The Works of
ALEXANDRE DUMAS

DELPHI CLASSICS

THE WORKS OF
ALEXANDRE DUMAS
(1802 – 1870)

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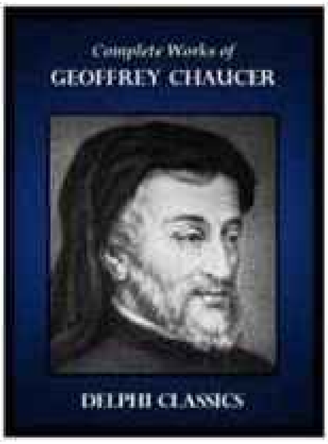
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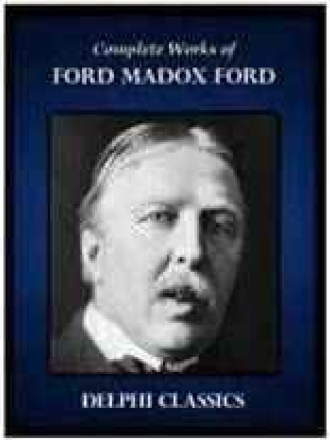
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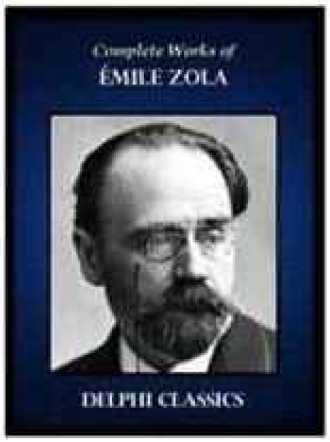
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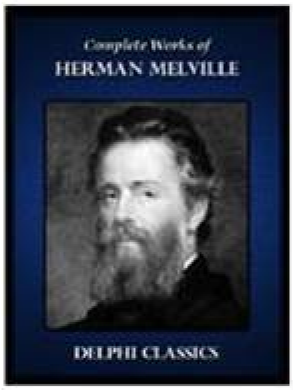
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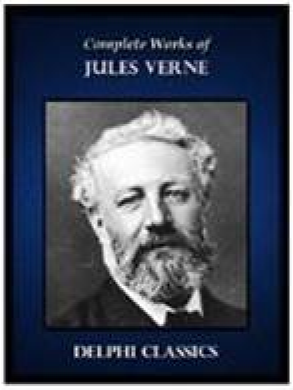
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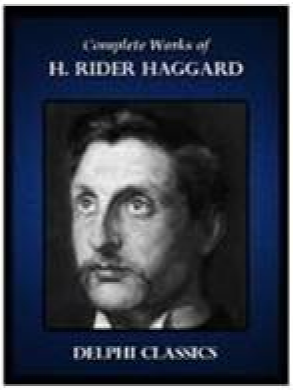
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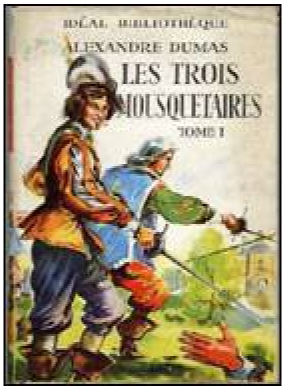
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TOME I

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TWENTY YEARS AFTER
THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE

Please note : *The Man in the Iron Mask* is the fourth part of THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE.

Cycle des Valois

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PAR ALEXANDRE DUMAS
TOME III
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CHICOT THE JESTER
THE FORTY-FIVE GUARDSMEN

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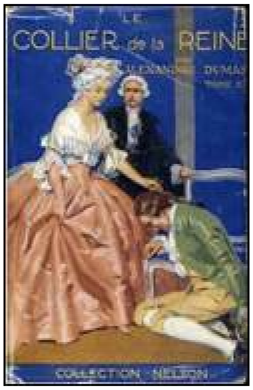
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The Novels

Dumas' birthplace, Villers-Cotterêts, now a museum

Inside the museum

Dumas' statue erected in the centre of the city

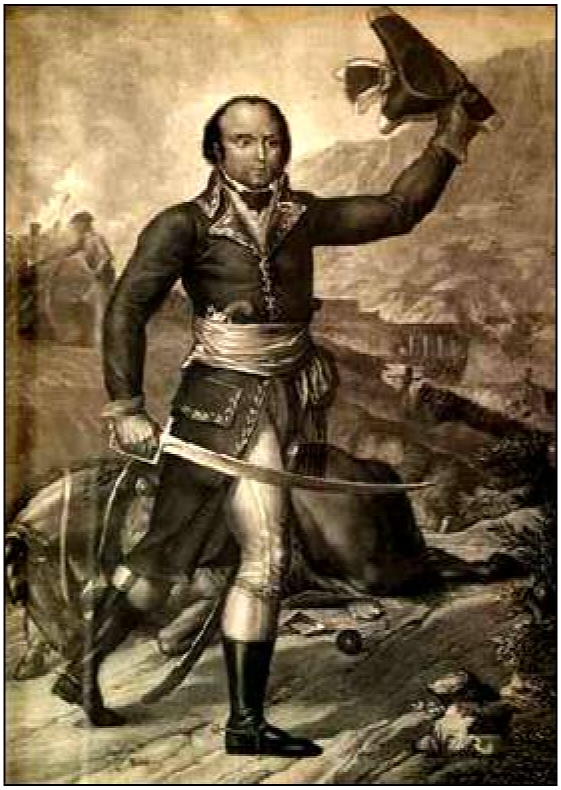

Général Thomas-Alexandre Davy de la Pailleterie-Dumas, the author’s father

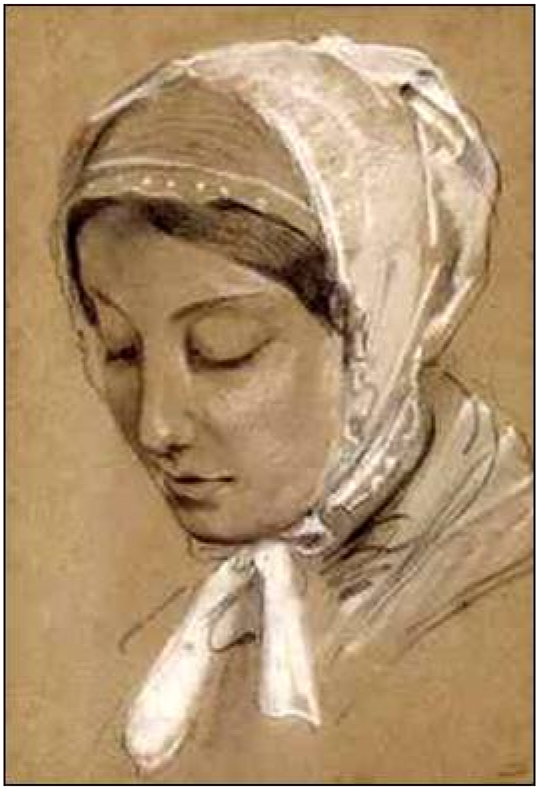

Marie-Catherine Laure Labay, his mother

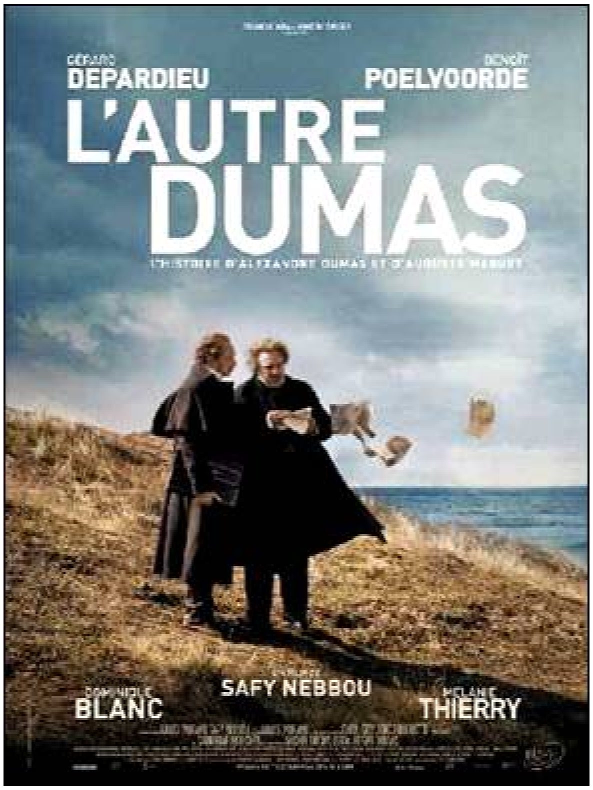
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DEPARDIEU
BENOÎT
POELVOORDE
L'AUTRE
DUMAS
L'HISTOIRE D'ALEXANDRE DUMAS ET D'AUGUSTE MAQUET
SAFY NEBBOU
DOMINIQUE
BLANC
MÉLANIE
THIERRY

Poster of the 2010 film concerning Alexandre Dumas and his collaborator, Auguste Maquet

Dumas and Maquet, who collaborated together in the writing of many of the novels

ACTÉ

Translated by Alfred Allinson

Dumas' first historical novel was published in serial format in 1837 and it is set in ancient times, unlike most of his other works. The author returned to the reign of Nero in the later novel *Isaac Laquedem*, but sadly it was left unfinished.

Acté hints at the quality and success of Dumas' upcoming masterpieces, demonstrating his learned knowledge of the classical world, while offering rich historical characters and a compelling love story. The novel begins in 57 AD in the ancient city of Corinth, where many competitors arrive to participate in the Nemean Games. Among them, Lucius, a handsome young Roman meets a comely local girl, whose family welcome the stranger, offering him a place to stay. However, it isn't long before Lucius appears to be more than an ordinary visitor.

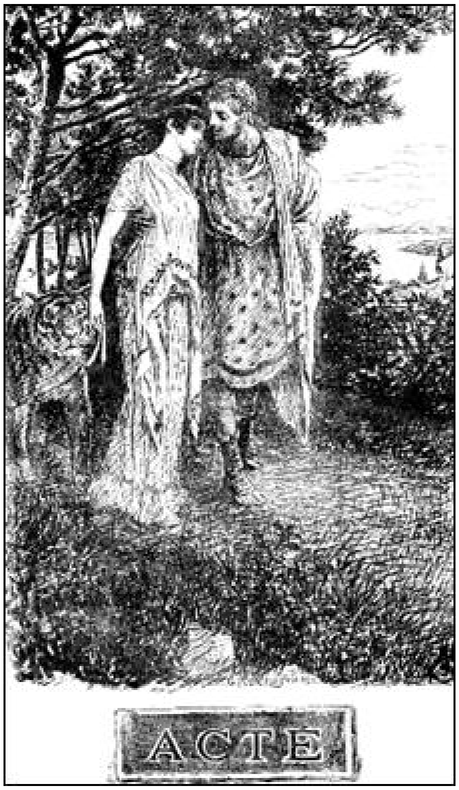

The frontispiece of the first edition

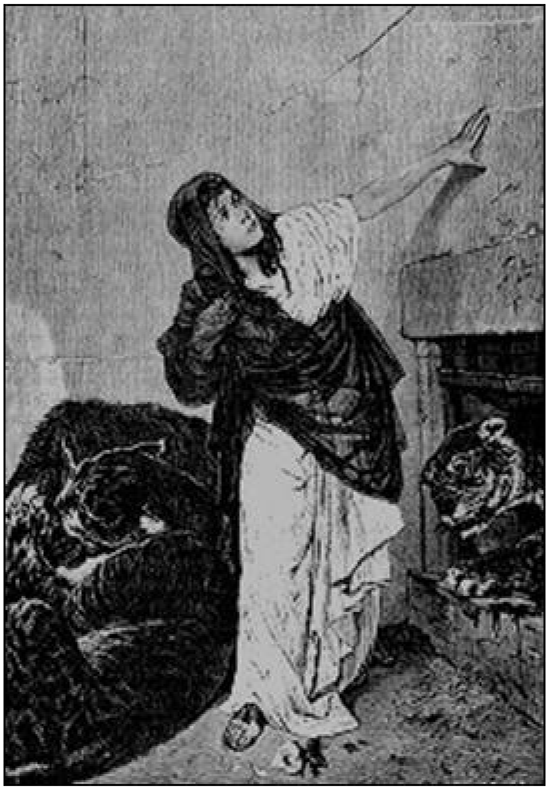

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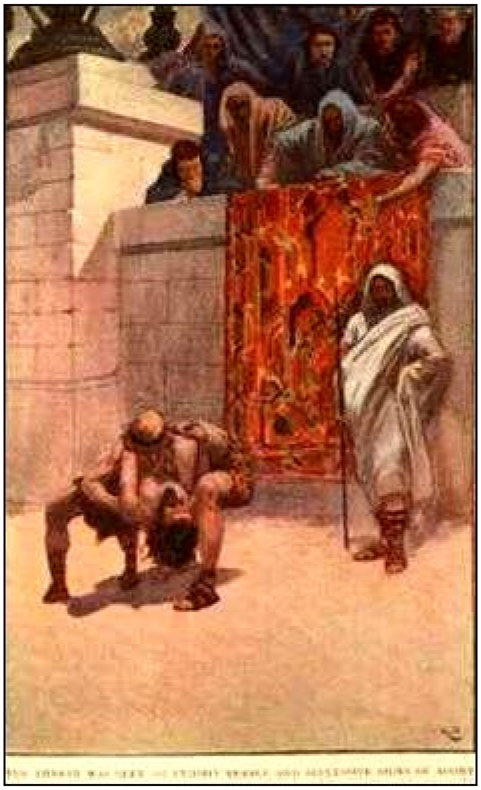

An original illustration

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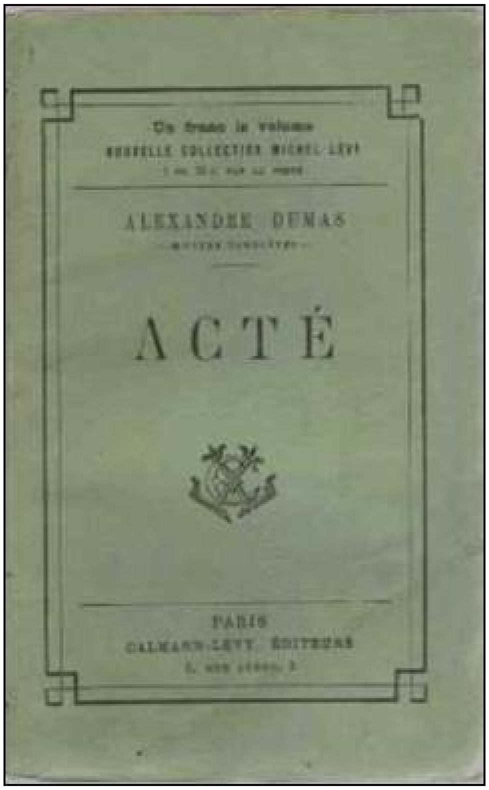

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ALEXANDRE DUMAS

ACTÉ

PARIS
CALMANN-LÉVY, ÉDITEURS

A serial part of the novel

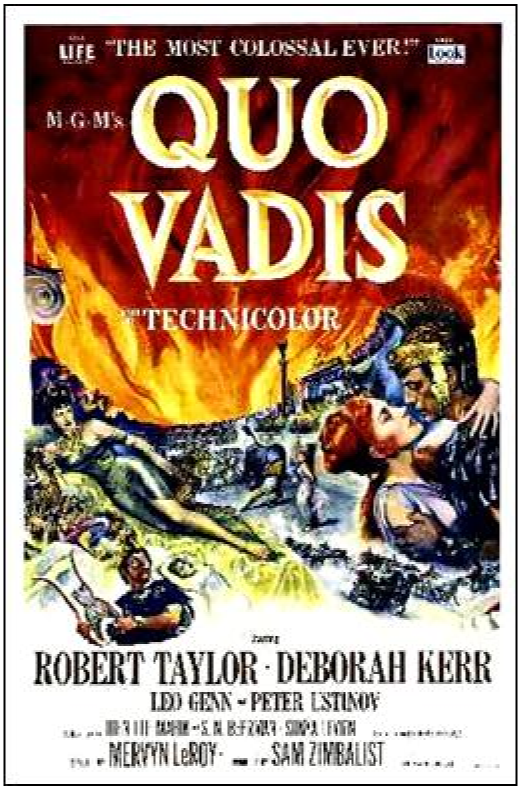
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MERVYN LeROY
SAM ZIMBALIST

The 1951 Hollywood epic inspired by the novel

INTRODUCTION

IT has been said of Dumas the son that to preserve his plays from oblivion he furnished them with imperishable prefaces. It was not in the father's nature to fear oblivion for *his* dramas, but nevertheless he, too, frequently wrote a preface; sometimes expressive of thanks to the actors or to the public, but more commonly descriptive of his own exultation at the fall of the curtain on the first performance. Nothing is more characteristic of the man, or more curious, than the preface to his *Caligula*, produced at the Théâtre Français on the 26th December, 1837. Dumas states that finding his study of the Latin classics insufficient for his purpose, he went to Rome. There he remained for two months, visiting, he says, the Vatican by day and the Coliseum by night, and rebuilding in imagination the city as it appeared to the Emperor. He thus re-peopled the empty houses from the patrician's palace to the oilseller's hut, with the result, he proceeds to narrate, that a great ladder like that of Jacob appeared to him in a dream filled with beings ascending and descending, beginning with the Emperor and ending with the slave. This was not enough: he went to them, opened their tunics, raised their cloaks, and found the men themselves, *Caligula,* although not a wholly satisfactory play, has in fact this indispensable merit, that it lives and moves and that all its characters and scenes besides being full of passion are perfectly realised and coloured. One of Dumas' most useful gifts was his power of identifying himself with his subject and, as it were, abstracting himself into it. Without this faculty all his historical researches would have been of little avail; with it, when writing *Caligula,* he was a citizen of ancient Rome, and what of the inhabitants that peopled it he did not know he contrived to divine!

Dumas' researches for *Caligula* led him on to study the strange career of Nero; and the character of the freedwoman Acté, Nero's mistress, once found, he saw his way to a historical romance. He brought to it his fresh vivid imagination, his eye for colour, and what an ardour and vigour! *Acté,* written in 1838, was an immense advance on anything he had previously accomplished in the field of historical fiction. Indeed he had only produced some spirited "Chroniques," inspired by de Barante's History of the Dukes of Burgundy, and *Gaule et France,* intended as an introduction to them. The publication of *Acté* fulfilled expectations raised but not satisfied by his previous work.

M. Hippolyte Parigot, whose recent monograph has filled the niche in the French Great Writers Series too long left unoccupied by the bust of Dumas, says of *Acté*, “Scott could not have written the first two hundred pages. Renan, who recounted the martyrdom of Blandina, would not have been ashamed of them. Tacitus, Suetonius, and St. Paul are authorities for his facts. Dumas does not advance a single step without a document on which to take his stand. Nero’s triumphal entry into the free cities through breaches made in the battlements by the citizens, his ‘Golden House,’ his colossal statue, the enormous porticos, the suppers at Baise, the games in the circus, the fight of Silas with the beasts, the *estrade du prince*, the letters from Gaul which interrupt the games — the whole story.

in short — including Nero’s flight and his death in the villa of Plancus — is drawn from the best sources. But with what grace — with what wealth of imagination does Dumas make this prodigious epoch live again before our eyes! As he unfolds the story with consummate art, all these pictures, brought together with such lavish expenditure of intellectual force, become one living whole of which we form a part. We glide with Sporus over the lake, bordered by vast stretches of turf where, in the midst of simulated ruins, wild beasts gambol as if in an African desert. We penetrate into the thick night of the forest of pines and sycamores, whose dense foilage deadens the plaintive cries of the Christians crowded together in the adjacent prison; we gaze on the Emperor-god, Lucius Nero the beautiful — the golden-bearded, as clad in white tunic and crowned with olive he languidly reposes on his couch — Singer and Master of the World, until we are compelled to bow before the grandeur of the imagination that can thus infuse life into dead documents and restore monuments that time had crumbled into dust.”

Unfortunately, while Dumas was still writing the story, his excellent mother, whom he had brought to Paris from his birthplace, died on 1st August, 1838. It would appear that the conclusion of the romance was wanted by the newspaper in which it was running as a serial, and that in his trouble finding his raw material ready to his hand in Chateaubriand’s *Martyrs*, he plagiarized extensively from it, thus sacrificing the personal interest of his characters. Having so brought the book to a conclusion, Dumas, who deeply lamented his mother and was advised to travel, left for a tour in Germany with Gérard de Nerval.

Acté is usually considered not to have appeared in book form till 1839. A copy in our possession, however, published in Brussels by Adolphe Wahlen et Compagnie is dated 1838. The first Paris edition, issued by Dumont, appears to be dated 1839 as to some copies and 1840 as to others. The second volume is made up with *Monseigneur Gaston de Phébus,* a story derived from Froissart. *Acted* may be usefully compared with Dean Farrar's *Darkness and Dawn, or Scenes in the Life of Nero,* and with Mr. Bernard W. Henderson's brilliant study *The Life and Principate of the Emperor Nero.* In the latter will be found a full account of *Claudia Acté.* Two romances on the same subject are Sienkiewicz's celebrated *Quo Vadis* and Mr. Hugh Westbury's *Acté.*

R. S. G.

TO
THE MEMORY OF MY VERY HONOURED
MOTHER

WHO DIED WHILE I WAS
FINISHING THIS WORK

ALEX DUMAS.

CHAPTER I

ON the seventh of May (the month called *Thargelion* by the Greeks) in the year 57 A.D., and eight hundred and ten years after Rome was founded, a girl of fifteen or sixteen, tall, handsome, and fleet as the huntress Diana, passed through the west gate of Corinth and proceeded towards the sea-shore. On reaching a small meadow bordered on one side by a grove of olives, on the other by a stream shaded by orange-trees and oleanders, she stopped and began to look for wild flowers. She paused for a moment in indecision between the violets and gladioli which flourished beneath the shade of the olives, and the daffodils and water-lilies growing on the banks of the stream or floating on its surface; soon, however, she decided in favour of the latter, and, bounding like a young fawn, ran towards the water.

On reaching the bank of the stream she stopped; the speed with which she had run had loosened her long hair; she knelt down at the water's edge, looked at herself in the stream, and smiled to see herself so beautiful. She was, indeed, one of the loveliest maidens of Achaia, with dark, voluptuous eyes, an Ionic nose, and lips of coral; her body, firm as marble, yet at the same time supple as the reed, resembled a statue of Phidias animated by Prometheus, though her feet, apparently too small to support the weight of her frame, seemed out of proportion, and might have constituted a defect, if you could have dreamed of reproaching a girl with such an imperfection. At any rate, the nymph Pyrené, who, true woman that she was, lent her the mirror of her tears, could not refrain from reproducing her image in all its grace and purity. After a moment of silent contemplation, the girl divided her hair into three tresses, made two plaits of those which fell over her temples, joined them together at the top of her head, fixed them with a garland of oleander and orange-blossoms which she wove then and there, and, letting the tress which fell down her back float like the mane on the helmet of Pallas, leaned over the water to quench the thirst which had drawn her to this side of the meadow, but which, urgent as it was, had nevertheless yielded to a need still more urgent, that of assuring herself that she was the most beautiful of the daughters of Corinth. The reality and the reflection now approached one another imperceptibly; you would have said that two sisters, a nymph and a naiad, were about to join in a sweet embrace; their lips met in a moist bath, the water quivered, and a light breeze, passing through the air like a voluptuous breath, rained down upon the stream a pink and scented snow which the current carried away to the sea.

As she rose from the ground, the girl directed her eyes to the gulf and remained for an instant motionless with curiosity; a galley with two banks of oars, with gilded hull and purple sails, was making for the shore, urged by the wind that blew from Delphi; although still a quarter of a mile distant, the sailors could be heard singing a chorus to Neptune. The girl recognised the Phrygian mode, which was consecrated to religious hymns; but, instead of the rough voices of the mariners of Calydon or Cephalonia, the notes which reached her ear, though scattered and weakened by the breeze, were skilfully modulated and sweet as those sung by the priestesses of Apollo. Attracted by this melody, the young Corinthian maiden got up, broke off some boughs of orange and oleander destined to form a second garland which she intended on her return to deposit in the temple of Flora, to whom the month of May was consecrated; then with slow steps, at once curious and timid, she advanced towards the shore, weaving the scented branches which she had broken off by the bank of the stream.

The bireme had now drawn nearer, and the girl could not only hear the voices, but even distinguish the faces of the musicians; the song consisted of an invocation to Neptune, chanted by a single leader and repeated in chorus, with a rhythm so sweet and well balanced that it imitated the regular movement of the sailors bending to their oars and the oars beating the water. The principal singer, who also appeared to be the master of the vessel, was standing at the prow, accompanying himself on a three-stringed lyre resembling the instrument which sculptors depict in the hands of Euterpé, the Muse of Harmony. At his feet, covered with a long Asiatic robe, reclined a slave whose dress belonged equally to either sex — so that the girl could not distinguish if it were a man or a woman; while the melodious rowers stood up beside their benches and clapped their hands in measured time, thanking Neptune for the favourable wind which was bringing them rest from their toil.

This spectacle, which two hundred years earlier would scarcely have attracted the notice of a child looking for shells among the sand, excited the girl’s astonishment to the highest pitch. Corinth was no longer at this period what she had been in the days of Sylla — the rival and the sister of Athens. Taken by assault in the year of Rome 608 (146 B.C.) by the Consul Mummius, she had seen her citizens put to the sword, her wives and children sold as slaves, her houses burnt, her walls demolished, her statues sent to Rome, and her pictures, for one of which Attaeus had offered a million sesterces, used as a carpet by those Roman soldiers whom Polybius found playing dice on the masterpiece of Aristides. Rebuilt eighty years later by Julius Caesar, who restored the walls and sent thither a Roman colony, Corinth had resumed her life, but was still far from having recovered her ancient splendour. However, the Roman Proconsul, with the view of restoring to her some importance, had announced for the 10th of May and following days, Nemean, Isthmian, and Floral games, in which the strongest athlete, the most skilful charioteer,, and the most expert singer would be crowned. Consequently, for some days past, a crowd of strangers of all nationalities had been travelling towards the capital of Achaia, attracted either by curiosity or the desire to carry off prizes. For the time being this event restored to the town, still feeble from loss of blood and treasure, the pomp and fame of her ancient days. Some had arrived in chariots, some on horseback; others, again, in vessels which they had hired or built; but none of these last had entered the harbour in so splendid a ship as the vessel which at this moment touched that shore for which, out of sheer love of it, Apollo and Neptune had contended in days of old.

Hardly had the bireme been drawn up on the sands, when the sailors set against her prow a ladder of citron-wood inlaid with brass and silver, and the singer, throwing his lyre over his shoulder, stepped ashore leaning on the slave whom we have seen reclining at his feet. The former was a handsome man of seven or eight and twenty, with fair hair, blue eyes, and golden beard; he was dressed in a purple tunic, a blue chlamys spangled with gold, and wore round his neck knotted in front, a scarf, the floating ends of which fell down to his girdle. The other appeared about ten years younger; he was a lad hardly entered on manhood, with slow gait and a look of sadness and suffering; the freshness of his cheeks, however, would have put a woman’s complexion to shame, his rosy and transparent skin might have contended for delicacy with that of the most voluptuous maidens of effeminate Athens, while his white, plump hand seemed by its shape and weakness much more designed to turn a spindle or ply a needle than to wield sword or javelin, emblems of the man and the warrior. He was dressed, as we have said, in a white robe embroidered with golden palms, which descended below the knee; his flowing locks fell over his bare shoulders, and a little mirror framed in pearls was suspended by a gold chain from his neck.

As he was about to set foot to the ground his companion checked him sharply; the youth started.

"What is the matter, master?" said he, in a soft and timid voice.

"The matter is that you were about to touch the shore with your left foot, and by this imprudence to expose us to the loss of the whole fruit of my calculations, thanks to which we have arrived on the day of the Nones, which is a good omen."

"You are right, master," said the youth; and he placed his right foot on the shore, his companion doing the same.

"Stranger," said the girl, who had heard these words pronounced in the Ionic dialect, addressing the elder of the two travellers, "the land of Greece, with whatever foot you touch it, is propitious to any one who lands thereon with friendly intent; it is the land of love, of poetry, and of combat; it has crowns for lovers, for poets, and for warriors. Whoever you may be, stranger, accept this wreath while waiting for the one you have, doubtless, come to seek."

The young man eagerly took the garland offered him by the Corinthian maiden and placed it on his head.

"The gods smile upon us," cried he. "See, Sporus, the orange, that apple of the Hesperides whose golden fruit gave victory to Hippomenes by delaying the course of Atalanta, and the oleander, tree beloved of Apollo. What is your name, prophetess of good fortune?"

"I am called Acté," answered the girl with a blush.

"Acté!" cried the elder of the two travellers. "Do you hear, Sporus? A fresh augury: Acte — that is to say, the *shore.* You see the land of Corinth was awaiting me to crown me."

"What is there astonishing in that? are you not predestined, Lucius?" answered the youth.

"If I mistake not," inquired the girl timidly, "you come to contest for one of the prizes offered to the victors by the Roman Proconsul?"

"You have received the talent of divination as well as the gift of beauty," said Lucius.

"And you, no doubt, have some relation in the town?"

"All my family is at Rome."

"Some friend, perhaps?"

"My only friend is the one you see here, and he, like myself, is a stranger to Corinth."

"Some acquaintance, then?"

"Not one."

"Our house is large, and my father hospitable," continued the girl. "Will Lucius deign to give us the preference? We will pray Castor and Pollux to be favourable to him."

"Might you not be their sister Helen?" interrupted Lucius with a smile. "It is said that she loved to bathe in a fountain which cannot be far from here; and doubtless this fountain had the gift of prolonging life and preserving beauty. Venus must have confided the secret to Paris, and Paris to you. If it be so, conduct me, fair Acté, to this fountain; for, now that I have seen you, I would live for ever, in order to see you always."

"Alas! I am no goddess," answered Acté, "nor does Helen's fount possess this wonderful privilege. However, you are not wrong as regards its situation; there it is, a few yards from us, throwing its waters into the sea from the top of yonder cliff."

"Then the temple that rises near it is Neptune's?"

"Yes, and that path bordered by pines leads to the running-ground. It is said that in former days a statue stood in front of every tree; but Mummius carried them off, and they have left my country for yours, never to return. Will you take this path, Lucius," continued the girl, smiling, "it leads to my father's house."

"What do you think of this offer, Sporus?" said the young man, changing his dialect and speaking in Latin.

"That Fortune has not given you the right to doubt her constancy."

"Well! then let us trust her this time again, for never has she presented herself in a more alluring and enchanting guise." Then, returning to the Ionic dialect, which he spoke with the greatest purity, "Guide us, maiden," said Lucius, "for we are ready to follow you; and do you, Sporus, bid Libycus keep guard over Phœbé?"

Acté led the way, while the youth climbed to the deck of the vessel to carry out his master's order. On reaching the running-ground she paused: "See," she observed to Lucius, "here is the course. It is all sanded in readiness, for the games begin the day after to-morrow and they commence with the wrestling. On the right, beyond the stream, at the end of this avenue of pines, you see the hippodrome; the second day, as you know, will be devoted to the chariot-races. Then lastly half-way from the hill in the direction of the citadel is the theatre, where the contest for the singing-prize will take place. For which of the three crowns does Lucius intend to compete?"

"For all three, Acté."

"You are ambitious, sir."

"The number three is pleasing to the gods," said Sporus, who had just rejoined his companion, and the travellers, guided by their fair hostess, continued their road.

When they arrived near the town, Lucius stopped. "What is this fountain," said he, "and these broken bas-reliefs? they seem to me to belong to the best period of Greek art."

"This is Pyrené's fountain," said Acté; "her daughter was slain by Diana at this very spot, and the goddess, seeing the mother's grief, changed her into a fountain over the very body of the child whom she was lamenting. As for the bas-reliefs, they are the work of Lysippus, a pupil of Phidias."

"Just look, Sporus," cried the young man with the lyre enthusiastically; "look, what modelling! what expression! It is the combat of Ulysses with Penelopé's suitors, is it not? See how forcibly the death of that wounded man is depicted, how he writhes in his agony; the arrow has struck him below the heart. A shade higher, and there would have been no pain; the sculptor was a clever man, who understood his art. I will have this marble transported to Rome or Naples, I should like to have it in my hall. I have never seen a man die with a more agonised expression."

"It is one of the relics of our ancient splendour," said Acté. "The town is jealous and proud of them, and, like a mother who has lost her handsomest children, she clings to those that are left to her. I question, Lucius, whether you are wealthy enough to buy this fragment."

"Buy it!" answered Lucius with an indescribable expression of disdain; "what is the good of buying it, when I can take it? If I desire this marble, I will have it, though the whole city of Corinth say me nay." Sporus pressed his master's hand — "Unless, however," he continued, "the fair Acté should say that she wishes the marble to remain in her country."

"I understand your power as little as I do my own, Lucius, but I thank you none the less. Leave us our poor relics, Roman, and do not complete the work of your fathers. They came as conquerors; you come as a friend. What was barbarism on their part, would be sacrilege on yours.”

“Make your mind easy, maiden,” said Lucius; “for I begin to realise that there are in Corinth things to be carried off more precious than the bas-relief of Lysippus, which, after all, is but marble. When Paris came to Lacedaemon, it was not the statue of Minerva or Diana that he took away, but Helen, the fairest of the Spartans.”

Acté lowered her eyes beneath the ardent gaze of Lucius, and, continuing her road, entered the town, followed by the two Romans.

Corinth had resumed the activity of her ancient days. The announcement of the games to be celebrated there had brought together competitors, not only from all parts of Greece, but likewise from Sicily, from Egypt, and from Asia. Each house had its guest, and the new arrivals would have had great difficulty in finding a lodging, had not Mercury, the patron deity of travellers, brought this hospitable maiden across their path. Still under her guidance, they crossed the marketplace, where were displayed, in haphazard confusion, papyrus and flax from Egypt, ivory from Libya, skins from Cyrené, frankincense and myrrh from Syria, carpets from Carthage, dates from Phoenicia, purple-dye from Tyre, slaves from Phrygia, horses from Selinus, swords from Spain, coral and carbuncle from Gaul. Then, continuiug their road, they crossed the square, where formerly stood a statue of Minerva, a masterpiece of Phidias, which, out of veneration for the old master, had never been replaced; they took one of the streets leading from it, and, a few yards farther on, stopped in front of an old man who was standing at the threshold of his house.

“Father,” said Acté, “here is a guest sent to us by Jupiter; I met him at the moment of his landing on our shores, and offered him hospitality.”

“You are welcome, young man with the golden beard,” answered Amycles; and, pushing open with one hand the door of the house, he extended the other to Lucius.

CHAPTER II

THE day following that on which the door of Amycles had been opened to admit Lucius, the young Roman, Acté, and her father, having assembled in the triclinium round a table made ready for the meal, were preparing to throw dice to determine who should preside over the banquet. Amycles and his daughter had wished to award this dignity to the stranger; but their guest, either from superstition or respect, had declined the garland; consequently the dice were brought and the box was handed to Amycles, who threw the *“Hercules.”* It was now the turn of Acté to throw, and the combination produced the “*Chariot*”; she then passed the box to the young Roman, who took it with visible anxiety, shook it for a long time, turned it tremblingly upon the table, and uttered a cry of joy as he looked at the result; he had thrown the “*Venus,”* which is superior to all the other combinations.

“Look, Sporus,” he cried in Latin. “The gods are certainly on our side, and Jupiter does not forget that he is the head of my race; the throw of ‘Hercules,’ the ‘Chariot,’ and the ‘Venus,’ could there be a more lucky combination for a man who comes to contest the prizes for wrestling, driving, and singing, and does not the last clearly promise me a double triumph?”

“You were born under a lucky star,” answered the youth, “and the sun touched you before you touched the earth; on this occasion, as always, you will triumph over all competitors.”

“Alas! there was a time,” answered the old man with a sigh, adopting the tongue which the stranger spoke, “when Greece would have afforded adversaries worthy to contend with you for victory; but we are no longer in the days when Milo of Crotona was crowned six times at the Pythian games, or when Alcibiades the Athenian sent seven chariots to the Olympian games and bore away four prizes. Greece has lost, together with her freedom, her arts and her strength, and Rome, according to Cicero, has sent us her children to carry away all our palms. May Jupiter, from whom you boast to be descended, protect you then, young man; for, next to the honour of seeing victory gained by one of my fellow-citizens, the greatest pleasure that I could experience would be to see fortune favour my guest. Go then, my daughter, and bring us garlands of flowers, to serve until we receive our crowns of laurel."

Acté went out and returned almost immediately with a wreath of myrtle and saffron for Lucius, one of parsley and ivy for her father, and one of lilies and roses for herself; in addition to these a young slave brought in several larger wreaths, which the guests placed round their necks. Acté then reclined on the right-hand couch, Lucius occupied the consular seat, and the old man, standing between his daughter and his guest, poured a libation of wine and offered a prayer to the gods, after which he, too, reclined, saying to the young Roman: "You see, my son, we fulfil the prescribed conditions, since the number of those who feast, if we are to believe one of our poets, should not be less than the number of the Graces, and should not exceed that of the Muses. Slaves, serve the first course."

A well-furnished tray was brought in, the servants held themselves in readiness to obey the first sign.

Sporus reclined at his master's feet, offering him his long hair on which to wipe his hands, and the carver began his duties.

At the beginning of the second course, and when the appetite of the banqueters began to be appeased, the old man fixed his gaze upon his guest, and after looking for some time, with the benevolent expression of age, at the handsome face of Lucius, whose fair hair and golden beard gave him an unusual and striking appearance, he asked:

"You come from Rome?"

"Yes, father," answered the young man. "Have you come direct?"

"I embarked at the port of Ostia."

"The gods continue to protect the divine Emperor and his mother?"

"Yes."

"And was Caesar preparing for any military expedition?"

"No tribe is in revolt at this moment. Caesar, master of the world, has given it the peace and repose during which the arts may flourish. He has closed the temple of Janus, and has now taken up his lyre to render thanks to the gods."

"And has he no fear that, while he sings, others perchance should reign?"

"Ah!" said Lucius with a frown, "then in Greece also they say that Caesar is a child?"

"No; but they fear that he delays too long in becoming a man."

“I thought that he had assumed the *toga virilis* at the funeral of Britannicus?”

“Britannicus had been long ago condemned to die by Agrippina.”

“Yes, but it was Caesar who killed him, you may take my word for it; was it not, Sporus?”

The youth raised his head and smiled.

“He murdered his brother!” cried Acté.

“He put the son to the death that the mother desired to inflict on himself. If you do not know, maiden, then ask your father, who appears to be well informed on questions of this sort, and he will tell you that Messalina sent a soldier to kill Nero in his cradle, and that the soldier was about to strike, when two serpents issued from the child’s bed and put the centurion to flight? — No, no, father, be assured that Nero is not an imbecile like Claudius, a fool like Caligula, a coward like Tiberius, nor an actor like Augustus.”

“My son,” said the old man in alarm, “you should remember that you axe insulting deities.”

“Fine deities, by Hercules !” cried Lucius; “a fine god was Octavius, who was afraid of cold, of heat, of thunder; who came from Apollonia and presented himself before Caesar’s old legions limping like Vulcan; a fine god, whose hand was so feeble that sometimes it could not support the weight of his pen; who lived without once daring to be Emperor, and died asking if he had played his part well! A fine god was Tiberius, with his Olympus at Capreœ, from which he durst not stir, where he lived like a pirate on a ship at anchor, with Thrasyllus at his right hand governing his mind, and at his left Charicles ruling his body; who, though he owned the world, over which he might stretch his wings like an eagle, withdrew into the hollow of a rock like an owl! A fine god, too, Caligula, whose head had been turned by drink, and who thought himself as great as Xerxes because he had thrown a bridge from Puteoli to Baiae, and as powerful as Jove because he imitated the noise of thunder by rolling an iron chariot over a bridge of brass; who styled himself the lover of the moon, and whom Chaerea and Sabinus despatched with twenty sword-thrusts to consummate his marriage in the sky! A fine god Claudius, who was found skulking behind a curtain when they sought him on the throne, the slave and puppet of his four wives! who signed the contract of marriage between his wife Messalina and his freedman Silius! A fine god he, whose knees gave way at every step, whose mouth slobbered at every word, who stammered and rolled his head idiotically from side to side; who lived despised without knowing how to make himself feared, and who died of eating mushrooms cooked by Halotus, cleaned by Agrippina, and seasoned by Locusta! Ah! a fine set of gods, I repeat, and what a noble figure they must cut in Olympus beside Hercules, the club-bearer, beside Castor, the chariot-driver, and Apollo, the prince of the lyre!"

Some moments of silence succeeded this startling and sacrilegious outburst. Amycles and Acté looked at their guest with amazement, and the interrupted conversation had not yet resumed its course when a slave entered, announcing a messenger from Cnaeus Lentulus, the Proconsul. The old man inquired if the messenger came to speak to himself or to his guest. The slave answered that he did not know; the lictor was brought in. His business was with the stranger; the Proconsul had been informed of the arrival of a vessel in the harbour, he knew that the owner of this vessel intended to compete for the prizes, and he ordered him to come and enter his name at the Prefectorial Palace and declare to which of the three crowns he aspired. The old man and Acté rose to receive the commands of the Proconsul; Lucius listened to them still reclining.

When the lictor had finished, Lucius drew from his breast a set of ivory tablets coated with wax, wrote some lines with a *stilus* on one of the leaves, impressed the signet of his ring below them, and handed the answer to the lictor, bidding him carry it to Lentulus. The lictor hesitated in astonishment; Lucius made an imperative gesture; the soldier bowed and retired. Then Lucius snapped his fingers to call his slave, held out his goblet, which the cup-bearer filled with wine, drank off part of it to the health of his host and his daughter, and gave the remainder to Sporus.

"Young man," said Amycles, breaking the silence, "you say you are a Roman, and yet I can hardly believe it. If you had lived in the Imperial City, you would have learned to pay better obedience to the orders of Caesar's representatives; the Proconsul is absolute master here and reverenced as much as Claudius Nero is at Rome."

"Have you forgotten that at the commencement of the meal the gods made me for the time being the Emperor's equal by choosing me King of the feast? and when did you see a King leave his throne to obey the orders of a Proconsul?"

"You have refused to obey them?" said Acté in alarm.

"No, but I have written to Lentulus that, if he is anxious to learn my name and my object in coming to Corinth, he has only to come and ask me himself."

"And you think he will come?" cried the old man.

"I am sure of it," answered Lucius.

"Here, to my house?"

"Listen," said Lucius.

"What is it?"

"He is knocking at the door; I recognise the sound of the lictors' rods. Tell them to open the door, my father, and leave us alone together."

The old man and his daughter rose in astonishment and went themselves to the door; Lucius remained in a reclining posture.

He had not been mistaken; it was Lentuius himself. His brow was wet with perspiration, indicating with what promptitude he had complied with the stranger's invitation. He asked in quick and eager tones where the noble Lucius was; and, when the room was pointed out to him, he put on his *toga* and entered the dining-hall, the door of which closed behind him and was promptly guarded by the lictors.

What passed at this interview no one knew; but after a quarter of an hour the Proconsul came out, while Lucius went and rejoined Amycles and Acté beneath the peristyle where they were walking. His face was calm and smiling.

"My father," said he, "it is a beautiful evening; will you not accompany your guest as far as the citadel, from which I am told there is a magnificent view? Besides, I am curious to know if they have carried out the order of Caesar, who, when he heard that games were to be held at Corinth, sent back the ancient statue of Venus, that it might be propitious to the Romans who came to contend for your crowns."

"Alas! my son," replied Amycles, "I am now too old to act as a guide up the mountain; but Acté here, who is light-footed as a nymph, will accompany you."

"Thank you, my father. I had not asked this favour through fear lest Venus should be jealous and avenge herself on me for your daughter's beauty; but, since you offer her to me, I will have the courage to accept."

Acté smiled and blushed, and, at a signal from her father, ran to fetch a veil and returned draped as modestly as a Roman matron.

“Has my sister taken some vow,” said Lucius, “or is she, without my knowing it, a priestess of Minerva, Diana, or Vesta?”

“No, my son,” said the old man, taking the Roman by the arm and drawing him aside; “but Corinth is the city of courtesans, as you know; in memory of their intercession having saved the city from the invasion of Xerxes we have had them painted in a picture, as the Athenians had the portraits of their generals painted after the battle of Marathon. Since then, so loath have we been to want them, that we purchase them at Byzantium, in the islands of the Archipelago, and in Sicily. You may know them by their faces and uncovered bosoms. Make your mind easy; Acté is no priestess of Minerva, nor Diana, nor Vesta, but she fears being taken for a worshipper of Venus.” Then, raising his voice, “Come, my children,” continued the old man, “go, my daughter, and from the height of the hill recall to our guest all the ancient memories of Greece, pointing out to him the localities which preserve them. The only property that remains to the slave and which his masters cannot take from him is the memory of the days when he was free.”

Lucius and Acté started, and in a few minutes had reached the north gate and taken the road which leads to the citadel. Although it appeared scarcely five hundred yards from the town as the crow flies, yet the windings of the road were so numerous that it took them nearly an hour to reach the summit.

Twice Acté stopped on the way; the first time, to point out to Lucius the tomb of Medea’s children; the second, to make him notice the spot where Bellerophon received the magic steed Pegasus from the hands of Minerva. At last they reached the citadel, and, at the entrance to a temple adjoining it, Lucius recognised the statue of Venus covered with shining armour, having on its right the statue of Love, and on its left that of the Sun, the first deity that was worshipped at Corinth. Lucius prostrated himself and prayed.

This religious act accomplished, the two young people took a path which crossed the sacred wood and led to the summit of the citadel. The Corinthian maiden walked in front, like Venus conducting Aeneas along the road to Carthage; while Lucius, behind her, traversed an atmosphere scented by the balmy perfume of her hair. From time to time she turned round, and as, on leaving the town, she had dropped her veil down upon her shoulders, the Roman devoured with eager eyes that charming face to which the walk had imparted fresh animation, and the bosom which he saw heaving through the light tunic that covered it. In proportion as they climbed higher, the panorama became more and more extensive. At last, at the highest point of the hill, Acté stopped beneath a mulberry-tree, and, leaning against it to recover breath, said to Lucius: “Here we are arrived. What think you of this view? Does it not equal that from Naples?”

The Roman approached her without making any reply, passed his arm round one of the branches of the tree for support, and, instead of looking at the view, fixed his eyes on Acté with such an ardent look of love that the girl, feeling herself blushing, hurriedly went on talking to hide her confusion.

“See towards the east,” said she; “spite of the growing twilight, there is the acropolis of Athens, gleaming like a point of white light, and the promontory of Sunium standing out against the blue waves like a spear-head. Nearer to us, in the middle of the Saronic Gulf, that horseshoe-shaped island that you see is Salamis, where Aeschylus fought and Xerxes was defeated; below, towards the south, in the direction of Corinth, and about fifteen miles from this spot, you can see Nemea and the forest in which Hercules slew the lion whose skin he wore ever after as a trophy of his victory. Farther off, at the foot of that chain of mountains bounding the horizon, is Epidaurus, dear to Aesculapius; and, behind it, Argos, the land of the King of Kings; to the west, plunged in the golden waves of the setting sun, at the end of the rich plains of Sicyon, beyond that blue line made by the sea, do you perceive Samé and Ithaca? And now turn your back on Corinth and look northwards. See, to our right, Mount Cithseron, on which Œdipus was exposed; to our left, Leuctra, where Epaminondas defeated the Spartans; and, opposite to us, Plataea, where Aristides and Pausanias vanquished the Persians; then, in the centre, and at the extremity of that chain of mountains which runs from Attica into Aetolia, Helicon clad with pines, myrtles, and bay-trees, and Parnassus with its two summits white with snow, between which flows the Castalian fount which received from the Muses the gift of imparting poetic inspiration to those who drink of its waters.”

“Yes,” said Lucius, “your country is the land of great memories; it is a pity that all her children do not cherish them as religiously as you do. But console yourself with the thought that, if Greece is no longer queen in strength, she is always queen by beauty, and *that* sovereignty is the sweetest and the most powerful.”

Acté felt for her veil, but Lucius grasped her hand. The girl started, but yet had not the courage to withdraw it; a mist passed before her eyes, and, feeling her knees giving way, she leant against the trunk of the mulberry-tree.

It was that delightful hour when it is no longer day and not yet night; the twilight, extending over the whole horizon towards the east, covered the Archipelago and Attica; while in the opposite quarter the lire-lit waves of the Ionian Sea and the golden clouds in the sky seemed separated from one another only by the sun which, like some mighty shield forged to a red heat, began to dip its lower edge into the sea. From the city still rose a murmur like that of a hive; but all sounds of plain and mountain gradually died away, save that occasionally the shrill cry of a shepherd sounded from the direction of Cythaeron, or the shout of a sailor drawing his boat over the beach rose from the Saronic Sea or the Gulf of Crissa. Nocturnal insects began to chirp in the grass, and the glow-worms, scattered by thousands through the warm evening air, shone like sparks from an invisible hearth. You felt that Nature, wearied with the day’s toils, was letting herself gradually fall asleep, and that in a few moments all would be hushed so as not to disturb her voluptuous repose.

The young people themselves, yielding to the influence of this impression, had grown silent, when in the direction of the harbour of Lechaeum there was heard so strange a cry that Acté shuddered. Lucius quickly turned his head and directed his eyes towards the bireme that could be seen on the beach like a golden shell. With an instinctive feeling of fear the girl rose and made a movement to take the road towards the city, but Lucius stopped her. She yielded without a word, and, as though overcome by a force greater than her own, leant once more against the tree, or rather against the arm which Lucius had, without her perceiving it, passed round her waist, and, letting her head droop backward, looked at the sky with eyes and lips half closed. Lucius gazed amorously at her in this charming attitude, and, though she felt the eyes of the young Roman devouring her with their ardent glance, she had not the strength to avoid them, when a second cry, nearer and more terrible, penetrated the sweet, calm air, and aroused Acté from her ecstasy.

“Let us flee! Lucius,” she cried in terror, “there is some savage animal prowling in the mountain. We have but to cross the sacred wood, and we are at the temple of Venus or the citadel. Come, Lucius, come.”

Lucius smiled.

“Does Acté fear anything,” said he, “when she is beside me? For my part, I feel that for her I would brave all the monsters that Theseus, Hercules and Cadmus overcame.”

“But do you know what that noise is?” asked the girl, trembling.

“Yes,” answered Lucius with a smile, “yes, it is the roar of a tiger.”

“Jupiter protect us!” cried Acté, throwing herself into the Roman’s arms.

A third cry, nearer and more menacing than the first two, had just crossed the intervening space; Lucius answered it by a cry almost similar. Almost at the same instant a tigress sprang out of the sacred wood, stopped, and rose on its hind-paws as though in doubt as to the road. Lucius uttered a peculiar whistle; the tigress sprang forward, clearing myrtles, ilexes, and oleanders, like a dog dashing through heather, and made towards him, roaring with delight. Suddenly the Roman felt the girl’s whole weight upon his arm; she had fallen unconscious and half-dead with terror.

When Acté recovered consciousness she found herself in the arms of Lucius, while the tigress, lying at their feet, laid her terrible head caressingly upon her master’s knees, the eyes gleaming like carbuncles. At this sight the girl threw herself again into her lover’s arms, half in terror, half in shame, at the same time extending her hand towards her unfastened girdle, which had been thrown a few feet from her. Lucius saw this last effort on the part of modesty, and, unfastening the massive gold collar which encircled the neck of the tigress, and to which there still hung a link of the chain that she had broken, he clasped it round the girl’s slender and supple waist; next, picking up the girdle which he had stealthily untied, he fastened one end of the riband to the tiger’s neck, and placed the other one between Acté’s trembling fingers. Then both rose and went down in silence towards the city, Acté resting one hand on Lucius’ shoulder, and with the other leading, chained and submissive, the tigress that had caused her such alarm.

At the entrance to the town they met the Nubian slave in whose charge “Phœbé” had been left; he had followed her into the country and had lost sight of her at the moment when the animal, scenting out tier master, had dashed forward towards the citadel. On seeing Lucius he fell upon his knees and bowed his head in expectation of the chastisement he thought he had merited. But Lucius was too happy at this moment to be severe, and besides, Acté was looking at him with clasped hands.

“Rise, Libycus,” said the Roman; “I forgive you this once, but henceforth keep a better guard over Phœbé; you have been the cause of this fair nymph nearly dying of fright. Come, my Ariadné, hand over your tigress to her keeper; I will yoke a pair of them to a chariot of gold and ivory, and make you drive in it through the midst of a people that will worship you as a goddess.... All right, Phœbé, all right; goodbye....”

But the tigress was not content to go away like this. She halted in front of Lucius, stood up against him, and, placing her two fore-paws on his shoulders, caressed him with her tongue, uttering little roars of affection.

“Yes, yes,” said Lucius *sotto voce;* “yes, you are a beautiful creature; and when we return to Rome I will give you a fine Christian slave and her two children to devour. Go, Phœbé, go along.”

The tigress obeyed as though she understood this sanguinary promise, and followed Libycus, but not without turning several times in the direction of her master; and it was not until he and Acté, who was still pale and trembling, had disappeared through the gate of the city, that she made up her mind to return to the gilded cage which she occupied on board the vessel.

In his host’s entrance-hall Lucius found a slave waiting to conduct him to his sleeping-chamber. The young Roman pressed Acté’s hand and followed the slave who preceded him with a lamp. As for the fair Corinthian, she went, according to her custom, to kiss her father, who, on seeing her so pale and agitated, asked her what dread was troubling her.

Thereupon she told him of the fright which Phœbé had given her, and how this terrible creature obeyed Lucius’ slightest gesture.

The old man remained an instant plunged in thought, then observed with uneasiness:

“What man is this, who plays with tigers, who orders about Proconsuls, and who blasphemes the gods!”

Acté approached her cold, pale lips to her father’s forehead; but scarcely ventured to lay them on the old grey hairs. She withdrew to her room, and, in utter bewilderment, not knowing if what had passed had been a dream or a reality touched herself with her hands to make sure that she was really awake. Then she felt beneath her fingers the circle of gold which had replaced her maiden girdle, and, drawing the lamp closer, she read upon the collar these words, which so closely corresponded with her thoughts: *“I belong to Lucius.”*

CHAPTER III

THE night was spent in sacrifices: the temples were adorned with garlands as for the great national festivals. Then, directly the sacred ceremonies were accomplished, although it was hardly one o'clock in the morning, the crowd hurried towards the wrestling-ground, so great was their eagerness to witness once more the games which recalled the old and palmy days of Greece.

Amycles was one of the eight selected judges; in this capacity he had his place reserved opposite to that of the Roman Proconsul; consequently he did not arrive until the games were about to begin. At the entrance he met Sporus coming to rejoin his master there; the guards, however, refused him admission, because, from his fair complexion, delicate hands, and languid walk, they took him for a female. Now, an ancient law, revived for this occasion, condemned any woman, who witnessed the races and wrestling in which the athletes contended naked, to be hurled from a rock. Amycles vouched for Sporus, and the youth, who had been momentarily stopped, was enabled to rejoin his master. The gymnasium resembled a bee-hive; beyond the first arrivals, who were seated on tiers of benches, the whole space was thronged. The doors seemed closed in by a wall of heads; the coping of the walls was surmounted by rows of spectators standing and holding one another up, their sole point of support being the gilded posts, at intervals of ten feet, to which the awning was fastened. Many more buzzed like bees round the entrances to the immense structure into which not merely the population of Corinth had just disappeared, but likewise representatives from the whole civilized world who crowded to this celebration. As for the women, you might see them from a distance at the gates and on the walls of the city, where they waited until the winner's name should be proclaimed.

Scarcely had Amycles seated himself, when, the number of the judges being now complete, the Proconsul rose and announced, in the name of Nero Caesar, Emperor of Rome and master of the world, that the games were opened. Loud shouts of applause greeted his words, and all eyes were turned towards the portico where the wrestlers stood waiting. Seven young men issued from it and advanced towards the Proconsul’s tribune. Two only of the wrestlers hailed from Corinth; of the five others, one was a Theban, one from Syracuse, one from Sybaris, while two were Romans.

The two Corinthians were twin-brothers; they came forward with their arms intertwined, clothed in similar tunics, and so closely alike in build, appearance, and face, that the whole circus clapped their hands at the sight of these two Menaechmi. The Theban was a young shepherd who, while keeping his sheep near Mount Cithaeron, seeing a bear coming down from the mountain, had thrown himself in its path, and, unarmed against this terrible antagonist, had seized the bear round the body and choked the life out of him. To commemorate this victory, he had covered his shoulders with the skin of the animal, whose head, serving as a helmet for him, enframed with its white teeth his sunburnt face. The Syracusan had given a no less extraordinary proof of his strength. One day, when his compatriots were making a sacrifice to Jupiter, the bull, being clumsily struck by the sacrificer, dashed into the middle of the crowd, all decked with its garlands and fillets, and had already trampled several persons under foot, when the Syracusan seized it by the horns, and, raising one horn and depressing the other, made it fall upon its side and held it under him, like a vanquished athlete, until a soldier plunged his sword into its throat. Lastly, the young Sybarite, who had for long been unaware of his own strength, had its presence revealed to him in a manner no less accidental and extraordinary. Reclining with his friends on purple couches round a sumptuous table, he had suddenly heard shouts; a chariot, drawn by two spirited horses, had dashed against the nearest corner of the street. In this chariot sat his mistress; he rushed out through the window and seized the chariot from behind; the horses, being checked in their course, suddenly reared, one of the two fell over on its side, and the young man seized in his arms his mistress, who was unconscious but unhurt. As for the two Romans, one was a professional athlete, renowned for his great victories; the other was Lucius.

The judges placed seven papers in an urn. Two of these papers were marked with an “A,” two with a “B,” two with a “C,” and one with a “D.” The lots would thus form three pairs and leave a seventh athlete to contend against the winners. The Proconsul shuffled the papers with his own hands, then the seven competitors advanced, each took out a paper and placed it in the hands of the president of the games; the latter opened them one after the other and paired the men. It chanced that the two Corinthians each drew an “A,” the Theban and the Syracusan each a “B,” the Sybarite and the athlete the two “C’s,” and Lucius the “D.”

The athletes, still in ignorance as to the order of wrestling decided by the lots, now stripped themselves, with the exception of Lucius, who, having to enter the lists last of all, remained enveloped in his cloak. The Proconsul called the two “A’s”; immediately the two brothers sprang from the portico and found themselves opposed to one another. Surprise elicited from them a cry to which the assemblage replied by a murmur of astonishment; then they remained for a moment motionless and undecided. But this hesitation lasted no longer than a flash of lightning, for they threw themselves at once into each other’s arms; the whole amphitheatre burst into unanimous applause, and, at the sound of this homage paid to fraternal affection, the two handsome youths smilingly retired to leave the field free for their rivals, and, linked arm in arm like Castor and Pollux, instead of being performers as they had expected, became spectators.

The pair who should have given the second exhibition now found themselves the first; accordingly the Theban and the Syracusan stepped forward, the conqueror of bears and the vanquisher of bulls measured one another with their eyes and then advanced to the fray. For a moment their two bodies, united and interlocked, presented the appearance of a knotted and shapeless tree-trunk capriciously modelled by Nature suddenly rolling over, torn from its roots by a stroke of lightning. For some seconds you could distinguish nothing amid the dust, so equal did the chances of each appear, and so rapidly did each wrestler find himself now above, now underneath; at last the Theban ended the struggle by planting his knee on the Syracusan’s chest, and, encircling his throat with both hands like a ring of iron, he pressed it with such violence that the latter was obliged to raise his hand in token of confession of defeat. Unanimous applause, which proved with what enthusiasm the Greeks took part in this spectacle, greeted the conclusion of this first contest; and it was to cheers thrice renewed that the victor went and placed himself beneath the Proconsul’s box, while his humiliated antagonist returned to the portico, from which at once issued the last pair of combatants, consisting of the Sybarite and the Roman professional.

It was curious to see, when they had stripped off their clothing, and while the slaves were rubbing them with oil, these two men of such an opposite character and presenting the two finest types of antiquity, that of Hercules and that of Antinous, — the Roman with his short hair and brown muscular limbs, the rounded body. The Greeks, those great worshippers of physical beauty, those religious votaries of form, those connoisseurs in every perfection, allowed a murmur of admiration to escape which at the same time caused the two adversaries to raise their heads. Their proud glances met like lightning-flashes, and, without waiting until this preparatory operation was completely finished, both tore themselves from the hands of their slaves and advanced towards one another.

Having arrived within a distance of three or four yards, they looked at each other with fresh attention, and each doubtless recognised in his adversary a rival worthy of himself, for the eyes of the one assumed the expression of defiance, and of the other that of craft. At last, with a spontaneous and similar movement, they grasped each other by the arms, placed their foreheads together, and, like two bulls struggling, made the first trial of their strength in endeavouring to force each other backwards. Both, however, remained upright and motionless in their places, like statues whose life was indicated only by the gradual swelling of the muscles which seemed on the point of bursting. After maintaining this motionless position for a minute, both threw themselves backward, their faces bathed in sweat, and breathing loudly, like divers when they return to the surface of the water.

The interval was of short duration; the two adversaries closed once more, and this time seized one another around the body; but, either from ignorance of this method of contest or from conviction of his own strength, the Sybarite gave his opponent the advantage in letting himself be grasped below the arms. Instantly the Roman lifted him from the ground. Bending, however, beneath the weight, he staggered three paces backwards, and the Sybarite, meanwhile succeeding in touching the ground with his foot, put forth all his strength, and the athlete, already tottering, fell beneath. Yet scarce could you see him touch the ground before, with supernatural strength and activity, he was on his feet again, so that the Sybarite only rose from the ground second.

There was neither victor nor vanquished; accordingly the two opponents resumed the struggle with fresh stubbornness and amid a profound silence. The thirty thousand spectators seemed carved in stone like the steps on which they were seated. Only from time to time, as fortune favoured one of the wrestlers, you heard a quick dull murmur escape from their breasts, and a slight movement undulated through the entire crowd, as ears of corn wave beneath a passing breeze. At last the wrestlers lost their footing a second time and rolled over in the sand, but this time the Roman found himself uppermost; and yet this would have been but a slight advantage had he not combined with his strength all the principles of skill in his art. Thanks to them, he kept the Sybarite in the position from which he had so promptly extricated himself. Like a serpent that chokes and bruises its prey before devouring it, he interlaced his arms and legs in those of his adversary with such skill that he succeeded in repressing all his movements; and then, pressing his forehead against that of his opponent, he forced him to touch the ground with the back of his head, which constituted in the eyes of the judges an avowal of defeat. Loud shouts resounded and a mighty clapping of hands made itself heard; but the Sybarite, though beaten, could assuredly claim his share of the applause. His defeat had come so close to victory that no one considered him disgraced; accordingly he retired slowly beneath the portico without blushes or embarrassment, having lost his crown, but nothing more.

There remained then two victors and Lucius, who had not yet wrestled and had now to encounter them both. The eyes of the spectators were now directed towards the man who, calm and unexcited during the preceding contests, had followed them with his glance, leaning against a pillar and wrapped in his cloak. Then only did they remark his sweet and effeminate features, his fair long hair, and the light golden beard which hardly concealed the lower part of his face. Every one smiled on seeing this feeble adversary who was so imprudently about to dispute the palm with the vigorous Theban and the trained professional. By the murmur which ran through the whole assemblage, Lucius perceived this prevailing sentiment; and without being disturbed or deigning to respond to it, he stepped forward a few paces and let his cloak fall to the ground. Then was seen, supporting this Apollo-like head, a strong neck and powerful shoulders, and, more strange still the whole of his fair body, the skin of which would have put to shame that of a Circassian maiden, was speckled with brown spots like those marking the tawny fur of the panther. The Theban looked carelessly at his new adversary; but the athlete, visibly disconcerted, retreated a few paces. At this moment Sporus appeared and poured over his master’s shoulders a flagon of perfumed oil, which he spread over his whole body with the aid of a purple cloth.

The Theban was to be his first antagonist; accordingly he took a step towards Lucius, expressive of his impatience at his preparations lasting so long. But Lucius held up his hand with an imperative gesture to intimate that he was not ready, and the voice of the Proconsul immediately uttered the word “Wait.” The young Roman, however, was already covered with oil, and nothing now remained but to roll himself in the dust of the circus according to the usual custom; but, instead of this, he knelt on one knee and Sporus emptied over his shoulders a bag filled with sand gathered from the banks of the Pactolus, and which was mingled with spangles of gold. This last preparation completed, Lucius rose and extended his arms in token that he was ready to wrestle.

The Theban advanced full of confidence, and Lucius awaited him with composure; but hardly had the rough hands of his adversary touched his shoulder when a terrible glance flashed from his eyes and a sound issued from his throat more like a wild beast’s roar than anything else. At the same time he let himself sink on one knee and with his powerful arms grasped the flanks of the shepherd below the ribs and about the hips; then, knotting together his hands behind his opponent’s back, he pressed his chest against the other’s belly and suddenly rose up, holding the giant between his arms. This action was so rapid and so skilfully executed that the Theban had neither time nor strength to resist it, and found himself lifted from the ground, overtopping his opponent’s head with his own, and beating the air with his arms, which found nothing to lay hold of. Then the Greeks witnessed a second wrestling of Hercules and Antaeus: the Theban rested his hands on the shoulders of Lucius, and, stiffening himself with all the strength of his arms, tried to burst the terrible chain that was choking him. In vain in his turn he surrounded his adversary’s loins with both legs like a pair of serpents; this time it was Laocoôn who got the mastery over the reptile. The more the Theban redoubled his efforts, the closer did Lucius seem to tighten the grasp with which he was strangling him, and, resting motionless on the same spot without any apparent movement, with his head against his opponent’s breast as if to listen to his suffocated breathing, ever pressing more firmly as though his increasing strength would reach a superhuman pitch, he remained in this position for several minutes, during which the Theban was seen to exhibit visible and successive signs of agony.

First, a deathly sweat poured from his forehead down his body, washing the dust which covered him; then his face grew purple, his breath rattled, his legs loosed their hold of his opponent's body, his arms and head dropped backwards, and finally a torrent of blood gushed violently from his nose and mouth. Then only did Lucius relax his arms and the unconscious Theban fell like a log at his feet.

No shout of joy, no applause greeted this victory; the assemblage remained dumb and silent. However, there was nothing to be said; all that had happened had been strictly in accordance with the rules of wrestling, no blow had been delivered, and Lucius had fairly and honourably defeated his opponent. But, although not manifested by applause, the interest taken by the spectators in this exhibition was none the less keen. So, when the slaves had carried off the still unconscious Theban, the glances which had followed him were at once directed to the athlete who, by the strength and skill which he had shown in the preceding contest, promised to prove a formidable antagonist to Lucius. But the general expectation was strangely falsified, for at the moment when Lucius was preparing for a second struggle, the athlete advanced towards him with respectful demeanour, and kneeling on one knee, raised his hand in confession of defeat. Lucius appealed to regard this act of homage without any astonishment; for, without holding out his hand to the athlete or raising him up, he threw his eyes around him as if to ask the astounded crowd if there were in its ranks a man who dared contest his victory. But no one moved or spoke, and it was amid the most profound silence that Lucius advanced towards the box of the Proconsul, who handed to him the crown. Only at this moment did some slight applause break out; but it was easy to recognise in those who gave this token of approval the sailors of the vessel that had carried Lucius to Corinth.

And yet the feeling which overpowered the crowd was not unfavourable to the young Roman. It was rather a sort of superstitious terror which had pervaded the assemblage. This supernatural strength, combined with such youthfulness, recalled the prodigies of the heroic age; the names of Theseus and Pirithoüs were on everybody's lips, and, without any interchange of their thoughts, every one was ready to believe in the presence of a demi-god. In short, this public homage, this avowal of anticipated defeat, this abasement of the slave before the master, yielded some foundation for the idea. Accordingly, when the victor quitted the circus supported on one side by the arm of Amycles and resting his other hand on the shoulder of Sporus, the whole crowd followed him to his host's door, thronging round him with eager curiosity, but at the same time so silently and timorously that you might well have called it a funeral *cortège* rather than a triumphal procession.

When they reached the gates of the city, the girls and women who had not been able to witness the contest were awaiting the victor with boughs of laurels in their hands. Lucius' eyes sought for Acté among them; but, whether from shamefacedness or fear, Acté was not present, and he looked in vain. Then he quickened his steps in the hope that the Corinthian girl might be waiting for him at the threshold of the door which she had opened for him the previous evening. He crossed that square which he had crossed in her company, and took the street through which she had guided him; but no crown, no wreath, adorned the hospitable door. Lucius rapidly cleared the threshold and rushed into the vestibule, leaving the old man far behind him; the vestibule was empty, but through the door which opened into the garden he perceived the girl kneeling before a statue of Diana, white and motionless as the marble which she held in her embrace; then he stepped softly behind her, and placed upon her head the crown which he had just carried off. Acté uttered a cry and turned round quickly towards Lucius, and the proud and ardent eyes of the young Roman announced to her, more clearly even than the crown which rolled to her feet, that her guest had won the first of the three palms of victory which he had come to Greece to contend for.

CHAPTER IV

NEXT day all Corinth decked herself in festal array from earliest dawn. The chariot races, though not the most ancient of sports, were the most solemn, being celebrated in the presence of the images of the gods. The sacred statues, brought together during the night into the temple of Jupiter which rose near the gate of the harbour of Lechseum, that is to say, on the east side of the town, had to traverse the entire length of the city in order to reach the circus which was built in the opposite quarter, within sight of the harbour of Crissa. The procession started at ten in the morning, that is to say, towards the fourth hour of the day according to the Roman division of time. The Proconsul Lentulus led the way, mounted in a chariot and wearing the garb of a triumphant general; then, behind him, came a troop of youths of fourteen or fifteen years old, all sons of knights, riding magnificent horses adorned with scarlet and gold saddle-cloths. Behind these came the competitors for the prize of the day, Lucius at the head of them, as the winner of the previous day, clothed in a green tunic, mounted in a chariot of ivory and gold, and driving with purple reins a magnificent team of four white horses. Upon his head, where one looked in vain for the wrestling crown, glittered a dazzling circle like that with which painters surround the face of the sun; and, by way of further addition to his resemblance to that deity, his beard was sprinkled with gold dust. Behind him came a young Greek from Thessaly, proud and handsome as Achilles, clothed in a yellow tunic, and driving a bronze chariot drawn by four black steeds. The two last consisted of an Athenian who claimed descent from Alcibiades, and a Syrian with a sun-tanned face. The first of these two wore a blue tunic and let his long, dark, and perfumed locks float in the wind; the second was clad in a sort of white robe tied close to the figure by a Persian girdle, and, like the sons of Ishmael, his head was surrounded by a white turban as sparkling as the snow that shines on the summit of Sinai.

Next came, marching before the statues of the gods, a troop of harpists and flute-players disguised as Satyrs and Sileni, with whom were mingled the subordinate priests of the worship of the twelve greater gods, bearing coffers and vases filled with perfumes, and gold or silver pans in which smoked the most precious aromatic herbs. At the close of the procession were placed in curtained litters the images of the gods, reclining or standing, drawn by magnificent horses and escorted by knights and patricians. This procession, which had to traverse nearly the whole extent of the city, wended its way between rows of houses covered with pictures, adorned with statues, or hung with tapestry. On passing the house of Amycles, Lucius turned to look for Acté, and beneath one of the flaps of the purple cloth extending along the front of the house he perceived the girl, blushing and timid, her head adorned with the crown which he had thrown at her feet the evening before. Acté, overcome with surprise, let the corner of the hanging fall; but, through the veil that concealed her, she heard the voice of the young Roman saying, “Come to meet me, fair hostess, on my return, and I will change your olive wreath into a crown of gold.”

Towards midday the procession reached the entrance to the hippodrome. This was an immense building two thousand feet in length and eight hundred broad. In the middle was a wall six feet high which extended the entire length of the building, with the exception of a passage wide enough for four chariots at each end; this wall was surmounted by altars, shrines, and empty pedestals awaiting the statues of the gods which would occupy them for this solemn occasion only. One end of the hippodrome was occupied by the barriers or starting-places, the other by the spectators’ benches; at each end of the wall were three triangular turning-posts, which had to be doubled seven times to make up the length of the course agreed upon.

The drivers had, as we have seen, assumed the colours of the various parties which divided Rome at this time, and, as large amounts had been wagered beforehand, those who had made bets had adopted the colours of such of the charioteers as, by their smart appearance, the pedigree of their horses, or their previous victories, had inspired them respectively with most confidence. Nearly all the benches, then, in the hippodrome were thronged with spectators who added to the enthusiasm generally inspired by chariot races the personal interest which they took in those whom they were backing. The ladies themselves had their different favourites, as could be seen by their girdles and veils corresponding to the colours worn by the four competitors. Accordingly, when the procession was heard approaching, a strange movement that seemed to thrill it like an electric shock surged through all this human sea, and all heads waved like the surging billows of a sea.

When the doors were opened, the small space that still remained unoccupied was overwhelmed by torrents of fresh spectators, who beat like a flood against the walls of the gigantic stone building. Scarcely a fourth part of the sightseers who accompanied the procession were able to enter, and the remainder, thrust back by the Proconsul’s guard, might be seen looking for all the highest points which allowed them to overlook the hippodrome, clinging to the boughs of trees, hanging over the battlements and crowning, as it were, with living flower-work the terraces of the nearest houses.

Hardly had all taken their place, when the principal door was opened and Lentulus, appearing at the entrance to the hippodrome, caused the noisy confusion of expectation to be succeeded by the profound silence of curiosity. Either from confidence in Lucius, the victor of the previous day, or by way of flattery of the divine Emperor Claudius Nero, who gave his patronage in Rome to the green faction to which he did himself the honour to belong, the Proconsul wore a tunic of that colour instead of the purple robe. He drove slowly round the hippodrome, followed by the images of the gods, which were still preceded by the musicians, who did not cease to play until the images were laid upon their couches or placed erect on their pedestals. Then Lentulus gave the signal by throwing a piece of white wool into the centre of the hippodrome. Immediately a herald, mounted on a horse without saddle or bridle, and clad in the garb of Mercury, galloped into the arena, and, without dismounting, picked up the piece of wool on the point of his wand, then galloped round the inner railing waving it like a standard, and on arriving at the barriers threw wand and wool over the walls behind which the chariots were waiting. At this signal the doors of the barriers were thrown open and the four competitors appeared.

At the same moment their names were thrown into a basket, since their positions were to be determined by lot in order that those who were furthest from the wall running down the middle might have no ground to complain of the accident which gave them a larger circle to traverse. The order in which the names were drawn would assign to each the position he was to occupy.

The Proconsul shuffled the names written on pieces of paper folded up, drew them out and opened them one after the other. The first he called was that of the Syrian with the white turban; he at once left his place and drew up close to the wall in such a way that the axle tree of his chariot was parallel with a line drawn with chalk on the sand. The second was that of the Athenian in the blue tunic, who placed himself next to the Syrian. The third was that of the Thessalian in yellow. The last was that of Lucius, to whom Fortune had assigned the most disadvantageous position, as though she were already jealous of his victory on the previous day. The two last named at once placed themselves alongside of their rivals. Then a band of young slaves passed between the chariots, decking the horses' manes with their masters' colours, and waved little flags before the eyes of these noble animals to arouse their mettle, while the starters, holding a chain fastened to two rings, brought the four chariots into an exactly even line.

Then came a moment of noisy expectation; wagers were redoubled, fresh bets were offered and taken, confused shouts were interchanged. Suddenly a trumpet is heard and instantly all is hushed; the spectators who had been standing sat down, and the surface of this human sea, just now so tumultuously agitated, became calm, and assumed the appearance of a sloping prairie enamelled with a thousand colours. At the last note of the trumpet the chain dropped, and the four chariots started, whirled along at the utmost speed of the horses.

Two circuits were accomplished during which the competitors preserved pretty nearly their respective positions; however, the quality of the teams began to be distinguishable to the eyes of such of the spectators as were judges of horseflesh. The Syrian had difficulty in controlling his head-strong steeds with their slender legs, habituated to run wild in the desert, and which by dint of patience and skill he had trained, from a wild state, to bear the yoke; and you felt that, when he gave them full liberty, they would carry him as swiftly as the *simoon,* which they had often outstripped in those vast sandy plains stretching from the foot of the mountains of Judaea to the shores of the Dead Sea. The Athenian had brought his horses from Thrace; but, voluptuous and proud as the hero from whom he boasted descent, he had left the task of training them to his slaves, and you felt that his team, guided by a hand and animated by a voice to which they were strangers, would support him badly at a critical moment. The Thessalian, on the contrary, seemed to be one in spirit with his steeds, which came from Elis, and which he had fed with his own hand and trained a hundred times on the very ground where Achilles trained his, between the Peneus and the

Enipeus. As for Lucius, he had assuredly found again the breed of Mysian horses mentioned by Virgil, whose dams were fertilised by the wind; for, though he had the longest distance to cover, yet he maintained his position and even seemed to have gained rather than lost ground, and this without any effort, neither checking his horses nor pressing them, but letting them gallop at what appeared to be their ordinary pace.

At the third round the advantages, real or apparent, were more clearly pronounced; the Athenian had gained two spear-lengths on the Thessalian, the foremost of his competitors; the Syrian, holding in his Arab steeds with all his might, had allowed himself to be passed in the certainty of being able to regain his lead; while Lucius, calm and quiet as the god whose statue he seemed to be, appeared to be watching a contest to which he was a stranger and in which he took no special interest, — so smiling was his countenance, so studied his attitude in accordance with the most precise rules of mimetic action.

At the fourth turn, an incident diverted attention from the other three competitors and fixed it more especially on Lucius: his whip, which had a lash of rhinoceros’ skin and was inlaid with gold, fell from his hand to the ground. Instantly Lucius pulled up his horses, sprang into the arena, picked up the whip which hitherto had seemed a quite unnecessary instrument, and, mounting his chariot, found himself left about thirty yards behind his rivals. Short as the delay had been, it had struck a terrible blow at the hopes and interests of the green faction; but their fear disappeared like a flash of lightning, for Lucius leaned over his horses, and, without using the whip or exciting them by gestures, contented himself with giving a peculiar whistle. Instantly they set off as though endowed with the wings of Pegasus, and before the fourth round was finished, Lucius had regained his accustomed position amid loud shouts of applause.

At the fifth round the Athenian lost all control of his horses, which broke away at their utmost speed; true, he had left his rivals far behind, but this apparent advantage deceived nobody, and could not deceive himself. Accordingly you saw him every now and then turn round uneasily, and, estimating all the possibilities of the actual situation, instead of trying to restrain his already tired horses, he even lashed them with his triple-thonged whip, calling them by their name and hoping that before they were quite used up he would have gained enough ground to prevent his being overtaken. Moreover, he realised so fully his lack of control over the animals that, although he might have drawn closer to the wall and consequently have diminished the distance to be traversed, he made no attempt to do so for fear of coming to grief at the turning-post, but continued his course at the same distance from the wall which the lots had assigned to him at the start.

Only two circuits now remained to be made, and from the excitement of both spectators and combatants the decisive crisis was felt to be approaching. The supporters of the blue, represented by the Athenian, appeared visibly uneasy at their momentary success, and shouted to him to pull his horses in, but the animals taking these shouts as signs of encouragement, quickened their pace, and foaming and sweating, showed that they would speedily exhaust their remaining strength.

It was at this moment that the Syrian gave the rein to his coursers and that the sons of the desert, left to their own free will, began to encroach on the Athenian’s lead. The Thessalian was for a moment taken aback by the speed at which they went, but immediately letting his faithful companions hear his voice, he too dashed forward as though borne by a whirlwind. As for Lucius, he contented himself with the whistle with which he had already urged his horses on, and, without their even yet appearing to exert their full strength, kept his position.

The Athenian, however, saw the two rivals whom the lots had placed to right and left of him dash upon him like a tempest; he realised that he was done for if he allowed space for a chariot to pass between the wall and himself; so he drew towards it just in time to prevent the Syrian from passing him, whereupon the latter pulled his horses to the right and tried to pass between the Athenian and the Thessalian; but the space was too narrow. With a quick glance he perceived that the Thessalian’s chariot was lighter and less solid than his own; forming an instant resolve he drove sideways at him, and crushing wheel against wheel, broke his axle tree and overturned driver and chariot in the sand. Cleverly as this manoeuvre had been executed, rapid as had been the collision and the overthrow occasioned by it, the Syrian had nevertheless been retarded by it; but he soon regained his advantage, and the Athenian saw the two rivals whom he had so long left in the rear arrive at the sixth turn all but simultaneously with himself. Before he had accomplished the sixth part of this last circuit, he was overtaken and instantly passed. The struggle thenceforward lay between the white and the green drivers, between the Syrian and Lucius.

Then ensued a grand spectacle; the speed of the eight horses was so swift and so even that you might have thought they were harnessed abreast; a cloud of dust surrounded them, and as in a tempest you hear the rattle of the thunder and see the lightning rend the sky, so you heard the rattle of the wheels, and seemed to perceive through the whirlwind of dust the horses breathing flames. The whole assemblage rose to its feet, those who had laid wagers waved their veils and their green and white cloaks frantically, and even those who had lost through backing the blue of the Thessalian or the yellow of the Athenian, forgetful of their recent defeat, encouraged the two rivals with shouts and applause. At last, it seemed as though the Syrian must win the day, for his horses passed those of his adversary by a head; but at the same instant, and as though he had only been waiting for this to happen, Lucius with one stroke of the whip drew a bloody line across the hind-quarters of his horses. The noble beasts neighed shrilly with surprise and pain; then, with a simultaneous spring, dashing away like the eagle, like the arrow, like the thunderbolt, they passed the vanquished Syrian, accomplished the required distance, and, leaving him more than fifty yards behind, stopped at the goal, after completing the entire course, that is to say, seven times the circuit of the arena.

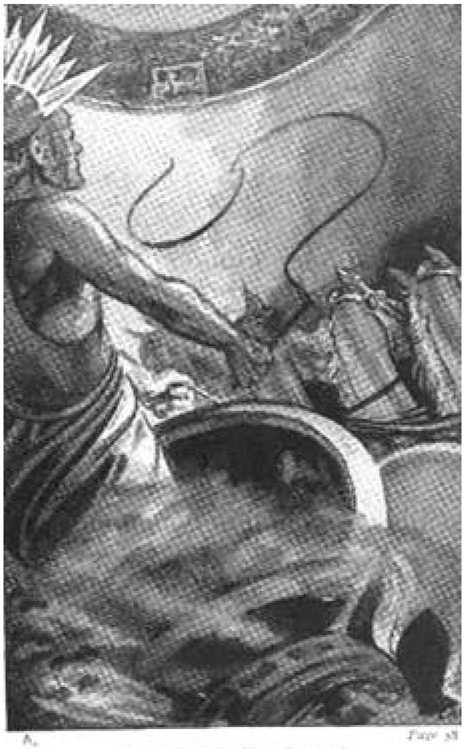

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. . . . dashing away like the eagle . . . . .

Deafening shouts of admiration rent the air, and the excitement rose almost to frenzy. This young Roman, victor in the previous day’s wrestling, victor in the race to-day, was Theseus, was Castor, perhaps Apollo come down to earth once more; but assuredly he was a favourite of the gods. Meanwhile, as though accustomed to such triumphs, he had leapt lightly from his chariot on to the wall, mounted some steps leading to a pedestal where he exhibited himself to the gaze of the spectators, while a herald proclaimed his name and victory, and Lentulus, descending from his box, went and placed in his hand an Idumaean palm and surrounded his head with a crown of gold and silver leaves interlaced with purple fillets. As for the money prize, which consisted of gold coins brought to him in a brass vessel, Lucius handed it back to the Proconsul to be distributed in his name to the aged poor and the orphans of the city.

Then he immediately made a rapid sign to Sporus, who ran rapidly towards him, holding in his hands a pigeon which he had taken that morning from Acté’s pigeon-house. Lucius passed round the neck of the bird of Venus a purple string to which were tied two leaves from the golden crown, and released the messenger of victory, which flew off swiftly towards that quarter of the city where the house of Amycles was situated.

CHAPTER V

THE two successive victories of Lucius and the strange circumstances accompanying them had produced, as we have said, a profound impression on the minds of the spectators. Greece had been formerly the land beloved of the gods; Apollo, when banished from heaven, had turned shepherd and had kept the flocks of Admetus, King of Thessaly; Venus, born on the bosom of the waves and drawn by the Tritons towards the nearest shore, had landed near Helos, and, though free to choose the places for her worship, had preferred Cnidus, Paphos, Idalia and Cythera to all the countries of the earth. Finally, the Arcadians, when disputing with the Cretans the honour of being the compatriots of the king of the gods, asserted that Jupiter was born on Mount Lycseus, and, even were this claim a false one, certain it is that when he had to choose a seat of empire he placed his throne, in dutiful recollection of the past, on the summit of Olympus. Well, all these reminiscences of the ages of myth and fable had presented themselves, thanks to Lucius, to the poetic imagination of this favoured nation, whom the Romans had disinherited of their future, but had been unable to despoil of their past. So the competitors who had presented themselves to strive with him for the prize of song, one and all retired from the field on seeing the bad fortune of those who had contested with him the prize of wrestling and the chariot race. They recalled the fate of Marsyas contending with Apollo, and the Pierides challenging the Muses. Lucius therefore remained the sole competitor out of the five who had originally entered their names. Nevertheless, the Proconsul decided that the performance should take place on the day and at the hour that had been announced.

The subject chosen by Lucius was one that interested the Corinthians keenly, being a poem on Medea, the authorship of which was attributed to the Emperor Nero himself. That enchantress, as you know, having been brought to Corinth by Jason, who had carried her off, and having been deserted by him at that city, had laid her two sons on the steps of the altar, committing them to the protection of the gods, while she destroyed her rival by sending her a garment poisoned like that of Nessus. But the Corinthians, aghast at the crime of the mother, had torn the children from the temple and stoned them to death. This act of sacrilege did not go unpunished; the gods avenged their outraged majesty, and an epidemic disease attacked all the Corinthian children. However, as more than fifteen centuries had elapsed since that date, the descendants of the murderers denied this crime of their forefathers. Still, an annual festival on the day of the massacre of the two victims, the custom of making children wear a black robe, and of shaving their heads up to the age of five as an act of expiation, — these were evident proofs that the dreadful truth had prevailed over all these denials. Easy, therefore, to understand how this circumstance added to the curiosity of the spectators.

Since the crowds of people who had swarmed to Corinth could not all find room in the theatre, which, far smaller than the running-ground or the hippodrome, only held twenty thousand spectators, there had been distributed among the chief inhabitants of Corinth and the most distinguished of the visitors, small ivory tablets on which numbers were engraved corresponding to similar numbers carved upon the seats. Stewards, placed at the different blocks, were charged with the duty of seating the audience and of seeing that nobody intruded into the reserved places; consequently, in spite of the surging crowd outside, everything was arranged in the most orderly manner within.

To mitigate the glare of the May sun, the theatre was covered with an enormous awning; this was a blue covering, composed of silk material interspersed with golden stars, at the centre of which, within a radiant circle, was seen a representation of Nero in the costume of a triumphant general and mounted on a chariot drawn by four horses. In spite of the shade which this kind of tent afforded to the theatre, the heat was so great that many of the younger members of the audience held in their hands large fans of peacocks’ feathers, with which they cooled the ladies, who reclined, rather than sat, on purple cushions or on Persian rugs which had been placed beforehand by slaves upon the seats reserved for them. Among these was to be seen Acté, who, not venturing to wear the crowns with which the victor had presented her, had intertwined in her hair the two golden leaves brought her by the pigeon. Instead, however, of being surrounded by a court of young people toying with her, as was the case with the majority of ladies present at the spectacle, she had by her side only her father, whose handsome and grave, but at the same time smiling face indicated the interest which he took in the triumphs of his guest and the pride which he felt in them. He it was who, confident in Lucius' good fortune, had persuaded his daughter to be present in the certainty that on this occasion too they would witness his success.

The hour announced for the performance was approaching, and every one was on the tiptoe of expectation, when a noise like thunder was heard, and a light shower fell on the spectators and refreshed the atmosphere, perfuming it at the same time. All the spectators clapped their hands, for the thunder, produced by two men rolling stones in a brazen vase behind the scenes, was that of Claudius Pulcher, its inventor, and announced that the performance was about to begin; while the shower was nothing but a perfumed dew composed of an infusion of Cilician saffron which escaped by spouts from the statues which crowned the periphery of the theatre. A moment later the curtain was lowered, and Lucius appeared with a lyre in his hand, having on his right the actor Paris, whose duty it was to make appropriate gestures while Lucius sang, and behind him the chorus, led by the choragus, to the accompaniment of a flute and conducted by a pantomime actor.

At the first notes let fall by the young Roman it was easy to recognise a skilled and practised singer; for instead of at once attacking his subject he preceded it by a kind of scale containing two octaves and the fifth of a third octave, that is to say, the greatest compass of the human voice that had been heard since Timotheus. Then, and then only, after executing this prelude with as much ease as correctness, he entered upon his theme.

This was, as we have said, the adventures of Medea, the woman of entrancing beauty, the magician with terrible enchantments. A skilful master of the dramatic art, the Emperor Claudius Nero had taken up the legend at the moment when Jason on board his good ship *Argo*, lands on the coast of Colchis and encounters Medea, the daughter of King Aetes, gathering flowers by the sea-shore. At his first notes Acté started. Was it not just so she herself had seen Lucius arrive? She too was gathering flowers when the gilded bireme touched the strand of Corinth, and she recognised in Jason's questions and the answers of Medea the very words exchanged between herself and the young Roman.

At this moment, and as though a special harmony were required to express such tender sentiments, Sporus, taking advantage of a pause made by the chorus, came forward with a lyre strung in the Ionian manner, that is to say, with eleven strings, resembling the instrument with which Timotheus made his soft music ring in the ears of the Lacedaemonians, and which the Ephors pronounced so dangerously enervating that they declared the singer had wounded the majesty of the ancient music, and attempted to corrupt the young Spartans, albeit the Lacedaemonians had issued this decree about the very time of the battle of Aegospotami, which made them masters of Athens.

Well, four centuries had elapsed since that day; Sparta had been levelled to the ground, Athens was the slave of Rome, Greece reduced to the rank of a province; the prophecy of Euripides had been fulfilled, and, instead of the corrupting lyre being curtailed of four strings by public decree, Lucius was applauded with an enthusiasm amounting to frenzy! As for Acté, she listened, voiceless and breathless; for it seemed to her that it was her own story which her lover had begun to tell in song.

And indeed, like Jason, Lucius came to carry off a wonderful prize, and already two attempts, crowned with success, had announced that, like Jason, he would prove victorious; but to celebrate the victory, he needed another lyre than that on which he had sung of love. So from the moment when, having met Medea in the temple of Hecaté, he had obtained from his fair mistress the aid of her magic art, and the three talismans that would help him to surmount the terrible obstacles which stood in the way of his gaining the golden fleece, it is with a Lydian lyre, with tones now deep, now piercing, that he engages in his enterprise. A shudder runs through Acté's frame, for her thoughts cannot separate Jason from Lucius; she follows her hero, who has been anointed with magic juices to render him invulnerable, into the first lists, where he encounters two Vulcanian bulls of gigantic size, with brazen hoofs and horns and mouths that breathe flames. Yet scarce has Jason touched them with the enchanted whip than they allow themselves to be quietly harnessed to a plough adamant, and the heroic husbandman ploughs up the four acres consecrated to Mars. Thence he passes to the second lists, whither Acté follows him in spirit; scarce has he entered ere a gigantic serpent rears its head amid a wood of olives and oleanders that forms its lair, and hissing felly, advances against the hero. Then begins a terrible struggle, but Jason is invulnerable, the serpent breaks its teeth in vain attempts to bite, exhausts itself in fruitless efforts to crush him in its coils, while on the other hand each stroke of Jason's sword inflicts deep gashes. Soon it is the monster that retreats while Jason attacks, the reptile that flees and the man who pursues. The reptile enters a dark and narrow cavern; Jason, crawling like the serpent, enters after it, and presently comes forth again, holding in his hand the head of his grim adversary. Then he returns to the field that he has ploughed, and sows the monster’s teeth in the deep furrows traced in the earth by the ploughshare. Instantly from the magic furrow springs a living crop of armed warriors, who rush upon him. But Jason has only to throw amongst them the stone given by Medea, to make them turn their weapons against each other, and, busied with mutual slaughter, they leave him to penetrate to the third lists, in the centre of which rises a tree with silver trunk bearing emerald foliage and ruby fruit, from the branches of which hangs the golden fleece shorn from the ram of Phrixus. But there remains yet a last enemy, more terrible and hard to overcome than any that Jason has yet contended with; a gigantic dragon with prodigious wings all covered with scales of adamant, that render it as invulnerable as is he who attacks it. Accordingly he employs a different weapon for dealing with this adversary, in the shape of a golden cup filled with magic milk which Jason puts upon the ground, and out of which the monster drinks a soporific beverage, that produces a heavy sleep, during which the adventurous son of Aeson carries off the golden fleece. Then Lucius resumes the Ionian lyre, for Medea awaits the victor, and Jason must find words of love potent enough to make his mistress resolve to quit father and country, and follow him over the waves. The struggle is long and hard, but at length love gains the day; Medea, trembling and half-clad, leaves her old father while he is asleep. But lo! on reaching the Palace gates, she is seized with a longing to see the author of her being once again; she goes back with timid step and suspended breathing, enters the old man’s chamber and approaches his bed, leans over him and presses a kiss of eternal farewell on his white locks, utters a sobbing cry, which the old man takes for a voice in dreamland, and returns to throw herself into the arms of her lover, who awaits her at the gate, and carries her off swooning in that strange vessel built by Minerva herself in the dockyards of Iolcus, and beneath whose keel the waves run so obediently, that when Medea awakens, she sees the paternal shore fading from view on the horizon, and quits Asia for Europe, father for husband, the past for the future.

This second part of the poem had been sung by Lucius with such passionate rapture that all the women listened with overpowering emotion; Acté especially, seized with the ardour of love, her eyes fixed, her mouth voiceless, her bosom breathless, thought she listened to her own story, and that she saw her own life, of which the past and the future were being represented to her by art magic. And so at the moment when Medea laid her lips on the white locks of Aëtes, and let the last sob of a daughter’s love escape from her broken heart, Acté pressed close to Amycles, and, looking pale and distraught, leaned her head against the old man’s shoulder. As for Lucius, his triumph was complete; at the first pause in his poem he had been greeted with wild applause; now there were frantic shouts and tumultuous stampings of feet, and none but he could calm, by resuming the third part of his drama, the enthusiastic clamour which he himself had aroused.

Once more he changed his lyre, for it was no longer virginal or voluptuous love that he had to depict, no longer the triumph of the lover or the warrior, but the ingratitude of man, and the transports of a woman’s jealousy, It was love, mad, delirious, frenzied, love avenging and homicidal, of which the Dorian mode alone could express all the suffering and the rage.

Medea sails in the enchanted vessel, she lands in Phseacia, touches at Iolcus to pay a filial debt to Jason’s father by renewing his youth; then she lands at Corinth, where her lover abandons her in order to marry Creüsa, daughter of the King of Epirus. It is then that the jealous wife takes the place of the devoted mistress. She steeps a robe in a deadly poison, and sends it to the bride, who wraps herself in it, all unsuspecting. Then, while she expires in agony in sight of the faithless Jason, Medea herself, in frenzy and despair, cuts the throats of her two sons, so that the mother may preserve no remembrance of the lover, and disappears in a chariot drawn by winged dragons.

At this point in the poem, which flattered the pride of the Corinthians by fastening, as Euripides had already done, the murder of the children upon their mother, the applause and bravos gave place to shouts and stamping, amid which the rattling sound of castanets burst forth, the use of these instruments expressing in the theatre the final pitch of enthusiasm. Then it was not merely the olive crown prepared by the Proconsul that was awarded to the wonderful singer, but a very rain of flowers and garlands which the ladies tore from their heads and hurled frantically upon the stage. For a moment you might have feared Lucius would be crushed beneath these crowns as Tarpeia had been beneath the Sabine bucklers; the more so that, motionless and to all appearance insensible to this unexampled triumph, he sought with his eyes amid the audience the one woman in particular in whose eyes he desired to triumph. At last he perceived her lying almost unconscious in the old man's arms, the only one of all these fair Corinthians who still wore her garland on her head. Then he looked at her with such a tender gaze and extended his arms towards her with such a suppliant gesture, that Acté raised her hand to her garland and detached it from her brow; but lacking strength to throw it as far as her lover, let it fall into the middle of the orchestra, and buried her weeping face in her father's arms.

Next day at dawn the gilded bireme floated on the blue waves of the Corinthian gulf, light and enchanted as the *Argo;* like the *Argo,* it bore away another Medea, disloyal to her father and her country. This was Acté, supported in the arms of Lucius and leaning with pale face on the taffrail, watching the mountains of Cithaeron, below which Corinth rests, gradually fade from view. Motionless, with fixed gaze and parted lips, she remained thus so long as she could see the city crowning the hill, and the acropolis overlooking the city. Then, as the city disappeared behind the waves, and next the acropolis, a white point lost in space, dancing for a while on the crest of the waves, was lost to view like a halcyon diving into the sea, a sigh that exhausted all the strength of her spirit escaped her breast, her knees failed her, and she fell in a swoon at Lucius' feet.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN the young fugitive opened her eyes again, she found herself in the chief cabin of the ship; Lucius was seated near her bed and was supporting her dishevelled head, while in a corner on a purple rug embroidered with gold, the tigress, quiet and gentle as a gazelle, lay sleeping. It was night, and through the opening in the deck above could be seen the clear blue Ionian sky all studded with stars. The bireme floated so quietly that it resembled an immense cradle rocked by the kindly sea as a nurse rocks the cradle of her child. All nature, now lulled to sleep, was so calm and clear that Acté was tempted for a moment to believe she had been dreaming beneath the maiden veil of her early years; but Lucius, attentive to her slightest movement, on seeing that she was awake, snapped his fingers, and immediately a young and handsome slave-girl entered, holding in her hand a taper of burning wax, with which she lighted a golden lamp supported by a bronze pedestal which stood at the foot of the bed. The moment the girl entered, Acté's eyes had fastened on her and watched her with growing attention. This slave whom she saw for the first time seemed, nevertheless, not unknown to her; her features even aroused in her memory recent recollections, and yet it was impossible to put a name to that young and melancholy visage. So many conflicting thoughts were tossing in the poor child's brain that she could not bear their pressure, but closed her eyes and let her head fall back upon the pillow. Then Lucius, thinking that she wished to sleep, signed to the slave-girl to watch over her slumber and left the room. The slave, left alone with Acté, looked at her for a moment with an indescribable expression of sadness, and presently lying down on the purple rug on which Phœbé was stretched, made a cushion for herself of the shoulder of the tigress who, disturbed in her sleep, half opened a fierce and gleaming eye, but, on recognising a friend, instead of punishing such boldness, licked the slave's delicate hand two or three times with her red tongue, and carelessly lay down again uttering a sigh which was more like a roar.

At this moment an entrancing harmony proceeded from the interior of the vessel. This came from the same body of singers whom Acté had already heard when the bireme landed at the port of Corinth; but on this occasion the solitude and silence of night lent to it even greater charm and mystery. Presently the united chorus was succeeded by a single voice; Lucius was chanting a prayer to Neptune, and Acté recognised those thrilling tones which had struck the innermost chords of her being in the theatre the previous day, — tones so resonant and melodious you might fancy the Sirens of Cape Palinurus had met the ship of a second Ulysses. Acté, yielding herself wholly to the influence of this enchanted music, reopened her weary lids, and fixing her eyes on the starry heavens, little by little forgot her remorse and grief in thinking only of her love. By now the last vibrations of the lyre and the last cadences of the voice had gradually died away as though wafted on the wings of the spirits of the air, yet Acté still seemed to hear the melody which had taken such a hold upon her; at last she lowered her eyes, and her gaze for the second time encountered that of the young slave-girl. She, like her mistress, seemed to be under the influence of a spell; presently the glances of the two women met, and Acté was more than ever convinced that this was not the first time that that sad eye had let its bright, quick glance fall upon her. Acté made a sign with her hand and the slave rose. Both remained for an instant without speaking; Acté was the first to break the silence.

"What is your name, girl?" she asked.

"Sabina," answered the slave, and this one word made her questioner start; for, like the face, the voice was not unfamiliar to her; however, the name which she had uttered did not arouse any memories in her breast.

"Of what country are you?" continued Acté.

"I left it so young that I have no country."

"Who is your master?"

"Yesterday I belonged to Lucius; to-day I belong to Acté."

"Have you belonged to him for long?"

"As long as I can remember."

"And you are no doubt devoted to him?"

"As a daughter to her father."

"Come, sit down beside me, and let us talk of him."

Sabina obeyed, but with evident reluctance. Acté, attributing this hesitation to fear, took her hand to reassure her; it was cold as marble. Yielding, however, to a movement on the part of her mistress, who gently drew her towards her, she let herself sink, rather than sat down, upon the seat which the other had indicated.

“Have I not seen you before?” Acté went on.

“I do not think so,” stammered the slave.

“At the running-ground, the hippodrome or the theatre?”

“I did not leave the ship.”

“And you were not a spectator of the triumphs of Lucius?”

“I am accustomed to them.”

A fresh silence succeeded these questions and replies exchanged by the one with increasing curiosity, by the other with a marked reluctance. This sentiment was so evident, that Acté could not mistake it.

“Listen, Sabina,” she said, “I see how much it costs you to exchange masters; I will tell Lucius that you do not wish to leave him.”

“Do nothing of the kind,” said the slave trembling; “when Lucius orders, he must be obeyed.”

“Is his anger then so terrible?” continued Acté, smiling.

“Terrible!” answered the slave with such an expression of alarm that Acté shuddered involuntarily.

“And yet,” she resumed, “those who surround him appear to love him; that young Sporus, for example.”

“Sporus!” murmured the slave.

At this moment Acté stopped. Her memory returned to her; it was Sporus whom Sabina resembled, and this resemblance was so perfect that, in surprise that she had not discovered it sooner, she seized the girl by both hands and looking hard at her, said:

“You know Sporus?”

“He is my brother,” stammered the child.

“And where is he?”

“He has remained at Corinth.”

At this moment the door was opened; the young Roman appeared, and Acté, who was still holding Sabina’s two hands within her own, felt a shudder run through the veins of her new slave. Lucius fixed his piercing blue eyes on the strange sight which presented itself, then, after a moment’s silence, he remarked: “My beloved Acté, do you not wish to take advantage of the rising dawn to come and breathe the pure morning air?”

Beneath the tones of his voice, calm and sweet as they were on the surface, there was something hard and metallic, as it were, which Acté noticed for the first time. An instinctive feeling approaching to terror penetrated her breast so deeply, that she took this question for a command and obeyed without answering; but her strength did not support her inclination, and she would have fallen, had not Lucius rushed to her and held her up. She felt herself lifted between her lover's arms with the same ease with which an eagle would have snatched up a dove, and, without accounting to herself for the reason of her fear, let herself be carried by him silently and with her eyes closed, as if he were bearing her to the edge of a precipice.

When they reached the deck, she felt herself reviving in the pureness of the balmy breeze; besides, she was no longer in the arms of Lucius, so she summoned up courage to open her eyes, and found that she was lying near the taffrail in a hammock stitched with gold, fastened at one end to the mast and at the other to a small carved column designed apparently for its support. Lucius, leaning against the mast, was standing by her side.

During the night, the vessel, favoured by the wind, had sailed out of the gulf of Corinth and, after doubling the cape of Elis, had passed between Zacynthus and Cephalonia. The sun appeared to be rising behind these two islands and its first rays were lighting up the crest of the mountains and separating them into two distinct parts, so that the western slopes were still plunged in shadow. Acté was completely ignorant of where she was, so turning to Lucius, she asked:

"Can we still see Greece?"

"Yes," said Lucius, "and this scent which is wafted to us is a last farewell, it is that of the roses of Samé and the orange-trees of Zacynthus; there is no winter for those twin sisters which expand to the sun like a basket of flowers. Would my fair Acté like me to build her a palace on each of these islands?"

"Lucius," said Acté, "you frighten me sometimes by making me promises such as none but a god could perform. Who are you, and what are you concealing from me? are you Jove the Thunderer, and do you fear lest, if you appeared before me in your true splendour, your thunderbolt would consume me as it did Semelé?"

"You are mistaken," said Lucius, smiling; "I am nothing but a poor singer to whom an uncle left all his fortune on condition that I should bear his name; my sole power, Acté, lies in my love, but I feel that with your support I could face the twelve labours of Hercules."

“You love me then?” asked the girl.

“Yes, darling!” said Lucius.

And the Roman uttered these words in a tone of such earnest conviction that his mistress raised both hands to heaven as though to thank it for her happiness. For the moment, she had forgotten everything; both regrets and remorse were effaced from her heart, just as her country, now disappearing on the horizon, was effaced from her sight.

They sailed thus for six days beneath a blue sky, upon a blue sea; on the seventh they perceived ahead of them the town of Locri, built by the soldiers of Ajax. Then, doubling the promontory of Hercules, they entered the straits of Sicily, leaving on their left Messina, the ancient Zanclé, with its harbour curved like a sickle, and on their left Rhegium, from which city the tyrant Dionysius demanded a wife and which offered him the daughter of its public executioner. Then, keeping a straight course between the boiling Charybdis and the roaring Scylla, they bade farewell to the Ionian waves and entered the Tyrrhenian sea illuminated by the volcano of Strongylé, that never extinguished lighthouse of the Mediterranean. For five days more they voyaged, now with sails, now with oars, and saw rise before them in succession Velia, near which could be still distinguished the ruins of the tomb of Palinurus; Paestum with its three temples, Caprese with its twelve palaces. Then finally they entered the magnificent bay at the farther extremity of which rose Naples, that fair daughter of Greece, that slave to whom Rome had given freedom, lying at the foot of Vesuvius, having on her right Herculaneum, Pompeii and Stabise, cities destined to be overwhelmed twenty years later in their tomb of lava; and on her left, Puteoli with its giant mole, Baiae, so dreaded by Propertius, and Bauli, soon to be rendered notorious by the matricide of Nero.

Scarcely was Lucius in sight of the city, ere he exchanged the white sails of his bireme for purple ones and decked his mast with a branch of laurel. This signal had doubtless been agreed upon and proclaimed his victory; for he had hardly hoisted it when a great commotion seemed to take place on shore, and the people rushed to meet the Olympic vessel. The harbour was entered to the accompaniment of musical instruments, the songs of sailors and the applause of the multitude. A chariot drawn by four white horses awaited Lucius, which he mounted, clad in a purple robe and a blue chlamys starred with gold, wearing on his brow the Olympic crown of olive, and holding in his hand the Pythian crown of laurel. Then, through a breach effected in the walls, he entered the city in triumph as a conqueror.

Along the whole route to Rome he was greeted with similar honours and rejoicings. At Fundi, an old man of sixty-five, whose family was as ancient as Rome itself, and who, after the African war, had obtained an ovation and three priesthoods, had prepared splendid games in his honour, and came himself to meet him and offer them to him. This proceeding on the part of a man of such consideration appeared to cause a great sensation among the followers of Lucius — a sensation which increased momentarily on account of the strange reports concerning this old man. It was said that, as one of his ancestors was offering sacrifice, an eagle swooped down upon the victim, tore out its entrails and bore them off to the top of an oak. It was then predicted that one of his descendants should be Emperor, and this descendant, it was said, was Galba; for when the latter had come one day with several young men of his own age to salute Octavius, the Emperor, struck with a kind of momentary second sight, had passed his hand over his cheek, saying: “And you, too, child, shall exercise our power.” Livia was so fond of him that at her death she left him fifty million sesterces; but as the amount was written in figures Tiberius reduced the sum to five hundred thousand, and possibly the old Emperor’s hatred would not have stopped there, inasmuch as he knew of the prediction of the oracle, had not Thrasyllus, his astrologer, told him that it would be only in his old age that Galba would reign. “Let him live then!” the Emperor had replied, “for it will make no difference to me.” In point of fact, Tiberius was dead; Caligula and Claudius had occupied the throne; Nero was now Emperor; Galba was sixty-five and nothing seemed to indicate that he would attain to supreme power. As, however, the successors of Tiberius, coming closer to the fulfilment of the prediction, could not show the same indifference as he had done, Galba habitually wore, even in his sleep, a dagger suspended from his neck by a chain, and never went abroad without carrying with him a million sesterces in gold, in case he should have to flee from the lictors, or buy over his assassins.

The victor spent two days with Galba amid fêtes and triumphs, and Acté witnessed a precaution on the part of Lucius which she had not seen him take before, and the reason of which she could not explain. A detachment of soldiers, who had come to meet the victor and act as his escort, kept watch all night in the apartments surrounding his chamber, and her lover, before retiring to bed, took special care to place his sword beneath the pillow. Acté did not venture to question him, but she felt instinctively that some danger threatened him; so each morning she begged him earnestly to depart; at last, on the third day, he left Fundi, and continuing his triumphal progress through the towns, always entering by breaches made in the walls, arrived finally at the Alban Mount, accompanied by a procession which resembled the army of a satrap rather than the following of a mere victor in the games. On arriving at the summit, Acté uttered a cry of surprise and admiration; she had just caught sight of Rome, in all its extent and splendour, at the end of the Appian road.

In very truth, Rome presented itself to the sight of the young Greek under its most magnificent aspect. The Appian Way was styled the queen of roads, as being the finest and most important, inasmuch as, starting from the Tyrrhenian Sea, it crossed the Apennines, passed through Calabria and joined the Adriatic. From the Alban Mount to Rome it served as a public promenade, and, in accordance with the custom of the ancients, who regarded death but as a repose, and sought the most picturesque and frequented spots for depositing the ashes of their dead, it was lined on both sides by magnificent tombs, among which that of Ascanius was famous for its antiquity, that of the Horatii was honoured for its heroic tradition, while that of Caecilia Metella was quoted for its imperial magnificence.

Well, on this day the whole of this grand stretch of road was covered with eager crowds coming to meet Lucius; some riding in brilliant equipages drawn by Spanish mules with purple harness, others reclining in litters each borne by eight slaves dressed in magnificent cloaks and accompanied by runners with tucked up robes. The latter were preceded by Numidian horsemen who raised clouds of dust and dispersed the crowd as they passed; while the former drove before them a pack of Molassian hounds with collars studded with silver nails. Hardly had the foremost of them perceived the victor when their shouts, passed on from mouth to mouth, flew towards the walls of the city. At the same moment, at the order of a horseman who set off at a gallop, the pedestrians ranged themselves on either side of the way which, with its breadth of thirty-six feet, offered an ample passage to the victor’s four-horsed chariot as it continued to advance towards the city. At a distance of about a mile from the gates, a squadron of horsemen numbering some five hundred awaited the procession and placed itself at its head. They had not gone fifty yards before Acté noticed that the horses were shod with silver, and that the shoes, which were badly fastened on, became detached and rolled on the road, so that the people, in order to pick them up, rushed eagerly under the animals' feet at the risk of being knocked down by them. On reaching the gates of the city the victorious chariot entered it amid the frantic applause of the mob. Acté understood nothing of this excitement and yet let herself be carried away by it. She heard the name of Caesar mingled with that of Lucius; she passed beneath the triumphal arches, through streets strewn with flowers and perfumed with incense. At all the cross-roads priests were immolating victims at the altars of the Lares of the country. She traversed the finest quarters of the city; the great circus, of which three arcades had been levelled, the Velabrum and the Forum; finally, entering the Sacred Way, the procession began to ascend the Capitol and stopped opposite the temple of Jupiter.

Lucius then alighted from his chariot and mounted the steps leading to the temple. The Flamens awaited him at the doors, and accompanied him to the foot of the statue. On reaching it he deposited the trophies of his victory on the knees of the god, and, taking a *stilus,* inscribed on a massive gold plate presented to him by the Pontifex Maximus the following inscription:

"Lucius Domitius Claudius Nero, victor in wrestling, the chariot-race, and in singing, has consecrated these three crowns to Jupiter, best and greatest."

Amid the applause which immediately broke out on all sides, there was heard a cry of terror. Acté had just realised that the poor singer whom she had followed as a lover was no other than Caesar himself.

CHAPTER VII

THE Emperor, however, had not forgotten Acté amid the intoxication of his triumph. The young Greek had not yet recovered from the surprise mingled with dismay which the name and title of her lover had caused her, when she saw two Liburnian slaves approaching her; they were sent by Nero, and invited her respectfully to follow them. Acté obeyed mechanically, ignorant of where they were taking her and even without a thought of asking them, to such an extent was she overwhelmed by the terrible reflection that she was the mistress of a man whose name she had never heard uttered without terror. Below the Capitol, between the Tabularium and the temple of Concord, she found a magnificent litter borne by six Egyptian slaves, whose breasts were adorned with plates of polished silver in the shape of crescents, while their arms and legs were encircled with rings of the same precious metal. Sitting near the litter was Sabina, whom she had for a moment lost sight of in the excitement of the triumph, and whose presence there served to complete her recollection of all that had passed. Acté entered the litter, reclined on its silk cushions, and set off for the Palatine accompanied by Sabina, who walking on foot beside her mistress, shaded her with a large fan of peacock's feathers fastened to an Indian reed. For three hundred yards or so the litter took the same course along the Sacred Way that Acté had taken in Caesar's procession; soon, however, turning to the right, it passed between the temples of Apollo and Jupiter Stator, and ascended a flight of steps leading to the Palatine Hill. Then, on reaching the noble plateau which crowns the hill, it skirted the side overlooking the Subura and the Via Nova; at last, on arriving opposite the fountain of Juturna, it stopped at the door of a small detached house, and the two Liburnians immediately placed at each side of the litter a pair of steps covered with purple, so that the lady whom the Emperor had just assigned to them as their mistress should not have the trouble of intimating by so much as a gesture at which side she would prefer to alight.

Acté was evidently expected, for the door opened on her approach, and, when she had passed through it, closed behind her without her seeing any one who performed the office of door-keeper. Only Sabina accompanied her, and thinking no doubt that after her long and tiring journey the first desire of her mistress would be to have a bath, she conducted her to the *apodyterium,* a chamber so called from a Greek verb meaning to step off. But, on reaching it, Acté, who was still upset and pre-occupied by that strange fatality which had dragged her in the train of the master of the world, sat down on the bench that extended round the apartment, signing to Sabina to wait for a moment. Hardly had she become absorbed in her thoughts, when, as though the unseen and powerful master whom she had chosen had feared lest she should abandon herself to them, a sweet and sonorous strain of music was heard, the precise source of which it was impossible to determine; in point of fact, the musicians were arranged in such fashion that the whole chamber was surrounded with harmony. No doubt Nero, who had observed the influence exerted over the young Greek by the mystery of sound, the effects of which he had been able during the voyage frequently to observe, had ordered beforehand this distraction to those memories whose power he wished to combat. Had such been his intention, his expectation was not disappointed, for hardly had these harmonies sounded in the girl’s ears before she gently raised her head, and the tears which trickled down her cheeks ceased, a final tear trembling for an instant on her long lashes like a dewdrop on the pistils of a flower; then, just as the dew evaporates in the sun’s rays, so this tear seemed soon to dry in the fire of the glance which it had obscured. At the same time, a vivid flush appeared on her pale lips, half opened as though for a smile or a kiss.

Then Sabina approached her mistress, who, instead of making any further objection, herself helped to take off her garments, which fell at her feet one after another, leaving her nude and blushing like the chaste Venus. The beauty that had just been unveiled was of so perfect a type that the slave herself seemed to remain entranced before it, and when Acté laid her hand upon her bare shoulder in order to reach the second chamber, she felt Sabina thrill through her whole frame, and saw her pale cheeks flush for an instant as though a flame had touched her. On seeing this, Acté stopped, fearing that she had in some way hurt her young follower; but the latter, guessing the cause of her hesitation, at once took hold of the hand which Acté had removed, and placing it once more upon her shoulder, entered with her into the *tepidarium.*

This was a vast square chamber, in the centre of. which was a tank of tepid water resembling a lake. A band of young slave-girls with garlands of reeds, daffodils and water-lilies on their heads, were sporting on the surface like a band of Naiads, and no sooner did they perceive Acté than they pushed to the edge nearest her an ivory shell inlaid with coral and mother-of-pearl. All these enchantments had succeeded one another so rapidly, that Acté surrendered herself to them as though in a dream. She sat down, therefore, in this fragile boat, and found herself immediately in the centre of the lake, surrounded, like Venus, by her marine court.

Then the strains of that delightful music which had already charmed her burst forth once more; presently the voices of the water-nymphs began to accompany it, singing the legend of Hylas going to draw water on the shores of the Troad; and just as the nymphs of the river Ascanius allured the favourite of Hercules with voice and gestures, so they extended their arms to Acté and in their song invited her to plunge in and join them. The young Greek was accustomed to water pastimes; she had swum in the Gulf of Corinth countless times with her companions; without hesitation, therefore, she dived into this tepid and scented lake, where the slaves received her as their queen.

These maidens had all been selected on account of their beauty; some had been brought from the Caucasus, others from Gaul; some came from India, some from Spain; and yet, amid this picked band chosen by love for voluptuousness, Acté seemed a goddess. After a short interval, during which she had floated on the surface of the water like a siren, dived like a Naïad, and sported in this artificial lake with the supple grace of a serpent, she perceived that Sabina was missing from her marine court, and looking round saw her sitting down with her face concealed in her veil. Unconstrained and laughing like a child, she called to her; Sabina started and raised the veil which hid her face. Then the girls all began to call Sabina in mocking tones, and laughing in an odd way which Acté could not understand, raising themselves half out of the water to invite her by their gestures to come and join them. For a moment the young slave seemed inclined to comply with this invitation; something strange was passing in her mind; her eyes were aflame, her face burning, and yet tears trickled from her lashes and dried on her cheeks. But, instead of yielding to what was clearly her desire, Sabina rushed towards the door as though to escape from this voluptuous enchantment; this movement, however, was not so rapid but that Acté had time to leave the water and bar her passage amid the laughter of all the slaves. Then Sabina appeared on the point of fainting; her knees shook and a cold perspiration stood on her brow, while she turned so visibly pale that Acté, fearing she would fall, stretched her arms towards her and received her on her bare bosom, but instantly pushed her away again, uttering a slight cry of pain. In the strange paroxysm by which the slave was agitated, her mouth had touched the shoulder of her mistress and had bitten it sharply; then, in another instant, overwhelmed at what she had done, she had rushed out of the chamber.

On hearing Acté cry out, the slaves rushed up and surrounded their mistress; but the latter, fearing lest Sabina would be punished, disguised her pain and, forcing a smile, wiped away a drop or two of blood that trickled down her breast like liquid coral; moreover the accident had been too slight to cause Acté any feeling save that of astonishment. She therefore proceeded to the next chamber, in which her bath would be completed, and which was called the *caldarium.*

This was a small circular apartment surrounded by steps and furnished all round with narrow niches each containing a seat; a tank of boiling water occupied the centre of the chamber from which rose a vapour as thick as that which hangs in early morning over the surface of a lake. This heated mist was warmed by an exterior furnace, the flames of which circulated in the pipes which embraced the *caldarium* with their red arms, running along the outside walls like ivy.

When Acté, unaccustomed to these baths, which were known and used only at Rome, entered this chamber, she was so overcome by the waves of vapour which rolled about her like clouds, that, deprived of breath and speech, she extended her arms and wanted to summon help, but she could only utter inarticulate and sobbing cries. Then she tried to rush to the door; but being held back in the arms of the slaves she threw herself backwards, making a sign that she was being stifled. One of the girls immediately pulled a chain, and a golden shield which closed the ceiling opened like a plug and allowed a current of air from outside to penetrate this atmosphere which was rapidly becoming impossible to breathe. This restored life to Acté; she felt her chest dilate, a gentle and languorous weakness seized her; she let herself be led to one of the seats and sat down, beginning already to support more easily this fiery temperature which seemed to make a liquid flame, rather than blood, course through her veins. Presently the vapour became once more so thick and scorching that they were obliged to have recourse a second time to the golden shield, and together with the outer air there descended on the bathers such a sense of comfort that the young Greek began to understand how the Roman ladies had become such devotees of this kind of bath, with which she was hitherto unacquainted, and which she had begun by regarding as torture.

The vapour had now recovered its intensity; this time, however, instead of opening a passage for its escape, they allowed it to condense until Acté again felt herself ready to faint; then two of her slaves approached with a cloak of scarlet wool with which they completely surrounded her, and lifting her half unconscious in their arms, they carried her to a couch placed in a chamber warmed to the ordinary temperature.

Then Acté went through a fresh operation as strange, though already less unexpected and less painful than that of the *caldarium.* This was the massage, that voluptuous operation which Orientals have borrowed from the Romans and retained to our own day. Two new slaves, skilful in this performance, began to press and knead her until her limbs had become supple and flexible; then they cracked all her joints one after the other without pain or effort; after which taking from small flasks made of rhinoceros horn some oil and essential perfumes, they polished her whole body with them, rubbing it first with fine wool, next with the softest Egyptian muslin, and lastly with swans’ skin from which the feathers had been plucked, leaving only the down.

While all this was taking place, Acté had remained with eyes half closed, plunged in a languorous ecstasy, without speaking or thinking, a prey to a sweet and strange somnolence which left her only strength to feel a fullness of existence hitherto unknown. Not only was her chest dilated, but it seemed to her that at each inspiration life flowed in through all her pores. It was a physical impression so powerful and overwhelming that it was able not only to obliterate the remembrance of the past, but even to banish the grief of the present; situated thus it was impossible to believe in misfortune, and life presented itself to the girl’s mind a series of pleasing and delightful emotions marshalled without palpable forms in a vague and marvellous horizon!

While in this magnetic half slumber and this dreamland untroubled with thought, Acté heard the door of the chamber at the end of which she was lying open. But inasmuch as, in the strange condition in which she found herself, all motion seemed fatiguing, she did not even turn round, thinking that one of the slaves had come in, but remained with eyes half-closed, hearing slow and measured steps approach her couch, each one of which, strange to say, as it came nearer, seemed to find an echo within herself. Then, with an effort, she moved her head, and looking in the direction from which the sound came, she saw advancing, slowly and majestically, a woman dressed entirely in the costume of Roman matrons, and wrapped in a long robe which enfolded her from head to heels. On reaching her couch this ghost-like figure stopped, and the girl felt a deep and questioning glance fixed upon her, a glance like that of a diviner, and from which it would be impossible to hide anything. The unknown female looked at her thus for an instant in silence, then in a deep, sonorous voice, of which each word penetrated like the icy blade of a sword the heart of her to whom she spoke, she said:

"You are the young Corinthian who have left your father and country to follow the Emperor, are you not?"

All Acté's life, her happiness and despair, her past and her future, were comprehended in these few words, so that she felt herself suddenly overwhelmed by a flood of memories; her life as a child plucking the flowers on the brim of the fountain of Pyrené; her old father's despair when he had called her vainly on the day after the games; her arrival at Rome when the terrible secret which her imperial lover had up to then hidden from her had been revealed; all these things reappeared vividly behind the enchanted veil which the chilly touch of this woman had drawn aside. Acté uttered a cry and covering her face with both hands, sobbed out: "Oh, yes, yes. I am that unhappy creature!"

A moment's silence succeeded the question and reply, during which Acté did not venture to open her eyes, guessing that the woman's domineering glance still fell upon her. At last she felt the hand with which she had been concealing her features seized in another's, and thinking that in this grasp, cold and undecided though it was, she discerned pity rather than menace, she ventured to raise her tearful eyelids. The unknown woman was still looking at her.

"Listen," continued she in the same sonorous tones, though more gently than before, "destiny is strangely mysterious; sometimes she places the prosperity or the ruin of an empire in the hands of a child. It may be, instead of being sent here by the gods in their wrath, you have been chosen by their clemency."

“Oh!” cried Acté, “I am guilty, but guilty of loving, that is all; there is not in my heart one evil thought I and, if I cannot be happy myself, I wish at least to see every one else happy!... But I am very lonely, very weak and powerless. Show me what I can do and I will do it!”

“In the first place, do you know who the man is to whom you have confided your destiny?”

“It is but this morning that I learned that Lucius and Nero are one and the same, and that my lover is the Emperor himself. A true daughter of ancient Greece, I have been seduced by beauty, by skill, by song. I followed the victor of the games, not knowing that he was the master of the world.”

“And now,” resumed the unknown female, looking at her more fixedly, and in still more penetrating tones, “now you know that it is Nero. But do you know what Nero is?”

“I have been accustomed to regard him as a god,” replied Acté.

“Well,” she continued, seating herself, “I will tell you what he is, for it is right, at least, that the mistress should know her lover, and the slave her master.”

“What am I about to hear?” murmured the girl.

“Lucius was far removed from the throne by birth; he got closer to it by a marriage, he ascended it by a crime.”

“It was not he who committed it,” cried Acté.

“It was he who profited by it,” answered the other coldly. “However, the tempest which had laid low the parent tree still spared the sapling. But the son soon shared the father’s fate. The sun of Britannicus set very soon after that of Claudius, and this time there was no doubt but that Nero was the murderer.”

“Oh! who can dare say so?” cried Acté; “who can bring such a dreadful charge against him?”

“Do you doubt, girl?” continued the other without any change of tone. “Would you like to know how it was managed? Then I will tell you. One day, in a room close to that in which Agrippina held her court, Nero was playing with some children; among them Britannicus, too, was playing, and Nero ordered him to go into the dining-hall and sing some verses to the guests, thinking to frighten the lad and draw down upon him the laughter and jeers of the courtiers. Britannicus obeyed the order; clothed in white he entered the hall of the *triclinium*, and stepping with pale and sorrowful face into the centre of the orgy, he sang in a broken voice and tearful eyes those lines which Ennius, our old poet, puts into the mouth of Astyanax: ‘O father! O country! O splendid palace of Priam! temple with resounding hinges and decoration resplendent with gold and ivory! I have seen you fall beneath a stranger’s hand, I have seen you become the prey of flames!’ and all of a sudden the laughter was checked and gave place to tears, and shameless as were the revellers, they were abashed and hushed in the presence of innocence and grief. But that settled the fate of Britannicus. There was at that time in the prisons of Rome a celebrated poisoner, notorious for her crimes; Nero summoned the Tribune Julius Pollio in whose custody she was, for he still hesitated, Emperor though he was, to speak to this woman. The next day Julius brought him the poison, which was put into the cup of Britannicus by his tutors themselves. But, whether though fear or pity, the murderers had recoiled from the crime, and the drink did not prove fatal: whereupon Nero, the Emperor, the god forsooth! as you just now styled him, summoned the poisoners to the Palace, to his chamber, and there, before the altar of the tutelary deities of the hearth, he had the poison mixed. It was tried first upon a goat, which lived five hours after it, during which interval the potion was brewed again; then they made a boar swallow it, and the boar expired instantly. Nero then went to his bath, perfumed himself and put on a white robe; after which he sat down, with a smile on his lips, at the table next to the one where Britannicus was dining.”

“But,” interrupted Acté in a trembling voice, “if Britannicus was really poisoned, how came it that the slave who acted as ‘taster’ did not experience the effects of the poison? They say that Britannicus had been subject to epileptic fits from his childhood, and perhaps one of these seizures.”

“Yes, yes, that is what Nero says, and that is where he displayed his diabolical caution. Yes, everything that Britannicus ate or drank was tasted beforehand; but the drink was given to him so hot that, though the slave could taste it, the child could not drink it. So some cold water was poured into the cup, and in this cold water was the poison: a poison swift and skilfully prepared, for Britannicus, without uttering sound or complaint, closed his eyes and fell backwards. Some persons were so imprudent as to run away, but the more astute remained where they were, pale and trembling, and divining the horrible truth. As for Nero, who was singing at that moment, he stooped over the couch and looked at Britannicus and then remarked: ‘It is nothing, he will recover sight and consciousness in a few moments,' and resumed his singing. And yet all the time he had made preparations for the funeral, a pyre had been erected in the Campus Martius, whither the body, covered with livid spots, was conveyed that same night. But, as though the gods refused to be accomplices in the fratricide, thrice did the rain fail in torrents and extinguish the funeral-pyre! Then Nero had the corpse covered with pitch and resin; a fourth attempt was made, and this time the flames, as they consumed the body, seemed to waft in a blazing column to the skies the outraged spirit of Britannicus."

"But Burrhus and Seneca!" cried Acté.

"Burrhus and Seneca!" replied the other bitterly; "they were given plenty of money, and they held their tongues."

"Alas! alas!" murmured Acté.

"From that day," continued the unknown woman, who seemed to be familiar with all these terrible secrets, "from that day Nero became a noble son indeed of the family of Aiienobarbus, a worthy descendant of that race of the red-bearded men, with faces of iron and hearts of lead. From that day he repudiated Octavia, to whom he owed his throne, exiled her to Campania where he had her placed under strict surveillance, and giving himself up entirely to players and courtesans, began that life of orgies and debauchery, which for two years has astounded Rome. For this man whom you love, girl, your gallant Olympic victor, the man whom everyone styles Emperor and the courtesans worship as a god, steals out from his palace at night disguised as a slave, and hurries, wearing the cap of a freedman on his head, either to the Mulvian Bridge or some tavern in the Subura, and there, amid libertines and prostitutes, street-porters and mountebanks, the divine Caesar chants his exploits in love and war to the accompaniment of the cymbals of a priest of Cybelé or the flute played by a harlot. Then, at the head of this band, heated with wine and lewdness, he perambulates the streets of the city, insulting women, striking the passers-by, plundering houses, until he returns at length to his Golden Palace, sometimes bearing on his face the shameful marks left by the stick of some unknown avenger."

"Impossible! you are slandering him!" cried Acté.

"You are wrong, girl, I am hardly stating the full truth."

"But how is it he does not punish you for divulging such secrets?"

"That is quite likely to happen some day, and I am expecting it."

"But who are you then?"

"His mother!"

“Agrippina!” cried Acté, starting from the couch and falling on her knees, “Agrippina! daughter of Germanicus — sister, widow, mother of Emperors! Agrippina standing before me, a poor Greek girl — oh! what would you have me do? Speak, command, and I will obey — unless at least you bid me cease to love, for I still love him, spite of all you have told me. — But in that case, if I cannot obey you, I can at least die.”

“On the contrary, my child,” replied Agrippina, “continue to love Caesar with the same great and devoted love you had for Lucius, for in that love lies all my hope, since the purity of the *one* object of his love is needed to counteract the vileness of the *other.*”

“Of the other!” cried the girl in terror. “Does Caesar then love another?”

“Are you ignorant of that too, child?”

“Ah! did I know anything? — When I followed Lucius, did I make inquiries about Caesar? What mattered the Emperor to me? It was a simple artist whom I loved, to whom I offered my life, thinking that he could give me his. But who is this woman then?”

“A daughter who has disowned her father — a wife who has betrayed her husband — a woman fatally beautiful, to whom the gods have given everything, except a heart — Sabina Poppaea.”

“Oh! yes, I have heard her name — I have heard her story, not knowing that it would one day be my own; my father, not knowing that I was present, was telling it *sotto voce* to another old man, and they both blushed at it! Did not this woman desert Crispinus her husband in order to follow her lover Otho? And did not her lover, after a banquet, sell her to Caesar for the government of Lusitania?”

“Exactly so!” cried Agrippina. “And he still loves her!” murmured Acté sorrowfully.

“*Yes,*” replied Agrippina in a tone that conveyed her hatred, “yes, he still loves her, for some mystery underlies this affair, some philtre, some cursed *hippomanes,* like the one which was given to Caligula by Caesonia.”

“Just heavens!” cried Acté, “am I not sufficiently punished, sufficiently unhappy!”

“Less so than I am,” replied Agrippina, “for you were free to reject him as a lover, while the gods have imposed him on me as a son. Well! do you now understand what remains for you to do?”

“To escape from him and never see him again.”

“Far from it, my child: they say he loves you.”

“Do they say so? Is it true? Do you believe it?”

“Yes.”

“Oh! bless you for saying so!”

“Well! it is for you to give this love an object, a result; you must rid him of this evil genius which is destroying him, and you will save Rome, the Emperor, and possibly myself.”

“‘Yourself’! Do you think then he would dare ?”

“Nero dares anything!”

“But I am unequal to such a task.”

“You are perhaps the only woman pure enough to accomplish it.”

“Oh! no, no! I had better go, and never see him again.”

“The divine Emperor is asking for Acté,” said a slave who had just opened the door, in a gentle voice.

“Sporus!” cried Acté in astonishment.

“Sporus!” murmured Agrippina, covering her face with her robe.

“Caesar is waiting,” continued the slave after a moment’s silence.

“Go then!” said Agrippina.

“I will follow you,” said Acté.

CHAPTER VIII

ACTÉ put on a veil and a cloak and followed Sporus. After many windings and turnings in the Palace, with which Acté, although she lived in it, had not yet had time to become familiar, her guide opened the door with a golden key, which he then handed to the young Greek, so that she could return by herself, and they then found themselves in the gardens of the Golden House.

Here the view was so extensive and so grand, that Acté thought she must be outside the city. Through the trees she perceived a sheet of water as large as a lake, and on the other side of this lake beneath bushy trees she saw, in the distance, silvered by the rays of the moon, the colonnade of a palace.

The air was clear; not a cloud dimmed the limpid azure of the sky; the lake resembled a vast mirror, and the last sounds from the city now making ready for sleep were dying away into space. Sporus and the girl, both dressed in white and walking silently through this lovely scene, resembled ghosts wandering in the Elysian fields. Herds of wild gazelles, as though this spot were in the solitudes of Africa, were grazing on the borders of the lake and the vast lawns that joined the woods; while on the artificial ruins, which reminded them of their own country, tall white birds with flaming wings stood grave and motionless as sentinels, like sentinels, too, uttering at regular intervals a hoarse, monotonous cry. Reaching the edge of the lake, Sporus stepped into a boat and signed to Acté to follow him; then, spreading a small purple sail, they glided as if by magic over the water beneath whose surface gleamed the golden scales of the rarest fishes from the Indian seas. This nocturnal voyage recalled to Acté her voyage on the Ionian Sea; and fixing her eyes on the slave she found fresh matter for astonishment at the wonderful resemblance between brother and sister which had struck her already in Sabina, and now struck her once more on observing Sporus. As for the latter, his timidly downcast eyes seemed to shun those of his former hostess, and he steered the boat like a silent pilot, without uttering a single word. Acté was the first to break the silence, and in a voice which, sweet though it was, made Sporus start, observed:

"Sabina told me, Sporus, that you had remained at Corinth; was she deceiving me then?"

"Sabina told you the truth," answered the slave; "but I could not stay any longer away from Lucius. A vessel was sailing for Calabria and I embarked in it; and as, instead of going round through the strait of Messina, she made direct for Brundisium, I followed the Appian way, and though I started two days after the Emperor, I arrived at Rome at the same time as he did."

"And Sabina was doubtless rejoiced to see you again, for you must be very fond of each other?"

"Yes, no doubt," said Sporus, "for not only are we brother and sister, but twins into the bargain."

"Well! tell Sabina that I wish to speak to her, and that she is to come and find me to-morrow morning."

"Sabina is no longer in Rome," answered Sporus.

"And why has she left?"

"Such was the divine Caesar's wish."

"And where has she gone?"

"I do not know."

There was in the slave's tone, though perfectly respectful, an accent of hesitation and constraint which deterred Acté from putting any further questions; besides, at this very moment the boat touched the edge of the lake, and Sporus, after drawing it up on shore and seeing Acté land, resumed the journey. The young Greek followed him once more, silently, but with a quicker step, for at this moment they entered a wood of pines and sycamores whose bushy branches rendered the darkness so deep that, though she knew she need expect no help from her guide, an instinctive movement of fear made her draw closer to him.

For some minutes past, a plaintive noise that seemed to proceed from the bowels of the earth had reached her ears at short intervals, and presently a distinct cry of human distress was heard. The girl started, and placing her hand in alarm on Sporus' shoulder, she said:

"What is that?"

"Nothing," answered the slave.

"But yet," Acté went on, "I thought I heard…"

"A groan. Yes, we are passing near the prisons."

"And who are these prisoners?"

“They are Christians reserved for the arena.” Acté hurried on, for she had just recognised, on passing by an air-hole, some most plaintive and dolorous sounds of human voices, and although these Christians, whenever she had heard them mentioned, had always been represented as an impious and criminal sect, given up to all kinds of debauchery and wickedness, yet she experienced that sympathetic regret which one feels for those, however guilty, who are condemned to suffer a horrible death. She hastened therefore to get out of this fatal road, and, on arriving at its outskirts, she saw the Palace brightly illuminated, and heard the strains of instruments. The light and the melody were a welcome change from the darkness and the groans, and accordingly she entered the vestibule with a more confident, though less rapid, step.

For a moment she paused in bewilderment. Never, in her dreams, could the fanciful imagination of a child have pictured such magnificence. This vestibule, resplendent with bronze, ivory and gold, was so vast that it was surrounded by a triple row of columns composing a series of porticos a thousand yards in length, and so lofty that beneath them stood a statue a hundred and twenty feet high, carved by Zenodorus and representing the divine Emperor standing in the attitude of a god. Acté passed near this statue with a shudder. What must be the awful power of this man who had statues carved thrice the height of those of the Olympian Jove; who had for his pleasure-grounds gardens and pools that resembled forests and lakes, and, for his amusement in his leisure hours, captives who were thrown to the lions and tigers? In this Palace all the laws of human life were turned upside down; a gesture, a signal, a glance from this man, and all was over. An individual, a family, a people would disappear from the earth’s surface, and that without a breath of opposition to the execution of his will, without a murmur being heard save from those who perished, without any convulsion taking place in the order of Nature, without the sun veiling its face, or the thunderbolt proclaiming that there was a heaven above men and gods above emperors!

So it was with a feeling of profound terror that Acté ascended the stairs leading to the apartments of Lucius; and so powerful had this feeling grown that, on reaching the door, and just as Sporus was about to turn the key, she stopped and placed one hand on his shoulder, laying the other on her heart, the beating of which almost stifled her. At last, after a moment’s hesitation, she motioned to Sporus to open the door; the slave obeyed, and at the further end of the apartment she perceived Lucius, clothed in a simple white tunic and half-reclining on a couch. All sad recollections were at once effaced from her memory. She had thought that she could not help seeing some change in this man, now that she had learnt him to be the master of the world; but at a single glance she recognised in him Lucius, the handsome young man with the golden beard, whom she had guided to her father's house. She had found again her Olympian victor; Caesar had disappeared. She tried to run to him, but her strength failed her half-way; she sank on one knee, extending her hands towards her lover and murmuring with difficulty:

"Lucius — you are still Lucius, are you not?"

"Yes, yes, my fair Corinthian, be not uneasy!" answered Caesar gently, and motioning her to come to him: "still Lucius. Was it not under this name that you loved me, loved me for myself, and not for my crown or for my empire, like all the women by whom I am surrounded? Come, my Acté, rise! the *world* at my feet, but *you* in my arms!"

"Oh! I knew it!" cried Acté, throwing herself upon her lover's neck; "I knew it was not true that my Lucius was cruel!"

"Cruel!" said Lucius. "Who has told you that already?"

"No, no, forgive me!" interrupted Acté: "but the lion, who is noble and courageous like yourself, and who is king among animals as you are Emperor among men, is sometimes regarded as cruel because, not knowing his strength, he slays with his embrace. O my lion, take care of your gazelle!"

"Fear nothing, Acté," replied Caesar smiling; "the lion thinks not of his claws and teeth except for those who wish to fight against him. There, you see, he lies at your feet like a lamb."

"It is not Lucius whom I fear. In my eyes Lucius is my host and my lover, the man who took me from my country and my father, and who ought to repay me in love what he has robbed me of in chastity. But the man whom I do fear" — she hesitated, and Lucius gave her a sign of encouragement — "is Caesar, who has exiled Octavia — is Nero, the future husband of Poppaea!"

"You have seen my mother!" cried Lucius, springing to his feet and looking Acté full in the face.

"Yes," murmured the girl, trembling.

"Yes," went on Nero bitterly; "and it was she who told you that I was cruel, was it not? that my embrace was fatal, and that I had inherited nothing from Jove but the devouring thunderbolt? It was she who told you of this Octavia, whom she protects and whom I detest; whom she thrust into my arms against my will and whom I have rid myself of with so much difficulty! — whose barren love has never yielded me more than forced and submissive caresses. Ah! they are mistaken and in the wrong, if they think to obtain anything from me by wearying me with entreaties or threats. I would fain have forgotten this woman, the last of a cursed race! Let them not give me cause to remember her then!"

Hardly had Lucius uttered these words ere he was alarmed to see the impression they had produced. Acté, with pallid lips, with head thrown backward and eyes filled with tears, had fallen against the back of the couch, terrified by the first explosion of his wrath to which she had ever listened. His voice, the soft tones of which had at first thrilled the innermost chords of her heart, had assumed in a moment a terrible and menacing tone, while his eyes, in which she had hitherto read nothing but love, gleamed with that terrible glance before which Rome herself quailed and hid her face.

"O father, father!" sobbed Acté, "forgive me, father!"

"Yes, for Agrippina has doubtless told you that your love for me will cost you dear; she has pointed out to you what kind of wild beast you were in love with; has told you of the death of Britannicus, of Julius Montanus and I know not how much more. But she has been very careful not to tell you that the one wanted to rob me of my throne, and that the other struck me in the face with a stick. I understand it; my mother's own life is such a pure one!"

"Lucius! Lucius!" cried Acté, "hush! in God's name, hush!"

"Oh!" continued Nero, "she has confided half of our family secrets to you. Well, listen to the other half. This woman, who reproaches me for the death of a child and of a scoundrel, was banished on account of her licentiousness by her own brother Caligula, whom nobody would accuse of being a severe censor in respect to morals. Recalled from banishment when Claudius ascended the throne, she married Crispus Passienus, a patrician of noble family, who was foolish enough to will his immense fortune to her, and whose assassination she procured because he did not die with sufficient promptness. Then began the struggle between her and Messalina. Messalina got the worst of it, and Claudius was the prize of victory. Agrippina became her uncle’s mistress; it was then that she conceived the scheme of reigning in my name. Octavia, the Emperor’s daughter, was betrothed to Silanus. She tore Silanus from the steps of the altar and procured false witnesses who accused him of incest. Silanus committed suicide, and Octavia was a widow. She was thrown weeping into my arms, and I was forced to take her, though her heart was full of love for another. Presently a woman tried to rob her of her imbecile lover. The witnesses who had accused Silanus of incest accused Lollia Paulina of witchcraft, and Lollia Paulina, who was reputed the most beautiful woman of the day, whom Caligula had espoused after the fashion of Romulus and Augustus, and had exhibited to the Romans wearing a tiara of emeralds and pearls valued at forty million sesterces, died of slow torture. Nothing now stood between her and the throne. The niece married the uncle. I was adopted by Claudius, and the Senate decreed to Agrippina the title of Augusta. Wait, that is not all,” continued Nero, pushing aside Acté’s hands, with which she tried to stop her ears, so as not to hear the accusations of the son against his mother. “There came a day when Claudius condemned to death an adulteress. This sentence made Agrippina and Pallas tremble. On the next day the Emperor dined at the Capitol with the priests. Halotus placed before him a dish of mushrooms prepared by Locusta; and as the dose of poison was not strong enough and when the Emperor, falling backwards on his banqueting couch, was writhing in his agony, his physician Xenophon, on pretence of giving him an emetic, passed a poisoned feather down his throat, and Agrippina found herself a widow for the third time. She passed over this first chapter of her history in silence, did she not? and began it at the moment when she placed me on the throne with the intention of reigning in my name, in the belief that she would be the substance and I the shadow, she the reality and I the phantom. And this state of things did, indeed, last for a while; she had a praetorian guard; she presided over the meetings of the Senate; she issued decrees, condemned the freedman Narcissus to death, and poisoned the Proconsul Julius Silanus. Then one day when, seeing so many sentences inflicted, I complained that she left me nothing to do, she told me that, as it was, I exercised too much authority for one who was not a member of the family, but merely an adopted child, and that fortunately she and the gods had preserved the life of Britannicus. I swear to you that, when she said that, I was no more thinking of that boy than I am thinking to-day of Octavia, and this threat, and not the poison which I gave him, was the actual blow that caused his death. So my crime was not that of being a murderer, but of wishing to be veritably Emperor! Then it was — have patience, I have all but finished, listen carefully to this, you who even in your love are still a maiden chaste and pure — then it was that she attempted to recover, in the capacity of mistress, the ascendancy over me which, as mother, she had lost."

"Oh, hush!" cried Acté, in horror.

"Ah, you mentioned Octavia and Poppaea, but you did not suspect that you had a third rival."

"Hush! hush!"

"And it was not in the silence of the night, in the lonely and mysterious darkness of a retired chamber that she came to me with this intention; no, it was at a banquet, in the midst of an orgy, in the presence of my court. Seneca was present, Burrhus was there, Paris and Phaon were there; everybody was there. In the midst of the singing, in the full blaze of the lights, she advanced towards me, crowned with flowers and almost naked And then it was that her enemies, alarmed at her project and her beauty — for beautiful she undoubtedly is — pushed Poppaea between her and me. Well, what think you of my mother, Acté?"

"Horrible! horrible!" murmured the girl, putting up her hands to hide her face that was blushing with deadly shame.

"Yes, ours is a strange family, is it not? So, thinking us unworthy to be men, they have made gods of us! My uncle smothered his tutor with a pillow and his father-in-law in a bath. My father knocked out the eye of a knight in the Forum with a stick; on the Appian Way he crushed beneath the wheels of his chariot a young Roman who did not get out of his way quickly enough; and one day at table, when sitting near the young Caesar, who had accompanied him to the East, he stabbed his freedman for refusing to drink, with the knife which he was using for cutting up his meat. As for my mother, I have told you of her deeds; she killed Passienus, Lollia Paulina, and Claudius, and I, the last of the race, I, with whom our name will become extinct, were I to act as a just Emperor instead of being a dutiful son, I should kill my mother!"

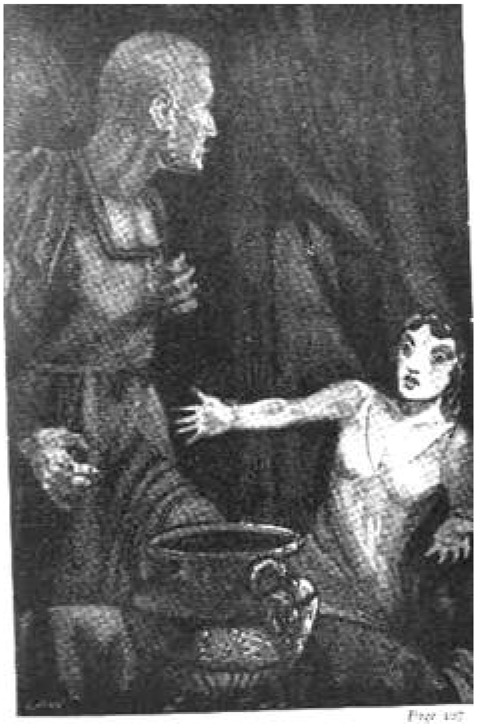

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“. . . . were I to act like a just Emperor . . . .
I should kill my mother!”

Acté uttered a terrible cry and fell on her knees, her arms extended towards Caesar.

“Well, what are you about?” continued Nero with a strange smile; “you are taking seriously what is merely a joke; some verses which have stuck in my memory since the last time I sang ‘Orestes,’ and which have got mixed up with my prose. Come, make your mind easy, foolish child. Besides, you have not come here to supplicate and to be frightened. Did I send for you hither that you should bruise your knees and twist your arms? Come, get up. Am I Caesar? am I Nero? is Agrippina my mother? You have dreamt all this, my fair Corinthian; I am Lucius, the wrestler, the chariot-driver, the singer with the golden lyre and sweet voice, and nothing more.”

“Oh!” answered Acté, resting her head against his shoulder, “it is true there are moments when I could believe that I was under the influence of a dream and should wake up to find myself in my father’s house, were it not that I feel in the depths of my heart the reality of my love. Oh, Lucius! Lucius! do not trifle with me thus; do you not see that I am suspended by a thread over the yawning gulf of hell? Have pity on my weakness; do not drive me mad.”

“And whence come these fears and this grief? Has my fair Helen any complaint against her Paris? Is not the palace in which she dwells sufficiently magnificent to satisfy her? We will build her another with silver columns and capitals of gold. Have the slaves who serve her been wanting in respect? She has the power of life and death over them. What does she wish for? what does she desire? and all that a man, all that an Emperor, all that a God can grant, let her ask and she shall have it."

"Yes, I know that you are all-powerful, I believe that you love me, and that you would give me everything I asked you for; everything except peace of mind and the inward conviction that Lucius is mine, even as I am his. There is now a whole side of your personality, a whole part of your life that escapes me, that is wrapped in shadow and buried in darkness. It is Rome, the empire, the world, which claims you, and you are not mine, except at the single point at which I touch you. You have secrets, you cherish hatreds which I cannot share, loves which I must not know. Amid our tenderest outpouring, our sweetest discourse, our most intimate moments, a door will be opened as yonder door is opening at this moment, and a freedman with impassive countenance will give you some mysterious signal which I cannot, and must not, understand. See, here is the beginning of my apprenticeship."

"What is it, Anicetus?" said Nero.

"The woman whom the divine Caesar asked for is here, waiting."

"Tell her that I will come to her," replied the Emperor.

The freedman went out.

"There, you see," said Acté, looking at him sadly.

"Explain yourself," said Nero.

"There is a woman there?"

"Certainly."

"And I felt you give a start when she was announced."

"Does nothing except love make people start?"

"That woman, Lucius."

"Go on — I am waiting."

"That woman."

"Well! that woman?"

"Her name is Poppaea."

"You are wrong," answered Nero, "her name is Locusta."

CHAPTER IX

NERO rose and followed the freedman; after taking several turnings through the secret corridors which were known only to the Emperor and his most trusted slaves, they entered a small chamber without any windows, which was lighted and ventilated from the roof. The opening in this was constructed, not so much to give light to the room as to give a means of escape to the smoke which, at certain times, exhaled from bronze chafing-dishes, extinguished at the present moment, but on which the coal lay ready, wanting only breath and sparks, those two great authors of all life and light, around the chamber were ranged vessels of glass and of earthenware of strange and elongated shapes, which seemed to have been modelled by some capricious designer on vague recollections of quaint birds and unknown fishes; jars of various sizes, carefully closed with lids on which the astonished eye tried to decipher conventional characters belonging to no language, were arranged on circular shelves and surrounded the magic laboratory like those mysterious bands which swathe the figures of mummies, and above these were hung from golden nails plants, either dried or still green, according as they were to be used with fresh leaves or powdered. The greater number of these herbs had been culled at the times prescribed by magicians, that is to say, at the commencement of the dog-days, at that precise and short period of the year when the magician could be seen neither by the sun nor by the moon. The jars contained the most rare and valuable preparations: in some were salves which rendered people invisible, composed, at great expense and with great trouble, of the head and tail of a flying serpent, hair plucked from a tiger's head, lion's marrow, and the foam of a winning horse; others contained basilisk's blood, called also blood of Saturn, a potent prescription for the accomplishment of every wish; lastly, there were vases which could not be purchased for their weight in diamonds, in which were sealed-up packets of that perfume so rare that only Julius Caesar, it was said, could have procured it, and which is found in *apyrine* gold, that is to say, gold which has not yet been submitted to the ordeal of fire. Among these plants were wreaths of sun-gold, that flower which bestows favour and glory, and bunches of vervain uprooted with the left hand, the leaves, stalks, and roots of which had been dried separately in the dark. This latter was for joy and pleasure; for by sprinkling the dining-hall with water in which a few of its leaves had been steeped, there was no guest so morose, no philosopher so grave, but soon thawed to a condition of the wildest gaiety.

A woman was waiting for Nero in this chamber; she was dressed in black, her robe gathered up on one side as high as her knee with a brooch of carbuncle; in her left hand was a hazel wand, a plant that had the property of discovering hidden treasure. She was sitting down, and was buried in such a profound reverie that the entrance of the Emperor could not distract her from her preoccupation. Nero approached her, and as he advanced, her face assumed a curious expression of fear, dislike, and contempt. When he was quite close to her, he motioned to Anicetus, who touched the woman's shoulder with his hand, upon which she slowly raised her head, shook it to throw back her hair which, falling down freely without comb or fillet, covered her face like a veil every time she bent her head. This movement allowed the countenance of the sorceress to be seen; it was that of a woman of from thirty-five to thirty-seven, who had once been beautiful, but was withered before her time by insomnia, debauchery, and possibly remorse.

She was the first to speak, addressing Nero without rising or making any other movement than that of her lips.

"What do you want with me now?" she said to him.

"In the first place," said Nero, "do you remember the past?"

"Ask Theseus if he remembers the infernal regions."

"You remember that I took you from a loathsome prison, where you were slowly dying, rotting in the mud in which you lay, while odious reptiles crawled over your hands and face."

"It was so cold that I did not feel them."

"You know where I placed you, in a house which I built for you and furnished as though for a mistress; your occupation was called a criminal one, I called it an art; your accomplices were hunted down, I gave you pupils."

"And in exchange I endowed you with half the power of Jupiter: I placed at your service — Death — that blind and deaf daughter of Sleep and Night."

"Good! I see that you remember: I have sent for you again."

"Who is to die now?"

"Oh, for that matter, you must guess, for I cannot tell you; it is an enemy so powerful and so dangerous that I cannot breathe the name even to the statue of Silence. Only, you must be careful; for the poison must not be slow, as in the case of Claudius, or fail at the first attempt, as happened to Britannicus; it must kill instantaneously without giving time for him or for her whom it attacks to utter one word or make one sign; in short, I must have a poison like the one we compounded, in this very place, and with which we experimented on a boar."

"Oh!" said Locusta, "if it be merely a question of preparing this poison, or even a more deadly one still, nothing is easier; but when I gave you the one you are speaking about, I knew who it was I was working against. It was a young child who had no suspicions, and I could guarantee the result; but there are people, on whom poison, as in the case of Mithridates, has no effect; for they have gradually accustomed their stomachs to withstand the most venomous juices and the most deadly powders. If by any mischance my art were to come into collision with one of these iron constitutions, the poison would fail of its result, and you would say I had deceived you."

"And I would plunge you back into your dungeon," answered Nero, "and put you in charge of your old jailer, Julius Polio; that is what I would do, so bethink you."

"Tell me the name of the victim and I will give you an answer."

"For the second time, I cannot and I will not tell you. Have you no combinations of your art for discovering the unknown person? no sorcery that can call up veiled phantoms whom you can question and who will answer you? Seek them and question them; I will tell you nothing, but that does not prevent your guessing."

"I can do nothing here."

"You are not a prisoner."

"I will return in two hours."

"I prefer to accompany you."

"Even to the Esquiline Hill?"

"Anywhere."

"And you will come alone?"

"Alone, if I must."

"Come then."

Nero motioned to Anicetus to withdraw, and followed Locusta out of the Golden House, having as his only visible weapon his sword. True it has been said that he wore day and night next his skin a cuirass of mail which entirely protected his breast, and which was so skilfully made that it bent with every movement of his body, though it was proof against the most finely-tempered weapons and the stoutest arm.

They wended their way through the dark streets of Rome without any slave to light them and reached the Velabrum where Locusta's house was situated. The sorceress gave three knocks, and an old woman who sometimes helped her with her enchantments came to open the door, standing aside with a smile to make way for the handsome young man who no doubt had come to order a love-potion. Locusta opened the door of her laboratory and motioned to Caesar to follow her.

A strange miscellaneous collection of various hideous objects now presented itself to the Emperor's gaze; Egyptian mummies and Etruscan skeletons were ranged round the walls; crocodiles and curiously shaped fishes hung from the ceiling suspended by invisible wires; waxen figures, differing in size and appearance, stood on pedestals with needles or daggers stuck through their bodies. Amid all these various appliances a startled owl flew noiselessly, showing, each time that it settled, two eyes flaming like live coals, and clacking its beak to denote its alarm; while in a corner of the room a black sheep was bleating sadly as though it guessed the fate that awaited it. Amid all these various noises Nero presently distinguished the sound of groaning; he accordingly looked round carefully and saw, near the middle of the room and on a level with the floor, an object the shape of which he could not at first make out. This turned out to be a human head, without a body, although its eyes seemed to be alive; round its neck was coiled a serpent that moved its black tongue from time to time uneasily in the direction of the Emperor and then buried it in a bowl of milk; near this head had been placed plates of food, as though for the torture or mockery of a second Tantalus. After examining it for a moment, the Emperor was no longer in doubt — it was clearly from this head that the groans proceeded.

However, Locusta now began her magical operations. After sprinkling the whole house with water from Lake Avernus, she lighted a fire composed of boughs of sycamore and cypress that had been plucked from graves, threw into it some screech-owl's feathers steeped in toad's blood, and added sundry plants gathered at Iolcus and in Iberia. Then she crouched before this fire muttering unintelligible words; presently, when the fire began to get low, she looked round as though searching for something which her eye did not catch; next she gave a peculiar whistle which caused the snake to raise its head; a moment after, she whistled a second time and the reptile slowly uncoiled itself; as the whistle was heard for the third time, the creature, as though compelled to render obedience to this summons, slowly crawled towards her, but as if in fear. Then she grasped it by the neck and held its head to the flame; in a moment the creature had writhed its whole body round the arm of the enchantress, hissing in pain; she forced it, however, even closer to the hearth until its throat became white with a kind of froth. Three or four drops of this froth fell upon the ashes, and this is probably all that Locusta wanted for she at once released the reptile which, quickly escaping, coiled itself like ivy round the leg of one of the skeletons, and took refuge in the cavity of its breast, where, through the ribs that surrounded it like a cage, it could be seen for some time afterwards still quivering from the effects of the pain.

Locusta next placed these ashes and live embers in a napkin of mountain-flax, took the black sheep by a cord that hung from its neck, and, having doubtless accomplished the preparations which she had to make in the house, tinned to Nero, who had watched all these proceedings as motionless as a statue, and asked him if he still meant to accompany her to the Esquiline Hill. Nero nodded in the affirmative; Locusta left the room, followed by the Emperor. As she was in the act of shutting the door, he heard a voice entreating pity in such a heartrending tone that he was moved by it and tried to stop Locusta; but she replied that the slightest delay would destroy the effect of the charm, and that, if the Emperor did not go with her that very instant, she must either go alone or postpone her task until the morrow. Nero closed the door again and hastened to follow her; besides, not being a stranger to the mysteries of divination, he had a fairly accurate notion of the preparation which was in question. The head that he had seen was that of a child buried up to its neck, whom Locusta was allowing to starve within sight of food placed within its reach, so that after its death she might make with the marrow of its bones and the heart emaciated by torture one of those love-potions or amatory beverages for which the rich libertines of Rome or the mistresses of Emperors sometimes paid sums with which they might have bought a province.

Nero and Locusta, like two ghosts, followed for some time the tortuous alleys of the Velabrum; then passed quickly and in silence behind the wall of the Great Circus and reached the foot of the Esquiline Hill; at this moment the moon, now in its first quarter, rose behind the summit, and against the silvery blue of the sky stood out the numerous crosses to which were nailed the bodies of thieves, murderers, and Christians, condemned indiscriminately to the same punishment. The Emperor at first thought that Locusta's business lay with one of these corpses, but she passed through them without stopping, and, motioning to Nero to wait for her, went and knelt down on a little hillock, and began, like a hyaena, to excavate the earth of a grave with her nails; then she emptied into the hole which she had just dug the hot embers which she had carried with her, and from the centre of which a passing breeze drew forth some sparks; next, taking the black sheep which she had brought with her for this purpose, she opened with her teeth the artery of its neck and quenched the fire with its blood. At this instant the moon withdrew, as though refusing to be a spectator of such sacrilege; but in spite of the darkness in which the hill was at once shrouded, Nero saw a shadowy form uprear itself before the sorceress, who conversed with it for some moments; he then recollected that it was near this spot that, after strangling her for the murders she had committed, they had buried the body of the witch Canidia, mentioned by Horace and Ovid, and he entertained no doubt but that it was her accursed phantom that Locusta was now questioning. Presently the shadowy form seemed to sink into the earth again, the moon emerged from the cloud behind which she was hidden, and Nero saw Locusta coming towards him, pale and trembling.

"Well?" said the Emperor.

"All my skill would be ineffectual," murmured Locusta.

"Have you no other fatal drug?"

"Yes, indeed; but she possesses sovereign antidotes against them."

"You know, then, who it is I have condemned?" replied Nero.

"It is your mother."

"Very well," replied the Emperor coldly; "then I will find some other means."

And both of them then descended the accursed hill, and were lost in the dark and deserted lanes that lead to the Velabrum and the Palatine.

Next day Acté received a letter from her lover inviting her to proceed to Baise and there await the Emperor, who was going to celebrate the festival of Minerva at that place, in company with his mother Agrippina.

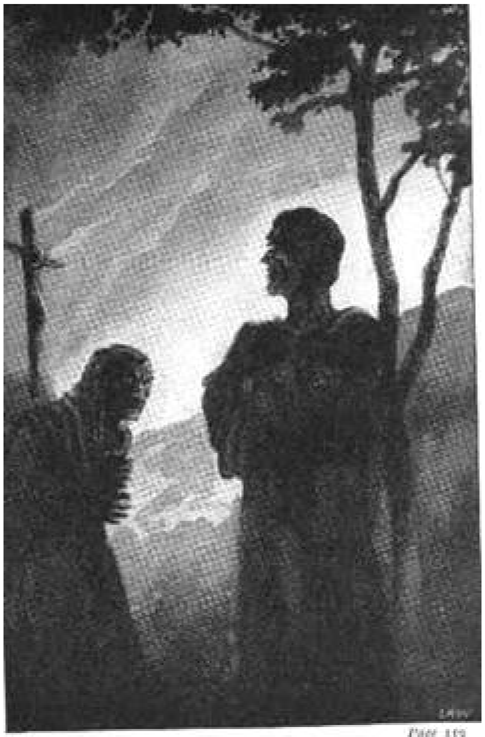

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"You know, then, who it is I have condemned?"

CHAPTER X

A WEEK had elapsed since the scene related in the previous chapter. It was ten o’clock at night. The moon, which had just appeared on the horizon, was rising slowly behind Vesuvius and casting its beams over the whole coastline of the Bay of Naples. In its clear, bright light shone forth the Bay of Puteoli, traversed by the dark line of that monumental folly, the mole which the third Caesar, Caius Caligula, threw across so as to connect its two shores, in order to accomplish the prophecy of the astrologer Thrasyllus. Along the entire extent of the immense crescent formed by this bay from the point of the Mons Pausylipus to Cape Misenum, you saw disappearing one after the other, like stars fading in the sky, the lights of the towns, villages, and palaces scattered along its shore, gazing at their own reflection in those waves that rival the deep blue of the waters of the Cyrenaic Gulf. Amid the silence you could see from time to time some benighted boat gliding along, with a lantern at its prow, as it made for the harbour of Aenaria or Prochyta or Baiae, by the aid of its triangular sail or its double tier of oars. Presently the last of these boats disappeared, leaving the bay entirely silent and deserted, except for some vessels moored to the shore opposite the gardens of Hortensius, between the Villa of Julius Caesar and the palace of Bauli.

An hour passed thus, during which the night became calmer and clearer still, owing to the hushing of all noise and the absence of all mist on the surface of the earth. No cloud dimmed the sky, which was as clear as the sea; no wave ruffled the sea, which reflected the sky. The moon, pursuing her path amid the clear azure of the heavens, seemed to have paused for a moment above the bay from the waters of which her beams were mirrored back. The last lights of Puteoli had been extinguished; the lighthouse on Cape Misenum alone still flared at the edge of the promontory like a torch in a giant’s hand. It was one of those voluptuous nights when Naples, that fair daughter of Hellas, loosens to the breeze her flowing locks of orange-trees, and bares her marble bosom to the waves. From time to time the air was traversed by one of those mysterious sighs which the sleeping earth sends upward to the sky, and on the eastern horizon the white smoke of

Vesuvius ascended amid an atmosphere so calm that the vapour resembled an alabaster column, the gigantic relic of some Babel long since demolished. Of a sudden, the sailors who were passing the night on board the vessels moored to the shore, saw the gleam of torches flashing through the trees which half concealed the palace of Bauli, and heard joyous voices approaching in their direction, and presently they saw a procession which burst forth into light and sound emerging from a wood of orange-trees and oleanders and advancing towards them. On the instant, the person who appeared to be in command of the largest of the vessels, a trireme magnificently gilt and decked from head to stern with flowers, had a purple carpet spread over the gangway which connected his ship with the land, and, jumping ashore, waited in an attitude of respect and fear, since the man who walked at the head of this procession which now drew near the vessels was no other than Nero Caesar himself. He was accompanied by Agrippina, and on this occasion, an incident unusual since the death of Britannicus, the mother leaned upon her son's arm, and both were exchanging friendly words, with smiles upon their faces, and appeared to be upon the best of terms. On arriving at the trireme, the procession halted; and Nero, in the presence of his whole Court, pressed his mother to his heart, his eyes dimmed with tears, covering her face and neck with kisses as though he could hardly bear to part from her; at last, reluctantly releasing her from his arms, he turned to the captain of the vessel and observed:

"Anicetus, I entrust my mother to your care, on peril of your life."

Agrippina crossed the gangway and ascended the trireme, which slowly left the shore, steering her course between Baiae and Puteoli; but Nero still remained for some time longer shouting and waving farewells to his mother at the spot where he had taken leave of her, while Agrippina, in her turn, returned his greetings. Presently the vessel began to draw beyond reach of the voice; then Nero returned to Bauli and Agrippina descended to the cabin which had been prepared for her.

Hardly had she lain down upon her bed with its purple hangings, when a curtain was raised and a girl, pale and trembling, came and threw herself at her feet, crying: "Oh! my mother, save me!" Agrippina started at first with surprise and fear; then, recognising the beautiful Greek, held out her hand to her, exclaiming in astonishment:

"Acté! you here, in my ship! and asking my protection. And from whom must I save you, you who are so powerful as to have restored to me the friendship of my son?”

“Oh! from him, from myself, from my love — from this Court which terrifies me, from this life which is so strange and new to me.”

“Why, yes,” answered Agrippina, “you disappeared in the middle of the banquet; Nero asked for you and sent to seek you; why did you act in that strange way?”

“Why? you ask me why? Was it possible for a woman — oh! forgive me — to remain at an orgy like that, which would have made even our priestesses of Venus themselves blush? Oh! my mother! — did you not hear those songs? did you not see those naked courtesans, those dancers whose every gesture was an infamy, even more to those who looked on at them than to themselves? Oh! I could not endure such a sight and so I escaped to the gardens. But there it was quite as bad — these gardens were peopled like the forests of old time; each fountain was the home of some lewd nymph; each bush concealed some dissolute satyr — and, would you believe it? among these men and women I recognised Roman knights and matrons — then I fled from the gardens as I had done from the banquet. A door stood open leading to the sea, I rushed down to the shore — I saw the trireme and recognised it; I told them that I was a member of your suite and had come to wait for you, and I was admitted on board; and in the company of these coarse soldiers and sailors I breathed more freely than at that table where Nero was surrounded by all the nobility of Rome.”

“Poor child! and what do you expect from me?”

“A shelter in your house on the Lucrine Lake, a place among your slaves, a veil thick enough to hide my blushes.”

“Then do you wish never to see the Emperor again?”

“Oh! my mother!”

“Do you wish to leave him to drift like a wreck, on this ocean of debauchery?”

“Oh! if I loved him less, perhaps I could make up my mind to live with him; but would you have me see other women there, the objects of his love, or what I thought his love, equally with myself? It is out of the question; I cannot, cannot have bestowed so much for such a small return. Amid these evil people, I should become evil too; surrounded by these women, I should become as they; I, too, should wear a dagger in my girdle, carry poison in some ring, and then some day.”

"What is it, Acerronia?" interrupted Agrippina, addressing a young slave who entered at this moment.

"May I speak, madam?" answered the latter in a frightened voice.

"Speak."

"Where do you suppose, madam, you are going?"

"Why, to my villa on the Lucrine Lake, I imagine."

"Yes, we began by steering in that direction, but after a short time the vessel shifted her course, and we are now heading for the open sea."

"For the open sea!" cried Agrippina.

"Look," said the slave, drawing back one of the window curtains, "the lighthouse on the cape should be far behind us, and here it is on our right; instead of nearing Puteoli we are drawing away from it at full sail."

"What does this mean?" cried Agrippina. "Gallus! Gallus!" A young Roman knight appeared at the door. "Gallus," continued Agrippina, "tell Anicetus that I wish to speak to him." Gallus went out, followed by Acerronia.

"Just gods!" she continued, "there is the lighthouse extinguished as if by magic. Acté, Acté, some infamy is doubtless taking place. Ah! I was warned not to come to Bauli, but, fool that I was, I refused to believe! — Well, Gallus?"

"Anicetus cannot obey your orders; he has to lower the boats."

"Then I will go and find him myself — ah! what is that noise overhead? By Jupiter! we are doomed, and the vessel is going to pieces!"

And scarcely had Agrippina uttered these words and thrown herself into the arms of Acté, when the deck above their heads fell in with a frightful crash. The two women gave themselves up for lost; but, by a strange chance, the canopy of the bed was so solidly constructed that it supported the weight of the deck-beams, the other end of which had just crushed in its fall the young Roman knight who was standing at the entrance to the cabin. As for Agrippina and Acté, they found themselves in the angular space formed by the deck, which was still held up by the canopy. At the same moment loud cries resounded throughout the vessel, a dull noise was heard in the depth of the hold, and the two women felt the vessel groan and tremble beneath their feet. In point of fact, several planks in the hull had just parted, and the sea, inundating the hold by the gaping breach thus made, was already washing against the door of the cabin. Agrippina realised the situation in an instant. Death had been contrived for her above her head and beneath her feet at one and the same time. Looking round, she saw the deck above on the point of crushing her, the water ready to engulf her; there was the open stern-window through which she had looked when the lighthouse on Misenum was extinguished. It was the one means of safety; she dragged Acté towards it, motioning her to silence with that quick and imperative gesture which denotes that life depends on it, and both of them, clasping one another's arms, and without looking behind them, threw themselves into the water without hesitation or delay. At the same instant they seemed to be drawn down by some infernal power into the lowest depths of the sea; the ship heeled over and sank, carrying them down in its eddy. They remained under water for some seconds, which appeared to them an age; at last the force of the attraction was spent, and they felt that they had ceased to descend; presently they perceived that they were rising, and finally, they came to the surface in a half-unconscious state. At this moment they dimly descried a third head appearing near the boats, and heard, as in a dream, a voice crying: "Save me! I am Agrippina, I am Caesar's mother." Acté, too, wanted to shout for help; but she felt herself once more dragged down by Agrippina, and could only utter inarticulate sounds. When they came to the surface again, the boats were almost out of sight, yet Agrippina, while swimming with one hand, pointed with the other to an oar which was raised and then brought down with a crash on the head of Acerronia, who had been foolish enough to think she could save herself by shouting to the murderers of Agrippina that she was Caesar's mother.

The two fugitives then continued to swim in silence, making for the shore, while Anicetus, thinking his mission of death accomplished, rowed towards Bauli, where the Emperor was awaiting him. The sky was still unclouded and the sea had grown calm again; the distance however was so great from the spot where Agrippina and Acté had thrown themselves into the water to the shore which they hoped to reach, that after swimming for more than half an hour they found themselves still more than a mile from land. Agrippina had injured her shoulder in her fall; she felt her right arm becoming so numb that she seemed likely to have escaped a first danger only to fall into another even more terrible and more certain. Acté presently perceived that she was swimming only with great difficulty, and though she did not complain, she guessed by the heaving of Agrippina's breast that she was in need of help. She crossed at once to her other side, took her arm within her own, gave her her shoulder to lean upon, and continued to advance, supporting the exhausted Agrippina, who vainly besought her to save herself and leave her to perish.

Meanwhile Nero had returned to the palace at Bauli, and, resuming the place at the banquet which he had temporarily quitted, had summoned fresh courtesans and dancers, had ordered the feast to proceed, and, having had his lyre brought to him, was singing of the siege of Troy. Occasionally, however, he would give a start, and suddenly a shudder ran through his veins and a cold sweat moistened his brow; for now he thought he heard his mother's last cry, now it seemed to him that the spirit of Death, crossing that warm and perfumed atmosphere, touched his face with the tips of her icy wings. At last, after two hours of this feverish suspense, a slave entered, and, approaching Nero, whispered in his ear some words which nobody else heard, but which caused him to turn pale; dropping his lyre and tearing off his garland, the Emperor rushed at once from the banqueting-hall without telling anyone what had caused this sudden terror, and leaving the guests free to withdraw or to continue the orgy. But the Emperor's alarm had been too visible, and his retreat too abrupt, for the courtiers not to have guessed that some terrible event had just taken place; accordingly, they all hastened to follow the example of their lord, and within a few minutes of his departure the apartment, lately so crowded with a noisy and animated assembly, was silent and empty as a violated grave.

Nero had retired to his chamber and had summoned Anicetus. The latter, on reaching port, had sent an account of his mission to the Emperor, who, certain of his loyalty, had entertained no doubt as to the truth of his story. The astonishment of Anicetus was therefore great when Nero, on seeing him enter, rushed towards him exclaiming:

"Why did you tell me that she was dead? there is a messenger below who has just come from her."

"He must have come from hell, then," answered Anicetus; "for I saw the deck fall in and the vessel sink; I heard a voice crying, 'I am Agrippina, the mother of Caesar! ' — and I saw the oar rise and fall which broke the head of her who so imprudently called for help!"

"Well! you are mistaken; it was Acerronia who was killed, and my mother who was saved."

"Who says so?"

"The freedman Agerinus."

"Have you seen him?"

"No, not yet."

"What does the divine Emperor intend to do?"

"Can I rely upon you?"

"My life is at Caesar's disposal."

"Well, then! go into that room, and when I call for help, come in quickly and arrest Agerinus, and say that you saw him lift a dagger against me."

"Your wishes are my orders," answered Anicetus, bowing and going into the adjoining room.

Nero, left alone, seized a looking-glass, and, seeing that his face looked haggard, concealed its paleness with some rouge; then, collecting his flowing locks and gathering up the folds of his toga as though about to appear upon the stage, he reclined in a studied attitude and waited for Agrippina's messenger.

This messenger came to inform Nero that his mother was saved; he related to him the twofold accident which had happened to the trireme, all which account Nero listened to as though he were in ignorance of the facts; then the messenger added that the august Agrippina had been rescued by a boat at the very moment when, her strength failing her, she had nothing to hope for save from the help of the gods. This boat had taken her from the bay of Puteoli to the Lucrine Lake through the canal constructed by Claudius; from the shores of the lake she had been carried to her villa in her litter, and on her arrival there had sent to tell her son that the gods had taken her under their protection, and to beseech him, however great might be his wish to see her, to defer his visit, since she needed some interval of repose.

Nero heard him to the end, displaying alarm, surprise and joy as the several details of the story required; then, having ascertained all he wished to learn, namely the place to which his mother had betaken herself, immediately carrying out the plot which he had hastily formed, he threw a naked sword between the messenger's legs, shouting at the same time for help. Anicetus sprang in at once from the adjoining room, seized Agrippina's envoy, and picking up the sword lying at his feet before he had had time to deny the attempt with which he was charged, handed him over to the chief of the praetorians, who had rushed in with his guard at the sound of the Emperor's voice, and dashed through the corridors of the palace, shouting out that Nero had just escaped being murdered by his mother's orders.

While this was happening at Bauli, Agrippina had been rescued, as we have said, by a fisherman’s boat which was entering the harbour late at night; but, just before hailing this boat, not knowing whether the wrath of Nero would not pursue her to her villa on the Lucrine Lake, and unwilling to involve in her own destruction the girl to whom she owed her life, she had asked Acté if she had strength enough remaining to gain the shore, which was just becoming visible; marked by the dark line of the hills that stood up in outline, parting the sky from the sea. Acté, guessing the motive which was influencing Agrippina, had insisted on following her; but the latter had ordered her positively to leave her, promising that she would summon her in case there should be no cause for alarm. Acté had obeyed, and Agrippina, uttering a cry of distress, had hailed the boat, while Acté disappeared unseen, her fair, light form cleaving the surface of the bay, like a swan burying its head beneath the water.

As Agrippina approached, the shore seemed to her eyes and ears to become animated; she saw lights careering madly along the beach and the wind wafted sounds of which her uneasiness tried to discover the meaning. The cause of all this commotion was that Anicetus, on entering the harbour of Bauli, had spread the news of the shipwreck and the death of the Emperor’s mother, and that immediately her slaves, her clients, and her friends had assembled on the beach in the hope that she might reach the land alive, or that at least the sea would cast her body ashore. Accordingly, the moment a white sail was perceived through the darkness, the whole crowd rushed to the place where the boat would land, and when it was seen that Agrippina was in the vessel, all this mournful clamour was changed to shouts of joy; so that Caesar’s mother, doomed to death on the one side of the bay, landed on the other with all the acclamations and honours of a triumphal return, and was borne aloft in the arms of her servants and escorted by a whole population excited by this event and aroused from its slumber. In this fashion she entered the imperial villa, the doors of which were instantly closed behind her, but all the inhabitants of the shore, from Puteoli to Baiae, still remained on the spot, and, the curiosity of fresh arrivals adding fuel to the excitement of those who had accompanied Agrippina from the sea, fresh cries of joy and affection broke out, the people demanding to see her on whom the Senate, by order of the Emperor, had conferred the title of Augusta.

Agrippina, however, who had withdrawn to the deepest privacy of her apartments, far from surrendering herself to these transports was filled with greater terror by them, inasmuch as all popularity was reckoned a crime at the Court of Nero; all the more so when the object of this popularity was a person proscribed. Hardly had she reached her chamber, when she summoned her freedman Agerinus, the only man on whom she thought she could depend, and charged him to bear to Nero the message which we have seen him deliver. This first duty accomplished, she had thought of her injured arm, and after having it dressed, she dismissed all her women, and retired to bed, covering her head with the counterpane, harassed by terrible reflections, and listening to the clamour outside which became more deafening every moment. Then suddenly the thousand voices were hushed, the shouts subsided as if by magic; the lights of the torches which flickered against the window like the reflection of a fire disappeared; the night resumed its darkness and the silence its mystery. Agrippina felt a deadly terror pass through all her frame and a cold perspiration mount to her brow, for she divined that this crowd had not become silent, nor these lights been extinguished, without good reason. And presently was heard the tramp of an armed band entering the outer court, then the noise of steps growing more and more distinct resounded from corridor to corridor and from room to room.

Agrippina listened to these threatening sounds, leaning upon one elbow, breathless, but without stirring, for, having no hope of escape, she did not even dream of attempting to fly. Presently the door of her room was opened; upon which, summoning up all her courage, she turned her head, pale but determined, and saw at the entrance the freedman Anicetus, and behind him Herculeus the tetrarch, and Olaritus, centurion of Marines. At sight of Anicetus, whom she knew to be the confidant of Nero and frequently employed as his executioner, she realised that all was over, and, foregoing all complaint or entreaty, exclaimed:

“If you come as a messenger, tell my son that I have recovered from the shock of the accident; if you come as an executioner, perform your duty.”

The sole answer of Anicetus was to draw his sword and approach the bed, while the sole prayer of Agrippina, as with a sublime shamelessness she lifted the counterpane which covered her, was contained in these two words: *“Feri ventrem” (*“Pierce my womb!”).

The assassin obeyed, and Agrippina expired without another word save this implied imprecation on her body for having borne such a son.

Meanwhile, Acté, on leaving Agrippina, had continued to make for the shore; but, as she drew nearer, she had seen the gleam of the torches and heard the shouts; not knowing what was the meaning of these lights and noises, and feeling that she had still some strength left, she determined not to land until she had reached the further side of Puteoli. In order, therefore, to be still more concealed from observation, she had followed the bridge of Caligula, swimming in the dark shadow cast by it across the sea, clinging occasionally to the piles on which it was built in order to rest herself; but at about three hundred yards from the end of this bridge, seeing the gleam of a sentry’s helmet, she struck out once more for the open sea, though her heaving chest and tired arms warned her of the urgent need she had to gain the shore speedily. At last she perceived the shore, and just such a shore as suited her purpose, for it was low, dark, and deserted, although the light of the torches and the joyful cries proceeding from Baiae still reached her. Soon, however, both lights and sounds began to grow indistinct, and even the beach itself, which she had seen a moment before, now disappeared; for a mist covered her eyes and a roaring sound filled her ears, as though a rout of marine monsters were lashing the water with their fins; she would fain have cried out, but her mouth filled with water and a wave passed over her head. Acté felt that she was lost unless she summoned up all her strength; by a convulsive effort she raised herself half out of the water, and by this rapid movement gained time to fill her lungs with air. She now perceived with joy that the land of which she had got a glimpse was perceptibly nearer to her; she swam bravely on therefore, but soon all the symptoms of exhaustion seemed to seize on her once more, and confused thoughts began to jostle each other in her mind; she seemed to see once more in confused array all that she held dear, and her whole past life rose up before her eyes. She thought she could distinguish an old man holding out his arms with a gesture of entreaty from the shore, while some mysterious force paralysed her limbs and drew her back into the depths of the waves. Then it was the banquet all ablaze with light that dazzled her eyes, and its songs that resounded in her ears. Nero sat holding his lyre; his favourite applauded the indecent ballads, and the courtesans, whose lascivious dancing had shocked the girl’s modesty, entered the hall. Then she wanted to escape, as in fact she had escaped, but her feet were tied fast with garlands of flowers;

however, at the end of the gallery leading to the banqueting-hall, she saw the same old man making gestures of appeal to her. A sort of halo round his head lit up his features amid the surrounding shadows. He beckoned her to come to him, and she knew that if she did so she would be saved. Presently all these lights went out and the sounds were hushed, and, feeling that she was sinking once more, she uttered a cry. Another cry seemed to answer her, but a second wave passed like a shroud over her head and she was on the point of losing all consciousness of existence; it seemed as though she were being carried off while asleep and rolled down the slope of a mountain, until on reaching the bottom, she dashed against a rock — she felt a dull agony like that which one suffers in a fainting fit, and then nothing but an icy sensation creeping about her heart and robbing her of all consciousness.

When she recovered her senses, it was still night, she found herself on the shore, wrapped in a large cloak, with a man on his knees beside her supporting her dripping and dishevelled head; she raised her eyes and looked at her preserver, and, strange to say thought that she recognised the old man whom she had seen when she was struggling in the sea. He had the same sweet, calm and venerable face, so that she seemed to be still continuing her dream.

“O, my father,” she murmured, “you called me to you and I have come — I am here — you have saved my life — tell me your name that I may bless it.”

“My name is Paul,” said the old man.

“And who are you?” continued the girl.

“An apostle of Christ,” he replied.

“I do not understand,” said Acté softly, “but no matter, I trust you as I would my father; take me where you will, I am ready to follow you.”

The old man rose and walked away, followed by Acté.

CHAPTER XI

NERO spent the rest of the night in sleeplessness and alarm. He trembled lest Anicetus should not be able to find his mother, for he thought that she would probably remain but a short time at the villa, and that the message she had sent him with regard to her being weak and ill was only a means of gaining time so that she might be free to set out for Rome. Already he saw her entering the capital with haughty determination, invoking the aid of the populace, arming the slaves, raising troops, and obtaining admission to the Senate for the purpose of demanding justice in the matter of the shipwreck, for her injuries and the murder of her friends. He trembled like a child at every sound; for, in spite of his outrageous conduct towards her, he had never ceased to fear his mother; he knew of what she was capable, and that she could mete out to him the same treatment as that of which he himself had been guilty.

It was not until seven in the morning that a slave arrived from Anicetus at the palace of Bauli, and, demanding to be conducted to the Emperor's presence, knelt before him and handed back to him the ring which he had given to the assassin as a symbol of full authority, and which the latter now returned to him according to their bloody compact, in token that the murder was accomplished. At this Nero rose joyfully from his bed, exclaiming that never until now had he felt himself really a ruler, and that he owed his empire to Anicetus.

He judged it of importance, however, to anticipate report, and to put people off the scent in regard to his mother's death. He wrote instantly to Rome to the effect that Agerinus, his mother's freedman and confidant, had been surprised in the Emperor's apartment armed with a dagger for the purpose of assassinating him; and that Agrippina, on learning the failure of her plot, and through fear of the vengeance of the Senate, had put an end to her own life. He added that she had long cherished the scheme of robbing him of the sovereignty, and had boasted that, once the Emperor was dead, she would make the people, the Praetorians and the Senate swear obedience to a woman; that the banishment of a number of distinguished personages was her work, in proof of which he cited the cases of Valerius Capito and

Licinius Gabolus, formerly Praetors, Calpurnia, a lady of the highest rank, and Julia Calvina, sister to Silanus, the former lover of Octavia. He alluded also to the shipwreck as an act of vengeance on the part of the gods, thus slandering heaven and lying to earth; the actual writer, however, of this letter was Seneca, since Nero was in such a state of trembling agitation that he was unable to do more than sign it.

But when this first moment of terror was over, he bethought himself, clever comedian as he was, of acting the part of grief. So he rubbed off the rouge which still covered his cheeks, let his locks fail sparsely over his shoulders, and, exchanging his white festal robe for one of sombre hue, exhibited himself to the Praetorians, the courtiers, and even to the slaves, as though overwhelmed by the blow which had just fallen upon him.

Then he spoke of going himself to take a last look at his mother, and had a vessel brought to the tops where, on the previous day, he had taken leave of her with such demonstrations of affection. He crossed the bay in which he had attempted to drown her, landed on the same shore which had seen her land, wounded and almost dying. Then he proceeded towards the villa where the scene of this great drama had just been enacted. He was accompanied in silence by Burrhus, Seneca, Sporus, and a number of courtiers, all of whom tried to gather from the expression of his features the expression which their own ought to assume, which was that of profound sadness, and which they succeeded so successfully in adopting, that as they followed him into the courtyard where the soldiers had made their first halt, all of them seemed, like him, to have lost their mothers.

Nero ascended the staircase with slow and solemn step, as befitted a dutiful son approaching the corpse of her who had given him life. On reaching the corridor leading to the room, he motioned to those accompanying him to stay behind, as though he feared to give way to his grief in the presence of spectators, and took only Sporus with him. When they arrived at the door, he stopped for a moment and leant against the wall, covering his face with his cloak as though to hide his tears, but in reality to wipe away the perspiration that trickled down his face; then, after a moment’s hesitation, he opened the door with a quick and determined movement, and entered the room.

Agrippina was still lying on the bed. Her murderer had evidently concealed all traces of her death struggle, for you would have said that she was asleep. The counterpane was thrown over her, leaving only her head exposed, a portion of her breast, and her arms to which the paleness of death imparted the cold, bluish look of marble. Nero paused at the foot of the bed, still followed by Sporus, whose eyes, more expressionless than his master’s, seemed as though gazing with indifferent curiosity at some statue fallen from its pedestal. Presently the face of the matricide lighted up — all his doubts were removed, all his fears were over. The throne, the world, the future were his and his alone at last; he would reign in freedom and without hindrance now that Agrippina was really dead. After a while this feeling was succeeded by a stranger one; his eyes, fastening on those arms which had pressed him to her heart and that breast which had suckled him, flamed with a guilty desire, and he slowly lifted the counterpane so as to entirely expose his mother’s naked body. He glanced at it with a cynical look, and then exclaimed to Sporus: “I had no idea she was so beautiful.”

Daylight had arrived ere this, and had restored to the bay its accustomed life; and every one had resumed his ordinary occupation. The news of Agrippina’s death had spread, and a dull feeling of uneasiness prevailed along the whole shore, which was thronged nevertheless, as usual, with merchants, fishermen, and idlers. People spoke in loud tones of the danger which the Emperor had escaped, and rendered thanks to Heaven when they thought any one could hear them, and then passed, without troubling to turn their heads, close by the funeral-pile which a freedman, with the help of a number of slaves, was erecting on the road to Misenum, close to the villa of Julius Caesar.

But not a trace of this noise or uneasiness penetrated to the retreat whither Paul had conducted Acté. This was a small secluded house built on the point of the promontory facing Nisida, and inhabited by a family of fisher-folk. Although he appeared to be a stranger in this family the old man exercised an evident authority over it; the obedience, however, which was paid to his slightest wish was not a servile one, but that of respect, the obedience paid by children to a father, by servants to an honoured master, by disciples to an apostle.

The first requisite for Acté was rest; full of confidence in her protector, and feeling that henceforward there was some one watching over her, she had yielded to the old man’s entreaties, and had fallen asleep. As for Paul, he had seated himself beside her, like a father at the bedside of his child, and, fixing his eyes on the sky, had gradually become absorbed in profound contemplation, so that when the girl opened her eyes again she did not need to search for her protector. Though her heart was wrung with the thousand memories that returned to her on awaking, she smiled sadly at him, and extended her hand.

"You are in pain?" said the old man.

"I am in love," answered the girl.

There was a short silence, and then Paul continued:

"What do you desire?"

"A retreat where I can think of him and weep."

"Do you feel strong enough to follow me?"

"Let us go at once," said Acté, making a movement as if to rise.

"It is impossible to go at this moment, my child; if you are a fugitive, I also am a man proscribed; we can only travel under cover of darkness. Are you prepared to start this evening?"

"Yes, my father."

"A long and fatiguing journey does not frighten you in your frail and delicate condition?"

"The girls of my country are accustomed to course the hinds through the thickest forests, and over the highest mountains."

"Timotheus," said the old man, turning round, "call Silas."

The fisherman took Paul's brown cloak, fastened it to the end of a stick, went out at the door of the cottage, and stuck the stick into the ground.

This signal did not remain long unnoticed, for almost immediately a man came down the hill from Nisida to the shore, got into a small boat which he unmoored from the beach, and began to row across the space of sea that lay between the island and the promontory. The passage was a short one; after some quarter of an hour he reached the shore at about a hundred yards from the house where he was expected, and five minutes later he appeared at the door. Acté gave a start, for she had seen nothing of what had been going on, but had been gazing in the direction of Bauli.

His dark complexion, the turban surrounding his head, and the supple slimness of his frame, made the new-comer easily recognisable as a son of Arabia. He advanced respectfully, and greeted Paul in a language unknown to Acté; whereupon Paul gave him in the same language some instructions in a manner which seemed to combine the kindness of a friend with the authority of a master. For sole answer, Silas fastened his sandals more firmly to his feet, girded up his loins with a cord, took a staff in his hand, knelt down before Paul, who gave him his blessing, and started on his journey.

Acté looked at Paul in astonishment. Who, she wondered, was this old man who gave his orders in gentle yet firm tones, who was obeyed as a king and reverenced as a father? Her short sojourn at the Court of Nero had shown her servility in all its forms — but a base and cringing servility begotten of fear, and not the willing obedience that proceeds from respect. Did the world contain two Emperors, and was this one who thus concealed his dignity, more powerful, though without treasures, slaves, and armies, than the other with all the wealth of the earth at his command, with his hundred and twenty millions of subjects, and his two hundred thousand soldiers? These thoughts succeeded one another so quickly in Acté's mind, and became so profoundly imprinted there, that she turned towards Paul, and clasping her hands with the same gesture of respect which she had seen observed by every one who approached this holy man, said:

"Who are you, my lord, whom every one obeys without seeming to fear you?"

"I have told you, my daughter; I am called Paul, and I am an Apostle."

"But what is an Apostle?" replied Acté; "does it mean an orator, like Demosthenes, or a philosopher, like Seneca? Eloquence with us is represented as chains of gold proceeding from the mouth. Do you enchain men by your speech?"

"I speak the words that free and not those that bind," answered Paul with a smile; "and far from telling men they are slaves, I am come to tell the slaves that they are free."

"I cannot understand you, and yet you speak my mother tongue as though you were a born Greek."

"I lived for six months at Athens and a year and a half in Corinth."

"In Corinth!" murmured the girl, hiding her face in her hands, "was that long ago?"

"Five years ago."

"And what did you do at Corinth?"

"During the week, I worked at making tents for soldiers, sailors and travellers, not wishing to be a burden on the generous host who had taken me in — then, on the Sabbath days, I preached in the Synagogue, enjoining modesty on the women, forbearance on the men, and the virtues of the Gospel on all."

“Yes, yes, I remember now hearing you spoken of,” said Acté; “did you not lodge near the Jews’ Synagogue in the house of a nobleman called Titus Justus?”

“Do you know him?” exclaimed Paul with evident delight.

“He was a friend of my father’s,” replied Acté. “Yes, I remember now; the Jews denounced you and brought you before Gallio, who was Proconsul of Achaia and brother to Seneca. My father took me to the door as you were passing, and said to me: ‘See, my daughter, there goes an upright man.’”

“And what was your father’s name? what is your own name?”

“My father’s name was Amycles, and mine is Acté.”

“Yes, I, too, remember now, the name is not unknown to me. But how did you come to leave your father? how came I to find you alone and dying on this shore? Tell me the whole story, my daughter, and, if you have no longer a country, I will find you one. I am going to confess my crimes to you, so that you may acknowledge your faults to me in return.”

“Your crimes!”

“Yes, my crimes; I have atoned for them, thank Heaven, and the Lord has, I trust, forgiven me. — Listen, my child, I am going to tell you of things of which you know nothing, but which you will understand some day, and of One whom, when you know Him, you will worship.”

“I was born at Tarsus in Cilicia; the loyalty of my native city to Augustus had earned for its inhabitants the name of Roman citizens, so that my parents, who were already wealthy, enjoyed, in addition to their wealth, the advantages attaching to the status bestowed on them by the Emperor. At Tarsus I studied Greek literature, which flourished with us as much as it flourished at Athens. Then my father, who was a Jew and of the sect of the Pharisees, sent me to study at Jerusalem under Gamaliel, a learned and austere teacher of the law of Moses. I was not called Paul at that time, but Saul.

“There was just then at Jerusalem a young man older than myself by two years; his name was Jesus, that is to say, *Saviour,* and wonderful stories were related of his birth. An angel had appeared to his mother, had greeted her in the name of God, and announced to her that she was chosen from among all women to be the Mother of the Messiah; some time later, this maiden married a man named Joseph, who, seeing that she was with child, and not wishing to expose her, resolved to send her back secretly to her family. But when he had come to this decision, the same Angel of the Lord who had appeared to Mary appeared to him and said: ‘Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take Mary as thy wife, for that which is born in her is conceived of the Holy Ghost.’ About that time was published an edict of Augustus Caesar for taking a census of the whole world. This was the first census made by Cyrenius, governor of Syria, and as all went to be registered in the town to which they belonged, Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, and came into Judaea, to the town of David called Bethlehem, to be enrolled together with Mary his wife. But while they were there, the time of her delivery was fulfilled and she brought forth her first-born, and, having wrapped him in swaddling clothes, laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Now, there were some shepherds near by keeping watch over their flocks by night; suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared to them, a light from heaven shone round about them, filling them with great fear. Then the angel said to them: ‘Fear not, for behold I bring you glad tidings of great joy which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.’

“For God had looked upon the earth and considered that the time prepared in His wisdom had arrived. The whole world, or at least the whole world known to the Romans, obeyed a single authority. Tyre and Sidon had perished according to the word of the prophet; Carthage had been levelled to the ground, Greece and Gaul conquered, Alexandria burned; one single man ruled a hundred provinces through the voice of his proconsuls; and everywhere the point of the sword whose handle was at Rome made itself felt. In spite, however, of its apparent might, the heathen edifice was crumbling on its clay foundations; an undefined but universal malady proclaimed that the old world was diseased at heart, that a crisis was at hand, that a new and unknown state of things was about to arise, — since justice had disappeared owing to an excess of arbitrary authority, since there were no longer any men, because there were over many slaves, no longer any religion because there were over many gods. Well, as I have told you, at the moment when I arrived at Jerusalem, a man had come there before me, who said to the powerful: ‘Do what is your duty, and nothing beyond;’ — to the rich: ‘He that hath two coats, let him give to him that hath none;’ — to the masters: ‘There is neither first nor last, the kingdom of this world is to the strong, but the kingdom of heaven belongs to the weak;’ — and to all: ‘The gods whom you worship are no gods, there is but one Almighty God, the Creator of the world, and that God is my father; for I am the Messiah promised in the Scriptures.'

"Blind and deaf as I then was, I closed my eyes and my ears, or rather I was blinded by envy; then came hatred, and destroyed me. Hear how I became the persecutor of the God-man, of whom to-day I am the unworthy but faithful Apostle.

"One day when Peter and I had been fishing all day without result on the ancient lake of Gennesareth, to-day called the Sea of Tiberias, Jesus came to the shore of the lake, thronged by the multitude who desired to hear his words. Peter's boat being closer to the shore, or Peter being a better man than myself, Jesus entered his boat, and sitting down in it, continued to instruct the crowd, who listened to him from the shore. When he had ceased speaking, he said to Peter: 'Launch out now into the deep and let down your nets for a draught.' Peter answered him: 'Master, we have toiled all night and have taken nothing; how should we fare better now?' — 'Do as I command you,' continued Jesus.

"And when Peter had let down his net, he enclosed so great a draught of fishes that his net was almost breaking, and the fish filled his boat so that it began to sink. Then Peter, with James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were in the boat with him, fell on their knees, perceiving that this was a miracle. But Jesus said to them: 'Be of good cheer; your work as fishermen is done; henceforth ye shall become fishers of men;' and, stepping out upon the shore, took them in his company.

"I, who remained behind, said to myself: 'Why should not I also catch fish as the others have done?' and going to the spot I cast my nets ten times in the same place where they had cast theirs, but each time I drew up the nets empty. Then instead of saying to myself: 'This man is indeed what he professes to be, the messenger of God,' I said, 'This man is no doubt a magician possessed of certain charms,' and I felt in my heart a bitter envy against him.

"But as he quitted Jerusalem at about this time to go and preach throughout Judaea, this feeling gradually disappeared, and I had almost forgotten the man who had inspired it, when one day, as we were selling our goods in the Temple courts as usual, the report went about that Jesus was returning to Jerusalem with a higher repute than ever; that he had healed a paralytic man in the wilderness, had restored a blind man at Jericho to sight, and had raised a young man from the dead at Nain. Such was his fame that the people spread their garments on the road wherever he passed by, and his disciples accompanied him, transported with joy, bearing palm branches in their hands and praising God with a loud voice for all the wonders they had seen.

"Accompanied by this procession, he advanced towards the Temple; but when he saw that it was thronged with buyers and sellers, he began to drive us all out, saying: 'It is written, "My house is the house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves." 'At first we tried to resist him, but we soon found that it was useless, and that it was of no avail to do anything against him, for all the people hung as it were upon his lips in wonder at the words which he spoke. My anger at these proceedings aroused my ancient enmity against Jesus, and my envy was turned into hatred.

"Some time afterwards I heard that on the very evening of the Passover, which he had celebrated with his disciples, Jesus had been arrested at the order of the High Priest by a band of armed men, led by Judas, one of his disciples; that he had been brought before Pilate who, knowing that he came from Nazareth, had sent him to Herod, in whose jurisdiction Galilee lay. But Herod finding nothing against him, except that he called himself 'King of the Jews,' sent him back to Pilate, who, having summoned the chief priests, the rulers and the people, said to them: 'You have charged this man with stirring up the people to revolt, but neither Herod nor I have found him guilty of the crime of which you accuse him; as therefore he has done nothing deserving of death, I will chastise him and let him go.'

"But all the people began to shout: 'This is the feast of the Passover, and you are bound to release a criminal unto us; put this man to death, and deliver Barabbas to us.'

"Pilate again remonstrated with the multitude, which demanded the death of Jesus; but they all answered: 'Crucify him, crucify him!'

"And I," continued the old man, smiting his breast, "I was one of that crowd, and shouted with all my might: 'Crucify him, crucify him!'

"Pilate accordingly ordered that Barabbas should be released, and abandoned Jesus to the will of his executioners.

"Ah! Lord, pardon me," said the old man, prostrating himself with his face to the ground; "Lord, I followed thee to Calvary; I saw thy hands and feet nailed to the cross; I saw thee drink the vinegar; I saw the sky covered with darkness and the sun hidden behind the clouds, and the veil of the Temple rent in twain; I heard thee cry with a loud voice 'Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit;’ at thy voice I felt the earth tremble to its foundations — or rather I saw nothing, I heard nothing, for I was blind and deaf. Lord, pardon me; it was my fault, my grievous fault.”

The old man remained for some time with his face bowed to the ground, praying and groaning in a low tone, while Acté looked at him silently, with her hands clasped, surprised at this exhibition of remorse and humility in one whom she thought so powerful.

At last he rose and said:

“That is not all, my daughter. My hatred for the prophet was succeeded by a hatred for his disciples. The Apostles, occupied in preaching the Word, chose seven deacons to distribute the alms; the people rose against one of these deacons, named Stephen, and haled him before the tribunal, where false witnesses accused him of having spoken blasphemously against God, against Moses and the Law. Stephen was condemned to death; his foes immediately threw themselves upon him, dragged him outside Jerusalem, in order to stone him in accordance with the laws against blasphemers. I was among those who had demanded the death of the first martyr; I was not of the number of those who threw stones, but I kept the raiment of those who did. Doubtless I was included among those for whom the condemned martyr prayed in that sublime prayer, unknown before Jesus Christ: ‘Lord, lay not this sin to their charge; forgive them, for they know not what they do.’

“However, if the moment of forgiveness had not arrived, it was at least approaching quickly. The chiefs of the Synagogue, seeing my zeal in persecuting the infant Church, sent me into Syria to hunt out Christians and bring them to Jerusalem. I followed the banks of the Jordan from the river Jaher as far as Capernaum: I saw once more the shores of the Lake of Gennesareth where the miraculous draught of fishes had taken place. At last I reached the Hermon range, still pursuing my scheme of vengeance, when, on reaching the top of a hill from which is visible the plain of Damascus and the twenty-seven rivers that water it, I was suddenly surrounded and struck down by a light from heaven; then I fell to the ground like a dead man and heard a voice saying to me: ‘Saul! Saul! why persecutest thou Me?’

“‘Lord,’ said I, trembling, ‘who art Thou, and what wilt Thou with me?’

“‘I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest,’ the voice replied, ‘and I would use thee to spread abroad My Gospel — thou who hast hitherto striven to destroy it.’

“‘Lord,’ I continued, more trembling and affrighted than before, ‘what wilt Thou have me to do?’

“‘Rise, and enter the city, and there it shall be told thee what thou must do.’

“Those who accompanied me were almost as much astonished as myself, for they heard a loud voice though they saw no man. At last, hearing nothing more, I rose and opened my eyes; but it seemed to me as though the brilliant light had been succeeded by the thickest darkness. I was blind; I stretched out my arms therefore and said: ‘Lead me, for I can see nothing.’ One of my attendants then took me by the hand and led me to Damascus, where I remained three days without eating or drinking.

“On the third day, an unknown man, whose name, however, I knew to be Ananias, seemed to approach me; at the same moment I felt that hands were laid upon me, and a voice said: ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to thee in the way by which thou earnest, hath sent me that thou mayest recover thy sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost.’ And immediately there fell from my eyes as it had been scales, and I saw. Then, falling on my knees, I asked to be baptised.

“Since that time, as zealous in my faith as I had been implacable in my hatred, I have traversed Judaea from Sidon to Arad, and from Mount Seir to the torrent of Besor; I have gone through Asia, Bithynia and Macedonia; I have visited Athens and Corinth, have touched at Malta and landed at Syracuse. From there, after coasting round Sicily, I entered the harbour of Puteoli, where I have been for fifteen days waiting for letters from Rome, which reached me yesterday; these letters are from my Christian brethren, asking me to visit them. The day of triumph is at hand, and God is preparing the way for us; for, while he sends hope to His people, He is sending madness upon the Emperors to the end the old world may be undermined from top to base. It was not Chance, but Providence, that dealt out panic terror to Tiberius, weak imbecility to Claudius and madness to Nero. A succession of Emperors such as these makes the existence of the gods they worship to be called in question; and so gods and Emperors will fall together — the former despised, the latter execrated.”

“Oh! my father!” cried Acté, “stop — have pity on me.”

“Why! what have you to do with these names of blood and terror?” replied Paul in astonishment.

“My father,” continued the girl, hiding her face in her hands, “you have told me your story and you ask me to tell mine; it is a very short, though a terrible, a criminal one: I am Caesar’s mistress.”

“I look upon that but as a fault, my child,” answered Paul, approaching her with interest and curiosity.

“Ah! but I love him,” cried Acté; “I love him more than I shall ever love man on earth or God in heaven.”

“Alas! Alas!” murmured the old man, “that is where the crime is;” and kneeling down in a corner of the hut, he began to pray.

CHAPTER XII

WHEN night arrived, Paul also girded up his loins, made fast his sandals, took his staff, and then turned to Acté, who was quite ready, and still determined on flight. Where she was going mattered little, so long as she got out of reach of Nero. For the moment, the horror and dread she had experienced on the previous evening still urged her to accomplish this project. But she fully realised that if she hesitated for a day, or if she saw this man again who exerted such a powerful influence over her heart, she was lost; that she would have neither courage nor strength to relinquish her love, spite of all that had passed, and that her life would yet be lost in his feverish and overpowering life, as a rivulet is swallowed up by the ocean. For, strange to say, her lover was always Lucius in her eyes, and never Nero; the victor in the Olympic games and the Emperor were two distinct individuals, and her life was divided into two quite different phases — one consisting of her love for Lucius, of the sincerity of which she felt quite sure, entirely convinced; the other, of Nero's love for her, which seemed to her only like a dream.

On quitting the cottage, her eyes turned towards the bay which had witnessed on the previous evening the terrible catastrophe which we have related; the sea was calm and the air clear, the moon lit up the sky, and the lighthouse of Misenum the land, so that the other side of the gulf was as clearly visible as by daylight. Acté perceived the dark mass of the trees surrounding Bauli, and, thinking that Lucius was there, she stopped and uttered a sigh. Paul waited for a moment, then, taking a few steps towards her, he asked in a sympathetic tone:

"Are you not coming, my child?"

"O my father!" said Acté, not daring to confess to the old man the emotions which had caused her to stop, "yesterday I left Nero, and accompanied his mother Agrippina. The ship which carried us was wrecked, and we both had to swim for our lives, and after the boat took her in, I saw no more of her. I should not like to quit this shore without knowing what has become of her."

Paul extended his hand towards the villa of Julius Caesar, and pointing out to Acté a bright light rising between that building and the road to Misenum, observed:

“You see that flame?”

“Yes.”

“Well!” continued the old man, “that is the flame of her funeral pyre.”

And he resumed the journey, as though knowing that these few words would form an answer to what was passing in Acté’s mind; and, in point of fact, she followed him without another word or another sigh.

They kept close to the sea for some time, passed through Puteoli, and took the road to Neapolis. On arriving within about a mile of the city, they left it on the right and took a path which lead them into the road to Capua. Towards one o’clock in the morning they came to Atella, and presently they saw a man standing in the road, apparently expecting them; this man proved to be Silas, Paul’s messenger. The old man and he exchanged a few words, and then Silas struck across the fields, followed by Paul and Acté, and they presently reached a small, secluded house, where they were evidently looked for, for the door was opened directly Silas knocked at it.

The whole family, including the servants, were assembled in an elegant *atrium* and seemed to be waiting for them. No sooner did Paul appear at the threshold than they all knelt down. Paul extended his hands over them and blessed them; the mistress of the house then conducted him to the dining-hall, and insisted on herself washing the traveller’s feet before he partook of the meal which was already served and waiting for them. As for Acté, who was a stranger to this new religion, and who was entirely absorbed in the multitude of thoughts which were oppressing her heart, she asked to be allowed to retire. Immediately a handsome girl of fifteen or sixteen, veiled like a vestal, conducted her to her chamber, and returned presently, bringing Acté her share of the family meal.

Everything was a subject of astonishment to Acté. At her father’s house she had never heard the Christians spoken of except as a crack-brained sect of ideologists, who added one more to the number of those petty schools of fanaticism in which the doctrines of Pythagoras, the morality of Socrates, the philosophy of Epicurus or the theories of Plato were discussed and refuted; at the Court of Caesar, she had only heard them alluded to as an impious race given over to the most odious superstitions and the most abominable debaucheries — useful to be thrown to the people when they demanded a scapegoat, or to the lions when the leaders of society wanted a holiday. It was but a day since her life had been saved by Paul, but a day since she had become acquainted with the Christians; and yet these few hours had sufficed to efface this mistaken impression which she had derived from Greek philosophy and the Emperor's hatred. What she had realised particularly in regard to the new sect was their devotion, for devotion is almost always the predominant virtue of the woman who is in love, be her faith or her creed what it may; and she had come to feel an instinctive sympathy for this religion which enjoined upon the powerful the protection of the weak, upon the rich, charity towards the poor, and on the very martyrs, prayers for their executioners.

The next evening they resumed their journey at the same hour at which they had set out on the day before. This time, they travelled a longer distance; they left Capua on their right, the city which an error of Hannibal's has rendered as famous as any victory could have done; then they halted on the banks of the river Vulturnus. They had hardly arrived there when a boat rowed by a waterman issued from a small creek and came towards them; Paul and the boatman exchanged signs of recognition, and the old man and Acté stepped into the boat. When they had reached the farther bank, Paul held out a piece of money to the boatman; but the latter, falling on his knees, silently kissed the hem of the Apostle's cloak, and remained in this humble attitude long after the man to whom he had just accorded this mark of respect had left him. Towards three o'clock a man who was seated on one of those stones which the Romans placed by the roadside to assist travellers in mounting their horses rose at their approach; this was their silent and watchful messenger, who was waiting for them as on the previous evening to conduct them to their resting-place. This time no elegant mansion, as on the night before, awaited them, but a poor cottage; no splendid supper, served in a marble *triclinium*, but only a share of bread steeped in tears — the poor man's staff of life offered with the same respect as that with which the superfluity of the rich man had been bestowed.

The host who received them bore on his forehead the brand of a slave, and had an iron collar round his neck and two iron rings round his legs; this man was the shepherd of a wealthy estate, and drove to their pasture the thousands of sheep belonging to a hard and avaricious master, yet he had not a sheepskin to throw over his shoulders. He had placed a loaf on the table, and beside the loaf an earthenware vase, common in material, but artistic in shape; in a corner of the room he had spread a bed of ferns and reeds; and these humble preparations were doubtless of more value in the sight of God than the most splendid hospitality of the wealthiest could have been.

Paul sat at the table with Acté beside him: their host, having done for them all he could, went into a room at the side, and presently they heard through the half-closed door the sound of grief and sobs. Acté laid her hand on Paul’s arm:

“Don’t you hear, my father?” she said.

“Yes, my daughter,” answered the old man; “tears of bitterness are being shed in yonder room, but He who afflicts can comfort.”

A moment later their host entered and sat down, without saying a word, in a corner of the room; then, resting his elbows on his knees, he buried his face in his hands.

And Acté, seeing him so sad and dejected, went and knelt beside him and said in a low tone:

“Slave, why do you not speak to this man here? perhaps he may have some remedy for your affliction, some consolation for your grief.”

“Thank you,” replied the slave, “but our sorrow is not such as can be healed by words.”

“O man of little faith,” said Paul, rising, “wherefore dost thou doubt? Knowest thou not the miracles wrought by the Christ?”

“Yes, but Christ is dead,” exclaimed the slave, shaking his head; “the Jews nailed Him to the cross, and He is now in Heaven at the right hand of His Father. Blessed be His Name!”

“Knowest thou not,” replied Paul, “that He has bequeathed His power to His Apostles?”

“My child, my poor child!” said the father, bursting into sobs and without answering Paul.

A dull groan which was heard in the adjoining room sounded like an echo to this outburst of grief.

“0 my father!” said Acté, turning to Paul, “if you can do anything for these unhappy people, do it, I beg of you. Though I do not know the cause of their despair, it rends my heart; ask him what is the matter, perhaps he will *give you* an answer.”

“I know what is the matter,” said the old man; “he lacks faith.”

“And how would you have me believe? how would you have me hope?” said the afflicted man: “my whole life has been nothing but sorrow. A slave, the son of a slave, I have never known a moment’s happiness; as a child, I was not even free when I lay at my mother’s breast; as a young man, I had to toil incessantly beneath the rod and the lash; as a husband and a father, I was robbed each day of the food necessary for my wife and child — my child who, struck even when in his mother’s womb by the blows which they heaped on her during her pregnancy, came into this world a cripple and dumb — my child, whom we loved, victim of the wrath of heaven though he was, and who we hoped would escape his natural destiny by his very misfortunes. Well! no, such happiness was not to be; his master sold him yesterday to one of the men who traffic in human flesh; who value what can be made out of every infirmity; who grow rich by making the unhappy creatures, whose sores they reopen or whose limbs they twist every evening, beg for them in the streets of Rome; and to-morrow, to-morrow! they are going to tear him from us to hand him over to this torture — the poor innocent, who will not have even a voice with which to complain, to call us to his help, or to curse his tormentors!”

“And what if God were to cure your child?” said the old man.

“Oh! in that case they would leave him with us,” cried the father, “for what these wretches are making merchandise of is his misfortunes, his crippled limbs, his tied tongue; if he could walk and talk, he would be like other children, and possess no money value until he grew into a man.”

“Open that door,” said Paul.

The slave rose with astonishment depicted on his countenance, filled at once with doubt and hope, and, going to the door, obeyed the Apostle’s order. Acté, though her eyes were filled with tears, could then see into the other room; it contained, like the one they were in, a bed of ferns; on this bed was seated a child of four or five, smiling unconcernedly and playing with some flowers, while a woman lay beside him, stiff and motionless, her face turned towards the ground and her hands buried in her hair, her whole attitude resembling that of a statue of Despair.

At this sight the Apostle’s face assumed a sublime expression of confidence and faith; his eyes were uplifted to heaven with a fixed and eager gaze as though they penetrated to the throne of the Holy One; a ray of light played like an aureole around his white locks, and, without moving a step from his place he extended his hand slowly and solemnly towards the child and uttered but these words: “In the name of the living God, Creator of heaven and earth, arise and speak!” The child rose and said: “Blessed be Thy Name, O Lord!” The mother sprang to her feet with a cry, the father fell on his knees; the child was saved.

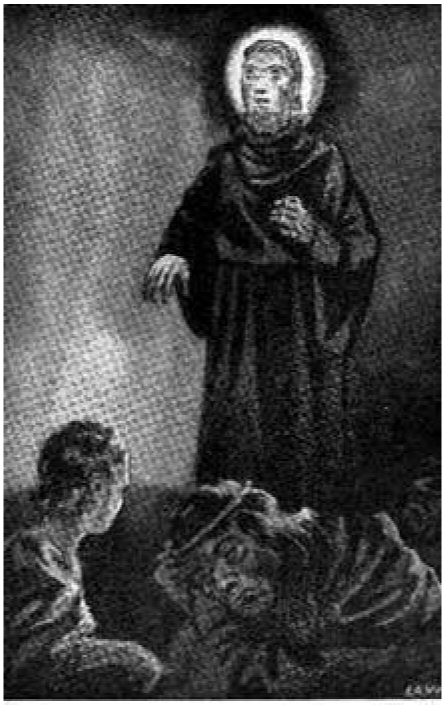

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“In the name of the living God, Creator of Heaven and earth, arise and speak!”

Paul closed the door upon them saying: “There is a family of slaves whose happiness an Emperor’s family might envy.”

The following night they continued their road and arrived at Fundi; thus Acté, during the whole of this mysterious nocturnal journey, revisited one after the other the places through which she had passed with Nero on his triumphal progress. It was at Fundi that they had been so splendidly received by Galba, the old man to whom the oracles had promised the imperial crown; the sight of him had recalled this prediction to the Emperor, who had forgotten it, thanks to the obscurity of life which the future Caesar studiously affected. The result had been, that no sooner had Nero arrived at Rome, than his first care had been to remove Galba from Italy; the government of Spain had consequently been bestowed on him, and he had set out thither immediately, even more anxious perhaps to get out of reach of the Emperor, than the latter was to place him out of reach of the throne.

Before setting out, Galba had freed the most trusty of his slaves, and it was at the house of one of these freedmen, who had become a convert to the

Christian faith, that Silas prepared a lodging for Paul and Acté. This slave had been the gardener of Galba’s orchards, and the day of his enfranchisement had received as a gift the little house which he occupied in his master’s gardens, and from the windows of this humble abode Acté could see by the moon’s clear light the magnificent mansion where she had stayed with Lucius. The first of these two journeys seemed to her like a dream; what strange vicissitudes she had experienced! what illusions, that had once seemed to be within her reach, had now vanished! what sufferings, which at that time she could not believe even to have existed, had since been realised! How everything had changed for her; how those blooming gardens in which she fancied she was still walking were dried up and withered; how in her barren and solitary life her love alone had remained alive, ever fresh, ever the same, ever standing firm like a pyramid in the midst of the desert.

For three days, or rather three nights, more, they continued their road; seeking places of concealment at the approach of daylight and resuming their journey when darkness came on, always preceded by Silas and staying every night with fresh converts, for the Christian faith was already beginning to reckon a large number of adherents, especially among the slaves and the lower orders. At last, on the third day they left Velitrae, that ancient capital of the Volscians, where Coriolanus died and Augustus was born; and just as the moon was rising on the horizon, they reached the summit of the Alban Mount. Silas had remained with them during this stage of their journey, though he walked about three or four hundred yards in advance of them. On reaching the tomb of Ascanius, however, he stopped, and waited until they came up with him, then, stretching out his hand towards the horizon where a multitude of lights were shining and the dull roar of a city could be heard, he pronounced this single word which announced to the old man and the girl that they were nearing their journey’s end:

“Rome!”

Paul fell on his knees, thanking the Lord for having brought him, through so great dangers, to his journey’s end and to the goal which had been promised him.

As for Acté, she leant against the tomb to prevent herself from falling, so sweet and yet so cruel were the memories aroused by the name of the Imperial city, at the spot where she had beheld it for the first time.

“O my father!” said the girl, “I have followed you without asking whither we were bound; but had I known that it was Rome — oh! I do not think I should have had the courage to come.”

“It is not to Rome that we are going,” said the old man, rising; then, as a group of horsemen were approaching along the Appian Way, Silas quitted the road and went off to the right across the plain, followed by Paul and Acté.

They then resumed their journey, keeping between the Latin and the Appian Way, at the same time avoiding following either of the roads that branched off from the first-named, and led, the one to Marina, near the Alban Lake, and the other to the temple of Neptune, near Antium. After walking for two hours and leaving the temple of Fortuna on their right and that of Mercury on their left, they entered the valley of Egeria and followed for some time the banks of the little river Almo, then, turning to the right, and proceeding past masses of rocks that seemed to have been detached from the mountain by some earthquake, they suddenly found themselves at the entrance to a cavern.

Silas plunged at once into this cavern, inviting the travellers in a low tone to follow him; but Acté shuddered involuntarily at the unexpected sight of the dark opening, that resembled the jaws of some monster ready to devour her. Paul felt her arm laid upon his own as though to stop him; he understood the reason of her terror.

“Fear nothing, my daughter,” said he; “the Lord is with us.”

Acté sighed, and cast a last look at the sky studded with stars of which she was about to lose sight, then hurried with Paul beneath the vault of the cavern.

After picking their steps amid a darkness so profound that they were only able to follow Silas by the sound of his voice, the latter stopped at the foot of one of the massive pillars which supported the roof, and striking two stones one against the other, produced some sparks, by means of which he set fire to rag steeped in sulphur; then, drawing forth a torch concealed in a hollow of the rock, he observed: “There is no danger at this hour, and all Nero’s soldiers might be in pursuit of us without discovering us now.”

Acté glanced round and could at first distinguish nothing; the torch, still flickering owing to the currents of air from outside, only cast a faint and fitful light upon the surrounding objects, which relapsed again into obscurity before their shape or colour could be distinguished. Gradually, however, the eye grew accustomed to this flickering motion, the flame of the torch burned more strongly, lighting up a wider extent of space, and the travellers could even distinguish the roof of this immense vault. Presently the outer air having ceased to penetrate to the spot where they now were, the light burned steadily and allowed them to see further; sometimes they walked along a confined path as though between two walls, sometimes they came upon a large open space with deep rocky cavities which the light of the torch was unable to penetrate, while it but dimly reflected the angles of the pillars which stood white and motionless as spectres. In this darkling walk, in the sound of their footsteps, which, light as they were, were answered by mournful echoes, in the absence of fresh air — an absence to which her lungs were not yet accustomed — in all this there was something which oppressed Acté's heart with a sense of sadness. Suddenly she stopped with a shudder, laying one of her hands on Paul's arm, and pointing with the other to a row of coffins occupying one of the sides of the wall. At the same time could be seen at the furthest end of these dark avenues women passing dressed in white and looking like ghosts; they were carrying torches and all making for a common point of meeting. Presently, as Acté and her companions still advanced, they heard clear strains of music, resembling an angelic chorus, swelling melodiously beneath the resonant arcades. Lamps fixed at intervals to the pillars began to point out the road; the coffins became more frequent, the white-shrouded forms more numerous, the singing more plainly heard, as they approached nearer and nearer to the subterranean city, and as its suburbs began to be populated by the dead and the living. Occasionally they came across roses and other flowers that had fallen from some wreath and were lying scattered on the ground and withering sadly in the absence of sun and air. Acté gathered up these poor flowers, children of the sunny daylight like herself, and astonished like herself at finding themselves buried alive in a tomb; these she fastened together and made into a wan and scentless bouquet, even as out of the relics of a happiness that is past, a man constructs a dim and dreary hope for the future. At last, at a turning of one of the thousand roads of this labyrinth, they discovered a large space where the rocks had been carved into the resemblance of a subterranean basilica, lighted by lamps and torches, in which were assembled a whole population of men, women and children. A body of maidens robed in long white veils were making the vaulted roof resound with the strains which Acté had heard; a priest was advancing through the kneeling assembly and preparing to celebrate the Holy Mysteries, when, just as he reached the altar, he suddenly stopped, and turning to the astonished congregation, exclaimed in tones of awed reverence:

“There is among us one more worthy than I to proclaim to you the Word of God, for he has heard it from the lips of His Son. Approach, Paul, and bless thy brethren.”

The entire congregation, to whom the Apostle had long since promised a visit, prostrated themselves; Acté, heathen though she was, followed their example, and the future martyr ascended the altar-steps.

They were in the Catacombs!

CHAPTER XIII

THE Catacombs constituted an entire city, — a city beneath a city. Earth, nations, and individuals have all a similar existence; the earth has its cataclysms, nations have their revolutions, mankind its diseases; all three have a childhood, a vigorous manhood, and an old age; their ages differ in length, that is all. The first counts by thousands of years, the second by centuries, the last by days. In this term which is granted to them, each has periods of transition during which events hitherto unheard of take place, which events, while connected with the past and preparing for the future, reveal themselves to the investigations of science under the title of natural accidents, while to the eye of faith they shine forth as the dispensations of Providence. Now, Rome had arrived at one of those mysterious epochs, and was beginning to experience those strange convulsions which accompany the birth or the fall of empires; she felt within her the quickening of the unknown progeny to which she was destined to give birth and which already stirred ponderously within her vast womb; she was in the throes of a mortal disease, and, like a person in a fever, who can obtain neither rest nor slumber, she was spending the closing years of her pagan life, now in fits of delirium, now in intervals of prostration. The cause of all this was, as we have said, that, beneath the outward and superficial civilization which moved above the surface, there had slipped in a new principle, subterranean and invisible, bringing with it destruction and reconstruction, death and life, darkness and light. Accordingly there took place every day above her, beneath her and around her, those events which to her blind condition seemed inexplicable, and which her poets recount as prodigies. These consisted of strange subterranean noises which were ascribed to the gods of the nether regions; sudden disappearances of men, women, and entire families; apparitions of people who were thought to be dead, and who emerged suddenly from the realms of shadows to utter denunciations and predictions. The subterranean furnace which heated this immense crucible was boiling within it, like gold and lead, all noble and all base passions; only, the gold was precipitated, while the lead remained on the surface. The

Catacombs were the mysterious receptacle in which was collected drop by drop the treasure of the future.

The Catacombs, as everybody knows, were vast disused quarries; the entire city of Rome, with its houses, palaces, theatres, baths, circuses, and aqueducts, had emerged from these quarries, stone by stone. They were the womb which had mothered the city of Romulus and of Scipio; but since the days of Octavius, when marble had superseded stone, these vast galleries had ceased to reverberate to the steps of the workmen. *Travertine* had become too common, and the Emperors had requisitioned from Babylon her porphyry, from Thebes her granite, from Corinth her brass. The immense caverns which extended beneath Rome had accordingly remained forsaken, deserted and forgotten, until the rise of Christianity slowly and mysteriously re-peopled them; they became at first a temple, then a place of refuge, then a city.

At the time when Acté and the old man descended into them, they were as yet only a hiding-place; slaves, unfortunates, proscribed persons, all such were sure of finding there a refuge, consolation, and a tomb. Accordingly, whole families had taken shelter within their dark recesses, and already the adherents of the new faith were reckoned by thousands; but amid the enormous population that thronged Rome above ground, none had thought of noticing this subterranean infiltration, since it was not so great as to be visible on the surface of society or to reduce to any appreciable extent the level of the population.

It must not, however, be thought that the life of the early Christians was concerned only in withdrawing itself from the persecutions which now began to arise; it associated itself by acts of sympathy, of piety and courage with all the occurrences which threatened such of their brethren as, owing to any necessity, were detained within the walls of the heathen city. Often, when threatened by danger, the neophyte in the upper city perceived some unexpected aid ascending towards him; some unseen trap-door would open beneath his feet and close above his head; the door of his cell would turn mysteriously on its hinges and gaoler and victim would fly together. Or when the blow of wrath had fallen so swiftly that, like the thunderbolt, it had struck instantaneously with the lightning — when the neophyte had become the martyr, whether strangled in the *Tullianum,* beheaded in the public square, hurled from the height of the Tarpeian rock, or, lastly, crucified on the Esquiline — then, taking advantage of the darkness, cautious old men, or adventurous young ones, sometimes even timid women, climbing the winding pathways up the accursed hill where the bodies of the condemned victims were cast out to be devoured by wild beasts and birds of prey, carried away these mutilated corpses and bore them with religious care to the Catacombs, where, from being objects of the hatred and execration of their persecutors, they became objects of reverence and adoration for their brethren, who exhorted one another so to live and die, as these chosen ones who had preceded them to heaven had lived and died on earth.

Often it chanced that Death, weary of striking his blows in the upper air, came and chose some victim below in the Catacombs; in this case, it was not merely a mother, or a son, or a wife who bewailed the loss of a relation; it was, as it were, an entire family lamenting a child. The corpse would be wrapped in a shroud; if it were a maiden, she would be covered with roses; if a man, young or old, a palm branch was placed in his hand, and the priest would recite over him the prayers for the dead; then the body would be laid gently in the niche hollowed out beforehand, where it would rest in expectation of the resurrection to eternal life. These were the coffins seen by Acté when she entered for the first time these unknown vaults; at the moment they had inspired her with a profound dread, which was presently converted into sadness. The girl, still a heathen intellectually, but at heart already a Christian, would often remain for whole hours before these tombs where some bereaved mother, wife, or daughter had carved with the point of a knife the name of the beloved one, together with some religious symbol or sacred inscription expressive either of grief or of hope. Upon almost all of them the symbol was a cross, preaching resignation to men by reminding them of the Divine passion; or again, it might be the seven-branched candlestick that used to burn in the temple at Jerusalem, or, perhaps the dove of the Ark, sweet messenger of pity, bringing to earth the olive branch plucked in the gardens of Heaven.

But occasionally the memories of her former happiness returned vividly and forcibly to Acté's heart, and she seemed to see once more the rays of the sunshine and to hear the sounds of earth. At such times she would go and sit in solitude, leaning her back against some massive pillar; and there, shrouded in a long veil, her hands crossed and her face buried in her lap, the passers-by would have taken her for a statue seated on a tomb, had it not been that an occasional sigh was heard escaping from her lips, or a shudder of grief was seen to pass through her whole frame. Then Paul, who alone knew the struggle that was passing in her soul, Paul, who had seen Christ pardon the Magdalene, trusted to time and to God to heal her wound, and, seeing her thus silent and motionless, would say to the purest of the Christian maidens: “Pray for this woman, that the Lord may pardon her, and that she may one day be numbered among yourselves.” The maidens obeyed, and, whether it was that their prayers reached the ear of Heaven, or that tears assuage the bitterness of grief, the young Greek before long joined her young companions with a smile upon her lips and tears in her eyes.

However, while the Christians concealed in the Catacombs were thus spending their lives in acts of love, were making proselytes, and living in an attitude of expectation, affairs overhead were drawing to a crisis. The entire pagan world was reeling like a drunken man, and Nero, prince of the feast and king of the orgy, was surfeiting himself with pleasure, wine and blood. The death of Agrippina had burst the last bond which might have yet held him in check by means of the instinctive reverence of a son for a mother. But the instant that the flame of her funeral-pyre was extinguished, all sense of shame, all warnings of conscience, all remorse seemed to be extinguished along with it. He now wanted to live at Bauli, any noble sentiments he might have ever possessed having been succeeded by fear; and Nero, however great his contempt for men, however great the irreverence he professed for the gods, could not suppose that such a crime as the murder of his mother would not call down upon him the hatred of men and the wrath of gods, Accordingly he remained at a distance from Naples and Rome, awaiting the news brought him by his messengers; but he had been wrong in his doubts as to whether the Senate could sink so low as it actually did, and presently a deputation of patricians and knights arrived for the purpose of congratulating him on having escaped a fresh and unforeseen danger, and of announcing that not only Rome, but all the cities of the empire were thronging the temples with their envoys and testifying by sacrifices to their joy. As for the gods, if we may believe Tacitus, who may possibly have ascribed to them some portion of his own sternness and severity, they were less complaisant; in default of remorse, they visited the parricide with insomnia, and during this insomnia he heard a trumpet blare on the summit of the neighbouring hills, and cries of lamentation, of which no explanation could be given, reached his ears, coming from the direction of his mother’s tomb. In consequence of this he had removed to Naples.

There he met Poppaea, who stirred up his hatred against Octavia, that unhappy sister of Britannicus, the poor girl who, torn from the man who loved her purely, had been flung by Agrippina into the arms of Nero — the poor bride whose widowhood had begun on her wedding-day, who entered her husband's house only to see her father and brother done to death by poison, only to struggle in vain against an all-powerful master — who remained for twenty years far away from Rome in banishment in the island of Pandalaria; her life made miserable by the presentiment of death, her sole court consisting of centurions and common soldiers, a terrible court whose eyes were ever turned eagerly towards Rome, and who waited but an order, a sign, a gesture, to turn each flatterer into an executioner. Alas! the fact that this woman still lived, lonely and unhappy as her life was, annoyed Poppaea amid her adulterous splendour and her unlimited power. For Octavia's youth and beauty, as well as her misfortunes, had made her popular; the Romans instinctively pitied her from that sentiment natural to men of commiserating the weak who suffer; but this very feeling might contribute to her ruin rather than her safety, for it was more tender than effectual, like that displayed for a wounded gazelle or a flower broken from its stalk.

Nero, however, spite of his indifference towards Octavia and the entreaties of Poppaea, hesitated about striking the blow. There are some crimes so useless that the most cruel of men shrink from committing them, for what the guilty tyrant dreads is not remorse, but the want of an excuse for his deed. Poppaea understood why the Emperor hesitated; for, knowing that it was neither from affection nor pity, she had set herself to discover the true reason and was not long in arriving at it. Accordingly one day there was a seditious outbreak; voices were heard demanding the recall of Octavia; the statues of Poppaea were pulled down and dragged in the mud; then came a band of men armed with whips who dispersed the rioters and replaced the images of Poppaea upon their pedestals. The rising had lasted for an hour and had cost a million of money- — not an extravagant sum to pay for the head of a rival. This demonstration was all that Poppaea needed. Poppaea was at Rome, she hurried to Naples, fleeing, as she said, from the assassins hired by Octavia; she was enchanting in her terror, and threw herself at Nero's knees. The Emperor despatched the order to Octavia to compass her own death.

In vain did the poor exile offer to reduce her style to that of widow and sister; in vain did she invoke the name of the Germanici, their common ancestors, or the name of Agrippina who, so long as she lived, had protected her interests. All was in vain, and as she delayed to obey, and had not courage to strike the blow herself, her arms were bound and the four veins opened, then all the other arteries were severed, for her blood, congealed by terror, refused to flow, and when even that operation proved ineffectual, she was finally suffocated by the steam of a boiling bath. Lastly, that there might be no doubt that she was really killed, and no suspicion that some vulgar victim had been substituted for the object of the imperial wrath, her head was severed from her body and brought to Poppaea, who laid it on her knees, opened its eyelids, and, thinking perhaps that she detected a look of menace in that frozen stare, stabbed the eyes with the golden pins which fastened her hair.

At last Nero returned to Rome, where he carried his dissolute folly to the highest pitch. There were games in which Senators fought in place of gladiators; singing contests, in which those who did not applaud were punished with death; there was a conflagration which destroyed half Rome, and which Nero looked on at, clapping his hands and singing to the accompaniment of his lyre. Poppaea at last realised that it was time to check the man whom she had hitherto incited; that amusements so unheard of and so monstrous were countermining her own influence, which was based entirely on pleasure. Accordingly, alleging her pregnancy as an excuse, she refused to go to the theatre on an occasion when Nero was to sing. Her refusal wounded the performer; he remonstrated with her as Emperor, she held her ground in the capacity of a privileged favourite, and Nero, losing all patience, kicked her to death. Nero then pronounced her panegyric from the rostrum, and being unable to commend her for her virtues, praised her for her beauty; he then personally issued orders for her obsequies, commanding that her body should not be burnt, but embalmed after the fashion of Eastern monarchs. The naturalist Pliny assures us that Arabia does not produce annually as much frankincense and myrrh as the Emperor consumed for the funeral of the woman who shod her mules with gold, and used for her bath each day the milk of five hundred she-asses.

The tears of wicked monarchs descend upon their people in showers of blood; Nero accused the Christians of the crimes that were his own, and a fresh persecution commenced, more terrible even than the preceding ones.

With the danger, the zeal of the catechumens was redoubled; every day there were fresh widows and orphans to be comforted; every night there were fresh bodies to be rescued from the wild beasts and birds of prey. At last, Nero observed that his corpses were being stolen; a guard was placed round the Esquiline, and one night when some Christians, led by Paul, came to fulfil their sacred mission as usual, a band of soldiers concealed in one of the ravines in the hillside fell upon them unexpectedly and took them all prisoners with one exception; the one who escaped was Silas.

He rushed off to the catacombs, where he arrived just as the faithful were assembling for prayer; he announced the fatal news, and all fell on their knees in prayer to God. Acté alone remained standing, for the Christian's God was not yet her God. Some exclaimed against her for her impiety and ingratitude; but Acté extended her arm to obtain silence, and upon their complying, exclaimed:

"To-morrow I will go to Rome and endeavour to save him."

"And I," said Silas, "will return to die with him, if you are unsuccessful."

CHAPTER XIV

NEXT morning Acté, in accordance with her promise, left the Catacombs and took the road to Rome, alone and on foot; she was clad in a long *stola* falling from her neck down to her feet, and had passed a short, sharp dagger through her girdle, dreading lest she should be insulted by some drunken cavalier or rough soldier. Moreover, in case she should be unsuccessful in her enterprise and unable to obtain for Paul the pardon which she came to request, she intended to ask for permission to see him and would then hand him the weapon, to the end that he might escape a shameful and terrible punishment. She was still, you see, the child of Achaia, born to be a priestess of Diana and Minerva, nurtured in pagan examples and ideas, ever recalling to her mind Hannibal swallowing the poison, Cato disembowelling himself, and Brutus throwing himself upon his sword; she knew not that the new religion forbade suicide while it glorified martyrdom, and that what was considered a disgrace in the eyes of Gentiles was regarded by the faithful as an apotheosis.

When she arrived within a few yards of the Porta Metronis, beyond which the valley of Aegeria, which she had been following since she left the Catacombs, continued right into Rome itself, she felt her knees giving way and her heart beating so violently that she was obliged to lean against a tree to save herself from falling. Her agitation was caused by the thought that she was about to see again the man whom she had not beheld since that terrible night of the festival of Minerva. Would she find him as Lucius or as Nero, the victor of the Olympic games or the Emperor — her lover or her judge? As for herself, she felt that the sort of torpor into which she had sunk during the long stay in the Catacombs was connected with the cold and silence and darkness of that abode, and that her heart had leapt into life again at the touch of the light of day, and was opening again to love, as the flower expands to the sun.

Besides, as we have said, the tidings of all that had happened above ground had penetrated to the Catacombs, but only like some fugitive, distant, and deceptive echo; Acté had heard therefore of the murder of Agrippina and the death of Poppaea, but all the shameful details transmitted to us by historians were known as yet only to a limited circle of court flatterers and executioners. Nothing had leaked out save whispered rumours and mangled accounts. The death of princes alone tears away the veil that shrouds their faces, and it is only when God has reduced all their majesty to the condition of a harmless corpse, that truth, long banished from their palaces, returns to sit upon then-tombs. All that Acté knew was that the Emperor had no longer either wife or mistress, and that a faint hope told her that he had perhaps cherished in some corner of his heart the remembrance of that love which, to her, was her whole existence.

Accordingly, she quickly composed herself and passed through the city gate; it was a fine, warm morning in July, the fifteenth day before the Kalends, — a day reckoned among the lucky ones; it was the second hour of the morning, corresponding to seven o'clock with ourselves, also reckoned a propitious hour.

Whether this coincidence of favourable dates was making people betake themselves to their business or their amusements, or that a promised *fête* was attracting the multitude, or that some unexpected spectacle had drawn the people from their usual morning occupations, the streets were thronged with crowds of persons, nearly all of whom were making their way towards the Capitol.

Acté followed them, for they were taking the road to the Palatine, and it was there that she expected to find Nero. Entirely absorbed in the thought of the approaching interview, she walked along without seeing or hearing anything, following the long street that extended between the Cœlian and Aventine Hills, and which was hung with costly fabrics and decorated with flowers as if for some public solemnity. On reaching the corner of the Palatine, she saw the images of the gods of the country dressed in their festal array and their heads surrounded with garlands of grasses, oak, and laurel leaves; she then turned to the right, and soon found herself in the Sacred Way, along which she had passed in triumph at her first entry into Rome. The crowd became more numerous and close-packed as she advanced towards the Capitol, where preparations for some splendid solemnity seemed to be taking place. Little mattered it, however, to Acté what was going on at the Capitol; it was Lucius whom she sought, and Lucius lived in the Golden House. So, on arriving opposite the temple of Romulus and Remus, she turned to the left, passed quickly between the temples of Apollo and Jupiter Stator, ascended the steps leading to the Palatine, and found herself beneath the vestibule of the Golden House.

There she received the first hint of the strange scene which was about to be enacted before her eyes. A magnificent couch had been prepared opposite to the entrance to the *atrium*; this couch was covered with Tyrian purple embroidered with gold, was raised on an ivory pedestal inlaid with tortoiseshell and draped with Eastern hangings, which sheltered it like a tent. Acté shuddered through her whole frame, a cold sweat gathered on her brow, a mist passed before her eyes; this couch, exposed to the gaze of the multitude, was clearly a marriage-bed. Still she was reluctant to believe it, and approaching a slave, asked him what this couch meant; the slave replied that it was for Nero, who was being wedded at that moment in the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus.

Thereupon the girl’s mind was seized with a sudden and terrible return of the mad love which had been her ruin. She forgot everything — the Catacombs in which she had found a shelter, the Christians who had based their hopes upon her, the peril from which Paul had rescued her and that which she in her turn had come to save him from. She clenched her hand on the dagger with which she had provided herself as a defence to modesty or a protection against insult, and, her heart consumed with jealousy, sprang down the steps and rushed off towards the Capitol in order to set eyes on the fresh rival who had stolen her lover’s heart just as she was about, perhaps, to regain it. the crowd was enormous, and yet, by means of the effect produced by a stern determination, she made a passage for herself through it; for although her face was entirely hidden by her veil, it was easy to see that this woman walking with such a firm and rapid step was bent on some important errand, and would suffer nobody to impede her progress. In this way she followed the Sacred Way as far as the point where it forked beneath the arch of Scipio, and taking the most direct course, namely, that which passed between the public prisons and the temple of Concord, she entered with resolute step the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus. There, at the foot of the statue of the god, surrounded by the ten witnesses required by the law and chosen from among the noblest of the patricians, each of them seated on a stool covered with the fleece of a sheep that had been offered in sacrifice, she saw the bridal pair. Their heads, however, were veiled, so that she could not recognise who this new bride was; but at that moment the

Pontifex Maximus, assisted by the Flamen of Jupiter, after making a libation of milk and honeyed wine, advanced towards the Emperor and said:

"Lucius Domitius Claudius Nero, I give thee Sabina; be her husband, friend, protector and father; I endow thee with all her worldly goods and entrust them to thy good faith."

At the same time he placed the bride's hand within that of the bridegroom, and raised her veil so that every one might salute the new Empress. Then Acté, who had been still incredulous so long as she had only heard the name, was forced to believe at last, when she saw the face. There was no room for doubt — it was the girl she had seen on the vessel and at the bath — Sabina the sister of Sporus. In the face of gods and men, the Emperor was marrying a slave!

Acté thereupon questioned herself as to the strange feeling she had always experienced for this mysterious creature, and which amounted to an instinctive repulsion and hatred conceived at first sight, such as women entertain for other women who will one day be their rivals. Nero was marrying this girl whom he had given to herself, who had waited upon her, who had been her slave — who possibly was even then sharing her lover's affection with her — over whom she had wielded the power of life and death, yet whom she had not strangled between her hands as a serpent that would one day pierce her to the heart. Oh! it was incredible, impossible! and once more Acté gazed at her with doubtful eyes; but the priest had made no mistake, it was Sabina sure enough, Sabina in bridal array, dressed in a plain white tunic, and adorned with fillets, her waist bound with the woollen girdle, the loosing of which was the privilege reserved for her husband, her hair pierced with the golden javelin that recalled the rape of the Sabines, and her shoulders covered with the flame-coloured mantle, a nuptial ornament worn by the bride only on this one day, and chosen from all time as of fortunate omen, since it was the customary dress of the wife of the Flamen, to whom the laws forbade divorce.

At this moment the newly-married pair rose to leave the temple; they were awaited at the door by Roman knights bearing images of the four divinities who were patrons of marriages, and by four women of the noblest birth, each carrying a pinewood torch. Tigellinus waited for them on the threshold with the new bride's dowry. Nero received it, placed the crown upon Sabina's head and on her shoulders the mantle worn by the Empresses, then ascended with her into a magnificent open Utter in the sight of all and with the acclamations of the populace, among which might be distinguished the courtier-like voices of the Greeks, who, in their language, so well adapted for flattery, ventured even to utter prayers for the fruitful result of this strange union.

Acté followed them in the expectation that they would return to the Golden House; but, on reaching the base of the Capitol, they turned off by the Vicus Tuscus, crossed the Velabrum and gained the Argiletum, then entered the Campus Martius by the triumphal gate. It was thus that Nero decided to display his new Empress to the people at the festival of *Sigillaria.* Accordingly he took her through the Forum Olitorium (vegetable market), to the theatre of Pompey and the porticos of Octavius. Acté followed them everywhere, to the markets, temples, and public promenades, without losing sight of them for an instant. A magnificent banquet was served in the slope of the gardens of Augustus; Acté stood against a tree during the whole time that the banquet lasted. They returned by way of Caesar’s Forum, where the Senate were waiting to offer their congratulations. She listened to the speeches, leaning against the statue of the Dictator; the whole day passed thus, for it was not till towards evening that they resumed their journey to the Palace; and Acté remained standing the entire day, without tasting food, thinking neither of fatigue nor hunger, supported by the flame of jealousy that burned within her breast and coursed madly through all her veins. At last they entered the Golden House, and Acté went in with them; she found no difficulty in doing this, as all the doors were open, since Nero, unlike Tiberius, did not fear the populace. Nay more, his extravagances, his games, and shows, his very cruelty itself — since it vented itself only on the higher orders or the enemies of the heathen religion — had made him the idol of the mob, and to this day he is the Emperor whose name has remained the most popular in Rome.

Acté was acquainted with the interior of the Palace through having visited it with Lucius; her dress and her white veil gave her the appearance of being one of Sabina’s attendants; nobody therefore took any notice of her, and while the Emperor and Empress passed into the dining-hall for supper, she slipped into the bridal chamber whither the bed had been carried back, and concealed herself behind one of its curtains.

There she remained for two hours, silent and motionless, breathing so quietly as not even to stir the light drapery that concealed her behind its folds; she hardly knew why she had come there, yet during these two hours her hand never ceased to grasp the handle of the dagger. At last she heard a slight noise, women’s footsteps approached along the corridor, the door opened, and Sabina, conducted by Calvia Crispinella, a matron connected with one of the first and most ancient families in Rome, and who was playing the part of mother to the bride, just as Tigellinus had done that of father, entered the room in her bridal robe, with the exception of the woollen girdle, which Nero had untied during the meal, so that Calvia might remove the bride’s garments. She began by unfastening the false plaits twined round her head in the shape of a tower, upon which her hair fell down over her shoulders; then she removed the *flammeum,* next she took off the robe, so that all that remained to the girl was a simple tunic. Strange to say, as these various adornments were removed, an extraordinary metamorphosis seemed gradually to take place before Acté’s eyes — Sabina disappeared and gave place to Sporus, looking just as she had seen him when disembarking from the bireme and following Lucius with his flowing tunic, his bare arms and long hair. Was this, then, a dream or a reality? Were the brother and the sister but one person? or was she, Acté, going mad?

Calvia having completed her duties, now bowed low before her strange Empress. The androgynous creature, of whichever sex it was, thanked her in tones which the young Greek recognised as belonging to Sporus equally with Sabina. Then presently Calvia quitted the room.

The bride, finding herself, as she thought, alone, looked in all directions and then, thinking that nobody either saw or heard her, dropped her hands dejectedly and sighed, while two tears trickled from her eyes. Then she approached the bed with an evident feeling of profound disgust, but on placing her foot upon the first step, she drew back in astonishment, uttering a cry of alarm, for behind the purple hangings she had just caught sight of the pale face of the Corinthian girl who, seeing that her presence was discovered, and thinking that her rival would escape her, sprang on her like a tigress. However, the creature whom she pursued was too feeble either to run away or to defend herself, but fell upon her knees with arms extended towards Acté and trembling as she saw the blade of the dagger gleaming in her hand; suddenly a ray of hope shone in her eyes.

“Is it you, Acté? is it you?”

“Yes, yes, it is I — Acté: but who are you? Are you Sabina or Sporus? man or woman? answer, speak, will you?”

“Alas! alas!” cried the eunuch, falling in a swoon at Acté’s feet, “alas! I am neither the one nor the other.”

Acté, overcome with astonishment, dropped her dagger.

At this moment the door was opened and several slaves entered hurriedly for the purpose of placing round the bed the statues of the gods who were the patrons of marriage. They saw Sporus lying on the ground in a dead faint, and a woman with dishevelled hair, pale and with glaring eyes, bending over him, while a dagger lay on the floor. Hastily guessing at the situation, they seized Acté and took her off to those same palace prisons close to which she had passed on that sweet night when Lucius had sent for her, and whence she had heard such plaintive groans proceeding.

In the prison she found Paul and Silas.

“I was expecting you,” said Paul to Acté.

“O my father!” cried the young Corinthian, “I came to Rome to try and save you.”

“And, being unable to do so, you would die with me.”

“Oh! no, no,” cried the girl in confusion, “I had forgotten about you. No, I do not deserve that you should call me daughter; I am a foolish, unhappy girl who deserves neither pity nor forgiveness.”

“You still love him, then?”

“No, I no longer love him; that were impossible. Only, as I have told you, I am mad; who can save me from my folly? there is neither man on earth nor God in heaven powerful enough for that.”

“Remember the slave’s child; he who heals the body can heal the mind.”

“Yes, but the slave’s child possessed innocence in lieu of faith, while I have not yet faith, and have lost my purity.”

“And yet,” said the Apostle, “all is not lost, since there remains repentance.”

“Alas! alas!” murmured Acté with an accent of doubt.

“Well! come here,” said Paul, seating himself in a corner of the cell. “Come, I want to speak to you of your father.”

Acté fell on her knees and laid her head on the shoulder of the old man, who talked with her until far into the night. Acté replied only by sobs; but when morning came, she was prepared to receive baptism.

Nearly all the prisoners who were confined with Paul and Silas were Christians taken from the Catacombs. During the two years that Acté had lived among them they had had time to appreciate her virtues, while they were ignorant of the sin into which she had fallen; during that whole night therefore they had prayed that God would cause the light of faith to illumine the heart of this poor Pagan. So it came in the nature of a solemn and affecting declaration when the Apostle proclaimed with a loud voice that another was added to the number of the believers.

Paul did not leave Acté in ignorance of the extent of the sacrifice which the profession of the Christian name would entail upon her — the first being the sacrifice of her love, the second, perhaps, that of her life. Almost daily some victim was selected at random from the prison by way of expiation or for the public festivals; on such occasions many offered themselves in their eagerness for martyrdom, and they were carried off haphazard and without selection, for any person who was capable of suffering was good enough to be placed on a cross or thrown into the arena. Under such circumstances an abjuration of heathenism was not merely a religious ceremony; it was the devotion of oneself to death.

Acté thought then that the very danger would compensate for her small knowledge of the new faith. She had seen enough of the two religions to make her curse the one and bless the other; all the criminal examples with which she had been brought in contact belonged to Heathens, all the spectacles of goodness that had been presented to her had been afforded by Christians. Above all, the certainty that she could not live with Nero made her desire to die with Paul.

Therefore it was with an ardour which doubtless in the sight of God atoned for her weak faith that she herself knelt among the circle of kneeling prisoners, beneath the ray of dawn descending by an air-hole through the grating by which she caught a glimpse of the sky. Paul stood behind her, his hands raised in an attitude of prayer, while Silas knelt holding the vessel of holy water and the consecrated sprinkler. At this moment, and while Acté was reciting the apostolic formula, that ancient creed which, unaltered to our own day, has remained the symbol of the faith, the door opened with a loud noise and a number of soldiers appeared with Anicetus at their head. Struck by the strange spectacle which met his gaze, for all had remained on their knees in prayer, he halted on the threshold and stood silent and motionless.

“Who is it you come for?” said Paul, questioning the man who came sometimes as judge, sometimes as executioner.

“I come for this girl,” answered Anicetus, pointing to Acté.

“She will not follow you,” replied Paul, “for you have no authority over her.”

“This girl belongs to Caesar,” cried Anicetus.

“You are mistaken,” answered Paul, pronouncing the baptismal formula and pouring the holy water over the neophyte’s head — ” this girl belongs to God!”

Acté uttered a cry and fainted, for she felt that Paul had spoken truly, and that the words he had just uttered severed her for ever from Nero.

“Then I shall take you to the Emperor instead of her,” said Anicetus, motioning to the soldiers to seize Paul.

“Do as you will,” said the Apostle, “I am ready to follow you; I know that the time has come for me to render account of my earthly mission to Heaven.”

Paul was taken before the Emperor and condemned to be crucified, but as a Roman citizen he appealed against this sentence, and his rights as an inhabitant of Tarsus, in Cilicia, being recognised, he was beheaded the same day in the Forum.

Caesar was present at the execution, and as the populace, who had reckoned on the sight of a more prolonged punishment, indulged in some murmurs, the Emperor promised them an exhibition of gladiators for the coming Ides of March by way of celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the death of the Dictator Julius Caesar.

CHAPTER XV

NERO had hit the mark. This promise of his instantly stilled the murmurs; for among all the spectacles with which their Aediles, Praetors, and Emperors had surfeited the people, those of which they were most greedy were exhibitions of wild animals and gladiators. Formerly these two classes of spectacles had been distinct; but Pompey during his second consulate, on the occasion of the dedication of the temple of Venus Victrix, had for the first time conceived the notion of uniting them for the purposes of combat, and arranged a contest of twenty wild elephants against a number of Gaetulians armed with javelins. True a long time previous to this, according to Livy, one hundred and forty-two elephants had been killed in the arena on a single day; but these elephants had been taken in a battle with the Carthaginians, and Rome, at that time poor and prudent, was unwilling either to feed these animals or to give them to the allies, so that in the end they were slaughtered with arrows and javelins by the spectators from the benches of the amphitheatre. Eighty years later, in the year of Rome 523, Scipio Nasica and Lentulus had sent into the arena sixty-three African panthers, and the Romans were becoming tired of this kind of sport when Securus, transferring the spectacle to another element, filled the floor of the amphitheatre with water and let loose into this artificial sea fifteen hippopotami and twenty-three crocodiles. Sulla, when praetor, had exhibited a hundred maned lions; the great Pompey had given an exhibition of three hundred and fifteen, and Julius Caesar one of four hundred; lastly, Augustus — who had inherited from Octavius a thirst for blood — in the *fêtes* given by him in his own name as well as in that of his grandson, had some three thousand five hundred lions, tigers, and panthers slaughtered. Again there was a certain Publius Servilius, of whose life no details have been preserved save the fact that he gave a performance at which were killed three hundred bears and as many lions and panthers brought from the deserts of Africa. Later on this luxury surpassed all bounds, and the Emperor Titus had five thousand wild beasts of all kinds slaughtered at a single performance.

But of all others, the man who had given the most sumptuous and varied exhibitions was Nero; in addition to the tribute of silver imposed on the conquered provinces he had laid the Nile and the Desert under contribution, and the river and the sand supplied him with their quota of lions and tigers, panthers and crocodiles. As for the gladiators, the prisoners of war and the Christians had advantageously and economically replaced them; they lacked, it is true, the skill which the study of their art gave to the gladiators, but they made up for this by their exalted courage, which added a romantic and novel fascination to their sufferings, and this was all that was required to revive the curiosity of the public.

All Rome, therefore, poured into the amphitheatre. The deserts and the prisons had on this occasion been drawn upon with unsparing hand; there were human victims and wild beasts enough for the spectacle to last for the whole day and night, in addition to which the Emperor had promised to light up the amphitheatre in a novel manner. So he was received with unanimous acclamations; this time he was dressed to resemble Apollo, bearing, like the Pythian deity, bow and arrows, since he intended to give proofs of his skill during the intervals between the combats. Trees had been uprooted from the Alban Forest, and had been transported to Rome and planted in the arena, branches and all, and on these branches peacocks and tame pheasants, expanding their gold and purple plumage, offered a mark for the Emperor’s arrows. Sometimes too it chanced that Caesar took pity on some wounded beast, or that some animal that failed to attack its victim aroused his wrath; he would then take his bow or his darts, and from his throne where he was sitting despatch, like Jove the Thunderer, a missile of death to the other extremity of the arena.

Scarcely was the Emperor seated when the gladiators arrived in their chariots. Those who were to commence the combats had been purchased from their owners as was the usual custom; but this being a specially great occasion, some young patricians had united with the professional gladiators by way of paying court to the Emperor. It was even reported that among their number were two nobles, known to be ruined owing to their dissolute extravagances, who had been hired, one for the sum of two hundred and fifty thousand, the other for three hundred thousand sesterces.

At the moment when Nero entered, the gladiators were in the arena, awaiting the signal and practising thrusts with each other as though the forthcoming combats had been mere fencing-bouts. But no sooner had the cry, “The Emperor! the Emperor!” resounded through the amphitheatre, and Caesar- Apollo was seen to be seated on his throne opposite the Vestal virgins, than the masters of the games entered the arena holding in their hands sharpened weapons which they presented to the combatants, receiving from them in exchange the blunt ones with which they had been practising. The combatants then passed in procession before Nero, raising their swords towards him that he might satisfy himself that they were sharp and keen, which he was able to do by bending forward, his box being only raised some nine or ten feet above the level of the arena.

The list of combatants was then handed to Caesar, that he might himself appoint the order in which they should fight. He decided that the *retiarius* and the *mirmillo* should begin; after them were to come two *dimachæ,* then two *andabatce;* while to close the first performance, which would end at noon, two Christians, a man and a woman, were to be thrown to the wild beasts to be devoured. The people appeared well satisfied with this first programme, and amid shouts of “Long live Nero! Glory to Caesar! Good luck to the Emperor!” the first two gladiators entered the arena from opposite doors. These were, in accordance with Caesar’s decision, a *mirmillo* and a *retiarius.* The first of them, called also the *secutor,* because he more often pursued his adversary than was pursued by him, was clad in a bright green tunic with transverse stripes of silver; his waist was surrounded by a belt of embossed copper in which shone incrustations of coral; his right leg was protected by a high boot or legging of bronze, and a visored helmet resembling those worn by knights in the fourteenth century, surmounted by a crest representing the head of a buffalo with long horns, concealed the whole of his face; on his left arm he wore a large round shield, while in his right hand he carried a javelin and a leaded club. This constituted the armour and costume of the Gauls.

The *retiarius* held in his right hand the net from which he derived his name, and which was something like what fishermen in our own day term a casting net, and in his left, which was protected by a small shield called a *parma,* a long trident with a handle of maple and three prongs of steel; his tunic was of blue cloth, his gaiters of blue leather and his boots of bronze gilt; his face, unlike that of his adversary, was exposed, his head having no other protection than a long cap of blue wool from which hung golden network.

The two adversaries drew together, not taking a straight line, but moving in circles round and round each other, the *retiarius* holding his net in readiness, the *mirmillo* poising his javelin. When the *retiarius* thought himself at the proper distance he sprang forward swiftly, at the same time unfolding his net and making a cast with it; but none of his movements had escaped the *mirmillo*, who took a similar jump backwards, the net falling at his feet. At the same moment, and before the *retiarius* had time to protect himself with his shield, he hurled his javelin, but his adversary, seeing the weapon coming, stooped, not so rapidly, however, but that the dart, which should have struck his chest, carried away his smart head-dress. Thereupon the *retiarius*, though armed with his trident, began to flee, dragging his net after him, for the only use to which he could put his weapon was to enable him to slay his adversary when caught within its folds. At once the *mirmillo* dashed off in pursuit, but his course, retarded by his heavy club and the difficulty of seeing through the small holes which formed the visor of his helmet, gave the *retiarius* time to prepare his net afresh and put himself once more on guard. This done, he resumed his former position, while the *mirmillo* stood in an attitude of defence.

The *secutor,* while running, had picked up his javelin and suspended his adversary’s cap at his girdle as a trophy. Each combatant had, therefore, regained his own weapon. This time the *mirmillo* began the attack; his javelin, hurled with the whole force of his arm, struck the shield of the *retiarius* in the centre, pierced the bronze plate that covered it and the seven thongs of folded leather underneath and grazed his chest; the people believed him to be mortally wounded, and from all sides resounded the cry of “*Hahet! habet!”* (“Hit! hit!”)

But the *retiarius*, at once pushing away from his breast the shield, from which the javelin remained suspended, showed that he was scarcely touched, whereupon the air was rent with shouts of joy, for what the spectators feared above everything was that the combats should last too short a time. Accordingly they regarded with contempt any gladiator who struck at his adversary’s head, although such a proceeding was not actually against the rules.

The *mirmillo* began to fly, for his club, though a terrible weapon when pursuing the *retiarius* if disarmed of his net, was almost useless when the *retiarius* carried the net on his shoulder, for, in order to approach near enough to his adversary to strike him, he gave the latter the opportunity of enveloping him in its deadly folds. Then began the spectacle of a flight according to the recognised rules, for the flight was also an art. But once more, just as when he had been the pursuer, the *mirmillo* found himself impeded by his helmet; soon the *retiarius* was so close upon him that shouts broke out to warn the Gaul, who, seeing that he was lost if he did not rid himself of his useless helmet, opened, while still running, the iron clasp that kept it dosed, and, tearing it from his head, threw it far away. Then the spectators to their great astonishment, recognised in the *mirmillo* a young man named Festus, belonging to one of the noblest families in Rome, who had put on this visored helmet much more for the purpose of disguising than of protecting himself, and this discovery redoubled the interest taken by the spectators in the combat.

The young patrician now began to gain upon his opponent, who, in his turn, found himself hampered by his shield pierced with the javelin, which he was unwilling to pull out, for fear of supplying his adversary with a weapon. Excited by the shouts of the spectators, as well as by seeing his opponent increasing his distance, he threw away both shield and javelin, upon which the *mirmillo,* either thinking this action so rash that it gave him a chance of equalising the contest once more, or being tired of running away, suddenly stopped and swung his club round his head. The *retiarius,* on his part, got his net ready for action, but before he could get within reach of his adversary, the club with a whizzing noise like that made by the great beam of a catapult, struck the *retiarius* full in the chest; he staggered for a moment and then fell, entangled in the folds of his own net. Festus rushed to the shield and tore the javelin from it, then, with one spring, dashing back towards his opponent, he placed the iron head of the javelin to his throat and looked round to ask the people whether he should slay or spare him. All hands were then extended, some clasped, others held apart with thumbs pointing downwards; but, as in such a crowd it was impossible to ascertain the majority, there was a shout of “To the Vestals! to the Vestals!” since with them lay the appeal in case of doubt. Festus accordingly turned towards the balcony: the twelve Vestals stood up — eight had their thumbs turned downwards; the majority were for death. Seeing this, the *retiarius* himself seized the iron point, placed it at his throat, cried for the last time, “Caesar is God!” and without uttering a murmur, made the javelin of Festus sever the artery of his neck and penetrate his breast.

The people then clapped their hands, applauding both victor and vanquished, for the one had killed his man with skill and the other had met his end gracefully. Festus walked round the amphitheatre to receive the applause he had earned and quitted the arena by one door while his opponent’s body was carried out at the other.

Immediately a slave entered and with a rake turned over the sand to obliterate the marks of blood, and then two fresh combatants entered the lists. These were the two *dimach*oe.

The *dimach*oe were the duellists of the days of Nero; without either helmet, cuirass, shield or grieves *(ocreæ),* they fought with a sword in each hand, much in the same way as our cavaliers of the Fronde used to fight their duels with dirk and dagger. Hence these combats were regarded as the triumph of their art, and sometimes the champions were no other than the professors of fencing themselves. On this occasion it was a professor and his pupil. The latter had profited so well by his instruction that he attacked the professor with his own feints. Some insult which he had received from him at a former time had sown the seeds of a fierce, deep-seated hatred, but this he had successfully concealed from all eyes, and, with the intention of avenging himself one day, had continued his daily practice and finally mastered all the secrets of the profession. Thus for such of the spectators as were judges of the art, it was a highly curious thing to see these two men who were about for the first time to substitute a real combat for a pretended one, and to exchange their blunted weapons for sharp and keen ones. Their appearance was therefore greeted by a triple salvo of applause, which continued until the master of the games, at a gesture from the Emperor, gave the signal, upon which the applause was succeeded by a profound silence.

The opponents advanced towards each other, animated by that deep hatred which all rivalry inspires; though at the same time this hatred which flashed forth from their eyes lent an unusual caution both to the attack and the defence; for not merely was it their lives that were at stake, but likewise the reputation which the one had enjoyed for a long time, and the other was eager to acquire.

At last their swords crossed — the dart of the serpent, the flash of the lightning with its rapid flame, these are more easily followed with the eye than was the play of the swords which they held in their right hands and with which they attacked, while with the left they parried the strokes as if with a shield. Passing successfully from attack to defence, and showing a marvellous correctness in both, the pupil first drove back the professor to the foot of the Emperor’s throne, and then the professor in his turn forced the pupil as far as the balcony where the Vestal virgins sat; then they came back to the centre of the arena both untouched, though twenty times the point of each sword came near enough to tear the tunic that covered the breast at which it was aimed. At last the younger man sprang backwards; the spectators cried: “He is wounded!” But though the blood spurted from below his tunic down his thigh, he at once returned to the combat with greater determination than before, and after a few more passes had been exchanged, it was the professor’s turn to betray, by a movement that would have been imperceptible to eyes less well trained than those which were looking on, the fact that the startling sensation of cold steel had just passed through his veins. This time, however, no shouts were raised — excitement, at its highest pitch, is dumb — all that was heard, as each thrust was skilfully delivered or parried, was that suppressed murmur, which indicates to the performer that, if the audience does not applaud, it is not from want of appreciation, but through fear of interrupting him in his performance. Each combatant, therefore, redoubled his efforts, and the swords continued to flash with the same rapidity, so that it looked as if the only termination to this noteworthy contest would be reached by the strength of one or other of the antagonists becoming exhausted, when the professor, stepping upon a splash of blood, as he was dropping back, suddenly slipped and fell. The pupil, profiting by the advantage which chance had offered him, rushed upon him; but to the great astonishment of the spectators, neither of the two rose from the ground. The people rose in a mass, clasping their hands together and shouting: “Pardon I freedom!” but neither of the combatants responded to the cry. Then the master of the games entered the arena, bearing from the Emperor the palms of victory and the wands symbolic of freedom. But it was too late; the champions, if not victorious, had at any rate gained their freedom, since each had buried his sword in the other’s body and slain him.

The *dimachœ* were to be followed, as we have said, by the *andabatœ;* it had no doubt been arranged that the latter should immediately succeed the *dimachœ* in order to please the people by a complete contrast, since art and skill formed no part of their methods. Their heads were entirely confined in a helmet which had no opening except a hole at the mouth to enable them to breathe, and two others by the ears so that they could hear; they fought therefore blindfolded. The people took the greatest delight in this terrible kind of blind-man’s-buff in which each blow told, the combatants having no defensive armour with which to parry or allay the force of the blows.

At the moment when these new victims — for the unfortunate creatures did not deserve the name of combatants — were introduced into the arena amid shouts of laughter from the multitude, Anicetus approached the Emperor and handed him a packet of despatches. Nero read these with great uneasiness; when he came to the last, a profound change was depicted on his countenance. He remained for a moment buried in thought; then suddenly rising, he rushed from the amphitheatre, indicating by a gesture that the games were to continue in his absence. This circumstance — which was no uncommon one, since urgent business frequently summoned the Caesars at inopportune moments in the middle a *fête* to the Forum, the Senate, or the Palatine — far from having a depressing effect on the enjoyment of the spectators, put them more at their ease, for, feeling no longer the restraint of the Emperor’s presence, the people became masters of the situation. So the programme was continued, as Nero had ordered, although he was no longer there to preside over the proceedings.

The two champions proceeded therefore to advance towards one another from opposite ends of the arena; the closer they came, the more did they exert their sense of hearing to escape the danger which they would not see. But in such circumstances the senses are very likely to be deceived; accordingly they began flourishing their swords when they were still a long way from each other, the result being that they struck nothing but the empty air. At length, excited by shouts of “Forward, forward! to the right! to the left!” they advanced more confidently, only to pass each other without touching, and finally to stand back to back aiming futile blows at nothing. This at once caused such an outburst of laughter and hooting on the part of the spectators that the combatants realised their absurd position, and wheeling round at the same moment they found themselves face to face and within striking distance; their swords clashed together, but from different angles, so that one received a thrust in his right thigh, the other in his left arm. This caused each of them to step backwards, and they found themselves once more separated, without knowing how to get at each other. One of the two then put his ear to the ground to listen for the sounds of steps and thus surprise his adversary; as the latter approached, the gladiator who had his ear to the ground struck his opponent for the second time, like a serpent darting out its tongue from a place of concealment. The opponent, feeling himself dangerously wounded, took a quick step forward, struck the body of the other with his foot and fell headlong a few inches from him, but rising instantly he described a circle with his sword so quickly and so vigorously that the weapon, meeting his adversary's neck just below the point where it was protected by the helmet, struck his head from his shoulders as skilfully as it could have been done by an executioner. The trunk remained for an instant in an upright position, while the head, enclosed in its iron case, rolled far away from it; then, taking a few unsteady steps, as though searching for the head, the body fell upon the sand, deluging it with blood. The surviving gladiator, guessing by the shouts of the people that he had dealt a mortal blow, continued nevertheless to hold himself in an attitude of defence against his adversary who was in the throes of death. Then one of the masters of the games entered and opened his helmet, crying:

"You are the victor and are now a free man."

The victor then went out by the door which was called *sana vivaria*, since by that door the combatants who had escaped death quitted the arena; while the dead body was removed to the *spoliariutn*, a sort of cavern situated beneath the tiers of the amphitheatre, where the surgeons awaited the wounded, and where two men walked up and down, the one dressed to represent Mercury, the other Pluto. Mercury, to see if any traces of life remained in the apparently senseless bodies, touched them with a wand heated in the furnace, while Pluto knocked on the head with a heavy mallet those whom the doctors pronounced to be beyond hope of cure.

Scarcely had the *andabatœ* gone out when another great wave of excitement rolled over the amphitheatre, the reason being that the gladiators were now to be followed by those who were condemned to fight with wild beasts. The combatants being Christians, all the sympathies of the spectators were on the side of the animals and against their human antagonists. Impatient, however, as was the multitude, they were obliged to wait until the slaves had raked the sand of the arena, but this operation was hastened by furious shouts from all parts of the amphitheatre. At last the slaves withdrew, the arena remained empty for a few moments, during which the crowd waited impatiently, then a door was thrown open, and all eyes were turned upon the fresh victims about to enter.

The first of these was a woman, clad in a white robe, her head shrouded in a white veil. She was led to one of the trees and fastened to it by the waist; one of the slaves then removed her veil, and the spectators were able to see a face of perfect beauty, pale, but resigned. The sight produced a murmur which continued for several minutes. In spite of her being a Christian, the first sight of this girl had stirred the hearts of the fickle and impressionable crowd. While all eyes were still fixed upon her, a young man entered by another door. The custom was to expose to the wild beasts a male and a female Christian together, so that the desire on the part of the man to save not only his own life but that of his companion, who was always either a sister, a mother, or a mistress, might, by imparting a fresh courage to the brother, son, or lover, prolong a combat which, in ordinary cases, the Christians almost always declined, preferring a martyr's death, although they knew that if they could succeed in overcoming the three first animals let loose against them they were saved.

In the present instance, although the man, whose strength and suppleness it was easy to perceive at a glance, was followed by two slaves, one of whom carried a sword and two javelins, while the other led in a Numidian courser, he did not appear inclined to afford the people the gratification of the combat they were looking for. He advanced into the arena slowly, looked round him with calm and confident gaze, then, making a gesture with his hand to indicate that the horse and the weapons were not wanted, he raised his eyes to heaven, and falling on his knees, began to pray. The people, disappointed in their expectation, at once uttered a menacing roar; they had come to see a fight and not a martyrdom, and cries were raised of "Crucify! crucify!" for, punishment for punishment, they preferred at least that form in which the suffering was most prolonged. On hearing this shout, a ray of unspeakable joy shone in the young man's eyes as he extended his arms in token of thanksgiving, counting himself happy that he was to die the same death as his Saviour.

At this moment he heard a sigh so deep that it made him turn round.

"Silas! Silas!" murmured the girl.

"Acté!" cried the young man, rising from his knees and rushing towards her.

"Have pity on me, Silas," said Acté; "when I recognised you hope came into my breast again. You are brave and strong, Silas, accustomed to contend with the wild denizens of the forest and the desert; perhaps, if you had fought, you might have saved us both."

"And have foregone martyrdom!" interrupted Silas, pointing to the sky.

"And have escaped a painful death," said Acté, letting her head fall on her breast. "Alas! I was not born in a holy city like you; I did not hear the Word of Life from the lips of Him for whom we are about to die. I am a Corinthian maid, brought up in the religion of my forefather; I have but recently embraced the Faith, and martyrdom was a thing unknown to me till yesterday. It may be, for myself, I might still have courage, but for you, Silas, if I must watch you die this slow and cruel death before my very eyes, I might perhaps lack the resolution to endure the sight."

"Very well, then, I will fight," replied Silas; "for I am sure of finding later on the happiness of which you deprive me to-day." Then, with a sign of command to the slaves, he exclaimed aloud and with the gesture of an emperor, "My horse, my sword, and my javelins!"

The spectators began to clap their hands, for from his voice and gesture they gathered that they were about to witness one of those herculean contests such as were required in order to whet their appetites, now surfeited by the ordinary combats.

Silas first went up to the horse, a son of Arabia like himself. The two compatriots recognised one another; the man addressed to the horse some words in an unknown tongue, and the noble animal, as though he had understood them, responded by a neigh. Silas then pulled off from the back and mouth of his trusty companion the saddle and bridle imposed on him by the Romans as the badges of slavery, whereupon the child of the desert bounded joyfully round the man who had restored him his liberty.

Silas meanwhile, in his turn, divested himself of such portions of his dress as might impede him, and, rolling his red cloak round his left arm, stood up in his tunic and turban only. He then girded on his sword, took his javelins, called to his horse, who, gentle as a gazelle, obeyed his summons, and, leaping on his back, leaned over his neck, and guiding him by means of voice and knees alone, rode thrice round the tree to which Acté was bound, like a second Perseus prepared to fight for his Andromeda. The pride of the Arab had got the better of the humility of the Christian.

At this moment a pair of folding-doors beneath the balcony opened, and a Cordovan bull excited by slaves entered the arena with a roar, but he had scarcely taken ten steps when, confused by the bright light, the sight of the spectators, and the shouts of the multitude, he bent his forelegs, lowered his head to the ground, and, directing his dull, fierce eyes upon Silas, began to paw the sand and prod the ground with his horns, breathing smoke through his nostrils. One of the masters of the games now threw at him a figure stuffed with straw resembling a man, whereupon the bull dashed upon it and trampled it beneath his feet; but just as his fury against this object had reached its climax, a javelin whizzed from the hand of Silas and buried itself in his shoulder. The bull uttered a roar of pain, and at once quitting the artificial adversary for the real one, advanced rapidly upon the Syrian with lowered head and leaving a track of blood on the sand. Silas quietly allowed him to approach, but when the bull was within a few paces of him he made his active steed, by the aid of his voice and his knees, spring to one side, and while the bull, carried away by the impetus, flew past him, the second javelin buried its six inches of iron in his flank. The animal stopped and staggered as though about to fall, then almost immediately turned round and charged horse and rider, who, however, turned and fled in front of him as if borne along by a whirlwind.

Three times they made the circuit of the amphitheatre in this fashion, the bull becoming more exhausted at each turn and losing ground on the rider and horse. At the third turn he fell upon his knees, but, rising almost immediately, uttered a terrific roar, and, as though despairing of overtaking Silas, cast his eyes round as though to see if he could not find some other victim on whom to vent his wrath. Then for the first time the infuriated animal noticed Acté. At first he seemed to be in doubt whether she were a living being, so statuelike and pale and still was she; presently, however, he scented her through his nostrils. Immediately, collecting all his strength, he charged straight for her; the girl saw him coming and uttered a shriek of terror; but Silas was on the watch and became in his turn the pursuer while it was the bull that fled. A few strides, however, of his trusty Numidian brought him level with him; Silas then sprang from the back of the horse on to that of the bull, and while with the left hand he seized him by one of his horns and twisted his neck, with the other he plunged his sword up to the hilt in his throat; the bull fell dead at half a spear’s length from Acté, who, however, had closed her eyes in expectation of death, and it was only the applause of the spectators that apprised her of the first victory on the part of Silas.

Three slaves then entered the arena, two of them leading each a horse which they harnessed to the bull in order to drag him out of the amphitheatre The third carried an amphora and a cup; the latter he filled and presented it to the young Syrian, who scarcely put his lips to it, and then called for other weapons. A bow and arrows and a boar-spear were brought to him, and then all who were in the arena hurried out, for beneath the seat which the Emperor had left vacant an iron grating was now raised, and an African lion left his den and stalked majestically into the ring.

He was indeed the king of beasts, for, at the roar with which he greeted the daylight, all the spectators shuddered, and even the courser, mistrusting for the first time his fleetness of foot, responded with a neigh of terror. Silas alone, well accustomed to that mighty voice by having often heard it resound in the deserts that extend from the Dead Sea to the Wells of Moses, prepared for either attack or defence by taking shelter behind the tree nearest to that to which Acté was bound, and by fitting to his bow the best and sharpest of his arrows. Meanwhile his powerful antagonist advanced slowly and confidently, not knowing exactly what was expected of him, wrinkling the folds of his broad face and sweeping the sand with his tail. In order to excite him the masters of the games then threw at him some blunted darts to which streamers of different colours were attached; the lion, however, continued to advance with grave and unconcerned demeanour and without being disturbed by these incitements, when all of a sudden, amid these harmless missiles, a sharp and whizzing arrow flashed like lightning and buried itself in one of his shoulders. The lion stopped immediately, more from astonishment than pain, and as though unable to realize that a human being had ventured to attack him; he yet hardly knew that he was wounded. But soon his eyes grew blood-shot, his mighty jaws opened, and a prolonged roar resembling a peal of thunder issued from his chest as though from the depths of a cavern. He seized the arrow which was fixed in the wound and broke it with his teeth; then casting a glance round him which made the very spectators start back, although protected by the iron railings, he sought for some victim on whom to vent his kingly wrath. At this moment he perceived the courser, who was trembling as if he had just come out of an ice-cold stream, though at the same time bathed in foam and sweat. Thereupon the lion, ceasing to roar, and uttering a short, sharp, and reiterated cry, took a spring which brought him within twenty paces of the first victim which he had selected.

Then began a second chase more amazing even than the first; for in this case there was not even the skill of man to defeat the instinct of the animals; strength and speed in all their savage energy were pitted against each other, and the eyes of the two hundred thousand spectators were diverted for the moment from the two Christians in order to follow this strange race round the amphitheatre, all the more pleasing to the crowd for being unexpected. A second spring had brought the lion close to the horse, which, driven to bay at the extremity of the arena and not daring to try escape either to right or left, jumped clean over the head of his enemy, who now began to pursue him with wild uneven leaps, his mane bristling, and occasionally uttering sharp roars to which the fugitive replied with neighs of terror. Thrice they saw the fleet son of Numidia pass by like a shadow, an apparition, a courser escaped from Pluto’s infernal chariot, and each time the lion appeared to be gaining on him without effort, until at last, ever narrowing the circle, he drew level with him. Finally the horse, seeing that he could no longer escape his foe, stood up on his hind legs against the iron railing, convulsively beating the air with-his fore feet, then the lion approached slowly, like a conqueror certain of his victory, stopping occasionally to roar and shake his mane and tear up the sand of the arena with each paw alternately. As for the unhappy courser, fascinated as deer and gazelles are said to be at the sight of a snake, he floundered and fell, rolling over in the sand in the agony of his terror. At this moment a second arrow sped from the bow of Silas and buried itself deeply between the lion’s ribs, the man thus coming to the rescue of the horse and drawing down upon himself the wrath which had been for a time diverted from him.

The lion then wheeled round, for he began to realise that there was in the arena a more formidable foe than the one which he had just overcome by his mere glance; it was then that he perceived Silas, who had just drawn from his girdle a third arrow which he was fitting to the string of his bow. The animal halted for a moment opposite the man, that other lord of creation. That moment sufficed for the Syrian to launch against his foe a third messenger of pain, which pierced the skin of his face and penetrated to his neck. What next took place passed as swiftly as a dream; the lion charged Silas, who received him on his spear, then man and lion rolled over together; ribbons of flesh were seen flying, and the nearest spectators felt a shower of blood fall over them. Acté uttered a cry of farewell to her brother; her protector was no more, yet neither did her enemy exist. The lion had survived the man no longer than the time necessary for wreaking his vengeance, the agony of the executioner had begun at the very moment when his victim's ceased. As for the horse, he was dead, without the lion having once touched him.

Then the slaves came in again and amid the shouts and frantic applause of the multitude, carried off the bodies of man and animals.

All eyes were then directed towards Acté, whom the death of Silas now left defenceless. So long as her comrade lived, she entertained hopes for her own safety. But when she saw him fall, she realised that all was over, and tried to murmur a prayer for him who was dead and on behalf of herself who was about to die, but the prayer died away in inarticulate sounds on her pale and paralysed lips. Contrary, however, to custom, she had sympathizers among this crowd, who by her features recognised her for a Greek, while at first they had taken her for a Jewess. The women and younger men, who started the murmur of remonstrance, and some of the other spectators, were rising to their feet to ask for pardon for her when shouts of "Sit down! sit down!" were heard from the higher benches. A grating was raised and a tigress glided into the arena.

She had hardly entered it when she couched on the ground and looked around with a fierce glance, but without uneasiness or astonishment; then she sniffed the air and began to crawl like a snake towards the spot where the horse had fallen. Reaching it, she reared herself against the railings as the horse had done, sniffing and biting at the bars which he had touched; then she gave a gentle roar, questioning the iron, the sand, and the air as to her absent prey. Presently the scent of warm blood and quivering flesh reached her, for this time the slaves had not taken the trouble to rake the sand over; she walked straight to the tree near which the combat between Silas and the lion had taken place, neither turning to right not left, except to pick up the fragments of human flesh which the lion had sent flying round him. Next she reached a small pool of blood which the sand had not yet absorbed, and began to drink it like a thirsty dog, roaring and lashing herself to fury as she drank. Having finished it, she looked round her once more with gleaming eyes, and then only did she notice Acté, where tied to the tree and with closed eyes, she awaited the death whose approach she dared not look at.

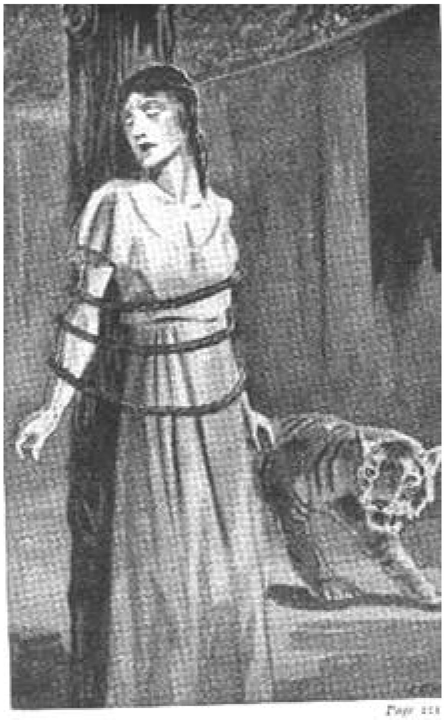

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. . . . she awaited the death whose approach she dared not look at

The tigress now crouched with her belly touching the ground, crawling stealthily as she advanced obliquely upon her victim, yet without once losing sight of her; arrived within ten paces of her, she rose and with extended neck and dilated nostrils sniffed the air. Then with a single bound clearing the space which still separated her from the young Christian, she alighted at her feet, and while the whole amphitheatre, expecting to see her torn to pieces, uttered a cry of terror expressive of the sympathy which the girl had aroused in the breasts of those very spectators who had come to clap their hands at her death, the tigress lay down, softly and coaxingly as a gazelle, uttering little cries of delight and licking the feet of her former mistress. At these unexpected caresses Acté opened her eyes in surprise and recognised Phœbé, Nero’s pet.

Next instant shouts of “Pardon! pardon!” resounded from all sides, for the multitude looked upon the mutual recognition of the girl and the tigress as a prodigy. Besides, Acté had undergone the three ordeals required, and being still safe and sound, was therefore free; and the changing temper of the spectators passed, by one of those transitions so natural to a crowd, from extreme cruelty to that of extreme pity. The young knights threw down their gold chains, the ladies their wreaths of flowers. The whole assembly rose and stood on the benches calling to the slaves to unfasten the victim. At these shouts Licycus, Phœbé’s black keeper, entered and with a dagger severed her bonds; Acté at once fell upon her knees, for these bonds were the only support that held up her body now benumbed with terror. But Licycus raised her and, supporting her as she walked, led her, accompanied by Phœbé, who followed like a dog, towards the door: there an immense crowd awaited her, for the herald, descending into the arena, had just announced the adjournment of the games until five in the evening. Directly they caught sight of her, the crowd burst into applause and would have carried her off in triumph, but Acté clasped her hands in entreaty to be spared this, and the people opened and made a free passage for her. Presently, reaching the temple of Diana, she sat down behind a pillar of the shrine; there she remained weeping and despondent wishing now that she had died, since she found herself alone in the world, without father, lover, protector or friend; for her father was lost to her, her lover had forgotten her, Paul and Silas had died the death of martyrs.

When night arrived, she recollected that there was still one family to which she belonged, and alone and in silence took the road back to the Catacombs.

In the evening, at the hour stated, the amphitheatre opened again. The Emperor resumed his place on the throne which had remained vacant during part of the day, and the games were resumed. Then, when darkness had descended, Nero recollected the promise which he had made to the people of giving them a torchlight performance; twelve Christians who had been steeped in sulphur and resin were tied to as many iron stakes and set on fire, and then fresh lions and combatants were introduced into the arena.

On the morrow a report spread through Rome to the effect that the despatches which Caesar had received during the performance, and which had appeared to produce so deep an impression upon him, announced the revolt of the Spanish legions and of the Gauls under command of Galba and Vindex.

CHAPTER XVI

THREE months after the events which we have just related, at the close of a rainy day and the beginning of a stormy night, five men who had left the city by the Porta Nomentana were riding along the road that bears the same name. The one who rode in front, and might consequently be considered the leader of the little band, was bare-footed, and wore a blue tunic over which was thrown a large dark cloak; his face, whether as a protection against the rain which was beating violently, or to conceal it from the glances of the inquisitive, was entirely covered by a veil. Although it was a dreadful night, and the lightning furrowed the dark sky to the ceaseless accompaniment of peals of thunder, the earth seemed to be so taken up with her own disturbances as to have forgotten those which were occurring in the sky, and a mighty tumult was swelling up from the Imperial City like the roar of the ocean in a storm, while along the road you met at every hundred yards or so either solitary individuals, or groups such as the one we have just described. On either side of the Nomentane and Salarian Ways were to be seen numerous tents belonging to the soldiers of the praetorian guard, who had abandoned their barracks situated within the enclosure of the city, seeking outside its walls an encampment more secure and less easy of surprise. It was, as we have said, one of those terrible nights when all things in Nature assume a voice of complaint, while human throats find nothing to utter but despairing curses. From the terror manifested by the leader of the cavalcade to which we have drawn our reader’s attention you would have said that he was the one object against which this concentrated anger of gods and men was directed. At the very instant, indeed, that he quitted Rome, a mysterious disturbance had agitated the air, causing the trees to shiver, while at the same moment the ground shook and horses fell down neighing with terror, while the houses scattered over the surrounding country visibly rocked on their foundations. This shock had lasted only a few seconds, but it had travelled from the extremity of the Apennines to the base of the Alps, so that the whole of Italy had felt its effects. As they crossed the bridge over the Tiber a moment later, one of the horsemen remarked to his companions that its waters, instead of descending to the sea, were flowing with a surging tide upwards towards their source, a prodigy which had not been seen since the day when Julius Caesar was assassinated. Finally, on reaching the summit of a hill from which the whole of Rome was visible, and on the crest of which rose a venerable cypress as ancient as the city itself, a peal of thunder had resounded, the sky had seemed to open, and the lightning, enveloping the travellers in a sulphurous cloud, had shattered this venerable tree hitherto spared by the hand of time.

At each of these sinister omens the veiled rider had uttered a deep groan and, in spite of the remonstrances of one of his companions, urged his horse to a faster pace, so that the little company was now proceeding along the middle of the road at a sharp trot. About a mile from the city they met a group of peasants who, in spite of the dreadful weather, were coming joyfully to Rome, clothed in their holiday attire and wearing on their heads freedman’s caps to show that from this day the people were free. The veiled horseman wanted to quit the road and strike across country, but his companion seized his horse by the bridle and forced him to continue on his path. When they reached the peasants, one of the latter raised his stick as a sign that they were to stop; the horseman obeyed.

“You come from Rome?” said the peasant.

“Yes,” answered the veiled horseman’s companion.

“What were they saying of Nero Ahenobarbus?”

The veiled man gave a start.

“That he had escaped,” replied one of the horsemen.

“In which direction?”

“Towards Naples, they say, along the Appian Way.”

“Thank you,” shouted the peasants, and continued their road towards Rome crying: “Long live Galba! death to Nero!”

These shouts evoked answering cries along the plain, and from both sections of the camp came the voices of the praetorians, objurgating Caesar with frightful imprecations.

The little company proceeded on its journey and about a mile further on encountered a troop of soldiers.

“Who are you?” said one of the spearmen, barring the road with his lance.

“Partisans of Galba searching for Nero,” replied one of the horsemen.

“Well, better luck to you than we have had, for we have missed him,” said the officer.

“How did you manage that?”

“Why, we were told that he would pass by this road, and seeing a man riding at full gallop, we thought it was he.”

“And?” said the veiled man in a trembling voice.

“And we killed him,” answered the officer; “it was only when we came to examine his corpse that we discovered we had made a mistake. May you be more fortunate, and Jupiter protect you!”

The veiled man again wanted to put his horse to a gallop, but his companions checked him. He continued therefore to follow the road, but after about five hundred yards his horse stumbled against a dead body that lay on the ground, and swerved aside so violently that the veil which covered his rider’s face fell off. At this moment a praetorian, returning from furlough, happened to pass by — ” Hail, Caesar!” said the soldier, recognising Nero by the lurid glare of a flash of lightning.

And, indeed, it was no other than Nero in person, whose horse had just stumbled against the corpse of the man who had been mistaken for himself — Nero, whom at this moment every passing incident, down to this mark of respect paid to him by the veteran, threw into an abject state of terror — Nero, who, fallen from the summit of his power by one of those strange turns of fortune of which the history of this period affords numerous examples, found himself in his turn a fugitive and proscribed, fleeing from the death which he neither had the courage to inflict on himself, nor to receive at the hands of others.

Let us now look back and see by what sequence of events the erstwhile master of the world had been reduced to this extremity.

At the very moment when the Emperor was entering the amphitheatre, where he had been greeted with shouts of “Long live the Olympic Nero! long live Nero Hercules! long live Nero Apollo! long live Augustus, vanquisher of all rivals! Glory to that voice divine! happy they who have heard his celestial tones!” — a messenger from Gaul had galloped through the Flaminian Gate, his horse streaming with sweat, crossed the Campus Martius, passing beneath the arch of Claudius, skirted the Capitol, and entering the amphitheatre, handed to the soldier who was on guard at the Emperor’s box the letters which he had carried so far and with such red-hot haste. It was in consequence of these letters that Caesar had been obliged, as we have related, to leave the amphitheatre, and, in truth, they were of sufficient importance to account for his sudden disappearance, for they announced the revolt of the Gauls.

There are periods in the world's history when one sees some empire, apparently sunk in a death-like slumber, suddenly start into life, as though for the first time the angel of freedom had descended from heaven to shed a radiance on its dreams; and then, however wide that empire, the electric touch which has made it thrill spreads from north to south, and from east to west, travelling enormous distances in order to arouse nations that have no intercourse with one another, but who, plunged in the same depths of servitude, feel the same desire for freedom. Instantly, as though some lightning flash had given them the signal for the storm, identical cries are heard proceeding from twenty opposite directions, all making the same peremptory demand, but in different languages — the demand that what is shall be no longer. Will the future be better than the present? No man can tell. But what matters that? The present is so cruel, so oppressive, it must first be got rid of; then there will be time to deal with the future.

The Roman Empire, to its furthest limits, had now arrived at this condition. Fonteius Capito, in lower Germany; Vindex, in Gaul; Galba, in Spain; Otho, in Lusitania; Claudius Macer, in Africa; and Vespasian, in Syria — all these formed with their legions a menacing circle that waited but a word to close in upon the capital. Virginius alone, in Upper Germany, had determined, come what might, to remain loyal, not to Nero, but to his country. There needed, then, but a spark to kindle the conflagration, and it was Julius Vindex who let that spark fly.

At that time Praetor, a native of Aquitania and sprung from royal blood, a man of spirit and intelligence, Julius Vindex realised that the time for the extinction of the race of the Caesars had arrived. Without ambition for his own personal advancement, he cast his eyes round to find the man chosen beforehand by general sentiment. On his right hand, beyond the Pyrenees, was Sulpicius Galba, whose victories in Africa and Germany had made him powerful at once with the people and the army. Galba hated the Emperor, who in his fear of him had dragged him from his villa at Fundi, in order to send him to Spain, nominally as Praetor, in reality as an exile. Long ago Galba had been pointed out beforehand both by popular report and divine oracle as destined to wear the crown; he was the man most suitable in every respect to be placed at the head of a revolt. Vindex secretly sent letters to him containing the whole plan of the enterprise, promising him, in default of the co-operation of the legions, the support of a hundred thousand Gauls, and entreating him, even if he were unwilling to aid in bringing about the fall of Nero, at least not to decline the supreme dignity, which he had not sought, but which would nevertheless be offered to him.

As for Galba, his wavering and undecided character did not belie itself in these circumstances; he received the letters and burned them, so as to destroy the slightest trace of his having ever received any such communication, but retained their whole contents in his memory.

Vindex saw that Galba wanted to be pressed still further; he had not accepted the offer, but he had not betrayed the man who made it. Thus his silence gave consent.

The moment was favourable; the Gauls were in the habit of holding a general assembly twice every year; the meeting was held at Clarus Mons (Clermont) and Vindex entered the debating chamber.

Amid the civilisation, the luxury and the corruption of Rome, Vindex had remained the Gaul of former days: he combined with the cool and fixed determination of the men of the North the ready and flowery speech of the Southerner. “You are deliberating,” said he, “on the affairs of Gaul, and are looking round to find the cause of our evils. The cause is to be found at Rome, the man responsible for them is Ahenobarbus; he it is who has destroyed all our rights one after another, who has reduced our wealthiest provinces to poverty, who has clothed our noblest families in mourning. Now that, because he is the last of his race, and the only survivor of the race of the Caesars, now that he fears neither rivals nor avengers, behold him giving the rein to his madness, as he does to his races; behold him carried away by his passions, crushing at once Rome, which is the head, and the provinces, which are the members, of the Empire, beneath the iron wheels of his chariot. I have seen him,” (he continued), “yes, I have seen him with my own eyes, this imperial athlete, this decorated singer, drunk and debauched, doing deeds to disgrace the fame of gladiator or actor. Why then honour him with the titles of Caesar, of Prince, of Augustus, titles which the divine Augustus earned by his virtues, the divine Tiberius by his genius, the divine Claudius by his beneficence. For him, this infamous Ahenobarbus, he should be styled Oedipus, or Orestes, since he boasts of bearing the titles of adulterer and parricide. Our ancestors in days of yore, led on merely by a desire for change and the allurement of gain, took Rome by storm; this time a nobler and more worthy motive will lead us in the steps of our forefathers;

this time we will throw into the balance, instead of the sword of old Brennus, the freedom of the world, and this time it will not be woe, but weal, that we shall bring to the conquered.”

Vindex was brave, and they knew that his words were no mere empty boast. Accordingly his speech was received with loud shouts, lively applause, and noisy acclamations; each Gallic chieftain drew his sword and swore upon it that he would return within one month with a following proportioned to his rank and fortune, and then withdrew to his home. The mask had been plucked from the face and the scabbard thrown far from the sword. Vindex wrote a second time to Galba.

From the time of his arrival in Spain, Galba had made it his study to gain popularity. He had never at any time lent himself to the violences of the Procurators, and, though unable to prevent their extortions, had openly expressed his pity for their victims. Though never speaking ill of the Emperor himself, he permitted free circulation to satirical verses and insulting epigrams upon him. All who surrounded him had guessed his projects, though he had never confided them to any one. The day that he received the message from Vindex he gave a great banquet to his friends, and in the evening, after having announced to them the revolt of the Gauls, he communicated the momentous despatch to them without making any comment upon it, thus by his silence leaving them free to approve or to disapprove of the offer made to him. His friends, on hearing the letter read, remained silent and undecided; one of them, however, named Titus Venius, a bolder man than the rest, turned towards him and, looking him full in the face, observed:

“Galba, to deliberate in order to see if we shall be loyal to Nero, is to be already disloyal to him. We must either accept the friendship of Vindex, as though Nero were already our enemy, or denounce him here and now, and declare war against him — and for what reason? Because he wishes the Romans to have you as Emperor rather than Nero as tyrant.”

“We will assemble, if you are agreed upon it,” answered Galba as though he had not heard the question, “on the fifth of next month at New Carthage, for the purpose of setting certain slaves at liberty.”

Galba’s friends agreed to the appointed meeting-place, and at all risks circulated the report that the object of this assembly was to decide upon the destiny of the Empire.

On the appointed day, all the most illustrious men in Spain, whether foreigners or natives, were gathered at the place of meeting; all came with one purpose, animated by one desire, pursuing one scheme of vengeance. Galba mounted the tribunal, and was instantly proclaimed Emperor by the unanimous voices of all the vast assemblage.

CHAPTER XVII

THIS is what the letters received by Nero contained, and such was the news that he had learnt. At the same time he was informed that proclamations by Vindex had been distributed, some copies of which had already reached Rome, and before long one of these fell into his hands. In it the titles of adulterer, parricide, and tyrant were freely lavished upon him, and yet it was not these things that annoyed and wounded him so much as his being constantly alluded to as *Ahenobarbus*, or “Red-beard,” and his qualities as a singer disparaged. These outrages the Senate must avenge, and accordingly to the Senate he writes. With the object of wiping out the reproach of want of skill in his art, and with the view of avenging the *manes* of his ancestors, he promises a million sesterces to the man who shall slay Vindex, and then relapses into his wonted indifference and apathy.

Meanwhile the revolt was progressing in Spain and Gaul; Galba had created a body-guard from the Equestrian order and had established a kind of Senate. As for Vindex, he had replied to the man who informed him that a price was set upon his head, that he would allow his head to be taken by the man who should bring him Nero’s head in exchange.

But among all these generals, prefects, and praetors who had declared in favour of a revolution, there was one who had remained faithful, not from love of Nero, but because, seeing in Vindex a foreigner, and knowing Galba to be a feeble and irresolute man, he feared lest Rome, however unhappy she might be at present, would suffer still more from a change of rulers. Accordingly he marched with his legions against the Gauls, to rescue the Empire from the disgrace of being subjugated by one of its former conquerors.

The Gallic chieftains had kept their oath and had gathered round the banner of Vindex the three most distinguished and powerful tribes of the Gauls, namely, the Sequani, the Aedui, and the Arverni; the Viennese had also joined them, but these latter had not assembled like the rest from patriotic motives or the desire for liberty, but were influenced by their hatred of the people of Lugdunum, who had remained loyal to Nero. Virginius, on his side, had under his banner the Germanic legions, the auxiliaries of the Belgae and the Batavian cavalry; the two armies advanced to meet each other. The army of Virginius having arrived before Vesontio, which held out for Galba, laid siege to the town; but hardly had the military dispositions been made for sustaining the siege before the army of Vindex appeared on the horizon.

The Gauls continued to advance upon the Romans awaiting their attack, and on finding themselves within three arrow-shots of the latter, halted to make their dispositions for the battle. But at this moment a herald stepped forward from the ranks of Vindex and proceeded towards Virginius; a quarter of an hour later the body-guards of the two generals advanced to the space between the two armies and a tent was erected. The guards drew up each on the side next their own army, and Vindex and Virginius entered the tent.

No one was present at their interview; historians, however, are of opinion that, after Vindex had explained his policy and had given proof that he was not acting in his own interests, but in those of Galba, Virginius, seeing in this revolution a chance for his country's happiness, allied himself with the man against whom he had come to fight. The two chiefs were then on the point of separating for the purpose of arranging for a joint march upon Rome, when loud cries were heard on the right wing of the army. A company of a hundred men had issued from Vesontio in order to parley with the Gauls, and these latter having advanced to meet them, the soldiers of Virginius thought they were being attacked, and accordingly marched against the Gauls. This was the cause of the shouts heard by the two Generals, who hurried off each to his own army imploring the soldiers to desist; but their entreaties were drowned, by the clamours uttered by the Gauls as they placed their bucklers to their lips to magnify the sound, while their signals were taken for gestures of encouragement. One of those strange fits by which armies, no less than individuals, are sometimes seized, had attacked the whole multitude. And now was presented a terrible spectacle: the soldiery, without word of command from their leaders and without order of battle, urged on by the instinctive lust of slaughter, stimulated by the long-standing hatred between conquered and conquerors, between victors and vanquished, rushed at each other and engaged in a hand-to-hand conflict, tearing each other like lions and tigers in an amphitheatre. After two hours of this fighting the Gauls had lost twenty thousand men, and the German and Batavian legions sixteen thousand, uninterrupted slaughter occupying the whole of this period. Eventually the Gauls retreated, but darkness having supervened, the two armies remained in close proximity. Still this first defeat had damped the courage of the rebels, and they took advantage of the night to effect a withdrawal; and at the spot where the German legions had expected to find them next morning, there remained but a single tent, and within this tent the body of Vindex. In despair that a mere accident had dashed such auspicious hopes of liberty to the ground, he had thrown himself on his sword, which he now deemed useless, and pierced himself to the heart. The first soldiers who entered the tent stabbed the corpse and gave out that it was they who had killed him; but at the moment when the rewards granted by Virginius for this act were being distributed, one of their number who thought himself to have been unfairly treated in the matter of booty, disclosed the whole plot, and so the truth was known.

Meanwhile, events no less favourable to the Emperor were taking place in Spain. One of the revolted squadrons, repenting of having broken the oath of fidelity, and desirous of abandoning the cause of Galba, had been induced to obey his orders only with the greatest difficulty; and on the very day that Vindex committed suicide, Galba had narrowly escaped being assassinated in a narrow street, when on his way to the bath, by some slaves presented to him some time before by one of Nero’s freedmen. So at the moment when he was unnerved by the double danger which he had incurred, he heard of the defeat of the Gauls and the death of Vindex; and, in the belief that all was lost, instead of boldly trusting to fortune, he obeyed the timid promptings of his own disposition and retired to Clunia, a fortified town, the defences of which he at once set himself to strengthen. However, very shortly afterwards sundry omens, the significance of which it was impossible to mistake, restored to Galba his failing courage. One of the soldiers employed in marking out a new line of fortification round the town discovered, at the first blow of his pickaxe, an ancient ring of precious workmanship, on the stone of which was represented a victory and a trophy. Under the influence of this presage of returning fortune he enjoyed a more calm sleep than he had done hitherto, during which he beheld in a dream a small statue of Fortune, about a cubit in height, to which in his villa at Fundi he had always paid special reverence, having vowed to a monthly sacrifice and an annual vigil. The goddess seemed to open the door of his chamber and told him that she was weary of waiting at his threshold, and that, unless he was anxious to receive her, she would now follow some one else. When he rose next morning, agitated by these two prognostications, and was told that a vessel laden with arms, but with neither passengers, crew, nor pilot on board, had just landed at Dertosa, a town situated on the Ebro, from that day forward he looked upon his cause as a just one, and already as good as gained, since it was clear that it was regarded favourably by the gods.

As for Nero, he had at first regarded the news of the rising as of small importance, and had even been pleased with it, since he saw that the pretext of raising money for the purposes of war would enable him to levy fresh taxes; he had therefore contented himself, as we have said, with sending the proclamations of Vindex to the Senate and demanding that he should be punished for having alluded to the Emperor as an inferior performer on the lyre. He had then summoned a meeting of the principal citizens for the same evening; they had been careful to obey his summons, thinking that the object of their meeting was to deliberate on affairs of state, but all that Nero did was to exhibit to them some musical instruments of a new kind, organs worked by hydraulic power, explaining the uses and advantages of each instrument, and his only mention of the Gallic revolt was that he intended to have all these instruments carried into the amphitheatre, unless Vindex prevented him from so doing.

Fresh despatches having arrived next day announcing that the number of Gauls in revolt had risen to a hundred thousand, Nero thought that at last it behoved him to make some preparation for war. Strange and senseless were the orders that he issued. He had vehicles brought to the Palace and the Amphitheatre, loaded them with instruments of music instead of instruments of war, summoned the urban tribes and administered to them the military oath; but, seeing that none of those who were fit to bear arms responded to the summons, he demanded a certain number of slaves from their owners, and went in person to their houses to select the strongest and most healthy, taking amongst others even the estate managers and their clerks. Lastly he assembled four hundred courtesans and had their hair cut short; aiming these women like Amazons with axe and buckler, he appointed them to take the place of his imperial bodyguard. Then, as he was leaving the banqueting-hall after dinner, leaning on the arms of Sporus and Phaon, he told those who were waiting for an audience and who seemed anxious and afraid, that they might make their minds easy, inasmuch as directly he touched the soil of the Province and showed himself unarmed to the eyes of the Gauls, he would have but to shed a few tears, upon which the rebels would immediately repent of their conduct, and that on the next day the citizens would see him, the centre of a joyous throng, chanting a hymn of victory, which he told them he was just about to compose for the occasion.

A few days later a fresh messenger arrived from Gaul. He, at any rate, brought news of a more favourable character, for he announced the encounter between the Gauls and the Romans which had ended in the defeat of the rebels and the death of Vindex. Nero uttered loud cries of delight, running through the rooms and gardens of the Golden House like a madman, ordering *fêtes* and rejoicings, announcing that he would sing that evening at the theatre, and inviting the leading men of the city to a banquet the next day.

True to his promise, Nero repaired to the theatre in the evening, but a strange commotion reigned in Rome. As he passed by one of his own statues, he saw that it had been covered over with a sack. Now, it was the custom to fasten up parricides in a sack, after which they were thrown into the Tiber along with a monkey, a cat, and a snake. A little further on a column bore these words inscribed on its base: “Nero has sung so loud he has awakened the cocks.” (The word *Galli* means both Gauls and cocks.) A wealthy patrician on the road taken by the Emperor was wrangling — or pretending to wrangle — so noisily with his slaves, that Nero asked what was going on, and was told that, his slaves having merited chastisement, the patrician was calling for a Vindex (avenger).

The performance began with a farce in which the actor Aëtius played; his part began with the words: “Greeting to my father, greeting to my mother.” As he spoke the words, he turned towards Nero, and in saying “Greeting to my father” imitated the act of drinking, while at the words “Greeting to my mother” he imitated the act of swimming. This sally was received with unanimous applause; for every one recognised in it an allusion to the deaths of Claudius and Agrippina. As for Nero, he laughed and applauded like the rest, either because he was dead to all feeling of shame, or because he feared that the sight of his anger might excite more of such witticisms or turn the public against him.

When his own turn came, he quitted his box and went on to the stage. While he was dressing before making his appearance, a strange piece of news spread through the theatre and went the round of the audience, to the effect that the bay-trees of Livia had withered up and that all the sacred chickens had died. Here is the explanation of how these trees had come to be planted and how the chickens had become sacred:

At the time when Livia Drusilla, who by her marriage with Octavius received the name of Augusta, was betrothed to Caesar, she was sitting one day in her villa at Veii when an eagle let fall upon her knees from an immense height a white hen, which not only fell uninjured, but did not even appear to be frightened. Livia looked at the bird in astonishment and was caressing it, when she noticed that it held in its beak a sprig of laurel. Thereupon she consulted the soothsayers, who ordered the sprig of laurel to be planted so as to obtain offshoots from it, and the hen to be fed so that she might rear a brood. Livia carried out these instructions. One of Caesar's county seats, situated on the Flaminian Way near the Tiber and nine miles from Rome, was selected for the experiment, which succeeded beyond expectation. So large a brood of chickens was hatched that the spot received the name of "*ad Gallinas*" (hens), and so large a number of off-shoots sprang up that the bay-tree soon became the centre of a forest. Well, the forest had now withered to the roots and every single one of the sacred fowls was dead.

The Emperor presently appeared upon the stage, but all in vain did he advance humbly towards the orchestra as was his custom and make a respectful speech to the audience, telling them that he would do his best, but that the result depended on fortune; not a single cheer was given to encourage him. He began nevertheless, but in a nervous and trembling voice, and was listened to through half his piece in silence and without a single sign of appreciation. When, however, he came to the line: "*Wife, father, mother, all demand my death!*" applause and cheers broke out for the first time, and this time there was no mistaking their significance. Nero realised then the true meaning and quitted the stage abruptly; but as he went down the stairs his feet caught in his long robe, so that he fell and hurt his face and was picked up in a fainting condition.

When he had got back to the Palatine and had recovered consciousness, he shut himself in his private apartment, filled with terror and indignation. Then he drew out his tablets and traced upon them strange schemes which required but his signature to convert them into sentences of death. These schemes consisted of allowing the Gauls to destroy the Roman forces, inviting the entire Senate to a banquet and there poisoning them, setting fire to the city and at the same time letting loose all the wild beasts, so that this ungrateful people who had refused to applaud him except by way of presaging his death might be unable to defend themselves from the ravages of the conflagration. Then, feeling once more reassured as to his power by the thought of the mischief he might still accomplish, he threw himself upon his bed, and the gods, as though wishing to send him fresh omens of disaster, allowed him to sleep.

Then Nero, who as a rule never dreamed at all, dreamed that he was lost amid a tempest on a furious sea, and that the helm of the vessel that he was steering was torn out of his hands. Next, by one of the incoherent transitions so common in dreams, he suddenly found himself near the theatre of Pompey, and the fourteen statues executed by Coponius, and representing the tributary nations, descended from their pedestals, and while the one in front of him barred his passage, the others formed a circle which gradually contracted until he found himself enclosed within their marble arms. Having escaped with great difficulty from these phantoms of stones, he was running, pale, panting, and speechless, through the Campus Martius, when, in passing in front of the Mausoleum of Augustus, the doors of the tomb opened of their own accord and a voice within called him three times. This last dream broke his slumber and he awoke trembling, his hair erect and his brow streaming with perspiration. Then he called out and ordered Sporus to be brought to him, and the young man remained in his chamber for the rest of the night.

With daybreak his nocturnal terror vanished; but he still remained haunted by a vague fear which every moment made him start and shudder. Presently he sent for the messenger who had brought the despatch announcing the death of Vindex. The man was a Batavian trooper, who had come from Germany with Virginius and had been present at the battle. Nero made him go over the details of the fight several times, especially the circumstances connected with the death of Vindex, nor was he satisfied until the soldier swore to him by Jupiter that he had with his own eyes seen the body pierced with wounds and ready for the grave. Then the Emperor had a sum of one hundred thousand sesterces counted out to the Batavian, and gave him in addition his own gold ring.

The hour for the banquet arrived and the imperial guests assembled at the Palatine. Before the meal, Nero, according to his custom, made them pass through the bathing-hall, and after the bath the slaves presented them with white robes and garlands of flowers. Nero was awaiting them in the banqueting-room, dressed, like his guests, in white, with a wreath on his head, and they took their places on the couches to the strains of delightful music.

The dinner was served, not merely with all the refinement, but with all the luxury of Roman feasts. At the feet of each guest lay a slave ready to anticipate his slightest whim; a parasite of each guest dined at a small separate table consecrated to his exclusive use, while at the end of the apartment on a kind of dais were Gaditanian dancers, who by their graceful and active motions resembled the divinities of the spring-time who accompany Flora and Zephyrus when visiting their kingdom in the month of May.

As the dinner proceeded and the guests warmed up, the spectacle changed its character and, from being voluptuous, became lascivious. The dancing-girls were succeeded by rope-dancers, and then began those disgraceful games, re-introduced, it is said, during the French Regency, and which had been invented to revive the worn-out passions of the aged Tiberius. At the same time Nero seized a lyre and began to recite verses in which Vindex was overwhelmed with ridicule; these verses he accompanied with comic gestures, both verses and gestures being frantically applauded by the guests. At this moment a fresh messenger arrived, bringing letters from Spain. These letters announced both the revolt and the proclamation of Galba as Emperor.

Nero read these letters more than once, growing paler each time; presently, snatching up two vases which he specially valued, and which he called “Homeric,” because on them were depicted subjects taken from the Iliad, he dashed them to pieces as if they had been of common clay. Then, falling upon the ground, he tore his clothes and struck his head violently against the banqueting couches, declaring that his loss of the sovereignty in music was causing him unspeakable distress.

On hearing his cries, his old nurse Eulogé entered, took him like a child into her arms, and tried to comfort him; but as often happens with children, his grief was only increased by the attempts made to console him, and presently grief was succeeded by anger. He now called for pen and paper that he might write to the chief of the praetorian guard. Having written and signed his order, he looked for his ring in order to seal it; but, as has been already mentioned, he had given it that morning to the Batavian messenger. He therefore asked Sporus for a seal, and the latter handed him his own; Nero pressed it on the wax without looking at it, but on raising it he observed that the ring represented the descent of Proserpine into Hades. This last omen, and at such a moment, seemed to him more terrible than all the others, and whether he thought that Sporus had handed him this ring designedly, or whether in the madness by which he was possessed he was incapable of recognising his dearest friends, when Sporus approached him to inquire the cause of this fresh outburst, he struck him full in the face with his fist, and the young man fell bleeding and unconscious amid the remains of the banquet.

The Emperor, without taking leave of his guests, went up at once to his chamber and ordered Locusta to be sent for.

CHAPTER XVIII

THIS time it was with a view to his own death and not that of others that Nero sought the advice and skill of his friend Locusta. They spent the whole night together in consultation, and in his presence the sorceress compounded a subtle poison which she had discovered three days previously, and of which she had made proof the evening before. Nero enclosed it in a golden casket and concealed it in a cabinet which had been given him by Sporus, the secret of opening which was known only to the eunuch and himself.

The report of Galba's revolt had spread with extraordinary rapidity. This time it was no distant menace, no desperate enterprise like that of Vindex; it was "a powerful and direct attack from a patrician, whose family, always popular in Rome, was both illustrious and ancient, and who bore on his statues the title of grandson of Quintus Catulus Capitolinus, that is to say; of the magistrate who by his courage and virtue had been reckoned the foremost man of his day.

In addition to this prejudice in favour of Galba, there existed fresh grievances against Nero. Entirely preoccupied with his various amusements and his musical performances, he had altogether neglected to make the usual arrangements for which, in his capacity of prefect of the corn supplies, he was responsible, the result being that the fleet which was to convey the wheat from Sicily and Alexandria had only just started at the moment when it ought to have arrived. Consequently the price of corn had in a few days risen enormously, and then had followed famine, and the whole of Rome, perishing from hunger and with longing eyes turned towards the South, would rush like one man to the banks of the Tiber every time a vessel came up the river from the port of Ostia. Well, on the morning after the night Nero had spent with Locusta, being the day following that on which the news of Galba's insurrection had arrived, the people had gathered in the Forum, hungry and clamorous, when a vessel was signalled. Thereupon the whole multitude rushed down to the Portus Aelius, in the belief that this vessel was the vanguard of the provision fleet, and jumped aboard with shouts of joy, only to find that the cargo of the ship was sand from Alexandria for the use of the court wrestlers. The disappointment was followed by a loud outburst of murmurs and curses.

Noticeable among the malcontents was one of Galba's freedman, named Icelus. The man had been arrested on the previous evening; but during the night a band of some hundred armed men had attacked the prison and rescued him. Consequently he reappeared among the people as a sort of hero owing to his temporary punishment, and, taking advantage of this feeling summoned the bystanders to organise an open rising. The latter, however, still hesitated, through that remnant of obedience to existing authority which is often not taken into account, but which ordinary minds find it difficult to shake off. At this moment a young man, whose features were concealed beneath a cloak, passed close to Icelus and handed him a leaf torn from a tablet. Icelus took the ivory plate smeared with wax which had been given to him, and saw with delight that fortune had come to his help by affording him another proof of Nero's villainy. The leaf of the tablet contained the scheme formed by the Emperor, on the night when Sporus had stayed in his room, of setting fire for the second time to this Rome which was growing weary of his musical performances, and of letting loose the wild beasts during the conflagration, so that the Romans might be unable to extinguish the flames. Icelus read in a loud voice the lines written on the tablet, and yet, so mad did this scheme of vengeance appear, that people hesitated to believe its truth. Some even asserted that the order just read by Icelus was a fictitious one, when Nymphidius Sabinus took the tablet from the freedman's hands and declared that he recognised perfectly not only the Emperor's handwriting, but also his manner of erasing, blotting out, and inserting words. To this there could be no reply, since Nymphidius Sabinus, as chief of the praetorium, was in the constant habit of receiving autograph letters from Nero.

At this moment several Senators passed by, in disordered robes and without their cloaks, making for the Capitol, whither they had been summoned in consequence of the leader of the Senate having seen that very-morning a tablet similar to the one which had been handed to Icelus, on which was written in detail the scheme of inviting all the Senators to a grand banquet and poisoning them at one blow. The crowd followed these Senators and surged into the Forum like the hurrying waves of the tide pouring into a harbour-mouth. Then while waiting until the Senate should have come to some decision, they fell upon the statues of Nero, since they dared not yet to lay hands upon the Emperor himself. From the height of the terrace on the Palatine the Emperor witnessed the insults to which his statues were exposed; presently, he dressed himself in black, intending to go down to the people and present himself to them as a suppliant. But just as he was about to start, the shouts of the mob had assumed such an expression of rage and menace that he retreated precipitately, and opening a door at the back of the Palace, fled into the gardens of Servilius. Once secure within that retreat, which none except his most intimate confidants knew that he had chosen, he despatched Phaon to the commander of the praetorians.

But Caesar's messenger had been preceded to the camp by the agent of Galba. Nymphidius Sabinus had just promised in the name of the new Emperor seven thousand five hundred drachmas to every praetorian, and to each soldier quartered in the provinces twelve hundred and fifty drachmas. The commander of the praetorians therefore answered Phaon that all that he could do was to give the preference to Nero in case he was willing to offer a similar amount. This answer Phaon brought back to the Emperor; the sum demanded, however, totalled up to more than eleven million pounds sterling, and the treasury had been so depleted by the Emperor's foolish extravagance, that he did not possess the twentieth part of this sum. Nero, however, did not despair; night was approaching, and he thought that with the help of some of his old friends whose aid, thanks to the darkness, he could implore without being seen, he might perhaps succeed in raising the amount required.

Darkness descended upon the city seething with excitement; wherever there were open spaces or cross roads there might be seen groups of people standing in the light of blazing torches. Among this multitude, animated by such diverse feelings, the wildest and most contradictory rumours circulated, as though an eagle were shaking them from its wings, and every one of these rumours, no matter how silly and incoherent, obtained credence. As each successive report spread, there were such wavings of torches in the air and such shouting that from a distance one might have thought it was a volcano in eruption and the roaring of wild beasts. In the middle of all this tumult the praetorians left their barracks and went to encamp outside the city. Wherever they passed, the crowd became silent, for none knew on whose side they had declared themselves; but no sooner had they passed out of sight than the crowd began to wave their torches once more and utter confused and menacing cries.

In spite, however, of all this disturbance in the city, Nero ventured to come down, disguised in workman’s clothes, from the gardens of Servilius, where, as we have said, he had been all day in hiding. His motive for running this risk lay in the hope of finding help, if not from the arms, at least from the purses of the former companions of his revels. But in vain did the unhappy man drag himself from house to house and kneel as a suppliant at every door, imploring, as a mendicant solicits alms, that help which alone could save his life. In vain were all his appeals and groans; all hearts were deaf and all doors shut fast against him. Then, as the mob, weary of the delay in the deliberations of the Senate, began to grow more clamorous, Nero realised that there was not a moment to be lost, and, instead of returning to the gardens of Servilius, hurried off to the Palatine to secure some gold and valuable jewels. On reaching the fountain of Jupiter, he slipped behind the temple of Vesta, and keeping within the shadow thrown by the walls of the Palace of Tiberius and Caligula reached the gate which had been opened for his triumphal progress on his arrival from Corinth, crossed the splendid gardens which he would presently be forced to exchange for the deserted strand of some lonely isle of exile, and entering the Golden House made his way through dark and secret corridors to his chamber.

On entering the chamber he uttered a cry of surprise. During his absence the guards of the Palatine had fled, taking with them whatever they could lay hands on — Eastern hangings, silver vases, costly furniture. Nero ran to the little cabinet in which he had placed Locusta’s poison and opened the drawer, but the gold box had disappeared and with it his last resource against the shame of a public and disgraceful death. Then the man who but the day before had been master of the world, overcome by weakness in the hour of peril, abandoned or betrayed by everybody, threw himself face downwards on the floor and wallowed there, uttering frenzied cries for help. Three men rushed in; they were Sporus, Epaphroditus, his secretary, and Phaon, his freedman. On seeing them, Nero rose on his knees and looked anxiously at them; then, perceiving from their sad and dejected countenances that there was no hope left, he bade Epaphroditus go and fetch the gladiator Spiculus, or any other who would be willing to kill him. Next he ordered Sporus and Phaon to chant the dirges sung at funerals by the hired female mourners, and they had not finished doing this when Epaphroditus returned to say that neither Spiculus nor any one else would come. Then Nero, summoning up all his strength, and seeing that this last method of securing a speedy death was cut off from him, dropped his arms and exclaimed: “Alas! alas! then I have neither friend nor enemy;” next he wanted to leave the Palatine and run to the Tiber and throw himself in, but Phaon checked his purpose by offering him his country-house, which was situated about four miles from Rome, between the Salarian and Nomentane ways. Nero, clinging to this last hope, accepts the offer. Five horses are got ready; the Emperor mounts one of them, muffles his face, and, followed by Sporus, who sticks to him like his shadow, while Phaon remains at the Palatine to send him news, passes through the entire city, leaving it by the Nomentane Gate, and follows the road on which we met him at the moment when the salute given by the soldier who had recognised him had put the coping-stone to his terror.

The little band had now arrived opposite Phaon’s villa, which was situated where Serpentara stands to-day. This tract of country, lying behind the Sacred Mount, might afford Nero a temporary hiding-place, sufficiently isolated at any rate to give him time in which to make up his mind to die, in case every chance of escape were cut off. Epaphroditus, who knew the road, took the leadership of the party, and, turning to the left, struck into a bye road; Nero followed him, while the two freedman and Sporus brought up the rear. When they had covered half the distance they heard a noise on the road, but could not see by whom it was caused. The darkness favoured them, and Nero and Epaphroditus struck off across country while Sporus and the two freedmen continued along past the Sacred Mount. The sounds presently proved to have been caused by a night patrol, in command of a centurion, which had been sent out to hunt for the Emperor. The patrol stopped the three travellers, but not recognising Nero among them, allowed them to proceed on their road after a few words had been exchanged with Sporus.

The Emperor and Epaphroditus, however, found the country so strewn with boulders and masses of earth which had fallen, owing to the earthquake felt at the moment when the little band had left Rome, that they were obliged to dismount. Then they made their way over rushes and thorns, which made Nero’s bare feet bleed and tore his cloak. At last they perceived a mass of building looming through the darkness. A watch-dog barked, following them up on the inside of the wall as they skirted it on the outside. Presently they arrived at the entrance to a quarry belonging to the estate, from which Phaon had drawn gravel. The opening was low and narrow, but Nero, impelled by his terror, dropped on his hands and knees and crept inside. Epaphroditus did not enter, but told the Emperor that he was going to look round the walls and make his way into the house, so as to find out whether his master might safely follow him there. Scarcely had he gone off when Nero, finding himself alone in this quarry, was seized with an extreme terror; he seemed to be imprisoned in a tomb the door of which had shut him in alive; so he rushed out hastily again to see the sky and breathe the open air. Having reached the further end of the quarry he saw a pool a few yards distant. Although the water was stagnant, he was so thirsty that he could not resist the desire to drink. Accordingly he placed his cloak under his feet to protect them to some extent from the stones and brambles, dragged himself to the water and drank a few mouthfuls in the hollow of his hand; then, looking up to heaven, he exclaimed in a tone of reproach: “So this is the last refreshment vouchsafed to Claudius Nero!”

He had been sitting for some little time sadly and pensively on the edge of the pool, occupied in removing the thorns and brambles from his cloak, when he heard himself called. The voice thus breaking the stillness of the night, although its expression was one of kindness, made him start; he turned and saw Epaphroditus at the entrance to the quarry with a torch in his hand. His secretary had kept his word, and after entering the villa by the principal gate and pointing out to the freedmen the spot where the Emperor was waiting for them, they had by their united efforts made a hole through an old wall and effected an opening by which he could pass from the quarry into the villa. Nero followed his guide with such haste that he forgot his cloak on the edge of the pool. Retracing his steps through the quarry, he made his way by the newly-made opening into a slave’s room, which had for its sole furniture a mattress and an old counterpane, and was lighted by a miserable earthenware lamp that gave out more smoke than light in the filthy little chamber that felt more like a tomb than anything else.

Nero sat down on the mattress with his back resting against the wall. Being hungry and thirsty, he asked for food and drink. They brought him a little brown bread and a glass of water. But after tasting the bread, he threw it away; then he handed back the water, asking them to warm it. Left to himself, he let his head sink upon his knees and remained for some minutes silent and motionless as a statue of grief. Presently the door opened;

thinking that they were bringing him the water, Nero raised his head and saw Sporus before him, holding a letter in his hand.

There was on the eunuch's pale face, accustomed to express dejection and sadness, such a strange look of savage joy that Nero stared at him for a moment, not recognising in the young man who now approached him the docile slave of all his caprices. When Sporus was close to the bed, he held out his arm and handed the Emperor a parchment. Nero, although he did not understand why Sporus was smiling, suspected that this parchment contained some fatal news.

"From who does this letter come?" he asked, without making any movement to take it.

"From Phaon," answered the young man.

"And what does it say?" continued Nero, turning pale.

"That the Senate has declared you the enemy of the State, and that they are searching for you to hand you over for punishment."

"For punishment!" cried Nero, rising on one knee, "for punishment! me! Claudius Caesar!"

"You are no longer Claudius Caesar," replied the eunuch coldly; "you are Domitius Ahenobarbus, that is all, declared a traitor to your country and condemned to death!"

"And what is the punishment for traitors to their country?" asked Nero.

"Their clothes are stripped off, their necks are fixed between the prongs of a fork, they are paraded through the forums, the markets, and the Campus Martius, and then they are scourged with rods until they are dead."

"Oh!" cried Nero, springing to his feet, "I can still fly, there is still time to escape, to reach the forest of Laricia and the marshes of Minturnae; some vessel will take me aboard and I will hide in Sicily or Egypt."

"Fly!" said Sporus, still pale and cold as a marble statue, "fly! and which way, pray?"

"By this way," cried Nero, opening the door of the chamber and rushing towards the quarry; "if I came in, I can equally well go out."

"Yes, but since you came in," said Sporus, "the opening has been blocked up again, and, athlete though you be, I doubt whether you can push back the stone by your own strength."

"By Jupiter! it is true!" cried Nero, vainly exhausting himself in efforts to remove the stone. "Who has blocked up the cavern? who rolled this rock here?"

"I and the freedmen," answered Sporus. "And why did you do so? why have you shut me in, like Cacus in his cave?"

"In order that you may die like him," said Sporus in a tone of hatred of which you would never have thought his gentle voice was capable.

"Die! die!" said Nero, striking the wall with his head like a trapped stag seeking an outlet. "Every one, then, wants me to die? every one forsakes me?"

"Yes," answered Sporus, "every one desires your death, but every one has not forsaken you, since I am here and have come to die with you."

"Yes, yes," murmured Nero, letting himself fall back again upon the mattress; "yes, that is fidelity, indeed."

"You are mistaken, Caesar," said Sporus, crossing his arms and gazing at Nero, who was biting his pillow, "you are mistaken; it is not fidelity, but something sweeter than that; it is revenge."

"Revenge!" cried Nero, turning round quickly, "revenge! what have I done to you then, Sporus?"

"Great Jupiter!" said the eunuch, lifting his arms to heaven, "he actually asks what he has done to me!"

"Ah! Yes," murmured Nero, in terrified accents and retreating against the wall.

"What have you done to me?" answered Sporus, advancing towards him and then letting his hands drop as though they had suddenly lost all power; "you have transformed me, from a child who was born to become a man and have his share in the feelings and joys of earth and heaven, into a poor creature devoid of all hope, deprived of all natural rights. Fettered by my impotence, I have seen all joys and pleasures pass me by, as Tantalus saw meat and drink without being able to reach them. Nor was that all; I might perhaps have forgiven you, had I been allowed to suffer and to weep in silence and in solitude, clothed in the garb of mourning; but no, I have had to wear purple and fine linen, like the great ones of the earth, to smile like those who are happy, to mingle in society like those who really exist — I, who was nought but a poor shadow, a very phantom."

"But what more did you want?" said Nero, trembling; "I shared with you my wealth, my pleasures, my power; you have been at all my *fêtes,* have had your courtiers and flatterers like myself; and, when I knew not what more to give you, I bestowed on you my name."

“And that is exactly what has made me hate you, Caesar. If you had had me poisoned like Britannicus, assassinated like Agrippina, or had made me open my veins like Seneca, I might have forgiven you in the hour of death. But you have treated me neither as man nor as woman, but as a mere plaything which you could deal with as you pleased, as though I were a marble statue, without eyes or tongue or heart. These favours of which you speak were gilded humiliations, nothing more; and the more you loaded me with shameful honours and placed me on a pinnacle above others, the more could every one measure the extent of my infamy. Nor is that all; the day before yesterday, when I handed you my signet ring, and when you might have vented your anger on me with a dagger-thrust, which at least would have made all who were present think that I was worth the trouble of killing, you struck me with your fist, as if I had been a parasite, a slave, a dog!”

“Yes, yes,” said Nero, “I was wrong; forgive me, my good Sporus.”

“And yet,” continued Sporus, as though he had not noticed Nero’s interruption, “this nameless, sexless being, without friends, without feelings; this ambiguous creature, if he could do no good, could at least do some harm; could enter your chamber by night and steal from you the tablets which condemned the Senate and people to death, could disperse them, as a storm of wind might have done, over the Forum and the Capitol, so that you have no longer any mercy to expect from Senate or people; he could carry off the box containing Locusta’s poison, so as to hand you over defenceless and unarmed to those who are searching for you to make you suffer an infamous death.”

“You are wrong!” cried Nero, drawing a dagger from beneath his pillow; “you are wrong: I have this weapon left.”

“Yes,” said Sporus, “but you have not the courage to use it either against others or against yourself. There will be given to the world, thanks to a eunuch, the spectacle of an Emperor dying beneath the rods and scourges, after having been paraded naked with the malefactors’ fork at his neck through the Forum and the markets of Rome.”

“But I have a good hiding-place, they will not find me here,” said Nero.

“Yes, you might possibly have escaped them yet, had I not met a centurion and told him where you were. At this moment he is knocking at the gate of the villa; they are coming, Caesar, they are here.”

“Oh! I will not wait for them,” cried Nero, placing the point of the dagger to his breast; “I will strike home and kill myself.”

“You dare not,” said Sporus.

“And yet,” murmured Nero in Greek, as though feeling with the point of the blade for a spot at which to strike, but still hesitating to bury the steel; “yet it ill befits Nero not to know how to die — yes, I have lived shamefully and I die in shame. But, oh! what an artist will be lost to the world in me.” He stopped suddenly, the blow arrested, his hair standing on end, his brow streaming with perspiration, listening to a fresh noise that he had just heard, and mumbled this line from Homer:

“‘Tis the sound of horses swiftly galloping.”

At this moment Epaphroditus rushed into the chamber. Nero was not mistaken; the noise was indeed that of the pursuing horsemen who, guided by the information given by Sporus, had made straight for the villa. There was therefore not a moment to be lost if the Emperor was not to fall into the hands of his executioners.

Nero now appeared to come to a fixed determination; drawing Epaphroditus aside he made him swear by the Styx not to allow his head to fall into the hands of any one, and to have his entire body burned as soon as possible. Then, drawing the dagger from his girdle where he had replaced it, he put the point to his throat. At this moment was heard the sound of approaching footsteps and the menacing tones of angry voices. Epaphroditus saw that the supreme moment had come; he seized Nero’s hand, and setting the dagger to his throat, drove it in to the hilt; then, followed by Sporus, he rushed into the quarry, closing the door of the room behind them.

Nero uttered a fearful cry, plucked out the weapon and threw it away from him, then staggered for a moment with eyes fixed and breast panting, fell upon one knee and then on both, tried to hold himself up with one arm, while the blood gushed from his throat over the fingers of his other hand with which he was endeavouring to close the wound. Finally he looked round him for the last time with an expression of despair, and seeing that he was alone, let himself sink to the ground with a groan. At this moment the door flew open and the centurion came in. Seeing the Emperor lying motionless, he sprang towards him and tried to stanch the blood with his cloak; but Nero, summoning his remaining strength, pushed him away, then added in a tone of reproach: “Is this the fidelity you swore to me?” With these words he uttered his last sigh and expired; his eyes, however, strange to say, remained open and staring.

Such was the end. The soldiers who had accompanied the centurion came in to assure themselves that the Emperor was really dead, and having no doubt on this point, returned to Rome to announce the fact while the corpse of the man who but the day before was master of the world was left lying in the blood-stained mire, without one slave to discharge the last offices.

The body lay there for a whole day; in the evening there entered a woman, Acté, pale of face, with slow and solemn step. She had obtained from Icelus, Galba’s freedman, whom we saw stirring up the people, and who had become all powerful at Rome where the advent of his master was now expected, permission to perform the last offices for Nero. She undressed the body and washed away the blood with which it was fouled, wrapped it in a white cloak embroidered with gold which he had worn the last time she had seen him, and which he had given her as a present; then she carried it back to Rome in a covered chariot which she had brought with her. There she gave him a modest funeral, no grander than that of an ordinary citizen, depositing the corpse in the Mausoleum of Domitian, which is seen from the Campus Martius on the hill of the Gardens, and where Nero had had a tomb of porphyry erected for himself, surmounted by an altar of marble from Luna and enclosed with a balustrade of the same material from Thasos.

All this completed, she knelt there a whole day in prayer at the tomb, silent and motionless as a statue of grief.

At the approach of evening she descended the hill slowly and without looking behind her; took the road through the valley of Egeria and entered the Catacombs, never to leave them again.

As for Epaphroditus and Sporus, they were found in the quarry lying dead side by side. Between them was the golden box; they had shared the contents like brothers, and the poison prepared for Nero had proved sufficient for them both.

CHAPTER XIX

THUS died Nero in the thirty-second year of his age, and on the very day of the year on which he had put Octavia to death. However, the strange mystery which shrouded the manner of his death, and the performance of his funeral rites by a woman without his body having been publicly exposed according to the usual custom, left the Roman people, who are the most superstitious of nations, in great uncertainty as to whether he were actually dead or not. Many people asserted that the Emperor had reached the port of Ostia and that a vessel had transported him thence into Syria, so that he might be expected to re-appear any day; and while his tomb continued for fifteen years to be religiously decked with spring and summer flowers, there were those who from time to time carried to the rostrum images of Nero depicted in the purple robe; others there were who came and read proclamations there as though he were still alive and would return with armed power to take vengeance on his enemies. Twenty years, moreover, after his death, when Suetonius, who relates the fact, was a young man, there appeared among the Parthians an individual of humble birth who claimed to be Nero and was cherished for long years by this nation who had especially honoured the memory of the late Caesar. Nor was this all; these traditions spread from Pagans to Christians, and St. Jerome, relying on certain passages written by St. Paul himself, described Nero as Antichrist, or at least as his precursor. Sulpicius Serverus in his Dialogues instructs St. Martin that Nero and Antichrist were to appear before the end of the world, the one in the West, where he would re-establish the worship of idols; the other in the East, where he would rebuild the city and temple of Jerusalem, establishing it as the seat of his empire, until finally Antichrist would be recognised as the Messiah, would declare war against Nero and destroy him. Lastly, St. Augustine, in his *Civitas Dei*, declare that even in his own day, that is to say, at the beginning of the fifth century, many still refused to believe that Nero was dead, asserting that, on the contrary, he was concealed in some inaccessible spot, still retaining all his former vigour and cruelty, to re-appear some day and ascend once more the Imperial throne.

To this present day, among the whole long series of Emperors who have each in his turn added one more to the monuments of Rome, the most popular is Nero. There still exist Nero’s palace, Nero’s baths, Nero’s tower. At Bauli, a vine-dresser pointed out to me without the slightest hesitation the former site of Nero’s villa. In the middle of the bay of Baiae the sailors who rowed me stopped at the exact spot where the trireme prepared by Nero was wrecked, and on my way back to Rome a peasant conducted me straight to Serpentara along the same Nomentane Way which Nero had followed in his flight, and there, in some ruins standing solitary amid the far-stretching campagna of Rome, so rich in architectural remains, insisted on my recognising the site of the house where the Emperor stabbed himself to death. And lastly, there is not a single soul, down to the very Vetturino I hired to drive me to Florence, but told me, in his ignorant devotion to the memory of the last of the Caesars, as he pointed out a ruin to the right hand of the Stora at Rome:

“There is the tomb of Nero.”

Let who can explain the oblivion into which the names of Titus and of Marcus Aurelius have fallen at the very same localities.

THE END

CAPTAIN PAUL

Anonymous translation, 1859

First published in 1838 in serial format, this novel was influenced by one of Dumas' favourite authors, James Fenimore Cooper. After reading the novel *The Pilot*, Dumas decided to continue the story of Captain Paul. During a visit to Brittany, he went to research the setting of the novel, as well as the marine ecosystem. The novel, also inspired by the earlier play *Paul Jones* (1836), was a promising success for the young author.

The story opens in October 1779, when an Indian frigate stops in Brittany. Its captain, in disguise, meets Emmanuel d'Auray, who wishes to entrust Captain Paul with a secret mission from the King.

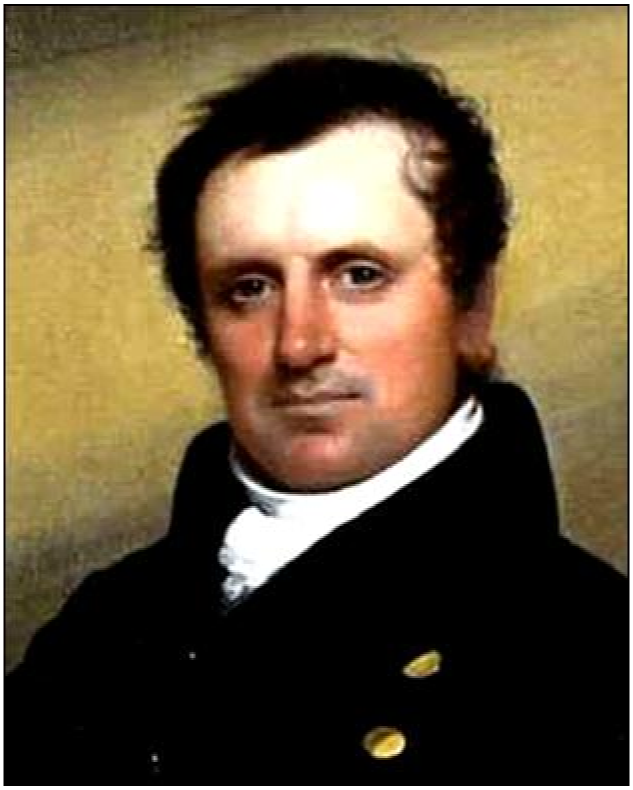

James Fenimore Cooper

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INTRODUCTION

THE admirers of “The Pilot,” one of the most magnificent of Cooper’s novels, have evinced a general feeling of regret, in which we ourselves have deeply participated, that the book, once finished, we altogether lose sight of the mysterious being whom we had followed with such intense interest, through the narrows of the Devil’s Grip, and the Cloisters of St. Ruth. There is in the physiognomy, in the language, and in the actions of this person, introduced in the first place by the name of John, and afterwards under that of Paul, a melancholy so profound, a grief so bitter, a contempt of life of so intense a nature, that every reader desires to become acquainted with the motives which influenced so bravo and generous a heart. For ourselves, we acknowledge that we have more than once been tempted, however indiscreet, to say the least of it, it might have been, to write to Cooper himself, and ask him for information regarding the early career and closing years of this adventurous seaman — information which we have vainly searched for in his narrative. I thought that such a request would be readily forgiven by him to whom it was addressed, for it would have been accompanied by the expression of the most sincere and ardent admiration of his work; but I was restrained by the reflection that the author himself, perhaps, knew no more of that career, of which he had given us but an episode, than that portion of it which had been illuminated by the sun of American Independence: for, in fact, this brilliant meteor had passed from the clouds which environed his birth to the obscurity of his death in such a manner, that it was quite possible the “poet historian,” being far distant from the place where his hero was born, and from the country in which he died, knew no more of him than what he has transmitted to us. The very mystery which surrounded him, may have been the cause of his selecting Paul Jones to play a part in his annals. Urged by these considerations, I resolved upon obtaining, by my own research, those details which I had so often desired to receive from others. I searched through the archives of the Navy; all I found there was a copy of the letters of marque granted to him by Louis XVI. I examined the annals of the Convention; I only found in them the Decree passed at the time of his death. I questioned his contemporaries; they told me that he was buried in the cemetery of Père la Chaiso. This was all the information I could gather from my first attempts.

I then consulted our living library — Nodier, the learned — Nodier, the philosopher — Nodier, the poet. After reflecting for a few moments, he mentioned a small book written by Paul Jones himself, containing memoirs of his life, bearing this motto, "Munera sunt Laudi." I started off to hunt for this precious relic; but it was in vain I searched through libraries, rummaged the old book-stalls — all that I could find was an infamous libel, entitled, "*Paul Jones, ou Prophétie sur* l*'Amérique,* l*'Angleterre, la France,* l*'Espagne et la Hollande* which I threw from me with disgust, before I had got through the fourth page, marvelling that poisons should be so enduring, and so perfectly preserved, whilst we search in vain for wholesome and nutritious food — I therefore renounced all hope in this quarter.

Some time afterwards, while taking a voyage along our coast, having started from Cherbourg, I visited St. Malo, Quimper, and l'Orient. Upon my arrival at the latter place I recollected having read in a biography of Paul Jones, that this celebrated seaman had been three times in that port. This circumstance had struck me — I had noted down the dates, and had only to open my pocket-book to ascertain them. I examined the naval archives, and in them I actually found entries of the sojourn which the two frigates, the Ranger, of eighteen guns, and the Indienne, of thirty-two, had made in these roads. As to the reasons for their coming there, whether from ignorance or neglect, the secretary who had kept the register had omitted to assign them. I was just leaving the office without further information, when I thought of inquiring of an old clerk who was sitting there, whether there was no traditional recollection in the country as to the captain of these two ships. The old man told me that in 1784, he being then a boy, and employed in the Quarantine Office at Havre, had seen Paul Jones there. He was at that time a commodore in the fleet of the Count do Vaudreuil. The renowned courage of this officer, and his extraordinary exploits, had made such an impression upon him, that upon his, the clerk's, return to Brittany, he spoke of him to his father, who then had charge of the Chateau d'Auray. Upon hearing the name of Paul Jones, the old man started, and made a sign to him to be silent — the young man obeyed, though not without astonishment. He frequently afterwards questioned his father upon the subject, but he always refused to satisfy his curiosity. It was not till after the death of the Marchioness d'Auray, the emigration of her son, the Marquis, and the dispersion of the family at the Revolution, that the old man felt himself permitted to reveal, even to his son, the strange and mysterious history, in which that of the object of my inquiries was so singularly blended. Although nearly forty years had passed away since his father had related that eventful history, it had made so deep an impression upon him that he repeated it to me, as ho assured me, nearly word for word.

I have treasured up this history in the recesses of my memory for nearly seven years: and it would have still remained buried there, with a mass of other recollections, destined never to see the light, had I not about six months ago read “the Pilot “for the second time, and even with much greater interest than before; for, thanks to the researches I had made, the hero was no longer to me an unknown being, appearing only for an instant, his face but partially visible, and with merely the portion of a name; he had now become a friend, almost a brother, to me — for new sympathies had been awakened in my heart besides those which had formerly been inspired by the recital of the expedition to Whitehaven. These led me to reflect that whatever of interest and disappointment I had experienced on reading Cooper’s novel, they must have been entertained alike by others, and that the anxious desire I had felt to know more of the former lover of Alice Dunscombe was not a feeling peculiar to myself, but would be participated by all those, and their number must be great, who have followed this skilful seaman from the moment of his first meeting Lieutenant Barnstaple on the English cliffs, until that in which he quitted the Alert to land on the shores of Holland.

I have, therefore, gathered up my recollections, and have written this history.

CHAPTER I.

A STRANGE SAIL.

Hoarse o’er her side the rustling cable rings —
The sails are furled — and anchoring, round she swings;
And gathering loiterers on the land discern
Her boat descending from the latticed stern.
Tis mann’d — the oars keep concert to the strand,
Till grates her keel upon the shallow sand. — BYRON.

TOWARD the close of a fine evening in the month of October,. 1779, the most inquisitive among the inhabitants of the small town of Fort Louis, had assembled on the point of land immediately opposite to that on which stands the city of Lorient. The object which attracted their attention, and which was the subject of their inquiries, was a noble beautiful frigate, carrying 32 guns, which had been anchored for about a week, not in the port, but in a small cove in the roadstead, and which had been perceived for the first time early one morning, like an ocean flower which had suddenly blossomed during the night. From the elegant and coquettish appearance of this frigate, it was imagined that this was the first time of her putting to sea; she bore the French flag, for the three golden *fleurs-de-lis* were seen glittering in the last rays of the setting sun.

That which, above all, appeared to excite the curiosity of the admirers of this spectacle, so frequent, and

notwithstanding, always so interesting in a seaport, was the uncertainty as to the country in which this vessel had been built; for, having all her sails clewed up and snugly stowed around her yards, showed in the setting sun the graceful outline of her hull, and a minute elegance as to her running rigging. Some thought they could discern in her the bold and taunt masts used by the Americans, but the perfection exemplified in the finish which distinguished the rest of her construction, was in perfect contrast with the barbarous rudeness of those rebellious children of England. Others, deceived by the flag she had hoisted, were endeavouring to divine in what port of France she had been launched, but their national pride soon gave way to the conviction that she was not built in France, for they sought in vain for those heavy galleries, ornamented with sculpture, which is the compulsory decoration of the stern of every daughter of the ocean, or of the Mediterranean, born on the stocks of Brest or of Toulon; others, again, knowing that the flags were frequently used as a mask to hide the real face, maintained that the lion and the towers of Spain would have more properly been placed upon the ensign waving from her peak, than the three *fleur-de-lis* of France: but the latter were asked whether the straight and elegant sides and quarters of the frigate at all resembled the bulging build of Spanish galleons. In short, there were some among them who would have sworn that this beautiful fairy of the waters had been brought to life among the frogs of Holland, had not the dangerous boldness of her masts and rigging fully contradicted the suggestion that she could have been built by those old but prudent sweepers of the seas. But, as we have said, for eight whole days, and ever since the first appearance of this splendid vision upon the coast of Brittany, she had been the constant theme of wonder and of conversation, for nothing had happened to give them any positive information, as not an individual from the crew had landed from the ship, under any pretext whatever. They might, indeed, have doubted whether she had a crew or not, had not they now and then seen the head of a sentinel, or of the officer of the watch, peering above the bulwarks. It appeared, however, that this vessel, although she had not communicated with the shore, could not have any hostile intention; her arrival had not seemed to give the least uneasiness to the public authorities of Lorient, for she had run under the guns of a small fort, which the recent declaration of war between England and France had caused to be put in order, and which displayed a battery of long guns of heavy calibre.

Among this crowd of idlers, however, there was a young man, who was remarked for the anxious eagerness of his inquiries: — without any one being able to divine the cause, it was easily perceived that he felt some direct interest in this mysterious vessel. His brilliant uniform was that of the *mousquetaires*, and as these royal guards rarely left the capital, he had, at first, directed a portion of the public curiosity to himself, but it was soon discovered that this person, whom their thought a stranger, was the young Count d’Auray, the last scion of one of the most ancient families of Brittany. The castle inhabited by his family rose above the shores of the Gulf of Morbihan, at six or seven leagues distance from Fort Louis. The family consisted of the Marquis d’Auray, a poor insane old man, who for twenty years had never been seen beyond the boundaries of his estates; of the Marchioness d’Auray, whose rigid morality, and whose ancient nobility, could alone excuse Her haughty and aristocratic bearing; of the young Marquerite, a sweet girl of seventeen or eighteen years of age, delicate and pale as the flower whose name she bore; and of Count Emanuel, whom we have mentioned above, and around whom the crowd had gathered, carried away, as it always is, by a sounding title, a brilliant uniform, and noble and lordly manners.

However eager might have been the desire of those he addressed to satisfy his curiosity, they could only answer his questions in a vague and undecided manner; all they knew of the frigate being mere conjecture. The count was about retiring from the jetty, when he perceived a six-oared boat approaching it. At a moment when curiosity had been so much excited, this incident could not fail to attract all eyes. In the stern of the boat sat a young man, who appeared to be from twenty to twenty-two years of age, and who was dressed in the uniform of a lieutenant of the royal navy — he was -sitting, or rather lying, upon a bearskin, one hand reclining carelessly on the tiller of the small boat, while the coxswain, who, thanks to the caprice of his officer, had nothing to do, was sitting in the bow. From the moment that it first made its appearance, every eye was directed towards it, as if it contained the means of solving the mystery which had so much puzzled them. The boat, urged on by the last efforts of its oarsmen, took the ground at eight or ten feet distance from the beach, there being too little water in that place to allow it to come nearer. Two of the -sailors jumped into the sea up to their knees. The young lieutenant then rose up in a careless way, walked to the bow of the boat, and allowed the two sailors to carry him in their arms to the beach, so that not a drop of salt water should soil his elegant uniform. He then ordered his men to double the point of land which advanced about three hundred feet into the sea, and to go and wait for him on the opposite side of the battery. As for himself, he stopped a moment on the beach to arrange his dress, which had been a little disordered by the rough mode of transport he had been compelled to adopt, and then he advanced, humming a French air, towards the gate of a small fort, which he passed, after having slightly returned the military salute of the sentinel on duty.

Although nothing could, in a seaport, be more natural than that a naval officer should cross the roads and walk into a fort, the minds of the lookers-on had been so much occupied with the foreign vessel, that there was hardly one among the crowd who did not imagine that this visit to the commandant of the fort had some relation to her, so that when the young officer issued from it, he found himself surrounded so closely by the crowd, that for a moment he appeared half inclined to use the rattan which he carried in his hand, to make way through it. However after having flourished it with impertinent affectation above the heads of those who were nearest him, he appeared all at once to change his mind, and perceiving Count Emanuel, whose distinguished appearance, and elegant uniform, contrasted strikingly with the vulgar air and habiliments of the persons who surrounded him, he made a few steps towards him at the same moment that the count had advanced to meet him. The two officers merely exchanged a rapid glance, but that look at once assured both that they were persons of rank and station. They immediately saluted each other with that easy grace and affable politeness which characterized the young nobility of that period.

“By Heaven!” exclaimed the young midshipman; “my dear countryman, for I suppose that like myself you are a Frenchman, although I meet you in a seemingly hyperborean land, and in regions which, if not absolutely savage, appear sufficiently barbarous — will you have the goodness to tell me what there is so extraordinary about me, that I seem to cause quite a revolution in the country? Or is the appearance of an officer of the navy an event so rare and so extraordinary at Lorient, that his mere presence excites, in so singular a degree, the curiosity of the natives of Lower Brittany? By solving this mystery, you will render me a service which I shall be happy to reciprocate, should any opportunity present itself in which I can be useful to you.”

“This will be so much the more easy,” replied Count Emanuel, “as this curiosity is not founded in any feeling which you would consider offensive to your uniform or hostile to your person — and the proof of this is, my dear comrade — for I see by your epaulettes that we are of equal rank in the service of his majesty — that I participate with these honest Britons in the curiosity which they evince, although, perhaps, my motives are more weighty than theirs, in endeavouring to obtain a solution of the problem which has occupied us.”

“If I can be of any assistance to you, in the inquiries which you have undertaken, I place all the algebra I possess at your disposal. Only the position we are in is not a comfortable one to carry out mathematical demonstrations. Will it please you to remove to a small distance from these honest people, whose presence would only tend to confuse our calculations.”

“Certainly,” replied the mousquetaire, “and the more readily, as, if I do not deceive myself, by walking this way I shall lead you nearer to your boat and your sailors.”

“Oh! that is not of the slightest consequence’; should this path not be convenient to you we can take another, I have plenty of time; and my men are less eager to return on board than I am. Therefore, we will about ship, if such is your good pleasure.

“Not at all; on the contrary, let us go on, the nearer we are to the beach the better we can discuss the matter in question. Let us, therefore, walk upon this strip of land as far as we can.”

The young seamen, without replying a word, continued to walk on, like a man to whom the direction he was to take was perfectly indifferent, and these two young men, who had thus met for the first time, walked arm in arm, as though they had been friends from infancy, towards the end of the promontory. When they had reached the extreme point, Count Emanuel paused, and pointed towards the frigate, saying, “Do you know what ship that is?”

The young seaman threw a rapid and scrutinizing glance upon the mousquetaire, and then looked towards the ship: “Yes,” replied he, negligently, “it is a pretty frigate carrying two and thirty guns, with her sails bent and her starboard anchor atrip, ready to sail at the first signal given.”

“Excuse me,” replied Emanuel, smiling; “that is not what I ask of you. It signifies little to me how many guns she carries, or by what anchor she is holding — is not that your technical mode of speaking?”

The lieutenant smiled in turn. “But,” continued Emanuel, “what I wish to know is, to what nation she actually belongs, the port, that she is bound to, and the name of her captain.”

“As to the nation she belongs to,” replied the lieutenant, “she has taken care to give us that information herself, or she is an outrageous liar; Do you not see her flag flying from her peak? It is the flag without a stain, rather worn out from being too much used that’s all. As to the place she is bound to, it is as the commandant of the fort told you, when you asked him, — Mexico.” Emanuel looked with astonishment at the young lieutenant. “And finally, as to her captain, that is a much more difficult matter.. There are some people who would swear he is a young man about my own age or yours, for; I believe we left the cradle pretty closely the one after the other, although the professions we follow may place a long interval between our graves. There are others who pretend he is of the same age with my uncle, the; Count: d’Estaing, who as you doubtless know, has just been made an admiral and who is at this moment affording every assistance to the rebels of America, as some people, even in France, still call them. But, in short, as to his name, that is quite another thing; it is said he does not know it himself, and until some fortunate occurrence shall apprise him of it, he calls himself Paul.”

“Paul?”

“Yes, Captain Paul.”

“Paul, what?”

“Paul, of the *Providence*, of the *Ranger*, of the *Alliance}* according to the name of the ship he commands. Are there not also in France some of our young nobles, who, finding their family name too short, lengthen it out by the name of an estate, and surmount the whole with a knight’s casque, or a baron’s coronet: so that their seals or their carriages bear the evidence of belonging to some ancient family, quite delightful to reflect upon? Well! so it is with him. At this moment he calls himself, I believe, Paul, of the *Indienne*, and he is proud of the appellation; if I may judge from my naval sympathies, I do not think he would exchange his frigate for the finest estate to be found between the Port of Brest and the mouth of the Rhone.”

“But, tell me,” rejoined Emanuel, after reflecting for a moment on the singular mixture of simplicity and sarcasm which pervaded the answers of his companion; “what is the character of this man?”

“His character — but, my dear baron — count — marquis.”

“Count,” replied Emanuel, bowing.

“Well, my dear count, then, I was about to say that you pursued me from one abstraction to another, and that when I placed at your disposal all my knowledge in algebra, I did not intend that we should enter into a research of the unknown. His character! good heaven, my dear count, who can speak knowingly of the character of a man, unless it be himself — and even then — but hold — I, myself, as you now see me, have ploughed for twenty years, at one time with the keel of a brig, at another with that of a frigate, this vast expanse, which now extends itself before us. My eyes, for so I may express myself, discerned the ocean almost at the same moment that they saw the sky above it; since my tongue was able to join two words together, or my comprehension could combine two ideas, I have interrogated and studied the caprices of the ocean, and yet I do not, even to this time, know its character — and there are only four principal winds and thirty-two breezes which agitate it — that’s all. How, then, can you expect that I should judge of man, torn as he is by his thousand passions.”

“Nor did I ask you, my dear — duke — marquis — count?” —

“Lieutenant,” replied the young sailor, bowing, as Emanuel had done before.

“I was about to say, then, my dear lieutenant, I do not ask a physiological lecture on the passions of Captain Paul. I only wish to inform myself upon two points. Firstly, whether you consider him a man of honor?”

“We must first of all understand each other as to the meaning of words, my dear count — what is your precise definition of the word honor?”

“Permit me to remark, my dear lieutenant, that this question is a most singular one. Honor! Why, honor — is — honor.”

“That’s it precisely — a word without a definition, like the word God! God- — is God! and every one creates a God after his own fashion. The Egyptians adored him under the form of a scorpion — the Israelites, under that of a golden calf. So it is with honor. There is the honor of Camillus, and that of Coriolanus — that of the Cid, and that of Count Julian. Define your question better if you wish me to reply to it.”

“I ask, then, whether his word may be relied upon?”

“I do not believe he ever failed in that regard. His enemies — and no one can arrive to his station without having them — even his enemies, I say, have never doubted that he would keep, even unto death, an oath which he had sworn to. This point is, therefore, believe me, fully settled. In this respect, he is a man of *honor.* Let us pass, therefore, to your second question, for if I do not deceive myself, you wish to know something farther.”

“Yes, I wish to know whether - he would faithfully obey an order given by his Majesty?”

“What Majesty?”

“Really, my dear lieutenant, you affect a difficulty of comprehension which would better suit the gown of a sophist, than a naval uniform.”

“Why so? You accuse me of cavilling, because, before replying, I wish to know precisely what I have to answer. We have, at this present time, eight or ten majesties, seated securely or otherwise, upon the different thrones of Europe. We have his Catholic Majesty — a feeble majesty, who allows the inheritance; left him by Charles, the Fifth, to be torn from him piece by piece; — we have his Britannic Majesty — a headstrong majesty, who clings to his America, as Cyingetus to the Persian ship, and whose hands we shall cut off, if he does not loose his hold; — we have his Christian Majesty, whom I venerate and honor”--

“Well — it is of him I wish to speak,” said Emanuel, “do you believe that Captain Paul would feel disposed to obey an order which I should deliver from him?”

“Captain Paul,” replied the lieutenant, “would, as every captain ought to do, obey every order emanating from a power which has the right of commanding him — unless indeed he be an accursed pirate, or some damned privateer’s-man, some buccaneer, who owes no allegiance and which I should doubt from the appearance of the frigate he commands, and from the way she is fitted. He must have then in some drawer of his cabin, a commission signed by some power or other. Well! should this commission bear the name of Louis, and be sealed with the fleur-de-lis of France, there can be no doubt that he would obey any order sealed, and signed by the same name.”

“This is all then that I wish--to be informed of,” replied the young mousquetaire, who began to grow impatient at the strange and evasive answers given by his companion. “I will only ask you one more question.”

“I am ready to obey your wishes in that, as I have in the rest, count,” returned the lieutenant.

“Do you know any way of getting on board of that ship?”

“There is one,” replied the lieutenant, pointing towards his own boat, which lay rocked by the waves, in a small creek close to them.

“That boat! why, is it yours?”

“Well! I will take you on board.”

“You know this Captain Paul, then?”

“I? not in the least! But as nephew of an admiral, I am naturally acquainted with every officer of a ship, from a boatswain, who pipes the hands aloft, to the rear admiral, who commands a squadron. Besides which, we sailors have secret signs among us, a certain masonic language, by which we know one another as brothers in whatever part of the ocean we may meet. You may, therefore, accept my proposal with the same frankness in which I offer it. I, my rowers, and my boat, are at your disposal."

"Do me this service, then," said Emanuel, "and" —

"You will forgive me the annoyance I have caused by my tergiversations, will you not?" said the lieutenant. "You cannot be surprised at it," continued he smiling, "my dear count, the solicitude of a seaman's life has given to us children of the sea, the habit of soliloquising. During a calm, we invoke the winds! During the tempest, we invoke the calm; and during the night we address ourselves to God."

Emanuel again looked doubtingly at his companion, who met his gaze with that apparent good tempered simplicity, which had appeared to spread over his features every tune he had become the object of investigation, to the mousquetaire. The latter was surprised at this mixture of contempt for human things, and of poetic feeling toward the works of God. But finding that this singular man was disposed to render him, although in a strange manner, the service he had asked of him, he accepted his proffered assistance. Five minutes afterwards, the two young men were advancing towards the unknown vessel with as much rapidity as the vigor of six stout rowers could give to the light bark in which they were seated. Their oars rose and fell with so regular a movement, that it appeared rather impelled by some powerful machine, than by the combination of human strength.

CHAPTER II.

THE FRIGATE.

And oil! the little warlike world within!
The well-reeved guns, the netted canopy;
The hoarse command, the busy humming din-
When, at a word, the tops are mann'd on high,
Hark to the boatswain's call, the cheering cry;
While through the seaman's hands the tackle glides:
Or schoolboy midshipman that, standing by,
Strains his shrill pipe, as good or ill betides,
And well the docile crew that skilful urchin guides. — BYRON.

As they advanced, the graceful form of the ship became more and more clearly defined, and although the vocation of the count did not lead him to admire beauty under such a form, yet he could not avoid being struck by the graceful model of her construction, the loftiness and strength of her masts, and the elegance of her rigging, which appeared, as it stood out against the richly tinted sky, reddened by the setting sun, to be composed of flexible and silky fibres, spun by some gigantic spider. There was not, however, any appearance of movement on board the ship, which seemed, either from inattention or contempt, to care but little for the visit she was about to receive. The young mousquetaire thought, however, at one moment, that he perceived the end of a telescope peeping out of one of the port-holes, near the muzzle of a gun, and which was pointed towards the boat; but the ship being gently moved round by the quiet heaving of the waves, presented her prow toward them, his attention was attracted by the figure-head which generally bears some allusion to the name of the vessel that it decorates: it was a representation of one of the daughters of America, discovered by Columbus, and conquered by Cortez, with a head-dress of many colored feathers, her bosom naked, and ornamented with a coral necklace. As to the remainder of the figure, it was a curious combination, half syren, half serpent, attached to the fore part of the ship in a graceful though fantastic form. The nearer the boat approached the ship, the more did the attention of the count appear attracted by this figure. It was, in fact, a sculpture, not only singular as to form, but very remarkable from the finish of its execution; and it was easy to perceive, that it was not the work of vulgar hands, but had been carved by a superior artist. The lieutenant remarked, with the satisfaction of a seaman, the increasing admiration which appeared in the countenance of the soldier; and at last perceiving that his attention was concentrated in the figure-head we have described, he seemed to wait with impatience that the latter should express his opinion upon it; but finding that he did not give any, although they were near enough not to lose any of its beauties, he took upon himself to be the first to speak, and to question his young companion.

"Well, count," said he, concealing the interest which he took in his reply under an apparent gaiety, "what do you think of this masterpiece?"

"I think," replied Emanuel, "that comparing it with works of the same description, which I have seen, it merits the appellation which you have given it."

"Yes," said the lieutenant, carelessly, "it is the last work of William Coustou, who died before he had completed it: it was finished by one of his pupils, named Duprè, a man of genius, who is starving, and who is obliged to carve wood for want of marble, and to cut figure-heads of ships, when he ought to be employed in sculpturing statues. See," said he, giving an impulsion to the rudder which laid then across her bows, "it is a real necklace of coral that she wears, and they are real pearls that are hanging from her ears. *A*s to her eyes, each pupil is a diamond worth a hundred guineas. The captain who takes this frigate, will, besides the honor of capturing her, have a splendid wedding present to offer to his bride."

"What an odd caprice," exclaimed Emanuel, carried away by the singularity of the object he was gazing at, "to ornament a ship in the same way that one would an animated being, and to risk considerable sums to the chances of a battle, or the dangers of a storm."

"Why should this astonish you?" said the lieutenant with an accent of indescribable melancholy; "we seamen have no other family than our sailors, no other country but the ocean, no gorgeous pageants but the tempest, no amusements but the battle. We must attach ourselves to something, having no real mistresses, for who would love us sea-gulls, who are always on the wing? We must therefore shape to ourselves an imaginary love. The one becomes enamoured of some verdant and shady island, and every time he perceives one in the distance, rising from the ocean like a flower garden, his heart becomes as joyous as that of a bird, when returning to its nest. Another selects some favorite star from out the firmament, and during the long and lovely nights on the Atlantic, every time he passes the equator, it appears to him that it approaches nearer to him, and salutes him with a more vivid light. There are others, and they are the greater number, who attach themselves to their frigate as to a well beloved daughter, who groan whenever the tempest tears away any part of her, at every wound given by the shot that strikes her, and when she is at length sunk by the tempest or the combat, prefer to perish with her, rather than to save themselves without her, giving to landsmen a holy example of fidelity. Captain Paul is one of the latter class, that’s all, and he has given to his frigate the wedding present which he had intended for his bride. Ah? I see they are waking up.”

“Boat ahoy?” cried some one from on board the frigate, “what boat’s that?”

“We want to come on board,” replied Emanuel; “throw us a rope that we may catch hold of.”

“Go round to the starboard side, and you will find the gangway ladder.”

The sailors pulled round, and in a few seconds the two young men were going up the ship’s side. The officer of the watch came forward with an eagerness which appeared in Emanuel’s mind to promise well.

“Sir,” said the lieutenant to a young man who was dressed in the same uniform as himself, and appeared to be of the same rank, “this is my friend, the Count--By the by, I forgot to ask your name?”

“Count Emanuel d’Auray.”

“I was saying then, that this is my friend, the Count Emanuel d’Auray, who anxiously desires to speak to Captain Paul. Is he on board?”

“He has just this moment arrived,” replied the officer.

“In that case I will go below and prepare him to receive you, my dear count. In the meantime, this is Mr. Walter, who will have the pleasure of showing you through the ship. It is an interesting sight for a land officer, and the more so, as I doubt whether *foil* would find many ships kept in such order as this is. The people are at supper just now, I believe?”

“Yes, sir.”

“In that case it will be the more curious sight “But,” observed the officer, hesitating a little, “it is my watch on deck.”

“Bah! you can easily find one of your brother officers who will relieve you for a short time. I will endeavour to manage so that the captain shall not make you kick your heels too long in the ante-room. Adieu, till I meet you again, count: I shall recommend you in such a way as will insure a good reception for you.” With these words, the young lieutenant disappeared down the companion ladder, while the one who remained with Emanuel to show him over the ship, took him into the ‘tween decks.

As the lieutenant had presumed, the crew of the frigate were at their supper. It was the first time that the young count had been present at such a repast; and however much he desired to speak immediately to the captain, he felt so curious to observe what was going on, that he examined everything with eager attention.

Between every two guns, a table and benches were prepared, not standing on their feet, but slug by ropes from above. Four men were seated upon each of the benches, taking their portion of pieces of beef, which seemed to resist the action of their knives, but which had to do with hearty fellows who did not appear at all disposed to be daunted by its toughness. At every table there were two cans of wine, that is to say, about a pint for each man. As to the bread, it did not appear to be distributed by rations, but they could take as much as they wanted. The most profound silence reigned throughout the crew, which, was composed of not more than from one hundred and eighty to two hundred men.

Although none of those seated at the table, opened their mouths for any other purpose than to eat, Emanuel perceived, with some surprise, that they were composed of many different nations, which was easily discernible from the contour of their countenances. His *cicerone* remarked his astonishment, and replying to his thought before he had given utterance to it, said, with an American accent, which Emanuel had already observed, and which proved that he who spoke to him was born on the other side of the Atlantic: “Yes, yes, we have a tolerably pretty sample of every nation in the world, and if all at once a good deluge should carry off the children of Noah, as it formerly did those of Adam, our ark could furnish people who speak every language. Do you observe those three fellows who are exchanging a piece of roast beef for a clove of garlick, they are lads from Galicia, whom we picked up at Cape Ortegal, and who would not go into action without having said a prayer to St Jago, of Compostello, but who, when once their prayer is over, would rather allow themselves to be cut in pieces, like martyrs, than retreat a single step. Those two who are polishing their table at the expense of their jacket-sleeves, are honest Dutchmen, who still complain of the injury done to their commerce by the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope. You see them — at first sight they look like very beer-pots. Well, those brave fellows, the moment they hear the drum beat to quarters, become as active as monkeys. Go near them, and they will talk to you about their ancestors; they will tell you they descended from those famous sweepers of the sea, who when going into action, hoisted a broom instead of a flag; but they will take good care not to inform you that one fine morning the English took their broom, and made rods of it to whip them with. That whole table, where they are chattering together at such a rate, but in an under tone, is occupied by Frenchmen, who would talk louder if they dared. The seat of honor is occupied by a chief, elected by themselves; he is a Parisian by birth, a cosmopolite from taste, a great master at the small sword, single-stick, and a dancing-master to boot. Always gay and contented, he sings when he is on duty, sings when he is fighting, and will die singing, unless a hemp cravat should stop his voice, which may very likely happen to him should he have the misfortune to fall into the hands of John Bull. Turn your eyes to the other side now, and observe that row of square and idle heads. These are strange faces to you, are they not? but which every American born between Hudson’s Bay and the Gulf of Mexico, would recognize at once for bears born on the borders of Lake Erie, or seals from Nova Scotia. There are three, or four of them who are one eyed — this arises from, their peculiar mode of fighting; they twist their fingers in the hair of their antagonist, and gouge out his eye with their thumbs. There are some of them who are very expert at this exercise, and who never miss their mark. So that when they are boarding a ship, they almost invariable throw away their boarding pikes, or their cutlass and seizing the first Englishman they can catch hold of, they uneye him with a dexterity and quickness quite delightful to behold. You will now comprehend that I did not deceive you in what I said, and that our collection is complete.”

“But,” asked Emanuel, who had listened to this long enumeration with a certain degree of interest, “how does your, captain manage to make himself understood by men brought together from such distant nations?”

“First of all our captain understands all languages — and although in battle and during stormy weather he speaks his mother tongue, he gives such an accent to it that every one understands him and obeys; him. But see, the larboard cabin door is opening,- and I doubt not he is ready to receive you."

And instantly a boy dressed in a midshipman uniform came up to the two officers, and asked Emanuel if he did not call himself the Count d'Auray; and on his receiving an affirmative reply he requested him to follow him; and the officer who had so conscientiously sustained the part of a cicerone, immediately went on deck to resume his duties there. As to Emanuel he advanced towards the cabin with a mixed feeling of anxiety and curiosity, He was at last about to be ushered in the presence of Captain Paul.

He was a man who appeared to be between fifty and fifty-five years of age, and to whom the habit of walking between decks had given him a stoop rather than age. He wore the uniform, of the French navy, according to its strictest regulations. It was a blue coat with scarlet facings, a red waistcoat, and breeches of the same color, grey stockings, with frilled shirt and' ruffles. His hair, rolled up in large curls, and powdered quite white, was tied into a queue by a ribbon, the ends of which floated upon his shoulders. His cocked hat and his CAPTAIN PAUL, sword were lying upon a table beside Mm. At the moment Emanuel entered the door, he was sitting upon the carriage of a gun, but when he perceived him, he rose up to receive him.

The young count felt intimidated by the aspect of this man: there was in his eye a searching look which appeared to peer into the very soul of the person whom he gazed upon. Perhaps, also, this impression was the more powerful, that he presented himself before him with a conscience that reproached him with the act he was endeavouring to accomplish, and of which he was about to render the captain, if not an accomplice, at all events the executioner. These two men, as though they felt a secret repulsion, the one towards the other, saluted each other with politeness, but with cold reserve.

"It is the Count d'Auray that I have the honor of addressing," said the old officer.

"And I Captain Paul, I believe," replied the young mousquetaire; they both bowed a second time.

"May I know to what fortunate chance I owe the honor," rejoined the captain, "of the visit which is now paid to me by the heir of one of the oldest and greatest families in Brittany?"

Emanuel bowed again by way of thanks for this compliment, and then, after hesitating for a moment as if he found it difficult to open the conversation, he observed: I am told, Captain Paul, that you are bound to the Gulf of Mexico?"

"And you have not been deceived, sir; I purpose sailing for New Orleans, calling on my way at Cayenne, and at the Havannah."

"This falls out very fortunately, captain, and you will not have to alter your course, in case you should be willing to undertake the execution of the order of which I am the bearer."

"You have an order to communicate to me, sir, and from whom?"

"From the Minister of Marine."

"An order addressed to me personally?" reiterated the captain, doubtingly.

"Not personally to you, sir; but to any captain of the royal navy, who may be about to sail for South America."

"Of what nature is it, count?"

"A state prisoner to be transported to Cayenne."

"And you have the order with you?"

"Here it is," replied Emanuel, taking it from his pocket, and presenting it to the captain.

He took the paper, and going near the cabin window, that he might avail himself of the last gleam of daylight, he read aloud:

"The Ministers of Marine and of the Colonies, orders any captain or lieutenant, commanding a government vessel, who may be about to sail for South America, or for the Gulf of Mexico, to take on board his ship and to land at Cayenne, the person named Lusignan, condemned to transportation for life. During the passage the convict shall take his meals in his own cabin, and shall, not be allowed to have any communication with the ship's company,"

"Is the order in due form?" asked Emanuel.

"Perfectly, sir," replied the captain.

"And are you disposed to execute it?"

"Am I not under the orders of the Minister of Marine?"

"The prisoner may then be sent to you?"

"Whenever you will; but it had better be this evening, or as soon as possible, as I do not expect to be long in these roads."

"I will take care that due diligence shall be used."

“Is this all that you have to say to me?”

“Nothing further, excepting to add my thanks.”

“Do not add anything, sir. The minister orders, and I obey, that’s all. It is a duty which I fulfil, and not a service that I am rendering.”

Upon these words, the captain and the count bowed to each other and separated, more coldly even than they had met.

When he reached the deck, Emanuel asked the officer of the watch for his friend who had accompanied him on board, but was informed he had been detained by Captain Paul to sup with him, and that being anxious to oblige the count, he had placed his boat as his disposal.

She was waiting alongside the ship, and the sailors were in readiness to accompany him. Emanuel had scarcely got into her when they rowed him away with a rapidity equal to that with which they had conducted him on board. But this time she proceeded in sorrowful silence, for the young lieutenant was no longer there to animate the count with his practical philosophy.

That same night the prisoner was conducted on board the *Indienne*, and the next morning at day-break the inquisitive inhabitants of the coast no longer discerned the frigate which had given rise to so many conjectures, and whose unexpected arrival, her remaining there without any apparent object, and her spontaneous departure, remained an inexplicable mystery to the inhabitants of Fort Louis.

CHAPTER III.

THE SEA FIGHT.

The gallant vessels side by side did lie,
Yard-arm and yard-arm, and the murd’rous
Belch’d forth their flame and shot, ‘till the white decks
    Ran like a sea with blood. Uncertain still
    The victory stood, ‘till Perry, waving
    His bright sword o’er his head, cried, “Follow me!”
    A hundred shouts responded to this call,
    .Then with one spring he bounded on the deck
    Of his determined fou. — OLD PLAY.

As the motives which had induced Captain Paul to visit the coast of Brittany had no relation with our history, excepting as far as regards the events which we have related, we shall leave our readers in the same state of uncertainty as were the inhabitants of Fort Louis; and although our vocation and our sympathies naturally incline us to terra-firma, we must follow our hero for a few days in his adventurous course upon the ocean. The weather was as beautiful as it generally is on the western coast of France, at the commencement of autumn. The *Indienne* sailed gaily on with as fair a wind as could blow for her. The ship’s crew, excepting those actually employed in manoeuvring the vessel, were availing themselves of the fine weather and occupied in their own matters, as caprice directed them, or were idly lounging about the ship, when all at once a voice which appeared to descend from the sky, called out, “Below, there!”

“Hullo, there!” replied the quarter-master, who was standing near the helm.

“Sail, ho!” cried the seaman who was on the lookout, at the head-mast.

“Sail, ho!” repeated the quarter-master. “Officer of the deck, be so good as to inform the captain there is a sail in sight,”

“A sail! a sail!” re-echoed the crew from different parts of the deck; for at that moment a wave having raised the vessel which appeared upon the horizon, hail for an instant rendered her visible to the eyes of the ship’s company.

“A sail!” exclaimed a young man of five-and-twenty, springing upon the quarter deck from the cabin stairs; “ask Mr Arthur what he thinks of her.”

“Mast head, there!” cried the lieutenant, using his speaking trumpet; the captain wants to know, Mr. Arthur, what you make of the strange sail.”

Arthur, the young midshipman, had gone aloft immediately upon hearing a sail announced. He replied, “She looks like a large square-rigged vessel, close hauled, and steering for us.”

“Yes, yes,” said the young man, to whom Walter had given the title of captain, “she has as good eyes as we have, and she has seen us. Very well, if she wishes for a little chat, she will find us ready to talk to her. Besides, our guns must be almost choked from having their mouths stopped so long.”

After some little time, the midshipman again hailed the officer on deck, and told him that the strange ship had just set her mainsail, and had altered her course a little, so as to cross their bow.

“Sir,” said the captain, addressing the lieutenant, “get ready to beat to quarters, we must prepare for this fellow; he looks rather suspicious.” And then calling out to the midshipman, “How does the ship seem to sail, Mr. Arthur? what do you think of her?”

“She seems to be a fast sailor, and is a man-of-war, I should think, by the squareness of her yards; and although I cannot see her flag, I would wager that she bears King George’s commission.”

“I should not wonder,” observed the captain to the first lieutenant, “and that she has orders to give chase to a certain frigate called the Indienne, and that her commander is promised good promotion should he succeed in capturing her. Ha! ha! now she is loosing her top gallant sails. The blood hound has scented us, and is decidedly about to give us chase. Set our top gallant sails, too, Mr. Walter, and let us keep our course without varying a point. We shall see whether they will dare to come athwart our hawse.”

The captain’s orders were instantly repeated by the lieutenant, and in a few minutes the ship which had been running under her top sails, felt the influence of her top gallant sails, heeled over under this new pressure and bounded along as if animated by the sight of an enemy, and dashing away the spray from either bow with eager impetuosity.

For some time there was hardly a word uttered on board. Every one appeared to wait anxiously the termination of this state of suspense, and we shall profit by this momentary quiet, to call the attention of our readers to the person of the officer to whom the lieutenant had given the title of captain.

It was no longer either the young and sceptical lieutenant whom we have seen accompanying the Count d'Auray on board the ship, nor the old sea-wolf with his stooping gait, and harsh and snappish answers, who had received him in the cabin. He was a handsome young man, from twenty to twenty-five years of age, as we have said before, who, having thrown off all disguise, appeared at length in his own person, and dressed in the fanciful uniform which he always wore when upon the wide ocean. It was a sort of great coat of black velvet, with gold shoulder knots and fastened with hooks and eyes of the same metal. Around his waist he wore a Turkish belt, in which was placed a pair of elegant duelling pistols, richly inlaid and ornamented, apparently more for show than defence. His pantaloons were of white kerseymere, with boots which reached nearly to his knees. Round his neck, a cravat of transparent India muslin, embroidered with flowers in their natural colors, was loosely tied; his hair, no longer disfigured by powder, and black as ebony, flowed about his cheeks, which were tanned by exposure to the sun; his eyes beamed with hope and animation. Near him, upon a gun, was placed a steel helmet which fastened by a curb chain under the chin. This was his battle dress, and the only defensive armour which he wore. Some deep indentations in his helmet proved that it had more than once saved the head which it protected from those severe wounds inflicted by those terrible cutlasses used by seamen when boarding. As to the ship's company, they wore the elegant though plain uniform of the French navy.

During this time, the vessel which had been described by the man at the mast head, and which had then appeared like a white speck upon the horizon, had become, little by little, a pyramid of sails and rigging. All eyes were fixed upon her, and although no order had been actually given, every one of the crew had taken the position which individually belonged to him, as though it had been determined that a combat should take place. There reigned then on board the Indienne that solemn and profound silence, which in a ship of war always precedes the decisive orders of the captain. Finally, the hull of the strange sail appeared rising out of the water, as her sails had successively done before. It was then clearly discernible that she was a larger ship than the Indienne, and that she carried thirty-six guns. She, however, showed no colors, and as her crew were carefully and completely concealed behind her bulwarks, it was impossible to ascertain, unless by some particular indications, to what nation she belonged. These two observations were made almost at the same moment by Captain Paul; the last, however, seemed to strike him the most forcibly.

“It appears,” said lie, addressing his lieutenant, “that we are going to have a scene of a masked ball. Order Arthur to bring us a few flags, and let us prove to this unknown, that the Indienne has several disguises at her disposal. And then, Mr. Walter, give orders that cutlasses and boarding pikes be distributed, for we can hardly expect, in these seas, to meet with any but enemy’s ships.”

The two orders were executed as soon as given. In an instant the young midshipman had brought on deck a dozen flags of different nations, and Lieutenant Walter, having had the arm chest opened, had boarding pikes piled in different positions throughout the ship, and had distributed cutlasses and axes to the ship’s company, he then returned to his place by the Captain’s side. Every man again resumed his post by instinct rather than by order, for they had not yet beat to quarters; so that the apparent confusion which had existed for a moment ceased at once, and the frigate became once more, as it were, silent and attentive.

However, the two ships following their converging directions, continued to approach each other. * When they were about the distance of three gun shots, “Mr. Walter,” said the Captain, “I think it is time we should begin to mystify our good friend here. Let us show him the old Scotch flag.”

The lieutenant gave a sign to the quartermaster, and the red Lion of Scotland, on a blue field, rose like a flame to the peak of the Indienne; but nothing on board the enemy’s ship gave evidence of their paying the slightest attention to this manœuvre.

“Yes, yes,” murmured the captain, “the three leopards of England have so well filed the teeth and pared the claws of the Scottish lion, that they pay no attention to him, believing that he is tamed because he is defenceless. Show him some other color, Mr. Walter, and perhaps we shall succeed in loosening his tongue.”

“What flag shall I hoist, captain?”

“Take the first one that comes; chance may perhaps favor us.”

This order was scarcely given, when the Scotch flag was hauled down, and that of Sardinia took its place. The ship still remained mute.

“Well, well,” said the captain, jestingly, it appears that His Majesty, King George, is on good terms with his brother of Cyprus and Jerusalem. Do not let us bring them to loggerheads by carrying our joke farther. Mr. Walter, let us show the American flag, and prove that it is really the right one, by firing an unshotted gun.”

The same manœuvre was repeated. The Sardinian flag was hauled down, and the stars of the United States rose slowly towards the sky, and were certified by firing a gun.

What the captain had foreseen then happened immediately on the display of this symbol of rebellion rising insolently in the air. The unknown ship immediately betrayed its incognita by hoisting the British flag. At the same moment a cloud of smoke was seen issuing from the side of the royalist ship, and before the report was heard, a cannon ball was seen tipping from wave to wave, and fell about a hundred yards short of the Indienne.

“Beat to quarters, Mr. Walter, for you see we have guessed rightly. Come, my boys,” cried he, to the crew, “hurrah for America! and death to England!”

This was answered by a general shout, and had not ceased, when they heard them beating to quarters on board the *Drake*, for that was the name of the English ship. The drums of the Indienne immediately replied, and every man ran to his post: — the gunners to their guns, the officers to their stations, and the sailors to their running rigging. As to the captain, he jumped upon the top of the companion, his speaking trumpet in his hand — the supreme symbol, the sceptre of nautical royalty, which the commander always wields in the hour of combat or during the raging of the tempest.

They now seem to have made an exchange of parts, for the English appeared impatient, and the Americans affected calmness. The ships were hardly within gun shot, when a long line of smoke was seen issuing from the side of the English vessel, and a report similar to loud thunder was heard, and the iron messengers sent to deal death among the rebels, having in their impetuosity, miscalculated the distance, fell harmless before reaching the sides of the frigate. The latter, however, as if refusing to reply to so premature an attack, continued to haul to the wind, as if to spare the enemy too long a course.

At this moment the captain turned, as if to give a last look round his ship, and his astonished gaze was attracted by the appearance of a new personage on the deck, who had selected this dangerous and exciting moment to make his entrance upon the scene.

It was a young man, somewhere about twenty-two or twenty-three years of age. His face was pale and mild; he was plainly, but elegantly dressed, and whom the captain had not before seen on board. He was leaning against the mizen-mast, his arms folded over his chest, and looking with melancholy indifference at the English vessel which was approaching them under a heavy press of canvas. The calmness at such a moment, and in a man who appeared a stranger to nautical combats, forcibly struck the captain. He then remembered the prisoner, whom the Count d'Auray had announced to him, and who had been brought on board during the last night he had passed at the anchorage of Port Louis.

"Who allowed you to come on deck, sir?" said he, softening as much as possible, the tone of his enquiry, so that it would have been difficult to ascertain whether this was addressed as a mere question, or as a reproach.

"No one, sir," replied the prisoner, in a soft and sorrowful voice; "but I had hoped that under the present circumstances, you would less severely observe the orders by which I became your prisoner."

"Have you forgotten that you were forbidden to hold any communication with the ship's company."

"I did not come here for the purpose of holding communication with the ship's company, sir; I came to see whether some friendly cannon ball would do me a good: turn."

"You may, but too soon, have your desire accomplished, if you remain where you are now standing; therefore, believe me, you had better remain below."

"Is this your advice, or an order, captain?"

"You have full liberty to construe it as you please."

"In that case," replied the young man, "I thank you — I will remain here."

At this instant, another loud report was heard, but the two ships had by this time neared each other so much, that they were within gun-shot, and the whole tempest of shot passed through the sails of the Indienne. Two splinters fell from the masts and the groans and stifled cries of some of the ship's company were heard. The captain, at that moment, had his eyes fixed upon the prisoner, above whose head, a cannon ball had passed within two feet, grazing the mizen mast, against which he was leaning; but notwithstanding this death-warnings he remained calm and unmoved, in the same attitude as if he had not felt the wing of the exterminating angel waft above his head. The captain knew how to appreciate courage — this incident was sufficient tor assure him of the undaunted bravery of the man who stood before him.

“Tis well, sir,” said he to him, “remain where you are, and when we come to boarding, if you should be tired of remaining with your arms crossed, take up a cutlass, or an; axe, and give us a helping hand. You will excuse me not? paying you more attention at this moment, for I have other things to do.”

“Fire!” cried he, in a voice of thunder, through his speaking trumpet, *“now,* give it her: fire!”

“Fire!” repeated the officers like an echo, at their different stations.

At the instant, the Indienne trembled from her keel, to her royal mast head, as she poured her broadside into the enemy — a cloud of smoke spread itself like a veil, along the starboard-side, which was soon carried to leeward. The captain, standing upon the companion, impatiently awaited its clearing off, that he might ascertain the effect which the broadside had produced upon the enemy’s vessel. When his gaze could penetrate through the smoke, he perceived that the enemy’s main top mast had fallen, and had, with its sails, encumbered the after-part of the Drakes deck, and that her other sails were cut to ribbons. Then putting his speaking trumpet to his mouth, he cried —

“Well done! my lads. Now watch her closely. They will be too busy in clearing away the wreck of their mast, to think of raking us — fire — as you can — and this time shave close!”

The crew hastened to obey this order- — the frigate veered round, and as the guns were brought to bear upon the enemy, they were discharged with terrible effect; and, as the captain had imagined, without any hindrance from the Drake. The Indienne once more trembled like a volcano, and, as a volcano, vomited forth her flame and smoke.

This time the gunners had followed the orders of their captain to the letter, and the broadside had been fired point blank, striking the hull and the lower masts. Both her masts were still standing; but on all sides the sails were hanging in tatters. It appeared that some more considerable damage had been done, which it was impossible to ascertain at that distance; for some time, the broadside was not returned; at length it was, and instead of raking the *Indienne*, it struck her in a diagonal direction. It was not the less terrible, for it swept off many a brave fellow from the deck; but by a chance which appeared positively magical, touched neither of the masts. Some of the running rigging was cut, but nothing that prevented her manœuvring as before. At

one glance, Paul ascertained that he had only lost some men. His heart bounded with joy. He once more placed the speaking-trumpet to his mouth.

"Larboard the helm," cried he, "and board her on the larboard side! Boarders, to your stations — be ready! Give her one more broadside."

At the first movement of the *Indienne,* the enemy at once perceived the intention, and endeavoured to neutralize it by ii similar movement, but at the instant of attempting to execute it, a dreadful crash was heard on board her, and the mainmast, which had been nearly cut through by the last discharge from the *Indienne,* trembled, for a few seconds like an uprooted tree, and fell forward, covering the deck with the mainsail and the rigging. Captain Paul at once comprehended what had delayed the return of the broadside.

"Now, she is ours, my lads!" cried he; "we have only to take her. One last broadside within pistol shot, and then we'll board her!"

The *Indienne* obeyed her helm, as does a well trained horse the bridle, and unopposed, advanced towards her enemy, for the latter had no steerage-way upon her, and her guns were consequently useless. The Drake was therefore at the mercy of her adversary, who by remaining at a distance and playing at long bowls, might have riddled her and sunk her, but disdaining this too easy victory, sent in a last broadside; and then, before seeing the effect it had produced, the frigate ran in upon her larboard quarter, and threw her grappling-irons on board. On the instant, the tops and forecastle of the *Indienne* blazed as with fireworks on a holiday, and flaming grenades were showered upon the deck of the Drake with the rapidity of hailstones.

"Courage, my lads, courage, lash the bowsprit to her quarter rails. Well done! now, to your two forecastle carronades — fire!"

All these orders were executed with magical celerity: the two ships were as securely lashed together as if by iron chains — the two carronades which had not been fired during the combat, thundered in there turn, and swept the enemy's deck with a cloud of grape shot, and then another cry was heard, uttered by the same stentorian voice — "Now, board her!!!"

And, adding example to precept, the captain of the *Indienne* threw aside his speaking trumpet, now of no longer use, placed his helmet on his head, fastening the clasp beneath his chin; placed the sabre which he usually wore in his belt between his teeth, and rushed upon the bowsprit to jump thence upon the deck of the enemy.

Although this movement followed the order he had given with as great rapidity as the thunder succeeds the lightning, he was only the second upon the English deck: he was preceded by the young prisoner with whom he had conversed, who had thrown aside his coat, and armed only with a hatchet, was the first to encounter death or victory.

“You are not conversant with the discipline of my ship,” said Paul, laughing; “it is my place to be the first to board a ship I am attacking. I forgive you this time, but take care it does not again happen.”

At the same instant, the seamen of the *Indienne* rushed from their own ship to the enemy’s, taking advantage of every point of contact, some from the bowsprit, others from the end of the yards, and nettings, and fell upon the deck like ripe fruit falling from a tree when shaken by the wind. Then the English, who had retreated to their forecastle, unmasked a carronade which they had had time to turn upon their enemy. A volley of fire and iron was vomited forth on the assailants. One fourth of the crew of the *Indienne* fell killed or mutilated on the enemy’s deck, in the midst of cries and maledictions. But above the cries and blasphemous oaths, a voice resounded, crying:

“Forward — all of you!”

Then ensued a scene of appalling confusion — a Digitized by combat hand to hand — a general duel. To the roar of cannon, to the report of musketry, to the explosion of hand grenades, had succeeded the struggle with cold steel, less noisy but more sure, above all with seamen, who have retained for their sole use this inheritance from the giants, proscribed for more than two centuries on the field of battle. It was with hatchets that they cleaved each other’s sculls; it was with cutlasses they wounded each other’s breasts; it was with boarding-pikes that they nailed each other to the deck and masts. From time to time, in the midst of this mute carnage, a stray pistol shot was heard, but isolated, and as if ashamed of taking part in such a butchery. It lasted nearly a quarter of an hour, and amidst a confusion it would be impossible to describe. And then the British flag was lowered, and the crew of the Drake being driven below, there remained on deck only the conquerors, the wounded and the dead; in the midst of whom was the captain of the *Indienne*, surrounded by his crew, with his foot upon the breast of the captain of the enemy’s ship, having on his right his first lieutenant, Walter, and on his left his young prisoner, whose shirt, steeped in blood, witnessed the share he had in the victory.

“Now, all is over,” said Paul, stretching out his hand; “and he who strikes another blow will have to deal with me.”

Then holding out his hand to his young prisoner, “Sir,” said he, “you will relate to me, to-night, how it was that you were made my prisoner, will you not? For there must be some cowardly machination in this affair. The infamous only are transported to Cayenne, and you are too brave to be infamous’’

CHAPTER IV.

THE MARCHIONESS.

She was a woman
Of virtue most austere; noble in birth,
And of most royal presence — but sad thoughts
Seemed to possess her wholly — her children, even,
Seldom approached her, and when they did,
No soft affection, motherly caress,
Was e'er accorded to them — stern and cold,
She looked a moving statue. — OLD PLAY

About six months after the occurrence of the events we have just related, and in the early part of the spring of 1780, a post chaise, whose wheels and panels covered with mud and dust, clearly certified that it had performed a long journey, was dragging slowly along, although two powerful horses were harnessed to it, upon the road between Vanness and Àuray. The traveller it contained, and who was roughly jolted in traversing the cross-roads, was our former acquaintance, Count Emanuel, whom we saw open the scene upon the jetty of Fort Louis. He was coming from Paris with all haste, and proceeding to his ancient family mansion, with regard to which it is now necessary to give some more precise and circumstantial details.

Count Emanuel d'Auray was descended from one of the oldest families in Brittany — one of his ancestors had followed Saint Louis to the Holy Land, and from that time the name, of which he was the last inheritor, had been constantly blended with the history of our monarchy, whether in its victories or defeats. His father, the Marquis of d'Auray, Chevalier of the order of St. Louis, Commander of the order of St. Michael, and Grand Cross of the order of the Holy Ghost, enjoyed at the Court of Louis XV., in which he filled the post of high steward, that high distinction to which his birth, his fortune and his personal merit, truly entitled him. His influence there had been increased by his marriage with Mademoiselle de Sable, who was his equal in every thing that regarded family or credit at court: so that a brilliant future was opened to the ambition of the young people, when, after being married five years, a report was suddenly spread about the court, that the Marquis d’Auray had become insane during a journey he had made to his estates. This report was for a long time disbelieved. At length the winter arrived, and neither the marquis nor his wife made their appearance at Versailles, His place was kept open for him another year, for the king, still hoping he would regain his reason, refused to appoint a successor to it; but a second winter passed on, and even the marchioness did not return to pay her court to the queen. In France people are soon forgotten; absence is a wearying malady, to which even the greatest names sooner or later must succumb. The shroud of indifference was gradually spread over this family, immured in their old chateau, as in a tomb, and whose voices were not heard either soliciting or complaining. Genealogists alone had duly enregistered the birth of a son and daughter, the only fruits of this union; the d’Aurays, therefore, continued to figure among the names of the French nobility; but not having mixed themselves up for more than twenty years either in court intrigues or in political affairs, not having sided either with a Pampadour or a Du Barry, not having distinguished themselves in the victories of the Maréchal de Broorlie, or in the defeats of the Count Clermont — in short, having neither sound nor echo, they had been completely forgotten.

However, the ancient name of the lords of d’Auray had been twice pronounced at court, but without producing any impression. The first time on the occasion of the young Count Emanuel’s being admitted in 1769, as one of the pages of Louis XV., and the second, when after having served his time as page, he entered the company of mousquetaires of the young King Louis XVI. He had, during this time, become acquainted with the Baron de Lectoure, a distant relation of M. do Maurepas, who was favorably disposed towards him, and who enjoyed a considerable degree of influence with that minister. Emanuel had been presented to his old courtier, who having been informed that the Count d’Auray had a sister, one day let fall a few words upon the possibility of an union between the two families. Emanuel, young and full of ambition, wearied with struggling beneath the veil which had obscured his family name, saw in this marriage a means of regaining the position which his father had occupied at court under the late king, and had eagerly caught at the first overtures for this alliance. M. de Lectoure, on his side, under the pretext of uniting himself still closer by the bands of brotherhood, to his young friend, had urged his suit with an eagerness which was so much the more flattering to Emanuel, that the man who demanded the hand of his sister had never seen her. The Marchioness d'Auray had listened the more readily to this proposal, as it opened to her son the road to royal favor, and the marriage was agreed upon, if not between the two young people, at all events between the families. Emanuel, who preceded M. de Lectoure three or four days only, had hastened into the country to inform his mother that everything had been arranged according to her desire. As to Marguerite, the intended wife, they contented themselves with informing her of the resolution they had taken without thinking it necessary to ask her consent to it, in about the same way that a criminal is informed of the sentence which condemns him to the scaffold.

It was, therefore, thus cradling himself in the brilliant dreams of future exalted favor, and bouying himself "p with the most elevated projects of ambition, that young Count Emanuel re-entered the gloomy castle of his family, whose feudal towers, black walls, and court yards, overgrown with grass, formed so striking a contrast with the golden hopes that agitated him. The castle was a league and a half distant from any other dwelling. The principal facade overlooked that part of the ocean, which being so constantly swept by storms, has obtained the name of "the Wild Sea." The other looked toward an immense park, which, being for twenty years abandoned and uncultivated, had become a complete forest. As to the apartments, they had remained constantly closed, with the exception of those inhabited by the family. The furniture, which had been renewed during the reign of Louis XIV., had, thanks to the care of a numerous household, retained a rich and aristocratic appearance, which the more modern part of it had begun to lose, and which, although more elegant, was less magnificent. It had been supplied from the workshops of Boule, the appointed upholsterer of the court.

It was into one of these rooms, with deep mouldings, sculptured chimney pieces, and ceiling painted in fresco; that the Count Emanuel was ushered on alighting from his carriage. He was in such haste to communicate to his mother the happy news of which he was the bearer,. that without taking the time to change his dress, he threw his hat, his gloves, and travelling pistols on the table, and ordered an old servant to inform the marchioness of his arrival, and to ask her permission to present himself, saying that he would await it in that room; for such in this old family was the respect paid to parents, that the son, after an absence of five months, did not dare to present himself to his mother, without in the first place consulting her desires upon the subject. As to the Marquis d'Auray, his children could not remember having seen him more than two or three times, and then it was by stealth: for his insanity was of a

nature, it was said, that certain objects irritated, and they had been always kept from him with the greatest precaution. The marchioness alone, a model of conjugal virtue, remained always with him, fulfilling towards the poor lunatic not only the duties of a wife, but also those of a servant. Consequently, her name was revered in the surrounding villages, as that of a saint, whose devotedness on earth has gained a place in heaven.

In a few moments the old servant returned, and announced that the marchioness d'Auray preferred coming down to him, and begged that the count would wait for her in the room in which he then was. Almost immediately afterward the door of the room again opened, and Emanuel's mother entered it. She was about forty or forty-five years of age, tall and pale, but still handsome, whose calm, austere and melancholy features had a singular appearance of haughtiness, energy, and command. She was in costume of a widow as adopted in 1760, for since the time that her husband had lost his reason, she had never laid aside her mourning garments. Her long black gown gave to her movements, cold and slow as those of a shadow, a solemn appearance, which shed around this extraordinary woman a feeling of awe, which even filial affection had never been able to surmount. Therefore, on seeing her, Emanuel started as at the sight of an unexpected apparition, and instantly rising, he advanced three steps toward her, respectfully went down upon one knee, and kissed the hand she presented to him.

"Rise, sir," said the marchioness. "I am happy to see you again." And she pronounced these words with as little emotion as if her son, who had been absent five months, had left her but the day before. Emanuel obeyed, conducted his mother to a large arm chair, in which she seated herself, and he remained standing before her.

"I received your letter, count," she said, "and I congratulate you on your skill. You appear to me born for diplomacy, and even more so than for military life. You ought to request the Baron de Lectoure to obtain an embassy for you, rather than a regiment."

"Lectoure is ready to solicit any thing we may desire, madam; and what is more, he will obtain any thing we may solicit, so great is his power with

M. Maurepas, and so great is his love for my sister."

"In love with a woman he has never seen?"

"Lectoure is a gentleman, madam, and the portrait I have drawn of Marguerite, and perhaps the information he has received as to our fortune, has inspired him with the most earnest desire to become your son and to call himself my brother. And therefore he has requested that all the preliminary ceremonies may be gone through in his absence. You have obtained the publication of the bans, madam?"

"Yes."

"The day after to-morrow, then, the marriage contract can be signed."

"With the help of God, all will be ready."

"Thanks, madam."

"But tell me," continued the marchioness, leaning on the arm of her chair, and bending toward Emanuel, "has he not questioned you regarding that young man, for whom he obtained from the minister an order of deportation?"

"By no means, my mother, These are services which are asked without entering into any explanation, and which are granted in implicit confidence. It is well understood between people who know the world, that they are to be forgotten as soon as rendered."

"Then he knows nothing?"

"No — but did he know all--"

"Well?"

"Well, madam, I believe he is so much of a philosopher, that the discovery would not in any way influence his determination."

"I thought as much; he is a ruined spendthrift," replied the marchioness, with an indescribable expression of contempt, and as if speaking to herself.

"But supposing it should be so," said Emanuel anxiously, "your resolution would be still unchanged, I hope."

"Are we not rich enough to repair his fortune if ho can restore our former influence?"

"Then, there is only my sister--"

"Do you doubt that she will obey me, when I inform her of my will?"

"Can you believe, then, that she has forgotten Lusignan?"

"For seven months, at least, she has not dared to remember him in my presence."

Reflect, my mother, that this marriage is the only means by which our family can be restored to influence; for there is one thing I must not conceal from you. My father has been ill for fifteen years, and having been absent from court so long, was completely forgotten by the old king at his death, and by the young king on his accession to the throne. Your virtuous attention to the marquis, has not permitted you to leave him, even for a moment, since the hour in which he was deprived of reason; your virtues, madam, are of that nature which God sees, and recompenses, but of which the world remains ignorant; and while you are fulfilling in this old forgotten castle in Brittany, the holy and consolatory mission, which you call a duty, your former friends disappear, they die, or they forget you (this is a painful truth to people, who like us, can count six hundred years of illustrious nobility); for when I reappeared at court, our name, the name of the family d'Auray, was hardly known to their majesties, but as an historical recollection."

"Yes; I know full well that kings have but short memories," murmured the marchioness; but instantly, and as if reproaching herself for such a blasphemy, she rejoined, "I hope that the blessing of God may always attend their majesties and France."

"And what can in any way affect their happiness?" replied Emanuel, with that perfect confidence in the future, which in those days was the distinctive, characteristic of the hair-brained and unthinking nobility. "Louis XVI. is young and good; Marie Antoinette young and lovely; both of them beloved by a brave and loyal people. Fate has placed them, Heaven be praised, beyond the reach of every evil."

"No one, my son," replied the marchioness, mournfully shaking her head, "believe me, is placed beyond the reach of human woes and human frailty. No heart, however confidently its owner may believe that he can master it, firm as it may be, is proof against the passions; and no head, were it even a crowned one, but may be blanched in a single night. The people, you say, are brave and loyal." The marchioness arose and slowly advanced to the window, and with a solemn gesture pointing to the ocean. "Observe that sea; it is now calm and peaceful; and yet tomorrow, this night, in an hour perhaps, the breath of the tempest may bear us the cries of distress of unhappy beings it is about to engulph. Although I am separated from the world, strange reports sometimes reach my ears, borne as it were by invisible and prophetic spirits. Does there not exist a sect of philosophers which has led away men of high name, by the errors which it propagates? Do they not speak of a whole world, which is detaching itself from the mother country, whose children refuse to acknowledge their father? Is there not a people who style themselves a nation? Have I not heard it said that men of high birth have crossed the ocean, to offer to rebels, swords which their ancestors never drew but at the call of their legitimate sovereigns? and have I not been told, moreover, or is it but the dream of my solitude, that King Louis XVI. and the Queen, Marie Antoinette herself, forgetting that sovereigns are a family of brothers, have authorised these armed emigrations, and have given letters of marque to I know not what foreign pirate?”

“All this is true,” said Emanuel, much astonished, “May God, then, watch over their majesties, the King and Queen of France!” rejoined the marchioness as she slowly retired from the room, leaving Emanuel so astounded at these painful forebodings, that he saw her withdraw without uttering a word or even making a gesture to retain her.

Emanuel remained for some time pensive and serious, but soon his buoyant character surmounted these gloomy presages, and as if thinking to change his ideas by changing the view he had been gazing at, he left the window which opened towards the sea, and crossed the room to another, whence he could discern the whole of the plain which extends itself between d’Auray and Vannes. He had been there but a few minutes, when he perceived two persons on horseback, following the same road he had just travelled over, and who appeared to be approaching the castle. As they drew nearer he could distinguish that they were a gentleman and his servant. the first, dressed in the costume of young men of fashion of that clay, that is to say, in a short green riding coat with gold frogs, stocking-knit breeches, and top-boots, wearing a round hat with a broad brim, and his hair tied with a large bow of ribbons. He was mounted on an English horse of rare beauty and great value, which he managed with a grace that proved he had made equestrian exercises a profound study. He was followed at a short distance by a servant, whose aristocratic livery was in perfect harmony with the lordly air of the person whom he served. Emanuel imagined for a moment on seeing them proceed so directly towards the castle, that it was the Baron de Lectoure, who, having hastened his departure from Paris, intended to surprise him; but he soon found that he was mistaken; and although it appeared to him that it was not the first time he had seen the horseman, he could not recollect where or under what circumstances he had met him. While he was racking his memory to discover the event in his life with which this vague remembrance was connected, the strangers had disappeared behind an angle of the castle wall. Five minutes afterwards Emanuel heard the sound of their horses' feet in the court yard, and, almost immediately the door was opened; a servant announced, "*Mr. Paid!*"

CHAPTER V.

DEVOTED LOVE.

> Woman's love
> Once given, may break the heart that holds — but never
> Melts into air save with her latest sigh.
> BULWER. — *The Sea Captain.*

THE name, as well as the appearance of the person thus announced, awakened in their turn in the mind of Emanuel a confused recollection of which he could not affix either date or event. The person, preceded by the servant, entered the room by a door opposite the one through which the marchioness had retired. Although the moment was ill-timed for a visit, and though the young count, pre-occupied by his projects for the future, would have preferred meditating upon and ripening them, he was compelled, by the rules of etiquette, so severe in those days between well-bred people, to receive the visitor with courtesy and politeness. The deportment of the latter bespoke the man of distinction. After the usual salutations, Emanuel, by a gesture, invited the stranger to be seated, who bowed and took a chair, and then the conversation commenced with some common-place polite observation, "I am delighted to meet you, count," said the stranger.

"Chance has favored me, sir," replied Emanuel; an hour sooner you would not have found me here: I have just arrived from Paris."

"I am aware of that, count, for we have been travelling the same road. I set out an hour after you, and all along the road I heard of you, by means of the postillions who had the honor of driving you."

"May I be bold enough to ask," said Emanuel, in a tone which began to evince a certain degree of dissatisfaction, "to what circumstance I owe the interest you appear to evince concerning me."

This interest is perfectly natural between old acquaintance, and perhaps I might have reason to complain that it does not appear to be reciprocal."

"In fact, sir, it does appear to me," replied Emanuel, "that I have met you somewhere; but my recollection serves me but confusedly; will you be kind enough to assist it?”

“If what you say be the case, count, your memory must indeed be rather fugitive, for within the last six months, on three separate occasions, I have the honor of exchanging compliments with you,”

“Even should I expose myself to further reproach, I am compelled to say that I still remain in the same state of uncertainty with regard to your person. Pray, therefore, have the goodness to fix my memory, by aid of more precise dates, on some event, and remind me under what circumstances I had the honor of meeting you for the first time.”

“The first time, count? it was on the jetty of Port Louis. You desired to obtain some information with regard to a certain frigate, which I was so fortunate as to be able to furnish you. I believe, even, that I accompanied you on board. Upon that occasion I wore the uniform of a lieutenant in the royal navy, and you that of a mousquetaire.”

“I now well recollect it, sir, and I was obliged to leave the vessel without offering the thanks I owed you.”

“You are mistaken, count; I received those thanks during our second interview.”

“And where did that take place?”

“On board the very vessel to which I had conducted you — in the cabin. I then wore the uniform of the captain of the ship: blue coat, red waistcoat and breeches, with grey stockings, a three-cornered hat, and curled hair. Only the captain appeared to you some thirty years older than the lieutenant, and it was not without motive that I had made myself appear so much older, for you would perhaps, not have chosen to confide to a young man a secret of such importance as you then communicated to me.”

“What you now say is incredible, sir; and yet something tells me that it was really so. Yes, yes; I now remember that in the shade in which you remained half concealed, I saw eyes sparkling similar to yours. I have not forgotten them; but this was only the time before the last, you say, that I had the honor of seeing you. Continue, sir, I beg, to assist my memory, for I cannot recollect our third interview.”

“The last, count, was only a week since, at Paris — at a fencing match, at Saint-George’s, in the rue Chantereein. You remember, do you not, an English gentleman, with his hair so red that his powder could scarcely conceal its brilliant color — a scarlet coat, and tightly fitting pantaloons. I even had the honor of trying a bout with you, and I was fortunate enough to hit you three times, while, on the contrary, you were not lucky enough to touch me once. On that occasion I called myself Jones."

"It is most singular — it was certainly the same look, but it could not be the same man."

"The will of God has directed that the look should be the only thing which cannot be disguised, and this is why he has thrown into the look a spark of his own light. Well, then, the lieutenant, the captain, the Englishman, were one and the same person."

"At the present moment, sir, what are you if you please? For, with a man who can so perfectly disguise himself, that question you must admit, is not altogether unnecessary."

"At the present moment, count, as you see, I have no motive for concealment, and, therefore, I have come to you in the simple costume of the young nobility, when they visit each other as neighbors in the country. I am whatever you may please to consider me; French, English, Spanish, or even an American. In which of these languages would you wish our conversation to be continued?"

"Although some of these languages may be as familiar to me as they are to you, sir, I prefer the French language; it is that of a plain and concise explanations."

"Be it so," replied Paul, with an expression of profound melancholy; "the French is also the language I prefer; I first saw the day upon French ground, for the sun of France was that which gladdened my eyes; and although I have often seen more fertile climes, and a more brilliant sun, there has never been for me but one country and one sun, the sun and the country of France!"

Tour national enthusiasm," said Emanuel, interrupting him ironically, "causes you to forget the motive to which I am indebted for the honor of this visit."

"You are right, sir, and I will return to it. It was, then, about six months ago, while walking on the jetty of Port Louis, you saw in the outer roads a fine sharp frigate, with tall masts and square yards, and you said to yourself: 'the captain of that ship must have some motive known only to himself, for carrying so much canvas, on masts so slight--and from that sprung to your mind that he must be some buccaneer, a pirate, a corsair"--

"And was I mistaken?"

“I thought I had already expressed to you, count, replied Paul, with a slight tone of irony, “my admiration of the perspicacity with which, at the first glance, you sound the depths of men and circumstances” — - “A truce to compliments, if you please, sir, and let us to facts.”

“It was under this persuasion that you caused yourself to be conducted on board the frigate, by a certain devoted love.

lieutenant, and that you found a certain captain in the cabin. You were the bearer of a letter from the Minister of Marine, ordering any officer, upon your requisition, and whose ship was under the French flag and bound for the Gulf of Mexico, to conduct to Cayenne a person named Lusignan, guilty of a crime against the state.”

“That is true.”

“I obeyed that order, for I was then ignorant that this great culprit, thus transported, had committed no other crime than that of being the lover of your sister.”

“Sir,” cried Emanuel, starting up.

“These are very fine pistols, count,” carelessly continued Paul, playing with the weapons which the Count d’Auray had placed upon the table, on alighting from his carriage.

“And they are ready loaded,” said Emanuel, in a tone which was not to be mistaken.

“Are they so?” returned Paul, with affected indifference.”

“That is a matter of which you can assure yourself, if you will take a turn in the park with me.”

“There is no necessity for going out to do that,” replied Paul, without pretending to understand Emanuel’s proposal in the sense which he meant to give to it; “here is a mark which is well placed, and at a proper distance.”

Saying these words, the captain cocked the pistol, and pointed it through the open window towards the top of a small tree. A goldfinch was rocking himself on the highest branch, singing forth his shrill and joyful notes. Paul fired, and the poor bird, cut in two, fell at the foot of the tree. Paul coolly replaced the pistol on the table.

“You were perfectly right, count,” said he, “they are excellent weapons, and I advise you not to part with them.”

“You have just given me an extraordinary proof of it,” replied Emanuel; “and I feel bound to acknowledge that you have a steady hand.”

“There is nothing extraordinary in that,” rejoined Paul, in that melancholy tone which was peculiar to him. “During those long days, when not a breath passes over that mirror of the Supreme Being, which is called the ocean, we seamen are compelled to seek for amusements to which you landsmen are daily accustomed. Then we try our skill upon the sea-gulls, which hover over the crest of a wave; or the fish-hawks, which dart down upon the imprudent tenant of the deep that rise to its surface; or, again, upon the swallows which, fatigued with a long flight, alight upon the royal mast-head or on the yards or rigging. It is thus, count, that we acquire some dexterity in exercises which may appear so incompatible with our profession.”

“Go on, sir; and if it be possible, let us return to the subject of our conversation.”

“He was a handsome, brave young man, this Lusignan; he related his whole history to me. That being the son of an old friend of your father’s, who had died poor, he had been adopted by him some two years before the unknown accident occurred which deprived him of his reason. That having been brought up with you, he had inspired you with hatred — your sister with affection. He told me that, during the long years they passed together in the same solitude, they never perceived the isolation from the world in which they lived, excepting when they were absent from each other. He recounted to me all the details of their youthful love, and how Marguerite had one day said to him, in the words of the tender maiden of Verona —

“I will be thine, or else I’ll be the tombs.”

“She has but too truly kept her word.”

“Yes — has she not? And you virtuous people call that shame and dishonour, when a poor child, lost through her own innocence, is carried away by love. Your mother, whose duties estranged her from her daughter, and perpetually confined her to your father’s room — (for I know the virtues of your mother, sir, as well as I know your sister’s weakness: she is an austere woman, more severe than one of God’s creatures ought to be, whose only advantage over others is, that of never having fallen) — your mother, I say, one night heard some stifled cries; she entered your sister’s chamber, walked pale and silently up to her bed, and coldly snatched from her arms a child which had just been born, and left the room without addressing even a reproach to her daughter, but only paler and more silent than when she entered it. As to poor Marguerite, she did not utter even a cry

— she made no complaint. She had fainted away immediately on perceiving her mother. Was it so, sir? Have I been rightly informed, and is the whole of this dreadful story true?"

"You seem to be acquainted with every detail of it!" exclaimed Emanuel, with amazement.

"It is because the whole of these details are given in these letters signed by your sister," replied Paul, opening a pocket-book, "and which Lusignan, at the time he was about to be thrown amid robbers and assassins, through your instrumentality, confided to me, that I might restore them to her who had written them."

"Give them to me, then," said Emanuel, stretching forth his hand towards the pocket-book," and they shall be faithfully delivered to her who has had the imprudence"--

"To complain to the only person who loved her in this world — is it not so?" said Paul, withdrawing the letters and the pocket-book. "Imprudent daughter, whose own mother snatched the child from her heart, and who poured her bitter tears into the bosom of the father of her child! Imprudent sister, who, not finding any protection from this tyranny in her brother, has compromised his noble name by signing with the

name he bears, letters, which, in the stupid and prejudiced eye of the world, may — how is it you term this in your noble class — dishonour her family, is it not?"

Then," cried Emanuel, reddening with impatience, "since you are aware of the terrible tendency of these papers, fulfil the mission which you have been charged, by delivering them either to me, to my mother, or my sister."

"This was my intention when I landed at Lorient; but about ten or twelve days ago, on entering a church--"

"A church!"

"Yes, sir."

"And for what purpose?"

"To pray there."

"Ah! Captain Paul believes in God, then!"

"Did I not "believe in him, whom should I invoke during the raging of the tempest?"

"And in this church, then?"

"In that church, sir, I heard a priest announce the approaching marriage of the noble Marguerite d'Auray with the very high and very potent Baron de

Lectoure. I immediately inquired for you, and was informed you were at Paris, where I was myself compelled to go to give an account of my mission to the king."

"To the king!"

"Yes, sir, to the king — Louis XVI.; to his majesty,, in person. I immediately set out, intending to return here as soon as you did. I met you in Saint George's rooms, and was informed of your approaching departure. I arranged mine in consequence, in order that we might arrive here at about the same time, and here I am, sir, with a very different resolution to that I had formed before landing in Brittany."

"And what is this new determination? Let me hear it, for we must come to some conclusion."

"Well, then, I think that as all the world, and even his mother, seem to have forgotten the poor orphan, it is highly necessary that I should remember it. In the position in which you are placed, sir, and with the disposition you have evinced of becoming allied to the Baron de Lectoure (who in your view, is the only person who can assist the realization of your ambitious projects), these letters are well worth a hundred thousand francs, are they not? and will make but a very trifling breach in the income of two hundred thousand francs which your estates afford you."

"But who will prove to me that this hundred thousand francs."

"You are right, sir, and therefore it will be in exchange for a contract for an annuity upon the young Hector de Lusignan, that I will deliver up these letters."

"Is that all, sir?"

"I will also ask, that the child be confided to me, and I will have him brought up, thanks to his little fortune, far from the mother who has forgotten him, and far from his father whom you caused to be banished."

"'Tis well, sir; had I known that it was for so small a sum, and so trifling an interest that you had come, I should not have experienced so much anxiety. You will, however, permit me to speak to my mother on the subject."

"Monsieur le Comte," said a servant, opening the door.

"I am not at home to any one. Leave the room," replied Emanuel, impatiently.

"It is your sister, sir, who wishes to see you."

"Tell her to come by and by."

“She desires to speak to you this instant.”

“Do not put yourself out of the way on my account,” said Paul.

“But my sister must not see you, sir, — you comprehend it is important that she should not see you.”

“As you please; but as it is important, also, that I should not leave the castle before concluding the affair which brought me here, permit me to go into this side room.”

“That will do,” said Emanuel, himself opening the do or; “but be quick, I beg of you.”

Paul went into the small room, and Emanuel hastily closed the door upon him, which was hardly done when Marguerite appeared.

CHAPTER VI.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

Look kindly on them; I cannot bear
Severity;
My heart’s so tender, should you charge me rough,
I should but weep and answer you with sobbing;
    But use me gently, like a loving brother,
    And search through all the secrets of my soul. — Or WAY.

MARGUERITE D’AURAY, whose history the reader has become acquainted with, from the conversation between Captain Paul and Emanuel, was one of those delicate, pale beauties, who bear impressed upon their features the characteristic stamp of high birth. At the first glance, from the soft flexibility of her form, the whiteness of her skin, the shape of her hands and tapering fingers, with their thin, rosy and transparent nails, could be discerned that she was descended from an ancient race. It was evident that her feet, so small that both of them could have been placed in the footmark of most women, had never walked excepting on carpeted saloons or on the flowery turf of a park. There was in her movements, graceful as they were, a certain degree of haughtiness and pride, the attribute of all her family; in fine, she conveyed the impression that her soul, capable of making any sacrifice she had resolved upon, was very likely to rebel against tyranny; that devotedness was an instinctive virtue of her heart, while obedience, in her view, was only an educational duty, so that the tempest wind which blew upon her, might make her bend down before it as a lily, but not as a reed.

And yet, when she appeared at the door, her features depicted such complete discouragement, her eyes had retained the traces of such burning tears, her whole frame seemed weighed down by such an overwhelming despair, that Emanuel saw at once, that she must have summoned all her strength to assume an appearance of calmness. On seeing him, she made a violent effort, and it was with a certain degree of nervous firmness that she approached the arm chair on which he was sitting. And then, seeing that the features of her brother retained the expression of impatience, which they had assumed on being interrupted, she paused, and these two children of the same mother, looked at each other as strangers, the one with the eyes of ambition, the other with those of fear. By degrees, Marguerite resumed her courage.

"You have come at last, Emanuel! I was awaiting your return as the blind await the light, and yet from the manner in which you look upon your sister, it is easy to perceive that she was wrong in placing her hopes in you."

"If my sister has become, as she always ought to have been," replied Emanuel, "that is to say, a submissive and respectful daughter, she will have understood what her rank and her position demand of her; she will have forgotten past events as things which never should have happened, and which consequently she ought not to remember, and she will have prepared herself for the new destiny which awaits her. If it is in this disposition that she now comes before me, my arms are open to receive her, and my sister is still my sister."

"Listen attentively to what I am about to say," said Marguerite, "and above all, consider it as a justification of myself, and not intended as a reproach to others. If my mother — and God forbid that I should accuse her, for a holy duty keeps her apart from us — if my mother had been, I was about to say, toward me as other mothers are towards their daughters, I should constantly have opened my heart to her as a book; at the first word traced upon it by any stranger hand, she would have warned me of my danger and I should have avoided it. Had I been educated in the world instead of being brought up like a poor wild flower beneath the shade of this old castle, I should have learned from infancy the value of the rank and position which you speak of to-day, and I should, perhaps, not have infringed the decorum they prescribe, or the duties they impose. In short, had I been tutored amidst women of the world, with their sparkling wit and frivolous hearts, whom I have so often heard you praise, but whom I never knew, had I been guilty of some faults from levity, which love has caused me to commit — yes, I can well understand, I might then have forgotten the past, have sown upon the surface new recollections as flowers are planted upon tombs; and then, forgetting the place where they had grown, have formed of them a bouquet for a ball, or a bridal wreath. But unfortunately it is not so, Emanuel. I was told to beware, when it was too late to avoid the danger. They spoke to me of my rank and position in society, when I had already forfeited them, and I am now called upon to look forward to joy in the future, when my heart is drowned in the tears and misery of the past.”

“And the conclusion of all this;” bitterly rejoined Emanuel.

“The conclusion depends on you alone, Emanuel; it is in your power to render it, if not happy, at all events becoming. I cannot have recourse to my father. Alas! I know not even if he could recognise his daughter. I have no hope in my mother; her glance freezes me, her words are death to me. You alone, Emanuel, were left to me, to whom I could say, brother: you are now the head of the family; it is to you alone that we are answerable for our honor. I have fallen from ignorance, and I have been punished for my fault as if it had been a wilful crime.”

“Well! well!” murmured Emanuel impatiently, “what is it that you ask?”

“Brother, I demand, since a union with the only being I could have loved, is said to be impossible, I demand that my punishment be regulated according to my strength to bear it. My mother — may heaven pardon her! — tore my child from me as if she had never herself been a mother, and my child will be brought up far from me, neglected, and in obscurity. You, Emanuel, removed the father, as my mother did the child, and you were more cruel to him than the case required; I will not say as man to man, but even as a judge towards a guilty person. As to myself, you have both united to impose upon me a martyrdom more painful still. Well, then, Emanuel, I demand in the name of our childhood spent in the same cradle, of our youth passed under the same roof, in the name of the tender appellations of brother and sister, which nature bestowed upon us — I demand that a convent be opened to me, and that its gates should close upon me for ever. And in that convent, I swear to you, Emanuel, that every day upon my knees, before God, my forehead bent down to the stone-pavement, weighed down by my fault, I will entreat the Lord as a recompense for all my sufferings, to restore my father to reason, my mother to happiness, and to pour on you, Emanuel, honor, and glory and fortune. I swear to you, I will do this.”

“Yes; and the world will say that I had a sister whom I sacrificed to my fortune, whose property I inherited while she still lived! Why this is sheer madness!”

"Listen to me, Emanuel," rejoined Marguerite, supporting herself on the back of a chair, near which she was standing.

"Well?" replied Emanuel.

"When you have pledged your word, you keep it, do you not?"

"I am a gentleman."

"Well, then! look at this bracelet."

"I see it — perfectly — what then?"

"It is fastened by a key — the key which opens it is attached to a ring, and with that ring, I pledged my word that I would not be released from a promise I had made, until the ring should be brought back and returned to me."

"And he who has the key of it?"

"Thanks to you, and to my mother, Emanuel, he is too far from us to ask it of him. He is at Cayenne."

"Before you are married two months," replied Emanuel, with an ironical smile, "that bracelet will be so irksome to you, that you will be the first to get rid of it."

"I thought that I had told *fou* it is locked upon my arm."

"You know what people do when they have lost the key and cannot get into their house — they send for a locksmith."

"Well! in my case, Emanuel," replied Marguerite, raising her voice, and extending her arm with a solemn gesture, "they must send for the executioner then, for this hand shall be cut off before I give it to another."

"Silence! silence!" cried Emanuel, rising hastily, and looking anxiously towards the door of the inner room.

"And now I have said all I had to say," rejoined Marguerite: "my only hope was in you, Emanuel; for although you cannot comprehend any deep-seated feeling, you are not cruel. I came to you in tears, look at me and you will see that it is true — I came to you to say, 'Brother, this marriage is the misfortune, is the misery of my life — I would prefer a convent — I would prefer death to it — and you have not listened to me, or if you have listened, you have not understood me. Well, then, I will address myself to this man — I will appeal to his honor, to his delicacy; if that should not he sufficient, I will tell him all; my love for another, my weakness, my fault, my crime! I will tell him that I have a child; that although he was torn from me, although I have never since seen him, although I am ignorant of his abode, still my child exists. A child cannot die, without his death striking some chord within its mother’s heart. In short I will tell him, should it be necessary, that I still love another, that I cannot love him, and that I never will.”

“Well! tell him all this,” cried Emanuel, irritated by her persistence, “and that evening we will sign the contract, and the next day you will be Baroness de Lectoure.”

“And then,” replied Marguerite, “then, I shall be truly the most miserable woman in existence, for I should then have a brother whom I should no longer love, and a husband for whom I should have no esteem. Farewell, Emanuel; believe me this contract is not yet signed.”

And after saying these words, Marguerite withdrew with that deep and settled despair upon her features, which could not for a moment be mistaken. And Emanuel, convinced that he had not, as he had anticipated, obtained a victory, but that the struggle was still to be continued, gazed after her with an anxiety which was not devoid of tenderness.

After a few moments of silence, in which he sat pensive and motionless, he turned round and saw Captain Paul, whom he had completely forgotten, standing at the door of the study, and then considering the vital importance it was to him to get possession of the papers, which the captain had offered him, he hurriedly sat down at the table, took a pen and paper, and turning towards him, said —

“And now, sir, we are again alone, and there is nothing to prevent our at once concluding this affair. In what terms do you wish the promise to be drawn up. Dictate them, I am ready to write them down.”

“It is now useless,” coldly replied the captain.

“And why so?”

“I have changed my mind.”

“How is that?” said Emanuel, rising, alarmed at the consequences which he perceived might arise from words which he was far from expecting.

“I will give,” replied Paul, with the calmness of a fixed determination, “the hundred thousand livres to the child, and I will find a husband for your sister,”

“Who are you, then,” said Emanuel, advancing a step towards him, “who are you, sir, who thus disposes of a young girl who is my sister, who has never seen you, and who does not even know that you exist?”

“Who am I!” replied Paul, smiling; “upon my honor, I know no more upon that subject than you do, for my birth is a secret which is only to be revealed to me when I have attained my twenty-fifth year.”

“And you will attain that age?”--

“This evening, sir. I place myself at your disposal from to morrow morning, to give you all the information you may require of me,” and saying these words, Paul bowed.

“I allow you to depart, sir, but you will understand it is upon the condition that we meet again.”

“I was about to propose that condition, count, and I thank you for having anticipated me.”

He then bowed to Emanuel a second time, and left the room. At the castle gate, Paul found his horse and servant, and resumed the route to Port Louis. When he had got out of sight of the castle, he alighted from his horse, and directed his steps towards a fisherman’s hut, built upon the beach. At the door of this house, seated upon a bench, and in a sailor’s” dress, was a young man so deeply absorbed in thought, that he did not observe Paul’s approach. The captain placed his hand upon the young man’s shoulder, the latter started, looked at him, and became frightfully pale, although the open and joyful countenance of Paul, indicated that he was far from being the bearer of bad news.

“Well!” said Paul to him, “I have seen her.”

“Who?” demanded the young man “Marguerite, by heaven!”

“And--”

“She is charming.”

“I did not ask you that.”

“She loves you still.” Gracious heaven!” exclaimed the young man, throwing himself into Paul’s arms, and bursting into tears.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FAITHFUL SERVANT.

O good old man; how well in thee appears
The constant service of the antique world
When service sweat for duty, not for need!
Thou art not for the fashion of these times
Where none will sweat but for promotion;
And having that, do choice their service up
Even with the having: it is not so with thee.
Shakespeare.

ALTHOUGH our readers must readily comprehend, after that which we have just related to them, all that had passed in the six months during which we had lost sight of our heroes, some details are, however, necessary, in order that they should fully understand the new events about to be accomplished.

On the evening after the combat between the In*dienne* and the Drake, and which, notwithstanding our ignorance in naval matters, we have attempted to describe to our readers, Lusignan had related to Paul the history of his whole life. It was a very simple one, and contained but few incidents. Love had formed the principal event in it, and after having been its only joy, it had become its greatest grief. The adventurous and independent life of Paul, his station, which had placed him beyond the trammels of society, his caprice which was superior to all laws, his habit of supreme command on board his own ship, had inspired him with too just a sense of natural rights to obey the order he had received with regard to Lusignan. Moreover, although he had anchored under the French flag, Paul, as we have seen, belonged to the navy of America, whose cause he had enthusiastically espoused. He continued, therefore, his cruise along the shores of England; but finding there was nothing to be done on the sea he landed at Whitehaven, a small port in Cumberland, at the head,of twenty men, among whom was Lusignan, took the fort, spiked the guns, and put to sea again, after having burnt the merchant vessels in the roads. Thence he sailed for the coast of Scotland, with the intention of carrying off the Earl of Selkirk and taking him as a hostage to the United States; but this project had miscarried from an unforeseen circumstance, that nobleman having unexpectedly gone to London. In this enterprise, as in the other, Lusignan had seconded him with the courage we have seen him exhibit in the battle between the *Indienne* and the Drake; so that Paul congratulated himself more than ever upon the chance which had enabled him to oppose an injustice. But it was not enough that he had saved Lusignan from transportation, it was necessary to restore his honor, and to our young adventurer, in whom our readers will doubtless have recognised the celebrated privateers man, Paul Jones, it was a more easy matter than to any other person; for having letters of marque from Louis XVI., against the English, he had to repair to Versailles to give an account of his cruize.

Paul determined upon running into Lorient, and for the second time cast anchor there, that he might be within a short distance of the Chateau d'Auray. The first answer which the young men received to their enquiries regarding that family, was that Marguerite d'Auray was about to be married to M. de Lectoure. Lusignan thought himself forgotten, and in the first paroxysm of his despair, insisted, even at the risk of falling into the hands of his former persecutors, on once more seeing Marguerite, if it were only to reproach her for infidelity; but Paul, more calm and less credulous, made him pledge his word that; he would not land until he had heard from him; then, being assured that the marriage would not take place in less than fifteen days, he set out for Paris, and was received by the king, who presented him with a sword, the hilt of which was of gold, and decorated him with the order of military merit. Paul had availed himself of the kindness of the king towards him to relate to him Lusignan's adventures, and had obtained not only his pardon, but also as a reward for his late services, the appointment of Governor of Guadeloupe. All these cares had not prevented him from keeping sight of Emanuel. Being informed of the count's intended departure, he left Paris, and having written to Lusignan, appointing a place of meeting, he arrived at Auray an hour after the young count.

After their joyful meeting, Paul and Lusignan remained together until nearly twilight. Then Paul, who, as he had told Emanuel, had a personal revelation to receive, left his friend and again took the road to Auray. But this time he was on foot, and did not enter the castle, but going along the park wall, he directed his steps toward an iron gate which opened into a wood belonging to the domains of Auray.

About an hour before Paul left the fisherman’s hut, where he had found Lusignan, a person had preceded him on the road toward the cottage at which he was to ask the revelation of the secret of his birth; that person was the Marchioness d’Auray, the haughty heiress of the name of Sable. She was attired in her usual mourning garments with the addition of a long black veil, which enveloped her from head to foot. Moreover, the habitation which our young adventurer, with the hesitation of ignorance, was seeking for, was to her familiar. It was a sort of keeper’s house, situated at a few paces from the entrance to the park, and inhabited by an old man, in whose behalf the Marchioness d’Auray had for twenty years fulfilled one of those acts of sedulous benevolence which had gained for her in that part of Lower Brittany, the reputation of rigid holiness which she enjoyed. These attentions to age were given, it is true, with the same gloomy and solemn face which we have observed in her, and which the tender emotions of pity never softened; but they were nevertheless afforded, and all knew it, with careful punctuality.

The face of the Marchioness d’Auray was even more grave than it was wont to be, while she crossed the park to repair to the dwelling of a man who was said to be an old servant of the family. The door was standing open as if to allow the last rays of the setting sun to penetrate into the house, so sweet and balmy to old people in the month of May. The house was however empty. The Marchioness d’Auray entered it, looked around her, and then as if certain that the person she was in search of would not be long absent, she resolved to await his return. She sat down. She had remained there about half an hour, motionless and absorbed in her reflections, when she saw, between her and the declining daylight, a shadow cast before the door. She slowly raised her eyes and recognised the person she had been expecting. They both started as though they had met by chance, and were not in the habit of seeing each other every day.

“It is you, Achard,” said the marchioness, who was the first to speak. “I have been waiting for you half an hour. “Where can you have been?”

“Had your ladyship walked fifty paces farther, you would have found me under the large oak, on the edge of the forest.”

“You know I never walk that way,” said the marchioness, with a visible shudder.”

“And you are wrong, madam; there is one in heaven who has a right to our joint prayers, and who, perhaps, is astonished to hear only those of old Achard.”

“And how know you that I do not also pray?” said the marchioness, with a certain degree of feverish agitation. “Do you believe that the dead require we should be constantly kneeling on their tombs?”

“No,” replied the old man, with a feeling of profound sorrow; “no, I do not believe that the dead are so exacting, madam; but I believe if any part of us lives under ground, it would thrill at the noise caused by the steps of those whom we have loved during our life.”

“But,” said the marchioness, in a low and hollow tone, “if that love were a guilty passion?”

“However guilty it may have been, madam,” replied the old man, also lowering his voice, “do you not believe that blood and tears have expatiated it? God was then, believe me, too severe a judge, not to have now become an indulgent father.”

“Yes, God has perhaps pardoned it,” murmured the marchioness;” but did the world know that which God knows, would it pardon as God has done?”

“The world!” exclaimed the old man; “the world! Yes, there is the great word which has again escaped your lips! The world! It is to it, to that phantom you have sacrificed everything, madam; your feelings as a lover, your feelings as a wife, your feelings as a mother! your own happiness, the happiness of others! The world! It is the fear of the world which has clothed you in perpetual mourning, beneath which you hope to conceal remorse! And in that you are right, for you have succeeded in deceiving it, for it has taken your remorse for virtue.”

The marchioness raised her head with some degree of agitation, and putting aside her veil that she might look upon the person who addressed her in such extraordinary language; then, after a momentary silence, not being able to discover any sinister expression in the calm features of the old man — “You speak to me,” she said to him, “with a bitterness which would lead me to believe you have some personal reason for reproaching me. Have I failed in any promise I have made? The persons who attend on you by my orders, are they wanting in that respect which I have desired them to observe? You know, if this should be the case, you have only to say a word.”

"Forgive me, madam, it is in sorrow that I speak, not bitterness; it is the effect of solitude and of age. You must well know what it is to have sorrows that you cannot speak of — tears which we dare not shed, and which fall back, drop by drop upon the heart! No, I have not to complain of any one, madam, since first, from a feeling for which I am truly grateful, without seeking to know whence it emanated, you have been pleased to see personally that my wants were all supplied, and you have not for a single day forgotten your promise, but like the old prophet, I have sometimes seen an angel come as your messenger."

"Yes," replied the marchioness, "I know that Marguerite often accompanies the servant who is charged to wait upon you; and I have seen with pleasure the attentions she has paid you, and the friendship she feels for you."

"But in my turn, I have not failed either, I trust, in the promises I made. For twenty years I have lived far from the habitations of men, I have kept away every living being from this dwelling; so much did I fear on your account, the delirium of my waking hours, or the indiscretion of my dreams."

"Undoubtedly! undoubtedly! and happily the secret has been well preserved," said the marchioness, placing her hand upon Achard's arm; "but this is a stronger incentive in my mind not to lose in a single day the fruit of twenty years, all more gloomy, more isolated, and more terrible than yours have been."

"Yes, I understand you perfectly; and you have shuddered more than once upon suddenly remembering that there is roaming about the world, a man who may one day call upon me to reveal that secret, and that I have not the right to conceal it from that man. Ah! you tremble at the bare idea, do you not? But, tranquilise yourself; that man, when but a boy, fled from the school at which we had placed him in Scotland, and for ten years past nothing has been heard of him. In short, destined to obscurity, he himself rushed forward to meet his fate. He is now lost amid the millions that crowd this populous world, and not a soul knows where to find him; this poor unit, without a name, is lost for ever. He must have lost his father's letter, have mislaid the token by which I was to recognise him; or, better still, perhaps he exists no longer."

"It is cruel of you, Achard," replied the marchioness, "to utter such words to a mother. You cannot appreciate the strange feelings and singular contradictions contained in the heart of woman. For, in fine, can I not be tranquil unless my child be dead! Consider, my old friend; this secret, of which he has been ignorant five and twenty years, has it become at the age of twenty-five, so necessary to his existence that he cannot live, unless it be revealed to him. Believe me, Achard, for himself even it would be better he should still remain ignorant of it, as he has been to this day. I feel assured that to this day he has been happy — old man, do not mar this happiness — -do not inspire his mind with thoughts which may induce him to commit an evil action. No — tell him, in lieu of the dreadful tale you were desired to communicate, that his mother has gone to rejoin his father in heaven; and, would to God that it were so! but that when dying (for I must see him whatever you may say to the contrary, I will even if it be but once, press him to my heart), when dying, as I said, his mother had bequeathed him to her friend the Marchioness d’Auray, in whom he will find a second mother.”

“I understand you, madam,” said Achard, smiling. “It is not the first time you have pointed out this path, in which you wish to lead me astray. Only to-day, you speak more openly, and if you dared to do so, or if you knew me less, you would offer me some reward to induce me to disobey the last injunctions of him who sleeps by us.”

The marchioness made a gesture as if about to interrupt him.

“Listen to me, madam,” hastily said the old man, stretching forth his hand, “and let my words be considered by you as holy and irrevocable. As faithful as I have been to the promise which I made to the Marchioness d’Auray, so faithful will I be to that I made to the Count de Morlaix, on the day when his son, or your son, shall present himself before me with the token of recognition, and shall demand to know the secret. I shall reveal it to him, madam. As to the papers which attest it, you are aware that they are to be delivered to him only after the death of the Marquis d’Auray. The secret is here,” said the old man, placing his hand upon his heart; “no human power could have extracted it before the time; no human power, that time having arrived, can prevent me from revealing it. The papers are there in that closet, the key of which I always have about me, and it is only by robbery or by assassination that I can be deprived of them.”

“But,” said the marchioness, half rising and supporting herself on the arm of her chair, “you might die before my husband, old man; for although he is more dangerously ill than you are, you are older than he is, and then what would become of those papers?”

“The priest who shall attend my last moments will receive them under the seal of confession.”

“Ah! it is that!” cried the marchioness, rising, “and thus this chain of fear will be prolonged until my death! and the last link of it will be to all eternity riveted to my tomb. There is in this world a man, the only one perhaps, who is as immoveable as a rock; and God has placed him in my path, not only as a remorse/ but as a vengeance also. My secret is in your hands, old man, — tis well! — do with it as you will! — you are the master, and I am your slave — farewell!”

So saying, the marchioness left the cottage, and returned towards the chateau.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SECRET.

More than ten years have passed since I beheld him,
The noble boy; now time annuls my oath
And cancels ail his wrongs.
I took a solemn oath to veil the secret,
Conceal thy rights, while lived her lord,
And thus allow'd thy youth to quit my roof.
BULWEU. — *The Sea Captain.*

"YES," said the old man, gazing after the marchioness as she withdrew, "yes, I know you have a heart of adamant, madam, insensible to every sort of fear, with the exception of that which God has placed within your breast to supply the place of remorse. But that suffices; and it is dearly buying that reputation you have obtained for virtue, to pay the price of such eternal terrors. It is true that the virtue of the Marchioness d'Auray is so firmly established, that if truth herself were to rise from the earth or to descend from heaven to arraign her, she would be treated as a calumniator. But God orders all things according to His will, and what He does ordain, His wisdom has long before matured."

"Rightly reasoned," cried a youthful and sonorous voice, replying to the religious axiom which the resignation of the old man had led him to utter. "Upon my word, good father, you speak like Ecclesiastes."

Achard turned round and perceived Paul, who had arrived just as the marchioness left him, but who was so absorbed by the scene we have just described, that she had not observed the young captain. The latter, seeing the old man alone, approached him, and no bearing the last words he had uttered, had spoken with his usual good humor. Achard, who was surprised by his unexpected appearance, looked at him as if he wished him to repeat that which he had said.

"I say," resumed Paul, "that there is more grandeur in resignation that humbly bows itself, than in philosophy that doubts. That is a maxim of our quakers, which, for my eternal welfare, I wish I had less often on my tongue, and more frequently in my heart.”

“I beg your pardon, sir,” said the old man on seeing our adventurer, who was fixedly gazing at him, while standing with one foot on the threshold of his door. “May I know who you are?”

“For the moment,” replied Paul, giving, as usual, free course to his poetical and heedless gaiety, “I am a child of the republic of Plato, having all human kind for brothers, the world for a country, and possessing upon this earth only the station I have worked out for myself.”

“And what are you in search of?” continued the old man, smiling in spite of himself at the air of jovial good-nature which was spread over the features of the young man.

“I am seeking,” replied Paul, “at three leagues distance from Lorient, at five hundred paces from the chateau d’Auray, a small house which very much resembles this one, and in which I am to find an old man, whom it is very likely is yourself.”

“And what is the name of this old man?”

“Louis Achard.”

“That is my name.”

“Then may the blessing of heaven descend on your white hairs,” said Paul, in a voice which at once changing its tone, assumed that of deep feeling and respect; “for here is a letter which I believe was written by my father, in which he says that you are an honest man.”

“Does not that letter enclose something?” cried the old mail with sparkling eye3, and advancing a step nearer to the young captain.

“It does,” replied the latter, opening the letter and taking out of it one half of a Venetian sequin, which had been broken in two; “it seems to be part of a gold coin, of which I have one half, and you ought to be in possession of the other.”

Achard mechanically held out his hand, while gazing with intense interest at the young man.”

“Yes, yes,” said the old man, and eyes gradually became more and more suffused with tears, “yes, this is the true token, and more than that, the extraordinary resemblance;” and opening his arms, he cried, “child! — oh! my God! ray God!”

“What is it?” cried Paul, extending his arms to support the old man, who was quite overcome by his emotions.

“Oh! can you not comprehend?” replied the latter, “can you not comprehend that you are the living portrait of your father, and that I loved your father — loved him so much that I would have shed my blood, have given my life to serve him, as I would now for you, young man, were you to demand it.”

“Embrace me, then, my old friend,” said Paul, throwing his arms around the old man, “for the chain of feeling, believe me, is not broken, which extended from the tomb of the father to the cradle of the son. “Whatever my father may have been, if in order to resemble him it be only necessary to have a conscience without reproach, undaunted courage, and a memory which never forgets a benefit conferred, although it may sometimes forget an injury; if this be so, then am I, as you have said, my father’s living portrait, and more so in soul than in form.”

“Yes, he possessed all these,” replied the old man, with solemnity, and clasping Paul to his breast, looking at him with affectionate though tearful tenderness — ” Yes, he had the same commanding voice, the same flashing eyes, the same nobleness of heart. But why was it that I have not seen you sooner, young man? I have, during my life, passed many gloomy hours, which your presence would have brightened.”

“Why — because this letter told me to seek you out only when I should have attained the age of twenty-five, and because it is not long since I attained that age, not more than an hour ago.”

The old man bowed down his head with a pensive air, and remained silent for some time, seemingly absorbed by recollections of the past.

“Can it be so?” at length he said, raising his head, “can it be twenty-five years ago. Good heaven! it appears to me only yesterday that you were born in this house, that you first saw the light in that very room: “and the old man raised his head, and pointed to a door which led into another room.

Paul, in his turn, appeared to reflect, and then, looking around him, to strengthen by the aid of objects which presented themselves to his view, the recollections which crowded on his memory.

“In this cottage, in that room,” he repeated, “and I lived here till I was five years old, did I not?”

“Yes,” murmured the old man, as if fearful to disturb the feelings which were taking possession of the young man’s mind.

“Well,” continued Paul, leaning his head on both his hands, as if to concentrate his thoughts, “allow me for one moment to look back, in my turn, to the past, for I am recollecting a room which I had thought I had seen in a dream — it may be that one. Listen to me! Oh! how strange it is — remembrances now rush upon me."

"Speak, my child, speak!" said the old man. "If it be that room, there ought to be on the right, as you go in, at the end of the room, abed with green hangings.* "Yes."

"A. crucifix at the head of the bed."

"Yes."

"A closet opposite, in which were books, among the rest a largo Bible, with numerous engravings."

"There it is," said the old man, pointing to the sacred book which was lying open on a desk for prayer.

"Oh! it is that--it is that," cried Paul, pressing his lips against the leaves.

"Oh! good and pious heart," cried the old man, "I thank thee, oh! my God — I thank thee."

"Then," said Paul, rising, "in that room there is a window, from which you can discern the sea, and on the sea, three islands?"

"Yes, Houat, Hoedie, and Belle-Ileen-mer.

"Then, it is really so," said Paul, rushing towards the room, and then perceiving that the old man was about to follow him, he said: "No, no! I must he alone — let me enter it alone — I feel that I must he alone and he went into the room, closing the door after him.

He then paused a moment, impressed with that holy respect which accompanies the remembrance of our infancy. The room was as he had described it, for the religious devotedness of the old servant had preserved it from any change. Paul, feeling doubtless that the eye of a stranger would have interrupted the expression of the feelings he experienced, and now certain of being alone, abandoned himself to them He slowly advanced, and with clasped hands, towards the ivory crucifix; and falling on his knees, which formerly he had the habit of doing, morning and evening, he endeavoured to remember one of those simple prayers, in which a child, still on the threshold of this life, prays to God for those who have opened its gates to him. What events had succeeded each other in the lapse of time which had passed between these genuflexions! Paul remained for a considerable time absorbed in thought, and then slowly arose, and went to the window. The night was beautiful and calm, the moon was shining in the heavens, and tipped the ocean waves with silver. The three islands appeared on the horizon, like blue vapor floating on the ocean. He remembered how often in his infancy ho had leaned against that window, gazing upon that same scene, following with his eyes some bark, with its snowy sails, which glided silently over the sea, like the wing of a night bird. Then his heart swelled with sweet and tender recollection; his head fell upon his chest, and silent tears ran down his cheeks. At that moment he felt that some one pressed his hands — it was the old man — he wished to conceal his emotions; but instantly repenting this vain feeling, he turned toward A chard, ‘and frankly let him see his face, down which the tears were streaming.

“You weep, my child,” said the old man.

“Yes, I weep,” replied Paul; “and why should I conceal it? Yes, look at me. And yet I have, during my life, witnessed dreadful scenes. I have seen the tempest bear my vessel to the summit of a mountain wave, and then sink her into an abyss, from which I thought she would never rise again; and I felt that she weighed no more upon the wings of the storm than does a dried leaf on the evening breeze. I have seen men fall around me like the ripe ears of corn before the sickle of the reaper. I have heard the cries of distress, and the dying groans of those whoso meal I had shared but the day before. In order to receive their last sigh, I have walked amid a shower of bullets, and grape-shot, upon a plank slippery with Wood. And yet, amid all this, my soul was calm--my eyes remained unmoistened. But this room, see you; this room, of which I had retained so holy a remembrance; this room, in which I had received the first caresses of a father whom I shall never see again, and the last kisses of a mother who perhaps desires no more to see me; this room is sacred as a cradle and as a tomb. I cannot thus revisit it without giving vent to my emotions; I must weep, or I shall suffocate.” The old man clasped him in his arms. Paul leaned his head upon his shoulder, and during some time nothing was heard but his sobs. At length the old servant rejoined:

“Yes, you are right; this room is at once a cradle and a tomb; it was there that you were born;” he pointed to one corner with his hand; “and it was there that you received the last blessing of your father,” continued he, pointing to the opposite side of the room.

“He is then dead?” said Paul.

“He is dead.”

“You must tell me bow he died.”

"I will tell you all."

"Defer it for a moment," added Paul, as he reached a chair and seated himself, "for I am now too weak to listen to you. Let me recover myself." He placed his elbow on the window-sill, leaned his head upon his hand, and once more cast his eyes upon the sea.

"What a magnificent spectacle is the ocean when the moon shines upon it as brightly as it does now," continued he, with that accent of soft melancholy which was habitual to him. "It is as calm as God himself, and vast as eternity. I do not believe that a man accustomed to study such a scene can be afraid of death. My father met death bravely, did he not?"

"Assuredly!" proudly replied Achard. "It could not be otherwise," continued Paul, "for I remember my father, although I was only four years old when I last saw him."

"He was a handsome young man, as you yourself are," said Achard, looking sorrowfully at Paul, "and just as old as you are."

"What was his name?"

"The Count de Morlaix."

"Then I also am of an old and noble family. I also have arms and an escutcheon as well as those young and insolent nobles who ask me for my parchments when I show them my wounds?"

"Wait, young man, wait; do not allow pride to carry you thus away, for I have not yet told you the name of her who gave you being, and you are still ignorant of the dreadful secret of your birth."

"Well: be it so. I shall not with the less respect and veneration hear the name of my mother. What was my mother's name?"

"The Marchioness d'Auray," slowly replied the old man, as if regretting that he was compelled to mention her name.

"What is it that you tell me!" cried Paul, starting from his chair, and seizing the hands of the old man.

"The truth!" replied Achard, sorrowfully.

"Then Emanuel is my brother — Marguerite is my sister?"

"Do yon then already know them?" exclaimed the old servant, much astounded.

"Oh! you were right, old man," said Paul, throwing himself into his chair. "God orders all things according to His will, and what He does ordain, His wisdom has long before matured."

They both remained silent for a time, when at length Paul raised his head, and resolutely fixing his eyes on the old man’s face, said:

“Now, I am ready to hear all you have to communicate — you may go on.”

CHAPTER IX.

FATAL LOVE.

I shall a tale unfold
Will harrow up thy soul; freeze thy young blood;
Make thy two eyes like stars, start from their spheres;
Thy knotted and combined locks to part.
And each particular hair to stand on end
Like quills upon the fretful porcupine. Shakespeare.

THE old man seemed to be summoning up his recollections for a time, and then began:

“They were affianced to each other. I know not what mortal hatred it was that arose between the families and separated them. The Count de Morlaix, broken hearted, could not remain in Prance. He sailed for Saint Domingo, where his father possessed a large estate; I accompanied him, for the Count de Morlaix reposed much confidence in me. I was the son of her who had nursed him; I had received the same education as himself; he used to call me his brother, and I alone remembered the distance which nature had placed between us. The Marquis de Morlaix confided to me the charge of watching over his son, for I loved him with all the love of a father. “We remained two years under a tropical sun; during that two years, your father, lost amid the solitude of that magnificent island, a traveller without an object and without an aim, an ardent and indefatigable sportsman, endeavouring to cure the griefs of the mind, by the fatigues of the body; but so far from succeeding, one would have thought that his heart became still more inflamed under that ardent sun. At length, after two years of trial and incessant struggles, his love conquered. He must either see her again or die. I yielded and we set sail for France. Never was a voyage more beautiful, or more prosperous. The sea and sky seemed to smile upon us; so favourable were they that it would have induced one to believe in lucky omens. Six weeks after our departure from Port au Prince, we landed at Havre. Mademoiselle de Sablé was married. The Marquis d’Auray was at Versailles, fulfilling at the court of Louis XV. the duties of his charge, and his wife, who was too much indisposed to follow him, was at the old chateau d'Auray. the turrets of which you see from this place."

"Yes, yes," said Paul, "I know it; pray go on."

"As to myself," rejoined the old map, "during our voyage, one of my uncles, an old servant of the house of Auray, had died, and left me this small house, with a small quantity of land surrounding it. I took possession of it. Tour father had left me at Vannes, telling me he was going to Paris, and for the whole of the first year that I inherited this house I did not see him."

"One night, — it is exactly twenty-five years ago, —

some one knocked at my door; I went to open it and found your father there, carrying in his arms a woman whose face was veiled. He brought her into this room, and laid her on that bed. And then returning to me in the adjoining room, where I was waiting mute and motionless with astonishment, he placed his hand upon my shoulder, and looking at me in a supplicating manner, although he had the right to command me, said, 'Louis, you can do more than save my life and honor — you can save the life and honor of her I love — get on horseback, gallop to the next town, and return here in an hour with a doctor.' He spoke to me in that short and hasty tone, which indicated that there was not a moment to be lost. I immediately obeyed. The day was beginning to break when we returned. The doctor was introduced by the Count de Morlaix into this room, the door of which was immediately closed: he remained there during the whole day; towards five in the afternoon, the doctor left the house, and at nightfall your father also left the house carrying in his arms the mysterious veiled lady whom he had brought the previous night. "When they had gone, I came into this room and found you here — you had just been born."

"And how did you learn that this woman was the Marchioness d'Auray?"

"Oh!" exclaimed the old man, in a way which was as terrible as it was unexpected; "I had offered the Count de Morlaix to keep you here, and he accepted my proposal: from time to time he would come to spend an hour with you."

"Alone?" demanded Paul, with much anxiety.

"Yes, always; but as he had given me permission to walk with you in the park, it would sometimes happen that at the corner of one of the avenues I would meet the marchioness, whom chance appeared to have conducted in that direction. She would make you a sign to come to her, and she would kiss you as people kiss a strange child, because he is handsome. Four years passed on in this way, and then one night some one again knocked at this door, and it was again your father. He was more calm, but had, perhaps, a more gloomy look than on the first occasion. ‘Louis,’ said he, ‘to-morrow, at the break of day, I have to meet the Marquis d’Auray. It is a duel in which one of us must fall, and you are to be the only witness of it. The terms are agreed upon. You must, therefore, give me shelter for this night, and let me have materials for writing. He sat down at this table, on the very chair you are now seated.”

Paul sprang up, but supported himself on the back of the chair, without again sitting down upon it.

“He sat up all night. At day-break he came into *my* room and found me up — I had not gone to bed. As to you. poor child, unconscious of the passions and miseries of this life, you were quietly sleeping.”

“And then, — pray go on.”

“Your father bent slowly over you, supporting himself by the wall, and looking sorrowfully upon you: ‘Louis,’ said he to me, in a hollow voice, ‘should I be killed, and which may happen, we to this child! You will deliver him with this letter to Field, my valet de chambre, whom I have charged to conduct him to Selkirk, in Scotland, there to leave him in sure hands. When he is twenty-one years old, he will bring you the other half of this gold coin, and will ask you to reveal to him the secret of his birth. You will communicate it; for then, perhaps, his mother will be alone and isolated. As to these papers which prove his birth, you will not deliver them to him, until after the death of the Marquis d’Auray. Now I have said all that is necessary, let us go, for it is the appointed hour.’ He then leaned over your bed, bent down toward you, and although he was a man of fortitude, as I have told you, I saw a tear fall upon your cheek.”

“Proceed,” said Paul, in a voice choked by emotion.

“The rendezvous was in one of the avenues of the park, about a hundred paces from this house. “When we readied the place, we found the marquis there, he had been waiting for us some minutes. Near him upon a bank were pistols ready loaded. The adversaries bowed to each other without exchanging a word. The marquis pointed to the weapons — they each took one, and then, according to the terms which had been agreed upon, as your father had told me, they placed themselves, mute and gloomily, at the distance of thirty paces, and then began to walk towards each other. Oh! it was a moment of agony for me, I can assure you," rejoined the old man, almost as much moved as if the scene were then actually passing before him, "when I saw the distance gradually diminishing between these two men. When they were only about ten paces, the marquis stopped and fired. I looked at your father; not a muscle of his face was moved, so that I thought him safe and unhurt. He continued to walk on till he came close to the marquis, and then placing the muzzle of the pistol to his heart--"

"He did not kill him, I trust," cried Paul seizing the old man's arm.

"He said to him, 'Tour life is in my hands, sir, and I might take it, but I wish you to live, that you may pardon me, as I do you.' And uttering these words, he fell dead at the feet of the marquis, whose ball had passed through his chest."

"Oh! my father! my father!" cried Paul, wringing his hands. "And the man who killed my father — he still lives, does he not? He is still young, and has strength enough to wield a sword or raise a pistol? We will go to him — to-day — instantly! You will tell him, that it is *his* son! that he must fight with him."

"God has avenged your father," replied Achard — "that man is mad."

"That is true — I had forgotten that," murmured Paul.

"And in his madness that bloody scene is ever before his eyes, and he repeats ten times a day the dying words your father addressed to him."

"And that must be the reason why the marchioness will not leave him for a single moment."

"And that is also the reason, under the pretext that he will not see his children, that she keeps Emanuel and Marguerite from him."

"My poor sister," said Paul, with an accent of undefinable tenderness; "and now she wishes to sacrifice her by forcing her to marry that wretch Lectoure."

"Yes, but that wretch Lectoure will take Marguerite with him to Paris, and give a regiment of dragoons to her brother, so that the marchioness will no longer have cause to dread the presence of her children. Her secret, therefore, remains henceforward in the breasts of two old men, who to-morrow, thi3 night even, may die. The grave is silent."

"But, I — I" —

"You! Does she know that you still exist! Has anything been heard of you since you escaped from Selkirk? Could not some accident have prevented you from coming to the appointment, which fortunately you have done safely? It is certain that she has not forgotten you, but she hopes.”

“Oh! can you believe that my mother.”

“I your pardon, that is true. I do not believe it!” cried Achard, “I was wrong; forget what I have said.”

“Yes, yes, let us speak of you, my friend; let us speak of my father.”

“Is it necessary that I should tell yon that his last wishes were fulfilled. Field came to fetch you during the day, and took you away with him. Twenty-one years have passed since then, and since then not a single day has passed without my putting up a prayer that I might see you at the appointed time. My prayers have been granted,” continued the old man; “and thanks be to God, you are here. Your father lives again in you — I once more see him — I am speaking to him. I weep no longer, I am now consoled.”

“And he died thus, instantly, without a struggle, without a sigh?”

“Yes — I brought him here. I placed him on the bed in which you were born — I closed the door that no one might enter the house, and I went alone and dug his grave. I passed the whole day in this painful duty; for, according to the request of your father, to no one was to be confided this dreadful secret. In the evening I returned for the body. The heart of man is singularly constituted, and hope which God has planted in it can with difficulty be eradicated. I had seen him fall — I had felt his hands grow cold — I had kissed his ice-like face — I had left him, to hollow out his grave, and that grave being made, that duty being accomplished, I returned with a beating heart, for it appeared to me, although a miracle would be required for such a change, that during my absence life had returned to him, and that he would rise from his bed and speak to me. I entered the house — alas! alas! the days of miracles had passed away. Lazarus remained lying on his couch — dead! dead! dead!” and the old man remained for some time overwhelmed with grief, silent and voiceless, and tears rolled down his furrowed cheeks.

“Yes, yes,” cried Paul, also bursting into tears; “yes, and you then fulfilled your holy mission. Good old man, let me kiss those hands which deposited my father in his last home. And you have remained faithful to his tomb as you had been to him during life. Poor guardian of the sepulchre; you have remained near him that your tears might water the grass which grew about the unknown grave. Oh! how little are those who think themselves great because their name resounds amid the tempest, and the cry of war, louder than the storm or the din of battle, in comparison with you, old man, whose devotedness has been mute and noiseless. Oh! give me your blessing; lay those hallowed hands upon my head, since my father is not here to bless me," continued Paul, throwing himself on his knees before him.

"Rise to my arms — let me clasp you to my heart, my child, for you exaggerate these actions, in themselves so simple and so natural. And then, believe me, that which you term my piety has not been a useless lesson to me. I have seen how little space a man occupies beneath the ground, and how soon he is lost amid the world, should God turn his face from him. Your father was young, full of courage, with a brilliant career opening before him. Your father was the last descendant of an ancient line; he bore a noble name. His path seemed marked with honors and distinction; he had a family and powerful friends. Well, he suddenly disappeared, as if the earth had opened beneath his feet. I know not if some tearful eyes sought for him till they lost all trace of him; but this I know, that for one-and-twenty years no one has sought out his tomb — no one knows that he lies beneath that spot, where the grass is greener and grows more luxuriantly than elsewhere — and yet, vain, glorious, and miserable as he is, man considers himself of some value."

"Oh! and my mother, has she not visited his grave?"

The old man did not answer.

"Well, then! there will be two of us who hence forward will know the spot, where he reposes. Come, and show it to me; for I will return to it, I promise solemnly, every time my ship returns to the coast of France."

Saying this, he drew Achard into the outer room, bat as they opened the door they heard a slight noise in the park. It was a servant from the castle, who had accompanied Marguerite. Paul hurriedly returned into the bedroom.

"It is my sister," said he to Achard; "leave me alone with her a moment. It is necessary that I should speak to her. I have something to communicate which will make her pass a happy night. We must have compassion for those who watch and weep."

"Reflect," said Achard, "that the secret I have revealed to you is your mother's."

"Fear not — I will speak to her but of that which concerns herself."

At that moment Marguerite entered the room.

CHAPTER X.

CONFIDENCE.

This ring I gave him when he parted from me
To bind him to remember my good will;
The more shame for him that ho sends it to me.
Shakespeare.

MARGUERITE had come, as she frequently did, to bring some provisions for the old man, and it was not without astonishment that she perceived in the outer room, where she usually found Achard, a young and handsome man, who looked at her with gladdened eyes, and with a kindly smile. She made a sign to the servant to put down the basket in a corner of the room; he obeyed, and then went out to wait for his mistress in the park. When he had withdrawn, she advanced towards Paul, saying, — ” I beg your pardon, sir, but I expected to find my old friend, Achard, here, and I came, to bring him something from my mother”--

Paul pointed to the inner room, to lot her know that the person she was seeking was within, for he could not reply to her; he felt that the tone of his voice would betray the emotions he experienced. The young girl thanked him, with a bow, and went into the room to find Achard.

Paul followed her with his eyes — his hand pressed upon his heart. That virgin soul into which love had never penetrated, now expanded with fraternal tenderness. Isolated as he had always been, having no friends but the rude children of the ocean, all that was soft or tender in his heart, he had turned towards God, and although in the eyes of rigid Christians, his religion might not have appeared as strictly orthodox, it is no less true, that the poetry which overflowed in every word he uttered was nothing more than one vast and eternal prayer. It was not, therefore, astonishing, that this first feeling which penetrated his heart, although purely fraternal, was as extravagant and transporting as the emotions of love.

“Oh!” murmured he, “poor isolated being that I am! How shall I be able to restrain my feelings when she returns, and prevent myself from clasping her to my heart and saying to her: Marguerite! my sister, no woman has yet felt love for me; love me then with sisterly affection. Oh! mother! mother! by depriving me of your caresses, you have also deprived me of those of this dear angel. May God restore to you in eternity that happiness which you have driven from yourself and others."

"Farewell!" said Marguerite to the old man, opening the door, "farewell! I wished this evening to come myself, for I know not when I may see you again."

And she went toward the outer door, pensive, and with her eyes cast down, without seeing Paul, without remembering that a stranger was in that room. Paul remained gazing at her with outstretched arms as if to prevent her leaving the house, with palpitating heart and moistened eyes. At length, when he saw her placing her hand upon the door-latch, he cried aloud —

"Marguerite!"

She turned round amazed, but not being able to comprehend this strange familiarity, in one who was totally unknown to her, she half-opened the door.

"Marguerite!" reiterated Paul, advancing a step towards his sister, "Marguerite, do you not hear me call you?"

"It is true that my name is Marguerite, sir," she replied, with dignity; "but I could not imagine that word was addressed to me by a person whom I have the honor of knowing."

"But I know you!" exclaimed Paul, going nearer to her, and then closing the door he brought her back into the room. "I know that you are unhappy, that you have not one friendly heart into which you can pour your sorrows, not one arm from which you can ask support."

"You forget the one which is on high," replied Marguerite, raising her eyes and hand toward heaven.

"No, no, Marguerite, I do not forget, for it is He who sends me to offer you that which you most need; to tell you when all lips and all hearts are closed toward you, 'I am your friend, devotedly, eternally.'"

"Oh! sir!" replied Marguerite, "these are sacred and solemn words which you have uttered; words, unfortunately, to which it would be difficult for me to give credence without proofs."

"And should I give you one?" said Paul.

"Impossible!" murmured Marguerite.

"Irrefragable!" continued Paul.

"Oh! then!" exclaimed Marguerite, with an indescribable accent, in which doubt began to give place to hope--

"Well! and then "--

"Oh! then — but no, no!"

"Do y ou know this ring?" said Paul, showing her the one with the key that opened the bracelet.

"Gracious heaven!" exclaimed Marguerite, "have mercy upon me! he is dead!"

"He lives."

"Then he no longer loves me."

"He loves you!"

"If he be living — if he still love me — oh! I shall go mad — what was it I was saying? If he be living — if he still love me, how comes it that this ring is in your possession?"

"He confided it to me as a token of recognition."

"And have I confided this bracelet to any one?" cried Marguerite, pushing back the sleeve of her gown — " Look!"

"Yes, but you, Marguerite, you are not proscribed — dishonored in the eyes of the whole world — thrown amongst a condemned race!"

"Of what importance is that. Is he not innocent?"

"And then, he thought," continued Paul, wishing to discover the extent of the devotedness and love of his sister, "he thought that delicacy required, banished as he is for ever from society, that he should offer you, if not restore to you, the liberty of disposing of your hand."

"When a woman has done for a man that which I have done for him," replied Marguerite, "her only excuse is to love him eternally, and it is that I mean to do."

"Oh! you are an angel!" exclaimed Paul.

"Tell me!" rejoined Marguerite, seizing the young man's hands, and looking at him with a supplicating air--

"What?"

"Have you seen him, then?"

"I am his friend, his brother."

"Speak to me of him, then?" she exclaimed, giving herself up entirely to the recollection of her lover, and forgetting that it was the first time she had seen the person to whom she was addressing questions of so delicate a nature. "What is he doing? what hope has he? Poor, unhappy man I"

“He loves you — and he hopes again to see you.”

“Then, then,” stammered Marguerite, and drawing back some paces, — ” he has told you--?”

“All!”

“Oh!” she cried, looking down and concealing her face, over which a sudden, tinge of red had cast itself, replacing for a moment its habitual paleness.

Paul approached her and clasping her to his breast, exclaiming —

“You are a miracle of devotedness!”

“You do not then despise me, sir?” said Marguerite, Venturing to raise her eyes.

“Marguerite!” cried Paul, “had I a sister I would pray to heaven that she might resemble you.”

“Oh! were it so you would have a most unhappy sister,” she replied, leaning upon his arm and bursting into tears.

“Perhaps,” said Paul, smiling.

“You know not, then--?”

“Proceed.”

“That Monsieur de Lectoure is to arrive to-morrow morning.”

“I have been informed of that.”

“And that to-morrow night the marriage contract is to be signed.”

“I know that, too.”

“Well! then! what can I hope for in such extremity as this? To whom can I apply to prevent this hated union? Who can I interest to aid me? My brother? God knows that I forgive him, but he cannot comprehend my feelings. My mother? Oh! sir, you do not know my mother. She is a woman whose reputation is unsullied, of the most austere virtue, and her will inflexible, for never having failed in her duty, she does not believe that others can forget it, and when she has once said, ‘It is my will,’ all that remains to do is to bow down one’s head, to weep, and to obey. My father? Yes, I well know that my father must leave the room from which he has never stirred for twenty years, to sign this contract. My father! for any one less unhappy and less culpable than I might prove a resource: but you know not that he is insane — that he has lost his reason, and with it every feeling of paternal affection. And besides, it is ten years since I last saw him. For the last ten years I have not pressed his trembling hands, nor kissed his snow white hairs. He knows not that he has still a daughter! he knows not even whether he has a heart, and will not be able even to recognize me. And were he but to know me, and took compassion on me, my mother would place a pen in his hand and would say, ‘Sign that, it is my will!’ and he would sign it — the poor feeble old man! and his daughter would be condemned.”

“Yes, yes. I know all this as well as you do, my poor child; but be pacified, that contract never will be signed.”

“And who can prevent it?”

“I will!”

“You?”

“Do not despair. To-morrow I shall be present at the family council.”

“Who will present you there?”

“I have the means.”

“My brother is violent and passionate. Oh! good heaven, beware, while striving to save me that you do not sink me still deeper in misery?”

“Your brother’s person is in my eyes as sacred as your own, Marguerite. Fear nothing, and rely confidently upon me.”

“Oh! I believe you, sir, and I implicitly confide in you,” said Marguerite, as if overwhelmed by the contending feelings of confidence and mistrust which she had till then labored under. “For what advantage could you derive from endeavoring to deceive me? What interest could you have to betray me?”

“None, undoubtedly; but let us talk of other matters. What line of conduct do you intend to pursue with regard to the Baron de Lectoure?”

“I will tell him all!”

“Oh!” cried Paul, bowing profoundly, “allow me to adore you.”

“Sir!” murmured Marguerite, “sir!”

“As a sister! as a sister!”

“Yes, you are indeed kind and good,” cried Marguerite, “and I believe it is God who sent you to my aid.”

“Believe it,” replied Paul.

“Then — to-morrow evening.”

“Do not be astonished, nor alarmed at anything that may occur, only contrive to let me know by letter, by a word, a sign, the result of your interview with Lectoure!”

“I will endeavor to do so.”

"It is now late, and your servant may be surprised at the length of this interview, Return to the castle, and say not a word of me to any one. Farewell!"

"Farewell," reiterated Marguerite; "you to whom I know not what name to give."

"Call me your brother."

"Farewell, then, brother."

"Oh, my sister! my sister!" cried Paul, clasping her convulsively in his arms, "your lips are the first from which I have heard so sweet a word. God will reward; you for it."

The young girl drew back amazed; and then returning to Paul, she held out her hand to him. Paul again pressed it, and Marguerite left the cottage.

The young man then went to the door of the inner room, and opened it.

"And now, good old man," said he, "conduct me to my father's grave."

CHAPTER XI.

THE COURTIER.

Hamlet. — — — Dost thou know this water-fly?
Horatio. — No, my good lord.
Hamlet. — Thy state is the more gracious; for ‘tis a vice to know him.
SHAKESPEARE.

Here on my knees by heaven’s blest power I swear,
If you persist, I ne’er henceforth will see you;
But rather wander through the world a beggar,
And live on sordid scraps at poor men’s doors.
For, though to fortune lost, I’ll still inherit
My mother’s virtues and my father’s honor. — OTWAY.

THE clay following that on which Paul had been made acquainted with the secret of his birth, the inhabitants of the castle of Auray awoke more than ever absorbed in the fears and hopes which their several interests had created, for that day must necessarily prove a decisive one to the whole of them. The marchioness, whom our readers have ere this discovered, was neither perverse or wicked, but a haughty and inflexible woman, saw in it the termination of those heart-rending apprehensions, which for so many years, had been her daily companions; for it was above all, in the eyes of her children, that she wished to preserve that unsullied reputation, the usurpation of which had been purchased at such cost. To her, Lectoure was not only a fitting son-in-law, being the bearer of a name as noble as her own, but more than this, a man, or rather a good genius, who at the same moment would bear away not only her daughter, whom he would take with him as his wife, but her son also, to whom the minister, thanks to this alliance, had promised to give a regiment. Both her children

gone, her first-born might come, and the secret revealed to him, would find no echo. Moreover, there were a thousand methods by which to close his lips. The fortune of the marchioness was immense, and gold was one of those resources, which, in such a case, she deemed infallible. The more terrible her fears, the more ardently did she desire this union; so that she not only encouraged the anxiety of Lectoure, but she also excited that of Emanuel. As to the latter, tired of living unknown at Paris, or immured in Brittany, lost in the crowd of brilliant young men who formed the household of the King, or shut up in the antique castle of his ancestors, having their portraits as his sole companions, he knocked with impatient eagerness at the golden door which his intended brother-in-law was to open for him, at Versailles. The grief and tears of his sister had, certainly, for a time afflicted him; for he was ambitious, more from a dread of the *ennui*, which would consume him if compelled to live on his estate, and from the desire of parading at the head of his regiment, captivating the hearts of all the ladies by the richness and good taste of his uniform, than from either pride or hardness of heart. Being himself incapable of forming any serious attachment, and despite the fatal consequences of his sister’s love, he considered that love, merely as a childish fancy, which the tumult and pleasure of the world would soon efface from her memory, and he really believed that before a year had elapsed, she would be the first to thank him for having thus done violence to her feelings.

As to Marguerite, poor victim, so irrevocably condemned to be immolated to the fear of the one, and to the ambition of the other, the scene of the preceding day had made a profound impression on her mind. She could not at all account to herself for the extraordinary feelings which the young man who had -transmitted to her the words of Lusignan, had awakened in her heart; who had tranquillized her as to the fate of the unhappy exile, and had concluded by pressing her to his heart, and calling her his sister. A vague and instinctive hope whispered to her heart, that this man, as he had told her, had received from heaven the mission to protect her. But as she was ignorant of the tie which bound him to her, of the secret which made him master of his mother’s will, of the influence he might exercise over her future life, she did not dare allow herself to dream of happiness, habituated as she had been for six months, to consider death as the only term to her misfortunes.

The marquis, alone, amid the various emotions which agitated all around him, had remained coldly and impossibly indifferent; for to him the world had ceased to move since the dreadful day on which reason had abandoned him; continually absolved by one fixed idea, that of his mortal combat, without seconds. The only words he ever uttered, were those pronounced by the Count de Morlaix, when he forgave him his death. He was an old man, weak as an infant, and whom his wife could overawe by a gesture, and who received from her cold and continuous will, every impulsion, which, for twenty years, the vegetating instinct had received, and which, on him, had usurped the place of reason and free will. On this day, however, a great change had taken place in his monotonous mode of life. A valet de chambre had entered his apartment, and had succeeded to the marchioness in the cares of his toilette; he had dressed him in his uniform of steward of the household, had decorated his breast with the several orders that had been conferred upon him; and then the marchioness, placing a pen in his hand, had ordered him to try to sign his name, and he had obeyed, passively and negligently, without imagining that he was studying the part of an executioner.

About three in the afternoon, a postchaise, the sound of whose wheels had very differently impressed the hearts of the three persons who were expecting it, entered the court-yard of the castle. Emanuel had eagerly run down to the vestibule to receive his future brother-in-law, for it was he who had arrived. Lectoure sprang lightly from his carriage. He had halted for some time at the last post-house, to attire himself in a presentable costume, so that he arrived in an elegant court dress of the latest fashion. Emanuel smiled at this evidence of his anxiety, for it was clearly to be perceived, that Lectoure was determined not to lose the advantage of a first favorable impression, by presenting himself in a dusty travelling dress. His intercourse with the fair sex had taught him, that they almost invariably judge from the first glance, and the effect which it produces upon their minds or hearts, let it be favorable or unfavorable, is with difficulty removed. Moreover, it is but rendering justice to the baron to acknowledge that his person was graceful and elegant, and might have been dangerous to any woman whose heart was not already occupied by another.

“Permit me, my dear baron,” said Emanuel, advancing toward him,” in the momentary absence of the ladies, to do the honors of the mansion of my ancestors. See,” continued he, when they had reached the top of the stone steps leading into the hall, and pointing to the turrets and the bastions, “these date from the time of Philip Augustus, as to architecture, and from Henry IV., in point of ornament.”

“Upon my honor,” replied the baron, in the affected tone which the young men of that day had adopted, “it is a most charming fortress, and throws around it, to a distance of at least three leagues, a baronial odour, which would perfume even an army contractor. If ever," continued he, as they passed through the hall and entered a gallery ornamented on each side with long lines of family portraits, "I should take a fancy *to* enter into a rebellion against his most Christian Majesty, I shall entreat you to lend me this jewel of a place; and," added he, casting his eyes on the long rows of ancestors which offered themselves to his view, "the garrison with it."

"Thirty-three quarters — I will not say in flesh and blood," replied Emanuel, "for they are long since turned to dust — but in painting, as you see. They begin with a certain Chevalier Hugues d'Auray, who accompanied King Louis VII. to the crusades; that one, it is pretended, is my aunt Deborah, whom you see decked out as Judith; and all this eventually ends in the male line, in the last member of this illustrious family, your very humble and very obedient servant, Emanuel d'Auray."

"It is perfectly respectable, and nothing can be more authentic."

"Yes; but as I do not feel that I have, as yet, become sufficiently a patriarch," rejoined Emanuel, passing before the baron to show him the way to the apartment which had been prepared for him, "to spend my clays in such formidable society, I hope, baron, that you have thought of the means by which I can withdraw from it?"

"Undoubtedly, my dear count," said Lectoure, following him. "I wished even to have been myself the bearer of your commission, as my wedding gift to you. I knew of a vacancy in the queen's dragoon's, and called yesterday on M. de Maurepas to solicit it for you, when I heard that it had been granted, at the request of I know not what mysterious admiral, a sort of corsair, pirate, or fantastic being, whom the queen has made the fashion by giving him her hand to kiss, and whom the king has taken a great affection to because he beat the English, I know not where — so that his majesty has conferred upon him the order of military merit, and presented him a sword with a gold hilt, just as he would have done to one of the nobility. In short, the game is lost on that side, but do not be alarmed, we will turn round to another."

"Vey well," replied Emanuel, "I care not what regiment it may be in; what I desire is, that it should be a rank suitable to my name, and a position which would be becoming to our wealth."

"Precisely — you shall have them."

"But how," said Emanuel, wishing to change the subject of conversation, "how did you manage to get rid of the thousand engagements you must have had on your “hands.”

“Why,” said the baron, with that perfectly free and easy air, which belonged only to that distinguished class, and stretching himself upon a couch, for they had at length reached the apartment destined for him, “why, by frankly stating the fact to them. I announced at the. queen’s card table, I was going to be married.”

“Oh! good heaven! Why, this was perfect heroism! Above all, if you acknowledged you were about to seek a wife in the depths of Lower Brittany.”

“I did acknowledge it.”

“And then,” said Emanuel, smiling, “compassion stifled every angry feeling.”

“Gad! you will readily comprehend, my dear count, ‘said Lectoure, putting one knee over the other and, balancing his leg with a motion as regular as that of a pendulum, “our women of the court believe that the sun rises at Paris, and sets at Versailles — all the rest of France, is, in their idea, a Lapland, Greenland, Nova Zembla! So that they expect, as you have hinted, my dear count, to see me bring back with me from my voyage to the pole some large hands, and formidable feet! Fortunately, they are mistaken,” he added, with an accent half timorous, half interrogatory; “is it not so, Emanuel? for you told me that your sister.”

“You will see her,” replied Emanuel.

“It will be a dreadful disappointment to that poor Madame de Chaulne — it cannot be helped — and she must console herself. What is it?”

This question was induced by the entrance of Emanuel’s valet-de-chambre, who had half opened the door, and remained upon the threshold, waiting, as was then the custom of all servants in great houses, till his master should address him.

“What is it? repeated Emanuel.

“Mademoiselle Marguerite d’Auray requests that Monsieur, the Baron de Lectoure, will honor her with a private interview.”

“Me!” said Lectoure, rising from the sofa, “certainly, with the greatest pleasure.”

“But no! it is a mistake!” exclaimed Emanuel; “you must be mistaken, Celestin.”

“I have the honor to assure your lordship,” replied the valet de chambre, “that I have correctly and faithfully executed the order which was given to me.”

“Impossible!” said Emanuel, uneasy to the highest degree, at the step his sister had ventured to take: “Baron, if you will be advised by me, you will send the little simpleton about her business.”

“By no means! by no means,” replied Lectoure. “What does this bluebeard of a brother mean? Celestin! Did you not call this lad, Celestin?”

Emanuel impatiently bowed his head in the affirmative.

“Well then, Celestin, tell my lovely betrothed that I throw myself at her knees, at her feet, and that I await her orders either to go to her or to receive her here; — and there, take this for the charges of your embassy.”

He threw him his purse.

“And you, count,” rejoined Lectoure, “I trust that you have confidence enough in me, to permit this *tête-à-tête.*”

“But it is so perfectly absurd!”

“*Not* at all,” replied Lectoure; “on the contrary, it is perfectly befitting. I am not a crowned head, that I should marry a woman upon her portrait, and by proxy. I wish to see her in person. Come, Emanuel,” he continued, pushing his friend toward a side door, that he might not meet his sister — ” Come, now, tell me frankly — in confidence, between ourselves — is there any — deformity?”

“Why, no, by heaven!” replied the young count, no — on the contrary, she is as lovely as an angel.”

“Well, then!” said the baron, “what does all this opposition mean? Come, now, begone, or must I call my guards?”

“No; but on my word, I am afraid that this little simpleton, who has not the slightest notion of the world, is coming to destroy all that has been arranged between us.”

“Oh! if that is all you fear,” replied Lectoure, opening the door, “you may be perfectly at ease. I like the brother too well not to look over some caprice — some extraordinary fantasies in the sister — and I pledge you my word as a gentleman, unless the devil should play us some strange trick, (whom, I trust, is at this moment fully occupied in some other corner of the world) that Mademoiselle Marguerite d’Auray, shall be Madame the Baroness de Lectoure, and that in a month you shall have your regiment.”

This promise appeared in some degree to pacify Emanuel, who allowed himself to be pushed out of the door without making further difficulty, Lectoure immediately ran to a looking-glass to repair the slight traces of disorder, which the jolting over the three last leagues had occasioned in his dress. He had scarcely given to his hair and garments the most becoming turn and folds, when the door again, opened, and Celestin announced--

“Mademoiselle Marguerite d’Auray.”

The baron turned round, and perceived his betrothed standing pale and trembling on the threshold of the door. Although the promises of Emanuel had inspired him with some degree of hope, a certain residue of doubt had still remained on his mind, if not as to the beauty, at all events, with regard to the deportment of the lady who was about to become his wife. His surprise was therefore unbounded, when he saw that delicate and graceful creature standing before him, and whom the most fastidious critic of female elegance could only have reproached with being in a slight degree too pallid. Marriages, such as the one about to be contracted by Lectoure, were by no means rare in an age in which questions as to rank and suitableness of fortune in general, decided alliances between noble houses; but that which was scarcely found once in a thousand times, was, that a man in the baron’s position should meet, immured in a distant province, a lady possessed of an immense fortune, and whom, at the first glance, he could discern, was worthy, by her demeanor, her elegance, and her beauty, to shine in the most brilliant circles of the court. He, therefore, advanced toward her, no longer with the feeling of superiority as a courtier, addressing a country girl, but with all the respectful ease which distinguished good society at that time.

“Pardon me, mademoiselle,” said he, offering her his hand to conduct her to an arm chair, but which she did not accept; “it was to me to solicit the favor you have bestowed upon me; and believe me, it was the apprehension of being considered indiscreet, which alone has occasioned the apparent neglect of allowing myself to be forestalled.”

“I truly appreciate this delicacy, sir,” replied Marguerite, in a trembling voice, and retreating one step, she remained standing. “It strengthens me still more in the confidence which, without having seen you, without knowing you, I had placed in your honor and good faith.”

“Whatever aim this confidence may have had, I am honored by it, mademoiselle, and I will endeavor to render myself worthy of it. But, good heaven, what can so affect you?”

“Nothing, sir, nothing,” replied Marguerite, endeavoring to overcome her emotion; “but it is — it is — that I have to tell you that — but — really — I am not sufficiently mistress of myself to--”

She staggered, and appeared as if about to fall; the baron sprang toward her to offer his support, but he had scarcely touched her when a flush of crimson suffused the cheeks of the young girl, and with a feeling, which might be attributed as well to modesty as to repugnance, she disengaged herself from his arms. Lectoure had taken her hand, and conducted her to a chair, against which she leaned, but would not seat herself in it.

"Good God!" exclaimed the baron, still retaining her hand, "it must then be something very difficult to utter, that has brought you hither! Or, without my at all suspecting it, has my being affianced to you already conferred upon me the imposing air of a husband?"

Marguerite made another effort to withdraw her hand from the baron, and which induced the latter to observe it, "How!" said he, "not satisfied with having the most adorable of faces, the elegant figure of a fairy, but you must have such lovely hands! — hands perfectly royal in their shape — why, 'tis enough to make me expire at once."

"I trust M. le Baron," rejoined Marguerite, and making a last effort, she withdrew her hand from his grasp, "that the words with which you are now addressing me, are merely words of gallantry."

"No, by my soul! they are the sincere truth."

"Well then, I hope, should it be, which I much doubt, that you really think that which you have been pleased to say — I trust, I say, that such motives will not lead you to attach a higher value to the union which has been projected?"

"They will, indeed, and that I swear to you."

"And yet," continued Marguerite, gasping for breath, so much was her heart oppressed, "and yet, sir, you consider marriage as a solemn matter?"

"That is as it may happen," smilingly replied Lectoure; "for example, if I were about to marry an old dowager."

"In short," rejoined Marguerite, in a more determined tone, "I beg your pardon, sir, if I have been mistaken; I thought, perhaps, that with regard to the alliance proposed between us, you had formed some idea of reciprocity of feeling."

"Never!" cried Lectoure, interrupting her, for he appeared as eager to avoid the frank explanation, which Marguerite desired, as she seemed to provoke it. "Never! and above all, since I have seen you, I could not hope to be worthy of your love. And yet my name, my position in society, notwithstanding I should fail to influence your heart, may yet give me a title to your hand.”

“But how, sir,” said Marguerite, timidly, “how can you separate the one from the other?”

“As do three-fourths of the people who get married, mademoiselle,” replied Lectoure, with a carelessness which would have at once deterred the confidence of a woman less candid than Marguerite. “A man marries in order to have a wife, the wife to have a husband; it is a social compact, an arrangement of convenience. What can love have to do in a matter of this nature?”

“Your pardon, sir; perhaps I have not clearly expressed my meaning,” continued Marguerite, making an effort to control her feelings, and to conceal from the man upon whom her future fate depended, the impression his words had produced upon her mind. “But you must attribute my hesitation, sir, to the timidity of a young girl, compelled by imperious circumstances to speak on such a subject.”

“Not at all, mademoiselle,” replied Lectoure, bowing and giving to his voice a tone which nearly approached raillery; “on the contrary, you speak like Clarissa Harlowe, and all you say is as clear as daylight. God has endowed me with a mind sufficiently quick-sighted perfectly to comprehend things which are but hinted at.”

“How, sir!” cried Marguerite, “you comprehend what I had the intention of saying, and you allow me to continue? How would it be if on looking deeply into my heart and interrogating all its feelings, I found it impossible to love — to love the person who had been presented to me as my future husband Î”

“Why,” replied Lectoure, in the same sarcastic tone in which he had before spoken, “in my opinion the best course to pursue would be not to tell him of it.”

“And why not, sir?”

“Because — but — but — because it would really be too simple.”

“And if that avowal were made, not from simplicity but from delicacy? If I added, and may the shame of such an avowal fall back on those who compel me to make it — if I added sir, that I have loved, that I still love?”

“Oh! some little romance, is it not so?” said Lectoure, carelessly, crossing his leg and playing with the frill of his shirt; “upon my honor, the race of little cousins is an accursed race. But fortunately we know what these ephemeral attachments are; and there is not a school-girl, who, after the holidays, does not return to her convent but with a passion in her little heart."

"Unfortunately for me," replied Marguerite, with, a voice as sorrowful and grave as that of the baron was sarcastic and light, €t unfortunately, I am no longer a school-girl, sir; and although still young, I have long ago passed the age of childish games and infantine attachments. When I speak to the man who does me the honor to solicit my hand and to offer me his name, of my love for another, he ought to understand that I am speaking of a serious, profound, and eternal love; of one of those passions, in fine, which leave their traces in the heart, and imprint them there for ever."

"The devil!" exclaimed Lectoure, as if beginning to attach some importance to Marguerites confession; "why, this is perfectly pastoral. But let us see! is it a young man whom one can receive at one's house? "- Oh! sir," cried Marguerite, catching at the hope which these words seemed to inspire:

"Oh! believe me, he is the most estimable being, the most devoted soul."

"Why, I am not asking you to tell me this — I was not speaking of the qualities of his heart — he has all these, of course, that's perfectly understood. I ask you whether he is noble? if he is of good race? in short, whether a woman of quality could acknowledge him, and that without degrading her husband?"

"His father, whom he lost when very young, and who was my father's friend from infancy, was a counsellor at the Court of Rennes."

"Nobility of the bar!" exclaimed Lectoure, dropping his nether lip with a contemptuous shrug; "I would rather it were otherwise — is he a knight of Malta, at least?"

"He was educated for a military life."

"Oh! then, we must get a regiment for him, to give him rank and standing in society. Well, that's all arranged, and it is well. Now, listen to me: he will absent himself for six months, merely for decency's sake, will obtain leave of absence, no difficult matter now, as we are not at war — he will get himself presented to you for forms sake, by some mutual friend, and then all will go on rightly."

"I do not understand you, sir," replied Marguerite, looking at the baron with an expression of profound astonishment."

“What I have said to you is, notwithstanding, perfectly pellucid,” rejoined the latter, with some show of impatience; “you have engagements on your side — I have on mine — but that is no reason for preventing an union which is perfectly suitable in every respect; and once accomplished, why, I think, we are bound to render it as bearable as we can. Do you comprehend me now?”

“Oh! pardon me, sir, pardon me,” cried Marguerite, starting back, as though these words had outraged her; I have been very imprudent, very culpable perhaps; hut whatever I may have been, I did not dream I could have merited so gross an insult. Oh! sir, the blush of shame is now scorching my cheek, but more for you than for myself. Yes, I understand you — an apparent love and a concealed one; the face of vice and the mask of virtue; and it is to me — to me, the daughter of the Marquis d’Auray, that so shameful, so humiliating, so infamous a bargain is proposed. Oh!” continued she, falling into an arm-chair, and hiding her face with both her hands, “I must then be a most unfortunate, most contemptible lost creature! Oh! my God! my God!”

“Emanuel! Emanuel!” cried the baron, opening the door, at which he rightly suspected Marguerite’s brother had remained; “come in, my dear friend; your sister is attacked with spasms; these things ought to be attended to, or they may become chronic; Madame de Moulan died of them. Here, take my scent bottle, and let her smell at it. As to myself, I am going down into the park. If you have nothing else to do, you can rejoin me there, and bring me, if you please, news of your sister.”

Saying these words, the Baron de Lectoure left the room with miraculous calmness, leaving Marguerite and Emanuel together.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CHALLENGE.

Do as you will, heap wrongs on wrongs upon me,
It shall not anger me — I tell thee Claudius,
Thou art enshrined in a holy circle
  My foot can never pass — nor taunt, nor insult
  Can e'er induce this hand to rise against thee.
  Therefore be satisfied — Once more I tell thee
  I will not fight with thee. — OLD PLAY.

ON the day of which the interview between Marguerite and the Baron de Lectoure had taken place, the result of which had proved so diametrically opposed to the hopes and expectations of the young girl, on that day at four o'clock, the dinner bell recalled the baron to the castle. Emanuel did the honors of the table, for the marchioness could not leave her husband, and Marguerite had requested permission not to come down stairs. The other guests were the notary, the relations of the family, and the witnesses. The repast was a gloomy one, notwithstanding the imperturbable gaiety of Lectoure; but it was evident that by his joyous humor, so stirring that it appeared feverish, he strove to stun his own feelings. From time to time, indeed, his boisterous liveliness failed all at once, like a lamp, the oil of which is nearly extinguished, and then it suddenly burst forth again, as doth the flame when it devours its last aliment. At seven o'clock they rose from table, and went into the drawing-room. It would be difficult to form an idea of the strange aspect which the old castle then presented; the vast apartments of which were hung with damask draperies, with gothic designs, and ornamented with furniture of the times of Louis XIII. and Louis XIV.

They had been so long closed that they appeared unaccustomed to the presence of living beings. And, therefore, notwithstanding the abundance of chandeliers with which the servants had decorated the rooms, the feeble and vacillating light of the wax candles was insufficient to illuminate the vast rooms, and in which the voice resounded as under the arches of a cathedral. The small number of the guests, who were to be joined during the evening by some three or four gentlemen of the neighbourhood, increased the gloom which appeared to hover over the emblazoned columns of the castle. In the centre of one of the saloons, the same one in which Emanuel, at the moment after his arrival from Paris, had received Captain Paul, was placed a table prepared with much solemnity, on which was laid a closed portfolio, which, to the eyes of a stranger ignorant of all that was preparing, might as well have enclosed a death warrant as a marriage contract. In the midst of these grave aspects and gloomy impressions, from time to time a shrill mocking laugh would reach the ears of a group of persons whispering to each other. It proceeded from Lectoure, who was amusing himself at the expense of some good country gentlemen, without any respect for the feelings of Emanuel, upon whom a portion of his raillery necessarily recoiled. He would, however, every now and then cast an anxious glance around the room, and then a gloomy cloud would pervade his features, for he saw not either his father-in-law, or the marchioness, or Marguerite enter the room. As we have already stated, that neither of them had been present at the dinner table, and his interview with the latter had not, however careless he endeavored to appear, left him without some uneasiness with regard to the signing of the contract, which was to take place during the evening. Neither was Emanuel exempt from all anxiety, and he had just determined to go up to his sister’s apartment, when in passing through one of the rooms he saw Lectoure, who made a sign to him to draw near.

“By heaven! you have come in the nick of time, my dear count,” said he to him, while appearing to pay the greatest attention to a good country gentleman, who was talking to him, and of whom he seemed on terms of perfect intimacy; “here is M. do Nozay, who is relating to me some very curious things, upon my word! But do you know,” continued he, turning to the narrator, “this is most admirable, and highly interesting. I also have marshes and ponds, and I must ask my steward as soon as I get to Paris, to tell me where they are situated. And do you catch many wild ducks in this way.”

“An immense quantity,” replied the gentleman, and with the accent of perfect simplicity, which proved that Lectoure could, without fear of detection, for some time longer sustain the conversation in the same tone.

“What, then, is this miraculous mode of sporting?” inquired Emanuel.

“Only imagine, my dear friend,” replied Lectoure, with the most complete sang froid, “that this gentleman gets into the water up to his neck,

— At what time of the year, may I ask, without being indiscreet?”

“In the month of December and January.”

“It is impossible that any thing can be more picturesque. I was saying, then, that he gets into the water up to his neck, puts a large toadstool over his head, and conceals himself among the bulrushes. This so completely metamorphoses him that the ducks do not recognise him, and* allow him to come close to them. Did you not say so?”

“As near as I am to you.”

“Bah! really!” exclaimed Emanuel.

“And this gentleman kills just as many as he pleases.”

“I kill them by dozens,” said he, proudly, being enchanted by the attention which the two young men were paying to the recital of his exploits.

“It must be a delightful thing for your good lady, if she be fond of ducks,” said Emanuel.

“She adores them,” said M. de Nozay, “I hope you will do me the honor to introduce me to so interesting a person,” said Lectoure, bowing.

“Undoubtedly baron.”

“I swear to you,” said Lectoure, “that instantly on my return to Paris, I will speak of this sport in the king’s dressing-room, and I am persuaded that his majesty himself will make a trial of it in one of his large ponds of Versailles.”

“I beg your pardon, dear marquis,” said Emanuel, taking Lectoure’s arm, and whispering in his ear, “this is one of our country neighbors, whom we could not do otherwise than invite on so solemn an occasion.”

“It requires no apology, my dear friend,” said Lectoure, using the same precaution not to be heard by the party in question: you would have been decidedly wrong had you deprived me of so amusing a companion. He is an appendage to the dower of my future wife, and I should have been greatly chagrined not to have made his acquaintance.”

“Monsieur de la Jarry,” said a servant, opening the door.

“A sporting companion?” said Lectoure.

“No,” replied M. de Nozay; “he is a traveller.”

“Ah! ah!” exclaimed Lectoure, with an accent which announced that the newly arrived personage was to be the subject of a new attack. He had hardly made the ejaculation, when the person announced entered the room, muffled up in a Polish dress, lined with fur.

“Ah! my dear La Jarry,” cried Emanuel, advancing to meet him, and holding out his hand to him, “but how you are be-furred! Upon my honor, you look like the Czar Peter.”

“It is,” replied La Jarry, shivering, although the weather was by no means cold, “because, when one arrives from Naples — perrrrrou!”

“Ah! the gentleman has arrived from Naples,” said Lectoure, joining in the conversation.

“Direct, sir.”

“Did you ascend Vesuvius, sir?”

“No. I was satisfied with looking at it from my window. And then,” continued the traveller, with a tone of contempt, most humiliating to the volcano, “Vesuvius is not the most curious thing that is to ho seen at Naples. A mountain that smokes? my chimney does as much, when the wind is in the wrong quarter, — and besides Madame La Jarry was dreadfully alarmed at the idea of an eruption.”

“But of course you visited the *Grotto del Cane?”* continued Lectoure.

“To what purpose?” rejoined La Jarry; “to see an animal that has vapors — give a pill to the first poodle that passes, and he will do as much. And then, Madame La Jarry has quite a passion for dogs, and it would have given her pain to witness so cruel an exhibition.”

“I hope, however, that a man of science, like yourself,” said Emanuel, bowing, “did not neglect the Solfatara.”

“Who, I — I would not set my foot there. I can very easily imagine what three or four acres of sulphur looks like, the sole produce of which is a few millions of matches. Moreover, Madame La Jarry cannot support the odour of sulphur.”

“What do you think of our new friend?” said Emanuel, leading Lectoure into the room in which the contract was to be signed.

“I know not whether it is because I saw the other first, but I decidedly prefer Nozay.”

The door again opened, and the servant loudly announced, “Monsieur Paul.”

“Eh!” exclaimed Emanuel, turning round.

“Who is this?” inquired Lectoure, listlessly, “another country neighbour?”

“No; this is quite another sort of person,” replied Emanuel, with agitation. How does this man dare to present himself here?”

"Ah! ah! a plebeian — eh? a common fellow, is he not? but rich, I suppose. No — a poet? musician? painter? well, I can assure you, Emanuel, that they are beginning to receive this sort of people — that accursed philosophy has confounded every thing. It cannot be helped, my dear fellow, we must courageously make up our minds to it — we have come to that. An artist sits down by a great noble, elbows him, touches the corner of his hat to him, remains seated when the other rises — they converse together on court matters — they jest, they joke, they squabble, it is *bon ton* though decidedly bad taste."

"You are mistaken, Lectoure," replied Emanuel; "he is neither poet, painter, or musician: he is a man to whom I must speak alone. Just lead off Nozay, while I do the same with La Jarry."

Upon this, the two young gentlemen took each of the country neighbours by the arm, and drew them away into another room, talking of shooting and travelling. The side door through which they went out, had scarcely closed upon them, when Paul appeared at the principal one. He went into the room he already knew, each corner of which concealed a door — the one led to a library, the other to the room in which he had been shut up on his first visit, awaiting the result of the conference between Marguerite and Emanuel, and then approaching the table, he remained there for a moment, looking attentively at the two doors, as though he had expected to see one of them opened. His hope was not fallacious. In a few moments, that of the library was opened, and he perceived a white form standing within it; he rushed towards it.

"Is it you, Marguerite?" said he.

"Yes," replied a trembling voice.

"Well?"

"I told him all?"

"And--"

"And in ten minutes the contract is to be signed."

"I suspected as much — he is a miserable wretch."

"What's to be done?" cried the young girl.

"Take courage, Marguerite."

"Courage — oh! it now fails me entirely."

"There is that which will restore it," said Paul, handing her a letter.

M What does this letter contain?"

“The name of the village in which you will find your son, and the name of the woman in whose house he has been concealed.”

“My son!? oh! you are my guardian angel,” cried Marguerite, endeavoring to kiss the hand which held the paper to her.

“Silence! some one is coming — whatever may happen, you will find me at Achard’s.”

Marguerite suddenly closed the door without replying to him, for she had heard the sound of her brother’s footsteps. Paul turned round, and went to meet him, which he did, near the table.

“I expected you at another time, sir, and in less numerous company,” said Emanuel, who was the first to speak.

“It appears to me that we are alone at this moment,” said Paul, glancing around the room.

“Yes, but it is here that the contract is to be signed, and in an instant this room will be full.”

“But many things may be said in an instant, count.”

“You are right, sir, but you must meet a man who docs not require more than, an instant to comprehend them.”

“I am listening,” said Paul.

“You spoke to me of letters “rejoined Emanuel, drawing nearer to him, and lowering his voice.

“It is true,” said Paul, with the same calmness.

“You fixed a price upon those letters?”

“That is also true.”

“Well, then! if you are a man of honor, for that price, for the sum enclosed in this pocket-book, you ought now to be prepared to give them up.”

“Yes, sir, yes,” replied Paul, “the case stood thus, as long as I believed your sister, forgetful of the vows she had made, the fault she had Committed, and even the child to which she had given birth, was seconding your ambition by her perjury. Then, I thought it would be a sufficiently bitter fate for the poor child to enter upon life without a name and without a family, not to allow him to enter it without a fortune also, and I then demanded of you, it is true, that sum in exchange for the letters in my possession. But now the state of things is altered, sir. I saw your sister throw herself upon her knees before you, I heard her entreat you not to force her into this infamous marriage, and neither prayers, nor tears, nor supplications could make any impression on your heart. It is now for me, for me who hold your honor, and the honor of your family within my hands, it is for me to save the mother from despair, as I would have saved the child from penury and misery. Those letters, sir, shall be delivered to you, when you shall, upon this table, instead of signing the marriage contract of your sister with the Baron de Lectoure, sign that of Mademoiselle Marguerite d'Auray with Anatole de Lusignan."

"Never, sir, never!"

"You shall not have them, excepting on that condition, count."

"Oh! I shall, perhaps, find some mode of compelling you to return them."

"I know not any," coldly replied Paul.

"Will you, sir, deliver those letters to me!"

"Count," replied Paul, with an expression of countenance, which, under the circumstances, was perfectly inexplicable to Emanuel, "count, listen to me?"

"Will you return me those letters, sir?"

"Count--"

"Yes, or no!"

"No!" said Paul, calmly.

"Well then, sir, you wear a sword, as I do; we are both gentlemen, or rather I would believe you to be such; let us leave the house together, and one of us shall return alone, and he, being unfettered and powerful from the death of the other, shall then do as he best pleases."

"I regret I cannot accept the offer, count."

"How? you wear that uniform, that cross upon your breast, by your side that sword, and you refuse a duel."

"Yes, Emanuel, I do refuse it, because I cannot raise my sword against you, count — believe me, I entreat you."

"You cannot fight with me!"

"I cannot, upon my honor."

"You cannot fight with me, you say?"

At this moment a person who had entered the room without being perceived, burst into a loud laugh, close behind the two young men. Paul and Emanuel turned hastily round. Lectoure was standing close to them.

"But," said Paul, pointing to Lectoure, "I can fight with him, for he is a miserable and infamous wretch."

A burning blush passed over Lectoure’s features, like the reflection of a flame. He made a step towards Paul, and then stopped.

“It is well, sir,” said he; “send your second to Emanuel and they can arrange this matter.’’

“You will understand that between us the affair is merely deferred,” said Emanuel, to Paul.

“Silence!” replied Paul, “they are announcing your mother.”

“Yes, silence, and to-morrow we meet again. Lectoure,” added Emanuel, “let us go to receive my mother.”

Paul looked silently at the young men as they retired, and then he entered the small room in which he had before been concealed.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CONTRACT.

Listen to me and heed me! If this contract
Thou hold’st me to, abide thou the result!
Answer to heaven for what I suffer! act!
Prepare thyself for such calamity
To fall on me, and those whose evil
Have linked them with me, as no past mishap,
However rare and marvellously sad, Can parallel...
KNOWLES — *The Hunchback.*

AT the moment that Paul went into the study, the marchioness appeared at the door of the drawing-room, followed by the notary, and the several persons who had been invited to be present at the signing of the contract. Notwithstanding the nature of the meeting, the marchioness had not considered it proper to lay aside, even for one evening, her mourning garments, and dressed in complete black, as she had been always during twenty years, she came into the room a few moments before the marquis. None of the persons present, not even his son, had seen the marquis for many years. Such attention was in those days paid to ancient forms, that the marchioness would not allow the marriage contract of her daughter to be signed, without the head of the family, although deprived of reason, being present at the ceremony. However little accustomed Lectoure was to feel intimidated, the marchioness produced upon him the effect which she did on every one that approached her, and on seeing her enter the room with so grave and dignified an aspect, he bowed to her with a feeling of profound respect.

“I am grateful to you, gentlemen,” said the marchioness, bowing to the persons who accompanied her, “for the honor you have been pleased to confer upon me, by being present at the betrothal of Mademoiselle Marguerite d’Auray, with the Baron de Lectoure. I, in consequence, was desirous that the marquis, although suffering from illness, should also be present at this meeting, to thank you at least by his presence, if he cannot do so verbally. You are all aware of his unfortunate malady, and you will, therefore, not be astonished, should some disjointed words--"

"Yes, madam," said Lectoure, interrupting her," we know the misfortune which has befallen him, and we admire the devoted wife, who for twenty years has borne half the weight of this sad visitation."

"You see, madam," said Emanuel, addressing in his turn, and kissing the hand of his mother, "all the world bows down in admiration of your conjugal piety."

"Where is Marguerite?" murmured the marchioness, in a half whisper.

"She was here not a moment ago," said Emanuel.

"Let her know that we are all assembled," rejoined the marchioness, in the same tone.

A servant then announced "the Marquis d'Auray."

All present drew to one side, so as to leave free passage from the door, and all eyes were directed to the spot at which this new personage was to appear. It was not long before their curiosity was satisfied; the marquis came in almost immediately, supported by two servants.

He was an old man, whose countenance, notwithstanding that the traces of suffering had deeply furrowed it, still retained that noble and dignified appearance which had rendered him one of the most distinguished men of the court of Louis XV. His large, hollow, and feverish eyes, glanced around the assembly with a strange expression of astonishment. Ho was dressed in his costume of Steward of the Household, wore the order of the Holy Ghost suspended from his neck, and that of St. Louis, at his button hole. He advanced slowly, and without uttering a word. The two servants led him forward amid the most profound silence, to an arm-chair, in which he seated himself, and the servants left the room. The marchioness then placed herself at his right hand. The notary opened the portfolio, drew from it the marriage contract and read it aloud. The marquis and the marchioness made over the sum of five hundred thousand francs to Lectoure, and gave a like sum to Marguerite, as her dowry.

During the whole of the time occupied by the reading of the contract, the marchioness, notwithstanding her great self command, had betrayed some symptoms of uneasiness. But just at the moment when the notary had placed the contract open on the table, Emanuel returned and approached his mother.

"And Marguerite?" said the marchioness.

“She will be here instantly.”

“Madam,” murmured Marguerite, half opening the door, and clasping her hands.

The marchioness pretended not to hear her, and pointed with her finger at the pen.

“Baron, it is you who are first to sign.”

Lectoure immediately approached the table and signed the contract.

“Madam!” cried Marguerite, in a tone of supplication, and advancing one step toward her mother.

“Pass the pen to your betrothed, Baron,” said the marchioness.

The Baron walked round the table, and drew near to Marguerite.

“Madam!” again cried the latter, with an accent so melancholy, that it struck to the heart of every person present, and even the marquis himself raised his head.

“Sign!” said the marchioness, pointing to the marriage contract.

“Oh! my father! my father!” exclaimed Marguerite throwing herself at the feet of the marquis..

“What does this mean?” said the marchioness, leaning upon the arm of the marquis’ chair, and bending over him, “are you mad, mademoiselle?”

“My father! oh! my father!” again cried Marguerite, throwing her arms around him, “my father, have pity, save your daughter!”

“Marguerite!” murmured the marchioness, in a threatening accent.

“Madam!” replied Marguerite, “I cannot address myself to you — permit me, then, to implore my father’s pity; unless,” she added, pointing to the notary with a firm and determined gesture, “you would prefer my invoking the protection of the law.”

“Come, come,” said the marchioness, rising, and in a tone of bitter irony, “this is a family scene, and which, although highly interesting to near relations, must be sufficiently tedious to strangers. Gentlemen, you will find refreshments in the adjoining rooms. My son, conduct these gentlemen, and do the honors. Baron, I must beg your pardon for a short time.”

Emanuel and Lectoure bowed in silence and withdrew, followed by all the company. The marchioness remained motionless until the last of them had withdrawn, and then she closed all the doors leading into the room, when, returning to the marquis, whom Marguerite still held clasped in her arms.

“And now,” said she, “that there is no one present excepting those who have the right to lay their commands upon you, sign that paper, mademoiselle, or leave the room.”

“For pity’s sake, madam, for pity’s sake, do not compel me to commit so infamous an act!”

“Have you not heard me?” said the marchioness, giving to her voice an imperative tone, which she thought impossible to be resisted, “or must I repeat my words? Sign, or leave the room.’

“Oh! my father!” cried Marguerite, “mercy! mercy! No, it shall not be said, that after having been banished from my father’s presence for ten years, I was torn from his arms the first time I again beheld him — and that, before he had recognized me, before he has embraced me, Oh! father! father! — it is I, it is your daughter!”

“What is that voice that is imploring me?” murmured the marquis. “Who is this child who calls me father?”

“That voice,” said the marchioness, seizing the arm of her daughter, “is a voice that is raised against the rights of nature. That child is a rebellious daughter.”

“My father!” cried Marguerite imploringly, “look at me. Oh! my father, save me! defend me! I am Marguerite.”

“Marguerite? Marguerite?” stammered the marquis, “I had formerly a child of that name.”

“It is I! it is X!” rejoined Marguerite: “I am your child — I am your daughter.”

“There are no children but those who obey. Obey! and you will then have the right to call yourself our daughter,” rejoined the marchioness.

“To you, my father, yes, — to you I am ready to obey. But you do not command this sacrifice! you do not wish that I should be unhappy — unhappy even to despair — unhappy even to death.”

Come! come!” said the marquis holding her in his turn, and pressing her to his heart. “Oh! this is a delicious and unknown feeling to me. And now — wait! wait!” He pressed his hand to his forehead, “It seems to me that I recollect.”

“Sir!” cried the marchioness, “tell her that she ought to obey; that the malediction of God awaits rebellious children. Tell her that, rather than to encourage her in her impiety!”

The marquis slowly raised his head, and fixed his piercing eyes upon his wife, and then slowly pronounced the following words: “Take care! madam, take care. Have I not told you that I begin to remember! and then again bending down his head to that of Marguerite; so that. his grey hairs mingled with the dark tresses of his daughter, — “Speak — speak!” said he, “what is it that disturbs you, my child-tell me all.”

“Oh! I am most unhappy!”

“Everybody, then, is unhappy here,” exclaimed the marquis, “whether their hair be grey or black — an old man or a child. Oh! and I also — lam unhappy — he assured.

“Sir, go up stairs into your room again: you must,” said the marchioness.

“Yes, that I may again be face to face with you; shut up like a prisoner! That may be very well, when I am mad.”

“Yes, yes, my father, you are right. My mother has devoted herself to you long enough; it is now time that your daughter should perform that duty. Take me with you, father. I will not leave you day or night.. You will only have to make a sign, to utter a word, and I will serve you on my knees.”

“Oh! you would not have the strength to do it.”

“Yes, yes, my father, I will — as truly as I am your daughter.”

The marchioness wrung her hands with impatience.

“If you are my daughter, how is it that I have not seen you for ten years?”

“Because I was told that you would not see me, my father; because they told me that you did not love me.”

“You were told that I would not see you — not see that angel face!” said he, taking her head between his hands, and looking at her with intense affection; “they told you that — they told you that a poor condemned soul did not wish for heaven! “Who was it, then, that told you a father would not see his child?

Who has dared to say, child, your father loves you not?”

“I!--” said the marchioness, again endeavoring to take Marguerite from her father’s arms.

“You!” exclaimed the marquis, interrupting her: “it was you? To you then, has been confided the fatal mission of deceiving me in all my affections. All my griefs, then, must find their source in you? You wish, then, now to break the father’s heart, as twenty years ago, you did that of the husband.”

“You are delirious, sir,” said-the marchioness, “loosing the arm of her daughter; and going to the right of the marquis, she whispered — ” be silent!”

“No, madam, no, I am not now delirious,” replied the marquis, “No! no! Say rather, say that, — and it will be the truth, — say that I am now between an angel who would recall me to reason, and a demon who wishes me again to become insane. No! No! I am not mad. Do you wish that I should prove it to you?” He rose, supporting himself on the arms of his chair. “Must I speak to you of letters, of adultery, of a duel?”

“I say,” said the marchioness, grasping his arm, “I tell you that you are more forsaken by heaven than ever, when you utter such things, without reflecting as to whose ears are listening. Cast down your eyes, sir — look who is standing yonder, and then dare assert that you are not mad!”

“You are right;” said the marquis, falling back in his chair. Your mother is right,” continued he, addressing Marguerite — ” I am mad, and you must not believe what I say, but what she says. Your mother is devotedness, virtue itself, and therefore, she has not sleepless nights, nor remorse, nor madness. What does your mother wish?”

“My misery, father; my everlasting misery.”

“And how can I prevent this misery?” said the unhappy old man, with a most heart-rending anguish; “how can I, a poor, insane old man, prevent it? who thinks he always sees the blood issuing from a wound — who thinks he constantly hears a voice proceeding from a tomb!”

“Oh you can do all; say but one word and I am saved! They wish me to marry--”

The marquis listlessly reclined his head on the back of his chair.

“Listen to me! they wish to marry me to a man whom I do not love — do you understand me? - — to a wretch! — and you have been brought here — placed in that arm-chair, before the table — you, you my father! to sign this infamous contract — this contract which I now hand to you.”

“Without consulting me,” said the marquis, taking the contract; “without asking me whether I will, or I will not! Do they believe me dead? And if they think me dead, do they fear me less than they would a spectre? This marriage would cause your misery, you say?”

“My eternal misery!” exclaimed Marguerite.

“The marriage, then, shall not take place.”

“I have pledged your word and mine,” said the marchioness, and with the more energy, that she felt her influence over her husband about to escape her.

“This marriage, I tell you, shall not take place!” replied the marquis, in a tone louder than that of his wife. “It is too dreadful a thing,” continued he, in a gloomy sepulchral tone, “to be permitted. A marriage in which a wife loves not her husband — why, it causes madness! As to myself, the marchioness has always loved me, and loved me faithfully — that which drove me mad — oh! that was a different matter.”

A flash of diabolical joy shot from the eyes of the marchioness, for she at once saw from the violence of the expressions used by her husband, and the terror depicted on his features, that his insanity was about to return.

“This contract,” said the marquis, and he raised it in his hands as if about to tear it.

The marchioness eagerly caught his hand. Marguerite appeared to be hanging by a thread between heaven and hell.

“That which drives me mad!” reiterated the marquis, “is a tomb which widely opens, a spectre that ‘issues from the earth, it is a phantom that speaks to me, and says--”

“Your life is in my hands!” murmured the marchioness in his ear, repeating the last words of the dying Morlaix: “I could take it.”

“Do you hear that?” cried the marquis, rising, and as if about to rush from the room.

“My father! oh J my father! recall your senses; there is no tomb, there is no spectre, there is no phantom; those words were uttered by the marchioness.”

“But I wish you to live,” continued the latter, concluding the sentence she had begun, “to forgive me as I forgive you.”

“Pardon, Morlaix, pardon!” cried the marquis, falling back in his arm-chair, his hair standing on end with terror, and the perspiration streaming from his forehead, “Oh! father! father!”

‘“You see that your father is altogether deranged” said the marchioness, triumphantly; “say no more to him.”

“Oh!” cried Marguerite, “God will, I trust, perform a miracle! My love, my caresses, my tears, will restore him to reason.”

‘“Make the attempt,” replied the marchioness, coldly, abandoning to her care the marquis, who was powerless, speechless, and almost without consciousness.

“Oh! my poor father!” exclaimed Marguerite, in a tone of agony.

The marquis remained perfectly impassable.

“Sir!” said the marchioness, in an imperative manner.

“Eh! eh!” cried the marquis, shuddering.

“Save me! oh! save me, father!” cried Marguerite, wringing her hands, and throwing herself back in despair.

“Take this pen and sign,” said the marchioness, “you must — it is my will.”

“Now, I am lost indeed!” cried Marguerite, overwhelmed with terror, and feeling that she had no longer strength to continue the struggle.

But at the moment that the marquis, overpowered, had written the first letters of his name; when the marchioness was congratulating herself on the victory she had obtained, and Marguerite was about to leave the room in despair, an unexpected incident suddenly changed the scene. The door of the study opened, and Paul, who had been anxiously watching, though invisibly, the whole of this terrible conflict, issued from it.

“Madam,” said he, “one word before this contract is signed!”

“Who is it calls me!” said the marchioness, endeavoring to distinguish in the distance that separated them, the person who had thus spoken, and who stood in a dark corner of the room.

“I know that voice!” exclaimed the marquis, shuddering, as if seared by a red-hot iron.

Paul advanced three paces, and the light from the lustre hanging in the centre of the room fell full upon him.

“Is it a spectre?” cried the marchioness, in her turn, struck with the resemblance of the youth who stood before her to her former lover.

“I know that face!” cried the marquis, believing that he saw the man whom he had killed.

“My God! my God! protect me,” stammered Marguerite, raising her eyes and hands to heaven.

“Morlaix! Morlaix!”

“said the marquis, rising and advancing toward Paul, “Morlaix! — pardon! mercy!” and he fell at full length upon the floor.

“My father!” cried Marguerite, rushing to his assistance.

At that moment a servant entered the room, with terror in his looks, and addressing the marchioness said —

“Madam, Achard has sent to request that the priest and the doctor of the castle, may instantly be ordered to attend him — he is dying.”

“Tell him,” replied the marchioness, pointing to her husband, whom Marguerite was vainly endeavoring to restore to consciousness, “that they are both obliged to remain here to attend upon the marquis.”

CHAPTER XIV.

RELIGIOUS CONVICTION.

And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in every thing.
Shakespeare.

As has been seen by the end of the preceding chapter, God, by one of those extraordinary combinations, which short-sighted man almost always attributes to chance, had summoned to his presence, and almost at the same moment, the souls of the noble Marquis d'Auray, and the poor low-born Achard. We have seen that the former, struck by the sight of Paul, the living portrait of his father, as if by a thunderbolt, fell at the feet of the young man, who was himself terrified at the effect his appearance had produced.

As to Achard, the circumstances which had hastened his death, although differing in their nature, and from very opposite feelings, had arisen from the same fatal causes, and had been brought about by the same individual. The sight of Paul had created direful emotions in the breasts both of the marquis and Achard. On the former from excess of terror, on the latter from excess of joy; During the day which had preceded the intended signing of the contract, Achard had felt himself more feeble than usual. Notwithstanding this, he had not neglected in the evening to crawl to his master's grave, there to put up his accustomed prayer. Thence he had observed with a devotion more profound than ever, that ever new and splendid spectacle, the sun sinking into the ocean. He had followed the decline of its enpurpled light, and as though the vast torch of the world had drawn his soul toward it, he had felt his strength extinguished with its last rays; so that when the servant from the castle came in the evening: at the accustomed hour to receive his orders, not finding him in his house, had sought for him without the park, and as it was well known that he generally walked in that direction, found him lying extended at the foot of the great oak tree, upon the grave of his master, and deprived of consciousness. Thus did he remain constant to the last in that religious devotedness he had vowed to his master’s tomb, and which had been the exclusive feeling of the last years of his life.

The servant took him in his arms, and carried him into his house; and then, terrified at the unexpected accident, had hastened to the marchioness to inform her that Achard required the attendance of a physician and a priest, which message was delivered to her by the servant then in waiting, to which the marchioness refused to accede, under the pretext that they were required as urgently by the marquis as the old servant, and that superiority of rank, powerful, even when at the point of death, gave her husband the right of first employing.

But the intelligence which had been announced to the marchioness at the moment of that dreadful agony, into which their varying interests and varying passions had thrown the actors in this family drama, of which we have become the historian, this intelligence, we say, was heard by Paul. Conceiving that the signature of the contract had now become impossible from the state of the marquis, he had only allowed himself time to whisper to Marguerite, that should she need his assistance, she would find him at A chard’s cottage, and then he rushed into the park, and winding his way amid its serpentine walks and thickets, with the skill of a seaman, who reads his path in the starry firmament, he soon reached the house, entered it panting from his rapid course, and found Achard just as he was recovering from his fainting fit, and clasped him in his arms. The delight of again seeing him renewed the strength of the old man, who now felt certain of having a friendly hand to close his eyes.

“Oh! it is you — it is you!” exclaimed the old man. “I did not hope to see you again.”

“And could you possibly believe that I should have been apprized of the state in which you were, and that I would not instantly fly to your assistance?”

“But I knew not where to find you — where I could send to tell you that I wished once more to see you before I died.”

“I was at the castle, father, where I learned that you were dangerously ill, and I hastened hither.”

“And how was it that you were at the castle?” said the old man, with amazement.

Paul related to him all that had occurred.

“Eternal Providence!” cried the old man, when Paul had concluded his recital, “how hidden and inevitable are thy decrees. Thou, who, after twenty years, hast conducted this youth to the cradle of his infancy, and hast killed the assassin of the father, by the mere aspect of the son!”

“Yes, yes, thus it happens,” replied Paul, “and it is Providence, also, who conducts me to you, that I might save you. For I heard them refuse to send you the physician and the priest.”

“According to common justice,” rejoined Achard, “they might have made a fair division. The marquis, who fears death, might have retained the physician, while to me who am tired of life, they might have sent the priest.”

“I can go on horseback,” said Paul, “and in less than an hour--”

“In an hour it would be too late,” said the dying man, in an enfeebled voice, “a priest; a priest only — I ask but for a priest.”

“Father,” replied Paul, “in his sacred functions, I know I cannot supply his place; but we can speak of God, of his greatness and his goodness.”

“Yes, but let us first finish with the things of this earth, that we may then be able to turn our thoughts wholly to those of heaven. You say that, like myself, the marquis is dying,”

“I left him at the last agony.”

“You know, that immediately after his death, the papers which are deposited in that closet, and which prove your birth, are yours by right.”

“I know it.”

“If I die before the marquis, to whom can I confide them?” The old man sat up and pointed to a key hanging at the head of his bed. “You will take that key, you will open the closet — in it you will find a casket. You are a man of honor. Swear to me that you will not open that casket until the marquis shall be dead.”

“I swear it,” said Paul solemnly, and extending his hand towards the crucifix hanging at the head of the bed.

“‘Tis well,” replied Achard; “now I shall die in peace.”

“You may do so, for the son holds your hand in this world, and the father stretches out his towards you from heaven!”

“Do you believe, my child, that he will be satisfied with my fidelity?”

“No king was ever so faithfully obeyed during life, as he has been since his death.”

“Yes,” murmured the old man, in a gloomy tone, “I was but too exact in following his orders. I ought. not to have suffered the duel to have taken place; I ought to have refused attending it as a witness. Hear me, Paul; it is this that I wished to have said to a priest, for it is the only tiling that weighs upon my conscience: listen: there have been moments of doubt, during which, I have regarded this solitary duel as an assassination. In that case, Paul, oh! in that case, I have not only been a witness, but an accomplice!”

“Oh! my second father,” replied Paul, “I know not whether the laws of earth are always in accordance with the laws of heaven, and whether honor as it is considered by man, would be a virtue in the eyes of the Lord; I know not whether our holy church, an enemy to bloodshed, permits that the injured should attempt with his own hands, to avenge the wrongs inflicted upon him by attacking his injurer, and if in that case, the judgment of heaven directs the pistol ball or the sword’s point. These are questions not to be decided by reasoning, but by conscience. Well, then, my conscience tells me, that situated as you were, I should have done precisely as you did. Should conscience in this case mislead me, it also misled you, and in this view of the matter, I have a greater right than a priest, to absolve you; and in my name, and in that of my father, I pardon you.”

“Thanks! thanks!” cried the old man, pressing the hands of Paul; “thanks, for these words, pour consolation into the soul of a dying man. Remorse is a dreadful thing! remorse would lead one to believe that there exists no God. For without a judge there can be no judgment.”

“Listen to me,” said Paul, in that poetic and solemn accent, which was peculiar to him: “I also have often doubted in the existence of a God: isolated and lost in the wide world, without family, and without a single friend, I sought for support in the Lord, and I asked of every thing that encircled me, some proof of his existence. Often have I arrested my steps at the foot of one of these crosses, erected by the road side, and with my eyes fixed upon the Saviour, I demanded, and witty tears, to be assured of his existence, and divine mission; I prayed that his eyes would deign to look upon me: that one drop of blood might fall from his wound, or that a sigh might issue from his lips. The crucifix remained motionless, and I arose, my heart being overcome with despair, saying — ’ did I but know where I could find my father’s tomb, I would question him as Hamlet did the ghost, and he would perhaps answer me!”

“Poor child!”

“Then would I enter a church,” continued Paul, “one of those churches of the north, gloomy, religious, Christian! And I would feel myself borne down with sorrow; but sorrow is not faith! I approached the altar; I threw myself upon my knees before the tabernacle, in which God dwells; I bowed my head till it touched the marble of the steps; and when I had thus remained prostrated for hours and lost in doubt, I raised my head, hoping that the God I was seeking would at length manifest his presence to me by a ray of his glory, or by some dazzling proof of his power. But the church remained gloomy, as the cross had remained motionless. And I would then rush from its porches with insensate haste, crying, ‘Lord! Lord! didst thou exist, thou would reveal thyself to man. It is thy will, then, that men should doubt, since thou canst reveal thyself to them, but dost not.’”

“Beware of what you are saying, Paul,” cried the old man: “beware that the doubt thy heart contains do not attaint mine! Thou hast time left to thee to believe, whereas, I — I am about to die.”

“Wait, father, wait!” continued Paul, with softened voice, and placid features. “I have not told you all. It was then, that I said to myself, ‘the crucifix by the road side, the churches of the cities are but the work of man. Let us seek God, in God’s own works.’ From that moment, my father, began that wandering life, which will remain an eternal mystery, known only to the heavens, the ocean, and myself — it led me into the solitary wilds of America, for I thought the newer a world was, the more freshly would it retain the impress of God’s hand. I did not deceive myself. There, often in those virgin forests, into which I was perhaps the first who had ever penetrated; with no shelter, but the heavens, no couch, but the earth, absorbed by one sole thought, I have listened to the thousand noises of a world about to sleep, and nature when awakening. For a long time, did I still remain without comprehending that unknown tongue, formed by the mingling of the murmur of rivers, the vapor of the lakes, the rustling of the forest, and the perfume of flowers. Finally, the veil which had obscured my eyes, and the weight which had oppressed my heart, was little by little removed; and from that time, I began to believe that these noises of evening, and of approaching day, were but one universal hymn, by which created things expressed their gratitude to the Creator “Almighty God!” cried the dying man, clasping his hands, and raising his eyes to heaven, with an expression of holy faith, “I cried to you from the bottomless pit, and you heard me in my distress; oh! my God! I thank thee.”

“Then,” continued Paul, with still increasing enthusiasm, “then, I sought upon the ocean, that full conviction which earth had refused to me. The earth is but a span — the ocean is immensity! The ocean is, after God himself, the grandest, the most powerful object in the universe. I have heard the ocean roar like a chafed lion, and then at the voice of its master, become tranquil as a submissive dog; I have seen it rise like a Titan, to scale the heavens; and then beneath the whip of the tempest, moan like a weeping infant. I have seen it dashing its waves to meet the lightning, and endeavoring to quench the thunder with its foam; and then become smooth as a mirror, and reflect even the smallest star in the heavens. Upon the land, I had become convinced of God’s existence, upon the ocean, I recognised his power. In the solitary wilds, as Moses, I had heard the voice of the Lord, but during the tempest, I saw him, as did Ezekiel, riding upon the wings of the storm. Thenceforward, my father, thenceforward, all doubt was driven from my mind, and from the evening on which I witnessed the first hurricane, I believed, and prayed.”

“I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of Heaven and Earth,” said the dying man, with ardent faith; and he continued thus the symbol of the apostles to the last word.

Paul listened to him in silence, with his eyes raised to heaven, and when he had concluded, said —

“It is not thus, that a priest would have spoken to you, my father, for I have spoken to you as a seaman, and with a voice more accustomed to pronounce words of death than consolation. Forgive me, father, forgive me for it.”

“You have made me pray, and believe as you do,” said the old man; “tell me, then, what more could a priest have done? “What you have said is plain and grand; let me reflect on what you have said.”

“Listen!” said Paul, shuddering.

“What is it?”

“Did you not hear?”

“No.”

“I thought that a voice of some one in distress called to me — there again — do you not hear it? — now, again! — It is the voice of Marguerite.”

“Go to her instantly,” replied the old man; “I need to be alone.”

Paul rushed into the adjoining room, and as he entered it he heard his name again repeated, and close to the door of the cottage. Then, running to the door he anxiously opened it, and found Marguerite upon the threshold, her strength having failed her, and she had fallen upon her knees.

“Save me! save me,” she cried, with an expression of profound terror, on perceiving Paul, and clasped his knees.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PAPERS.

Mercy from him!
And how can I expect it? By what right
Can I demand he should withhold his claim,
The proofs once in his power? — ANONYMOUS.

PAUL ran to Marguerite, and caught her in his arms; she was pale and icy cold. He carried her into the first room, placed her in an arm chair, returned to the door which had remained open, and closed it, and then hastened back.

“What is it that so terrifies you? who is pursuing you? and how does it happen that you come here at this unusual hour?”

“Oh!” exclaimed Marguerite, “at any hour, whether by day or night, I should have flown as long as the earth would have borne me! I should have flown till I had found some heart in which I could have poured forth my sorrows, an arm capable of defending me. Paul! Paul! my father is dead?”

“Poor child!” said Paul, pressing Marguerite to his heart, “who flies from one house of death to fall into another; who leaves death in the castle, to find it in the cottage.”

“Yes, yes!” cried Marguerite rising, still trembling with terror, and convulsively pressing Paul’s arm. “Death is yonder, and I find death here! but yonder it is attended with despair and fear, while here it is met with tranquillity and hope. Oh! Paul! Paul! had you but seen that which I have seen!”

“Tell me all that happened.”

“You saw the terrible effect produced by your appearance, and the mere sound of your voice?”

“Yes, I saw that.”

“They carried him still fainting and speechless into his own room.”

“It was to your mother that I spoke,” said Paul, “and he heard me; I could not foresee it would so much have terrified him.”

"You full well know all that had passed, for you must have heard from the room in which you were concealed, every word we uttered. My father, my poor father, had recognized me, and I, seeing him thus, could not repress my uneasiness: notwithstanding the risk I ran of irritating my mother, I went up to his room — the door was locked; I knocked softly at it. He had recovered his senses, for I heard a faint voice asking 'who was there?'"

"And your mother?" said Paul eagerly.

"My mother," replied Marguerite, "was no longer there, and she had locked him in as she would have done to a child; but when he had recognized my voice, when I had told him that it was his daughter Marguerite who wished to see him, he told me that I could get into the room by going down stairs again, and that in the study I should find a private staircase which led to it. A minute afterwards, I was kneeling by his bedside, and he gave me his blessing. Yes, Paul, I received his blessing before he died, his paternal benediction, which I trust will bring down the blessing of God upon my head."

"Yes," said Paul, "God will pardon you; you may now feel tranquil. Weep for your father, Marguerite, but weep no longer for yourself, for you are saved."

"You have heard nothing yet, Paul!" exclaimed Marguerite. "Hear me still."

"Proceed!"

"At the very moment when I was kneeling, kissing the hand of my father, and thanking him for the relief he had afforded my afflicted mind, I heard my mother's footstep on the staircase. I recognized her voice, and *my* father also recognized it, for he again embraced me, and made a sign to me to leave him. I obeyed him, but such was my terror and confusion, that I mistook the door, and instead of the staircase by which I had ascended, I found myself in a small cabinet which had no issue. I felt all around its walls, but could find no door. I was compelled to remain there. I then heard my mother, accompanied by the priest, entering my father's room — I restrained my breathing, fearing that she should hear me. I saw then through the glass window of the door, and I assure you, Paul, that she was paler than my father who was about to die."

"Gracious heaven!" murmured Paul.

“The priest seated himself by the bed-side,” continued Marguerite, so terrified that she pressed still closer against Paul; “my mother remained standing at the foot of the bed — I was there, just opposite to them, compelled to remain a witness of that mournful spectacle, without the means of retreat! — a daughter, obliged to hear the dying confession of her father! — was it not horrible? I fell upon my knees, closing my eyes that I might not see — praying that I might not hear — and yet in spite of myself — and this I swear to you, Paul — I saw and I heard — Oh! what I then heard, can never be obliterated from my memory — I saw my father, whose recollections seemed to inspire him with a feverish strength, sit up in his bed, the paleness of death imprinted on his face. I heard him — I heard him pronounce the words, a duel — adultery — assassination! — and at each word he uttered, I saw my mother turn pale — and paler even than before — and I heard her raise her voice so that it might drown the voice of the dying man, saying to the priest: “believe him not — believe him not, reverend father; what he says is false — or rather, he is mad, he knows not what he says — believe him not!’ Oh! Paul, it was a dreadful spectacle, an impious sacrilege; a cold perspiration stood upon my forehead, and I fainted.”

“Justice of Heaven!” cried Paul.

“I know not how long I remained without consciousness. “When I recovered my senses, the room was as silent as the tomb. My mother and the priest had disappeared, and two wax lights were burning near my father. I opened the door of the cabinet, and cast my eyes on the bed; it appeared to me that I could distinguish beneath the sheet which completely covered it, the stiffened form of a corpse. I divined that all was over! I remained motionless, divided between the funereal awe which such a sight inspired, and the pious desire of raising the covering to kiss once more before he should be enclosed in his coffin, the venerable forehead of my dear father. Fear, however, overcame every other feeling — an ice-like mortal, and invincible terror drove me from the room. I flew down the staircase, I know not how, but I believe without touching a single step, — I fled across the rooms and through the corridors, till the freshness of the air convinced me that I had left the castle. I fled, completely unconscious of whither my steps were leading me, until I remembered you had told me I should find you here. A secret instinct — tell me what it was — for I cannot myself comprehend it, had led me in this direction. It appeared to me that I was pursued by shadows, horrid phantoms. At the corner of one of the avenues I thought — (had I then lost my senses?) — I thought I saw my mother, dressed all in black, and walking as noiselessly as a sceptre. Oh! then, then! terror lent me wings — I at first fled without knowing whither; after this my strength failed me, and it was then you heard my cries. I dragged myself along a few more paces, and fell motionless at this door; had you not opened it, I should have expired upon the spot, for I was so much terrified, that it appeared to me,”--then suddenly pausing, Marguerite trembled, and whispered to Paul, “Silence! do you not hear?”

“Yes,” replied Paul, instantly extinguishing the Limp, “yes, yes — footsteps — I hear them also.”

“Look! look!” cried Marguerite, concealing herself behind the curtain of the window, and throwing them around Paul at the same moment — ” look! I was not mistaken — it was my mother.”

The door had been opened, and the marchioness, pale as a spectre, entered the room slowly, closed the door after her, and locked it, and then without observing Paul and Marguerite, went into the second room where Achard was lying. She then walked up to his bed, as she had only a short time before to that of the marquis, only that she was not now accompanied by a priest.

“Who is there?” said Achard, drawing back one of the curtains of his bed.

“It is I,” replied the marchioness, drawing back the other curtain.

“You, madam,” cried the old man with terror; “for what purpose have you come to the bedside of a dying man?”

“I have come to make a proposal to him.”

“One that will lose his soul! is it not?”

“To save it, on the contrary. There is only one thing in this world, Achard, of which you stand in need,” rejoined the marchioness, bending down over the bed of the dying man, “and that is a priest.”

“You refused to allow the one who is attached to the castle to attend me.”

“In five minutes, if you wish it, he shall be here.”

“Let him be sent then,” said the old man, “and believe me there is not a moment to be lost. He must come quickly.”

“But if I give you the peace of heaven, you will give me in exchange peace on earth.”

“What can I do for you?” murmured the dying man, closing his eyes, that he might not see a woman whose looks chilled him.

"You stand in need of a priest, that you may die in peace," said the marchioness, if you know the gift I require, in order to exist in tranquillity."

"You would close heaven to me by a perjury."

"I would open it to you by a pardon."

"That pardon I have already received."

"And from whom?"

"From him who, perhaps, had alone the right to grant it to me."

"Has Morlaix then descended from heaven?" asked the marchioness, in a tone in which there was almost as much terror as irony.

"No, madam," replied he, "but have you forgotten that he left a son upon this earth?"

"Then you have also seen him," exclaimed the marchioness."

"Yes," replied Achard.

"And you have told him all--"

"All!"

"And the papers which prove his birth?" asked the marchioness, with trembling anxiety.

"The marquis was not dead — the papers are still there."

"Achard!" cried the marchioness, falling upon her knees, by the bedside. "Achard! you will take pity on me?"

"You, on your knees, before me, madam?"

"Yes, old man," replied the marchioness, in a supplicating tone, "yes, I am on my knees before you — and I beg, I implore you, for you hold in your hands the honor of one of the most ancient families in France — my past, my future life! Those papers are my heart, my soul — they are more than this — they are my name — the name of my forefathers — of my children — and you well know all that I have suffered to preserve that name unsullied. Do you believe that I had not a heart as other women have? the feelings of a lover, of a wife, and of a mother? Well! I have overcome them all, one by one, and the struggle has been long. I am twenty years younger than you are, old man, I am still in the prime of life, and you are on the verge of the grave. Look, then, upon these hairs; they are even whiter than your own."

"What says she?" whispered Marguerite, who had softly crept to the door, and could see all that was passing in the inner room. "Gracious heaven!"

"Listen, listen, dear child," said Paul, "it is the Lord who permits that all shall be thus revealed."

“Yes, yes,” murmured Achard, who was becoming weaker every moment. “Yes, you doubted the goodness of the Lord, you had forgotten that he had forgiven the adulterous woman--”

“Yes, but when she met with Christ, men were about to east stones at her — men, who for twenty generations have been accustomed to revere our name, to honor our family — did they but learn, that which, thank heaven! has heretofore been hidden from them — would hear it Tittered with shame and with contempt. I have so much suffered, that God will pardon me — but man! men are so implacable, that they will not pardon — moreover, am I alone exposed to their insults — on either side, the cross I bear, have I not a child? — and is not the other that we speak of, the first-born? In the eyes of the law, is he not the son of the Marquis d’Auray? do you forget that he is the first-born, the head of the family? Do you not know, that in order to possess himself of the title, the estates, the fortune of the family of Auray, he has only to invoke the law? and then what would remain to Emanuel? The cross of the order of Malta — and to Marguerite? — a convent.”

“Oh! yes, yes,” whispered Marguerite, and stretching out her arms, toward the marchioness, “yes, a convent, in which I would pray for you, my mother.”

“Silence! silence!” whispered Paul. “Oh! you know him not,” said Achard, whose voice was scarcely audible. “No! but I know human nature,” replied the marchioness, “he may recover a name, he! who has no name — a fortune, he! who has no fortune. And do you believe he would renounce that fortune and that name.”

“Should you ask it of him, he would.”

“And by what right could I demand it?” said the marchioness; “by what right could I ask him to spare me, to spare Emanuel, to spare Marguerite? He would say, ‘I do not know you, madam — I have never seen you — you are my mother, and that is all I know.’”

“In his name,” stammered Achard, whose tongue death was beginning to benumb, “in his name, madam, I engage, I swear — oh! my God! my God!”

The marchioness arose, observing attentively by the old man’s features, the approach of death.

“You engage, you swear!” she said, “is he here to ratify this engagement — you engage! you swear! and on your word, you would, that I should stake the years I have yet to live, against the moments which yet remain between you and death! I have entreated, I have implored, and again, I entreat and implore you to give up those papers to me."

"Those papers now are his."

"I must have them! I repeat, I must have them," continued the marchioness, gaining strength, as the dying man became more feeble.

"My God! my God! have mercy upon me!" murmured Achard.

"No one can now come," rejoined the marchioness "you told me that you wore the key of that closet always about you--"

"Would you wrest it from the hands of a dying man?"

"No," replied the marchioness, "I will wait."

"Let me die in peace," exclaimed Achard tearing the crucifix from the head of his bed, and raising it between, himself and the marchioness, he cried: "leave me! leave me; in the name of Jesus Christ!"

The marchioness fell upon her knees, bowing her head to the ground. The old man, for a moment, remained in the same awful attitude; then, by degrees, his strength forsook him, and he fell back on his bed, crossed his arms, and pressed the image of the Saviour to his breast.

The marchioness seized the lower part of the two curtains, and without raising her head, she crossed them in such a manner as to conceal the last struggles of the dying man.

"Horror! horror!" murmured Marguerite. "Let us kneel, and pray," said Paul. A moment of solemn and dreadful silence then ensued, which was only interrupted by the last gasps of the dying man; these gasps became fainter by degrees, and then ceased altogether. All was over; the old man was dead.

The marchioness slowly raised her head, listened with intense anxiety for some minutes, and then, without opening the curtains, passed her hand between them, and after some effort, withdrew her hand again — she had obtained the key. She then silently arose, and with her face still turned toward the bed, walked to the closet. But at the moment she was about to unlock it, Paul, who was observing all her movements, rushed into the room, and seizing her by the arm, said —

"Give me that key, my mother! for the marquis is dead, and those papers now belong to me."

"Justice of heaven!" exclaimed the marchioness, starting back with terror, and falling into a chair, "justice of heaven! it is my son!"

“Merciful heaven!” murmured Marguerite, throwing herself upon her knees in the outer room: “merciful heaven! he is my brother! “Paul opened the closet, and took the ca3ket which contained the papers.

CHAPTER XVI.

RECRIMINATION.

Thou canst save me,
Thou ought’st! thou must! I tell thee at his feet
I’ll fall a corse, ere mount his bridal bed!
So choose betwixt my rescue and my grave.
KNOWLES. — *The Hunchback*

NOTWITHSTANDING the dreadful nature of the events which had occurred during that fatal night. Paul had not forgotten the mortal defiance which had been exchanged between himself and Lectoure. As that young gentleman would probably not know where to find him, he thought it only decorous to save Lectoure the trouble of seeking for him, and about seven in the morning, Lieutenant Walter presented himself at the castle, being charged on behalf of Paul to arrange the terms of the combat. He found Emanuel in Lectoure’s apartment. The latter, on perceiving the officer, withdrew, and went down into the park, that the two young men might more freely discuss the matter. Walter had received from his commander directions to accede to every thing that might be proposed. The preliminary terms were, therefore, very speedily arranged; and it was agreed between them, that the meeting should take place in the afternoon, at four o’clock. The place of rendezvous the sea-side, near the fisherman’s hut, which was about half-way between Port Louis and Auray castle. As to the weapons, they were to bring their pistols and their swords; it would be decided on the spot which they were to use, it being clearly understood that Lectoure, having been the party insulted, should have the right to make his choice.

As to the marchioness, although in the first instance petrified by the unexpected appearance of Paul, she soon recovered all her natural firmness, and drawing her veil over her face, she withdrew from the chamber, and walked across the outer room which had remained in darkness. She did not, therefore, perceive Marguerite, who was kneeling in one corner of it, mute from astonishment and terror. She after that crossed the park, entered the castle, and repaired to the room in which the scene of the contract had taken place. There, by the dying light of the wax tapers, with both her elbows resting on the table, her head supported on her hands, her eyes riveted to the paper to which Lectoure had already affixed his name, and the marquis had signed the half of his, she passed the remainder of the night reflecting upon a new determination. Thus she awaited the coining day without even thinking of taking the least repose, so powerfully did her soul of adamant support the body in which it was enclosed. This resolution was to get Emanuel and Marguerite away from the castle as speedily as possible, for it was from her children, most especially that she desired to conceal that which was about to take place between Paul and herself.

Marguerite, who had been thus most unexpectedly present at the death-bed of the marquis and of Achard, through which she had so providentially discovered her mother's secret, rushed into Paul's arms immediately after her mother's departure from the cottage, exclaiming:

"Oh! now you are really my brother."

Her tears choked further utterance, and it was some minutes before Paul could tranquillize her agitated spirit, torn by so many and such conflicting emotions. Paul then fearing that the marchioness might enquire for her daughter, on her arrival at the castle, urged Marguerite to hasten thither; and seeing she was still trembling at the recollection of the many horrors she had witnessed, led her out of the cottage, of which he locked the door, and accompanied her to within a few paces of the castle. During this walk, Marguerite had in a certain degree, recovered her composure. Paul stood gazing at her till he saw that she had safely entered the court yard, and then returned to watch and pray beside the body of his father's faithful servant.

At seven o'clock, the marchioness hearing the noise occasioned by Lieutenant "Walter s arrival at the castle, reached a bell which was standing on the table and rang it, A servant presented himself at the door in the grand livery he had worn the previous evening; it was easy to perceive that he also had not been in bed.

"Inform Mademoiselle d'Auray, that her mother is waiting for her in the drawing room," said the marchioness.

The servant obeyed, and the marchioness resumed, gloomy and motionless, her previous attitude. In a few minutes afterward, she heard a slight noise behind her, and turned round. It was Marguerite. The young girl, with more respect, perhaps, than she had ever before evinced, held out her hand toward her mother, that she might give her her hand to kiss. Bat the marchioness remained motionless, as if she had not understood the intention of her daughter. Marguerite let fall her hand, and silently awaited her mother’s pleasure. She also wore the same dress as the night before. Sleep had hovered over the whole world, but had forgotten the inhabitants of Auray castle.

“Come nearer,” said the marchioness.

Marguerite advanced one step.

“Why is it that you are thus pale and trembling?” continued the marchioness.

“Madam,” murmured Marguerite.

“Speak,” said the marchioness.

“The death of my father — so sudden — so unexpected,” stammered Marguerite; “indeed I have suffered so much this night.”

“Yes, yes,” rejoined the marchioness, in a hollow tone, but fixing on her daughter looks which were not altogether void of affection: “yes, the young tree bends before the wind, and is stripped of its leaves. The old oak alone withstands every tempest. I, also, have suffered, Marguerite, and suffered much. I have passed a dreadful night, and vet you see me calm and firm.”

“God has endowed you with a soul, my mother, firm and austere; but you should not expect the same strength and firmness in the souls of others. You would destroy them.”

“And therefore is it,” replied the marchioness, letting her hand fall upon the table, “that all I ask of you is obedience. The marquis is dead, Marguerite, and Emanuel is now the head of the family. You must immediately set out for Rennes with Emanuel.”

“I!” exclaimed” Marguerite, “I set out for Bennes! and for what purpose?”

“Because the chapel of the castle is too narrow to contain at the same moment the wedding party of the daughter, and the funeral procession of the father.”

“My mother!” replied Marguerite with an indescribable accent of anguish, “it would seem to me to be more pious to place a longer interval between two ceremonies of so opposite a nature.”

“True piety,” rejoined the marchioness, “should lead us to fulfil the last wishes of the dead. Cast your eyes upon this contract, and see the first letters of your father’s name.”

“Oh! madam!” cried Marguerite, “allow me to ask you whether my father, when he traced these letters, which death prevented him from finishing, was in possession of his faculties, and did he write them of his own free will?”

“Of that, I am ignorant, mademoiselle,” replied the marchioness, with that imperative and icy tone, which until this time had subjected all that approached her. “I am ignorant of that, but this I know, that the influence which made him thus act, he fully understood; and I know, also, that parents, as long as they exist, should, in the eyes of their children, have the authority of God. Now, God has ordained me to effect things terrible in themselves, and I have obeyed. Do as I have done, mademoiselle, obey!”

“Madam,” said Marguerite, who had remained standing, but who now seemed motionless, with somewhat of that determined tone, which in her mother was so terrible, and in which she had inherited from her; “madam! it is only three days ago, that with tearful eyes, I threw myself first at the feet of Emanuel, then at the feet of the man whom you would compel me to receive as my husband, and then at my father’s. Neither of them would or could listen to me, for grasping ambition, or reckless madness hardened their hearts, and drowned my voice. At length, I am now at your feet, my mother, you arc the last whom I can supplicate, but also, you are best capable of understanding me. Listen, then, attentively, to what I am about to say. Had I only to sacrifice my own happiness to your will, I would make that sacrifice: my love! I would sacrifice that also; but I must also sacrifice my son. — You are a mother, and I also, madam.”

“A mother! — a mother!” cried the! marchioness, “yes! a mother, but by a dreadful fault--”

“Be that as it may, madam, still I am a mother, and the feelings of a mother need not be sanctified, in order to be holy. Well, then, madam, tell me — for you should better comprehend these things than I — tell me if those who have given us birth, have received from heaven a voice which speaks to our hearts — have not those to whom we have given birth a voice as powerful, mid when these two voices are opposed to each other, to which ought we to obey?”

“You will never hear the voice of your child,”

the marchioness; “for you will never again see him.”

“I shall never again see my son!” exclaimed Marguerite, “and who, madam, can assert that positively?”

"He will himself be ignorant as to whose son he is."

"And should he some day discover it?" replied Marguerite; whose respect as a daughter was giving way before her mother's harshness; "if he should then come to me and demand an account of his birth — and this may happen, madam," — she took up the pen "and, with such an alternative awaiting me, tell me, ought I to sign this contract?"

"Sign it," said the marchioness.

"But," observed Marguerite, placing her trembling and convulsed fingers upon the contract, "should my husband some day discover the existence of this child; should he demand an explanation from my lover, of the wrong committed against his name and honor? If in a desperate duel, alone and without seconds — a duel in which it is agreed that one must foil, he should till that lover, and then, tormented by his conscience, pursued by a voice from the tomb, my husband should at length become deprived of reason--"

"Be silent!" cried the marchioness, her features quivering with terror, but still doubting whether it was chance, or some unheard of discovery which dictated the words her daughter had employed: "be silent!"

"You would have me, then," continued Marguerite, who had now said too much to pause, "you would have me, then, in order to preserve my name, and that of my other children, pure and unsullied, that I should immure myself with a man deprived of reason! you would have me banish from my sight, and from his, every living being, and that I should render my heart iron, that I may no longer feel — that my eyes should never shed a tear! You would have me, then, clothe myself in mourning as a widow, before my husband's death? You would have my hair turn white, twenty years before the accustomed time?"

"Be silent! say not another word!" cried the marchioness, in a tone which proved that menaces were giving way to fear: "be silent!"

"You would have me, then," continued Marguerite, carried away by the bitterness of her grief; "you would have me, then, in order that the dreadful secret might die with those who have the keeping of it, that I should banish from their death-beds, both priest and physician — you would, in fine, that I should wander from one death-bed to another, that I might close, not the eyes, but the mouths of the dying." - "Be silent! in the name of heaven! be silent!" again cried the marchioness, wringing her hands.

"Well, then," continued Marguerite, "tell me again, my mother, to sign this paper, and all this will happen, and the malediction of the Lord will be accomplished, and the faults of the fathers shall be visited upon the children, even to the third and fourth generations."

"Ah! my God! my God!" exclaimed the marchioness, bursting into tears, "am I not sufficiently humbled — am I not sufficiently punished?"

"Pardon! pardon! madam," cried Marguerite, recalled to filial feeling by the first tears she had ever seen her mother shed; "I implore you to forgive me."

"Yes, pardon! ask for forgiveness, unnatural daughter," said the marchioness, advancing toward Marguerite, "you who have wrenched the scourge from the hands of eternal vengeance, and have yourself applied the lash even on your mother's forehead."

"Mercy! mercy!" reiterated Marguerite; "pardon me, my mother. I knew not what I said. You had deprived me of reason — I was mad!"

"Oh! my God! my God," said the marchioness, raising both her hands above her daughters head, "Thou hast heard, the words which have issued from my daughter's lips. It would be too much to hope that thy mercy will forget them; but at the moment thou shalt punish her, remember that I have not cursed her!"

She then moved toward the door; her daughter endeavored to retain her, but the marchioness turned toward her with an expression of countenance so fearful, that without needing to lay a command upon her, Marguerite dropped the skirt of her mother's dress, and remained with arms outstretched towards her, mute and palpitating, until the marchioness had disappeared. And when she no longer saw her, she threw herself upon the ground with so piercing a shriek, that it might have been deemed that the heart which had so much Buffered, had at length broken.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BROTHERS.

Be angry as you will, it shall have scope;
Ah, Cassius, you are yoked with a lamb
That carries anger, as the flint bears fire —
    “Who, much enforced, shows a hasty spark,
    And straight is cold again. And from henceforth
    “When you are over earnest with your brother,
    He’ll think your mother chides, and leave you so.

OUR readers will perhaps have been surprised, that after the violent manner in which Paul had insulted Lectoure the day before, a meeting had not been appointed for the following morning; but Lieutenant Walter, who had been commissioned to regulate the conditions of the duel, together with Count d’Auray, had received from his commander directions to make every concession, saving on one point, and this was, that Paul would not meet Lectoure until the afternoon.

The reason for this was, that the young captain felt, that until the time arrived when he should have wound up this strange drama, in which, having in the first instance mingled only as a stranger, he at last found himself in the position of the head of the family, his life belonged not to himself, and that he had not the right to risk it. Moreover, as we have seen, the delay he had fixed was not a long one; and Lectoure, who was ignorant of the reason which could have induced his adversary to require it, had acceded to it without much difficulty.

Paul had therefore determined not to lose a moment, and therefore, as soon as the hour arrived at which he could, with propriety, present himself to the marchioness, he bent his steps towards the castle.

The events of the previous evening, and of that day also, had occasioned so much confusion in the stately residence, that he entered it without meeting a single servant to announce him. He nevertheless traversed the apartments, following the direction he had before twice taken, and on going into the drawing-room, found Marguerite lying fainting on the floor.

On seeing the contract lying on the table, and his sister deprived of consciousness, Paul readily imagined that a dreadful scene must have taken place between the marchioness and her daughter. He ran to Marguerite, raised her in his arms, and opened one of the windows to give her air. The state in which -Marguerite then was, proceeded more from a complete prostration of strength, than an actual fainting fit; and therefore, as soon as she felt that assistance was being rendered her, and with a kindness, which left no doubt as to the feelings of the person who had thus endeavored to relieve her, she opened her eyes, and recognized her brother, that living Providence, whom God had sent to sustain her every time she felt she was about to succumb.

Marguerite related to Paul, that her mother had endeavored to compel her to sign the contract, in order to get her to leave the castle with her brother, and that having been overcome by her grief, and carried away by the dreadful situation in which she was placed, she had allowed her mother to perceive that she knew all.

Paul comprehended at once the feelings which must have rent the heart of the marchioness, who, after twenty years of silence, isolation and anguish, saw, without being able to divine the manner in which it had been brought about, that in one moment her secret had been revealed to one of the two persons, from whom she was most anxious to conceal it. Therefore, compassionating the sufferings of his mother, he resolved to terminate them as speedily as he could, by hastening on the interview he had come to seek, and which would at once enlighten her as to the intentions of that SOD, whose existence she was so unwilling to acknowledge. Marguerite, on her side, wished to obtain her mother’s forgiveness; she, therefore, undertook to inform the marchioness that the young captain waited her orders.

Paul, therefore, remained alone, leaning against the high chimney-piece, above which was carved the escutheheon of his family, and began to lose himself in the thoughts, which the successive and hurried events of the last few hours gave rise to, and which had rendered him the sovereign arbiter of all that house, when one of the side doors suddenly opened, and Emanuel appeared with a case of pistols in his hand. On hearing the door open, Paul turned his eyes toward them, and immediately perceiving the young man, bowed to him with that sweet and fraternal expression, which reflected in his features the serenity of his soul.

Emanuel, on the contrary, although he returned the salutation, as politeness required, allowed those hostile feelings which the presence of the man whom he regarded as his personal and determined enemy had awakened to flush his features, and they instantly assumed a look of fierce defiance.

"I was on the point of setting out to seek for you, sir," said Emanuel, placing the pistols upon the table, and remaining at some distance from Paul; "and that, however, without precisely knowing where to find you; for, like the evil genii of our popular traditions, you appear to have the gift of being everywhere and nowhere. But a servant informed me that he had seen you enter the castle, and I thank you for having saved me the trouble I was about to take, in thus anticipating my desire."

"I am happy," replied Paul, "that my desire in this instance, although probably emanating from a totally different cause, has so harmoniously chimed in with yours. Well, then, I am here — what do you ask of me?"

"Cannot you divine even that, sir?" replied Emanuel, with increasing agitation. "In that case — and you will allow me to express my astonishment that it should be so — you are but ill-informed as to the duties of a gentleman and an officer, and this is a fresh insult that you put upon me."

"Believe me, Emanuel," rejoined Paul, in a calm tone--

"I yesterday called myself the count; to-day I call myself the Marquis d'Auray," said Emanuel, interrupting him with a gesture of Haughtiness and contempt; "and I beg, sir, that you will not forget it."

An almost imperceptible smile passed over the lips of Paul "I was saying, then," continued Emanuel, "that you but imperfectly comprehend the feelings of a gentleman, if you "believed that I would permit another to take up, on my behalf, a quarrel which you came here to seek. Yes, sir, for it is you who have thrown yourself across my path, and not I who have sought you."

"His lordship, the Marquis d'Auray," said Paul, smiling, "forgets his visit on board the *Indienne* "A truce to your cavils, sir, and let us at once proceed to facts. Yesterday, I know not from what strange and inexplicable feeling, when I proposed to you that, which I will not say every gentleman, every officer, but simply, any man of courage would instantly, and without hesitation, have acceded to, you refused, sir, and evading my provocation, you went, as it were, behind my back to seek an adversary, who, although not precisely a stranger to the quarrel, yet good taste should have dictated that he ought not to have been drawn into it.”

“Believe me, that in this, sir,” replied Paul, with the same calmness and the same candor of manner which accompanied all he said; “I was compelled *to* yield to the exigency of the case, which did not leave me the choice of an adversary. You had proposed a duel, which I could not accept, you being my adversary, but which was perfectly indifferent to me with any other person. I am too much habituated to encounters of this description, and to encounters of a far more murderous and mortal nature, to consider an event of this kind, but as one of the usual accidents of my adventurous life. You will, however, please to remember that it was not I who sought this duel; you, yesterday, proposed it to me; but, as I could not, I again repeat it, appear as your antagonist, I selected M. de Lectoure, as I would have done M. de Nozay or M. la Jarry, because he happened to be there, within my reach — and because, if it were absolutely necessary that I should kill some one, I preferred killing an useless and insolent fop, rather than a good and honest country gentleman, who would consider himself dishonored, did he but dream that he had entered into a bargain of so vile and despicable a nature as that which the Baron de Lectoure has, in reality, proposed to you.”

“‘Tis well, sir,” said Emanuel, jeeringly; “continue to constitute yourself as the redresser of wrongs, to dab yourself the knight-errant of oppressed princesses, and to shield yourself under the buckler of your mysterious replies! As long as this antiquated quixotism does not come in collision with my views, my interests, and my engagements, I will fully permit it to wander over the whole earth, and ocean also, even from pole to pole, and I shall merely smile at it as it passes by me; but whenever this madness breaks out against me, as yours has done, sir; whenever, in the intimate concerns of a family of which I am the head, I meet a stranger, who orders as a master where I alone have the right to raise my voice, I shall present myself before him, as I now do before you, should I have the happiness to meet him alone as I do you, and then feeling assured, that no one will come to interrupt us before I had obtained the necessary explanation, I would say to him: ‘You have, if not insulted me, at all events wounded my feelings, sir, by coming to my house, and injuring me in my interests, and my family affections. It is then with me, and not with another, that you ought to fight, and you *shall* fight with *me.’*”

"You are mistaken, Emanuel," replied Paul; "I will not fight, at all events, with you; the thing is impossible."

"Oh! sir, the time of enigmas is gone by," cried Emanuel, impatiently; "we live in the midst of a world, in which at every moment we elbow a reality. Let us, therefore, leave the poetical and the mysterious, to the authors of romances and tragedies. Your presence in this castle has been marked by circumstances too fatal to render it necessary to add that which is not, to that which is. Lusignan returned, notwithstanding the order which condemned him to transportation; my sister, who, for the first time, has shown herself rebellious against the orders of her mother; my father, killed by your mere presence: these are the disasters by which you have been accompanied, which have heralded you from another hemisphere, and have formed your funereal escort: for all this, you have to account to me; therefore, speak, sir; speak as a man should to a man, in the broad daylight, face to face, and not as a phantom gliding in the darkness, which escapes under the cloud of night, letting fall some few solemn and prophetic words, as if from the other world. Such things are well calculated to terrify nurses and children! Speak, sir, speak! Look at me, you will see that I am calm. If you have anything to reveal to me I will listen to you."

"The secret which you ask of me is not my own," replied Paul, whose perfect calmness strongly contrasted with the feverish excitement of Emanuel; "believe what I have said, and do not insist farther. Farewell!"

After pronouncing these words, Paul moved toward the door.

"Oh!" cried Emanuel, rushing between him and the door, to prevent his passage; "you shall not leave me thus, sir! I have you now, we are alone in this room, without fear of any interruption, into which, it was not I that enticed you, but you have come here of your own free will. Therefore, hearken to that which I am about to say. The person you have insulted is myself! the person to whom you owe satisfaction is myself! The person with whom you have to fight is--"

"You are mad, sir," tranquilly replied Paul; "I have already told you it is impossible. Therefore, allow me to withdraw."

"Take care, sir," cried Emanuel, stretching out his hand to the box, and taking out the pistols; "take care, sir. After having done every thing in my power to compel you to act as a gentleman, I may treat you as a brigand. — You are here in a house, in which you are a total stranger; you have entered it, I know not how, nor for what purpose; if you have not come into it to despoil us of our gold and jewels, you have entered it to steal the obedience of a daughter to her mother, and to cancel the sacred promise given by a friend to a friend. In one case or the other, you are a violator, whom I have met at the moment that his hands were about to seize a treasure; that treasure, is honor, the most precious of all riches! Come, sir, believe me, you will do better to accept this weapon" — Emanuel endeavored to thrust one of the pistols into Paul's hand — "and defend yourself."

"You may kill me, sir," replied Paul, again placing his elbow on the chimney-piece, as if he were continuing an ordinary conversation; "although I do not believe that God would permit so great a crime: but you shall not force me to fight with you. I have before told you so, and I repeat it."

"Take the pistol, sir!" cried Emanuel, "take it, sir, I tell you! you believe that the threat I am making is but a vain menace; undeceive yourself! for three days have you fatigued my patience! for three days have you filled my soul with gall and hatred! for three days have I familiarised my mind with the idea of ridding myself of you; whether it be by a duel or by murder! Do not imagine, that the dread of punishment withholds my hand; this castle is isolated, mute, and deaf. The sea is there; and before you could be even laid in the tomb, I should be in England. Therefore, sir, for the last time, I say to you, take this pistol and defend yourself."

Paul, without uttering a word, gently put the pistol aside.

"Well then!" cried Emanuel, exasperated to the highest degree, by the sangfroid of his adversary; "as you will not defend yourself like a man, die like a dog!"

And so saying, he raised the muzzle of the pistol to the level of the captain's breast.

At that moment a dreadful shriek was heard; it was Marguerite, who had returned from her mother, and who had, at a glance, comprehended all that had happened. She rushed upon Emanuel, and at that instant he fired the pistol, but the direction of the ball having been changed by the young girl's striking up his arm, it passed two or three inches above Paul's head, and shattered the glass above the chimney-piece.

"My brother!" cried Marguerite, with one bound, springing to were Paul stood, and throwing her arms around him: "my brother, are you not wounded?"

“Your brother!” exclaimed Emanuel, letting fall the pistol which was still smoking; “your brother!”

“Well, Emanuel!” said Paul, with the same calmness which he had evinced during the whole of this painful scene; “do you now comprehend why it was I could not fight with you?”

At that moment, the marchioness appeared at the door, pale as a spectre, for she had heard the report of the pistol; then looking around her with an expression of infinite terror, and seeing that no one was wounded, she silently raised her eyes to heaven, as if to ask if its anger was at length appeased. She remained thus for some time in an attitude of mental thanksgiving. When she again cast down her eyes, Emanuel and Marguerite were on their knees before her, each holding one of the hands, and covering it with tears and kisses.

“I thank you, my children,” said the marchioness, after a short silence; “and now leave me with this young man.”

Marguerite and Emanuel bowed with an expression, of the most profound respect, and obeyed the command of their mother.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RECOGNITION.

Oh! my mother!
You do not know the heart that you have pierced!
I — I — thy son — thine Arthur — I avenge?
Never on thee. Live happy — love my brother —
Forget that I was born. Here, here — these proofs —
These — these! Oh! see you where the words are blistered
With my hot tears? I wept — it was for joy —
I did not think of lands, of name, of birthright —
I did but think these arms should clasp a mother.
BULWER. — *The Sea Captain.*

The marchioness closed the door as soon as they had withdrawn, advanced into the middle of the room, and went without looking at Paul, and leaning upon the arm-chair in which the marquis had the night before been seated to sign the contract. There she remained standing, with her eyes cast upon the ground. Paul for a moment experienced the desire to throw himself upon his knees before her, but there was upon the features of the marchioness such an expression of severity, that he repressed the yearnings of his heart, and stood motionless awaiting her commands. After a few moments of ice-like silence, the marchioness addressed him.

"You desired to see me, sir, and I have come to know your will — you wished to speak to me — I am listening."

These words were uttered without the marchioness making the least movement — her lips trembled, rather than opened — it seemed a marble statue that was speaking.

"Yes, madam," replied Paul, in a tone of intense feeling, "yes, yes, I desired to speak with you; it is long since first this desire was cherished in my heart, and it has never left me. Recollections of infancy preyed upon the mind of the grown man. I remembered a woman who would formerly glide to my cradle, and in my youthful dreams, I thought her the guardian angel of my infancy. Since that time, still so fresh in my memory, although so distant, more than once, believe me, I have awakened with a start, imagining that I had felt upon my forehead the impression of a maternal kiss: and then seeing that there was no one near me, I would call that person, hoping she would, perhaps, return. It is now twenty years since first I thus had called, and this is the first time she has replied to me. Can it have been as I have -often fearfully imagined, that you would have trembled at again beholding me? Can it be true, as I at this moment fear, that you have naught to say to me?"

"And had I feared your return," said the marchioness, in a hollow tone, "should I have been to blame? You appeared before me only yesterday, sir, and now the mystery which ought to have been concealed to all but God and myself, is known to both my children."

"Is it my fault that God has been pleased to reveal the secret to them? Was it I that conducted Marguerite, despairing and in tears, to the bedside of her dying father, whose protection she had gone to ask, and whose confession she was compelled to hear? Was it I that led her to Achard, and was it not you, madam, that followed her thither? As to Emanuel, the report you heard, and that shattered glass, attest, that I would have preferred death rather than to have saved my life at the expense of your secret. No, no, believe me, madam, I am the instrument, and not the hand; the effect, and not the cause. No, madam, it is God who has brought about all this, that you might see at your feet, as you have just now seen them, your two children whom you have so long banished from your arms!"

"But there is a third," said the marchioness, in a voice in which emotion began to evince itself, "and I know not what I have to expect from him."

"Let me accomplish a last duty, madam, and that once fulfilled, he will on his knees await your orders."

"And of what nature is this duty?"

"It is to restore his brother to the rank to which he is entitled, his sister to that happiness which she has lost — to his mother that tranquillity of mind which she has so long sought in vain."

"And yet, thanks to you," replied the marchioness, "M. de Maurepas refused to M. de Lectoure the regiment he had solicited for my son."

"Because," replied Paul, taking the commission from his pocket and laying it on the table, "because the king had already granted it to me, for the brother of Marguerite."

The marchioness cast her eyes upon the commission, and saw that it was made out in the name of Emanuel d'Auray.

“And yet you would give the hand of Marguerite to a man without name, without fortune — and what is more, to a man who is banished.”

“You arc mistaken, madam; I would give Marguerite to the man she loves. I would give Marguerite not to the banished Lusignan, but to the Baron Anatole de Lusignan, his majesty’s governor of the Island of Guadeloupe — there is his commission also.”

The marchioness looked at the parchment, and saw that in this instance, as in the former one, Paul had uttered but the truth.

“Yes, I acknowledge it,” she replied, “these will satisfy the ambition of Emanuel, and confer happiness on Marguerite.”

“And at the same time, secures your tranquillity, madam; for Emanuel will join his regiment, and Marguerite will follow her husband. You will then remain here alone, as you have, alas! so frequently desired.”

The marchioness sighed.

“Is not this all you desire, or have I deceived myself,” continued Paul.

“But,” said the marchioness, “how can I recall the promise given to the Baron de Lectoure?”

“The marquis is dead, madam,” replied Paul; “is not the death of a husband and a father a sufficient cause for the adjournment of a marriage?”

The marchioness, without replying, seated herself in the armchair, took a pen and paper, wrote a few lines, folded the letter, and putting on the address the name of the Baron de Lectoure, she rang the bell for the servant. After waiting a few moments, during which time, both Paul and herself remained silent, a servant came into the room.

“In two hours from this time, you will deliver this to the Baron de Lectoure,” said the Marchioness.

The servant took the letter and withdrew.

“And now,” continued the marchioness, looking at Paul, “now sir, that you have done justice to the innocent, it remains to you to pardon the guilty. You have papers which prove your birth, you are the elder — at all events, in the eyes of the law. The fortunes of Emanuel and Marguerite are yours by right. What do you require in exchange for these papers?”

Paul took them from his pocket, and showing them to the marchioness, said, “Here are the documents, look at them — they are the letters you wrote to my poor father — look here, they are moistened by my tears, for I read them last night, while watching by Achard’s corpse.” Then approaching the fire-place, he held them over the flaming wood, saying, “permit me even but once to call you mother! call me but once your son, and--”

“Can it be possible!” exclaimed the marchioness, rising.

You speak of name, of fortune,” continued Paul, with an expression of profound melancholy; “what need have I of them. I have by my own sword gained a rank which few men of my age have ever attained — I have acquired a name, which is pronounced with blessings by one nation, and with terror by another. I could, did it so please me, amass a fortune, worthy of being bequeathed to a king. What, then, are your names, your fortune, and your rank, to me, if you have nothing else to offer me — if you do not give me that which I have incessantly, and in every position of my life most yearned for — that which I have not the power to create — which God had granted to me, but which misfortune wrested from me — that which you alone can restore to me — a mother!”

“My son!” exclaimed the marchioness, overcome at length, by his tears, and supplicating accent, “my son! my son! my son!”

“Ah!” exclaimed Paid, letting the papers fall into the flames, which speedily consumed them, “ah! that blessed appellation has at length escaped your lips — that tender name so long desired, and which I have so unceasingly prayed to hear addressed to me. Merciful heaven! I thank thee.”

The marchioness had fallen back into her chair, and Paul had thrown himself upon his knees, his head leaning upon her bosom. At length the marchioness gently raised him.

“Look at me!” she said; “for twenty years, this is the first tear that has ever escaped my eyelids. Give me your hand!” — she placed it upon her heart — ‘‘for twenty years this is the first feeling of happiness with which my heart has palpitated. Come to my arms! For twenty years this is the first caress I have either given or received. These twenty years have doubtless been my expiation, since God now pardons me, for he has restored to me the power of weeping, of feeling joy, and has permitted me to embrace my son. Thanks to God! and thanks to thee, my son!”

“My mother!” cried Paul, “my beloved mother!”

“And I trembled at the thoughts of seeing you again — I trembled when I did see you — I knew not — I could not have imagined that such feelings still existed in my heart. Oh! I bless thee! I bless thee!”

At that moment, the tolling of the chapel bell was heard: the marchioness shuddered. The funeral hour had arrived. The bodies of the noble Marquis d’Auray and that of the poor man Achard, were about to be returned to earth at the same moment.

“This hour must be consecrated to prayer,” said the marchioness: “I must now leave you.”

“I must sail to-morrow, my mother,” said Paul; “shall I not once more see you?”

“Oh! yes, yes,” replied the marchioness, “we must meet again.”

“Well, then, my mother, this evening I shall beat the park gate. There is a spot which is sacred to me, and to which I must pay a last visit. I shall expect to meet you there. It is on that spot, my mother, that we should say farewell.”

“I will be there,” said the marchioness.

“Here, my mother, here,” said Paul, “take these commissions: the one for Emanuel, and the other for the husband of Marguerite. Let the happiness of your children be conferred by yourself. Believe me, mother, you have bestowed more on me than I on them.”

The marchioness retired to shut herself up in her oratory. Paul left the castle, and proceeded toward the hut of the fisherman.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FAREWELL.

Hark! she has bless'd her son — I bid ye witness,
Ye listening heavens — thou circumambient air;
The ocean sighs it back — and with the murmur
  Rustle the happy leaves. All nature breathes
  Aloud — aloft — to the Great Parent's ear,
  The blessing of the mother on her child.

ON approaching the fisherman's hut, the place appointed with Lectoure, Paul perceived Lusignan and Walter, who were waiting for him.

Precisely at the hour agreed, Lectoure appeared on horseback; he had been obliged to find his way as he best could, for he had no guide, and his own servant was as much a stranger as himself in that part of the country, On seeing him at a distance the young men came out of the hut. The baron instantly put his horse into a gallop, to hasten to them. "When within a few paces of them he alighted from his horse, and threw the rein to his servant.

"I trust you will pardon me, gentlemen," said he, "that I should have approached you thus alone, like a forsaken orphan; but the hour selected by that gentleman," he added, raising his hat to Paul, who returned the salutation, "was precisely that fixed upon for the funeral obsequies of the marquis; I have therefore left Emanuel to fulfil the duties of a son, and have come here without a second, trusting that I had to deal with an adversary generous enough to procure some friend of his own to aid me in this dilemma."

"We are entirely at your service, baron," replied Paul; "here are two friends of mine. Select which you please, and he who shall he honored by your choice, will instantly become yours."

"I have no preference, I swear to you," said Lectoure; "please to designate which of these two gentlemen you may desire should render me this service."

"Walter," said Paul, "be so good as to officiate as second to the baron."

The lieutenant assented; the two adversaries again bowed to each other.

"And now, sir," continued Paul, "permit me, before our respective seconds, to address a few words to you, not of apology, but explanation."

"At your own pleasure, sir," replied Lectoure.

"When I uttered the words which have been the cause of your coming hither, the events which have since occurred at the castle were hidden in the womb of time, and these events might have entailed the misery of a whole family. You, sir, had on your side Madame d'Auray, Emanuel, and the marquis — Marguerite had but me alone. Every chance was, therefore, in your favor. It was for this reason that I addressed myself directly to you, for had I fallen by your hand, from circumstances which must for ever remain hidden to you, Marguerite could not have married you. If I had killed you, the case would have been still more simplified and requires no commentary."

"This exordium is really most logical, sir," replied the baron, smiling, and tapping his boots with his riding-whip; "let us proceed, if you please, to the main body of the discourse."

"Now," continued Paul, bowing in sign of acquiescence, "every circumstance has changed; the marquis is dead, Emanuel has received his commission, the marchioness renounces your alliance, honorable as it may be, and Marguerite marries the Baron Anatole de Lusignan, who, for that reason, I did not name your second."

"Ah! ah!" exclaimed Lectoure, "then that is the true meaning of the note which a servant delivered to me at the moment I was about to leave the castle. I had the simplicity to imagine that, it was merely an adjournment. It appears that it was a dismissal in due form. 'Tis well, sir, and now to the peroration."

"It will be as simple and frank as the explanation, sir. I did not know you — I had no desire to know you; chance threw us in presence of each other, and with opposing interests — hence our collision. Then, as I have before told you, mistrusting fate, I wished in some measure to make sure of a result. But now affairs have become so altered that either my death or yours would be altogether useless, and would merely add bloodshed to the winding up of this drama; and tell me candidly, sir, do you thank it would be worth while to risk our Jives to so little purpose?"

"I might, perhaps, agree with you in opinion, sir, had I not performed so long a journey," replied Lectoure: "Not having the honor to espouse Mademoiselle Marguerite d'Auray, I should desire, at least, to have the honor of crossing swords with you. It shall not be said that I have travelled all the way from Paris into Brittany for nothing. I am at your orders, sir," continued Lectoure, drawing his sword, and with it saluting his adversary.

"At your good pleasure, sir," replied Paul, and replying to the salutation in the same manner.

The two young men then advanced towards each other — their swords crossed — at the third parry *Lec*toure's sword was twisted from his hand, and flew to a distance of twenty yards.

"Before taking sword in hand," said Paul, "I had offered an explanation, and now, sir, I trust you will be pleased to accept my apology."

"And this time I will accept it, sir," said Lectoure, in the same careless and easy manner, as if nothing particular had occurred. "Pick up my sword, Dick.

His servant ran to fetch it, handed it to his master, who very tranquilly put it into the scabbard.

"Now," continued he, "if either of you, gentlemen, have any orders for Paris, I am about to return there, and from this spot."

"Tell the king, sir," replied Paul, bowing, and in his turn sheathing his sword, "that I feel happy that the sword he gave me to be employed against the English, has remained unstained by the blood of one of my own country men."

And then the two young men again bowed to each other. Lectoure remounted his horse, and at about a hundred paces from the sea shore, got into the high road leading to Vannes, and galloped off; while his servant went to the castle to get his travelling carriage, with which Lectoure had ordered him to rejoin him speedily.

"And now, Mr. Walter," said Paul, "you must send the long-boat to the nearest creek to Auray castle, and have every thing in readiness to set sail tonight."...

The lieutenant immediately set out for Port Louis, and Paul and Lusignan returned into the fisherman's hut.

During this time Emanuel and Marguerite had fulfilled the mournful duty to which they had been summoned by the chapel bell. The body of the marquis had been deposited in the emblazoned tomb of his ancestors, and Achard's in the humble cemetery outside the chapel, and then the brother and sister repaired to their mother's apartment. The marchioness delivered to Emanuel the commission which he so anxiously coveted, and gave to

Marguerite her unexpected consent to her marriage with Lusignan. She then handed to Marguerite the king’s sign manual appointing Lusignan governor of Guadeloupe. And then, in order that the emotions which they experienced should not be renewed, and which were the more poignant, because they were concealed within their own breasts, for neither of them made any allusion to past events, the mother and the children embraced each other for the last time, each feeling the innate conviction that they should never meet again.

The remainder of the day was occupied in the necessary preparations for departure. Toward the evening the marchioness left the castle, to meet Paul at the place which he had appointed. “When passing through the court-yard she perceived a carriage, with horses already attached to it, standing on one side of it, and the young midshipman, Arthur, with four sailors, on the other. Her heart was oppressed by the sight of this two-fold preparation. She, however, passed on, and went into the park, without giving way to her emotions, so much had her long-continued restraint upon natural feelings given her the power of self-command.

However, when she had reached a small clearing, from which she could see Achard’s house, she paused, for her knees trembled beneath her, and she was obliged to lean for support against a tree, while she pressed her hand to her breast to restrain the violent beatings of her heart. For there are souls which present danger, however imminent, cannot cause to quail, but which tremble at the remembrance of perils past; and the marchioness recalled to mind the agonizing fears and emotions to which she had been for twenty years a prey, and during which time she had daily visited that house, now closed never again to be opened. She, however, soon overcame this weakness, and reached the park gate.

There she again paused. Above all the trees rose the summit of a gigantic oak, whose wide spreading branches could be discerned from many places in the park. Often had the eyes of the marchioness remained riveted for hours upon its verdant dome: but never had she dared to seek repose beneath its shade. It was there, however, that she bad promised to meet Paul, and there Paul was awaiting her. At length she made a last effort, and entered the forest.

From a distance she perceived a man kneeling upon the ground in the attitude of prayer. She slowly approached him, and kneeling down by his side, prayed also. When the prayer was concluded, they both rose, and without uttering a word, the marchioness placed her arm around Paul’s neck, and leaned her head upon his shoulder. After some moments’ silence, they heard the noise of the wheels of a carriage at a distance. The marchioness shuddered, and made a sign to Paul to listen; it was Emanuel setting out to join his regiment. Shortly afterwards Paul pointed in a direction opposite to that in which they had heard the noise, and showed the marchioness a boat gliding rapidly and silently upon the surface of the ocean; it was Marguerite going on board the frigate.

The marchioness listened to the noise of the receding wheels as long as she could hear it, and followed with anxious eyes the movements of the boat, as long as she could distinguish it; then she turned toward Paul, and raising her eyes to heaven, for she felt that the moment was approaching, when he, whom she was leaning upon, would, in his turn, leave her, she exclaimed —

“May God bless, as I now bless, the duteous son, who was the last to leave his mother.”

Saying these words, she threw her arms around his neck, pressed him convulsively to her heart, and kissed him; then gazing at him intently, she seemed to be scanning every outline of his face, and then, again, rapturously embraced him.

“Yes,” she cried, “in every feature he his the living resemblance of my poor lost Morlaix then for some moments she seemed to be absorbed in thought; at last after a seemingly violent struggle, she continued, “Paul, you have refused to accept any portion of that; fortune to which you are legally entitled, although you know the wealth of the Auray family is unbounded — and that the fortune which I inherit in my own right, from the family of Sablé, is very large.” Paul shook his head. “Well, then, there is one thing that you must receive from your mother, as her parting gift. It is twenty years since I have dared to look upon it, and yet I have clung to its possession — it is your father’s portrait, presented to me when I was authorized to receive it — when, by the assent of both our families, he was to have become my husband — take it, my dear son, for although it tears my heart to part with it, yet I feel that I shall be more tranquil when it is in your possession — to no one but yourself would I have given it. You will sometimes look upon it, and you will think of your mother, who must now remain for ever isolated from the world. But it is better that it should be so

— henceforward all my moments shall be spent in making my peace with Heaven.”

While saying these words, she had drawn from her pocket a case, which she put into Paul’s hands, and which he had eagerly opened, and gazed with intense interest at the features of his father. The miniature was richly set in diamonds of great value.

Then summoning all her fortitude, the marchioness for the last time kissed her son, who was kneeling before her, and tearing herself from his arms, she returned alone to the castle.

The next morning the inhabitants of Port Louis vainly sought the frigate they had seen only the evening before, and which for fifteen days had remained at anchor in the outer roads of Lorient. As on the former occasion, she had disappeared without their being able to comprehend the cause of her arrival, or the motive of her so sudden departure.

EPILOGUE.

Last scene of all
That ends this strange, eventful history.

FIVE years had elapsed since the occurrence of the events we have related. The independence of the United States had been recognized; New York, the last strong-hold of the English, had been evacuated. The roar of cannon, which had resounded in the Indian seas, as well as in the Gulf of Mexico, had ceased to thunder. Washington, in the solemn meeting of Congress of the 28th December, 1783, had resigned his commission as general-in-chief, and had retired to Mount Vernon, his parental estate, without any other recompense than that of being allowed to receive and send letters free of charge; and the tranquillity which America had begun to enjoy, had extended to the French colonies in the West Indies; for the mother country having espoused the American cause, they had been several times exposed to the hostile attempts of Great Britain. Among these islands, Guadeloupe had been more particularly threatened, in consequence of its military and commercial importance; but, thanks to the vigilance of its new governor, the attempts of the enemy to land there had always failed, and France had not to mourn over any serious discomfiture in this important position, so that at the commencement of the year 1784, the island, without being altogether denuded of warlike appearance, which was maintained in it more from custom than from necessity, the inhabitants generally had applied themselves anew to the cultivation of the numerous products which form its riches.

If our readers will be pleased by a last effort of their complaisance, to accompany us to the other side of the Atlantic, and land with us at the port of Basseterre, we will conduct them amidst fountains which jet on every side, through the street which leads to the promenade, called Champ d’Arbaud; then, after having availed ourselves of the cool shade of the tamarind trees, planted on each side of it, till we have proceeded about two-thirds of its length, we will turn upon the left up a small beaten road, which conducts to the gate of a garden, the upper part of which commands a view of the whole town.

When we have arrived there, we will allow them for a few moments to inhale the evening breeze, so refreshingly sweet after the mid-day heat of the month of May, and they can cast a glance with us over the luxuriant vegetation of the tropics.

With our backs turned to the woody and volcanic mountains, which divide the western part of the island, and amid which arise, crowned with their plumes of smoke and sparks, the two calcined pinnacles of the sulphur mountain, we have at our feet, sheltered by the hills, which have been named Bellevue, Mont-Désir, Beau Soliel, Espérance and Saint Charles, the city gracefully descending towards the sea, the waves of which sparkling with the last rays of the setting sun, laves its white walls. The horizon, formed by the ocean, lying like a vast and limpid mirror, and to the right and left, the most beautiful and richest plantation of the island; large square fields of coffee trees, transplanted originally from Arabia, with their knotty and flexible branches, covered with dark green glossy leaves, of an oblong and pointed form, and bearing clusters of flowers as white as snow; long rows of cotton plants, covering with a rich carpet of verdure, the dry and stony soil, on which they thrive best, and among which we see, like so many colossal ants, negroes occupied in reducing to two or three, the thousand shoots which sprout out from each stalk. And then again, but in more level and well sheltered spots, in which the soil is richer and more argillaceous, we see plantations of cocoa trees, first introduced into the West Indies by the Jew, Benjamin Dacosta, with their lofty trunks and porous branches, covered with fawn colored bark, from which large oblong leaves are pending, among which we see fresh shoots of a soft rose color, which contrast strongly with the long, curved and yellow fruit, which bends the branches with its weight. And further off, whole fields of the plant, discovered at Tabaco, first brought to Prance by the Ambassador of Francis II., who presented it to Catherine de Medicis, from which circumstance it derived its name of *Herbe-a-là-reine* (Queen’s Grass). This did not, however, prevent it from being, like every popular thing, in the first instance, excommunicated and proscribed, in Europe and Asia, by the two powers who then divided the world, proscribed by the Grand Duke of Muscovy, Michael Fedorowich, by the Turkish Sultan Amurath IV., by the Emperor of Persia, and excommunicated by Pope Urban VIII. Here and there, we see springing up to a height of forty or fifty feet above all the shrubs and plants, by which it is surrounded, the banana tree of Paradise, of which, according to tradition, the oval leaves, seven or eight feet in length, served to form the first garment of the first created woman. And finally, elevated above all the rest, and standing forth pre-eminent, whether backed by the azure of the Heavens, or by the dark green sea, the cocoa-nut. and the palm-tree, “those two giants

of the Western Archipelago, graceful and prodigal, as is everything that is powerful. Figure to yourselves, then these beautiful hills, intersected by seventy rivers, eased in beds, ninety feet in depth; these mountains illuminated during the day by a tropical sun, at night, by the volcano of the sulphur mountain; that vegetation, which never is arrested, the new leaves of which succeed the leaves which fall; this soil so salubrious, and air so pure, that notwithstanding the insensate experiments that man, the real enemy of himself, has made by transporting serpents from Martinique, and Saint Lucie, it was found that they could neither live nor reproduce there, and then judge after the sufferings they had endured in Europe, of the happiness which Antole do Lusignan and Marguerite d’Auray must have enjoyed there.

To a life agitated by the passions, to that struggle of natural rights against legal power, to that succession of scenes in which all earthly pains, from childbirth even to death, had played their part, had succeeded a life of pure delights, each day of which had passed on calmly and tranquilly; the only clouds that darkened it, arose from that vague uneasiness for distant friends, which as if borne upon the air, and which contracts the heart like a painful presentiment. However, from time to time, whether by newspapers, or by vessels, touching at the island, Anatole and Marguerite had obtained some intelligence of the generous being who had so powerfully served them as a protector; they had heard of his victories; that after he had left them, he had been appointed to the command of a small squadron, and had destroyed the English establishments on the coast of Acadia, which had gained for him the title of commodore; that, in an engagement with the *Serapis* and the *Countess of Scarborough*, after a combat yard-arm to yard-arm, which lasted four hours, he had obliged the two frigates to strike to him, and that finally, as a reward for the services ho had rendered to the cause of American Independence, he had received the public thanks of Congress, who had voted him a gold medal, and had selected him to command the frigate *America*, to which that name had been given as being the finest in the service, and the command of which had been conferred on him as the bravest of its officers; but this splendid ship had been presented by Congress to the King of Prance, to replace the *Magnifique*, which had been lost at Boston. Paul J ones, alter conducting this frigate to Havre, had joined the fleet of the Count de Vaudreuil, who had projected an attack upon Jamaica. This last intelligence had overjoyed the hearts of Lusignan and Marguerite, for this enterprize would bring Paul into their latitude, and they hoped at last they should soon see their brother and their friend; but peace, as we have before said, had intervened, and from that time, they had heard no more of the adventurous seaman.

In the evening of the day on which we have transported our readers from the wild shores of Brittany to the fertile coast of Guadeloupe, the young family were assembled in the very garden which we have entered, and which commands a view of the immense panorama we have described; the foreground of which is formed by the city, at its feet the ocean, studded with islands in the distance.

Marguerite had promptly habituated herself to the soft listlessness of Creole life; and her mind now tranquil and full of happiness, she gave herself up to the *dolce far niente*, which renders the sensual existence of the colonies a half sleep, the incidents of which appear as dreams.

She was lying with her daughter in a Peruvian hammock, netted with the silken fibres of the aloe, and ornamented with the most brilliant colored plumes of the rarest tropical birds; her son was swinging her with a soft and regular motion, and Lusignan was holding one of her hands between both his. She was still pale, but delicate and graceful as a wild lily. Her looks were vacantly wandering over the immense extent of ocean lying before her, and she felt her soul and senses enraptured by all the bliss which heaven promise, and all the enjoyments which this earth can offer. At that moment, and as if everything concurred to complete the magic spectacle which every evening she came there to contemplate, and which every succeeding evening she found still more marvellously beautiful, there suddenly appeared, doubling the cape *Trois Pointes*, and looking like an ocean king, a large vessel, gliding along the surface of the sea without more apparent effort than a swan playing upon the tranquil bosom of a lake. Marguerite was the first to perceive it, and without speaking, for every action is a fatigue under that burning clime, she made a sign with her head to Lusignan, who directed his looks to the spot she had indicated, and then, like her, silently followed with his eyes the rapid and graceful movements of the vessel. By degrees as she approached, and as the elegant and delicate proportions of her masts amidst the mass of sails which they sustained, could be discerned, which, in the first instance, had seemed a cloud floating upon the horizon — they began to discover in one corner of her flag the stars of America, equal in number to the States they represent. One same idea shot instantly through their minds, and they exchanged a glance, radiant with hope that they were, perhaps, about to receive some news of Paul. Lusignan immediately ordered a negro to bring a telescope: but before he had returned, a hope still more delightful pervaded both their hearts. It appeared to Lusignan and Marguerite that they recognized an old friend in the frigate that was approaching. To persons, however, unaccustomed, it is so difficult to distinguish, at a great distance, signs which speak at once to the eye of an experienced seaman, that they did not yet dare to have faith in this hope, and which, indeed, was more an instinctive presentiment than positive reality. At last the negro brought the so much longed for telescope. Lusignan uttered a cry of joy, and then handed it to Marguerite: he had recognized the sculpture of Guillaume Costou, upon the prow of the vessel, and it was really the *Indienne* which was advancing towards Basseterre.

Lusignan raised Marguerite from the hammock and placed her on her feet, for their first impulse was to hasten to the harbour; but then they reflected that Paul had left the *Indienne* nearly five years, at the time that his promotion entitled him to the command of a larger vessel, and that she might now be under the orders of another captain, and they paused with palpitating hearts and trembling limbs. During this time, their son Hector had taken up the telescope, and placing it to his eye, looked through it, and soon after exclaimed, — ” Father, see there, — upon the deck stands an officer, dressed in a black coat, embroidered with gold, just like the one in the picture of my dear friend, Paul!” Lusignan hastily snatched the glass from his son’s bauds, looked through it for a few moments, then again passed it to Marguerite, who, after directing it toward the vessel, let it fall, and then they threw themselves into each other’s arms; they had recognized their friend, who, as he was about to visit them, had put on the dress which we have before said he had generally worn. At this instant the frigate passed the fort, which it saluted with three guns, and the fort returned the salute with an equal number.

From the moment that Lusignan and Marguerite had acquired the certitude that their friend and brother was actually on board the *Indienne*, they had hastened down the mountain, followed by young Hector, towards the port, leaving their little Blanche in the hammock. The captain had also recognized them, so that at the moment they left the garden he had ordered a boat to be lowered, and, thanks to the united strength of ten vigorous oarsmen, he had rapidly glided over the distance between the anchorage ground and the port, and “had sprung upon the jetty at the instant that his friends arrived there. Such sensations as then filled their breasts cannot be expressed in words; tears are their only interpreter. And thus their joy more closely resembled grief, for they ail wept, even to the child, who wept because he saw them weep.

After giving some orders relating to the vessel, the young commodore, with his delighted friends, slowly ascended the hill down which they had rushed so rapidly to meet him. Paul told them that the expedition of Admiral Vaudreuil having failed, he had returned to Philadelphia, and peace having been signed, as we have before mentioned, with England, the Congress, as a token of gratitude, had presented him with the first ship he had commanded as captain.

Upon hearing this, Lusignan and Marguerite experienced the most lively joy, for they hoped that their brother had come with the intention of taking up his abode with them; but the character of the young seaman was too adventurous, and stood too much in need of excitement, to sink quietly down into the monotonous and unvaried dulness of a life on shore. He informed his friends that he had but eight days to remain with them, after which he should seek in another quarter of the globe, to follow the profession he had adopted.

These eight days passed by as rapidly as a dream, and notwithstanding the reiterated entreaties of both Lusignan and Marguerite, Paul would not consent to delay his departure even for twenty-four hours. He vas still the same ardent determined being, considering the execution of a resolution he had once formed as a positive duty, and more austere with regard to himself than toward others.

The hour of separation had arrived. Marguerite and Lusignan wished to accompany the young commodore on board his ship; but Paul wished not to prolong the grief of this leave-taking. When they reached the jetty he embraced them for the last time, then jumped into his boat, which was rowed away as swiftly as an arrow. Marguerite and Lusignan followed him with their eyes until his boat had disappeared on the leeward side of the frigate, and they sorrowfully reascended the hill to watch the ship’s departure, from the same terrace from which they had before discerned its arrival.

At the moment they reached it, they observed that activity and bustle on board the frigate which always precede the departure of a vessel. The sailors had surrounded the capstan, and were employed in getting up the anchor, and thanks to the pureness of the atmosphere, the sonorous and lively cries of the seamen reached the ears of Lusignan and Marguerite; the anchor was soon apeak, and they saw it rising slowly under the ship’s bows; then the sails dropped successively from the yards, from the royals to the courses, and the ship, seemingly endowed with an instinctive and animated feeling, gracefully turned her prow toward the harbour’s mouth, and beginning to move, cut through the waves with an easy motion, as if merely gliding upon their surface. Then, as if the frigate might be abandoned to her own will, they saw the young commodore spring upon the stern rails, and devote all his attention to the land he was thus leaving. Lusignan took out his handkerchief and made a signal, to which Paul replied. And then, when they could no longer perceive each other with the naked eye, they had recourse to their telescopes, and, thanks to this ingenious invention, they retarded the separation for another hour. They all felt a presentiment that this separation would be eternal.

The vessel gradually diminished upon the horizon, and darkness was about to cover the heavens, when Lusignan ordered a quantity of wood to be brought upon the terrace, to form a beacon fire, which was instantly ignited, in order that Paul, whose vessel was nearly enshrouded in the darkness, might continue to fix his eyes upon that spot until he had doubled Cape Trois Pointes. Lusignan and Marguerite had for an hour lost sight of the ship, while Paul, thanks to their large brilliant fire, might still perceive them, when a bright flame, like to a flash of lightning, appeared on the horizon, and in a few seconds the report of a gun, similar to the prolonged sound of distant thunder, reached their ears, and all again was silent. Lusignan and Marguerite had received Paul’s last farewell.

* * * * *

And now, although the domestic drama which we had undertook to relate, has, in fact, terminated here, some of our readers may, perhaps, have felt sufficient interest in the young adventurer, of whom we have made the hero of this story, to follow him in the second part of his career; to these then, after thanking them for the kind attention they have been pleased to grant to us, we are about to recount truly and plainly, facts which a most minute research have enabled us to lay before them.

At the period we have reached, that is to say, in the month of May, 1784, the whole of Europe had fallen into that state of torpor, which unthinking men imagined to be tranquillity, but which minds more profound, regarded as the dull and momentary calm that precedes the tempest. America, by obtaining her independence, had prepared France for her revolution. Kings and people, mistrustful of each other, were upon their guard. Peter III., who had become odious to the Russians, in consequence of his ignoble character, the narrowness of his political views, and above all, for his excessive leaning to Prussian manners, and Prussian discipline, had been deposed without opposition, and strangled without a struggle. Catherine had thus found herself, at the age of thirty-two, mistress of an empire which extended over one-seventh part of the globe; her first care was to compel the neighbouring powers to accept her as a mediatrix in their quarrel, and thus become dependent upon her. Thus, had she obliged the people of Courland to drive from them their new Duke, Charles of Saxony, and to recall Biren; she had sent her ambassadors and her armies to Warsaw, there to have crowned by the name of Stanislaus Augustus, her former lover, Poniatowski; she had formed an alliance with England; she had associated to her policy the Courts of Vienna and Berlin; and notwithstanding all these great projects of foreign policy, she had not neglected the internal government of her own country, and in the interval of her amours, so fickle and so various, she still found time to reward industry, to encourage agriculture, to reform the laws, to raise a navy, to send Pallas into provinces the productions of which were till then unknown — Blumager into the northern Archipelago, and Bellings into the Indian ocean; in fine, jealous of the literary reputation of her brother, the King of Prussia, she wrote with the same hand that had ordered the erection of a new city, signed the order for the execution of young Ivan, and the dismemberment of Poland, *The Refutation of the Journey into Siberia,* by the Abbé Chappe, a romance of the Czarowich Chlose, several plays, among which was a translation into French of *Oleg,* a drama, written by the Russian poet, Derschawin, so that

Voltaire proclaimed her the Semiramis of the North, and the King of Prussia, in his letters, classed her between Solon and Lycurgus.

The effect produced amid this voluptuous and chivalric court by the arrival of such a man, as our adventurous seaman, can readily be imagined. The reputation for courage, which had rendered him the terror of the enemies of France and America, had preceded him to the court of Russia, and in exchange for his frigate, which he presented to Catherine, he received the rank of Rear-Admiral. Then the flag of Russia, after having navigated round one-half the old world, appeared in the Grecian seas, and beneath the ruins of Lacedemon and the Parthenon, he, who had assisted in establishing the independence of America, dreamt of the re-establishment of the Republics of Sparta and of Athens. The old Ottoman empire was shaken to its foundations, the defeated Turks signed a treaty of peace at Kainardji. Catherine retained Azof, Taganrog, and Kenburr, and Kenburn, compelled the Turks to grant to her the free navigation of the Black Sea, and the independence of the Crimea; she then desired to visit her new possessions. Paul, recalled to St. Petersburgh, accompanied her on this journey, the route of which had been drawn up by Poterakin. During the whole of it, all the attributes of triumph were offered to the conquering Empress and her suite; bonfires were lighted all along the road, cities were illuminated with the most fairy-like brilliancy, magnificent palaces erected, as if by magic, for one day, amid desert countries, and which the next morning disappeared; villages, rising as if beneath the wand of an enchanter, in solitudes, in which eight days before the Tartars fed their flocks; towns appearing on the horizon of which there existed but the exterior walls; in every direction, homage, and songs of welcome, and dances of the people: during the day, a numerous population crowded the road, and at night, while the Empress was sleeping, they would run to station themselves in the way she was to proceed on waking the following morning: a king and emperor rode by her side, calling themselves not her brothers, not her equals, but her courtiers; finally, a triumphal arch was erected at the last halt she was to make on her journey southward, bearing the inscription — ” *This is the road to Byzantium”* which if it did not reveal the ambition of Catherine, demonstrated at least, the policy of Potemkin. Then Russia became strengthened in her tyranny, as America had in her independence. Catherine offered to her Admiral places which would have more than satisfied the rapacity of a courtier, honors which would have overwhelmed the ambitious, estates which would have consoled a deposed king for the loss of his dominions; but it was the deck of his. ship, it was the sea with its combats and its tempests, it was the boundless immensity of ocean for which yearned the heart of our adventurous and poetic seaman. He, therefore, left the brilliant court of Catherine, as he had left the austere Congress of America, and returned to France to seek that, which he could not find elsewhere, that is to say, a life of excitement, enemies to combat, a people to defend. Paul arrived in Paris in the midst of our European wars and civil struggles; while, with one hand, we were seizing a foreign enemy by the throat, with the other, we were tearing our own entrails. That king, whom he had seen ten years before, beloved, honored, powerful, was then a captive, despised and strengthless. All that had been exalted was abased, and great names fell as did high-born heads. — It was the reign of equality, and the guillotine was the levelling instrument. Paul inquired after Emanuel, and was told that he was proscribed. He asked what had become of his mother, and was informed that she was dead. Then he felt an irresistible longing to revisit once again, before he himself might die, the spot on which, twelve years before, he had experienced emotions at once so sweet and terrible. He set out for Brittany, left his carriage at Vannes, and mounted on horseback, as he had done on the first day he had seen Marguerite; but he was no longer the young and enthusiastic seaman, whose desires and hopes had no horizon; he was a man bereft of all those brilliant illusions, for he had tasted of all, whether sweet or bitter, had learnt to appreciate all, both men and things; had known all, glory and oblivion. Therefore, did he not come to search a family, but to visit tombs.

When he came within sight of the castle, he turned his eyes toward Achard’s house, and not being able to discover it, he thought he would go into the forest, but the forest seemed to have vanished as by enchantment. It had been sold as national property to twenty-five or thirty farmers of the neighbourhood, who had cleared off the timber, and transformed it into a large plain. The gigantic oak had disappeared, and the plough had passed over the unknown grave of the Count de Morlaix, and the eyes of his son even, could no longer recognize the spot.

Then he returned through the park toward the castle, now become even more gloomy and desolate than when he had last seen it. In it he found only an old man, a living ruin amidst these ruins of the past; it was at first intended to have pulled down the mansion, but the reputation for holiness which the marchioness had left behind her, was regarded with, such religious veneration throughout the country, that the old walls, which for four centuries had been the abode of her ancestors, remained undesecrated. Paul went through the apartments, which for three years had remained closed, and which were now open for him. He walked through the portrait gallery; it was in the same state as he had formerly seen it; no pious hand had added to the portrait either of the marquis or the marchioness. He went into the study in which he had been concealed — found a book lying in it which he had opened and placed upon the very spot which he found it, and read the same passages which he had read so many years before. Ho then pushed open the door which communicated with the contract chamber, where had passed the chief scenes of that drama in which he was the principal actor. The table was still in the same place and the Venetian looking-glass over the chimney-piece was there, shattered as it had been by the ball from Emanuel's pistol. Paul advanced to the fire-place, and placing his elbow on the marble mantle-piece, questioned the servant as to the last years of the marchioness.

The account he received shewed that she had remained austere and melancholy, as was her wont. Remaining secluded and alone at the castle, her hours were uniformly spent in three different places: her oratory, the vault in which the body of her husband had been buried, and the spot sheltered by the oak tree, at the foot of which her lover had been interred. For eight years after the evening on which Paul had taken leave of her, she had been seen to wander amid the old corridors of the castle, and in the gloomy avenues of the park, slow and pale as a spectre; then a disease of the heart, engendered by the agonies she had suffered, declared itself, and she daily became weaker. At length, one evening, when her failing strength no longer permitted her to walk, she had ordered the servants to carry her to the foot of the oak tree, her favorite walk, that she might once more see, she said, the sun setting in the ocean. When they had reached the spot, she desired the servants to withdraw, and to come back to her in half an hour. On their return they found her lying fainting on the ground. They immediately bore her to the castle, but having recovered her senses on the way, she ordered them, instead of conducting her to her own room, which they usually did, to take her down into the family vault. There she had still strength enough to kneel upon the tomb of her husband, and made a sign that she desired to be left alone. However imprudent their doing so might be, the servants withdrew, for she had accustomed them to obey her in every thing at the first intimation of her will. They, however, remained at a short distance, concealed behind the corner of a tomb, that they might be ready to render her assistance, should it be necessary. In a few minutes they saw her fall down upon the stone on which she had been praying; they rushed forward, imagining that she had again fainted. She was dead.

Paul requested the old servant to conduct him into the vault, and slowly entered it with uncovered head; and when he had reached the stone which covered the grave of his mother, he knelt down and prayed. On the monumental stone were inscribed the following words, and which may still be seen in one of the chapels of the church of the small town of Auray; to which it has since been removed. The inscription had been written by the marchioness herself, and she had desired that it should be placed upon her tomb.

“Hero lies the very noble and very puissant lady Marguerite Blanche de Sablé, Marchioness of Auray; born the 2nd of August 1729 — died the 3rd September, 1788.

“Pray for her and for her children.”

Paul raised his eye3 to heaven, with an expression of infinite gratitude. His mother, who during her life, had for so long a time forgotten him, had remembered him in her funeral inscription.

Six months after this visit, the National Convention decreed, in solemn sitting, that they would attend in a body the funeral procession of Paul Jones, formerly a commodore in the American navy, and whose burial was to take place in the cemetery of Pere La Chaise.

They had come to this decision, said the decree, in order to consecrate the establishment of *religious freedom throughout France.*

CAPTAIN PAMPHILE

Translated by Alfred Allinson

This children's story was first published in 1839, with the intention of criticising trafficking and slavery. In the narrative, animals are often depicted as victims, offering a clear parallel with the slave trade. Despite these controversial themes, the novel is often humorous and even cynical in tone.

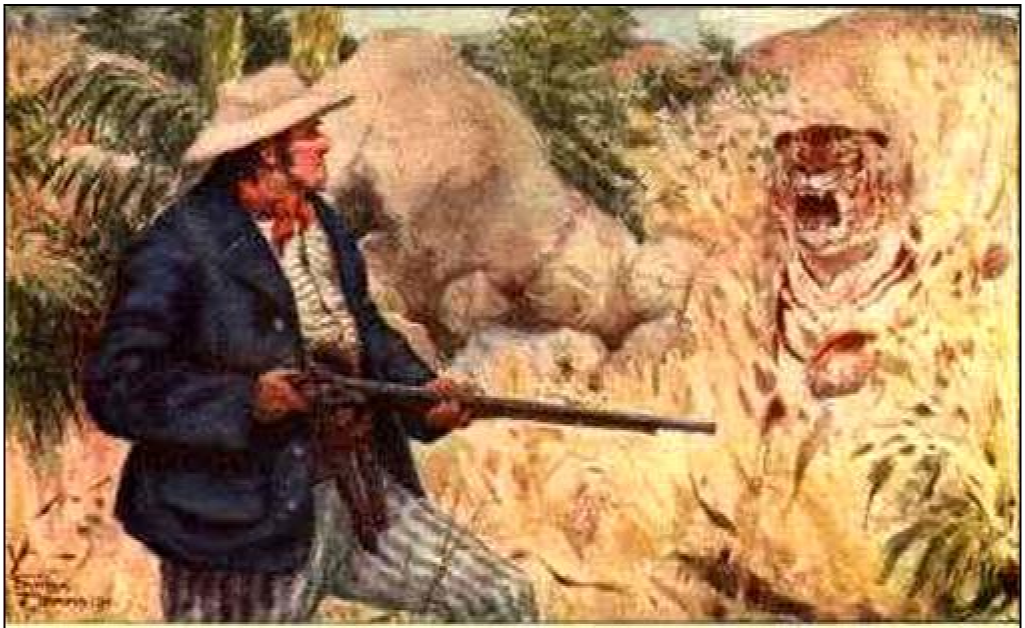

IT WAS A ROYAL TIGER OF THE LARGEST SIZE.

An illustration from an English edition

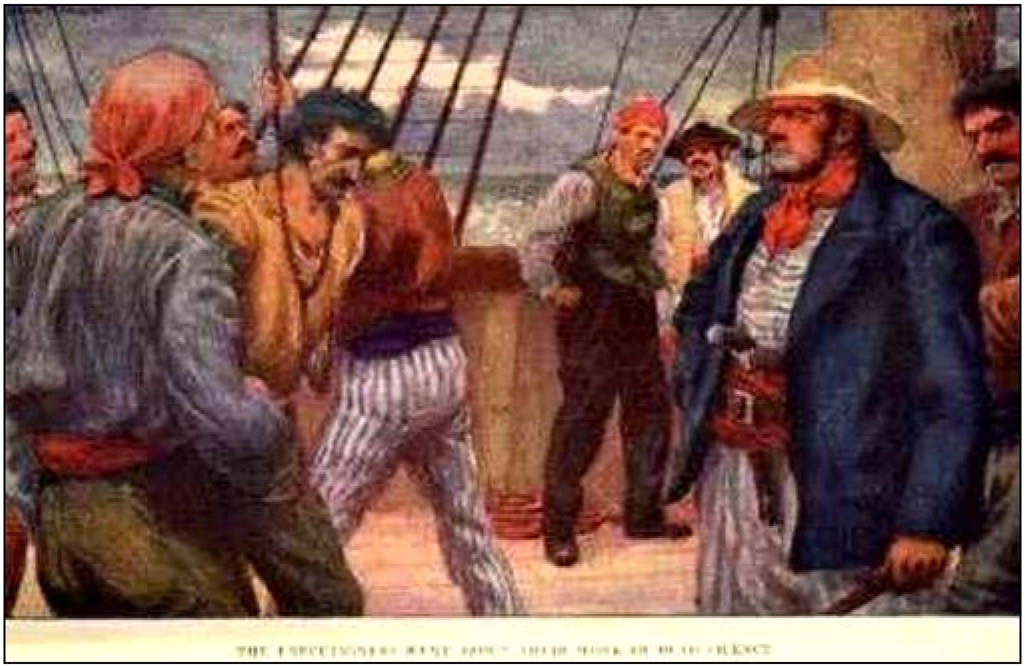

Another illustration from the same edition

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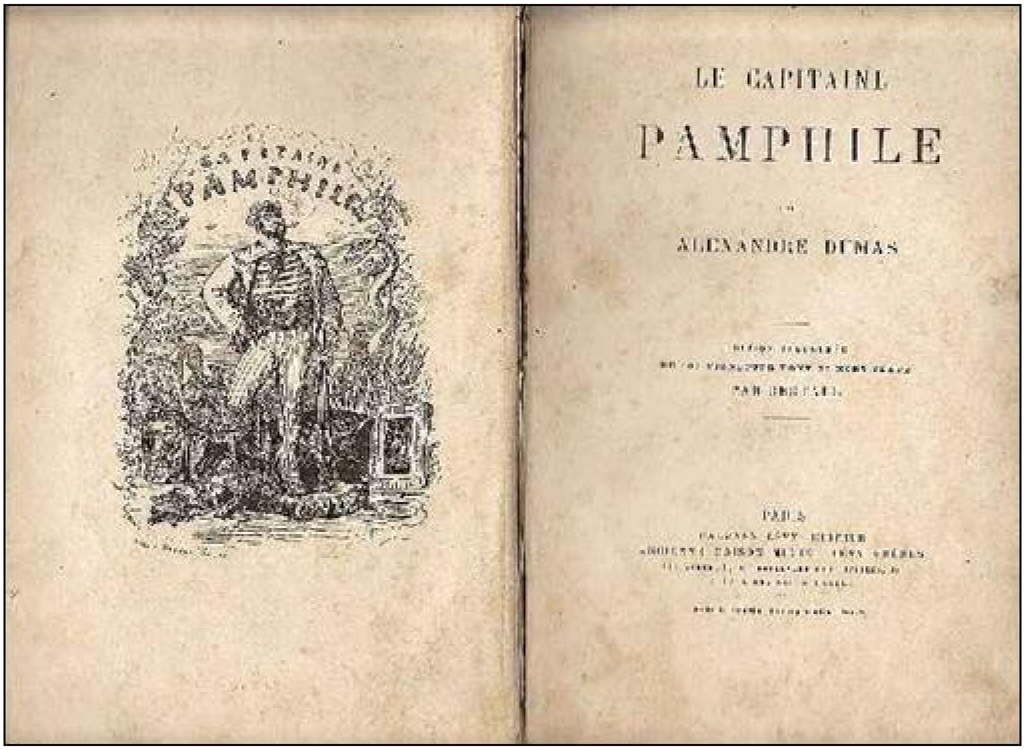

CAPITAINE
PAMPHILE

LE CAPITAINE
PAMPHILE

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

PARIS

The first edition titlepage

INTRODUCTION

IF, following one of the most enterprising of our weekly journals, a French paper were to invite celebrities to summon up their recollections and supply lists of the authors who most charmed their childhood, we may hazard the conjecture that the name of Dumas would be found in many. This may surprise those who only know Dumas as the author of “Monte Cristo,”

“The Three Musketeers,” and “The Black Tulip,” and who remember, more or less vaguely, as a matter of literary history, that in 1829 he headed the Romantic Movement with his drama “Henri III “; and it is perfectly true that the enormous success of his novels altogether surpassed the reputation he had previously acquired as the writer of entertaining travels and delightful tales for young people. It is not, however, uncommon to find in contemporary literature affectionate tributes paid to some one or more of these tales, and the title that is recorded most frequently is “Le Capitaine Pamphile.”

Dumas wrote the first few chapters of “Captain Pamphile “as early as 1834, when they appeared in the second volume of the “Journal des Enfants,” the story being continued in the third and sixth and completed in the seventh volume. In 1835 the same chapters, entitled “Jacques I et Jacques II: Fragments Historiques,” were reprinted in Dumas’ “Souvenirs d’Antony,” which, containing stories so remarkable as “Blanche de Beaulieu “and “Le Cocher de Cabriolet,” were read by every one who cared for the productions of the Romantic School. “Jacques I et Jacques II “had a great success, and in 1840, Dumas having completed the book, Dumont published it as “Le Capitaine Pamphile,” with the following editorial note:

“At last we find ourselves in the fortunate position of being able to bring before the public the interesting series of adventures associated with the name of “Captain Pamphile.” It has required no less than the time which has elapsed since the first four chapters appeared in the “Souvenirs d’Antony “(from which we have reprinted them in order to lay before our readers a complete work), that is to say, five years, to procure the necessary documents relating to the characters in this history. These documents were scattered over the four quarters of the globe, but, thanks to the good offices of our consuls, we have succeeded in gathering them together. We feel amply rewarded to-day for our trouble by the conviction that we are presenting to the public a book which is so nearly perfect that only professional critics, with their well-known justice and discernment, are capable of pointing out the slight distance by which the account of “The Adventures of Captain Pamphile” falls short of absolute perfection.”

The original text was not, however, exactly reproduced, and for the edification of the curious in such matters we translate the concluding paragraph of “Jacques I et Jacques II,” which should be read after the mention of the captain’s purchase of a parrot on page 47 of the present edition.

“Gentlemen,” said Jadin, breaking off short in his narrative, “as it has proved impossible for me to find out whether the parakeet in question was a true parrot or a cockatoo, and as it was important to clear this point up, I wrote to Captain Pamphile, in order to procure the most accurate information as to the family of the new personage we are about to bring under your notice, but before my letter reached him he, having disposed of his cargo most advantageously, had set out on a second voyage to India. Mme. Pamphile did me the honour to reply to my letter, saying that her husband would be back in September or October next; I am therefore obliged to ask you to wait till then for the continuation of the history of ‘Jacques I et Jacques II.’”

For general reading in France the edition of 1840 has been entirely superseded by the issue of one illustrated by Bertall. The book with “Le Fléau de Naples “also forms a volume of the “Œuvres Complètes.”

“Captain Pamphile,” besides being a most amusing trifle, written with much grace and wit, has this distinction: that no other book can well be compared with it. It is true that one or two of the adventures of the “worthy captain “recall those of Baron Munchausen, while others may have been inspired by Captain Marryat, of whose work Dumas was an admirer, but the conception and working out of the story, besides the character of the captain himself, are as widely different as can be. The stories about the animals, which are ingeniously made to serve as a peg on which to hang the said adventures, are no less amusing, and it is interesting to observe that these stories, written in 1834, are precisely in the same style as Dumas’ more famous “Histoire de mes Bétes,” composed about thirty years later. They are not only interesting in themselves, they introduce on the scene Dumas himself and a group of his friends, the famous painters — Decamps, Flers, Tony Johannot, and Jadin. Jadin accompanied Dumas on his excursions in the South of France and Italy, and is immortalized in the "Impressions de Voyage," while Dauzats, of whom mention is made, supplied the material for the entertaining "Quinze Jours au Sinai "and for the drama and romance "Captain Paul." Every one is familiar with the name of Alphonse Karr, whose letter to Dumas is printed at the end of the present story.

To give the reader an idea of the Dumas of 1840, which as we have seen was the year of publication of "Captain Pamphile," we can scarcely do better than present his portrait as sketched by de Villemessant, the founder and brilliant editor of the "Figaro." To assist the sale of the "Sylphide," his journal for the time being, de Villemessant had the idea of giving a concert, and of issuing free tickets of admission to all his regular subscribers.

"Long before the commencement of the concert Herz's Hall was filled by a distinguished audience. It was not towards the platform that all eyes were directed, but towards the door of entrance, for Alexandre Dumas was expected. Suddenly a rustle and a murmur of pleasure ran through the hall from end to end: Alexandre Dumas had just arrived; he was about to enter. I have seen the entrance of many remarkable persons since then, but no sovereign presenting himself before spectators assembled to receive him ever produced such an effect. In an instant the entire audience rose and every look was fixed on the illustrious writer, whose high stature towered above the assembly, as, smiling right and left on friends and even on strangers, he slowly made his way to his stall, his progress impeded by the number of hands held out to grasp his as he passed.

"Alexandre Dumas was then in the height of his glory, and a grasp of his hand was better than a touch of genius to those receiving it. All the opera glasses were turned on the young writer to whom he spoke two words in the crowd. 'He is a friend of Dumas; he must be some one very distinguished,' ran from mouth to mouth, while the young girls could not look enough at any young man lucky enough to. be able to boast of such a friendship. In order to understand the prestige of Alexandre Dumas we must transport ourselves back to the time when all Paris fell under the charm of his matchless talent. Success, which is an accident in the lives of most writers, was to him a daily companion. Everything in him was stupendous: his imagination, his intellect, his gay good nature, and his lavishness.

"At no time and among no people had it till then been granted to a writer to achieve fame in every direction; in serious drama and in comedy, in novels of adventure and of domestic interest, in humorous stories and in pathetic tales he had been alike successful. The frequenters of the *Théâtre français* owed him evenings of delight, but so did the 'man in the street.' Dumas alone had had the power to touch, interest, or amuse, not only Paris or France, but the whole world. If all other novelists had been swallowed up in an earthquake, this one would have been able to supply the lending libraries of Europe. If all other dramatists had died, Alexandre Dumas could have occupied every stage; his magic name on a play-bill or affixed to a newspaper story ensured the sale of the newspaper or a full house at the theatre. He was king of the stage, prince of feuilletonists, *the* literary man, *par excellence,* in that Paris then so full of intellect. When he opened his lips the most eloquent held their breath to listen; when he entered a room the wit of man, the beauty of woman, the pride of life grew dim in the radiance of his glory; he reigned over Paris in right of his sovereign intellect, the only monarch who for an entire century had understood how to draw to himself the adoration of all classed of society from the Faubourg St. Germain to the Marais and the Batignolles.

"Just as he united in himself capabilities of many kinds, so he displayed in his person the perfection of many races. From the negro he had derived the frizzled hair and those thick lips on which Europe had laid a delicate smile of ever-varying meaning; from the southern races he derived his vivacity of gesture and speech, from the northern his solid frame and broad shoulders and a figure which, while it showed no lack of French elegance, was powerful enough to make green with envy gentlemen of the Russian Life-Guards.

"Nature had richly endowed him; intelligence and physical strength, intellect and health were his. At the period we are thinking of Alexandre Dumas, tall and slim, was the finished type of a perfect cavalier: what was heavy in his features was hidden in the light of his blue eyes; in the struggle between the two races which had taken place within him the negro had been subdued by the man of civilization; the impetuosity of the blood of Africa had been toned down by the elegances of European culture; the wit which flowed from his lips ennobled, so to speak, their form, and his ugliness was transfigured by the brilliant mind and consciousness of success which glowed behind it.

"Every quality displayed by this extraordinary man pleased and fascinated. His delight in his own strength, his self-satisfied smile, fatuous in anyone else, were in him an added grace. Never had been met before, and long will it be till we meet again, in the streets of Paris a man whose mere appearance drew all hearts to him.

"Alexandre Dumas had learned the great art of exciting no jealousy by his success. Simple and friendly with great writers, familiar with the less known, he gained the confidence of the one class and aroused the enthusiasm of the other, so that both those whose career was beginning and those who had succeeded were on his side. His exquisite courtesy, while it stifled envy in the germ, fascinated young writers, who were delighted „ to be met with such friendliness by the lion of the day. "Passing through the whole length of the hall to reach the place I had reserved for him in the front row, he paused every instant to shake hands with one and another. Among the multitude of his admirers Dumas, who was always absent-minded, did not try to distinguish friends from mere acquaintances, for all he had the same smile, the same hand-clasp; I myself had only met him two or three times before, and yet that evening on seeing me he held out both his hands and said: — "*'Bon soir, mon cher ami, tu te portes bien?'*"It is now years ago since the American public was invited to purchase some "Historical Fragments "by Alexandre Dumas, to find that James I and James II were not monarchs, but monkeys.

An edition of "Captain Pamphile," long out of print, was published in New York by Winchester, and episodes from the book adapted for use in schools have been edited by Mr. E. C. Morris (Longmans, 1892). Mr. Andrew Lang laid a few chapters from it under contribution when making up his "Animal Story Book."

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCING THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS OF THE STORY AND ITS AUTHOR

I was passing, in the year 1831, along a street near the Porte de Chevet, when I noticed an Englishman in a shop, turning over and over in his hands a turtle which he was proposing to buy, with the obvious intention of converting it, as soon as it became his property, into turtle-soup.

The resigned air with which the poor creature allowed itself to be thus examined without so much as trying to escape, by withdrawing into its shell, the cruelly gastronomic gaze of its enemy, went to my heart.

A sudden impulse seized me to save it from the grave of the stockpot, in which it had one foot already. I entered the shop, where I was then well known, and with a glance of intelligence at Madame Beauvais, I asked her if the turtle about which I had called the previous evening had been kept for me. Madame Beauvais grasped my meaning at once with that quickness of perception which characterizes the Parisian shopkeeper, and, politely withdrawing the creature from the hands of the would-be purchaser, she placed it in mine, saying in what she supposed to be English to our Insular friend, who stared at her with open eyes and mouth: “Pardon my lord, the leetle tortue, this shentleman have her bought since the morning.”

“Ah,” said the newly-created peer to me, in excellent French, “then this charming animal belongs to you, Monsieur?”

“Yes, yes, my lord,” interpolated Madame Beauvais,! eagerly.

“Well, Monsieur,” continued he, “you are now in possession of a little creature that will make into excellent soup. My sole regret is that probably it is the only one of its kind that Madame has for sale at present.”

“We have the ‘ope to-morrow to have some more,” said Madame Beauvais.

“But to-morrow will be too late,” answered the Englishman, coldly; “I have put all my affairs in order, so as to blow out my brains to-night, and I hoped, before doing so, to have enjoyed a basin of turtle-soup.”

So saying, he lifted his hat to us, and went out of the shop.

“Perdition!" I said to myself, after a moment’s reflection, “the least I can do for such a gallant gentleman is to help him to gratify his last earthly wish.”

And I rushed out of the shop, singing out, like Madame Beauvais, “My lord! my lord!”

But he was out of sight, and as I could not discover which turn he had taken, I had to give up the attempt to trace him.

I went home full of sad thoughts. My feelings of humanity towards the beast had made me cruel to the man. What a strangely constructed machine is the world, in which one cannot do a kind action to one creature without causing pain to another. Thinking thus, I reached the Rue de l’Université, climbed to my rooms on the third floor and laid down my new purchase on the carpet. It was just a turtle of the COMMONEST sort — *testudo lutaria, sive aquarum dulcium*; which means, according to Linnaeus among older writers, and Kay among more modern, marsh or fresh-water turtle.

Now, in the social order of the *chelonians*, the marsh or fresh-water turtle holds pretty much the same rank as that occupied in our civil society by grocers, or in the military oligarchy by the National Guard.

For all that, it was the very strangest and most peculiar turtle that ever pushed four legs, a head, and a tail through the holes of a shell. No sooner did the creature feel herself on the floor, than she gave me a proof of her originality by making a bee-line for the fireplace with a speed which earned her on the spot the name of Gazelle, and then doing her best to force herself through the bars of the fender so as to reach the fire, the light of which seemed to have an irresistible attraction for her. Finally, at the end of an hour’s fruitless endeavours, finding her attempt to reach it a hopeless failure, she quietly went to sleep, first extending her head and limbs through the apertures nearest to the blaze, thus choosing, for her special delectation, a temperature of from ninety to a hundred degrees Fahrenheit, as nearly as I could judge. This led to the conclusion that either by vocation or fatality she was destined one day to be roasted; thus it seemed that, by saving her from my Englishman’s stewpan and making her an inmate of my room, I had only exchanged one method of cooking her for another. The sequel will show that I was not mistaken in my forebodings.

As I had to go out, and feared some harm might come to Gazelle in my absence, I called my servant.

Joseph," I said to him, when he came, "please take charge of this animal." He drew near my new pet with curiosity depicted on his countenance.

"Oh, fancy!" he cried, "it's a turtle! It could carry a cart on its back."

Yes, I know that. But I hope you will never be tempted to try the experiment."

Oh! that would not hurt him," replied Joseph, who was anxious to display his knowledge of natural history.

"The Láon 'diligence' might drive over her back, and she would not be crushed, not she!"

Joseph spoke of the Lâon 'diligence,' because he came from Soissons, through which it passes.

"Yes," I said, "I quite believe that the great sea turtle, the true turtle, *testudo mydas*, could bear such a weight; but I doubt whether this one, which belongs to the smallest species..."

"That has nothing to do with it," replied Joseph, "these little creatures are as strong as Turks; and, look you, a wagon wheel running over it..."

"Very good, very good. Kindly go out and buy her some salad and some snails."

"What! snails? Is she weak in her chest? The j master I lived with before I came to your honour used to take snail broth because he had '*phisics ';* well, that did not stop..."

I was out of the room before he got to the end of his story. Half-way down the stairs I found I had come away without a handkerchief, and returned to get one. I discovered Joseph, who had not heard me come into the room, posing as the Apollo Belvedere, one foot on: Gazelle's back, the other poised in air, so that not a. grain of the ten stone the idiot weighed should be lost for the poor creature's benefit.

"What are you doing there, stupid?"

"I told you so, did I not, Monsieur?" replied Joseph, full of pride at having, at least partially, proved his proposition.

"Give me a pocket-handkerchief, and never again meddle with that animal."

"Here is it, Monsieur," said Joseph, bringing me what I wanted. "But you need have no fears for her; a wagon might pass over her."

I ran away as fast as I could; but I had not got twenty steps down the stairs before I heard Joseph grumbling to himself as he shut the door, "*Pardieu!* As if I did not know what I was talking about. Besides that, it is obvious from the conformation of these animals that a cannon loaded with grapeshot could..."

Fortunately, the noise of the street below prevented my hearing the end of his cursed nonsense. That night I came home pretty late, as my habit is. The first step I took in the room I felt something crunch under my boot. I raised one foot hastily, throwing my weight on the other; the same crunching was heard again. I thought I had walked into a row of hen's nests. I lowered the candle to the floor. My carpet was covered with snails.

Joseph had obeyed me to the letter. He had bought salad and snails, and had put tortoise and provender together into a basket in the middle of my room; ten minutes afterwards, either the heat of the room had roused the snails up or they had been seized with panic at the idea of being eaten alive, and the whole caravan had got on the march. Indeed, they had already done some considerable amount of travelling, as I could easily see by the silvery tracks left by the fugitives on the carpet and furniture.

As for Gazelle, she was still in the basket, up the sides of which she had found it impossible to climb. But some empty snail shells showed me that the flight of the Israelites had not been sufficiently rapid to prevent her getting her teeth into one or two of them before they had time to cross the Red Sea.

I at once began a careful inspection of the battalion which was manoeuvring in my room, as I did not much care about being subject to their attacks during the night; then, gently picking up all the stragglers with my right hand, I placed them one by one in their guardroom, the basket, which I held in my left hand, and shut the lid down on them. At the end of five minutes I began to perceive that if I left this menagerie in my room I ran the risk of-going without a wink of sleep; there was a sound as if a dozen mice had been tied up in a bag of walnuts. I therefore took steps to convey the whole party to the kitchen.

On my way there I reflected that, at the rate Gazelle had been carrying on, if I left her in the midst of such a well-stocked larder I should find her dead in the morning from indigestion; at the same moment, as if by inspiration, there flashed across my mind's eye the recollection of a certain trough in the back yard, which the restaurant keeper on the ground floor used for scouring his fish in. This seemed to me such a desirable lodging for a *testudo aquarum dulcium* that I thought it useless; to rack my brains to find another; so, taking Gazelle out of her dining-room, I bore her forthwith to her watery couch.

I returned upstairs at once and fell asleep, persuaded that I was the cleverest man in France for finding a way; out of a difficulty.

Next morning Joseph awoke me the moment it was; light.

“Oh, Monsieur, here’s a pretty business!” he said, planting himself at my bedside.

“What business?”

“What your tortoise has done.”

“What?”

“Well, would you believe it? She got out of your room — I do not know how — walked down the three flights of stairs, out into the open air, and straight into the restaurant keeper’s fish-tank.”

“Why you fool, could you not guess I put her there myself?”

“Ah, well! Then you did a pretty piece of work.”

“How so?”

“How? Because she has eaten up a tench, a splendid tench, weighing three pounds.”

“Go and fetch Gazelle, and bring me a pair of scales.”

While Joseph was executing this order I went to my library and opened my Buffon at the paragraph Turtles for I was anxious to know if this *chelonia* was a fish-eater, and I read as follows: —

“The fresh-water turtle, *testudo aquarum dulcium* (that was Gazelle), especially prefers marshes and stagnant waters. When it gets into a river or pond it attacks, all sorts of fish indiscriminately, even the largest: it grips them below the belly in its jaws, wounding them severely, and when they are thus weakened through loss of blood it devours them with the greatest avidity, leaving nothing whatever of them but the bones, the heads, and their swimming bladders, which last sometimes float up to the surface of the water!”

“The deuce!” said I; “the restaurant man has M. de Buffon on his side; what he says is quite possibly true.”

I was thus engaged in meditation as to the probability of the accident which was said to have occurred, when Joseph returned, holding the accused in one hand and the scales in the other, “Do you see,” said Joseph, “this kind of animal eats a great deal to keep up its strength, especially fish, because the latter contains a great quantity of nourishment. Unless it did so, how could it bear, think you, to carry a cart on its back? See how strongly built sailors are in seaport towns; that is because they live on nothing but fish." I interrupted Joseph's harangue at this point. "How much did the tench weigh?"

"Three pounds; the waiter asks nine francs for it."

"And you say Gazelle has eaten every morsel of it?"

"She has left nothing but the bones, the head, and the bladder."

"That is it exactly! Monsieur de Buffon is a great naturalist."

"However," I muttered to myself, "three pounds!

...That seems a little too much."

I put Gazelle in the scales. She only weighed two pounds and a half, shell and all.

The result of the experiment then was, not that Gazelle was innocent of the criminal charge, but that she had committed the offence on a fish of less than the alleged size.

This seemed likewise to be the opinion of the cookshop waiter; as he seemed very well pleased with the five francs I gave him in satisfaction of his claim., adventure with the snails and the accident to the tench had made me somewhat less enthusiastic about

my new purchase; and as I happened to meet the same day one of my friends, a great savant and a talented! artist, who was then engaged in turning his studio into a menagerie, I promised him that I would, the next day, augment his collection by the addition of a fresh object, belonging to the highly renowned family of the *chelonice,* at which he seemed greatly delighted.

Gazelle passed the night in my room, where, in the absence of the snails, she slept tranquilly.

In the morning, Joseph came in, as usual, gathered up the carpet strip by my bedside, opened the window, and began shaking out the dust; but, all of a sudden, he gave a cry of terror and craned his head so far out of window I really thought he was going to throw himself down.

"What is the matter, Joseph?" I asked, still only half awake.

"Alas! Monsieur, it is... your tortoise was asleep on the carpet. I did not notice her..."

"Yes, and...?"

"And, my word! without doing it on purpose, I'll have shaken her out of window."

“You idiot, you!”

I jumped out of bed.

“But there,” said Joseph, whose face and voice were! beginning to resume an expression of serenity, which! was quite reassuring, “there she is, eating cabbage.”

As a matter of fact, the creature, which had instinctively withdrawn inside its cuirass, had fallen by good luck on to a heap of oyster shells. This had broken its fall, and finding a head of cabbage conveniently within its reach, it had set to work on its breakfast as quietly as if a fall from the third floor were just an everyday incident in its life.

“I told you so, Monsieur!” reiterated Joseph in the joy of his heart. “I told you so; nothing can hurt these animals. Why, look you, while she’s eating, if a carriage were to drive over her...”

“Never mind that; go down at once and fetch her up.”

Joseph obeyed orders. Meantime I dressed, and was ready before Joseph reappeared. Accordingly I went down to find him, and discovered him standing in the middle of an interested audience, to whom he was holding forth on the events of the morning.

I took Gazelle out of his hands, jumped into a cab, and drove to No. 109, Faubourg Saint-Denis; then, after mounting to the fifth floor, I entered my friend’s studio, and found him busy at his easel.

Grouped about him were a bear, lying on its back and playing with a cork; a monkey seated in a chair, pulling out the hairs of a paint-brush one by one; in a big glass jar a frog seated on the third rung of a miniature ladder, which she could use for the purpose of climbing to the surface of the water when she so pleased.

My friend’s name was Decamps, the bear’s Tom, the monkey’s James the First, and the frog’s Mademoiselle Camargo.

CHAPTER II

RELATES HOW JAMES THE FIRST CONCEIVED A VIOLENT DISLIKE TO TOM, ALL ON ACCOUNT OF A CARROT

My entrance produced a profound sensation.

Decamps raised his eyes from that marvellous little picture of his, “Performing Dogs,” which you all know so well, and which he was then giving the finishing touches to.

Tom let the cork he was playing with fall on his nose, and ran away growling to his kennel, which stood! between the two windows.

James the First incontinently tossed the brush he was! tearing to pieces behind his back, and picked up a straw,! which he carried to his mouth with one hand, while he scratched his left leg with the other, raising his eyes with! a pious look of injured innocence to heaven.

Last of all, Mademoiselle Camargo slowly climbed! one step higher on her ladder: a feat which, under any I ordinary circumstances, would have been considered! as a sign of coming rain.

As for myself; I put Gazelle down at the door of the room, and came to a standstill on the threshold, saying, “Here’s the creature I spoke of, my boy. You see I stick to my word.”

Gazelle was not at home for a moment or two; the motion of the cab had so upset her ideas of locality that probably with a view to collecting her faculties and reflecting on her situation during her travels, she had withdrawn entirely within her house. Thus what j placed upon the floor looked like nothing in the world but an empty shell. Nevertheless, when Gazelle felt by the correct position of her centre of gravity, that she had a solid resting place below her, she tentatively began to show her nose through the upper window of her dwelling. For prudential reasons, doubtless, this portion of her body was accompanied by the advance of her two forepaws; and, at the same time, as if all her members had been worked by a concealed spring, her two hind paws and tail appeared at the further extremity of the shell. Five minutes afterwards Gazelle had all sail set.

But she remained inactive yet a little longer, waving her head from side to side, as if trying to make certain of her course; then suddenly her eyes became riveted on her mark, and she dashed forward, as swiftly as if she were running the race against La Fontaine’s hare, towards a carrot lying under the chair which served as a pedestal for James the First.

Just at first the latter contemplated the advance of the new arrival in his direction with comparative indifference; but directly he comprehended the apparent object of her quest, he gave signs of genuine disquietude, which he showed by a low grumbling, degenerating, as fast as she gained ground towards him, into piercing yells alternating with violent gnashing of his teeth. At last, by the time she had got to little more than a foot’s distance from the precious vegetable, James’s agitation had changed to downright despair; with one hand he grasped the back of the chair, with the other the straw-covered cross bar, and, probably hoping he might scare away this new parasite which was coming to devour his dinner, he shook the chair with all the strength of his wrists, throwing his two hind feet back like a Kicking horse, and accompanying these antics with every gesture and grimace which he thought likely to disturb the automatic impassibility of his enemy. But all was useless; Gazelle did not slacken her speed by a single inch for anything he could do. James the First knew not to what Saint he could turn for succour.

Happily for James an unexpected ally appeared at last moment. Tom, who had withdrawn to his lair my arrival, had at last become used to my presence, and was paying, like the rest of the company, a good deal of attention to the scene enacting before our eyes.” Astonished at first at the sight of this unknown animal, which, thanks to me, had become a fellow-lodger of his, and its new activity, he had followed its career towards the carrot with ever-increasing curiosity. Moreover, as Tom, too, was by no means indifferent to carrots, when he saw Gazelle had almost reached the precious morsel, he took three steps forward at a trot, and raising his great paw brought it heavily down on the back of the unhappy intruder. The flat of her shell struck the ground heavily, and she instantly shut herself up inside and remained motionless, only two inches distant I from the comestible which for the moment had become the goal of a triple ambition.

Tom seemed much surprised at seeing how head, legs, and tail had disappeared as if by magic. He brought his nose close to the creature’s shell, sniffed j noisily at the apertures in it, and finally, the more perfectly to study the organization of the singular object before him, took it up, and turned it over and over between his paws. Then, as if convinced that he must have been the victim of an illusion when *hp* conceived the absurd notion that a thing like that was endowed with life and the power of motion, he dropped it carelessly down, took up the carrot in his mouth, and set out on his return to his kennel.

But this action of his did not at all suit James. He had never suspected that the good service his friend Tom had done him was to be spoilt by such a display of selfish egoism. But, as he had not the same respect for his comrade as he felt for the stranger, he sprang like lightning from the chair, on which he had remained from prudential motives during the scene we have just described, and seized with one hand the carrot by its green top, while Tom held on to it by the root. He nerved himself for the combat with all his strength, grimacing, swearing, chattering with his teeth, while; with his free hand he delivered a series of heavy blows on the nose of his placid antagonist, who, without returning the blows, yet at the same time without ever letting go his hold on the subject of litigation, merely laid back his ears and closed his little black-eyes as each blow from the agile hand of James fell on his fat countenance. In the end the victory fell, as usually happens, not to the stronger, but to the more daring. Tom relaxed his clenched teeth, and James, the happy possessor of the coveted carrot, dashed up a ladder, carrying off the spoils of combat, which he proceeded to hide behind a plaster cast of Malagutti, which stood on a shelf six feet above the ground. This operation completed, he came quietly down again, certain in his own mind that neither bear nor tortoise could get it out of its hiding place.

As he reached the last rung, when it became a question of stepping on to the floor, he made a judicious halt, and, casting a glance at Gazelle, whom in the heat of his dispute with Tom he had quite forgotten, he found she was in a position which positively invited attack.

The fact was that Tom, instead of carefully replacing her in the position whence he originally took her, had, as stated, just let her drop casually out of his paws to alight where she might, so that the unfortunate beast, on recovering her senses, instead of being in her normal position on her belly, came to herself on her back, an attitude which, as every one knows, is in the highest degree antipathetic to every individual of the cheladonian race.

It was easy to see from the confident air which James bore in approaching Gazelle that he had instantly concluded that the accident had placed it beyond her power to offer any resistance. Nevertheless, at the distance of some six inches from the *monstrum horrendum*, he stopped a moment, looked carefully into the aperture nearest to him, and then started, with an exaggerated air of extreme nonchalance, on a tour of inspection round the citadel, which he reconnoitred for all the world like a general examining the defences of a town he Proposes to attack. The survey completed, he stretched out one arm softly and felt one end of the shell with his finger-tips; then immediately, springing lightly backwards, without losing sight of the object on which his attention was engaged, he commenced a merry dance round on his hands and feet, accompanying the measure with a sort of song of triumph which it was his habit to indulge in, whenever, from a difficulty overcome or a peril braved, he saw reason to congratulate himself on his ability or courage.

However, the song and dance were suddenly cut short; a new idea flashed across James's brain, and appeared to absorb all his thinking faculties. He studied carefully the shape of the tortoise, to which the touch of his hand had imparted an oscillatory movement which the spherical shape of the carapace made more pronounced, and approached with a sidelong gait like a crab's. Then, rising on his hind legs, he bestrode the shell as a rider does a horse, watched it a moment rocking between his legs, and finally, appearing completely reassured by the minute examination he had just made, he took a firm seat on his rocking-horse, giving a good shove off with his feet, which he kept close to the floor. Thus balanced, he swung merrily to and fro, scratching his sides and blinking his eyes, gestures which, to those who knew him, were the manifestations of ineffable delight.

Of a sudden, James gave a piercing yell, bounded up perpendicularly three feet in the air, fell on his back, scrambled up his ladder, and took refuge behind the bust of Malagutti. This revulsion of feeling was brought about by Gazelle, who, tired of a game in which she had no share of the fun, had at last given signs of life by digging her sharp clammy claws into the bare, hairless flesh of James the First's posteriors. The latter was the more upset by this aggression, because the attack came from a totally unexpected quarter.

At this juncture, a customer came into the studio, and, on a sign from Decamps, I took my hat and stick and departed.

I was still on the landing, when Decamps called me back.

"By the way," he said, "come and spend the evening with us tomorrow."

“Why! What is going on in particular tomorrow?”

“We are going to enjoy a supper and a lecture.”

“Nonsense!”

“Yes, Mademoiselle Camargo is billed to eat a hundred flies, and Jadin to read a paper.”

CHAPTER III

HOW MADEMOISELLE CAMARGO ORIGINALLY CAME INTO M. DECAMPS' POSSESSION

NOTWITHSTANDING the verbal invitation Decamps had given me, I received the morning following a formal note. This letter was to remind me of the correct dress to be worn, no guests being admitted except in smoking jackets and slippers. I was punctual to time and in appropriate costume.

A painter's studio is well worth peeing, when the host, to do honour to his guests, decorates his walls with his collection of curios and works of art, gathered from the four corners of the earth. You think to enter an artist's workshop, and lo! you find yourself in a museum that would do credit to many a county town of provincial France. Suits of armour, dating from different centuries represent the civilization of mediaeval Europe, and show by their style and shape to what epoch their manufacture may be assigned. This one, burnished on both sides of the breastpiece, with its sharp, bright ridge, and engraved with a crucifix and the Virgin below in prayer, carrying the legend, *"Mater Dei, or a pro nobis,"* was forged in France and presented to King Louis XI, who had it hung on the walls of his ancient Castle of Plessis-les-Tours. Another, with the rounded breast still bearing the marks of the mace from whose blows it protected its master, received its dents in the tournaments of the Emperor Maximilian, and came to us from Germany. A third, embossed in relief with the Labours of Hercules, was perhaps worn by King François I, and is an authentic product of the Florentine workshops of Benvenuto Cellini. This Canadian tomahawk and scalping knife come from America; the one has broken French heads, the other has raised the perfumed locks of fair dead women. These arrows and this kréese are from the Indian Seas; the heads of the one and the blade of the other are deadly, for they have been poisoned with the sap of venomous plants from Java. This curved sabre was tempered at Damascus. This yatagan, with a notch on the back of its blade for every neck it has severed, was torn from the grasp of a dying Bedouin. Lastly, this long Arab musket with the silver mountings and rings was brought back from Casaubah perhaps by Isabey, who may have bartered it from Yousouf against a sketch of the Roads of Algiers or a plan of the Fort l'Empereur.

Now, after studying these trophies one by one, and each of them has the history of a world attached, look at these tables on which are shown, higgledy-piggledy, a thousand varied objects, astonished to find themselves together. Here are porcelains from Japan, Egyptian figurines, Spanish knives, Turkish poniards, Italian stilettos, Algerian slippers, Circassian caps, idols from the Ganges, crystals from the Alps. Look long and carefully; there is enough to keep you engaged for a whole long day. Under your feet are the skins of tiger, lion and leopard, shot in Asia or Africa; above your head, with wings extended and poised as in life, is the seagull, that, as the wave curls and falls, dashes beneath the vault it forms as under an arch; the osprey that, watching the waters from above, closes its wings and drops like a stone on any fish coming near the surface; the guillemot, that, when the sportsman's gun is pointed at him, dives as the trigger is pulled, rising again far beyond range; and last, the kingfisher, the halcyon of the ancients, with its brilliant plumage of mingled aquamarine and lapis lazuli.

But what is above all likely to catch the eye of a connoisseur in an artist's interior is the heterogeneous collection of pipes which await, all ready filled, the Promethean fire which shall descend on them from heaven. For you must know there is nothing more fantastic and capricious than the tastes of different smokers. One will prefer the common short clay, to which our old seasoned vessels give the expressive name of "brûle-gueule." These are loaded up with the common Government tobacco called "caporal." Another will only touch his dainty lips with the amber mouthpiece of the Arabian *chibouk* that is filled with the black weed of Algiers or the green of Tunis. This smoker, grave as one of Fenimore Cooper's Indian braves, methodically draws through the calumet of peace long whiffs of Maryland; that again, sensuous as an Indian nabob, winds, like a serpent's coils, around his arm the sinuous folds of his *hookah,* which brings to his palate the Latakia's fumes cooled and perfumed with rose-water and benzoin. There are some who from habit prefer the meerschaum pipe of the German student and the strong short cigar of the Belgians to the *narghile* of the Turk, sung by Lamartine, and the tobacco of Sinai, of which the repute is higher or lower according as it grows on or below the mountain's sides. Others, to complete the list, there are who will dislocate their necks to keep in an upright position the *gorgory* of the negroes, while an obliging friend standing on a chair tries, with vast expenditure of charcoal and pulmonary vigour, first to dry and then to light the clay-caked growth of Madagascar.

When I entered the rooms of my host, pipes had been all chosen and seats all occupied. But all sat up to “attention “on seeing me come in; and, with a precision which would have done credit to a company of the National Guard, every pipe-stem, whether of wood or clay, of horn or ivory, of jasmine or of amber, was detached from the loving lips which pressed it, and was stretched towards me. By a wave of the hand, I declined the gifts with thanks, drew from my pocket a book of papelitos, and proceeded to roll between my fingers the Andalusian cigarette with all the patience and skill of some grey-haired Spaniard.

In five minutes’ time, we were all floating in an atmosphere dense enough to drive a steamboat of a hundred-and-twenty horse power. As far as the smoke would allow, you could make out, over and above the guests, the ordinary boarders of the household, whose acquaintance the reader has already made. There was Gazelle, who this evening showed the first symptoms of a very singular preoccupation; this was to climb up and on to the marble mantelpiece, so as to warm herself at the lamp, and she gave herself up to this impossible task with all the zeal and perseverance of her nature. There was Tom, whom Alexandre Decamps was using as an arm-rest, much as he might the cushions of a lounge, and from time to time he raised his good-tempered head under his master’s arm, snorted and sneezed to clear his nostrils from the smoke, and then resumed his slumber with a heavy sigh. There was James the First seated on a stool close beside his old friend Fau, who, by the free use of the whip, had brought his education to the present pitch of perfection, and for whom he cherished the liveliest sense of gratitude, and the most implicit obedience. Finally, there was, seated in her glass jar and planted conspicuously in the middle of the circle of guests, Mademoiselle Camargo, whose gymnastic and gastronomic feats were to form the main entertainment of the evening.

It is important, before we go further, to look back a little and show our readers by what an unprecedented concatenation of events Mademoiselle Camargo, who was born and bred on the plain of Saint-Denis, became the companion of Tom, who was a native of Canada, of James, who had first seen the light on the coasts of Angola, and of Gazelle, who had been captured in the marshes of Holland.

Every one knows what a ferment of preparation begins to stir in the parts of Paris about the Rue Saint-Martin and the Rue Saint-Denis when the month of September brings back the commencement of the shooting season. Then every second person you meet is a citizen returning from the canal, where he has been to get his hand in by shooting swallows, leading his dog in leash, a gun on his shoulder, resolving to be less of a duffer this year than last, and stopping each of his acquaintances to ask, “Are you fond of quail, of partridge?”

“Yes.”

“That’s right. I will send you some on the third or fourth of next month.”

“Thanks.”

“By the way, I have just killed five swallows in eight shots.”

“Very good.”

“Not bad shooting, is it?”

“Capital.”

“Good-bye.”

“Good night to you.”

Thus, towards the end of the month of August, 1829, one of these sportsmen entered the front door of No. 109, Faubourg Saint-Denis, and asked the concierge if Decamps was in. On receiving a reply in the affirmative, he went upstairs, dragging his dog step by step, and knocking the barrel of his gun against every turn, up the five sets of stairs which led to the studio of our great painter.

There he found only the artist’s brother, Alexandre. Alexandre is one of those clever and original men who are instantly recognized as artists merely as they pass you in the street; who would be good at everything, if they were not too indolent ever to take any one thing up seriously; recognizing by instinct the beautiful and the true wherever they come across it, without troubling themselves to enquire whether the work that excites their enthusiasm is pushed by a clique or signed by a great name; for the rest, a good fellow in every sense of the term, always ready to turn his pockets inside out for a friend, and, like all persons preoccupied by ideas worth the trouble of thinking of, easy to lead, not from any weakness of character, but merely from a hatred of discussion and a dread of being bored. With this kind of disposition, Alexandre easily allowed himself to be persuaded by the visitor that it would give him great pleasure to open the season with him on the plain of Saint-Denis, where there were, it was reported, this year flights of quail, coveys of partridges, and flocks of hares. As a consequence of this conversation Alexandre ordered a shooting jacket from Chevreuil, a gun from Lepage, and a pair of leggings from Boivin’s; the bills came to six hundred and sixty francs, without reckoning the cost of the shooting licence, which was delivered to him at the Prefecture of Police, on presentation of a certificate of good life and decent conduct, granted him without objection by the Commissary of his own district.

On the 31st August Alexandre made the discovery that there was but one thing wanting to make him a finished sportsman — to wit, a dog. Instantly he hastened to the house of the man who, along with his pack, had sat to his brother for his picture of “The Performing Dogs,” and asked him if he had anything to suit him. The man replied that he had several animals of wonderful sagacity, just the thing for the work required, and, passing from his room into the kennels, with which it communicated, with one turn of his wrist he removed the three-cornered hat and uniform coat which adorned a species of black and white mongrel, immediately led him in, and introduced him to Alexandre as a thoroughbred dog of a very superior breed. The latter remarked that for a thoroughbred he had very straight, pointed ears, which seemed contrary to the received canons about breeding; but to this the man answered that Love was an English dog, and that it was the height of good breeding in England to wear the ears in that style. “As, after all, this might be the truth, Alexandre - forced himself to accept the explanation, and carried Love off to his house.

Next day, at five o’clock in the morning, our sportsman came and aroused Alexandre, who was still sleeping the sleep of the just, scolded him roundly for his laziness and dilatoriness, declaring that he would find, on his arrival, the whole plain already swept and devastated with powder and shot.

In fact, the nearer they got to the barrier, the louder and more frequent became the detonations. So our sportsmen quickened their steps, passed the customhouse, turned down the first alley leading to the plain, threw themselves into a cabbage garden, and fell instantly into the middle of a general action.

You must have seen the plain of Saint-Denis with your own eyes on the first day of the shooting season to form an idea of the mad scene it presents. Not a lark, not a house-sparrow flies by without being saluted by a thousand shots from every quarter. If perchance it falls, thirty gamebags open, thirty bourgeois quarrel over the slain, thirty dogs fall upon each other tooth and nail. If it continues its flight, every eye is fixed upon it; if it settles, every man starts running; if it gets up again, every one fires. Now and then some of the pellets intended for the game find their billet in the gunners' bodies; you must not take any notice of that. Moreover, there is an ancient saw among Parisian sportsmen to the effect that lead is the friend of man. If this be true, I have to my credit three friends in my leg, which a fourth friend kindly placed there.

The smell of powder and the popping of the fowling-pieces produced the usual effect. No sooner had our sportsman begun to scent the one and hear the other than-he charged into the mêlée and commenced at once to bear his part in the Witches' Sabbath which had just drawn him within its circle of attraction.

Alexandre, less impressionable than his friend, advanced more leisurely, religiously followed by Love, whose nose never left his master's heels. But, as we all know, the work of a sporting dog is to quarter the ground and not to watch for missing nails in the soles of your boots; this thought naturally occurred to Alexandre after walking for half an hour. Consequently he waved his hand to Love and shouted:

“Seek!

Love at once stood on his hind legs and began to dance. “Well!” said Alexandre, resting the butt of his gun on the ground and contemplating his dog, “it appears that Love, over and above his general education, possesses some agreeable accomplishments. I think Ï have been fortunate in my purchase.”

However, as he had brought Love to hunt for game and not to dance, he seized the moment when Love resumed his ordinary four-footed attitude and made a second more expressive signal and said with a louder voice, “Hi! Seek!”

Love lay fiat on his side, shut his eyes tight, and shammed dead. Alexandre took up his eye-glasses and scrutinized Love. The intelligent animal lay as still as a log; not a hair on his body stirred; life might have been extinct for twenty-four hours.

“That is very pretty,” said Alexandre, “but, my dear friend, this is neither the time nor place for this sort of amusement, we have come out to shoot game; so let us shoot. Come along, stupid, let us get to work.”

Love did not move.

“Wait a bit!” said Alexandre, picking up a pea-stick from the ground and going up to Love with the intention of laying it across his shoulders. “Wait a bit.”

Directly Love saw the stick in his master’s hands, he got upon his legs and followed all his movements with an expression on his countenance of remarkable intelligence. Alexandre, noticing this, deferred chastising him, and hoping that at last he was going to obey him this time, he extended the stick towards Love and repeated once more his command.

“Go! seek!”

Love took a run and made a flying leap over the pea-stick. Love understood three things perfectly: dancing on his hind legs, shamming dead, and jumping for his king.

Alexandre, who, for the time being, was no better pleased with the last accomplishment than with the two others, broke the stick across Love’s back, who ran away howling towards our sportsman.

And so it happened, that just as Love reached him, our sportsman fired, and, by the greatest piece of luck, an unfortunate skylark, who got in the way of the shot, fell into the very jaws of Love. The dog blessed Providence for its gift, and without troubling to see whether it was wanted or not, he made only one mouthful of it.

Our sportsman flung himself upon the unhappy dog with the most terrible maledictions, seized him by the throat, and choked him till he was forced to open his jaws, in spite of his resistance to the operation. The sportsman plunged his other hand up to the wrist down the animal’s throat, and drew it out grasping three feathers from the lark’s tail. As to the body, that was gone beyond his reach.

The owner of the lark then felt in his pockets for a knife with which to disembowel Love and thus to recover his game. But unfortunately for him and luckily for Love, he had lent his, the previous evening, to his wife to shape beforehand the skewers on which his partridges were to be trussed, and the wife had forgotten to give it back. Forced therefore to have recourse to less violent measures of punishment, he gave Love a kick which would have driven in any ordinary *porte-cochère,* placed carefully in his gamebag the three feathers he had rescued, and shouted at the top of his voice to Alexandre.

“You make your mind easy, my dear friend, never again will I come out shooting with you. Your devil of a Love has just swallowed a magnificent quail of mine! Ah — come in here! you brute!”

Love took care not to “come in.” On the contrary, he travelled, as fast as his legs would carry him, back towards his master, which seemed to show that, all things considered, he liked being beaten better than being kicked.

Nevertheless, the mouthful of lark had given Love an appetite, and as he went, he saw that here and there individuals apparently of the same species flew up in front of him. So, forgetting his terror, he began to run about in every direction, hoping, no doubt, that he might chance on a second toothsome windfall as good as the first one.

Alexandre followed him with great difficulty, cursing his own folly the while; Love’s system of hunting was quite different from that of other dogs, that is he carried his head high and his tail down. This showed that his eyesight was better than his sense of smell; but this interchange of faculties was intolerable for his master, for the dog kept circling about at exactly a hundred paces in front, putting up the game at just double the range of a fowling-piece and throwing his tongue after the birds till they settled down again.

The same game went on the whole day.

Towards five o’clock in the evening, Alexandre had covered some fifteen leagues and Love more than fifty; the one was exhausted with shouting, the other with barking. As to the sportsman, he had finished his quest and, quitting them both, had gone off to shoot snipe on the Pantin marshes. All at once Love made a point!

Such a sure, firm point it was, that he might have been, like the dog of Cephalus, changed into stone. At this sight, so novel for him, Alexandre forgot his fatigue, and ran like a lamplighter, trembling all the time lest Love should break before he got within range. But there was no fear of that. Love’s feet were glued to the ground.

Alexandre came up to him, watched the direction of his eyes, and found they were fixed on a tuft of grass; under this tuft he perceived a greyish object. He judged it to be a young partridge separated from the rest of the covey; and trusting rather to his cap than to his gun, he laid the latter down, took his cap in his hand, and, approaching on tip-toe like a child after a butterfly, he clapped it over the unknown object, groped under it with the other hand, and drew out — a frog! Anybody else would have thrown the frog thirty yards away; not so Alexandre, for he reasoned that since this interesting creature had been sent to him by Providence in such a miraculous manner, there must be some hidden mystery in her destiny, and great events probably depended upon her career.

Accordingly, he put her carefully into his gamebag, brought her straight home, transferred her forthwith to a big glass jar, out of which we had eaten the last remaining cherries the day before, and poured over her head all the water left in the water jug.

All this care and attention for a frog would have seemed extraordinary on the part of a man who had obtained one in a less complicated fashion, but Alexandre knew what the capture of that frog had cost him, and he treated her accordingly.

She had cost him six hundred and sixty francs, without reckoning the gun licence.

CHAPTER IV

MADEMOISELLE CAMARGO IS BILLED TO EAT A HUNDRED FLIES, AND JADIN TO READ A PAPER

“Halloa!” said Doctor Thierry, on entering the studio the next day, “so you’ve got a new boarder?”

And without responding to the amicable growls of Tom and the alluring gestures of James, he went straight to the jar in which was Mademoiselle Camargo, and plunged in his hand.

Mademoiselle Camargo, who did not know that Thierry was a learned doctor of colossal intellect, commenced to swim round and round as fast as she could; but this did not save her from being seized in another moment by the extremity of her left hind leg, and so incontinently quitting her habitation head downwards.

“Why!” said Thierry, spinning her round as a peasant girl does a spindle, “it is, you see, a *liana temporaria,* so called because of these two black marks extending from the eye to the tympanum; it lives equally well in running water and in swamps; some authors give it the name of the dumb frog, because it croaks below water, whereas the green frog can only croak when out of water. If you had a couple of hundred of ‘em like this one, I should recommend your cutting off their hind legs, dressing them like fricasseed chickens, sending to Corcelet’s for a couple of bottles of good Bordeaux, and asking me to dinner. But as there is only this one, we will rest content with clearing up, with her aid and your permission, a doubtful point in science, affirmed by many naturalists, viz., that this frog can go for six months without food.”

With these words he let Mademoiselle Camargo go, and she, with the happy swing she could impart to her limbs, frolicked two or three times round her jar; and then, seeing a fly which had fallen into her domain, she made a dash up to the surface and sucked it down.

“I don’t mind you taking that,” said Thierry; “but, mind you, it is to last you for 183 days.”

For, unfortunately for Mademoiselle Camargo, the year 1832 being leap year, Science gained twelve hours from this accident in the calendar.

Mademoiselle Camargo did not appear at all disquieted by this threat, and remained boldly with her head out of water, her four legs stretched out in careless comfort and quite motionless, for all the world as though she were resting on terra firma.

"Now," said Thierry, opening a drawer, "let us see to the prisoner's furniture."

He took out two cartridges, a file, a penknife, two paint-brushes, and four matches. Decamps watched his proceedings in silence and without in the least comprehending the preparations, which the doctor made as carefully as if about to perform a surgical operation. Then he emptied the powder into a snuffers-tray and kept the bullets, threw the quills and badger-hair to James, and kept the handles of the brushes.

"What devil's work are you after now?" said Decamps, snatching away from James his two best brushes; "you are making fine hay of my studio!"

"I am constructing a ladder," gravely replied Thierry.

In fact, he had just bored through with the file the two leaden bullets, had fixed firmly in the holes so made the brush handles, and in these handles, intended for the supports of the ladder, he fixed, crosswise, the matches, so making the rungs. In five minutes' time the ladder was completed and let down into the bowl, in which it remained on a firm base formed by the weight of the bullets.

Mademoiselle Camargo no sooner found herself in possession of this piece of furniture than she tried it, as if to make sure of its strength, by climbing up to the top step.

"We shall have rain," said Thierry.

"The deuce we shall," said Decamps; "and there is my brother who wants to go out shooting again to-day."

"Mademoiselle Camargo does not recommend it," answered the doctor.

"How do you mean?"

"I have just made a barometer for you, dear friend. Whenever Mademoiselle Camargo climbs up her ladder, it is a sign of rain; when she descends, you will have fine weather for certain; and when she stays about half-way up, do not go out without an umbrella or a topcoat: the prediction is 'Change! Variable weather! '"

"There — fancy that!" said Decamps.

“Now,” continued Thierry, “we are going to cover the top of the jar with the parchment, just as if it was still full of cherries.”

“Here it is,” said Decamps, giving him what he asked for.

“Now a piece of twine to tie it on tight.”

“There you are.”

“Then I must ask you for some wax! thank you... a light — that is right... and to make sure of my experiment (he melted the wax, sealed the knot, and applied the stone of his ring to the seal)... there!... there she remains for six months. Now,” he continued, piercing some holes in the parchment with a penknife, “now for pen and ink.”

Have you ever asked a painter for a pen and ink? No? Then don’t: for he will surely do as did Decamps — offer you a pencil.

Thierry took the pencil and marked the parchment:

“2nd September, 1832.”

Accordingly, on the evening of the party, the commencement of which we have tried to describe to our readers, exactly one hundred and eighty-three days, or six months and twelve hours, had elapsed; and during the whole of this period Mademoiselle Camargo had gone on predicting, without making the mistake of a minute, rain, fine weather, and change; this regularity was the more remarkable in that she had not since her incarceration swallowed one single atom of food.

So, when Thierry, taking out his watch, announced the expiration of the last second of the sixtieth minute of the twelfth hour, and the jar had been brought forward, a common sentiment of pity took possession of the company when they saw the miserable condition to which the poor creature was reduced through having, at the expense of her stomach, thrown such a great and important light upon an obscure point in Science.

“See,” said Thierry, triumphantly, “Schneider and Roësel were right.”

“Right, right,” said Jadin, taking up the jar and holding it at the level of his eyes. “But I am not yet convinced that Mademoiselle Camargo is still alive!”

“Oh! you must not listen to Jadin,” said Flers; “he’s always borne a grudge against Madame Camargo.”

Thierry took up a lamp and held it behind the jar.

“Look,” he said, “and you will see her heart beating.”

In truth Mademoiselle Camargo had grown so thin that she was as transparent as crystal, and you could see all the organs of circulation; it was even possible to remark that the heart had only one ventricle and one valve. At the same time these organs performed their offices so feebly, and Jadin was only mistaken to such a small extent, that it was truly not worth while contradicting him, for you would not have given the poor creature ten minutes more to live. Her limbs had wasted to threads, and the hinder part of her body seemed only attached to the forepart by the bones which form the springs whereby frogs jump instead of walking. Besides all this, on her back had grown a sort of moss, which, under the microscope, became a regular thicket of marine grasses, intermingled with reeds and flowers. Thierry, as a botanist, even said that this impalpable growth belonged to the order of the mastics and the cresses. No one disputed his statement.

"Now," said Thierry, after each in turn had thoroughly examined Mademoiselle Camargo, "we must let her eat her supper in peace."

"And what is she to eat?" said Flers.

"I have her meal in this box."

And Thierry, raising the parchment, introduced into the space intended for air so many flies, each short of one wing, that he had evidently devoted his morning to catching them and his afternoon to mutilating them. We thought Mademoiselle would have enough to do to eat them in another six months; one of us even ventured to say so.

"Quite a mistake," said Thierry, "in a quarter of an hour not a fly will be left."

The least incredulous among us could not help giving signs of doubt at this. Thierry, strong in the success of his first experiment, replaced Mademoiselle Camargo in her usual position without deigning to answer.

He had scarcely resumed his seat when the door opened and the proprietor of the neighbouring café carried in a tray with tea, sugar, cups, and saucers. He was followed closely by two waiters carrying in a large basket, a large loaf of bread, a bun, a lettuce, and a good assortment of fancy patties and sweets. The loaf was for Tom, the bun for James, the green food for Gazelle, and the pastry for us. The animals were first attended to, and then the guests were asked to help themselves as they pleased — a plan which seems to me the best so far discovered for doing the honours of one's house pleasantly and successfully.

There was a moment of apparent confusion, while each settled himself down according to his fancy. Tom grumbled away with his bread to his kennel; James took refuge with his bun behind the busts of Malagutti and

Rata; Gazelle slowly dragged her lettuce under the table; as for the rest of us, we took a cake in one hand and a cup in the other, as is the usual custom of mankind, and in ten minutes had finished both tea and pastry. The proprietor of the café was summoned again, and appeared with his satellites.

"More!" said Decamps.

The proprietor, with many bows and respectful gestures, backed out to fulfil his instructions.

"Now, gentlemen," said Flers, looking at Thierry with a quizzical wink and at Decamps with the respect due to the host, "while we are waiting for Mademoiselle Camargo to finish her supper and for our own fresh supply of refreshments, I propose we should fill up the interlude with the reading of Jadin's paper. It treats of the history of the early years of James the First, whom we have all the honour to know pretty intimately, and in whom we all take so great an interest that the smallest details connected with his life acquire for us a special importance — *Dixi.*"

Everyone bowed in sign of consent, one or two even clapped their hands.

"James, my friend," said Fau, who, as his tutor, was the most intimate of all of us with the hero of this history, "you see they are all talking about you. Come here."

And to these two words he added a whistle so well known as a private signal by James that the intelligent animal, with one spring from his shelf, landed on the speaker's shoulder.

"Well done, James; you are a very good boy to be obedient, especially when your chops are full of bun. Salute these gentlemen."

James carried his hand smartly to his forehead in a soldierlike manner.

"And if your friend Jadin, who is about to read your history, relates any calumnies, tell him at once that he is a liar."

James nodded his head up and down, showing he perfectly understood what he had to do.

James and Fau were in truth bound together by ties of the most harmonious friendship. On the part of the animal, especially, the affection was such as one never now finds among men; and on what did it turn? It must be confessed to the shame of the simian race, that it was not by improving the pupil's mind as did Fénelon for the Dauphin, but rather in pandering to his vices, as did Catherine towards Henri III, that the tutor had acquired this deplorable influence over his scholar. For instance, when he arrived in Paris, James was a connoisseur in good wine: Fau made him a drunkard; he was a Sybarite like Alcibiades: Fau made him a cynic after the school of Diogenes; he had a cultivated palate like Lucullus: Fau made him into a glutton like Grimod de la Reynière. It is nevertheless true that in exchange for the loss of his morals, he had gained many physical accomplishments which made him an animal of great distinction. Thus he knew his left hand from his right, he could sham dead for ten minutes running, he could dance on the tight rope as well as Madame Saqui; he went shooting, gun under arm and gamebags on back, showed his licence to the foresters and his heels to the police-constables. In short, he was a very fascinating young *roué,* whose only fault was that unfortunately he had been born under the Restoration instead of under the Regency.

Thus, if Fau knocked at the street door, James would tremble with joy; when he walked upstairs, James approached instinctively. Then he would give little cries of pleasure and hop about on his hind legs like a kangaroo. When, finally, Fau opened the door, he would spring into his arms, as they still do at the *Théâtre français* in the *Deux Frères.* In a word, whatever belonged to James belonged to Fau, and he would have given him the very bun from between his teeth.

“Gentlemen,” said Jadin, “if you will take your seats and light your pipes and cigars, I am ready.”

Every one obeyed. Jadin coughed, opened his manuscript, and read as follows:

CHAPTER V

HOW CAPTAIN PAMPHILE, MASTER OF THE TRADING BRIG “ROXELANE,” FOUND BETTER SPORT ON THE BANKS OF THE RIVER BANGO THAN ALEXANDRE DECAMPS HAD ENJOYED ON THE PLAIN OF SAINT-DENIS

ON the 24th July, 1827, the brig, “Roxelane,” set sail from Marseilles to load up with coffee from Mocha, spices from Bombay, and tea from Canton. She put in, for fresh provisions, at the Bay of St. Paul de Loanda, which lies, as every schoolboy knows, about half-way down the coast of Guinea.

While the victualling was in progress, Captain Pamphile, who was making his tenth voyage to the Indies, took his gun, and with the thermometer marking a hundred in the shade, amused himself by walking up the banks of the River Bango. The captain was, excepting Nimrod, the mightiest hunter before the Lord who had ever appeared on this earth.

He had not taken twenty steps in the long grass which grows near the river before he felt his foot slip on something round and smooth like the trunk of a young tree. At the same moment he heard a sharp hiss, and ten paces from him he saw the uplifted head of an enormous boa constrictor, on whose tail he had just trodden.

Anyone but Captain Pamphile would have been somewhat frightened to find himself confronted by this terrific head, whose bloodshot eyes glared out at him like carbuncles. But the boa did not know Captain Pamphile.

“God ‘a mercy, you filthy reptile you! Do you think to frighten me?” said the captain. And as the serpent opened its great jaws to seize him, he drove a bullet slap through the monster’s palate and out at the top of its head. The serpent collapsed, dead.

The Captain first leisurely reloaded, then, opening his clasp-knife, he went to the animal and slit up its belly, separated the liver from the entrails, as the Angel of Tobias did, and, after a short search, found a small blue stone about the size of a hazel-nut.

“Good,” said he to himself.

And he put the stone into a purse in which there were already a dozen similar stones. Captain Pamphile was as learned as a mandarin; he had read “The Thousand and One Nights,” and was looking for the enchanted bezoar-stone of Prince Camaralzaman.

Thinking he had verily found it, he continued his sport. In about a quarter of an hour’s time he saw that the grass was shaking some forty paces from him, and heard a terrible growling. At this sound every beast of the forest seemed to know that the king of them all was at hand. The birds stopped singing; two gazelles, terrified, bounded away and fled for the open plain; a wild elephant, which could be seen upon a knoll a quarter of a league away, raised his trunk ready for combat.

“Pr-r-r-r! pr-r-r!” rattled out Captain Pamphile, as if he were driving up a covey of partridges.

At this sound a tiger, which till then had been crouching down, stood up, lashing his sides with his tail; it was a Royal Tiger of the largest size. The huge beast bounded forward and landed within twenty feet of the hunter.

“Ho! ho!” cried Captain Pamphile, “so you think I am going to fire at long range, do you, and risk spoiling your skin? Pr-r-r! pr-r-r!”

The tiger made a second leap, which brought him to close quarters; but just as he landed, the captain fired, and the ball pierced the animal’s left eye. The tiger tumbled over like a hare, and died on the spot.

The Captain reloaded carefully as usual, drew his knife, turned the body over on its back, made an incision, and skinned the tiger as a cook would a rabbit. Then he wrapped himself in his victim’s hide, just as, four thousand years before, the Nemean Hercules had “done — a hero from whom, as a native of Marseilles, Captain Pamphile might claim descent; then he started once more on his quest for game.

Scarcely half an hour had passed when he heard a great splashing in the water of the river, up the course of which he was making his way. Running quickly to the brink, he saw that the cause of the commotion was a hippopotamus, which was swimming against the current and which from time to time came to the surface to blow.

“*Bagasse!*” cried Captain Pamphile. “There is a good six francs’ worth of glass beads saved.”

That was the price current of a bullock at St. Paul de Loanda, and Captain Pamphile had a reputation for economy. Thinking thus, guided by the bubbles which, ascending and breaking on the surface, betrayed the hippo’s course below, he followed the animal’s path, and when the enormous head came up, the sportsman, picking out the only vulnerable spot, sent a ball into the ear. The captain would have hit Achilles in the heel at five hundred yards.

The monster swam round and round for some seconds, groaning frightfully, and beating the water with his legs. For a moment it seemed as if he would be swallowed up in the whirlpool which he made in his agony; but soon his strength was spent, and he rolled over like a log; then by degrees the white and shiny skin of his under parts appeared instead of the black wrinkled hide of his back, and with his last effort he ran aground, legs uppermost, among the reeds growing at the edge of the stream.

Captain Pamphile reloaded his gun, drew his knife, and cut down a sapling about the thickness of a broomstick, sharpened one end and made a slit in the other, stuck the pointed end upright in the carcass, while in the cleft he inserted a leaf torn from his memorandum book, on which he had written in pencil:

“To the cook of the trading brig, ‘Roxelane ‘; this from Captain Pamphile, at present shooting up the River Bango.”

Then he shoved the animal off with his foot, so that it got well into the current, and started off quietly floating down stream, duly labelled like a commercial traveller’s portmanteau.

“Ah!” said Captain Pamphile, as soon as he saw his provisions well under way for his vessel, “I think I have fairly earned my breakfast.”

And, as it was a literal fact that to think of a plan with him was to carry it out forthwith, he spread his tiger skin on the ground, sat himself down on it, took from his left pocket a case-bottle of rum which he placed to his right, from his right pocket a fine guava which he placed to his left, and from his gamebag a piece of biscuit, which he placed between his legs.

This done, he proceeded to fill his pipe, so as to have nothing fatiguing left to do after his repast.

You may sometimes have seen Pantaloon carefully spreading his breakfast table, for Harlequin to eat? You may remember his face when turning round he finds his glass empty and his apples pilfered? You do? Well then, you can imagine that of Pamphile on finding his rum upset’ and his guava gone.

Captain Pamphile, whose freedom of speech the edict of the Home Minister had in no wise checked, gave vent to the most heartfelt “God ‘a mercy!” that ever escaped from the mouth of a Provençal since first Marseilles was built; but as he was less easily taken in than our friend Pantaloon, as he had read both ancient and modern works of philosophy, and had learnt from Diogenes Laertius and from M. de Voltaire that there can be no effect without a cause, he at once began to search for the cause, of which the effect was so prejudicial to his interests. This he did without seeming to notice anything, without moving from his seat, and affecting the while to gnaw his dry bread. Only his head turned slowly from side to side, like a Chinese mandarin’s. This was equally without result, until suddenly some substance fell on his head and remained entangled in his hair. The Captain put up his hand to the affected spot, and found the rind of his guava sticking there. Captain Pamphile then threw his head back and discovered, immediately above him, a monkey making faces at him from the branch of a tree.

Captain Pamphile felt for his gun, without losing sight of the thief; then, bringing it to his shoulders, he fired. The ape fell beside him.

“As I am a sinner!” said Captain Pamphile, on looking at his new victim, “I have killed a two-headed monkey.” In fact, the animal lying at the feet of the Captain had two separate heads, quite distinct from each other, and the phenomenon was the more remarkable in that one of the two heads was dead, with its eyes shut, while the other was alive and had its eyes wide open.

Captain Pamphile, wishing to clear up this odd freak of natural history, took up the monster by the tail to examine it closely, but at once all cause of astonishment disappeared. The monkey was a female ape, and the second head was that of her young one, whom she was carrying on her back when the shot was fired, and who fell with her without letting go its mother.

Captain Pamphile, who would not have shed a single tear over all the devotion of Cleobis and Bito, took the little monkey by the scruff of the neck, tore it from the corpse which he held in his arms, examined it as minutely as if he were M. de Buff on, and smiling with an air of great satisfaction:

“*Bagasse!*” cried he, “this is a piece of luck; it is worth fifty francs if it is worth a farthing, delivered alive at the port of Marseilles.” And he put it into his pouch.

Then, as Captain Pamphile was still fasting by reason of the incident described, he decided to return towards the bay.

Moreover, although his expedition had not lasted more than a couple of hours, he had killed a boa constrictor, a tiger, and a hippopotamus, and captured a live young ape. There are a good many sportsmen in Paris who would be very well satisfied to do the same in a whole day's shooting.

On his arrival on board the brig, he found the whole crew engaged about the hippopotamus, which had fortunately arrived as addressed. The surgeon was extracting the tushes to make into knife handles and false teeth; the quartermaster was cutting off the hide, and making it into strips for the manufacture of whips for dogs and gaskets for cabin boys; and the cook was cutting steaks from the ribs and fillets from the undercut for the Captain's table. The rest of the carcass was to be salted down for the use of the crew.

The Captain was so well pleased with all the energy displayed that he ordered an extra tot of grog all round, and remitted five lashes of the sentence of seventy to which a boy had been condemned.

They sailed that evening.

Having taken in so many provisions Captain Pamphile thought it unnecessary to touch at the Cape of Good Hope, and leaving on the right Prince Edward's Islands and on the left the Island of Madagascar he sailed into the Indian Ocean.

The "Roxelane "then bowled gaily along with the wind abaft, doing her eight knots an hour, which sailors say is good going for a merchantman. Suddenly one of the watch bellowed from the foretop:

"Sail ahoy!"

Captain Pamphile took his spy-glass and trained it on the stranger, looked at her with the naked eye, and again through the telescope; then, after a few moments of careful study, he called up the mate and without a word put the glass into his hands. The mate at once put his eye to it.

"Well, Policar," said the Captain, when he had given sufficient time for the officer to examine the object thoroughly, "what do you make of the craft?"

"'Faith, Captain, I call her a rum-looking sort of ark.

As for her ensign," — he brought the spy-glass up again — " the devil seize me if I can make out what nation flies it; it is a green and yellow dragon on a white ground."

“Well, my boy, bow down to it to the very dust, for before you is a vessel belonging to the son of the sun, to the father and mother of the human race, to the king of kings, to the sublime Emperor of China and of Cochin China. Besides that, I can see by her laboured roll and her snail’s pace that she is not returning to Pekin with her hold empty.”

“The devil!” said Policar, scratching his ear.

“What do you think of our falling in with her?”

“I think it would be funnv if...’

“Would it not?... Well, I think so, too, my boy.”

“Then we must...?”

“Get the metal up on deck, and clap on every stitch of canvas.”

“Ah, now she has just made us out.”

“Then we will wait till dark, and till then will hold on quietly as at present, so that she may suspect nothing. As far as I can judge of her speed, about five o’clock we shall be in her wake; throughout the night we will sail abeam of her, and to-morrow at daybreak we will wish her good morning.”

Captain Pamphile had a system. Instead of ballasting his vessel with broken stone and pigs of iron, he placed in the bottom of the hold half a dozen swivel guns, four or five twelve-pounder Garronades, and a long eight-pounder; then he threw in casually a few thousand rounds of ammunition, half a hundred muskets, and a score of boarding cutlasses. On an occasion such as the present he would get all these little odds and ends up on deck, fix the swivel guns and carronades to their pivots, mount the long piece of eight on the poop, serve out the small arms to his men, and thus establish what he called his system of barter. Thus he was ready for trade when the Chinese discovered him in the morning.

On board the Imperial vessel stupefaction reigned supreme. The Captain had seen and recognized the previous evening a foreign merchantman, and after a pipe of opium had turned comfortably into his bunk; but here was the cat grown into a tiger during the night, here he was showing his claws of iron and his teeth of brass.

They went and warned the Captain, Kao-Kiou-Kwan, of the plight in which he was. He was finishing a most enchanting dream: the sun’s son had just given him one of his sisters in marriage, so that he became brother-in-law to the moon.

So he had a great deal of difficulty in making out what Captain Pamphile wanted. It was none the easier in that the latter spoke the tongue of

Provence and the bridegroom answered in Chinese. At last there was found on board the “Roxelane “a Provençal deckhand who knew a little Chinese, and on board the ship of the Sublime Emperor a Chinaman who could speak tolerable Provençal, so that in the end the two skippers came to an understanding.

The result of the conversation was that half the cargo of the Imperial ship (master — Kao-Kiou-Kwan) was passed directly on board the merchant brig “Roxelane “(master — Pamphile).

And as this cargo consisted of coffee, rice, and tea, the system of barter rendered it unnecessary for Captain Pamphile to put in at Mocha, Bombay, or Pekin, so that he affected great economy, both of time and money.

This put him into such a happy mood that, when touching at the Isle of Rodriguez, he bought a parrot.

On arriving at the southern extremity of Madagascar, it was found that the supply of fresh water was getting low; but as the anchorage off Cape St. Mary was not safe for a vessel so deeply laden as the “Roxelane,” the Captain put his crew on half rations, and resolved not to bring to until he got to Algoa Bay. As he was looking after the filling-up of the water-casks at that place, he saw coming towards him a chief of the Gonaquas, followed by two men carrying a magnificent elephant’s tusk slung across their shoulders, and looking for all the world like a Bible cut of the Israelitish spies bearing the grapes of Eshcol. This was a sample which the chief Outavari (which, in the Gonaqua language, means “Son of the East “) was carrying down to the coast, hoping to obtain an order for a quantity.

Captain Pamphile examined the ivory, and found its quality was excellent. He asked the Gonaqua chief how much he would have to pay for two thousand tusks as good as the sample. Outavari said he would charge exactly two thousand bottles of trade brandy. The Captain wanted to get the ivory cheaper; but the Son of the East held to his price, saying he had not asked for more than he meant to take; so the Captain had to give in to the negro’s demand. He did not, however, do so very badly, for at this price he could, make about ten thousand per cent. The price settled, the Captain asked him when he could take delivery of the goods. Outavari asked for two years’ time; this period fitted in capitally with Captain Pamphile’s engagements, so the two worthy negotiators shook hands on the bargain, and parted with the most profound feelings of mutual respect.

Now after ill, this transaction, good as it was for him, did not sit altogether easy on the commercial conscience of the worthy master; he reflected, when alone, that if he bought ivory so cheap on the East of Africa, he ought to be able to buy it at half the rate on the Western side, since it was there that elephants were to be found in such multitudes that they had given the name to a river. He felt that he must purge his conscience of this sin, and so when he got to the thirtieth degree of latitude, he ran down for the land. But having made a mistake of one or two degrees in his reckoning, he made the mouth of the Orange River instead of the Elephant River.

Captain Pamphile did not mind a bit. The difference between the landfalls was so trifling that there could be little to choose as to the probable price of ivory; so he lowered the pinnace, and ascended the river as far as the chief town of the Little Namaquas, which was two days' journey from the coast. He found the king, Outavaro, returning from a hunting expedition, in which he had killed fifteen elephants. Thus, there was no lack of samples, and the Captain could satisfy himself that they were even better than those of Outavari.

The result of this interview was a bargain between Outavaro and the Captain which was still better for the latter than that which he had concluded with Outavari. The Son of the West promised Captain Pamphile two thousand tusks for fifteen hundred bottles of brandy; that was twenty-five per cent less than his brother chieftain's price; still, like him, he stipulated for two years to fulfil his contract in. Captain Pamphile raised no objection to this delay; far from it, he saw it suited him excellently, as he would only have to make one voyage for the two consignments. Outavaro arid the Captain shook hands over the bargain, and parted the best of friends in the world. The brig "Roxelane "proceeded on her voyage to Europe.

At this point in Jadin's story the clock struck twelve, which is, perforce, bedtime for all who live above or about the fifth floor in Paris. All got up to go, when Flers reminded the doctor that there still remained one portion of his experiment to be verified. The doctor took the jar and held it up for all to see. Not a single fly was to be seen; while to compensate for their disappearance Mademoiselle Camargo had grown to the size of a turkey's egg, and looked at if she had come out of a bottle of furniture polish.

All went home after congratulating Thierry on his profound learning. The next day we received each a letter couched in the following terms:

“Messieurs Eugène and Alexandre Decamps have the honour to acquaint you with the sad loss they have sustained by

the death of Mademoiselle Camargo, of indigestion, during the night of the 2nd-3rd March. Your presence is requested at the funeral meal, which will take place at the residence of the lamented defunct at five o’clock (precisely) in the afternoon of the 4th instant.”

CHAPTER VI

HOW JAMES THE FIRST, TORN FROM THE ARMS OF HIS DYING MOTHER AND CARRIED ABOARD THE “ROXELANE,” BEGAN HIS. CAREER THERE BY PLUCKING FOWLS, AND ENDED BY PLUCKING A PARROT

As soon as possible after the funeral dinner, which was over between seven and eight o’clock, Jadin, whose reading at the last meeting had excited great interest, was asked to continue. Mademoiselle Camargo, in consequence of the nun-like existence she had led for the six months and one day during which she had inhabited the studio, had not been able to inspire either the minds or the hearts of the artist’s friends with any very profound sentiments of esteem or affection. Thierry was the sole one among us with whom she had been on intimate terms; and even their relations had been purely scientific. Thus the regret we felt for her sudden end was of but short duration, and, moreover, was soon effaced by the thought of the great scientific demonstration illustrated by the untimely event. It will thus be readily understood that we returned eagerly to the adventures of our friend James, told as they were by a historian so faithful, conscientious, and ingenious as was Jadin, whose reputation as a painter was already established by his beautiful picture, “The Cows,” and as a historian by his biography of Prince Henry, a work composed with the collaboration of M. Dauzats, and which even before its appearance already obtained from all the recognition it deserved. Jadin then, without requiring to be pressed, drew his manuscript from his pocket and began again where he had left off:

The parrot which Captain Pamphile had bought was a cockatoo of the handsomest kind, with a body white as snow, a beak black as ebony, and a crest yellow as saffron, a crest which he raised or lowered according as he was in a good or a bad temper, and which gave him at one time the paternal aspect of a grocer wearing his nightcap, at another the fierce, bellicose appearance of a National Guard with his plumed helmet. Besides these natural physical advantages, Catacwa had many accomplishments; he spoke with equal facility English, Spanish, and French, sang “God save the King “like Lord Wellington, the “Pensativo estaba el Cid “like Don Carlos, and the “Marseillaise “like General Lafayette. One can understand that with such a talent for languages he was not slow, after falling among the crew of the “Roxelane,” in extending the circle of his acquirements; so much so that by the time that, after about eight days’ sail,-he caught sight of the Island of St. Helena, he began to swear with great skill and propriety in Provençal, thus rejoicing greatly the heart of Captain Pamphile, who, like the Troubadours of old, spoke only the Langue d’Oc.

Thus, when, coming on deck after his night’s rest Captain Pamphile had completed his inspection of the vessel, seen that each man and each thing was in its proper place, superintended the issue of grog to the sailors and of rope’s end to the boys; when he had gazed at the sky, studied the sea and whistled to the wind, when at last he had arrived at that tranquil frame of mind which follows on the consciousness of duty done, he would stroll forward to Catacwa, followed by James, who grew visibly from day to day, and who shared with his feathered rival all the Captain’s affection, and give the bird a lesson in Provençal. At the end of the lesson, if the pupil pleased him, he would put a piece of sugar between the bars of the cage, a reward which Catacwa seemed to value highly, and of which James was very jealous. So, directly the Captain’s attention was diverted by some chance or other, James would steal up to the cage and manage so well that usually the piece of sugar passed into his keeping, and Catacwa, one claw uplifted, and his crest bristling with rage, would fill the air with his most formidable shrieks and his most bloodcurdling oaths. As for James himself, he would stroll about with an innocent air near the cage where the bereft bird was screaming with anger, concealing the booty he had not time to munch in the pouch of his cheeks, so that it melted gently, while he scratched his ribs and half closed his eyes in saintly meditation. Thus the only punishment of his theft was that he was obliged to drink his sugar instead of eating it.

It is obvious that this violation of the rights of property could be anything but agreeable to Catacwa, and as soon as Captain Pamphile returned to him he would launch out his whole vocabulary of talk. Unfortunately, none of his tutors, past or present, had taught him to cry “Stop, thief!” or its equivalent. So his master took this volley of words, which was really a denunciation in form of the robber, for a simple expression of welcome to himself, and thinking he had enjoyed his dessert, he would just scratch his poll with one finger. This pleased Catacwa to a certain extent, but undoubtedly less so than the lump” of sugar in dispute would have done. Catacwa then came to the conclusion that he must look to himself, only, if he wished to have his revenge. So, one day, when James, having stolen the lump of sugar, put his hand back into the cage to gather up the broken pieces, Catacwa swung himself head downwards by the foot, and, pretending to be solely absorbed in this gymnastic exercise, suddenly got hold of James’s thumb and bit it to the bone. James gave a piercing yell, jumped into the rigging, and climbed as high as wood and hemp would carry him. At last when the main truck stopped his upward progress he stayed there, holding on to the mast with three of his paws, while he waved the fourth about as if he were sprinkling holy water on the faithful.

When dinner time came, Captain Pamphile whistled for James. But James did not answer; this silence was so contrary to his usual rules as to diet, that Captain Pamphile became uneasy about him and whistled again. This time he heard a sort of murmur coming down from the clouds, and raising his eyes he saw James waving his benediction to all on land or sea.

Upon this he and James exchanged signals, with the result that the latter was understood to refuse flatly to come down. Captain Pamphile, who had trained his crew to habits of absolute obedience, and was not going to allow his system of discipline to be broken by an ape, took the speaking trumpet and bellowed, “Double-Bouche! “The individual addressed appeared forthwith, climbing the kitchen ladder backwards and sidled towards the Captain much like a dog who expects a beating from his keeper. Captain Pamphile, who never wasted words with his inferiors, showed the boy the rebel sitting grimacing on the main-top-gallant mast.

Double-Bouche grasped what was required of him at once, sprang up the ratlines, and began to climb the top-mast shrouds with agility, showing that in honouring Double-Bouche with this hazardous mission, Captain Pamphile had made a most excellent choice.

Another consideration, which was determined, I will not say, by his knowledge of James’s affections, but by that of James’s appetite, largely influenced the selection made by Captain Pamphile. Double-Bouche was employed chiefly in the kitchen, where his talents were appreciated by all the ship’s company, and by none more so than by James, who had a special liking for that part of the vessel. He was then bound with the strands of sympathy to the personage whom we have just introduced to the reader, and who owed the expressive nickname of “Double-Bouche,” which had replaced his patronymic on board the “Roxelane,” to the facilities his post afforded him for dining before the rest, without prejudice to his right to dine again after them. James then understood Double-Bouche and Double-Bouche understood James, and the consequence of this mutual appreciation was that on this occasion James, instead of attempting to escape, as he would have done from anyone else, came down part of the way, and the two friends met on the main-top-gallant-yard. They descended at once, one carrying the other, to the poop, where Captain Pamphile stood waiting for them.

Captain Pamphile had only one cure for wounds, of whatever kind they might be; this was a compress of brandy, arrack, or rum. He therefore soaked a rag in spirits and wrapped it round the wounded finger. When the alcohol first came into contact with the raw flesh, James started pulling a very wry face; but noticing that while the Captain turned his back, Double-Bouche quickly swallowed the dregs of the liquor from the glass in which the bandage had been dipped, the thought struck him, that however painful it might be as a dressing for a wound, it might prove beneficial if taken internally, So he put the tip of his tongue to the rag, then licked it, and, finally, as the taste grew on him, put his thumb into his mouth and sucked it. As Captain Pamphile had given orders that the bandage was to be kept wet by dipping it in the brandy every ten minutes, and as his orders were punctually carried out, in two hours or so James began to blink his eyes and waggle his head in a very queer fashion. The longer the treatment lasted, the fonder grew James of the remedy, and he ended by falling dead drunk into the arms of Double-Bouche, who took the patient down below and put him to bed in his own berth.

James slept for twelve hours without a move, and when he opened his eyes, the first thing that met them was the sight of his friend Double-Bouche plucking a fowl. This was no new sight for James; nevertheless it seemed this time to claim his particular attention. He got up quietly, and crept near, his eyes fixed on the operation, and remained motionless and preoccupied the whole time it lasted. When the fowl was plucked, James, who felt his head still a trifle heavy, went on deck for a breath of fresh air.

The wind remained fair the next day, so that Captain Pamphile, seeing all going well with the voyage, thought it unnecessary to husband his resources, and moreover he did not want to carry his poultry into Marseilles, not having bought them as a speculation. So he gave the order, on account of his health he said, that roast or boiled poultry should be on his table every day, in addition to his accustomed cut of hippopotamus and his *bouillabaisse.* Five minutes after the order was given, the quack of a duck, whose throat was being cut, was heard.

At this sound James slid down from his seat on the main-yard so quickly that a person ignorant of his egotistical character would have thought he was going to the rescue of the victim, and rushed into the cook’s galley. There he found Double-Bouche fulfilling conscientiously his duty of cook’s mate, so well that he did not leave so much as a bit of down on the bird’s skin. This time, as before, James seemed to take the greatest interest in the operation; then, when it was finished, he went up on deck, and, for the first time since his accident, he drew near Catacwa’s cage and walked round it several times, carefully avoiding coming within reach of the parrot’s beak. Then, when at last he saw an opportunity, he made a grab at one of his tail feathers, and pulled so hard that, despite the flapping of Catacwa’s wings and the oaths he swore, the quill came out in his hand. This experiment, of but little apparent importance at first sight, seemed to delight James beyond measure, for he executed a dance on all fours, springing up and down on the same ground, which was his way of expressing the liveliest feelings of supreme satisfaction.

In the meanwhile land was far out of sight, and the vessel ploughing the broad Atlantic with every sail set. All around was sea and sky and empty space stretching away to the far distant horizon. From time to time a sea-bird with wide-stretched wings would be seen in the far distance, on its long journey from continent to continent, but nothing else. Then Captain Pamphile, trusting that instinct would teach Catacwa that her wings were unequal to the task of carrying her to land, opened his prisoner’s cage and gave her complete freedom to fly about the rigging. Catacwa instantly profited by this liberty to get up to the top-gallant-mast and, ravished with joy at her exaltation, she rattled off to the great satisfaction of the ship’s company, all her choicest sayings in turn, making more noise by herself than did the five-and-twenty sailors who were watching her.

While this scene was going on above decks a different drama was being performed below. James, as was his custom, went to see Double-Bouche while the poultry was being plucked; but this time the boy, who had noticed how he had been watched at work, thought he had discovered in his comrade a vocation for the post he himself held. A happy thought struck

Double-Bouche, which was to employ James henceforth in plucking his fowls and ducks, while he, changing places, folded his arms and looked on. Double-Bouche had one of those decided characters the possessors of which leave scarcely any interval between the inception and the execution of an idea, so he went and closed the door gently, picked up, as if by chance, a whip, which he stuck into the waist of his breeches, taking care to leave the handle showing, and, coming back to James, put into his hands the duck which it was his own proper task to pluck. At the same time he pointed with his forefinger at the end of the whip, which he intended employing as arbiter in case of dispute.

But James never even gave him the chance of calling in this third party. Either Double-Bouche had guessed rightly, or the new accomplishment which he put James in the way of acquiring appeared to the latter as the necessary complement to all good education. Whichever was the reason, James took the duck between his knees as he had seen his instructor do and set to work at the task with such ardour that Double-Bouche had no further need to interfere. Towards the end, as he saw the feathers give place to down, and the down to bare flesh, the energy he displayed amounted to enthusiasm.; so far did it carry him that on the complete termination of the work James set to work at his triumphal dance, just as he had done the evening before by the side of Catacwa's cage. For his part Double-Bouche was in ecstasy; he had only one thing to reproach himself with, which was that he had not profited at an earlier date by the goodwill of his acolyte; but he promised himself that he would not let his ardour cool for want of practice. So on the morrow, at the same time and place, with similar precautions, he began the second rehearsal of yesterday's play. It was as successful as the first. Thus the third day Double-Bouche, recognizing James as his equal, tied his cook's apron round his waist, and gave him over entire charge of turkeys, fowls, and ducks. James showed himself more than worthy of this confidence, for at the end of a week he had left his professor far behind him both in quickness and dexterity.

As this went on, the brig sailed like an enchanted ship. She had passed by James's native land, left out of sight St. Helena and Ascension on her starboard beam, and was nearing the equator under full sail. It was one of those days when in the tropics the sky seems to press down on the earth; the man at the helm was at his post, the look out in the foretop, and Catacwa on the topgallant-mast. As for the remainder of the ship's company, each man tried to breathe fresh air, wherever it seemed most likely to be obtained, while Captain Pamphile himself, lying in his hammock and smoking his long pipe, had himself fanned by Double-Bouche with a peacock's tail. This day, strange to say, James, instead of picking his fowl, put it untouched on a chair, took off his kitchen apron, and appeared either, like everybody else, overcome by the heat, or lost in his own thoughts. But this reaction was but of short duration. First he looked all around with quick and intelligent glances; then, as if frightened at his own audacity, he picked up a feather, put it to his mouth, and threw it aside with a gesture of indifference. Then he began scratching his sides and blinking his eyes. After a moment, with a little jump, which the closest observer would have thought quite purposeless, he got on the first step of the ladder, stopped a moment to look at the sun through the hatchway, and then began to ascend nonchalantly to the upper deck, somewhat like a lounger who, for want of something better to do, strolls out on the Boulevard des Italiens.

On reaching the top step, James saw that the deck was quite abandoned; the brig might have been a derelict floating about at the mercy of the winds and waves. The solitude seemed to suit James exactly — he scratched his side, chattered with his teeth, winked, and did two of his perpendicular dancing steps, keeping a good look out all the time for Catacwa, who, he saw, was in her ordinary place flapping her wings and singing at the top of her voice, "God save the King." Then James instantly pretended to look the other way. He climbed slowly up the shrouds as far as possible from the mizen-mast, on the top of which the enemy was perched, gained the yards, stopped for a moment in the top-mast shrouds, climbed the fore-top-mast, and finally ventured on the mizen-top-mast stay. In the middle of this trembling bridge he hung himself, head downwards, by the tail, letting go altogether with his paws, and seeming as if he had gone up solely for the pleasure of enjoying a swing. Then, satisfied that Catacwa was not noticing him, he quietly approached her, always looking the other way, and, at the moment when his rival was at the very highest point of her song and pleasure, shouting at the top of her voice and flapping her wings like a coachman warming his arms on a wintry day, James rudely broke in on her triumphant song by seizing her in his left hand so as to pin her wings together behind her. Catacwa screeched for help; but no one heard or answered, so overcome was the entire ship's company by the stifling heat which the perpendicular sun shed from the zenith.

“Heaven above!” ejaculated suddenly Captain Pamphile, “here is a strange phenomenon! snow at the Equator!”

“No!” said Double-Bouche, “it is not quite like snow; it is... Oh! my eye! it is...” and he made a dash at the ladder.

“Well, what the devil is it?” cried Captain Pamphile, sitting up in his hammock.

“What is it?” cried Double-Bouche from the top of his ladder. “It is James picking Catacwa’s feathers!”

Captain Pamphile roused the echoes of his ship with some of the most tremendous oaths that had ever been heard at the Equator, and ran on deck himself, while the whole crew, startled out of sleep as if the powder magazine had blown up, tumbled up by every gangway the brig possessed.

“Now you young lubber!” shouted Captain Pamphile, seizing a belaying pin, and addressing Double-Bouche, “what are you gaping at? Quick, stir yourself.”

Double-Bouche sprang at the rigging, and ran up like a squirrel, but the quicker he climbed, the quicker worked James; Catacwa’s feathers flew in clouds, and fell like snowflakes in December. Catacwa, seeing Double-Blouche nearing them, redoubled her screams; but just as her rescuer extended his arms, James, who till then, had seemed to notice nothing of the commotion below, judged that his daily task was successfully accomplished, and let go his enemy, who had nothing but her wing feathers left. Catacwa, beside herself with pain and fear, forgot that the balance of her tail feathers was wanting, fluttered for a few seconds in an aimless fashion, and ended her grotesque movements by falling into the sea, where, her feet not being webbed, she was drowned.

“Flers,” said Decamps, interrupting the speaker, “you have a fine voice; call down to the *portière s* little girl to bring some more cream; the jug is empty.”

CHAPTER VII

HOW TOM HUGGED THE *PORTIÈRE'S* DAUGHTER, WHO WAS BRINGING UP THE CREAM, AND THE DECISION ARRIVED AT IN CONSEQUENCE OF HIS MISDEEDS:

Flers opened the door and went to the staircase, to call for the cream: then he returned without noticing that Tom, who followed him, remained outside; upon his resuming his seat, Jadin, who had left off at the death of Catacwa, was asked to continue his reading:

Here, gentlemen (said he, showing the last page of his manuscript), I must substitute for written memoirs a verbal story, the subsequent events being of comparatively little importance. The offering made by James to the gods of the sea had the effect of making the elements propitious to Captain Pamphile's vessel. So the remainder of the voyage passed without further adventure. One day, only, there was reason to fear James had met with a fatal mischance. The following shows how it happened.

Captain Pamphile, while they were passing the latitude of Cape Palmas, within sight of Upper Guinea, found in his cabin a magnificent butterfly, a true flying flower of the tropics, with its wings bejewelled and glittering like the breast of a humming-bird. The Captain, as we have seen, neglected nothing which might make a bit of money on his return to Europe. So he captured his unfortunate visitor with the greatest care,

for fear of chafing the velvet of its wings, and fastened it with a pin to the panelling of his room. Not one of you but has watched the dying agonies of a butterfly, and yet who, with the wish to keep, under a glass or in a box, this graceful child of the sun, has not stifled the tenderer feelings of the heart? You know, then, how long is the struggle, as the poor victim turns about the pivot on which its body is impaled, and dies a victim to its own beauty. Captain Pamphile's butterfly thus I lived for some days, convulsively moving its wings as if it were sucking honey from a flower. This, of course, attracted James's attention, who watched it out of the corner of his eye, without seeming to notice it. Then, taking advantage of the Captain's back being turned, he jumped up, and guessing that the animal must be good to eat from its brilliant appearance, devoured it with his usual greediness.

Captain Pamphile turned round at the springs and somersaults of James; in eating the butterfly, he had swallowed the pin, which stuck fast in his throat; the unlucky glutton was choking.

The Captain, unsuspicious of the reason for these grimaces and contortions, thought he was playing, and was at first amused at his mad pranks; but when he saw that the antics seemed to be indefinitely prolonged, | and that the voice of the acrobat seemed to grow more and more like the patter of a Punch-and-Judy show; also that James, instead of merely sucking his thumb, as he had taken to do since his mishap, had put the whole hand half way down his throat, he began to suspect something more than a desire to please in all these gambols, and went up to James. The poor devil rolled his I eyes in a way which left little doubt as to the nature of I his feelings, so that Captain Pamphile, thinking his well-beloved monkey was about to depart this life, shouted for the doctor with all the strength of his lungs, not so much that he believed in the power of medicine, as that he wished to have nothing to reproach himself with later on.

The voice of Captain Pamphile, in consequence of the interest he felt for James, took such a tone of distress that, besides the doctor, every one within hearing ran to his help. Among the first to arrive was Double-Bouche, who, startled by the Captain’s shout while he was following his usual avocation, ran in with a leek and a carrot, which he had been engaged in peeling, in his hand. The Captain had no trouble in explaining the reason for his cries. He only pointed to James, who still continued, in the middle of the room, to show the same signs of pain and grief. Everybody crowded round the invalid. The doctor declared that he was suffering from a brain fever, a malady to which that species of ape was particularly liable, as their habit of hanging by the tail sent the blood to the head; that he must, therefore, bleed James forthwith, but that, whether or no, as he had not been called directly the first symptoms of the disease showed themselves, he could not answer for the result. After this preamble, he drew out his instrument case, got ready his lancet, and desired Double-Bouche to hold the patient steady, for fear he might cut an artery instead of a vein.

The Captain and his crew had great confidence in the doctor, so that they listened with profound respect to the scientific dissertation, the gist of which we have just given; only Double-Bouche made a sign of dissent by shaking his head. Double-Bouche had an old grudge against the doctor. One day it happened that some preserved plums, which the Captain held in great esteem as having been given him by his wife — it happened, then, that these plums, shut up in a certain drawer, were found to have sensibly diminished in number. On this Captain Pamphile had assembled his ship's company with a view to finding out what member of the crew had dared to put his teeth into the private store of the master of the "Roxelane." Everybody had denied the theft, Double-Bouche with the rest, but as the last was a likely thief, the Captain had taken his denial for what it was worth, and asked the doctor if there were no means of arriving at the truth. The doctor, whose motto, like that of Jean Jacques Rousseau, was *vitam impendiere vero*, had answered that nothing was simpler, and that there were two ways, both infallible. The first and speedier method was to rip up Double-Bouche, an operation he could perform in seven seconds; the second was to administer an emetic, which would entail a delay greater or less according to the strength of the drug, but would not under any circumstances be more than one hour. Captain Pamphile, who preferred gentle means, whenever possible, chose the emetic. The medicine was promptly and forcibly administered, and the suspect was handed over to the charge of two sailors, who had strict orders on no account to lose sight of him.

Thirty-nine minutes afterwards the doctor entered, watch in hand, bearing five plum stones, which Double-Bouche had thought well to swallow with the plums for better security, and which, in spite of himself, he had just given up to meet the ends of justice. His guilt was flagrant, Double-Rouche having positively declared that he had eaten no fruit for eight days but bananas and Indian figs, and condign punishment was his instant fate. The prisoner was sentenced to fifteen days' bread and water with, by way of dessert, twenty-five lashes with a rope's end, which were regularly administered to him by the quartermaster. From this little event it came about that Double-Bouche, as we have said, hated the doctor cordially, and never let a chance pass from that time forth of making things unpleasant for that individual.

Moreover, Double-Bouche was the only one of the company who did not believe a word of the doctor's diagnosis. In his illness James exhibited certain symptoms which were very familiar to Double-Bouche from his having suffered in exactly the same manner, when, surprised in the act of tasting the Captain's *bouillabaisse,* he had to swallow a piece of fish before he had time to take out the bones. His glance then instinctively wandered round the room seeking for what, by analogy, he reasoned must have tempted James's appetite. The butterfly and the pin were gone; this was quite enough to show Double-Bouche exactly what was wrong. James had the butterfly in his stomach and the pin in his gullet.

Thus, when the doctor, holding his lancet ready, came cautiously up to James, whom Double-Bouche supported in his arms, the latter said, to the stupefaction and scandal of the Captain and his men, that the doctor was wrong; that James was not the least bit in the world menaced with apoplexy, but was suffering from strangulation; that there was nothing whatever wrong with the brain, but merely a big pin stuck in the oesophagus. Having had his say, Double-Bouche, trying on James the remedy with which he usually cured himself, forced down his throat after several attempts the leek he happened to be peeling when called by the Captain, thus driving the foreign body from the narrow passage where it was into the wider space below. Certain that the operation had been successful and would redound to his credit, he placed the moribund ape in the middle of the room. The latter, instead of going on with the antics which he had been performing before the crew five minutes earlier, rested for a moment quite quietly, as if to be certain that the pain was really past; then he began to blink, then to rub his stomach gently with one hand, and finally he stood up and danced on his hind legs, which, as we all know, was his expression for supreme contentment. But this was not all, for Double-Bouche, to give the final blow at the doctor's reputation, held out to the convalescent the carrot he had brought, and James, who was very fond of that vegetable, took possession of it at once and proved, by the way in which he munched it without delay and without interruption, that his digestive organs were again quite free from obstruction, and ready to recommence their duties. The amateur surgeon was triumphant. As for the legitimate professor of the art, he made up his mind to take his revenge when Double-Bouche got ill; but unfortunately for him Double-Bouche had nothing whatever the matter with him during the rest of the voyage but a slight attack of indigestion in the latitude of the Azores, and this he treated himself, after the fashion of the ancient Romans, by putting his finger down his throat.

The brig "Roxelane," Captain Pamphile, after a successful run, arrived then, 30th September, in the harbour of Marseilles, where were unladen, to the great advantage of the Captain, the tea, coffee, and groceries which he had obtained by barter from Captain Kao-Kiou-Kwan, in the Indian Archipelago; as for James the First, he was sold for the sum of seventy-five francs to Eugène Isabey, who gave him to Flers for a Turkish pipe, and Flers exchanged him for a Greek musket with Decamps.

And that is how James passed from the banks of the Bango River to No. 109, Rue du Faubourg Saint-Denis, where his education was, thanks to the paternal care of Fau, brought to the state of perfection which you all appreciate so highly in him.

Jadin was modestly acknowledging the plaudits of the meeting, when we were startled by loud cries from the outside of the door. We rushed towards the staircase and found the *portière's* daughter nearly fainting in the arms of Tom, who, frightened in his turn by our sudden appearance, started off downstairs at full gallop. A moment later we heard a second cry, shriller even than the first; an old *marquise,* who had lived on the third floor for the last thirty-five years, had been disturbed by the noise, had come out candle in hand, met the fugitive face to face, and gone off in a dead faint. Tom ran upstairs again a few steps, found the door of the fourth floor open, went in as if the rooms belonged to him, and fell into the midst of a wedding supper. In an instant a fearful hubbub arose, the guests, bride and bridegroom at their head, made a dash for the stairs. The whole house, from cellar to attics, was out in less than no time, the lodgers lining the banisters, all talking at once and not one of them listening. Eventually they came back to the fountain head of information; the little girl, who gave the alarm, explained that she was going upstairs without a light, carrying the cream, when she felt that some one had thrown an arm round her waist. Supposing that some impertinent lodger had taken this liberty, she retaliated by a sound box on the ear. Tom replied to the blow by a growl which at once betrayed his identity; the girl, terrified at finding herself in the claws of a bear instead of, as she thought, in the arms of a young man, had given the scream which brought us all out. Our appearance had, as has been said, frightened Tom, and Tom's fright had brought about the subsequent events, namely, the *marquise's* fainting fit and the upset of the wedding party.

Alexandre Decamps, who was Tom's especial friend, made his excuses to the company, and as proof of his good manners, promised to bring him back as St. Marthe led the famed *Tarasque* with a mere bit of blue or pink riband. On this a little scamp of a boy brought him the bride’s garter, which he had just got hold of to give to the guests, when the alarm was given. Alexandre took the riband, entered the dining-room, and found Tom walking with the greatest cleverness in and out among the various dishes on the table, where he was just eating his third currant cake. This fresh transgression was his ruin; the bridegroom, unfortunately, had exactly the same tastes as Tom; he called round him all those who were fond of cake. Loud murmurs arose forthwith, and the docility with which poor Tom followed Alexandre did little to allay their anger. At the door of the apartment they met the landlord. The *marquise* had just given notice to quit; the bridegroom declared he would not stay another quarter of an hour in the house unless justice was done him; and the rest of the lodgers joined in the chorus. The landlord turned pale as he thought of the empty house and vanished rents, and he therefore told Decamps that, much as he desired to retain him as a tenant, it would be impossible for him to do so unless he at once gave up keeping an animal which, at such a time of day and in a respectable house, was the occasion of so grave a scandal. On his part Decamps, who was beginning to get disgusted with Tom, made only sufficient demur to give his surrender the appearance of a favour. He gave his word of honour that Tom should be sent away the next day, and to reassure those of the lodgers who demanded instant expulsion, declaring their inability to go to bed if there was any delay, he went down to the backyard, shoved Tom into a dog kennel, pushed the door of the kennel against the wall, and piled up a heap of paving stones on the top of the kennel.

Thus, the promise, the execution of which had commenced so brilliantly, appeared satisfactory to the complainants; the *portière s* daughter dried her tears, the *marquise* calmed down after three severe nervous paroxysms, and the bridegroom magnanimously said he would be satisfied with hot buns in default of currant cakes. All went to their respective rooms, and two hours afterwards perfect tranquillity reigned again.

As for Tom, at first he tried, like Enceladus, to get rid of the mountain which weighed him down, but finding this too much for his strength, he made a hole in the wall and walked out into the next garden.

CHAPTER VIII

HOW TOM BROKE THE WRIST OF A MUNICIPAL GUARD, AND THE ORIGIN OF THE TERROR WITH WHICH HE REGARDED ALL MEMBERS OF THAT HIGHLY RESPECTABLE FORCE

The tenant of the ground floor of No.III was not a little surprised to see next morning a bear walking about among his flower-beds. He immediately reclosed his veranda door, which he had just opened with a view to taking a similar walk, and attempted to discover through the glass by what means this new gardener had obtained access to his premises. Unfortunately the opening was hidden by a clump of lilac, so that the search, prolonged though it was, produced no satisfactory result.

Then, as the tenant of the ground floor of No. Ill was fortunate enough to be a regular subscriber to the “Constitutionnel “newspaper, he remembered having read, a few days previously, under the heading “Valenciennes “that that town had been the scene of an extraordinary phenomenon; a shower of frogs, accompanied by thunder and lightning, had fallen, and so heavy was it that the streets of the town and the roofs of the houses were completely covered.

Immediately after Tom’s appearance the sky, which two hours before had been ashen grey, became blue as indigo. The patron of the “Constitutionnel “looked up to the sky and, seeing it was black as ink, and that Tom was in his garden without visible means of entrance, he began to think that a phenomenon similar to that at Valenciennes was about to be repeated, with the sole difference that instead of frogs it would rain bears. One was no more surprising than the other, the hailstones were simply larger and more dangerous, that was all. Having taken up this idea, he turned round and looked at his barometer. The index pointed to “much rain “and “very stormy “; and as he looked there was a clap of thunder. The room, too, was lit up with the bluish light of a flash of lightning; the reader of the “Constitutionnel” thought there was not a moment to be lost, and hoping to have company in the approaching storm, he sent his valet for the commissary of police, and his cook for a corporal and nine men, so that, whatever happened, he would have the protection of the civil power and also that of the military.

In the meantime, the passers-by, seeing the cook and valet running wildly out of No. Ill, assembled round the front door and made all kinds of guesses at what might be going on within. They interrogated the *portier,* but the *portier,* greatly to his own disgust, knew no more than anybody else; all he could tell them was that the alarm, whatever its cause, began in the apartments situated between the entrance and the back garden. At this moment the subscriber to the “Constitutionnel “appeared at tire door of the veranda which opened on to the courtyard, pale and trembling, and shouted for help. Tom had seen him through the glass door, and being well accustomed to human society, he had trotted up to him, with a view to making his acquaintance; but the reader of the “Constitutionnel” misunderstanding his intentions, had taken a simple act of politeness for a declaration of war, and prudently beaten a retreat. On arriving at the courtyard door he heard a cracking noise at the windows of the garden door. Upon this the retreat degenerated into a panic flight, and the fugitive appeared, as we have said, before the loungers and gossips, showing visible signs of the greatest distress and calling for help with the full power of his lungs.

Then, as usually happens under such circumstances, the crowd, instead of responding to the appeal, melted away. The only one left was a Municipal Guard, who stood his ground, and, advancing to the subscriber of the “Constitutionnel,” touched his shako, and asked how he could serve him. But the poor man had neither speech nor language left; he pointed without a word to the door he had left open and the steps he had descended so precipitately. The Municipal Guard saw that the danger must lie there, bravely drew his sword, ascended the steps, went through the door, and stood inside the room.

The first thing that met his eyes was the good-tempered face of Tom, who, standing upright on his hind legs, had put his head and fore paws through a pane of glass, and was leaning on the framework of the window and looking with curiosity at the unknown furniture of the room.

The Municipal Guard stopped short, uncertain, brave as he was, whether to advance or retreat. But hardly had Tom caught sight of him than, staring at the apparition with haggard eyes, he withdrew his head from the casement, and fled with the utmost speed of all four legs to the remote corner of the garden, blowing hard like a terrified buffalo, and showing manifest signs of the terror which the sight of the constable’s uniform inspired.

As, so far, we have presented our friend Tom to our readers as possessing both reason and good sense, we must be allowed, notwithstanding the critical situation, to interrupt our narrative while we explain how it came about that he was suddenly frightened by the representative of the law, seeing that so far no hostile demonstration had been made, and without some such explanation the irreproachable reputation he has left behind him might suffer.

It was an evening during the carnival of the year of grace 1832. Tom had been in Paris barely six months, and yet the artistic society in which he moved had already so civilized him that he was one of the most; amiable bears you could wish to meet. He would go and open the door when the bell rang, mount guard for hours at a time standing on his hind legs with a halberd in his hand, and dance a minuet, holding a broomstick with infinite grace behind his head. He had passed the day in these innocent recreations, to the great satisfaction of the studio, and had just dropped off into the sleep of the just in the wardrobe which he used as his kennel, when a knock was heard at the front door. At the sound James showed so many signs of joy that Decamps knew at once that it was his beloved tutor who was coming to see him.

As he had supposed, the door opened and disclosed Fau, muffled in a masquerade dress. James, as was his custom, threw himself into his arms.

“Very well, very well indeed!” said Fau, placing James on the table, and putting his walking-stick into his hand, “you are a charming little animal. Port arms! Present arms! Ready! Fire! Capital! I will get a complete uniform made for you as a Grenadier, and you shall mount guard instead of me. But, just now, I have not come for you, but for your friend Tom. Where is the animal in question?”

“Where?” replied Decamps. “In his kennel, I believe.”

“Tom, come here! Tom!” called Fau.

Tom gave a low growl, which explained that he quite understood that he was the person wanted, but that he did not feel at all eager to respond to the invitation.

“Very well,” said Fau, “so that’s the way you obey me, eh? Tom, my friend, do not oblige me to have recourse to forcible measures.”

Tom stretched out one paw, which appeared at the door of his wardrobe, without any more of his body being visible, and began to yawn plaintively and slowly like a child ordered to get up, who dares not protest otherwise against the tyranny of his schoolmaster.

"Where is the broomstick?" said Fau, in a menacing tone, and making a clatter with the bows, assagais, and fishing tackle which hung behind the door.

"Adsum!" called Alexandre, pointing to Tom, who, at this well-known sound, had jumped quickly up and approached Fau with an innocent and friendly kind of apologetic manner.

"That is right at last," said Fau; "be a good fellow, now; I have come on purpose for you all the way from the Café Procope to the Faubourg Saint-Denis."

Tom shook his head up and down, down and up.

"All right; now shake hands with your friends. Well done!"

"Are you going to take him away?" said Decamps.

"A little way," said Fau, "and we are going to get him something pleasant, too!"

"And where are you going together?."

"To the *bal masqué,* that is all.... Come, come, Tom, let us be going, my friend. We have a cabriolet hired by the hour."

And as if Tom understood the force of this last argument, he went down the, stairs four steps at a time, followed by his chaperon.

When they reached the coach, the driver opened the door, lowered the steps, and Tom guided by Fau, got inside the conveyance as if he had been accustomed to go out driving every day of his life.

"Well, I never!" said the driver; "that is a funny dress. One would take him for a real bear. Where am I to drive you, my good people?"

"To the Odéon," replied Fau.

"Grrooonn!" said Tom.

"There — there — no need to get angry," said the driver; "it *is* a good step, but we shall get there all in good time."

In point of fact, half an hour later the coach stopped at the door of the theatre. Fau got out first and paid the fare; then he gave Tom a hand, took two tickets at the box-office, and entered the hall without the slightest objection being raised by the officials.

The second turn they took round the room, people began to follow Tom. The truth with which the new arrival imitated the gait of the animal whose skin he bore struck some of the learned in natural history. The investigators then drew gradually closer, and, wishing to find out if his talent for imitation extended also to the voice, they gave little tugs at the hair on his tail or pinched his ears.

"Grrooonn!" growled Tom.

A cry of admiration burst from the circle. It was absolutely life-like.

Fau led Tom to the refreshment stall, and gave him some sweet pastry, of which he was very fond, and the voracity with which he ate was so exactly like that of the real animal that the gallery roared with laughter. Then he gave him a glass of water, which Tom took carefully between his paws, as he was in the habit of doing when by chance Decamps did him the honour of asking him to dine at table, and he drank it at one gulp. Then the enthusiasm reached its highest point.

At this moment, when Fau came to leave the counter, he found such a tightly-packed circle round them, that he began to fear Tom might be tempted to have recourse to his teeth and claws to clear a way, and this would have complicated matters a good deal; so he led him aside into a corner, put him with his back resting against the angle of the walls, and ordered him to remain there until further orders. This was, as we have said, a form of drill perfectly familiar to Tom, as it was the way he had been taught to mount guard, and, moreover, suited well the natural indolence of his character. Thus, far more scrupulously obeying his orders than many a National Guard of my acquaintance, he did his turn of sentry-go, patiently waiting for his relief. A Harlequin then gave him his stick to complete the parody, and Tom gravely placed his heavy paw atop of his wooden musket.

"Are you aware," said Fau to the obliging son of Bergamo, "who it is you have just lent your stick to?"

"No," replied Harlequin.

"Can't you guess?

"No! I haven't a notion!"

"Come, look again. The grace of his movements, the neck for ever bent over the left shoulder, like Alexander the Great's — the perfect mimicry... what! you don't recognize him?"

"No, upon my word of honour!"

“Odry,” whispered Fau; “Odry, in the costume he wears in ‘The Bear and the Pacha.’”

“But — he plays the white bear.”

“Exactly. That is why he has borrowed Vernet’s bearskin, to make the disguise perfect.”

“Oh, nonsense! You are joking,” said the Harlequin. “Grrooonn!” said Tom.

“Ah, now I recognize his voice,” said Fau’s new acquaintance. “You should tell him to disguise it better. How strange I did not know him sooner.”

“Yes, I will,” said Fau, walking towards the hall; “but we must not bother him too much,- for fear of offending him. I will try and get him to dance the minuet.”

“Oh — really?”

“He promised he would. Tell your friends that, so that no one may go playing tricks on him.”

“All right.”

Fau crossed the room, and the Harlequin, delighted, went from one masker to another to tell them the news, and to repeat the advice given; upon which everybody discreetly fell back. Just then, the band struck up the first bars of the gallop, and all made for the dancing room; but, before following his companion, the facetious Harlequin advanced towards Tom on tip-toes, and, whispering in his ear, said:

“I know you, my pretty fellow!”

“Grrooonn!” answered Tom.

‘Oh, *groon, groon, groon*, as much as you please; but you *are* going to dance the minuet; you will dance the minuet, my dear, good Odry?”

Tom nodded his head slowly up and down, down and up, as he always did when asked questions, and the Harlequin, satisfied with this sign of assent, went off to find a Columbine with whom to dance the galop himself.

While this dance was going on, Tom was left alone with the barmaid, he standing motionless on his part, but with longing eyes fixed on the pyramids of tarts and cakes with which the buffet was crowned. The girl noticed his marked attention to her wares, and seeing an opening for a sale she took a plate and stretched out her arm; Tom extended his paw, and politely took a tart, then a second, and then a third. The barmaid went on handing tarts, and Tom accepted them thankfully, so that he was well on in his second dozen when the galop finished and the dancers came back to the crush-room. Harlequin had recruited a Shepherdess and a Pierrette, and he introduced these ladies as partners for the minuet.

Then, as an old acquaintance, he came up to Tom and whispered a few words to him. Tom, whom his repast had put into a charming frame of mind, replied with one of his most amiable grunt. The Harleqruin turned towards the spectators, andannounced that, the Signor Odry consented with great pleasure to gratify, the wishes of the assembly. At these words rounds of applause, mingled with cries of "To the saloon!" broke forth; the Pierrette and the Shepherdess each took one of Tom's paws. Tom, for his part, like gallant cavalier, followed where they led, looking from one to the other of his two partners with an air of great astonishment, and was soon in the middle of the floor. All took up positions to watch, some in the boxes, some in the balconies, while the majority stood round in a circle, and the band struck up.

The minuet was Tom's strong point, and the masterpiece of Fau's course of instruction. This success was assured from the first opening of the first figure, and the enthusiasm rose as the dance went on. Towards the end the applause was deafening. Tom was carried in triumph to the stage box. There the Shepherdess took off her crown of roses and placed it on his head. The whole house clapped and shouted, one voice even crying, "Long live Odry the First!"

Tom leant on the balustrade of his box with a grace all his own. Just as his triumph was complete, the first bars of the next country dance were played, and the crowd ran off to take their places, except a few courtiers of the new king, who stayed on in the hope of getting some free passes for the theatre out of him. But to all their requests Tom replied with nothing but his everlasting "Grooonn."

As the joke began to be monotonous, one by one fell away from the neighbourhood of the obstinate vizier of the great Shah-i-Baham, acknowledging his talent as a figure dancer, but declaring his conversation most insipid. Soon only three or four persons cared to notice him, and in an hour's time he was left absolutely alone. *Sic transit gloria mundi.*

At last the time for closing the ballroom drew near; the floor was gradually cleared, the boxes were empty. Some stray dim rays of dawn were creeping in through the windows of the *foyer* when the box-opener, going her rounds, heard from one of the stage boxes of the lower tier a prolonged sound of snoring, which betrayed the presence of some belated masker. She opened the door and found Tom, who, tired out with the stormy night he had spent, had retired to the back of his box, and resigned himself to slumber. The rules on this point are strict, and every box-opener is a bond slave to rules and regulations. Therefore she entered the box, and with that politeness which is characteristic of the estimable class of society to which she had the honour to belong, she pointed out to Tom that it was nearly six o’clock in the morning, which was surely high time to be starting homewards.

“Grrooonn!” said Tom.

“I quite understand,” replied the courteous official; “you are more than half asleep, my good man. But you would sleep better still in your own bed. Come! come! And your wife must be getting anxious, too. He does not hear a word, upon my soul! What a hard sleeper he is! “She tapped him on the shoulder.

“Grrooonn!”

“All right, all right. But really, there’s a time for everything; and this is not the time for larks. Besides, we know who you are, my noble gentleman. Look, they are lowering the footlights and putting out the lustre. Shall I send for a coach for you?”

“Grrooonn!”

“Get along with your nonsense, the Odéon is not a pothouse; come, be off. Ah, so that is the way you take it! Oh, Monsieur Odry, for shame! To an actress as was too! Very well, Monsieur Odry, I shall call the guard; the Commissary has not gone to bed yet. Ah, you won’t obey the rules! You use your fists! You would strike a woman! We’ll soon see! Hi! Commissary! Mister Commissary!”

“What is the matter now?” growled the fireman on duty.

“Help, fireman, help!” cried the distressed damsel. “Hi, hi! Police!”

“What’s the row?” came from the Sergeant who was in command of the patrol.

“It’s Mother What’s-her-name shouting for help from the stage boxes.”

“Coming.”

“Here, this way, Sergeant!” cried the woman.

“Coming, coming. Where are you, my dear?”

“Come on, there are no steps. Here, here! He is in the corner right against the stage door. Oh, the ruffian! He’s as strong as a Turk.”

“Grooonn!” grunted Tom.

“There, do you hear? Is that, I ask you, the language of a Christian gentleman?”

“Come, come, my friend,” said the Sergeant, who, as his eyes got accustomed to the gloom, began to make out Tom in the darkness. “We all know what it is to be young, and there — I’m like other people. I like a bit of fun, don’t I, darlint? But I’ve got to obey orders. Time’s up now for being in quarters; so, smart with the left foot! Double! March!”

“Grooonn!’

“Bravo! bravo! A perfect imitation of a bear’s growl. But we’ve got to try another sort of game now. Come, come, mate, just keep your temper, and come along quietly. Ah, you won’t? You want to give trouble! Very good, we shall have the laugh on our side presently. Here, my lads, just lay hold of this bruiser and run him out into the street.”

“He won’t budge, sergeant.”

“He won’t? But what are our musket butts for? Give it him about the legs.”

“Grooonn! Grrooonn!...”

“Hit him hard, lay it on stiff.”

“Look here, sergeant,” said one of the Municipal Guards, “I’ve got a notion it’s a real bear. I laid hold of the scruff of his neck just now, and the skin seems firm on the flesh.”

“Oh, then, if it is a bear, we must treat it with kindness, and get the owner to pay us for our care of it. Go and fetch the fireman’s lantern.”

“Grrooonn!”

“Bear or no bear,” said one of the men, “he’s had a good licking, and if he’s got any memory at all, he won’t forget the Municipal Guard in a hurry.”

“Here is, what you want,” said one of the patrol, bringing the lantern.

“Put the light close to the prisoner’s face.”

The soldier obeyed.

“It is an animal’s snout,” pronounced the Sergeant.

“Oh, Christ!” said the box-opener, bolting for her life. “A real bear!”

“Well, yes — a real bear. We must see if he carries a passport and conduct him to his domicile; there will no doubt be a reward. He has probably strayed away, and, being partial to society, he entered the Odéon, while the ball was going on.”

"Grrooonn!"

"There, you see, he admits the fact."

"Look here, look here," said one of the soldiers. "There is a little bag hung round his neck."

"Open the bag."

"A card!"

"Read the card."

The soldier took it and read:

"MY name is Tom. I reside at 109, Faubourg Saint-Denis. I have five francs in my purse, two to pay the hackney coach, and three as a reward for the person bringing me back."

"Gospel truth, there are the five francs!" said the municipal guardian.

"The citizen's papers are quite in order," said the Sergeant.

"Now for two volunteers to conduct him to his place of domicile."

"Here!" said the policemen in chorus.

"No promotion by favour; all to go by seniority and merit. Let the two men holding most good-conduct badges have the benefit of the affair. Go, my sons."

Two Municipal Guards came up to Tom, passed a rope round his neck, and, for the sake of extra precaution, took three turns of it round his muzzle. Tom made no resistance. The butt-ends had made him as supple as a glove. Forty paces from the Odéon one of the Guards said, "It's a fine night. Suppose we don't take a coach; we shall be giving our gentleman a nice little walk."

"And then we shall each have fifty sous instead of thirty."

Motion carried unanimously.

In half an hour's time they were at the door of No. 109. At the third time of knocking the doorkeeper opened the door herself, half asleep.

"Here, Mother Wake-her-up," said one of the Municipal Guards, "we have brought one of your lodgers home. Do you recognize him as a member of your menagerie?"

"My goodness! Yes, I do," said the *portière*. "It is Monsieur Decamps' bear."

The same day a bill amounting to seven and a half francs for tarts and cakes was presented at Monsieur Odry's house. But the vizier of Shah-i-Baham easily proved an alibi; he was on guard at the Tuileries.

As for Tom, from that day forth he walked in great terror of that respectable corps which had beaten him with their butt ends, and had made him travel, on foot, although he had paid his full cab fare.

Thus no one will be surprised that, when he saw the face of the municipal guardian appear in the doorway of the sitting-room, be beat a retreat to the uttermost end of the garden. Nothing makes a man more bold than seeing his enemy giving ground before him. Moreover, as we have said, this guardian was not wanting in courage; so he set out in pursuit of Tom, who, finding himself driven into a corner, tried to climb the wall. But finding, after a few attempts, that he could not escape that way, he faced his foe, and, standing on his hind legs, prepared to make a sound defence, utilizing for the purpose the boxing lessons which his friend Fau had given him.

The municipal guardian, on his part, threw himself promptly and properly into the first position and proceeded to attack *secundum artem.* At the third lunge, he feinted at the head and cut at the leg. Tom defended with the second guard. The municipal then threatened a cut to the right; Tom recovered and countered heavily at the sword arm, and catching the hilt a blow with the full force of his fist, he bent back his enemy’s wrist so violently that he dislocated it. The municipal dropped his sabre, and was thus at the mercy of his adversary.

Happily for him, and unhappily for Tom, the Commissary arrived at this moment on the scene. He saw the act of rebellion against the arm of the law, took his sash from his pocket and wound it three times round his waist. Then feeling himself supported by the guard, sent the Corporal and his nine men into the garden with orders to deploy into line of battle, and himself took post, on the veranda behind, to superintend the firing. Tom, preoccupied with these manoeuvres, allowed the Municipal Guard to retreat, which he did, holding his right hand in his left, and remained himself upright and motionless against the wall.

Then the trial began. Tom, accused of having, during the night, broken into an inhabited dwelling, and having attempted to commit murder on the person of a public official, which said attempted murder only failed owing to circumstances which were independent of his will, and being unable to produce witnesses in his defence, was condemned to suffer the penalty of death. Consequently, the Corporal was desired to proceed with the execution of the sentence, and gave the order to his men to handle their firearms.

Upon this, dead silence fell upon the crowd which had assembled behind the patrol, and was broken only by the voice of the Corporal giving his words of command. One after another he went through the twelve motions of loading. Notwithstanding his instructions, after the word “Present,” he turned back once more to the Commissary before giving the fatal word, “Fire!” and a murmur of compassion ran through the assembly.

But the Commissary of Police, who had been disturbed in the midst of his breakfast, was inexorable; he raised his hand as a signal to proceed.

“Fire!” said the Corporal.

The soldiers fired, and the unfortunate Tom fell pierced with eight bullets.

At this very moment Alexandre Decamps came back with a letter from M. Cuvier, giving Tom admission to the Jardin des Plantes, and making him the successor of Martin.

CHAPTER IX

HOW CAPTAIN PAMPHILE PUT DOWN A MUTINY ON BOARD THE BRIG “ROXELANE,” AND WHAT WAS THE SEQUEL THEREOF

Tom was a native of Canada. He belonged to that herbivorous species of bear, which, while generally confined to the mountains lying between New York and Lake Ontario, sometimes in the winter, when driven down by the snow from among the ice-bound peaks, ventures to descend in famishing bands to the very outskirts of Portland and Boston.

Now, if our readers care to know how Tom managed to travel from the banks of the St. Lawrence to those of the Seine, they must be good enough to look back to the end of the year 1829, and to follow us to the northern extremity of the Atlantic Ocean, between the coast of Iceland and the promontory of Cape Farewell. There we shall show them, “walking the waters like a thing of life,” the brig of our old friend Captain Pamphile. The adventurer in question, forsaking for once his old love for the East, this time turned away towards the Pole, not, however, like Ross, or Parry, seeking to explore the North-west Passage, but with a more utilitarian and certainly a more lucrative aim. Captain Pamphile, having two years to wait for his cargoes of ivory, was making use of the time in attempting to introduce to the Northern Seas that system of barter which we have watched him practising with so much success in the waters of the Indian Archipelago. The theatre of his early exploits was becoming somewhat unproductive, in consequence of the frequent colloquies he had held with passing ships in those latitudes, and, moreover, he felt

the need of change of air. Only, this voyage, instead of seeking cargo of tea and spices, Captain Pamphile directed his attention to the acquisition of sperm oil.

Given the character of our worthy filibuster, it will be obvious that he would not waste time in selecting whaling hands for his crew, or in fitting out his ship with whaleboats, lines, and harpoons. He was quite satisfied with a careful inspection, as he put to sea, of the swivel guns, the carronades, and the long eights, which, as we have said, he made serve him for ballast. He had put his muskets in good order, sharpened up his boarding cutlasses, laid in provisions for six weeks, passed the Straits of Gibraltar, and in the month of September — that is to say, just when the fisheries are at their best — he was cruising about the 60th parallel of latitude, and forthwith began to ply his trade.

As we have seen, Captain Pamphile liked well-finished work. So, he gave special attention to such vessels as he conjectured, from the way they sailed, to hold good and sufficient cargoes.’ We know what his method of bargaining was in these delicate negotiations. He had made no appreciable change in his system, notwithstanding the change in locality. Thus it is needless to repeat the details to our readers.

We need only say that the success of the system was complete. Thus, he was returning with not more than fifty of his casks empty, when chance threw in his way, off the banks of Newfoundland, a barque returning from the cod fisheries. Captain Pamphile, while undertaking grand speculative ventures, by no means despised smaller transactions. He therefore did not let this opportunity of completing his cargo pass. The fifty empty casks were passed on board the fishing smack, and in exchange for them the fishermen kindly sent Captain Pamphile fifty full barrels. Policar brought to his notice the fact that the full casks were not so high by three inches as the empty ones. But Captain Pamphile was good enough to condone this irregularity, in consequence of the cod having been only just salted the day before. Only he examined the whole of the casks one by one, to satisfy himself as to the good quality of the fish. Then, after ordering the lot to be headed down, he had them lowered into the hold, with the exception of one cask which he kept out for his own ‘table.

In the evening the doctor entered his cabin just as he was sitting down to supper. He came to ask, in the name of the crew, for three or four casks of fresh cod. For the space of nearly a month, the ship being short of food, the sailors had been living on whale steaks and seal cutlets. The Captain asked if they were out of provisions. The doctor replied that they still had a certain amount of the kind we have mentioned, but that this sort of food, anything but good when fresh, was far from being improved by being salted down. Pamphile, upon this, remarked that he was very sorry indeed to refuse, but he had an order from the firm of Breda and Company, of Marseilles, for exactly forty-nine barrels of salt cod, and he could not disappoint such good customers. Moreover, if the crew wanted fresh cod, they had only to fish for them, as they were quite at liberty to do, he, Captain Pamphile, placing no obstacle whatever in their way. The doctor went back to the crew. In ten minutes' time Captain Pamphile heard the sound of a great commotion on board the brig "Roxelane." A hubbub of voices shouted, "Boarding pikes! Cutlasses!" and one sailor cried, "Hurrah for Policar! Down with Captain Pamphile! "Captain Pamphile judged it was about time to show himself. He got up from his seat, put a brace of pistols in his belt, lit his short pipe, which he never smoked but in very stormy weather, and took in his hand a sort of full-dress cat-o'- nine-tails, elaborately constructed, which he carried only on very great occasions. He went on deck and found a mutiny in active progress. Captain Pamphile walked forward into the middle of the ship's company, who were gathered about in groups, looking to right and left the while for any man bold enough to say the first word. A stranger would merely have supposed Captain Pamphile to be making an ordinary tour of inspection, but to the crew of the "Roxelane," who well knew his long arm, it was something quite different. They knew that Captain Pamphile was never so near a dangerous outburst as when he said nothing; and his silence was terrifying. At last, after two or three turns up and down, he stopped in front of his first officer, who seemed to be mixed up in the disaffection along with the others.

"Policar, my lad," said he, "can you tell me which way the wind is?"

"But — Captain," said Policar, "the wind is... You said the wind?"

"Yes, I said the wind. How's the wind?"

"Upon my word!" said Policar, "I don't know."

"Very well, I am going to tell you, I am! ". And Captain Pamphile looked aloft at the sky, which was overcast, with an air of serious consideration; then, holding up his head towards the breeze, he whistled as sailors do. Finally, turning to his first officer: "Well, Policar, my fine fellow, I can tell you what the wind's doing, I can. It's going to blow a gale."

"I thought as much," said Policar. "And now, Policar, my man, will you have the goodness to tell me what is going to fall?"

"What is going to fall?"

"Yes, to come down like hail."

"Upon my word and honour, I don't know what's going to come down," said Policar.

“Well, I’ll tell you; rope’s ends and cat-o’-nine-tails are. So, friend, Policar, if you want to keep out of the storm look sharp and get into your cabin, and don’t come out again till I tell you. Do you understand me, Policar?”

“Aye, aye, sir,” said Policar, going below. “That’s a very intelligent young man,” said Captain Pamphile to himself. Then he paced up and down the deck two or three times more and presently stopped dead in front of the carpenter, who held a pike in his hand. “Good-day to you, Georges,” said he to the carpenter. “What is that little plaything you’ve got there, my lad?”

“Why! Captain...” stammered the carpenter. “Lord a’ mercy, why, it’s my broom!” suddenly cried the Captain.

The carpenter dropped the pike, the Captain picked it up and broke it into two halves as he might have snapped a willow wand. “I see how it was,” continued Captain Pamphile, “you wanted to brush your clothes. Very good, my friend, very good indeed. Cleanliness is next to godliness, so they say.” He made a sign for two of the crew to come to him.

“Come here, you two; each of you lay hold of one of these bits of stick and dust his jacket for poor old Georges; and Georges, my boy, mind you stay inside your jacket during the operation!”

“How many lashes, sir?” asked the men. “Well, say five-and-twenty each of you.” The flogging began, the two fellows striking blow for blow with the regularity of a pair of Virgilian shepherds. The Captain counted the strokes, and at the thirtieth Georges fainted.

“That will do, said the Captain. “Carry him to his hammock. He can have the rest to-morrow. Give every man his due.”

The Captain’s orders were obeyed. Then he paced three times up and down the deck again, finally stopping in front of the sailor who had shouted, “Hurrah for Policar! Down with Captain Pamphile.”

“Well,” said he, “how’s that sweet voice of yours getting on, Gaetâno, my boy?”

Gaetano tried to speak, but, hard as he tried, nothing came of the effort but indistinct gurgles and mutterings.

“Goodness me!” said the Captain, “the man’s lost his voice. Gaetano, my son, this is dangerous, and calls for prompt treatment. Doctor, tell off four dressers for the job this minute.” The doctor chose four men, who came round Gaetano. “Come here, my dear boys,” said the Captain, “and mind you follow my directions carefully. You must get a line and reeve it through a block; then you will take one end and knot it round this honest lad’s neck for a cravat; then you must haul in the slack till you’ve lifted our man thirty feet in the air. You will keep him there for ten minutes, and when you lower him, he’ll talk like a starling and sing like a blackbird. Look alive, my hearties, look alive!”

The executioners went about their work in dead silence, and the Captain’s orders were followed out from start to finish without the faintest protest being raised. Captain Pamphile watched it with so much care that he let his pipe go out. In ten minutes’ time the body of the rebellious sailor was let down on the deck perfectly rigid. The doctor came up and satisfied himself that he was really dead; then they tied one cannonball to the neck of the corpse and two to the feet, and pitched it into the sea.

“Now,” said Captain Pamphile, taking his cutty out of his mouth, “all of you go and relight my pipe, and take care that only one man brings it back.” The nearest sailor took the relic of antiquity from the hand of his superior, with signs of the most profound respect, and descended the main hatchway, followed by the whole crew, leaving the Captain alone with the doctor. A moment afterwards Double-Bouche appeared, carrying the relighted cutty.

“Ah, it’s you, you young brigand,” said the Captain. “And what were you doing while these good people were walking about the deck discussing their business? Answer me that, you little blackguard.”

“My word,” said Double-Bouche, seeing from the Captain’s manner that he had nothing to fear, “I was dipping a crust of bread into the stew-pan to see if the stew was good, and my fingers into the saucepan to see if the sauce was properly seasoned.”

“Very well, you young imp, you may take the best of the stew and the sauce, and turn out the rest of it as soup for my dog. As for the sailors, they can eat dry bread and drink plain water for three days. That is a good preventive against scurvy. Let us go to dinner, doctor.”

And the Captain went back to his cabin, called for another plate for his guest, and resumed his dinner of fresh cod as if there had been no interruption between the first and second courses. At the end of dinner the Captain went on deck again to make his evening round. Everything seemed in perfect order, the quartermaster at his post, the steersman at the helm, and the look out in the fore-top. The brig was under full sail, and was doing her steady eight knots an hour, having to port the banks of Newfoundland and to starboard the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The wind was west-north-west, and seemed likely to hold. So that Captain Pamphile, after a stormy day, counting on a quiet night, went below to his cabin, took off his coat, lit his pipe, and leaned out of the stern-ports, following with his eyes now the trail of his tobacco smoke, now the wake of the vessel.

Captain Pamphile, as the reader will have noticed, was more of a man of action than of poetry and picturesque imagination; still, like the true sailor he was, he could not be a spectator of the cloudless moon silvering the waves of ocean without dropping into that sympathetic and pensive mood that comes over every seaman when contemplating the element on which he lives and moves.

He had been leaning thus for perhaps two hours, his body half in, half out of the port, hearing nothing but the wash of the passing waves, seeing nothing but the Cape of St. John disappearing on the horizon like a sea mist, when he suddenly was recalled to himself by some one gripping him by the collar of his shirt and the seat of his breeches. At the same time that he was seized, the hands which had taken this liberty with him appeared to execute a sort of see-saw movement, the one on his collar bearing down, the other lifting, so that Captain Pamphile's feet were raised considerably higher than his head. The captain tried to call for help, but he had not time to do so. As he opened his mouth the individual who guided his movements, having brought his body into the desired degree of inclination, let go simultaneously both shirt and breeches, so that Captain Pamphile, obeying, in spite of himself, the laws of equilibrium and gravity, took a nearly vertical plunge, and disappeared in the silvery wake of the "Roxelane," which continued on her rapid and even course without the least consciousness that she had been widowed of her captain.

Next day, at ten o'clock, as Captain Pamphile had not, according to his invariable custom, started on his round of inspection on deck, the doctor entered his cabin, and found it empty. In a moment, the news of the Captain's disappearance flew round the crew. The command of the vessel devolved as a matter of right upon the mate; consequently they ran to bring Policar from the cabin in which he was conscientiously keeping his arrest; and he was proclaimed captain.

The first act of authority on the part of the new skipper was to serve out to each man a share of the cod and a double ration of brandy, and to remit in Georges' favour the twenty stripes which remained of his sentence.

Three days later than the events we have just described, not a soul on board the brig “Roxelane “troubled either more or less about Captain Pamphile than would have been the case had that worthy mariner never existed.

CHAPTER X

HOW CAPTAIN PAMPHILE, THINKING TO LAND ON AN ISLAND, LANDED ON A WHALE INSTEAD, AND BECAME THE SLAVE OF BLACK SNAKE

By the time Captain Pamphile regained the surface of the water, the brig “Roxelane “was beyond hailing distance, so he knew better than to tire himself by useless shouts for help. He began by taking his bearings with a view to making out what might be the nearest land, and coming to the conclusion that it should be Cape Breton, he laid his course for it by the help of the Pole Star, which he kept carefully on his right hand.

Captain Pamphile swam like a seal. Nevertheless, after four or five hours of this exercise, he began to feel a little tired. Moreover, the sky was overcast, and the beacon light by which he had been steering had disappeared; thus he thought he could not do better than take a rest. So he stopped his forward stroke, and, turning over, floated on his back.

He remained for about an hour in this position, making no movement beyond what was necessary to keep his face above water, and watching the stars one by one being blotted out from the sky. However great the stock of philosophy possessed by Captain Pamphile, it will be understood that the situation was not altogether amusing for him. He was quite familiar with the lie of the coast around him,- and knew that he must still be three or four leagues away from the nearest land. Feeling his strength renewed by the temporary repose he had taken, he had just renewed his swim with fresh vigour when he saw, a few yards beyond him, a black something on the sea, which the darkness of the night had prevented his observing sooner. Captain Pamphile considered it to be some isle or rock which navigators and geographers had overlooked, and he swam towards it. He soon reached it, but he had some difficulty in gaining a footing, as the surface of the ground, incessantly washed by the waves, was very slippery. But after a few attempts he succeeded, and found himself on a small hillock of an island from twenty to twenty-five yards in length, and rising in the centre to a height of ten feet above the level of the sea. It was entirely uninhabited.

Captain Pamphile soon explored the whole of his new domain. It was barren and naked, except for a sort of tree about as thick in the stem as a broomstick and from eight to ten feet high, entirely destitute of branches and leaves, and for some low weeds which were still wet, showing that, in stormy weather, the waves washed completely over the rock. To this circumstance Captain Pamphile attributed the incredible ignorance of cartographers, and made a firm resolve that, as soon as he got back to France, he would send to the Society of Exploration a scientific memoir correcting the mistakes of his precursors. He was thus forming his plan and projects, when he thought he heard some one talking not far off. He looked about on all sides, but, as we have said, the night was so dark that he could distinguish nothing. He listened once again, and this time he heard clearly the sound of several voices, albeit the words were still unintelligible, Captain Pamphile had in the first instance thought of hailing the speakers; but, on second thoughts, as he did not know whether those who were approaching through the darkness were friends or foes, he determined to await the course of events. In any case, the island on which he had landed could not be so far from the mainland as to leave him in much danger of dying of hunger in so frequented a neighbourhood as that of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. He determined then to keep still until daylight, unless he were discovered himself. Accordingly he placed himself at the end of his isle furthest removed from the point whence proceeded the sounds of the human voice which under certain circumstances man dreads more than the roaring of beasts of prey.

All was still again, and Captain Pamphile began to hope that things would pass off without further adventure, when he felt the ground move under him. His first thought was that there was an earthquake; but within the whole perimeter of his island he had not seen the smallest sign of a mountain bearing the appearance of a volcano; then he recollected having heard accounts of submarine formations which appear suddenly on the surface of the sea, remain above it sometimes days, sometimes months, sometimes years, give colonists time to sow crops, to build cabins, to form a community, and then, at a given moment, go down as they came up, without apparent cause, carrying with them the overconfident population which has made its home on them. Whatever might happen, as Captain

Pamphile had not had time to sow of build, and would not have to lament either for his corn or his houses, he simply prepared to resume his swim, only too happy that his miraculous island had remained long enough above the surface to allow him to take a rest upon it. Thus he had quite resigned himself to whatever might be the will of God, when, to his great astonishment, he saw that his island, instead of disappearing, was actually moving through the water, leaving behind it a wake like that astern of a vessel. Captain Pamphile was on a floating island; the miracle of Latona was being performed again for his benefit, and he was drifting, on some unknown Delos, towards the shores of the New World.

Captain Pamphile had seen so much in the course of his nomadic and adventurous life that he was not the man to be astonished at a trifle like this; the only thing he thought strange was that his island, as if endowed with intelligence such as he had never dared to expect, was steering straight for the northerly point of Cape Breton. As he had no preference for one point over another, he resolved to let the island go wherever its business seemed to take it, and to take advantage of the circumstance by travelling in its company. But as the slippery state of the ground was rendered still more dangerous than before by the motion, Captain Pamphile, although he had sea-legs, still climbed towards the top of his island, and, holding on by the isolated and leafless tree which seemed to mark the centre, awaited events with patience and resignation.

Yet, Captain Pamphile, who had become, naturally enough, all eyes and ears, in the intervals of light when the wind, driving aside the clouds, allowed some star to sparkle like a diamond in the heavens, thought he saw, like a black speck, a little island acting as guide to the larger, keeping about fifty paces in front. Moreover when the waves, which broke against-his domain, were less noisy, those same voices which he had heard before for a moment, again struck on his ear, borne on the murmuring wind, vague and unmeaning as the sounds of the spirits of the deep.

It was not until dawn began to break in the east that Captain Pamphile found his bearings completely, and was astonished that, with the intelligence for which he gave himself credit, he had not grasped the situation much sooner. The small isle travelling in front was a boat manned by six Canadian Indians, the large island on which he stood was a whale, which the former allies of France were towing off to cut up, and the branchless and leafless tree to which he was clinging was the harpoon that had dealt death to the sea-monster, and which, penetrating four or five feet into the wound it had caused, stood still eight or nine feet above it. The Hurons, on their part, when they saw the double capture they had made, allowed an exclamation of surprise to escape them. But, remembering immediately that it is beneath the dignity of man to appear surprised by anything, they went on rowing in silence towards the land, without taking any further notice of Captain Pamphile. The latter, seeing that the savages, notwithstanding their apparent indifference, never took their eyes off him, affected to maintain the greatest calm, although the strange situation in which he was really caused him considerable perturbation of spirit.

As the whale reached to within about a quarter of a league of the northern end of Cape Breton, the skiff stopped; but the enormous cetacean, continuing the impulse of motion imparted to it, ranged up gradually to the little boat till it brought the latter alongside. Then the native who appeared to be the commander of the crew, a great, strong fellow of over six feet, painted blue and red, with a black snake tattooed on his chest and carrying on his shaven crown the tail of a bird of paradise plaited into the only lock of hair he had kept on his head, stuck a large knife into his waistcloth, took a tomahawk in his right hand, and advanced, slow and dignified, towards Captain Pamphile.

Captain Pamphile, who, for his part, had seen every savage race of the known world, from those who come down from La Courtille on Ash Wednesday mornings to those of the Sandwich Isles who treacherously slow Captain Cook, quietly allowed him to approach, without taking apparently the least notice of him.

Three paces distant from the European, the Huron stopped and fixed his eyes on Captain Pamphile; Captain Pamphile resolutely declined to recede a hair’s breadth and gazed back at the Huron with as much calm and tranquillity as the latter affected. At last, after ten minutes of mutual inspection — ” The Black Snake is a great chief,” said the Huron.

“Pamphile, of Marseilles, is a great Captain,” said the Provençal.

“And why, my brother,” answered the Huron, “did he leave his vessel and embark on the Black Snake’s whale?”

“Because,” said the Captain, “his crew threw him overboard, and, tired of swimming, he took a rest on the first thing he came across, without waiting to inquire to whom it belonged.”

“Very good,” said the Huron, “Black Snake is a great chief, and Captain Pamphile will be his servant.”

“Just say that over again,” said the Captain, in a tone of banter.

“I say,” repeated the Huron, “that Captain Pamphile will row Black Snake’s boat when he is on the water, will carry his birch-bark tent when he travels by land, will light his fire when it is cold, will keep the flies off when it is hot, and will mend his mocassins when they are out of repair; in return for which Black Snake will give Captain Pamphile the leavings of his dinner and such old beaver skins as may be of no use to himself.”

“Ah, well!” said the Captain, “and supposing the conditions do not suit Captain Pamphile and that he declines them?”

“Then Black Snake will raise Captain Pamphile’s scalp, and hang it up before his door with those of seven Englishmen, nine Spaniards, and eleven Frenchmen which are already there.”

“Very good,” said the Captain, seeing that he was not the stronger of the two, “Black Snake is a great chief, and Pamphile shall be his servant.”

Upon this Black Snake made a signal to his crew, who in due course landed on the whale and surrounded Captain Pamphile. The chief said something to his men, and they proceeded at once to land on the animal several small boxes, a beaver, two or three birds which they had killed with bows and arrows, and everything necessary for kindling a fire. Then Black Snake got on board the canoe, took an oar in each hand, and proceeded to row towards land.

The Captain was engaged in watching the departure of the chief, and in admiring the speed with which the little boat skimmed over the sea, when three Huron Indians approached him: one took off his neck-tie, the second his shirt, and the third his trousers, in the pocket of which was his watch. Then two others followed, one of them holding a razor, and the other a sort of palette made up of little cockle shells-filled with yellow, red, and blue pigments. They made a sign to Captain Pamphile to lie down, and while the remainder of the band lighted a fire, as they would on a real island, plucked the birds and skinned the beaver, they proceeded with the toilet of their new comrade. One shaved his head, leaving only the lock which the savages are in the habit of growing; the other dipped his brush in the various colours, and painted him all over after the latest fashion obtaining among the dandies of the River Ottawa and Lake Huron.

The first preparation made, the two valets of Captain Pamphile went and brought, one a handful of feathers from the tail of the whip-poor-will they were just singeing, the other the skin of the beaver they were beginning to cook. Coming back to their victim, they fastened the plume of feathers to the one lock of hair which they had left him, and tied the beaver's skin round his loins. The operation being now complete, one of them gave Captain Pamphile a small piece of looking-glass. He was hideous! In the meantime, Black Snake landed and took his way to a good-sized house which could be seen from a distance showing white above the sands. He soon came out accompanied by a man dressed as a European, and from his gestures it was plain that the child of the desert was showing to the man of civilization the capture he had made in the open sea and which he had brought during the night to within sight of the coast.

After a few moments, the inhabitant of Cape Breton got into a boat with two slaves, pulled off to the whale and rowed round it, but without landing on it; then, after having probably decided that the Huron had told him the truth, he returned to the Cape, where the chief awaited him, sitting motionless on the ground.

Then the white man's slaves brought out sundry articles which the Captain could not see properly on account of the distance, and placed them in the skiff of the red man; the Huron chief took his paddles and rowed back again to the island where his crew and Captain Pamphile awaited his coming.

He landed just as the beaver and the stork were done to a turn, ate the tail of the beaver and the wings of the whip-poor-will, and in accordance with his agreement, gave the remains of his dinner to the servants, among whom it seemed to please him greatly to include Captain Pamphile. Thereupon the Hurons brought him the booty taken from the prisoner, so that he might, as chief, make choice of such of the spoil as should be most to his liking.

Black Snake looked with considerable disdain at the Captain's neckerchief, shirt and breeches; but, on the other hand, his attention was much attracted by the watch, the use of which he was evidently ignorant of. Nevertheless, after having turned it over and over, held it up by its short chain and swung it by the longer chain, he listened attentively to its ticking. Then, turning it backwards and forwards again to try and discover its mechanism, he put one hand to his own heart, while with the other he again placed it to his ear. At last, convinced that it was a living creature, since it had a pulse which beat in unison with his own, he placed it with the greatest care beside a small tortoise about the breadth of a five-franc piece and the thickness of half a walnut, in a box, which, richly encrusted with shell work, evidently held his most valued treasures. Then, as if well pleased with the share of the plunder he had taken, he pushed away with his foot the tie, shirt, and pantaloons, generously leaving them at the disposition of his crew.

Breakfast over, Black Snake, the Hurons, and the prisoner left the whale for the canoe. Captain Pamphile then saw that the goods brought in her for the Hurons were two English muskets, four bottles of brandy, and a barrel of powder. Black Snake, considering it beneath his dignity to cut up the whale he had killed, had bartered it with a colonist for spirits, ammunition, and arms.

As they embarked, the resident of Cape Breton reappeared on the shore, and, followed by five or six slaves, got into a larger boat than he had selected for his first visit to the whale. As he pushed off from shore, Black Snake, on his part, gave the orders to leave the whale, so that its new owner might see there was nothing to fear. Then began Captain Pamphile's apprenticeship. A Huron, supposing that he would be ignorant of the use of the oar, placed a paddle in his hands, but as he had served in every grade, from cabin boy to captain, he made use of it with so much strength, precision, and skill, that Black Snake, to show his great satisfaction, gave him his elbow to kiss. The same evening the Huron chief and his followers stopped for the night on a large rock which stretches out, at some distance from a smaller one, into the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Immediately some set to work pitching the birch-bark tent, which the North American Indians generally carry with them when they travel or go on a hunting expedition, while others scattered about the rock and searched in the clefts for oysters, mussels, sea-urchins, and the products of the ocean, which they collected in such numbers, that after providing for the Great Snake, there was plenty left for everybody else.

After supper, the Great Snake sent for the box in which he had put the watch, so that he might see that it had not met with any accident. He took it up, as he had done in the morning, with the greatest care; but no sooner had he lifted it out than he perceived that the beating of the heart had stopped. He put it to his ear, and heard no sound; then he tried warming it with his breath, but finding every effort was in vain — " Here", said he, handing it to its owner with an expression of deep contempt, “take back your animal; he is dead.”

Captain Pamphile, who valued his watch greatly as being a present from his wife, did not wait for a second offer, but hung the chain round his neck, delighted to get his timepiece back, and took good care not to wind it up.

At break of day, they started again, travelling still westward; in the evening they landed on the shores of a solitary inlet in the Island of Anticosti, and the following day, about four in the afternoon, doubling Cape Gaspé, they entered the St. Lawrence River, which they had to ascend to Lake Ontario, whence the chief expected to reach Lake Huron, on the banks of which was his wigwam.

CHAPTER XI

HOW CAPTAIN PAMPHILE TRAVELLED UP THE ST. LAWRENCE RIVER FOR FIVE DAYS, AND MADE GOOD HIS ESCAPE FROM BLACK SNAKE TOWARDS THE END OF THE SIXTH DAY

Captain Pamphile had, as we have seen, adapted himself to circumstances with more promptitude and resignation than might have been expected of a man of so violent and overbearing a disposition. It was because, thanks to the many different situations in which he had been thrown during the course of a very stormy life, of which we have only shown the reader the successful side, he had fallen into the habit of taking immediate and decided resolutions. Moreover, as we have said, he had quickly seen that his was the weaker side, and he at once drew, from an ancient spring of philosophy which he held in reserve for similar occasions, an appearance of resignation which duped Black Snake, clever as that noble savage was.

It must be confessed, too, that Captain Pamphile, being devoted as he was to the great art of navigation, was not devoid of a certain sense of pleasure in watching the degree of perfection to which its practice had been brought among the natives of Upper Canada.

The timbers of the canoe, in which Captain Pamphile was the sixth hand, were constructed of a strong elastic wood covered by strips of birch-bark sewn together and the seams covered with a thick coating of pitch. Within she was lined by very thin planks of pine placed one joint above another like the tiles on a roof.

Our connoisseur, then, was impartial enough to render justice to the builders of the vessel in which he was being carried, much against his will, from the north to the south; he had given only one sign, but that indicated the opinion, of the master, of his satisfaction with the light build of the canoe. In fact, this lightness gave it two great advantages. The first was that, given an equal number of rowers, it could beat easily by a considerable distance in five minutes the best English-built racing craft, and the second, peculiar to the locality, was that it could be readily lifted on shore and carried without difficulty by a couple of men, when the rapids which “were scattered about the river forced the crew to take to the banks, sometimes for the distance of two or three leagues. It is true that there was one drawback to these two advantages; a single false movement caused it to turn bottom upwards in a moment. But this mattered little to men who, like the Canadian Indians, live as much on the water, as on the land; as for Captain Pamphile, we know he belonged to the family of the seals, otters, and other amphibious animals. At the close of the first day of inland navigation, the boat was brought to in a little inlet on the right bank; the crew drew her up at once on land, and prepared to pass the night on the soil of New Brunswick. The Black Snake was so pleased with the intelligence and docility shown by his new servant during the forty-eight hours they had passed together that, after leaving over for him, as on the previous evening, a goodly portion of his supper, he gave him a buffalo hide, on which there still remained some hair, to serve for a mattress. As to bed clothes, the Captain was obliged to do without any. Moreover, as our readers will recollect if they have good memories, his only garment was the beaver’s skin which depended from his hips half-way down his legs; so it is not surprising that the worthy merchant skipper, accustomed to the temperature of Senegambia and the Congo, passed the whole night shifting his beaver’s skin from place to place, so as to warm the different parts of his body in succession. Nevertheless, as there is a good side to everything, his insomnia gave him the opportunity of 4

Il observing that his companions were extremely distrustful of him; at each movement of his, however slight it was, a head would be raised and two eyes, glowing like those of a wolf through the gloom, would be fixed upon him. Captain Pamphile saw that he was closely watched, and consequently he himself became doubly prudent.

The next day, the boatmen started before it was light. They were still in the estuary of the river, where it is broad enough to be like a lake running into the sea. There was then nothing to interfere with their progress, the current being all but imperceptible, and the wind, whether fair or ahead, making little difference to the light canoe. On each side the landscape spread before the eye like a boundless plain, losing itself in the blue horizon, with here and there houses appearing as white spots. Now and again, in the hazy depths which the eye failed to pierce, there was to be seen the snowy peak of some mountain belonging to the range which stretches from Cape Gaspé to the source of the Ohio; but the distance was so great that it was scarcely possible to tell whether the fading apparition belonged to the sky or earth. The day passed by in the midst of these scenes, to which Captain Pamphile seemed to give constant attention and profound admiration. Still this twofold sentiment, strong as it appeared to be, never caused him to forget for a moment his duty as a sailor. So Black Snake, flattered both by his good taste and by his good work, gave him, while they were taking a rest, a pipe ready filled. This favour was the better appreciated by the Captain in that, from the time when Double-Bouche had relit his short clay, after he had let it go out during the mutiny, he had been obliged to forgo the luxury of a smoke. So he bowed at once and said, “The Black Snake is a great chief,” a compliment to which Black Snake responded by saying, “Captain Pamphile is a faithful servant.”

This ended the conversation, and each began to smoke.

In the evening they landed on an island; the ceremony of supper was gone through, as usual, much to the general satisfaction. The previous night made Captain Pamphile somewhat anxious as to how he was to bear the cold, which, of course, is more intense on an island nearly level with the water than on the wooded mainland. But on unrolling his buffalo-hide he found a woollen blanket inside. Decidedly, Black Snake was not a bad sort of master, and if Captain Pamphile had not already formed some plans for the future, he might have stayed on in his service. But, however pleasant he found it to lie between his blanket and buffalo robe on an island in the River St. Lawrence, he still had the weakness to prefer his berth on board the good ship “Roxelane.” Still, however inferior his temporary couch might be, the Captain slept without waking until daybreak.

About eleven o’clock on the third day Quebec hove in sight. Captain Pamphile had some hopes that Black Snake would put in at that town; thus, directly he saw the town, he set to work with such vigour at rowing that he gained extra consideration from the great chief, and that he failed to pay as much attention to the Falls of Montmorency as the sight deserved. But he was mistaken in his conjectures. The boat passed by the harbour, doubled Diamond Cape, and went on till they landed opposite the Falls of La Chaudière.

As it was still daylight, Captain Pamphile had time to admire this magnificent cascade, which falls from a height of one hundred and fifty feet, with a breadth of two hundred and sixty, spreading out like a sheet of snow on a carpet of verdure and running between banks wooded nearly to the edge, while from the forest here and there stand up masses of rock looking like the bald and white foreheads of weather-beaten old men. Supper and night followed as usual.

The next day the boat was launched at daybreak. Notwithstanding his philosophy, Captain Pamphile began to experience some anxiety. He could not help reflecting that the further he penetrated inland, the greater was his distance from Marseilles, and the more difficult became any attempt at escape. Thus he rowed with more negligence than the great chief had ever remarked in him, but he was forgiven in view of his former alacrity. Suddenly his eyes became fixed on the horizon, and his paddle stopped working, and as the sailor who pulled bow to his stroke continued to row, the canoe swung completely round.

“What is the matter?” said Black Snake, getting up from the bottom of the boat where he had been lying, and taking his calumet out of his mouth.

“The matter is,” said Captain Pamphile, pointing to the south, “either I am ignorant of sailor craft, or we are going to have a bit of a gale.”

“And where does my brother see the sign which shows that God has commanded the tempest to ‘Blow and destroy ‘?”

“Egad!” said the Captain, “in that cloud which is coming up black as ink.”

“My brother has the eyes of a mole; what he sees is not a cloud.”

“You are joking,” said Captain Pamphile.

“Black Snake has the eye of an eagle,” said the chief; “let the white man wait, and judge for himself.”

In fact, this cloud advanced with a speed and rush such as Captain Pamphile had never seen in a true cloud, however hard blew the wind which drove it; at the end of three seconds, our worthy mariner, confident as he was of his knowledge, began to feel sundry doubts. At last, before a minute had passed, he saw that he was wrong and Black Snake right. The cloud was nothing but a serried mass of innumerable pigeons taking flight towards the north.

At first the Captain could not believe his eyes. The birds came with so much noise and in such quantities that it seemed impossible for the pigeons of the whole world united to form so dense a body. The sky, which northwards, still retained its azure blue, was entirely covered to the south as far as the eye could see with a grey sheet, the extremities of which were out of sight. Soon the sheet, intercepting the rays of the sun, blotted it out instantaneously, so that one might suppose twilight was falling on the boatmen. In a moment, a kind of advance guard made up of some thousands of the birds passed over with the rapidity of magic; then, almost immediately, the main body followed, and daylight vanished as if the wings of the tempest had been stretched between sky and earth.

Captain Pamphile saw this phenomenon with astonishment bordering on stupor; while the Indians, on the contrary, accustomed to similar sights every five or six years, gave utterance to cries of joy and got ready their arrows to profit by the winged manna which the Lord had sent them. For his part, Black Snake loaded his gun with a deliberation which proved his faith in the size of the living cloud passing over him. Then, when ready, he leisurely raised the gun to his shoulder and. without troubling to take aim, pulled the trigger. As he fired a sort of opening like that of a well appeared, letting in a ray of light, which again disappeared instantaneously; some fifty pigeons, which had come within the circle formed by the shot, fell like rain into and around the canoe. The Indians picked them all up, to the last bird, greatly surprising Captain Pamphile, who saw no reason for this care, seeing that if one or two more shots had been fired, the canoe itself would have caught sufficient to provision the crew without the trouble of turning her to right or left. But, turning round, he saw that the chief had lain down again, placed his weapon at his side, and resumed his calumet.

“Has Black Snake finished his sport already? said Captain Pamphile.

“Black Snake has Silled with one shot as many pigeons as were wanted for his supper and for that of his followers; a Huron is not a white man who destroys to no purpose the creatures of the Great Spirit.”

“Ah!” said Captain Pamphile, half to himself, “that is not badly reasoned, for a savage; but I would not be sorry to see two or three more holes in this feathered canopy above our heads, if it was only to make certain that the sun was still in its proper place.”

“Look and make your mind easy,” answered the chief, stretching out his hand to the south.

In fact, on the southern horizon a golden light began to appear, while in the opposite direction, towards the north, the whole landscape was being plunged into darkness; then the head of the column must at least have reached the mouth of the St. Lawrence. Thus they had obviously covered in a quarter of an hour the distance the boat had just taken four whole days to accomplish. Above, the grey cloth continued to skim over, as if the genii of the Pole were dragging it to them, while the daylight, swift in its turn as had been the darkness, came on at a rapid rate, descending in waves on the mountains, streaming down the valleys and spreading in broad lakes over the meadows. At last, the flying rearguard passed like a mist over the face of the sun, which, the last veil gone, smiled as before on the earth beneath.

Brave as was Captain Pamphile, and little danger as there was in the phenomenon which he had just witnessed, he had been ill at ease during the time the artificial night reigned. Thus it was with real joy that he welcomed the light, resumed his oar, and began to row, while the rest of Black Snake's followers plucked the pigeons killed by his gun and by their arrows.

Next day the boat passed Montreal, as it had passed Quebec, Black Snake showing that he had no intention whatever of stopping in the town. Far from this, he made a sign to the rowers which guided them to the right bank of the river. This was the dwelling-place of the tribe of Cochenonegas Indians, and their chief, sitting and smoking on the shore, exchanged a few words with Black Serpent in a language which the Captain could not understand. A quarter of an hour afterwards they came to the first rapids of the river. Instead of trying to pass them by punting up with the poles kept in the bottom of the canoe, Black Snake ordered the crew to land, and sprang out himself, followed by Captain Pamphile. The boatmen put the canoe on their shoulders, the crew formed themselves into a caravan, and instead of laboriously pushing their bark up the rushing river, they quietly marched along its bank. In a couple of hours the rapids were past, the canoe was afloat once more, and flying over the surface of the stream.

They had been travelling for about three hours when Captain Pamphile was aroused from his reflections by a joyful cry which came from all except the chief. This exclamation was caused by a new sight, almost as singular as that of the previous day, only this time the miracle was performed, not in the air, but on the water. A band of black squirrels were on the move from east to west, just as the pigeons of the day previous had been emigrating from the south to the north, and were passing across the whole width of the St. Lawrence. Doubtless for some days they had been assembled on the bank and waiting for a favourable wind, for as the stream at this point is over four miles broad, good swimmers though these animals are, they could not possibly have crossed without the help which God had just sent them. In fact, a lovely breeze had been blowing for an hour from the mountain, so that the whole flotilla had started on its voyage, each squirrel spreading its tail as a sail, and only making sufficient use of its feet to keep in the right direction.

As the natives were still fonder of squirrel than they were of pigeon, the crew of the canoe at once prepared to hunt the emigrants; the great chief himself even did not seem to despise this form of recreation. So he took a blow tube, and, opening a small box made of birch-bark beautifully worked with strings of elk hide, took out a score of little arrows scarcely two inches long and fine as steel wire, sharply pointed at one end and having the other end bound with thistle down so as exactly to fit the calibre of the tube from which they were to be propelled. Two Indians prepared similar weapons, two others were told off to row, to Captain Pamphile and the fifth Indian was assigned the duty of collecting the slain and with drawing from their bodies the small missiles with which the Indians hoped to compass their destruction. In ten minutes’ time the boat was brought within range and the sport began.

Captain Pamphile was struck dumb with astonishment; never had he seen such skill displayed. At thirty or forty paces the Indians struck the animals they aimed at, generally in the breast, so that in ten minutes’ time the river was covered for a fairly wide circle round the boat with dead and wounded. When about sixty had been stretched on the battlefield, Black Snake, true to his principles, gave a signal to stop the slaughter. He was obeyed by his men with an alacrity which would have done credit to the discipline of a Prussian squadron, and the fugitives who by this time did not disclaim the use of their legs as well as of their tails, scurried to land with all speed, without the Indians making any attempt at pursuit.

In the meanwhile, short as had been the time thus occupied, a storm had crept up without the Indians noticing its approach, and Captain Pamphile was interrupted before he got half through his task by orders to take part in managing the boat; his share was simply to pull at the fourth oar, so as to land, if possible, as Black Snake hoped, before the storm burst. Unfortunately the wind came directly from the shore they wished to reach, and the waves got up so rapidly that they might have thought themselves out in the open sea before they had gone any distance.

To put a climax to their discomfort, night came on, and the stream was only lit up from time to time by the flashes of lightning; the frail craft was tossed about like a nutshell, first on the top of a wave and then down in the trough, so that it seemed as if every moment she must be swamped. Still they were making some progress, and in spite of the darkness the bank could be seen like a black line, when the canoe, darting forward like an arrow from the crest of a wave, came with a crash on a rock and broke up as if made of glass. Then it was each for himself, and all struggled singly to reach dry land. Black Snake was the first to land; instantly he kindled a fire by rubbing two sticks together, so that his companions might be guided so as to rejoin him. This proved a useful precaution, and in ten minutes the whole company — except Captain Pamphile — was assembled in a circle round the great chief.

CHAPTER XII

HOW CAPTAIN PAMPHILE SPENT TWO VERY EVENTFUL NIGHTS, ONE IN A TREE, THE OTHER IN A HUT

the first night

THANKS to the care we have taken to explain to our readers that Captain Pamphile was a first-class swimmer, they are not likely to have been much disturbed at seeing him with the rest of his fellow-travellers immersed in the river. In any case, we hasten to reassure them by stating that after a deadly struggle of ten minutes' duration he found himself safe and sound on the shore. Scarcely had he shaken the wet off, an operation which, thanks to the paucity of his attire, did not take long, before he saw the fiery beacon Black Snake had raised to rally his attendants. His first step was to turn his back on the flame and to get away from it as quickly as possible. In spite of the delicate attentions which the great chief had lavished on him during the six days passed in his company, Captain Pamphile had constantly cherished the hope that one day or another an opportunity might occur for parting company with him; thus for fear that chance might fail to help him a second time, he took instant advantage of the first opportunity offered, and in spite of the darkness and the storm he plunged into the forest, which extends from the margin of the river to the base of the mountains.

After about two hours' walking, Captain Pamphile, hoping he had put a sufficient distance between himself and his enemies, decided to make a halt and deliberate as to how he might pass the night in the best manner possible.

The position was anything but comfortable. The fugitive found himself with his beaver skin for his sole article of clothing, and it was, moreover, to serve him besides for both bed and bedding. He was shivering beforehand in anticipation of the night he was likely to have, when he heard, from three or four different directions, distant howls which quickly aroused him from this first preoccupation to the thought of another prospect still less to his taste. For in these howls Captain Pamphile could recognize the voices of hungry wolves, which are so common in the forests of North America, that at times, when they are short of food, they will even come out into the streets of Portland or of Boston.

He had not time to form a plan before fresh howls resounded still nearer him; there was not a moment to lose. Captain Pamphile, whose gymnastic education had been sedulously cultivated, included among his talents an aptitude for climbing a tree like a squirrel. He therefore selected an oak of moderate size, embraced its trunk as if to tear it up by the roots, and reached its lowest branches just as the cries which had first warned him sounded for the third time at a distance of less than thirty steps from where he was. The Captain had made no mistake; a pack of wolves, who had been spread over a circle a league in circumference, had scented him and were galloping back towards the centre, where they hoped to find their supper. They arrived too late; Captain Pamphile was on his perch.

Notwithstanding this, the wolves did not consider themselves beaten; nothing is more persevering than an empty stomach; they collected round the tree and began to howl so plaintively that Captain Pamphile, brave as he was, could not, while listening to their mournful, long-drawn cry, help feeling some degree of fear, although he was, as a matter of fact, quite free from all immediate danger. The night was dark, but still not so dark that he could not see through the gloom the brown backs of his enemies, like the waves of a heaving sea: moreover, each time one of them raised its head, Captain Pamphile saw two live coals shining through the darkness, and as the disappointment was general, there were moments when the whole ground below him seemed spangled with flashing carbuncles which, crossing each other as they moved, formed weird and diabolical figures.... But soon, from gazing constantly at the same point, his vision became confused; fantastic shapes took the place of the actual forms beneath; his mind, somewhat shaken by the effect of a sensation never before experienced, ceased to remember the real danger while dreaming of supernatural terrors. A crowd of beings, who were neither men nor beasts, took the place of the familiar quadrupeds surging below him; he seemed to see demons springing up with flaming eyes, holding hands and dancing round and round in a hellish ring. Astride on his branch, like a witch on her broomstick, he saw himself in the middle of an infernal revel in which he, too, was called to take his part.

The Captain felt by instinct that vertigo was dragging him down, and that if he gave in to it, he was lost; with a last effort of will he gathered all the strength of body and mind left to him and lashed himself to the trunk of the tree with the rope which fastened the beaver’s skin to his waist, and clasping his hands together around the branch above him, he laid his head back and shut his eyes.

Then insanity and delirium mastered him completely. Captain Pamphile first felt his tree moving, bending and swaying like the mast of a ship in a heavy sea. Then it seemed as if the tree was trying to drag its roots out of the ground, as a man endeavours to free his feet when caught in a quicksand; after some moments of violent effort the oak succeeded, and from the wound thus made in the earth bubbled up a fountain of blood, which the wolves lapped up greedily. The tree took advantage of their rush round the blood to get away from them, but staggering blindly and moving much as a cripple might hop on his wooden leg. Soon, their thirst assuaged, the wolves, the demons, the vampires, from whom the brave Captain had fancied himself freed, again started in pursuit of him. They were led by an old woman who kept her face hidden and carried a huge knife. The whole hunt went at a mad gallop.

At last the tree, tired, panting, gasping for breath, seemed completely exhausted, and threw itself down like a man utterly spent with fatigue; then the wolves and demons, still headed by the old woman, came fiercely on with their blood-stained tongues and their glowing eyes. The Captain gave a shout of terror and tried to stretch out his arms, but before he could move there came a hissing sound behind him, an icy terror passed over him, he seemed bound by the links of a cold chain which was suffocating him; and then gradually the pressure seemed to relax, the phantoms faded, the howls became stilled, the tree was shaken two or three times more, and then all was once more darkness and silence.

Little by little, thanks to the quiet, Captain Pamphile’s nerves regained their steadiness; his blood, which had been boiling with delirium, cooled down, and his mind, as it became calm, returned from the shadowy region in which it had been wandering to “the actual world of nature; he glanced around him and found himself alone in the midst of the same dark, dreary forest as before. He pinched himself to make sure that he was really in the body, and finally took a calm view of his actual situation; tied to the tree, astride on the branch, he was, if not so comfortable as in his hammock aboard the “Roxelane,” or even on the buffalo hide of the great chief, at any rate safe from the attacks of the wolves. They, moreover, had left him, at least for a time. In looking down to the foot of the trunk the Captain thought there was something rolling and moving about around it, but as the faint noises he seemed to hear soon ceased entirely and the fancied movements ended at the same time, Captain Pamphile made rip his mind that this last fancy was only a delusion left by the impression of his horrible dream; and finally, breathless, sweating from every pore, tired to death, at last he dropped off into a slumber as deep and quiet as the precarious nature of his sleeping-place would allow.

Captain Pamphile was aroused at sunrise by the twittering of a thousand birds of different kinds flying about gaily among the waving branches of the tree tops. He opened his eyes, and they rested on the wide arches of verdure which stretched above him, pierced at intervals by the first rays of the rising sun. He was not a devout man by nature, but he had, like all sailors, that feeling of the grandeur and power of God which is developed in the hearts of all those who work on the boundless ocean. His first thought then was to render thanks to Him who holds the world, sleeping or waking, in the hollow of His hand; then after thus instinctively keeping his eyes upturned to heaven for a short time, he turned them to earth, and at the first glance downwards all the strange events of the night became explained to him.

For twenty paces round the oak the ground was trampled and scored by the claws of the wolves, as if a cart had been driven round and round, while at the base of the tree one of these animals, crushed and shapeless, was hanging half out of the jaws of an enormous boa constrictor, whose tail was bound about the tree seven or eight feet above the base. Captain Pamphile had been hanging between two dangers which had counteracted each other: under his feet the wolves, above his head the serpent. The hissing he had heard, the cold compression he had felt, were the sound of the serpent’s voice, and the cold of his coils winding round him. The sight of the reptile had frightened away his carnivorous foes, with the exception of one, which, entangled in the coils of the monster, had been crushed to death. The swaying of the tree which the Captain had experienced was caused by the struggles of the victim. Then, when the reptile conquered, he proceeded to devour his prey, and, as is the habit of the tribe, he swallowed half and left the rest of the body exposed, awaiting its turn for gradual deglutition, Captain Pamphile stayed for a moment looking at the sight below. Many times, in Africa or in India, he had seen similar serpents, but never under circumstances so fitted to impress him; thus, although he knew that, as the reptile was now, it was quite incapable of doing any harm to him, he considered how he might get down without descending by the trunk. Therefore he first untied the rope by which he was lashed, then, crawling backwards along the branch until it gave beneath his weight, he trusted to its spring and let himself hang by his hands so that his feet reached far enough down for him to drop without fear of serious harm. As he hoped, when he let go, he found himself safe on the ground.

He moved off without delay, looking back more than once. He walked in the direction of the sun. There was no track in the forest to guide him, but with the hunter's instinct and the sailor's knowledge he needed only a glance at the earth and a look at the sky to keep his direction exactly. Thus he walked boldly on, as if he were quite at home in this vast wilderness; the farther he got into the depths of the forest, the more wild and grand its character became. Gradually the leafy vault grew thicker and thicker until it was quite impervious to the sun. The trees shot up closer and closer together, straight and upright as the shafts of pillars, and bearing like pillars a roof impervious to light. Even the wind blowing over the dome of verdure failed to penetrate the shades below; since the creation of the world all this part of the forest had slept in an eternal twilight. By the dim light of this semi-night Captain Pamphile saw large birds whose species he could not make out, and flying squirrels springing and leaping lightly and noiselessly from branch to branch. In these gloomy vistas all nature seemed to have lost its natural colour and to have assumed the tints of nocturnal moths; a hind, a hare, and a fox which fled from the sound of the steps which invaded their abode, all three seemed to have adopted the monotonous and uniform colour of the mosses over which they travelled without a sound. From time to time Captain Pamphile stopped, startled by what he saw; great yellow fungi, growing one over the other like the bosses of shields-, took shape and colour so like crouching lions that, although he knew well that the king of creation was not to be met with in this part of his domain, he still trembled at the evidence of his eyes.

Great climbing parasitic plants, which seemed to gasp for breath, twined about the trees, grew high among their tops, hung to the branches in festoons till they touched the roof. Through this they seemed to glide like serpents, reaching up to spread their scarlet, perfumed crowns to the light of the sun, while such flowers as were obliged to bloom half-way up grew pale, scentless, sickly, as if jealous of the happiness of their friends basking in the brilliant day and in the smiles of God.

About two o’clock Captain Pamphile was reminded by a certain feeling of emptiness in the region of his stomach that not only had he had no supper, but that his usual breakfast hour was passed. He looked around; birds flew from branch to branch and flying foxes sprang from tree to tree as if they had been accompanying him on his march; but he had neither gun nor blowpipe with which to kill them. He tried flinging stones at them, but a very few essays convinced him that the exercise was more likely to increase his hunger than to bring him the means of satisfying it. So he decided to fall back on the vegetable world in default of an animal diet. This time his search was better rewarded. After hunting about carefully for some time in the twilight of the forest he found two or three roots of the cyperus tribe and a few of the plants commonly known as Carib cabbages.

Thus he had procured all he wanted to satisfy the first craving of hunger; but Captain Pamphile was a man who liked to provide for the future. He reflected that as soon as he had assuaged the pangs of hunger, he was likely to feel those of thirst; so he began to search for a stream, as he had searched for roots. Unfortunately water seemed harder to find than food.

He listened carefully; no murmur reached his ear. He sniffed the air, to catch any indication of the presence of water. But there was no stir or breath of wind under this gigantic roof, vast as it was. Under its canopy there was a heavy, thick atmosphere which even the animals and the plants, obliged to grow in its shade, seemed to breathe with difficulty, as if it had scarcely vigour enough in it to support life.

Then Captain Pamphile adopted another plan. He picked up a sharp pebble, and, instead of continuing a useless quest, he went from tree to tree, examining each trunk carefully, till he seemed to have found what he was looking for. It was a noble maple, young, supple, and strong. He encircled it with his left arm, while with his right he drove the pebble into the bark. Some drops of that precious vegetable blood, from which the Canadians make a better sugar than that of the cane, at once gushed out as if from a wound. Captain Pamphile, satsified with his experiment, sat quietly down at the foot of his victim, and began his breakfast; and when he had finished, he put his parched lips to the wound from which the sap was now running like a fountain, and then went his way fresher and stronger than ever.

About five o’clock in the evening Captain Pamphile thought he saw some rays of light breaking through the leafy canopy; he stepped out more vigorously at the sight and reached the edge of this forest, which, like that of Dante, seemed to belong neither to life nor to death, but to some nameless power intermediate between the two. He seemed as if bathed in an ocean of light; he plunged into its waves, gilded, as they were, by the rays of the setting sun, as a diver, long held at the bottom of the sea by a branch of coral or the tentacles of a cuttlefish, when he gets free from the deadly obstacle, springs up to the surface and breathes free air again.

He had reached one of those vast meadows interspersed like lakes of vegetation and light among the spreading forests of the New World on the far side of the clearing another line of trees stretched like a dark and solid wall, while above it again could be seen the snowy summits, floating in the last rays of the departing day, of the mountains whose chain bisects the length of the peninsula.

The Captain looked about him with satisfaction; for he saw that he had not wandered from his path.

At last his eye was caught by a white and wavy cloud which mounted from the depths below towards the sky. It did not take him long to discern that it was the smoke from a hut, or to decide that, whether it held friend or foe, he would march on it, the memory of the night he had just passed strongly influencing his decision.

THE SECOND NIGHT

Captain Pamphile found a small pathway which seemed to lead from the forest to the hut. He followed it, although it was not without a certain amount of fear lest he should encounter an adder or a rattlesnake, common reptiles in these parts, that he walked between the high and tufted grasses.

As he drew near the smoke which guided him, he got a view of the hut situated at the junction of the plain and forest. Night overtook him before he reached it, but his path was the more easy to find and keep.

The door was open towards the traveller, and opposite the door inside the hut burned a fire which seemed kindled as a beacon on purpose to guide his solitary steps. From time to time a form passed and repassed before the flame, showing black against the hearth.

When somewhat nearer, he saw that it was the figure of a woman, and advanced with fresh confidence; at last he stepped on to the threshold and asked whether there was room for him by the fire which he had seen from so far and had wished for so long.

A species of grunt, which the Captain interpreted as a sign of assent, answered his question. Accordingly, he entered without further hesitation, and sat down on an old stool which seemed to be awaiting his coming at a convenient distance from the fire.

On the other side of the hearth, his elbows on his knees, and his head in his hands, motionless, and still as a statue crouched a young Red Indian of the Sioux tribe; his long maple-wood bow lay near, and at his feet were several pigeons and small quadrupeds which had been killed by his arrows. Neither the arrival nor the actions of Pamphile seemed to rouse him from the appearance of apathy which the savage employs to conceal his perpetual distrust of civilized man; for the young Sioux had recognized the traveller to be a European by the mere sound of his footfall. Captain Pamphile, for his part, watched him with the careful manner which a man adopts when he knows that for one chance of meeting a friend there are ten of coming across an enemy. Then, as his scrutiny showed him nothing but what he saw at first, and as that left him in uncertainty, he decided to begin a conversation with him.

“Is my brother asleep,” he asked, “that he does not even raise his head at the entry of a friend?”

The Indian shuddered, and without answering except in dumb show, he raised his face and pointed with his finger to one of his eyes, hanging by a sinew to its socket, and from the hole left by it a stream of blood falling down over his chest. Then, without a single word or a single groan, he let his head fall back into his hands once more.

An arrow had just broken as he was bending his bow, and one of the splinters of the shaft had flown back into the young Indian’s eye. Captain Pamphile saw at a glance what had happened, and addressed no more questions to him, respecting the strength of mind of this heroic native of the wilderness. Then he turned again to the woman.

“The traveller is weary and hungry: can his mother give him a meal and a bed?”

“There is a cake baked in the embers, and in the corner there is a bear’s skin; my son may eat one and then sleep on the other.”

“Have you nothing else?” continued Captain Pamphile, who, after the frugal meal he had made in the forest, would not have been sorry to get a better supper.

“Certainly, I have something else,” said the old woman, coming forward with a quick step, and fixing her greedy eyes upon the gold chain by which the watch was hung, which had been returned to him by the great chief. “I have... My son has a fine chain there!... I have salt buffalo and good venison. I should be very glad to get a chain like that.”

“Very well, bring your salt buffalo and your venison pasty,” answered Captain Pamphile, avoiding a direct promise or refusal to the request of the old woman. “Then if you have, in some corner or other, a bottle of maple rum, it would not be out of place, I think, in such good company.”

The old woman went away, turning her head from time to time to stare at the bauble which she coveted so much; then at last, raising a reed screen, she went through into another part of the hut. Scarcely had she gone, when the young Sioux quickly raised his head.

“Does my brother know where he is?” said he in Subdued tones to the Captain.

“‘Faith, I do not,” said the latter carelessly.

“Has my brother any weapon to defend himself with?” continued he, speaking still lower.

“None,” said the Captain.

“If that is so, let my brother take this knife and keep awake.”

“And for yourself?” said the Captain, hesitating to accept the proffered weapon.

“I have my tomahawk. Hush!”

With these words, the young native dropped his head into his hands again and resumed his motionless pose, as the old woman again lifted the curtain and came in, carrying the supper. The Captain concealed the knife in his waistcloth; the old woman again looked at the watch.

“My son,” said she, “met a white man on the warpath; he slew the white man and took his chain; then he rubbed it till he had removed the bloodstains. That is why it shines so brightly.”

“My mother is mistaken,” said Captain Pamphile, beginning to suspect the unknown danger of which the Indian had warned him. “I ascended the Ottawa River as far as Lake Superior to hunt buffaloes and beavers; then, after collecting many skins, I exchanged half for fire-water and half for this watch, in the town.”

“I have two sons,” said the old woman, patting the rum and meat on the table, “who have been hunting buffalo and beaver for ten years, and never have they been able to take enough skins into the town to buy a chain like that. My son says he is hungry and thirsty; my son may eat and drink.”

“Does not my prairie brother want supper?” said Captain Pamphile to the young Sioux, drawing his stool up to the table.

“. Pain is nourishment,” said the young hunter, without stirring: “I feel neither hunger nor thirst; I am weary and will sleep. May the Great Spirit watch over my brother!”

“How many beaver skins did my son give for that watch?” interrupted the old woman, returning again to her favourite subject.

“Fifty,” said Captain Pamphile, without thinking, and bravely attacking a buffalo steak.

“I have by me ten bear skins and twenty beaver; I give them to my son for the chain alone.”

“The chain goes with the watch,” replied the Captain. “They cannot be separated; moreover, I do not wish to part with either.”

“Very well,” said the old woman, with the smile of a witch, “let my son keep them! Every living man is master of his own property. It is only the dead man who can own nothing.”

Captain Pamphile gave a quick glance at the young Indian, but he seemed sound asleep. He then turned again to his supper and did as much justice to it as if he had been in a far less precarious position. Having finished his repast, he threw an armful of wood on the fire and stretched himself on the buffalo rug spread in one corner, not with a view of going to sleep, but to disarm all suspicion on the part of the old woman, who had again withdrawn to the inner room and disappeared from view.

A few moments after Captain Pamphile had lain down, the curtain was gently lifted, and the ugly head of the hag appeared, fixing eager eyes first on one, then on the other of the sleepers. Seeing that neither moved, she came into the room and crossed to the entrance door of the hut, where she listened as if expecting some one else. But as no sound fell on her ear, she turned inwards again, and as if she feared to waste time, she took from the walls of the hut a long kitchen knife, mounted cross-legged on the frame of a grindstone, and turning it with her foot, began carefully to sharpen her weapon. Captain Pamphile watched the water falling drop by drop on the whetstone, and did not lose one of the motions which the flickering flame of the fire illuminated.

The preliminaries spoke for themselves; the Captain furtively drew his knife from his girdle, felt the point with his finger, passed his thumb along the edge, and, satisfied with the trial, he awaited events, lying quiet and apparently in deep and calm sleep. The old woman went on with her devilish occupation, but at last she stopped suddenly and listened. The sound she heard came nearer; she got up with a spring, as if the thought of murder had restored all the activity of youth to her withered limbs, hung the knife up again on the wall, and went to the door. This time, her long-expected confederates actually arrived, and, making a sign to them to hurry, she re-entered the hut and again took a look at her guests. Neither of them had stirred, and, to all appearance, both were in a deep sleep.

Close behind her came two young braves of tall stature and powerful build; they carried a stag on their shoulders which they had just killed. They halted and gazed silently with threatening looks at the guests whom they found in their cottage, and one of them asked his mother in English what she meant by allowing these brutes of savages to come here. The old woman put her finger to her lips; the hunters threw down their venison at Captain Pamphile’s feet. They disappeared behind the screen followed by their mother, who took with her the maple rum, which her guest had scarcely touched, and the hut was left to the two sleepers.

Captain Pamphile remained as he was for some seconds without moving; no sound was heard but the quiet, regular respirations of the Indian: his breathing was so perfectly natural that the Captain began to think that, instead of pretending to be asleep, he was really so. Then, doing his best to follow the pattern he had before him, he turned over, as if actuated by one of those spasmodic movements which the wakeful brain imposes on the sleeping body, and thus, instead of keeping his face to the wall, he lay with it turned towards the Indian.

After lying thus for a moment, he half opened his eyes; he saw that the young Sioux was still in the same position, except that his head was only supported by his left hand; the other hand was hanging by his side and thus rested close to the shaft of his tomahawk.

Just then a slight sound was heard, and the Indian’s fingers closed round his weapon; so the Captain saw that, like himself, the young man was watching and waiting his chance to meet the common peril.

Soon the screen was raised a little, and the two young Indians glided out one after the other, crawling silently like a couple of snakes. Behind them appeared the old woman, her body still remaining in the darkness of the inner chamber. Evidently she thought there was no need to take an active part in the coming scene, but she wanted to be ready, in case of need, to encourage the assassins with gesture and voice.

The youths got up slowly and silently without losing sight of the Indian and Captain Pamphile. One carried a curved blade, sharp as a razor on its inner edge; -he was making straight for the Indian, when his brother made signs to him to wait till he also was armed. In fact, he went to the wall on tip-toe and took the knife. Then they exchanged a last glance of intelligence, and both sought their mother's eyes with a questioning look.

"They are asleep," whispered the hag, "go on!"

The young men obeyed, each going to the victim he had chosen. One raised his arm to strike the Indian, the other bent over Captain Pamphile with his knife raised to stab.

Simultaneously the two assassins staggered back, each with a cry of pain on his lips; the Captain had buried his knife to the hilt in the breast of one, and the other's skull has been split in two by the Indian's tomahawk. Both stood on their feet for a moment, swaying about like drunken men, while the travellers instinctively drew together; then the youths fell outwards like two saplings torn up by the roots from the ground. As they fell the hag gave vent to an oath, and the Sioux to a shout of triumph; a second more, and he dashed into the inner room, taking his bowstring with him. Soon he returned dragging the old woman by her hair, and, taking her outside the hut, he bound her firmly to a young birch-tree growing about ten paces from the door. Then he re-entered-with a spring like a tiger's, picked up the knife dropped by one of the assassins, and with its point tried if there was any life in their bodies. As neither of them gave any signs of vitality he motioned Captain Pamphile to leave the hut. The latter obeyed mechanically, and the young Sioux then took a blazing pine torch from the hearth, set fire to the four angles of the hut, came out with the firebrand in his hand, began to circle round the burning cabin in a strange dance, singing the while a song of victory.

Notwithstanding the Captain's familiarity with scenes of violence, his whole attention was aroused by this one. Indeed, the locality, the loneliness, the danger through which he had just passed, all gave the act of justice which was being carried out a peculiar character of wild vengeance. He had often heard, as a matter of common report, that in the district lying between the Falls of Niagara and the Atlantic seaboard, it was the recognized law that the dwellings of murderers should be burned to the ground; but he had never been present at an execution of the kind.

Leaning against a tree, as still and rigid as if bound and strangled himself, he watched a black, dense smoke pouring out from every opening, and tongues of flame dancing like reddened lance-points along the roof; soon columns of blazing fire arose, driven before the wind, now curling aloft like serpents, now floating out like streamers. As the flames rose and fell, the young Indian, like the demon of the conflagration, circled round, dancing and singing without a pause. In a few moments, all the flames became one and formed an immense bonfire, throwing its light for half a league around, stretching on one side across the broad green plain, on the other losing itself in the vaulted depths of the forest. At last, the heat became so great that the old woman, tied ten paces from the fire, began to shriek with pain. Suddenly the roof fell in, a column of fire like the eruption of a volcano shot up,-sending a million sparks aloft; then, one by one, the walls fell in, and at each fall the light and heat of the fire diminished. The darkness conquered bit by bit the ground it had lost, and at last there remained nothing of the accursed hut but a mass of burning embers, covering the corpses of the murderers with a glowing tomb.

Then the dance and chant of the native ceased, and, lighting from his torch a second pine branch, he handed it to the Captain.

“Now,” said he, “where is my brother going?”

“To Philadelphia,” answered Captain Pamphile. “Very well, let my brother follow, and I will be his guide till he reaches the border of the forest.”

With these words, the young Sioux plunged into the depths of the wood, leaving the hag, half consumed, by the side of the smoking embers of her cabin.

Captain Pamphile, with a last look at the scene of desolation, followed his young and courageous fellow-traveller. At the break of day they arrived at the edge of the forest and the foot of the mountains; there the Sioux stopped.

“My brother has reached his destination,” said he; “from the top of these hills he will see Philadelphia. Now, may the Great Spirit be with my brother! “Captain Pamphile considered what recompense he could make to the native for his devotion; and as he had nothing but his watch to give, he began to take it off, but his companion stopped him.

“My brother owes me nothing,” he said; “after a fight with the Hurons, the Young Elk was taken prisoner and transported to the neighbourhood of Lake Superior. He was already bound to the stake; the men had their knives drawn to scalp him, and the women and children were dancing and singing his death-song, when some soldiers, born, like my brother, on the other side of the great salt water, drove off the Hurons, and saved the Young Elk. I owed my life to them, and I have saved yours. When you meet these soldiers, you will tell them that I have paid my debt.”

With these words, the young Indian turned back into the forest. Captain Pamphile followed him with the eye as long as he was in sight; then, after he was lost to view, our worthy sailor tore up a young ebony sapling to serve as a walking-stick and weapon, and started to climb the mountains.

The Young Elk had not lied: on reaching the crest, he saw Philadelphia before him, sitting like a queen between the green waters of the Delaware and the blue waves of Ocean.

CHAPTER XIII

HOW CAPTAIN PAMPHILE MET TOM’S MOTHER ON THE BANKS OF THE DELAWARE, AND WHAT BEFELL IN CONSEQUENCE

Although he estimated by eye the distance to Philadelphia from where he was at two good days’ travel, Captain Pamphile continued his journey with all his energy, only stopping from time to time to look for birds’ eggs and edible roots; as for water, he had soon come on the upper springs of the Delaware, and the stream, flowing full to its banks, relieved him from all anxiety on that score.

He thus marched on gaily, in sight of the rest he craved after so much toil, enjoying the wonderful scenery which opened on his view, and in that happy frame of mind which the traveller feels who regrets nothing but the want of a friend to whom he can unburden the overflowing well of his thoughts. As he reached the top of a small hill, he thought he saw, half a league ahead of him, a small black object coming to meet him. He tried for a moment to make out what it was, but the distance being too great, he walked on, without troubling more about it, and the ground being very broken, he soon lost sight of it. He went on then, whistling an air which was popular at that period on the Cannebière, and twirling his stick round and round like a windmill, till the same object reappeared some hundred of yards nearer. This time the Captain himself was seen and examined by the new personage we have just introduced, much as he was observing the latter. Captain Pamphile made a kind of telescope of his hand, looked at him through the improvised tube, and saw that it was a negro.

This meeting seemed the more happy, as the Captain had no wish to pass a third night similar to the two preceding ones, and hoped to get some information from him about a resting-place and bed; he stepped out, therefore, quicker than before, regretting that the undulations of the ground prevented him from keeping his new acquaintance in sight, but hoping to be able to meet and question him on the brow of a small hill which seemed about half-way between himself and the place where he last saw the figure. Captain Pamphile’s strategic calculations proved to be perfectly correct; on the top of the hill he came face to face with the person he wanted to meet. Only, the hue of the person in question had deceived the Captain’s eye. It was not a negro he confronted, but a bear.

Captain Pamphile’s rapid glance told him at once in how great danger he stood; but we are saying nothing fresh when we state that the Captain was just the man to grasp and meet on the instant the perils of a situation like this. A cursory glance around showed him at once that there was no hope of avoiding the encounter. On the left flowed the river between high banks, too swift to be practicable to a swimmer, except at the risk of a greater danger than that confronting him on the bank; on the right hand were pointed rocks, practicable for lizards, but inaccessible to all other terrestrial animals; behind and before, a road, or rather a path, about as broad as that on which Oedipus met Laïus.

For his part, the animal had come to a standstill about ten paces from Captain Pamphile, seeming himself to be taking stock of the situation with great care.

Captain Pamphile had, during his life, come across many cowards carrying brave faces, and he augured from this halt that perhaps the bear was as much afraid of him as he was of the bear. He moved on to meet him, the bear did the same; Captain Pamphile began to think he had made a mistake in his conjectures, and halted. The bear continued to advance. Thus his doubts were cleared up for certain. It was obviously not the bear that was afraid. Captain Pamphile turned on his left heel, so as to leave the way clear for his adversary, and began to retreat. He had not taken three paces before he was stopped by the scarped rocks. He placed his back against them, so as to avoid being taken in rear, and awaited events.

The development was speedy. The bear, which was of the largest kind, advanced by the path up to the point where Captain Pamphile had left it; then he turned exactly at the same angle as the able strategist with whom he had to deal, and made straight for him. The situation was indeed critical; the place was solitary; there was no help to be hoped for from any one for the Captain: his sole weapon was his stick, which was but a poor arm of defence. The bear was not two paces from him. He raised his stick.... But lo! as he did so, the bear stood up on his hind legs, and... began to dance.

It was a trained bear, which had broken its chain and escaped from New York, where it had had the honour of performing before Mr. Jackson, the President of the United States.

Captain Pamphile, reassured by the terpsichorean performance of his enemy, now saw that the latter was muzzled and had a piece of broken chain hanging round his neck. He at once calculated how much a man, reduced as he was to penury, could profit by such a happy adventure, and as neither his birth nor his education was such as to give rise to false aristocratic fancies, he thought the trade of a bear-leader very much more honourable than many others he had seen carried on by some of his fellow-countrymen in France and abroad. Thus, he took the end of the dancer’s rope, hit him a blow with his stick on the snout, to make him understand it was-time to finish his minuet, and then resumed his journey towards Philadelphia, leading him in a leash as if he had been a retriever.

In the evening, as he was crossing an open prairie, he noticed that his bear stopped in front of certain plants which were unknown to him. The wandering life which he had led had taught him to study carefully the instincts of animals. He presumed that these constant halts must have an object; so the next time the animal showed a disposition to stop, Captain Pamphile halted too, and gave him time to develop his intentions. He had not long to wait for a reward; the bear scraped up the ground; then, in a few moments he uncovered a bunch of roots which looked quite appetizing. Captain Pamphile tasted them; they combined the flavour of truffles and potatoes.

The discovery was valuable; and so he allowed his bear full time to look for more; in an hour’s time they had gathered sufficient to provide both man and beast with supper.

After the repast, Captain Pamphile looked out for a solitary tree, and when he had satisfied himself that not even the smallest of reptiles was concealed in the foliage, he tied the bear to the trunk and used him as a short ladder for getting into the lower branches. Having climbed up, he made himself safe as he had done in the forest; only this night he was left in perfect peace, the wolves being kept at a distance by the scent of the bear.

Next morning, Captain Pamphile awoke calm and refreshed. His first thought was for his bear, which, he found, was sleeping quietly at the foot of the tree. Captain Pamphile went down and woke him up. Then the pair amicably started on the road to Philadelphia, where they arrived about eleven o’clock at night. Captain Pamphile had marched like Jack the Giant-Killer’s ogre.

He searched about for an inn, but he could not find a single landlord who was willing at that hour of night to find room for a bear and an Indian savage. Thus he was already beginning to think himself worse off in the capital of Pennsylvania than he had been in the forests of the St. Lawrence, when he saw a brilliantly illumined tavern, from which there flowed such a torrent of laughter, rattle of glasses, songs and oaths, that he saw there must be some ship’s company inside that had just been paid off. Forthwith hope returned to the Captain’s heart. Either he was quite ignorant of the ways of the sailor, or else within there was waiting for him wine, money, and a bed — the three things he most longed for in his present situation. Thus he was going in with confidence, when all of a sudden he stopped short, as if he had been nailed in his tracks.

In the midst of the uproar of shouts, oaths, and general rowdiness, he seemed to recognize, in one of the drunken songs, a familiar Provençal air. He stopped dead, listening with all his ears, so improbable did it seem that he had heard aright. But soon, when the refrain was taken up in chorus, he had no doubt whatever that he had his own countrymen before him. He then advanced a little farther and stopped again; but this time the expression of his face was that of such supreme astonishment that it bordered on idiocy; not only were the men natives of Southern France, not only was the song a song of Provence, but the man who was singing it was Policar! The crew of the “Roxelane “were spending the proceeds of her voyage at Philadelphia.

Captain Pamphile took the situation in at a glance, and made up his mind what to do; thanks to the barber and the painter commissioned by Black Snake, he was so well disguised that his most familiar friend would not have known him. He boldly opened the door and entered the room with his bear. A general shout of welcome greeted the new-comers.

Captain Pamphile had but one cause for doubt; he had forgotten to ask his bear for a rehearsal, so that he had not the faintest notion as to what the animal could do; but the intelligent beast made out his own programme at once. The instant he got inside, he began to trot round the room to clear a ring for his performance. The sailors took their places on the forms and benches. Policar took the chair, and the performance began. There was nothing in the world which a bear could be taught that Captain Pamphile’s bear did not know; he danced the minuet like Vestris, he rode a broomstick like a wizard, he pointed out the most drunken man in the room in a way which would have shamed the learned ass. Thus, when the performance was over, there was such a unanimous shout of applause that Policar declared he would buy the bear at any price from its owner, to make it a present to the ship's company. His proposition was received with a shout of acclamation. The offer was then renewed in a formal manner; Captain Pamphile asked ten crowns for his beast. Policar, who was in a generous mood, gave him fifteen, and, paying the money down, he became the owner of the animal on the spot. As for Captain Pamphile, he left the auditorium at the commencement of the first part of the second performance without his departure being noticed or his identity being suspected by any one of the sailors. Our readers have sufficient intelligence to understand for themselves the cause of Captain Pamphile's disappearance. Nevertheless, that no sort of doubt may remain as to the actual facts, we will give a full and complete explanation, suited to all who from indolence or any other motive may be disinclined to hazard a conjecture.

Captain Pamphile had lost no time. From the moment he entered the tavern, he had kept one eye on the performance of his bear, while with the other he counted the number of the sailors. All were in the tavern from the first to the last. It was thus certain that not one man was on board ship. Double-Bouche alone was absent from the assembly, and Captain Pamphile guessed from that fact-that he had been left on board the “Roxelane “for fear the ship might take it into her head to set sail on her own account for Marseilles. Following out his train of reasoning, Captain Pamphile made for the sea-front, walking down Water Street, which runs parallel to the quay.

On arriving at the harbour, he took a look at all the vessels in the anchorage, and, in spite of the darkness, he recognized five hundred yards or so away the “Roxelane “riding gracefully on the flowing tide. Not a light was visible, not a thing to show that there was a living soul on board. Captain Pamphile's conjectures were perfectly correct, and without a moment's hesitation he plunged head first into the river and swam silently out to the vessel.

Captain Pamphile swam twice round the “Roxelane “to make sure that no one was on the look out; then he slipped under the bowsprit, got hold of the rope ladder, and began to climb it, stopping at each step to listen for any sound. All remained quiet; Captain Pamphile took his last step upwards and was on the deck of his ship. Then he began to breathe freely once more; he was at home at last.

The first thing Captain Pamphile wanted was a change of raiment. The dress he wore was a little too near that of nature, and might lead to a mistake in his identity. So he went down to his old cabin and found everything was in its former place, just as if nothing unusual had happened. The only change was that Policar had brought his own things in there, and like the tidy man he was, had stowed away those of Captain Pamphile in a trunk. So little had the furniture been disturbed that on Captain Pamphile feeling with his hand in the place where he used to keep his piece of phosphorus, he found it at once, and at the ninth attempt he was successful in obtaining a light. He forthwith proceeded to dress; it was a great feat accomplished in having recovered his vessel, but this was not enough; he had also to regain his own face, and that was more difficult. The great chief's artist had done his work conscientiously. Captain Pamphile nearly left the skin of his face on his towel. But at last he got rid of his foreign decorations, and by diligent rubbing our worthy mariner managed to reduce his face to personal ornaments only. Then he looked at himself in a small mirror, and although careless as a rule of appearances, he experienced some pleasure in again seeing himself as he had formerly been.

Having got through the first transformation, the remainder of his task became perfectly easy of accomplishment. Captain Pamphile opened his chest, drew on his trousers, which were striped lengthways, buttoned his waistcoat, which was striped crossways, put on his back his jacket, which was striped both ways, took down his straw hat from the peg on which it hung, wound his red sash round his waist, stuck his silver-mounted pistols in his belt, extinguished the light, and went up on deck. There he found, as before, solitude and silence. Double-Bouche was still invisible, just as if he was wearing the ring of Gyges and had turned the bezel inwards.

Fortunately Captain Pamphile knew the habits of his subordinate, and also where to look for him when he was not in his proper place. In fact, going straight down the kitchen companion, stepping carefully lest the steps should creak, he saw through the half-closed door Double-Bouche getting ready his own supper and cooking for that purpose a steak of cod *à la maître d'hôtel.* It seemed that the cod was just done as Captain Pamphile arrived, for Double-Bouche laid his table and put his fish on a plate. He put the plate on the table and took up his mug. Finding it nearly empty, and fearing he might want some more liquor in the middle of his repast, he went out by the door leading to the caboose to fill it up. Supper was thus left all ready. Captain Pamphile was hungry, so he went in and sat down to eat it.

It may be because the Captain had not tasted European cooking for a whole fortnight, or perhaps because Double-Bouche really was an artist in the trade he so much enjoyed practising, at any rate the former found the supper excellent, although it had not been prepared for him, and acted accordingly. He was well engaged in enjoying it, when he heard a scream behind him; turning his head he saw Double-Bouche in the middle of the doorway pale and terror-struck he took Captain Pamphile for a ghost, although the said Captain was engaged in an occupation which we believe is peculiar to the inhabitants of the world of flesh and blood.

“Well, stupid,” said the Captain, without interrupting his meal, “come, come, what are you thinking about? Don’t you see I am choking with thirst? Come, quick, something to drink!”

Double-Bouche’s knees trembled and his teeth chattered.

“Who am I speaking to?” continued the Captain, holding out his glass. “Come, now! are you going to bring me something or not?”

Double-Bouche came forward much as if he was walking to the scaffold, and tried to obey; but in his terror he poured half the wine into -the glass and half over the edge of it. Captain Pamphile affected not to notice this clumsiness, and he placed the glass to his lips. Then, after tasting its contents, he smacked his lips.

“By Gad!” he said, “you seem to know where to go. And where did you draw this wine from, eh, Mister Butler?”

“Why!” answered Double-Bouche, nearly fainting with fright, “why from the third cask on the left.”

“Ah, precisely! Château-Laffitte; so you like Lafitte?... I ask you, do you like Lafitte? Answer my question, if you please.”

“Why, certainly,” answered Double-Bouche, “certainly, sir, only...

“Only! You mean it does not go well with water? Very well, my lad, then have some without water.”

He took the pannikin from Double-Bouche, poured out another glass of wine and handed it him. Double-Bouche took it, hesitated a little, and then, taking a desperate resolution, at last, —

“Your very good health, sir!” said the boy, and swallowed the bumper without once taking his eyes off the Captain. The tonic took immediate effect, and Double-Bouche regained a little confidence.

"Well," said the Captain, who saw with pleasure this physical and moral improvement in Double-Bouche, "now that I know your taste for cod *à la maître d'hôtel* and your liking for Château-Lafïitte, suppose we talk over our own little affairs. What has gone on since I left the vessel?"

"Well, first, Captain, they promoted Policar in your place."

"Fancy that!"

"Then they decided to sail for Philadelphia, instead of going straight for Marseilles, and to sell half the cargo there. So they sold it, and for the past three days they have been eating as much of the proceeds. as they could not drink, and have been drinking as much as they could not eat."

"Yes, yes," said the Captain. "I saw them at work."

"That's all, sir."

"Egad? But it is quite enough for me. And when are they to sail?"

"To-morrow."

"To-morrow? Then it was about time I came back! Now hark'ee, Double-Bouche, my lad; you like good soup?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good beef?"

"Better still."

"Fat poultry?"

"Rather."

"And good Château-Laffitte?"

"I'd give my life for it."

"Well, Double-Bouche, I hereby appoint you chief cook of the brig "Roxelane," pay to be a hundred crowns a year, and a twentieth share in the profits."

"Really and truly?" said Double-Bouche. "Will you swear to it?"

"I will, by my word of honour."

"It's a bargain I accept gladly. What have I got to do to earn my pay?"

"You've got to hold your tongue.". "That's easy enough."

"Not to tell a soul I'm alive."

"Good!"

"And in case their departure is delayed, to bring to my hiding-place a slice or two of this capital cod and a bottle of this excellent Laffitte."

"Certainly. And where are you going to hide, sir?"

“In the powder magazine, so that I can blow you all sky-high in case things don’t go as I wish.”

“Very good, sir; I will try not to displease you.”

“Then the thing is settled?’

“Yes, sir.”

“And you will bring me twice a day some Bordeaux and codfish?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Very well; good evening to you.”

“Good evening, sir! Good evening! A good night’s rest to you, sir!”

These reiterated good wishes were all but superfluous. Our worthy sailor, strong as he was, could scarcely keep his eyes open, so, as soon as he got into the powder magazine and had shut the door from inside, he made himself a sort of bed between two casks and adjusted a smaller barrel to serve as a pillow, and was asleep almost before he lay down. He slept as soundly as if he had never been obliged, owing to circumstances we have narrated, to leave his vessel, and he never woke or moved for twelve solid hours.

When he came to himself he felt, by the motion of the ship, that the “Roxelane “was under way. During his sleep the ship had got up anchor and was dropping down to the open sea, unsuspicious of the addition to her crew which she had on board. In the midst of the noise and confusion which always occur at sailing, Captain Pamphile heard a scratching at the door of his hiding-place; this was Double-Bouche bringing his food.

“Well, my boy,” said the Captain, “here we are — off!”

“As you see, she is moving.”

“And where are we bound?”

“To Nantes.”

“And where are we?”

“Off Reedy Island.”

“Good. They are all aboard?”

“Yes, all.”

“And they have not recruited anybody?”

“Yes, they have — a bear.”

“And when shall we be at sea?”

“Oh! this evening; wind and stream are with us, and at Bombay Hook we shall catch the ebbtide.”‘

“Very good. And what’s the time?”

"Ten o'clock."

"I am quite satisfied with your intelligence and punctuality, and I add another hundred livres to your pay."

"Thank'ee, sir."

"And now, off with you — smart's the word! — and bring me my dinner at six o'clock."

Double-Bouche made a sign that he would be punctual and went out enchanted with the Captain's manners. Ten minutes afterwards, as the Captain was finishing his breakfast, he heard Double-Bouche crying. From the regularity of the sounds he at once recognized them as produced by the blows of the rope's end. He counted twenty-five stripes, not without a feeling of insecurity for himself, for he had a presentiment that he was interested in some way in the chastisement administered to his purveyor. But as the cries ceased, without indication of any unusual event occurring on board, and as the "Roxelane "continued her course as before, his disquiet was soon allayed.

At the end of an hour more he knew from the roll of the vessel that she must be off Bombay Hook, the swell of the tides having taken the place of the river's current. So the day passed. About seven o'clock in the evening there was again a scratching at the door of the magazine. Captain Pamphile opened it, and Double-Bouche appeared for the second time.

"Ah, my lad!" said the Captain, "is there anything fresh on board?"

"Nothing, Captain."

"I think I heard you singing a tune which I know."

"Ah! you mean this morning?"

"Yes."

"They gave me twenty-five with the rope's end."

"What for? Tell me all about it."

"What for? Because I was seen going into the magazine, and they wanted to know what I was doing there."

"They are very inquisitive; and what answer did you give to these busybodies?"

"Oh! I said I had been stealing powder to make fireworks with."

"And they gave you twenty-five cuts for that?"

"Oh! that's nothing; there is plenty of wind blowing, and I feel all right now."

"A hundred livres additional a year for the rope's ending."

“Thank’ee, sir.”

“And now, apply a little rum externally and internally, and turn in. I need not tell you where the rum is kept.”

“No, sir.”

“Good evening, my brave lad.”

“Good evening, sir.”

“By the bye, where are we now?”

“Between Cape May and Cape Henlopen.”

“Capital,” muttered the Captain, “we shall be on the high seas in three hours more.”

And leaving him in this happy expectation Double-Bouche closed the door.

Four more hours passed without bringing any change in the relative positions of the different individuals who made up the “Roxelane’s” crew; only the latter part of the time passed slowly and anxiously for Captain Pamphile. He listened with increasing attention to the different sounds which told him what was going on around and above him. He heard the sailors turning into their hammocks, he saw through the cracks in the door the lights being put out; little by little silence fell on all, then the silence was broken by the snores of the sleepers, and Captain Pamphile, feeling that he could venture to leave his hiding-place, opened the magazine door and put his head out on the main deck. All was peaceful as a nunnery; Captain Pamphile went up the six steps which led to the Captain’s cabin, and on tip-toe approached the door. He found it half open, took a moment to draw a long breath, and then looked cautiously in. It was only lighted by some straggling moonbeams, which came in by the stein window. They fell on a man leaning out of the window and apparently so absorbed in the contemplation of an object outside that he did not hear Captain Pamphile opening the door and bolting it behind him.. This preoccupation on the part of his adversary, easily recognizable as Policar although he had his back towards the door, seemed to effect a change in the Captain’s plans; he replaced the half-drawn pistol in his belt, and slowly and silently crept up to Policar, halting at each step and holding his breath for fear of disturbing him. Then, when at last within reach, profiting by the experience he had had himself under similar circumstances, he grasped Policar with one hand by the collar of his coat, with the other by the seat of his breeches, and, before he had time to offer the least resistance or to utter a single cry, sent him, with the same swing he had felt himself, to investigate at close quarters the object he had been so intently watching from the stern-port of the vessel.

Then, seeing that the last-named event had not in any way disturbed the slumbers of the crew, and that the “Roxelane “continued to make her ten knots an hour, the Captain quietly went to rest in his hammock, which he appreciated the more from having been temporarily dispossessed, and soon slept the sleep of the just.

As for Policar, the object which he had been watching with so much attention was nothing more nor less than a hungry shark which was following in the wake of the vessel in the hopes of picking up some unconsidered trifle.

Next morning, at daybreak, Captain Pamphile got up, lit his pipe, and climbed on deck. The man on watch, who was pacing up and down to keep himself warm, saw his head, his shoulders, his chest and his legs appearing successively at the top of the companion, and stopped short, thinking he must be dreaming. It was Georges, the sailor whose jacket Captain Pamphile, a fortnight before, had had dusted-down with the butt-end of a boarding-pike.

The Captain passed by him without appearing to notice his astonishment, and sat down, as was his custom, on the stern-sheet gratings. He had been sitting there half an hour or so, when another hand came on deck to relieve the watch; but barely was his head above the hatchway before he stopped dead, staring wildly at Captain Pamphile. You might have thought that gallant tar was a second Perseus, armed with the terrors of Medusa’s head.

“Well,” said Captain Pamphile, after a moment of silence, “what are you after, Baptiste? Aren’t you going to relieve poor Georges, who is half frozen with cold, after three long hours on duty? What sort of a way is that? Come! hurry up a bit, my man!”

The sailor obeyed mechanically, and advanced to take his comrade’s place.

“That’s all right!” continued Captain Pamphile, “every man in his turn; fair play’s a jewel. Now, Georges, my lad, come here; take my pipe, it’s gone out; go and light it, and rouse out all the hands to fetch it back again.”

Georges, trembling from head to foot, took the pipe, went down the ladder to the main deck reeling like a drunken man, and reappeared immediately with the lighted cutty in his hand. He was followed by the whole ship’s company, who lined the deck without speaking a single word.

Then Captain Pamphile got up and paced up and down the decks from end to end, now on the port, now on the starboard side, just as if nothing unusual had happened. Each time as he passed along the ranks, of the crew, the men shrank back from him as if his very touch were deadly; and yet he was unarmed, while the crew numbered seventy all told, and had at their disposal the whole armament of the “Roxelane.”

After a quarter of an hour of this silent tour of inspection, the Captain stopped at the master’s hatchway, looked once more around him, descended the companion, and entering his cabin called for his breakfast.

Double-Bouche brought a cod steak *à la maître d’hôtel* and a bottle of Bordeaux-Laffitte. He had taken up his duties as master cook.

This was the only change made on board the “Roxelane “during her passage from Philadelphia to Hâvre, where she anchored, after a pleasant voyage of thirty-seven days, carrying one man less and one bear more than her original complement.

Moreover, as it happened, the animal was a she-bear, and, strangely enough, she was big with young when Captain Pamphile met her on the banks of the Delaware. She gave birth to two cubs in Paris, where her master had taken her to present to M. Cuvier.

Immediately Captain Pamphile made up his mind to profit by this event in spite of the slight depreciation of the original animal, and he sold one of the young bears to the landlord of the Montmorency Hotel, where some of our readers may have seen it playing about on the balcony, till it was sold to an Englishman to take to London. The other he sold to Alexandre Decamps, who christened it Tom, and handed it over for its education to Fau, Under the latter’s able tuition Tom would have developed into a most superior bear, surpassing even the Great Bear of the Arctic Sea, had it not been for the melancholy event which we have described, whereby he was cut off in the flower of his youth.

And that is how Tom came to be transferred from the banks of the St. Lawrence to those of the Seine.

CHAPTER XIV

HOW JAMES THE FIRST, FAILING TO DIGEST THE PIN ON WHICH THE BUTTERFLY WAS IMPALED, SUSTAINED A PERFORATION OF THE PERITONEUM

“Misfortunes never come singly,” says the proverb, and this is profoundly true. Only a day or two after Tom’s death, James the First showed unmistakable signs of illness, which alarmed the whole colony, with the exception of Gazelle. The latter, remaining three-fourths of the day tucked into her shell, seemed quite indifferent to any events which did not directly bear on her personal comfort, and, moreover, as we know, she was not on very intimate terms with James.

The first symptoms of the disorder showed themselves in continuous somnolence, accompanied by heaviness in the head; in two days’ time his appetite gave way entirely, and was succeeded by an insatiable and increasing thirst; towards the middle of the third day the comparatively slight colic from which he suffered became so intense and unintermitting that Alexandre Decamps took a cabriolet and went for Doctor Thierry. The latter at once recognized the serious nature of the attack, although he could not precisely diagnose it, being undecided as to whether it was inflammation of the bowels, paralysis of the intestines, or peritonitis. At any rate he began by taking a couple of ounces of blood from him, promised to return in the evening to bleed him again, and ordered that during the interval thirty leeches should be applied to the abdominal region. Further, James was to be given soothing drinks and everything calculated to allay internal inflammation. James allowed the treatment to be carried out with a resignation which showed he himself understood the serious nature of the case.

In the evening, when the doctor returned, he found that, far from yielding to the remedies applied, the disease had made progress; there was increased thirst, complete loss of appetite, swelling of the abdomen, and inflamed tongue; the pulse was small, weak, and quick, and the sunken eyes showed the suffering which poor James felt. Thierry bled him again, taking another two ounces, James submitting without a murmur, as earlier in the day he had felt some little relief after a similar operation. The doctor ordered the cooling drinks to be continued throughout the night; and a nurse was sent for, to keep on administering them hour by hour. Soon a little old woman, who might almost have passed for a female of James's species, arrived, and directly she saw the invalid, demanded an increase in the wages she generally received, under the frivolous pretext that, as she was accustomed to nurse men and not monkeys, the task was beneath her dignity. The matter was arranged, as matters usually are when it is a question of dignity, by paying a double fee.

It was a bad night for both. James kept the old woman from her sleep, and the old woman beat James; the noise of the combat reached Alexandre's room, and he got up and entered the sick chamber. James, exasperated by the disloyal conduct of the old woman towards him, had rallied all the strength he possessed, and, as she bent down to hit him, he seized her cap and tore it in pieces.

Alexandre arrived just in time to see the end of the row. The old woman gave her account of the affair in words, and James his by signs. Alexandre soon saw that the old woman was in the wrong. She still wished to defend her conduct, but the bottle, the contents of which were still almost untouched, although the night was two-thirds gone, completed the evidence against her.

The old woman was paid off and turned out, in spite of the unholy hour, and Alexandre, to James's great delight, continued the watch by the bedside which the infamous hag he had sent off had begun. Then the energy which the patient had shown was followed by a complete collapse; James fell back as if he were dying. Alexandre thought that the last moment had come, but on bending over James he saw that it was an attack of feebleness and not actual death. About nine o'clock in the morning James stirred and partially raised himself in bed, showing some signs of pleasure; as he did so, the sound of footsteps was heard, and the bell rang. For a moment James tried to get up, but fell back exhausted; the door opened and Fau appeared. He had been told by the doctor how ill James was, and he came to see how his pupil was.

For a few moments James's emotion caused him to forget all his pain. But soon his physical condition triumphed over his moral force; fearful nausea supervened, followed in half an hour's time by vomiting. The doctor arrived while this was going on; he found the patient lying on his back, with his tongue blanched, dry and covered with mucous deposit. His breathing was short and stertorous; the scene between James and the old woman had hastened the progress of the disease. Thierry at once wrote off to one of his fellow-practitioners, Doctor Blasy, sending the note by one of the lads in Decamps' studio. A consultation was necessary, Thierry being no longer in a position to answer for his patient.

Towards mid-day Doctor Blasy came. Thierry introduced him to James's room, detailed the symptoms, and showed him his prescriptions; then after he had himself examined the unfortunate James, he agreed with Thierry that his treatment had been correct and the patient was suffering from congestion of the bowels, caused by eating too much white lead and Prussian blue.

The patient was so weak that they dared not take the risk of more bleeding, and the men of science had to fall back on the possible efforts of Nature. The day passed away thus, broken from time to time by recurrent attacks. In the evening Thierry came again, and a glance showed him that the disease was gaining ground. He shook his head sadly, wrote out no fresh prescription, and said that if the patient seemed to show a liking for any particular thing, he might have whatever he fancied. The same remark is often heard in the condemned cell on the eve of an execution, and threw everybody into despair.

In the evening Fau came, declaring that he and no one else should sit up with James. In consequence of the doctor's decision, he filled his pockets with sugar plums,- pralines, and fresh almonds. Being unable to save James, he wished at least to soothe his last moments.

James received his visit with a transcendental look of joy. When he saw him sit down in the place vacated by the old woman, he understood the devoted affection of his master, and thanked him by a little murmur of pleasure and contentment. Fau began to give him a glass of the draught prescribed by Thierry. James, evidently for fear of displeasing Fau, swallowed it with a great effort, but he brought it up again with such fearful spasms that Fau thought he would die in his arms. However, at the end of a few minutes he became somewhat calmer, and, trembling as he was in every limb, he found a short respite to his sufferings more from exhaustion than actual sleep.

About two o’clock in the morning the first symptoms of cerebral disturbance appeared. Not knowing how to calm the patient they offered James some sugared almonds. He at once understood what they were, holding as they did the first place in his gastronomic affections. A week before he would have submitted to any chastisement on the chance of obtaining a supply of these delicacies. But sickness is a hard instructor. It had left James with the will to enjoy pralines, but had removed the power. James sadly picked out the sweetmeats which seemed to hold the best almonds and to be the best coated with sugar, and, unable to swallow them, he concealed them in the pouches with which Nature had endowed him on each side of his mouth, so that very soon his cheeks hung down to his breast, like Charlet’s whiskers did until he had them cut.

But, although James could not, greatly to his regret, swallow the pralines, he still felt a certain pleasure in the preliminary operation which he managed to accomplish. Moistened by the saliva, the sugar coating of the almonds slowly melted, and this gave a certain pleasure to the dying monkey. As the sugar melted, the volume in his pouches diminished and left room for more pralines. James put out his hand. Fau understood James, offered him a handful of sweets, from which the patient picked such as suited him, and the pouches again seemed quite full and round. As for Fau, he began to hope a little from what had passed, for, as the pouches diminished in size, he supposed that this was due to mastication, and augured from this that there must be a sensible improvement in the state of the patient, who was now able to eat, while a short time before he could not even drink. Unfortunately, Fau was wrong. About seven in the morning the cerebral attacks became frightful. This Thierry had foreseen, for instead of asking, when he came, how James was, he asked if he were dead or not. On being told he was not, he seemed surprised, and entered the room where he found assembled Fau, Jadin, Alexandre and Eugène Decamps. The patient was at his last gasp. Then, being unable to save his life, and certain that he had not two hours to live, he sent the servant with instructions to go to Tony Johannot and bring back with him James the Second, so that James the First, dying in the arms of one of his own kindred, might at least communicate to him his last wishes.

The scene was piteous; everybody loved James, who, except for the faults common to all his kind, was what amongst men of the world is called a downright good fellow. The only dry eye among those present was that of Gazelle, who as if to fling a last insult at the poor dying ape, came into the room dragging with her from the studio a carrot, which she proceeded to eat underneath a table in an impassive manner, which indicated an excellent digestion, but a very hard heart. James gave her many sidelong looks, which would not have altogether befitted his position had he been a Christian, but which were certainly excusable in a monkey. While this was going on, the servant returned bringing James the Second. James the Second had not been warned as to the scene which awaited him, so that his first impulse was one of extreme terror. The death-bed on which lay one of his own kind, the view of the animals of another kind which surrounded the dying monkey — animals he recognized as men, who as a race were in the habit of persecuting his own — everything impressed him so gravely that he began to tremble in every limb.

But to allay his fears, Fau came to meet him with a sugar-plum in his hand. James the Second took the sweetmeat, turned it over and over to see if there was anything noxious concealed in it, tasted it with the tip of his tongue, and then at last, convinced by the evidence of his senses that no harm was to be done him, recovered little by little from his state of fear.

Then the servant put him down close to the bed of his fellow-countryman, who, making a last effort, turned towards him a face on which death was written. James the Second then understood, or, at least, appeared to understand what was expected of him; he came up to his dying comrade, all disfigured as he was from the fact of his pouches being stuffed full of sugared almonds, and taking him gently by the paw, seemed to beg him to confide his last wishes to him. The invalid, making an obvious effort to rally his energy, succeeded in sitting up; then whispering some words in his mother tongue into the ear of his friend, he pointed to the impassive Gazelle, with a gesture similar to that with which, in Alfred de Vigny’s fine drama, the dying Maréchal d’Ancre points out to his son Albert de Luynes, his father’s murderer. James the Second nodded his head, to show he understood, and James the First fell back, motionless.

Ten minutes later, he carried his two hands to his head, looked round the circle of those about him, as if to bid them an eternal farewell, and raising himself for the last time with a feeble exclamation, fell back in the arms of James the Second.

James the First was dead.

Among the bystanders there supervened a moment of stupefaction, which James the Second seemed at first to share. With fixed eyes he watched his dead friend, rigid himself as the corpse before him. Then, after thus staring at him for five minutes, so as to be perfectly certain that there was not the faintest trace of life in the body before his eyes, he took the mouth of the corpse between his two paws, opened the jaws and, taking the pralines out of the pouches, incontinently crammed his own cheeks with them. What had been taken for the devotion of a friend was really but the greed of an heir-at-law!

Fau snatched the body of James the First from the arms of his unworthy executor, and handed it over to Thierry and Jadin, who asked for it in the names of Science and Art respectively. Thierry wanted to make a post-mortem examination as to the cause of death, while Jadin wished to take a cast of the head so as to preserve the face among the collection of casts of celebrities. Priority was given to Jadin, so that his operation might be completed before death had changed the expression of the features, and it was settled that he should pass the body on to Thierry, for him to make the autopsy. As the modelling allowed a spare hour to Thierry, he employed it in going to look up Blasy, with whom he planned to go to Fontane's where the body was to be taken, and where it would be placed at the disposal of the surgeons. These arrangements made, Jadin, Fau, Alexandre and Eugène Decamps took a carriage and went to Fontane's studio, carrying with them James the First, and leaving James the Second and Gazelle in sole charge of the house. The model,-.executed with great care, succeeded to perfection, and the likeness was taken with a fidelity which left to James's friends the consolation of preserving a perfect likeness of the defunct. They had just finished this last sad function when the two doctors arrived. Art had done her part; it was now the turn of Science. Fau, Alexandre and Eugène Decamps retired, not having the courage to witness this second operation, and Jadin alone remained. Having opened the body, they found the contents of the peritoneum much discoloured, with here and there white patches mingled with a bloody mucus. All this was evidently an effect, and not the cause. Then almost in the middle of the lesser bowel they found a slight ulceration surrounding the point of a pin, the body of which was buried in the intestines. They at once recollected the incident of the butterfly pin, and all was clear to them. Death had been inevitable, and the two doctors had the consolation of knowing that although they had made a slight mistake as to the cause of the malady, it could not but have proved fatal, and that none of the resources of science could have saved him from the consequences of his gluttony.

As for Fau, Alexandre and Eugène Decamps, they went sadly up the stairs of No. 109, and on the second floor they smelt a strange odour of frying fat. As they got higher the smell became stronger, till when they got to their own landing, they became certain that the odour came from their rooms. They opened the door hurriedly, for, as they had not left the cook at home, they were at a loss to interpret the meaning of these culinary operations; the smell came from the studio, which they entered at once. A sound of frizzling came from the stove, and a thick heavy smoke was pouring up from it. Alexandre opened the stove door, and there on the glowing embers was Gazelle, turned over on her back and done to a cinder in her own shell.

The vengeance of James the First had been carried out by James the Second. He was pardoned on account of the goodness of his intentions, and sent home to his master.

CHAPTER XV

HOW TONY JOHANNOT, NOT HAVING LAID IN FIREWOOD ENOUGH TO LAST THE WINTER, PROCURED A CAT, AND HOW IN CONSEQUENCE OF THE SAID CAT’S DEATH, JAMES THE SECOND GOT HIS TAIL FROZEN

Some time after the events we have just narrated, winter began, and every one had made such provision to pass it in comfort as his resources permitted and his foresight suggested. But, as Matthieu Laensberg had prophesied a mild season for that year, many had laid in but a poor stock of firewood. Among these was Tony Johannot, influenced either by his belief in Matthieu Laensberg, or perhaps by other reasons, into which we need not be indiscreet enough to pry. The result of this neglect on his part was that about the 15th of January the talented artist of the “King of Bohemia and his Seven Castles,” on going to fetch a log of wood for his stove, found that if he continued to keep up fires both in his studio and his bedroom, he would scarcely have enough to last him a fortnight.

Moreover, skating had been going on for a week, the river was full of broken ice as in the time of Julian the Apostate, and M. Arago, disagreeing with the Canon of Saint-Barthélemy, announced from the top of the Observatory that the cold, already fifteen degrees below freezing point, would probably go down to twenty-three degrees, that is to say, within six degrees of the temperature experienced during the retreat from Moscow. And as the future may safely be predicted from the

past, people began to believe that M. Arago was right, and that for once in a way Matthieu Laensberg might have made a mistake.

Tony came out of his woodshed greatly distressed at the result of his investigations. It seemed a choice between freezing by day or freezing by night. However, after thinking deeply, while working up a picture of Admiral Coligny being hanged at Montfaucon, he saw a way out of the difficulty — namely, to carry his bed into his studio. As for James the Second, a bearskin rolled up in four would do for him very well. Thus, the same evening, both he and James made their move, and Tony slept warm and happy with the thought that Providence had led him to make such a fortunate choice.

The next morning he wondered for a moment where he was; then, as he recognized his studio, his eyes, with the paternal instinct which the artist feels for his work, turned towards his easel. James the Second was seated on the back of a chair, just within easy reach of the picture. Tony, when he first looked, thought that the intelligent animal, from constantly watching painting, had become a connoisseur in the art, and as he had placed himself very close to the work, it seemed evident that he was admiring its high finish. But soon Tony found he had made a great mistake; James the Second loved the taste of white lead, and the picture of Coligny being nearly finished, and all the high lights being put in with the pigment in question, James was engaged in licking it off with his tongue wherever he could find it.

Tony jumped out of bed and James jumped off his chair. But it was too late; all the flesh-tints executed in this colour were cleared off down to the bare canvas. The Admiral’s body was gone completely; there was the gibbet and there was the rope, but there was no one hanging to it. Clearly the Protestant hero must be hanged all over again. Tony at first was in a fearful rage with James, but on reflection he saw that after all it was his own fault for not tying the monkey up, and went to get a chain and a staple. He fixed the staple in the wall, fastened one end of the chain to it, and, having thus made all his preparations for the following night, he set to work again on his Coligny, who was almost hanged again by five o’clock in the evening. Then, thinking he had done quite enough work for one day, he went for a turn on the boulevard, dined at the Taverne Anglaise, and afterwards went to the theatre, where he remained till about half-past eleven.

On re-entering his studio, which he found still cosy with the warmth of the day, Tony saw with great satisfaction that nothing was out of place and that James was asleep on his cushion; he went to bed himself and was soon sleeping the sleep of the just.

About midnight he was awakened by the noise of clanking irons. You might have supposed the ghosts in one of Anne Radcliffe’s blood-curdling romances were dragging their chains up and down the studio. Tony did not believe much in phantoms, so, thinking some one was stealing his wood, he felt with his hand for an old damascened halberd decorated with a tuft, which hung on the wall among other trophies. He saw his mistake at once, and recognizing the origin of the disturbance, he ordered James to go to bed again. James obeyed, and Tony, with the longing for rest which is produced by a hard day's work, resumed his broken slumbers. But in half an hour he was aroused again, this time by smothered cries. As Tony's house was situated in an unfrequented street, he thought that somebody was being assassinated under his windows, jumped out of bed, took a pair of pistols, and opened the shutter. The night was calm, the street quiet. Not a sound broke the silence of the neighbourhood, except that low murmur which broods at all times over Paris, like the measured respiration of a sleeping giant. Then he shut his window, and found that the sighs of distress came from within the room itself. As he and James were alone in the room, and that he had himself nothing to complain of beyond being turned out of bed, he: went to James. James, for want of something to do, I had been amusing himself by walking round one of the legs of the table underneath which he had been put to sleep. But at the end of five or six turns his chain had got shortened up. James did not notice this, and continued his walk, so that he was at last brought up by his collar, and as he tried to go on forwards instead of turning back, each effort he made to get free increased the danger of strangulation. This was the cause of the moans which Tony had heard.

Tony was quite ready to leave James as he was, as a punishment for his stupidity, but if he condemned James to be throttled, he condemned himself to the loss of his night's rest. He therefore untwisted the chain as many times as James had twisted it, and James, glad to find his respiratory organs free, lay down humbly and quietly. Tony, for his part, did the same, hoping that nothing further would occur to trouble his rest until the morning. But here again he was disappointed, for James, having had his habits interfered with, could not close an eye, now he had already got through the eight hours' sleep which was his usual quantum. The consequence was that in twenty minutes' time Tony got out of bed again, but this time he did not take either a halberd or a pistol, but a cane.

James saw at once what he was about, and hid himself under his cushion; but he was too late. Tony was merciless, and James received a punishment conscientiously proportionate to his crime. This calmed him down for the night, but then it was Tony's turn to be unable to get to sleep, so he got up bravely, lit his lamp, and unable to paint by artificial light, began one of those exquisite woodcuts which have made him the king of engravers.

It can easily be understood that, although Tony made a little money through his insomnia, things could not go on long in this fashion; so, as soon as daylight appeared he set himself seriously to consider if there were not some means of conciliating the necessity for repose with the exigencies of his purse. He was in the midst of his most abstruse calculations, when he saw entering his studio a pretty cat of the neighbourhood named Michette. James liked her because she let him do what he pleased to her, and she was fond of James because he used to hunt the fleas in her coat. Tony no sooner recollected this intimate friendship than he saw his way to turning it to his own advantage. The cat, with her winter fur, might very well take the place of a stove. Thinking thus, he took up the cat, who in ignorance of the duty she was to perform, made no resistance whatever, put her into the barred hutch belonging to James, pushed James in behind her, and went back to the studio to watch through the keyhole the effect of his arrangements.

At first the two captives each tried every way of getting out which their diverse characters suggested to them. James jumped against the three walls of his cage one after the other, and then returned to shake the bars with his hands, then went through the same performance twenty times before he made up his mind that the procedure was quite hopeless. Michette stayed at first exactly where she had been put down without moving anything but her head, then, returning to the gratings, she rubbed gently against them first with one side then with the other, arching her back and stiffening her tail; then after turning twice, she tried, purring all the time, to get her head between each of the spaces between the bars; then when she saw that this was an impossibility, she gave three or four piteous mews; finally, when they produced no effect, she made herself a nest in the corner of the cage, rolled herself up in the hay, and soon appeared like an ermine muff looked at end on.

As for James, he went on for perhaps a quarter of an hour, springing, jumping, and scolding; then, seeing that all his antics were unavailing, he went and plumped down in the opposite corner to that occupied by the cat. For a short time, warmed by the exercise he had taken, he sat still with his blood still in full circulation, but soon, as the cold gained on him, he began to shiver all over.

Then it was that he began to notice his friend warmly wrapped up in her furry covering, and his egotistical instinct gave him the idea of the advantage he might gain from his forced imprisonment in company with his friend. Following up this plan, he crept up quietly to Michette, lay down close to her, passed one arm under her body, put the other into the upper opening of the natural muff which she made, wrapped his tail in a spiral round that of his neighbour, who kindly tucked both tails in between her legs, and this done, appeared perfectly reassured as to his future.

Tony also was impressed with the same idea, and satisfied with what he had seen, he withdrew his eye from the keyhole, rang for his housekeeper, and desired her to serve every day for Michette food suited to her tastes in addition to the carrots, nuts, and potatoes which formed James's ordinary diet.

The housekeeper followed his orders exactly; and everything would have gone well with the daily routine of Michette's and James's establishment, had not the latter upset the whole arrangement by his gluttony. From the first day he noticed that there were certain new dishes served at the two meals which were brought him regularly, the one at nine in the morning, the other at five in the evening. As for Michette, she at once understood that the milk of the morning dish and the meat of the evening were intended for her, so that she commenced to eat the one and the other, perfectly satisfied with them, but still in that slightly disdainful manner which may often be noticed when well-bred cats are taking their dinners.

At first, undecided as to the character of these comestibles, James let her feed alone; then when Michette, as became a well-mannered cat, left a little of her bread and milk on the plate, he came behind her tasted it, and finding it good, finished it off. The same thing occurred at dinner, James finding the meat sop equally to his taste, and he passed the night snugly, lying close up to Michette as usual, asking himself how it came to pass that he, a son of the house, should be fed on carrots, nuts, potatoes, and other uncooked vegetables, while a mere stranger was regaled on delicate and succulent viands.

The result of his lying awake thinking was that James held Tony's conduct to be supremely unfair, and he resolved to "restore things to their natural order by eating the cooked food himself and leaving Michette the carrots, the nuts, and the potatoes.

So the next morning, when the housekeeper brought the two breakfasts, and Michette went purring to her saucer, James took her under his arm, turning her head away from the saucer, and held her thus as long as the saucer held anything; then, having finished the milk, and satisfied with his meal, he let Michette go, leaving her at liberty to make her breakfast off vegetables. Michette went about smelling the carrots, the nuts, and the potatoes; then, discontented with them, she returned, sadly mewing, and lay down near James. He, with his stomach comfortably plenished, at once busied himself with extending the soft warmth which he experienced in his abdominal regions to his paws and his tail, these extremities being much more sensitive to cold than all the rest of his body. At dinner the same manœuvres took place, but this time James was still more pleased with his change. of diet, and the meat-sop appeared to him as much superior to the milk as the milk itself was to the carrots, the nuts, and the potatoes. Thanks to this very comforting food and to Michette's fur, James passed an excellent night, without paying the least attention in the world to the distress of poor Michette, who, with an empty and famishing stomach, mewed piteously from night to morning, while James snored like a canon in his stall and dreamt golden dreams. This went on for three days, to James's great ‘delight and Michette's great privation.

At last, on the fourth day, when dinner was brought, Michette had not sufficient strength to make even a show of approaching the saucer, and she remained curled up in her corner, so that James, freer in his movements, since he was not obliged to control those of Michette, dined better than he had ever done. Having finished his dinner, he went, according to custom, and lay down near his cat, and, feeling that she was colder than usual, he embraced her the more closely with his paws and tail, scolding and grumbling because his warming pan was getting cold.

The next day Michette was dead and James's tail was frost-bitten. That morning Tony himself, uneasy at the increasing cold of the night, went, on rising, to visit his two prisoners. He found that James had fallen a victim to his own selfishness, and was chained to a corpse. He took up the dead and the living, one almost as still and cold as the other, and carried them into his studio. No amount of extra heat could revive Michette; but as James was only in a state of collapse, he gradually recovered the power of movement, his tail only remaining frozen. Moreover, as it had been frozen while wound about Michette's tail, it remained in the form of a corkscrew, a shape unheard of and unknown among the simian race up to that day. This gave James an air of the most fantastic of fabulous monsters conceivable by the imagination. Three days later a thaw set in; moreover, the thaw brought about an event which we cannot pass over in silence, not because it was important in itself, but on account of the disastrous effect it had on James's tail, which was already somewhat compromised by the events we have already detailed.

Tony had received, during the frost, two lion skins, via Algiers, from one of his friends who was shooting in the Atlas Mountains. These two lion skins were sent fresh and uncured, and being frozen by the cold, had thus lost their peculiar smell. Tony had placed them in his room, meaning to have them properly tanned when the opportunity offered, and to decorate his studio with them. But, when the thaw came and everything, except James's tail, thawed, the skin, becoming soft again, emitted the acrid, strong odour which warns all denizens of the wilds of the presence of their king, the lion. The consequence of this was that James, who, after meeting with his accident, had again been allowed to live in the studio, smelt, with the keen sense peculiar to his race, the terrible stench which gradually spread through the room, and he gave unmistakable signs of discomfort, these being at first attributed by Tony to the loss of use of one of his most necessary members.

This condition of restlessness lasted for two days; for two whole days James, dwelling constantly on the same idea, sniffed every breath of air which stirred, jumped from chairs to tables and from tables to bookshelves, ate his food in haste, looking about him in terror all the time, drank in great gulps, nearly choking himself as he drank; in a word, was leading a life of dire alarm, when it chanced that I paid a call on Tony.

As I was one of James's great friends and never entered the studio without bringing him something good to eat, he ran up to me as soon as I appeared, to make sure that I had not forgotten him. Then the first thing that struck me as I offered him a Havana cigar, an article of which he was very fond, not to smoke, as our young men of fashion do, but simply to chew, as he had been taught by the sailors on board the "Roxelane "; the first thing, I repeat, I noticed was the extraordinary tail, which I did not remember at all, and the second was the nervous trembling and feverish excitement which I had never before seen him in. Tony gave me the explanation of the first phenomenon, but as to the cause of the second he was as ignorant as I was, and proposed to send for Thierry in order to consult him about it.

I was leaving him, agreeing in the wisdom of the proposed course, when, in passing through the bedroom, I was struck with the wild beast kind of atmosphere emanating from it. I asked Tony what caused this, and he pointed to the two lion skins. I saw at once what was the matter; it was clear that the skins were the cause of James's torments. Tony would not credit me, and as he still believed that James was seriously ill, I proposed a simple experiment to show that if James were really ill, it was from terror. This experiment was very easy to carry out. It was only to call his two studio lads, who were playing marbles during our temporary absence, to place on each a lion's skin and to send them into the studio crawling on all fours and tricked out like the Nemean Hercules. Already the open door of the bedroom allowed the odour of lion to reach him stronger and more directly than before. James's distress was visibly increasing. He sprang on to a set of steps, and, getting up to the very top, he turned his head towards us, sniffing the air and giving little screams of fear, showing that he smelt the approaching peril, and knew from which side to fear attack. In fact, after a few moments, one of the boys, duly caparisoned, went down on all fours and crawled towards the studio, followed closely by his comrade. James's distress reached its height. As he saw the head of the first lion appear at the door, his distress became terror. A frenzied terror, mad, hopeless; the terror of the bird fascinated by the snake; a terror such as shatters all physical strength, paralyses all moral courage; fear such as ends in vertigo, causing the sky to swim before the eyes and the solid earth to rock, and from which a man, losing his every faculty, falls panting as in a dream, without even a cry. Such was the effect produced by the mere sight of the lions. They took a step towards James, and James fell prone from the top of his ladder.

We ran to his aid; he had fainted. We revived him; he was tailless! The frost had made it as brittle as glass, and the fall had broken it short off!

We had not intended to carry out the joke so far; so we sent the lion skins out to the store-room, and in five minutes the boys returned in their ordinary aspect and dress. As for James, he came to himself, with faint piteous cries, and as he sadly opened his eyes and recognized Tony, he threw his arms round his neck and hid his face in his breast.

While this was going on, I was getting out a glass of claret to try and give James back a little of the courage he had lost. But James had no heart either to eat or drink; at the faintest noise he trembled-in every limb, and yet, little by little, while still sniffing the air occasionally, he began to perceive that the danger seemed to have passed away.

Suddenly the door opened once more, and in one bound James was out of Tony’s arms and back on his ladder, but instead of the monsters he feared would enter by the open door, appeared his old friend, the cook, and the sight restored still further his sense of security. I took advantage of the happy moment to offer him a saucer of Bordeaux. He looked at it for a moment with an expression of distrust, looked at me again to be sure that it was the hand of a friend that offered him the tonic draught, and then wetted the tip of his tongue with it. He drew his tongue back within his mouth, as if he were doing me a favour, but at once found out, with the delicate sense of taste which characterized him, that the unknown liquid possessed an excellent aroma of its own. He then returned to the saucer for his own delectation, and after three or four laps his eyes became brighter, and he gave several low gurglings of pleasure, which showed that he was gradually recovering his ordinary joyous mood. Finally, after emptying the saucer, he got up on his hind legs, looked round for the bottle, saw where it was on the table, and ran to it with sufficient agility to show that his muscles were recovering their tone, and took it down, handling it much as a clarinet player does his instrument. He inserted his tongue into the neck, but unfortunately its length was insufficient by several inches for the task he set it. Then Tony, taking pity on him, poured out a second saucer of wine.

This time James did not want any pressing; on the contrary, he put his mouth into it so quickly that he swallowed nearly as much through his nostrils as between his lips, and had to stop to sneeze. But this was only for a moment. James at once set to work again, and in a few minutes the saucer was as clean as if it had been wiped with a napkin. James, as the saucer became empty, began to show signs of-being in liquor; every trace of fear had gone and was replaced by a swaggering and vainglorious manner; he looked for the bottle again, which Tony had, after moving it, replaced on another table, and tried to walk on his hind legs towards it. But, finding that he was likely to be more secure if he had four supports, he dropped down at once on all-fours and began to walk, with the gravity of incipient drunkenness, towards the goal he had set himself to attain. He had got about two-thirds of the way towards the bottle, when, lying just before him, he came on his own tail.

The sight, diverted his attention for a moment from his objective. He stopped and looked at it, wagging the little stump which was all that was left him, and, after a few seconds, he walked round it so as to make a more detailed examination; then he took it up and turned it over and over like a thing that roused his curiosity somewhat, smelt it, tasted it by just touching it with his teeth, and finding both smell and taste insipid, he threw it down with an expression of profound disdain, and resumed his route towards the bottle.

It was one of the funniest displays of drunkenness I have ever seen in my life, and as such I leave it to the appreciation of my readers. Never after that did James again mention his tail, but never a day passed without his calling for his bottle. So, as I write to-day, not only is this our last hero enfeebled by age, but he is debased by drink.

CHAPTER XVI

HOW CAPTAIN PAMPHILE OFFERED A PRIZE OF TWO THOUSAND FRANCS AND THE CROSS OF THE LEGION OF HONOUR TO HAVE THE MOOT POINT SETTLED, ONCE FOR ALL, WHETHER JEANNE D’ARC’S NAME WAS WRITTEN WITH A “Q “OR A “K”

Although our readers may have forgotten a little, through the lively interest they no doubt felt in the fate of James the First, about the events which took place before those just narrated, they probably can remember that on his return from his eleventh voyage to the East with the cargo of tea, spices and indigo obtained from Captain Koa-Kio-Kwan, after purchasing his parrot in the Rodriguez Islands, the worthy mariner whose veracious history we are relating had put in at Algoa Bay and afterwards at the mouth of the Orange River. At each of the two coasts, it will be remembered, he had struck bargains; first with a Kaffir chief named Outavari and then with a Namaqua chief named Outavaro for four thousand elephants’ tusks. Further, it was, as we have related, with a view to giving his two worthy contractors time to meet their engagements, that the Captain undertook that famous cod-fishing expedition during which he had so many trying days, and which, nevertheless, ended by contributing greatly to his renown, thanks to his courage and presence of mind, seconded as these were by the devotion of Double-Bouche. The latter, it will be remembered, was rewarded by promotion to the high office of master cook of the trading brig “Roxelane.”

Thus, after having disposed of his cod at Havre and his bear cubs in Paris, Captain Pamphile’s next step was to commence his preparations for the thirteenth voyage, which promised to be quite as certain of successful results as had been the previous twelve. Thus, following up his previous procedure, which he knew had produced so much profit on former occasions, he took the coach for Orléans in the Rue de Grenelle St-Honoré and put up at the Hôtel de Commerce. There, in answer to the customary inquiries of the landlord, he stated that he was a member of the Institute, belonging to the Branch of Historical Science, and that he had come to the chief town of the Department of the Loiret in order to conduct an inquiry as to the correct orthography of the name Jeanne d’Arc, which it appeared some wrote with a Q and some with a K, not to speak of others who, like the writer, spell it with a C.

At a time when all serious thinkers are turning their attention to historic research, a pretext of this sort would naturally seem quite plausible to the good people of Orléans, who would naturally believe a discussion of this kind to be of sufficient importance to engage the attention of the Académie des Inscriptions, and to warrant its sending one of its most important members to investigate the important question on the spot. Consequently, the very day of his arrival, the distinguished traveller was presented by his host to a member of the Municipal Council. He in his turn introduced him to the Recorder, who introduced him to the Mayor, and before the end of the week the latter presented him to the Prefect. The latter, flattered by the honour done to the town through him, asked the Captain to dinner, so as to arrive the more quickly arid surely at the solution of the great problem inviting to meet him the last descendant of Bertrand de Pelonge. As every one knows Bertrand brought Jeanne la Pucelle from Domrémy to Chinon, and from Chinon to Orléans, where he married, and his race was perpetuated down to our time, when it flourished in all its splendour in the person of M. Ignace Nicolas Pelonge, wholesale wine and spirit merchant, Place du Martroy, and moreover Sergeant-Major in the National Guard and Corresponding Member of the Académies of Carcassonne and of Quimper-Corentin. As for the suppression of the particle “de “in the name which, like Cassius and Brutus, is conspicuous by its absence this was a sacrifice which M. de Pelonge, senior, made to the cause of the people during the famous night on which M. de Montmorency burned his patent of nobility and M. de la Fayette renounced his title of *marquis.*

Chance served the worthy Captain beyond his desires. What he appreciated, as we may well believe, in the citizen Ignace Nicolas Pelonge, Sergeant-Major of the National Guard and Wholesale Spirit Merchant, was not the distinction gained from his ancestry, but what he had created for himself, Citizen Ignace Nicolas Pelonge being known as making, not only in France but abroad, large consignments of vinegar and of spirits to other merchants. Now, we know the need Captain Pamphile had for a considerable quantity of alcohol, engaged as he was to deliver to Outavari and to Outavaro, to the one fifteen hundred, to the other two thousand, bottles of brandy in exchange for an equivalent number of elephants' tusks. Thus he accepted with great pleasure M. le Préfet's invitation to dinner.

The dinner was severely literary. The guests, warned beforehand as to the illustrious man they were invited to meet, all came prepared with treasures of local erudition, and each one was in possession of such irresistible proofs of the correctness of his own opinion that, by dessert time, the followers of William the Cruel and those of Peter of Fénin were about to throw the Government House plates at each other's heads, if Captain Pamphile had not intervened with a proposition. He asked the representatives of each class of opinion to submit their views in memoranda addressed to the Institute, promising to distribute two thousand francs from the Prix Montyon fund and a Cross of Honour to those whose opinion might be adjudged correct at the awards of the 27th, 28th, and 29th July following.

This offer was received with enthusiasm, and the Prefect rose to propose a toast in honour of the distinguished body who favoured the City of Orléans with this mark of esteem, and who had sent one of its most renowned members to draw from the local springs one of the rays with which the Parisian Sun enlightens the world.

Captain Pamphile rose, and with tears in his eyes, and in a voice broken with emotion, replied for the body of which he formed part, that if Paris was the sun of Science, Orléans, thanks to the valuable information they had given him — which information he would with all haste transmit to his colleagues — could not fail to be known before long, as the moon. The guests swore in chorus that this was the height of their ambition, and that when that ambition was satisfied the Department of Loiret would be the proudest of all the eighty-six departments of France. On the termination of this speech the Prefect put his hand to his breast, told his guests that he carried the thought of them always next his heart, and suggested that they should retire to the drawing-room for coffee.

This was the moment secretly awaited by each for the purpose of making interest with Captain Pamphile; no one was ignorant of the influence which so distinguished a member of the Institute, full of learning as he had showed himself during dinner, was sure to have with his colleagues; moreover, he had delicately hinted that he was likely to be chosen as recorder of the votes, and in that case his opinion would carry great weight. So his right-hand neighbour, instead of allowing him to proceed straight to the drawing-room, drew him aside into a corner of the dining-room and asked him how he liked raisins. The Captain, who had nothing to say against that excellent fruit, praised them highly, upon which his friend pressed his hand warmly and asked him what his address was. The worthy “savant” replied that his scientific domicile was at the Institute, but that he actually lived chiefly at Hâvre, where he had gone with a view to making observations on the flux and reflux of the tides, and that anything sent to the address of his brother, master of the brig “Roxelane,” would find him in due course.

The same thing happened as regards his left-hand neighbour, who was watching his turn for a word apart with the recorder of the commission; he was, in private life, a highly esteemed confectioner, and he inquired, with the same interest as had his fellow-townsman, the grocer, how Captain Pamphile liked sweetmeats and sweetcakes. The Captain replied that it was a matter of common knowledge that the Academy as a body was very fond of confectionery and, as a proof of what he stated he did not mind telling him in confidence that this honourable assembly, which every Thursday meets with the ostensible object of discussing science and literature has no other object in sitting with closed doors but only, by eating rose-leaf conserve and drinking red-currant syrup, to ascertain what progress is being made in the manufactures of the Millelots and Tanrades; while doing this they had for a long time seen the danger of over-centralization in the manufacture of confectionery, and that the pâte d’Auvergne and the nougat of Marseilles were certainly worthy of Academic honours. As for himself, he considered he was very fortunate in finding, by experience, that the confectionery of Orléans, of which till that day he had heard nothing, was not a whit behind that of Bar and Chalons. This discovery he hoped to lay before the Academy at one of the earliest of its forthcoming meetings. His left-hand neighbour shook Captain Pamphile’s hand and asked him his address, and the Captain having answered him exactly as he had his right-hand neighbour, at last found himself free to pass into the drawing room, where the Prefect awaited him with coffee. Albeit the Captain knew very well how to appreciate the Arabian berry, and what he now tasted seemed to him to have come direct from Mocha, he reserved all his spoken praise for the liqueur glass of brandy which accompanied it, and which he declared better than the finest cognac he had ever tasted. At this eulogy, the descendant of Bertrand de Pelonge bowed; he was the wine merchant in ordinary to the Prefecture, and the arrow of flattery, which Captain Pamphile let fly, hit the very centre of the mark.

Then followed a long conversation between Citizen Ignace Nicolas Pelonge and Captain Amabile Désiré Pamphile, in which the merchant showed great practical knowledge and the Academician equal theoretical erudition. The result of the discussion was that Captain Pamphile learned exactly what he wished to hear, namely that Citizen Ignace Nicolas Pelonge was about to send fifty pipes of this same brandy, each holding five hundred bottles, to Messrs. Jackson & Williams, of New York, with whom he had commercial dealings, and further that the consignment, standing actually packed on the Quai de l'Horloge, was to be sent down the Loire to Nantes, and there was to be transferred to the full-rigged ship "Zephyr "(master, Malvilain), to sail for North America. She was to be ready for sea in from a fortnight to three weeks.

There was not a minute to lose if Captain Pamphile wished to appear on the scene at an opportune moment. So he took his leave that same evening of the authorities of Orléans, saying, that the clear way in which they had enlightened him that evening rendered a further prolonged stay in the capital of the Department of the Loiret quite unnecessary. He, therefore, once more shook hands with the grocer and the confectioner, embraced the wine merchant, and departed from Orléans the same night, leaving the most prejudiced against the Academy entirely reassured as to the character of that most estimable body.

CHAPTER XVII

HOW CAPTAIN PAMPHILE MADE THE COAST OF AFRICA AND FOUND HIMSELF CONSTRAINED TO LOAD UP WITH BLACK IVORY INSTEAD OF WHITE

The day after his arrival at Havre, Captain Pamphile received half a hogshead of raisins and six dozen pots of sweetmeats, which he ordered Double-Bouche to lock up in his private cupboard. That done, he busied himself getting the vessel fitted up for sea, which did not take long, for, as we have seen, the worthy mariner nearly always sailed in ballast and took on board his cargo in the open sea. So well did he work that at the end of the week he doubled the Cape of Cherbourg, and in a fortnight's time he was cruising between the 47th and 48th parallels of latitude, just across the course which the ship "Zephyr "should take to reach New York from Nantes. The consequence of this clever manoeuvre was, that one fine morning, as Captain Pamphile, half asleep and half awake, was dreaming lazily in his hammock, he was roused from his semi-somnolence by the cry, "Sail — ho!" from the man on the look out.

The Captain sprang out of his hammock, seized a telescope, and without staying to put on his breeches, ran up on deck. His appearance in the dress of ancient mythology, might have seemed strange in a vessel where greater attention was paid to details than was the case on board the "Roxelane," but it must be confessed to the shame of the crew, that not one of them paid the slightest attention to this infraction of the laws of decency, so accustomed were they to the

vagaries of the Captain. As to the latter, he quietly walked across the deck, climbed into the shrouds, mounted a few steps of the ratlines, and with as much self-possession as if he were clothed properly, commenced his inspection of the vessel which had been sighted. After a few moments he was certain that it was the vessel he expected; so. orders were promptly given to mount the carronades on their pivots and the piece of eight on its carriage. Then seeing that his orders were being obeyed with the customary smartness, the Captain ordered the helmsman to hold on the same course, and went below, so as to be able to present a more decent appearance on his meeting with his fellow-commander, Captain Malvilain.

When the Captain returned to the deck, the two vessels were about one league apart, and a sailor could recognize in the new arrival the sober steady gait of the honest merchantman, deeply laden, and with all its sails set making its five or six knots before a steady breeze; it was clear that if she had been tempted to bear away, the brisk and lively “Roxelane “could have overhauled the “Zephyr “in a couple of hours. But nothing was further from the thoughts of the latter’s crew than flight, confident as they were in the peace sworn by the Holy Alliance, and in the total and entire abolition of piracy, the funeral oration of which had been published by the “Constitutionnel,” before their departure. The vessel then continued her course on the faith of the treaties, and she was not more than half a gunshot from Captain Pamphile, when the following words rang out on board the “Roxelane,” and, carried by the wind, found their way to the astonished ears of the master of the “Zephyr.”

“Ship ahoy! Lower a boat, and send the captain on board of us.”

There was a moment’s pause, then the following reply came from the ship: “We are the merchant vessel ‘Zephyr ‘; captain, Malvilain; cargo, brandy; bound from Nantes to New York.”

“Fire!” said Captain Pamphile.

A flash of light and a cloud of smoke, followed by a noisy report, appeared on the forecastle of the “Roxelane,” and simultaneously the blue sky appeared through a rent in the foresail of the innocent and inoffensive ship, from which came the words, repeated slowly and distinctly, as if there had been some misinterpretation of the original statement:

“We are the trading ship ‘Zephyr ‘ — Captain, Malvilain — cargo, brandy — bound from Nantes to New York.”

“Ship ahoy!” replied the “Roxelane.”

“Lower away a boat and send your captain aboard us.”

Then, as the ship still appeared to hesitate, and the long eight was ready again, —

“Fire!” ordered Captain Pamphile, a. second time. And the ball ricocheted over the crests of the waves and lodged just eighteen inches above the water line.

“In the name of heaven, who are you, and what do you want?” came in a voice which the effect of the speaking trumpet made the more melancholy.

“Ship ahoy! Lower away a boat! Send your captain aboard us,” came from the imperturbable “Roxelane.”

This time, whether the brig had made a mistake or not before, whether her crew were deaf or only pretending to be, there was no mistaking the necessity for obedience. A third shot, if this time it struck below the water’s line, the ship would be sunk! So the captain of the “Zephyr “lost no time in answering; and it was obvious to all eyes that he was anxious his crew should get the gig lowered as soon as possible.

As soon as it touched the water, six sailors slid down the falls one after another; the captain following them, took his seat in the stern, and the gig, unhooked from the ship, like a child leaving its mother, was rowed quickly across the space between the two vessels, and made for the brig’s starboard quarter; but a sailor standing on the bulwarks beckoned to them to come alongside to port, that is on the side reserved for honoured visitors. Captain Malvilain could not object to the manner of his reception, which was that due to his rank.

At the top of the ladder Captain Pamphile awaited his brother officer; then, as our worthy mariner was a man who knew how to conduct himself, he began by apologizing to Captain Malvilain for the lack of ceremony in his invitation to him. He followed up his apologies by inquiries as to his wife and children, and being assured that they were in good health, he invited the captain of the “Zephyr “down to his cabin, where he wished, he said, to discuss an affair of some importance.

Captain Pamphile’s invitations were generally given in such an irresistible manner that refusals were out of the question. Captain Malvilain therefore yielded with a good grace to the desire of his brother mariner, who, after bowing him in before himself, in spite of the polite refusal of this honour on the part of the-guest, closed the door behind him, telling Double-Bouche to excel himself if possible, so that Captain Malvilain might carry away a happy impression of the “Roxelane’s “hospitality.

In half an hour’s time Captain Pamphile half opened the door and gave, Georges, who was on duty in the saloon, a letter from Captain Malvilain to his chief officer; this letter conveyed an order to send on board the “Roxelane “a dozen of the fifty pipes of spirits shipped on the “Zephyr “by order of Ignace Pelonge et Cie. This was really two thousand bottles in excess of what was strictly necessary for Captain Pamphile to take; but, as a prudent man, he thought it well to allow for the possible wastage which a two months’ voyage might effect. Moreover, he could, if he chose, take the whole, and when thinking to himself of the power which his host used with such moderation, Captain Malvilain thanked our Lady of Guerrand that he had got off so cheaply.

The transfer was effected in about two hours, and Captain Pamphile, sticking to his system of politeness, was thoughtful enough to carry out the arrangements during dinner time, so that his colleague’s feelings should not be hurt by the sight of what was going on. They had got as far as the raisins and sweetmeats of the dessert, when Double-Bouche came and whispered a word to his master; the latter nodded as if satisfied, and ordered coffee. It was served at once, accompanied by a bottle of cognac, which the Captain at once recognized at the first sip as the same which he had tasted at the table of the Prefect of Orléans. This gave him a high opinion of the probity of Citizen Ignace Nicolas Pelonge, in that he sent his consignments out corresponding so closely with his samples.

Coffee finished and the twelve pipes stowed below, Captain Pamphile had no motive for any further detention of his colleague, so he conducted him, with the same marks of respect as he paid him on arrival, to the port gangway, where the gig was waiting, and took leave of him there, following him with his eyes to the “Zephyr “with looks full of incipient friendship. Then, as he saw him mount to his own deck and judged from the movements of the crew that he was about to get under way again, he again put the speaking trumpet to his lips, but this time it was to wish him a good voyage.

The “Zephyr,” as if she were only waiting for this, at once trimmed her sails to the wind and glided away towards the west, whilst the “Roxelane” huffed up till she headed nearly due south. Captain Pamphile continued, as they parted, to make signals of friendship, and Captain Malvilain returned the courtesy. This exchange of compliments was ended only by nightfall, and by sunrise the next day the two vessels were far out of sight of each other.

Two months subsequent to the events we have just described Captain Pamphile anchored at the mouth of the Orange River and ascended the stream with an escort of twenty well-armed sailors to pay his visit to Outavaro.

Captain Pamphile, who was an acute observer, noticed with astonishment that a great change had come over the country since he had left it. Instead of the rich plains covered with rice and maize, with the roots of the crops bathed in the waters of the river, instead of the flocks and herds which used to come, bleating and lowing, to refresh themselves on its banks, there was nothing but unfilled land and a silent desert. At first he thought he had made a mistake and had come to the Fish instead of the Orange River; but having taken observations, he found that his calculations were correct, and, in fact, after twenty hours' journey up the river, he came in sight of the capital of the Little Namaquas.

The town was inhabited only by women, children, and old men, all in the direst poverty; for this is what had happened. Immediately after Captain Pamphile's departure Outavari and Outavaro, attracted, the one by the two thousand, the other by the fifteen hundred bottles of brandy which they were to receive for their ivory, had both started from their respective sides on a grand hunting expedition. Unfortunately the elephants were to be found in an extensive forest, which lay as neutral ground between the Little Namaquas' country and that of the Kaffirs. So no sooner did the two parties meet each other and understood that their objectives were the same, and that the success of one nation meant the detriment of the other, than the embers of the old feud which had never been quenched between the sons of the east and of the west, broke out into flame once more. Each party, being armed for the chase, was equally prepared for war, and so, instead of listening to the advice of some of the greybeards and acting in concert to obtain the four thousand tusks, they attacked each other, and on the first day of their meeting fifteen Kaffirs and seventeen Namaquas lay dead on the battlefield.

From that day forth there reigned bloody and relentless war between the two tribes, in the course of which Outavari was killed and Outavaro wounded. The Kaffirs elected a new chief, and Outavaro recovered. Thus, both leaders being in their places again, the strife went on more briskly than before, and each party called up all its warriors to keep its army up to strength. In the end each nation had made a supreme effort to back up its chief by calling up all its population from the ages of sixteen to sixty to join the army, and the forces of the two nations had been for a few days lying thus face to face, so that one general action was likely to decide the fate of the war.

This is how it came to pass that there were only women, children, and dotards left in the Namaquas capital; and they were already, as we have said, in a state of absolute destitution. As for the elephants, they were gaily slapping each other with their trunks and taking advantage of the preoccupation of their human enemies, browsing at their ease on the fields of maize and rice surrounding the deserted villages.

Captain Pamphile saw in the twinkling of an eye what steps he ought to take. His agreement had been personal with Outavari and not with his successor. He was therefore free to do as he liked about the latter, and his natural ally was obviously Outavaro. He ordered his men to overhaul their muskets and pistols and served out four dozen cartridges to each man. Then he asked for a young Namaqua sufficiently intelligent to act as a guide, and timed his march so as to arrive in camp at dead of night.

All was carried out exactly as he planned, and on the second night, about eleven o’clock, Captain Pamphile entered Outavaro’s tent, where the latter, who had decided on attacking the next morning, was holding council with the oldest and wisest of his nation’s leaders.

Outavaro recognized Captain Pamphile with the certainty and promptitude which is a characteristic of the memory of the savage; thus, directly he saw him, he rose and came forward with one hand on his mouth and the other on his heart, as if to signify that heart and tongue were one in the speech he was about to make. He said in broken Dutch that, as he had failed to carry out his bargain, the tongue which had lied and the heart which had deceived were both Captain Pamphile’s to be torn out and thrown to his dogs, as was the befitting punishment of the liar and the deceiver. The Captain, who spoke Dutch like William of Orange, answered that he had no use for the tongue and heart of Outavaro, that his dogs were quite satisfied already, having found the pathway strewn with corpses of Kaffirs, and that he had come prepared to make a much better offer than that which his faithful friend and ally, Outavaro, proposed. This was, that he should help Outavaro in his war with the Kaffirs, on the understanding that all prisoners made during or after the battle should become the sole property of Captain Pamphile, to do with as he or his appointed agents might decide. Captain Pamphile, it will be surmised from his style, had been a lawyer’s clerk previous to his developing into a buccaneer.

This proposal was too good to be refused, and it was received with enthusiasm, not only by Outavaro, but by the whole council of war. The oldest and wisest of the councillors took their cups from their lips and their quids from their cheeks to offer both to the white chief. But the latter said majestically that it was for him to treat the assembly, and he sent Georges to go and bring from his baggage two ells of Virginian tobacco twist and four bottles of the Orléans spirits, which were received and duly handed round with expressions of the deepest gratitude.

When the repast was over, as it was then about one o'clock in the morning, Outavaro sent them all away to sleep at their posts, and stayed alone with Captain Pamphile, so as to settle with him the plan of the coming battle.

Captain Pamphile, knowing that the first duty of a general is to obtain a clear idea of the ground on which he is to manoeuvre, and considering it improbable that there was a good map of the country to be had, he asked Outavaro to guide him to the loftiest point of the neighbourhood, the moon being bright enough to light up the country as clearly as it would be illuminated in the twilight of northern latitudes. There was just what was required, in the shape of a small hill on the edge of the forest, where the right wing of the Little Namaquas rested. Outavaro signified to Captain Pamphile to follow in silence, and led him along a path on which they were obliged to spring like tigers at times and at others to crawl like serpents. Fortunately in the course of his adventures Captain Pamphile had crossed many worse places in the morasses and virgin forests of America, so in half an hour's time he had crawled and climbed to such purpose that he found himself and his guide on the top of the hillock.

Then, although the Captain was accustomed to contemplate the grandest scenery in nature, he could not help pausing to admire the panorama which lay before him. The forest made a vast semicircle, within which was contained the forces of the two nations. It formed a great black mass which threw its shadow across the two camps, seeming impenetrable to the eye, and uniting the horns of the semicircle, forming the chord of an arc, ran the Orange River like a liquid riband of silver. Beyond, again, the landscape was lost in the horizon which, without a visible boundary, stretched away to the country of the Great Namaquas.

All this immense tract, which kept even at night its warm and clear-cut features, was lit up by the bright tropical moon, which alone knows what goes on among the unexplored wastes of the African Continent. From time to time the silence was broken by the howls of the hyenas and jackals which followed in the track of the two armies; while again, above all, rose the roar of some prowling lion. At this sound all became silent, as if the universe was listening to its Master's voice, from the song of the humming-bird which sings its love-song from the petals of a flower, to the voice of the hissing serpent, which, erect above the undergrowth, calls in its own fashion for its mate. Then once more the lion’s voice is hushed, and all the many sounds, which were silenced by his roar, break forth again upon the jungle and the night.

Captain Pamphile, as we have said, remained for a moment gazing at the sight before him; but, as we know, the worthy sailor was not the man to allow sentimental considerations to interfere for long with the serious business which had brought him to the spot. Thus his second thoughts brought him back full into the midst of his material interests. Then he observed, on the far side of a small stream which flowed from the depths of the forest into the Orange, the whole of the Kaffir army lying asleep in their bivouacs, watched over by a few sentinels, who might have been taken for statues. Like the Little Namaquas, they seemed resolved to offer battle on the morrow, and to be waiting, with a firm front, the onslaught of their foes. Captain Pamphile reconnoitred their position at a glance, and calculated the chances of a surprise; then, as he had settled his plans, he made a sign to his companion, and they returned to camp as stealthily as they had left it. He had scarcely got back before he aroused his men, took twelve with him, leaving eight with Outavaro, and accompanied by about one hundred Little Namaquas, whom their chief had ordered to follow the white captain, he plunged into the forest, made a long march in a particular direction, and so came out and hid himself and his men in the fringe of wood which covered the rear of the Kaffir position.

He disposed his men so that between each pair of sailors, who were extended at considerable intervals, there should be ten to twelve Namaquas; he made all lie down, and awaited events.

There was not long to wait; at daybreak, loud shouts announced to Captain Pamphile that the battle had begun. Soon among the shouts rose the sound of sustained musketry, and this was quickly followed by a panic among the enemy’s ranks, who, turning tail, fled for the forest. This was what Captain Pamphile was waiting for, and he had only to show himself and his men to complete the defeat.

The unfortunate Kaffirs, surrounded both behind and before, shut in on one side by the river, on the other by the forest, did not even attempt to fly further; they fell on their knees and thought that their last hour was come. In fact, probably not one would have escaped destruction at the hands of the

Namaquas had not Captain Pamphile reminded Outavaro that their slaughter was a breach of his convention. The chief exerted his authority, and instead of using their clubs and knives, the conquerors proceeded to bind the vanquished hand and foot. Then, when the operation was completed, they collected, not the dead, but the living. They slackened the cords which bound their legs, and made them march willy-nilly to the capital of the Little Namaquas. As for the few who had escaped, their number was too small to cause any disquietude.

As this last decisive victory was due to Captain Pamphile's intervention, he was received with all triumphal honours. The women danced in front of him with garlands, the girls strewed roses in his path. The old men saluted him with the title of The White Lion, and the whole nation united in a great feast in his honour. When the rejoicings were over, the Captain, after thanking the Namaquas for their hospitality, announced that the time he could devote to pleasure had expired, and that he was reluctantly compelled to return to business; therefore he desired Outavaro to make the prisoners over to him. The chief admitted the justice of the demand, and led him to the large shed into which they had been thrown on their arrival, and in which they had been left forgotten till then. As three days had elapsed since their capture, some had died of their wounds, others of hunger, and some of the heat. Thus it was high time, it will be admitted, that Captain Pamphile looked to his merchandise, which was beginning to deteriorate.

Captain Pamphile went down the ranks of the prisoners, in company with the doctor, himself handling the sick, looking at the wounds, helping with the bandages, and separating the bad from the good, like the Angel of the Day of Judgment. After doing this, he took a muster of the sound ones and found he had two hundred and thirty negroes in excellent condition.

All these could be recommended as well-seasoned men; they had passed through the fight, the march, and the starvation. They could be sold and bought with perfect confidence; there was no fear of deterioration. So pleased was the Captain with his bargain that he presented Outavaro with a quarter pipe of brandy and twelve ells of tobacco twist. As a return for his civility, the chief of the Namaquas lent him eight large canoes for the embarkation of the prisoners, and he himself, with his family and the nobles of his kingdom, accompanied him to his ship in his state barge.

The Captain was received by the sailors who had remained on board with so great a show of pleasure that the chief of the Namaquas was much impressed by the affection in which the worthy sailor was held. As the Captain was, before everything a man of method, who allowed nothing to interfere with his duty, he left the doctor and Double-Bouche to do the honours of the “Roxelane “to his guests, and went down into the hold with the carpenter.

It was in that part of the ship that a difficulty had to be overcome, which called for the personal supervision of Captain Pamphile. When sailing from Havre, the Captain had reckoned on effecting an exchange of cargo. Naturally the goods taken in would take the place of those given out. But here, by an unexpected course of events, Captain Pamphile was taking away again what he had brought. The problem, then, was how to pack two hundred and thirty niggers into a vessel already fairly well laden.

Fortunately the fresh goods were men; if they had been ordinary packages of merchandise, the thing would have been physically impossible. But the human machine is so wonderfully well made, it has such flexible joints, it can be so readily stowed on its feet or on its head, on right side or left, on belly or back, that one must be very maladroit not to contrive to turn its capabilities to advantage. So Captain Pamphile soon saw how he could fit everything into place. He had his eleven pipes of brandy put into the “lion’s den “and the sail-room; for he considered it unadvisable to mix up his cargo, as either the brandy would spoil the negroes, or the negroes would spoil the brandy. Then he measured the length of the hold. It was eighty feet long — more than was necessary. Every one ought to be satisfied with one foot of the surface of the globe, and by Captain Pamphile’s reckoning, each man would have a line and a half above and to spare. Obviously, this was positive luxury, and the Captain could really have found room for half a score more. Thus, the master carpenter, following out the Captain’s orders, proceeded in the following manner:

He fastened to port and to starboard a plank standing out about ten inches from the bilge of the vessel to serve as a rest for the feet; supported in this way by this plank, seventy-seven negroes could lie very comfortably against the sides of the ship, especially as to prevent their falling on top of each other during bad weather, which was certain to be encountered, each was attached to an iron ring placed between each. True, the rings took up some of the room on which Captain Pamphile had reckoned, so that instead of having a line and a half to spare, each man found himself as a matter of fact three lines to the bad. Still, what are three lines to a man — a mere fraction of an inch — why, nothing! You must be of a very carping spirit to make a fuss about three lines when you have close upon a good foot of space all to yourself. The arrangements were thus carried on down both sides of the hold. The negroes when thus ranged in two ranks, left a space twelve feet broad down the middle. In this space, Captain Pamphile had a sort of long camp-bed made, six feet broad, over the centre of the keel. But as there were only sixty-six negroes to place on it, each man gained fifty-four hundredths of an inch; therefore, the chief carpenter called this centre bench very appropriately the Pashas' Row. As it was six feet wide, there was a passage on each side three feet wide for walking about and feeding the cargo. As we have seen, there was plenty of room, and moreover the Captain did not fail to see that, in passing through the tropics twice, his ebony would probably shrink a little, which unfortunately would waste some more room. But all speculations must trust something to chance, and a merchant of any foresight always counts on some loss from wastage.

Once the procedure was settled, the execution of the work rested with the chief carpenter; so having acquitted himself of his duties as a philanthropist, Captain Pamphile went up on deck again to see how they were entertaining his guests.

He found Outavaro, his family and his grandees, in the midst of a magnificent banquet, presided over by the doctor. The Captain took his place at the top of the table, quite certain that he could entirely trust his work below to his deputy. In fact, by the time the dinner was over, and the chief of the Little Namaquas with his wife and his courtiers had re-embarked in their canoe, the chief carpenter came and reported that all was ready in the hold and that he could come and see how the cargo was stowed. This the worthy Captain immediately did.

The statement was perfectly correct; everything was properly arranged and each negro tied to the timbers so that he appeared to form part of the vessel and looked like a mummy waiting to be put into his coffin. They had even saved a few inches on those placed amidships, so that it was possible to walk all round this kind of gigantic gridiron on which they were spread. So well packed were they that Captain Pamphile was struck with the idea of adding Outavaro, his august family, and the notables of the kingdom to his collection. Happily for the chief, he had no sooner been safely conducted to his canoe, than his subjects, who had not quite so much confidence in the White Lion as had their king, took advantage of their liberty to row away as fast as possible. So that, when Captain Pamphile regained the deck with the unpleasant idea which had occurred to him in the hold, the canoe was just disappearing round the first bend of the Orange River.

As he saw them go, Captain Pamphile heaved a deep sigh; he had lost fifteen to twenty thousand francs by his tardiness in making up his mind.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOW CAPTAIN PAMPHILE, HAVING DISPOSED TO ADVANTAGE OF HIS BLACK IVORY AT MARTINIQUE AND HIS SPIRITS AT THE GRAND ANTILLES, CAME ACROSS HIS OLD FRIEND BLACK SNAKE AGAIN, NOW CAZIQUE OF THE MOSQUITOS, AND PURCHASED THAT DIGNITY FROM HIM FOR A HALF- PIPE OF BRANDY

After two months and a half of a prosperous voyage, during which, thanks to the paternal care exercised by Captain Pamphile over his cargo, he only lost thirty-two negroes, the “Roxelane “sailed into the harbour of Martinique.

The time was most opportune for the disposal of his cargo. Thanks to the philanthropic measures which by common agreement had been adopted by civilized nations against the slave trade, which was now exposed to quite ridiculous risks, the colonies had been driven to want.

Captain Pamphile’s wares were thus at a high premium when he landed at Saint-Pierre-Martinique; thus he had none but the richest for his customers. Moreover, the Captain’s cargo was really of the very best description. All these men captured on the battlefield were the bravest and strongest of their race; then they had little of the natural stupidity and animal apathy of the Congo negroes; their intercourse with the Cape had made them almost civilized. They were only a half-savage race. Thus the Captain sold them for a thousand dollars apiece, taking one with the other. This came to a total of nine hundred and ninety thousand francs, And, since he as commander was

entitled to a half-share, he pocketed, on his own account, after all expenses were paid, four hundred and twenty-two thousand francs (£16,880), a sum of money not to be sneezed at.

Then an unexpected occurrence gave another opportunity to Captain Pamphile to make a good profit on the other portion of his cargo. As the firm of Jackson and Co., of New York, had only received thirty-eight pipes of brandy instead of the fifty which had been expected from Ignace Nicolas

Pelonge of Orléans, it had been obliged, contrary to its well-known principles of punctual delivery, to disappoint some of its customers. Consequently, Captain Pamphile heard at Saint-Pierre that the islands of the Great Antilles were entirely out of spirits. As he had on board, as will be remembered, eleven and three-quarter pipes of brandy which he had not used, he resolved to set sail for Jamaica.

Captain Pamphile had not been deceived; the inhabitants of Jamaica were longing for a taste of brandy, which they had been without for three months; so the worthy Captain's arrival was welcomed as a providence. But as there is no bargaining with Providence, the Captain sold his pipes at the rate of twenty francs a bottle; this added to his first dividend of four hundred and twenty-two thousand francs an additional fifty thousand livres, which brought the sum total up to four hundred and seventy-two thousand francs. So, Captain Pamphile, who up to this time had never formed an aspiration beyond the *aurea mediocritas* of Horace, now resolved to sail immediately for Marseilles, where, by getting together all the funds which he had gathered in different parts of the globe, he would realize a small fortune of from seventy-two to eighty thousand livres of annual income. Man proposes and God disposes. The Captain had scarcely cleared the Bay of Kingston before he was caught in a gale which drove him towards the Mosquito Coast, which lies in the Gulf of Mexico, between the Bay of Honduras and the San-Juan River. Then, as the "Roxelane "was in need of some repairs, and required a new top-mast and flying jib-boom, the Captain decided to land, although the natives of the country were assembled in crowds on the shore, and some, armed with muskets, seemed disposed to resist his attempt. Thus, having got out the long-boat, and ordered that in case of accidents a small twelve-pound carronade should be mounted on a pivot in the bows, he manned her with twenty men and pulled vigorously to land, without troubling about the hostile demonstration of the natives, being resolved to get a top-mast and a jib-boom at any price.

The Captain had reckoned correctly on the effect which this prompt and precise demonstration of his intentions would produce; for as he neared the shore, the natives, who could see the Captain's warlike preparations with the naked eye, retreated inland, where some poor huts could be seen, the largest of which carried a flag, whose device could not be made out, owing to the distance from the shore. The result of their retirement was, that when the Captain landed, the two forces were about the same distance apart, about a thousand yards, as before. This distance was too great for a conversation except by signals, and the Captain at once made his, by planting in the ground a staff from which floated a white handkerchief. This, all over the world, is understood as a sign that the makers of it are animated by friendly intentions.

It was doubtless so interpreted by the Mosquitos, for directly they saw it, a person who appeared to be their chief, dressed as such in an old uniform coat, which, for the sake of coolness, he wore without shirt or trousers, put down his musket/ tomahawk, and knife, and, raising both hands to show he was unarmed, advanced towards the shore. This demonstration was instantly understood by the Captain; for, not wishing to be behindhand, in his courtesy he put down his gun, pistols, and sword, raised his hands, and went to meet the savage with the same appearance of confidence as the latter had shown. When he got within fifty paces of the Mosquito Chief, Captain Pamphile stopped to look at him more attentively. It struck him that his face was not unknown to him and that this was not the first time he had the honour of meeting him. On his side, the savage appeared to have much the same idea, and the sight of the Captain seemed to stir up some confused and uncertain memories in his brain. At last, as they could not go on staring thus for ever, both advanced again till they were within about ten paces of each other, when both halted afresh with exclamations of surprise.

"*Heuu!*" said the Mosquito, gravely.

"*Sacredié!*" said the Frenchman, laughing.

"Black Snake is a great chief," said the Huron.

"Pamphile is a great captain," said the sailor.

"What does Captain Pamphile come to seek in the land of the Black Snake?"

"Two poor little sticks of willow, one to make a top-mast, the other a jib-boom."

"And what will Captain Pamphile give Black Snake for them?"

"A bottle of fire-water."

"Captain Pamphile is welcome," said the Huron, after a short interval of silence, offering his hand as a token of consent. The Captain seized the Chief's hand, and clasped it so tightly that he crushed his fingers, as a sign that the bargain was made. Black Snake bore the torture like a true Indian with calm eyes and smiling lips. Seeing this, the sailors on their side and the

Mosquitos on theirs gave three mighty cheers to show their pleasure at the sight.

“And when will Captain Pamphile deliver the firewater?” asked the Huron, withdrawing his hand.

“On the spot,” replied the sailor.

“Pamphile is a great captain,” said the Huron, bowing.

“Black Snake is a great chief,” said the sailor, returning the salutation.

Upon this, both turning about with the same gravity, returned each to his own command, to tell how the conference had ended. An hour afterwards Black Snake had his bottle of fire-water and the same evening Captain Pamphile had selected two palm trees which exactly suited his purpose.

As the head carpenter wanted eight days to fit up his top-mast and jib-boom, the Captain, to prevent any breach of the peace between his crew and the natives occurring in the meanwhile, had a line drawn on the shore, which the sailors were forbidden to pass on any pretext whatsoever. Black Snake, on his side, also defined certain boundaries which his people were ordered to respect as their limit, and in the neutral zone between the camps a tent was pitched to serve as a meeting place when business relations rendered it desirable that the two commanders should hold conferences with each other.

The following day Black Snake took his-way towards the tent, calumet in hand. Captain Pamphile, noting the peaceful attitude of the Chief of the Mosquitos, strolled over from his side with his cutty in his mouth.

Black Snake had drunk his bottle of fire-water and wanted another. Captain Pamphile, without being inordinately inquisitive, was not at all sorry for the opportunity for finding out how it came to pass that he met on the Isthmus of Panama as Chief of the Mosquitos the man he had left on the River St. Lawrence as Chief of the Hurons.

Thus, as both were ready to make some concession with a view to satisfying their respective wishes, they met like two old friends delighted to renew their acquaintanceship, and as a mark of complete amity Black Snake took Captain Pamphile’s pipe and Captain Pamphile the Indian’s calumet, and both sat for a short time gravely puffing clouds of smoke in each other’s faces.

After a short space of silent contemplation, Black Snake began the conversation by observing:

“The tobacco of my brother the paleface is very strong.”

“Which is to say, that my brother the redskin would like to wet his lips with fire-water,” answered Captain Pamphile.

“Fire-water is the Huron’s milk,” replied the Huron, with a proud air which showed how superior he considered himself in this respect to the European.

“Let my brother drink, then,” said Captain Pamphile, taking a case-bottle from his pocket, “and when the vessel is empty, we will refill it.”

Black Snake took the flask, put it to his lips, and at the first draught emptied about a third of its contents.

The Captain took it back, gave it a shake to calculate the deficit, and applying his mouth to it, gave it a suck with a goodwill fully equalling that shown by his guest. The latter wanted it back again in turn.

“One moment!” said the Captain, placing it between his knees. “As the flask is two-thirds empty, suppose we talk a little about our doings since we last saw each other.”

“What would my brother like to know?” asked the Chief.

“Your brother wishes to hear,” said Captain Pamphile, “whether you -came here by sea or over land?”

“By sea,” answered the Huron, laconically. “And who brought you here?”

“The Chief of the Redcoats.”

“Let the tongue of Black Snake be loosened, and let him tell his story to his brother the paleface,” said the Captain, handing the case-bottle back to the Huron, who emptied the rest of it at a draught.

“Is my brother listening?” asked the Chief, his eyes beginning to sparkle.

“He listens,” replied the Captain, answering in the laconic manner of the Indian.

“After my brother left me in the middle of the storm,” said the Chief, “Black Snake continued his journey up the big river, no longer in his canoe, which was wrecked, but by marching on foot up the bank. He travelled thus for five days more, and then came to the shores of Lake Ontario. He crossed it to York, and was soon at Lake Huron, where his wigwam was situated. But during his absence great events had taken place.

“The English, pushing the red men back before them, had little by little made their way as far as the shores of Lake Superior. Black Snake found his village inhabited by palefaces, and strangers had taken his place in the home of his ancestors.

“Then he retired to the mountains in which the Ottawa has its source, and called on his young braves; they dug up the war hatchet, and flocked round him, numerous as were the elks and their hinds before the palefaces come to the springs of the Delaware and the Susquehanna. Then the palefaces were dismayed, and in the name of the Governor they sent an embassy to the Black Snake. They offered to give him six muskets, two barrels of powder, and fifty bottles of fire-water if he would sell the roof-tree of his father and the land of his ancestors. And instead of this homestead and of those fields they were to give him the country of the Mosquitos, which had just been ceded to the palefaces by the Republic of Guatemala. Black Snake resisted for a long time all the tempting offers made him, but at last he unfortunately tasted the fire-water, and then his heart became as wax. He gave his consent to the treaty, and the exchange was made. Black Snake took a stone and threw it away behind him, saying:

“‘As I throw away this stone, so may Manitu, the Great Spirit, cast me away from him if ever again I set foot, in the forests, the prairies, or the mountains which lie between Lake Erie and Hudson’s Bay, and between Lake Ontario and Lake Superior.’

“Forthwith he was taken to Philadelphia, placed on board ship, and conveyed to Mosquitos; there Black Snake and the young braves who accompanied him built the huts which my brother can see from here. When the houses were ready, the commander of the palefaces raised the English flag above the largest of them and returned to his ship, leaving with Black Snake a paper written in an unknown tongue.”

As he concluded his story Black Snake sighed, and drew a parchment from his breast, opening it for Captain Pamphile to peruse; it was the document by which was ceded to him all the territory lying between the Bay of Honduras and the Lake of Nicaragua, it being placed under the protection of England, and he reigning with the title “Cazique of the Mosquitos.”

The Britannic Government reserved to itself the right of constructing one or more fortresses, at such places as it might choose, in the territory of the Cazique.

England is the most far-sighted of nations; on the presumption that some day or other the Isthmus of Panama would be cut through, it might be at Chiapa, it might be at Cartago, she formed beforehand the project of establishing an American Gibraltar between the Atlantic and the Pacific

Oceans. While reading the document Captain Pamphile was struck by a novel idea. He had speculated in everything — tea, indigo, coffee, cod, apes, bears, spirits, and Kaffirs; now he saw his way to purchasing a kingdom.

Only the last-named cost him rather more than he had at first expected. This was not on account of the sea teeming with fish which washed its shores, nor of the tall cocoanut trees which fringed the streams, nor yet again of the vast forests which clothe the mountains cutting the Isthmus in two, and form the border between the Guatemalians and the Mosquitos. No, Black Snake set but small store by all this potential wealth; but, on the other hand, he set an enormous value on the red seal which ornamented the foot of his parchment. Unfortunately, the deed was worthless without the seal, which was that of the English Foreign Minister. The seal cost the Captain one hundred and fifty bottles of fire-water; but he got the parchment thrown in into the bargain.

CHAPTER XIX

HOW THE CAZIQUE OF THE MOSQUITOS ENDOWED HIS SUBJECTS WITH A CONSTITUTION, THEREBY FACILITATING A LITTLE LOAN FOR HIMSELF OF TWELVE MILLIONS

About four months after the events we have ju*st* described, a smart brig, flying a gorgeous ensign, divided horizontally into three bands of green, blue and silver, hoisted below the Royal Standard of England, which floated proudly above it in token of suzerainty, fired a salute of twenty-one guns as it hove to under the fortifications of Portsmouth, and the courtesy was returned gun for gun.

The vessel was the “Solomon,” a swift cruiser, one of the numerous men-of-war belonging to the Cazique of Mosquitos, detailed for the purpose of conveying to London and to Edinburgh the Consuls appointed by his Highness. The object of their visit was to present themselves, carrying the deed of cession, and to get their master’s position recognized by his Majesty William IV.

There had been a good deal of curiosity shown as soon as an unknown ensign had been seen in Portsmouth Roads; but this was considerably increased as soon as it was known how important were the persons on board the unknown vessel. Everybody rushed to the harbour to view the disembarkation of the two distinguished envoys sent by the new sovereign whom Great Britain had just added to the number of its vassals. It seemed to the English, longing as they do for novelty, that the two consuls were sure to be something out of the common, and would, of course, retain something of the uncivilized state from which the kindly rule of England would shortly rescue them. But, in this respect, the anticipations of the crowd were completely falsified; the pinnace landed two men, one of whom, from fifty to fifty-five years of age, short, rotund and red-faced was the Consul for England, and the other, twenty to twenty-three years of age, tall and spare, was the Consul for Edinburgh. Both were dressed in handsome uniforms which seemed to be half-way between military and civil dress. As to their general appearance, their skins tanned by the burning sun, and their strongly marked Southern accent, proclaimed both to eye and ear their equatorial origin. The travellers on landing inquired for the residence of the Governor of the Station, and paid him a visit, which lasted about an hour; on leaving him they returned on board the "Solomon," followed as before by an admiring throng. The same evening the vessel sailed again, and in a week's time, their happy arrival in London was reported in "The Times," the "Standard," and the "Sun," and according to these papers, they created a great sensation. The Governor of Portsmouth was not at all surprised at this, for, as he had told everybody who cared to listen, he had been himself astonished at the varied accomplishments displayed by the envoys of the Cazique of the Mosquitos. Both talked very fair French, and one, the Consul for England, appeared to have very clear ideas about commercial matters, and even possessed a slight knowledge of medicine, while the other, the Consul for Edinburgh, shone especially by his brilliant wit, and the interesting studies he had made of the various culinary arts obtaining among the different nations of the world; for young as he was, his parents had made a great traveller of him, foreseeing, no doubt, the important duties to which he was called by Providence.

The two Mosquito Consuls were as great a success in the ministerial circles of London as they had been at Government House at Portsmouth. The authorities, to whom they paid their respects, noted in them, it is true, complete ignorance as to the usages of society; but this want of fashionable manners, which one could scarcely wonder at in men born south of the tenth degree of latitude, was amply atoned for by the many talents they had at their finger-ends, such as are often I quite unknown to the members of the most civilized nations.

For instance, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, having returned one evening very hoarse from the House of Commons, where he had been forced to debate with O'Connell a fresh scheme of taxation for Ireland, the Consul for London, who chanced to be present when he came in, asked her ladyship for the yolk of an egg, a lemon, a glass of rum and a few cloves, and with his own hands mixed a draught which was very agreeable to the palate, and which, he said, was frequently taken at Comayagua as a cure for attacks of this nature. The Chancellor having swallowed the potion in all good faith, found himself completely cured the next morning. This display of skill attracted so much attention in the diplomatic world that the Consul of London was from that time forth universally known as the “Doctor.”

Another circumstance, not less extraordinary than the foregoing, happened with reference to Sir Edward Twomouth, the Edinburgh Consul.

One day when a conversation was being carried on, at the house of the Minister for Public Instruction, about the dishes of different nations, Sir Edward Twomouth showed such an intimate knowledge of the subject, from Indian curry, such a favourite in Calcutta, to bison-hump pasty, the standing delicacy of Philadelphia, that his descriptions made everybody’s mouth water. The Consul seeing the effect he had produced on the distinguished company about him, offered the Minister for Public Instruction, in the kindest way possible, personally to superintend the preparation of one of his approaching dinners, promising that no dishes should be served except such as were entirely unknown in Europe. The Minister, overwhelmed by such excessive condescension, refused for a long time to put him to so much trouble; but Sir Edward Twomouth pressed his services so graciously and frankly that His Excellency gave way at last and invited all his colleagues to join in the culinary solemnity. So, on the appointed day, the Consul for Edinburgh, who had given his orders for the necessary purchases the previous evening, arrived in the morning, and without an atom of pride or assumption, went down to the kitchen, and, in his shirt-sleeves, took over command of the cooks and scullions, setting them to work as if he had never had any other occupation in his life. The dinner having been cooked, half an hour before its time for dishing up he untied his apron, resumed his official attire, and, with the modesty of real merit, entered the drawing room as calmly as if he had just arrived in his carriage.

This was the dinner, the effect of which was a revolution in the English Cabinet, that was compared to Belshazzer’s feast by the “Constitutionnel “in a scathing leading article headed “Perfidious Albion.”

In this wise deep regret was felt in the gastronomic clubs of Piccadilly when Sir Edward Twomouth, obeying the stern mandates of duty, was obliged to leave London for Edinburgh. The “Doctor “then remained by himself in Town. After some time, he notified to the Diplomatic Corps that his august master, his Highness Don Guzman y Pamfilos would shortly arrive in England. The news produced a great sensation in the fashionable world.

Following the announcement, one morning a foreign vessel was signalled sailing up the Thames, flying the Mosquitos flag at her peak and that of Great Britain at the mizen. This was the brig “Mosquitos,” from the same port and of the same tonnage as the “Solomon,” but all splendid with gilded mouldings and decorations. The same day she dropped anchor off the docks. She proved to be the Cazique’s own ship bringing his Highness in person to London.

If the crowd had been large on the occasion of the Consuls’ landing, it was much greater when their master arrived. All London seemed to be in the streets, and the Diplomatic Corps had great difficulty in getting through the eager crowd, as they proceeded to meet and receive the new potentate.

He was a man of forty-five to forty-eight years of age, recognizable at a glance as belonging to the true Mexican type, with his sparkling eyes, his bronzed complexion, his aquiline nose and his jackal’s teeth. He was dressed as a Mosquitos General and wore, as his only decoration, the badges of his rank. He spoke pretty fair English, but with a Provençal accent. This was because French was the first language he had mastered, and his instructor was a native of Marseilles. But he conversed easily with all, talking to each Minister and Ambassador in his own tongue. His Highness the Cazique seemed to be a most accomplished linguist.

The following day his Highness was received by his Majesty William IV. A week later the walls of London were papered with woodcuts of the different uniforms of the Army and Navy of the Cazique of the Mosquitos. These were followed by landscape drawings of the Bay of Cartago and Cape Gracias-a-Dios taken from where the Golden River flows into the sea.

Lastly appeared a correct view of the chief square of the capital, with the palace of the Cazique in the middle, the theatre on one side, and the chamber of commerce on the other.

All the soldiers looked fat and sleek, and the phenomenon was explained by a printed announcement at the foot of each engraving giving the rates of pay of each rank. These were three francs a day for privates, five francs for corporals, eight to fifteen francs for sergeants and other non-commissioned officers, twenty-five francs for lieutenants and fifty francs for captains. The cavalry received double these rates, because they had to keep up their own horses. These splendid salaries, which would have been extravagant in London or Paris, were quite reasonable in Mosquitos, where the rivers rolled with gold and the precious metals cropped up visibly from the ground, so that a man had only to stoop and pick up gold and silver.

As for the landscapes, they displayed the richest prospects that could possibly be imagined; ancient Sicily, which used to feed Rome and Italy from the surplus stores of its twelve million inhabitants, was but a desert beside the plains of Panamakas, of Caribania and of Tinto. The whole country was covered with maize, rice, sugar cane, and coffee, the fields being only divided by the pathways absolutely necessary to allow the cultivators to get about among their crops, all of which grew spontaneously, without any labour whatever. In fact, the natives cultivated the ground not for the sake of the crops at all, which they had only to harvest as they grew, but because their ploughshares frequently turned up nuggets of gold weighing two or three pounds, and diamonds of from thirty to thirty-five carats.

Lastly, as far as could be judged from the then magnificent buildings which formed three sides of the great square of Mosquitos, the town was built in a happily eclectic style of architecture, borrowed from the chaste edifices of the Ancient Greek, the florid erections of the Middle Ages, and the handsome utilitatian constructions of modern times; thus the Cazique’s Palace was a replica of the Parthenon, the façade of the theatre was in the style of the Cathedral of Milan, and the “Bourse,” resembled the Church of Notre Dame de Lorette at Paris. As for the inhabitants, they were dressed in magnificent garments, glittering with gold and precious stones. Negresses bore parasols of the brilliant plumage of toucans and humming-birds over the ladies’ heads; lackeys were giving away pieces of gold to all who asked, while in the corner of the picture was a poor man feeding his dog with sausages.

For a fortnight after the arrival of the Cazique in London nothing was talked of throughout the country but the Eldorado of the Mosquitos; people collected in such crowds before these magnificent advertisements that the constables were unable to keep the roads clear for traffic. When this was brought to the Cazique’s notice, he forthwith called upon the Lord Mayor, and begged him to prohibit the exhibition of any bill or poster calculated to attract public attention to his kingdom. The Lord Mayor, who up till that time had refrained from interfering solely because he did not wish to offend his Highness Don Guzman y Pamfilos, gave the order for the confiscation, that very day, of all illustrations and literature relating to the said kingdom.

But if the prints and bills were lost to sight, their memory was by no means effaced; so the day after this high-handed seizure, almost unprecedented in a free country like Great Britain, more than fifty persons attended at the Consul's office, stating that they were desirous of emigrating, if their inquiries could be answered as favourably as they had been led to anticipate.

The Consul informed them that whatever idea they might have conceived of the beauties of this happy land was as far removed from the reality as night is from day, or storm from sunshine, that the art of the lithographer could not, at best, be anything but a very imperfect medium for the representation of nature, seeing that black and white not only failed in reproducing colour, but also in giving a notion of the thousand and one beautiful touches which went to make up the charm and harmony of creation. For instance, he said, the bird which fluttered about the trees and which enjoyed the privilege, unknown to those of Europe, of being able to destroy all noxious insect life, without themselves suffering at all from the diet, were necessarily represented by the engraver as nothing better than sparrows or swallows, whereas in truth their brilliant plumage outshone the rainbow and they might have been taken for flying rubies or living topazes. And, he continued, if they would kindly step into his sitting-room he could show them the birds, which they would recognize as the same from their shape, their beaks and their tails, and then by comparing their true plumage with what the engraver had been able to show, they would be able to judge of the rest of the drawings by the example he was able to put before them. The worthy folk followed him into the other room, and as the "Doctor," a great lover of natural history, had, in the course of his travels, made a valuable collection of all those flying blossoms we call humming-birds, honey-suckers, and Indian finches, they came back profoundly impressed with the veracity of his statements. Next day a bootmaker waited on the Consul, and asked if industry was free from taxation in Mosquitosland. The Consul replied that Government was so paternal in its methods that even payment for patent rights was a thing unknown. The result of free competition was beneficial both to the producer and the consumer, for all the neighbouring nations drew their supplies from the capital of the Caziquate, where they found everything so much below the prices current in their own countries, that the saving effected repaid them over and over again the cost of travel and transport. The only tradesmen who were to be allowed special privileges in the future, for the class did not exist at present — the idea of its creation having only been suggested to the Cazique in England — were the purveyors to the Serene Person and Household of His Highness. The bootmaker asked at once if a bootmaker to the Crown had been appointed in Mosquitos. The Consul said that there had been numerous applications for the post, but that no one had yet been honoured with the appointment; moreover, that the Cazique intended to establish a scale of purchase for all similar appointments, with a view to preventing once for all the intrigue and venality which were the curse of European administrations. The bootmaker asked at what figure the post of bootmaker to the Crown had been scheduled. The “Doctor “consulted his books and found that the appointment of bootmaker to the Crown was valued at two hundred and fifty pounds sterling. The bootmaker jumped for joy; that was nothing at all, so taking out of his pocket five bank-notes he handed them over to the Consul, begging that he would at once enter his name as that of the sole and only holder of the office, which was only fair, as he had made on the spot full and complete payment of the charges involved. The Consul thought the request so extremely right and proper that he forthwith proceeded to fill up the commission, which he delivered straightway to the petitioner, signing it himself and sealing it with the state seal of His Highness. The bootmaker left the Consulate confident that his fortune was made, and congratulating himself on having attained his desire at so small a sacrifice.

From that time forth, there were applications by the score at the Consulate. The bootmaker was followed by a tailor, the tailor by a chemist and druggist; in a week’s time every branch of industry, of commerce or of art, had its commissioned representative. After this began the purchase of ranks and titles; the Cazique promoted applicants to colonels, and created them barons; he sold both life peerages and peerages in perpetuity. One gentleman, who already possessed the order of the Golden Spur and the Hohenlohe Order, even offered to purchase the Star of the Equator, which had been established as a reward for civil merit and military daring. But the Cazique replied that at this point he must draw the line between his practice and those of European Governments, and that he declined to grant this decoration to anyone who had not earned it. Notwithstanding this refusal, which, by the way, brought him much credit among the Radical Party in

England, the Cazique banked during the month a sum of sixty thousand pounds sterling.

About this period, after a State Dinner, the Cazique ventured to let fall a remark about a loan of four millions. The Crown banker, who was a Jew, money-lender to every sovereign in Europe, smiled with pity at the idea, and observed to the Cazique that he would not find it easy to borrow less than twelve millions, all monetary transactions below that figure being left to the bucket-shops and outside brokers. The Cazique answered that any little difficulty of that kind need make no difference to him, as twelve millions would suit him every bit as well as four. The banker told him that if he would come round to his office, he would find his head clerk there, whose duty it was to negotiate all loans not amounting to more than fifty millions. This young man would be given orders to facilitate the transaction, and the Cazique could make his own terms with him. As for the banker himself, he took no personal interest in transactions involving less than a thousand millions.

The next day the Cazique paid a visit to the financier’s office. Everything was ready for him, as had been promised. The loan was to be issued at six per cent; Mr. Samuel guaranteed the placing of the loan on the market, and in the meantime was to find the whole capital. Nevertheless, there was one condition attached that was to be considered as a *sine qua non.* The Cazique felt some little anxiety as he inquired what the said condition might be. The agent replied that the condition was that he should grant Constitutional Government to his subjects. The Cazique stood for a moment dumb with amazement at the nature of the request. Not that he had the slightest intention of refusing it. He well knew the value attaching to documents settling grants of this nature, and would have given a dozen for a thousand crowns, and à fortiori one for twelve thousand crowns. But he never expected that Mr. Samuel would take up the cause of liberty among the nations; and had even heard him express, in his half-German, half-French patois, opinions distinctly inimical to the request which he now had conveyed to him. He could not then refrain from expressing his astonishment to the agent.

The latter explained to the Cazique that His Highness had quite correctly gauged the political opinions of his employer, but whereas in an Absolute Monarchy the Prince was responsible for the debts of the State, in a constitutional kingdom the State became responsible for the ruler’s debts, and although Mr. Samuel trusted to a great extent in the promises of kings, he had a still more implicit faith in engagements entered into by nations.

The Cazique, who was a man of experience, was constrained to admit that the theory propounded by the agent had a great deal of force, and he also saw that Mr. Samuel, whom he had taken for a purse-proud blunderer, was really a far-sighted financier. He therefore promised to draw up by the next day a constitution conceived in as liberal terms as any obtaining in Europe, one of the principal articles running as follows:

“the public debt.

“Such debts as have been, or shall be, contracted by His Highness the Cazique up to the date of the approaching Convocation of Parliament are hereby declared to be part of the State Debt, and they are guaranteed by the whole revenue and property of the State.

“A law will be prepared for submission at the approaching session for fixing the portion of the revenue assignable to the payment of interest and the gradual extinction, by repayment of capital, of the bonded debt.”

This clause was drafted by Mr. Samuel.

The Cazique did not alter one iota of this, and the next day he brought with him to the office the complete constitution, just as it appears in the documentary evidence we append to this history. It was signed by his own hand and impressed with his own seal. The clerk examined it and judged it in form, and took it to Mr. Samuel. Mr. Samuel wrote below it at the foot “Passed for Press,” tore a leaf from his memorandum book, scribbled on it, “Pay to Bearer twelve millions, and charge to current account,” and signed it “*Samuel.*”

A week later, every English newspaper printed the text of the constitution granted to the people of Mosquitos, and this was copied into every newspaper on the Continent. This evoked from the “Constitutionnel.”

that remarkable leading article which is still fresh in the memories of all, the title of which was “Noble England!”

It can easily be understood that such unparalleled generosity, on the part of a Prince from whom nothing had been demanded, redoubled the confidence he had already inspired, and tripled the number of emigrants. The total had mounted up to six thousand six hundred and thirty-nine souls, when, as the Consul, after signing, was handing over the sixth thousand and thirty-ninth passport, he casually asked the emigrant what money he and his comrades were taking out. The man replied that they had bank-notes and gold. Upon this the Consul said it was his duty to warn them that they would lose at the Bank of Mosquitos six per cent on their notes and two shillings a guinea on their gold, this loss being explained by the distance between the two countries and the rarity of intercourse, all commerce generally taking the direction of Cuba, Haïti, Jamaica, and of North and South America.

The emigrant, who was a man of understanding, quite saw the reason for the loss, but, distressed at the thought of the terrible hole which the unfavourable rate of exchange would make in his little savings, he asked His Excellency the Consul if he could not possibly, as a special favour, exchange his bank-notes and guineas then and there against Mosquitos silver or gold. The Consul regretted that he could not part with his Mosquitos cash, because, as the coinage was of pure metal unmixed with alloy, it was of considerably greater intrinsic value than the money of England, but said that for the nominal commission of one-half per cent he could furnish him with bank-notes drawn on the Cazique's own bank, which would be exchanged at par, on his arrival against the gold and silver currency of the Mosquitos. The emigrant tried to kiss the Consul's feet, but the latter, raising him with true Republican dignity, said that all men were equal, and gave him his hand to kiss. On that day the change of money began, and the process lasted a week. At the end of that period the Consul had received eighty thousand pounds sterling, without reckoning his commission.

About the same time Sir Edward Twomouth, the Consul at Edinburgh, advised his colleague in London of the receipt, through methods very analogous to those employed in the capital of the three kingdoms, of various sums amounting to fifty thousand pounds English. The "Doctor," at first sight, thought the total rather small; but on second thoughts he remembered that Scotland, as a poor country, could not be expected to produce as much as England.

For his part, his Highness the Cazique Don Guzman y Pamfilos cashed the banker Samuel's cheque for twelve millions.

CONCLUSION

The emigrants sailed in eight ships which had been chartered at their joint expense, and, after a three months' voyage, they arrived in sight of the coast the reader already knows, and cast anchor in Cartago Bay.

They found that the only town was the collection of huts we have described, and the only inhabitants the followers of Black Snake, who, on their being conducted before him, asked how much fire-water they had brought him. One part of the unfortunate band having nothing left to return to in England, decided on remaining in Mosquitos; the second half resolved to return to their own country. Half of this half died on the voyage home from hunger and privation. Those who reached London, exactly one-fourth of those who had left it, had no sooner set foot on dry land than they proceeded in a body to the Cazique's Mansion and the Consul's Residence. The Cazique and his Consul had not been seen for the last week preceding their arrival, and no one had any idea what had become of them.

Our own opinion is that the Cazique is living incognito in Paris, and we have reason to believe that he is in some way or another connected with not a few of the industrial developments which have been taking place for some time past. If we receive any precise information as to his movements, we shall not fail to apprise our readers of the fact.

Just as we are going to press we read the following in the "Medical Gazette ":

"Up to the present time spontaneous combustion has not been known to occur except among human beings; but a case has just been reported by Dr. Thierry, in which the victim belonged to the simian race. For the last five or six years this individual, in consequence of the sad loss he sustained through the death of a friend, had acquired the unfortunate habit of habitual daily indulgence in excessive quantities of wine and spirituous liquors. The very day of the accident he had drunk three successive glasses of rum and retired, as was his custom, to rest in the corner of the room, whence was heard, all of a sudden, a crackling sound like that of sparks flying about from a wood fire. The housekeeper, who was tidying the room, turned at once in the direction of the sound, and saw that the animal was enveloped in a cloud of blue flames like those emitted by burning spirits of wine, and yet he appeared to be without the power or will to make the slightest effort to escape. The terror with which she was seized at this extraordinary sight prevented her from going to help the poor beast, and it was not until the fire had burnt itself out that she dared approach the spot where it had originated. It was then too late; the animal was dead.

“The monkey which was the victim of this extraordinary fatality belonged to our famous fellow-townsman, the painter Tony Johannot.”

THE END

APPENDIX

CONSTITUTION OF THE MOSQUITOS, OF CENTRAL AMERICA — DON GUZMAN Y PAMFILOS, BY THE GRACE OF GOD, CAZIQUE OF THE SAID NATION

The heroic people of this country, having from time immemorial preserved their independence by their courage and their patriotism, were peacefully enjoying the fruits of their devotion at a time when all the rest of America groaned beneath the yoke of Spain. At the great and ever memorable epoch of the emancipation of the New World, the nations of this vast territory had not been brought into subjection by any European power; Spain had not exercised any real authority in the land, and had been forced to confine herself to the chimerical pretensions against which the courage and constancy of the native inhabitants had successfully protested. The nation of the Mosquitos has preserved intact the primitive liberties which she holds directly from the Creator.

With a view to consolidating its existence, to defending its freedom — the chiefest of all the possessions of a nation — and to guiding its progress towards the happiness of the social state, this country has already chosen us to govern it and in the immortal strife for the freedom of America we have shown the people of the continent that we are not unworthy contribuants to the glorious task of securing the destinies of this noble half of the human race.

Absorbed as we are in the duties which Providence has imposed upon us, while calling us, by the voice of a free people, to the government of these fair lands, we thought it well to defer, so far, the inauguration of certain changes which would add greatly to the happiness of our subjects; especially did we consider it necessary first to study thoroughly the wants of the nation to which the new institutions were to apply.

The time has come at last. We are rejoiced at being able to perform this duty, just at the time when victory has crowned for ever the destiny of this continent and has put an end to the strife wherein, for fifteen years, we have been among the first to uphold the banner of independence and to seal with our blood the imprescriptible rights of American peoples. For these reasons we have decreed and ordered, and do hereby decree and order as follows:

In the name of God Almighty and All Merciful:

ART. 1

All the provinces of this country, by whatsoever designations they are known, shall in future be confederated into a single State, which shall for ever remain one and indivisible, under the name of the “State of Poyais.” The various titles, under which we have, up to this present time, carried on the functions of government, shall, for the future, be all merged and consolidated in that of the Cazique of Poyais.

ART. 2

All the present inhabitants of this country, and all those who in the future shall receive letters of naturalization shall form but one single nation and be known as the Poyaisians, without distinction as to origin, birth, or colour.

ART. 3

All Poyaisians are equal as to duties and rights.

ART. 4

The State of Poyais will be divided into twelve provinces.

Each province is divided into districts, each district into parishes. The boundaries of the provinces are fixed by law.

For each province there is a governor, nominated by the Cazique. The governor’s duty is to manage the internal affairs of the province; he will be aided by a council composed of magnates, chosen and Organized by law.

In each district there is a deputy governor, and in each parish a mayor.

The nominations of deputies and of mayors and their duties will be regulated by law.

THE CAZIQUE

The Cazique is the Commander-in-Chief of all the State Forces both by land and sea.

It is his duty to raise, arm, and organize the forces, in accordance with the numbers and expenditure placed at his disposal by law. He appoints all officers, both civil and military, except in those cases where the constitution provides for their election by the popular vote. He is the Administrator-General of all the State Revenues, and acts in accordance with the laws as to its source, assessment, collection and disbursement. He is especially charged with the duty of keeping order within the kingdom, and he also enters into treaties of peace, and has the power of declaring war. All treaties must be submitted for approval to the Senate. He sends and receives all ambassadors and all descriptions of diplomatic envoys.

He alone has the right of proposing laws to the Parliament and of approving or rejecting them after they have passed through Parliament. The laws do not become of legal force until after his sanction and promulgation.

He may make regulations for the enforcement of the laws.

All lands which do not belong to private owners are hereby declared the property of the Cazique.

Their revenue and the proceeds of their sale are assigned for the due maintenance of his Highness the Cazique, of his family and of his personal, civil and military, establishments. The Cazique has the power, in consequence of this law, of disposal of any portion of these domains.

On his accession, the Cazique swears to observe the constitution in presence of the Parliament assembled.

The Cazique grants letters of naturalization to aliens.

The Cazique has the right of pardoning offenders.

The person of the Cazique is inviolable; his ministers only are responsible.

In case of ill-health, or of absence for some sufficient reason, the Cazique shall have the power of nominating one or more regents to govern in his name.

Our eldest son, issue of our marriage with Dona Josepha-Antonia-Andrea de Xérès de Aristiquicta y Lobera, born at Caracas, in the Venezuelan Republic, is hereby declared heir apparent of the dignity of Cazique of Mosquitos. In the next session of Parliament, a law will be brought forward providing for the case of the minority of the Cazique.

PARLIAMENT

Parliament exercises legislative powers concurrently with the Cazique. No loan can be raised in future, no tax, direct or indirect, can be imposed, without a decree passing through Parliament.

At the beginning of each session, the members of the two Houses of Parliament swear fealty to the Cazique and to the Constitution.

Parliament settles the value, weight, pattern and standard of the currency, and determines all weights and measures.

Each House makes its own rules for the conduct of business and for the good order of its sessions.

Either House may petition the Cazique in favour of a project of law on such and such subjects.

Parliament is composed of two bodies; the Senate and the House of Representatives.

SENATE

The Senate consists of fifty senators.

Four years after the promulgation of the present constitution, this number may be increased by due process of law.

The fifty senators shall be nominated by the Cazique for the first time only.

The senators are nominated for life.

In future, when any places become vacant in the senate, the senators shall choose, to fill the vacancy, one of three names submitted to them by the Cazique.

To become a Senator, the qualifications are: Age, thirty-one years at least; domicile, three years at least in the country; property qualification, three thousand acres in fee simple.

The Chancellor is President of the Senate.

The Bishop, or Bishops, of Poyais are *de jure* members of the Senate.

The sessions of the Senate are public.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The Lower House will be formed of sixty members (five representing each province) until such time as an Act shall be passed for increasing that number.

To become a deputy of the people of Poyais the age qualification is twenty-five years; the property qualification, a freehold of one thousand acres.

The House of Deputies shall verify the qualification of its own members.

Each province shall elect five deputies, to form the first House.

During the forthcoming meeting of Parliament, an Act shall be passed for the redistribution of these sixty seats among the different provinces, according to the population of each.

Further, during the same session, Parliament shall have the power of giving seats to the representatives of such towns of our State as shall be deemed, from their size, fit to be ranked as cities.

For the purposes of the election of members from districts, all the inhabitants, being born or naturalized citizens of this State, and who, being taxpayers and having attained the age of twenty-one years, and being neither servants, slaves, outlaws, bankrupts, nor habitual criminals, shall assemble at the chief town in the district, on the day to be notified by our letters patent, and shall elect their deputies from among those persons possessing the necessary qualifications.

Deputies are elected for the term of four years, and there will be a general election at the end of that period.

The Cazique names the President of the Lower House, from a list of three prepared by the said assembly.

The elections will be superintended by a president to be chosen from the electorate by the Cazique.

The laws for Customs duties, and for both direct and indirect taxation, must be submitted for the approval of the House of Representatives, and cannot be brought before the Senate without such approval.

The Cazique may dissolve the House, on condition of calling together another within three months.

The House of Representatives may impeach the Ministry at the bar of the Senate for rebellion, treason, malversation or usurpation of authority.

The proceedings in the House shall be open to the public.

RELIGION

The Catholic Apostolic Roman Religion is that of the State. The ministers thereof are endowed, and the territories over which they shall exercise spiritual jurisdiction fixed by law.

All religions are protected by the State, and no differences in religious belief shall be held to exclude from public office.

Bodies professing a faith other than that of the Catholic religion who may wish to establish places of worship, must notify their desire to the civil power, and further show that the ministers appointed to serve the places of worship are provided with sufficient incomes.

THE PUBLIC DEBT

... (The provisions on this head are those already given in the text, as having been drafted by Mr. Samuel.)

JUDICIAL POWERS

The judges are appointed by the Cazique, on the nomination of three candidates for the office by the Senate.

There will be six State Judges who will go on circuit through the provinces, holding assizes and administering both civil and criminal justice.

A law to be passed subsequently will introduce the system of trial by jury in criminal cases. In each district there will be a magistrate appointed to consider all cases, settling those within his powers, and to bring such cases to the Assizes as he may consider necessary to be tried. Appeals against the Courts of Assizes shall be heard by the Senate. Applications for redress of judgments of the Supreme Court must be laid before Parliament. No subject may be arrested save by the order of a Judge or Magistrate, and the warrant must specify the crime of which he is accused, the said crime being one defined as such by law. Gaolers are forbidden, under penalties attaching to false imprisonment, to receive or detain any person against whom a warrant as described above is not produced.

As soon as practicable the necessary steps will be taken to draw up codes of both Civil and Criminal Law uniformly applicable to the whole country.

The foregoing constitution shall be submitted for acceptation to the Parliament which is hereby convoked for the 1st September next.

Given in London the 20th day of March, in the year of our Lord 1837, and first of our reign.

[Signed) Don Guzman y Pamfilos *Letter from M. Alphonse Karr*

My Dear Alexandre, Allow me to press a request upon you. France contains thirty-two million inhabitants; if each one of them were to be the object of public attention for an equal space of time, that is to say, if fame and honour were evenly distributed, each would have one minute and one-third of this public renown in his life, the average duration of life being taken at eighty years.

It is for the sake of fame that we hang on to anything which creates a sensation in the world, and long to be a part of whatever attracts notice for the moment; so much so that many covet to a certain extent the situation of the criminal on the road to the guillotine, and find their only comfort in being able to say, “I knew him intimately,” or “I went through the same street the very day after the murder.”

I know of nothing more amusing than the books so full of humour and sly fun and good-natured sarcasm, which you sometimes publish when not engaged in the production of noble dramas and sparkling comedies. Well, here is one certain to win universal admiration for a fortnight in a city where a revolution only takes three days. Accordingly, following out the calculation I made just above, it will deprive nearly thirteen thousand persons of their chance of ever being talked about.

Now I have a right to be mentioned in your book, and I claim my right. James the Second belonged to me before he became the property of Tony Johannot. Our dear good Tony could tell how you, one day he showed me his monkey, the animal threw his arms round my neck, took my head in his hand, kissed me on both cheeks in the most touching manner possible. James the Second had lived with me a whole year, when one day he disappeared. Never a day passed afterwards but I feared I should meet him on the Boulevards, dressed as an opera-bouffe troubadour, taught and trained, and now plying the ignoble calling of a merry-andrew. I was overjoyed to find him again with Tony, who has far too much sense to want to teach any monkey tricks.

Thus, my dear Alexandre, “I beg and, if necessary, I demand,” as the newspapers say, that you will insert this claim to consideration among the documentary evidence printed in your appendix.

Yours ever,

[Signed) Alphonse Karr

OTHO THE ARCHER

Translated by Alfred Allinson

This 1840 short novel is based on tales Dumas heard during his trip to Germany and is set on the banks of the Rhine in 1340. It features a melodramatic plot which keeps veering off in unexpected directions as Dumas explores various German tales.

In the narrative, the Landgrave (Prince) Ludwig of Godesburg, is struck by the resemblance of his son to a friend of his wife's, and so decides that he has been cuckolded. He sends his wife off to a nunnery and ships his son, Otho, to a monastery.

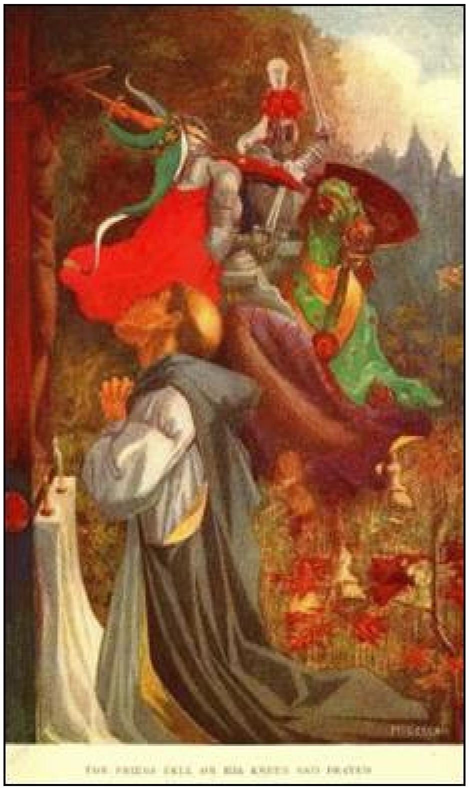
THE PRIEST FELL ON HIS KNEES AND PRAYED

An illustration from the first English edition

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CHAPTER I.

TOWARDS the end of the year 1340, on a cold but still beautiful autumn night, a horseman was riding along the narrow road that follows the left bank of the Rhine. You might have thought, considering the lateness of the hour and the rapid pace at which he urged his horse, tired as it was with the long day’s journey already done, that he was going to stop for a few hours in the little town of Oberwinter, which he had just reached. But nothing of the kind; without slackening his pace and like a man who is familiar with them, he plunged into the midst of narrow tortuous streets that might shorten his way by a few minutes, and soon reappeared on the other side of the town, going out by the opposite Gate, to that by which he had come in.

Just as the portcullis was dropped behind him, the moon, which had hitherto been clouded, now entered a space of sky clear and brilliant as a peaceful lake amid the sea of clouds rolling its fantastic waves over the heavens, and so we will use this passing gleam to take a rapid glance at the belated traveller.

He was a man of from forty-five to fifty years of age, of medium height, but of an athletic and square-shouldered build; and so entirely were his movements in harmony with those of his horse that the two appeared as if cut out of one and the same piece of rock. As he was in a friendly country and thus secure from all danger, he had hung his helmet from his saddle-bow, and to protect his head from the dank night air wore only a little hood of mail lined with cloth, which when his helmet was on his head fell back in a point between his shoulders.

True a head of long and abundant hair just turning grey served its owner for the same purpose as the most comfortable head-dress could have done, besides surrounding as with a natural frame a face dignified and reposeful as a lion’s.

His rank could have been a secret only to the few people who at this period were ignorant of heraldic language; for if you looked at his helmet, you saw rising through an Earl’s coronet — which combined with it formed a crest — a bare arm supporting a naked sword, while on the other side of the saddle hung a shield face outwards, on which glittered on a background *gules* the three gold stars — two in line and one under — of the house of Homburg, one of the oldest and most highly esteemed in all Germany.

Now if you would know more of the character we have just introduced, we will add that Count Karl was on his way back from Flanders, where he had gone at the command of the Emperor Louis V. of Bavaria, to lend the assistance of his brave sword to Edward III., of England, nominated eighteen months previously Vicegerent of the Empire. And this monarch, in virtue of the year's truce he had just signed with Philip of Valois at the intercession of the Lady Jeanne, sister of the King of France, and mother of the Count de Hainault, had for the time being given our friend his freedom.

Arrived near the little village of Melheim, the traveller left the riverside road he had followed since Coblentz, to take a pathway leading directly inland. Horse and rider plunged into a ravine, to emerge shortly on the other side, and then pursue across the open plain a road that seemed well known to both of them.

In fact in another five minutes, the horse tossed his head and neighed, as if to announce his arrival, and then without his master finding it necessary to urge him on by word or spur, his eagerness increased so much that in a few moments they passed on their left in the darkness the little village of Godesberg, hidden in its clump of trees, and quitting the road from Rolandseck to Bonn, and turning a second time to the left, made straight for the Castle situated on the top of a hill, and bearing the same name as the town, though which of the two gave the name to the other is uncertain.

It was now clear the Castle of Godesberg was the goal of Count Karl's journey, but it was even more evident that he was about to reach his destination in the midst of great festivities. As he climbed higher up the road ascending spirally from the foot of the mountain to the Great Gate, he saw each face of the Donjon Keep gleaming with lights from all its windows, and behind the redly glowing window-hangings numerous figures moving, continually forming and reforming in diversified groups. Though it was easy to discern by the slight frowning of his brows that he would rather have lighted in the midst of the family circle than amid the confusion of a ball, he pushed on his way all the same, so that in a few moments he was passing through the Castle Gate.

The Bailey was crowded with squires, grooms, horses and litters; for, as we have said, there was high festival at Godesberg. Scarcely had Count Karl put foot to ground ere a crowd of grooms and serving- men ran forward to take his horse, and lead it to the stables. But not so readily would the Knight part with his faithful companion, neither would he trust the care of it to anyone but himself; taking the bridle, he led the animal to a stable apart from the others, where the Landgrave of Godesberg's own horses were kept.

The grooms did not interfere, though astonished at his boldness, for the Knight had acted with an assurance which convinced them that he was entitled to do what he pleased.

When Hans — this was the Count's name for his horse — was securely placed in a vacant stall, and this stall was supplied with sufficient straw for his comfort, his manger with oats, his rack with hay, the Knight then began to think of himself, and after again stroking his noble animal, which turned aside from its meal to acknowledge the attention by a grateful neigh, — he proceeded to the Great Staircase, and in spite of the hindrance of pages and squires blocking the way, he reached the rooms where all the nobility of the country-side were then gathered together.

Count Karl paused a moment at one of the doors of the principal withdrawing room to look at the most brilliant portion of the assemblage. Here was an animated and noisy scene, gay with young men dressed in velvet and noble ladies with embroidered robes; and amongst the young men and noble ladies, the handsomest was Otho, and the fairest the Lady Emma, the one the son and the other the wife of the Landgrave Ludwig of Godesberg, Lord of the Castle and companion in arms of the newly-arrived Knight.

The appearance of the latter had roused attention.

Alone in the midst of all the guests, he appeared like Wilhelm to Lenora, still wearing his armour, the dark steel of which contrasted strangely with the bright, joyous hues of velvet and silk. Immediately, all looks were turned in his direction, except only the Count Ludwig's, who standing at the opposite door seemed rapt in such a profound meditation that his eyes remained set in a fixed gaze.

Karl recognised his old friend, and without troubling himself further as to the cause of his preoccupation, he made his way through the rooms, and after a desperate but successful struggle with the crowd he reached the retired apartment, at one door of which he saw, as he entered by the other, Count Ludwig who had not changed his posture, and still stood there with the same gloomy look.

Karl again paused a moment to observe the host's strange melancholy, the more strange as, while lavishing pleasure upon others, he seemed to have kept only gloom and anxiety for himself; then he stepped forward, and seeing that he had reached his friend without the sound of his steps attracting attention, he placed his hand on his shoulder.

The Landgrave turned round with a start. His mind and thought were so deeply immersed in a range of ideas far removed from the man who now broke in upon him, that he looked at him for some time without recognising him, though his face was now uncovered, — and this the man whom on any other occasion he would have named, even with the visor lowered, amid all the Emperor's Court. But Karl, holding out his arms, said, "Ludwig," and the charm was broken.

Ludwig flung himself on his comrade's breast, rather as a man who seeks refuge from a great sorrow than as a friend full of joy at beholding his friend once more.

But this unexpected return produced a happy distraction for the care-worn host of the gay festival. He drew the newcomer to the other end of the room, and there making him sit on a spacious oaken settle overhung by a canopy of cloth-of- gold, he took a seat beside him, and hiding his head in the shadow and taking his hand, asked him for an account of his fortunes during the three long years of absence which had separated them from each other.

Karl told the whole story with the fullness of military detail in which an old soldier delights; how the troops of England, Brabant and the Empire, led by Edward III. in person, had besieged Cambrai, burning and destroying all before them; how the two armies met at Buironfosse without fighting, because a message from the King of Sicily, who was learned in astrology had come just as they were about to engage, telling Philip of Valois that any battle he fought with the English and in which Edward should personally command would be fatal to him (a prediction that came true later on at Crecy), and he described how a year's truce had been concluded between the two rival Kings on the plain of Esplechin, and that, as we have said, at the earnest entreaty of the Lady Jeanne de Valois, sister of the King of France.

The Landgrave had listened to this account with a silence which up to a certain point might have passed for attention, although he had risen from time to time with obvious restlessness to look into the ball-room, but as he returned each time to take his former place, the speaker, though momentarily interrupted, did not fail to resume his narrative, comprehending how the master of the house was bound to keep an eye on the details of the entertainment, so that nothing should be lacking for the pleasure of the guests.

However, since after the last interruption, the Landgrave, as if he had forgotten his friend, did not return to his seat beside him, he rose and again drew near the ball-room door by which a flood of light entered this small, dark, retired room; and this time his friend heard his approach, for he raised his arm without turning his head.

Count Karl took the place pointed out to him by this movement, and the Landgrave's arm fell on his comrade's shoulder, which he pressed convulsively against his own.

A terrible struggle was evidently taking place in the man's secret heart, and yet though Karl looked in vain at the happy throng that whirled before him, he saw nothing that could explain such emotion. But it was too obvious for a friend so devoted as the Count not to perceive it, and not himself in some measure to be distressed. Still he said nothing, recognising that a scrupulous regard for a friend's secret is the first duty of friendship; but at the same time there is a sympathetic union in hearts that are accustomed to understand one another. Thus the Landgrave, appreciating the other's discreet silence, looked at his friend, passed his hand across his forehead and sighed. Then after a moment's hesitation:

"Karl," he said finally, in a hollow voice and pointing to his son, "do you not think there is a strange resemblance between Otho and the young lord who is dancing with his mother?"

It was now Count Karl's turn to start. These few words were to him as the lightning illumining the night to the traveller lost in the desert; by its tempestuous flash, swift as it was, he had seen the precipice. The resemblance was so striking between the boy and the man, that in spite of his friendship for the Landgrave, the Count, though he felt the import of his answer, replied before he could stop himself:

"True, Ludwig, they might indeed be brothers."

He had hardly spoken, however, when a shiver ran through the man he stood beside, and he hastened to add: "After all, what of it?"

"Nothing," answered the Landgrave in a thick voice; "only I was glad to have your opinion on the point. Now tell me the end of your campaign."

And he led him back to the same settle where Karl had begun his story, which he now finished without further interruption.

He had hardly stopped talking when a man stood in the doorway by which Karl had entered. The Landgrave rose quickly at sight of him, and advanced to meet him. The two men conversed in low voices for a moment, without Karl being able to hear what they said. However he easily saw by their gestures that it concerned a matter of the deepest moment, and he was the further convinced of this when the Landgrave returned to him with a face even more profoundly melancholy than before.

“Karl,” said Ludwig, but this time not sitting down, “you must want rest rather than dancing and merry-making after such a long journey as you have had today. I will show you to your room. Good-night, we shall see one another to-morrow.”

Karl perceived his friend wished to be left alone; so he rose without answering, silently shook his head, questioning him with a look for the last time. But the Landgrave responded only with one of those sad smiles that inform a friend the moment has not yet come to give him the sacred trust he claims. Karl by a last pressure of the hand gave him to understand he would always find him a trusty comrade, and retired to the room that had been prepared for him, where, remote as it was, the noise of revel still reached him. The Count lay down, his mind full of sad thoughts and his ears dinned with sounds of merriment; and the conflict of this strange contrast banished sleep. But at last fatigue got the better of uneasiness, the body prevailed over the mind. Little by little, thoughts and objects became less distinct, his senses grew benumbed, and his eyes closed. There was still between somnolence and real sleep an interval similar to the twilight which divides day and night, a fantastic and indescribable interval during which reality blends with dream, so that it is neither dream nor reality. Then followed deep slumber.

It was so long since the Knight had slept anywhere but under a tent and in his armour, that he yielded himself with pleasure to the delight of a good bed so thoroughly that, when he awoke, he perceived by the daylight that the morning must be far advanced. He saw immediately an unexpected sight, recalling the scene of the previous evening and absorbing all his attention. The Landgrave was seated in an armchair, perfectly still, with his head drooping on his breast, as if he were waiting for his friend to awake, but so great was his abstraction that he had not noticed his awakening, when it actually occurred. The Count looked silently at him for a moment; then seeing two tears rolling down the furrowed and pale cheeks, he could no longer contain himself, but holding out his arms towards him, he cried earnestly:

“Ludwig! In God’s name, what is the matter with you?”

“The matter?” answered the Landgrave, “Alas! alas! I have neither wife nor son left me.”

And rising with difficulty as he spoke, staggering like a drunken man, he fell forward into the Count’s outstretched arms.

CHAPTER II.

IN order to understand the events which | follow, our readers must go back with us into the past. The Landgrave had been married for sixteen years; his wife was the daughter of Count Ronsdorf, who had been killed in 1316 during the wars between King Ludwig of Bavaria, for whom he had fought, and Friedrich, surnamed the Handsome, of Austria, and whose lands lay on the right bank of the Rhine beyond and at the foot of the chain of hills called the Sieben Gebirge, or Seven Mountains. The Dowager Countess, a woman of lofty virtue and unblemished reputation, had been left a widow with one daughter five years old; but as she was of royal race she had during her widowhood kept up the former splendour of her house, so that her retinue continued to be one of the best appointed among all the neighbouring Castles.

Shortly after the Count’s death the Dowager Countess’s household was increased by a young page, the son, she said, of a friend of hers who had died in poor circumstances. He was a handsome lad, not more than three or four years older than Emma; and in her treatment of him the Countess did not belie her reputation for kindness and generosity. The orphan boy was received by her as a son, and was brought up side by side with her daughter, with whom he shared the affections of the Countess so impartially that it was hard to say which of the two was her own and which the adopted child. Thus the two grew up beside each other, and were destined, many people said, for each other; when much to the astonishment of the nobles who dwelt near the Rhine, the young Count Ludwig of Godesberg, then eighteen years of age, was betrothed to little Emma of Ronsdorf, who was only ten. It was however arranged between the old Margrave and the Countess that the betrothed pair should wait another five years before becoming man and wife.

And so Emma and Albrecht grew up, he into a handsome Knight and she into a charming girl; the Countess had moreover kept a watchful eye upon the progress of their friendship, and had noticed with pleasure that, sincere though their affection was, it had none of the characteristics of love.

Emma was now thirteen and Albrecht eighteen; their hearts like budding roses were soon to open in the early glow of adolescence, and that was the time which the Countess feared for them. Unfortunately, just at this crisis she fell ill; for a time it was hoped that the vigour of youth (for the Countess was barely thirty-four) would triumph over the persistence of the malady. But this was not to be; she was sick unto death. Feeling this herself, she sent for her doctor and questioned him so urgently and with such determination that he could not avoid telling her that human science was powerless, and that she could henceforth look only to heaven for help.

The Countess accepted this news with Christian resignation, and summoning Albrecht and Emma, bade them kneel beside her bed; then in lowered voice and with no other witness but God, she disclosed to them a secret which none else heard. It was observed however with surprise that in her last moments, instead of the dying woman blessing the children, it was the children who gave their blessing to her, and seemed to be pardoning her while still on earth for a sin from which she would ere long receive absolution in heaven.

On the same day on which this secret had been imparted, the Countess passed peacefully away, and Emma, who had another year to wait before she became a wife, went to spend that period in the Convent of Nonnenwerth, which stood in the middle of the Rhine on the island of the same name opposite the little village of Honnef. Albrecht remained at Ronsdorf, and displayed as much sorrow at the loss of his benefactress as he would have felt for a mother.

The appointed time passed away. Emma who had reached her fifteenth year had continued to bloom amid her tears and on her holy island, like a fair water-lily floating on the surface of a pool, all glistening with a dewy freshness. Ludwig reminded the old Landgrave of the engagement made by the late Countess, and accepted by her daughter. The truth was, for the last year the young man had constantly turned his steps towards the pretty hill of Rolandswerth which overlooks the Rhine, and from which, spread out beneath and cutting the stream like the prow of a vessel, can be seen the lovely island, where the Cloister yet stands, though now turned into an Inn.

Here Ludwig would spend whole hours gazing on the sacred walls; for often a young girl, whom he recognised by the Novice’s dress she was soon to relinquish, used to come and sit under the trees which border the river bank, and there she would stay for hours together, silent and absorbed in thoughts which it may be were bent in the same direction as Ludwig’s own. No wonder then if the young man was the first to remember that the period of mourning was over, while he reminded the Landgrave that this date opportunely coincided with the one fixed for the celebration of his marriage.

By a kind of tacit convention everyone looked upon Albrecht as the guardian of Emma, for though he was barely twenty, he had always shown a seriousness beyond his years; and so it was Albrecht to whom the Landgrave mentioned that the time had come for replacing the garb of mourning by festal attire. He proceeded to the Convent and informed Emma that young Ludwig was claiming the fulfilment of her mother's promise. Emma blushed and gave her hand to Albrecht, telling him that she was ready to follow him wherever he took her. The journey was not long, for they had only to cross half the Rhine and then go two leagues along its bank; the time this occupied would not long delay the moment so eagerly desired by the young Count. Thus it was that three days after she had completed her fifteenth year, Emma attended by a retinue worthy of the heiress of Ronsdorf, and escorted by Albrecht, was handed over to her lord and master, Count Ludwig of Godesberg.

Two years of perfect happiness followed, during which the young Countess gave birth to a son who was named Otho. Albrecht, who had found another home, had spent those two years sometimes at Ronsdorf, sometimes at Godesberg, and had now reached the age when a man of noble family should make his first essay of arms. He had therefore taken service as an esquire among the troops of John of Luxemburg, King of Bohemia, one of the bravest warriors of his time; and he had attended this Prince at the siege of Cassel, whither he had gone to render good service to the French King, Philip of Valois, that King having undertaken to restore Count Louis of Crecy to the Estates of the Low Countries, from which he had been driven by the good people of Flanders.

He had been present accordingly at the battle in which the Flemish were cut to pieces beneath the walls of Cassel, and as his first feat of war he had dealt so shrewdly with the villain rabble, that John of Luxemburg had there and then knighted him on the field of battle.

The victory indeed was so decisive it ended the campaign at one blow; and Flanders being now subdued Albrecht had returned to the Castle of Godesberg, very proud to display to Emma his gold chain and spurs. The Count happened to be away on Imperial Service, for the Turks had invaded Hungary, and Ludwig summoned by the Emperor, had gone to the wars with Count Karl of Homburg, his brother-in-arms: Albrecht was none the less welcome at the Castle of Godesberg, where he stayed nearly six months.

After this, tired of inactivity and seeing that the Sovereigns of Europe were at peace with one another, he departed to fight against the Saracens of Spain, on whom Alfonso XI., King of Castille and Léon, was then making war. In that country he performed prodigies of valour, battling against Muley-Mohammed; but being severely wounded before the walls of Grenada, he returned once more to Godesberg. Here he found that Emma's husband had now come back, having just succeeded to the title and possessions of the old Landgrave, who had departed this life about the beginning of 1332.

Little Otho was now growing up — a handsome child of five with fair hair, rosy cheeks and blue eyes. Albrecht's return was an occasion of rejoicing to the whole family and especially to the child, who was devoted to him. Albrecht and Ludwig were pleased to see each other again. Both had been fighting against the Infidels — one in the south and the other in the north; both had been victorious, and both brought back many tales of battle for the long winter evenings Thus a year passed like a day; but at the end of that time Albrecht's roving instinct prevailed; he visited the French and English Courts, followed King Edward in his campaign against Scotland, broke a lance with James Douglas; then returning to fight against France, he took a hand in the capture of the Isle of Cad- sand under Gauthier de Mauny. Finally finding himself on the Continent he availed himself of the opportunity to visit his old friends, and had come back to the Castle of Godesberg for the third time, to find a new guest installed there.

This was one of the Landgrave's relations named Godefroy, who having nothing to look forward to from his father, had tried to make a fortune for himself as a soldier. He too had fought against the Infidels, but in the Holy Land; the ties of relationship, the fame he had won in the Crusade, a certain display of luxury which showed that his faith sprang rather from self-glorification than disinterestedness, had opened the gates of Godesberg Castle to him as to a distinguished guest. Then ere long, Homburg and Albrecht being both away, he succeeded in making his companionship almost indispensable to the Landgrave Ludwig, who had detained him when he wished to go away. Thus Godefroy was now settled in the Castle, no longer as a guest but as an inmate.

Friendship no less than love is often the subject of jealousy; whether it was fancy or reality, Albrecht imagined that Ludwig received him with greater coldness than of old; he complained of this to Emma, who told him that she too had observed alteration in her husband's conduct towards herself.

Albrecht stayed at Godesberg for a fortnight; then pretending that he must return to Ronsdorf to look after unavoidable repairs, he left the Castle and crossed the river and the mountain gorge that alone divides the two domains.

In a fortnight's time he heard from Emma. She could not understand her husband's behaviour; from kind and gentle as she had always known him, he had become suspicious and silent. Everyone, even young Otho, suffered from a harshness hitherto unknown, and it was the more poignant for mother and child, because it was on them in particular he had lavished an intense and deep affection. Moreover in proportion as this affection lessened, added Emma, Godefroy seemed to be drawn into the confidence of the Landgrave in a strange and ever-increasing way, as if he inherited that measure of affection which was taken from wife and son to enrich a stranger.

Albrecht pitied from the depths of his soul that self-hatred which makes a happy man, as though tormented by his own happiness, seek by every device to lessen it, or extinguish it altogether, as he might a menacing conflagration by which he feared to see his own heart devoured.

Things had come to this pass when he received like all the neighbouring nobility an invitation to the Castle of Godesberg, to a birthday festival given by the Landgrave in honour of Otho, who was just sixteen years old.

It was towards the end of this same festival we introduced our readers to the Castle. Its gaiety presented, as we have observed, a curious contrast to the brooding melancholy occasioned by Godefroy having remarked at the beginning of the ball to the Landgrave on the likeness between Otho and Albrecht, as an idea that had only then occurred to him.

In truth, except that the one was in the first flower of his youth, the other a man bronzed by a Spanish sun, there was a striking likeness between the two, — the same fair hair, the same blue eyes; indeed there was nothing which a fairly close observation would not show as common to both, even to certain expressions of feature, indicating a community of blood.

This revelation was a dagger-thrust to the Landgrave; for some time, thanks to Godefroy, he had suspected Emma and Albrecht's affection for each other; but the thought that a culpable intimacy had already existed before his marriage, the still sharper pang to which the singular resemblance gave fresh force — that Otho, whom he had loved so tenderly was the child of adultery, broke his heart, and drove him well-nigh mad. At this juncture, as we have related, Count Karl arrived, and we saw how, carried away by the truth, he increased his unhappy friend's grief by confessing that the resemblance between Albrecht and Otho was undeniable; however he had retired for the night without attributing to Ludwig's melancholy the seriousness it really and truly possessed.

The man who had talked so mysteriously with the Landgrave, in the little room where he had retired with Karl, was this same Godefroy, whose presence had caused in a happy family the first trouble which had tarnished its joy. He came to tell him that he was convinced from a few words he had overheard that Emma had given an assignation to Albrecht, who was to leave that same night for Italy, where he was to take the command of a body of troops sent there by the Emperor. The certainty of this treachery was moreover easy to prove; the assignation was given at one of the gates of the Castle, and Emma would have to cross the garden to keep it.

Having once yielded to suspicion, a man will never stop; therefore the Landgrave, wishing to gain certain proof, cost what it might, stifled the generous instinct which makes every man of good feeling disdain to lower himself to the work of a spy. He entered his room again with Godefroy, and opening the window which overlooked the garden, anxiously waited this last test which should enable him to form a positive conclusion. Godefroy was not mistaken.

About four o'clock in the morning Emma went down to the steps, stealthily crossed the garden, and entered a clump of trees which masked the Gate. She was absent for nearly ten minutes; then she returned to the steps accompanied by Albrecht, on whose arm she was leaning. The Landgrave saw them embrace by the light of the moon and he fancied he perceived tears on his wife's upturned face, due doubtless to the coming departure of her lover.

Henceforth Ludwig had no further doubt, and he instantly determined to banish his guilty wife and the child of her guilt. A letter entrusted to Godefroy ordered Emma to follow him, and an order was given to the

Captain of the Guard to arrest Otho at dawn and conduct him to the Abbey of Kirberg, near Cologne, where instead of the brilliant future of a Knight's career the narrow cell of a monk awaited him.

This order had been carried out, and Emma and Otho had an hour ago left the Castle, the one for the nunnery of Nonnenwerth and the other for the Abbey of Kirberg, when Count Karl awoke, as we have related, to find his friend near him, like a fine old oak with its leaves stripped by the wind and its branches shattered by the lightning.

Homburg listened with a grave and sympathetic attention to the account Ludwig gave him of all that had happened. Then without trying to comfort him whether as father or husband:

"You give me liberty to do what I like?" he said.

"Yes," answered the Landgrave, "but what can you do?"

"That is my business," answered Count Karl.

Embracing his friend, he dressed himself, girt on his sword, then left the room and, going down to the stables, he saddled his faithful Hans, and returned slowly and with far different thoughts over the winding road he had traversed the evening before so eagerly and with such pleasant anticipation.

On reaching the foot of the hill, Count Karl took the road to Rolandseck, which he followed leisurely and lost in a deep reverie, giving his horse complete freedom to go at what pace he fancied. Then having come to a dell at the end of which was a small Chapel where a priest was praying, he surveyed the spot and seeing that it was the very place he wished for, he stopped.

At this moment the priest, who no doubt had finished his prayer, rose up and was going away. But Karl stopped him, asked him if there was no other road by which it was possible to go from the Convent to the Castle, and as the answer was "no," he begged him to wait, because probably before long there would be a man needing his ministrations.

The priest understood by the grave voice of the old Knight that he spoke in all sincerity, and without so much as asking who the condemned man was, he fell to praying for him who was about to die.

Count Karl was a type of the ancient Chivalry which in the XVth century had already begun to disappear, and which Froissart describes with all the love an antiquarian bears towards a relic of the past. For Karl, everything was decided by the sword and rested with God. And in his opinion a man could not make a mistake who entrusted everything to the arbitrament of the trusty steel.

Now the Landgrave's story had roused doubts in his mind as to Godefroy's designs, which reflection had almost changed into certainty; especially, as no one except that baneful adviser had ever suspected Emma's love and fidelity to her husband. He had been the Count of Ronsdorf's friend, as he had been the friend of the Landgrave of Godesberg. The honour of both was a part of his own; so it was his bounden duty to restore its brightness, tarnished for a while by a slanderer's malice. Accordingly, without saying a word to anyone, he had determined to wait on the road Godefroy would take, and there to make him confess his treachery or kill him on the spot; firmly resolved to carry the enterprise, come what might, to one or other conclusion.

So he lowered the visor of his helmet, reined up Hans in the middle of the road, and horse and rider waited an hour, standing there motionless as an equestrian statue. Finally he saw a Knight in full armour appear at the opening of the hollow way. The Knight, seeing his way barred, paused a moment, but presently satisfied that his adversary was alone, he contented himself with settling himself firmly in his saddle and feeling if his sword would slip easily from its scabbard, and then rode straight on. When he had arrived a few paces from the Count, and saw that he showed no intention of stirring, Godefroy likewise drew up.

"Sir Knight," he said, "are you lord of the soil and do you purpose closing the road to all travellers?"

"Not at all, sir," answered Count Karl, "but only to one, and he is a dastard and traitor, whom I intend calling to account for his treachery and cowardice."

"Since it is no concern of mine," rejoined Godefroy, "I must ask you to draw your horse aside to the right or left, so that there shall be room in the middle of the road for two men abreast."

"You mistake me, sir," answered Count Karl, in the same quiet tone; "on the contrary, 'tis you and you alone it does concern. As to sharing the middle of the road with a despicable liar, that is what a true and loyal Knight shall never do."

The priest rushed between the two men.

"Brothers," he cried "do you wish to kill each other?"

“You are wrong, Sir Priest,” answered the Count, “this man is not my brother, and I am not especially set on his death. If he will own to having slandered the Countess Ludwig of Godesberg, I will leave him free to go and do penance where he pleases.”

“She lacked nothing better to prove her innocence than being so well defended by her lover,” said Godefroy laughing, supposing the Knight was Albrecht.

“You are deceived,” answered the Knight, shaking his head with its iron mask, “I am not the man you think. I am Count Karl of Homburg. I have no hatred against you beyond what I have for all traitors, or contempt beyond what I have for all liars. Confess that you have lied, and you are free.”

“That,” answered Godefroy laughing, “is a matter between God and myself.”

“Then let God judge!” cried Count Karl, making ready for the combat.

“So be it!” murmured Godefroy, with one hand lowering his visor, and drawing his sword with the other.

The priest fell on his knees and prayed.

Godefroy was a brave man, and he had given more than one proof of his valour in Palestine; but *then* he was fighting for God, not fighting against God. And though the combat was long and furious, though he was a courageous and skilful warrior, he could not resist the might which a consciousness of right gave Count Karl; he fell pierced by the latter’s sword, which had cloven the cuirass and penetrated deep into his breast. His horse, terrified by his master’s fall, returned by the road down which he had come, and soon disappeared beyond the summit of the declivity.

“Father,” Count Karl said quietly to the priest, who was quaking with fear, “I think you have not much time to lose in accomplishing your sacred duty. Behold the confession I promised you; make haste to receive it.”

And putting back his sword into its sheath, he resumed his attitude of a living statue.

The priest approached the dying man, who had raised himself on one knee and one hand, but could do no more. He unfastened his helmet for him; the wounded man’s face was ashen and his lips covered with blood. Karl thought for a moment that he would not be able to speak, but he was mistaken. Godefroy sat up and the priest kneeling beside him, heard the confession he made in a low, broken voice. At the last word the wounded man felt his end was near, and with the help of the priest he rose on his knees, lifted both his hands to Heaven and said thrice, “Oh, Lord! oh, Lord! forgive me!”

At the third repetition, he drew a deep sigh, and fell back motionless, a dead man.

“Father,” said Count Karl to the priest, “are you not authorised to reveal the confession that has but now been made to you?”

“I am,” answered the priest, “but only to one person, — the Landgrave of Godesberg.”

“Get you up on my horse then,” continued the Knight dismounting, “and let us go and find him.”

“What are you going to do, my brother?” answered the priest, accustomed to travel in more humble style.

“Get up, get up, Father,” insisted the Knight; “it shall not be said that a poor sinner like me rides, when a man of God walks.”

So saying, he helped the other up into the saddle, and despite any resistance the humble rider could make, he led him thus by the bridle to the Castle of Godesberg. Arrived there, he placed Hans, contrary to custom, in the charge of the grooms, led the priest to the Landgrave, whom he found in the same room, at the same place and seated in the same chair, though seven hours had passed since he left the Castle. At the noise of their entrance the Landgrave raised his pale face and looked at them, astonished.

“See, brother,” Karl said to him, “here is a worthy servant of God who has a confession made *in extremis* to reveal to you.”

“Why! who is dead?” cried the Count, turning paler still.

“Godefroy,” answered the Knight.

“And who has slain him?” murmured the Landgrave.

“I have,” said Karl.

And he left the room softly, shutting the door behind him, and leaving the Landgrave alone with the priest.

This is what the priest related to the Landgrave:

Godefroy had known in Palestine a German Knight from the neighbourhood of Cologne, called Ernst of Huningen: he was a stern and sober man who had some fifteen years previously joined the Order of the Knights of Malta, and who was renowned for his piety, loyalty and valour:

Godefroy and Ernst were fighting side by side at Saint-Jean-d’Acre, when Ernst fell, mortally wounded.

Godefroy saw him fall, carried him out of the press and returned to the mêlée.

The battle over, he went back to his tent to remove his armour; but he was hardly there when they came to tell him that Ernst of Huningen in desperate plight desired to see him before he died.

He complied with this wish, and found the wounded man in the paroxysm of a burning fever, which would in a little while consume what remained of his life. Ernst knew he was going to die, and explained to his friend in a few words the service he wished Godefroy to render him.

When he was twenty years old, Ernst had loved a young girl and had been loved by her; but as the younger son of the family, without title or fortune, he had been unable to ask for her hand. In despair the lovers had forgotten they could never marry, and a son was born who could bear the name neither of father nor mother.

Shortly afterwards the girl was compelled by her relations to marry a noble and wealthy Lord. Ernst had gone away, had halted on his way at Malta to take the vows, and ever since had been fighting in Palestine. God had rewarded his bravery; after living a holy life, he died a martyr’s death.

Ernst entrusted Godefroy with a paper; it was the gift of everything he possessed to his son Albrecht, — about sixty thousand florins. As to his mother, as she had been dead six years, he thought he might reveal her name, since it would guide him in his search. It was the Countess of Ronsdorf.

Godefroy returned to Germany with the purpose of carrying out his friend’s last wishes. But on reaching the house of his kinsman, the Landgrave, and noting the position of affairs, he saw at once all the advantage he might derive from the secret he possessed. The Landgrave had only one son, and Otho and Emma out of the way, Godefroy would be the Count’s only heir.

We have seen how he had put this scheme into practice, till the hour when he met the Count Karl of Homburg in the gorge of Rolandswerth.

“Karl! Karl!” cried the Landgrave, flinging himself like a madman into the corridor where his comrade was waiting for him, “Karl, he was not her lover; he was her brother!”

And he gave instant orders that they should bring Emma and Otho back to Godesberg. Two messengers set off, one ascending, the other descending, the Rhine.

During the night the first returned. Emma, for long unhappy, and insulted I the evening before, now asked to end her life in the Cloister where she had passed her youth, and declared that, if need be, she would invoke the sanctity of her place of asylum.

At daybreak, the second messenger returned. He was accompanied by the armed men who should have led Otho to Kirberg; but Otho was not with them. At night descending the Rhine, Otho who knew the fate for which he was destined chose the moment when the men were one and all busy guiding the boat in a rapid current, and had plunged into the deepest part of the river and disappeared.

CHAPTER III.

THE Landgrave's misfortune was not so great as he imagined. Otho had flung himself into the river, not to, seek death but freedom. Brought up on its banks, the old Rhine was a friend against whom he had too often tried his strength for him to fear it. He plunged then into the deepest part, swam as long under the water as his breath allowed, and when he came to the surface to fill his lungs with air, the boat was so far removed and the night so black that the guard who accompanied him could only think he had been swallowed up in the stream.

Otho hastened to gain the bank. The night was cold, his clothes were streaming, he needed fire and a bed. So he turned to the first house whose windows he saw shining in the darkness, introduced himself as a traveller who had lost his way, and since it was impossible to distinguish whether he was soaked by the rain of heaven or by the river, he roused no suspicion, and hospitality was given him with true German liberality and discretion.

The next day he left at morning and set out for Cologne. It was Sunday and as he entered the town about the hour of mass, he saw everybody going towards the Church. He followed the crowd; for he, too, wished to pray to God... first for his father on account of the sad mistake he had made and the bereavement in which he had left him... then for his mother who was shut up in a Convent... lastly for himself, free but without protection, and lost in this wide world, which had as yet shown him no wider horizon but that of the Castle where he was born. He hid behind a pillar to pray; so near to Godesberg, he might be recognised by some of the Nobles who had come the evening before to the festal gathering, or by the Archbishop, Walerand of Juliers, who was one of his father's oldest and most faithful friends.

When Otho had ended his prayer, he looked round him and seeing with astonishment so great a number of Archers from different countries among the congregation, his first thought was that they must be celebrating a mass in honour of Saint Sebastian, the patron saint of the guild. So he enquired of his nearest neighbour, and learnt that they had repaired thither for the Festival of the Bow, which was held yearly at the same season by Prince Adolphus of Cleves, one of the wealthiest and most renowned of all the Barons whose Castles crown the steep from Strasburg to Nimwegen.

Otho straightway left the Church, found out the most suitable tailor in the town, and changed his velvet and silk clothes for a close coat of green cloth fastened by a leathern belt. He bought a bow of the best maple wood he could find, chose a quiver stocked with its dozen arrows; then having enquired at which hostelry the Archers chiefly gathered, and having learnt that it was the *Golden Heron*, he proceeded towards that Inn, which was situated on the Verdingen road, outside the Eagle Gate.

There he found some thirty Archers assembled and feasting. He sat himself down in the midst of them, and although he was unknown to them all, they all welcomed him, thanks to his youth and comely looks. Besides, he had forestalled a cordial reception by first remarking that he was on his way to the Festival of the Bow and would like to travel in company with such brave and merry comrades, — a proposal accepted with unanimity.

As the Archers had still three days before them, and Sunday being a day consecrated to rest, they did not start on their way till the next morning, when they followed the banks of the river, with much merry chat of sport and hunting to beguile the way.

As they went along, the Archers noticed that Otho had no feather in his cap, which was not in accordance with the uniform, everyone of them having a feather, at the same time spoil and trophy of some bird the victim of his skill, and they jeered at his new bow and arrows. Otho smilingly acknowledged that neither his bow nor arrows had yet been used, but he would endeavour with their help at the first opportunity to provide himself with the indispensable ornament lacking to his cap. So he strung his bow. They all waited with curiosity for an opportunity of testing the skill of their new comrade.

Opportunities were not wanting. A raven was croaking on the lowest decayed branch of an oak tree and the Archers laughingly showed this mark to Otho; but the young man answered that the raven was an obscene bird whose feathers were unworthy to adorn the cap of an honest archer. This was true enough; and the merry travellers were satisfied with the answer.

A little further on they observed a hawk motionless on a peak of rock, and the same proposal was made to the young man. But this time he answered that the hawk is a noble bird which men of noble birth alone had the right to kill, and that he, the son of a peasant, could not allow himself to kill such a bird on the estates of a powerful Lord like the Count of

Woringen, whose territories they were now crossing. Though there was a foundation of truth in this reply, and though E

not one of the Archers would have dared indulge in the deed to which they instigated Otho, all received this answer with a more or less derisive smile. For they began to imagine that their young friend, uncertain of his skill, sought to delay the moment for giving as decisive a proof as they required.

Otho had seen and understood the Archers' smile; but had not appeared to notice it, and went on his way, laughing and chatting, when suddenly about fifty paces from the noisy troop a heron rose from the banks of the river. Then Otho turned to the Archer nearest him, and whom they had themselves pointed out to him as one of the most skilful marksmen.

"Brother," he said to him, "I am very anxious to have one of this bird's feathers for my cap; do you, who are the best shot amongst us, bring him down for me."

"On the wing?" said the Archer, astonished.

"Of course on the wing," continued Otho. "You see how heavily he rises; he has hardly gone ten paces since he left the ground, and he is only half a range off."

"Shoot, Robert, shoot!" cried all the Archers.

Robert nodded with his head to show that he complied with the general invitation, but more out of deference to the honourable company than with any hope of success. He took aim none the less carefully, and the arrow shot by a strong arm and a practised eye flew, watched by them all, and passed so near to the bird that it gave a cry of terror, greeted with a shout of applause from all the Archers.

"Well shot!" said Otho. "Now you, Hermann," he added turning towards the Archer on his left. Whether the man he spoke to was expecting this invitation or whether he was carried away by the force of example, he was ready when Otho addressed him, and hardly had he spoken when another arrow as quick and well aimed as the first followed the retreating bird. It gave a fresh cry as this second messenger of death whistled only a few inches from its body, and again the Archers applauded.

"Now it is my turn," said Otho.

Every eye was turned on the lad: for the heron, though not altogether out of range, was now a very considerable distance off, and having the wide space of air necessary for his ample wings, flew with a swiftness which would soon put him beyond all danger. Otho had no doubt taken all this into calculation; for it was only after he had measured the distance with his eyes, that he took slow and careful aim at the bird, then having got the line of sight, he drew the string back almost behind his head, after the manner of English Archers, bending his bow as if it were a willow-wand. One moment he remained motionless as a statue; then suddenly a slight whistling was heard, for the arrow had sped so rapidly that no one had seen it. Every eye was fastened on the bird which stopped as if a flash of unseen lightning had struck him, and fell pierced through, from a height to which one would scarce have supposed it possible an arrow could reach.

The Archers were stupefied, such prowess was scarcely credible; as to Otho, who had stopped to judge the effect of his shot, he had hardly seen the bird fall when he set off again without seeming to notice the amazement of his companions. When he had come up to the heron, he plucked the delicate and graceful neck feathers of the bird that formed a natural aigrette, and fastened them in his cap. The Archers meantime had paced the distance; the bird had fallen three hundred and twenty paces off.

This time admiration had not burst into applause; the Archers looked at one another, astonished at such a proof of skill, then they had counted the paces, as we have said, and when Otho had finished decorating his hat with the feathers he had won in so wonderful a way, Franz and Hermann, the two Archers who had shot before him, gave him their hands, but with a feeling of respect that showed plainly they recognised in him not only a comrade but a master too.

The company of travellers, who stopped at Woringen only to break their fast, reached Neufs at four o’clock in the afternoon. They dined hastily, for three leagues from Neufs was the famous Church Stone, near which no pious Archer could well pass without making a pilgrimage to it. Otho, who had adopted the life and customs of his new companions, followed them in this excursion, and as day declined they reached the sacred rock; it was an immense boulder bearing the outward appearance of a Church.

The tale goes that this rock was actually the first Christian Church built on the banks of the Rhine, — raised by a German chieftain who died in the odour of sanctity, leaving seven lovely and virtuous daughters to pray around his tomb.

It was in the days of the great Barbarian invasions. An unknown people, impelled by an invisible hand, descended from the plains of Asia to alter the face of the European world. A hind had led Attila across the Palus Maeotis, (sea of Azof.) and he came swooping down on Germany, heralded by the panic terror his name inspired. The Rhine shuddered at the tramp of these wild hordes, and hesitated to pursue its course towards the sands where its waters are absorbed, trembling all its length like an enormous serpent. Soon the Huns appeared on the right bank, and the same day fire was seen kindling the whole horizon from Colonia Agrippina to Aliso.(Cologne, Wesel)

The danger was imminent. No pity was to be hoped from such enemies; and next morning, the instant they saw launched on the water the rafts the Barbarians had built in the night with the trees of a forest that had ceased to exist, the seven maidens fled into the Church and kneeling round their father’s tomb, besought him by the holy love he bore them in his life to protect them even after his death.

The day and night were spent in prayer, and they already thought themselves saved, when at break of day they heard the Barbarians approaching. Soon they began hammering at the oaken door with the pommels of their swords; but finding that it refused to open, while some returned to the town to fetch ladders to scale the windows, others began cutting down a fir tree which they stripped of its branches and made into a battering-ram to break down the obstacle. Then when they had procured the necessary implements for their sacrilegious purpose, they set forth with them towards the Church in which the sisters had taken refuge. But when they arrived there, it had neither doors nor windows. The Church was still there; but it had turned into a rock. And from the midst of the granite mass a low chant was heard issuing, sad and sweet as the chant of the dead. It was the thanksgiving Canticle to the Lord of the seven virgins.

The Archers offered up their prayers at the Church Stone, then returned to sleep at Strump.

On the morrow they resumed their way. The journey was accomplished without any incident except a constant increase of numbers. Archers came from all parts of Germany to this annual festival, the prize of which for this occasion was a cap of green velvet mounted with two branches of ash in gold, fastened together by a diamond brooch. It was to be presented by the only daughter of the Margrave, the young Princess Helena, who had just turned fourteen. Thus there was nothing surprising in the concourse of so many dexterous archers.

The little company which now amounted to forty or fifty men wished to reach Cleves the next morning, as the shooting was to begin directly after the last mass at eleven o’clock. Accordingly the Archers had determined to sleep at Kervenheim. The day’s journey was severe, they scarcely delayed either for breakfast or dinner. Yet in spite of their efforts the travellers did not arrive at the town in question till after the closing of the gates. It was necessary to spend the night outside, and with as little discomfort as possible; some one noticed a ruined castle on a neighbouring hill — the castle of Windeck.

Everyone was disposed to make the best use they could of this favourable opportunity, excepting the oldest of the Archers, who opposed the scheme to his utmost, but as he stood alone in his opinion, no one heeded him and he was compelled to accompany his young friends — the only alternative being to stay by himself; so he followed them however unwillingly. The night was dark, not a star shone in the sky. Heavy clouds charged with rain swept over the heads of our travellers like the waves of a misty sea. Such a shelter, insufficient though it were, was a boon from heaven.

The Archers climbed the hill in silence, but at every step they took along the brush-grown pathway they heard the flight of wild creatures of the wood, whose very numbers proved that the solitary ruins were guarded against the intrusion of man by some superstitious fear. Suddenly those marching in front saw rising up like a phantom before them the first tower, a gigantic sentinel whose mission it was in former times to defend the entrance to the castle.

The old Archer proposed that they should halt at this tower and be satisfied with its shelter. They did halt consequently; one of the Archers struck a light, lighted a branch of fir and stepped through the gate. Then they saw that the roofs had fallen in, that the walls alone were standing, and as the night threatened to be rainy, with one accord they were for pushing on to the main building. Again the old Archer was left free to stay behind; but again he refused, preferring to follow his companions wherever they went, rather than to remain alone on such a night and in such a neighbourhood.

So the company resumed its march. During this short halt each man had broken off a fir branch and had provided himself with a resinous torch, so that the mountain, so dark before, had suddenly become brilliantly lighted, and at the edge of the circle of light it was possible to make out the dim, vague, dark form of the Castle, the details of which became more definite as they approached nearer, — massive columns and low browed vaults, whose first stones had perhaps been laid by Charlemagne himself when he was constructing from the Pyrenees to the Batavian Marshes his line of forts intended to break the invasion of the Northmen.

As the Archers approached with blazing torches, the denizens of the Castle, — night flying owls and ospreys, took alarm, and after wheeling silently twice or thrice over the heads of the intruders, flew off screaming into the darkness. At sight of them and hearing their ill-omened cries, the bravest were not without an impulse of terror, for they knew that there are some dangers against which neither courage nor numbers may avail. None the less they entered the Outer Bailey of the Castle and found themselves in the centre of a great square formed by buildings, some of which were in ruins, while others were in a state of preservation all the more remarkable by contrast with the crumbling fragments covering the ground in front of them.

The Archers entered the block which appeared to them most fit for habitation and immediately found themselves in a great hall, which seemed to be that once used as a guard room. Remains of shutters closed the windows strongly enough to withstand the utmost violence of the wind; oaken benches placed against the walls and extending all round the room were still capable of serving their original purpose, while an immense fire-place afforded a means of giving at once light and warmth to the sleep of the newcomers. This satisfied all the desires of men inured to the hard labours of the chase and war, and accustomed to spend their nights with no other pillow but the roots of a tree, and no other shelter but its leaves.

The worst of it was that they had nothing for supper. Their journey had been long, and their mid-day dinner was far off; but this after all was one of those inconveniences with which men of the chase were bound to be familiar. And so they drew tight the buckles of their belts, they made a big fire and warmed themselves abundantly as the best thing they could do. Then as sleep began to fall on the travellers, each man settled himself down to pass the night as comfortably as he could, not however until, following the old Archer’s advice, they had taken the precaution of appointing four of their comrades to act as sentries in succession, so that the slumber of the rest might be secure. They drew lots and the lot fell on Otho, Hermann, the old Archer and Franz. Each watch was fixed to last two hours; half-past nine was striking from the Church of Kervenheim when Otho began his duty, and a minute afterwards he was the only man awake among his new comrades.

This was the first moment's quiet he had found for reflection. Three days ago at the same hour he had been proud and happy, doing the honours of the Castle of Godesberg to the most noble Knights of the neighbourhood; and now without having done anything to bring about the change and almost without knowing its cause, lo! he was disinherited from his father's love, banished without knowing the limit of his exile and forming one of a band of men, brave and loyal no doubt, but men of no birth and no future; he was watching over their slumber, he, the son of a Prince, who was accustomed to sleep while others watched over him! Such thoughts made his vigil seem short. Ten, half-past ten and eleven struck in succession without his noticing the lapse of time and without anything happening to disturb his meditation. And yet bodily fatigue was beginning to struggle against mental activity, and when half-past eleven struck it was quite time for the end of his watch to come; for his eyes were closing in spite of himself. So he woke up Hermann, who was to come next, telling him that his turn was due.

Hermann woke up in very ill-humour; he had been dreaming that he was roasting a buck he had killed, and just as he was making — at least in his dream — a capital supper, he woke to find himself fasting, with his stomach empty and no chance of filling it. Faithful however to the order given, he changed places with Otho. The latter lay down; for some time his half-open eyes made out vaguely the objects which surrounded him and among these objects Hermann standing against one of the massive columns of the fireplace; soon everything became blended in a grey mist wherein each object lost its form and colour; at last he closed his eyes completely and fell asleep.

Hermann, as we said, was standing against one of the huge pillars of the fireplace, listening to the noise made by the wind roaring in the turrets, and directing his eyes by the dying flicker of the fire into the darkest corners of the room, he was gazing upon a closed door which looked as though it led to the inner apartments of the Castle when midnight struck.

Brave as he was, Hermann, not without a certain inward fear and with his eyes still fixed on the same point, counted the eleven strokes, when just as the twelfth was sounding, the door opened and on the threshold appeared a beauteous damsel, pale and silent, lighted by a lamp concealed behind her.

Hermann would have called out; but the girl, as if she guessed his intention, put a finger to her lips to impose silence upon him, while with the other hand she beckoned him to follow her.

CHAPTER IV.

HERMANN hesitated a moment. But reflecting that it was shameful for a man to feel fear before a woman, he took two or three steps towards the mysterious Unknown. Seeing this, she went back into the room, took a lamp from the table and opened an inner door, from the threshold of which she turned and beckoned again to the Archer who remained standing at the entrance to the second room. Her sign was accompanied by a smile so gracious that Hermann's last fears vanished. He sprang forward, and the girl hearing his hurried steps, turned once more with a gesture which bade him walk behind her at an interval of some paces. Hermann obeyed; and thus they advanced in silence through a number of desolate gloomy rooms, until at last his unknown guide pushed open the door of a brilliantly-lighted apartment in which was a table with two places laid. The girl led the way in, set the lamp on the chimney- piece, and without a word sat down on one of the chairs prepared for the guests. Then noticing that Hermann, nervous and hesitating, still remained standing at the door, she said to him: "Welcome to the Castle of Windeck."

"But ought I to accept the honour you offer me?" was Hermann's reply.

"Are you not hungry and thirsty, Sir Archer?" said the girl; "sit you down at this table, eat and drink: it is I who invite you."

"You are the Lady of the Castle, I suppose? "Hermann said as he took his seat. The girl nodded assent.

"And do you dwell alone in this ruin?" was the Archer's next question, as he gazed around him in astonishment.

"Alone." — " Your parents?" said he.

The girl pointed to two portraits hanging on the wall — a man and a woman — and replied softly, "I am the last of my family."

Hermann did not yet know what to think of the strange creature before him. But the girl's eyes, as they met his, were melting and tender. He thought no more of his hunger or thirst; he saw before him, — he a humble Archer, — a high-born lady, forgetting her rank and her pride to receive him at her table. He was young, handsome, and not lacking in self-assurance; he fancied that the hour of fortune which comes (they say) to every man once in a lifetime was now come to him.

“Eat now,” said the girl, helping him to a slice of boar’s head. “Drink,” she said, pouring out for him a glass of wine red as blood.

“How are you named, my fair hostess?” answered Hermann, emboldened as he raised his glass.

“My name is Bertha.”

“Well then, here’s to your health, fair Bertha!” and he tossed off the wine at one draught.

Bertha made no reply, but smiled sadly. Magical was the effect of the liquor; Hermann’s eyes now sparkled, and availing himself of the lady’s invitation he fell upon the supper with a relish which showed how acceptable it was, and which might be his excuse for forgetting now to make the sign of the Cross, as was his wont whenever he sat down to food. Bertha watched him, but did not join his meal.

“You do not eat?” he said.

She shook her head and poured him out a second goblet of wine.

It was already the mode at this period for fair ladies to regard eating and drinking as a thing unworthy of them; and at dinners which he had attended as squire in waiting, Hermann had often seen the mistress of the house remain fasting thus, while the knights around her were eating, so as to let it be thought that she — like the butterflies and flowers, whose airiness and brilliance she shared, — lived only on fragrance and on dew. He supposed it was so with Bertha, and he continued his repast just as if she were keeping him company. Nor was his gracious hostess idle; seeing that his glass was empty, she replenished it for the third time.

Hermann was no longer afraid or embarrassed; the wine was exquisite and very real, for it produced its usual stimulating effect upon the guest. The Archer became full of confidence in himself, and, as he thought over all the merits he was now conscious of possessing, he ceased to wonder at the good fortune which had befallen him; indeed his only wonder was that it had been so long in coming. Such was his happy frame of mind when his eyes fell upon a lute which lay on a chair, as though it had already been used that day. Then he bethought him that a little music would well suit with the excellent meal he had made; and so he politely begged Bertha to take her lute and sing to him. She stretched out her hand, and taking the instrument drew from it a note so thrilling that Hermann’s very heartstrings quivered in response; then before this emotion was over, the girl — in a voice both soft and deep — began a ballad, the words of which were so appropriate to the Archer's present position that it seemed almost as though the mysterious musician were inventing it on purpose.

Its theme was a lady who loved an Archer. Hermann did not miss this point, and if he had still any lingering doubts, the ballad would have dispelled them. When the last lines were reached, he rose, and going round the table stationed himself behind Bertha, so close to her that her hand, when it released its hold of the strings, fell between Hermann's own. He shuddered, for that hand was like ice; but instantly recovering himself he said, "Ah! madam, I am only a humble Archer without birth or fortune; and yet, for loving, my heart is that of a king."

"A heart is all I want," replied Bertha.

"You are free, then? "Hermann ventured to ask.

"Yes, I am free."

"I love you," said Hermann. "And I love you," answered she.

"You are willing to marry me?" he eagerly asked.

Bertha's only reply was to get up and go to a cabinet in which she opened a drawer, and taking out two rings handed them to him; then returning to the cabinet, she drew out — still without a word — a wreath of orange-blossom and a bridal veil. Placing the veil over her head and attaching to it the wreath, she turned and said, "I am ready."

Hermann could not but tremble; still he had gone too far to draw back now. After all, what was he risking, — he, a poor Archer, who owned not an inch of land and to whom the mere plate with which the table was spread would have been a fortune? He therefore offered his hand to his betrothed, expressing by an inclination of his head that he was ready to follow her.

In her cold palm Bertha took her lover's burning hand, and opening a door she entered a gloomy corridor lighted only by the pale ray which the moon, emerging from the clouds, flung through the narrow windows which opened through the walls at regular intervals. At the end of the passage was a staircase, down which they went into complete darkness. At this point Hermann, quaking in spite of himself, made as though he would retrace his steps; but it seemed to him that Bertha's hand grasped his with more than human strength, and so — partly through shame, partly by compulsion — he continued to follow her. Down — down — still down they went; presently Hermann fancied that they were underground, from the pervading dampness: immediately afterwards he was sure of the fact. They had now ceased descending, and were walking on a level surface which was obviously the floor of a cellar. Ten paces further, and Bertha, stopping, turned to the right and said: “Come, father.” Then she proceeded on her way. After another ten yards she stopped again, and turning to the left said: “Come, mother.” Once more she resumed her course for the same space, and then for the third time spoke: “Come, sisters,”

And Hermann, though he could see nothing, fancied that he heard behind him a noise of foot-steps and a rustling of garments. At this moment his head touched the vaulted roof; but Bertha pushed the stone with her finger, and the stone rose up, giving entrance to a brilliantly lighted Church. They were coming from a tomb and found themselves before an altar. Just then two flag-stones in the Choir uplifted themselves, and Hermann saw the father and mother of Bertha appear, wearing the same costume as in the pictures of the room in which he had supped; behind them, in the nave, came forth in the same manner the Nuns of the Abbey which adjoined the Castle, and which had fallen into ruins a century ago.

Thus everyone was assembled for the marriage, the betrothed, parents and guests. Only the priest was wanting: Bertha beckoned, and a bishop in marble sleeping on his tomb rose slowly and took up his position before the altar. Hermann now regretted his folly, and would have given many years of his life to be in the guard-room and lying near his friends; but he was drawn on by a supernatural force and was like a man who is the prey of a fearful dream, and who can neither cry out nor fly.

In the meantime Otho had awoke and his eyes turned instinctively to where Hermann should be keeping guard; Hermann was there no longer, and no one was present in his place. Otho rose; one of his last recollections just as he fell asleep was that he dimly saw a door open and a woman appear; he had supposed it was the beginning of a dream, but the disappearance of Hermann gave an effect of reality to the dream. Immediately he looked towards the door, which he distinctly recalled having seen shut when he himself was on duty, and which was now open.

Perhaps Hermann was tired out and had gone to sleep. Otho took a fir bough, lit it at the hearth, passed from one sleeper to the other and did not discover the man he sought. Then he awoke the old Archer, whose turn it was to act sentinel; Otho related what had happened and begged him to watch, while he went to find his lost companion. The old Archer shook his head and said, “He may have seen the Lady of Win- deck; if so, he is lost.”

Otho urged the old man to explain himself, but he would say nothing more. Yet these few words, instead of stifling Otho’s wish to attempt the discovery, gave him fresh enthusiasm; he saw in this adventure something mysterious and supernatural, which it flattered his courage to be the first to fathom. And moreover he liked Hermann; the two days’ march in his company had made him familiar with a brave and light-hearted fellow, whom he would be sorry to lose. Beyond this he had great confidence in a miraculous medal brought from Palestine by one of his ancestors, who had touched the tomb of Christ with it. His mother had given it him as a child, and he had always religiously worn it on his breast.

None of the old Archer’s representations availed to shake Otho in his resolve, and by the light of his torch he entered the adjoining room, the door of which had remained open. Everything there was in its usual position; only another door was also open. He assumed that Hermann, having entered by one, had gone out by the other; he followed the same direction and walked through the long series of rooms Hermann had crossed. It ended in the banqueting hall.

As he approached this room, he fancied he heard voices; immediately he paused, listened, and after a second’s consideration all uncertainty vanished. Only it was not Hermann’s voice; still, imagining he might learn something from those who were talking, he advanced to the door.

The threshold reached, he stood still, astounded by the amazing scene before him. The table was still laid and lit; only the guests were changed. The two portraits had left the canvas, and were come down from their frames and, seated on either side of the table, were talking in a dignified manner suitable to their age and rank. Otho mistrusted his sight; he saw before him personages who, judging by their appearance, had belonged to a generation that had passed away more than a century ago, and were speaking German of the time of Charles the Bald. Otho attended all the more carefully to what he saw and heard.

“In spite of your arrangements, my dear Count,” the woman was saying, “I still maintain that the marriage which Bertha is now making is a step beneath her, such as has not befallen before in our family. A common Archer!... Shame on it!”

“Madam,” answered her husband, “you are right, but no one has come to these ruins for ten years, and she serves a master who is not so exacting as we, and one to whom a soul is a soul.... Moreover, ‘tis possible to wear an

Archer’s uniform, and yet not be a low-bred fellow on that account. Witness this young Otho who comes to stay the marriage, who is impudently listening to us at this moment, and whom I will cleave with my sword if he does not instantly rejoin his comrades.”

And turning towards the door as he spoke, where the young man stood mute and rooted to the spot with astonishment, he drew his sword and came towards him with a slow mechanical tread, as if he walked by the help of cleverly contrived springs, and not with living muscles.

Otho watched his advance with uncontrollable terror. None the less, whoever was his enemy, he did not dream of not defending himself and fighting. But seeing what an extraordinary foe he had to deal with, he recognised that neither spiritual nor temporal weapons were superfluous for his defence, and before drawing his sword, he made the sign of the Cross.

In an instant the lights went out, the table disappeared, and the old Knight and his wife vanished like visions.

Otho stood dazed; then seeing and hearing nothing further, he entered the room a moment ago so full of life, now so dark; and by the light of his resinous torch he saw that the weird guests had resumed their places in their frames; only the eyes of the old Knight seemed still alive and followed Otho with a menacing look.

Otho passed on. According to what he had heard, he decided that imminent danger threatened Hermann, and seeing an open door, he followed the indication thus given and entered the corridor. Arrived at the end of the passage, he found himself at the head of the staircase, went down the first steps, and soon discovered he was level with the Abbey cemetery, on the other side of which he saw the Church all lighted up. A door going down to the vaults stood open, and seemed likewise to lead to the Church; but Otho preferred going across the cemetery rather than under it.

So he entered the cloister and advanced towards the Church. The door was shut, but he had only to push it, and the lock broke away from the oak, the door was so completely decayed and rotten. Now he stood within the Church; he saw everything, the monks, the betrothed pair, the parents, the marble Bishop who had risen from the grave, and who was just about to place the nuptial ring on Hermann’s finger, as he stood before the altar white and trembling.

This no doubt was the marriage the old Knight and his dame had spoken of.

Otho stretched out his hand to the holy water basin, then raising his wet fingers to his forehead, he made the sign of the Cross.

Instantaneously, as if by magic, the whole scene vanished, — bishop, bride, father and mother, nuns; the tapers were extinguished, the Church rocked as if on returning to their graves the dead had shaken the very foundations; a peal of thunder was heard, lightning flashed across the chancel, and as if he were struck by the bolt of heaven, Hermann fell unconscious on the stones of the sanctuary.

By the light of his torch that was almost burning out, Otho went to him, and taking him on his shoulder, he tried to carry him away. Just then the torch went quite out. Otho flung it away and tried to regain the door; but the darkness was so intense that he failed to find it. So he went on for an interminable half hour, knocking against pillar after pillar, his brow streaming with sweat and his hair bristling at the remembrance of the demoniacal things he had witnessed. At last he found the door he had searched for so long.

As he set foot in the cloister, he heard his name and that of Hermann repeated by many voices; another moment and torches flashed in the Castle windows, men appeared at the foot of the staircase and crowded under the cloister arcades. Otho answered by a single cry in which he spent all his strength, and then fell exhausted beside the still unconscious Hermann.

The Archers carried the two young men into the guard-room, where they soon opened their eyes. Hermann and Otho related in turn what had happened to them. The old Archer hearing that thunder-peal unaccompanied by a storm, had at once awakened all the sleepers, and they had set out in search of the adventurous youths, whom they found, as we have just seen, in a condition that left little to choose between them.

No one slept again, and at the first beam of day the company marched silently out of the ruined Castle of Windeck, and resumed its journey to Cleves, where they arrived at nine o’clock in the morning.

CHAPTER V.

THE lists prepared for the Archery consisted of a plain stretching from the Castle of Cleves to the banks of the Rhine. On the Castle side a dais was erected, prepared for the Prince and his courtiers. On the other side and on the bank the people from all the surrounding villages were already waiting in rows for the spectacle they were about to enjoy, and of which they were all the more proud since the victor of the day would come from their own rank. A group of Archers, arrived from other parts of Germany, were already in position at one end of the meadow, while at the other, the butt to be aimed at by arrows showed a black point surrounded by two rings, — one red, the other blue, — placed on a white ground, a hundred and fifty paces off.

At ten o'clock the trumpets sounded; the Castle gate opened, and there issued forth a noble cavalcade, composed of Prince Adolf of Cleves, the Princess Helena and the Sovereign Count of Ravenstein. A numerous retinue of pages and grooms, — on horseback like their masters, though the distance which separated the Castle from the meadow was barely half a mile, — followed their lords, and as it wound along the narrow path descending from hill to plain, it looked like a long speckled serpent going down to quench its thirst in the river below.

Long shouts of applause welcomed the King and Queen of the festival, as they ascended the dais that had been prepared for them. As for Otho, the great folks had already taken their places before a sound issued from his lips, so absorbed was he in a deep, silent meditation at sight of the young Princess Helena.

She was indeed one of the most graceful creatures Northern Germany — so fertile in fair and graceful types — could produce. Like plants growing in the shade with roots steeped in a humid soil, Helena lacked perhaps those vivid colours of youth blossoming under a warmer sun; but on the other hand, she had all the suppleness and grace of those lovely lake- flowers which may be seen rising out of the water in the day-time to look around them a while and take their share in the festival of life, but close up at twilight, and rest at night under the large round leaves with unseen stems that nature has given them for a cradle. She followed her' father, and was herself followed by the Count of Ravenstein, who would, everyone said, soon become her betrothed. Behind them walked pages bearing on a red velvet cushion the cap intended to be the prize for the conqueror. The officers of Prince Adolf had finished filling up the places of honour reserved on the dais, and after Princess Helena had responded by a gracious bow to the murmur of admiration which greeted her, her father motioned that the contest might begin.

There were a hundred and twenty competitors, or thereabouts, and the conditions imposed were as follows:

All who at the first attempt missed the white altogether, should there and then retire from the competition.

All who at the second attempt landed their arrows outside the red circle should likewise retire.

Then there would only remain for the final contest those who after the third attempt had kept within the blue ring.

In this way they avoided confusion amongst the competitors, as well as all possibility that chance instead of skill might give the victory to an indifferent bowman.

The signal given, the Archers one and all strung their bows and prepared their arrows. Each had been enrolled, and the list had been drawn up in alphabetical order. A herald called the names, and as they were called, the marksmen advanced and loosed their arrows.

Some twenty Archers fell out at the first test, and shamefaced and accompanied by the laughter of the spectators, retired into a reserved enclosure, where they would soon be joined by fresh companions in misfortune.

After the second round the number was still further augmented, for the more difficult the task became, the more failures there were bound to be. At last, after the third trial, there only remained eleven Archers to contest the prize, among whom were Franz, Hermann and Otho. These were the pick of all the Bowmen of the Rhine between Strasburg and Nimwegen. Attention became keener, and even the Archers who had no further place in the contest, forgetting their defeat, shared in the general excitement, each praying that the luck which had forsaken himself, might protect friend, countryman or brother.

A new rule was next made amongst the Archers themselves, — that a fourth test should be applied. This time every arrow that did not hit the black spot itself was to exclude the shooter, and further reduce the number of competitors. Seven failed; Franz and Hermann had accomplished the shot called *magpie,* that is to say they had landed their arrows partly on the black. Mildar and Otho had hit the bull's eye fair and full.

This Mildar whom we now mention for the first time was one of the Count of Ravenstein's Archers, whose fame had spread up the Rhine from where the river is lost amid the sands of Dortrecht to where it springs a mere rivulet from the ridges of the Saint-Gothard. For long Franz and Hermann, who had their reputation to maintain, had desired to meet this redoubtable adversary, whom everyone was for pitting against them. The final test was now decided without their being disqualified, but still the advantage remained with Mildar, whom Otho alone had equalled throughout these preliminary trials.

As the number of competitors diminished, the stronger grew the interest of the spectators. The four Archers who remained in the lists were the object of all eyes. Three were already famous for having contested and carried away prizes. But the fourth and the youngest was absolutely unknown to everyone; his name was asked on all sides, and no one could give any other than that he had chosen for himself, — Otho the Archer.

According to alphabetical order, Franz was to shoot first. He went forward to the limit marked by a line of turf, chose his best arrow, slowly raised and adjusted his bow, aimed some seconds with all possible care, then let go the string, and the arrow buried itself in the centre of the black. Applause burst forth from every side, and Franz drew aside to give place to his comrades.

Hermann advanced the second, took the same precautions as his predecessor and with the same result.

It was Mildar's turn. He took his place in the midst of the most profound silence, chose with extreme care an arrow from his quiver, balanced it on his finger so as to make sure the point did not weigh heavier than the notched ivory; then, satisfied with the examination, he placed it on the string. At the same moment his patron the Count of Raven- stein rose, and drawing a purse from his pocket, "Mildar," he said to him, "if you go nearer the peg than your two rivals, this purse is yours."

Then he threw the purse, which rolled to the Archer's feet. But he was so preoccupied that he seemed hardly to pay any attention to what his master said. The purse fell ringing near him without his turning his head; many an eye momentarily sought in the grass the gold gleaming in the silken meshes which enclosed it, then instantly returned to Mildar's figure.

The Count of Ravenstein was not mistaken in his expectation. Mildar's arrow broke the peg itself and buried itself in the centre of the butt. A cry broke out on all sides; the Count of Ravenstein clapped his hands.

Helena, on the contrary, paled so distinctly that her father anxiously leant towards her, asking her if she was in pain; but she only shook her fair head smilingly for answer, and Prince Adolf, reassured, turned his eyes towards the marksmen. Mildar picked up the purse.

There still remained Otho, whose name had set him last, and to whom Mildar's skill seemed to have left no chance. He too had smiled like the Princess, and by this smile it might be seen he did not deem himself beaten yet.

But those who appeared to take the liveliest interest in this struggle were Franz and Hermann. Franz and Hermann once vanquished, transferred all their hope to their young friend. They had no purse of gold to cast at his feet, as the Count of Ravenstein had done for his champion, but they went up to Otho and grasped his hand.

"Think of the honour of the Archers of Cologne," they said to him, "though in all conscience we do not see how you can uphold it further."

"If someone will take out Mildar's arrow," answered Otho, "I can bury mine in the hole that his has made."

Franz and Hermann gazed at each other with stupefied wonder. Otho had proposed this in such a quiet tone and with such coolness, they did not doubt after the proof of skill he had once before given them that he was capable of doing what he proposed. Then amid the noisy clamour that rose from the assembled crowds, they signalled that they wished to speak, and silence reigned once more. Then Hermann, turning towards the dais where the Prince of Cleves was seated, raised his voice and repeated Otho's request. It was so fair and so unusual that it was at once granted; and this time it was Mildar who smiled, but with an expression of incredulity that plainly showed he considered the thing impossible.

Then Otho laid down his cap, his bow and arrows on the ground, and went himself with a slow and measured step to examine the shot; it was just as the marker had said. Mildar who had followed him, now reached the butt and drew out his arrow with his own hand.

Franz and Hermann were about to do the same, but Otho stopped them with a look; they understood that their young friend wished to use their two arrows as two guides, and responded with an intelligent glance. Otho then picked up a small field daisy, thrust it into the hollow formed by Mildar's arrow, in order to be guided by a white point in the middle of the round black spot. Then having taken this precaution he returned to his place, without humility as without pride, convinced that though he should lose the prize, he had contested it for a sufficiently long time not to be ashamed at seeing it go into other hands.

Arrived once more at the firing line, he waited a moment till each had resumed his proper station. Then order once more established, he lifted up his bow, apparently took the first arrow that chanced, — although a practised eye would have observed that he had felt under the others for the one he took, — shook his head to throw out of the way his long fair hair which his movements had tossed over his eyes; then calm and smiling like the Pythian Apollo, he set his arrow to the bow, raised it slowly to the level of the butt and of his eye, drew back his right hand till the bow-string almost touched his shoulder; then suddenly the arrow was seen like a lightning-flash and at the same moment the daisy vanished. Otho had kept his promise, and his arrow had replaced Mildar's in the centre of the butt.

A cry of astonishment escaped every mouth, the feat was well nigh miraculous.

Otho turned towards the Prince and bowed to him. Helena blushed with pleasure, and Ravenstein with mortification.

The Prince Adolf of Cleves rose and announced that from this point he considered there were two victors, and so there should be two prizes: one would be the cap embroidered by his daughter, the other, the gold chain which he wore on his neck. However, as this contest of skill interested him as deeply as it did all present, he wished that each of the rivals should propose a last proof, choosing what test he pleased, and that the other should be bound to accept it. Otho and Mildar agreed like men who would have asked this very boon, if it had not been proposed to them, and the crowd, delighted at seeing an exhibition so interesting, clapped hands with one accord, thanking the Prince for his generosity.

The alphabetical order gave Mildar the choice of the first test. He went to the bank of the river, cut two willow-branches, came back and planted one at half distance from the original butt; then returning to the limit he clove it with his arrow.

Otho prepared the other and did the same. Now it was his turn: he took two arrows; one he passed into his belt, placed the other on the bow, shot it so as to make it describe a circle, and while the first was falling almost vertically, he split it with the second.

This appeared so miraculous to Mildar, that he declared, never having performed a similar feat, he considered success impossible. Consequently he owned himself beaten, and left the choice to his rival between the cap embroidered by Princess Helena and the gold chain given by Prince Adolf of Cleves.

Otho chose the cap, and went and knelt before the Princess amid the loud acclamations of the multitude.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Otho rose to his feet, his forehead adorned with the cap he had won, his face was radiant with joy and happiness. Helena’s hair had almost touched his, their breaths had mingled, it was the first time that he had breathed the atmosphere of a woman.

His green close coat fitted so well his supple and slender figure, his eyes were so brilliant with the first pride a man experiences in his first triumph, he was so handsome and so proud of his good fortune that Prince Adolf of Cleves at once thought how advantageous it would be to attach such a follower to himself. So turning towards the young man, who was about to descend from the platform, he said, “A moment, my young master, I hope we shall not part like this.”

“I am at your Lordship’s orders,” answered the young man.

“What is your name?”

“My name is Otho, my Lord.”

“Well, Otho,” continued the Prince, “you know me since you have come to the festival I give. You know that my retainers and my gentlemen think me a good master. Are you unattached?”

“I am free, my Lord,” answered Otho.

“Very well, then, will you enter my service?”

“In what capacity?” answered the young man.

“In what seems to me suitable to your condition and your skill — to wit, as an Archer.”

Otho smiled with an expression unintelligible to those who could see in him only a clever marksman, and would without doubt have answered in accordance with his rank and not his appearance, when he saw Helena’s eye fasten on him with such an expression of anxiety that his words died on his lips. At the same time the young girl drew her hands together as if in entreaty. Otho felt his pride melting away at the first ray of love, and turning towards the Prince, he said, “I accept.”

A flash of joy overspread Helena’s face.

“Very well, that is arranged,” continued the Prince; “from to-day you are in my service. Take this purse, ‘tis the earnest money of our bargain.”

“No, thank you, my Lord,” replied Otho smiling. “I have still some money my mother gave me. When I have no more, I will claim from your Lordship the pay due to me for my services. Only since your Lordship is so well disposed towards me, I will ask for another favour instead.”

“What is that?” said the Prince.

“To engage at the same time as myself,” said Otho, “the brave young fellow that your Lordship sees leaning on his bow over there, and who is called Hermann; he is a good comrade whom I do not wish to leave.”

“Well,” said the Prince, “go and make him in my name the same offer I made you, and if he accepts, give him this purse which you do not want; perhaps he will not be so proud as you.”

Otho bowed to the Prince, descended from the dais and went to offer Hermann the Prince’s proposal and the purse. He received one with joy and the other with gratitude; then immediately the two young fellows returned to take their place in the Prince’s suite.

This time the Prince did not again give his hand to his daughter. The Count of Ravenstein had solicited this honour, and it had been granted him; then the proud procession advanced a few steps on foot to reach the spot where the horses were standing. That belonging to Princess Helena was under the care of a simple groom, as the page who should have held the stirrup for the Princess had loitered longer than he should have done amongst the throng of spectators where curiosity had led him. Otho observed his absence, and forgetting that it would betray him, since only a young man of noble blood was entitled to perform the duty of a page or squire, he hurried forward to take his place.

“It would seem, my young master,” said the Count of Ravenstein to him, thrusting him aside with his elbow, “that victory has made you forget your rank. For this once we will forgive your pride on account of your good intention.”

The blood surged to Otho’s face so fast it passed like a flame before his eyes. But he remembered that to say a word or make a sign would be ruin; therefore he stood motionless and silent. Helena thanked him with a glance. Already between those two young hearts which had only just met there was an understanding as deep and sympathetic as if they had always been brother and sister.

The page’s horse stood riderless, and the groom held the bridle. The Prince noticed this, and that Otho was coming behind him with Hermann.

“Otho,” said the Prince to him, “do you know how to ride?”

“Yes, my lord,” he answered smiling.

“Very well, take the page’s horse; ‘tis scarce fitting a conqueror should tramp afoot.”

Otho bent his head in token of obedience and gratitude. Then approaching the steed, he threw himself into the saddle without the help of the stirrup so nimbly and gracefully that it was obvious this new exercise was as familiar to him as that in which he had just now shown himself so great an adept.

The cavalcade continued its way towards the Castle and arrived at the great gate. Otho observed the escutcheon above it, whereon were carved and painted the arms of the House of Cleves, a field azure bearing a swan *argent* on a sea *vert.* Then he remembered that the swan was connected with the House of Cleves by an old tradition, which he had often heard recounted in his childhood. Over the gate was a heavy and massive balcony, called the balcony of Princess Beatrix, and between the gate and the balcony a carving belonging to the beginning of the XIIIth century, and representing a Knight sleeping in a boat drawn by a swan. The same heraldic figure was repeated on all sides, combined gracefully with the more modern ornamentation of certain recently built portions of the Castle.

The rest of the day was spent in festivity. Otho in his capacity of victor was throughout the day an object of general attention; and while the Prince gave his friends a luxurious banquet, Otho’s companions gave him a dinner, of which he, Otho, was the prince. Mildar alone refused to take part in it.

The next day by the orders of the Prince they brought Otho an Archer’s complete costume. Otho contemplated for a while this livery which, military though it was, was still none the less a livery; but thinking of Helena, he took courage, doffed the clothes he had had made at Cologne, and put on those provided for him for the future.

He entered on his duties that same day, — to act as guard of the turrets and galleries. Otho’s turn came, and the young Archer was placed as sentry on a terrace facing the Castle windows. He thanked Heaven for his luck; through the windows opened to welcome the sun, which had begun to pierce the clouds, he hoped to see Helena.

His hope was fulfilled; Helena shortly appeared with her father and the Count of Ravenstein. The party stopped to look at the young Archer; Otho even fancied that the noble Lords deigned to be interested in him. He was in truth the subject of their conversation. Prince Adolf of Cleves remarked on the fine appearance of his new follower to the Count of Ravenstein, and the Count drew the Prince's attention to the fact that his new servant, in spite of human and divine laws, wore his hair long like a noble, when he ought to have his hair short, as became a man of humble condition. Helena ventured a word to save from the scissors the fair and curly hair of the young man she was interested in; but Prince Adolf of Cleves struck by the truth of his future son-in-law's remarks, and jealous of the rights of the nobility, answered that the other Archers would have reason to complain if a rule to which they were subjected were violated in Otho's favour.

Otho was far from conjecturing the designs now being formed against this aristocratic adornment that his mother was so fond of; he passed and repassed before the windows, casting a hungry look at the interior of the rooms which she whom he loved already with all his heart inhabited. Dreams of happiness and schemes of vengeance then rose up together in his mind, entwined like a deadly serpent round a tree loaded with delicious fruit. From time to time remembrance of his father's wrath darkened his brow, to pass away like a cloud which came between the future and the rising sun of his love.

Relieved from guard, Otho found the Castle barber awaiting him, sent by the Count to cut his hair.

Otho made him repeat this order twice; for since he could not drive away the vivid memory of his late exalted position, he was unwilling to believe the order really applied to him. But on reflection, he understood that what the Prince required was a simple matter; he, Otho, was only an Archer to the Prince, more dexterous it might be than the others; yet skill did not confer nobility, and nobles alone had the right to wear long hair. Otho would have to leave the Castle or obey.

So great was the importance attributed by young nobles to this part of their person that Otho paused a while in suspense; it seemed to him that for his own honour and that of his family he should not undergo such degradation. Moreover, from the moment he allowed it, he would in truth become a mere Archer in Helena's eyes, and the thought of separation from her was to be preferred to being thus lowered in her esteem. His reflections had reached this point when the Prince passed by with his daughter on his arm.

Otho stepped forward towards the Prince, and the Prince stopped, seeing the young man wished to speak to him.

"Forgive me, your Lordship," said the young Archer "for daring to approach you with such a question; but is it really by your orders this man has come to crop my hair?"

"Certainly," answered the Prince, astonished, "why?"

"Because your Lordship spoke of no such conditions when he proposed to me that I should take service among his Archers."

"I did not speak of this condition," said the Prince, "because I did not dream you hoped to keep an adornment which does not belong to your station. Are you of noble origin to wear long hair like a Baron or a Knight?"

"But," said the young man, avoiding the question, "if I had known your Lordship demanded such a sacrifice from me, perhaps I should have refused your offer, however anxious I might be to accept it."

"There is still time to go back, young master," answered the Prince, who began to be perplexed by such obstinacy displayed by a man of the people. "But take heed you do not make a worse bargain, and that the first nobleman whose territories you cross does not exact the same sacrifice, without offering you the same alternative."

"For anyone but you, my Lord," answered Otho, smiling with an expression of disdain that astonished the Prince and made Helena tremble, "that were easy to undertake, but difficult to carry out. I am an Archer, and," he continued, laying his hands on his arrows, "I carry as your Lordship can see the lives of twelve men at my belt."

"The Castle gate stands open," answered the Count; "stay or go as you will. I have no change to make in the order I have given; your decision is you-r own. Now you know the condition and cannot say I have engaged you unfairly."

"I have decided, my Lord," answered Otho, bowing with respect blended with dignity, and uttering these words with an accent that made it plain his resolution was in fact already formed.

"You are going?" said the Prince.

Otho was about to answer; but, before saying the words which would separate him for ever from Helena, he turned a last look towards her. A tear trembled in the girl's eyes, and Otho saw it.

"You are going," said the Prince a second time, surprised at having to wait so long for an answer from one of his servants.

“No, my Lord, I will stay,” said Otho.

“That is well,” said the Prince, “I am glad to see you more reasonable.” And he went on his way.

Helena said nothing; but she looked at Otho with such a grateful expression that when father and daughter were out of sight, the young man turned cheerfully to the barber, who was waiting for his answer.

“Come along, master,” he said to him, “set to work.”

And pushing him into the first room that he found open in the corridor, he sat down and resigned his head to the poor barber, who began the operation for which he had been summoned, without understanding a word of what had passed in his presence. Feeling no hesitation on that account, he proceeded with such energy that in a short time the stone flags were covered with ringlets of beautiful hair, the fair waving curls that had formed so graceful a frame to the young man’s face.

Otho was left alone, and in spite of his devotion to the slightest orders of Helena, he could not look without regret at the silken curls his mother had so loved to play with, when he thought he heard a slight noise at the end of the corridor; he listened and recognised the girl’s light footfall. At that, though the sacrifice had been made on her account, he was ashamed to show her his head despoiled of its hair, and promptly threw himself into a recess before which hung a curtain. He was scarce there when he saw Helena appear, pacing slowly along as if looking for something. Passing before the door, her eyes fell on the floor. Then glancing round her and seeing she was alone, she paused a moment and listened; soon reassured by the silence, she entered softly, leant down — still listening and watching — then picking up a curl of the young Archer s hair, she hid it in her bosom and fled.

Otho had fallen on his knees behind the curtain, his lips open in amaze and his hands clasped.

All were surprised at this sudden resolution; but the same evening the rumour spread amongst the followers of the Prince that, pressed by her father to answer the proposal he had made for her hand, the young Countess had declared she had rather enter a Convent than become the Count of Ravenstein’s wife.

CHAPTER VII.

A WEEK after the events we related in our last chapter, and just as Adolf of Cleves was about to rise from table, it was announced that a herald from the Count of Ravenstein had entered the court-yard of the Castle, bringing his master's challenge. The Prince turned towards his daughter with a look of mingled tenderness and reproach. Helena coloured and lowered her eyes; then after a moment's silence, the Prince gave orders for the messenger to be brought in.

The herald entered; he was a fine young man dressed in the Count's colours, and wearing his coat of arms on his breast. He bowed low to the Prince, and with a voice in which firmness and courtesy were united gave the challenge.

The Count of Ravenstein, without referring to the motives of his declaration, defied Prince Adolf wherever he might meet him, either man to man, or twenty against twenty, or army against army, by day or night, on mountain or plain.

The Prince, seated and covered, listened to the Count's challenge. When it was concluded, he rose, took from a settle where he had thrown it his own velvet mantle lined with ermine, placed it on the herald's shoulders, unfastened a gold chain from his neck and passed it over the messenger's. Then he gave orders he should be hospitably entertained, that when he left the Castle he might say that in the house of Prince Adolf of Cleves a challenge was received as an invitation to a feast.

Two hours after and just when they were least expecting it, the Count of Ravenstein ordered his retinue to be ready next day to leave the Castle of Cleves.

The Prince under this assumed calmness concealed deep anxiety. He had reached the age when armour begins to weigh on a warrior's shoulders. He had neither son nor nephew to whom he could confide the care of his quarrel; but only friends from whom, — in these troublous times when each had his own business to attend to, whether on his own account or for the Emperor, — he knew well that he should have difficulty in getting, not indeed sympathy, but effectual help. Still he sent letters in all directions, appealing to alliance and friendship. Then he set himself to repair his

Castle, strengthening it in weak places, and bringing in all provisions possible.

The Count of Ravenstein had on his side made the most of the week's start he had gained over his enemy. So a few days after the message had been received, and before the allies of the Prince of Cleves had time to come to his assistance, a voice was suddenly heard crying out: "To arms! to arms!"

It was the voice of Otho, who happened to be on guard upon the walls, and had seen on the horizon from the direction of Nimwegen a cloud of dust in the midst of which glittered weapons, like sparks in smoke.

The Prince without thinking the attack would come so quickly, still always held himself in readiness. He gave orders for the gates to be closed, the portcullis to be lowered, and the garrison to man the ramparts. Helena went down to the Chapel of the Countess Beatrix, and began to pray.

When the troops of the Count of Ravenstein were only half a league from the Castle, the same herald who had come before in his master's name, came out from the army and, preceded by a trumpeter, approached the foot of the walls.

Arrived there, the trumpeter blew three blasts, and the herald on behalf of the Count once again challenged the Prince in person, or any champion who would fight in his stead, granting three days during which he would every morning come into the meadow which separated the ramparts from the river and claim single combat. After which time, if his challenge were not accepted, he would offer general warfare. This fresh challenge delivered, the herald advanced to the gate and with his dagger nailed the Count's glove to the oak.

For answer the Prince flung his down from the top of the wall. Then as night was coming on, besieged and besiegers made their arrangements, the one for attack, the other for defence.

Meanwhile Otho, relieved at his post, and seeing that danger was not pressing, had descended from the ramparts to the Castle; for it sometimes happened that going through the quarters reserved for the Archers and servants of the Prince, he caught a glimpse of Helena in some corridor or other. Then, unaware she had been seen by the young Archer the day she had picked up the curl of hair, the girl sometimes smiled and always blushed. Also, under some pretence or other, she spoke to Otho, but not often; on those days the Archer's heart rejoiced, and as soon as she had left him, he went to hide in some retired and solitary corner of the Castle, where in imagination he heard the words of his lady, and closing his eyes, saw once again the smile and blush that had accompanied them.

This time it was all in vain; it was useless for him to gaze across through the windows, to pace through the corridors, he neither saw her nor met her. Wondering then if she were praying in the church, he went down there; but the church was empty. There only remained the Chapel of the Countess Beatrix, — she might be there, — but this was a private chapel, and the servants never entered it except when they were summoned there.

Otho hesitated a little before following her into this sanctuary, but thinking the gravity of the situation might serve him as an excuse, he went towards the spot where he hoped to find her, and raising the tapestry which hung before the door, he saw Helena kneeling at the foot of the altar.

It was the first time Otho had ever entered this oratory, a dim and dark and holy place, where the day only penetrated through stained windows, and everything invited the soul to prayer. A single lamp suspended over the altar burnt before a picture still representing the same legend of a Knight drawn by-a swan; only here the head of the Knight was surrounded! by a brilliant halo. And from the two columns that framed the picture hung, on the one side, a Crusader’s sword with hilt and scabbard of gold, and, on the other, a horn encrusted with pearls and rubies Between the pillars and above the picture, as is still the custom in Germany, was hung a shield surmounted by a helmet, the same shield and the same helmet as that portrayed in the painting. They were easily recognised; for on the canvas as on the steel, shone the same escutcheon, — *or*, a cross *gules* crowned with thorns on a hill *vert*. Sword, horn, helmet and shield were most probably those of the Knight with the swan, and this Knight undoubtedly was one of those paladins of olden days who had taken part in the Crusades.

Otho quietly approached the young girl, who was praying in a low voice before the knight, as she would have prayed before the Christ or before a martyr, and holding in her hand a rosary of ebony beads inlaid with mother-of-pearl, at the end of which hung a small bell, which gave no sound, however, the clapper having most probably become detached by age and never having been replaced.

At the noise made by Otho knocking against a chair, the girl turned round, and so far from her face showing any resentment at being followed in this way, she looked at him with a sad but sweet smile.

“You see,” she said to him, “we each do as the spirit of God has inclined us. My father is preparing to fight, while I am praying. You hope to win by blood; I hope to conquer by tears.”

“And what saint are you praying to?” replied Otho, yielding to the curiosity that filled him at sight of this image thus constantly reproduced, sometimes on stone and sometimes on canvas. “Is it St. Michael or St. George? Tell me his name, that I may pray to the same saint as you.”

“It is neither the one nor the other “answered the girl; “it is Rudolph of Alost, and the painter was mistaken when he gave him the aureole; the palm were more appropriate to him, for he was a martyr and not a saint.”

“But still,” Otho went on, “you pray to him as if he were seated on the right hand of God; what can you hope from him?”

“A miracle such as he worked for our ancestor on a like occasion. But, alas! the rosary of the Countess Beatrix is voiceless to-day, and the sound of the blessed bell will not a second time awaken Rudolph from the grave.”

“I can give you neither fear nor hope,” answered Otho, “for indeed I do not know what you mean.”

“Are you not acquainted with the legend of our family?” asked Helena.

“I only know what I see; yonder Knight crossing the Rhine in a boat drawn by a swan has no doubt delivered Countess Beatrix from some danger?”

“From a danger like the one which threatens us at this moment, and that is why I pray to him. Another time I will tell you the legend,” said Helena rising as if to withdraw.

“And why not now?” answered Otho, making a respectful sign to stop the girl. “Time and place are well chosen for a warrior’s legend and a sacred tradition.”

“Sit there, then, and listen,” answered the girl, who was only too pleased to find any excuse for staying with Otho.

Otho shook his head, to show that he recalled the difference in their stations, which Helena was ready to forget, and remained standing near her.

“You know,” said the girl, “that Godfrey de Bouillon was the uncle of Princess Beatrix of Cleves, our ancestress.”

“Yes, I know that,” answered the young man bowing.

“But what you do not know,” continued Helena, “is that Prince Robert of Cleves, who had married the sister of the hero of Brabant, resolved to follow his brother-in-law to the Crusade, and in spite of the prayers of his daughter Beatrix, he made all arrangements to carry out his holy resolve.

“Godfrey, pious as he was, tried at first to dissuade him from this idea; for when he had set out for the Holy Land, Robert would leave alone and without protection his only daughter, a child barely fourteen years old. But nothing served to stop the old soldier, and to all they could say to him, he answered with the motto he had already inscribed on his banner, “God wills it!”

“Godfrey de Bouillon was to be joined by his brother-in-law as he passed by. The path of the Crusaders lay through Germany and Hungary, and this would not bring him out of his way; moreover he wished to bid farewell to his young niece Beatrix. He left his army, composed of 10,000 horsemen and 70,000 foot- soldiers under the orders of his brothers Eustache and Beaudoin, associating with them in this provisional command his friend Rudolf of Alost, and descended the Rhine from Cologne to Cleves.

“He had not seen young Beatrix for six years. During this interval, from a child she had become a girl; everywhere her budding beauty was spoken of, which ultimately became so wonderful that to this day, when the country folk wish to speak of a woman conspicuous in this respect, they say, ‘Beautiful as the Princess Beatrix.’

“Godfrey spent himself in efforts to persuade his brother-in-law to stay with his child. But to no purpose, the Prince had already settled everything to enable him to accompany the future Sovereign of Jerusalem. A Squire called Gerard, renowned for strength and courage and who was thoroughly trusted by his master, was chosen by him to act as guardian to the young Princess, and received for this purpose all a guardian’s rights, and the full power of a trustee.

“Godfrey, who — it may be because he foresaw the future, was distressed at all these arrangements, gave his niece, as his one gift, the rosary I held between my hands when you came in just now. It had been brought from the Holy Land by Peter the Hermit himself; it had touched the sacred Tomb of our Lord, and had been blessed by its venerable guardian, — father of the Holy Sepulchre. Peter the Hermit had given it to Godfrey de Bouillon as a sacred talisman possessing miraculous properties, and Godfrey assured the girl that, if danger threatened her, she had only to take this rosary, to pray with it with religious and fervent heart, and then he would hear wherever he was the sound of the little bell that was fastened to it, though separated from her by mountains and seas.

“Beatrix accepted the precious rosary whose virtues her uncle, her father and she alone knew, and asked the Prince’s permission to found a chapel which should worthily enclose in its marble shrine such a priceless jewel. I need hardly tell you this request was granted.

“The Crusaders departed. An inscription that you may see on the gate of the castle, and which is said to have been carved by the hand of Godfrey himself, shows this was on the 3rd of September, 1096. Peacefully and unopposed they crossed Germany and Hungary, reached the frontiers of the Greek Empire, and after staying awhile at Constantinople, they entered Bithynia. They reached Nicea, and it was impossible to mistake their way, for the road was marked out for them by the bones of the two armies that had preceded them, the one led by Peter the Hermit, the other by Walter the Penniless.

“They arrived before Nicea. You know the details of the siege. At the third assault Prince Robert of Cleves was killed. The intelligence took six months to travel home and put the young Princess Beatrix into mourning weeds. The army pursued its way, marching ever southwards, midst such weariness and suffering that at the sight of each town they came to the Crusaders asked if this were not at last the city of Jerusalem, the end of their journey. Finally the heat became so intense, that the nobles’ dogs succumbed on the leash and falcons died on the wrist. In one single halt, five hundred men expired from the terrible thirst they endured and could not quench. God keep their souls!

“During this long and painful march, thoughts of the West, fresher and dearer than ever, came to the unhappy Crusaders. Such were wakened in Godfrey by the death of his brother-in-law, Robert of Cleves. And few days went by without the Christian General speaking to his young friend, Rudolf of Alost, of his charming niece Beatrix. Confident she would not dispose of her hand without his consent, he had hopes, if the sacred enterprise did not delay them too long in Palestine, of marrying Rudolph to Beatrix. And he had spoken of her to the young warrior so often and so affectionately, that from the picture he had drawn of her Robert himself had fallen in love, and when by chance a day passed without Godfrey speaking of Beatrix to Rudolph, it was Rudolph who spoke of her to Godfrey.

“Now they were before Antioch. After a siege of six’ months, the town was taken; but after marches under a fiery sun, thirst in the desert, followed another scourge no less terrible — the scourge of famine. It was impossible to stay longer in this town they had longed for as a harbour of refuge. Jerusalem had become not only a goal, but a vital necessity. The Crusaders left Antioch, chanting the psalm, “Let the Lord arise and let His enemies be scattered,” and marched on co Jerusalem; which city, on reaching the heights of Emmaus, they at last beheld. They were but 40,000 out of the 900,000 who had started.

“Next day the siege began. Three assaults followed each other without result; the final one lasted three days, when on Friday, July 15th, 1099 — the same day and hour when Jesus Christ was crucified — two men stood on the top of the ramparts of Jerusalem. But of these one fell, and only one was left alive. This one was Godfrey de Bouillon, and the one who fell was Rudolph of Alost, the betrothed of Beatrix. The golden dream of the Conqueror had vanished.

“Godfrey de Bouillon was elected king, but still remained as soldier. On the return of an expedition against the Sultan of Damascus, the Emir of Csesarea came to him and presented him with the fruits of Palestine.

“Godfrey took a cedar-apple and ate it. Four days after, July 18th, 1100, he died, after reigning eleven months, and being absent from his country four years.

“He asked that his tomb might be reared beside that of his young friend Rudolph of Alost, and his last wishes were obeyed.

CHAPTER VIII.

"THESE tidings one after the other were noised in the West, and of all the echoes they awoke the saddest was that in the lamenting heart of Beatrix; she heard in turns of the death of her father, the Prince of Cleves, then of Rudolph of Alost, her betrothed, and of Godfrey de Bouillon, her uncle. The least afflicting of these three was the death of Rudolph, whom she had never known; but the other two deaths made her twice an orphan; for in losing Godfrey de Bouillon she felt she had lost a second father.

"A new trouble was added to these; during the five years that had elapsed between his departure for the Crusade and Godfrey's death, Beatrix had grown in beauty. She was now a graceful girl of nineteen, and she had discovered that the Squire to whose care she had been entrusted, was not impervious to the feelings she inspired in all who came near her. As long as he had remained her guardian, Gerard had subdued his love. But as soon as he saw Beatrix in the position of an orphan and without defence, he was sufficiently emboldened to declare that he loved her. Beatrix received this avowal as a Prince's daughter should; but Gerard had arranged his plans before throwing off his mask. He replied to the girl that he would give her a year and a day for her mourning, but that time once passed, she must prepare to receive him as her husband.

"A total transformation had taken place; the servant dictated as though master. Beatrix was weak, alone, without protection; no help could come to her from men, she turned to God, and God sent her, if not hope, at least resignation. And Gerard the same day shut the gates of the Castle, placed a double guard at each, fearing Beatrix would attempt to escape.

"You remember Beatrix had had this chapel built to enshrine the miraculous rosary her uncle had given her. Had Godfrey still been alive, she would have felt no fear; for her heart was full of faith, and he had told her that wherever he was, though divided from her by mountains and seas, he would hear the sound of the holy bell and come to her assistance. But Godfrey was dead, and at each *Pater* the bell might ring in vain, there was no more hope that this sound would bring her a defender. The days passed, the months, and the year; Gerard had never for a moment slackened his watchfulness, so that no one knew the extremity to which Beatrix was driven. The flower of the nobility at this period, too, was in the East and there were scarce two or three Knights left on the borders of the Rhine who would have dared, so well known was Gerard's strength and courage, to undertake the defence of the beautiful prisoner.

"The last day had dawned. Beatrix according to her custom had just finished her prayers; the sun shone pure and dazzling, as if his celestial light illumined a world all happy. The girl went and sat on her balcony, and from there her eyes were turned naturally to the spot by the water-side where she had seen her father and her uncle disappear for the last time. Presently at this same place, generally unfrequented, she thought she saw a speck moving. It was still too far away to make out the form; but from the moment she first caught sight of it, strange to say, it seemed to her that this speck was moving on her account, and with that superstition the disconsolate alone have, she set all her hopes, without knowing what hope could still remain to her, on this unknown speck, which as it descended the Rhine began to take shape and substance. The eyes of Beatrix were fixed on it with such intensity, that overstraining rather than sorrow made her shed tears. But through these tears she began to distinguish a boat. Shortly after she saw that this boat was drawn by a swan, and carried a Knight who stood upright in the prow, his face turned towards her, whilst in the stern neighed a horse ready caparisoned for battle. As the boat drew nearer, details were more plainly to be seen; the swan was harnessed with golden chains, the Knight was armed from head to foot except for his helmet and shield, which were laid beside him; and his appearance was that of a handsome young man of from twenty-five to twenty-eight, whose complexion was tanned by an Eastern sun, but whose fair and waving hair revealed a Northern origin.

"So rapt was Beatrix in the vision that she had not noticed the ramparts filling with soldiers, attracted as she was by this unusual sight. Now the interest deepened as there could be no mistake the boat was coming straight to the Castle. For no sooner was it arrived than the swan came ashore, the Knight donned his helmet, thrust his shield on his left arm, jumped on the bank, drew his horse after him, leapt into the saddle, and making a sign to the obedient bird, he advanced towards the Castle, while the boat ascending the stream returned the way it had come.

"Having ridden to within fifty paces of the Great Gate, the Knight took an ivory horn which he carried on a baldric, and bringing it to his lips, he blew three powerful and prolonged blasts, as if to demand silence. Then in a loud voice, he cried, "'I, soldier of Heaven, and noble of the earth, to thee, Gerard, Keeper of this Castle. We do command thee in the name of divine and human law to renounce thy pretensions to the hand of the Princess Beatrix — whom thou dost hold prisoner in sore despite of her birth and rank, — and instantly to quit this Castle, which thou didst enter as a servant, but hast dared to rule as a master. In default whereof we do challenge thee to mortal combat, by lance and by sword, by axe and by dagger, for the disloyal traitor that thou art; and this we will prove by the grace of God and of our Lady of Mount Carmel; in token whereof here is our gauntlet.'

"Then the Knight drew off his glove which he flung on the ground, and everyone saw sparkling on one of his fingers the diamond you must have noticed on my father's hand, and which is so beautiful that he values it at half a county.

"Gerard was brave; so for answer the Great Gate was opened. A page went out to pick up the glove, and behind the page came the master of the Castle, clad in his armour and riding his battle- horse.

"Not a word passed between the two adversaries. The unknown Knight lowered the visor of his helmet, Gerard did the same. The champions took on each side the space of ground they thought necessary, couched their lances, and charged one another. Gerard, as I have told you, was known to be one of the strongest and bravest men in Germany. He had a cuirasse forged by the best armourer of Cologne. The steel of his lance had been tempered in the blood of a bull worried to death by dogs, just when the blood was still boiling from the animal's dying agony, — and yet his lance shivered like glass as it touched the Knight's shield, while the Knight's lance pierced with one stroke the buckler, cuirasse, and heart of his adversary.

"Gerard fell, without a word, without a moment for repentance, as if blasted by lightning. The Knight turned towards Beatrix; she was on her knees thanking God.

"The combat had been so short, and the ensuing stupefaction so great, that Gerard's men-at-arms on seeing their master fall had not even remembered to shut the Castle Gate. The Knight without let or hindrance therefore entered the first court, where he dismounted, fastened his horse's bridle to an iron hook, and advanced to the main staircase. As he set foot on the lowest step, Beatrix appeared on the highest, coming to meet and greet her deliverer.

“‘This Castle is yours, Knight,’ she said to him, ‘for you have conquered it. Consider it therefore yours. The longer you will stay, the greater will be my gratitude.’

“‘Lady,’ answered the’ Knight, “tis not I, but God you must thank; for ‘tis God has sent me to your help. As to this Castle, it has been the house of your fathers for ten centuries, and I hope it may be that of their descendants for another ten.’

“Beatrix blushed, for she was the last of her family. The Knight accepted the offered hospitality; he was young, he was handsome, Beatrix was alone and mistress of her heart. After three months the two young people realised that between them, on the one side there was more than friendship, and on the other more than gratitude. The Knight spoke of love, and as he was manifestly of high birth, though no one knew his lands or county, Beatrix who was sufficiently rich for them both, and happy to do something for him who had done so much for her, offered him with her hand the principality he had protected with such courage, and so unexpectedly to boot. The Knight fell at the feet of Beatrix, who would have raised him.

“‘Forgive me, lady,’ said the Knight, ‘for craving your indulgence; I will stay as I am till I win it.’

“‘Speak,’ replied Beatrix, ‘I am listening to you, ready beforehand to obey you, as if you were already my master and my lord.’

“‘Alas,’ said the Knight, ‘it will sure seem strange to you that receiving so great happiness from you, I can only accept it on one condition.’

“‘It is granted,’ answered Beatrix. ‘Now what is it?’

“It is that you shall never ask me either my name or whence I come, nor how I learnt the danger that hung over you. For if you asked me, I love you so much I could not have the courage to refuse you, and once I had told you, I could no longer stay near you, and we should be for ever separated. Such is the law imposed on me by the power which guided me across mountains, plains and seas through all the long journey I made to come to your deliverance.’

“‘What matters your name? What matters it from whence you come? What matters it who told you I was in peril? I abandon the past for the future. Your name is the Knight of the Swan. You come from a blessed land, and ‘tis God who sent you. What more do I want to know? Here is my hand.’

“Eagerly the Knight kissed it, and a month after the Chaplain united them in the same Oratory where Beatrix in the fear of another marriage had during a year and a day prayed and wept so much. Heaven blessed their union. In three years Beatrix presented the Knight with three sons who were called Robert, Godfrey and Rudolph. Another three years passed in most perfect concord, and a happiness which seemed to belong to another world.

“‘Mother,’ said young Robert one day, on returning to the Castle, ‘tell me my father’s name.’

“‘Why so? ‘replied his mother trembling.

“‘Because the Baron of Asperen’s son asked me to tell him.’

“‘Your father is called the Knight of the Swan,’ said Beatrix, ‘and has no other name.’

“The child was satisfied with this answer and returned to play with his young friends. Yet another year passed, no longer in the ardent happiness which had accompanied the first, but in that tender restfulness which proves an intimacy of souls.

“‘Mother,’ said young Godfrey one day, ‘when he came to this country in a boat drawn by a swan, from where did our father come?’

“‘Why do you want to know? ‘replied his mother sighing.

“‘Because the Count of Megen’s son asked me.’

“‘He came from a distant and unknown country,’ said the mother. ‘That is all I know.’

“This answer was enough for the child, who passed it on to his young friends, and continued to play with the heedlessness of his age on the river’s banks.

“Yet another year passed, but during it the Knight on more than one occasion found Beatrix musing and anxious. But he did not appear to notice, and redoubled his attentions and endearments. One day young Rudolph said, “‘Mother, when father saved you from the wicked Gerard, who had told him that you wanted help?’

“‘Why do you ask? ‘answered his mother, weeping.

“‘Because the Margrave of Gorkum asked me.’

“‘God,’ answered his mother, — ’ God who sees those who suffer and sends them angels to help them.’

“The child asked no further question. He had been taught to look upon God as a father, and it did not surprise him that a father should do for a child what God had done for his mother.

“But it was otherwise with the Princess Beatrix. She had remembered a son’s first treasure is his father’s name; but her three sons were without a name. Often the question they had each asked of her would be repeated by men, and they could not answer men as they had answered children. Thus she became prone to deep and constant sadness; because come what might, she was resolved to wrest from her husband the secret she had promised never to ask him.

“The Knight observed her growing unhappiness and guessed the reason. More than once, at sight of Beatrix’s melancholy, he was on the verge of telling her everything; but each time he was restrained by the fearful thought that this confidence would be followed by a severance for ever.

“At last Beatrix could resist no more; she came to the Knight, and falling on her knees, she besought him in her children’s name to tell her who he was, from whence he came, and who had sent him.

“The Knight turned pale, as if he would die; then putting his lips to Beatrix’s brow, he kissed her, and whispered with a sad sigh:

“‘Alas! the doom is come; this evening I will tell you all!’

CHAPTER IX

IT was nearly six o'clock in the evening when the Knight and his wife seated themselves on the balcony. Beatrice was constrained and embarrassed; the Knight sad.

"Both were silent for a while, and instinctively they looked towards the spot where the Knight had appeared the day he fought with Gerard. The same speck could be seen at the same place. Beatrix trembled, the Knight sighed. This same feeling that touched both their hearts at the same time, brought them once more together; their eyes met. The Knight's were moist and expressed such deep grief that Beatrix could not bear it and fell on her knees.

"'No! dearest, no,' she said to him. 'Not a word of that secret which must cost us so heavily. Forget what I asked you, and though you leave no name to my sons, they will be brave like their father and make one for themselves.'

"'Listen, Beatrix,' answered the Knight, 'everything is foreseen by the Lord, and since He has permitted you to make the request you have, it is because my day is come. I have passed nine years beside you, — nine years of a happiness not intended for this world; 'tis more than any man has ever received. Thank God, as I do, and listen to what I have to tell you.'

"'Not a word! Not a word! 'cried Beatrix; 'not a word, I implore you.'

"The Knight held out his hand towards the speck which for some little time had been growing more and more distinct, and Beatrix recognised the boat drawn by the swan.

"'You see the time is come,' he said; 'so listen to what you have long had the secret wish to know, 'and what I am bound to tell you, directly you ask me.'

"Beatrix sobbing, let her head fall on the knight's knees. He gazed at her with an ineffable look of sadness and love, and letting his hands fall on her shoulders, 'I am,' he said to her, 'the comrade in arms of your father Robert of Cleves, and the friend of your uncle, Godfrey de Bouillon; I am Count Rudolph of Alost, who was killed at the siege of Jerusalem.'

"Beatrix screamed and lifted up her pale face, and fastened on the knight her wild and haggard eyes. She tried to speak; but her voice could only frame inarticulate sounds, such break from one in a dream.

"'Yes, I know,' continued the knight, 'what I tell you is unheard of. But remember, Beatrix, that I died in the land of miracles. The Lord did for me what He did for the daughter of Jailrus, and the brother of the Magdalen. That is all!'

"'Ah! My God! My God!' cried Beatrix, rising from her knees, 'what you tell me is impossible!"

"'I thought you had more faith, Beatrix,' answered the knight.

"'You are Rudolph of Alost? 'murmured the Princess.

"Himself and no other. You know how Godfrey left me, in conjunction with his two brothers, the command of the army, while he went home for your father. When he rejoined us, so impressed was he with your beauty that during the whole way he spoke only of you. If Godfrey loved you as a daughter, I can only say he loved me as a son; and so from the moment he had seen you again, one single thought possessed him — that of our marriage. I was then twenty, my soul as virgin as a girl's. The picture he drew of you fired my heart, and soon I loved you as passionately as if I had known you from childhood.

"So completely in agreement were we about everything, that he now always called me his nephew.

"Your father was killed; I mourned for him as if he had veritably been my father. Dying he gave me his blessing, and again gave his consent. From that time I thought of you as my own; the remembrance of you, unknown but always present, was fresh amidst all my thoughts; your name was intermingled with all my prayers.

"We reached Jerusalem; we were repulsed in three assaults; the last continued sixteen hours. We had to give up our hopes of the Holy City or take it then and there. Godfrey ordered a last attack. Together we led forward a column; we marched at its head; we set up two scaling ladders and mounted them side by side. At last we were on the top of the ramparts; I was lifting up my arm to clutch a battlement when I saw the flash of a lance: a sharp pain followed the flash, and a shudder ran through my body. I cried out your name, then I fell backwards, and felt and saw nothing more. I was a dead man!

"I do not know how long I slept the dreamless sleep they call death. But one day I thought I felt a hand laid on my shoulder. I had a vague idea that the day of Jehoshaphat had come. A finger touched my eyelids, I opened my eyes, I was lying in a tomb, the lid of which stood open of itself, while standing before me was a man whom I recognised as Godfrey, though he had a purple mantle on his shoulders, a crown on his head, and a halo round his brow. He leant towards me, breathed on my mouth, and I felt new life and consciousness enter my breast. Still it seemed to me that I was held to the sepulchre by fetters of iron. I tried to speak; but my lips moved without producing any sound.

"'Wake, Rudolph, the Lord grants the boon,' cried Godfrey, 'and listen to what I have to say to you.'

"Then I made a superhuman effort in which all the gathering strength of my new life was united, and I uttered your name.

"'It is of her I come to speak to you,' said Godfrey.

"'But,' interrupted Beatrix, 'Godfrey was dead too.'

"'Yes,' answered Rudolph; 'and this is what had happened:

"'Godfrey had died poisoned, and had asked before his death that his body might rest near mine; his wishes had been obeyed, he had been buried in his royal robes; but God added an aureole to his diadem and purple mantle. Godfrey related to me all that had happened since my own death, — facts therefore which I could not know.'

"'And what of Beatrix? 'I asked.

"'We have now come to what concerns her,' he answered me, 'I slept like you in my grave, awaiting the Judgment hour, when gradually it seemed to me as if I were waking from a deep sleep and returning to life and consciousness. Hearing was the first sense which woke in me; I thought I heard the noise of a little bell and as life returned to me the sound became more and more distinct. Soon I recognised it as that of the little bell I had given Beatrix. Beatrix was in danger, and the Lord had granted that the sound of the sacred bell should penetrate my tomb and wake me even in the arms of death.

"'I opened my eyes and found myself in utter darkness. Then a dreadful fear took hold upon me. Unconscious as I was of the time that had passed, I believed I had been buried alive. But just at that moment the vault became fragrant with an odour of incense; I heard celestial songs, two angels raised the stone of my tomb, and, I saw on a throne of clouds, Christ seated beside His Holy Mother. I wanted to prostrate myself, but I could not stir.

"'But I felt the bonds that fastened my tongue loosen and I cried:

"'Lord, Lord! Thy holy Name be blessed!'

"'Christ then spoke in answer, and His words were sweet as a song to my ears.

"'Godfrey, my brave and faithful servant, hearest thou nothing? 'He said to me.

"'Alas! Lord Jesus,' I answered, 'I hear the sound of the holy bell which tells me that she whose father died for Thee, whose betrothed died for Thee, and whose uncle died for Thee, is now in peril and has no one but Thou to help her.'

"'And what shall I do for thee? 'said Christ. 'I am God who requites; ask, and what thou askest shall be granted thee.'

"'O Lord Jesus! 'I replied, 'I have nothing to ask for myself; for Thou hast given me more than my fellow-men. Thou hast chosen me to lead the crusade and to deliver the Holy City; Thou hast given me a golden crown in the city where Thou didst wear a crown of thorns, and Thou hast granted me that I should die in Thy grace. I have nothing therefore to ask of Thee for myself, O Lord Jesus! now above all that I have seen with my mortal eyes Thy Godhead. But if I may dare to pray for another...'

"'Have I not told thee that whatsoever thou askest shall be granted thee? In thy life thou didst believe in My word; wilt thou doubt it after thou art dead?'

"'Lord Jesus! 'I answered Him, 'Thou who readest the hearts of men, Thou knowest the sorrow wherewith I died. Four long years I cherished a tender hope: to unite him whom I loved as a brother with her whom I loved as a daughter; but death has divided them.

"'Rudolph of Alost died for Thy holy cause. Lord Jesus, restore to him the days that he was to live, and grant that he may go to the help of his betrothed, whom sore peril presses at this moment, if I may believe the sound of the bell which never ceases ringing — a proof she never ceases praying.'

"'Let it be done as thou dost desire,' said Christ; 'let Rudolph of Alost rise and go and succour his betrothed. I grant him that he may quit his tomb till the day when his wife shall ask him who he is, whence he comes, and who sent him. These three questions shall be the token whereby he shall know I call him back to Myself.'

"'Lord! Lord! 'I cried a second time, 'Thy holy Name be blessed.'

"'Scarcely had I said the words when He passed like a cloud between me and the sky and all vanished.

“‘Then I rose from my tomb and came to yours. I leant my hand upon your shoulder to rouse you from death. I touched your eyelids with my finger to open your eyes; I breathed my breath on your lips to restore you life and speech. And now, Rudolph of Alost, arise! for it is Christ’s will that you should go to the help of Beatrix, and that you stay by her till the day when she shall ask you who you are, whence you come, and who sent you.’

“Godfrey had scarce ceased speaking when I felt the bonds that bound me to the sepulchre burst asunder. I stood erect in my tomb as full of life as before I had received my death-blow, and as they had buried me in my cuirasse, I found myself fully armed, excepting for my sword which I dropped as I fell, and which they had probably not recovered.

“Then Godfrey girt me with his own sword which was of gold, hung on my shoulder the horn which he was wont to use in the press of battle, and put the ring which had been given him by the Emperor Alexis on my finger. Then he embraced me and said: ‘Brother, I feel that God is calling me back to Himself. Set my tombstone over me again, and this done heedfully, go without loss of time to the help of Beatrix.’

“With these words he lay down again in his sepulchre, closed his eyes and. murmured a second time: ‘Lord, Lord! Thy holy Name be blessed.’

“I leant over him to embrace him yet once more; but he was without breath and already asleep in the Lord.: “I let the stone which a divine finger had raised fall back on him; I went to kneel at the altar, I prayed, and without losing a moment, I resolved to come to your help. Under the porch of the church I found a horse ready caparisoned, a lance stood against the wall; I never doubted that both were for me. I took the lance, I mounted the horse, and thinking that the Lord had entrusted it to his instinct to lead me aright, I threw his bridle on his neck and left him to take the path he chose.”

“I crossed Syria, Cappadocia, Turkey, Thrace, Dalmatia, Italy and Germany; at last after a year and a day’s journey, I reached the shores of the Rhine. There I found a boat with a swan harnessed to it by golden chains. I embarked on the boat and it carried me before your Castle. You know the rest, Beatrix.

“‘Alas! ‘cried Beatrix, ‘alas! yonder are the swan and the boat; they are coming ashore in the same spot as they did of old; but now, unhappy woman that I am, they come to take you back again. Rudolph, Rudolph, forgive me!’

“‘I have nothing to forgive you, Beatrix,’ said Rudolph, embracing her. ‘The time is come, God calls me back, and that is all. Let us thank him for the nine years of happiness which He has given us, and ask him that He will give us like years of bliss in Paradise.’

“Then he called his three sons, who were playing in the meadow; and they ran to him at once. Robert, who was the eldest, he kissed first and gave him his shield and sword, naming him his successor. Next he kissed Godfrey, who was the second, and gave him his horn and bequeathed him the county of Lôwen; then he kissed Rudolph, who was the third, and gave him the ring and the county of Metz. Having clasped Beatrix a last time in his arms, he bade her stay where she was, charged his three sons to comfort their mother, whom they saw weeping without knowing the reason of her tears. Then he went down into the Castle court-yard, where he found his horse standing once more ready saddled, and turning round at every step, he crossed the meadow and embarked in the boat, which at once went back by the way it had come and soon was lost to sight in the darkness of approaching night.

“From that hour till the day of her death, Princess Beatrix went daily to the balcony; but she never again saw boat or swan or Knight appear.”

“And,” continued Helena, “I came hither to pray Rudolph of Alost to ask God in His mercy to work a miracle for me like that He worked in His goodness for Princess Beatrix.”

“Amen! and may it be so,” answered Otho with a fond smile.

CHAPTER X.

THE Count of Ravenstein kept his word. At sunrise, in the meadow separating the river from the Castle, his banner was seen floating above his tent. At its entrance hung his shield, on the centre of which shone his arms — *gules,* a lion rampant *or* on a rock *argent;* and every hour a trumpeter came out from the tent, and, turning to the four points of the horizon in succession, gave forth a blast of challenge. The day passed without anyone responding to this invitation; for, — as we have shown, — the friends, allies and kinsmen of Prince Adolph had not been told the news till too late, and were occupied either on their own account or in the service of the Emperor. And so no one came. The old warrior was anxiously pacing to and fro on the ramparts, Helena was praying in the Chapel of the Princess Beatrix, and Otho was offering to wager that he would put three consecutive arrows into the Count's lion rampant. Hermann had vanished without any known reason, and at the morning's roll-call he had not answered his name, nor had any one done so for him.

Night came without making any change in the respective positions of besiegers and besieged. Helena did not dare look at her father. Now for the first time she realised all the consequences of her refusal, — a refusal so sudden and unexpected that she feared every moment the old Prince might ask her the reason of it. Day dawned, as gloomy and threatening as the evening before had been; and with daybreak the Count's trumpet blared out again. The Prince mounted his ramparts every hour, turning — like the trumpeter — to the four points of the compass, and swearing that in the days of his youth such a thing would not have happened without ten champions coming forward at once to defend a sacred cause like his. Helena never left the chapel; Otho still showed himself calm and unperturbed amid the general anxiety; Hermann had not re-appeared.

The night wore on, full of unrest and perplexity; the day now rising was to be the last. On the morrow assault and escalade would begin, and the lives of hundreds of men would go to pay for a girl's caprice, and so, when the first rays of daylight showed in the east, Helena who had spent the night in weeping and prayer, had resolved to sacrifice herself that she might end this quarrel. She was crossing the courtyard to find her father, who was, she heard, in the armoury, when she learnt that at the morning's roll-call Otho in his turn had been missing, and was believed — like Hermann — to have left the Castle. These tidings gave the last blow to Helena's resistance. Otho deserting her father, Otho running away, when the help of every man — especially of a man so skilled as he — was needed for the defence of the Castle, that was a possibility which had never so much as entered her mind, and it was bound to settle her resolve quickly and definitely.

She found her father putting on his armour. The old soldier had recalled the memories of his youth, and, trusting in God, he hoped that He would give him back the strength of his prime; and so he had resolved to give battle himself to the Count of Ravenstein. Helena comprehended at once all the disasters which such a resolve might entail. She fell at her father's knees, and told him she was prepared to marry the Count. But, as she said the words, there was such sorrow in her voice, and so many tears in her eyes that the Prince knew well it was better for him to die than to live and see his only daughter suffering for ever as she was suffering at this moment. As he raised her up and pressed her to his heart, once more the Count of Ravenstein's hourly challenge made itself heard. Father and daughter shuddered together, as though one blow had stricken both. A deathlike silence succeeded that blast of war. But the silence, this time, did not last long; the challenge just given was replied to by the sound of a horn. Again the Prince and Helena trembled, but now it was for joy; a champion was coming to them.

Both ascended to the balcony of Princess Beatrix to see from what direction this unexpected aid proceeded; nor was there any difficulty in seeing, for every arm and eye were turned in the same direction. A Knight, fully armed and with visor lowered, was coming down the Rhine in a boat; and beside him was his Squire, like him completely armed. In the bows stood his war-horse and neighed in response to the double battle-challenge. As the boat drew nearer, the Knight's arms could be made out; they were *gules*, with a swan *argent*. Boundless was Helena's amazement. Had Rudolph of Alost then heard her prayers, and was a supernatural champion repeating for her the miracle which God had wrought in favour of the Princess Beatrix? However that might be, the boat continued to approach, while all wondered. At last it came to land just at the spot where, — two and a half centuries ago, — the bark of Count Rudolph had stopped. The unknown Knight sprang ashore, brought his horse after him and leapt into the saddle. Leaving his Squire in the boat, he proceeded to salute Prince Adolf and the Princess Helena; then going straight to Count Ravenstein's tent he touched the shield with the point of his lance, in token that he challenged its owner to the wager of deadly battle. The Count's Squire at once came out and looked to see what was the armour of the unknown Knight. In his hand was a lance, at his side a sword, and from his saddle-bow hung a battle- axe; moreover, he wore on his neck the small dagger called "the poniard of mercy." Having finished his inspection the Squire went back into the tent; while the Knight, after saluting once more those to whose help he was coming, took his proper portion of the field, and halting about a hundred paces from the Count's tent, awaited his adversary.

There was not long to wait; for the Count was ready armed, so that he had only to put on his helmet to be prepared for entering the lists. Soon he appeared from his tent. His horse was brought to him, and he sprang on its back with an alacrity which showed how anxious he was not to delay for a moment the combat now so unexpectedly offered him by the Knight of the silver swan. And yet, all eager as he was, he cast a glance at his enemy, that he might, if possible, recognise by some heraldic sign the man with whom he had to deal. On the crest of his helmet the Knight wore, — as his only distinctive badge, — a little gold crown, the jewels of which were cut in the shape of vine-leaves, this indicating that he was a Prince or the son of a Prince.

Then there was a moment's silence, while each champion was making ready his weapons, and the spectators were able to make a hasty scrutiny of each. The Count of Ravenstein, who might be between thirty and thirty-five years of age, had reached his full vigour; squarely set upon his war-horse, he was a fine type of physical strength. It seemed that to dislodge him from his saddle would be as difficult as to uproot an oak-tree, and that a sturdy woodman indeed would be wanted to accomplish such a task. The unknown Knight, on the other hand, as far as could be inferred from his graceful movements, was hardly past the age of youth. His armour, close-fitting as it was, was as supple as a serpent's skin. Beneath that elastic mail you felt instinctively that young blood was circulating. Whether victorious or vanquished, it was evident that he would inevitably attack or defend by resources quite different from those which nature had granted to the Count of Ravenstein.

The Count’s trumpet sounded, the horn of the Knight replied; and Prince Adolf of Cleves who from his balcony looked down upon the battle like an umpire excited by the memories of his youth, loudly shouted, “Forward.” Instantly the two opponents dashed at one another, and came to close quarters almost in the middle of the appointed distance. The Count’s lance glanced along the edge of the Knight’s shield and was broken against the target which he wore hanging from his neck; while the Knight’s lance struck the crest of his foe’s helmet, broke the straps which fastened it under the chin, and carried it off, leaving the Count with bare and unprotected head; at the same time a few drops of blood trickling down his face showed that the point of the lance, while tearing off his helmet, had grazed his skull.

The Knight of the silver swan paused to give the Count time to get another helmet and lance, thereby showing that he did not wish to benefit by a first advantage, and that he was ready to begin the struggle again with chances equal. The Count recognised this courteous conduct, and hesitated a moment before making up his mind to avail himself of it. But as his adversary had by this first rencounter shown him that he was no foe to be disdained, he flung away the useless fragment, took from his Squire’s hand a fresh helmet, and rejecting the lance which was offered him, drew his sword, showing that he preferred to continue the struggle with that weapon. The Knight at once imitated his enemy in every respect, flung away his lance and drew his sword, while he saluted as a token that he awaited the other’s good pleasure. A second time the trumpet sounded, and the two rushed upon each other. From the outset the spectators saw that their anticipations had been right; one of the combatants relied on his strength and the other on his skill. Each therefore acted accordingly, the first striking with the edge, the second with the point; the Count trying to slash through his opponent’s armour, the Knight seeking every means of penetrating that of his foe. It was a fearful struggle; the Count striking with both hands like a woodman, carried off some splinters of iron at every blow. The silver swan had completely vanished, the buckler was falling bit by bit, the gold crown was shattered. On his side the Knight had sought for every path by which death might penetrate to the heart of his foe. Soon from the gorget of the latter’s helmet and from the shoulder- joints of his cuirasse drops of blood which flowed over the Count’s armour revealed that the sword point had entered through every available opening. If they went on in this fashion the issue of the battle became a question of time. Would the Knight’s armour hold out until Count Ravenstein’s strength was exhausted by the two or three wounds he seemed already to have received? That was what each man asked himself as he watched the tactics adopted by the two combatants. At length a last stroke of the Count’s sword shattered completely the crest of the other’s helmet, and left the top of his head almost disarmed. Henceforth all the chances seemed to be in favour of the Count; for the Prince and for Helena there was a moment’s terrible anguish. But their fear did not last long. Their young champion saw it was time to change his tactics; at once he ceased attacking and concerned himself only with parrying. Then was seen a marvellous joust; the Knight remained motionless as a statue, his arm and his sword alone seeming to be alive, and his enemy’s sword meeting his at every point never once touched his armour. The Count was a skilful swordsman, but every resource of fighting seemed familiar to his enemy. The two blades followed one another as though attracted by a magnet, flash crossing flash like two serpents darting out their stings in play. Such a struggle however could not last; the Count’s wounds, though trifling, caused a loss of blood, which trickled down over his horse’s housings. Blood was collecting in the helmet and the Count was compelled every now and then to drive it out with his breath through the holes of his visor. He felt that his strength was beginning to fail and that his sight was getting dim; the skill of his adversary was now too clearly demonstrated to admit of his hoping anything from his sword. So he formed a desperate resolve, and, with one hand flinging away the ineffective weapon, with the other he quickly snatched the axe which hung from his saddlebow. The knight did likewise with an accuracy and promptness almost magical; and the two were now ready to begin another combat, — one which this time could not fail to be decisive.

But with their first blows the champions perceived with amaze that the position of things was reversed; it was the Count who now stood on the defensive, and it was the Knight who in his turn made the attack, and did so with such strength and swiftness that the eyes could not follow the short massive weapon which glittered in his hand. For a brief while the Count showed himself worthy of his name and fame; but at last he was too slow in parrying, and a blow from his adversary came straight down on his helmet, breaking the Count’s crest and crown and, although the axe did not penetrate to the head, it produced all the effect of a blow from a club. Stunned, the Count let his head fall on to his horse’s neck, clutching it with both hands as he instinctively sought for support; then he dropped his axe, and after wavering to and fro a moment, he fell from his horse without his foe having need to repeat the blow.’ His Squires ran up and unlaced his helmet; blood was welling from the Count’s nose and mouth, and he had completely swooned away. They conveyed him to his tent, and when they took off his armour found besides the blows on the head five other wounds in different parts of his body.

The Knight of the silver swan re-slung his axe to his saddle-bow, put back his sword in its sheath, took up his lance, and advancing once more towards the balcony of Countess Beatrix, he saluted Prince Adolf and his daughter. Then, just as they expected their deliverer to enter the Castle, he made his way to the bank, dismounted and re-entered his boat, which at once proceeded up stream, carrying away the mysterious conqueror. Two hours later, the Count, who had now recovered consciousness, ordered his camp to be struck at once and his men to march back to Ravenstein.

In the evening, Count Karl of Homburg arrived with a score of men-at-arms. He was come to the help of Prince Adolf of Cleves, who, as we know, had sent messages to all his friends and allies in the neighbourhood.

The help was no longer needed; but the old warrior was none the less received in state and worthily entertained.

CHAPTER XI.

WHILE the events we have just related were taking place at Cleves, the Landgrave Ludwig, having with him only his old friend Count Karl of Homburg, had remained in the Castle of Godesberg, mourning for Emma who would not return to him, and for Otho whom he believed to be dead. Vainly the Count strove to encourage him with a twofold hope, by telling him his wife would forgive him, and that his son had assuredly escaped by swimming. The poor Landgrave would put no’ faith in this talk of hope, and said that having condemned without mercy, without mercy he was condemned. This violent mood could not last; but deep melancholy took its place, and the Landgrave shut himself up in the most remote rooms of the Castle of Godesberg.

Only Homburg was allowed to go near him, and sometimes whole days passed without his being able to see his friend. The good Knight knew not what to do; at times he thought of appealing to Emma in the Convent of Nonnenwerth, but he feared that she might refuse again and so intensify her husband’s misery; at other times he thought of starting to try and find Otho, but he dreaded lest an unavailing search might fill the father’s cup of anguish to overflowing.

Such was the position when the message from Prince Adolph reached the Castle of Godesberg.

Under usual circumstances the Landgrave would have hastened to answer this summons in person; but he was so absorbed in his sorrow that he delegated his duties to Homburg. So the good Knight, — having with his own hands, as his wont was, caparisoned Hans in his warlike array, sallied forth with twenty men-at-arms towards the principality of Cleves, arriving on the evening of the day on which the combat we have described took place between the Knight of the silver swan and the Count of Ravenstein.

Count Karl had been received as an old brother-in-arms, and he had found the Castle keeping high festival. One fact alone, which none could explain, flung a shadow over the Prince’s joy, and that fact was the disappearance of the unknown Knight, who had withdrawn so quickly and so unexpectedly that the Prince had seen him disappear ere he could find a means of detaining him. Nothing was talked about during the whole evening except this strange adventure, and each of the company retired without being any the wiser concerning it. Since the issue of the combat the Prince's thoughts had been so centred on this one subject that it was not till he found himself once more alone that he remembered the disappearance of his two archers, Hermann and Otho. So strange did such conduct in the hour of danger seem on the part of these two, that he determined to dismiss them with public ignominy, should they show themselves again at the Castle without being able to give a valid excuse. Orders were therefore given to the night sentries to let the Prince know in case Otho and Hermann should return during the hours of darkness.

Next morning, at daybreak, a servant came to the Prince's room to tell him that the two deserters had re-appeared in the guards' quarters about two in the morning.

The Prince at once dressed himself and commanded Otho's attendance.

In ten minutes the young Archer stood before his master, seeming as unconcerned as though he had no idea of the reason for which he was summoned. The Prince looked at him severely; yet it was obviously a feeling not of shame but of respect which made Otho lower his eyes before that stern gaze. Such assurance was inexplicable to the Prince. Then he questioned Otho, and the young man answered respectfully but firmly all his questions: "He had been occupied for the whole of that day with an important matter in which Hermann had assisted him, — that was all he could say. As to Hermann's fault, he took the responsibility on himself, because he — Otho — had put pressure on the young man (who owed his life to him), so as to make the latter fail in his duty."

The Prince could not understand this obstinate persistence; but as it involved disobedience to the power of his lord and master in addition to a breach of military regulations, he told Otho that, though he was sorry to part with so skilled an Archer, yet the established rules of the Castle made it impossible that a servant should go off in this way without asking leave, and should return without choosing to say whence he came. The young man might, therefore, consider himself free to take service with any master who should suit him. Two tears rose to Otho's eyes, but were dried at once by the flush which overspread his face; he made no reply, but bowed and went out.

Not without reluctance had the Prince made up his mind to this course; to bring himself to inflict this severe punishment, he had been obliged to strengthen his purpose by the feeling of anger which the culprit’s obstinacy aroused in him. Thinking, therefore, that the young man would repent, the Prince went to the casement opening on the court-yard which Otho had to cross in order to return to the Archers’ quarters; and there he concealed himself behind a curtain so as not to be seen, feeling sure that the other would return. But Otho withdrew slowly, without looking back; and at every step he took, the Prince, who was watching him, lost a hope. Just then he saw on the further side of the court-yard Count Karl of Homburg, who had been giving his personal attention to providing Hans with his breakfast at the usual hour. The old Count and the young Archer were walking straight towards each other, when looking up, they both stopped short as though thunderstruck. Otho had recognised Karl, and Karl had recognised Otho. The young man’s first impulse was to move away; but Homburg flung his arms round his neck and held him tight, pressing the boy to his heart with all the earnest affection of the thirty years’ friendship by which he was attached to the father.

The Prince thought the good Knight must be gone mad; a Count embracing an Archer seemed to him a spectacle strange beyond belief. So he opened his casement, and called out loudly to Karl. On seeing the Prince, the young man had only time to make the Knight promise that he would keep the secret; he then dashed away to the guard-room, while Homburg obeyed the summons of the Prince.

Questioned in his turn, Homburg likewise refused to say anything. All he would answer was that, as Otho had been for a long time in the service of the Landgrave of Godesberg, he had known him there when quite a lad, and had come to like him. The consequence was that on meeting him he had yielded to a first impulse of delight; and it was quite natural in a man of his genial temperament that this impulse should have taken him beyond the strict limits of propriety.

The Prince, who regretted his severity to Otho, because he suspected that there must be some strange mystery connected with his unaccountable absence, seized this opportunity to recall his action. Summoning a serving-man, he bade him go tell the Archer that he might stay in the Castle, and that the Prince pardoned him on the intercession of Count Karl of Homburg; but the servant returned to say that Otho and Hermann had both disappeared, and that no one knew what had become of them. For some while the Prince was so concerned about their departure that he forgot the combat of the previous day; but soon the memory of it recurred to his thoughts, together with regret at leaving unrewarded the devotion of the unknown Knight. He consulted Count Karl as to what he should do, and the old Count advised him to make proclamation that, as Helena’s hand belonged of right to her champion, the Knight of the silver swan had only to present himself in order to receive a reward which the beauty and the wealth of Helena made a noble one even for a King’s son.

That evening Count Karl left the Castle, though the Prince pressed him to stay; business of the utmost importance, he said, took him back to his old friend, the Landgrave of Godesberg.

Otho was waiting for the Count at Kervenheim, and it was there that he heard of the Landgrave’s desperate grief. Everything else — even his love for Helena — had disappeared before the thought of his father suffering and miserable.

And therefore he demanded of the Count that they should start forthwith for home.

But Homburg had another hope, which was, to restore to the Landgrave his wife at the same time as his son; for he trusted that a word from the son would win from the mother what the entreaties of the husband had failed to obtain.

Nor was he mistaken; and three days later, with tears of joy in his eyes, he beheld his old friend embracing the wife and the son whom he had believed lost for ever.”

But the Castle of Cleves, meanwhile, seemed empty and desolate; Otho’s departure had robbed it of all life and cheerfulness. Helena still prayed unceasingly in the Chapel of the Princess Beatrix, and Prince Adolf still stood watching from the balcony to see whether he might not discern the unknown Knight returning.

Father and daughter only met now at meal times; each was distressed at the other’s sorrow, and at last the Prince resolved to carry out the advice given him by Count Karl.

One evening after Helena had been praying all the day, and when she was about to withdraw again to prayer, her father stopped her at the door.

“Helena,” he said, “have you not now and again thought of the unknown Knight, since the day of that combat which delivered you so happily from the Count of Ravenstein?”

“Indeed, have I, sir,” the girl replied, “for I do not think I have addressed a single prayer to God, since that day, without asking Him to recompense my deliverer, since you cannot do so.”

“The only reward suitable to a young man so noble as he seemed to be,” said the Prince, “is the hand of the lady he has saved. What say you?”

“What! father!” exclaimed Helena, blushing.

Perceiving in the expression of his daughter’s face more surprise than dismay, the Prince replied: “I say that I am sorry I have not adopted before now the advice which Homburg gave me.”

“What did he advise?” asked Helena.

“You shall know tomorrow,” said her father.

Next day heralds set out for Dortrecht and Cologne, making proclamation everywhere that Prince Adolf, finding no more noble reward to offer the man who had fought for his daughter than that daughter’s hand in marriage, hereby informed the Knight of the Silver Swan that this same recompense was awaiting him at the Castle of Cleves.

Seven days later, while the Prince and his daughter were sitting on the balcony of Princess Beatrix, Helena hastily touched her father’s arm and pointed out to him a black speck just growing visible on the river at the bend of Dornick, — the very spot where Rudolph of Alost had vanished. Ere long the speck grew more visible, and Helena was the first to note that it was a boat with three passengers and six rowers.

Soon she could make out that the three were clad in armour, with visors lowered, and that the one who stood between the two others wore on his left arm an emblazoned shield. From that moment her eyes never left that buckler; a little while longer, and there was no room for doubt. The arms were plainly a swan *argent* on a field *azure*. Even the old Prince himself, spite of his failing eyesight, began to recognise it, and could not contain his joy; while Helena quivered in every limb.

The boat came to shore, and the three Knights, disembarking on the bank, proceeded towards the Castle.

The Prince took Helena by the hand, and compelling her to come down with him, he led her almost by force to meet her deliverer. At the top of the Great Stairs her strength failed her, and the Prince had to stop; at that instant the three Knights entered the courtyard.

“Welcome to you, whoever you are,” exclaimed the Prince, “and if one of you be really the brave Knight who came so valiantly to our help, let him approach and raise the visor of his helmet, that I may embrace him face to face."

Then the Knight who bore the armorial shield halted for a moment, leaning for support on the shoulders of his two companions, for he seemed as agitated as the girl herself. But soon he appeared to recover himself, and ascending the steps one by one — still escorted by his two comrades — he halted on the last but one, bent his knee before Helena, and after a last moment's hesitation, lifted the visor of his helmet.

"Otho the Archer!" exclaimed the Prince in amazement.

"I was sure it would be he," whispered the girl, as she hid her face on her father's bosom.

"But who gave you the right to wear a crowned helmet?" demanded the Prince.

"My birth," replied the young man in that firm but gentle tone Helena's father knew so well.

"Who will be your voucher for that same?" next demanded Prince Adolf, still doubting the humble Archer's word.

"I, who am his godfather," said Count Karl of Homburg.

"And I, who am his father," said the Landgrave Ludwig of Godesberg.

And as they said the words, both raised their visors.

A week later the young people were united in wedlock in the Chapel of the Princess Beatrix.

Such is the story of Otho the Archer as it was told to me on the banks of the Rhine.

THE END

THE FENCING MASTER

A translation of LE MAITRE D’ARMES

Translated by Alfred Allinson

This novel was first published in 1840 in the *Revue de Paris*. In the introduction, Dumas reveals that he drew heavily from the collection of the notes he made during his stay in Russia from 1824 to 1826. Interestingly, the novel received harsh criticism from the Russian Imperial Court and so was banned on publication, which was not lifted in Russia until the 20th century.

The story is set in 1824 and concerns Grisier, a young French weapons master, who leaves for St. Petersburg to seek glory and fortune. After an exhausting trip, he forms a friendship with Louise Dupuis, a French Milliner expatriate, and her lover Count Alexis Vaninkoff, the young lieutenant in the Knights guards of the Emperor.

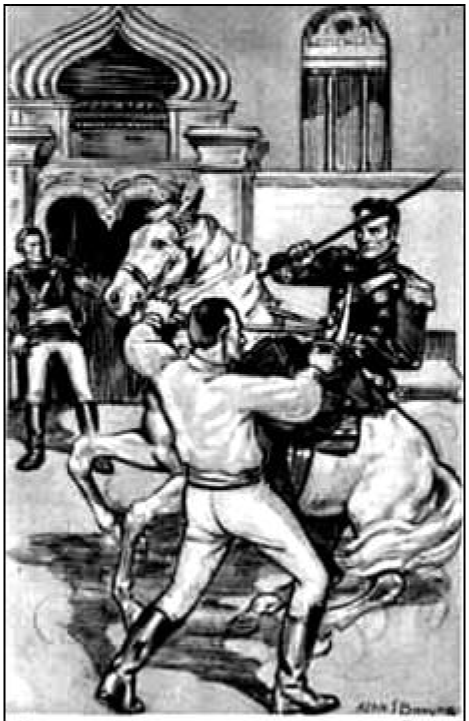

M. Page 98

At the same time I held the point of my sabre at the Czar vitche's breast.

An illustration from the first English edition

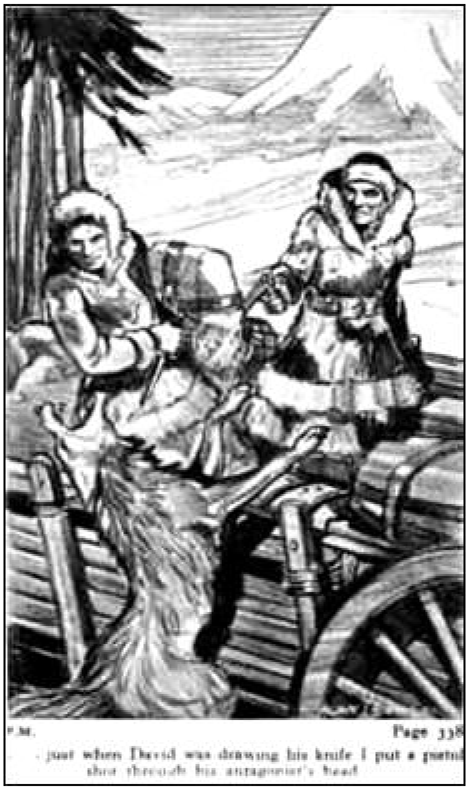

P.M. Page 338

… just when David was drawing his knife I put a pistol shot through his antagonist's head

An illustration from the same edition

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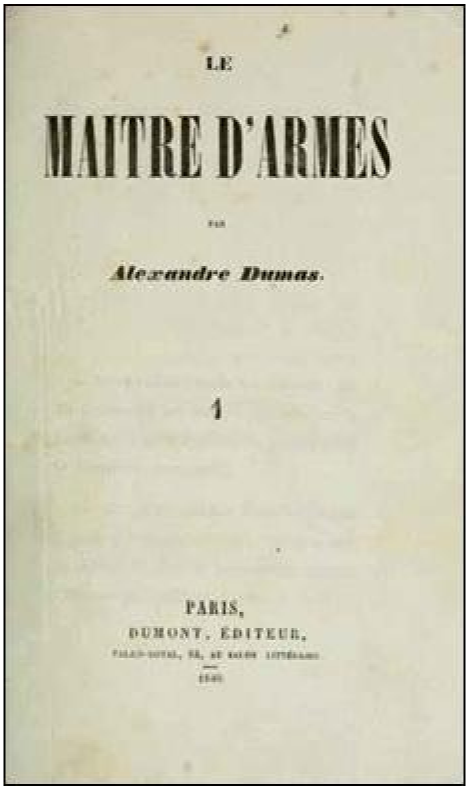

LE

MAITRE D'ARMES

PAR

Alexandre Dumas.

1

PARIS,

DUMONT, ÉDITEUR,

The titlepage of the first edition

THE FENCING MASTER

LIFE IN RUSSIA

INTRODUCTION

IN one of the volumes devoted to his travels in Russia, Dumas relates that the Czarina, wife of the Czar Nicholas, having procured a copy of *The Fencing Master*, asked her friend the Princess Trubetzki to read it to her. While thus engaged the door opened and the Czar appeared. The princess, who held the book, hastily hid it under the sofa cushions. The Czar approached, and standing before his confused consort, “You were reading, Madame?” he said.

“Yes, Sire.”

“Do you wish me to tell you what you were reading?”

The Czarina was silent.

“You were reading the romance of M. Dumas, *The Fencing Mastery* “How do you know that, Sire?”

“It is not difficult to guess, since it is the last book I have prohibited.”

In spite of, or rather by reason of this prohibition, *The Fencing Master* became very popular in Russia, so popular indeed that when in 1858, some eighteen years after its publication, Dumas visited the famous fair at Nijni Novgorod, handkerchiefs printed in colours with scenes from the book were offered for sale to its surprised author. But what pleased Dumas still more at Nijni was his meeting Alexis and Pauline, his hero and heroine. How this came about we have related in our introduction to *The Snowball and Sultanetta*, two tales of the Caucasus.

Grisier, to whom Dumas introduces us in his naïve and amusing preface, was a well-known figure in Paris, where for many years his fencing-saloon was the rendezvous of young men of fashion. In Dumas’ younger days the use of sword and pistol was as necessary to a dramatist or novelist as the typewriter is to-day. Alexandre seems to have been one of Grisier’s favourite pupils, and as in 1840 he was already a celebrated author, it was naturally to him that the Professor entrusted the “Notes “of his life in

Russia. It has been observed of Dumas that he could sometimes drudge, and has been caught at work with a pencil between his teeth and twenty open volumes scattered around him. As may be supposed, in his expert hands the “Notes “of the worthy Professor were considerably expanded. Dumas took occasion to “do a little history,” as he would put it; and he sometimes gets rather far from the adventures of Grisier, and of Alexis and Pauline. But our author possesses the secret of vivifying everything he touches. With him history reads like romance, and romance like history. The reader, without meaning in the least to do so, and while intent on the story of the conspiracy and the loves of Alexis and Pauline, which form the main theme, finds himself getting a good deal of insight, not only into the history of Russia, but into the manners and customs of its people. Probably if the “truth were known, many who are more or less deeply versed in Russian history and Russian literature could trace their first interest in them to *The Fencing Master.* And yet when Dumas occupied himself with Grisier’s “Notes” he had never visited Russia! Later he was to do so, and to send to Paris some exceedingly acute observations concerning that country. He wrote: —

“Russia is a grand façade; what lies behind no one cares. The person who should trouble to look behind would resemble a cat, which, seeing itself for the first time in a looking-glass, walks behind it expecting to find another cat on the other side. Russia is the country of abuses; though everybody, from Czar to peasant, desires the cessation of abuses. Everybody speaks of these abuses; everybody knows them, analyzes them, deplores them; and on him who lifts his eyes above to say, “Our Father, which art in Heaven, deliver us from abuses,” the abuses only fall the thicker. Hopes are reposed upon the Czar Alexander for the putting down of abuses, and with reason; he wishes sincerely and with a whole heart for universal reform. But as soon as you touch an abuse in Russia, can you guess who it is who cries out in remonstrance? The abuse that you touch? No; that would be too clumsy. Those who cry the loudest are the abuses which are not yet being dealt with, but which fear the coming of their turn. In the artichoke the most difficult leaves to pick are the first that one eats. The abuses are an immense artichoke, all bristling with prickles. One does not arrive at the heart of it without wounding the fingers.”

The Fencing Master (Le Maître d’Armes) was published in 1840, in three volumes, by Dumont (Paris).

R. S. G.

THE FENCING MASTER

"WHY! wonders will never cease!"cried Grisier, as he saw me step over the threshold of his fencing saloon, which was deserted for the moment save for himself.

As a matter of fact I had not put foot in No. 4 Faubourg Montmartre since the evening when Alfred de Nerval told us the story of Pauline.

"I hope," continued the professor with the almost paternal solicitude he was wont to display to his former pupils, "I hope no unlucky affair has brought you here?"

"No, dear master," I replied, "for though I have come to ask a favour of you, it is unlike the many others you have rendered me."

"You are well aware that whatever it is, I am at your service. Now what is it?"

"Well, my good sir, I want you to help me out of a difficulty."

"If the thing is possible, consider it done."

"My confidence in you is not misplaced."

"I am all attention."

"Well, I have just signed a contract with my publisher and I have nothing ready for him."

"The deuce you haven't!"

"So I have come to borrow something from you."

"From me!"

"Yes, haven't you told me fifty times over about your travels in Russia."

"Well, that's a fact."

"When were you there?"

"In 1824, 1825 and 1826."

"Just the most interesting years; the close of Alexander's reign and the accession of Nicholas."

"I was present at the funeral of the one and the coronation of the other. But, but! wait a moment...!"

"I was sure you had something for me."

"'Tis an extraordinary story."

"Exactly what I want."

“Well! just fancy... But better still, have you patience to wait?”

“Have I patience, — a man who spends half his life at rehearsals!”

“Well then, wait a moment.” He went to a cupboard and got out an enormous bundle of papers. “There, that’s what you want.”

“Manuscript, by all that’s holy!”

“Notes taken by one of my colleagues who was at St. Petersburg at the same time as myself and saw ail I did; you can absolutely rely upon him.”

“And you will give them to me?”

“Yes, copyright and all.”

“Why, ‘tis a perfect treasure.”

“One that has more copper in it than silver and more silver than gold. But you must make the most of it, such as it is.”

“My good sir, I will set about my task this very evening and in two months time...”

“Well, in two months?”

“Your friend will wake up one fine morning and find himself in print.”

“Really?”

“Yes, you may count on that.”

“Well, upon my word, be will be delighted.”

“By the way, there’s one thing your manuscript lacks.”

“What’s that?”

“A title.”

“Do you expect me to give you a title into the bargain?”

“Well, while you are about it, my good fellow, don’t do things by halves.”

“You have not examined it; there is one.”

“Where?”

“Here, look; ‘The Fencing Master,’ or ‘Eighteen Months in St. Petersburg.’”

“Very well then, since it is there, let’s leave it.”

“Just as it is?”

“Right you are.”

After this preamble the reader will understand that I claim no originality either of contents or title, but that the sole responsibility rests with Grisier’s friend who tells the story.

CHAPTER I

I HAD not yet lost the buoyancy of youth; I was in possession of a sum 4,000 francs, an inexhaustible treasure so it seemed to me, and I had heard Russia described as a veritable Eldorado for any artist of more than average ability, and as I was not lacking in self-confidence I decided to set out for St. Petersburg.

This resolution once taken was soon put into execution; I was a bachelor, I left nothing behind, not even debts; I had merely to get a few letters of introduction and a passport, a simple business, and a week after deciding to go, I was on the Brussels road.

I preferred to travel by land, in the first place because I intended to give some assaults at arms in the towns I should pass through, thus defraying the expenses of the journey as I went along, and secondly because, like a patriotic Frenchman, I wanted to see those famous battlefields, where I thought that nothing but laurels should grow, as on Virgil’s tomb.

I stopped two days in the capital of Belgium; on the first, giving an assault at arms and on the second, fighting a duel. As I came off as well in the one as the other, some very tempting proposals were made to me to settle in the town. However I declined them all; an uncontrollable impulse urged me forward in spite of myself.

Nevertheless I stopped a day at Liège, as a former pupil, now employed in the record office of that town, was living there, and I did not like to pass through without paying him a visit. He had a house in the Rue Pierreuse, and from the garden terrace I made the acquaintance both of the famous Rhine wine and of the town spread out beneath my feet, from the village of Herstall, the birthplace of Pepin, to the Château de Ranioule whence Godfrey set out for the Holy Land. My pupil’s account of the old buildings was diversified with five or six legends each more curious than the last. One of the most tragic, was undoubtedly the “Banquet of Varfusée,” which detailed the murder of the Burgomaster Sébastien Laruelle whose name is still borne by one of the streets.

I spoke to my pupil, when getting into the diligence for Aix-la-Chapelle, of my idea of inspecting the chief towns and visiting the famous battlefields, but he laughed at my suggestion and told me that in Prussia travellers do not stop where they like, but where the conductor chooses, and that once seated in his vehicle they are absolutely in his hands. Truly enough from Cologne to Dresden, where I had resolved to stay three days, we were not allowed out of our cage, except for meals, and then only just long enough to absorb the nourishment necessary to keep life in us. At length we reached Dresden after three days of this imprisonment, against which no one but myself raised any protests, so reasonable does it appear to the subjects of his Majesty Frederick William of Prussia.

It was at Dresden that Napoleon, on the eve of invading Russia, called for the great halt of 1812, where he summoned to meet him an Emperor, three Kings and a Viceroy; as for Sovereign Princes, they pressed in such crowds round the door of the Imperial tent that they were undistinguishable from mere aides-de-camp and orderlies; the King of Prussia was kept three days dancing attendance.

Vengeance is being prepared against Asia for the incursions of the Huns and the Tartars. From the banks of the Guadalquivir and from the Calabrian Sea, six hundred and seventeen thousand men, shouting — ” Vive Napoleon “in eight different languages, have been pushed forward by the hand of the giant to the banks of the Vistula; they drag with them thirteen hundred and seventy-two field pieces, six sets of pontoons and a siege train; and in the van toil four thousand commissariat carts, three thousand artillery waggons, fifteen hundred ambulances and twelve hundred herds of cattle, and as they pass along, the plaudits of Europe accompany them.

On the 29th May Napoleon leaves Dresden, halting at Posen only long enough to speak a few friendly words to the Poles, passes Warsaw scornfully on one side, leaves on his right Friedland of glorious memory, halts at Thorn only for the time absolutely necessary for inspecting the fortifications and the stores accumulated there, and at length reaches Kônigsberg, where moving down the river towards Gumbinnen, he reviews four or five of his army corps. The order to advance is given; the whole country extending from the Vistula to the Niemen is one mass of men, carts and baggage wagons; the Pregel which flows from one river to the other, like a vein connecting two large arteries, is crowded with heavily laden barges. At length on the 23rd of June Napoleon arrives at the edge of the Prussian forest of Pilviski; a chain of hills stretches in front of him, and on the other side of the hills flows the Russian river. The Emperor, who had been driving up till then, mounts a horse at two o'clock in the morning, and coming up to the outposts near Kovno, seizes the cap and cloak of a Polish light cavalryman and departs at a gallop with General Haxo and a few men, to reconnoitre the river in person. On reaching the bank, the horse stumbles and flings its rider on to the sand.

"That is an unlucky omen," says Napoleon, picking himself up, "a Roman would have beaten a retreat."

The reconnaissance is accomplished, the army will maintain its position in concealment from the enemy during the day, and at night cross the river on three bridges.

Evening is at hand, Napoleon approaches the Niemen; a few sappers pass across the stream in a skiff; the Emperor follows them with his eyes until they are lost in the darkness; they reach the Russian bank and land.

The enemy who were there on the previous evening seem to have vanished. After a moment's absolute silence, a Cossack officer appears on the scene: he is alone and seems astonished that strangers should be on the river bank at such an hour.

"Who are you?" says he.

"Frenchmen," answer the sappers.

"What do you want?"

"To cross the Niemen."

"What is your business in Russia?"

"To make war, *pardieu!*"

Without replying to the subaltern's words, the Cossack gallops off in the direction of Vilna and disappears like a spectre of the night.

Three musket shots are fired at him without result. Napoleon starts at the noise; the campaign has opened.

The Emperor at once orders three hundred light infantry to cross the river to cover the building of the bridges; and despatches orderlies to every position. Then the massed troops get under way in the darkness and advance, hidden by the woods, and crouching in the growing rye; so dark is it that the van-guard approaches within two hundred paces of the river before being sighted by Napoleon; he hears nothing but a dull noise like an impending storm; he dashes forward; the order to halt, repeated in a low tone, passes down the whole line; no fires are lighted, strict silence is enjoined, ranks are not to be broken, but every man must sleep with his arms ready. By two o'clock in the morning the three bridges are completed.

Daylight appears and the left bank of the Niemen swarms with men, horses and wagons; the right bank is deserted and dismal; the ground itself, on becoming Russian, seems to have changed its aspect. When it is not gloomy forest, it is barren sand.

The Emperor hastens from his tent, pitched on the summit of the highest hill and in the centre of the camp; his orders are immediately given and the aides-decamp dart forth with their various despatches, diverging like the rays of a star.

At the same time the confused masses are set in motion, they blend into army corps and deploy in column, winding over the undulating ground like streams flowing down to a river.

At the very moment that the vanguard was setting foot on Russian territory, the Emperor Alexander who happened to be patronizing a ball given in his honour at Vilna, was dancing with Madame Barclay de Tolly, the wife of the Commander-in-chief. At midnight he heard from the Cossack officer who encountered our sappers of the approach of the French army to the Niemen, but he did not wish to interrupt the festivities.

The vanguard has scarcely reached the right bank of the Niemen by the triple passage now prepared for it, before I Napoleon dashes up to the middle bridge and crosses it, followed by his staff. Arrived on the opposite bank he feels troubled, then dismayed; the absence of an enemy which is for ever escaping him, seems more formidable than its presence. For a moment he pauses, thinking he hears cannon shots; he is mistaken, it is only thunder; a storm is gathering over the army, the sky becomes overcast and gloomy as if night were approaching. Napoleon surrounded by a handful of men only, cannot restrain his impatience, and putting spurs to his horse is soon lost to sight in the grey tones of the dense forest. The weather continues threatening.

Half-an-hour later a flash of lightning reveals the Emperor; he has ridden more than two leagues without encountering a living soul. Now the storm bursts; Napoleon seeks the shelter of a Monastery.

About five o’clock in the evening while the army continues its passage of the Niemen, Napoleon tormented by the silence and absence of life, rides on till he comes up to the Wilia, about a quarter of a league from its junction with the Niemen. The Russians in full retreat have burnt the bridge; it will take too much time to build another; the Polish light cavalry must find a ford.

By Napoleon’s orders a squadron of cavalry plunges into the river; at first the squadron preserves its ranks and the issue seems hopeful, but little by little men and horses begin to sink, and are carried off their feet; but none the less they push forward, and soon in spite of all efforts they break rank. The middle of the stream once attained, the violence of the current overwhelms them; some horses have already disappeared; the others become terrified and neigh frantically in their distress; the men struggle and flounder, but the power of the water is such that they are swept away. A few with difficulty reach the opposite bank, the others sink and disappear, shouting “Vive l’Empereur!” and the rest of the troops on the Niemen get the first news of their vanguard by watching the corpses of men and horses floating down the stream.

It took the French army three whole days to make the passage.

In two days Napoleon gains the passes which protect Vilna; he hopes that the Emperor Alexander will be waiting for him in a position so admirably suited to the defence of the capital of Lithuania; the defiles are deserted, he can hardly believe his eyes; the vanguard has already made the passage without the least opposition; he storms, he scolds, he threatens; not only is the enemy unapproachable, it is invisible. It is a preconceived plan, a skilfully arranged retreat; he knows the Russians from past experience, and when once they have received orders to fight, they become living walls which may be thrown down but never recoil.

In spite of possible danger Napoleon must profit by the retreat of the enemy. Accompanied by an escort of Poles he enters Vilna. The Lithuanians welcome with shouts of joy and enthusiasm the men whom they regard as compatriots and the leader who will bring them salvation; but Napoleon, harassed with anxiety, passes through Vilna, seeing nothing and hearing nothing, and hurries to the outposts who are already beyond the city walls. At last, he receives news of the Russians; the 8th Hussars, who had rashly plunged into a wood without any support, have been cut to pieces. Napoleon breathes again, he has no longer to deal with a phantom army; the enemy is retreating in the direction of Drissa; the Emperor hurls Murat and his cavalry after them, then he returns to Vilna and takes possession of the palace, deserted by Alexander only the previous evening. There he halts and pressing business claims his attention. Meanwhile the army continues to advance under the direction of his officers. Since a Russian army does exist, every effort must be made to force an engagement. Our convoys, our baggage waggons, our ambulances are not yet upon the scene; no matter, the indispensable thing now is a battle, for a battle means a victory, and Napoleon is thrusting four hundred thousand men into a country which failed to feed Charles XII. and his twenty thousand Swedes.

Most disastrous reports are brought in from every direction; the army, short of provisions, can only subsist by pillage; at last pillage no longer suffices. Then, although the country is friendly, recourse is had to threats, violence and incendiarism; doubtless this last mishap is due to carelessness, but whole villages fall victims to these accidents. In spite of everything the army begins to suffer, depression makes its appearance; there are ugly tales how young conscripts, less inured to hardships than the old campaigners, and unable to endure the prospect of long days of torture such as those they are experiencing, have turned their weapons upon themselves and left their brains scattered by the roadside. On both sides of the track are to be seen deserted ammunition limbers, and baggage wagons lying open and plundered as if they had been captured by the enemy, for more than ten thousand horses have died from eating the unripe rye.

Napoleon receives all these reports, but feigns disbelief. When visited in his apartments he is always to be seen poring over immense maps endeavouring to surmise the route the Russian army will follow; lacking positive data, he relies on his genius and believes he has discovered Alexander’s plan. The Czar’s patience will hold out so long as the French do not trample the soil of old Russia and only march across the modern conquests, but doubtless he will strain every nerve to defend Muscovy. But Muscovy does not begin until eighty leagues beyond Vilna. Two great rivers mark its borders — the Dnieper and the Dvina, the former rising above Viazma, the latter near Toropetz; they flow side by side for a distance of nearly sixty leagues from east to west, hugging the slopes of that great chain, the backbone of Russia, which extends from the Carpathian mountains to the Urals. They separate abruptly at Polotsk and Orsha, one to the right, the other to the left, the Dvina making for Riga on the Baltic, and the Dnieper for Kherson of the Black Sea, but before finally parting they almost reunite to embrace Smolensk and Vitebsk, the keys of St. Petersburg and Moscow.

Unquestionably this is the spot where Alexander will await Napoleon.

In a moment the Emperor perceives the situation: Barclay de Tolly is retiring by Drissa on Vitebsk and Bagration on Smolensk by way of

Borisov; together they will oppose the entry of France into Russia.

The following orders are hurriedly distributed: Davoust is to seize the Dnieper and with the assistance of the King of Westphalia, attempt to overtake Bagration before he can reach Minsk: Murat, Oudinot and Ney are to hasten after Barclay de Tolly; and Napoleon himself with his army of picked men, the Italian and Bavarian divisions, the Imperial Guard and the Poles, a total of a hundred and fifty thousand men, will march between the two forces, ready to make a rapid deviation and unite with Davoust or with Murat, should either have need of his assistance to stave off an attack or to accomplish a victory.

A quarrel as to precedence between Davoust and the King of Westphalia gave Bagration his opportunity. Davoust at length overtakes him at Moghilev, but what should have been a battle degenerates into a skirmish; however, the desired end is partly attained, Bagration is compelled to abandon the direct route to Smolensk and make a wide détour.

On the left wing the same thing happens to Murat, who at length succeeds in getting in touch with Barclay de Tolly and every day there is an affair of outpost between the Russian rearguard and the French van; then Subervic and his light cavalry attack the Russians on the Visna and capture two hundred prisoners, while Montbrun's artillery annihilates Korf's division, when the latter is trying in vain to destroy a bridge in the rear, meanwhile Sébastiani enters Vidzi which had been abandoned by the Emperor Alexander only the previous evening.

Barclay de Tolly decides to wait for the French in the entrenched camp at Drissa where he hopes to be joined by Bagration; but at the end of three or four days he learns of the check to the Russian Prince and the point scored by Napoleon. If he does not hurry the French will be at Vitebsk first; so orders to advance are given and the Russian army, after this momentary halt, is once more in full retreat.

As for Napoleon, on the 16th he left Vilna, by the 17th he had got to Sventrioni and on the 18th he was at Klupokoé. There he learns that Barclay has evacuated his camp at Drissa; he supposed him to be already at Vitebsk; perhaps there is time for him to get there before him. He starts immediately for Kamen. Six days are spent in forced marches, but the enemy is not even sighted. The army marches forward on the alert, ready to wheel round at the call of danger. At length on the 24th the rumbling of cannon is heard in the direction of Bezenkovitzi; it is Eugène engaged on the Dvina with Barclay’s rearguard. Napoleon dashes in the direction of the firing, but all is over before he can come up with the combatants, and when at length he arrives on the scene he finds Eugène busy repairing the bridge, destroyed by the retreating Doctorov. He crosses the instant it is possible; not that he is in a hurry to take possession of the river, his latest conquest, but to see for himself in which direction the Russian army is marching. From the appearance of the enemy’s rearguard, and the remarks of some prisoners, he gathers that Barclay must be already at Vitebsk. He had made no mistake about the enemy’s plan, Barclay will await him there.

Napoleon has reached the spot where he directed his troops to concentrate a month ago. Looking back, he can discern, in three several directions, the gradual approach of three separate columns, which left the Niemen at different dates and different roads. All these troops, from a distance of a hundred leagues, arrive at the appointed spot, not only on the day resolved upon, but almost at the same hour. It is a masterpiece of strategy.

They meet at Bezenkovitzi and its neighbourhood, infantry, cavalry and artillery crowd and jostle together, intersect one another, get in each others way and push each other about in the utmost disorder. Some hunt for food, some for forage, while others search for quarters; the streets are blocked by orderlies and aides-de-camp who cannot force a way through the masses of common soldiers, so largely has the distinction between the different ranks already disappeared, and this forward movement assumed the features of a retreat. For six hours two hundred thousand men essay the task of bivouacing in a village of five hundred houses.

At length about ten o’clock at night orders arrive from Napoleon to collect the staff officers lost in this multitude, two-thirds of whom have not eaten or drunk anything for the last twelve hours and are on the point of coming to blows. The officers mount and set out in the name of the Emperor, the only name to have any effect on the mob. Instantly, and as if by magic, the confused masses melt away; every man returns to his post and all rally to their colours; long files thread their way through the crowds, like streams flowing from a lake, and march forth with bands playing. The crowds disperse in the direction of Ostrovno and at Bezenkovitzi an oppressive silence succeeds the frightful turmoil. Conscious of the vigour and rapidity with which orders have been received and carried out, every man feels certain that a battle is imminent and such a conviction always awakens the most solemn thoughts in an army.

At daybreak the army awakens to find itself drawn up *en échelon* along a wide road bordered by birch trees. Murat and the cavalry are in the rear. He has under him Dumont, du Coêtlosquet and Carignan, with the 8th Hussars as scouts. The latter, under the impression that two regiments of their division have gone ahead on the flanks, press on confidently in the direction of Ostrovno, in ignorance that the regiments are hampered by the inequalities of the ground, and that instead of following, they are actually in front of them. Suddenly the head of the French column when nearly at the top of some rising ground, catches sight of a line of cavalry ranged in order of battle along the ridge of the hill, and takes it for the two regiments of scouts. General Piré receives orders to charge, but he cannot believe that what he sees in front of him is the enemy; he sends an officer to reconnoitre the mysterious troops and continues on his way. The officer sets off at a gallop, but almost before he reaches the summit he is surrounded and made prisoner. At this juncture six pieces of cannon thunder forth together and mow down whole files. It is no longer any question of strategy; a shout of “Charge!” rings out, and the 8th Hussars and the 10th Chasseurs dart forth, and at the first assault, before there is time to reload them a second time, fall upon the pieces, capture them, throw into confusion the opposing regiment, pierce the lines through and through and find themselves in the rear of the Russians. Seeing nothing in front of them they wheel round and perceive that the regiment which they left on the right is stupefied at such impetuosity. They immediately attack it while engaged in executing a quarter turn and annihilate it; they retrace their steps and perceiving that the regiment on the left is in full retreat, follow, attack, and send it flying to the woods which form a continuous belt round the town of Ostrovno. Just then Murat approaches the hill with all the men he can muster: he orders his reinforcements to the front masses the whole force upon the woods, for he imagines he is only dealing with the rearguard; however he receives a check. In all probability the Russian army is at Ostrovno. Murat rapidly surveys the position and perceives that it is in reality excellent, though he finds himself more involved than he could wish; but Murat is not the man to retreat, and he orders the leaders of the column, composed of the Bruyère and Saint-Germain divisions, to hold the positions they have just gained.

This matter settled, he puts himself at the head of the light cavalry and awaits the enemy, whose turn it is now to debouch; every man who ventures outside the wood is instantly assailed; the Russians approach with a view to attack but are compelled to put themselves on the defensive. The cavalry are cut to pieces by the long lances of the Poles, the infantry are sabred by the Hussars and the Chasseurs. But the woods are of as much service to the Russians as the earth was to Antaeus: scarcely had they disappeared within them, before they came rushing out more numerous than ever. So hot is the attack, that lances are broken, swords lose their edge and the infantry have exhausted their ammunition. At this critical moment the Delzons division makes its appearance on the rising ground coming up at the charge and eager for the fight. Murat notes its approach, orders it up at the double quick and throws it against the enemy's right. At sight of reinforcements the enemy wavers; Murat orders a final assault; and now there is no show of resistance, the Russians are in full retreat; the French army comes up to the woods, which no longer vomit flames, and sweeping through them arrive at the further edge, only to see the Russian rearguard disappearing into another belt of forest.

Eugène hurries up bringing fresh reinforcements; but it is too late to venture into the unexplored defiles; night is falling, the advance must be postponed to the morrow. Murat and Eugène specify the various positions the troops are to occupy and establish all the artillery at their disposal upon a neighbouring slope. Then they retire to the same tent and fall asleep without undressing.

Réveille sounds before daybreak. The Russians are likewise drawn up for action; Murat and Eugène have no longer to deal with a paltry rearguard, but with a whole army corps. Palhen and Konovnitzin have joined forces with Ostermann. What matter? are they not themselves the advance guard of the Grand Army and will they not be reinforced by Napoleon?

At five in the morning the French are astir, Murat is laying out his plans of action, his left wing is already under way to attack the Russians while the right is awaiting his instructions. Suddenly Murat hears a great commotion; it is the cheering of ten thousand Russians who, pouring from the wood in dense masses, encounter our cavalry and infantry and twice drive them back. The brave fellows have been on the defensive too long, the order to advance has been given and they are taking advantage of it.

Murat takes note of these troops advancing to our artillery, which shows signs of uneasiness, for their fire seems to take no effect and the furrows ploughed through the packed columns are instantly closed up. The 84th regiment and a battalion of Croats check the advancing hordes and only retire step by step; but as they do so, heaps of dead are left behind and crowds of wounded and even a few fugitives. There are but two alternatives, — either to be annihilated or to disperse and leave our artillery unprotected save for the gunners. At the sight the right, which had so far stood firm, begins to waver, and the preliminary symptoms of panic become apparent. There is not an instant to be lost; in restricted and encumbered ground a check soon develops into a disaster.

Murat gives his orders with the promptness and decision that such a crisis demands. The right, instead of waiting to be attacked, will itself act on the aggressive, with General Piré in command.

General Anthouard is to hasten to his gunners and compel them to hold their ground; if need arise they must die at their posts.

General Girardin is to rally the 106th Regiment and again throw it against the Russian right wing, which continues to advance, while Murat will make a flank attack with a regiment of Polish lancers.

Everyone hurries to his post at lightning speed.

Murat dashes to the front of the Polish troops, and harangues them; the regiment believing that the King himself is going to lead them into action, answer with cheers, and lowering their lances charge. Murat, who only intended to urge them on, is perforce compelled himself to lead them; the lances in the rear spreading across the whole extent of the ground constrain him to gallop; he can neither pull up nor escape to one side; he accepts the situation like a hero, draws his sword, and shouting “Forward,” heads the charge as if he were a mere Captain and is lost to sight with the whole regiment amid the enemy’s ranks, which are pierced through and through and thrown into dire confusion by the tremendous carnage.

On the further side he falls in with Girardin and his regiment; and from a hill top he watches the effect of his artillery which is now firing with redoubled energy, while a well-sustained fusillade on the extreme left informs him that General Piré is not belying his great reputation.

Thus does the struggle continue for two hours with no material advantage to either side. At last the Russians give way and commence to abandon the ground, but step by step, like men yielding to orders rather than a beaten army in retreat. Finally they reach the woods once more and disappear while the French are left in possession of the open.

Murat and Eugène hesitate to pursue them through the thick forest. At this moment the Emperor appears on the scene, and putting spurs to his horse, gallops up to the top of the hill, which commands the battle field. There he draws rein and poses like an equestrian statue. Murat and Eugène are quickly at his side. In a few words they explain how they have been checked.

"Penetrate the woods," says Napoleon, "they are only a curtain and the Russians will never hold them."

And now the bands of the approaching regiments are heard. Confident of support, Murat and Eugène once more take command of their troops and resolutely enter the woods, which they find deserted, dark and gloomy as an enchanted forest. About an hour later an aide-de-camp returns to Napoleon with news that the advance guard has traversed the woods, and from its present position Vitebsk is in view.

"That is where they are awaiting us," said Napoleon. "I was not mistaken."

Then he orders the whole army to follow him, and galloping through the wood he comes up with Murat and Eugène. His officers had spoken the truth, Vitebsk is really before his eyes, clustering on the two slopes of an amphitheatre.

By now the day is too far advanced for any fresh enterprise; a halt is essential for reconnoitring, studying the country, and evolving a plan; besides the rest of the army is still engaged in the defiles, whence Napoleon himself emerged only three hours ago. He orders his tent to be pitched on a hillock to the left of the main road, has his maps spread out and drops asleep over them.

Night falls and the camp fires are lit, and from their number and extent it is quite obvious that the Russian army is at hand, on the spot, and waiting.

From time to time, Napoleon awakens, and asks if the Russians are still at their posts, only to be told that such is the case. Seven times in the night he summons Berthier and on the last occasion he walks with him to the entrance of his tent, to make certain with his own eyes that he is not mistaken; then, giving orders that he is to be called at daybreak, he goes to sleep greatly reassured.

But the orders proved needless; at three in the morning he asks for a horse. As one is always kept ready, it is brought to him. He leaps into the saddle and, accompanied by some of his staff, picks his way through the lines. Russians and French are at their posts, and when day breaks, Napoleon views with joy the hostile army spread over the terraces commanding the approaches of Vitebsk. Three hundred feet below the river Luczissa is rushing down the mountain slopes on its way to swell the Dvina.

In the van of the army, thrown out, *en échelon*, are ten thousand cavalry, their right supported by the Dvina, and their left by a wood crowded with infantry and bristling with cannon. There is every indication, so it seems to him, of a fierce resolve to fight.

Napoleon has mastered at one glance the whole disposition of the enemy, and his forebodings are dispelled. If the Russians display no eagerness to attack us, at any rate they seem prepared to act on the defensive.

At this point the Viceroy joins Napoleon, who gives his instructions, and climbs an isolated knoll, to the left of the main road, and from this point of vantage, he can command both armies.

Orders are immediately issued. Broussier’s division, followed by the 18th regiment of light infantry and General Piré’s cavalry brigade, wheels to the right, crosses the road, and sets about repairing a small bridge destroyed by the enemy which will afford a passage to the other side of a ravine that runs along our lines just as the Luczissa fronts the Russians. After an hour’s work the bridge is restored without the least opposition on the part of the enemy.

The first to cross the ravine are two hundred musketeers of the 9th regiment of the line under the command of Captains Gayard and Savary; they are to bear away to the left and form the extremity of our wing, which will be ranged up to the Dvina like the Russian flank. They are followed by the 16th Mounted Chasseurs, led by Murat, and after them come a few pieces of light artillery. The Delzons division now makes its appearance and begins the passage, when suddenly Murat, either because he allows himself to be carried away by his customary eagerness, or misinterpreting some order, charges at the head of the 16th Chasseurs against the masses of Russian cavalry, who up till this have been watching our passage, motionless and steady as though on parade.

There is astonishment mingled with dread at the sight of six hundred men rushing upon ten thousand; but before they can get up to them, the irregularities of the ground, cut up by the winter rains, throw their lines into disorder, so that at the first movement on the part of the Russian Lancers, our men perceiving that resistance is perfectly futile, wheel round and beat a retreat. But the rains which hindered their attack are unluckily still greater obstacles to a retreat. Hotly pursued by the enemy, the Chasseurs are beset and overthrown in the hollow and only rally under the fire of the 53rd regiment. Murat alone holds on, accompanied by some sixty odd officers and horsemen, and fighting his way, he is so inextricably mixed up with the Russian cavalry that he appears to be the pursuer instead of the pursued. Twice during this mad enterprise does his body servant save his life, once by pistolling a lancer who was within an ace of transfixing him, and once by striking up the wrist of a trooper, who had his sword raised ready to cut him down. Suddenly the Russian Lancers catch sight of the Emperor, standing on his knoll, at not more than a few hundred yards distance and protected by a mere handful of guardsmen. They gallop straight at him, while the whole army is in dismay and the two hundred Musketeers retrace their steps. Murat and his brave troopers come thundering by with the speed of an arrow, overtake them and draw rein at the foot of the knoll; the horsemen leap to the ground, and carbine in hand form a circle round Napoleon; Murat himself seizes a musket and starts firing, The on-coming Lancers stop short at this unexpected resistance; the fusillade redoubles; The Delzons division comes up at the double. Thus the fifteen or eighteen hundred Lancers, finding themselves in a tight place face about and put spurs to their horses; but half way they encounter the two hundred French Musketeers, who now find themselves hemmed in between the two armies; it is their fate to act as scapegoats.

For a moment all thought the two hundred heroes were lost, when suddenly from the centre of the circle which surrounds them and almost conceals them from view, the sustained rattle of musketry is heard and its deadly effects are very apparent; the brave fellows are not going to give in without a struggle. By a rapid manœuvre the two captains have ranged their troops in a hollow square, and from its four faces fire and death belch forth; for reply, the Lancers attack them furiously. Meanwhile the murderous battalion retreats slowly, but never relaxes its fire and at length gains a position intersected by ravines and brushwood. The Lancers hemming them in on every side, beset them tenaciously; while the bloody track is strewn with dead and wounded, and more than two hundred riderless horses are scattered over the plain. The Russians grow desperate; they get hopelessly confused in the brushwood, and stumble in the ravines; while the continuous and regular fusillade shows that the hollow square still remains intact. At length the Lancers lose heart in a struggle which threatens nought but disaster, wheel round and make for their own lines, which like ours have stood motionless watching this strange combat; one final discharge pursues them and the whole French army bursts out in a shout of joy at the sight of a mere handful of men rescued by their own bravery in so strange and miraculous a fashion.

Napoleon oblivious of the risk of personal danger he ran in watching the bloody contest, sends an aide-de-camp to ascertain what corps the two hundred heroes belong to; the aide-de-camp returns with the answer: — ”The ninth, Sire, — Paris lads every one of them.”

“Go back and tell the plucky fellows that they deserve the Cross of the Legion of Honour and that they shall have ten decorations to distribute as they think fit.”

This message is greeted with cries of — “Long live the Emperor.”

But up to this point all that has happened is mere child’s play, the real battle is only just beginning.

Broussier arranges his division in double squares, regiment by regiment, and advances straight at the enemy, while the army of Italy, Count Lobau’s three divisions and Murat’s cavalry make for the high road and the woods, upon which the Russian left wing rests.

Two hours later all the advanced positions are in our possession and the enemy has retreated beyond the Luczissa; every man emulates the example of the two hundred Musketeers and does his best; Murat particularly having an old score to wipe off performs prodigies.

It is only mid-day and there is still enough time to renew the battle; but doubtless Napoleon, discovering that the Russians, dismayed at their first check, are only fooling us with a rearguard action while arranging for a general retreat, hopes to lessen their fears by simulating vacillation. He therefore gives the order to cease firing, quietly trots along the line, warning every one to be prepared for fighting on the morrow, and halts for lunch on a small hillock in the midst of the sharpshooters, where a stray bullet wounds a soldier three yards from him.

In the course of the day the various army corps come up and unite to form one grand army.

That evening Napoleon left Murat with the words: “To-morrow, at five in the morning, the sun of Austerlitz!”

Murat shaking his head doubtfully moved away and had his tent pitched on the banks of the Luczissa, within half a gunshot of the enemy’s outposts.

Napoleon was not mistaken, Barclay de Tolly’s intention was to occupy the approaches of Smolensk and hold them, until Bagration could unite with him sooner or later; but at eleven o’clock that night the Russian General learns that Bagration has been defeated and driven beyond the Dnieper; so, with all his communications cut, he is forced to repair to Smolensk, where he will await orders from the commander-in-chief.

At midnight Barclay de Tolly gives the order for a retreat, and so quietly and orderly is it conducted that Murat hears not the least movement; in fact as the camp fires still remain alight, everyone believes that the Russians are close at hand.

Napoleon awakens at day break and steps out of his tent; every spot is silent and deserted where the evening before there were seventy thousand men; once more have the Russians eluded his grasp.

The Emperor refuses to believe they have retreated, so desirous is he of engaging them; he gives orders that the army is not to advance without a strong vanguard and with sharpshooters scouting on the wings, so fearful is he of a surprise. But very shortly he realizes the truth; he finds himself in the midst of Barclay’s camp and a prisoner captured asleep under a bush is all that remains of the Russian army.

Two hours later Vitebsk is entered and found to be abandoned; with the exception of a few Jews, there are absolutely no inhabitants. Napoleon, who cannot believe in this everlasting retreat, has his tent erected in the courtyard of the castle as if to indicate that he is only making a halt there. He sends out two parties to reconnoitre, one to work up the bank of the Dvina, the other to scour the Smolensk road. Both return without having encountered a soul save a few mounted Cossacks who disperse at their approach, but of the seventy thousand men lately spread out in full view not a trace remains, they have vanished like phantoms.

At Vitebsk the most disastrous news is brought to Napoleon; according to despatches from Berthier one sixth of the army is laid up with dysentery; Belliard, when questioned, declares that six days more of these forced marches will put all the cavalry out of action. Napoleon, from the castle windows, casts his eyes over the situation and notes how admirable are its natural defences so that art can do little to strengthen them. Various projects coursed through his brain; here he is six hundred leagues from France; Lithuania is conquered, it must be organized; he is beaten, not by men it is true, but by leagues; why not stop here and prepare for the lengthy and terrible Russian winter. Vitebsk would make excellent headquarters; the course of the Dvina and Dnieper would determine the French lines; the siege artillery could march on Riga with the left wing of the army supporting it; Vitebsk, gifted by nature with woods and strengthened by the ramparts Napoleon would provide, would supply an admirable entrenched camp in a central position, while the right wing would extend to Bo-Bruisk, of which they would have to take possession, then blockhouses must be erected on the lines of communication.

Thus disposed, the grand army would be well supplied with every need; besides the dépôts at Dantzig, Vilna and Minsk, contributions can be levied on Courland and Livonia; thirty-six immense ovens must be put up, capable of baking thirty thousand loaves of bread at the same time. So much for material wants.

A number of mean buildings mar the site of the palace; they must be pulled down and the rubbish carted away. But the town is deserted; no matter, the richest of the gentry and the most fashionable ladies from Vilna and Warsaw shall be invited to spend the winter there; a theatre shall be built and at its inauguration Talma and Mademoiselle Mars shall come to Vitebsk, just as they visited Dresden. Thus will amusement be provided.

In such a fashion does Napoleon resolve upon a plan which has taken him not more than half-an-hour to mature, then unbuckling his sword he throws it on the table and addresses the King of Naples, who has just entered the room, as follows: — ” Murat, the preliminary campaign in Russia is over; let us plant our eagles here; I want time to reconnoitre and to recover; two great rivers mark out our position; let us form a hollow square with guns at the four angles and within, so that they can cross fire in all directions; 1813 will see us at Moscow, 1814 at St. Petersburg; the Russian War is to be a matter of three years.”

Thus did the good genius of Napoleon dictate at this moment, but it was not long before the demon of war regained his sway; a fortnight later all the Emperor’s grand projects were scattered to the winds; and like an exhausted runner who has got his second wind, a fortnight later he was again on the march.

On the 15th of August Smolensk fell into our possession; on September the 16th Moscow was in flames, and on the 13th of December Napoleon in full flight recrossed the Niemen by night, alone and haunted by the spectre of his grand army.

As a humble tourist bent on witnessing the scenes of our country's glory, as likewise of its disasters, I had followed the route pursued by Napoleon twelve years before, collecting all the traditions which the simple Lithuanians had preserved of his march. I should have much liked to see Smolensk and Moscow, but this expedition would mean an additional two hundred leagues for me, and that was out of the question. After spending a day at Vitebsk and visiting the castle where Napoleon resided for a fortnight, I ordered horses and one of those little post carriages used by the Russian couriers and known as *perekladnoi* because they are changed at the end of each stage. I threw my portmanteau inside and had soon left Vitebsk behind, swept swiftly along by my three horses, of which the middle one kept up a trot with his head in the air, while his companions galloped and neighed with lowered heads, as if they wanted to devour the very ground.

After all I was only leaving one road rich in memories for another. For now I was on the route taken by Catherine on her journey to the Crimea.

CHAPTER II

ON leaving Vitebsk I was confronted with the Russian custom house; but as I had only one valise, in spite of the evident desire of the official to prolong the business to its utmost limits, it lasted only two hours and twenty minutes, a feat almost without precedent in the annals of the Muscovite customs. This duty accomplished, I could continue my journey to St. Petersburg without fear of a similar interruption. That evening I reached Velikiye-Luki, which is the Russian equivalent for the “Great Bow.” This picturesque title is derived from the windings of the river Lovat which flows in and out of its walls. Built in the eleventh century, the town was laid waste by the Lithuanians in the twelfth, then conquered by Ballori, king of Poland, afterwards recovered by Ivan Vasilievitch and finally burnt by the ‘‘False Demetrius.” Abandoned for nine years, it was repeopled by the Cossacks of the Don and the Jaik, from whom the present population is almost wholly descended. It boasts of three churches, two of them situated in the main street, before which my post-boy did not fail to make the sign of the cross.

Notwithstanding the hardness of my springless carriage and the wretched state of the roads, I had made up my mind not to stop, for I had been told that I could do the hundred and seventy-two leagues from Vitebsk to St. Petersburg in forty-eight hours. I halted at the post-house just long enough to change horses and continued my journey. I need hardly say that I did not get an hour’s sleep all night. I was tossed about in my chaise like a nut in its shell. I tried hard to cling to the wooden board on which they had laid a leather cushion about the thickness of a copy book; but at the end of ten minutes my arms felt dislocated and I was compelled once more to abandon myself to the terrible jolting, pitying from the bottom of my heart, the unlucky Russian couriers who sometimes travel a hundred leagues in such a conveyance.

Already the difference between a night spent in Russia and one in France was apparent. In any other vehicle I could have read. I may as well own that weary from want of sleep, I made the attempt, but at the fourth line, a jolt wrenched the book from my hands and as I was stooping to pick it up, another jolt sent me too flying from my seat. I spent a good half hour floundering in the bottom of the chaise, before picking myself up and I was cured of my desire to continue my reading.

At day-break we entered Bejanitzi, a small village of no importance, and at four o’clock in the afternoon we arrived at Porkhov, an old town situated on the Chelonia, which exports corn and flax to Lake Ladoga by way of Lake Ilmen and the river connecting the two lakes. Half my journey was over. I must confess that the temptation to stop one night was great, but so terribly dirty was the interior of the inn that I quickly re-entered my carriage. It is only fair to add that the post-boy assured me that the worst of the journey was over, and the fact materially aided me in arriving at such a heroic determination.

Accordingly the chaise once more started at full speed, and I continued to flounder in the interior while the post boy on the box chanted a melancholy dirge. Its meaning I was unable to gather, but judging from the air it was marvellously applicable to my painful situation.

To say that I went to sleep sounds incredible and I could not have believed it, if I had not been awakened by a terrific blow on the forehead.

So violent was the impact that the post boy had been thrown from his seat. As for myself I was saved by the tilt of the chaise and the shock which awoke me was due to my forehead striking against the wicker work. It occurred to me then, that I had better ride on the box and put the post boy inside, but he raised strong objections to this idea, either because he did not understand my suggestion or because he imagined that by complying he would be neglecting his duty. So we made a fresh start, the post-boy continued his song and I my dance. About five o’clock in the morning we reached Selogorodetz where we made a halt for breakfast. Thank heaven another fifty leagues would see us at our journey’s end.

I returned to my cage with a sigh and climbed on to my perch. Not till then did I think of asking if the cover of the chaise could be raised. They said it was the easiest thing in the world. I immediately ordered it to be done and from that moment only the lower half of my body felt incommoded.

At Iouga I struck on an equally brilliant idea; this was to remove the seat, spread some straw in the bottom of the chaise and lie down on it with my portmanteau in place of a pillow. Thus one improvement led to another and my situation at length became almost endurable.

My post boy insisted on drawing up before the Castle of Gatshina where Paul I. was confined during the whole of Queen Catherine’s reign, and then in front of the Tsarskoe-Selo Palace, the summer residence of the Emperor Alexander; but I was so fatigued that I was quite satisfied to merely glance at these two wonders, mentally resolving to pay them a future visit under more comfortable circumstances.

As we were leaving Tsarskoe-Selo the axle tree of a drosky in front of us suddenly broke and the carriage without overturning fell on its side. As I was about a hundred yards behind the drosky, I had time, before overtaking it to see a gentleman alight, tall and thin, holding in one hand an opera hat and in the other a kit or miniature violin. He was wearing a black coat such as would have been fashionable in Paris in 1812, black knee breeches, black silk stockings and shoes with buckles. The moment he touched the ground, he began to stamp with his right leg, then with his left, then he cut capers on both and finally turned round three times to satisfy himself that no bones were broken. The anxiety he displayed regarding his safety induced me to stop and inquire if he had hurt himself.

“No, sir, no,” said he, “except that I shall lose my lesson; a lesson which brings me in a louis, sir, and with the prettiest young lady in St. Petersburg, Mademoiselle de Vlodeck, who is acting the part of Philadelphia, one of Lord Warton’s daughters in Sir Anthony Van Dyck’s picture, at the fête to be given by the Court in honour of the hereditary Grand Duchess of Weimar/’

“Sir,” I answered, “I do not quite understand what you say, but never mind, if I can be of any assistance to you?”

“What, sir, if you can be of any assistance to me, why you can save my life! Just think, sir, I have been giving a dancing lesson to the Princess Lubormiska, whose country seat is close by. She is to represent Cornelia. A lesson worth two louis, sir, I never give them for less; I am all the rage and I am making hay while the sun shines. It is very simple, I am the only French dancing master in St. Petersburg. Now can you believe it, this rascal put me into a dilapidated carriage which very nearly disabled me; luckily my legs are all right. I have taken your number you scoundrel.”

“If I am not mistaken, sir, the service I can render you is to offer you a place in my carriage,”

“Yes, sir, you are quite right, it would be an immense service, but I am afraid.”

“What, with a fellow countryman.”

“You are a Frenchman, sir?”

“And with a fellow artist.”

“You are an artist? My dear sir, St. Petersburg is the worst town in the world for artists. Dancing too, particularly dancing, why, dancing is a one legged business. I suppose, sir, you do not happen to be a dancing master?”

“What, they only dance on one leg! Why, you told me you were paid a louis a lesson; do they give you so much for teaching them to hop? A whole louis, sir, it seems to me that is pretty good pay.”

“Well, yes, just now, considering the special circumstances, but Russia is no longer what she once was. The French have ruined her. I presume, sir, you are not a dancing master?”

“I have been told that at St. Petersburg talent is always appreciated.”

“Oh! yes, no doubt it was so once; why a wretched hairdresser has been known to earn 600 roubles a day while I can scarcely make 80. I trust you are not a dancing master.”

“No, my dear fellow countryman,” I replied at last, pitying his distress, “and you may get into my chaise without any fear of encountering a rival.”

“I accept your offer with the greatest pleasure,” cried my dancing friend, seating himself beside me, “Thanks to you I shall be at St. Petersburg in time to give my lesson.”

The post boy set off at full gallop and three hours later, as night was falling, we entered St. Petersburg by the Moscow gate. Owing to the information rained upon me by my companion, who was wonderfully affable now that he felt sure I was not a dancing master, I got down at the Hôtel de Londres, in the Admiralty Square at the corner of Nevski Prospect. Here we parted; he jumped into a drosky and I entered the hotel.

I need hardly say that though I was eager to explore Peter the Great’s city, I postponed the matter until the morrow. I felt literally broken in pieces and could barely support myself on my legs.

With the utmost difficulty I crawled to my room, where fortunately I found a good bed, a luxury I had not experienced since leaving Vilna.

I woke up the next day at noon, and the first thing I did was to rush to the window. In front of me was the Admiralty Palace, with its tall gilded spire surmounted by a ship and its girdle of trees; on my left was the Senate House; on my right the Winter Palace and the Hermitage; while in the spaces separating these splendid works of art I caught glimpses of the Neva which appeared to be as wide as the sea.

I took my breakfast while dressing, and as soon as I was ready repaired to the Palace Quay and hurried along to the Troitskoï bridge, which, by the way, is eighteen hundred feet long. Here I had been advised to get my first impression of the city as a whole. It was the best piece of advice I have ever received.

I very much doubt if there exists in the whole world such a panorama as that which displayed itself before my eyes, when, with my back to the Viborg quarter, I drank in the view as far as the Isles of Volnoï and the Gulf of Finland.

Close at hand on my right, and moored like a ship by two light bridges to the Islet of Aptekarskoï, rose the Fortress, the earliest cradle of St. Petersburg, and from amidst its walls sprang the golden spire of the church of St. Peter and St. Paul, the mausoleum of the Czars, and the green roof of the Mint.

Facing the Fortress and on the opposite bank I distinguished, beginning with the left, the Marble Palace, faulty chiefly because the architect seems to have forgotten to give it a façade; the Hermitage, the charming retreat which Catherine II. built herself as a refuge from state and ceremony; the Royal Winter Palace, remarkable more for its size than its proportions, for its height rather than its architecture; the Admiralty, with its two pavilions and granite staircases, — the imposing centre from which the three principal streets in St. Petersburg diverge; and lastly, beyond the Admiralty, the English Quay, with its magnificent mansions, ending in the New Admiralty.

After feasting my eyes on this long line of majestic buildings I turned my attention to those in front of me. There at the extreme end of the Isle of Vasilievskoï, towered the Exchange, with its semi-circular staircases reaching to the water’s edge.

Beyond on the bank facing the English Quay is the row of the twelve Colleges, with the Academies of Science and Fine Arts, and at the end of this magnificent vista, the School of Mines, situated at the extremity of the bend described by the river.

On the other side of Basil Islet, — which derives its name from a lieutenant of Peter the Great to whom the Emperor entrusted affairs, while he himself, busied in building the Fortress, was living in his little hut on the

Isle of St. Petersburg — flows in the direction of the Isles of Volnoï that branch of the river known as the Little Neva. Here in the midst of lovely gardens, enclosed in gilded railings and carpeted with flowers and shrubs imported from Africa and Italy for the three short months of summer enjoyed in St. Petersburg, and for the other nine months of the year shut up in hot-houses, here, I say, are situated the country residences of the St. Petersburg aristocracy. The whole of one of these islands is given up to the Empress, who has built a little palace there and changed the whole site with gardens and walks.

Turn round and look up the river instead of down, the view changes in character but retains its grandeur. At the two ends of the bridge on which I was resting, stood on one bank the Church of the Trinity, and on the other the Summer gardens; on the left I noticed the little wooden hut, occupied by Peter the Great while he was building the Fortress. Near this cabin there is still a tree on which an image of the Virgin is nailed about ten feet from the ground. When the founder of St. Petersburg asked how high the river rose in the time of the highest floods, they showed him this image. At the sight of it he almost determined to abandon his gigantic enterprise. The sacred tree and the ever famous house are surrounded by arcades, intended to shelter from the action of the weather and the climate this commonplace looking hut, consisting of only three rooms: a dining-room, a parlour, and a bedroom. Peter was laying the foundations of a city, and had no time to build a fine house for himself.

A little farther off, but still on the left hand, and on the other side of the Neva and old Petersburg, are the Military Hospital, the Academy of Medicine, and in the distance the village of Oklawith its suburbs; opposite these buildings, and on the right of the Horse Guards’ Barracks, are the Crimean Palace with its emerald roof, the Artillery Barracks, the Poor House, and the old Monastery of Smolna.

I cannot say how long I stood entranced with this double panorama. Perhaps on further reflection all these palaces bore too close a resemblance to stage scenery, and all these columns, which from a distance seemed to be of marble, were perhaps nothing but pinchbeck brickwork, yet at a first glance they are simply marvellous, and easily surpass the highest expectations any one can have formed concerning them.

Four o’clock struck. I had been told that dinner was served at half-past four, so turning my steps in the direction of the hotel with great reluctance, I passed in front of the Admiralty to get a better view of the colossal statue of Peter the Great, which I had noticed from my window.

I had been so deeply engrossed in inspecting the buildings that I scarcely noticed the people until I was coming back, yet their well-marked characteristics are deserving of attention. In St. Petersburg everyone is a bearded yokel or a fine gentleman; there is no middle class.

At a cursory glance the mujik, it must be confessed, not very interesting. In winter, sheepskins turned inside out; in summer, striped shirts dangling about their knees, instead of being tucked into their breeches, sandals fastened to their feet by thongs twisted round their legs, hair cut short and square at the nape of the neck, and faces hidden in bushy, unkempt beards, such are the men; pelisses of some common stuff or very voluminous jackets which half cover their petticoats, top boots so immense that feet and legs are hidden from view, so much for the women.

It is true that in no other country in the world do the people bear such a serene expression upon their faces. Examine the countenances of any dozen people drawn from the dregs of Paris, six or seven at least will express suffering, dire poverty or fear. In St. Petersburg nothing of the kind. The serf, assured as to the future and usually satisfied with the present, does not trouble himself about food, dress or shelter, knowing that his master is bound to provide these things for him, and marches through life with nothing to dread but sundry floggings to which his shoulders have long since grown accustomed. Besides, he quickly forgets the lash, thanks to the disgusting vodki, his favourite drink; instead of exciting him, like the wine which intoxicates our street porters, it endows him with the deepest and humblest respect for his betters, the most tender regard for his equals, and the most comical and affecting goodwill towards every one.

Here then are plenty of reasons for referring again to the mujik, and nothing but an unjust prejudice prevented me from speaking of him before.

Another peculiarity which struck me was the ease with which traffic was conducted in the streets, thanks to the three great canals which encircle the city, for by their agency scavenging and household removals are an easy matter, and provisions and wood can be quickly brought in. There is never any obstruction caused by carts, such as would compel a carriage to take three hours on a journey that might be completed in ten minutes on foot.

On the contrary plenty of room everywhere; in the streets are droskys, chaises, vehicles of every description, crossing in all directions at a breakneck speed, and yet the cry “Faster, faster” is heard on every side; the pavements are reserved for foot passengers, who are never run over, even though they seem to desire it, for so skilful are the Russian coachmen in stopping at full gallop that you would have to be smarter than the driver before an accident could happen to you.

I was forgetting another precaution taken by the police to let pedestrians know that they are expected to keep to the footpaths. Unless they are shod like horses they find it dreadfully tiring to walk on the paved roads, which remind one of the abominable *pavé* of Lyons. St. Petersburg fully justifies the popular description given of her, — a dainty dame, superbly clad but vilely shod.

Among the jewels presented to her by the Czars, one of the grandest is the statue of Peter the First, a gift from Catherine the Second. The Emperor is mounted on a mettled prancing steed, typical of the Muscovite nobility, who gave him so much trouble to subjugate, He is seated on a bear’s skin, representative of the state of barbarism in which he found his people. Then, to complete the allegory, when the statue was finished, except for its pedestal, they hauled to St. Petersburg a virgin block of granite, an emblem of the difficulties which the civilizer of the North had had to surmount. The following inscription is cut on the granite, with a translation in Russian on the other side: —

PETRO PRIMO CATHERINA SECUNDA, 1782.

Half-past four struck as I completed my third turn round the iron railing surrounding the monument; and I was obliged to leave the *chef-d’oeuvre* of my compatriot Falconnet, unless I liked to run the risk of losing my place at table.

St. Petersburg is the finest provincial town I know.

The news of my arrival had already got about, thanks to my fellow traveller; and as he could say nothing about me except that I was posting and that at any rate I was not a dancing master, the news had disconcerted the little French professional colony. Each displayed the same anxiety that my piroutte dancer had shown, fearful lest I should turn out to be a competitor or a rival.

So my entry into the dining-room was the cause of a general commotion among the honourable guests at the table d’hôte, who nearly all belonged to the colony, and every one tried to find out to which profession I belonged by studying my appearance and my manners. Now this required an unusual degree of perspicacity, for I simply bowed and sat down.

During soup, thanks to the demands of hunger and the respect due to a stranger, I maintained my incognito. But after the joint, curiosity could no longer be restrained, and my neighbour on the right opened the attack.

“A stranger in St. Petersburg, I think, Sir?” said he, passing his glass to me and bowing.

“I arrived last night,” I answered, filling his glass and likewise bowing.

“Are you a fellow countryman, Sir?” said my left hand neighbour in a tone of assumed friendship.

“I don’t know, Sir. I am a Parisian.”

“And I belong to Tours, the garden of France, where the purest French is spoken, as no doubt you are aware. So I came to St. Petersburg to be an Utchitel.”

“Excuse me, Sir,” said I, turning to my right hand neighbour, “but can you tell me what an Utchitel is?”

“A dealer in participles,” replied my neighbour, in a most contemptuous manner.

“You have not come in the same capacity, I hope,” interrupted the gentleman from Tours, “otherwise I would give you a piece of friendly advice and that is to return to France as quickly as possible.”

“Why?”

“Because the recent fair for schoolmasters at Moscow has been a failure.”

“The fair for schoolmasters? “I cried in bewilderment.

“Yes, Sir. Don’t you know that poor Monsieur Le Duc has lost half his business this season?”

“Sir,” said I, again appealing to the gentleman on my right, “may I be allowed to inquire who and what this Monsieur Le Duc is?”

“A worthy restaurant keeper, Sir, who has an agency for tutors, whom he lodges and charges according to their attainments. During the two great Russian festivals at Easter and Christmas, when the gentry are accustomed to repair to the capital, he opens his agency and claims a commission in addition to the charges which he makes for obtaining a situation for a tutor. Well, this year a third of his clients are still on his hands, and a sixth of those whom he had despatched into the country have been returned to him, so the poor fellow is almost bankrupt.”

“Really.”

“You see, Sir,” answered the Utchitel, “if you are here with the idea of taking pupils, you have hit on an unlucky moment, since gentlemen born in Touraine, that is in the province where the best French is spoken, find it hard to get a berth.”

“You need not disturb yourself on my account,” I replied; “I belong to a totally different profession.”

“Sir,” said my opposite neighbour, addressing me across the table with a Bordeaux accent of the most pronounced kind, “if you are a wine-merchant, it is only fair to tell you, it is a pitiful trade, no good at all.”

“What now, Sir,” I returned; “have the Russians taken to drinking beer then, or have they planted vineyards, maybe, in Kamtchatka?”

“*Bagasse!* if that was all, we might compete with them; it’s the Russian noblemen, for ever buying, but never paying.”

“Thank you, Sir, for your advice; but I am quite sure I shall not become a bankrupt at this business. I don’t deal in wine.”

“At any rate, Sir,” observed an individual in a strongly marked Lyons accent, and wearing an overcoat with a fur collar, though it was the height of summer, “at any rate, I recommend you, if you are a wool and fur merchant, to keep the pick of your goods for yourself, as you do not appear to have a strong constitution, and delicate chests in this country soon come to grief. We buried fifteen Frenchmen last winter. That ought to be warning sufficient.”

“I will take precautions, Sir, and as I intend to supply myself from your establishment I hope you will deal with me as a fellow countryman.”

“Why, certainly, Sir, with the greatest pleasure. I come from Lyons, the second city in France, and we are noted for our honesty, and since you are not a dealer in wool or furs....”

“Don’t you see that our dear fellow countryman does not want to tell us who he is?” struck in casually a gentleman, whose hair fresh from the curling tongs reeked with the abominable smell of jasmine pomade. For the last quarter of an hour he had been trying unsuccessfully to sever the wing from a chicken, while each of us awaited our share.

“Don’t you see,” he repeated, with emphasis on every word, “don’t you see he does not want to tell us who he is?”

“If I were lucky enough to possess manners like yours, Sir, or to emit such a delightful perfume, people would not have much trouble in identifying me.”

“What does that mean?” cried the young man with the curls, “what does that mean?”

“It means that you are a barber.”

“Do you wish to insult me, Sir?”

“It seems that you are insulted when you are told who you are.”

The curly-headed youth drew a card from his pocket and shouted,” Here is my address.”

“Sir,” said I, “go on with your carving.”

“So you refuse to give me satisfaction?”

“You wanted to know my profession? well, my profession prevents me from fighting.”

“You are a coward then?”

“No, Sir, I am a fencing master.”

“Ah!” cried the youth with the curls, immediately growing calm.

There was a moment’s silence, while my cross-questioner tried with even less success than before to tear a wing from the chicken; at last weary of the struggle he passed it on to a neighbour.

“So you are a fencing master,” said my neighbour from Bordeaux after a short pause; “a nice profession, Sir; I took a turn at it myself sometimes, when I was young and hot-headed.”

“It is a branch of industry not much cultivated here, and one which cannot fail to succeed, especially under the direction of a man such as you,” said the professor.

“Oh! yes, doubtless,” interrupted the furrier, “but I advise you to wear flannel waistcoats when giving your lessons, and to get a fur mantle in which to wrap yourself when the display is finished.”

“My word, my dear compatriot,” said the young man with the curls, helping himself to a portion of the chicken, which his neighbour had carved for him, and once more full of self assurance, “My word, my dear compatriot, for you are a Parisian, I think you said?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“So am I. You are embarked on an excellent speculation, I think, for here there is no one but a second-rate fencing master’s assistant, a worn out super from the ‘Gaiety,’ who has managed to get himself appointed fencing master to the Guards on the strength of the mimic battles he organizes at the theatres. You can see him in the Prospect. He teaches his pupils the four cuts. I agreed to take lessons from him, but at the first encounter I perceived that I was master and he the pupil; so I dismissed him for a contemptible fellow, paying him half the fee which I charge for dressing the hair, and the poor devil was only too pleased.”

“Sir,” said I, “I know the man of whom you are speaking. As a stranger and as a Frenchman you ought not to speak like that; for as a stranger you should respect the Emperor’s choice and as a Frenchman you have no business to disparage a fellow-countryman. Now I am giving you a lesson, and I don’t even charge half fees, you see I am generous.”

With these words I rose from the table, for I had already had enough of the French colony and was anxious to depart.

A young man who had not spoken during dinner also got up and left the room with me.

“It appears to me,” said he with a smile, “that a very brief introduction has sufficed you to take stock of our beloved fellow-countrymen.”

“I must indeed confess that they do not meet with my approval.”

“Well,” he replied with a shrug of the shoulders, “it is by such specimens we are judged in St. Petersburg. Other nations send abroad of their best, we generally export our worst; yet all the same we everywhere outweigh their influence. It is very creditable to France, but very unpleasant to Frenchmen.”

“Are you living in St. Petersburg? “I asked.

“Yes, I have been here a year, but I am leaving to-night.”

“Really?”

“I must engage a carriage. I have the honour to...”

“Sir, your most humble...’

“Well! “I pondered, going upstairs again, while my companion made for the door, “I am unlucky, I meet a decent fellow by chance and he is leaving the very day I arrive.”

I found a servant in my room preparing the bed for the siesta. In St. Petersburg as at Madrid it is the custom to take a nap after the midday meal — and very sensibly, for it is hotter in Russia than in Spain for two months of the year.

This rest exactly suited me, bruised as I was by the couple of days’ travelling and yet desirous of enjoying as soon as possible one of those beautiful nights on the Neva which are so greatly extolled. On questioning the servant as to how I could procure a gondola, he replied that it was the simplest thing in the world, as it was only necessary to order it and in consideration of ten roubles, which would include the commission, he would make himself responsible for everything. I had previously exchanged some money for Russian bank-notes and giving him one I told him to wake me up at nine o'clock.

The bank-note produced the desired effect. On the stroke of nine there was a knock at my door and a boatman was waiting for me downstairs.

Night was in reality twilight, so calm and clear that one could easily read by it and distinguish even at a considerable distance buildings lost in a delightful haze and clothed in indistinct colours, as under an Italian sky. The stifling heat of the day had been dissipated by a pleasant breeze from the islands bearing in its train a light perfume of roses and oranges. The city, deserted by day, was now thronged with people who crowded on to the marine parade, while every branch of the Neva conveyed its contingent of the aristocracy. All the gondolas had been moored round an immense barge anchored in front of the Citadel and filled with more than sixty musicians.

Suddenly the most marvellous music that I had ever heard, arose from the river and mounted majestically to the sky. I ordered the boatman to get as near as possible to this gigantic living organ, of which each musician formed a pipe, so to speak; for I recognized the concert of the horns, I had often heard about, where each performer plays one note only, waiting for a given signal and sustaining the note so long as the conductor's baton is turned in his direction. This novel performance seemed to me perfectly miraculous, I could never have believed that men could be played upon like a piano, and I hardly knew which to admire the more, the patience of the conductor or the skill of the orchestra.

The concert lasted far into the night. I remained rooted to the same spot until two o'clock in the morning, listening and watching, instead of wandering to and fro like everyone else; I almost fancied that the concert was given for my special benefit and scarcely believed that such musical wonders would be displayed on the following nights. I had plenty of opportunities of examining the instruments used by the performers. They are tubes, wide at the end whence the sound proceeds and gradually tapering to the mouthpiece which is bent. These trumpets vary in length from two to thirty feet. Three persons are necessary to play the latter, two to hold the instrument and one to blow.

I returned as day was breaking, utterly astonished with the night I had just passed under this Byzantine sky, in the midst of this Northern music, on this river so wide that it resembles a lake, and so pure that everything is reflected as in a mirror, the stars of heaven and the lights of earth. I confess that at this moment St. Petersburg appeared to me far above everything that I had imagined, and I decided, that if it was not quite paradise, it did not fall far short of it.

I could not rid my head of these Aeolian strains and sleep was impossible. Although I lay down for a few hours I was up again at six o’clock. I arranged some letters of introduction I had brought with me and I intended to deliver them after my first public assault at arms, so as not to be obliged to distribute prospectuses. I took only one with me, as a friend had begged me to deliver it with my own hand. This letter was from his mistress, a poor grisette in the Latin quarter and was addressed to her sister, a humble dressmaker; but it is not my fault if circumstances bring all classes together and if the tide of revolution in our days so often bears the masses into the presence of Royalty.

The address read as follows:

“To Mademoiselle Louise Dupuy, at Madame Xavier’s, dressmaker, Nevski Prospect, near the Armenian Church, in front of the Bazaar.”

You can guess the style of writing and spelling.

I looked forward with pleasure to delivering this letter personally. At eight hundred leagues distance from France, it is always delightful to see a young and pretty Frenchwoman, and I knew that Louise was young and pretty; besides she was well acquainted with St. Petersburg, having lived there for the last four years and might be able to give me some useful hints for my business.

As I could not very well call upon her at seven o’clock in the morning, I decided to take a stroll round the city and return to the Nevski Prospect about five in the afternoon.

I rang the bell; and a valet made his appearance. The valets are both servants and cicerones; they black your boots and show you palaces. I immediately despatched him on the first duty; as for the second, I knew my St. Petersburg as well as he, having made a study of it beforehand.

CHAPTER III

I HAD not taken the trouble to order a I carriage, as I had done in the case of a boat the previous evening; for though I had been in St. Petersburg only a short time, I had not failed to notice the stands for post chaises and droskys at every street corner.

Scarcely had I crossed the Admiralty Square on my way to the Alexander Column, and made a sign that I wanted a carriage, before I found myself surrounded by coachmen, who made the most seductive offers in their eagerness for a customer. As there is no authorised tariff I was anxious to see how far down the scale they would bid; they drew the line at five roubles. For five roubles I engaged the driver of a drosky for the whole day and ordered him to take me to the Crimean Palace.

These drivers or coachmen are as a rule serfs, who, by the agency of certain services, rendered to their masters, have purchased the right to try and make a fortune on their own account in St. Petersburg.

The vehicle they employ in the pursuit of the capricious goddess is a kind of four wheeled sledge fitted with a seat running lengthways instead of across, so that the passengers do not sit as in our tilburies, but astride like the children on their hobby horses in the Champs Elysées. The contrivance is drawn by a horse just as wild and unkempt as his master, who, like him, has left his native steppes to dash up and down, this way and that, about the streets of St. Petersburg. The *ivostchik* or driver displays quite a paternal affection for his horse and rather than beat him, as is the custom with our cabmen, addresses him in more endearing terms than the Spanish muleteer devotes to his smartest steed. He calls him father, uncle, little pigeon; he improvises songs in his honour and composes both the air and the words and as a recompense for the hard fate he experiences in this world, promises him a future of untold bliss, which would well content the most exacting mortal. Thus the wretched animal, susceptible to flattery or implicitly believing in the fellow’s promises, hammers out its life, hardly ever out of harness and taking a hasty meal at one of the troughs placed in the streets for this purpose. So much for the drosky and its steed.

As for the driver, in one respect he bears a resemblance to the Lazzaroni of Naples. There is no occasion to learn his language to make him understand you, so marvellously can his keen wits fathom your thoughts. He sits on a little perch between his employer and the horse, with his number slung round his neck and hanging between his shoulders, so that the passenger, with the number always in view, can seize it if he has any cause for dissatisfaction.

The number is then forwarded to the Police with a complaint and the coachman is nearly always punished. Though rarely necessary, this precaution is not always without its uses, as you shall see, for the account of a mishap which occurred at Moscow during the winter of 1825 was still circulating through the streets of St. Petersburg.

Madame L., a French lady, happened to be paying a visit at some distance from her home one evening rather late. As she did not wish to return on foot, although her hostess offered her the escort of a servant, a carriage was called. Unfortunately there were only seven droskys in the square; one was brought; she got in, gave her address and started. The sparkling of a gold chain and some diamond earrings caught the attention of the driver, who also noticed that Madame L. was wrapped in a magnificent fur mantle. Profiting by the darkness of the night, the deserted state of the streets and the abstraction of Madame L., who sat enveloped in her mantle to keep out the cold and let the man drive on without noticing the direction in which they were going, he diverged from the proper route and had already got beyond the outskirts of the city, when Madame L. suddenly lifted her cloak and discovered that she was in the country. She instantly calls out, then shouts, but seeing that the driver, far from stopping, only urges on his horse the faster, she catches hold of the plate on which his number was engraved and keeping possession of it threatens to take it next day to the Police Station unless he at once drives her to her house. Whether the coachman had reached the scene of his premeditated plot or whether he feared that Madame L.’s determination would not allow him to accomplish his purpose, he suddenly leaps from his seat and lands on one side of the carriage. Luckily Madame L., who was careful to retain her hold on the incriminating plate, jumps to the other side, and forcing her way through a garden gate, which stood half open in front of her, she bursts into an enclosure full of wooden crosses and at once perceives that she is in a cemetery.

In hot pursuit follows the coachman with renewed ardour; for it is no longer a question of enriching himself by the theft of the furs and the diamonds, it is a matter of life and death. Fortunately Madame L. is a few paces ahead, and the night is dark, so that at a very short distance she is lost to sight. Suddenly the earth gives way beneath the fugitive, she appears to be engulfed, she has fallen into an open grave prepared overnight for a funeral. In a flash she perceives that this grave may be a refuge capable of baffling the pursuit of the assassin, so she utters no sound, not even a murmur. The coachman catches sight of her disappearing like a ghost and rushes past the grave, ever on the pursuit, Madame L. is saved.

For a good part of the night the driver prowled round the cemetery, for he could not dismiss the hope of recovering what is equivalent to his life. At first he tried to frighten her by appalling threats, then he attempted to move her by his supplications, swearing by all the saints that if she would only give him back his tablet, he would drive her to her house without doing her the least injury; but Madame L. was proof against every threat, every blandishment, and remained at the bottom of the pit, silent and motionless, like the corpse whose place she occupied.

The night was now far advanced and the coachman was forced to leave the cemetery and fly. Madame L. remained in her hiding place till daybreak; two hours after she had extricated herself, the tablet was in the hands of the Police, and her tale was told. For three days the criminal found an asylum in the forests surrounding Moscow. At length, overcome by cold and hunger, he sought refuge in a little village, but his number and a description of him had been notified throughout the district; he was recognised, arrested, punished with the knout and banished to the mines.

However, such incidents are rare; the native Russian is naturally well-disposed, and probably there is no capital where crimes, done for gain or vengeance, are rarer than in Saint Petersburg. More than this; although very prone to theft, the *mujik* has a horror of breaking open anything, and you might, with the utmost confidence, entrust a sealed letter, full of banknotes, to a lacquey or a coachman, even though he knew what it contained, while it would be rash to let a few almost worthless coins lie loose within his reach.

I do not know if my driver was a thief, but to a certainty he was terribly afraid of being robbed, for no sooner had we driven up to the Crimean Palace, than he let me know, that as the Palace had two entrances, he would be much obliged if I would pay him something in advance towards the six roubles, in settlement of the journey we had just accomplished. In Paris I should have reprimanded him for his insolent request; but in St. Petersburg I only laughed, for the same thing had happened to much greater personages than myself, without any offence being taken. As a matter of fact, two months previously, the Emperor Alexander, seeing a shaver imminent, when out for a walk, as his custom was, hailed a drosky in the street and told the man to drive to the Imperial Palace. When alighting he felt in his pocket, and finding he had no money, said to the coachman:

"Wait here and I will send you your fare."

"Ah!" said the driver, "I was expecting that."

"What's that?" demanded the astonished Emperor.

"Oh! I know what I'm saying."

"Well, what is it you say?"

"I say that everyone, whom I drive to a house with two doors, and who gets out without paying me, is a swindle and I never see him again."

"What! even in front of the Emperor's Palace?"

"More often there than anywhere. Gentlemen have very short memories."

"Why don't you lodge a complaint and have the thieves arrested?" said Alexander, who was greatly amused at the conversation.

"Arrest a nobleman! Your Excellency knows it is quite impossible. With one of us it would be a simple matter," added the coachman pointing to his head, "for we can be easily identified, but with you clean shaved gentlemen it is simply impossible. Now, Sir, search in your pockets and I am sure you will find the wherewithal to pay me."

"Listen," said the Emperor, "here is my cloak, it is well worth the fare, is it not? Keep it and give it back to the person who brings you the money."

"Oh! all right," said the driver, "that's a bargain anyhow."

A few minutes later the Emperor redeemed his pledge by sending out a note for a hundred roubles.

Thus did he settle the account of himself and his guests.

As such an act of liberality was beyond my means, I contented myself with handing my driver five roubles or a day's wages, only too glad to prove that I had more confidence in him than he in me. It is true I knew his number and he did not know my name.

The Crimean Palace, with its magnificent furniture, marble statues, and lakes of gold and silver fish, was a gift of the favourite Potemkin to his powerful and famous sovereign Catherine II., to celebrate the conquest of the country whose name it bears; but the curious part of it is not so much the ostentation of the donor as the marvellous way in which he kept his secret. A prodigy was erected in her capital and she knew nothing about it, so that one evening when the Minister invited the Empress to a fête, which he intended to give in her honour, in some damp meadows, which she knew very well, she found a Palace, resplendent with lights, resounding with music, and embellished with flowers, a Palace which might well have been built by the fairies.

This same Potemkin was the typical upstart Prince, just as Catherine II. was the model for all women suddenly called to the throne; the one was simply a non-commissioned officer, the other an insignificant German princess, and yet if all the hereditary princes and all the kings of this epoch are drawn up in review, these two will stand out as conspicuously great even among the great ones.

A strange fate or perhaps we should say the designs of providence drew them together.

Catherine was a beautiful woman of thirty-three, beloved for her graciousness and respected for her piety, when she suddenly heard that Peter III. wished to divorce her and marry the Countess Voronsov, and as an excuse for such an act, he intended to declare that Paul Petrovitch was illegitimate. She realizes that not a moment must be lost; leaves the Peterhoff Castle at eleven o’clock at night, clambers into a country cart, without betraying her identity to the driver, reaches St. Petersburg at daybreak, collects her most trustworthy friends, puts herself at their head, and parades in front of the troops garrisoned at the capital, who have been assembled in ignorance of the event. Catherine addresses them, appealing to their gallantry as men and their loyalty as soldiers, then taking immediate advantage of the effect produced by her harangue, she draws a sword, throwing away the scabbard, and asking a dragoon to tie it to her arm. A young non-commissioned officer steps out of the ranks, approaches her and offers her his own; Catherine accepts the gift with the sweet smile befitting one in search of a kingdom. The young officer then attempts to regain the ranks, but his horse, accustomed to the squadron refuses to obey, rears, prances, and persists in remaining by the side of the Empress’s charger. Then the Empress looks at the young man who is pressing against her and in his unavailing efforts to withdraw from her presence she sees the hand of

Providence pointing out a protector. She immediately promotes him and a week later when Peter III. has been captured and resigned the crown he wished to wrest from her, while she reigns in his stead, Potemkin is remembered and appointed gentleman of the Bedchamber in the Imperial Palace.

From that day the favourite's good luck increased by leaps and bounds. Many attacks were made upon it only to meet with defeat. One individual thought he had succeeded; a certain young Servian called Zoritsch, a protégé of Potemkin himself, and admitted by him into Catherine's household, took advantage of his benefactor's absence to bring about his ruin by slandering him. Thereupon Potemkin, who had got wind of the affair, hurries back, repairs to his old room in the palace, and there learns that he is utterly disgraced and exiled. Potemkin in an instant and without waiting to brush his soiled travelling dress, rushes to the Empress's quarter.

At the door of her apartment a young orderly attempts to stop him, Poteinkin seizes hold of him, lifts him from the floor and flings him to the other end of the room, enters Catherine's boudoir and a quarter of an hour later emerges with a paper in his hand.

"Here, sir," said he to the young lieutenant, "is a Captain's commission which I have just obtained for you from her Majesty."

On the morrow Zoritsch was exiled to the town of Shklov, over which his generous rival appointed him in supreme command.

As for Potemkin, he dreamed one moment of the Duchy of Courland and the next of the throne of Poland, then he wearied of all such ideas and contented himself with providing fêtes for kings and palaces for queens. Besides, could a crown have made him more powerful or more magnificent than he was already? Did not the courtiers adore him as an Emperor? Had he not on his left hand (for his right he kept bare the better to grasp his sword) as many diamonds as adorned the crown. Had he not agents to supply him with sturgeon from the Volga, water melons from Astrakan, grapes from the Crimea, bouquets from every region where beautiful flowers grew, and did he not present to his royal Mistress, among other gifts each of them the earliest crop of the season, a dish of cherries said to have cost ten thousand roubles.

Potemkin had in his employ an officer called Faucher, who spent his whole existence in posting from one end of the kingdom to the other on such errands. Foreseeing that he would probably break his neck on one of these expeditions he had composed in advance the following epitaph on himself.

“Ci-gît, Faucher, (Here lies Fauchee!)

Fouette, Cocher!” (Whip up, Coachee.)

At one moment an angel, at another a demon, Potemkin was for ever creating or destroying, and when he was doing neither, he threw everything into confusion only to put it straight again; no one could make any show except when he was absent and when he reappeared all faded into insignificance before him. The Prince de Ligne used to describe him as a conglomeration of the gigantic, the romantic and the barbaric, and the Prince was right.

His death was as strange as his life and the end as unexpected as the beginning. He had just spent a year at St. Petersburg in the midst of fêtes and orgies, considering that he had acquired enough glory for himself and Catherine by extending the boundaries of Russia as far as the Caucasus, when he suddenly learns that old Reptnin, taking advantage of his absence to beat the Turks and force them to petition for peace, has accomplished more in two months than he himself in three years.

From that moment all is confusion; he is ill, it is true, but no matter he must set out at once. He will fight against disease and master it. He reaches Jassy his capital and starts for Otchakov the scene of his triumphs. After travelling for a few versts he feels suffocated in his carriage; his cloak is spread out on the turf and he lies down, only to breath his last by the roadside.

Catherine nearly died at the news. Everything, almost life itself, appeared to be shared in common by these two great souls; she fainted three times, wept copiously and ever afterwards mourned for him.

The Crimean Palace, the residence at the time of my visit of the Grand Duke Michael, was occupied for a short visit by Queen Louise, the Modern Amazon, who dreamt for one moment of subduing her conqueror.

For Napoleon, the first time he saw her, exclaimed, “Madam, I had often heard that you were the most beautiful of queens, but I did not expect to find you! the most beautiful of women.” Unfortunately the gallantry of the Corsican hero was not of long duration.

One day Queen Louise was toying with a rose:

"Give me that rose," said Napoleon.

"Give me Magdeburg," answered the queen.

"My faith no," replied the Emperor, "it would be too dear at the price."

The queen, greatly piqued, threw away the rose; but she did not get Magdeburg.

After leaving the Crimean Palace, I continued my walk, crossing the Troitskoï bridge, to inspect Peter the Great's hut, that rough Imperial jewel, whose casket only had I seen the previous evening.

The veneration of a nation has preserved this monument in all its original simplicity, the dining-room, saloon, and bedroom appear to be awaiting the return of the Czar. In the yard is the little boat entirely built by the carpenter of Saardam in which he was wont to row over the Neva to the various parts of the new born city which required his presence.

Near this abode of a few days is his eternal resting place. His mortal remains, like those of his descendants, repose in the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul situated within the Fortress. His Church, though its golden spire gives one a false idea of its height, is in reality quite small, very irregular in shape and in bad taste; it is in nowise noteworthy, its sole claim to distinction lying in the monument it guards. The Czar's tomb is near the door on the right side; from the roof hang more than seven hundred flags captured from the Turks, Swedes and Persians.

I crossed the Tiutchkov bridge to the Island of Vasilievskooï. The chief objects of interest in this quarter are the Exchange and the Academies. I merely passed along in front of them and taking the Isaac bridge and the Street of the Resurrection, I found my way to the Fontalka Canal and traversed the quay as far as the Catholic Church; there I halted, as I wanted to see Moreau's tomb. It is a plain slab in front of the altar in the middle of the chancel.

As I was in the neighbourhood I thought I would visit the Kasan Church, which is the Notre Dame of St. Petersburg. I entered by the double colonnade modelled on Saint Peter's, Rome. Here I was disappointed and my expectations were not realised. The exterior is nothing but brick and plaster; while the inside is a medley of bronze, marble and granite; the doors are of brass or solid silver, the floors of jasper and the walls of marble.

I was surfeited with my day’s sight seeing, so directed my steps to the famous Madame Xavier’s, that I might deliver the letter entrusted to me to my fair fellow country woman. I found she had left the establishment six months ago, and was informed by her late employer in a very stiff manner that she had set up for herself between the Moika Canal and the Orgelot Bazaar. I had no difficulty in finding the place, for Orgelot’s is the Bon Marché of St. Petersburg.

Ten minutes later I was at the shop door. I decided that I would dine at a restaurant opposite, as I noticed it was kept by a Frenchman; so dismissing the drosky I entered the establishment and asked for Mademoiselle Louise Dupuy.

One of the shop girls enquired if I wished to make a purchase or had come on private business. On my answering that I should like to have a personal interview, the girl at once conducted me to Mademoiselle’s apartment.

CHAPTER IV

I WAS shown into a boudoir hung all round with Oriental tapestry and there I found my fellow country woman, stretched at her ease and reading a novel. At sight of me she sprang up with the exclamation: — ” Ah! you are a Frenchman!”

I excused myself for interrupting her siesta, but as I had reached the capital only the evening before, perhaps she would excuse my ignorance of the universal custom; then I handed her the letter.

“It’s from my sister,” she cried; “darling Rose, how delighted I am to hear from her. Do you know her? is she still in good spirits and pretty?”

“I can answer for her prettiness and I trust she is in good spirits, but I have only seen her once, the letter was forwarded to me by one of my friends.”

“M. Auguste, was it not?”

“Yes.”

“My poor little sister must be very happy now; I recently sent her some splendid dress materials and something else besides. I invited her to come and live with me, but...”

“But, what?”

“It meant leaving M. Auguste and she refused. Won’t you sit down?”

I was about to take a chair when she beckoned to me to come and sit by her. I accepted the invitation very readily and while she was reading the letter I took the opportunity of examining her.

Women possess the marvellous faculty which is not shared by any other creature, of being able to transform themselves, so to say. I was contemplating a simple grisette from the Rue de la Harpe; four years ago, no doubt, this grisette spent her Sundays in dancing at the Prado or the Chaumière. Well now the girl is taken and just transported like a plant to a fresh country, and lo! here she I is flourishing in the midst of luxury and fashion as if it were her native soil! Yet familiar though I am with the manners and customs of that stratum of the amiable if not very refined class of society to which she originally belonged I cannot find the smallest trace of her humble origin or defective education. The change was so complete, that at sight of this pretty girl, with her hair arranged in the English fashion, her simple wrapper of white muslin, and her little Turkish slippers, reclining in just the elegant attitude an artist painting her portrait would have posed her in, I might have fancied myself in some smart boudoir of the aristocratic Faubourg Saint Germain, while in reality I was only in the private room behind a modiste’s shop.

“Well, what’s the matter?” said Louise, who had finished perusing the letter, and felt somewhat embarrassed at my close scrutiny.

“I am looking at you and thinking.”

“What are your thoughts.”

“I am thinking that if Rose had come, instead of remaining faithful to Monsieur Auguste; if she could have been suddenly transported by some magic power into the middle of this charming boudoir; if she could find herself before you now as I am, instead of throwing herself into the arms of her sister, she would fall on her knees as if in the presence of a queen.”

“Your praise is too extravagant,” replied Louise with a smile, “yet there is some truth in it; yes,” she added with a sigh, “yes, I am greatly changed.”

“Madam,” said a shop girl coming in, “the Gossudarina wants a hat like the one you sold yesterday to the Princess Dolgorouki.”

“Has she come herself?”

“Yes, Madam.”

“Take her to the showroom, I will be there in a moment.”

The girl left us.

“This would remind Rose,” continued Louise, “that after all I am nothing but a poor dressmaker. But if you would like to see a transformation still more remarkable than mine,” she added, “lift this curtain and watch through the glass door.”

With these words, she entered the showroom, leaving me alone. Taking advantage of the permission accorded me, I raised the curtain and glued my eyes to a corner of the window pane.

The lady who had been announced as the Gossudarina was a fine looking woman of twenty-two or twenty-three, evidently of Asiatic origin, and with her neck, ears and fingers loaded with ornaments, diamonds and rings. She came in leaning on a young serf’s shoulder, apparently unable to endure the fatigue of walking across the soft carpets which covered the floor, dropped into the sofa nearest the door, while the girl revived her by waving a fan. On seeing Louise she beckoned her to approach with a most nonchalant air, and in atrocious French ordered her to submit for her inspection the smartest and especially the most expensive hats in the shop. Louise hastened to bring in the very best of her stock; the Gossudarina tried on all the hats in turn, looking at herself in a mirror which her attendant on her knees held before her, but none of them would satisfy her, for not one exactly resembled the hat bought by the Princess Dolgorouki. So it was necessary to promise that one should be trimmed to the identical pattern. Unfortunately the haughty beauty wanted the hat that very day and with this expectation she had taken all this trouble. So, in spite of all protestations, she insisted that it should be sent to her early the next morning though this was only possible by working at it all night.

Satisfied by this promise, which Louise could be relied on to keep, the Gossudarina rose, and slowly walked out with the assistance of her attendant, warning Louise that if the hat did not make its appearance, she would die of vexation. Louise conducted her to the door and then came back to look for me.

"Well!" said she with a smile, "What do you think of the woman? Eh!"

"She is certainly very pretty."

"That is not what I mean; I want to know what station in life you think she holds.'; "Well, if I saw her in Paris, with her ultra-fashionable clothes and her upstart manners, I should imagine her to be a retired ballet dancer and mistress of some English Lord."

"That is not bad for a beginner," said Louise, "and you have almost guessed the truth. The beautiful lady whose feet are almost too tender to tread upon a Persian carpet, was formerly a Georgian slave and is now the mistress of M. Naravitchev, the favourite Minister of the Emperor. This transformation took place barely four years ago and already poor Machinka has forgotten her former condition or rather she recalls it so well, that, except for the hours she devotes to her toilet the rest of her time is spent in tormenting her former comrades, to whom she has become a veritable terror. The other slaves, not daring to call her by her old name Machinka, have named her the Gossudarina, which is practically the same as *Madam*. You heard her announced as such to me. In conclusion I will mention an instance of this upstart creature's cruelty. It happened lately that not being able to find a pin-cushion in which to put a pin while she was undressing, she drove it into the breast of a wretched serf girl, who was doing duty as lady’s maid. Fortunately the affair made so much stir that it reached the Emperor’s ears.”

“And what happened?” I ejaculated.

“He gave the slave her freedom, married her to a peasant and warned the Minister that if his favourite repeated any such performance he would send her to Siberia.”

“Had it the desired effect?”

“Yes. I have not heard anything against her for some time past. But, come, I and my affairs are monopolizing the conversation; let us hear your news. May I claim to know as a compatriot what has brought you to St. Petersburg. Perhaps, as I have been in residence here for the last three years, I may be able to help you with some advice.”

“I rather doubt it, but no matter. Since you have heard enough to take an interest in me, I may as well say that I am here in the capacity of a fencing master. Is there much duelling in St. Petersburg?”

“No, because duels almost always end fatally. Since there is an almost certain prospect of Siberia both for principals and seconds, they only fight when matters are really serious and the issue must be fought to the death. However you will have plenty of pupils; but I can give you one piece of advice.”

“What is that?”

“Try to obtain from the Emperor a nomination as fencing-master of some regiment; that will give you a military footing, for of course you are aware that uniform is everything here.”

“Very good advice, but easier to give than to follow.”

“Why so?”

“How can I obtain an audience of the Emperor? I am without any interest in this city.”

“I will think about that.”

“*You* will?”

“Are you surprised?” said Louise with a smile.

“No, Madam, nothing can astonish me as regards yourself, and you are charming enough to realize all you undertake. Only I have done nothing to deserve such consideration.

“You have done nothing? Are you not a fellow countryman? Have you not brought me a letter from my darling Rose? have you not, by reminding me of my beloved Paris, given me one of the pleasantest hours that I have yet spent in St. Petersburg. I hope I shall see you again.”

“You mean that?”

“When?”

“To-morrow, if you will allow me.”

“Yes, at the same hour, I can spare more time then for a good chat.”

“Very good, to-morrow at the same hour.”

I left Louise, enchanted with her, and already feeling that I was no longer alone in St. Petersburg. Rather a precarious prop it is true, to be dependent on a young girl without influence, as she seemed to be, but there is something so sweet in the friendship ‘of a woman that the first feeling to which it gives birth is hope.

I dined at a restaurant opposite Louise’s shop, kept by a Frenchman called Talon, but without the least desire to speak to any of my fellow countrymen, who betray their origin wherever they may be by their high-pitched voices and their marvellous facility for discussing their private affairs out loud. Besides my own thoughts were quite enough for me and I should have resented any conversation as an attempt to deprive me of my dreams.

As on the previous evening I hired a two-oared gondola, and spent the night reclining on my cloak, intoxicated with the sweet music of the horns, and never weary of counting the numbers of the stars.

Again I returned at two o’clock in the morning and slept till seven. As I wanted to make a clean sweep of the sights of St. Petersburg in order to direct more time to my own affairs, I ordered my valet to engage a drosky on the same terms as before and I started to visit all that remained for me to see, — from the Monastery of St. Alexander Nevski, with its silver tomb on which are life-size figures in the attitude of prayer, to the Academy of Science, famed for its collection of minerals, the globe of Gottorp presented by Frederick IV. King of Denmark to Peter the Great, and the mammoth, coeval with the deluge, found in the glaciers of the White Sea by Michael Adam the explorer.

Everything was very interesting, yet none the less I kept looking at my watch every few minutes to see if it was time to pay my visit to Louise.

At length as four o’clock approached, I could restrain myself no longer; I told the man to drive to the Nevski Prospect where I thought I would take a stroll till five. But opposite the Catherine canal, it was impossible for my drosky to move, so great was the press of people. Crowds are so rare in St. Petersburg, that, as I had nearly reached my destination I paid my driver and leapt to the ground mingling with the swarm of sight-seers. It appeared that a thief who had just been arrested by Monsieur Gorgoli, the chief of the Police, was being escorted to prison. The strange circumstances which accompanied the theft accounted for the curiosity of the crowd.

Although M. Gorgoli, one of the handsomest men in the capital, and one of the bravest generals in the army, was of an unusually distinguished appearance, fate had decreed that one of the cleverest swindlers in St. Petersburg should bear him a close resemblance. The rascal determined to make the most of the striking likeness; so, to make the similarity more complete, our Sosia dons the uniform of a Major-General, wraps himself in a gray cloak with a high collar, prepares a drosky exactly like the one M. Gorgoli is accustomed to use, completes the resemblance by hiring a pair of horses of the same colour and having himself driven by a coachman dressed exactly like the General's, pulls up at a rich tradesman's in a principal street, then hurrying into the establishment he addresses the shopkeeper as follows: —

"Sir, you know me, of course, I am General Gorgoli, the head of the Police."

"Yes, your Excellency."

"Well, at the present moment, a very important business transaction necessitates the sum of 25,000 roubles in hard cash; it is too far to go back to the office, for the least delay may spoil everything. Lend me 25,000 roubles, I beg, and come to-morrow morning to my house for repayment."

"Your Excellency," cried the tradesman, only too pleased to render such a service, "with the greatest pleasure in the world; will you have more?"

"Well, make it thirty thousand."

"There you are, Sir."

"Thanks, nine o'clock to-morrow at my house." So saying he jumps into his drosky and gallops off in the direction of the summer garden.

On the morrow the merchant presents himself at M. Gorgoli's, who receives him with his customary politeness, and since his guest seems in no hurry to explain his visit, he asks him what he wants.

This question disconcerts the tradesman, who, in addition, now that he examines the General close at hand, fancies he detects some differences between him and the individual who presented himself in his name the day before. A moment later he cries out, “Your Excellency, I have been robbed.” And then he recounts the audacious trick by which he had been victimized. M. Gorgoli listens without interrupting; but when he has finished, the General calls for his gray coat and orders his chestnut horse to be put in the drosky, then having received a further detailed account of the affair, he invites the merchant to wait for him at his house, while he gives chase to the thief.

M. Gorgoli drives to the street indicated, starts from the tradesman’s shop, follows the direction taken by the thief, and hailing a butchnick (a police officer guarding the road), says: —

“Yesterday I drove past here at three o’clock in the afternoon, did you see me?”

“Yes, your Excellency.”

“Which way did I go?”

“In the direction of the Troitskoï bridge.”

“Quite right.”

Then the General hurries on towards the bridge and hails the sentinel guarding its approach.

“I drove past here at ten minutes past three yesterday; you saw me?”

“Yes, your Excellency.”

“Which way did I go?”

“Your Excellency crossed the bridge.”

“Quite so.”

On reaching the other end of the bridge he stops before the cabin of Peter the Great. The sentry who was in his box rushes out.

“I drove past here at half-past three yesterday,” said the General.

“Yes, your Excellency.”

“Did you notice where I went?”

“To the Viborg quarter.”

“Right.”

M. Gorgoli continues his quest, resolved to follow the clue to the bitter end. At the corner of the Military hospital he comes across another sentry and cross-questions him. It seems that he went in the direction of the spirit warehouses. The General follows, and leaving the spirit warehouses, crosses the Voskresenskoi’ bridge. From the bridge he makes a bee line for the end of the Grand Prospect; from the end of the Grand Prospect he proceeded as far as the last shop, near the Bank and Assignations Office. For the last time M. Gorgoli enquires of a sentry.

“I passed by this spot at half-past four yesterday?” said he.

“Yes, your Excellency.”

“Where did I go, then?”

“To No. 19 by the corner of the Catherine canal.”

“Did I go in?”

“Yes.”

“Did you see me come out again?”

“No.”

“Very well. Get another man to take your place, and go and look for a couple of soldiers in the nearest barracks.”

“Yes, your Excellency.”

The sentry runs off and returns in ten minutes with the two soldiers.

The General presents himself with his escort at No. 19, orders all the doors to be shut, questions the concierge, finds out that the man he is seeking for is lodging on the second floor, climbs the stairs, kicks down the door and finds himself face to face with his double, who, alarmed at the visit and suspecting its object, confesses everything and hands over the thirty thousand roubles.

Thus it is evident that St. Petersburg is not one whit less civilized than Paris.

This incident, in the dénoûement of which I was assisting caused me to lose or rather gain twenty minutes; it was now nearly twenty minutes to the time when Louise would be expecting me.

I set off. The nearer I approached her, the more violently my heart began to beat, and when at length I asked if she were in, my voice was trembling so that to make myself understood I had to repeat my question.

Louise was awaiting me in the boudoir.

CHAPTER V

WHEN she saw me enter she nodded a welcome with the graceful familiarity characteristic of Frenchwomen, then taking my hand she made me sit by her as on my previous visit.

“Well,” said she, “I have been looking after your business.”

“On! “I replied with an expression which caused her to smile. “Do not let us talk of me, but of you.”

“Of me? What has all this to do with me? Is it I who am on the look out for the post of fencing master in one of his Majesty’s regiments? Of me? What can you say about me?”

“I can say, that since yesterday you have made me the happiest of men, that since yesterday I can think of no one but you, that I have not slept a single moment, and that I thought the hour for seeing you once more would never come.”

“Why you are making me a formal declaration.”

“On my faith, take it as you like; I have said not only what I think, but what I can prove.”

“You are joking?”

“No, on my honour.”

“You are speaking seriously?”

“Quite seriously.”

“Well, since after all it is possible,” said Louise, “and since the avowal, though premature, is perhaps none the less sincere, it is my duty not to let you proceed farther.”

“Why so?”

“My dear compatriot, it is impossible that there can be anything but the noblest and purest friendship between us.”

“On what grounds?

“Because I have a fiancé; and my sister has already taught you that faithfulness is a vice in our family.”

“Well, I am unlucky.”

“No, you are not. If I had allowed the sentiment which you feel towards me to strike deeper roots, instead of tearing it up before it had time to reach your heart, you might have become so; but, thank God," added Louise with a smile, "no time has been lost and I hope that the disease has been checked before it has made any great strides."

"Let us say no more about it."

"On the contrary let us talk of it, for as you will meet here the man to whom I am engaged, it is important that you should know how I came to love him."

"I am grateful for so much confidence."

"You are huffed, and you are wrong. Come, give me your hand like a true friend."

I took the hand Louise extended, and as I certainly had no right to bear her any grudge! "You are true and loyal," said I.

"That is right."

"No doubt," acquiesced I, "it is some Prince?"

"No, I am not so ambitious as all that; to tell the truth he is only a Count."

"Ah! Rose, Rose," I cried, "do not come to St. Petersburg, or you will forget M. Auguste!"

"You are accusing me without having heard me," answered Louise, "and that is wrong of you; that is why I wanted to tell you everything, but you would not be a Frenchman if you had not already judged me."

"Happily your penchant for Russians makes me think that you are a trifle unjust towards your fellow countrymen."

"I am not unjust towards anyone, Sir; I make comparisons, that is all. Every nation has its faults, which it does not recognise, because they are part and parcel of its nature; but they stare other people in the face. No doubt our besetting sin is levity. A Russian who has received a visit from one of our fellow-countrymen never says to another Russian, — ' A Frenchman has been to see me.' He says, — 'A lunatic has been here.' There is no need to mention the nationality of the lunatic, everyone knows it is a Frenchman."

"Are the Russians then faultless?"

"Certainly not; but it is hardly for folks who claim their hospitality to note their defects."

"Thanks for the lesson."

"My goodness, it is not a lesson, it is a piece of advice. You have come with the intention of settling here, have you not? make friends then and not enemies."

"You are right, as always."

"I was just like you myself? did I not swear that not one of these fine gentlemen, so humble in the presence of the Czar, so unbearable towards their inferiors, would ever be anything to me? Well, I have broken my vow; beware lest you follow my example."

"And knowing your character, though I never saw you till yesterday, the struggle must have been a long one," said I to Louise.

"Yes it was, and not only that but tragic."

"You evidently expect my curiosity will get the better of my jealousy."

"I cannot say; I want you to learn the truth, that is all."

"Speak then, I am all attention."

"I was, as the superscription of Rose's letter must have informed you, at Madame Xavier's, the most famous dressmaker in St. Petersburg, who numbers among her customers the cream of society. Thanks to my youth, my reputation for beauty and especially my nationality, compliments and even proposals were not wanting, as you may suppose. Yet, I assure you that though the declarations and compliments were often accompanied by most brilliant promises, none of these made the least impression on me, and all were thrown into the fire. Eighteen months passed by."

"About two years ago a carriage drawn by four horses stopped in front of the shop; two young ladies, a young officer and a middle aged lady got out. The young man was a Lieutenant in the Horse Guards and quartered in St. Petersburg; but his mother and two sisters lived at Moscow. They were going to spend the three summer months together, and their first business on arriving was to pay a visit to Madame Javier, the great arbiter of fashion; no lady with any pretensions to smartness could enter society except under her tutelage. The two girls were charming; as for the youth, I hardly noticed him, though during his short visit he appeared to be much interested in me. When her shopping was finished, the lady gave me her address: — Countess Vaninkov, on the Fontalka canal.

"Next day the young man came alone; he wanted to know if we had taken in hand the orders left by his mother and sisters, and he made a point of speaking to me, asking me to change the colour of a ribbon.

"The same evening I received a letter signed Alexis Vaninkov; needless to say it contained a declaration, like all similar epistles; but I detected an air of refinement about it. No promise was made; though hopeful that he would win my heart, he did not propose to purchase it.

“There are certain occasions when an over display of modesty appears ridiculous; if I had been a young lady of birth, I should have returned Count Alexis his letter unread. Being nothing but a poor grisette I first read the letter, then burnt it.

“Next day the Count called again; his sisters and mother wanted some hats and left the selection to him. Just as he entered I took the opportunity of slipping into Madame Xavier’s room, and did not return to the shop until he had left.

“In the evening I received another letter. The writer said he had still one hope — that I had not received his earlier note. Like the previous one, I left it unanswered.

“On the morrow I received a third note. I was struck by the tone of this one, so different from the others. From the first line to the last it was impressed with a trait of melancholy — not as I expected the irritability of a child who clamours in vain for a toy, but rather the despair of a man who abandons his last hope.

“He had made up his mind, if his letter were unanswered, that he would ask for leave from the Emperor and spend the next four months with his mother and sisters in Moscow. My silence left him free to do as he thought proper. Six weeks later I received a letter dated from Moscow and containing these words: —

“‘I am on the point of embarking on an insane enterprise, which will take me out of myself, and perhaps endanger not only my future but even my present existence. Send me word that the time may come when you will love me; thus will my life be enlightened by a ray of hope and I will remain unfettered.’

“I imagined that this letter had been written with the idea of frightening me and, like the others, it was never answered.

“After an interval of four months, the following came to hand: — ’ I am returning at once, my first thought is for you. I love you as much, nay, even more than when I left you. You can no longer save my life, but you may be able to make me love it.’

“His persistence, the mystery concealed in the last two letters, the tone of sadness which pervaded them, determined me to send an answer, not indeed by a letter such as the Count was doubtless hoping for, but with a few words of consolation, and yet I concluded by telling him that I did not love him and never should love him.

"'It seems strange to you,' interrupted Louise, 'and I see you smile; virtue appears to you inconsistent with poverty. Remember it was with me a matter of education too. My poor mother, left an Officer's widow, without any means, had reared Rose and me very carefully. When sixteen years old we lost her and with her the tiny pension, our only source of livelihood. My sister became a florist and I a dressmaker. My sister fell in love with your friend and yielded to him.

"I impute no crime to her; I think it quite right to bestow one's person where the heart is already given. But I had not yet met the man I could love and as you see I posed as an innocent woman without really meriting the distinction.

"Meanwhile New Year's day came round. Among the Russians New Year's day is a great holiday You have not seen one yet but you will very shortly. For this day at least, the nobleman and the peasant, the princess and the dressmaker, the general and the private, fraternise. The Czar welcomes his subjects; twenty-five thousand invitations are distributed more or less by chance through the streets of St. Petersburg.

"At nine in the evening the Winter Palace is thrown open and the twenty-five thousand guests pour through the saloons of the Imperial residence, which for the remainder of the year is barred to all but the aristocracy. The men appear in dominos or fancy dress; the women in their ordinary costumes.

"Madame Xavier had given us tickets, so we decided to make up a party for the Palace. Such a party was quite practicable, for incredible though it may sound, in spite of the immense crowd there was no disorder, not an insult, not even a theft, though one might search in vain for a soldier.

The respect inspired by the Emperor extends to all classes and the most modest girl is as safe there as in her mother's bedroom.

"We had arrived about half an hour and were so crowded in the White Drawing room, that we did not think it possible it could contain another soul, when suddenly the orchestras in every room struck up the Polonaise. Loud cries of 'The Emperor, the Emperor,' were heard on all sides. His Majesty appeared in the doorway, leading the dance with the English Ambassadress and followed by the whole Court.

"Everyone presses forward, then the crowd gives way and is divided by a clear space ten feet wide; the throng of dancers sweep along, — a torrent of diamonds, feathers, velvet and perfume. The cortège once past, everyone pushes, struggles and presses forward. Cut off from my two companions, I try in vain to join them. I catch a momentary glimpse of them borne away by the crowd, and almost immediately I lose sight of them. In vain I search for them; I cannot pierce the human wall which separates us, and I am left alone in the midst of twenty-five thousand people.

"At this supreme moment when utterly distracted I was about to seek protection from the first man I met, a domino approached me and I recognized Alexis.

"'What, alone? 'said he.

"'Oh! It is you, Count,' I cried seizing his arm, so terribly frightened was I at finding myself alone in such a crowd. 'I beg you to take me away and order a carriage that I may go home.'

"'Allow me to escort you there and I shall be grateful to fortune for granting me more than all my solicitations have procured.'

"'No, I beg you, a public conveyance'

"'It is impossible to procure a public conveyance at this time of night, everyone is arriving, none departing. Stay for an hour at least.'

"'No, I want to go.'

"'Then make use of my sleigh, I will get my people to escort you and since you do not wish to see me, well, you will not see me.'

"'My goodness! I would rather'

"'Listen, you must take one of these alternatives, either stay here, or accept my sleigh, for I presume you are not thinking of walking, seeing you are alone and considering how cold it is.'

"'Very well, take me to your carriage.'

"Alexis at once obeyed. However there was such a throng of people that we were more than an hour in getting to the door which opened on to the Admiralty Square. The Count summoned his servants and the next minute a stylish looking sleigh, which was in reality nothing but the framework of a closed coupé drew up before the door.

"I got in immediately giving Madame Xavier's address; the Count took my hand and kissed it, shut the door, uttered a few polite words in Russian and I was whirled away.

"A moment later the horses seemed to double their speed and the driver attempted to check them in vain; I tried to cry out, but my shouts were drowned by those of the coachman. I attempted to open the door, but behind the glass there was a kind of blind and I could not find the spring. After further useless attempts I fell exhausted on the seat of the carriage, convinced that the horses had run away and that we should be dashed to pieces at the corner of the street.

“At the end of a quarter-of-an-hour however they pulled up, the door was opened and I was so distracted that I threw myself out of the carriage; but, now that all danger was over, my legs gave way beneath me and I thought I was going to be ill.

“At this supreme moment, a shawl was thrown over my head and I felt myself being laid on a couch. With an effort I got rid of the covering and found myself in a strange room with Count Alexis standing near me.

“‘You have deceived me,’ I cried, ‘this is scandalous, sir,’

‘Pardon me,’ said he. ‘If I had allowed this opportunity to escape me, I should never have obtained another. For one moment at least in my life I shall be able to tell you’

“You shall tell me nothing, Count,’ I cried jumping up, ‘and you are going to order them to take me home immediately, or you are no gentleman.’

“‘Give me a single hour, in the name of Heaven, to talk to you, to look at you. It is so long since I spoke to you or saw you.’

“‘Not a minute, not a second. Understand, you are to let me go at once, this instant.’

“‘Will neither my adoration, nor my love, nor my prayers’

“‘No, no, no!’

“‘Then listen to me. I see that you do not love me, that you never will love me. Your letter gave me a faint hope, but your letter has deceived me; well and good, you condemn me, I accept the verdict. I ask for five minutes only; if at the end of five minutes you demand your liberty you shall have it.’

“‘You swear that I shall be free at the end of five minutes.’

“‘I swear it.’

“‘Then, speak,’

“‘I am rich, Louise, I am of noble birth, I have a mother who adores me and two sisters devoted to me; from my childhood I have been waited upon by servants eager to obey my slightest wish and yet in spite of everything I am stricken with the disease which victimises so many of my countrymen; an old man at twenty, for having obtained my majority too young, I am tired of everything, sick of life, bowed to death.’

"'This disease has become the Nemesis of my life, no balls, no festivities, no illusions, no pleasures can tear down the leaden pall which separates me from the world. War with its intoxications, its dangers, its fatigues, might have some effect on my mind possibly, but the whole of Europe is wrapt in a profound slumber and there is no Napoleon now to awaken it.'

"'I was weary of everything and was about to set out on my travels when I caught sight of you. and I don't mind confessing that my first feeling for you was little more than a whim; I wrote to you, supposing that I had merely to write for you to yield. Contrary to my expectation, you gave no answer; I wrote again, for your silence piqued me; what I took at first for a mere ephemeral fancy, had developed into real and lasting love. I did not attempt to combat the feeling, for fighting against myself merely weakens and depresses me. I wrote to you that I was leaving and I left.

"'Once more at Moscow I hunted up my old comrades; they found me gloomy, unsettled, bored, and credited me with ideals to which I could lay no claim. They thought I was chafing under the yoke which oppresses all of us, they mistook my protracted reveries for philosophical reflections; they pondered over my speeches and my intervals of silence; then supposing that my sadness concealed some deep secret, they took this secret to be the love of liberty and offered to let me join in a conspiracy against the Emperor.'

"'Great Heavens! 'I cried in dismay, 'of course you refused?'

"'I wrote to you; my answer to them depended on this last chance; if you loved me, my life would no longer be my own but yours and I should have no right to dispose of it. If you did not answer me, I should know that you did not love me, and what became of me would be a matter of indifference. A conspiracy would be a diversion. It would end in the scaffold if we were discovered; but as the idea of putting an end to my existence had occurred to me more than once, it would be something to escape the trouble of committing suicide.'

"'My God! can it be possible that you really thought that.'

"'I am telling you the truth, Louise, and here is a proof of it. Come! 'added he rising and taking a sealed packet from a small table, 'I could not know that I was going to meet you to-day; I did not expect even to see you again. Read this payer.'

"'Your will!'

"'Made at Moscow, the day after I joined the conspiracy.'

"'My goodness! you left me a fortune of thirty thousand roubles.'

“Since you would not love me during my life I was desirous that at least you should have a pleasant souvenir of me after my death.’

“‘But as regards the conspiracy, your death or suicide, you have given up all that?’

“‘Louise, you are at perfect liberty to depart, the five minutes are up; but you are my last hope, you alone can make life supportable. When once you have gone from here you will never return; I give you my word of honour, as a gentleman, that when once the street door is closed behind you I shall blow out my brains.’

“‘You must be mad.’

“‘No, I am only bored.’

“‘You would not do such a thing.’

“‘Try me.’

“‘Sir, in the name of Heaven.’

“‘Listen Louise, I have struggled against it to the bitter end. Yesterday I made up my mind to finish it; to-day I met you again, I decided I would throw one more stake, in the hope of winning the game. I risked my life on the chance of happiness; I have lost, I will pay.’

“If Alexis had said such things in the delirium of fever I should not have believed them; but he spoke in his natural voice with his usual composure, in fact his tone was rather gay than sad; so that I began to think that he was indeed speaking the truth and that I should be obliged to give in. I looked at the handsome young man so full of life who wanted but me to complete his happiness. I called to mind his adoring mother and his merry-hearted sisters; I fancied I saw him bleeding and disfigured, while they wept in agony, I put it to myself, what right had poor insignificant I to shatter such a brilliant career, such high hopes. I must confess it, such devotion began to bear its fruit.

“I too, in the silence of the night, in the depth of my heart, had sometimes thought of this young man, who never had me out of his thoughts. On the point of leaving him for ever I saw more clearly into my soul. I discovered that I loved him and I remained.

“Alexis had spoken the truth. His life had hitherto lacked one thing — love. For two years now he has been in love with me, and he is happy or appears to be so. He has abandoned the foolish conspiracy which he entered solely from weariness of existence. Vexed at the restrictions imposed upon our meetings by my position at Madame Xavier’s, unknown to me he rented this shop for me For the last eighteen months I have been living altogether a different life, taking up the studies I dropped in my youth, such as a distinguished man expects to find in the woman he loves, when alas! he has ceased to love her. This accounts for the change you have noticed when comparing me with my position. You must admit I did right to stop you, and only a flirt could have acted otherwise; since I love him, I cannot love you."

"I do, and I see too whose influence you relied upon to second my petition."

"I have already invoked his aid."

"Very good, but I refuse to avail myself of it. It is all very well, but my pride forbids."

"Come, do you want us to quarrel, and never see each other again?"

"That would be cruel, for I know no one here but you."

"Well, look upon me as a sister and let me act."

"You wish it."

"I insist upon it."

At that moment the door opened and Count Alexis Vaninkov appeared on the threshold.

The Count was a handsome young man of twenty-five or twenty-six, fair in complexion and of slender build, half Tartar and half Turk, who held the position of Lieutenant in the Horse Guards. This privileged corps had been for a long time under the direct command of the Czarevitch Constantine, the brother of the Emperor Alexander, and at that period Viceroy of Poland. In accordance with the custom of the Russian officers, who never lay aside their military dress, Alexis was in uniform and displayed on his breast the crosses of St. Vladimir and of Alexander Nevski, and on his neck the third-class order of Stanislas-Augustus. At sight of him Louise rose with a smile.

"Welcome, Count," said she, "we were talking of you, allow me to present to your Excellency the fellow-countrymen of whom I have spoken, and on whose behalf I entreat your patronage." I bowed and the Count replied with a graceful inclination, and then spoke with a wonderfully pure accent, spoilt perhaps by a tinge of affectation.

"My dear Louise," said he, kissing her hand, "I fear my patronage is of little account, but I can give your friend some useful advice. My travels have taught me to gauge the good and the bad side of my fellow-countrymen, and I can give your protégé many hints; meanwhile I will at once enable him to start a connection by offering him two pupils, my brother and myself.”

“That is a beginning, but it is not enough; did you not say something about the post of fencing master in some regiment?”

“Yes, but since yesterday I have been told that there are already two fencing masters in St. Petersburg, one a Frenchman, the other a Russian. Your compatriot, my dear Sir,” added Vaninkov, turning towards me, “is called Valville I will not speak of his accomplishments; he has succeeded in pleasing the Emperor, who has raised him to the rank of Major and decorated him with several orders; he is fencing-master of the Imperial Guards. My fellow-countryman is a splendid fellow, who possesses no other fault in our eyes than that of being a Russian, but this is not regarded as such in the eyes of the Emperor. His Majesty, to whom he formerly gave lessons, has made him a Colonel and presented him with the third-class order of St. Vladimir. You do not wish to begin by making either of these two your enemy, I presume?”

“Certainly not,” I replied. “Very well then, you must not appear to be poaching on their preserves; announce an assault-at-arms, give your performance, and let it be evident that you are up to your work. Then, after your reputation has been noised abroad, I will give you a humble letter of recommendation to the Czarevitch Constantine, who for the last day or two has been staying at his castle at Strelna, and I trust that at my request he will deign to forward your petition to his Majesty.”

“Well, that is splendid,” said Louise, delighted at the Count’s friendliness towards me; “you see I spoke the truth.”

“Yes, and the Count is the kindest of patrons, just as you are the most delightful of women. I will leave you to entertain him in this happy frame of mind, and to prove that I have taken his advice to heart, I am going to draw up my programme this very evening.”

“Excellent,” said the Count. “Now, excuse me, Sir, but I want a little bit of advice on local matters. Since I am to give an assault-at-arms to make myself known and not for the sake of the money, ought I to issue free invitations as if to a party, or would it be better to make a charge as if for a show?”

“Oh! make them pay, my dear Sir, or no one will come. Make the tickets ten roubles each, and send me a hundred; I will undertake to get rid of them.”

No one could have been more gracious. My ill feeling towards him was at an end, so saying good-bye I left the house.

Next day my notices were distributed and a week later I had given my assault, in which neither Valville nor Siverbruck had a share, but only some amateurs, Poles, Russians and French. It is not my intention to give a description of my exploits or the number of the cuts I gave and received. Suffice it to say, that during the performance the Comte de la Ferronayes, our ambassador, engaged me to teach his son, the Vicomte Charles, and during the next two days I received most encouraging letters, and among others one from the Duke of Wurtemburg, who was anxious for me to teach his sons, while the Count Bobrinski enrolled himself as a pupil.

When I paid my next visit Count Vaninkov said to me, “Well, everything has gone splendidly. Your reputation is established, it only needs recognition from the Emperor to consolidate it. Look, here is a letter addressed to the aide-de-camp of the Czarevitch; he has already heard of you. Present yourself boldly before him with your petition to the Emperor; flatter his military vanity and get him to countersign the paper.”

“But, Count,” I haltingly replied, “do you think he will welcome me?”

“What do you mean by welcoming you?”

“Will he be glad to see me?”

“Listen, my dear Sir,” said Count Alexis, laughing, “you are always by way of doing us too great an honour. You regard us as civilized beings, whereas in truth we are little more than savages. Here is the letter; I have opened the door for you, but I can give you no promise, everything depends on the Prince’s good or bad temper at the moment. You must choose the right moment; you are a Frenchman, that is to say you are a brave man. You have to sustain a combat and return triumphant.”

“Yes, but the combat of a waiting room, the triumph of a courtier. I must confess, your Excellency, I would rather engage in a duel.”

“Jean Bart was not more familiar than you are with polished floors and Court dress. How did he manage when he went to Versailler?”

“With fisticuffs, your Excellency.”

“Well, do as he did. Meanwhile I have been asked by Nariskin, who is, you know, the Emperor’s cousin, by Count Zernitchev and by Colonel Mouraviev to tell you that they will be glad if you will give them lessons.”

“Do you want to overwhelm me?”

“Not at all and you owe nothing to me; I am merely carrying out my commissions, that is all.”

“It seems to me you have not done badly,” said Louise.

“Owing to you; once more I thank you. Well, the die is cast; I will follow your Excellency’s advice, and to-morrow I will put it to the test.”

“Good-bye and good luck to you.”

This encouragement was the only thing I wanted. I had heard of the reputation of the man with whom I had to deal, and I must confess I would have rather encountered a bear in its den in the Ukraine than ask a favour of the Czarevitch, that strange compound of good qualities, violent passions and mad outbursts.

CHAPTER VI

THE Grand Duke Constantine, the younger brother of the Emperor Alexander and elder brother of the Grand Duke Nicholas, possessed neither the cordial politeness of the former nor the cool and calm dignity of the latter. He seemed to have inherited every quality from his father, reproducing at the same time his good points and his eccentricities; while his two brothers favoured Catherine, the former with his good nature, the latter with his intellect, and both of them with the Imperial dignity which their grandmother displayed so conspicuously before the world.

When Catherine saw this fine and numerous family springing up around her, she concentrated her attention on the two eldest, and by their very baptismal names, that is to say by calling one of them Alexander and the other Constantine, appeared to have mapped out for them the dominion of the world. So firmly was she possessed with this idea that she had them painted while quite children, one cutting the Gordian knot and the other holding a Labarum. The plan of their education likewise, for the initiation of which she was responsible, was merely the application of the same great idea. Thus Constantine, who was destined for the Empire of the East, had none but Greek nurses, and was surrounded by Greek teachers; while Alexander, set apart for the Empire of the West, was educated by English masters. The two brothers shared a private tutor, a Swiss called Laharpe, a cousin of the brave General Laharpe who served in Italy under Napoleon. But the lessons of the worthy tutor were not received by his two pupils with equal zeal; the seed from the same stock produced very different fruit; for in the one case it fell upon well-prepared fertile ground, in the other upon a rough and barren soil. Alexander when twelve years old said to Graft, his master of practical Physics, who had told him that light was a continual emanation from the sun, “That is impossible, for then the sun would every day grow smaller.” Constantine answered Saken, his private tutor who was urging him to learn to lead, as follows, “I don’t want to read, because I see you always reading, and no one could be a bigger fool than you.”

These two answers give the key to the character and intelligence of the two children.

Constantine’s enthusiasm for military exercises made up for his repugnance to scientific study. Fighting, riding and attending manœuvres seemed to him accomplishments far more worthy of a Prince than drawing, botany or astronomy. In this particular he bore a striking resemblance to Paul, and he had such a passion for military manœuvres that on his wedding night he rose at five o’clock to drill a squad of soldiers who happened to be on guard.

The rupture between Russia and France was a God-send to Constantine. He was sent to Italy for the purpose of completing his military education under the care of Field Marshal Suvarov, and took part in his victories on the Mincio and his disaster in the Alps. Such a master, as renowned for his eccentricities as his courage, was ill chosen to reform the natural peculiarities of Constantine.

As a consequence these peculiarities, instead of disappearing, increased to such an extent that the question arose more than once whether the young Grand Duke did not, like his father, suffer from the taint of madness.

After the campaign with France and the Treaty of Vienna, Constantine was nominated Viceroy of Poland. Placed at the head of a warlike people, his military tastes increased by leaps and bounds and for want of actual sanguinary contests in which he had just been assisting, parades and reviews, those mimic battles, were his sole distraction. Winter or summer, whether he resided at the Palace of Bruhl, near the Jardin de Saxe, or whether he was resident at the Belvedere Palace, he rose at three o’clock in the morning and dressed in his General’s uniform; no valet ever assisted him at his toilet. Then, seated at a table covered with regimental lists and military orders in a room wherein every panel was adorned with a sketch of some regimental uniform, he read over the reports brought in the night before by Colonel Axamilovski, or by Lubovitski, the Prefect of Police, approved or disapproved of them, but invariably added some footnote. This work lasted till nine o’clock in the morning; then he swallowed in haste a soldier’s breakfast and hurried down to the Great Square, where as a rule two regiments of foot and a squadron of cavalry were awaiting him. As soon as he appeared, the band heralded his approach with a performance of the march composed by Kurpinski on the theme: “God Save the King! “The review began at once. The companies filed past the Czarewitch at regular intervals and with mathematical precision, while their General watched them on foot, dressed usually in the green uniform of the Chasseurs and wearing a hat mounted with cock’s feathers, which was posed on his head in such a fashion that one corner touched his left shoulder, while the other pointed straight at the sky. Under a narrow forehead furrowed with deep wrinkles, indicating constant and anxious preoccupations, two long thick eyebrows, which the persistent contraction of his skin had drawn out of shape, almost entirely hid his blue eyes. The peculiar vivacity of his expression, together with his small nose, and lengthy lower lip gave a kind of savage look to his head, which appeared to be resting on his shoulders owing to his extremely short neck and his habit of carrying it poked forward. At the sound of the music, at the sight of the men he had trained and at the measured tread of their footsteps, his whole being seemed to expand. A kind of fever took possession of him, and a flush mounted to his cheeks. He kept his short arms tight against his body with wrists held out stark and stiff, yet twitching nervously, while his feet beat time in a ceaseless accompaniment and his guttural voice gave vent from time to time, in the intervals of shouting commands, to raucous and irregular sounds, which had nothing human about them, but expressed alternately, either pleasure, when everything went to his satisfaction, or anger at some slight error in discipline. Should the latter occur, the punishment meted out was usually terrible; the least slip involved imprisonment for the private and degradation for the officer. This harshness was not limited to men, it extended to everything, even to animals. One day he had a monkey hanged in its cage for making too much noise; a horse which happened to stumble, because he had let go the bridle for a moment was violently thrashed, while a dog was shot for waking him one night.

His savage nature was equally conspicuous when he was pleased as when he was angry. He would double up with shouts of laughter, clapping his hands with glee and beating the ground alternately with either foot. Then he would scamper off and seize the nearest child, turn it round and round, make it kiss him, pinch its cheeks and its nose, and dismiss it with a piece of gold in its hand. Then intervened strange periods, times neither of joy nor sorrow, but hours of complete prostration and profound melancholy. During such periods he became as weak as a woman, groaned aloud, and writhed on the sofa or the floor. No one dared approach him in such a state. On these occasions only his windows and doors were seen to open, and a fair pale woman of slender build, wearing a white dress with a blue belt would glide in like a ghost. She held a magic sway over the Czarewitch, for at her approach, his nervous sensibility was stimulated, his sighs were converted into sobs and he shed copious tears. Then the crisis past, — the woman would sit beside him, his head would drop on her knees and he would fall asleep to wake up cured. This woman was Jeannette Grudzenska, the guardian angel of Poland.

One day when quite a child, as she was praying in the Cathedral before the image of the Virgin, a crown of immortelles placed under the picture fell on to her head and an old Cossack of the Ukraine who passed as a prophet, on being consulted by the child's father, had predicted that this saintly crown which had fallen upon her from Heaven, was a prognostication of the one destined for her upon earth. Father and child both forgot the prediction, or rather they remembered it only as a dream when fate brought Jeannette and Constantine face to face.

Then did this half savage creature with his fiery and despotic passions, grow gentle as a child; the man who had never been thwarted, who held at his disposal the lives of fathers and the virtue of daughters, came to the old man and humbly begged for the hand of his daughter, beseeching him not to refuse the sole means of happiness that existed for him in the world. The old man then called to mind the prediction of the Cossack; he recognized in Constantine's request the accomplishment of the decrees of Providence and did not think it right to oppose their fulfilment. The Grand Duke obtained the consent of both father and daughter; would he be equally successful with the Emperor?

He got his way, but the price he paid for it was abdication.

Yes, this strange man, this mysterious individual, who like Olympian Jove could make a whole people tremble at a frown, exchanged for the hand of a simple girl, the double crown of the East and West, in other words, a kingdom which embraces a seventh part of the world, with its fifty-three million inhabitants and six seas washing its shores.

As a set off Jeannette Grudzendska received from the Emperor Alexander the title of Princess of Loviez.

Such was the man with whom I was about to have an interview. It was vaguely rumoured that he had come to St. Petersburg because he had picked up at Warsaw the threads of a vast conspiracy which penetrated the whole of Russia; but these threads remained broken short off in his hands owing to the obstinate silence of the two conspirators already arrested. It must be admitted that circumstances were none too favourable for submitting to him a request so frivolous as was mine.

All the same I decided to run the risk of a reception which could not fail to be out of the common. I hired a drosky and set out the next morning for Strelna, fortified with my letter to General Rodna the Czarewitch's aide-de-camp and my petition to the Emperor Alexander.

After a two hours' drive along a magnificent road, bordered on the left by country houses and on the right by plains stretching to the Gulf of Finland, we reached the Monastery of St. Sergins, the holiest saint in Russia after Alexander Nevski, and ten minutes later we arrived at the village. Half way down the main street we turned to the right by the post house, and a few moments later we drew up in front of the Castle. The sentinel tried to stop me, but at the sight of my letter for General Rodna he let me pass.

I mounted the steps and was ushered into the waiting room. General Rodna was at work with the Czarewitch. I was told to wait in a room which opened on to some magnificent gardens bisected by a canal, which was connected directly with the sea, while an officer took charge of my letter; the next moment the officer returned and told me to enter.

The Czarewitch was leaning against the mantelpiece for although we were scarcely at the end of September cold weather was setting in; he had been dictating a despatch to the General who was seated.

I did not expect to be introduced so quickly and stopped on the threshold astonished to find myself in his Highness's presence. Scarcely had the door been shut, when he stuck out his head without making any other movement of the body and fixing two piercing eyes upon me said: —

"What is your country?"

"Fiancé, your Highness."

"Your age?"

"Twenty-six."

"Your name?"

"Grisier."

"And you want to obtain the post of Fencing Master in one of the regiments of his Imperial Majesty my brother."

"That is the sole object of my ambition."

"You say you are in the front rank."

I beg your Imperial Majesty's pardon; I did not say that, it is not for me to say such a thing."

“No, but you think so.”

“Your Imperial Highness knows that pride is a besetting sin of the human race; besides I have given a display and your Highness can ascertain what happened.”

“I know all about it, but you had to deal with second class amateurs only.”

“But I treated them gently.”

“Ah! you treated them gently, and if you had not done so what would have happened.”

“I should have touched them ten times to their two.”

“Ah! Now take me for instance, would you prick me ten times to my two?”

“That depends.”

“What do you mean, — *that depends?*”

“Well, it depends how your Highness would like me to treat you. If you wish me to treat you as a Prince, it is you who will touch me ten times, whereas I shall only touch you twice. But if you allow me to deal with you as if you were anybody, the probability is that I shall only be hit twice, while you will be hit ten times.”

“Lubenski!” cried the Czarevitch rubbing his hands. “Lubenski, my foils. Ha! ha! Mr. Braggart, we shall see.”

Does your Highness give me permission?”

“My Highness does not give permission, my Highness commands you to touch him ten times; perhaps you would like to back out of it?”

“When I came to the Castle of Strelna, it was to put myself at your Highness’s disposition. I am at your service.”

“Very well, take this foil and mask, we shall soon see.”

“Is your Highness in earnest?”

“Yes, a hundred times yes, a thousand times yes, a thousand million times yes.”

“I am your man.”

“I must have my ten hits, do you hear,” shouted the Czarevitch, beginning to attack me, “my ten hits, do you hear, not one less, I won’t let you off one, ha! ha!”

In spite of the irritation of the Czarevitch I contented myself with parrying, and did not thrust in return.

"Why!" he cried, growing warm, "I believe you are only playing with me. Look out, look out, — Ha! ha!"

And through his mask I saw the colour mount to his cheeks and his eyes suffused with blood.

"Well, where are your ten pricks?"

"Your Highness, respect... — "

"Go to the devil with your respect, fight, man, fight!"

I took immediate advantage of the permission and touched him three times following.

"Very good, very good," he cried "now it is my turn. Steady — Ha! a hit, a hit.... "It was true.

"I fancy your Highness is not playing with me, and I shall have to do my best."

"Do your best? Ha! ha! "I struck him four times in succession, while he, after parrying, touched me once.

"A hit, a hit," cried he delighted and stamping about. "Rodna, did you notice that I struck him twice to his seven times."

"Twice to ten times, your Highness," I replied attacking him again eight — nine — ten. Now we are quits."

"Capital! capital!" cried the Czarevitch, "but anyone can learn to fence; what good would that be to my cavalry? They want the broadsword, the sabre's the thing. Can you use the sabre?"

"I am about as good as with a sword."

"Oh! well, could you defend yourself on foot with a sabre against a man on horseback with a lance?"

"I think so, your Highness."

"You think so, but you are not sure Ha! ha! you are not sure?"

"Yes, your Highness, I am sure."

"Ah! you are sure. You can defend yourself?"

"Yes, your Highness."

"You can parry a lance thrust?"

"Yes, I can."

"Against a mounted man?"

"Against a mounted man."

"Lubenski! Lubenski!" shouted the Czarevitch.

The officer appeared. "Have a horse brought round, and get me a lance; a lance and a horse, do you hear; and quick, quick!"

“But, your Highness....”

“Ah! you think better of it, eh?”

“I do not think better of it, but against anybody else but your Highness, I should regard these contests as a pastime.”

“And what are they against me?”

“Against you, your Highness, I am equally afraid either to be successful or to fail; for I fear that if I succeed, your Highness will forget that you ordered..”

“I forget nothing; besides Rodna is my witness that I *have* ordered and that I *do* order you to treat me as you would him.”

“Allow me to observe, your Highness, that even this does not put me at my ease, because I should deal with his Excellency in a very respectful manner.”

Be quiet, you wretched flatterer; do you think to curry favour with him; no one has the least influence over me, I form my own judgment, do you hear, my own judgment; you were successful in the first encounter, we shall see if you emerge equally successfully from the second.”

Just then an officer appeared in front of the windows, leading a charger and carrying a lance.

“Here we are!” cried Constantine, dashing out of doors, “Come here,” said he, making me a sign to follow him; “and you, Lubenski, give him a sabre, a good sabre, a sabre that fits his hand, one of the Horseguards’ sabres. Ha! ha! we shall see. Look out for yourself, Mr. Fencing Master or I shall spit you through like the toads which are in my summer house. Do you remember the last one, Rodna, why, it lived for three days with a nail through its body.”

With these words Constantine mounted his horse, a wild creature from the steppes, whose mane and tail swept the ground. He made it perform the most intricate evolutions with marvellous skill, toying all the time with his lance. While this was going on, three or four sabres were brought to me and I was invited to choose one; my choice was soon made; I put out my hand and took the first that came.

“Come on! come on! are you ready?” cried the Czarevitch.

“Yes, your Highness.”

Then he set out at full gallop for the other end of the terrace.

“I suppose it is only a joke,” I asked of General Rodna.

“On the contrary,” he replied, “it is a matter of deadly earnest, your life and your position depend on the result; all I can say is that you had better defend yourself as if it were a fight in earnest.”

The affair had become more serious than I imagined; if it had been only a matter of defending myself and returning blow for blow, well, I would run the risk. But this was a different matter; seeing that my sabre was sharpened and his lance was pointed, the joke might terminate seriously. No matter! I was in for it now, my retreat was cut off; so summoning all my sang-froid and all my skill, I faced about to receive the Czarevitch.

He had already got to the end of the terrace and had just wheeled round. In spite of what the General had said, I still hoped that the whole affair was only a joke, when calling out for the last time, “Are you ready?” I saw him galloping towards me with his lance at the rest. Then at length I realized that my work was cut out to defend my life and I put myself on guard.

The horse came on like the wind, with the Czarevitch crouching down on his charger so that he was lost in the waves of its mane which streamed in the wind; I could see nothing but the top of his head between the ears of his mount. When he got to me, he tried to fell me with a blow full in the chest, but I turned aside the weapon with a parry in *tierce*, and leaping to one side, I let horse and rider dash past in full career, leaving me untouched. Seeing that he had missed his mark, the Czarevitch pulled up his horse short with marvellous skill.

“All right, all right,” he cried, “now for another turn.”

Then, without giving me time to reply, he caused his horse to pirouette on its hind legs, once more took up his position and asking me if I was ready, came at me more furiously even than on the former occasion. Once more I kept my eyes fixed on his and did not lose sight of a single movement; then in the very nick of time I parried in *quarte* and bounded to the right so that horse and rider again flashed by me as fruitlessly as they had done before.

The Czarevitch gave vent to a kind of a roar. He looked upon this tournament as a real fight, and was anxious that it should end to his advantage, so just when I thought he was tired of it, I saw him making preparations for a third encounter. By this time I had come to the conclusion that the joke had gone far enough and made up my mind to put an end to it.

Therefore the moment I saw him on the point of striking me, instead of contenting myself with a simple parry, I gave a violent blow at the shaft of his lance and cut it in two leaving the Czarevitch unarmed, then seizing the bridle of his horse, I, (not the Czarevitch this time), checked it so violently that it recoiled on its haunches; and at the same moment I held the point of my sabre at the Czarevitch's breast. General Rodna uttered a terrible cry; he thought I was going to kill his Highness. Constantine had the same idea, for I saw him turn pale. But I immediately made a step to the rear and bowing to the Grand Duke remarked, "There your Highness, that is a specimen of what I can show your soldiers, if you still deem me fit to be their instructor."

"Oh! my God! yes, you are fit enough and you shall have a regiment, or my name is not Lubenski, Lubenski!" he shouted leaping from his horse, take Pulk to the stables. Now do you come with me, I am going to write a recommendation on your petition."

I followed the Grand Duke into his room, where he seized a pen and wrote at the end of my petition:

"I humbly beg to recommend the undersigned to your Imperial Majesty, believing him to be altogether worthy of obtaining the favour he solicits."

"Now," said he, "take your petition and present it to the Emperor in person. It means imprisonment if you are found talking to him; but, by the Lord, he who risks nothing gets nothing. Good-bye and if you are ever near Warsaw, come and see me."

I bowed, delighted at having accomplished my purpose so satisfactorily, and jumping into my drosky I set off for St. Petersburg, taking with me my all powerful recommendation.

In the evening I called on Count Alexis and thanked him for the advice he had given me; I told him all that had happened, to the great alarm of Louise, and on the next day at ten o'clock in the morning I started for the Palace of Tsarkoe-Selo where the Emperor was residing, having made up my mind to stroll through the gardens until I met him and to risk the chance of imprisonment, which is the punishment meted out to all who present him with a petition.

CHAPTER VII

THE Imperial residence is situated at only three or four leagues distance from St. Petersburg, and yet the road thither presents an utterly different appearance from the one I had followed the day before when I went to Strelna. No longer were there magnificent villas and extensive vistas of the gulf of Finland, but in their place rich plains covered with teeming corn fields and verdant meadows wrested a few years ago by the science of agriculture from the gigantic fern-brakes which had held a peaceful sway there from the time of creation.

In less than an hour's drive I found myself, after traversing the German colony, lost within a small chain of hills, and from the summit of one of them I was just able to distinguish the trees, the monuments and the five gilded domes of the chapel, which distinguish the dwelling place of the sovereign.

The Palace of Tsarkoe-Selo is situated on the exact site of a little cottage, where Peter the Great was in the habit of coming to drink milk. It had belonged to an old Dutchman, called Sara. The poor peasant died and Peter, who had conceived a great liking for the cottage on account of the magnificent view spread out before its windows, gave it to Catherine, with the land surrounding it, that she might build a farm there. Catherine sent for an architect, and explained exactly what she wanted. The architect, like all others of his profession, deliberately disobeyed his instructions, and built a mansion.

Nevertheless, this residence, though greatly improved since its original construction, appeared to Elizabeth quite out of keeping with the grandeur and position of a Russian Empress; so the paternal mansion was pulled down and a magnificent palace was built from the designs of Count Rastreti. The noble architect who had heard Versailles described as a masterpiece of sumptuousness, wished to surpass Versailles in splendour; and having been told, that of the Great King's palace only the interior was gilded, he went one better in his palace by gilding all the exterior carvings and sculptures at Tsarkoe-Selo, — mouldings, cornices, caryatids, trophies, even the very roof itself. When all was finished, Elizabeth chose a magnificent day, and invited her whole court, as well as the ambassadors of the various powers, to come and inaugurate her dazzling country house. At sight of so much magnificence in such a strange position, everyone extolled it as the eighth wonder of the world, with the exception of the Marquis de La Chetardie, the French [ambassador, who, alone of the courtiers, said not a word, but on the contrary, began to gaze around him. Some what piqued at his apparent absent mindedness, the Empress asked him what he was looking for.

"What am I looking for, Madam?" replied the ambassador coldly; "in truth I was looking for a casket to hold this magnificent jewel."

This was at the time when a quatrain gave one the entry to the Academy and immortality could be purchased by a witticism. Thus did M. de La Chetardie achieve immortality at St. Petersburg.

Unfortunately the architect had thought only of the summer, and completely forgotten the winter.

In the following spring it was necessary to carry out most costly repairs to the gilding, and as each winter wrought the same havoc and each spring necessitated the same renovations, Catherine II. decided to replace the metal by a simple coat of yellow paint; as to the roof it was settled that it should be coloured a delicate green, as is the custom at St. Petersburg.

The announcement of this change had hardly spread abroad before a speculator made his appearance and offered Catherine two hundred and forty thousand francs for all the gilt work which was to be destroyed. Catherine while thanking him for the offer, told him that she was not in the habit of selling her old clothes.

In the midst of her victories, her intrigues and her travels, she never ceased to take an interest in her favourite residence. For the elder of her grandchildren, the Little Alexander Palace was built about a hundred yards from the Imperial Castle, and M. Bush, her architect, planned some immense gardens, which lacked but one requisite — water.

Nevertheless M. Bush constructed canals, cascades and lakes, well satisfied that, to anyone who bears the title of Catherine the Great, and is in need of water, water will not be long in coming. As a matter of fact his successor Bauer discovered that M. Demidoff, the owner of a fine estate in the neighbourhood, had an excess of the very commodity his sovereign lacked; he explained to M. Demidoff the shortcomings of the Imperial gardens: and M. Demidoff, like a loyal servant, put his superfluity at

Catherine’s disposal. Immediately and in spite of several obstacles, the water was to be seen pouring in from all sides, filling up lakes, spouting up in jets, and tumbling over cascades. Hence the *bon mot* of the poor Empress Elizabeth: “Let us fall out, if we must, with the whole of Europe, but never, never with M. Demidoff.”

In truth the whole Court might die of thirst should M. Demidoff in a moment of ill-humour will it so.

Brought up at Tsarkoe-Selo, Alexander inherited his grandmother’s love for the place. All the recollections of his childhood, that is to say the olden period of his life, clustered round this palace. On its lawns he had essayed his earliest footsteps, in its alleys he had learnt to ride, and on its lakes he had served his apprenticeship as a sailor! so, at the first signs of fine weather he would hurry to Tsarkoe-Selo, only to leave it at the first snowfall.

It was at Tsarkoe-Selo I had come to seek him and I flattered myself I should be successful. After a poor and hurried breakfast taken at a French hotel outside the gates, I entered the park, where, in spite of the sentries, the public may walk at will. As the early frosts were approaching the park was deserted. It is possible that they refrained from entering out of respect for the sovereign whom I was about to disturb. I was aware that he sometimes spent the whole day in wandering up and down the least frequented glades, so I struck into one haphazard, walking straight ahead, and almost certain, from the information I gathered, that I should end up by encountering him. Besides, even if chance did not favour me immediately there were in the meantime plenty of objects to distract and amuse me.

Presently I ran up against the Chinese village, a charming group of fifteen houses, each of which had its own porch, ice house and garden, and served as a residence for one of the Emperor’s aides-de-camp. The village is laid out in the shape of a star and at its centre is a pavilion intended for balls and concerts; a conservatory takes the place of an anteroom, and in the four corners of the edifice are four statues of Mandarins, life size and smoking pipes. One day, which happened to be her fifty-eighth birthday, Catherine was walking in the gardens with the Court and turning her steps in the direction of the conservatory, she was astonished to see clouds of smoke issuing from the pipes of the Mandarins, and as she gazed they began to nod their heads gracefully and to roll their eyes amorously. Catherine drew near to observe the phenomenon more closely. Then the four Chinamen descended from the pedestals, approached her and prostrated themselves at her feet in exact imitation of the traditional ceremonial of China and recited a number of complimentary verses. The four Mandarins were the Prince de Ligne, M. de Ségur, M. de Cobentzel, and Potemkin.

Leaving the Generals' quarters I descended into the llamas' enclosure. These denizens of the Cordilleras are a present from the Viceroy of Mexico to the Emperor Alexander. Of the nine that were sent, five have since died; but the four who withstood the climate have given birth to a numerous progeny and the latter who were born in the country will probably accustom themselves better to the climate than those which came over with their parents.

At a short distance from the menagerie in the midst of the French gardens and in the centre of a fine dining room is the famous Table of Olympus, in imitation of the Regent's, a veritable Fairy feast, served by invisible waiters and cooks from a mysterious kitchen, where everything makes its appearance from beneath the ground as at the Opera. If the guests are in want of anything, a note is placed on a plate, the plate disappears as if by magic and five minutes later again appears bearing the article bespoken. So well are all contingencies provided for that on one occasion a pretty visitor, wishing to repair the disorder consequent upon a tête-à-tête, asked for some hair pins, without the least expectation of getting them; the plate ascended in triumph with a dozen pins.

Continuing my walk I came face to face with a pyramid and at its base sleeping the sleep of the just were Catherine's three greyhounds. The epitaph composed by M. de Ségur for one of them does duty for all there. It is a compliment paid by the Empress to France in the person of her ambassador, for the Empress had also written an epitaph for one of them; and as her poem consisted of the only two rhymes she had composed in her life, naturally it ought to be there, the more so because in my opinion it will compare very favourably with the verses of the rival of the Prince de Ligne.

Here are M. de Ségur's lines; they have the advantage of not only eulogising the defunct, but also of establishing her genealogy after a fashion, a matter of serious import to scientists.

EPITAPH ON ZEMIRE.

A favourite Greyhound Bitch of the Empress Catherine.

Ici mourut Zémire, et les Graces en deuil
Doivent jeter des fleurs sur son cercueil.
Comme Tom son aïeul, comme Lady sa mère,
Constante dans ses gouts, à la course légère,
Son seul dé faut était un peu d'humeur,
Mais ce dé faut venait d'un si bon cœur!
Quand on aime, on craint tout, Zémire aimait tant celle
Que tout le monde aime comme elle!
Voulez-vous qu'on vive en repos,
Ayant cent peuples pour rivaux?
Les Dieux témoins de sa tendresse Devaient à sa fidélité
Le don de l'Immortalité,
Pour qu'elle fût toujours auprès de sa Maîtresse."

Now for Catherine's own couplet:

Ci-git la Duchesse Anderson, Qui mordit Monsieur Rogerson.

(In English: Here died Zémire, and the mourning Graces must needs cast flowers upon her grave. Like Tom her grandsire and Lady her dam, she was constant in her affections, fleet in the chase; her only fault was a hot temper, hut this came from her very goodness of heart! When we love, we dread all rivalry, and Zemire loved so fondly her whom all love as devotedly as she! How should she live at ease, with a hundred Peoples for rivals? The Gods that witnessed her fidelity owed her surely the gift of immortality, that she might never be parted from her Mistress's side.

Catherine couplet:
Here lies the Duchess Anderson
Who bit poor Mister Rogerson.

As for the third dog, though no one wrote her epitaph, she enjoyed even greater popularity than her two companions. She was called Sunderland after the Englishman who presented her to the Empress, and her death was very nearly the occasion of the most tragical misunderstanding that ever befell an unhappy financier.

One morning at daybreak Mr. Sunderland, a rich English capitalist, was aroused from his slumbers. He it was who had presented the beloved greyhound to the Empress and thanks to this gift had basked in the sunshine of her smiles for the last three years.

“Sir,” said his valet, “your house is surrounded by soldiers, and the head of the police insists upon speaking to you.”

“What does he want with me?” cries the banker leaping from his bed, and already alarmed at the mere announcement.

“I don’t know, sir,” replies the valet, “but it appears that it is a matter of the highest importance, which, so he says, can only be communicated direct to you.”

“Tell him to come in,” says Mr. Sunderland, hurrying into his dressing gown.

The valet goes out and reappears in a few minutes introducing his Excellency M. Reliev, and from his expression the banker detects at the first glance that he is the bearer of bad news. Nevertheless, the worthy Islander receives the head of the police with his customary politeness and handing him a chair begs him to be seated, but the latter though bowing his thanks remains standing, and in the most sorrowful tones addresses him.

“Mr. Sunderland, I would beg you to believe that I am distressed beyond measure, in spite of the honour that this proof of her confidence brings to me, at having been chosen by her Majesty, my most gracious sovereign, to carry out her orders, though their severity causes me anguish; yet doubtless some terrible crime has justified them.”

“What terrible crime, your Excellency,” cries the banker, “and who has committed this crime?”

“You, sir, no doubt, since the punishment is directed against you.”

“Sir, I swear that the closest scrutiny of my conscience reveals nothing with which I can reproach myself in conduct towards our Sovereign. You know, I am a naturalized Russian.”

“And just because you are a naturalized Russian, sir, that makes your position so terrible; if you were still a subject of his Britannic Majesty, you might claim the protection of the English Consul, and possibly escape from the severity of the order, which to my great regret, I am bound to carry out.”

“Well, your Excellency, what is the order?”

“Oh! sir, I shall never be able to tell you what it is.”

“Am I then out of favour with her Majesty?”

“Oh! if that were all!”

“What do you mean by, *if that were all?* is there any question of sending me back to England?”

“That is your own country, and the punishment would be too slight to account for my hesitation in speaking of it.”

“My God! you frighten me, is there any question of sending me to Siberia?”

“Siberia, Sir, is a delightful country, though much traduced; besides you could come back!”

“Am I condemned to prison?”

“Imprisonment is nothing, imprisonment does not last for ever.”

“Sir, Sir,” cried the banker becoming more and more terrified, “am I sentenced to the knout.”

“The knout is exquisite torture, but the knout does not kill.”

“My God!” said Sunderland staggered, “I see now that the punishment is death.”

“And such a death,” cried the Chief of the Police raising his eyes to heaven with an expression of profound commiseration.

“Why, *such a death?* Is it not enough to kill me without a trial, to assassinate me without any reason; has Catherine ordered....”

“Alas! yes, she has ordered.”

“Speak, Sir; what has she ordered? I am a man, I have a man’s spirit; speak.”

“Alas! my dear Sir, she has ordered..... If I had not received the order myself, I give you my word, my dear Mr. Sunderland, that I should not believe it.”

“But you are making me die a thousand times over; come, sir, what did she order?”

“She ordered me to have you stuffed with straw.”

The poor Banker uttered a cry of horror; then fixing his eyes on the head of the police he said, “What your Excellency says is monstrous, you must have lost your wits.”

“No, Sir, I have not lost them yet, but doubtless I shall during the operation.”

“But how can you who have called yourself my friend a hundred times, how can you whom I have fortunately been able to assist on various occasions, I say, how can you have received such an order, without making her Majesty understand the enormity of it.”

“Alas! Sir, I did what I could, and certainly what no one else would have dared to do in my place; I entreated her Majesty to give up the idea, or at least to give the order to someone else and though I implored her with tears in my eyes, her Majesty replied in the voice you know so well, which admits of no reply, ‘go, Sir, and do not forget that it is your duty to perform without a murmur the orders I vouchsafe to entrust to you.’”

“And then?”

“Then,” said the head of the police, “I at once called upon a very clever naturalist, who stuffs birds for the Academy of Science, for since the thing has to be carried through you ought certainly to be stuffed in the best style.”

“And did the wretch agree to do it?”

“He sent me to a brother artist who stuffs monkeys because of the resemblance between the two species — men and apes.”

“Well!”

“He is waiting for you.”

“What, waiting for me, is it to be done now?”

“This very moment, her Majesty’s commands admit of no delay.”

“Without leaving me time to put my affairs in order; it is impossible.”

“It must be done, Sir.’’

“You will at least allow me to write a note to the Empress.”

“I do not know whether I ought to.”

“Oh! Sir! it is the last boon I shall ever ask, — a boon granted to the greatest criminal. I implore you, grant it.”

“But my official position is involved.”

“And my *life* is at stake!”

“Very well, write, I give you leave; but I warn you that I cannot leave you for a single moment.’’

Thank you, thank you; please summon one of your officers to take my letter.”

The chief of the police called a Lieutenant of her Majesty’s Guards, handed him poor Sunderland’s note and ordered him to bring back the answer at once. Ten minutes later the Lieutenant returned with orders to bring the banker to the Imperial Palace; this was all the poor wretch wanted.

A carriage was waiting at the door, Sunderland steps in, the Lieutenant takes his place beside him; five minutes later they reach the Hermitage where Catherine awaits them; the prisoner is brought into her presence; he finds the Empress shrieking with laughter.

Sunderland is convinced she has gone mad; he throws himself at her feet and taking her hand says: — ” Pardon me, Madame, in the name of Heaven pardon me, or at least tell me for what crime I have merited so terrible a punishment.”

‘‘Why, my dear Sunderland, this affair has nothing whatever to do with you.”

“What, your Majesty, nothing to do with me! whom does it concern then?”

“Why, the dog you gave me who died yesterday of indigestion. So, in my grief at losing him and with the very natural desire of saving his skin at least, I sent for that idiot Reliev, and said to him: ‘Have Sunderland stuffed.’ When he hesitated, I thought he was ashamed of such an errand; I grew angry and then he left me.”

“Well, Madame,” replied the banker, “you may congratulate yourself on possessing a most trustworthy servant in the head of the police; but another time, beg him, please, to have the orders he receives more carefully explained.”

Indeed, if the head of the police had not allowed himself to be moved by the prayers of the banker, poor Sunderland would have been flayed alive.

It must be confessed that at St. Petersburg every one does not get out of a tight place so happily as did the worthy banker and sometimes, owing to the promptitude with which orders are executed the mistake is only recognized when it is too late to repair it. One day M. de Ségur, an Ambassador at Catherine’s Court, saw a man enter his house, with flashing eyes, a fiery red face, and torn clothes.

“Justice, my Lord, justice! ‘cries our unlucky fellow countryman.

“Justice against whom?”

“Against a great Russian nobleman, my Lord, against the Governor of the town, by whose orders I have just received a hundred lashes with a whip.”

“A hundred lashes!” cried the astonished Ambassador. “What on earth had you done?”

“Nothing, my Lord, absolutely nothing.”

“That’s impossible.”

“I swear on my honour, your Lordship.”

“You must be mad, my friend.”

“My Lord, I beg your pardon but I am perfectly sane.”

“How can you expect me to believe that a man whose kindness and fairness is a byword can have allowed such an act.”

“Excuse me, my Lord,” cries the suppliant, “but though I have the greatest respect for you, you must permit me to give you the proof of what I allege.”

With these words the unfortunate Frenchman strips off his waistcoat and displays to M. de Ségur his shirt drenched in blood and sticking to his wounds.

“How did it happen?” asks the Ambassador.

“Oh! good Lord! sir, in a very simple manner. I hear that M. de Bruce is on the look out for a French cook. I was out of a situation, so take advantage of the opportunity and present myself at his house; the footman ushers me in, the Governor is in his study. ‘Sir,’ said the footman opening the door, ‘here is the cook.’ Good,’ replies M. de Bruce, absent-mindedly, ‘Take him into the courtyard and give him a hundred lashes! ‘Then, your honour, I am seized, dragged into the yard and in spite of my struggles, cries and threats, they carry out my punishment to the letter, not one stroke too many, not one less.”

“But if what you say is true, it is infamous.”

“If I am not telling you the absolute truth, sir, I will willingly receive my punishment again.”

“Listen to me, my friend,” said M. de Ségur, convinced of the truth from the tone of the poor wretch’s lamentations, “I will make enquiries, and if, as I am inclined to believe, you have not deceived me, you shall obtain a handsome compensation for this outrage, I give you my word for that; but if on the other hand you have deceived me in the smallest particular, you shall be escorted at once to the frontier and you will have to go back to France the best way you can.”

“I agree to everything, sir.”

“Very well,” said M. de Ségur sitting down at his desk, “take this letter to the Governor.’

“No, no, thank you! with your Excellency’s permission, I will not run the risk of again putting my feet in the house of a man who receives in so strange a manner those with whom he has business.”

“One of my secretaries shall go with you.”

“That puts another complexion on it, sir; accompanied by a member of your household, I would visit the infernal regions.”

“Go then,” said M. de Ségur, giving a letter to the brave-hearted fellow, and ordering one of his suite to go with him.”

After an absence of three quarters of an hour the sufferer returns with a radiant face.

“Well?” asks M. de Ségur.

“Oh, your Excellency, everything is cleared up.”

“To your satisfaction, apparently.”

“Yes, sir.”

“I must say I shall be very pleased if you will tell me all about it.”

‘‘Nothing easier, sir; his Excellency the Comte de Bruce had for a cook one of his serfs in whom he trusted implicitly; four days ago the rascal ran away, taking with him five hundred roubles belonging to his master, and in consequence his situation was vacant.”

“Well?”

“Well, it was my ambition to obtain this situation and with this idea I presented myself at the Governor’s.”

“Go on.”

“Unluckily for me he had heard only this morning that his domestic had been arrested twenty versts from St. Petersburg; so when the footman said to him, ‘Sir, here is the cook,’ he thought they had brought back the thief; and as he was very busy at the time with a report to the Emperor, he said, without even turning round, ‘Very well, take him into the courtyard and give him a hundred lashes.’ They are the hundred cuts which I received.”

“Has M. de Bruce apologised to you?”

“*He* has gone one better than that, your Excellency,” said the cook, rattling in the hollow of his hand a purse full of gold; “he has paid me a louis for each stroke of the whip, so that I am sorry, now it is over, that he did not order them to give me two hundred instead of one; he has also taken me into his service and has assured me that the thrashing I have had shall be regarded as a security paid in advance, from which deductions shall be made for every fault I commit; so if only I keep a tight rein over myself, I shall go on for three or four years without receiving a flick, and that’s a good job.”

Just then an aide-de-camp from the Governor made his appearance with an invitation for M. de Ségur to try a specimen of the new cook’s skill on the morrow.

The cook remained for ten years in the service of M. de Bruce and at the end of that period returned to France with a pension of six thousand roubles, blessing to his last hour the fortunate accident to which he owed it.

All these anecdotes which coursed through my mind in all their details did little to reassure me, especially after my adventure with the Czarevitch the day before. But I was aware of the genuine good nature of the Emperor, and though such a proceeding was very unusual in Russia, I did not hesitate to see the thing through, so continued my walk in the earnest expectation of encountering him.

In the meantime I paid successive visits to the obelisk of Gregory Orlov, the pyramid erected to the conqueror of Tchesma and the grotto of Posilipo. For four hours I had been wandering in the grounds, which comprise lakes, parks and forests, and was beginning to despair of meeting him for whom I had come in search when, while traversing an avenue, I caught sight of an officer wearing a military frock coat, who saluted me and continued his walk along a side alley. I turned to a young gardener who was raking a path behind me; I asked him the name of the polite officer: “The Emperor, sir,” he replied.

I immediately hurried along a cross alley which would cut diagonally the path along which the Emperor was strolling, and I had scarcely gone eighty paces before I saw him again; but at sight of him I had no strength loft to make another step.

The Emperor halted for a moment; then, seeing that deference kept me from approaching him he continued his walk towards me. I was standing at the side of the path and the Emperor was walking in the centre; I awaited him hat in hand and as he advanced limping slightly, for a wound which he had received in the leg during one of his excursions on the banks of the Don, had just reopened, I was able to remark the extreme change that had taken place in him since I saw him in Paris nine years ago. His face, formerly so open and so cheerful, was sullied by an unhealthy sadness, and it was evident, and indeed openly talked about, that a profound melancholy was consuming him. Yet his features had retained a kindliness of expression that somewhat reassured me, and at the moment he was passing I took a step towards him and said, “Sire.”

“Put on your hat,” said he, “the air is too keen to stand uncovered.”

“Will your Majesty permit...”

"Put it on, sir, put it on."

As he saw that respect prevented me from obeying his orders, he caught hold of my hat and with one hand he forced it on my head, while with the other, he seized my arm to compel me to keep it there.

Then perceiving that my resistance was at an end, he said: —

"Now, what do you want of me?"

"Sire, this petition."

And as I drew the written request from my pocket, his face clouded over.

"Are you aware, sir, since you have followed me here, that I have fled from St. Petersburg to escape petitions."

"Yes, sire, I know," I replied, "and I am well aware of the boldness of my proceeding; but this petition has perhaps more claim than others to your Majesty's favour; it has been recommended."

"By whom?" interrupted the Emperor sharply.

"By the august brother of your Majesty; by his Imperial Highness the Grand Duke Constantine."

"Ah!" said the Emperor, advancing his hand, but immediately withdrawing it.

"Therefore I had hopes that your Majesty would make an exception and condescend to receive this request."

"No, sir, no," said the Emperor, "I will not take it, for to-morrow I should be inundated with thousands, and be compelled to flee from these gardens, where I should be no longer alone. But," added he, noting the disappointment which this refusal had produced on my countenance, and pointing with his hand in the direction of the Church of Saint Sophia, "post your petition in the town there; I shall see it just the same and you will get an answer by the day after to-morrow."

"Sir, how can I show my gratitude?"

"Do you wish to do so?"

"Oh! your Majesty, how can you ask?"

"Very well, tell no one that you have presented a petition to me, without being punished. Good day, sir."

The Emperor -walked on, leaving me bewildered by his gloomy good nature. All the same I followed his advice and posted my petition.

Three days later I received his answer according to his promise.

It was a commission as fencing instructor to the Imperial Engineers, with the rank of Captain.

CHAPTER VIII

SEEING that my position was on a fairly good footing, I decided to leave the Hôtel de Londres on the spot and have a house of my own. I therefore set about scouring the town in every direction; and it was during these excursions that I began to acquire a real knowledge of St. Petersburg and its inhabitants.

Count Alexis kept his word. Thanks to him I had since my arrival got together a small body of pupils which, without his recommendation, I most certainly could not have obtained in a whole year. They comprised M. de Nariskin, the Emperor’s cousin; M. Paul de Bobrinski, the acknowledged grandson, though not legally recognised, of Gregory Orlov and Catherine the Great; Prince Troubetskï, Colonel of the Prebovjenskoï regiment; M. de Gorgoli, the chief of the police; several other members of the leading families in St. Petersburg, and finally two or three Polish officers serving in the Emperor’s army.

One of the things that most struck me in the houses of the most distinguished Russians was their hospitable civility, the chief virtue of primitive peoples, which rarely survives their civilization, nor did it ever fail as regards myself. It is true that the Emperor Alexander, like Louis XIV., who gave the six senior fencing masters in Paris patents of nobility transmissible to their descendants, looking upon fencing as an art and not a trade, had taken pains to elevate the profession which I exercised, by conferring upon my colleagues and myself positions in the army of more or less consequence. Nevertheless I stoutly maintain that in no country in the world except Russia should I have experienced that aristocratic familiarity which elevates the recipient without lowering the position of him who concedes it.

This kindly welcome of the Russians provides greater resources of pleasure to strangers because their home life is so full of animation, thanks to the birthdays and the numerous fêtes throughout the year, in which that of the master of the house must not fail to be included. Thus if only one has a fairly wide circle of acquaintances, very few days pass without two or three invitations to dinners and balls.

Professors in Russia have an additional advantage, owing to the fact that they become habitual guests and in a measure members of the family. A professor with some pretension to distinction, occupies on the hearth, between friend and relation, a position which is of the nature of both, and keeps it as long as he likes, scarcely ever losing it except through his own fault.

Many of my pupils wished to regard me as such, and among others the head of the police, M. de Gorgoli, one of the noblest and best-hearted men I ever knew. Of Greek origin, handsome, tall, well set up and skilled in all exercises, he, with Count Alexis Orlov and M. de Bobrinski, was certainly typical of the real nobility. Excelling in every form of sport, from riding to tennis, in the first rank as an amateur fencer, liberal as a Russian nobleman should be, he was at once the protector of strangers and of his fellow citizens, who could depend on an interview at any hour of the day or night. In a city like St. Petersburg, that is to say in this monarchical Venice, where no report gives back an echo, where the Mocka and Catherine canals, like those of the Giudecca and Orfano, give up their dead without a sound, where the butchniks who watch at the corner of every street often inspire terror rather than allay fear, Major Gorgoli was answerable for the public safety. Everyone, seeing him in his light drosky, drawn by horses as speedy as gazelles, with a fresh team four times a day, ceaselessly patrolling the twelve quarters of the city, the markets and the bazaars, shut the door of his house every night in peace and security, perfectly certain that this visible providence would keep his eyes open in the dark. I will give a proof of his ceaseless vigilance. During the twelve years that M. de Gorgoli had been head of the police he had not quitted St. Petersburg for a single day.

Perhaps there is no city in the world where one can rest so secure at night as in St. Petersburg. The police watch over both those who are shut up in their houses and those who are traversing the streets. At various spots huge wooden towers have been erected tall enough to overlook all the houses, which indeed have seldom more than two or three floors. Two men are always on the look out at the top of the towers; the moment a spark or a flash or a cloud of smoke denotes a fire, they ring a bell communicating with the base of the tower, and while the horses which are kept in harness day and night are being fastened to the pumps and water barrows, they point out the quarter of the city where danger threatens. Firemen and engines set out at a gallop. The minimum time necessary to reach a given spot has been exactly calculated and they are bound to get there to the second; now in France it is the householder who comes and wakes up the police, whereas in St. Petersburg the police come to him shouting: “Get up, your house is on fire.”

As to burglary, it is practically nonexistent. For though the Russian lower orders may be thieves, or rather, to make use of an expression which better describes how this failing is regarded by them, though they may be *pilferers,* they will never break a window pane or force open a door; so much is this the case that a letter may be entrusted confidently to a mujik so long as it is sealed, although he may have seen bank notes to the value of ten thousand roubles enclosed within it, while it would be unsafe to leave a kopek lying about within his reach.

Thus do the stay-at-homes dwell in peace. As to the wanderers through the streets, they have little to fear except from the street sentries, whose business it is to protect them; but the latter are such cowards that a single man armed with a stick or a pistol can put ten of them to flight. These miserable creatures are forced then to fall back upon some unfortunate belated girl to whom in any case robbery can mean no great loss or an assault be the cause of much shame. However, everything has its good points; during the winter nights, when in spite of the public lamps, the darkness is so profound that the horses are in constant danger of running into each other, the sentry is always at hand to warn the drivers of the danger they are running. His eyesight is so accustomed to the obscurity in which he dwells that he can distinguish on the darkest night a sledge, a drosky or a barouche noiselessly approaching over the snow, which but for his warning would dash into some other vehicle coming up like lightning in the opposite direction.

From November to March, the occupation, never an easy one, of these poor wretches, who are paid only twenty roubles a year, so I am told, is fraught with positive danger to life. In spite of the heavy clothes they wear, in spite of all the precautions taken to ward off its attack, the insidious cold penetrates through cloth and fur.

Then the night watchman has not the determination to compel himself to keep walking; a profound languor takes possession of him, a treacherous drowsiness steals over him, he goes to sleep standing, and unless some officer on his rounds happens to pass at that moment and has him thrashed mercilessly until the blows cause his blood to circulate again through his body, there is an end of him, he wakes no more and on the morrow he is discovered stiff and stark in his sentry box.

During the winter before my arrival in St. Petersburg, one of these poor fellows was found to have died like this, and when they tried to remove him, fell with his forehead against a post; his neck broke off short, and his head rolled like a ball to the other side of the road.

After several days’ search, I at length lighted upon some suitable apartments by the side of the Catherine canal, that is to say, in the centre of the town. The rooms were furnished, with the exception of a mattress and a couch, which I procured, for the use of a bed is confined to the wealthy, and is looked upon as a luxury by the peasants, who go to rest on their stoves, and by the tradespeople, who sleep in skins on arm chairs.

Very pleased with the fresh arrangements I had just concluded, I was returning from the Catherine canal to the Admiralty, when the desire seized me to have a vapour bath, quite oblivious of the fact that it was Sunday. In France I had often heard of these establishments, so as I was passing in front of a bathing house I decided I would profit by the occasion. I went up to the door and in exchange for two and a half roubles, say two shillings English, I received a ticket of admission and was shown into the first room, which is used for undressing; this room is of the ordinary temperature.

While I was taking off my clothes in the company of a dozen other people, a youth came and asked me if I had brought a servant, and on my answering in the negative, he enquired of what age, price and sex I would like the person to be who was to rub me.

Such a request necessitated an explanation; I asked for one and was told that children and men belonging to the establishment were always ready to perform this duty, but if women were wanted, they were summoned from a neighbouring house.

When the choice is made, the person who has been selected strips like the bather and enters with him into the second room which is raised to blood heat. For an instant I stood dumbfounded; then my curiosity getting the better of my shame, I selected the youth who had spoken to me. Scarcely had I made known my choice than he began his preparations, and the next moment was as naked as myself.

Then he opened the door and pushed me into the second room.

I thought that some modern Mephistopheles had conducted me to his revels, without my suspecting it.

Imagine three hundred people stark naked, of all ages and of both sexes, men, women, children and aged folks, of whom one half were buffeting the other, with cries, shouts of laughter and strange contortions, and all without the faintest idea of shame. The fact is that in Russia the people are so downtrodden and degraded that their habits closely resemble those of brute beasts.

At the end of ten minutes I complained of the heat, so returning to the first room I put on my clothes, and throwing two roubles to my attendant, fled from the place, revolted at such demoralization, which seems to be so natural to the lower orders that no one had mentioned it to me.

I followed the street of the Resurrection, my mind lost in thought at what I had just witnessed, when I ran up against a large crowd who were pressing into the courtyard of a magnificent mansion. Urged by curiosity, I followed on their heels and saw that this huge concourse had been attracted by the preparations being made to administer the knout to a serf. I was about to withdraw, feeling no inclination to witness such a spectacle, when one of the windows was opened and a couple of girls came out on to the balcony, placing there an armchair and a velvet cushion; behind the two girls there appeared the creature whose delicate limbs feared the contact with the stone, but whose eyes did not dread the sight of blood. Just then a murmur ran through the crowd and the words: “The Gossudarina, the Gossudarina,” were repeated in a low tone by a hundred voices, and there was no mistaking their meaning.

In truth I recognized, in spite of the furs which enveloped her, the beautiful Machinka of the Minister’s household. One of her former companions, it was said, had had the misfortune to act disrespectfully towards her, and she had insisted that an exemplary punishment would act as a warning to the others not to imitate his example. One might have supposed that this would have satisfied her vengeance; on the contrary, it did not satisfy her to know that the victim had been punished, she wanted to see him take his punishment. For myself, I hoped, in spite of what Louise had told me of her cruelty, that she had come out to pardon the wretch, or at least to mitigate his sentence, I remained among the spectators.

The Gossudarina had heard the murmur which greeted her appearance; but instead of experiencing fear or shame, she ran her eyes over the multitude with so haughty and disdainful an air that a queen could not have acted better; then sitting in the armchair and placing her elbow on the cushion, she rested her head upon one of her hands while with the other she caressed a white greyhound which stretched out its long, snake-like head along its mistress's knees.

It seemed in fact that her appearance was the signal for the performance to begin, for no sooner was the fair spectator seated on the balcony than a door in the basement opened and the culprit was dragged forward by two mujiks, each holding a cord fastened around his wrists, and followed by two other executioners, each carrying a knout.

He was a fair-haired youth, with an emotionless countenance and decided and striking features. Then a strange rumour passed through the crowd; some said that the young man, who was the minister's head gardener, had fallen in love with Machinka when she was still a serf, and that the girl loved him, so much so that they were going to be married, when the minister cast his eyes upon her and raised or lowered her, which ever you will, to the position of mistress. From that moment, by a strange revulsion of feeling, the Gossudarina conceived a violent hatred towards the youth, and he had already experienced the effect of this change, as if she were afraid that her master might suspect her of still entertaining her former sentiments. The affair reached its climax the previous day, when she had encountered the companion of her slavery in a pathway in the garden, and in answer to something he had said, she cried out that he was insulting her, and on the minister's return she had demanded the condign punishment of the culprit.

Preparations for the punishment had been made beforehand. They consisted of a sloping board with an iron ring to encircle the victim's neck and two posts fixed right and left to which his arms might be bound. The knout itself was a whip with a handle about two feet long; to this handle was fastened a lash of plaited leather about twice the length of the handle, and terminating in an iron ring to which was fastened another strip of leather not more than half the length of the other, about two inches in thickness but decreasing regularly until it ended in a point. This end is soaked in milk and then dried in the sun until it becomes as hard and sharp as the blade of a knife. As a rule the lash is changed after every six strokes, for the blood softens the leather; but, in the present instance, this was unnecessary, for the victim was to receive only twelve strokes and there were two performers. Moreover the two executioners were none other than the minister's coachmen, who had been selected for the business owing to their familiarity with the whip; nor did they forfeit the friendship of their comrade, who, when the opportunity presented itself would take their revenge, but without any feeling of rancour and merely as dutiful servants obeying orders. Besides, it often happens that at the same performance the executioner and the culprit change places and more than once during my visit to Russia I saw great nobles, in a sudden burst of anger against their servants, and having nothing at hand with which to strike them, order them to catch hold of each others' hair and hit each other on the nose. It must be owned that at first there was some hesitation and timidity about obeying this order, but presently the pain would stir them up, each one strove his hardest and hit with all his might, while the master kept shouting: "Harder, you rascals, harder," and then when he thought the punishment enough, he had only to say "Enough.'' At this word the combat ceased as if by magic, the pugilists retired to wash their bleeding faces in the same trough and returned arm in arm as if nothing had passed between them.

On this occasion the culprit was not going to get off so easily. The mere preparations for the punishment were enough to inspire in me a profound feeling of disgust, and yet I felt rooted to the spot by that strange fascination which attracts human beings to the side of fellow sufferers, and I must confess that I remained; besides I wanted to see to what lengths this woman's cruelty would go.

The two executioners approached the young man, stripped him to the waist, stretched him on the scaffold, adjusted his neck within the iron band and bound his arms to the two posts; then one of the executioners having pushed back the crowd, in order to preserve for the actors of this terrible scene a semi-circular space which would allow them plenty of room, the other ran forward, stood on the tips of his toes, and gave a cut so that the lash wound itself twice round the culprit's body where it left a bluish furrow. Although he must have felt frightful pain, the unhappy wretch uttered no cry.

At the second blow some drops of blood oozed from his skin.

At the third it spouted out.

From this moment the whip fell upon raw flesh, so much so that after each cut the executioner drew the lash through his fingers to squeeze out the blood.

After six strokes the other executioner took his place with a fresh whip; from the fifth stroke to the twelfth, the sufferer gave no sign of sensibility, with the exception of a nervous contraction of the hands, and if it had not been for a slight muscular movement, which caused his fingers to quiver at each blow, one would have thought him dead.

When the punishment was over, they untied the victim; he had almost fainted and could not stand up; yet he had not uttered a single cry, nor even emitted a groan. As for me I must confess I could not understand such insensibility or such courage.

Two mujiks held him up under the arms and led him back towards the door through which he had made his appearance; just as he was entering, he turned round, looked at Machinka and muttered a few words in Russian which I could not understand. No doubt these words were an insult or a threat, for his companions pushed him hurriedly under the arch. The only answer the Gossudarina vouchsafed was a haughty smile, then drawing a gold box from her pocket she gave her favourite greyhound some bonbons, summoned her attendants and went off leaning on their shoulders.

The window shut behind her, and the crowd seeing that all was over melted away in silence. Some of those who composed it shook their heads, as if to say that such inhumanity in a young and beautiful creature would, sooner or later, draw upon her the vengeance of God.

CHAPTER IX

CATHERINE used to say that St.

Petersburg could not boast of a winter and a summer, but only two winters; one white, the other green.

We were rapidly approaching the white winter, and I must say, that as far as I was concerned, it was not without a certain amount of curiosity that I saw it coming. I like an exaggerated view of a country, for it is only then its true character shows up.

It would be better to stay in France than visit St. Petersburg in summer, or Naples in winter, for really nothing representative of either can be seen at such times.

The Czarevitch Constantine had returned to Warsaw without having discovered anything of the plot which had brought him to St. Petersburg; and the Emperor Alexander, who felt himself invisibly surrounded by a vast conspiracy, sadder than ever, had left the beautiful trees of his beloved Tsarskoe-Selo, when leaves began to cover the ground. The glowing days and the pale nights had disappeared, no more azure skies, no more sapphires rolling along the waves of the Neva, no more Aeolian music, no more gondolas filled with women and flowers. I had a fancy to revisit once more those wonderful islands which I found on my arrival carpeted with strange plants, dense foliage and gigantic blossoms; but the plants had been removed into their greenhouses for the next eight months. I came in search of palaces, temples and delightful parks, I saw bare spots like floating rafts enveloped in fog, around which the birches were waving their dismantled branches, and the fir trees their sombre limbs, all laden with funeral fringes, while the inhabitants, those brilliant birds of summer, had already fled to St. Petersburg. I had followed the advice which had been given me on my arrival by my friend from Lyons at the *table d’hôte,* and wrapped up in furs purchased at his establishment, I ran from one end of the town to the other to give my lessons, which however almost always developed into chats rather than instruction on fencing. M. de Gorgoli particularly, who, after thirteen years’ service as Chief of the Police, had sent in his resignation as the result of an altercation with General Milarodovitch, the Governor of the town, and had returned to private life, was feeling the need of rest after so strenuous a time, made me stay for hours at a time talking to him about France, and giving an account of my adventures as if to a friend. Next to him M. de Bobrinski showed me the greatest marks of affection, and among the presents which he was always giving me was a very handsome Turkish sabre. As to Count Alexis, he was always my most enthusiastic supporter, although I rarely visited him since he was always busy with his acquaintances in St. Petersburg or even in Moscow, for notwithstanding the two hundred leagues which separate the two capitals, he was always on the road. Of such strange contradictions is the Russian fashioned that, by nature the slave of indolence, he easily allows himself to be captured by the feverish activity of ennui.

Many and many a visit I paid to Louise. My poor compatriot was every day becoming more sad, and I noticed the change with deep sorrow. When I found her alone, I questioned her as to the reason of this melancholy, which I put down to jealousy; but when I broached the subject, she shook her head and spoke of Count Alexis with so much trust, that I began to think, when I recalled what she had said about Vaninkov’s profound ennui, that he was taking an active part in that secret conspiracy, of which people spoke mysteriously without knowing who were hatching it or understanding in the least what it was aimed at. As to the Count, I must pay homage to Russian conspirators, for I do not recollect having seen the least change in his expression, or the smallest alteration in his spirits; and f hold that Machiavelli’s contention that Constantinople was the best school for conspirators, was unjust towards Moscow the Holy.

We had now reached the ninth of November, 1824; the city was wrapped in dense fogs, and for three days a cold damp wind from the south-west, had been blowing violently from the Gulf of Finland, so that the Neva was as tempestuous as a sea. Numbers of people gathered on the quays, in spite of the keen and hissing wind which cut their faces, and were watching with uneasiness the turbulent undercurrents of the river and counting, along the granite walls, which keep it back, the rings placed one above the other to mark the different heights of the various inundations. Others while praying at the foot of the Virgin who, as I have already mentioned, failed to make Peter the Great desist from building the Imperial city, reckoned that the river was up to the first floors. In the city people were frightened at the sight of the fountains flowing more abundantly, and the springs rising with great bubbles as if they were urged by some strange power in their subterranean channels. Finally an indefinable gloom spread over the city, portending the advent of a serious catastrophe. Evening approached; the watchmen posted at the signalling stations, were everywhere doubled. Night came, and with it a terrible storm. Orders had been given to raise the bridges so as to allow vessels to seek a refuge in the very heart of the city, and all night long they were threading their way up the course of the Neva, like white ghosts, and anchoring opposite the Fortress.

I waited at Louise’s till midnight. She was the more terrified because Alexis had received orders to repair to the horse-guards’ barracks; in fact from the precautions taken the city might have been in a state of siege. Leaving her I paid a hurried visit to the quays. The Neva seemed to be in torrent, and yet did not grow visibly bigger; but from time to the strange noises like prolonged wails could be heard in the direction of the sea.

I returned to my rooms; no one in the house was asleep. A small stream which ran through the courtyard had been over-flowing for the past two hours and had inundated the ground floor. It was said that in other places slabs of granite had been displaced, causing many terrible disasters in the other houses. I went up to my room and as it was on the second floor, I was quite safe. For some time, however, the disturbance I had remarked in other houses, rather than what I had witnessed in my own, kept me awake; but presently I fell asleep, overcome with fatigue, lulled even by the noise of the storm.

About eight o’clock in the morning I was awakened by a cannon shot. I slipped on a dressing-gown and ran to the window. The streets presented to my sight an extraordinary commotion. I dressed in haste and went down.

“What is the meaning of the cannon shot?” I asked of a man who was carrying up some mattresses to the first floor.

“The water is rising, Sir,” he replied, and he went on his way.

I descended to the ground floor; here the water was up to one’s ankles, although the floor of the house was raised above the level of the street by the height of the three steps which formed the entrance flight. I ran to the threshold of the door; the middle of the street was flooded and a kind of tidal wave, caused by the passing carriages, was lapping against the pavements.

I caught sight of a drosky and hailed it, but the driver refused the job, being anxious to get back to shelter as soon as possible. A bank note for twenty roubles proved too much for him. I jumped into the carriage and gave Louise’s address on the Nevski Prospect. The horse was up to his hocks in water; at intervals of five minutes the cannon was fired and at each report the people passing us called out, “the water is rising.”

I got to Louise’s. A trooper was at the door. He had just arrived at full gallop from Count Alexis to tell Louise to go to the top floor of the house for greater safety. The wind had now veered to the west, and was driving back the Neva against the stream, the sea seeming to be striving with the river to throw the latter back upon its source. The soldier j had just finished his errand as I entered the house and disappeared at a gallop in the direction of the barracks, making the water fly around him. The cannon still continued to boom out at intervals.

It was quite time I arrived; Louise was dying of fright, less perhaps for her own sake than for Count Alexis, whose barracks in the Narva quarter would be the first to suffer from the flood. Yet the message she had just received, had somewhat reassured her. We climbed together on to the roof of the house, which, being one of the highest, commanded the whole town, and permitted a view of the sea in fine weather. But now the fog was so thick that the view was confined to a very limited horizon, being lost in an ocean of vapour.

Presently the cannon shots became more frequent, and we noticed the public carriages, whose drivers, in view of the subterranean eruption of water, had repaired to their accustomed positions with the expectation of making a small fortune, dashing from the Admiralty Square through the streets in all directions. Forced to flee before the impetuous river, they kept shouting: — ” The water is rising, the water is rising.” In truth behind the vehicles, as if in pursuit, a huge wave showed its greenish crest above the quays and broke at the corner of the Isaac bridge, while the foam rolled to the base of the statue of Peter the Great.

Then there arose a cry of terror as if the whole city had seen the wave. The Neva was overflowing.

In response to the cry uniforms swarmed over the roof of the Winter Palace. The Emperor, surrounded by his staff, had just gone up to give his orders, for the danger was becoming more and more threatening. When he got there he saw that the water had already crept more than half way up the walls of the Fortress, and he thought of the unhappy prisoners who were in the barred dungeons fronting the Neva. The captain of a vessel was ordered instantly to go and command the Governor, in the Emperor’s name, to release them from their cells and put them in a place of safety. But the boat arrived too late; in the general confusion they had been forgotten. They were dead.

We now perceived above the Winter Palace, the streamer of the Imperial yacht, which had come up to offer a refuge to the Emperor and his family if need were. The water was now on a level with the parapets of the quays, which were beginning to disappear, and seeing a carriage floundering about with its driver and horse, we perceived that people were being swept off their feet in the streets. Presently the coachman flung himself into the water, gained a window and was dragged up on to the first floor balcony.

Interested in this incident we had neglected the Neva, but on turning our eyes in that direction we perceived two vessels on the Admiralty Square. The water was already so high that they had been able to pass over the parapet. These boats had been sent by the Emperor to bring help to those who were drowning. Three others followed them. We thereupon turned our eyes mechanically in the direction of the horse and carriage; the roof of the carriage was still in sight, but the horse had been absolutely swallowed up. There were then nearly six feet of water in the streets. And now the cannon had ceased to fire, — proof positive that the inundation had reached the top of the ramparts of the citadel.

Then we began to see the wreckage of houses floating in from the suburbs, driven forward by the waves; they were chiefly miserable wooden shanties from the Narva quarter, which were not able to resist the hurricane and had been swept away with their wretched inmates.

One of the vessels which was entering the Prospect fished out a dead man before our very eyes. It is difficult to describe the impression produced upon us by the sight of the first corpse.

The water continued to rise with startling rapidity; the three canals which encircle the city were discharging into the streets vessels laden with stores, fodder and timber. From time to time we would see a man cling to one of these floating islands, then scramble to the top and hail the boats, which then attempted to reach him; but it was a difficult matter, for the waves hemmed in by the streets raged furiously; so much so that before help could reach him it often happened that the poor wretch was carried away by a wave or saw his would-be rescuers themselves engulfed.

We felt the house tremble and heard it groan under the stress of the waves, which had now reached the first floor and every moment we thought that the basement would give way and the upper storeys go crashing down; and yet in the midst of this chaos Louise could murmur nothing but, “Alexis, oh! my God! my God! Alexis!”

The Emperor appeared to be in despair. Count Milarodovitch, Governor of St. Petersburg, was near him receiving and transmitting orders, which, however perilous they might be, were executed immediately with miraculous devotion. Meanwhile the news which reached him grew more and more disastrous. At one of the city barracks a whole regiment had sought refuge on the roof, but the building had collapsed and the whole of the unfortunate men disappeared. While this was being related to the Emperor, a sentinel, floating by on his sentry box, which till that moment had served him as a boat, appeared on the top of a wave, and catching sight of the Emperor on the roof, stood up and presented arms. At that moment a wave toppled over both him and his frail bark. The Emperor uttered a cry and ordered a small boat to go to his assistance. Happily the soldier knew how to swim and was able to sustain himself in the water for a few moments, till the boat reached him and conveyed him to the palace.

By this time the whole scene was one of chaos of which it was impossible to follow the details.

Vessels were crashing together and breaking up, and we watched the wreckage floating by mingled with the remains of houses and furniture and the corpses of men and animals. Coffins torn from their graves rendered up their dead as on the day of judgment, and finally a cross wrested from a cemetery entered a window of the Imperial palace and was found, an unlucky omen, in the Emperor’s room.

The sea continued to rise for twelve hours. The first floors were everywhere submerged, and in some quarters of the city the water reached as far as the second, that is to say, six feet above Peter the Great’s Virgin; then it began to subside, for, by the grace of God, the wind shifted from the West to the North, and the Neva was able to retrace its course which the sea heaped up like a wall had hitherto prevented. Twelve hours more and St. Petersburg with its inhabitants would have disappeared from the face of the earth, like the cities of the antediluvian world at the flood.

All this time the Emperor, the Grand Duke Nicholas, the Grand Duke Michael and Count Milarodovitch, the Governor General, whose bravery had procured him the title of the Russian Bayard, although in morals he fell far short of the French hero, did not leave the roof of the Winter Palace, while the Empress at her window threw purses of gold to the boatmen who were nobly hazarding their lives for others.

Towards evening a boat approached towards the second floor of our house. For some time Louise exchanged joyous signals with the soldier in command of it, for she recognised his uniform. He brought news of the Count and had come to inquire after us. She wrote him a few lines in pencil to reassure him and I added a postscript in which I promised not to leave her.

As the water continued to subside and the wind seemed settled in the North, we descended from the roof to the second floor. There we spent the night, for it was impossible to get to the first floor; the water had disappeared it is true, but everything was soiled and broken; the windows and doors were smashed and the floor was covered with fragments of furniture.

This was the third time in a century that St. Petersburg with its palaces of brick and plaster colonnades had been threatened thus with water, making a counterpart to Naples, at the opposite end of Europe, which is periodically menaced with fire.

The next morning there were not more than two or three feet of water in the streets and the magnitude of the disaster could be appreciated by the spectacle of wreckage and corpses strewing the pavements. Ships had been driven up as far as the church of Kazan and at Cronstadt a hundred-gun battleship, forced into the midst of the public square had demolished in its course two houses, against which it had been flung as if they had been reefs at sea.

While the vengeance of God was being exercised the vengeance of man had not been idle.

At eleven o’clock at night the Russian Minister had been summoned by the Emperor and had left his beautiful mistress at home, advising her, at the first sign of danger to repair to the rooms out of reach of the water; this was an easy matter, for the Minister’s mansion, one of the finest in the Street of the Resurrection, was four storeys high.

The Gossudarina was left alone in the house with her serfs, while the Minister hastened to the Winter Palace, where he remained in attendance on the Emperor for nearly two days, in fact until the inundation had subsided.

The moment he was free he returned to his home and found all the doors smashed in; the water had risen seventeen feet, and the house was completely deserted.

Anxious about his beautiful mistress, the Minister ran upstairs to her room; the door was shut and was one of the few which had resisted the waves; almost all the others had been torn from their hinges and swept away. Disturbed at such a strange circumstance, he knocks, he calls out, but all is silent as the grave; his terror is greatly augmented at this silence, he makes a stupendous effort and forces in the door.

The body of the Gossudarina was lying in the centre of the room; but, terrible proof that the flood was not altogether responsible for her death, the body was without a head.

The Minister, almost out of his mind with grief, called for help, stepping on to the balcony whence Machinka had watched the knouting of her quondam companion. Several people ran up and found him on his knees near the poor mutilated corpse.

The room was searched and the head was found, carried under the bed by the waves; near the head was a pair of large shears used for clipping hedges, evidently the instrument of the crime.

All the Minister’s serfs, who at the first sign of danger had deserted their mistress, returned the same evening or the next day.

But the gardener never came back.

CHAPTER X

THE shifting of the wind from West to North foreshadowed the arrival of winter; scarcely had the urgent repairs necessitated by the ravages of the retreating enemy been taken in hand, before preparations for meeting the advancing host became imperative.

There was all the more need for haste, since the inundation did not happen till the 10th of November. The vessels which had escaped the hurricane made for the open sea with all despatch, only to be seen again in the spring, like the swallows.

The bridges were removed, and then we waited quietly for the first frost. It arrived on December 3rd; on the fourth snow fell, and although there were only five or six degrees of frost, the sleighs were brought out; this was lucky, for all the winter store of provisions had been spoilt by the flood and the sleighs would preserve us from starvation. In fact, thanks to the sleighs, which almost rival steam in speed, as soon as this method of transport was in working order, there arrived in the capital, from every quarter of the empire, game which had been shot -sometimes a thousand or twelve hundred leagues from the spot where it would be eaten. Grouse, partridge, chicken and wild duck, packed in casks amid layers of snow, glut the markets, where they give them away almost rather than sell them. Near them may be seen the choicest fish from the Black Sea or the Volga spread out on tables or piled up in heaps; as for butcher’s meat, the carcases are exposed for sale, standing upon their four feet and are cut up in that position.

The first few days when St. Petersburg put on her white robe of winter afforded me many a curious sight, for everything was a novelty. In particular I could not refrain from sleighing; for it is such a delightful pleasure to feel oneself drawn over a surface smooth as ice by horses excited by the keenness of the air; feeling almost no weight on the traces, they seem to fly rather than gallop. The first few days were additionally pleasant to me, for winter with unusual coquetry advanced slowly step by step, so that thanks to my coats and furs I experienced twenty degrees of frost almost without knowing it; at twelve degrees the Neva began to solidify.

I had worked my unfortunate horses so hard that my driver told me one morning that unless I allowed them a rest of forty-eight hours at least, they would be unfit for further use at the end of a week. As the sky was cloudless, though the air was sharper than I had yet felt it, I decided I would take walking exercise. I fortified myself from head to foot against the inroads of the frost; I put on a large astrakhan overcoat, pushed a fur cap over my cars, wrapped a cashmere comforter round my neck and ventured forth into the street, presenting no part of my body to the air except the tip of my nose.

All went well at first; I was astonished at the slight inconvenience I was put to by the cold, and I laughed to myself at all the tales I had heard; I was moreover delighted that fortune had given me this opportunity of acclimatizing myself. But as the first two pupils, M. de Bobrinski and M. de Nariskin, at whose houses I called, were not at home, I began to think that fortune had not dealt too kindly with me, for I noticed that the passers by were looking at me with a certain uneasiness, yet they said nothing.” But presently a gentleman more talkative than the others, said to me as he passed: “Noss.” As I did not know a word of Russian I thought it hardly worth while to stop for a monosyllable and continued my walk. At the corner of the Rue des Pois, I encountered a coachman who was driving his sleigh like the wind; but in spite of the rapidity with which he was going he could not refrain from speaking also and shouted out to me: “Noss! Noss!”

At length when I reached the Admiralty Square I came face to face with a mujik, who said nothing at all but picked up a handful of snow and rushing at me before I could free myself of my encumbrances, began to wash my face and in particular to rub my nose with all his might. I did not think much of this joke, especially considering the weather, and freeing an arm from my pocket I hit out straight with my fist and sent him flying ten yards. Unluckily or rather luckily for me, two peasants who happened to be passing, looked at me and then rushed at me and though I tried to defend myself they seized hold of my arms, while the infuriated mujik picked up another handful of snow, and not to be disappointed this time, set upon me again. And now seeing it was impossible for me to defend myself, he began to rub me once more. But though my arms were held, my tongue was free, and believing that I was the victim of some mistake or of some plot I shouted for help with all my strength. An officer ran up and asked in French, what was the matter.

"What, sir," I cried making a final effort and freeing myself from the three men, who in the calmest possible fashion continued their walk, one in the direction of the Prospect and the two others towards the English Quay; "did you not see what these scoundrels were doing?"

"What were they doing?"

"Why, they were rubbing my face with snow. Perhaps you think such a joke as this in good taste, especially in such weather?"

"Why, sir, they were rendering you an enormous service," replied the officer, looking me straight and close in the face. "How so?"

"Doubtless your nose was frost bitten."

"My goodness! "I cried touching the affected spot.

"Sir," said a pedestrian addressing the officer, "excuse me, sir, but your nose is freezing."

"Thanks," said the officer taking the warning as the most natural thing in the world; then stooping down he picked up a handful of snow and applied it to his person, exactly as I had been treated by the poor mujik, whom I had rewarded so brutally for his kind services.

"Then, sir, if it had not been for that fellow..."

"You would have lost your nose," continued the officer still rubbing his own.

"Then, sir, excuse me..."

And I began to run after my mujik, who, thinking I wanted to start thrashing him again, also took to flight; so that, as fear is naturally speedier than gratitude, I should have never caught him in all probability, if some other people, seeing him running and me in full pursuit, had not taken him for a thief and barred his progress. When I got up I found him talking with the utmost volubility, trying to make them understand that he was guilty of nothing more than an excess of good will; a present of ten roubles from me put the matter right. The mujik kissed my hands and one of the bystanders who spoke French advised me to pay more attention to my nose for the future. This advice was gratuitous, for the rest of my walk I kept it always in sight.

I went to M. Siverbruck's fencing school, where I was to meet M. de Gorgoli, who had made an appointment with me there. I related my recent escapade as if it had been quite an extraordinary incident; then he asked if no one else had spoken to me before the poor mujik sacrificed himself. I told him that two pedestrians had stared at me and as they passed me had shouted, “Noss! Noss!”

“Well,” said he, “they were only warning you to look after your nose. That is the usual warning; another time you had better take heed of it.”

M. de Gorgoli was quite right, but there is not so much to fear in St. Petersburg so far as one’s nose and ears are concerned, since, if you do not yourself perceive that the frost has attacked you, the first passer by will acquaint you with the fact and always warn you in time to apply some remedy. But when unfortunately the cold seizes upon some other part of the body hidden by clothing, advice cannot be given, and it is not till numbness sets in that you realize you have been attacked and then it is often too late. During the previous winter, a Frenchman called Pierson, a clerk in one of the leading Paris banks was the victim of an accident of this sort from lack of precaution.

M. Pierson, who had set out from Paris to St. Petersburg with a considerable sum of money, part of a loan negotiated by the Russian government, left Paris in perfect weather, and took no forethought as regards cold.

When he got to Riga he found the weather still quite tolerable, so he continued his journey not thinking it worth while to buy a cloak, or furs or wool-lined boots. All went well while passing through Livonia, but three leagues beyond Revel, the snow fell in such thick flakes that the postilion lost his way and upset the carriage in a quagmire. He was obliged to go in search of help, for the two men were not strong enough to extricate the carriage; the postboy unharnessed one of the horses and hurried off to the nearest town, while M. Pierson, noticing the night was coming on, could not leave for a single moment the treasure he was escorting for fear of robbers. But at nightfall the snow ceased, and the wind shifting to the North, the temperature fell suddenly twenty degrees. M. Pierson, who was aware of the danger he ran, did all he could to ward it off by immediately starting to walk round and round the carriage.

After a halt of three hours, the postilion came back with men and horses, the carriage was again set on its wheels, and thanks to the extra horses, M. Pierson quickly reached the neighbouring town, where he stopped. The landlord who had supplied the horses was anxiously awaiting him, for he knew how he had been situated while the postilion was absent; so the first question he put to M. Pierson when he got out of the carriage was to ask him if he had been frost bitten. The traveller replied that he thought he was all right, as he had kept walking the whole time and thanks to the exercise he believed he had been successful in keeping out the cold. With these words he unwrapped his face and showed his hands; they had not been attacked.

But, as M. Pierson felt very tired and was afraid that if he continued his journey a mishap might befall him similar to the one he thought he had escaped, he ordered his bed to be warmed, drank a glass of hot wine and went to sleep.

The next morning he wakes and tries to get up, but he seems glued to his bed; with one of his arms, which he raises with difficulty, he pulls the bell rope and calls out. When a servant appears he tells him how he feels; it is a kind of general paralysis; the doctor is sent for; he comes and lifting the coverlet discovers that the patient’s legs are livid and covered with black patches; gangrene has set it. The doctor at once informs his patient that amputation is the only hope.

Though such a remedy is a terrible one M. Pierson gives his consent. The doctor sends for the necessary instruments; but while he is making his preparations the sick man complains suddenly that his vision is affected and that he can hardly distinguish surrounding objects. The doctor then begins to suspect that the case is more serious than he had supposed at first, makes a further examination and finds that the flesh on his patient’s back is bursting open. Then instead of explaining to M. Pierson the shocking discovery he has just made, he reassures him, and declares that his condition is less alarming than he had imagined, and to bear out his opinion, says that he ought to be feeling very sleepy. The invalid replies that in truth he does feel uncommonly drowsy. Ten minutes later he falls asleep and at the end of a quarter of hour’s slumber breathes his last.

If it had been possible to detect the marks of frost bite on his body and had they been rubbed immediately with snow, as the worthy mujik had treated mine, M. Pierson might have continued his journey on the morrow as if nothing had happened.

This was a lesson to me; and fearing that I might not always find the same timely disinterestedness among strangers, I did not venture forth without a small mirror in my pocket, and at regular intervals I took a look at my nose.

In less than a week St. Petersburg had put on her winter robe; the Neva was frozen over and could be crossed in all directions either on foot or in vehicles. Sleighs had quite taken the place of carriages; the Prospect might have been another Longchamps, the stoves were lighted in the churches and at night in front of the theatres large fires were kept burning in enclosures erected for the purpose, with a roof, but open at the sides and fitted with circular seats on which servants awaited their masters. As for coachmen, if their masters have any feeling, they are sent home, with orders to return again at the proper time. The soldiers and the street sentries are in the worst plight of all; not a night passes but some of them are found to be dead who at the previous relief were alive and well.

Meanwhile the cold steadily increased, and at last reached such a pitch, that troops of wolves were seen in the neighbourhood of St. Petersburg, and one morning one of the creatures was found prowling about the Foundry quarter. The poor beast did not seem to be very menacing, and gave me the impression of a beggar rather than a robber. It was knocked on the head before long with a cudgel.

After narrating this circumstance to Count Alexis that evening he broached the subject of a great bear hunt, which was to come off the day after to-morrow, in a forest ten or twelve miles from St. Petersburg. As the sport was under the direction of M. de Nariskin, one of my pupils, I had no trouble in persuading the Count to mention how much I should like to participate in it; he readily promised and on the morrow I received an invitation accompanied with a programme, not of the proceedings, but of the correct costume. The costume consists of a coat covered with furs inside and out, with a kind of a leather helmet which descends like a tippet over the shoulders; the hunter’s right hand is protected by a gauntlet and in it he holds a dagger. With this weapon he attacks the bear in a fight at close quarters, and almost always despatches it at the first blow.

The details of the chase which had been repeated to me at great length two or three times, somewhat damped my ardour. However, as I had myself proposed to join in, I did not like to withdraw, and I made the necessary preparations, and bought coat, helmet and dagger, in order to try them on the same evening and get accustomed to the gear.

I remained very late at Louise’s, and it was past midnight when I got home. I immediately began a rehearsal in costume; I placed my bolster on a chair and lunged out at it, endeavouring to strike it on a spot I had marked, which was supposed to represent the bear’s sixth rib, when my attention was suddenly distracted by an extraordinary noise in the fireplace of my room. I ran there at once and peering between the doors which I had already shut (for at St. Petersburg the fireplaces are shut up at night like stoves), I perceived some object, which came down the chimney almost to the level of the register, and then climbed up again. I felt convinced it was a robber, who, rather than break into the house had adopted this means of effecting an entrance, and then finding I had not gone to bed, had beaten a retreat in haste. After calling out several times “Who is there?” and getting no reply, my suspicions were absolutely confirmed. I waited for nearly half-an-hour on the look out, but not hearing another sound, I imagined that the thief had departed for good, then carefully barricading the doors of the fireplace, I went to bed and was soon asleep.

I can scarcely have rested my head a quarter of an hour on the pillows, when in the midst of my dreams I fancied I heard footsteps in the corridor. Greatly excited by the extraordinary incident of the fireplace, I awoke with a start and listened. Most assuredly there is someone walking up and down before the door of my room, for the floor boards are creaking in spite of the obvious care he is taking not to make the slightest sound. Very soon the footsteps halt in hesitation before my door, probably to ascertain if I am asleep. I put out my hand to the chair in which I had thrown down all my kit, I catch hold of the helmet and the dagger, putting on the former and arming myself with the latter, then I wait.

Another moment’s hesitation, and I hear someone turning the door handle, the bolt grates, the door opens, and I see, illuminated by the light of a lantern which he has left in the corridor, a fantastic creature approaching me, with his face hidden by a mask, as far as I can make out in the semi-darkness. Rather than await an attack I quickly decided to be the aggressor, so as he approaches the fireplace with a confidence which proves that he knows his ground, I leap out of bed, seize him by the throat, knock him down, and placing my dagger before his chest, ask him what the devil he wants; then to my intense astonishment, my prisoner utters fearful cries and appears to be yelling for help. Then, anxious to know with whom I have to deal, I rush out into the corridor, snatch up the lantern and come back, but quick as I was the thief had disappeared as if by magic.

Yet I hear a slight rustling in the chimney, I run there, gaze up, and in the distance catch sight of the soles of a man’s boots and the lower extremities of a pair of breeches, whose owner is making such a rapid flight that it is quite evident he is no stranger to this mode of travelling. I remain thunderstruck.

Just then a neighbour who had been disturbed by the infernal din we had been making for the last few minutes, hurries into my apartments, imagining that I am being assassinated, and finds me standing in my night shirt, with a lantern in one hand, a dagger in the other, and a helmet on my head. His first question is to ask me if I am mad.

Then that I might let him see I have all my wits about me, and in addition, that he may have some idea of my bravery, I proceed to tell him what has happened. My neighbour roars with laughter. I have defeated a chimney-sweep. I can hardly believe him, but my hands, my shirt, and my face even are covered with soot and bear out his statement. The whole matter is explained to me and there is no longer room to doubt.

It appears that the sweep, who in France, even in winter, is only a bird of passage, singing once a year at the top of the chimney, becomes at St. Petersburg a being of the first necessity; once a fortnight at least he pays a visit to every house. Only he carries out his protective operations at night, for if the stove pipes were opened during the daytime or the fires were extinguished, the cold would penetrate into the apartments. The stoves then are shut down in the morning as soon as the fires are lighted, and the fireplaces are closed every night when the fires go out. Then the chimney-sweeps, who have made arrangements with the landlords, climb on to the roofs and, without warning the tenants, lower into the chimney a bundle of thorns with a heavy stone in the middle, and with this improvised broom sweep the upper half of the chimney; and when this is finished, they enter the houses, visit the tenants’ rooms and sweep out the lower end of the pipes. People who are accustomed to it or have been warned, know what is going on and pay no attention. Unfortunately I had not been warned, and as it was the first time the wretched sweep had come to my house on business, it fell to his lot to be the victim of my readiness to think evil.

On the next day I received a proof that my neighbour was right. My landlady visited me in the morning and said that there was a sweep at the door below asking for his lantern.

At three in the afternoon Count Alexis called upon me in his sledge, which was in truth a well-made carriage body mounted on runners, and we proceeded to the place selected for the hunt with marvellous rapidity. The rendezvous was a country house belonging to M. de Nariskin at about ten or twelve leagues distance from St. Petersburg and situated in the midst of a very thick wood; we got there at five o’clock and found nearly all the sportsmen on the spot. In a few minutes all the company had arrived, and the announcement was made that dinner was on the table. A grand dinner in a Russian nobleman’s house must be seen before one can appreciate the extent to which the luxury of the table is carried. We were half way through December, and the first thing that struck me was a magnificent cherry tree covered with cherries, such as we are accustomed to see in France at the end of May, gracing the centre of the table cloth. Around the tree oranges, bananas, figs and grapes piled in pyramids, formed a dessert which it would have been difficult to procure in Paris in the month of September. I am certain that the dessert must have cost more than three thousand roubles.

We sat down; at this period, the excellent custom had been adopted at St. Petersburg of entrusting the carving to the steward, and allowing the guests to help themselves to drink; and as the Russians are the greatest drinkers in the world, there were set out between each of the guests, in a neat group, five bottles of wine of different sorts, Claret, Champagne, Madeira, Constantine, and Tokay; as to the viands, they had sent to Archangel for veal, to the Ukraine for beef, and everywhere for game.

After the first course the butler entered carrying in a silver dish two fish alive, but of a species unknown to me. The guests with one voice uttered a shout of delight, they were sterlets. Now since sterlets are only found in the Volga, and the nearest point of the Volga is more than three hundred and fifty leagues from St. Petersburg, and seeing that these fish cannot live out of their native water, they must have made a hole in the ice and so fished up from the depths of the river two of its inhabitants; then for five days and five nights while on the road, conveyed them in a carriage closed and heated sufficiently to prevent the river water from freezing.

As they must have cost eight hundred roubles each, or more than sixteen hundred for the pair, Potemkin of fabulous memory could not have done better.

Ten minutes afterwards they made their reappearance on the table, and now they were so exquisitely cooked, that praises were equally lavished on the Amphitryon who had procured them, and the steward who was responsible for serving them; then came early peas, forced asparagus and haricot beans, all of them bearing an exact resemblance to the articles they were intended to represent, but their lack of flavour and watery consistence belied their appearance.

After dinner we adjourned to the drawing room where tables were set out for play; but as I was neither poor enough nor rich enough to be a victim to the passion, I watched the others. At midnight when I retired to bed, three hundred thousand roubles and twenty-five thousand peasants had exchanged hands.

I was called next morning at daybreak. The huntsmen had heard of five bears which had sought the cover of a wood about three leagues in circumference. I received this news with a slight shudder, though I suppose I ought to have been delighted. However brave a man is, he always experiences some trepidation in tackling a strange enemy who is being encountered for the first time.

All the same I boldly dressed in my costume, which was designed so that I had nothing to fear from the cold. Besides, as if to take an interest in the sport, the sun was shining gloriously and the temperature, mitigated by its rays, registered not more than fifteen degrees of frost at this early hour and gave promise of rising seven or eight degrees by noonday.

I went downstairs and found the whole party ready and dressed exactly alike, so that we had great difficulty in recognizing one another. Sleighs fully equipped were waiting for us; we got in and ten minutes later were at the appointed spot. It was a charming cottage belonging to some Russian peasant, constructed of wood in a rough fashion, with its big stove and its patron saint, before which we all bowed humbly, as a matter of course, as we crossed the threshold. A substantial breakfast was awaiting us, to which we all did justice; but I noticed that contrary to their usual custom none of the sportsmen drank anything. It was like abstaining from drink before a duel, and we were about to engage in a real duel. When breakfast was nearly over, the huntsman appeared at the door as a hint that it was time to start. We each received a fully loaded carbine at the door, which we were to sling across our shoulders, but not to use except as a last resource. In addition to the carbines they gave each of us five or six tin plates to throw at the bear and irritate it by the sound and sparkle.

After walking for a few yards we arrived at the covert, which had been surrounded by bands of music by M. de Nariskin’s orders, exactly like those I had heard on the Neva during the lovely summer nights. Every man held his horn in his hand ready to produce the note. The whole enclosure was thus surrounded, so that the bears in whatever direction they attempted to escape were met by the noise. Between the musicians was a huntsman, a marker or a peasant with a gun loaded with powder only, lest any of us should be accidentally shot. The combined noise of the firing and the music would confront any attempt on the part of the bears to break out. We passed this line and entered the covert.

At the same moment the wood was enveloped in a circle of music, which had the same effect upon us as military music must produce among soldiers going into battle. As for myself I felt transported with warlike ardour, such as I should have felt myself incapable of experiencing five minutes previously.

I was placed between M. de Nariskin's huntsman, who thanks to my inexperience received the honour of taking part in the hunt, and Count Alexis, over whom I had promised Louise to keep a watchful eye, whereas in reality he was looking after me. He had on his left Prince Nikita Muraviev, with whom he was extremely intimate, and beyond the Prince I could I just distinguish M. de Nariskin, through the trees. I could see nothing further on.

We walked in this order for nearly ten minutes when cries of "Medvede, Med.

vede" were heard followed by a few gun shots. A bear disturbed by the sound of the horns had probably appeared on the edge of the covert to be driven back at once by the markers and the musicians. My neighbours made the signal to halt and we remained at attention. A moment later we heard in front of us the crashing of brushwood and a muffled growl.

I must confess that at this sound, which seemed to be approaching in my direction, I felt the sweat oozing from my forehead in spite of the cold weather. But on looking round I noticed that my two neighbours looked cheerful enough, so I followed their example. At that moment we caught sight of the bear, its head and half its body appearing from the middle of a thorn bush, standing between Count Alexis and myself.

Instinctively I threw away my dagger and seized my gun, for the astonished bear kept gazing at each of us in turn and seemed undecided as to which he should first attack. But the Count did not allow him time to choose; fearing lest I should make some mistake, he wanted to draw the enemy upon himself, so advancing a few steps in order to reach an open space where he would have more freedom to act, he threw at the bear's face one of the plates he was carrying. With one bound the bear stood bolt upright and with marvellous skill caught the plate with 1rs paws and crushed it, all the while growling. The Count thereupon advanced another pace and threw another plate; the bear caught it exactly as a dog seizes a stone and ground it with his teeth. The Count threw a third, to excite it to still greater fury; but on this occasion as if he understood it was folly to vent his rage on inanimate objects, he scornfully let the plate fall at his side, faced straight at the Count, uttered a terrible roar and trotted towards him, till they were not more than ten feet apart. At this moment the Count gave a shrill whistle. The bear immediately stood upon its hind legs; this is what the Count had expected; he threw himself upon the brute, which stretched out his two arms to hug him; but before he had time to close them, the bear uttered a cry of pain and making three steps to the rear, staggered like a drunken man and fell dead. He was pierced to the heart by the dagger.

I ran up to the Count to ask if he was wounded and found him calm and cool as if he had just hamstrung a deer. I could not comprehend such courage; as for me I was all in a tremble at having merely watched the encounter.

“You see how it is done,” said the Count, “it is not very difficult after all. Help me to turn him over; I left my dagger in the wound, in order that you might witness the whole performance.”

The animal was quite dead. We turned it over with difficulty, for it must have weighed four hundred pounds being one of the large black bears. The dagger was indeed driven up to the hilt in its breast. The Count drew it out and plunged it two or three times in the snow to clean it. Just then we heard fresh cries and through the trees we could see the huntsman who was posted on M. de Nariskin’s left at close quarters with a bear. The struggle was a little more prolonged, but eventually the bear fell like the first.

The double victory which I had just seen accomplished before my eyes, excited me; the fever which was consuming my blood removed all thought of danger. I felt possessed of the strength of Hercules, and I was eager to give proof of my powers.

The opportunity was not long in coming. We had scarcely proceeded two hundred paces from the spot where we had left the two carcases, when I fancied I saw the upper half of a bear, standing at the entrance of its den, between two rocks. For an instant I was in doubt, and to make sure I bravely threw towards the object, whatever it might be, one of my tin plates. This experiment was successful; the bear opened its lips, showed me two rows of teeth as white as snow and uttered a growl. At this sound my right and left-hand neighbours halted and held their guns at attention, in order to assist me if need were, for they saw plainly that this was to be my affair.

Seeing them handle their guns made me think that I might use my own; besides, I must confess that I had more confidence in such a weapon than in a dagger. I placed the latter in my belt and taking my gun, I aimed at the creature with all the *sang froid* I could command. For his part he remained quite still and gave me a splendid chance, so when I had got a good sight I pulled the trigger and the gun went off.

Then ensued a terrible growling. The bear rose erect, fighting the air with one of his paws, while the other, broken at the shoulder, hung down his side. At the same moment I heard my two neighbours shout: “Look out;” and well they might, for the bear, on recovering from his first shock of amazement, came at me at such a pace, in spite of his broken shoulder, that I had scarcely time to draw my dagger. I hardly recollect what took place then, for everything happened as quick as thought. I saw the infuriated animal towering above me, his jaws a mass of blood. I struck him a terrible blow with all my strength, but I encountered a rib, and the dagger glanced off; I then felt the weight of his paw like a mountain upon my shoulder. I was overwhelmed and fell prone beneath my adversary, seizing him instinctively by the neck with both my hands and exerting all my strength to keep his mouth away from my face. The next moment two shots were fired; I heard the hissing of the bullets, and then a dull thud. The bear uttered a cry of pain and collapsed upon me with all his weight. I gathered up my strength, and forcing myself to one side, found myself free. I immediately leapt to my feet, prepared to defend myself, but it was needless, the bear was dead; he had been struck at the same instant by Count Alexis’ ball behind his ear, and one from the huntsman in the hollow of the shoulder. For my part I was covered with blood, but I had not received the slightest wound.

All the company gathered together; for as soon as it was known that I was at close quarters with a bear, everyone was afraid that I should cut a poor figure in the encounter. There was general rejoicing when I was discovered standing over my fallen foe, My victory, though shared by others, gained me considerable honour, for I had acquitted myself very creditably for a beginner. As I have already said, the bear’s shoulder was shattered by my bullet; and my dagger, though glancing off a rib, had well gone up into his throat; I had kept a steady hand both at a distance and at close quarters.

The two other bears which had been noticed in the covert forced their way past the musicians and the huntsmen, and the sport was over; the carcases were dragged on to the roadway and there they were skinned. Then the fore paws were cut off, that they might be prepared for dinner, as they are considered to be a great dainty.

We returned to the house with our trophies. A perfumed bath was in readiness in every room and was very welcome, considering that we had spent half the day wrapped up in our furs. Half-an-hour later a bell announced that it was time to descend to the dining room.

The dinner was no less sumptuous than the evening before, the place of the sterlets was taken by the bears’ paws. To the disgust of the steward, the huntsmen, claiming their right, had cooked them in an oven dug out of the earth, simply placing them on some glowing embers. When I saw some shapeless and blackened lumps of charcoal make their appearance, I felt little taste for such a peculiar dish; however, like others, I received my paw, so making up my mind to go through the whole business, I raised with the point of my knife the burnt skin which covered it and discovered the flesh cooked to a nicety in its own juice. The sight of it encouraged me to try a mouthful. It was one of the most savoury dishes I have ever eaten.

On getting into my sleigh I found the skin of my bear placed there by M. Nariskin’s courtesy.

CHAPTER XI

WE found St. Petersburg busy preparing for the two great festivals which are separated by an interval of only a few days; I refer to New Year’s Day and the Blessing of the Waters, the former wholly secular, the latter distinctly religious.

On New Year’s Day, in accordance with the Russian habit of regarding the Emperor as their father and the Empress their mother, the Emperor and the Empress are “at home” to their children. Twenty-five thousand invitations are scattered haphazard about the streets of St. Petersburg, and twenty-five thousand guests, without distinction of rank, are admitted to the Winter Palace.

Certain sinister reports were in circulation; it was said that the reception would not be held this year, for rumours of assassination had got about, in spite of the morose and unbroken silence habitually maintained by the Russian police. Once more the mysterious plot, like some venomous serpent with a thousand coils, reared its head and then withdrew into the shade, defying observation. But for the time being the rumours had subsided, at least they no longer interested the curious; for the Emperor had given definite orders to the head of the police, that he wanted everything to take place as usual, regardless of the facility afforded for the execution of a murder by the dominos which from remote times the men had been accustomed to wear on the occasion.

There is this remarkable feature in Russia, that except for family intrigues, the Emperor has nothing to fear save from the nobility; the two-fold character of Pontiff and Emperor, which he has inherited from the Caesars, as their Eastern successor, makes his person sacred in the eyes of the people. Moreover, this is the experience of all countries, and indicates the sanguinary side of civilization. The assassin in barbarous times is a product of the family; from the family he passes on to the aristocracy, and from the aristocracy he descends to the people. Ages must elapse before Russia can have a Jacques Clément, a Damiens or an Alibaud; she is only in the stage of the Pahlens and Ankarstroms.

Thus it was said that Alexander would discover the assassins among his aristocracy, even in his palace and possibly among his private bodyguard. Though this was known, at least so it was reported, yet among the hands which were stretched out to the Emperor, it was impossible to distinguish between those of friends and those of enemies; so that he who approached him fawning like a dog, might suddenly spring upon him and rend him like a lion. There was nothing for it but to be on his guard and trust in God; this is what Alexander did.

New Year's Day arrived. The tickets were distributed as usual; I received no less than ten, so anxious were my pupils that I should see their national fête, an interesting sight to a stranger. At seven o'clock the gates of the Winter Palace were thrown open.

I had expected, considering the reports which had gone abroad, to find the corridors in the palace lined with troops; so my astonishment was great at not perceiving a single additional bayonet. The usual sentinels were at their posts; as for the interior of the palace, it was destitute of guards.

One can guess by the concourse which throngs our free entertainments, what must be the commotion of a crowd eight times as large, pressing into a palace as big as the Tuileries; yet it is noteworthy that at St. Petersburg the respect instinctively felt for the Emperor prevents this invasion from degenerating into a noisy mob. Instead of seeing who can shout the loudest, every man imbued with a sense of his own inferiority, and grateful for the favour accorded him, murmurs to his neighbour: "No noise, no noise."

While the people are streaming into the palace, the Emperor remains in the St. George's Hall, seated by the Empress and surrounded by Grand Dukes and Grand Duchesses, while he receives the diplomatic bodies. Then suddenly when the rooms are filled with gentlemen and peasants, princesses and shop girls, the door of St. George's Hall is flung open, the band strikes up and the Emperor offers his hand to France, Austria or Spain, represented by their Ambassadresses, and shows himself at the door. Then everyone presses forward only to fall back again in two orderly lines; the waves part like the Red Sea and Pharaoh passes through.

It was said that this was the moment chosen to assassinate the monarch, and undoubtedly it would have been an easy thing to do.

The rumours which had been bruited about caused me to watch the Emperor with renewed curiosity. I expected to find him wearing the sad expression I had seen at Tsarskoe-Selo, so my astonishment was extreme when I noticed that on the contrary never had it been more open or joyous. It was no doubt due to the moral reaction experienced by the Emperor at this time of imminent danger. Indeed he had given two striking examples of this factitious calmness, one at a ball given by M. de Caulaincourt the French Ambassador, and the other at a fête at Zakret near Vilna.

M. de Caulaincourt was giving a ball in honour of the Emperor, when at midnight, that is to say when the dancers were in the thick of the fun, he was told that the house was on fire. The remembrance of Prince Schwartzemberg’s ball, interrupted by a similar cause, instantly flashed through the mind of the Duc de Vicence, with a vivid recollection of the fatal consequences which had ensued, due to the terror which turned everyone into a madman rather than to the danger itself. Therefore the Duke, anxious to make a personal inspection, stationed an aide-decamp at each door with orders to let no one pass, and approached the Emperor:

“Sire,” said he in a whisper, “the house is on fire; I am going to examine the matter myself; it is important that no one should hear of it, until the nature and the extent of the danger is ascertained. My aides-de-camp have orders to allow nobody to leave except your Majesty and their Imperial Highnesses the Grand Dukes and the Grand Duchesses. If your Majesty would like to retire, you can of course do so; only I beg to observe that little credence will be given to the fire so long as you are to be seen in the rooms.”

“Very well,” said the Emperor, “Go. I will remain here.”

M. de Caulaincourt ran to the spot where the fire had been discovered. As he had foreseen, the danger was not so great as a first glance had led him to suppose and the fire soon yielded to the united exertions of the household servants. The Ambassador immediately returned to the ball room and found the Emperor dancing a Polonaise. M. de Caulaincourt and he exchanged glances.

“Well?” said the Emperor when the dance was over.

“Your Majesty, the fire has been extinguished,” replied M. de Caulaincourt and nothing more was said. It was not till the next day that the guests who had been present at the magnificent ball learnt that they had been dancing on a volcano.

The case was different at Zakret; for there the Emperor risked not only his life, but his crown into the bargain.

In the midst of the gaiety he was told that the French vanguard had just crossed the Niemen and that the Emperor Napoleon, his host at Erfurt, whom he had forgotten to invite, might at any moment enter the ball room followed by six hundred thousand dancers. Alexander gave his orders while seeming to chat on indifferent matters with his aides-de-camp, continued to stroll through the rooms, praising the illuminations and declaring that the moon which had just risen was the prettiest feature of all. Nor did he retire till midnight, when all the guests were crowding round the supper tables and he could slip out unperceived. During the whole evening not the least trace of anxiety had crossed his face, so that it was not till the actual arrival of the French that their presence was suspected.

As I have said, the Emperor at this time, that is to say on the first of January, 1825, though ailing and gloomy, had recovered, if not all his former serenity, at least his old energy; he marched through all the rooms as usual, holding a kind of procession and followed by his court as I have already described. I allowed myself to be caught up in the crowd, which got back to its starting place about nine o’clock, after having accomplished the round of the palace.

At ten o’clock, as the illumination of the Hermitage was over, people who had tickets for the special performance there were invited to enter.

As I was among the number of privileged guests, I disengaged myself with difficulty from the crowd. A dozen negroes clad in rich oriental costumes, guarded the door leading to the theatre, to keep back the crowd and check the tickets.

I must confess that on entering the Hermitage theatre, at the end of which was displayed the Royal supper in a long gallery facing the main hall, I fancied myself in some palace of the fairies. Imagine an immense room with walls and ceiling covered with crystal tubes as large as the glass peashooters used by children for shooting sparrows with putty bullets. All these tubes are shaped, twisted and bent to fit their various positions to the best advantage and are held together by invisible silver threads. They form a screen in front of from eight to ten thousand lamps, reflecting and doubling the light. These coloured lamps illuminate landscapes, gardens, flowers, glades, which emit ethereal and invisible music, cascades and lakes, which glitter as if spangled with countless thousands of diamonds, and viewed thus through a curtain of dazzling light afford a spectacle of fantastic and poetic magnificence. The installation of this illumination alone costs twelve thousand roubles and occupies two months to complete.

At eleven o'clock a fanfare of trumpets announces the entry of the Emperor. He comes in surrounded by his family and followed by the Court. As soon as the Grand Dukes and Duchesses, the Ambassadors and their wives, the gentlemen and ladies in waiting, have taken their seats at the centre table, the rest of the guests consisting of nearly six hundred people, all of whom belong to the aristocracy, sit down. The Emperor alone remains standing, strolling from table to table, and occasionally talking to one of his guests, who replies without rising according to the established rules of etiquette.

I cannot tell what effect was produced upon the other witnesses of this marvellous display, Emperor, Grand Dukes, Grand Duchesses, gentlemen and ladies, the former covered with gold and embroidery, the latter streaming with diamonds, seen thus in the midst of a crystal palace; but as far as I am concerned, I have never experienced either before or since such an overpowering sense of grandeur. I have seen since some of our Royal fêtes; but in spite of my patriotism I must acknowledge the superiority of the former.

The banquet over, the Court left the Hermitage, and returned to St. George's Hall. At one o'clock the music struck up for the second Polonaise, which like the previous one was led by the Emperor. This was his farewell to the entertainment, for as soon as the Polonaise was ended, he retired.

I am bound to say I was pleased when I knew he had left; the whole evening my heart was oppressed with fear, thinking that at any moment this magnificent spectacle might end in bloodshed, though seeing the immense trust displayed by the Sovereign towards his people or rather by the father towards his children, it seemed to me impossible that the dagger would not fall from the hand of the murderer, whoever he might be.

After the Emperor's departure the crowd gradually melted away; though the thermometer registered forty degrees of heat inside the palace, there were twenty degrees of frost outside. This is a difference of sixty degrees. In France, we should have learnt a week later how many people had fallen victims to this abrupt and violent transition, and the opportunity would have been taken to lay the blame on the Emperor, or his Ministers, or the Police; then would the philanthropists of the Press have indulged in a wonderful polemic. At St. Petersburg nothing is ever reported, and thanks to this silence, their festivities are spoilt by no sad consequences.

For myself, thanks to my servant, who wonderful to relate, actually remained where I had told him to wait, and thanks to a triple cloak of furs and a well boxed in sleigh, I got back to the Catherine Canal without any misfortune.

The other fête, the Blessing of the Waters, acquired an additional solemnity this year from the terrible disaster which the recent inundation of the Neva had brought about. So for nearly a fortnight the preparations for the ceremony were carried out with a pomp and an activity evidently quickened by religious and superstitious apprehension in a way inconceivable to us unbelieving Westerns. These preparations consisted in the erection on the Neva of a large building, circular in shape, pierced with eight openings, adorned with four large pictures and surmounted with a cross; access was afforded by a jetty opposite the Hermitage and in the middle of the ice flooring of the building, a large hole would be bored on the morning of the fete to allow the priest to get at the water or rather to enable the water to reach the priest.

The day destined to appease the anger of the river at length arrived. In spite of the cold, which was at least twenty degrees, at nine o’clock in the morning, the quays were thronged with spectators; as for the river, it altogether disappeared from view beneath the multitude of sightseers. I must admit that I did not dare to take up a position among them, fearful lest the ice in spite of its strength and thickness should give way beneath the strain. I crept along as well as I could, and after three quarters of an hour’s exertion, during which I was warned two or three times that my nose was freezing, I reached the granite parapet, which lined the quay. A vast circular space had been cleared round the pavilion, At half-past eleven the Empress and the Grand Duchesses, by appearing on the glazed balconies of the palace, informed the concourse that the *Te Deum* was over.

Then the whole of the Imperial Guard, to the number of nearly forty thousand men came into view; debouching from the Champ de Mars and marching to the sound of their regimental bands, they formed in review order along the river, stretching in a triple line from the French Embassy to the fortress.

Meanwhile the palace gates were opened, banners, holy images and choristers from the chapel issued forth, going in advance of the clergy and headed by the Pontiff; then came pages and the flags of the various regiments of the guard, carried by the non-commissioned officers; and finally the Emperor, having on his right hand the Grand Duke Nicholas and on his left the Grand Duke Michael, and followed by the chief officers of state, aides-de-camp and generals.

As soon as the Emperor arrived at the door of the pavilion, which by this time was almost filled with clergy and standard bearers, the Primate gave a signal, and at the same moment the sacred chants, intoned by a hundred men and boys, without any instrumental accompaniment, resounded so harmoniously, that I do not remember having ever heard such marvellous notes. During the whole of the service, that is for nearly twenty minutes, the Emperor wearing no furs, but in his uniform only, remained standing, motionless and bareheaded, braving a climate more powerful than all the emperors in the world, and running a danger more real than if he found himself in front of a hundred muzzles in the foremost line of battle. This rashness in the cause of religion was all the more terrifying to the spectators, wrapped in their mantles and with their heads protected by fur caps, insomuch that the Emperor, though still young was almost bald.

Immediately the second *Te Deum* was finished, the Metropolitan took a silver cross from the hands of a choir boy, and in the midst of the kneeling crowd, blessed the river in a loud voice, and plunged the cross through the opening made in the ice, which allowed the water to reach him. He took a vessel which he filled with the water he had just blessed and presented it to the Emperor. After this ceremony came the turn of the flags.

Precisely at the moment when the standards were lowered to receive the benediction, a mortar was discharged from the pavilion and a jet of white smoke rose in the air; at the same moment a terrific report was heard; the whole of the artillery of the Fortress, with its brazen voice, was chanting the *Te Deum.*

The salvoes were repeated three times during the Benediction. After the third the Emperor replaced his headgear and set out for the palace. On the way he passed within a few paces of me. On this occasion he looked more melancholy than I had ever seen him; he knew that in the midst of a religious festival he ran no danger and he was himself once more.

Scarcely had he departed before the people, in their turn, hurried into the pavilion; some of them dipping their hands into the opening and making the sign of the cross with the recently blessed water, while others carried away vessels full of it, and some of them even dipped in their children bodily, convinced that on that particular day the contact with the water would be without danger.

On the same day an identical ceremony takes place at Constantinople; only there, where in winter there are no gales and the sea is free from ice, the Patriarch embarks on a boat and throws into the blue water of the Bosphorus the holy cross, which a diver recovers before it is lost in the depths. Following on the religious ceremonies come the secular sports, for which the wintry surface of the river should likewise serve as the arena, only the latter are entirely dependent on the caprice of the weather. Often when all the booths are fitted up, all the preparations made, and the race courses ready, except for the horses, and the “Montagnes Russes “are only waiting for the sliders, the shifting weathercock veers suddenly to the west; puffs of damp wind are blown in from the Gulf of Finland, the ice melts and the police interfere; immediately to the despair of the inhabitants of St. Petersburg, the booths are taken down and conveyed to the Champ de Mars. But, though everything is exactly the same and the crowd finds exactly the same amusements there, no matter, the carnival is spoilt. The Russian has the same regard for his Neva as the Neapolitan for his Vesuvius; if it ceases to smoke, they are fearful lest it should become extinct, and the Lazzaroni would rather see it destroying life than dead.

Happily it was not so during the glorious winter of 1825, and not for one moment was there any fear of a thaw; so while a few balls given by the aristocracy anticipated the popular festivities, numerous booths began to make their appearance in front of the French Embassy, stretching almost from one quay to the other, that is to say for a distance of more than two thousand yards. The erections known a “Montagnes Russes “were well advanced and to my great astonishment appeared to be less elegant than the imitations in Paris; they are simply an inclined plane a hundred feet high and four hundred feet long, made of planks, on to which water and snow are thrown alternately until it is coated with ice nearly six inches thick. The sleighs are fashioned from a plank turned up at one end, and in shape exactly resemble the crooks used by our porters to assist them in carrying their burdens. The attendants come among the crowd with the little sleighs under their arms seeking for customers. When they have found one, they climb up the staircase which leads to the top, and is built on the side opposite the slope; the slider, male or female, sits in front, with feet resting against the turned up edge; the conductor crouches in the rear, and guides the sleigh skilfully, as is very necessary, seeing that the sides of the mountains have no railings and the least deviation would precipitate the plank to the ground. Each trip costs a kopek, or rather less than a halfpenny in our coinage.

The other amusements resemble those customary at our fêtes in the Champs Elysées on days of popular rejoicing; there were marvels from every country, wax works, giants and dwarfs, all of them advertised by blaring music and blazing lights.

So far as I could judge by their gestures and attitudes with which they appealed to customers, they bore a great resemblance to our own; though each was distinguished by details peculiar to each several country. One of the jokes which met with the most success is that in which an honest father of a family is anxiously waiting to see his last born who is expected to arrive that day from the village whither he had been sent. Presently the nurse appears holding the infant so completely swathed that nothing can be seen but the end of a little black nose. The father delighted at the sight of his offspring, who utters loud grunts, considers that in physique it resembles himself, and in disposition its mother. At these words the mother comes on the scene and hears the compliment; the compliment leads to a dispute, the dispute to a quarrel; the youngster, hauled about in all directions, is divested of its clothing; a little bear comes to light amid the frantic applause of the spectators and it dawns upon the father that a changeling has been foisted upon him.

During the last week of the carnival masqueraders stroll through the streets of St. Petersburg by night, calling from house to house, bent on intrigues, as is the custom in our provincial towns. One of the favourite disguises is that of a Parisian. It consists of a tight-fitting coat with long skirts, with an excessively starched shirt collar, reaching three or four inches beyond the cravat; a curly wig, an enormous frill and a little straw-hat complete the caricature, while an immense quantity of charms and chains are suspended from the neck and dangle at the waist. Unfortunately as soon as the masqueraders are recognised, etiquette claims her rights, the pierrot is transformed into the gentleman and all the spice is eliminated from the intrigue.

The lower classes as if to make up beforehand for the privations of Lent are busy in stuffing themselves with as much food and drink as they can hold; but as soon as the clock strikes twelve on midnight of Sunday to usher in Shrove Monday, the orgy gives way to fasting, and so strict are they, that the remainder of the meal, which is interrupted by the first stroke of the clock, has already been thrown to the dogs before the last stroke. The change is marvellous, lascivious gestures are converted into signs of the Cross, drunken ditties give place to prayers. Candles are lighted before the patron saint of the house and the churches, deserted hitherto and apparently totally forgotten, are for the next day or two too small for the thronging congregations.

Yet these fêtes in spite of their brilliancy at the present time, have greatly degenerated by comparison with those of former days. For example in 1740 the Empress Anna Ivanovna decided to surpass everything that had been done up till then in this direction and wanted to present a spectacle such as a Russian Empress alone can give. For this purpose she arranged the wedding of her jester for the last few days of the carnival and sent an order to all Provincial Governors to send her, in order to appear at the ceremony, a sample pair of every tribe in his district, wearing their native costumes, and with their own peculiar means of transport. The Empress’s orders were literally obeyed and on the appointed day, the mighty sovereign witnessed the arrival of a hundred different peoples, some of whom she scarcely knew by name. There were natives from Kamtchatka and from Lapland drawn in sledges, the former by dogs and the latter by reindeer. There were Calmucks astride their cows, Buchars on their camels, Indians on their elephants and Ostiaks on their skates. Then for the first time were to be seen face to face, brought from the extremities of the Empire, the red-haired Finns and the Circassians with jet black locks, the giants of the Ukraine and the Samoyede dwarfs, and finally, the degraded Baschkir, nicknamed by their neighbours the Kirghis Tartars *Istaki,* that is *Dirty,* and the grandly built and nobly featured inhabitants of Georgia and Jaroslav, whose daughters queen it in the harems of Constantinople and Tunis.

As soon as they arrived, the representatives of each nation, were arranged, according to the country they inhabited, under four banners, which were in readiness; the first represented Spring, the second Summer, the third Autumn and the fourth Winter. Then when all were at their quarters, one morning this strange cortège began to thread its way through the streets of St. Petersburg, and though for a solid week this daily procession was held the public curiosity could not be satisfied. At length the day fixed for the nuptials arrived. The newly wed pair, after attending mass at the Castle chapel, repaired in company with their burlesque escort to the palace prepared for them by the commands of the Empress, and in its grotesqueness quite on a par with the rest of the show. This palace was constructed of nothing but ice, it was fifty-two feet long and twenty wide, with decorations both inside and out, with chairs, chandeliers, seats, statues and a bed, all of them transparent, likewise balconies on the roof and a pediment over the door, the whole of them to imitate green marble. It was protected by six cannons made of ice, one of which was loaded with a pound and a half of powder and a cannon ball, and saluted the guests on their arrival, sending its projectiles seventy paces and piercing a ten-inch plank. But the most curious feature of this winter palace was a colossal elephant, on which rode a Persian armed to the teeth, with two slaves as attendants; happier than his confrèr at the Bastille the creature was both fountain and beacon, for by day he emitted a jet of water from his trunk and one of fire at night time; and as is the custom of these creatures, he uttered terrible trumpetings, which were heard from one end of St. Petersburg to the other, thanks to eight or ten men who made their way into the vacant interior by means of the legs, which were hollow.

Unluckily such fêtes, even in Russia, are ephemeral. The exigencies of Lent caused the return home of the hundred strangers, and the thaw melted the palace. Since then, there has been no such spectacle, and at each subsequent year the carnival appears to lose some of its éclat.

That of 1825 was less gay than usual, and seemed to be but a shadow of its former glories; the ever growing sadness of the Emperor Alexander had by now spread to the courtiers, who were fearful of displeasing him, and to the people, who shared his griefs without understanding them.

As it has been stated by some that this melancholy was the effect of remorse, we will narrate faithfully what was the cause of it.

CHAPTER XII

AT the death of his mother, Catherine II., Paul I. ascended the throne, from which no doubt he would have been excluded for ever, had not his son Alexander refused to lend himself to the designs which were aimed against him. Long exiled from Court, always separated from his children, for the education of whom their grandmother was responsible, the new Emperor brought to the administration of supreme affairs, so long directed by the genius of Catherine and the devotion of Potemkin, a character at once suspicious, sullen and fantastic, and during the short period he remained on the throne made of the Russian Court a spectacle almost incomprehensible to the neighbouring nations and his brother kings.

The lamentable cry which Catherine had uttered, after thirty-seven hours of agony, was the signal in the palace that proclaimed Paul I. autocrat of all the Russians. At this cry the Empress Marie fell at her husband's knees with her children round her, and was the first to hail him Czar. Paul raised them up assuring them of his goodwill as a father and an Emperor. Then the Court, represented by the leading statesmen and generals, the nobility and courtiers, passed in review before him, prostrating themselves in due order of rank, each according to his position and seniority. After them a detachment of Guards, brought round beneath the palace windows had, together with the officers and guards, just arrived from Gatchina, the former residence of Paul, sworn allegiance to their sovereign, over whom the previous evening they had been keeping guard, more with the idea of being answerable for him than of paying him an attention, and rather as a prisoner than a sovereign.

Then were heard loud words of command, the clashing of arms, the tramp of heavy boots and the clanking of spurs, in the very room where Catherine had just fallen into her last sleep. On the following day Paul I. was proclaimed Emperor and his son Alexander Czarevitch or heir presumptive to the throne.

Paul came to the throne after thirty-five years of privations, exile and contempt, and at forty-three years of age he found himself master of the kingdom in which the previous day he had only possessed a prison. During these thirty-five years he had suffered much and as a consequence learnt much; so when he appeared on the throne his pockets were stuffed with decrees he had drawn up during his exile, orders which he busied himself in carrying out with a strange haste, one after the other and sometimes all together.

At first, in utter disregard of Catherine's methods, towards whom his ill-feeling, gradually embittered and now transformed to hatred, was manifest in every action, he surrounded himself with his children, as handsome and rich a family as any among the reigning houses of Europe, and appointed the Grand Duke Alexander military governor of St. Petersburg. As for the Empress Marie, who up till then had good reason to complain of his estrangement, now with astonishment mingled with fear she witnessed his kind and affectionate behaviour towards her. Her allowances were doubled, but she still doubted; but presently he accompanied his favours with caresses, and then at length she believed; for she owned a mother's saintly soul and a woman's noble heart.

Owing to his mania for opposition, which was characteristic of him, and was always displayed when least expected, Paul's first ukase was to counter order a levy of recruits, lately ordered by Catherine, which was to be spread over the whole kingdom, embracing one serf in every hundred. This was an act of diplomacy, as well as a humane measure; for it secured to the Emperor the gratitude of the nobility, who felt the burden of this military tithe, and likewise the love of the peasants, who would have to pay for it in kind.

Zubov, the last favourite of Catherine, thought that by losing his sovereign he was losing everything, and was fearful not only for his liberty but for his life. Paul summoned him, confirmed his appointment, and when handing him back the governor's staff carried by the aide-de-camp-in-chief which he had given up, said to him: “Continue to fulfil your duties near my mother's body; I hope you will serve me as faithfully as you have served her.”

Kosciusko had been captured; he was confined in the Castle of the lately deceased Count of Anhalt, and had for his custodian a major who never left him, even taking his meals with him. Paul himself went to set him free and announced his liberty to him.

As the Polish General, bewildered and astonished at the interview, had allowed the Emperor to depart without paying him the thanks which he thought were his due, he arranged that he should be carried to the palace with his head enveloped in bandages, for he was still weak and ailing from his wounds. He was conducted into the presence of the Emperor and Empress, and Paul offered him a well-populated estate in Russia, but Kosciusko refused and asked for a sum of money instead, that he might go and die where he liked. Paul gave him a hundred thousand roubles, and Kosciusko left the country and died in Switzerland.

While carrying out these orders, which completely disposed of everyone's fears and presaged a noble reign, the moment arrived for performing the funeral rites in honour of Catherine. Then did Paul decide to accomplish a two-fold filial duty. For thirty-five years the name of Peter III. had been spoken with bated breath at St. Petersburg. Paul repaired to the Monastery of St. Alexander Nevski, where the unfortunate Emperor had been buried; he was shown his father's neglected tomb by an old monk, had the coffin opened, knelt before the august remains, and drawing off the glove which covered the skeleton's hand, kissed it several times. Then, having prayed long and piously beside the coffin, he had it brought up into the centre of the church and gave orders that the same religious services should be accorded to the remains of Peter as would be celebrated over the body of Catherine, now lying in state in the halls of the palace. Then having unearthed from his retreat, where he had been living in disgrace for the third of a century, Baron Ungern Hernberg, his father's old body servant, he commanded him to be brought into a room in the palace where was a portrait of Peter III., and when the old man had come: "I have summoned you," said the Emperor, "in order that this portrait, in default of my father's presence, may witness my gratitude towards his faithful friends." Then leading him in front of the picture, as if the painted eyes could see what was about to happen, he embraced the old warrior, made him a General, placed round his neck the ribbon of St. Alexander Nevski, and ordered him to keep watch and ward by his father's body, wearing the same uniform that he had worn as Peter's aide-de-camp.

The day of the funeral ceremony arrived; Peter III. had never been crowned, and this was the excuse for burying him as an ordinary Russian nobleman in the Church of St. Alexander Nevski.

Paul I. placed a crown on his coffin and had it conveyed to the palace to be exposed to view near Catherine's corpse; thence the remains of the two sovereigns were borne to the citadel, placed on the same bier, and for a whole week the courtiers with servility and the people with affection, came and kissed the livid hand of the Empress and the coffin of the Emperor.

At the foot of this double tomb, which he came to visit like the rest, Paul I. seemed to have forgotten his piety and prudence. When alone in his prison at Gatchina with two or three companies of guards, he had directed his attention to petty military details and sometimes spent whole hours in polishing the buttons of his uniforms with the same care and assiduity that Potemkin devoted to cleaning his diamonds.

Thus on the very morning of his accession, everything in the palace took on a fresh complexion, and the new Emperor before busying himself with affairs of state, began to put in execution all the minute changes which he had made up his mind to introduce in the drill and accoutrements of his soldiers. About three o'clock in the afternoon of the same day, he went down into the courtyard to put his soldiers through their manœuvres and exercises according to his peculiar ideas. This inspection which took place every day was called by him the "watch parade," and became not only the most important institution in his government, but actually the pivot of the whole administration of the kingdom. At this parade he read his reports, gave his orders, issued his ukases, and was presented to his officers.

There between the two Archdukes, Alexander and Constantine, every day for three hours, in spite of the cold, wearing no furs, with his bald head uncovered, with the wind in his face, with one hand behind his back, while with the other he alternately raised and lowered his cane and shouted, "Ras, diva! ras diva" ("one two! one two! "), he might be observed stamping his feet to keep warm and taking a pride in defying twenty degrees of frost.

Soon insignificant military details developed into affairs of state, he first of all changed the colour of the Russian cockade, which was white, for a black cockade with a yellow border; and this was an advantage, for the Emperor truly remarked that white could be seen from a distance, and only served as a point at which to aim, while black would mingle with the colour of the cap and by virtue of the identity of tone the enemy would no longer know where to direct their fire. But reforms did not stop here; he altered the colour of the plume, the height of the boots and the buttons of the gaiters; so much so that the greatest proof of zeal that could be shown him was to appear on the morrow at the watch parade with the changes he had introduced the day before, and more than once this promptness in falling in with his ridiculous orders was rewarded by a decoration or a promotion.

Notwithstanding Paul’s partiality for his soldiers, whom he dressed and undressed ceaselessly like a child with its doll, his reforms were also occasionally directed against civilians. The French Revolution, by bringing round hats into fashion, produced in him a feeling of horror for this form of head covering; so one fine morning an order appeared prohibiting the wearing of round hats in the streets of St. Petersburg. Either through ignorance or opposition, the observance of this rule was not initiated quickly enough to please the Emperor. Then he placed at every street corner details of Cossacks and military police, with orders to knock off all the objectionable hats; he was driven through the streets in a sleigh to see for himself how St. Petersburg regarded his latest edict. One day he was returning to the palace with satisfaction after a tour of inspection, when he caught sight of an Englishman who, thinking that the ukase as to hats was an outrage on the liberty of the subject, had not submitted to the change. The Emperor immediately stops and orders one of his officers to go and knock off the hat of the impudent foreigner who dares to defy him actually in the Admiralty Square; the officer sets out at a gallop, comes up to the delinquent and finds him wearing a three cornered hat. The messenger, disappointed, wheels round and returns to make his report. The Emperor fancying that his eyes have deceived him, draws out his field glasses and levels them at the Englishman, who calmly continues his walk. The officer was mistaken, the Englishman is wearing a round hat; the officer is put under arrest and an aide-decamp is sent in his stead; keen to please the Emperor the aide-de-camp spurs on his horse at the gallop, and in a few seconds comes up with the Englishman.

No, the Emperor is mistaken, the Englishman has a three cornered hat. The aide-de-camp, much crestfallen, returns to his sovereign and gives the same answer as the officer. The Emperor once more uses his glasses and the aide-de-camp is sent to join the officer; the Englishman has a round hat. Then a general offers to undertake the task which has ended so disastrously for his predecessors, and gallops towards the stranger without taking his eyes off him. Then he notices that as he approaches, the hat gradually changes its shape from round to triangular; fearful of such a disgrace as has befallen the officer and the aide-de-camp, he conducts the Englishman into the Emperor’s presence and all is explained. The worthy islander, wishing to reconcile his native pride with the whims of a foreign ruler, had had a special hat made, and by means of a little spring concealed in the inside he could in a moment alter it from the prohibited to the lawful shape. The Emperor who was tickled at the idea, pardons the aide-de-camp and the officer, and allows the Englishman for the future to wear whatever hat he pleases.

The regulation with regard to hats was followed by one affecting vehicles. One morning a decree was published in St. Petersburg, prohibiting the harnessing of horses in the Russian fashion, that is with a postilion riding the off horse and having the shaft horse on his near side. A fortnight was allowed the proprietors of barouches, landaus, droskies to obtain German harness, after which date the police were commanded to cut the traces of all carriages not fitted with the regulation harness. Moreover the reforms did not stop at the carriages but proceeded to the drivers; the coachmen were ordered to dress in the German mode. So they were obliged, to their great grief, to clip their beards and sew on to their coat collars a pigtail which was to remain in the same position always, however much they might move their heads from side to side. An officer who had not had time to fall in with the latest order, decided to go on foot to the watch parade rather than annoy the Emperor by the sight of a proscribed vehicle. He wrapped himself in a large cloak and gave his sword to a soldier to carry, when he was met by Paul who noticed the breach of discipline; the officer was degraded to the ranks, while the private was given an officer’s commission.

Among all these changes etiquette was not forgotten. An old law decreed that when anyone met the Emperor or the Empress or the Czarevitch, he was to stop his carriage or horse and, dismounting, to prostrate himself in the dust or the mud or the snow. This homage so difficult to pay in a capital where thousands of carriages are passing along each street at all hours of the day, had been abolished in Catherine’s reign. At his accession Paul put it in force again in all its severity. A General whose servants did not recognise the Emperor’s carriage was deprived of his arms and placed under arrest; when his imprisonment terminated, they were about to give him back his sword, but he refused to take it, declaring that it was a sword of honour presented by Catherine, with the proviso that it should never be taken from him. Paul examined the sword and perceived that it was of gold and studded with diamonds; then he summoned the General, restored him his sword, saying that he bore him no grudge, but nevertheless he ordered him to set out for the army within twenty-four hours.

Unluckily matters did not always end in such a satisfactory fashion. One day, M. de Likarov, one of the most gallant Brigadiers in the Emperor’s service, fell ill in the country. His wife, not wishing to entrust such an important errand to a subordinate, came to St. Petersburg herself to procure a doctor; as ill luck would have it she met the Emperor’s carriage. Since she and her servants had been absent from the capital for three months, none of them had heard of the new regulations, so her carriage passed along without stopping a short distance from Paul who was riding on horseback. Such a flagrant breach of his injunction wounded the Emperor’s feelings keenly, so he at once despatched an aide-de-camp after the refractory vehicle, with orders to enlist the four servants as soldiers and to confine their mistress in prison; the lady lost her reason and her husband died.

The rules of etiquette were quite as harsh in the interior of the Palace as in the streets of the capital; every courtier admitted to the function of kissing the royal hand, was obliged to make the kiss resound with his lips and touch the floor with his knee; Prince George Galitzin was sent to prison for not having bowed sufficiently low, and for having kissed the hand somewhat carelessly.

These outrageous acts, which we pick haphazard from the history of Paul I. had, after four years, rendered a longer reign almost impossible, for day by day the little reason remaining to the Emperor grew less, disappearing before some fresh act of folly; and the follies of an all powerful sovereign, from whom the least sign is instantly converted into a command, are dangerous things. Thus Paul felt instinctively that an unknown danger, but none the less a real one, was closing round him, and fear rather increased the capricious instability of his mind. He practically retired to the St. Michael Palace which had been built for him on the old site of the Summer Palace. This edifice, coloured in red to please the taste of one of his mistresses, who had appeared one evening in court with gloves of that colour, was a huge building in wretched style and bristling with bastions; here, alone, did the Emperor fancy himself safe.

Meanwhile, in the midst of executions, exiles and degradations, two favourites remained rooted to their posts. One was Kutaïsov, originally a Turkish slave, who from his position of Emperor’s barber had become one of the chief personages in the country, without the least qualification to merit such a distinction; the other was Count Pahlen, a nobleman from Courland and a major-general under Catherine II., who had been raised to the position of Civil Governor of Riga, through the favour of Zubov, the last protégé of the Empress.

It so happened that the Emperor Paul, sometime before his accession to the throne, passed through the town; this was at the time when he was almost proscribed, and the courtiers hardly dared to address him. Pahlen paid him the honours due to a Czarevitch. Paul not being accustomed to such deference, preserved in his heart the recollection of it, and when once he was on the throne, called to memory the reception afforded him by Pahlen, summoned him to St. Petersburg, decorated him with the chief orders of the Empire and appointed him in command of the Guards and Governor of the city, in place of the grand Duke Alexander, his son, whom he mistrusted in spite of his respect and affection.

But Pahlen, thanks to his elevated position in the immediate circle of Paul, which he had already preserved for nearly four years, contrary to all expectations, could better appreciate than anyone the instability of human fortunes. He had seen so many men rise, and so many succumb; he had seen so many others fall and come to grief that he could not understand how it was that his downfall had not yet arrived, but he made up his mind that the Emperor's ruin should forestall his. Zubov, his old patron, who had been nominated general aide-de-camp of the palace by the Emperor and entrusted with the guardianship of his mother's corpse; Zubov, Pahlen's former patron, suddenly fell into disgrace, and one day found himself deprived of his chancellorship; his two chief secretaries, Altesti and Gribovski, were dismissed most unfairly, while all his staff officers and suite were required forthwith to rejoin their regiments or hand in their resignations. By way of compensation, the Emperor with strange inconsistency, made him a present of a palace; but his disgrace was none the less complete, for the next day all his orders had been countermanded; and on the day after he was obliged to dismiss five-and-twenty or thirty dependents whom he employed, and in less than a week he had obtained permission, or rather been ordered, to leave Russia. Zubov retired to Germany, where his wealth, youth and handsome person, adorned with decorations, added to his high sprits, were a tribute to the good taste of Catherine, proving that she adhered to a high ideal even in her weaknesses.

A notification from Pahlen reached him there. Undoubtedly Zubov had already complained to his former protégé of his exile, which, though perfectly explicable, had never been explained, and Pahlen only answered one of his letters. His reply consisted of a piece of advice, namely, that he should pretend an infatuation for the daughter of Kutaïsov, a favourite of Paul; doubtless the Emperor, flattered by this attention, would permit the exile to return to St. Petersburg; once there, everything would be easy.

The suggested plan is carried out. One fine morning Kutaïsov receives a letter from Zubov, asking for his daughter’s hand in marriage. The upstart barber, immensely flattered, hurries immediately to the St. Michael Palace, throws himself at the feet of the Emperor, and implores him with Zubrov’s letter in his hand, to crown his good fortune and that of his daughter by approving of the marriage, and allowing the return of the exile. Paul casts a rapid glance over the letter presented by Kutaïsov, and after perusing it, returns it with these words: — “It is the first sensible idea that ever came into that fool’s head; let him return.” A fortnight later Zubov returned to St. Petersburg and began his courtship of the favourite’s daughter.

Under cover of this intrigue the conspiracy took shape, and gradually grew, being recruited day by day with fresh malcontents. The conspirators at first spoke only of simple abdication, of a change of person, nothing more. Paul was to be sent in charge of a strong escort to some remote province, and the Grand Duke Alexander, whose consent seemed immaterial, would mount the throne. Some of them knew nothing but that the dagger was to be unsheathed instead of the sword, and that it would be stained with blood before it was replaced in its scabbard.

They thoroughly understood Alexander; and being aware that he would never accept a regency, they had decided to offer him a succession.

Meanwhile Pahlen, who was the leading spirit in the plot, had scrupulously avoided compromising himself in the smallest detail; so that, happen what might, he could either keep in with his fellow conspirators or go over to Paul. This reserve on his part cast a certain coolness over the deliberations, and the matter might perhaps have dragged out another year, if he had not himself brought it to a crisis by a curious stratagem, but knowing what he did of Paul’s character he was assured of success. He wrote an anonymous letter to the Emperor, in which he warned him of the impending danger. To this letter was appended a list of the names of all the conspirators.

Paul’s first act on receiving the letter was to double the guards at the St. Michael’s Palace and to send for Pahlen.

Pahlen, who was expecting the summons, instantly repaired thither. He found Paul in his bedroom on the first floor. It was a large square room, with a door opposite the fireplace, two windows overlooking the courtyard, a bed opposite the windows, and at the foot of the bed a curtained door which led to the Emperor's rooms; in addition a trapdoor had been constructed in the floor. This could be opened by a slight pressure of the heel; it led to a staircase, and beyond the staircase was a corridor which afforded a means of escape from the Palace.

Paul was pacing the apartment with long strides, and pausing abruptly to give vent to terrible imprecations when the door opened and the Count made his appearance.

The Emperor turned round and remained standing with his arms crossed and his eyes fixed on Pahlen.

"Count," said he after a moment's pause, "are you aware of what is going on?"

"I know," replied Pahlen, "that my gracious sovereign has summoned me, and that I have hastened to do his bidding."

"But do you know why I have summoned you?" cried Paul with a slight gesture of impatience.

"I am respectfully waiting for your Majesty to inform me."

"I summoned you, sir, because a plot is being hatched against me."

"I am aware of it, your Majesty."

"What, you know all about it?"

"Certainly, I am one of the conspirators."

"Well! I have just received the list. Here it is."

"And I, Sire, have a duplicate of it. There it is."

"Pahlen!" muttered Paul, terrified, and quite unable to realize the facts as yet.

"Sire," continued the Count, "you can compare the two lists; if the informer is correct, they ought to correspond."

"Look at them."

"Yes, they are identical," said Pahlen coldly; "only three names are missing."

"Which?" demanded the Emperor sharply.

"Sire, prudence prevents me from giving them; but after the proof I have just given your Majesty of the accuracy of my information, I trust that you will accord me your absolute confidence and entrust your safety to my zealous care.”

“No evasion!” shouted Paul with the energy begotten of terror, “who are they? I insist upon knowing this very moment.”

“Sire,” replied Pahlen, bowing his head, “respect prevents me from revealing names of so august a sound.”

“I understand,” answered Paul in a hollow voice, and casting a glance at the curtained door which led to his wife’s room. “You mean the Empress, do you not? You mean the Czarevitch Alexander and the Grand Duke Constantine.”

“Since the law only takes cognizance of those whom it can reach...”

“The law can reach everyone, sir, and the crime, however great it may be, shall not go unpunished. Pahlen, you are to arrest at once the two Grand Dukes, and to-morrow they shall depart for Schlusselburg. As to the Empress I will settle with her. You must see to the other conspirators.”

“Sire,” said Pahlen, “give me the order in writing, and I will obey it, however high may be the head it strikes or however great may be the individuals aimed at.”

“Good Pahlen!” exclaims the Emperor, “you are the only faithful follower left to me. Watch over me, Pahlen, for I can see that they are all desirous of my death, and you alone are on my side.”

With these words, Paul signed the order to arrest the two Grand Dukes and handed it to Pahlen.

This was all the clever conspirator wished. Satisfied with his orders, he rushes off to Plato Zubov’s, where he knew the conspirators were gathered together.

“All is discovered,” said he; “here is the order for your arrest. There is not a moment to lose; to-night I am still Governor of St. Petersburg; to-morrow I may be in prison possibly. Make up your minds at once.”

There was no question of hesitation, for hesitation meant the scaffold, or at the very least Siberia. The conspirators appointed a meeting for that same night at Count Talitzin’s, Colonel of the regiment of Prebovjenskoï; and as they were not very numerous, they decided to add to their forces all the malcontents arrested that day. There had been a good haul that day, for in the morning thirty officers belonging to the best families in St. Petersburg had been degraded and condemned to imprisonment or exile for faults which scarcely merited a reprimand. The Count ordered a dozen sleighs to hold themselves in readiness at the gates of the various prisons sheltering their proposed adherents; then seeing that his accomplices had decided to cast in their lot with him, he paid his visit to the Czarevitch Alexander.

Alexander had just encountered his father in a corridor of the Palace and in his customary manner came straight to him; but Paul beckoned him to go back, and sent him to his apartments telling him to remain there until further orders. The Czarevitch was all the more uneasy inasmuch as he was ignorant of the cause of the anger he read in the Emperor’s eyes; so he scarcely saw Pahlen before he asked him if he was bringing some command from his father.

“Alas! your Highness, yes; “answered Pahlen,” I am the bearer of a terrible order.”

“What?” demanded Alexander.

“To arrest your Highness and ask for your sword.”

“Me! my sword!” cried Alexander; “why?”

I Because, from this moment, you are a prisoner.”

“I, a prisoner! of what crime am I accused, Pahlen?”

“Your Imperial Highness is well aware that unfortunately punishment is sometimes incurred without any offences having been committed.”

“The Emperor is doubly master of my fate,” replied Alexander, “since he is both sovereign and father. Show me the order and whatever its nature I will submit to it.”

The Count handed him the order. Alexander opened it, kissed his father’s signature and began to read; only when he got to Constantine’s name he cried out — ” My brother also! I was in hopes that the order concerned me only.” But when he came to the paragraph concerning the Empress, he exclaimed: “Oh; my mother; my virtuous mother; that Saint descended among us from Heaven! It is too much, Pahlen, it is too much.”

Cohering his face with both his hands, he let the order fall. Pahlen believed that the favourable moment had arrived.

“Sire,” said he, throwing himself at his feet. “Sire, listen to me; great misfortunes must be prevented; an end must be put to the strange aberrations of your august father. To-day he seeks to deprive you of your liberty; to-morrow perchance he will want your....”

“Pahlen!”

“Your Highness, do you remember Alexis Petrovitch?”

“Pahlen, you are calumniating my father.”

"No, your Highness, for it is not his heart I am accusing but his reason. So many strange contradictions, so many impracticable orders, so many useless penalties, can only be explained by the influence of some terrible disorder. In the Palace and all over the country people are saying the same thing. Sire, your unhappy father is mad."

"My God!"

"Well, your Highness, he must be saved from himself. It is not I who say this, it is the nobility, the Senate, the Empire, I am but their spokesman; the Emperor must abdicate in your favour."

"Pahlen!" cried Alexander, recoiling a step, "what are you saying? I to succeed my father while he lives, and snatch the crown from his head and the sceptre from his hands. It is you who are mad, Pahlen.... Never, never!"

"But your Highness, you have not yet seen the order. You fancy it is only a question of simple imprisonment. No, believe me, your very life is at stake."

"Save my brother; save the Empress! that is all I ask," cried Alexander.

"Am I the master?" said Pahlen. "Besides, the order is directed as much against them as against you. When once arrested, when once imprisoned, who knows whether the too eager courtiers, thinking they are serving the Emperor, will not anticipate his wishes? Turn your eyes towards England, Sire; the same thing is happening there, though the monarchy being less absolute, the danger is not so pressing. The Prince of Wales is prepared to handle the reins of government, yet the madness of King George is of a mild and harmless nature. One word more, your Highness; by accepting my offer, you may perhaps save the life not only of the Grand Duke and the Empress, but even that of your father."

"Explain yourself."

"I say that your father's rule is so oppressive, that the nobility and the Senate have decided to put an end to it by every means in their power. You refuse to consent to an abdication? Perhaps tomorrow you will be obliged to pardon a murder.

"Pahlen," cried Alexander, "cannot I see my father?"

"Impossible, Sire; I am absolutely forbidden to allow your Highness to interview his Majesty."

"And you say that my father's life is threatened?"

"The only hope of Russia lies in you, Sire, and if we must choose between a decision which is to destroy us and a crime which is to save us, we shall choose the crime.”

Pahlen made a movement towards the door.

“Pahlen!” cried Alexander, stopping him with one hand while with the other he drew from his breast a crucifix which he wore suspended by a gold chain; “Pahlen, swear to me by Christ, that my father’s life is not in danger and that you would die, if necessary in his defence. Swear this or I will not let you go.”

“Sire,” replied Pahlen, “I have told you all I can. Ponder over my suggestion; meanwhile I will think over the oath you wish me to take.”

With these words Pahlen bowed respectfully, went out and placed guards at the door, then he called on the Grand Duke Constantine and the Empress Marie, informed them of the Emperor’s orders but did not take the same precautions as in the case of Alexander.

It was now eight o’clock in the evening, and consequently dark, for it was still early in spring. Pahlen rushed off to Count Talitzin’s, where he found the conspirators at table; his appearance was greeted by a chorus of questions. “I have no time to answer you,” said he, “except to say that all promises well so far, and that in half an hour’s time I will return with reinforcements.” The meal which had been momentarily interrupted, went on; Pahlen made his way to the prison.

As he was Governor of St. Petersburg, all doors opened at his command. All who saw him entering with his stern expression and surrounded by guards thought that the hour of their departure for Siberia had arrived, or that they were going to be transferred to a more rigorous imprisonment. The manner in which Pahlen ordered them to hold themselves in readiness for the sleighs confirmed them in that surmise. The unfortunate youths obeyed; at the gate a company of guards was awaiting them, the prisoners got into the sleighs quietly, and were scarcely seated before they felt themselves being driven off at the gallop.

To their great surprise, at the end of a very few minutes, the sleighs came to a halt in the courtyard of a magnificent mansion; the prisoners who were told to get out of the sleighs obeyed; the gates were shut behind them, the soldiers stayed outside, they were alone with Pahlen.

“Follow me,” said the Count, going on ahead.

Without in the least understanding what it meant, the prisoners did as they were told; on reaching a room which adjoined that occupied by the conspirators, Pahlen lifted a cloak lying on the table and disclosed a bundle of swords.

"Arm yourselves," said Pahlen.

While the bewildered prisoners were obeying this order and fastening to their belts the swords which had been ignominiously removed by the gaolers that very morning, they began to suspect that something as strange as it was unexpected was going to happen. Then Pahlen suddenly opened the doors and the new comers saw, sitting at table, glass in hand, and amid shouts of "Long live Alexander!" their friends from whom, ten minutes before, they thought they were separated for ever.

They immediately dashed into the festive throng. With a few words they were told of all that was happening; they were still angry and chafing at the treatment they had been compelled to submit to that day.

The regicidal plot was acclaimed with shouts of joy and not one refused to accept the part allotted to him in the terrible tragedy that was about to take place. At eleven o'clock, the conspirators to the number of nearly sixty left Talitzin's house and wended their way to the St. Michael's Palace, wrapped in their cloaks. The ringleaders were Beningsen; Plato Zubov, Catherine s former favourite; Pahlen, the Governor of St. Petersburg; Depreradovitch, Colonel of the Semonovski regiment; Arkamakov, the Emperor's aide-de-camp; Pnnce Tatetsvill, Major-General of the Artillery; General Talitzin, Colonel of the Prebovjenskoï Guards; Gardanov, Adjutant of the Horse Guards; Sartarinov; Prince Verinski and Seriatin.

The conspirators entered the St. Michael's Palace by a garden gate; but just as they -were passing under some tall trees which render it a shady spot in the summer, though now they were stript of their leaves and stretched their naked limbs in deep shadow, a colony of ravens, awakened by the noise, flew forth uttering such mournful croakings that the conspirators, coming to a dead halt, since these cries are looked upon in Russia as an evil omen, hesitated to go any farther; but Zubov and Pahlen revived their courage, and they continued on their way. On reaching the courtyard they divided into two groups; one, headed by Pahlen, entered by a private door which the Count was accustomed to use when he wished to visit the Emperor without being seen; the other under the leadership of Zubov and Beningsen proceeded towards the grand staircase with Arkamakov for a guide, which they reached without any opposition, Pahlen having relieved the Palace sentinels and replaced them with officers who were sworn conspirators. A single sentry, who by an oversight had not been changed like the others, seeing them approaching, called out “Who goes there? “Then Beningsen went up to him and opening his cloak to let him see his decorations, said to him: — “Silence, don’t you see where we are going? ‘“Pass, patrol,” answered the sentinel, nodding his head knowingly, and the assassins proceeded on their way. On reaching the gallery which opened on to the ante-room, they came across an officer in a private’s uniform.

“Well!” asked Plato Zubov, “what of the Emperor?”

“He came in an hour ago,” replied the officer, I and is no doubt now in bed.”

“Good!” answered Zubov, and the death-dealing patrol once more advanced.

For Paul, as was his habit, had spent the evening with Princess Gagarin. Seeing him paler and more gloomy than usual, she ran up to him and implored him to tell her what was the matter.

“What is the matter?” answered the Emperor, “the matter is that the moment for striking my great *coup* has arrived, and in a few days you will witness the execution of my most beloved ones.” v Terrified at this threat the Princess Gagann, who was aware of Paul’s mistrust of his family, seized the first opportunity to leave the room, wrote a short note to the Grand Duke Alexander, in which she told him that his life was in danger, and sent it to the St. Michael’s Palace. As the officer on duty at the gate had only received instructions not to let the Czarevitch go out, he allowed the messenger to enter. Alexander received the note and as he was aware that the Princess Gagarin was admitted to all the secrets of the Emperor, his anxiety was greatly augmented.

At about eleven o’clock, as the sentinel had said, the Emperor returned to the Palace, and at once retired to his apartment, where he immediately got into bed and had just fallen asleep, pinning his faith on Pahlen.

At this moment the conspirators reached the door of the ante-room which lay before the bedroom, and Arkamakov knocked.

“Who is there?” inquired the valet de chambre.

“I, Arkamakov, his Majesty’s aide-decamp.”

“What do you want?”

“I have come to make my report.”

“Your Excellency is joking, it is almost midnight.”

“Not at all, you are mistaken, it is six o’clock in the morning; open the door at once, or the Emperor will be angry with me.”

“But I don’t know if I ought...”

“I am on duty and I command it.”

The valet obeyed. The conspirators immediately burst into the ante-room, sword in hand; the terrified valet took refuge in a corner, but a Polish Huzzar, who was on guard, throws himself in front of the Emperor’s door, and, guessing the intentions of the nocturnal visitors, orders them to depart. Zubov refuses and tries to push the man on one side. A pistol goes off; and at that moment the sole defender of the man who an hour before ruled over fifty-three millions, is disarmed, felled to the ground and reduced to impotence.

At the report of the pistol Paul had awakened with a start, had leapt out of his bed, and rushing at the curtained door which led to the Empress’s room, had tried to open it; but three days before in a moment of misgiving he had had it blocked up, so it resisted his efforts; then he thought of the trap door and dashed to the corner of the room where it was concealed, but as he had bare feet the bolt would not yield to the pressure and the trap door likewise refused to act. At this moment the door of the ante-room burst open and the Emperor had only time to hide behind a fire screen.

Beningsen and Zubov rushed into the room, and Zubov went straight to the bed, but seeing it empty, “All is lost!” he cried, “he has escaped us.”

“No,” said Beningsen, “here he is.”

“Pahlen!” cried the Emperor, seeing that he is discovered. “Help! Pahlen.”

“Sire,” said Beningsen, advancing towards Paul and saluting him with his sword, “it is useless to call for Pahlen, Pahlen is one of us. Besides, your life is in no danger: only you are a prisoner in the name of the Emperor Alexander.”

“Who are you?” said the Emperor, so bewildered by the feeble and flickering light of the lamp that he failed to recognise who was speaking to him.

“Who are we?” replied Zubov, presenting the Act of Abdication, “we are Envoys of the Senate. Take this paper, read it, and settle your own fate.”

Then Zubov hands him the paper with one hand, while with the other he places the lamp on the corner of the mantelpiece so that the Emperor may read the Act presented to him. Then Paul takes the paper and reads it. A third of the way through he stops short, raises his head and looks at the conspirators.

“But in God’s name,” cried he, “what have I done to be treated like this?”

“For four years you have tyrannised over us,” cries a voice.

The Emperor continues to read.

But the more he reads the greater becomes his distress; expressions increasingly virulent cut him to the quick; dignity gives place to anger; he forgets that he is alone, half naked and without weapons, that he is surrounded by men in uniform, sword in hand; he crumples up the Act of Abdication and throwing it at his feet:

“Never,” said he, “death rather.” With these words he endeavours to get possession of his sword, resting against a chair a few paces from him.

Just then the second body of conspirators appears on the scene; it is composed chiefly of young noblemen who had been degraded or sentenced to service in remote provinces, and one of the most distinguished was Prince Tatetsvill, who had sworn to avenge himself for such an insult. The moment he enters he throws himself on the Emperor, grips him, struggles and falls with him, upsetting the lamp and the screen. The Emperor utters a terrible cry, for in falling he strikes his head against the corner of the mantelpiece, and receives a deep wound. Fearful lest the cry should be heard, Sartarinov, Prince Verinski and Seriatin throw themselves upon him. Paul gets on his feet for a moment, then falls again. All this takes place in the dark in the midst of sharp cries and muffled groans. At length the Emperor tears aside the hand which is covering his mouth: — ” Gentlemen,” he cries in French, “spare me, give me time to pray to the Almighty...” The last syllable of the word was lost, for one of his assailants has torn off his belt and passed it round the victim’s waist. They dare not strangle him by the neck, for the corpse will have to lie in state, and it is imperative that it should have the appearance of a natural death. Then the groans were succeeded by a rattling in the throat; presently all was still; a few convulsive movements followed, but they soon ceased, and when Bernngsen returned with lights the Emperor was dead. It was not till then that the wound in the cheek was noticed; but no matter, as he had fallen the victim to an apoplectic fit, it can be no matter for surprise that in falling he had struck against a piece of furniture and thus injured himself.

In the silence which succeeds the crime and while every eye is fixed on the motionless corpse, lit up by the candles brought by Beningsen, a noise is heard at the door leading to the Empress's room; she has heard the stifled cries, the muffled voices and the threats, and is approaching. The conspirators are at first dismayed; but they recognise the voice and their confidence returns; besides since Paul could not make use of the door, neither can she; they have plenty of time to finish what they have begun and will not be disturbed in their work.

Beningsen raises the Emperor's head and seeing that life is extinct, he has the body laid on the bed. Not till then does Pahlen enter sword in hand; for, faithful to his double role, he has waited till all is over before allying himself with the conspirators. At sight of his sovereign over whose face Beningsen is throwing a coverlet, be stops short in the doorway, turns pale and leaning against the wall drops his sword to his side.

"Come, gentlemen," said Beningsen, who though one of the last to join in the conspiracy had preserved his imperturbable *sang froid* during the whole of that fatal night, "it is time to go and render homage to the new Emperor."

"Yes, yes," tumultuously exclaims everyone, their eagerness to leave the room greatly exceeding their precipitation in entering it; "Yes, yes, let us go and pay homage to the Emperor. Long live Alexander!"

While this was going on, the Empress Marie, seeing that she could not get past the barred door, and hearing the incessant clamour, runs to the other door of her apartment, but in the adjoining room she encounters Pettaroski, a lieutenant in the Semonovski Guards, with thirty men under him. Faithful to his trust, Pettaroski bars the way.

"Pardon, Madam," said he, bowing before her, "but you cannot pass this way."

"Don't you know me?" demands the Empress.

"Yes, Madam, I know I have the honour of speaking to your Majesty; but I have special orders not to allow your Majesty to pass."

"Who gave you the orders?"

"My Colonel."

"We will see if you dare to obey them."

With these words she approaches the soldiers; but they cross their arms and bar her passage.

At this moment the conspirators tumble pell-mell out of Paul's room, crying "Long live Alexander! "Beningsen at their head advances towards the Empress; then she recognises him, and calling him by name, begs him to let her pass.

“Madam,” said he, “all is now over, you might endanger your own life, Paul’s is already ended.”

At these words the Empress utters a cry and sinks into a chair: the two Grand Duchesses, Marie and Christine, who have been aroused by the disorder, run up to her assistance, and kneel on each side of the chair. Feeling faint the Empress asks for some water. A soldier brings a glass; the Grand Duchess Marie hesitates to give it to her mother, fearing that it may be poisoned. The soldier, divining the cause, drinks half of it and presenting the remainder to the Grand Duchess; “You see,” said he, “her Majesty may drink it in perfect safety.”

Beningsen leaves the Empress in the care of the Grand Duchesses and goes down to the Czarevitch. His room is below Paul’s; he has heard everything; the pistol shot, the cries, the struggle, the groans and the death rattle. He attempted to leave the room and go to the assistance of his father; but the guard posted by Pahlen at his door thrust him back into his room; everything has been well prepared; he is a prisoner and can do nothing.

Then Beningsen enters, followed by the conspirators. The cries of “Long live Alexander “tell him that all is over. The manner in which he is ascending the throne is no longer in doubt to him; then catching sight of Pahlen, who is the last to enter, he cries: — ” Ah! Pahlen, what a page for the commencement of my history!”

“Sire,” replied Pahlen, “those which are to follow will soon cause it to be forgotten.”

“But don’t you understand,” cries Alexander, “that it will be said that I am my father’s assassin?”

“Sire,” said Pahlen, “there is only one thing for you to consider at the present moment; at this hour...”

“My God! what would you have me consider if not my father?”

“That you should be acknowledged by the Army.”

“But my mother, the Empress!” cries Alexander, “what will become of her?”

“She is quite safe, Sire, but in the name of Heaven let us not lose a moment.”

“What must I do?” asks Alexander, incapable in Ins prostration of coming to any decision.

“Sire,” answers Pahlen, “you must follow me this instant, for the least delay may provoke the most disastrous consequences.”

“Do what you like, I am ready.”

Thereupon Pahlen hurries the Emperor to a carriage which is waiting in readiness to convey him to the fortress; Paul takes his seat weeping, Pahlen and Zubov climb up behind in the footmen’s seats, and the carriage, bearing the future destiny of Russia, sets out at a gallop for the Winter Palace, escorted by two battalions of Guards. Beningsen remains with the Empress, for one of Alexander’s last recommendations was for the safety of his mother.

On the Admiralty Square Alexander comes upon the chief regiments of the Guards: “The Emperor! The Emperor!” shout Pahlen and Zubov pointing to Alexander whom they are escorting. “The Emperor! the Emperor!” cry the two accompanying battalions. “Long live the Emperor!” reply all the regiments in chorus.

Then they crowd to the door. Alexander is helped out, pale and weary, they drag him along, and finally lift him up, they swear allegiance to him with an enthusiasm, which proves that the conspirators though they have committed a crime, have only fulfilled the desire of the people; it is quite certain then that however much he may desire to avenge his father, he must abandon all idea of punishing the assassins. The latter separated for their homes, in ignorance as to how the Emperor would treat them in the future.

The next day it was the turn of the Empress to swear allegiance to her son; according to the constitution of the Empire, she ought to succeed her husband, but when she saw the urgency of the situation, she was the first to renounce her rights.

Vette, the surgeon, and Dr. Stoff, held a post-mortem on the body, and gave out that the Emperor Paul had died in an apoplectic fit; the wound on the cheek was attributed to the fall that occurred when the seizure caught him.

The body was embalmed and exposed to view for a fortnight on a state bed, to the steps of which etiquette brought Alexander several times; but not once did he ascend or descend them without turning pale and bursting into tears. Then the conspirators were gradually removed from the court; some received special appointments, others were incorporated in regiments stationed in Siberia; there only remained Pahlen who had retained his post of military governor of St. Petersburg, the sight of whom filled the new Emperor with remorse; so he took advantage of the first opportunity of getting rid of him, and this is how it happened.

A few days after Paul’s death, a priest exposed to view a sacred image, which, so he pretended, had been brought to him by an angel. On its base were inscribed these words: — ” God will punish all the assassins of Paul I.”

Pahlen hearing that the people were flocking into the chapel where the miraculous image was exposed and fearing lest from this trick some false impression might be implanted upon the Emperor’s mind, asked permission to put an end to the priest’s pretensions, a permission which was readily granted by Alexander. The priest was therefore flogged and in his agony declared that he had only acted in accordance with the orders of the Empress. In proof of his assertion, he declared that an image exactly like his would be found in her oratory. Pahlen broke open the Empress’s chapel and finding the image there had it removed; the Empress very properly resented this insult and demanded reparation from her son. Alexander was on the look out to get rid of Pahlen, and did not allow such an opportunity to escape him. M. de Beckleclev was commissioned to hand to Count Pahlen the Emperor’s command that he should withdraw into retirement. “I was expecting it,” said Pahlen, “and my belongings are already packed.”

An hour later Count Pahlen had sent in his resignation to the Emperor and the same evening he set out for Riga.

CHAPTER XIII

THE Emperor Alexander was barely twenty-four years old when he ascended the throne. He had been educated under the supervision of his grandmother Catherine, on an original plan of her own, one of the principal tenets of which ran as follows: —

“The young Dukes are not to be taught either poetry or music, for to bear any fruit it would be necessary to dedicate too much time to their study.” Alexander therefore received a strict and severe education. His tutor, La Harpe, selected by Catherine herself and known at Court by the name of “the Jacobin,” because he was not only a Swiss but also a brother of the brave General La Harpe who served in the French Army, was exactly the man to impress his pupil with noble and upright ideas, so important in the case of those in whom the impressions of later life are likely to conflict with the recollections of youth. This choice of Catherine’s was remarkable at an epoch when thrones were tottering, shaken by the volcano of revolution, when Leopold died of poison, so it was said, Gustavus fell murdered by Ankarstrôm and Louis XVI. lost his head on the scaffold.

One of Catherine’s express commands was to keep all knowledge of the distinction between the sexes and of love which brought them together, from entering the heads of the young Dukes. The celebrated Pallas was giving them a course of Botany in the Imperial Gardens; the demonstration of the system of Linnaeus *OR*. the sexes of flowers and their method of reproduction led to a crowd of questions on the part of his august pupils which he found it very difficult to answer. Protasov, the superintendent of the Princes, was obliged to make a report to Catherine who, in an interview with Pallas, advised him to omit all details as to pistils and stamens. As this recommendation rendered the course of Botany almost impossible and the silence of the professor only led to a fresh outburst of questions, the study was definitely abandoned. However such a system of education did not last long and while Alexander was still quite a youth, Catherine had to consider the question of providing him with a wife.

Three young German Princesses were brought to the Russian Court, that the grandmother might make a selection for her grandson. Catherine heard of their arrival at St. Petersburg and eager to see and criticise them, she invited them to come to the Palace, and awaited them in rapt attention at a window whence she could see them alight in the Courtyard. Very soon the carriage which was conveying them drove up, the door was opened, and one of the Princesses jumped straight to the ground without putting foot on the step.

"That is not the one," said Catherine shaking her head, "to be Empress of Russia, she is too lively."

The second alighted in the same fashion, and catching her feet in her dress very nearly fell.

"That is not the one either, to be Empress of Russia," said Catherine; "she is too clumsy."

Then the third one stepped out, handsome, stately and sedate.

"That is the Empress of Russia," said Catherine.

It was Louise of Baden.

Catherine sent for the grandsons to come to the Palace while the young Princesses were there, telling them that as she knew their mother, the Duchess of Baden-Durlach, originally Princess of Darmstadt, and that as the French had captured their country, she had invited them to St. Petersburg to live near her. After staying a short time, the two Grand Dukes were dismissed; on their return they spoke a great deal of the three young girls, and Alexander said he thought the eldest very pretty. "Well, I don't," said Constantine; "I don't think any of them pretty. They will have to be sent to Riga, to the Princes of Courland, they will just suit them."

The Empress heard the same day of the opinion of her grandson concerning the lady she had selected for him and looked upon the fact of his youthful predilection coinciding with her intentions as providential. Moreover the Grand Duke Constantine was wrong, for the young Princess in addition to the freshness of youth, had beautiful long flaxen hair falling over magnificent shoulders, a graceful figure like a Rhineland fairy and the great blue eyes of Goethe's Marguerite.

The next day the Empress paid them a visit at one of Potemkin's Palaces, where they were staying. As they were at their toilette, she brought them some dress materials and jewels and also the ribbon of St. Catherine. After a short chat, she made them show her their wardrobes, handled several articles in turn, and after she had finished her examination, kissed them on the forehead with a smile and said to them: — " My dears, I was not so rich as you when I first entered St. Petersburg.” The truth is Catherine was very poor when she came to Russia; but she more than made, up for her lack of dowry by leaving as a heritage both Poland and the Crimea.

The Princess Louise for her part reciprocated the feeling which she had inspired. Alexander, who later on was to be described by Napoleon as “the handsomest and most distinguished of the Greeks,” was a delightful young man, full of charm and frankness, with such perfect good temper and of a character so sweet and kind, that possibly he might be thought a trifle timid. Nor did the simple-hearted young German Princess attempt to conceal her affection for the Czarevitch; so that Catherine decided to take advantage of their mutual feeling and told them shortly that they were intended for each other. Alexander danced for joy and Louise wept for her good fortune.

Then began the preparations for the marriage. The young Princess put her heart into all that was demanded of her, she learnt the Russian language, was instructed in the religion of the Greek Church, made a public profession of her new faith, received on her bare arms and beautiful feet the Holy unction and was proclaimed a Grand Duchess with the name of Elizabeth Alexievna which was also the name of Catherine the daughter of Alexis.

Notwithstanding Catherine’s foresight, this precocious marriage was nearly fatal to one of the parties and absolutely fatal to the other. Alexander just escaped being deaf; and the Empress was an elderly matron when she should have been a young girl. The Emperor was handsome and as we have said, had inherited from Catherine a loving disposition; yet scarcely had the wedding wreath faded on the brow of the bride before it was converted into a crown of thorns for the wife.

The accident by which Alexander came to the throne has been described. The profound grief which the young Emperor felt at the death of his father restored him to his wife. Although Paul was almost a stranger to her, she wept as if she had been his daughter; tears seek for the companionship of tears and days of unhappiness were retrieved by nights of bliss.

Austerlitz and Friedland, Tilsit and Erfurt, 1812 and 1814 are subjects for the historian. For ten years Alexander was illuminated by the light of Napoleon; then one day all men’s looks, while pursuing the conquered, were diverted from the conqueror; at this point we will return to our tale.

During these ten years the youth had grown into a man. The ardour of his early passion had by no means diminished. But in spite of his charming and gracious manner with women, in spite of his polished and kindly attitude towards men, from time to time gloomy clouds would pass across his brow; they were mute but terrible souvenirs of that night of bloodshed when he had heard his father writhing in his death agony. Little by little as he grew older, these recollections haunted him more frequently and threatened to develop into a chronic melancholy. He tried to fight against them by intellectual and physical exercise. Then would he dream of impossible reforms and make useless journeys.

Alexander, a pupil, as we have already said of the brother of General La Harpe, had retained from his literary education a penchant for ideology, which his travels in France, England and Holland had served to increase. Ideas of Liberty, imbibed during the French Occupation, were taking root everywhere, and the Emperor instead of repressing them, rather encouraged them by letting fall from his lips from time to time the word *Constitution.* Then Madame de Krudener appeared on the scene, and Mysticism joined hands with Ideology; the Emperor was a victim to this double influence at the time of my arrival in St. Petersburg.

As to his journeys, they appear fabulous to us Parisians. It has been calculated that the Emperor in his various excursions, both within and without the Empire, has already travelled two hundred thousand versts, something like fifty thousand leagues. What is strange about these journeys is that the time of his return is settled on the day of his departure. Thus the year before my journey, the Emperor set out for Little Russia on the 26th August, announcing that he would return on November the 2nd, and so strictly and invariably fixed beforehand is the distribution of his time, that after having traversed a distance of eighteen hundred and seventy leagues, Alexander returned to St. Petersburg on the given day and almost at the appointed hour.

The Emperor undertakes these long journeys, not only without guards, not only without an escort, but almost alone; and as one might expect, they give rise to many curious encounters and unexpected dangers, which are faced by the Emperor with the good humour of Henri IV. and the courage of Charles XII. For instance, on one occasion when travelling in Finland with Prince Peter Volkovski as his sole companion, just as the latter had fallen asleep, the heavy Imperial carriage, which was being dragged up a steep sandy mountain road, masters its team of horses and begins to slip back. Alexander in a moment, without rousing his companion, leaps to the ground and joins the coachman and the servants in pushing at the wheels. While this is taking place, the sleeper disturbed in his slumber by the sudden change of movement awakes and finds himself alone in the carriage; he looks about him in bewilderment and perceives the Emperor mopping his forehead; they had reached the top of the ascent.

On another occasion during an expedition in Little Russia, the Emperor got to a straggling village, and while the horses were being changed, thought he would like to exchange the jolting of the carriage for a few versts on foot; he told the postilions not to hurry, so that he might have time to get some distance ahead. Then, without any escort, and dressed in an ordinary military overcoat, he passes through the village and comes out on the other side where the road separates into two equally well worn tracks; not knowing which of the two he should take Alexander comes up to a man dressed in a uniform much the same as his own and smoking a pipe in the doorway of the last house.

“My friend,” says the Emperor, “which of these two roads must I take to get to.”

The man with the pipe eyes him from head to foot, and in his astonishment, that a simple traveller should dare to speak with such familiarity to a man of his importance, especially in Russia, where the distinction of rank fixes a great gulf between those in office and their subordinates, drawled out the words, “To the right,” between two whiffs of smoke.

“Excuse me, Sir,” said the Emperor raising his hat, “but one more question, if you please.”

“What?”

“Allow me to inquire what is your rank in the army?”

“Guess.”

“Perhaps you are a lieutenant?”

“Higher.”

“A Captain?”

“Higher.”

“A Major?”

“Still higher.”

“Commander of a battalion?”

“At last you have got it.” The Emperor bows. “And now it is my turn,” said the man with the pipe, “convinced that he was addressing an inferior, “who are you, if you please?”

“Guess!” answers the Emperor. “A Lieutenant?”

“Higher.”

“A Captain?”

“Go on.”

“A Major?”

“Higher.”

“Commander of a battalion?”

“Higher still.”

The man removes his pipe from his mouth.

“A Colonel?”

“You have not got it yet.”

“I presume your Excellency is a Lieutenant-General. “You are getting near.” The man raises his hand to his cap and stands at attention.

“Then your Highness must be a Field Marshal.”

“One step higher, Sir.”

“His Imperial Majesty!” cries the man in consternation, letting his pipe fall and break into fragments.

“Exactly,” answers Alexander with a smile.

“Pardon me, Sire,” exclaims the officer falling on his knees.

“Why should I pardon you?” replied the Emperor, “I merely asked you the way and you have told me. Thanks.”

With these words the Emperor salutes the unfortunate Commander of a battalion and takes the road to the right, where he is soon overtaken by his carriage.

On another occasion when visiting the Northern provinces, the Emperor while crossing a lake situated near Archangel, was assailed by a violent tempest. “My friend,” said the Emperor to the pilot, “nearly eighteen hundred years ago, under very similar circumstances, a great Roman general said to his pilot, ‘Fear nothing, for Caesar and his fortunes are in your hands.’ I am less confident than Caesar and I say to you simply, ‘My friend, forget that I am the Emperor, regard me as a man like yourself, and try to save both our lives.’ “The pilot who was on the point of losing his head with the weight of the responsibility, which was overwhelming him, immediately plucked up his courage, and the vessel, directed by a firm hand, reached the shore unharmed.

Alexander was not always so lucky, and trifling accidents were sometimes followed by serious results. During his last expedition through the Provinces of the Don, he was upset violently from his drosky and injured in the leg. A slave to the routine which he prescribed for himself, he was anxious to continue his journey, that he might reach home at the pre-arranged date; but over exertion and neglect caused the sore to fester. Since that time erysipelas has on several occasions appeared in the leg, compelling the Emperor to keep his bed for weeks and to walk lame for months. With these attacks his melancholy is accentuated; for then he is constantly in the presence of the Empress and in her pale sad face, on which a smile never makes its appearance, he sees a living reproach, for he is the cause of the pale sad face.

The last outbreak of this disease, which occurred during the winter of 1824, at the time of the marriage of the Grand Duke Michael and just when the information received from Constantine of the existence of that everlasting but invisible plot, which could be felt but not seen, had filled him with vivid apprehensions. It happened at Tsarskoe-Selo, the Prince's favourite residence, which was becoming more and more dear to him, the deeper he plunged into his hopeless melancholy. After going for a walk in solitude, as was his invariable custom, he returned to the Castle, perishing with cold, and had dinner served in his room. The same evening erysipelas of a most violent character set in, accompanied by a high temperature, delirium and brain fever; that very night the Emperor was conveyed in a closed sleigh to St. Petersburg, where the principal medical men in consultation decided that the leg must be amputated; Dr. Wyllie, the Emperor's private surgeon alone opposed the idea, staking his life on the recovery of the august patient. Thanks to his assiduity the Emperor recovered his health. But his melancholy made rapid strides during this illness, and as I have said, threw gloom over the latter part of the carnival.

While still convalescent he returned to his beloved Tsarskoe-Selo and there resumed his usual habits of life; he spent the spring alone, without any court, without even a Grand Marshal and only received his ministers on certain days of the week; his existence there resembled rather that of an anchorite lamenting his sins, than of a great Emperor entertaining his subjects.

At six o'clock in winter or at five in summer, Alexander rose, performed his toilet, retired to his study, where everything was in the most perfect order, the preparations including invariably a cambric handkerchief folded on his desk and a bundle of ten freshly cut pens. The Emperor settled down to his work, never employing a pen which had done duty on the previous day, even if he had used it only to write his name; when his despatches were finished and all had been signed he would descend to the park, where, in spite of the rumours of conspiracy, which had been floating about for the last two years, he would go for a walk absolutely alone and without any protection beyond the sentinels of the Alexander Palace. About five o'clock he would return, dine alone, and go to bed to the accompaniment of a tattoo played by the Guards' band under his windows. He always selected the most depressing pieces, and would fall asleep in the same frame of mind as that in which he had spent the day.

The Empress Elizabeth likewise lived a life of profound solitude, watching over the Emperor like an invisible angel; time had not extinguished within her the deeply rooted love inspired by her first glimpse of the Czarevitch, which remained pure and constant in spite of the numerous infidelities of her husband. When I saw her she was a woman of about forty-five, with a slight and well set up figure, and on her face could be traced the evidences of great beauty, which was beginning to fade away after thirty years' contest with grief. To sum up, she was as pure as a Saint, never could the most biting and calumnious tongues find anything to seize upon. In fact, in her presence, every one paid respect to her supreme goodness rather than to her great power and regarded her as an angel exiled from heaven rather than a queen reigning upon earth.

When summer came, the doctors decided unanimously that a change was necessary to set up the Emperor in health and settled on the Crimea, since its climate would exactly suit his stage of convalescence. Alexander, contrary to his custom had not arranged any journeys for this year, and received the doctors' orders with absolute indifference. Moreover the Empress, as soon as the resolution to depart had been taken, begged and obtained permission to accompany her husband. Their departure meant a great increase of work for the Emperor, because in anticipation of the journey, everyone was anxious to settle his business with him, as if he would never see him again; for a whole fortnight he was obliged to get up very early and go to bed late. Meanwhile his health had not suffered visibly, when, in the course of the month of June, after a special service to ask a blessing on the journey, in which the whole Imperial family took part, he left St. Petersburg, accompanied by the Empress, driven by Ivan, his trustworthy coachman, and escorted by several orderlies under the command of General Diebitch.

CHAPTER XIV

THE Emperor reached Taganrog about the end of August, 1825, after passing through Warsaw, where he halted a few days to celebrate the birthday of the grand Duke Constantine; this was the second visit the Emperor had paid to the town, whose position pleased him and he often said he should like to retire there to spend the remainder of his days. The excursion had been of great benefit to him as well as the Empress, and augured well for their sojourn under the beautiful climate in which they hoped to recover their healths. The Emperor's fondness for Taganrog could only be justified by the improvements which he hoped to carry out, for this little town, situated on the shore of the sea of Azov, consisted of barely a thousand ramshackle houses, of which a sixth part at the most were built of brick or stone, all the others being nothing but wooden huts covered with mud. As for the streets, which are wide, it is true, but unpaved, the soil is so friable that after a shower you sink to the knees in mud. Moreover, when sun and wind have dried the damp loam, the horses and cattle bringing in the produce of the country stir up clouds of dust with their feet, which the wind whirls about in masses so thick that it is not possible to distinguish between a man and a horse at a few paces distance in broad daylight. This dust gets in everywhere, enters the houses, finds its way through closed blinds or shutters, penetrates clothes, however thick they may be, and charges the water with a kind of sediment which can only be deposited by boiling tartaric acid in it.

The Emperor put up at the Governor's house, situated in front of the fortress of Azov, but he was very seldom inside it, for he went out every morning and did not return till dinner time at two o'clock. He spent the rest of his time in tramping through the mud or dust, neglecting all the precautions which the inhabitants of the country take to ward off the autumnal fevers, which by the way had been more numerous and malignant this year than usual. His chief occupation was the laying out and planting of a great public garden, designed by an Englishman, who had been brought from St. Petersburg for the purpose; at night he slept on a camp bed, resting his head upon a leather pillow.

It was said by many that this occupation was a mere cloak, to conceal a hidden plan, and that in reality the Emperor had retired to this out of the way corner of his empire to come to some great determination. They were in constant expectation of seeing emerge from this little town of the Palus Maeotis the outline of a constitution for the whole of Russia. If they are to be believed, this was the real reason of this journey in search of health; the Emperor was desirous of coming to a decision unfettered by the influence of the old nobility, which is to this very day quite as much the slave of its prejudices as in the time of Peter the Great.

Meanwhile Taganrog was only Alexander’s headquarters; Elizabeth adopted it permanently, for she could not endure the excursions undertaken by the Emperor in the Province of the Don, now to Tcherkask, now to Donetz.

Having returned from one or these expeditions, he was on the point of setting out for Astrakan, when the unexpected arrival of the Count of Voronsov, who had lived in France down to 1818, and was now Governor of Odessa, brought news to the Emperor that an insurrection was on the point of declaring itself in the Crimea, and that his presence alone could prevent an outbreak.

It would be necessary to travel three hundred leagues, but what are three hundred leagues in Russia, where rough-maned horses carry you across the steppes and forests with the rapidity of a dream. Alexander promised the Empress that he would be back in three weeks’ time, and gave orders that he would leave immediately after the return of a courier whom he had despatched to Alupka.

The courier came back bringing fresh news of the conspiracy. It had been discovered that it aimed not only at the government, but even at the Emperor’s life. On hearing this, Alexander let his head fall upon his hands and uttering a deep groan, cried: “My father I my father!”

This occurred in the middle of the night. General Diebitch, who lived in a house near, was awakened by the Emperor’s orders. Meanwhile Alexander seemed to be very uneasy and kept striding up and down his room, throwing himself at intervals on his bed and then springing up again in his agitation. The general arrived, two hours were spent in writing and discussions; then two couriers departed bearing despatches, one going to the Viceroy of Poland and the other to the Grand Duke Nicholas.

By the following day the Emperor had regained his habitual equanimity, and his face betrayed no signs of the distress he had experienced in the night. When Voronsov came for orders he found him in a state of irritability utterly different from his usual suavity. Nevertheless he gave orders that a start should be made the next morning.

The journey only increased his mental suffering; it seemed to him that the time would never pass and he kept grumbling at the slowness of the horses and the wretched state of the roads. His ill-temper redoubled when Dr. Wyllie advised him to take precautions against the icy autumnal winds. Then he threw aside his overcoat and cloak, and appeared to court the very dangers his friends urged him to shun. Such rashness bore its own punishment; the Emperor was seized one evening with an obstinate cough and the next day, when they got to Ortelov an intermittent fever made its appearance and, aided by the obstinacy of the patient, developed in a few days into a remittent fever, and was soon diagnosed by Wyllie as the same that had raged all the autumn from Taganrog to Sebastopol.

The journey was immediately abandoned. Alexander appeared to be aware of the seriousness of his condition, and being desirous of seeing the Empress again before his death, insisted that he should be removed at once to Taganrog. Absolutely regardless of the entreaties of Wyllie, he rode part of the way on horseback; but he was very soon unable to keep the saddle, and was compelled to et into his carriage. At last, on November 3rd, he reached Taganrog. He had hardly entered the Governor’s palace, before he fainted.

The Empress, who was herself nearly dying of heart disease, forgot her own sufferings in a moment, to attend to her husband. The fatal fever *in* spite of the change of air, recurred day after day with renewed activity, until on the 8th the symptoms increasing in urgency, Sir James Wyllie insisted that Dr. Stophiegen, the medical adviser of the Empress, should be called in to a consultation. On the 13th the two Physicians agreed that with the hope of combating the brain affection which threatened to complicate matters, the Emperor should be bled; however Alexander vehemently opposed the suggestion, asking for nothing but iced water, and when this was refused, rejecting everything else. About four in the afternoon the Emperor called for ink and paper, and wrote and sealed a letter; then while the candle was still alight he said to a servant: — ” My friend, extinguish that light; otherwise it may be taken for a funeral taper, and they may think I am already dead.”

On the morrow the two doctors returned to their charge, backed up by the prayers of the Empress, but ‘t was in vain, and the Emperor dismissed them in anger. Then almost immediately repenting of his brusqueness he called them back and said to Stophiegen: “Listen, you and Sir James Wyllie, it gives me great pleasure to see you; but I must warn you that I shall be obliged to renounce this pleasure, if you split my head with your medicine.”

However about midnight the Emperor consented to take a dose of calomel.

About four o’clock in the evening the disease had made such appalling strides that t became an urgent matter to call in a priest. Sir James Wyllie at the instigation of the Empress, entered the sick room, and going up to the bed, implored the Emperor with tears in his eyes, since he persisted in refusing the aid of medicine not to refuse the consolations of Religion. The Emperor replied that in this respect he was willing to leave all to them.

On the 15th at five in the morning, a Confessor was introduced. As soon as the Emperor caught sight of him, he stretched out his hand and said, “Father, look upon me as a man and not as an Emperor.” The priest then approached the bed, listened to the Imperial confession and administered the sacrament to the august patient.

Then, as he was aware of the obstinacy with which Alexander had repulsed all medical succour, he brought the dying man’s religious feelings to bear on the question, telling him, that if he persisted in this line of action, it might be a grave question whether God would not regard his death rather as a case of suicide. This idea produced a profound impression upon Alexander and he immediately summoned Wyllie and told him that he put himself in his hands, and that he was to do what he thought fit.

Wyllie immediately ordered twenty leeches to be applied to his head, but it was too late. The sick man was a prey to a consuming fever, and counting from that moment all hope was abandoned and the servants crowded into the apartment weeping and groaning. Meanwhile Elizabeth had not quitted his bedside, except to give place to the Confessor and at his departure she resumed her accustomed place.

About two o’clock the Emperor appeared to be suffering from a great access of pain. He made signs as if he was desirous of imparting a secret.

Then changing his mind he cried: “Kings suffer more than other men.” Then with an abrupt pause he fell back among the pillows muttering, “They committed an infamous act.” What did he refer to? No one knows; but many believe it was a final reproach levelled against his father’s assassins.

During the night the Emperor lost consciousness. About two o’clock in the morning General Diebitch spoke of an old man called Alexandrovitch, who was reported to have saved several Tartars from this very fever which was consuming the Emperor. Sir James Wyllie insisted that the man should be sent for, and the Empress catching at this ray of hope, gave orders that he should be found and brought at once.

All this while, the Empress was on her knees at the bedside of the dying man, her eyes fixed on his, watching in dismay the life slowly ebbing. Verily, if the most fervent and most sincere prayers could have influenced the Almighty to spare the dying man, the dying man would have been saved.

About nine in the morning the old man entered. It was with difficulty that he had been induced to come and it had been found necessary to bring him almost by force. At sight of the dying Emperor, he shook his head; and when asked the meaning of this inauspicious sign, replied: — ” It is too late; besides the people whom I cured were not suffering from the same illness.” With this avowal Elizabeth’s last hope vanished.

At ten minutes to three in the morning the Emperor expired.

This was the first of December according to the Russian calendar.

The Empress was leaning so close over him that she actually felt him breathe his last. She uttered a terrible cry, and fell on her knees and began to pray; then after a few minutes, she rose much calmer, closed the eyes of the Emperor which till then had remained open, bound a handkerchief round his head to prevent the jaw from falling, kissed his hands which were now cold, and falling on her knees, continued in prayer until the doctors induced her to withdraw to another room that they might commence the post-mortem examination.

The autopsy revealed the presence of two ounces of fluid in the cavities of the brain, and the congestion of the veins and arteries of the head. In addition they found that there was a softening of the spleen, a characteristic alteration of this organ when the patient has been carried off by one of the local fevers. The Emperor might have been saved if he had not obstinately neglected all precautions.

The next day the body was laid out on a raised platform, erected in the house where he died. The room was hung with black, while the coffin was draped with a pall of cloth of gold, and a vast number of tapers illuminated the apartment. Everyone who entered was presented with a lighted torch which he held as long as he remained in the funeral chamber. A priest, stationed at the head of the bier recited prayers; two sentinels with drawn swords, kept watch day and night; two more guarded the doors, while others were posted on the steps of the staircase.

The body lay exposed to view for twenty-two days, visited by crowds of sightseers, who thronged thither as if to a show. Meanwhile the Empress remained at her post, taking part in the masses which were recited every other day, and invariably fainting under the strain. At last on the 25th of December at nine o’clock in the morning the corpse was conveyed from the Palace to the Greek Monastery of St. Alexander, where it was to lie exposed to view until its removal to St. Petersburg. It was placed on a funeral car drawn by eight horses, draped with black cloths reaching to the ground, while it was sheltered from above by a golden canopy and reposed in a coffin covered with a silver pall, and decorated with escutcheons bearing the arms of the empire. The Imperial crown was placed under the canopy. Four Major-generals, assisted by eight commissioned officers, held the supports of the canopy. The members of their Imperial Majesties’ suites followed, clad in long, black cloaks and bearing torches, while at intervals of a minute, a battery of artillery belonging to the Cossacks of the Don, drawn up in the fortress square, fired a salute.

On reaching the church the body was placed on a staging with twelve steps, covered with black cloth, surmounted by a catafalque hung with red, supporting a framework covered with poppy coloured velvet and studded with golden hatchments. Four pillars held up the canopy, which was surmounted by the Imperial diadem, sceptre and orb. The catafalque was surrounded by curtains of poppy coloured velvet and cloth of gold, while four large candelabras, placed at the four corners of the staging, sustained a sufficient number of candles to overpower the gloominess of the church. This obscurity was due to black hangings, embroidered with white crosses, and hung across the lower windows of the church.

The Empress was very desirous of taking part in the final ceremony, but her strength was not equal to the occasion.

She was carried to the Palace in a swoon, but had no sooner recovered than she entered the private chapel and went through the same service that was being performed in the Church of St. Alexander.

As soon as the first serious symptoms had made their appearance, that is to say on the 18th, the day the Emperor returned to Taganrog, a messenger had been despatched to His Imperial Highness, the grand Duke Nicholas, to inform him of the Emperor’s illness. This messenger had been followed by others despatched on the same errand on the 21st, 24th, 27th and 28th of November. All the letters they carried spoke of the growing danger and caused consternation in the Imperial family, until at last a letter on the 29th gave rise to a spark of hope by announcing that the Emperor, who had been lying in a state of coma for eight hours, had recovered consciousness, recognized everyone, and declared that he felt a little better.

Though the hopes raised on such a slender foundation were but shadowy, the Dowager Empress and the Grand Dukes Nicholas and Michael ordered a public *Te Deum* in the great Metropoutan Church at Kazan, and as soon as the populace knew that the *Te Deum* was to be performed in thanksgiving for the improvement in the Emperor’s health, they flocked thither joyfully and filled every corner not occupied by the clergy and the court.

Towards the end of the *Te Deum,* while the clear voices of the choristers were chanting the praises of God, an officer entered and whispered to the Grand Duke Nicholas that a courier had arrived from Taganrog bearing a despatch which he wished to deliver in person, and that meanwhile he was waiting in the sacristy. The Grand Duke got up, followed by the aide-de-camp and left the church. The Dowager Empress alone noticed his departure, and the service continued.

The Grand Duke had only to glance at the courier to divine the fatal news he was conveying. Besides, the letter he presented was sealed in black. The Grand Duke recognised Elizabeth’s writing and opened the Imperial despatch; it contained nothing but these lines:

“My angel is in heaven, while I still grovel upon the earth; but I am in hopes of soon joining him.”

The Grand Duke sent for the Archbishop, who was a handsome old man with a long white beard and hair falling half way down his back; he handed him the letter, telling him to break the news to the Dowager Empress, returned to his place near her, — and continued his devotions.

A moment later the old man returned to the choir. At a signal from him the service was abruptly stopped and the stillness of death fell upon the place. Then amidst the breathless attention and astonishment of everyone, he advanced with slow and stately steps to the altar, took up a massive silver crucifix which rested upon it, and throwing a black veil over the symbol of all earthly grief and of all Divine hope, he approached the Dowager Empress and held the draped crucifix to her lips.

The Empress uttered a cry and fell face downwards to the ground; she understood that her son was dead.

The sorrowful expectation indulged in by the Empress Elizabeth in her short and touching letter, was not long in being accomplished. About four months after the death of Alexander, at the return of spring, she left Taganrog for the province of Kolouga, where a magnificent estate had just been procured for her. She had journeyed barely a third of the way, when she was suddenly taken ill and halted at Belov, a little town in the province of Kursk; a week later she had joined “her angel in heaven.”

CHAPTER XV

WE heard this news and how it had been broken to the Dowager Empress from Count Alexis, who was present at the *Te Deum* in his capacity of Lieutenant of the Horseguards. Either, because he was greatly impressed by this news, or because it closely affected other matters, to which it seemed to bear little or no relation, Louise and I fancied we detected some uneasiness in the Count’s manner which was not natural to him, and manifested itself in spite of the habitual self control common to the Russians. We gave voice to our thoughts immediately the Count left us to attend at Prince Trubetski s at six o’clock.

Our exchange of ideas proved very distressing to my poor fellow countrywoman, who naturally could not disassociate her thoughts from the conspiracy, concerning which Alexis at the beginning of his attachment to Louise had allowed a few words to escape. It is true that since then, every time Louise had attempted to bring the conversation round to that topic, the Count had tried to reassure her, declaring that the conspiracy had been dissolved almost as soon as it was formed; but certain signs which are not likely to deceive a woman in love made me think that the Count was trying to beguile her. The next day St. Petersburg appeared in mourning. The Emperor Alexander was adored, and as Constantine’s renunciation of the throne was not known at that time, it was natural that the sweet and generous disposition of the one should be compared with the savage brusqueness of the other. As to the Grand Duke Nicholas, no one thought of him.

In fact, though he knew of the act of abdication which Constantine had signed at the time of his marriage, far from taking advantage of this renunciation which his brother might have regretted since, he had taken the oath of allegiance, looking upon his brother as the Emperor, and had sent a courier inviting him to come and take possession of the throne. But at the same time that the messenger set out from St. Petersburg for Warsaw, the Grand Duke Michael, under orders from the Czarevitch, left Warsaw for St. Petersburg, in charge of the following letter:

“MY DEAREST BROTHER, “It was with the deepest grief that I heard last evening of the death of our adored sovereign, my benefactor, the Emperor Alexander. While hastening to demonstrate to you the feelings inspired in me by this cruel blow, it is my duty to inform you, that I am forwarding by the same messenger, a letter to her Imperial Majesty, our august mother, in which I have declared, that in accordance with the rescript which I obtained from the late Emperor, dated February 2nd, 1822, sanctioning my renunciation of the throne, it is still my unalterable determination to yield to you all my rights of succession to the throne of the Emperors of all the Russias. At the same time I have begged our well-beloved mother and all whom it may concern to make known my resolution in this respect, in order that it may be put in execution.

“After this declaration Ï look upon it as a sacred duty to beg most humbly that your Imperial Majesty will allow me to be the first to take the oath of allegiance and submission, and permit me to declare that it is my express desire not to receive any fresh dignity or title, but simply to preserve the designation of Czarevitch, with which my august father thought fit to honour me for my services. Henceforth my sole pleasure will consist in assuring your Imperial Majesty of my profound respect and unlimited devotion; my best guarantee is the thirty years of faithful service and the unceasing zeal I have displayed in the interests of both Emperors, my father and my brother; inspired by similar feelings, I will not cease to serve your Imperial Majesty and your successors in whatever position I may be.

“I remain, with the deepest respect, “CONSTANTINE.”

The two messengers crossed. The one sent to the Czarevitch Constantine had received strict injunctions from the Grand Duke Nicholas to use every means in his power to induce him to take the crown. He therefore begged and implored the Czarevitch; but the latter held out resolutely, saying that his intentions had not altered since the day when he abandoned his rights and nothing in the world would induce him to change his mind.

Then came the tears of his wife the Princess of Lovitz, who threw herself at his feet, saying that as it was for her sake, in order that he might marry her that he renounced his right to the throne of the Czars, she was willing to agree to the nullity of their marriage, and would be happy to make some return for all he had done for her; but Constantine drew her up and would not allow the discussion to continue, declaring that his resolve was unalterable.

Meanwhile the Grand Duke Michael reached St. Petersburg bearing the Czarevitch’s letter; the Grand Duke Nicholas would not consider it a definite refusal, saying that he hoped the entreaties of his messenger would have a successful termination. But the envoy returned with a formal refusal, and as it was dangerous to leave the matter in this unsettled state, there was nothing for it but to accept what his brother refused.

The day after the courier from the Grand Duke Nicholas had been despatched to the Czarevitch, the Council of State made an announcement that they had in their keeping a document entrusted to them on October 15th 1823, and bearing the seal of the Emperor Alexander, together with an autograph letter from his Majesty, commanding them to take charge of the document until further orders, or in the event of his death to open it at a special meeting. The Council of State had just carried out these orders, and inside the cover they had found the Grand Duke Constantine’s renunciation couched in the following terms: —

“Letter from His Imperial Highness the Czarevitch Grand Duke Constantine to the Emperor Alexander.”

“SIRE, “Emboldened by the numerous proofs of your goodwill towards me, I venture to appeal to it once more, and to lay my humble supplication at your feet. Believing that I am possessed of neither the necessary intelligence, nor capacity, nor strength, if I should ever be called upon to occupy the high position to which my birth entitles me, I earnestly request your Imperial Majesty to transfer this right to the next heir, thus insuring the stability of the Empire in perpetuity. As for me, I will give in exchange for this renunciation a fresh guarantee and pledge for all that I willingly and solemnly agreed to at the time of my divorce from my first wife. Present circumstances altogether determine me to adopt a course which will prove to the Empire and the world in general the sincerity of my opinions.

“I trust your Imperial Majesty will generously accede to my wishes. I also trust that our august mother will likewise receive them kindly and hallow them with her Imperial consent. In the privacy of home life, I will endeavour to live as a model to your faithful subjects and to all who are inspired with a love for our beloved country.

“I remain with the deepest respect, “CONSTANTINE.”

“Petersburg, 14th Jan., 1822.”

Alexander sent the following reply to the letter: —

“DEAREST BROTHER, “I have just read your letter with all the attention it deserves; there is nothing in it that surprises me, as I have always been able to appreciate your lofty sentiments; it has furnished me with a fresh proof of your sincere attachment to the State, and of your careful foresight for the preservation of peace.

“In accordance with your wishes, I have handed your letter to our beloved mother; she has read it, appreciates as I do your noble sentiments, and recognizes with gratitude the high ideals which have guided you.

“Having regard to your motives we feel bound to grant you full liberty to abide by your unalterable resolve and we trust the Almighty will bless such pure sentiments with the most satisfactory rewards.

“Believe me always your most affectionate brother, “ALEXANDER.”

Constantine’s second refusal renewed in almost identical terms after an interval of three years, necessitated an immediate decision on the part of the Grand Duke Nicholas; he therefore published on December 25th, by virtue of the above letters, a manifesto in which he declared that he accepted the throne, which descended to him owing to the renunciation by his elder brother; he fixed on the next day the 26th for the taking of the oath which would be administered to him and his eldest son, the Grand Duke Alexander.

On receipt of this official communication from its future sovereign St. Petersburg once more breathed calmly; the character of the Czarevitch, which greatly resembled that of Paul I., inspired the most lively fears, while the disposition of the Grand Duke Nicholas implied a settled calm.

For in truth, while Alexander and Constantine each followed his natural bent, the one sinking amid the soft delights of pleasure, the other a slave to the rougher joys of a soldier’s life, the young Grand Duke, pure-minded and serious, had grown up immersed in the earnest study of history and politics. For ever absent-minded or reserved, he was in the habit of walking with his head bent towards the earth and when he raised it to fix his keen, penetrating eyes on a man, the man whoever he might be recognized he was in the presence of his master. Few knew how to give a reply without growing confused to his pointed and searching questions which he invariably delivered in a quick over-bearing manner; and while Alexander, ever popular and courteous, took part in every social function before his sorrows kept him shut up at Tsarskoe- Selo, the Grand Duke Nicholas lived in the seclusion of his family, which was both a pretext and an excuse for his isolation. Thus the Russian people, who themselves feel the need of being led gradually and gently out of the ruts of barbarism, understood instinctively that with a calm exterior, concealing an inflexible will, their new sovereign was the man they would have chosen, if God had not taken the matter in hand Himself, and that to wield the sceptre which was to extend over a nation too barbarous and yet, strangely enough, too civilized, there was need of an iron hand in a silken glove.

We must add, and this is a matter of importance in every nation, that the new Emperor was the handsomest man in the kingdom and the bravest in the army.

Everyone then was looking forward to the morrow as to a fête day, when in the course of the evening strange rumours began to circulate through the city; there was a report that the renunciation made known that very morning in the name of the Czarevitch Constantine was forged, and that on the contrary the Viceroy of Poland was marching upon St. Petersburg with an army, to demand his rights. It was also rumoured that the officers of various regiments and among them the regiment of Moscow had openly declared that they would decline to swear allegiance to Nicholas, seeing that the Czarevitch was their sole lawful sovereign.

These rumours had just reached certain houses I had visited that evening, when on returning home I found a note from Louise begging me to go and see her, however late it might be; I went to her at once and found her much upset; the Count hail been there as usual, but in spite of all his self control, he could not conceal his agitation. Louise had cross-questioned him; but although he had confessed nothing, he had given a display of that intense love which is only manifested at supreme moments, so much so, that though she was accustomed to find him affectionate and kind, his mournful tenderness on this occasion confirmed her in her suspicions; without a doubt there would be an unexpected development on the morrow and whatever it might be it would concern the Count.

Louise entreated me to go to him; she hoped that my presence would cheer him up and in case he should admit me to his confidence concerning the plot she hoped I would do all in my power to help him out of it. As may be supposed I agreed very readily to carry the message; besides for a long time past I had also been in dread, and gratitude had opened my eyes almost as well as love.

The Count was not at home, but as I was a constant visitor, I said I would wait and was admitted at once; I went into his bedroom and as it had been prepared for him it was evident that he meant to sleep there.

The servant left me alone in the room; I looked round to see if there was nothing to put an end to my uncertainty, and on a table I noticed a pair of double barrelled pistols. I put the ramrod down the barrels; they were loaded; this evidence, immaterial in itself, confirmed me in my suspicions.

I threw myself into an armchair, having made up my mind not to leave the room till the Count returned; midnight passed, one and two struck; my anxiety gave way to weariness and I fell asleep.

About four o'clock I woke up; in front of me was the Count writing at a table, his pistol near him; he was very pale.

At my first movement he turned round towards me:

"You were asleep," said he, "and I did not wish to disturb you; you had some message for me, I feel certain that is what brings you here; well, if you do not see me to-morrow evening, give this letter to Louise; I intended to send it to you tomorrow morning by my valet, but I would rather hand it to you."

"Then our suspicions were justified; a conspiracy is hatching, is it not so, and you are implicated in it?"

"Hush!" said the Count pressing my hand violently and looking around him, "hush! one rash word in St. Petersburg may mean death."

"Oh! "I said in an undertone, "what madness!"

"Don't you think that I know as well as you that I have acted like a madman? Do you think I have the least hope of success? No; I am on the brink of a precipice and only a miracle can prevent me from falling over; all I can do is to shut my eyes in order to hide its depth from myself."

"How is it then, that you are exposing yourself to such danger if you are able to foresee it?"

"Because it is too late now to withdraw, because I should be called a coward, because I have given my word to my friends and I must stick to them.... even if it means the scaffold."

"Well, but you, you, a member of a noble family..."

"What would you have, men are fools; in France barbers are fighting to become gentlemen, here we are struggling to become barbers."

"With what object?"

"To establish a republic, neither more, nor less, and to cut off our slaves' beards until they cut off our heads; upon my word I shrug my shoulders with contempt at it. And whom have we selected for our great political reform? A Prince!"

"A Prince?"

"Oh! we have lots of Princes; what we lack is men."

"Why, have you a constitution all prepared?"

"A constitution!" cried Count Alexis laughing bitterly; "oh! yes, we have a 'Russian Code 'drawn up by Pestel who is a native of Courland, which has been revised by Trubetski's orders in London and Paris; and then we have a catechism in fine figurative language, full of maxims such as this: Trust solely in your friends and your arms! your friends will help you and your dagger will defend you... You are a Slav and on your native soil, on the shores of the seas which wash it, you will build four ports; the port of Niort, the White port, the port of Dalmatia and the Northern port, and in the middle you will place on her throne the goddess of light."

"But, your Excellency, what is the meaning of all this rubbish?"

"Ah! you do not understand, do you?" said the Count giving way more and more to this kind of feverish bantering in which he took a pleasure in reviling himself; "you see you have not been initiated; it is true that if you were, you would not understand any better; but never mind, you might cite the Gracchi. Brutus, Cato; you might say that tyranny must be opposed, Caesar assassinated, Nero punished; you might say..."

"I should say nothing of the sort, on my oath; quite the contrary, I should withdraw without a word and never again set foot in any of their clubs, which are merely a bad travesty of our French *Feuillants* and *Jacobins."*

"But the oath, the oath? do you suppose we have forgotten it? Can any good conspiracy exist without an oath; listen to ours: — ' If I break my oath I shall be punished, both by remorse and by the sword on which I swear; may it bury itself in my heart, may it kill all who are dear to me and from that moment may my life be nothing but a series of unheard of tortures! 'It is a trifle melodramatic no doubt, and would most likely be shouted down at your Parisian theatres; but at St. Petersburg we are behind the times, and I was greatly applauded when I delivered in'

“But, in the name of Heaven,” I cried, V seeing you are so well aware of the ridiculous side of it, how do you happen to be mixed up with the business at all?”

“How did it come about? Well, what could I do? I was so bored I would have exchanged my He any day for a kopek; I thrust myself like a fool into the trap, and had scarcely done so when I received a letter from Louise; I wanted to draw back; without being released from my oath, I was told that all was at an end, and the society dissolved; it was nothing of the kind. A year ago I was told that the country relied on me; poor country, what stuff they put in your mouth. I had a great mind to give up the whole business, for I was now happy, you see, just as formerly I had been miserable; but a false idea of honour kept me back, so here I am prepared, as Bestujev said this evening, to stab the tyrants and throw their dust to the winds. It is very romantic, is it not? but the least that can happen is that we shall be hanged by the tyrants, and we shall richly deserve it.”

“But have you considered one matter, sir?” said I to the Count seizing him by both hands and looking into his face, “this eventuality which appears to you but a laughing matter will be the death of poor Louise.” Tears filled his eyes. “Louise will live,” said he. “Oh I you do not know her,” I answered.

“On the contrary I say that, because I do know her; Louise has no longer any right to die, she will live for the sake of her child.”

Poor woman,” I cried, “I did not know she was so unfortunate.”

“Listen,” said the Count, “as I do not know what may happen to-morrow, or rather to-day, here is a letter for her; I hope that everything will turn out better than we both expect and that all this talk will end in smoke, so attenuated, that no one will imagine there was ever any fire. Then you must tear it up, and everything will go on as before. But should matters turn out differently, you must hand it to her. It contains a recommendation to my mother to regard her as a daughter; I would gladly leave her all I have, but you know, if I am caught and sentenced, they will immediately confiscate all my possessions, so the bequest would be futile. As to my ready money, the future republic has borrowed it to the last silver; so I am not worried on that score. Will you promise to do what I want?”

“I give you my word.”

“Thank you; now, good-bye; take care you are not seen leaving my house, or you might be compromised.”

“Well, really, I am not quite sure I ought to leave you.”

“Yes, you ought, my dear fellow, think how important it is, in case of disaster, that Louise should have a brother at least; you are already in some danger owing to your friendship with me, and Muraviev and Trubetski; it behoves you to be careful, if not for yourself, at least for my sake; I implore you in the name of Louise.”

“For her sake, I will do anything you like.”

J Well, good-bye then; I am tired and must have some hours’ sleep, for I am expecting a rough day.”

“Good-bye then, since you wish it so.”

“I insist upon it.”

“Be careful.”

“My dear sir, I have no voice in the matter; I only go where others lead me; farewell. By the way I need not warn you that a single imprudent word may ruin both of us.”

“Oh!...”

“Now, embrace me.”

I threw myself in his arms.

“Now, once more, farewell.”

I left without another word, shutting the door behind me; but before I got to the end of the passage, the door was opened and a voice cried out: — ” I place Louise under your care.”

That same evening the conspirators had met at Prince Obolinski’s and every precaution was taken, if one can speak of a few ridiculous arrangements for an impossible revolution as precautions. At this meeting, when the ringleaders were present, they had communicated the general plans to the ordinary members of the band, and had selected the morrow, the day of the oath-taking, for the execution of their project. It had been decided that the soldiers should be induced to mutiny, if they were told that the renunciation of the Czarevitch was not genuine, for as he associated so much with the army, he was greatly beloved by it; then as soon as every regiment refused to take the oath, the next one would be induced to follow its example and so on until a sufficiently imposing body had been massed together; then with the beat of the drums to collect a crowd, they would all march to the Senate House Square. When once there the conspirators hoped that a simple demonstration would suffice, and that the Emperor, shrinking from the employment of force, would treat with the rebels and renounce his right to the throne. Then they would impose upon him the following conditions: —

(1) That the deputies from every department should be summoned.

(2) That the Senate should issue a manifesto declaring that the deputies should bring in an entirely fresh set of laws for the government of the Empire.

(3) That meanwhile a provisional government should be established and that the deputies from the kingdom of Poland should be invited to join it in order to adopt measures necessary for the preservation of the unity of the State.

If it should happen that the Emperor, before accepting these conditions, should desire to confer with the Czarevitch, leave would be granted on condition that the conspirators and the regiments in revolt should be allowed quarters outside the city to camp there, even though it was winter, and there to await the arrival of the Czarevitch. The latter would find the States assembled prepared to present him with a constitution drawn up by Nikita Muraviev and ready to take the oath if he would accept it or if the contrary, to depose him. If the Grand Duke Constantine disapproved of the insurrection, though the conspirators did not consider this likely, the devotion they felt for him personally would be alleged as a sufficient motive for their action. If on the other hand the Emperor refused all negotiations, the whole Imperial family would be placed under arrest, and it must be left to circumstances to decide what should be done with them.

If everything miscarried the conspirators were to leave the city and stir up a revolution in the country.

The only part that Count Alexis took in the long and noisy meeting was to oppose one half the resolutions and make no comment on the others; but *in spire* of his opposition and silence, they had been adopted by the majority and when once they were settled, he considered it a point of honour to run the same risks as f there was some hope of success.

All the others seemed quite certain of success and full of confidence in Prince Trubetski; so much so that Bulatov, one of the conspirators, when leaving the meeting exclaimed enthusiastically to the Count; “Have not we elected a splendid leader?”

“Yes,” said the Count, “he is a fine figure of a man.”

In this frame of mind the Count had returned and found me waiting for him.

CHAPTER XVI

SINCE I could not say anything to Louise which would reassure her and as I still hoped that some unforeseen circumstances might prevent the insurrection, I returned to my rooms and attempted to get some rest; but I was so excited that I woke at daybreak, immediately dressed and hurried to the Senate House Square. All was quiet.

Meanwhile the conspirators had been busy during the night. According to the pre-arranged plans, everyone had repaired to his post, indicated by Rylejev, who was at the head of the military arrangements, just as Trubetski was the political chief. Lieutenant Arbuzov was to gain the support of the naval guards, the two brothers Rodisco and Sub-Lieutenant Gudimov, of the regiment of the Izmailovski Guards; Prince Stchepine Rostovski, Sub-Captain Michael Bestujev, his brother Alexander and two other officers in the regiment, named Brock and Volkov, were responsible for the Moscow regiment; and Lieutenant Suthov would answer for the regiment of Grenadier Guards. The Count had declined any important position but that of an ordinary member, promising to follow the example of the others; as he was known to be a man of honour and did not seek a situation in the future Government, no further pressure was put upon him.

I waited until eleven o'clock, not on the Senate House Square, for it was too cold for such an exposed situation, but at a shop kept by a dealer in confectionery and wine, known as a *conditor*, whose establishment was at the end of the Prospect near the house of the banker Cercler. It was an excellent position to await news, first because it faced the Admiralty Square, and also because the *conditors* of St. Petersburg serve the purpose of the Paris pastry cooks; and this one being the “Félix “of the place people kept coming into his shop every minute from all directions. So far everything had passed off quietly; the General of the Guards and of the Staff had just arrived at the palace bringing the news that the regiments of the Horse Guards, the Light Cavalry, the Prebovjenski, the Semonovski, the Paulovski Grenadiers, the Chasseurs of the Guard, the Chasseurs of Finland and the Engineers had just taken the oath. Certainly there was no news yet of the other regiments, but that was due doubtless to the situation of their barracks, a long way from the centre of the capital.

I returned home hoping that the day would pass off without any trouble and that the conspirators, recognizing the danger of their enterprise, would remain quiet, when suddenly an aide-de-camp went by at the gallop, and it was easy to see that something unexpected had happened. Everybody hurried on to the Square, for there was in the air that curious sense of uneasiness which always presages great events; in fact the insurrection had begun and with such an outburst that the end of it could not be foreseen.

Prince Stchepine Rostovski and the two Bestujevs had kept their word. At nine o'clock in the morning they entered the barracks of the Moscow Regiment, and addressing the 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 6th Companies, who, they know, were the most attached to the Grand Duke Constantine, Prince Stchepine declared that they were making a great mistake in the oath that was being forced from them. He added that far from renouncing the crown, the Grand Duke had been arrested for having refused to give up his rights to his brother. Then Alexander Bestujev putting in a word said that he had come from Warsaw with instructions from the Czarevitch himself to oppose the taking of the oath. Then seeing that this news produced a great impression upon the troops, Prince Stchepine ordered the soldiers to take ball cartridges and load their weapons. Just then, the aide-de-camp Verighine, followed by Major-General Fredricks, at the head of a company of Grenadiers, with their flag, came on the scene with an invitation to the officers to repair to their Colonel's quarters. Stchepine thought that the moment had come for action; he ordered the soldiers to thrust back the Grenadiers with the butt end of their muskets and seize their flag; at the same time he rushed at Major-General Fredricks, whom Bestujev was likewise covering with a pistol, and struck him a violent blow on the head with his sword, which felled him to the earth, and turning to Major-General Schenschine, commander of the Brigade, who ran up to his colleague's assistance, he gave him the point. Then immediately rushing into the midst of the Grenadiers, he wounded in succession Colonel Khvoschinski, Sub Lieutenant Mussejev and the Grenadier Krassovski, and ended by successfully snatching the flag which he held aloft, shouting, "Hurrah!" In reply to the cheer and at the sight of blood, more than half the regiment replied with shouts of "Long live Constantine! down with Nicholas! "Then, profiting by the outburst of enthusiasm, Stchepine induced nearly four hundred men to accompany him and set out with drums beating to the Admiralty Square.

At the door of the Winter Palace, the aide-de-camp who was bringing the news ran up against another officer who was coining from the barracks of the Grenadier Guards. The intelligence he brought was hardly less disquieting than that conveyed by the aide-de-camp. Just when the regiment was preparing to start to take the oath, Sub-Lieutenant Kojemkov threw himself on the advance guard, crying out, “It is not the Grand Duke Nicholas to whom you must swear allegiance, but to the Emperor Constantine.” Then on someone replying that the Czarevitch had abdicated, he cried: “It is a lie, a lie, nothing but a lie; the Czarevitch is marching on St. Petersburg to punish all who have forgotten their duty and to reward all who are faithful.”

But in spite of his declaration the regiment continued on its way, took the oath, and returned to the barracks without any sign of insubordination, when at dinner time, Lieutenant Suthov, who had sworn allegiance like the others, entered and harangued his company as follows: — “Comrades, we did wrong to obey, the other regiments are in open revolt, they refused the oath and are now in the Senate House Square; get ready, load your weapons and follow me. I have your pay in my pocket and I will give it to you without waiting for orders.”

“Is what you say quite true?” cried several voices.

“Wait, here is Lieutenant Panov, your friend, as I am; ask him.”

“My friends,” said Panov without waiting to be asked, “you know that Constantine is your sole and legitimate Emperor, and that they wish to dethrone him. Long live Constantine!”

“Long live Constantine!” cried the soldiers.

“Long live Nicholas!” answered Colonel Sturler, the Commandant of the regiment, bursting into the room. “They are deceiving you, my friends, the Czarevitch has abdicated and you have no Emperor but the Grand Duke Nicholas. Long live Nicholas!”

“Long live Constantine!” answered the soldiers.

“You are mistaken, soldiers, and they are leading you on the wrong track,” cried Sturler once more.

“Don’t desert me, but follow me,” answered Panov; “let us join those who are supporting Constantine. Long live Constantine!”

“Long live Constantine!” cried more than three quarters of the men.

“To the Admiralty, to the Admiralty!” shouted Panov; “follow me, soldiers, follow me!”

And he rushed out followed by two hundred men, shouting “Hurrah!” like him, and advancing towards the Admiralty Square, like the Moscow regiment, only by another street. While the news of these events was being brought to the Emperor, Count Milarodovitch, the military governor of St. Petersburg, himself appeared at the palace. He already knew of the revolt of the Moscow regiment and the Grenadiers; he had ordered the troops on whom he thought he could most rely to repair to the Winter Palace; they were the first battalion of the Prebovjenski regiment three regiments of the Paulovski Guards and a battalion of Engineers of the Guard.

The Emperor then saw that the affair was more serious than he had imagined He therefore commanded Major-General Neidhart to convey orders to the regiment of Semonovski Guards to go immediately and hold the mutineers in check, and to the Horse Guards to keep themselves in readiness for any emergency; and when these instructions had been given he himself went down to the chief bodyguard of the Winter Palace where the regiment of Finland Guards was on duty, and ordered them to load their muskets and watch the principal approaches to the palace. Just then a great commotion arose; the third and sixth companies of the Moscow regiment, headed by Prince Stchepine and the two Bestujevs, came on the scene with their flag flying and drums beating and shouting: “Down with Nicholas! long live Constantine! “They debouched on the Admiralty Square; but when once there, instead of marching on the Winter Palace, went and lined up against the walls of the Senate House, either because they did not think they were strong enough, or because they shrank from the presence of the Imperial Majesty. Scarcely were they in position before they were joined by the Grenadiers; while about fifty men in civilian attire, some of whom were armed with pistols, were mingled with the rebellious soldiers.

At that moment I saw the Emperor make his appearance at one of the gateways of the palace; he approached as far as the railings and threw a glance at the rebels; he was paler than usual but appeared quite at his ease. It was reported that he had attended confession, that he might die like an Emperor and a Christian, and had bidden farewell to his family.

While I was watching him, I heard behind me in the direction of the marble palace, a squadron of Cuirassiers approaching at the gallop; they were the horse guards led by Count Orlov, one of the bravest and most devoted friends of the Emperor. The gates opened for him; he leapt from his horse and the regiment drew up in front of the palace; almost at the same moment we heard the drums of the Prebovjenski Grenadiers, who were approaching by battalions. They entered the courtyard of the palace, where they found the Emperor, the Empress and the young Grand Duke Alexander; behind them appeared the light cavalry, among whom I recognised Count Alexis Vaninkov; they ranged themselves at right angles with the Cuirassiers, leaving between them an interval which the artillery very soon occupied. The regiments in revolt let all these preparations be made with apparent indifference, and made no demonstration except to shout: — ” Long live Constantine! down with Nicholas! “They were evidently waiting for reinforcements.

Meanwhile the messengers sent by the Grand Duke Michael followed one another to the palace. While the Emperor was preparing to defend himself and his family, the Grand Duke visited the barracks, and by his presence helped to check the rebellion. Some fortunate measures had already been taken; at the very moment that the remainder of the Moscow regiment was about to follow the two insubordinate companies, Count de Liéven, the brother of one of my pupils and a captain in the fifth company, arrived in time to prevent the battalion leaving and to have the gates shut. Then standing in front of the soldiers he drew his sword, swearing on his honour that he would run it through the first man that attempted to move. At this threat a young sub-lieutenant advanced pistol in hand, holding it so that it pointed straight at the Count’s head. The Count answered this menace by striking out with the pommel of his sword, and knocking the pistol out of the lieutenant’s hand; but the latter got hold of it again and aimed at the Count once more. Then the Count, crossing his arms, walked right up to the lieutenant, while the whole regiment, motionless and silent, watched this strange duel like seconds. The lieutenant backed a few paces, followed by Count de Liéven, who stuck out his chest defiantly; but at last the former halted and drew the trigger. The priming exploded, but by a miracle the pistol missed fire.

Then came a knock on the gate.

“Who is it?” cried several voices.

“His Imperial Highness the Grand Duke Michael,” was the reply from without.

These words were succeeded by a few moments of profound suspense. The Count de Liéven advanced to the gate and opened it, no one attempting to stop him.

The Grand Duke entered on horseback, followed by several orderlies.

“Why this inaction in the moment of danger? Am I in the midst of traitors or loyal soldiers?”

“You are surrounded by your most trustworthy regiment,” answered Count de Liéven, “and your Imperial Highness shall have a proof of it.”

Then lifting his sword he cried, “Long live the Emperor Nicholas!”

“Long live the Emperor Nicholas! ‘‘answered the soldiers with one voice.

The young sub-lieutenant tried to speak, but the Count de Liéven seized his arm: — ” Silence, Sir, I shall not say anything of what has just happened, do not give yourself away.”

“Liéven,” said the Grand Duke, “I hold you responsible for the conduct of the regiment.”

“I will answer for it with my life, your Imperial Highness,” replied the Count.

The Grand Duke then continued his rounds and everywhere found, if not enthusiasm, at any rate obedience. Matters were now improving. On all sides reinforcements were hurrying up; the Engineers were drawn up in front of the Hermitage Palace, and the rest of the Moscow regiment led by Count Liéven entered by the Nevski Prospect. At sight of the latter, great shouts were uttered by the conspirators, for they thought that at last the expected reinforcements had arrived; but they were quickly undeceived. The new-comers ranged themselves in front of the Law Courts, opposite the palace: with the Cuirassiers, the Artillery and the Horse Guards, they hemmed in the conspirators with a ring of steel.

A moment later the chanting of the priests could be heard. The Archbishop, followed by the clergy in attendance, was emerging from the Kasan church, preceded by the sacred banners, and was about to implore the rebels in the name of heaven to return to their duty. But, perhaps for the first time, the soldiers disregarded in their political impiety the images which they were accustomed to adore, and begged the priests to confine their attentions to spiritual matters and not to interfere with those of the world. The Archbishop attempted to persist, when an order from the Emperor commanded him to withdraw; Nicholas wished to make a last effort himself to win over the rebels.

The Emperor’s entourage then wanted to prevent him, but the Emperor replied that since he was playing for his own hand, it was only right that he should risk his life. He therefore ordered the gates to be thrown open; but scarcely had it been done when the Grand Duke arrived at full speed and, rushing up to the Emperor, whispered that a portion of the Prebovjenski regiment by which he was surrounded, were on the side of the rebels, and that Prince Trubetski, whose absence the Emperor had remarked with astonishment, was the ring-leader of the rebellion. There was a strong antecedent probability of this, for twenty-four years before this same regiment held the approaches to the Red Palace, while its Colonel, Prince Talitzin, was murdering the Emperor Paul.

The situation was appalling, and yet the Emperor did not change countenance; but it was evident he was meditating an extreme resolve. After a moment’s pause he turned round, and, addressing one of his generals, he said: “Fetch the young Grand Duke.”

A minute later the General appeared with the child. Then the Emperor lifted him from the ground and, advancing towards the Grenadiers, said: “Soldiers, if I am killed, there is your Emperor; open the ranks, I confide him to your loyalty.”

A loud hurrah greeted this speech; a heartfelt cry of enthusiasm resounded through the square; the most guilty were the first to ground their weapons and throw up their hands. The child was borne into the midst of the regiment and put under the same guard as the flag; the Emperor mounted his horse and entered the Square. At the gate the generals begged him not to proceed, saying that they intended to kill him. and that all their weapons were loaded. But the Emperor waved them aside and forbidding anyone to follow him, put his horse to the gallop, spurred straight up to the rebels, and pulled up at half a pistol shot’s distance.

“Soldiers!” cried he, “I am told that you want to kill me, if that is true, here I am.”

There was a moment’s silence during which the Emperor remained motionless between the two forces, like an equestrian statue. Twice the rebels were heard to mutter the word “Fire,” but without result, then on the third repetition, the report of several shots was heard. The bullets whistled past the Emperor, but Colonel Velho and a few soldiers were wounded by the discharge.

At that moment Milarodovitch and the Grand Duke Michael dashed to the Emperor’s side; the regiments of Cuirassiers and Horse Guards advanced, while the artillery prepared their fuses.

“Halt!” cried the Emperor.... Everyone obeyed....” General!” added he, addressing Count Milarodovitch, “go to those unfortunate men and try to bring them to their senses.”

Count Milarodovitch and the Grand Duke Michael approached them; but the rebels met them with another discharge and with cries of “Long live Constantine.”

“Soldiers,” exclaimed Count Milarodovitch, raising above his head a magnificent Turkish sabre, studded with precious stones, and advancing right up to the massed rebels, “here is a sabre which was given to me by his Imperial Highness the Czarevitch himself; well, on my honour, I swear to you by this sabre, that you have been deceived, that they are playing with you, that the Czarevitch has renounced the crown, and that your sole legitimate sovereign is the Emperor Nicholas I.”

Hurrahs and shouts of “Long live Constantine! ‘‘were the answers to this harangue; then in the midst of the shouts a pistol shot was heard, and Count Milarodovitch was seen to stagger; another pistol was aimed at the Grand Duke Michael, but some Marines, though they had joined the conspirators, had knocked up the assassin’s arm.

In a moment Count Orlov with his Cuirassiers, in spite of repeated volleys from the rebels, had completely surrounded Count Milaiodovitch, the Grand Duke and the Emperor Nicholas, and dragged them off by force to the palace. Milarodovitch could scarcely support himself in the saddle, and when they halted he fell into the arms of his comrades.

The Emperor was desirous that a further attempt should be made to win over the rebels; but while he was giving the necessary orders, the Grand Duke Michael dismounted; then going up to the artillery he seized a linstock from the hands of a soldier, and fixing the fuse, cried: —

“Fire! fire at the assassins!”

Four guns loaded with shrapnel were discharged simultaneously and repaid the rebels with interest for the deaths they had caused; then, since it was impossible to hear the Emperor’s orders, a second discharge followed the first.

The effect of these two volleys at the range of half a musket shot was appalling. More than sixty men, including Grenadiers of the body-guard, several of the Moscow regiment and some Marines had fallen on the Square; the rest immediately took to flight by way of the Galernaïa Street, the English quay, the Isaac bridge and the Neva, which was frozen over; then the Horse Guards sprang to their horses and went in pursuit of the rebels, with the exception of one man, who allowed his regiment to ride off, and then dismounting and leaving his horse to go where it pleased, advanced towards Count Orlov. On getting up to him, he unfastened his sabre and presented it to him.

"What is the matter, Count?" asked the astonished General, "why do you come and hand me your sabre instead of using it against the rebels?"

"Because I was in the conspiracy, Sir, and as I am bound to be denounced and caught sooner or later I prefer to give myself up."

"Take charge of Count Alexis Vaninkov," said the General, addressing the two cuirassiers and escort him to the fortress."

The order was at once executed. I saw the Count led across the Moïka bridge and disappear behind the corner of the French Embassy.

Then I thought of Louise, whose only friend was now myself. I pressed through the crowd on to the Prospect, and when I reached my poor compatriot I was so pale and sorrowful that she was perfectly certain I was bringing her bad news. The moment she saw me she ran to me with her hands clasped.

"In the name of heaven, what is it?" she asked of me.

"You must either trust in a miracle from God or in the clemency of the Emperor," I answered.

Then I related to her all I had seen and handed her Vaninkov's letter.

As I expected, it was to bid her farewell.

The same evening Count Milarodovitch died of his wound; but before his death he insisted that the surgeon should extricate the bullet; when the operation was over he took the pellet of lead in his hand, and seeing it was not of the regulation calibre, said: "I am satisfied, it is not an army bullet."

Five minutes afterwards he passed away.

At nine o'clock the next morning, that is at the time when life is beginning to pulsate through the city, and when everyone is uncertain whether yesterday's rebellion has been quelled or is about to burst out afresh, the Emperor left the Palace hand in hand with the Empress but without any attendants or any escort; then getting into a drosky which was waiting at the gate of the Winter Palace, he drove through the streets of St.

Petersburg, passing in front of all the barracks, and offering himself as a target to the assassins if any remained. But on all sides he heard nothing but shouts of joy, uttered from afar as soon as the waving plumes of his hat were perceived; but as he was returning to the palace after this rash excursion which had been so successful, and was passing along the Prospect, he saw a woman emerge from a house, with a paper in her hand, rush into the road and kneel down in such a position that unless his sleigh turned aside, she would be crushed. When three paces from her the coachman pulled up short, with the proverbial skill of Russians in managing a horse; then the woman, weeping but speechless, had only strength enough to wave the paper she held in her hand; possibly the Emperor might have continued his drive, but the Empress looked at her with the smile of an angel, and took the paper on which were the following words hastily scrawled and still wet:

“SIRE, “Have pity on Count Vaninkov: in the name of all that is most precious to your Majesty, pardon him pardon him.”

The Emperor looked in vain for a signature; there was none. Then turning to the unknown woman, he inquired:

“Are you his sister?”

The suppliant shook her head sadly.

“Are you his wife?”

Another shake of the head.

“Well, who are you then?” asked the Emperor, becoming slightly impatient.

“Alas!” cried Louise, recovering her voice, “in seven months time, Sire, I shall be the mother of his child.”

“Poor girl!” said the Emperor; and signalling to the coachman, he set off at a gallop, taking away the petition, but leaving no hope to the weeping creature beyond the two words of pity which fell from his lips.

CHAPTER XVII

THE following days were spent in removing all traces of the terrible *émeute*, though the bullet-pitted walls of the Senate house still served as a reminder of the tragedy.

On the same evening or during the night, the ringleaders had been arrested; they consisted of Prince Trubetski, Rylejev the journalist, Prince Obolinski, Captain Jacubovitch, Lieutenant Kakovski, Sub-Captain Stchepine Rotovski and Bestujev, another Bestujev, aide-decamp to the Duke Alexander of Wurtemburg; altogether from sixty to eighty individuals, who were more or less involved by word or action; Vaninkov, who, as I have stated, had surrendered of his own accord and Colonel Bulatov who had followed his example.

By a strange coincidence, Pestel, in accordance with instructions emanating from Taganrog, had been arrested in the middle of Russia on the same day that the insurrection had broken out at St. Petersburg.

As to Sergius and Apostol Muraviev, who had succeeded in escaping and had induced six companies of the Tchernigov regiment to revolt, they were overtaken near the village of Pulogov, in the district of Vasilkov, by Lieutenant-General Roth. After a desperate resistance, one of them attempted to blow out his brains with a pistol, but failed; the other was captured after receiving a terrible wound in the side from a grape shot and a sabre cut on the head.

No matter how far distant the spot where they were arrested, all prisoners were brought to St. Petersburg; then a commission of investigators, composed of Tatischev, the Minister of War, the Grand Duke Michael, Prince Galitzin, Privy Councillor Golemtchev-Kotusov, who had succeeded Count Milarodovitch as Military Governor of St. Petersburg, Tchernychev, Benkendorff, Levachev and Potapov, all four aides-de-camp, was appointed by the Emperor, and that the inquiry would be conducted impartially the names I have just mentioned were a sufficient guarantee.

But as is usual at St. Petersburg, everything was conducted in silence and secrecy and nothing was allowed to see the light of day. Even more than this, strange though it may appear, on the morrow of the day that the army had been officially informed of the arrest of all the traitors, they might as far as one could tell, have never existed, or have been born friendless and without relations; not a single house lowered its blinds in token of condolence, not a face was clouded with grief, expressive of mourning. Everything went on as if nothing had happened. Louise alone took the step I have mentioned, one probably without precedent in the Muscovite annals; and yet everyone, I suppose, felt like myself in his secret soul, that any morning might give birth to some terrible blood-curdling news. It had been a flagrant conspiracy, the actors had not hesitated to take life, and though all were aware of the Emperor's kind heart, it was well understood that he could not extend a pardon to all; blood called for blood.

From time to time a ray of hope pierced the darkness like some faint flicker, and gave fresh evidence of the Emperor's generosity. In the list of the traitors that had to be submitted to him, he recognised one name dear to Russia; I refer to Suvarov. As a matter of fact, the son of the rude conqueror of the Trebia was among the number of the conspirators. When Nicholas came to his name he paused; then after a moment's silence "We cannot allow," said he as if speaking to himself, "so noble a name to be dishonoured." Then turning to the Head of the Police who had presented the list, he said: "I will myself cross examine Lieutenant Suvarov."

The next day the young man was brought before the Emperor, whom he expected to find angry and threatening; but on the contrary he appeared quite calm and gentle. Nor was this all, the prisoner at once perceived why he had been brought there. All the questions of the Sovereign, prepared with paternal solitude, were such that the examination could only end in an acquittal. All the Emperor's questions required only the answer 'Yes 'or 'No '; the Czar would then turn to the spectators of this strange scene and say: "You see, you hear, I told you so, gentlemen, it is impossible for a Suvarov to be a traitor." Then Suvarov was released from prison and sent back to his regiment and shortly afterwards was gazetted to a Captaincy.

But all the conspirators were not named Suvarov, and although I did all I could to inspire in my poor compatriot a hope which I did not myself possess, the grief of Louise was indeed distressing. From the day of Vaninkov's arrest, she had absolutely abandoned all the ordinary tasks of her former life and retired into a little room which she had arranged behind the shop and there she sat leaning her head upon her hands, and silently shedding great tears, only opening her lips to ask of the visitors, who, like myself, were admitted to her little retreat; “Do you think they will shoot him? “Then, whatever the answer, to which she never paid any heed, she would exclaim — ” Ah! if only I were not about to become a mother.”

Thus, time passed on, without any news as to the fate of the prisoners. The Commission of inquiry continued its task in the dark; it was felt that the end of the bloody tragedy was approaching, but no one could foretell what this end would be, or when it would be made known.

Two events supervened, which enabled the inhabitants of St. Petersburg to forget for a time at least, the tragedy of December; one was the Embassy extraordinary sent from France and headed by the Duc de Ruguse; the other was the arrival of the corpse of the Empress Elizabeth. She had kept her word, and survived Alexander only four months. The Embassy arrived in the early days of May, and the obsequies took place at the beginning of June. I got news of the former by a letter from one of my former pupils and of the latter by a cannon shot fired from the fortress. As I was perpetually on the alert, both owing to my affection for Louise and the fancy I had conceived for the Count, I thought the cannon shot betokened something quite different and I hurriedly left the house to find out what was happening. Just then I heard a second cannon shot and seeing everybody hurrying to the quays I followed. On the way I heard what had happened.

When I got to the quay, there was such a throng of people that I perceived it would be impossible to see anything if I remained there. So I hired a boat and mooring it in the middle of the stream waited to see the cortège pass, for it would have to cross the immense bridge of boats which stretched from the Champ de Mars to the fortress. Presently all the bells in the city began to mingle their sound with the artillery and rang out a grand peal.

The first individual to appear was the master of the ceremonies on horseback, wearing in token of mourning a scarf of black and white crêpe.

After him marched a company of the Prebovjenski Guards, then an officer attached to the Imperial stables, then a Court steward, whose mourning was indicated by an immense hat pulled down over his eyes and a black cloak draping his shoulders.

The kettle drummers and trumpeters of the light cavalry and horse guards came next, followed by forty footmen, forty runners, eight grooms of the Chamber and four Court officials. Twenty pages marched behind them, accompanied by their director, who brought up the rear of the first section of the procession.

Sixty-two standards from various provinces of the Empire came next, each borne aloft by an officer, while two other officers accompanied them to render assistance, and amidst these symbols of mourning a black silk flag bearing the arms of Russia was held high and followed by a man-at-arms clad in black armour, holding in his hand a naked sword with the point turned earthwards. Behind the man-at-arms twelve Huzzars of the Guard, led by an officer, formed the advance guard of a state coach, surmounted by the Imperial crown and drawn by eight horses richly caparisoned. Eight grooms walked beside the horses, two footmen were opposite the doors and four mounted grooms followed. It was a spectacle of earthly pomp being performed for the last time amid the gloomy attributes of death.

The procession then resumed its funeral aspect, and nothing could be distinguished but an indistinct mass of black cloaks and crêpe, which marched in front of the arms of Baden, Scheswig-Holstein, the Crimea, Siberia, Finland, Astrakhan, Kasan, Poland, Novgorod, Kiev, Vladimir and Moscow.

Each of these banners like the others, was held aloft by an officer, escorted on either side by two brother officers; then came the great banner emblazoned with the arms of the Empire, preceded by four Generals and supported by two Major- Generals, two Colonels and two Captains.

After the emblems representative of the Imperial Power and the Army, came the deputies from the various corporations of tradesmen, merchants and coachmen, each preceded by a small standard on which were painted or embroidered the distinctive symbols of the trades pursued by those comprising it, and the whole heralded by the master of the ceremonies.

The various societies, such as the Russian American Company, the Economic Society, the Prisons Society, the Philanthropic Society, the numerous employees in the Public Imperial Library, the St. Petersburg University, the Academy of Arts, the Academy of Science passed along; then the Generals and Aides-de Camp of the Emperor, the Secretaries of State, the Senators and Members of the Council and lastly all the pupils of the industrial and other schools to which the defunct Empress had accorded her special patronage. Two heralds-at-arms followed them, clothed in black and ushering in the foreign orders, the Russian orders and the Imperial crown reposing on cushions of gold brocade.

Three images carried by the Empress’s confessor and two others by archdeacons and priests came next and were directly followed by the funeral car on which was laid the body of the Empress. The supports of the baldachin were held by four chamberlains, as well as the cords and tassels of the pall and on both sides of the car walked the Ladies of the Order of St. Catherine, draped with long veils, and the maids of honour, who had accompanied the Empress on her last journey and loyal to the last were escorting her to her final resting place. Important officials led the horses attached to the carriage and sixty pages, holding lighted candles, surrounded it with a cordon of fire.

Then came the Emperor Nicholas clad in a black mantle and wearing a turned down hat; on his right was the Grand Duke Michael and a short distance behind, the Commander-in-Chief, the Minister for War, the Quartermaster-General, the General on duty and several others. Twenty-four standard bearers marched at a respectful distance from the Emperor, skirting the parapets of the bridge and enclosing in their double file a mourning coach in which were seated the Empress and the young Grand Duke Alexander, the heir to the throne. Then came on foot the Grand Duke of Wurtemburg, his two sons and daughter together with the Queen of Imiritia and the Queen Regent of Mingrelia. Next came all the women formerly in the service of the deceased Empress; while a detachment of the Semonovski regiment brought up the rear of the procession.

The cortège took nearly an hour and a half to cross the bridge, so slow was its pace, and so extended its length. When this long thread had wended its way into the fortress, the people crowded in after it to pay their last respects to one who for twenty years had been regarded as an intermediary between heaven and earth.

On my return I found Louise terribly upset. Like myself she had been in ignorance of the religious ceremony which was about to take place, and at the first report of the cannons and the pealing of the bells she trembled as if it had been the signal for execution.

Now M. de Gorgoli, with whom I continued to maintain very friendly relations, had repeatedly reassured me, telling me that the result of the inquiry would be published some days before it took effect, and that we should in any case have time to appeal directly to the Emperor if our unfortunate Vaninkov should be condemned to death. At last on the 14th of July the St. Petersburg Gazette appeared, containing the report addressed to the Emperor by the High Court of Justice.

The conspirators were divided into three classes and condemned under one of the three following charges: —

(1) Disturbing the Empire.
(2) Overthrowing the established constitution of the State.
(3) Subverting the established order.

Thirty-six of the prisoners were sentenced by the Court to the death penalty, and the others to the mines or to exile, Vaninkov was of the number of those condemned to death. But on the heels of Justice followed Mercy; in the case of thirty-one the death sentence was commuted to perpetual exile and Vaninkov was fortunately included among them.

Only five of the condemned were to suffer the extreme penalty: — Rylejev, Bestujev, Michael Sergius, Muraviev and Pestel.

I tore out of the house, running like a madman, with the paper in my hand, and stopping everybody I met, to get them to share in my joy, and arrived at Louise’s completely out of breath. I found her with a copy of the same paper in her hand, and at sight of me she threw herself into my arms, shedding floods of tears, and incapable of uttering anything but these words: “He is saved! God bless the Emperor!”

In our selfishness we had forgotten the poor wretches who were to suffer death and who, no doubt possessed families or friends, wives or mistresses. Louise’s first thought was for Vaninkov’s mother and sisters, whom it will be remembered, she knew from having seen them during their visit to St. Petersburg. The unfortunate women were still in ignorance that their son and brother was not to die, and this is everything in such a case, for there is a way back from the mines or from Siberia, but when once the tomb is closed, it is closed for ever.

Then occurred to Louise one of those ideas which can emanate only from a sister or a mother; she calculated that the Gazette containing the happy news would leave St. Petersburg by the post-courier not before the evening, and that consequently twelve hours would be lost in forwarding it to Moscow, so she asked me if I knew of any messenger who could be prevailed upon to start immediately, and post with the Gazette to Vaninkov’s mother. My valet was a Russian and therefore above suspicion, he was intelligent and reliable; I proposed him and she eagerly accepted my offer. It was only necessary to get a passport. In half an hour’s time, thanks to the unfailing interest of M. de Gorgoli I had procured it and Gregory set out, bearing the good news, with a thousand roubles for his expenses.

He gained fourteen hours on the Courier, fourteen hours sooner for them to get the news, fourteen hours sooner a mother and two sisters learnt that they still had a son and a brother.

Gregory returned with one of those letters that are written with a pen plucked from an angel's wing; the old Countess called Louise her daughter, the girls addressed her as their sister. They asked as a favour that when the execution took place and the prisoners were starting on their journey, a courier should be despatched to them. I told Gregory to be ready to start at a moment's notice. Such a journey was too much to his advantage for him to dream of refusing.

Vaninkov's mother had given him a thousand roubles. So from his first journey the poor beggar had made a small fortune, which he hoped to double by the second.

We waited for the day of the execution, it was not announced beforehand, no one knew when it was to be, and every morning we woke up expecting to hear that the five poor wretches had expiated their crime. The notice that an execution was about to take place produced a profound impression, for no one had suffered the death penalty in St. Petersburg for sixty years.

The days dragged on and the interval between the publication of the sentence and its execution astonished everyone. The time was required to send to Germany for two executioners.

At length on the evening of the 23rd of July, I saw a young Frenchman enter my room; he was a former pupil and as I have already mentioned, attached to Marshal Marmont's embassy. I had often begged him to let me have the latest news, which his position in the diplomatic service enabled him to obtain before I could. He had hurried round to tell me that the Marshal and his suite had just received an intimation from M. de la Ferronays to repair to-morrow at four in the morning to the French embassy, whose windows, as everyone knows, overlook the fortress. Undoubtedly it was to enable them to watch the execution.

I hastened with the news to Louise, and at once all her apprehensions returned. Probably it was a mistake for Vaninkov's name to have appeared on the list of exiles instead of among those condemned to death. This commutation of sentence was in all likelihood spread abroad so that the execution might produce less effect upon the inhabitants of the city, but to-morrow’s spectacle of thirty-six corpses instead of five would undeceive them. Like all unhappy people, it was plain that Louise went out of the way to make herself miserable. I had received authentic information that all would take place as announced in the official Gazette, and I had also been told that the interest, which Louise had inspired in the Emperor and Empress, on the day that she had gone down on her knees with her petition in the Prospect, had a good deal to do with the alteration in Vaninkov’s punishment.

I left Louise for a while, but promised to return soon, and went for a stroll near the fortress, to see if any preparations were being made indicative of the terrible tragedy that would be performed amid this setting on the morrow. I only saw the members of the tribunal leaving the fortress; but that was enough. The recorders had just informed the prisoners of their fate. There could no longer be a doubt, the executions would take place tomorrow morning.

We immediately despatched Gregory to Moscow with another letter from Louise to Vaninkov’s mother. In this case it was not a dozen hours in advance that we had heard the news, but twenty-four hours.

About midnight Louise asked me to escort her to the vicinity of the fortress; since she could not see Vaninkov, she wished at least to see the walls which immured him, now that she was about to be separated from him.

We found a guard on the Trinity bridge; no one could pass. It was another proof that the demands of justice were about to be carried into effect. Then turning to the other side of the Neva, we fixed our eyes on the fortress, which could be seen in the beautiful Northern night as clearly as if it had been twilight hi the West. Presently we could see lights moving about on the platform and dim figures passing to and fro, carrying curious loads, they were the executioners putting up the scaffold.

We were the only loiterers on the quay; no one was in doubt or appeared to doubt what the preparations meant. Occasionally a belated vehicle would drive past rapidly, with its two lamps flashing like the eyes of a dragon. A few vessels floated past on the Neva and would gradually disappear, either into the canals or the branches of the river, some in silence, others noisily. One solitary boat remained motionless as if at anchor, not a sound proceeded from it, either of joy or sorrow. Perhaps its occupant was a mother, a sister or a wife, waiting as we were.

We were ordered to move away by a patrol at two o’clock in the morning.

We returned to Louise’s. There was not long to wait as the execution was fixed for four o’clock. I waited there for a hour and a half and then went out again.

The streets of St. Petersburg were absolutely deserted except for a few mujiks, who seemed to be in complete ignorance of what was about to take place. As the first stroke of dawn made its appearance a light fog rising from the river passed like a veil of white crêpe between the two banks of the Neva. As I got to the corner of the French Embassy I saw Marshal Marmont entering, followed by ail the members of his suite; a moment later they appeared on the balcony.

A few people had collected on the quay like myself, not because they were aware of the impending tragedy, but because the Trinity bridge was held by troops, and they could not get to their business on the islands.

They were talking in undertones and it was clear that they were uneasy and undecided, for they were in doubt whether they ran any danger by remaining there. I had made up my mind to stay where I was until I was ordered to move.

Shortly before four o’clock, a big fire blazed up and attracted my eyes towards a point in the fortress. At the same time the fog began to lift and I could see five gallows standing in relief against the sky like black silhouettes; these gallows were placed on a wooden scaffold of which, the floor, built in the English fashion, opened by means of a trap under the feet of the victims.

As four was striking we saw the prisoners, who had been sentenced to exile, ascend the citadel platform and station themselves round the scaffold.

They were in full uniform, with epaulettes and decorations, while their swords were carried by soldiers. I tried to recognize Yamnkov among his unfortunate companions; but at that distance it was impossible.

At a few minutes past four, the five men who were condemned to death appeared on the scaffold; they were dressed in grey blouses, wearing on their heads a kind of white hood. No doubt they had been confined in separate cells; for as soon as they met, they were allowed to embrace each other.

Just then a man came up and spoke to them. The next moment we heard a cheer; but did not at first understand the meaning of it. We have heard since, though I do not know if it is true, that this man offered the prisoners their lives, if they would agree to ask for pardon; but it is said that they answered this suggestion with cries of: — ” Long live Russia! Long live Liberty,” cries which were drowned by the shouts of the gaolers.

The man left them and the executioners approached. The condemned men moved a few paces, cords were passed round their necks, and the caps were drawn over their eyes.

At this moment the clock struck a quarter past four.

The bell was still vibrating when the trap was released beneath the feet of the victims; at the same instant a great commotion arose; some soldiers rushed on to the scaffold; a shudder seemed to pass through the air, setting us shivering; indistinct cries reached us and I thought a mutiny had occurred.

Two of the ropes had broken, and the two poor wretches, instead of being strangled, fell to the bottom of the scaffold, when the trap opened; one had broken his thigh and the other his shoulder. Hence arose the commotion and uproar. Meanwhile the others had ceased to breathe.

Some ladders were procured and the wretched men were lifted on to the platform. They were laid down for they could not stand, Then one of them turned to the other and said: — ” See the result of an enslaved people, they do not know even how to hang a man.”

While they were being raised, fresh ropes had been obtained, so that they had not to wait long. The executioners approached, and making what efforts they could, they crawled up to the fatal knot. As the rope was on the point of being passed around their necks, they once more shouted in a loud voice: “Long live Russia! Long live Liberty! May we be avenged! “This dirge died away without any response, from lack of sympathisers. They who uttered it were born out of time and lived a century too soon.

When the Emperor was informed of the incident, he stamped his feet with impatience.

“Why was not I told of it?” he cried. “Now I shall be regarded as more austere than God.”

But no one had dared to take upon himself the responsibility of suspending the execution, and five minutes after uttering their last cry, the two poor wretches had joined their comrades in their last sleep.

Then came the turn of the exiles; they listened to the delivery in a loud voice of their sentence depriving them of all earthly possessions, rank, decorations, property, family; then the executioners coming up to them, tore off one by one their epaulettes and decorations, throwing them into the fire with cries of: — ” So much for the epaulettes of a traitor! So much for the decorations of a traitor! “Then snatching each man’s sword from the hands of the soldiers who held them, they seized them by the hilt and the point, and broke them over their owner’s heads saying: — ” So much for a traitor’s sword.”

When the execution was over the prisoners were stript of their uniforms and clothed themselves hap-hazard from a heap of grey cotton smocks like those worn by labourers; then they descended a flight of stairs and were taken back to their cells.

The platform was now deserted, all that was left being a sentinel, the scaffold, the five gallows, and on the gallows the five corpses of the traitors.

I returned to Louise’s and found her on her knees, weeping and praying, “Well?” she said.

“Well! “I replied, “those who were to die are dead, and those who were to live are alive.”

Louise continued to pray, with her eyes turned to Heaven, and a countenance expressive of infinite gratitude.

Then when her prayer was finished, she asked me: “How far is it to Tobolsk?”

“Nearly eight hundred leagues.”

“It is less than I thought,” said she, “thank you.”

I waited a moment, gazing at her in silence and beginning to divine her intention.

“Why do you ask me that question,” said I.

“What, cannot you guess?” she replied.

“But it is impossible, Louise, that you can think of going in your present condition.”

“My friend,” she said, “do not be alarmed, I know what a mother owes to a child as well as what she owes to its father. I will wait.”

“I bowed in respect to such a woman, and I kissed her hand with as much reverence as if she had been a queen.

During the night the exiles started, and the scaffold disappeared; so that when day arrived, not a trace remained of the tragedy, and all who were not specially concerned might have fancied it all a dream.

CHAPTER XVIII

IT was not without sufficient reason that Vaninkov's mother and two sisters were anxious to know beforehand the date of the execution; the convicts on their journey from St. Petersburg to Tobolsk would have to pass through Iroslav, about sixty leagues from Moscow, and Vaninkov's relatives hoped to see him there.

As before, Gregory was eagerly greeted by the three ladies; since they had been expecting him for more than a fortnight and had got their passports. So only stopping to thank him for the precious news he brought, they got into a kabitka, without losing a moment and without mentioning it to a soul, started for Iroslav.

Travelling in Russia is rapid; quitting Moscow in the morning mother and sisters got to Iroslav the same night, and were delighted to hear that the sleighs conveying the convicts had not yet passed. As a halt in the town might arouse suspicions and besides as it was very probable that the mere public the situation, the greater would be the difficulty in bribing the guards, the Countess and her daughters set off for Mologa, and stopped at a little village. Three versts from this place was a thatched cottage, at which the convicts would change horses, the sergeants who accompanied them having received positive orders never to halt in a town or village; so they placed at intervals some smart and active servants to warn them of the approach of the sleighs.

Two days later, one of the Countess's men hurried in to say that the first section of convicts, consisting of five sleighs, had just reached the cottage, and they believed that the sergeant-in-charge had sent two of his escort into the village to procure horses. The Countess immediately entered her carriage and set out at a gallop for the cottage. On arriving there she stopped the carriage in the middle of the road, and peered eagerly through the half-opened door; Vaninkov was not one of the first detachment.

In a quarter of an hour's time the horses made their appearance, the convicts re-entered the sleighs and started off at full speed.

Half-an-hour later the second detachment came up and halted, like the first, at the cottage; two couriers went in search of horses, and returned with them as before in about a quarter of an hour. The horses were harnessed to the sleighs and the convoy galloped away; Vaninkov was not in this detachment.

So great was the Countess's anxiety to see her son once more, that she hoped he would be in the last detachment, for the later he was in arriving the greater would be the chance that horses would not be available for the next stage, as so many had been used by the earlier sections which had just passed through. Then it would be necessary to send to the town, and the halt would be longer, thus favouring the poor mother's plans.

Everything favoured the accomplishment of her desire; three more detachments went by without a sign of Vaninkov, and the last one remained for more than three quarters of an hour, so great vas the difficulty in obtaining a sufficient number of horses at Iroslav, The last detachment had no sooner driven off than the sixth convoy came on the scene. Mothers and sisters grasped hands instinctively; they really fancied that they felt some premonition in the air of the near approach of a son and a brother.

The convoy appeared out of the darkness and an involuntary fit of trembling took possession of the unfortunate women, who threw themselves into each other's arms weeping, the girls with their heads on their mother's breast, and the mother with her head raised to heaven.

Vaninkov descended from the third sleigh. In spite of the darkness, and in spite of the sordid costume he was wearing, the Countess and her daughters recognized him; as he approached the cottage one of the girls was on the point of calling him by name; but the mother stifled the cry by putting her hand before her daughter's mouth. Vaninkov and his companions entered the cottage.

The convicts in the other sleighs likewise got down and went in after him. The officer in charge at once ordered two soldiers to go and look for horses, but as he had been told by a peasant that the horses generally in use on this stage were all gone, he ordered all his men to spread themselves over the neighbourhood and seize in the Emperor's name any horses they could find. The soldiers obeyed, and he remained alone with the convicts. To be left alone thus would have been madness in any other country but in Russia; for in Russia an exile is literally a prisoner; in the immense empire owned by the Czar he cannot escape; before going a hundred versts he would be arrested infallibly; before reaching the frontier he would have died of hunger a hundred times.

The non-commissioned officer in charge, Sergeant Ivan, remained alone walking up and down in front of the cottage, flipping his leather breeches with his whip and stopping from tune to time to look at the carriage stranded in the middle of the high road.

Presently the door opened, three women sallied out like three ghosts and approached him; the Sergeant pulled up short, not knowing what to make of the threefold apparition.

The Countess approached him with clasped hands; her daughters standing slightly to the rear.

“Sir,” said the Countess, “have you any pity in your heart?”

“What does your Ladyship want?” asked the Brigadier, discerning that the speaker was well born from her voice and dress.

“I want more than life, Sir; I want to see my son whom you are taking to Siberia.”

“That is impossible, Madam,” replied the Sergeant; I have the most stringent orders not to allow the convicts to speak to a soul, and I should be punished with the knout if I failed in my duty.”

“But who will ever know that you have failed, Sir?” cried the mother while the two sisters, who had remained standing behind her as motionless as statues, slowly and mechanically without being aware of it, joined their hands in supplication to the Sergeant.

“Impossible! madam, impossible!” said the Sergeant.

“Mother!” cried Alexis, opening the door of the cottage. “Mother! it must be you, I recognize your voice,” and he rushed into the arms of the Countess.

The Sergeant made a movement to seize the Count, but at that moment with a sudden impulse the two girls rushed at him; one falling at his feet hugged his knees, while the other catching hold of him, pointed with her finger at mother and son locked in each other’s arms, and cried out: —

“Look! look!”

He was a fine fellow, was Sergeant Ivan. He uttered a sigh, and the girls knew that they had conquered.

“Mother,” said one of them in a low voice, “we are longing to embrace our brother.”

Then the Countess released her son from her arms and offering a purse of gold to the Sergeant, “Here, my friend,” said she, “if you are running any risk for our sake, you certainly ought to have some recompense.”

The Sergeant looked at the purse for a moment while the Countess held it out; then shaking his head without even touching it, for fear that contact might make the temptation too strong, “No, your Ladyship, no,” said he, “If I am failing in my duty, here is my excuse,” and he pointed to the two girls in tears. “This is the excuse I shall plead before the judge, and if the judge will not accept it, well, I will offer it to God, and he will accept it.”

The Countess seized the man’s hand and kissed it. The girls ran to their brother.

“Listen,” said the Sergeant, “since we must wait at least half-an-hour for fresh horses, and you cannot go inside the cottage where the other convicts will see you, nor can you wait all the time in the road, jump all four of you into your carriage and pull down the blinds, and as no one will see you, there may be a chance that my foolish act may never be known.”

“Thanks, Sergeant,” said Alexis, now also in tears; “but at any rate take the purse.”

“Take it yourself, Lieutenant,” answered Ivan in a low tone, instinctively addressing the young man by a title he no longer possessed; “take it out there, you will have more need of it than I.”

“But when I get there, I shall be searched.”

“Very well; I will take it out and give it back to you afterwards.”

“My friend--”

“Hush! hush! I hear a horse galloping, get into your carriage, and look sharp by all that’s holy; it is one of my soldiers returning from the village because he cannot find any horses. I will send him to another. Get in! get in!”

Thereupon the Sergeant pushed Vaninkov into the carriage where he was followed by his mother and sisters, then he shut the door upon them.

They stayed there for an hour, an hour full of joy and sorrow, smiles and sobs, a supreme hour like that of death, for they believed that on parting with him they would never see him again.

During the conversation Vaninkov’s mother and sisters related how they had heard of the commutation of his sentence twelve hours earlier, and of his departure from St. Petersburg a whole day sooner, and that it was owing to Louise that they had been able to see him once more. Vaninkov raised his eyes to heaven, murmuring her name as if he had been addressing a saint.

At the end of the hour which had sped by like a second, the Sergeant came and opened the door.

“Horses are now coming up in all directions,” said he, “you must separate.”

“Oh! a few minutes longer,” said the women in one breath, while Alexis, too proud to ask a favour of an inferior, remained dumb, “Not a second, or I shall be lost,” said Ivan.

“Good-bye, good-bye!” and then the voices were smothered n kisses.

“Listen,” said the Sergeant, affected in spite of himself, “would you like to meet once more?”

“Oh! yes, yes!”

“Go on ahead and wait at the next stage; it is now quite dark, no one will see you and you can have another hour. I shall not be punished more severely for two lapses of duty than for one.”

“Oh! you cannot possibly be punished,’’ cried the three, “on the contrary, God will reward you.”

“Well, well!” answered the Sergeant, somewhat doubtfully, while he could hardly force himself to drag his prisoner out of the carriage, and the latter made some slight resistance. But the next moment hearing the horses approaching, Alexis immediately parted from his mother and went and sat down outside the cottage on a stone, and there his companions supposed he had been resting all the time he was absent.

The Countess’s carriage now that the horses had rested, started off like a flash and did not pull up till it had reached a little isolated cottage like the former one, between Iroslav and Kostroma, whence the new comers watched the departure of the detachment next in advance to Alex’s. The horses were taken out and the coachman sent to procure fresh ones at any price. The ladies themselves, supported by the expectation of again seeing their son and brother, remained alone on the high road and waited.

This waiting was terrible. In her impatience the Countess had imagined that she would be hastening the meeting with her son by urging on her horses, whereas she was now more than an hour in advance of the sleighs. This hour seemed a century; a thousand different ideas, a thousand terrors tormented the unfortunate woman. At last they were beginning to suspect that the Sergeant had repented of his rash promise and had gone by a different route, when they heard the rattling of sleighs and the cracking of whips. They put their heads out of the window and saw the convoy approaching from out of the darkness. Their hearts, which had felt as though gripped in a vice of iron, were relieved of the terrible pressure.

Everything turned out as luckily at this stage as at the other. Having no expectation of meeting again except in Heaven, they spent another three quarters of an hour together as if by a miracle. During these three quarters of an hour, the unhappy family arranged as well as they could under the circumstances a system of mutual correspondence; then as a last souvenir the Countess gave her son a ring which she took from her finger. Brother and sisters, son and mother, embraced for the last time, as the night was too far advanced for the Sergeant to allow them to attempt a third interview. Besides another attempt might be so dangerous, that it would be mean to demand it. Alexis got into the sleigh, which was to bear him away to the ends of the earth, beyond the Ural Mountains, and away to the shores of Lake Tchany; then the whole gloomy procession passed the carriage where mother and sisters were weeping, and was soon swallowed up in the darkness.

The Countess found Gregory at Moscow where she had told him to await her. She handed him a letter for Louise which Vaninkov had written in pencil in his sister's pocket book. It consisted of a few lines:

"I was not mistaken; you are an angel. All I can do for you in this world is to love you as a woman and to adore you as a saint. I commend our child to your care.

"Farewell.

"ALEXIS."

Vaninkov's mother appended a note to this letter inviting Louise to come and stay with her at Moscow, where she would look after her as a mother cares for her daughter.

Louise kissed the letter from Alexis; but shook her head as she read the mother's note:

"No," said she, smiling with the sad smile characteristic of her, "I am not going to Moscow, my place is elsewhere."

CHAPTER XIX

AS a matter of fact, from this moment Louise pursued indefatigably her project, which no doubt the reader has long ago guessed, of rejoining Alexis at Tobolsk.

I have already said that Louise was expecting to become a mother in about two months' time, but as she was anxious to set out the moment she was convalescent, she did not lose a minute over her preparations.

They consisted in converting into cash everything she possessed, shop, furniture and jewels. As it was well known, that she was in want of money, her property realized hardly a third of its value; then having collected about thirty thousand roubles in this manner, she left her establishment on the Prospect and retired to some humble quarters on the Moika canal.

As usual, I had recourse to M. de Gorgoli, my unfailing supporter, and he promised me, that when the time arrived he would obtain permission from the Emperor for Louise to follow Alexis. Her project had been rumoured about St. Petersburg, and everyone admired the devotion of the young French woman; but all said that when the time came for a start, her courage would fail her. I was the only one who really knew Louise and I was convinced to the contrary.

Moreover I was her sole friend, or rather more than a friend, I was her brother; every moment that I could spare, I spent with her and while we were together we spoke of nothing but Alexis.

Sometimes I tried to make her give up the idea which I looked upon as madness. Then she would take my hands and looking at me with her sad smile say: "You know quite well, that if love did not compel me to go, duty would. Did not he join the conspiracy, because he was tired of life, because I did not answer his letters? If I had told him I loved him six months sooner, he would not have spoiled his career, and he would not now be in exile. You must acknowledge that we are both guilty and it is only right that I should suffer the same punishment."

Then since I felt in my heart that I should act likewise, I answered: "Go then and God's will be done."

In the early days of September a son was born to Louise. I wanted to write to the Countess Vaninkov and acquaint her with the news, but Louise said to me: —

"In the eyes of society, my child has no name and therefore no position. If Vaninkov's mother asks for him, I will give him to her, for I will not expose my child to such a journey at such a time; but I will certainly not offer him to her for she might refuse to take him."

Then she called the nurse and embraced the infant and pointed out the likeness to his father.

What ought to happen, did happen. Vaninkov's mother heard of the birth of the child and wrote to Louise that as soon as she could she was to come with her child. This letter removed all her doubts if she still hesitated; her child's future had worried her; now she felt happy about him and her chief cause of anxiety was removed.

But, though Louise had an intense desire to start as soon as possible, the anxieties she had experienced during the last few months had told so much on her health that her convalescence was greatly prolonged. It is true she had risen from her bed some time but I was not going to be deceived by the appearance of strength. I consulted her doctor who told me that her strength depended entirely upon her will power, but that in reality she was too weak to undertake such a journey. This would by no means have prevented her from starting if she had had it in her power to leave St. Petersburg; but permission could only come through me and it was a good thing that she must do what I wanted.

One morning I heard a knock at my door and at the same time Louise's voice calling me. I imagined that some fresh misfortune had befallen her. I hastily slipped on a pair of trousers and a dressing gown and opened the door; she threw herself into my arms, wreathed in smiles. "He is saved," she said. "Saved, who?"

"Why, Alexis, of course."

"What, saved, it is impossible."

"Look I "said she.

And she handed me a letter in the Count's handwriting, and as I looked at it in astonishment: —

"Read, read," continued she, falling into an armchair overcome by the magnitude of her joy.

I read:

“MY DEAR LOUISE, “Trust in him who brings you this letter as you would in me, for he is more than a friend, he is a saviour.

“I have fallen ill worn out with the fatigue of the journey and am stopping at Perm, where as luck would have it, I have discovered that the gaoler’s brother was formerly a steward in my family. Owing to his entreaties the doctor has declared that I am too ill to continue the journey and has settled that I am to spend the winter in the Ostrog (a prison for politcial prisoners) at Perm. I am writing this letter there.

“Everything is ready for my escape; the gaoler and his brother will fly with me; but I must recoup them both for the situations they will lose for my sake and the risks they will run in accompanying me. Give the bearer not only every coin you can lay your hands on but in addition dispose of your jewels.

“As soon as I am in a place of safety I will write for you to rejoin me.

“COUNT VANINKOV.”

“Well?” said I, after reading the letter through twice.

“Well!” replied she, “don’t you understand it?”

“Yes, I understand the plan of escape.”

“Oh! he will succeed.”

“And what did you do?”

“You ask me that.”

“What!” I cried, “you have given a stranger...?”

“All I had. Did not Alexis tell me to trust in the stranger as I would in him?”

“But,” I asked, fixing my eyes upon her, and uttering each word deliberately, “are you quite sure the letter is from Alexis?”

Now it was her turn to gaze at me. “Whom could it be from? What wretch would be coward enough to make sport of my grief?”

“Suppose this man was... Wait, I dare not say it; I have a presentiment... I am afraid.”

“Speak,” said Louise, turning pale. “Suppose this man was a forger, who had imitated the Count’s handwriting?”

Louise uttered a cry and snatched the letter from my hand.

“Oh! no, no!” she cried speaking loudly as if to reassure herself, “oh! No. I know his writing too well. I could not be deceived.”

Yet, while reading the letter again, she became still paler.

“Have you any of his letters with you?”

"Yes," said she, "here is his note written in pencil."

The writing was exactly the same, as far as one could judge, and yet there was a suspicion of a shakiness in it, which denoted hesitation.

"Do you think the Count would have written such a letter to you?"

"Why not to me? Don't I love him better than anyone in the world?"

"Yes, no doubt, if it was to ask for your love, or your devotion, he would have addressed it to you, but when asking for money he would write to his mother."

"But all I have is his? everything I possess came from him?" replied Louise in a voice, which was rapidly changing its expression.

"Yes, no doubt, everything belonged to him; but either I do not know Count Vaninkov, or, I can only repeat it, he did not write that letter.

"Oh! my God, my God, why those thirty thousand roubles were my sole fortune, my only resource, my only hope."

"How did he sign the letters which he used to write to you?" I asked.

"Always 'Alexis,' nothing else."

"This one, you notice, is signed, Count Vaninkov."

"That is true," said Louise, utterly dejected.

"Don't you know what has become of the man?"

"He told me that he arrived at St. Petersburg last night and that he was "on the point of returning to Perm."

"We must inform the police. Oh! if only M. de Gorgoli were still in command."

"The police."

"Of course."

"But if we arc mistaken," said Louise, "suppose this man is not a swindler, suppose he is really trying to assist Alexis? Then owing to my doubts, for fear of losing a few thousand wretched roubles, I should prevent his escape, I should then be the cause of his lifelong exile a second time. As for me I will do what I can, don't be uneasy about me. All I want to know is, if he is really at Perm."

"Listen," I said, "I have heard that the soldiers who formed an escort for the convicts have returned some days. I know a Lieutenant in the Gendarmerie; I will go and find him and get all the information I can from him. You wait for me here."

"No, no, I will go with you."

"No, stay where you are. In the first place you are not strong enough to go out yet and what you have already done is dreadfully imprudent, besides you might prevent me from finding out what I could probably ascertain without you."

"Very well, go, but come back quickly; remember I am waiting for you and why I am waiting."

I went into another room and finished dressing in haste and having sent for a drosky, I ran down stairs and ten minutes later I was with Lieutenant Soloviev of the Gendarmerie, who was one of my pupils.

I had not been mistaken, the escort had been back three days, and the lieutenant in command, from whom I could have acquired precise information had received six weeks leave and had gone off to his family at Moscow. Seeing how greatly I was disappointed at his absence, Soloviev offered his services on my behalf, with so much effusion, that I did not hesitate for a moment to confess the great desire I had for positive news of Vaninkov; he then said it was quite a simple matter, for the Sergeant who had charge of the detachment to which Vaninkov belonged, was in his company. He immediately sent his mujik to tell Sergeant Ivan he wished to speak to him.

Ten minutes later the Sergeant entered; he had one of those good-humoured, manly soldier's faces, half serious, half jovial, which never quite laugh outright, but are ever on the smile. Though I was then in ignorance of what he had done for the Countess and her daughters I was at first sight predisposed in his favour; as soon as he appeared I went to him.

"Are you Sergeant Ivan?" I asked.

"At your service, your Excellency," he replied.

"Were you in command of the sixth convoy?"

"Yes."

"Did Count Vaninkov belong to your detachment?"

"H'm! h'm!" mumbled the Sergeant, not knowing what might be the result of such a question. I noticed his embarrassment.

"Don't be afraid," I said, "you are talking to a friend who would give his life for him; tell me the truth I beg you."

"What do you want to know?" asked the Sergeant still on the defensive.

"Was Count Vaninkov ill on the journey?"

"Never."

"Did he stay at Perm?"

“Not even to change horses.”

“Then he continued the journey?”

“As far as Koslovo, where I hope he is at the present time in as good health as you or myself.”

“What is Koslovo?”

“A pretty little village situated on the Irtich, nearly twenty leagues beyond Tobolsk.”

“Are you quite sure.”

“Yes, absolutely; the Governor gave me a receipt, which I brought back, and on my arrival the day before yesterday, handed to his Excellency the Head of the Police.”

“Thus the account of his illness and sojourn at Perm is all a fable.”

There is not a word of truth in it.”

“Thank you, my friend.”

Now that I was sure of my facts I went to M. de Gorgoli and told him all that had happened.

“You say,” said he, “that this young woman has made up her mind to join her lover in Siberia.”

“On my word, sir, yes.”

“Although she has lost all her money?”

“Although she has lost all her money.”

“Very well, go and tell her from me, that she shall go.”

I left the house and going home found Louise in my room.

“Well” she said, as soon as she saw me.

“I have both good news and bad news for you,” said I, “your thirty thousand roubles are gone, but the Count has not been ill; the prisoner is at Koslovo, whence there is not the least chance of escape, but you will be allowed to go and rejoin him there.”

“It is all I want,” said Louise, “only get leave as soon as possible.”

I promised her and she went away greatly consoled, so powerful was her will and indomitable her resolution.

It goes without saying that I put all I possessed at her disposal, that is about two or three thousand roubles, since, a month before, not knowing that I should be in want of the money, I had sent to France all I had saved since I came to St. Petersburg.

In the evening, while I was at Louise’s, an aide-de-camp from the Emperor was announced.

He was the bearer of a command for an audience with the Emperor on the morrow at eleven o’clock in the morning at the Winter Palace.

Thus did M. de Gorgoli keep his word and more.

CHAPTER XX

ALTHOUGH the summons to an audience was a good omen, Louise nevertheless spent a night full of anxiety and fear. I remained with her till one o’clock in the morning, doing my best to cheer her up, and telling her all I could of the kindness of the Emperor Nicholas; at last I left her a little calmer after promising to come for her in the morning and escort her to the palace. I got to her at nine o’clock.

She was quite ready, dressed as becomes a suppliant; all in black, for she wore mourning for her exiled lover, and not a single jewel. The poor child, now one comes to think of it, had sold everything, silver as well as gold.

At the appointed time we started; I remained in the drosky; she got out, presented her summons and was not only allowed to enter, but was shown in by an officer, who had received orders to that effect. On reaching the Emperor’s study, he left her alone, telling her to wait.

Ten minutes dragged by, during which, Louise told me, she nearly fainted two or three times; at last a step was heard on the floor of the next room, the door opened and the Emperor appeared.

At sight of him, Louise did not know whether to advance or retreat, to speak or keep silence; she could only fall on her knees with her hands elapsed.

The Emperor approached her:

“This is the second time I have met you, Mademoiselle, and on both occasions I have found you on your knees. Get up, I beg you.”

“On both occasions, Sire, I have had a favour to ask,” replied Louise. “The first time it was for his life and now it is for mine.”

“Well!” said the Emperor, with a smile, “the success of your first request ought to have encouraged you for the second. You want to join him, I am told, and this is the favour you have come to ask me.”

“Yes, Sire, that is my request.”

“Meanwhile, you are neither his sister, nor his wife.”

“I am his.... friend.... Sire; and he must be in great need of a friend.”

“You know he is banished for life.”

“Yes, Sire.”

“Beyond Tobolsk.”

“Yes, Sire.”

“That is to say in a country where there are scarcely four months’ sun and verdure, while the remainder of the year is given up to snow and ice.”

“I know, Sire.”

“You know that he no longer has rank, or title or future to share with you, that he is as poor as the beggar to whom you gave a trifle when entering just now.”

“I know, Sire.”

“But no doubt you have some money, some fortune, some expectation.”

“Alas! Sire, I have nothing now. Yesterday I had thirty thousand roubles, the result of selling all I possessed; it was known that I had this money, and regardless of the cause to which I had devoted it, it was stolen, Sire.”

“By means of a forged letter from him, I am aware. It is more than a theft, it is a sacrilege. If the criminal falls into the hands of the police he will be punished, I can promise you, as if he had robbed the poor box of a church. But there is one way of easily supplying this loss.”

“What, Sire?”

“Appeal to his family. They are rich and will help you.”

“I beg your Majesty’s pardon, but I do not want any help except from God.”

“Then you are thinking of starting in such a predicament?”

“If I can obtain your Majesty’s permission.”

“But how? with what resources?”

“By selling what is left to me, I can collect a few hundred roubles.”

“Have you no friends who can help you?”

“Yes, Sire, but I am proud, and I do not wish to borrow what I could never repay.”

“But your two or three hundred roubles are scarcely enough to pay for a conveyance for a quarter of the journey; do you know how far it is from here to Tobolsk, my child?”

“Yes, Sire, it is three thousand four hundred versts, nearly eight hundred French leagues.”

“How will you traverse the five or six hundred remaining leagues?”

“Sire, there are towns along the route. Well, I have not forgotten my old trade; I shall stop in every town, call at the houses of the rich, tell them the reason of my journey, they will have compassion on me, give me work to do, and when I have earned enough to continue my journey, why, I will proceed on my way.”

“Poor woman,” said the Emperor, touched. “But have you thought of the practical difficulties of such a journey, even for rich people? Which route do you contemplate?”

“By Moscow, Sire.”

“And beyond?”

“I don’t know.... I shall enquire... I only know that Tobolsk is in the East.”

“Well!” said the Emperor, spreading out on his study table, a map of his immense Empire, “Come and look!”

Louise approached.

“Here is Moscow, it is easy enough so far; here is Perm that is also easy enough; but after Perm come the Ural Mountains, that is to say the frontier of Europe. You will find one more town, a last sentinel that watches the borders of Asia, that is Ekaterinburg; but when once you have passed tins town, you must not expect another and you have still three hundred leagues to go. Here are villages, notice how far apart; here are rivers, observe their width; no inns on the road, no bridges over the streams, shoals often and fords everywhere, but fords which require knowing, otherwise they will swallow up travellers, horses and baggage.

“Sire,” replied Louise with the coolness of resolve, “when I get to the rivers they will be frozen, for I am told that the cold of winter comes on much earlier there than at St. Petersburg.”

“What!” said the Emperor, “do you want to start now? Will you join him during the w inter?”

“Sire, during the winter his loneliness must be terrible.”

“But it is impossible; why, you must be mad.”

“It is impossible, if your Majesty so decrees it, for no one can disobey your Majesty.”

“No obstacles shall be due to me; the obstacles will originate in yourself, in your resolve; the obstacles will arise from the inevitable difficulties, to which your project will expose you.”

“Then, Sire, I will start to-morrow.”

“But suppose you succumb on the journey?”

"If I succumb, Sire, he will never know that I died on my way to join him, and he will think that I did not love him, that is all; if I succumb, he will lose nothing, for I am nothing to him, neither mother, nor sister, nor daughter; if I succumb, he will lose a mistress, that is all, that is a woman to whom Society grants no rights, who must pay her acknowledgments to the world while the world treats her with indifference. If on the other hand I reach him, Sire, I shall be everything to him, wife, sister, daughter. I shall be more than a wife, I shall be an angel, come down from heaven; then there will be two of us to suffer, and each of us will be only half exiled. You see, Sire, I must join him as soon as possible."

"Yes, you are right," said the Emperor looking at her, "and I no longer oppose your departure. Only, as far as is in my power, I wish to watch over you during your journey, if you will permit me?"

"Oh! Sire, I will thank you on my knees."

The Emperor rang the bell and an aide-de-camp appeared.

"Has Sergeant Ivan been ordered to attend here?" asked the Emperor.

"He has been expecting your Majesty's orders for the last hour," replied the aide-de-camp.

"Send him in."

The aide-de-camp saluted and withdrew; five minutes later, the door opened, and an old acquaintance, Sergeant Ivan, stepped into the room, then he halted stiff and motionless, with his left hand on the seam of his trousers and his right at his shako.

"Come here," said the Emperor in a hard, formal voice. The Sergeant advanced four paces in silence then resumed his former attitude.

"Nearer."

The Sergeant advanced four more steps until only the table separated him from the Emperor.

"Are you Sergeant Ivan?"

"Yes, Sire."

"Were you in charge of the sixth detachment?"

"Yes, Sire."

"Did you receive any orders allowing prisoners to hold conversation with anyone?"

The Sergeant tried to answer, but he could only stammer forth the words which he had uttered quite clearly on the previous occasions; the Emperor aid not appear to notice the hesitation and went on: —

“You had in your detachment, among the prisoners, Count Alexis Vaninkov?”

The Sergeant turned pale and bent his head in affirmation.

“Well, in spite of the inunctions you received, you allowed him to see his sisters and mother, once between Moscow and Iroslav and again between Iroslav and Kostroma.”

Louise moved as if about to go to the assistance of the unfortunate Sergeant, but the Emperor made a sign with his hand for her to stand still; as for poor Ivan he was obliged to support himself by the table. The Emperor remained silent for a moment and then continued:

“By disobeying orders, you are aware of the punishment you have incurred.”

The Sergeant was incapable of speech. Louise felt so much compassion for him, that at the risk of displeasing the Emperor she clasped her hands and said:

“In the name of Heaven, pardon him, Sire.”

“Yes, yes, Sire,” muttered the wretched man, “pardon, pardon.”

“Well, I will grant it, your pardon.”

The Sergeant breathed again; and Louise uttered a cry of joy.

“I grant it to you at Madame’s entreaty,” said the Emperor, pointing to Louise, “but on one condition.”

“What, Sire?” exclaimed Ivan, “speak, speak, I beg.”

“Where did you take Count Alexis Vaninkov?”

“To Koslovo.”

“You are to repeat the journey you have just accomplished and you are to escort Madame to him.”

“Oh! Sire,” cried Louise, who began to understand the meaning of the Emperor’s assumed anger.

“You are to obey her in every particular, except that you are to be absolutely responsible for her safety.”

“Yes, Sire.”

“Here are the orders.” the Emperor went on, and signed a paper prepared before hand, on which the seal was already fixed; “these orders will place at your disposal horses, men and vehicles. Now you are to answer for her to me with your life.”

“I will be responsible for her, Sire.”

“And when you return,” continued the Emperor, “if you bring back a letter from Madame, to say that she has arrived without accident and that she has been satisfied with you, you shall be promoted Sergeant-Major.”

Ivan fell on his knees, and forgetful of the discipline due from a soldier relapsed into the language of the peasants, “Thank you, father,” said he.

“The Emperor, following his usual custom, even with the humblest mujik, gave him his hand to kiss.

Louise was about to throw herself on her knees and kiss the other hand, but the Emperor stopped her, saying, “You are a good and deserving woman I have done all I can for you. I commend you to the protection of God.”

“Oh, Sire,” cried Louise, “you are Providence personified to me. Thank you I thank you! but what can I do?”

“When you pray for your child,” said the Emperor, “pray likewise for mine.”

Then with a salute he left the room.

On returning to her apartments, Louise found a small casket which had been sent to her by the Empress.

It contained 30,000 roubles.

CHAPTER XXI

IT was settled that Louise should start the next day for Moscow, where she was to leave her child in the care of the Countess Vaninkov and her daughters. I also got permission to accompany Louise as far as the second city in Russia, which I had been desirous of visiting for a long time. Louise gave Ivan orders to have a carriage ready in the morning at eight o'clock.

The carriage came round at the appointed time and the fact gave me a high opinion of Ivan's punctuality. I glanced at the vehicle and was surprised to see how strong it was, yet light; but my astonishment disappeared when I recognized in a corner of a panel the distinguishing mark of the Imperial stables. Ivan had put to good use the Emperor's orders, had examined all the carriages in turn and selected the one he considered the best.

Louise did not keep us waiting. She was radiant, all danger had disappeared, all her fears had vanished. Only the day before she had made up her mind to undertake the journey, without any money and if need be, on foot; to-day she was carrying out her project with all the appurtenances of luxury and under the protection of the Emperor. The carriage was equipped with furs, for though no snow had yet fallen, the air was already cold, especially at night. Louise and I settled ourselves in the vehicle; Ivan took up his seat on the box with the postilion and with a whistle from the Sergeant for a signal, we set of! like the wind.

People who have not travelled in Russia, can have no idea of the rapidity of the progression. It is seven hundred and twenty-seven versts, or about a hundred and ninety French leagues from St. Petersburg to Moscow, and by paying the driver well they can be covered in forty hours. I will explain what is meant by paying the driver well in Russia.

The charge for each horse is five centimes for a quarter of a league. This is equivalent to about seven or eight French sous a stage. This is the charge of the owners of the horses, and we were not concerned with them for we were travelling at the expense of the Emperor.

As to the postilion, his *pour-boire* to which he has no legal claim, is left to the generosity of the traveller; eighty kopeks for a course of twenty-five or thirty miles, or a distance of six or seven leagues, seems so magnificent a sum, that he never fails to shout out at a distance when approaching a posting horse: “Quick! quick! I am bringing eagles; “meaning that he must travel with the speed of the bird whose name he borrows to indicate his magnificent customer. If on the other hand he is dissatisfied, and his employers give him little or nothing, he drives up to the post house at a jog trot and proclaims with an expressive gesture that he is in charge of crows.

Fifteen or twenty peasants, whose horses are ready to start, are always stationed near each post house on the watch for a post chaise or a sleigh, and while waiting they play, for the Russian peasant dearly loves a game, though he plays like a child, to amuse himself and not to make money. The moment a carriage is in sight the game stops, and if “eagles “are approaching, everyone bestirs himself; the horses are unharnessed before they come to a standstill, the men catch hold of the right-hand trace which is nothing but a piece of rope; each one seizes the rope in turn, placing his hand next his companion’s until the cord has been gripped two or three times by the same hands throughout its length, and he whose hand holds the end of the rope is eligible to drive the carriage from this post house to the next. He immediately goes in search of his horses amid the congratulations of his confrères: everyone lends him a hand with the harnessing, and in a few seconds, the fresh relay sets off on its journey. On the other hand if the newcomers are “crows,” everything is done in a dilatory fashion, although always in the same manner; only the game is changed and the loser has to take charge of the relay; thus does every man grip the cord cunningly so that the selection may not fall to him, and when chance has ended this matter the unfortunate driver moves off with lowered head to look for his horses, amid the jeers of his comrades and when the horses are in, he proceeds at a gentle trot.

But when once on the road, however small may be the reward, the coachman cheers himself up by talking to his horses, for he never whips them, and it is solely with his voice that he urges on or slackens their pace. It is true that his eulogies are the height of flattery, just as his reproaches are the depth of humiliation. If they go well, his horses are swallows and doves; he calls them his brothers, his best beloved, his little pigeons; but if they dawdle they are tortoises, slugs and snails; and he prophesies that they will be worse stabled in the next world than the present, a threat which usually puts fresh life into them, and thanks to which they continue the journey with the rapidity of the wind.

Once started on the road, nothing stops the Russian driver; it is a regular steeplechase, ditches, mounds, faggots of wood or fallen trees, he takes them all alike; if there is a spill, he picks himself up without troubling about himself, and runs to the window wreathed in smiles. His first words are: Nitchevau, meaning, “It is nothing,” and his next Nebos, or “Don’t be afraid.” Whatever may be your rank or position he invariably uses the same words; however severely you may be injured, the face stuck in at your window is always one broad smile.

If the damage is slight, it is soon repaired. Should an axle tree break, the first tree encountered on the road is hewn down with the little hatchet that the Russian peasant almost always carries with him and uses for all kinds of purposes. In a few minutes the tree is felled, trimmed, cut square and replaces the axle, enabling the carriage to start at once. Should a trace break, so that it cannot be tied together again, a very short time will suffice for the Russian peasant to plait a rope stronger than toe old one with the bark of a birch tree and the horses with fresh harness bound away at the first signal from their master.

Moreover the coachman makes so much noise with his shouts and his songs, is so forgetful of the cage he is dragging behind him, in which he shakes up his eagles or his crows, that sometimes he does not even notice, if the forecarriage breaks away as the result of a jerk. Then will he gallop along at full speed, leaving the body of the carriage in the road; and it is not till he gets to the next post that he notices his passengers are left behind. Then he retraces his step, with the imperturbable good nature which forms the foundation of his character; he comes up to them with his everlasting: “It is nothing,” fixes on the fore carriage and makes a fresh start with his: “Don’t be afraid.”

Although, as may be imagined, we were classed in the category of “Eagles,” our vehicle, thanks to Ivan’s foresight, was so strong that no accident of this kind happened to us, and the same evening we reached Novgorod, the ancient and powerful town which has chosen for its device the Russian proverb: — ”No one can resist the Almighty or Great Novgorod.”

Novgorod, formerly the cradle of the Russian Monarchy, whose sixty churches barely sufficed for its teeming population, is to-day with its dismantled ramparts, a kind of ruin of deserted streets, and rears itself on the road, like the ghost of a dead capital, between St. Petersburg and Moscow, the two modern capitals.

We stopped at Novgorod for supper only and started again immediately. From time to time as we drove along we noticed great fires and squatting round them ten or twelve men with long beards and a collection of wagons drawn up on one side of the road. These men are the country carriers, who, since there are no villages and therefore no inns, camp out along the sides of the highways, sleep in their cloaks, and set out the next day as well pleased and happy as if they had spent the night in the best bed in the world. While they sleep their horses browse in the forests or graze in the plains; day-break the carriers whistle for them and the horses come and range themselves in their proper places.

We woke up on the morrow in the midst of what is known as Russian Switzerland — a delightful country, amid everlasting steppes, or immense gloomy pine forests, a country interspersed with lakes, valleys and mountains. Valdai, situated about ninety leagues from St. Petersburg is the centre and capital of this northern Helvetia. Almost before our carriage pulled up we were surrounded by a crowd of biscuit sellers who reminded me of the hucksters who hawk novelties n the streets of Paris, only instead of the small number of privileged traders who exploit the approaches to the Tuileries, at Valdai’ we were assailed by a perfect army of young girls in short petticoats.

After Valdai comes Torschok, famous for the manufacture of embroidered leather, which is fashioned into charming bedroom slippers and ladies’ shoes of a most whimsical and tasteful pattern. Then comes Tver, the headquarters of the Government, where the Volga is crossed by a bridge six hundred feet long. This vast river rises in Lake Selguier and flows into the Caspian Sea, after traversing the whole breadth of Russia, or in other words a distance of neatly seven hundred leagues.

Twenty-five versts from the last mentioned town night overtook us, and when daylight appeared we were in sight of the flashing domes and gilt spires of Moscow.

The prospect made a profound impression upon me. I had spread before my eyes the mighty tomb where the fortunes of France lay buried. I shuddered in spite of myself and it seemed to me that the ghost of Napoleon was about to appear like the shade of Adamastor and describe his defeat with tears of blood.

On entering the city I looked about in all directions for traces of our visit in 1812 and noticed a few. From time to time vast ruins, depressing proofs of the savage devotion of Rostopchin, came into view, still blackened with the flames. I was eager to stop the carriage and, before entering the hotel, before going farther, to ask the way to the Kremlin, so anxious was I to visit the gloomy fortress, which the Russians had one morning surrounded by a belt of burning houses. I postponed my visit and allowed Ivan to conduct us; he drove us through part of the city and stopped in front of an inn kept by a Frenchman, near the Marshal’s Bridge. As chance would have it, we alighted close to the family mansion of the Vaninkovs.

Louise was greatly fatigued with the journey, as she had carried her child in her arms the whole way; but though I insisted that she ought to go to bed immediately, she began to write to the Countess announcing her arrival at Moscow and asking permission to call upon her. We were looking for a messenger to bear the despatch to the Countess when we thought of our brave Sergeant Ivan. We were aware that the letter would be none the less welcomed if carried by him and he accepted the commission with great pleasure.

Ten minutes later when I had just retired to my room, a carriage stopped at the door. It conveyed the Countess and her daughters who could not wait for Louise’s visit and themselves hastened to find her. Indeed they were well aware of the devotion of her noble heart, they knew with what intention she had started and the destination she was aiming at, and they were unwilling that she, whom they called their daughter and sister, should reside elsewhere than in their home during her short visit to Moscow.

As my room adjoined Louise’s, I was to some extent a witness of the depth of feeling with which the poor mother threw herself into the aims of the woman who was on her way to see her son. As we had expected, the sight of Ivan had given the whole family great pleasure, for through him the Countess gathered the latest news of Vaninkov and heard that he reached Koslovo in as good a state of health as could be expected. Moreover it was a comfort to the Countess and her daughters to know the name of the village where he was residing.

Louise drew aside the curtains of her bed and showed them the sleeping child and before she had told them that it was her intention to leave him with them the two sisters had snatched him up and offered him to their mother to be kissed.

Then came my turn. They knew that I was accompanying Louise and that I was the Count’s fencing-master; so all these women wanted to see me. Louise had warned me of what was expected; I was waiting for them and fortunately had had time to make good the disorder of my toilet, due to two days and nights on the road.

As may be imagined I was overwhelmed with questions. I had lived long enough in the Count’s society to be able to satisfy their demands and I was too fond of him to grow weary of speaking about him. The result was that the women were so delighted with me that they insisted upon my accompanying Louise to their house; but as I had no claim to such hospitality, I declined. Besides apart from scandal which might have arisen, I should have much more freedom at the hotel; and as I did not intend to stay at Moscow after Louise’s departure, I wished to take advantage of my short visit to examine the holy city.

Louise gave an account of her interview with the Emperor, including everything that he had done for her, and the Countess wept at the narration, as much from joy as gratitude; for she hoped that the Emperor’s munificence would not stop half way and that he would commute the life exile into temporary banishment just as he had reduced the life sentence to one of exile.

As I had disappointed her the Countess was anxious to offer her hospitality to Ivan; but I claimed him as I hoped to make use of him as a cicerone. Ivan had been in the campaign of 1812; he had been in the retreat from the Niemen to Vladimir and had pursued us from Vladimir to the Beresina. It will be seen then that he was much too valuable for me to let him go. Louise and her child got into the carriage with the Countess Vaninkov and her daughters and I remained in the hotel with Ivan, though I promised I would go and dine with the Countess the same evening.

A quartet of an hour later, we left the hotel and I began my investigations.

CHAPTER XXII

IT was at half-past two in the afternoon of September 14th, 1812, that the French army got their first view of the holy city from the heights of Salvation Hill. At once a hundred and twenty thousand men began to clap their hands, exactly as had been the case fifteen years before at sight of the pyramids and shouted “Moscow! Moscow! “After a long voyage over a sea of steppes land was at last in sight. The aspect of the town, with its golden cupolas, caused all past sufferings to be forgotten, even the terrible and sanguinary victory of the Moskva which had cut up the army as much as a defeat. After stretching one hand to the Indian Ocean, France was about to touch the Polar seas with the other. Nothing could resist her, no desert of sand, no wilderness of snow. She was in truth Queen of the World and was going to be crowned in all the great capitals in turn.

At the shouts of the whole army of soldiers who had now broken their ranks, and were jostling and congratulating each other, Napoleon himself hurried to the front. His first feeling was one of unspeakable joy which illuminated his forehead like an aureole. Like everyone else he shouted, while he raised himself in his stirrups, “Moscow! Moscow! “But at that moment a kind of shadow was seen to pass across his face and sinking back into his saddle he murmured; “It was high time.”

The army halts; for Napoleon fixes his eyes on one the gates of the city and even attempts to peer covetously within the city while he waits for the approach of a deputation of long-bearded Boyards (Russian noblemen) and young girls bearing branches, who will come to him carrying the golden keys of the holy city on a plate of silver. But all is silent and deserted as if the city were asleep; no smoke rises above the chimneys; the only signs of life are the great flocks of rooks circling round the Kremlin and alighting on some cupola from which the gold disappears as it covered with a black cloth.

Only on the further side of Moscow, he fancies he sees the exodus of a great army, pouring through the opposite gate facing us. It is the same unapproachable enemy, who slipped between our hands from the Niemen to the Moskva and is now melting away to the East.

And now the French army, like one of its own eagles, has spread its two wings, Eugène and Ponietowski deploying to the right to out-flank the city, while Murat, whom Napoleon follows with his eyes with increasing uneasiness, reaches the outskirts of the suburbs, without the least sign of any deputation.

Then his Marshals press round him, anxious about his uneasiness; Napoleon notices the gloomy faces and fixed looks; he guesses that his thoughts are shared by them.

“Patience! patience!” said he mechanically, “these people are little better than savages, they probably don’t know the proper way to surrender.”

By now Murat had entered the city; Napoleon tarries no longer, he sends Gourgaud after him, Gourgaud gallops off, rapidly covers the ground, and entering the city overtakes Murat, just when an officer from Milarodovitch is telling the King of Naples that the Russian general will set fire to the city if he is not given time to withdraw his rear-guard. Gourgaud returns at full speed to Napolean with this news.

“Let them go,” said Napoleon, “I require the whole of Moscow, from the finest palace to the humblest cottage.”

Gourgaud brings the answer back to Murat whom he finds surrounded by Cossacks, gazing with astonishment at the embroidery on his handsome polonaise and the plumes streaming from his hat. Murat informs them of the armistice and gives his watch to one of the officers and his jewels to another and when he has disposed of everything, he borrows the watches and rings of his aides-de-camp.

Then under the protection of this truce the Russian army continues to evacuate Moscow.

appears and every officer who comes back to him repeats the same story — “Moscow is deserted.” Yet he cannot believe it, he looks, he listens, nothing but the solitude of the desert, nothing but the silence of death. He is at the threshold of a city of tombs, another Pompeii or Necropolis.

However he still hopes that like Brennus he will find the army in the Capitol or the Senators on their curule chairs. At length to prevent the exit from Moscow of all who had no right to leave, he has the city surrounded on the left wing by Prince Eugène and on the right by Prince Poniatowski; the two army corps extend their lines in a crescent and envelop Moscow; then he sends on in advance the Duke of Dantzig with the Young Guard, to penetrate to the heart of the city. Then having delayed his own entry as long as he can, as if he would like to doubt the testimony of his own eyes, he decides to pass the Dorogomitov gate, sends for the interpreter Leborgne who knows Moscow, ordering him to keep near him, and advancing into the midst of the great silence which is only broken by the sound of his own footsteps, he looks with questioning eyes at all the deserted buildings, all the empty palaces and all the vacant houses. Then, as if afraid to venture further into this modern Thebes, he halts, dismounts and takes up temporary quarters at a large inn abandoned like the rest of the city.

Scarcely is he installed there before he sends abroad his orders as if his tent had been just pitched on some battlefield. He must fight against the solitude and silence which depresses him more than the din and bustle of an army. The Duke of Trévise is appointed the governor of the province; the Duke of Dantzig is to take possession of the Kremlin and have charge of the police in that quarter; the King of Naples w 11 pursue the enemy, not losing sight of them, gather in the stragglers and send them to Napoleon.

Night approaches and as the darkness gathers Napoleon likewise becomes more and more depressed. A few musket shots are heard in the direction of the Kolomna gate; it is Murat, who after marching nine hundred leagues and taking part IN sixty pitched battles, has passed through Moscow. the city of the Czars, as if it had been a village, and has now come up with the Napoleon halts at the gateway, even now expecting some of the inhabitants to emerge from the enchanted city. No one Cossacks on the road to Vladimir. Some French prisoners are brought in who have come to ask for mercy from their own Emperor. Napoleon interviews them and questions them; and in a certain sense thanks them for having brought him some news. But at their very first words, he knits his brow, flies into a passion and contradicts them. In truth they tell of strange things. It appears that Moscow is doomed to be destroyed, it is to be set on fire by the Russians themselves, by her own sons; such a thing is impossible.

At two o’clock in the morning it is reported that fire has broken out in the Palais-Marchand, that is to say in the handsomest quarter of the city. The threat cast at him by Rostopchin is being realised; but Napoleon is still in doubt; the outbreak is only due to the carelessness of some private soldier, and he gives order after order, and despatches courier after courier. Day breaks but the fire has not been extinguished, for strange to say, no fire engines can be found anywhere. Napoleon can no longer remain inactive, he himself hurries to the scene of the disaster. It must be Mortier’s fault, or the fault of the Young Guard; everything is owing to the carelessness of the soldiers. Then Mortier shows Napoleon a house barred and barricaded, burning by itself as if bewitched. Napoleon heaves a sigh and with bowed head slowly ascends the steps leading to the Kremlin.

At last he has reached the object of his desires; in front of him is the old home of the Czars; on his right the church which watches over their remains; on his left the Senate House, and below him the steeple of Ivan Velikoï whose gilt cross already selected to replace the one on the Invalides, towers above all the domes in Moscow.

He enters the Palace, but neither its architecture reminding him of Venice, nor its huge and magnificent rooms, nor the incomparable view from the windows of his apartment, embracing the Moskva and stretching beyond the sea of many coloured houses, beyond the gilded domes, beyond the silver cupolas, beyond the bronze roofs, nothing can distract him from his reverie. It is not Moscow which lies within his grasp; it is its shadow, its spectre, its ghost. Who has slain it?

Presently he is informed that the fire has been extinguished. His enemy is conquered then; the good luck of Caesar is not going to desert him. In fact except for solitude and the fire everything is happening according to the expectation of Napoleon.

Reports are constantly arriving. The arsenal at the Kremlin contains forty thousand English, Austrian and Russian muskets, a hundred field pieces, and lances, sabres, armour and trophies captured from the Turks and the Persians. At the German gate the discovery has been made of four hundred thousand weight of powder and more than a million weight of saltpetre, hidden away in isolated sheds. The nobility have abandoned over five hundred palaces; but the palaces are furnished and not barricaded, they will be occupied by the officers of high rank. A few houses which are believed to be empty will be thrown open; they belong to the inhabitants who form the middle class of society. Once their shyness is broken down others will be attracted. Finally we have behind us two hundred and fifty thousand men; we can await the winter; the good ship France which set sail for the conquest of the Northern seas, will be caught for six months in the polar ice; that is all. After the spring will come war, and with war, victory.

Thus does Napoleon fall asleep, lulled by the ebbing and flowing of his fears and hopes.

At midnight the cry of “Fire “is once more heard. The wind is in the north and the fire is breaking out in the north. Thus does chance assist the conflagration; driven by the breeze it creeps in the direction of the Kremlin like a glowing river; the sparks are already playing about the roof of the palace and falling into the midst of a park of artillery drawn up underneath the walls. Then the wind backs to the west, the flames change their direction; they still continue to spread, but the burning area is further off.

Suddenly a second conflagration arises in the west; and approaches like the former, urged on by the wind. It appears that its objective is the Kremlin, and this clever ally of the Russians is marching straight at Napoleon. There is no longer any doubt, it is a novel plan of destruction adopted by the enemy and the truth, which Napoleon has refused to believe so long begins to gnaw at his heart.

Presently in all directions, fresh columns of smoke arise, bursting suddenly into flames like glaring lances; as the wind is fitful and constantly shifting from north to west, the fire creeps like a crawling serpent; in all directions fiery trails are moving on, they envelop the Kremlin and rivers of lava appear to flow from them. Every moment fresh torrents break away from these rivers, themselves to give rise to others; it seems as if the earth is opening and vomiting forth fire; it is no longer a conflagration but a sea and the immense flood ever rising, advances with a roar to beat against the walls of Kremlin.

The whole night Napoleon watches the tempest of fire with terror; now is his power tottering, his genius conquered; a hidden demon is fanning the flames, and like Scipio gazing upon burning Carthage, he shudders thinking of Rome.

The sun rises upon this furnace and day brings to light the disasters of the night. The fire has swept over an immense circle, driving in front of it every living being and creeping up nearer and nearer to the Kremlin. Then reports are brought in and the authors of the incendiarism are being found.

On the night of the 14th, that is to say the night following the occupation, a globe of fire, like a bomb fell on to the Palace of Prince Trubetski and set it alight; no doubt this was a signal, for at the same moment the Bourse bursts into flames, and at two or three different places fire made its appearance, encouraged by sticks soaked in tar wielded by the Russian police. Bombs had been hidden in almost all the stoves, and the French soldiers, having lit them to warm themselves were blown to pieces; thus were the bombs doubly dangerous, for they destroyed men and set fire to houses. The whole night was spent by the soldiers in flying from house to house and watching the. house they were leaving or the one they were entering suddenly burst into flames spontaneously without any visible cause. Moscow, like the old cursed cities of the Bible, is utterly doomed to destruction, except that the fire, instead of falling from heaven, seems to be vomited from the earth.

Then is Napoleon vanquished and recognises that the fires, rising simultaneously in all directions are the work of one mind if not of one hand. He passes his hand across his brow, from which the perspiration is dripping and gives vent to a sigh, while murmuring: — ”See how these people make war. The civilization of St. Petersburg has deceived us, the modern Russians are just as savage as the ancient Scythians.”

He at once gives orders that any one found starting or assisting a fire is to be arrested, tried and executed on the spot; the Old Guards, quartered in the Kremlin, are to fall in; the horses are to be harnessed to the wagons and hold themselves in readiness to leave this city in search of which he had travelled so far and on which he had counted so much.

In an hour’s time the Emperor is told that his orders have been executed; twenty incendiaries have been caught red handed and shot. At their trials they confessed that there were nine hundred of them and that before evacuating Moscow, Rostopchin the Governor had made them hide in the cellars so as to start a fire in every quarter. They obeyed him faithfully. In the last hour the flames have made further progress; the Kremlin looks like an island cast upon a sea of fire. The very air is charged with burning vapours, the window panes in the Kremlin are cracking and breaking. The cinder laden air is choking everyone.

Just then another cry is heard: “The Kremlin is on fire! the Kremlin is on fire!”

Napoleon turns pale with anger. So the ancient palace, the time-hallowed Kremlin, the home of the Czars, is to be polluted at the hands of these political incendiaries. But at any rate the culprit has been secured and is brought before the Emperor. He is a private in the Russian police. Napoleon himself cross examines him: he repeats the same story; he and eight comrades were assigned the Kremlin. Napoleon dismisses him in disgust, and he is shot down in the courtyard.

Then they urge the Emperor to quit the palace where he is pursued by the fire. But he clings to his fancy, he will neither accept nor refuse the idea; he remains deaf, listless, disheartened; suddenly a muttered report is whispered around him: “the Kremlin is undermined.”

The next minute the Grenadiers are heard shouting for him; the ominous report has reached them; they want their Emperor, they must have their Emperor; if there is any further delay they will come and look for him themselves.

Napoleon at last makes up his mind, but how shall he escape? He has waited so long that there is no longer any exit. The Emperor orders Gourgaud and the Prince of Neuchatel to ascend the terrace of the Kremlin and endeavour to find a way of escape and at the same time he orders several orderlies to distribute themselves about the neighbourhood of the palace with the same object; everyone hastens to obey him, the officers descending rapidly by the staircases while Berthier and Gourgaud climb on to the terrace. On emerging they are obliged to cling to each other; the violence of the wind and the rarefaction of the air, cause so tremendous a commotion of the atmosphere that the eddies whirling about in every direction very nearly carried them away; meanwhile from their position it is impossible to see anything but a limitless ocean of flames.

They come down and tell the Emperor their news.

Then Napoleon no longer hesitates; at the risk of rushing headlong into the flames, he rapidly descends the northern staircase, on the steps of which the Strelitz were butchered, but on reaching the courtyard no means of exit can be found, all the gates are blocked by fire; the delay has been too protracted, there is no time left now.

Just then an officer runs up panting, the sweat on his brow and his hair singed; he has discovered an exit; it is by way of a closed postern which is said to open on to the Moskva; four sappers make for the door and break it down with their axes. Napoleon stumbles through two walls of rocks; his officers, marshals and body guard follow him; should they require to retrace their steps the thing will be impossible, they must go forward.

The officer was mistaken; the postern does not give on to the river, but on to a narrow street in flames. No matter; should the street lead to the infernal regions, they must follow it. Napoleon sets the example and dashes headlong under the archway of fire; everyone follows him, no one dreams of seeking safety apart from him; if he dies so will they.

There is no longer any path, no one is there to guide them, there are no stars; they stagger along haphazard amid the roaring of flames, the crackling of burning wood and the falling in of vaults; all the houses were on fire or already consumed while the flames were bursting from the windows and the doors of those that remained standing, as if attempting to pursue the fugitives; beams were falling, molten lead was running in the gutters; everything was on fire, air, walls and even the sky; some of the fugitives fell as they ran, suffocated for the want of air or crushed beneath the ruins.

At this moment, some soldiers of the First Corps who were looking for the Emperor appeared almost from the midst of the flames; they recognised him, and while ten or twelve of them surrounded him as if they were about to defend him from an ordinary enemy, the others marched in front calling out: “This way! this way!”

Napoleon entrusted himself to them with the same confidence that they were accustomed to repose in him and five minutes later he found himself in safety amid the ruins of a quarter which had been destroyed that morning.

Then he stumbles upon a double row of vehicles, baggage and ammunition waggons, and asks to whom they belong. He is told that they are the park of the First Corps, who have rescued them; each waggon contains thousands of pounds of powder, and firebrands are blazing between the wheels!

Napoleon gives the order to make a start for Petroski, a royal residence situated beyond the city, half-an-hour’s drive from the St. Petersburg gate, in the midst of Prince Eugène’s cantonments: henceforth the Imperial quarters will be there.

For two days and nights Moscow continues to burn; and then, on the morning of the third day the flames died out while through the smoke which hung over it like a fog Napoleon could discern reared aloft the blackened and half-consumed skeleton of the holy city.

Except for a few remaining traces of the fire, which appear to have been left as gloomy reminders of that terrible time, Moscow has risen again from its ashes, more splendid, more magnificent and more gilded than ever before. The Kremlin alone, standing up like an ancient and indestructible witness of the past, has preserved its Byzantine character, bearing a striking resemblance, at a first glance, to the Doge’s palace at Venice. My first visit was to this building and of the five gates piercing its high embattled walls, I chose the Spaskoï or holy gate and entered as is customary, with head uncovered, the ancient palace, on which the history of old Muscovy is pivoted.

It is said that the Kremlin derives its name from the word Kremle, meaning stone. It embraces the Senate House, the arsenal, the Church of the Annunciation, the Cathedral of the Assumption, where the ceremony of coronation is held, and as a matter of fact the Emperor Nicholas had just been crowned there; the Church of St. Michael containing the monuments of the early sovereigns of the Empire; the palace of the Patriarchs and the palace of the old Czars. Peter I. was born in this granite nest.

Thanks to Ivan, who made good use of the Emperor’s orders and to whom by the way the utmost deference was paid, I was able to make a very close inspection of the palace. I was first of all shown the little postern by which Napoleon made his escape, then the apartment he had occupied, at whose window he had sat with folded arms, for a whole day and night watching the advance of this novel and unknown enemy, irresistible and indomitable, which inch by inch stole from him his prize. I then climbed on to the terrace, from the heights of which Gourgaud and Berthier were nearly precipitated, and from there I surveyed Moscow, no longer in torment and writhing in its burning agony, but fresh, joyous, smiling, studded everywhere with its green gardens, sparkling everywhere with its gilded domes.

Moscow dates from about the middle of the thirteenth century. It is a city therefore of only moderate antiquity; a great lord of the age of Louis XIV. would have had to boast a longer pedigree, to claim a seat in the King’s state-coaches. It may have been in existence a long time before this, poor, unknown and insignificant, but staffing from this time it had risen to the rank of a principality and was governed by Michael the Brave, the brother of Alexander Nevski: he who became an anchorite in later life is now regarded as a Saint and has become one of the most miraculous benefactors of the city of St. Petersburg. The origin of the name of Moscow does not arouse the same doubts as that of the Kremlin. Its good mother is the Moskva an insignificant muddy river, which rises at Giath and falls into the Oka, beyond Riazan, much astonished at having in a few hours’ course, done duty as the belt of a queen.

The Kremlin forms the centre of Moscow, and is situated on the highest point, so that from the terrace of the palace the whole city can be seen spread out at one’s feet. From this elevation the irregularity of Moscow, like a fantastic city designed by some architect from “The Arabian Nights “appears in all its strange variety, with its mosaic work of roofs, its Byzantine minarets, its Chinese Pagodas, its Italian terraces, its Indian Kiosks, and its Dutch farms. From this same spot the representatives of every nation in the world can be observed, pouring into the three quarters into which it is divided, but especially towards Kitaï Gorod the business quarter. They can be distinguished; the Turk by his turban, the Armenian by his long cloak, the Mangolian by his pointed hat, the mujik by his calico smock frock, and the Frenchman by his well fitting clothes.

The streets are as tortuous as the river which meanders through them, and whose name is said to be derived from a Sarmatian word meaning *serpent*; but they have the great advantage of being built with their backs to the wind and sun and never offer to the weary eyes those interminable vistas which seem unendurable to the pedestrian.

On descending from the terrace where I had remained for more than an hour without tiring of the magnificent view, I passed on to the Senate house an immense building reared in Catherine’s reign, and bearing on the four sides of the cube which surmounts its dome, the word “Law “in Russia characters cut in large, letters. As the assembly hall was of little interest to me and the extent of my visit to Moscow was limited, I moved on to the arsenal, a vast building, commenced in 1702 in the reign of Peter I.

Blown up by mines in 1812, immediately after the evacuation of the French Army, the arsenal still bears traces of the terrible explosion which destroyed a great part of it, without breaking a sheet of glass which happened to be in front of an image of St. Nicholas, an event looked upon as a miraculous intervention of the Saint, so an inscription cut beneath it states.

Another evidence of an equally wonderful miracle, but one due to the instrumentality of winter, a much more powerful saint than Alexander Nevski is to be found in the eight hundred and seventy pieces of artillery taken from the French and their allies, collected from highways, river banks, morasses and ravines, on the route from Moscow to Vilna. These trophies are drawn up in front of the building. Every one of them, though a prisoner still bears the proud title bestowed upon it when it was cast, in total ignorance of what the future would bring about. One is the “Invincible “another the “Impregnable” a third the “Avenger.” The whole scene proves that it is not only on columns and monuments that the brass tablet has learned to lie.

In front of one of the side walls is the famous cannon cast in 1694, weighing ninety-six thousand pounds thirteen ounces, of which the length is seventeen feet and the diameter four feet three inches; it is surrounded by several other pieces captured from the Turks and the Persians, of whom it might be the grandfather, although the smallest, taken by itself would appear enormous. They are loaded with strange Oriental decorations and each of them, to display its power, has the figures designating its weight stamped on its breech. Compared with the smallest of these weapons, our largest seems a mere plaything.

In front of us was the belfry of Ivan Velikoï, raised to perpetuate the memory of a famine which desolated Moscow about the year 1600. The belfry is octagonal in shape and the dome is, they say, covered entirely with gold made from ducats. The cross surmounting the church was taken away immediately before Napoleon’s retreat. He intended to place it on the Invalides, and the men in charge of it threw it into the Beresina not being able to drag it farther. The Russians replaced it with a wooden cross covered with copper gilt.

Just below the church, in a circular cavity boarded with planks, reposes the renowned bell, transported from Novgorod to Moscow, where it was to be the queen over thirty-two other bells which comprise the chimes of the Church of Ivan the Great. As a matter of fact for a short time it did lord it over them, as much by its size as its sound; but one day it broke its bonds, fell, and as a result sank into the ground to the depth of several feet. We visited it by means of a trap door and a staircase of twenty steps, under the care of a sentry who warned us not to break our necks. On reaching the foot of the mountain of bronze, we made its circuit, skirting a little brick wall built to support it. The circumference of the bell is sixty-seven feet four inches, making the diameter twenty-two feet four and a third inches, its height is twenty-one feet four inches and a half, its thickness at the part where the clapper strikes it twenty-three inches and its weight four hundred and forty-three thousand seven hundred and seventy-two pounds which at the current price of metal, that is about three francs fifteen sous a pound, represents a sum of nearly seventy thousand five hundred louis.

But the real value of the bell is three times as much, for when it was being cast, the nobility and the common people vied with each other in throwing in their gold, silver and plate. Thus were nearly four million seven hundred and forty-two thousand francs swallowed up. absolutely uselessly and bringing no return.

On certain days in the year, the peasants visit the bell with great reverence, and cross themselves on every step of the staircase both going down and ascending.

As I was in a hurry to finish with the Kremlin I entered the Church of the Assumption, where the coronation of the Emperor had taken place six months before. It is a rather small building in the shape of a square and was founded in 1325. But it collapsed in 1474 and was rebuilt in the following year by some Italian architects who were brought from Florence by Ivan III. The church which will hold five hundred people, contains the tombs of the patriarchs and the throne of the Czars. Before 1812 it was lighted by a silver chandelier weighing more than 3,700 pounds which disappeared during the French invasion. But in revenge it has been replaced by another cast from the silver taken from us during the retreat, though it is true that the church lost by this compulsory exchange, as the one there now weighs only six hundred and sixty pounds.

I was very eager to pay a visit to Petroski the same day; but my invitation to dine with the Countess Vaninkov prevented me. I contented myself with a glance at the stone scaffold on which the bloodthirsty civiliser of Russia more than once carried out the sentence of death with the same hand that had signed it; and I told Ivan to take me to the Church of the Protection of the Virgin which the Russians call Vassili-Blajennoï and is the most curious of the two hundred and sixty-three enclosed within the walls of the capital.

This building, erected in 1354, in the reign of Ivan the Terrible, to commemorate the taking of Kazan, is the work of an Italian architect, who, summoned from the heart of the most splendid civilization to the midst of a barbarous people, wished to build something which by its peculiarities would satisfy the untutored taste of the Czar. Seventeen cupolas stud the roof of Vassili-Blajennoï and each is of a different shape and colour. With this incongruous collection of balls, pineapples, melons and prickly pears, green, red, blue, yellow and violet, Ivan the Terrible appeared very pleased. His pleasure increased by such leaps and bounds during the next few days that when the. architect came to take his leave, and ask for his fee and return to Italy, he gave him twice the amount he had promised and had his eyes put out, for fear that he might endow the city of the Medici with a similar masterpiece to the one he possessed.

It was now time to repair to the Countess Vaninkov's. I found Louise installed there. But, the only abatement she could be induced to make was not to start until the morning of the day after to-morrow. As to the infant, he was already master of the house; at the least cry, the whole of the household was afoot, and I found the nurse in a magnificent Russian costume which the two young ladies had bought for her.

As may be imagined the conversation centered on Vaninkov's exile and the devotion of Louise. No one knew how he was situated in the depths of Siberia, whether he was free or a prisoner; while the approach of winter, during which the thermometer, in the northern regions, registers sometimes as many as forty or forty-five degrees, aroused the most vivid anxieties in the minds of the poor women who knew that Count Alexis was accustomed, like the majority of the young and wealthy Russian noblemen, to all the comforts of luxury and the gratifications of the East. So under the pretence of mitigating the severity of Vaninkov's exile, they had already offered Louise, in a thousand different disguises, a real fortune; but excepting furs, she refused everything, saying that Vaninkov was chiefly in need of love, care, and devotion, and that she was taking him a perfect treasure house of all three.

I likewise received my full share of offers but refused them like Louise. Though I allowed myself to be tempted by a Turkish sabre which had belonged to the Count and was valuable more from its fine temper than its mounting.

In spite of my fatigue after travelling for two days and two nights, this excellent family, who fancied they saw in us something of him whom they had lost, kept us up till midnight. At last at twelve o'clock I got permission to retire. It had been decided in the morning that Louise was not to return to the hotel and they had immediately prepared for her the finest room in the house.

Before leaving Ivan I had told him that on the morrow I wished to lunch at Petroski, so at seven o'clock in the morning he was at the door with a drosky. It must be understood that I was about to undertake a pilgrimage. Napoleon retired to Petroski for three days during the burning of Moscow.

Three quarters of an hour after leaving the hotel we got to the palace, which gives its name to a delightful village composed almost entirely of the magnificent country houses of the richest gentlemen in Moscow. It is a building of curious design, which, by its modern singularity, seeks to imitate the style of the old Tartar palaces. Before getting there, I passed through a little wood, where, in the midst of black pines, I greeted with almost childish glee some beautiful green oaks, which reminded me of our grand forests in France.

On leaving the palace Ivan, who had left me for a few minutes to order lunch at the inn, came back to tell me with joy that by a lucky chance, some gipsies were on a visit to Petroski this year. I had heard of the passion displayed by the great Russian noblemen for these *tzigani,* who are to them what the *almehs* are to the Egyptians, or what the *nautch-girls* are to India, so after sounding my pockets I decided to give myself a princely pleasure after lunch. I therefore told Ivan to take me to the gipsies' quarters, being curious to see for myself both the persons and the dwellings of these descendants of the Copts and the Nubians.

Ivan stopped in front of one of the handsomest houses in the village, which had been chosen by the *Tzigani* for a resting-place; but they were not at home as they had had engagements during the night at various mansions and had not yet returned. This answer was brought to us by a Maltese girl who was in their service and could speak a little Italian. I asked her if there was any objection to our inspecting the house in the absence of her masters. She told us to come in and the door of their sanctuary was opened.

The large room into which I was introduced was about thirty feet long and twenty wide. On both sides were placed beds covered with mattresses, rugs and coverlets, much better and particularly much cleaner than those generally found on Russian beds. Even the beds bore evidence of the oriental origin of those who used them; for on some of them I counted as many as six or eight different kinds of cushions. Some were like long bolsters, others like pillows were about the size of the little square footstool used by our ladies. At the head of each bed were hung the instruments, weapons or jewels of him or her to whom the bed belonged.

After making the round of this curious dormitory two or three times, seeing that the *Tzigani* did not return, I told their servant that though I should be glad to receive four or five of the gipsies during lunch, yet I feared they would be too tired to come as they had spent the night out. But the girl reassured me, saying that I might rely on the first that returned, and however fatigued they were, they would rest later.

The proprietor of the restaurant where Ivan had ordered lunch was a Frenchman who had remained in the country after the retreat, thinking to make use of his talents, for he had been chef to the Prince of Neuchatel.

In Russia cooks and teachers can always rely on very quickly getting a situation; so, on the strength of his knowledge, he at once entered the service of a Russian prince. The situation was a good one; and at the end of seven or eight years he retired with a considerable sum and established this restaurant where he was in a fair way to make a fortune. The worthy proprietor, knowing that he was entertaining a compatriot, had done his best for me, and I found a magnificent lunch served in the finest room in his establishment. So much luxury made me tremble for my purse, but I resolved that I would spend the day like a lord and that Ivan should share in my lavish display.

We had reached the dessert and I was beginning to abandon all hope of seeing the gipsies, when our host came up himself to tell us that they were downstairs. I immediately ordered them to be brought in and I saw two men and three women make their appearance.

At first sight, I must confess I could hardly understand the passion displayed by the Russians for these curious creatures, from whom the famous Count Tolstoï and Prince Gagarin selected lawful wives. Two of them did not seem to me at all pretty; as to the third who displayed herself with the confidence due to the superiority of her beauty or talent, she gave me the impression, like her companions, of a kind of wild animal in human shape, rather than a woman. Her black eyes heavy with fatigue, had the wild look of a gazelle just awakened, while her copper-coloured skin reminded me of a serpent. Beneath her livid lips her white teeth gleamed like pearls, while beneath her wide Turkish trousers peeped the feet of a child, the smallest and most elegant I had ever seen. Moreover all of them, both men and women looked worn out, and I feared that they had overstrained themselves for the love of money and I began to regret that instead of sleeping later they had not gone to sleep sooner.

The eldest of the men, who seemed to exercise a patriarchal authority over the troop, sat down, with his guitar in hand, on one of those gigantic stoves which take up pretty well a third of the floor space of every decently comfortable room, and while he struck a few preliminary chords on his instrument, the other man and the two women crouched at his feet. The prettiest and most elegant of the three women remained standing alone, almost on the point of collapsing, with her knees slightly bent and her head resting on her shoulder, like a bird seeking the shelter of its wing before going to sleep.

Presently the uncertain sounds gave way to harmonies, and striking in after a chord, and without any other preparation, the guitar player suddenly started a canzon or rather a cantata, lively, full of feeling and loud, which, after a few beats, the two women and the man crouching on the floor, hailed with a chorus, during which the gipsy who had remained standing, seemed to wake up, nodding her head gently as if to mark the cadence; then, when the chorus was over, she produced from this collection of notes, if I may use such an expression, a sweet little song, elegant and rhythmical, finishing with a flourish of short high notes with marvellous precision and of a curious charm; then the chorus replied and on the chorus she grafted afresh her soft and melodious improvisation. Then once again, after another spell by the chorus she made a third reply, always with the same precision and the same sweetness, as if she were engaged in composing a bouquet with three coloured flowers and different scents, then the chorus once more took up their refrain and ended it *smorzando;* it almost seemed as if the performers were dying from exhaustion with the final note, which was drawn out like a sigh.

I cannot describe the profoundly acute impression produced upon me by this wild but wonderfully melodious song. It was as if I had suddenly heard in one of our parks, frequented by nightingales and warblers, some unknown bird from the virgin forests of America, singing not for men but for nature and God. I remained absolutely still with my eyes fixed on the singer, hardly able to breathe, and my heart gripped with pain. Suddenly the guitar sparkled beneath the fingers of the old gipsy with trembling chords, the women and the man who were crouching leapt from their places and sprang to their feet; a few lively notes were the signal for the dance, and joining hands, the three Bohemians began to circle round the dancer, surrounding her with outstretched aims, while she, rocking herself to and fro, seemed to gradually wake up until at length the others suddenly stopped short, while she broke the chain that had confined her, and commenced a series of wild leaps and bounds.

The steps executed by the Bohemian partook at first more of the nature of a pantomime than a dance. As a butterfly emerging from its chrysalis and finding for the first time room to expand its wings, appears to flutter aimlessly and on the point of settling on the nearest object; she made with her little feet such amazing and yet such elegant steps, that she appeared to be suspended by a wire, like a fairy at the opera. All this while her limbs, which I had imagined to be in a state of collapse, had assumed the suppleness and strength of a gazelle's; her eyes which had seemed so heavy with sleep, were now fully awake and flashing fire; her lips, which at first she appeared scarce able to open, were now raised lasciviously at the two corners of her mouth, and exposed to view, like rims of pearls, two magnificent rows of teeth: the butterfly was transformed into a woman, and the woman into a raving Bacchante.

Then as if he were himself carried away by the strains of the guitar and allured to the pursuit of the Bohemian, the man likewise jumped up and touched her on the shoulder with his lips; the young savage bounded to one side with a loud cry as if she had been touched by a red hot iron. Then there began between them a kind of circular race in which the woman appeared to gradually lose her desire to escape; at length she stopped, stood face to face with her partner and commenced a dance which represented a combination of the Pyrrhic of Greece, the Jaleo of Spain and the Chica of America; it was both a flight and a provocation, a struggle in which the woman kept escaping like a snake and the man ever pursued her like a tiger. All this time the music kept increasing in volume; the other two women uttered cries and leapt about like amorous hyenas, beating the ground with their feet, and clapping their hands like cymbals; and finally dancers and singers, male and female, having apparently utterly exhausted their strength, uttered a mingled cry of exhaustion, rage and love; the two women and the man fell on the floor, and the beautiful Bohemian, making a final effort, threw herself on to my knees at a moment when I was least expecting it, and encircling me with her arms like two snakes, she pressed upon my lips hers, perfumed with I know not what Oriental cosmetic.

This was her way of asking what was due to her for the marvellous spectacle she had just given me.

I emptied my pockets upon the table, and it was very lucky I had only two or three hundred roubles; if I had possessed a fortune I should have given it to her.

I understand now the passion of the Russians for the gipsies.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE nearer the time came for Louise to depart, the more an idea, which had already entered my mind more than once, kept assailing my heart and my conscience if I may express myself so. I had been told in Moscow of the difficulties the journey to Tobolsk offers at this season of the year, and all to whom I spoke on the subject had assured me that it was not only difficulties which Louise would have to conquer, but real perils that she must surmount. From all this it is easy to understand that I was tormented with the idea of abandoning thus in her devotion a poor woman, eight hundred leagues from her own country, from which she was about to separate herself by another nine hundred leagues, without family, without relatives, without any friend but myself. The share I had taken in her joys and griefs during the eighteen months I had spent at St. Petersburg; the patronage which had been accorded me by Count Alexis through her instrumentality, to whose recommendation was really due the position the Emperor had thought fit to bestow upon me; and more than all that, the voice within which shows a man his duty in all the important crises of life, where his interest is opposed to his conscience, clearly told me that I ought to accompany Louise to the termination of her journey and deliver her into the hands of Alexis. Besides I considered that if I left her at Moscow and any accident happened to her on the way, it would not only be very painful to me but also a matter of remorse. I therefore decided (for I was under no misapprehension as to the inconveniences such a journey would involve considering my position, as I had not obtained leave from the Emperor, and my motive might very possibly be misinterpreted), I decided to do everything in my power to persuade Louise to delay her journey till the spring, but if she persisted in her resolve to go with her.

The opportunity shortly arose of making a fresh attempt to bring Louise to my way of thinking. That very evening as the Countess, her two daughters, Louise and myself were seated round a tea table, the Countess seized her by the hands and telling her all she had heard as to the dangers of the journey, she begged her, in spite of her own longings as a mother that her son should be comforted, to spend the winter at Moscow with her and her daughters. I profited by this opening and joined my entreaties to hers; but Louise invariably replied with her gentle sad smile: — ” Be calm, I shall manage.” We then implored her to wait at least till the sleighing season began; but she shook her head again saying, “It will be too long to wait.” In fact the autumn was damp and rainy, so that it was impossible to say when the cold weather would set in. As we continued to press her she answered with some impatience, “Do you want him to die out there and me here?” It was quite clear that she had made up her mind, so I also hesitated no longer.

Louise was to start the next morning at ten o’clock, after breakfast which the Countess had asked us to take with her. I got up early and went out to buy a travelling coat and cap, a pair of heavy fur boots, a carbine and a brace of pistols. I instructed Ivan to pack everything into the carriage, which, as I have already said, was an excellent post-chaise, which we should no doubt be obliged to abandon later on and take to a *telega* or a sleigh, though we expected to make good use of it while the weather and the roads permitted us. I wrote to the Emperor that seeing the woman to whom he had granted his generous protection on the point of setting forth on a long and dangerous journey, I, her fellow-countryman and friend, had not the courage to let her start alone; and I therefore begged his Majesty to grant me a permit, as I had not been able to ask for his consent, seeing that my resolve had been taken on the spur of the moment, beseeching him to look upon my motives in the true light. This done I set out for the Countess’s.

The breakfast, as may be supposed, was a sad and solemn function. Louise only was radiant; there was in her, at the near approach of danger and at the thought of the reward destined to follow it, something akin to the religious enthusiasm of the early Christians ready to descend into the amphitheatre, above which Heaven lay open to them; moreover her quiet confidence took possession of me, and like her I was full of hope and faith in God.

The Countess and her daughters accompanied Louise into the courtyard, where the carriage was waiting; there the most tender and sorrowful farewells were exchanged between them, though with more resignation so far as Louise was concerned; then came my turn; she stretched out her hand to me and I led her to the carriage.

“Well,” she said, “are not you going to say good-bye?”

I Why should I?” I answered.

“Why, because I am on the point of starting.”

“And I also.”

“What! you also?”

“Certainly, you know the Persian poet’s pebble which was not the flower, but had always rested near it.”

“Well?”

“Well, your devotion has affected me, I intend to go with you, hand you over to the Count safe and sound, and then come back.”

Louise made a movement as if to prevent me, then after a moment’s silence, she said: “I have no right to prevent you from performing a noble and Christian act; if you believe in God as I do, if you are as resolved as I am, come.”

Just then I felt someone seize hold of my hand and kiss it; it was the poor mother; as for the girls they were in tears.

“Cheer up,” I said, “he shall hear from me that the reason you have not come is because you cannot do so.”

“Oh! yes! tell him that!” cried the mother, “tell him that we asked for leave, but we were told that no similar permission had ever been granted; tell him that if we had been allowed, we should have found our way to him, if necessary either on foot or by begging along the roadside.”

“We will tell him what he knows already, that you have a real mother’s heart and that is enough.”

“Bring me my child!” cried Louise who had maintained her equanimity till that minute but burst into sobs when she heard these words: “bring me my child, that I may give him a last embrace.”

This was the hardest moment of all; the child was brought to her and she smothered it with kisses; at last I snatched it from her arms, handed it to the Countess and jumping into the carriage shut the door, calling out: — ” All right.” Ivan was already on the box; the postilion did not want telling twice but drove off at a gallop and amid the rattling of the wheels over the pavé we all for the last time exchanged good-byes, shouting farewells and receiving their wishes for a good journey. Ten minutes later we had left Moscow behind us.

I had informed Ivan that it was our intention to travel day and night, and now Louise’s impatience was on the side of prudence for as I have already said, the autumn was unusually wet and it was possible that we might get to

Tobolsk before the first snowfall; thus all danger in the journey would be removed and we might accomplish it in a fortnight. We passed, with the rapidity characteristic of travelling in Russia, Pokrov, Vladimir and Kurov, and on the evening of the second day we reached Nijin-Novgorod.

I insisted that Louise should take a few hours’ rest of which she stood in great need as she had hardly recovered from her illness and the accompanying strain. Though the town is very quaint we did not stop long enough to examine it, and at eight o’clock in the morning we set out again at the same speed, so on the evening of the same day we got to Kosmodemiansk. As far as this point everything had gone like clockwork and there was nothing to show that we were on the road to Siberia. The villages were rich and all possessed several churches; the peasants seemed happy, their houses would be called mansions in other provinces, and in every house, and all were marvellously clean, we found to our astonishment a bath room and a handsome tray on which to serve tea. We were welcomed everywhere with the utmost friendliness and good nature and this must not be attributed to the order from the Emperor which we had had no occasion to use so far, but to the natural kindliness of the Russian peasants.

Meanwhile the rains had ceased; a few squalls of cold wind, which appeared to come from the Arctic Ocean, would occasionally pass over our heads, and make us shiver; the sky looked like an immense plate of dull coloured tin and on reaching Kazan shortly, we could not rest more than two hours in spite of the strange appearance of the ancient place, betokening its Tartar origin. In any other circumstances I should have experienced much pleasure in peeping beneath the large veils which envelop the women of Kazan, who are reported to be very beautiful, but this was not the time to undertake investigations of that nature; the appearance of the sky became more and more threatening; we could scarcely hear the words of Ivan, when he told each successive post boy in a voice that admitted of no reply, to drive “Faster, faster!” so much so that we seemed to fly over the vast plain where not even a hillock opposed an easy progress. It was evident that our escort had the greatest desire to cross the Ural Mountains before the snow fell, and his energies were concentrated on obtaining this object.

When at last we got to Perm, Louise was so fatigued that we were obliged to ask Ivan for a night’s rest; he hesitated a moment, then looking at the sky which was duller and more threatening than usual he said; “Yes, you can rest; the snow will soon fall now and it is better to be caught here than on the high road.”

In spite of this gloomy prognostication, I revelled in a long night’s sleep; but when I woke up Ivan’s prediction had been fulfilled, the roofs of the houses and the streets of Perm were covered with two feet of snow.

I dressed quickly and went downstairs to consult with Ivan as to our plan of action. I found him much perturbed; so heavy had been the fall of snow, that all trace of the road had disappeared and every hollow was filled up; yet it was not yet cold enough to use sleighs, while the thin sheet of ice that covered the rivers was not strong enough to bear the weight of vehicles. Ivan advised us to wait at Perm until the frost set in; I shook my head for I was certain that Louise would not consent to this.

The next moment we saw her approaching, looking somewhat distressed; she found us arguing as to the plan we should adopt and at once settled the discussion by saying that she wanted to start; we explained to her all the difficulties to be encountered in carrying out her idea and when we had finished she said: — ” I will give you two days; God who has watched over us hitherto, will not abandon us now.”

I was afraid of being thought more timid than a woman, and recognizing from the firm though sweet tone in which Louise had just spoken to Ivan that her remark was intended for a command, I repeated to him that we gave him two days and invited him, during the interval to make all necessary arrangements for our fresh method of travelling.

His preparations included the abandonment of our post-chaise and the purchase of a telega, or kind of little wooden cart without springs, which we shall be able to exchange later, when the severe weather sets in, for a sleigh mounted on runners. The exchange was effected that same day and our furs and weapons transferred to our new acquisition. Ivan like a true Russian had obeyed orders without making a single remark and would have been prepared to start that very day without a murmur, no matter what danger threatened.

At Perm we first encountered some exiles; they were Poles who had taken but an insignificant part in the conspiracy or had not disclosed it, and like the souls whom Dante met at the entrance to the Inferno, were not deemed worthy of dwelling with the absolutely lost.

Exile in this spot, apart from banishment from one’s country and separation from family, is as bearable as exile can be. Perm must be a pleasant town in summer and in winter there is hardly ever more than 35 or 38 degrees of frost while at Tobolsk fifty degrees is said to have been registered more than once.

After our two days’ rest we again took the road in our *telega*, and did not experience any discomfort from its hardness thanks to the thick layer of snow which covered the ground. On leaving Perm the novel appearance of the surrounding country depressed us. Under the white shroud, spread by the hands of God, everything had disappeared, roads, paths and rivers; it was like an immense ocean upon which a compass would have been just as necessary as upon a real sea, if it had not been for a few isolated fir trees with which the post boys were familiar. From time to time a gloomy forest of fir trees whose branches were fringed with diamonds, would come into view like islands, either to our right or left, or on ahead, and in this last event we could perceive that we had not lost our way owing to the opening cut through the trees. We traversed nearly fifty leagues of ground like this, plunging into the depths of a country which, as far as we could tell from its snowy covering, appeared increasingly wild. The further we advanced, the scarcer became the posting houses, until they were quite thirty versts apart, or about eight leagues.

Those halting places were very different from those between St. Petersburg and Moscow where we always found a lively and merry gathering in front of the door. Here on the contrary an almost complete silence prevailed. Only one or two men lived in the huts, which were heated by one of the large stoves, the one indispensable adjunct of the humblest cottage; on hearing our approach one of them would leap on to a horse without a saddle and with a big stick in his hand, disappear into a clump of firs, from which he would emerge, driving in front of him a herd of wild horses. Then was it often necessary for our post boy or Ivan or sometimes myself to seize the horses by the mane, and drag them by main force to our *telega*. They started off at a terrific pace but the spurt did not last long, for since there was no frost at present, they sank up to their hocks in the snow and were quickly exhausted; thus it happened that after wasting an hour longer on each stage than we had been accustomed to, we had to lose another twenty or twenty-five minutes at each halting place where a similar performance was always enacted. In this way we passed across the country drained by the Silva and the Ouja, whose waters wash down small particles of gold, silver and platinum, and fragments of malachite, indicating the presence of these precious minerals and stones. As long as we were within the exploited area, the country we were crossing, thanks to the villages inhabited by the miners and their families, seemed comparatively populated.

but we soon got beyond the limits of their region, and began to notice on the horizon like a great wall of snow, its top serrated by a line of black peaks, the Ural Mountains, that powerful barrier which nature has interposed between Europe and Asia.

As we approached nearer I noticed with joy that the air became keener, raising our hopes that the snow would soon become firm enough to bear the weight of the sleighs. At last we got to the foot of the Ural Mountains and halted at a wretched hamlet of some twenty cottages, where we found no inn but only the post house. Our determination to stop here was necessitated by a sudden increase in the cold as it became necessary to exchange our *telega* for a sleigh. Louise made up her mind then to spend in this wretched village the time which would be lost in waiting for the snow to freeze, get hold of a sleigh and transfer our belongings into the new vehicle; we thereupon entered the building which the post boy had the effrontery to call an inn.

The establishment must have been a very poor one, for in place of the universal stove we found a big fire burning in the middle of the room while the smoke made its escape through a hole cut in the roof; we nevertheless went in and took our places round the hearth, which we found already in the possession of a dozen carriers, who were also about to cross the Ural Mountains, and were likewise waiting until the track was fit. At first they took not the slightest notice of us; but upon my throwing aside my cloak, the sight of my uniform soon obtained us a place; they made way respectfully and left Louise and me our full share of the accommodation.

Our most pressing need was to get warm, so we set about accomplishing this at once; and when we had got back a little heat into our bodies, I began to take an interest in another matter equally important and this was supper. I summoned the landlord of this miserable inn and made him understand what I wanted; but this desire seemed to him, so it appeared to me, a most unheard of demand, for at my request he displayed the most profound astonishment and brought me half a black loaf, giving me to understand that this was all he could offer us. I looked at Louise, who, with her sweet resigned smile, was already reaching out her hand, but I stopped her, and urged the landlord to find us something else; but the poor devil, understanding from my expressive actions that I was dissatisfied with what he had provided, and wanted something better, went and opened all the cupboards, presses and boxes in his wretched shanty and invited me to look for myself. But while watching our fellow guests, the carriers, I noticed that each of them drew from his wallet a loaf of bread and a piece of bacon with which he rubbed it and then carefully replaced the bacon in his bag, in order that this refinement of luxury might last as long as possible. I was just going to ask our friends if we might rub our bread with their bacon, when I saw Ivan come in. Guessing the fix we should be in, he had provided against it by securing some bread not quite so black and two fowls whose necks he had already wrung so as not to wound our feelings. Now it was our turn to despise our friends with the bacon, who I believe had been laughing in their sleeves at our distress while now they were overwhelmed at our extravagance.

There was no time to lose, for our appetites which had departed at the sight of the supper offered us by our landlord now returned with redoubled force; we decided we would begin with soup and then go on to the roast. Ivan got hold of a saucepan which the post boy began to scour with all his might, while Louise and I plucked the fowls and Ivan rigged up a spit. In a very short time everything was ready; the saucepan was emitting great bubbles; while the fowl suspended by a string, was revolving to perfection in front of the fire.

No sooner were we reassured about our supper than we began to worry about our means of departure. It had been impossible to procure a sleigh, but Ivan got over the difficulty by removing the wheels of our *telega,* and replacing them with runners. The local wheelwright was at the present moment busy with the job; as to the weather it appeared to be gradually freezing harder, and we were hopeful that we might be able to start the next morning; this good news served to increase our appetites; it was a long time since I had supped so well as that evening.

As for beds, of course we had not so much as asked if there were any; but we had such splendid furs that we could easily do without them. We wrapped ourselves in our cloaks and mantles and went to sleep, uttering prayers that the favourable state of the weather might last.

About three o’clock in the morning, I was awakened by a smart pecking on my face. I raised myself in my chair and perceived by the light of the fire which was still flickering, a hen, who had taken good care not to show herself the previous evening, but had now found her way into the room to sample the remains of our supper. Not knowing whether Ivan would be as lucky on the morrow as on the previous evening, and having learnt by experience what we must expect to find at other inns, I was careful not to frighten the estimable biped, so lay down again affording it every facility for continuing its gastronomic researches.

Scarcely had I settled down quietly when the hen emboldened by the success of her first attack, came again with a delightful familiarity and hopped from my feet on to my knees, and from my knees on to my chest; but there its journey ended, with one hand I seized its legs and with the other its head, and before it had time to utter a cry I wrung its neck.

It may be supposed that after such a programme, which brought all my faculties into play, I was not greatly inclined for more sleep. Even if I had desired it, the matter would have been almost impossible, thanks to a brace of cocks, which began to salute the approaching dawn at intervals of a few minutes. So I got up and went outside to have a look at the weather; it was just what we had hoped for and the snow was sufficiently firm to allow the sleigh runners to slide over it.

On returning to the hearth, I found I was not the only person the cock-crowing had aroused. Louise was seated there, enveloped in her furs, smiling as if she had just spent the night in a luxurious bed, and did not appear to have a thought for the dangers which probably awaited us in the gorges of the Ural Mountains; and now the carriers were beginning to show signs of life. Ivan was still sleeping the sleep of the just. Although under ordinary circumstances I am a pious devotee of the God of sleep, the situation was too serious for me to pay my respects to him now. The carriers had gradually collected about the threshold and were holding a discussion; I saw that they were arguing for and against a start. I therefore woke Ivan that he might take a share in the discussion and gain information from the experience of these good fellows whose normal occupation is the going to and fro between Europe and Asia and making, summer and winter the very journey we were about to undertake.

I was not mistaken; there were divided counsels. Some, who numbered among them the oldest and most experienced, wanted to wait a day or two longer; but the others, who were younger and more enterprising, were anxious to make a start, and Louise who had caught a few words of their patois agreed with the latter.

Whether Ivan was susceptible to the entreaties which fell from a pretty mouth, or whether the indications really seemed to him to betoken fine weather, he ranged himself among the advocates for an immediate start; and it is quite likely that the influence which his military dress naturally exercised, in a country where uniform is everything, caused some of those who were opposed to his opinions to veer round and agree with him; so the question being settled by the votes of the majority everyone set about his preparations. The fact is Ivan was afraid that, whatever decision the carters came to, we should follow our original plan, and he preferred to travel in company rather than alone.

As it was Ivan's duty to settle the bills I told him to add on to the total presented by the landlord the price of his fowl and I handed it over to him as something on account for our supper, telling him to get hold of some more food and particularly some bread not so brown. He went off to explore and presently returned with another fowl, an uncooked ham, some eatable bread, and a few bottles of a kind of red brandy, which is made, I believe, from the bark of the birch tree.

All this while the carriers were harnessing their horses, and I went myself to the stables to choose ours.

But, as usual, they were in the neighbouring forest. Our landlord thereupon woke up a lad of about thirteen or fourteen years of age who was asleep in the corner and ordered him to go and bring them in. The poor little beggar got up without a murmur, then with the passive obedience of the Russian peasant, he took a large stick, jumped on to one of the carters' horses and galloped off.

Meanwhile the carriers had chosen a captain to take command of the caravan; when the leader has been once elected, everyone was bound to submit to his experience and plan of action and obey him as a private obeys his superior officer; their choice fell on a carter called George.

He was an old carter of about seventy or seventy-five though he looked barely forty-five, with powerful limbs, black eyes concealed beneath thick greyish eyebrows and a long white beard. He was dressed in a woollen shirt bound round the waist with a leather belt, trousers of striped swan skin, a fur cap and a sheep skin with the wool inside. He carried at his side, slung on to his belt, two or three horse shoes, which clinked against each other, a pewter spoon and fork and a long knife which was something between a dagger and a hunting knife; and on the other side a short handled axe and a bag into which were jumbled a screw driver, a gimlet, a pipe, some tobacco, some tinder, a tinder box, two flints, some nails, a pair of pincers and some money.

The costume of the other carters was almost identical. George had no sooner assumed the rank of chief guide than he began to make use of his privilege by ordering everyone to put his horses in at once, in order that they might reach, in time to spend the night, a small shelter situated about a third of the way; but in spite of his haste to make a start, I begged him to wait for the arrival of our horses, so that we might all set out together. My request was acceded to with the utmost politeness. The carters entered the house and the landlord having thrown a few armfuls of fir and birch branches on to the hearth, the flames leaped up and we could the better appreciate their value, when we wore on the point of leaving them. We had scarcely seated ourselves round the fire, when we hoard the galloping of the horses coming from the forest, the next moment the door opened and the wretched lad who had fetched them burst into the room uttering piercing cries; then breaking into the circle, he threw himself on his knees in front of the fire and stretched out his arms almost into the flames as if he wanted to devour them. Then all the faculties of his being seemed to expand under the impressions of the happiness he felt. He remained thus for a moment, motionless, silent and eager; then his eyes closed, he sank down, uttered a groan and collapsed. I tried to raise him and seized him by the hand; but I felt with horror my fingers sink into his flesh as if it had been cooked meat. I uttered a cry; Louise wanted to take the child into her arms, but I stopped her. Then George stooped down and looked at him and said coldly: — ” He is lost.”

I could not believe it was true; the child was apparently full of life, he had opened his eyes again and was looking at us. I shouted for a doctor but received no answer. But in consideration of a five rouble note, one of the hands consented to go and look in the village for a sort of veterinary surgeon who did duty for a doctor both for men and horses.

All this time Louise and I were undressing the poor fellow, we warmed a sheep skin at the fire and wrapped him up in it; while the child murmured a few words of thanks, and ceased to move appearing paralysed in all his limbs. Meanwhile the carriers returned to their horses and continued their preparations. I went up to George and begged him to delay the start for a few moments until the doctor had come and he answered me: “Don’t you disturb yourself, we shall not start for another quarter of an hour and in a quarter of an hour he will be dead.” I returned to the poor boy whom I had left in care of Louise; he had made a slight movement as if he would get nearer still to the fire and this gave us a little hope. Just then the doctor came in and Ivan explained to him why he had been sent for.

The doctor shaking his head, came near the fire and pulled aside the sheep skin; the child was dead.

Louise asked for the parents of the unfortunate boy, to give them a hundred roubles; the landlord replied that there were none but that he was an orphan whom he had reared out of charity.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE omen was not a lucky one; but it was too late to defer the start now; it was George himself who urged it; the vehicles were drawn up in file in front of the inn door; George was at the head of the caravan, while in the middle was our *telega* drawn *troika* fashion, that is by three horses harnessed abreast; we got in, Ivan sat down beside the post boy on a bench which did duty for a box seat which had disappeared during the alterations to our equipage, and with a prolonged whistle we got under way. We had already proceeded a dozen versts from the village when daylight appeared; in front of us, apparently within reach of our hands, were the Ural Mountains which we were about to attack; but before going any farther, George ascended a height, exactly as the captain of a ship would have done, and perceived by the bearings of the trees that we were on the right track. Thus did we continue taking precautions not to lose it, and arrived in less than an hour at the Western slope. Here we perceived that the ascent was too steep and the snow was not yet sufficiently consolidated to permit each wagon being dragged up by the eight horses that were attached to it. George decided that only two wagons could ascend at the same time and that all the horses in the caravan should be harnessed to these two vehicles; then when the two vehicles had reached the top, all the horses were to go back and bring up the others until the whole ten which comprised our caravan had been dragged up. Two horses were set aside to be harnessed unicorn fashion to our sleigh. It was easy to see that our fellow travellers looked upon us as brothers, and yet all was settled without our having recourse once to the Emperor’s order.

But here the order of the procession was changed, as our vehicle was the lightest we left the centre and proceeded to the head; two men walked in front armed with long pikes to prod the ground. George held our leader by the bridle while two men followed us, to cut with their axes the snow behind the sleigh, in order to leave tracks at the places where the wheels had passed, which might be followed by a second vehicle and afterwards by a third; I found a place between the sleigh and the precipice, delighted to get an opportunity of walking and thus we commenced the ascent followed by two wagons.

After an hour and a half's steady climb, we reached a kind of plateau surmounted by a few trees. The place seemed suitable for a halt. There were still eight wagons which required to be pulled up two at a time like the others; it would take eight hours without counting the time, taken by the horses in going down the hill; so we could scarcely hope to finish before nightfall.

All the carters except two left at the bottom to guard the baggage, had climbed up with us to examine the ground and all agreed that we were on the right road. Since there was nothing to do but follow the track we had made, they went down again with the horses except four who remained with George, Ivan and me to build a shelter.

Louise rested in the sleigh, wrapped up in her furs and having nothing to fear from the cold; we let her remain there comfortably until it was time to get out and set to work to fell with our big axes the trees which surrounded us, but leaving four to serve as corner posts for our house. Rather with the idea of warming ourselves than providing a shelter, we began to build a hut and after an hour's work, thanks to the marvellous skill of our amateur carpenters, we had constructed a log cabin. We then scooped away the snow inside until we reached the solid earth, and piling the snow outside the building made it air-tight; then with the waste branches we lighted a large fire, allowing the smoke to escape, as usual, through a hole made in the roof. The hut was finished, Louise left the sleigh and sat in front of the hearth; the fowl already plucked and suspended by a siring was turning backwards and forwards when the second convoy arrived.

At five o'clock in the evening all the wagons were drawn up on the plateau and the horses unharnessed were eating their maize straw, while the men had prepared in a large pot a kind of polenta and this together with their raw bacon with which they rubbed their bread and a bottle of brandy we gave them constituted their supper.

When the meal was over we made ourselves as comfortable as we could; the carters wanted to leave the hut to us and sleep in the open air, but we insisted that they should share the shelter which they had themselves built, only it was thought expedient that one of them should act as sentinel, armed with my carbine as a protection against wolves and bears, and at intervals of an hour the sentinel was to be relieved; it was in vain that Ivan and I entreated that we might take our share of the watch.

As may be supposed, our position was not at all a bad one; for thanks to the furs with which the Countess Vaninkov had supplied us so plentifully, we went to sleep without feeling the cold much. We were all sound asleep when we were suddenly awakened by a gun shot.

I leapt to my feet, and seizing a pistol in each hand rushed with Ivan to the door; the carters contented themselves with raising their heads and asking what was the matter, there were even two or three who did not wake up at all.

It was George who had just fired at a bear; attracted by curiosity the brute had approached within twenty paces of the hut and once there, doubtless the better to see what was going on inside, he reared himself on his hind quarters; then George seizing the opportunity let fly at him; he was calmly reloading his weapon, for fear of a surprise, when I got to him. I asked him if he thought he had hit the animal and he said he was sure of it.

As soon as the other carters heard the word bear mentioned, their apathy gave way to a desire to go in search of the animal; and as the bear had certainly been wounded it would be an easy matter to trace it by the big tracks of blood left on the snow. George alone had any claim to it, so his son a young man of about twenty five or twenty-six called David, asked permission to follow up the tracks, and getting leave, he went off in the direction of the blood; I called him back to offer him my carbine, but he made signs that he had his knife and axe and that these two weapons would be enough.

I followed him with my eyes for a distance of about fifty paces and saw him go down into a ravine, plunging into the darkness, and going down on all fours so as not to lose sight of the blood stained footprints. The carriers returned into the hut and George continued his spell of duty which was not yet over, and as I had waked up so effectively that I should not be able to get to sleep again for some time, I remained with him. After a few seconds, I thought I heard in the direction in which George’s son had disappeared, a dull growling; the father evidently heard it too, for without saying a word he seized me by the arm and squeezed it tight. After a few moments we heard another growl and I felt the iron fingers of George digging into my flesh, then there was silence for nearly five minutes which seemed I suppose five centuries to the father; at length at the end of five minutes a human cry was heard. George breathed loudly, let go my arm and turning towards me, said: — ” We shall have a better dinner tomorrow than to-day, the bear is dead.”

“Oh! good heavens! George,” murmured a soft voice behind us, “how can you allow your son to follow such an animal alone, and almost without weapons.”

“I beg your pardon, Madam “said George smiling with pride, “we understand bears; I have myself accounted for more than fifty in my life and in these encounters I have never received more than a few scratches which are scarcely worth mentioning. Why should an accident happen to my son rather than to me?”

“Nevertheless,” I said, “you were not quite so cool just now as you appear at the present moment, as witness my arm which I thought you were going to break.”

“Ah!” said George, “I knew from the peculiar growl that the bear gave that he and my son were having a hand to hand struggle. It is a weakness, your Excellency, I admit, but what would you have, a father is always a father.”

At this moment Georges reappeared at the same spot where I had last lost sight of him, retracing his steps exactly as he set out, by following the track of blood. George, as if he wished to prove that all traces of his weakness had passed away did not move a step to greet David, and I advanced alone to meet the young man.

He was carrying the four paws of the animal, that is, the portion which is usually considered the greatest delicacy, and these paws were intended for us. The carcase he was not able to lift; the bear was enormous and weighed at least five hundred weight.

At this news every jack man among the sleepers sprang up and offered to go in search of the rest of the animal. Meanwhile David had thrown aside his sheep skin and laid bare his shoulder; he had received a scratch from the claws of his terrible antagonist which had gone in so deeply as to nearly expose the bone. However he had lost little blood as it had almost immediately congealed. Louise wished to bathe the wound with warm water and bind it up with her handkerchief, but David shook his head and said it was already dry; then he put on his shepherd’s skin once more, after simply rubbing the wound with a little bacon. His father then ordered him not to leave the hut and the six carters appointed by George to go and search for the bear’s quarters, set out alone.

George’s spell of duty being at an end, he came and sat down near his son and another man took his place. I then heard the young man giving a detailed account of the encounter to his father. As he told his tale the father’s eyes glared like coals. When he had finished, Louise offered the wounded man some of our furs in which to wrap himself but he refused them and placing his head on the old man’s shoulder went to sleep.

We were so tired that we soon followed his example and woke up again at five o’clock in the morning, without any further incident to disturb our sleep.

Our guides had already harnessed half the wagons and our sleigh. As the ascent was now not so abrupt, they hoped this time to make but two journeys. George, as before, held our leader’s bridle and headed the procession; his son and another man walked in front with their long pikes to probe the ground. About midday we reached the summit, not of the mountain, but of the pass. It was time to call a halt if we wanted the rest of the vehicles to come up with us before night. We looked all round us to see if we could find any clumps of trees like those we made use of the evening before; but as far as the eye could see the mountain was bare; it was therefore arranged that the second convoy should bring up a load of wood, not only for preparing supper, but to keep a fire going all night.

We were much annoyed at ourselves for not having thought of this before, and we were thinking of building as well as we could, a kind of tent, by driving four poles into the ground and stretching over them one of the coverings of the wagons, when we saw George’s son riding up with two horses, laden with wood. The good fellows had thought of us and foreseeing that without a fire the time would pass heavily, they had sent up some fuel. When the tent was finished, we scraped out the snow as usual, and David dug a square shaped hole in the earth about a foot deep, and then set fire to a faggot over the hole. When the faggot was burnt up he half filled the hole with the hot ashes, placed upon them two of the paws of the bear he had killed in the night, covered them up with glowing charcoal, just as he might have dealt with potatoes or chestnuts, then he placed on this improvised oven another faggot and in two hours’ time the whole thing was a mass of cinders and embers.

While our cook was thus preparing the supper he would constantly go to the door of the tent to take stock of the weather; for in truth clouds covered the sky and there was a death-like silence; evidently some change was portended for the night, while any change situated as we were would only be to our disadvantage. So when the second convoy arrived, the wagoners gathered together in consultation peering into the sky and holding up their fingers to the wind, to see if its direction was settled; the result was doubtless not very satisfactory, for they came and sat down gloomily by the fire. As I did not wish to appear to share their apprehensions in the presence of Louise, I told Ivan to find out what they were afraid of; he came back a moment later to say that they were expecting a snowstorm and in that case the wind and the avalanches might cause them to lose their way to-morrow, and as the road for the whole of the descent ran by the edge of precipices, the least deviation might bring about a tragedy. This was the very danger I had anticipated and I was quite prepared for the news.

However anxious my fellow travellers may have been they did not neglect the claims of hunger; for the moment they had seated themselves round the fire they set about cutting steaks from the bear which they laid on the charcoal. The most delicious morsels were set aside for us, namely the paws baked on a slow fire; so when our self-appointed cook judged that they were ready he carefully removed the ashes which covered them, and drew them out one by one from the embers.

I must confess that on this occasion their appearance was not at all flattering; the paws had grown to an enormous size, and looked like a shapeless mass, far from attractive. After placing them smoking hot on a fir log which his companions had cut the day before, and had brought with them to serve as a table, our cook began to remove the crust in which they were buried, with his knife. As he proceeded with this operation the most appetising odour arose and I began to change my mind; besides, having eaten nothing since the morning but a little bread, and raw bacon, I was terribly hungry. Louise regarded all the preparations with manifest repugnance and declared positively that she would eat nothing but bread.

Unfortunately when the meal was ready the sight of it very nearly took away the appetite which the smell had excited; for as a matter of fact when the paws of a bear are stripped of their skin they almost exactly resemble the hands of a giant. To the great astonishment of the spectators I remained for a minute in doubt, attracted by the odour, but repelled by the appearance, and yet anxious to see someone taste this much vaunted dainty, I turned to Ivan who was gazing at the joint with the eyes of a gourmand, and made a sign to him to sample it; he did not want telling twice, but borrowed his neighbour’s knife and fork and with the most evident delight set to work on the two paws; as there was no reason to doubt his disinterested assurance and his evident satisfaction, I followed his example and at the first mouthful I am bound to confess that his taste was justified.

Neither our example nor our entreaties had the slightest influence upon Louise, who was content to eat a little bread and fried bacon, and not caring to drink the brandy, she quenched her thirst with melted snow.

In the meantime night had fallen, and the darkness increasing more and more, clearly showed us that the weather was changing; the horses huddled together with a kind of instinctive uneasiness, and from time to time great gusts of wind passed over us, which would have carried away our tent, if our far-sighted companions had not taken the precaution to plant it against a rock; we nevertheless made, preparations for sleeping if such a thing were possible. As the tent did not offer sufficient protection for a woman, Louise got into the sleigh and I covered the opening with the skin of the bear which had been shot the night before. I then re-entered the tent which our comrades had deserted, pretending that they would be more comfortable under their wagons. Indeed the tent was too small to hold all of us, though we begged that at any rate half the company should share it with us; but they absolutely refused, and the only one who would consent to enter the tent with me was George’s son, who was still feeling the effects of the wound he received the day before. Meanwhile the others as I have already stated, crept in underneath their wagons, with the exception of George, who despised such sybaritism, and went to sleep in the open air, wrapping himself in a sheep skin and resting his head upon a rock; one of the wagoners kept watch at the tent door as on the previous night.

As I was returning from my tour of inspection, I caught sight of a huge pile of branches, which I had not noticed before. They were heaped up in the middle of the road and were just being lighted. This second fire which could warm no one seemed to me rather needless and I asked why it had been prepared. David told me it was to scare away the wolves who would be attracted by the smell of roast meat and would be certain to come and prowl round us. This reason seemed to me a sound one, and the precaution well conceived; the sentry had received orders to attend to both the fire in our tent and the fire on the road.

We wrapped ourselves in our cloaks and awaited, if not with tranquillity, at any rate with resignation, for the two enemies which threatened us, snow and wolves. Our suspense was not long, for before half an hour had passed, I saw the former falling and heard in the distance the howling of the latter. Yet I was so fatigued that when I noticed, after the lapse of about twenty minutes, that the howls, which I confess frightened me much more than the snow, though they were really less dangerous, did not come any more, I fell sound asleep.

I do not know how long I had been asleep when I felt a heavy mass fall upon me. I awoke with a start; stretched my arms out instinctively but encountered some obstacle, wanted to shout but felt myself being choked. At the first moment I was in complete ignorance as to where I was; then collecting my ideas I thought that the mountain had overwhelmed us, and I redoubled my efforts. By the shouts which were convulsing it, I perceived I was not the only Enceladus buried beneath this novel Etna. I stretched out my hand towards my companion in misfortune who seized me by the arm and dragged me to him; I yielded to the impulse and found my head outside. The cover of our tent, surcharged with snow, had collapsed upon us and caught us as if in a trap; but David, while I was seeking to find an impossible exit, had sliced it up with his dagger, and seizing me by one hand, and Ivan by the other, dragged us both out through the opening he had made.

It was no use hoping to get any more sleep that night; the snow was falling in thick flakes so that our carriages had entirely disappeared beneath the layers of snow that covered them and looked like little mounds on a mountain side. George’s position could be made out by a slight elevation in the general level. We sat up with our feet to the fire and our backs to the wind and waited for daybreak.

About six o’clock in the morning the snow ceased to fall; but in spite of the near approach of day, the sky remained dull and lowering. At the sight of the first streaks on the eastern horizon we called George, who immediately protruded his head from its snow coverlet. But this was all he could do; his sheepskin had frozen solid in the snow and held him as if nailed to the ground. He had to make a violent effort before he could free himself. He at once went round to awaken the other wagoners.

Then we saw them one by one protrude their heads through the curtain of snow which had converted each wagon into a kind of closed alcove. Every man turned his gaze to the east. A pale and gloomy day was struggling with the night and it looked almost as if night would get the upper hand; the outlook was disquieting for they immediately held a council to decide what should be done.

Now the snow had been falling all night and everyone plunged up to his knees at each step that he made in this new layer. All traces of the road had disappeared and the gusts of wind which had been so violent all night had had the effect of filling up all the ravines, so that it would be impossible to avoid them.

But on the other hand, we could not remain where we were, quite unprovided for, no fire, no provisions, no shelter. The idea of retracing our steps was abandoned as t would be quite as dangerous as going forward; besides, even if our companions did think of it, we had decided on no account to adopt it.

While the discussion was going on Louise put her head out of the sleigh and called me; like the other vehicles, it was completely buried in the snow, so at the first glance she took in the situation and guessed what was going on. I found her calm and collected as usual and determined to go on.

All this time the discussion continued among the wagoners, and I saw by the rapid gestures and animated speech of George that he was advancing an opinion but was receiving but little support. As a matter of fact George wanted to go ahead while the others wanted to remain where they were. George maintained that the snow would continue to fall for a day or two and remain, as sometimes happens, for a week or more without consolidating. Then the whole caravan could neither advance nor go back but would be buried alive; on the contrary by continuing our journey at once while there was still only two feet of fresh snow, we could by to-morrow morning reach a village, situated at the foot of the eastern slope, fifteen leagues from Ekaterinburg.

I am bound to say that this idea, though I had already felt keenly disposed towards it, presented many dangers. The wind continued to blow violently; snow slides and avalanches are moreover common in these mountains. George's advice met with strong opposition, which presently degenerated into open revolt. As the authority with which he was invested was only a voluntary concession, they who had given it to him could withdraw it, and as a matter of fact they had just told him to continue the journey with his son and wagon if he liked when Ivan, alter coming to consult Louise and me, and sharing our confidence as to the experience of the old guide, came forward and ordered them to put the horses in the wagons. This order was at first received with astonishment, then murmurs; and then Ivan drew a paper from his pocket, and spreading it out, said: “The Emperor’s orders.” None of the wagoners could read but they all knew the Imperial seal. Without inquiring how Ivan came to be carrying such an order, without discussing whether they should submit to it, they ran to their horses, who were huddled together in a body and pressing against each other like a flock of sheep, and in ten minutes’ time the caravan was ready to start.

George’s son went on in front to probe the ground; George with his wagon headed the procession. Our sleigh came next, so if George’s vehicle plunged into a drift we should be able with our light carriage to avoid it easily. The others formed a long line as now we could all move forward together. For as I have already said we had reached the highest point of the pass and the rest of the way was downhill.

We very soon heard a cry and saw our guide disappear. We ran to the spot where we last saw him and discovered a hole fifteen feet deep at the bottom of which the snow was stirring about and then we saw a hand protrude. At this moment the poor father ran up, holding a long rope in his hand, which he could tie round his body and let himself be lowered after his son with the idea of rescuing him. But a wagoner came up and said that George was wanted to take charge of the caravan and that he himself would descend. The rope was fastened under his armpits: Louise handed him her purse which he put in his pocket with a bow of thanks without looking to see what was inside; six or eight of us caught hold of the rope and let it run out rapidly, so that he got to the bottom just as the hand was beginning to disappear. Then catching hold of the poor fellow while at the same time we began to haul from above, he raised him from the snowy couch in which he was engulfed and took him fainting into his arms. We immediately redoubled our efforts and a minute later both of them were resting on the solid ground.

The poor father did not know which to embrace first, his son or his son’s rescuer, but as David had fainted he turned to him first. The unconsciousness was evidently due to cold; so George made him swallow a few drops of brandy which soon brought him round; then they placed him on some furs, undressed him and rubbed him all over with snow, until his skin was the colour of blood and then as he was moving his arms and legs and there was no longer any danger, David begged them to continue the march, saying that he felt fit to go on; but Louise would not hear of it and had him laid beside her in the sleigh while another man-took his place. Our post boy mounted one of his horses, I sat by Ivan on the box and we made a fresh start.

The road turned to the left hollowed out of the sides of the mountains; on the right stretched the ravine into which David had fallen, a hollow of which it was impossible to measure the depth for in all likelihood David had not rolled to the bottom, but had been caught on some ledge which had fortunately held him up. The best thing to do then was to hug as closely as possible the wall of rock against which no doubt the road had been built.

This plan succeeded and we advanced thus for nearly two hours without any accident. During these two hours the descent was appreciable, though not rapid; we then reached a clump of trees like the one under which we had spent the first night. None of us as yet had had any food; we therefore resolved to halt for an hour to rest the horses, light a fire and have breakfast.

It was no doubt by His merciful foresight that God placed in the midst of the snows those resinous trees which can be so easily lighted. All that was necessary was to cut down a fir tree and shake off the snow which hung to its branches like a fringe to make a splendid fire around which we quickly settled in groups, while the heat had the effect of re-animating David. I was very keen to tackle bear’s paw once more but we had no time to improvise a stove; and I was obliged to content myself with a steak cooked on the embers, a steak, by the way, which I found excellent. “We ate meat only; bread was too precious and there only remained a few pounds of it.

This halt, short as it was, did us all the good in the world; and men and horses were ready to start again with renewed courage, when we noticed that the wheels would no longer revolve; during our stay a thick coating of ice had clogged the naves, and it was necessary to smash it with a hammer before we could get the wheels to turn round. This operation took us at least half-an-hour and it was noon by the time we set off again. We proceeded for three hours without any adventure, so that we must have accomplished something like seven leagues, from our original starting place, when we heard a crackling noise, followed by a report like a cannon shot which echoed and re-echoed, at the same time we felt a tremendous rush of wind and everything was obliterated by a cloud of snow.

At the noise George pulled up his wagon short; “An avalanche! he cried, and everyone stood stock still, silent and in expectation. Presently the noise ceased, the air grew clearer, and the storm of wind continued on its way like a whirlwind, sweeping away the snow and uprooting two firs which were growing on a rock five hundred feet below us. All the wagoners raised a shout of joy; for if we had only been half a verst farther on, we should have been caught by the hurricane or overwhelmed by the avalanche; in fact we found the road blocked with snow half a verst from where we were then.

To tell the truth we had been expecting this, for as soon as we saw the whirlwind, George feared that it might leave us some such reminder of its passage. We tried all the same to cut our way through it as the snow was light and friable, and urged the horses against it but they recoiled as if they had struck a wall; we spurred them with our pikes to compel them to advance, but they reared up and fell on their fore feet into the snow which got into their eyes and nostrils, enraging them and driving them back. It was hopeless to attempt to force our way through; we must make a cutting.

Three carters climbed on to the highest wagon, and a fourth raised himself on their shoulders to get a view of the obstacle. The mass must have been about twenty feet thick; the disaster then was not so serious as we had supposed at first; by all working hard we could get through it in two or three hours.

The sky was so overcast that although it was hardly four o’clock in the afternoon, night was already approaching with rapid and threatening strides. On this occasion we had not time even to construct the frail shelter of a tent, moreover we had no means of procuring a fire, for as far as the eye could reach we could not see a single tree. We halted there, arranging our wagons in the form of an arc of which the mass of snow formed the chord and within this semi-circle we placed the horses and the sleigh.

These precautions were taken against wolves which it would be impossible to keep at a distance seeing that we lacked fire. Scarcely had we finished preparations when we found ourselves in complete darkness.

It was hardly worth while to think of supper, though all the wagoners ate some bear which they seemed to find as good raw as cooked. But in spite of the hunger I was experiencing, I could not get over the disgust this raw flesh inspired in me; I contented myself by sharing a loaf with Louise, and then I offered the company my last bottle of brandy but George declined it in the name of his comrades saying that it must be kept for the workers.

Then Louise with her habitual presence of mind, reminded me that there had been in one travelling carriage two lanterns which I had ordered Ivan to put in the sleigh. I called him and asked him if he had carried out my instructions on this point, and heard with joy that the two lanterns were in the box. I immediately got them out and found them properly supplied with candles.

Ivan told our companions of the treasure we had just discovered and the news was received with shouts of joy. It was not a fire that would scare away wild beasts, but it was a light by the aid of which we might at least be warned of their approach. The two lanterns were suspended from two long poles driven into the solid snow; then they were lighted and we were pleased to see that the illumination, though faint, was sufficient to light up the surroundings of our camp for a circumference of fifty paces, thanks to the reflection of the snow.

We were ten men in all; two were stationed as sentries on the wagons, and eight began to work at snow cutting. Since two o’clock in the afternoon it had been freezing so hard, that the snow had already required sufficient consistency to enable us to cut a passage through it, although it was not hard enough to render this task as fatiguing as it would have been two days later. I elected to throw in my lot with the workers, as I thought I should feel the cold less thanks to the exercise.

For three or four hours we worked very steadily and then it was that we appreciated the value of my brandy which George had rescued so fortunately. But about eleven o’clock at right there was a howl so long and so prolonged that we all stopped working and then we heard the voice of old George, whom we had placed as a sentinel, calling for us. We left our work three quarters finished and ran and climbed on to the wagons. For more than an hour a dozen wolves had been in sight; but restrained by the light of our lanterns, they dared not approach and we could see them prowling about the shadows just beyond the illuminated area, retiring into obscurity and reappearing only to disappear once more. At last one of them had approached so near, that George knowing from his peculiar howls that he would very shortly come even nearer, called us.

I confess that at the first moment I felt rather uncomfortable at the appearance of these monstrous animals which appeared to be double the size of the European variety. Nevertheless I put on a bold face and examined my carbine which I held in my hand and the pistols in my belt to see that they were properly primed. All was in order and yet in spite of the cold I felt the warm sweat pouring down my face.

The eight wagons as I have already said formed a semi-circular enclosure, which sheltered the horses, the *telega* and Louise; this enclosure was protected on one side by the steep mountain cliff which rose perpendicularly for more than eighty feet, and on the other by the mound of snow which formed a kind of natural rampart at our backs. As to the row of wagons, they corresponded to the battlements of a besieged town; every man had his pike, his axe and his knife while Ivan and I were each armed with a carbine and a brace of pistols.

Thus we remained for nearly half an hour, busy on both sides in taking stock of our resources. The wolves, as I have already stated, would occasionally turn aside into the light as if to gain courage, and yet these rushes were plainly marked by hesitation.

Such tactics by their clumsiness familiarized us with the danger; my initial fears had given way to a kind of feverishness and I was weary of a situation in which the danger had already been prolonged while the fighting had not yet begun. At last one of the wolves approached so near to us. that I asked George whether it would be expedient to fire and make it repent of its rashness.

“Yes!” he said, “if you are sure you can kill it at once.”

“Why?”

“Because if you kill it at once, its comrades will busy themselves with eating it like dogs in a kennel; it is true though,” he murmured between his teeth, “that when once they have tasted blood, they will turn into demons.”

“My goodness,” I replied, “it is such a splendid shot, that I am almost certain of hitting.”

“Very well then, fire,” said George, “for we must end this one way or the other.”

His words were hardly finished when my gun went off and the wolf was biting the snow.

The next moment as George had predicted, five or six wolves, which we had only noticed as shadows, dashed into the circle of light, seized the dead animal, and dragging it with them retired into the darkness in less time than it takes to mention the fact.

But though the wolves were out of sight, their presence was none the less indicated by their ferocious howls; in addition the howls increased to such an extent, that it was evident reinforcements had come up. It was in fact a kind of a rallying cry and all the wolves for two miles round had now collected in front of us; at last their howls ceased.

"Do you hear our horses?" said Georges.

"What are they doing?"

"They are neighing and stamping; as much as to say that we are to hold ourselves in readiness."

"But I believe the wolves have gone; they are no longer howling."

"No, they have finished and are licking their chops. But look, here they are; look out for the others."

At this moment eight or ten wolves, which in the darkness appeared to us as large as donkeys, entered suddenly into the circle of light which surrounded us, then rushed upon us boldly with cries of rage, and instead of trying to pass under the wagons, leapt up at us bravely to attack us in front. This onslaught was as quick as thought and I had scarcely time to perceive them when we were already struggling with them; yet, either by chance or because they had noticed whence the shot was fired, none of them attacked my vehicle, so that I could take stock of the combat better than if I were actively engaged in it.

On my right the wagon which George was defending was attacked by three wolves, one of which, when hardly within reach was transfixed by a thrust from a pike which the old man hurled at it, while another fell from a shot from my carbine; there only remained the third one and as I saw George raising his axe over it, I paid no more attention to it, and turned to the wagon on the left where David was stationed.

In this case fate was less propitious, although only two wolves had attacked him, for it must not be forgotten that David was wounded in the left shoulder. He had given one of the wolves a good blow with his pike, but the steel not having struck a vital spot, apparently, the wolf had bitten and broken through the pike shaft, so that David was left for a moment with nothing but a stick in his hand. At the same moment the other wolf dashed at him and clung to the ropes in order to reach David. I immediately jumped from one wagon to the other and just when David was drawing his knife, I put a pistol shot through his antagonist's head; as for the other it was rolling on the snow, howling with rage and in vain biting at the broken pike shaft which was protruding from six to eight inches from the wound.

All this while Ivan was performing wonders, and I heard him fire his carbine and both pistols, showing that our opponents were getting as hot a reception on the extreme left as on the left and right centre, and in another minute four wolves again crossed the lighted area, but this time to flee, and curious to relate two or three of those which we imagined to be mortally wounded raised themselves on their paws. Then dragging themselves along and leaving behind them a wide trail of blood, they followed their companions and disappeared with them; so that when we took stock we found only three of our enemies on the field of battle.

I turned to George, beneath whose wagon two wolves were lying; the one he had pierced with his pike and the one I had shot with my carbine.

“Load again at once,” he said, “they are old acquaintances and I know all their tricks; load again quickly, we shall not get rid of them so cheaply.”

“What!” I said, putting his advice into execution at once, “don’t you think that we are already quit of them?”

“Listen to them,” answered George; “listen, do you hear them calling; and.... there, out there....” and he stretched out his hand towards the horizon.

In truth the howls near at hand were answered by more distant howls; so it was clear the old guide was right and the first attack was nothing but an affair of outposts.

Just then I turned round and saw glowing like two flaming torches the two eyes of a wolf which had climbed on to the crest of the snow mound and was diving straight into our camp. I aimed at him, but just as I fired he leapt among the horses and fell clinging to the throat of one of them. Two or three of the men immediately let themselves down at the back of the wagons; but they were restrained by the shouts of old George.

“It is only one wolf,” he cried, “and one man is enough; all you others stick to your posts.... and you,” he added, addressing me, “load again quick and only fire if you are certain of your aim.”

Two of the men climbed back into the wagons, while the third crept along on his stomach with his long knife in his hand, between the horses’ feet, while the latter were stamping in terror and throwing themselves like mad creatures against the wagons which confined them. A moment later I saw a blade flash and then immediately disappear; then the wolf relaxed its hold on the horse, which streaming with blood reared up on its hind legs, while a shapeless mass could be seen rolling on the ground, and wolf could not be distinguished from man nor man from wolf; it was a really terrific sight. In another moment the man got up; we uttered a shout of joy, for we had been greatly depressed.

"David," shouted the man, shaking himself, "come and help me to pick up this carrion; as long as it is within the enclosure the horses will not be happy."

David got down, dragged the wolf as far as his father's wagon, and raised it with the assistance of his companion. George caught hold of it by the hind paws as if it had been a hare, and dragging it towards him threw it beyond the circle with the two others which were already dead; then turning to the wagoner who was sitting on the ground, while David climbed back on to his wagon, he said: — "Well, Nicholas, are not you going to return to your post?"

"No, old fellow, no," said the man, shaking his head, "I have had enough of it."

"Are you wounded, then?" cried Louise, coming half out of the sleigh.

"I hardly know what to say, madam," answered Nicholas; "only what I do know is that I believe I am done for."

"Eugène! "Louise called to me, "Eugène! come and help me to tend this poor man; he is bleeding to death."

I handed my carbine to George, jumped down from the wagon and ran to the wounded man.

In fact, a piece of his jaw was torn away, and the blood was pouring from a deep wound in his neck. I feared for a moment that the carotid artery had been severed; I took a handful of snow and applied it to the wound, without knowing whether I was doing good or otherwise. The poor fellow, overcome by the cold, uttered a cry and fainted; I thought he was dead.

"Oh! God," cried Louise, "pardon me, I am the cause of it all."

"Help, your Excellency! help!" cried George, "here are the wolves."

I left the wounded man in charge of Louise and returned to my wagon.

This time I could not follow the details, for I had enough to do on my own account without attending to others. We were attacked by at least twenty wolves; I discharged my two pistols point blank and then seized an axe which George handed me. When my pistols were emptied they were good for nothing, and I replaced them in my belt and tried to do my best with my new weapon.

The fight lasted for nearly a quarter of an hour and during this period all who were taking part in the struggle were presented with one of the most terrible spectacles it is possible to see. In about a quarter of an hour’s time, I heard a loud shout of victory pass along our line and made a final effort. A wolf had scrambled on to the cordage of my wagon to get at me, and I struck him a terrible blow on the head, and although the axe glided off his skull he received a severe wound in the shoulder, let go his hold and fell backwards.

Then as before we saw the wolves beat a retreat, pass howling across the lighted space, and disappear into the darkness, — this time not to re-appear.

Each of us cast a silent and sorrowful look around him; three of our men were more or less severely wounded, and seven or eight wolves were lying about: it was evident that unless we had found means to light up the field of battle, we should most likely have all been devoured.

The peril we had just encountered made us realise more than ever the necessity of reaching the plains speedily. Who could foresee the fresh dangers another night might produce should we be forced to spend it in the mountains?

We placed the wounded men as sentinels over the wagons, after bandaging their wounds, for, although it was probable, from the more and more distant howls of the fugitives, that we were quite rid of them, it would be rash not to hold ourselves in readiness; when this precaution was taken we set to work again to dig out our gallery.

At daybreak the mound of snow was pierced from end to end.

Then George gave the order to put the horses in. Four of the wagoners attended to this, while the four others stript the carcases, for the fur, especially at that season, has a certain value; but just as we were starting it was noticed that the horse which had been bitten by the wolf was so terribly wounded as to be not only unfit for duty but unable even to walk.

Then the carter to whom it belonged borrowed one of my pistols, and taking the poor creature aside blew out its brains.

When this was over we once more started forth silently and sadly. Nicholas was in an almost desperate condition, and Louise, who assumed the responsibility of him, had him placed beside her in the sleigh; the others lay down on their wagons, while we walked by the horses.

After progressing for three or four hours, during which the wagons just escaped falling over the precipices twenty times, we arrived at a little wood, which the wagoners recognised with shouts of joy, for it was only three or four leagues from the first village on the Asiatic slope of the Urals. We stopped here, and as we were all greatly in need of rest, George ordered a general halt.

Everyone set vigorously to work, even the wounded; in ten minutes the horses were unharnessed, three or four fir trees cut down and a big fire lighted. Once more the bear supplied us with a meal, and as we had no lack of charcoal on which to roast it, everyone partook of it, even Louise.

Then as all of us were eager to quit the cursed mountains, as soon as we had finished our meal and given the horses a feed, we again set out. After travelling for an hour and a half we caught sight at a bend of the road of several columns of smoke which seemed to be coming out of the earth; this was the eagerly expected village which more than one of us had never expected to reach. At last we entered it about four o’clock in the evening.

There was nothing but one wretched inn, which in any other circumstances I would not have used as a dog kennel, and yet to us it seemed a palace.

The next day, when starting, we left five hundred roubles with George, asking him to distribute it among the others.

CHAPTER XXV

FROM this moment all went well, for we found ourselves amidst the vast plains of Siberia, which extend as far as the Arctic Ocean, without a single elevation meriting the title of hill. Thanks to the orders which Ivan carried, the best horses were at our service; then at night-time, to guard against accidents such as those to which we had nearly fallen victims, ten or a dozen men armed with carbines or lances accompanied us as an escort, galloping on either side of our sleigh. We passed through Ekaterinburg without stopping at the magnificent jewellers' shops, which make it sparkle like a fairy city, and appear all the more marvellous to us, who had just emerged from a wilderness of snow, where for three nights we had found no better shelter than a hut; then Tiumen where Siberia proper begins; at last we entered the valley of the Tobol and seven days after leaving the terrible Ural Mountains we reached at nightfall the capital of Siberia.

We were overwhelmed with fatigue, yet Louise, sustained by the intensity of her love, which increased in volume the nearer she approached its object, would only stop long enough to take a bath. About two in the morning we started for Koslovo, a little town on the banks of the Irtich, which had been fixed upon as quarters for about twenty of the convicts, among whom was Count Alexis, as I have already mentioned.

We drew up at the residence of the Captain in command of the colony, and found the Emperor's order of great assistance as usual. We were told that the Count was still at Koslovo and that he was in excellent health. I settled with Louise that I should go and see him immediately to inform him of her arrival. I therefore asked the Governor if I might see him, and received the necessary permission without any difficulty. As I did not know where the Count resided and could not speak the language of the country, I was given a Cossack as a guide.

We proceeded to a part of the village, which was enclosed by high palisades, with gates guarded by sentinels, and consisted of nearly twenty houses. The Cossack halted and pointed to one of them. I knocked at the door with a strange beating of the heart, and heard the voice of Alexis answer, “Come in.” I opened the door and found him lying fully dressed on his bed, with his arm hanging down and an open book on the floor.

I stood on the threshold looking at him and stretching out my arms, while he rose in astonishment and did not appear able to recognise me “Yes,” I said, “it is I.”

“What! you! you!”

Then he leapt from his bed and threw his arms round my neck; the next moment he started back as if terrified.

“Good God!” he cried, “you must be exiled too, and I am unlucky enough to be the cause of it.”

“Make yourself easy,” I said, “I have come here as a tourist.”

He smiled bitterly.

“A tourist in the depths of Siberia, nine hundred leagues from St. Petersburg. Explain yourself.. or rather.. first of all, can you give me any news of Louise?”

“Excellent and the very latest. I have just left her.”

“You have just left her! You must have left her a month ago?”

“Five minutes ago.”

“Good God!” cried Alexis, turning pale, “what are you saying?”

“The truth.”

“Louise?...”

“Is here.”

“Oh! noble-hearted woman!” he murmured, raising his hands to Heaven, while two great tears rolled down his cheeks.

Then after a moment’s silence, during which he seemed to be thanking God, he asked: — ” Where is she?”

“At the Governor’s house.”

“Let us hasten there.”

Then he stopped dead.

“What a fool I am! I forgot that I am penned in and cannot leave my hut without permission from the Sergeant 111 charge. My dear friend, go and fetch Louise, that I may see her, and fold her in my arms; or rather stay here, the man can go. Meanwhile we will talk about her.”

He said a few words to the Cossack, who left us to execute the commission.

Then I told Alexis all that had happened since his arrest; Louise’s determination, how she had sold everything, how she had been robbed, her interview with the Emperor, his kindness to her, our departure, from St. Petersburg, our arrival at Moscow, our reception by his mother and sisters, who had taken possession of his child; then I spoke of our departure, our weariness, our dangers; the terrible journey across the Urals and finally of our arrival at Tobolsk and Koslovo. The Count listened to my narrative as if it had been a fairy tale, every now and then catching hold of my hands and looking me in the face to assure Himself that it was really myself who was there in front of him and speaking to him. Then he got up impatiently and walked to the door, but seeing no one coming, he sat down again, asking me some fresh details, which it did not weary me to repeat any more than it did him to listen to. At length the door opened and the Cossack came in alone.

"Well?" asked the Count, turning pale.

"The Governor replied that you ought to know that the prisoners are forbidden...

"What?"

"To see women."

The Count put his hand to his forehead and fell back into his chair. I began to feel doubtful myself and I looked at the Count, whose face betrayed the tumult of emotion that was passing through his breast. After a moment's silence, he turned to the Cossack: "Can I speak to the Sergeant?" he said.

"He was with the Governor when I was there."

"Will you wait for him at the door, and beg him from me to have the kindness to call here?"

The Cossack bowed and left us.

"These people obey you still?" said I to the Count.

"Yes, from habit," he answered with a smile. "But did you ever hear of anything like this anything so dreadful? here she is within a stone's throw, after journeying nine hundred leagues to join me, and I am not able to see her."

"But there must be some mistake," I said, "they must have misunderstood the instructions, they will change their minds about it,"

Alexis smiled doubtfully.

"Then, we can petition the Emperor."

"Yes, and the answer will come in three months' time; and meanwhile... My God? you don't know what this country is!"

Then a look of despair came into the Count's eyes which frightened me.

“Well; if it must be,” I answered with a smile, “during these three months I will keep you company; we will talk of her and that will help you to grow patient, besides the heart of the Governor will be softened or he will keep his eyes shut.”

Alexis looked at me and smiled.

“Look here,” said he, “you must not expect anything of the sort. All is ice here like the ground. If there is an order the order will be carried out, and I shall not see her.’’

“This is terrible,” I murmured.

Just then the Sergeant came in.

“Sir!” cried Alexis, rushing up to him, “a woman by the strength of her heroic and sublime devotion, has travelled from St. Petersburg to join me; she is here on the spot after running countless dangers, and this man tells me I may not see her... Surely he is mistaken?”

“No sir,” replied the Sergeant icily; “you know quite well that prisoners are not allowed to see females.”

“And yet, sir, Prince Trubetski got the permission which has been refused me; is that because he is a Prince?”

“No, sir,” answered the Sergeant, “but because the Princess is his wife.”

“If Louise was my wife,” cried the Count, “would they offer no opposition to my seeing her?”

“None, sir.”

“Oh!” cried the Count, as if he had been relieved of a heavy load.

Then a moment later he said to the Sergeant: — ” Sir, will you allow a priest to come and see me?”

“I will send for one at once,” answered the Sergeant.

“Will you, my friend,” continued the Count, pressing my hands, “after acting as a companion and defender of Louise, carry out the duties of a witness and a father?”

I threw my arms round his neck and embraced him with tears; I could not utter a word.

“Go and find Louise,” said the Count, “and tell her we shall see her tomorrow.”

On the morrow at ten o’clock in the morning, Louise, escorted by the Governor and myself and Count Alexis, followed by Prince Troubetski and all the other exiles, entered the doors of the little church at Koslovo, bowed in silence before the altar, and there exchanged their first words.

By the solemn “Yes “they were bound to each other for life. The Emperor, in an autograph letter addressed to the Governor, and delivered to him by Ivan, unknown to us, had ordered that Louise was not to go to the Count except as his wife.

As we have noted, the Count had anticipated the Emperor’s wishes.

On returning to St. Petersburg I found letters recalling me urgently to France.

It was now February and the sea route was impracticable, but sleighing was in full swing and I did not hesitate to travel by that method.

I found it less a wrench to leave the city of Peter the Great. Although the Emperor had had the kindness not to fill up my place in the regiment in spite of my absence without leave, I had lost by the conspiracy a good number of my pupils, and I could not help feeling sorry for the misguided young men, however guilty they may have been.

I took the same route that I had followed on my journey eighteen months before, and again I crossed old Muscovy and a part of Poland, but this time over a vast carpet of snow.

I had just entered the realms of his Majesty the King of Prussia, when putting my head out of the sleigh, I caught sight, to my great astonishment, of a man of about fifty, tall, thin and dried up, wearing a black coat, vest and trousers, on his feet pumps with buckles, on his head an opera hat, and under his left arm a pocket violin or kit, while with his right he flourished a bow as if it had been a switch. The costume appeared to me so strange and the situation so singular for a man to be taking a walk on the snow in twenty-five to thirty degrees of frost, that I stopped and waited for him to come up; moreover I fancied I saw the stranger making signs to me. As soon as he saw that I had halted, he hastened his steps, but still with deliberation and a certain combination of dignity and grace. As he approached, I thought I recognized the poor beggar, and presently he was so near that I could not be mistaken. It was my fellow countryman whom I had met walking on the high road just outside of St. Petersburg and now was meeting again in the same attire, but in much more serious circumstances. When he was two paces from my sleigh, he halted, arranged his feet in the third position, passed his bow under the strings of the violin, and catching hold of the crown of his hat with three fingers: “Sir,” said he, with all the punctiliousness of the chirographic art, “may I presume to ask in what quarter of the world I happen to be?”

“Sir,” I replied, “you happen to be just beyond the Niemen, about thirty leagues from Kônigsberg; you have on your left Friedland and on the right the Baltic.”

“Ha! ha!” said the stranger, greatly pleased at finding from my answer that he was in a civilized land.

“Now, sir, it is my turn,” I said, “will you kindly tell me how you happen to be on foot in such a dress, with black silk hose, an opera hat on your head and a violin under your arm, thirty leagues from any dwelling, and in such a frost?”

“Well, it is peculiar, is it not. This is how it happened. But you are quite sure I am beyond the territory of his Majesty the Czar of All the Russias?’

“The ground you stand on is part of the dominions of King Frederick William of Prussia.”

“Well! you must know that I had the misfortune to give dancing lessons to almost all the unhappy young men who were wicked enough to plot against his Majesty’s life. As I was constantly passing from one house to another in the exercise of my profession, the foolish young fellows committed to my charge incriminating letters, which I delivered, sir, upon my word of honour, as innocently as if they had been simply invitations to a dinner or a ball; the conspiracy came to a head as you know perhaps.”

I bowed in assent.

“By some means or other they found out the part I had played, with the result, sir, that I was thrown into prison. My position was a serious one, for I was a party, it would seem, to withholding information. It is true that I knew nothing, and therefore, you see, I could not possibly reveal anything; that is plain, is it not?”

Again I signified my assent.

“However, just as I was expecting to be hanged, I was put into a closed sleigh, where, by the way, I was very comfortable, but I was only allowed out twice a day to get my breakfast and dinner.”

For a third time I bowed to show that I understood him.

“In short, sir, only a quarter of an hour ago the sleigh, after depositing me in the middle of the plain, set off again at a gallop, yes, sir, at a gallop, without saying a word to me, that was not very polite, but at the same time without asking me for a tip and that is very nice. I quite imagined I was in Tobolsk beyond the Ural Mountains. Perhaps you know Tobolsk, sir?”

Again I bowed in assent.

“But on the contrary I am in a Catholic country, or I should say Lutheran; for of course you know, sir, that the Prussians are followers of Luther.” I signified that my knowledge went so far.

“Well, sir, I must now beg your pardon for having disturbed you and I must ask you to tell me what kind of conveyance I can secure in this happy country.”

“In which direction are you travelling, sir?”

“I want to go to France, I still have my money, sir, I tell you this because you do not look like a thief. I say, I still have my money, quite a little fortune, — an annuity of nearly twelve hundred francs, not enough to live in grand style, but with economy one can jog along on it. So I wish to return to France and spend my twelve hundred francs, far from all human vicissitudes and the searching eye of government. To return to France, sir, once more to see my native land, is the reason why I am asking you about the means of conveyance the least... the least expensive.”

“Upon my word, my dear Vestris,” said I changing my tone, for I began to take pity on the poor devil, who, though preserving his smiles and his chorographic pose, was beginning to shiver in all his limbs, “as regards a means of conveyance, I have one quite simple and easy, if you like to adopt it.”

“What is that, sir?”

“I likewise am returning to France, to my own country. Get up with me into my sleigh, and when we get to Paris, I will put you down in the Boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle, precisely as I set you down at the Hotel Angleterre, when we arrived at St. Petersburg.”

“Why, can it really be you, my dear M. Grisier?”

“At your service, sir; but let us lose no more time. You are in a hurry and so am I; take half my furs and get yourself warm.”

“To tell the truth I am beginning to feel cold. Ah!...”

“Put down your violin; there is plenty of room.”

“No thank you; with your permission I will carry it under my arm.”

“Just as you like. Now, post boy, drive on!” and we started off again at full gallop.

Nine days later, to the very hour, I put down my travelling companion in front of the entrance to the Opera. I have never seen him since.

As for myself, since I had not been clever enough to make my fortune, I continued to give lessons. God has blessed my skill, and among my very numerous pupils not one has lost his life in a duel. No greater piece of good fortune can befall a Fencing Master.

THE CONSPIRATORS

A translation of LE CHEVALIER D’HARMENTAL

Anonymous translation, 1893

This historical novel was first published in 1842 and established Dumas’ reputation as a novelist, at a time when he was only well-known for his theatre work. The novel was a collaboration with Auguste Maquet, with whom Dumas wrote many later works. Historically, the novel deals with the so-called Cellamare conspiracy, devised against the Regent of France, Philippe d’Orléans (1674–1723). Dumas’ first true historical novel features a number of ingredients of future and more famous works, as well as including several appearances of d’Artagnan, two years before the release of *The Three Musketeers*. The novel also led to a successful stage adaptation under the same name.

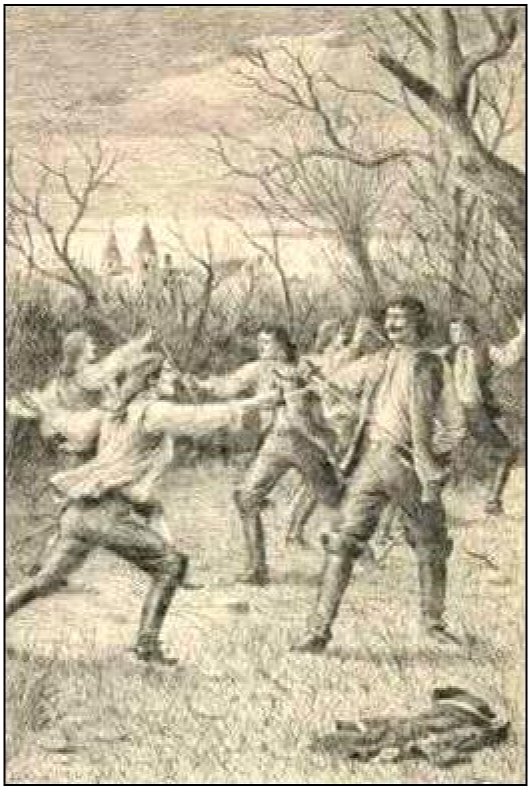

An original illustration

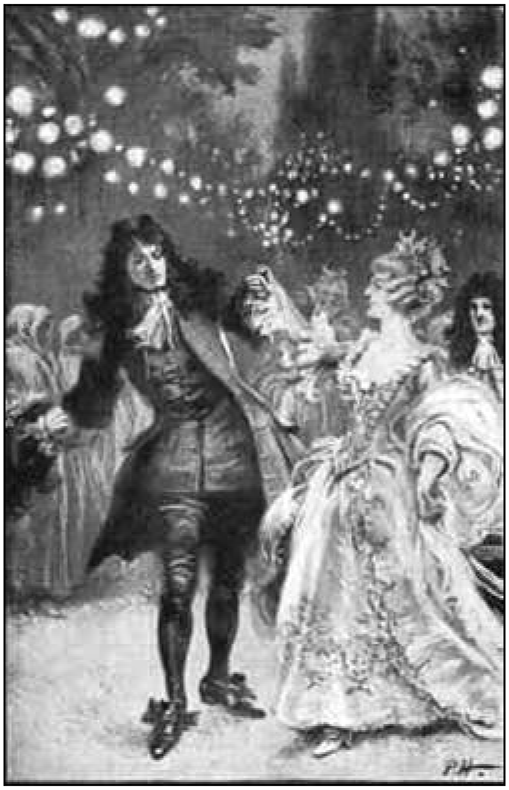

An illustration from an early English edition

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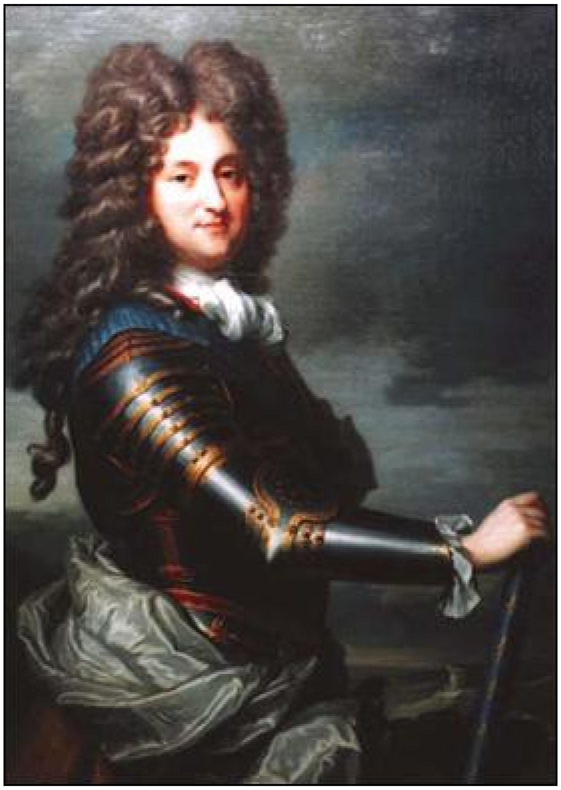

Philippe d’Orléans, against whom the Cellamare Conspiracy was directed

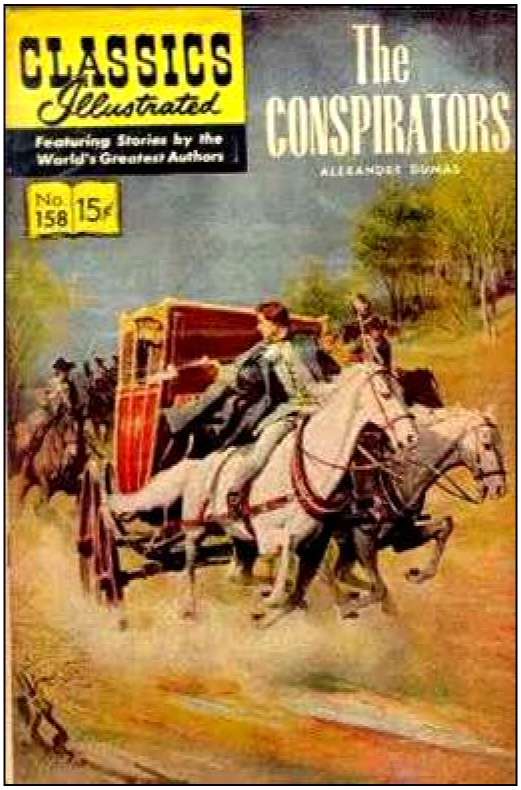
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The CONSPIRATORS
ALEXANDRE DUMAS

The publication of an English language 1950s comic version, showing the popularity of Dumas' novels abroad

The 1966 French television adaptation

CHAPTER I.

CAPTAIN ROQUEFINETTE.

On the 22d of March, in the year of our Lord 1718, a young cavalier of high bearing, about twenty-six or twenty-eight years of age, mounted on a pure-bred Spanish charger, was waiting, toward eight o'clock in the morning, at that end of the Pont Neuf which abuts on the Quai de l'Ecole.

He was so upright and firm in his saddle, that one might have imagined him to be placed there as a sentinel by the Lieutenant-General of Police, Messire Voyer d'Argenson. After waiting about half an hour, during which time he impatiently examined the clock of the Samaritaine, his glance, wandering till then, appeared to rest with satisfaction on an individual who, coming from the Place Dauphine, turned to the right, and advanced toward him.

The man who thus attracted the attention of the young chevalier was a powerfully-built fellow of five feet ten, wearing, instead of a peruke, a forest of his own black hair, slightly grizzled, dressed in a manner half-bourgeois, half-military, ornamented with a shoulder-knot which had once been crimson, but from exposure to sun and rain had become a dirty orange. He was armed with a long sword slung in a belt, and which bumped ceaselessly against the calves of his legs. Finally, he wore a hat once furnished with a plume and lace, and which — in remembrance, no doubt, of its past splendor — its owner had stuck so much over his left ear, that it seemed as if only a miracle of equilibrium could keep it in its place. There was altogether in the countenance and in the carriage and bearing of the man (who seemed from forty to forty-five years of age, and who advanced swaggering and keeping the middle of the road, curling his mustache with one hand, and with the other signing to the carriages to give place), such a character of insolent carelessness, that the cavalier who watched him smiled involuntarily, as he murmured to himself, "I believe this is my man."

In consequence of this probability, he walked straight up to the new-comer, with the evident intention of speaking to him. The latter, though he evidently did not know the cavalier, seeing that he was going to address him, placed himself in the third position, and waited, one hand on his sword and the other on his mustache, to hear what the person who was coming up had to say to him. Indeed, as the man with the orange ribbon had foreseen, the young cavalier stopped his horse by him, and touching his hat — ”Sir,” said he, “I think I may conclude, from your appearance and manner, that you are a gentleman; am I mistaken?”

“No, palsam-bleu!” replied he to whom this strange question was addressed, touching his hat in his turn. “I am delighted that my appearance speaks so well for me, for, however little you would think that you were giving me my proper title, you may call me captain.”

“I am enchanted that you are a soldier; it is an additional security to me that you are incapable of leaving a brave man in distress.”

“Welcome, provided always the brave man has no need of my purse, for I confess, freely, that I have just left my last crown in a cabaret on the Port de la Tonnelle.”

“Nobody wants your purse, captain; on the contrary, I beg you to believe that mine is at your disposal.”

“To whom have I the honor to speak?” asked the captain, visibly touched by this reply, “and in what can I oblige you?”

“I am the Baron Rene de Valef,” replied the cavalier.

“I think,” interrupted the captain, “that I knew, in the Flemish wars, a family of that name.”

“It was mine, since we are from Liege.” The two speakers exchanged bows.

“You must know then,” continued the Baron de Valef, “that the Chevalier Raoul d’Harmental, one of my most intimate friends, last night, in my company, picked up a quarrel, which will finish this morning by a meeting. Our adversaries were three, and we but two. I went this morning to the houses of the Marquis de Gacé and Comte de Sourgis, but unfortunately neither the one nor the other had passed the night in his bed; so, as the affair could not wait, as I must set out in two hours for Spain, and that we absolutely require a second, or rather a third, I installed myself on the Pont Neuf with the intention of addressing the first gentleman who passed. You passed, and I addressed myself to you.”

“And you have done right, pardieu! rest satisfied, baron, I am your man. What hour is fixed for the meeting?”

“Half-past nine this morning.”

“Where will it take place?”

“At the Port Maillot.”

“Diable! there is no time to lose; but you are on horseback and I am on foot; how shall we manage that?”

“There is a way, captain.”

“What is it?”

“It is that you should do me the honor of mounting behind me.”

“Willingly, baron.”

“I warn you, however,” added the young cavalier, with a slight smile, “that my horse is rather spirited.”

“Oh, I know him!” said the captain, drawing back a step, and looking at the beautiful animal with the eye of a connoisseur; “if I am not mistaken, he was bred between the mountains of Grenada and the Sierra Morena. I rode such a one at Almanza, and I have often made him lie down like a sheep when he wanted to carry me off at a gallop, only by pressing him with my knees.”

“You reassure me. To horse then, captain.” — — ”Here I am, baron.”

And without using the stirrup, which the young cavalier left free for him, with a single bound the captain sprang on to the croup.

The baron had spoken truly; his horse was not accustomed to so heavy a load, therefore he attempted to get rid of it. Neither had the captain exaggerated, and the animal soon felt that he had found his master; so that, after a few attempts, which had no other effect than to show to the passers-by the address of the two cavaliers, he became obedient, and went at a swinging trot down the Quai de l’Ecole, which at that time was nothing but a wharf, crossed at the same pace the Quai du Louvre and the Quai des Tuileries, through the gate of the Conference, and leaving on the left the road to Versailles, threaded the great avenue of the Champs-Elysées, which now leads to the triumphal Arc de l’Etoile. Arrived at the Pont d’Antin, the Baron de Valef slackened his horse’s pace a little, for he found that he had ample time to arrive at the Port Maillot at the hour fixed.

The captain profited by this respite.

“May I, without indiscretion, ask why we are going to fight? I wish, you understand, to know that, in order to regulate my conduct toward my adversary, and to know whether it is worth killing him.”

“That is only fair,” answered the baron; “I will tell you everything as it passed. We were supping last night at La Fillon’s. Of course you know La Fillon, captain?”

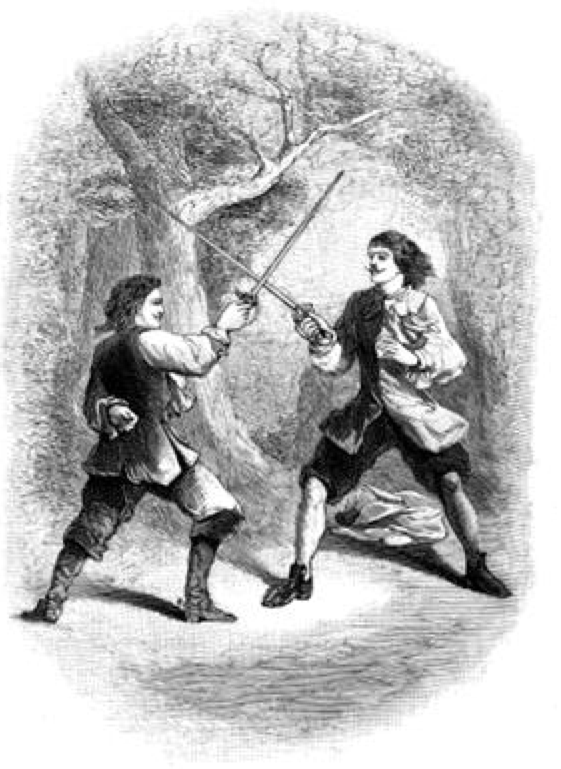

”Pardieu! it was I who started her in the world, in 1705, before my Italian campaign.”

“Well,” replied the baron, laughing, “you may boast of a pupil who does you honor. Briefly, I supped there tete-à-tete with D’Harmental.”

“Without any one of the fair sex?”

“Oh, mon Dieu, yes! I must tell you that D’Harmental is a kind of Trappist, only going to La Fillon’s for fear of the reputation of not going there; only loving one woman at a time, and in love for the moment with the little D’Averne, the wife of the lieutenant of the guards.”

“Very good!”

“We were there, chatting, when we heard a merry party enter the room next to ours. As our conversation did not concern anybody else, we kept silence, and, without intending it, heard the conversation of our neighbors. See what chance is. Our neighbors talked of the only thing which we ought not to have heard.”

“Of the chevalier’s mistress, perhaps?”

“Exactly. At the first words of their discourse which reached me, I rose, and tried to get Raoul away, but instead of following me, he put his hand on my shoulder, and made me sit down again. ‘Then Philippe is making love to the little D’Averne?’ said one. ‘Since the fete of the Marechal d’Estrée, where she gave him a sword-belt with some verses, in which she compared him to Mars,' replied another voice. 'That is eight days ago,' said a third. 'Yes,' replied the first. 'Oh! she made a kind of resistance, either that she really held by poor D'Harmental, or that she knew that the regent only likes those who resist him. At last this morning, in exchange for a basketful of flowers and jewels, she has consented to receive his highness.'"

"Ah!" said the captain, "I begin to understand; the chevalier got angry."

"Exactly. Instead of laughing, as you or I would have done, and profiting by this circumstance to get back his brevet of colonel, which was taken from him under pretext of economy, D'Harmental became so pale that I thought he was going to faint; then, approaching the partition, and striking with his fist, to insure silence, 'Gentlemen,' said he, 'I am sorry to contradict you, but the one who said that Madame d'Averne had granted a rendezvous to the regent, or to any other, has told a lie.'

"'It was I who said it, and who repeat it, and if it displeases you, my name is Lafare, captain of the guards.' 'And mine, Fargy,' said a second voice. 'And mine, Ravanne,' said the third. 'Very well, gentlemen,' replied D'Harmental, 'to-morrow, from nine to half-past, at the Port Maillot.' And he sat down again opposite me. They talked of something else, and we finished our supper. That is the whole affair, captain, and you now know as much as I."

The captain gave vent to a kind of exclamation which seemed to say, "This is not very serious;" but in spite of this semi-disapprobation, he resolved none the less to support, to the best of his power, the cause of which he had so unexpectedly been made the champion, however defective that cause might appear to him in principle; besides, even had he wished it, he had gone too far to draw back. They had now arrived at the Port Maillot, and a young cavalier, who appeared to be waiting, and who had from a distance perceived the baron and the captain, put his horse to the gallop, and approached rapidly; this was the Chevalier d'Harmental.

"My dear chevalier," said the Baron de Valef, grasping his hand, "permit me, in default of an old friend, to present to you a new one. Neither Sourgis nor Gacé were at home. I met this gentleman on the Pont Neuf, and told him our embarrassment, and he offered himself to free us from it, with the greatest good will."

"I am doubly grateful to you then, my dear Valef," replied the chevalier, casting on the captain a look which betrayed a slight astonishment. "And to you, monsieur," continued he. "I must excuse myself for making your acquaintance by mixing you up thus with an unpleasant affair. But you will afford me one day or another an opportunity to return your kindness, and I hope and beg that, an opportunity arising, you would dispose of me as I have of you."

"Well said, chevalier," replied the captain, leaping to the ground; "and in speaking thus you might lead me to the end of the world. The proverb is right: 'It is only mountains that don't meet.'"

"Who is this original?" asked D'Harmental of Valef, while the captain stamped the calls with his right foot, to stretch his legs.

"Ma foi! I do not know," said Valef, "but I do know that we should be in a great difficulty without him. Some poor officer of fortune, without doubt, whom the peace has thrown abroad like so many others; but we will judge him by-and-by, by his works."

"Well!" said the captain, becoming animated with the exercise he was taking, "where are our adversaries?"

"When I came up to you," replied D'Harmental, "they had not arrived, but I perceived at the end of the avenue a kind of hired carriage, which will serve as an excuse if they are late; and indeed," added the chevalier, pulling out a beautiful watch set with diamonds, "they are not behind time, for it is hardly half-past nine."

"Let us go," said Valef, dismounting and throwing the reins to D'Harmental's valet, "for if they arrive at the rendezvous while we stand gossiping here, it will appear as though we had kept them waiting."

"You are right," said D'Harmental; and, dismounting, he advanced toward the entrance of the wood, followed by his two companions. — —"Will you not take anything, gentlemen," said the landlord of the restaurant, who was standing at his door, waiting for custom.

"Yes, Maitre Durand," replied D'Harmental, who wished, in order that they might not be disturbed, to make it appear as if they had come from an ordinary walk, "breakfast for three. We are going to take a turn in the avenue, and then we shall come back." And he let three louis fall into the hands of the inn-keeper.

The captain saw the shine of the three gold pieces one after another, and quickly reckoned up what might be had at the "Bois de Boulogne" for seventy-two francs; but as he knew whom he had to deal with, he judged that a little advice from him would not be useless; consequently, in his turn approaching the maitre d'hotel —

"Listen, my friend," said he; "you know that I understand the price of things, and that no one can deceive me about the amount of a tavern bill. Let the wines be good and varied, and let the breakfast be copious, or I will break your head! Do you understand?"

"Be easy, captain," answered Durand, "it is not a customer like you whom I would deceive."

"All right; I have eaten nothing for twelve hours. Arrange accordingly."

The hotel-keeper bowed, as knowing what that meant, and went back to his kitchen, beginning to think that he had made a worse bargain than he had hoped.

As to the captain, after having made a last sign of recognition, half amicable, half threatening, he quickened his pace, and rejoined the chevalier and the baron, who had stopped to wait for him.

The chevalier was not wrong as to the situation of the hired carriage. At the turn of the first alley he saw his three adversaries getting out of it. They were, as we have already said, the Marquis de Lafare, the Comte de Fargy, and the Chevalier de Ravanne.

Our readers will now permit us to give them some short details of these three personages, who will often reappear in the course of this history. Lafare, the best known of the three, thanks to the poetry which he has left behind him, was a man of about thirty-six or thirty-eight years, of a frank and open countenance, and of an inexhaustible gayety and good humor. Always ready to engage with all comers, at table, at play, or at arms, and that without malice or bitterness; much run after by the fair sex, and much beloved by the regent, who had named him his captain of the guards, and who, during the ten years in which he had admitted him into his intimacy, had found him his rival sometimes, but his faithful servant always. Thus the prince, who had the habit of giving nicknames to all his boon companions, as well as to his mistresses, never called him any other than "bon enfant." Nevertheless, for some time the popularity of Lafare, established as it was by agreeable antecedents, was fast lowering among the ladies of the court and the girls of the opera. There was a report current that he was going to be so ridiculous as to become a well-behaved man. It is true that some people, in order to preserve his reputation for him, whispered that this apparent conversion had no other cause than the jealousy of Mademoiselle de Conti, daughter of the duchess, and granddaughter of the great Conde, who it was said honored the regent’s captain of the guards with a particular affection. His alliance with the Duc de Richelieu, who on his side was supposed to be the lover of Mademoiselle de Charolais, gave consistency to this report.

The Comte de Fargy, generally called “Le Beau Fargy,” thus substituting the title which he had received from nature for that which his fathers had left him was cited, as his name indicates, as the handsomest man of his time, which in that age of gallantry imposed obligations from which he had never recoiled, and from which he had always come with honor. Indeed, it was impossible to be a more perfect figure than he was. At once strong and graceful, supple and active, he seemed to unite all the different perfections of a hero of romance of that time. Add to this a charming head, uniting the most opposite styles of beauty; that is to say, black hair and blue eyes, strongly-marked features, and a complexion like a woman. Unite with all these, wit, loyalty, the greatest courage, and you will have an idea of the high consideration which Le Fargy must have enjoyed from the society of that mad period.

As to the Chevalier de Ravanne, who has left us such strange memoirs of his early life, that, in spite of their authenticity, one is tempted to believe them apocryphal, he was still but a youth, rich and of noble birth, who entered into life by a golden door, and ran into all its pleasures with the fiery imprudence and eagerness of his age. He carried to excess, as so many do at eighteen, all the vices and all the virtues of his day. It will be easily understood how proud he was to serve as second to men like Lafare and Fargy in a meeting which was likely to “make a noise.”

CHAPTER II.

THE MEETING.

As soon as Lafare, Fargy, and Ravanne saw their adversaries appear at the corner of the path, they walked to meet them. Arrived at ten paces from each other, they all took off their hats and bowed with that elegant politeness which was a characteristic of the aristocracy of the eighteenth century, and advanced some steps thus bareheaded with a smile on their lips, so that to the eyes of the passer-by, ignorant of the cause of their réunion, they would have appeared like friends enchanted to meet.

“Gentlemen,” said the Chevalier d’Harmental, to whom the first word by right belonged, “I hope that neither you nor we have been followed; but it is getting late, and we might be disturbed here. I think it would be wise in us to find a more retired spot, where we shall be more at ease to transact the little business which we have in hand.”

“Gentlemen,” said Ravanne, “I know one which will suit you, a hundred yards from here — a true cover.”

“Come, let us follow the child,” said the captain; “innocence leads to safety.”

Ravanne turned round, and examined, from head to foot, our friend with the yellow ribbons.

“If you are not previously engaged, my strapping friend,” said he, in a bantering tone, “I claim the preference.”

“Wait a moment, Ravanne,” interrupted Lafare; “I have some explanations to give to Monsieur d’Harmental.”

“Monsieur Lafare,” replied the chevalier, “your courage is so well known, that the explanations you offer me are a proof of delicacy for which I thank you; but these explanations would only delay us uselessly, and we have no time to lose.”

“Bravo!” cried Ravanne, “that is what I call speaking, chevalier. As soon as we have cut each other’s throats, I hope you will grant me your friendship. I have heard you much spoken of in good quarters, and have long wished to make your acquaintance.”

"Come, come, Ravanne," said Fargy, "since you have undertaken to be our guide, show us the way."

Ravanne sprang into the wood like a young fawn: his five companions followed. At the end of about ten minutes' walking, during which the six adversaries had maintained the most profound silence, either from fear of being heard, or from that natural feeling which makes a man in the moment of danger reflective for a time, they found themselves in the midst of a glade, surrounded on all sides by a screen of trees.

"Well," said Ravanne, looking round him in a satisfied manner, "what do you say to the locality?"

"I say that if you boast of having discovered it," said the captain, "you are a strange kind of Christopher Columbus. If you had told me it was here you were coming, I could have guided you with my eyes shut." — — "Well," replied Ravanne, "we will endeavor that you shall leave it in the same manner."

"It is with you that my business lies, Monsieur de Lafare," said D'Harmental, throwing his hat on the ground.

"Yes, monsieur," replied the captain of the guards, following the example of the chevalier; "and at the same time I know that nothing could give me more honor and more pain than a rencontre with you, particularly for such a cause."

D'Harmental smiled as a man on whom this flower of politeness was not lost, but his only answer was to draw his sword.

"It appears, my dear baron," said Fargy, addressing himself to Valef, "that you are on the point of setting out for Spain."

"I ought to have left last night; and nothing less than the pleasure I promised myself in seeing you this morning would have detained me till now, so important is my errand."

"Diable! you distress me," said Fargy, drawing, "for if I should have the misfortune to retard you, you are the man to bear me deadly malice."

"Not at all. I should know that it was from pure friendship, my dear count," replied Valef; "so do your best, I beg, for I am at your orders."

"Come, then, monsieur," said Ravanne to the captain, who was folding his coat neatly, and placing it by his hat, "you see that I am waiting for you."

"Do not be impatient, my fine fellow," said the old soldier, continuing his preparations with the phlegm natural to him; "one of the most essential qualities in arms is sang-froid. I was like you at your age; but after the third or fourth sword-blow I received, I understood that I was on the wrong road, and I returned to the right path. There," added he, at last drawing his sword, which I have said was of extreme length.

"Peste!" said Ravanne, throwing a glance on his adversary's weapon, "what a charming implement you have there! It reminds me of the great spit in my mother's kitchen; and I am grieved that I did not order the maitre-d'hotel to bring it me, as a match to yours."

"Your mother is a worthy woman, and her 'cuisine' is a good one; I have heard both spoken of with great praise, Monsieur le Chevalier," replied the captain with an almost paternal manner; "I should be grieved to take you from one or the other for a trifle like that which procures me the honor of crossing swords with you. Suppose, then, that you are only taking a lesson from your fencing-master, and keep the distance."

The recommendation was useless. Ravanne was exasperated by his adversary's calmness, to which, in spite of his courage, his young and ardent blood did not allow him to attain. He attacked the captain with such fury that their swords engaged at the hilt. The captain made a step back.

"Ah! you give ground, my tall friend."

"To give ground is not to fly, my little chevalier," replied the captain; "it is an axiom of the art which I advise you to consider; besides, I am not sorry to study your play. Ah! you are a pupil of Berthelot, apparently; he is a good master, but he has one great fault: it is not teaching to parry. Stay, look at this," continued he, replying by a thrust in "seconde" to a straight thrust; "if I had lunged, I should have spitted you like a lark."

Ravanne was furious, for he had felt on his breast the point of his adversary's sword, but so lightly that he might have taken it for the button of a foil. His anger redoubled at the conviction that he owed his life to the captain, and his attacks became more numerous and more furious than ever.

"Stop, stop," said the captain; "now you are going crazy, and trying to blind me; fie! fie! young man; at the chest, morbleu! Ah! at the face again; you will force me to disarm you. Again! Go and pick up your sword, young man; and come back hopping on one leg to calm yourself."

And with a sudden twist he whipped Ravanne's sword out of his hand and sent it flying some twenty paces from him. This time Ravanne profited by the advice. He went slowly to pick up his sword, and came back quietly to the captain; but the young man was as pale as his satin vest, on which was apparent a small drop of blood.

"You are right, captain," said he, "and I am still but a child; but this meeting will, I hope, help to make a man of me. Some passes more, if you please, that it may not be said you have had all the honors."

And he put himself on guard. The captain was right; the chevalier only required to be calm to make him a formidable adversary: thus, at the first thrust of this third engagement, he saw that he must attend solely to his own defense; but his superiority in the art of fencing was too decided for his young adversary to obtain any advantage over him. The matter ended as it was easy to foresee. The captain disarmed Ravanne a second time; but this time he went and picked up the sword himself, and with a politeness of which at first one might have supposed him incapable.

"Monsieur le Chevalier," said he, extending his hand to Ravanne, "you are a brave young man; but believe in an old frequenter of schools and taverns, who was at the Flemish wars before you were born, at the Italian when you were in your cradle, and at the Spanish while you were a page; change your master. Leave Berthelot, who has already taught you all he knows, and take Bois-Robert; and may the devil fly away with me, if in six months you are not as good a fencer as myself."

"Thanks for your lesson," said Ravanne, taking the hand of the captain, while two tears, which he could not restrain, flowed down his cheeks; "I hope it will profit me."

And, receiving his sword, he did what the captain had already done — sheathed it. They then both cast their eyes on their companions to see how things were going. The combat was over. Lafare was seated on the ground, with his back leaning against a tree: he had been run through the body, but happily the point of the sword had struck against a rib, and had glanced along the bone, so that the wound seemed at first worse than it really was; still he had fainted — the shock had been so violent. D'Harmental was on his knees before him, endeavoring to staunch the blood with his handkerchief. Fargy and Valef had wounded each other at the same moment. One was struck in the thigh, the other run through the arm; both had apologized, promising to be friends for the future.

"Look, young man," said the captain, showing Ravanne these different episodes of the field of battle. "Look on that, and meditate. There is the blood of three brave gentlemen flowing — probably for a folly."

“Faith, captain,” answered Ravanne, quite calmed down, “I believe you are right, and that you are the only one of us all that has got common sense.”

At that moment Lafare opened his eyes and recognized D’Harmental in the man who was tending him.

“Chevalier,” said he, “take a friend’s advice; send me a kind of surgeon whom you will find in the carriage, and whom I brought with me in case of accident. Then gain Paris as fast as possible. Show yourself to-night at the opera ball, and if they ask you about me, say that it is a week since you have seen me. As to me, you may be quite easy. Your name shall not pass my lips; and if you get into any unpleasant discussion with the police, let me know at once, and we will manage so that the affair shall have no consequences.”

“Thanks, Monsieur le Marquis,” answered D’Harmental, “I quit you because I leave you in better hands than mine; otherwise, believe me, nothing should have separated me from you until I had seen you in your bed.”

“Pleasant journey, my dear Valef,” said Fargy, “for I do not think that scratch will hinder your going. On your return, do not forget that you have a friend at No. 14, Place Louis-le-Grand.”

“And you, my dear Fargy, if you have any commission for Madrid, you have but to say so, and you may rely upon its being executed with the exactitude and zeal of a true comrade.”

And the two friends shook hands as if nothing had passed.

“Adieu, young man, adieu,” said the captain to Ravanne; “do not forget the advice which I have given you. Give up Berthelot, and take to Bois-Robert. Be calm — give ground when it is necessary — parry in time, and you will be one of the best fencers in the kingdom of France. My implement sends its compliments to your mother’s great spit.”

Ravanne, in spite of his presence of mind, could not find anything to reply to the captain; so he contented himself with bowing and going up to Lafare, who appeared to be the most seriously wounded.

As to D’Harmental, Valef, and the captain, they rapidly gained the path, where they found the coach, and inside, the surgeon, who was enjoying a nap. D’Harmental woke him; and showing him the way he must go, told him that the Marquis de Lafare and the Comte de Fargy had need of his services. He also ordered his valet to dismount and follow the surgeon in order to aid him; then, turning toward the captain —

“Captain,” said he, “I do not think that it would be prudent to go and eat the breakfast which we have ordered; therefore receive my thanks for the assistance you have rendered me, and in remembrance of me, as it seems you are on foot, will you accept one of my two horses? you can take one by chance; they are both good, and neither will fail you if you have need to go eight or ten leagues in the hour.”

“Faith, chevalier,” answered the captain, casting a look on the horse which had been so generously offered to him, “there was no need for that. Their blood and their purses are things which gentlemen lend each other every day; but you make the offer with so good a grace that I know not how to refuse you. If you ever have need of me, for anything whatever, remember that I am at your service.”

“If that case should occur, where should I find you, monsieur?” said D’Harmental, smiling.

“I have no fixed residence, chevalier, but you may always hear of me by going to La Fillon’s and asking for La Normande, and inquiring of her for Captain Roquefinette.”

And as the two young men mounted their horses, the captain did the same, not without remarking to himself that D’Harmental had left him the best of the three. Then, as they were near a four-cross road, each one took his own way at a gallop.

The Baron de Valef re-entered by the Barriere de Passy, and returned straight to the arsenal to receive the commissions of the Duchesse de Maine, to whose establishment he belonged, and left the same day for Spain.

Captain Roquefinette made two or three tours round the Bois de Boulogne, walking, trotting, and galloping, in order to appreciate the different qualities of his horse; and having satisfied himself that it was, as the chevalier had told him, a fine and pure-blooded animal, he returned to Durand’s hotel, where he ate, all alone, the breakfast which had been ordered for three. The same day, he took his horse to a dealer and sold it for sixty louis. It was about half what it was worth; but one must be prepared to make sacrifices, if one wishes to realize promptly.

As to the Chevalier d’Harmental, he took the road to La Muette, entered Paris by the great avenue of the Champs-Elysées, and on returning to his home in the Rue de Richelieu, found two letters waiting for him. One of these letters was in a handwriting so well known to him that he trembled from head to foot as he looked at it, and after having taken it up with as much hesitation as if it had been a burning coal, he opened it with a hand whose shaking betrayed the importance he attached to it. It read as follows:

"My dear Chevalier — No one is master of his own heart — you know that; and it is one of the misfortunes of our nature not to be able to love the same person, or the same thing, long at a time. As to myself, I wish at least to have, beyond other women, the merit of never deceiving the man who has been my lover. Do not come, then, at your accustomed hour, for you will be told that I am not at home; and I am so scrupulous that I would not willingly endanger the soul even of a valet or a waiting-maid by making them tell so great a lie.

"Adieu, my dear chevalier. Do not retain too unkind a remembrance of me, and behave so that ten years hence I may still think what I think now — that is to say, that you are one of the noblest gentlemen in France.

"Sophie d'Averne."

"Mon Dieu!" cried D'Harmental, striking his fist on a beautiful buhl table, which he smashed to bits, "if I have killed that poor Lafare I shall never forgive myself."

After this outburst, which comforted him a little, the poor fellow began to walk backward and forward between the door and the window in a manner that showed that he still wanted more deceptions of the same sort in order to arrive at the perfection of moral philosophy which the faithless beauty preached to him. Then, after two or three turns, he saw the other letter, which he had entirely forgotten, lying on the floor. He passed it once or twice, looking at it with a supreme indifference. At last, seeming to think that it would make some diversion on the first, he picked it up disdainfully, opened it slowly, looked at the writing, which was unknown to him, searched for the signature, but there was none; and then, led on by the mysterious air of it, he read as follows:

"Chevalier — If you have in your mind a quarter of the romance, or in your heart half the courage, that your friends give you credit for, some one is ready to offer you an enterprise worthy of you, and the result of which will be at the same time to avenge you on the man you hate most in the world, and to conduct you to a goal more brilliant than you can have hoped for in your wildest dreams. The good genius who will lead you thither by an enchanted road, and in whom you must trust entirely, will expect you this evening at ten o'clock at the opera ball. If you come there unmasked, he will come to you; if you come masked, you will know him by the violet ribbon which he will wear on his left shoulder. The watch-word is 'open sesame;' speak boldly, and a cavern will open to you as wonderful as that of Ali Baba."

"Bravo!" said D'Harmental; "if the genius in the violet ribbons keeps only half his promise, by my honor he has found his man!"

CHAPTER III.

THE CHEVALIER.

The Chevalier Raoul d’Harmental, with whom, before going further, it is necessary that our readers make a better acquaintance, was the last of one of the best families of Nivernais. Although that family had never played an important part in history, yet it did not want a certain notoriety, which it had acquired partly alone and partly by its alliances. Thus the father of the chevalier, the Sire Gaston d’Harmental, had come to Paris in 1682, and had proved his genealogical tree from the year 1399, an heraldic operation which would have given some trouble to more than one duke and peer. In another direction, his maternal uncle, Monsieur de Torigny, before being named chevalier of the order in the promotion of 1694, had confessed, in order to get his sixteen quarterings recognized, that the best part of his scutcheon was that of the D’Harmentals, with whom his ancestors had been allied for three hundred years. Here, then, was enough to satisfy the aristocratic demands of the age of which we write.

The chevalier was neither poor nor rich — that is to say, his father, when he died, had left him an estate in the environs of Nevers, which brought him in from 20,000 to 25,000 livres a year. This was enough to live well in the country, but the chevalier had received an excellent education, and was very ambitious; therefore he had at his majority, in 1711, quitted his home for Paris. His first visit was to the Comte de Torigny, on whom he counted to introduce him at court. Unfortunately, at that time the Comte de Torigny was absent from home; but as he remembered with pleasure the family of D’Harmental, he recommended his nephew to the Chevalier de Villarceaux, who could refuse nothing to his friend the Comte de Torigny, and took the young man to Madame de Maintenon.

Madame de Maintenon had one good quality — she always continued to be the friend of her old lovers. She received the Chevalier d’Harmental graciously, thanks to the old recollections which recommended him to her, and some days afterward, the Marechal de Villars coming to pay his court to her, she spoke a few such pressing words in favor of her young protégé, that the marechal, delighted to find an opportunity of obliging this queen “in partibus,” replied that from that hour he attached the chevalier to his military establishment and would take care to offer him every occasion to justify his august protectress’s good opinion of him.

It was a great joy to the chevalier to see such a door opened to him. The coming campaign was definitive. Louis XIV. had arrived at the last period of his reign — the period of reverses. Tallard and Marsin had been beaten at Hochstett, Villeroy at Ramilies, and Villars himself, the hero of Friedlingen, had lost the famous battle of Malplaquet against Marlborough and Eugene. Europe, kept down for a time by Colbert and Louvois, rose against France, and the situation of affairs was desperate.

The king, like a despairing invalid who changes his doctor every hour, changed ministers every day. Each new attempt but revealed a new weakness. France could not sustain war and could not obtain peace. Vainly she offered to abandon Spain, and limit her frontier. This was not sufficient humiliation. They exacted that the king should allow the hostile armies to cross France, in order to chase his grandson from the throne of Spain; and also that he should give up, as pledges, Cambray, Mettray, La Rochelle, and Bayonne, unless he preferred dethroning him himself, by open force, during the following year.

These were the conditions on which a truce was granted to the conqueror of the plains of Senef, Fleurus, of Steerekirk, and of La Marsalle; to him who had hitherto held in the folds of his royal mantle peace and war; to him who called himself the distributer of crowns, the chastiser of nations, the great, the immortal; to him in whose honor, during the last half century, marbles had been sculptured, bronzes cast, sonnets written, and incense poured.

Louis XIV. had wept in the full council. These tears had produced an army, which was intrusted to Villars.

Villars marched straight to the enemy, whose camp was at Denain, and who slept in security while watching the agony of France. Never had greater responsibility rested on one head. On one blow of Villars hung the salvation of France. The allies had established a line of fortifications between Denain and Marchiennes, which, in their pride of anticipation, Albemarle and Eugene called the grand route to Paris.

Villars resolved to take Denain by surprise, and, Albemarle conquered, to conquer Eugene. In order to succeed in this audacious enterprise, it was necessary to deceive, not only the enemy’s army, but also his own, the success of this coup de main being in its impossibility.

Villars proclaimed aloud his intention of forcing the lines of Landrecies. One night, at an appointed hour, the whole army moves off in the direction of that town. All at once the order is given to bear to the left. His genius throws three bridges over the Scheldt. Villars passes over the river without obstacle, throws himself into the marshes considered impracticable, and where the soldier advances with the water up to his waist; marches straight to the first redoubts; takes them almost without striking a blow; seizes successively a league of fortifications; reaches Denain; crosses the fosse which surrounds it, penetrates into the town, and on arriving at the place, finds his young protégé, the Chevalier d’Harmental, who presents to him the sword of Albemarle, whom he has just taken prisoner.

At this moment the arrival of Eugene is announced. Villars returns, reaches, before him, the bridge over which he must pass, takes possession of it, and awaits him. There the true combat takes place, for the taking of Denain had been but a short skirmish. Eugene makes attack after attack, returns seven times to the head of the bridge, his best troops being destroyed by the artillery which protects it, and the bayonets which defend it. At length, his clothes riddled with balls, and bleeding from two wounds, he mounts his third horse, the conqueror of Hochstett and Malplaquet retreats crying with rage and biting his gloves with fury. In six hours the aspect of things has changed. France is saved, and Louis XIV. is still Le Grand Roi.

D’Harmental had conducted himself like a man who wished to gain his spurs at once. Villars, seeing him covered with blood and dust, recalled to his mind by whom he had been recommended to him; made him draw near, while, in the midst of the field of battle, he wrote on a drum the result of the day.

“Are you wounded?” asked he.

“Yes, Monsieur le Marechal, but so slightly that it is not worth speaking of.”

“Have you the strength to ride sixty leagues, without resting an hour, a minute, a second?”

“I have the strength for anything that will serve the king or you.”

“Then set out instantly; go to Madame de Maintenon; tell her from me what you have seen, and announce to her the courier who will bring the official account.”

D’Harmental understood the importance of the mission with which he was charged, and bleeding and dusty as he was, he mounted a fresh horse and gained the first stage. Twelve hours afterward he was at Versailles.

Villars had foreseen what would happen. At the first words which fell from the mouth of the chevalier, Madame de Maintenon took him by the hand, and conducted him to the king. The king was at work with Voisin, but, contrary to his habit, in his room, for he was a little indisposed.

Madame de Maintenon opened the door, pushed D’Harmental to the feet of the king, and raising her hands to heaven:

“Sire,” said she, “give thanks to God, for your majesty knows we are nothing by ourselves, and it is from Him comes every blessing.”

“What has happened, monsieur? Speak,” said the king quickly, astonished to see this young man, whom he did not know, at his feet.

“Sire,” replied the chevalier, “the camp at Denain is taken. Albemarle is a prisoner. Prince Eugene has taken flight; and the Marechal de Villars places his victory at your majesty’s feet.”

Louis XIV. turned pale, in spite of his command over himself. He felt his limbs fail him, and leaned against the table for support.

”What ails you, sire?” said Madame de Maintenon, hastening to him.

“It is, madame, that I owe you everything,” said Louis XIV.; “you save the king, and your friends save the kingdom.”

Madame de Maintenon bowed and kissed the king’s hand respectfully.

Then Louis XIV., still pale and much moved, passed behind the great curtain which hid the alcove containing his bed, and they heard a prayer of thanksgiving. He then reappeared, grave and calm, as if nothing had happened.

“And now, monsieur,” said he, “tell me the details.”

D’Harmental gave an account of that marvelous battle, which came as by a miracle to save the monarchy; then, when he had finished:

“And have you nothing to tell of yourself?” asked Louis XIV. “If I may judge by the blood and dust with which you are yet covered, you did not remain idle.”

“Sire, I did my best,” said D’Harmental, bowing; “but if there is really anything to tell, I will, with your permission, leave it to the Marechal de Villars.”

"It is well, young man; and if he forgets you by chance, we shall remember. You must be fatigued. Go and rest. I am pleased with you."

D'Harmental retired joyously, Madame de Maintenon conducting him to the door; he kissed her hand again, and hastened to profit by the royal permission. For twenty hours he had neither eaten, drunk, nor slept. On his awaking, they gave him a packet which had been brought from the minister of war. It was his brevet as colonel. Two months afterward peace was made. Spain gave up half its monarchy, but France remained intact. Louis XIV. died. Two distinct and irreconcilable parties were in existence. That of the bastards, centering in the Duc de Maine, and that of the legitimate princes, represented by the Duc d'Orleans. If the Duc de Maine had had the will, the perseverance, the courage of his wife, Louise Benedicte de Conde, perhaps, supported as he was by the royal will, he might have triumphed; but he had to defend himself in broad day, as he was attacked; and the Duc de Maine, weak in mind and heart, dangerous only because he was a coward, was only good at underhand deeds.

He was threatened openly, and his numerous artifices and wiles were of no use to him. In one day, and almost without a struggle, he was precipitated from that height to which he had been raised by the blind love of the old king. His fall was heavy, and above all disgraceful; he retired mutilated, abandoning the regency to his rival, and only preserving, out of all the favors accumulated upon him, the superintendence of the royal education, the command of the artillery, and the precedence over the dukes and peers.

The decree, which had just passed the parliament, struck the old court and all attached to it. Letellier did not wait to be exiled. Madame de Maintenon took refuge at Saint Cyr, and Monsieur le Duc de Maine shut himself up in the beautiful town of Sceaux, to finish his translation of Lucrece.

The Chevalier d'Harmental saw, as a passive spectator, these different intrigues, waiting till they should assume a character which would permit him to take part in them. If there had been an open and armed contest, he would have taken that side to which gratitude called him. Too young and too chaste, if we may say so, in politics, to turn with the wind of fortune, he remained faithful to the memory of the old king, and to the ruins of the old court.

His absence from the Palais Royal, round which hovered all those who wished to take a place in the political sky, was interpreted as opposition; and one morning, as he had received the brevet which gave him a regiment, he received the decree which took it from him.

D’Harmental had the ambition of his age. The only career open to a gentleman was that of arms. His debut had been brilliant, and the blow which at five-and-twenty took from him his hopes for the future was profoundly painful.

He ran to Monsieur de Villars, in whom he had found so warm a protector. The marshal received him with the coldness of a man who not only wishes to forget the past, but also to see it forgotten.

D’Harmental understood that the old courtier was about to change his skin, and retired discreetly. Though the age was essentially that of egotism, the chevalier’s first experience of it was bitter to him; but he was at that happy time of life when a disappointed ambition is rarely a deep or lasting grief.

Ambition is the passion of those who have no other, and the chevalier had all those proper to five-and-twenty years of age; besides, the spirit of the times did not tend to melancholy, that is a modern sentiment, springing from the overthrow of fortunes and the weakness of man. In the eighteenth century it was rare to dream of abstract things, or aspire to the unknown: men went straight to pleasure, glory, or fortune, and all who were handsome, brave or intriguing could attain them. That was the time when people were not ashamed to be happy. Now mind governs matter so much that men dare not avow that they are happy.

After the long and somber winter of Louis XIV.’s old age appeared all at once the joyous and brilliant spring of a young royalty. Every one basked in this new sun, radiant and benevolent, and went about buzzing and careless, like the bees and butterflies on the first fine day. The Chevalier d’Harmental had retained his sadness for a week; then he mixed again in the crowd, and was drawn in by the whirlpool which threw him at the feet of a pretty woman.

For three months he had been the happiest man in the world. He had forgotten Saint Cyr, the Tuileries, and the Palais Royal. He did not know whether there was a Madame de Maintenon, a king, or a regent. He only knew that it is sweet to live when one is loved, and he did not see why he should not live and love forever. He was still in this dream, when, as we have said, supping with his friend, the Baron de Valef, at La Fillon’s, in the Rue Saint Honore, he had been all at once brutally awakened by Lafare. Lovers are often unpleasantly awakened, and we have seen that D’Harmental was not more patient under it than others. It was more pardonable in the chevalier, because he thought he loved truly, and that in his juvenile good faith he thought nothing could replace that love in his heart.

Thus Madame d’Averne’s strange but candid letter, instead of inspiring him with the admiration which it merited at that time, had at first overwhelmed him. It is the property of every sorrow which overtakes us to reawaken past griefs which we believed dead, but which were only sleeping. The soul has its scars as well as the body, and they are seldom so well healed but a new wound can reopen them.

D’Harmental again began to feel ambitious. The loss of his mistress had recalled to him the loss of his regiment. It required nothing less than the second letter, so unexpected and mysterious, to divert him from his grief. A lover of our days would have thrown it from him with disdain, and would have despised himself if he had not nursed his grief so as to make himself poetically melancholy for a week; but a lover in the regency was much more accommodating. Suicide was scarcely discovered, and if by chance people fell into the water, they did not drown as long as there was the least little straw to cling to. D’Harmental did not affect the coxcombry of sadness. He decided, sighing, it is true, that he would go to the opera ball; and for a lover betrayed in so unforeseen and cruel a manner this was something; but it must be confessed, to the shame of our poor species, that he was chiefly led to this philosophic determination by the fact that the letter was written in a female hand.

CHAPTER IV.

A BAL-MASQUE OF THE PERIOD. — THE BAT.

The opera balls were then at their height. It was an invention of the Chevalier de Bullon, who only obtained pardon for assuming the title of Prince d'Auvergne, nobody exactly knew why, by rendering this service to the dissipated society of the time. It was he who had invented the double flooring which put the pit on a level with the stage: and the regent, who highly appreciated all good inventions, had granted him in recompense a pension of two thousand livres, which was four times what the Grand Roi had given to Corneille. That beautiful room, with its rich and grave architecture, which the Cardinal de Richelieu had inaugurated by his "Mirame," where Sully and Quinault's pastorals had been represented, and where Moliere had himself played his principal works, was this evening the rendezvous of all that was noble, rich, and elegant.

D'Harmental, from a feeling of spite, very natural in his situation, had taken particular pains with his toilet. When he arrived, the room was already full, and he had an instant's fear that the mask with the violet ribbons would not find him, inasmuch as the unknown had neglected to assign a place of meeting, and he congratulated himself on having come unmasked. This resolution showed great confidence in the discretion of his late adversaries, a word from whom would have sent him before the Parliament, or at least to the Bastille. But so much confidence had the gentlemen of that day in each other's good faith, that, after having in the morning passed his sword through the body of one of the regent's favorites, the chevalier came, without hesitation, to seek an adventure at the Palais Royal. The first person he saw there was the young Duc de Richelieu, whose name, adventures, elegance, and perhaps indiscretions, had already brought him so much into fashion. It was said that two princesses of the blood disputed his affections, which did not prevent Madame de Nesle and Madame de Polignac from fighting with pistols for him, or Madame de

Sabran, Madame de Villars, Madame de Mouchy, and Madame de Tencin, from sharing his heart.

He had just joined the Marquis de Canillac, one of the regent’s favorites, whom, on account of the grave appearance he affected, his highness called his mentor. Richelieu began to tell Canillac a story, out loud and with much gesticulation. The chevalier knew the duke, but not enough to interrupt a conversation; he was going to pass, when the duke seized him by the coat.

“Pardieu!” he said, “my dear chevalier, you are not de trop. I am telling Canillac an adventure which may be useful to him as nocturnal lieutenant to the regent, and to you, as running the same danger as I did. The history dates from to-day — a further merit, as I have only had time to tell it to about twenty people, so that it is scarcely known. Spread it, you will oblige me, and the regent also.”

D’Harmental frowned. The duke had chosen his time badly. At this moment the Chevalier de Ravanne passed, pursuing a mask. “Ravanne!” cried Richelieu, “Ravanne!”

“I am not at leisure,” replied he.

“Do you know where Lafare is?”

“He has the migraine.”

“And Fargy?”

“He has sprained himself.” And Ravanne disappeared in the crowd, after bowing in the most friendly manner to his adversary of the morning.

“Well, and the story?” asked Canillac.

“We are coming to it. Imagine that some time ago, when I left the Bastille, where my duel with Gacé had sent me, three or four days after my reappearance Rafé gave me a charming little note from Madame de Parabere, inviting me to pass that evening with her. You understand, chevalier, that it is not at the moment of leaving the Bastille that one would despise a rendezvous, given by the mistress of him who holds the keys. No need to inquire if I was punctual; guess who I found seated on the sofa by her side. I give you a hundred guesses.”

“Her husband,” said Canillac.

“On the contrary, it was his royal highness himself. I was so much the more astonished, as I had been admitted with some mystery; nevertheless, as you will understand, I would not allow myself to appear astonished. I assumed a composed and modest air, like yours, Canillac, and saluted the marquise with such profound respect, that the regent laughed. I did not expect this explosion, and was a little disconcerted. I took a chair, but the regent signed to me to take my place on the sofa. I obeyed.

"'My dear duke,' he said, 'we have written to you on a serious affair. Here is this poor marchioness, who, after being separated from her husband for two years, is threatened with an action by this clown, under pretext that she has a lover.' The marchioness tried to blush, but finding she could not, covered her face with her fan. 'At the first word she told me of her position,' continued the regent, 'I sent for D'Argenson, and asked him who this lover could be.'

"'Oh, monsieur, spare me!' said the marchioness. — 'Nonsense, my little duck; a little patience.' — 'Do you know what the lieutenant of police answered me, my dear duke?' — 'No,' said I, much embarrassed. — 'He said it was either you or me.' — 'It is an atrocious calumny,' I cried. — 'Don't be excited, the marchioness has confessed all.'

"'Then,' I replied, 'if the marchioness has confessed all, I do not see what remains for me to tell.' — 'Oh!' continued the regent, 'I do not ask you for details. It only remains for us, as accomplices, to get one another out of the scrape.' — 'And what have you to fear, monseigneur?' I asked. 'I know that, protected by your highness's name, I might brave all. What have we to fear?' — 'The outcry of Parabere, who wants me to make him a duke.'

"'Well, suppose we reconcile them,' replied I. — 'Exactly,' said his highness, laughing; 'and you have had the same idea as the marchioness.' — 'Pardieu, madame, that is an honor for me. There must be a kind of apparent reconciliation between this tender couple, which would prevent the marquis from incommoding us with the scandal of an action.' — 'But the difficulty,' objected Madame de Parabere, 'is, that it is two years since he has been here; and, as he piques himself on his jealousy and severity, what can we say? He has made a vow, that if any one sets foot here during his absence, the law should avenge him.'

"'You see, Richelieu, this becomes rather uncomfortable,' added the regent. — 'Peste! It does indeed.' — 'I have some means of coercion in my hands, but they do not go so far as to force a husband to be reconciled to his wife, and to receive her at his house.' — 'Well,' replied I, 'suppose we bring him here.' — 'There is the difficulty.' — 'Wait a moment. May I ask if Monsieur de Parabere still has a weakness for champagne and burgundy?' — 'I fear so,' said the marchioness. — 'Then, monseigneur, we are saved. I invite the marquis to supper, with a dozen of mauvais sujets and charming women. You send Dubois.’ — ’What! Dubois?’ asked the regent.

“‘Certainly; one of us must remain sober. As Dubois cannot drink, he must undertake to make the marquis drink; and when everybody is under the table, he can take him away from us and do what he likes with him. The rest depends on the coachman.’ — ’Did I not tell you, marchioness,’ said the regent, ‘that Richelieu would give us good advice? Stop, duke,’ continued he; ‘you must leave off wandering round certain palaces; leave the old lady to die quietly at St. Cyr, the lame man to rhyme at Sceaux, and join yourself with us. I will give you, in my cabinet, the place of that old fool D’Axelles; and affairs will not perhaps be injured by it.’ — ’I dare say,’ answered I. ‘The thing is impossible; I have other plans.’ — ’Obstinate fellow!’ murmured the regent.”

“And Monsieur de Parabere?” asked the Chevalier d’Harmental, curious to know the end of the story. — ”Oh! everything passed as we arranged it. He went to sleep at my house, and awoke at his wife’s. He made a great noise, but there was no longer any possibility of crying scandal. His carriage had stopped at his wife’s hotel, and all the servants saw him enter. He was reconciled in spite of himself. If he dares again to complain of his beautiful wife, we will prove to him, as clearly as possible, that he adores her without knowing it; and that she is the most innocent of women — also without his knowing it.”

“Chevalier!” at this moment a sweet and flute-like voice whispered in D’Harmental’s ear, while a little hand rested on his arm.

“You see that I am wanted.”

“I will let you go on one condition.”

“What is it?”

“That you will tell my story to this charming bat, charging her to tell it to all the night-birds of her acquaintance.”

“I fear,” said D’Harmental, “I shall not have time.”

“Oh! so much the better for you,” replied the duke, freeing the chevalier, whom till then he had held by the coat; “for then you must have something better to say.”

And he turned on his heel, to take the arm of a domino, who, in passing, complimented him on his adventure. D’Harmental threw a rapid glance on the mask who accosted him, in order to make sure that it was the one with whom he had a rendezvous, and was satisfied on seeing a violet ribbon on the left shoulder. He hastened to a distance from Canillac and Richelieu, in order not to be interrupted in a conversation which he expected to be highly interesting.

The unknown, whose voice betrayed her sex, was of middle height, and young, as far as one could judge from the elasticity of her movements. As M. de Richelieu had already remarked, she had adopted the costume best calculated to hide either graces or defects. She was dressed as a bat — a costume much in vogue, and very convenient, from its perfect simplicity, being composed only of two black skirts. The manner of employing them was at the command of everybody. One was fastened, as usual, round the waist; the masked head was passed through the placket-hole of the other. The front was pulled down to make wings; the back raised to make horns. You were almost certain thus to puzzle an interlocutor, who could only recognize you by the closest scrutiny.

The chevalier made all these observations in less time than it has taken to describe them; but having no knowledge of the person with whom he had to deal, and believing it to be some love intrigue, he hesitated to speak; when, turning toward him:

“Chevalier,” said the mask, without disguising her voice, assuming that her voice was unknown to him, “do you know that I am doubly grateful to you for having come, particularly in the state of mind in which you are? It is unfortunate that I cannot attribute this exactitude to anything but curiosity.”

“Beautiful mask!” answered D’Harmental, “did you not tell me in your letter that you were a good genius? Now, if really you partake of a superior nature, the past, the present and the future must be known to you. You knew, then, that I should come; and, since you knew it, my coming ought not to astonish you.”

“Alas!” replied the unknown, “it is easy to see that you are a weak mortal, and that you are happy enough never to have raised yourself above your sphere, otherwise you would know that if we, as you say, know the past, the present and the future, this science is silent as to what regards ourselves, and that the things we most desire remain to us plunged in the most dense obscurity.”

“Diable! Monsieur le Genie,” answered D’Harmental, “do you know that you will make me very vain if you continue in that tone; for, take care, you have told me, or nearly so, that you had a great desire that I should come to your rendezvous.”

“I did not think I was telling you anything new, chevalier. It appeared to me that my letter would leave you no doubt as to the desire I felt of seeing you.”

“This desire, which I only admit because you confess it, and I am too gallant to contradict you — had it not made you promise in your letter more than is in your power to keep?”

“Make a trial of my science; that will give you a test of my power.”

“Oh, mon Dieu! I will confine myself to the simplest thing. You say you are acquainted with the past, the present and the future. Tell me my fortune.”

“Nothing easier; give me your hand.”

D’Harmental did what was asked of him.

”Sir,” said the stranger, after a moment’s examination, “I see very legibly written by the direction of the ‘adducta,’ and by the arrangement of the longitudinal lines of the palm, five words, in which are included the history of your life. These words are, courage, ambition, disappointment, love, and treason.”

“Peste!” interrupted the chevalier, “I did not know that the genii studied anatomy so deeply, and were obliged to take their degrees like a Bachelor of Salamanca!”

“Genii know all that men know, and many other things besides, chevalier.”

“Well, then, what mean these words, at once so sonorous and so opposite? and what do they teach you of me in the past, my very learned genius?”

“They teach me that it is by your courage alone that you gained the rank of colonel, which you occupied in the army in Flanders; that this rank awakened your ambition; that this ambition has been followed by a disappointment; that you hoped to console yourself for this disappointment by love; but that love, like fortune, is subject to treachery, and that you have been betrayed.”

“Not bad,” said the chevalier; “and the Sybil of Cuma could not have got out of it better. A little vague, as in all horoscopes, but a great fund of truth, nevertheless. Let us come to the present, beautiful mask.”

“The present, chevalier? Let us speak softly of it, for it smells terribly of the Bastille.”

The chevalier started in spite of himself, for he believed that no one except the actors who had played a part in it could know his adventure of the morning.

“There are at this hour,” continued the stranger, “two brave gentlemen lying sadly in their beds, while we chat gayly at the ball; and that because a certain Chevalier d’Harmental, a great listener at doors, did not remember a hemistich of Virgil.”

“And what is this hemistich?” asked the chevalier, more and more astonished.

“‘Facilis descensus Averni,’“ said the mask, laughing.

“My dear genius,” cried the chevalier, trying to peep through the openings in the stranger’s mask, “that, allow me to inform you, is a quotation rather masculine.”

“Do you not know that genii are of both sexes?”

“Yes; but I had never heard that they quoted the Æneid so fluently.”

“Is not the quotation appropriate? You speak to me of the Sybil of Cuma; I answer you in her language. You ask for existing things; I give them you. But you mortals are never satisfied.”

“No; for I confess that this knowledge of the past and the present inspires me with a terrible desire to know the future.”

“There are always two futures,” said the mask; “there is the future of weak minds, and the future of strong minds. God has given man free will that he might choose. Your future depends on yourself.”

“But we must know these two futures to choose the best.”

“Well, there is one which awaits you, somewhere in the environs of Nevers, in the depth of the country, among the rabbits of your warren, and the fowls of your poultry-yard. This one will conduct you straight to the magistrate’s bench of your parish. It is an easy ambition, and you have only to let yourself go to attain it. You are on the road.”

“And the other?” replied the chevalier, visibly piqued at the supposition that in any case such a future could be his.

“The other,” said the stranger, leaning her arm on that of the young man, and fixing her eyes on him through her mask; “the other will throw you back into noise and light — will make you one of the actors in the game which is playing in the world, and, whether you gain or lose, will leave you at least the renown of a great player."

"If I lose, what shall I lose?" asked the chevalier.

"Life, probably."

The chevalier tossed his head contemptuously.

"And if I win?" added he.

"What do you say to the rank of colonel of horse, the title of Grandee of Spain, and the order of the Saint Esprit, without counting the field-marshal's baton in prospective?"

"I say that the prize is worth the stake, and that if you can prove to me that you can keep your promise, I am your man."

"This proof," replied the mask, "must be given you by another, and if you wish to have it you must follow me."

"Oh!" said D'Harmental, "am I deceived, and are you but a genius of the second order — a subaltern spirit, an intermediate power? Diable! this would take away a little of my consideration for you."

"What does it matter if I am subject to some great enchantress, and she has sent me to you?"

"I warn you that I do not treat with ambassadors."

"My mission is to conduct you to her."

"Then I shall see her?"

"Face to face." — — "Let us go, then."

"Chevalier, you go quickly to the work; you forget that before all initiations there are certain indispensable ceremonies to secure the discretion of the initiated."

"What must I do?"

"You must allow your eyes to be bandaged, and let me lead you where I like. When arrived at the door of the temple, you must take a solemn oath to reveal nothing concerning the things you may hear, or the people you may see."

"I am ready to swear by the Styx," said D'Harmental, laughing.

"No, chevalier," said the mask, in a grave voice; "swear only by your honor; you are known, and that will suffice."

"And when I have taken this oath," asked the chevalier, after an instant's reflection, "will it be permitted to me to retire, if the proposals made are not such as a gentleman may entertain?"

“Your conscience will be your sole arbiter, and your word the only pledge demanded of you.”

“I am ready,” said the chevalier.

“Let us go, then,” said the mask.

The chevalier prepared to cross the room in a straight line toward the door; but perceiving three of his friends, who might have stopped him on the way, he made a turn, and described a curve which would bring him to the same end.

“What are you doing?” asked the mask.

“I am avoiding some one who might detain us.”

“Ah!” said the mask, “I began to fear.”

“Fear what?” asked D’Harmental.

“To fear that your ardor was diminished in the proportion of the diagonal to the two sides of a square.”

“Pardieu!” said D’Harmental, “this is the first time, I believe, that ever a rendezvous was given to a gentleman at an opera ball to talk anatomy, ancient literature, and mathematics. I am sorry to say so, but you are the most pedantic genius I ever met in my life.”

The bat burst out laughing, but made no reply to this sally, in which was betrayed the spite of the chevalier at not being able to recognize a person who appeared to be so well acquainted with his adventures; but as this only added to his curiosity, both descended in equal haste, and found themselves in the vestibule.

“What road shall we take?” asked the chevalier. “Shall we travel underground, or in a car drawn by griffins?”

“With your permission, chevalier, we will simply go in a carriage; and though you appear to doubt it, I am a woman, and rather afraid of the dark.”

“Permit me, then, to call my carriage,” said the chevalier.

“Not at all; I have my own.”

“Call it then.”

“With your permission, chevalier, we will not be more proud than Mahomet with the mountain; and as my carriage cannot come to us, we will go to it.”

At these words the bat drew the chevalier into the Rue St. Honore. A carriage without armorial bearings, with two dark-colored horses, waited at the corner of the street. The coachman was on his seat, enveloped in a great cape which hid the lower part of his face, while a three-cornered hat covered his forehead and eyes. A footman held the door open with one hand, and with the other held his handkerchief so as to conceal his face.

”Get in,” said the mask.

D’Harmental hesitated a moment. The anxiety of the servants to preserve their incognito, the carriage without blazon, the obscure place where it was drawn up, and the advanced hour of the night, all inspired the chevalier with a sentiment of mistrust; but reflecting that he gave his arm to a woman, and had a sword by his side, he got in boldly. The mask sat down by him, and the footman closed the door.

“Well, are we not going to start?” said the chevalier, seeing that the carriage remained motionless.

“There remains a little precaution to be taken,” said the mask, drawing a silk handkerchief from her pocket.

“Ah! yes, true,” said D’Harmental; “I had forgotten. I give myself up to you with confidence.”

And he advanced his head. The unknown bandaged his eyes; then said —

“Chevalier, you give me your word of honor not to remove this bandage till I give you permission?”

“I do.”

“It is well.”

Then, raising the glass in front, she said to the coachman —

“You know where, Monsieur le Comte.”

And the carriage started at a gallop.

CHAPTER V.

THE ARSENAL.

They both maintained a profound silence during the route. This adventure, which at first had presented itself under the appearance of an amorous intrigue, had soon assumed a graver aspect, and appeared to turn toward political machinations. If this new aspect did not frighten the chevalier, at least it gave him matter for reflection. There is a moment in the affairs of every man which decides upon his future. This moment, however important it may be, is rarely prepared by calculation or directed by will. It is almost always chance which takes a man as the wind does a leaf, and throws him into some new and unknown path, where, once entered, he is obliged to obey a superior force, and where, while believing himself free, he is but the slave of circumstances and the plaything of events.

It was thus with the chevalier. Interest and gratitude attached him to the party of the old court. D’Harmental, in consequence, had not calculated the good or the harm that Madame de Maintenon had done France. He did not weigh in the balance of genealogy Monsieur de Maine and Monsieur d’Orleans. He felt that he must devote his life to those who had raised him from obscurity, and knowing the old king’s will, regarded as a usurpation Monsieur d’Orleans’ accession to the regency.

Fully expecting an armed reaction against this power, he looked around for the standard which he should follow. Nothing that he expected happened; Spain had not even protested. Monsieur de Maine, fatigued by his short contest, had retired into the shade. Monsieur de Toulouse, good, easy, and almost ashamed of the favors which had fallen to the share of himself and his elder brother, would not permit even the supposition that he could put himself at the head of a party. The Marshal de Villeroy had made a feeble and systemless opposition. Villars went to no one, but waited for some one to come to him. D’Axelles had changed sides, and had accepted the post of secretary for foreign affairs. The dukes and peers took patience, and paid court to the regent, in the hope that he would at last take away from the Dukes of Maine and Toulouse the precedence which Louis XIV. had given them.

Finally, there was discontent with, and even opposition to, the government of the Duc d'Orleans, but all impalpable and disjointed. This is what D'Harmental had seen, and what had resheathed his half-drawn sword: he thought he was the only one who saw another issue to affairs, and he gradually came to the conclusion that that issue had no existence, except in his own imagination, since those who should have been most interested in that result seemed to regard it as so impossible, that they did not even attempt to attain to it.

Although the carriage had been on the road nearly half an hour, the chevalier had not found it long: so deep were his reflections, that, even if his eyes had not been bandaged, he would have been equally ignorant of what streets they passed through.

At length he heard the wheels rumbling as if they were passing under an arch. He heard the grating of hinges as the gate opened to admit him, and closed behind him, and directly after, the carriage, having described a semicircle, stopped.

"Chevalier," said his guide, "if you have any fear, there is still time to draw back; if, on the contrary, you have not changed your resolution, come with me."

D'Harmental's only answer was to extend his hand.

The footman opened the door; the unknown got out first, and then assisted the chevalier. His feet soon encountered some steps; he mounted six — still conducted by the masked lady — crossed a vestibule, passed through a corridor, and entered a room.

"We are now arrived," said the unknown, "you remember our conditions; you are free to accept or refuse a part in the piece about to be played, but, in case of a refusal, you promise not to divulge anything you may see or hear."

"I swear it on my honor," replied the chevalier.

"Now, sit down; wait in this room, and do not remove the bandage till you hear two o'clock strike. You have not long to wait."

At these words his conductress left him. Two o'clock soon struck, and the chevalier tore off the bandage. He was alone in the most marvelous boudoir possible to imagine. It was small and octagonal, hung with lilac and silver, with furniture and portieres of tapestry. Buhl tables, covered with splendid china; a Persian carpet, and the ceiling painted by Watteau, who was then coming into fashion. At this sight, the chevalier found it difficult to believe that he had been summoned on grave matters, and almost returned to his first ideas.

At this moment a door opened in the tapestry, and there appeared a woman who, in the fantastic preoccupation of his spirit, D’Harmental might have taken for a fairy, so slight, small, and delicate was her figure. She was dressed in pearl gray satin, covered with bouquets, so beautifully embroidered that, at a short distance, they appeared like natural flowers; the flounces, ruffles, and head-dress was of English point; it was fastened with pearls and diamonds. Her face was covered with a half-mask of black velvet, from which hung a deep black lace. D’Harmental bowed, for there was something royal in the walk and manner of this woman which showed him that the other had been only an envoy.

“Madame,” said he, “have I really, as I begin to believe, quitted the earth for the land of spirits, and are you the powerful fairy to whom this beautiful palace belongs?”

“Alas! chevalier,” replied the masked lady, in a sweet but decided voice, “I am not a powerful fairy, but, on the contrary, a poor princess, persecuted by a wicked enchanter, who has taken from me my crown, and oppresses my kingdom. Thus, you see, I am seeking a brave knight to deliver me, and your renown has led me to address myself to you.”

“If my life could restore you your past power, madame,” replied D’Harmental, “speak; I am ready to risk it with joy. Who is this enchanter that I must combat; this giant that I must destroy? Since you have chosen me above all, I will prove myself worthy of the honor. From this moment I engage my word, even if it cost me my life.”

“If you lose your life, chevalier, it will be in good company,” said the lady, untying her mask, and discovering her face, “for you would lose it with the son of Louis XIV., and the granddaughter of the great Conde.”

“Madame la Duchesse de Maine!” cried D’Harmental, falling on one knee; “will your highness pardon me, if, not knowing you, I have said anything which may fall short of the profound respect I feel for you.”

“You have said nothing for which I am not proud and grateful, chevalier, but, perhaps, you now repent. If so, you are at liberty to withdraw.”

“Heaven forbid, madame, that having had the honor to engage my life in the service of so great and noble a princess, I should deprive myself of the greatest honor I ever dared to hope for. No, madame; take seriously, I beg, what I offered half in jest; my arm, my sword, and my life."

"I see," said the Duchesse de Maine, with that smile which gave her such power over all who approached her, "that the Baron de Valef did not deceive me, and you are such as he described. Come, I will present you to our friends."

The duchess went first, D'Harmental followed, astonished at what had passed, but fully resolved, partly from pride, partly from conviction, not to withdraw a step.

The duchess conducted him to a room where four new personages awaited him. These were the Cardinal de Polignac, the Marquis de Pompadour, Monsieur de Malezieux, and the Abbe Brigaud.

The Cardinal de Polignac was supposed to be the lover of Madame de Maine. He was a handsome prelate, from forty to forty-five years of age; always dressed with the greatest care, with an unctuous voice, a cold face, and a timid heart; devoured by ambition, which was eternally combated by the weakness of his character, which always drew him back where he should advance; of high birth, as his name indicated, very learned for a cardinal, and very well informed for a nobleman.

Monsieur de Pompadour was a man of from forty-five to fifty, who had been a minion of the dauphin's, the son of Louis XIV., and who had so great a love for his whole family, that, seeing with grief that the regent was going to declare war against Philip V., he had thrown himself, body and soul, into the Duc de Maine's party. Proud and disinterested, he had given a rare example of loyalty, in sending back to the regent the brevet of his pensions and those of his wife, and in refusing for himself and the Marquis de Courcillon, his son-in-law, every place offered to them.

Monsieur de Malezieux was a man of from sixty to sixty-five, Chancellor of Dombes and Lord of Chatenay: he owed this double title to the gratitude of M. de Maine, whose education he had conducted. A poet, a musician, an author of small comedies, which he played himself with infinite spirit; born for an idle and intellectual life; always occupied in procuring pleasure for others, and above all for Madame de Maine, whom he adored, he was a type of the Sybarite of the eighteenth century, but, like the Sybarites who, drawn by the aspect of beauty, followed Cleopatra to Actium, and were killed around her, he would have followed his dear Bénédicte through fire and water, and, at a word from her, would, without hesitation, and almost without regret, have thrown himself from the towers of Notre-Dame.

The Abbe Brigaud was the son of a Lyons merchant. His father, who was commercially related with the court of Spain, was charged to make overtures, as if on his own account, for the marriage of the young Louis XIV. with the young Maria Theresa of Austria. If these overtures had been badly received, the ministers of France would have disavowed them; but they were well received, and they supported them.

The marriage took place; and, as the little Brigaud was born about the same time as the dauphin, he asked, in recompense, that the king’s son should stand godfather to his child, which was granted to him. He then made acquaintance with the Marquis de Pompadour, who, as we have said, was one of the pages of honor. When he was of an age to decide on his profession, he joined the Fathers of the Oratory. He was a clever and an ambitious man, but, as often happens to the greatest geniuses, he had never had an opportunity of making himself known.

Some time before the period of which we are writing, he met the Marquis de Pompadour, who was seeking a man of spirit and enterprise as the secretary of Madame de Maine. He told him to what the situation would expose him at the present time. Brigaud weighed for an instant the good and evil chances, and, as the former appeared to predominate, he accepted it.

Of these four men, D’Harmental only knew the Marquis de Pompadour, whom he had often met at the house of Monsieur de Courcillon, his son-in-law, a distant relation of the D’Harmentals.

When D’Harmental entered the room, Monsieur de Polignac, Monsieur de Malezieux, and Monsieur de Pompadour were standing talking at the fireplace, and the Abbe Brigaud was seated at a table classifying some papers.

“Gentlemen,” said the Duchesse de Maine, “here is the brave champion of whom the Baron de Valef has spoken to us, and who has been brought here by your dear De Launay, Monsieur de Malezieux. If his name and antecedents are not sufficient to stand sponsor for him, I will answer for him personally.”

“Presented thus by your highness,” said Malezieux, “we shall see in him not only a companion, but a chief, whom we are ready to follow wherever he may lead.”

“My dear D’Harmental,” said the Marquis de Pompadour, extending his hand to him, “we were already relations, we are now almost brothers.”

“Welcome, monsieur!” said the Cardinal de Polignac, in the unctuous tone habitual to him, and which contrasted so strangely with the coldness of his countenance.

The Abbe Brigaud raised his head with a movement resembling that of a serpent, and fixed on D’Harmental two little eyes, brilliant as those of the lynx.

“Gentlemen,” said D’Harmental, after having answered each of them by a bow, “I am new and strange among you, and, above all, ignorant of what is passing, or in what manner I can serve you; but though my word has only been engaged to you for a few minutes, my devotion to your cause is of many years’ standing. I beg you, therefore, to grant me the confidence so graciously claimed for me by her highness. All that I shall ask after that will be a speedy occasion to prove myself worthy of it.”

“Well said!” cried the Duchesse de Maine; “commend me to a soldier for going straight to the point! No, Monsieur d’Harmental, we will have no secrets from you, and the opportunity you require, and which will place each of us in our proper position — ”

“Excuse me, Madame la Duchesse,” interrupted the cardinal, who was playing uneasily with his necktie, “but, from your manner, the chevalier will think that the affair is a conspiracy.”

“And what is it then, cardinal?” asked the duchess, impatiently.

“It is,” said the cardinal, “a council, secret, it is true, but in no degree reprehensible, in which we only seek a means of remedying the misfortunes of the state, and enlightening France on her true interests, by recalling the last will of the king, Louis XIV.”

“Stay, cardinal!” said the duchess, stamping her foot; “you will kill me with impatience by your circumlocutions. Chevalier,” continued she, addressing D’Harmental, “do not listen to his eminence, who at this moment, doubtless, is thinking of his Lucrece. If it had been a simple council, the talents of his eminence would soon have extricated us from our troubles, without the necessity of applying to you; but it is a bona fide conspiracy against the regent — a conspiracy which numbers the king of Spain, Cardinal Alberoni, the Duc de Maine, myself, the Marquis de Pompadour, Monsieur de Malezieux, l’Abbe Brigaud, Valef, yourself, the cardinal himself the president; and which will include half the parliament and three parts of France. This is the matter in hand, chevalier. Are you content, cardinal? Have I spoken clearly, gentlemen?”

“Madame — ” murmured Malezieux, joining his hands before her with more devotion than he would have done before the Virgin.

“No, no; stop, Malezieux,” said the duchess, “but the cardinal enrages me with his half-measures. Mon Dieu! are these eternal waverings worthy of a man? For myself, I do not ask a sword, I do not ask a dagger; give me but a nail, and I, a woman, and almost a dwarf, will go, like a new Jael, and drive it into the temple of this other Sisera. Then all will be finished; and, if I fail, no one but myself will be compromised.”

Monsieur de Polignac sighed deeply; Pompadour burst out laughing; Malezieux tried to calm the duchess; and Brigaud bent his head, and went on writing as if he had heard nothing. As to D’Harmental, he would have kissed the hem of her dress, so superior was this woman, in his eyes, to the four men who surrounded her.

At this moment they heard the sound of a carriage, which drove into the courtyard and stopped at the door. The person expected was doubtless some one of importance, for there was an instant silence, and the Duchesse de Maine, in her impatience, went herself to open the door.

“Well?” asked she.

“He is here,” said a voice, which D’Harmental recognized as that of the Bat.

“Enter, enter, prince,” said the duchess; “we wait for you.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE PRINCE DE CELLAMARE.

At this invitation there entered a tall, thin, grave man, with a sunburned complexion, who at a single glance took in everything in the room, animate and inanimate. The chevalier recognized the ambassador of their Catholic majesties, the Prince de Cellamare.

“Well, prince,” asked the duchess, “what have you to tell us?”

“I have to tell you, madame,” replied the prince, kissing her hand respectfully, and throwing his cloak on a chair, “that your highness had better change coachmen. I predict misfortune if you retain in your service the fellow who drove me here. He seems to me to be some one employed by the regent to break the necks of your highness and all your companions.”

Every one began to laugh, and particularly the coachman himself, who, without ceremony, had entered behind the prince; and who, throwing his hat and cloak on a seat, showed himself a man of high bearing, from thirty-five to forty years old, with the lower part of his face hidden by a black handkerchief.

“Do you hear, my dear Laval, what the prince says of you?”

“Yes, yes,” said Laval; “it is worth while to give him Montmorencies to be treated like that. Ah, M. le Prince, the first gentlemen in France are not good enough for your coachmen! Peste! you are difficult to please. Have you many coachmen at Naples who date from Robert the Strong?”

“What! is it you, my dear count?” said the prince, holding out his hand to him.

“Myself, prince! Madame la Duchesse sent away her coachman to keep Lent in his own family, and engaged me for this night. She thought it safer.”

“And Madame la Duchesse did right,” said the cardinal. “One cannot take too many precautions.”

“Ah, your eminence,” said Laval, “I should like to know if you would be of the same opinion after passing half the night on the box of a carriage, first to fetch M. d’Harmental from the opera ball, and then to take the prince from the Hotel Colbert.”

“What!” said D’Harmental, “was it you, Monsieur le Comte, who had the goodness — ”

“Yes, young man,” replied Laval; “and I would have gone to the end of the world to bring you here, for I know you. You are a gallant gentleman; you were one of the first to enter Denain, and you took Albemarle. You were fortunate enough not to leave half your jaw there, as I did in Italy. You were right, for it would have been a further motive for taking away your regiment, which they have done, however.”

“We will restore you that a hundredfold,” said the duchess; “but now let us speak of Spain. Prince, you have news from Alberoni, Pompadour tells me.”

“Yes, your highness.”

“What are they?”

“Both good and bad. His majesty Philip V. is in one of his melancholy moods and will not determine upon anything. He will not believe in the treaty of the quadruple alliance.”

“Will not believe in it!” cried the duchess; “and the treaty ought to be signed now. In a week Dubois will have brought it here.”

“I know it, your highness,” replied Cellamare, coldly; “but his Catholic majesty does not.”

“Then he abandons us?”

“Almost.”

“What becomes, then, of the queen’s fine promises, and the empire she pretends to have over her husband?”

“She promises to prove it to you, madame,” replied the prince, “when something is done.”

“Yes,” said the Cardinal de Polignac; “and then she will fail in that promise.”

“No, your eminence! I will answer for her.”

“What I see most clearly in all this is,” said Laval, “that we must compromise the king. Once compromised, he must go on.”

“Now, then,” said Cellamare, “we are coming to business.”

“But how to compromise him,” asked the Duchesse de Maine, “without a letter from him, without even a verbal message, and at five hundred leagues’ distance?”

“Has he not his representative at Paris, and is not that representative in your house at this very moment, madame?”

“Prince,” said the duchess, “you have more extended powers than you are willing to admit.”

“No; my powers are limited to telling you that the citadel of Toledo and the fortress of Saragossa are at your service. Find the means of making the regent enter there, and their Catholic majesties will close the door on him so securely that he will not leave it again, I promise you.”

“It is impossible,” said Monsieur de Polignac.

“Impossible! and why?” cried D’Harmental. “On the contrary, what is more simple? Nothing is necessary but eight or ten determined men, a well-closed carriage, and relays to Bayonne.”

“I have already offered to undertake it,” said Laval.

“And I,” said Pompadour.

“You cannot,” said the duchess; “the regent knows you; and if the thing failed, you would be lost.”

“It is a pity,” said Cellamare, coldly; “for, once arrived at Toledo or Saragossa, there is greatness in store for him who shall have succeeded.”

“And the blue ribbon,” added Madame de Maine, “on his return to Paris.”

“Oh, silence, I beg, madame,” said D’Harmental; “for if your highness says such things, you give to devotion the air of ambition, and rob it of all its merit. I was going to offer myself for the enterprise — I, who am unknown to the regent — but now I hesitate; and yet I venture to believe myself worthy of the confidence of your highness, and able to justify it.” — — ”What, chevalier!” cried the duchess, “you would risk — ”

“My life; it is all I have to risk. I thought I had already offered it, and that your highness had accepted it. Was I mistaken?”

“No, no, chevalier,” said the duchess quickly; “and you are a brave and loyal gentleman. I have always believed in presentiments, and from the moment Valef pronounced your name, telling me that you were what I find you to be, I felt of what assistance you would be to us. Gentlemen, you hear what the chevalier says; in what can you aid him?”

“In whatever he may want,” said Laval and Pompadour.

“The coffers of their Catholic majesties are at his disposal,” said the Prince de Cellamare, “and he may make free use of them.”

“I thank you,” said D’Harmental, turning toward the Comte de Laval and the Marquis de Pompadour; “but, known as you are, you would only make the enterprise more difficult. Occupy yourselves only in obtaining for me a passport for Spain, as if I had the charge of some prisoner of importance: that ought to be easy."

"I undertake it," said the Abbe Brigaud: "I will get from D'Argenson a paper all prepared, which will only have to be filled in."

"Excellent Brigaud," said Pompadour; "he does not speak often, but he speaks to the purpose."

"It is he who should be made cardinal," said the duchess, "rather than certain great lords of my acquaintance; but as soon as we can dispose of the blue and the red, be easy, gentlemen, we shall not be miserly. Now, chevalier, you have heard what the prince said. If you want money — "

"Unfortunately," replied D'Harmental, "I am not rich enough to refuse his excellency's offer, and so soon as I have arrived at the end of about a million pistoles which I have at home, I must have recourse to you."

"To him, to me, to us all, chevalier, for each one in such circumstances should tax himself according to his means. I have little ready money, but I have many diamonds and pearls; therefore want for nothing, I beg. All the world has not your disinterestedness, and there is devotion which must be bought."

"Above all, be prudent," said the cardinal.

"Do not be uneasy," replied D'Harmental, contemptuously. "I have sufficient grounds of complaint against the regent for it to be believed, if I were taken, that it was an affair between him and me, and that my vengeance was entirely personal."

"But," said the Comte de Laval, "you must have a kind of lieutenant in this enterprise, some one on whom you can count. Have you any one?"

"I think so," replied D'Harmental; "but I must be informed each morning what the regent will do in the evening. Monsieur le Prince de Cellamare, as ambassador, must have his secret police."

"Yes," said the prince, embarrassed, "I have some people who give me an account." — — "That is exactly it," said D'Harmental.

"Where do you lodge?" asked the cardinal.

"At my own house, monseigneur, Rue de Richelieu, No. 74."

"And how long have you lived there?"

"Three years."

"Then you are too well known there, monsieur; you must change quarters. The people whom you receive are known, and the sight of strange faces would give rise to questions."

"This time your eminence is right," said D'Harmental. "I will seek another lodging in some retired neighborhood."

"I undertake it," said Brigaud; "my costume does not excite suspicions. I will engage you a lodging as if it was destined for a young man from the country who has been recommended to me, and who has come to occupy some place in an office."

"Truly, my dear Brigaud," said the Marquis de Pompadour, "you are like the princess in the 'Arabian Nights,' who never opened her mouth but to drop pearls."

"Well, it is a settled thing, Monsieur l'Abbe," said D'Harmental; "I reckon on you, and I shall announce at home that I am going to leave Paris for a three months' trip."

"Everything is settled, then," said the Duchesse de Maine joyfully. "This is the first time that I have been able to see clearly into our affairs, chevalier, and we owe it to you. I shall not forget it."

"Gentlemen," said Malezieux, pulling out his watch, "I would observe that it is four o'clock in the morning, and that we shall kill our dear duchesse with fatigue."

"You are mistaken," said the duchess; "such nights rest me, and it is long since I have passed one so good."

"Prince," said Laval, "you must be contented with the coachman whom you wished discharged, unless you would prefer driving yourself, or going on foot."

"No, indeed," said the prince, "I will risk it. I am a Neapolitan, and believe in omens. If you overturn me it will be a sign that we must stay where we are — if you conduct me safely it will be a sign that we may go on."

"Pompadour, you must take back Monsieur d'Harmental," said the duchess.

"Willingly," said the marquis. "It is a long time since we met, and we have a hundred things to say to each other."

"Cannot I take leave of my sprightly bat?" asked D'Harmental; "for I do not forget that it is to her I owe the happiness of having offered my services to your highness."

"De Launay," cried the duchess, conducting the Prince of Cellamare to the door, "De Launay, here is Monsieur le Chevalier d'Harmental, who says you are the greatest sorceress he has ever known."

“Well!” said she who has left us such charming memoirs, under the name of Madame de Staël, “do you believe in my prophecies now, Monsieur le Chevalier?”

“I believe, because I hope,” replied the chevalier. “But now that I know the fairy that sent you, it is not your predictions that astonish me the most. How were you so well informed about the past, and, above all, of the present?”

“Well, De Launay, be kind, and do not torment the chevalier any longer, or he will believe us to be two witches, and be afraid of us.”

“Was there not one of your friends, chevalier,” asked De Launay, “who left you this morning in the Bois de Boulogne to come and say adieu to us.”

“Valef! It is Valef!” cried D’Harmental. “I understand now.”

“In the place of Œdipus you would have been devoured ten times over by the Sphinx.”

“But the mathematics; but the anatomy; but Virgil?” replied D’Harmental.

“Do you not know, chevalier,” said Malezieux, mixing in the conversation, “that we never call her anything here but our ‘savante?’ with the exception of Chaulieu, however, who calls her his flirt, and his coquette; but all as a poetical license. We let her loose the other day on Du Vernay, our doctor, and she beat him at anatomy.”

“And,” said the Marquis de Pompadour, taking D’Harmental’s arm to lead him away, “the good man in his disappointment declared that there was no other girl in France who understood the human frame so well.”

“Ah!” said the Abbe Brigaud, folding his papers, “here is the first savant on record who has been known to make a bon-mot. It is true that he did not intend it.”

And D’Harmental and Pompadour, having taken leave of the duchess, retired laughing, followed by the Abbe Brigaud, who reckoned on them to drive him home.

“Well,” said Madame de Maine, addressing the Cardinal de Polignac, “does your eminence still find it such a terrible thing to conspire?”

“Madame,” replied the cardinal, who could not understand that any one could laugh when their head was in danger, “I will ask you the same question when we are all in the Bastille.”

And he went away with the good chancellor, deploring the ill-luck which had thrown him into such a rash enterprise.

The duchess looked after him with a contempt which she could not disguise: then, when she was alone with De Launay:

“My dear Sophy,” said she, “let us put out our lantern, for I think we have found a man.”

CHAPTER VII.

ALBERONI.

When D’Harmental awoke, he wondered if all had been a dream. Events had, during the last thirty-six hours, succeeded each other with such rapidity, that he had been carried away, as by a whirlpool, without knowing where he was going. Now for the first time he had leisure to reflect on the past and the future.

These were times in which every one conspired more or less. We know the natural bent of the mind in such a case. The first feeling we experience, after having made an engagement in a moment of exaltation, is one almost of regret for having been so forward. Little by little we become familiarized with the idea of the dangers we are running. Imagination removes them from our sight, and presents instead the ambitions we may realize. Pride soon becomes mingled with it, as we think that we have become a secret power in the State. We walk along proudly, with head erect, passing contemptuously those who lead an ordinary life; we cradle ourselves in our hopes, and wake one morning conquering or conquered; carried on the shoulders of the people, or broken by the wheels of that machine called the government.

Thus it was with D’Harmental. After a few moments’ reflection, he saw things under the same aspect as he had done the day before, and congratulated himself upon having taken the highest place among such people as the Montmorencies and the Polignacs. His family had transmitted to him much of that adventurous chivalry so much in vogue under Louis XIII., and which Richelieu with his scaffolds, and Louis XIV. with his antechambers, had not quite been able to destroy. There was something romantic in enlisting himself, a young man, under the banners of a woman, and that woman a granddaughter of the great Conde.

D’Harmental lost no time in preparing to keep the promises he had made, for he felt that the eyes of all the conspirators were upon him, and that on his courage and prudence depended the destinies of two kingdoms, and the politics of the world. At this moment the regent was the keystone of the arch of the European edifice; and France was beginning to take, if not by arms, at least by diplomacy, that influence which she had unfortunately not always preserved. Placed at the center of the triangle formed by the three great Powers, with eyes fixed on Germany, one arm extended toward England, and the other toward Spain, ready to turn on either of these three States that should not treat her according to her dignity, she had assumed, under the Duc d'Orleans, an attitude of calm strength which she had never had under Louis XIV.

This arose from the division of interests consequent on the usurpation of William of Orange, and the accession of Philip V. to the throne of Spain. Faithful to his old hatred against the stadtholder, who had refused him his daughter, Louis XIV. had constantly advanced the pretensions of James II., and, after his death, of the Chevalier de St. George. Faithful to his compact with Philip V., he had constantly aided his grandson against the emperor, with men and money; and, weakened by this double war, he had been reduced to the shameful treaty of Utrecht; but at the death of the old king all was changed, and the regent had adopted a very different line of conduct. The treaty of Utrecht was only a truce, which had been broken from the moment when England and Holland did not pursue common interests with those of France.

In consequence, the regent had first of all held out his hand to George I., and the treaty of the triple alliance had been signed at La Haye, by Dubois, in the name of France; by General Cadogan, for England; and by the pensioner, Heinsiens, for Holland. This was a great step toward the pacification of Europe, but the interests of Austria and Spain were still in suspense. Charles VI. would not recognize Philip V. as king of Spain; and Philip V., on his part, would not renounce his rights over those provinces of the Spanish empire which the treaty of Utrecht had given to the emperor.

It was in the hopes of bringing these things about that the regent had sent Dubois to London, where he was pursuing the treaty of the quadruple alliance with as much ardor as he had that of La Haye. This treaty would have neutralized the pretensions of the State not approved by the four Powers. This was what was feared by Philip V. (or rather the Cardinal d'Alberoni).

It was not thus with Alberoni; his was one of those extraordinary fortunes which one sees, always with new astonishment, spring up around the throne; one of those caprices of destiny which chance raises and destroys;

like a gigantic waterspout, which advances on the ocean, threatening to annihilate everything, but which is dispersed by a stone thrown from the hand of a sailor; or an avalanche, which threatens to swallow towns, and fill up valleys, because a bird in its flight has detached a flake of snow on the summit of the mountain.

Alberoni was born in a gardener’s cottage, and as a child he was the bell-ringer. When still a young man he exchanged his smock-frock for a surplice, but was of a merry and jesting disposition. The Duke of Parma heard him laugh one day so gayly, that the poor duke, who did not laugh every day, asked who it was that was so merry, and had him called. Alberoni related to him some grotesque adventure. His highness laughed heartily; and finding that it was pleasant to laugh sometimes, attached him to his person. The duke soon found that he had mind, and fancied that that mind was not incapable of business.

It was at this time that the poor bishop of Parma came back, deeply mortified at his reception by the generalissimo of the French army. The susceptibility of this envoy might compromise the grave interests which his highness had to discuss with France. His highness judged that Alberoni was the man to be humiliated by nothing, and he sent the abbe to finish the negotiation which the bishop had left unfinished. M. de Vendome, who had not put himself out for a bishop, did not do so for an abbe, and received the second ambassador as he had the first; but, instead of following the example of his predecessor, he found in M. de Vendome’s own situation so much subject for merry jests and strange praises, that the affair was finished at once, and he came back to the duke with everything arranged to his desire.

This was a reason for the duke to employ him a second time. This time Vendome was just going to sit down to table, and Alberoni, instead of beginning about business, asked if he would taste two dishes of his cooking, went into the kitchen, and came back, a “soupe au fromage” in one hand, and macaroni in the other. De Vendome found the soup so good that he asked Alberoni to take some with him at his own table. At dessert Alberoni introduced his business, and profiting by the good humor of Vendome, he twisted him round his finger.

His highness was astonished. The greatest genius he had met with had never done so much. The next time it was M. de Vendome who asked the duke of Parma if he had nothing else to negotiate with him. Alberoni found means of persuading his sovereign that he would be more useful to him near

Vendome than elsewhere, and he persuaded Vendome that he could not exist without “soupe au fromage” and macaroni.

M. de Vendome attached him to his service, allowed him to interfere in his most secret affairs, and made him his chief secretary. At this time Vendome left for Spain. Alberoni put himself in communication with Madame des Ursins; and when Vendome died, she gave him, near her, the same post he had occupied near the deceased.

This was another step. The Princesse des Ursins began to get old, an unpardonable crime in the eyes of Philip V. She resolved to place a young woman near the king, through whom she might continue to reign over him. Alberoni proposed the daughter of his old master, whom he represented as a child, without character, and without will, who would claim nothing of royalty but the name. The princess was taken by this promise. The marriage was decided on, and the young princess left Italy for Spain.

Her first act of authority was to arrest the Princesse des Ursins, who had come to meet her in a court dress, and to send her back, as she was, with her neck uncovered, in a bitter frost, in a carriage of which the guard had broken the window with his elbow, first to Burgos, and then to France, where she arrived, after having been obliged to borrow fifty pistoles from her servants. After his first interview with Elizabeth Farnese, the king announced to Alberoni that he was prime minister. From that day, thanks to the young queen, who owed him everything, the ex-ringer of bells exercised an unlimited empire over Philip V.

Now this is what Alberoni pictured to himself, having always prevented Philip V. from recognizing the peace of Utrecht. If the conspiracy succeeded — if D’Harmental carried off the Duc d’Orleans, and took him to the citadel of Toledo, or the fortress of Saragossa — Alberoni would get Monsieur de Maine recognized as regent, would withdraw France from the quadruple alliance, throw the Chevalier de St. George with the fleet on the English coast, and set Prussia, Sweden, and Russia, with whom he had a treaty of alliance, at variance with Holland. The empire would then profit by their dispute to retake Naples and Sicily; would assure Tuscany to the second son of the king of Spain; would reunite the Catholic Netherlands to France, give Sardinia to the Dukes of Savoy, Commachio to the pope, and Mantua to the Venetians. He would make himself the soul of the great league, of the south against the north; and if Louis XV. died, would crown Philip V. king of half the world.

All these things were now in the hands of a young man of twenty-six years of age; and it was not astonishing that he should be, at first, frightened at the responsibility which weighed upon him.

As he was still in deep thought, the Abbe Brigaud entered. He had already found a lodging for the chevalier, at No. 5, Rue du Temps-Perdu; a small furnished room, suitable to a young man who came to seek his fortune in Paris. He brought him also two thousand pistoles from the Prince of Cellamare.

D’Harmental wished to refuse them, for it seemed as if he would be no longer acting according to conscience and devotion; but Brigaud explained to him that in such an enterprise there are susceptibilities to conquer, and accomplices to pay; and that besides, if the affair succeeded, he would have to set out instantly for Spain, and perhaps make his way by force of gold. Brigaud carried away a complete suit of the chevalier’s, as a pattern for a fresh one suitable for a clerk in an office. The Abbe Brigaud was a useful man.

D’Harmental passed the rest of the day in preparing for his pretended journey, and removed, in case of accident, every letter which might compromise a friend; then went toward the Rue St. Honore, where — thanks to La Normande — he hoped to have news of Captain Roquefinette. In fact, from the moment that a lieutenant for his enterprise had been spoken of, he had thought of this man, who had given him, as his second, a proof of his careless courage. He had instantly recognized in him one of those adventurers always ready to sell their blood for a good price, and who, in time of peace, when their swords are useless to the State, place them at the service of individuals.

On becoming a conspirator one always becomes superstitious, and D’Harmental fancied that it was an intervention of Providence which had introduced him to Roquefinette. The chevalier, without being a regular customer, went occasionally to the tavern of La Fillon. It was quite fashionable at that time to go and drink at her house. D’Harmental was to her neither her son, a name which she gave to all her “habitués,” nor her gossip, a word which she reserved for the Abbe Dubois, but simply Monsieur le Chevalier; a mark of respect which would have been considered rather a humiliation by most of the young men of fashion. La Fillon was much astonished when D’Harmental asked to see one of her servants, called La Normande.

“Oh, mon Dieu! Monsieur le Chevalier!” said she, “I am really distressed; but La Normande is waiting at a dinner which will last till to-morrow evening.”

“Plague! what a dinner!”

“What is to be done?” replied La Fillon. “It is a caprice of an old friend of the house. He will not be waited on by any one but her, and I cannot refuse him that satisfaction.”

“When he has money, I suppose?”

“You are mistaken. I give him credit up to a certain sum. It is a weakness, but one cannot help being grateful. He started me in the world, such as you see me, monsieur — I, who have had in my house the best people in Paris, including the regent. I was only the daughter of a poor chair-bearer. Oh! I am not like the greater part of your beautiful duchesses, who deny their origin; nor like two-thirds of your dukes and peers, who fabricate genealogies for themselves. No! what I am, I owe to my own merit, and I am proud of it.”

“Then,” said the chevalier, who was not particularly interested by La Fillon’s history, “you say that La Normande will not have finished with this dinner till to-morrow evening?”

“The jolly old captain never stays less time than that at table, when once he is there.”

“But, my dear presidente” (this was a name sometimes given to La Fillon, as a certain quid pro quo for the presidente who had the same name as herself), “do you think, by chance, your captain may be my captain?”

“What is yours called?”

“Captain Roquefinette.”

“It is the same.”

“He is here?”

“In person.”

“Well, he is just the man I want; and I only asked for La Normande to get his address.”

“Then all is right,” said the presidente.

“Have the kindness to send for him.”

“Oh! he would not come down for the regent himself. If you want to see him you must go up.”

“Where?”

"At No. 2, where you supped the other evening with the Baron de Valef. Oh! when he has money, nothing is too good for him. Although he is but a captain, he has the heart of a king."

"Better and better," said D'Harmental, mounting the staircase, without being deterred by the recollection of the misadventure which had happened to him in that room; "that is exactly what I want."

If D'Harmental had not known the room in question, the voice of the captain would soon have served him for a guide.

"Now, my little loves," said he, "the third and last verse, and together in the chorus." Then he began singing in a magnificent bass voice, and four or five female voices took up the chorus.

"That is better," said the captain; "now let us have the 'Battle of Malplaquet."

"No, no," said a voice; "I have had enough of your battle."

"What! enough of it — a battle I was at myself?"

"That is nothing to me. I like a romance better than all your wicked battle-songs, full of oaths." And she began to sing "Linval loved Arsene — "

"Silence!" said the captain. "Am I not master here? As long as I have any money I will be served as I like. When I have no more, that will be another thing; then you may sing what you like; I shall have nothing to say to it."

It appeared that the servants of the cabaret thought it beneath the dignity of their sex to subscribe to such a pretension, for there was such a noise that D'Harmental thought it best to announce himself.

"Pull the bobbin, and the latch will go up," said the captain.

D'Harmental followed the instruction which was given him in the words of Little Red Riding-hood; and, having entered, saw the captain lying on a couch before the remains of an ample dinner, leaning on a cushion, a woman's shawl over his shoulders, a great pipe in his mouth, and a cloth rolled round his head like a turban. Three or four servants were standing round him with napkins in their hands. On a chair near him was placed his coat, on which was to be seen a new shoulder-knot, his hat with a new lace, and the famous sword which had furnished Ravanne with the facetious comparison to his mother's spit.

"What! is it you?" cried the captain. "You find me like Monsieur de Bonneval — in my seraglio, and surrounded by my slaves. You do not know Monsieur de Bonneval, ladies: he is a pasha of three tails, who, like me, could not bear romances, but who understood how to live. Heaven preserve me from such a fate as his!”

“Yes, it is I, captain,” said D’Harmental, unable to prevent laughing at the grotesque group which presented itself. “I see you did not give me a false address, and I congratulate you on your veracity.”

“Welcome, chevalier,” said the captain. “Ladies, I beg you to serve monsieur with the grace which distinguishes you, and to sing him whatever songs he likes. Sit down, chevalier, and eat and drink as if you were at home, particularly as it is your horse we are eating and drinking. He is already more than half gone, poor animal, but the remains are good.”

“Thank you, captain, I have just dined; and I have only one word to say to you, if you will permit it.”

“No, pardieu! I do not permit it,” said the captain, “unless it is about another engagement — that would come before everything. La Normande, give me my sword.”

“No, captain; it is on business,” interrupted D’Harmental.

“Oh! if it is on business, I am your humble servant; but I am a greater tyrant than the tyrants of Thebes or Corinth — Archias, Pelopidas, Leonidas, or any other that ends in ‘as,’ who put off business till to-morrow. I have enough money to last till to-morrow evening; then, after to-morrow, business.”

“But at least after to-morrow, captain, I may count upon you?”

“For life or death, chevalier.”

“I believe that the adjournment is prudent.”

“Prudentissimo!” said the captain. “Athenais, light my pipe. La Normande, pour me out something to drink.”

“The day after to-morrow, then, captain?”

“Yes; where shall I find you?”

“Listen,” replied D’Harmental, speaking so as to be heard by no one but him. “Walk, from ten to eleven o’clock in the morning, in the Rue du Temps Perdu. Look up; you will be called from somewhere, and you must mount till you meet some one you know. A good breakfast will await you.”

“All right, chevalier,” replied the captain; “from ten to eleven in the morning. Excuse me if I do not conduct you to the door, but you know it is not the custom with Turks.”

The chevalier made a sign with his hand that he dispensed with this formality, and descended the staircase. He was only on the fourth step when he heard the captain begin the famous song of the Dragoons of Malplaquet, which had perhaps caused as much blood to be shed in duels as there had been on the field of battle.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GARRET.

The next day the Abbe Brigaud came to the chevalier’s house at the same hour as before. He was a perfectly punctual man. He brought with him three things particularly useful to the chevalier; clothes, a passport, and the report of the Prince of Cellamare’s police respecting what the regent was going to do on the present day, March 24, 1718. The clothes were simple, as became the cadet of a bourgeois family come to seek his fortune in Paris. The chevalier tried them on, and, thanks to his own good looks, found that they became him admirably.

The abbe shook his head. He would have preferred that the chevalier should not have looked quite so well; but this was an irreparable misfortune. The passport was in the name of Signior Diego, steward of the noble house of Oropesa, who had a commission to bring back to Spain a sort of maniac, a bastard of the said house, whose mania was to believe himself regent of France. This was a precaution taken to meet anything that the Duc d’Orleans might call out from the bottom of the carriage; and, as the passport was according to rule, signed by the Prince de Cellamare, and “viséd” by Monsieur Voyer d’Argenson, there was no reason why the regent, once in the carriage, should not arrive safely at Pampeluna, when all would be done.

The signature of Monsieur Voyer d’Argenson was imitated with a truth which did honor to the caligraphers of the Prince de Cellamare. As to the report, it was a chef-d’œuvre of clearness; and we insert it word for word, to give an idea of the regent’s life, and of the manner in which the Spanish ambassador’s police was conducted. It was dated two o’clock in the morning.

“To-day the regent will rise late. There has been a supper in his private rooms; Madame d’Averne was there for the first time instead of Madame de Parabere. The other women were the Duchesse de Falaris, and Saseri, maid of honor to madame. The men were the Marquis de Broglie, the Count de Nocé, the Marquis de Canillac, the Duc de Brancas, and the Chevalier de

Simiane. As to the Marquis de Lafare and Monsieur de Fargy, they were detained in bed by an illness, of which the cause is unknown. At noon there will be a council. The regent will communicate to the Ducs de Maine and de Guiche the project of the treaty of the quadruple alliance, which the Abbe Dubois has sent him, announcing his return in three or four days.

"The rest of the day is given entirely to paternity. The day before yesterday the regent married his daughter by La Desmarets, who was brought up by the nuns of St. Denis. She dines with her husband at the Palais Royal, and, after dinner, the regent takes her to the opera, to the box of Madame Charlotte de Baviere. La Desmarets, who has not seen her daughter for six years, is told that, if she wishes to see her, she can come to the theater. The regent, in spite of his caprice for Madame d'Averne, still pays court to Madame de Sabran, who piques herself on her fidelity — not to her husband, but to the Duc de Richelieu. To advance his affairs, the regent has appointed Monsieur de Sabran his maitre-d'hotel."

"I hope that is business well done," said the Abbe Brigaud.

"Yes, my dear abbe," replied D'Harmental; "but if the regent does not give us greater opportunities than that for executing our enterprise, it will not be easy for us to take him to Spain."

"Patience, patience," said Brigaud; "if there had been an opportunity to-day you would not have been able to profit by it."

"No; you are right."

"Then you see that what God does is well done. He has left us this day; let us profit by it to move."

This was neither a long nor difficult business. D'Harmental took his treasure, some books, and the packet which contained his wardrobe, and drove to the abbe's house. Then he sent away his carriage, saying he should go into the country in the evening, and would be away ten or twelve days. Then, having changed his elegant clothes for those that the abbe had brought him, he went to take possession of his new lodging. It was a room, or rather an attic, with a closet, on the fourth story, at No. 5, Rue du Temps Perdu. The proprietor of the house was an acquaintance of the Abbe Brigaud's; therefore, thanks to his recommendation, they had gone to some expense for the young provincial. He found beautifully white curtains, very fine linen, and a well-furnished library; so he saw at once that, if not so well off as in his own apartments, he should be tolerably comfortable.

Madame Denis (this was the name of the abbe’s friend) was waiting to do the honors of the room to her future lodger. She boasted to him of its convenience, and promised him that there would be no noise to disturb him from his work. To all which he replied in such a modest manner, that on going down to the first floor, where she lived, Madame Denis particularly recommended him to the care of the porter and his wife. This young man, though in appearance he could certainly compete with the proudest seigneurs of the court, seemed to her far from having the bold and free manners which the young men of the time affected. ‘Tis true that the Abbe Brigaud, in the name of his pupil’s family, had paid her a quarter in advance.

A minute after, the abbe went down to Madame Denis’s room and completed her good opinion of his young protege by telling her that he received absolutely nobody but himself and an old friend of his father’s. The latter, in spite of brusk manners, which he had acquired in the field, was a highly respectable gentleman.

D’Harmental used this precaution for fear the apparition of the captain might frighten Madame Denis if she happened to meet him. When he was alone, the chevalier, who had already taken the inventory of his own room, resolved to take that of the neighborhood. He was soon able to convince himself of the truth of what Madame Denis had said about the quietness of the street, for it was not more than ten or twelve feet wide; but this was to him a recommendation, for he calculated that if pursued he might, by means of a plank passed from one window to that opposite, escape to the other side of the street. It was, therefore, important to establish amicable relations with his opposite neighbors.

Unfortunately, they did not seem much disposed to sociability; for not only were the windows hermetically sealed, as the time of year demanded, but the curtains behind them were so closely drawn, that there was not the smallest opening through which he could look. More favored than that of Madame Denis, the house opposite had a fifth story, or rather a terrace. An attic room just above the window so carefully closed, opened on this terrace. It was probably the residence of a gardener, for he had succeeded, by means of patience and labor, in transforming this terrace into a garden, containing, in some twelve feet square, a fountain, a grotto, and an arbor.

It is true that the fountain only played by means of a superior reservoir, which was fed in winter by the rain, and in summer by what he himself poured into it. It is true that the grotto, ornamented with shell work, and surrounded by a wooden fortress, appeared fit only to shelter an individual of the canine race. It is true that the arbor, entirely stripped of its leaves, appeared for the time fit only for an immense poultry cage. As there was nothing to be seen but a monotonous series of roofs and chimneys, D’Harmental closed his window, sat down in an armchair, put his feet on the hobs, took up a volume by the Abbe Chaulieu, and began to read the verses addressed to Mademoiselle de Launay, which had a double interest for him, since he knew the heroine.

The result of this reading was that the chevalier, while smiling at the octogenarian love of the good abbe, discovered that he, less fortunate, had his heart perfectly unoccupied. For a short time he had thought he had loved Madame d’Averne, and had been loved by her; but on her part this deep affection did not withstand the offer of some jewels from the regent, and the vanity of pleasing him.

Before this infidelity had occurred, the chevalier thought that it would have driven him to despair. It had occurred, and he had fought, because at that time men fought about everything which arose, probably from dueling being so strictly forbidden. Then he began to perceive how small a place this love had held in his heart. A real despair would not have allowed him to seek amusement at the bal-masque, in which case the exciting events of the last few days would not have happened.

The result of this was, that the chevalier remained convinced that he was incapable of a deep love, and that he was only destined for those charming wickednesses so much in vogue. He got up, and began to walk up and down his room; while thus employed he perceived that the window opposite was now wide open. He stopped mechanically, drew back his curtain, and began to investigate the room thus exposed.

It was to all appearance occupied by a woman. Near the window, on which a charming little Italian greyhound rested her delicate paws, was an embroidery frame. Opposite the window was an open harpsichord between two music stands, some crayon drawings, framed in black wood with a gold bead, were hung on the walls, which were covered with a Persian paper. Curtains of Indian chintz, of the same pattern as the paper, hung behind the muslin curtains. Through a second window, half open, he could see the curtains of a recess which probably contained a bed. The rest of the furniture was perfectly simple, but almost elegant, which was due evidently, not to the fortune, but to the taste of the modest inhabitant.

An old woman was sweeping, dusting, and arranging the room, profiting by the absence of its mistress to do this household work, for there was no one else to be seen in the room, and yet it was clear it was not she who inhabited it. All at once the head of the greyhound — whose great eyes had been wandering till then, with the aristocratic indifference characteristic of that animal — became animated. She leaned her head over into the street; then, with a miraculous lightness and address, jumped on to the window-sill, pricking up her long-ears, and raising one of her paws. The chevalier understood by these signs that the tenant of the little room was approaching. He opened his window directly; unfortunately it was already too late, the street was solitary.

At the same moment the greyhound leaped from the window into the room and ran to the door. D’Harmental concluded that the young lady was mounting the stairs. In order to see her at his ease, he threw himself back and hid behind the curtain, but the old woman came to the window and closed it. The chevalier did not expect this denouement. There was nothing for him but to close his window also, and to come back and put his feet on the hobs. This was not amusing, and the chevalier began to feel how solitary he should be in this retreat. He remembered that formerly he also used to play and draw, and he thought that if he had the smallest spinet and some chalks, he could bear it with patience.

He rang for the porter, and asked where he could procure these things. The porter replied that every increase of furniture must be at his own expense. That if he wished for a harpsichord he must hire it, and that as to pencils, he could get them at the shop at the corner of the Rue de Clery.

D’Harmental gave a double louis to the porter, telling him that in half an hour he wished to have a spinet and some pencils. The double louis was an argument of which he had before found the advantage; reproaching himself, however, with having used it this time with a carelessness which gave the lie to his apparent position, he recalled the porter, and told him that he expected for his double louis to have, not only paper and pencils, but a month’s hire of his instrument.

The porter replied that as he would speak as if it were for himself, the thing was possible; but that he must certainly pay the carriage. D’Harmental consented, and half an hour afterward was in possession of the desired objects. Such a wonderful place is Paris for every enchanter with a golden wand. The porter, when he went down, told his wife that if the new lodger was not more careful of his money, he would ruin his family, and showed her two crowns of six francs, which he had saved out of the double louis. The woman took the two crowns from the hands of her husband, calling him a drunkard, and put them into a little bag, hidden under a heap of old clothes, deploring the misfortune of fathers and mothers who bleed themselves to death for such good-for-nothings. This was the funeral oration of the chevalier’s double louis.

CHAPTER IX.

A CITIZEN OF THE RUE DU TEMPS PERDU.

During this time D’Harmental was seated before the spinet, playing his best. The shopkeeper had had a sort of conscience, and had sent him an instrument nearly in tune, so that the chevalier began to perceive that he was doing wonders, and almost believed he was born with a genius for music, which had only required such a circumstance to develop itself. Doubtless there was some truth in this, for in the middle of a brilliant shake he saw, from the other side of the street, five little fingers delicately raising the curtain to see from whence this unaccustomed harmony proceeded. Unfortunately, at the sight of these fingers the chevalier forgot his music, and turned round quickly on the stool, in hopes of seeing a face behind the hand.

This ill-judged maneuver ruined him. The mistress of the little room, surprised in the act of curiosity, let the curtain fall. D’Harmental, wounded by this prudery, closed his window. The evening passed in reading, drawing, and playing. The chevalier could not have believed that there were so many minutes in an hour, or so many hours in a day. At ten o’clock in the evening he rang for the porter, to give orders for the next day; but no one answered; he had been in bed a long time, and D’Harmental learned that there were people who went to bed about the time he ordered his carriage to pay visits.

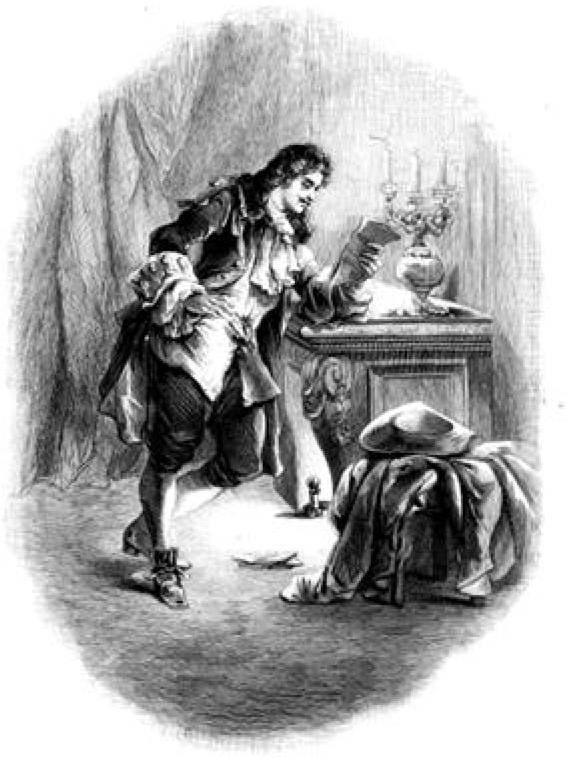

This set him thinking of the strange manners of that unfortunate class of society who do not know the opera, who do not go to supper-parties, and who sleep all night and are awake all day. He thought you must come to the Rue du Temps Perdu to see such things, and promised himself to amuse his friends with an account of this singularity. He was glad to see also that his neighbor watched like himself. This showed in her a mind superior to that of the vulgar inhabitants of the Rue du Temps Perdu. D’Harmental believed that people only watched because they did not wish to sleep, or because they wanted to be amused. He forgot all those who do so because they are obliged. At midnight the light in the opposite windows was extinguished; D’Harmental also went to his bed. The next day the Abbe Brigaud appeared at eight o’clock. He brought D’Harmental the second report of secret police. It was in these terms:

“Three o’clock, a.m.

“In consequence of the regular life which he led yesterday, the regent has given orders to be called at nine.

“He will receive some appointed persons at that time.

“From ten to twelve there will be a public audience.

“From twelve till one the regent will be engaged with La Vrilliere and Leblanc.

"From one to two he will open letters with Torcy.

"At half-past two there will be a council, and he will pay the king a visit.

"At three o'clock he will go to the tennis court in the Rue du Seine, to sustain, with Brancas and Canillac, a challenge against the Duc de Richelieu, the Marquis de Broglie, and the Comte de Gacé.

"At six he will go to supper at the Luxembourg with the Duchesse de Berry, and will pass the evening there.

"From there he will come back, without guards, to the Palais Royal, unless the Duchesse de Berry gives him an escort from hers."

"Without guards, my dear abbe! what do you think of that?" said D'Harmental, beginning to dress; "does it not make your mouth water?"

"Without guards, yes," replied the abbe; "but with footmen, outriders, a coachman — all people who do not fight much, it is true, but who cry very loud. Oh! patience, patience, my young friend. You are in a great hurry to be a grandee of Spain."

"No, my dear abbe, but I am in a hurry to give up living in an attic where I lack everything, and where I am obliged to dress myself alone, as you see. Do you think it is nothing to go to bed at ten o'clock, and dress in the morning without a valet?"

"Yes, but you have music," replied the abbe.

"Ah! indeed!" replied D'Harmental. "Abbe, open my window, I beg, that they may see I receive good company. That will do me honor with my neighbors."

"Ho! ho!" said the abbe, doing what D'Harmental asked; "that is not bad at all."

"How, not bad?" replied D'Harmental; "it is very good, on the contrary. It is from Armida: the devil take me if I expected to find that in the fourth story of a house in the Rue du Temps Perdu."

"Chevalier, I predict," said the abbe, "that if the singer be young and pretty, in a week there will be as much trouble to get you away as there is now to keep you here."

"My dear abbe," said D'Harmental, "if your police were as good as those of the Prince de Cellamare, you would know that I am cured of love for a long time, and here is the proof. Do not think I pass my days in sighing. I beg when you go down you will send me something like a pâté, and a dozen bottles of good wine. I trust to you. I know you are a connoisseur; besides, sent by you, it will seem like a guardian's attention. Bought by me, it would seem like a pupil’s debauch; and I have my provincial reputation to keep up with Madame Denis.”

“That is true. I do not ask you what it is for, but I will send it to you.”

“And you are right, my dear abbe. It is all for the good of the cause.”

“In an hour the pâté and the wine will be here.”

“When shall I see you again?”

“To-morrow, probably.”

“Adieu, then, till to-morrow.”

“You send me away.”

“I am expecting somebody.”

“All for the good of the cause?”

“I answer you, go, and may God preserve you.”

“Stay, and may the devil not get hold of you. Remember that it was a woman who got us turned out of our terrestrial paradise. Defy women.”

“Amen,” said the chevalier, making a parting sign with his hand to the Abbe Brigaud.

Indeed, as the abbe had observed, D’Harmental was in a hurry to see him go. The great love for music, which the chevalier had discovered only the day before, had progressed so rapidly that he did not wish his attention called away from what he had just heard. The little which that horrible window allowed him to hear, and which was more of the instrument than of the voice, showed that his neighbor was an excellent musician. The playing was skillful, the voice sweet and sustained, and had, in its high notes and deep vibrations, something which awoke an answer in the heart of the listener. At last, after a very difficult and perfectly executed passage, D’Harmental could not help clapping his hands and crying bravo! As bad luck would have it, this triumph, to which she had not been accustomed, instead of encouraging the musician, frightened her so much, that voice and harpsichord stopped at the same instant, and silence immediately succeeded to the melody for which the chevalier had so imprudently manifested his enthusiasm.

In exchange, he saw the door of the room above (which we have said led on to the terrace) open, and a hand was stretched out, evidently to ascertain what kind of weather it was. The answer of the weather seemed reassuring, for the hand was almost directly followed by a head covered by a little chintz cap, tied on the forehead by a violet ribbon; and the head was only a few instants in advance of a neck and shoulders clothed in a kind of dressing-gown of the same stuff as the cap. This was not quite enough to enable the chevalier to decide to which sex the individual, who seemed so cautious about exposing himself to the morning air, belonged. At last, a sort of sunbeam having slipped out between two clouds, the timid inhabitant of the terrace appeared to be encouraged to come out altogether. D'Harmental then saw, by his black velvet knee-breeches, and by his silk stockings, that the personage who had just entered on the scene was of the masculine gender.

It was the gardener of whom we spoke. The bad weather of the preceding days had, without doubt, deprived him of his morning walk, and had prevented him from giving his garden his ordinary attention, for he began to walk round it with a visible fear of finding some accident produced by the wind or rain; but, after a careful inspection of the fountain, the grotto, and the arbor, which were its three principal ornaments, the excellent face of the gardener was lighted by a ray of joy, as the weather was by the ray of sun. He perceived, not only that everything was in its place, but that the reservoir was full to overflowing. He thought he might indulge in playing his fountain, a treat which, ordinarily, following the example of Louis XIV., he only allowed himself on Sundays. He turned the cock, and the jet raised itself majestically to the height of four or five feet. The good man was so delighted that he began to sing the burden of an old pastoral song which D'Harmental had heard when he was a baby, and, while repeating —

"Let me go And let me play Beneath the hazel-tree,"

he ran to the window, and called aloud, "Bathilde! Bathilde!"

The chevalier understood that there was a communication between the rooms on the third and fourth stories, and some relation between the gardener and the musician, and thought that perhaps if he remained at the window she would not come on to the terrace; therefore he closed his window with a careless air, taking care to keep a little opening behind the curtain, through which he could see without being seen. What he had foreseen happened. Very soon the head of a charming young girl appeared on the terrace; but as, without doubt, the ground, on which he had ventured with so much courage, was too damp, she would not go any further. The little dog, not less timid than its mistress, remained near her, resting its white paws on the window, and shaking its head in silent denial to every invitation. A dialogue was established between the good man and the young girl, while D'Harmental had leisure to examine her at ease.

She appeared to have arrived at that delicious time of life when woman, passing from childhood to youth, is in the full bloom of sentiment, grace, and beauty. He saw that she was not less than sixteen nor more than eighteen years of age, and that there existed in her a singular mixture of two races. She had the fair hair, thick complexion, and graceful neck of an English woman, with the black eyes, coral lips, and pearly teeth of a Spaniard.

As she did not use either rouge or white, and as that time powder was scarcely in fashion, and was reserved for aristocratic heads, her complexion remained in its natural freshness, and nothing altered the color of her hair.

The chevalier remained as in an ecstasy — indeed, he had never seen but two classes of women. The fat and coarse peasants of the Nivernais, with their great feet and hands, their short petticoats, and their hunting-horn shaped hats; and the women of the Parisian aristocracy, beautiful without doubt, but of that beauty fagged by watching and pleasure, and by that reversing of life which makes them what flowers would be if they only saw the sun on some rare occasions, and the vivifying air of the morning and the evening only reached them through the windows of a hot-house. He did not know this intermediate type, if one may call it so, between high society and the country people, which had all the elegance of the one, and all the fresh health of the other. Thus, as we have said, he remained fixed in his place, and long after the young girl had re-entered, he kept his eyes fixed on the window where this delicious vision had appeared.

The sound of his door opening called him out of his ecstasy: it was the pâté and the wine from Abbe Brigaud making their solemn entry into the chevalier’s garret. The sight of these provisions recalled to his mind that he had now something better to do than to abandon himself to contemplation, and that he had given Captain Roquefinette a rendezvous on the most important business. Consequently he looked at his watch, and saw that it was ten o’clock. This was, as the reader will remember, the appointed hour. He sent away the man who had brought the provisions, and said he would lay the cloth himself; then, opening his window once more, he sat down to watch for the appearance of Captain Roquefinette.

He was hardly at his observatory before he perceived the worthy captain coming round the corner from the Rue Gros-Chenet, his head in the air, his hand on his hip, and with the martial and decided air of a man who, like the Greek philosopher, carries everything with him. His hat, that thermometer by which his friends could tell the secret state of its master’s finances, and which, on his fortunate days was placed as straight on his head as a pyramid on its base, had recovered that miraculous inclination which had so struck the Baron de Valef, and thanks to which, one of the points almost touched his right shoulder, while the parallel one might forty years later had given Franklin, if Franklin had known the captain, the first idea of his electric kite.

Having come about a third down the street, he raised his head as had been arranged, and saw the chevalier just above him. He who waited, and he who was waited for, exchanged nods, and the captain having calculated the distance at a glance, and recognized the door which ought to belong to the window above, jumped over the threshold of Madame Denis’s poor little house with as much familiarity as if it had been a tavern. The chevalier shut the window, and drew the curtains with the greatest care — either in order that his pretty neighbor might not see him with the captain, or that the captain might not see her.

An instant afterward D’Harmental heard the sound of his steps, and the beating of his sword against the banisters. Having arrived at the third story, as the light which came from below was not aided by any light from above, he found himself in a difficulty, not knowing whether to stop where he was, or mount higher. Then, after coughing in the most significant manner, and finding that this call remained unnoticed —

“Morbleu!” said he. “Chevalier, as you did not probably bring me here to break my neck, open your door or call out, so that I may be guided either by the light of heaven, or by the sound of your voice; otherwise I shall be lost, neither more nor less than Theseus in the labyrinth.”

And the captain began to sing in a loud voice —

“Fair Ariadne, I beg of you, Help me, by lending me your clew. Toutou, toutou, toutaine, toutou!”

The chevalier ran to his door and opened it.

“My friend,” said the captain, “the ladder up to your pigeon-house is infernally dark; still here I am, faithful to the agreement, exact to the time. Ten o’clock was striking as I came over the Pont-Neuf.”

CHAPTER X.

THE AGREEMENT.

The chevalier extended his hand to Roquefinette, saying:

“Yes, you are a man of your word, but enter quickly; it is important that my neighbors should not notice you.”

“In that case I am as dumb as a log,” answered the captain; “besides,” added he, pointing to the pâté and the bottles which covered the table, “you have found the true way of shutting my mouth.”

The chevalier shut the door behind the captain and pushed the bolt.

“Ah! ah! mystery — so much the better, I am fond of mystery. There is almost always something to be gained when people begin by saying ‘hush.’ In any case you cannot do better than address yourself to your servant,” continued the captain, resuming his mythological language. “You see in me the grandson of Hippocrates, the god of silence. So do not be uneasy.”

“That is well, captain,” answered D’Harmental, “for I confess that what I have to say to you is of sufficient importance for me to claim your discretion beforehand.”

“It is granted, chevalier. While I was giving a lesson to little Ravanne, I saw, out of a corner of my eye, that you were a skillful swordsman, and I love brave men. Then, in return for a little service, only worth a fillip, you made me a present of a horse which was worth a hundred louis, and I love generous men. Thus you are twice my man, why should I not be yours once?”

“Well,” said the chevalier, “I see that we understand each other.”

“Speak, and I will listen,” answered the captain, assuming his gravest air.

“You will listen better seated, my dear guest. Let us go to breakfast.”

“You preach like St. John with the golden mouth, chevalier,” said the captain, taking off his sword and placing that and his hat on the harpsichord; “so that,” continued he, sitting down opposite D’Harmental, “one cannot differ from you in opinion. I am here; command the maneuver, and I will execute it.”

“Taste that wine while I cut the pate.”

"That is right," said the captain, "let us divide our forces, and fight the enemy separately, then let us re-unite to exterminate what remains."

And joining practice to theory, the captain seized the first bottle by the neck, drew the cork, and having filled a bumper, drank it off with such ease that one would have said that nature had gifted him with an especial method of deglutition; but, to do him justice, scarcely had he drunk it than he perceived that the liquor, which he had disposed of so cavalierly, merited a more particular attention than he had given it.

"Oh!" said he, putting down his glass with a respectful slowness, "what have I done, unworthy that I am? I drink nectar as if it were trash, and that at the beginning of the feast! Ah!" continued he, shaking his head, "Roquefinette, my friend, you are getting old. Ten years ago you would have known what it was at the first drop that touched your palate, while now you want many trials to know the worth of things. To your health, chevalier."

And this time the captain, more circumspect, drank the second glass slowly, and set it down three times before he finished it, winking his eyes in sign of satisfaction. Then, when he had finished —

"This is hermitage of 1702, the year of the battle of Friedlingen. If your wine-merchant has much like that, and if he will give credit, let me have his address. I promise him a good customer."

"Captain," answered the chevalier, slipping an enormous slice of pate on to the plate of his guest, "my wine-merchant not only gives credit, but to my friends he gives altogether."

"Oh, the honest man!" cried the captain. Then, after a minute's silence, during which a superficial observer would have thought him absorbed in the appreciation of the pate, as he had been an instant before in that of the wine, he leaned his two elbows on the table, and looking at D'Harmental with a penetrating glance between his knife and fork —

"So, my dear chevalier," said he, "we conspire, it seems, and in order to succeed we have need of poor Captain Roquefinette."

"And who told you that, captain?" broke in the chevalier, trembling in spite of himself.

"Who told me that, pardieu! It is an easy riddle to answer. A man who gives away horses worth a hundred louis, who drinks wine at a pistole the bottle, and who lodges in a garret in the Rue du Temps Perdu, what should he be doing if not conspiring?"

"Well, captain," said D'Harmental, laughing, "I shall never be discreet; you have divined the truth. Does a conspiracy frighten you?" continued he, filling his guest's glass.

"Frighten *me*! Who says that anything on earth can frighten Captain Roquefinette?"

"Not I, captain; for at the first glance, at the first word, I fixed on you as my second."

"Ah! that is to say, that if you are hung on a scaffold twenty feet high, I shall be hung on one ten feet high, that's all!"

"Peste! captain," said D'Harmental, "if one always began by seeing thing in their worst light, one would never attempt anything."

"Because I have spoken of the gallows?" answered the captain. "That proves nothing. What is the gallows in the eyes of a philosopher? One of the thousand ways of parting from life, and certainly one of the least disagreeable. One can see that you have never looked the thing in the face, since you have such an aversion to it. Besides, on proving our noble descent, we shall have our heads cut off, like Monsieur de Rohan. Did you see Monsieur de Rohan's head cut off?" continued the captain, looking at D'Harmental. "He was a handsome young man, like you, and about your age. He conspired, but the thing failed. What would you have? Everybody may be deceived. They built him a beautiful black scaffold; they allowed him to turn toward the window where his mistress was; they cut the neck of his shirt with scissors, but the executioner was a bungler, accustomed to hang, and not to decapitate, so that he was obliged to strike three or four times to cut the head off, and at last he only managed by the aid of a knife which he drew from his girdle, and with which he chopped so well that he got the neck in half. Bravo! you are brave!" continued the captain, seeing that the chevalier had listened without frowning to all the details of this horrible execution. "That will do — I am your man. Against whom are we conspiring? Let us see. Is it against Monsieur le Duc de Maine? Is it against Monsieur le Duc d'Orleans? Must we break the lame one's other leg? Must we cut out the blind one's other eye? I am ready."

"Nothing of all that, captain; and if it pleases God there will be no blood spilled."

"What is going on then?"

"Have you ever heard of the abduction of the Duke of Mantua's secretary?"

“Of Matthioli?” — — ”Yes.”

“Pardieu! I know the affair better than any one, for I saw them pass as they were conducting him to Pignerol. It was the Chevalier de Saint-Martin and Monsieur de Villebois who did it; and by this token they each had three thousand livres for themselves and their men.”

“That was only middling pay,” said D’Harmental, with a disdainful air.

“You think so, chevalier? Nevertheless three thousand livres is a nice little sum.”

“Then for three thousand livres you would have undertaken it?”

“I would have undertaken it,” answered the captain.

“But if instead of carrying off a secretary it had been proposed to you to carry off a duke?”

“That would have been dearer.”

“But you would have undertaken it all the same?”

“Why not? I should have asked double — that is all.”

“And if, in giving you double, a man like myself had said to you, ‘Captain, it is not an obscure danger that I plunge you into; it is a struggle in which I am myself engaged, like you, and in which I venture my name, my future, and my head:’ what would you have answered?”

“I would have given him my hand, as I now give it you. Now what is the business?”

The chevalier filled his own glass and that of the captain.

“To the health of the regent,” said he, “and may he arrive without accident at the Spanish frontier, as Matthioli arrived at Pignerol.”

“Ah! ah!” said the captain, raising his glass. Then, after a pause, “And why not?” continued he, “the regent is but a man after all. Only we shall neither be hanged nor decapitated; we shall be broken on the wheel. To any one else I should say that a regent would be dearer, but to you, chevalier, I have only one price. Give me six thousand livres, and I will find a dozen determined men.”

“But those twelve men, do you think that you may trust them?”

“What need for their knowing what they are doing? They shall think they are only carrying out a wager.”

“And I,” answered D’Harmental, “will show you that I do not haggle with my friends. Here are two thousand crowns in gold, take them on account if we succeed; if we fail we will cry quits.”

“Chevalier,” answered the captain, taking the bag of money and poising it on his hand with an indescribable air of satisfaction, “I will not do you the injustice of counting after you. When is the affair to be?”

“I do not know yet, captain; but if you find the pate to your taste, and the wine good, and if you will do me the pleasure of breakfasting with me every day as you have done to-day, I will keep you informed of everything.”

“That would not do, chevalier,” said the captain. “I should not have come to you three mornings before the police of that cursed Argenson would have found us out. Luckily he has found some one as clever as himself, and it will be some time before we are at the bar together. No, no, chevalier, from now till the moment for action, the less we see of one another the better; or rather, we must not see each other at all. Your street is not a long one, and as it opens at one end on the Rue du Gros-Chenet, and at the other on the Rue Montmartre, I shall have no reason for coming through it. Here,” continued he, detaching his shoulder-knot, “take this ribbon. The day that you want me, tie it to a nail outside your window. I shall understand it, and I will come to you.”

“How, captain!” said D’Harmental, seeing that his companion was fastening on his sword. “Are you going without finishing the bottle? What has the wine, which you appeared to appreciate so much a little while ago, done to you, that you despise it so now?”

“It is just because I appreciate it still that I separate myself from it; and the proof that I do not despise it,” said the captain, filling his glass, “is that I am going to take an adieu of it. To your health, chevalier; you may boast of having good wine. Hum! And now, n — o, no, that is all. I shall take to water till I see the ribbon flutter from your window. Try to let it be as soon as possible, for water is a liquid that does not suit my constitution.”

“But why do you go so soon?”

“Because I know Captain Roquefinette. He is a good fellow; but when he sits down before a bottle he must drink, and when he has drunk he must talk; and, however well one talks, remember that those who talk much always finish by making some blunder. Adieu, chevalier. Do not forget the crimson ribbon; I go to look after our business.”

“Adieu, captain,” said D’Harmental, “I am pleased to see that I have no need to preach discretion to you.”

The captain made the sign of the cross on his mouth with his right thumb, placed his hat straight on his head, raised his sword for fear of its making a noise or beating against the wall, and went downstairs as silently as if he had feared that every step would echo in the Hotel d’Argenson.

CHAPTER XI.

PROS AND CONS.

The chevalier remained alone; but this time there was, in what had just passed between himself and the captain, sufficient matter for reflection to render it unnecessary for him to have recourse either to the poetry of the Abbe Chaulieu, his harpsichord, or his chalks. Indeed, until now, he had been only half engaged in the hazardous enterprise of which the Duchesse de Maine and the Prince de Cellamare had shown him the happy ending, and of which the captain, in order to try his courage, had so brutally exhibited to him the bloody catastrophe. As yet he had only been the end of a chain, and, on breaking away from one side, he would have been loose. Now he was become an intermediate ring, fastened at both ends, and attached at the same time to people above and below him in society. In a word, from this hour he no longer belonged to himself, and he was like the Alpine traveler, who, having lost his way, stops in the middle of an unknown road, and measures with his eye, for the first time, the mountain which rises above him and the gulf which yawns beneath his feet.

Luckily the chevalier had the calm, cold, and resolute courage of a man in whom fire and determination — those two opposite forces — instead of neutralizing, stimulated each other. He engaged in danger with all the rapidity of a sanguine man; he weighed it with all the consideration of a phlegmatic one. Madame de Maine was right when she said to Madame de Launay that she might put out her lantern, and that she believed she had at last found a man.

But this man was young, twenty-six years of age, with a heart open to all the illusions and all the poetry of that first part of existence. As a child he had laid down his playthings at the feet of his mother. As a young man he had come to exhibit his handsome uniform as colonel to the eyes of his mistress; indeed, in every enterprise of his life some loved image had gone before him, and he threw himself into danger with the certainty that, if he succumbed, there would be some one surviving who would mourn his fate.

But his mother was dead, the last woman by whom he had believed himself loved had betrayed him, and he felt alone in the world — bound solely by interest to men to whom he would become an obstacle as soon as he ceased to be an instrument, and who, if he broke down, far from mourning his loss, would only see in it a cause of satisfaction. But this isolated position, which ought to be the envy of all men in a great danger, is almost always (such is the egotism of our nature) a cause of the most profound discouragement. Such is the horror of nothingness in man, that he believes he still survives in the sentiments which he has inspired, and he in some measure consoles himself for leaving the world by thinking of the regrets which will accompany his memory, and of the pity which will visit his tomb. Thus, at this instant, the chevalier would have given everything to be loved, if it was only by a dog.

He was plunged in the saddest of these reflections when, passing and repassing before his window, he noticed that his neighbor's was open. He stopped suddenly, and shook his head, as if to cast off the most somber of these thoughts; leaning his elbow on the table, and his head on his hand, he tried to give a different direction to his thoughts by looking at exterior objects.

The young girl whom he had seen in the morning was seated near her window, in order to benefit by the last rays of daylight; she was working at some kind of embroidery. Behind her the harpsichord was open, and, on a stool at her feet, her greyhound slept the light sleep of an animal destined by nature to be the guard of man, waking at every noise which arose from the street, raising its ears, and stretching out its elegant head over the window-sill; then it lay down again, placing one of its little paws upon its mistress's knees. All this was deliciously lighted up by the rays of the sinking sun, which penetrated into the room, sparkling on the steel ornaments of the harpsichord and the gold beading of the picture-frames. The rest was in twilight.

Then it seemed to the chevalier (doubtless on account of the disposition of mind he was in when this picture had struck his eye) that this young girl, with the calm and sweet face, entered into his life, like one of those personages who always remain behind a veil, and make their entrance on a piece in the second or third act to take part in the action, and, sometimes, to change the denouement.

Since the age when one sees angels in one’s dreams, he had seen no one like her. She was a mixture of beauty, candor, and simplicity, such as Greuze has copied, not from nature, but from the reflections in the mirror of his imagination. Then, forgetting everything, the humble condition in which without doubt she had been born, the street where he had found her, the modest room which she had inhabited, seeing nothing in the woman except the woman herself, he attributed to her a heart corresponding with her face, and thought what would be the happiness of the man who should first cause that heart to beat; who should be looked upon with love by those beautiful eyes, and who, in the words, “I love you!” should gather from those lips, so fresh and so pure, that flower of the soul — a first kiss.

Such are the different aspects which the same objects borrow from the situation of him who looks at them. A week before, in the midst of his gayety, in his life which no danger menaced, between a breakfast at the tavern and a stag-hunt, between a wager at tennis and a supper at La Fillon’s, if D’Harmental had met this young girl, he would doubtless have seen in her nothing but a charming grisette, whom he would have had followed by his valet-de-chambre, and to whom, the next day, he would have outrageously offered a present of some twenty-five louis.

But the D’Harmental of a week ago existed no more. In the place of the handsome seigneur — elegant, wild, dissipated, and certain of life — was an insulated young man, walking in the shade, alone, and self-reliant, without a star to guide him, who might suddenly feel the earth open under his feet, and the heavens burst above his head. He had need of a support, so feeble was he; he had need of love, he had need of poetry. It was not then wonderful that, searching for a Madonna to whom to address his prayers, he raised in his imagination this young and beautiful girl from the material and prosaic sphere in which he found her, and that, drawing her into his own, he placed her, not such as she was, doubtless, but such as he wished her to be, on the empty pedestal of his past adorations.

All at once the young girl raised her head, and happened to look in his direction, and saw the pensive figure of the chevalier through the glass. It appeared evident to her that the young man remained there for her, and that it was at her he was looking. Then a bright blush spread over her face. Still she pretended she had seen nothing, and bent her head once more over her embroidery. But a minute afterward she rose, took a few turns round her room; then, without affectation, without false prudery, but nevertheless with a certain embarrassment, she returned and shut the window. D'Harmental remained where he was, and as he was; continuing, in spite of the shutting of the window, to advance into the imaginary country where his thoughts were straying.

Once or twice he thought that he saw the curtain of his neighbor's window raised, as if she wished to know whether he whose indiscretion had driven her from her place was still at his. At last a few masterly chords were heard; a sweet harmony followed; and it was then D'Harmental who opened his window in his turn.

He had not been mistaken, his neighbor was an admirable musician; she executed two or three little pieces, but without blending her voice with the sound of the instrument; and D'Harmental found almost as much pleasure in listening to her as he had found in looking at her. Suddenly she stopped in the midst of a passage. D'Harmental supposed either that she had seen him at his window, and wished to punish him for his curiosity, or that some one had come in and interrupted her. He retired into his room, but so as not to lose sight of the window, and soon discovered that his last supposition was the true one.

A man came to the window, raised the curtain, and pressed his fat, good-natured face against the glass, while with one hand he beat a march against the panes. The chevalier recognized, in spite of a sensible difference which there was in his toilet, the man of the water-jet whom he had seen on the terrace in the morning, and who, with a perfect air of familiarity, had twice pronounced the name of "Bathilde."

This apparition, more than prosaic, produced the effect which might naturally have been expected; that is to say, it brought D'Harmental back from imaginary to real life. He had forgotten this man, who made such a strange and perfect contrast with the young girl, and who must doubtless be either her father, her lover, or her husband. But in either of these cases, what could there be in common between the daughter, the wife, or the mistress of such a man, and the noble and aristocratic chevalier? The wife! It is a misfortune of her dependent situation that she rises and falls according to the grandeur or vulgarity of him on whose arm she leans; and it must be confessed that the gardener was not formed to maintain poor Bathilde at the height to which the chevalier had raised her in his dreams.

Then he began to laugh at his own folly; and the night having arrived, and as he had not been outside the door since the day before, he determined to take a walk through the town, in order to assure himself of the truth of the Prince de Cellamare's reports. He wrapped himself in his cloak, descended the four stories, and bent his steps toward the Luxembourg, where the note which the Abbe Brigaud had brought him in the morning said that the regent was going to supper without guards.

Arrived opposite the palace of the Luxembourg, the chevalier saw none of those signs which should announce that the Duc d'Orleans was at his daughter's house: there was only one sentinel at the door, while from the moment that the regent entered a second was generally placed there. Besides, he saw no carriage waiting in the court, no footmen or outriders; it was evident, then, that he had not come. The chevalier waited to see him pass, for, as the regent never breakfasted, and took nothing but a cup of chocolate at two o'clock in the afternoon, he rarely supped later than six o'clock; but a quarter to six had struck at the St. Surplice at the moment when the chevalier turned the corner of the Rue de Conde, and the Rue de Vaugirard.

The chevalier waited an hour and a half in the Rue de Tournon, going from the Rue du Petit-Lion to the palace, without seeing what he had come to look for. At a quarter to eight he saw some movement in the Luxembourg. A carriage, with outriders armed with torches, came to the foot of the steps. A minute after three women got in; he heard the coachman call to the outriders, “To the Palais Royal;” and the outriders set off at a gallop, the carriage followed, the sentinel presented arms; and, quickly as the elegant equipage with the royal arms of France passed, the chevalier recognized the Duchesse de Berry, Madame de Mouchy, her lady of honor, and Madame de Pons, her tire-woman.

There had been an important error in the report sent to the chevalier; it was the daughter who went to the father, not the father who came to the daughter.

Nevertheless, the chevalier still waited, for some accident might have happened to the regent, which detained him at home. An hour after he saw the carriage repass. The Duchesse de Berry was laughing at a story which Broglie was telling her. There had not then been any serious accident; it was the police of the Prince de Cellamare, then, that were at fault.

The chevalier returned home about ten o'clock without having been met or recognized. He had some trouble to get the door opened, for, according to the patriarchal habits of Madame Denis's house, the porter had gone to bed, and came out grumbling to unfasten the bolts. D’Harmental slipped a crown into his hand, saying to him, once for all, that he should sometimes return late, but that each time that he did so he would give him the same; upon which the porter thanked him, and assured him that he was perfectly welcome to come home at any time he liked, or even not to return at all.

On returning to his room, D’Harmental saw that his neighbor’s was lighted up; he placed his candle behind a piece of furniture, and approached the window, so that, as much as the muslin curtains allowed, he could see into her room, while she could not see into his.

She was seated near a table, drawing, probably, on a card which she held on her knees, for he saw her profile standing out black against the light behind her. Shortly another shadow, which the chevalier recognized as that of the good man of the terrace, passed twice between the light and the window. At last the shade approached the young girl, she offered her forehead, the shadow imprinted a kiss on it, and went away, with his candle in his hand. Directly afterward the windows of the fifth story were lighted up. All these little circumstances spoke a language which it was impossible not to understand. The man of the terrace was not the husband of Bathilde, he must be her father.

D’Harmental, without knowing why, felt overjoyed at this discovery; he opened his window as softly as he could, and leaned on the bar, which served him as a support, with his eyes fixed on the shadow. He fell into the same reverie out of which he had been startled that morning by the grotesque apparition of his neighbor. In about an hour the girl rose, put down her card and crayons on the table, advanced toward the alcove, knelt on a chair before the second window, and offered up her prayers. D’Harmental understood that her laborious watch was finished, but remembering the curiosity of his beautiful neighbor, when he had begun to play the first time, he wished to see if he could prolong that watch, and he sat down to his spinet. What he had foreseen happened; at the first notes which reached her, the young girl, not knowing that from the position of the light he could see her shadow through the curtains, approached the window on tiptoe, and thinking herself hidden, she listened to the melodious instrument, which, like the nightingale, awoke to sing in the middle of the night.

The concert would have probably continued thus for some hours, for D’Harmental, encouraged by the result produced, felt an energy and an ease of execution such as he had never known before. Unluckily, the occupier of the third floor was undoubtedly some clown, no lover of music, for D'Harmental heard suddenly, just below his feet, the noise of a stick knocking on the ceiling with such violence that he could not doubt that it was a warning to him to put off his melodious occupation till a more suitable period. Under other circumstances, D'Harmental would have sent the impertinent adviser to the devil, but reflecting that any ill-feeling on the lodger's part would injure his own reputation with Madame Denis, and that he was playing too heavy a game to risk being recognized, and not to submit philosophically to all the inconveniences of the new position which he had adopted, instead of setting himself in opposition to the rules established without doubt between Madame Denis and her lodgers, he obeyed the intimation, forgetting in what manner that intimation had been given him.

On her part, as soon as she heard nothing more, the young girl left the window, and as she let the inner curtains fall behind her, she disappeared from D'Harmental's eyes. For some time longer he could still see a light in her room; then the light was extinguished. As to the window on the fifth floor, for some time that had been in the most perfect darkness. D'Harmental also went to bed, joyous to think that there existed a point of sympathy between himself and his neighbor.

The next day the Abbe Brigaud entered the room with his accustomed punctuality. The chevalier had already been up more than an hour; he had gone twenty times to his window, but without seeing his neighbor, although it was evident that she was up, even before himself; indeed, on waking he had seen the large curtains put up in their bands. Thus he was disposed to let out his ill-humor on any one.

"Ah! pardieu! my dear abbe," said he, as soon as the door was shut; "congratulate the prince for me on his police; it is perfectly arranged, on my honor!"

"What have you got against them?" asked the abbe, with the half-smile which was habitual to him.

"What have I! I have, that, wishing to judge for myself, last evening, of its truth, I went and hid myself in the Rue Tournon. I remained there four hours, and it was not the regent who came to his daughter, but Madame de Berry who went to her father."

"Well, we know that."

“Ah! you know that!” said D’Harmental.

“Yes, and by this token, that she left the Luxembourg at five minutes to eight, with Madame de Mouchy and Madame de Pons, and that she returned at half-past nine, bringing Broglie with her, who came to take the regent’s place at table.”

“And where was the regent?”

“The regent?”

“Yes.”

“That is another story; you shall learn. Listen, and do not lose a word; then we shall see if you will say that the prince’s police is badly arranged.”

“I attend.”

“Our report announced that at three o’clock the duke-regent would go to play tennis in the Rue de Seine.”

“Yes.”

“He went. In about half an hour he left holding his handkerchief over his eyes. He had hit himself on the brow with the racket, and with such violence that he had torn the skin of his forehead.”

“Ah, this then was the accident!”

“Listen. Then the regent, instead of returning to the Palais Royal, was driven to the house of Madame de Sabran. You know where Madame de Sabran lives?”

“She lived in the Rue de Tournon, but since her husband has become maitre d’hotel to the regent, she lives in the Rue des Bons Enfants, near the Palais Royal.”

“Exactly; but it seems that Madame de Sabran, who until now was faithful to Richelieu, was touched by the pitiable state in which she saw the prince, and wished to justify the proverb, ‘Unlucky at play, lucky at love.’ The prince, by a little note, dated half-past seven, from the drawing-room of Madame de Sabran, with whom he supped, announced to Broglie that he should not go to the Luxembourg, and charged him to go in his stead, and make his excuses to the Duchesse de Berry.”

“Ah, this then was the story which Broglie was telling, and at which the ladies were laughing.”

“It is probable; now do you understand?”

“Yes; I understand that the regent is not possessed of ubiquity, and could not be at the house of Madame de Sabran and at his daughter’s at the same time.”

“And you only understand that?”

“My dear abbe, you speak like an oracle; explain yourself.”

“This evening, at eight o’clock, I will come for you; we will go to the Rue des Bons Enfants together. To me the locality is eloquent.”

“Ah! ah!” said D’Harmental, “I see; so near the Palais Royal, he will go on foot. The hotel which Madame de Sabran inhabits has an entrance from the Rue des Bons Enfants; after a certain hour they shut the passage from the Palais Royal, which opens on the Rue des Bons Enfants: and he will be obliged, on his return, to follow either the Cour des Fontaines, or the Rue Neuve des Bons Enfants, and then we shall have him. Mordieu! you are a great man, and if Monsieur de Maine does not make you cardinal, or at least archbishop, there will be no justice done.”

“I think, therefore, that now you must hold yourself in readiness.”

“I am ready.”

“Have you the means of execution prepared?” — — ”I have.”

“Then you can correspond with your men?”

“By a sign.”

“And that sign cannot betray you?”

“Impossible.”

“Then all goes well, and we may have breakfast; for I was in such haste to tell you the good news that I came out fasting.”

“Breakfast, my dear abbe! you speak coolly; I have nothing to offer you, except the remains of the paté and two or three bottles of wine, which, I believe, survived the battle.”

“Hum! hum,” murmured the abbe; “we will do better than that, my dear chevalier.”

“I am at your orders.”

“Let us go down and breakfast with our good hostess, Madame Denis.”

“And why do you want me to breakfast with her? Do I know her?”

“That concerns me. I shall present you as my pupil.”

“But we shall get a detestable breakfast.”

“Comfort yourself. I know her table.”

“But this breakfast will be tiresome.”

“But you will make a friend of a woman much known in the neighborhood for her good conduct, for her devotion to the government — a woman incapable of harboring a conspirator. Do you understand that?”

“If it be for the good of the cause, abbe, I sacrifice myself.”

“Moreover, it is a very agreeable house, where there are two young people who play — one on the spinet, and the other on the guitar — and a young man who is an attorney’s clerk; a house where you may go down on Sunday evenings to play lots.”

“Go to the devil with your Madame Denis. Ah! pardon, abbe, perhaps you are her friend. In that case, imagine that I have said nothing.”

“I am her confessor,” replied the Abbe Brigaud, with a modest air.

“Then a thousand excuses, my dear abbe; but you are right indeed. Madame Denis is still a beautiful woman, perfectly well preserved, with superb hands and very pretty feet. Peste! I remember that. Go down first; I will follow.”

“Why not together?”

“But my toilet, abbe. Would you have me appear before the Demoiselles Denis with my hair in its present state? One must try to look one’s best — que diable! Besides, it is better that you should announce me: I have not a confessor’s privilege.”

”You are right. I will go down and announce you, and in ten minutes you will arrive — will you not?”

“In ten minutes.”

“Adieu!” — — ”Au revoir!”

The chevalier had only told half the truth. He might have remained partly to dress, but also in the hope of seeing his beautiful neighbor, of whom he had dreamed all the night, but in vain. He remained hidden behind the curtains of his window: those of the young girl with the fair hair and the beautiful black eyes remained closed. It is true that, in exchange, he could perceive his neighbor, who, opening his door, passed out, with the same precaution as the day before, first his hand, then his head; but this time his boldness went no further, for there was a slight fog, and fog is essentially contrary to the organization of the Parisian bourgeois. Our friend coughed twice, and then, drawing in his head and his arm, re-entered his room like a tortoise into his shell. D’Harmental saw with pleasure that he might dispense with buying a barometer, and that this neighbor would render him the same service as the butterflies which come out in the sunshine, and remain obstinately shut up in their hermitages on the days when it rains.

The apparition had its ordinary effect, and reacted on poor Bathilde. Every time that D’Harmental perceived the young girl, there was in her such a sweet attraction that he saw nothing but the woman — young, beautiful, and graceful, a musician and painter — that is to say, the most delicious and complete creature he had ever met. But when, in his turn, the man of the terrace presented himself to the chevalier's gaze, with his common face, his insignificant figure — that indelible type of vulgarity which attaches to certain individuals — directly a sort of miraculous transition took place in the chevalier's mind. All the poetry disappeared, as a machinist's whistle causes the disappearance of a fairy palace. Everything was seen by a different light. D'Harmental's native aristocracy regained the ascendency. Bathilde was then nothing but the daughter of this man — that is to say, a grisette: her beauty, her grace, her elegance, even her talents, were but an accident — an error of nature — something like a rose flowering on a cabbage-stalk. The chevalier shrugged his shoulders as he stood before the glass, began to laugh, and to wonder at the impression which he had received. He attributed it to the preoccupation of his mind, to the strange and solitary situation, to everything, in fact, except its true cause — the sovereign and irresistible power of distinction and beauty. D'Harmental went down to his hostess disposed to find the Demoiselles Denis charming.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DENIS FAMILY.

Madame Denis did not think it proper that two young persons as innocent as her daughters should breakfast with a young man who, although he had been only three days in Paris, already came in at eleven o'clock at night, and played on the harpsichord till two in the morning. In vain the Abbe Brigaud affirmed that this double infraction of the rules of her house should in no degree lower her opinion of his pupil, for whom he could answer as for himself. All he could obtain was that the young ladies should appear at the dessert; but the chevalier soon perceived that if their mother had ordered them not to be seen, she had not forbidden them to be heard, for scarcely were they at table, round a veritable devotée's breakfast, composed of a multitude of little dishes, tempting to the eye and delicious to the palate, when the sounds of a spinet were heard, accompanying a voice which was not wanting in compass, but whose frequent errors of intonation showed lamentable inexperience. At the first notes Madame Denis placed her hand on the abbe's arm, then, after an instant's silence, during which she listened with a pleased smile to that music which made the chevalier's flesh creep, "Do you hear?" she said. "It is our Athenais who is playing, and it is Emilie who sings."

The Abbe Brigaud, making signs that he heard perfectly, trod on D'Harmental's foot under the table, to hint that this was an opportunity for paying a compliment.

"Madame," said the chevalier, who understood this appeal to his politeness perfectly, "we are doubly indebted to you; for you offer us not only an excellent breakfast, but a delightful concert."

"Yes," replied Madame Denis, negligently, "it is those children: they do not know you are here, and they are practicing; but I will go and tell them to stop."

Madame Denis was going to rise.

"What, madame!" said D'Harmental, "because I come from Ravenne do you believe me unworthy to make acquaintance with the talents of the capital?”

“Heaven preserve me, monsieur, from having such an opinion of you,” said Madame Denis, maliciously, “for I know you are a musician; the lodger on the third story told me so.”

“In that case, madame, perhaps he did not give you a very high idea of my merit,” replied the chevalier, laughing, “for he did not appear to appreciate the little I may possess.”

“He only said that it appeared to him a strange time for music. But listen, Monsieur Raoul,” added Madame Denis, “the parts are changed now, my dear abbe, it is our Athenais who sings, and it is Emilie who accompanies her on the guitar.”

It appeared that Madame Denis had a weakness for Athenais, for instead of talking as she did when Emilie was singing, she listened from one end to the other to the romance of her favorite, her eyes tenderly fixed on the Abbe Brigaud, who, still eating and drinking, contented himself with nodding his head in sign of approbation. Athenais sang a little more correctly than her sister, but for this she made up by a defect at least equivalent in the eyes of the chevalier. Her voice was equally vulgar.

As to Madame Denis, she beat wrong time with her head, with an air of beatitude which did infinitely more honor to her maternal affection than to her musical intelligence.

A duet succeeded to the solos. The young ladies appeared determined to give their whole repertoire. D’Harmental, in his turn, sought under the table for the abbe’s feet, to crush at least one, but he only found those of Madame Denis, who, taking this for a personal attention, turned graciously toward him.

“Then, Monsieur Raoul,” she said, “you come, young and inexperienced, to brave all the dangers of the capital?”

“Yes,” said the Abbe Brigaud, taking upon himself to answer, for fear that D’Harmental might not be able to resist answering by some joke. “You see in this young man, Madame Denis, the son of a friend who was very dear to me” (the abbe put his table-napkin up to his eyes), “and whom, I hope, will do credit to the care I have bestowed on his education.”

“And monsieur is right,” replied Madame Denis; “for, with his talents and appearance, there is no saying to what he may attain.”

“Ah! but, Madame Denis,” said the Abbe Brigaud, “if you spoil him thus I shall not bring him to you again. My dear Raoul,” continued the abbe, addressing him in a paternal manner, “I hope you will not believe a word of all this.” Then, whispering to Madame Denis, “Such as you see him, he might have remained at Sauvigny, and taken the first place after the squire. He has three thousand livres a year in the funds.”

“That is exactly what I intend giving to each of my daughters,” replied Madame Denis, raising her voice, so as to be heard by the chevalier, and giving a side-glance to discover what effect the announcement of such magnificence would have upon him.

Unfortunately for the future establishment of the Demoiselles Denis, the chevalier was not thinking of uniting the three thousand livres which this generous mother gave to her daughters to the thousand crowns a year which the Abbe Brigaud had bestowed on him. The shrill treble of Mademoiselle Emilie, the contralto of Mademoiselle Athenais, the accompaniment of both, had recalled to his recollection the pure and flexible voice and the distinguished execution of his neighbor. Thanks to that singular power which a great preoccupation gives us over exterior objects, the chevalier had escaped from the charivari which was executed in the adjoining room, and was following a sweet melody which floated in his mind, and which protected him, like an enchanted armor, from the sharp sounds which were flying around him.

“How he listens!” said Madame Denis to Brigaud. “‘Tis worth while taking trouble for a young man like that. I shall have a bone to pick with Monsieur Fremond.”

“Who is Monsieur Fremond?” said the abbe, pouring himself out something to drink.

“It is the lodger on the third floor. A contemptible little fellow, with twelve hundred francs a year, and whose temper has caused me to have quarrels with every one in the house; and who came to complain that Monsieur Raoul prevented him and his dog from sleeping.”

“My dear Madame Denis,” replied the abbe, “you must not quarrel with Monsieur Fremond for that. Two o’clock in the morning is an unreasonable time; and if my pupil must sit up till then, he must play in the daytime and draw in the evening.”

“What! Monsieur Raoul draws also!” cried Madame Denis, quite astonished at so much talent.

“Draws like Mignard.”

“Oh! my dear abbe,” said Madame Denis, “if you could but obtain one thing.”

“What?” asked the abbe.

“That he would take the portrait of our Athenais.”

The chevalier awoke from his reverie, as a traveler, asleep on the grass, feels a serpent glide up to him, and instinctively understands that a great danger threatens him.

“Abbe!” cried he, in a bewildered manner, “no folly!”

“Oh! what is the matter with your pupil?” asked Madame Denis, quite frightened.

Happily, at the moment when the abbe was seeking a subterfuge, the door opened, and the two young ladies entered blushing, and, stepping from right to left, each made a low courtesy.

“Well!” said Madame Denis, affecting an air of severity, “what is this? Who gave you permission to leave your room?”

“Mamma,” replied a voice which the chevalier recognized, by its shrill tones, for that of Mademoiselle Emilie, “we beg pardon if we have done wrong, and are willing to return.”

“But, mamma,” said another voice, which the chevalier concluded must belong to Mademoiselle Athenais, “we thought that it was agreed that we were to come in at dessert.”

“Well, come in, since you are here; it would be ridiculous now to go back. Besides,” added Madame Denis, seating Athenais between herself and Brigaud, and Emilie between herself and the chevalier, “young persons are always best — are they not, abbe? — under their mother’s wing.”

And Madame Denis presented to her daughters a plate of bon-bons, from which they helped themselves with a modest air which did honor to their education.

The chevalier, during the discourse and action of Madame Denis, had time to examine her daughters.

Mademoiselle Emilie was a tall and stiff personage, from twenty-two to twenty-three, who was said to be very much like her late father; an advantage which did not, however, suffice to gain for her in the maternal heart an affection equal to what Madame Denis entertained for her other two children. Thus poor Emilie, always afraid of being scolded, retained a natural awkwardness, which the repeated lessons of her dancing-master had not been able to conquer.

Mademoiselle Athenais, on the contrary, was little, plump, and rosy; and, thanks to her sixteen or seventeen years, had what is vulgarly called the devil’s beauty. She did not resemble either Monsieur or Madame Denis, a singularity which had often exercised the tongues of the Rue St. Martin before she went to inhabit the house which her husband had bought in the Rue du Temps Perdu. In spite of this absence of all likeness to her parents, Mademoiselle Athenais was the declared favorite of her mother, which gave her the assurance that poor Emilie wanted. Athenais, however, it must be said, always profited by this favor to excuse the pretended faults of her sister.

Although it was scarcely eleven o’clock in the morning, the two sisters were dressed as if for a ball, and carried all the trinkets they possessed on their necks, arms, and ears.

This apparition, so conformable to the idea which D’Harmental had formed beforehand of the daughters of his landlady, gave him a new subject for reflection. Since the Demoiselles Denis were so exactly what they ought to be, that is to say, in such perfect harmony with their position and education, why was Bathilde, who seemed their equal in rank, as visibly distinguished as they were vulgar? Whence came this immense difference between girls of the same class and age? There must be some secret, which the chevalier would no doubt know some day or other. A second pressure of the Abbe Brigaud’s foot against his made him understand that, however true his reflections were, he had chosen a bad moment for abandoning himself to them. Indeed, Madame Denis took so sovereign an air of dignity, that D’Harmental saw that he had not an instant to lose if he wished to efface from her mind the bad impression which his distraction had caused.

“Madame,” said he directly, with the most gracious air he could assume, “that which I already see of your family fills me with the most lively desire to know the rest. Is not your son at home, and shall not I have the pleasure of seeing him?”

“Monsieur,” answered Madame Denis, to whom so amiable an address had restored all her good humor, “my son is with M. Joulu, his master; and, unless his business brings him this way, it is improbable that he will make your acquaintance.”

“Parbleu! my dear pupil,” said the Abbe Brigaud, extending his hand toward the door; “you are like Aladdin. It is enough for you to express a wish, and it is fulfilled.”

Indeed, at this moment they heard on the staircase the song about Marlborough, which at this time had all the charm of novelty; the door was thrown open, and gave entrance to a boy with a laughing face, who much resembled Mademoiselle Athenais.

“Good, good, good,” said the newcomer, crossing his arms, and remarking the ordinary number of his family increased by the abbe and the chevalier. “Not bad, Madame Denis; she sends Boniface to his office with a bit of bread and cheese, saying, ‘Beware of indigestion,’ and, in his absence, she gives feasts and suppers. Luckily, poor Boniface has a good nose. He comes through the Rue Montmartre; he snuffs the wind, and says, ‘What is going on there at No. 5, Rue du Temps Perdu?’ So he came, and here he is. Make a place for one.”

And, joining the action to the word, Boniface drew a chair to the table, and sat down between the abbe and the chevalier.

“Monsieur Boniface,” said Madame Denis, trying to assume a severe air, “do you not see that there are strangers here?”

“Strangers!” said Boniface, taking a dish from the table, and setting it before himself; “and who are the strangers? Are you one, Papa Brigaud? Are you one, Monsieur Raoul? You are not a stranger, you are a lodger.” And, taking a knife and fork, he set to work in a manner to make up for lost time.

“Pardieu! madame,” said the chevalier, “I see with pleasure that I am further advanced than I thought I was. I did not know that I had the honor of being known to Monsieur Boniface.”

“It would be odd if I did not know you,” said the lawyer’s clerk, with his mouth full; “you have got my bedroom.”

“How, Madame Denis!” said D’Harmental, “and you left me in ignorance that I had the honor to succeed in my room to the heir apparent of your family? I am no longer astonished to find my room so gayly fitted up; I recognize the cares of a mother.”

“Yes, much good may it do you; but I have one bit of advice to give you. Don’t look out of window too much.”

“Why?” asked D’Harmental.

“Why? because you have a certain neighbor opposite you.”

“Mademoiselle Bathilde,” said the chevalier, carried away by his first impulse.

“Ah! you know that already?” answered Boniface; “good, good, good; that will do.” — — ”Will you be quiet, monsieur!” cried Madame Denis.

“Listen!” answered Boniface; “one must inform one’s lodgers when one has prohibited things about one’s house. You are not in a lawyer’s office; you do not know that.”

“The child is full of wit,” said the Abbe Brigaud in that bantering tone, thanks to which it was impossible to know whether he was serious or not.

“But,” answered Madame Denis, “what would you have in common between Monsieur Raoul and Bathilde?”

“What in common? Why, in a week, he will be madly in love with her, and it is not worth loving a coquette.”

“A coquette?” said D’Harmental.

“Yes, a coquette, a coquette,” said Boniface; “I have said it, and I do not draw back. A coquette, who flirts with the young men and lives with an old one, without counting that little brute of a Mirza, who eats up all my bon-bons, and now bites me every time she meets me.”

“Leave the room, mesdemoiselles,” cried Madame Denis, rising and making her daughters rise also. “Leave the room. Ears so pure as yours ought not to hear such things.”

And she pushed Mademoiselle Athenais and Mademoiselle Emilie toward the door of their room, where she entered with them.

As to D’Harmental, he felt a violent desire to break Boniface’s head with a wine-bottle. Nevertheless, seeing the absurdity of the situation, he made an effort and restrained himself.

“But,” said he, “I thought that the bourgeois whom I saw on the terrace — for no doubt it is of him that you speak, Monsieur Boniface — ”

“Of himself, the old rascal; what did you think of him?”

“That he was her father.”

“Her father! not quite. Mademoiselle Bathilde has no father.”

“Then, at least, her uncle?”

“Her uncle after the Bretagne fashion, but in no other manner.”

“Monsieur,” said Madame Denis, majestically coming out of the room, to the most distant part of which she had doubtless consigned her daughters, “I have asked you, once for all, not to talk improprieties before your sisters.”

“Ah, yes,” said Boniface, “my sisters; do you believe that, at their age, they cannot understand what I said, particularly Emilie, who is three-and-twenty years old?”

“Emilie is as innocent as a new-born child,” said Madame Denis, seating herself between Brigaud and D’Harmental.

“I should advise you not to reckon on that. I found a pretty romance for Lent in our innocent’s room. I will show it to you, Pere Brigaud; you are her confessor, and we shall see if you gave her permission to read her prayers from it.”

“Hold your tongue, mischief-maker,” said the abbe, “do you not see how you are grieving your mother?”

Indeed Madame Denis, ashamed of this scene passing before a young man on whom, with a mother’s foresight, she had already begun to cast an eye, was nearly fainting. There is nothing in which men believe less than in women’s faintings, and nothing to which they give way more easily. Whether he believed in it or not, D’Harmental was too polite not to show his hostess some attention in such circumstances. He advanced toward her with his arms extended. Madame Denis no sooner saw this support offered to her than she let herself fall, and, throwing her head back, fainted in the chevalier’s arms.

“Abbe,” said D’Harmental, while Boniface profited by the circumstance to fill his pockets with all the bon-bons left on the table, “bring a chair.”

The abbe pushed forward a chair with the nonchalance of a man familiar with such accidents, and who is beforehand quite secure as to the result.

They seated Madame Denis, and D’Harmental gave her some salts, while the Abbe Brigaud tapped her softly in the hollow of the hand; but, in spite of these cares, Madame Denis did not appear disposed to return to herself; when all at once, when they least expected it, she started to her feet as if by a spring, and gave a loud cry.

D’Harmental thought that a fit of hysterics was following the fainting. He was truly frightened, there was such an accent of reality in the scream that the poor woman gave.

“It is nothing,” said Boniface, “I have only just emptied the water-bottle down her back. That is what brought her to; you saw that she did not know how to manage it. Well, what?” continued the pitiless fellow, seeing Madame Denis look angrily at him; “it is I; do you not recognize me, Mother Denis? It is your little Boniface, who loves you so.”

“Madame,” said D’Harmental, much embarrassed at the situation, “I am truly distressed at what has passed.”

"Oh! monsieur," cried Madame Denis in tears, "I am indeed unfortunate."

"Come, come; do not cry, Mother Denis, you are already wet enough," said Boniface; "you had better go and change your linen; there is nothing so unhealthy as wet clothes."

"The child is full of sense," said Brigaud, "and I think you had better follow his advice."

"If I might join my prayers to those of the abbe," said D'Harmental, "I should beg you, madame, not to inconvenience yourself for us. Besides, we were just going to take leave of you."

"And you, also, abbe?" said Madame Denis, with a distressed look at Brigaud.

"As for me," said Brigaud, who did not seem to fancy the part of comforter, "I am expected at the Hotel Colbert, and I must leave you."

"Adieu, then," said Madame Denis, making a curtsey, but the water trickling down her clothes took away a great part of its dignity.

"Adieu, mother," said Boniface, throwing his arms round her neck with the assurance of a spoiled child. "Have you nothing to say to Maître Joulu?"

"Adieu, mauvais sujet," replied the poor woman, embracing her son, and yielding to that attraction which a mother cannot resist; "adieu, and be steady."

"As an image, mother, on condition that you will give us a nice little dish of sweets for dinner."

He joined the Abbe Brigaud and D'Harmental, who were already on the landing.

"Well, well," said the abbe, lifting his hand quickly to his waistcoat pocket, "what are you doing there?"

"Oh, I was only looking if there was not a crown in your pocket for your friend Boniface."

"Here." said the abbe, "here is one, and now leave us alone."

"Papa Brigaud," said Boniface, in the effusion of his gratitude, "you have the heart of a cardinal, and if the king only makes you an archbishop, on my honor you will be robbed of half. Adieu, Monsieur Raoul," continued he, addressing the chevalier as familiarly as if he had known him for years. "I repeat, take care of Mademoiselle Bathilde if you wish to keep your heart, and give some sweetmeats to Mirza if you care for your legs;" and holding by the banister, he cleared the first flight of twelve steps at one bound, and reached the street door without having touched a stair.

Brigaud descended more quietly behind him, after having given the chevalier a rendezvous for eight o’clock in the evening.

As to D’Harmental, he went back thoughtfully to his attic.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CRIMSON RIBBON.

What occupied the mind of the chevalier was neither the denouement of the drama where he had chosen so important a part, nor the admirable prudence of the Abbe Brigaud in placing him in a house which he habitually visited almost daily, so that his visits, however frequent, could not be remarkable. It was not the dignified speeches of Madame Denis, nor the soprano of Mademoiselle Emilie. It was neither the contralto of Mademoiselle Athenais, nor the tricks of M. Boniface. It was simply poor Bathilde, whom he had heard so lightly spoken of; but our reader would be mistaken if he supposed that M. Boniface's brutal accusation had in the least degree altered the sentiments of the chevalier for the young girl, for an instant's reflection showed him that such an alliance was impossible.

Chance might give a charming daughter to an undistinguished father. Necessity may unite a young and elegant woman to an old and vulgar husband, but a liaison, such as that attributed to the young girl and the bourgeois of the terrace, can only result from love or interest. Now between these two there could be no love; and as to interest, the thing was still less probable; for, if they were not in absolute poverty, their situation was certainly not above mediocrity — not even that gilded mediocrity of which Horace speaks, with a country house at Tibur and Montmorency, and which results from a pension of thirty thousand sestercia from the Augustan treasury, or a government annuity of six thousand francs — but that poor and miserable mediocrity which only provides from day to day, and which is only prevented from becoming real poverty by incessant labor.

D'Harmental gathered from all this the certainty that Bathilde was neither the daughter, wife, nor mistress of this terrible neighbor, the sight of whom had sufficed to produce such a strange reaction on the growing love of the chevalier. If she was neither the one nor the other, there was a mystery about her birth; and if so, Bathilde was not what she appeared to be. All was explained, her aristocratic beauty, her finished education. Bathilde was above the position which she was temporarily forced to occupy: there had been in the destiny of this young girl one of those overthrows of fortune, which are for individuals what earthquakes are for towns, and she had been forced to descend to the inferior sphere where he found her.

The result of all this was, that the chevalier might, without losing rank in his own estimation, allow himself to love Bathilde. When a man's heart is at war with his pride, he seldom wants excuses to defeat his haughty enemy. Bathilde had now neither name nor family, and nothing prevented the imagination of the man who loved her from raising her to a height even above his own; consequently, instead of following the friendly advice of M. Boniface, the first thing D'Harmental did was to go to his window and inspect that of his neighbor. It was wide open. If, a week ago, any one had told the chevalier that such a simple thing as an open window would have made his heart beat, he would have laughed at the idea. However, so it was; and after drawing a long breath, he settled himself in a corner, to watch at his ease the young girl in the opposite room, without being seen by her, for he was afraid of frightening her by that attention which she could only attribute to curiosity, but he soon perceived that the room was deserted.

D'Harmental then opened his window, and at the noise he made in doing so, he saw the elegant head of the greyhound, which, with his ears always on the watch, and well worthy of the trust that her mistress had reposed in her, in making her guardian of the house, was awake, and looking to see who it was that thus disturbed her sleep.

Thanks to the indiscreet counter-tenor of the good man of the terrace and the malice of M. Boniface, the chevalier already knew two things very important to know — namely, that his neighbor was called Bathilde, a sweet and euphonious appellation, suitable to a young, beautiful, and graceful girl; and that the greyhound was called Mirza, a name which seemed to indicate a no less distinguished rank in the canine aristocracy. Now as nothing is to be disdained when we wish to conquer a fortress, and the smallest intelligence from within is often more efficacious than the most terrible machines of war, D'Harmental resolved to commence opening communications with the greyhound; and with the most caressing tone he could give to his voice, he called Mirza. Mirza, who was indolently lying on the cushion, raised her head quickly, with an expression of unmistakable astonishment; and, indeed, it must have appeared strange to the intelligent little animal, that a man so perfectly unknown to her as the chevalier should address her by her Christian name. She contented herself with fixing on him her uneasy eyes, which, in the half-light where she was placed, sparkled like two carbuncles, and uttering a little dull sound which might pass for a growl.

D’Harmental remembered that the Marquis d’Uxelle had tamed the spaniel of Mademoiselle Choin, which was a much more peevish beast than any greyhound in the world, with roast rabbits’ heads; and that he had received for this delicate attention the baton of Maréchal de France; and he did not despair of being able to soften by the same kind of attention the surly reception which Mademoiselle Mirza had given to his advances: so he went toward the sugar-basin; then returned to the window, armed with two pieces of sugar, large enough to be divided ad infinitum.

The chevalier was not mistaken; at the first piece of sugar which fell near her, Mirza negligently advanced her head; then, being by the aid of smell made aware of the nature of the temptation offered to her, she extended her paw toward it, drew it toward her, took it in her teeth, and began to eat it with that languid air peculiar to the race to which she belonged. This operation finished, she passed over her mouth a little red tongue, which showed, that in spite of her apparent indifference, which was owing, no doubt, to her excellent education, she was not insensible to the surprise her neighbor had prepared for her; instead of lying down again on the cushion as she had done the first time, she remained seated, yawning languidly, but wagging her tail, to show that she would wake entirely, after two or three such little attentions as she had just had paid to her.

D’Harmental, who was well acquainted with the habits of all the King Charles’ dogs of the pretty women of the day, understood the amiable intentions of Mirza, and not wishing to give her time to change her mind, threw a second piece of sugar, taking care that it should fall at such a distance as to oblige her to leave her cushion to get it. This test would decide whether she was most inclined to laziness or greediness. Mirza remained an instant uncertain, but then greediness carried the day, and she went across the room to fetch the piece of sugar, which had rolled under the harpsichord. At this moment a third piece fell near the window, and Mirza came toward it; but there the liberality of the chevalier stopped; he thought that he had now given enough to require some return, and he contented himself with calling Mirza in a more imperative tone, and showing her the other pieces of sugar which he held in his hand.

Mirza this time, instead of looking at the chevalier with uneasiness or disdain, rested her paws on the window, and began to behave as she would to an old acquaintance. It was finished; Mirza was tamed.

The chevalier remarked that it was now his turn to play the contemptuous with Mirza, and to speak to her, in order to accustom her to his voice; however, fearing a return of pride on the part of his interlocutor, who sustained her part in the dialogue by little whines and grumblings, he threw her a fourth piece of sugar, which she seized with greater avidity from having been kept waiting. This time, without being called, she came to take her place at the window. The chevalier's triumph was complete. So complete, that Mirza, who the day before had given signs of so superior an intelligence in discovering Bathilde's return, and in running to the door as she descended the staircase, this time discovered neither the one nor the other, so that her mistress, entering all at once, surprised her in the midst of these coquetries with her neighbor. It is but just to say, however, that at the noise the door made in opening Mirza turned, and recognizing Bathilde, bounded toward her, lavishing on her the most tender caresses; but we must add, to the shame of the species, that this duty once accomplished, she hastened back to the window. This unusual action on the part of the dog naturally guided Bathilde's eyes toward the cause which occasioned it. Her eyes met those of the chevalier.

Bathilde blushed: the chevalier bowed; and Bathilde, without knowing what she was doing, returned the salute.

Her first impulse was to go and close the window, but an instinctive feeling restrained her. She understood that this was giving importance to a thing which had none, and that to put herself on the defensive was to avow herself attacked. In consequence, she crossed to that part of the room where her neighbor's glance could not reach. Then, at the end of a few minutes, when she returned, she found that he had closed his window. Bathilde understood that there was discretion in this action, and she thanked him. Indeed, the chevalier had just made a masterstroke. On the terms which he was on with his neighbor, it was impossible that both windows should remain open at once; if the chevalier's window was open, his neighbor's must be shut; and he knew that when that was closed, there was not a chance of seeing even the tip of Mirza's nose behind the curtain; while if, on the contrary, his window was closed, hers might possibly remain open, and he could watch her passing to and fro, or working, which was a great amusement for a poor devil condemned to absolute seclusion; besides, he had made an immense step: — he had saluted Bathilde, and she had returned it. They were no longer strangers to each other, but, in order that their acquaintance might advance, he must be careful not to be too brusk.

To risk speaking to her after the salute would have been risking too much; it was better to allow Bathilde to believe that it was all the effect of chance. Bathilde did not believe it, but she appeared to do so. The result was that she left her window open, and, seeing her neighbor's closed, sat down by her own with a book in her hand. As to Mirza, she jumped on to the stool at her mistress's feet, but instead of resting her head as usual on the knees of the young girl, she placed it on the sill, of the window, so much was she occupied with the generous unknown. The chevalier seated himself in the middle of his room, took his pencils, and thanks to a corner of his curtain skillfully raised, he sketched the delicious picture before him. Unfortunately the days were short, and toward three o'clock the little light which the clouds and rain had permitted to descend to the earth began to decline, and Bathilde closed her window. Nevertheless, even in this short time the chevalier had finished the young girl's head, and the likeness was perfect. There was her waving hair, her fine transparent skin, the graceful curve of her swan-like neck; in fact, all to which art can attain with one of those inimitable models which are the despair of artists.

When night closed in, the Abbe Brigaud arrived. The chevalier and he wrapped themselves in their mantles, and went toward the Palais Royal; they had, it will be remembered, to examine the ground. The house in which Madame de Sabran lived, since her husband had been named maitre d'hotel to the regent, was No. 22, between the Hotel de la Roche-Guyon and the passage formerly called Passage du Palais Royal, because it was the only one leading from the Rue des Bons Enfants to the Rue de Valois. This passage, now called Passage du Lycée, was closed at the same time as the other gates of the garden; that is to say, at eleven o'clock in the evening; therefore, having once entered a house in the Rue des Bons Enfants, unless it had a second door opening on the Rue de Valois, no one could return to the Palais Royal after eleven o'clock without making the round, either by the Rue Neuve des Petits-Champs, or by the Cour des Fontaines.

Thus it was with Madame de Sabran's house; it was an exquisite little hotel, built toward the end of the last century, some five-and-twenty years before, by a merchant who wished to ape the great lords and have a petite maison of his own. It was a one-storied house, with a stone gallery, on which the servants' attics opened, and surmounted by a low tilted roof. Under the first-floor windows was a large balcony which jutted out three or four feet, and extended right across the house; but some iron ornaments, similar to the balcony, and which reached to the terrace, separated the two windows on each side from the three in the center, as is often done when it is desired to interrupt exterior communications. The two facades were exactly similar, only, as the Rue de Valois was eight or ten feet lower than that of the Bons Enfants, the ground-floor windows and door opened on a terrace, where was a little garden, filled in spring with charming flowers, but which did not communicate with the street, the only entrance being, as we have said, in the Rue des Bons Enfants.

This was all our conspirators could wish; the regent, once entered into Madame de Sabran's house, would — provided he stayed after eleven o'clock, which was probable — be taken as in a trap, and nothing would be easier than to carry out their plan in the Rue des Bons Enfants, one of the most deserted and gloomy places in the neighborhood; moreover, as this street was surrounded by very suspicious houses, and frequented by very bad company, it was a hundred to one that they would not pay any attention to cries which were too frequent in that street to cause any uneasiness, and that if the watch arrived, it would be, according to the custom of that estimable force, long after their intervention could be of any avail. The inspection of the ground finished, the plans laid, and the number of the house taken, they separated; the abbe to go to the Arsenal to give Madame de Maine an account of the proceedings, and D'Harmental to return to his attic.

As on the preceding night, Bathilde's room was lighted, but this time the young girl was not drawing but working; her light was not put out till one o'clock in the morning. As to the good man, he had retired long before D'Harmental returned. The chevalier slept badly; between a love at its commencement and a conspiracy at its height, he naturally experienced some sensations little favorable to sleep; but toward morning fatigue prevailed, and he only awoke on feeling himself violently shaken by the arm. Without doubt the chevalier was at that moment in some bad dream, of which this appeared to him the end, for, still half asleep, he stretched out his hand toward the pistols which were at his side.

"Ah, ah!" cried the abbe, "an instant, young man. What a hurry you are in! Open your eyes wide — so. Do you not recognize me?"

"Ah!" said D'Harmental, laughing, "it is you, abbe. You did well to stop me. I dreamed that I was arrested."

"A good sign," said the Abbe Brigaud: "you know that dreams always go by contraries. All will go well."

"Is there anything new?" asked D'Harmental.

"And if there were, how would you receive it?"

"I should be enchanted. A thing of this kind once undertaken, the sooner it is finished the better."

"Well, then," said Brigaud, drawing a paper from his pocket and presenting it to the chevalier, "read, and glorify the name of the Lord, for you have your wish."

D'Harmental took the paper, unfolded it as calmly as if it were a matter of no moment, and read as follows:

"*Report of the 27th of March.*

"Two in the Morning.

"To-night at ten o'clock the regent received a courier from London, who announces for to-morrow the arrival of the Abbe Dubois. As by chance the regent was supping with madame, the dispatch was given to him in spite of the late hour. Some minutes before, Mademoiselle de Chartres had asked permission of her father to perform her devotions at the Abbey of Chelles, and he had promised to conduct her there; but on the receipt of this letter his determination was changed and he has ordered the council to meet at noon.

"At three o'clock the regent will pay his majesty a visit at the Tuileries. He has asked for a tete-à-tete, for he is beginning to be impatient at the obstinacy of the Marechal de Villeroy, who will always be present at the interviews between the regent and his majesty. Report says that if this obstinacy continue, it will be the worse for the marshal.

"At six o'clock, the regent, the Chevalier de Simiane, and the Chevalier de Ravanne, will sup with Madame de Sabran."

"Ah, ah!" said D'Harmental; and he read the last sentence, weighing every word.

"Well, what do you think of this paragraph?" asked the abbe.

The chevalier jumped from his bed, put on his dressing-gown, took from his drawer a crimson ribbon, a hammer and a nail, and having opened his window (not without throwing a stolen glance at that of his neighbor), he nailed the ribbon on to the outer wall.

"There is my answer," said he.

"What the devil does that mean?"

"That means," said D'Harmental, "that you may go and tell Madame de Maine that I hope this evening to fulfill my promise to her. And now go away, my dear abbe, and do not come back for two hours, for I expect some one whom it would be better you should not meet."

The abbe, who was prudence itself, did not wait to be told twice, but pressed the chevalier's hand and left him. Twenty minutes afterward Captain Roquefinette entered.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RUE DES BONS ENFANTS.

The evening of the same day, which was Sunday, toward eight o’clock, at the moment when a considerable group of men and women, assembled round a street singer who was playing at the same time the cymbals with his knees and the tambourine with his hands, obstructed the entrance to the Rue de Valois, a musketeer and two of the light horse descended a back staircase of the Palais Royal, and advanced toward the Passage du Lycée, which, as every one knows, opened on to that street; but seeing the crowd which barred the way, the three soldiers stopped and appeared to take council. The result of their deliberation was doubtless that they must take another route, for the musketeer, setting the example of a new maneuver, threaded the Cour des Fontaines, turned the corner of the Rue des Bons Enfants, and walking rapidly — though he was extremely corpulent — arrived at No. 22, which opened as by enchantment at his approach, and closed again on him and his two companions.

At the moment when they commenced this little detour, a young man, dressed in a dark coat, wrapped in a mantle of the same color, and wearing a broad-brimmed hat pulled down over his eyes, quitted the group which surrounded the singer, singing himself, to the tune of Les Pendus, “Vingt-quatre, vingt-quatre, vingt-quatre,” and advancing rapidly toward the Passage du Lycée, arrived at the further end in time to see the three illustrious vagabonds enter the house as we have said. He threw a glance round him, and by the light of one of the three lanterns, which lighted, or rather ought to have lighted, the whole length of the street, he perceived one of those immense coalheavers, with a face the color of soot, so well stereotyped by Greuze, who was resting against one of the posts of the Hotel de la Roche-Guyon, on which he had hung his bag. For an instant he appeared to hesitate to approach this man; but the coalheaver having sung the same air and the same burden, he appeared to lose all hesitation, and went straight to him.

“Well, captain,” said the man in the cloak, “did you see them?”

“As plainly as I see you, colonel — a musketeer and two light horse; but I could not recognize them. However, as the musketeer hid his face in his handkerchief, I presume it was the regent.”

“Himself; and the two light horse are Simiane and Ravanne.”

“Ah, ah! my scholar,” said the captain, “I shall have great pleasure in seeing him again: he is a good boy.”

“At any rate, captain, take care he does not recognize you.”

“Recognize me! It must be the devil himself to recognize me, accoutered as I am. It is you, rather, chevalier, who should take the caution. You have an unfortunately aristocratic air, which does not suit at all with your dress. However, there they are in the trap, and we must take care they do not leave it. Have our people been told?”

“Your people, captain. I know no more of them than they do of me. I quitted the group singing the burden which was our signal. Did they hear me? Did they understand me? I know nothing of it.”

“Be easy, colonel. These fellows hear half a voice, and understand half a word.”

Indeed, as soon as the man in the cloak had left the group, a strange fluctuation which he had not foreseen began to take place in the crowd, which appeared to be composed only of passers-by, so that the song was not finished, nor the collection received. The crowd dispersed. A great many men left the circle, singly, or two and two, turning toward each other with an imperceptible gesture of the hand, some by the Rue de Valois, some by the Cour des Fontaines, some by the Palais Royal itself, thus surrounding the Rue des Bons Enfants, which seemed to be the center of the rendezvous. In consequence of this maneuver, the intention of which it is easy to understand, there only remained before the singer ten or twelve women, some children, and a good bourgeois of about forty years old, who, seeing that the collection was about to begin again, quitted his place with an air of profound contempt for all these new songs, and humming an old pastoral which he placed infinitely above them. It seemed to him that several men as he passed them made him signs; but as he did not belong to any secret society or any masonic lodge, he went on, singing his favorite —

“Then let me go And let me play Beneath the hazel-tree,”

and after having followed the Rue St. Honoré to the Barriere des Deux Sergents, turned the corner and disappeared. Almost at the same moment, the man in the cloak, who had been the first to leave the group, reappeared, and, accosting the singer —

"My friend," said he, "my wife is ill, and your music will prevent her sleeping. If you have no particular reason for remaining here, go to the Place du Palais Royal, and here is a crown to indemnify you."

"Thank you, my lord," replied the singer, measuring the social position of the giver by his generosity. "I will go directly. Have you any commissions for the Rue Mouffetard?"

"No."

"Because I would have executed them into the bargain."

The man went away, and as he was at once the center and the cause of the meeting, all that remained disappeared with him. At this moment the clock of the Palais Royal struck nine. The young man drew from his pocket a watch, whose diamond setting contrasted strangely with his simple costume. He set it exactly, then turned and went into the Rue des Bons Enfants. On arriving opposite No. 24, he found the coalheaver.

"And the singer?" asked the latter.

"He is gone."

"Good."

"And the postchaise?" asked the man in the cloak.

"It is waiting at the corner of the Rue Baillif."

"Have they taken the precaution of wrapping the wheels and horses' hoofs in rags?"

"Yes."

"Very good. Now let us wait," said the man in the cloak.

"Let us wait," replied the coalheaver. And all was silent.

An hour passed, during which a few rare passers-by crossed the street at intervals, but at length it became almost deserted. The few lighted windows were darkened one after the other, and night, having now nothing to contend with but the two lanterns, one of which was opposite the chapel of St. Clare, and the other at the corner of the Rue Baillif, at length reigned over the domain which it had long claimed. Another hour passed. They heard the watch in the Rue de Valois; behind him, the keeper of the passage came to close the door.

"Good," murmured the man in the cloak; "now we are sure not to be interrupted."

"Provided," replied the coalheaver, "he leaves before day."

“If he were alone, we might fear his remaining, but Madame de Sabran will scarcely keep all three.”

“Peste! you are right, captain; and I had not thought of it; however, are all your precautions taken?” — — ”All.”

“And your men believe that it is a question of a bet?”

“They appear to believe it, at least, and we cannot ask more.”

“Then it is well understood, captain. You and your people are drunk. You push me. I fall between the regent and him who has his arm. I separate them. You seize on him and gag him, and at a whistle the carriage arrives, while Simiane and Ravanne are held with pistols at their throats.”

“But,” answered the coalheaver, in a low voice, “if he declares his name.”

The man in the cloak replied, in a still lower tone, “In conspiracies there are no half measures. If he declares himself, you must kill him.”

“Peste!” said the coalheaver; “let us try to prevent his doing so.”

There was no reply, and all was again silent. A quarter of an hour passed, and then the center windows were lighted up.

“Ah! ah! there is something new,” they both exclaimed together.

At this moment they heard the step of a man, who came from the Rue St. Honore, and who was preparing to go the whole length of the street.

The coalheaver muttered a terrible oath; however, the man came on, but whether the darkness sufficed to frighten him, or whether he saw something suspicious moving there, it was evident that he experienced some fear. As he reached the Hotel St. Clare, employing that old ruse of cowards who wish to appear brave, he began to sing; but as he advanced, his voice trembled, and though the innocence of the song proved the serenity of his heart, on arriving opposite the passage he began to cough, which, as we know, in the gamut of terror, indicates a greater degree of fear than singing. Seeing, however, that nothing moved round him, he took courage, and, in a voice more in harmony with his present situation than with the sense of the words, he began —

“Then let me go,”

but there he stopped short, not only in his song, but in his walk; for, having perceived two men standing in a doorway, he felt his voice and his legs fail him at once, and he drew up, motionless and silent. Unfortunately, at this moment a shadow approached the window. The coalheaver saw that a cry might lose all, and moved, as if to spring on the passenger; his companion held him back.

“Captain,” said he, “do not hurt this man;” and then, approaching him — ”Pass on, my friend,” said he, “but pass quickly, and do not look back.”

The singer did not wait to be told twice, but made off as fast as his little legs and his trembling condition allowed, so that in a few minutes, he had disappeared at the corner of the Hotel de Toulouse.

“‘Twas time,” murmured the coalheaver; “they are opening the window.”

The two men drew back as far as possible into the shade. The window was opened, and one of the light horse appeared on the balcony.

“Well?” said a voice, which the coalheaver and his companion recognized as that of the regent, from the interior of the room. “Well, Simiane, what kind of weather is it?”

“Oh!” replied Simiane, “I think it snows.”

”You think it snows?”

“Or rains, I do not know which,” continued Simiane.

“What!” said Ravanne, “can you not tell what is falling?” and he also came on to the balcony.

“After all,” said Simiane, “I am not sure that anything is falling.”

“He is dead drunk,” said the regent.

“I!” said Simiane, wounded in his amour propre as a toper, “I dead drunk! Come here, monseigneur, come.”

Though the invitation was given in a strange manner, the regent joined his companions, laughing. By his gait it was easy to see that he himself was more than warmed.

“Ah! dead drunk,” replied Simiane, holding out his hand to the prince; “well, I bet you a hundred louis that, regent of France as you are, you will not do what I do.”

“You hear, monseigneur,” said a female voice from the room; “it is a challenge.”

“And as such I accept it.”

“Done, for a hundred louis.”

“I go halves with whoever likes,” said Ravanne.

“Bet with the marchioness,” said Simiane; “I admit no one into my games.”

“Nor I,” said the regent.

“Marchioness,” cried Ravanne, “fifty louis to a kiss.”

“Ask Philippe if he permits it.”

"Yes," said the regent, "it is a golden bargain; you are sure to win. Well, are you ready, Simiane?"

"I am; will you follow me?"

"Everywhere. What are you going to do?"

"Look."

"Where the devil are you going?"

"I am going into the Palais Royal."

"How?"

"By the roofs."

And Simiane, seizing that kind of iron fan which we have said separated the windows of the drawing-room from those of the bedrooms, began to climb like an ape.

"Monseigneur," cried Madame de Sabran, bounding on to the balcony, and catching the prince by the arm, "I hope you will not follow."

"Not follow!" said the regent, freeing himself from the marchioness's arm; "do you know that I hold as a principle that whatever another man tries I can do? If he goes up to the moon, devil take me if I am not there to knock at the door as soon as he. Did you bet on me, Ravanne?"

"Yes, my prince," replied the young man, laughing.

"Then take your kiss, you have won;" and the regent seized the iron bars, climbing behind Simiane, who, active, tall, and slender, was in an instant on the terrace.

"But I hope you, at least, will remain, Ravanne?" said the marchioness.

"Long enough to claim your stakes," said the young man, kissing the beautiful fresh cheeks of Madame de Sabran. "Now, adieu," continued he, "I am monseigneur's page; you understand that I must follow him."

And Ravanne darted on to the perilous road already taken by his companions. The coalheaver and the man in the cloak uttered an exclamation of astonishment, which was repeated along the street as if every door had an echo.

"Ah! what is that?" said Simiane, who had arrived first on the terrace.

"Do you see double, drunkard?" said the regent, seizing the railing of the terrace, "it is the watch, and you will get us taken to the guard-house; but I promise you I will leave you there."

At these words those who were in the street were silent, hoping that the duke and his companions would push the joke no further, but would come down and go out by the ordinary road.

“Oh! here I am,” said the regent, landing on the terrace; “have you had enough, Simiane?”

“No, monseigneur,” replied Simiane; and bending down to Ravanne, “that is not the watch,” continued he, “not a musket — not a jerkin.”

“What is the matter?” asked the regent.

“Nothing,” replied Simiane, making a sign to Ravanne, “except that I continue my ascent, and invite you to follow me.”

And at these words, holding out his hand to the regent, he began to scale the roof, drawing him after him. Ravanne brought up the rear.

At this sight, as there was no longer any doubt of their intention, the coalheaver uttered a malediction, and the man in the cloak a cry of rage.

“Ah! ah!” said the regent, striding on the roof, and looking down the street, where, by the light from the open window, they saw eight or ten men moving, “what the devil is that? a plot! Ah! one would suppose they wanted to scale the house — they are furious. I have a mind to ask them what we can do to help them.”

“No joking, monseigneur,” said Simiane; “let us go on.”

“Turn by the Rue St. Honore,” said the man in the cloak. “Forward, forward.”

“They are pursuing us,” said Simiane; “quick to the other side; back.”

“I do not know what prevents me,” said the man in the cloak, drawing a pistol from his belt and aiming at the regent, “from bringing him down like a partridge.”

“Thousand furies!” cried the coalheaver, stopping him, “you will get us all hanged and quartered.”

“But what are we to do?”

“Wait till they come down alone and break their necks, for if Providence is just, that little surprise awaits us.”

“What an idea, Roquefinette!”

“Eh! colonel; no names, if you please.”

“You are right. Pardieu!”

“There is no need; let us have the idea.”

“Follow me,” cried the man in the cloak, springing into the passage. “Let us break open the door and we will take them on the other side when they jump down.”

And all that remained of his companions followed him. The others, to the number of five or six, were already making for the Rue St. Honore.

“Let us go, monseigneur,” said Simiane; “we have not a minute to lose; slide on your back. It is not glorious, but it is safe.”

“I think I hear them in the passage,” said the regent; “what do you think, Ravanne?”

“I do not think at all,” said Ravanne, “I let myself slip.”

And all three descended rapidly, and arrived on the terrace.

“Here, here!” said a woman’s voice, at the moment when Simiane strode over the parapet to descend his iron ladder.

“Ah! is it you, marchioness?” said the regent; “you are indeed a friend in need.”

“Jump in here, and quickly.”

The three fugitives sprang into the room.

“Do you like to stop here?” asked Madame de Sabran.

“Yes,” said Ravanne; “I will go and look for Canillac and his night-watch.”

“No, no,” said the regent; “they will be scaling your house and treating it as a town taken by assault. Let us gain the Palais Royal.”

And they descended the staircase rapidly and opened the garden door. There they heard the despairing blows of their pursuers against the iron gates.

“Strike, strike, my friends,” said the regent, running with the carelessness and activity of a young man, “the gate is solid, and will give you plenty of work.”

“Quick, quick, monseigneur,” cried Simiane, who, thanks to his great height, had jumped to the ground hanging by his arms, “there they are at the end of the Rue de Valois. Put your foot on my shoulder — now the other — and let yourself slip into my arms. You are saved, thank God.”

“Draw your sword, Ravanne, and let us charge these fellows,” said the regent.

“In the name of Heaven, monseigneur,” cried Simiane, “follow us. I am not a coward, I believe, but what you would do is mere folly. Here, Ravanne.”

And the young men, each taking one of the duke’s arms, led him down a passage of the Palais Royal at the moment when those who were running by the Rue de Valois were at twenty paces from them, and when the door of the passage fell under the efforts of the second troop. The whole reunited band rushed against the gate at the moment that the three gentlemen closed it behind them.

"Gentlemen," said the regent, saluting with his hand, for as to his hat, Heaven knows where that was; "I hope, for the sake of your heads, that all this was only a joke, for you are attacking those who are stronger than yourselves. Beware, to-morrow, of the lieutenant of police. Meanwhile, good-night."

And a triple shout of laughter petrified the two conspirators leaning against the gate at the head of their breathless companions.

"This man must have a compact with Satan," cried D'Harmental.

"We have lost the bet, my friends," said Roquefinette, addressing his men, who stood waiting for orders, "but we do not dismiss you yet; it is only postponed. As to the promised sum, you have already had half: to-morrow — you know where, for the rest. Good-evening. I shall be at the rendezvous to-morrow."

All the people dispersed, and the two chiefs remained alone.

"Well, colonel," said Roquefinette, looking D'Harmental full in the face.

"Well, captain," replied the chevalier; "I have a great mind to ask one thing of you."

"What?" asked Roquefinette.

"To follow me into some cross-road and blow my brains out with your pistol, that this miserable head may be punished and not recognized."

"Why so?"

"Why? Because in such matters, when one fails one is but a fool: What am I to say to Madame de Maine now?"

"What!" cried Roquefinette, "is it about that little hop-o'-my-thumb that you are bothering yourself? Pardieu! you are frantically susceptible, colonel. Why the devil does not her lame husband attend to his own affairs. I should like to have seen your prude with her two cardinals and her three or four marquises, who are bursting with fear at this moment in a corner of the arsenal, while we remain masters of the field of battle. I should like to have seen if they would have climbed walls like lizards. Stay, colonel, listen to an old fox. To be a good conspirator, you must have, first, what you have, courage; but you must also have what you have not, patience. Morbleu! if I had such an affair in my hands, I would answer for it that I would bring it to a good end, and if you like to make it over to me we will talk of that."

“But in my place,” asked the colonel, “what would you say to Madame de Maine?”

“Oh! I should say, ‘My princess, the regent must have been warned by his police, for he did not leave as we expected, and we saw none but his roué companions.’ Then the Prince de Cellamare will say to you, ‘My dear D’Harmental, we have no resources but in you.’ Madame de Maine will say that all is not lost since the brave D’Harmental remains to us. The Count de Laval will grasp your hand trying to pay you a compliment, which he will not finish, because since his jaw is broken his tongue is not active, particularly for compliments. The Cardinal de Polignac will make the sign of the cross. Alberoni will swear enough to shake the heavens — in this manner you will have conciliated everybody, saved your amour propre, and may return to hide in your attic, which I advise you not to leave for three or four days if you do not wish to be hanged. From time to time I will pay you a visit. You will continue to bestow on me some of the liberalities of Spain, because it is of importance to me to live agreeably, and keep up my spirits; then, at the first opportunity we recall our brave fellows, and take our revenge.”

“Yes, certainly,” said D’Harmental; “that is what any other would do, but you see I have some foolish ideas — I cannot lie.”

“Whoever cannot lie cannot act,” replied the captain; “but what do I see there? The bayonets of the watch; amicable institution, I recognize you there; always a quarter of an hour too late. But now adieu, colonel,” continued he; “there is your road, we must separate,” said the captain, showing the Passage du Palais Royal, “and here is mine,” added he, pointing to the Rue Neuve des Petits-Champs; “go quietly, that they may not know that you ought to run as fast as you can, your hand on your hip so, and singing ‘La Mere Gaudichon.’“ And the captain followed the Rue de Valois at the same pace as the watch, who were a hundred paces behind him, singing carelessly as he went.

As to the chevalier, he re-entered the Rue des Bons Enfants, now as quiet as it had been noisy ten minutes before; and at the corner of the Rue Baillif he found the carriage, which, according to its orders, had not moved, and was waiting with the door open, the servant at the step, and the coachman on his box.

“To the arsenal,” said the chevalier.

“It is useless,” said a voice which made D’Harmental start; “I know all that has passed, and I will inform those who ought to know. A visit at this hour would be dangerous for all.”

“Is it you, abbe?” said D’Harmental, trying to recognize Brigaud in the livery in which he was disguised; “you would render me a real service in taking the news instead of me, for on my honor I do not know what to say.”

“Well, I shall say,” said Brigaud, “that you are a brave and loyal gentleman, and that if there were ten like you in France, all would soon be finished; but we are not here to pay compliments: get in quickly — where shall I take you?”

“It is useless,” said D’Harmental; “I will go on foot.”

“Get in. It is safer.”

D’Harmental complied, and Brigaud, dressed as he was, came and sat beside him.

“To the corner of the Rue du Gros Chenet and the Rue de Cléry,” said the abbe.

The coachman, impatient at having waited so long, obeyed quickly. At the place indicated the carriage stopped; the chevalier got out, and soon disappeared round the corner of the Rue du Temps-Perdu. As to the carriage, it rolled on noiselessly toward the Boulevards, like a fairy car which does not touch the earth.

CHAPTER XV.

JEAN BUVAT.

Our readers must now make a better acquaintance with one of the principal personages in the history which we have undertaken to relate, of whom we have scarcely spoken. We would refer to the good bourgeois, whom we have seen quitting the group in the Rue de Valois, and making for the Barrière des Sergents at the moment when the street-singer began his collection, and who, it will be remembered, we have since seen at so inopportune a moment in the Rue des Bons-Enfants.

Heaven preserve us from questioning the intelligence of our readers, so as to doubt for a moment that they had recognized in the poor devil to whom the Chevalier d’Harmental had rendered such timely assistance the good man of the terrace in the Rue du Temps-Perdu. But they cannot know, unless we tell them in detail, what he was physically, morally, and socially. If the reader has not forgotten the little we have already told him, it will be remembered that he was from forty to forty-five years of age. Now as every one knows, after forty years of age the bourgeois of Paris entirely forgets the care of his person, with which he is not generally much occupied, a negligence from which his corporeal graces suffer considerably, particularly when, as in the present instance, his appearance is not to be admired.

Our bourgeois was a little man of five feet four, short and fat, disposed to become obese as he advanced in age; and with one of those placid faces where all — hair, eyebrows, eyes, and skin — seem of the same color; in fact, one of those faces of which, at ten paces, one does not distinguish a feature. The most enthusiastic physiognomist, if he had sought to read on this countenance some high and curious destiny, would have been stopped in his examination as he mounted from his great blue eyes to his depressed forehead, or descended from his half-open mouth to the fold of his double chin. There he would have understood that he had under his eyes one of those heads to which all fermentation is unknown, whose freshness is respected by the passions, good or bad, and who turn nothing in the empty corners of their brain but the burden of some old nursery song. Let us add that Providence, who does nothing by halves, had signed the original, of which we have just offered a copy to our readers, by the characteristic name of Jean Buvat.

It is true that the persons who ought to have appreciated the profound nullity of spirit, and excellent qualities of heart of this good man, suppressed his patronymic, and ordinarily called him Le Bonhomme Buvat.

From his earliest youth the little Buvat, who had a marked repugnance for all other kinds of study, manifested a particular inclination for caligraphy: thus he arrived every morning at the College des Oratoriens, where his mother sent him gratis, with his exercises and translations full of faults, but written with a neatness, a regularity, and a beauty which it was charming to see. The little Buvat was whipped every day for the idleness of his mind, and received the writing prize every year for the skill of his hand. At fifteen years of age he passed from the Epitome Sacræ, which he had recommenced five times, to the Epitome Græcæ; but the professor soon perceived that this was too much for him, and put him back for the sixth time in the Epitome Sacræ. Passive as he appeared, young Buvat was not wanting in a certain pride. He came home in the evening crying to his mother, and complaining of the injustice which had been done him, declaring, in his grief, a thing which till then he had been careful not to confess, namely, that there were in the school children of ten years old more advanced than he was.

Widow Buvat, who saw her son start every morning with his exercises perfectly neat (which led her to believe that there could be no fault to be found with them), went the next day to abuse the good fathers. They replied that her son was a good boy, incapable of an evil thought toward God, or a bad action toward his neighbor; but that, at the same time, he was so awfully stupid that they advised her to develop, by making him a writing-master, the only talent with which nature had blessed him. This counsel was a ray of light for Madame Buvat; she understood that, in this manner, the benefit she should derive from her son would be immediate. She came back to her house, and communicated to her son the new plans she had formed for him. Young Buvat saw in this only a means of escaping the castigation which he received every morning, for which the prize, bound in calf, that he received every year was not a compensation.

He received the propositions of his mother with great joy; promised her that, before six months were over, he would be the first writing-master in the capital; and the same day, after having, from his little savings, bought a knife with four blades, a packet of quills, and two copy-books, set himself to the work. The good Oratoriens were not deceived as to the true vocation of young Buvat. Caligraphy was with him an art which almost became drawing. At the end of six months, like the ape in the Arabian Nights, he wrote six kinds of writing; and imitated men's faces, trees, and animals. At the end of a year he had made such progress that he thought he might now give out his prospectus. He worked at it for three months, day and night; and almost lost his sight over it. At the end of that time he had accomplished a chef-d'œuvre.

It was not a simple writing, but a real picture representing the creation of the world, and divided almost like the Transfiguration of Raphael. In the upper part, consecrated to Eden, was the Eternal Father drawing Eve from the side of the sleeping Adam, and surrounded by those animals which the nobility of their nature brings near to man, such as the lion, the horse, and the dog. At the bottom was the sea, in the depths of which were to be seen swimming the most fantastic fishes, and on the surface a superb three-decked vessel. On the two sides, trees full of birds put the heavens, which they touched with their topmost branches, in communication with the earth, which they grasped with their roots; and in the space left in the middle of all this, in the most perfectly horizontal line, and reproduced in six different writings, was the adverb "pitilessly." This time the artist was not deceived; the picture produced the effect which he expected. A week afterward young Buvat had five male and two female scholars. His reputation increased; and Madame Buvat, after some time passed in greater ease than she had known even in her husband's lifetime, had the satisfaction of dying perfectly secure about her son's future.

As to him, after having sufficiently mourned his mother, he pursued the course of his life, one day exactly like the other. He arrived thus at the age of twenty-six or twenty-seven, having passed the stormy part of existence in the eternal calm of his innocent and virtuous good nature. It was about this time that the good man found an opportunity of doing a sublime action, which he did instinctively and simply, as he did everything; but perhaps a man of mind might have passed it over without seeing it, or turned away from it if he had seen it. There was in the house No. 6, in the Rue des Orties, of which Buvat occupied the attic, a young couple who were the admiration of the whole quarter for the harmony in which they lived. They appeared made for each other. The husband was a man of from thirty-four to thirty-five years of age, of a southern origin, with black eyes, beard and hair, sunburned complexion, and teeth like pearls. He was called Albert du Rocher, and was the son of an ancient Cevenol chief, who had been forced to turn Catholic, with all his family, at the persecutions of Monsieur Baville; and half from opposition, half because youth seeks youth, he had entered the household of M. le Duc de Chartres, which was being reformed just at that time, having suffered much in the campaign preceding the battle of Steinkirk, where the prince had made his debut in arms. Du Rocher had obtained the place of La Neuville, who had been killed in that charge which, conducted by the Duc de Chartres, had decided the victory.

The winter had interrupted the campaign, but in the spring M. de Luxembourg had recalled all those officers who shared their life between war and pleasure. The Duc de Chartres, always eager to draw a sword which the jealousy of Louis XIV. had so often replaced in the scabbard, was one of the first to answer this appeal. Du Rocher followed him with all his military household. The great day of Nerwinden arrived. The Duc de Chartres had, as usual, the command of the guards; as usual he charged at their head, but so furiously that five times he found himself almost alone in the midst of the enemy. At the fifth time he had near him only a young man whom he scarcely knew; but in the rapid glance which he cast on him he recognized one of those spirits on whom one may rely, and instead of yielding, as a brigadier of the enemy's army, who had recognized him, proposed to him, he blew the proposer's brains out with his pistol. At the same instant two shots were fired, one of which took off the prince's hat, and the other turned from the handle of his sword. Scarcely had these two shots been fired when those who had discharged them fell simultaneously, thrown down by the prince's companion — one by a saber-stroke, the other by a bullet. A general attack took place on these two men, who were miraculously saved from any ball. The prince's horse, however, fell under him. The young man who was with him jumped from his, and offered it to him.

The prince hesitated to accept this service, which might cost him who rendered it so dear; but the young man, who was tall and powerful, thinking that this was not a moment to exchange politenesses, took the prince in his arms and forced him into the saddle. At this moment, M. d'Arcy, who had lost his pupil in the melée, and who was seeking for him with a detachment of light horse, came up, just as, in spite of their courage, the prince and his companion were about to be killed or taken. Both were without wound, although the prince had received four bullets in his clothes. The Duc de Chartres held out his hand to his companion, and asked him his name; for, although his face was known to him, he had been so short a time in his service that he did not remember his name. The young man replied that he was called Albert du Rocher, and that he had taken the place of La Neuville, who was killed at Steinkirk.

Then, turning toward those who had just arrived —

“Gentlemen,” said the prince, “you have prevented me from being taken, but this gentleman,” pointing to Du Rocher, “has saved me from being killed.”

At the end of the campaign, the Duc de Chartres named Du Rocher his first equerry, and three years afterward, having retained the grateful affection which he had vowed to him, he married him to a young person whom he loved, and gave her a dowry.

As M. le Duc de Chartres was still but a young man, this dowry was not large, but he promised to take charge of the advancement of his protégée. This young person was of English origin; her mother had accompanied Madame Henriette when she came to France to marry Monsieur; and after that princess had been poisoned by the Chevalier d’Effiat, she had passed, as lady-in-waiting, into the service of the Grand Dauphine; but, in 1690, the Grand Dauphine died, and the Englishwoman, in her insular pride, refused to stay with Mademoiselle Choin, and retired to a little country house which she hired near St. Cloud, where she gave herself up entirely to the education of her little Clarice. It was in the journeys of the Duc de Chartres to St. Cloud that Du Rocher made acquaintance with this young girl, whom, as we have said, he married in 1697. It was, then, these young people who occupied the first floor of the house of which Buvat had the attic. The young couple had first a son, whose caligraphic education was confided to Buvat from the age of four years. The young pupil was making the most satisfactory progress when he was carried off by the measles. The despair of the parents was great; Buvat shared it, the more sincerely that his pupil had shown such aptitude. This sympathy for their grief, on the part of a stranger, attached them to him; and one day, when the young man was complaining of the precarious future of artists, Albert du Rocher proposed to him to use his influence to procure him a place at the government library. Buvat jumped with joy at the idea of becoming a public functionary; and, a month afterward, Buvat received his brevet as employé at the library, in the manuscript department, with a salary of nine hundred livres a year. From this day, Buvat, in the pride natural to his new position, neglected his scholars, and gave himself up entirely to the preparation of forms. Nine hundred livres, secured to the end of his life, was quite a fortune, and the worthy writer, thanks to the royal munificence, began to lead a life of ease and comfort, promising his good neighbors that if they had a second child no one but himself should teach him to write. On their parts, the poor parents wished much to give this increase of occupation to the worthy writer. God heard their desire. Toward the termination of 1702, Clarice was delivered of a daughter.

Great was the joy through the whole house. Buvat did not feel at all at his ease; he ran up and down stairs, beating his thighs with his hands, and singing below his breath the burden of his favorite song, “Then let me go, and let me play,” etc. That day, for the first time since he had been appointed, that is to say, during two years, he arrived at his office at a quarter past ten, instead of ten o’clock exactly. A supernumerary, who thought that he must be dead, had asked for his place.

The little Bathilde was not a week old before Buvat wished to begin teaching her her strokes and pot-hooks, saying, that to learn a thing well, it is necessary to commence young. It was with the greatest difficulty that he was made to understand that he must wait till she was two or three years old. He resigned himself; but, in expectation of that time, he set about preparing copies. At the end of three years Clarice kept her word, and Buvat had the satisfaction of solemnly putting her first pen into the hands of Bathilde.

It was the beginning of the year 1707, and the Duc de Chartres had become Duc d'Orleans, by the death of Monsieur, and had at last obtained a command in Spain, where he was to conduct the troops to the Marechal de Berwick. Orders were directly given to all his military household to hold themselves in readiness for the 5th of March. As first equerry, it was necessary that Albert should accompany the prince. This news, which would have formerly given him the highest joy, made him now almost sad, for the health of Clarice began to fill him with the greatest uneasiness; and the doctor had allowed the word consumption to escape him. Whether Clarice felt herself seriously attacked, or whether, more natural still, she feared only for her husband, her burst of grief was so wild that Albert himself could not help crying with her, and little Bathilde and Buvat cried because they saw the others cry.

The 5th of March arrived; it was the day fixed for the departure. In spite of her grief, Clarice had busied herself with her husband's outfit, and had wished that it was worthy of the prince whom he accompanied. Moreover, in the midst of her tears a ray of proud joy lit up her face when she saw Albert in his elegant uniform, and on his noble war-horse. As to Albert, he was full of hope and pride; the poor wife smiled sadly at his dreams for the future; but in order not to dispirit him at this moment, she shut her grief up in her own heart, and silencing her fears which she had for him, and, perhaps, also those which she experienced for herself, she was the first to say to him, “Think not of me, but of your honor.”

The Duc d’Orleans and his corps d’armée entered Catalonia in the first days of April, and advanced directly, by forced marches, across Arragon. On arriving at Segorbe, the duke learned that the Marechal de Berwick held himself in readiness for a decisive battle; and in his eagerness to arrive in time to take part in the action he sent Albert on at full speed, charging him to tell the marshal that the Duc d’Orleans was coming to his aid with ten thousand men, and to pray that if it did not interfere with his arrangements, he would wait for him before joining battle.

Albert left, but bewildered in the mountains, and misled by ignorant guides, he was only a day before the army, and he arrived at the marshal’s camp at the very moment when the engagement was going to commence. Albert asked where the marshal was; they showed his position, on the left of the army, on a little hill, from which he overlooked the whole plain. The Duc de Berwick was there surrounded by his staff; Albert put his horse to the gallop and made straight toward him.

The messenger introduced himself to the marshal and told him the cause of his coming. The marshal’s only answer was to point to the field of battle, and tell him to return to the prince, and inform him what he had seen. But Albert had smelled powder, and was not willing to leave thus. He asked permission to wait till he could at least give him the news of a victory. At that moment a charge of dragoons seemed necessary to the marshal; he told one of his aides-de-camp to carry the order to charge to the colonel. The young man started at a gallop, but he had scarcely gone a third of the distance which separated the hill from the position of the regiment, when his head was carried off by a cannon-ball. Scarcely had he fallen from his stirrups when Albert, seizing this occasion to take part in the battle, set spurs to his horse, transmitted the order to the colonel, and instead of returning to the marshal, drew his sword, and charged at the head of the regiment.

This charge was one of the most brilliant of the day, and penetrated so completely to the heart of the imperial guard that they began to give way. The marshal had involuntarily watched the young officer throughout the melée, recognizing him by his uniform. He saw him arrive at the enemy’s standard, engage in a personal contest with him who carried it; then, when the regiment had taken flight, he saw him returning with his conquest in his arms. On reaching the marshal he threw the colors at his feet; opening his mouth to speak, instead of words, it was blood that came to his lips. The marshal saw him totter in his saddle, and advanced to support him, but before he had time to do so Albert had fallen; a ball had pierced his breast. The marshal sprung from his horse, but the brave young man lay dead on the standard he had just taken. The Duc d'Orleans arrived the day after the battle. He regretted Albert as one regrets a gallant gentleman; but, after all, he had died the death of the brave, in the midst of victory, and on the colors he himself had taken. What more could be desired by a Frenchman, a soldier, and a gentleman?

The duke wrote with his own hand to the poor widow. If anything could console a wife for the death of her husband, it would doubtless be such a letter; but poor Clarice thought but of one thing, that she had no longer a husband, and that her child had no longer a father. At four o'clock Buvat came in from the library; they told him that Clarice wanted him, and he went down directly. The poor woman did not cry, she did not complain; she stood tearless and speechless, her eyes fixed and hollow as those of a maniac. When Buvat entered, she did not even turn her head toward him, but merely holding out her hand, she presented him the letter. Buvat looked right and left to endeavor to find out what was the matter, but seeing nothing to direct his conjectures, he looked at the paper and read aloud:

"Madame — Your husband has died for France and for me. Neither France nor I can give you back your husband, but remember that if ever you are in want of anything, we are both your debtors.

"Your affectionate,

"Philippe d'Orleans."

"What!" cried Buvat, fixing his great eyes on Clarice, "M. du Rocher — it is not possible!"

"Papa is dead," said little Bathilde, leaving the corner where she was playing with her doll, and running to her mother; "is it true that papa is dead?"

"Alas! yes, my dear child!" said Clarice, finding at once words and tears. "Oh yes, it is true; it is but too true, unhappy that we are!"

"Madame," said Buvat, who had been seeking for some consolation to offer, "you must not grieve thus; perhaps it is a false report."

“Do you not see that the letter is from the Duc d’Orleans himself?” cried the poor widow. “Yes, my child, your father is dead. Weep, my child; perhaps in seeing your tears God will have pity on me;” and saying these things, the poor widow coughed so painfully that Buvat felt his own breast torn by it, but his fright was still greater when he saw that the handkerchief which she drew from her mouth was covered with blood. Then he understood that a greater misfortune threatened Bathilde than that which had just befallen her.

The apartments which Clarice occupied were now too large for her. No one was astonished when she left them for smaller ones on the second floor. Besides her grief, which annihilated all her other faculties, Clarice felt, in common with all other noble hearts, a certain unwillingness to ask, even from her county, a reward for the blood which had been spilled for it, particularly when that blood is still warm, as was that of Albert. The poor widow hesitated to present herself to the minister-at-war to ask for her due. At the end of three months, when she took courage to make the first steps, the taking of Requena and that of Saragossa had already thrown into the shade the battle of Almanza. Clarice showed the prince’s letter. The secretary replied that with such a letter she could not fail in obtaining what she wanted, but that she must wait for his highness’s return. Clarice looked in a glass at her emaciated face, and smiled sadly.

“Wait!” said she; “yes, it would be better, but God knows if I shall have the time.”

The result of this repulse was, that Clarice left her lodging on the second floor for two little rooms on the third. The poor widow had no other fortune than her husband’s savings. The little dowry which the duke had given her had disappeared in the purchase of furniture and her husband’s outfit. As the new lodging which she took was much smaller than the other, no one was astonished that Clarice sold part of her furniture.

The return of the Duc d’Orleans was expected in the autumn, and Clarice counted on this to ameliorate her situation; but, contrary to the usual custom, the army, instead of taking winter quarters, continued the campaign, and news arrived that, instead of returning, the duke was about to lay siege to Lerida. Now, in 1647, the great Conde himself had failed before Lerida, and the new siege, even supposing that it ever came to a successful issue, threatened to be of a terrible length.

Clarice risked some new advances. This time they had forgotten even her husband’s name. She had again recourse to the prince’s letter, which had its ordinary effect; but they told her that after the siege of Lerida the duke could not fail to return, and the poor widow was again obliged to wait.

She left her two rooms for a little attic opposite that of Buvat, and she sold the rest of her furniture, only keeping a table, some chairs, Bathilde’s little cot, and a bed for herself.

Buvat had seen, without taking much notice, these frequent removals, but it was not very difficult to understand his neighbor’s situation. Buvat, who was a careful man, had some savings which he had a great wish to put at his neighbor’s service; but Clarice’s pride increased with her poverty, and poor Buvat had never yet dared to make the offer. Twenty times he had gone to her with a little rouleau, which contained his whole fortune of fifty or sixty louis, but every time he left without having dared to take it out of his pocket; but one day it happened that Buvat, descending to go to business, having met the landlord who was making his quarterly round, and guessing that his neighbor might be embarrassed, even for so small a sum, took the proprietor into his own room, saying that the day before Madame du Rocher had given him the money, that he might get both receipts at once. The landlord, who had feared a delay on the part of his tenant, did not care from whence the money came, and willingly gave the two receipts.

Buvat, in the naïveté of his soul, was tormented by this good action as by a crime. He was three or four days without daring to present himself to his neighbor, so that when he returned, he found her quite affected by what she thought an act of indifference on his part. Buvat found Clarice so much changed during these few days, that he left her wiping his eyes, and for the first time he went to bed without having sung, during the fifteen turns he generally took in his bedroom —

“Then let me go,” etc.

which was a proof of melancholy preoccupation.

The last days of winter passed, and brought, in passing, the news that Lerida had surrendered, and that the young and indefatigable general was about to besiege Tortosa. This was the last blow for poor Clarice. She understood that spring was coming, and with it a new campaign, which would retain the duke with the army. Strength failed her, and she was obliged to take to her bed.

The position of Clarice was frightful. She did not deceive herself as to her illness. She felt that it was mortal, and she had no one in the world to whom she could recommend her child. The poor woman feared death, not on her own account, but on her daughter's, who would not have even the stone of her mother's tomb to rest her head on, for the unfortunate have no tomb. Her husband had only distant relations, from whom she could not solicit aid; as to her own family, born in France, where her mother died, she had not even known them; besides, she understood that if there were any hope from that quarter, there was no longer the time to seek it. Death was approaching.

One night Buvat, who the evening before had left Clarice devoured by fever, heard her groaning so deeply, that he jumped from his bed and dressed himself to go and offer her help; but on arriving at the door, he did not dare to enter or to knock — Clarice was sobbing and praying aloud. At this moment Bathilde woke and called her mother. Clarice drove back her tears, took her child from the cradle, and placing her on her knees on her own bed, made her repeat what prayers she knew, and between each of them Buvat heard her cry in a sad voice —

"Oh, my God! listen to my poor child!"

There was in this nocturnal scene — the child scarcely out of the cradle, and a mother half way to the grave, both addressing the Lord as their only support in the silence of night — something so deeply sad that good Buvat fell on his knees, and inwardly swore, what he had not dared to offer aloud, that though Bathilde might be an orphan, yet she should not be abandoned. God had heard the double prayers which had ascended to Him, and He had granted them.

The next day Buvat did what he had never dared to do before. He took Bathilde in his arms, leaned his good-natured round face against the charming little face of the child, and said softly —

"Be easy, poor little innocent, there are yet good people on the earth."

The little girl threw her arms round his neck and kissed him. Buvat felt that the tears stood in his eyes, and as he had often heard that you must not cry before sick people, for fear of agitating them, he drew out his watch, and assuming a gruff voice to conceal his emotion —

"Hum, it is a quarter to ten, I must go. Good-day, Madame du Rocher."

On the staircase he met the doctor, and asked him what he thought of the patient. As he was a doctor who came through charity, and did not consider himself at all bound to be considerate when he was not paid, he replied that in three days she would be dead.

Coming back at four o’clock, Buvat found the whole house in commotion. The doctor had said that they must send for the viaticum. They had sent for the curé, and he had arrived, and, preceded by the sacristan and his little bell, he had without any preparation entered the sick room. Clarice received it with her hands joined, and her eyes turned toward heaven; but the impression produced on her was not the less terrible. Buvat heard singing, and thought what must have happened. He went up directly, and found the landing and the door of the sick room surrounded by all the gossips of the neighborhood, who had, as was the custom at that time, followed the holy sacrament. Round the bed where the dying woman was extended, already so pale and motionless that if it had not been for the two great tears that ran down her cheeks, she might have been taken for a marble statue lying on a tomb, the priests were singing the prayers for the dying, and in a corner of the room the little Bathilde, whom they had separated from her mother, that she might not distract her attention during her last act of religion, was seated on the ground, not daring to cry, frightened at seeing so many people she did not know, and hearing so much she did not understand.

As soon as she saw Buvat, the child ran to him as the only person she knew in this grave assembly. Buvat took her in his arms, and knelt with her near the bed of the dying woman. At this moment Clarice lowered her eyes from the heavens toward the earth. Without doubt she had been addressing a prayer to Heaven to send a protector to her daughter. She saw Bathilde in the arms of the only friend she had in the world. With the penetrating glance of the dying she read this pure and devoted heart, and saw what he had not dared to tell her; and as she sat up in bed she held out her hand to him, uttering a cry of gratitude and joy, such as the angels only can understand; and, as if she had exhausted her remaining strength in this maternal outburst, she sank back fainting on the bed.

The religious ceremony was finished. The priests retired first, then the pious followed; the indifferent and curious remained till the last. Among this number were several women. Buvat asked if there was none among them who knew a good sick-nurse. One of them presented herself directly, declared, in the midst of a chorus of her companions, that she had all the necessary virtues for this honorable situation, but that, just on account of these good qualities, she was accustomed to be paid a week in advance, as she was much sought after in the neighborhood. Buvat asked the price of this week. She replied that to any other it would be sixteen livres, but as the poor lady did not seem rich, she would be contented with twelve. Buvat, who had just received his month's pay, took two crowns from his pocket and gave them to her without bargaining. He would have given double if she had asked it.

Clarice was still fainting. The nurse entered on her duty by giving her some vinegar instead of salts. Buvat retired. As to Bathilde, she had been told that her mother was asleep. The poor child did not know the difference between sleep and death, and returned to her corner to play with her doll.

At the end of an hour Buvat returned to ask news of Clarice. She had recovered from her fainting, but though her eyes were open she did not speak. However, she recognized him, for as soon as he entered she joined her hands as if to pray, and then she appeared to seek for something under her bolster. The nurse shook her head, and approaching the patient:

"Your pillow is very well," said she, "you must not disarrange it." Then turning to Buvat, "Ah! these sick people!" added she, shrugging her shoulders, "they are always fancying that there is something making them uncomfortable: it is death, only they do not know it."

Clarice sighed deeply, but remained motionless. The nurse approached her, and passed over her lips the feather of a quill dipped in a cordial of her own invention, which she had just been to fetch at the chemist's. Buvat could not support this spectacle; he recommended the mother and child to the care of the nurse, and left.

The next day Clarice was still worse, for though her eyes were open, she did not seem to recognize any one but her daughter, who was lying near her on the bed, and whose little hand she held. On her part the child, as if she felt that this was the last maternal embrace, remained quiet and silent. On seeing her kind friend she only said, "Mamma sleeps."

It appeared to Buvat that Clarice moved as if she heard and recognized her child's voice, but it might have been only a nervous trembling. He asked the nurse if the sick woman had wanted anything. She shook her head, saying, "What would be the use? It would be money thrown away. These apothecaries make quite enough already." Buvat would have liked to stay with Clarice, for he saw that she had not long to live, but he never would have thought of absenting himself for a day from business unless he were dying himself. He arrived there, then, as usual, but so sad and melancholy that the king did not gain much by his presence. They remarked with astonishment that that day Buvat did not wait till four o'clock had struck to take off the false blue sleeves which he wore to protect his coat; but that at the first stroke of the clock he got up, took his hat, and went out. The supernumerary, who had already asked for his place, watched him as he went, then, when he had closed the door, "Well!" said he, loud enough to be heard by the chief, "there is one who takes it easy."

Buvat's presentiments were confirmed. On arriving at the house he asked the porter's wife how Clarice was.

"Ah, God be thanked!" replied she; "the poor woman is happy; she suffers no more."

"She is dead!" cried Buvat, with that shudder always produced by this terrible word.

"About three-quarters of an hour ago," replied she; and she went on darning her stocking, and singing a merry song which she had interrupted to reply to Buvat.

Buvat ascended the steps of the staircase one by one, stopping frequently to wipe his forehead; then, on arriving on the landing, where was his room and that of Clarice, he was obliged to lean his head against the wall, for he felt his legs fail him. He stood silent and hesitating, when he thought he heard Bathilde's voice crying. He remembered the poor child, and this gave him courage. At the door, however, he stopped again; then he heard the groans of the little girl more distinctly.

"Mamma!" cried the child, in a little voice broken by sobs, "will you not wake? Mamma, why are you so cold?" Then, running to the door and striking with her hand, "Come, my kind friend, come," said she; "I am alone, and I am afraid."

Buvat was astonished that they had not removed the child from her mother's room; and the profound pity which the poor little creature inspired made him forget the painful feeling which had stopped him for a moment. He then raised his hand to open the door. The door was locked. At this moment he heard the porter's wife calling him. He ran to the stairs and asked her where the key was.

"Ah!" replied she, "how stupid I am; I forgot to give it you as you passed."

Buvat ran down as quickly as he could.

“And why is the key here?” he asked.

“The landlord placed it here after he had taken away the furniture,” answered she.

“What! taken away the furniture?” cried Buvat.

“Of course, he has taken away the furniture. Your neighbor was not rich, M. Buvat, and no doubt she owes money on all sides. Ah! the landlord will not stand tricks; the rent first. That is but fair. Besides, she does not want furniture any more, poor dear!”

“But the nurse, where is she?”

“When she saw that her patient was dead, she went away. Her business was finished, but she will come back to shroud her for a crown, if you like. It is generally the portress who does this: but I cannot; I am too sensitive.”

Buvat understood, shuddering at all that had passed. He went up quickly. His hand shook so that he could scarcely find the lock; but at length the key turned, and the door opened. Clarice was extended on the ground on the mattress out of her bed, in the middle of the dismantled room. An old sheet was thrown over her, and ought to have hidden her entirely, but little Bathilde had moved it to seek for her mother’s face, which she was kissing when he entered.

“Ah, my friend,” cried she, “wake my mamma, who sleeps still. Wake her, I beg!” And the child ran to Buvat, who was watching from the door this pitiable spectacle. Buvat took Bathilde back to the corpse.

“Kiss your mother for the last time, my poor child,” said he.

The child obeyed.

“And now,” said he, “let her sleep. One day God will wake her;” and he took the child in his arms and carried her away. The child made no resistance. She seemed to understand her weakness and her isolation.

He put her in his own bed, for they had carried away even the child’s cot; and when she was asleep, he went out to give information of the death to the commissary of the quarter, and to make arrangements for the funeral.

When he returned, the portress gave him a paper, which the nurse had found in Clarice’s hand. Buvat opened and recognized the letter from the Duc d’Orleans. This was the sole inheritance which the poor mother had left to her daughter.

CHAPTER XVI.

BATHILDE.

In going to make his declaration to the commissary of the quarter and his arrangements for the funeral, Buvat had not forgotten to look for a woman who could take care of little Bathilde, an office which he could not undertake himself; firstly, because he was entirely ignorant of its duties; and, secondly, because it would be impossible to leave the child alone during the six hours he spent daily at the office. Fortunately, he knew the very person he wanted; a woman of from thirty-five to thirty-eight years of age, who had been in Madame Buvat's service, and whose good qualities he had duly appreciated. It was arranged with Nanette — for this was the good woman's name — that she should live in the house, do the cooking, take care of little Bathilde, and have fifty livres a year wages, and her board. This new arrangement must greatly change all Buvat's habits, by obliging him to have a housekeeper, whereas he had always lived as a bachelor, and taken his meals at an eating-house. He could no longer keep his attic, which was now too small for him, and next morning he went in search of a new lodging. He found one, Rue Pagevin, as he wished to be near the royal library, that he might not have too far to walk in wet weather. This lodging contained two rooms, a closet, and a kitchen. He took it on the spot, and went to buy the necessary furniture for Bathilde and Nanette's rooms; and the same evening, after his return from business, they moved to their new lodgings.

The next day, which was Sunday, Clarice was buried; so that Buvat had no need to ask for a day's leave even for this.

For the first week or two, Bathilde asked constantly for her mamma; but her friend Buvat had brought her a great many pretty playthings to console her, so that she soon began to ask for her less frequently; and as she had been told she had gone to join her father, she at length only asked occasionally when they would both come back.

Buvat had put Bathilde in the best room; he kept the other for himself, and put Nanette in the little closet.

This Nanette was a good woman, who cooked passably, and knitted and netted splendidly. In spite of these divers talents, Buvat understood that he and Nanette would not suffice for the education of a young girl; and that though she might write magnificently, know her five rules, and be able to sew and net, she would still know only half of what she should. Buvat had looked the obligation he had undertaken full in the face. His was one of those happy organizations which think with the heart, and he had understood that, though she had become his ward, Bathilde remained the child of Albert and Clarice. He resolved, then, to give her an education conformable, not to her present situation, but to the name she bore.

In arriving at this resolution, Buvat had reasoned, very simply, that he owed his place to Albert, and consequently, the income of that place belonged to Bathilde. This is how he divided his nine hundred livres a year: four hundred and fifty for music, drawing and dancing masters; four hundred and fifty for Bathilde’s dowry.

Now, supposing that Bathilde, who was four years old, should marry at eighteen, the interest and the capital together would amount to something like nine or ten thousand francs. This was not much, he knew, and was much troubled by that knowledge; but it was in vain to think, he could not make it more.

To defray the expense of their living, lodgings, and clothing, for himself and Bathilde, he would again begin to give writing lessons and make copies. For this purpose he got up at five o’clock in the morning, and went to bed at ten at night. This would be all profit; for, thanks to this new arrangement, he would lengthen his life by two or three hours daily. For some time these good resolutions prospered; neither lessons nor copies were wanting; and, as two years passed before Bathilde had finished the early education he himself undertook to give her, he was able to add nine hundred francs to her little treasure. At six years old Bathilde had what the daughters of the richest and noblest houses seldom have — masters for music, drawing and dancing. Making sacrifices for this charming child was entirely pleasure; for she appeared to have received from God one of those happy organizations whose aptitude makes us believe in a former world, for they appear not so much to be learning a new thing as to be remembering one formerly known. As to her beauty, which had given such early promise, it had amply fulfilled it.

Buvat was happy the whole week, while after each lesson he received the compliments of the master, and very proud on Sundays, when, having put on his salmon-colored coat, his black velvet breeches, and chiné stockings, he took Bathilde by the hand and went for his weekly walk.

It was generally toward the Chemin des Porcherons that he directed his steps.

This was a rendezvous for bowls, and Buvat had formerly been a great lover of this game. In ceasing to be an actor, he had become a judge. Whenever a dispute arose, it was referred to him; and his eye was so correct, that he could tell at the first glance, and without fail, which ball was nearest the mark. From his judgments there was no appeal, and they were received with neither more nor less respect than those of St. Louis at Vincennes. But it must be said to his credit that his predilection for this walk was not entirely egotistical: it also led to the Marsh of the Grange Bateliere, whose black and gloomy waters attracted a great many of those dragon-flies with the gauzy wings and golden bodies which children delight to pursue. One of Bathilde's greatest amusements was to run, with her green net in her hand, her beautiful fair curls floating in the wind, after the butterflies and dragon-flies. The result of this was that Bathilde had many accidents to her white frock, but, provided she was amused, Buvat took very philosophically a spot or a tear. This was Nanette's affair. The good woman scolded well on their return, but Buvat closed her mouth by shrugging his shoulders and saying, “Bah! one can't put old heads on young shoulders.”

And, as Nanette had a great respect for proverbs, which she occasionally used herself, she generally gave way to the moral of this one. It happened also sometimes, but this was only on fete days, that Buvat complied with Bathilde's request to take her to Montmartre to see the windmills. Then they set out earlier. Nanette took dinner with them, which was destined to be eaten on the esplanade of the abbey. They did not get home till eight o'clock in the evening, but from the Cross des Porcherons Bathilde slept in Buvat's arms.

Things went on thus till the year 1712, at which time the great king found himself so embarrassed in his affairs that the only thing left for him to do was to leave off paying his employés. Buvat was warned of this administrative measure by the cashier, who announced to him one fine morning, when he presented himself to receive his month's pay, that there was no money. Buvat looked at the man with an astonished air: it had never entered into his head that the king could be in want of money. He took no further notice of this answer, convinced that some accident only had interrupted the payment, and went back to his office singing his favorite

"Then let me go," etc.

"Pardon," said the supernumerary, who after waiting for seven years had at last been named employé the first of the preceding month, "you must be very light-hearted to sing when we are no longer paid."

"What!" cried Buvat; "what do you mean?"

"I mean that I suppose you have not gone to be paid."

"Yes, I have just come from there."

"Did they pay you?"

"No; they said there was no money."

"And what do you think of that?"

"Oh! I think," said Buvat, "that they will pay the two months together."

"Oh, yes! two months together! Do you hear, Ducoudray? He thinks they will pay the two months together. He is a simple fellow, this Buvat."

"We shall see next month," replied the second clerk.

"Yes," replied Buvat, to whom this remark appeared very just, "we shall see next month."

"And if they do not pay you next month, nor the following months, what shall you do, Buvat?"

"What shall I do!" said Buvat, astonished that there could be a doubt as to his resolution, "I should come just the same."

"What! if you were not paid you would come still?"

"Monsieur," said Buvat, "for ten years the king has paid me down on the nail; surely after that he has a right to ask for a little credit if he is embarrassed."

"Vile flatterer," said the clerk.

The month passed, and pay-day came again. Buvat presented himself with the most perfect confidence that they would pay his arrears; but to his astonishment they told him that there was still no money. Buvat asked when there would be any. The cashier replied that he should like to know. Buvat was quite confused, and went away; but this time without singing. The same day the clerk resigned. Now as it was difficult to replace a clerk who resigned because he was not paid, and whose work must be done all the same, the chief told Buvat, besides his own work, to do that of the missing clerk. Buvat undertook it without murmur; and as his ordinary work had left him some time free, at the end of the month the business was done.

They did not pay the third month any more than the two others — it was a real bankruptcy. But as has been seen, Buvat never bargained with his duties. What he had promised on the first impulse he did on reflection; but he was forced to attack his treasure, which consisted of two years' pay. Meanwhile Bathilde grew. She was now a young girl of thirteen or fourteen years old, whose beauty became every day more remarkable, and who began to understand all the difficulties of her position. For some time the walks in the Porcheron and the expedition to Montmartre had been given up under pretext that she preferred remaining at home to draw or play on the harpsichord.

Buvat did not understand these sedentary tastes which Bathilde had acquired so suddenly. And as, after having tried two or three times to go out without her, he found that it was not the walk itself he cared for, he resolved, as he must have air upon a Sunday, to look for a lodging with a garden. But lodgings with gardens were too dear for his finances, and having seen the lodging in the Rue du Temps-Perdu, he had the bright idea of replacing the garden by a terrace. He came back to tell Bathilde what he had seen, telling her that the only inconvenience in this lodging would be that their rooms must be separated, and that she would be obliged to sleep on the fourth floor with Nanette, and he on the fifth. This was rather a recommendation to Bathilde. For some time she had begun to feel it inconvenient that her room should be only separated by a door from that of a man still young and who was neither her father nor her husband. She therefore assured Buvat that the lodging must suit him admirably, and advised him to secure it at once. Buvat was delighted, and at once gave notice to quit his old lodgings, and at the half-term he moved. Bathilde was right; for since her black mantle sketched her beautiful shoulders — since her mittens showed the prettiest fingers in the world — since of the Bathilde of former times there was nothing left but her childish feet, every one began to remark that Buvat was young — that the tutor and the pupil were living under the same roof. In fact, the gossips who, when Bathilde was six years old, worshiped Buvat's footsteps, now began to cry out about his criminality because she was fifteen. Poor Buvat! If ever echo was innocent and pure, it was that of the room which adjoined Bathilde's, and which for ten years had sheltered his good round head, into which a bad thought had never entered, even in dreams.

But on arriving at the Rue du Temps-Perdu it was still worse. In the Rue Pagevin, where his admirable conduct to the child was known, this remembrance had protected him against calumny; but in their new quarter this was quite unknown, and their inscribing themselves under two different names prevented any idea of very near relationship. Some supposed that they saw in Bathilde the result of an old passion which the Church had forgotten to consecrate, but this idea fell at the first examination. Bathilde was tall and slender, Buvat short and fat; Bathilde had brilliant black eyes, Buvat's were blue and expressionless; Bathilde's face was white and smooth, Buvat's face was bright red. In fact, Bathilde's whole person breathed elegance and distinction, while poor Buvat was the type of vulgar good-nature. The result of this was, that the women began to look at Bathilde with contempt, and that men called Buvat a lucky fellow. The previsions of the clerk who resigned were realized. For eighteen months Buvat had not touched a sou of his pay, and yet had not relaxed for a moment in his punctuality. Moreover, he was haunted with a fear that the ministry would turn away a third of the clerks for the sake of economy. Buvat would have looked on the loss of his place as a great misfortune, although it took him six hours a day which he might have employed in a lucrative manner. They took care not to dismiss a man who worked the better the less they paid him.

Bathilde began to think that there was something passing of which she was ignorant. She thought it would be no use to ask Buvat, and addressing herself to Nanette, who, after a short time, avowed all to her, Bathilde learned for the first time all she owed to Buvat; and that to pay her masters, and to amass her dowry, Buvat worked from morning till night; and that in spite of this, as his salary was not paid, he would be obliged sooner or later to tell Bathilde that they must retrench all expenses that were not absolutely necessary.

Bathilde's first impulse on learning this devotion was to fall at Buvat's feet and express her gratitude; but she soon understood that, to arrive at her desired end, she must feign ignorance.

The next day Bathilde told Buvat, laughing, that it was throwing away money to keep her masters any longer, for she knew as much as they did; and as, in Buvat's eyes, Bathilde's drawings were the most beautiful things in the world, and as, when she sang, he was in the seventh heaven, he found no difficulty in believing her, particularly as her masters, with unusual candor, avowed that their pupil knew enough to study alone; but Bathilde had a purifying influence on all who approached her. Bathilde was not satisfied with saving expense, but also wished to increase his gains. Although she had made equal progress in music and drawing, she understood that drawing was her only resource, and that music could be nothing but a relaxation. She reserved all her attention for drawing; and as she was really very talented, she soon made charming sketches. At last one day she wished to know what they were worth; and she asked Buvat, in going to his office, to show them to the person from whom she bought her paper and crayons, and who lived at the corner of the Rue de Cléry. She gave him two children’s heads which she had drawn from fancy, to ask their value. Buvat undertook the commission without suspecting any trick, and executed it with his ordinary naïveté. The dealer, accustomed to such propositions, turned them round and round with a disdainful air, and, criticising them severely, said that he could only offer fifteen francs each for them. Buvat was hurt not by the price offered, but by the disrespectful manner in which the shopkeeper had spoken of Bathilde’s talent. He drew them quickly out of the dealer’s hands, saying that he thanked him.

The man, thinking that Buvat thought the price too small, said that, for friendship’s sake, he would go as high as forty francs for the two; but Buvat, offended at the slight offered to the genius of his ward, answered dryly that the drawings which he had shewn him were not for sale, and that he had only asked their value through curiosity. Every one knows that from the moment drawings are not for sale they increase singularly in value, and the dealer at length offered fifty francs; but Buvat, little tempted by this proposition, by which he did not even dream of profiting, took the drawings and left the shop with all the dignity of wounded pride. When he returned, the dealer was standing, as if by chance, at his door. Buvat, seeing him, kept at a distance; but the shopkeeper came to him, and, putting his two hands on his shoulders, asked him if he would not let him have the two drawings for the price he had named. Buvat replied a second time, sharply, that they were not for sale. “That is a pity,” replied the dealer, “for I would have given eighty francs.” And he returned to his door with an indifferent air, but watching Buvat as he did so. Buvat, however, went on with a pride that was almost grotesque, and, without turning once, went straight home. Bathilde heard him, as he came up the staircase, striking his cane against the balusters, as he was in the habit of doing. She ran out to meet him, for she was very anxious to hear the result of the negotiation, and, with the remains of her childish habits, throwing her arms round his neck —

“Well, my friend,” asked she, “what did M. Papillon say?”

“M. Papillon,” replied Buvat, wiping his forehead, “is an impertinent rascal.”

Poor Bathilde turned pale.

“How so?” asked she.

“Yes; an impertinent rascal, who, instead of admiring your drawings, has dared to criticise them.”

“Oh! if that is all,” said Bathilde, laughing, “he is right. Remember that I am but a scholar. But did he offer any price?”

“Yes,” said Buvat; “he had impertinence enough for that.”

“What price?” asked Bathilde, trembling.

“He offered eighty francs.”

“Eighty francs!” cried Bathilde. “Oh! you must be mistaken.”

“I tell you he offered eighty francs for the two,” replied Buvat, laying a stress on each syllable.

“But it is four times as much as they are worth,” said the young girl, clapping her hands for joy.

“It is possible, though I do not think so; but it is none the less true that M. Papillon is an impertinent rascal!”

This was not Bathilde’s opinion; but she changed the conversation, saying that dinner was ready — an announcement which generally gave a new course to Buvat’s ideas. Buvat gave back the drawings to Bathilde without further observation, and entered the little sitting-room, singing the inevitable, “Then let me go,” etc.

He dined with as good an appetite as if there had been no M. Papillon in the world. The same evening, while Buvat was making copies, Bathilde gave the drawings to Nanette, telling her to take them to M. Papillon and ask for the eighty francs he had offered to Buvat. Nanette obeyed, and Bathilde awaited her return with great anxiety, for she still believed there must be some mistake as to the price. Ten minutes afterward she was quite assured, for the good woman entered with the money. Bathilde looked at it for an instant with tears in her eyes, then kneeling before the crucifix at the foot of her bed, she offered up a thanksgiving that she was enabled to return to Buvat a part of what he had done for her.

The next day Buvat, in returning from the office, passed before Papillon’s door, but his astonishment was great when, through the windows of the shop, he saw the drawings. The door opened and Papillon appeared.

“So,” said he, “you thought better of it, and made up your mind to part with the two drawings which were not for sale? Ah! I did not know you were so cunning, neighbor. But, however, tell Mademoiselle Bathilde, that, as she is a good girl, out of consideration for her, if she will do two such drawings every month, and promise not to draw for any one else for a year, I will take them at the same price.”

Buvat was astonished; he grumbled out an answer which the man could not hear, and went home. He went upstairs and opened the door without Bathilde having heard him. She was drawing; she had already begun another head, and perceiving her good friend standing at the door with a troubled air, she put down her paper and pencils and ran to him, asking what was the matter. Buvat wiped away two great tears,

“So,” said he, “the child of my benefactors, of Clarice Gray and Albert du Rocher, is working for her bread!”

“Father,” replied Bathilde, half crying, half laughing; “I am not working, I am amusing myself.”

The word “father” was substituted on great occasions for “kind friend,” and ordinarily had the effect of calming his greatest troubles, but this time it failed.

“I am neither your father, nor your good friend,” murmured he, “but simply poor Buvat, whom the king pays no longer, and who does not gain enough by his writing to continue to give you the education you ought to have.”

“Oh! you want to make me die with grief,” cried Bathilde, bursting into tears, so plainly was Buvat’s distress painted on his countenance.

“I kill you with grief, my child?” said Buvat, with an accent of profound tenderness. “What have I done? What have I said? You must not cry. It wanted nothing but that to make me miserable.”

“But,” said Bathilde, “I shall always cry if you do not let me do what I like.”

This threat of Bathilde’s, puerile as it was, made Buvat tremble; for, since the day when the child wept for her mother, not a tear had fallen from her eyes.

“Well,” said Buvat, “do as you like, but promise me that when the king pays my arrears — ”

“Well, well,” cried Bathilde, interrupting him, “we shall see all that later; meanwhile, the dinner is getting cold.” And, taking him by the arm, she led him into the little room, where, by her jokes and gayety, she soon succeeded in removing the last traces of sadness from Buvat’s face.

What would he have said if he had known all?

Bathilde thought she could do the two drawings for M. Papillon in eight or ten days; there therefore remained the half, at least, of every month, which she was determined not to lose. She, therefore, charged Nanette to search among the neighbors for some difficult, and, consequently, well-paid needlework, which she could do in Buvat’s absence. Nanette easily found what she sought. It was the time for laces. The great ladies paid fifty louis a yard for guipure, and then ran carelessly through the woods with these transparent dresses. The result of this was, that many a rent had to be concealed from mothers and husbands, so that at this time there was more to be made by mending than by selling laces. From her first attempt, Bathilde did wonders; her needle seemed to be that of a fairy. Nanette received many compliments on the work of the unknown Penelope, who did by day what was undone by night. Thanks to Bathilde’s industry, they began to have much greater ease in their house.

Buvat, more tranquil, and seeing that he must renounce his Sunday walks, determined to be satisfied with the famous terrace which had determined him in the choice of his house. For a week he spent an hour morning and evening taking measures, without any one knowing what he intended to do. At length he decided on having a fountain, a grotto, and an arbor. Collecting the materials for these, and afterward building them, had occupied all Buvat’s spare time for twelve months. During this time Bathilde had passed from her fifteenth to her sixteenth year, and the charming child into a beautiful woman. It was during this time that her neighbor, Boniface Denis, had remarked her, and his mother, who could refuse him nothing, after having been for information to the Rue Pagevin, had presented herself, under pretext of neighborhood, to Buvat and his ward, and, after a little while, invited them both to pass Sunday evenings with her.

The invitation was given with so good a grace that there was no means of refusing it, and, indeed, Buvat was delighted that some opportunity of amusement should be presented to Bathilde; besides, as he knew that Madame Denis had two daughters, perhaps he was not sorry to enjoy that triumph which his paternal pride assured him Bathilde could not fail to obtain over Mademoiselle Emilie and Mademoiselle Athenais. However, things did not pass exactly as he had arranged them. Bathilde soon saw the mediocrity of her rivals, so that when they spoke of drawing, and called on her to admire some heads by these young ladies, she pretended to have nothing in the house that she could show, while Buvat knew that there were in her portfolio two heads, one of the infant Jesus, and one of St. John, both charming; but this was not all — the Misses Denis sang; and when they asked Bathilde to sing, she chose a simple little romance in two verses, which lasted five minutes, instead of the grand scene which Buvat had expected.

However, this conduct appeared singularly to increase the regard of Madame Denis for the young girl, for Madame Denis was not without some uneasiness with respect to the event of an artistic struggle between the young people. Bathilde was overwhelmed with caresses by the good woman, who, when she was gone, declared she was full of talents and modesty, and that she well deserved all the praises lavished upon her. A retired silk-mercer raised her voice to recall the strange position of the tutor and the pupil, but Madame Denis imposed silence on this malicious tongue by declaring that she knew the whole history from beginning to end, and that it did the greatest honor to both her neighbors. It was a small lie, however, of good Madame Denis, but it was doubtless pardoned in consideration of the intention.

As to Boniface, in company he was dumb and a nonentity; he had been this evening so remarkably stupid that Bathilde had hardly noticed him at all.

But it was not thus with Boniface, who, having admired Bathilde from a distance, became quite crazy about her when he saw her near. He began to sit constantly at his window, which obliged Bathilde to keep hers closed; for it will be remembered that Boniface then inhabited the room now occupied by the Chevalier d’Harmental. This conduct of Bathilde, in which it was impossible to see anything but supreme modesty, only augmented the passion of her neighbor. At his request, his mother went again to the Rue

Pagevin, and to the Rue des Orties, where she had learned, from an old woman, something of the death-scene we have related, and in which Buvat played so noble a part. She had forgotten the names, and she only remembered that the father was a handsome young officer, who had been killed in Spain, and that the mother was a charming young woman, who had died of grief and poverty.

Boniface also had been in search of news, and had learned from his employer, who was a friend of Buvat's notary, that every year, for six years past, five hundred francs had been deposited with him in Bathilde's name, which, with the interest, formed a little capital of seven or eight thousand francs. This was not much for Boniface, who, as his mother said, would have three thousand francs a year, but at least it showed that Bathilde was not destitute. At the end of a month, during which time Madame Denis's friendship for Bathilde did not diminish, seeing that her son's love greatly increased, she determined to ask her hand for him. One afternoon, as Buvat returned from business, Madame Denis waited for him at her door, and made a sign to him that she had something to say to him. Buvat followed her politely into her room, of which she closed the door, that she might not be interrupted; and when Buvat was seated, she asked for the hand of Bathilde for her son.

Buvat was quite bewildered. It had never entered his mind that Bathilde might marry. Life without Bathilde appeared so impossible a thing that he changed color at the bare idea. Madame Denis did not fail to remark the strange effect that her request had produced on Buvat. She would not even allow him to think it had passed unnoticed. She offered him the bottle of salts which she always kept on the chimney-piece, that she might repeat three or four times a week that her nerves were very sensitive.

Buvat, instead of simply smelling the salts from a reasonable distance, put it close up under his nose. The effect was rapid. He bounded to his feet, as if the angel of Habakkuk had taken him by the hair. He sneezed for about ten minutes; then, having regained his senses, he said that he understood the honorable proposal made for Bathilde, but that he was only her guardian: that he would tell her of the proposal, but must leave her free to accept or refuse.

Madame Denis thought this perfectly right, and conducted him to the door, saying that, waiting a reply, she was their very humble servant.

Buvat went home, and found Bathilde very uneasy; he was half an hour late, which had not happened before for ten years. The uneasiness of the young girl was doubled when she saw Buvat's sad and preoccupied air, and she wanted to know directly what it was that caused the abstracted mien of her dear friend. Buvat, who had not had time to prepare a speech, tried to put off the explanation till after dinner; but Bathilde declared that she should not go to dinner till she knew what had happened. Buvat was thus obliged to deliver on the spot, and without preparation, Madame Denis's proposal to Bathilde.

Bathilde blushed directly, as a young girl always does when they talk to her of marriage; then, taking the hands of Buvat, who was sitting down, trembling with fear, and looking at him with that sweet smile which was the sun of the poor writer —

"Then, my dear father," said she, "you have had enough of your daughter, and you wish to get rid of her?"

"I," said Buvat, "I who wish to get rid of you! No, my child; it is I who shall die of grief if you leave me."

"Then, my father, why do you talk to me of marriage?"

"Because — because — some day or other you must marry, and if you find a good partner, although, God knows, my little Bathilde deserves some one better than M. Boniface."

"No, my father," answered Bathilde, "I do not deserve any one better than M. Boniface, but — " — — "Well — but?"

"But — I will never marry."

"What!" cried Buvat, "you will never marry?"

"Why should I? Are we not happy as we are?"

"Are we not happy?" echoed Buvat. "Sabre de bois! I believe we are."

Sabre de bois was an exclamation which Buvat allowed himself on great occasions, and which illustrated admirably the pacific inclinations of the worthy fellow.

"Well, then," continued Bathilde, with her angel's smile, "if we are happy, let us rest as we are. You know one should not tempt Providence."

"Come and kiss me, my child," said Buvat; "you have just lifted Montmartre off my stomach!"

"You did not wish for this marriage, then?"

"I wish to see you married to that wretched little imp of a Boniface, against whom I took a dislike the first time I saw him! I did not know why, though I know now."

"If you did not desire this marriage, why did you speak to me about it?"

"Because you know well that I am not really your father, that I have no authority over you, that you are free."

"Indeed, am I free?" answered Bathilde, laughing.

"Free as air."

"Well, then, if I am free, I refuse."

"Diable! I am highly satisfied," said Buvat; "but how shall I tell it to Madame Denis?"

"How? Tell her that I am too young, that I do not wish to marry, that I want to stop with you always."

"Come to dinner," said Buvat, "perhaps a bright idea will strike me when I am eating. It is odd! my appetite has come back all of a sudden. Just now I thought I could not swallow a drop of water. Now I could drink the Seine dry."

Buvat drank like a Suisse, and ate like an ogre; but, in spite of this infraction of his ordinary habits, no bright idea came to his aid; so that he was obliged to tell Madame Denis openly that Bathilde was very much honored by her selection, but that she did not wish to marry.

This unexpected response perfectly dumfounded Madame Denis, who had never imagined that a poor little orphan like Bathilde could refuse so brilliant a match as her son; consequently she answered very sharply that every one was free to act for themselves, and that, if Mademoiselle Bathilde chose to be an old maid, she was perfectly welcome.

But when she reflected on this refusal, which her maternal pride could not understand, all the old calumnies which she had heard about the young girl and her guardian returned to her mind; and as she was in a disposition to believe them, she made no further doubt that they were true, and when she transmitted their beautiful neighbor's answer to Boniface, she said, to console him for this matrimonial disappointment, that it was very lucky that she had refused, since, if she had accepted, in consequence of what she had learned, she could not have allowed such a marriage to be concluded.

Madame Denis thought it unsuited to her dignity that after so humiliating a refusal her son should continue to inhabit the room opposite Bathilde's, so she gave him one on the ground floor, and announced that his old one was to let.

A week after, as M. Boniface, to revenge himself on Bathilde, was teasing Mirza, who was standing in the doorway, not thinking it fine enough to trust her little white feet out of doors, Mirza, whom the habit of being fed had made very petulant, darted out on M. Boniface, and bit him cruelly in the calf.

It was in consequence of this that the poor fellow, whose heart or leg was not very well healed, cautioned D’Harmental to beware of the coquetry of Bathilde, and to throw a sop to Mirza.

CHAPTER XVII.

FIRST LOVE.

M. Boniface’s room remained vacant for three or four months, when one day Bathilde, who was accustomed to see the window closed, on raising her eyes found that it was open, and at the window she saw a strange face: it was that of D’Harmental. Few such faces as that of the chevalier were seen in the Rue du Temps-Perdu. Bathilde, admirably situated, behind her curtain, for seeing without being seen, was attracted involuntarily. There was in our hero’s features a distinction and an elegance which could not escape Bathilde’s eyes. The chevalier’s dress, simple as it was, betrayed the elegance of the wearer: then Bathilde had heard him give some orders, and they had been given with that inflection of voice which indicates in him who possesses it the habit of command.

The young girl had discovered at the first glance that this man was very superior in all respects to him whom he succeeded in the possession of this little room, and with that instinct so natural to persons of good birth, she at once recognized him as being of high family. The same day the chevalier had tried his harpsichord. At the first sound of the instrument Bathilde had raised her head. The chevalier, though he did not know that he had a listener, or perhaps because he did not know it, went on with preludes and fantasies, which showed an amateur of no mean talents. At these sounds, which seemed to wake all the musical chords of her own organization, Bathilde had risen and approached the window that she might not lose a note, for such an amusement was unheard of in the Rue du Temps-Perdu. Then it was that D’Harmental had seen against the window the charming little fingers of his neighbor, and had driven them away by turning round so quickly that Bathilde could not doubt she had been seen.

The next day Bathilde thought it was a long time since she had played, and sat down to her instrument. She began nervously, she knew not why; but as she was an excellent musician, her fear soon passed away, and it was then that she executed so brilliantly that piece from Armida, which had been heard with so much astonishment by the chevalier and the Abbe Brigaud.

We have said how the following morning the chevalier had seen Buvat, and become acquainted with Bathilde’s name. The appearance of the young girl had made the deeper impression on the chevalier from its being so unexpected in such a place; and he was still under the influence of the charm when Roquefinette entered, and gave a new direction to his thoughts, which, however, soon returned to Bathilde. The next day, Bathilde, who, profiting by the first ray of the spring sun, was early at her window, noticed in her turn that the eyes of the chevalier were ardently fixed upon her. She had noticed his face, young and handsome, but to which the thought of the responsibility he had taken gave a certain air of sadness; but sadness and youth go so badly together, that this anomaly had struck her — this handsome young man had something to annoy him — perhaps he was unhappy. What could it be? Thus, from the second time she had seen him, Bathilde had very naturally meditated about the chevalier. This had not prevented Bathilde from shutting her window, but, from behind her window, she still saw the outline of the chevalier’s sad face. She felt that D’Harmental was sad, and when she sat down to her harpsichord, was it not from a secret feeling that music is the consoler of troubled hearts?

That evening it was D’Harmental who played, and Bathilde listened with all her soul to the melodious voice which spoke of love in the dead of night. Unluckily for the chevalier, who, seeing the shadow of the young girl behind the drapery, began to think that he was making a favorable impression on the other side of the street, he had been interrupted in his concert by the lodger on the third floor; but the most important thing was accomplished — there was already a point of sympathy between the two young people, and they already spoke that language of the heart, the most dangerous of all.

Moreover, Bathilde, who had dreamed all night about music, and a little about the musician, felt that something strange and unknown to her was going on, and, attracted as she was toward the window, she kept it scrupulously closed; from this resulted the movement of impatience, under the influence of which the chevalier had gone to breakfast with Madame Denis.

There he had learned one important piece of news, which was, that Bathilde was neither the daughter, the wife, nor the niece of Buvat; thus he went upstairs joyfully, and, finding the window open, he had put himself — in spite of the friendly advice of Boniface — in communication with Mirza, by means of bribing her with sugar. The unexpected return of Bathilde had interrupted this amusement; the chevalier, in his egotistical delicacy, had shut his window; but, before the window had been shut, a salute had been exchanged between the two young people. This was more than Bathilde had ever accorded to any man, not that she had not from time to time exchanged salutes with some acquaintance of Buvat's, but this was the first time she had blushed as she did so.

The next day Bathilde had seen the chevalier at his window, and, without being able to understand the action, had seen him nail a crimson ribbon to the outer wall; but what she had particularly remarked was the extraordinary animation visible on the face of the young man. Half an hour afterward she had seen with the chevalier a man perfectly unknown to her, but whose appearance was not re-assuring; this was Captain Roquefinette. Bathilde had also remarked, with a vague uneasiness, that, as soon as the man with the long sword had entered, the chevalier had fastened the door.

The chevalier, as is easy to understand, had a long conference with the captain; for they had to arrange all the preparations for the evening's expedition. The chevalier's window remained thus so long closed that Bathilde, thinking that he had gone out, had thought she might as well open hers.

Hardly was it open, however, when her neighbor's, which had seemed only to wait the moment to put itself in communication with her, opened in turn. Luckily for Bathilde, who would have been much embarrassed by this circumstance, she was in that part of the room where the chevalier could not see her. She determined, therefore, to remain where she was, and sat down near the second half of the window, which was still shut.

Mirza, however, who had not the same scruples as her mistress, hardly saw the chevalier before she ran to the window, placed her front paws on the sill, and began dancing on her hind ones. These attentions were rewarded, as she expected, by a first, then a second, then a third, lump of sugar; but this third bit, to the no small astonishment of Bathilde, was wrapped up in a piece of paper.

This piece of paper troubled Bathilde a great deal more than it did Mirza, who, accustomed to crackers and sucre de pomme, soon got the sugar out of its envelope by means of her paws; and, as she thought very much of the inside, and very little of the wrapper, she ate the sugar, and, leaving the paper, ran to the window; but the chevalier was gone; satisfied, no doubt, of Mirza's skill, he had retired into his room.

Bathilde was very much embarrassed; she had seen, at the first glance, that the paper contained three or four lines of writing; but, in spite of the sudden friendship which her neighbor seemed to have acquired for Mirza, it was evidently not to Mirza that he was writing letters — it must, therefore, be to her. What should she do? Go and tear it up? That would be noble and proper; but, even if it were possible to do such a thing, the paper in which the sugar had been wrapped might have been written on some time, and then the action would be ridiculous in the highest degree, and it would show, at any rate, that she thought about the letter. Bathilde resolved then, to leave things as they were. The chevalier could not know that she was at home, since he had not seen her; he could not, therefore, draw any deduction from the fact that the paper remained on the floor. She therefore continued to work, or rather to reflect, hidden behind her curtain, as the chevalier, probably, was behind his.

In about an hour, of which it must be confessed Bathilde passed three-quarters with her eyes fixed on the paper, Nanette entered. Bathilde, without moving, told her to shut the window — Nanette obeyed; but in returning she saw the paper.

“What is that?” asked she, stooping down to pick it up.

“Nothing,” answered Bathilde quickly, forgetting that Nanette could not read, “only a paper which has fallen out of my pocket.” Then, after an instant's pause, and with a visible effort, “and which you may throw on the fire,” continued she. — — ”But perhaps it may be something important; see what it is, at all events, mademoiselle.” And Nanette presented the letter to Bathilde.

The temptation was too strong to resist. Bathilde cast her eyes on the paper, affecting an air of indifference as well as she could, and read as follows:

“They say you are an orphan: I have no parents; we are, then, brother and sister before God. This evening I run a great danger; but I hope to come out of it safe and sound if my sister — Bathilde — will pray for her brother Raoul.”

“You are right,” said Bathilde, in a moved voice, and taking the paper from the hands of Nanette, “that paper is more important than I thought;”

and she put D’Harmental’s letter in the pocket of her apron. Five minutes after Nanette, who came in twenty times a day without any particular reason, went out as she had entered, and left Bathilde alone.

Bathilde had only just glanced at the letter, and it had seemed to dazzle her. As soon as Nanette was gone she read it a second time.

It would have been impossible to have said more in fewer words. If D’Harmental had taken a whole day to combine every word of the billet, instead of writing on the spur of the moment, he could not have done it better. Indeed, he established a similarity of position between himself and the orphan; he interested Bathilde in her neighbor’s fate on account of a menacing danger, a danger which would appear all the greater to the young girl from her not knowing its nature; and, finally, the expression brother and sister, so skillfully glided in at the end, and to ask a simple prayer, excluded from these first advances all idea of love.

It followed, therefore, that, if at this moment Bathilde had found herself vis-a-vis with D’Harmental, instead of being embarrassed and blushing, as a young girl would who had just received her first love-letter, she would have taken him by the hand and said to him, smiling — ”Be satisfied, I will pray for you.” There remained, however, on the mind of Bathilde something more dangerous than all the declarations in the world, and that was the idea of the peril which her neighbor ran. By a sort of presentiment with which she had been seized on seeing him, with a face so different from his ordinary expression, nail the crimson ribbon to his window, and withdraw it directly the captain entered, she was almost sure that the danger was somehow connected with this new personage, whom she had never seen before. But how did this danger concern him? What was the nature of the danger itself? This was what she asked herself in vain. She thought of a duel, but to a man such as the chevalier appeared to be, a duel was not one of those dangers for which one asks the prayers of women; besides, the hour named was not suitable to duels. Bathilde lost herself in her conjectures; but, in losing herself, she thought of the chevalier, always of the chevalier, and of nothing but the chevalier; and, if he had calculated upon such an effect, it must be owned that his calculations were wofully true for poor Bathilde.

The day passed; and, whether it was intentional, or whether it was that he was otherwise employed, Bathilde saw him no more, and his window remained closed. When Buvat came home as usual, at ten minutes after four, he found the young girl so much preoccupied that, although his perspicacity was not great in such matters, he asked her three or four times if anything was wrong; each time she answered by one of those smiles which supplied Buvat with enough to do in looking at her; and it followed that, in spite of these repeated questions, Bathilde kept her secret.

After dinner M. Chaulieu's servant entered — he came to ask Buvat to spend the evening with his master. The Abbe Chaulieu was one of Buvat's best patrons, and often came to his house, for he had taken a great liking for Bathilde. The poor abbe became blind, but not so entirely as not to be able to recognize a pretty face; though it is true that he saw it across a cloud. The abbe had told Bathilde, in his sexagenarian gallantry, that his only consolation was that it is thus that one sees the angels.

Bathilde thanked the good abbe from the bottom of her heart for thus getting her an evening's solitude. She knew that when Buvat went to the Abbe Chaulieu he ordinarily stayed some time; she hoped, then, that he would stop late as usual. Poor Buvat went out, without imagining that for the first time she desired his absence.

Buvat was a lounger, as every bourgeois of Paris ought to be. From one end to the other of the Palais Royal, he stared at the shops, stopping for the thousandth time before the things which generally drew his attention. On leaving the colonnade, he heard singing, and saw a group of men and women, who were listening to the songs; he joined them, and listened too. At the moment of the collection he went away, not from a bad heart, nor that he would have wished to refuse the admirable musician the reward which was his due, but that by an old habit, of which time had proved the advantage, he always came out without money, so that by whatever he was tempted he was sure to overcome the temptation. This evening he was much tempted to drop a sou into the singer's bowl, but as he had not a sou in his pocket, he was obliged to go away. He made his way then, as we have seen, toward the Barriere des Sergents, passed up the Rue du Coq, crossed the Pont-Neuf, returned along the quay so far as the Rue Mazarine; it was in the Rue Mazarine that the Abbe Chaulieu lived.

The Abbe Chaulieu recognized Buvat, whose excellent qualities he had appreciated during their two years' acquaintance, and with much pressing on his part, and many difficulties on Buvat's, made him sit down near himself, before a table covered with papers. It is true that at first Buvat sat on the very edge of his chair; gradually, however, he got further and further on — put his hat on the ground — took his cane between his legs, and found himself sitting almost like any one else.

The work that there was to be done did not promise a short sitting; there were thirty or forty poems on the table to be classified — numbered, and, as the abbe's servant was his amanuensis, corrected; so that it was eleven o'clock before they thought that it had struck nine. They had just finished and Buvat rose, horrified at having to come home at such an hour. It was the first time such a thing had ever happened to him; he rolled up the manuscript, tied it with a red ribbon, which had probably served as a sash to Mademoiselle de Launay, put it in his pocket, took his cane, picked up his hat, and left the house, abridging his leave-taking as much as possible. To add to his misfortunes there was no moonlight, the night was cloudy. Buvat regretted not having two sous in his pocket to cross the ferry which was then where now stands the Pont des Arts; but we have already explained Buvat's theory to our readers, and he was obliged to return as he had come — by the Quai Conti, the Rue Pont-Neuf, the Rue du Coq, and the Rue Saint Honoré.

Everything had gone right so far, and except the statue of Henri IV. of which Buvat had forgotten either the existence or the place, and which had frightened him terribly, and the Samaritaine, which, fifty steps off, had struck the half-hour without any preparation, the noise of which had made poor belated Buvat tremble from head to foot, he had run no real peril, but on arriving at the Rue des Bons Enfants things took a different look. In the first place, the aspect of the street itself, long, narrow, and only lighted by two flickering lanterns in the whole length, was not reassuring, and this evening it had to Buvat a very singular appearance; he did not know whether he was asleep or awake; he fancied that he saw before him some fantastic vision, such as he had heard told of the old Flemish sorceries; the streets seemed alive — the posts seemed to oppose themselves to his passage — the recesses of the doors whispered to each other — men crossed like shadows from one side of the street to the other; at last, when he had arrived at No. 24, he was stopped, as we have seen, by the chevalier and the captain. It was then that D'Harmental had recognized him, and had protected him against the first impulse of Roquefinette, inviting him to continue his route as quickly as possible. There was no need to repeat the request — Buvat set off at a trot, gained the Place des Victoires, the Rue du Mail, the Rue Montmartre, and at last arrived at his own house, No. 4, Rue du Temps-Perdu, where, nevertheless, he did not think himself safe till he had shut the door and bolted it behind him.

There he stopped an instant to breathe and to light his candle — then ascended the stairs, but he felt in his legs the effect of the occurrence, for he trembled so that he could hardly get to the top.

As to Bathilde, she had remained alone, getting more and more uneasy as the evening advanced. Up to seven o'clock she had seen a light in her neighbor's room, but at that time the lamp had been extinguished, and had not been relighted. Then Bathilde's time became divided between two occupations — one of which consisted in standing at her window to see if her neighbor did not return; the other in kneeling before the crucifix, where she said her evening prayers. She heard nine, ten, eleven, and half-past eleven, strike successively. She had heard all the noises in the streets die away one by one, and sink gradually into that vague and heavy sound which seems the breathing of a sleeping town; and all this without bringing her the slightest inkling as to whether he who had called himself her brother had sunk under the danger which hung over his head, or come triumphant through the crisis.

She was then in her own room, without light, so that no one might see that she was watching, and kneeling before her crucifix for the tenth time, when the door opened, and, by the light of his candle she saw Buvat so pale and haggard that she knew in an instant that something must have happened to him, and she rose, in spite of the uneasiness she felt for another, and darted toward him, asking what was the matter. But it was no easy thing to make Buvat speak, in the state he then was; the shock had reached his mind, and his tongue stammered as much as his legs trembled.

Still, when Buvat was seated in his easy chair, and had wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, when he had made two or three journeys to the door to see that his terrible hosts of the Rue des Bons Enfants had not followed him home, he began to stutter out his adventure. He told how he had been stopped in the Rue des Bons Enfants by a band of robbers, whose lieutenant, a ferocious-looking man nearly six feet high, had wanted to kill him, when the captain had come and saved his life. Bathilde listened with rapt attention, first, because she loved her guardian sincerely, and that his condition showed that — right or wrong — he had been greatly terrified; next, because nothing that happened that night seemed indifferent to her; and, strange as the idea was, it seemed to her that the handsome young man was not wholly unconnected with the scene in which Buvat had just played a part. She asked him if he had time to observe the face of the young man who had come to his aid, and saved his life.

Buvat answered that he had seen him face to face, as he saw her at that moment, and that the proof was that he was a handsome young man of from five to six and twenty, in a large felt hat, and wrapped in a cloak; moreover, in the movement which he had made in stretching out his hand to protect him, the cloak had opened, and shown that, besides his sword, he carried a pair of pistols in his belt. These details were too precise to allow Buvat to be accused of dreaming. Preoccupied as Bathilde was with the danger which the chevalier ran, she was none the less touched by that, smaller no doubt, but still real, which Buvat had just escaped; and as repose is the best remedy for all shocks, physical or moral, after offering him the glass of wine and sugar which he allowed himself on great occasions, and which nevertheless he refused on this one, she reminded him of his bed, where he ought to have been two hours before.

The shock had been violent enough to deprive Buvat of all wish for sleep, and even to convince him that he should sleep badly that night; but he reflected that in sitting up he should force Bathilde to sit up, and should see her in the morning with red eyes and pale cheeks, and, with his usual sacrifice of self, he told Bathilde that she was right — that he felt that sleep would do him good — lit his candle — kissed her forehead — and went up to his own room; not without stopping two or three times on the staircase to hear if there was any noise.

Left alone, Bathilde listened to the steps of Buvat, who went up into his own room; then she heard the creaking of his door, which he double locked; then, almost as trembling as Buvat himself, she ran to the window, forgetting even to pray.

She remained thus for nearly an hour, but without having kept any measure of time. Then she gave a cry of joy, for through the window, which no curtain now obscured, she saw her neighbor’s door open, and D’Harmental enter with a candle in his hand.

By a miracle of foresight Bathilde had been right — the man in the felt hat and the cloak, who had protected Buvat, was really the young stranger, for the stranger had on a felt hat and a cloak; and moreover, hardly had he returned and shut the door, with almost as much care as Buvat had his, and thrown his cloak on a chair, than she saw that he had a tight coat of a dark color, and in his belt a sword and pistols. There was no longer any doubt: it was from head to foot the description given by Buvat. Bathilde was the more able to assure herself of this, that D'Harmental, without taking off any of his attire, took two or three turns in his room, his arms crossed, and thinking deeply; then he took his pistols from his belt, assured himself that they were primed, and placed them on the table near his bed, unclasped his sword, took it half out of the scabbard, replaced it, and put it under his pillow; then, shaking his head, as if to shake out the somber ideas that annoyed him, he approached the window, opened it, and gazed earnestly at that of the young girl, who, forgetting that she could not be seen, stepped back, and let the curtain fall before her, as if the darkness which surrounded her were not a sufficient screen.

She remained thus motionless and silent, her hand on her heart, as if to still its beatings; then she quietly raised the curtain, but that of her neighbor was down, and she saw nothing but his shadow passing and repassing before it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CONSUL DUILIUS.

The morning following the day, or rather the night, on which the events we have just related had occurred, the Duc d'Orleans, who had returned to the Palais Royal without accident, after having slept all night as usual, passed into his study at his accustomed hour — that is to say, about eleven o'clock. Thanks to the sang-froid with which nature had blessed him, and which he owed chiefly to his great courage, to his disdain for danger, and his carelessness of death, not only was it impossible to observe in him any change from his ordinary calm, which ennui only turned to gloom, but he had most probably already forgotten the strange event of which he had so nearly been the victim.

The study into which he had just entered was remarkable as belonging to a man at once a savant, a politician, and an artist. Thus a large table covered with a green cloth, and loaded with papers, inkstand, and pens, occupied the middle of the room; but all round, on desks, on easels, on stands, were an opera commenced, a half-finished drawing, a chemical retort, etc. The regent, with a strange versatility of mind, passed in an instant from the deepest problems of politics to the most capricious fancies of painting, and from the most delicate calculations of chemistry to the somber or joyous inspirations of music. The regent feared nothing but ennui, that enemy against whom he struggled unceasingly, without ever quite succeeding in conquering it, and which, repulsed by work, study, or pleasure, yet remained in sight — if one may say so — like one of those clouds on the horizon, toward which, even in the finest days, the pilot involuntarily turns his eyes. The regent was never unoccupied, and had the most opposite amusements always at hand.

On entering his study, where the council were to meet in two hours, he went toward an unfinished drawing, representing a scene from "Daphnis and Chloe," and returned to the work, interrupted two days before by that famous game of tennis, which had commenced by a racket blow, and finished by the supper at Madame de Sabran's.

A messenger came to tell him that Madame Elizabeth Charlotte, his mother, had asked twice if he were up. The regent, who had the most profound respect for the princess palatine, sent word that not only was he visible, but that if madame were ready to receive him, he would pay her a visit directly. He then returned to his work with all the eagerness of an artist. Shortly after the door opened, and his mother herself appeared.

Madame, the wife of Philippe, the first brother of the king, came to France after the strange and unexpected death of Madame Henriette of England, to take the place of that beautiful and gracious princess, who had passed from the scene like a dream. This comparison, difficult to sustain for any new-comer, was doubly so to the poor German princess, who, if we may believe her own portrait, with her little eyes, her short and thick nose, her long thin lips, her hanging cheeks and her large face, was far from being pretty. Unfortunately, the faults of her face were not compensated for by beauty of figure. She was little and fat, with a short body and legs, and such frightful hands that she avows herself that there were none uglier to be found in the world, and that it was the only thing about her to which Louis XIV. could never become accustomed. But Louis XIV. had chosen her, not to increase the beauties of his court, but to extend his influence beyond the Rhine.

By the marriage of his brother with the princess palatine, Louis XIV., who had already acquired some chance of inheritance in Spain, by marrying Maria Theresa, and by Philippe the First’s marriage with the Princess Henriette, only sister of Charles II., would acquire new rights over Bavaria, and probably in the Palatinate. He calculated, and calculated rightly, that her brother, who was delicate, would probably die young, and without children.

Madame, instead of being treated at her husband’s death according to her marriage contract, and forced to retire into a convent, or into the old castle of Montargis, was, in spite of Madame de Maintenon’s hatred, maintained by Louis XIV. in all the titles and honors which she enjoyed during her husband’s lifetime, although the king had not forgotten the blow which she gave to the young Duc de Chartres at Versailles, when he announced his marriage with Mademoiselle de Blois. The proud princess, with her thirty-two quarterings, thought it a humiliation that her son should marry a woman whom the royal legitimation could not prevent from being the fruit of a double adultery, and at the first moment, unable to command her feelings, she revenged herself by this maternal correction, rather exaggerated, when a young man of eighteen was the object, for the affront offered to the honor of her ancestors.

As the young Duc de Chartres had himself only consented unwillingly to this marriage, he easily understood his mother’s dislike to it, though he would have preferred, doubtless, that she should have shown it in a rather less Teutonic manner. The result was, that when Monsieur died, and the Duc de Chartres became Duc d’Orleans, his mother, who might have feared that the blow at Versailles had left some disagreeable reminiscence in the mind of the new master of the Palais Royal, found, on the contrary, a more respectful son than ever. This respect increased, and as regent he gave his mother a position equal to that of his wife. When Madame de Berry, his much-loved daughter, asked her father for a company of guards, he granted it, but ordered at the same time that a similar company should be given to his mother.

Madame held thus a high position, and if, in spite of that position, she had no political influence, the reason was that the regent made it a principle of action never to allow women to meddle with state affairs. It may be also, that Philippe the Second, regent of France, was more reserved toward his mother than toward his mistresses, for he knew her epistolary inclinations, and he had no fancy for seeing his projects made the subjects of the daily correspondence which she kept up with the Princess Wilhelmina Charlotte, and the Duke Anthony Ulric of Brunswick. In exchange for this loss, he left her the management of the house and of his daughters, which, from her overpowering idleness, the Duchesse d’Orleans abandoned willingly to her mother-in-law. In this last particular, however, the poor palatine (if one may believe the memoirs written at the time) was not happy. Madame de Berry lived publicly with Riom, and Mademoiselle de Valois was secretly the mistress of Richelieu, who, without anybody knowing how, and as if he had the enchanted ring of Gyges, appeared to get into her rooms, in spite of the guards who watched the doors, in spite of the spies with whom the regent surrounded him, and though, more than once, he had hidden himself in his daughter’s room to watch.

As to Mademoiselle de Chartres, whose character had as yet seemed much more masculine than feminine, she, in making a man of herself, as one may say, seemed to forget that other men existed, when, some days before the time at which we have arrived, being at the opera, and hearing her music master, Cauchereau, the finished and expressive singer of the

Academic Royal, who, in a love scene, was prolonging a note full of the most exquisite grace and feeling, the young princess, carried away by artistic enthusiasm, stretched out her arms and cried aloud — ”Ah! my dear Cauchereau!” This unexpected exclamation had troubled her mother, who had sent away the beautiful tenor, and, putting aside her habitual apathy, determined to watch over her daughter herself. There remained the Princess Louise, who was afterward Queen of Spain, and Mademoiselle Elizabeth, who became the Duchesse de Lorraine, but as to them there was nothing said; either they were really wise, or else they understood better than their elders how to restrain the sentiments of their hearts, or the accents of passion. As soon as the prince saw his mother appear, he thought something new was wrong in the rebellious troop of which she had taken the command, and which gave her such trouble; but, as nothing could make him forget the respect which, in public and in private, he paid to his mother, he rose on seeing her, and after having bowed, and taking her hand to lead her to a seat, he remained standing himself.

“Well, my son,” said madame, with a strong German accent, “what is this that I hear, and what happened to you last evening?”

“Last evening?” said the regent, recalling his thoughts and questioning himself.

“Yes,” answered the palatine, “last evening, in coming home from Madame de Sabran’s.”

“Oh! it is only that,” said the prince.

“How, only that! your friend Simiane goes about everywhere saying that they wanted to carry you off, and that you only escaped by coming across the roofs: a singular road, you will confess, for the regent of the kingdom, and by which, however devoted they may be to you, I doubt your ministers being willing to come to your council.”

“Simiane is a fool, mother,” answered the regent, not able to help laughing at his mother’s still scolding him as if he were a child, “it was not anybody who wanted to carry me away, but some roisterers who had been drinking at some cabaret by the Barriere des Sergents, and who were come to make a row in the Rue des Bons Enfants. As to the road we followed, it was for no sort of flight upon earth that I took it, but simply to gain a wager which that drunken Simiane is furious at having lost.”

“My son, my son,” said the palatine, shaking her head, “you will never believe in danger, and yet you know what your enemies are capable of.

Believe me, my child, those who calumniate the soul would have few scruples about killing the body; and you know that the Duchesse de Maine has said, ‘that the very day when she is quite sure that there is really nothing to be made out of her bastard of a husband, she will demand an audience of you, and drive her dagger into your heart.’“

“Bah! my mother,” answered the regent, laughing, “have you become a sufficiently good Catholic no longer to believe in predestination? I believe in it, as you know. Would you wish me to plague my mind about a danger which has no existence; or which, if it does exist, has its result already inscribed in the eternal book? No, my mother, no; the only use of all these exaggerated precautions is to sadden life. Let tyrants tremble; but I, who am what St. Simon pretends to be, the most debonnaire man since Louis le Debonnaire, what have I to fear?”

“Oh, mon Dieu! nothing, my dear son,” said the palatine, taking the hand of the prince, and looking at him with as much maternal tenderness as her little eyes were capable of expressing, “nothing, if every one knew you as well as I do, and saw you so truly good that you cannot hate even your enemies; but Henry IV., whom unluckily you resemble a little too much on certain points, was as good, and that did not prevent the existence of a Ravaillac. Alas! mein Gott,” continued the princess, mixing up French and German in her agitation, “it is always the best kings that they do assassinate; tyrants take precautions, and the poniard never reaches them. You must never go out without a guard; it is you, and not I, my son, who require a regiment of soldiers.”

“My mother,” answered the regent, “will you listen to a story?”

“Yes, certainly, for you relate them exquisitely.”

“Well, you know that there was in Rome, I forget in what precise year of the republic, a very brave consul, who had the misfortune, shared by Henry IV. and myself, of going out of a night. It happened that this consul was sent against the Carthaginians, and having invented an implement of war called a crow, he gained the first naval battle in which the Romans had been victors, so that when he returned to Rome, congratulating himself beforehand, no doubt, on the increase of fortune which would follow his increase of reputation, he was not deceived; all the population awaited him at the city gates, and conducted him in triumph to the capitol, where the senate expected him.

“The senate announced to him that, in reward for his victory, they were going to bestow on him something which must be highly pleasing to him, which was, that whenever he went out he should be preceded by a musician, who should announce to every one, by playing on the flute, that he was followed by the famous Duilius, the conqueror of the Carthaginians. Duilius, you will understand, my mother, was at the height of joy at such an honor. He returned home with a proud bearing, and preceded by his flute-player, who played his best, amid the acclamations of the multitude, who cried at the top of their voices, ‘Long live, Duilius; long live the conqueror of the Carthaginians; long live the savior of Rome!’ This was so intoxicating that the poor consul nearly went crazy with joy. Twice during the day he went out, although he had nothing to do in the town, only to enjoy the senatorial privilege, and to hear the triumphal music and the cries which accompanied it. This occupation had raised him by the evening into a state of glorification such as it is not easy to explain. The evening came. The conqueror had a mistress whom he loved, and whom he was eager to see again — a sort of Madame de Sabran — with the exception that the husband thought proper to be jealous, while ours, as you know, is not so absurd.

“The consul therefore had his bath, dressed and perfumed himself with the greatest care, and when eleven o’clock arrived he set out on tiptoe for the Suburranian Road. But he had reckoned without his host; or, rather, without his musician. Hardly had he gone four steps when the flute-player, who was attached to his service by night as well as day, darted from a post on which he was seated and went before, playing with all his might and main. The consequence of this was, that those who were in the streets turned round, those who were at home came to the door, and those who were in bed got up and opened their windows, all repeating in chorus — ’Here is the Consul Duilius; long live Duilius; long live the conqueror of the Carthaginians; long live the savior of Rome!’ This was highly flattering, but inopportune. The consul wished to silence his instrumentalist, but he declared that the orders he had received from the senate were precise — not to be quiet a minute — that he had ten thousand sesterces a year to blow his flute, and that blow he would as long as he had any breath left.

“The consul saw that it was useless to discuss with a man who had the dictate of the senate on his side, so he began to run, hoping to escape from his melodious companion, but he copied his actions from those of Duilius with such exactitude, that all the consul could gain was to get before the flute-player instead of behind him. He doubled like a hare, sprang like a roebuck, rushed madly forward like a wild boar — the cursed flute-player did not lose his track for an instant, so that all Rome, understanding nothing about the object of this nocturnal race, but knowing that it was the victor who performed it, came to their windows, shouting, ‘Long live Duilius; long live the conqueror of the Carthaginians; long live the savior of Rome!’ The poor man had one last hope; that of finding the people at his mistress’s house asleep and the door half-open, as she had promised to leave it. But no; as soon as he arrived at that hospitable and gracious house, at whose door he had so often poured perfumes and hung garlands, he found that they were awake like all the rest, and at the window he saw the husband, who, as soon he saw him, began to cry, ‘Long live, Duilius; long live the conqueror of the Carthaginians; long live the savior of Rome!’ The hero returned home despairing.

“The next day he hoped to escape his musician; but this hope was fallacious; and it was the same the day after, and all following days, so that the consul, seeing that it was impossible to keep his incognito, left for Sicily, where, out of anger, he beat the Carthaginians again; but this time so unmercifully, that every one thought that must be the end of all Punic wars, past, present, or to come. Rome was so convulsed with joy that it gave public rejoicings like those on the anniversary of the foundation of the city, and proposed to give the conqueror a triumph more splendid even than the last. As to the senate, it assembled before the arrival of Duilius, to determine what reward should be conferred upon him. They were all in favor of a public statue, when suddenly they heard shouts of triumph and the sound of a flute. It was the consul who had freed himself from the triumph, thanks to his haste, but who could not free himself from public gratitude, thanks to his flute-player. Suspecting that they were preparing something new, he came to take part in the deliberations. He found the senate ready to vote, with their balls in their hands.

“He advanced to the tribune. ‘Conscript fathers,’ said he, ‘is it not your intention to give me a reward which will be agreeable to me?’ ‘Our intention,’ replied the president, ‘is to make you the happiest man on earth.’ ‘Good,’ said Duilius; ‘will you allow me to ask from you that which I desire most?’ ‘Speak,’ cried all the senators at once. ‘And you will confer it on me?’ asked he, with all the timidity of doubt. ‘By Jupiter we will!’

answered the president in the name of the assembly. ‘Then, Conscript fathers,’ said Duilius, ‘if you think that I have deserved well of the country, take away from me, in recompense for this second victory, this cursed flute-player, whom you gave me for the first.’ The senate thought the request strange, but they had pledged their word, and at that period people kept their promises. The flute-player was allowed to retire on half-pay, and the Consul Duilius, having got rid of his musician, recovered his incognito, and, without noise, found the door of that little house in the Suburranian Road, which one victory had closed against him, and which another had reopened.”

“Well,” asked the palatine, “what has this story to do with the fear I have of your being assassinated?”

“What has it to do with it, my mother?” said the prince, laughing. “It is, that if, instead of the one musician which the Consul Duilius had, and which caused him such disappointment, I had a regiment of guards, you may fancy what would happen to me.”

“Ah! Philippe, Philippe,” answered the princess, laughing and sighing at the same time, “will you always treat serious matters so lightly!”

“No, mother,” said the regent; “and the proof is, that as I presume you did not come here solely to read me a lecture on my nocturnal courses, but to speak on business, I am ready to listen to you, and to reply seriously.”

“Yes, you are right,” said the princess; “I did come to speak to you of other things. I came to speak of Mademoiselle de Chartres.”

“Yes, of your favorite, mother; for it is useless to deny it, Louise is your favorite. Can it be because she does not love her uncles much, whom you do not love at all?”

“No, it is not that, but I confess it is pleasing to me to see that she has no better opinion of bastards than I have; but it is because, except as to beauty, which she has and I never had, she is exactly what I was at her age, having true boy’s tastes, loving dogs, horses, and cavalcades, managing powder like an artilleryman, and making squibs like a workman; well, guess what has happened to her.” — — ”She wants a commission in the guards?”

“No, no; she wants to be a nun.”

“A nun! Louise! Impossible; it must be some joke of her sisters!”

”Not at all,” replied the palatine; “there is no joke about it, I swear to you.”

“How has she got this passion for the cloister?” asked the regent, beginning to believe in the truth of what his mother told him, accustomed as he was to live at a time when the most extravagant things were always the most probable.

“Where did she get it?” replied madame; “why, from the devil, I suppose; I do not know where else she could have got it. The day before yesterday she passed with her sister, riding, shooting, laughing; in fact, I had never seen her so gay; but this evening Madame d’Orleans sent for me. I found Mademoiselle de Chartres at her mother’s knees, in tears, and begging permission to retire to the Abbey des Chelles. Her mother turned to me, and said, ‘What do you think of this, madame?’ ‘I think,’ I replied, ‘that we can perform our devotions equally well in any place and that all depends on our own preparations;’ but hearing my words, Mademoiselle de Chartres redoubled her prayers, and with so much earnestness that I said to her mother, ‘It is for you to decide.’ ‘Oh,’ replied the duchess, ‘we cannot prevent this poor child from performing her devotions.’ ‘Let her go then,’ I replied, ‘and may God grant that she goes in that intention.’ ‘I swear to you, madame,’ said Mademoiselle de Chartres, ‘that I go for God alone, and that I am influenced by no worldly idea.’ Then she embraced us, and yesterday morning at seven o’clock she set out.”

“I know all that, since I was to have taken her there,” replied the regent. “Has nothing happened since then?”

“Yes, yesterday evening she sent back the carriage, giving the coachman a letter addressed to you, to her mother, and to me, in which she says that finding in the cloister that tranquillity and peace which she cannot hope for in the world, she does not wish to leave it.”

“And what does her mother say to this resolution?”

“Her mother!” replied madame. “To tell you the truth, I believe her mother is very glad, for she likes convents, and thinks it a great piece of good-luck to have a daughter a nun; but I say there is no happiness where there is no vocation.”

The regent read and re-read the letter of Mademoiselle de Chartres, trying to discover, by the expression of her desire to remain at Chelles, the secret causes which had given rise to it. Then, after an instant of meditation, as deep as if the fate of empires depended on it:

“There is some love pique here,” said he; “do you know if Louise loves any one?”

Madame told the regent the adventure of the opera, and the exclamation of the princess, in her admiration for the handsome tenor.

“Diable!” cried the regent, “and what did you and the Duchesse d’Orleans do in your maternal council?”

“We showed Cauchereau the door, and forbade the opera to Mademoiselle de Chartres; we could not do less.”

“Well!” replied the regent, “there is no need to seek further. We must cure her at once of this fancy.”

“And how will you do that, my son?”

“I will go to-day to the Abbey des Chelles, and interrogate Louise. If the thing is but a caprice, I will give it time to pass off. I will appear to adopt her views, and, in a year hence, when she is to take the veil, she herself will come and beg us to free her from the difficulty she has got herself into. If, on the contrary, the thing is serious, then it will be different.”

“Mon Dieu!” said madame, rising, “remember that poor Cauchereau has, perhaps, nothing to do with it, and that he is even ignorant of the passion he has inspired.”

“Do not be afraid,” replied the prince, laughing at the tragic interpretation which the princess, with her German ideas, had given to his words. “I shall not renew the lamentable history of the lovers of the Paraclete; Cauchereau’s voice shall neither lose nor gain a single note in this adventure, and we do not treat a princess of the blood in the same manner as a little bourgeoise.”

”But, on the other hand,” said madame, almost as much afraid of the regent’s real indulgence as of his apparent severity, “no weakness either.”

“My mother,” said the regent, “if she must deceive some one, I would rather that it was her husband than God.” And kissing his mother’s hand respectfully, he led her to the door, quite scandalized at those easy manners, among which she died, without ever having accustomed herself to them. Then the Duc d’Orleans returned to his drawing, humming an air from his opera of Porthée.

In crossing the antechamber, madame saw a little man in great riding-boots coming toward her, his head sunk in the immense collar of a coat lined with fur. When he reached her he poked out of his surtout a little face with a pointed nose, and bearing a resemblance at once to a polecat and a fox.

“Oh!” said the palatine, “is it you, abbe?”

“Myself, your highness. I have just saved France — nothing but that.” And bowing to madame, without waiting for her to dismiss him, as etiquette required, he turned on his heel, and entered the regent’s study without being announced.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ABBE DUBOIS.

All the world knows the commencement of the Abbe Dubois. We will not enlarge on the history of his youth, which may be found in the memoirs of the time, and particularly in those of the implacable Saint-Simon. Dubois has not been calumniated — it was impossible; but all the evil has been told of him, and not quite all the good.

There was in his antecedents, and in those of Alberoni, his rival, a great resemblance, but the genius was on the side of Dubois; and in the long struggle with Spain, which the nature of our subject does not allow us to do more than indicate, all the advantage was with the son of the apothecary over the son of the gardener. Dubois preceded Figaro, to whom he probably served as type; but, more fortunate than he, he passed from the office to the drawing-room, and from the drawing-room to the court. All these successive advantages were the rewards of various services, private or public.

His last negotiation was his chef-d'oeuvre; it was more than the ratification of the treaty of Utrecht; it was a treaty more advantageous still for France. The emperor not only renounced all right to the crown of Spain, as Philip V. had renounced all his to the crown of France, but he entered, with England and Holland, into a league, formed at once against Spain on the south, and against Sweden and Russia on the north. The division of the five or six great states of Europe was established by this treaty on so solid and just a basis that, after a hundred years of wars and revolutions, all these states, except the empire, remain in the same situation that they then were.

On his part, the regent, not very particular by nature, loved this man, who had educated him, and whose fortune he had made. The regent appreciated in Dubois the talents he had, and was not too severe on the vices from which he was not exempt. There was, however, between the regent and Dubois an abyss. The regent's vices and virtues were those of a gentleman, Dubois' those of a lackey. In vain the regent said to him, at each new favor that he granted, "Dubois, take care, it is only a livery-coat that I am putting on your back." Dubois, who cared about the gift, and not about the manner in which it was given, replied, with that apish grimace which belonged to him, "I am your valet, monseigneur, dress me always the same."

Dubois, however, loved the regent, and was devoted to him. He felt that this powerful hand alone had raised him from the sink in which he had been found, and to which, hated and despised as he was by all, a sign from the master might restore him. He watched with a personal interest the hatreds and plots which might reach the prince; and more than once, by the aid of a police often better managed than that of the lieutenant-general, and which extended, by means of Madame de Tencin, into the highest aristocracy, and, by means of La Fillon, to the lowest grades of society, he had defeated conspiracies of which Messire Voyer d'Argenson had not even heard a whisper.

Therefore the regent, who appreciated the services which Dubois had rendered him, and could still render him, received the ambassador with open arms. As soon as he saw him appear, he rose, and, contrary to the custom of most princes, who depreciate the service in order to diminish the reward —

"Dubois," said he, joyously, "you are my best friend, and the treaty of the quadruple alliance will be more profitable to King Louis XV. than all the victories of his ancestor, Louis XIV."

"Bravo!" said Dubois, "you do me justice, monseigneur, but, unluckily, every one is not equally grateful."

"Ah! ah!" said the regent, "have you met my mother? She has just left the room."

"And how is his majesty?" asked Dubois, with a smile full of a detestable hope. "He was very poorly when I left."

"Well, abbe, very well," answered the prince, gravely. "God will preserve him to us, I hope, for the happiness of France, and the shame of our calumniators."

"And monseigneur sees him every day as usual?"

"I saw him yesterday, and I even spoke to him of you."

"Bah! and what did you tell him?"

"I told him that in all probability you had just secured the tranquillity of his reign."

"And what did the king answer?"

“What did he answer! He answered, my friend, that he did not think abbes were so useful.”

“His majesty is very witty; and old Villeroy was there, without doubt?”

“As he always is.”

“With your permission, I must send that old fellow to look for me at the other end of France some fine morning. His insolence to you begins to tire my patience.”

“Leave him alone, Dubois, leave him alone, everything will come in time.”

“Even my archbishopric.”

“Ha! What is this new folly?”

“New folly, monseigneur! on my honor nothing can be more serious.”

“Oh! this letter from the king of England, which asks me for an archbishopric for you — ”

“Did your highness not recognize the style?”

“You dictated it, you rascal!”

“To Nericault Destouches, who got the king to sign it.”

“And the king signed it as it is, without saying anything?”

“Exactly. ‘You wish,’ said he to our poet, ‘that a Protestant prince should interfere to make an archbishop in France. The regent will read my recommendation, will laugh at it, and pay no attention to it.’ ‘Yes, yes, sire,’ replied Destouches, who has more wit than he puts into his verses, ‘the regent will laugh at it, but after all will do what your majesty asks.’“

“Destouches lied.”

“Destouches never spoke more truly, monseigneur.”

“You an archbishop! King George would deserve that, in return, I should point out to him some rascal like you for the archbishopric of York when it becomes vacant.”

“I defy you to find my equal — I know but one man.”

“And who is he? I should like to know him.”

“Oh, it is useless, he is already placed, and, as his place is good, he would not change it for all the archbishoprics in the world.”

“Insolent!”

“With whom are you angry, monseigneur?”

“With a fellow who wants to be an archbishop, and who has never yet officiated at the communion table.”

“I shall be all the better prepared.”

“But the archdeaconship, the deaconship, the priesthood.”

“Bah! We will find somebody; some second Jean des Entomeures, who will dispatch all that in an hour.”

“I defy you to find him.”

”It is already done.”

“And who is that?”

“Your first almoner, the bishop of Nantes, Tressan.”

“The fellow has an answer for everything. — But your marriage?”

“My marriage!”

“Yes, Madame Dubois.”

“Madame Dubois! Who is that?”

“What, fellow, have you assassinated her?”

“Monseigneur forgets that it is only three days since he gave her her quarter’s pension.”

“And if she should oppose your archbishopric?”

“I defy her; she has no proofs.”

“She may get a copy of the marriage certificate.”

“There is no copy without an original.”

“And the original?”

“Here it is,” said Dubois, drawing from his pocket a little paper, containing a pinch of ashes.

“What! and are you not afraid that I shall send you to the galleys?”

“If you wish to do so, now is the time, for I hear the lieutenant of police speaking in the antechamber.”

“Who sent for him?”

“I did.”

“What for?”

“To find fault with him.”

“For what reason?”

“You will hear. It is understood then — I am an archbishop.”

“And have you already chosen your archbishopric?”

“Yes, I take Cambray.”

“Peste! you are not modest.”

“Oh, mon Dieu! it is not for the profit, it is for the honor of succeeding Fenelon.”

“Shall we have a new Telemachus?”

“Yes, if your highness will find me a Penelope in the kingdom.”

"Apropos of Penelope, you know that Madame de Sabran — "

"I know all."

"Ah, abbe; your police, then, is as good as ever!"

"You shall judge."

Dubois stretched out his hand, rang the bell, and a messenger appeared.

"Send the lieutenant-general," said Dubois.

"But, abbe, it seems to me that it is you who give orders here now."

"It is for your good, monseigneur. — Let me do it."

"Well, well!" said the regent, "one must be indulgent to new-comers."

Messire Voyer d'Argenson entered — he was as ugly as Dubois, but his ugliness was of a very different kind. He was tall, thick, and heavy; wore an immense wig, had great bushy eyebrows, and was invariably taken for the devil by children who saw him for the first time. But with all this, he was supple, active, skillful, intriguing, and fulfilled his office conscientiously, when he was not turned from his nocturnal duties by other occupations.

"Messire d'Argenson," said Dubois, without even leaving the lieutenant-general time to finish his bow, "monseigneur, who has no secrets from me, has sent for you, that you may tell me in what costume he went out last night, in whose house he passed the evening, and what happened to him on leaving it. I should not need to ask these questions if I had not just arrived from London; you understand, that as I traveled post from Calais, I can know nothing of them."

"But," said D'Argenson, who thought these questions concealed some snare, "did anything extraordinary happen last evening? I confess I received no report; I hope no accident happened to monseigneur?"

"Oh, no, none; only monseigneur, who went out at eight o'clock in the evening, as a French guard, to sup with Madame de Sabran, was nearly carried off on leaving her house."

"Carried off!" cried D'Argenson, turning pale, while the regent could not restrain a cry of astonishment, "carried off! and by whom?"

"Ah!" said Dubois, "that is what we do not know, and what you ought to know, Messire d'Argenson, if you had not passed your time at the convent of the Madeleine de Traisnel."

"What, D'Argenson! you, a great magistrate, give such an example!" said the regent, laughing. "Never mind, I will receive you well, if you come, as you have already done in the time of the late king, to bring me, at the end of the year, a journal of my acts."

"Monseigneur," said the lieutenant, stammering, "I hope your highness does not believe a word of what the Abbe Dubois says."

"What! instead of being humiliated by your ignorance, you give me the lie. Monseigneur, I will take you to D'Argenson's seraglio; an abbess of twenty-six, and novices of fifteen; a boudoir in India chintz, and cells hung with tapestry. Oh, Monsieur le Lieutenant de Police knows how to do things well."

The regent held his sides with laughing, seeing D'Argenson's disturbed face.

"But," replied the lieutenant of police, trying to bring back the conversation to the less disagreeable, though more humiliating subject, "there is not much merit, abbe, in your knowing the details of an event, which, doubtless, monseigneur himself told you."

"On my honor," said the regent, "I did not tell him a single word."

"Listen, lieutenant; is it monseigneur also who told me the story of the novice of the Faubourg Saint-Marceau, whom you so nearly carried off over the convent walls? Is it monseigneur who told me of that house which you have had built under a false name, against the wall of the convent of the Madeleine, so that you can enter at all hours by a door hidden in a closet, and which opens on to the sacristy of the chapel of Saint Mark, your patron? No, no, all that, my dear lieutenant, is the infancy of the art, and he who only knew this, would not, I hope, be worthy to hold a candle to you."

"Listen, abbe," replied the lieutenant of police with a grave air, "if all you have told me about monseigneur is true, the thing is serious and I am in the wrong not to know it, if any one does — but there is no time lost. We will find the culprits, and punish them as they deserve."

"But," said the regent, "you must not attach too much importance to this; they were, probably, some drunken officers who wished to amuse their companions."

"It is a conspiracy, monseigneur," replied Dubois, "which emanates from the Spanish embassy, passing through the Arsenal before it arrives at the Palais Royal."

"Again, Dubois?"

"Always, monseigneur."

"And you, D'Argenson, what is your opinion?"

"That your enemies are capable of anything, monseigneur; but that we will mar their plots, whatever they may be, I give you my word."

At this moment the door opened, and the Duc de Maine was announced, who came to attend the council, and whose privilege it was, as prince of the blood, not to be kept waiting. He advanced with that timid and uneasy air which was natural to him, casting a side-glance over the three persons in whose presence he found himself, as though to discover what subject occupied them at his entrance. The regent understood his thought.

“Welcome, my cousin,” said he; “these two bad fellows — whom you know — have just been assuring me that you are conspiring against me.”

The Duc de Maine turned as pale as death, and was obliged to lean for support on the crutch-shaped stick which he carried.

“And I hope, monseigneur,” replied he, in a voice which he vainly endeavored to render firm, “that you did not give ear to such a calumny.”

“Oh, mon Dieu! no!” replied the regent negligently; “but they are obstinate, and declare that they will take you one day in the fact. I do not believe it, but at any rate I give you warning; be on your guard against them, for they are clever fellows, I warrant you.”

The Duc de Maine opened his mouth to give some contemptible excuse, when the door opened again, and the groom announced successively the Duc de Bourbon, the Prince de Conti, the Duc de St. Simon, the Duc de Guiche, captain of the guards; the Duc Noailles, president of the council of finance; the Duc d’Antin, superintendent of ships; the Marshal d’Uxelles, president of the council of foreign affairs; the Archbishop of Troyes; the Marquis de Lavrilliere; the Marquis d’Efflat; the Duc de Laforce; the Marquis de Torcy; and the Marshals de Villeroy, d’Estrées, de Villars, and de Bezons.

As these grave personages were gathered together to deliberate upon the treaty of the quadruple alliance, brought from London by Dubois, and as the treaty of the quadruple alliance only figures secondarily in this history, our readers will excuse our leaving the sumptuous reception-room in the Palais Royal, to lead them back to the attic in the Rue du Temps-Perdu.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CONSPIRACY.

D'Harmental, after having placed his hat and cloak on a chair, after having placed his pistols on his table, and his sword under his pillow, threw himself dressed on to his bed, and, more happy than Damocles, he slept, though, like Damocles, a sword hung over his head by a thread.

When he awoke it was broad daylight, and as the evening before he had forgotten to close his shutters, the first thing he saw was a ray of sunshine playing joyously across his room. D'Harmental thought that he had been dreaming, when he found himself again calm and tranquil in his little room, so neat and clean, while he might have been at that hour in some gloomy and somber prison. For a moment he doubted of its reality, remembering all that had passed the evening before; but all was there — the red ribbon, the hat and cloak on the chair, the pistols on the table, and the sword under the pillow; and, as a last proof, he himself in the costume of the day before, which he had not taken off, for fear of being surprised by some nocturnal visit.

D'Harmental jumped from his bed. His first look was for his neighbor's window: it was already open, and he saw Bathilde passing and repassing in her room; the second was for his glass, which told him that conspiracies suited him — indeed, his face was paler than usual, and therefore more interesting; his eyes were rather feverish, and therefore more expressive: so that it was evident that, when he had smoothed his hair and arranged his collar and cravat, he would be a most interesting person to Bathilde. D'Harmental did not say this, even to himself; but the bad instinct which always impels our poor souls to evil whispered these thoughts to him, so that when he went to his toilet he suited his dress to the expression of his face — that is to say, that he dressed entirely in black, that his hair was arranged with a charming negligence, and that he left his waistcoat more than usually open, to give place to his shirt-frill, which fell with an ease full of coquetry. All this was done in the most preoccupied and careless manner in the world; for D'Harmental, brave as he was, could not help remembering that at any minute he might be arrested; but it was by instinct that, when the chevalier gave the last look in the glass, before leaving his little dressing-room, he smiled at himself with a melancholy which doubled the charm of his countenance. There was no mistake as to the meaning of this smile, for he went directly to the window.

Perhaps Bathilde had also her projects for the moment when her neighbor should reappear, perhaps she had arranged a defense which should consist in not looking toward him, or in closing her window after a simple recognition; but at the noise her neighbor's window made in opening, all was forgotten, and she ran to the window, crying out:

"Ah! there you are. Mon Dieu! monsieur, how anxious you have made me!"

This exclamation was ten times more than D'Harmental had hoped for. If he, on his part, had prepared some well-turned and eloquent phrases, they were all forgotten, and clasping his hands:

"Bathilde! Bathilde!" he cried, "you are, then, as good as you are beautiful!"

"Why good?" asked Bathilde. "Did you not tell me that if I was an orphan, you also were without parents? Did you not say that I was your sister, and you were my brother?"

"Then, Bathilde, you prayed for me?"

"All night," replied the young girl blushing.

"And I thanked chance for having saved me, when I owed all to an angel's prayers!"

"The danger is then past?" cried Bathilde.

"The night was dark and gloomy," replied D'Harmental. "This morning, however, I was awakened by a ray of sunshine which a cloud may again conceal: so it is with the danger I have run; it has passed to give place to a great happiness — that of knowing you have thought of me, yet it may return. But stay," continued he, hearing steps on the staircase, "there it is, perhaps, approaching my door."

As he spoke, some one knocked three times at the chevalier's door.

"Who is there?" asked D'Harmental from the window, in a voice which, in spite of all his firmness, betrayed some emotion.

"A friend," answered a voice.

"Well?" asked Bathilde, with anxiety.

“Thanks to you, God still continues to protect me: it is a friend who knocks. Once again, thanks, Bathilde.” And the chevalier closed his window, sending the young girl a last salute which was very like a kiss; then he opened to the Abbe Brigaud, who, beginning to be impatient, had knocked a second time.

“Well,” said the abbe, on whose face it was impossible to see the smallest change, “what has happened, then, my dear pupil, that you are shut in thus by bolts and bars? Is it as a foretaste of the Bastille?”

“Holla! abbe,” said D’Harmental, in a cheerful voice, “no such jokes, I beg; they might bring misfortune.”

“But look! look!” said Brigaud, throwing his eyes round him, “would not any one suppose they were visiting a conspirator? Pistols on the table, a sword on the pillow, and a hat and cloak on the chair. Ah! my dear pupil, you are discomposed, it appears to me! Come, put all this in order, that I may not be able to perceive, when I pay my paternal visit, what passes during my absence.”

D’Harmental obeyed, admiring, in this man of the Church, the sang-froid which he himself found it difficult to attain.

“Very good,” said Brigaud, watching him, “and this shoulder-knot which you have forgotten, and which was never made for you (for it dates from the time when you were in jackets), put it away too; who knows? — you may want it.”

“And what for, abbe?” asked D’Harmental, laughing; “to attend the regent’s levée in?”

“Oh, no, but for a signal to some good fellow who is passing; come, put it away.”

“My dear abbe,” said D’Harmental, “if you are not the devil in person, you are at least one of his most intimate acquaintances.”

“Oh, no! I am a poor fellow who goes his own quiet way, and who, as he goes, looks high and low, right and left, that is all. Look, there is a ray of spring, the first, which knocks humbly at your window, and you do not open it: one would suppose you were afraid of being seen. Ah, pardon! I did not know that, when your window opened, another must close.”

“My dear abbe, you are full of wit,” replied D’Harmental, “but terribly indiscreet; so much so, that, if you were a musketeer instead of an abbe, I should quarrel with you.”

“And why? Because I wish to open you a path to glory, fortune, and, perhaps, love? It would be monstrous ingratitude.”

“Well, let us be friends, abbe,” said D’Harmental, offering his hand, “and I shall not be sorry to have some news.”

“Of what?”

“How do I know? Of the Rue des Bons Enfants, where there has been a great deal going on, I believe; of the Arsenal, where, I believe, Madame de Maine has given a soirée; and even of the regent, who, if I may believe a dream I had, came back to the Palais Royal very late and rather agitated.”

”All has gone well. The noise of the Rue des Bons Enfants, if there were any, is quite calm this morning; Madame de Maine has as much gratitude for those whom important affairs kept away from the Arsenal as she has contempt for those who were there; finally, the regent, dreaming last night, as usual, that he was king of France, has already forgotten that he was nearly the prisoner of the king of Spain. Now we must begin again.”

“Ah, pardon, abbe,” said D’Harmental; “but, with your permission, it is the turn of the others. I shall not be sorry to rest a little, myself.”

“Ah, that goes badly with the news I bring you.”

“What news?”

“It was decided last night that you should leave for Brittany this morning.”

“For Brittany! — and what to do there?”

“You will know when you are there.”

“And if I do not wish to go?”

“You will reflect, and go just the same.”

“And on what shall I reflect?”

“That it would be the act of a madman to interrupt an enterprise near its end for a love only at its beginning. To abandon the interests of a princess of the blood to gain the good graces of a grisette.”

“Abbe!” said D’Harmental.

“Oh, we must not get angry, my dear chevalier; we must reason! You engaged voluntarily in the affair we have in hand, and you promised to aid us in it. Would it be loyal to abandon us now for a repulse? No, no, my dear pupil; you must have a little more connection in your ideas if you mix in a conspiracy.”

“It is just because I have connection in my ideas,” replied D’Harmental, “that this time, as at first, before undertaking anything new, I wish to know what it is. I offered myself to be the arm, it is true; but, before striking, the arm must know what the head has decided. I risk my liberty. I risk my life. I risk something perhaps dearer to me still. I will risk all this in my own manner, with my eyes open, and not closed. Tell me first what I am to do in Brittany, and then perhaps I will go there.”

“Your orders are that you should go to Rennes. There you will unseal this letter, and find your instructions.”

“My orders! my instructions!”

“Are not these the terms which a general uses to his officers? And are they in the habit of disputing the commands they receive?”

“Not when they are in the service; but you know I am in it no longer.”

“It is true. I forgot to tell you that you had re-entered it.” — — ”I!”

“Yes, you. I have your brevet in my pocket.” And Brigaud drew from his pocket a parchment, which he presented to D’Harmental, who unfolded it slowly, questioning Brigaud with his looks.

“A brevet!” cried the chevalier; “a brevet as colonel in one of the four regiments of carabineers! Whence comes this brevet?”

“Look at the signature.”

“Louis-Auguste, Duc de Maine!”

“Well, what is there astonishing in that? As grand master of artillery, he has the nomination of twelve regiments. He gives you one to replace that which was taken from you, and, as your general, he sends you on a mission. Is it customary for soldiers in such a case to refuse the honor their chief does them in thinking of them? I am a churchman, and do not know.”

“No, no, my dear abbe. It is, on the contrary, the duty of every officer of the king to obey his chief.”

“Besides which,” replied Brigaud, negligently, “in case the conspiracy failed, you would only have obeyed orders, and might throw the whole responsibility of your actions on another.”

“Abbe!” cried D’Harmental, a second time.

“Well, if you do not go, I shall make you feel the spur.”

“Yes, I am going. Excuse me, but there are some moments when I am half mad. I am now at the orders of Monsieur de Maine, or, rather, at those of Madame. May I not see her before I go, to fall at her feet, and tell her that I am ready to sacrifice my life at a word from her?”

”There, now, you are going into the opposite extreme; but no, you must not die; you must live — live to triumph over our enemies, and wear a beautiful uniform, with which you will turn all the women's heads."

"Oh, my dear Brigaud, there is but one I wish to please."

"Well, you shall please her first, and the others afterward."

"When must I go?"

"This instant."

"You will give me half an hour?"

"Not a second."

"But I have not breakfasted."

"You shall come and breakfast with me."

"I have only two or three thousand francs here, and that is not enough."

"You will find a year's pay in your carriage."

"And clothes?"

"Your trunks are full. Had I not your measure? You will not be discontented with my tailor."

"But at least, abbe, tell me when I may return."

"In six weeks to a day, the Duchesse de Maine will expect you at Sceaux."

"But at least you will permit me to write a couple of lines."

"Well, I will not be too exacting."

The chevalier sat down and wrote:

"Dear Bathilde — To-day it is more than a danger which threatens me; it is a misfortune which overtakes me. I am forced to leave this instant, without seeing you, without bidding you adieu. I shall be six weeks absent. In the name of Heaven, Bathilde, do not forget him who will not pass an hour without thinking of you.

Raoul."

This letter written, folded, and sealed, the chevalier rose and went to the window; but as we have said, that of his neighbor was closed when Brigaud appeared. There was then no means of sending to Bathilde the dispatch destined for her. D'Harmental made an impatient gesture. At this moment they heard a scratching at the door. The abbe opened it, and Mirza appeared, guided by her instinct, and her greediness, to the giver of the bonbons, and making lively demonstrations of joy.

"Well," said Brigaud, "who shall say God is not good to lovers? You wanted a messenger, and here is one."

"Abbe, abbe," said D'Harmental, shaking his head, "do not enter into my secrets before I wish it."

“Oh,” replied Brigaud, “a confessor, you know, is an abyss.”

“Then not a word will pass your lips?”

“On my honor, chevalier.”

D’Harmental tied the letter to Mirza’s neck, gave her a piece of sugar as a reward for the commission she was about to accomplish; and, half sad at having lost his beautiful neighbor for six weeks, half glad at having regained forever his beautiful uniform, he took his money, put his pistols into his pockets, fastened on his sword, took his hat and cloak, and followed the Abbe Brigaud.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ORDER OF THE HONEY-BEE.

At the appointed day and hour, that is to say, six weeks after his departure from the capital, and at four o’clock in the afternoon, D’Harmental, returning from Brittany, entered the courtyard of the Palace of Sceaux, with his post horses going at full gallop. Servants in full livery waited on the door-step, and everything announced preparations for a fete. D’Harmental entered, crossed the hall, and found himself in a large room, where about twenty people were assembled, standing in groups talking, while waiting for the mistress of the house.

There were, among others, the Comte de Laval, the Marquis de Pompadour, the poet St. Genest, the old Abbe Chaulieu, St. Aulaire, Madame de Rohan, Madame de Croissy, Madame de Charost, and Madame de Brissac.

D’Harmental went straight to the Marquis de Pompadour, the one out of all this noble and intelligent society with whom he was best acquainted. They shook hands. Then D’Harmental, drawing him aside, said:

”My dear marquis, can you tell me how it is that where I expected to find only a dull political assembly I find preparations for a fete?”

“Ma foi! I do not know, my dear chevalier,” replied Pompadour, “and I am as astonished as you are. I have just returned from Normandy myself.”

“Ah! you also have just arrived?”

“This instant I asked the same question of Laval, but he has just arrived from Switzerland, and knows no more than we do.”

At this moment the Baron de Valef was announced.

“Ah, pardieu! now we shall know,” continued Pompadour. “Valef is so intimate with the duchesse he will be able to tell us.”

Valef, recognizing them, came toward them.

D’Harmental and Valef had not seen each other since the day of the duel with which this story opened, so that they met with pleasure; then, after exchanging compliments —

“My dear Valef,” said D’Harmental, “can you tell me what is the meaning of this great assembly, when I expected to find only a select committee?”

“Ma foi! I do not know anything of it,” said Valef, “I have just come from Madrid.”

“Every one has just arrived from somewhere,” said Pompadour, laughing. “Ah! here is Malezieux, I hope he has been no further than Dombes or Chatenay; and as at any rate he has certainly passed through Madame de Maine’s room we shall have some news at last.”

At these words Pompadour made a sign to Malezieux, but the worthy chancellor was so gallant that he must first acquit himself of his duty toward the ladies. After he had bowed to them, he came toward the group, among which were Pompadour, D’Harmental, and Valef.

“Come, my dear Malezieux,” said Pompadour, “we are waiting for you most impatiently. We have just arrived from the four quarters of the globe, it appears. Valef from the south, D’Harmental from the west, Laval from the east, I from the north, you from I do not know where; so that we confess that we are very curious to know what we are going to do here at Sceaux.”

“You have come to assist at a great solemnity, at the reception of a new knight of the order of the honey-bee.”

“Peste!” said D’Harmental, a little piqued that they should not have left him time to go to the Rue du Temps-Perdu before coming to Sceaux; “I understand now why Madame de Maine told us to be so exact to the rendezvous; as to myself, I am very grateful to her highness.”

“First of all you must know, young man,” interrupted Malezieux, “that there is no Madame de Maine nor highness in the question. There is only the beautiful fairy Ludovic, the queen of the bees, whom every one must obey blindly. Our queen is all-wise and all-powerful, and when you know who is the knight we are to receive you will not regret your diligence.”

“And who is it?” asked Valef, who, arriving from the greatest distance, was naturally the most anxious to know why he had been brought home.

“His excellency the Prince de Cellamare.”

“Ah!” said Pompadour, “I begin to understand.” — — ”And I,” said Valef.

“And I,” said D’Harmental.

“Very well,” said Malezieux, smiling; “and before the end of the evening you will understand still better; meanwhile, do not try to see further. It is not the first time you have entered with your eyes bandaged, Monsieur d'Harmental?"

At these words, Malezieux advanced toward a little man, with a flat face, flowing hair, and a discontented expression. D'Harmental inquired who it was, and Pompadour replied that it was the poet Lagrange-Chancel. The young men looked at the new-comer with a curiosity mixed with disgust; then, turning away, and leaving Pompadour to advance toward the Cardinal de Polignac, who entered at this moment, they went into the embrasure of a window to talk over the occurrences of the evening.

The order of the honey-bee had been founded by Madame de Maine, apropos of the Italian motto which she had adopted at her marriage: "Little insects inflict large stings."

This order had, like others, its decorations, its officers, and its grand-master. The decoration was a medal, representing on one side a hive, and on the other the queen-bee: it was hung by a lemon-colored ribbon, and was worn by every knight whenever he came to Sceaux. The officers were Malezieux, St. Aulaire, the Abbe Chaulieu, and St. Genest. Madame de Maine was grand-master.

It was composed of thirty-nine members, and could not exceed this number. The death of Monsieur de Nevers had left a vacancy which was to be filled by the nomination of the Prince de Cellamare. The fact was, that Madame de Maine had thought it safer to cover this political meeting with a frivolous pretext, feeling sure that a fete in the gardens at Sceaux would appear less suspicious in the eyes of Dubois and Messire Voyer d'Argenson than an assembly at the Arsenal. Thus, as will be seen, nothing had been forgotten to give its old splendor to the order of the honey-bee.

At four o'clock precisely, the time fixed for the ceremony, the doors of the room opened, and they perceived, in a salon hung with crimson satin, spangled with silver bees, the beautiful fairy Ludovic seated on a throne raised on three steps. She made a gesture with her golden wand, and all her court, passing into the salon, arranged themselves in a half circle round her throne, on the steps of which the dignitaries of the order placed themselves.

After the initiation of the Prince de Cellamare as a knight of the honey-bee, a second door was opened, displaying a room brilliantly lighted, where a splendid supper was laid. The new knight of the order offered his hand to the fairy, and conducted her to the supper-room followed by the assistants.

The entertainment was worthy of the occasion, and the flow of wit which so peculiarly characterized the epoch was well sustained. As the hour began to draw late, the Duchesse de Maine rose and announced that having received an excellent telescope from the author of “The Worlds,” she invited her company to study astronomy in the garden.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE QUEEN OF THE GREENLANDERS.

As might have been expected, new surprises awaited the guests in the garden. These gardens, designed by Le Notre for Colbert, and sold by him to the Duc de Maine, had now really the appearance of a fairy abode. They were bounded only by a large sheet of water, in the midst of which was the pavilion of Aurora — so called because from this pavilion was generally given the signal that the night was finished, and that it was time to retire — and had, with their games of tennis, football, and tilting at the ring, an aspect truly royal. Every one was astonished on arriving to find all the old trees and graceful paths linked together by garlands of light which changed the night into brilliant day.

At the approach of Madame de Maine a strange party, consisting of seven individuals, advanced gravely toward her. They were dressed entirely in fur, and wore hairy caps, which hid their faces. They had with them a sledge drawn by two reindeer, and their deputation was headed by a chief wearing a long robe lined with fur, with a cap of fox-skin, on which were three tails. This chief, kneeling before Madame de Maine, addressed her.

“Madame! the Greenlanders have chosen me, as one of the chief among them, to offer you, on their parts, the sovereignty of their state.”

This allusion was so evident, and yet so safe, that a murmur of approbation ran through the whole assembly, and the ambassador, visibly encouraged by this reception, continued —

“Fame has told us, even in the midst of our snows, in our little corner of the world, of the charms, the virtues, and the inclinations of your highness. We know that you abhor the sun.”

This allusion was as quickly seized on as the first, for the sun was the regent’s device, and as we have said, Madame de Maine was well known for her predilection in favor of night.

“Consequently, madame,” continued the ambassador, “as in our geographical position God has blessed us with six months of night and six months of twilight, we come to propose to you to take refuge in our land from the sun which you so much dislike; and in recompense for that which you leave here, we offer you the title of Queen of the Greenlanders. We are certain that your presence will cause our arid plains to flower, and that the wisdom of your laws will conquer our stubborn spirit, and that, thanks to the gentleness of your reign, we shall renounce a liberty less sweet than your rule.”

“But,” said Madame de Maine, “it seems to me that the kingdom you offer me is rather distant, and I confess I do not like long voyages.”

“We foresaw your reply, madame,” replied the ambassador, “and, thanks to the enchantments of a powerful magician, have so arranged, that if you would not go to the mountain, the mountain should come to you. Hola, genii!” continued the chief, describing some cabalistic circles in the air with his wand, “display the palace of your new sovereign.”

At this moment some fanciful music was heard; the veil which covered the pavilion of Aurora was raised as if by magic, and the water showed the reflection of a light so skillfully placed that it might have been taken for the moon. By this light was seen an island of ice at the foot of a snowy peak, on which was the palace of the Queen of the Greenlanders, to which led a bridge so light that it seemed to be made of a floating cloud. Then, in the midst of general acclamation, the ambassador took from the hands of one of his suite a crown, which he placed on the duchess’s head, and which she received with as haughty a gesture as though it had been a real crown. Then, getting into the sledge, she went toward the marine palace; and, while the guards prevented the crowd from following her into her new domain, she crossed the bridge and entered, with the seven ambassadors. At the same instant the bridge disappeared, as if, by an illusion not less visible than the others, the skillful machinist had wished to separate the past from the future, and fireworks expressed the joy of the Greenlanders at seeing their new sovereign. Meanwhile Madame de Maine was introduced by an usher into the most retired part of the palace, and the seven ambassadors having thrown off caps and cloaks, she found herself surrounded by the Prince de Cellamare, Cardinal Polignac, the Marquis de Pompadour, the Comte de Laval, the Baron de Valef, the Chevalier d’Harmental, and Malezieux. As to the usher, who, after having carefully closed all the doors, came and mixed familiarly with all this noble assembly, he was no other than our old friend the Abbe Brigaud. Things now began to take their true form, and the fete, as the ambassadors had done, threw off mask and costume, and turned openly to conspiracy.

"Gentlemen," said the duchess, with her habitual vivacity, "we have not an instant to lose, as too long an absence would be suspicious. Let every one tell quickly what he has done, and we shall know what we are about."

"Pardon, madame," said the prince, "but you had spoken to me, as being one of ourselves, of a man whom I do not see here, and whom I am distressed not to count among our numbers."

"You mean the Duc de Richelieu?" replied Madame de Maine; "it is true he promised to come; he must have been detained by some adventure; we must do without him."

"Yes, certainly," replied the prince, "if he does not come we must do without him; but I confess that I deeply regret his absence. The regiment which he commands is at Bayonne, and for that reason might be very useful to us. Give orders, I beg, madame, that if he should come he should be admitted directly."

"Abbe," said Madame de Maine, turning to Brigaud, "you heard; tell D'Avranches."

The abbe went out to execute this order.

"Pardon, monsieur," said D'Harmental to Malezieux, "but I thought six weeks ago that the Duc de Richelieu positively refused to be one of us."

"Yes," answered Malezieux, "because he knew that he was intended to take the cordon bleu to the Prince of the Asturias, and he would not quarrel with the regent just when he expected the Golden Fleece as the reward of his embassy; but now the regent has changed his mind and deferred sending the order, so that the Duc de Richelieu, seeing his Golden Fleece put off till the Greek kalends, has come back to us."

"I have given the order," said the Abbe Brigaud, returning.

"Well," said the duchess, "now let us go to business. Laval, you begin."

"I, madame," said Laval, "as you know, have been in Switzerland, where, with the king of Spain's name and money, I raised a regiment in the Grisons. This regiment is ready to enter France at any moment, armed and equipped, and only waits the order to march."

"Very good, my dear count," said the duchess; "and if you do not think it below a Montmorency to be colonel of a regiment while waiting for something better, take the command of this one. It is a surer way of getting the Golden Fleece than taking the Saint Esprit into Spain."

"Madame," said Laval, "it is for you to appoint each one his place, and whatever you may appoint will be gratefully accepted by the most humble of your servants."

"And you, Pompadour," said Madame de Maine, thanking Laval by a gesture of the hand, "what have you done?"

"According to your highness's instructions," replied the marquis, "I went to Normandy, where I got the protestatior signed by the nobility. I bring you thirty-eight good signatures" (he drew a paper from his pocket). "Here is the request to the king, and here the signatures."

The duchess snatched the paper so quickly that she almost tore it, and throwing her eyes rapidly over it:

"Yes, yes," said she, "you have done well to put them so, without distinction or difference of rank, so that there may be no question of precedence. Guillaume-Alexandre de Vieux-Pont, Pierre-Anne-Marie de la Pailleterie, De Beaufremont, De Latour-Dupin, De Chatillon. Yes, you are right; these are the best and most faithful names in France. Thanks, Pompadour; you are a worthy messenger; your skill shall not be forgotten. And you, chevalier?" continued she, turning to D'Harmental with her irresistible smile.

"I, madame," said the chevalier, "according to your orders left for Brittany, and at Nantes I opened my dispatches and took my instructions."

"Well?" asked the duchess quickly.

"Well, madame," replied D'Harmental, "I have been as successful as Messieurs de Laval and Pompadour. I have the promises of Messieurs de Mont-Louis, De Bonamour, De Pont-Callet, and De Rohan Soldue. As soon as Spain shows a squadron in sight of the coasts, Brittany will rise."

"You see, prince," cried the duchess, addressing Cellamare, with an accent full of ambitious joy, "everything favors us."

"Yes," replied the prince; "but these four gentlemen, influential as they are, are not all that we must have. There are Laguerche-Saint-Amant, Les Bois-Davy, De Larochefoucault-Gondral, Les Decourt, and Les d'Erée, whom it would be important to gain."

"It is done, prince," said D'Harmental; "here are their letters;" and taking several from his pocket, he opened two or three by chance and read their contents.

"Well, prince," cried Madame de Maine, "what do you think now? Besides these three letters, here is one from Lavauguyon, one from Bois-

Davy, one from Fumée. Stay, chevalier, here is our right hand; ‘tis that which holds the pen — let it be a pledge to you that, if ever its signature should be royal, it would have nothing to refuse to you.”

“Thanks, madame,” said D’Harmental, kissing her hand respectfully, “but you have already given me more than I deserve, and success itself would recompense me so highly, by placing your highness in your proper position, that I should have nothing left to desire.”

“And now, Valef, it is your turn,” continued the duchess; “we kept you till the last, for you were the most important. If I understood rightly your signs during dinner, you are not displeased with their Catholic majesties.”

“What would your highness say to a letter written by his highness Philippe himself?”

“Oh! it is more than I ever dared to hope for,” cried Madame de Maine.

“Prince,” said Valef, passing a paper to Cellamare, “you know his majesty’s writing. Assure her royal highness, who does not dare to believe it, that this is from his own hand.”

“It is,” said Cellamare.

“And to whom is it addressed?” asked Madame de Maine, taking it from the prince’s hands.

“To the king, Louis XV., madame,” said the latter.

“Good!” said the duchess; “we will get it presented by the Marshal de Villeroy. Let us see what it says.” And she read as rapidly as the writing permitted:

“‘The Escurial, 16th March, 1718.

“‘Since Providence has placed me on the throne of Spain, I have never for an instant lost sight of the obligations of my birth. Louis XIV., of eternal memory, is always present to my mind. I seem always to hear that great prince, at the moment of our separation, saying to me, ‘The Pyrenees exist no longer.’ Your majesty is the only descendant of my elder brother, whose loss I feel daily. God has called you to the succession of this great monarchy, whose glory and interests will be precious to me till my death. I can never forget what I owe to your majesty, to my country, and to the memory of my ancestor.

“‘My dear Spaniards (who love me tenderly, and who are well assured of my love for them, and not jealous of the sentiments which I hold for you) are well assured that our union is the base of public tranquillity. I flatter myself that my personal interests are still dear to a nation which has nourished me in its bosom, and that a nobility who has shed so much blood to support them will always look with love on a king who feels it an honor to be obliged to them, and to have been born among them.’

“This is addressed to you, gentlemen,” said the duchess, interrupting herself; and, looking round her, she continued, impatient to know the rest of the letter:

“‘What, then, can your faithful subjects think of a treaty signed against me, or rather against yourself?

“‘Since your exhausted finances can no longer support the current expenses of peace, it is desired that you should unite with my most mortal enemy, and should make war on me, if I do not consent to give up Sicily to the archduke. I will never subscribe to these conditions: they are insupportable to me.

“‘I do not enter into the fatal, consequences of this alliance. I only beg your majesty to convoke the States-General directly, to deliberate on an affair of such great consequence.’“

“The States-General!” murmured the Cardinal de Polignac.

“Well, what does your eminence say to the States-General?” interrupted Madame de Maine, impatiently. “Has this measure the misfortune not to meet with your approbation?”

“I neither blame nor approve, madame,” replied the cardinal; “I only remember that this convocation was made during the league, and that Philip came off badly.”

“Men and times are changed, cardinal,” replied the duchess; “we are not in 1594, but in 1718. Philip II. was Flemish, and Philip V. is French. The same results cannot take place, since the causes are different.” And she went on with the letter:

“‘I ask this in the name of the blood which unites us — in the name of the great king from whom we have our origin — in the name of your people and mine. If ever there was a necessity to listen to the voice of the French nation, it is now. It is indispensable to learn what they think: whether they wish to declare war on us. As I am ready to expose my life to maintain its glory and interests, I hope you will reply quickly to the propositions I make to you. The Assembly will prevent the unfortunate results which threaten us, and the forces of Spain will only be employed to sustain the greatness of France, and to fight her enemies, as I shall never employ them but to show your majesty my sincere regard and affection.’

“What do you think of that, gentlemen? Can his majesty say more?”

“He might have joined to this an epistle addressed directly to the States-General,” answered the Cardinal de Polignac. “This letter, if the king had deigned to send it, would have had a great influence on their deliberations.”

“Here it is,” said the Prince de Cellamare, taking a paper from his pocket.

“What, prince!” cried the cardinal.

“I say that his majesty is of the same opinion as your eminence, and has sent me this letter, which is the complement of the letter which the Baron de Valef has.”

“Then nothing is wanting,” cried Madame de Maine.

“We want Bayonne,” said the Prince de Cellamare; — ”Bayonne, the door of France.”

At this moment D’Avranches entered, announcing the Duc de Richelieu.

“And now, prince, there is nothing wanting,” said the Marquis de Pompadour, laughing: “for here is he who holds the key.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DUC DE RICHELIEU.

“At last!” cried the duchess, seeing Richelieu enter. “Are you, then, always the same? Your friends cannot count on you any more than your mistresses.”

“On the contrary, madame,” said Richelieu, approaching the duchess, “for to-day, more than ever, I prove to your highness that I can reconcile everything.”

“Then you have made a sacrifice for us, duke,” said Madame de Maine, laughing.

“Ten thousand times greater than you can imagine. Who do you think I have left?”

“Madame de Villars?” asked the duchess.

“Oh no! better than that.”

“Madame de Duras?”

“No.”

“Madame de Nésle?”

“Bah!”

“Madame de Polignac? Ah! pardon, cardinal.”

“Go on. It does not concern his eminence.”

“Madame de Soubise, Madame de Gabriant, Madame de Gacé?”

“No, no, no.”

“Mademoiselle de Charolais?”

“I have not seen her since my last trip to the Bastille.”

“Mademoiselle de Valois?”

“Oh! I intend her for my wife, when we have succeeded, and I am a Spanish prince. No, madame; I have left, for your highness, the two most charming grisettes.”

“Grisettes! Ah! fie!” cried the duchess, with a movement of contempt, “I did not think that you descended to such creatures.”

“Creatures! two charming women! Madame Michelin and Madame Rénaud. Do you not know them? Madame Michelin, a beautiful blonde; her husband is a carpet manufacturer; I recommend him to you, duchesse. Madame Rénaud, an adorable brunette, with blue eyes and black lashes, and whose husband is — . Ma foi! I do not remember exactly — ”

“What M. Michelin is, probably,” said Pompadour, laughing.

“Pardon, duke,” replied Madame de Maine, who had lost all curiosity for Richelieu’s love adventures as soon as they traveled from a certain set, “may I venture to remind you that we met here on important business!”

“Oh, yes! we are conspiring, are we not?”

”Had you forgotten it?”

“Ma foi! a conspiracy is not one of the gayest thing’s in the world, therefore I forget it whenever I can; but that is nothing — whenever it is necessary I can come back to it. Now let us see: how does the conspiracy go on?”

“Here, duke, look at these letters, and you will know as much as we do.”

“Oh! your highness must excuse me,” said Richelieu; “but really I do not read those which are addressed to me, and I have seven or eight hundred, in the most charming writings, which I am keeping to amuse my old days. Here, Malezieux, you, who are clearness itself, give me a report.”

“Well, these letters are the engagements of the Breton nobles to sustain the rights of her highness.”

“Very good.”

“This paper is the protestation of the nobility.”

“Oh! give it me. I protest.”

“But you do not know against what.”

“Never mind, I protest all the same.”

And, taking the paper, he wrote his name after that of Guillaume Antoine de Chastellux, which was the last signature.

“Let him alone,” said Cellamare to the duchess, “Richelieu’s name is useful everywhere.”

“And this letter?” asked the duke, pointing to the missive of Philip V.

“That letter,” continued Malezieux, “is written by King Philip himself.”

“Then his Catholic majesty writes worse than I do,” answered Richelieu. “That pleases me. Raffé always says it is impossible.”

“If the letter is badly written, the news it contains is none the less good,” said Madame de Maine, “for it is a letter begging the king of France to assemble the States-General to oppose the treaty of the quadruple alliance.”

“And is your highness sure of the States-General?”

"Here is the protestation which engages the nobility. The cardinal answers for the clergy, and there only remains the army."

"The army," said Laval, "is my affair. I have the signs-manual of twenty-two colonels."

"First," said Richelieu, "I answer for my regiment, which is at Bayonne, and which, consequently, is able to be of great service to us."

"Yes," said Cellamare, "and we reckon on it, but I heard that there was a question of changing the garrison."

"Seriously?"

"Very seriously. You understand, duke? We must be beforehand."

"Instantly — paper — ink; I will write to the Duc de Berwick. At the moment of commencing a campaign, no one will be astonished at my begging not to be removed from the theater of war."

The duchess hastened to give Richelieu what he asked, and taking a pen, presented it to him herself. The duke bowed, took the pen, and wrote a letter to the Duc de Berwick, begging that his regiment should not be removed till May.

"Now read, madame," continued the duke, passing the paper to Madame de Maine. The duchess took the letter, read it, and passed it to her neighbor, who passed it on, so that it made the round of the table. Malezieux, who had it the last, could not repress a slight smile.

"Ah! poet," said Richelieu, "you are laughing; I suppose I have had the misfortune to offend that ridiculous prude called orthography. You know I am a gentleman, and they forgot to teach me French; thinking, I suppose, that for fifteen hundred francs a year I can always have a valet-de-chambre, who could write my letters and make my verses. This will not prevent me, my dear Malezieux, from being in the Academy, not only before you, but before Voltaire."

"In which case, will your valet-de-chambre write your discourse?"

"He is working at it, and you will see that it will not be worse than those that some academicians of my acquaintance have done themselves."

"Duke," said Madame de Maine, "it will doubtless be a curious thing to see your reception into the illustrious body of which you speak, and I promise you to employ myself to-morrow in procuring a seat for that day; but this evening we are occupied with other things."

"Well," said Richelieu, "speak, I listen. What have you resolved?"

"To obtain from the king, by means of these two letters, the convocation of the States-General; then, sure as we are of the three orders, we depose the regent, and name Philip V. in his place."

"And as Philip V. cannot leave Madrid, he gives us full powers, and we govern France in his stead. Well, it is not badly arranged, all that, but to convoke the States-General you must have an order from the king."

"The king will sign it."

"Without the regent's knowledge?"

"Without the regent's knowledge."

"Then you have promised the bishop of Frejus to make him a cardinal."

"No; but I will promise Villeroy a title and the Golden Fleece."

"I am afraid, madame," said the Prince of Cellamare, "that all this will not determine the marshal to undertake so grave a responsibility."

"It is not the marshal we want; it is his wife."

"Ah! you remind me," said Richelieu, "I undertake it."

"You!" said the duchess with astonishment.

"Yes, madame," replied Richelieu, "you have your correspondence, I have mine. I have seen seven or eight letters that you have received to-day. Will your highness have the goodness to look at one I received yesterday?"

"Is this letter for me only, or may it be read aloud?"

"We are among discreet people, are we not?" said Richelieu, looking round him.

"I think so," replied the duchess, "besides, the gravity of the situation."

The duchess took the letter, and read:

"'Monsieur le Duc — I am a woman of my word. My husband is on the eve of setting out for the little journey you know of. To-morrow, at eleven o'clock, I shall be at home for you only. Do not think that I decide on this step without having put all the blame on the shoulders of Monsieur de Villeroy. I begin to fear for him, as you may have undertaken to punish him. Come, then, at the appointed hour, to prove to me that I am not too much to blame in conspiring with you against my lord and master.'"

"Ah! pardon, this is not the one I intended to show you, that is the one of the day before yesterday. Here is yesterday's."

The duchess took the second letter, and read as follows:

"'My dear Armand,'

— "Is this it, or are you mistaken again?" said the duchess to Richelieu.

"No, no; this time it is right."

The duchess went on.

"'My dear Armand — You are a dangerous advocate when you plead against Monsieur de Villeroy. I need to exaggerate your talents to diminish my weakness. You had, in my heart, a judge, interested in your gaining your cause. Come to-morrow to plead again, and I will give you an audience.'

"And have you been there?"

"Certainly, madame."

"And the duchess?"

"Will do, I hope, all we desire; and, as she makes her husband do whatever she likes, we shall have our order for the convocation of the States-General on his return."

"And when will he return?"

"In a week."

"And can you be faithful all that time?"

"Madame, when I have undertaken a cause, I am capable of the greatest sacrifices to forward it."

"Then we may count on your word?"

"I pledge myself."

"You hear, gentlemen?" said the Duchesse de Maine. "Let us continue to work. You, Laval, act on the army. You, Pompadour, on the nobility. You, cardinal, on the clergy, and let us leave the Duc de Richelieu to act on Madame de Villeroy."

"And for what day is our next meeting fixed?" asked Cellamare.

"All depends on circumstances, prince," replied the duchess. "At any rate, if I have not time to give you notice, I will send the same carriage and coachman to fetch you who took you to the Arsenal the first time you came there." Then, turning toward Richelieu, "You give us the rest of the evening, duke?"

"I ask your pardon," replied Richelieu, "but it is absolutely impossible; I am expected in the Rue des Bons Enfants."

"What! have you made it up with Madame de Sabran?"

"We never quarreled, madame."

"Take care, duke; that looks like constancy."

"No, madame, it is calculation."

"Ah! I see that you are on the road toward becoming devoted."

"I never do things by halves, madame."

"Well, we will follow your example, Monsieur le Duc. And now we have been an hour and a half away, and should, I think, return to the gardens, that our absence may not be too much noticed; besides, I think the Goddess of Night is on the shore, waiting to thank us for the preference we have given her over the sun."

"With your permission, however, madame," said Laval, "I must keep you an instant longer, to tell you the trouble I am in."

"Speak, count," replied the duchess; "what is the matter?"

"It is about our requests and our protestations. It was agreed, if you remember, that they should be printed by workmen who cannot read."

"Well."

"I bought a press, and established it in the cellar of a house behind the Val-de-Grace. I enlisted the necessary workmen, and, up to the present time, have had the most satisfactory results; but the noise of our machine has given rise to the suspicion that we were coining false money, and yesterday the police made a descent on the house; fortunately, there was time to stop the work and roll a bed over the trap, so that they discovered nothing. But as the visit might be renewed, and with a less fortunate result, as soon as they were gone I dismissed the workmen, buried the press, and had all the proofs taken to my own house."

"And you did well, count," cried the Cardinal de Polignac.

"But what are we to do now?" asked Madame de Maine.

"Have the press taken to my house," said Pompadour.

"Or mine," said Valef.

"No, no," said Malezieux; "a press is too dangerous a means. One of the police may easily slip in among the workmen, and all will be lost. Besides, there cannot be much left to print."

"The greater part is done," said Laval.

"Well," continued Malezieux, "my advice is, as before, to employ some intelligent copyist, whose silence we can buy."

"Yes, this will be much safer," said Polignac.

"But where can we find such a man?" said the prince. "It is not a thing for which we can take the first comer."

"If I dared," said the Abbe Brigaud.

"Dare, abbe! dare!" said the duchess.

"I should say that I know the man you want."

“Did I not tell you,” said Pompadour, “that the abbe was a precious man?”

“But is he really what we want?” said Polignac.

“Oh, if your eminence had him made on purpose he could not do better,” said Brigaud. “A true machine, who will write everything and see nothing.”

“But as a still greater precaution,” said the prince, “we might put the most important papers into Spanish.”

“Then, prince,” said Brigaud, “I will send him to you.”

“No, no,” said Cellamare; “he must not set his foot within the Spanish embassy. It must be done through some third party.”

“Yes, yes, we will arrange all that,” said the duchess. “The man is found — that is the principal thing. You answer for him, Brigaud?”

“I do, madame.”

“That is all we require. And now there is nothing to keep us any longer,” continued the duchess. “Monsieur d’Harmental, give me your arm, I beg.”

The chevalier hastened to obey Madame de Maine, who seized this opportunity to express her gratitude for the courage he had shown in the Rue des Bons Enfants, and his skill in Brittany. At the door of the pavilion, the Greenland envoys — now dressed simply as guests — found a little galley waiting to take them to the shore. Madame de Maine entered first, seated D’Harmental by her, leaving Malezieux to do the honors to Cellamare and Richelieu. As the duchess had said, the Goddess of Night, dressed in black gauze spangled with golden stars, was waiting on the other side of the lake, accompanied by the twelve Hours; and, as the duchess approached, they began to sing a cantata appropriate to the subject. At the first notes of the solo D’Harmental started, for the voice of the singer had so strong a resemblance to another voice, well known to him and dear to his recollection, that he rose involuntarily to look for the person whose accents had so singularly moved him; unfortunately, in spite of the torches which the Hours, her subjects, held, he could not distinguish the goddess’s features, which were covered with a long veil, similar to her dress. He could only hear that pure, flexible, sonorous voice, and that easy and skillful execution, which he had so much admired when he heard it for the first time in the Rue du Temps-Perdu; and each accent of that voice, becoming more distinct as he approached the shore, made him tremble from head to foot. At length the solo ceased, and the chorus recommenced; but D’Harmental, insensible to all other thoughts, continued to follow the vanished notes.

“Well, Monsieur d’Harmental,” said the duchess, “are you so accessible to the charms of music that you forget that you are my cavalier?”

“Oh, pardon, madame,” said D’Harmental, leaping to the shore, and holding out his hand to the duchess, “but I thought I recognized that voice, and I confess it brought back such memories!”

“That proves that you are an habitué of the opera, my dear chevalier, and that you appreciate, as it deserves, Mademoiselle Berry’s talent.”

“What, is that voice Mademoiselle Berry’s?” asked D’Harmental, with astonishment.

“It is, monsieur; and if you do not believe me,” replied the duchess, “permit me to take Laval’s arm, that you may go and assure yourself of it.”

“Oh, madame,” said D’Harmental, respectfully retaining the hand she was about to withdraw, “pray excuse me. We are in the gardens of Armida, and a moment of error may be permitted among so many enchantments;” and, presenting his arm again to the duchess, he conducted her toward the chateau. At this instant a feeble cry was heard, and feeble as it was, it reached D’Harmental’s heart, and he turned involuntarily.

“What is it?” asked the duchess, with an uneasiness mixed with impatience.

“Nothing, nothing,” said Richelieu; “it is little Berry, who has the vapors. Make yourself easy, madame. I know the disease; it is not dangerous. If you particularly wish it, I would even go to-morrow to learn how she is.”

Two hours after this little accident — which was not sufficient to disturb the fete in any way — D’Harmental was brought back to Paris by the Abbe Brigaud, and re-entered his little attic in the Rue du Temps-Perdu, from which he had been absent six weeks.

CHAPTER XXIV.

JEALOUSY.

The first sensation D’Harmental experienced on returning was one of inexpressible satisfaction at finding himself again in that little room so filled with recollections. Though he had been absent six weeks, one might have supposed that he had only quitted it the day before, as, thanks to the almost maternal care of Madame Denis, everything was in its accustomed place. D’Harmental remained an instant, his candle in his hand, looking around him with a look almost of ecstasy. All the other impressions of his life were effaced by those which he had experienced in this little corner of the world. Then he ran to the window, opened it, and threw an indescribable look of love over the darkened windows of his neighbor. Doubtless Bathilde slept the sleep of an angel, unconscious that D’Harmental was there, trembling with love and hope.

He remained thus for more than half an hour, breathing the night air, which had never seemed to him so pure and fresh, and began to feel that Bathilde had become one of the necessities of his life; but as he could not pass the whole night at his window, he then closed it, and came into his room, although only to follow up the recollections with which it was filled. He opened his piano, and passed his fingers over the keys, at the risk of re-exacting the anger of the lodger on the third floor. From the piano he passed to the unfinished portrait of Bathilde. At length he slept, listening again in his mind to the air sung by Mademoiselle Berry, whom he finished by believing to be one and the same person as Bathilde. When he awoke, D’Harmental jumped from his bed and ran to the window. The day appeared already advanced; the sun was shining brilliantly; yet Bathilde’s window remain hermetically closed.

The chevalier looked at his watch; it was ten o’clock, and he began to dress. We have already confessed that he was not free from a certain almost feminine coquetry; but this was the fault of the time, when everything was mannered — even passion. At this time it was not a melancholy expression on which he reckoned. The joy of return had given to his face a charming expression of happiness, and it was evident that a glance from Bathilde would crown him king of the creation. This glance he came to the window to seek, but Bathilde's remained closed. D'Harmental opened his, hoping that the noise would attract her attention; nothing stirred. He remained there an hour: during this hour there was not even a breath of wind to stir the curtains: the young girl's room must be abandoned. He coughed, opened and closed the window, detached little pieces of plaster from the wall, and threw them against the window — all in vain.

To surprise succeeded uneasiness; this window, so obstinately closed, must indicate absence, if not misfortune. Bathilde absent! — where could she be? What had happened to disturb her calm, regular life? Who could he ask? No one but Madame Denis could know. It was quite natural that D'Harmental should pay a visit to his landlady on his return, and he accordingly went down. Madame Denis had not seen him since the day of the breakfast. She had not forgotten his attention when she fainted. She received him like the prodigal son. Fortunately for D'Harmental, the young ladies were occupied with a drawing lesson, and Boniface was at his office, so that he saw no one but his hostess. The conversation fell naturally on the order and neatness of his room during his absence; from this the transition was easy to the question if the opposite lodging had changed tenants. Madame Denis replied that she had seen Bathilde at the window the morning before; and that in the evening her son had met Buvat returning from his office, but had noticed in him a singular air of pride and hauteur. This was all D'Harmental wished to know. Bathilde was in Paris, and at home; chance had not yet directed her looks toward that window so long closed, and that room so long empty. He took leave of Madame Denis with an effusion of gratitude which she was far from attributing to its true cause; and on the landing he met the Abbe Brigaud, who was coming to pay his daily visit to Madame Denis.

The abbe asked if he was going home, and promised to pay him a visit. On entering his room D'Harmental went straight to the window. Nothing was changed; it was evidently a plan, and he resolved to employ the last means which he had reserved. He sat down to the piano, and after a brilliant prelude sang the air of the cantata of Night which he had heard the evening before, and of which he had retained every note in his memory. Meanwhile he did not lose sight for an instant of the inexorable window; but there was no sign. The opposite room had no echo.

But D’Harmental had produced an effect which he did not expect. Hearing applause, he turned round, and saw the Abbe Brigaud behind him.

“Ah! it is you, abbe?” said D’Harmental; “I did not know that you were so great a lover of music.”

“Nor you so good a musician. Peste! my dear pupil, an air you only heard once. It is wonderful.”

“I thought it very beautiful, abbe, and as I have a very good memory for sounds, I retained it.”

“And then it was so admirably sung. Was it not?”

“Yes,” said D’Harmental; “Mademoiselle Berry has an exquisite voice, and the first time she sings I shall go incognito to the opera.”

“Is it that voice you want to hear?” asked Brigaud. — — ”Yes.”

“Then you must not go to the opera for that.”

“And where must I go?”

“Nowhere. Stay here. You are in the boxes.”

“What! The Goddess of Night?”

“Is your neighbor.”

“Bathilde!” cried D’Harmental. “Then I was not deceived; I recognized her. But it is impossible! How could she have been there?”

“First of all,” said the abbe, “nothing is impossible; remember that, before you deny or undertake anything. Believe that everything is possible; it is the way to succeed in everything.”

“But Bathilde?”

“Yes, does it not appear strange at first? Well, nothing is more simple. But it does not interest you, chevalier; let us talk of something else.”

“Yes, yes, abbe; you are strangely mistaken — I am deeply interested.”

“Well, my dear pupil, since you are so curious, this is the whole affair. The Abbe Chaulieu knows Mademoiselle Bathilde; is not that your neighbor’s name?”

“Yes. How does the Abbe Chaulieu know her?”

“Oh! it is very simple. The guardian of this charming child is, as you know, or do not know, one of the best writers and copyists in the capital. The Abbe Chaulieu wants some one to copy his poetry, since, being blind, he is obliged to dictate in the first instance to a little lackey who cannot spell, and he has confided this important task to Buvat. By this means he has become acquainted with Mademoiselle Bathilde.”

"But all this does not explain how Mademoiselle Bathilde came to Sceaux."

"Stop; every history has its commencement, its middle, and its termination."

"Abbe, you will make me swear."

"Patience, patience."

"Go on; I listen to you."

"Well, having made Mademoiselle Bathilde's acquaintance, the Abbe Chaulieu, like the rest, has felt the influence of her charms, for there is a species of magic attached to the young person in question; no one can see her without loving her."

"I know it," murmured D'Harmental.

"Then, as Mademoiselle Bathilde is full of talent, and not only sings like a nightingale, but draws like an angel, Chaulieu spoke of her so enthusiastically to Mademoiselle de Launay that she thought of employing her for the costumes of the different personages in the fete."

"This does not tell me that it was Bathilde and not Mademoiselle Berry who sang lost night."

"We are coming to it."

"Well?"

"It happened that Mademoiselle de Launay, like the rest of the world, took a violent fancy to the little witch. Instead of sending her away after the costumes were finished, she kept her three days at Sceaux. She was still there the day before yesterday, closeted with Mademoiselle de Launay, when some one entered with a bewildered air to announce that the director of the opera wished to speak to her on a matter of importance. Mademoiselle de Launay went out, leaving Bathilde alone. Bathilde, to amuse herself, went to the piano and finding both the instrument and her voice in good order, began to sing a great scene from some opera, and with such perfection that Mademoiselle de Launay, returning and hearing this unexpected song, opened the door softly, listened to the air, and threw her arms round the beautiful singer's neck, crying out that she could save her life. Bathilde, astonished, asked how, and in what manner, she could render her so great a service. Then Mademoiselle de Launay told her how she had engaged Mademoiselle Berry of the opera to sing the cantata of Night on the succeeding evening, and she had fallen ill and sent to say that to her great regret her Royal Highness the Duchesse de Maine could not rely upon her, so that there would be no ‘Night,’ and, consequently, no fete, if Bathilde would not have the extreme goodness to undertake the aforesaid cantata.

“Bathilde, as you may suppose, defended herself with all her might, and declared that it was impossible that she should thus sing music which she did not know. Mademoiselle de Launay put the cantata before her. Bathilde said that the music seemed terribly difficult. Mademoiselle de Launay answered that for a musician of her powers nothing was difficult. Bathilde got up. Mademoiselle de Launay made her sit down again. Bathilde clasped her hands. Mademoiselle de Launay unclasped them and placed them on the piano. The piano being touched gave out a sound. Bathilde, in spite of herself, played the first bar; then the second; then the whole cantata. Then she attacked the song, and sang it to the end with an admirable justness of intonation and beauty of expression. Mademoiselle de Launay was enchanted. Madame de Maine arrived in despair at what she had heard of Mademoiselle Berry. Mademoiselle de Launay begged Bathilde to recommence the cantata. Bathilde did not dare to refuse; she played and sang like an angel. Madame de Maine joined her prayers to those of Mademoiselle de Launay. You know, chevalier, that it is impossible to refuse Madame de Maine anything.

“Poor Bathilde was obliged to give way, and half laughing, half crying, she consented, on two conditions. The first, that she might go herself to her friend Buvat to explain her absence; the second, that she might remain at home all that evening and the next morning in order to study the unfortunate cantata. These clauses, after a long discussion, were granted, with reciprocal promises, on Bathilde’s part that she would return at seven o’clock the next evening, on the part of Mademoiselle de Launay and Madame de Maine that every one should continue to believe that it was Mademoiselle Berry who sung.”

“But then,” asked D’Harmental, “how was the secret betrayed?”

“Oh! by an unforeseen circumstance,” replied Brigaud, in that strange manner which caused one to doubt if he was in jest or earnest. “All went off capitally, as you know, till the end of the cantata, and the proof is, that having only heard it once, you are able to remember it from one end to the other. At the moment the galley which brought us from the pavilion of Aurora touched the shore, whether from emotion at having sung for the first time in public, or that she recognized among Madame de Maine’s suite some one she had not expected to see there, for some unknown reason, however, the poor Goddess of Night uttered a cry and fainted in the arms of the Hours, her companions. All promises and oaths were at once forgotten; her veil was removed to throw water in her face, so that when I came up, while you were going away with her highness, I was much astonished to find, instead of Mademoiselle Berry, your pretty neighbor. I questioned Mademoiselle de Launay, and as it was impossible any longer to keep the incognito, she told me what had passed, under the seal of secrecy, which I have betrayed for you only, my dear pupil, because, I do not know why, I can refuse you nothing."

"And this indisposition?" asked D'Harmental with uneasiness.

"Oh! it was nothing; a mere momentary emotion which had no bad consequences, since, in spite of all they could say to the contrary, Bathilde would not remain another hour at Sceaux, but insisted on returning, so that they put a carriage at her disposal, and she ought to have been home an hour before us."

"Then you are sure she is at home? Thanks, abbe, that is all I wished to know."

"And now," said Brigaud, "I may go, may I not? You have no more need of me, now that you know all you wish to know."

"I do not say so, my dear Brigaud; on the contrary, stop, you will give me great pleasure."

"No, I thank you; I have got some business of my own to transact in the town, and will leave you to your reflections, my dear pupil."

"When shall I see you again?" asked D'Harmental, mechanically.

"Most likely to-morrow," answered the abbe.

"Adieu till to-morrow, then."

"Till to-morrow."

So saying, the abbe turned round, laughing his peculiar laugh, and reached the door while D'Harmental was reopening his window, determined to remain there till the next day, if necessary, and only desiring, as a reward for this long watch, to catch a single glimpse of Bathilde.

The poor gentleman was in love over head and ears.

CHAPTER XXV.

A PRETEXT.

At a few minutes past four D’Harmental saw Buvat turning the corner of the Rue du Temps-Perdu. The chevalier thought he could recognize in the worthy writer an air of greater haste than usual, and instead of holding his stick perpendicularly, as a bourgeois always does when he is walking, he held it horizontally, like a runner. As to that air of majesty which had so struck Monsieur Boniface, it had entirely vanished, and had given place to a slight expression of uneasiness. He could not be mistaken. Buvat would not return so quickly if he was not uneasy about Bathilde. Bathilde, then, was suffering.

The chevalier followed Buvat with his eyes till the moment when he disappeared in his own door. D’Harmental, with reason, imagined that Buvat would go into Bathilde’s room, instead of mounting to his own, and he hoped that Buvat would open the window to admit the last rays of the sun, which had been caressing it all day.

But D’Harmental was wrong; Buvat contented himself with raising the curtain, and pressing his good round face against the window, and drumming on the panes with his hands; but even this apparition was of short duration, for he turned round suddenly, as a man does when any one calls him, and let fall the muslin curtain behind him and disappeared. D’Harmental presumed that his disappearance was caused by some appeal to his appetite, and this reminded him, that in his preoccupation about the obstinacy of that unlucky window in refusing to open, he had forgotten his own breakfast, which, it must be confessed, to the shame of his sensibility, was a very great infraction on his habits. Now, however, as there was no chance that the window would open while his neighbors were at dinner, the chevalier determined to profit by the interval by dining himself; consequently he rang for the porter, and ordered him to get from the confectioner the fattest pullet, and from the fruiterer the finest fruit that he could find. As to wine, he had still got some bottles of that which the Abbe Brigaud had sent him.

D’Harmental ate with a certain remorse. He could not understand how he could be at the same time so tormented, and have such a good appetite. Luckily he remembered reading in the works of some moralist or other that sorrow sharpened hunger wonderfully. This maxim set his conscience at rest, and the result was, that the unfortunate pullet was eaten up to the very bones.

Although the act of dining was very natural, and by no means reprehensible, D’Harmental shut the window, leaving, however, a corner of the curtain raised; and, thanks to this precaution, he saw Buvat — who had doubtless finished his repast — appear at the window of his terrace. As we have said, the weather was splendid, and Buvat seemed disposed to profit by it; but as he belonged to that class of beings who enjoy nothing alone, he turned round, with a gesture, which D’Harmental took to be an invitation to Bathilde — who had doubtless followed him into his room — to come on to the terrace to him; consequently he hoped for an instant that Bathilde would appear, and he rose with a beating heart; but he was mistaken. However tempting might be the beautiful evening, and however pressing the invitations of Buvat, both were useless; but it was not thus with Mirza, who, jumping out of the window without being invited, began to bound joyously about the terrace, holding in her mouth a purple ribbon, which she caused to flutter like a streamer, and which D’Harmental recognized as the one which had fastened his neighbor’s veil on the preceding night. Apparently, Buvat recognized it also, for he started off in pursuit of Mirza as fast as his little legs would allow him; a pursuit which would doubtless have been indefinitely prolonged, if Mirza had not had the imprudence to take refuge in the arbor. Buvat pursued, and an instant afterward D’Harmental saw him return with the ribbon in his hand, and after smoothing it on his knee, he folded it up, and went in, probably to deposit it in a place of safety.

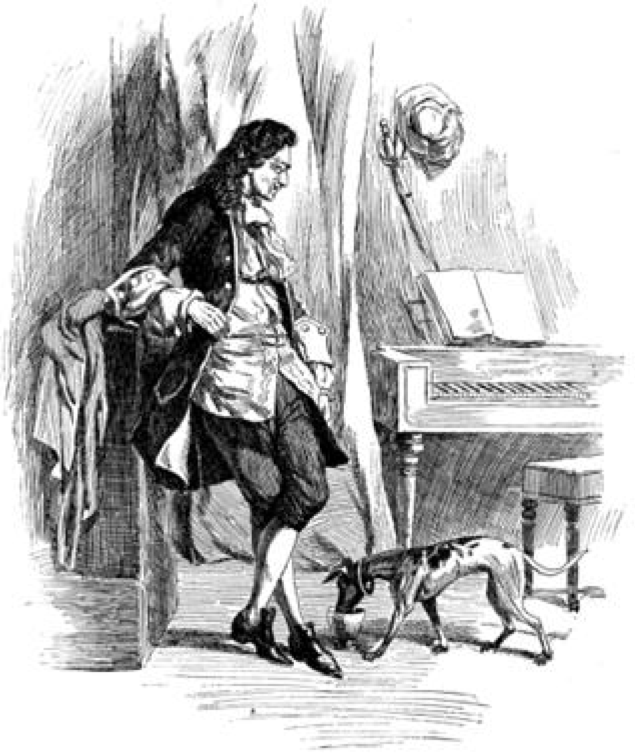

This was the moment that the chevalier had waited for; he opened his window and watched. In a minute he saw Mirza put her head out of the arbor, look about her, and jump on to the terrace; then D’Harmental called her in the most caressing and seductive tone possible. Mirza trembled at the sound of his voice, then directed her eyes toward him. At the first look she recognized the man of the bits of sugar — gave a little growl of joy — then, with a rapid gastronomic instinct, she darted through Buvat’s window with a single bound, and disappeared.

D’Harmental lowered his head, and, almost at the same instant, saw Mirza coming across the street like a flash of lightning; and before he had time to shut his window, she was already scratching at the door. Luckily for D’Harmental, Mirza had the memory of sugar as strongly developed as he had that of sounds.

It will be easily understood that the chevalier did not make the charming little creature wait; and she darted into the room, bounding, and giving the most unequivocal signs of her joy at his unexpected return. As to D’Harmental, he was almost as happy as if he had seen Bathilde. Mirza was something to the young girl; she was her dearly loved greyhound, so caressed and kissed by her — who laid his head on her knees during the day, and slept on the foot of her bed during the night. The chevalier set

Mirza to eat sugar, and sat down; and letting his heart speak, and his pen flow, wrote the following letter:

"Dearest Bathilde — You believe me very guilty, do you not? But you cannot know the strange circumstances in which I find myself, and which are my excuse; if I could be happy enough to see you for an instant — even for an instant — you would understand that there are in me two different persons — the young student of the attic, and the gentleman of the fetes at Sceaux. Open your window then, so that I may see you — or your door, so that I may speak to you. Let me come and sue for your pardon on my knees. I am certain that when you know how unfortunate I am, and how devotedly I love you, you will have pity on me.

"Adieu, once more; I love you more than I can express! — more than you can believe — more than you can ever imagine.

"Raoul."

This billet, which would have appeared very cold to a woman of these days, because it only said just what the writer intended, seemed sufficient to the chevalier, and was really impassioned for the epoch; thus D'Harmental folded it up, and attached it, as he had the first, to Mirza's collar; then, taking up the sugar, which the greedy little animal followed with her eyes to the cupboard, where D'Harmental shut it up, the chevalier opened the door of his room, and showed Mirza, with a gesture, what there remained for her to do. Whether it was pride or intelligence, the little creature did not wait to be told twice; darted out on the staircase as if she had wings, and only stopped on the way to bite Monsieur Boniface, whom she met coming home from his office; crossed the road, and disappeared in Bathilde's house. D'Harmental remained at the window for a minute, fearing that Mirza would take his note to Buvat instead of Bathilde, but she was too intelligent for that, and he soon saw her appear in Bathilde's room. Consequently, in order not to frighten poor Bathilde too much, he shut his window, hoping that by this concession he should obtain some sign, which would indicate to him that he was pardoned.

But it did not turn out so. D'Harmental waited in vain all the evening, and a great part of the night. At eleven o'clock, the light scarcely seen through the double curtains, still hermetically closed, went out altogether, and D'Harmental was obliged to renounce the hope of seeing Bathilde till the next day.

The next day brought the same rigor; it was a settled plan of defense, which, with a man less in love than D’Harmental, would simply have indicated fear of defeat; but the chevalier, with a simplicity worthy of the age of gold, saw nothing but a coldness, in the eternity of which he began to believe, and it is true that it had lasted four and twenty hours.

D’Harmental passed the morning in turning in his mind a thousand projects, each more absurd than the preceding one. The only one which had common sense was to cross the street, mount boldly to Bathilde’s room, and tell her everything. It came to his mind like all the rest; and as it was the only reasonable one, D’Harmental did well to stop at it. However, it would be a great boldness to present himself thus before Bathilde, without being authorized by the least sign, and without having any pretext to give. Such a course of conduct could but wound Bathilde, who was only too much irritated already; it was better to wait then, and D’Harmental waited. At two o’clock Brigaud returned, and found D’Harmental in a very savage state of mind. The abbe threw a glance toward the window, still hermetically closed, and divined everything. He took a chair, and sat down opposite D’Harmental, twisting his thumbs round one another, as he saw the chevalier doing.

“My dear pupil,” said he, after an instant’s silence, “either I am a bad physiognomist, or I read on your face that something profoundly sad has happened to you.”

“And you read right, my dear abbe,” said the chevalier; “I am ennuied.”

“Ah, indeed!”

“So much so,” said D’Harmental, “that I am ready to send your conspiracy to the devil.”

“Oh, chevalier, one must not throw the helve after the hatchet! What! send the conspiracy to the devil, when it is going on wheels! Nonsense; and what will the others say?”

“Oh, you are charming, you and your others. The others, my dear abbe, have society, balls, the opera, duels, mistresses, amusements in fact, and they are not shut up like me in a nasty garret.”

“Yes; but the piano, the drawing?”

“Even with this, it is not amusing.”

“Ah, it is not amusing when one sings or draws alone; but when one sings or draws in company, it begins to do better.”

“And with whom, in the devil’s name, should I sing or draw?”

"In the first place there are the Demoiselles Denis."

"Oh, yes, they sing beautifully and draw well, do they not?"

"Mon Dieu! I do not propose them to you as virtuosos and artists; they have not the talents of your neighbor. But, by-the-by, there is your neighbor."

"Well, my neighbor?"

"Why do you not sing with her, since she sings so well? That will amuse you."

"Do I know her? Does she even open her window? Look, since yesterday she has barricaded herself in her own room. Ah, yes, my neighbor is amiable."

"Yes, they told me that she was charming."

"Besides, it seems to me, that both singing in our own rooms, we should have a singular duet."

"Then go to her room."

"To her room! Have I been introduced to her? Do I know her?"

"Well, make a pretext."

"I have been searching for one since yesterday."

"And you have not found one, a man of imagination like you? My dear pupil, I do not recognize you there."

"Listen, abbe! A truce to your pleasantries — I am not in the humor for them to-day: every one has his stupid days."

"Well, on those days one addresses one's self to one's friends."

"To one's friends — and what for?"

"To find the pretext which one has sought for vainly one's self."

"Well, then, abbe, you are my friend; find the pretext; I wait for it."

"Nothing is easier."

"Really!"

"Do you want it?"

"Take care what you engage to do."

"I engage to open your neighbor's door to you."

"In a proper manner?"

"How! do I know any others?"

"Abbe, I will strangle you if your pretext is bad."

"But it is good."

"Then you are an adorable man."

“You remember what the Comte de Laval said about the descent which the police have made upon the house in the Val-de-Grace, and the necessity he was under of sending away his workmen and burying his press?”

“Perfectly.”

“You remember the determination which was come to in consequence?”

“To employ a copyist.”

“Finally, you remember that I undertook to find that copyist?”

“I do.”

“Well, this copyist on whom I had cast my eyes, this honest man whom I promised to discover, is discovered, and is no other than the guardian of Bathilde.”

“Buvat?”

“Himself! Well, I give you full powers, you go to his house, you offer him gold, the door is opened to you on the instant, and you can sing as much as you like with Bathilde.”

“My dear abbe,” cried D’Harmental, “you have saved my life!”

D’Harmental took his hat, and darted toward the door; now that he had a pretext he doubted of nothing.

“Stop, stop,” said Brigaud; “you do not even ask me where the good man must go for the papers in question.”

“To your house, pardieu!”

“Certainly not, young man, certainly not.”

“Where then?”

“At the Prince de Listhnay’s, Rue du Bac, 110.”

“The Prince de Listhnay! And who is he?”

“One of our own making — D’Avranches, the valet-de-chambre to Madame de Maine.”

“And you think that he will play his part well?”

“Not for you, perhaps, who are accustomed to see princes, but for Buvat.”

“You are right. Au revoir, abbe!”

“You find the pretext good?”

“Capital.”

“Go, then, and good luck go with you.”

D’Harmental descended the stairs four at a time; then, having arrived at the middle of the street, and seeing the abbe watching him from the window, he made a parting sign to him with his hand, and disappeared through the door of Bathilde’s house.

CHAPTER XXVI.

COUNTERPLOTS.

On her part, as may be easily understood, Bathilde had not made such an effort without suffering from it; the poor child loved D'Harmental with all the strength of a love at seventeen, a first love. During the first month of his absence she had counted the days; during the fifth week she had counted the hours; during the last week she had counted the minutes. Then it was that the Abbe Chaulieu fetched her, to take her to Mademoiselle de Launay; and as he had taken care, not only to speak of her talents, but also to tell who she was, Bathilde was received with all the consideration which was due to her, and which poor De Launay paid all the more readily from its having been so long forgotten toward herself.

This removal, which had rendered Buvat so proud, was received by Bathilde as an amusement, which might help her to pass these last moments of suspense; but when she found that Mademoiselle de Launay wished to retain her longer, when, according to her calculation, Raoul would return, she cursed the instant when the abbe had taken her to Sceaux, and would certainly have refused, if Madame de Maine herself had not interposed. It was impossible to refuse a person who, according to the ideas of the time, from the supremacy of her rank, had almost a right to command this service; but as she would have reproached herself eternally if Raoul had returned in her absence, and in returning had found her window closed, she had, as we have seen, insisted on returning to study the cantata, and to explain to Buvat what had passed. Poor Bathilde! she had invented two false pretexts, to hide, under a double veil, the true motive of her return.

If Buvat had been proud when Bathilde was employed to draw the costumes for the fete, he was doubly so when he found that she was destined to play a part in it. Buvat had constantly dreamed of Bathilde's return to fortune, and to that social position of which her parents' death had deprived her, and all that brought her among the world in which she was born appeared to him a step toward this inevitable and happy result. However, the three days which he had passed without seeing her appeared to him like three centuries. At the office it was not so bad, though every one could see that some extraordinary event had happened; but it was when he came home that poor Buvat found himself so miserable.

The first day he could not eat, when he sat down to that table where, for thirteen years, he had been accustomed to see Bathilde sitting opposite to him. The next day, when Nanette reproached him, and told him that he was injuring his health, he made an effort to eat; but he had hardly finished his meal when he felt as if he had been swallowing lead, and was obliged to have recourse to the most powerful digestives to help down this unfortunate dinner. The third day Buvat did not sit down to table at all, and Nanette had the greatest trouble to persuade him to take some broth, into which she declared she saw two great tears fall. In the evening Bathilde returned, and brought back his sleep and his appetite.

Buvat, who for three nights had hardly slept, and for three days had hardly eaten, now slept like a top and ate like an ogre. Bathilde also was very joyous; she calculated that this must be the last day of Raoul's absence. He had said he should be away six weeks. She had already counted forty-one long days, and Bathilde would not admit that there could be an instant's delay; thus the next day she watched her neighbor's window constantly while studying the cantata. Carriages were rare in the Rue du Temps-Perdu, but it happened that three passed between ten and four; each time she ran breathless to the window, and each time was disappointed. At four o'clock Buvat returned, and this time it was Bathilde who could not swallow a single morsel. The time to set out for Sceaux at length arrived, and Bathilde set out deploring the fate which prevented her following her watch through the night.

When she arrived at Sceaux, however, the lights, the noise, the music, and above all the excitement of singing for the first time in public, made her — for the time — almost forget Raoul. Now and then the idea crossed her mind that he might return during her absence, and finding her window closed, would think her indifferent; but then she remembered that Mademoiselle de Launay had promised her that she should be home before daylight, and she determined that Raoul should see her standing at her window directly he opened his — then she would explain to him how she had been obliged to be absent that evening, she would allow him to suspect what she had suffered, and he would be so happy that he would forgive her.

All this passed through Bathilde's mind while waiting for Madame de Maine on the border of the lake, and it was in the midst of the discourse she was preparing for Raoul that the approach of the little galley surprised her. At first — in her fear of singing before such a great company — she thought her voice would fail, but she was too good an artiste not to be encouraged by the admirable instrumentation which supported her. She resolved not to allow herself to be intimidated, and abandoning herself to the inspiration of the music and the scene, she went through her part with such perfection that every one continued to take her for the singer whom she replaced, although that singer was the first at the opera, and was supposed to have no rival. But Bathilde's astonishment was great, when, after the solo was finished, she looked toward the group which was approaching her, and saw, seated by Madame de Maine, a young cavalier, so much like Raoul, that, if this apparition had presented itself to her in the midst of the song, her voice must have failed her. For an instant she doubted; but as the galley touched the shore she could do so no longer. Two such likenesses could not exist — even between brothers; and it was certain that the young cavalier of Sceaux and the young student of the attic were one and the same person.

This was not, however, what wounded Bathilde; the rank which Raoul appeared to hold, instead of removing him from the daughter of Albert du Rocher, only brought him nearer to her, and she had recognized in him, at first sight, as he had in her, the marks of high birth. What wounded her — as a betrayal of her good faith and an insult to her love — was this pretended absence, during which Raoul, forgetting the Rue du Temps-Perdu, had left his little room solitary, to mix in the fetes at Sceaux. Thus Raoul had had but an instant's caprice for her, sufficient to induce him to pass a week or two in an attic, but he had soon got tired of this life: then he had invented the pretext of a journey, declaring that it was a misfortune; but none of this was true. Raoul had never quitted Paris — or, if he had, his first visit had not been to the Rue du Temps-Perdu.

When Raoul touched the shore, and she found herself only four steps from him, and saw him whom she had supposed to be a young provincial offering his arm, in that elegant and easy manner, to the proud Madame de Maine herself, her strength abandoned her, and with that cry which had gone to D'Harmental's heart, she fainted. On opening her eyes she found near her Mademoiselle de Launay, who lavished on her every possible attention. She wished that instead of returning to Paris Bathilde should remain at Sceaux, but she was in haste to leave this place where she had suffered so much, and begged, with an accent that could not be refused, to be allowed to return, and as a carriage was in readiness to take her, she went directly. On arriving, Bathilde found Nanette waiting for her; Buvat also had wished to do so, but by twelve o'clock he was so sleepy that it was in vain he rubbed his eyes, and tried to sing his favorite song; he could not keep awake, and at length he went to bed, telling Nanette to let him know the next morning as soon as Bathilde was visible.

Bathilde was delighted to find Nanette alone; Buvat's presence would have been very irksome to her, but as soon as she found that there was no one but Nanette, Bathilde burst into tears. Nanette had expected to see her young mistress return proud and joyous at the triumph which she could not fail to obtain, and was distressed to see her in this state, but to all her questions Bathilde replied that it was nothing, absolutely nothing. Nanette saw that it was no use to insist, and went to her room, which was next to Bathilde's, but could not resist the impulse of curiosity, and looking through the key-hole, she saw her young mistress kneel down before her little crucifix, and then, as by a sudden impulse, run to the window, open it, and look opposite. Nanette doubted no longer, Bathilde's grief was somehow connected with her love, and it was caused by the young man who lived opposite. Nanette was more easy; women pity these griefs, but they also know that they may come to a good end. Nanette went to sleep much more easy than if she had not been able to find out the cause of Bathilde's tears.

Bathilde slept badly; the first griefs and the first joys of love have the same results. She woke therefore with sunken eyes and pale cheeks. Bathilde would have dispensed with seeing Buvat, but he had already asked for her twice, so she took courage, and went smiling to speak to him. Buvat, however, was not deceived; he could not fail to notice her pale cheeks, and Bathilde's grief was revealed to him. She denied that there was anything the matter. Buvat pretended to believe her, but went to the office very uneasy and anxious to know what could have happened to her.

When he was gone, Nanette approached Bathilde, who was sitting in her chair with her head leaning on her hand, and stood an instant before her, contemplating her with an almost maternal love; then, finding that Bathilde did not speak, she herself broke silence.

"Are you suffering still, mademoiselle?" said she.

"Yes, my good Nanette."

"If you would open the window, I think it would do you good."

"Oh! no, Nanette, thank you, the window must remain closed."

"You do not know perhaps, mademoiselle?"

"Yes, yes, Nanette, I know."

"That the young man opposite returned this morning — "

"Well, Nanette?" said Bathilde, raising her head and looking at her with severity, "what is that to me?"

"Pardon, mademoiselle," said Nanette, "but I thought — "

"What did you think?"

"That you regretted his absence, and would be glad of his return."

"You were wrong."

"Pardon, mademoiselle, but he appears so distinguished."

"Too much so, Nanette; a great deal too much so for poor Bathilde."

"Too distinguished for you, Mademoiselle!" cried Nanette, "as if you were not worth all the noblemen in the world! besides, you are noble!"

"I know what I appear to be, Nanette — that is to say, a poor girl, with whose peace, honor, and love, every nobleman thinks he may play with impunity. You see, Nanette, that this window must be closed. I must not see this young man again."

"Mon Dieu! Mademoiselle Bathilde, you wish then to kill this poor young man with grief? This whole morning he has not moved from his window, and looks so sad that it is enough to break one's heart."

"What does his looking sad matter to me? What has he to do with me? I do not know him. I do not even know his name. He is a stranger, who has come here to stay for a few days, and who to-morrow may go away again. If I had thought anything of him I should have been wrong, Nanette; and, instead of encouraging me in a love which would be folly, you ought, on the contrary — supposing that it existed — to show me the absurdity and the danger of it."

"Mon Dieu! mademoiselle, why so? you must love some day, and you may as well love a handsome young man who looks like a king, and who must be rich, since he does not do anything."

"Well, Nanette, what would you say if this young man who appears to you so simple, so loyal, and so good, were nothing but a wicked traitor, a liar!"

"Ah, mon Dieu! mademoiselle, I should say it was impossible."

“If I told you that this young man who lives in an attic, and who shows himself at the window dressed so simply, was yesterday at Sceaux, giving his arm to Madame de Maine, dressed as a colonel?”

“I should say, mademoiselle, that at last God is just in sending you some one worthy of you. Holy Virgin! a colonel! a friend of the Duchesse de Maine! Oh, Mademoiselle Bathilde, you will be a countess, I tell you! and it is not too much for you. If Providence gave every one what they deserve, you would be a duchess, a princess, a queen, yes, queen of France; Madame de Maintenon was — ”

“I would not be like her, Nanette.”

“I do not say like her; besides, it is not the king you love, mademoiselle.”

“I do not love any one, Nanette.”

“I am too polite to contradict you; but never mind, you are ill; and the first remedy for a young person who is ill, is air and sun. Look at the poor flowers, when they are shut up, they turn pale. Let me open the window, mademoiselle.”

“Nanette, I forbid you; go to your work and leave me.”

“Very well, mademoiselle, I will go, since you drive me away,” said Nanette, lifting the corner of her apron to her eye; “but if I were in that young man’s place I know very well what I would do.”

“And what would you do?”

“I would come and explain myself, and I am sure that even if he were wrong you would excuse him.”

“Nanette,” said Bathilde, “if he comes, I forbid you to admit him; do you hear?”

“Very well, mademoiselle; he shall not be admitted, though it is not very polite to turn people away from the door.”

“Polite or not, you will do as I tell you,” said Bathilde, to whom contradiction gave strength; “and now go. I wish to be alone.”

Nanette went out.

When she was alone, Bathilde burst into tears, for her strength was but pride. She believed herself the most unfortunate woman in the world, as D’Harmental thought himself the most unfortunate man. At four o’clock Buvat returned. Bathilde, seeing the traces of uneasiness on his good-natured face, tried all she could to tranquilize him. She smiled, she joked, she kept him company at table; but all was in vain. After dinner he proposed to Bathilde, as an amusement which nothing could resist — to take a walk on the terrace. Bathilde, thinking that if she refused Buvat would remain with her, accepted, and went up with him into his room, but when there, she remembered that she must write a letter of thanks to the Abbe Chaulieu, for his kindness in presenting her to Madame de Maine; and, leaving her guardian with Mirza, she went down. Shortly after she heard Mirza scratching at the door, and went to open it. Mirza entered with such demonstrations of joy that Bathilde understood that something extraordinary must have happened, but on looking attentively she saw the letter tied to her collar. As this was the second she had brought, Bathilde had no difficulty in guessing the writer. The temptation was too strong to be resisted, so she detached the paper with one hand, which trembled as she remembered that it probably contained the destiny of her life, while with the other she caressed Mirza, who, standing on her hind legs, appeared delighted to become so important a personage. Bathilde opened the letter, and looked at it twice without being able to decipher a single line. There was a mist before her eyes.

The letter, while it said a great deal, did not say quite enough. It protested innocence and asked for pardon; it spoke of strange circumstances requiring secrecy; but, above all, it said that the writer was madly in love. The result was, that, without completely reassuring her, it yet did her good. Bathilde, however, with a remnant of pride, determined not to relent till the next day. Since Raoul confessed himself guilty, he should be punished. Bathilde did not remember that half of this punishment recoiled upon herself. The effect of the letter, incomplete as it was, was such that when Buvat returned from the terrace he thought Bathilde looked infinitely better, and began to believe what she herself had told him in the morning, that her agitation was only caused by the emotion of the day before. Buvat went to his own room at eight o’clock, leaving Bathilde free to retire at any hour she liked, but she had not the least inclination to sleep; for a long time she watched, contented and happy, for she knew that her neighbor’s window was open, and by this she guessed his anxiety. Bathilde at length dreamed that Raoul was at her feet, and that he gave her such good reasons that it was she, in her turn, who asked for pardon.

Thus in the morning she awoke convinced that she had been dreadfully severe, and wondering how she could have had the courage to do so. It followed that her first movement was to run to the window and open it; but perceiving, through an almost imperceptible opening, the young man at his window, she stopped short. Would not this be too complete an avowal? It would be better to wait for Nanette; she would open the window naturally, and in this way her neighbor would not be so able to pride himself on his conquest. Nanette arrived, but she had been too much scolded the day before about this window to risk a second representation of the same scene. She took the greatest pains to avoid even touching the curtains. Bathilde was ready to cry. Buvat came down as usual to take his coffee with Bathilde, and she hoped that he at least would ask why she kept herself so shut up, and give her an opportunity to open the window. Buvat, however, had received a new order for the classification of some manuscripts, and was so preoccupied, that he finished his coffee and left the room without once remarking that the curtains were closed.

For the first time Bathilde felt almost angry with him, and thought he must have paid her very little attention not to discover that she must be half-stifled in such a close room. What was she to do? Tell Nanette to open the window? She would not do it. Open it herself she could not. She must then wait; but till when? Till the next day, or the day after perhaps, and what would Raoul think? Would he not become impatient at this exaggerated severity? Suppose he should again leave for a fortnight, for a month, for six weeks — forever; Bathilde would die, she could not live without Raoul. Two hours passed thus; Bathilde tried everything, her embroidery, her harpsichord, her drawing, but she could do nothing. Nanette came in — a slight hope returned to her, but it was only to ask leave to go out. Bathilde signed to her that she could go. Nanette was going to the Faubourg St. Antoine; she would be away two hours. What was she to do during these two hours? It would have been so delightful to pass them at the window.

Bathilde sat down and drew out the letter; she knew it by heart, but yet she read it again. It was so tender, so passionate, so evidently from the heart. Oh! if she could receive a second letter. This was an idea; she looked at Mirza, the graceful little messenger; she took her in her arms, and then, trembling as if she were about to commit a crime, she went to open the outer door. A young man was standing before this door, reaching out his hand toward the bell. Bathilde uttered a cry of joy, and the young man a cry of love — it was Raoul.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SEVENTH HEAVEN.

Bathilde made some steps backward, for she had nearly fallen into Raoul's arms. Raoul, having shut the door, followed Bathilde into the room. Their two names, exchanged in a double cry, escaped their lips. Their hands met in an electric clasp, and all was forgotten. These two, who had so much to say to each other, yet remained for a long time silent; at length Bathilde exclaimed —

"Oh, Raoul, how I have suffered!"

"And I," said D'Harmental, "who have appeared to you guilty, and am yet innocent!"

"Innocent!" cried Bathilde, to whom, by a natural reaction, all her doubts returned.

"Yes, innocent," replied the chevalier.

And then he told Bathilde all of his life that he dared to tell her — his duel with Lafare; how he had, after that, hidden in the Rue du Temps-Perdu; how he had seen Bathilde, and loved her; his astonishment at discovering successively in her the elegant woman, the skillful painter, the accomplished musician; his joy when he began to think that she was not indifferent to him; then he told her how he had received, as colonel of carabineers, the order to go to Brittany, and on his return was obliged to render an account of his mission to the Duchesse de Maine before returning to Paris. He had gone directly to Sceaux, expecting only to leave his dispatches in passing, when he had found himself in the midst of the fete, in which he had been obliged unwillingly to take a part. This recital was finished by expressions of regret, and such protestations of fidelity and love that Bathilde almost forgot the beginning of his discourse in listening to the end.

It was now her turn. She also had a long history to tell D'Harmental; it was the history of her life. With a certain pride in proving to her lover that she was worthy of him, she showed herself as a child with her father and mother, then an orphan and abandoned; then appeared Buvat with his plain face and his sublime heart, and she told all his kindness, all his love to his pupil; she passed in review her careless childhood, and her pensive youth; then she arrived at the time when she first saw D'Harmental, and here she stopped and smiled, for she felt that he had nothing more to learn. Yet D'Harmental insisted on hearing it all from her own lips, and would not spare her a single detail. Two hours passed thus like two seconds, and they were still there when some one rang at the door. Bathilde looked at the clock which was in the corner of the room; it was six minutes past four; there was no mistake, it was Buvat. Bathilde's first movement was one of fear, but Raoul reassured her, smiling, for he had the pretext with which the Abbe Brigaud had furnished him. The two lovers exchanged a last grasp of the hand, then Bathilde went to open the door to her guardian, who, as usual, kissed her on the forehead, then, on entering the room, perceived D'Harmental. Buvat was astonished; he had never before found any man with his pupil. Buvat fixed on him his astonished eyes and waited; he fancied he had seen the young man before. D'Harmental advanced toward him with that ease of which people of a certain class have not even an idea.

"It is to Monsieur Buvat," he said, "that I have the honor of speaking?"

"To myself, sir," said Buvat, starting at the sound of a voice which he thought he recognized; "but the honor is on my side."

"You know the Abbe Brigaud?" continued D'Harmental.

"Yes, perfectly, monsieur — the — that — the — of Madame Denis, is he not?"

"Yes," replied D'Harmental, smiling; "the confessor to Madame Denis."

"Yes, I know him. A clever man."

"Did you not once apply to him to get some copies to make?"

"Yes, monsieur, for I am a copyist, at your service."

"Well," said D'Harmental, "this dear Abbe Brigaud, who is my guardian (that you may know who you are speaking to), has found an excellent customer for you."

"Ah! truly; pray take a seat, monsieur."

"Thank you."

"And who is the customer?"

"The Prince de Listhnay, Rue du Bac, 110."

"A prince, monsieur, a prince!"

"Yes; a Spaniard, who is in correspondence with the 'Madrid Mercury,' and sends all the news from Paris."

“Oh! that is a great honor.”

“It will give you some trouble, however, for all the dispatches are in Spanish.”

“Diable!” said Buvat.

“Do you know Spanish?” asked D’Harmental.

“No, monsieur; I do not think so, at least.”

“Never mind,” continued the chevalier, smiling; “one need not know a language to copy it.”

“I could copy Chinese, monsieur; caligraphy, like drawing, is an imitative art.”

“And I know that in this respect, Monsieur Buvat,” replied D’Harmental, “you are a great artist.”

”Monsieur,” said Buvat, “you embarrass me. May I ask, without indiscretion, at what time I shall find his highness?”

“What highness?”

“His highness the prince — I do not remember the name you said,” replied Buvat.

“Ah! the Prince de Listhnay.”

“Himself.”

“He is not highness, my dear Monsieur Buvat.”

“Oh! I thought all princes — ”

“This is only a prince of the third order, and he will be quite satisfied if you call him monseigneur.”

“You think so?”

“I am sure of it.”

“And when shall I find him?”

“After your dinner; from five to half-past five. You remember the address?”

“Yes; Rue du Bac, 110. I will be there, monsieur.”

“Now,” said D’Harmental, “au revoir! And you, mademoiselle,” said he, turning to Bathilde, “receive my thanks for your kindness in keeping me company while I waited for M. Buvat — a kindness for which I shall be eternally grateful.”

And D’Harmental took his leave, while Bathilde remained astonished at his ease and assurance in such a situation.

“This young man is really very amiable,” said Buvat.

“Yes, very,” said Bathilde, mechanically.

"But it is an extraordinary thing; I think I have seen him before."

"It is possible," said Bathilde.

"And his voice — I am sure I know his voice."

Bathilde started; for she remembered the evening when Buvat had returned frightened from the adventure in the Rue des Bons Enfants, and D'Harmental had not spoken of that adventure. At this moment Nanette entered, announcing dinner. Buvat instantly went into the other room.

"Well, mademoiselle," said Nanette softly, "the handsome young man came, then, after all?"

"Yes, Nanette, yes," answered Bathilde, raising her eyes to heaven with an expression of infinite gratitude, "and I am very happy."

She passed in to the dining-room, where Buvat, who had put down his hat and stick on a chair, was waiting for her, and slapping his thighs with his hands, as was his custom in his moments of extreme satisfaction.

As to D'Harmental, he was no less happy than Bathilde; he was loved — he was sure of it; Bathilde had told him so, with the same pleasure she had felt on hearing him make the same declaration. He was loved; not by a poor orphan, not by a little grisette, but by a young girl of rank, whose father and mother had occupied an honorable position at court. There were, then, no obstacles to their union, there was no social interval between them. It is true that D'Harmental forgot the conspiracy, which might at any time open an abyss under his feet and engulf him. Bathilde had no doubts for the future; and when Buvat, after dinner, took his hat and cane to go to the Prince de Listhnay's, she first fell on her knees to thank God, and then, without hesitation, went to open the window so long closed. D'Harmental was still at his. They had very soon settled their plans, and taken Nanette into their confidence. Every day, when Buvat was gone, D'Harmental was to come and stay two hours with Bathilde. The rest of the time would be passed at the windows, or, if by chance these must be closed, they could write to each other. Toward seven o'clock they saw Buvat turning the corner of the Rue Montmartre; he carried a roll of paper in one hand, and his cane in the other, and by his important air, it was easy to see that he had spoken to the prince himself. D'Harmental closed his window. Bathilde had seen Buvat set out with some uneasiness, for she feared that this story of the Prince de Listhnay was only an invention to explain D'Harmental's presence. The joyous expression of Buvat's face, however, quite reassured her.

"Well!" said she.

"Well! I have seen his highness."

"But, you know," answered Bathilde, "that M. Raoul said the Prince de Listhnay had no right to that title, and was only a prince of the third order."

"I guarantee him of the first," said Buvat, "sabre de bois! a man of five feet ten, who throws his money about, and pays for copies at fifteen francs the page, and has given twenty-five louis in advance!"

Then another fear began to come into Bathilde's mind, that this pretended customer, whom Raoul had found for Buvat, was only a pretext to induce him to accept money. This fear had in it something humiliating; Bathilde turned her eyes toward D'Harmental's window, but she saw D'Harmental looking at her with so much love through the glass, that she thought of nothing but looking at him in return, which she did for so long, that Buvat came forward to see what was attracting her attention; but D'Harmental, seeing him, let fall the curtain.

"Well, then," said Bathilde, wishing to turn off his attention, "you are content?"

"Quite; but I must tell you one thing."

"What is it?"

"You remember that I told you that I thought I recognized the face and voice of this young man, but could not tell you where I had seen or heard them?"

"Yes, you told me so."

"Well, it suddenly struck me to-day, as I was crossing the Rue des Bons Enfants, that it was the same young man whom I saw on that terrible night, of which I cannot think without trembling."

"What folly!" said Bathilde, trembling, however, herself.

"I was on the point of returning, however, for I thought this prince might be some brigand chief, and that they were going to entice me into a cavern; but as I never carry any money, I thought that my fears were exaggerated, and so I went on."

"And now you are convinced, I suppose," replied Bathilde, "that this poor young man, who came from the Abbe Brigaud, has no connection with him of the Rue des Bons Enfants."

"Certainly, a captain of thieves could have no connection with his highness; and now," continued Buvat, "you must excuse me if I do not stay with you this evening. I promised his highness to begin the copies directly, and I must do so." Buvat went into his room, leaving Bathilde free to resume the interrupted conversation. Heaven only knows at what hour the windows were closed.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FENELON’S SUCCESSOR.

The events which were to rouse our lovers from their happy idleness were preparing in silence. The Duc de Richelieu had kept his promise. The Marshal Villeroy, who had intended to remain a week away from the Tuileries, was recalled on the fourth day by a letter from his wife, who wrote to him that his presence was more than ever necessary near the king, the measles having declared itself at Paris, and having already attacked several persons in the Palais Royal. Monsieur de Villeroy came back directly, for, it will be remembered, that all those successive deaths which three or four years before had afflicted the kingdom, had been attributed to the measles, and the marshal would not lose this opportunity of parading his vigilance. It was his privilege, as governor of the king, never to leave him except by an order from himself, and to remain with him whoever entered, even though it was the regent himself. It was especially with regard to the regent that the marshal affected such extraordinary precaution; and as this suited the hatred of Madame de Maine and her party, they praised Monsieur de Villeroy highly, and spread abroad a report that he had found on the chimney piece of Louis XV. some poisoned bon-bons which had been placed there.

The result of all this was an increase of calumny against the Duc d’Orleans, and of importance on the part of the marshal, who persuaded the young king that he owed him his life. By this means he acquired great influence over the king, who, indeed, had confidence in no one but M. de Villeroy and M. de Frejus. M. de Villeroy was then the man they wanted for the message; and it was agreed that the following Monday, a day when the regent rarely saw the king, the two letters of Philip V. should be given to him, and M. de Villeroy should profit by his solitude with the king to make him sign the convocation of the States-General, and that it should be made public the next day before the hour of the regent’s visit, so that there should be no means of drawing back.

While all these things were plotting against him, the regent was leading his ordinary life in the midst of his work, his studies, and his pleasures, and above all, of his family bickerings. As we have said, three of his daughters gave him serious trouble. Madame de Berry, whom he loved the best, because he had saved her when the most celebrated doctors had given her up, throwing off all restraint, lived publicly with Riom, whom she threatened to marry at every observation her father made. A strange threat, but which, if carried out, would at that time have caused far more scandal than the amours, which, at any other time, such a marriage would have sanctified.

Mademoiselle de Chartres persisted in her resolution of becoming a nun, although she still, under her novitiate, continued to enjoy all the pleasures she could manage to introduce into the cloister. She had got in her cell her guns and pistols, and a magnificent assortment of fireworks, with which she amused her young friends every evening; but she would not leave the convent, where her father went every Wednesday to visit her.

The third person of the family who gave him uneasiness was Mademoiselle de Valois, whom he suspected of being Richelieu’s mistress, but without ever being able to obtain certain proof — although he had put his police on the watch, and had himself more than once paid her visits at hours when he thought it most probable he should meet him. These suspicions were also increased by her refusal to marry the Prince de Dombe, an excellent match, enriched as he was by the spoils of La Grande Mademoiselle. The regent had seized a new opportunity of assuring himself whether this refusal were caused by her antipathy to the young prince, or her love for the duke, by welcoming the overtures which Pleneuf, his ambassador at Turin, had made for a marriage between the beautiful Charlotte Aglaë and the Prince de Piedmont. Mademoiselle de Valois rebelled again, but this time in vain; the regent, contrary to his usual easy goodness, insisted, and the lovers had no hope, when an unexpected event broke it off. Madame, the mother of the regent, with her German frankness, had written to the queen of Sicily, one of her most constant correspondents, that she loved her too much not to warn her that the princess, who was destined for the young prince, had a lover, and that that lover was the Duc de Richelieu. It may be supposed that this declaration put an end to the scheme.

The regent was at first excessively angry at this result of his mother’s mania for writing letters, but he soon began to laugh at this epistolary escapade, and his attention was called off for the time by an important subject, namely that of Dubois, who was determined to become an archbishop. We have seen how on Dubois’s return from London, the thing had first been broached under the form of a joke, and how the regent had received the recommendation of King George; but Dubois was not a man to be beaten by a first refusal. Cambray was vacant by the death of the Cardinal la Tremouille, and was one of the richest archbishoprics in the Church. A hundred and fifty thousand francs a year were attached to it, and it was difficult to say whether Dubois was most tempted by the title of successor to Fenelon, or by the rich benefice.

Dubois, on the first opportunity, brought it again on the tapis. The regent again tried to turn it off with a joke, but Dubois became more positive, and more pressing. The regent, thinking to settle it, defied Dubois to find a prelate who would consecrate him.

“Is it only that?” cried Dubois, joyously, “then I have the man at hand.”

“Impossible!” said the regent.

“You will see,” said Dubois; and he ran out.

In five minutes he returned.

“Well?” asked the regent.

“Well,” answered Dubois, “I have got him.”

“And who is the scoundrel who is willing to consecrate such another scoundrel as you?”

“Your first almoner, monseigneur.”

“The bishop of Nantes!”

“Neither more nor less.”

“Tressan!”

“Himself.”

“Impossible!”

“Here he is.”

And at this moment the door was opened, and the bishop of Nantes was announced.

“Come,” cried Dubois, running to him, “his royal highness honors us both in naming me archbishop of Cambray, and in choosing you to consecrate me.”

"M. de Nantes," asked the regent, "is it true that you consent to make the abbe an archbishop?"

"Your highness's wishes are commands for me."

"Do you know that he is neither deacon, archdeacon, nor priest?"

"Never mind, monseigneur," cried Dubois, "here is M. de Tressan, who will tell you all these orders may be conferred in a day."

"But there is no example of such a thing."

"Yes, Saint Ambloise."

"Then, my dear abbe," said the regent, laughing, "if you have all the fathers of the Church with you, I have nothing more to say, and I abandon you to M. de Tressan."

"I will give him back to you with the cross and miter, monseigneur."

"But you must have the grade of licentiate," continued the regent, who began to be amused at the discussion.

"I have a promise from the University of Orleans."

"But you must have attestations."

"Is there not Besons?"

"A certificate of good life and manners."

"I will have one signed by Noailles."

"No, there I defy you, abbe."

"Then your highness will give me one. The signature of the regent of France must have as much weight at Rome as that of a wicked cardinal."

"Dubois," said the regent, "a little more respect, if you please, for the princes of the Church."

"You are right, monseigneur. There is no saying what one may become."

"You, a cardinal!" cried the regent, laughing.

"Certainly. I do not see why I should not be pope some day."

"Well! Borgia was one."

"May God give us both a long life, monseigneur, and you will see that, and many other things."

"Pardieu!" said the regent, "you know that I laugh at death."

"Alas, too much."

"Well, you will make a poltroon of me by curiosity."

"It would be none the worse; and to commence, monseigneur would do well to discontinue his nocturnal excursions."

"Why?"

"In the first place because they endanger his life."

"What does that matter?"

"Then for another reason."

"What?"

"Because," said Dubois, assuming a hypocritical air, "they are a subject of scandal for the Church!"

"Go to the devil."

"You see, monsieur," said Dubois, turning to Tressan, "in the midst of what libertines and hardened sinners I am obliged to live. I hope that your eminence will consider my position, and will not be too severe upon me."

"We will do our best, monsieur," said Tressan.

"And when?" asked Dubois, who was unwilling to lose an hour.

"As soon as you are ready."

"I ask for three days."

"Very well; on the fourth I shall be at your orders."

"To-day is Saturday. On Wednesday then."

"On Wednesday," answered Tressan.

"Only I warn you beforehand, abbe," answered the regent, "that one person of some importance will be absent at your consecration."

"And who will dare to do me that injury?"

"I shall."

"You, monseigneur! You will be there, and in your official gallery."

"I say not."

"I bet a thousand louis."

"And I give you my word of honor."

"I double my bet." — — "Insolent!"

"On Wednesday, M. de Tressan. At my consecration, monseigneur."

And Dubois left the room highly delighted, and spread about everywhere the news of his nomination. Still Dubois was wrong on one point, namely, the adhesion of the Cardinal de Noailles. No menace or promise could draw from him the attestation to good life and morals which Dubois flattered himself he should obtain at his hands. It is true that he was the only one who dared to make this holy and noble opposition to the scandal with which the Church was menaced. The University of Orleans gave the licenses, and everything was ready on the appointed day. Dubois left at five o'clock in the morning, in a hunting-dress, for Pautoix, where he found M. de Tressan, who, according to his promise, bestowed on him the deaconship, the archdeaconship, and the priesthood. At twelve all was finished; and at four, after having attended the regent's council, which was held at the old Louvre in consequence of the measles having, as we have said, attacked the Tuileries, Dubois returned home in the dress of an archbishop.

The first person whom he saw in his room was La Fillon. In her double quality of attachée to his secret police and to his public loves, she had admittance to his room at all hours; and in spite of the solemnity of the day, as she had said that she had business of importance to communicate, they had not dared to refuse her.

"Ah!" cried Dubois, on perceiving his old friend, "a lucky meeting."

"Pardieu! my dear gossip," answered La Fillon, "if you are ungrateful enough to forget your old friends I am not stupid enough to forget mine, particularly when they rise in the world."

"Ah! tell me," said Dubois, beginning to pull off his sacerdotal ornaments, "do you count on continuing to call me your gossip now that I am an archbishop?"

"More than ever. And I count on it so strongly that the first time the regent enters my house I shall ask him for an abbey, that we may still be on an equality one with the other."

"He comes to your house then? the libertine!"

"Alas! no more, my dear gossip. Ah! the good time is passed. But I hope that, thanks to you, it will return, and that the house will feel your elevation."

"Oh! my poor gossip," said Dubois, stooping down in order that La Fillon might unclasp his frock, "you see that now things are much changed, and that I can no longer visit you as I used to."

"You are proud. Philippe comes there."

"Philippe is only regent of France, and I am an archbishop. Do you understand? I want a mistress at a house where I can go without scandal; like Madame de Tencin, for example."

"Yes, who will deceive you for Richelieu."

"And how, on the contrary, do you know that she will not deceive Richelieu for me?"

"Hey-day! and will she manage your police and your love at the same time?"

"Perhaps. But apropos of police," answered Dubois, continuing to undress, "do you know that yours have slept infernally during three or four months, and that if this continues I shall be obliged to withdraw you from the superintendence?”

“Ah! diable!” cried La Fillon; “this is the way you treat your old friends. I come to make a revelation; well, you shall not know it.”

“A revelation! and what about?”

“Pshaw! take away my superintendence; scoundrel that you are.”

“Is it relating to Spain?” asked the archbishop, frowning, and feeling instinctively that the danger came from thence.

“It relates to nothing at all. Good-evening.”

And La Fillon made toward the door.

“Come here,” said Dubois, stepping toward his desk; and the two old friends, who understood each other so well, looked toward each other and laughed.

“Come, come,” said La Fillon, “I see that all is not lost, and that there is yet some good in you. Come, open this little desk and show me what it contains, and I will open my mouth and show you what I have in my heart.”

Dubois took out a rouleau of a hundred louis, and showed it to La Fillon.

“How much is it?” said she; “come, tell the truth; however, I shall count after you, to be sure.”

“Two thousand four hundred francs; that is a pretty penny, it seems to me.”

“Yes, for an abbe, but not for an archbishop.”

“Do you not know to what an extent the finances are involved?”

“Well, what does that matter, you humbug, when Law is going to make millions for us?”

“Would you like in exchange ten thousand francs in Mississippi bonds?”

“Thanks, my dear, I prefer the hundred louis; give them to me; I am a good woman, and another day you will be more generous.”

“Well, what have you to tell me? Come.” — ”First promise me one thing.”

“What is it?”

“That as it is about an old friend, he shall come to no harm.”

“But if your old friend is a beggar who deserves to be hanged, why should you cheat him of his due?”

“I have my own reasons.”

“Go along; I promise nothing.”

“Well, good-evening then. Here are the hundred louis.”

“Ah! you are getting scrupulous all at once.”

“Not at all; but I am under obligations to this man; he started me in the world.”

“He may boast of having done a good thing for society that day.”

“Rather, my friend; and he shall never have cause to repent it, for I will not speak a word to-day unless his life is safe.”

“Well, safe it shall be, I promise you; are you content?”

“By what do you promise it me?”

“On the faith of an honest man.”

“Ah! you are going to deceive me.”

“Do you know that you are very tiresome?”

“Oh! I am very tiresome. Well, good-by.”

“Gossip, I will have you arrested.”

“What do I care?”

“You shall be sent to prison.”

“That is a good joke.”

“I will leave you to die there.”

“Till you do it yourself. It will not be long.”

“Well, what do you want?”

“My captain’s life.”

“You shall have it.”

“On what faith?”

“On the faith of an archbishop.”

“I want a better.”

“On the faith of an abbe.”

“Better still.”

“On the faith of Dubois.”

“That will do.”

“First, I must tell you that my captain is the most out at elbows of any in the kingdom.”

“Diable! he has a rival.”

“Still, he will have the prize.”

“Continue.”

“Well, you must know that lately he has become as rich as Crœsus.”

“He must have robbed some millionaire.”

“Incapable. Killed maybe — but robbed! What do you take him for?”

“Do you know where the money comes from?”

“Do you know the different coinages?”

“Yes.”

“Where does this come from, then?”

“Ah! a Spanish doubloon.”

“And without alloy, with the effigy of King Charles II. Doubloons which are worth forty-eight francs if they are worth a penny, and which run from his pockets like a stream, poor dear fellow.”

“And when did he begin to sweat gold?”

“The day after the regent was nearly carried off in the Rue des Bons Enfants. Do you understand the apologue, gossip?”

“Yes; and why have you not told me before to-day?”

“Because his pockets were full then; they are now nearly empty, which is the time to find out where he will fill them again.”

“And you wished to give him time to empty them?”

“Well, all the world must live.”

“And so they shall; even your captain. But you understand that I must know what he does?”

“Day by day.”

“And which of your girls does he love?”

“All when he has money.”

“And when he has none?”

“La Normande.”

“I know her; she is as sharp as a needle.”

“Yes, but you must not reckon on her.”

“Why not?”

“She loves him, the little fool.”

“Ah! he is a lucky fellow.”

“And he merits it. He has got the heart of a prince, not like you, old miser.”

“Oh! you know that sometimes I am worse than the prodigal son, and it depends on you to make me so.”

“I will do my best.”

“Then day by day I shall know what your captain does?”

“You shall.”

“On what faith?”

“On the faith of an honest woman.”

“Something better.”

“On the faith of Fillon.”

“That will do.”

“Adieu, monseigneur the archbishop.”

“Adieu, gossip.”

La Fillon was going toward the door, when at that moment an usher entered.

“Monseigneur,” said he, “here is a man who wants to speak to your eminence.”

“And who is he, idiot?”

“An employé of the royal library, who, in his spare time, makes copies.”

“And what does he want?”

“He says that he has an important revelation to make to your eminence.”

“Oh! it is some poor fellow begging.”

“No, monseigneur; he says that it is a political affair.”

“Diable! about what?”

“Relative to Spain.”

“Send him in; and you, gossip, go into this closet.”

“What for?”

“Suppose my writer and your captain should know each other?”

“Ah, that would be droll.”

“Come, get in quickly.”

La Fillon entered the closet which Dubois showed her.

An instant afterward, the usher opened the door and announced Monsieur Jean Buvat.

We must now show how this important personage came to be received in private audience by the archbishop of Cambray.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE PRINCE DE LISTHNAY’S ACCOMPLICE.

We left Buvat going up to his own room, with his papers in his hand, to fulfill his promise to the Prince de Listhnay, and this promise was so scrupulously kept, that by seven o’clock the next evening the copy was finished and taken to the Rue du Bac. He then received from the same august hands some more work, which he returned with the same punctuality; so that the Prince de Listhnay, feeling confidence in a man who had given such proofs of exactitude, gave him at once sufficient papers to necessitate an interval of three or four days between this interview and the next. Buvat was delighted with this mark of confidence, and, on his return, set himself gayly to his work; and, although he found that he did not understand a word of Spanish, he could now read it fluently, and had become so accustomed to it, that he felt quite disappointed when he found among the copies one all in French. It had no number, and almost appeared to have slipped in by mistake; but he resolved, nevertheless, to copy it. He began with these lines:

“Confidential.

“For his Excellency Monsieur Alberoni in person.

“Nothing is more important than to make sure of the places near the Pyrenees, and of the noblemen who reside in these cantons.”

“In these cantons!” repeated Buvat, after having written it; then, taking a hair from his pen, he continued:

“To gain or master the garrison of Bayonne.”

“What is that?” said Buvat. “Is not Bayonne a French town? Let us see — let us see;” and he continued:

“The Marquis de P — — is governor of D — — . One knows the intentions of that nobleman; when it is decided, it will be necessary for him to triple his expenditure, in order to attract the aristocracy: he ought to scatter rewards.

“In Normandy, Charenton is an important post. Pursue the same course with the governor of that town as with the Marquis of P — — ; go further

— promise his officers suitable rewards.

“Do the same in all the provinces.”

“Hallo!” cried Buvat, re-reading what he had just written; “what does this mean? It seems to me that it would be prudent to read it all before going further.”

“He read:

“To supply this expenditure one ought to be able to reckon on at least three hundred thousand francs the first month, and afterward a hundred thousand per month, paid to the day.”

“Paid to the day!” murmured Buvat, breaking off. “It is evidently not by France that these payments are to be made, since France is so poor that she has not paid me my nine hundred francs’ salary for five years. Let us see — let us see;” and he recommenced:

“That expenditure, which will cease at the peace, will enable his Catholic majesty to act with certainty in case of war.

“Spain will only be an auxiliary. The army of Philip V. is in France.”

“What! what! what!” cried Buvat; “and I did not even know that it had crossed the frontier.”

“The army of Philip V. is in France. A body of about ten thousand Spaniards is more than sufficient, with the presence of the king.

“But we must be able to count on being able to seduce over at least half of the Duc d’Orleans’ army (Buvat trembled). This is the most important, and cannot be done without money. A present of one hundred thousand francs is necessary for each battalion or squadron.

“Twenty battalions would be two millions; with that sum one might form a trustworthy army, and destroy that of the enemy.

“It is almost certain, that the subjects most devoted to the king of Spain will not be employed in the army which will march against him. Let them disperse themselves through the provinces; there they will act usefully. To resupply them with a character — if they have none — it will be necessary for his Catholic majesty to send his orders in blank, for his minister in Paris to fill up.

“In consequence of the multiplicity of orders, it would be better if the ambassador had the power to sign for the king of Spain.

“It would be well, moreover, if his majesty were to sign his orders as a French prince; the title is his own.

“Prepare funds for an army of thirty thousand men, whom his majesty will find brave, skillful, and disciplined.

“This money should arrive in France at the end of May, or the commencement of June, and be distributed directly in the capitals of provinces, such as Nantes, Bayonne, etc.

“Do not allow the French ambassador to leave Spain. His presence will answer for the safety of those who declare themselves.”

“Sabre de bois!” cried Buvat, rubbing his eyes; “but this is a conspiracy — a conspiracy against the person of the regent, and against the safety of the kingdom. Oh! oh!”

Buvat fell into profound meditation.

Indeed the position was critical. Buvat mixed up in a conspiracy — Buvat charged with a state secret — Buvat holding in his hands, perhaps, the fate of nations: a smaller thing would have thrown him into a state of strange perplexity.

Thus seconds, minutes, hours flowed away, and Buvat remained on his chair, his head drooping, his eyes fixed on the floor, and perfectly still. From time to time, however, a deep breath — like an expression of astonishment — escaped his breast.

Ten o’clock, eleven — midnight sounded. Buvat thought that the night would bring him aid, and he determined to go to bed. It is needless to say that his copying came to an end, when he saw that the original was assuming an illegal character.

Buvat could not sleep; the poor fellow tossed from side to side, but scarcely had he shut his eyes, before he saw this horrible plan of the conspiracy written upon the wall in letters of fire. Once or twice, overcome by fatigue, he fell asleep; but he had no sooner lost consciousness, than he dreamed, the first time that he was arrested by the watch as a conspirator; the second that he was stabbed by the conspirators themselves. The first time Buvat awoke trembling; the second time bathed in perspiration. These two impressions had been so terrible, that he lighted his candle, and determined to wait for day, without another attempt to sleep.

The day came, but, far from dispelling the phantoms of the night, it only gave a more terrific reality. At the least noise Buvat trembled. Some one knocked at the street-door. Buvat thought he should faint. Nanette opened his room door, and he uttered a cry. Nanette ran to him, and asked what was the matter, but he contented himself with shaking his head, and answering, with a sigh —

"Ah, my poor Nanette, we live in very sad times."

He stopped directly, fearing he had said too much. He was too preoccupied to go down to breakfast with Bathilde; besides, he feared lest the young girl should perceive his uneasiness, and ask the cause; and as he did not know how to keep anything from her, he would have told her all, and she would then have become his accomplice. He had his coffee sent up to him, under pretext of having an overwhelming amount of work to do, and that he was going to work during breakfast. As Bathilde's love profited by this absence, she was rather pleased at it than otherwise.

A few minutes before ten, Buvat left for his office; his fears had been strong in his own house, but once in the street, they changed into terrors. At every crossing, at the end of every court, behind every angle, he thought that he saw the police-officers waiting for him. At the corner of the Place des Victoires a musketeer appeared, coming from the Rue Pagevin, and Buvat gave such a start on seeing him, that he almost fell under the wheels of a carriage. At last, after many alarms, he reached the library, bowed almost to the ground before the sentinel, darted up the stairs, gained his office, and falling exhausted on his seat, he shut up in his drawer all the papers of the Prince de Listhnay, which he had brought with him, for fear the police should search his house during his absence; and finding himself in safety, heaved a sigh, which would not have failed in denouncing him to his colleagues as being a prey to the greatest agitation, if he had not, as usual, arrived the first.

Buvat had a principle, which was, that no personal preoccupation, whether grave or gay, ought to disturb a clerk in the execution of his duty. Therefore he set himself to his work, apparently as if nothing had happened, but really in a state of moral perturbation impossible to describe.

This work consisted, as usual, in classifying and arranging books. There having been an alarm of fire three or four days before, the books had been thrown on the floor, or carried out of the reach of the flames, and there were consequently four or five thousand volumes to be reinstated in their proper places; and, as it was a particularly tedious business, Buvat had been selected for it, and had hitherto acquitted himself with an intelligence and assiduity which had merited the commendations of his superiors, and the raillery of his colleagues.

In spite of the urgency of the work, Buvat rested some minutes to recover himself; but as soon as he saw the door open, he rose instinctively, took a pen, dipped it in the ink, took a handful of parchment labels, and went toward the remaining books, took the first which came to hand, and continued his classification, murmuring between his teeth, as was his habit under similar circumstances.

"The 'Breviary of Lovers,' printed at Liege in 1712; no printer's name. Ah, mon Dieu! what amusement can Christians possibly find in reading such books? It would be better if they were all burned in the Place de Grève by the hand of the public hangman! Chut! What name have I been pronouncing there! I wonder who this Prince de Listhnay, who has made me copy such things, is; and the young man who, under pretense of doing me a service, introduced me to such a scoundrel. Come, come, this is not the place to think about that. How pleasant it is writing on parchment; the pen glides as if over silk. What is the next?"

"Well, monsieur," said the head clerk, "and what have you been doing for the last five minutes, with your arms crossed and your eyes fixed?"

"Nothing, M. Ducoudray, nothing. I was planning a new mode of classification."

"A new mode of classification! Are you turned reformer? Do you wish to commence a revolution, M. Buvat?"

"I! a revolution!" cried Buvat, with terror. "A revolution, monsieur! — never, oh, never! Good heavens, my devotion to monseigneur the regent is known; a disinterested devotion, since he has not paid me for five years, as you know."

"Well, go on with your work."

Buvat continued: — "'Conspiracy of Monsieur de Cinq Mars' — diable! diable! I have heard of that. He was a gallant gentleman, who was in correspondence with Spain; that cursed Spain. What business has it to mix itself up eternally with our affairs? It is true that this time it is said that Spain will only be an auxiliary; but an ally who takes possession of our towns, and who debauches our soldiers, appears to me very much like an enemy. 'Conspiracy of Monsieur de Cinq-Mars, followed by a History of his Death, and that of Monsieur de Thou, condemned for not revealing it. By an Eye-Witness.' For not revealing! It is true, no doubt, for the law is positive. Whoever does not reveal is an accomplice — myself, for instance. I am the accomplice of the Prince de Listhnay; and if they cut off his head, they will cut off mine too. No, they will only hang me — I am not noble. Hanged! — it is impossible; they would never go to such extremities in my case: besides, I will declare all. But then I shall be an informer: never! But then I shall be hanged — oh, oh!"

"What is the matter, Buvat?" said a clerk: "you are strangling yourself by twisting your cravat."

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen," said Buvat, "I did it mechanically; I did not mean to offend you."

Buvat stretched out his hand for another book. "'Conspiracy of the Chevalier Louis de Rohan.' Oh, I come to nothing but conspiracies! 'Copy of a Plan of Government found among the Papers of Monsieur de Rohan, and entirely written by Van der Enden.' Ah, mon Dieu! yes. That is just my case. He was hanged for having copied a plan. Oh, I shall die! 'Procès-verbal of the Torture of Francis-Affinius Van der Enden.' If they read one day, at the end of the conspiracy of the Prince de Listhnay, 'Procès-verbal of the Torture of Jean Buvat!'" Buvat began to read.

"Well, well, what is the matter, Buvat?" said Ducoudray, seeing the good man shake and grow pale: "are you ill?"

"Ah, M. Ducoudray," said Buvat, dropping the book, and dragging himself to a seat, "ah, M. Ducoudray, I feel I am going to faint."

"That comes of reading instead of working," said an employé.

"Well, Buvat, are you better?" asked Ducoudray.

"Yes, monsieur, for my resolution is taken, taken irrevocably. It would not be just, by Heaven, that I should bear the punishment for a crime which I never committed. I owe it to society, to my ward, to myself. M. Ducoudray, if the curator asks for me, you will tell him that I am gone out on pressing business."

And Buvat drew the roll of paper from the drawer, pressed his hat on to his head, took his stick, and went out with the majesty of despair.

"Do you know where he has gone?" asked the employé.

"No," answered Ducoudray.

"I will tell you; — to play at bowls at the Champs-Elysées, or at Porcherons."

The employé was wrong; he had neither gone to the Champs-Elysées nor to Porcherons. He had gone to Dubois.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FOX AND THE GOOSE.

“M. Jean Buvat,” said the usher. Dubois stretched out his viper’s head, darted a look at the opening which was left between the usher and the door, and, behind the official introducer, perceived a little fat man, pale, and whose legs shook under him, and who coughed to give himself assurance. A glance sufficed to inform Dubois the sort of person he had to deal with.

“Let him come in,” said Dubois.

The usher went out, and Jean Buvat appeared at the door.

“Come in, come in,” said Dubois.

“You do me honor, monsieur,” murmured Buvat, without moving from his place.

“Shut the door, and leave us,” said Dubois to the usher.

The usher obeyed, and the door striking the posterior part of Buvat, made him bound a little way forward. Buvat, shaken for an instant, steadied himself on his legs, and became once more immovable, looking at Dubois with an astounded expression.

In truth, Dubois was a curious sight. Of his episcopal costume he had retained the inferior part; so that he was in his shirt, with black breeches and violet stockings. This disagreed with all Buvat’s preconceived notions. What he had before his eyes was neither a minister nor an archbishop, but seemed much more like an orang-outang than a man.

“Well, monsieur,” said Dubois, sitting down and crossing his legs, and taking his foot in his hand, “you have asked to speak to me. Here I am.”

“That is to say,” said Buvat, “I asked to speak to Monseigneur the Archbishop of Cambray.”

“Well, I am he.”

“How! you, monseigneur?” cried Buvat, taking his hat in both hands, and bowing almost to the ground: “excuse me, but I did not recognize your eminence. It is true that this is the first time I have had the honor of seeing you. Still — hum! at that air of majesty — hum, hum — I ought to have understood — ”

"Your name?" asked Dubois, interrupting the good man's compliments.

"Jean Buvat, at your service."

"You are — ?"

"An employé at the library."

"And you have some revelations to make to me concerning Spain?"

"That is to say, monseigneur — This is how it is. As my office work leaves me six hours in the evening and four in the morning, and as Heaven has blessed me with a very good handwriting, I make copies."

"Yes, I understand," said Dubois; "and some one has given you suspicious papers to copy, so you have brought these suspicious papers to me, have you not?"

"In this roll, monseigneur, in this roll," said Buvat, extending it toward Dubois.

Dubois made a single bound from his chair to Buvat, took the roll, and sat down at a desk, and in a turn of the hand, having torn off the string and the wrapper, found the papers in question. The first on which he lighted were in Spanish; but as Dubois had been sent twice to Spain, and knew something of the language of Calderon and Lopez de Vega, he saw at the first glance how important these papers were. Indeed, they were neither more nor less than the protestation of the nobility, the list of officers who requested commissions under the king of Spain, and the manifesto prepared by the Cardinal de Polignac and the Marquis de Pompadour to rouse the kingdom. These different documents were addressed directly to Philip V.; and a little note — which Dubois recognized as Cellamare's hand writing — announced that the denouement of the conspiracy was near at hand; he informed his Catholic majesty, from day to day, of all the important events which could advance or retard the scheme. Then came, finally, that famous plan of the conspirators which we have already given to our readers, and which — left by an oversight among the papers which had been translated into Spanish — had opened Buvat's eyes. Near the plan, in the good man's best writing, was the copy which he had begun to make, and which was broken off at the words, "Act thus in all the provinces."

Buvat had followed all the working of Dubois's face with a certain anxiety; he had seen it pass from astonishment to joy, then from joy to impassibility. Dubois, as he continued to read, had passed, successively, one leg over the other, had bitten his lips, pinched the end of his nose, but all had been utterly untranslatable to Buvat, and at the end of the reading he understood no more from the face of the archbishop than he had understood at the end of the copy from the Spanish original. As to Dubois, he saw that this man had come to furnish him with the beginning of a most important secret, and he was meditating on the best means of making him furnish the end also. This was the signification of the crossed legs, the bitten lips, and the pinched nose. At last he appeared to have taken his resolution. A charming benevolence overspread his countenance, and turning toward the good man, who had remained standing respectfully —

"Take a seat, my dear M. Buvat," said he.

"Thank you, monseigneur," answered Buvat, trembling; "I am not fatigued."

"Pardon, pardon," said Dubois, "but your legs shake."

Indeed, since he had read the procès-verbal of the question of Van der Enden, Buvat had retained in his legs a nervous trembling, like that which may be observed in dogs that have just had the distemper.

"The fact is, monseigneur," said Buvat, "that I do not know what has come to me the last two hours, but I find a great difficulty in standing upright."

"Sit down, then, and let us talk like two friends."

Buvat looked at Dubois with an air of stupefaction, which, at any other time, would have had the effect of making him burst out laughing, but now he did not seem to notice it, and taking a chair himself, he repeated with his hand the invitation which he had given with his voice. There was no means of drawing back; the good man approached trembling, and sat down on the edge of his chair; put his hat on the ground, took his cane between his legs, and waited. All this, however, was not executed without a violent internal struggle as his face testified, which, from being white as a lily when he came in, had now become as red as a peony.

"My dear M. Buvat, you say that you make copies?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"And that brings you in — ?"

"Very little, monseigneur, very little."

"You have, nevertheless, a superb handwriting, M. Buvat."

"Yes, but all the world does not appreciate the value of that talent as your eminence does."

"That is true, but you are employed at the library?" — — "I have that honor."

"And your place brings you — ?"

"Oh, my place — that is another thing, monseigneur; it brings me in nothing at all, seeing that for five years the cashier has told us at the end of each month that the king was too poor to pay us."

"And you still remained in the service of his majesty? that was well done, M. Buvat; that was well done."

Buvat rose, saluted Dubois, and reseated himself.

"And, perhaps, all the while you have a family to support — a wife, children?"

"No, monseigneur; I am a bachelor."

"But you have parents, at all events?"

"No, monseigneur; but I have a ward, a charming young person, full of talent, who sings like Mademoiselle Berry, and who draws like Greuze."

"Ah, ah! and what is the name of your ward, M. Buvat?"

"Bathilde — Bathilde du Rocher, monseigneur; she is a young person of noble family, her father was squire to Monsieur the Regent, when he was still Duc de Chartres, and had the misfortune to be killed at the battle of Almanza."

"Thus I see you have your charges, my dear Buvat."

"Is it of Bathilde that you speak, monseigneur? Oh no, Bathilde is not a charge; on the contrary, poor dear girl, she brings in more than she costs. Bathilde a charge! Firstly, every month M. Papillon, the colorman at the corner of the Rue Clery, you know, monseigneur, gives her eighty francs for two drawings; then — "

"I should say, my dear Buvat, that you are not rich."

"Oh! rich, no, monseigneur, I am not, but I wish I was, for poor Bathilde's sake; and if you could obtain from monseigneur, that out of the first money which comes into the State coffers he would pay me my arrears, or at least something on account — "

"And to how much do your arrears amount?"

"To four thousand seven hundred francs, two sous, and eight centimes, monseigneur."

"Is that all?" said Dubois.

"How! is that all, monseigneur?"

"Yes, that is nothing."

"Indeed, monseigneur, it is a great deal, and the proof is that the king cannot pay it."

"But that will not make you rich."

"It will make me comfortable, and I do not conceal from you, monseigneur, that if, from the first money which comes into the treasury — "

"My dear Buvat," said Dubois, "I have something better than that to offer you."

"Offer it, monseigneur."

"You have your fortune at your fingers' ends."

"My mother always told me so, monseigneur."

"That proves," said Dubois, "what a sensible woman your mother was."

"Well, monseigneur! I am ready; what must I do?"

"Ah! mon Dieu! the thing is very simple, you will make me, now, and here, copies of all these."

"But, monseigneur — "

"That is not all, my dear Monsieur Buvat. You will take back to the person who gave you these papers, the copies and the originals, you will take all that that person gives you; you will bring them to me directly, so that I may read them, then you will do the same with other papers as with these, and so on indefinitely, till I say enough."

"But, monseigneur, it seems to me that in acting thus I should betray the confidence of the prince."

"Ah! it is with a prince that you have business, Monsieur Buvat! and what may this prince be called?"

"Oh, monseigneur, it appears to me that in telling you his name I denounce — "

"Well, and what have you come here for, then?"

"Monseigneur, I have come here to inform you of the danger which his highness runs, that is all."

"Indeed," said Dubois, in a bantering tone, "and you imagine you are going to stop there?"

"I wish to do so, monseigneur."

"There is only one misfortune, that it is impossible, my dear Monsieur Buvat."

"Why impossible?"

"Entirely."

"Monseigneur, I am an honest man."

"M. Buvat, you are a fool."

“Monseigneur, I still wish to keep silence.”

“My dear monsieur, you will speak.”

“And if I speak I shall be the informer against the prince.”

“If you do not speak you are his accomplice.”

“His accomplice, monseigneur! and of what crime?”

“Of the crime of high treason. Ah! the police have had their eyes on you this long time, M. Buvat!”

“On me, monseigneur?”

“Yes, on you; under the pretext that they do not pay you your salary, you entertain seditious proposals against the State.”

”Oh! monseigneur, how can they say so?”

“Under the pretext of their not paying you your salary, you have been making copies of incendiary documents for the last four days.”

“Monseigneur, I only found it out yesterday; I do not understand Spanish.”

“You do understand it, monsieur?”

“I swear, monseigneur.”

“I tell you you do understand it, and the proof is that there is not a mistake in your copies. But that is not all.”

“How, not all?”

“No, that is not all. Is this Spanish? Look, monsieur,” and he read:

“‘Nothing is more important than to make sure of the places in the neighborhood of the Pyrenees, and the noblemen who reside in the cantons.’“

“But, monseigneur, it was just by that that I made the discovery.”

“M. Buvat, they have sent men to the galleys for less than you have done.”

“Monseigneur!”

“M. Buvat, men have been hanged who were less guilty than you.”

“Monseigneur! monseigneur!”

“M. Buvat, they have been broken on the wheel.”

“Mercy, monseigneur, mercy!”

“Mercy to a criminal like you, M. Buvat! I shall send you to the Bastille, and Mademoiselle Bathilde to Saint Lazare.”

“To Saint Lazare! Bathilde at Saint Lazare, monseigneur! Bathilde at Saint Lazare! and who has the right to do that?” — — ”I, M. Buvat.”

“No, monseigneur, you have not the right!” cried Buvat, who could fear and suffer everything for himself, but who, at the thought of such infamy, from a worm became a serpent. “Bathilde is not a daughter of the people, monseigneur! Bathilde is a lady of noble birth, the daughter of a man who saved the life of the regent, and when I represent to his highness — ”

“You will go first to the Bastille, M. Buvat,” said Dubois, pulling the bell so as nearly to break it, “and then we shall see about Mademoiselle Bathilde.”

“Monseigneur, what are you doing?”

“You will see.” (The usher entered.) “An officer of police, and a carriage.”

“Monseigneur!” cried Buvat, “all that you wish — ”

“Do as I have bid you,” said Dubois.

The usher went out.

“Monseigneur!” said Buvat, joining his hands; “monseigneur, I will obey.”

“No, M. Buvat. Ah! you wish a trial, you shall have one. You want a rope, you shall not be disappointed.”

“Monseigneur,” cried Buvat, falling on his knees, “what must I do?”

“Hang, hang, hang!” continued Dubois.

“Monseigneur,” said the usher, returning, “the carriage is at the door, and the officer in the anteroom.”

“Monseigneur,” said Buvat, twisting his little legs, and tearing out the few yellow hairs which he had left, “monseigneur, will you be pitiless!”

“Ah! you will not tell me the name of the prince?”

“It is the Prince de Listhnay, monseigneur.”

“Ah! you will not tell me his address?”

“He lives at No. 110, Rue du Bac, monseigneur.”

“You will not make me copies of those papers?”

“I will do it, I will do it this instant,” said Buvat; and he went and sat down before the desk, took a pen, dipped it in the ink, and taking some paper, began the first page with a superb capital. “I will do it, I will do it, monseigneur; only you will allow me to write to Bathilde that I shall not be home to dinner. Bathilde at the Saint Lazare?” murmured Buvat between his teeth, “Sabre de bois! he would have done as he said.”

“Yes, monsieur, I would have done that, and more too, for the safety of the State, as you will find out to your cost, if you do not return these papers, and if you do not take the others, and if you do not bring a copy here every evening."

"But, monseigneur," cried Buvat, in despair, "I cannot then go to my office."

"Well then, do not go to your office."

"Not go to my office! but I have not missed a day for twelve years, monseigneur."

"Well, I give you a month's leave."

"But I shall lose my place, monseigneur."

"What will that matter to you, since they do not pay you?"

"But the honor of being a public functionary, monseigneur; and, moreover, I love my books, I love my table, I love my hair seat," cried Buvat, ready to cry; "and to think that I shall lose it all!"

"Well, then, if you wish to keep your books, your table, and your chair, I should advise you to obey me."

"Have I not already put myself at your service?"

"Then you will do what I wish?"

"Everything."

"Without breathing a word to any one?"

"I will be dumb."

"Not even to Mademoiselle Bathilde?"

"To her less than any one, monseigneur."

"That is well. On that condition I pardon you."

"Oh, monseigneur!"

"I shall forget your fault."

"Monseigneur is too good."

"And, perhaps, I will even reward you."

"Oh, monseigneur, what magnanimity!"

"Well, well, set to work."

"I am ready, monseigneur. I am ready."

And Buvat began to write in his most flowing hand, and never moving his eyes, except from the original to the copy, and staying from time to time to wipe his forehead, which was covered with perspiration. Dubois profited by his industry to open the closet for La Fillon, and signing to her to be silent, he led her toward the door.

"Well, gossip," whispered she, for in spite of his caution she could not restrain her curiosity; "where is your writer?"

“There he is,” said Dubois, showing Buvat, who, leaning over his paper, was working away industriously.

“What is he doing?”

“Guess.”

“How should I know?”

“Then you want me to tell you?”

“Yes.”

“Well, he is making my cardinal’s hat.”

La Fillon uttered such an exclamation of surprise that Buvat started and turned round; but Dubois had already pushed her out of the room, again recommending her to send him daily news of the captain.

But the reader will ask what Bathilde and D’Harmental were doing all this time. Nothing — they were happy.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A CHAPTER OF SAINT-SIMON.

Four days passed thus, during which Buvat — remaining absent from the office on pretext of indisposition — succeeded in completing the two copies, one for the Prince de Listhnay, the other for Dubois. During these four days — certainly the most agitated of his life — he was so taciturn and gloomy that Bathilde several times asked him what was the matter; but as he always answered nothing, and began to sing his little song, Bathilde was easily deceived, particularly as he still left every morning as if to go to the office — so that she saw no material alteration from his ordinary habits.

As to D'Harmental, he received every morning a visit from the Abbe Brigaud, announcing that everything was going on right; and as his own love affairs were quite as prosperous, D'Harmental began to think that to be a conspirator was the happiest thing on the earth.

As to the Duc d'Orleans, suspecting nothing, he continued his ordinary life, and had invited the customary guests to his Sunday's supper, when in the afternoon Dubois entered his room.

"All, it is you, abbe! I was going to send to you to know if you were going to make one of us to-night."

"You are going to have a supper then, monseigneur?" asked Dubois.

"Where do you come from with your fast-day face? Is not to-day Sunday?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Well, then, come back to us; here is the list of the guests. Nocé, Lafare, Fargy, Ravanne, Broglie; I do not invite Brancas: he has been wearisome for some days. I think he must be conspiring. Then La Phalaris, and D'Averne, they cannot bear each other; they will tear out each other's eyes, and that will amuse us. Then we shall have La Souris, and perhaps Madame de Sabran, if she has no appointment with Richelieu."

"This is your list, monseigneur?"

"Yes."

“Well, will your highness look at mine now?” — — ”Have you made one, too?”

“No, it was brought to me ready made.”

“What is this?” asked the regent, looking at a paper which Dubois presented to him.

“‘Nominal list of the officers who request commissions in the Spanish army: Claude Francois de Ferrette, Knight of Saint Louis, field marshal and colonel of cavalry; Boschet, Knight of Saint Louis, and colonel of infantry, De Sabran, De Larochefoucault-Gondrel, De Villeneuve, De Lescure, De Laval.’ Well, what next?”

“Here is another;” and he presented a second letter to the duke.

“‘Protestation of the nobility.’“

“Make your lists, monseigneur, you are not the only one, you see — the Prince de Cellamare has his also.”

“‘Signed without distinction of ranks, so that there may be no dissatisfaction: — De Vieux-Pont, De la Pailleterie, De Beaufremont, De Latour-du-Pin, De Montauban, Louis de Caumont, Claude de Polignac, Charles de Laval, Antoine de Chastellux, Armand de Richelieu.’ Where did you fish up all this, you old fox?”

“Wait, monseigneur, we have not done yet. Look at this.”

“‘Plan of the conspirators: Nothing is more important than to make sure of the strong places near the Pyrenees, to gain the garrison of Bayonne.’ Surrender our towns! give the keys of France into the hands of the Spanish! What does this mean, Dubois?”

“Patience, monseigneur; we have better than that to show you; we have here the letters from his majesty Philip V. himself.”

“‘To the king of France — ’ But these are only copies.”

“I will tell you soon where the originals are.”

“Let us see, my dear abbe, let us see. ‘Since Providence has placed me on the throne of Spain,’ etc., etc. ‘In what light can your faithful subjects regard the treaty which is signed against me?’ etc., etc. ‘I beg your majesty to convoke the States-General of the kingdom.’ Convoke the States-General! In whose name?”

“In the name of Philip V.”

“Philip V. is king of Spain and not of France. Let him keep to his own character. I crossed the Pyrenees once to secure him on his throne; I might cross them a second time to remove him from it.”

“We will think of that later — I do not say no; but for the present we have the fifth piece to read — and not the least important as you will see.”

And Dubois presented another paper to the regent, which he opened with such impatience that he tore it in opening it.

“Never mind,” said Dubois, “the pieces are good; put them together and read them.”

The regent did so, and read —

“‘Dearly and well beloved.’

“Ah!” said the regent, “it is a question of my deposition, and these letters, I suppose, were to be given to the king?”

“To-morrow, monseigneur.”

“By whom?” — — ”The marshal.”

“Villeroy?”

“Himself.”

“How did he determine on such a thing?”

“It was not he; it was his wife, monseigneur.”

“Another of Richelieu’s tricks?”

“You are right, monseigneur.”

“And from whom do you get these papers?”

“From a poor writer to whom they have been given to be copied, since, thanks to a descent made on Laval’s house, a press which he had hidden in the cellar has ceased to work.”

“And this writer is in direct communication with Cellamare? The idiots!”

”Not at all, monseigneur; their measures are better taken. The good man has only had to deal with the Prince de Listhnay.”

“Prince de Listhnay! Who is he?”

“Rue du Bac, 110.”

“I do not know him.”

“Yes, you do, monseigneur.”

“Where have I seen him?”

“In your antechamber.”

“What! this pretended Prince de Listhnay?”

“Is no other than that scoundrel D’Avranches, Madame de Maine’s valet-de-chambre.”

“Ah! I was astonished that she was not in it.”

“Oh! she is at the head, and if monseigneur would like to be rid of her and her clique, we have them all.”

“Let us attend to the most pressing.”

“Yes, let us think of Villeroy. Have you decided on a bold stroke?”

“Certainly. So long as you confine yourself to parading about like a man at a theater or a tournament, very well; so long as you confine yourself to calumnies and impertinences against me, very good; but when it becomes a question of the peace and tranquillity of France, you will find, Monsieur le Marechal, that you have already compromised them sufficiently by your military inaptitude, and we shall not give you an opportunity of doing so again by your political follies.”

“Then,” said Dubois, “we must lay hold of him?”

“Yes; but with certain precautions. We must take him in the act.”

“Nothing easier. He goes every morning at eight o’clock to the king.”

“Yes.”

“Be to-morrow at half-past seven at Versailles.”

“Well?”

“You will go to his majesty before him.” — — ”Very well.”

The regent and Dubois talked for some little time longer, after which Dubois took his leave.

“There is no supper this evening,” said Dubois to the usher, “give notice to the guests; the regent is ill.”

That evening at nine o’clock the regent left the Palais Royal, and, contrary to his ordinary habit, slept at Versailles.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A SNARE.

The next day, about seven o'clock in the morning, at the time when the king rose, an usher entered his majesty's room and announced that his royal highness, Monseigneur le Duc d'Orleans, solicited the honor of assisting at his toilet. Louis XV., who was not yet accustomed to decide anything for himself, turned toward Monsieur de Frejus, who was seated in the least conspicuous corner of the room, as if to ask what he should say; and to this mute question Monsieur de Frejus not only made a sign with his head signifying that it was necessary to receive his royal highness, but rose and went himself to open the door. The regent stopped a minute on the doorstep to thank Fleury, then having assured himself by a rapid glance round the room that the Marshal de Villeroy had not yet arrived, he advanced toward the king.

Louis XV. was at this time a pretty child of nine or ten years of age, with long chestnut hair, jet-black eyes, and a mouth like a cherry, and a rosy complexion like that of his mother, Mary of Savoy, duchesse de Burgundy, but which was liable to sudden paleness. Although his character was already very irresolute, thanks to the contradictory influences of the double government of the Marshal de Villeroy and Monsieur de Frejus, he had something ardent in his face which stamped him as the great-grandson of Louis XIV.; and he had a trick of putting on his hat like him. At first, warned against the Duc d'Orleans as the man in all France from whom he had most to fear, he had felt that prejudice yield little by little during the interviews which they had had together, in which, with that juvenile instinct which so rarely deceives children, he had recognized a friend.

On his part, it must be said that the Duc d'Orleans had for the king, beside the respect which was his due, a love the most attentive and the most tender. The little business which could be submitted to his young mind he always presented to him with so much clearness and talent, that politics, which would have been wearisome with any one else, became a recreation when pursued with him, so that the royal child always saw his arrival with pleasure. It must be confessed that this work was almost always rewarded by the most beautiful toys which could be found, and which Dubois, in order to pay his court to the king, imported from Germany and England. His majesty therefore received the regent with his sweetest smile, and gave him his little hand to kiss with a peculiar grace, while the archbishop of Frejus, faithful to his system of humility, had sat down in the same corner where he had been surprised by the arrival of the regent.

"I am very glad to see you, monsieur," said Louis XV. in a sweet little voice, from which even the etiquette which they imposed upon him could not entirely take away all grace; "and all the more glad to see you from its not being your usual hour. I presume that you have some good news to tell me."

"Two pieces, sire," answered the regent; "the first is, that I have just received from Nuremberg a chest which seems to me to contain — "

"Oh, toys! lots of toys! does it not, Monsieur le Regent?" cried the king, dancing joyously, and clapping his hands, regardless of his valet-de-chambre who was waiting for him, and holding the little sword with a cut-steel handle which he was going to hang in the king's belt. "Oh, the dear toys! the beautiful toys! how kind you are! Oh! how I love you, Monsieur le Regent!"

"Sire, I only do my duty," answered the Duc d'Orleans, bowing respectfully, "and you owe me no thanks for that."

"And where is it, monsieur? Where is this pretty chest?"

"In my apartments, sire; and if your majesty wishes it brought here, I will send it during the course of the day, or to-morrow morning."

"Oh! no; now, monsieur; now, I beg."

"But it is at my apartments."

"Well, let us go to your apartments," cried the child, running to the door, and forgetting that he wanted, in order to complete his toilet, his little sword, his little satin jacket, and his cordon-bleu.

"Sire," said Frejus, advancing, "I would remark that your majesty abandons yourself too entirely to the pleasure caused by the possession of things that you should already regard as trifles."

"Yes, monsieur; yes, you are right," said Louis XV., making an effort to control himself; "but you must pardon me; I am only ten years old, and I worked hard yesterday."

"That is true," said Monsieur de Frejus; "and so your majesty will employ yourself with the toys when you have asked Monsieur le Regent what the other piece of news which he came to bring you is."

"Ah! yes. By-the-by, what is the second affair?"

"A work which will be profitable to France, and which is of so much importance that I think it most necessary to submit it to your majesty."

"Have you it here?" asked the king.

"No, sire; I did not expect to find your majesty so well inclined to work, and I left it in my study."

"Well," said Louis XV., turning half toward Monsieur de Frejus, half toward the regent, and looking at both of them with an imploring eye, "cannot we reconcile all that? Instead of taking my morning walk, I will go and see these beautiful Nuremberg toys, and when we have seen them we will pass into your study and work."

"It is against etiquette, sire," answered the regent, "but if your majesty wishes it — "

"Oh, I do wish it! That is," added he, turning and looking at Frejus so sweetly that there was no resisting it, "if my good preceptor permits it."

"Does Monsieur de Frejus see anything wrong in it?" said the regent, turning toward Fleury, and pronouncing these words with an accent which showed that the preceptor would wound him deeply by refusing the request which his royal pupil made him.

"No, monseigneur," said Frejus; "quite the contrary. It is well that his majesty should accustom himself to work; and if the laws of etiquette are a little violated, that violation will bring about a happy result for the people. I only ask of monseigneur the permission to accompany his majesty."

"Certainly, monsieur," said the regent, "with the greatest pleasure."

"Oh, how good! how kind!" cried Louis XV. "Quick! my sword, my jacket, my cordon-bleu. Here I am, Monsieur le Regent;" and he advanced to take the regent's hand. But instead of allowing that familiarity, the regent bowed, and, opening the door, signed to the king to precede him, following three or four paces behind, hat in hand, together with Frejus.

The king's apartments, situated on the ground floor, were level with those of the Duc d'Orleans, and were only separated by an antechamber, opening into the king's rooms, and a gallery leading from thence to the antechamber of the regent. The distance was short, therefore, and — as the king was in haste to arrive — they found themselves in an instant in a large study, lighted by four windows, all forming doors, which opened into the garden. This large study led to a smaller one, where the regent generally worked, and where he brought his most intimate friends and his favorites. All his highness's court was in attendance — a very natural circumstance, since it was the hour for rising. The king, however, did not notice either Monsieur d'Artagnan, captain of the Gray Musketeers, or the Marquis de Lafare, captain of the Guards, or a very considerable number of the Light Horse, who were drawn up outside the windows. It is true that on a table in the middle of the room, he had seen the welcome chest, whose monstrous size had, in spite of the chilling exhortation of Monsieur de Frejus, caused him to give a cry of joy.

However, he was obliged to contain himself, and receive the homage of Monsieur d'Artagnan and Monsieur de Lafare; meanwhile the regent had called two valets-de-chambre, who quickly opened the lid, and displayed the most splendid collection of toys which had ever dazzled the eyes of a king of nine years old. At this tempting sight, the king forgot alike perceptor, guards, and Gray Musketeers. He hastened toward this paradise which was opened to him, and, as from an inexhaustible mine, he drew out successively locks, three-deckers, squadrons of cavalry, battalions of infantry, pedlars with their packs, jugglers with their cups; in fact, all those wonders, which, on Christmas eve, turn the heads of all children beyond the Rhine; and that, with such undisguised transports of joy, that Monsieur de Frejus himself respected his royal pupil's happiness. The assistants watched him with that religious silence which surrounds great griefs or great joys. While this silence was the most profound, a violent noise was heard in the antechamber, the door was opened, an usher announced the Duke de Villeroy, and the marshal appeared, loudly demanding to see the king. As they were, however, accustomed to such proceedings, the regent merely pointed to his majesty, who was still continuing to empty the chest, covering the furniture and floor with the splendid toys.

The marshal had nothing to say; he was nearly an hour late; the king was with Monsieur Frejus, but he approached him, grumbling, and throwing round him glances, which appeared to say that he was there ready to protect his majesty from all danger.

The regent exchanged glances with D'Artagnan and Lafare; every thing went well.

The chest was emptied — and, after having allowed the king to enjoy for an instant the sight of all his treasures — the regent approached him, and, still hat in hand, recalled to his mind the promise he had made to devote an hour to the consideration of State affairs.

Louis XV., with that scrupulousness which afterward led him to declare that punctuality was the politeness of kings, threw a last glance over his toys; and then merely asking permission to have them removed to his apartments, advanced toward the little study, and the regent opened the door. Then, according to their different characters, Monsieur de Fleury, under pretext of his dislike of politics, drew back, and sat down in a corner, while the marshal darted forward, and, seeing the king enter the study tried to follow him. This was the moment that the regent had impatiently expected.

“Pardon, marshal,” said he, barring the passage; “but I wish to speak to his majesty on affairs which demand the most absolute secrecy, and therefore I beg for a short tete-à-tete.”

“Tete-à-tete!” cried Villeroy; “you know, monseigneur, that it is impossible.”

“And why impossible?” asked the regent, calmly.

“Because, as governor to his majesty, I have the right of accompanying him everywhere.”

“In the first place, monsieur,” replied the regent, “this right does not appear to me to rest on any very positive proof, and if I have till now tolerated — not this right, but this pretension — it is because the age of the king has hitherto rendered it unimportant; but now that his majesty has nearly completed his tenth year, and that I am permitted to commence instructing him on the science of government, in which I am his appointed preceptor, you will see that it is quite right that I, as well as Monsieur de Frejus and yourself, should be allowed some hours of tete-à-tete with his majesty. This will be less painful to you to grant, marshal,” added the regent, with a smile, the expression of which it was impossible to mistake, “because, having studied these matters so much yourself, it is impossible that you can have anything left to learn.”

“But, monsieur,” said the marshal, as usual forgetting his politeness as he became warm, “I beg to remind you that the king is my pupil.”

“I know it, monsieur,” said the regent, in the same tone; “make of his majesty a great captain, I do not wish to prevent you. Your campaigns in

Italy and Flanders prove that he could not have a better master; but, at this moment it is not a question of military science, but of a State secret, which can only be confided to his majesty; therefore, again I beg to speak to the king in private."

"Impossible, monseigneur!" cried the marshal.

"Impossible!" replied the regent; "and why?"

"Why?" continued the marshal; "because my duty is not to lose sight of the king for a moment, and because I will not permit it."

"Take care, marshal," interrupted the Duc d'Orleans, haughtily: "you are forgetting your proper respect toward me."

"Monseigneur," continued the marshal, becoming more and more angry, "I know the respect which I owe to your royal highness, and I also know what I owe to my charge, and to the king, and for that reason I will not lose sight of his majesty for an instant, inasmuch as — "

The duke hesitated.

"Well, finish," said the regent.

"Inasmuch as I answer for his person," said the marshal.

At this want of all restraint, there was a moment's silence, during which nothing was heard but the grumblings of the marshal, and the stifled sighs of Monsieur de Fleury.

As to the Duc d'Orleans, he raised his head with a sovereign air of contempt, and, taking that air of dignity which made him, when he chose, one of the most imposing princes in the world:

"Monsieur de Villeroy," said he, "you mistake me strangely, it appears, and imagine that you are speaking to some one else; but since you forget who I am, I must endeavor to remind you. Marquis de Lafare," continued he, addressing his captain of the guards, "do your duty."

Then the Marshal de Villeroy, seeing on what a precipice he stood, opened his mouth to attempt an excuse, but the regent left him no time to finish his sentence, and shut the door in his face.

The Marquis de Lafare instantly approached the marshal, and demanded his sword. The marshal remained for an instant as if thunderstruck. He had for so long a time been left undisturbed in his impertinence that he had begun to think himself invincible. He tried to speak, but his voice failed him, and, on the second, and still more imperative demand, he gave up his sword. At the same moment a door opens, and a chair appears; two musketeers push the marshal into it — it is closed. D'Artagnan and Lafare place themselves at each side, and the prisoner is carried off through the gardens. The Light Horse follow, and, at a considerable and increasing speed they descend the staircase, turn to the left, and enter the orangery. There the suite remain, and the chair, its porters, and tenant, enter a second room, accompanied only by Lafare and D'Artagnan. The marshal, who had never been remarkable for sang-froid, thought himself lost.

"Gentlemen," cried he, turning pale, while perspiration and powder ran down his face, "I hope I am not going to be assassinated!"

"No, no, make yourself easy," said Lafare, while D'Artagnan could not help laughing at his ridiculous figure — "something much more simple, and infinitely less tragic."

"What is it, then?" asked the marshal, whom this assurance rendered a little more easy.

"There are two letters, monsieur, which you were to have given to the king this morning, and which you must have in one of your pockets."

The marshal, who, till that moment, in his anxiety about himself, had forgotten Madame de Maine's affairs, started, and raised his hands to the pocket where the letters were.

"Your pardon," said D'Artagnan, stopping his hand, "but we are authorized to inform you — in case you should feel inclined to remove these letters — that the regent has copies of them."

"I may add," said Lafare, "that we are authorized to take them by force, and are absolved in advance from all accidents that may happen in such a struggle."

"And you assure me," said the marshal, "that the regent has copies of these letters?"

"On my word of honor," said D'Artagnan.

"In this case," replied Villeroy, "I do not see why I should prevent you from taking these letters, which do not regard me in the least, and which I undertook to deliver to oblige others."

"We know it," said Lafare.

"But," added the marshal, "I hope you will inform his royal highness of the ease with which I submitted to his orders, and of my regret for having offended him."

"Do not doubt it; all will be reported as it has passed. But these letters?"

"Here they are, monsieur," said the marshal, giving two letters to Lafare.

Lafare assured himself by the seals that they were really the letters he was in search of. “My dear D’Artagnan,” said he, “now conduct the marshal to his destination, and give orders, in the name of the regent, that he is to be treated with every respect.”

The chair was closed, and the porters carried it off. At the gate of the gardens a carriage with six horses was waiting, in which they placed the marshal, who now began to suspect the trap which had been laid for him. D’Artagnan seated himself by him, an officer of musketeers and Du Libois, one of the king’s gentlemen, opposite; and with twenty musketeers at each side, and twelve following, the carriage set off at a gallop. Meanwhile, the Marquis of Lafare returned to the chateau with the two letters in his hand.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

The same day, toward two o'clock in the afternoon, while D'Harmental, profiting by Buvat's absence, was repeating to Bathilde for the thousandth time that he loved her, Nanette entered, and announced that some one was waiting in his own room on important business. D'Harmental, anxious to know who this inopportune visitor could be, went to the window, and saw the Abbe Brigaud walking up and down his room. D'Harmental instantly took leave of Bathilde, and went up to his own apartments.

"Well," said the abbe, "while you are quietly making love to your neighbor, fine things are happening."

"What things?" asked D'Harmental.

"Do you not know?"

"I know absolutely nothing, except that — unless what you have to tell me is of the greatest importance — I should like to strangle you for having disturbed me; so take care, and if you have not any news worthy of the occasion, invent some."

"Unfortunately," replied the abbe, "the reality leaves little to the imagination."

"Indeed, my dear abbe," said D'Harmental, "you look in a terrible fright. What has happened? Tell me."

"Oh, only that we have been betrayed by some one. That the Marshal de Villeroy was arrested this morning at Versailles, and that the two letters from Philip V. are in the hands of the regent."

D'Harmental perfectly understood the gravity of the situation, but his face exhibited the calmness which was habitual to him in moments of danger.

"Is that all?" he asked, quietly.

"All for the present; and, if you do not think it enough, you are difficult to satisfy."

"My dear abbe," said D'Harmental, "when we entered on this conspiracy, it was with almost equal chances of success and failure. Yesterday, our chances were ninety to a hundred; to-day they are only thirty; that is all."

"I am glad to see that you do not easily allow yourself to be discouraged," said Brigaud.

"My dear abbe," said D'Harmental, "at this moment I am a happy man, and I see everything on the bright side. If you had taken me in a moment of sadness, it would have been quite the reverse, and I should have replied 'Amen' to your 'De Profundis.'"

"And your opinion?"

"Is that the game is becoming perplexed, but is not yet lost. The Marshal de Villeroy is not of the conspiracy, does not even know the names of the conspirators. Philip V.'s letters — as far as I remember them — do not name anybody; and the only person really compromised is the Prince de Cellamare. The inviolability of his character protects him from any real danger. Besides, if our plan has reached the Cardinal Alberoni, Monsieur de Saint-Aignan must serve as hostage."

"There is truth in what you say."

"And from whom have you this news?" asked the chevalier.

"From Valef, who had it from Madame de Maine; who, on receipt of the news, went to the Prince of Cellamare himself."

"We must see Valef."

"I have appointed him to meet me here, and on my way I stopped at the Marquis de Pompadour's. I am astonished that he is not here before me."

"Raoul," said a voice on the staircase.

"Stay, it is he," cried D'Harmental, running to the door and opening it.

"Thank you," said Valef, "for your assistance, which is very seasonable, for I was just going away, convinced that Brigaud must have made a mistake, and that no Christian could live at such a height, and in such a pigeon-hole. I must certainly bring Madame de Maine here, that she may know what she owes you."

"God grant," said the Abbe Brigaud, "that we may not all be worse lodged a few days hence!"

"Ah! you mean the Bastille! It is possible, abbe; but at least one does not go to the Bastille of one's own accord; moreover, it is a royal lodging, which raises it a little, and makes it a place where a gentleman may live without degradation; but a place like this — fie, abbe!"

"If you knew what I have found here," said D'Harmental, a little piqued, "you would be as unwilling to leave it as I am."

"Ah, some little bourgeoise; some Madame Michelin, perhaps. Take care, D'Harmental; these things are only allowed to Richelieu. With you and me, who are perhaps worth as much as he is, but are unfortunately not quite so much in fashion, it will not do."

"Well," said the Abbe Brigaud, "although your conversation is somewhat frivolous, I hear it with pleasure, since it assures me that our affairs are not so bad as I thought."

"On the contrary, the conspiracy is gone to the devil."

"How so?"

"I scarcely thought they would leave me time to bring you the news."

"Were you nearly arrested then, Valef?" asked D'Harmental.

"I only escaped by a hair's breadth."

"How did it happen, baron?"

"You remember, abbe, that I left you to go to the Prince de Cellamare?"

"Yes."

"Well, I was there when they came to seize his papers."

"Have they seized the prince's papers?"

"All except what we burned, which unfortunately were the smaller number."

"Then we are all lost," said the abbe.

"Why, my dear abbe, how you throw the helve after the hatchet!"

"But, Valef, you have not told us how it happened," said D'Harmental.

"My dear chevalier, imagine the most ridiculous thing in the world. I wish you had been there: we should have laughed fit to kill ourselves. It would have enraged that fellow Dubois."

"What! was Dubois himself at the ambassador's?"

"In person, abbe. Imagine the Prince de Cellamare and I quietly sitting by the corner of the fire, taking out letters from a little casket, and burning those which seemed to deserve the honors of an auto-da-fé, when all at once his valet-de-chambre enters, and announces that the hotel of the embassy is invested by a body of musketeers, and that Dubois and Leblanc wish to speak to him. The object of this visit is not difficult to guess. The prince — without taking the trouble to choose — empties the caskets into the fire, pushes me into a dressing closet, and orders that they shall be admitted. The order was useless. Dubois and Leblanc were at the door. Fortunately, neither one nor the other had seen me."

"Well, I see nothing droll as yet," said Brigaud.

“This is just where it begins,” replied Valef. “Remember that I was in the closet, seeing and hearing everything. Dubois entered, and stretching out his weasel’s head to watch the Prince de Cellamare, who, wrapped in his dressing-gown, stood before the fire to give the papers time to burn.

“‘Monsieur,’ said the prince, in that phlegmatic manner you know he has, ‘may I know to what event I owe the honor of this visit?’

“‘Oh, mon Dieu, monseigneur!’ said Dubois, ‘to a very simple thing — a desire which Monsieur Leblanc and I had to learn a little of your papers, of which,’ added he, showing the letters of Philip V., ‘these two patterns have given us a foretaste.’“

“How!” said Brigaud, “these letters seized at ten o’clock at Versailles are in Dubois’s hands at one o’clock!”

“As you say, abbe. You see that they traveled faster than if they had been put in the post.”

“And what did the prince say then?” asked D’Harmental.

“Oh! the prince wished to carry it off with a high hand, by appealing to his rights as an envoy; but Dubois, who is not wanting in a certain logic, showed him that he had himself somewhat violated these rights, by covering the conspiracy with his ambassador’s cloak. In short, as he was the weakest, he was obliged to submit to what he could not prevent. Besides, Leblanc, without asking permission, had already opened the desk, and examined its contents, while Dubois drew out the drawers of a bureau and rummaged in them. All at once Cellamare left his place, and stopping Leblanc, who had just taken a packet of papers tied with red ribbon —

“‘Pardon, monsieur,’ said he, ‘to each one his prerogatives. These are ladies’ letters.’

“‘Thanks for your confidence,’ said Dubois, not in the least disconcerted, but rising and taking the papers from the hand of Leblanc, ‘I am accustomed to these sort of secrets, and yours shall be well kept.’

”At this moment, looking toward the fire, he saw — in the midst of the burned letters — a paper still untouched, and darting toward it, he seized it just as the flames were reaching it. The movement was so rapid that the ambassador could not prevent it, and the paper was in Dubois’s hands.

“‘Peste!’ said the prince, seeing Dubois shaking his fingers, ‘I knew that the regent had skillful spies, but I did not know that they were brave enough to go in the fire.’

“‘Ma foi! prince,’ said Dubois, unfolding the paper, ‘they are well rewarded for their bravery, see.’

“The prince cast his eyes over the paper; I do not know what it contained, but I know that the prince turned pale as death; and that, as Dubois burst out laughing, Cellamare broke in pieces a little marble statue which was near his hand.

“‘I am glad it was not I,’ said Dubois, coldly, and putting the paper in his pocket.

“‘Every one in turn, monsieur; Heaven is just!’ said the ambassador.

“‘Meanwhile,’ said Dubois, ‘as we have got what we wanted, and have not much time to lose to-day, we will set about affixing the seals.’

“‘The seals here!’ cried the ambassador, exasperated.

“‘With your permission,’ replied Dubois; ‘proceed, Monsieur Leblanc.’

“Leblanc drew out from a bag bands and wax, all ready prepared. They began operations with the desk and the bureau, then they advanced toward the door of my closet.

“‘No,’ cried the prince, ‘I will not permit — ’

“‘Gentlemen,’ said Dubois, opening the door, and introducing into the room two officers of musketeers, ‘the ambassador of Spain is accused of high treason against the State. Have the kindness to accompany him to the carriage which is waiting, and take him — you know where; if he resists, call eight men, and take him by force.’“

“Well, and what did the prince do then?” asked Brigaud.

“What you would have done in his place, I presume, my dear abbe. He followed the two officers, and five minutes afterward your humble servant found himself under seal.”

“How the devil did you get out?” cried D’Harmental.

“That is the beauty of it. Hardly was the prince gone, when Dubois called the valet-de-chambre.

“‘What are you called?’ asked Dubois.

“‘Lapierre, at your service, monseigneur.’

“‘My dear Leblanc,’ said Dubois, ‘explain, if you please, to Monsieur Lapierre, what are the penalties for breaking seals.’

“‘The galleys,’ replied Leblanc.

“‘My dear Monsieur Lapierre,’ continued Dubois, in a mild tone, ‘you hear. If you like to spend a few years rowing on one of his majesty’s vessels, touch one of these seals and the affair is done. If, on the contrary, a hundred louis are agreeable to you, keep them faithfully, and in three days the money shall be given you.’

“‘I prefer the hundred louis,’ said the scoundrel.

“‘Well, then, sign this paper. We constitute you guardian of the prince’s cabinet.’

“‘I am at your orders, monseigneur,’ replied Lapierre; and he signed.

“‘Now,’ said Dubois, ‘you understand all the responsibility you have undertaken?’

“‘Yes, monseigneur.’

“‘And submit to it.’

“‘I do.’

“‘Now, Leblanc,’ said Dubois, ‘we have nothing further to do here, and,’ added he, showing the paper which he had snatched from the fire, ‘I have all I wanted.’

“And at these words he left, followed by Leblanc.

“Lapierre, as soon as he had seen them off, ran to the cabinet, and exclaimed, ‘Quick, baron, we must profit by our being alone for you to leave.’

“‘Did you know I was here then, fellow?’

“‘Pardieu! I should not have accepted the office of guardian if I had not. I saw you go in, and I thought you would not like to stay there for three days.’

“‘And you were right; a hundred louis for your good idea.’

“‘Mon Dieu! what are you doing?’ cried Lapierre.

“‘I am trying to get out.’

“‘Oh, not by the door! You would not send a poor fellow to the galleys; besides, they have taken the key with them.’

“‘And where am I to get out, then?’

“‘Raise your head.’

“‘It is raised.’

“‘Look in the air.’

“‘I am looking.’

“‘To your right. Do you not see anything?’

“‘Yes, a little window.’

“‘Well, get on a chair, on anything you find; it opens into the alcove, let yourself slip now, you will fall on the bed — that is it. You have not hurt yourself, monsieur?’

“‘No, I hope the prince will have as comfortable a bed where they are taking him.’

“‘And I hope monsieur will not forget the service I have rendered him.’

“‘Oh, the hundred louis? Well, as I do not want to part with money at this moment, take this ring, it is worth three hundred pistoles — you gain six hundred francs on the bargain.’

“‘Monsieur is the most generous gentleman I know.’

“‘Now, tell me how I must go.’

“‘By this little staircase; you will find yourself in the pantry; you must then go through the kitchen into the garden, and go out by the little door.’

“‘Thanks for the itinerary.’

“I followed the instructions of Monsieur Lapierre exactly, and here I am.”

“And the prince; where is he?” asked the chevalier.

“How do I know? In prison probably.”

“Diable! diable! diable!” said Brigaud.

“Well, what do you say to my Odyssey, abbe?”

“I say that it would be very droll if it was not for that cursed paper which Dubois picked out of the cinders.”

“Yes,” said Valef, “that spoils it.”

“And you have not any idea what it could be?”

“Not the least; but never mind, it is not lost, we shall know some day.”

At this moment they heard some one coming up the staircase. The door opened, and Boniface appeared.

“Pardon, Monsieur Raoul,” said he, “but it is not you I seek, it is Father Brigaud.”

“Never mind, my dear Boniface, you are welcome. Baron, allow me to present you to my predecessor in my room. The son of our worthy landlady, and godson of the Abbe Brigaud.”

“Oh, you have friends barons, Monsieur Raoul! what an honor for our house!”

“Well,” said the abbe, “you were looking for me you said. What do you want?”

“I want nothing. It was my mother who sent for you.”

“What does she want? Do you know?”

“She wants to know why the parliament is to assemble to-morrow.”

“The parliament assemble to-morrow!” cried Valef and D’Harmental together.

“And how did your mother know?”

“I told her.”

“And how did you know?”

“At the office. Maitre Joullu was with the president when the order arrived.”

“Well, tell your mother I will come to her directly.”

“She will expect you. Adieu, Monsieur Raoul.”

And Monsieur Boniface went out, far from suspecting the effect he had produced on his listeners.

“It is some coup-d’état which is preparing,” murmured D’Harmental.

“I will go to Madame de Maine to warn her,” said Valef.

“And I to Pompadour for news,” said Brigaud.

"And I," said D'Harmental, "remain here; if I am wanted, abbe, you know where I am."

"But if you were not at home, chevalier?"

"Oh! I should not be far off. Open the window, clap your hands, and I should come."

Valef and Brigaud went away together, and D'Harmental went back to Bathilde, whom he found very uneasy. It was five o'clock in the afternoon, and Buvat had not returned — it was the first time such a thing had ever happened.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

PARLIAMENTARY JUSTICE.

The following day, about seven o'clock in the morning, Brigaud came to fetch D'Harmental, and found the young man ready and waiting. They both wrapped themselves in their cloaks, drew down their hats over their eyes, and proceeded through the Rue de Cléry, the Place des Victoires, and the garden of the Palais Royal.

On reaching the Rue de l'Echelle they began to perceive an unusual stir. All the avenues leading toward the Tuileries were guarded by detachments of musketeers and light horse, and the people, expelled from the court and gardens of the Tuileries, crowded into the Place du Carrousel. D'Harmental and Brigaud mixed with the mob.

Having arrived at the place where the triumphal arch now stands, they were accosted by an officer of Gray Musketeers, wrapped in a large cloak like themselves. It was Valef.

"Well, baron," asked Brigaud, "what news?"

"Ah! it is you, abbe," said Valef; "we have been looking for you, Laval, Malezieux, and myself. I have just left them; they must be somewhere near. Let us stop here; it will not be long before they find us. Do you know anything yourself?"

"No, nothing. I called at Malezieux's, but he had already gone out."

"Say that he was not yet come home. We remained at the Arsenal all night."

"And no hostile demonstration has been made?" asked D'Harmental.

"None. Monsieur le Duc de Maine, and Monsieur le Comte de Toulouse were summoned for the regent's council, which is to be held before the sitting of the parliament. At half-past six they were both at the Tuileries, so Madame de Maine, in order to get the news as soon as possible, has come and installed herself in her superintendent's apartments."

"Is it known what has become of the Prince de Cellamare?" asked D'Harmental.

“He is sent to Orleans, in a chaise and four, in the company of a gentleman of the king’s household, and an escort of a dozen light horse.”

“And is nothing known about the paper which Dubois picked out of the cinders?” asked Brigaud. — — ”Nothing.”

“What does Madame de Maine think?”

“That he is brewing something against the legitimated princes, and that he will profit by this to take away some more of their privileges. This morning she lectured her husband sharply, and he promised to remain firm, but she does not rely upon him.”

“And Monsieur de Toulouse?”

“We saw him yesterday evening, but, you know, my dear abbe, there is nothing to be done with his modesty, or rather his humility. He always thinks that they have done too much for him, and is ready to abandon to the regent anything that is asked of him.”

“By-the-by, the king?”

“Well, the king — ”

“Yes, how has he taken the arrest of his tutor?”

“Ah! do you not know? It seems that there was a compact between the marshal and Monsieur de Frejus, that if one of them left his majesty, the other should leave immediately — yesterday morning Monsieur de Frejus disappeared.”

“And where is he?”

“God knows! And so the king, who had taken the loss of his marshal very well, was inconsolable at that of his bishop.”

“And how do you know all that?”

“Through the Duc de Richelieu, who went yesterday, about two o’clock, to Versailles, to pay his respects to the king, and who found his majesty in despair in the midst of the china and ornaments which he had broken. Unfortunately, Richelieu, instead of encouraging the king’s grief, made him laugh by telling him a hundred stories, and almost consoled him by helping him to break the rest of the china and ornaments.”

At this moment an individual clothed in a long advocate’s robe, and with a square cap, passed near the group which was formed by Brigaud, D’Harmental, and Valef, humming the burden of a song made on the marshal after the battle of Ramillies. Brigaud turned round, and, under the disguise, thought he recognized Pompadour. On his part the advocate stopped, and approached the group in question. The abbe had no longer any doubt. It was really the marquis.

"Well, Maitre Clement," said he, "what news from the palace?"

"Oh!" answered Pompadour, "good news, particularly if it be true; they say that the parliament refuses to come to the Tuileries."

"Vive Dieu!" cried Valef, "that will reconcile me with the red robes. But they will not dare."

"Why not? You know that Monsieur de Mesme is for us, and has been named president through the influence of Monsieur de Maine."

"Yes, that is true, but that is long since," said Brigaud; "and if you have nothing better to rely upon, Maitre Clement, I should advise you not to count upon him."

"Particularly," answered Valef, "as he has just obtained from the regent the payment of five hundred thousand francs of his salary."

"Oh, oh!" said D'Harmental, "see, it appears to me that something new is going on. Are they not coming out of the regent's council?"

Indeed, a great movement was taking place in the court of the Tuileries, and the two carriages of the Duc de Maine and the Comte de Toulouse left their post, and approached the clock pavilion. At the same instant they saw the two brothers appear. They exchanged few words, each got into his own carriage, and the two vehicles departed at a rapid pace by the waterside wicket.

For ten minutes Brigaud, D'Harmental, Pompadour, and Valef were lost in conjectures regarding this event, which, having been remarked by others as well as by them, had made a sensation among the crowd, but without being able to assign it to its proper cause. Then they noticed Malezieux, who appeared to be looking for them: they went to him, and by his discomposed face they judged that the information which he had to bring was not comforting.

"Well," asked Pompadour, "have you any idea of what has been going on?"

"Alas!" answered Malezieux, "I am afraid that all is lost."

"You know that the Duc de Maine and the Comte de Toulouse have left the council?" asked Valef.

"I was on the quay when he passed in his carriage, and he recognized me, and stopped the carriage, and sent me this little pencil note by his valet-de-chambre."

“Let us see,” said Brigaud, and he read:

“I do not know what is plotting against us, but the regent invited us — Toulouse and me — to leave the council. That invitation appeared to me an order, and, as all resistance would have been useless, seeing that we have in the council only four or five voices, upon which we cannot count, I was obliged to obey. Try and see the duchesse, who must be at the Tuileries, and tell her that I am retiring to Rambouillet, where I shall wait for the turn of events.

“Your affectionate,

“Louis Auguste.”

“The coward,” said Valef.

“And these are the men for whom we risk our heads,” murmured Pompadour.

“You are mistaken, my dear marquis,” said Brigaud, “we risk our heads on our own account I hope, and not for others. Is not that true, chevalier? Well, what the devil are you about now?”

“Wait, abbe,” answered D’Harmental; “I seem to recognize — yes, by Heaven, it is he! You will not go away from this place, gentlemen!”

“No, I answer for myself at least,” said Pompadour.

“Nor I,” said Valef.

“Nor I,” said Malezieux.

“Nor I,” said the abbe.

“Well, then, I will rejoin you in an instant.”

“Where are you going?” asked Brigaud.

“Do not look, abbe,” said D’Harmental, “it is on private business.”

Dropping Valef’s arm, D’Harmental began to traverse the crowd in the direction of an individual whom he had been following with his eyes for some time, and who, thanks to his personal strength, had approached the gate.

“Captain,” said the chevalier, tapping Roquefinette on the shoulder, and hoping that, thanks to the movement occasioned by the approach of the parliament, they should be able to talk without being observed, “can I say a few words to you in private?”

“Yes, chevalier, with the greatest pleasure. What is it?” continued he, drawing back. “I have recognized you for the last five minutes, but it was not my business to speak first.”

“And I see with pleasure,” said D’Harmental, “that Captain Roquefinette is still prudent.”

“Prudentissimo, chevalier; so if you have any new overture to make, out with it.”

“No, captain, no; not at present, at least. Besides, the place is not suitable for a conference of that nature. Only I wish to know, in case of my having need of you, whether you still live in the same place?”

“Still, chevalier; I am like a briar — I die where I grow; only, instead of your finding me, as you did the first time, on the first or second floor, you will have to look for me on the fifth or sixth, seeing that, by a very natural see-saw movement, as my funds lower I go up.”

“How, captain,” said D’Harmental, laughing, and putting his hand in his pocket, “you are in want of money, and you do not address yourself to your friends?”

“I, borrow money!” cried the captain, stopping D’Harmental’s liberal intentions with a sign; “no; when I do you a service you make me a present; well and good. When I conclude a bargain you execute the conditions. But I to ask without having a right to ask! It may do for a church rat, but not for a soldier; although I am only a simple gentleman, I am as proud as a duke or a peer; but, pardon me, if you want me, you know where to find me. Au revoir, chevalier! au revoir!”

And, without waiting for D’Harmental’s answer, Roquefinette left him, not thinking it safe that they should be seen talking together.

As it was only eleven o’clock in the morning, however, and as in all probability the parliament would not break up till four in the afternoon, and as, no doubt, there was nothing determined on yet, the chevalier thought that, instead of remaining on the Place du Carrousel, he would do better to turn the four hours which he had before him to the profit of his love. Moreover, the nearer he approached to the catastrophe, the more need he felt of seeing Bathilde. Bathilde had become one of the elements of his life; one of the organs necessary to his existence; and, at the moment when he might perhaps be separated from her forever, he did not understand how he could live a single day away from her. Consequently, pressed by the eternal craving for the presence of the loved object, the chevalier, instead of going to look for his companions, went toward the Rue du Temps-Perdu.

D’Harmental found the poor child very uneasy. Buvat had not come home since half-past nine the morning before. Nanette had been to inquire at the library, and to her great astonishment, and the scandal of his fellow-clerks, she had learned that he had not been there for five or six days. Such a derangement in Buvat's habits indicated serious events. On the other hand, the young girl had noticed in Raoul, the day before, a sort of nervous agitation, which, although kept down by determination, gave warning of an important crisis. Thus, joining her old fears to her new agonies, Bathilde felt instinctively that a misfortune, invisible but inevitable, hung above her, and that at any moment it might fall on her devoted head.

But when Bathilde saw Raoul, all fear, past or future, was lost in the happiness of the present. On his part, Raoul, whether it was self-command, or a similar feeling to her own, thought of nothing but Bathilde. Nevertheless, this time the preoccupations on both sides were so powerful that Bathilde could not help expressing her uneasiness to Raoul; he made but little answer, for the absence of Buvat became connected in his mind with some suspicions which he had entertained for a minute, and then cast from him. The time, nevertheless, flowed away with its accustomed rapidity, and four o'clock struck, when the lovers fancied that they had only been together a few minutes. It was the hour at which he generally took his leave.

If Buvat returned, he would probably return at this time. After exchanging a hundred vows, the two young people separated, agreeing, that if anything new happened to either of them, whatever hour of the day or night it might be, they should let the other know directly.

At the door of Madame Denis's house D'Harmental met Brigaud. The sitting was over, and nothing positive was yet known, but vague rumors were afloat that terrible measures had been taken. The information must soon arrive, and Brigaud had fixed a rendezvous with Pompadour and Malezieux at D'Harmental's lodgings, which, as they were the least known, must be the least watched.

In about an hour the Marquis de Pompadour arrived. The parliament had at first wished to make opposition, but everything had given way before the will of the regent. The king of Spain's letters had been read and condemned. It had been decided that the dukes and peers should rank immediately after the princes of the blood. The honors of the legitimated princes were restricted to the simple rank of their peerages. Finally, the Duc de Maine lost the superintendence of the king's education, which was given to the Duc de Bourbon. The Comte de Toulouse alone was maintained, during his lifetime, in his privileges and prerogatives. Malezieux arrived in his turn; he had recently left the duchess. They had just given her notice to quit her apartments in the Tuileries, which belonged henceforward to Monsieur le Duc. Such an affront had, as may easily be understood, exasperated the granddaughter of the great Condé. She had flown into a violent passion, broken all the looking-glasses with her own hands, and had all the furniture thrown out of the window; then, this performance finished, she had got into her carriage, sending Laval to Rambouillet, in order to urge Monsieur de Maine to some vigorous action, and charging Malezieux to assemble all her friends that evening at the Arsenal.

Pompadour and Brigaud cried out against the imprudence of such a meeting. Madame de Maine was evidently watched. To go to the Arsenal the day when they must know that she was the most irritated would be to compromise themselves openly. Pompadour and Brigaud were therefore in favor of going and begging her highness to appoint some other time or place for the rendezvous. Malezieux and D’Harmental were of the same opinion regarding the danger of the step; but they both declared — the first from devotion, the second from a sense of duty — that the more perilous the order was, the more honorable it would be to obey it.

The discussion, as always happens in similar circumstances, began to degenerate into a pretty sharp altercation, when they heard the steps of two persons mounting the stairs. As the three individuals who had appointed a meeting at D’Harmental’s were all assembled, Brigaud, who, with his ear always on the qui-vive had heard the sound first, put his finger to his mouth, to impose silence on the disputants. They could plainly hear the steps approaching; then a low whispering, as of two people questioning; finally, the door opened, and gave entrance to a soldier of the French guard, and a little grisette.

The guardsman was the Baron de Valef.

As to the grisette, she threw off the little black veil which hid her face, and they recognized Madame de Maine.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MAN PROPOSES.

“Your highness! your highness at my lodging!” cried D’Harmental. “What have I done to merit such an honor?”

“The hour is come, chevalier,” said the duchess, “when it is right that we should show people the opinion we hold of their merits. It shall never be said that the friends of Madame de Maine expose themselves for her, and that she does not expose herself with them. Thank God, I am the granddaughter of the great Conde, and I feel that I am worthy of my ancestor.”

“Your highness is most welcome,” said Pompadour; “for your arrival will get us out of a difficulty. Decided, as we were, to obey your orders, we nevertheless hesitated at the idea of the danger incurred by an assembly at the Arsenal, at such a moment as the present, when the police have their eyes upon it.”

“And I thought with you, marquis; so, instead of waiting for you, I resolved to come and seek you. The baron accompanied me. I went to the house of the Comtesse de Chavigny, a friend of De Launay’s, who lives in the Rue du Mail. We had clothes brought there; and, as we were only a few steps off, we came here on foot, and here we are. On my honor, Messire Voyer d’Argenson would be clever, indeed, if he recognized us in this disguise.”

“I see, with pleasure,” said Malezieux, “that your highness is not cast down by the events of this horrible day.”

“Cast down! I! Malezieux, I hope you know me too well to have feared it for a single instant. Cast down! On the contrary, I never felt more vigor, or more determination. Oh, if I only were a man!”

“Let your highness command,” said D’Harmental, “and everything that you could do if you could act yourself, we will do — we, who stand in your stead.”

“No, no; it is impossible that any other should do that which I should have done.”

“Nothing is impossible, madame, to five men as devoted as we are. Moreover, our interest demands a prompt and energetic course of action. It is not reasonable to believe that the regent will stop there. The day after to-morrow — to-morrow evening, perhaps — we shall all be arrested. Dubois gives out that the paper which he saved from the flames at the Prince of Cellamare’s is nothing less than the list of the conspirators. In that case he knows all our names. We have, then, at this very moment, a sword hanging over each of our heads; do not let us wait tamely till the thread which suspends it snaps; let us seize it, and strike!”

“Strike! What — where — and how?” asked Brigaud. “That abominable parliament has destroyed all our schemes. Have we measures taken, or a plot made out?”

“The best plan which has been conceived,” said Pompadour, “and the one which offered the greatest chance of success, was the first; and the proof is, that it was only overthrown by an unheard-of circumstance.”

“Well, if the plan was good then, it is so still,” said Valef; “let us return to it!”

“Yes, but in failing,” said Malezieux, “this plan put the regent on his guard.”

“On the contrary,” said Pompadour; “in consequence of that very failure, it will be supposed that we have abandoned it.”

“And the proof is,” said Valef, “that the regent, on this head, takes fewer precautions than ever. For example — since his daughter, Mademoiselle de Chartres, has become abbess of Chelles, he goes to see her every week, and he goes through the wood of Vincennes without guards, and with only a coachman and two lackeys, and that at eight or nine o’clock at night.”

”And what day does he pay this visit?” asked Brigaud.

“Wednesday.”

“That is to-morrow,” said the duchess.

“Brigaud,” said Valef, “have you still the passport for Spain?”

“Yes.”

“And the same facilities for the route?”

“The same. The postmaster is with us, and we shall have only to explain to him.”

“Well,” said Valef, “if her royal highness will allow me, I will to-morrow call together seven or eight friends, wait for the regent in the Bois de Vincennes, carry him off; and in three days I am at Pampeluna.”

“An instant, my dear baron,” said D’Harmental. “I would observe to you that you are stepping into my shoes, and that this undertaking belongs to me of right.”

“You, my dear chevalier! you have already done what you had to do: now it is our turn.”

“Not at all, if you please, Valef. My honor is concerned in it, for I have revenge to take. You would annoy me infinitely by insisting on this subject.”

“All that I can do for you, my dear D’Harmental,” said Valef, “is to leave it to her highness’s choice. She knows that we are equally devoted to her; let her decide.”

“Will you accept my arbitration, chevalier,” said the duchess.

“Yes, for I trust to your justice, madame,” said D’Harmental.

“And you are right; yes, the honor of the undertaking belongs to you. I place in your hands the fate of the son of Louis the Fourteenth, and the granddaughter of the great Conde. I trust entirely to your devotion and courage, and I have the greater hope of your success, that fortune owes you a compensation. To you, my dear D’Harmental, all the honor, and all the peril.”

“I accept both with gratitude,” said D’Harmental, kissing the duchess’s hand; “and to-morrow, at this hour, I shall be dead, or the regent will be on the way to Spain.”

“Very good,” said Pompadour, “that is what I call speaking; and if you want any one to give you a helping hand, my dear chevalier, count on me.”

“And on me,” said Valef.

“And are we good for nothing?” said Malezieux.

“My dear chancellor,” said the duchess, “to each one his share. To poets, churchmen, and magistrates, advice; to soldiers, execution. Chevalier, are you sure of finding the men who assisted you before?”

“I am sure of their chief, at least.”

“When shall you see him?”

“This evening.” — — ”At what time?”

“Directly, if your highness wishes it.”

“The sooner the better.”

“In a quarter of an hour I will be ready.”

“Where can we learn the result of the interview?”

“I will come to your highness, wheresoever you may be.”

“Not at the Arsenal,” said Brigaud, “it is too dangerous.”

“Can we not wait here?” asked the duchess.

“Remember,” said Brigaud, “that my pupil is a steady fellow, receiving scarcely any one, and that a long visit might arouse suspicion.”

“Can we not fix a rendezvous where there would be no such fear?” asked Pompadour.

“Certainly,” said the duchess, “at the stone in the Champs-Elysées, for instance. Malezieux and I will come there in a carriage without livery, and without arms. Pompadour, Valef, and Brigaud will meet us there, each one separately; there we will wait for D’Harmental, and settle the last measure.”

“That will suit well,” said D’Harmental, “for my man lives in the Rue Saint Honore.”

“You know, chevalier,” replied the duchess, “that you may promise as much money as you like.”

“I undertake to fill the purse,” said Brigaud.

“That is well, abbe, for I know who will undertake to empty it,” said D’Harmental.

”Then all is agreed,” said the duchess. “In an hour, in the Champs-Elysées.”

Then the duchess — having readjusted her mantle so as to hide her face — took Valef’s arm, and went out. Malezieux followed at a little distance, taking care not to lose sight of her. Brigaud and Pompadour went out together, and D’Harmental went directly to the Rue Saint Honore.

Whether it were chance, or calculation on the part of the duchess, who appreciated D’Harmental, and understood how fully she might rely upon him, the chevalier found himself more than ever put forward in the conspiracy: but his honor was engaged; and although he foresaw the terrible consequences of the step which he was about to take, he went boldly forward, resolved to sacrifice everything, even his life and his love, to the fulfillment of his promise.

He presented himself at La Fillon’s with the same tranquillity as before, although many things were altered in his life since then, and having been, as before, received by the mistress of the house in person he inquired if Captain Roquefinette were visible.

Without doubt La Fillon had expected a much less moral demand; for on recognizing D’Harmental, she could not repress a movement of surprise. However, she asked if he were not the same person, who — two months before — had come there to inquire for the captain. D'Harmental replied in the affirmative. As soon as she was informed on this point, she called a servant, and ordered her to conduct the chevalier to No. 72. The girl obeyed, taking a candle, and going before D'Harmental, who followed her. This time, no songs guided him in his ascent; all was silent in the house; and as the chevalier himself was occupied with grave thoughts, he mounted the six flights, and knocked at once at the door.

"Enter," said Roquefinette.

The chevalier slipped a louis into the servant's hand, opened the door, and went in.

The same change was observable in the interior as in the exterior. Roquefinette was no longer, as on the first occasion, sitting among the debris of a feast, surrounded by slaves, smoking his long pipe. He was alone, in a little dark attic, lighted by a single candle, which, nearly burned out, gave more smoke than flame, and whose flickering light gave a strange expression to the harsh face of the brave captain, who was standing leaning against the chimney-piece.

"Ah!" said Roquefinette in a slightly ironical tone, "it is you, chevalier; I expected you."

"You expected me, captain! and what induced you to do so?"

"Events, chevalier; events."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you thought you could make open war, and consequently put poor Captain Roquefinette aside, as a bandit, who is good for nothing but a nocturnal blow at a street corner, or in a wood; and now Dubois knows all; the parliament, on whom we thought we might count, have failed us, and has said yes, instead of no. Now we come back to the captain. My dear captain here! my good captain there! Is not this exactly as it has happened, chevalier? Well, here is the captain, what do you want of him? Speak."

"Really, my dear captain," said D'Harmental, not knowing exactly how to take this speech, "there is some truth in what you say. Only you are mistaken if you think we had forgotten you. If our plan had succeeded, you would have had proof that my memory was better, and I should have come to offer you my credit, as I now come to ask your assistance."

"Hum!" said the captain; "for the last three days, since I have inhabited this new apartment, I have made many reflections on the vanity of human things, and have more than once felt inclined to retire altogether from these affairs, or — if I did undertake one — to take care that it should be sufficiently brilliant to insure my future."

"What I come to propose to you is just the thing. Without preamble, it is — "

"What?" asked the captain, after waiting two or three minutes in vain for the end of the speech.

"Oh captain, I thought — "

"What did you think, chevalier?"

"I thought I heard steps — a sort of creaking in the wall."

"Ah!" said the captain, "there are not a few rats in this establishment, I can tell you."

"Oh, that must be it!" said D'Harmental. "Well! my dear Roquefinette, we wish to profit by the regent's returning unguarded from Chelles to carry him off and take him to Spain."

"Before going any further," said Roquefinette, "I must warn you that this is a new treaty, and that every new treaty implies new conditions."

"No need of discussions on that point. You shall fix them yourself; but can you still dispose of your men?"

"I can."

"Will they be ready at two o'clock to-morrow?"

"They will."

"That is all that is necessary."

"Something else is necessary — money to buy a horse and arms."

"There are a hundred louis in that purse; take it."

"It is well. You shall have an account of it."

"Then to-morrow at my house at two o'clock."

"It is agreed, chevalier; you are not to be astonished if I am a little exacting."

"You know that last time I only complained of your being too modest."

"Very well, that will do," said the captain, "you are easily satisfied. Let me light you; it would be a pity that a brave fellow like you should break his neck."

And the captain took the candle, which, now burned down to the paper, threw a splendid light over the staircase.

D'Harmental had not forgotten that Madame de Maine waited with anxiety for the result of the interview. He did not trouble himself, therefore, about what had become of La Fillon, whom he did not see on leaving; and having gone down the Rue des Feuillons, he passed along the Champs-Elysées, which, without being altogether deserted, was nevertheless almost solitary. Having arrived at the stone, he noticed a carriage standing on the opposite side of the road, while two men were walking at a little distance off in the cross-road. He approached the carriage; a woman, seeing him, put her head impatiently out of the window. The chevalier recognized Madame de Maine; Malezieux and Valef were with her. As to the walkers, who, seeing D'Harmental, approached the vehicle, it is needless to say that they were Brigaud and Pompadour.

The chevalier, without naming Roquefinette, or enlarging on the character of the illustrious captain, told them in a few words what had passed. This recital was welcomed by a general exclamation of joy. The duchess gave D'Harmental her hand to kiss; the men pressed his. It was agreed that the next day at two o'clock the duchess, Pompadour, Laval, Valef, Malezieux, and Brigaud, should meet at No. 15, Faubourg Saint Antoine, a house occupied by D'Avranches' mother, and that they should there await the event.

The result was to be announced to them by D'Avranches himself, who, at three o'clock, should be at the Barrière du Trône with two horses, one for himself, the other for the chevalier. He was to follow D'Harmental at a distance, and return to announce what had passed. Five other horses, saddled and bridled, were to be ready in the stables of the house in the Faubourg Saint Antoine, so that the conspirators might fly at once in case of the chevalier's failure.

These plans settled, the duchess forced the chevalier to seat himself beside her. The duchess wished to drive him home, but he told her that the appearance of a carriage at Madame Denis's door would produce too much sensation, and that, flattering as it would be to him, it would be too dangerous for all. In consequence, the duchess set D'Harmental down in the Place des Victoires, after repeatedly expressing her gratitude for his devotion. It was ten o'clock in the evening. D'Harmental had scarcely seen Bathilde during the day; he wished to see her again; he was sure to find her at her window, but that was not sufficient, for what he had to say was too serious to be thus spoken from one side to the other of the street.

He was thinking under what pretext he could present himself at such a late hour, when he thought he saw a woman at the door of her house. He advanced and recognized Nanette, who was there by Bathilde's order. The poor girl was dreadfully uneasy, Buvat not having returned. All the evening she had remained at the window to watch for D’Harmental, but had not seen him. It seemed to Bathilde that there must be some connection between Buvat’s strange disappearance and the melancholy which she had remarked the day before in D’Harmental’s face. Nanette was waiting at the door for Buvat and D’Harmental; she now waited for Buvat, and D’Harmental went up to Bathilde.

Bathilde had heard and recognized his step, and ran to open the door. At the first glance she noticed the pensive expression of his face.

“Oh! mon Dieu, Raoul!” she exclaimed, “has anything happened to you?”

“Bathilde,” said D’Harmental, with a melancholy smile, “you have often told me that there is in me something mysterious which frightens you.”

“Yes,” cried Bathilde; “it is the only torment of my life; my only fear for the future.”

“And you are right; for before I knew you, Bathilde, I had abandoned a part of my free-will; this portion of myself no longer belongs to me, but submits to a supreme law, and to unforeseen events. It is a black point in a clear sky. According to the way the wind blows, it may disappear as a vapor or increase into a storm. The hand which holds and guides mine may lead me to the highest favor or to the most complete disgrace. Tell me, Bathilde, are you disposed to share my good and evil fortune; the calm and the tempest?”

“Everything with you, Raoul.”

“Think of what you are undertaking, Bathilde. It may be a happy and a brilliant life which is reserved for you; it may be exile; it may be captivity; it may be that you will be a widow before you are a wife.”

Bathilde turned so pale that Raoul thought she would fall; but she quickly regained her self-command, and, holding out her hand to D’Harmental —

“Raoul,” said she, “have I not already told you that I love you; that I never have and never can love any other? It seems to me that all these promises you ask are included in those words; but since you wish them renewed, I do so. Your life shall be my life, and your death my death; both are in the hands of God.”

“And I, Bathilde,” said D’Harmental, leading her before the crucifix, “I swear that from this moment you are my wife before God and before men; and since the events which may dispose of my life leave me nothing but my love to offer to you, that love is yours — profound, unalterable, eternal;" and the young people exchanged their first kiss with the renewal of their vows.

When D'Harmental left Bathilde, Buvat had not returned.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DAVID AND GOLIATH.

Toward ten o'clock in the morning the Abbe Brigaud entered D'Harmental's room; he brought him 20,000 francs, partly in gold, partly in Spanish paper. The duchess had passed the night at the Comtesse de Chavigny's, in the Rue du Mail. The plans of the preceding day were in no degree changed, and they had ascertained that the regent would pay his accustomed visit to Chelles. At ten o'clock Brigaud and D'Harmental went down, Brigaud to join Pompadour and Valef on the Boulevard du Temple, and D'Harmental to visit Bathilde.

Uneasiness was at its height in the little household; Buvat was still absent, and it was easy to see by Bathilde's eyes that she had had but little sleep. As soon as she saw D'Harmental, she understood that some expedition was preparing. D'Harmental again wore that dark costume in which she had never seen him but on that evening when, on returning, he had thrown his mantle on a chair, and displayed to her sight the pistols in his belt. Moreover, she saw by his spurs that he expected to ride during the day. All these things would have appeared insignificant at any other time, but, after the nocturnal betrothal we have described, they took a new and grave importance. Bathilde tried at first to make the chevalier speak, but he told her that the secret she asked did not belong to himself, and she desisted. An hour after, Nanette appeared, with a distressed face. She came from the library; Buvat had not been there, and no one had heard anything of him.

Bathilde could contain herself no longer; she fell into Raoul's arms, and burst into tears. Then Raoul confessed to her his fears, and that the papers which the pretended Prince de Listhnay had given Buvat to copy were politically important, by which he might have been compromised and arrested, but had nothing to fear, and that the passive part which he had played in this affair did not endanger him in the least.

Bathilde, having feared some much greater misfortune, eagerly seized on this idea. She did not confess to herself that the greater part of her uneasiness was not for Buvat, and that all the tears she shed were not for the absent.

When D’Harmental was near Bathilde, time appeared to fly; he was astonished when he found that he had been with her an hour and a half, and remembering that at two o’clock he had to arrange his new treaty with Roquefinette, he rose to go. Bathilde turned pale. D’Harmental, to reassure her, promised to come to her again after the departure of the person he expected.

The chevalier had only been a few minutes at his window when he saw Roquefinette appear at the corner of the Rue Montmartre. He was mounted on a dapple-gray horse, both swift and strong, and evidently chosen by a connoisseur. He came along leisurely, like a man to whom it is equally indifferent whether he is seen or not. On arriving at the door he dismounted, fastened up his horse, and ascended the stairs. As on the day before, his face was grave and pensive, his compressed lips indicated some fixed determination, and D’Harmental received him with a smile, which met with no answer on the captain’s face. D’Harmental at a glance took in all these different signs.

“Well, captain,” said he, “I see that you are still punctuality itself.”

“It is a military habit, chevalier, and is not astonishing in an old soldier.”

“I did not doubt you, but you might not have been able to meet your men.”

“I told you I knew where to find them.”

“And where are they?”

“In the horse-market at the Porte Saint Martin.”

“Are you not afraid they will be noticed?”

“How should twelve or fifteen men dressed as peasants be noticed among three hundred other peasants, buying and selling horses? It is like a needle in a bottle of hay, which none but myself can find.”

“But how can these men accompany you, captain?”

“The simplest thing in the world. Each one has bargained for the horse which suits him. Each one has offered a price, to which the vendor replies by another. I arrive, give to each twenty-five or thirty louis. Every one pays for his horse, has it saddled, mounts, slips into the holsters the pistols which he has in his belt, and, by a different route, arrives at a given place in the Bois de Vincennes at four o’clock. Then only I explain to them for what they are wanted. I again distribute money, put myself at the head of my squadron, and go to the work — supposing that you and I agree on the conditions.”

“Well, these conditions, captain,” said D’Harmental, “let us discuss them, and I think I have arranged so that you will be satisfied with what I have to offer you.”

“Let us hear them,” said Roquefinette, sitting down by the table.

“First, double the sum you received last time,” said the chevalier.

”Ah!” said Roquefinette, “I do not care for money.”

“What! you do not care for money, captain?” — ”Not the least in the world.”

“What do you care for, then?”

“A position.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, chevalier, that every day I am four-and-twenty hours older, and that with age comes philosophy.”

“Well, captain,” said D’Harmental, beginning to be seriously uneasy, “what is the ambition of your philosophy?”

“I have told you, chevalier, a position suitable to my long services — not in France, you understand. In France I have too many enemies, beginning with the lieutenant of police; but in Spain, for instance. Ah! that would suit me well. A fine country — beautiful women — plenty of doubloons! Decidedly, I should like a rank in Spain.”

“The thing is possible; it depends on the rank you desire.”

“Well, you know, chevalier, when one is wishing, it is as well to wish for something worth the trouble.”

“You make me uneasy, monsieur,” said D’Harmental, “for I have not the seals of King Philip, to sign brevets in his name. But never mind; speak.”

“Well,” said Roquefinette, “I see so many greenhorns at the heads of regiments, that I also have thought of being a colonel.”

“Colonel? Impossible!”

“Why so?”

“Because, if they make you a colonel, you who only hold a secondary position in the affair, what am I to ask, I, who am at the head?”

“That is the very thing: I wish to change positions for the moment. You remember what I said to you on a certain evening in the Rue du Valois?”

“Aid my memory, captain. I have unfortunately forgotten.”

"I told you that if I had an affair like this to manage, things would go better. I added that I would speak to you of it again. I do so now."

"What the devil are you talking about, captain?"

"A simple matter, chevalier. We made a first attempt together, which failed. Then you changed batteries: you thought you could do without me, and you failed again. The first time you failed at night, and without noise: we each went our own way, and there was nothing known about it. The second time, on the contrary, you failed in broad daylight, and with an éclat which has compromised all; so that if you do not save yourselves by a bold stroke, you are all lost, as Dubois has your names; and to-morrow — to-night perhaps — you may be all arrested, knights, barons, dukes, and princes. Now, there is in the world one man, and one only, who can free you from your troubles — that man is Captain Roquefinette, and you offer him the same place he held before! Fie, chevalier! — you wish to bargain with him. Remember, pretensions increase with the services to be rendered. I am now an important personage. Treat me as such, or I put my hands in my pockets, and leave Dubois to do as he likes."

D'Harmental bit his lips, but he understood that he had to treat with a man who was accustomed to sell his services as dear as possible; and as what the captain said of their necessity was literally true, he restrained his impatience and his pride.

"Then you wish to be a colonel?"

"That is my idea."

"But suppose I make you this promise, who can answer that I have influence enough to ratify it?"

"Oh, chevalier, I reckon on managing my little affairs myself."

"Where?"

"At Madrid."

"Who told you that I shall take you there?"

"I do not know if you will take me there, but I know that I shall go there."

"You, to Madrid! What for?"

"To take the regent."

"You are mad."

"Come, come, chevalier, no big words. You ask my conditions; I tell them you. They do not suit you: good-evening. We are not the worst friends for that."

And Roquefinette rose, took his hat, and was going toward the door.

"What, are you going?"

"Certainly."

"But you forget, captain."

"Ah! it is true," said Roquefinette, intentionally mistaking D'Harmental's meaning: "you gave me a hundred louis; I must give you an account of them."

He took his purse from his pocket.

"A horse, thirty louis; a pair of double-barreled pistols, ten louis; a saddle, bridle, etc., two louis; total, forty-two louis. There are fifty-eight louis in this purse; the horse, pistols, saddle, and bridle, are yours. Count, we are quits."

And he threw the purse on the table.

"But that is not what I have to say to you, captain."

"What is it, then?"

"That it is impossible to confide to you a mission of such importance."

"It must be so, nevertheless, or not at all. I must take the regent to Madrid, and I alone, or he remains at the Palais Royal."

"And you think yourself worthy to take from the hands of Philippe d'Orleans the sword which conquered at Lérida La Pucelle, and which rested by the scepter of Louis XIV., on the velvet cushion with the golden tassels?"

"I heard in Italy that Francis I., at the battle of Pavia, gave up his to a butcher."

And the captain pressed his hat on his head, and once more approached the door.

"Listen, captain," said D'Harmental, in his most conciliating tone; "a truce to arguments and quotations; let us split the difference. I will conduct the regent to Spain, and you shall accompany me."

"Yes, so that the poor captain may be lost in the dust which the dashing chevalier excites, and that the brilliant colonel may throw the old bandit into the shade! Impossible, chevalier, impossible! I will have the management of the affair, or I will have nothing to do with it."

"But this is treason!" cried D'Harmental.

"Treason, chevalier! And where have you seen, if you please, that Captain Roquefinette was a traitor? Where are the agreements which I have made and not kept? Where are the secrets which I have divulged? I, a traitor! Good heavens, chevalier, it was only the day before yesterday that I was offered gold to betray you, and I refused! No, no! Yesterday you came and asked me to aid you a second time. I told you that I was ready, but on new conditions. Well, I have just told you those conditions. Accept them or refuse them. Where do you see treason in all this?"

"And if I was weak enough to accept these conditions, monsieur, do you imagine that the confidence which her royal highness the Duchesse de Maine reposes in the Chevalier d'Harmental can be transferred to Captain Roquefinette?"

"And what has the Duchesse de Maine to remark upon in this? You undertake a piece of business. There are material hindrances in the way of your executing it yourself. You hand it over to me. That is all."

"That is to say," answered D'Harmental, shaking his head, "that you wish to be free to loose the regent, if the regent offers you, for leaving him in France, twice as much as I offer you for taking him to Spain."

"Perhaps," replied Roquefinette.

"Hearken, captain." said D'Harmental, making a new effort to retain his sang-froid, and endeavoring to renew the negotiations, "I will give you twenty thousand francs down."

"Trash," answered the captain.

"I will take you with me to Spain."

"Fiddlesticks."

"And I engage on my honor to obtain you a regiment."

Roquefinette began to hum a tune.

"Take care," said D'Harmental; "it is more dangerous for you now, at the point at which we have arrived, and with the terrible secrets which you know, to refuse than to accept."

"And what will happen, then, if I refuse?" asked Roquefinette.

"It will happen, captain, that you will not leave this room."

"And who will prevent me?"

"I!" cried D'Harmental, bounding before the door, a pistol in each hand.

"You?" said Roquefinette, making a step toward the chevalier, and then crossing his arms and regarding him fixedly.

"One step more, captain," said the chevalier, "and I give you my word I will blow your brains out."

"You blow my brains out — you! In the first place, it is necessary for that, that you should not tremble like an old woman. Do you know what you will do? You will miss me; the noise will alarm the neighbors, who will call the guard, and they will question me as to the reasons of your shooting at me, and I shall be obliged to tell them."

"Yes, you are right, captain," cried the chevalier, uncocking his pistols, and replacing them in his belt, "and I shall be obliged to kill you more honorably than you deserve. Draw, monsieur, draw."

And D'Harmental, leaning his left foot against the door, drew his sword, and placed himself on guard. It was a court sword, a thin ribbon of steel, set in a gold handle. Roquefinette began to laugh.

"With what shall I defend myself, chevalier? Do you happen to have one of your mistress's knitting needles here?"

"Defend yourself with your own sword, monsieur; long as it is, you see that I am placed so that I cannot make a step to avoid it."

"What do you think of that, my dear?" said the captain, addressing his blade.

"It thinks that you are a coward, captain," cried D'Harmental, "since it is necessary to strike you in the face to make you fight." And with a movement as quick as lightning, D'Harmental cut the captain across the face with his rapier, leaving on the cheek a long blue mark like the mark of a whip.

Roquefinette gave a cry which might have been taken for the roaring of a lion, and bounding back a step, threw himself on guard, his sword in his hand. Then began between these two men a duel, terrible, hidden, silent, for both were intent on their work, and each understood what sort of an adversary he had to contend with. By a reaction, very easy to be understood, it was now D'Harmental who was calm, and Roquefinette who was excited. Every instant he menaced D'Harmental with his long sword, but the frail rapier followed it as iron follows the loadstone, twisting and spinning round it like a viper. At the end of about five minutes the chevalier had not made a single lunge, but he had parried all those of his adversary. At last, on a more rapid thrust than the others, he came too late to the parry, and felt the point of his adversary's sword at his breast. At the same time a red spot spread from his shirt to his lace frill. D'Harmental saw it, and with a spring engaged so near to Roquefinette that the hilts almost touched. The captain instantly saw the disadvantage of his long sword in such a position. A thrust "sur les armes" and he was lost; he made a spring backward, his foot slipped on the newly-waxed floor, and his sword-hand rose in spite of himself. Almost by instinct D'Harmental profited by it, lunged within, and pierced the captain's chest, where the blade disappeared to the hilt. D'Harmental recovered to parry in return, but the precaution was needless; the captain stood still an instant, opened his eyes wildly, the sword dropped from his grasp, and pressing his two hands to the wound, he fell at full length on the floor.

"Curse the rapier!" murmured he, and expired; the strip of steel had pierced his heart.

Still D'Harmental remained on guard, with his eyes fixed on the captain, only lowering his sword as the dead man let his slip. Finally, he found himself face to face with a corpse, but this corpse had its eyes open, and continued to look at him. Leaning against the door, the chevalier remained an instant thunderstruck; his hair bristled, his forehead became covered with perspiration, he did not dare to move, he did not dare to speak, his victory seemed to him a dream. Suddenly the mouth of the dying man set in a last convulsion — the partisan was dead, and his secret had died with him.

How to recognize, in the midst of three hundred peasants, buying and selling horses, the twelve or fifteen pretended ones who were to carry off the regent?

D'Harmental gave a low cry; he would have given ten years of his own life to add ten minutes to that of the captain. He took the body in his arms, raised it, called it, and, seeing his reddened hands, let it fall into a sea of blood, which, following the inclination of the boards down a channel in the floor, reached the door, and began to spread over the threshold.

At that moment, the horse, which was tied to the shutter, neighed violently.

D'Harmental made three steps toward the door, then he remembered that Roquefinette might have some memorandum about him which might serve as a guide. In spite of his repugnance, he searched the pockets of the corpse, one after another, but the only papers he found were two or three old bills of restaurateurs, and a love-letter from La Normande.

Then, as he had nothing more to do in that room, he filled his pockets with gold and notes, closed the door after him, descended the stairs rapidly, left at a gallop toward the Rue Gros Chenet, and disappeared round the angle nearest to the Boulevard.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE SAVIOR OF FRANCE.

While these terrible events were going forward in the attic of Madame Denis's house, Bathilde, uneasy at seeing her neighbor's window so long shut, had opened hers, and the first thing she saw, was the dappled gray horse attached to the shutter; but as she had not seen the captain go in, she thought that the steed was for Raoul, and that reflection immediately recalled both her former and present fears.

Bathilde consequently remained at the window, looking on all sides, and trying to read in the physiognomy of every passer-by whether that individual was an actor in the mysterious drama which was preparing, and in which she instinctively understood that Raoul was to play the chief part. She remained, then, with a beating heart, her neck stretched out, and her eyes wandering hither and thither, when all at once her unquiet glances concentrated on a point. The young girl gave a cry of joy, for she saw Buvat coming round the corner from the Rue Montmartre. Indeed, it was the worthy caligraphist in person, who, looking behind him from time to time — as if he feared pursuit — advanced with his cane horizontal, and at as swift a run as his little legs permitted.

While he enters, and embraces his ward, let us look back and relate the causes of that absence, which, doubtless, caused as much uneasiness to our readers as to Nanette and Bathilde.

It will be remembered how Buvat — driven by fear of torture to the revelation of the conspiracy — had been forced by Dubois to make every day, at his house, a copy of the documents which the pretended Prince de Listhnay had given him. It was thus that the minister of the regent had successively learned all the projects of the conspirators, which he had defeated by the arrest of Marshal Villeroy, and by the convocation of parliament.

Buvat had been at work as usual, but about four o'clock, as he rose, and took his hat in one hand and his cane in the other, Dubois came in and took him into a little room above that where he had been working, and, having arrived there, asked him what he thought of the apartment. Flattered by this deference of the prime minister's to his judgment, Buvat hastened to reply that he thought it very agreeable.

"So much the better," answered Dubois, "and I am very glad that it is to your taste, for it is yours."

"Mine!" cried Buvat, astonished.

"Certainly; is it astonishing that I should wish to have under my hand, or rather, under my eyes, a personage as important as yourself?"

"But," asked Buvat, "am I then going to live in the Palais Royal?"

"For some days, at least," answered Dubois.

"Monseigneur, let me at all events inform Bathilde."

"That is just the thing. Bathilde must not be informed."

"But you will permit that the first time I go out — "

"As long as you remain here you will not go out."

"But," cried Buvat, with terror, "but I am then a prisoner?"

"A State prisoner, as you have said, my dear Buvat: but calm yourself; your captivity will not be long, and while it lasts we will take of you all the care which is the due of the savior of France, for you have saved France, Monsieur Buvat."

"I have saved France, and here I am a prisoner under bolts and bars!"

“And where on earth do you see bolts and bars, my dear Buvat?” said Dubois, laughing; “the door shuts with a latch, and has not even a lock: as to the window, yours looks on the gardens of the Palais Royal, and has not even a lattice to intercept the view, a superb view — you are lodged here like the regent himself.”

“Oh, my little room! Oh, my terrace!” cried Buvat, letting himself sink exhausted on a seat.

Dubois, who had no other consolation to bestow upon Buvat, went out, and placed a sentinel at the door. The explanation of this step is easy. Dubois feared that, seeing the arrest of Villeroy, they would suspect from whence the information came, and would question Buvat, and that he would confess all. This confession would, doubtless, have arrested the conspirators in the midst of their schemes, which, on the contrary, Dubois, informed beforehand of all their plans, wished to see carried to a point, so that in crushing one monster rebellion he might put an end to all lesser ones.

Toward eight o’clock, as daylight began to fade, Buvat heard a great noise at his door, and a sort of metallic clashing, which did not tend to reassure him. He had heard plenty of lamentable stories of State prisoners who had been assassinated in their prisons, and he rose trembling and ran to the window. The court and gardens of the Palais Royal were full of people, the galleries began to be lighted up, the whole scene was full of gayety and light. He heaved a profound sigh, thinking perhaps that he might be bidding a last adieu to that life and animation. At that instant the door was opened; Buvat turned round shuddering, and saw two tall footmen in red livery bringing in a well-supplied table. The metallic noise which had so much disturbed him had been the clattering of the silver plates and dishes.

Buvat’s first impression was one of thankfulness to Heaven, that so imminent a danger as that which he had feared had changed into such a satisfactory event. But immediately the idea struck him that the deadly intentions held toward him were still the same, and that only the mode of their execution were changed — instead of being assassinated, like Jeansans-Peur, or the Duc de Guise, he was going to be poisoned, like the Dauphin, or the Duc de Burgundy. He threw a rapid glance on the two footmen, and thought he remarked something somber which denoted the agents of a secret vengeance. From this instant his determination was taken, and, in spite of the scent of the dishes, which appeared to him an additional proof, he refused all sustenance, saying majestically that he was neither hungry nor thirsty.

The footmen looked at each other knowingly. They were two sharp fellows, and had understood Buvat’s character at a glance, and not understanding a man not being hungry when before a pheasant stuffed with truffles, or not thirsty before a bottle of Chambertin, had penetrated the prisoner’s fears pretty quickly. They exchanged a few words in a low tone, and the boldest of the two, seeing that there was a means of drawing some profit from the circumstances, advanced toward Buvat, who recoiled before him as far as the room would allow.

“Monsieur,” said he, in a reassuring tone, “we understand your fears, and, as we are honest servants, we will show you that we are incapable of lending ourselves to the dealings which you suspect; consequently, during the whole time that you remain here, my comrade and I, each in our turn, will taste all the dishes which are brought you, and all the wines which are sent in, happy if by our devotion we can restore your tranquillity.”

“Monsieur,” answered Buvat, ashamed that his secret sentiments had been discovered thus, “monsieur, you are very polite, but in truth I am neither hungry nor thirsty.”

“Never mind, monsieur,” said the man, “as my comrade and myself desire not to leave the smallest doubt on your mind, we will execute what we have offered. Comtois, my friend,” continued the fellow, sitting down in the place which had been intended for Buvat, “do me the favor to help me to a little of that soup, a wing of that pullet in rice, a glass of that Chambertin, there — to your health, monsieur.”

“Monsieur,” said Buvat, opening his eyes, and looking at the footman who was dining so impudently in his stead, “monsieur, it is I who am your servant, and I should wish to know your name, in order to preserve it in my memory by the side of that of the good jailer who gave to Comte l’Ancien a similar proof of devotion to that which you give me.”

“Monsieur,” answered the footman modestly, “I am called Bourguignon, and here is my comrade Comtois, whose turn for devotion will come to-morrow, and who, when the moment shall have arrived, will not be behindhand. Comtois, my friend, a slice of that pheasant, and a glass of champagne. Do you not see that, in order to reassure monsieur completely, I must taste everything; it is a severe test, I know, but where would be the merit of being an honest man if it did not sometimes bring trials like the present? To your health, Monsieur Buvat."

"Heaven preserve yours, Monsieur Bourguignon."

"Now, Comtois, hand me the dessert, so that I may leave no doubt on Monsieur Buvat's mind."

"Monsieur Bourguignon, I beg you to believe that, if I had any, they are completely dissipated."

"No, monsieur, no, I beg your pardon, you still have some. Comtois, my friend, now the hot coffee, very hot; I wish to drink it exactly as monsieur would have done, and I presume it is thus that monsieur likes it."

"Boiling, monsieur, boiling," answered Buvat, bowing.

"Oh!" said Bourguignon, sipping his coffee, and raising his eyes blissfully to the ceiling, "you are right, monsieur. It is only so that coffee is good — half-cold it is a very second-rate beverage. This, I may say, is excellent. Comtois, my friend, receive my compliments, you wait admirably; now help me to take away the table. You ought to know that there is nothing more unpleasant than the smell of wines and viands to those who are not hungry nor thirsty. Monsieur," continued Bourguignon, stepping toward the door, which he had carefully shut during the repast, and which he opened while his companion pushed the table before him, "monsieur, if you have need of anything, you have three bells, one at the head of your bed, and two at the mantelpiece. Those at the fireplace are for us, that at the bed for your valet-de-chambre."

"Thank you, monsieur," said Buvat, "you are too good. I do not wish to disturb any one."

"Do not trouble yourself about that, monsieur — monseigneur desires that you should make yourself at home."

"Monseigneur is very polite."

"Does monsieur require anything else?"

"Nothing more, my friend, nothing more," said Buvat, touched by so much devotion; "nothing, except to express my gratitude."

"I have only done my duty, monsieur," answered Bourguignon, modestly, bowing for the last time, and shutting the door.

"Ma foi!" said Buvat, following Bourguignon with his eyes, "it must be allowed that some proverbs are great liars. One says, 'As insolent as a lackey,' and yet here is an individual practicing that calling, who nevertheless could not possibly be more polite. I shall never believe in proverbs again, or rather, I shall make a difference between them."

And making himself this promise, Buvat found himself alone.

Nothing makes a man so hungry as the sight of a good dinner; that which had just been eaten under the good man's very eyes surpassed in luxury everything that he had ever dreamed of, and he began — influenced by the decided calls of his stomach — to reproach himself for his too great defiance of his persecutors; but it was too late. Buvat, it is true, might have rung for Monsieur Bourguignon, and requested a second dinner, but he was of too timid a character for that, and the result was, that he had to search among his stock of proverbs for the most consoling, and having found, between his situation and the proverb, "He who sleeps dines," an analogy which seemed to him most direct, he resolved to make use of it, and, as he could not dine, to endeavor at least to sleep.

But, at the moment of taking this resolution, Buvat found himself assailed by new fears. Could they not profit by his sleep to dispatch him? The night is the time of ambushes — he had often heard his mother tell of beds which, by the lowering of their canopies, smothered the unfortunate sleeper; of beds which sank through a trap, so softly as not to wake the occupant; finally, of secret doors opening in panels, and even in furniture, to give entrance to assassins. This luxuriant dinner, these rich wines, had they not been sent him to insure a sounder sleep? All this was possible, nay, probable, and Buvat, who felt the instinct of self-preservation in the highest degree, took his candle, and commenced a most minute investigation. After having opened the doors of all the cupboards, sounded all the paneling, Buvat had gone down on his hands and feet, and was stretching his head timidly under the bed, when he thought he heard steps behind him. The position in which he found himself did not permit him to act on the defensive; he therefore remained motionless, and waited with a beating heart. After a few seconds of solemn silence, which filled Buvat with vague alarms, a voice said:

"Your pardon; but is not monsieur looking for his nightcap?"

Buvat was discovered — there was no means of escaping the danger, if danger there was. He therefore drew his head from under the bed, took his candle, and remaining on his knees, as a humble and beseeching posture, he turned toward the individual who had just addressed him, and found himself face to face with a man dressed in black, and carrying, folded up on his arm, many articles, which Buvat recognized as human clothes.

"Yes, monsieur," said Buvat, seizing the opening which was offered to him, with a presence of mind on which he secretly congratulated himself; "is that search forbidden?"

"Why did not monsieur, instead of troubling himself, ring the bell? I have the honor to be appointed monsieur's valet-de-chambre, and I have brought him a night-cap and night-shirt."

And with these words the valet-de-chambre spread out on the bed a night-shirt, embroidered with flowers, a cap of the finest lawn, and a rose-colored ribbon. Buvat, still on his knees, regarded him with the greatest astonishment.

"Now," said the valet-de-chambre, "will monsieur allow me to help him to undress?"

"No, monsieur, no," said Buvat, accompanying the refusal with the sweetest smile he could assume. "No, I am accustomed to undress myself. I thank you, monsieur."

The valet-de-chambre retired, and Buvat remained alone.

As the inspection of the room was completed, and as his increasing hunger rendered sleep more necessary, Buvat began to undress, sighing; placed — in order not to be left in the dark — a candle on the corner of the chimney-piece, and sprang, with a groan, into the softest and warmest bed he had ever slept on.

"The bed is not sleep," is an axiom which Buvat might, from experience, have added to the list of his true proverbs. Either from fear or hunger, Buvat passed a very disturbed night, and it was not till near morning that he fell asleep; even then his slumbers were peopled with the most terrible visions and nightmares. He was just waking from a dream that he had been poisoned by a leg of mutton, when the valet-de-chambre entered, and asked at what time he would like breakfast.

Buvat was not in the habit of breakfasting in bed, so he rose quickly, and dressed in haste; he had just finished, when Messieurs Bourguignon and Comtois entered, bringing the breakfast, as the day before they had brought the dinner.

Then took place a second rehearsal of the scene which we have before related, with the exception that now it was Monsieur Comtois who ate and Monsieur Bourguignon who waited; but when it came to the coffee, and

Buvat, who had taken nothing for twenty-four hours, saw his dearly-loved beverage, after having passed from the silver coffee-pot into the porcelain cup, pass into the cavernous mouth of Monsieur Comtois, he could hold out no longer, and declared that his stomach demanded to be amused with something, and that, consequently, he desired that they would leave him the coffee and a roll. This declaration appeared to disturb the devotion of Monsieur Comtois, who was nevertheless obliged to satisfy himself with one cup of the odoriferous liquid, which, together with a roll and the sugar, was placed on a little table, while the two scamps carried off the rest of the feast, laughing in their sleeves.

Scarcely was the door closed, when Buvat darted toward the little table, and, without even waiting to dip one into the other, ate the bread and drank the coffee; then, a little comforted by that repast, insufficient as it was, began to look at things in a less gloomy point of view.

In truth, Buvat was not wanting in a certain kind of good sense, and, as he had passed the preceding evening and night, and entered on the present morning, without interference, he began to understand that, though from some political motive they had deprived him of his liberty, they were far from wishing to shorten his days, and surrounded him, on the contrary, with cares, of which he had never before been the object. He had seen that the dinner of the day before was better than his ordinary dinner — that the bed was softer than his ordinary bed — that the coffee he had just drunk possessed an aroma which the mixture of chicory took away from his, and he could not conceal from himself that the elastic couches and stuffed chairs which he had sat upon for the last twenty-four hours were much preferable to the hair sofa and cane chairs of his own establishment. The only thing, then, which remained to trouble him, was the uneasiness which Bathilde would feel at his not returning. He had for an instant the idea — not daring to renew the request which he had made the day before, to have news of him sent to his ward — of imitating the man with the iron mask, who had thrown a silver plate from the window of his prison on to the shore, by throwing a letter from his balcony into the courtyard of the Palais Royal; but he knew what a fatal result this infraction of the will of Monsieur de Saint-Mars had had for the unfortunate prisoner, so that he feared, by such an action, to increase the rigors of his captivity, which at present seemed to him tolerable.

The result of all these reflections was, that Buvat passed the morning in a much less agitated manner than he had the evening and the night; moreover, his hunger — appeased by the roll and the coffee — only existed in the form of that appetite which is an enjoyment when one is sure of a good dinner. Add to all this the particularly cheerful look-out which the prisoner had from his window, and it will be easily understood that mid-day arrived without too many sorrows, or too much ennui.

Exactly at one o'clock the door opened, and the table reappeared ready laid, and brought, like the day before and that morning, by the two valets. But this time, it was neither Monsieur Bourguignon nor Monsieur Comtois who sat down to it. Buvat declared himself perfectly reassured concerning the intentions of his august host; he thanked Messieurs Comtois and Bourguignon for the devotion of which each in turn had given him a proof, and begged them to wait upon him in their turn. The two servants made wry faces, but obeyed. It will be understood that the happy disposition in which Buvat now was became more blissful under the influence of a good dinner. Buvat ate all the eatables, drank all the drinkables, and at last, after having sipped his coffee — a luxury which he usually only allowed himself on Sundays — and having capped the Arabian nectar with a glass of Madame Anfoux' liquor, was, it must be confessed, in a state bordering upon ecstasy.

That evening the supper was equally successful; but as Buvat had abandoned himself at dinner rather freely to the consumption of Chambertin and Sillery, about eight o'clock in the evening he found himself in a state of glorification impossible to describe. The consequence was, that when the valet-de-chambre entered, instead of finding him like the evening before, with his head under the bed, he found Buvat seated on a comfortable sofa, his feet on the hobs, his head leaning back, his eyes winking, and singing between his teeth, with an expression of infinite tenderness:

"Then let me go, And let me play, Beneath the hazel-tree."

Which, as may be seen, was a great improvement on the state of the worthy writer twenty-four hours before. Moreover, when the valet-de-chambre offered to help him to undress, Buvat, who found a slight difficulty in expressing his thoughts, contented himself with smiling in sign of approbation; then extended his arms to have his coat taken off, then his legs to have his slippers removed; but, in spite of his state of exaltation, it is only just to Buvat to say, that it was only when he found himself alone that he laid aside the rest of his garments.

This time, contrary to what he had done the day before, he stretched himself out luxuriously in his bed, and fell asleep in five minutes, and dreamed that he was the Grand Turk.

He awoke as fresh as a rose, having only one trouble — the uneasiness that Bathilde must experience, but otherwise perfectly happy.

It may easily be imagined that the breakfast did not lessen his good spirits; on the contrary, being informed that he might write to Monsieur the Archbishop of Cambray, he asked for paper and ink, which were brought him, took from his pocket his penknife, which never left him, cut his pen with the greatest care, and commenced, in his finest writing, a most touching request, that if his captivity was to last, Bathilde might be sent for, or, at least, that she might be informed, that, except his liberty, he was in want of nothing, thanks to the kindness of the prime minister.

This request, to the caligraphy of which Buvat had devoted no little care, and whose capital letters represented different plants, trees, or animals, occupied the worthy writer from breakfast till dinner. On sitting down to table he gave the note to Bourguignon, who charged himself with carrying it to the prime minister, saying that Comtois would wait during his absence. In a quarter of an hour Bourguignon returned, and informed Buvat that monseigneur had gone out, but that — in his absence — the petition had been given to the person who aided him in his public affairs, and that person had requested that Monsieur Buvat would come and see him as soon as he had finished his dinner, but hoped that monsieur would not in any degree hurry himself, since he who made the request was dining himself. In accordance with this permission Buvat took his time, feasted on the best cookery, imbibed the most generous wines, sipped his coffee, played with his glass of liquor, and then — the last operation completed — declared in a resolute tone, that he was ready to appear before the substitute of the prime minister.

The sentinel had received orders to let him pass, so Buvat, conducted by Bourguignon, passed proudly by him. For some time they followed a long corridor, then descended a staircase; at last the footman opened a door, and announced Monsieur Buvat.

Buvat found himself in a sort of laboratory, situated on the ground-floor, with a man of from forty to forty-two, who was entirely unknown to him, and who was very simply dressed, and occupied in following — at a blazing furnace — some chemical experiment, to which he appeared to attach great importance. This man, seeing Buvat, raised his head, and having looked at him curiously —

“Monsieur,” said he, “are you Jean Buvat?” — — ”At your service, monsieur,” answered Buvat, bowing.

“The request which you have just sent to the abbé is your handwriting?”

“My own, monsieur.”

“You write a fine hand.”

Buvat bowed, with a proudly modest smile.

“The abbé,” continued the unknown, “has informed me of the services which you have rendered us.”

“Monseigneur is too good,” murmured Buvat, “it was not worth the trouble.”

“How! not worth the trouble? Indeed, Monsieur Buvat, it was, on the contrary, well worth the trouble, and the proof is, that if you have any favor to ask from the regent, I will charge myself with the message.”

“Monsieur,” said Buvat, “since you are so good as to offer to interpret my sentiments to his royal highness, have the kindness to request him, when he is less pressed, if it is not too inconvenient, to pay me my arrears.”

“How! your arrears, Monsieur Buvat? What do you mean?”

“I mean, monsieur, that I have the honor to be employed at the royal library, but that for six years I have received no salary.”

“And how much do your arrears amount to?”

“Monsieur, I must have a pen and ink to calculate exactly.”

“Oh, but something near the mark — calculate from memory.”

“To five thousand three hundred and odd francs, besides the fractions of sous and deniers.”

“And you wish for payment, Monsieur Buvat?”

“I do not deny it, monsieur; it would give me great pleasure.”

“And is this all you ask?”

“All.”

“But do you not ask anything for the service which you have just rendered France?”

“Indeed, monsieur, I should like permission to let my ward Bathilde know that she may be easy on my account, and that I am a prisoner at the Palais Royal. I would also ask — if it would not be imposing upon your kindness too much — that she might be allowed to pay me a little visit, but, if this second request is indiscreet, I will confine myself to the first.”

“We will do better than that; the causes for which you were retained exist no more, and we are going to set you at liberty; so you can go yourself to carry the news to Bathilde.”

“What, monsieur, what!” cried Buvat; “am I, then, no longer a prisoner?”

“You can go when you like.”

“Monsieur, I am your very humble servant, and I have the honor of presenting you my respects.”

“Pardon, Monsieur Buvat, one word more.” — — ”Two, monsieur.”

“I repeat to you that France is under obligations to you, which she will acquit. Write, then, to the regent, inform him of what is due to you, show him your situation, and if you have a particular desire for anything, say so boldly. I guarantee that he will grant your request.”

“Monsieur, you are too good, and I shall not fail. I hope, then, that out of the first money which comes into the treasury — ”

“You will be paid. I give you my word.”

“Monsieur, this very day my petition shall be addressed to the regent.”

“And to-morrow you will be paid.”

“Ah, monsieur, what goodness!”

“Go, Monsieur Buvat, go; your ward expects you.”

“You are right, monsieur, but she will lose nothing by having waited for me, since I bring her such good news. I may have the honor of seeing you again, monsieur. Ah! pardon, would it be an indiscretion to ask your name?”

”Monsieur Philippe.”

“Au revoir! Monsieur Philippe!”

“Adieu! Monsieur Buvat. One instant — I must give orders that they are to allow you to pass.”

At these words he rang: an usher appeared. “Send Ravanne.”

The usher went out; a few seconds afterward a young officer of guards entered.

“Ravanne,” said Monsieur Philippe, “conduct this gentleman to the gate of the Palais Royal. There he is free to go where he wishes.”

“Yes, monseigneur,” answered the young officer.

A cloud passed over Buvat’s eyes, and he opened his mouth to ask who it was that was being called monseigneur, but Ravanne did not leave him time.

“Come, monsieur,” said he, “I await you.”

Buvat looked at Monsieur Philippe and the page with a stupefied air; but the latter — not understanding his hesitation — renewed his invitation to follow. Buvat obeyed, drawing out his handkerchief, and wiping his forehead.

At the door, the sentinel wished to stop Buvat.

“By the order of his royal highness Monseigneur the Regent, monsieur is free,” said Ravanne.

The soldier presented arms, and allowed him to pass.

Buvat thought he should faint, he felt his legs fail him, and leaned against a wall.

“What is the matter, monsieur?” asked his guide.

“Pardon, monsieur,” murmured Buvat, “but who is the person to whom I have just had the honor of speaking?”

“Monseigneur the Regent in person.”

“Not possible!”

“Not only possible, but true.”

“What! it was the regent himself who promised to pay me my arrears?”

“I do not know what he promised you, but I know that the person who gave me the order to accompany you was the regent.”

“But he told me he was called Philippe.”

“Well, he is — Philippe d’Orleans.”

“That is true, monsieur, that is true, Philippe is his Christian name. The regent is a brave man, and when I remember that there exist scoundrels who conspire against him — against a man who has promised to pay me my arrears — but they deserve to be hanged, all of them, to be broken on the wheel, drawn and quartered, burned alive; do not you think so, monsieur?”

“Monsieur,” said Ravanne, laughing, “I have no opinion on matters of such importance. We are at the gate; I should be happy to accompany you further, but monseigneur leaves in half an hour for the Abbey of Chelles, and, as he has some orders to give me before his departure, I am — to my great regret — obliged to quit you.”

“All the regret is on my side, monsieur,” said Buvat, graciously, and answering by a profound bow to the slight nod of the young man, who, when Buvat raised his head, had already disappeared. This departure left Buvat perfectly free in his movements, and he profited thereby to take his way down the Place des Victoires toward the Rue du Temps-Perdu, round the corner of which he turned at the very moment when D’Harmental ran his sword through the body of Roquefinette. It was at this moment that poor Bathilde — who was far from suspecting what was passing in her neighbor’s room — had seen her guardian, and had rushed to meet him on the stairs, where Buvat and she had met at the third flight.

“Oh, my dear, dear father,” cried Bathilde, remounting the staircase in Buvat’s arms, and stopping to embrace him at every step, “where have you been? What has happened? How is it that we have not seen you since Monday? What uneasiness you have caused us, mon Dieu! But something extraordinary must have occurred.”

“Yes, most extraordinary,” answered Buvat.

“Ah, mon Dieu! tell then me, first, where do you come from?”

“From the Palais Royal.”

“What! from the Palais Royal; and with whom were you stopping at the Palais Royal?”

“The regent.”

“You with the regent! and what about?”

“I was a prisoner.”

“A prisoner — you!”

“A State prisoner.”

“And why were you a prisoner?”

“Because I have saved France.”

“Oh, father! are you mad?” cried Bathilde, terrified.

“No, but there has been enough to make me so if I had not had a pretty strong head.”

“Oh, explain, for God’s sake!”

“Fancy that there was a conspiracy against the regent.”

“Oh, mon Dieu!”

“And that I belonged to it.”

“You?”

“Yes, I, without being — that is to say, you know that Prince de Listhnay?”

“Well!”

“A sham prince, my child, a sham prince!”

“But the copies which you made for him?”

“Manifestoes, proclamations, incendiary papers, a general revolt, Brittany — Normandy — the States-General — king of Spain — I have discovered all this.”

“You?” cried Bathilde, horrified.

“Yes, I; and the regent has called me the savior of France — me; and is going to pay me my arrears.”

“My father, my father, you talk of conspirators, do you remember the name of any of them?”

“Firstly, Monsieur the Duc de Maine; fancy that miserable bastard conspiring against a man like Monseigneur the Regent. Then a Count de Laval, a Marquis de Pompadour, a Baron de Valef, the Prince de Cellamare, the Abbe Brigaud, that abominable Abbe Brigaud! Think of my having copied the list.”

“My father,” said Bathilde, shuddering with fear, “my father, among all those names, did you not see the name — the name — of — Chevalier — Raoul d’Harmental?”

“That I did,” cried Buvat, “the Chevalier Raoul d’Harmental — why he is the head of the company: but the regent knows them all, and this very evening they will all be arrested, and to-morrow hanged, drawn, quartered, broken on the wheel.”

“Oh, luckless, shameful, that you are!” cried Bathilde, wringing her hands wildly; “you have killed the man whom I love — but, I swear to you, by the memory of my mother, that if he dies, I will die also!”

And thinking that she might still be in time to warn D’Harmental of the danger which threatened him, Bathilde left Buvat confounded, darted to the door, flew down the staircase, cleared the street at two bounds, rushed up the stairs, and, breathless, terrified, dying, hurled herself against the door of D’Harmental’s room, which, badly closed by the chevalier, yielded before her, exposing to her view the body of the captain stretched on the floor, and swimming in a sea of blood.

At this sight, so widely different from what she expected, Bathilde, not thinking that she might perhaps be compromising her lover, sprang toward the door, calling for help, but on reaching the threshold, either from weakness, or from the blood, her foot slipped, and she fell backward with a terrible cry.

The neighbors came running in the direction of the cry, and found that Bathilde had fainted, and that her head, in falling against the angle of the door, had been badly wounded.

They carried Bathilde to Madame Denis’s room, and the good woman hastened to offer her hospitality.

As to Captain Roquefinette, as he had torn off the address of the letter which he had in his pocket to light his pipe with, and had no other paper to indicate his name or residence, they carried his body to the Morgue, where, three days afterward, it was recognized by La Normande.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

GOD DISPOSES.

D’Harmental, as we have seen, had set off at a gallop, feeling that he had not an instant to lose in bringing about the changes which the death of Captain Roquefinette rendered necessary in his hazardous enterprise. In the hope of recognizing by some sign the individuals who were destined to play the part of supernumeraries in this great drama, he followed the boulevards as far as the Porte Saint Martin, and having arrived there, turned to the left, and was in the midst of the horse market: it was there, it will be remembered, that the twelve or fifteen sham peasants enlisted by Roquefinette waited the orders of their captain. But, as the deceased had said, no sign pointed out to the eye of the stranger who were the men, clothed like the rest, and scarcely known to each other. D’Harmental, therefore, sought vainly; all the faces were unknown to him; buyers and sellers appeared equally indifferent to everything except the bargains which they were concluding. Twice or thrice, after having approached persons whom he fancied he recognized as false bargainers, he went away without even speaking to them, so great was the probability, that, among the five or six hundred individuals who were on the ground, the chevalier would make some mistake which might be not only useless, but even dangerous.

The situation was pitiable: D’Harmental unquestionably had there, ready to his hand, all the means necessary to the happy completion of his plot, but he had, in killing the captain, broken with his own hand the thread which should have served him as a clew to them, and, the center link broken, the whole chain had become useless.

D’Harmental bit his lips till the blood came, and wandered to and fro, from end to end of the market, still hoping that some unforeseen event would get him out of his difficulty. Time, however, flowed away, the market presented the same aspect, no one spoke to him, and two peasants to whom despair had caused him to address some ambiguous words, had opened their eyes and mouths in such profound astonishment that he had instantly broken off the conversation, convinced that he was mistaken.

Five o’clock struck.

At eight or nine the regent would repair to Chelles, there was therefore no time to be lost, particularly as this ambuscade was the last resource for the conspirators, who might be arrested at any moment, and who staked their remaining hopes on this last throw. D’Harmental did not conceal from himself the difficulties of the situation; he had claimed for himself the honor of the enterprise; on him therefore rested all the responsibility — and that responsibility was terrible. On the other hand, he found himself in one of those situations where courage is useless, and where human will shatters itself against an impossibility, and where the last chance is to confess one’s weakness, and ask aid from those who expect it of us. But D’Harmental was a man of determination; his resolution was soon taken — he took a last turn round the market to see if some conspirator would not betray himself by his impatience; but, seeing that all faces retained their expression of unconcern, he put his horse to the gallop, rode down the Boulevards, gained the Faubourg Saint Antoine, dismounted at No. 15, went up the staircase, opened the door of a little room, and found himself in the company of Madame de Maine, Laval, Valef, Pompadour, Malezieux and Brigaud.

A general cry arose on seeing him.

D’Harmental related everything: the pretensions of Roquefinette, the discussion which had followed, the duel which had terminated that discussion. He opened his cloak and showed his shirt saturated with blood; then he passed to the hopes which he had entertained of recognizing the sham peasants, and putting himself at their head in place of the captain. He showed his hopes destroyed, his investigations useless, and wound up by an appeal to Laval, Pompadour, and Valef, who answered that they were ready to follow the chevalier to the end of the earth, and to obey his orders.

Nothing was lost, then — four resolute men, acting on their own account, were well worth twelve or fifteen hired vagabonds, who were not influenced by any motive beyond that of gaining some hundred louis a-piece. The horses were ready in the stable, every one had come armed; D’Avranches was not yet gone, which re-enforced the little troop by another devoted man. They sent for masks of black velvet, so as to hide from the regent as long as possible who his enemies were, left with Madame de Maine Malezieux, who from his age, and Brigaud, who from his profession, were naturally excluded from such an expedition, fixed a rendezvous at Saint Mande, and left, each one separately, so as not to arouse suspicions.

An hour afterward the five friends were reunited, and ambushed on the road to Chelles, between Vincennes and Nogent-sur-Marne.

Half-past six struck on the chateau clock.

D'Avranches had been in search of information. The regent had passed at about half-past three; he had neither guards nor suite, he was in a carriage and four, ridden by two jockeys, and preceded by a single outrider. There was no resistance to be feared; on arresting the prince they would turn his course toward Charenton, where the postmaster was, as we have said, in the interest of Madame de Maine, take him into the courtyard, whose door would close upon him, force him to enter a traveling carriage, which would be waiting with the postilion in his saddle; D'Harmental and Valef would seat themselves by him, they would cross the Marne at Alfort, the Seine at Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, reach Grand-Vaux, then Monthéry, and find themselves on the road to Spain. If at any of the villages where they changed horses the regent endeavored to call out, D'Harmental and Valef would threaten him, and, if he called out in spite of the menaces, they had that famous passport to prove that he who claimed assistance was not the prince, but only a madman who thought himself the regent, and whom they were conducting to his family, who lived at Saragossa. All this was a little dangerous, it is true, but, as is well known, these are the very enterprises which succeed, so much the easier from their unforeseen audacity.

Seven o'clock, eight o'clock, struck successively. D'Harmental and his companions saw with pleasure the night approaching, and the darkness falling more and more dense and black around them; two or three carriages had already given false alarms, but had had no other effect than preparing them for the real attack. At half-past eight the night was pitch-dark, and a sort of natural fear, which the conspirators had felt at first, began to change into impatience.

At nine o'clock they thought they could distinguish sounds. D'Avranches lay down, with his ear to the ground, and distinctly heard the rolling of a carriage. At that instant they saw, at about a thousand paces from the angle of the road, a point of light like a star; the conspirators trembled with excitement, it was evidently the outrider with his torch. There was soon no doubt — they saw the carriage with its two lanterns. D'Harmental, Pompadour, Valef, and Laval, grasped one another's hands, put on their masks, and each one took the place assigned to him. The carriage advanced rapidly — it was really that of the duke. By the light of the torch which he carried they could distinguish the red dress of the outrider, some five-and-twenty paces before the horses. The road was silent and deserted, everything was favorable. D’Harmental threw a last glance on his companions. D’Avranches was in the middle of the road pretending to be drunk, Laval and Pompadour on each side of the path, and opposite him Valef, who was cocking his pistols. As to the outrider, the two jockeys and the prince, it was evident that they were all in a state of perfect security, and would fall quietly into the trap. The carriage still advanced; already the outrider had passed D’Harmental and Valef, suddenly he struck against D’Avranches, who sprang up, seized the bridle, snatched the torch from his hand, and extinguished it. At this sight the jockeys tried to turn the carriage, but it was too late; Pompadour and Laval sprang upon them pistol in hand, while D’Harmental and Valef presented themselves at the two doors, extinguished the lanterns, and intimated to the prince that if he did not make any resistance his life would be spared, but that if, on the contrary, he defended himself, or cried out, they were determined to proceed to extremities.

Contrary to the expectation of D’Harmental and Valef, who knew the courage of the regent, the prince only said:

“Well, gentlemen, do not harm me. I will go wherever you wish.”

D’Harmental and Valef threw a glance at the road; they saw Pompadour and D’Avranches leading into the depth of the wood the outrider, the two jockeys, the outrider’s horse, and two of the carriage horses which they had unharnessed. The chevalier sprang from his horse, mounted that of the first postilion; Laval and Valef placed themselves before the doors, the carriage set off at a gallop, and taking the first turn to the left, began to roll, without noise and without light, in the direction of Charenton. All the arrangements had been so perfect, that the seizure had not occupied more than five minutes; no resistance had been made, not a cry had been uttered. Most assuredly, this time fortune was on the side of the conspirators.

But having arrived at the end of the cross-road, D’Harmental encountered a first obstacle; the barrier — either by accident or design — was closed, and they were obliged to retrace their steps and take another road. The chevalier turned his horses, took a lateral alley, and the journey, interrupted for an instant, recommenced at an increased speed.

The new route which the chevalier had taken led him to a four-cross road; one of the roads led straight to Charenton. There was no time to lose, and in any event he must traverse this square. For an instant he thought he distinguished men in the darkness before him, but this vision disappeared like a mist, and the carriage continued its progress without interruption. On approaching the cross-roads D'Harmental fancied he heard the neighing of a horse, and a sort of ringing of iron, like sabers being drawn from their sheaths, but either taking it for the wind among the leaves, or for some other noise for which he need not stop, he continued with the same swiftness, the same silence, and in the midst of the same darkness. But, having arrived at the cross-roads, D'Harmental noticed a singular circumstance, a sort of wall seemed to close all the roads; something was happening. D'Harmental stopped the carriage, and wished to return by the road he had come down, but a similar wall had closed behind him. At that instant he heard the voices of Laval and Valef crying:

"We are surrounded, save yourself!"

And both left the doors, leaped their horses over the ditch, darted into the forest, and disappeared among the trees.

But it was impossible for D'Harmental, who was mounted on the postilion's horse, to follow his companions, and, not being able to escape the living wall, which the chevalier recognized as a regiment of musketeers, he tried to break through it, and with his head lowered, and a pistol in each hand, spurred his horse up the nearest road, without considering whether it was the right one. He had scarcely gone ten steps, however, when a musket-ball entered the head of his horse, which fell, entangling D'Harmental's leg. Instantly eight or ten cavaliers sprang upon him; he fired one pistol by hazard, and put the other to his head, to blow his brains out, but he had not time, for two musketeers seized him by the arms, and four others dragged him from beneath the horse. The pretended prince descended from the carriage, and turned out to be a valet in disguise; they placed D'Harmental with two officers inside the carriage, and harnessed another horse in the place of the one which had been shot. The carriage once more moved forward, taking a new direction, and escorted by a squadron of musketeers. A quarter of an hour afterward it rolled over a drawbridge, a heavy door grated upon its hinges, and D'Harmental passed under a somber and vaulted gateway, on the inner side of which, an officer in the uniform of a colonel was waiting for him. It was Monsieur de Launay, the governor of the Bastille.

If our readers desire to know how the plot had been discovered, they must recall the conversation between Dubois and La Fillon. The gossip of the prime minister, it will be remembered, suspected Roquefinette of being mixed up in some illicit proceeding, and had denounced him on condition of his life being spared. A few days afterward D'Harmental came to her house, and she recognized him as the young man who had held the former conference with Roquefinette. She had consequently mounted the stairs behind him, and, going into the next room, had, by aid of a hole bored in the partition, heard everything.

What she had heard was the project for carrying off the regent on his return from Chelles. Dubois had been informed the same evening, and, in order to take the conspirators in the act, had put a suit of the regent's clothes on Monsieur Bourguignon, and, having surrounded the Bois de Vincennes with a regiment of Gray Musketeers, besides light-horse and dragoons, had produced the result we have just related. The head of the plot had been taken in the fact, and as the prime minister knew the names of all the conspirators, there was little chance remaining for them of escape from the meshes of the vast net which was hourly closing around them.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A PRIME MINISTER’S MEMORY.

When Bathilde reopened her eyes, she found herself in Mademoiselle Emilie’s room. Mirza was lying on the end of the bed; the two sisters were one at each side of her pillow, and Buvat, overcome by grief, was sitting in a corner, his head bent, and his hands resting on his knees.

At first all her thoughts were confused, and her sensation was one of bodily pain; she raised her hand to her head; the wound was behind the temple. A doctor, who had been called in, had arranged the first dressing, and left orders that he was to be sent for if fever declared itself.

Astonished to find herself — on waking from a sleep which had appeared to her heavy and painful — in bed in a strange room, the young girl turned an inquiring glance on each person present, but Emilie and Athenais shunned her eyes, and Buvat heaved a mournful sigh. Mirza alone stretched out her little head for a caress. Unluckily for the coaxing little creature, Bathilde began to recover her memory; the veil which was drawn before the late events rose little by little, and soon she began to connect the broken threads which might guide her in the past. She recalled the return of Buvat, what he had told her of the conspiracy, the danger which would result to D’Harmental from the revelation he had made. Then she remembered her hope of being in time to save him, the rapidity with which she had crossed the street and mounted the staircase; lastly, her entry into Raoul’s room returned to her memory, and once more she found herself before the corpse of Roquefinette.

“And he,” she cried, “what has become of him?”

No one answered, for neither of the three persons who were in the room knew what reply to give; only Buvat, choking with tears, rose, and went toward the door. Bathilde understood the grief and remorse expressed in that mute withdrawal; she stopped him by a look, and extending her arms toward him —

“My father,” said she, “do you no longer love your poor Bathilde?”

"I no longer love you, my darling child!" cried Buvat, falling on his knees, and kissing her hand, "I love you no longer! My God! it will be you who will not love me now, and you will be right, for I am worthless; I ought to have known that that young man loved you, and ought to have risked all, suffered all, rather than — . But you told me nothing, you had no confidence in me, and I — with the best intentions in the world — made nothing but mistakes; oh, unlucky, unhappy, that I am, you will never forgive me, and then — how shall I live?"

"Father," cried Bathilde, "for Heaven's sake try and find out what has happened."

"Well, my child, well, I will discover; will not you forgive me if I bring you good news? If the news is bad, you will hate me even more; that will but be just, but you will not die, Bathilde?"

"Go, go," said Bathilde, throwing her arms round his neck, and giving him a kiss in which fifteen years of gratitude struggled with one day of pain; "go, my existence is in the hands of God, He only can decide whether I shall live or die."

Buvat understood nothing of all this but the kiss, and — having inquired of Madame Denis how the chevalier had been dressed — he set out on his quest.

It was no easy matter for a detective so simple as Buvat to trace Raoul's progress; he had learned from a neighbor that he had been seen to spring upon a gray horse which had remained some half hour fastened to the shutter, and that he had turned round the Rue Gros Chenet. A grocer, who lived at the corner of the Rue des Jeuneurs, remembered having seen a cavalier, whose person and horse agreed perfectly with the description given by Buvat, pass by at full gallop; and, lastly, a fruit woman, who kept a little shop at the corner of the Boulevards, swore positively that she had seen the man, and that he had disappeared by the Porte Saint Denis; but from this point all the information was vague, unsatisfactory, and uncertain, so that, after two hours of useless inquiry, Buvat returned to Madame Denis's house without any more definite information to give Bathilde than that, wherever D'Harmental might be gone, he had passed along the Boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle. Buvat found his ward much agitated; during his absence she had grown rapidly worse, and the crisis foreseen by the doctor was fast approaching. Bathilde's eyes flashed; her skin seemed to glow; her words were short and firm. Madame Denis had just sent for the doctor.

The poor woman was not without her own anxieties; for some time she had suspected that the Abbe Brigaud was mixed up in some plot, and what she had just learned, that D'Harmental was not a poor student but a rich colonel, confirmed her conjectures, since it had been Brigaud who had introduced him to her. This similarity of position had not a little contributed to soften her heart — always kind — toward Bathilde. She listened, then, with eagerness to the little information which Buvat had been able to collect for the sufferer, and, as it was far from being sufficiently positive to calm the patient, she promised, if she heard anything herself, to report it directly.

In the meantime the doctor arrived. Great as was his command over himself, it was easy to see that he thought Bathilde in some danger — he bled her abundantly, ordered refreshing drinks, and advised that some one should watch at the bedside. Emilie and Athenais, who, their little absurdities excepted, were excellent girls, declared directly that that was their business, and that they would pass the night with Bathilde alternately; Emilie, as eldest, claimed the first watch, which was given her without contest. As to Buvat, since he could not remain in the room, they asked him to return home; a thing to which he would not consent till Bathilde herself had begged it. The bleeding had somewhat calmed her, and she seemed to feel better; Madame Denis had left the room; Mademoiselle Athenais also had retired; Monsieur Boniface, after returning from the Morgue, where he had been to pay a visit to the body of Roquefinette, had mounted to his own room, and Emilie watched by the fire-place, and read a little book which she took from her pocket. She shortly heard a movement in the bed, and ran toward it; then, after an instant's silence, during which she heard the opening and shutting of two or three doors, and before she had time to say — "That is not the voice of Monsieur Raoul, it is the Abbe Brigaud," Bathilde had fallen back on her pillow.

An instant afterward Madame Denis half opened the door, and in a trembling voice called Emilie, who kissed Bathilde and went out.

Suddenly Bathilde was aroused; the abbe was in the room next to hers, and she thought that she heard him pronounce Raoul's name. She now remembered having several times seen the abbe at D'Harmental's rooms; she knew that he was one of the most intimate friends of Madame de Maine; she thought, then, that the abbe must bring news of him. Her first idea was to slip from the bed, put on a dressing-gown, and go and ask what had happened; but she considered that if the news was bad they would not tell it, and that it would be better to overhear the conversation, which appeared animated. Consequently she pressed her ear to the panel, and listened as if her whole life had been spent in cultivating that single sense.

Brigaud was relating to Madame Denis what had happened. Valef had made his way to the Faubourg Saint Antoine, and given warning to Madame de Maine of the failure of the expedition. Madame de Maine had immediately freed the conspirators from their oaths, advised Malezieux and Brigaud to save themselves, and retired to the Arsenal. Brigaud came therefore to bid adieu to Madame Denis; he was going to attempt to reach Spain in the disguise of a peddler. In the midst of his recital, interrupted by the exclamation of poor Madame Denis and of Mesdemoiselles Athenais and Emilie, the abbe thought that he heard a cry in the next room, just at the time when he was relating D'Harmental's catastrophe; but as no one had paid any attention to the cry, and as he was not aware of Bathilde's being there, he had attached no importance to this noise, regarding the nature of which he might easily have been mistaken; moreover, Boniface, summoned in his turn, had entered at the moment, and, as the abbe had a particular fancy for Boniface, his entrance had naturally turned Brigaud's thoughts into a different channel.

Still, this was not the time for long leave-takings; Brigaud desired that daylight should find him as far as possible from Paris. He took leave of the Denis family, and set out with Boniface, who declared that he would accompany friend Brigaud as far as the barrier.

As they opened the staircase-door they heard the voice of the portress, who appeared to be opposing the passage of some one; they descended to discover the cause of the discussion, and found Bathilde, with streaming hair, naked feet, and wrapped in a long white robe, standing on the staircase, and endeavoring to go out in spite of the efforts of the portress. The poor girl had heard everything; the fever had changed into delirium; she would join Raoul; she would see him again; she would die with him.

The three women took her in their arms. For a minute she struggled against them, murmuring incoherent words; her cheeks were flushed with fever, while her limbs trembled, and her teeth chattered; but soon her strength failed her, her head sank back, and, calling on the name of Raoul, she fainted a second time.

They sent once more for the doctor. What he had feared was now no longer doubtful — brain fever had declared itself. At this moment some one knocked; it was Buvat, whom Brigaud and Boniface had found wandering to and fro before the house like a ghost; and who, not able to keep up any longer, had come to beg a seat in some corner, he did not care where, so long as from time to time he had news of Bathilde. The poor family were too sad themselves not to feel for the grief of others. Madame signed to Buvat to seat himself in a corner, and retired into her own room with Athenais, leaving Emilie once more with the sufferer. About daybreak Boniface returned: he had gone with Brigaud as far as the Barriere d'Enfer, where the abbe had left him, hoping — thanks to his good steed, and to his disguise — to reach the Spanish frontier.

Bathilde's delirium continued. All night she talked of Raoul; she often mentioned Buvat's name, and always accused him of having killed her lover. Buvat heard it, and, without daring to defend himself, to reply, or even to groan, had silently burst into tears, and, pondering on what means existed of repairing the evil he had caused, he at last arrived at a desperate resolution. He approached the bed, kissed the feverish hand of Bathilde, who did not recognize him, and went out.

Buvat had, in fact, determined on a bold course. It was to go himself to Dubois, tell him everything, and ask, as his recompense — not the payment of his arrears — not advancement at the library — but pardon for D'Harmental. It was the least that could be accorded to the man whom the regent himself had called the savior of France. Buvat did not doubt that he should soon return bearing good news, and that it would restore Bathilde to health.

Consequently Buvat went home to arrange his disordered dress, which bore the marks of the events of the day and the emotions of the night; and, moreover, he did not dare to present himself at the minister's house so early, for fear of disturbing him. His toilet finished, and as it was still only nine o'clock, he returned for a few minutes to Bathilde's room — it was that which the young girl had left the day before. Buvat sat down in the chair which she had quitted, touched the articles which she liked to touch, kissed the feet of the crucifix, which she kissed each night — one would have thought him a lover following the steps of his mistress.

Ten o'clock struck; it was the hour at which Buvat had often before repaired to the Palais Royal. The fear of being importunate gave place to the hope of being received as he had always been. He took his hat and cane, and called at Madame Denis's to ask how Bathilde had been during his absence; he found that she had never ceased to call for Raoul. The doctor had bled her for the third time. He raised his eyes to heaven, heaved a profound sigh, and set out for the Palais Royal.

The moment was unlucky. Dubois, who had been constantly on his feet for four or five days, suffered horribly from the malady which was to cause his death in a few months; moreover, he was beyond measure annoyed that only D'Harmental had been taken, and had just given orders to Leblanc and D'Argenson to press on the trial with all possible speed, when his valet-de-chambre, who was accustomed to see the worthy writer arrive every morning, announced M. Buvat.

"And who the devil is M. Buvat?"

"It is I, monseigneur," said the poor fellow, venturing to slip between the valet and the door, and bowing his honest head before the prime minister.

"Well, who are you?" asked Dubois, as if he had never seen him before.

"What, monseigneur!" exclaimed the astonished Buvat; "do you not recognize me? I come to congratulate you on the discovery of the conspiracy."

"I get congratulations enough of that kind — thanks for yours, M. Buvat," said Dubois, quietly.

"But, monseigneur, I come also to ask a favor."

"A favor! and on what grounds?"

"Monseigneur," stammered Buvat, "but — monseigneur — do you not remember that you promised me a — a recompense?"

"A recompense to you, you double idiot."

"What! monseigneur," continued poor Buvat, getting more and more frightened, "do you not recollect that you told me, here, in this very room, that I had my fortune at my fingers' ends?"

"And now," said Dubois, "I tell you that you have your life in your legs, for unless you decamp pretty quick — "

"But, monseigneur — "

"Ah! you reason with me, scoundrel," shouted Dubois, raising himself with one hand on the arm of his chair, and the other on his archbishop's crook, "wait, then, you shall see — "

Buvat had seen quite enough; at the threatening gesture of the premier he understood what was to follow, and turning round, he fled at full speed; but, quick as he was, he had still time to hear Dubois — with the most horrible oaths and curses — order his valet to beat him to death if ever again he put his foot inside the door of the Palais Royal.

Buvat understood that there was no hope in that direction, and that, not only must he renounce the idea of being of service to D'Harmental, but also of the payment of his arrears, in which he had fondly trusted. This chain of thought naturally reminded him that for eight days he had not been to the library — he was near there — he resolved to go to his office, if it was only to excuse himself to his superior, and relate to him the causes of his absence; but here a grief, not less terrible than the rest, was in store for Buvat; on opening the door of his office, he saw his seat occupied — a stranger had been appointed to his place!

As he had never before — during the whole fifteen years — been an hour late, the curator had imagined him dead, and had replaced him. Buvat had lost his situation for having saved France!

This last stroke was more than he could bear, and Buvat returned home almost as ill as Bathilde.

CHAPTER XL.

BONIFACE.

As we have seen, Dubois urged on the trial of D’Harmental, hoping that his revelations would furnish him with weapons against those whom he wished to attack, but D’Harmental took refuge in a total denial with respect to others. As to what concerned himself personally, he confessed everything, saying, that his attempt on the regent was the result of private revenge, a revenge which had arisen from the injustice which had been done him in depriving him of his regiment. As to the men who had accompanied him, and who had lent him their aid in the execution of his plans, he declared that they were poor devils of peasants, who did not even know whom they were escorting. All this was not highly probable, but there was no means of bringing anything beyond the answers of the accused to bear on the matter; the consequence was, that to the infinite annoyance of Dubois, the real criminals escaped his vengeance, under cover of the eternal denials of the chevalier, who denied having seen Monsieur or Madame de Maine more than once or twice in his life, or ever having been trusted with any political mission by either of them.

They had arrested successively Laval, Pompadour, and Valef, and had taken them to the Bastille, but they knew that they might rely upon the chevalier; and, as the situation in which they found themselves had been foreseen, and it had been agreed what each should say, they all entirely denied any knowledge of the affair, confessing associations with Monsieur and Madame de Maine, but saying that those associations were confined to a respectful friendship. As to D’Harmental, they knew him, they said, for a man of honor, who complained of a great injustice which had been done to him. They were confronted, one after the other, with the chevalier; but these interviews had no other result than that of confirming each in his system of defense, and showing each that the system was religiously adhered to by his companion.

Dubois was furious — he reopened the proofs for the affair of the States-General, but that had been settled by the special parliament, which had condemned the king of Spain’s letters, and degraded the legitimated princes from their rank; everyone regarded them as sufficiently punished by this judgment, without raising a second prosecution against them on the same grounds. Dubois had hoped, by the revelations of D’Harmental, to entangle Monsieur and Madame de Maine in a new trial, more serious than the first; for this time it was a question of a direct attempt, if not on the life, at least on the liberty of the regent; but the obstinacy of the chevalier destroyed all his hopes. His anger had therefore turned solely on D’Harmental, and, as we have said, he had ordered Leblanc and D’Argenson to expedite the prosecution — an order which the two magistrates had obeyed with their ordinary punctuality.

During this time the illness of Bathilde had progressed in a manner which had brought the poor girl to death’s door; but at last youth and vigor had triumphed; to the excitement of delirium had succeeded a complete and utter prostration; one would have said that the fever alone had sustained her, and that, in departing, it had taken life along with it.

Still every day brought improvement — slight, it is true, but decided — to the eyes of the good people who surrounded the bed of sickness. Little by little Bathilde began to recognize those who were about her, then she had stretched out her hand to them, and then spoken to them. As yet, to the astonishment of every one, they had remarked that Bathilde had not mentioned the name of D’Harmental; this was a great relief to those who watched her, for, as they had none but sad news to give her about him, they preferred, as will easily be understood, that she should remain silent on the subject; every one believed, and the doctor most of all, that the young girl had completely forgotten the past, or, if she remembered it, that she confounded the reality with the dreams of her delirium. They were all wrong, even the doctor: this was what had occurred:

One morning when they had thought Bathilde sleeping, and had left her alone for a minute, Boniface, who, in spite of the severity of his neighbor, still preserved a great fund of tenderness toward her, had, as was his custom every morning since she had been ill, half opened the door to ask news of her. The growling of Mirza aroused Bathilde, who turned round and saw Boniface, and having before conjectured that she might probably know from him that which she should ask in vain from the others, namely, what had become of D’Harmental, she had, while quieting Mirza, extended her pale and emaciated hand to Boniface. Boniface took it between his own two great red hands, then, looking at the young girl, and shaking his head:

"Yes, Mademoiselle Bathilde, yes," said he, "you were right; you are a lady, and I am only a coarse peasant. You deserved a nobleman, and it was impossible that you should love me."

"As you wished, true, Boniface, but I can love you in another manner."

"True, Mademoiselle Bathilde, very true; well, love me as you will, so that you love me a little."

"I can love you as a brother."

"As a brother! You could love poor Boniface as a brother, and he might love you as a sister; he might sometimes hold your hand as he holds it now, and embrace you as he sometimes embraces Mélie and Naïs? Oh! speak, Mademoiselle Bathilde, what must I do for that?"

"My friend — " said Bathilde.

"She has called me her friend," said Boniface, "she has called me her friend — I, who have said such things about her. Listen, Mademoiselle Bathilde: do not call me your friend, I am not worthy of the name. You do not know what I have said — I said that you lived with an old man; but I did not believe it, Mademoiselle Bathilde, on my honor I did not — it was anger, it was rage. Mademoiselle Bathilde, call me beggar, rascal; it will give me less pain than to hear you term me your friend."

"My friend," recommenced Bathilde, "if you have said all that, I pardon you, for now not only can you make up for it, but also acquire eternal claims upon my gratitude."

"And what shall I do? Speak! Let me see! Must I go through the fire? Shall I jump out of the second-floor window? Shall I — What shall I do? Tell me! Everything is alike."

"No, no, my friend, something much easier."

"Speak, Mademoiselle Bathilde, speak!"

"First it is necessary that you should swear to do it."

"I swear by Heaven!"

"Whatever they may say to hinder you?"

"Hinder me from doing what you ask? — never!"

"Whatever may be the grief that it may cause me?"

"No, that is a different thing; if it is to give you pain I would rather be cut in half."

“But if I beg you, my friend, my brother,” said Bathilde, in her most persuasive voice.

“Oh, if you speak like that I shall cry like the Fountain of the Innocents!”

And Boniface began to sob.

“You will tell me all then, my dear Boniface?”

“Everything.”

“Well, tell me first — ”

Bathilde stopped.

”What?”

“Can you not imagine, Boniface?”

“Yes, I think so; you want to know what has become of M. Raoul, do you not?”

“Oh yes,” cried Bathilde, “in Heaven’s name, what has become of him?”

“Poor fellow!” murmured Boniface.

“Mon Dieu! is he dead?” exclaimed Bathilde, sitting up in the bed.

“No, happily not; but he is a prisoner.”

“Where?”

“In the Bastille.”

“I feared it,” said Bathilde, sinking down in the bed; “in the Bastille! oh, mon Dieu! mon Dieu!”

“Oh, now you are crying, Mademoiselle Bathilde.”

“And I am here in this bed, chained, dying!” cried Bathilde.

“Oh, do not cry like that, mademoiselle; it is your poor Boniface who begs you.”

“No, I will be firm, I will have courage; see, Boniface, I weep no longer; but you understand that I must know everything from hour to hour, so that when he dies I may die.”

“You die, Mademoiselle Bathilde! oh, never, never!”

“You have promised, you have sworn it. Boniface, you will keep me informed of all?”

“Oh, wretch that I am, what have I promised!”

“And, if it must be, at the moment — the terrible moment — you will aid me, you will conduct me, will you not, Boniface? I must see him again — once — once more — if it be on the scaffold.”

“I will do all you desire, mademoiselle,” said Boniface, falling on his knees, and trying vainly to restrain his sobs.

“You promise me?”

“I swear.”

“Silence! some one is coming — not a word of this, it is a secret between us two. Rise, wipe your eyes, do as I do, and leave me.”

And Bathilde began to laugh with a feverish nervousness that was frightful to see. Luckily it was only Buvat, and Boniface profited by his entrance to depart.

“Well, how are you?” asked the good man.

“Better, father — much better; I feel my strength returning; in a few days I shall be able to rise; but you, father, why do you not go to the office?” — Buvat sighed deeply. — ”It was kind not to leave me when I was ill, but now I am getting better, you must return to the library, father.”

“Yes, my child, yes,” said Buvat, swallowing his sobs. “Yes, I am going.”

“Are you going without kissing me?”

“No, my child, on the contrary.”

“Why, father, you are crying, and yet you see that I am better!”

“I cry!” said Buvat, wiping his eyes with his handkerchief. “I, crying! If I am crying, it is only joy. Yes, I am going, my child — to my office — I am going.”

And Buvat, after having embraced Bathilde, returned home, for he would not tell his poor child that he had lost his place, and the young girl was left alone.

Then she breathed more freely now that she was tranquil; Boniface, in his quality of clerk to the procureur at Chatelet, was in the very place to know everything, and Bathilde was sure that Boniface would tell her everything. Indeed, from that time she knew all: that Raoul had been interrogated, and that he had taken everything on himself; then the day following she learned that he had been confronted with Laval, Valef, and Pompadour, but that interview had produced nothing. Faithful to his promise, Boniface every evening brought her the day’s news, and every evening Bathilde, at this recital, alarming as it was, felt inspired with new resolution. A fortnight passed thus, at the end of which time Bathilde began to get up and walk a little about the room, to the great joy of Buvat, Nanette, and the whole Denis family.

One day Boniface, contrary to his usual habit, returned home from Joullu’s at three o’clock, and entered the room of the sufferer. The poor boy was so pale and so cast down, that Bathilde understood that he brought some terrible information, and giving a cry, she rose upright, with her eyes fixed on him.

“All is finished, then?” asked Bathilde.

“Alas!” answered Boniface, “it is all through his own obstinacy. They offered him pardon — do you understand, Mademoiselle Bathilde? — his pardon if he would — and he would not speak a word.”

“Then,” cried Bathilde, “no more hope; he is condemned.”

“This morning, Mademoiselle Bathilde, this morning.”

“To death?”

Boniface bowed his head.

“And when is he to be executed?”

“To-morrow morning at eight o’clock.”

“Very well,” said Bathilde.

“But perhaps there is still hope,” said Boniface.

“What?” asked Bathilde.

“If even now he would denounce his accomplices.”

The young girl began to laugh, but so strangely that Boniface shuddered from head to foot.

“Well,” said Boniface, “who knows? I, if I was in his place, for example, should not fail to do so; I should say, ‘It was not I, on my honor it was not I; it was such a one, and such another, and so on.’“

“Boniface, I must go out.”

“You, Mademoiselle Bathilde!” cried Boniface, terrified. “You go out! why, it would kill you.”

“I say I must go out.”

“But you cannot stand upright.”

“You are wrong, Boniface, I am strong — see.”

And Bathilde began to walk up and down the room with a firm step.

“Moreover,” added Bathilde, “you will go and fetch a coach.”

“But, Mademoiselle Bathilde — ”

“Boniface,” said the young girl, “you have promised to obey me; till this minute you have kept your word; are you getting lax in your devotion?”

“I, Mademoiselle Bathilde! I lax in my devotion to you? You ask for a coach, I will fetch two.”

“Go, my friend, my brother,” said Bathilde.

“Oh! Mademoiselle Bathilde, with such words you could make me do what you liked. In five minutes the coach will be here.”

And Boniface ran out.

Bathilde had on a loose white robe; she tied it in with a girdle, threw a cloak over her shoulders, and got ready. As she was advancing to the door Madame Denis entered.

"Oh, my dear child, what in Heaven's name are you going to do?"

"Madame," said Bathilde, "it is necessary that I should go out."

"Go out! you are mad?"

"No, madame," said Bathilde, "I am in perfect possession of my senses, but you would drive me mad by retaining me."

"But at least where are you going, my dear child?"

"Do you not know that he is condemned?"

"Oh! mon Dieu! mon Dieu! who told you that? I had asked every one to keep it from you."

"Yes, and to-morrow you would have told me that he was dead, and I should have answered, 'You have killed him, for I had a means of saving him, perhaps.'"

"You, you, my child! you have a means of saving him?"

"I said, perhaps; let me try the means, it is the only one remaining."

"Go, my child," said Madame Denis, struck by the inspired tone of Bathilde's voice, "go, and may God guide you!"

Bathilde went out, descended the staircase with a slow but firm step, crossed the street, ascended the four stories without resting, opened the door of her room, which she had not entered since the day of the catastrophe. At the noise which she made, Nanette came out of the inner room, and gave a cry at seeing her young mistress.

"Well," asked Bathilde, in a grave tone, "what is it, my good Nanette?"

"Oh, mon Dieu!" cried the poor woman, trembling, "is that really you, or is it your shadow?"

"It is I, Nanette; I am not yet dead."

"And why have you left the Denis's house? Have they said anything to wound you?"

"No, Nanette, but I have something to do which is necessary — indispensable."

"You, go out in your present state! You will kill yourself. M. Buvat! M. Buvat! here is our young lady going out; come and tell her that it must not be."

Bathilde turned toward Buvat, with the intention of employing her ascendency over him, if he endeavored to stop her, but she saw him with so sorrowful a face that she did not doubt that he knew the fatal news. On his part, Buvat burst into tears on seeing her.

“My father,” said Bathilde, “what has been done to-day has been the work of men, what remains is in the hands of God, and he will have pity on us.”

“Oh!” cried Buvat, sinking into a chair, “it is I who have killed him! it is I who have killed him!”

Bathilde went up to him solemnly and kissed him.

“But what are you going to do, my child?”

“My duty,” answered Bathilde.

She opened a little cupboard in the prie-Dieu, took out a black pocket-book, opened it, and drew out a letter.

“You are right, you are right, my child, I had forgotten that letter.”

“I remembered it,” answered Bathilde, kissing the letter, and placing it next her heart, “for it was the sole inheritance my mother left me.”

At that moment they heard the noise of a coach at the door.

“Adieu, father! adieu, Nanette! Pray for my success.”

And Bathilde went away, with a solemn gravity which made her, in the eyes of those who watched her, almost a saint.

At the door she found Boniface waiting with a coach.

“Shall I go with you, Mademoiselle Bathilde?” asked he.

“No, no, my friend,” said Bathilde, “not now; to-morrow, perhaps.”

She entered the coach.

“Where to?” asked the coachman.

“To the Arsenal.”

CHAPTER XLI.

THE THREE VISITS.

On arriving at the Arsenal Bathilde asked for Mademoiselle de Launay, who — at her request — led her at once to Madame de Maine.

“Ah, it is you, my child!” said the duchess, with a distracted air and voice; “it is well to remember one’s friends when they are in misfortune.”

“Alas, madame!” replied Bathilde, “I come to your royal highness to speak of one still more unfortunate. Doubtless you may have lost some of your titles, some of your dignities, but their vengeance will stop, for no one would dare to attack the life, or even the liberty, of the son of Louis XIV., or the granddaughter of the great Conde.”

“The life, no; but the liberty, I will not answer for it. Do you know that that idiot of an Abbe Brigaud has got arrested three days ago at Orleans, dressed as a peddler, and — on false revelations, which they represented to him as coming from me — has confessed all, and compromised us terribly, so that I should not be astonished at being arrested this very day?”

“He for whom I come to implore your pity, madame, has revealed nothing, but, on the contrary, is condemned to death for having kept silence.”

“Ah! my dear child,” cried the duchess, “you speak of poor D’Harmental; he is a gentleman; you know him, then?”

“Alas!” said Mademoiselle de Launay, “not only Bathilde knows him, but she loves him.”

“Poor child! but what can I do? I can do nothing: I have no influence. For me to attempt anything in his favor would be to take away from him the last hope remaining.”

“I know it, madame,” said Bathilde, “and I only ask of your highness one thing; it is, that, through some of your friends or acquaintances, I may gain admission to Monseigneur the Regent. The rest lies with me.”

“My child, do you know what you are asking?” inquired the duchess. “Do you know that the regent respects no one? Do you know — that you are beautiful as an angel, and still more so from your present paleness? Do you know — ”

“Madame,” said Bathilde, with dignity, “I know that my father saved his life, and died in his service.”

“Ah, that is another thing,” said the duchess; “stay, De Launay, call Malezieux.”

Mademoiselle de Launay obeyed, and a moment afterward the faithful chancellor entered.

“Malezieux,” said the duchess, “you must take this child to the Duchesse de Berry, with a recommendation from me. She must see the regent, and at once; the life of a man depends upon it — it is that of D’Harmental, whom I would myself give so much to save.”

“I go, madame,” said Malezieux.

“You see, my child,” said the duchess, “I do all I can for you; if I can be useful to you in any other way — if, to prepare his flight, or to seduce a jailer, money is needed, I have still some diamonds, which cannot be better employed than in saving the life of so brave a gentleman. Come, lose no time, go at once to my niece; you know that she is her father’s favorite.”

“I know, madame,” said Bathilde, “that you are an angel, and, if I succeed, I shall owe you more than my life.”

“Come, De Launay,” continued Madame de Maine, when Bathilde was gone, “let us return to our trunks.”

Bathilde, accompanied by Malezieux, arrived at the Luxembourg in twenty minutes. Thanks to Malezieux, Bathilde entered without difficulty; she was conducted into a little boudoir, where she was told to wait while the chancellor should see her royal highness, and inform her of the favor they came to ask.

Malezieux acquitted himself of the commission with zeal, and Bathilde had not waited ten minutes when she saw him return with the Duchesse de Berry. The duchess had an excellent heart, and she had been greatly moved by Malezieux’ recital, so that, when she appeared, there was no mistaking the interest she already felt in the young girl who came to solicit her protection. Bathilde came to her, and would have fallen at her feet, but the duchess took her by the hand, and kissing her on the forehead —

“My poor child,” said she, “why did you not come to me a week ago?”

“And why a week ago rather than to-day, madame?” asked Bathilde, with anxiety.

“Because a week ago I should have yielded to none the pleasure of taking you to my father, and that now is impossible.”

“Impossible! and why?” cried Bathilde.

“Do you not know that I am in complete disgrace since the day before yesterday? Alas! princess as I am, I am a woman like you, and like you I have had the misfortune to love. We daughters of the royal race, you know, may not dispose of our hearts without the authority of the king and his ministers. I have disposed of my heart, and I have nothing to say, for I was pardoned; but I disposed of my hand, and I am punished. See, what a strange thing! They make a crime of what in any one else would have been praised. For three days my lover has been my husband, and for three days, that is to say, from the moment when I could present myself before my father without blushing, I am forbidden his presence. Yesterday my guard was taken from me; this morning I presented myself at the Palais Royal and was refused admittance.”

“Alas!” said Bathilde, “I am unhappy, for I had no hope but in you, madame, and I know no one who can introduce me to the regent. And it is to-morrow, madame, at eight o’clock, that they will kill him whom I love as you love M. de Riom. Oh, madame, take pity on me, for if you do not, I am lost!”

“Mon Dieu! Riom, come to our aid,” said the duchess, turning to her husband, who entered at this moment; “here is a poor child who wants to see my father directly, without delay; her life depends on the interview. Her life! What am I saying? More than her life — the life of a man she loves. Lauzun’s nephew should never be at a loss; find us a means, and, if it be possible, I will love you more than ever.”

“I have one,” said Riom, smiling.

“Oh, monsieur,” cried Bathilde, “tell it me, and I will be eternally grateful.”

“Oh, speak!” said the Duchesse de Berry, in a voice almost as pressing as Bathilde’s.

“But it compromises your sister singularly.”

“Which one?”

“Mademoiselle de Valois.”

“Aglaé! how so?”

“Do you not know that there exists a kind of sorcerer, who has the power of appearing before her day or night, no one knows how?”

"Richelieu? it is true!" cried the Duchesse de Berry; "but — "

"But what, madame?"

"He will not, perhaps — "

"I will beg him so that he will take pity on me," said Bathilde; "besides, you will speak a word for me, will you not? He will not dare to refuse what your highness asks."

"We will do better than that," said the duchess. "Riom, call Madame de Mouchy, beg her to take mademoiselle herself to the duke. Madame de Mouchy is my first lady-in-waiting," said the duchess, turning to Bathilde, "and it is supposed that the Duc de Richelieu owes her some gratitude. You see, I could not choose you a better introductress."

"Oh, thanks, madame," cried Bathilde, kissing the duchess's hands, "you are right, and all hope is not yet lost. And you say that the Duc de Richelieu has a means of entering the Palais Royal?"

"Stay, let us understand each other. I do not say so, report says so."

"Oh!" cried Bathilde, "if we only find him at home!"

"That is a chance; but yet, let me see, what time is it? scarcely eight o'clock. He will probably sup in town, and return to dress. I will tell Madame de Mouchy to wait for him with you. Will you not," said she, turning to the lady-in-waiting, who now entered, "wait for the duke till he returns?"

"I will do whatever your highness orders," said Madame de Mouchy.

"Well, I order you to obtain from the Duc de Richelieu a promise that mademoiselle shall see the regent, and I authorize you to use, for this purpose, whatever influence you may possess over him."

"Madame goes a long way," said Madame de Mouchy, smiling.

"Never mind, go and do what I tell you; and you, my child, take courage, follow madame, and if, on your road in life, you hear much harm of the Duchesse de Berry, whom they anathematize, tell them that I have a good heart, and that, in spite of all these excommunications, I hope that much will be forgiven me, because I have loved much. Is it not so, Riom?"

"I do not know, madame," said Bathilde, "whether you are well or ill spoken of, but I know that to me you seem so good and great that I could kiss the trace of your footsteps."

"Now go, my child; if you miss M. de Richelieu you may not know where to find him, and may wait for him uselessly."

“Since her highness permits it, come, then, madame,” said Bathilde, “for every minute seems to me an age.”

A quarter of an hour afterward, Bathilde and Madame de Mouchy were at Richelieu’s hotel. Contrary to all expectation, he was at home. Madame de Mouchy entered at once, followed by Bathilde. They found Richelieu occupied with Raffe, his secretary, in burning a number of useless letters, and putting some others aside.

“Well, madame,” said Richelieu, coming forward with a smile on his lips, “what good wind blows you here? And to what event do I owe the happiness of receiving you at my house at half-past eight in the evening?”

“To my wish to enable you to do a good action, duke.”

“In that case, make haste, madame.”

“Do you leave Paris this evening?”

“No, but I am going to-morrow morning — to the Bastille.”

“What joke is this?”

“I assure you it is no joke at all to leave my hotel, where I am very comfortable, for that of the king, where I shall be just the reverse. I know it, for this will be my third visit.”

“What makes you think you will be arrested to-morrow?”

“I have been warned.”

“By a sure person?”

“Judge for yourself.”

And he handed a letter to Madame de Mouchy, who took it and read —

“Innocent or guilty you have only time to fly. The regent has just said aloud before me that at last he has got the Duc de Richelieu. To-morrow you will be arrested.”

“Do you think the person in a position to be well informed?”

“Yes, for I think I recognize the writing.”

“You see, then, that I was right in telling you to make haste. Now, if it is a thing which may be done in the space of a night, speak, I am at your orders.”

“An hour will suffice.”

“Speak, then; you know I can refuse you nothing.”

“Well,” said Madame de Mouchy, “the thing is told in a few words. Do you intend this evening to go and thank the person who gave you this advice?”

“Probably,” said the duke, laughing.

"Well, you must present mademoiselle to her."

"Mademoiselle!" cried the duke, astonished, and turning toward Bathilde, who till then had remained hidden in the darkness, "and who is mademoiselle?"

"A young girl who loves the Chevalier d'Harmental — who is to be executed to-morrow, as you know, and whose pardon she wishes to ask from the regent."

"You love the Chevalier d'Harmental, mademoiselle?" said the duke, addressing Bathilde.

"Oh, monsieur!" stammered Bathilde, blushing.

"Do not conceal it, mademoiselle. He is a noble young man, and I would give ten years of my own life to save him. And do you think you have any means of interesting the regent in his favor?"

"I believe so."

"It is well. I only hope it may be so. Madame," continued the duke, turning to Madame de Mouchy, "return to her royal highness and tell her that mademoiselle shall see the regent in an hour."

"Oh, M. le Duc!" cried Bathilde.

"Decidedly, my dear Richelieu, I begin to think, as people say, that you have made a compact with the devil; that you may pass through key-holes, and I confess I shall be less uneasy now, in seeing you go to the Bastille."

"At any rate, you know, madame, that charity teaches us to visit prisoners, and if you retain any recollection of poor Armand — "

"Silence, duke, be discreet, and we will see what can be done for you. Meanwhile, you promise that mademoiselle shall see the regent?"

"It is a settled thing."

"Adieu, duke, and may the Bastille be easy to you."

"Is it adieu you say?"

"Au revoir!"

"That is right."

And having kissed Madame de Mouchy's hand he led her to the door; then, returning to Bathilde:

"Mademoiselle," said he, "what I am about to do for you compromises the reputation and honor of a princess of the blood, but the gravity of the occasion demands some sacrifice. Swear to me, then, that you will never tell, but to one person (for I know there are persons for whom you have no secrets), swear that you will never tell any but him, and that no other shall ever know in what manner you came to the regent."

"Monsieur, I swear it by all I hold most sacred in the world — by my mother's memory."

"That will suffice," said the duke, ringing a bell. A valet-de-chambre entered.

"Lafosse," said the duke, "the bay horses and the carriage without arms."

"Monsieur," said Bathilde, "if you would save time, I have a hired carriage below."

"That is still better. I am at your orders, mademoiselle."

"Am I to go with monsieur?" asked the servant.

"No, stay and help Raffe to put these papers in order. There are several which it is quite unnecessary for Dubois to see."

And the duke offered his arm to Bathilde, went down, handed her into the carriage, and after telling the coachman to stop at the corner of the Rue Saint Honore and the Rue de Richelieu, placed himself by her side, as thoughtless as though the fate from which he was about to save the chevalier might not also await himself.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE CLOSET.

The carriage stopped at its destination, and Richelieu, getting out and taking a key from his pocket, opened the door of a house at the corner of the Rue de Richelieu.

"I must ask your pardon, mademoiselle," said the duke, offering his arm to Bathilde, "for leading you by badly-lighted staircases and passages; but I am anxious not to be recognized, should any one meet me here. We have not far to go."

Bathilde had counted about twenty steps, when the duke stopped, drew a second key from his pocket, and opened a door, then entered an antechamber, and lighted a candle at a lamp on the staircase.

"Once again I must ask pardon, mademoiselle," said the duke, "but you will soon understand why I chose to dispense with a servant here."

It mattered little to Bathilde whether the duke had a servant or not; she entered the antechamber without replying, and the duke locked the door behind her.

"Now follow me," said the duke; and he walked before the young girl, lighting her with the candle which he held in his hand. They crossed a dining-room and drawing-room, then entered a bedroom, where the duke stopped.

"Mademoiselle," said Richelieu, placing the candle on the chimney-piece, "I have your word that you will reveal nothing of what you are about to see."

"I have given you my promise, and I now renew it; I should be ungrateful indeed if I were to fail."

"Well, then, be the third in our secret, which is one of love; we put it under the safeguard of love."

And the Duc de Richelieu, sliding away a panel in the woodwork, discovered an opening in the wall, beyond which was the back of a closet, and he knocked softly three times. Presently they heard a key turn in the lock, then saw a light between the planks, then a low voice asked, "Is it you?” On the duke’s replying in the affirmative, three of these planks were quietly detached, opening a means of communication from one room to the other, and the duke and Bathilde found themselves in the presence of Mademoiselle de Valois, who uttered a cry on seeing her lover accompanied by a woman.

“Fear nothing, dear Aglaé,” said the duke, passing into the room where she was, and taking her hand, while Bathilde remained motionless in her place, not daring to move a step till her presence was explained.

“But will you tell me?” began Mademoiselle de Valois, looking at Bathilde uneasily.

“Directly. You have heard me speak of the Chevalier d’Harmental, have you not?”

“The day before yesterday you told me that by a word he might save his own life and compromise you all, but that he would never speak this word.”

“Well, he has not spoken, and he is condemned to death, and is to be executed to-morrow. This young girl loves him, and his pardon depends on the regent. Do you understand?”

“Oh, yes!” said Mademoiselle de Valois.

“Come, mademoiselle,” said the duke to Bathilde, taking her by the hand; then, turning again to the princess, “She did not know how to reach your father, my dear Aglaé, and came to me just as I had received your letter. I had to thank you for the good advice you gave me; and, as I know your heart, I thought I should please you by showing my gratitude, in offering you an opportunity to save the life of a man to whose silence you probably owe my own.”

“And you were right, duke. You are welcome, mademoiselle. What can I do for you?”

“I wish to see the regent,” said Bathilde, “and your highness can take me to him.”

“Will you wait for me, duke?” asked Mademoiselle de Valois uneasily.

“Can you doubt it?”

“Then go into the closet, lest any one should surprise you here. I will take mademoiselle to my father, and return directly.”

“I will wait,” said the duke, following the instructions of the princess and entering the closet. Mademoiselle de Valois exchanged some low words with her lover, locked the closet, put the key in her pocket, and holding out her hand to Bathilde —

“Mademoiselle,” said she, “all women who love are sisters; Armand and you did well to rely upon me; come.”

Bathilde kissed the hand she held out, and followed her. They passed through all the rooms facing the Palais Royal, and then, turning to the left, entered those which looked on the Rue de Valois, among which was the regent’s bedroom.

“We have arrived,” said Mademoiselle de Valois, stopping before a door, and turning to Bathilde, who at this news trembled and turned pale; for all the strength which had sustained her for the last three or four hours was ready to disappear just as she needed it the most.

“Oh, mon Dieu! I shall never dare to speak,” said Bathilde.

“Courage, mademoiselle! enter, fall at his feet, God and his own heart will do the rest.”

At these words, seeing that the young girl still hesitated, she opened the door, pushed Bathilde in, and closed it behind her. She then ran down with a light step to rejoin Richelieu, leaving Bathilde to plead her cause tete-à-tete with the regent.

At this unforeseen action, Bathilde uttered a low cry, and the regent, who was walking to and fro with his head bent down, raised it, and turned toward Bathilde, who, incapable of making a step in advance, fell on her knees, drew out her letter, and held it toward the regent. The regent had bad sight; he did not understand what was going on, and advanced toward this woman, who appeared to him in the shade as a white and indistinct form; but soon in that form he recognized a woman, and, in that woman, a young, beautiful, and kneeling girl.

As to the poor child, in vain she attempted to articulate a prayer. Voice and strength failing her together, she would have fallen if the regent had not held her in his arms.

“Mon Dieu! mademoiselle,” said the regent, on whom the signs of grief produced their ordinary effect, “what is the matter? What can I do for you? Come to this couch, I beg.”

“No, monseigneur, it is at your feet that I should be, for I come to ask a boon.”

“And what is it?”

“See first who I am, monseigneur, and then I may dare to speak.”

And again Bathilde held out the letter, on which rested her only hope, to the Duc d’Orleans.

The regent took the letter, and, by the light of a candle which burned on the chimney-piece, recognized his own writing, and read as follows:

"'Madame — Your husband is dead for France and for me. Neither France nor I can give you back your husband; but, remember, that if ever you are in want of anything we are both your debtors.

"'Your affectionate,

"'Philippe d'Orleans.'

"I recognize this letter perfectly as being my own," said the regent, "but to the shame of my memory I must confess that I do not know to whom it was written."

"Look at the address, monseigneur," said Bathilde, a little reassured by the expression of benevolence on the duke's face.

"Clarice du Rocher," cried the regent, "yes, indeed, I remember now; I wrote this letter from Spain after the death of Albert, who was killed at the battle of Almanza. I wrote this letter to his widow. How did it fall into your hands, mademoiselle?"

"Alas, monseigneur, I am the daughter of Albert and Clarice."

"You, mademoiselle! And what has become of your mother?"

"She is dead."

"Long since?"

"Nearly fourteen years."

"But happy, doubtless, and wanting nothing."

"In despair, monseigneur, and wanting everything."

"But why did she not apply to me?"

"Your highness was still in Spain."

"Oh! mon Dieu! what do you say? Continue, mademoiselle, for you cannot tell how much you interest me. Poor Clarice, poor Albert, they loved each other so much, I remember. She could not survive him. Do you know that your father saved my life at Nerwinden, mademoiselle?"

"Yes, monseigneur, I know it, and that gave me courage to present myself before you."

"But you, poor child, poor orphan, what became of you?"

"I, monseigneur, was taken by a friend of our family, a poor writer called Jean Buvat."

"Jean Buvat!" cried the regent, "I know that name; he is the poor copyist who discovered the whole conspiracy, and who some days ago made his demands in person. A place in the library, was it not, some arrears due?"

“The same, monseigneur.”

“Mademoiselle,” replied the regent, “it appears that those who surround you are destined to save me. I am thus twice your debtor. You said you had a boon to ask of me — speak boldly, I listen to you.”

“Oh, my God!” murmured Bathilde, “give me strength.”

“Is it, then, a very important and difficult thing that you desire?”

“Monseigneur,” said Bathilde, “it is the life of a man who has deserved death.”

“Is it the Chevalier d’Harmental?”

“Alas, monseigneur, it is.”

The regent’s brow became pensive, while Bathilde, seeing the impression produced by her demand, felt her heart beat and her knees tremble.

“Is he your relation, your ally, your friend?”

“He is my life, he is my soul, monseigneur; I love him.”

“But do you know that if I pardon him I must pardon all the rest, and that there are some still more guilty than he is?”

“His life only, monseigneur, all I ask is that he may live.”

“But if I change his sentence to a perpetual imprisonment you will never see him again. What would become of you, then?” asked the regent.

Bathilde was obliged to support herself by the back of a chair.

“I would enter into a convent, where I could pray the rest of my life for you, monseigneur, and for him.”

“That cannot be,” said the regent.

“Why not, monseigneur?”

“Because this very day, this very hour, I have been asked for your hand, and have promised it.”

“You have promised my hand, monseigneur; and to whom?”

“Read,” said the regent, taking an open letter from his desk, and presenting it to the young girl.

“Raoul’s writing!” cried Bathilde; “what does this mean?”

“Read,” repeated the regent.

And in a choking voice, Bathilde read the following letter: —

“‘Monseigneur — I have deserved death — I know it, and I do not ask you for life. I am ready to die at the day and hour appointed; but it depends on your highness to make this death sweeter to me. I love a young girl whom I should have married if I had lived; grant that she may be my wife before I die. In leaving her forever alone and friendless in the world, let me at least have the consolation of giving her the safeguard of my name and fortune. On leaving the church, monseigneur, I will walk to the scaffold. This is my last wish, my sole desire. Do not refuse the prayer of a dying man.

"'Raoul d'Harmental.'

"Oh, monseigneur," said Bathilde, sobbing, "you see that while I thought of him, he thought of me. Am I not right to love him, when he loves me so much?"

"Yes," said the regent, "and I grant his request, it is just; may it, as he says, sweeten his last moments."

"Monseigneur," cried the young girl, "is that all you grant him?"

"You see," said the regent, "he is just; he asks nothing else."

"Oh, it is cruel! it is frightful! to see him again, and lose him directly; his life, monseigneur, his life, I beg; and let me never see him again — better so."

"Mademoiselle," said the regent, in a tone which admitted of no reply, and writing some lines on a paper which he sealed, "here is a letter to Monsieur de Launay, the governor of the Bastille; it contains my instructions with regard to the prisoner. My captain of the guards will go with you, and see that my instructions are followed."

"Oh! his life, monseigneur, his life; on my knees, and in the name of Heaven, I implore you."

The regent rang the bell; a valet entered.

"Call Monsieur the Marquis de Lafare," he said.

"Oh, monseigneur, you are cruel," said Bathilde, rising; "at least permit me then to die with him. We will not be separated, even on the scaffold; we will be together, even in the tomb."

"Monsieur de Lafare, accompany mademoiselle to the Bastille," said the regent. "Here is a letter for Monsieur de Launay, read it with him, and see that the orders it contains are punctually executed."

Then, without listening to Bathilde's last cry of despair, the Duc d'Orleans opened the door of a closet and disappeared.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE MARRIAGE IN EXTREMIS.

Lafare dragged the young girl away, almost fainting, and placed her in one of the carriages always standing in the courtyard of the Palais Royal. During the route Bathilde did not speak; she was cold, dumb, and inanimate as a statue. Her eyes were fixed and tearless, but on arriving at the fortress she started. She fancied she had seen in the shade, in the very place where the Chevalier de Rohan was executed, something like a scaffold. A little further a sentinel cried “Qui vive!” the carriage rolled over a drawbridge, and drew up at the door of the governor’s house. A footman out of livery opened the door, and Lafare gave Bathilde his arm — she could scarcely stand — all her strength had left her when hope left her. Lafare and the valet were obliged almost to carry her to the first floor. M. de Launay was at supper. They took Bathilde into a room to wait, while Lafare went directly to the governor. Ten minutes passed, during which Bathilde had only one idea — that of the eternal separation which awaited her. The poor girl saw but one thing — her lover on the scaffold. Lafare re-entered with the governor. Bathilde looked at them with a bewildered air. Lafare approached her, and offering her his arm —

“Mademoiselle,” said he, “the church is prepared, the priest is ready.”

Bathilde, without replying, rose and leaned on the arm which was offered her. M. de Launay went first, lighted by two men bearing torches.

As Bathilde entered by one of the side doors, she saw entering by the other the Chevalier d’Harmental, accompanied by Valef and Pompadour. These were his witnesses, as De Launay and Lafare were hers. Each door was kept by two of the French guard, silent and motionless as statues.

The two lovers advanced, Bathilde pale and fainting, Raoul calm and smiling. On arriving before the altar, the chevalier took Bathilde’s hand, and both fell on their knees, without having spoken a word.

The altar was lighted only by four wax tapers, which threw a funereal light over the chapel, already dark, and filled with gloomy recollections.

The priest commenced the ceremony; he was a fine old man with white hair, and whose melancholy countenance showed the traces of his daily functions. He had been chaplain of the Bastille for five-and-twenty years, and had heard many sad confessions, and seen many lamentable events. He spoke to them, not, as usual, of their duties as husband and wife, but of divine mercy and eternal resurrection. At the benediction Bathilde laid her head on Raoul's shoulder; the priest thought she was fainting, and stopped.

"Finish, my father," murmured Bathilde.

The priest pronounced the sacramental words, to which both replied by a "yes," which seemed to unite the whole strength of their souls. The ceremony finished, D'Harmental asked M. de Launay if he might spend his few remaining hours with his wife. Monsieur de Launay replied that there was no objection. Raoul embraced Pompadour and Valef, thanked them for having served as witnesses at his marriage, pressed Lafare's hand, thanked Monsieur de Launay for his kindness to him during his imprisonment, and throwing his arm round Bathilde, led her away by the door through which he had entered. When they reached D'Harmental's room, Bathilde could no longer contain her tears, a despairing cry escaped her lips, and she fell weeping on a chair, where doubtless D'Harmental had often sat, during the three weeks of his captivity, and thought of her. Raoul threw himself at her feet, and tried to console her, but was himself so much moved by her grief, that his own tears mingled with hers. This heart of iron melted in its turn, and Bathilde felt at once on her lips the tears and kisses of her lover. They had been about half-an-hour together when they heard steps approaching the door, and a key turning in the lock. Bathilde started, and pressed D'Harmental convulsively against her heart. Raoul understood the dreadful fear which crossed her mind, and reassured her. It could not be what she dreaded, since the execution was fixed for eight o'clock in the morning, and eleven had only just struck.

It was Monsieur de Launay who appeared.

"Monsieur le Chevalier," said he, "have the kindness to follow me."

"Alone?" asked D'Harmental, clasping Bathilde in his arms.

"No, with madame," replied the governor.

"Oh! together, Raoul, together!" cried Bathilde, "where they like, so that we are together. We are ready, monsieur, we are ready."

Raoul kissed Bathilde again; then recalling all his pride, he followed M. de Launay, with a face which showed no trace of the terrible emotion he had experienced. They passed through some ill-lighted corridors, descended a spiral staircase, and found themselves at the door of a tower. This door opened out to a yard, surrounded by high walls, which served as a promenade to those prisoners who were not kept secret. In this courtyard was standing a carriage with two horses, on one of which was a postilion, and they saw, shining in the darkness, the cuirasses of a dozen musketeers. A ray of hope crossed the minds of the two lovers. Bathilde had asked the regent to change Raoul's death into a perpetual imprisonment. Perhaps the regent had granted him this favor. The carriage, ready, doubtless, to conduct him to some State prison, the musketeers destined to escort them, all gave to the supposition an air of reality. They raised their eyes to heaven to thank God for this unexpected happiness. Meanwhile M. de Launay had signed to the carriage to approach; the postilion had obeyed, the door was opened, and the governor — with his head uncovered — held his hand to Bathilde, to assist her into the carriage.

She hesitated an instant, turning uneasily to see that they did not take Raoul away by the other side; but seeing that he was ready to follow her, she got in without resistance. An instant afterward Raoul was sitting by her; the door was closed, and both carriage and escort passed through the gate, over the drawbridge, and they found themselves outside of the Bastille.

They threw themselves into each other's arms; there was no longer any doubt; the regent granted D'Harmental his life, and what was more, consented not to separate him from Bathilde.

This was what Bathilde and D'Harmental had never dared to hope; this life of seclusion — a punishment to many — would be to them a paradise of love — they would be together; and what else had they desired for their future, even when they were masters of their own fate? A single sad idea crossed their minds, and both, with the sympathy of hearts who love, pronounced the name of Buvat.

At this moment the carriage stopped; at such a time everything was, for the lovers, a subject of fear. They again trembled, lest they should have given way too much to hope. The door opened — it was the postilion.

"What do you want?" asked D'Harmental.

"I want to know where I am to take you."

"Where you are to take me! Have you no orders?"

"My orders were to take you to the Bois de Vincennes, between the Chateau and Nogent-sur-Marne, and here we are."

“And where is the escort?” asked D’Harmental.

“Oh, the escort left us at the barrier!”

“Oh, mon Dieu!” cried D’Harmental, while Bathilde — panting with hope — joined her hands in silence, “is it possible?”

And the chevalier jumped out of the carriage, looked round him anxiously, then clasping Bathilde in his arms, they uttered together a cry of joy and thankfulness.

They were free as the air they breathed, but the regent had ordered that they should be taken to the very place where D’Harmental had carried off Bourguignon, mistaking him for himself.

This was the only revenge of Philippe le Debonnaire.

Four years after this event, Buvat, reinstated in his place — and with his arrears paid — had the satisfaction of placing a pen in the hand of a fine boy of three years old — he was the son of Raoul and Bathilde.

The two first names which the child wrote were Albert du Rocher and Clarice Gray. The third was that of Philippe d’Orleans, regent of France.

POSTSCRIPTUM.

Perhaps some persons may have taken sufficient interest in those who have played a secondary part in our history to wish to know what became of them after the events which lost the conspiracy and saved the regent. We will satisfy them in a few words.

The Duc and Duchesse de Maine, whose plotting they wished to stop for the future, were arrested — the duke at Sceaux, and the duchess in her house in the Rue Saint Honoré. The duke was taken to the chateau of Doullens, and the duchess to that of Dijon, and afterward to the citadel of Châlons. Both left at the end of a few months, disarming the regent, one by an absolute denial, the other by a complete avowal.

Richelieu was arrested, as Mademoiselle de Valois had warned him, the day after that on which he had procured Bathilde’s interview with the regent; but his captivity was a new triumph for him. It was reported that the handsome prisoner had obtained permission to walk on the terrace of the Bastille. The Rue Saint Antoine was filled with most elegant carriages, and became, in twenty-four hours, the fashionable promenade. The regent — who declared that he had proofs of the treason of M. de Richelieu, sufficient to lose him four heads if he had them — would not, however, risk his popularity with the fair sex by keeping him long in prison. Richelieu, again at liberty, after a captivity of three months, was more brilliant and more sought after than ever; but the closet had been walled up, and Mademoiselle de Valois became Duchesse de Modena.

The Abbe Brigaud — arrested, as we have said, at Orleans — was kept for some time in the prison of that town, to the great despair of Madame Denis and her children; but, one fine morning, as they were sitting down to breakfast, the abbe entered, as calm as ever. They asked him a number of questions, but — with his habitual prudence — he referred them to his judicial declarations, saying that the affair had already given him so much trouble that they would greatly oblige him by never speaking of it any more. Now, as the Abbe Brigaud was quite an autocrat in Madame Denis’s establishment, his desire was religiously respected, and from that day the affair was as completely forgotten in the Rue du Temps-Perdu as if it had never existed. Some days afterward Pompadour, Valef, Laval, and

Malezieux went out of prison in their turn, and began again to pay their court to Madame de Maine, as if nothing had happened. As to the Cardinal de Polignac, he was not even arrested; he was simply exiled to his Abbey d'Anchin.

These proofs of clemency appeared to Dubois so out of all reason that he came to the regent, intending to make a scene about it, but the regent only replied by repeating the burden of the song which Saint-Simon had made on him:

"For I am Philippe le Debonnaire, Philippe le Debonnaire."

This enraged Dubois so much that the regent, in order to pacify him, was obliged to transform him into his Eminence the Cardinal.

THE END

GEORGES

Translated by Alfred Allinson

This 1843 short novel is set on the island of Mauritius from 1810 to 1824. *Georges* is of particular interest as Dumas reused many of the ideas and plot devices in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, and because racism is a central theme, on which Dumas rarely wrote, in spite of his part-African ancestry.

The novel concerns Georges, the son of a wealthy mulatto plantation owner named Munier, in the Île de France. While part-black, Georges appears to be very light-skinned, if not white. As a child, Georges witnesses an attempt by the British to gain control of the island. Because George's father is a mulatto, the other plantation owners refuse to fight alongside him. Instead, George's father leads the blacks and delivers a crushing blow against the invading forces. Refusing to acknowledge that a man of colour saved them, M. Malmedie and the other white plantation owners ignore the accomplishment.

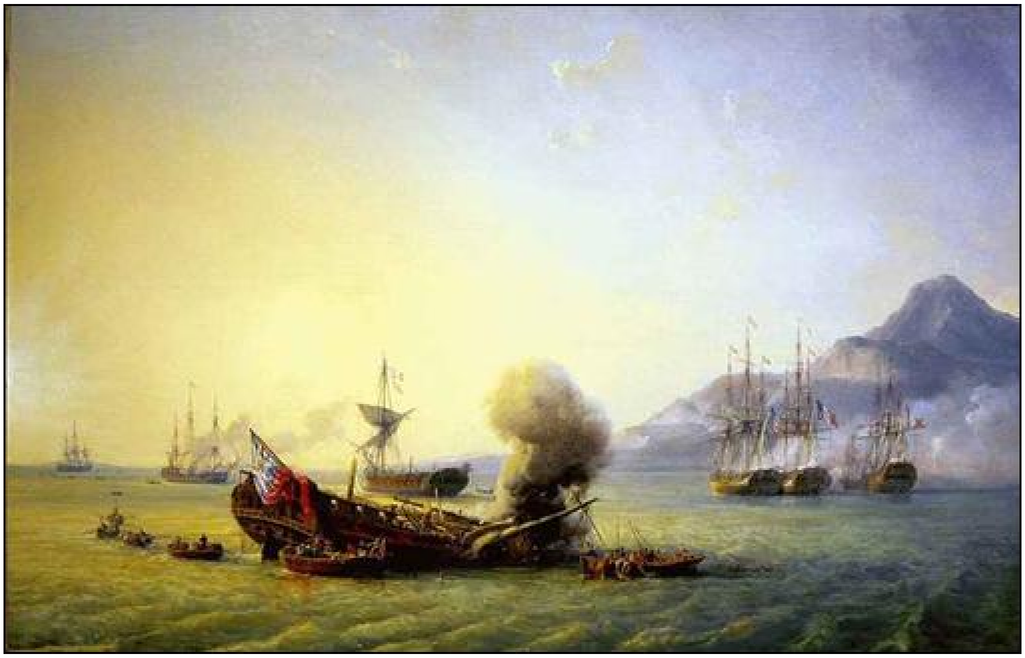

Mauritius in 1810, where and when the novel begins

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INTRODUCTION.

THE scene of the pretty and graceful story which goes by the name of its hero, the romantic half-caste, Georges Munier, is laid in the Mauritius, or as it was called by the French previously to the English occupation, The Isle of France. The leading interest depends on the rivalry between *white* and *black*, the ineradicable prejudice of the former against the latter, and the gallant but unavailing struggle of the hero, a rich mulatto planter's son educated in Europe, to break through the barrier. With this main thread is interwoven the account of a slave revolt, and a pleasing love story, how Georges woos and wins the beautiful Creole, Sara de Malmédie, to say nothing of a dashing description of the encounter of the rival squadrons of France and England, and the eventual conquest of the island by the British.

The sea-fight in question is *not* historical, nor are all its details entirely convincing to a sailor's mind, but it makes an exciting episode nevertheless. "Lord Williams Murrey "and "le capitaine Villougby "will be searched for in vain in the Biographical Dictionaries. At any rate, Dumas, when dealing with the sea and ships (did he not own a yacht of his own, and did he not sail her himself?), is *nothing if not* technical; and the great fight off Port Louis afforded some fine hard nuts for the translator to crack!

The amiable Eugène de Mirecourt — Jacquot of the "mercantilisme littéraire "accusations — says *Georges* was written by one Félicien Mallefille; but then Jacquot and Quérard and their like were always ready to affiliate any child of Dumas' pen on anybody — except of course the rightful parent, Alexandre Dumas. According to these gentry *Monte Cristo* itself was one half by Fiorentino, one half by Maquet! "It was such a simple thing to believe I was the author that they never so much as thought of it," was the great man's laughing comment.

In connection with this same M. Mallefille a good story is told, which we must apologize for borrowing from Mr. A. E. Davidson's admirable *Life and Works of Dumas:* "Speaking of Mallefille — one of his collaborators, and not one of the most remarkable — the master observed, as if pondering a problem, 'There is just something he lacks, — I can't define what it is, — to make him a man of talent.'

“‘Perhaps he lacks the talent,’ suggested some one.

“‘*Tiens!* ‘said Dumas, ‘well, perhaps you are right. I never thought of that.’”

The truth in the case of *Georges* seems to be that Mallefille, or somebody else familiar with the Mauritius, supplied raw material and local colour; Dumas did the rest. Anyhow there can be no doubt of this, that the hero, Georges Munier, who suffers humiliation and discouragement because of his “dash of the tar brush,” but faces every obstacle and insult with irrepressible energy and spirit, is a fancy portrait of Dumas himself, Dumas “the inspired mulatto.”

The book appeared in 1843 — just before, that is, the “annus mirabilis” that saw the birth of *Monte Cristo* and *The Three Musketeers.*

CHAPTER I.

THE ISLE OF FRANCE.

HAS it never been your fate, on one of those long, cold, gloomy winter evenings when, alone with your own thoughts, you stood listening to the wind as it howled down the corridors and the rain as it beat at the windows, your brow resting against the mantelpiece and your eyes gazing, without seeing them, at the logs crackling on the hearth; has it never been your fate under such circumstances to be seized with a sick disgust of our dismal climate, this wet, muddy Paris of ours, and to dream fondly of some enchanted oasis, all carpeted with greenery and refreshed with cooling waters, where, no matter what the season, you might gently sink asleep beneath the shade of palms and jameroses, soothed by the babbling of a crystal spring and happy in the sensation of physical well-being and a delicious languor?

Well, this Paradise you dreamed of exists, this Eden you coveted awaits you. The streamlet that should lull you to soft slumber does actually plunge from its rocky height to rebound in spray, the palm that should guard your siesta does really spread its slender leaves to flutter in the seabreeze like the plume on a giant’s helm, the jameroses, laden with many-coloured fruitage, do veritably offer you their scented shade. Up then, and come with me!

Come to Brest, that warlike sister of commercial Marseilles, that armed sentinel watching over the ocean; and there, from among the hundred vessels sheltering in its harbour, choose one of those brigs with narrow beam, well-cut sails, and long tapering masts, such as Walter Scott’s rival, the poetic chronicler of the sea, assigns to his pirates bold. We are in September, the month most propitious for long voyages. Get you aboard the ship to which we have entrusted our common fortune; let us leave the summer behind us and sail to meet the spring. Adieu, Brest! Hail, Nantes and Bayonne! Adieu, France! See on our right that giant rising to a height of ten thousand feet, whose granite summit is lost in the clouds, above which it seems to hang suspended, and whose rocky foundations you can distinguish through the clear water descending into the depths. It is the peak of Teneriffe, the ancient Nivaria, the rendezvous of the sea-eagles you see wheeling round their eyries and looking scarce as big as pigeons. Pass on, this is not our journey's end; this is but the flower-garden of Spain, and I have promised you the Paradise of the World. Do you see on our left that bare and barren rock scorched incessantly by the tropic sun? It is the rock where the modern Prometheus was chained for six long years; the pedestal whereon England herself has reared the statue of her own shame; the counterpart of the pyre of Jeanne d'Arc and of the scaffold of Mary Stuart; the political Golgotha, for eighteen years the pious rendezvous of all vessels; but this is not where I am taking you. Pass on, we have no longer any business there; the regicide St. Helena is widowed of the relics of her martyr.

We are at the Cape of Storms. Do you see that mountain emerging from the haze? It is the same giant Adamastor which appeared to the author of the 'Lusiad.' We are passing the extremity of the earth; yonder jutting promontory is the prow of the world. See how the ocean breaks against it, furious but powerless; that good ship fears not its tempests, for its sails are set for the harbour of eternity, it has God Himself for pilot. Pass on, for beyond those verdant mountains we shall find barren tracts and sun-scorched deserts. Pass on, I have promised you clear water and sweet shade, fruits ever ripening and everlasting flowers.

Hail to the Indian Ocean! where the west wind urges us along; hail to the scene of the 'Thousand and One Nights '; we are approaching the end of our voyage. Here is the melancholy Bourbon devoured by an eternal volcano. Give a glance at its flames, and a smile for its odours; sail a few knots further and let us pass between the *Plate* and the *Coin-de-Mire;* let us double *Canonneers" Head* and stop at the flag-staff.

Let us drop anchor, the roadstead is good; our brig, wearied with her tedious voyage, craves rest. Besides, we have arrived, for this is the fortunate land which Nature seems to have hidden at the ends of the earth, as a jealous mother conceals from profane eyes the virginal beauty of her daughter; for this is the land of promise, the pearl of the Indian Ocean, the Isle of France.

Now, chaste daughter of the seas, twin sister of Bourbon, favoured rival of Ceylon, let me lift a corner of thy veil to show thee to the stranger-friend, the fraternal traveller, who accompanies me; let me unloose thy girdle, fair captive! for we are two pilgrims from France, and perhaps one day France will be able to redeem thee, rich daughter of the Indies, for the price of some petty kingdom of Europe. And you who have followed us with your eyes and thoughts, let me now speak to you of this wondrous land, with its ever-fruitful fields, with its double harvests, with its year made up of springs and summers following and replacing each other without intermission, linking flowers to fruits, and fruits to flowers. Let me tell of the romantic isle which bathes her feet in the sea and hides her head in the clouds; a second Venus, born, like her sister, of the foam of the waves, ascending from her wet cradle to her celestial empire, crowned with sparkling days and starry nights, eternal ornaments which she has received from the hand of the Creator Himself, and of which England has not yet had power to strip her.

Come then, and if aerial flights alarm you no more than voyages by sea, grasp, like a new Cleophas, a lappet of my cloak, and I will transport you with me to the inverted cone of the Pieterbot, the highest mountain in the island, next to the Peak of the Black River. Once arrived there, we shall look in all directions, successively to right and left, in front, behind, above us and below.

Above us, you see, is a sky always clear, studded with stars, — an azure carpet on which God raises at each of His steps a golden dust, whereof each atom is a world.

Beneath us is the island, stretched at our feet like a map a hundred and forty-five leagues in circumference, with its sixty rivers that look from here like silver threads designed to chain the sea around its shores, and its thirty mountains all plumed with cocoas, *takamakas,* and palm-trees. Amid all these rivers see the waterfalls of the *Réduit* and *La Fontaine*, which, out of the bosom of the woods they spring from, let loose their hurtling cataracts at headlong speed, to meet the sea which waits them, and, whether in calm or tempest, is aye ready to answer their eternal challenge, now with silent contempt, now with reverberating rage — a duel of Titans, each striving which shall make the greater noise and havoc in the world, — then near this wild scene of foolish rivalry, see the great, calm “Black River,” rolling down quietly its fertilising waters, imposing its respected name on all within its neighbourhood, showing thus the triumph of wisdom over force, and of calm over fury. Among all these mountains, see the gloomy *Brabant*, standing over the northern point of the Island as a gigantic sentinel to defend it against surprises of the enemy, and to break the fury of the ocean.

See the peak of the *Trois-Mamelles*, at the base of which flow the rivers of the *Tamarin* and the *Rempart*, as though the Indian Isis had wished to justify her name in everything — see, lastly, the *Ponce*, next after the Pieterbot, where we are standing, the most majestic peak in the Island; it seems to raise a finger to the sky to show to master and to slave alike that there is a Tribunal above which will render justice to us all.

In front of us is Port Louis, formerly Port Napoléon, the capital of the Island, with its crowded wooden houses, its two streams which, after every storm, become torrents; its Ile des Tonneliers, defending the approaches, and its hybrid population, which seems to be a sample of all the nations of the earth, from the lazy Creole who is carried in a palanquin if he wants to cross the street, and who finds conversation so fatiguing that he has trained his slaves to obey his gestures, down to the negro hounded by the whip to his work in the morning and from it in the evening. Between these two extremes of the social ladder see the Lascars, distinguished by their red and green turbans, from which two colours they never vary, with bold, bronzed features, a cross between the Malay and the Malabar types. See the Yoloff negro, of the tall and handsome Senegambian race, with complexion black as jet, eyes bright as carbuncles, teeth white as pearls; the Chinaman, short, flat-chested and broad-shouldered, with his bare skull and drooping moustaches, his jargon which nobody understands, but with whom, notwithstanding, everybody deals; for the Chinaman sells everything, runs all trades, follows all professions, is the Jew of the colony: then the Malays, copper-coloured, small, vindictive, cunning, always forgetful of a kindness, never of an injury; selling, like the Bohemians, things that one wants quite cheap: the Mozambiques, gentle, honest and stupid, and valued only for their strength: the Madagascans, thin, cunning, of an olive tint, flat-nosed and thick-lipped, distinguished from the negroes of the Senegal by the reddish reflection of their skin: the Namaquais, slim, skilful and proud, trained from their infancy in hunting the tiger and the elephant, and astonished at being transported to a country where there are no wild animals to fight: lastly, in the midst of all this, the English officer, garrisoned in the island or stationed in the harbour, with his round scarlet waistcoat, his cap-shaped headgear, his white trousers, looking down from the height of his grandeur upon Creoles and mulattos, masters and slaves, colonists and natives, talking only of London, boasting only of England, valuing only himself. Behind us, Grand Port, formerly *Port Impérial*, first established by the Dutch, but afterwards abandoned by them, because it lies to windward of the island and the same breeze which brings vessels in, prevents them from going out. So, after having fallen into ruins, it is to-day but a town whose houses barely rise above ground, a creek where a schooner comes to take shelter from the pirate’s clutches, forest-covered mountains in which the slave seeks refuge from his master’s tyranny. Next, bringing our eyes back to the landscape lying almost beneath our feet, we shall distinguish, behind the mountains by the harbour, Moka, perfumed with aloes, pomegranates, and currants; Moka, always so fresh that it seems to fold up the treasures of its attire in the evening to display them in the morning, which decks itself every day as the other districts do only on festivals; Moka, the garden of this island which we have termed the garden of the world.

Let us resume our first position; let us face Madagascar and direct our eyes to our left: at our feet, beyond the Réduit, are the Williams plains, next to Moka the most delightful quarter of the island, bounded, towards the plains of St. Pierre by the *Corps-de-Garde* mountain, shaped like the hind-quarters of a horse; then, beyond the *Trois-Mamellcs* and the great woods, the quarter of la Savane, with its sweetly-named rivers, ‘Lemon-Trees,” Negresses’ Bath,’ and the ‘Arcade,’ with its harbour so well defended by the natural escarpment of its sides that it is impossible to land there otherwise than in friendly fashion; with its pastures rivalling those of the plains of St. Pierre, with its soil still virgin as that of an American prairie: lastly, in the depths of the woods, the great pond where are found muraenas so gigantic that they are more like serpents than eels, and which have been seen to carry off and devour alive stags pursued by hunters and runaway negroes who had been so imprudent as to bathe there.

Next let us turn to the right: here is the quarter of the *Rempart,* dominated by the Mount of Discovery, on the summit of which rise ships’ masts, which look from here as thin and small as willow branches; here is *Cap Malheureux,* the bay of the *Tombeaux,* the church of the *Pamplemousses.* In this quarter rose the two neighbouring huts of Madame de la Tour and Marguerite; on the *Cap Malheureux* the Saint -Géran went to pieces; in the bay of the *Tombeaux* was found the body of a girl holding a portrait clasped in her hand; in the church of the *Pamplemousses,* two months later, side by side with this girl, a young man of about the same age was buried. You have already guessed the names of these two lovers whom the same tombstone covers; they were Paul and Virginia, those two halcyons of the tropics, whose death the sea, as it moans on the reefs that surround the coast, seems evermore to bewail, as a tigress evermore laments her whelps rent to pieces by herself in a transport of fury or a moment of jealousy.

And now, whether you traverse the island from the pass of Descorne in the south-west, or from Mahebourg to the little Malabar, whether you follow the coast or plunge into the interior, whether you descend the rivers or climb the mountains, whether the sun's blazing disc kindle the plains with flaming rays, or the crescent of the moon silver the mountains with melancholy light, should your feet be weary, or your head grow heavy, or your eyes close; should you feel your senses, intoxicated by the perfumed exhalations of the China rose, the Spanish or the red jasmine, dissolving gently as if under the influence of opium, you can yield, my companion, without fear or reluctance to the deep and penetrating voluptuousness of tropic slumber. Lie down, then, on the lush grass, sleep quietly and awake without fear, for this light noise which makes the foliage rustle at its approach, those two dark sparkling eyes which are fixed on you, are not the poisoned rustling of the Jamaican boqueira, nor the eves of the Bengal tiger. Sleep softly, and awake without fear; the isle has never echoed the shrill hiss of a reptile, nor the nocturnal howl of a beast of prey. No, it is a young negress who parts two bamboo branches to push her pretty head through and look with curiosity at the newly-arrived European. Make a sign, without even stirring from your place, and she will pick you the savoury banana, the scented mango or the tamarind-husk; speak a word, and she will answer you in her guttural and mournful tone, 'Mo sellave, me faire ça que vous vié' ('Me slave-girl, me do what you will'). Only too happy should a kind look or a word of satisfaction reward her services, she will then offer to act as your guide to her master's dwelling. Follow her; it matters not whither she leads you; and, when you perceive a pretty house with an avenue of trees, engirdled by flowers, you will have arrived; it will be the home of the planter, tyrant or patriarch, according as he is good or bad; but, be he the one or the other, that is not your concern and affects you but little. Enter boldly; go and sit down at the family table; say, « I am your guest '; and then will be placed before you the richest china plate, loaded with the finest bananas, the silver goblet with its bottom of glass, in which will foam the best beer of the island; you will shoot to your heart's content in his savannahs, and fish in the river with his lines, and each time you come yourself or introduce a friend to him, the fatted calf will be killed; for here the arrival of a guest is made a festival, as the return of the Prodigal Son was a joy to his father’s household?

So the English, with their eternal jealousy of France, long fixed their eyes on her beloved daughter, hovering round her incessantly, now trying to seduce her with gold, now to intimidate her by threats; but to all these proposals the beautiful Creole replied with supreme disdain, so that it soon became apparent that her lovers, unable to win her by their wiles, were fain to carry her off by force, and that she must be kept in sight like a Spanish *monja*. For some time she had nothing worse to fear than a series of unimportant and ineffectual attempts; but at last England, unable to resist her charms, threw herself headlong upon her, and when one fine morning the Isle of France learned that her sister Bourbon had just been carried off, she besought her protectors to keep a yet stricter guard over her than in time past, and knives began to be sharpened in deadly earnest and bullets to be melted, as the enemy was momentarily expected.

On the 23rd of August, 1810, a terrific cannonade, reverberating through all the island, announced that the enemy had actually arrived.

CHAPTER II.

LIONS AND LEOPARDS.

IT was five in the evening towards the end of one of those magnificent summer days unknown in our Europe. Half the population of the Isle of France, arranged in a semi-circle on the mountains which dominate Grand-Port, were breathlessly watching the contest going on at their feet, as in olden days the Romans leaned over the gallery of the amphitheatre at a contest of gladiators or a combat of martyrs. Only, on this occasion, the arena was a large harbour environed by rocks on which the combatants had run themselves aground to prevent all possibility of retreat, and, freed from the distracting anxiety of evolutions, be able to tear each other to pieces at their ease: neither again were there any vestal virgins with upturned thumbs to put an end to this terrible sea-fight: it was, as was fully understood, a strife of extermination, a combat to the death; accordingly the ten thousand spectators present at it maintained an anxious silence, while the very sea, so often stormy in those regions, was still, so as not to lose one roar of those three hundred mouths of fire.

This is what had happened. On the morning of the 20th Captain Duperré, coming from Madagascar in the Bellone, accompanied by the Minerve, Victor, Ceylan and the Windham, had sighted the Mountains of the Wind in the Isle of France.

As three previous fights in which he had been without exception victorious had caused severe damage to his fleet, he had determined to enter the large harbour and refit there, — a course which was the more easy because, as is well known, the Island at this time was entirely in our power, and the tri-coloured flag floating over the fort of the Ile de la Passe, and from a three-master anchored below it, gave the worthy sailor the assurance of being welcomed by friends. Consequently Captain Duperré gave orders to double the Ile de la Passe, situated about two leagues in front of Mahebourg, and, to carry out this manœuvre, ordered the corvette Victor to go ahead, followed by the Minerve, Ceylan and Bellone, the Windham concluding the line. The squadron then advanced, each ship in front of the next one, the narrow entrance not allowing of two ships passing alongside each other.

When the Victor was within cannon-range of the three-master lying broadside beneath the fort, the latter signalled that the English were cruising within sight of the Island. Captain Duperré replied that he was quite aware of it, and that the flotilla which he had observed was composed of the Enchantress, Nereid, Sirius and Iphigenia, commanded by Commodore Lambert; but that as, on his own side, Captain Hamelin was stationed to windward of the Island with the Entreprenant, La Manche and Astrée, he was sufficiently strong to accept battle should the enemy present himself.

A few moments later, Captain Bouvet, who was second in the line, thought he observed some hostile indications in the vessel that had just signalled; besides he had in vain examined all her details with that piercing glance that so rarely deceives the sailor, but could not recognise her as belonging to the French navy. He communicated his observations to Captain Duperré, who told him in answer to take precautions, and that he would do the like. As for the Victor it was impossible to give her information; she was too far ahead, and any signal made to her would have been seen from the fort and the suspected vessel.

The Victor then continued to advance without misgivings, impelled by a gentle south-east breeze, with all her crew on deck, while the two ships that follow her anxiously watch the movements of the three-master and the fort. Both, however, still keep up an appearance of friendship; indeed the two vessels when opposite each other exchange a few words. The Victor continues her course; she has already passed the fort, when suddenly a line of smoke appears on the sides of the ship that lies broadside towards her and on the rampart of the fort. Forty-four guns thunder at once, raking the French corvette, cutting her rigging and sails, decimating her crew, carrying away her fore-top-sail yard, while at the same instant the French colours disappear from the fort and the three-master and give place to the English flag. We have been duped by trickery, and have fallen into the trap laid for us.

But instead of going back, which might still be possible by abandoning the corvette which has acted the part of a scout and now, having recovered from her surprise, is replying to the fire of the three-master with her two stern-guns, Captain Duperré signals the Windham, which makes for sea again, and orders the Minerve and Ceylan to force the channel. He himself will support them, while the Windham goes to warn the rest of the French fleet of the situation in which the four vessels are.

Then the ships continue to advance, no longer with the unguardedness of the Victor, but with lighted lintstocks, each man at his post, and in that profound silence which always precedes a great crisis. Presently the Minerve gets alongside the hostile three-master, but this time it is she who strikes first. Twenty-four mouths burst into flame together; the broadside pierces her hull through and through; but part of the bulwarks of the English vessel is cut away; stifled shrieks are heard, then in her turn she thunders with her whole battery and sends back to the Minerve as deadly messengers as she has just received from her, while the artillery of the fort bursts out upon her as well, but without doing her any other injury than killing a man or two and cutting some of her rigging.

Next comes the Ceylan, a pretty brigantine with twenty-two guns, taken, like the Victor, Minerve, and Windham, a few days previously from the English, and which, like the Victor and Minerve, was now about to fight for France, her new mistress. She advances lightly and gracefully, as a sea-bird skims the waves; then, when opposite the fort and the three-master, all three break out into flames together, firing so simultaneously that the volleys formed one sound, and so close to each other that their smoke was intermingled.

There remained Duperré in the Bellone. He was even at this period one of the bravest and most skilful officers in our navy. He advanced, hugging the Ile de la Passe more closely than any of the other vessels had done; then, at close quarters, broadside to broadside, the two ships burst into flame, at pistol-range. The channel was forced; the four ships were within the harbour; they rally at the cliff of the Aigrettes and cast anchor between the *Ile aux Singes* and the *Pointe de la Colonie.* Duperré having at once put himself in communication with the town, learns that Bourbon is taken, but that, in spite of his attempts on the Isle of France, the enemy has only been able to seize the Ile de la Passe. A messenger is at once despatched in all haste to General Decaen, Governor of the Island, to inform him the four French vessels, Victor, Minerve, Ceylan and Bellone, are at Grand-Port. At noon on the 21st Decaen receives this advice, transmits it to Captain Hamelin, who orders the ships under his command to get under weigh, hurries reinforcements of men across country to Captain Duperré, informs him that he will do what he can to come to his aid, inasmuch as everything leads him to the conclusion that he is threatened by superior numbers.

As a fact, in endeavouring to anchor in the Rivière Noire at four a m. on the 21st, the Windham had been captured by the English frigate Sirius. Captain Pym, Commander of the latter, had then learned that four French ships under Duperré’s orders had entered Grand-Port, where they were confined by the wind; he had at once informed the captains of the Enchantress and Iphigenia of this, and the three frigates had sailed immediately. The Sirius went back towards Grand-Port, going before the wind, the two other frigates turning to windward to reach the same point.

These were the movements which Captain Hamelin had seen, and which by their agreement with the news he had just heard cause him to think that Captain Duperré is about to be attacked. He hastens therefore to get under weigh, but in spite of all diligence he is only ready on the morning of the 22nd. The three English frigates are three hours in advance of him, and the difficulty he must experience in reaching Grand-Port is still further increased by the wind, which is set in the south-east and freshening momentarily.

On the evening of the 21st General Decaen mounts his horse and arrives at Mahebourg at five in the morning, followed by the chief planters and those of their negroes on whom they think they can rely. Masters and slaves are armed with guns, and have each fifty rounds, in case the English should attempt to land. A meeting takes place between him and Duperré. At noon the English frigate Sirius, which has sailed to leeward of the Island, and consequently experienced less difficulty in her passage than the other two frigates, appears at the entrance of the channel, meets the three - master moored with her broadside to the fort, now recognised as the frigate Nereïd, Captain Willoughby. As though reckoning to attack the French division by themselves, both advance upon us, taking the same course as we had done; but, keeping too close to the shoal water, the Sirius runs aground and her crew spend the rest of the day in getting her oft.

During the night the reinforcement of sailors sent by Captain Hamelin arrives, and is distributed among the four French ships, who thus amount to nearly fourteen hundred men with a hundred and forty-two guns, but as immediately on their distribution Duperré has made his division run aground, so that each vessel presents its broadside, only the half of the guns will take part in the sanguinary feast that is preparing.

At two o’clock the frigates Enchantress and Iphigenia appeared in their turn at the entrance of the channel, met the Sirius and Nereïd and advanced all four to encounter us. Two ran themselves aground, the other two lay moored at anchor, presenting a total of seventeen hundred men and two hundred guns. It was a solemn and terrible moment when the ten thousand spectators who thronged the mountains saw the hostile frigates advance with furled sails, impelled only by the slow force of the wind through their rigging, and, with the confidence imparted by superiority of numbers, range themselves at half-gunshot from the French division, presenting in their turn their broadsides, grounding as we had grounded, abandoning retreat beforehand, as we had abandoned it.

A battle of extermination, then, was about to commence; lions and leopards had met, and were about to rend each other with brazen teeth and roars of fire.

It was our sailors who, with less patience than the French guards had shown at Fontenoy, gave the signal for slaughter. A long train of smoke rushed from the sides of the four vessels at whose peak flew the tricolour; then at the same moment bellowed forth the roar of seventy guns, and the iron hurricane fell upon the English squadron.

The latter answered promptly, and then began, with no other manoeuvre than that of clearing from the decks the splinters of timber and expiring bodies, with no interval but that of loading the guns, one of those struggles to the death such as, since Aboukir and Trafalgar, naval annals had not witnessed. At first it might be thought the advantage lay with the enemy; for the first English volleys had cut the springs on the hawsers of the Minerve and the Ceylan, so that, owing to this accident, the fire of these two ships was to a large extent masked. But, under the captain’s orders, the Bellone met every event, replying to the four ships at once; having arms, powder and shot for all; incessantly belching forth fire like a volcano in eruption, and that for two hours, that is to say, while the Ceylan and Minerve were repairing their injuries. This done, as though impatient of their inaction, they began again to roar and bite in their turn, forcing the enemy, who had turned from them for a moment to crush the Bellone, to pay attention to them once more, and restoring the unity of the fight along the whole line. It then seemed to Duperré that the Nereïd, already damaged by three broadsides which the squadron had fired at her when forcing the channel, was slackening her fire, and the order was at once given to direct all the firing at her and to give her no rest. For a whole hour they overwhelmed her with shot and grape, thinking at each moment that she would strike her flag; but, as she did not do so, the hail of iron continued, mowing down the masts, sweeping her deck, piercing her hull, until her last gun died away like an expiring sigh, and she remained a demolished hulk in the stillness and silence of death.

At this moment, and while Duperré was giving an order to his lieutenant Roussin, a grape-shot struck his head and knocked him over against the guns. Realising that he was dangerously, perhaps mortally, wounded, he calls Captain Bouvet, hands over to him the command of the Bellone, orders him to sink the four ships rather than surrender them, and, after giving these final orders, extends his hand to him and swoons away. Nobody perceives this incident; Duperré has not left the Bellone, since Bouvet takes his place.

At ten o'clock it is so dark that the men can no longer take aim and have to fire at random. At eleven the firing ceases; but as the spectators understand that it is only a truce, they remain at their post. As a fact, at one o'clock the moon rises, and by its pale light the strife begins afresh.

During this short respite the Nereïd has received some reinforcements; five or six of her guns have been refitted; the frigate that was thought dead was only in a swoon and recovers her senses, giving signs of life by attacking us afresh.

Then Bouvet sends Lieutenant Roussin on board the Victor, whose captain is wounded, with orders to float the ship again and go and overwhelm the Nereïd at close quarters with his whole artillery. This time his firing will not cease until the frigate be really dead.

Roussin carries out his order to the letter; the Victor sets her top-sails and jib, moves off and, without firing a single shot, anchors three or four fathoms from the Nereïd's stern; from there she opens fire, to which the Nereïd can only reply with her stern guns, raking her from poop to prow at each discharge. At dawn the frigate is silent once more. This time she is really dead, yet, notwithstanding, the English flag still floats at her peak. She is dead, but she has not surrendered. At this moment, shouts of 'Long live the Emperor! 'resound from the Nereïd — the seventeen prisoners whom she took in the Ile de la Passe and had placed in the hold, burst from their place of confinement, and escape up the hatchways with a tri-coloured flag in their hands. The standard of Great Britain is lowered, the tri-colour floats in its place. Roussin gives the order to board, but at the moment when he is about to fasten the grappling-irons, the enemy directs his fire on the Nereïd, which escapes him. To continue the struggle is useless; the Nereïd is nothing but a hulk, on which he will lay hands as soon as the other ships are subdued. The victor leaves the frigate floating like the carcase of a dead whale, takes on board the seventeen prisoners and resumes her place of battle, announcing to the English, by firing her whole broadside, that she had returned to her position.

All the French ships were now ordered to direct their fire on the Enchantress, Bouvet wishing to demolish the hostile frigates one after the other. Towards three p m. then the Enchantress became the target for all their shots; at five, she answered our fire spasmodically, and breathed like a combatant mortally wounded; at six o’clock it could be seen from the land that her crew were making all preparations for abandoning her. Shouts first, then signals, warn the French division of this; the firing is redoubled; the two other hostile frigates despatch their boats to her; she herself lowers her cutters into the sea; the remnant of un-wounded, or slightly-wounded men get into them, but in the space which they have to cross to reach the Sirius two boats are sunk by cannon shot, and the sea is strewn with men making for the neighbouring frigates by swimming.

A moment later a thin smoke issues from the portholes of the Enchantress; then it becomes gradually thicker; next, at the hatchways wounded men are seen dragging themselves along, raising their mutilated arms, appealing for help; for already smoke is followed by flames which dart their fiery tongues through every porthole. Then they burst outside, creep along the netting, climb to the masts, envelop the yards, and in the midst of these flames are heard cries of rage and pain; then all at once the vessel splits, as the crater of a volcano is rent asunder. A fearful explosion is heard; the Enchantress is blown to bits. The eye follows the burning fragments which mount to the sky, descend again and are extinguished with a loud hissing sound in the waves. Of that fine frigate, which the day before thought herself queen of the ocean, nothing remains, not even debris, not even the wounded, not even the dead. A wide space between the Nereïd and the Iphigenia alone indicates the place where she was.

Then, as though weary of the strife, dismayed at the spectacle, English and French fell silent, and the rest of the night was consecrated to repose.

But at dawn the fight begins again. The French division has chosen the Sirius this time as its victim, and the four-fold fire of Victor, Minerve, Bellone, and Ceylan are about to crush her. Shot and grape are concentrated upon her. At the end of two hours she has not a mast left, her bulwarks are cut down, the water enters her hull through twenty wounds; had she not been aground she must have sunk. Her crew then abandons her, the captain being the last to leave. But, as with the Enchantress, the fire has remained there; a train conducts it to the magazine; and at eleven in the forenoon a fearful explosion is heard, and the Sirius disappears annihilated.

Then the Iphigenia, which has fought at anchor, realises that no more fighting is possible. She remains alone against four; for, as we have said, the Nereïd is nothing now but a sheer hulk; she makes sail, and, profiting by the fact that she has escaped almost safe and sound from all this destruction, tries to sheer off, in order to place herself under the protection of the fort.

Bouvet at once orders the Minerve and Bellone to refit and get afloat again. Duperré, on the blood-stained bed where he is laid, has learned all that has happened: he does not want a single frigate to escape destruction, nor a single Englishman to go and announce their defeat in England. We have to avenge Trafalgar and Aboukir. Pursue the Iphigenia!

And the two noble frigates, battered as they are, rouse and recover themselves, make sail and away in pursuit, ordering the Victor to man the Nereïd. As for the Ceylan she is herself so damaged that she cannot quit her place until the caulker has stopped her thousand gaping wounds.

Then loud shouts of triumph rise from the land; the whole population, which has kept silence, recovers breath and voice to encourage the Minerve and Bellone in their pursuit. But the Iphigenia, less damaged than her two foes, gains on them visibly, passes the Ile des Aigrettes, will reach the fort of la Passe, will gain the open sea and escape. Already the shot from the Minerve and Bellone fail to reach her, dropping in her wake, when suddenly three ships appear at the entrance of the channel, flying the tri-colour; it is Captain Hamelin, who had sailed from Port Louis with the Entreprenant, and La Manche and Astrée. The Iphigenia and the fort are caught between two fires; they will surrender at discretion, not an Englishman will escape. During this time the Victor has for the second time drawn close to the Nereïd; and, fearing a surprise, boards her cautiously. But the silence she maintains is truly that of death. Her deck is strewn with corpses; the Lieutenant, who was the first to set foot on her, is up to his ankles in blood.

A wounded man raises himself and relates that six times the order was given to strike the flag, but six times the French discharges carried away the men told off to carry out this order. Then the Captain retired to his cabin and was seen no more.

Roussin goes towards the cabin and finds Captain Willoughby seated at a table, on which are still a jug of grog and three glasses. He has an arm and a thigh carried away. In front of him his first Lieutenant Thomson, killed by a grape-shot, which struck him in the chest; at his feet lies his nephew, William Murray, likewise wounded in the side by a grape-shot.

Then Willoughby with his remaining hand makes a movement to give up his sword; but Lieutenant Roussin, in his turn extending his arm, salutes the dying Englishman, saying: — ” Captain, when a man uses a sword as you have done, he surrenders it to God alone!”

And he at once orders every possible attention to be lavished upon Captain Willoughby. But all aid was useless; the brave defender of the Nereïd died on the morrow.

Lieutenant Roussin was more fortunate as regards the nephew than he had been with the uncle. Lord Murray, though wounded deeply and dangerously, was not mortally hurt. Accordingly we shall see him reappear in the course of this history.

CHAPTER III.

THREE CHILDREN.

AS may well be imagined, the English, though they had lost four vessels, had not abandoned their designs on the Isle of France; on the contrary, they had now both fresh conquest to make and an old defeat to avenge. Accordingly, hardly three months after the events which we have just laid before the reader, a second struggle no less desperate, but destined to result very differently, had taken place at Port Louis itself, that is to say, at a spot in exactly the opposite direction to that where the former took place.

This time it was not a question of four ships or eighteen hundred men. Twelve frigates, eight corvettes and fifty transports had landed twenty or twenty-five thousand men on the coast, and the invading army was advancing on Port Louis, then called Port Napoléon. This was the capital of the island, and at the moment of being attacked by so large a force presented a spectacle difficult to describe. Everywhere the multitude, hurrying in from different quarters of the island and crowded together in the streets, showed signs of the greatest excitement; as nobody knew the real danger, every one invented some imaginary peril, and those which obtained most credence were the most exaggerated and unheard-of ones. From time to time some aide-de-camp of the General in command would appear suddenly, bringing an order and tossing to the crowd a proclamation intended to arouse the hatred which the Nationalists bore towards the English and to excite their patriotism. On its being read out, hats were raised on the points of bayonets; shouts of “Long live the Emperor “resounded; oaths to conquer or die were exchanged; a shiver of enthusiasm ran through the crowd, which passed from a state of noisy idleness to one of furious activity, and rushed headlong from all quarters, demanding to march upon the enemy.

But the real meeting-place was the Place d’Armes, that is to say, in the centre of the town. Thither were continually arriving, now an ammunition waggon dragged helter-skelter by two small horses of Timor or Pegu, now a gun brought in at full gallop by the National Artillery, young fellows of fifteen to sixteen years of age, for whom the powder that blackened their faces took the place of beards. There, too, assembled the Civic Guards in fighting trim, Volunteers in miscellaneous garments, who had added bayonets to their sporting guns; negroes clothed in remnants of uniforms and armed with carbines, sabres and lances; all these mingling, colliding, crossing one another, upsetting one another, contributing each his share of noise to the insistent rumour which rose above the town, just as the hum of an innumerable swarm of bees ascends from a large hive.

Once arrived, however, at the Place, whether rushing in singly or in groups, these men assumed a more regular appearance and a calmer demeanour. At the Place d’Armes was stationed, while waiting for the order to march against the enemy, half of the garrison of the Island, composed of regular troops and forming a total of fifteen to eighteen hundred men, whose attitude, at once proud and nonchalant, was a silent reproach to the noise and confusion made by those who, less familiar with scenes of this kind, had nevertheless the courage and goodwill to take part in them. Accordingly, while the negroes hurried pell-mell to one end of the great square, a regiment of national Volunteers, restraining themselves at sight of the military discipline of the Regulars, halted in front of the troops, forming in the same order as they, and trying, though without success, to imitate the regularity of their lines.

He who appeared to be the leader of this last body of men, and who, it must be said, gave himself infinite trouble to attain the result we have indicated, was a man from forty to forty-five years of age, wearing a Major’s epaulettes, and endowed by nature with one of those insignificant faces to which no emotion can succeed in imparting signs of intelligence or character. For the rest, he was curled, shaved, smartly got up as if for parade; only, occasionally, he unfastened a clasp of his coat, originally buttoned from top to bottom but which gradually opening, displayed to view an embroidered vest, frilled shirt and white tie with embroidered ends. Near him, a pretty child of twelve, attended by a household negro who stood some yards away, dressed in a suit of dimity, displayed, with that ease which the habit of being well-dressed imparts, his large scalloped collar, his jacket of green camlet with silver buttons, and his grey beaver adorned with a feather. At his side hung with his sabretache the scabbard of a little sword, the blade of which he held in his right hand, trying to copy, as well as he could, the martial bearing of the officer, whom he took care, from time to time to address very loudly as “Father,” a title with which the Major seemed no less flattered than by the illustrious rank in the national militia to which the confidence of his fellow-citizens had raised him.

At a short distance from this group which swaggered so gaily, might be distinguished another, less brilliant no doubt, but certainly more remarkable. It consisted of a man from forty-five to forty-eight years of age, and two children, one aged fourteen and the other twelve.

The man was tall and thin, of bony frame, a little bent, not by age, since, as we have said, he was not more than forty-eight at the outside, but by the humility of a subservient position. From his copper tint and slightly woolly hair one could recognise at first glance one of those Mulattos whose fortunes, which are often enormous and the result of their own well-directed industry, avail nothing in the Colonies to excuse their colour. He was dressed with rich simplicity, held in his hand a carbine embossed with gold, armed with a long slender bayonet, and had at his side a cuirassier’s sabre which, thanks to his great height, hung along his thigh like a sword. His pockets bulged with cartridges, in addition to those contained in his pouch.

The eldest of the two children who accompanied him was, as we have said, a tall lad of fourteen whose sporting pursuits, more than his negro origin, had deepened his complexion. Thanks to the active life he had led he was as strong as a young man of eighteen, and thus had obtained his father’s leave to share in the. engagement which was soon to take place. He, on his side, was armed with a double-barrelled gun, the same which he used in his expeditions across the island, and with which, young as he was, he had already gained a reputation for skill which the most celebrated hunters envied him. But, at the present moment, his actual age overcame his apparent age; for having laid his gun down on the ground, he was rolling over and over with an enormous Madagascar hound, which seemed to have come there in case the English should have brought any of their bulldogs with them.

The young hunter’s brother, younger son of the man of tall stature and humble mien, who completed the group we have endeavoured to describe, was a child of about twelve, whose slim and puny build bore no relation to his father’s great height or the powerful frame of his brother, who seemed to have united in himself alone the vigour intended for both; in contrast therefore to Jacques, as the oldest was called, little Georges seemed two years younger than he really was, so far did his short stature, his pale, thin, and melancholy face, shaded by long dark hair, betoken a lack of the physical strength so common in the Colonies. But, to make up for this, you might read in his uneasy, penetrating look such an eager intelligence, and in the precocious knitting of the brows which was already habitual to him, such a manly reflection and such firmness of will, that you were amazed to meet with such insignificance and such vigour united in one and the same individual.

Having no weapons, he kept close by his father and grasped with all the strength of his little hand the barrel of the handsome embossed gun, turning his eager and inquiring eyes from his father to the Major, asking inwardly, no doubt, why his father, who was twice as rich and strong and clever as the other, did not also boast like him some honourable badge or individual mark of rank.

A negro in waistcoat and trousers of blue cloth was waiting, as his comrade was for the child with the scalloped collar, till the time came for the men to march, for the boy would stay behind with him while his father and brother went to fight.

The noise of cannon had been heard since morning, for General Vandermaesen with the other half of the garrison had marched out to meet the enemy, so as to check them in the defiles of the Long Valley and at the crossing of the Pont-Rouge and Lataniers rivers. He had held on with tenacity the whole morning; but, not wishing to risk all his forces at one blow, and fearing besides that the attack which he met might be merely a feint during which the English would advance on Port-Louis by some other route, he had taken with him only eight hundred men, leaving the rest of the garrison, as has been said, and the national volunteers to defend the town. The result was that, after prodigies of courage, his small force, which had to deal with a body of four thousand English and two thousand sepoys, had been obliged to evacuate position after position, taking advantage of every accident of the ground, but soon forced to retire again; so that from the Place d’Armes, where the reserves were, it was possible, though the actual combatants were invisible, to calculate the progress the English were making by the increasing roar of the artillery drawing nearer and nearer every minute. Presently could be distinguished, between the thunders of the big guns, the crackling of musketry. But it must be confessed that this noise, instead of frightening those defenders of Port-Louis who, condemned to inaction by their General’s orders, were stationed in the Great Square, only stimulated their bravery; so much so that, while the Regulars were content to bite their lips or swear beneath their moustaches, the Volunteers brandished their weapons, grumbling openly, and crying that, if the order to start was delayed any longer, they would break their ranks and go and fight as skirmishers.

At this moment there was a general shout, at the same time an aide-de-camp galloped up and, without even entering the Place, raising his hat to attract attention, shouted from the end of the street: —

“To your entrenchments; the enemy is here!”

Then he went off as fast as he had come At once the drum of the regulars sounded, and the soldiers, forming line with the quickness and precision of long habit, started off at the double.

Whatever rivalry might exist between the Volunteers and the Regulars, the former could not get away with so rapid a dash. Some moments elapsed before the ranks were formed; then as, when they were formed, some led off with the right foot, others with the left, there was a moment of confusion necessitating a halt.

At this moment, seeing a vacant place in the middle of the third file of volunteers, the tall man with the ornamented gun embraced the youngest of his children and, putting him into the arms of the negro in the blue suit, ran with his eldest boy modestly to occupy the place which the false start of the Volunteers had left vacant.

But, at the approach of the two pariahs, their neighbours on the right and left turned aside, forcing the same movement upon the men next to them, so that the tall man and his son found themselves the centre of circles which went moving from them, just as circles of water retire from the spot at which a stone has been thrown in.

The stout man in Major’s epaulettes, who had with great difficulty just got his first file in order, now perceived the disorder into which the third was being thrown; rising on his toes, he shouted to those who were executing the singular manoeuvre which we have described: —

“To your ranks, my men! to your ranks!”

But at this repeated order, made in a tone that admitted no reply, a general shout arose: —

“No blacks! no blacks with us! “This cry the entire battalion echoed with a universal roar.

Then the officer understood the cause of this disorder, and saw in the centre of a large circle the mulatto who had remained at the “port arms,” while his elder son, red with anger, had already fallen back two paces to get away from those who were pushing him back.

On seeing this, the Major passed through the two front ranks which opened to make way for him, and went straight for the insolent fellow who had dared, man of colour as he was, to mix with the whites. When in front of him he looked him up and down with an indignant stare, the man remaining before him upright and motionless as a post: —

“Well! Pierre Munier,” said he, “can’t you hear, or must you be told twice over, that this is not your place and that you are not wanted here?”

Pierre with his strong right hand might have crushed at a blow the man who spoke thus; but instead of this, he made no reply, only raised his head with a scared look, and, meeting the looks of his questioner, turned away his own in confusion.

This added fuel to the other’s anger, and still further roused the man’s insolence.

“Come! What are you doing there?” he asked, giving him a push with his open hand.

“Monsieur de Malmédie,” answered Munier, “I had hoped that on a day like this difference of colour would disappear in face of the common danger.”

“You hoped!” said the Major shrugging his shoulders with a loud chuckle. “You hoped! and what gave you this hope, if you please?”

“The desire that I have to die, if needs be, to save our Island.”

“*Our* Island!” muttered the Major, “*our* Island. Because these fellows have plantations like us, they fancy the Island belongs to them.”

“The Island belongs to us no more than to you white gentlemen, I am well aware,” replied Munier in a timid voice, “but if we stay for such questions at the hour of fighting, it will soon be no longer either yours or ours.”

“Enough!” said the Major, stamping his foot to impose silence both by gesture and voice on his interlocutor. “Enough! Are you in command of the National Guard? “#

“No, sir, as you very well know,” answered Munier; “for when I presented myself, you rejected me.”

“Then what do you want?”

“I wanted to follow you as a volunteer.”

“Impossible,” said the Major.

“Why impossible? Ah! if you would only let me, Mons. de Malmédie.”

“Impossible,” repeated the Major, drawing himself up. “These gentlemen who are under my orders will have no mulattos among them.”

“No, no blacks,” shouted the National Guards with one voice.

“But may I not fight them, sir?” said Munier, letting his arms fall dejectedly by his sides, and with difficulty keeping back the large tears which trembled on his eyelashes.

“Form a corps of coloured men and put yourself at their head, or join this detachment of blacks which is going to follow us.”

“But — ” murmured Pierre.

“I order you to quit the battalion; I order it,” repeated M. de Malmédie, bridling up.

“*Come*, father, come, and leave these men who are insulting you,” said a small voice trembling with anger. And Pierre felt himself pulled back with such force that he retreated a step.

“Yes! Jacques, yes, I will follow you,” said he.

“It is not Jacques, father, it is I, Georges.”

Munier turned in astonishment.

It was, in fact, the child who had got down from the negro’s arms, and come to give his father this lesson in dignity.

Munier let his head sink on his breast, and uttered a deep sigh. During this time the ranks of the National Guard had reformed, M. de Malmédie resumed his post at the head of the first file, and the regiment set off at increased speed.

Pierre Munier remained alone between his two children, one of whom was red as fire, the other pale as death. He glanced at the red face of Jacques and Georges’ pale one, and as if these symptoms were a double reproach to him, exclaimed: — “What would you have, my poor children? — there is no help for it.” Jacques was indifferent and philosophical. The first feeling had been painful to him, no doubt; but reflection had come quickly to his aid and consoled him.

“Bah!” he replied to his father, snapping his fingers. “What does it matter to us after all if this silly man despises us? We are richer than he, aren’t we, father? And for myself,” he added, casting a side glance at the child with the scalloped collar, “let me find his cub of a Henri at a lucky moment, and I will give him a drubbing which he will remember.”

“Good, Jacques!” said Pierre Munier, thanking his eldest son for having in some degree relieved his shame by his careless attitude. Then he turned to his younger son, to see if the latter would take the matter as philosophically as the elder.

But Georges remained motionless: all that his father could discover in his stony countenance was an imperceptible smile which contracted his lips: still, imperceptible as it was, that smile had such a suggestion of contempt and pity that, as we sometimes reply to words that have not been uttered, Pierre answered to this smile: —

“But what do you want me to do then?”

And he waited for the child’s answer, disquieted by that vague uneasiness which we never confess to ourselves, but which, however, disturbs us when we await, from an inferior, whom we fear in spite of ourselves, his opinion of something we have done.

Georges made no reply; but turning his head towards the extremity of the Great Square, said: —

“Father, the negroes down there are waiting for a leader.”

“Why, you are right, Georges!” cried Jacques joyously, already consoled for his humiliation by the consciousness of his strength, and reasoning, no doubt, as Caesar did,. — It is better to command these than to obey those.

And Munier, yielding to the advice given by his youngest son and the impetus imparted by the other, advanced towards the negroes, who, engaged in discussing whom to choose as their leader, no sooner perceived the man whom all coloured people in the island looked up to as a father, than they grouped themselves round him as their natural chief, and begged him to lead them to battle.

Then a strange change took place in the man. That feeling of inferiority, which he could not overcome in presence of the whites, disappeared and gave way to a proper estimation of his own merit; his bowed frame drew itself up to its full height; his eyes, which he had kept humbly lowered or wandering vaguely before M. de Malmédie, darted fire; his voice, trembling a moment earlier, assumed an accent of formidable sternness, and it was with a gesture of noble energy that, throwing back his carbine slung over his shoulder, he drew his sword, and, extending his sinewy arm towards the enemy, cried “Forward!”

Then, taking a last look at his youngest child, who had returned to the protection of the negro in the blue suit and, filled with pride and pleasure, was clapping his hands, Pierre disappeared with his black company round the corner of the same street by which the Regulars and National Guards had just disappeared, shouting once again to the negro in the blue jacket: —
” Télémaque, look after my son!”

The line of defence consisted of three divisions. On the left the Fanfaron bastion, situated on the edge of the sea and armed with eighteen cannon; in the centre the entrenchment, properly so called, lined with twenty-four field guns; and, on the right, the Dumas battery, protected by six guns only.

The victorious enemy, after having advanced at first in three columns on the three different points, abandoned the two first, the strength of which they perceived, so as to concentrate upon the third, which was not only, as has been said, the weakest, but which further was only defended by the National Artillery. However, contrary to all expectation, at the sight of the compact mass which marched on them with the terrible regularity of British discipline, this martial band of young men, instead of being alarmed, ran to their posts, manoeuvring with the speed and the skill of veteran soldiers, with a fire so well maintained and directed that the enemy thought themselves mistaken as to the strength of the battery and the men who served it; still, they continued to advance, for the deadlier the battery became, the more imperative it was to silence its fire. But then the confounded battery got angry, and like a juggler who makes us forget one astounding trick by performing another still more astounding, it redoubled its volleys, making shot follow grape, and grape common shot, with such rapidity that disorder began to spread in the hostile ranks. At the same time, and as the British had come within musket-shot, the rifle discharge in its turn began to splutter, so that the enemy, seeing their ranks thinned by cannon shot and whole files swept away by musket fire, astonished by a resistance as vigorous as it was unexpected, wavered and drew back.

By order of the General in command the Regulars and the National Battalion who had combined on the threatened point now moved off, one to the left, the other to the right, and charged with fixed bayonets on the enemy’s flanks, while the formidable battery continued to pound him in front. The Regulars carried out their manoeuvre with their customary precision, fell upon the British, cut through their ranks and increased the disorder. But, whether carried away by their courage, or that they executed the given order clumsily, the National Guards, commanded by M. de Malmédie, instead of falling upon the left flank and making an attack parallel to that executed by the Regulars, made a wrong movement and encountered the British front. Consequently the battery was obliged to cease firing, and as it was this fire especially that frightened the enemy, who now had only to deal with men inferior in number to themselves, they regained courage and turned on the Nationals, who, to their credit be it said, sustained the shock without giving way a single yard. However, this resistance could not last on the part of these brave fellows placed between an enemy better disciplined than themselves and ten times superior in numbers, and the battery which was forced to be silent to avoid overwhelming them; at each moment they lost so many men that they began to give way. Soon, by a skilful movement, the British left outflanked the right of the National Battalion now on the point of being surrounded and who, too inexperienced to adopt the formation in square, were looked upon as lost. The British, in fact, continued their progressive movement and, like a rising tide were about to surround this island of men with their waves, when suddenly shouts of “France! France!” resounded in the rear of the enemy. This was followed by a fearful discharge, succeeded by a silence more dreadful than the discharge itself.

A strange undulation passed through the enemy’s rear and was felt even in their front ranks; red-coats bent under a vigorous bayonet charge like ripe ears beneath the mower’s sickle; it was now their turn to be surrounded, to have to face front, right and left. But the newly-arrived reinforcement gave them no respite, but kept on charging, so that at the end of ten minutes they had opened a path through a bloody gap to the unlucky battalion and extricated it. Then, seeing that they had accomplished their object, the new arrivals fell back, wheeled to the left with a circular movement, and charged the enemy’s flank. Malmédie, on his side, imitating instinctively the same manoeuvre, had given a similar impulse to his battalion, so that the battery, seeing itself unmasked, lost no time, and bursting forth once more aided the efforts of this triple attack, belching torrents of grape-shot on the enemy. From this point victory decided in favour of the French.

Then Malmédie, feeling himself out of danger, glanced at his liberators, whom he had already partly seen, but hesitated to acknowledge, so much did it go against the grain to owe his safety to such merit was, indeed, the corps of blacks, so despised by him, that had followed in his wake and joined him at such an opportune moment, and at their head Pierre Munier, who, seeing Malmédie surrounded by the British who thus presented their backs to him, had with his three hundred men caught them in the rear and overthrown them; it was Munier who, after having planned this movement with the genius of a general, had carried it out with the courage of a soldier, and who at this moment finding himself in a position where he need fear nothing except death, fought in front of all, erect at his full height, his eyes flashing, his nostrils dilated, his forehead bare, his hair floating in the wind, enthusiastic, daring, sublime. In short, it was Munier's voice that was raised from time to time in the midst of the fighting, drowning all the noise of battle to shout "Forward!"

Then, as to follow him was to advance, and as the disorder in the British ranks increased, the cry was heard "Comrades, make for the flag! "He was seen to hurl himself into the midst of a group of British, fall, spring up again, plunge into their ranks, and after an instant reappear with torn clothes and bleeding forehead, but with the flag in his hand.

At this moment the General, fearing that the victors might advance too far in pursuit of the British and fall into a trap, gave the order to fall back. The Regulars obeyed first, bringing in the prisoners, the National Guard carrying away the dead; the black Volunteers in the rear, surrounding their flag.

The whole island had rushed to the port, crowding to see the victors, for the inhabitants of Port-Louis thought in their ignorance that the entire army of the enemy had been engaged, and hoped that the British, after being repulsed so vigorously, would not return to the charge, so, as each corps passed, they were greeted with fresh hurrahs!; all were proud, all victorious, all beside themselves. An unexpected happiness fills their hearts, an unhoped for success turns their heads; the inhabitants had expected to make some resistance, but not to gain a victory: so, when they saw victory so completely and entirely theirs, men, women, veterans and children swore with one mouth that they would work at the entrenchments and die, if needs be, for their defence. Excellent promises, no doubt, and made by all with the intention of keeping them, but not worth, by a great deal, an extra regiment, if an extra regiment could have arrived!

But, amid this general ovation, no object attracted so much notice as the British flag and the man who had taken it; there were endless cries of astonishment round Munier and his trophy, to which the blacks replied by blustering remarks, while their leader, becoming once more the humble mulatto with whom we are acquainted, satisfied the questions put by each with a timid politeness. Standing near the conqueror, and leaning on his double-barrelled gun, which had not been dumb during the engagement and the bayonet of which was stained with blood, Jacques carried his head proudly, while Georges, who had escaped from Télémaque and joined his father at the port, convulsively clasped his powerful hand and vainly tried to check the tears of joy which fell from his eyes in spite of himself. Close by Munier was M. de Malmédie, no less curled and bedecked than when he started, but with his tie torn, his frill in rags and covered with sweat and dirt; he, too, was surrounded and congratulated by his family; but the congratulations he received were such as are offered to a man who has escaped a danger, not the praises lavished on a victor. So he appeared rather embarrassed by the chorus of affecting solicitude, and, to put a good face on it, was asking loudly where his son Henri and his negro Bijou were, when he saw them both appear making their way through the crowd, Henri to throw himself into his father’s arms, and Bijou to congratulate his master.

At this moment, some one came to tell Munier that a negro who had fought under him and received a mortal wound, having been carried to a house near the port, wished to see him. Pierre looked round in search of Jacques to entrust him with his flag, but Jacques had discovered his friend the dog again, who in his turn had come with the rest to offer his compliments; he had placed his gun on the ground, and the child getting the better of the man, he and the dog were rolling over and over, some fifty yards off. Georges, seeing his father’s difficulty, stretched out his hand, saying: —

“Give it me, father; I will take care of it for you.”

Pierre smiled, and believing that none would dare to touch the glorious trophy which belonged to him alone, kissed Georges on the forehead, handed him the flag, which the child with great difficulty held upright by clasping his hands on his breast, and went off to the house where the sufferings of one of his Volunteers claimed his presence.

Georges remained alone; but the child felt instinctively that, though alone, he was not isolated; his father’s fame protected him, and his eyes beaming with pride he looked at the crowd that surrounded him; this bright and happy glance then met that of the child with the embroidered collar, and became disdainful. The latter, on his part, eyed Georges with envy, asking himself no doubt why his father too had not taken a flag. This question naturally led him doubtless to say to himself, that, failing a flag of his own, he must monopolise another's. For, rudely approaching Georges, who, though he saw his hostile purpose, did not draw back a step, he said: —

"Give me that."

"What?" asked Georges.

"That flag," replied Henri.

"This flag is not yours, it's my father's."

"What has that got to do with me? I want it!"

"You shall not have it."

The child with the embroidered collar then put out his hand to snatch the staff of the flag, an action to which Georges only replied by tightening his lips, becoming paler than usual, and drawing back a step. But this act only encouraged Henri, who, like all spoilt children, thought he had but to ask to get; he stepped forward, and this time laid his plans so well that he grasped the stick, shouting loudly with his little angry voice: —

"I tell you I want it."

"And I tell you you shan't have it," repeated Georges, pushing him back with one hand, while with the other he continued to press the captured flag against his chest.

"Ah! you nigger, you! how dare you touch me?" cried Henri. "Well, you will see." And, drawing his little sword from the scabbard before Georges had time to defend himself, he struck him with all his strength on the top of the forehead. The blood at once gushed from the wound and trickled down the boy's face.

"Coward!" said Georges coldly.

Exasperated by this insult, Henri was about to repeat the blow, when Jacques, reaching his brother at one bound, sent the aggressor flying ten yards by a vigorous blow in the middle of his face, and, jumping on the sword which the latter had let fall in the struggle, broke it into three or four pieces, spat on it, and tossed the pieces at him.

It was now the turn of the boy with the embroidered collar to feel the blood run down his face, but *he* had lost his blood not from a sword blow, but from a blow with the fist.

All this had passed so rapidly that neither M. de Malmédie, who, as we have said, was engaged a few yards off in receiving the congratulations of his family, nor Munier, who was coming from the house where the negro had just breathed his last, had time to anticipate it. They were merely spectators of the catastrophe, and ran up both at once; Pierre panting, troubled and trembling; Malmédie red with anger and choking with arrogance. They met in front of Georges.

"Did you see," cried M. de Malmédie, "what happened just now?"

"Alas! yes, M. de Malmédie," answered Pierre, "and, believe me, had I been there, this would not have taken place."

"Meanwhile, sir," cried M. de Malmédie, "your son laid his hand on mine. A mulatto's son has dared to touch a white man's son."

"I am distressed at what has just taken place, M. de Malmédie," stammered the poor father, "and humbly offer my apologies."

"Your apologies, sir," replied the angry settler, bridling up as the other humbled himself; "do you think your apologies are sufficient?"

"What more can I do, sir?"

"What can you do?" repeated Malmédie, himself at a loss to name the satisfaction he wished to obtain; "you can have that wretch who struck my son whipped."

"Have me whipped?" said Jacques, picking up his double-barrelled gun and changing from child to man again. "Well, come and meddle with me yourself, M. de Malmédie."

"Hush! Jacques; hush, my son," cried Pierre.

"Excuse me, father," said Jacques, "but I am right, and I will not be silent. M. Henri struck my brother, who was doing nothing to him, with his sword; and I struck M. Henri with my fist. So M. Henri is wrong, and I am right."

"Struck my son with his sword, my Georges. Georges, dear child," cried Munier, going towards his son, "is it true that you are wounded?"

"It's nothing, father," said Georges.

"What! nothing?" cried Pierre Munier; "why! your forehead is cut open. Look, sir," he resumed, turning to M. de Malmédie, "Jacques spoke the truth; your son has almost killed mine."

Malmédie turned towards Henri, and, as there was no means of resisting the evidence, inquired: —

"Come, Henri, how did the thing happen?"

"Papa," said Henri, "it is not my fault; I wanted the flag to bring it to you, and that wretch wouldn't give it me."

"And why wouldn't you give my son the flag, you little rascal?" asked M. de Malmédie.

"Because the flag isn't yours, or your son's, or anybody's, but my father's."

"Well?" asked Malmédie, continuing to question his son.

"Well, when I saw he wouldn't give it me, I tried to take it. Then this brute came up and struck me in the face with his fist."

"Then that is what happened?"

"Yes, father."

"He is lying," said Jacques, "and I only struck him when I saw my brother's blood flowing; but for that, I should never have hit him."

"Silence, you villain!" cried M. de Malmédie. Then going up to Georges, he said: —

"Give me the flag."

But Georges, instead of obeying this order, stepped back once more, pressing the flag to his breast with all his might.

"Give me the flag." repeated Malmédie in a threatening tone which showed that, if his demand were not complied with, he would resort to the utmost extremities.

"But, sir," muttered Pierre, "it was I who took the flag from the British."

"I know it, sir, but it shall not be said that a mulatto has coped with a man like me with impunity. Give me the flag."

"But, sir " —

"I will have it, I order it; obey your officer."

It entered Pierre's head to answer, "You are not my officer, sir, since you wouldn't have me as your soldier "; but the words died upon his lips; his habitual humility got the better of his courage. He sighed; and though obedience to such an unjust order grieved him, he himself took the flag from Georges, who ceased to offer any resistance, and handed it to the Major, who walked off laden with his stolen trophy.

It was incredible, strange, miserable, to see a man of a nature so rich, vigorous and determined, yield without resistance to that other nature so vulgar, dull, mean, common and poor, yet so it was; and, what is still more extraordinary, the thing surprised nobody, for it happened every day in the colonies, not in similar, but in parallel circumstances. So, accustomed from infancy to respect the white as men of a superior race, Munier had all his life let himself be crushed by that aristocracy of colour to which he had just yielded once more without even attempting to resist. He resembles those heroes who hold their heads high in the face of grape shot, and bend the knee to a prejudice. The lion attacks man, the terrestrial image of God, and flees in alarm when he hears the cock crow.

As for Georges, who had not shed a tear when he saw his blood trickling down, he burst into sobs on finding his hands empty in presence of his father, who looked at him sadly without even trying to comfort him.

Jacques, for his part, bit his fists with rage, and vowed to be avenged one day on Henri, M. de Malmédie and all the whites.

Scarcely ten minutes after the scene which we have just related, a messenger covered with dust rushed up announcing that the British, to the number of ten thousand, were advancing by the Williams plains and the Little River; then, almost immediately, the look-out signalled the arrival of a fresh British squadron which, anchoring in the bay of Grande-Rivière, landed five thousand men on the coast. Finally, it was ascertained at the same time that the division repulsed in the morning had rallied on the banks of the Rivière des Lataniers, and was ready to march again upon Port Louis, combining its movements with the two other invading corps who were advancing, one by Curtois Bay, the other by the Réduit. There were no means of resisting such a force; so, when some despairing voices, appealing to the oath taken in the morning to conquer or die, demanded fight, the Captain-General replied by disbanding the National Guard and the Volunteers, and declaring that, armed with full powers from his Majesty the Emperor Napoleon, he was about to treat with the British for the surrender of the town.

Only madmen could have tried to combat such a step; twenty-five thousand men surrounded less than four thousand; accordingly, on the order of the Captain-General every one went home, so that the town remained occupied only by the Regulars. On the night of the 2nd of December the capitulation was concluded and signed; at five a.m. it was approved and exchanged; the same day the enemy occupied the lines; on the morrow he took possession of the town and harbour.

Eight hours afterwards the captured French squadron left the harbour under full sail, carrying the whole of the garrison, like a poor family driven from the paternal roof; so long as the last flutter of the last flag could be seen, the crowd remained on the quay; but when the last frigate had disappeared, every one went home in gloom and silence. Two men remained alone and were the last to leave the harbour, the mulatto Pierre Munier and the negro Télémaque.

“M. Munier, we will climb the hill; we shall still be able to see Masters Jacques and Georges.”

“Yes, you are right, my good Télémaque,” cried Pierre Munier, “and if we do not see *them*, we shall at least see the ship that carries them.”

And Pierre Munier, dashing off with the rapidity of a young man, in an instant had climbed the hill of the Discovery, from the height of which he could follow with his eyes, until it grew dark, not his *sons*, for the distance, as he had foreseen, was too great for him to distinguish them any longer, but the frigate Bellona on board which they had embarked.

In fact, Pierre Munier had resolved, cost him what it might, to sever himself from his children, and was sending them to France under the protection of the worthy General Decacn. Jacques and Georges started then for Paris with recommendations to two or three of the richest merchants in the capital, with whom Pierre Munier had for a long time had business relations. The pretext for their departure was to get their education. The real cause of their absence was the very evident hatred shown towards both of them by M. de Malmédie since the day of the flag incident, a hatred on account of which their poor father trembled, especially with their known disposition, lest they should become the victims.

As for Henri, his mother was too fond of him to part from him. Besides, what did he want to learn? unless it was that every coloured man was born to respect and obey him.

Well! as we have seen, that was a thing Henri had already learned by heart.

CHAPTER IV.

FOURTEEN YEARS LATER.

THE day when a European vessel is signalled off the port is a general holiday in the Isle of France; for, long severed from the mother country, the majority of the inhabitants impatiently await news of their country, their families, and those beyond the seas; each hopes for something, and keeps his eyes fixed, directly she comes in sight, upon the maritime messenger which brings him the letter or the portrait of a friend, male or female, or it may be that friend, himself or herself, in person. For this vessel, the object of so many desires and the source of so many hopes, is the over-sea chain joining Europe to Africa, the flying-bridge thrown from one world to the other. Accordingly, no news spreads so rapidly through the whole Island as that which issues from the peak of the Discovery, “A vessel in sight!”

We say the peak of the Discovery, because in almost all cases the vessel, obliged to keep away to catch the east wind, passes in front of Grand-Port, coasts along the land at the distance of two or three leagues, doubles the point of Quatre-Cocos, steers between the Plate and the Coin-de-Mire, and some hours after, having cleared this passage, appears at the entrance of Port-Louis, whose inhabitants, warned the previous day by the signals which have traversed the Island to announce its approach, await it in crowds that throng the quay.

After what has been said of the eagerness with which every one in the Isle of France awaits news from Europe, you will doubtless not be astonished at the crowd which one fine morning in the end of February 1824, about eleven in the morning, assembled at every point from which they could see the entry into the harbour of Port-Louis of the Leicester, a fine frigate of thirty-six guns, which had been signalled the day before at two in the afternoon.

We ask the reader’s permission to introduce to him, or rather to renew his acquaintance with, two of the persons whom she carried on her deck.

The one was a man with fair hair, light complexion, blue eyes, regular features, and calm expression, a little above middle height, whom you would have set down as no more than thirty or thirty-two, but who was really more than forty. At first sight you saw nothing specially striking about him, though it must also be confessed his general appearance was very agreeable. If, after the first glance, you had any reason to continue the inspection, you remarked that he had small and beautifully shaped hands and feet, which in all countries, but especially in England, is a sign of good family. His voice was clear and distinct, but without modulation, and so to speak, unmusical. His sky-blue eyes, which might in ordinary circumstances be charged with want of expression, wandered with a clear glance which seemed to fasten on nothing in particular and to examine nothing deeply. From time to time, however, he blinked his eyes like one tired of the sunshine, accompanying this movement with a slight parting of the lips which exposed a double row of small, well-set teeth, white as pearls. This trick seemed to deprive his face of what little expression it possessed; but, on looking at him carefully, you noticed, on the contrary, that it was at such moments that his quick and profound glance, darting a ray of fire between his contracted eyelids, probed the thought of his questioner to the very depths of his soul. Those who saw him for the first time seldom failed to take him for a man of no parts; he knew that this was, in general, the superficial judgment which men formed of him, and almost always, whether designedly or through indifference, he was content to leave them in that opinion, quite sure of undeceiving them when it might suit his humour or when the proper moment should arrive. For this deceptive exterior concealed a singularly profound mind, just as sometimes two inches of snow will mask a precipice of a thousand feet; so, with the consciousness of an almost universal superiority, he waited patiently till it was given the opportunity to triumph. Then, when he met with an opinion opposed to his own, and, in the person giving vent to that opinion, a foeman worthy of his steel, he caught up the conversation which he had allowed to stray into a hundred capricious bye-ways, gradually became animated and opened out, growing, as it were, to his full height; for his harsh voice and blazing eyes ably supported his lively, incisive, and highly coloured speech, at once enticing and serious, dazzling and practical. If on the contrary this opportunity did not occur, he was quite satisfied, and continued to be looked upon by those who surrounded him as a commonplace person. Not that he lacked self-esteem; on the contrary, he pushed his pride in certain matters to excess. But it was a plan of conduct imposed on himself, from which he never swerved. Every time that an erroneous proposition, a false idea, a badly supported conceit, in short, anything ridiculous, was stated in his presence, the extreme acuteness of his mind brought instantly to his tongue a smart sarcasm or to his lips a scornful smile. But he at once checked this sort of outward irony, and, when he could not entirely suppress the outburst of contempt, he concealed beneath one of those blinkings of the eyes which were habitual to him, the bantering expression which had escaped him in spite of himself, knowing well that the way to see and hear everything was to appear blind and deaf. Perhaps he would have wished, like Pope Sixtus V., to appear paralysed as well; but, as this would have entailed a too lengthy and tiring dissimulation, he had abandoned the idea.

The other was a dark young man of sallow complexion, with long black hair; his eyes, which were large, beautifully formed and velvety, had, behind the apparent softness which was due only to the continual preoccupation of his thoughts, a firmness of character which struck one from the first. If he became excited, which was but seldom, for his whole frame seemed to obey not the physical instincts but a moral force, then his eyes lighted up with an inward flame, the fire of which seemed to lie in the depths of his soul. Though the lines of his face seemed clear, they wanted regularity to a certain extent; his harmonious forehead, though vigorous and square in mould, was furrowed by a slight scar, almost imperceptible in the state of calmness which was habitual to him, but which betrayed itself by a white line when his face became red. A moustache, as dark as his hair and as regular as his eyebrows, shaded, while concealing its size, a mouth with strong lips and furnished with splendid teeth. The general aspect of his countenance was serious; by the wrinkles in his forehead, the almost perpetual frowning of the eyebrows, and the severity of all his features, might be recognised a deep reflection and an unshaken resolve. Accordingly, in contrast with his companion, whose features lacked character, and who, though forty years old, appeared scarcely thirty or thirty-two, he, who was hardly twenty-five, appeared nearly thirty. As to the rest of his person, he was of moderate height, but well-built; his limbs were all perhaps a trifle slender, but one felt that, when animated by any excitement, violent tension of nerve would supply them with strength. Byway of compensation, one understood that nature had endowed him with activity and dexterity beyond what she had denied him in the way of clumsy vigour. For the rest, dressed almost always with an elegant simplicity, he wore at this moment trousers, waistcoat and frock-coat whose cut showed that they came from the hands of one of the best Parisian tailors, and in the buttonhole of his frock-coat he wore, knotted with elegant carelessness, the united ribands of the Legion of Honour and of Charles III.

These two men had met on board the Leicester, which had taken aboard the one at Portsmouth, the other at Cadiz. At the first glance they had recognised the fact that they had already seen each other in the saloons of London and Paris, where one sees everybody; they had greeted each other, therefore, as old acquaintances, but at first without speaking. For, having never been introduced, both had been restrained by that aristocratic reserve of fashionable people who hesitate, even in special circumstances of life, to break through the general proprieties. However, the loneliness of the deck, the limited space within which they walked every day, the natural attraction two men of the world instinctively feel for one another, had soon brought them together. At first they had exchanged some trifling remarks, then their conversation had assumed a more serious character. After some days, each of the two had recognised his companion as a man out of the common, and congratulated himself at such a meeting on a three months' voyage; then, after further waiting, they had become united by that friendship of circumstances which, without roots in the past, forms a distraction in the present, without creating any complication for the future. Then, during those long evenings under the equator, and fine tropical nights, they had had time to study each other, and both had recognised that in art, science and politics, they had, whether by inquiry or by experience, learnt all that it is given to man to know. Both had then remained constantly face to face like wrestlers of equal strength, and in this long voyage the first of these two men had gained but one single advantage over the second, and that was when in a squall which struck the frigate after doubling the Cape of Good Hope, and in which the captain of the Leicester, injured by the fall of a top-gallant-mast, had been carried swooning into his cabin, the fair-haired passenger had seized the speaking-trumpet, and, springing on the quarterdeck, had, in the absence of the second in command, whom severe illness kept prisoner in his berth, with the firmness of a man accustomed to command and the knowledge of an accomplished sailor, at once issued a series of orders which saved the vessel from succumbing to the force of the hurricane. Then, when the squall was over, his face, shining for a moment with that sublime pride which mounts to the brow of every human creature when struggling against his Creator, had resumed its ordinary expression; his voice, the stentorian tones of which had made themselves heard above the roll of the thunder and the howling of the storm, had sunk to its normal pitch. Lastly, with a gesture as simple as the preceding ones had been romantic and exalted, he had handed the second officer back the speaking-trumpet, that sceptre of a master mariner which is, in the hands of him who wields it, the token of absolute and undisputed authority.

During all this time, his companion, on whose calm face, let us hasten to say, it would have been impossible to detect the least trace of emotion, had followed him with his eyes with the envious expression of a man obliged to recognise himself as inferior to him whose equal he had hitherto thought himself. Then, when the danger being over, they found themselves side by side again, he had contented himself with saying:

“You have commanded a ship then, my Lord?”

“Yes,” the man to whom this title of honour had been applied answered simply; “I have even reached the rank of Commodore, but six years ago I went into the diplomatic service; and at the moment of danger I recollected my old profession; that is all.”

Then there had been no further talk between the two men on the subject; only it was clear that the younger of the two was inwardly humiliated by this superiority which his companion had in such unexpected fashion gained over him, and which he would certainly have known nothing of but for the incident which had in a way forced it into the light of day. The question which we have reported and the answer it evoked show, moreover, that during the three months they had just spent together, neither of these men had asked any question as to their respective social positions; they had recognised each other as brothers in intelligence, and that had been enough for them. They knew that the Isle of France was for both the object of their journey, and they had asked nothing more. Both appeared equally impatient to arrive, for both had given orders to be told the moment the Island came in view. The order was needless in the case of one of them, for the young man with dark hair was on deck, leaning against the taffrail of the poop, when the look-out man gave the cry, always so spirit-stirring, even to sailors, of “Land ho!”

At this cry, his companion appeared at the top of the companion, and, advancing towards the young man with a step more rapid than usual, came and leant beside him.

“Well, my Lord,” said the latter, “we have arrived, so at least they assure us; for I confess to my shame that I have scanned the horizon without observing anything but a sort of haze which may quite as well be a mist floating on the sea as an island that has its roots at the bottom of the ocean.”

“Yes, I daresay,” said the elder man, “for it is only with difficulty that even the sailor’s eye can distinguish with certainty, especially at such a distance, water from sky, and land from clouds; but I,” he added, blinking his eyes, “old sea dog that I am, perceive all the outlines of our Island, I might even say all its details.”

“Well, my Lord, that is a fresh superiority I recognise in your Lordship over myself; but I assure you it requires that to assure me of such a thing, so as not to reject it as incredible.”

“Then take my glass,” said the sailor, “while I with the naked eye will describe the coast to you; will you believe me then?”

“My Lord,” said the doubter,” I consider you in everything a man so superior to others that I believe what you tell me, you may rest assured, without your needing to add any proof to your words. If I take the glass which you offer me, it is rather to satisfy a longing of my heart than a desire of my curiosity.”

“Come, come,” said the fair-haired man, laughing; “I see that the land air is taking its effect, you are becoming a flatterer.”

“I a flatterer, my Lord?” said the young man shaking his head. “Oh! your Lordship is mistaken. The Leicester, I assure you, might make a voyage further than from pole to pole and sail round the world more than once before you would see me so changed. No, my Lord, I do not flatter you, I only thank you for the gracious kindness you have shown me throughout this interminable voyage, I will venture almost to say the friendship which your Lordship has evidenced towards an unknown person like me.”

“My dear comrade,” answered the Englishman, holding out his hand to the young man, “I hope that for you as for me there are no people in the world ‘unknown ‘except vulgarians, fools, and rogues; but I hope also that for the one as for the other of us every superior man is a relation whom we recognise as belonging to our family, wherever we meet him. That granted, a truce to compliments, my young friend; take these glasses and look; for we are drawing near so rapidly that there will soon be no merit in accomplishing the little lesson in geography which I have undertaken to give you.”

The young man took the spy-glass and put it to his eye.

“Can you make it out?” asked the Englishman.

“Perfectly,” said the young man.

Do you see on our extreme right, like a cone rising out of the sea, the solitary *Ile Ronde?”*

“Wonderfully clearly.”

“Do you see closer to us the *lie Plate,* below which is passing at this moment a brig, which from her shape has to me all the look of a man-of-war? This evening we shall be where she is, and shall pass where she is passing.”

The young man put down the glass and tried to see with the naked eye the objects which his companion made out so easily, and which he himself saw with difficulty by the aid of the telescope he held in his hand. Then he said with a smile of astonishment: —

“It is marvellous! “And he put up the glass to his eye again.

“Do you see the *Coin-de-Mire,”* continued his companion, “which, from here, is almost undistinguishable from Cap Malheureux, of sad and poetic memory? Do you see the *Piton de Bambou,* behind which rises the Mountain of La Faience? do you see the hill of Grand-Port; and there, do you see on its left the *Morne des Créoles?”*

“Yes, yes, I see it all and recognise it, for all the peaks and summits are familiar to me from childhood, and I have kept them in my memory religiously; but,” continued the young man, pushing together with the palm of his hand the three tubes of the spy-glass, “this is not the first time that you have seen this coast, and there is more of memory than of actual sight in the description you have just given me.”

“True,” said the Englishman, smiling, “and I see that there is no means of practising trickery on you. Yes, I have already seen this coast.

“Yes, I speak to some extent from memory, though the recollections which it has left me are probably less tender than those which it recalls to you. Yes, I came here at a time when, in all probability, we were enemies, my dear companion, for it was fourteen years ago.”

“That is just the time when I left the Isle of France,” replied the dark-haired young man.

“Were you still there at the time of the sea fight that took place at Grand-Port, and to which I ought not to allude, from a feeling of national pride, considering what a splendid beating we got there?”

"Oh! speak of it, my Lord, speak of it," interrupted the young man; "you have so often taken your revenge, you English, that there is almost pride in your confessing to a defeat."

"Well, that was the time I visited the Island; for I was serving then in the navy."

"As Midshipman, no doubt?"

"As Lieutenant of the frigate, sir."

"But at that time, allow me to say, my Lord, you were a child."

"What age do you put me at, sir?"

"Why, I should think we are nearly of the same age, and you are scarcely thirty."

"I am just forty," replied the Englishman, smiling; "I was quite right in saying just now that you were in a flattering vein."

The young man was astonished, and looked at his companion with more attention than he had hitherto paid him, and noticed, by the slight wrinkles at the corners of his eyes and mouth, that he might actually be the age he declared himself, and which he was so far from appearing to be. Then, leaving his investigation to return to the question which had been put to him, he went on: —

"Yes, yes, I remember that battle and also another which took place at the opposite end of the island — Do you know Port-Louis, my Lord?"

"No, sir, I only know this side of the coast. I was dangerously wounded at the battle of Grand-Port, and carried as prisoner to Europe. Since that time I have not revisited the Indian seas, where I shall now probably make an indefinite stay."

Then, as though the last words that they had exchanged had just aroused in the two men a source of inward memories, each moved away mechanically and disappeared to meditate in silence, one at the bows, the other at the stern.

It was the day after this conversation that, having rounded the *Ile d'Ambre* and passed at the predicted hour at the foot of the the Plate, the frigate Leicester, as we pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, made her entrance into the harbour of Port-Louis, in the midst of the customary crowd which welcomed the arrival of every European vessel.

Of course, the fair-haired Englishman was no other than Lord Murray, member of the Upper House, who after being in turn sailor and ambassador, had just been nominated Governor of the Isle of France by His Britannic Majesty.

We invite the reader, then, to recognise in him the young lieutenant of whom he got a glimpse on board the Nereïd, lying at the feet of his uncle, Captain Willoughby, wounded in the side by a discharge of grape, and of whom we announced not only the recovery, but also the approaching re-appearance as one of the chief characters of our story.

At the moment of separating from his companion, Lord Murray turned to him and said: —

“By-the-bye, sir, in three days I am giving a banquet to the authorities of the Island; I hope that you will do me the honour of being one of my guests.”

“With the greatest pleasure, my Lord,” answered the young man; “but, before I accept, it is right that I should tell your Lordship who I am.”

“Your name will be announced when you come in, sir,” replied Lord Murray, “and then I shall know who you are; meanwhile, I know what you are worth, and that is all I want.”

Then, giving his travelling companion a shake of the hand and a smile, the new Governor passed down with the Captain to the barge of honour, which shoved off from the ship’s side, and impelled by the arms of ten stout oarsmen, soon landed at the fountain of the Chien-de-Plomb.

As the Governor landed, a Guard of Honour presented arms, the drums beat a salute, the guns of the forts and the frigate roared simultaneously, and those of the other ships answered them like an echo; immediately universal shouts of “Long live Lord Murray!” joyously welcomed the new Governor, who, after graciously saluting those who gave him this honourable reception, went off to his palace, surrounded by the chief authorities of the Island. And yet, these men who thus fêted the representative of His Britannic Majesty and applauded his arrival, were the same men who had formerly lamented the departure of the French. But fourteen years, it is true, had elapsed since that time; the older generation had partly disappeared, and the new generation only cherished the recollection of the past in ostentation, and as one cherishes an old family pedigree. Fourteen years had elapsed, as we have already said, and that is more than are required in order to forget the death of one’s best friend, to violate an oath sworn; more than are required, in short, for killing, burying, or changing the name of a great man or a great nation.

CHAPTER V.

THE PRODIGAL SON.

ALL eyes had followed Lord Murray to Government House; but, when the door of the palace had closed on him and those who surrounded him, all eyes were directed to the ship.

At this moment the young man with dark hair disembarked in his turn, and the curiosity of which the Governor had just been the object, was transferred to him. As a matter of fact, they had seen Lord Murray talking graciously to him and shaking his hand; so that the assembled crowd decided, with its usual sagacity, that this stranger was some young nobleman belonging to the aristocracy of France or England. This probability had changed to an absolute certainty at the sight of the double riband which adorned his buttonhole, one of which ribands, it must be confessed, was a little less widely distributed at that period than it is to-day. For the rest, the inhabitants of Port-Louis had time to examine the new arrival; for, after casting his eyes around him as though he had expected to find some of his friends or relations on the pier, he had waited on the quay while the Governor’s horses were being disembarked; then, when this operation was over, a servant of a tawny complexion, dressed in the costume of the African Moors, with whom the stranger had exchanged some words in an unknown tongue, saddled two horses in Arabian fashion, and leading both of them by their bridles, for their legs, stiffened by long confinement, could not yet be trusted, followed his master who had already started on foot towards the street, looking all round him as though he had expected a friendly face to appear suddenly amid all these, to him, unmeaning countenances.

Among the groups awaiting the strangers at the spot characteristically known as *La Pouite-aux-Blagucurs* or “Idlers’ Corner,” was one in the midst of which stood a man of from fifty to fifty-four, with hair that was turning grey, common features, rasping voice, and pointed whiskers which joined the corner of his mouth on either side, together with a handsome young fellow of twenty-five or six. The elder was dressed in a frock-coat of maroon merino, nankeen trousers and a waistcoat of white piqué. The younger man, whose features were a little more marked than those of his neighbour, but still bore such a resemblance to them that it was clear these two individuals were connected by the closest ties of relationship, wore a grey hat, a silk handkerchief knotted carelessly about his neck, and white waistcoat and trousers.

"My word, there's a nice-looking young fellow," said the stout man looking at the stranger who Avas passing close to him at the moment, "and if he is going to remain in the Island, I advise the husbands and mothers to look after their wives and daughters."

"That's a fine horse," said the young man, putting an eyeglass in his eye, "of the very purest Arab blood, if I am not mistaken; an Arab of the Arabs."

"Do you know this gentleman, Henri?" asked the stout man.

"No, father, but if he wants to sell his horse, I know who will give him a thousand dollars for it."

"And that is Henri de Malmédie, is it not, my son? and, if you like the horse, you will do well to indulge your fancy for it; you can afford it, you are rich."

No doubt the stranger heard Henri's offer and the approval given it by his father, for his lip curled contemptuously as he gave father and son alternately a haughty glance that was not without menace; then, better informed, no doubt, as regards them than they were about him, he passed on murmuring, "Those people again! there's no escaping them!"

"What does that dandy want with us?" asked M. de Malmédie of those who surrounded him.

"I don't know, father," answered Henri; "but the first time we meet him, if he looks at us in the same fashion, I promise you I'll ask him."

"Why, Henri," said M. de Malmédie with an air of pity for the stranger's ignorance, "the poor young fellow does not know who we are."

"Well, then, I will teach him," murmured Henri.

During this interval the stranger, whose look of contempt had aroused this threatening dialogue, had continued his way to the Rampart without showing any uneasiness at the impression which his passing had produced, and without condescending to turn round to see its effect. When he had gone about a third of the way along the *Jardin de la Compagnie*, his attention was attracted by a group of persons standing on a small bridge which connected the garden with the courtyard of a fine-looking house. In the centre of this group was a charming girl of fifteen or sixteen, and the stranger, who was no doubt a man of artistic tastes and therefore a lover of beauty in all forms, stopped in order to get a better look at her. Although she Avas at her very door-step, the girl, who no doubt belonged to one of the wealthiest families in the Island, was accompanied by a European governess, evidently an Englishwoman, from her long fair hair and the clearness of her skin, while an old grey-haired negro in a suit of white dimity held himself in readiness, with eyes fixed on his young mistress, and foot uplifted, so to speak, to carry out her slightest orders.

Perhaps, too, as everything is heightened by contrast, her beauty, which we have described as wonderful, was increased still further by the ugliness of the person who stood dumb and motionless in front of her, and with whom she was endeavouring to enter into business negotiations in respect of one of those charming fans of carved ivory, transparent and fragile as lace work.

The man who was talking to her was bony in frame, of a yellow complexion, with eyes raised at the corners, and a broad-brimmed straw hat on his head, from which hung, like a sample of the hair with which the skull that it shaded was presumably covered, a long plait which came down to the middle of his back; he was dressed in blue cotton drawers, reaching to his knees, and a blouse of the same material coming half-way down his thighs. At his feet was a bamboo cane, six feet in length, supporting at each of its extremities a basket, the weight of which made this long cane bend like a bow when its middle rested on the dealer’s shoulders. These baskets were filled with the numerous little knick-knacks which alike in the colonies as in France, in the open-air bazaars of the tropics as in the elegant shops of Alphonse Giroux and Susse, turn the heads of girls and sometimes even of their mothers. Well, as we have said, the beautiful Creole, in the midst of all these wonders spread out on a mat stretched at her feet, had stopped for a moment at a fan representing houses, pagodas, and impossible palaces, dogs, lions, and fantastic birds; in short, a thousand figures of men, animals and buildings that had no existence save in the very lively imagination of the inhabitant of Canton and Pekin. She was asking then purely and simply the price of this fan. But there lay the difficulty. The Chinaman, who had landed only a few days before, didn’t know a single word of French, English, or Italian, and this ignorance was clearly responsible for his failure to reply to the question which had been put to him in these three languages successively. This ignorance was already so well known in the colony that the inhabitant of the banks of the Yellow River was alluded to at Port-Louis merely by the name of Miko-Miko, the only two words which he uttered while going along the streets of the town, carrying his long bamboo loaded with baskets, first on one shoulder, then on the other, and which in all probability meant "Buy, buy." The relationship hitherto established between Miko-Miko and his customers was purely and simply that of gestures and signs. As the beautiful girl had never had occasion to make a profound study of the language of the Abbé de l'Epée, she found it absolutely impossible to understand Miko-Miko or to make herself understood by him.

It was at this moment that the stranger approached her. "Excuse me, Mademoiselle," he began, "but, seeing you are in a difficulty, I presume to offer you my services: can I be of use to you in any way, and will you condescend to employ me as interpreter?"

"Oh! Monsieur," replied the governess, while the young girl's cheeks were covered with a layer of the finest pink, "I am grateful a thousand times for your offer, for Mademoiselle Sara and myself have in the last ten minutes exhausted our philological knowledge without succeeding in making this man understand us. We have spoken to him by turns in French, English and Italian, and he has answered to none of those languages."

"Perhaps Monsieur is acquainted with some language that this man can speak, Henrietta dear," said the young girl; "and I want this fan so much that, if Monsieur succeeds in finding out the price, he will have done me a real service."

"But you see it is impossible," answered Henrietta; "the man talks no language."

"At least he talks that of the country where he was born," said the stranger.

"Yes, but he is a Chinaman; and who can speak Chinese?"

The stranger smiled, and, turning to the dealer, spoke some words in a foreign tongue.

We should try in vain to describe the astonishment that came over the features of poor Miko-Miko, when the accents of his mother tongue sounded in his ears like the echo of distant music. He dropped the fan which he held, and, staring open-mouthed at the man who had just addressed him, seized his hand and kissed it several times; then, as the stranger repeated the question that he had already put to him, he at last decided to answer. But it was with an expression in his look and a tone of voice that formed one of the strangest contrasts imaginable; for with the most affected and sentimental air possible he told him quite simply the price of the fan.

“It is twenty pounds sterling, Mademoiselle,” said the stranger, turning to the girl, “about ninety dollars.”

“A thousand thanks, sir,” answered Sara, blushing once more. Then, turning to her governess, “Is it not really most fortunate, dear Henrietta,” she went on in English, “that Monsieur speaks this man’s language?”

“And also most surprising,” said Henrietta.

“And yet it is very simple, ladies,” answered the stranger in the same language. “My mother died before I was three months old, and I was given as nurse a woman from the Island of Formosa, who was in the service of our house. So her language was the first that I prattled, and, though I have not often had occasion to speak it, I have, as you have seen, retained some words, for which I shall congratulate myself all my life, since, thanks to those words I have been able to render you a slight service.”

Then, slipping into the Chinaman’s hand a Spanish doubloon, and, signing to his servant to follow him, the young man went off, saluting Mademoiselle Sara and her friend Henrietta with perfect grace.

The stranger took the road to Moka; but he had hardly gone a mile on the road leading to Pailles and reached the foot of Discovery Hill, when he suddenly stopped, and his eyes fastened on a bench placed half-way up the ascent, on which was seated an old man perfectly motionless, his hands resting on his knees and his eyes fixed on the sea. For a moment the stranger surveyed this man with a doubtful air; then, as if this hesitation had given way to an absolute conviction, he murmured:

“It is he, I am certain; great heavens! how changed he is! “Then, after looking at the old man with an air of remarkable interest, the young man took a path by which he might approach him without being seen, a plan which he carried out successfully, after stopping twice or thrice on the way and placing his hand on his breast, as if to give a strong emotion time to calm down.

As for the old man, he did not stir at the approach of the stranger, so that it might have been thought that he had not even heard the sound of his step; but this would have been a mistake, for scarcely had the young man sat down upon the same bench than he turned his head towards him and, saluting him in a timid manner, got up and began to walk away.

“Oh! don’t disturb yourself for me, sir,” said the young man.

The old man at once sat down, no longer in the middle of the seat but at its extremity.

Then a moment’s silence ensued between the old man who continued to gaze at the sea, and the stranger who looked at the old man.

At last, after five minutes of silent and deep contemplation, the stranger spoke: —

“Sir,” said he to his neighbour, “doubtless you were not down at the harbour just now when the Leicester came to anchor there, — about an hour and a half ago?”

“Pardon me, I was not there, sir,” answered the old man in a tone of mingled humility and astonishment.

“Then,” resumed the young man, “you took no interest in the arrival of this vessel from Europe?”

“Why so, sir?” said the old man with increasing astonishment.

“Because in that case, instead of stopping here, you would have gone like everybody else down to the harbour.”

“You are wrong, sir, you are wrong,” replied the old man sadly, shaking his white head; “on the contrary I take, I am certain of it, a greater interest than any one in this sight. Every time a ship has arrived, no matter from what country, I have come for fourteen years to see if it does not bring me a letter from my children, or even my children themselves. And, as it would tire me too much to remain standing, I seat myself here in the morning at the same spot from which I saw them depart; and I remain here the whole day until, when every one has gone away, I have given up all hope.”

“But why do you not go down yourself to the harbour?” asked the stranger.

“So I did during the first years,” replied the old man; “but then I learned my fate too quickly; and, as each fresh disappointment became too painful, I ended by staying here and sending my negro Télémaque in my place. In this way hope lasts longer. If he comes back quickly, I think he brings me word of their arrival; if he is slow in returning, I think he is waiting for a letter. He comes back most times with empty hands. Then I get up and go back alone as I came; I enter my deserted house and pass the night in tears, saying to myself, no doubt it will be the next time.”

“Poor father!” murmured the stranger.

“You pity me, sir?” asked the old man with astonishment.

"Certainly, I pity you," answered the young one.

"You do not know then who I am?"

"You are a man, and you suffer."

"But I am a mulatto," answered the old man in a low and profoundly humble tone.

A deep blush passed over the young man's forehead.

"And I, too, sir, am a mulatto," he answered.

"You?" cried the old man.

"Yes," answered the stranger.

"You a mulatto?" and the old man looked with astonishment at the red and blue riband knotted in the stranger's frock-coat. "You a mulatto! Oh! then I am not surprised at your pity. I had taken you for a white; but, since you are a man of colour like myself, it becomes another thing at once; you are a friend, a brother."

"Yes, a friend, a brother," said the stranger extending both his hands to the old man.

Then he murmured under his breath, looking at him with an indescribable expression of tenderness, "and even more than that, perhaps."

"Then I can tell you everything," the old man went on. "Ah! I feel that to speak of my sorrow will do me good. Picture to yourself, sir, that I have, or rather had, for God only knows if both are still alive — picture to yourself that I had two children, two sons, both of whom I loved with a father's love, one especially."

The stranger gave a start and came closer to the old man.

"Oh! if you had known them both," he continued, "you would have understood that. It is not that Georges — his name was Georges, was the most handsome: on the contrary, his brother Jacques was a finer lad than he; but he had in his poor little body a mind so intelligent, so keen, so resolute, that, had I put him to the College at Port-Louis with the other boys, I am quite certain that, although he was only twelve, he would soon have left all the other scholars behind."

The old man's eyes shone for an instant with pride and enthusiasm, but this change passed with the swiftness of lightning, and his look had already resumed its vague, timid, dull expression when he added: —

"But I could not put him to school here. The College was founded for whites, and we are only mulattos."

The young man's countenance brightened in turn, and a flame, as it were of contempt and fierce anger, passed over his face.

The old man continued without even noticing the feeling displayed by the stranger.

"That is why I sent them both to France, in the hope that education would settle the roving propensities of the elder, and subdue the too self-willed character of the younger. But it seems that God did not approve my resolve; for, in a visit that he made to Brest, Jacques embarked on a privateer, and I have only heard from him three times since, and each time from a different quarter of the world; while Georges in growing up has allowed the germ of self-will which alarmed me in him to develop. He has written to me more often, sometimes from England, sometimes from Egypt, sometimes from Spain, for he too has travelled a great deal, and, though his letters are very good, I assure you I have not ventured to show them to any one."

"Then neither of them has ever mentioned to you the date of his return?"

"Never; and who knows even if I shall ever see them again; for though, on my part, the moment when I saw them once more would be the happiest of my life, I have never spoken to them of returning. If they stay away, it is because they are happier there than they would be here; if they do not feel a desire to see their old father again, it is because they have found people in Europe whom they love better than him. So let them have their wish, especially if that wish can lead them to happiness. Still, though I regret them both, it is Georges I miss especially, and it is he who causes me the most grief by never alluding to his return."

"If he does not speak of his return, sir," replied the stranger in a tone from which he vainly tried to repress the emotion, "it is perhaps because he is reserving for himself the pleasure of surprising you, and that he wishes you to conclude in happiness a day begun in expectation."

"God grant it!" said the old man, lifting his eyes and hands to heaven.

"Perhaps it is," continued the young man in tones of increased emotion, "that he wishes to creep up to you without being recognised by you, and so to enjoy your presence, your love, and your blessing."

"Ah! it would be impossible for me not to recognise him."

"And yet," cried the young man, unable to resist any longer the feeling which agitated him, "you have not recognised me, father!"

"You! you!" exclaimed the old man, devouring the stranger with an eager glance, while he trembled in all his limbs, his mouth half open and smiling doubtfully. Then, shaking his head: —

“No, no,” said he, “it is not Georges; there is some resemblance between you and him; but he is not tall, not handsome like you; he is but a child, and you are a man.”

“It is I, father; it is I; you must recognise me,” cried Georges; “remember that fourteen years have passed since I have seen you; remember that I am now twenty-six, and if you doubt, here, look at this scar on my forehead, the mark of the blow which M. de Malmédie gave me the day when you so gloriously captured an English flag. Oh! father, open your arms, and, when you have embraced me and pressed me to your heart, you will no longer doubt that I am your son.”

And with these words the stranger threw himself on the neck of the old man, who, looking now at the sky, now at his child, could not believe in so much happiness, and only made up his mind to embrace the handsome young man when the latter had repeated for the twentieth time that he was really Georges.

At this moment Télémaque appeared at the bottom of the hill of *La Découverte*, his arms hanging down, his eyes mournful and his head drooping, grieved that he was returning once more to his master without bringing him any news of either of his children.

CHAPTER VI.

A TRANSFORMATION.

AND now our readers must allow us to leave father and son to the enjoyment of reunion, and consent to go back with us over the past, and trace the physical and moral transformation which had taken place during the space of fourteen years in the hero of our tale, of whom we have given them a glimpse as a child and whom we have just shown them as a man.

We had at first intended to put before our readers' eyes purely and simply the history which Georges gave his father of the events of these fourteen years; but we reflected that, this story being entirely one of inmost thoughts and private feelings, the veracity of a man of Georges' character, especially when that man speaks about himself, might with good reason be distrusted. We have determined, therefore, to relate the facts, with every detail of which we are acquainted personally, and in our own way, promising beforehand, since our own self-esteem is not concerned in the matter, to conceal no feeling, whether good or bad, no thought, whether creditable or disgraceful.

Let us start then from the same point from which Georges himself had started.

Pierre Munier, whose character we have tried to describe, had, from the time that he first entered on active life, that is to say, from the time that he changed from boyhood to manhood, adopted a system of conduct towards the whites from which he had never swerved; feeling neither the strength nor the wish to combat as a duellist an overwhelming prejudice, he had formed the resolve of disarming his enemies by an unalterable submission and an inexhaustible humility, his whole life was occupied in apologising for his birth. Far from soliciting, in spite of his wealth and intelligence, any public office or political employment, he had constantly tried to efface himself by losing himself in the crowd; the same motive which had withdrawn him from public life guided him in his private capacity. By nature generous and magnificent, he regulated his house with an almost monastic simplicity. There was abundance everywhere, but a total absence of luxury, though he had nearly two hundred slaves, which constitutes in the Colonies a fortune of nearly two hundred thousand pounds per annum. He went about always on horseback until forced by age, or rather by the troubles which had broken him down before his time, to exchange this modest custom for a more aristocratic one, he bought a palanquin quite as unpretending as that of the poorest inhabitant of the Island. Always careful to avoid the slightest quarrel, always polite, agreeable, obliging to everybody, even to those whom, at the bottom of his heart, he disliked, he would rather have lost ten acres of land than commence or even sustain a law-suit which might have gained him twenty acres. If any inhabitant wanted plants of coffee, manioc or sugar-cane, he was sure of getting them from Pierre Munier, who even thanked him for giving him the preference. Well, all this good behaviour, which proceeded from the instincts of his excellent heart, but which might have appeared to be the result of his timid disposition, had doubtless gained for him the goodwill of his neighbours, yet merely a passive friendliness which, never having entertained the idea of doing him good, was limited purely and simply to doing him no harm. Still, there were some among them who, unable to pardon Pierre Munier his immense fortune, his numerous slaves and spotless reputation, tried constantly to crush him beneath the prejudice of colour. M. de Malmédie and his son were of that number.

Georges, born in the same condition as his father, but whose weakness of constitution had debarred him from physical exercise, had directed all his mental faculties to reflection, and precocious beyond his age, as weakly children generally are, had observed instinctively his father’s conduct, the motives of which he had penetrated while still young; and the manly pride which surged in the child’s breast had caused him to hate the whites who despised him, as well as the mulattos who allowed themselves to be despised. Accordingly, he firmly resolved to follow a line of conduct precisely the opposite of that which his father had observed, and, when he had grown big and strong, to advance vigorously and boldly to confront these ridiculous sentimental prejudices, and, if they did not give way before him, to seize them by the body as Hercules did Antaeus, and crush them in his arms. Did not the youthful Hannibal, at his father’s instigation, vow eternal hatred against a nation? Well! the youthful Georges, in spite of his father, swore war to the death against a prejudice.

Georges quitted the Colony after the scene that we have related, arrived in France with his brother, and entered the Collège Napoléon. Hardly was he seated on the benches of the lowest class before he grasped the difference of ranks and wished to reach the top: for him, superiority was a necessity of his organisation; he learnt quickly and well. A first success strengthened his desire by giving him the measure of his capabilities. His desire became stronger and his successes greater. True this mental work, and this development of his thoughts, left his body in its primitive state of feebleness, the moral absorbed the physical, the steel wore away the scabbard; but God had given a support to the tender plant. Georges enjoyed peace under the protection of Jacques, who was the strongest and idlest fellow in his class, as Georges was the hardest worker and the weakest.

Unfortunately, this state of things did not last long. Two years after their arrival, when Jacques and Georges had gone to spend their holidays at Brest with a business correspondent of their father's to whom they had been recommended, Jacques, who had always had a decided liking for the sea, profited by the opportunity which offered, and, weary of his prison, as he termed the College, embarked on a privateer, which he described to his father, in a letter he wrote him, as a Government vessel. On his return to school Georges felt his brother's absence cruelly. Without protection against the jealousy which his scholastic triumphs had aroused, and which, from the moment that it could be gratified, turned into absolute hatred, he was insulted by some, beaten by others, ill-treated by all; each had his favourite torture for him. It was a rough experience, which Georges endured bravely.

Only, he reflected more deeply than ever on his position, and realised that moral superiority was nothing without physical superiority; that the one was required to make the other respected, and that only the union of these two qualities made a man complete. From this time he changed his manner of life completely; from being the timid, retiring, inactive creature that he had been, he became playful, noisy and rowdy. He still worked pretty hard, but only sufficiently so to maintain the intellectual pre-eminence he had gained in the preceding years. At the start he was clumsy and they made fun of him. Georges took their mockery in bad part, and that of set purpose. He had not by nature the courage of hot temper, but that of brooding anger; that is to say, his first impulse, instead of throwing him into danger, was to make him retire in order to avoid it. He needed reflection to make him act bravely, and, though this bravery is the most real, since it is moral bravery, he was afraid of it as though it were an act of cowardice. He fought then on every quarrel, — or rather he was beaten; but, though beaten once, he started afresh every day until he proved victorious, not because he was the stronger, but because he was the better disciplined. For in the thick of the most stubborn fight he preserved an admirable coolness, and, thanks to this coolness, profited by the least mistake on the part of his antagonist. This gained him respect, and his schoolfellows began to think twice before insulting him; for, however weak an enemy may be, you hesitate to enter into a contest with him when you know he is determined. Besides, the prodigious ardour with which he embraced this new kind of life bore its fruit; Georges gradually gained strength, and, encouraged by his first attempts, never opened a book during the next holidays, but began to learn to swim and ride, continually inflicting fatigue upon himself — fatigue which more than once threw him into a fever, but to which in the end he grew accustomed. Next to exercises of skill he added feats of strength; for whole days he dug like a labourer, and carried loads like a workman, then, in the evening, instead of lying warm and comfortable in his bed, he wrapped himself in his cloak, threw himself on a bearskin mat, and so slept all night. For an instant nature hesitated in amazement, not knowing if she should give in or win the day. Georges felt that he was risking his life, but what did his life matter unless it brought him the strength and skill that would give him superiority over others? Nature proved victorious; physical weakness vanquished by energy of will, disappeared like a faithless servant dismissed by an implacable master. In short, three months of this system so set up the weakly lad that on his return his comrades scarcely recognised him. Then it was he who sought out quarrels with others, and who thrashed in his turn those who had so often thrashed him. Then it was he who was feared, and who, being feared, was respected. Besides, in proportion as his bodily strength developed, the beauty of his countenance increased in harmony with it. Georges had always possessed fine eyes and perfect teeth; he allowed his long black hair to grow, and by dint of care reduced its natural coarseness, making it supple by constant use of the scissors. His unhealthy pallor was replaced by a fine morbidezza, suggestive of melancholy and distinction; in short he made a study of becoming handsome as a man, just as he had made a study of becoming strong and skilful as a boy.

So, when Georges, after having completed his course of philosophy, left College, he was a graceful young fellow, five feet four in height, and, as we have said, though a trifle slim, very well proportioned. He knew almost everything that a young man of the world ought to know. But he realised that it was not enough to possess in all respects the power of the average man; he determined to surpass him in all respects.

Besides, the course of training which he had determined to undergo became easy to him, now that he was set free from the routine of school work and henceforth master of his own time. He laid down rules for the employment of his day, from which he resolved never to deviate; he rode every morning at six; at eight, he practised pistol-shooting; from ten to twelve, fencing; from twelve to two, attended University lectures; sketched, from three to five, sometimes in one studio, sometimes in another; his evenings he spent at the theatre or in society, where all doors were open to him, less on account of his wealth than of his charming manners.

Georges accordingly became intimate with all the best known artists, literary men, and leaders of society in Paris; connoisseur alike in art, science, and fashion, he was soon cited as one of the most intelligent minds, as one of the most logical thinkers, as well as one of the most charming squires-of-dames in the capital. Georges had almost attained his ambition.

There remained, however, a final experiment for him to make. Certain of his mastery over others, he did not yet know if he was master of himself. Now, Georges was not the man to remain in doubt on any point whatever; he resolved to be enlightened on the question of self-mastery.

Georges had often dreaded becoming a gambler.

One day he went to Frascati's with his pockets full of gold, having said to himself, "I will play three times, each time for three hours, and during those three hours I will risk ten thousand francs; when the three hours are up, I will leave off, whether I have won or lost."

The first day Georges lost his ten thousand francs in an hour and half. He spent the rest of his three hours, however, in watching the others, and though he had bank-notes in his pocket-book for the twenty thousand francs which he had decided to risk in the two remaining attempts, he did not put upon the table a louis more than he had in the first instance intended to.

On the second day, he started by winning twenty-five thousand francs; then, as he had meant to play for three hours, he went on, and lost all his winnings, besides two thousand francs of his original capital. At that moment, noticing that his three hours had expired, he left off with the same punctuality as the day before.

On the third day, he began by losing; but, with his last bank-note, luck changed and declared in his favour; he had three-quarters of an hour left, during which he played with one of those curious runs of luck which frequenters of the saloons perpetuate by tradition. During these three-quarters of an hour Georges seemed to have made a compact with the devil, by whose aid an invisible sprite whispered to him beforehand the colour which would turn up and the winning card. The pile of gold and notes in front of him mounted up to the astonishment of the onlookers. Georges left off calculating, and threw his money on the table, saying to the banker, “Put it where you please.” The banker staked it at random, and still Georges won. Two professional gamblers, who had followed his luck and won enormous sums, thought the moment had arrived to take the opposite line, and accordingly laid against him; but fortune remained faithful to Georges. They lost all they had won, as well as all the money they had about them; then, as they were known as safe customers, the banker lent them fifty thousand francs, which they also lost.

Georges watched his heap of gold and notes increasing without betraying by his features the slightest trace of excitement, merely glancing now and then at the clock which would sound the hour for him to cease playing. At last the time arrived. Georges left off at once, handed his winnings to his servant, and with the same calmness, the same sang-froid, with which he had played, whether winning or losing, went out, an object of envy to all who had witnessed the scene that had just taken place, and who fully expected to see him come back next day.

But, contrary to everybody’s expectation, Georges did not appear again. Nay more; he shovelled the gold and notes into a drawer of his desk, determining not to open the drawer for a week. When the day arrived, Georges opened the drawer and counted his winnings; they amounted to two hundred and thirty thousand francs.

Georges was well satisfied with himself; he had overcome a passion.

Georges had the strong sensual passions of men who live in tropical countries.

One evening after an orgy, some of his friends took him to the house of a courtesan celebrated for her beauty and capricious likes and dislikes. On this particular evening this modern Laïs was seized with a virtuous fit. The evening was spent in edifying conversation; the lady of the house might have passed for a candidate for the *Prix Montyon.* The eyes, however, of the fair preacher might have been seen occasionally fixed on Georges with an expression of eager desire which belied the coldness of her words. Georges on his side, thought her even more attractive than she had been described to him, and for three days the recollection of this seductive Astarté haunted the young man’s maiden fancy. On the fourth day, Georges took the road to the house where she lived, and, with his heart beating loudly, pulled the bell so violently that the rope nearly broke in his hand. Then, hearing the footsteps of the maid approaching, he bade his heart stop beating and his face look unconcerned, and in tones in which not the slightest trace of emotion was apparent, asked the servant to conduct him to her mistress. The latter, hearing his voice, sprang to him with joy; for Georges’ image, the sight of which had made a deep impression on her the moment she saw it, had never left her mind since. She hoped, then, that love, or at any rate lust, was bringing back this handsome young fellow, who had so captivated her fancy.

She was mistaken; Georges had determined to put himself to a further trial; he had come there to make a will of iron give battle to his ardent feelings. For two hours he remained with the woman, alleging a wager as the excuse for his want of passion, wrestling against the torrent of his desires and the caresses of the siren; then, after two hours he went away, having come off victorious in this second trial, as he had done in the first.

Georges was well satisfied with himself; he had subdued his feelings.

We have said that Georges did not possess the physical courage which rushes into the midst of danger, but only the brooding courage that waits until it cannot avoid it. Georges feared that he was not really brave, and had often trembled at the notion that, if danger threatened, he might not be sure of himself and might, in fact, behave perhaps like a coward. This idea troubled him greatly; so he resolved to seize the first opportunity that offered to pit his mind against danger. The opportunity presented itself in a curious manner.

One day Georges was at Lepage’s with a friend of his, and, while waiting till there was a vacant place, watched the performance of a frequenter of the establishment, who, like himself, was acknowledged to be one of the best pistol-shots in Paris.

The man who was practising at this moment was performing nearly all the incredible tricks of skill attributed by tradition to St. George and which are the despair of the neophyte; that is to say, he hit the bull's eye every time, repeated his shots so that the second mark exactly covered the first, sliced a bullet on the edge of a knife, and performed many other similar feats without a single failure. It should be said that the presence of Georges acted as a further incentive to his efforts, for the attendant when handing him his pistol had whispered to him that Georges was quite as skilful a shot as himself, the result being that he surpassed himself at each turn, but without winning from his rival the praise he undoubtedly deserved, for, in answer to the applause from the gallery, Georges merely observed: —

"Oh! he shoots well, of course, but firing at a target is a very different thing from firing at a man."

This depreciation of his skill as a duellist surprised and mortified the marksman. So, when Georges had for the third time uttered this qualified form of praise, the other turned and remarked in a tone that was half bantering, half threatening: —

"It seems to me, sir, that this is the second or third time you have insinuated a doubt as to my courage; will you be good enough to give me the clear and precise meaning of your words?"

"My words need no explanation," answered Georges, "and seem to me to speak for themselves quite sufficiently."

"Then, sir, will you be good enough to repeat them once more, that I may estimate their import and the intention that prompted them."

"I said," replied Georges, with the most perfect calmness, "when I saw you hit the mark every time, that, if you were aiming at a man's breast instead of at a target, you would not be so sure either of your hand or your eye."

"And why, may I ask?"

"Because it seems to me that in shooting at a fellow-creature there must always be a degree of excitement that is bound to disturb the aim."

"You have fought many duels, sir?"

"Not one," replied Georges.

"Ah! then I am not surprised at your supposing it possible to feel alarm in such circumstances," replied the stranger with a slightly ironical smile.

"Excuse me, sir," answered Georges; "but I think you misunderstood me; I imagine that one would tremble with something else besides fear at the moment of killing one’s man.”

“I never tremble, sir,” answered the other.

“Possibly,” answered Georges in the same calm manner, “but I am none the less convinced that at twenty paces, at the same distance that is to say, at which you make all your bull’s eyes.”

“Well, what?” said the stranger.

“At twenty paces you would miss your man,” replied Georges.

“And I am convinced of the contrary, sir.”

“Allow me to doubt your statement.”

“You give me the lie then?”

“No, I maintain a fact.”

“A fact which I imagine you would shrink from putting to the proof,” replied the champion shot in a sneering tone.

“Why should I?” answered Georges looking him hard in the face.

“But you would prefer the experiment made on some one else than yourself, I take it?”

“On somebody else, or on myself, it does not matter which.”

“You would be something rash, I warn you, in risking such a proof.”

“No, for I have given my opinion, and consequently am convinced that I should run a very slight risk.”

“So, sir, you tell me for the second time that at twenty paces I should miss my man?”

“You are wrong, sir, it is the fifth time, if I remember light.”

“Sir, this is too much; you evidently want to insult me.”

“You are quite at liberty to think that, if you like.”

“Very well, sir. Your hour?”

“This very moment, if you choose.”

“Where?”

“We are only five hundred yards from the Bois de Boulogne.”

“What weapons?”

“What weapons? Why, the pistol of course; it is not a question of fighting a duel, but of making an experiment.”

“I am at your service, sir.”

“And I at yours.”

The young men, each accompanied by a friend, got into two cabs. On arriving at the spot the two seconds tried to settle the matter, but found a difficulty in doing so. Georges’ antagonist demanded an apology, while

Georges declared that no apology was due, unless he should be wounded or killed, since only in that event would he be proved wrong; and a quarter-of-an-hour was wasted by the seconds in fruitless negotiations. Then they wanted to place the combatants thirty yards apart, but Georges objected that it was not a genuine experiment unless they stood at the ordinary distance for shooting at the target, namely, twenty-five yards. Accordingly they measured out this distance. Then they wished to toss up to decide who should fire first, but Georges declared that he considered this preliminary useless, as, under the circumstances, the right of priority naturally lay with his opponent; while his opponent made it a point of honour that an advantage which, between two men of so much skill, would give every chance to the one who fired first, should be decided by lot. Georges, however, stuck to his point, and his opponent had to give way.

The attendant from the shooting-gallery had followed the combatants. He loaded the pistols with the same quantities of powder and shot that had been used in the previous target-practice; in fact, they were the same pistols, for Georges had insisted on this point as a *sine quâ non.*

The opponents stood at twenty-five paces and each received from his second a pistol ready loaded. Then the seconds walked away, leaving the combatants free to fire at each other in the order agreed upon.

Georges took none of the precautions usual in such circumstances; not attempting to guard any part of his body with his pistol, he let his arm hang down his thigh and presented the whole of his breast entirely unprotected.

His opponent was puzzled at such behaviour. He had often been in a similar situation, but had never seen such coolness, and the firm conviction Georges had expressed now began to produce its effect; this skilful shot, who had never yet failed, had misgivings about himself. Twice he levelled his pistol at Georges and twice he lowered it. This was contrary to all the rules of duelling, but Georges contented himself each time with the remark; —

“Take your time, sir; take your time.” At the third attempt he felt ashamed and fired. It was a moment of terrible suspense for the seconds; but directly after the report Georges turned first to right and then to left, and, bowing to the seconds to show that he was not wounded, remarked to his opponent: —

“Well, sir, you see that I was right, and that it is more uncertain work shooting at a man than shooting at a target.”

“That is so, sir; I was wrong,” answered Georges’ opponent. “It is your turn to fire.”

“Mine?” said Georges, picking up his hat, which he had placed on the ground, and handing his pistol to the attendant, “why should I shoot at you?”

“But, sir, you are entitled to do so, and I insist upon it; besides, I should like to see how you shoot, yourself.”

“Excuse me,” said Georges with his imperturbable calmness, “let us understand one another, please. I did not say that I should hit you; I said you would not hit me, and you have not done so; that is all.”

And in spite of all entreaties from his opponent that he would fire in return, Georges got into his cab again, repeating to his friend; —

“Well, didn’t I say that it made a difference whether you shoot at a wooden figure or a human being.”

Georges was well satisfied with himself, for he was now sure about his courage.

These three adventures got talked about and established our hero firmly in Society. Two or three coquettes made it a point of honour to captivate this modern Cato; and, as he had no motive for resisting them, he soon became a man of fashion. But just when they thought him most firmly secured, the time that he had fixed for his travels arrived, and one fine morning Georges took leave of his mistresses, and, sending a princely present to each of them, started for London.

In London Georges was received everywhere. He kept horses, dogs and cocks, and went in for racing and cock-fighting, took all the wagers offered, and lost and won large amounts with quite aristocratic unconcern. In short, after a year he left London with the reputation of a thorough gentleman, as he had left Paris with that of a charming ladies’ man. It was during this stay in the capital of Great Britain that he came across Lord Murray, but, as we have said, without making further acquaintance with him.

It was the period when travelling in the East became fashionable. Georges visited Greece, Turkey, Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt in succession. He was presented to Mehemet-Ali at the moment when Ibrahim Pacha was starting on his Saïd expedition, accompanied the Viceroy’s son, fought under his eyes, and was presented by him with a sword of honour and two Arab horses, selected from the finest of his stud.

Georges returned to France through Italy. Preparation was being made for the Spanish expedition; Georges rushed to Paris and asked permission to serve as a volunteer. This being granted, he joined the ranks of the first battalion that started, and was constantly to the front.

Unfortunately, contrary to all expectation, the Spaniards offered no resistance, and the campaign, which was thought at first likely to prove a stiff affair, turned out to be merely a military promenade. At the Trocadero, however, the aspect of affairs changed, and it was seen that it would be necessary to sweep away by force this last bulwark of revolution in the Peninsula.

The regiment which Georges had joined was not told off for the assault, so Georges exchanged and joined the Grenadiers. When the breach was effected and the signal for scaling given, Georges dashed in at the head of the attacking column and was the third to enter the fortress. His name was quoted in despatches, and he received from the hands of the Duc d’Angoulême the cross of the Legion of Honour, and from Ferdinand VII. the cross of Charles III. Georges had only aimed at one distinction; he bad obtained two. The gallant fellow was at the height of delight.

He thought the moment was at last arrived for his return to the Isle of France. He had accomplished all that he had dreamed of, and passed every goal he had desired to reach; there was nothing more for him to do in Europe. His strife with civilisation was over, while his strife with barbarism was about to begin. His was a mind full of a pride that would not be consoled by squandering in the pleasures of Europe the strength painfully acquired for a combat nearer home; all that he had gone through for the last ten years was in order to surpass his fellow-countrymen, white as well as black, and be able to crush by his sole influence the dislike which no coloured man had as yet dared to combat. Little cared he for Europe and its hundred and fifty millions of inhabitants, for France with her thirty-three millions; little for Parliament or ministry, republic or kingdom. What he preferred above all the rest of the world and what took up all his thoughts was his own little corner of the earth, a mere dot upon the map, like a grain of sand at the bottom of the sea. But then, on this little spot of earth, he had a great achievement to perform, a great problem to solve. He cherished but one recollection, of having undergone humiliation; he had but one hope, of getting the upper hand.

Meanwhile the Leicester put into port at Cadiz. She was on her way to the Isle of France, where she was to be stationed. Georges asked for a passage on board this fine vessel, which he obtained through the recommendation of the French and Spanish authorities. In reality, he owed the favour to the fact that Lord Murray had discovered the person requiring the passage was a native of the Isle of France, and was not at all sorry to have some one who would give him beforehand, during a voyage of four thousand leagues, those numerous bits of information on politics and customs which it is so important for a Governor to have acquired before entering upon his new sphere.

We have seen how Georges and Lord Murray had gradually formed acquaintance and arrived at a certain degree of intimacy on landing at Port-Louis. We have seen, too, how Georges, dutiful son as he was and devoted to his father, had been obliged on his arrival to submit to a lengthy proof before being recognised. The old man's joy was all the greater for his having reckoned so little on his son's return. Moreover, the man who had come home was so different from the man who was expected, that all the way back to Moka the father could never cease looking at his son, stopping occasionally as if lost in thought. Each time he did this, the old man pressed his son to his heart with such effusion that Georges, spite of the self-control on which he prided himself, felt the tears come into his eyes.

After three hours' walking they came to the plantation; Télémaque, at a quarter-of-an-hour's distance from the house, had gone on in advance, so that, on their arrival Georges and his father found all the negroes awaiting them with a joy that was mingled with fear, for this young man whom they had only seen as a child was come to them as a fresh master, and they wondered what sort of a master he would prove.

His return indeed had a most important bearing on the future happiness or misery of all these poor people. The auguries were favourable. Georges began by giving them that day and the next as a holiday, and, as the day following that again was a Sunday, this holiday meant a good three days' rest. Then Georges, eager to judge for himself what importance his landed estate would give him in the island, scarcely allowed himself time to dine, and then, followed by his father, visited the whole estate. Fortunate speculations, no less than diligent and well-directed labour, had made it one of the finest properties in the Colony. In the centre of the estate was the house, a plain but roomy building, shaded by a triple row of trees that surrounded it, bananas, mangoes, and tamarinds, which opened in the front on a long avenue of trees leading to the road, and at the back on fragrant orchards where the double-flowering pomegranates softly swaying in the wind kissed in turn a cluster of oranges or a bunch of yellow bananas, rising and sinking continually like a bee hovering between two flowers, or a soul hesitating between two desires. Lastly, all around it, as far as the eye could reach, stretched great fields of cane or maize which, as though overweighted with the rich store of food they bore, seemed to implore the hand of the reaper..

Last of all you come to what is called, in every plantation, the Negroes' Cantonment. In the middle of this rose a large building, used in winter as a barn, in summer as a dancing-hall, whence now proceeded loud shouts of delight, mingled with the sound of the tambourine, the drum and the Madagascar harp. The Blacks, eagerly availing themselves of their holiday, had at once put themselves en fete; for their primitive nature knows no gradations; they pass straight from toil to pleasure, and rest from their fatigue by dancing. Georges and his father opened the door and appeared suddenly among them.

Instantly the dance was interrupted; each pressed to his neighbour's side, trying to fall into their places, like soldiers surprised by their Colonel. Then, after a moment of agitated silence, they greeted their masters with a triple shout, which for once was a perfectly frank expression of their feelings. Well clothed and well fed, and seldom punished since they seldom failed in their duty, they worshipped Pierre Munier, the only mulatto, perhaps, in the Colony who, while subservient towards the Whites, did not treat the Blacks with cruelty. As for Georges, whose return, as we have said, had inspired these poor fellows with grave fears, as though he had guessed the effect produced by his presence, he raised his hand as a sign that he wished to speak. The deepest silence at once ensued, and the Negroes listened with eagerness to the following words which fell from his mouth with a slowness and solemnity befitting a promise and an undertaking:-

"My friends, I am touched by the welcome you have given me, and even more by the happiness beaming on your faces. My father makes you happy, I know, and I thank him for it; for it is my duty, as it is his, to make happy those who will obey me, I hope, as dutifully as they obey him. There are three hundred of you here, and you have only ninety huts; my father wishes you to build sixty more, one for every two of you; each hut will have a small garden, where every one will be allowed to plant tobacco, yams and sweet potatoes, and to keep a pig and fowls. Those who want to turn these things into money will go and sell them on Sundays at Port-Louis, and dispose of the produce of the sale as they please. If any theft is committed, there will be a severe punishment for him who has robbed his neighbour; if any one is unjustly flogged by the overseer, let him prove that his punishment is not deserved, and justice will be done him. The case of runaways I do not anticipate, for you are and will be too happy, I hope, ever to think of leaving us."

Fresh cries of joy greeted this short speech, which will no doubt seem trifling and frivolous to the sixty millions of Europeans who have the good fortune to live under a constitutional system, but which, out there, was received with the more enthusiasm since it was the very first charter of the kind which had ever been granted in the Colony.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DINNER DRUM.

DURING the evening of the next day, which was, as we have said, a Saturday, an assembly of Negroes, less merry than the one we have just left, was gathered under a large shed, and, seated round a huge fire of dried branches, was quietly spending the dinner-drum or *berloque* as it is termed in the Colonies. That is to say, each individual, according to his needs or his disposition, was engaged either in some manual work intended to be sold next day, or in cooking rice, manioc, or bananas. Some were smoking in wooden pipes tobacco, not only of native growth but even gathered from their own gardens; others were talking together in subdued tones. In the middle of all the groups the women and children, whose business it was to keep up the fires, went to and fro continually. But, notwithstanding all this bustle and movement and the fact that the evening would be followed by a day of rest, a feeling of sadness and uneasiness seemed to oppress these unfortunate people. This was caused by the tyranny of the Manager, who was himself a Mulatto. The shed was situated in the lower part *of* the Williams Plains, at the foot of the *Trois Mamelles* mountain, round which lay the property of our old acquaintance M. de Malmédie.

Not that M. de Malmédie was a bad master in the French acceptation of the term. No, M. de Malmédie was an easygoing man, incapable of spite or revenge, but infected in the highest degree with his own civil and political importance, filled with pride as he reflected on the purity of the blood that ran in his veins, and sharing, with an innate faith which had been handed down from father to son, in the prejudice which still at that period in the Isle of France pursued men of colour. As for the slaves, they were no worse off on his estate than they were elsewhere; they were unhappy everywhere, for the Negroes, in the eyes of M. de Malmédie, as of others, were not regarded as human beings, but as machines for yielding certain produce. Now, when a machine fails to do the work which it is expected to do, it is set going again by mechanical means, and so M. de Malmédie simply applied to the Negroes the theory which he would have applied in the case of machines. When the Negroes ceased to work, either from idleness or fatigue, the overseer started them again with the whip; the machine resumed its movement, and, at the week’s end, the total output reached its proper amount.

As for Henri de Malmédie, he was the replica of his father, only twenty years younger, and with an extra dose of pride.

The moral and material condition then of the slaves in the district of the Williams Plains differed widely from that of the labourers in the Moka district.

Accordingly, at the dinner-drums, called, as we have said, *berloques*, gaiety came quite spontaneously to the slaves of Pierre Munier, while, on the other hand, in the case of those of M. de Malmédie it had to be stimulated by a song, or a story, or something to be seen. There are always to be found, in the tropics as well as in our own land, beneath the negro’s shed as well as in the soldier’s camp, one or two of those comic people who undertake the business — a more tiring one than might be supposed — of amusing society, and whom society in its gratitude repays in many different ways; it being understood that if society forgets, as sometimes happens, to pay its debt, the comedian very naturally reminds it of the fact that he is its creditor.

Well, the man who discharged in M. de Malmédie’s establishment the functions which Triboulet and l’Angeli formerly fulfilled at the court of François I. and Louis XIII. was a little fellow whose corpulent body was supported by such slender legs, that it seemed at first sight impossible they could bear its weight.

However, the balance upset by the middle of his person was restored at its two extremities, the big trunk carrying a small head with a yellow complexioned face, while the thin legs ended in a pair of enormous feet. As for his arms, they were of extraordinary length, like those of monkeys, — animals which, while walking on their hind feet, pick up objects which they find in their path, without stooping.

The result of all this want of proportion in the limbs of this new character whom we have brought upon the scene was a singular mixture of the grotesque and the terrible. To European eyes, the latter would have predominated so as to cause a feeling of intense repulsion; the Negroes, however, who are less susceptible to beauty in the human form than ourselves, looked at him generally from the comic point of view, though occasionally beneath his monkey’s skin the tiger in him extended his claws and showed his teeth. His name was Antonio, and he was born at Tingoram; so, to distinguish him from the other Antonios, who would no doubt have felt hurt at being confused with him, he was usually called Antonio the Malay.

The *berloque* then was proceeding somewhat sadly, as we have said, when Antonio who, without being seen, had glided behind one of the posts supporting the shed, raised his yellow head and uttered a little hiss like that made by the hooded snake, one of the most terrible reptiles in the Malay peninsula. This noise if uttered in the plains of Tenasserim, the marshes of Java, or the sands of Quiloa, would have frozen the hearer with terror; but in the Isle of France where, with the exception of the sharks that swim in shoals round its shores, no deadly creature is ever seen, the noise in question produced no other result than that of making the assembled blacks open their eyes and mouths wide. Then, as though guided by the sound, all heads were turned to the new-comer, and all lips uttered the same cry: —

“Antonio the Malay! hurrah for Antonio!”

Two or three of the Negroes, however, started and half rose; they were Malagassies, Yoloffs, or Zanzibar blacks, who had heard that sound in their childhood and had not forgotten it.

One of them got up altogether, a dark, handsome fellow, whom, apart from his colour, you might have taken as belonging to the finest Caucasian race. But no sooner had he recognised the cause of the sound that had drawn him from his meditation, than he lay down again, muttering with a contempt that equalled the delight of the other slaves: — ” Antonio the Malay!”

Antonio with three bounds of his long limbs found himself in the centre of the circle; then, jumping over the fire, he came down on the other side and seated himself cross-legged like a tailor.

“A song, Antonio! a song!” they all shouted.

Antonio, unlike those artists who are sure of producing their effect, needed no pressing; he took from his wallet a jew’s harp, and, putting it to his mouth, extracted from it some preparatory sounds by way of prelude. Then, accompanying his words with amusing gestures suitable to the subject, he sang the following: —

I.

My home's a little hut,
I stoop to pass the door ;
My head the ceiling strikes
When my feet are on the floor.
At night I go to sleep,
But do not need a light ;
There's plenty holes, thank God,
Through which the moon shines bright.

II.
My bed an Island mat,
My pillow is a log ;
My cellar an old gourd,
In which I keep my grog.
On Saturday my wife
My fav'rite supper hashes,
And in my small hut cooks
Bananas on the ashes.

III.
My coffer is not shut,
Because it has no locks,
For who would look for pelf
Inside a bamboo box.
I empty it on Sunday
My 'baccy for to buy,
And all week smoke my carob pipe,
Until my stock runs dry.

To have an idea of the effect produced by Antonio’s song, in spite of the poverty of the rhyme and the simplicity of the ideas, one must have lived among these primitive people, with whom everything whatsoever is matter for sentiment. At the end of the first and second verses there was laughter and applause. At the end of the third there were shouts and hurrahs. Only the young Negro, who had manifested his contempt for Antonio, shrugged his shoulders with a grimace of disgust.

As for Antonio, instead of enjoying his triumph as one might have expected, and swelling with pride at the vehemence of the applause, he leaned his elbows on his knees, letting his head sink upon his hands, and seemed to give himself up to deep thought.

Now, as Antonio was the life and soul of the company, with his silence gloom once more settled upon the assembly. — They begged him accordingly to tell them a story or sing another song. But Antonio turned a deaf ear to them, and the most urgent entreaties obtained no other answer but the same incomprehensible and obstinate silence.

At last one of those nearest to him, tapping him on the shoulder, asked: —

“What’s the matter, Malay?; are you dead?”

“No,” answered Antonio, “I’m all alive.”

“What are you doing then?”

“Thinking.”

“What about?”

“I am thinking,” said Antonio, “that the time of the *berloque* is a pleasant one. When the kind God has lighted the sky and the hour of the *berloque* comes, every one works with cheerfulness; for everybody is working for his own benefit, though there are some idle fellows who waste their time in smoking, like you, Toukal; or greedy ones who amuse themselves by cooking bananas, like you, Cambeba. But, as I said, there are others who work; you, for instance, Castor, are making chairs; you, Bonhomme, wooden spoons; you, Nazim, are making

nothing.”

“Nazim does as he pleases,” answered the young Negro; “Nazim is the stag of Anjouan, as Laïza is its lion, and what lions and stags do is no concern of serpents.”

Antonio bit his lips; then, after a moment’s silence during which the young Negro’s voice seemed still to vibrate, he continued: —

“I was thinking, then, and telling you that the time of the *berloque* was a pleasant one; but in order that you, Castor and Bonhomme, may not feel tired with your work, and that the smoke of your tobacco may seem nicer to you, Toukal; and that you, Cambeba, may not go to sleep while your banana is cooking, you want some one to tell you stories or to sing to you.”

“That’s true,” said Castor, “and Antonio knows some right good stories and songs too.”

“But,” went on the Malay, “when Antonio doesn’t sing his songs or tell his stories, what happens? Why, everybody goes to sleep, because they are all tired out with the week’s work. Then the *berloque* is a failure; you, Castor, don’t make your bamboo chairs, or you, Bonhomme, your wooden spoons; you, Toukal, let your pipe go out, and you, Cambeba, let your banana burn; isn’t it so?”

“Quite true,” replied not only those particularly addressed, but the whole crowd of slaves, with the exception of Nazim, who continued to maintain a contemptuous silence.

“Then you ought to be grateful to the man who tells you good stories to keep you awake, and sings nice songs to make you laugh.”

“Thank you,” Antonio, “thank you,” shouted all the voices.

“Is there any one, besides Antonio, who can tell you stories?”

“Laïza — he knows some fine stories, too.”

“Yes, but his stories frighten you.”

“That’s true,” answered the Negroes. “And, besides Antonio, is there anyone who can sing you songs?”

“Nazim — he too has some fine songs.”

“Yes, but they make you weep.”

“That’s true,” continued the Negroes. “And who gave you a song four days ago?”

“You, Malay.”

“Who told you a story three days ago?”

“You, Malay.”

“Who sang you a song the day before yesterday?”

“You, Malay.”

“Who told you a story yesterday?”

“You, Malay.”

“And who has already sung you a song to-day and will tell you a story tomorrow?”

“You, Malay, you again.”

“Well then, if it is I who amuse you at your work, and give you more pleasure in smoking, and prevent you from sleeping while your bananas are cooking, it is only right that you should give me, who can make nothing, since I sacrifice myself for your sake, something for my trouble.”

The justness of this observation struck everybody; however, our veracity as historians compels us to confess that only a few voices, coming from the hearts of the most fair-minded of their number, answered in the affirmative.

“So,” continued Antonio, “it is fair that Toukal should give me a little tobacco to smoke in my pipe, isn’t it, Cambeba?”

“Quite fair,” cried Cambeba, delighted that not himself but some one else was laid under contribution.

And Toukal was compelled to share his tobacco with Antonio.

“Now the other day,” continued Antonio, “I lost my spoon, and had no money to buy another, because, instead of working, I was singing you songs and telling you stories; isn’t it fair then that Bonhomme should give me a wooden spoon to eat my soup with? Don’t you think so, Toukal?”

“Quite fair,” cried Toukal, delighted at not being the only one taxed by Antonio.

And Antonio held out his hand to Bonhomme, who gave him the spoon he had just finished.

“Now,” resumed Antonio, “I have tobacco for my pipe, and a spoon to eat my soup with, but I have no money to buy stock — meat. Castor ought therefore to give me that pretty little stool so that I can sell it at market and buy a small piece of beef, oughtn’t he, Toukal? oughtn’t he, Bonhomme? oughtn’t he, Cambeba?”

“Quite right,” exclaimed all three.

And Antonio drew, partly with his consent, partly by force, from Castor’s hands the stool on which he had just nailed the last piece of bamboo.

“Now,” continued Antonio, “I have sung you a song which has already tired me, and am about to tell you a story which will tire me still more. I think I ought to keep up my strength by eating something, don’t you, Toukal, and Bonhomme and Castor?”

“Certainly,” shouted with one voice the three who had contributed. — A terrible idea came into Cambeba’s mind.

“But,” said Antonio, disclosing a double row of grinders, large and shining like a wolf’s, “I have nothing to put between my little teeth.”

Cambeba felt his hair begin to stand up, and mechanically stretched out his hand towards the fire.

“It is fair then,” Antonio went on, “that Cambeba should give me a little banana, isn’t it, all of you?”

“Yes, yes, quite fair,” cried Toukal, Bonhomme and Castor; “hand over the banana, Cambeba.”

And all the voices shouted in chorus: — “The banana, Cambeba! “The unhappy man regarded the assemblage with a frightened look and rushed to the fire to rescue his banana; but Antonio stopped him on the way, and, holding him with one hand with a strength of which nobody would have believed him capable, he seized with the other the rope by which the sacks of maize are hauled up to the loft, passed the hook through Cambeba’s belt, signalling at the same time to Toukal to pull the other end of the rope.

Toukal grasped the situation with a quickness that did credit to his intelligence, and, at the moment when he least expected it, Cambeba found himself lifted from the ground, and, to the great amusement of the company, began to ascend to the sky, twisting round and round. At about ten feet from the ground the ascent ceased, and Cambeba remained suspended, still holding out his shrivelled hands towards the unlucky banana, about which he had no longer any means of arguing with his enemy.

“Bravo, Antonio, well done!” shouted all the spectators, holding their sides with laughter, while Antonio, now perfectly master of the object in dispute, carefully pushed aside the embers and drew out the smoking banana, cooked to perfection and browned fit to make your mouth water.

“My banana, my banana!” cried Cambeba in a tone of the deepest despair.

“Here it is,” said Antonio, holding out his arm towards Cambeba. “Me too far off to take it.”

“Don’t you want it?”

“Me can’t reach down to it.”

“Then,” replied Antonio, mimicking the language of the hanging wretch, “me eat him to prevent him being spoilt.”

And Antonio began to peel the banana with such comic gravity that the laughter became convulsive.

“Antonio,” cried Cambeba; “me beg you give me back my banana; banana, him for my poor wife who is ill and can’t eat anything else. Me stole him, me wanted him so badly.”

“Stolen goods never profit,” answered Antonio philosophically, continuing to peel the banana.

“Ah! poor Narina! she will have nothing to eat, and will be very hungry.”

“Come, take pity on the unfortunate man,” said the young negro of Anjouan, who, in the midst of the general merriment, had alone remained grave and sad.

<: Not such a fool,” said Antonio.

“I wasn’t speaking to you,” replied Nazim.

“Who were you speaking to then?”

“I am talking to men.”

“Well, I speak to you,” replied Antonio, “and I say, hold your tongue, Nazim.”

“Untie Cambeba,” said the young Negro in a dignified tone that would have done honour to a king.

Toukal, who was holding the rope, turned to Antonio, uncertain if he should obey; but, without answering his questioning look, Antonio continued: —

“I said, hold your tongue, Nazim, and you have not done so.”

“When a cur yaps at me I make no reply and go on my way. You are a cur, Antonio.”

“Look out for yourself, Nazim,” said Antonio, shaking his head; “when your brother Laïza is not here, you are not much good. So I fancy you won’t repeat what you said just now.”

“You are a cur, Antonio,” repeated Nazim, getting up.

All the Negroes who were between Nazim and Antonio made themselves scarce, so that the handsome Aujouan and the hideous Malay found themselves face to face, but at ten paces from each other.

“You say that at a good distance,” replied Antonio, grinding his teeth with anger.

“And I repeat it at close quarters,” cried Nazim.

And with one bound he came within two paces of Antonio; then, with a contemptuous tone and haughty look, his nostrils dilating, shouted for the third time: —

“You are a cur!”

A white man would have thrown himself upon his enemy and strangled him, if it lay within his power; Antonio, on the contrary, took a step backwards, folded his long limbs, gathered himself up like a snake, drew his knife from his coat pocket and opened it.

Nazim saw the movement and guessed his purpose; but, without deigning to make a gesture of defence, waited, standing erect, dumb and motionless, like the statue of a Nubian deity.

The Malay glanced for an instant at his foe; then raising himself with the suppleness and agility of a snake: —

“Woe to you!” he cried, “Laïza is not here.”

“Laïza is here!” said a grave voice., The man who uttered these words had spoken them in his usual tone; he had not added a gesture, he had not accompanied them by a sign, yet, at the sound of that voice, Antonio stopped dead, and his knife, which was but two inches from Nazim’s breast, fell from his hand.

“Laïza!” cried all the Negroes, turning to the new-comer, and assuming in an instant the same attitude of submission.

The man who had but to speak a single word to produce such a powerful impression upon them all, including even Antonio, was in the prime of life, of ordinary height, but his muscular limbs betokened herculean strength. He stood upright, motionless, his arms crossed, and from his eyes, half closed like those of a lion when meditating, there flashed a bright glance, calm and imperious. To see all these men awaiting thus in respectful silence a word or a glance from the other, one would have deemed it a horde of Africans awaiting a nod of the head from their King as a signal for peace or war. Yet he was but a slave among slaves.

After remaining for some minutes motionless as a sculptured figure, Laïza slowly raised his hand and pointed towards Cambeba, who had remained all this time suspended from the end of the rope, surveying dumbly, like the others, the scene that had just passed.

Toukal at once lowered the rope, and Cambeba to his great delight found himself on the ground once more. His first care was to search for the banana which, however, in the confusion that naturally followed the incident we have just described, had disappeared.

While the search was proceeding, Laïza had gone out, but re-appeared almost immediately, carrying on his shoulders a wild pig, which he threw down by the fire. “Here, my children,” said he; “I thought of you; take it and divide it.”

This action, and the generous words accompanying it touched two chords in the hearts of the blacks, greediness and enthusiasm, too closely for them not to produce their effect.. They all surrounded the animal and gave vent to their ecstasy in their own fashion.

“What a good supper we shall have this evening,” said a Malabar.

“Him black as a Mozambique,” said a Malagasy.

“Him fat as a Malagasy,” said a Mozambique.

But, as may easily be imagined, this kind of admiration was of too ideal a nature not to be soon replaced by something more practical. Before you could say “Jack Robinson “the animal was cut in pieces, half of it put aside for the next day, and the other half carved into fairly thin slices that were laid on the coals, and more solid bits that were roasted before the fire.

Then each went back to his place, but with a brighter face, for each was expecting a nice supper. Cambeba alone stood sadly in a corner.

"What are you doing there, Cambeba?" asked Laïza.

"Me doing nothing, papa Laïza," Cambeba answered sadly. "Papa "is, as everybody knows, a title of honour among the blacks, and all the Negroes on the estate, from the youngest to the oldest, bestowed this title on Laïza.

"Are you still suffering from having been hung up by your belt?" asked the Negro.

"Oh! no, papa, me not so soft as that."

"Then you are vexed?"

This time Cambeba only answered by moving his head up and down in an affirmative manner.

"And why are you vexed?" asked Laïza.

"Antonio, he take my banana which me forced to steal for my wife who is ill, and me have nothing to take her now."

"Well then, give her a bit of this wild pig."

"Her not able to eat meat, no, her no able, papa Laïza."

"Here!" said Laïza in a loud voice, "who can give me a banana?"

A dozen bananas sprang as ii by a miracle from beneath the ashes. Laïza took the largest and gave it to Cambeba. who made off without even taking time to say thank you; then turning to Bonhomme, whose banana it was: —

"You shan't lose by it, Bonhomme," he said; "you shall have Antonio's share of meat instead of your banana."

"And what am I going to have?" asked Antonio impudently.

"You shall have the banana which you stole from Cambeba."

"But it's lost," answered the Malay.

"That is not my business."

"Bravo!" exclaimed the Negroes, "stolen goods bring no profit."

The Malay got up, glanced at the men who but an instant before had applauded his persecutions and who now applauded his punishment, and left the shed.

"Brother," said Nazim to Laïza, "look after yourself; I know him, he will be doing you some bad turn."

"Look after yourself rather, Nazim; for he would not venture to attack me."

'Well then, I will guard you, and you shall guard me," said Nazim; "but that is not the question now, and we have got, you know, something else to speak about."

"Yes, but not here."

“Come out, then.”

“Presently: when they are all busy over their meal, no one will pay any attention to us.”

“You are right, brother.”

And the two Negroes began to converse in low tones and upon indifferent topics; but, when the slices were grilled, and the pieces of steak roasted, profiting by the close attention always bestowed on the first part of a meal that is seasoned by a good appetite, they both slipped out without the rest of the party noticing their disappearance, exactly as Laïza had foreseen.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RUNAWAY'S TOILET.

IT was nearly ten in the evening; the moonless night was fine and starry, as nights generally are in the tropics towards the end of summer. In the sky were to be seen some of those constellations with which we are familiar from childhood by the name of the Little Bear, Orion's Belt, and the Pleiades, but in a position so different from that in which we are accustomed to see them, that a European would hardly have recognised them; by way of exchange the Southern Cross, invisible in our northern hemisphere, blazed in the midst of them. The silence of night was broken only by the noise which the numerous woodpeckers, which swarm so plentifully in the neighbourhood of the Black River, made in tapping the bark of the trees, by the song of the blue fig-eaters and the *fondi-jala,* those warbling nightingales of Madagascar, and the almost imperceptible rustle of the dry grass as it bent beneath the feet of the two brothers.

The two Negroes walked in silence, glancing round uneasily from time to time, stopping to listen and then resuming their way. At last, arriving at a more bushy spot, they entered a sort of little bamboo-copse, and, having reached its centre, they halted, still listening and looking around them again. The result of this last examination was doubtless more reassuring than the previous ones, for they exchanged a look that indicated that all was safe, and both sat down at the foot of a wild banana, that spread its broad leaves, like a magnificent fan, among the slender leaves of the roses which surrounded it.

"Well, brother?" asked Nazim, with that feeling of impatience which Laïza had always checked when the other had wished to question him in the hearing of the other Negroes.

"You are still in the same mind, Nazim?" said Laïza.

"More than ever, brother. I should die, you see, if I stayed here. I have hardened my heart to work up to now, I, Nazim, a Chief's son, and your brother. But I am weary of this wretched life; I must go back to Anjouan or die."

Laïza uttered a sigh.

“Anjouan is a long way from here,” said he.

“What does it matter?” answered Nazim.

“It is the stormy time of year.”

“The wind will drive us all the faster.”

“But if the boat capsizes?”

“We will swim as long as we have strength; then, when we can swim no longer, we will take a last look at the sky where the Great Spirit is waiting for us, and sink to the bottom in each other’s arms.”

“Alas!” said Laïza.

“That would be better than being a slave,” said Nazim.

“So you want to leave the Isle of France?”

“I do.”

“At the risk of your life?”

“At the risk of my life.”

“It is ten to one you never reach Anjouan.”

“There is one chance to ten that I do.”

“Very well; “said Laïza; “be it as you wish, my brother. But think over it again.”

“I have been thinking over it for two years. When the Chief of the Mongallos captured me in battle, as you yourself had been captured four years previously, and sold me to the Captain of a slave-ship, as you yourself had been sold, I made up my mind that very instant. I was put in chains, I tried to strangle myself with my chains, so they riveted me to a bulkhead in the hold. Then I wanted to beat out my brains against the ship’s side, so they spread straw under my head. Then I was for letting myself die of hunger, so they opened my mouth, and, not being able to make me eat, forced me to drink. They were obliged to sell me quickly, they landed me here and got rid of me at half price, and even that was dear; for I was determined to throw myself from the first cliff that I should climb. All at once, I heard your voice, brother; all at once, I felt my heart beat against your heart, I felt my lips on your lips, and I felt so happy that I thought I could live. That lasted for a year. Then, brother, forgive me, your friendship was not enough for me. I remembered our island, I remembered my father, and Zirna. Our labour seemed to me first wearisome, then humiliating, then intolerable. Then I said to myself that I wanted to flee, to go back to Anjouan, to see Zirna again, and my father, and our island; and you were kind to me, as ever, and said ‘Rest yourself, Nazim, you who are weak, and I, who am strong, will work.’ Then you went out every evening, for four days, and worked while I rested. Did you not, Laïza?”

“Yes, Nazim, but listen: you had better wait a bit longer,” replied Laïza, racing his forehead. “Slaves to-day, in a month, in three months, in a year, we shall perhaps be masters!”

“Yes,” said Nazim; “yes, I know your plans; yes, I know your hope.”

“Then, you understand what it would be,” resumed Laïza, “to see these whites, so proud and cruel, humiliated and suppliants in their turn? to make them work twelve hours a day? to beat them, lash them with whips, and bruise them with sticks?”

“They are but twelve thousand, and there are eighty thousand of us. And on the day when we come to settle accounts, they will be lost.”

“I will say to you what you said to me, Laïza; it is ten to one that you do not succeed...”

“But I will answer you as you answered me, Nazim; there is one chance to ten that I do. Let us wait then...”

“I cannot, Laïza, I cannot... I have seen my mother’s spirit; she told me to return to my country.”

“You have seen it?” said Laïza.

“Yes; every evening for a fortnight, a *fondi-jala* has come and perched above my head; it is the same one that sang at Anjouan over her grave. It has crossed the sea with its little wings, and has come here. I recognised its song; listen, it is here.”

And at that very moment a Madagascar nightingale, perched on the highest branch in the mass of trees beneath which Laïza and Nazim were lying, began its melodious song above the heads of the two brothers. Both listened, bending their heads sadly, until the nocturnal songster broke off, and, flying in the direction of the native land of the two slaves, uttered the same strains at a distance of fifty yards; then, flying off again, still in the same direction, repeated for the last time its song, as a distant echo from their country, of which, at this distance, they could only just catch the highest notes; then, once more, it flew away, but this time so far, that the two exiles listened in vain; they could hear its song no more.

“It has gone back to Anjouan,” said Nazim; “and it will return in the same way to call me and show me the way, until I return myself.”

“Go then,” said Laïza.

“Now?” asked Nazim.

“Everything is ready. I have chosen the largest tree I could find in one of the most deserted spots near the Black River; I have hollowed out a canoe in its trunk, and have cut two oars out of its branches. I have sawed it through above and below the canoe, but I have left it standing for fear lest its top should be seen missing among the other tree tops. Now all that is left is to push it over, to drag the canoe to the river and launch it in the stream. Since you will go, Nazim, well, you shall go to-night.”

“And you, my brother, are you not coming with me?” asked Nazim.

“No,” said Laïza; “I remain behind.” Nazim in his turn heaved a deep sigh. “And what hinders you then,” asked Nazim, after a moment’s silence, “from returning with me to the land of our forefathers?”

“I have told you, Nazim, what hinders me; for more than a year we have been determined to rise in revolt, and our friends have chosen me as their leader. I cannot betray our friends by leaving them.”

“It is not that which keeps you back, brother,” said Nazim, shaking his head; “there is something besides.”

“And what else do you suppose can keep me back, Nazim?”

“The Rose of the Black River,” answered the young man, looking fixedly at Laïza.

Laïza started; then, after a moment’s silence: —

“It is true,” he said; “I love her.”

“Poor brother!” replied Nazim. “And what is your plan?”

“I have none.”

“What is your hope?”

“To see her to-morrow, as I saw her yesterday, as I saw her to-day.”

“But she, does she know of your existence?”

“I doubt it.”

“Has she ever spoken a word to you?”

“Never.”

“Then what of your country?”

“I have forgotten it.”

“Nessali?”

“I remember her no longer.”

“Our father?”

Laïza let his head sink into his hands. Then, after an instant: —

“Listen,” he said. “All you can say to make me go is as vain as all that I have said to make you stay. She is everything to me, family and country! I must see her, to live, just as I must have the air that she breathes, to breathe. Let us each follow our own destiny. For you, Nazim, the return to Anjouan; for me, to remain here.”

“But what shall I say to my father, when he asks me why Laïza has not returned?”

“You will tell him that Laïza is dead,” answered the Negro in a choking voice.

“He will not believe me,” said Nazim, shaking his head.

“Why not?”

“He will say to me, ‘If my son were dead, I should have seen my son’s spirit: the spirit of Laïza has not visited his father: Laïza is not dead.’”

“Well then, you will tell him that I love a white girl,” said Laïza, “and he will curse me. But never will I quit the Island where she is!”

“The Great Spirit will inspire me, my brother,” answered Nazirn, rising; “take me to the canoe.”

“Wait,” said Laïza.

And the Negro went up to a hollow maple tree, drew from it a piece of glass and a gourd filled with cocoa-oil.

What is that?” asked Nazim.

“Listen, my brother,” said Laïza: “it is possible that with the help of a good wind and your oars you may, in eight or ten days, reach Madagascar, or even the Continent of Africa; but it is possible that to-morrow, or the day after, a storm may throw you back on this coast. Then your departure will be known, then signals about you will have been sent all over the Island, then you will be obliged to play the runaway, and fly from wood to wood, from rock to rock.”

“Brother, I was called the stag of Anjouan, as you were called the lion,” said Nazim.

“Yes, but, like the stag, you may fall into a trap. Then it will be needful for you to give them no hold upon you; you will have to slip through their hands. Here is some glass to cut your hair with, and some cocoa-oil to grease your limbs. Come, brother, let me perform the toilet of the runaway Negro.”

Nazim and Laïza made for a thinner part of the wood, and Laïza began, by the light of the stars, with the help of his broken piece of glass bottle to cut his brother’s hair as quickly and as thoroughly as the most skilful barber with the sharpest razor could have done it. When the operation was finished, Nazim threw off his jacket, while his brother poured over his shoulders a portion of the cocoa-oil contained in the gourd, and the young fellow spread it with his hands over every portion of his body. Thus anointed from head to foot, the handsome Anjouan Negro looked like an antique athlete prepared for the race.

But, in order quite to satisfy Laïza, an experiment was required. Like Alcides of old, Laïza could grasp a horse by his hind feet, and the horse would try in vain to escape from his hands. Laïza, like Milo of Croton, could take a bull by his horns and throw him over his shoulder or knock him down at his feet. If Nazim could escape from Laïza, he could escape from everybody: accordingly, Laïza seized Nazim by the arm, tightening his fingers with all the strength of his iron muscles. Nazim pulled his arm away and it slipped through the fingers of Laïza like an eel in a fisherman’s hands. Laïza seized Nazim by the middle, pressing him against his breast as Hercules pressed Antaeus; Nazim placed his hands on Laïza’s shoulders and slipped between his arms and breast just as a snake slips between the claws of a lion. Then, and not till then, was the Negro satisfied; Nazim could not be captured by a surprise, and, if it came to a chase, Nazim himself could outlast the stag from which he took his name.

Then Laïza gave Nazim the gourd three parts filled with cocoa-oil, bidding him keep it even more carefully than the roots of manioc for appeasing his hunger, and the water to quench his thirst. Nazim passed his strap through the gourd and fastened it to his girdle.

Then the two brothers examined the sky, and, seeing from the position of the stars that it must be midnight at least, took the road by the hill of the *Riviere Noire*, and soon disappeared into the woods that clothe the base of the *Trois-Mamelles.* But behind them, at twenty paces from the mass of bamboos, where the conversation which we have just related took place, a man who, from his absolute immobility, might have been taken for one of the tree-trunks among which he lay, slipped like a ghost into the underwood, appeared for an instant on the edge of the forest, and, making a menacing gesture after the two brothers, went off, as soon as they had disappeared, in the direction of Port-Louis.

It was the Malay, Antonio, who had promised to be revenged on Laïza and Nazim, and who was going to keep his word.

And now, quick as he may travel with his long legs, we must, if our readers permit, precede him to the capital of the Isle of France

CHAPTER IX.

THE ROSEBUD OF THE RIVIERE NOIRE.

AFTER paying Miko-Miko for the fan, the price of which, to her great astonishment, Georges had found out for her, the girl, of whom we had a momentary glimpse at the door of her house, ordered her Negro to help the Chinaman to pack up his wares, and went in, followed, of course, by her governess. She was quite delighted with her new acquisition, which, nevertheless, was fated to be forgotten the very next day. She now went, with that undulating and unconstrained gait which adds so much charm to Creole women, and lay down on a large sofa, which was evidently intended to be used either as a bed or as a lounge. This piece of furniture was placed at one end of a charming little boudoir, filled to overflowing with many coloured Chinese porcelains and Japanese vases; the hangings which covered the walls were made of that fine printed calico which the inhabitants of the Isle of France get from the Coromandel coast, and which is called patna. The chairs, as is usual in hot countries, were made of cane, and two windows at opposite sides of the room, the one opening on the main court which was full of trees, the other on a large back enclosure, allowed the sea breeze and the scent of flowers to penetrate freely through the bamboo mats which served as shutters.

Hardly had the girl stretched herself on the sofa, when a small green parrot with a grey head, as plump as a sparrow, flew from its perch, and, alighting on her shoulder, amused itself by picking the end of the fan which its mistress, amusing herself in her turn, was opening and shutting mechanically.

We say *mechanically*, for it was manifest the girl was no longer thinking about her fan, charming though it was, and greatly as she had desired to possess it. Her eyes, fixed apparently on some part of the room where there seemed to be no special object to account for her steady gaze, had evidently ceased to take in objects present to her sight, in order to pursue some internal train of thought. Nay more; this internal vision evidently possessed for her all the appearance of reality; for, from time to time, a slight smile passed over her face, and her lips moved, answering in dumb language to some mute remembrance. This preoccupation was too foreign to the girl’s usual manner not to be noticed by her governess; so, after having watched in silence for some moments her pupil’s play of features, Henrietta asked: — “What is the matter, Sara, dear?”

“Nothing,” answered the girl starting like a person aroused from sleep. “I am playing, as you see, with my parrot and my fan, that’s all.”

“Yes, I can see you are playing with your parrot and your fan: but I am certain that, at the moment when I disturbed you in your reverie, you were not thinking of either one or the other.”

“Oh! my dear Henrietta, I declare to you.”

“You don’t usually tell fibs, Sara, and least of all to me,” interrupted the governess; “why begin to-day?”

The girl blushed deeply; then, after a moment’s hesitation: —

“You are right, dear creature,” said she; “I was thinking of something quite different.”

“And what were you thinking of?”

“I was wondering who that young man could be who passed by at such an opportune moment and got us out of our difficulty. I have never seen him before to-day, and no doubt he came with the vessel that brought the Governor. Is there any harm in thinking about him?”

“No, my child, there is no harm in thinking about him, but it was an untruth to tell me that you were thinking of something else.”

“I was wrong,” said the girl, “forgive me.” And she turned her charming head to the governess, who stooped towards her and kissed her on the forehead.

Both were silent for a moment, then, as Henrietta, like the strictly conscientious Englishwoman that she was, did not like to allow her pupil’s imagination to linger too long on the recollection of a young man, and as Sara, on her part, experienced a certain embarrassment in being silent, they both opened their mouths at the same instant. Thus their first words clashed, and each stopping short in order to let the other speak, the result was another interval of silence, broken this time by Sara.

“What were you going to say, my dear Henrietta?” asked the girl.

“Nay, you were saying something yourself, Sara. What was it?”

“I was going to say I should like to know if your new Governor is a young man.”

“I suppose you would be very glad if he were young?”

“Of course. If he is young, he will give dinners, and fêtes, and balls, and that will wake up our dull Port-Louis a little. Oh! balls, especially, — if he would only give balls.”

“You are fond, then, of dancing, my child?”

“Oh! am I not?” cried the girl.

Henrietta smiled.

“Is there any harm then in being fond of dancing?”

“There is harm, Sara, in running to extremes in everything, as you do.”

“Can I help it, dear?” said Sara, in a sweetly coaxing manner, which she could assume on occasions, “I am made that way; I like or I dislike, and I cannot hide either my liking or my disliking. Haven’t you often told me pretence was a wicked sin?”

“No doubt; but there is a vast difference between disguising one’s feelings and yielding unceasingly to one’s desires, I might almost say to one’s natural instincts,” replied the severe Englishwoman, who was sometimes as much embarrassed by the ready-witted arguments of her pupil, as she was alarmed at other times by the outbursts of her wild nature.

“Yes, I know you have often told me that, dear. I know that European women, those of the fashionable world at least, steer in a wonderful way between frankness and concealment by means of reticence of speech and immobility of feature. But, dear, from me you must not expect too much; I am not a civilised girl, but a little savage, reared in the wide forests and on the banks of great rivers. When I see anything that pleases me, I want it, and, if I want it I must have it. Then, you see, I have been rather spoilt, by you too, dear Henrietta, among the rest; which has made me wilful. When I have asked for things, they have generally been given to me; and, when it has happened that I have been refused, I have taken them, and have been allowed to.”

“And, such being your disposition, how shall you manage when you are M. Henri’s wife?”

“Oh! Henri is a good fellow; we have already agreed,” said Sara, with the most perfect simplicity, “that I shall let him do as he pleases, and that I, too, shall do as I please. Haven’t we, Henri?” continued Sara, turning to the door, which opened at this moment to admit M. de Malmédie and his son.

“What is it, Sara dear?” asked the young man, going up and kissing her hand.

“Haven’t we agreed that, when we are married, you will never oppose me, and will give me everything I want?”

“Upon my word!” said M. de Malmédie, “I hope this young lady knows how to make her conditions beforehand!”

“Haven’t we agreed,” continued Sara, “that if I like to be always going to balls, you will take me to them and stay as long as I wish, and not be like those wretched husbands who go off after the seventh or eighth dance? that I may sing as much as I like, and go fishing as much as I like; and that if I want a nice hat from Paris, or a nice English or Arab horse, you will buy them for me?”

“Oh! of course,” said Henri, smiling, “but, talking of Arab horses, we saw two fine ones to-day, and I am glad you did not see them, Sara; for as they are probably not for sale, I could not have given them to you, if you had happened to take a fancy to them.”

“I saw them too,” said Sara; “they belong, do they not, to a dark young stranger of twenty-five or twenty-six, with fine hair and splendid eyes?”

“Confound it, Sara,” said Henri; “you seem to have paid even more attention to the rider than to the horses.”

“It is easily explained, Henri; the gentleman came up and spoke to me, while the horses I saw only at a certain distance, and they did not even neigh!”

“That young fop spoke to you, Sara? and why?”

“In the first place,” said Sara, “I noticed no signs of foppishness about him at all, nor did my dear Henrietta, who was with me. Next, you ask why he spoke to me? Oh! good gracious! nothing more simple. I was returning from church, when I saw waiting for me at the doorstep a Chinaman with his two baskets filled with boxes, fans, pocket books, and a host of other things. I asked him the price of this fan... look how pretty it is, Henri “ —

“Well, go on,” said M. de Malmédie; “all this has nothing to do with the stranger’s speaking to you.”

“I am coming to it directly, uncle,” answered Sara. “I asked him the price of the fan, but his answer gave us some trouble, for the worthy man spoke nothing but Chinese. Then Henrietta and I were quite at a loss, and asked those who were standing round us looking at the beautiful wares displayed by the dealer, if there was no one who could act as our interpreter, when this young man came forward and placed himself at our service, spoke to the

Chinaman in his own language, and, coming back to us, said, ‘Ninety dollars.’ It isn’t dear uncle, is it?”

“Ahem!” said M. de Malmédie; “it is the price we paid for a Negro before the English put a stop to the trade.”

“Then this gentleman speaks Chinese?” asked Henri in astonishment.

“Yes,” answered Sara.

“Just fancy, father,” cried Henri, bursting into laughter, “he speaks Chinese.”

“Well, is there anything to laugh at in that?” asked Sara.

“Oh, nothing at all,” replied Henri, continuing to give way to merriment. “Why, this is a charming accomplishment possessed by the handsome foreigner. He can chat with the tea-chests and folding-screens.”

“The act is that Chinese is a very little-known tongue,” answered M. de Malmédie.

“He must be some mandarin,” said Henri, continuing to enjoy himself at the expense of the stranger, whose haughty look had rankled in his mind.

“At any rate,” answered Sara, “he is an educated mandarin; for, after speaking Chinese to the dealer, he spoke French to me, and English to my dear Henrietta.’’

“Hang it! The fellow speaks every language,” said M. de Malmédie. “He is just the sort of man I want in my office.”

“Unfortunately, uncle,” said Sara, “the person of whom you are speaking seems to be in a service that will give him a distaste for all other employments.”

“What is that?”

“In that of the King of France. Didn’t you notice that he wears in his button-hole the riband of the Legion of Honour, and another riband besides?”

“Oh! these ribands are bestowed now-a-days without its being necessary for the recipient to have seen service.”

“But still, speaking generally, the man who gets them must be a person of note,’ replied Sara, vexed without knowing why, and defending the stranger by that instinct, so natural to simple hearts, of defending those who are unjustly attacked.

“Well,” said Henri, “he must have been decorated for knowing Chinese, that’s all.”

"Anyhow, we shall know all this soon," replied M. de Malmédie in a tone that showed that he did not notice the quarrel between the young people; "for he arrived on board the Governor's ship, and, as people do not come to the Isle of France to leave it next day, we shall no doubt have the advantage of having him with us for some time."

At this moment a servant entered with a letter that bore the Governor's seal, and which had just come from Lord Murray. It was an invitation for M. de Malmédie, Henri, and Sara, to the dinner which would take place on the following Monday, and to the ball that would follow the dinner.

Sara's uncertainties were at once decided in respect to the Governor. He must be a most delightful man who started by giving invitations for a dinner and a ball, and Sara uttered a cry of joy at the thought of spending a whole night in dancing.

This fell out the more opportunely as the last vessel from France had brought her some lovely trimmings of artificial flowers, which had not given her half the pleasure they ought to have done, since she did not know, when she received them, what opportunity she would get of showing them off.

As for Henri, in spite of the dignity with which he received the news, he was not, at heart, indifferent to it. Henry regarded himself as one of the best-looking young men of the Colony, and, although he was engaged and his marriage with his cousin quite settled upon, he lost no opportunity meanwhile of flirting with other women. Besides, this was not difficult for him, as Sara, whether from indifference or habit, showed not the slightest jealousy in this respect.

As for his father, he was extremely proud when he saw the invitation, which he read three times, and which gave him a still higher idea of his own importance at finding himself, two or three hours after the Governor's arrival, invited to dinner with him, an honour which in all probability was extended only to the most considerable personages in the Island.

The invitation, however, necessitated some change in the family plans. Henri had arranged a grand stag-hunt for the Sunday and Monday following in the district of the *Savane*, which, at this period, being still uninhabited, abounded in big game. Moreover as the hunt was to take place partly over his father's property, he had invited some dozen of his friends to meet on the Sunday morning at a charming country-house which he owned on the banks of the Rivière Noire, one of the most picturesque parts of the Island.

It was impossible to keep to the days agreed upon, seeing that one of these days was that selected by the Governor for his ball, so it became necessary to ante-date the party by twenty-four hours, not only on account of the Malmédies, but also for some of their guests who would no doubt have the honour of being asked to dine with Lord Murray. So Henri went to his room to write some dozen letters, telling the sportsmen of the change made in their original plan, and which Bijou was ordered to deliver at their respective addresses. M. de Malmédie, in his turn, took leave of Sara, making the excuse of a business-meeting, but in reality to announce to his neighbours that in three days he would be able to give them frankly his opinion of their new Governor, inasmuch as he was dining with him the following Monday.

As for Sara, she declared that, in these unexpected and serious circumstances, she had so many preparations to make that she would be unable to start with them on the Saturday morning, and would be content with joining them on Saturday evening or Sunday morning.

The rest of that day, then, and all the next, was spent, as Sara had foreseen, in preparations for the important evening, and, thanks to the calm and method which Henrietta imported into all the arrangements, Sara was ready to start on Sunday morning, as she had promised her uncle. The most important matter, the trying on of the frock, was finished, and the dressmaker, a trustworthy woman, undertook that Sara should find it completed next morning; if anything wanted alteration, there remained part of the day to do it in.

So Sara started in the most joyous frame of mind possible. Next to a ball, what she loved best in the world was the country; there she felt free to be idle or to rush about at will, — a freedom which she, so fond of running to opposite extremes, never quite found in the town. Besides, when in the country, Sara ceased to recognise any authority, even that of her dear Henrietta, the person who, after all, had the most influence over her. If she was in an idle mood, she chose a beautiful spot, lay down beneath a clump of jameroses or shaddocks, and there lived like the flowers, drinking in the dew, the air, and the sunshine at every pore, listening to the songs of the blue fig-eaters and *fondi-jala,* amusing herself with watching the monkeys leaping from bough to bough or hanging by their tails, following with her eyes the graceful and rapid movements of the pretty green lizards speckled and striped with red, that are so common in the Isle of France that at every step you disturb three or four of them. There she would remain whole hours, putting herself in communication, so to speak, with all nature, to whose thousand voices she listened, whose thousand aspects she studied, whose thousand harmonies she compared. If, on the other hand, she was in an active mood, then she was no longer a girl, but a gazelle, a bird, or a butterfly; she jumped the streams in pursuit of dragon-flies with heads sparkling like rubies; she hung over the cliff to gather the broad-leaved lilies, on which the dew-drops quiver like globules of quick-silver; she sped, like a water-fairy, beneath a waterfall whose damp spray shrouded her as with a gauzy veil, and then her cheeks, in marked contrast to the other Creole girls whose dull tint so seldom takes colour, would be flushed with so vivid a pink, that the Negroes, accustomed in their poetic and flowery language to give a descriptive name to everything, called Sara the Rosebud of the Dark River.

So Sara, as we have said, was very happy, since she had in prospect, one for that very day, the other for the day following, the two things she loved best in the world, to wit the country and the dance.

CHAPTER X.

A PERILOUS BATHE.

AT this period the Island was not, as it is to-day, intersected by roads on which you may travel by carriage to the different parts of the Colony, and the only means of transport were horses or the palanquin. Whenever Sara went into the country with Henri or M. de Malmédie, horses were preferred without any discussion, for riding was one of the exercises with which the girl was most familiar. But when she travelled in company with Henrietta this method of locomotion had to be abandoned, since Henrietta much preferred the palanquin. So it was in a palanquin carried by four Negroes, followed by a relay of four others, that Sara and her governess travelled side by side, sufficiently close to one another to be able to talk through the drawn curtains, while their bearers, assured beforehand of a *pourboire*, sang at the top of their voices, announcing thus to the passers-by the liberality of their young mistress.

Henrietta and Sara presented the most complete contrast, physical and moral, that can be imagined. The reader is already acquainted with Sara, the capricious girl with dark h?ir and eyes, complexion as changeful as her mind, with pearly teeth, hands and feet small as a child's, and body supple and undulating as a sylph's. He must now allow us to say a few words about Henrietta.

Henrietta Smith was born in London; her father was a teacher who, having intended her for the teaching profession, had had her instructed from childhood in Italian and French, which, thanks to this early study, were as familiar to her as her mother tongue. Teaching, as everybody knows, is an employment in which as a rule large fortunes are not made. Jack Smith then, died a poor man, leaving his daughter Henrietta very highly accomplished, but without a dowry, and in consequence this young lady attained the age of twenty-five without finding a husband.

Just then, one of her friends, an excellent musician, as she herself was a perfect linguist, proposed to Miss Smith to amalgamate their talents and start a school in partnership. The offer was accepted. But, though each of the two partners gave every attention and all the pains and devotion of which they were capable to the education of the pupils who were entrusted to them, the establishment did not prosper, and the two mistresses were obliged to dissolve partnership.

Meanwhile, the father of one of Miss Smith's pupils, a rich London merchant, received from M. de Malmédie, a correspondent of his, a letter asking him for a governess for his niece, offering her advantages sufficient to compensate her for the sacrifice she would make in expatriating herself. The contents of this letter were communicated to Henrietta. The poor girl was without resources; she was not wedded to a country where she had no other prospect than that of dying of starvation. She looked upon the offer made to her as a blessing from heaven, and embarked on the first vessel sailing for the Isle of France, recommended to M. de Malmédie as a lady worthy of the highest respect. M. de Malmédie consequently received her, and entrusted her with the education of his niece Sara, who was then nine years old.

Miss Henrietta's first question was to ask M. de Malmédie what sort of education he wished his niece to receive. M. de Malmédie answered that that did not in the least matter; that he had engaged a governess to free him from anxiety on this score, and that it was her business, having been recommended to him as a very intelligent person, to teach Sara what she knew; adding only, by way of afterthought, that the girl being definitely intended as the future wife of her cousin Henri, it was important that she should not conceive an affection for any one else. This decision of M. de Malmédie's in regard to the union of his son and niece was influenced, not only by the affection which he had for both, but still more by the fact that Sara, who had been left an orphan at the age of three, had inherited nearly a million francs, a sum which would double itself during M. de Malmédie's guardianship.

Sara at first stood in great awe of this governess who had come from over seas, and it must be admitted that, at first sight, the appearance of Miss Smith did not greatly re-assure her. She was at that time a tall woman of thirty or thirty-two, to whom school work had imparted that dry, stiff look so often to be seen in ladies engaged in education; her cold eye, pale complexion and thin lips gave her a wonderfully wooden appearance, the frigidity of which was only partly redeemed by the warmth of her auburn hair. From early morning fully dressed and with hair neatly done up, Sara had never once seen her carelessly attired, and for a long time believed that Miss Henrietta, instead of going to bed at night like ordinary people, was hung up in a wardrobe as dolls are, and came out in the morning just as she had entered it the evening before. The consequence was that in early days Sara was fairly obedient to her governess, and learned a little English and Italian. As for music, Sara was constituted like a nightingale, and played the piano and guitar almost by instinct, though the instrument she preferred to all others was the Malagasy harp, from which she drew sounds which delighted the most famous virtuosos of Madagascar in the Island.

Sara had made all this progress, however, without losing any of her individuality, or her primitive nature being in any degree modified, while Miss Henrietta, on her side, remained such as God and education had made her; so that these two beings, so widely different, lived side by side without ever yielding to each other. Still, as both, in their different ways, were endowed with excellent qualities, Henrietta came to form a deep attachment for her pupil, and Sara, in her turn, entertained a lively friendship for her governess, and the token of this mutual affection was that the teacher called Sara “my child,” while Sara, thinking the title of “Miss “or “Mademoiselle” too cold for the affection she bore to her governess, invented the more affectionate address of “ma mie Henriette.”

But it was especially in regard to physical exercises that Henrietta maintained her feeling of dislike. Her education, exclusively scholastic, had only developed her moral faculties, leaving her bodily faculties in their natural clumsiness, so, however much Sara might try to persuade her, Henrietta had never cared to ride, even on Berloque, a quiet Java pony that carried vegetables for the gardener. The narrow roads made her feel so giddy that she had often preferred to make a détour of a mile or two rather than pass close to a precipice. It was not without deep searchings of the heart that she went on board ship, and scarcely had she sat down, and the aforesaid ship begun to move, than the poor governess declared she was overtaken by sea-sickness, which did not leave her for a moment during the whole voyage from Portsmouth to Port-Louis, that is to say for more than four months. The result was that Henrietta’s life was passed in perpetual apprehension in regard to Sara; when she saw her ride with the boldness of an Amazon, with her cousin, or bounding with the lightness of a fawn from rock to rock, or gliding with the grace of a water-nymph on the surface of the water, or disappearing for a moment in its depths, her poor heart was wrung with a terror almost maternal. She was like those unfortunate hens who have hatched swans, and who, seeing their adopted progeny plunge into the water, remain on the edge of the bank, unable to understand such boldness, and clucking sadly to call back the rash young ones who are exposing themselves to such awful danger.

So Henrietta, though for the moment carried quite comfortably and safely in a palanquin, was none the less already anticipating the countless agonies which Sara, according to her wont, would make her go through, while the young girl was elated at the thought of these two days of happiness.

The morning, too, was magnificent. It was one of those beautiful days at the beginning of autumn (for the month of May, which is our spring time, is autumn in the Isle of France), when nature, getting ready to hide herself behind a veil of rain, pays the sweetest adieux to the sunshine. As they advanced, the country grew wilder and wilder; they crossed, by bridges, the fragility of which made Henrietta tremble, the double source of the river of the *Rampart*, and the falls of the Tamarin. On reaching the foot of the *Trois-Mamelles* mountain, Sara made enquiries about her uncle and cousin, and heard that they were at that moment hunting with their friends between the big pool and the plain of St. Pierre. Finally, they crossed the little river of the *Boucaut*, rounded the hill of the great *Riviere Noire*, and found themselves facing M. de Malmédie’s abode.

Sara began by paying a visit to the inmates of the house, whom she had not seen for a fortnight; then she went off to say good morning to her aviary, a large enclosure of wire netting that surrounded an entire thicket, in which were confined together Guida turtle-doves, blue and grey fig-eaters, *fomli-jala*, and fly-catchers. From there she went on to her flowers, almost all brought from London; there were tuberoses, carnations, anemones, ranunculuses, and Indian roses, while in the middle of them the beautiful Cape immortelle reared its head as queen of the flowers. All these were enclosed by hedges of jasmine and China roses, which latter, like our roses of the four seasons, bloom the whole year round. This was Sara’s kingdom; the whole island was her conquest. So long as Sara remained in the grounds belonging to the house, all went well for Henrietta, who enjoyed the gravel paths, the cool shade, and the air redolent with perfumes. But you may guess that this period of tranquillity was very brief. By the time Sara had said a kind word or two to the old mulatto woman who had been in her service and was spending her declining years by the banks of the *Rivière*

Noire, by the time she had kissed her favourite dove, and gathered a few flowers to put in her hair, this part of the day's proceedings was over. Then came the turn for the walk, and then began the anguish of the unhappy governess. At first, Henrietta tried to oppose the child's independent spirit and limit her to amusements that involved less roaming about, but she soon recognised that this was an impossibility. Sara had escaped from her hands and made her excursions without her; so that, at last, her anxiety for her pupil proving greater than her fears for her own safety, she made up her mind to accompany her. It is true she nearly always contented herself with sitting on some point of vantage from which she could follow the girl with her eyes as she climbed up hill or down, but at least she seemed to be checking her by gestures and keeping her in sight. On this occasion, seeing Sara prepared to start, she resigned herself as usual, took a book to read, while Sara ran about, and got ready to accompany her.

But Sara had planned something else than a walk this time; she had promised herself a bathe in the beautiful, calm, and peaceful bay of the *Rivière Noire,* the water in which was so clear that at a depth of twenty feet you could see the polypes which grew at the bottom, and the different tribes of shell-fish crawling among their branches. But Sara had taken good care, as usual, to give no hint of her intention to Henrietta; only the old mulatto woman had been told, and she was to wait for Sara with her bathing-dress at the place which she had pointed out.

So Sara and her governess descended, following the banks of the *Rivière Noire,* which continually grew wider, and at the end of which could be seen the bay shining like a vast mirror. On each side of the stream rose a high bank of woods, the trees of which shot up, like tall pillars, seeking for air and sun, in the midst of a vast dome of leaves so thick that the sky could only here and there be seen; while their roots, like countless snakes, unable to dig into the rocks which are continually rolling down from the top of the hill, surrounded them with their folds. In proportion as the bed of the river widened, the trees on the two banks bent over, profiting by the space left by the water, and formed an arch like a gigantic tent; the effect of the whole was sombre, desolate, peaceful, and silent, full of romantic sadness and mysterious calm. The only sound to be heard was the harsh cry of the grey-headed parrot; the only living creatures to be seen, as far as the eye could reach, were some of those reddish monkeys called aigrettes, which are the scourge of the plantations, but are so common in the island that all attempts to exterminate them have failed. Only from time to time, scared by the noise made by Sara and her governess, a green kingfisher with white throat and breast, darted, with a shrill and plaintive cry, from the mangroves which dipped their boughs in the river, crossed the stream swift as an arrow, shining like an emerald, plunged into the mangroves on the opposite bank and disappeared. This tropical vegetation, this profound solitude, these wild harmonies, so much in keeping with each other, rocks, treés, and river, all this was nature as Sara loved it; it was the country as her primitive imagination understood it; it was a panorama such as neither pen, nor crayon, nor brush could reproduce, but such as her soul reflected it.

Let us hasten to say that Henrietta was not insensible to this magnificent spectacle; but, as we know, her perpetual fear prevented her thorough enjoyment of it. So having reached the top of a small hill which commanded a fairly wide prospect, she sat down, and after having, though without hope of success, invited Sara to sit beside her, she saw the girl bound away from her side, and, drawing from her pocket the tenth or twelfth volume of “Clarissa Harlowe,” her favourite novel, began to read it for the twentieth time.

The girl proceeded to the bank of the river, springing from rock to rock like a wag-tail admiring itself in the water; then, after satisfying herself with the timid modesty of a nymph of olden days, that there was no one in sight of her, she began to let all her garments slip off her one after the other, and put on a white woollen tunic, which, drawn tight round the neck and below the bosom, and coming down to the knees, left her arms and legs bare, and consequently free to move. Standing thus in her fresh costume, the girl resembled Diana the huntress ready to enter her bath.

Sara advanced to the edge of a rock which overhung the bay, at a spot where the water was very deep; then boldly, and with confidence in her skill and strength, certain of her superiority over an element in which she had been, in some degree, born, like Venus, she plunged in, disappeared beneath the water, and came up again, swimming at some yards from the place where she had jumped in. All at once Henrietta heard a call, and, raising her head looked all round her; then her eyes, directed by a second call, lighted on the fair bather, and she saw her water-nymph in the middle of the bay gliding on the surface of the water. Her first impulse was to recall Sara, but knowing that that would be trouble thrown away, she contented herself with giving her pupil a reproachful gesture, and, getting up, she approached the river bank as closely as the slope of the rock on which she had been sitting allowed.

At this moment her attention was for the moment distracted by signals which Sara was making. While swimming with one hand, Sara pointed with the other to the depths of the wood to indicate that something fresh was taking place beneath those sombre arches of verdure. Henrietta listened, and heard the distant baying of a pack of hounds. After an instant the baying seemed to her to come closer, and she was confirmed in this opinion by fresh signals from Sara; the sound, in fact, became more and more distinct, and presently could be heard the sound of feet rushing through the depths of the forest. At last, all of a sudden, at two hundred yards above the spot where Henrietta was seated, a fine stag was seen to crash through the branches and burst out of the forest, spring with one bound over the river, and disappear on the other side. After an instant, the hounds in their turn appeared, jumped the river at the spot where the stag had jumped it, and, hotly pursuing the scent, disappeared into the forest.

Sara had shared their spectacle with all the delight of a keen lover of the chase. So, when the stag and hounds had disappeared, she gave a cry of pleasure; but this cry was answered by a shout of terror so deep and heart-rending that Henrietta turned in amazement. The old mulatto woman, standing on the bank, like a statue of wonder, was pointing her arms to an enormous shark that with the aid of the flood-tide, had cleared the barrier reef, and, scarcely sixty yards from Sara, was swimming on the surface of the water towards her. The governess had not even the strength to cry out, but fell upon her knees.

On hearing the woman’s shout, Sara had turned and seen the danger that threatened her. Then, with admirable presence of mind, she made for the nearest point of the shore. But this point was at least forty yards off, and, no matter with what skill and strength she swam, the monster seemed likely to overtake her before she could reach land.

At this moment another shout was heard, and a Negro, clasping a long dagger between his teeth, rushed through the middle of the mangroves that bordered the shore, and, with one spring, covered nearly half the width of the bay. Then, instantly beginning to swim with almost superhuman strength, he tried to intercept the shark, which all this time, as if sure of his prey, was advancing, without quickening the movements of his tail, towards the girl, who, turning her head at each stroke, could see her foe and her defender coming up together with almost equal swiftness.

It was a moment of awful suspense for the old mulatto and Henrietta, both of whom, standing on a higher level, could see the progress of this appalling chase. Both of them gasping, with outstretched arms and open mouths, without any means of helping Sara, uttered broken exclamations at each alternative of fear or hope; but presently the fear preponderated, for, spite of the swimmer's efforts, the shark gained on her. The Negro was still twenty yards from the monster, which was but a few strokes from Sara. A terrible twist of his tail brought him still closer. The girl, who was pale as death, could hear the wash of the water ten feet behind her. She threw a last glance at the shore which she had now no time to reach. Then she realised how it was useless to struggle any longer for her doomed life; she raised her eyes to heaven, clasped her hands above the water, imploring God who alone could succour her. And now the shark turned over to seize his prey; and, instead of his green back, his silver belly was seen on the surface of the sea. Henrietta covered her face with her hands so as to shut out the sight of what was about to happen; but, at this supreme moment, a double report from a gun sounded to the governess's right hard; two bullets followed one another with the rapidity of lightning, making the water spout up, and a calm, sonorous voice uttered, in the satisfied tone of a marksman well-pleased with himself, the words: —

"Well hit."

dived and disappeared under the water. The shark dived in turn; presently the water was agitated by the lashings of the monster's tail, its surface was tinged with blood, and it became evident that a struggle was taking place beneath the waves.

During this time Henrietta had come down, or rather, let herself slide down from her rock, and had reached the shore so as to hold out her hand to Sara, who, utterly exhausted and still unable to believe she had really and truly escaped such a fearful peril, no sooner touched the land than she fell on her knees. As for Henrietta, scarcely did she see her pupil safe than, her strength failing her in her turn, she collapsed in an almost swooning condition.

When the two women regained their senses, the first thing they noticed was Laïza standing, covered with blood from wounds in his arm and thigh, while the carcase of the shark was floating on the surface of the sea.

Then both women at the same instant and with a spontaneous movement directed their eyes towards the rock on which had appeared the delivering angel. The rock was deserted: the delivering angel had disappeared, though not so quickly but that both had had time to recognize him as the young stranger of Port-Louis.

Then Sara turned towards the Negro who had just given her so signal a proof of his devotion. But, after an instant of mute contemplation, the latter had betaken himself again into the wood, and Sara looked around her in vain; like the stranger, the Negro had vanished.

CHAPTER XI.

A SALE OF STOCK.

AT the same moment two men rushed up who had seen, from a point higher up the river, a part of the scene that had just taken place; they were M. de Malmédie and Henri.

The girl then remembered that she was but half-dressed, and, blushing at the idea of being seen in that state, she called the Henrietta turned and saw, dominating the whole of the dreadful scene, a young man who, grasping his still smoking rifle in one hand and holding on with the other to a cinnamon tree, while his feet were supported by the edge of a rock, watched the convulsions of the shark. The latter, wounded in two places, had at once turned over, as if to seek the invisible enemy who had just struck him. Then, seeing the Negro, who was not more than three or four strokes from him, he abandoned Sara in order to pursue him; but, on his approach, the man old mulatto woman, put on a dressing-gown, and, leaning on Henrietta’s arm, who was still palpitating with terror, advanced towards her uncle and cousin.

The latter, following the trail of the stag, had reached the bank of the river just as the double report of Georges’ gun made itself heard. Their first impression was that one of their companions had fired at the animal; so they had looked in the direction whence the sound had come, and had seen, as we have said, from a distance and indistinctly, part of the incident which has been related. Behind the Malmédies came the rest of the shooting party.

Sara and Henrietta soon found themselves the centre of a group of men who questioned them on what had happened, but Henrietta was still too agitated and upset to give any coherent answer, and it was Sara who told the whole story.

There is a vast difference between being an eye-witness of a scene so terrible as the one we have tried to describe, following all its details with looks of horror, and merely hearing the relation of it, whether from the lips of her who had nearly been the victim, or on the actual spot where it has occurred. Still, as the smoke from the reports of the gun had hardly cleared away, and as the carcase of the monster was still afloat there, quivering in convulsions of pain, Sara's story produced a great effect. Each man was gallant enough to regret that he had not happened to be there in the place of the unknown stranger or the Negro. Each man was confident that he would certainly have aimed as correctly as the one, or swum as vigorously as the other. But to all these declarations of skill and protests of devotion, a silent voice replied inwardly in Sara's heart: — "None but those two could have done what they did."

At this moment the noise of the hounds showed that the stag was brought to bay. Every one knows what a delight it is for keen sportsmen to be present at the death-halloo of an animal which they have hunted the whole morning. Sara was saved and had nothing to fear. It was useless, therefore, to waste in condolences over an accident which, after all, had had no serious result, the time that might be spent more profitably elsewhere. Two or three of the sportsmen who were furthest from the girl made themselves scarce, going off in the direction the noise came from, and four or five others soon followed their example. Henri remarked that it would be bad manners not to go with his invited guests, to whom he ought to do the honours of his estate under all circumstances; so at the end of ten minutes the only person remaining with Sara and Henrietta was M. de Malmédie.

The three returned to the dwelling-house, where an excellent dinner awaited the sportsmen, who were not long in arriving, with Henri at their head. He courteously brought his cousin one of the stag's hoofs, which he had himself cut off, to offer it to her as a trophy. Sara thanked him for this delicate attention, and Henri, on his side, congratulated her on having regained her beautiful colour so completely that one would have said, to look at her, that nothing at all out of the way had happened; and Henri's remark was echoed in chorus by the rest of the company. The meal was of the gayest. Henrietta had asked to be excused from it; the poor woman had received such a shock that she felt a feverish attack coming on. As for Sara, she was, as Henri had said, to all outward appearance at least, perfectly calm, and did the honours of the dinner with her customary grace. At dessert several toasts were drunk, among which, it is but right to say, some had reference to the event of the morning; but in these toasts no mention was made of the unknown Negro or the strange hunter. The whole honour of the miracle was credited to the grace of Providence wishing to preserve to M. de Malmédie and Henri a niece and a fiancée so tenderly beloved.

But if during the toasts no word was breathed of Laïza or Georges, whose names, in fact, were known to nobody, each individual, to make up for this omission, spoke at great length of his own prowess, and Sara with charming irony distributed to each the portion of the praise that was due to him for his skill and courage.

As they were rising from table, the Overseer entered, coming to tell M. de Malmédie that a slave who had attempted to escape had been caught and had just been brought back to the slaves' quarters. As this was a matter that happened almost every day M. de Malmédie contented himself with the answer: —

"All right; let him have the usual punishment."

"What is the matter, Uncle?" asked Sara.

"Nothing, my child," said M. de Malmédie.

And the conversation which had been interrupted, was resumed. Ten minutes later it was announced that the horses were ready. As Lord Murray's dinner and ball were on the next day, everybody was anxious to have the whole day to prepare for this solemnity; so it had been arranged that they should return to Port-Louis immediately after dinner.

Sara went into Henrietta's bedroom; the poor governess, without being seriously ill, was still so agitated that Sara insisted on her remaining at the *Riviere Noire;* besides, Sara would be the gainer by Henrietta's prolonged stay, for, instead of returning in the palanquin, she would go on horseback.

As the cavalcade was starting, Sara ob served three or four Negroes busy cutting up the shark; the mulatto woman had told them where they would find its carcase, and they had gone to fish it out, so as to make it into oil.

On approaching the *Trois-Mamelles* the sportsmen saw from a distance the Negroes all assembled. When they reached the spot, they realised that the crowd was caused by the expectation of the punishment of a slave, the custom being, on such occasions, to collect the Negroes on the estate and compel them to witness the correction of any of their companions who had been guilty of misconduct.

The culprit was a youth of seventeen, who stood waiting, bound and gagged, near the ladder on which he would be fastened at the hour fixed for his punishment. This, at the urgent entreaty of another Negro, had been delayed until the cavalcade of riders should pass by, the slave who had importuned this favour having said that he had an important communication to make to M. de Malmédie.

At the moment, indeed, when M. de Malmédie arrived opposite the youth, a Negro who was sitting beside him occupied in stanching a wound which he had received in the head, got up and came close to the road; but the Overseer barred his further advance.

“What is the matter?” asked M. de Malmédie.

“Sir, said the Overseer, “it is the negro Nazim, who is about to receive the hundred and fifty lashes to which he has been sentenced.”

“And why has he been sentenced to a hundred and fifty lashes?” asked Sara.

“For running away,” answered the Overseer.

“Oh! said Henri,” that is the man whose escape you came to tell us of.”

“Yes, the same.”

“And how did you recapture him?”

“Oh! quite easily. I just waited until he was too far from the shore either to row or to swim back to it; then I got into a long-boat with eight rowers and started in pursuit; on rounding the cape at the south-west we saw him at about two miles out to sea. As he had but two arms and a miserable canoe, while we had sixteen and a good pirogue, we very soon came up with him. Then he plunged in and swam, to try and reach the island, diving like a porpoise; but, to cut the matter short, he was the first to tire, and, finding the business troublesome, I took an oar from the hands of one of the rowers, and, when he came up again to the surface, struck him such a well-aimed blow on the head that I thought, the next time, that he had gone under for good and all. However, we saw him come up again after a moment, but he was unconscious, and did not recover his senses until we reached the Brabant hill, and here we are.”

“But,” said Sara eagerly, “perhaps the poor man is badly hurt.”

“Oh! good gracious! no, Mademoiselle,” replied the Overseer, “a mere scratch. These wretched Negroes are as soft as anything.”

“And why have you been so long in administering the punishment he has so richly deserved?” said M. de Malmédie. “After the orders I gave, it should have been already done.”

“And so it would have, sir,” replied the Overseer, “if his brother, who is one of our best workers, had not assured me that he had something of importance to tell you, before the orders were carried out. As you were to pass the cantonment, and as it only involved a quarter of an hour’s delay, I took upon myself to suspend your orders.”

“And you have done quite right, Overseer,” said Sara. “And where is he?”

“Who?”

“The brother of this wretched man?”

“Yes, where is he?” asked M. de Malmédie.

“Here,” said Laïza coming forward.

Sara uttered a cry of surprise; she had just recognised, in the brother of the condemned slave, the man who had so nobly devoted himself to saving her life that morning. To her astonishment, however, the Negro had not once glanced in her direction, and seemed not to recognise her; instead of imploring her interference, as he certainly had the right to do, he continued to advance towards M. de Malmédie. It was not possible, however, to be mistaken: the gashes left by the shark’s teeth on his arms and thigh were still open and bleeding.

“What do you want?” said M. de Malmédie.

“To ask a favour of you,” answered Laïza in a low tone, so that his brother, who was twenty yards off, guarded by some other Negroes, should not hear.

“What is it?”

“Nazim is weak, Nazim is young, Nazim is wounded in the head and has lost a great deal of blood; Nazim is perhaps not strong enough to endure the punishment he deserves; he may die under the lash, and then you will have lost a Negro who, upon the whole, is worth a good two hundred dollars...”

“Well, what do you want?”

“I want you to propose an exchange?”

“Of what sort?”

“That the hundred and fifty lashes which he has earned should be given to me instead. I am strong, and can bear them; and the punishment will not prevent my doing my work to-morrow as usual, while he, I repeat, is but a child, and it would kill him.”

“It cannot be done,” answered M. de Malmédie, while Sara, keeping her eyes fixed on the Negro, looked at him with the most profound astonishment.

“And why not?”

“Because it would be an injustice.”

“You are wrong, for it is I who am really to blame.”

“You!”

“Yes, I,” said Laïza; “it is I who stirred Nazim up to run away, I who hollowed out the canoe which he used, and shaved his head with a piece of bottle glass, and gave him cocoa-oil to rub his skin with. So you see that it is I who should be punished, and not Nazim.”

“You are wrong,” answered Henri, taking part in the discussion. “You ought both to be punished; he for running away, you for having helped him to do so.”

“Then give me three hundred lashes, and the matter will be settled.”

“Overseer,” said M. de Malmédie, “give each of these rogues a hundred and fifty lashes, and let that end it.”

“One moment, Uncle,” said Sara; “I ask for these two men to be let off.”

“And why?” asked M. de Malmédie in astonishment.

“Because this is the man who threw himself in the water so bravely this morning to save me.”

“She recognises me!” cried Laïza.

“Because, instead of the punishment he deserves, we must give him a recompense,” cried Sara.

“Then,” said Laïza, “if you think I have earned a recompense, grant me that Nazim shall be let off.”

“Confound it!” said M. de Malmédie, “how you stick to it! Was it you who saved my niece?”

“It was not I,” answered the Negro; “but for the young hunter, she would have been lost.”

“But he did what he could to save me, Uncle, and he fought with the shark,” cried the girl. “Why, look at his wounds, which are still bleeding.”

“I fought with the shark, but in my own defence,” replied Laïza. “The shark attacked me, and I had to kill it in order to save myself.”

“Well, Uncle, you will not refuse to let them off for my sake? “Sara persisted.

“Yes, I shall certainly refuse,” answered M.de Malmédie; “for if once an exemption were to be made on such an occasion, these blackamoors would all be running away, hoping that there would be some pretty mouth like yours to intercede for them.”

“But, Uncle..

“Ask these gentlemen if the thing is possible,” said M. de Malmédie in a confident tone, turning to the young men who accompanied his son.”

“It is a fact,” they answered, “that such an exemption would be a ruinous precedent.”

“You see, Sara.”

“But a man who has risked his life for me,” said Sara, “ought not to be punished on the very same day; for if you owe him a punishment, I owe him a reward.

“Well, we will each pay our debt; when I have had him punished, you shall reward him.”

But, Uncle, now does the fault which these unhappy men have committed affect you, after all? What harm have they done you, having failed to carry out their design?”

“What harm has it done? Why, it takes off part of their value. A Negro who has tried to run away loses a heavy percentage of his price. Here are two fellows who yesterday were worth, one five hundred, the other three hundred dollars — eight hundred dollars in all. Well, if I were to ask six hundred to-day, I should not get them.”

“For my part, I wouldn’t give six hundred for them now,” said one of the sportsmen.

“Well, sir, I will be more liberal than you,” said a voice, the tones of which made Sara start, “I will give a thousand.”

The girl turned and recognised the stranger of Port-Louis, the Saving Angel of the rock, who was standing, dressed in an elegant shooting suit and leaning on his double-barrelled gun. He had heard all that had passed.

“Oh! it is you, sir,” said M. de Malmédie, while Henri’s face flushed from a cause that he could not explain to himself, “accept, in the first place, my best thanks, for my niece has told me that she owes her life to you; and, had I known where to find you, I should have hastened to see you, not to try to acquit myself of my obligation to you, which would be impossible, but to express my gratitude.”

The stranger bowed without replying, and with an air of haughty modesty that did not escape Sara. Accordingly she hastened to add; —

“My Uncle is right, sir; such a service cannot be repaid. But be assured that, as long as I live, I shall remember that I owe you my life.”

“A couple of charges of powder and two lead bullets do not deserve such thanks, Mademoiselle. So I shall consider myself fortunate if M. de Malmédie’s gratitude will go so far as to let me have, at the price I have offered him, these two Negroes, whom I need.”

“Henri,” said M. de Malmédie *sotto voce*, “were we not told yesterday that there was a slave-ship in sight?”

“Yes father!” answered Henri.

“Good,” continued M. de Malmédie,. speaking this time to himself, “good, we shall be able to replace them.”

“I await your answer, sir,” said the stranger.

“Why, sir, with the greatest pleasure. The Negroes are yours, you can take them; but, if I were in your place and could spare them from work for three or four days, I should have them punished this very day in the way they deserve.”

“That is my affair,” said the stranger, smiling. “The thousand dollars shall be sent you this evening.”

“Excuse me, sir,” said Henri, “you are mistaken: my father’s intention is not to sell you these two men, but to give them to you. The life of two wretched Negroes cannot be put in comparison with a life so precious as that of my fair cousin. Let us, at least, offer you what we have, and what you appear to desire.”

“But, sir,” said the stranger, raising his head haughtily, while M. de Malmédie gave his son a most meaning look, “that was not our agreement.”

“Well, then,” said Sara, “allow me to make an alteration in it, and for the sake of her whose life you have saved, take these two Negroes whom we offer you.”

“I thank you, Mademoiselle,” said the stranger; “it would be absurd of me to insist further. So I accept; and it *is I* who now regard myself as in your debt.

And the stranger bowed and stepped back, as a sign that he did not wish to detain the company from their journey any longer.

The men exchanged bows; but Sara and Georges exchanged looks.

The cavalcade resumed its journey, and Georges followed it with his eye for some time with that contraction of the brows which was habitual to him when a bitter thought pre-occupied him. Then, turning to the Negroes and approaching Nazim, he said to the Overseer: —

“Unbind that man; for he and his brother are now my property.”

The Overseer, who had heard the con versation between the stranger and M. de Malmédie, made no difficulty. Nazim accordingly was unbound and handed over with Laïza to his new master.

“Now, my friends,” said the stranger turning to the Negroes and drawing from his pocket a purse filled with gold, “as I have received a present from your master, it is right that I, in my turn, should make you a small present. Take this purse and divide its contents amongst you.”

And he handed the purse to the Negro who was nearest to him, then, turning to the two slaves, who, standing behind him, were awaiting his orders, he said to them: —

“As for you two, do what you like now, go where you will, you are free.”

Laïza and Nazim both uttered a cry of joy mingled with doubt, for they could not believe this act of generosity on the part of a man to whom they had rendered no service. But Georges repeated his words, upon which Laïza and Nazim fell on their knees, and kissed the hand of the man who had set them free, with an outburst of gratitude impossible to describe.

As for Georges, he replaced on his head his large straw hat, which up to now he had been holding in his hand, threw his gun over his shoulder, and, as it was beginning to grow late, resumed his road to Moka.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BALL.

THE dinner and ball the announcement of which had caused such excitement in Port-Louis were to take place, as we have said, on the next day at Government House.

No one who has not lived in the Colonies, and especially in the Isle of France, has any idea of the luxury prevalent below the twentieth degree of South latitude. In addition to the marvels from Paris which cross the sea for the adornment of the graceful Creoles of Mauritius, they can make choice, at first hand, from among the diamonds of Visapore, the pearls of Ophir, the cashmeres of Siam, and the beautiful muslins of Calcutta. Not a vessel from the land of the "Thousand and One Nights "stops at the Isle of France without leaving behind a portion of the treasures she is carrying to Europe, and the dazzling effect presented by an assembly in the Isle of France causes astonishment even to one who is accustomed to the elegance of Paris or the profusion of England.

Accordingly the drawing-room in Gov-'ernment House, which in the space of three days had been entirely refurnished by Lord Murray in the most fashionable and comfortable style, presented, towards four o'clock in the afternoon, all the appearance of an apartment in the Rue du Mont-Blanc or Belgrave Square. The whole aristocracy of the Colony, male and female, were there assembled; the men in the simple dress imposed by modern fashion; the women sparkling with diamonds, loaded with pearls, attired all ready for the ball, with nothing to distinguish them from our European women but that languid and charming morbidezza of complexion possessed by none but Creole women. As each fresh arrival was announced, the person who entered was greeted with a general smile, for, at Port-Louis, everybody knows everybody else, and the only curiosity evinced at the entrance of a lady into the salon is to discover what new gown she has bought, where that gown comes from, of what material it is made, and how it is trimmed. It was especially in regard to the English women that the curiosity of the Creoles was aroused; for, in that perpetual strife of female vanity of which Port-Louis is the scene, the great question with the native ladies is how to outdo their foreign sisters in magnificence. The murmurs and whisperings which were heard at each fresh arrival were therefore louder and more prolonged when the lackey made the official announcement of some British name, the harsh sound of which contrasted as strongly with the soft-sounding native names as the fair pale daughter of the North differed from the dark maidens of the tropics. As each fresh guest entered, Lord Murray, with the politeness that characterises Englishmen in high society, advanced to meet them. If it was a lady, he offered his arm to lead her to her seat, paying her some compliment on the way; if it was a man, he shook hands with him and said a gracious word in his ear, so that everybody acknowledged the new Governor to be a charming man.

Presently the Malmédies were announced. Their arrival was expected with as much impatience as curiosity, not only because M. de Malmédie was one of the richest and most important men of the Island, but even more because Sara was one of the wealthiest and most elegant of its heiresses. Every one's eyes accordingly followed Lord Murray as he went to meet her, for the question of how she would be dressed was the one that chiefly filled the minds of all the prettiest women among the guests.

Contrary to the custom of Creole women and to all expectation, Sara was dressed exceedingly simply, in a charming gown of Indian muslin, transparent and light as the gauze which Juvenal terms “woven air,” without embroidery, without a single pearl or diamond; its sole adornment was a spray of pink hawthorn. A garland of the same leaves surrounded her head, while a bunch of the flowers was pinned at her waist; not so much as a bracelet set off the lustrous tint of her skin. Only her fine, dark, and silky hair fell in long ringlets over her shoulders, and in her hand she held the fan, that marvel of Chinese workmanship, which she had bought from Miko-Miko.

As we have said, every one knew every one else in the Isle of France; so that, after the arrival of the Malmédies, it was felt that there was no one else to come, since all those who, by their rank and wealth, were in the habit of meeting in society, were assembled. The company therefore naturally ceased to turn their eyes to the door, through which no one else was expected to enter, and, after waiting for ten minutes, began to ask each other what other guest Lord Murray could be expecting, when the door opened once more, and the servant in a loud voice announced “Monsieur Georges Munier.”

Had a thunderbolt fallen into the middle of the company whom we have just brought together under the reader’s eyes, it would certainly not have caused the effect produced by this simple announcement. On hearing the name, every one turned towards the door, wondering who it could be that was coming in; for, although the name was well known in the Isle of France, the person who bore it had been so long absent that people had almost forgotten his existence.

Georges entered.

The young mulatto was dressed with simplicity, but with extremely good taste. His well-fitting black coat, from the button-hole of which were suspended at the end of a gold chain the two little crosses with which he had been decorated, showed off all the elegance of his figure. His tight-fitting trousers revealed the graceful, lithe shape of limb peculiar to men of colour, and, contrary to the custom of these latter, he wore no jewellery except a thin gold chain like the one in his button-hole, the only visible end of which disappeared into the pocket of his white piqué waistcoat. In addition, a black cravat tied with that studied negligence only acquired by fashionable habits, and over which a round shirt-collar was turned down, framed his handsome face, the fine morbidezza of which was set off by his dark moustache and hair.

Lord Murray advanced further to meet Georges than he had done in the case of any one else, and, after shaking hands with him, introduced him to three or four ladies and five or six English officers who were in the room as a travelling companion, on whose society he had congratulated himself during the whole of the voyage. Then, turning to the rest of the company he said: —

“Gentlemen, I present to you M. Georges Munier. M. Munier is your fellow-countryman, and the return of a man so distinguished as he is, ought almost to be the occasion of a national festivity.”

Georges bowed in token of acknowledgment, but, whatever respect might be due to the Governor, especially in his own house, scarcely a single voice found strength to stammer a few words in answer to the introduction just made by Lord Murray.

Lord Murray either did not notice this, or appeared not to, and, on the servant announcing that dinner was served, the Governor gave his arm to

Sara, and a move was made to the dining-room.

After what we know of Georges' character it will be easily guessed that it was not unintentionally that he had made the company wait for him, now that he was on the point of entering upon his struggle with that prejudice which he had determined to combat; he had wanted, at the first onset, to see his enemy face to face, and what he wished for had happened; the announcement of his name and his entrance had produced all the effect he could have expected.

But the person most stirred in the whole august assembly was undoubtedly Sara. Knowing that the young hunter of the *Riviere Noire* had arrived at Port-Louis with Lord Murray, she had expected beforehand to see him, and possibly it was with a view to this fresh arrival from Europe that she had dressed herself with the elegant simplicity so much appreciated among ourselves, and which, it must be confessed, is so often replaced in the Colonies by an overdone smartness. So, on entering the salon, she had looked everywhere for the young stranger. One glance had sufficed to tell her that he was not there, but she concluded that he would arrive presently, and that when he was announced, as he no doubt would be, she would then learn for a certainty both his name and who he was.

What Sara had foreseen had happened. Scarcely had she taken her place in the circle of ladies, and the Messieurs Malmédie joined the group of men, than M. Georges Munier was announced.

At this name so well-known in the Island, but not usually heard mentioned in such circumstances, Sara started violently and then recovered herself, but yet was overcome with anxiety. She saw the young stranger of Port-Louis appear, with his calm face, his haughty look, his lip curling with contempt, and on the third appearance he seemed, let us hasten to add, even more handsome and romantic in her eyes than on the two previous occasions. Then she followed, not only with her eyes but with her heart, the introduction of Georges into society made by Lord Murray, and her heart was wounded when the repulsion inspired by the young mulatto's birth expressed itself by silence on the part of the guests, and it was with eyes almost blinded by tears that she responded to the swift and penetrating glance bestowed upon her by Georges.

Then Lord Murray gave her his arm and she saw nothing further, for she felt herself turning red and pale almost simultaneously beneath Georges' glance, and, feeling convinced that all eyes were directed towards herself, had immediately hastened to escape from the general curiosity. But on this point Sara was mistaken; nobody had given her a thought, for, with the exception of M. Malmédie and his son, they were all in ignorance of the two preceding incidents which had brought the young man and the girl in contact with each other, and nobody dreamed that there could be anything in common between Mademoiselle Sara de Malmédie and M. Georges Munier.

When once seated at table, Sara ventured to look round the room. She was placed on the right of the Governor, who had on his left the wife of the Military Commandant of the Island; opposite to her was the Commandant himself, seated between two ladies belonging to the most important families in the Island. Next, to the right and left of these two ladies, came M. de Malmédie and his son, and so on; while Georges, either by accident or by the graceful forethought of Lord Murray, was placed between two English ladies.

Sara breathed more freely: she knew that the prejudice that pursued Georges did not affect the minds of strangers, and that any one coming from a European country must have lived a very long time in the Colonies before sharing in it; she saw Georges therefore carrying out in the most easy fashion his rôle of an agreeable guest between the alternate smiles of Lord Murray’s compatriots, who were delighted to have as their neighbour a man who spoke their language as well as if he had been himself an Englishman by birth.

While thus directing her glance towards the centre of the table, Sara noticed that Henri’s eyes were fixed upon her. She understood perfectly what was passing in her fiancé’s mind, and, with a movement which her will could not control, lowered her own eyes and blushed.

Lord Murray was, in the fullest meaning of the term, a great nobleman, admirably skilled in playing the part of host — a part so difficult to learn, unless it is fulfilled instinctively, and unless a man is, so to speak, born to it. Accordingly, when the constraint and uneasiness which usually prevail during the first courses of a formal banquet were dispelled, he began to address remarks to his guests, speaking to each on the subject calculated to elicit the best replies, reminding the English officers of some noted engagement, and the merchants of some brilliant piece of speculation, in the midst of all this making an observation from time to time to Georges, which showed that with him he could converse on all topics, and that he was addressing a man of universal information, and not a specialist on military affairs or on questions of commerce.

In this way the dinner progressed. Georges with his quick intelligence, but with perfect modesty, had answered every observation and every question from the Governor in a way that proved to the officers that he, like themselves, had seen service, and to the merchants that he was acquainted with those great commercial concerns which make the whole world one single family, united by the bond of common interests. Moreover, interspersed with this fragmentary conversation, there had sprung to his lips the names of all those who in France or England or Spain occupied a high position in the world of politics, or of society, or of art, each accompanied by one of those remarks which show, in a single flash, that the man who is speaking speaks with a full knowledge of the character, or the genius, or the position of the men whom he has just mentioned.

Although these tit-bits of conversation, if one may so express it, had passed over the heads of the majority of the guests, there were among their number men who were capable of appreciating the superiority with which Georges had touched upon all these topics, so that, although the feeling of repulsion which they had shown towards the young mulatto still remained, their astonishment had increased, and, together with the astonishment, envy had entered the hearts of some of them. Henri especially, taken up with the idea that Sara had bestowed more notice on Georges than, considering her position as his fiancé, and her dignity as a white woman, she had any business to do, Henri, I say, felt an uncontrollable bitterness rising in his heart. Then, at the mention of the name of Munier, recollections of his boyhood were awakened; he recalled the day when, wishing to snatch the flag from Georges' hands, the latter's brother Jacques had struck him that severe blow in the face with his fist. All these bygone misdeeds of the two brothers stirred menacingly in his breast; and the thought that Sara had on the previous day been rescued by this man, instead of effacing these accusing murmurs in respect to the past, only fanned his resentment against him the more. As for M. Malmédie, he had been occupied throughout the dinner in a discussion with his neighbour on a new method of refining sugar, which would have the result of increasing by thirty per cent, the value of the produce of his estate. Consequently, apart from his first astonishment at finding in Georges the preserver of his niece, and at meeting Georges in Lord Murray's house, he had paid no further attention to him.

But, as we have said, this was not the case with Henri, who had not lost a word of the questions put by Lord Murray and the answers given by Georges. He had recognised the sound sense and cultivated thought in each of these answers; he had studied the firm glance which was the exponent of Georges' authoritative will, and realised that here was no longer, as on the day of his departure, a downtrodden boy whom he saw before him, but a powerful opponent who came to challenge him.

Had Georges, on his return to the Isle of France, relapsed humbly into the condition for which, according to the views of white men, Nature had intended him, and suffered himself to be eclipsed by the obscurity of his birth, Henri would in that case have passed over, or at any rate have cherished no malice against him for, the wrong inflicted upon him by Georges fourteen years ago. But the case was far otherwise.

He had come back proudly in broad daylight, as it were, and had, by a service rendered to his family, intermeddled in its life, and now came as his equal in rank and his superior in intelligence to sit at the same table with himself. This was more than Henri could bear, and Henri in his own mind deliberately declared war against him.

So, on leaving the table, and when they had just passed out into the garden, Henri went up to Sara, who, with several other ladies, was seated in an arbour parallel to the one beneath which the gentlemen were taking their coffee. Sara started, feeling an instinctive certainty that what Henri was about to say concerned Georges.

"Well, fair cousin," said the young man, leaning over the bamboo chair on which the girl was sitting, "what do you think of the dinner?"

"That question, I presume, does not relate to the menu?" answered Sara with a smile.

"No, dear cousin, though, with some of our fellow-guests, who do not live, like yourself, on dew and air and perfumes, that question wrould not be out of place. No, my question refers to the social aspect, if I may say so."

"Well, it was excellent, I thought. Lord Murray appeared to me to do the honours of his table admirably, and to have made himself, as far as I could see, as agreeable as possible to everybody."

"Yes, certainly; and therefore I am greatly astonished that he should have run the risk of compromising us all as he has done."

“In what way?” asked Sara, who understood perfectly what her cousin was driving at, and who, drawing upon a strength that lay, unknown to herself, at the bottom of her heart, looked her cousin straight in the eyes as she put this question to him.

“Why,” answered Henri, somewhat embarrassed not only by her clear gaze, but also by the low murmur of his conscience, “in inviting M. Georges Munier to meet us at the same table.”

“And I am no less astonished, Henri, that you should not have left to somebody else the task of making this observation to me, of all people.”

“And why am I alone forbidden to make this remark, my dear cousin?”

“Because, but for M. Georges Munier, whose presence here you think so unbecoming, your father and you, that is if a cousin is worth bewailing and a niece deserving of mourning, would now be in mourning and tears.”

“Yes, of course,” answered Henri, reddening; “I acknowledge all the gratitude we owe to M. Georges for having saved a life so precious as your own, and you saw yesterday how, when he wanted to buy those two Negroes whom my father was going to have punished, I hastened to give them to him.”

“And by the present of those two Negroes you think you have discharged your obligation to him? I thank you, cousin, for valuing the life of Sara de Malmédie at the sum of a thousand dollars.”

“Good heavens! my dear Sara,” said Henri, “how strangely you twist things to-day. Was I thinking for a moment of putting a price upon a life, for which I would sacrifice my own? No, I only intended to point out to you into what a false position, for instance, Lord Murray would put any lady who was invited to dance by M. Georges Munier.”

“Then, in your opinion, my dear Henri, that lady should decline?”

“Undoubtedly she should.

“Without reflecting that by declining, she offers a man who has done her no harm, and who has even perhaps rendered her some small service, an insult for which he would necessarily demand satisfaction from her father, her brother, or her husband?”

“I presume that, in such a case, M. Georges would examine himself and have the justice to suppose that a white man would not condescend to measure swords with a Mulatto.”

“Pardon me, cousin, for venturing to express an opinion in such a matter,” replied Sara; “but either, after the little I have seen of him I have misjudged M. Georges, or I do not think that, if it was a question of avenging his honour, a man who wears two crosses on his breast, as he does, would be stopped by that inward feeling of humility with which you have credited him — quite gratuitously, I think.”

“At any rate I hope, my dear Sara,” replied Henri, his face red with anger, “that the fear of exposing my father or myself to the wrath of M. Georges will not make you so imprudent as to dance with him, should he have the effrontery to ask you to do so.”

“I shall dance with no one, sir,” replied Sara, coldly, rising and taking the arm of the English lady who had sat next Georges at table, and who was a friend of hers.

Henri remained for a moment quite dumbfounded by this unexpected firmness, then he joined a group of young Creoles, among whom he doubtless found more sympathy with his aristocratic notions than his cousin had evinced.

During this time Georges, in the centre of another group, was chatting with some English officers and merchants, who did not share, or only to a very slight extent, the prejudice of his compatriots.

An hour passed thus during which all the preparations for the ball were completed, and then the doors were thrown open, giving admission to the rooms from which the furniture had been removed, and which were now ablaze with lights. At the same instant the orchestra struck up, as a signal for the quadrille.

Sara had had a severe internal struggle in condemning herself to merely watch the dancing, for, as we have said, she was passionately fond of balls. But all the bitterness of the sacrifice she was making recoiled upon the man who had demanded it of her; while on the contrary, a more deep and tender feeling than any she had yet experienced began to stir in her heart in favour of the man for whose sake she had made the sacrifice, for it is one of the sublime characteristics of women, whom Nature and Society have combined to make so weak and so winning, to display a strong interest in all who are oppressed, as well as a lofty admiration for such as will not let themselves be oppressed.

So, when Henri, hoping that his cousin would be unable to resist the temptation of the opening strains, came, in spite of her expressed decision, to ask her to dance the first quadrille with him as usual, Sara merely answered: —

“You know I am not dancing to-night, cousin.”

Henri bit his lips until the blood came, and, by an instinctive movement, sought with his eyes for Georges. The latter had taken up his position and was dancing with the Englishwoman whom he had taken in to dinner. With a feeling that was merely one of sympathy Sara’s eyes had followed in the direction of her cousin’s. Her heart was wrung with pain, for Georges was dancing with some one else, perhaps was not even thinking of the Sara who had just made a sacrifice for his sake, which but yesterday she would have deemed herself incapable of making for any one in the world. The minutes during which this quadrille lasted were perhaps the most unhappy that Sara had ever spent.

When the quadrille was over, Sara, in spite of herself, could not keep her eyes from following Georges. He escorted the Englishwoman to her place and then appeared to look about for some one. It was Lord Murray whom he sought. As soon as he discovered him, he went up and spoke a word or two to him, and then both advanced towards Sara.

Sara felt the blood rush to her heart.

“Mademoiselle,” said Lord Murray, “here is a fellow-traveller of mine who is perhaps a too scrupulous observer of European customs, and therefore does not venture to ask you to dance before he has had the honour of being introduced to you. Allow me then to present to you M. Georges Munier, one of the most distinguished men of my acquaintance.”

“As you say, my lord,” replied Sara, in a voice which, by dint of self-control, she succeeded in rendering almost steady, “this fear on the part of M. Georges is somewhat exaggerated; for we are already old acquaintances. On the very day of his arrival M. Georges did me a kindness; while yesterday he did more than that, for he saved my life.”

“What! the young hunter who had the good fortune to be on the spot and shoot that dreadful shark, while you were bathing, was he M. Georges?”

“The same, my lord,” replied Sara, blushing at the mere thought of Georges having seen her in her swimming-dress; “and I felt so agitated and alarmed yesterday that I had hardly strength to offer Georges my thanks. But to-day I renew them all the more gratefully, since it is to his skill and coolness that I owe the pleasure of being present at your delightful entertainment, my lord.”

“And we add our thanks to yours,” put in Henri, who had joined the little group of which Sara formed the central figure; “for we too, yesterday, were so disturbed and upset by this accident that we scarcely had the honour of saying a word to M. Georges.”

Georges, who had not uttered a word, but whose piercing eyes had penetrated to the depth of Sara’s heart, bowed in token of acknowledgment, but without making any other reply to Henri.

“Then I hope,” said Lord Murray, “that the request M. Georges wanted to make of you will be successful on its own merits, and I leave my protégé to speak for himself.”

“Will Mademoiselle de Malmédie give me the honour of a dance?” said Georges, bowing once more.

“Oh! sir,” said Sara, “I am truly sorry, and I hope you will forgive me. I have just refused my cousin, as I do not intend to dance to-night.”

Georges smiled with the air of a man who grasps the whole situation, and drew himself up, giving Henri a glance of such utter contempt that Lord Murray perceived, from this glance and the way in which it was answered by Henri, that between these two men existed a deep and inveterate hatred. But he concealed this observation in the depths of his heart, and, as though he had noticed nothing, remarked to Sara: —

“No doubt the effects of your alarm yesterday are re-acting upon your enjoyment to-day.”

“Yes, my lord,” answered Sara; “and I even feel so unwell that I will ask my cousin to let M. de Malmédie know that I should like to go away, and that I depend upon him for taking me home.”

Henri and Lord Murray both made a movement in order to carry out the girl’s wishes. Georges stooped quickly and said in a low tone: —

“You have a noble heart, Mademoiselle, and I thank you.”

Sara started, and would have answered him, but Lord Murray had already returned, so she only exchanged looks, almost in spite of herself, with Georges.

“You are still resolved to leave us, Mademoiselle?” said the Governor.

“Yes, alas!” answered Sara. “I should be so, so delighted to stay, my lord, but — I really feel ill.”

“In that case, I feel that it would be selfish to try to keep you; and, as M. de Malmédie’s carriage is probably not within reach, I will give orders for the horses to be put to my own.”

And Lord Murray went off at once.

“Sara,” said Georges, “when I left Europe to come back here, my one desire was to meet with a heart like yours; but I did not expect to do so.”

“Sir,” murmured Sara, swayed in spite of herself by the deep tones of his voice, “I do not know what you mean.”

“I mean that, since the day of my arrival, I have cherished a dream, and that, should that dream ever be realised, I shall be the happiest of men.”

Then, without waiting for Sara’s answer, Georges bowed with respect and, seeing M. de Malmédie and his son approaching, left Sara with her uncle and cousin.

Five minutes later, Lord Murray returned to tell Sara that the carriage was ready, and offered her his arm to cross the salon. As they reached the door, the girl gave a last look of regret at the scene where she had promised herself so much enjoyment, and disappeared. But her look had encountered one from Georges, which seemed as though it would pursue her all the rest of her days.

On coming back from taking Mlle, de Malmédie to the carriage, the Governor, passing through the ante-room, met Georges who, in his turn, was getting ready to leave the ball.

“You going also?” said Lord Murray.

“Yes, my lord; you know that for the present I am living at Moka, and that, consequently, I have nearly eight miles to go; Antrim fortunately can do that in about an hour.”

“You have had no private quarrel, have you, with Henri de Malmédie?” asked the Governor with an expression of interest.

“No, my lord, not yet,” replied Georges smiling; “but, in all probability, it will not be long delayed.”

“Either I am much mistaken, my young friend,” said the Governor, “or the causes of your enmity towards this family date from a long time back?”

“Yes, my lord, little bullyings between boys which produce first-class hatred between grown up men; pin-pricks that develop into sword-thrusts.”

“And is there no way of settling all this?” asked the Governor.

“I hoped so at one time, my lord; I thought fourteen years of British rule might ha\re killed the prejudice which I came back to combat. I was mistaken; and nothing remains but that the wrestler should rub his body with oil and step down into the arena.”

“Will you not be encountering windmills rather than giants, my dear Don Quixote?”

"I leave you to judge," said Georges smiling. "Yesterday I saved Mlle, de Malmédie's life. Do you know how her cousin thanked me for it to-day?"

"No."

"By forbidding her to dance with me."

"Impossible!"

"It is as I have had the honour to tell you, my lord."

"And why did he do this?"

"Because I am a Mulatto."

"And what do you intend to do?"

"What do I intend?"

"Forgive my indiscretion; but you know what an interest I take in you, and besides, we are old friends."

"You ask what I intend to do?" said Georges with a smile.

"Yes; I am sure you have thought out some plan on your side."

"I have decided upon one this very evening."

"What is it? Come, I will tell you if I approve of it."

"It is this, that in three months I will be Mademoiselle de Malmédie's husband."

And, before Lord Murray had time to express either approval or disapproval, Georges took his leave and went out. His Moorish servant was waiting at the door with his two Arab horses.

Georges mounted Antrim and galloped off towards Moka. On entering his house, the young man inquired where his father was, but learned that he had gone out at seven o'clock that evening and had not yet returned.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SLAVER.

NEXT morning Pierre Munier came into his son’s room.

Since his arrival, Georges had gone over his father’s fine estate several times, and, from his knowledge of industrial matters as carried on in Europe, had made several suggestions by way of improvement, which his father, as a practical man, had grasped immediately. The carrying out of these ideas, however, necessitated the employment of additional labour; while the abolition of public slave-dealing had so greatly increased the value of slaves, that there was no way of procuring in the Island, except at an enormous expense, the fifty or sixty Negroes whom the father and son wanted to add to the establishment. Accordingly, Pierre had heard with joy the evening before, in the absence of Georges, the news that there was a slave-ship in sight, and had gone down to the coast that very night, in accordance with the custom then adopted by the Colonists and the traders in “black ivory,” to answer the signals made by the slave-ship by other signals which indicated an intention to trade with her. These had been duly exchanged, and Pierre Munier came to tell Georges the good news. It was accordingly arranged that the father and son should repair at nine in the evening to the *Pointe-des-Caves,* below the *Petit-Malabar.* Having made this arrangement, Pierre went out to inspect, according to his custom, the work on the estate, while Georges, also according to his custom, took his gun and made for the woods, in order to give himself up to his dreams.

What Georges had told Murray the previous evening was no empty boast, but, on the contrary, a resolve firmly determined. The whole life and training of the young Mulatto had, as we have seen, been directed towards the object of imparting to his will the force and persistency of genius. Having reached such a superiority in every department, as, aided by his wealth, would have assured to him in France or in England, in London or in Paris, a career of distinction, Georges, eager for combat, had desired to return to the Isle of France. It was there that the prejudice existed which his courage believed itself destined to combat, and his pride believed itself able to overcome. He returned then with the advantage of being unknown by sight, of being able to study his enemy while the latter was in ignorance of the war which Georges had declared against him in his inmost heart, ready as he was to spring upon him at the moment when he least expected it, and to enter upon a struggle in which either the man must perish, or the whole system he was vowed to combat. On setting foot upon the quay, and seeing once more on his return the same men that he had left at his departure, Georges had realised a fact of which he had often been doubtful when in Europe, namely, that everything remained in *statu quo* in the Isle of France, although fourteen years had elapsed, although the Island which had been French was now English, and instead of being called the Isle of France was now called Mauritius. Then, and from that moment, he had put himself on his guard, had prepared for the moral duel which he had come in search of, just as another prepares for a physical duel, if we may so express it; and had waited, sword in hand, till the first opportunity of striking a blow at his adversary should present itself.

But just as Caesar Borgia, who had by his genius foreseen everything necessary for the conquest of Italy after the death of his father, except the fact that he would then be a dying man himself, Georges found himself engaged in a manner that he had been unable to foresee, and found himself struck at the very moment that he wished to strike. On the day of his arrival at Port-Louis, chance had thrown in his path a beautiful girl, whom he could not forget, do what he would.

Then Providence had brought him there in the nick of time for saving her life — the life of the very girl of whom he had been dreaming vaguely ever since he had seen her, so that this dream had entered more deeply than ever into his life. Finally, chance had brought them together the previous evening, and there a single glance, at the same moment that he knew he loved, had told him that he was loved in return. Henceforth, the struggle presented a fresh interest for him, an interest in which his happiness was doubly bound up, since henceforth this strife was carried on, not merely for the satisfaction of his pride, but also for that of his love.

Only, as we have said, Georges, being wounded at the beginning of the combat, lost the advantage of his coolness; though it is true that in the exchange he gained the vehemence of his passion.

But, if the sight of the girl had made the impression we have described upon a man like Georges, satiated with life, and with passions no longer unsullied, the sight of the young man and the circumstances in which he had successively appeared before her were bound to produce a vastly deeper impression upon the budding life and virgin soul of Sara. Brought up, since the time when she lost her parents, in M. de Malmédie's house, destined from that time to double, by her dowry, the fortune of the heir to the estate, she had accustomed herself henceforth to look on Henri as her future husband, and had the more easily submitted to this prospect, since Henri was a handsome and worthy youth, ranking among the wealthiest and most fashionable Colonists, not only of Port-Louis, but throughout the whole Island. As for Henri's other young friends, who were her companions in the chase and her partners in the dance, she had known them all too long for it ever to have entered her head to make any preference among them; to her they were merely the friends of her childhood who would be associated in peaceful friendship with her for the rest of her life, and that was all.

Sara then was in this perfectly tranquil condition of mind when she had noticed Georges for the first time. In the life of all young girls, the appearance of a young man unknown, handsome, of gentlemanly bearing and graceful build, is an event, and still more so, as you may readily believe, in the Isle of France.

The young stranger's face, the tone of his voice, the words he had spoken, had all dwelt in Sara's memory, without her knowing why, like a tune which you have only heard once, but which, nevertheless, you repeat over and over again in your head. No doubt Sara would have forgotten this event after a few days' time, had she met this young man again in ordinary circumstances; possibly a closer examination, such as is bestowed upon a second meeting, instead of involving the man more deeply in her life, might even have obliterated him from it entirely. But things had turned out differently. God had so willed that Georges and Sara should meet again at a supreme crisis; the episode of the "*Riviere Noire*" had occurred. To the curiosity which accompanied his first appearance were joined the romance and the gratitude that surrounded the second. In an instant Georges had been transformed in the girl's eyes. The unknown stranger had become an angel of deliverance. All the agony of the death with which Sara had been threatened, Georges had spared her; all the pleasure, and promise of future happiness that life holds out at the age of sixteen, Georges had restored to her at the moment when she was about to lose them. Yet when having scarcely seen him, having scarcely addressed a word to him, she found herself face to face with him and was about to pour out all the gratitude of her heart, she was forbidden to grant this man what she would have granted to the first stranger who asked it, and moreover was ordered to offer him an insult which she would not have offered to the meanest of men. Then the gratitude driven back to her heart had changed to love; a look had told Georges everything; a word from Georges had told Sara everything. Sara had been unable to deny anything, so Georges had the right to believe everything. Then, after the impression made upon her, had come reflection. Sara had been unable to prevent herself from comparing the behaviour of Henri, her future husband, with that of this stranger, with whom she was scarcely acquainted. On the first day, Henri’s sneers at the unknown stranger had hurt her feelings. His indifference, as he rushed off to the death-halloo of the stag when his fiancé had only just escaped a mortal peril, had wounded her heart; lastly, the masterful and chance this time proved inflexible. Georges rode in vain through all the streets in the neighbourhood of M. de Malmédie’s house; he rode in vain twice through the Jardin de la Compagnie, the usual promenade of the inhabitants of Port-Louis; he went in vain three times round the Champ de Mars, where preparations were being made for the forthcoming races — nowhere, even at a distance, did he see any woman whose appearance could have led him to think her to be Sara.

At seven, Georges gave up all hope, and, with a pain at his heart as though he had met with some misfortune, or undergone some dreadful hardship, he took once more the road of the *Grande-Rivière,* but slowly this time and holding his horse in; for now he was riding away from Sara, who doubtless had not guessed that Georges had ridden ten times up and down the *Rue de la Comédie* and the *Rue du Gouvernement,* that is to say, scarcely a hundred yards from where she was. He was passing then the cantonment of the free blacks, situated outside the town, still holding in Antrim, who could not at all understand this unaccustomed pace when suddenly a man came out of one of the huts and threw himself at his horse s stirrup grasping his knees and kissing his hand. It was Miko-Miko, the Chinese dealer, the man of the fan. #

On the instant Georges perceived vaguely the use which he could make of this man, whose business permitted him to gain entrance into every house, and who, through his ignorance of the language, could inspire no distrust. ° Georges dismounted and went into the shop of Miko-Miko, who at once made him inspect all his treasures.

There was no mistaking the feeling which the poor fellow had expressed for Georges, and which issued from the depths of his heart at each word he said The explanation was quite simple; with the exception of two or three of his fellow! countrymen, who were dealers like himself, and, consequently, if not hostile to him, at least in rivalry with him, Miko-Miko had not yet found a single person at Port-Louis with whom he could converse in his own language. According y he asked Georges in what way he could make a return for the happiness which he owed to him.

tone in which Henri had spoken to her on the day of the ball had offended her pride. So during that long night which should have been a happy one, but which Henri had turned into a sad and lonely one, Sara had questioned her feelings for the first time, perhaps, and had realised for the first time that she did not love her cousin. From that, to knowing that she loved another, was but a step.

What usually takes place in such cases happened now. Sara, after directing her eyes upon herself, turned them next upon her surroundings; she weighed in the balance of interest her Uncle’s conduct towards her; she remembered that she had a fortune of about a million and a half francs, that is to say, that she was nearly twice as rich as her cousin. She asked herself if her Uncle would have shown the same care and tenderness for her as a poor orphan which he had shown for her as a wealthy heiress, and she saw nothing more in M. de Malmédie’s adoption of her than what it was in reality, namely, the calculating policy of a father who prepares a good marriage for his son. All this was no doubt rather severe, but so it is with wounded hearts; the wound drives gratitude away, and the grief which remains becomes a stern judge.

Georges had foreseen all this, and had counted upon it as an aid in pleading his cause and damaging that of his rival. So, after a good deal of reflection, he determined to attempt nothing further that day, though, in the depth of his heart, he felt very impatient to see Sara again. That is why he now had his gun on his shoulder, hoping to find, in his favourite amusement of shooting, a distraction which would help him to pass the day. But Georges had deceived himself; his love for Sara was already speaking in his heart more loudly than any other feelings. Accordingly, towards four o’clock, unable any longer to resist his desire — I will not say to see Sara once more, for not being able to visit her, it would only be by chance that he could meet her — but his wish to be somewhere near her, he had Antrim saddled; then, giving the rein to the fleet child of Arabia, in less than an hour he found himself in the capital of the Island.

Georges came to Port-Louis with but a single hope; but, as we have said, this hope was entirely at the mercy of chance, The request which Georges had to make was a very simple one; nothing more than a plan of the interior of M. de Malmédie’s house, so that, should circumstances require it, he might know how to reach Sara’s apartments.

At the first words spoken by Georges, Miko-Miko understood the whole matter; we have said that the Chinese were the Jews, so to speak, of the Isle of France.

In order, however, to facilitate the negotiations between Miko-Miko and Sara, and possibly also with a further intention, Georges wrote upon one of his visiting-cards the prices of various objects which might tempt the girl’s fancy, bidding Miko-Miko let nobody see this card but Sara herself.

Then he gave the dealer another doubloon, telling him to come to Moka next day at about three in the afternoon.

Miko-Miko promised to be at the appointed meeting-place, and undertook to carry in his head as exact a plan of the house as could be traced by a draughtsman.

After this, inasmuch as it was now eight o’clock, and at nine Georges had to meet his father, as we have said, at the *Pointe-aux-Caves,* he remounted his horse and continued his journey along the road of the *Petite-Riviere,* with a lighter heart than before. For those who are in love, a very little thing is needed to change the aspect of the horizon.

It was quite dark when Georges arrived at the meeting-place. His father, true to the habit of punctuality, which he had always observed when dealing with white men, had been there for ten minutes. At half-past nine the moon rose.

This was the moment for which Georges and his father were waiting. They at once directed their gaze between the *Ile Bourbon* and the *lie de Sable,* and there they saw a light flash three times. This was the customary signal, given by a mirror reflecting the moon’s rays, and well understood by the Colonists. On seeing it, Télémaque, who had accompanied his employers, lighted a fire on the shore which he extinguished five minutes later, and then they waited.

Half-an-hour had not elapsed when they saw faintly appearing on the sea a dark line, like a great fish swimming on the surface of the water; then this line grew larger and more distinct, assuming the appearance of a pirogue. Soon after, a large boat could be made out, and, by the shimmering rays of the moon on the sea, the movement of oars striking the water could be discerned, though their sound was as yet inaudible. Eventually the boat entered the bay of the *Petite-Rivière*, and landed in the creek just opposite the small fort.

Georges and his father advanced down the beach. A man who had been seen sitting in the stern of the boat had already stepped ashore.

Behind him came some dozen sailors armed with guns and axes. They were the same men who had been rowing, with their guns slung over their shoulders. The man who had landed first gave them a signal, upon which they began to disembark the Negroes, of whom there were thirty lying in the bottom of the boat, while an equal number were to be brought in a second boat.

Then the two Mulattos and the man who had landed first came together and exchanged a few words, as the result of which Georges and his father were convinced of what they had already guessed, namely, that they were in the presence of the Captain of the Slaver himself.

He was a man of about two and thirty, tall in stature, and bearing all the signs of physical strength developed to a pitch that instinctively commands respect. He had dark frizzled hair, whiskers that met under the chin, and moustaches that joined the whiskers. His face and hands, tanned by the suns of the Tropics, had acquired very much the complexion of the Indians of Timor or Pegu. He was dressed in the jacket and trousers of blue cloth worn by sportsmen in the Isle of France, and, like them, had a broad straw hat and carried a gun over his shoulder. Only, unlike them, he wore in addition, suspended from his belt, a curved sword, shaped like an Arab scimitar, but larger, and with a hilt resembling that of the Scotch claymore. If the Captain of the Slaver had been the object of a close examination on the part of the two inhabitants of Moka, they too, in their turn, had had to undergo an examination no less searching. The trader in black flesh glanced from one to the other with equal curiosity, and the more closely he scrutinized them, the more did he appear unable to withdraw his eyes from them. Georges and his father failed apparently to notice the persistence of his gaze, or, at any rate, were not made uneasy by it, for they entered upon the negotiation for which they had come, examining one after another the Negroes who had been brought in the first boat, and who were nearly all natives of the West Coast of Africa, that is to say, of Senegambia and Guinea, — a circumstance which further increases their value, inasmuch as, not having, like the natives of Madagascar, the Mozambiques, or the Kaffirs, any hope of reaching their country again, they hardly ever make an attempt to escape. In spite of this excuse for raising the price, the Captain was very reasonable in his demands, and so, when the second boat-load arrived, the bargain for the first had been already concluded.

The Negroes in the second boat were as good in quality as those of the first. The Captain's stock was first-rate and showed him to be a thorough connoisseur in his own line of business. This was a piece of real good luck for the Isle of France, to which he had come for the first time to ply his trade, having heretofore shipped slaves more especially for the Antilles.

When all the Negroes had been disembarked and the deal was concluded, Télémaque, himself a native of the Congo, came up to them and delivered a discourse in his mother-tongue, which was theirs also. The aim of this discourse wasto boast to them of the mild lot in which their future life was cast, compared with the life led by their countrymen in the employment of the other planters of the Island, and to tell them that they had had the good fortune to come into the hands of MM. Pierre and Georges Munier, who were the kindest employers in the Island. Then the Negroes approached the two Mulattos, and, falling on their knees, promised, Télémaque acting as their mouthpiece, that they would prove worthy of the happiness which Providence had kept in store for them.

At the name of Pierre and Georges Munier, the Slave - Captain, who had followed the discourse of Télémaque with an attention which showed that he had closely studied the different dialects of Africa, had given a start, and looked even more attentively than before at the two men with whom he had just concluded with such promptness a transaction of nearly a hundred and fifty thousand francs. But Georges and his father appeared to notice the other’s reluctance to take his eyes off them no more than they had done before. At last the moment for settling up arrived. Georges asked the Captain how he would like to be paid, in gold or in notes, his father having brought gold in his saddle-bags and notes in his pocket-book, so as to be ready for every emergency. The Captain preferred gold. The amount was accordingly counted out on the spot and conveyed into the second boat; then the sailors embarked again. But, to the great astonishment of Georges and his father, the Captain did not go down with them to the boats, which, at an order given by him, pulled away from the shore.

The Captain followed them with his eyes for some little time; then, when they were out of sight and hearing, turned to the astonished Mulattos, and advancing towards them with a hand outstretched to each, exclaimed: —

“Good day, father! Good day, brother! “Then, seeing them hesitate, he added: —

“Why, do you not recognise your Jacques? “Both uttered a cry of surprise and held out their arms to him. Jacques threw himself into his father’s arms, then passed from them to those of his brother; after which Télémaque, too, had his turn, although, be it said, it was not without trembling that he ventured to touch the hands of the Slave-Captain.

Thus, by a strange coincidence, did chance re-unite in the same family the man who had laboured all his life under the prejudice of colour, the man who was making his fortune by trading in it, and the man who was readv to risk his life in order to combat it.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SLAVE TRADE.

THE man was really Jacques, — Jacques, whom his father had not set eyes on for fourteen, or his brother for twelve, years.

Jacques had left France on board one of those privateers, furnished with letters of marque from the Government, which at this period darted suddenly out of our harbours, like eagles from their eyries, and attacked the English.

It was a rough school of training, and quite as valuable as that of the Imperial Navy, the ships of which, at this time, constantly blockaded in our ports, were as often lying idly at anchor as those of this other branch of marine, swift, light, and independent, were scouring the high seas. Every day, indeed, there was some fresh fighting; not that our privateers bold as they were, picked quarrels with men-of-war, but that they were for ever attacking the great, big-bellied merchantmen, bursting with freight from India and China, homeward bound from Calcutta, or Buenos-Ayres, or Vera-Cruz. Now, either these vessels, harmless as they were to look at, were convoyed by some English frigate, by no means without beak and claws, or they had elected to arm and defend themselves on their own account. In the latter case, it was mere child’s-play, a two hours’ skirmish, and all was over; but, in the first case, the aspect of affairs was much more serious. Shots were exchanged, men were killed, and rigging damaged. Finally it came to boarding the vessel, and, after having been pounded from a distance, she was destroyed at close quarters.

Whilst this was taking place, the merchant-ships sheered off, and, if they did not meet, like the ass in the fable, with any other privateer to lay hands upon them, made some port in England, to the great satisfaction of the India Company who voted rewards of money to their defenders.

Such was the state of things at this period. Out of the thirty or thirty-one days which make up the month, fighting took place on twenty or twenty-five of them; then, by the way of respite from fighting, came days of tempest. Well, we repeat, in such a school a man learned quickly. At the first, as there was no conscription for the purpose of recruiting, and as this little amateur warfare did not discontinue until in the long run a good number of men had been used up, the crews were hardly ever up to their full strength. True, the sailors being all volunteers, quantity, in this case, was advantageously replaced by quality; so, during the fighting or the storms, nobody had any fixed duties, and each man could put his hand to everything, For the rest, there was absolute obedience to the Captain, when he was there, and to the First Officer, in the Captain's absence. Though this was the case throughout, it was particularly so on board the Calypso, which was the name of the ship which Jacques had chosen for serving his naval apprenticeship in; in six years she had had only two refractory seamen, one from Normandy, the other a Gascon, the one having disobeyed the authority of the Captain, the other that of his Lieutenant. The Captain had smashed in the first man's skull with an axe, while the Lieutenant had sent a pistol shot through the other's body; and both had died on the spot. Then, as nothing is so much in the way of working a ship as a dead body, the corpses had been chucked overboard, and there the matter ended. Only these two events, if they left no trace behind them except in the recollection of the crew, had none the less exercised a wholesome influence over their minds. None, after that, ever dreamed of picking a quarrel with Captain Bertrand or Lieutenant Rébard, for such were the names of these two worthies, who henceforth enjoyed the privilege of absolutely despotic authority on board the Calypso.

Jacques had always had a decided liking for the sea; when quite a boy he had been constantly on board the ships riding in Port-Louis, climbing into the shrouds and tops, swinging on the yards, sliding down the halliards; and, as it was especially on board vessels with which his father had business transactions that Jacques practised these gymnastic exercises, the Captains treated him with great kindness, satisfying his boyish curiosity, explaining everything to him and allowing him to climb from hold to top-gallants and back again. The result was, that, at the age of ten, Jacques was a most efficient cabin-boy, inasmuch as, in default of a vessel everything in his eyes represented a ship. He climbed trees, of which he made masts, and along bind-weed, which played the part of ropes, and at twelve years of age, knowing the name of every part of the ship, and every detail of the drill which takes place on its deck, he could have entered as a first-class candidate in the first vessel that appeared.

But, as we have already seen, his father had decided otherwise for him, and, instead of sending him to the Ecole d'Angoulême, to which his tastes summoned him, he had sent him to the Collège Napoléon. Here was afforded a fresh confirmation of the proverb, "Man proposes, and God disposes." Jacques, after spending two years in drawing ships in his composition books and launching frigates on the big pond of the Luxembourg, availed himself of the first opportunity that offered of passing from theory to practice; and having, during a stay at Brest, gone to visit the brig Calypso, he told his brother, who had accompanied him, that he might go back to land by himself, but that, for his part, he had decided to become a sailor. Both submitted to this sudden decision, and Georges returned alone, as has been duly related, to the Collège Napoléon. As for Jacques, whose frank face and gallant bearing had at once won over Captain Bertrand, he was raised forthwith to the rank of able seaman, at which his comrades grumbled loudly.

Jacques let them grumble; he had in his own mind very clear ideas of justice and injustice; the men with whom he had just been put on an equality were ignorant of his worth, and so it was quite natural that they should be annoyed that a mere novice should have been treated with such favour. But, on the occurrence of the first storm, he cut away a top-gallant-sail which was blocked in the tackle, and which threatened to carry away the mast; while the first time they boarded a ship, he sprang upon the enemy's deck in front of the Captain, a proceeding which earned him such a tremendous blow from the latter's fist that he remained unconscious for three days, the rule on board the Calypso being that the Captain must always set foot on the enemy's deck before any of the crew. However, as this was one of the breaches of discipline for which one brave man readily forgives another, the Captain admitted the validity of the apology made by Jacques, and told him that in future, next after himself and the Lieutenant, he was at liberty, in similar circumstances, to take what order pleased him. At the second boarding Jacques was the third man on deck.

From that time the sailors ceased to grumble at Jacques, and even the old hands came up to him and were the first to shake hands. So matters went on until the year 1815. We say 1815, because Captain Bertrand, who was of a very sceptical turn of mind, had never chosen to take the fall of Napoleon seriously. Possibly too this feeling was influenced by the fact that, having nothing to do, he had made two voyages to the Isle of Elba, and that, on the occasion of one of these voyages, he had had the honour of being received by the ex-master of the world. What had passed between the Emperor and the buccaneer at this interview no one ever discovered; all that was remarked was that Captain Bertrand returned on board whistling: — “Ran tan plan tirelire How we shall laugh, to be sure!” which, with Captain Bertrand, denoted an inward feeling of most intense satisfaction. After this, the Captain betook himself to Brest, where, without saying a word to any one, he began to put the Calypso in fighting trim, to lay in a stock of powder and shot, and to make up the few men who were wanting in order that his crew should be at its full strength. So that any one must have had a very imperfect acquaintance with Captain Bertrand who did not grasp the fact that he was cockering up behind the scenes some spectacle which would greatly astonish the audience.

As a matter of fact, six weeks after Captain Bertrand’s last voyage to Porto-Ferrajo, Napoleon landed at the Gulf of Juan. Twenty-four days after his landing at the Gulf of Juan, Napoleon entered Paris; and seventy-two hours after Napoleon’s entrance into Paris, Captain Bertrand left Brest with all sail set and the tricolour flying at the peak.

A week had not elapsed when Captain Bertrand entered the harbour again, hauling in tow a magnificent English three-master, laden with the finest spices from India; she had been so utterly astonished at seeing the tricoloured flag, which was thought to have disappeared off the face of the earth, that it never entered her head to make even the slightest show of resistance.

This prize had made Captain Bertrand’s mouth water. So, no sooner had he got rid of his capture at a suitable price and divided the proceeds among the crew, who had lain idle for nearly a year and were getting very weary of this inaction, than he went off in search of a second three-master. But, as everybody knows, you do not always find precisely what you are looking for; one fine morning, after a very dark-night, the Calypso found herself cheek by jowl with a frigate. This frigate was none other than the Leicester, the same vessel which we have seen at Port-Louis, conveying the Governor and Georges.

The Leicester had ten guns and sixty men more than the Calypso possessed; nor had she any cargo of cinnamon, sugar, or coffee; but, instead of these, a magazine perfectly equipped, and an arsenal stuffed full with shot and grape. Scarcely had she discovered, moreover, what country the

Calypso hailed from than, without giving her the slightest warning, she sent her a sample of her goods, in the shape of a fine thirty-six pounder, which buried itself in her hull.

Quite differently from her sister Galatea, who fled in order to be seen, the Calypso would have been very glad to fly, without being seen. She had nothing to gain from the Leicester, even should she come off victorious, which was in the last degree unlikely. Unfortunately, it was hardly probable that she would escape, since her Captain was this same Lord Murray, who had not yet, at this period, quitted the navy, and who, for all his elegant appearance, to which, later on, his diplomatic labours had given yet a fresh colour, was one of the most intrepid sea-dogs between the Straits of Magellan and Baffin’s Bay. Accordingly Captain Bertrand trained his two largest guns astern and sheered off.

The Calypso was a veritable ship of prey, designed for speed, narrow and long in the lines. But the poor little Sea-swallow was engaged with the Ocean-eagle; consequently, in spite of her agility, it was soon evident that the frigate was wearing the schooner down.

This superiority in pace soon became all the more noticeable from the fact that, every five minutes or so, the Leicester despatched leaden messengers to summon the Calypso to stop. To which the Calypso, still in flight, replied with her stern-guns by messengers of the same character. All this time, Jacques was examining with the greatest attention the masting of the brig, and making some most sensible remarks to Lieutenant Rébard on the improvements that might be made in the rigging of vessels intended, like the Calypso, either to chase or to be chased. There was above all a radical change to be effected in the top-gallant-masts, and Jacques, with his eyes fixed on this weak spot in the ship, had just finished his demonstration, when not receiving any signs of approval from the Lieutenant, he turned his eyes from the sky to the deck, and realised the cause of the silence of his interlocutor: Lieutenant Rébard had just been cut in two by a cannon-shot. The situation was becoming serious; it was plain that, before another half hour was over, the two ships would be alongside each other, and that the Calypso would be obliged, to use a technical term, to *fudge it out* with a crew a third again as strong as her own. Jacques was communicating, in an aside, this rather disconcerting reflection to the Captain of one of the two stern-guns, when the fellow, in stooping to aim, apparently took a false step and fell with his nose on the breech of the gun. Seeing that he was slower in getting up again than a man ought to have been in such circumstances, and in so responsible a position, Jacques took him by his coat-collar and restored him to the perpendicular. But this done, he perceived that the poor wretch had swallowed a grape-shot; only, instead of following the perpendicular, the grape-shot had taken a horizontal line. Hence had come the accident. The poor man had died, as they say, from being unable to digest cast-iron.

Jacques, who, at the moment, had nothing better to do, stooped in his turn towards the gun, rectified the sight by a degree or so, and cried: —

“Fire!”

At the same instant the gun thundered, and Jacques, anxious to see the result of his skill, jumped upon the nettings, in order to watch, as far as he could do so, the effect of the projectile which he had just hurled at the enemy.

The effect was instantaneous. The mizen-mast, shattered a little above the main-top, bowed like a tree bent by the wind, then fell with a terrible crash, littering the deck with sails and rigging, and crushing a portion of the starboard bulwarks. A loud shout of triumph resounded on board the Calypso. The frigate had stopped in mid-chase, dipping her broken wing in the sea, while the schooner, safe and sound, but for a few ropes cut away, continued her course, freed from the enemy’s pursuit.

The Captain’s first care, on seeing himself out of danger, was to appoint Jacques Lieutenant in place of Rébard; this rank had devolved upon him, long since, in case of a vacancy, in the minds of all his comrades. The announcement of his promotion was accordingly welcomed with unanimous acclamations. In the evening a public service was held for the dead. The bodies had been thrown into the sea as they passed from life to death, only that of the second in command having been reserved, in order that the honours due to his rank might be paid him. These honours consisted in being sewn up in a hammock with a thirty-six pounder at each foot. The ceremonial was carried out exactly, and poor Rébard went to rejoin his companions, having preserved the very slender advantage over them of being plunged into the depths of the sea, instead of floating on its surface.

In the evening, Captain Bertrand took advantage of the darkness to alter his course, that is to say, thanks to a slant of wind, he was able to reverse his course, so that he entered Brest, while the Leicester, which had hastened to substitute a fresh mast for her broken one, pursued her in the direction of Cape Vert.

This made Captain Murray extremely angry, and he swore that, if ever the Calypso came within reach of the Leicester again, she should not get off so cheaply the second time as she had done on the first occasion.

As soon as ever his damages were repaired, Captain Bertrand returned to his old game, and, well seconded by Jacques, performed many remarkable exploits. Unfortunately, Waterloo supervened; after Waterloo, came the second abdication, and, after the second abdication, peace. This time there was no longer room for doubt. The Captain saw the prisoner of Europe pass by, on board the Bellerophon, and, as he was acquainted with St. Helena from having called there twice, he realised at once that there is no escaping from that island as there is from Elba.

Captain Bertrand's prospects were greatly compromised by that great cataclysm in which so many things were shattered. He was obliged, therefore, to create for himself a fresh trade. He had a fine schooner, a good sea boat, with a crew of a hundred and fifty men ready to follow his fortunes, good or bad; it occurred to him quite naturally to engage in the slave trade.

This was quite a nice business before the profession had been ruined by a heap of philosophical preachments, which nobody at that time had so much as thought of, and there were immense fortunes to be made by those who were the first to embark in it. War, occasionally smothered in Europe, in Africa is perpetual; there is always some tribe that is thirsty, and, as the inhabitants of that fine country observed, once and for all, that the surest means of procuring prisoners was to have plenty of brandy, you needed only at this period to follow the coasts of Senegambia, Congo, Mozambique or Zanzibar with a bottle of trade brandy in each hand, and you were sure of returning to your ship with a negro under each arm. When prisoners ran short, mothers sold their children for a glass of liquor; true, these brats were of no great value; but any lack of quality was made up for by their quantity.

Captain Bertrand carried on this business with credit and profit for five years, that is to say, from 1815 to 1820, and was looking forward to carrying it on for a good many more, when an unforeseen accident put an end to his life. One day as he was ascending the *Riviere des Poissons,* situated on the West Coast of Africa, in company with a Hottentot chief, who was going to hand over to him, for the consideration of two casks of rum, a party of Grands-Namaquois Negroes for which he had just negotiated, and who were booked in advance for Martinique and Guadaloupe, he happened to set foot on the tail of a boqueira that lay basking in the sun. The tail of this species of snake is, as is well known, so sensitive, that Nature has endowed this part of its body with a number of little bells, so that the traveller, warned by the sound, may avoid treading upon it. The snake rose erect as quick as lightning, and bit Captain Bertrand in the hand. The Captain, though well inured to pain, uttered a cry. The Hottentot chief turned round, saw what had happened, and said in a grave tone: —

“Man bitten, man die.”

“I know it, God help me! answered the Captain, “and that is why I called out.”

Then, either for his own personal satisfaction, or from motives of philanthropy, and to insure that the snake which had bitten him should not bite any one else, he seized the boqueira with both hands and wrung its neck. Hardly had the brave Captain accomplished this than his strength suddenly forsook him, and he fell dead beside the reptile.

All this had happened with such rapidity that when Jacques, who was about twenty-five yards behind the Captain, came up to him, he had already turned as green as a lizard. He tried to speak, but could only stammer a few incoherent words, and expired. Ten minutes later, his body was covered with black and yellow spots, just like a poisonous fungus.

Owing to the marvellously subtle nature of the poison, decomposition set in so rapidly that to carry the Captain’s body on board the Calypso was not to be thought of. Jacques and the twelve sailors who accompanied him dug a grave in which they laid the body, heaping over it all the stones they could find in the neighbourhood, so as to preserve it, if possible, from the ravages of hyenas and jackals. As for the snake, one of the sailors, remembering that his Uncle, who was a chemist at Brest, had requested him, in case he ever came across one of these reptiles, to try and bring it to him, carried it off to be placed later on in a phial at the door of his uncle’s shop between a bottle filled with red water and another filled with blue.

There is a commercial adage which says: “Business before everything.” In virtue of this adage, it was decided by the Hottentot chief and Jacques that this catastrophe should not stand in the way of carrying out the bargain which had been concluded. Accordingly Jacques went to fetch from the neighbouring kraal the fifty Grands-Namaquois who had been sold; after which the Hottentot chief brought away from the brig the promised casks of rum. Having effected this exchange the two dealers separated, each delighted with the other, and with the mutual promise that their commercial relations should be renewed on a future occasion.

The same evening Jacques piped all hands on deck, from the boatswain's mate to the junior cabin-boy, and after touching briefly but eloquently on the numerous good qualities that had distinguished Captain Bertrand, he made two propositions to the crew; first, to dispose of the complete cargo and then of the ship, which was readily saleable, and, after distributing the proceeds of the whole in the customary proportions, to part good friends, and each to seek his fortune in whatever direction pleased him; or secondly, to appoint a successor to Captain Bertrand and continue the business under the style of "Calypso and Co.," declaring beforehand that, though he was the Lieutenant, he would submit to be re-elected, and would be the first to recognise the new Captain appointed as the result of the ballot. These words were followed by the very appropriate result that Jacques was elected Captain by acclamation.

Jacques immediately chose as his Lieutenant the boatswain's mate, a worthy Breton hailing from Lorient. who was usually called, in allusion to the remarkable toughness of his skull, M. Tête de Fer.

The same evening the Calypso, with shorter memory than the nymph whose name she bore, sailed for the Antilles, already consoled, in appearance at least, not for the departure of King Ulysses, but for the death of Captain Bertrand.

However, if she had lost one master, she had found another, and quite as good a one. The late Captain was one of those old sea-dogs who do everything by rule of thumb rather than by calculation. This was not the case with Jacques, who was always guided by circumstances, and was an all-round man in every branch ot seamanship, knowing as well as any Admiral how to give orders in a battle or storm, yet, if occasion required, making a sailor's knot as well as the youngest cabin-boy. Jacques was never idle, and, consequently, never felt dull. Each day witnessed some improvement in the trim or rigging of the schooner. Jacques was as fond of the Calypso as a man is of his mistress, and so his thoughts were constantly employed in adding something to her adornment; now it was a sail, the shape of which he altered, now a yard, of which he simplified the working.

And so, like the coquette that she was, she obeyed her new lord as she had never obeyed any other; roused into animation at the sound of his voice, bending and rearing under his hand, leaping beneath his feet like a horse that feels the spur, she and Jacques appeared so admirably matched, that you could not imagine it possible that henceforth one could live apart from the other.

So, but for the recollection of his father and brother, which occasionally clouded his brow, Jacques was happier than any man on land or sea. He was not one of those grasping Slave-Captains who lose half their profits by trying to gain too much, and in whom cruelty, after passing into a habit, becomes a pleasure. No, he was a decent trader, carrying on his business conscientiously, treating his Kaffirs, his Hottentots, his Senegambians and Mozambiques with almost as much care as if they had been bags of sugar, chests of rice, or bales of cotton. They were well fed, had straw to lie on, and took exercise on deck twice a day. Only the refractory ones were chained, and, speaking generally, he endeavoured, as far as possible, to sell the husbands along with their wives, and the children with their mothers, —a kindness hitherto unheard of and which found but few imitators among those who followed the same profession as Jacques. The result was that his Negroes generally reached their destination in capital condition and in good spirits, so that he nearly always sold them at an enhanced price It is unnecessary to remark that Jacques never stayed long enough on land to form any serious attachment. As he was swimming in gold and rolling in silver, the fair Creoles of Jamaica, Guadeloupe and Cuba had more than once set their caps at him; there were even fathers who, not knowing him to be a Mulatto, and taking him for a gentlemanly European Slave-Captain, made him overtures of marriage with their daughters. But Jacques had his own ideas on the subject of love. He knew by heart his mythology and his Bible; he was acquainted with the legend of Hercules and Omphalé, and the story of Samson and Delilah. Accordingly he had resolved to have no other wife but the Calypso. As for mistresses, there were plenty of them, thank Heaven; black, red, yellow, or chocolate, according as he loaded up at the Congo, Florida, Bengal or Madagascar. Every voyage he took with him a fresh one, whom he handed over on his arrival to some friend by whom he was sure that she would be well treated; having made it his rule never to stick to the same one for fear lest, be her colour what it might, she should acquire an influence over his heart, for, it must be said, what Jacques loved before all else was his freedom.

Let us add that Jacques had a whole host of other pleasures. He was as sensuous as Creoles generally are. All the grand effects of Nature impressed him agreeably; only, instead of stirring his spirit, they worked upon his senses. He loved the immensity of space, not because it made him think of God, but because, the greater the space, the more freely you breathe; he loved the stars, not because he conceived of them as so many worlds circling in space, but because it was pleasant to see overhead an azure canopy studded with diamonds; he loved the lofty forests, not because their depths were full of mysterious and romantic voices, but because their dense vault cast a shade through which the sun's rays could not penetrate.

As for his opinion on the business in which he was engaged, he looked upon it as a perfectly lawful occupation. He had seen Negroes bought and sold all his life, and so he honestly believed that they were made to be bought and sold. As for the validity of the right claimed by men to traffic in their fellow-creatures, that in no way concerned him. He bought and paid; consequently, the goods were his, and, from the moment he bought and paid for them, he had the right to sell them again. Never had he imitated the example of his fellow-captains, whom he had seen hunting down Negroes on their own account; he would have looked upon it as a fearful injustice personally to seize upon a free creature, whether by force or by stratagem, in order to make a slave of him. But, the moment that free creature had become a slave through circumstances for which Jacques was not responsible, he made no scruples about bargaining for him with his owner.

You can understand, then, that Jacques' life was a pleasant one, all the more so as, now and then, there came days of fighting, as in the time of Captain Bertrand. The trading in blacks had been abolished by a Congress of Governments, which had probably discovered that it affected injuriously the trade in whites; so that it sometimes happened that vessels which meddled in what was no business of theirs, peremptorily demanded to know what the Calypso was doing on the coast of Senegal or in the Indian seas. Then, if it was one of Captain Jacques' good-humoured days, he began by amusing the too inquisitive vessels by running up flags of all colours; next, when he was tired of playing charades, he would hoist his own flag, three Negroes' heads sable, two and one on a field gules; upon which the Calypso took to her heels, and the fun began.

In addition to the twenty guns which adorned her port-holes, the Calypso possessed, with a view to such occasions only, two thirty-six pounders astern, superior in range to those of ordinary ships; now, as she was a splendid sailor, and obeyed implicitly her master’s nod, she hoisted just so much sail as was required to keep the pursuer within range of these two guns. The result was that, while the shots from the enemy fell uselessly in her wake, each of her own shots (and Jacques as you may suppose, had not forgotten his business as a gunner) raked from bow to stern the vessel that displayed such an interest in Negroes. This went on for as long as Jacques chose to play what he called his game of skittles; then when he considered the ship to have been sufficiently punished for her indiscretion, he added sundry royals and top-gallant studding sails, with some spankers of his own invention, to the sail already set, despatched a couple of shots in token of farewell to his partner in the sport, and, skimming over the water like some belated bird making for its nest, left her to plug her holes, put her rigging in order, and repair her halliards, disappeared on the horizon.

These pranks, as you will readily understand, made the business of entering harbours somewhat risky; but the Calypso was a jilt who could alter her figure and even her face, as circumstances required. Sometimes she assumed some artless name and a guileless look, calling herself *la belle Jenny* or *la Jeune Olympe*, and appeared with an air of innocence quite pleasant to behold, having, as she said, just freighted tea at Canton, coffee at Mocha, or spices at Ceylon. She displayed samples of her cargo, took orders, and inquired for passengers. Captain Jacques became an honest native of Lower Brittany, with his big jacket, long hair, and broad hat, all the cast-off wardrobe, in fact, of the defunct Bertrand. Sometimes the Calypso changed her sex; was called *le Sphynx* or *le Léonidas;* her crew assumed French uniforms, and she entered harbour, flying the white flag, courteously saluting the fort, which returned her salute as courteously. Then the Captain would be, according to his whim, either a seaman, fuming, swearing and cursing, talking of nothing but port and starboard, not knowing what was the use of the land except to put in at from time to time for fresh water or to dry his fish. Or again, he would be some dandy young Officer just fresh from College, to whom the Government, to recompense the services of his ancestors, had given an appointment which a dozen Officers of long standing were applying for. In this case, Captain Jacques called himself M. de Kergouran or M. de Champ-Fleury; he was short-sighted, looked at you with a blinking eye, and lisped. All this would have been soon recognised as a piece of acting in a French or English harbour, but it enjoyed an enormous success in Cuba, in Martinique, in Guadeloupe or Java.

As to the investment of the money which accrued from his trade, Jacques, who did not understand movements of *agio* or rates of discount, had a very simple plan: in exchange for his gold or bank notes he took from Visapore or Gujerat the finest diamonds he could find in those places, so that he had come to be almost as good a judge of diamonds as he was of Negroes. Next he placed the newly-purchased stones, with those bought previously, in a belt which he always wore. When he ran short of money he rummaged in his belt and extracted, according to his needs, a stone as large as a pea or a diamond the size of a nut, walked into a Jew’s shop, had it weighed, and let him have it at the tariff price. Then, like Cleopatra, who drank the pearls which Anthony gave her, he ate and drank away his diamond; only, unlike the Queen of Egypt, Jacques usually made it last for several meals.

Thanks to this method of investing money, Jacques always carried on his person property to the value of two or three million francs, which, as he could hold it, literally, in the hollow of his hand, was easily concealed should occasion demand. For Jacques did not disguise from himself that a profession like his had its unlucky side; that the business which he carried on was not all a bed of roses, and that after years of good fortune he might meet with a day of reverse.

But, while awaiting this unlucky day, Jacques led, as we have said, a very pleasant life, and would not have exchanged positions with any monarch in the world, seeing that at this date to be a King was already beginning to be a very poor amusement. Thus our adventurer would have been perfectly happy, had not the recollection of his father and Georges occasionally saddened his thoughts; so, one fine day, he could hold out no longer, and having freighted in Senegambia and Congo, and then come on to complete his cargo on the coasts of Mozambique and Zanzibar, he determined to go on to the Isle of France, and inquire if his father had not left it, or if his brother had not returned to it. Accordingly, on approaching the coast, he had made the signals usually adopted by Slave-ships and had received a corresponding reply. Chance had brought it about that these signals were exchanged between father and son; so that, the same evening, Jacques found himself not only on his native shore, but also in the arms of the very persons he had come to seek.

CHAPTER XV.

PANDORA'S BOX.

IT was, as you will readily believe, a great happiness for the father and brothers who had not seen each other for so long a time to find themselves thus once more together, just when they least expected it. True, Georges at the first moment, thanks to his European education, experienced a feeling of regret at finding his brother a merchant of human flesh; but this first feeling soon disappeared. As for Pierre Munier, who had never left the Island, and who necessarily therefore looked at everything from the Colonial point of view, he took no notice of it at all; besides, the poor father was entirely absorbed in the unlooked-for delight of seeing his sons again.

Jacques, as was quite natural, returned to sleep at Moka. He and Georges and their father did not separate until well on into the night. During the first delightful chat each revealed to these intimates of his soul all that was in his own heart. Pierre Munier poured forth his joy, his sole topic being his paternal love. Jacques related his life of adventure, his strange amusements, his eccentric happiness.

Then came Georges' turn, and Georges related the story of his love.

On hearing this, Pierre Munier trembled in all his limbs. Georges, a Mulatto, and the son of a Mulatto, loved a white girl, and declared, while confessing his love, that this girl should be his wife. Such arrogance was an unheard-of audacity and unprecedented in the Colonies, and would draw down upon the man in whose heart it had been kindled all the sorrows of earth and all the wrath of heaven.

As for Jacques, he quite understood Georges loving a white girl, although, for many reasons, which he detailed with admirable logic, he much preferred black women for his own part. But Jacques was too much of a philosopher not to understand and respect the tastes of others. Besides he considered that Georges, handsome, wealthy and superior to other men as he was, might aspire to the hand of any white girl whatsoever, were she Aline herself, Queen of Golconda!

In any case he suggested to Georges a plan that would greatly simplify matters; namely, that in case of a refusal on the part of M. de Malmédie, he should carry off Sara and deposit her in some corner of the world, wherever Georges chose, to which he might go and join her. Georges thanked his brother for his obliging offer, which however, he declined as he had at the moment decided upon another plan.

Next day the three met again almost before daybreak, so much was there fresh to tell one another that had been forgotten the previous evening. At about eleven o’clock Jacques felt a longing to visit all the spots where his childhood had been spent, and proposed to his father and brother a walk round the estate by way of reviving the memories of his early days. Pierre Munier agreed to this; but Georges, as the reader will remember, was expecting news from the town. So he was obliged to let the two go off together and to remain at the house, where he had directed Miko-Miko to meet him.

At the end of half-an-hour Georges saw his messenger appear; he was carrying his long bamboo rod and his two baskets, just as though he had been doing business in the town; for the prudent trader had thought it possible that he might meet, on his way, some fancier of Chinese workmanship. Georges, in spite of the power of self-control which he had been at such pains to acquire, went to open the door with beating heart, for this man had seen Sara and would speak to him about her.

Everything had happened in the most natural manner, as you may easily suppose. Miko-Miko, making use of his privilege of gaining admittance everywhere, had gone into M. de Malmédie’s house, and Bijou, who had already seen his young mistress purchase a fan from the Chinaman, had taken him straight to Sara’s apartments.

On seeing the dealer, Sara started; for, by a perfectly natural connection of ideas and circumstances, Miko-Miko brought back Georges to her mind. Accordingly she welcomed him with eagerness, having but one regret, namely, at being compelled to converse with him by signs.

Miko-Miko then drew from his pocket Georges’ card, on which he had written, with his own hand, the prices of the different objects which Miko-Miko had thought likely to take Sara’s fancy, and gave it to the girl with the side on which its owner’s name was engraved uppermost.

Sara blushed involuntarily and turned the card over quickly. It was clear that Georges, being unable to see her, employed this means of recalling himself to her memory. She bought, without any bargaining, all the articles of which the price had been written in the young man's handwriting, and, as the dealer did not think of asking to have the card returned, neither did she think of giving it back to him.

On coming out from Sara's apartments, Miko-Miko was stopped by Henri, who in his turn took him to his rooms to inspect his stock. Henri bought nothing at that moment, but gave Miko-Miko to understand that, being on the point of marrying his cousin, he wanted some of the choicest knick-knacks which the dealer could procure for him.

This double visit to the girl and her cousin had given Miko-Miko the opportunity of examining the house in detail. Now, as Miko-Miko, among the bumps that adorned his bare skull, had the bump of locality developed in the highest degree, he had perfectly retained in his memory the arrangements of the buildings constituting M. de Malmédie's house.

The house had three entrances: — one which led, as we have said, by a bridge over the stream, into the Jardin de la Compagnie; the second, at the back, led, by means of a winding path planted with trees, into the *Rue du Gouvernement*; and, lastly, the third, which was a side entrance, opened into the *Rue de la Comédie.*

Approaching the house by its main entrance, that is to say, by the bridge which crossed the stream and led to the Jardin de la Compagnie, you found yourself in a large square Court, planted with mango-trees and China lilacs, through whose foliage and flowers you saw, directly opposite, the principal dwelling, which was entered by a door almost in a line with the one leading from the street; standing at this main entrance you had, first of all, the Negroes' quarters to your right, the stables to your left. Further on, on the right stood a summer-house shaded by a magnificent "dragon's blood," and opposite it, on the left, a second building, also reserved for the slaves. Last of all, you saw on the left the side entrance leading to the *Rue de la Comédie*, and on the right a path leading to a little staircase and winding on until it reached the lane, planted with trees, which formed a terrace opposite the Theatre.

From this, if you have followed clearly the description we have just given, you will see that the summer-house was separated from the main body of the house by the passage. Now, as this summer-house was Sara's favourite retreat, and as she spent the greater part of her time there, the reader will permit us to add a few words to what we have already said in a preceding chapter.

This summer-house had four fronts, although it was itself visible only on three sides, since the fourth side abutted on to the Negroes’ quarters. The other three overlooked, one, the Entrance Court planted with mango-trees, China lilies, and the dragon’s-blood; another, the passage leading to the little staircase, the third overlooked a large wood-yard, almost deserted; while the wood-yard, in its turn, overlooked, on one side, the same stream which flowed past one flank of M. de Malmédie’s house; on the other, the lane planted with trees which was about twelve feet above the level of the wood-yard. Leaning against this lane were two or three buildings the roofs of which, slightly inclined, offered an easy access to anybody who, from any motive, should desire to avoid the public path and slip down unobserved from the lane into the wood-yard.

The summer-house had three windows and a door leading, as we have said, into the Court. One of the windows was close to this door, the second looked on to the passage, and the third on to the wood-yard.

During Miko-Miko’s narrative Georges smiled thrice, but with very different expressions; first, when his messenger told him that Sara had kept the card; secondly, when he mentioned Henri’s marriage with his cousin; lastly, on hearing that it was possible to enter the summer-house by the window facing the wood-yard.

Georges put pencil and paper in front of Miko-Miko, and, while the latter, to make things doubly sure, drew a plan of the house, Georges took up a pen and began to write a letter.

This letter and the plan of the house were completed simultaneously.

Then Georges got up and fetched from his room a wonderful little Buhl cabinet, worthy of having belonged to Madame de Pompadour, placed inside it the letter he had just written, locked the cabinet, and handed both to Miko-Miko, giving him his instructions. Miko-Miko next received another doubloon in payment for the fresh commission he was about to undertake, and then, balancing his bamboo rod on his shoulder once more, took the road to the town at the same pace at which he had come, which would bring him to Sara’s abode in somewhere about four hours.

Just as Miko-Miko had disappeared from sight at the end of the avenue of trees leading to the plantation, Jacques and his father entered through a gate behind. Georges, who had been on the point of starting to meet them, was surprised at their quick return; but Jacques had seen in the skies signs that foretold a storm, and though he had absolute confidence in M. Tête-de-Fer, his Lieutenant, he was much too fond of the Calypso to entrust her safety to another in such a crisis. So he came back to bid his brother good-bye; for, from the top of the *Montagne du Pouce,* which he had climbed to see if the Calypso still remained at her station, he had seen her tacking about at nearly two miles distance from the shore, and had then made the signal arranged between the Lieutenant and himself, in case circumstances should compel him to return on board. His signal had been observed, and Jacques had no doubt but that in two hours the boat that had brought him ashore would be ready to take him back.

Poor old M. Munier had done all he could to keep his son with him, but Jacques had answered quietly: —

"It is impossible, father."

And the firm, though tender, manner in which he said this had convinced the old man that his son had fully made up his mind, so he pressed him no further.

As for Georges, he so thoroughly entered into the motive which took Jacques back on board, that he did not even attempt to dissuade him from his purpose. Only, he declared that he and his father would go with him as far as the ridge of the Pieterbot, from the opposite side of which they could see Jacques embark, and, once on the sea, follow him with their eyes as far as the ship.

Jacques accordingly started accompanied by Georges and his father, and the three, taking paths known only to sportsmen, reached the source of the *Riviere des Calebasses.* There Jacques took leave of his father and brother, whom he had seen for so short a time, giving a solemn promise to visit them again before long.

An hour later, the boat had left the shore with Jacques, who, loyal to the love which a sailor feels for his ship, went back to save the Calypso or perish with her.

The moment Jacques was on board, the schooner, which had been tacking to and fro off shore till then, headed for the *lle de Sable,* and sheered off to the Northward as quick as possible.

Meanwhile sky and sea had assumed a more and more threatening aspect. The sea roared loudly and was visibly rising, although the tide was still on the ebb; while the sky, as though wishing to rival the ocean, rolled along hurrying masses of clouds that parted suddenly to give passage to squalls of wind varying from east-south-east to south-east and south-south-east. These symptoms, however, to any one but a sailor, betokened only an ordinary tempest. Several times previously during the year the aspect of things had appeared as threatening without being followed by any catastrophe. But on entering the house, Georges and his father were obliged to acknowledge how sagacious the prognostications of Jacques had been. The mercury in the barometer had sunk to below twenty-eight inches.

Pierre Munier at once ordered the overseer to have all the stalks of the manioc cut in order to protect the roots, which, if this precaution is neglected, are nearly always torn up from the ground and carried off by the wind.

Georges, in his turn, ordered Ali to have Antrim saddled by eight o'clock. On hearing this order Pierre Munier started.

"What do you want your horse saddled for?" he asked in alarm.

"I have to be at the town at ten, father," answered Georges.

"But, my poor lad, it is impossible!" cried the old man.

"I must, father," said Georges.

And in the tone of these words, as in those of Jacques, the unhappy father recognised such a determination, that he dropped his head with a sigh and insisted no further.

Meanwhile Miko-Miko was fulfilling his mission.

No sooner did he reach Port-Louis than he made for M. de Malmédie's house, now doubly open to him owing to the order given by Henri. He presented himself this time with even more confidence, since in passing the harbour he had seen M. de Malmédie and his son occupied in watching the ships riding at anchor, whose skippers, in expectation of the threatening storm, were laying out extra anchors. Accordingly he entered the house without fear of being disturbed by anybody while transacting his business, and Bijou, who had seen Miko-Miko that same morning in conference with his young master as well as with her whom he already regarded as his young mistress, took him straight to Sara, who, as usual, was in the summer-house.

As Georges had anticipated, among all the fresh objects which the dealer offered to the curiosity of the young Creole, the charming Buhl cabinet at once attracted her notice. Sara took it up, turned it round and round, and, having admired the outside, wished to examine it within, and asked for the key to open it, upon which Miko-Miko pretended to search for it everywhere, but without success. Finally he intimated by signs that he had not got it, and had doubtless forgotten it at home, but would go and fetch it; so he went off at once leaving behind the cabinet and promising to return with the key.

Ten minutes later, while the girl, with childish eagerness and curiosity was turning the wonderful cabinet backwards and forwards, Bijou entered and gave her the key, which Miko-Miko had been satisfied to send by the hands of a Negro-messenger. Little mattered it to Sara how the key reached her, so long as it did reach her; so she took it from the hands of Bijou, who withdrew quickly to close all the shutters of the house that were threatened by the storm. Sara, left alone, hastened to open the cabinet, which, as we know, contained nothing but a piece of paper, not even sealed, but folded in four.

Georges had anticipated everything, and made every calculation.

Sara must be alone at the moment when she discovered the letter, and the letter must be open so that Sara could not send it back and say that she had not read it.

Accordingly Sara, seeing she was quite alone, hesitated for a moment; guessing, however, from whom the letter came, and carried away by curiosity, by love, in short, by the thousand feelings which surge in a young girl's bosom, she could not resist the desire to see what Georges had written to her, but with much agitation and a great deal of blushing, took the letter, unfolded it, and read as follows: —

"Sara, "I have no need to tell you I love you, for you know it; the dream of my life has been to find a companion like yourself. Now there are exceptional cases, supreme in one's life, when all the conventionalities of society break down in the presence of an overwhelming necessity.

"Sara, do you love me?

"Weigh carefully what your life with M. de Malmédie will be, weigh carefully what your life will be with me.

"With him, the respect of all men.

"With me, the scorn of all men, — except the few able to rise superior to deeply-rooted prejudice.

"Only, I repeat, I love you, more than any man on earth has ever loved you, or ever will. I know that M. de Malmédie is hurrying on the hour when he will become your husband. There is, then, no time to be lost; you are free, Sara; lay your hand on your heart, and decide between M. Henri and myself.

"Your answer I shall hold sacred as a mother's commands. This evening, at ten o'clock, I shall be at the summer house to receive it.

"GEORGES.

Sara glanced around her in terror. It seemed as though on turning round, she would see Georges.

At this moment the door opened and, instead of Georges, Sara saw Henri appear; she hid the letter in her bosom.

Henri generally, as we have seen, chose unfortunate times for his interviews with his cousin, and on this occasion he was no more happily inspired than usual. It was an inopportune moment for appearing before Sara, taken up as she was with her thoughts of another.

"Forgive me, Sara dear," said Henri, "for coming in thus unannounced, but it seems to me, whatever you may think about it, that, situated as we are, and going to be, in a fortnight, man and wife, such freedom is permissible. Besides, I have come to tell you that, if you have any nice flowers outside that you care for particularly, you would do well to bring them indoors."

"Why?" asked Sara. "Don't you see there is a storm brewing, and that it would be better for flowers, as well as for people, to be indoors than out to-night?"

"Oh! good heavens!" cried Sara, thinking of Georges, "will there be any danger then?"

"Not for those of us who have solid houses," said Henri; "but for the poor wretches who live in huts or who have business in the streets, yes; and I shouldn't like to be in their place."

"Do you really think so, Henri?"

"Think so? by George, I do! There, do you hear?"

"What?"

"The cypresses in the Jardin de la Compagnie."

"Yes, I hear. They are moaning; it is a sure sign of tempest, is it not?"

"And look at the sky, how black it is. So, I repeat, Sara, if you have any flowers to bring in, you have no time to lose; I am going to shut up my dogs in the kennels."

And Henri went out to put his pack-under shelter from the storm.

Night, in truth, was coming on with unusual rapidity, for the sky was covered with great, black clouds; from time to time gusts of wind shook the house, then all became still again, but it was that oppressive stillness that seems the agony of gasping Nature. Sara looked out into the Courtyard and saw the mango-trees shivering as though they were endowed with feeling and had a presentiment of the coming struggle between wind, earth and sky, while the China lilacs drooped their flowers sadly towards the ground. At this sight the girl was seized with deadly terror, and clasped her hands together, murmuring: —

"Oh God! protect him."

At this instant Sara heard her Uncle's voice calling her, and opened the door.

"Sara," said M. de Malmédie, "Sara, come here, my child, you wron't be safe in the summer-house."

"Here I am, Uncle," said the girl, shutting the door and turning the key after her, lest any one should go in in her absence.

But instead of joining Henri and his father, Sara went into her own room. A moment later M.de Malmédie came to see what she was doing there, and found her on her knees before the crucifix at the foot of her bed.

"What are you doing there," said he, "instead of coming to have your tea with us?"

"Uncle," answered Sara, "I am praying for all wayfarers abroad to-night."

"Oh! indeed," said M. de Malmédie. "I am sure there won't be a man in the whole island such a fool as to stir out of doors in this weather."

"Heaven grant it, Uncle," said Sara.

And she continued her prayers.

There was, in fact, no longer room for doubt that the event which Jacques, sailor as he was, had foretold at a glance, was to be accomplished; one of those terrible hurricanes, which are the terror of the Colonies, threatened the Isle of France. Night, as we have said, had come on with alarming swiftness, but the lightning flashes followed each other with such rapidity and brightness that this darkness was replaced by a blue, livid light which gave to all objects the sickly hue of those extinct worlds which Byron represents Cain as visiting under the guidance of Satan. Each of the short intervals during which the almost incessant lightning allowed the darkness to reign was filled with heavy peals of thunder, which, starting from behind the mountains, seemed to roll over their slopes, passed above the town and died away in the depths of the horizon. Then, as we have said, mighty gusts of wind followed the travelling thunder-claps and passed over in their turn, bowing as if they had been willow rods the stoutest trees, which rose up again slowly and fearfully, only to bend and moan and sigh once more beneath some fresh squall, ever fiercer than the preceding one.

It was especially in the centre of the Island, in the district of Moka and the Williams plains, that the hurricane, as if delighting in its liberty, was grandest to behold. Pierre Munier was therefore doubly terrified at seeing Jacques start off and Georges ready to start as well, but, always feeble in presence of any moral force, the poor father had yielded, and, though shuddering at the roaring of the wind, turning pale at the growling of the thunder, and starting at each fresh lightning flash, did not even attempt to keep Georges back. As for the young man, you would have said that he rose to greater heights of hardihood, the nearer he approached the danger. In contrast to his father, at each threatening roar he raised his head; at each flash of lightning he smiled; you would have said that he who had hitherto battled in every human strife, longed, like Don Juan, to battle with his Creator.

So when the hour for his departure had arrived, with that inflexible determination which was the distinctive result of the education — we will not say which he had received, but which he had given himself — Georges approached his father and gave him his hand, and, without seeming to understand the old man’s reluctance, went out with as firm a step and as composed a face as though he were leaving the house in quite ordinary circumstances. At the door he met Ali who, with the passive obedience of Orientals, was holding Antrim ready saddled. The son of the desert neighed and reared as though he sniffed the hiss of the Simoon, or the roar of the Khamsin; but, on hearing his rider’s well-known voice, seemed to calm down, and turned his wild eye and foaming nostrils towards him. Georges patted him for a moment on the shoulder, and spoke a few words in Arabic; then, with the lightness of a perfect horseman, jumped into the saddle without the aid of the stirrup. At the same moment Ali let go of the bridle, and Antrim dashed off like lightning without Georges even noticing his father, who, to avoid losing sight of his favourite son sooner than he could help it, had partly opened the door, and followed him with his eyes until he disappeared at the end of the avenue leading up to the house.

It was, indeed, wonderful to see the intrepid rider borne along as rapidly as the hurricane through which he passed, overleaping space, like Faust hurrying to the Brocken on his infernal steed. All around him were disorder and confusion. Nothing was to be heard save the crash of trees, broken by the beating of the storm. Sugar-canes and manioc plants torn from their roots were flying through the air like feathers carried by the wind. Birds, surprised in their sleep and whirled away in a flight which they could not control, wheeled round Georges, uttering shrill cries, while occasionally a terrified stag crossed the road swift as an arrow. Georges was now happy, for he felt his heart swell with pride; he alone was calm amidst this universal confusion, and, while all around him was bending and breaking, he alone pursued his course towards the goal determined by his will, suffering nothing to turn him from his path, or divert him from his purpose.

He went on thus for about an hour, leaping over trunks of fallen trees, streams that had swollen into torrents, and rocks that had been torn from their roots and rolled down from the mountain-top; then he perceived the sea, tossing its dark waves, foaming and roaring, as it beat with terrific din against the shore, as though the hand of God could no longer restrain it. Georges reached the foot of the *Montagne des Signaux*; he turned its base, still carried onwards by his steed's impetuous career, crossed the *Pont Bourgeois,* turned to the right up the *Rue de la Côte-d'Or,* passed behind the walls of the *Quartier* and, crossing the rampart, descended by the *Rue de la Rampe* into the Jardin de la Compagnie. Thence making his way through the deserted streets in the midst of fragments of fallen chimneys, tottering walls, and flying tiles, he followed the *Rue de la Comédie,* then turned sharp to the right up the *Rue du Gouvernement,* plunged into the blind alley opposite the Theatre, jumped down from his horse, opened the wicket which separated the alley from the lane planted with trees, that overlooked M. de Malmédie's house, closed the gate to behind him, and threw his bridle over Antrim's neck, who, having no outlet, could not run away. Then, letting himself slide down the roofs abutting on the lane, and jumping from them to the ground, he found himself in the wood-yard, into which opened the windows of the summer-house we have already described.

Meanwhile, Sara was in her room, listening to the roaring of the gale, crossing herself at each flash of lightning, praying unceasingly, calling upon the tempest, for she hoped that the tempest might stop Georges. Then starting suddenly as she told herself that when a man such as her lover says that he will do a thing, do it he will, though the whole world should fall upon his head. Then she besought God to calm the wind and quench the lightning; she saw Georges crushed beneath some tree, overwhelmed by some rock, rolling at the bottom of some torrent; and she realised in alarm how strong and swift an influence her rescuer had acquired over her; she felt that all resistance to what so attracted her was useless, that all struggle, in short, was vain against that love, born but the day before, yet already so powerful. She knew her poor heart could but struggle and groan, acknowledging itself vanquished without having so much as tried to show fight.

As the hour advanced, Sara’s excitement became more intense. With eyes fixed on the clock, she followed the movement of the hands, and a voice whispered in her heart that, as the hand marked each minute, Georges was coming nearer. The hand pointed in succession to nine o’clock, half-past nine, a quarter to ten, and the storm, far from diminishing, became every moment more appalling. The house shook to its foundations; you would have thought each instant that the wind would tear it from its base. From time to time, midst the wail of the cypresses and the cries of the Negroes, whose huts, less solid than the houses of the Whites, were demolished by the breath of a hurricane just as a child blows down the house of cards which he has erected, you could hear, in answer to the thunder, the mournful appeal of some building in distress imploring help that no human being could render it.

Among all these various sounds that echoed the destruction that was going on, Sara thought she heard a horse neighing.

Then she got up suddenly; her resolve was taken. The man who through the midst of such dangers, when the bravest were quaking in their houses, came to her across uprooted forests, swollen torrents, yawning gulfs, and all to say “I love you, Sara! do you love me?” this man was truly worthy of her. And if Georges had done this, Georges who had saved her life, then she belonged to Georges as he belonged to her. It was no longer a resolution formed by her free will; a hand divine bowed her, without her being able to resist it, beneath a pre-ordained destiny; it was no longer hers to choose her lot, but passively to obey her fate.

Then with that firmness imparted by a crisis, Sara quitted her room, reached the end of the corridor, descended by the little outer staircase we have mentioned, which seemed to quake beneath her feet, found herself at the corner of the square Courtyard, went on, stumbling against fragments at each step, and leaning against the wall of the summer-house so as not to be blown down by the wind, until she reached the door. At the moment she turned the handle, the lightning flashed, showing her the mango-trees all twisted, the lilacs dishevelled, her flowers crushed; then only did she fully realise the depths of the convulsion in which Nature was struggling, and thought that perhaps she would wait in vain, and that Georges would not come, not because he feared to come, but because he was dead. In face of this idea, everything disappeared, and Sara quickly entered the summer-house.

"Thank you, Sara," said a voice that startled her to the depths of her heart, "thank you! Oh! I was not mistaken; you love me, Sara; bless you a hundred times!"

And Sara felt a hand that grasped her own, a heart beating against hers, a breath that mingled with her breath. An unknown sensation, rapid, devouring, ran through all her frame; panting, distracted, bending over her as a flower bends upon its stalk, she fell upon Georges' shoulder, having exhausted, in the struggle which she had maintained for two hours, all the strength that she possessed, and only able to murmur: —

"Georges! Georges! have pity on me!"

Georges understood this appeal from weakness to strength, from the modesty of the girl to the loyalty of her lover. It may be he had come with a different object, but he felt from that moment Sara was his; that any favour obtained from the maid would be so much ravished from the bride, and, though quivering himself with love, desire, and happiness, contented himself with drawing her closer to the window to see her by the flash of the lightning, and, laying his head on that of the young Creole, said: —

"You are mine, Sara, are you not? mine for life?"

"Oh! yes, yes, for life!" murmured the girl.

"Nothing shall ever part us, but death?"

"Nothing but death."

"You swear it, Sara?"

"By my mother! Georges!"

"Good!" said the young man, trembling both with joy and pride. "From this moment you are my wife, Sara, and woe to him who tries to rob me of you!"

At these words Georges pressed his lips on those of the girl, and, dreading doubtless lest he should no longer control himself in the presence of such love, and youth, and beauty, dashed into the neighbouring room, the window of which, like that of the summer-house, overlooked the wood-yard, and disappeared.

At this moment there was such a deafening peal of thunder that Sara fell upon her knees. Almost immediately the door of the summer-house opened and M. de Malmédie and Henri entered.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MOMENTOUS INTERVIEW.

DURING the night the hurricane ceased, but it was not until the next morning that the havoc due to it could be properly estimated.

Many of the ships lying in the harbour had sustained very considerable damage; several had been dashed against one another and seriously injured.

The majority had been dismasted and swept bare like sheer hulks; two or three had dragged their anchors and grounded on the Ile des Tonneliers. Lastly, one had sunk in the harbour and perished, crew and cargo, without any one being able to afford her the slightest assistance.

On land, the destruction was no less great. Few of the houses of Port-Louis had altogether escaped the terrible cataclysm. Nearly all such as were covered with shingles, slates, tiles, copper or tin, had had their roofs carried away. Only those which were terminated by *argamasses,* that is to say, by terraces in the Indian fashion, had offered a complete resistance. So, next morning the streets were found strewed with fragments, and some of the buildings were only kept upright upon their foundations by the aid of numerous struts.

All the stands erected on the Champ-de-Mars in preparation for the races had been blown down. Two heavy guns belonging to the Battery near the *Grand-Riviere,* had been overturned by the wind and were found in the morning lying in an opposite direction to that in which they had been left the evening before.

The interior of the Island presented an aspect no less deplorable. What was left of the harvest, which happily had been almost all got in, had been torn up out of the ground; in several places whole acres of forest presented the appearance of wheat laid by the hail. Scarcely any tree standing by itself had been able to resist the hurricane, and even the tamarinds, those pre-eminently flexible trees, had been broken off short, — a thing hitherto regarded as an impossibility.

The house of M. de Malmédie, one of the highest in Port-Louis, had suffered greatly. There had even been a moment when the shocks had been so violent, that M. de Malmédie and his son determined to seek refuge in the summer-house, which, being built entirely of stone, with only one storey, and sheltered by the terrace, evidently afforded less hold to the wind. Henri had therefore run to his cousin’s room, but, finding it empty, concluded that Sara, like his father and himself, had thought of seeking refuge in the summer-house, where, upon going down, they found her. The reason for her being there was quite natural, and her terror required no excuse. Consequently neither father nor son suspected for a moment the cause which had made Sara leave her room, but assigned it to a feeling of fear, from which they themselves had not been exempt. Towards dawn, as we have said, the tempest lulled. But, though nobody had slept all night, they dared not seek repose as yet, and each individual occupied himself in examining what amount of personal loss would fall upon him. The Governor, on his side, as soon as it was light, visited all the streets in the town, putting the garrison at the disposal of the inhabitants. The result was that, even before night fell, some portion of the traces left by the catastrophe had disappeared.

Everybody was doing his very best to restore to Port-Louis the aspect it had worn the day before, inasmuch as the festival of the Yamsé, one of the greatest solemnities in the Isle of France, was approaching. Now as this festival, the name of which is probably unknown in Europe, is intimately connected with the events of this story, we ask the reader’s permission to make a few introductory remarks on the subject, which are necessary for our purpose.

Everybody knows that the great Mahometan family is divided into two sects, not merely different, but even hostile; namely, the *Sunnite* and the *Shyite*. The one, to which the Arab and Turkish populations belong, recognise Abu-Bekr, Omar and Osman as the legitimate successors of Mahomet; the other, consisting of the Persians and Mussulman inhabitants of India, look upon the three Caliphs as usurpers, and assert that Ali, the son-in-law and minister of the Prophet, had the sole right to his political and religious inheritance. In the course of the long wars waged by the pretenders, Hoseïn, Ali’s son, was seized, near the town of Kerbela, by a band of soldiers sent by Omar in pursuit of him, and the young Prince, together with sixty of his relatives who accompanied him, was massacred after a heroic defence.

It is the anniversary of this ill-fated event which is celebrated every year with a solemn festival by the Mahometans of India, and is called the Yamsé, from a corruption of the cries of “Va Hoseïn! ô Hoseïn!” repeated in chorus by the Persians. They have, moreover, transformed the festival as well as the name, by introducing into it certain customs of their native country and ceremonies belonging to their ancient religion.

Well, it was on the following Monday, being the day of the full moon, that the Lascars, who represent the Indian *Shyites* in the Isle of France, were to celebrate the Yamsé according to their custom, and to afford the Colony the spectacle of this strange ceremony, which was looked forward to with even greater curiosity than in preceding years.

In fact an unwonted circumstance was to render the festival on this occasion more magnificent than it had ever been before. The Lascars are divided into two bands, the Lascars of the sea and the Lascars of the land; those of the sea being distinguished by their green robes, and those of the land by their white robes. Each band ordinarily celebrates the festival in its own way with the greatest amount of display and splendour possible, trying to outshine its rival; the result is an emulation which resolves itself into disputes, and the disputes degenerate into quarrels. Then the sea Lascars, who are poorer but more courageous than those of the land, often avenge themselves for the financial superiority of their opponents with sticks and sometimes even with swords, and the police are obliged to interfere to prevent fatal results.

But this year, thanks to the active intervention of an unknown merchant who was inspired no doubt by religious zeal, the two parties had abandoned their jealousies, and had united, so as to form but one body. Accordingly, as we have said, the report had been generally spread abroad that the solemnity would be at once more peaceful and more brilliant than in preceding years.

You can readily understand that, in a place where there is so little diversion as in the Isle of France, this festival, always regarded with curiosity, even by those who have witnessed it from childhood, is awaited with impatience. For three months beforehand it is the chief topic of conversation, and people talk of nothing else but the *gouhu*, which is to be the chief ornament of the fête.

The said *gouhn* is a kind of pagoda made of bamboo, consisting generally of three storeys one above the other, each narrower than the one below, and covered with paper of all colours. Each of these storeys is constructed in a separate hut, square like itself, one of its four sides being eventually demolished to admit of the edifice inside being removed. These three floors are then placed inside a fourth hut, high enough to allow of their being erected one above the other. The whole fabric is then joined together with ropes, and the finishing touch put both to its general appearance and its several details. Moreover, in order to arrive at a result worthy of the proposed structure, the Lascars often four months beforehand search the whole Colony through for the most skilful workmen; Hindoos, Chinese, free blacks and black slaves, are all put under contribution. Only instead of paying these last their daily wage, it is handed over to their masters.

Among all the individual losses which each inhabitant had to deplore the news was received with general delight that the house containing the *goulin*, which had already reached a state of completion, had escaped all damage, sheltered as it was behind a spur of the *Montague du Pouce*. Nothing then would be wanting this year to the festival, which the Governor, in celebration of his arrival, had supplemented by public races, reserving to himself with aristocratic liberality the right of giving the prizes, on condition that owners should ride their own horses, after the fashion of gentlemen riders in England.

So, as you see, everything concurred to make the pleasure to which all were looking forward soon efface the disagreeable experience which they had just gone through.

Sara, contrary to her wont, absorbed as she was by thoughts unknown to those about her, appeared to take no interest in a solemnity which, in previous years, had given her a much appreciated opportunity of exhibiting her fascinations.

For the whole aristocracy of the Isle of France was in the habit of appearing at the races, as well as at the Yamsé, either in stands expressly erected or in open carriages; in either case it was an opportunity for the handsome Creoles of Port-Louis to air their showy elegance. Naturally, therefore, it created surprise that Sara, on whom the announcement of a ball or any spectacle whatsoever generally produced such an impression, now remained so indifferent to what was going on. Henrietta herself, who had brought the girl up, and could read her mind to its depths, as though it were the clearest crystal, could not make her out at all, and became lost in thought on the subject.

Let us hasten to say that “ma mie Henriette,” — whose return to Port-Louis we have not had the opportunity, amid such grave incidents, to mention, — had been so alarmed during the night of the storm that, although not yet recovered from the effects of the incident that had so agitated her, she had started from the Rivière *Noire* as soon as the gale had ceased, and arrived in the course of the day at Port-Louis, where she had now been for two days in the company of her young charge, whose unaccustomed absentmindedness was beginning, as we said, to cause her serious uneasiness.

The fact is that during the last three days a great change had taken place in the girl’s life. From the moment when she saw Georges for the first time, the face and appearance, nay, even the very voice, of the handsome young fellow had dwelt in her heart. Then, with an involuntary sigh, she had thought more than once of her future marriage with Henri, a marriage to which, for the last ten years, she had given her tacit consent, owing to the fact that she had never expected that circumstances could arise which would render it an obligation impossible for her to fulfil. But from the day of the banquet with the Governor, she had felt that to take her cousin as a husband would be to condemn herself to perpetual unhappiness. Finally, there came a time, as we have seen, when not only had this fear become a conviction, but when she had given a solemn promise to Georges that she would never belong to any one but him. Well, you will allow that here was a situation calculated to make a girl of sixteen reflect seriously, and to make her regard as of less importance all those fêtes and amusements which hitherto she had looked upon as the chief events of her life.

Neither had M. de Malmédie and his son been free from anxiety during the last five or six days. Sara’s refusal to dance with anyone else from the time she declined to dance with Georges, her retirement from the ball when it was just opening, whereas as a rule she was the last to come away; her persistent silence, whenever her cousin or her uncle broached the question of her coming marriage, all this seemed to them unnatural. Accordingly they had both decided that the preparations for the wedding should go forward without saying anything more about it to Sara, and that she should only be informed, when everything was in readiness. This course was all the easier, inasmuch as no definite time had ever been fixed for the marriage, while Sara, who had just reached the age of sixteen, was quite old enough to fulfil the purpose which M. de Malmédie had always entertained with regard to her.

All these individual anxieties constituted a general pre-occupation, which had for three or four days imparted a coolness and a feeling of constraint to the meetings which took place between the different persons who lived in M. de Malmédie’s house. These meetings generally occurred four times a day; in the morning, at the breakfast hour; at two o’clock, which was the hour for dinner; at five, which was the tea hour; and at nine, which was the time for supper.

For three days Sara had requested and obtained breakfast in her own room. At this meal embarrassment and constraint, saved up, as it were, from the previous day, always prevailed; but there still remained three daily meetings which she could not avoid, except by making illness her excuse. Well, this excuse could not last for very long, so Sara hardened her heart, and came down at the accustomed hours.

On the third day after the storm, Sara was seated accordingly at five o’clock in the large drawing-room, working near the window at some embroidery which necessitated her keeping her eyes lowered Henrietta was giving to the teamaking all the attention which English ladies usually bestow on that important occupation, and M. de Malmédie and his son were standing before the fire-place talking in low tones, when suddenly the door opened and Bijou announced Lord Murray and M. Georges Munier.

This double announcement affected each of those present differently, as you will readily understand. MM. de Malmédie, thinking they had heard wrongly, made Bijou repeat the names. Sara blushed and lowered her head over her work, while Henrietta, who had just opened the tap of the tea-urn, was so confused that, occupied in looking successively at the MM. de Malmédie, Sara, and Bijou, she let the boiling water overflow, which now began to trickle from the urn over the table and from the table to the ground.

Bijou repeated the names he had already pronounced, accompanying them with the most agreeable smile he could assume.

M. de Malmédie and his son looked at one another with increasing astonishment; then M. de Malmédie, feeling that the situation must be put an end to, said: —

“Show them in.”

Lord Murray and Georges entered, both dressed in dark coats, which denoted a visit of ceremony.

M. de Malmédie took a step or two towards them, while Sara rose blushing, and, after a timid bow, sat down again, or rather fell down again on her chair, and Henrietta, noticing the thoughtless act which her astonishment had caused, hastily turned the tap of the urn.

Bijou, at a sign from his master, brought forward two arm-chairs, but Georges bowed to indicate that they were unnecessary, and that he would stand.

“Sir,” said the Governor, addressing M. de Malmédie, “here is M. Georges Munier, who has begged me to accompany him to your house, and support by my presence a request which he has to make of you. As I am sincerely anxious that this request should be granted, I have thought I ought not to refuse to take this step which, besides, procures me the honour of seeing you.” The Governor bowed, and the two men answered by a similar movement.

“We are under an obligation to M. Georges Munier,” said M. de Malmédie at last; “we shall therefore be delighted to be of service to him in any way.”

“If you mean by that, sir,” answered Georges, “to allude to the pleasure I have had in saving Mademoiselle from the danger in which she was placed, allow me to declare to you that all the gratitude is due from me to God, who brought me there to do what any one else would have done in my place. Besides,” added Georges, with a smile, “you will see presently that my conduct on that occasion was not free from selfishness.”

“Excuse me, sir, but I do not understand you,” said Henri.

“Make your mind easy, sir,” replied Georges, “you will not be long in doubt of my meaning, which I am about to explain clearly.”

“We are listening to you, sir. “Shall I retire, Uncle?” asked Sara.

“If I dared hope,” said Georges, half turning and with a bow, “that a wish expressed by me would influence you, all the easier, inasmuch as no definite time had ever been fixed for the marriage, while Sara, who had just reached the age of sixteen, was quite old enough to fulfil the purpose which M. de Malmédie had always entertained with regard to her.

All these individual anxieties constituted a general pre-occupation, which had for three or four days imparted a coolness and a feeling of constraint to the meetings which took place between the different persons who lived in

M. de Malmédie’s house. These meetings generally occurred four times a day; in the morning, at the breakfast hour; at two o’clock, which was the hour for dinner; at five, which was the tea hour; and at nine, which was the time for supper.

For three days Sara had requested and obtained breakfast in her own room. At this meal embarrassment and constraint, saved up, as it were, from the previous day, always prevailed; but there still remained three daily meetings which she could not avoid, except by making illness her excuse. Well, this excuse could not last for very long, so Sara hardened her heart, and came down at the accustomed hours.

On the third day after the storm, Sara was seated accordingly at five o’clock in the large drawing-room, working near the window at some embroidery which necessitated her keeping her eyes lowered Henrietta was giving to the teamaking all the attention which English ladies usually bestow on that important occupation, and M. de Malmédie and his son were standing before the fire-place talking in low tones, when suddenly the door opened and Bijou announced Lord Murray and M. Georges Munier.

This double announcement affected each of those present differently, as you will readily understand. MM. de Malmédie, thinking they had heard wrongly, made Bijou repeat the names. Sara blushed and lowered her head over her work, while Henrietta, who had just opened the tap of the tea-urn, was so confused that, occupied in looking successively at the MM. de Malmédie, Sara, and Bijou, she let the boiling water overflow, which now began to trickle from the urn over the table and from the table to the ground.

Bijou repeated the names he had already pronounced, accompanying them with the most agreeable smile he could assume.

“We are listening to you, sir. “Shall I retire, Uncle?” asked Sara.

“If I dared hope,” said Georges, half turning and with a bow, “that a wish expressed by me would influence you,

Mademoiselle, I would beg you, on the contrary, to remain.”

Sara sat down again. There was a moment’s silence; then M. de Malmédie indicated by a gesture that he was waiting.

“Monsieur,” said Georges in a perfectly calm tone, “you know me, you know my family, you know my fortune. I am worth at this moment two million francs. Forgive my entering into these details, but they are unavoidable.”

“All the same, sir, I must confess,” replied Henri, “that I fail to see how they can interest us.”

*’ Well, it is not as a matter of fact to you that I am speaking, sir,” said Georges, preserving the same calmness of voice and demeanour, while Henri showed a visible impatience, “but to your father.”

“Allow me to tell you, sir, that I do not see that my father, either, requires such information.”

“You will understand it presently, sir,” replied Georges coldly.

Then, fixing his eyes upon M. de Malmédie, he continued: —

“I have come to ask you for the hand of Mademoiselle Sara.”

“For whom?” asked M. de Malmédie.

“For myself, sir,” answered Georges.

“For yourself!” cried Henri, making a movement which the young Mulatto checked by a stern look.

Sara turned pale.

“For yourself?” asked M. de Malmédie.

“For myself, sir,” replied Georges with a bow.

“But,” cried M. de Malmédie, “you know quite well, sir, that my niece is destined for my son?”

“By whom, sir?” asked the young Mulatto in his turn.

“By whom, by whom!... Why! by me,” said M. de Malmédie.

“I would observe to you, sir,” replied Georges, “that Mademoiselle Sara is not your daughter, but only your niece, consequently she owes you only a qualified obedience.”

“But, sir, this whole discussion appears to me more than extraordinary.”

“Pardon me,” said Georges, “it is, on the contrary, perfectly natural. I love Mademoiselle Sara; I believe that I am destined to make her happy; I am obeying at once the desire of my heart and the duty imposed by my conscience.”

“But my cousin does not love you, sir,” cried Henri, allowing his natural impetuosity to carry him away.

“You are mistaken, sir,” answered Georges, “and I am authorised by Mademoiselle to tell you that she does love me.”

“By her! by her!” cried M. de Malmédie. “Impossible!”

“Why, cousin, do you dare?”... cried Henri, moving towards Sara with a gesture that looked like a threat.

Georges moved forward; the Governor restrained him.

“I now repeat unflinchingly,” said Sara, answering her cousin’s gesture by a look of supreme contempt, “what I have already said to M. Georges. The life which he has saved is his, and I will never belong to any other but him.”

And, at these words, with a gesture full of grace and dignity, the gesture of a Queen, she extended her hand to Georges, who bent over it and placed a kiss there.

“Ah! this is too much!” cried Henri, lifting a cane which he held in his hand.

But Lord Murray checked Henri, as he had already checked Georges.

As for Georges, he contented himself with a contemptuous smile at Henri, and then led Sara to the door, bowing once more. Sara, in her turn, bowed, signed to Henrietta to follow her, and went out with her. Georges came back.

“You have seen what has passed, sir,” said he to Sarah’s Uncle. “You no longer doubt the feelings which Mademoiselle entertains towards me. I venture then to ask you a second time for a positive answer to the request which I have the honour to address to you.”

“An answer, sir!” cried M. de Malmédie in his turn; “an answer! Have you the audacity to expect that I shall make you any answer than the one you deserve?”

“I do not dictate to you, sir, what answer you should give me; only, be it what it may, I beg you to give me one.”

“I should hope you don’t expect anything but a refusal?” cried Henri.

“It is your father I am asking, and not you, sir,” answered Georges; “allow your father to answer me, and we will discuss *our* affairs afterwards.”

“Well, sir,” said M. de Malmédie, “understand that I refuse absolutely.”

“Very well, sir,” answered Georges; “I expected that answer, but courtesy required that I should make you the application, and I have done so.”

And Georges bowed to M. de Malmédie with the same politeness and ease as if nothing had passed between them; then, turning to Henri: —

“Now, sir,” said he, “as regards us two, if you please. This is the second time, recollect, at an interval of fourteen years, that you have lifted your hand to me, — the first time with a sword in it.”

He lifted his hair, and pointed with his finger to the scar which furrowed his brow.

“The second time with that cane.”

And he pointed to the cane which Henri held.

“Well?” said Henri.

“Well,” said Georges, “I demand satisfaction for these two insults. You are a brave man, I know, and I hope that you will answer as a man the appeal which I make to your courage.”

“I am glad, sir, you are acquainted with my bravery, though your opinion on that point is indifferent to me,” answered Henri with a sneer; “it puts me at my ease in the answer I have to give you.”

“And what is that answer, sir?” asked Georges.

“The answer is that your second request is at least as presumptuous as the first. I do not fight with a Mulatto.”

Georges turned deadly pale, yet an inscrutable smile strayed across his lips.

“That is your last word?” he said.

“Yes, sir,” answered Henri.

“Very good, sir,” replied Georges; “now I know what I have got to do.”

And, saluting M. de Malmédie and his son, he withdrew, followed by the Governor.

“I warned you how it would be, sir,” said Lord Murray, as they reached the door.

“And you told me nothing I did not know already, my lord,” answered Georges; “but I have returned here to accomplish a destiny, and I must see it out to the end. I have a prejudice to combat: it must crush me, or I must kill it. Meanwhile, my lord, accept my grateful thanks.”

Georges bowed, and, grasping the hand which the Governor held out to him, crossed the Jardin de la Compagnie. Lord Murray followed him with his eyes as long as he remained in sight; then, when he had disappeared at the corner of the *Rue de la Rampe*, he shook his head, saying to himself sadly: —

“There is a man going straight to his own destruction. It is a pity truly; there was something noble in that heart of his.”

CHAPTER XVII.

THE RACES.

THE festival of the Yamsé began on the following Saturday, and the town had decked itself, in honour of the day, with such bravery that it was hard to realise that but six days previously it had all but been destroyed.

At early morning the Sea Lascars and the Land Lascars, now united in a single band, started from the Malabar encampment situated outside the town between the brook *des Pucelles* and the *Fanfaron* brook, and, preceded by barbaric strains of music from tambourines, flutes and jews' harps, took the road to Port-Louis, in order to make what is called the *quête,* or collection. The two chiefs walked side by side, dressed according to the party which they represented, one in a green, the other in a white, robe, and each carrying a drawn sabre with an orange fixed upon its point. Behind them walked two Mullahs, each holding in both hands a plate filled with sugar and covered with leaves of China roses; next, after the Mullahs came, in fairly good order, the phalanx of native devotees.

The collection began at the first houses in the town; for, doubtless in a spirit of equality, the collectors do not despise the smallest huts, the offerings from which, as in the case of the wealthiest houses, are intended to defray a part of the enormous expense which all this poor population has incurred in order to render the ceremony as splendid as possible. Further, it must be stated, the method of begging adopted by the collectors is affected by the pride characteristic of Orientals, and, far from being low and servile, exhibits something noble and touching. After the chiefs, to whom all doors are opened, have saluted the owners of the house by lowering the points of their sabres before them, the Mullah advances and offers to the spectators sugar and rose leaves. Meanwhile other natives, selected by the chiefs, receive in plates the gifts which have been made to them; then they all withdraw, saying, *"Salaam."* In this way they seem not so much to receive alms, as to invite those who are strangers to their creed to a symbolic communion, by sharing with them in a fraternal way the expenses of their worship and their religious offerings. Usually the collection extends not only, as we have said, to all the houses in the town, but even to the ships in the harbour, to solicit from which is the province of the Sea Lascars. But on this occasion, as regards this last item, the collection was much curtailed, the majority of the vessels having suffered so greatly in the hurricane that their Captains felt more need of help than disposed to give it. However, at the very moment when the collectors had reached the quay, a ship which had been signalled that morning appeared between the Labourdonnaie Redoubt and Fort Blanc, and entered the harbour, flying the Dutch flag, with all sails set, saluting the fort which returned her salute gun for gun. She must no doubt have been a long way from the Island when the hurricane occurred, for not a rope in her rigging was missing, and she came onward, leaning over so gracefully the hand of some marine goddess might have been pushing her along the surface of the water. From a distance, by the aid of glasses, you could see her whole crew on deck, in the full uniform of King William, as if they had donned festival costume on purpose to be present at the ceremony. So you may guess that, thanks to its joyous and prosperous appearance, this vessel became at once the object aimed at by both chiefs. Consequently, hardly had she cast anchor ere the leader of the Sea Lascars got into a boat, and, accompanied by his plate-bearers and a dozen of his followers, put off towards the vessel, which certainly did not belie, when seen close at hand, the favourable opinion she had inspired at a distance.

Indeed, if ever Dutch spruceness, so famed all the world over, deserved a hearty eulogy, it was at the sight of this gallant ship, which appeared as the floating embodiment of that spruceness; her deck washed, sponged and polished might have contested the prize for elegance with the parquet floor of the most sumptuous drawing-room. Her copper-work shone like gold; the companion-ladders, carved in the most precious Indian wood, seemed rather for ornament than for purposes of ordinary utility. As for her guns, you would have called them guns *de luxe*, intended more for a museum of artillery than for the armoury of a ship.

Captain Van den Broek — for such was the name of the master of this charming vessel — seemed to know what the business was which brought the Lascars on board, for he went to the head of the ladder to receive the chief, and, having spoken a few words to him in his own language, which proved that this was not the first time he had sailed the Indian seas, placed upon the plate held out to him, not a piece of gold, nor a rouleau of silver, but a nice little diamond worth, perhaps, a hundred louis, apologising for having no other money at the moment, and begging the chief of the Lascars to be satisfied with this offering. This gift so far exceeded the anticipations of the worthy adherent of Ali, and was so little in harmony with the natural thriftiness of the compatriots of John de Witt, that the chief of the Lascars hesitated a moment, not venturing to take such liberality seriously, and it was not until Captain Van den Broek had assured him three or four times over that the diamond was really intended for the *Shyite* band with whose efforts he declared himself fully in sympathy, that the Lascar thanked him and presented to him with his own hands the plate of rose leaves powdered with sugar. The Captain gracefully took a small pinch, which he raised to his mouth and pretended to eat, to the great satisfaction of the Indians, who did not leave the hospitable ship until after many 'Salaams.' Then they continued their collection elsewhere, but without finding that the story which they told every one of the fine windfall which had fallen to them from the sky was successful in producing a similar donation.

The day was spent in this way, each preparing himself rather for the festival of the morrow than taking part in the proceedings of this day, which are only, so to speak, the prologue to the play.

On the morrow the races were to take place. Now, the ordinary races were already a great institution in the Island; but the present ones, occurring in the midst of the other fêtes and, above all, being given by the Governor, were going to surpass as you may suppose, anything of the kind seen before.

The Champ-de-Mars was, as usual, the spot chosen for the fête, and all the unreserved space had been crowded with sight-seers from early in the morning; for although the great race, that of the gentlemen jockeys, was the chief attraction of the day, it was by no means the only one. It was to be preceded by other events of a comic nature, which, for the populace especially, were all the more interesting, inasmuch as they themselves would take part in them. These introductory sports were a pig-hunt, a sack race, and a pony race. The Governor had offered a prize for each of these, as he had done for the big race. The winner of the pony race was to receive a splendid double-barrelled gun by Manton; of the sack race, a fine umbrella; while the winner in the pig-hunt kept the pig itself as a prize.

The prize for the great race was a silver-gilt cup of the finest design, and less valuable for its material than for its workmanship.

We have said that from early in the morning the ground open to the public was thronged with spectators, but it was not until about ten o’clock that the fashionable people began to put in an appearance. As in London, Paris, or anywhere, in short, where there are races, stands had been reserved for the upper ten; but, whether from caprice, or to avoid being jumbled up together, the prettiest women in Port-Louis had decided to attend the races in their carriages, and, with the exception of those who had been invited to its with the Governor, were all drawn up in line opposite the winning-post or at points of vantage nearest to him, leaving the other stands to the townspeople or inferior merchants.

The young men were, for the most part, on horseback, ready to follow the runners in the inner circle; while the gentlemen who were members of the Isle of France Jockey Club were on the lawn, making bets with all the reckless nonchalance and prodigality characteristic of Creoles.

By half-past ten the whole of Port-Louis was assembled in the Champ-de-Mars. Among the prettiest women in the most elegant carriages might be noticed Mademoiselle Conder and Mademoiselle Cypris de Gersigny, at that time one of the loveliest girls, to-day still one of the loveliest women, in the Isle of France, whose magnificent dark hair has become proverbial, even in the salons of Paris; lastly, there were the six Demoiselles Druhn, so fair, so white, so fresh, so graceful, that the carriage in which they generally drove out all together was called the “Basket of Roses.”

The Governor’s stand might also have deserved on this particular day the name given on ordinary days to the carriage of the Demoiselles Druhn. Any one who has not travelled in the Colonies, and who has not, in particular, visited the Isle of France, is unable to form an idea of the charm and grace of all these Creole faces with their velvet eyes and jet-black hair, among which were sprinkled, like flowers of the North, some of the pale daughters of England, with their transparent skin, aerial hair, and swan-like necks. In the opinion of the young men, the bouquets in the hands of all these fair onlookers, would in all probability have been far more valuable prizes than all the cups by Odiot, all the guns by Manton, and all the umbrellas by Verdier, which the Governor, in his magnificent liberality, could have offered them.

In the front row of Lord Murray’s stand was Sara, placed between M. de Malmédie and ‘ma mie Henriette,’ while Henri was on the lawn taking all the odds staked against him, though it must be admitted these were not very numerous. For, in addition to his being a splendid rider, with a great reputation on the race-course, he owned at that moment a horse which was considered to be the fastest ever seen in the Island.

At eleven, the garrison band, placed between the two stands, gave the signal for the first race, which was, as we have said, the pig-hunt.

The reader is acquainted with this comic amusement, which is a popular diversion in many French villages. The tail of a pig is smeared with lard, and the competitors endeavour one after the other to hold the animal, being allowed to grasp it only by the said tail. The man who succeeds in stopping him is the winner. This race taking place on the public ground, and every one having a right to take a part in it, no entries have been made.

Two Negroes brought in the animal — a fine pig of the largest size, greased beforehand, and all ready to enter the lists.

On seeing it there was a general shout, and Negroes, Hindoos, Malays, Madagas-cans and natives, bursting the barrier which had hitherto been respected, rushed at the animal, which, in astonishment at this onslaught, started to run away.

Precautions had however been taken that he should not escape from his pursuers; the poor animal had his two forelegs tied to the hind ones, much in the way that horses’ feet are hobbled to restrict them to a walking pace. The result was that the pig, being unable to go at more than a very moderate trot, was soon overtaken, and the disappointments of the competitors began once more.

As you may well suppose, the chances of winning in such a game do not rest with those who make the first attempts. It is impossible to retain a grasp of the newly-greased tail, and the pig eludes his antagonists without any difficulty; but, as the first layers of lard are removed in the successive attempts to grasp its tail, the animal comes slowly to perceive that the pretensions of those who hope to stop him are not so ridiculous as he at first thought them. At times even, when he is pressed too hard, he turns round upon his most determined foes, who then, according to the degree of courage with which nature has endowed them, either pursue their object or relinquish it. At last comes the moment when the tail, deprived of all adventitious aid, and reduced to its natural substance, only slips with difficulty, and finally betrays its owner, who struggles, grunts, utters unavailing cries, and finds himself by general acclamation adjudicated to the winner.

On this occasion the chase followed its usual course of progress. The unhappy pig freed himself with the greatest ease from his first pursuers, and, though hampered by his bonds, began to escape from the enclosure over the Martyrs’ Common. But a dozen of the best and most active runners dashed upon his heels, making successive grabs at the tail of the poor animal with a rapidity that did not allow him a moment’s peace, and which must have warned him that, however bravely delayed, the hour of his defeat approached. As a matter of fact, five or six of his antagonists, breathless and panting, now gave up the struggle. But, in proportion as the number of claimants diminished, the chances of those who still stuck to it increased, and they thereupon became doubly active and skilful, being further encouraged by the shouts of the spectators.

In the number of the competitors, and among those who seemed determined to see the matter through, were two of our old acquaintances, namely, Antonio the Malay, and Miko-Miko the Chinaman. Both had pursued the pig from the start, and had not lost sight of him for a moment. More than a hundred times already had the tail slipped through their hands; but, each time this happened, they felt that they were making way; and these fruitless attempts, far from discouraging them, had only added fresh fuel to their ardour. At last, having tired out all the other competitors, there remained only these two. It was then that the struggle became really interesting, and that the serious betting began.

The chase continued for another ten minutes or so; so that after having made almost the entire round of the Champ-de-Mars, the pig had come to what is called in sporting parlance his last push, and was squealing, grunting, and wriggling, without this heroic defence appearing in the least degree to disconcert his two enemies, who held on by turns to his tail with a regularity worthy of the shepherds of Virgil. At last Antonio stopped the fugitive for a moment, and was thought to have won. But the animal, collecting all his strength, shook himself off so vigorously, that, for the hundredth time, the tail slipped once more from between the Malay’s hands, while Miko-Miko, who was on the look out, seized it instantly, and all Antonio’s chances appeared to be transferred to himself. Then you saw him, in a manner worthy of the hopes which part of the spectators had reposed in him, holding on with both hands, stiffening his legs and being dragged along, tugging with might and main, followed by the Malay, who was shaking his head, as though he thought the game was up, but nevertheless held himself in readiness to take the other’s place. He kept close alongside the pig, letting his long arms hang down and, almost without the need of stooping, rubbing his hands in the sand, in order to give them a better grip. Unfortunately, all this commendable pertinacity seemed thrown away, as Miko-Miko seemed on the point of carrying off the prize. After dragging the Chinaman along for about ten yards, the pig looked like giving in, and came to a stand-still, still straining forward, but checked by an equal force that dragged him from behind; and, as these two equal forces neutralised each other, both pig and Chinaman remained for a time quite motionless, each making violent efforts, the one to advance, the other to hold his ground, and all to the loud plaudits of the crowd. Things remained in this position for a few seconds, and to all appearance were likely to continue so for the required time, when suddenly the two antagonists were seen to part with a violent jerk. The pig rolled over in front, while Miko-Miko rolled over behind at the same moment, only the one sprawled upon his belly, and the other upon his back. Antonio at once rushed in eagerly, encouraged by shouts from all those who were interested in his success, and who now felt sure of victory. But his delight was short-lived, and his disappointment a cruel one; for at the moment of seizing the animal by the part specified in the programme, he looked for that part in vain. The unlucky pig no longer owned a tail! This appendage had remained in the hands of Miko-Miko, who got up in triumph, holding out his trophy and appealing to the impartial verdict of the public.

The case was a novel one. It was referred to the decision of the Judges, who, after a short deliberation, declared, by three votes to two, that inasmuch as Miko-Miko would indubitably have stopped the animal if the latter had not elected to part with his tail, he must be considered the winner.

Miko-Miko’s name was accordingly proclaimed, and he was authorised to carry off the prize which belonged to him. To this the Chinaman, to whom the result was intimated by signs, responded by seizing his property by the hind-legs and marching it off in front of him as you would push a wheelbarrow, while Antonio retired grumbling into the crowd, which, with that instinct of justice which characterises the populace, gave him that honourable reception which it generally bestows in cases of bad fortune.

As generally happens on the conclusion of an event which has engaged all the attention of the spectators, there was now a good deal of bustle and conversation among the crowd; but these were soon arrested by the announcement that the sack-race was about to commence, and everybody resumed his place, having enjoyed the first event too much to run the risk of losing a sight of the second.

The distance to be run by the competitors was from the *Dreaper* post to the Governor’s stand, or about a hundred and fifty yards. On the signal being given, the runners, fifty in number, jumped out of a hut that had been put up as a dressing-room, and ranged themselves in a line.

To account for the large number of competitors who presented themselves for this race, it must be remembered that the prize was, as we have said, a magnificent umbrella, and an umbrella has always been in the Colonies, and especially in the Isle of France, the Negro’s chief object of ambition. Whence has this idea sprung, amounting as it does, almost to a monomania with them?

I, for my part, cannot tell, and men more learned than myself have made it the subject of deep but fruitless research. We simply state a fact, without assigning a reason; but certainly the Governor had been well advised in choosing the article in question as the prize for the sack race.

There are none of our readers who have not, once in their lives, witnessed a similar race; each of the competitors for the prize is tied up in a sack, the mouth of which is fastened round his neck, his arms and legs being enclosed. Under such circumstances, it is not a matter of running, but of jumping; well this kind of race, which is always sufficiently comic, becomes still more so in present conditions, for the drollery is increased by the strange heads surmounting the sacks, which present a curious assortment of different colours, this race, like the pig-hunt, being confined to Negroes and Hindoos.

In the front rank of those who had acquired a reputation from numerous victories in this kind of race were Télémaque and Bijou, who, having inherited the feuds of the families to which they belonged, rarely met without exchanging abusive remarks, remarks which often, to the credit of their valour be it said, led to a vigorous exchange of fisticuffs; but, on this occasion, as their hands were not free, and their feet were confined, in addition to their being separated by three or four of their comrades, they contented themselves with turning up the whites of their eyes at each other. At the last moment a fifty-first starter sprang out of the hut and joined the company; this was Antonio the Malay, who had been defeated in the first race.

On the signal being given, they looked for all the world like a herd of kangaroos, jumping in the most grotesque fashion, bumping, upsetting, rolling over, getting up again, bumping again and falling again. For the first sixty yards it was impossible to forecast the winner; a dozen competitors were so close together, while the falls were so unexpected, and so altered the face of things, that, like those who run the road to Paradise, the first found themselves last, and the last first. Still, among the most experienced who were always ahead of the others, were to be seen Télémaque, Bijou, and Antonio. At a hundred yards from the start these three drew away, and the race was clearly confined to a struggle between the three.

Antonio with his customary sharpness had promptly recognised, by the furious glances which they exchanged, the hatred which Télémaque and Bijou cherished towards each other, and had reckoned upon this furious rivalry almost as much as upon his own agility. So, as chance had brought it about that he found himself placed between the two and, consequently, separating them, the wily Malay had taken advantage of one of his numerous falls to roll to one side and leave his two opponents close to each other. What he had foreseen now occurred; scarcely did Télémaque and Bijou see the obstacle which had hitherto separated them disappear, than they instantly made for each other with the most terrible grimaces, grinding their teeth like monkeys quarrelling over a nut, and interspersing this threatening pantomime with words of abuse. Happily, confined as they were in their sacks, they could not pass from words to actions; but it was easy to see, by the shaking of the canvas, that their hands were itching to avenge the abuse uttered by their tongues. Accordingly, excited by their mutual hatred, they came close alongside of one another, so that they jostled at each spring, uttering abuse of the most virulent kind and promising each other that, when once they were out of their sacks, they would have an encounter more desperate than all their preceding ones. Meanwhile Antonio was rapidly gaining on them.

On seeing the Malay, who was five or six yards ahead, a momentary truce ensued between the two Negroes; and both endeavoured, by more gigantic leaps than they had yet made, to regain their lost advantage, indeed, both did actually begin to regain it, especially Télémaque, when a fresh fall gave him a fresh opportunity. Antonio tumbled, and, quickly as the Malay got up, Télémaque found himself with the lead.

Matters were becoming all the more serious as they were now but a dozen yards or so off the finish. Accordingly Bijou uttered a veritable roar, and, with a desperate effort, came up with his rival, but Télémaque was not the man to let himself be passed, so he continued to jump with such ever increasing agility, that you might have sworn the umbrella was already his. But, as the proverb has it, man proposes and God disposes. Télémaque tripped, staggered for a moment, and then fell amid the yells of the crowd; but in falling, still faithful to his hatred, he directed his fall in such a way as to bar the road for Bijou. The latter, whose impetus prevented his getting out of the way, stumbled over Télémaque and rolled in his turn in the dust.

Then, the same idea entered both their heads at the same moment; namely, that, sooner than allow a rival to triumph, it would be better that a third party should obtain the prize. So, to the great astonishment of the spectators, the occupants of the two sacks, instead of getting up and making for the winning-post, were no sooner on their feet than they rushed at one another, pommelling each other as fiercely as the canvas prison in which they were enclosed permitted; butting with their heads in Breton fashion, and leaving Antonio to continue in peace, free from all opposition on the part of his rivals, who, rolling one over the other, in default of feet and hands, the use of which was precluded, went for each other with their teeth.

Meanwhile Antonio arrived in triumph at the goal, fairly winning the umbrella, which was at once handed over to him and displayed by him to the applause of all the spectators, who consisted for the most part of Negroes envious of the happiness of the man who was fortunate enough to possess such a treasure.

Bijou and Télémaque, who had continued meanwhile to go for one another savagely, were eventually separated. Bijou had got off with the loss of a portion of his nose, while Télémaque had lost part of an ear.

It was now the turn of the ponies, and some thirty little animals, all natives of Timor and Pegu, issued from the reserved enclosure with Hindoo, Malagassy, or Malay riders on their backs. Their appearance was hailed with loud acclamations, this being a race in which the black population of the Island always shows the greatest interest, since these little animals, being half wild and almost untrained, are so uncontrollable that far more unexpected accidents happen than in the ordinary races. Accordingly, shouts went up from a thousand throats in encouragement of the swarthy jockeys who rode this band of little demons, and who required all the strength and skill they possessed to hold them in and prevent their starting before the signal was given.

Presently, at a sign from the Governor, the start was effected, and they all rushed, or, rather, flew off, for they much more resembled a flock of birds skimming the ground than a body of quadrupeds touching it with their feet. But hardly had they arrived opposite the *Malartic* memorial than, as usually happens, they began to bolt, as they say in racing phraseology, that is to say, half of them disappeared into the darkness of the woods together with their riders, despite all their efforts to keep them in the course. At the bridge, a third of those who were left had disappeared, so that on nearing the *‘Dreaper’* post you could not count more than seven or eight; while one or two more, having thrown their jockeys, were galloping down the course riderless.

The race was twice round the course, so they flew like a whirlwind past the winning-post without stopping, and disappeared round the corner. Presently you heard loud shouts, then laughter, then nothing more, and every one waited vainly. All the ponies had made off, and not one was left in the course; one and all had vanished, some into the woods of the Château-d’Eau, some into the streams in the background, some over the bridge. After waiting for ten minutes, suddenly on the rising slope there appeared, without its rider, an animal which had run through the town, turned by the church, and come back by one of the streets which lead to the Champ de Mars, continuing its course at its own sweet will, instinctively, and without any one to direct it; while gradually behind it you could see the other ponies beginning to appear, returning from all directions, though unfortunately too late. For in a twinkling the first pony cleared the distance that separated it from the post, passed it by fifty yards, and then stopped of its own accord, as though it understood perfectly well that it was the winner.

The prize, which, as we have said, was a fine gun by Manton, was handed to the intelligent animal’s owner, a Colonist named M. Saunders.

Meanwhile the other ponies kept coming in from all directions like pigeons which have been scared by a hawk, and which, having flown off in a flock, return to the dove-cot one by one.

There were seven or eight of them lost altogether and not recovered for a day or two afterwards.

The next event being the big race, there was now an interval of half an hour, during which race-cards were distributed and bets booked.

Among those who betted with most persistence was Captain Van den Broek who, on leaving his ship, had gone straight to Viger’s, the first goldsmith in the town, an Auvergnat, and like all his countrymen, renowned for his scrupulous honesty, where he had parted with 100,000 francs’ worth of diamonds in exchange for banknotes and gold. Accordingly he was quite ready to face the most desperate plungers. This he did, putting the whole of his money, to everybody’s great surprise, on a horse called Antrim, a name entirely unknown in the Island.

There were four horses entered: —

Restoration - Colonel Dreaper.

Virginie - - M. Rondeau de Courcy.

Gester - - M. Henri de Malmédie.

Antrim - - M. (the name was denoted by two asterisks).

The majority of the wagers were laid on Gester and Restoration, who at the races in the previous year had carried off the honours of the day. This year they were even stronger favourites, ridden as they were by their owners, both excellent horsemen, while Virginie was running for the first time.

Notwithstanding this, and in spite of being charitably warned that he was acting as an absolute madman, Captain Van den Broek continued to bet on Antrim, a proceeding which aroused no small curiosity in respect to this unknown horse and his owner.

The horses being ridden by their owners, there was no need to weigh the riders, consequently there was no surprise at not seeing under the tent either Antrim or the gentleman who concealed his identity beneath the hieroglyphics which took the place of his name, and every one expected that he would suddenly appear at the starting-post and take his place in line with his competitors.

In point of fact, when the horses with their riders came out from the enclosure, the person who since the distribution of the race-cards had been the object of public curiosity was seen riding up from the direction of the Malabar encampment. But his appearance, instead of dispelling the uncertainty, served but to increase it; he was dressed in an Egyptian costume, the embroidery of which was visible beneath a hood concealing the half of his face. He rode in the Arab fashion, that is to say with short stirrups, his horse being caparisoned in the manner of the Turks. It was clear to everybody at the first glance that he was a perfect horseman.

Antrim too, for no one doubted but that it was the horse entered under this name that had just appeared, Antrim, be it said, seemed to warrant the confidence reposed in him beforehand by Captain Van den Broek, so graceful, supple, and so much in harmony with his rider was his appearance.

No one recognized either horse or rider, but, as the entries had been made before the Governor, who must therefore know all about him, the incognito of the new comer was respected. One person only suspected perhaps the identity of the rider and leaned forward blushing to assure herself of the truth. That person was Sara.

The competitors drew up in a line, numbering, as we have said, four only, since the reputation of Gester and Restoration had discouraged all the other starters, and every one fancied that the race would resolve itself into a struggle between these two.

As this was only a gentlemen's race the judges had decided that the course should be a run round twice instead of once, so as to prolong the entertainment of the spectators; each horse therefore had to run about three miles, that is to say a league, which would give a greater chance to such horses as possessed staying power.

The start was made on the dropping of the flag, but in such circumstances it is well known that you cannot determine the actual result by the position of the horses at the early stages. When the first round was half over, Virginie, who, we repeat, was running her maiden race, had gained about thirty yards and Antrim was close at her heels, while Restoration and Gester remained in the rear, being clearly held hard by their riders.

At the hill, that is to say about two thirds of the circuit, Antrim had gained half a length, while Restoration and Gester had lessened their distance by ten yards; then they looked like passing, and every one was leaning forward clapping and encouraging the riders, when Sara, either accidentally or on purpose, let fall her bouquet. The unknown horseman saw it, and, without slackening speed, slipped under his horse's belly in the manner of Arab riders picking up the *djerid*, and with wonderful skill picked up the fallen bouquet, bowed to its fair owner, and continued his course, having lost barely ten yards, which he did not appear to trouble himself in the least about regaining.

In the middle of the second round Virginie was overtaken by Restoration, followed by Gester at the distance of a length, while Antrim still kept seven or eight yards behind; but, as his rider neither pressed him with whip nor spur, it was plain that this slight interval was of no account, and that he would recover the lost ground when he thought it advisable.

At the bridge, Restoration picked up a stone and rolled over with his rider, who, not having lost his stirrups, made an effort to pull him on his legs again. The noble animal struggled, rose, and fell again immediately; his leg was broken.

The other three continued their course, Gester now leading with Virginie two lengths behind and Antrim at her heels. But, at the rise, Virginie began to lose ground, while Gester maintained his lead, though Antrim without any effort now began to gain on him. On reaching the ‘*Dreaper*’ post not more than a length separated Antrim from his rival, and Henri, feeling himself overtaken, began to use his whip. The twenty-five thousand spectators of this fine race applauded loudly, and waved their handkerchiefs to encourage the competitors. Then the unknown horseman bent over Antrim’s neck and uttered some words in Arabic, when the intelligent animal, as though he understood what his master was saying, redoubled his speed. Now they were but twenty-five yards from the goal and opposite the first stand, Gester still leading, when the unknown, seeing that there was no time to lose, drove his spurs into his horse’s flanks, rose in his stirrups, and, throwing back the hood of his burnouse, shouted to his rival: —

“M. Henri de Malmédie, for two insults that you have offered me, I return you but one; but I hope that it will be an equivalent for both of them.”

And, raising his arm with these words, Georges, for it was he, struck Henri a violent blow across the face with his whip, which streaked his face with blood.

Then, plunging his spurs into Antrim, he won the race by two lengths; but. instead of waiting to claim the prize, he continued his course and disappeared, to the profound astonishment of everybody, into the woods surrounding the *Malartic* monument.

Georges was right; in exchange for two insults received from Henri de Malmédie at an interval of fourteen years he had just repaid one, but it was an insult public, terrible, bloody, one which decided his whole future, since it was not only a challenge to a rival, but a declaration of war against all whites.

Thus Georges found himself, by the irresistible march of events, brought face to face with this prejudice he had come so far over seas to encounter, and the two antagonists were to fight it out in deadly earnest as mortal enemies.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LAIZA.

GEORGES was reflecting, in the retirement of the apartment which he had furnished for himself in his father’s house at Moka, on the position in which he had just placed himself, when he was told that a Negro wished to see him. He thought very naturally that this was some message from M. Henri de Malmédie, and ordered the bearer to be shown in.

The moment he saw him, however, Georges perceived that he was mistaken; he had a vague recollection of having met this man somewhere, but where, he could not say.

“Do you not recognise me?” said the Negro.

“No,” answered Georges, “and yet we have met before, have we not?”

“Twice,” replied the Negro.

“Where was that?”

“The first time at the *Riviere Noire,* when you saved the girl’s life; the second —

“Yes, of course,” interrupted Georges, “I remember; and the second? — ”

“The second,” interrupted the Negro in his turn; “was when you gave me my liberty. I am called Laïza, and my brother’s name was Nazim.”‘

“And what has become of your brother?”

“Nazim, as a slave, wanted to escape and return to Anjouan: Nazim, now at liberty, thanks to you, has gone away and should be by now at our father’s house. I thank you on his behalf.”

“And you, though free, have remained behind?” asked Georges. “That seems strange.”

“I will explain that,” said the Negro with a smile.

“Do so,” answered Georges, who was beginning, in spite of himself, to be interested in this conversation.

“I am a Chiefs son,” replied the Negro. “I am of mixed Arab and Zanzibar blood, so I was not born to be a slave.”

Georges smiled at the Negro’s pride, without reflecting that this pride was closely allied to his own, while the Negro went on without seeing or noticing his smile: —

“The chief of Querimbo took me in war and sold me to a Slave-Captain, who sold me to M. de Malmédie. I offered, if they would send a slave to Anjouan, to have myself ransomed with twenty pounds of gold dust. They would not take a slave’s word and refused. I insisted for some time and then — a change occurred in my life, and I no longer thought of going away.”

“Did M. de Malmédie treat you as you deserved to be treated?” asked Georges.

“No, it was not that,” answered the Negro. “Three years later, my brother Nazim was captured in his turn and sold like myself, and luckily, to the same master; but not having the same reasons for remaining here as I had, he wished to escape. You know what followed, since it was you who rescued him. I loved my brother as my own child, and you,” continued the Negro, crossing his hands over his breast and bending low, “you I love now as my father. Well, this is what is going on; listen, for it interests yon as well as us. There are in this Island eighty-four thousand coloured men and twenty thousand whites.”

“I have counted them already,” said Georges with a smile.

“I suspected as much,” answered Laïza. “Out of these eighty thousand, twenty thousand at least are capable of bearing arms; while the whites, including the eight hundred English soldiers in the garrison, can hardly muster four thousand men.”

“I know that too,” said Georges.

“Well then, do you guess?” asked Laïza.

“I am waiting until you explain.”

“We have determined to rid ourselves of the whites. God knows we have suffered enough to warrant us in avenging ourselves.”

“Well?” asked Georges.

“Well, we are ready,” answered Laïza.

“What is stopping the way, then, and why do you not avenge yourselves?”

“We are without a leader, or rather, two have been proposed; but neither of the two is fitted for such an undertaking.”

“Who are they?”

“One is Antonio the Malay.”

Georges allowed a smile of contempt to pass over his lips.

“And the other?” he asked.

“The other is myself,” answered Laïza.

Georges looked hard at the Negro, who exhibited to white men such an unusual example of modesty, to see in what way he was unworthy of the position to which he was summoned.

“The other is yourself?” — replied the young man.

“Yes,” answered the Negro; “but we do not want two leaders for such an enterprise; we must have only one.”

“Ah! yes,” said Georges, understanding, as he thought, that Laïza was ambitious of having the supreme command.

“We want a single, supreme, absolute commander, one whose superiority is beyond question.”

“And where are you to find this man?” asked Georges.

“He is found already,” answered Laïza, looking steadily at Georges; “the only point is, will he accept the position?”

“He risks his neck,” said Georges.

“And don’t we also risk something?” asked Laïza.

“But what guarantee will you offer him?”

“The same as he will offer us, an end of persecution and slavery, and a future of vengeance and freedom.”

“And what plan have you formed?”

“To-morrow, after the festival of the Yamsé, when the whites, wearied with the day’s amusement, have retired after seeing the burning of the *gouhn*, the Lascars will be left alone on the banks of the *Rivière des Lataniers*. Then will gather from all quarters Africans, Malays, Madagascar, Malabars, Hindoos, all in fact who have joined the conspiracy; once there, they will choose a leader, and that leader will direct them. Well then, say but a word, and that leader will be yourself.”

“And who has bidden you make this proposal to me?” asked Georges.

Laïza gave a scornful smile.

“Nobody,” said he.

“The idea, then, is your own?”

“Yes.”

“And who has put it into your head?”

“You have, yourself.”

“How can I have done so?”

“You can only attain your desire by our aid.”

“And who told you that I desired anything?”

“You desire to wed the Rose of the *Rivière Noire,* and you hate M. Henri de Malmédie. You wish to possess the first, and to have your revenge against the second. We alone can offer you the means of doing both; for they will not consent to give you the one as your wife, and they will not allow the other to fight a duel with you.”

“And who told you that I loved Sara?”

“I have seen it.”

“You are mistaken.”

Laïza shook his head sadly.

“The eyes of the head are sometimes deceived,” said he; “but the eyes of the heart, never.”

“You are my rival, perhaps?” asked Georges with a smile of contempt.

“The only rival is he who has a hope of being loved,” said the Negro with a sigh, “and the Rose of the *Riviere Noire* will never love the Lion of Anjouan.”

“You are not jealous then?”

“You saved her life, and her life belongs to you, as is fair; I have not even had the good fortune to die for her, and yet,” added the Negro, looking straight at Georges, “do you think I have not done all I could to win that privilege?”

“Yes, yes,” murmured Georges, “you are a brave man; “but the others, can you reckon upon them?”

“I can only answer for myself,” said Laïza, “and I do so; whatever can be done with a man who is courageous, loyal, and devoted, that you can do with me.”

“You will be the first to obey me?”

“In everything.”

“Even as regards?....”

Georges stopped, and looked at Laïza.

“Even as regards the Rose of the *Riviere Noire,”* said the Negro, continuing the young man’s thought.

“But why are you thus devoted to me?”

“The Stag of Anjouan was about to die beneath the blows of the executioners, and you ransomed his life. The Lion of Anjouan was in the toils, and you restored him to liberty. The Lion is not only the strongest, but likewise the most generous of all animals; and because he is brave and generous,” continued the Negro, crossing his arms and raising his head proudly, “therefore Laïza is called the Lion of Anjouan.”

“Very well,” said Georges, holding out his hand to the Negro, “I ask for one day to make up my mind.”

“And what consideration will decide your acceptance or refusal?”

“I offered M. de Malmédie a very grave insult yesterday in public.”

“I know, I was there,” said the Negro.

“Well, if M. de Malmédie will fight with me, I have nothing to say.”

“And if he declines to fight?” asked Laïza with a smile.

“In that case I will join you; for, as he is known to be a brave man, who has already fought two duels with whites, in one of which he killed his opponent, he will have added a third insult to the two which he has already offered me, and then the cup will be full.”

“Then you are our leader,” said Laïza; “the White man will not fight with the Mulatto.”

Georges frowned, for he entertained the same idea himself. And yet, how could a White man keep the mark of the shame which the Mulatto had imprinted on his face?

At this moment Télémaque entered with his hands pressed to his ear, of which Bijou, as we have said, had carried off a portion.

“Master,” said he, “the Dutch Captain would like to speak to you.”

“Captain Van den Broek?” asked Georges.

“Yes.”

“Very well, said Georges. Then, turning to Laïza: —

“Wait for me here, I will come back to you; my answer will probably be more speedy than I expected.”

Georges left the room where Laïza was, and entered with open arms the one in which the Captain was waiting.

“Well, brother,” said the Captain, “you recognised me then?”

“Yes, Jacques, and I am delighted to embrace you, particularly at this moment.”

“You very nearly missed the pleasure of doing so, at any rate on this trip.”

“How so?”

“I ought to have started before now.”

“Why?”

“The Governor looks to me like an old sea-fox.”

“Say rather a sea-wolf, a sea-tiger, Jacques; the Governor is the famous Commodore Murray, formerly Captain of the Leicester.”

“Of the Leicester! I ought to have suspected it; then we have an old account to settle, and now I understand it all.”

“What has happened then?”

“This; the Governor came up to me after the races and said in a very gracious manner: ‘Captain Van den Broek, you have a very smart schooner.’ Nothing wrong, so far; but he added, ‘Might I have the honour of paying her a visit tomorrow? ‘“

“He suspects something.”

“Yes, and I who like a fool suspected nothing fell head over heels into the trap, and invited him to lunch on board, which he accepted.”

“Well?”

“Well, on going back to give orders for the aforesaid luncheon, I noticed that they were making signals from the *Montague de la Découverte* out to sea, and then I began to realise that possibly these signals were being made in honour of me. So I climbed the mountain and examined the horizon with my glass, and within five minutes I sighted a vessel some twenty miles off, which was replying to the signals.

“It was the Leicester?”

“Just so; they want to blockade me. But, mark you, Jacques was not born yesterday; the wind is in the South-East, so that no vessel can enter Port-Louis except by tacking. Well, for that business, you require at least twelve hours to make the *Ile des Tonneliers*; meanwhile, I am off, and I am come to find you and take you along with me.”

“Me? What reason have I for going?”

“Ah! true, I haven’t told you yet. What the deuce made you take it into your head to slash that handsome young man over the face with your whip? It was not polite.”

“Don’t you know then who the man was?”

“Why yes, for I laid a thousand louis against him. By the way, Antrim is a fine horse and I hope you will give him my compliments.”

“Well, don’t you remember how this same Henri de Malmédie, fourteen years ago, on the day of the fight?....”

“What did he do? “Georges lifted his hair and showed his brother the scar on his forehead.

"Oh! yes, of course," cried Jacques. "Shiver my timbers! yes, you do owe him a grudge; I had forgotten that little episode. But, so far as I can recollect, that little attention on his part earned him a blow from my fist, which made up for his sword-cut."

"Yes, and I had forgotten that first insult, or rather, I was prepared to forgive him for it, when he offered me a second."

"What was that?"

"He refused me the hand of his cousin in marriage."

"Oh! you are delightful, upon my word! Here are a father and son, who rear an heiress like a quail in a coop, so as to pluck her at their leisure by a rich marriage, and just as she is nicely fatted up, there comes along a poacher who wants to take her for himself. Why, come! could they do otherwise than refuse her to you? To say nothing, my dear fellow, of the fact that we are Mulattos, neither more nor less."

"True, and therefore it is not this refusal which I regarded as an insult; but, in the course of the discussion, he raised his stick to me."

"Ah! in that case, he was in the wrong. Then, I suppose, you knocked him on the head?"

"No," said Georges, laughing at the methods of conciliation which, in such circumstances, always presented themselves to his brother's mind; "no, I demanded satisfaction from him."

"And he refused it? He is within his rights, for we are Mulattos. True, we sometimes fight the Whites; but the Whites do not fight with us."

"And then I promised that I would force him to fight."

"And that is why you struck him across the face with your whip in the middle of the race, *coram populo,* as we used to say at the Collège Napoléon. It was not at all a bad idea; but the means which you took have not been successful."

"Not successful! What do you mean?"

"I mean that, in point of fact, M. de Malmédie's first idea was to fight; but nobody was willing to act as his second, and his friends declared that such a duel was out of the question."

"Then he will keep the cut of the whip that I gave him; he is free to do so."

"Yes, but he is keeping something else in store for you."

"What is he keeping for me?" asked Georges with a frown.

“As the obstinate fellow was still determined to fight spite of all they could say to him, they were obliged, in order to make him give up the duel, to promise him one thing.”

“And what have they promised him?”

“That one of these evenings, when you are at the town, some eight or ten of them will lie in wait for you on the road to Moka, and surprise you at the moment when you least expect it; that they will then lay you on a ladder and give you five and twenty lashes.”

“The curs! but that is the punishment of Negroes!”

“Well, what are we then, we Mulattos? White Negroes, nothing else.”

“They promised him that?” repeated Georges.

“Yes, in so many words.”

“You are quite sure?”

“I was present. They took me for a worthy Dutchman, a pure blood; they had no suspicions about me.”

“Very well!” said Georges; I have made up my mind.”

“You will go with me?”

“I stay here.’’

“Listen,” said Jacques, laying his hand on Georges’ shoulder; “be persuaded by me, brother; follow the advice of an old philosopher. Don’t stay behind, but come away with me!”

“Impossible! it would look as though I were running away. Besides, I love Sara.”

“You love Sara? What does that mean?”

“It means that I must possess that girl or die.”

“Listen, Georges, for my part I do not understand all these refinements. It is true I have never been enamoured, except of my ephemeral mistresses, who are just as good as any others, believe me. And, once you have tried them, mark you, you will be ready to exchange four white girls for a girl of the Comorin Islands, for instance. I have six of them at the present moment, and you can take your choice.”

“Much obliged, Jacques. I tell you once more, I cannot leave the Isle of France.”

“And I repeat that you are wrong. It is a good opportunity, such as you will not find again. I start to-night at one o’clock, as quietly as I can. Come with me, and to-morrow we shall be twenty-five leagues from here and able to laugh at all the Whites in Mauritius; not to mention that, if we catch any of them, we can administer to them, by the hands of four sailors, the gratification which they were reserving for you.”

“Thank you, brother,” repeated Georges; “it is impossible.”

“Very well then; you are a man, and, when a man says a thing is impossible, it is really and truly impossible. So I must just go away without you.”

“Yes, go; only don’t go too far, and you will see something which you don’t expect.”

“What is that? an eclipse of the moon?”

“You will see a volcano blaze forth from the *Passe Desconie* to the *Morne Brabant*, and from Port-Louis to Mahebourg, a volcano as grand as that of the Isle of Bourbon.”

“Ah! that’s quite another matter; you have got some idea of fire-works in your head, apparently. Come, just explain things to me a bit.”

“I mean that within eight days these Whites who threaten and despise me, these Whites who would whip me like a runaway Negro, will be at my feet. That’s all.”

“A little revolt--I understand,” said Jacques. “That might be possible, if there were in the Island but two thousand men like my hundred and fifty Lascars. I say Lascars, from habit; for, thank God, there isn’t one who really belongs to that wretched race: they are all worthy Bretons, brave Americans, true Dutchmen, pure-blooded Spaniards, all that is best in those four nations. But what have you got to sustain the revolt with?”

“Ten thousand slaves who have had enough of obeying, and think it is now their turn to command.”

“Negroes? Pooh!” said Jacques protruding his lower lip in contempt. “Listen, Georges, I know them well, for I sell them. They stand heat well, they live on bananas, they work hard; in short, they have their qualities, and I do not wish to depreciate my merchandise. But, mark you, they make very poor soldiers. See here, not later than yesterday, at the races, the Governor asked my advice in regard to Negroes.”

“In what way?”

“Yes, he said to me: ‘Captain Van den Broek, you have travelled a good deal and seem to me an excellent observer; now, if you were Governor of some Island, and a revolt of Negroes took place, what should you do? ‘“

“And what did you tell him?”

"I told him; 'My lord, I should stave in a hundred casks of spirits in the streets through which they would pass, and I should lock my door and go to bed.'"

Georges bit his lip until the blood came.

"Therefore I say again, brother, for the third time, come with me; it is the best thing you can do."

"And for the third time, brother, I answer, impossible."

"Then there is no use saying any more: embrace me, Georges."

"Good-bye, Jacques!"

"Good bye, brother: but, believe me, don't you trust to Negroes."

"You are going then?"

"Yes, by Gad, I'm not proud, and I can make a bolt for blue water, when occasion requires, as well as anybody, and go as far as ever the Leicester likes. Should she invite me to a game of skittles, she'll soon see whether I decline the offer; but, in harbour, under the fire of *Fort Blanc* and the Labourdonnaie Redoubt, no thank you! For the last time then, you refuse?"

"I refuse."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

"The young men exchanged a second embrace. Jacques then went into his father's room and found him sleeping peacefully, in complete ignorance of all that had happened. Meantime Georges passed into the room in which Laïza was waiting for him.

"Well?" asked the Negro.

"Well," said Georges; "you may tell them that they have a leader."

The Negro crossed his hands on his breast, and, without asking another question, bowed deeply and went out.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE YAMSE.

THE races, as we have said, were only an episode in the amusements of the second day. Accordingly, when they were over at about three in the afternoon, the whole of the motley multitude that covered the small mountain made off for the *Plaine Verte*, while the gentlemen and ladies of fashion who had witnessed the sports, some in carriages, some on horseback, went home to dinner, and sallied out again directly the meal was over, in order to be present at the exercises of the Lascars.

These exercises consist of symbolical gymnastic displays, including races, dances, and wrestling, accompanied by discordant songs and barbarous music, with which are mingled the shouts of the Negro vendors in the crowd, who do business on their own account or on that of their master, and go about crying, “Bananas! bananas!”

“Cane! cane!”

“Curds! curds! fine curdled milk!” or “Kalu! fine kalu!”

These excercises last until about six in the evening, and then begins the ‘little ‘procession, so called to distinguish it from the great procession of the next day.

Then the Lascars advance, between two lines of spectators, some half hidden under a sort of small pointed pagodan, made on the model of the great *gouhp*, and which are called *aidorés*; others, armed with sticks and blunt swords; others, again, half naked and with torn garments. Then, at a given signal, they all spring into action; those who carry the *aidorés* begin to dance round as though on a pivot; those with the sticks and sabres begin to fight, wheeling round one another, giving and parrying blows with marvellous skill; while the last beat their beasts and roll on the ground apparently in despair, all crying together or in turns: “Yamsé! Yamli! O Hoseïn! O Ali!”

While these religious performances are going on, some of their number go about offering boiled rice and aromatic herbs to all comers.

This promenade lasts until midnight; they then enter the Malabar encampment in the same order in which they had quitted it, not to come out again until the next day at the same hour.

The next day however brought a change and enlargement of the scene. After promenading the town in the same way as on the previous evening, the Lascars reentered the camp at night fall in order to fetch from it the *gouhn,* the result of the combined work of the two bands.

Covered with the richest papers of the most brilliant and most incongruous hues, illuminated on the inside by large fires, and on the outside by paper lanterns of all colours suspended from every angle and irregular projection, shedding cataracts of changing light over its vast sides, it advanced borne along by a great number of men. Of these some were stationed inside, others on the outside, all chanting a monotonous and moonlight dirge; while in front of the *gouhn* walked the scouts, balancing at the end of a rod a dozen feet in length lanterns, torches, suns, and other fireworks. Upon this, the dance of the *aidorés* and the hand-to-hand combats were resumed with renewed ardour, while the devotees in torn and tattered garments began once more to smite their breasts, uttering cries of grief which were taken up by the whole crowd in alternate shouts of: “Yamsé! Yamli! O Hoseïn! O Ali! “ — shouts even more prolonged and heart-rending than those uttered the day before.

The reason of this is that the *gouhn*, which accompanies them on this occasion, is intended to represent both the town of Kerbela, near which Hoseïn perished, and the tomb in which his remains were enclosed; while in addition, a naked man, painted to look like a tiger, typifies the miraculous animal who for several days guarded the corpse of the sacred Imaun. Occasionally he made a rush at the spectators, uttering a roar as though he would devour them; but a man, who walked behind him, representing his keeper, stopped him by means of a rope; while a Mullah who was placed at his side calmed him with mysterious words and magnetic gestures.

For several hours the *gouhn* was carried in procession through and round the town; after which its bearers took the road to the *Riviere des Lataniers*, followed by the entire population of Port-Louis. The festival was drawing to a close; the *gouhn* was about to be burned and buried, and everybody was anxious, after having accompanied it during its triumph, to accompany it also to its destruction.

When those who carried the immense structure reached the *Riviere des Lataniers,* they halted on its bank; then, as midnight sounded, four men approached with torches and set fire to each of its four corners. At the same moment the bearers let the *gouhn* fall into the river.

But as the river is only a mountain torrent and the base of the *gouhn* was hardly covered by the water, the flames spread rapidly over all the upper portions, and shot up like an immense spiral, mounting in wreaths towards the sky. Then came a strangely weird moment, during which, by the brightness of this transient though fierce light, you might see the thirty thousand spectators of all races shouting frantically in all languages, waving their handkerchiefs and hats, standing in groups, some on the bank itself, the rest on the surrounding rocks, — the latter, in masses darker in proportion as they receded beneath the shade of the forest, the former, in an immense circle, seated in their palanquins or carriages, or mounted on their horses. For a moment, the water reflected the flames which it was about to extinguish; for a moment, the whole multitude surged like a sea; for a moment, the trees threw long shadows like giants rising from the ground; for a moment, the very sky was hidden by a red vapour, which made each passing cloud look like a wave of blood.

But soon the light grew fainter and fainter, and all these heads became a confused mass; the trees appeared to recede into the shade; the sky grew pale and gradually resumed its leaden hue; the heavens were covered with darker and ever darker clouds. From time to time, some portion hitherto spared by the fire burst in its turn into flames, throwing a flickering light upon the crowd and the surrounding country, and then died out again, rendering the darkness greater than before. Gradually the whole frame-work dissolved into red-hot embers, making the water in the river hiss. Finally, the last portions that remained burning were extinguished, and the sky being, as we have said, overcast with clouds, each one found himself in a darkness all the more profound as the light that preceded it had been brilliant.

Then occurred what always happens at the end of public fêtes, especially after illuminations or fireworks: namely, an outburst of loud conversation; and every one made off as fast as possible for the town, talking, laughing, and joking. The carriages started at a gallop, the Negroes trotted off with their palanquins; while the pedestrians in chattering groups followed them as fast as they could.

Whether owing to a more lively curiosity, or from the habit of dawdling natural to their kind, the Negroes and men of colour remained to the last; but at length they too disappeared, some taking the road to the Malabar encampment, others ascending by the bank of the river, — the latter plunging into the forest, the former following the sea-coast.

After a few minutes the place was entirely deserted, and a quarter-of-an-hour elapsed during which no sound was to be heard save the murmur of the water rolling between the rocks, nothing was to be seen, in the bright intervals between the clouds, save some enormous bats which plunged heavily down to the river, as if to extinguish with their flapping wings the few embers that still remained floating on the surface, and presently rose again and disappeared into the forest.

Soon, however, a slight noise was heard and two men could be seen creeping towards the river, moving to meet one another, and coming, one from the direction of the Dumas Battery, the other from the *Montagne Longue*. When only the torrent separated them, they both rose and exchanged signals; then one of them clapped his hands three times, while the other gave three whistles.

Then out of the depths of the woods, from the angles of the fortifications, from the mangroves that waved on the margin of the sea, appeared a whole population of Negroes and Natives, whose presence five minutes earlier it would have been impossible to suspect. The entire crowd, however, was divided into two quite distinct bands, the one composed exclusively of Hindoos, the other exclusively of Negroes. The former ranged themselves round one of the two leaders who had arrived first, a man of olive complexion, who spoke in the Malay dialect.

The Negroes grouped themselves round the other leader, who was a Negro like themselves, and spoke in turns the language of Madagascar and of Mozambique.

One of the two leaders walked up and down in the crowd, chattering, scolding, declaiming, gesticulating, a type of the low-class ringleader, the vulgar intriguer. This was Antonio the Malay.

The other, calm, motionless, almost dumb, chary of words, sober in gesture, seemed to attract attention without seeking it — true type of the strength which restrains and the genius which commands.

This was Laïza, the Lion of Anjouan.

These two men were the leaders of the revolt; the ten thousand half-breeds who surrounded them were the conspirators.

Antonio addressed them first.

“There was once,” said he, “an island governed by monkeys, and inhabited by elephants, lions, tigers, panthers and snakes. The number of those governed was ten times as great as the number of those who governed them; but the governing class had had the cleverness, cunning baboons that they were, to sow dissension among the governed, so that the elephants lived on terms of hatred with the lions the tigers with the panthers, and the snakes with all of them. Consequently, when the elephants raised their trunks, the monkeys made the lions, tigers, panthers and snakes march against them; and, strong as were the elephants, it always ended in their being defeated. If it was the lions who roared, the monkeys made the elephants, the snakes, the tigers and the panthers go against them, so that, courageous as were the lions, it always ended in their being chained up. If it was the tigers who showed their teeth, the monkeys marched the elephants, the lions, the snakes and the panthers against them, and, strong as were the tigers, it always ended in their being caged. If it was the panthers who sprang, the serpents made the lions, the elephants, the tigers and the snakes march against them, so that, active as were the panthers, it always ended in their being subdued. Lastly, if it was the snakes who hissed, the monkeys made the elephants, the lions, the tigers and the panthers march against them, and cunning as were the snakes, it always ended in their being reduced to submission. The result was that the governors, with whom this device had a hundred times been successful, laughed in their sleeves every time they heard a revolt mentioned, and at once resorting to their customary tactics, suppressed the rebels. But, one day, it happened that a snake, more sharp than the rest, reflected upon this; he was a snake who knew his four rules of arithmetic just as well as M. de M ‘s cashier knows them.

He calculated that the monkeys were relatively to the other animals as 1 to 10. So he assembled the elephants, the lions, the tigers, the panthers and the snakes under the pretext of a festival, and said to them:

“‘How many do you number?’

“The animals counted themselves and answered:

“‘We are eighty thousand.’

“‘Good; ‘said the snake; ‘now count your masters, and tell me how many they are.’

“The animals counted the monkeys and answered:

“‘Eight thousand.’

“‘Then you are very foolish,’ said the snake, ‘not to exterminate the monkeys, since you are ten to one.’

“The animals combined and exterminated the monkeys, and became masters of the island, and the best of the fruits, of the fields, and of the houses were theirs; not to mention that they made the monkeys their slaves, and the she-monkeys their mistresses....

“Have you understood the story?” said Antonio.

Loud shouts resounded, hurrahs and bravos were heard; Antonio had produced no less an effect with his fable than the Consul Menenius Agrippa, two thousand two hundred years before had produced with his.

Laïza waited quietly until the moment of enthusiasm had passed; then, extending his arms to command silence, he spoke these simple words:

“There was once an island where the slaves desired to be free; they rose together, and they became free. That island was formerly called San Domingo, it is now called Hayti.... Let us do as they did, and we shall be free like them.”

Loud shouts again resounded, and hurrahs and bravos were heard for the second time. But it must be confessed that this speech was too simple to move the crowd as Antonio’s had done; Antonio perceived it and conceived a hope.

He made a sign that he wished to speak, and there was silence.

“Yes,” he said, “yes, Laïza has spoken the truth; I have heard tell of a large island away beyond Africa, very far off, where the sun sets, in which all the Negroes are kings. But in my own island, as in Laïza’s, in the island of animals as in the island of men, a leader was chosen, but a single one.”

“That is so,” said Laïza, “and Antonio is right. Power divided is power weakened. I am then of his opinion; we must have a leader, but one only.”

“And who shall this leader be?” asked Antonio.

“It is for those who are assembled here to decide,” answered Laïza.

“The man who is worthy to be our leader,” said Antonio, “is he who can pit cunning against cunning, strength against strength, courage against courage.”

“That is so,” said Laïza.

“The man who is worthy to be our leader,” continued Antonio, “is he who has lived with both Blacks and Whites, who is connected by blood with both; the man, who, though free, will sacrifice his freedom the man who, having a cottage and a field, will run the risk of losing them. That is the man who is worthy to be our leader."

"True," said Laïza.

"I know but one man who combines all these qualifications," said Antonio.

"And I also," said Laïza.

"Do you mean yourself?" asked Antonio.

"No," answered Laïza.

"You agree then that I am the man?"

"No, it is not you either."

"Who is it then?" cried Antonio.

"Yes, who is it? where is he? Let him come, let him show himself!" cried the Negroes and the Natives simultaneously.

Laïza clapped his hands three times; at the same moment the gallop of a horse was heard, and by the first light of the dawning day a horseman was seen issuing from the forest at full speed. Riding into the centre of the crowd, with a simple movement of his hand he pulled up his horse so short that the jerk made the animal fall back on his haunches. Laïza extended his hand with a gesture of supreme dignity towards the horseman.

"There," said he, "is your leader."

"Georges Munier!" exclaimed ten thousand voices.

"Yes, Georges Munier," said Laïza. "You have asked for a leader who can oppose cunning to cunning, strength to strength, courage to courage; there he is! You have asked for a leader who has lived with Whites and with Blacks, who is connected by blood with both; there he is!... You have asked for a leader who was free and would sacrifice his freedom; who had a house and a field, and would risk the loss of both; well, there is this leader! Where will you find another? Where will you find one like him?"

Antonio remained dumbfounded; all eyes were turned towards Georges, and the crowd were talking eagerly.

Georges knew the men with whom he had to do, and knew that he must before everything else appeal to them by his appearance. Accordingly, he was dressed in a magnificent burnouse all covered with gold embroidery; beneath this he wore the tunic of honour given him by Ibrahim Pacha, on which glittered the crosses of the Legion of Honour and of Charles the

Third; while Antrim, covered with a splendid crimson saddle-cloth, quivered beneath his master, impatient and full of mettle.

“But,” cried Antonio, “who will be responsible to us for him?”

“I will,” said Laïza.

“Has he lived with us? Does he know our wants?”

“No, he has not lived with us; but he has lived with the Whites and has studied their sciences; yes, he knows our desires and our wants, for we have but one desire and one want, namely, freedom.”

“Let him begin, then, by giving it to his own three hundred slaves.”

“That has already been done this morning,” said Georges.

“Yes, yes,” cried voices in the crowd; “yes, Master Georges has given us our freedom.”

“But he is connected with the Whites,” said Antonio.

“In the presence of all of you, I declare,” answered Georges, “that I broke with them yesterday.”

“But he loves a white girl,” said Antonio.

“That is an additional triumph for us men of colour,” answered Georges, “for the white girl loves me.”

“But, if they offer to give her as his wife,” replied Antonio, “he will betray us and make his compact with the Whites.”

“If they offer her to me, I shall refuse her,” answered Georges; “for I wish to have her of her own accord, and have need of nobody to give her to me.”

Antonio wished to raise a fresh objection, but shouts of “Long live Georges! long live our leader!” resounded on all sides, and drowned his voice so that he could not make a sound heard.

Georges made a sign that he wished to speak, and every one was silent.

“My friends,” said he, “it is day, and, consequently, time for us to break up. Friday is a holiday; on Friday you shall all be free. On Friday, at eight in the evening, I shall be here at this same spot; I will put myself at your head, and we will march upon the town.”

“Yes, yes,” cried all the voices.

“One word more: should there have been a traitor among us, let us decide that, when his treachery has been proved, any one of us may put him to death that very instant, by whatever death is most convenient, slow or quick, gentle or cruel. Do you agree in advance to his sentence? For myself; I am the first to agree.”

“Yes, yes!” cried all the voices; “if there is a traitor, let him be put to death; death to the traitor!”

“Very good. And now, how many are you?”

“We are ten thousand,” said Laïza.

“My three hundred servants are instructed to give each of you four dollars; for each of you by Friday next must have some weapon. Farewell then, until Friday.”

And Georges, waving a salute, departed as he had come, while the three hundred Negroes each opened a bag filled with gold, and gave each man the promised four dollars.

It is true that this princely munificence cost Georges Munier two hundred thousand francs.

But what was such a sum to a man worth millions, and who would have sacrificed his entire fortune to the accomplishment of the project so long determined upon by his will?

Now, at last, this project was about to be accomplished; the gauntlet was thrown down.

CHAPTER XX.

THE APPOINTMENT.

GEORGES returned home in a much calmer frame of mind than might have been thought possible. He was one of those men to whom inaction means death, and who grow greater under the pressure of strife; he contented himself with making his weapons ready in case of an unforeseen attack, holding in reserve for himself a retreat into the great woods, which he had traversed in his youth, and of which the murmur and vastness, mingling with the murmur and vastness of the sea, had made him the pensive youth we have already seen.

But it was his unhappy father on whom the weight of all these unforeseen events really fell. The desire of his life, for fourteen years, had been to see his children again, and that desire had just been fulfilled. He had seen them both again. But their presence had merely changed the habitual flaccidity of his temper into a constantly recurring uneasiness in regard to them, — the one, a slave-captain, perpetually at war with the elements and social laws; the other, a plotting theoriser, at war with prejudices and men; both contending with all that is most powerful in the world. Both might at any moment be shattered by the storm; while he himself, fettered by his habit of passive obedience, saw them both steering for the whirlpool without having the strength to hold them back, and having for his only consolation these words which he repeatedly incessantly:

“Of one thing, at least, I am sure, and that is, of dying with them.”

The interval which must decide the fate of Georges was a short one; two days only lay between him and the catastrophe which would make of him a second Toussaint-Louverture or a new Pétion. His one regret, during those two days, was his inability to communicate with Sara. It would have been imprudent for him to go into the town to find his usual messenger, Miko-Miko. But, on the other hand, he was reassured by his conviction that Sara was certain of him, as he was of her. There are souls that need but to exchange a glance or a word to understand each other’s worth, and who, from that moment, confide in one another with the assurance of conviction.

Then he smiled at the thought of this great revenge which he was about to obtain from society, and of this great reparation which fate had in store for him. He would say, when next he saw Sara: “I have not seen you for a week, but that week has been long enough to enable me to change, like a volcano, the face of an island. God desired to annihilate everything by a hurricane, and could not; while I desired to scatter men, laws and prejudices with a tempest; and I, more powerful than God, have been successful.”

There is a fascinating intoxication in political and social dangers of the kind to which Georges was exposing himself which will produce conspirators and conspiracies till the end of time. The strongest motive power of human actions is, undoubtedly, pride; and what flatters our pride, sinners as we are, more than the notion of renewing the struggle of Satan against God, or of the Titans against Jove? In that struggle, as we know, Satan was blasted, and the Titans buried beneath Enceladus. But Enceladus, heaped upon the giants, ever belches forth a fresh mountain; Satan, though crushed, became the monarch of the infernal regions.

It is true that poor Pierre Munier did not understand such considerations as these.

So, when Georges, after opening his window, had hung his pistols by his pillow and put his sword under his bolster, and gone to sleep as calmly as though he were not sleeping over a powder-magazine, Pierre Munier, arming five or six Negroes in whom he placed confidence, had posted them as sentinels all round the house, and put himself on guard in the road from Moka. In this way a momentary retreat at least was secured for his Georges, and he did not run the risk of a surprise. The night passed without any alarm. It is, moreover, the characteristic of plots hatched among the Negroes that their secret is always scrupulously kept. These poor fellows are not yet sufficiently civilised to enter into calculations of what they may gain by treachery.

The next day passed as the preceding night had done, and the following night as the day; nothing occurred to make Georges think he had been betrayed. Only a few hours now separated him from the accomplishment of his purpose.

At about nine in the morning Laïza arrived. Georges had him admitted to his room. No change had taken place in the general arrangements; but the enthusiasm produced by the generosity of Georges was increasing. At nine in the evening the ten thousand conspirators would be assembled in arms on the banks of the *Riviere des Lataniers;* at ten the conspiracy would break out.

While Georges was questioning Laïza as to the individual disposition of the men, and reckoning up with him the chances of this perilous enterprise, he perceived in the distance his messenger Miko-Miko, who, still carrying on his shoulders his rod and baskets, was walking at his usual pace and approaching the house. His appearance could not possibly have been better timed. Since the day of the races Georges had not even set eyes on Sara.

Self-controlled as was the young man, he could not restrain himself from opening the window and beckoning to Miko-Miko to quicken his pace, which the worthy Chinaman at once did. Laïza wanted to withdraw; but Georges detained him, saying that he had something further to tell him.

In point of fact, as Georges had foreseen, Miko-Miko had not come to Moka on his own initiative; immediately on entering he produced a charming little note, folded in the most aristocratic fashion, that is to say, long and narrow, on which a lady's neat hand had written his Christian name as its sole address. Georges' heart beat violently at the mere sight of the note. He took it from the messenger's hand, and to conceal his emotion — poor philosopher that he was, who dared not show the feelings of a man — went and read it in a corner of the window recess.

The letter turned out to be from Sara, and this is what it said:

"My friend, "Be at Lord Murray's at two o'clock this afternoon, and you will learn what I hardly dare tell you, so happy does it make me. Then, when you leave him, come and see me; I shall be waiting for you in our summer-house.

"Your Sara."

Georges read this letter twice; he could make nothing of this double appointment. How could Lord Murray tell him anything that would make Sara happy, and how could he, on leaving Lord Murray, that is to say at about three o'clock, in broad daylight, and in sight of everybody, present himself at M. de Malmédie's?

Miko-Miko was the only person who could explain all this; accordingly he appealed to the Chinaman and began to question him, but the worthy dealer knew nothing except that Mademoiselle Sara had sent for him by Bijou, whom he had not recognised at first, since, in his struggle with

Télémaque, the poor wretch had lost part of a nose flat enough already. He had followed him and found the young lady in the summer-house where he had been twice already, and there she had written the letter which he had just handed to Georges, and which the intelligent messenger had guessed to be addressed to him. She had then given him a piece of gold, and that was all he knew.

Georges however continued to question Miko-Miko, asking him if the girl had written it in his presence; if she had been alone while writing it; if her face seemed sad or joyful. The girl had written it in his presence; no one else was there; her face denoted entire calmness and complete happiness.

While Georges was proceeding with his inquiry, the gallop of a horse was heard. It brought a messenger in the Governor's livery, who, a moment later, entered the apartment and handed Georges a letter from Lord Murray. This letter was couched in the following terms:

"My dear Travelling Companion, "I have thought much about you since I saw you last, and think I have arranged your little business rather well. Be good enough to come to me to-day at two o'clock. I shall have, I hope, some good news for you.

"Yours always, "MURRAY."

These two letters harmonised perfectly with one another. Accordingly, however great the danger for Georges of presenting himself in the town in his present situation, and although prudence whispered to him that to adventure himself at Port-Louis, and especially at the Governor's house, was a foolhardy proceeding, he gave ear only to his pride, which told him that it would be almost an act of cowardice to decline to keep these two appointments, given as they were by the only two persons who had responded, the one, to his love, the other to his friendship. So, turning to the messenger, he ordered him to present his respect to his lordship and tell him that he would be there at the hour agreed upon.

The messenger went off with this reply. Then Georges sat down and wrote to Sara. Let us look over his shoulder and read the few lines which he wrote:

"Dear Sara, "In the first place, bless you for your letter! It is the first I have ever received from you, and short as it is, it tells me all I wanted to know, namely, that you have not forgotten me, that you still love me, and that you are mine, as I am yours. I shall be at Lord Murray's at the hour you name. Shall you be there? you do not say. Alas! the only happy news I can expect must come from your mouth alone, since the only happiness in the world to which I aspire is that of being your husband. Hitherto, I have done all I have been able in order to attain it; all that I shall yet do will have the same aim. Keep brave and true then, Sara, as I shall be brave and true; for, close to us as happiness seems to you to be, I greatly fear that we have both some trying experiences yet to go through before attaining it.

"No matter, Sara; my conviction is that nothing in the world can withstand a powerful and unchanging will, and a deep and devoted love; have this love, Sara, and I will have the will.

"Your Georges."

Having written this letter, Georges gave it to Miko-Miko, who took up his bamboo and his baskets again, and started at his wonted pace for Port-Louis, having received, it goes without saying, the fresh payment which his faithful services so well deserved.

Georges was left alone with Laïza, who had heard almost all, and understood everything.

"You are going to the town?" he asked Georges.

"Yes," replied the latter.

"It is imprudent," replied the Negro.

"I know it, but I must go; and I should be a coward in my own eyes, if I did not go."

"Very well, go then; but if at ten o'clock you have not arrived at the *Riviere des Lataniers....*"

"It will be because I am a prisoner or dead: in that event, march upon the town and rescue me, or avenge me."

"Very well," said Laïza, "you may count upon us." And these two men who had such a mutual understanding that one word, one gesture, one clasp of the hand sufficed to make them sure of one another, parted without exchanging one further promise or instruction.

It was now ten o'clock, and Georges was informed that his father was asking for him and would breakfast with him. Georges answered by going into the dining-room; he was as calm as if nothing had happened.

Pierre Munier threw at him a glance in which was depicted all his paternal solicitude; but was reassured by seeing his son’s face just the same as usual and perceiving the same smile upon his lips with which he greeted him daily.

“God be praised, my dear boy!” said the good man. “When I saw the messengers succeeding each other so rapidly I was afraid they brought bad news, but your air of calmness tells me that I was mistaken.”

“You are right, father,” answered Georges, “all goes well; the revolt is still fixed for this evening at the same hour, and these messengers brought me two letters: one from the Governor, giving me an appointment with him today at two o’clock; the other from Sara, who tells me that she loves me.”

Pierre Munier remained stunned by surprise.

It was the first time that Georges had spoken to him of the revolt of the blacks and of the Governor’s friendship. He had known indirectly of the revolt, and the poor father trembled to the depths of his heart at seeing his dearly-loved child embark on such a road. He stammered some words, but Georges interrupted him.

“Father,” said he with a smile, “do you recollect the day when, after having performed prodigies of valour, after having rescued the Volunteers and taken a flag, that flag was seized from you by M. de Malmédie. That day you behaved grandly, nobly, sublimely, in presence of the enemy, as you always will behave, indeed, in presence of danger. That day I swore that some time men and things should be restored to their proper place; the time has arrived, and I will not shrink from my oath. God shall judge between slaves and masters, between weak and strong, between martyrs and executioners, that is all.”

Then, as Pierre Munier, without strength, without power, without resistance to such a will, sank down, as though the weight of the world were pressing him under, Georges ordered Ali to saddle the horses, and, after quietly finishing his breakfast, glancing sadly at his father now and then, rose to go out.

Pierre Munier started and stood up, extending his arms towards his son.

Georges went up to him, took his head between his hands, and, with an expression of filial love to which he had never given way before, drew the venerable head close to him, and imprinted five or six kisses in quick succession upon his grey hair.

“My son, my son!” cried Pierre Munier.

“Father,” said Georges, “you shall have a respected old age, or I shall have a bloody grave. Farewell!”

Georges hurried from the room, and the old man fell back into his chair with a deep groan.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE REFUSAL.

AT about two leagues from his father’s house Georges overtook Miko-Miko returning to Port-Louis; he stopped his horse, motioned to the Chinaman to approach him, spoke a few words in his ear, to which Miko-Miko replied by a sign that he understood, and then continued his journey.

When he reached the foot of the *Montagne de la Découverte,* Georges began to meet people coming from the town; he carefully scrutinized the faces of these passers-by, but he did not observe on the various countenances of those whom chance brought across his path any indication that might lead him to think that the project for the revolt which was going to be put into execution by him that evening had in the slightest degree leaked out. He continued his road, passed the cantonments of the Blacks, and entered the town.

All was quiet there; every one appeared to be occupied with his own personal business, and no general anxiety hovered over the population. The ships were rocking peacefully in the shelter of the harbour. The *Pointe aux Blagueurs* was furnished with its customary loungers; an American vessel, just arrived from Calcutta, was casting anchor in front of the *Chien-de-Plomb.*

The appearance of Georges, however, seemed to create a certain excitement, but it was clear that this was connected with the affair of the races and the unheard-of insult offered by a Mulatto to a White. Several groups evidently dropped, on seeing Georges, the subject of conversation that was occupying them, in order to follow him with their eyes and exchange *sotto voce* some words of astonishment at his audacity in appearing in the Town again; but Georges responded to their stares with a look so haughty, and to their whispers with a smile so contemptuous, that they lowered their glances, unable to endure the gleam of galling superiority that flashed from his eyes. Besides, the silver-chased butt ends of a pair of double-barrelled pistols could be seen protruding from each of his holsters.

Georges bestowed his chief attention upon the soldiers and officers whom he met on his road. But both soldiers and officers wore the bored expression of persons who had been transported from one part of the world to another and condemned to exile at a distance of four thousand leagues. Certainly, if any of them had the knowledge that Georges was providing employment for them during the night, they looked, if not glad, at least as if they were not at all concerned.

Georges was reassured by these signs.

He arrived in due course at the gate of Government House, threw his horse's bridle into Ali's hands, ordering him not to leave the place. Then he crossed the court-yard, mounted the steps, and entered the ante-chamber.

The servants had been given instructions beforehand to admit M. Georges Munier as soon as he presented himself. A footman accordingly preceded the young man, opened the door of the salon and announced his name, and Georges entered.

In this room were Lord Murray, M. de Malmédie and Sara.

To the great astonishment of Sara, whose eyes had turned to him immediately, the face of Georges expressed a feeling of pain rather than of joy at sight of her; his forehead became slightly wrinkled, his eyebrows contracted, and an almost bitter smile passed over his mouth.

Sara, who had risen quickly, felt her knees give way under her, and sank back slowly into her chair.

M. de Malmédie stood up stiffly, as was his habit, contenting himself with a slight inclination of the head: Lord Murray took two steps towards Georges and gave him his hand.

"My young friend," said he, "I rejoice to tell you some news that will, I hope, crown your desires; namely, that M. de Malmédie, being desirous of putting an end to all these distinctions of colour and all these rivalries of caste which for two hundred years have been the bane, not only of the Isle of France, but of the Colonies in general, M. de Malmédie, I say, consents to grant you the hand of his niece, Mademoiselle Sara de Malmédie.

Sara blushed and raised her eyes imperceptibly to Georges, but the latter contented himself with bowing without making any reply. M. de Malmédie and Lord Murray looked at one another in astonishment.

"My dear M. de Malmédie," said Lord Murray smiling, "I quite see that our incredulous friend does not trust my unsupported word; tell him then that you grant him the request he has made you, and that you wish all recollection of animosity, past and present, to be forgotten between your two families."

"It is true, sir," said M. de Malmédie, evidently imposing a great effort upon himself, "and the Governor has just acquainted you with my sentiments. If you bear any malice on account of a certain incident which occurred at the taking of Port-Louis, forget it, as I promise you in my son's name that he will forget the grave insult which you offered him quite lately. As for your union with my niece, his Excellency the Governor has told you that I give my consent to it, and, unless to-day it should be you who decline--"

"Oh, Georges!" cried Sara carried away by her emotion.

"Do not judge me hastily by my answer, Sara," replied the young man, "for that answer is, I assure you, dictated by an imperious necessity. Sara, since the evening in the summer house, since the night of the ball, since the day when I saw you for the first time, you have been my wife in the sight of God and man. No other than yourself will ever bear a name which you have not despised in spite of its humbleness; all that I am about to say then is merely a question of form and of time."

Georges turned to the Governor.

"Thank you, my Lord," he continued, "thank you; I acknowledge, in what is happening to-day, the support of your generous philanthropy and of your kind friendship. But, on the day when M. de Malmédie refused me his niece, when M. Henri insulted me for the second time, and I thought it my duty to avenge that refusal and that insult by insulting him publicly and ignominiously, on that day I broke with the Whites, and there is no reconciliation possible between us. M. de Malmédie, influenced by some calculation, some intention which I do not understand, may be ready to meet me half-way, but I will not advance the other half. If Mademoiselle Sara leaves me, she is free, is mistress of her hand and her fortune; it is for her to show herself more noble still in my eyes by descending to my level, and not for me to lower myself in her eyes by trying to climb to hers."

"Oh, Monsieur Georges!" cried Sara, "you know quite well."

"Yes, I know," said Georges, "that you are a noble girl, that you have a devoted heart, a pure soul. I know that you will come to me, Sara, spite of all obstacles, all hindrances, all prejudices. I know that I have only to wait for you and that I shall see you appear one day, and for just this reason, that, the sacrifice being on your side, you have already decided in your generous heart that you will make this sacrifice for me. But for you, M. de Malmédie, for your son M. Henri, who agrees to decline to fight with me on condition that he shall have me whipped by his friends, oh! between us it is war to the death, do you understand? it is a mortal hatred that can only be ended on my part by his death or his humiliation; let your son make his choice then."

"Your Excellency," answered M. de Malmédie with more dignity than might have been expected from him, "you see that I, for my part, have done what I could; I have sacrificed my pride, I have forgotten the old insult as well as the recent one, but I cannot reasonably be expected to do more, and I must abide by the declaration of war which this gentleman has made against me. Only, we shall act on the defensive while awaiting his attack. Now, Mademoiselle," continued M. de Malmédie turning to Sara, "you are free in regard to your heart, your hand, and your fortune. Act then as you wish; stay with this gentleman, or follow me."

"Uncle," said Sara, "it is my duty to go with you. Farewell, Georges! I do not understand at all what you have done to-day; but I am certain that you have acted as you ought to have acted."

And, bowing with quiet dignity to the Governor, Sara went out with M. de Malmédie.

Lord Murray accompanied them to the door and went out with them, returning a moment afterwards.

His look of inquiry met the steadfast glance of Georges, and a short silence ensued between the two men who, thanks to their lofty nature, understood each other so well.

"So," said the Governor, "you have refused."

"I thought it my duty to act thus, my Lord."

"Forgive me if I appear to question you; but may I know what sentiment has prompted your refusal?"

"The sentiment of my own dignity."

"That is the only one?"

"If there be another, my Lord, allow me to keep it a secret."

"Listen, Georges," said the Governor, with a degree of unconstraint which was all the more charming in him, as you felt it to be quite foreign to his cold and placid disposition, "listen! From the moment when I met you on board the Leicester and was able to appreciate the high qualities that distinguish you, my desire was to make you act as a bond which should unite the two opposed castes in this Island. I began by discovering your sentiments, then you made me the confidant of your love, and I agreed to the request which you made to me that I would be your intermediary, your sponsor, your second. For that, Georges," resumed Lord Murray in response to an inclination of the head from Georges, "for that, my young friend, you owe no thanks; you were yourself anticipating my wishes, you were supporting my scheme of conciliation, you were making the path easy for my political projects. I therefore went with you to M. de Malmédie's and backed up your request with all the authority of my presence and all the weight of my name."

"I know, my Lord, and I thank you. But you saw for yourself that neither the weight of your name, honourable as it is, nor the authority of your presence, flattering as it must have been, were able to spare me a refusal."

"I felt it as much as you did, Georges. I admired your calm behaviour, and I understood from your coolness that you were planning a terrible revenge. That revenge you took publicly, on the day of the races, and on that day it was borne in upon me once more that I must in all probability abandon my schemes of conciliation."

"I had warned you, my Lord, when I left you."

"Yes, I know, but listen to me: I did not regard myself even then as defeated: yesterday I went to M. de Malmédie, and by dint of prayers and entreaties, by dint of almost abusing the influence which my position gives me, I obtained from the father a promise that he would forget his old hatred against your father; from the son, that he would forget his recent hatred against you; and from both, that they would consent to your marriage with Mademoiselle de Malmédie."

"Sara is free, my Lord," interrupted Georges vehemently, "and, thank God, requires the consent of nobody for becoming my wife."

"Yes, I admit it," replied the Governor, "but what a difference, I put it to you, in the eyes of the world, between carrying off a girl clandestinely from her guardian's house, and receiving her publicly from the hands of her family! Consult your pride, M. Munier, and see if I have not secured for it a supreme satisfaction — a triumph which even your pride did not anticipate."

"It is true," answered Georges. "Unhappily this consent comes too late."

"Too late! too late for what?" replied the Governor.

"Excuse me from answering you on that point, my Lord. It is my secret."

"Your secret, poor fellow! Well, would you like that I should tell you this secret which you are unwilling to disclose?"

Georges looked at the Governor with a smile of incredulity.

"Your secret, indeed!" continued the Governor, "a well-guarded secret certainly, that is confided to ten thousand persons."

Georges looked again at the Governor, but this time without smiling.

"Listen to me," resumed the Governor, "you wished to ruin yourself, I wanted to save you. I went and found Sara's uncle, I took him apart and said to him: 'You have under-rated M. Georges Munier, you have repulsed him with insolence, you have forced him to break openly with you, and you were wrong in so doing. For M. Georges Munier is a distinguished man, of lofty mind, and noble soul; there was something to be made of such qualifications as he possesses, and, in proof of this, I tell you that M. Georges Munier holds all our lives in his hand at the present moment; he is the leader of a vast conspiracy; at ten o'clock tomorrow evening (it was yesterday that I was speaking to him) M. Georges Munier will march upon Port-Louis at the head of ten thousand Negroes, and, as we have only eighteen hundred soldiers, we shall all be lost unless chance should suggest to me some plan for safety, such as sometimes occurs to men of genius. In short, the day after to-morrow M. Georges Munier, whom at this moment you look down upon as descended from a herd of slaves, will perhaps be our master, and perhaps will choose to have you in his turn as a slave. Well, sir,' I said to him, 'you can prevent all this, you can save the Colony; forgive the past, grant M. Georges your niece's hand which you refused him, and, if he accepts, if he consents to accept, I ought to say, for, the parts being changed, the claims may be changed also, well, then you will have saved not only your own life, your liberty and your fortune, but also the lives, liberties, and fortunes of us all.' That is what I said to him; and then, at my prayers, my entreaties, nay, my orders, he consented. But what I had foreseen has happened; you had pledged yourself too soon, and you are not able to withdraw."

Georges had followed the Governor's words with ever increasing astonishment, yet with perfect calmness.

"Then you know all, my Lord," he said when the other had finished.

"I think you must see that I do, and I believe I have forgotten nothing."

"No," answered Georges, smiling, "no, your spies are well informed, and I compliment you on the manner in which your police are organised."

“Well, then,” said the Governor, “now that you know the motive which caused my action, there is still time; accept Sara’s hand, be reconciled with her family, abandon your mad scheme, and I will know nothing, I will ignore everything, forget everything.”

“Impossible!” said Georges.

“Reflect then on the kind of men to whom you have bound yourself.”

“You forget, my Lord, that these men, of whom you speak with such contempt, are my brothers. They have recognised me, who am despised by the Whites as their inferior, as their Chief. You forget that when these men handed over their lives into my keeping, I consecrated my life to them.”

“You refuse then?”

“I refuse.”

“In spite of my entreaties? “Pardon me, my Lord, but I cannot listen to them.”

“In spite of your love for Sara and her love for you?”

“In spite of everything.”

“Reflect once more.”

“It is useless, my mind is made up.”

“Very good... Now, sir,” said Lord Murray, “one final question.”

“Put it.”

“If I were in your place, and you were in mine, what would you do?”

“What do you mean?”

“Yes; if I were Georges Munier, leader of a revolt, and you Lord Murray, Governor of the Isle of France; if you had me in your power as I hold you in mine, tell me, I ask you for the second time, what you would do?”

“What should I do, my Lord? I should allow the man to go out from here who came on your own invitation, believing he was summoned to an interview, and not being dragged into an ambuscade. Then, in the evening, if I had faith in the justice of my cause, I should appeal to God, that He might decide between us.”

“Well, you would be wrong, Georges; for, the moment I drew the sword you would be unable to save me. The moment I had kindled the revolt, I should have to quench it with my blood... No, Georges, I don’t want a man like yourself to die upon the scaffold, do you understand? to die like a vulgar rebel, whose intentions will be calumniated, and whose name will be blasted. So, in order to save you from such a misfortune, to snatch you from your fate, you are my prisoner, sir; I arrest you!”

"My Lord!" cried Georges, looking round him for some weapon which he might seize and defend himself with.

"Men," said the Governor, raising his voice, "enter and seize this man."

Four soldiers, headed by a corporal, entered and surrounded Georges.

"Conduct this gentleman to the Police Station," said the Governor; "put him in the room which I made ready this morning; and, while keeping a strict guard over him, take care that neither you nor any one else fail in the respect which is due to him."

With these words, the Governor saluted Georges, and Georges quitted the apartment.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE REVOLT.

ALL that had just taken place had occurred so rapidly and in a manner so unforeseen that Georges had had no time to prepare himself for what had befallen him. But, thanks to his wonderful power of self-control, he concealed beneath an impassive and perpetual smile of careless disdain the various emotions by which he was assailed.

The prisoner and his guards went out by a door at the back of the house at which the Governor’s carriage was waiting; and, either by accident or by intention, Miko-Miko was passing just in front of this door at the very moment when Georges was getting into the carriage. The young man and his usual messenger exchanged glances.

Georges was conducted in accordance with the Governor’s orders to the Police Station, a large building the name of which indicates its use, situated in the *Rue du Gouvernement,* a little below the Comedy Theatre. Georges was taken to the room mentioned by the Governor.

This room had evidently been prepared beforehand, as Lord Murray had said, and it was even clear that there had been the intention to make it as comfortable as possible. It was neatly furnished and the bed was almost elegant; nothing in the room suggested a prison, except that its windows were barred.

When the door had closed on Georges and the prisoner found himself alone, he went at once to the window, which was about twenty feet from the ground and looked out on the Hôtel Coignet. One of the windows of the hotel was just opposite the room occupied by Georges, so that the prisoner could see into the lower part of the room, and all the more easily because this window stood open. Georges went back from the window to the door, listened, and heard the guard being mounted in the corridor. Then he went back to the window and opened it. No sentry had been placed in the street, the bars being relied on for preventing the prisoner’s escape, and, in point of fact, the bars were so thick as to render such a precaution superfluous.

He had therefore no hope of escaping unless he received some help from outside.

But Georges was doubtless expecting this help from outside, for, leaving his window open, he remained with his eyes constantly fixed on the Hôtel Coignet, which, as we have said, rises opposite the Police Station. In point of fact, his hopes were not disappointed; after waiting for an hour he saw Miko-Miko, with his bamboo rod on his shoulder, cross the room opposite to his own, conducted by one of the servants of the house. Georges and he exchanged but one glance; but this look, rapid as it was, restored calmness to Georges' brow.

From that moment Georges appeared almost as much at ease as if he had been in his own room at Moka; from time to time, however, an attentive observer might have noticed that he knit his brows and passed his hand across his forehead. Beneath this apparent calmness a host of reflections were surging in his mind, and, like a rising tide, beating upon his brain with their ebb and flow.

However, the hours passed by without bringing to the prisoner any indication that preparations were being made in the town. Neither roll of drum nor clash of arms was heard. Georges ran to the window two or three times, deceived by a noise resembling the roll of drums; but each time he saw that he was mistaken, and that the sound which he had mistaken for drums was the noise made by waggons loaded with barrels passing along the streets.

Night was coming on, and Georges, becoming more disturbed and uneasy with its advance, kept going from the door to the window and back again with a feverish movement which he made the less effort to suppress since he was alone; the door remained guarded by the sentinel, while the window remained unguarded except for its bars.

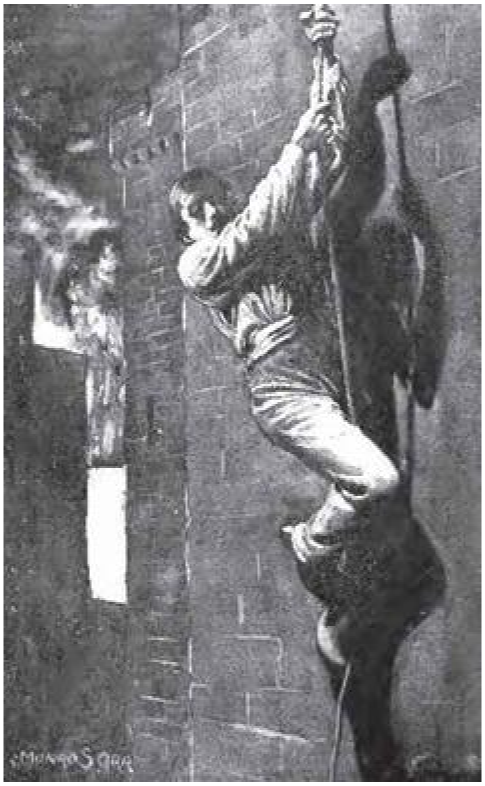

Occasionally Georges placed his hand over his breast, and a slight contraction of his features showed that he was feeling one of those momentary spasms which the bravest of men cannot overcome in critical circumstances. Doubtless he was thinking at such moments of his father, who was ignorant of his peril, and of Sara, who all unknowingly had brought him into this danger. As for the Governor, though Georges maintained against him that cold and concentrated rage which a gambler who has lost feels towards his antagonist, he could not disguise from himself that, on this occasion, he had displayed towards him not only all that gentlemanly conduct which was characteristic of him, but further that he had not arrested him until he had offered him all the means of escape which were in his power. All this, however, had not prevented Georges from being committed on a charge of high treason.

Meanwhile the darkness was increasing. Georges looked at his watch, and saw that it was half-past eight; in an hour and a half the revolt would break out.

Suddenly Georges raised his head and fixed his eyes once more on the Hôtel Coignet, where he had seen a shadow moving in the room opposite his own. The shadowy figure made him a sign; Georges moved from the window, and a parcel was thrown across the street through the bars and fell into the middle of the room.

Georges ran forward and picked up the parcel, which contained a rope and a file; this was the help from outside that Georges was expecting.

Georges held his liberty between his hands; but it was only in order to encounter the hour of danger that he wished to be at liberty.

He concealed the rope beneath his mattress, and, as it was now quite dark, began to file one of the bars. These bars were sufficiently wide apart from one another to enable him to creep through the opening, if one of them were removed.

It was a muffled file, which made scarcely any noise, and, as his supper had been brought to him at seven o’clock, Georges felt almost certain that he would not be disturbed.

However, the work progressed slowly. Nine o’clock, half-past nine, ten, sounded. For some time the prisoner while sawing at the iron bar had thought he saw bright lights shining towards the end of the *Rue du Gouvernement* in the direction of the *Rue de la Comédie* and the harbour. But not a single patrol made its way through the Town, not a single belated soldier was going back to barracks. Georges could not understand this indifference on the Governor’s part; he knew him too well not to be sure that he had taken all his precautions, and yet, as we have said, the Town appeared quite undefended, and as though abandoned to itself.

At ten o’clock, however, he thought he heard sounds gradually increasing in volume proceeding from the direction of the Malabar cantonment, the direction from which, as you will remember, the slaves, after mustering on the banks of the *Riviere des Latauiers,* would arrive. Georges redoubled his efforts; the bar was already completely sawn through at the bottom, and he had just begun upon the top.

The noise continued to increase. There was no room for mistake; it was the sound caused by the mingled voices of several thousands of men. Laïza had kept his word. A smile of joy passed over Georges’ lips, a flash of pride lit up his brow; there was to be fighting; not victory, perhaps, but, at least, a struggle. And Georges would be in the thick of it, for the bar now held only by a thread.

So he listened with eager ears and palpitating heart; the sounds came nearer and nearer, while the light which he had already noticed grew brighter. Was there a fire at Port-Louis? That could hardly be, for no cry of alarm had been heard.

Georges waited another quarter of an hour, hoping that his anxiety would be relieved by hearing the sound of firing, which would tell him that the work was beginning; but the same strange noise which he had heard previously continued, yet without being intermingled with the noise which he was expecting to hear.

The prisoner then thought that the important thing for him was to make his escape at once. Georges gave the bar a final wrench, and it yielded. He next tied the rope firmly to its support, threw the bar out to serve as a weapon, let himself slide down the rope, reached the ground safely, picked up the bar, and rushed down one of the side streets. The nearer Georges drew to the *Rue de Paris,* which crosses all the northern quarter of the Town, the brighter grew the light and the louder the noise; at last he reached the corner of a brilliantly illuminated street, and everything was at once explained to him.

All the streets that led to the Malabar cantonment, and by which the revolted slaves would enter the Town, were illuminated as if for a fete, and at different spots in front of the principal houses had been placed casks of arrack, brandy, and rum, with their heads staved in, as if for distribution gratis.

The Negroes had rushed like a torrent upon Port-Louis, uttering cries of rage and vengeance. But they arrived to find the streets illuminated, and had seen these tempting barrels. For an instant the orders of Laïza, and the thought that all these barrels might be poisoned, restrained them; but soon their natural craving got the better of their discipline and even of their fears. Some of them fell out of the ranks and began to drink. On hearing their shouts of delight, the other Negroes were unable to keep their ranks, and all this great multitude, sufficient to annihilate Port-Louis, was split up and scattered in a moment, crowding round the casks with shouts of joyous infatuation, drinking in handfuls rum, brandy, and arrack, the everlasting poison of the black races, the sight of which no Negro can resist, in exchange for which he sells his children, his father and mother, and often ends by selling himself.

Hence those shouts of strange import which Georges had not been able to explain. The Governor had put into practice the advice given by Jacques himself, and it had turned out only too well. The revolted slaves had entered

Port-Louis, but their rage had cooled down before they were well across the quarter of the Town extending from the *Petite-Montagne* to the *Trou-Fanfaron,* and had expired at a hundred yards from Government House.

At the sight of the strange spectacle which unfolded itself before his eyes, Georges retained no further doubt as to the result of his enterprise, he remembered what Jacques had predicted, and shuddered with anger and shame. These men by whose aid he had reckoned on making a revolution which would overthrow the Island and avenge two centuries of slavery by an hour of victory and a future of liberty, — these men were laughing, singing, dancing, defenceless, intoxicated, staggering; these men three hundred soldiers armed with whips might now drive them back to work; and these men numbered ten thousand!

So all this long toil which Georges had imposed upon himself was thrown away; all this lofty study of his own mind, his own strength, his own worth, was useless; all this God-given superiority of character, of education at the expense of others, all this was crushed in face of the instincts of a race that preferred brandy to liberty.

Georges realised at once the worthlessness of his ambitions; his pride had carried him for a moment to the top of a mountain, and had shown him all the kingdoms of the earth at his feet; then all had disappeared, — it was but a dream. And Georges found himself back at the same spot where his delusive pride had seized him.

He grasped his iron bar between his hands; he felt himself smitten with a fierce longing to hurl himself into the midst of all these wretches and to smash all these besotted heads that had not had the strength to resist the coarse temptation for which he would have to suffer.

Some groups of curious onlookers, no doubt puzzled at this extempore fête which the Governor was giving to the slaves, stood staring at the proceedings with open mouths. Every one asked his neighbour what it all meant, only to find that his neighbour, as ignorant as himself, could not give him the slightest explanation.

Georges rushed from group to group, searching with his eyes these long streets, illuminated and filled with drunken Negroes uttering frantic cries. He was looking amid all this crowd of filthy creatures for a man, the one man on whom he still relied among this general degradation. This man was Laïza.

Suddenly, Georges heard a loud noise proceeding from the direction of the Police Station, then a brisk firing began, on the one side with the precision customary to regular troops, on the other with that spasmodic fitfulness which accompanies the firing of volunteers.

So, at last, there was a spot where fighting was taking place.

Georges dashed off in that direction, and in five minutes was in the *Rue du Gouvernement.* He was not mistaken. This small band who were fighting were led by Laïza, who, having learnt that Georges was a prisoner, had gone round the Town with four hundred picked men, and had marched on the Police Station to rescue him.

This action had doubtless been foreseen, for, immediately on seeing the little band of revolted slaves appear at the end of the street, an English battalion had moved off to oppose them.

Laïza had hardly hoped to be allowed to rescue Georges without a fight, but he had reckoned on the diversion that would be caused by the rest of the Negroes arriving by the streets adjacent to the Malabar cantonment; unfortunately, as we have seen, this diversion had failed him from the cause which we have related.

Georges took one leap into the midst of the combatants, shouting loudly, “Laïza! Laïza! “He had found one Negro worthy of the name of man; he had found a nature equal to his own.

The two leaders met under fire, and, without seeking cover, and regardless of the bullets whistling round them, exchanged a few short hurried words such as a crisis demands. In an instant Laïza had been told the whole situation; he shook his head, and merely observed:

“All is lost.”

Georges wished to give him some hope, urged him to try some efforts with the drinkers; but Laïza replied, with a smile of profound contempt:

“Bah! They are on the drink; and, unless the brandy runs short, there is no hope left!”

But the barrels had been broached in too great quantities for the brandy to run short.

The struggle was now useless so far as regards the object with which it had been begun, since Georges, whom Laïza had come to rescue, was free; it only remained then to regret the loss of the dozen or so of men who had already been disabled, and to give the signal for a retreat. But retreat by the *Rue du Gouvernement* had become an impossibility; for while Laïza’s troop faced the English battalion which had opposed its attempt on the Police-Station, another detachment issued with drums beating from the powder-magazine, where it had been lying in wait, and blocked the road by which Laïza with his men had arrived. They were obliged therefore to make for the streets surrounding the Law Courts and thus regain the neighbourhood of the *Petite-Montagne* and the Malabar cantonments.

Georges and Laïza with their men had scarcely gone two hundred yards when they found themselves in the illuminated streets where the barrels were. The scene was even more disgusting than before; the drunkenness had made good progress.

Then, at the end of each street, could be seen flashing through the darkness the bayonets of an English company. Georges and Laïza looked at one another with a smile that implied:

“It is not a question here of conquering, but of dying and dying bravely.”

Both, however, wished to make a final effort, and rushed into the principal street, trying to rally some of the rebels to their small body. But some of these were hardly in a condition to listen to the appeals and exhortations of their chiefs, while others ignored them entirely, shouting with drunken voices and dancing with staggering limbs; while the greater number, now in the last stage of intoxication, were rolling in the street, losing more and more every minute the little sense that remained to them. Laïza had snatched up a whip and was belabouring the wretches with all his strength; Georges, leaning on his iron bar, the only weapon which he had touched, stood looking at them motionless and contemptuous, like a statue of Disdain.

After a few minutes, both were convinced that there was nothing to hope for, and that each moment that they stayed there was a year cut off from their life; besides, some men in their own band, led away by force of example, fascinated by the sight of the intoxicating liquor, and made giddy by the alcoholic odour which mounted to their brain, began in their turn to desert them. There was then no time to be lost in leaving the town; indeed it was evident that they had lost too much time already.

Georges and Laïza collected the little band which still remained faithful to them, and which consisted of about three hundred men; then, placing themselves at their head, they marched resolutely towards the end of the street, which, as we have said, was blocked by a wall of soldiers. When within forty yards of the English, they saw their rifles lowered at them, a gleam of flame burst along the whole line and immediately a hail of bullets swept their ranks; ten or twelve men fell, but the two leaders remained unhurt, and the cry of “Forward!” uttered simultaneously by their two powerful voices, resounded through the air.

When they came within twenty yards, the fire of the rear rank followed that of the first, causing still greater havoc among the rebels. Then, almost immediately, the two forces met, and a hand-to-hand combat ensued.

The fray was terrible; all the world knows what English troops are like, and how they die at their posts. But, on the other hand, they had to deal with desperate men, who knew that, if taken prisoners, an ignominious death awaited them, and who, consequently, wished to die as free men.

Georges and Laïza performed miracles of boldness and courage: Laïza, with his rifle, which he had grasped by the stock and employed as a flail; Georges, with the bar which he had wrenched from his window and used as all weapons combined. Their men, too, supported them excellently, rushing on the English with bayonet thrusts, while the wounded dragged themselves between the combatants, and, crawling up to the enemy, cut their hamstrings with their knives.

Thus for ten minutes the struggle lasted, furious, desperate, and deadly, no one being able to say which side would gain the advantage. Despair, however, triumphed over discipline; the English ranks opened like a bursting dam and let through the torrent, which at once overflowed beyond the town.

Georges and Laïza who had headed the attack now remained in the rear to support the retreat. At last, they reached the foot of the *Petite Montagne*, which was a place too precipitous and too thickly timbered for the English to venture to enter. Accordingly they halted, while the Negroes, on their side, paused to regain their breath. Some twenty blacks rallied round their leaders; the rest scattered in all directions; it was no longer a question of fighting, but of seeking safety in the great woods. Georges appointed the district of Moka, in which his father’s house was situated, as the general meeting-place for those who wished to rally round him, announcing that he would start in the morning at dawn in order to reach the district of Grand-Port, in which, as we have said, were the thickest forests.

Georges was giving his final instructions to the miserable remnants of the force with which he had for an instant hoped to conquer the Island, and the moon, gliding momentarily across the space between two clouds, shed her light upon the group of men whom he commanded, if not with the sword, at least by word and gesture, when suddenly a thicket, distant about forty yards from the fugitives, burst into flame; the report of a rifle was heard, and Georges fell at Laïza's feet struck by a bullet in his side.

At the same moment a man, whose rapid flight could be detected for a moment in the shadow, sprang from the still smoking thicket into a ravine extending behind him, and, hidden from all eyes, followed it down its length, regaining by a circuitous route the ranks of the English soldiers, who had halted on the banks of the *Ruisseau des Pucelles.*

But, swift as had been the flight of the assassin, Laïza had recognised him, and, before he quite lost consciousness, the wounded man heard these three words muttered, to the accompaniment of a calm but implacable gesture: "Antonio the Malay!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

A FATHER’S HEART.

WHILE the various events which we have just related were taking place at Port-Louis Pierre Munier was anxiously awaiting at Moka the dreaded result of the enterprise of which his son had given him a hint.

Accustomed, as we have said, to the everlasting supremacy of the Whites, he had come to regard it not merely as an acquired right, but as a natural superiority. However great the confidence with which his son had inspired him, he could not then believe that these obstacles, which he regarded as insurmountable, would be removed from his path.

From the moment when, as has been described, Georges took leave of him, he had sunk into a profound apathy; the very excess of the emotions which crowded his heart, and the diversity of the thoughts which clashed in his mind, had thrown him into an apparent state of insensibility almost amounting to imbecility. More than once he very nearly made up his mind to go himself to Port-Louis, and see with his own eyes what was going on; but to go and encounter a certainty required a strength of will which the poor father did not possess; had it only been a question of preventing a danger, Pierre Munier would have run there.

The day was spent then in an anguish all the more profound because it was con-fined within his own breast, and that the man who suffered it did not dare to tell any one, not even Télémaque, the cause of the dejection about which the latter questioned him. From time to time he rose from his arm-chair and went with bowed head to the open window, looked in the direction of the Town as though he could see, listened as though he could hear; then, neither seeing nor hearing anything, he sighed and went back with dumb lips and lack lustre eyes and sat down in his chair again.

The dinner hour arrived. Télémaque, who was entrusted with the ordinary duties of the household, laid the cloth, set the table, and brought in the dinner; but all these various occupations were completed, and meanwhile the man for whom the preparations were being made had not even raised his eyes. Then, when all was ready, Télémaque waited for a quarter of an hour, after which, seeing that his master remained in the same condition of stupor, he touched him lightly on the shoulder. Pierre Munier started, and getting up quickly, asked:

"Well, has anything been heard?"

Télémaque indicated to his master that dinner was served; but Pierre Munier smiled sadly, shook his head and relapsed into his reverie. The Negro perceived that something unusual was happening, and, without venturing to ask for an explanation, rolled the whites of his eyes round, as though to look for some sign that might put him on the track of this unknown event. Everything was in its customary place, and all was going on as usual; nevertheless it was evident that the expectation of some great misfortune had come to brood that morning over the domestic hearth.

The day passed in this manner.

Télémaque, still hoping that hunger would assert its rights, left the dinner on the table; but Pierre Munier was too profoundly absorbed to interest himself in anything except his own thoughts. However, there was a moment when Télémaque, seeing great drops of perspiration standing on his master's forehead, thought he was feeling the heat, and offered him a glass of wine and water; but Pierre Munier pushed the glass gently aside, saying:

"You have heard nothing yet?"

Télémaque shook his head, looked in turns at the floor and ceiling, as if to ask each of them alternately if they were any better informed than himself. Then, seeing that each of them remained dumb, he went out to ask the Negroes if they possessed any more knowledge than he did as to the unknown cause of his master's secret uneasiness.

But, to his great astonishment, he found that there was not a single Negro about the house. He ran at once to the barn where they were in the habit of assembling for the *berloque*. The barn was deserted, so he returned by the huts, but found not a soul in them except the women and children.

On questioning these he learned that the Negroes, as soon as the day's work was over, instead of taking their rest as usual, had armed themselves and gone off in separate bands, but all making in the direction of the *Riviere des Lataniers*. On hearing this, he returned to the house.

Aroused by the sound of the opening door, the old man turned round.

"Well?" he asked.

Then Télémaque told him of the absence of the Negroes, and how they had all gone off armed in the same direction.

“Yes, yes!” said Pierre Munier, “yes, alas!”

There was then no room for doubt, and this information concurred in making the poor father believe that the moment had come when what happened in the Town would decide his whole fate. I say, *his* fate, for, since the return of Georges, the old man, seeing his son so handsome and so brave, so confident of himself, so rich in the experience of the past, so sure of the future, had so identified his own life with that of his son that he had come to feel convinced that their existence was inseparable, and that he should never be able to endure the loss of his son, or even his absence.

How severely did he reproach himself for having let Georges go away that morning without questioning him, without learning to what dangers he was about to expose himself! How did he upbraid himself for not having insisted on accompanying him!

But the mere idea that his son was about to enter upon an overt struggle against the Whites had so utterly prostrated him that he had felt all his moral force desert him on the spot. This simple soul was so constituted, as we have said, that it had no strength except in the presence of dangers that were physical.

Night, however, had come, and the hours went by without bringing any news, either consoling or the reverse. Although the darkness which prevailed outside, rendered even more profound by the light shining in the room, prevented him from distinguishing any object at the distance of ten yards, Pierre Munier continued to move, at intervals almost regular, but gradually diminishing in length, from his chair to the window and back from the window to his chair. Télémaque, now extremely uneasy, had installed himself in the same room; but, devoted as this faithful servant was, he could not keep awake, and was sleeping on a chair with his head against the wall, against which his profile stood out like a drawing in charcoal.

At two in the morning, a watch-dog, which was usually allowed to run loose about the house during the night, but which had been left chained up that evening owing to the general pre-occupation, uttered a low and plaintive howl. Pierre Munier started and got up; but at the sound of that mournful whine which the superstition of the Blacks regards as the sure announcement of an approaching misfortune, his strength failed him, and he was obliged to lean against the table to save himself from falling. Five minutes later, the dog gave another howl, louder, more melancholy and more prolonged than the first; then, after a similar interval, a third, even more funereal and piteous than the other two.

Pierre Munier, pale and voiceless, the perspiration standing on his brow, remained with his eyes fixed upon the door without moving towards it, like a man expecting some misfortune which he knows will enter that way.

After an instant was heard the tread of a number of men, and the steps approached the house with slow and measured pace. They seemed to the poor father like those of men following a funeral procession.

The outer chamber soon seemed to fill with people, but this crowd, whatever it was, maintained silence. Amid the silence, however, the old man heard a groan, and in this groan he seemed to recognise the voice of his son.

“Georges!” he cried! “Georges! in the name of heaven, is it you? Answer, speak, come here!”

“Here I am, father,” answered a weak, but calm, voice; “here I am!”

At that instant the door opened and Georges entered, but leaning against the framework of the door, and so pale that Pierre Munier thought for a moment that it was his son’s ghost which had appeared in answer to his summons; so that, instead of going towards Georges, the old man stepped backwards.

“In heaven’s name,” he murmured, “what has happened to you?”

“I am severely wounded, father, but do not be alarmed, the wound is not mortal, for, as you see, I am standing up and walking; but I cannot keep up for long.” Then he added under his breath:

“Help, Laïza, my strength is going! “And he fell into the Negro’s arms. Pierre Munier rushed towards his son, but Georges had already fainted.

With that strength of will which had become the distinctive feature of his character, Georges had determined, weak and almost dying as he was, to let his father see him standing up. And this time his action was not the result of that pride which so often exhibited itself in him, but knowing the deep affection which his father bore for him, he feared lest the shock which he might receive from seeing him lying down might prove fatal to him. Accordingly, in spite of the remonstrances of Laïza, he had quitted the litter on which the Negroes had carried him in relays across the defiles of the *Montagne du Pouce*, and with superhuman courage, and that strength of will which asserted itself even over physical weakness, he had got up, clung to the wall, and, as he had decided what he would do, had appeared to his father standing upright on his feet.

And, as he had foreseen, the shock had in this way proved less violent to the old man.

Nevertheless his iron will now succumbed beneath the pain, and Georges, exhausted by his supreme effort, fell fainting into Laïza's arms.

The father's grief was terrible to witness, even for strong men, — a grief tearless and uncomplaining, mute and profoundly mournful. Georges was laid on a sofa. The old man knelt in front of him, passed his arm beneath his son's head, and waited with his eyes fixed on the closed eyes of the other, holding his breath as the other's was suspended, grasping with his other hand the hand of the wounded man, asking no questions, not anxious for details, nor inquiring how the result had come about. He knew everything he cared to know: for there was his son, wounded, bleeding, and unconscious; what more did he require to learn, and what to him mattered the cause in face of this terrible result?

Laïza stood erect at a corner of the sideboard, resting on his gun and looking from time to time in the direction of the window to see if it were not yet daylight.

The other Negroes, who had withdrawn respectfully after laying Georges upon the sofa, remained in the next room, occasionally putting their black heads through the doorway, while others were grouped outside in front of the window. Many of them had been wounded more or less dangerously, but no one seemed to think of his own wound.

Every instant their number increased, for all the fugitives, after having first separated in order to avoid pursuit by the English, had regained the dwelling by different roads, just as sheep that have been scattered find their way back one by one to their enclosure. At four in the morning there were about two hundred Negroes round the house.

Meanwhile Georges had recovered consciousness, and had tried to reassure his father by speaking a few words, but in a voice so faint that, though the old man's delight on hearing him speak was great, he signed to him to be silent. He had however inquired what was the nature of the wound, and what surgeon had dressed it, and Georges with a smile and a feeble motion of the head had pointed to Laïza.

It is well known that, in the Colonies, some of the Negroes have the reputation of being skilful in surgery, and that sometimes even the white

Colonists send for them in preference to the regular professors of the art. The explanation is quite simple; these primitive creatures, like our own shepherds who often possess remedies of their own to hold their ground against the cleverest doctors, being continually in the presence of Nature, surprise, as do the animals, some of those secrets which remain hidden from the eyes of other men. Now, Laïza had a reputation throughout the Island as a clever surgeon; the Negroes attributed his knowledge to the use of certain mystic words and magic enchantments, while the Whites ascribed it to his acquaintance with sundry plants and herbs of which he alone knew the names and properties. Accordingly, Pierre Munier felt more easy when he learned that it was Laïza who had dressed his son's wound. Daybreak was now approaching, and as the time went on, Laïza appeared to grow more and more uneasy. At last he could contain himself no longer, and, under pretence of feeling the sick man's pulse, went over to him and spoke to him in a low voice.

"What are you asking and what do you want, my friend?" asked Pierre Munier.

"I shall have to tell you, father, what he wants; he does not wish me to fall into the hands of the Whites, and he is asking me if I feel strong enough to be carried into the great woods."

"Carried into the great woods!" cried the old man; "in your weak condition! impossible!"

"There is nothing else, however, to be done, father, unless you prefer to see me arrested under your eyes and — "

"And what?" asked Pierre Munier anxiously; "what do they want and what can they do to you?"

"What do they want, father? To be avenged on a wretched Mulatto who has had the insolence to stand up against them, and has possibly made them shake in their shoes for an instant. What can they do to me? Oh! a mere trifle," added Georges with a smile, "just slice my head off on the *Plaine Verte.*"

The old man turned pale, then shuddered from head to foot, and it was evident that a terrible struggle was going on within him. At last, he raised his forehead, shook his head, and looking at the wounded man murmured:

"Take you! cut off your head! take my child from me! kill him! my Georges! and all because he is handsomer, braver and cleverer than they are — Ah! let them come then! Let them come!"

And the old man, with an energy of which, five minutes before, you would have thought him incapable, rushed to wards his carbine which was hanging on the wall, and, seizing the weapon that had lain idle for sixteen years, cried out:

"Yes, yes, let them come and we will see. Ah! you Whites, you have robbed this poor Mulatto of everything; you have robbed him of respect, and he said nothing; you might have taken his life, and he would still have said nothing. But now you want to take his son; you want to take his child and imprison him, torture him, cut off his head! Oh! come, you Whites, and we shall see! There are fifty years of hatred between us; come, come, it is time we should settle our accounts."

"Bravo, father, bravo!" cried Georges, raising himself on his elbow and looking at the old man with a feverish glance; "bravo! that's more like your old self."

"Well, yes, to the great woods then," said Pierre, "and we shall see if they dare follow us there. Yes, my son, come; the great woods are better than the towns. There we are under the eyes of God; let God look down and judge. And you, children," continued the Mulatto, addressing the Negroes, "have you always found me a good master?"

"Yes, yes!" cried all the Negroes with one voice.

"Have you told me a hundred times that you were devoted to me, not as slaves, but as children."

"Yes, yes!"

"Well then, now is the time you must prove your devotion."

"Give your orders, master, give your orders," cried all the Negroes.

"Come in, all of you."

The room was filled with Blacks.

"Here," continued the old man, "here is my son, who wished to save you, to set you free, to make men of you, and see his reward. And that is not all, they want to come and take him from me, wounded, bleeding and in pain. Will you protect him, will you save him? Will you die for him and with him?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" cried all the voices.

"To the great woods then, to the great woods!" said the old man.

"To the great woods!" shouted all the Negroes.

Then they brought the litter of branches to the side of the sofa on which Georges was lying, and placed the wounded man upon it, while four

Negroes took hold of the four handles. Georges was carried out of the house accompanied by Laïza, and took the head of the procession; then followed all the Negroes, while Pierre Munier came out last, leaving the house open, forsaken, and widowed of every human creature.

The procession, which was composed of about two hundred Negroes, followed for some time the road leading from Port-Louis to Grand-Port; then, after about half an hour’s march, turned to the right, advancing towards the base of the *Piton du Milieu*, in order to reach the source of the *Riviere des Créoles.*

Before disappearing behind the mountain, Pierre Munier, who had continued to act as rear-guard, stopped for a moment, climbed a small hill and cast a last look at this fine estate which he was forsaking. He took in at a glance those rich plains of cane, manioc, and maize, those splendid groves of shaddocks, jameroses and takamakas, that grand horizon of mountains which enclosed his immense property like a gigantic wall. He reflected that it had taken three generations of men, honest like himself, laborious like himself, esteemed like himself, to render this district the paradise of the Island. Then, with a sigh, and brushing away a tear, he turned his eyes away and shook his head, and with a smile upon his lips overtook the litter where his wounded child was waiting for him, — the child for whose sake he was giving up all this.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE GREAT WOODS.

THE day was breaking as the band of fugitives reached the source of the *Riviere des Créoles* and the rays of the eastern sun lighted up the granite summit of the *Piton du Milieu;* and this was the signal for the entire population of the forest to awake also. At each step, the *tanrecs* got up beneath the feet of the Negroes and scuttled off to their holes, the monkeys sprang from bough to bough and scampered out on the tiniest and most flexible branches of the *vacoas,* cypresses, and tamarind trees; then, hanging down and balancing themselves by their tails, hooked themselves on with wonderful cleverness, after a prodigious jump, to some other tree which afforded them a better shelter. The woodcock got up with a loud whirr, beating the air in his heavy flight, while the grey parrots seemed to jeer at him with their mocking cry, and the cardinal-bird, like a dying flame, flashed by swift as lightning and sparkling like a ruby. In a word, Nature, ever youthful, ever careless, ever fruitful, as is her wont, seemed in her serene tranquillity and her calm happiness ever to mock the troubles and griefs of man.

After marching for three or four hours, the band halted on a plateau at the foot of a nameless mountain, the base of which ran down to the banks of the river. Hunger began to make itself felt, but fortunately, every one had been hunting while on the road; some with their sticks had knocked over the *tanrecs,* an animal of which the Negroes are very fond; others had killed monkeys or woodcocks; lastly, Laïza had wounded a stag, in pursuit of which four men had set out, and which they had brought back at the end of an hour. There were provisions therefore for the whole company.

Laïza profited by this halt to dress Georges’ wound; he had left the litter from time to time to go and pluck some herb or plant, of which he alone knew the properties. On arriving at the resting-place he put together -what he had gathered, placed the precious collection which he had just obtained in a hollow of a rock, then with a rounded stone he bruised the simples just as he would have done in a mortar. This operation concluded, he pressed out the juice, dipped a rag in it, and, removing the bandage which he had put on the previous night, placed the newly-soaked compresses upon the two orifices of the wound; for, by good luck, the bullet had not remained in the wound, but, after entering a little below the lowest left rib, had gone out a little above the hip.

Pierre Munier followed this operation with deep anxiety. The wound was serious, but not mortal; nay more, it was evident from an examination of the flesh that, supposing no important organ in the interior had been injured, the healing would perhaps be more rapid than it would have been under the hands of one of the town doctors. The poor father none the less went through all the agony which such a sight must needs arouse in him; while Georges, on the contrary, in spite of the pain which a dressing of this sort was bound to cause him, did not even contract his brow, and restrained even the slightest trembling of the hand which his father held between his own.

The dressing over and the meal finished, they resumed their journey. They were now nearing the great woods, but had still to reach them; the little band, retarded by the transport of the wounded man, which was rendered still more difficult by the irregularity of the ground, advanced but slowly, and, ever since their departure from the dwelling, had left a track easy to follow.

They marched for about an hour more, following the bank of the *Riviere des Créoles*, then turned to the left, and began to find themselves on the outskirts of the forests, for, up to now, they had only traversed a sort of underwood. As they advanced, mimosas recurring in numerous clusters, and gigantic ferns growing in the space between the trees, rose as high as themselves, while bindweeds of prodigious size, dropping from the top of the takamakas like snakes hanging by their tails, began to indicate that they were entering the region of the great woods.

Soon the forest grew thicker and thicker; the trunks of the trees were closer together, the ferns were interlaced with one another, the bindweed formed barriers through which the passage became more and more difficult, especially for the men who carried the litter. Every moment Georges, seeing the difficulties which the march presented, made a movement to get out of the litter; but, each time, Laïza forbade him in such a tone of firmness, while his father clasped his hands with such a gesture of entreaty, that, in order not to wound the devotion of the one nor offend the tenderness of the other, the sick man resumed his place and let them make fresh attempts,

attempts which became every moment more painful, and which, sometimes, remained for a long while without result.

However, the difficulties experienced by the fugitives in penetrating into the interior of these virgin forests formed almost a guarantee of their security, as these difficulties would be found even greater by their pursuers, since the fugitives were Negroes accustomed to such journeys, while their pursuers were English soldiers accustomed to drill on the Champ de Mars and the Champ de Lort.

Presently, however, they arrived at a spot so thick, so full of briars, and of such compact growth, that all attempts to cross it proved ineffectual. For a long while the little band went up and down this kind of wall, through which the axe alone could open a passage; but this passage, if opened for the one party, would be equally open for the other, and, in offering an issue for escape, would afford a means of pursuit. While searching about, they came upon an *ajoupa,* a sort of shed built by hunters as a shelter, and beneath it the remains of a fire still smouldering; it was plain that some runaway Negroes were roaming in the neighbourhood, and, judging by the freshness of the tracks they had left, could not be very far away.

Laïza started on their trail. The skill of savages in following the track of a friend or an enemy across great solitudes is well-known. Laïza, stooping to the ground, examined every twig of grass bent by the heel, every stone moved from its bed by the tread of a foot, every branch diverted from its inclination by the pressure of the passer-by; but he arrived at last at a place where all trace was lost.

On one side was a stream which came down from the mountain and fell into the *Riviere des Creoles*; on the other, a mass of rocks, stones, and brushwood resembling a wall, at the top of which the forest seemed even thicker than in other parts, while behind lay the path which Laïza had just followed. Laïza crossed the stream, and searched in vain on the other side for the track which had led him to the bank. The Negroes, for there were more than one, had therefore gone no further.

Laïza tried next to climb the wall; in this he was successful, but, on reaching the summit, he saw that it would be impossible for a band of men, several of whom were wounded, to take such a path; accordingly, he came down again, and, being convinced that those whose track he had been looking for could not be far off, he uttered the various cries by which runaway Negroes are in the habit of recognising one another, and then waited.

After a moment, he thought he saw a slight waving of the thickest of the brushwood that covered the boulders forming the wall just described. Any one else except a man habituated to the mysteries of solitudes would have thought that these branches were being shaken by the wind; but in that case the waving movement would have been from top to bottom, whereas, on the contrary, this movement seemed to start from the bottom and gradually cease towards the extremities of the branches. This did not escape the notice of Laïza, and he fixed his glance on the thicket. His doubt soon changed into certainty; through the branches he had perceived a pair of restless eyes which, after roving in every direction, were fixed upon himself; Laïza then repeated the signal which he had already given, whereupon a man glided like a snake between the loose stones, and Laïza found himself face to face with a runaway Negro.

The two blacks exchanged only a word or two, and then Laïza returning on the track rejoined the little band, which now under his guidance took in its turn the same path which he had just taken, and soon reached the spot where he had found the Negro.

They found that an opening, made by moving some of the stones, provided a passage through the wall, and that this passage gave entrance to an immense cave.

The fugitives passed two and two through this narrow passage, so easy to defend. When the last man had passed through, the Negro replaced the stones exactly as they had been before, so that no trace of the passage was left visible; then he, too, by clinging to the brushwood and projecting edges of the rocks, scaled the wall and disappeared in the forest. Two hundred men had just been swallowed up into the bowels of the earth, and the most practised eye could not have told the spot at which they had entered.

Whether by one of those chances of Nature often met with, in which the hand of man has done nothing to bring about the effect produced, or, on the other hand, owing to long and fore-seeing toil on the part of the runaway Negroes, the top of this mountain, into the side of which the little band had just disappeared, was defended, on one side by a perpendicular rock like a rampart, and, on the other, by that gigantic hedge composed of trunks of trees, bindweed and brake, which had at first stopped the advance of our fugitives. Consequently, the only practicable entrance was the one which has been described, and, as we have said, this entrance was entirely hidden behind the stones that blocked it up and the brushwood that concealed the stones. Thus owing to the care with which it had been hidden from all eyes, the Colonists who, armed on their own account, had hunted runaway Negroes, or the English soldiers who, acting for the Government, had done the same, had doubtless passed a hundred times without noticing this opening, which was known to the fugitive slaves alone.

But, once on the other side of the hedge or of the cavern, the aspect of the ground changed completely. You were still in the great woods, the lofty forests, the thick cover, but it was at least possible to make your way through them, while in addition there was no lack of the first necessaries of life in these vast solitudes.

A waterfall, that had its source at the summit of the peak, fell majestically from a height of sixty feet, and, after being dashed into spray against the rocks which it wore away by its perpetual fall, flowed for some time in a gentle stream. Then, suddenly plunging into the bowels of the earth, it reappeared again beyond the enclosed space. Stags, boars, roe-deer, monkeys and *tanrecs* abounded; and, lastly, in the places where the rays of the sun shone through the immense vault of foliage, these rays lighted up shaddocks loaded with their orange globes and *vacoas* bending under their fruit, the stalks of which are so frail that the moment the fruit is ripe it falls at the slightest shake or the softest puff of wind.

So, if only the fugitives were successful in concealing their retreat, they might hope to live there without wanting for anything, until Georges should be healed and some plan for the future determined on, when the unfortunate slaves who accompanied Georges had decided to follow his fortunes to the end, whatever line of action he might decide upon.

Wounded however as Georges was, he had retained his usual coolness, and had not examined the retreat to which he had come for shelter without taking into consideration all the advantages which the position offered as a means of defence.

As soon then as he had reached the opposite side of the cave, he had stopped the litter, and, beckoning Laïza to his side, had pointed out how, after securing the outer opening of the passage, they could by means of an intrenchment defend the inner opening, and also mine the cave with powder, which they had taken the precaution of bringing from Moka. The plan of this work was at once sketched out and taken in hand; for Georges did not disguise from himself that in all probability he would not be treated as an ordinary fugitive, and he had sufficient pride to believe that the Whites would not regard themselves as victors, so long as they did not hold him bound hand and foot in their power.

They started at once therefore on the work of defence, which was superintended passively by Georges and actively by Pierre Munier.

Meanwhile Laïza was going round the mountain, which, as we have said, was protected everywhere either by natural palisades or by precipitous rocks. At one point, however, these rocks were capable of being scaled with ladders fifteen feet in length. The road, too, which led to this natural wall ran along a precipice and would have been easy to defend but that the band was too few in number and required to be spread over too many points at once, to allow of any military dispositions being made outside of what may be called the fortress.

Laïza recognised therefore that it was this spot and the entrance to the cavern that needed to be guarded more than all others with the greatest care.

Night was now approaching; Laïza left ten men to guard this important post, and returned to give Georges an account of his examination of the mountain.

He found him in a sort of cabin which had been hastily constructed with branches. The intrenchment had already been nearly dug out, and they continued to work hard at it, in spite of the darkness now rapidly advancing.

Five and twenty men were told off for sentry duty round the enclosure, the guard to be relieved every two hours; Pierre Munier remained at his post in the cavern, and Laïza, after putting a fresh bandage on the wound, returned to his.

Then everyone awaited such fresh developments as the night would doubtless bring with it.

CHAPTER XXV.

JUDGE AND EXECUTIONER.

IN point of fact, in a war of surprises like that which was about to take place between the revolted slaves and their white enemies, who would not fail to pursue them, the darkness of night would greatly aid the attack, while adding elements of terror to the defence.

The night which had just begun was beautiful and calm; the moon, however, now in its last quarter, would not rise until about eleven o’clock.

For men less pre-occupied with the dangers they were exposed to, and especially for men less accustomed to such sights, the gradual diminution of the daylight, amid these vast solitudes and the wild region which we have tried to depict, would have been a magnificent spectacle. The darkness first invaded the lower regions, rising like a tide along the trunks of the trees, the sides of the rocks, and the slopes of the mountain, bringing silence in its train and gradually dispersing the last gleams of day, which fled for refuge to the summit of the peak, where they hung for an instant like the flames of a volcano, then died away in their turn, submerged beneath the sea of darkness.

For eyes, however, accustomed to the night, this darkness is not total; for ears accustomed to solitude, this silence is not absolute. The life of Nature is never quite extinguished; to the sounds of day which are lulled asleep, succeed the awaking sounds of night. Amid the loud murmur of the rustling leaves intermingled with the prattling of the streams are heard other noises, caused by the voices or the steps of night — roving animals, sombre voices, stealthy and unexpected steps, which inspire the stoutest hearts with that mysterious emotion reason cannot fight against, since sight cannot reassure it.

None of these confused sounds escaped the trained ear of Laïza; a wild hunter and, consequently, a man of solitude and a traveller in the night, darkness and solitude had little that was mysterious or secret for his eyes or ears. He recognised the nibbling of the *tanrecs* as they gnawed the roots of the trees, the step of the stag making for his accustomed spring, the beating of the wings of the bat in the glades, and two hours passed without any of these sounds disturbing him from his motionless position.

Strangely enough, it was in this part of the mountain, inhabited at that moment by about two hundred men, that the silence was most absolute, and the solitude seemed most complete. The ten Negroes had lain down with their faces to the ground, so that Laïza himself could hardly distinguish them in the darkness, which was rendered still thicker by the shadow of the trees; and though some of them were asleep, you would have said that, even in their sleep, caution made them hold their breath, which could scarcely be heard.

As for Laïza himself, resting upright against an enormous tamarind, whose flexible branches projected, not merely over the path that ran beside the rocks, but even over the precipice which lay beyond the path, he might defy the most trained eye to distinguish his body from the trunk of the huge tree with which, thanks to the night and the colour of his skin, he was completely identified.

Laïza stood thus, silent and motionless, for about an hour, when he heard behind him the noise made by several men walking over ground that is strewn with pebbles and dry branches. These steps, though cautious, seemed to make no effort to conceal themselves; so he turned without any uneasiness, knowing that it must be a patrol which was advancing towards him. Presently, indeed, his eyes, accustomed to the darkness, distinguished six or eight men advancing, at the head of whom he recognised Pierre Munier by his height and the clothes he wore.

Laïza seemed to detach himself from the tree against which he had been leaning and went up to him.

“Well,” said he, “have the men whom you sent to reconnoitre come back?”

“Yes, and the English are in pursuit of us.”

“Where are they?”

“They were encamped, an hour ago, between the *Piton du Milieu* and the source of the *Riviere des Creoles.*”

“They are on our track?”

“Yes; and to-morrow we shall most likely have news of them.”

“Sooner than that,” answered Laïza.

“Why sooner?”

“Yes; if *we* have sent out scouts, *they* will have done the same.”

"Well?"

"Well, there are men prowling about in our neighbourhood."

"How do you know? have you heard their voices? have you recognised their step?"

"No; but I heard a stag go by, and I knew by the rapidity of his pace that he had been startled from his lair."

"You think then that some prowler is on our track?"

"I am sure of it. Hush!"

"What is it?"

"Listen — "

"Yes, I do hear a sound."

"It is a woodcock flying at two hundred yards from us."

"In which direction?"

"There!" said Laïza, extending his hand towards a clump of trees, the tops of which could be seen rising above the ravine.

"And you think it was a man that startled it?"

"A man or several men," answered Laïza; "I cannot determine the number."

"That is not what I mean. You think it was frightened by some human being?"

"Animals recognise instinctively the sounds made by other animals, and are not alarmed by them," answered Laïza.

"So then?"

"So then they are approaching. There! do you hear?" added the Negro, dropping his voice.

"What is it?" asked the old man, adopting the same precaution.

"The noise of a dry branch which has just cracked beneath the feet of one of them. Hush! for they are now nearly close enough to us to hear the sound of our voices. Hide behind this tamarind, while I go back to my post."

There was a moment's silence, during which nothing disturbed the quiet of the night, but after a few seconds came the sound of a pebble detached from the ground and rolling over the steep slope of the cliff. Laïza felt Pierre Munier's breath against his cheek. The latter was doubtless going to speak, but the Negro grasped him forcibly by the arm; the old man understood that silence was imperative, and obeyed.

At the same time the woodcock flew off noisily for the second time, uttering its peculiar cry, and passing over the top of the tamarind, made for the higher regions of the mountain.

The prowler was hardly twenty yards from those whose track he was doubtless searching for. Laïza and Pierre Munier held their breath; the other Negroes stood as if carved in marble.

At this moment a gleam of silver began to light the summits of the chain of mountains which, through the glades of the forest, could be seen rising against the horizon. Soon the hollow outline of the waning moon appeared behind the *Morne des Creoles*, and began to move across the sky.

In direct contrast to the darkness, which had mounted upwards, the light came down from above; but this light penetrated only the open places, leaving the forest, with the exception of a few spots of ground on which the light poured through the chinks of the foliage, in profound obscurity.

At this moment, there was a slight disturbance of the branches in a thicket bordering the path and rising above the declivity, of which the rapid slope led, as we have said, to a precipice; then gradually these branches parted and allowed a man's head to pass through them.

In spite of the darkness, which however at this spot was not so great since it was not overshadowed by any tree, Pierre and Laïza noticed at the same moment the movement imparted to the thicket, for the hand of each sought and grasped the hand of the other simultaneously.

The spy remained for an instant motionless; then he thrust his head forward once more, examining with eyes and ears the whole of the space disclosed to his gaze, made another forward movement, and then, reassured by the silence which made him think that no one was near, raised himself upon his knees, and listened once more, and still seeing and hearing nothing, finally stood upright altogether.

Laïza then grasped Pierre Munier's hand more firmly to impress on him a greater caution, since, for his own part, he no longer had any doubt but that this man was looking for their track.

And, in point of fact, when the prowler reached the edge of the path, he stooped once more and examined the ground to see if it retained any trace of the tread of a number of men; then he touched the grass with the palm of his hand to see if it had been crushed; he touched the stones with the point of his finger to be quite certain they had not been disturbed from their beds; and finally, as if even the air might have retained some traces of those for whom he was searching, he raised his head and fixed his eyes on the tamarind, against the trunk and beneath the shadow of which Laïza was concealed.

At this instant a moonbeam passed between the tops of two trees and threw its light on the spy’s face.

Then, with a movement quick as lightning Laïza disengaged his right hand from Pierre Munier’s hand, and, springing with one bound so as to seize at its extremity one of the most flexible branches of the tree which sheltered him, dived with the swiftness of a swooping eagle to the foot of the rock and seized the spy by his girdle; then, giving with his foot an impulse to the branch which now sprang up again, mounted with him as the eagle soars with its prey. Then slipping his hand along the smooth and polished bark of the bough, he fell at the foot of the tree in the midst of his companions, still grasping his prisoner, who, knife in hand, strove vainly to wound his captor, as the snake strives vainly to bite the king of the air which carries him off from the depths of a marsh to his eyrie near the sky.

Then, in spite of the darkness, every one at the first glance recognised the prisoner, who was none other than Antonio the Malay. All this had happened so swiftly and so unexpectedly that Antonio had not uttered a sound.

At last then Laïza held his mortal enemy in his power, and was about to inflict instant punishment on the traitor and assassin.

He was pressing him beneath his knee, looking at him with that terrible smile of the victor by which the vanquished realises that there is nothing to hope for, when suddenly the distant barking of a dog was heard.

Without loosing the hand with which he grasped his throat, or the hand by which he held his wrist, Laïza raised his head and listened in the direction whence the sound had come.

At this sound Laïza felt Antonio shudder.

“Everything at its proper time,” murmured Laïza, as if speaking to himself.

Then, addressing the Negroes who surrounded him:

“First fasten this fellow to a tree,” said he; “I must speak to M. Munier.”

The Negroes seized Antonio by his hands and feet and tied him with bindweed to the trunk of a takamaka. Laïza made certain that he was tied securely, and then, leading the old man a few paces away, stretched his hand in the direction whence he had heard the dog’s bark.

“Did you hear that?” he asked him.

“What?” asked the old man.

“The bark of a dog.”

“No.”

“Listen, it’s coming nearer.”

“Yes, I heard it that time.”

“They are hunting us like stags.”

“What! do you think it is we they are pursuing?”

“What should you think it is then?”

“Some dog that has escaped, hunting on his own account.”

“Yes, that is possible, after all,” murmured Laïza; “let us listen.”

There was a moment’s silence, at the end of which more barking re-echoed through the forest, nearer at hand than on the previous occasions.

“It is we they are chasing.”

“And how do you know that?”

“That is not the bark of a dog hunting,” said Laïza, “it is the howling of a dog in search of his master. The devils must have found a dog chained up in some Negro’s hut, and taken him to guide them; if that Negro is with us, we are lost.”

“It is Fidèle’s voice,” murmured Pierre Munier with a start.

“Yes, yes, I recognise it now,” said Laïza. “I have heard it before; it is the dog that howled last night, when we brought your son wounded to Moka.”

“I quite forgot to bring him when we started; still, if it were Fidèle, I think he would be running faster. Listen how slowly his voice comes nearer!”

“They are holding him in a leash and following him; he has perhaps a whole regiment at his heels. You must not be angry with the poor beast,” added the Anjouan Negro with a grim smile, “he cannot go any faster. But don’t be uneasy, he will come sure enough.”

“Well, what is to be done?” asked Pierre Munier.

“If you had any vessel waiting for you at Grand-Port, I should say that as we are but eight or ten leagues from it, there was still time for us to get there; but you have no chance of escape in that direction, have you?”

“None.”

“Then we must defend ourselves, and, if possible,” added the Negro in a gloomy tone, “die in doing so.”

“Come then,” said Pierre Munier, regaining all his courage the moment it was a question of fighting. “Come then, for the dog will lead them to the opening of the cavern, and it will take them some time to get in, even when they are there.”

“Very well,” said Laïza, “away with you then to the intrenchments.”

“But why do you not come with me?”

“I? Oh! I must wait here for a few moments longer.”

“But you will join us again?”

“When the first gun is fired, turn round and you will see me at your side.”

The old man extended his hand to Laïza, for the common danger had obliterated all difference of rank between them; then he threw his gun over his shoulder, and, followed by his escort, went off at a rapid pace towards the entrance to the cavern.

Laïza followed him with his eyes until he was quite lost in the darkness; then, turning to Antonio, whom the Negroes according to his orders had bound to a tree, he said:

“And now, Antonio, for you and me.”

“You and me?” said Antonio in a trembling voice. “And what does Laïza want with his friend and brother?”

“I want him to remember what was said on the evening of the Yamsé by the bank of the *Riviere des Lataniers.”*

“Many things were said, and my brother Laïza was very eloquent, for everybody followed his advice.”

“And among those things does Antonio remember the sentence pronounced beforehand against traitors?”

Antonio shuddered from head to foot, and, in spite of the copper tint of his skin, might have been seen to turn pale, had it been daylight.

“My brother appears to have lost his memory,” resumed Laïza in a tone of cutting irony; “well, I am going to bring it back to him. It was said that, in case a traitor should be found among us, any of us might put an end to him by a death prompt or lingering, gentle or terrible. Are those the exact words of the oath, and does my brother remember them?”

“I remember them,” said Antonio in a scarcely articulate voice.

“Well then, answer the questions I am going to put to you,” said Laïza.

“I do not recognise your right to question me; you are not my judge,” cried Antonio.

“Then I shall question someone else,” replied Laïza.

Then, turning to the Negroes who were lying round him on the ground:

“Get up, you others, and answer.”

The Negroes obeyed, and some ten or twelve black figures silently ranged themselves in a semi-circle in front of the tree to which Antonio was tied.

“They are slaves,” cried Antonio, “and I ought not to be judged by slaves; I am no Negro, I am free. It is for a court to judge me if I have committed a crime, and not for you.”

“That will do,” said Laiza. “We will judge you first, and then you shall appeal to whom you choose.”

Antonio held his tongue, and, in the moment of silence which followed the injunction Laïza had just given him, the bark of the dog was heard drawing nearer.

“Since the culprit will not answer,” said Laïza to the Negroes who surrounded Antonio, “you must answer for him. Who was it that denounced the conspiracy to the Governor, because some one else and not himself had been named as leader?”

“Antonio the Malay,” answered all the Negroes in a low tone, but unanimously.

“It is not true!” cried Antonio. “It is not true! I swear it! I protest!”

“Silence!” said Laïza in the same imperative tone.

Then he resumed:

“Who was it that, after denouncing the conspiracy to the Governor, shot at our leader, by the base of the little mountain, and wounded him?”

“Antonio the Malay,” answered all the Negroes.

“Who saw me?” cried the Malay: “Who dares to say it was I? Who could distinguish one man from another in the darkness?”

“Silence!” said Laïza.

Then, continuing in the same calm tone of inquiry, he said:

“Lastly, after denouncing the conspiracy to the Governor and trying to murder our leader, who was it came in the night crawling like a snake round our retreat, to discover some opening by which the English soldiers might enter?”

“Antonio the Malay,” replied the Negroes once more, with the same accent of conviction that had not failed them for an instant.

“I was coming to join my brothers,” cried the prisoner; “I was coming to share their lot, whatever it might be, I swear and protest I was.”

“Do you believe what he says?” asked Laïza.

“No! no! no!” chorussed all the voices.

“My kind friends,” said Antonio, “listen to me, I entreat you!”

“Silence!” said Laïza. Then he continued, with the same accent of solemnity which he had maintained all the time, and which indicated the greatness of the duty which he had imposed upon himself:

“Antonio is not once, but three times, a traitor; Antonio then would deserve to die three times, if that were possible. Antonio, prepare to appear before the Great Spirit, for you are about to die!”

“It is murder!” cried Antonio, “and you have no right to murder a free man. Besides, the English cannot be far off; I will appeal to them, I will shout. Help! help! They are cutting my throat! they are.”

Laïza took the Malay by the throat and smothered his cries between his fingers of iron; then, turning towards the negroes:

“Get a rope ready,” he said.

On hearing this order, which foreshadowed the fate awaiting him, Antonio struggled so violently that he broke some of the bonds which held him. But he could not free himself from the most terrible of them all, the hand of Laïza. After some seconds, however, the Negro realised, by the convulsions which he felt running through Antonio’s whole frame, that, if he continued to grasp him so tightly, there would soon be no need for a rope. So he relaxed his hold on the throat of the prisoner, who let his head fall on his breast like a man with the death-rattle in his throat.

“I said that I would grant you time to appear before the Great Spirit,” said Laïza; “you have ten minutes, prepare yourself.”

Antonio tried to pronounce some words, but his voice failed him.

The barking of the dog was heard drawing nearer every moment.

“Where is the rope?” said Laïza.

“Here,” answered a Negro, handing Laïza the article which he asked for.

“Good,” said he.

And, the office of the Judge having been completed, that of the Executioner began.

Laïza took hold of one of the strongest branches of the tamarind, pulled it towards him and fastened one end of the rope to it, then made a running knot of the other end and passed it over Antonio’s head. Next he ordered two Negroes to hold the branch, and, having assured himself that the condemned man, spite of the rupture of two or three of his bands, was still secured tightly, he bade him a second time prepare for death.

The condemned man had now recovered speech; but, instead of using it to implore the mercy of God, he raised his voice to make a last appeal to the pity of men.

“Well, yes, my brothers, yes, my friends,” said he, changing his tactics, and trying to obtain by confession what had been refused to his denials, “yes, I am very guilty, I know, and you have the right to treat me as you are doing; but you will pardon your old comrade, will you not? your comrade who used to amuse you in the evenings? poor Antonio, who used to tell you such nice stories and sang you such rousing songs! How will you do without him? who will amuse and distract you? who will make you forget the fatigue of the day’s work? Let me off, my friends! let poor Antonio off! I ask you on my knees for my life!”

“Think of the Great Spirit,” said Laïza; “for you have but five minutes to live, Antonio.”

“Instead of five minutes, Laïza, kind Laïza,” resumed Antonio in a tone of entreaty, “give me five years, and during those five years I will be your slave; I will follow you, be always at your orders, always ready to obey you, and, when I fail, or commit the slightest fault, well, then you shall punish me, and I will bear the lash, the rod, the rope, without complaint, and say that you are a kind master for having given me my life. Oh! Laïza, give me my life, give me my life!”

“Listen, Antonio,” said Laïza, “do you hear that dog barking?”

“Yes; and you think it was I who advised its being let loose? no, you are wrong, I swear it.”

“Antonio,” said Laïza, “it would not have entered the head of even a White to employ a dog to hunt down his own master. This idea was yours, Antonio.”

The Malay uttered a deep groan; then, after an instant, as though he hoped to melt his foe by dint of humility, he said:

“Well, yes, it was mine. The Great Spirit had forsaken me, the thirst for revenge had made me mad. You must show pity for a madman, Laïza; pardon me, in the name of your brother Nazim.”

“And who was it again who betrayed Nazim, when Nazim wanted to escape? Ah! that is a name that you were very foolish to pronounce, Antonio. The five minutes are up. Malay, you are going to die.”

“Oh! no, no, no! not to die!” said Antonio. “Pardon, Laïza! pardon, my friends!”

But, without listening to the plaints, the entreaties, or the prayers of the condemned man, Laïza drew his knife and at a blow cut all the ties which bound Antonio. At the same instant the two men, at an order from him, let go the branch, which sprang back, carrying with it the unfortunate Malay.

A shriek, terrible, supreme, a shriek in which seemed to be combined all the strength of despair, resounded and then died away in mournful accents and was lost in the depths of the forest. All was over, and Antonio was nothing but a corpse swinging at the end of the rope above the precipice.

Laïza remained for an instant motionless, watching the movements of the rope as its vibration gradually diminished; then, when it almost described a perpendicular and motionless line against the blue of the sky, he listened once more to the barking of the dog, which was now hardly more than a hundred yards from the cavern. He picked up his gun which he had laid on the ground, and, turning to the other Negroes, said:

“Come, my friends, we are avenged; now, we can die.”

And, starting off at a rapid pace, he marched at their head towards the intrenchments.

CHAPTER XXVI.

NIGGER HUNTING.

LAIZA had not been mistaken, and the dog, in following the track of his master, had led the English straight to the entrance of the cavern. Here he had dashed into the brushwood and had begun to scratch and to bite at the stones. Then the English knew they were at the end of their pursuit.

They immediately sent forward soldiers armed with picks, who fell to work, and in a few minutes effected an opening large enough to admit a man’s body. A soldier pushed his body through, in order to look into the opening. Instantly a shot was heard, and the soldier fell, his breast pierced by a bullet; a second soldier succeeded the first, and fell in the same way; a third advanced in his turn and shared the same fate.

It was evident from the rebels having themselves given the signal for attack, that they were resolved to make a desperate defence.

The assailants began to go to work more cautiously; sheltering themselves as much as they could, they enlarged the breach so that several men could enter abreast; the drums beat, and the Grenadiers advanced with fixed bayonets.

But the besieged occupied such an advantageous position that in an instant the breach was littered with dead, and the bodies had to be removed to make room for a second assault.

This time the English penetrated to the middle of the cavern, but only to leave a still larger number of dead than at the previous advance; sheltered behind the intrenchment which Georges had ordered to be raised, the Negroes, under the direction of Laïza and Pierre Munier, fired with unerring accuracy.

Meanwhile, Georges, incapacitated by his wound, and lying in his cabin, cursed the inactivity to which he was reduced; the smell of powder which enveloped him, the noise of musketry crackling in the ear, everything, including the succession charges made by the English, aroused is him that ardent fever of battle which makes a man stake his life on the whim of accident. But, in this case, it was much worse, for it was no foreign cause that was being fought out, it was no question of supporting the pleasure of a king, or of a Nation’s honour that had to be avenged. No, it was his own personal cause which these men were defending, while he, Georges, the man of stout heart, of adventurous spirit, could do nothing, neither in action, nor even in counsel; and Georges bit the mattress on which he was lying, Georges wept with vexation.

At the second attack, when the English succeeded in reaching the middle of the cavern, they fired, from the point which they had gained, several volleys at the intrenchment, and, as the cabin in which Georges was lying was just behind the intrenchment, two or three bullets whizzed through the branches forming its walls. This sound, which would have alarmed any one else, consoled and elated Georges, since he reflected that he, too, was in danger, and that if he could not inflict death, he might at least meet it.

The English had for the moment desisted from the attack; but it was evident that they were preparing for a fresh assault, and you could hear, from the heavy and resounding blows of the pick-axe, that they had not abandoned their project. In point of fact, after a short interval, a portion of the outer wall of the cavern fell in, thereby doubling the size of the opening. Immediately the drums beat again, and, by the light of the moon, the bayonets were seen for the third time gleaming at the entrance to the cavern.

Pierre Munier and Laïza exchanged glances; this time, it was evident the struggle would be a terrible one.

“What is your last resource?” asked Laïza.

“The cavern is mined,” said the old man.

“In that case, we have still a chance of safety, but, at the decisive moment, you must do as I tell you, or we are all lost, for it is not possible to retreat with a wounded man.”

“Well, I shall kill myself at his side,” said the old man.”

“It would be better that both of you should escape.”

“Together?”

“Together or separately, it matters little which.”

“I shall not leave my son, Laïza, I warn you.”

“You will leave him, if it is his only means of safety.”

“What do you mean?”

“I will explain, later on.”

Then, turning to the Negroes, he explained:

“Come, children, the supreme moment has arrived. Fire on the redcoats, and don’t waste a shot; in an hour’s time powder and ball will be scarce.”

Immediately the fusillade broke out. The Negroes as a rule are excellent shots; they therefore carried out Laïza’s injunctions to the letter, and the ranks of the English began to be thinned. But, after each discharge, the ranks closed up again with admirable discipline, and the column, which had been delayed by the first difficulties of the passage, continued to advance up the cave. Not a shot was now fired by the English, who appeared determined this time to carry the intrenchment at the point of the bayonet.

The situation, serious as it was for all, was doubly so for Georges, thanks to the helplessness to which he was condemned. He had at first raised himself on his elbow; then he had got upon his knees, and at last succeeded in struggling to his feet. But, having reached this point, his weakness became so great, that the earth seemed to give way beneath him, and he was forced to cling with his hands to the branches which surrounded him. While recognising the courage of the few devoted men who accompanied his fortunes to the end, he could not refrain from admiring the cool and imperturbable bravery of the English, who continued to march as if on parade, although, at each step they took, they were obliged to close up their ranks. He realised that this time they did not mean to retreat, and that in five minutes’ time they would carry the intrenchment, spite of the fire that issued from it. Then, the thought that it was for him, forced as he was to remain an inactive spectator of the combat, that all these men were about to be killed, filled his heart with remorse; he tried to step forward and throw himself between the combatants and put a stop to the slaughter by surrendering himself, since, in all probability, it was against himself alone that they bore ill-will. But he felt unable to traverse a third of the distance that divided him from the English. He wanted to call out to the besieged to cease their fire, to the besiegers to advance no further, and that he would give himself up; but his enfeebled voice was lost in the roar of the fusillade. Besides, at this moment he saw his father stand up, showing half his height above the intrenchment, then advance a few steps towards the English with a branch of fir blazing in his hand, and, amid the fire and smoke, lower this strange torch to the ground. Instantly a train of flame ran along the earth and, burying itself in the soil, disappeared; then, at the same moment, the ground shook, a terrible explosion was heard, a flaming crater opened beneath the feet of the English, the vault of the cavern yawned and sank down, the rocks which lay upon it buried themselves with it, and, amid the cries of the rest of the regiment who were still on the farther side of the opening, the subterranean passage disappeared in a yawning chasm.

“Now,” said Laïza, “there is not a moment to lose.”

“Give your orders; what must be done?”

“Fly towards Grand-Port and try to find refuge on a French ship; I will look after Georges.”

“I will not leave my son, I told you so.”

“And I told you that you will leave him; for, by remaining, you destroy him.”

“How is that?”

“With your dog, which they have still got, they are following you everywhere, driving you into the thickest part of the forest, reaching you in the deepest of caverns, and Georges, wounded as he is, will be soon overtaken. But, on the other hand, if you fly on your own account, they will think that your son is accompanying you; then it is you they will pursue; it is you they will be intent upon; it is you they will perhaps overtake. Meantime I profit by the darkness, and carry Georges, with four devoted men, in another direction; we shall reach the woods which surround the *Morne du Bambou.* If you find any means of saving us, you will light a fire on the *Ile des Oiseaux*; then we will go down the *Grande-Riviére* on a raft, and you will come with a boat and take us in at the mouth of the river.”

Pierre Munier had listened to all this with eyes fixed, and breathing suspended, pressing Laïza’s hands between his own; then, as he finished, he threw his arms round his neck and cried:

“Laïza! Laïza! yes, yes, I understand; it is the only way, with all this English pack at my heels. Yes, that is the way, and you will save my Georges.”

“I will save him or die with him,” said Laïza; “that is all I can promise.”

“And I know that you will keep your promise. Only wait while I go and embrace my son once more, and then I will start.”

“No, no,” said Laïza; “if you see him, you will not want to leave him; if he knows that you are exposing yourself to danger to save his life, he will not allow you to do it. Go then, go! And follow him, all of you; four men only come with me, the strongest, most vigorous, and most devoted.”

Some dozen men stepped forward, of whom Laïza selected four; then, as Pierre Munier hesitated to start:

“The English! the English!” he cried to the old man; “they will be here in a moment.”

“At the mouth of the *Grande-Riviere* then?” cried Pierre.

“Yes, if we are not taken or killed.”

“Farewell, Georges, farewell!” cried Pierre Munier. And, followed by the remaining Negroes, he rushed off in the direction of the *Montagne des Créoles.*

“Father,” cried Georges, “where are you going? what are you doing? why do you not come and die with your son? Wait for me, father, here I am.”

But Pierre Munier was already far away, and the last words, especially, were uttered in so feeble a tone that the old man could not hear them.

Laïza ran to the wounded man, and found him on his knees.

“Father!” murmured Georges, and fell back in a faint.

Laïza lost no time; this fainting fit was almost a stroke of luck. Doubtless, had Georges been conscious, he would not have wished to make any further struggle for his life with those who were pursuing him, and would have looked upon this solitary flight as a thing to be ashamed of. His weakness, however, placed him at the mercy of Laïza. The latter laid him, still unconscious, on the litter; each of the Negroes whom he had kept with him took one of its handles, and, going ahead himself to point out the road, he made for the direction of the *Trois-Ilots,* whence he hoped, by following the course of the *Grande-Rivière,* to reach the *Piton du Bambou.*

They had not gone a quarter of a league when they heard the barking of a dog.

At a gesture from Laïza the bearers halted. Georges was still unconscious, or at least so exhausted that he appeared to take no notice of what was going on.

What Laïza had foreseen had happened; the English had scaled the enclosure, and reckoned on using the dog in order to overtake the fugitives a second time, as they had already done once.

There was a moment of painful suspense during which Laïza listened to the dog’s barking; for some time the sound remained stationary. The dog had come to the spot where the encounter had taken place; presently, two or three barks sounded still nearer. The dog was going from the intrenchment where Georges had remained for some time and where his father had gone to visit him. Finally the noise of the barks died away in a southerly direction; the stratagem of Laïza had been successful; the hunters were foiled in the scent, and, abandoning the son, were following the father.

The situation was now all the more grave that, during this brief halt, the first gleams of day had appeared, and the mysterious darkness of the forest bean to be lighted up. Certainly, had Georges been in his usual health and vigour, the perplexity would have been less, for in that case craft, courage, and skill would have been present in equal proportions on both sides, between pursuers and pursued; but the fact that Georges was wounded made the game unequal, and Laïza did not disguise from himself the fact that the position was most critical.

One apprehension, especially, engaged his thoughts, namely, that in all probability the English might have taken as auxiliaries some slaves trained to the pursuit of runaway Negroes, and have made them some promise, as, for example, of freedom, if Georges should fall into their hands. In that case Laïza would lose part of his advantage as a man intimate with Nature, by being pitted against similar men for whom, like himself, solitude had no secrets and night no mysteries.

He concluded therefore that there was not a moment to lose, and, his uncertainty as to the direction which the pursuers would take being now resolved, he resumed the march, making always towards the East. The forest had a strange aspect, and all the animals seemed to share in the uneasiness of man. The firing, which had resounded all night long, had awakened the birds in the branches, the boars in their lairs, the deer in their thickets; everything was on the move, everything in a state of alarm; you might have thought that all living creatures were seized with a kind of giddiness.

They marched thus for two hours, when it became necessary to halt. The Negroes had been fighting all night and had eaten nothing since four o’clock the previous evening. Laïza halted under the ruins of a shed which had evidently that very night served as a shelter for runaway Negroes; for, on stirring a heap of ashes, the result apparently of a fairly long stay, they found them still alight.

Three of the Negroes went off to hunt for *tanrecs*. The fourth busied himself in rekindling the hearth, while Laïza searched for herbs to renew the wounded man’s bandages.

Strong as Georges was in body and vigorous in mind, his moral forces had been overcome by the material; he was now in a fever of delirium, ignorant of what was going on, unable to help by advice or action those who were trying to save him.

The dressing of the wound, however, appeared to soothe him. As for Laïza, he seemed to triumph over all the physical wants of nature. For sixty hours he had not slept, yet he seemed to need no sleep; for twenty hours he had not tasted food, and yet did not seem to be hungry.

The Negroes came back one after the other with six or eight *tanrecs*, which they hastened to roast before the large fire which their comrade had made? Laïzâ was rather uneasy about the smoke, but he reflected that they must now have travelled two or three leagues at least from the spot where the fight took place, without leaving any track behind them, and that, even supposing this smoke was observed, it would only be by some outpost sufficiently far off to allow them time to escape before they were overtaken.

When the meal was finished, the Negroes called Laïza, who had remained seated near Georges. Laïza got up, and, on looking at the group whom he hastily rejoined, noticed that one of the Negroes had received a wound in the thigh which was still bleeding.

This discovery destroyed all his feeling of security; his track would be followed like that of a wounded deer, not, perhaps, because the pursuers suspected the importance of the capture which they might make by following the track, but because the capture of any prisoner, whoever he might be, would be, owing to the information which he could supply, of too great importance for the English not to do all in their power to secure such a capture.

Just as this reflection struck him, and as he was opening his mouth to bid the four Negroes who were squatting round the fire resume their march, a small cluster of trees, thicker than the rest of the forest, and on which his uneasy eyes had rested more than once, burst into flame, a brisk discharge of musketry was heard, and five or six bullets whizzed round him. One of the Negroes fell forward into the fire, the three others jumped up; but, after running five or six yards, a second fell, and then a third about ten yards farther on. The fourth alone escaped safe and sound and disappeared into the woods.

At the sight of the smoke, the sound of the discharge, and the whistling of the bullets, Laïza sprang with one bound to the litter where Georges was lying; and, snatching him up in his arms as if he were a child, dashed off in his turn into the forest, not appearing to slacken his pace in the slightest degree for the burden he was bearing.

Immediately eight or ten of the English soldiers, escorted by five or six Negroes, leaped out of the cluster of trees and started in pursuit of the fugitives, of whom they had recognised Georges to be one, knowing that he was wounded. As Laïza had foreseen, the blood had guided them. They had followed the track, and arrived within half rifle-range of the shed, then had aimed with rested rifles, and, as we have seen, had aimed well, since three out of the four Negroes had been, if not killed, at least disabled.

Now began a desperate chase; for it was evident that, however great the strength and activity of Laïza, he could not succeed in getting out of sight of his pursuers, who must overtake him in the end. Unhappily, he was placed between two dangers almost equally fatal; if he plunged into the thickest of the forest, it might become so dense that it would be almost impossible to proceed farther; if he kept to the more open parts, he would expose himself to the fire of the enemy. However he preferred the latter alternative.

At the start, and by dint of his rapid dash, Laïza found himself almost beyond range of their rifles, and, had it been only the English with whom he had to deal, he would doubtless have got away. But, though it was perhaps with reluctance that the Negroes joined in the pursuit, still, as they were urged on by the soldiers with their bayonets, they were compelled to go forward, and so run down their human quarry, if not with enthusiasm, at least from motives of fear.

From time to time, when Laïza could be seen through the trees, some shots were fired at him, and the bullets grazed the bark of the trees round him or furrowed the earth at his feet. But, as though he bore an enchanted life, none of these bullets touched him, and his pace was quickened, if one may so say, by reason of the danger which he had just escaped.

At last he arrived at the edge of the glade; a steep and almost unprotected slope, with another thicket of trees at its summit, had to be climbed; but, the summit once reached, Laïza would at least be able to disappear behind some rock, slip down some ravine, and thus avoid the sight of his pursuers. On the other hand, he would remain unprotected and exposed to their fire throughout the whole interval that separated him from the trees.

There was, however, no room for hesitation; to turn to right or left was to lose ground; chance had, so far, favoured the fugitives, the same good luck might still attend them.

Laïza dashed into the glade; the pursuers in their turn, seeing an opportunity of firing in the open, redoubled their speed. Laïza was now about fifty yards ahead.

Then, as though by word of command, each soldier halted, took aim, and fired. Laïza appeared not to be touched, and continued his course. The soldiers had still time to reload their weapons before he disappeared, and hastily slipped the cartridges into the breech of their rifles.

Meanwhile, Laïza was gaining ground rapidly; it was plain that, if he escaped the second discharge as he had done the first, and reached the thicket safe and sound, all the chances would be in his favour. Scarcely twenty-five yards separated him from the edge of the thicket, and, during the brief halt of his pursuers, he had gained a hundred and fifty yards on them. Suddenly, he disappeared in a bend of the ground; but, unfortunately, its winding did not extend either to right or left. He followed it, however, as far as he could, in order to baffle his enemies; but, on reaching the extremity of the little ravine the shoulder of which had protected him, he was obliged to climb the slope once more, and, consequently, to show himself again. At this moment ten or a dozen shots were fired simultaneously, and his pursuers seemed to see him stagger. In point of fact, after taking a few steps, Laïza stopped, staggered again, fell on one knee, then on both, and laid Georges, who was still unconscious, on the ground. Then, rising to his full height, he turned towards the English, extending both his hands towards them with a final gesture of menace and fierce malediction, and, drawing his knife from his girdle, plunged it up to the hilt in his breast.

The soldiers dashed forward, uttering loud shouts of delight, like hunters at a death-halloo. Laïza remained standing for a few seconds; then, suddenly, fell like a tree torn up by the roots; the blade of the knife had pierced his heart.

On reaching the two fugitives, the soldiers found Laïza dead, and Georges dying. Georges, with a last effort, to avoid falling alive into the hands of his enemies, had torn the bandages from his wounds, and the blood was gushing forth in torrents.

As for Laïza, besides the blow aimed at his heart with the knife, he had received a bullet in his thigh, and another which had pierced his breast through and through.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE REHEARSAL.

ALL that passed during the two or three days following the catastrophe which we have just related left but a vague impression on the mind of Georges. His intellect, disordered by delirium, retained only dim recollections, which did not allow him to calculate the flight of time or to distinguish one event from another. One morning, however, he woke as from a sleep disturbed by dreadful dreams, and, on opening his eyes, realised that he was in a prison. The Surgeon-Major of the regiment stationed at Port-Louis was by his side.

On recalling, however, all that he could remember, Georges succeeded in retracing the events which had happened, but grouped, as it were, in large masses, much as through the fog you get a glimpse of lakes, mountains and forests. Everything came back to him, down to the moment when he was wounded. His arrival at Moka and his departure with his father had not quite escaped his memory, but everything, from the time of his reaching the great woods, was vague and indistinct, like a dream. However, the only indisputable, positive, and fatal certainty was that he was now in the hands of his enemies. Georges was too scornful to put any question, too proud to ask any service, so he could learn nothing of what had happened. His heart was distracted, however, by two terrible anxieties:

Had his father escaped?

Did Sara still love him?

These two thoughts pervaded his whole being; when one of them disappeared, it was to make room for the other; they were like two ceaseless tides beating in turns upon his heart with their everlasting ebb and flow.

But there were no outward indications of this tempest which was raging in his mind. His face remained pale, cold and unruffled as a marble statue, not only in presence of all who visited the prison, but even in presence of himself.

When the doctor considered the wounded man strong enough to undergo an examination, he informed the authorities, and on the next day the examining Magistrate, accompanied by a clerk, presented himself before Georges. Georges was still unable to leave his bed, but he did the honours of his room nevertheless to the two officials with a patience full of dignity, and, leaning on his elbow, declared that he was ready to answer any questions that might be put to him.

Our readers are too well acquainted with the character of Georges to think hat the idea had for a moment occurred to him of denying any of the facts with which he was charged. Not merely did he answer with absolute truth all the questions put to him, but he even promised, not that day, for he felt too weak, but on the morrow, that he would himself dictate to the clerk the whole story of the conspiracy in detail. The offer was too courteous to be declined by the Magistrate. Georges had a twofold object in making this proposal; first, to hasten the progress of the trial, secondly, to take the whole of the responsibility upon himself.

The two officials presented themselves next day. Georges gave them the account which he had promised; when, however, he was passing over in silence the proposals which had been made to him by Laïza, the Magistrate interrupted him with the remark that he was omitting an extenuating circumstance which, owing to the death of Laïza, could not now be charged against any one.

It was thus that Georges learned the death of Laïza and its accompanying circumstances; for, as we have said, all these events were, so far as he was concerned, shrouded in obscurity.

Not once was his father’s name pronounced, either by himself or the others, nor was the name of Sara, for stronger reasons still, as you may suppose, so much as mentioned.

This declaration by Georges rendered any other inquiry superfluous. Georges therefore ceased to receive any visits except from the doctor.

One morning the doctor, on entering the room, found Georges standing up.

“Sir,” said he, “I forbade you to get up for some days; you are not sufficiently strong yet.”

“That is to say, my dear doctor,” answered Georges, “that you do me the injustice of confounding me with the ordinary criminal, who delays the day of trial as long as he possibly can; whereas, I confess it frankly, I am in a hurry to get it over. Now do you think, in all conscience, that it is worth while getting so thoroughly healed, merely in order to die? For my own part, I think that, provided I have strength enough to mount the scaffold properly, it is all that can be required of me, and all that I can require of God."

"But who tells you that you will be condemned to death?" said the doctor.

"My own conscience, doctor; I have played a game in which my head was at stake. I have lost, and am ready to pay; that is all."

"All the same," said the doctor, "I am of opinion that you need a few days' care still before exposing yourself to the fatigue of a trial and the excitement of being sentenced."

But, that very day, Georges wrote to the examining Magistrate that his wound was completely healed, and that consequently, he was at the disposal of justice.

Two days afterwards the trial began.

Georges, on appearing before the Judges, looked round him with anxiety and was delighted to see that he was the only person charged.

Then he glanced confidently down the hall; the whole Town was present at the hearing, with the exception of M. de Malmédie, Henri, and Sara.

Some of the spectators appeared to pity the accused man, but the majority of the faces wore an expression of satisfied hatred.

As for Georges, his demeanour was calm and haughty, as ever. He was dressed, as usual, in a black frock-coat and cravat, with white waistcoat and trousers; his double riband was knotted at his button-hole.

An advocate for the defence had been appointed for him, Georges having declined to choose one. His wish was that no attempt even should be made to plead his cause.

What Georges himself said was not a defence, but a history of his whole life. He did not conceal the fact that he had returned to the Isle of France with the intention of overcoming, by all the means in his power, the prejudice oppressing men of colour; only, he did not breathe a word of the causes which had hastened the execution of his protest.

One of the Judges questioned him in regard to M. de Malmédie, but Georges asked to be allowed not to reply.

In spite of the facilities given to the Court by Georges, the discussion none the less dragged on for three days; even when they have nothing to say, lawyers must always talk.

The Advocate-General spoke for four hours and pulverised Georges.

Georges listened to the whole of this long harangue with the greatest calmness, bowing in token of assent from time to time.

Then, when the speech of the Public Prosecutor was finished, the President asked Georges if he wished to say anything.

“Nothing,” answered Georges, “except that the Advocate-General has been very eloquent.”

It was now the turn of the Advocate-General to bow, which he did.

The President announced that the discussion was closed, and Georges was taken back to his prison, the sentence having to be pronounced in the absence of the accused, and to be communicated to him afterwards.

Georges on entering the prison asked for paper and ink in order to write his will. Sentences inflicted by English law not entailing confiscation, he was able to dispose of his fortune. He left to the doctor who had attended him £3,000 sterling; To the Governor of the prison, *£1,000* sterling; To each of the turnkeys, one thousand dollars.

This was a fortune to each of the recipients.

To Sara he left a gold ring that had come to him from his mother.

As he was about to sign his name at the foot of the document, the clerk entered. Georges rose, with the pen in his hand, and the clerk read the sentence.

As Georges had always expected, he was condemned to the penalty of death.

When the reading was over Georges bowed, and sitting down again signed his name, without its being possible to notice the slightest difference between the handwriting in the body of the document and that of the signature.

Then he went to a glass, and looked to see if he was at all paler than before. His face was exactly as it had been, pale but calm. He was pleased with himself, and smiled to himself, as he murmured:

“Well, I thought a man would betray more feeling than that on hearing his death sentence.”

The doctor came to see him, and, from force of habit, asked him how he was feeling.

“Oh! very well, doctor,” answered Georges; “you have made a wonderful cure, and it is annoying that you are not allowed time to complete it.”

Then he inquired if the mode of execution had been changed since the occupation of the Island by the British; and the assurance that it still continued the same greatly pleased Georges, since it was not the ignoble gibbet of London, nor the hideous guillotine of Paris. No, execution at Port-Louis had a picturesque and romantic aspect, at the thought of which Georges did not feel degraded. A Negro, acting as executioner, beheaded the condemned man with an axe. It was thus that Charles the First, and Mary Stuart, Cinq-Mars and De Thou had died. The mode of execution enters largely into the question of how death is faced.

Then he passed into a physiological discussion with the doctor on the probability of physical suffering after the head was severed from the body. The doctor maintained that death must be instantaneous, while Georges thought the contrary, and quoted two instances in support of his opinion. Once, in Egypt, he had seen a slave beheaded; the victim knelt, and the executioner severed his head at a blow, the head rolling seven or eight yards away; the body immediately rose upon its feet, took two or three aimless steps waving its arms in the air, and then fell, not quite dead, but still in the last throes. On another day, when in the same country, he had been present at a similar execution, and had, in his perpetual desire for investigation, picked up the head at the instant it was separated from the body, and, raising it by the hair to a level with his mouth, had asked in Arabic: “Do you suffer?” At this question, the victim’s eyes had opened, and his lips had moved, trying to frame an answer. Georges therefore felt convinced that life survived for a few j moments at least after execution.

The doctor ended by agreeing with his opinion, it being really his own as well; he had thought it, however, his duty to give the condemned man the only consolation that the promise of an easy and gentle death could afford.

The day passed just as the preceding days had clone, except that he wrote to his father and brother. For one moment he took up his pen to write to Sara; but, whatever the motive was that restrained him, he stopped, and pushed the paper away, letting his head fall upon his hands. He remained a long time in this position, and any one who had seen him raise his forehead, which he did with the haughty and disdainful movement habitual with him, would hardly have observed that his eyes were slightly red, and that a tear carelessly brushed away trembled at the end of his long dark lashes.

The cause of this was that, since the day when, at the Governor’s house, he had refused to marry the beautiful Creole, not only had he not seen her, but had not even heard her name mentioned.

However, he could not believe that she had forgotten him.

Night came; and Georges, going to bed at his usual hour, slept as well as he had done on the previous night. On rising next morning he sent for the Governor of the prison.

“Sir,” said he, “I have a favour to ask of you.”

“What is it?” said the Governor.

“I should like to say a few words to the executioner.”

“I must have the authority of the Governor of the Island.”

“Oh!” said Georges smiling, “make the request from me; Lord Murray is a gentleman, and will not deny this favour to an old friend.”

The Governor of the prison went out, promising to make the desired application.

As he went out, a priest entered.

Georges held those ideas about religion characteristic of the men of our time, that is to say, while entirely neglecting the outward observances of religion, he was in his inmost heart profoundly impressionable to sacred things. Accordingly, a church, with its “dim religious light,” a lonely cemetery, or a passing coffin, produced on his mind a far deeper impression than one of those events which often unhinge the minds of ordinary men.

The priest was one of those venerable old men who do not busy themselves with trying to convince you, but who speak with entire conviction; one of those men who, reared in the midst of the grand scenes of Nature, have sought and found the Almighty in His works; in short, one of those serene hearts who draw suffering hearts to themselves, in order to console them by taking a part of the griefs of others upon themselves.

At the first words which they exchanged, they grasped each other’s hands.

It was a confidential talk and not a confession which the aged priest came to obtain from the young man; but, haughty in the presence of strength, Georges was humble in the presence of weakness. Georges accused himself of pride; like Satan, it was his only fault, and, like Satan, this fault had destroyed him.

But yet, at this very hour, it was this pride which sustained him, which made him strong, which made him great.

It is true that what is great with men is not great with God.

Twenty times the name of Sara was on the young man’s lips; but on each occasion he thrust it down to the bottom of his heart, — that gloomy abyss where so many emotions were swallowed up, and whose depths his face concealed, like a coating of ice.

While the priest and the condemned man were talking, the door opened and the Governor of the prison appeared. “The man you asked for is here,” he said, “and is waiting until you can receive him.”

Georges turned rather pale, and a slight shudder ran through his body; his emotion, however, was scarcely perceptible.

“Admit him,” he said.

The priest wanted to withdraw, but Georges restrained him.

“No, stay,” said he; “what I have to say to this man can be said before you.”

Possibly, this proud soul needed, in order to maintain all his strength, to have a witness of what was going to take place.

A Negro of tall stature and herculean proportions was brought in. He was naked, except for his loin cloth, which was of red stuff; his large, expressionless eyes denoted the absence of all intelligence. He turned to the Governor who brought him in, and, looking first at the priest and then at Georges, asked:

“Which of the two is my man?”

“The young one,” answered the Governor of the prison, going out of the cell.

“You are the executioner?” said Georges, coldly and calmly.

“Yes,” answered the Negro.

“Good. Come here, my friend, and answer my questions.”

The Negro stepped forward.

“You know that you will execute me to-morrow,” said Georges.

“Yes,” answered the Negro; “at seven in the morning.”

“Ah! seven in the morning; thank you for the information. I had asked to be told the time, but they refused to tell me. However, that is not the question.” The priest felt himself turning faint. “I have never seen an execution at Port-Louis,” said Georges; “but, as I wish things to go properly, I have sent for you, so that we may have what is called, in theatrical language, a rehearsal together.”

The Negro was nonplussed; Georges was obliged to explain to him more clearly what he wanted.

Then the Negro took a stool to represent the block, led Georges to the proper distance from the block at which he ought to kneel, showed him how he should place his head upon it, and promised him that he would sever it at one blow.

The old man tried to rise and go out, not having the strength of nerve to endure this strange ordeal in which the two chief actors preserved an equal impassiveness, the one through brutishness of mind, the other by strength of will and courage. But his legs failed him and he sank back in his chair.

The directions for the execution having been given and received, Georges drew a diamond from his finger.

“My friend,” said he to the Negro, “as I have no money here, and as I do not wish your time to have been quite wasted, take this ring.”

“I am not allowed to take anything from condemned persons,” said the Negro; “but I inherit from them; leave the ring on your finger, and to-morrow, when you are dead, I will pull it off.”

“Very well!” said Georges. And without any emotion he replaced the ring on his finger.

The Negro then took his departure; and Georges turned towards the priest, who was as pale as death.

“My son,” he said, “I am very happy to have met a spirit like yours. This will be the first time I have ever conducted a condemned man to the scaffold. I was afraid I should give way, but you will support me, will you not?”

“Make your mind easy, Father,” answered Georges.

The priest belonged to a small church situated on the road to the place of execution, in which condemned persons usually stopped to hear a last mass. The church was called St. Saviour’s.

The priest in his turn left the condemned cell, promising to return in the evening; and Georges was left alone.

What then passed within the mind and showed on the countenance of the prisoner, no man knows. It may be, Nature, that pitiless creditor, resumed her rights; it may be, he turned as weak as he had just been strong; it may be, when the curtain had once fallen between the public and the actor, all this apparent impassiveness disappeared to give place to a veritable agony. But in all probability it was not so; for, when the turnkey opened the door to bring Georges his dinner, he found him rolling a cigarette in his hand with as much calmness and tranquillity as a hidalgo on the *Puerto del Sol,* or a fashionable lounger on the *Boulevard de Gaud* could have displayed.

Georges dined as usual; only, he recalled the turnkey to ask him to have a bath ready for him at six next morning, and to awake him at half-past five.

Often, when reading in history or in the newspaper that such and such a condemned man had been awakened on the morning of his execution, Georges had wondered if this condemned man who had to be awaked had been really asleep. The moment had come for him to satisfy himself by his own experience, and on this question Georges was soon to know what to believe.

At nine, the priest came in again. Georges was lying down reading. The priest asked what was the book in which he was thus seeking a preparation for death, whether it was *Plato’s Phaedo* or the Bible. Georges held it out to him. It was *Paid and Virginia.*

Strange that, at this terrible moment, it should be this calm and romantic story that the condemned man had chosen!

The priest remained with Georges until eleven. During these two hours Georges did nearly all the talking, explaining to the priest his views of God, and developing his theories on the immortality of the soul. In the ordinary circumstances of life, Georges was eloquent; during this last evening, he was sublime.

It was the condemned man who instructed, and the priest who listened.

At eleven, Georges reminded the priest that the hour for him to go had arrived, and told him that, in order to keep his full strength for the next morning, he would need to take some repose.

As the old man went out, a violent struggle seemed to be taking place within Georges’ heart; he called the priest back, but as he returned to the room, Georges made an effort over himself.

“Nothing, Father,” he said, “nothing.”

Georges lied; once more it was the name of Sara that his mouth strove to utter.

But, yet once more, the old man went out without hearing it uttered.

Next morning when, at half-past five, the turnkey entered his room, he found Georges sleeping soundly.

“It is true then,” said Georges on waking, “a condemned man *can* sleep on his last night.”

But how long had he lain awake in order to attain this result? No one knows.

The bath was brought in.

At this moment the doctor entered.

“You see, doctor,” said he, “I model myself on antiquity; the Athenians used to take a bath before going to fight.”

“How are you?” asked the doctor, employing one of those common-place questions which people adopt when they do not know what to say.

“Why, very well, doctor,” answered Georges smiling; and I begin to believe that I shall not die of my wound.”

Then he took his will, duly sealed, and handed it to him.

“Doctor,” he added, “I have appointed you executor under my will. You will find on this piece of paper three lines that concern you; I wanted to leave you a souvenir of myself.”

The doctor brushed away a tear and stammered some words of thanks.

Georges got into the bath.

“Doctor,” he said after an instant, “how many times should the pulse of a calm and healthy man, in the normal condition, beat during a minute?”

“Why,” answered the doctor, “from sixty-four to sixty-six times.”

“Feel mine,” said Georges; “I am curious to know what effect the approach of death has upon my blood.”

The doctor pulled out his watch, took his wrist, and counted the beats.

“Sixty-eight,” he said at the end of a minute.

“Come, come,” said Georges, “I am quite satisfied. And you, doctor?”

“It is miraculous,” he answered; “are you made of iron?”

Georges smiled proudly.

“Ah! you Whites,” said he, “you are in a hurry to see me die? I understand it,” he added; “perhaps you needed a lesson in courage. I will give it you.”

The turnkey entered to tell the condemned man that it was nearly six o’clock.

“My dear doctor,” said Georges, “will you let me come out of the bath? Don’t go away, however, I should like to shake hands with you before leaving the prison.”

The doctor withdrew.

Georges, left alone, came out of the bath, put on white trousers, polished boots, and a cambric shirt of which he turned down the collar himself; after which he went to a small glass and arranged his hair, moustache, and beard with as much care as if he had been going to a ball, or perhaps even more. Then he knocked at the door to intimate that he was ready.

The priest entered and looked at Georges. Never had the young man appeared so handsome: his eyes gleamed, his brow was radiant.

"Oh! my son, my son!" said the priest; "beware of pride; pride has destroyed your body, beware lest it destroy your soul also."

"You will pray for me, Father," said Georges, "and God can refuse nothing, I am sure, to the prayers of a holy man like yourself."

Then Georges noticed the executioner, who was standing in the shadow of the doorway.

"Ah! is it you, my friend?" said he, "come here!"

The Negro was wrapped in a large cloak beneath which he concealed his axe.

"Your axe cuts well?" asked Georges.

"Yes," answered the executioner; "make your mind easy."

"Good!" said the condemned man.

Then he noticed that the Negro was looking at his hand for the diamond which he had promised him the previous evening, and the stone of which was accidentally turned inside.

"Make your mind easy in your turn," said he, turning his stone outwards, "you shall have your ring; besides, to save you the trouble of taking it, here--"

And he gave the ring to the priest, indicating by a sign that it was to go to the executioner.

Next he went to a small desk, opened it and took out the two letters which he had written to his father and his brother; and handed these likewise to the priest.

Once more he appeared to have something to say to him, for he placed his hand on his shoulder, looking earnestly at him, and moved his lips as if about to speak. But yet again his will proved stronger than his feelings, and the name which struggled to escape his breast died on his lips so softly that no one heard it.

At this moment the clock struck six.

"Come," said Georges.

And he went out from the room, followed by the priest and the executioner.

At the foot of the stairs he met the doctor, who was waiting to bid him a last farewell.

Georges held out his hand, and, leaning towards his ear, said to him:

“I bequeath my body to you.”

And with these words he stepped into the court-yard.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE CHURCH OF ST. SAUVEUR.

THE gate leading to the street was, as may easily be guessed, thronged with spectators. Such sights are rare at Port-Louis, and every one wished, if not to witness the actual execution, at least to see the condemned man go by.

The Governor of the prison had asked Georges how he would like to be taken to the scaffold. Georges had answered that he preferred to walk, and had obtained this concession as a final act of kindness on the part of Lord Murray.

Eight mounted Artillery men waited for him at the gate. In all the streets through which he would have to pass, English soldiers lined the road on each side, to guard the prisoner and keep back the spectators.

On his appearance, a loud clamour arose; but, contrary to Georges' expectation, the accent of hatred did not predominate in the sounds that greeted his presence.

The cries were of various import, but mostly expressive of concern and pity, since the sight of a proud and handsome man face to face with death always exercises a powerful fascination.

Georges walked with a firm step, his head erect, his face calm, in spite of the bitter thoughts which were passing through his mind.

He was thinking of Sara, — of Sara, who had made no attempt to see him, who had not written him a line, who had not given him a souvenir, — of Sara, in whom he had trusted, and to whom he owed his final self-deception.

It is true that, possessed of Sara's love, he would have regretted losing his life; but the being forgotten by Sara was the last drop of bitterness in his cup.

And then, side by side with the betrayal of his love came the murmur of his wounded pride.

He had miscarried, then, in everything; his superiority had brought him no profit whatsoever.

The result of this long struggle was the scaffold, to which he was now walking, abandoned by all. When people spoke of him, they would merely say, “The fellow was a crack-brained fool.”

As he walked on, continually looking round him, a smile which corresponded well with his thoughts crossed his lips now and then. This smile, outwardly resembling all other smiles, had a bitter source within.

And yet, at every street corner he hoped to see her, he looked for her at every window.

She who had dropped her bouquet in front of him, as he rode in victorious on Antrim, would she not let fall a tear on his path, as he walked defeated to the scaffold? But nowhere did he see a trace of her.

In this way he walked the whole length of the *Rue de Paris,* then turned to the right towards the Church of St. Sauveur.

The Church was draped with black as if for a funeral, which, indeed, this might be said to be. For what is a condemned man walking to the scaffold, but a living corpse?

On arriving at the door, Georges gave a start. Beside the good old priest who was waiting beneath the porch, was a woman dressed in black, with a black veil.

This woman in widow’s weeds, what was she doing there? for whom was she waiting?

In spite of himself, Georges doubled his pace; his eyes were fastened on the woman and he could not remove his gaze from her.

As he set his foot upon the first step of the little Church, the woman herself stepped towards him; Georges cleared the four steps at a bound, raised her veil, uttered a loud cry, and fell at her knees.

It was Sara.

Sara extended her hand with a slow and solemn gesture; a deep silence fell upon the whole crowd.

“Listen,” said she, “on the threshold of the Church he is entering, on the threshold of the grave he is about to enter, I call upon you all to witness, in the presence of God and man, that I, Sarade Malmédie, come to ask M. Georges Munier if he is willing to take me for his wife.”

“Sara,” cried Georges, bursting into sobs, “you are the best, the noblest, the most generous of women!”

Then, rising to his full height, and encircling her with his arm, as though he feared to lose her:

“Come, my widowed wife,” he said.

And he drew her into the Church.

If ever victor was proud of his triumph, it was Georges.

In an instant everything was changed for him; Sara, with one word, had placed him above all those men who smiled as they saw him pass. He was no longer a poor madman, unable to obtain the impossible, and dying with his purposes uneffected; but a conqueror smitten in the hour of victory, an Epaminondas, plucking the fatal javelin from his breast, but with his last glance seeing the enemy in flight.

So, by sheer force of will, by the sole influence of his personal worth, he, a Mulatto, had made a white girl love him, and, without his making any advance towards her, without his trying to influence her determination by a word, a letter, a sign, this woman had come to wait for him on his way to the scaffold, and in the face of all men, a thing perhaps unprecedented in the Colony, had chosen him as her husband.

Now, he felt that he could die; that he was rewarded for his long combat. He had fought hand to hand with Prejudice, and Prejudice, while striking Georges a mortal blow, had yet been slain in the struggle.

The brow of Georges was radiant with these thoughts, as he drew Sara into the building: he was no longer a criminal prepared to mount the scaffold, but a martyr ascending to the skies.

Some twenty soldiers lined the aisle of the Church; four soldiers guarded the chancel. Georges passed between them without seeing them, and knelt with Sara before the altar.

The priest began the nuptial mass, but Georges did not listen to his words; he held Sara’s hand, and occasionally turned to the crowd and cast on them a look of sovereign contempt.

Then he turned back to Sara, who was pale and almost fainting, — Sara, whose hand he felt trembling within his own, and bestowed on her a look full of gratitude and love, as he suppressed a sigh. He was thinking, he who was on the point of death, what a lifetime it would be, spent with such a woman.

It would have been Heaven! but Heaven is not made for the living.

Meantime the Mass was proceeding, when Georges on turning round saw Miko-Miko, who was doing all that lay in his power, not only by words, but by his gestures, to induce the soldiers who guarded the entrance to the chancel to let him go close to Georges. Devoted as he was to Georges, he wished to see him once more, and to press his hand in gratitude. Georges spoke to the officer in English, and asked that the worthy Chinaman might be allowed to come to him.

There seemed no objection to granting the condemned man this request; so, at a sign from the officer, the soldiers fell back and Miko-Miko hurried into the chancel.

We have seen how Miko-Miko had vowed gratitude to Georges from the first day that he had seen him. This gratitude had made him seek out the prisoner at the Police Station; it now came to display itself for the last time at the foot of the scaffold.

Miko-Miko threw himself at his knees, and Georges held out his hand.

Miko-Miko took the hand between his own and pressed his lips to it; but, at the same time, Georges felt that the Chinaman had slipped a little note between his fingers, and started violently.

The Chinaman, as though he had asked nothing but this last favour, and satisfied with having obtained it, wanted nothing more, disappeared at once, without uttering a single word.

Georges held the note in his hand and frowned. What could be the meaning of this note? It was, no doubt, of great importance, but Georges did not venture to look at it.

From time to time, seeing Sara so beautiful, so devoted, so detached from all terrestrial love, a grief unspeakable, and such as he had not felt hitherto, seized Georges by the heart and pressed him with an iron grip. In spite of himself, as he thought of the happiness he was losing, he clung to life, and while feeling his soul ready to mount to the skies, felt his heart enchained to earth.

Then he was seized with a terror of dying in despair.

And yet this note which burned in his hand, which he dared not read for fear of its being seen by the soldiers who guarded him, seemed to contain some hope within it, though, in his situation, to hope seemed madness.

He was impatient, however, to read it; although, thanks to the power of self-control which he always exercised, this impatience was betrayed by no outward sign. Only, his clenched hand crushed the note with such force that his nails penetrated the flesh.

Sara was praying.

They came to the consecration. The priest elevated the Host, the chorister rang his bell, and every one knelt.

Georges took advantage of this moment and, kneeling also, opened his hand.

The note contained but one line.

“We are here — Be ready!”

The first sentence was in the handwriting of Jacques; the second in that of Pierre Munier.

At the same moment, and as Georges in his astonishment raised his head, while all the rest were bowed, and looked round him, the door of the sacristy was flung wide open; eight seamen rushed out and seized the four soldiers in the chancel, presenting a pair of daggers at the breast of each. Jacques and Pierre Munier sprang in, Jacques carrying off Sara in his arms, Pierre dragging Georges by the hand. The husband and wife found themselves in the sacristy; the eight seamen entered after them, using the four English soldiers whom they held in front of them as a shield against the blows of their comrades.

Jacques and Pierre closed the door; another door led to the country, and at this door waited two horses ready saddled; they were Antrim and Yambo.

“Mount!” cried Jacques, “mount, both of you, and gallop as hard as you can to the *Baie du Tombeau!”*

“But you and my father!” cried Georges.

“Let them come and take us from my brave seamen,” said Jacques, setting Sara in the saddle, while Pierre Munier forced his son to mount.

Then, raising his voice, he shouted: “Here, my gallant Lascars! here! “Instantly a hundred and twenty men armed to the teeth appeared running out from the woods of the *Montagne Longue.*

“Off you go!” said Jacques to Sara, “take him, save him — ”

“But you?” said Sara. “We will follow you; don’t be uneasy.”

“Georges,” said Sara, “in the name of Heaven, come!”

And the girl dashed off at a gallop. “Father!” cried Georges, “father!”

“I will answer for everything, on my life,” said Jacques, striking Antrim with the flat of his sword.

And Antrim went off like the wind, carrying his rider with him, who, in less than ten minutes disappeared with Sara behind the Malabar cantonment, while Pierre Munier, Jacques and his seamen, followed them so quickly that, before the English had recovered from their astonishment, the little band was already on the other side of the *Ruisseau des Pucelles*, that is to say, out of gunshot range.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LEICESTER.

TOWARDS five o’clock on the evening of the same day on which the events which we have just related had taken place, the corvette Calypso was with nearly all sail set hugging the wind, which, as is usual in those latitudes, was from the East.

In addition to her worthy sailors and Master Tête de Fer, the first Lieutenant, with whom our readers are acquainted, if not by sight at least by reputation, her crew had been recruited by three other persons, namely, Pierre Munier, Georges, and Sara.

Pierre Munier was walking backwards and forwards on the quarter deck with Jacques. Georges and Sara were seated aft side by side. Georges held Sara’s hand in his, and was looking at her, while Sara was looking at the sky.

One must have been placed in the terrible situation from which the two lovers had just escaped to be able to analyse the feeling of supreme happiness and boundless joy which they experienced on finding themselves free on that great Ocean which was carrying them far from the land of their birth, it is true, but from a land which, like a cruel stepmother, had not troubled herself about them, except now and again to persecute them.

Nevertheless, a sigh of pain would escape occasionally from the mouth of the one and make the other start. The heart that has endured long torture does not venture all at once to regain confidence in its happiness.

Still, they were free, with nothing above them but the blue sky, nothing beneath them but the sea, and were flying at their gallant ship’s utmost speed from the Isle of France which had almost proved so fatal to them. Pierre and Jacques were chatting, but Georges and Sara did not talk; now and then one would utter the other’s name, and that was all.

Pierre Munier stopped occasionally and looked at them with an expression of ineffable delight; the poor old man had suffered so greatly, that he knew not how he had the strength to bear his happiness.

Jacques, who was less sentimental, glanced in the same direction, but it was clear that it was not the picture which we have just described that attracted his attention, for his eyes passed over the heads of Georges and Sara, and searched the horizon in the direction of Port-Louis.

Jacques was not merely below the level of the general joy, but he even at times became anxious, and passed his hand over his brow as if to dispel a cloud.

requirement, he was not proud, but was hail-fellow-well-met with every one, and talked with the first that came.

All the rest of the crew had resumed that careless expression which becomes habitual to the countenance of seamen, once the battle or the storm is over; the men on duty were on deck, the others below.

Pierre Munier, absorbed as he was in the happiness of Georges and Sara, had not failed, however, to notice Jacques' uneasiness. More than once his eyes had followed the direction in which Jacques was gazing, but, seeing nothing but some great masses of clouds in the West, he concluded that it was they that were causing him this anxiety.

"Are we threatened with a storm?" he asked his son, just as the latter was gazing at the horizon with one of those questioning glances of which we have spoken.

"A storm?" said Jacques. "Ah! my word! if it were only a matter of a storm, the Calypso would care no more than does that gull yonder; but we are threatened with something more than that."

"What are we threatened with then?" asked Pierrie Munier uneasily. "I thought that, from the moment that we set foot on your ship, we were safe."

"Well!" answered Jacques, "it is a fact that we have more chance of escape now than we had twelve hours ago, when we were hidden in the woods of the *Petite-Montagne*, and when Georges was saying his 'Confiteor 'in the Church of St. Sauveur; still, without wishing to make you uneasy, father, I cannot say that our heads are yet firmly fixed on our shoulders."

Then he added, without addressing any one in particular:

"Send a man to the top-gallant yard." Three sailors at once sprang forward; one of them reached the place indicated in a few seconds; the other two came down again.

"And what are you afraid of, Jacques?" resumed the old man; "do you think they will attempt to pursue us?"

“Exactly, father,” replied Jacques, “this time you have hit the mark. They have in Port-Louis a certain frigate called the Leicester, an old acquaintance of mine, and I confess that I fear she will not let us get away like this without As for Tête de Fer, he was sitting talking quietly to the man at the wheel. The worthy Breton would have cracked the head of the first man who showed a moment’s hesitation in obeying his orders; but, apart from this very natural proposing a little game of skittles, which we shall be obliged to accept.”

“But it seems to me,” replied Pierre Munier, “that, in any case, we have at least from twenty-five to thirty miles’ start, and that, at the rate we are making, we shall soon be out of sight.”

“Heave the log,” said Jacques.

Three sailors busied themselves at the same instant with this operation, which Jacques followed with visible interest; then, when it was finished, he asked:

“How many knots?”

“Ten knots, Captain,” answered one of the sailors.

“Yes, certainly, that is very good for a corvette keeping close to the wind, and there is, perhaps, in the whole British navy but one frigate that can travel half a knot faster; unfortunately, that frigate is just the one we shall have to tackle, in case the Governor should take into his head to pursue us.”

“Oh! if it depends on the Governor, we shall certainly not be pursued,” replied Pierre Munier; “you know that the Governor was your brother’s friend.”

“Certainly; but that did not prevent his allowing him to be condemned to death.”

“Could he do otherwise without failing in his duty?”

“This time, father, it is a question of something else than his duty; it is his self-respect which is at stake this time. Yes, no doubt, if the Governor had had the power to do so, he would have pardoned Georges; because to pardon him was to show his own superiority; but Georges has escaped from his hands at the moment when he thought he had got him safe. In these circumstances, then, the superiority has been on the side of Georges, and the Governor will take revenge.”

“Sail, ho!” cried the man on the lookout.

“Ah!” said Jacques nodding significantly to his father. “Where away?” he continued, raising his head.

“Under the wind, coming towards us,” answered the sailor.

“Where is she off?”

“Off the *Ile des Tonneliers,* or thereabouts.”

“Where is she coming from?”

“Coming out of Port-Louis, I should say.”

“There we are,” murmured Jacques, looking at his father. “I told you we were not out of their clutches.”

“What is it?” asked Sara. “Nothing,” answered Georges; “it seems we are pursued, that is all.”

“Oh Heavens!” cried Sara, “have you been given back to me so miraculously only to be taken from me again? It cannot be!”

Jacques meanwhile had taken his telescope and gone into the main-top.

He gazed for some time with great attention in the direction indicated by the look-out man, then, shutting the tubes of the telescope together with his hand, came down whistling, and resumed his place near his father.

“Well?” asked the old man. “Well,” said Jacques, “I was not mistaken, our good friends the English are giving chase. Fortunately,” he added, looking at his watch, “in two hours’ time it will be quite dark, and the moon does not rise until two hours after midnight.”

“Then you think we shall succeed in escaping them?”

“We will do all we can for that end, father, be assured. Oh! I am not proud, I assure you; I have no liking for adventures in which there is nothing to be gained but hard knocks, and, in this particular instance, be hanged if I abandon my prejudices.”

“Why, Jacques,” cried Georges, “will you flee before the foe, you, the intrepid and undefeated sea-dog!”

“My dear fellow, I shall always run away from the Devil, when his pockets are empty and his horns two inches longer than my own. If his pockets are full, that is a different matter, and I don’t mind running some risk.”

“But do you realise that they will say you are afraid?”

“And I shall answer that that is true, by God! Besides, what do we gain by coming to blows with those fellows? If they capture us, our goose is cooked; they will string us up to the yards, every man jack of us. If, on the other hand, we capture them, we shall be obliged to sink them, ship and crew.”

“What, sink them?”

“Undoubtedly; what do you want us to do with them? If only they were Niggers, we could sell them, but what is the good of Whites?”

“Oh! Jacques, my good brother, you wouldn’t do such a thing as that, would you?”

“Sara, little sister,” said Jacques, “we will do what we can; anyhow, when the moment arrives, if it should arrive, we shall put you in a charming little place from which you will not be able to see anything that goes on, and so, as far as you are concerned, it will be as if nothing had happened.”

Then, turning in the direction of the ship:

“Yes, yes, there she points; you can see the heads of her top-sails; do you see, there, father?”

“I see nothing but a white point rocking on a wave, and which looks to me just like a gull.”

“Well, that is it; your gull is a fine frigate of thirty-six guns. But, you know, the frigate is a bird as well; only, instead of being a swallow, she is an eagle.”

“But may it not be some other ship, a merchantman, for instance?”

“A merchantman would not keep close to the wind.”

“But we are doing the same.”

“Oh! we! that is another matter: we were not able to pass Port-Louis, for that would have been throwing ourselves into the wolf’s jaws, and so we had to keep as near as we could.”

“Can you not increase the corvette’s rate of speed?”

“She is carrying every stitch she can at present, father. When we get the wind behind us we will add a few more bits of canvas and make two knots more; but the frigate will do the same, so it will come to the same thing. The Leicester is bound to gain a mile an hour on us; I know her of old.”

“Then she will overtake us to-morrow morning?”

“Yes, unless we escape her during the night.”

“And do you think we shall?”

“That depends on what sort of a Captain she has got.”

“And supposing she does overtake us?”

“Well, then, father, it will be a matter of boarding, for, you see, an artillery duel is out of the question, so far as we are concerned. In the first place, the Leicester, if it be she, and I would wager a hundred Niggers to ten it is, has something like twelve guns more than we. Besides, she has Bourbon, the Isle of France, or Rodrigue to put into for repairs; whereas we have but sea, space, immensity, for every land is hostile to us. So we want our wings above all things.”

“And if it comes to boarding?”

“Then our chances are improved. In the first place, we possess howitzers, a thing which is not strictly permitted on a man-of-war, but is one of those privileges which we pirates allow ourselves on our own private authority. Next, as the frigate is on a peace establishment, she has probably not more than two hundred and seventy men in her crew, while we have two hundred and sixty, which, you see, especially with fellows like mine, puts things at least on an equality. So make your mind easy, father, and, as the bell is sounding, don’t let this prevent us taking our supper.”

Indeed, it was now seven in the evening, and the signal for the meal had just been given with its usual punctuality.

Georges gave Sara his arm, Pierre Munier followed them, and all three went down to the Captain’s cabin, which had been transformed, in honour of Sara, into a dining-room.

Jacques remained behind for a moment to give some orders to Master Tête-de-Fer, his Lieutenant.

The interior of the Calypso was a curious sight even to a landsman’s eye. As a lover adorns his mistress in all possible ways, so Jacques had adorned his corvette with all the embellishments by which a sea nymph can be enriched. The mahogany ladders shone like glass; the copper fittings, polished three times a day, blazed like gold; and all the weapons, axes, sabres, and muskets, arranged in fanciful designs round the port-holes through which the guns protruded their iron muzzles, appeared like ornaments arranged by a clever decorator in the studio of some famous painter.

But the Captain’s cabin was especially remarkable for its luxury. Master Jacques was, as we have said, a very sensuous young man, and, like people who, when circumstances demand, can make shift with anything, he loved, in ordinary circumstances, to enjoy everything of the very best. Consequently, his cabin, which was intended to serve at once as a drawing-room, a bed-room, and a boudoir, was a model of its kind.

In the first place, on each side, that is to say, both port and starboard, were installed two large divans, under which were hidden with their carriages two pieces of ordnance, which were visible only from outside. One of these two divans served as a bed, the other as a sofa; the space between the windows was filled with a handsome Venetian mirror in a rococo frame depicting Cupids surrounded with flowers and fruits. Lastly, from the ceiling was suspended a silver lamp, taken no doubt from the altar of some Madonna, the fine ornamentation of which denoted the best period of the Renaissance. The divans and partitions of the walls were covered with a splendid Indian material with red ground-work, on which meandered those beautiful gold flowers, alike on both sides, which seem as though embroidered by fairy needles.

This room had been made over by Jacques for the joint use of Georges and Sara. However, as the interrupted service at the Church of St. Sauveur did not quite satisfy the girl as to the legality of her marriage, Georges had promptly given her to understand that, if he was admitted to this sanctum during the day, he would find another apartment for the night.

It was in this room, as we have said, that meals were served.

These four persons enjoyed a strange sense of happiness in finding themselves thus united round the same table, after so much apprehension of being separated for ever. They forgot the rest of the world for a time, in thinking only of themselves; forgot the past and the future, in thinking only of the present.

An hour passed like a minute; after which they went up again on deck.

Their first glances were directed astern, looking for the frigate.

There was a moment’s silence.

“Why,” said Pierre Munier, “the frigate seems to have vanished.”

“That is because, the sun being on the horizon, her sails are in shadow,” answered Jacques, “but look this way, father.”

And the young man pointed with his hand to direct the old man’s glance.

“Yes, yes,” said Pierre, “now I see her.”

“She is even closer than before,” said Georges.

“Yes, about a mile or so; here, Georges, if you look you can make out her lower sails; she is not more than fifteen miles from us.”

They were at this moment off the channel of the *Cap,* that is to say, they were beginning to leave the Island behind; the sun was setting on the horizon in a bank of clouds, and night was coming on with the rapidity peculiar to tropical latitudes.

Jacques beckoned to Master Tête de Fer, who approached hat in hand.

“Well, Master Tête de Fer,” said Jacques, “what are we to think of this vessel?”

“Why, with all due respect, you know more about it than I do, Captain.”

“Never mind! I want your opinion. Is she a merchantman or a man-of-war?”

“You are joking, Captain,” answered Tête de Fer with his hearty laugh; “you know there isn’t, in the whole merchant navy, even in that of the East India Company, a ship that can keep up with us, and this one is overhauling us.”

“Ah! and how much has she gained on us since we first saw her, that is to say, in three hours?”

“You know quite well, Captain.”

“I want your opinion, Master Tête de Fer; two heads are better than one.”

“Why, Captain, she has gained about two miles.”

“Very well; and what ship do you suppose her to be?”

“You have recognised her, Captain.”

“Perhaps; but I may be mistaken.”

“Impossible!” said Tête de Fer, with another laugh.

“Never mind! tell me.”

“She is the Leicester, by God!”

“And what ship, think you, is it, she is after tackling?”

“Why, the Calypso, I fancy; you know, Captain, she has an old grudge against us for some trifle of a fore-mast we had the insolence to cut in two.”

“Bravo! Master Tête de Fer; I knew all you have just told me; but I am not sorry to see that you agree with me. In five minutes the watch will be changed; make the men off duty take a rest; they will want all their strength in twenty hours or so from now.”

“Don’t you intend to take advantage of the night and alter your course, Captain?”

“Silence, sir; we will talk of that later. Away with you to your business, and carry out the orders I have given.”

Five minutes later, the watch was relieved, and all the men who were not on duty disappeared below; at the end of ten minutes they were all asleep or pretending to be asleep.

And yet, among all these men, there was not one who did not know that the Calypso was being chased; but they knew their Captain and had confidence in him.

Meantime the corvette held on the same course; but she was now beginning to encounter the swell of the open sea, which could not fail to impede her rate of progress. Sara, Georges, and Pierre Munier went down again into the cabin, leaving Jacques alone on deck.

It was now quite dark, and the frigate had disappeared entirely from view. Half an hour passed, at the end of which Jacques again summoned his Lieutenant, who immediately made his appearance.

“Master Tête de Fer,” said Jacques, “where do you suppose we are now?”

“North of the *Coin-de-Mire,*” answered the Lieutenant.

“Exactly; do you think you could steer the corvette between the *Coin-de-Mirc* and the *Ile Plate* without grounding either to right or left?”

“I could take her through blindfolded, Captain.”

“Bravo! In that case, tell your men to be in readiness, since there is no time to lose.”

Each man ran to his post, and there was a moment of silent expectation.

Then, amid the silence, a voice was heard:

“Ready about!” cried Jacques.

“Belay there! Ready about!” repeated Tête de Fer.

Then the Boatswain’s pipe was heard.

The corvette paused for an instant, like a horse pulled up short in his gallop. Then she turned slowly, heeling over under the influence of a fresh breeze and a considerable sea.

“Port your helm!” ordered Jacques.

The steersman obeyed, and the corvette, coming up to the wind, began to forge ahead.

“Keep her away!” was the next order; “ease your sheets!”

These two manœuvres were carried out with the same rapidity and success as the preceding. The corvette fell off; her after-sails filled, while her fore-sails bellied out rapidly in their turn, and the graceful vessel sprang towards the new point of the compass to which she was directed.

“Master Tête de Fer,” said Jacques, after following all the movements of the corvette with the same satisfaction with which a horseman follows the movements of his steed, “you will double the Island, taking advantage of every variation of the breeze, always keeping your luff, and making the best weather you can along the whole belt of rocks from the *Passe des Conies* to the *Crique de Flac.*

“Aye, aye! sir,” answered the Lieutenant.

“And now, good night,” resumed Jacques; “and call me when the moon rises.”

And Jacques, in his turn, turned in with that happy-go-lucky indifference which is one of the privileges of those who are constantly placed ‘twixt life and death.

Ten minutes later he was sleeping as soundly as the rawest of the sailors.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FIGHT.

MASTER Tête de Fer was as good as his word; he passed successfully the narrows between the *Coin-de Mire* and the *Ile Plate*, and, after doubling the *Passe des Comes* and the *Ile d’Ambre*, kept as close as possible to the coast.

Then when, half an hour after midnight, he saw the young moon south of the Island of Rodrigue, he went, according to his instructions, to call the Captain.

Jacques on coming on deck examined all points of the horizon with that rapid glance of investigation which belongs essentially to the mariner; the wind had freshened and was shifting from East to North-East; the coast, which looked hazy, lay about nine miles to starboard; no vessel was in sight either ahead, to port, or astern.

The corvette was off Port Bourbon. Jacques had played the best game that he could have played. If the frigate, which had lost sight of him during the night, had continued her course eastwards, it would be too late for her when day broke to return on her tracks, and he was saved; if, on the other hand, the Captain of the pursuing vessel had, by some fatal inspiration, guessed his manœuvre and followed him, he still had the chance of escaping observation by hugging the coast and profiting by the indentations of the Island coast line to hide from his enemy.

While Jacques was endeavouring with the aid of a night-glass to pierce the gloomy horizon, he felt a hand on his shoulder and, turning round, saw Georges.

“Ah! brother, is it you?” he said, holding out his hand.

‘Well,” asked Georges, “is there anything fresh?”

“Nothing at present; though if the Leicester were in our wake, we could not see her at the distance which still separates us. At daybreak we shall know all about it Halloa!”

“What is it?”

“Nothing; a little veering of the wind, that is all.”

“In our favour?”

“Yes, if the frigate has kept on her course; if otherwise, this change is as good for her as for us. But in any case, we must make the most of it.”

Then, turning to the Boatswain, who had taken the place of the Lieutenant, he said:

“Stand by to hoist the studding-sails.”

“Hoist the studding-sails!” repeated the mate.

Instantly you saw ascending from the deck to the top, and then from the top to top-mast, as it were five floating clouds which were set outside the other sails. Almost at the same moment you could feel the corvette answer to a more rapid impulsion. Georges mentioned this to his brother.

“Yes, yes,” said Jacques, “she is like Antrim, she has a tender mouth, and you do not need to whip her to make her go. It is only a matter of giving her a suitable amount of canvas, and she will make a spanking pace.”

“And how many knots an hour are we going at her present pace?” asked Georges.

“Heave the log!” cried Jacques.

The order was carried out instantaneously.

“How many knots?”

“Eleven, captain.”

“That is two knots more than we were making just now. You cannot ask more from wood, and canvas, and iron, and, if we had any other ship at our heels but that demon of a Leicester, I would lead her as in a leash to the Cape of Good Hope, and then we would bid her good evening.”

Georges made no reply, and the two brothers continued to pace the deck in silence; each time, however, that Jacques returned aft, his eyes seemed striving to pierce the darkness. At last he stopped and, instead of continuing his promenade, leaned over the taffrail.

In point of fact, the darkness was beginning to lift, although the first streaks of day still delayed their appearance, and, in the nascent twilight which began to brighten like a fog that disperses to give place to a bluish dawn, Jacques thought he could distinguish, at a distance of about fifteen miles, the frigate holding the same course as the corvette.

At the same moment, and as he was extending his hand to point out to Georges this almost imperceptible dot, the look-out aloft hailed:

“A sail astern!”

“Yes,” said Jacques, as though speaking to himself, “yes, I saw it; yes, they have followed our track as though it had remained marked out behind us. Only, instead of passing between the *Ile Plate* and the *Coin-de-Mire*, they have passed between the *lie Plate* and the *Ile Ronde*, which has lost them two hours. They must have a man on that ship who knows his business.”

“But I don’t see anything!” said Georges.

“Why look, there, there!” replied Jacques; “you can see as far down as her courses, and, when the ship lifts on the waves, you can see her bows rising like a fish putting its head out of the water to take breath.”

“You are right,” said Georges; “yes, I can see her.”

“What can you see, Georges?” asked a soft voice behind him.

Georges turned and saw Sara.

“What do I see, Sara? Why, a splendid sight, namely, the rising sun. But there is no perfect happiness on earth, and this spectacle is a little spoiled by the sight of that vessel, which, as you see, despite my brother’s calculations and hopes, has not lost our track.”

“Georges,” said Sara, “God, who has so wonderfully brought us together so far, will not fail us now, when we have most need of His care, so do not let this sight prevent you from adoring Him in all His works. Look, look, Georges, what a grand sight!”

At the moment, indeed, when day was about to break, you might have thought that the night in her jealousy was trying to increase the darkness. A bluish and transparent light had spread over the sky, growing each instant in extent and brightness; then this light gradually dispersed, passing from a silvery white to a delicate pink, and from a delicate pink to a dark rose. Next, a purple cloud, like vapour illuminated by a volcano, rose on the horizon. This heralded the monarch of the world coming to take possession of his empire, the sun blazing forth as a ruler of the firmament.

It was the first time that Sara had seen such a spectacle, and she stood in an ecstasy of delight, clasping her lover’s hand with a love full of faith and religion. Georges, however, who during his long sea voyages had had time to grow accustomed to such sights, directed his first glance towards the object of the general anxiety. The pursuing vessel continued to draw nearer, although she was seen less distinctly, bathed as she was in the flood of light in the eastern sky; while, on the other hand, the corvette must now have been clearly visible to the frigate.

“Come,” murmured Jacques, “she has observed us now, for she is setting her studding-sails. Georges, my friend,” he continued, bending down to whisper to his brother, “you know what women are, and that they sometimes find it hard to make up their minds; you would do well, in my opinion, to give a hint to Sara of what is going to happen.”

“What is your brother saying?” asked Sara.

“He doubts your courage,” replied Georges, “and I am answering for you.”

“You are right, my friend. Besides, when the moment comes, you will tell me what I must do, and I will obey.”

“The demon flies as though she had wings!” continued Jacques. “Dear little sister, do you happen to have heard the name of the commander of this ship?”

“I have often seen him at my uncle M. de Malmédie’s house, and I remember his name perfectly; it is George Paterson. Still perhaps he is not in command of the Leicester at this moment, for I remember hearing some one say the day before yesterday that he was ill, and, as it was reported, dangerously so.”

“Well, I say that a great injustice will be done to his Lieutenant if he is not appointed Captain in his place on the very day that his superior officer dies. Why, it is a pleasure to have to deal with a fellow like that; see how his ship flies; upon my word, you might call her a racehorse; if this goes on, we shall be obliged in five or six hours to have a brush with her.”

“Well, let us have a brush with her then,” said Pierre Munier, who at this moment came up on deck, and whose eyes, on the approach of danger, gleamed with the ardour which inflamed his soul in great emergencies.

“Ah! father, is it you?” said Jacques. “Delighted to see you in such good fighting trim, for in a few hours, as I was telling you, we shall need every man on board.”

Sara turned slightly pale, and Georges felt her press his hand; he turned to her with a smile.

“Well, Sara,” said he, “after having such confidence in God, will you doubt Him now?”

“No, Georges, no,” replied Sara; “and when, from the bottom of the hold I hear the roar of the guns, the whistling of the bullets, and the cries of the wounded, I shall still remain, I promise you, full of faith and hope, certain of seeing my Georges again safe and sound. For something tells me we have drained the bitter cup of misfortune, and that, as the darkness has been succeeded by this brilliant sun, so will our night yield to a bright day.”

“Hear, hear!” cried Jacques, “that’s what I call talking to the purpose. Upon my honour, I don’t know how it is that I don’t go about and head off this presumptuous ship; that would save us half the trouble and annoyance. What say you, Georges, would you like to make the attempt?”

“Willingly,” said Georges, “but are you not afraid that at this distance, should there be any English vessel in Port Bourbon, she may come out when she hears the cannonade, and help her comrade?”

“Upon my word! you talk as eloquently as St. John of the Golden Mouth, brother, and we will keep on our course. Ah! is it you, Master Tête de Fer?” continued Jacques, addressing his Lieutenant who appeared on deck at that moment. “You come just in time: here we are, as you see, off Mt. Brabant; keep her head west-south-west upon the mountain. And now we will have our breakfast, a good precaution to take at any time, but especially so, when you are not sure of getting any dinner.”

And Jacques gave his arm to Sara and led the way down, followed by Pierre and Georges.

With the object no doubt of distracting his guests, for the time at least, from the danger that threatened them, Jacques tried to spin out the meal as long as possible, so it was nearly two hours before they went up again on deck.

Jacques’ first glance was at the Leicester, which had plainly drawn closer, for her battery could now be seen. Yet Jacques appeared to have expected to find her even closer still; for, throwing a glance aloft to make sure that no change had been made in the sails, he observed:

“Well, what have you been doing, Master Tête de Fer? It seems to me that we are going rather faster than we were going two hours ago.”

“Yes, Captain, yes,” answered the Lieutenant, “I should say it is something like that.”

“What have you done to the ship?”

“Oh! a mere trifle; I have shifted some weights and ordered the men to go forward.”

“Yes, yes, you’re a good sailor; and what have you gained by that?”

“A knot, Captain, one poor knot, that is all. I have just hove the log, and we are making twelve knots an hour, but that won’t help us much, and no doubt the enemy has done the same thing, for he also quickened his pace about a quarter of an hour ago. Look, Captain, you can see almost her entire hull. Oh! we have to deal with some old sea-dog who will give us a deal of trouble. It puts me in mind of the way in which this same Leicester chased us when Captain Murray commanded her.”

“Ah! by God! everything is explained now,” exclaimed Jacques; “a thousand pounds to a hundred, Georges, it is your enraged Governor on board that vessel; he wants to have his revenge.”

“Do you think so?” cried Georges, rising from the bench on which he was sitting, and grasping his brother’s arm, “do you think so? I declare I should be glad if it were he, for I, too, want to take revenge on my own account.”

“It is the Governor in person, I will vouch for it now. There isn’t another blood-hound who could have followed our track as he has done. What an honour for a humble Slave-Captain like myself to have dealings with a Commodore of the Royal Navy! Thank you, Georges! it is you to whom I am indebted for this good fortune.”

And Jacques laughingly extended his hand to his brother.

But with Jacques, in the critical situation in which he would soon find himself, the probability of having to deal with Lord Murray himself was only an additional reason for taking all necessary precautions. Jacques examined the ship’s sides; the hammocks were in the nettings; he examined the crew; the crew had already instinctively parted into groups, each man standing near the gun which he was to serve. Everything betokened that he had no need to teach these men anything, and that each man knew as well as he did what was to come next.

At this moment a passing breeze bore the sound of the drum beating on the deck of the enemy.

“Ah! ah!” said Jacques, “they can’t be accused of being behindhand. Come, my lads, let us follow their example. The sailors of the Royal Navy are good masters and we shall gain by imitating them.”

Then, raising his voice, he gave with all the strength of his lungs the order:

“Clear for action!”

Instantly the roll of two drums accompanied by the shrill notes of a fife was heard in the battery. Presently the three musicians appeared on deck, emerging from a hatchway, marched round the vessel and went back by the hatchway at the opposite end.

The effect of this sight and of the tuneful concert that followed it was magical.

In an instant, every one was at the post appointed beforehand, armed with the light weapons at his disposal; the top-men sprang aloft with their carbines; the musketeers took their station on the deck and gangway’s; swivels were got ready, the guns were cast loose, and loaded; supplies of grenades were placed at every spot from which they might be rained down upon the enemy’s deck. Finally the Boatswain stoppered all the rigging, serpentined the stays of the masts, and saw that the boarding nettings were ready for tricing up, and grappling irons handy.

The activity in the interior of the ship was no less great than on deck. The magazines were opened, the lanterns lighted below, the spare stores prepared; lastly, the decks were cleared, and two guns run aft as stern chasers.

Then perfect silence ensued. Jacques saw that everything was ready, and began his inspection.

Every man was at his post and everything in its place.

The inspection, nevertheless, occupied half-an-hour, since Jacques realised that the game he was about to engage in was one of the most serious that he had ever played in his life. During this inspection he examined everything and spoke to each man.

When he returned on deck, the frigate had visibly decreased the distance between them, and only a mile and a half now separated the two ships.

Another half hour passed, during which certainly not ten words were exchanged on board the corvette; all the faculties of crew, officers, and passengers seemed to be concentrated in their eyes.

Each countenance expressed a feeling in harmony with its owner’s character; that of Jacques, indifference; of Georges, pride; of Pierre Munier, paternal solicitude; of Sara, devotion.

All of a sudden a light puff of smoke appeared on the frigate’s side, and the standard of Great Britain rose majestically into the air.

A fight was now inevitable: the corvette could not haul closer to the wind; and the superiority of the frigate’s pace was evident. Jacques gave orders to lower the studding-sails, so as not to have any canvas set that would hamper his manoeuvres; then, turning to Sara, he observed:

“Come, little sister, you see that we are all at our posts, and I think it is time for you to go down to yours.”

“Oh! great heavens!” cried the girl, “the fight then is inevitable?”

“In a quarter of an hour,” said Jacques, “the conversation will begin, and as, in all probability, it will not *be* lacking in warmth, it is necessary that those who are not to take part in it should retire.”

“Sara,” said Georges, “don’t forget what you promised me.”

“Yes, yes,” said the girl, “I am ready to obey. You see, Georges, I am reasonable; but you — ”

“Sara, you will not ask me, I hope, to remain a spectator of what is going to take place, when so many brave men are exposing their lives only for my sake?”

“Oh! no,” said Sara; “I only ask you to think of me, and to remember that if you die, it will kill me.”

Then she offered her hand to Jacques, held up her face to Pierre Munier, and conducted by Georges, went down the after-companion ladder.

A quarter of an hour later Georges came up again, holding in his hand a boarding-sword and with a brace of pistols in his belt.

Pierre Munier was armed with his embossed carbine, the trusty friend that had always served him so faithfully.

Jacques was at his place on the quarter deck, holding his speaking-trumpet, the token of authority, in his hand, with a boarding-sword and a small iron morion lying at his feet.

The two ships were pursuing the same course, the frigate still pressing the corvette, and already so close that the sailors in the tops could see what was passing on each other’s decks.

“Master Tête de Fer,” said Jacques, “you possess good eyes and good judgment, be good enough to go into the mizzen-top and tell me what is going on yonder.”

The Lieutenant at once sprang aloft as actively as any common top-man, and in an instant reached the place mentioned.

“Well?” said the Captain.

“Well, Captain, each man is at his post, the gunners at the batteries, the marines at the gangways, and the Captain on the quarter-deck.”

“Are there any troops on board besides the sailors and marines?”

“I think not, Captain, unless indeed they are concealed in the battery, for I see the same uniform everywhere.”

“Good! In that case the numbers are almost equal, within about fifteen or twenty. That’s all I wanted to know. Come down, Master Tête de Fer.”

“Wait a moment! The Englishman is putting his trumpet to his mouth; if we are quite still, we may hear what he is going to say.”

This last opinion was rather in the nature of a conjecture, for, in spite of the silence on deck, no sound reached the corvette; but the order given by the Captain was none the less clearly explained to the whole crew, for instantly two flashes issued from the bows of the hostile vessel, a report was heard, and two shot ricocheted in the wake of the Calypso.

“Good!” said Jacques; “they have only got eighteen-pounders like ourselves; the chances grow more and more equal.”

Then, raising his head, he called to the Lieutenant:

“Come down; you are no use there now, and I want you here.”

Master Tête de Fer obeyed, and was by the Captain’s side in a moment. Meanwhile the frigate continued to advance, but without firing any more, having found that she was still out of range.

“Master Tête de Fer,” said Jacques, “go down into the battery, and, so long as we are running away from them, use round shot; but, the moment we come to boarding, use shells, and nothing but shells. You understand?”

“Aye, aye, sir!” answered the Lieutenant.

And he went down the after-ladder.

The two ships continued their course for about half-an-hour without any fresh sign of hostility on the part of the frigate, while the corvette, judging it useless to waste her powder and shot, remained insensible to the two challenges from the enemy. But it was evident, from the animation that began to appear on the sailors’ faces, and the care with which the Captain measured the distance which still separated the two vessels, that the conversation, as Jacques had said, would not long be confined to a monologue, and that the dialogue was on the point of beginning.

After waiting for another ten minutes which seemed like an age to everybody, the bows of the frigate burst into flame once more, a double report was heard, followed, this time, by the whistling of shot passing through the rigging, cutting a hole in the mizzen top-sail and carrying away two or three ropes.

Jacques followed with a rapid glance the effect wrought by these two messengers of destruction; then, seeing that the damage was only trifling, he cried:

“Come, my lads, it seems clear that it is we against whom they bear a grudge. Politeness for politeness. Fire!”

On the instant a double report shook the whole corvette, and Jacques leaned over to watch the effect of his repartee; one of the two shot had struck full in the bows, while the other had buried itself more astern.

“Well!” cried Jacques, “what are the rest of you about? Give her a broadside! aim at her masts; break her legs and clip her wings; masts and sails are more valuable to her at this moment than lives. Ah! look!”

Two balls passed at this moment through the sails and rigging of the corvette, one of which struck the fore yard-arm, and the other carried away the mizzen top-mast.

“Fire! confound you; and take example from those fellows. Twenty-five pounds for the first mast of the frigate that falls.”

The report followed the order almost immediately, and you could see the passage of the shot through the sails of the enemy.

For nearly a quarter of an hour the firing continued thus on both sides; the breeze, lulled by the discharges, had almost dropped, and the two ships were moving at scarcely more than four or five knots. The intervening space was so filled with smoke that the gunners fired almost at random; the frigate, however, still came on, and you could see the tops of her masts rising above the smoke that surrounded her, while the corvette, who had the wind behind her and fired from her stern, was quite clear of this inconvenience.

This was the moment for which Jacques was waiting. He had done all he could to avoid boarding; but, being forced in pursuit, was about to turn at last upon his pursuer, like a wounded boar. At this moment the frigate was on the starboard side of the corvette, and began to pound her with the forecastle guns, while the corvette replied with her stern-guns. Jacques saw the advantage of his position and determined to profit by it.

“All hands on deck for boarding!” he cried.

The men instantly rushed on deck.

“Stand by to take the mainsail off her! Man the after port braces and spanker clewlines! Port your helm! Port! Clew up the mainsail and spanker!”

Scarcely had these successive orders been carried out than the corvette, obeying the simultaneous action of her helm and her after sails, turned rapidly to starboard, having still sufficient way on her to run athwart the frigate’s course, and remained stationary, thanks to the precaution the Captain had taken of hauling taut his fore starboard braces. At the same moment the frigate, deprived of her power of manoeuvring owing to the damage to her after sheets, and unable to double the corvette with the wind, came on, ploughing through smoke and sea, and willy nilly ran her bowsprit with a terrific crash into the main-shrouds of the enemy.

At this moment the voice of Jacques rang out for the last time:

“Fire! Rake her fore and aft! Shave them bare as a hulk!”

Fourteen guns, six of them charged with grape and eight with shell, obey this order, sweeping the deck, on which they cut down thirty or forty men, and bringing the mizzen-mast down. At the same instant a shower of grenades descending from the three tops, scours the forward decks of the frigate, which can only reply to this storm of fire and hail of shot from her fore-top, encumbered as it is by the sail.

At this moment the pirates dash forward, rushing headlong and crowding along the yards of the corvette and the bowsprit of the frigate, over the shrouds, the rigging, and the ropes. In vain the marines pour upon them a terrible musketry fire; those who fall are succeeded by others; while the very wounded drag themselves along, pushing grenades before them and waving their arms. Georges and Jacques think that victory is already theirs, when at the order of “All boarders on deck!” the English sailors stationed in the battery rush in their turn up the hatchway and gain the upper deck. This reinforcement steadies the marines, who were beginning to fall back. The Commander of the frigate throws himself at their head. Jacques had not been mistaken; it was indeed the old Captain of the Leicester, who wanted to take his revenge. Georges Munier and Lord Murray meet face to face, but amid blood and slaughter, sword in hand, as mortal foes.

They both recognise and make for one another, but the confusion is such that they are carried along as if by a whirlwind. The two brothers hurry against the English ranks, dealing and receiving blows, fighting with coolness, and courage; two English sailors raise their axes over the head of Jacques, and both fall, struck by invisible bullets. Pierre Munier is watching over his son, the trusty carbine does its work.

Suddenly a terrible cry, rising above the noise of the grenades, the crackle of the musketry, the cries of the wounded, and the groans of the dying, bursts from the battery, freezing every one with horror.

“Fire! The ship’s on fire!” At the same instant a thick smoke issues from the after hatchways and port-holes. One of the shells has exploded in the Captain’s cabin and set the frigate on fire.

At this cry, so terrible, so unexpected, all is hushed for a moment j then the voice of Jacques is heard, powerful, imperious, supreme:

“All aboard the Calypso! “Instantly, with the same speed with which they had descended on to the deck of the frigate, the pirates abandon her, hauling themselves one over the other, clinging on to the rigging, jumping from one deck to the other, while Jacques and Georges, with some of the most resolute of the crew, support the retreat.

Then the Governor dashes forward in his turn, pressing hard on the pirates, firing on them at close range, hoping to board the Calypso at the same time as her crew. But at this the first arrivals spring into the tops of the corvette, and the shower of grenades and bullets begins once more.

Ropes are thrown to those who still remain on the frigate, and each man seizes hold. Jacques leaps back aboard, Georges remains the last. The Governor makes for him, and Georges waits. Suddenly Georges is seized and lifted in a grasp of iron; Pierre Munier is watching over his son, and, for the third time that day, saves him from almost certain death.

Then a voice, overpowering all this horrible confusion, roared: “Man the fore port braces! Hoist the head sails! Clew up the main sail and spanker! Haul in all ropes astern! Starboard your helm! “All these manœuvres, ordered in that powerful voice which compels obedience, were executed with such marvellous rapidity that, spite of the impetuosity with which the English rushed in pursuit of the pirates, they were not in time to make the ships fast to one another. The corvette, as though endowed with feeling, seemed to realise the danger she was in, and shook herself free with a vigorous effort, while the frigate, deprived of her mizzen-mast, moved forward slowly, impelled by the sails of her main and foremast.

To those on board the Calypso, terrible scenes were now visible.

In the heat of the contest the first outbreak of fire on board the frigate had been unperceived, so that when the cry of “Fire” was raised, the conflagration had already made such progress that there was no hope of extinguishing it.

It was at this crisis that the force of British discipline compelled admiration. Amid the smoke, growing denser each moment, the Governor taking his place on the port side of the quarter-deck, and lifting his speaking-trumpet, which he had kept suspended from his left wrist, shouted:

“Steady, men, steady! Trust to me!”

Every one paused.

“Lower the boats!” continued the Governor.

In five minutes the jolly boat at the stern, the two quarter boats at the davits, and one of the gigs, were lowered and alongside the frigate.

“The jolly boat and the gigs for the marines!” sang out the Governor; “the two quarter boats for the Bluejackets!”

Then, as the Calypso kept sheering off, she heard no more orders given, but she saw the boats being filled with all those who remained uninjured, while the unhappy men who were wounded, dragging themselves to the gangways, vainly besought their comrades to take them in.

“Lower the two quarter boats!” cried Jacques in his turn, when he saw that the frigate’s boats could not hold the whole crew.

And the two quarter boats were lowered from the davits of the Calypso into the water, notwithstanding the strong sea running. Immediately, all who could not find room in the frigate’s boats, jumped into the sea and began to swim towards those of the corvette.

The Governor remained on board.

They had tried to persuade him to enter one of the boats, but, unable to save his wounded, he preferred to die with them.

The sea now presented a fearful spectacle.

The frigate’s boats were rowing with might and main from the burning vessel; the sailors who had been left behind were swimming towards the corvette’s boats.

Motionless amid a whirlwind of smoke, her Commander standing stern and motionless on the quarter deck, the wounded cumbering her deck, the frigate burned on.

It was a sight so terrible that Georges felt the trembling hand of Sara resting on his shoulder, yet did not turn to look at her.

Having reached a certain distance, the boats were resting on their oars.

This is what now happened: —

The smoke grew thicker and thicker; then serpents of flame were seen issuing from the hatchways, and crawling along the masts, devouring the sails and rigging; next the flames burst through the portholes, and the loaded guns went off as the fire reached them. Then a terrible explosion resounded; the vessel was rent like a crater; a cloud of flame and smoke rose to the sky; finally from this cloud, fragments of masts, yards, and rigging were seen to fall into the boiling sea.

This was the last of the Leicester.

“And Lord Murray?” asked the girl.

“If I were not going to live with you, Sara,” said Georges turning to her, “upon my honour, I could have wished to die as he has died!”

THE END

AMAURY

Translated by Alfred Allinson

First published in 1843, this tragic-comic romance novel is set in the countryside outside Paris in 1838 and tells the story of a dying consumptive.

The novel opens with a group of French aristocrats conversing about the nature of love. One of them asks the question, "Meurt-on d'amour?" (Does one die of love?) In response, one them pulls forth a manuscript that purports to be the diary and letters of the family of the deceased M. d'Avrigny, widower and court physician to the King. The novel is nominally composed of the diary and letters being read aloud.

In the tale, Amaury de Leoville, young, wealthy, but orphaned, is beginning his career in the French diplomatic service. Amaury was raised by M. d'Avrigny, a friend of his late father, along side d'Avrigny's frail blonde daughter, Madeleine, and yet another orphan, the vigorous dark-haired Antoinette.

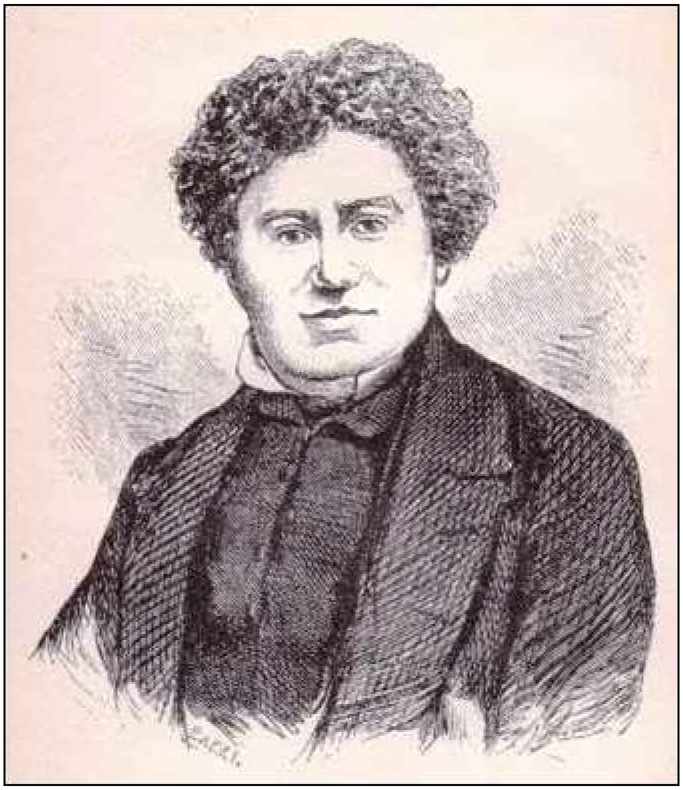

Dumas, close the the time of publication

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INTRODUCTION

"WHEN I write *finis* to one book, it merely means I am beginning another," Dumas says somewhere of himself, and his literary "output" for the year 1844 amply justifies the statement. This was the "great year," — the year of *Monte Cristo* and *The Three Musketeers;* but it saw the birth of quite a brood of minor romances as well, — *Fernande*, *Gabriel Lambert*, *Sylvandire*, and last, but not least, *Amaury.*

The book is not, of course, one of the "great" romances, in the sense in which *The Three Musketeers*, or *The Chevalier (l'Harmental*, or *The Chevalier de Maison Rouge*, or *The Lady of Monsoreau*, deserve that title; but it is a pathetic and beautiful story.

The tale is supposed to be told, or rather read aloud, under the following circumstances: M. le Comte de M — , an old aristocrat who has survived the Revolution and all subsequent and successive *bouleversements,* and has known Rousseau and Voltaire, Franklin and André Chenier, Talleyrand and Mme. de Staël, Chateaubriand and Mme. Récamier, the Empress Josephine and the Duchesse de Berri, — still holds one of those "salons" where discussions were held "de omnibus rebus et quibusdam aliis" with all the wit and wisdom of cultivated Frenchmen and Frenchwomen and all the urbanity of the *ancien régime.* He writes on his invitation cards "Conversation." where commonplace hostesses put "Dancing"; "the word keeps bankers and stockbrokers away, but it attracts wits who like to talk and poets who like to listen." The Count "is one of the last and one of the most delightful representatives of the poor much-maligned Eighteenth Century. There are not a great many things he believes in himself, but, unlike the majority of free-thinkers, he has no sort of wish to make other people share his incredulity."

On one of his evenings the question is started, "Meur-ton d'amour?" — " Do people die of love?" By way of answer the Count directs his secretary to read aloud to the company a manuscript bequeathed to him by a dead friend. "They are written experiences," he explains, "from that friend's life. He was a famous Parisian physician; therefore these memoirs are nothing but — pardon the expression — a long -*post-mortem* examination. Oh!

do not be alarmed, ladies, — a mental *post-mortem* performed not with the scalpel, but the pen, one of those *post-mortems* of the heart at which you so love to assist.” With this document was combined another diary, that kept by Doctor D’Avrigny’s ward and his daughter’s *fianci,* Amaury de Léoville; the two together give the life-story of the loves of Madeleine D’Avrigny and Amaury, the lingering death of the former and the eventual union of the latter with his lost darling’s cousin and friend, Antoinette de Valgenceuse.

In connection with the first publication of the book as a *feuilleton* in “La Presse,” Dumas was asked by M. de Noailles, whose daughter was “poitrinaire,” like the heroine of the romance, and who was so intensely interested in the successive instalments of the story as seriously to aggravate the symptoms of her illness, to suspend the publication, if Madeleine was to die. This the kind-hearted author did, and even took the trouble, some versions of the story add, to improvise in manuscript a miraculous recovery and happy ending for the special benefit of Mlle, de Noailles. Publication was only resumed after her death.

The details of the disease and its progress had been studied by Dumas from the case of a companion of his own boyhood, Félix Deviolaine, son of his gusty-tempered relative, M. Deviolaine, Inspector of the Royal Forest of Villers-Cotterets (it was cut down subsequently by Louis Philippe), whose house and household, and especially his girls — Cécile, who saved Dumas from being made a priest, and the rest — young Dumas’ playmates and tormentors, were such important factors in the future great man’s early days. The lad in question went through all the phases of pulmonary consumption, but eventually, almost by a miracle, recovered.

Dumas is said to have written *Amaury* in collaboration with Paul Meurice. Well and good! very likely he did. But to say, because in the Introductory portion, of which we have given the gist above, the Comte de M — , explaining the facts about the manuscript his secretary is going to read, declares “you must be under the impression that I am the author of this story, therefore I wish it to be clearly understood that I did not invent a word of it,” — to say on the strength of this that Dumas *disavows the authorship,* is surely to confound fact and fiction.

The book was originally published — after running through the pages of “La Presse” — as part of the *Bibliothique des Romans Nouveaux* issued by Hippolyte Souverain, of which it fills four volumes, — Paris, 1844.

AMAURY.

ONE thing there is, peculiar to France and all but unknown in all countries of Europe, — to wit the art of conversation.

In all parts of the world people discuss, they talk, they argue; but only in France do they converse.

When staying in Italy, in Germany, or in England, I would sometimes announce at a moment's notice that I was starting next day for Paris; then my friends, astounded at so sudden a decision, would ask:

"But what are you going to do in "Paris?" — to which I would reply: "I am going to enjoy a bout of conversation."

At this everybody would be still further amazed, marvelling how a man, wearied out with talking and hearing others talk, should be taking a journey of a thousand miles, merely to have some conversation.

Only my fellow-countrymen understood, and they would say enviously, "Lucky dog! ah, you lucky dog!"

Nay! Sometimes one or two of my French companions in exile who could get away with least difficulty, would slip their chain and come with me.

I know of nothing more delightful than these little gatherings, in the corner of an elegant *salon*, when five or six congenial guests toss the ball of conversation lightly to and fro. All is governed by the whim of the moment; now an idea is seized and followed up, but only so long as it is interesting, to be thrown aside directly its zest is exhausted; now a fresh topic is taken up, which in its turn broadens and deepens under the jests of some, the contradictions of others, the wit of all. Then, suddenly, having reached the height of its brilliance, the zenith of its development, it too disappears, melts away, bursts like a soap-bubble, at the touch of the hostess, who, carrying a cup of tea in her hand, draws near, a living shuttle that passes from group to group, guiding the silver thread of general conversation, asking the news, consulting opinions, suggesting problems, and from time to time compelling each little *coterie* to throw its word into that cask of the Danaïds we call conversation.

There are in Paris five or six such *salons* as I have been describing, where there is no dancing, no singing, no card- playing, and yet where no one takes his leave before three or four o'clock in the morning.

One such *salon* is that of my old friend Count de M — ; instead of calling him my old friend, I should rather have said an old friend of my father's, as Count de M — , who is careful never to tell his age, and whom certainly no one would ever think of questioning on that point, must be between sixty-five and sixty-eight. Though, thanks to the great care he takes of himself, he does not look a day more than fifty. He is one of the last and one of the most delightful representatives of the poor much-maligned eighteenth century. There are not a great many things he believes in himself, but unlike the majority of free-thinkers, he has no sort of wish to make other people share his incredulity.

He is the victim of two conflicting principles, one which emanates from the heart, the other from the head. Selfish in theory, he is naturally of a generous disposition. Born in the age of noblemen and philosophers, in him the aristocrat is stronger than the philosopher, though he has been fortunate enough to see all the great and intellectual lights of the last century. Rousseau called him *citizen;* Voltaire predicted that he would be a poet; Franklin told him to be an honest man.

He can tell of the horrors of '93 as the Comte de Saint-Germain talked of the proscriptions of Sylla, and the butcheries of Nero. He has seen them all pass by one after the other, with an equal distrust for them all, — murderers and massacres, men of September and men of the guillotine, first in their car of triumph, then in their cart of ignominy. He has known Florian and André Chénier, Demoustier and Mme. de Staël, the Chevalier de Bertin and Chateaubriand; he has kissed the hand of Mme. Tallien, of Mme. Récamier, of the Princess Borghèse, of Joséphine, and of the Duchesse de Berri. He has seen the rise of Bonaparte and the fall of Napoleon. The Abbé Maury called him his pupil, and Monsieur de Talleyrand his disciple; he is a dictionary of dates, an epitome of facts, a hand-book of anecdotes, an inexhaustible mine of witticisms. To make sure of keeping his reputation for superiority, he has always refused to write his experiences; he will only relate them.

Therefore, as I was saying, his *salon* is one of the five or six in Paris where, though there is neither card-playing, nor music, nor dancing, no one leaves before three or four o'clock in the morning. True, on his invitation cards is written with his own hand: “Conversation,” where others usually have printed: “Dancing.”

The word keeps bankers and stockbrokers away; but it attracts wits who like to talk, poets who like to listen, and misanthropes of every sort, who despise all the entreaties of enterprising hostesses, never venture to take the floor, and pretend to believe that a *valse à trois temps* is so called because it is three times as impossible as any other dance.

Moreover he has a rare tact in turning the conversation by a word from subjects likely to wound other people’s feelings, and of cutting short discussions which threaten to become tedious.

A young man with long hair and a long beard was one day discussing Robespierre in his presence; he praised his system, lamented his untimely death and predicted his ultimate rehabilitation. “Future generations have yet to record their verdict.”

“Luckily for us, past generations did record theirs, — and it was the guillotine,” replied the Count de M — , and there the subject dropped.

Now about a month ago I happened to be at one of these evenings when, all other topics of conversation being pretty well exhausted, somebody, probably not knowing what else to talk about, started the subject of love.

It happened to be just one of those moments when conversation becomes general, and when words are bandied about from one end of the room to the other.

“Who speaks of love?” asked Count de M — .

“Doctor P — ,” replied a voice.

“And what has he to say about it?”

“He says it is a mild form of congestion of the brain, which may easily be cured by diet, leeches and bleeding.”

“Do you really believe that, doctor?”

“Yes! though of course to possess the object of one’s love is even better; it is a quicker and more certain cure.”

“But, for the sake of argument, let us suppose that one’s love is not returned, and that the patient does not go to you, who have discovered the universal panacea, but to a fellow practitioner, not so learned as yourself in the disease, what then? Do folks die of love?”

“Egad! That is a question which the patient is better able to answer than the physician,” retorted the doctor. “Come, gentlemen, answer. Ladies, what is your opinion?”

One can easily understand that on so interesting a subject opinions were divided.

The young folk, who had long years before them in which to die of despair, answered yes; the old people, to whom time now could bring nothing worse than influenza or gout, answered no. The women tossed their heads doubtfully, but said nothing, — too proud to say no, too truthful to say yes.

Each one was so anxious to express his own views that it ended in a general misunderstanding.

“Well!” said Count de M — , “I see I must help you out of the difficulty.”

“You!”

“Yes! I.”

“How can you do that?”

“By telling you what is the difference between a love that kills and a love that does not kill.”

“Then there are different kinds of love?” asked a woman, who of all the company present was perhaps the least justified in asking this particular question.

“Yes, Madam,” answered the Count, “but at present I think there would hardly be time to enumerate them all.

“Let us therefore go back to my original proposition. It is nearly midnight; therefore we have still two or three hours before us. You are all cosily ensconced in armchairs, and the fire burns bright on the hearth. Outside, it is a cold night, and snow is falling. At last, therefore, fate is kind in providing me with an audience such as I have long waited for. I have got you, and I won’t let you escape. Auguste, see that the doors are shut, and bring me the MS.; you know the one.”

A young man got up, he was Count de M — ’s secretary, a distinguished-looking young fellow, whose position in the house, it was rumoured, was by right of a closer relationship than was apparent; and, certainly, the fatherly affection with which Count de M — regarded him gave some colour to the rumour.

Eagerness and impatience were manifested by all directly he mentioned the word “manuscript.”

“Pardon me,” said the Count, “but no novel ever begins without a preface, and I have not yet come to the end of mine. You might be under the impression that I am the author of this story, therefore I wish it to be clearly understood that I have never invented one word of it. This is how the story I am going to read you came to my knowledge. As executor to a friend of mine who died eighteen months ago, I was looking over his papers, and, in doing so, came across these memoirs; but let me say at once, they are written experiences from his own life, not from the lives of others. He was a doctor; therefore, pardon the expression, these memoirs are nothing but a long post-mortem examination. Oh! do not be alarmed, ladies; a mental post-mortem, a post-mortem performed not with the scalpel, but with the pen, one of those post-mortems of the heart at which you so love to assist.

"A second diary, in a different handwriting, was mixed up with his reminiscences, just as the biography of Kressler is mixed up with the lucubrations of Murr, the cat. I recognised this handwriting at once; it was that of his ward, a young man whom I had often met at his house.

"These two manuscripts, which, taken separately, made but an unintelligible story, when read together formed a complete whole. I have read them, and to me the story was full of — what shall I say? — full of pathos. I was deeply interested in it, and seeing I am generally looked upon as a scoffer (you all know that I have the reputation of being one, happy they who can boast of *any* special reputation) — I say, considering I am a scoffer, and that my interest is not often keenly awakened, it seemed to me that as this story had so touched my heart, — you must pardon my making use of the word, doctor, I am well aware that, in that sense, there is no such thing as a heart, but unless I keep to the ordinary term I may not be understood, — I thought then that, if this story had so touched the heart of an old scoffer like myself, it might make a like impression on others; then, to be perfectly frank, a little touch of vanity was mixed up with the matter too. I was afraid that, if I committed this to writing, my reputation as a man of letters might melt into thin air, as did that of M — , — I cannot recall his name for the moment, but you all know whom I mean, he has since become a minister of State. I therefore classified the two diaries, numbered each in the order in which it should be read to make a connected story; then I erased the real names, and replaced them by others of my own invention; lastly I substituted the third person for the first, and one fine day awoke to find myself the possessor of a couple of volumes."

"I suppose your reason for not having them published is because some of the people are still alive?"

“No! Good Heavens, no! That is not why. Of the two principal characters, one died eighteen months ago; the other left Paris a fortnight ago. Now, I am quite sure you are all either too busy or too forgetful to recognise the picture of either the dead or the absent, however true to life it may be. You must see, therefore, that that cannot have been the motive which restrained me.”

“What was it, then?”

“Hush! not a word of this to Lamennais, or Béranger, or Alfred de Vigny, or Soulié or Balzac, or Deschamps, or Sainte- Beuve, or Dumas, but I am promised the next vacant seat in the Academy on the one condition, that I go on writing nothing. Once my seat secured, I am free to do as I please.”

“Auguste, dear boy,” continued the Count, addressing himself to the young fellow who had just re-entered the room with the manuscript, “sit down and read it out to us; we are ready to listen.”

Auguste sat down, then there was a general clearing of throats, moving of chairs, settling on sofas, and when everyone was comfortable, the young man, in the midst of a solemn silence, proceeded to read what follows.

CHAPTER I.

TOWARDS the beginning of May, in the year 1838, as ten o’clock was just striking, the courtyard door of a large house in the Rue des Mathurins opened, and a young man, whose slender limbs and rather long neck betrayed his English origin, rode out mounted on a fine chestnut horse; behind him, and from the same entrance of the same house, followed a groom, dressed in black, who rode at a suitable distance. He too was mounted on a thoroughbred, though a lover of horseflesh would have easily discerned that his horse was not of so pure a blood as his master’s.

This horseman, who only needed to be seen to be instantly recognised for what, in the parlance our English neighbours across the water, the world calls a “lion,” was a young fellow between twenty-three and twenty-four, whose dress was marked by that simplicity and elegance which distinguishes those of gentle birth, and the habit of which can never be acquired by education.

It is but fair to say that his looks were in perfect harmony with his dress and appearance, and it would be difficult to meet with anyone more distinguished and refined-looking than this man, with his face framed in black hair and black whiskers, and to which a colourless, yet fresh and youthful, complexion lent a special air of distinction. The young man, last scion of one of the oldest families under the monarchy, was the proud possessor of one of those ancient names which are now rapidly dying out and will soon figure only in history: his name was Amaury de Léoville.

Now, if after describing his outward appearance, we pass on to a more intimate description, from the physical to the moral, from what seems to what is, we shall see that the calmness of his face is in harmony with the state of his heart, of which it is the reflex. The smile, which from time to time curves his lips, and which is but an answer to his thoughts, is the smile of a happy man.

Let us follow this fortunate youth, so richly endowed by fate that he is at once the possessor of good birth and good means, youth and distinction, handsome looks and happiness, for he is the hero of our story.

On leaving home he set his horse at a canter; and, keeping the same pace, reached the Boulevard, passed the Madeleine, threaded his way along the

Faubourg St. Honoré, and arrived at the Rue d'Angoulême.

Once there, with a light touch on the rein, he slackened speed, whilst his hitherto careless and indifferent gaze became riveted on a certain point in the street he was just entering.

This was a charming house situated between a forecourt, full of flowers and enclosed by iron railings, and one of those large gardens which the industrial Paris of these times sees day by day disappearing, only to be replaced by those huge stone barracks, without air, without space, without greenery, which we so inappropriately call houses. On reaching this spot, his horse drew up of its own accord, as though from force of habit, but after a long look at two of the windows, the curtains of which were closely drawn as if to defy too curious inquiry from without, Amaury continued his way, not, however, without looking back more than once, not without satisfying himself by consulting his watch that the hour had not yet arrived which would open the doors to him.

The only thing therefore for our young hero to do was to kill time: so he dismounted at Lepage's Gallery, and amused himself by shooting first at dolls, then at eggs, and finally at a minute mark.

All games of skill arouse the wish to excel. So in spite of the fact that our young marksman had no other spectators but the loaders, as he was an admirable shot, and they had nothing else to do than to stand round and watch him, he was able to dispose very satisfactorily of three quarters of an hour or so at this sport. Then he remounted, galloped off towards the Bois, and in a few minutes found himself at the Avenue Madrid. There he met one of his friends, with whom he spent half-an-hour discussing the latest steeple-chase, and the coming races at Chantilly.

They were then joined by a third friend, whom they came across at the Porte St. James. The friend in question was but three days returned from the East, and his descriptions of social life at Cairo and Constantinople were so interesting, that another hour passed by without seeming too excessively long. But this hour gone, our hero could no longer restrain himself, and wishing his two friends goodbye, he galloped off. Then, without drawing rein or slackening his pace, he returned, straight as an arrow, to that end of the Rue d'Angoulême which opens on to the Champs Elysées.

There he pulled up, looked at his watch and, seeing that it was now one o'clock, he dismounted, threw the reins to his groom, approached the house before which he had stopped some hours earlier, and rang the bell.

If Amaury were diffident, this diffidence seemed rather unaccountable, as by the smile with which the servants greeted him, from the *concierge* who opened the door, to the footman in the hall, it was very evident he was no stranger to the house.

So too, when the visitor asked if Monsieur d'Avrigny were at home, the servant replied as to one for whom the usual conventionalities might naturally be relaxed.

"No! sir! but the ladies are in the small drawing-room."

Then as he was about to announce him, Amaury waved him aside, and with the assurance of an old friend of the family, went along a narrow passage, on to which all the doors opened, and soon reached the small drawing-room, the door of which being ajar, enabled him to see into the room.

For one moment he stood in the doorway. Two young girls of eighteen and nineteen were seated facing each other embroidering at the same frame, whilst in the window recess their old English governess had just put down her book, and was gazing affectionately at her two pupils.

The highest conception of painting, that queen of the arts, could not have reproduced a more charming picture than that formed by the two young girls; the two faces, almost touching one another, were such a contrast both in character and appearance, that one might have imagined Raphael himself had brought them together as a study of two distinct types, equally beautiful though utterly different.

One of the young girls was fair and pale with long hair curled in the English fashion, blue eyes, and a neck perhaps a shade too long; she seemed a fragile and delicate maiden, born to float on the mists swept by the north wind round the summits of the bleak mountains of Scotland, or through the foggy valleys of Great Britain; one of those visions half-human, half-fairy, which Shakespeare alone has conceived, and transformed by sheer force of genius, from the fantastic to the real delightful creations which, before his birth, no one had ever imagined, since his death, no one has ever equalled, and to which he gave such sweet names as Cordelia, Ophelia, or Miranda.

Her companion, on the other hand, had black hair, which she wore plaited; a brilliant complexion, sparkling eyes, rich red lips, and a bright, sparkling manner; she reminded one of those maidens, bronzed by the suns of Italy, whom Boccaccio brings together in the Villa Palmieri, to listen to the gay tales of the Decameron. She was overflowing with life and health, thoughts which she could not put into words were reflected in her expressive face. If at times sad, for none however happy but have their moments of sadness, her melancholy could never entirely cloud her usually cheerful expression; behind her sadness one could always feel her smile, as the sun peeps out from behind the thunder-cloud.

Such were the two girls, who, as we have already said, seated opposite to each other, and bending over the same embroidery frame, worked at a bunch of flowers, which grew under their dainty fingers; and, each true to her character, the one created lilies and pale hyacinths, whilst the other shaded with living colours tulips, auriculas, and carnations.

After a moment or two of quiet contemplation, the young man pushed open the door.

At the sound both girls turned and uttered a little cry, like two gazelles caught unawares; the only difference was that a bright but fleeting blush suffused the fair girl’s face, whilst, on the other hand, her companion grew imperceptibly paler.

“I see that I should not have entered unannounced,” said the young man, as he advanced eagerly towards the fair young girl, taking no notice of her friend, “because I startled you, Madeleine. Forgive me, Madeleine; somehow I always consider myself Monsieur d’Avrigny’s adopted son, and act as if I were still living in the house.”

“Quite right, Amaury,” answered Madeleine. “Besides, I do not believe you could act differently, even if you tried; six weeks cannot change the habits of eighteen years. But you have not yet wished Antoinette good-morning.”

Smiling the young man held out his hand to the dark girl.

“Excuse my seeming rudeness, dear Antoinette,” he said; “but I felt I must ask forgiveness for my awkwardness from her whom my awkwardness alarmed. I heard Madeleine cry out, and hastened at once to her.”

Then turning to the governess he said, “How do you do, Miss Brown?”

Antoinette smiled half sadly, as she returned the young man’s grasp, because she knew that she too had uttered a cry, but Amaury had not noticed it.

As to Miss Brown, she saw nothing, or rather she saw everything, but did not look below the surface.

“You need make no excuses, my dear Count,” she said; “on the contrary, it is a pity others do not more often follow your example, if only to cure this dear child of her foolish terrors and sudden alarms. Do you know what is the cause of it all? her habit of dreaming. She lives in a world of her own into which she retires when wearied with the real world. What happens in that other world? I cannot tell. I only know that if this goes on, she will end by giving up the one for the other, and then her dream will become her life, whilst her life will become the dream.”

Madeleine turned to the young Count with a sweet steady look, which plainly said: “You know of whom I am thinking in my dreams. Amaury, do you not?”

Antoinette caught this look, she remained standing motionless for one moment, then instead of sitting down again at the frame, moved to the piano, and let her fingers stray lightly over the keys into one of Thalberg’s fantasias.

Madeleine took up her work, and Amaury seated himself beside her.

CHAPTER II.

"HOW IT pains me, my dear Made1eine," whispered Amaury, "that we are now so rarely alone and free to talk! Is it by chance or by your father's orders?"

"Alas! I do not know," answered the girl, "but be sure I suffer just as much as you do. When we were able to see each other every day, and at every hour of the day, we did not sufficiently appreciate our happiness; it is so in everything, — to make us long for the sun, we must first have felt the shadow."

"But, could you not tell Antoinette, or at least hint to her, that by sometimes keeping good old Miss Brown away, she would be doing us a great kindness; I think she remains on here more from force of habit than motives of prudence, and I do not believe your father has ever given her positive orders to keep us always in sight."

"I have thought of doing so twenty times over, Amaury, but I really cannot account for the feeling which always hinders me. The instant I open my lips to speak of you to my cousin, my voice fails, and yet what can I tell her which she does not know already? She knows how I love you."

"Yes! and I know it too, Madeleine; but I want to hear you say it openly. Look dear, you know how happy it makes me to see you, but truly I think I would rather deprive myself of this happiness than have to meet you always before strangers, before cold and indifferent people in whose presence your dear voice changes, and you disguise your feelings. Why, even at this moment you cannot tell how this restraint chafes me."

Madeleine rose with a smile on her face. "Amaury," she said, "will you come with me into the garden and greenhouse to pick some flowers? I am painting a nosegay from nature, and as mine of yesterday is faded, I must have a fresh one."

Antoinette got up quickly.

"Madeleine," she said, as the two girls exchanged a meaning glance, "it is not wise for you to go out this dull, cold weather. Let me do this for you, and I know that I shall carry it out with credit to myself. My dear Miss Brown," she said, "will you be good enough to fetch the nosegay which you will find in a Japanese vase on the small round buhl table in Madeleine's room, and bring it to me in the garden; only by having the old one before my eyes, can I arrange another exactly like it."

So saying, Antoinette stepped out by one of the windows opening to the ground, and walked down a flight of steps into the garden, whilst Miss Brown, who had received no instructions with regard to the two young people, and who well knew the strong affection which existed between them from childhood, opened a side door, and went out of the room, without making any remark.

Amaury's eyes followed the governess out of the room, then as soon as he found himself alone with the young girl, he seized her hand.

"At last, Madeleine dear," he said, with a look of passionate love, "we are alone for a moment. Look at me, darling. Tell me again and again that you love me, because truly, since the unaccountable change in your father's manner towards me, I begin to doubt everything. You know that I am yours body and soul; you know that I love you!"

"Oh yes!" answered the girl, with one of those sighs of joy which relieve the over-full heart, "yes, tell me again that you love me, because sometimes, frail creature that I am, it seems your great love alone which keeps me alive. When you are with me, Amaury, I breathe freely, I feel strong. Before you come, after you have gone, my heart dies within me; and now that you no longer live with us, you are so often away. How long must it be before it is my right to be always with you, — you who are my life, my soul?"

"Listen, Madeleine, whatever happens, I shall write to your father this very night."

"And what do you suppose can happen but that our childhood's dreams will at last be realised? Since you are twenty, and I fifteen, have we not always felt ourselves destined for each other? Write boldly to my father, Amaury, and you will see that he cannot refuse to listen to your letter on the one hand and my entreaties on the other."

"I wish I felt equally confident, Madeleine, but really your father's manner has I greatly changed towards me of late. After treating me for fifteen years as his own son, has he not little by little assumed towards me the attitude of a stranger?

After living in this house like your brother, now when I come into the room without warning, you utter a cry of alarm."

"Ah! that cry was one of joy, Amaury; your presence can never take me by surprise, for I am always expecting you; but I am now so weak and nervous that I cannot control my feelings. You must be lenient with me, dearest, and treat me like that sensitive plant which we amused ourselves with tormenting the other day, not thinking that it too has life, as we have, and that very probably we were hurting it. Well! I am like the sensitive plant; to feel you near me gives me that sense of security which, as a child, I felt when on my mother's knee. God, in taking her from me, has given me you instead. To her I owe the first part of my life, the second, I owe to you. She brought me to the light of day, you to the light of the soul. Amaury, to make me wholly yours, be often with me."

"Always, always," cried Amaury, taking the girl's hand, and pressing it to his burning lips; "oh! Madeleine, I love you, I love you!"

But at the touch of his kiss, the poor child started up, flushed and trembling, and, putting her hand to her side, said: "Oh! no, no! your voice is too passionate, it frightens me; your lips are burning. Restrain yourself, I do beseech you. Do remember the poor sensitive plant; I went to look at it yesterday, but it was dead."

"Well! well! Madeleine, it shall be as you wish. Sit down again, dear, and let me lie on this cushion at your feet, and since my love frightens you, well, I must content myself with a brotherly chat. Thank Heaven! your cheeks look natural again; they have lost that hectic flush which they had awhile ago, and that deadly pallor which overspread them when I came in so suddenly. You are better again, you are well, Madeleine, my sister, my sweetheart.

The girl sank down, rather than sat in the armchair, supporting herself on her elbow, and let her face, shaded by her long fair hair, fall forward, the tips of her curls brushing against the young man's forehead.

In this attitude her breath mingled with her lover's.

"Yes," she said, "yes Amaury, you can make me blush and grew pale at will.

You are to me what the sun is to the flowers."

"Oh! how intoxicating to thus make you blush with a look — revive with a word! Madeleine, I love you, I love you."

A silence fell between the two young people, and their very souls seemed to meet in that look.

Suddenly they heard a slight noise in the room. Madeleine raised her head, Amaury turned round.

Monsieur d’Avrigny was standing behind them, with a look of anger on his face.

“My father!” cried Madeleine, throwing herself back in her chair.

“My dear guardian!” said Amaury awkwardly, as he rose and bowed to him.

Monsieur d’Avrigny made no reply, but slowly took off his gloves and placed his hat on a chair, and, still without moving from the same spot, after a moment’s silence which seemed like an hour’s torture to the two young people, he said in a harsh grating voice:

“What! here again, Amaury! you are likely to become a very accomplished diplomat, if you continue thus to study politics in ladies’ boudoirs, and to make yourself acquainted with the wants and interests of the masses, by seeing how embroidery is made! You are sure not to remain long a simple attaché, but are certain to have rapid promotion as first Secretary in London or St. Petersburg, if you practise so industriously to fathom the depths of thought of a Talleyrand or a Metternich, in the company of a schoolgirl.”

“Sir,” Amaury replied, in a tone in which filial affection struggled with hurt pride, “perhaps in your eyes I neglect somewhat the studies necessary to the career you have been good enough to choose for me, but the Minister has never reproached me with any such neglect, and only yesterday, when reading over to him certain documents which he had given me — .”

“The Minister has given you documents to draw up, you! on what subject? on the forming of a second jockey-club, on the rules of boxing or fencing, on the laws of sport in general, or steeple-chasing in particular? Ah! then, I am no longer surprised, he was well satisfied.”

“But, my dear guardian,” Amaury replied with a slight smile, “may I remind you that it is to your almost fatherly solicitude I am indebted for these elegant accomplishments with which you now reproach me. You have always impressed upon me that fencing and riding, together with a knowledge of the two or three foreign languages I have mastered, are essential to the education of a gentleman of the nineteenth century.”

“Oh! I am well aware of that fact, sir, when he uses these accomplishments as a distraction from serious work, but not when he turns serious work into a foil for pleasure. You are truly an exact type of the man of the present day, who imagines science is to be mastered without hard study, and who, after spending an hour in the morning at the Chamber, an hour at the Sorbonne in the afternoon, an hour at the theatre in the evening, poses as a Mirabeau, a Cuvier, a Geoffrey, proclaiming aloud his genius, and contemptuously tossing his drawing-room judgment into the scale where the destinies of the world are weighed. You say the Minister congratulated you yesterday? very well, live on these great expectations, discount these pompous praises, and when the day of reckoning comes, fate will leave you bankrupt. Because at twenty-three, guided by an accommodating guardian, you find yourself doctor of law, bachelor of arts, attaché at the Embassy, because you are privileged to attend the lévees at Court in a uniform with gold embroidery on the collar; because the Legion of Honor has perhaps been promised you as to many others to whom it still remains but a promise, you seem to think that all is accomplished and that fortune can bring you nothing more. I am rich, you say, therefore I need do nothing; and as a result of this clever reasoning, your title of gentleman degenerates into a brevet for idleness.”

“But, father, dear,” cried Madeleine, alarmed at Monsieur d’Avrigny’s increasing anger, “what are you saying? I have never heard you speak to Amaury in this way before.”

“Sir! sir!” stammered the young fellow.

“Yes!” continued Monsieur d’Avrigny more calmly, but more bitterly, “my reproaches wound you, because you know how well they are deserved, is it not so? Well! you must get used to them, if you continue spending your time in such an aimless fashion, or else, you must make up your mind to cease visiting a cross and exacting guardian. Oh! it is only since yesterday that you have become your own master. The power over you which my old friend, the Comte de Léoville bequeathed to me, no longer legally exists now, but, morally, I feel the same responsibility; and it is my duty to warn you that in these troublous times, when wealth and honours depend on the caprice of the masses, or a rising of the people, one should only rely upon oneself, and that millionaire and nobleman though you be, a father of good position would but be acting wisely in refusing you the hand of his daughter, remembering that your success in racing, and your rank at the jockey-club are not considerations of any serious importance.”

Monsieur d’Avrigny’s excitement increased as he spoke, he strode up and down the room, neither looking at his daughter, who was trembling like a leaf, nor at Amaury who stood with knitted brows.

The young man, whom respect alone kept silent, looked from Monsieur d'Avrigny, powerless to understand the cause of his anger, to Madeleine who was as astounded as himself.

"Do you mean to say," continued Monsieur d'Avrigny, standing before the two young people, who were struck dumb by his sudden anger, "do you mean to say that you did not understand why I asked you to give up living with us? It is because I think it most unsuitable that a young man of birth and fortune should spend his time playing with girls; because what is all *very* well when twelve years old, becomes ridiculous at twenty- three; because, after all, my daughter's future, although in no way connected with yours, might suffer equally with your own from these repeated visits."

"Oh, sir! sir!" cried Amaury, "in pity spare Madeleine. Can you not see that you are killing her?"

For Madeleine, white as death, had fallen back motionless into her chair, struck to the heart by her father's terrible words.

"My daughter, my daughter!" exclaimed Monsieur d'Avrigny, turning as pale as she, "my daughter! Ah! it is you, Amaury, who are killing her."

And going up to Madeleine, he took her in his arms, as if she were a child, and carried her into the adjoining room.

Amaury wished to follow him.

"Remain where you are, sir," he said, turning on the threshold. "I order you."

"But," cried Amaury, clasping his hands, "she needs help."

"Well!" returned Monsieur d'Avrigny, "am I not a doctor?"

"I beg your pardon sir," stammered the poor young fellow, "but I thought — I should have been glad to remain at hand, in case — ."

"Many thanks, my good sir, many thanks for your solicitude. But rest content — Madeleine is with her father, and I will look after her myself. Therefore take care of yourself, and good-bye!"

"Good-bye for the present," said the young fellow hesitatingly.

"Oh! good-bye," Monsieur d'Avrigny replied coldly; and with his foot he pushed open the door, which closed on himself and Madeleine.

Amaury stood still a moment, motionless, crushed.

Just then a bell rang, summoning the maid; at the same moment, Antoinette re-entered the room with Miss Brown.

"Good Heavens! what is the matter?" cried Antoinette, "why are you so pale and unnerved? Where is Madeleine?"

“She is dying! dying!” exclaimed the young man. “Do go to her, Miss Brown; she badly needs your help.”

Miss Brown walked hurriedly towards the room which Amaury pointed out.

“But why do you not go in too?” asked Antoinette.

“Because he has forbidden me to do so,” answered Amaury.

“Who has?”

“He! Monsieur d’Avrigny! Madeleine’s father.”

And snatching up his hat and gloves, the young man rushed like a madman from the room.

CHAPTER III.

ON reaching home, he found a friend ‘waiting to see him. his was a young barrister, his schoolfellow at St. Barbe and afterwards at the Ecole de Droit and the University. He and Amaury were about the same age; but, although he was of independent means, with an income of some 20,000 francs a year, he was of humble birth, none of his ancestors having ever been great or famous. His name was Philip Auvray.

Amaury was apprised by his valet of this untimely visit, and, for one moment, he thought of going straight to his bedroom and leaving Philip to wait until he was tired of waiting. But Philip was such a good fellow, that Amaury felt it would be too bad to treat him so. He therefore entered the little study into which his friend had been shown.

As he entered the room, Philip rose, and came towards him.

“Well! old fellow,” said the young barrister, “I have been waiting for you nearly an hour. I was getting very impatient, and had just decided to leave; in fact, I would have done so long ago, had I not wished to ask your advice on a most important matter.”

“My dear Philip,” said Amaury, “we are such fast friends, that I know you will not feel hurt at what I am going to say. Have you lost at cards, or have you a duel on hand, — the only two things which cannot be put off; must the money be found to-day? have you’ to fight tomorrow? In either case my purse and myself are entirely at your service.”

“No,” said Philip, “it is something far more important, but manifestly less pressing.”

“In that case, dear friend,” said Amaury, “I must ask you to postpone to another day whatever you may have to tell me, as one of those things has just befallen me which thoroughly unnerve a man. I have no heart for anything. In spite of our great friendship, whatever you might say would be sheer waste of words.”

“My poor fellow,” said Philip, “but I, cannot I do something for you?”

“Nothing, but to put off for a few days what you wished to consult me about; nothing, but to leave me to myself and my troubles.”

“You unhappy! Amaury unhappy! Amaury who can boast of one of the most envied names, and one of the largest fortunes in France? Is it possible that the Comte de Léoville with a hundred thousand francs a year can be unhappy! Faith! had you not yourself said so, I could not have believed it.”

“Well! it is nevertheless true, old friend — yes! yes! miserable... most miserable! and it seems to me that when our friends are in trouble, the greatest kindness we can show them is to leave them to themselves, and their sorrow. You do not know what trouble means, Philip, unless you can understand this.”

“Whether I understand or not, Amaury, you know full well that I always do what you ask me. You wish to be alone, dear old fellow — then goodbye, goodbye.”

“Goodbye,” said Amaury, as he flung himself into an armchair.

Just as Philip was closing the door, he said:

“Philip, tell my valet that I am at home to no one, and do not wish to be disturbed on any pretext whatever, unless I ring.”

Philip signed to his friend that he would do as he wished, and after speaking to the valet, he went away, vainly trying to understand what could have happened to plunge Amaury in such deep distress.

As to Amaury, when he found himself alone, he let his head fall between his hands, trying to think what he could possibly have done to deserve his guardian’s anger, and although in a moment his whole life passed before him, he could discover no explanation of this sudden displeasure which had so unexpectedly burst upon him.

As we have already said, Amaury was one of those singularly gifted men who are Fortune’s favourites. Kindly nature had made him handsome, elegant, and distinguished looking, and his father had bequeathed him an old and honoured name, to which the wars of the Empire had added renewed lustre, and a fortune of more than a million and a half. He had appointed Monsieur d’Avrigny, an old friend of his, and one of the most noted physicians of the day, guardian to his son.

Moreover Amaury knew that his guardian had so ably managed his fortune, that it had now increased by nearly a third.

But Monsieur d’Avrigny had not only looked after his ward’s fortune, he had himself superintended his education, as if he had been his own son.

The result was that Amaury, brought up with Madeleine, and only three or four years her senior, had learned to love most tenderly one who looked upon him only as a brother, and had a more than brotherly affection for her whom he had so long called his sister.

And thus from childhood, these two children, in their sweet innocence and purity of heart, had vowed never to be parted from one another.

The great love which Monsieur d’Avrigny had borne his young wife, who died from consumption when only twenty- three, he now lavished on his daughter, and the almost fatherly affection which Amaury knew he had inspired in Monsieur d’Avrigny, contributed to make the young people sure of his consent; they never for one moment doubted it.

Everything had therefore conspired to delude them with vain hopes of one and the same future, and it was their unceasing subject of conversation ever since they had awakened to a consciousness of the deep love that lay in their hearts for one another.

As Monsieur d’Avrigny was frequently absent from home, being obliged to devote himself almost entirely to his practice, to the hospital of which he was a director, to the *Institut*, of which he was a member, this gave them many opportunities of building these delusive castles in the air to which memory of the past and hope for the future imparted the apparent solidity of granite.

It was at this stage of their life, Madeleine having reached her seventeenth year, and Amaury being twenty-two, that Monsieur d’Avrigny’s usually pleasant genial manner suddenly changed towards them both.

At first they thought the alteration was due to the death of a sister, who was very dear to him, and whose daughter, also a girl of seventeen, was Madeleine’s constant companion and shared her studies and her pleasures.

But days and months passed by, and Monsieur d’Avrigny, instead of looking happier, grew more and more gloomy every day, and strangely enough, it was nearly always Amaury who had to bear the brunt of his displeasure, without knowing why or wherefore, or else Madeleine, the child whom he worshipped, and on whom from her earliest days he had lavished that priceless love which usually a mother alone can give. Then, by an equally strange caprice, it was now bright playful Antoinette who seemed to be Monsieur d’Avrigny’s favourite, and who was permitted to speak to him in a way which, hitherto, Madeleine alone had been privileged to do.

But more than this, Monsieur d’Avrigny was continually praising Antoinette in Amaury’s presence, and had more than once hinted that Amaury would best please his guardian by abandoning the hope which he himself had so long encouraged between his ward and his daughter, and by transferring his affections to this niece whom he had adopted as an inmate of his home and on whom he seemed to have bestowed all his visible affection.

Meanwhile Amaury and Madeleine, blinded by their usual happy intercourse, saw nothing so very strange in Monsieur d’Avrigny’s passing displeasure — and never dreamed of a real trouble.

Their implicit confidence and trust in each other had thus remained unchanged, when one day as they were running round the billiard-table like the two children they were, Madeleine defending herself from Amaury, who tried to snatch a flower from her, the door suddenly opened and Monsieur d’Avrigny appeared.

“Well,” said he, with that bitterness which was now apparent whenever he addressed them, “what in the world is the meaning of this child’s play? Are you still a little girl of ten, Madeleine? or you, Amaury, a boy of fifteen? Do you think you are running round the lawn at the Château de Léoville? Why do you wish to take that flower from Madeleine? who is quite right in refusing to let you have it. I thought that only shepherds and shepherdesses at the opera performed these extraordinary gyrations; evidently I was mistaken.”

“But, father,” ventured Madeleine, who at first thought that he was only joking, but now perceived that, on the contrary, he had never been more in earnest, “but, father, only yesterday — ”

“Yesterday is no longer to-day, Madeleine; if you wish always to live in the past, you must renounce the future. And since you are so willing to go back to your childish games, pray why have you given up your dolls and your toys? If you do not realize that, as you grow older, certain duties and proprieties have to be observed, then it is my duty to remind you of the fact.”

“But, my dear guardian,” protested Amaury, “I think you are rather hard on us. You say that we are too childish! Why! you yourself have often told me that one of the evils of this century is that children so soon wish to become men!”

“Have I indeed ever told you that, sir? That may perhaps apply to young students who have just left college, and think that they are going to reform the world — to those Richelieus who are ‘blasé ‘at twenty, to those embryo poets who, out of disenchantment, create a tenth muse. But for you, my dear Amaury, if not because of your age, then because of your rank, you should take things more seriously. If you are not really in earnest, at least pretend that you are; however, I have come this time to have a serious talk with you. You had better leave the room, Madeleine.”

Madeleine rose to go, and as she did so, cast one of those pleading looks at her father which formerly softened his anger in a moment.

But Monsieur d’Avrigny remained cold and angry, for he remembered for whom these lovely eyes were pleading.

Left alone with Amaury, Monsieur d’Avrigny paced up and down the room for some time, without saying a word, whilst Amaury followed each step with anxious eyes. At last he stopped opposite the young man, and without relaxing his severe expression, said:

“Amaury, I should perhaps have told you long ago what I now feel it my duty to say at once, and which I blame myself for not having mentioned sooner; it is that I no longer consider it suitable that you, a young man of twenty-one, should continue to live in the same house as two young girls who are not related to you in any way. It is not without regret that I have come to this decision, and that is perhaps why I have delayed so long before telling you that this separation is absolutely necessary. But after to-day, any further delay on my part would be unpardonable. Do not therefore argue with me, it would be quite useless; make no objections, they would not convince me; my mind is made up on this point, and nothing can alter it.”

“But my dear, kind guardian,” said Amaury, his voice trembling with emotion, “it always gave me pleasure to think that you were so used to having me with you and looking upon me as your son, that you now considered me an actual member of your family, or at least that, one day, I might hope to become so in reality. Have I unconsciously offended you? And do you no longer love me, that you condemn me to this exile?”

“My dear boy,” said Monsieur d’Avrigny, “it seems to me that I had only an account of my guardianship to give you, and that being satisfactorily settled, we are quits?”

“You are mistaken, sir,” replied Amaury, “because I at least must always feel indebted to you; I can never forget all your kindness; you have been more than a faithful guardian, you have been to me a tender, watchful father. It is you who have brought me up, you who have made me what I am, you who have instilled into me whatever good there is in my heart and soul; you have been to me all that one man can be to another, guardian, father, tutor, guide and friend. I owe you, therefore, above everything, implicit obedience, and I can best prove this by leaving you. Farewell, father, I hope that some day you will recall your son.”

At these words, Amaury approached Monsieur d’Avrigny, and, almost against his will, took his hand and pressed it to his lips; this done, he immediately left the room.

The next day he sent in his card to Monsieur d’Avrigny, as if he already were a stranger and informed him in a firm voice which belied the moisture in his eyes, that he had rented a small house in the Rue des Mathurins, that his belongings were being removed there, and that he came to wish him good-bye.

Madeleine was in the room; she hung her head, poor broken lily, chilled by the cold breath of fatherly caprice, and as she stealthily raised her eyes to look at Amaury, her father noticed her face so white and drawn that he started.

Then, doubtless, Monsieur d’Avrigny realized that his unaccountable behaviour must appear hateful in his daughter’s eyes, and his severity relaxed a little, as, holding out his hand to Amaury, he said:

“Amaury, you have quite mistaken my motives; this parting does not mean exile. Far from it, this house will always be your home, and whenever you wish to come, you will be welcome.”

Monsieur d’Avrigny was rewarded by seeing a look of joy light up his daughter’s sad face and a faint smile hover round her lips.

But, as if Amaury had already understood that this concession was only due to his daughter’s sadness, he bowed humbly to his guardian, kissed Madeleine’s hand, but with so sorrowful an air that all thought of love seemed swallowed up in pain. Then he left the house.

Only now, when they were parted from each other, did these two young people realize how great was their love, and how indispensable they were to each other’s existence.

The longings to be together when apart, the sudden emotion felt when the loved one enters the room, the fits of unaccountable joy, then sadness, which are the usual symptoms of that sickness of the mind which we call love, were all severally experienced by our young lovers. Nothing of this escaped Monsieur d’Avrigny’s watchful eye, and more than once he had seemed to regret having allowed Amaury to visit at the house, when the scene which we have just described took place.

All these events, therefore, passed before Amaury’s eyes, as we have brought them before the reader’s notice, and yet the young fellow, although he taxed his memory most severely, could find no adequate reason for the sudden change.

At last it occurred to him that the only thing which could reasonably explain his guardian’s strange conduct was that, believing his marriage with Madeleine an understood thing, he had never spoken to Monsieur d’Avrigny on the subject. Could Monsieur d’Avrigny have thought that although living under his roof, then continuing to visit at the house when he no longer lived there, he had made other plans for the future than those which he had at first attributed to him?

It suddenly struck him that his silence had been misconstrued, and that, all unwittingly, he had wounded his guardian’s fatherly pride; he therefore decided to write a formal letter to Monsieur d’Avrigny, asking the hand of his daughter in marriage.

This decision arrived at, he set about putting it into execution at once and wrote the following letter.

CHAPTER IV.

“SIR,

“I am twenty-three years of age; my name, one of the most ancient in France, is Amaury de Léoville, a name revered in the council, and illustrious in the Army.

“An only son, I inherit from my father and mother, who are both dead, a fortune of nearly three million francs in landed property, which brings me in an annual income of about a hundred thousand a year.

“I state quite frankly these several advantages which have come to me by chance and not through any merit of my own, and which induce me to hope that with this fortune, this name, and the influence of those who love me, I may eventually reach the zenith of the career which I have entered upon — that of diplomacy.

“Sir, I have the honour to ask the hand of your daughter, Mlle. Madeleine d’Avrigny, in marriage.”

“MY DEAR GUARDIAN, “Enclosed you will find my formal epistle to Monsieur d’Avrigny, exact to a letter, dry to a fault.

“And now will you allow your child to speak to you out of the gratitude and fullness of his heart?

“I love Madeleine, and I hope that she loves me; and if we have delayed in making this confession to you, it is because we ourselves were ignorant of it.

“Our love has grown so gradually, then suddenly awakened so quickly, that it has surprised us both like a clap of thunder on a cloudless summer’s day. She and I have been brought up together, sharing your warm affection, and when the brotherly love which I once had for her changed to that of a lover, I myself was scarcely aware of it. I hope presently to prove to you the truth of what I say.

“To my surprise I can still remember the games and childish caresses of our early days, passed in your beautiful country house at Ville-d’Auray, with only dear Miss Brown to look after us both.

“I always called ‘Madeleine ‘by her name, and she always said ‘Amaury ‘; we wandered in the shadowy dells, from the depths of which we watched the setting sun; in the long summer evenings we danced beneath the chestnut trees in the park; we spent long days on the river, and took endless walks in the forest. My dear Guardian, those were indeed halcyon days.

"Why should our lives, which mingled at the dawn, be torn apart before they reach the noon-day?

"Why, as you already call me your son, may I not be so in reality?

"Why may not Madeleine and I again take up the dear old ways?

"Why may I no longer call her 'Madeleine,' and she no more say 'Amaury '?

"It all seems to me so simple, that I am dismayed and imagine endless difficulties; but there are none in reality, are there, my dear Guardian?

"Can it be that you think me too young and perhaps too frivolous? but I am four years older than Madeleine, and this frivolity is not a part of myself. As you know, I am not naturally frivolous, but have become so simply because you wished it.

"And I can give up all these passing pleasures at a word from you or a sign from Madeleine, for I love her as dearly as I respect you. I swear I can make her happy, and the younger I am, the longer shall I have in which to make her so. Oh, God! my life, my whole life belongs to her.

"You who love Madeleine, know well, that to love her once is to love her for ever.

"How is it possible to cease from loving her? it is madness even to think of it. To see her, to gaze on her beauty, to fathom the wealth of goodness, love, faith and purity, which is hers, is to be overwhelmed; she is the one woman in the world, and for me will be the only angel in heaven. Oh! my guardian, my father. I love her passionately. As the words come into my mind, I write them, without rhyme or reason; which must prove to you that I love her madly.

"Give her to me, dear father, and remain with us to guide us.

"There is no need for you to leave us, you will watch over our happiness, and if you ever detect in dear Madeleine's eyes a single tear, be it of sorrow or of pain, and that this sadness is caused through me, take any weapon you may choose, blow out my brains, or stab me to the heart, and you will be committing but an act of justice, you will be doing only what is right.

"But you need have no fear, Madeleine will never have cause to weep.

"Good heavens! who could be so cruel as to make this angel weep? a child so delicate, so tender, so sweet, that she is wounded by a harsh word, crushed by a jealous thought. Why! such a man would be a coward, and you well know, my dear guardian, that, at any rate, I am not a coward.

“Therefore, my father, your daughter will be happy. See, I already call you father, surely a sweet custom which you do not wish me to discontinue. Yet, lately, there is a harshness in your manner which, for me, was never there before; surely that must be because I have delayed so long in writing you on the subject nearest my heart.

“But I think that now I have discovered a simple way of justifying myself in your eyes, a way which you have yourself pointed out to me.

“You are annoyed because you think I have not been frank with you; because I have hidden from you as if it were a wrong, this love which should not and surely cannot offend you. Well! read my heart as God reads it, and you will see whether I am guilty.

“As you know, each night I write in my diary what I have thought and done during the day; this is a habit which you have taught me from childhood, and which you yourself, though busied with so many serious duties, have never once failed to keep up.

“Alone, face to face with our own selves, we can each of us judge fairly of our actions, and every morning have a truer knowledge of our inner nature.

“This fixed habit of self-analysis, this criticism of conduct, is sufficient to impart fairness to all one’s actions, and a sense of completeness to one’s life.

“I have always continued the habit, which I learned from you, and am now, more than ever, thankful to have done so, as it enables me to place before you the open book of my mind, which if not blameless, is, at least, candid.

“You will see reflected in this mirror my increasing love, though all unknown to myself; for I do assure you that, until the day when you parted us, I did not realize how dear Madeline had become to me, I did not know how well I loved her, until confronted by the fear that I might lose her. When you know me as I now know myself, you will then be in a position to judge whether or no I deserve the loss of your esteem.

“Therefore, dear father, although confident of your affection, I await with impatience and anguish your sentence on my future.

“It is in your hands, and as I pray to God, so do I beseech you, in mercy do not dash my fondest hopes to the ground.

“Ah! when shall I know whether you sentence me to life or death? A single night, a single hour! how interminable it sometimes seems.

“Farewell, dear guardian, God grant that the father in you may soften the judge. Farewell.

“Pray pardon the disconnectedness of this epistle, which I began in the formal manner of a business letter, but must end with a cry wrung from my heart, and which will surely find an echo in your own.

“I love Madeleine, dear father. It is death to me, if God or you should separate us.

“Your affectionate and grateful ward, “AMAURY DE LEOVILLE.”

Having written this letter, Amaury took the diary in which he had inscribed day by day his thoughts, his feelings, the events of his life.

He made a parcel of the whole, which he addressed to Monsieur d’Avrigny, and ringing for his valet, gave orders for the parcel to be taken at once to its destination.

Then, the young man, filled with uncertainty and anxiety, waited for a reply.

CHAPTER V.

AT the very time when Amaury was sending off his letter, Monsieur d'Avrigny came out of his daughter's room, and shut himself into his study.

He was pale and trembling; traces of a deep sorrow were visible on his face; he quietly went up to a table strewn with papers and books, with a deep sigh let his head fall between his hands, and remained for some time plunged in deep thought.

Then he roused himself, paced up and down the room with an agitated step, took from his pocket a small key which for a few seconds he turned over and over in his fingers, then, finally, unlocking his desk, he took from it a book, which he laid on the writing table.

It was his diary, in which, like Amaury, he wrote down each event of the day.

He remained standing for some little time, with his hand resting on the desk, reading aloud the last lines which he had written on the previous evening.

At last, with the triumphant look of a man who has conquered himself, and come to a painful resolution, he sat down, seized his pen, rested his trembling hand on the paper before him, and, after a moment's hesitation, wrote as follows:

"Friday, 12th May, 5 p m.

"Thank God! Madeleine is better; she is now asleep.

"I gave orders for her room to be darkened, and by the light of her night lamp watched the colour gradually come back to her cheeks, and her breathing grow calm and regular. Then, after pressing my lips to her moist yet burning brow, I left the room on tip-toe.

"Antoinette and Miss Brown are watching by her, and now here I sit face to face with my conscience, which condemns me.

"Yes, I have been unjust, I have been cruel; yes, I have, without a gleam of pity, mercilessly dealt a cruel blow to two pure young hearts that love each other. I have been the cause of my beloved daughter's fainting from grief, — poor frail child, who is overwhelmed by an unkind word.

"For the second time, I have forbidden my ward the house, he, the son of my best friend, who has so kindly a nature that even now I do not believe he suspects how wicked I am, nor the reason why.

“And what is my real reason? I scarcely dare own it even to myself.

“Here I am, pen in hand, with this diary open before me, in which are written all my thoughts, and yet I hesitate to put it in black and white.

“Why am I unjust? Why am I unkind? Why such unreasoning cruelty towards two beings who are dear to me?

“Because I am jealous!

“Everyone would not understand me, I know; but all fathers will; because I am jealous of my daughter, jealous of her love, jealous of her future, jealous of her life. It is a sad, sad thing to say, but it is the truth; even the best of us, — and do we not all believe ourselves to be in that category? — have thoughts of which we are ashamed, and terrible mental reservations; I, like Pascal, know this only too well.

“As a doctor, I have sounded in their death-agony, the depths of many hearts, of many consciences; but to analyse one’s own is the most difficult of all.

“When I think of her, as I do now, away from her presence, that is to say dispassionately, I make a firm resolution to conquer and to cure myself.

“Then, at the next impassioned look which I intercept between Madeleine and Amaury, it flashes across me that now I only hold the second place in my child’s affections, — she who has my whole heart; and the unreasoning instinct of fatherly egotism gains the day. I become blind, mad, furious. And yet, it is such a natural thing; he is 23, she is 19; they are young, good-looking, and they love each other. Formerly, when Madeleine was a child, I looked forward to their union with joyful anticipation, and now, in truth, I often ask myself whether my behaviour is either logical or reasonable, worthy of a man who is looked upon as an authority in the scientific world.

“An authority in the scientific world, because I was one of the first to penetrate into the mysteries of the human organization; because, by feeling a man’s pulse, I am able to diagnose accurately what he is suffering from; because I have been successful in curing certain diseases which others, less learned than myself, had pronounced incurable.

“But here my skill ceases; set me to cure any disease of the mind, and I am powerless, my pride is vanquished.

“Then are there not other diseases, before which all human skill is of no avail; one in particular which caused the death of the only woman I ever loved, Madeleine’s mother?

“Yes! yes! your young beautiful wife, who loves you and whom you love, is taken from you and returns to God, leaving you, as only comfort and supreme hope, an angel, her image, a younger and earlier picture of herself. You cling to this last joy as a shipwrecked man to his last plank, you kiss her little hand, which draws you back to life and love.

“The future is blighted, but another opens out before you, you may still find happiness in the blessing that is left; you merge your whole existence in that of this young frail creature; each breath she draws seems to rise from your own over-burdened heart.

“This world, which without your child, would be but a desert waste, wakes into life in her sweet presence, and is strewn with flowers under the touch of her tender feet.

“From the day you took her from her dying mother’s arms, you have never, for one moment, lost sight of her; you have surrounded her with watchful, loving care, whilst she played in the day, whilst she slept at night; you have anxiously watched her pulse, her breathing, growing anxious if a pallor overspread her face, or a flush mounted to her cheeks. Her fever has burnt your veins, her cough has racked your chest; and a hundred times have you parleyed with death, the grim spectre that keeps pace with us through life, walks ever at our side, unseen by all, except our unfortunate selves, whom science has so well taught; a hundred times have you told this dread spectre that by a touch may crush your flower, by a breath may destroy your re-awakened life, a hundred times have you said:

“‘Take me, and spare her life.’

“And death has turned away, not in answer to your prayer, but because the time had not yet come, and as the dread spectre fades away, you have taken fresh heart, even as, at its approach, all hope died out.

“But in seeing her whom you love return to life and strength, your whole longing is not yet satisfied, you still wish to mould her life and character.

“She is beautiful. Then to her beauty must be added grace.

“She is good. Then must you teach her the ethics of goodness.

“She is intellectual. Then must you lead her to cultivate her mind.

“From hour to hour, from thought to thought, from idea to idea, you form her mind, you guide her heart, you mould her soul. How beautiful she seems to you even now, and therefore how everyone else must admire her.

“She hesitates for others, but obeys your lightest word.

"She lisps? no, she talks.

"She spells? no, she reads.

"You make yourself a child like her, and are surprised to find that Perrault's fairy tales are far more interesting than Homer.

"An illustrious scholar, a famous poet, a noted statesman, whilst walking in your garden, discusses with you some of the most abstract questions of science, the grandest theories of poetry, or the most subtle deductions in politics. He thinks you wonderfully attentive to what he is saying, you incline your head and seem to be considering these combinations, these theories, these calculations.

"Poor statesman! poor poet! poor scholar 1

"If he only knew, you are in thought miles away from what he is speaking to you about, all that you see is your darling child playing in a neighbouring garden-path, and your only fear is, that running heedlessly, she may fall into that hateful pond, or that the dews of the evening may give her a chill.

"For you never forget that her mother died, when only twenty-two, from one of those relentless diseases which never allow their victim to escape.

"Meanwhile your Madeleine is growing, her mind is broadening, her imagination developing, she understands your meaning when you speak to her of poetry, of nature, of God. She is growing to love you otherwise than from mere instinct; already she is praised by everyone who knows her.

"She is pronounced charming by all; but, that she may lack nothing, is it not likewise needful for her to be rich? You want nothing for yourself, but for her the best is not too good.

"Therefore, to work! For her sake turn ambitious and miserly, make a crown of your fame for her, a treasure of your toil. State-bonds are uncertain, invest money for her in this rich farm; two short years' work, and it will be hers.

"To be wealthy is not sufficient, she must have luxury; her dainty little feet can scarcely bear her weight, therefore she must have a carriage, that will cost you a month's economy; why, it is not worth speaking about.

"If, poor father, you are tired in body, one look from her will rest you; if weary in mind, one smile will comfort you.

"Now that she has a farm, and a carriage, she must have jewels.

"Where is the father who would not wear himself out, body and soul, for his daughter's fair adorning? Each wrinkle on your brow has bought her a pearl; each white hair on your head is the cost of a ruby; only a few more drops of your blood and her casket will be complete. Thus at the sacrifice of five or six years out of your whole life, your daughter will be as richly attired as a queen.

"Besides, all these efforts, all this care, all this labour, is so much pleasure to you, and there is not long to wait for the reward; only a few months now, and the child will be a woman! What bliss, when at last her mind understands your every thought, her heart the full depth of your love!

"Then she will be to you friend, confidante, companion; she will be far more than this, no earthly feeling will mar your love for her, or hers for you; she will be an angel whom God has permitted to visit earth awhile.

"Yes! only a little more patience and you will reap what you have sown, your privations will bring you back untold wealth, and all your troubles will be changed into infinite joy.

"And lo! it is at this moment that a stranger passes by, sees your daughter, whispers three words into her ear, and at these three words she loves this stranger more than you; she leaves you for this stranger, and in this stranger's hands she places her whole life, which is your life.

"Yes! such is the law of nature; nature looks to the future.

"And what of you?... You! Never breathe a word of your pain; press your son-in-law's hand with a smiling face. Son-in-law! rather, I should say this thief, who robs you of your happiness; else others will say of you — :

"'Ho, ho. So Sganarelle does not wish his daughter Lucinde to marry Clitandre.'

"Has not Molière written a terrible comedy on this subject, 'L'amour Médecin,' a comedy, where, as in all Molière's plays, gaiety is but a mark covering a breaking heart?

"Ah! What do lovers mean when they talk of jealousy? What is the fury of the Moor of Venice, compared with the despair of Brabantio or Sachetto.

"Lovers! have *they* for twenty long years merged their life in that of the adored one?

"After having created her, have they twenty times over lost and rescued her?

"Can she be to them what she is to us poor fathers, their blood, their soul, their child? Their child! yes! that says all.

"She leaves them for another, and they cry aloud: It is a crime! But she had first deserted us for them, and they thought it natural enough!

“And yet I have not come to the worst of all, that for us our grief and despair are irreparable; but in losing their love, these lovers still retain the present, and look forward to the future. But we poor fathers! we fathers have to bid farewell to future, present, past, everything. Lovers are young, fathers are old.

“They are at their first love, we at our last emotion.

“If a husband be wronged or a lover betrayed, he will console himself with a hundred other mistresses, twenty subsequent passions will make these men forget their first love.

“But where can a father find another daughter?

“How dare these lovesick youths compare their despair to ours?

“Lovers die, where fathers sacrifice themselves; their love is one of pride, ours of devotion; they love their wives or their mistresses for their own. gratification.

“We love our daughters for their own sakes. Therefore let us submit to this last sacrifice, the most cruel of all. But what matters? were it a mortal wound, we must accept it; let not selfishness stain the thing that is most disinterested, most merciful, most divine on earth, — a father’s love. Let us cherish more tenderly this daughter, who now turns from us; let us become even kinder, as she grows more indifferent; let us even love him whom she loves, give her gladly to him who robs us of her.

“If we are sad, at least let us be generous. Is it not God’s will, God who loves those who turn from Him, God who is none other but our Father.

“Therefore, in two words, Amaury shall wed Madeleine, unless....

“Oh God! I dare write no more!”

“And, in truth, at these words the pen dropped from Monsieur d’Avrigny’s fingers, he heaved a profound sigh, and hid his face in his hands.

CHAPTER VI.

AT this moment the door of his study opened, and a young girl came in to the room on tip-toe, drew near to Monsieur d'Avrigny, and after looking at him for a moment with an expression of sadness evidently foreign to her usually laughing face, she touched him lightly on the shoulder.

Monsieur d'Avrigny started and raised his head. "Ah! it is you, my dear Antoinette," said he, "you are welcome."

"I wonder if you will be of that same opinion long, dear uncle?"

"And what should make me change towards you, dear child?"

"Because I am going to scold you."

"You! scold me?"

"Yes! I!"

"Pray what have I done that you should scold me?"

"My dear uncle, I wish to speak to you seriously."

"Indeed!"

"Yes! so seriously that I scarcely dare —

"Antoinette, the niece I love, does not dare to speak to me? What can she have to say, then?"

"Alas! dear uncle, something which neither befits my age nor my position."

"Speak on, Antoinette. I know that your gaiety hides a thoughtful mind, and beneath your light-heartedness I have often found you the wisest of us all; speak — especially if you come to speak to me of my daughter."

"Well! uncle, you are right; it is of her I wish to speak."

"And what have you to say?"

"I must tell you, dear, good uncle! — Oh! you will forgive me, I pray and beseech you, — but I must tell you that, in the greatness of your love, you will kill Madeleine."

"I kill her! great heavens! what do you mean?"

"I mean, dear uncle, that your lily — :hat is your name for her, is it not? — I mean that your lily is white and fragile, and that, crushed between the great love you both have for her, she will be broken."

"I do not understand you, Antoinette," said Monsieur d'Avrigny.

“Oh yes! uncle dear, you understand ne only too well,” said the young girl clasping her two arms round the doctor’s neck. “Yes! in spite of what you say, you do understand me. I know I understand you!”

“You understand me, Antoinette?” cried Monsieur d’Avrigny, with an expression on his face which looked like fear.

“Yes!”

“Impossible!”

“My dear uncle,” she replied, with a smile of such deep melancholy that it was hard to understand how it could rest on such laughing lips, “my dear uncle, you cannot blind the eyes of those who love; I have read your secret in your heart.”

“And what secret have you found there?”

For one moment Antoinette hesitated.

“Do not be afraid to speak frankly,” said he, — ” you are keeping me in suspense.”

Antoinette put her mouth to Monsieur d’Avrigny’s ear, and whispered:

“You are jealous!”

“I!” exclaimed Monsieur d’Avrigny.

“Yes!” the girl continued, “and it is this jealousy that makes you so unjust.”

“My God!” cried Monsieur d’Avrigny with bent head, “I thought that this was known only to you and me.”

“Well! what is there in this to alarm you so, uncle dear? jealousy is certainly an ugly passion, but one may overcome it. Have I not also felt jealous of Amaury?”‘

“You I jealous of Amaury!”

“Yes !” answered Antoinette, bending her head in turn, “yes! because he deprived me of my sister; for when he was there, Madeleine had eyes for no one else.”

“Then you also have felt what I suffer?”

“Yes! the same thing, or much about the same. Well! I have conquered myself sufficiently to be able to come to you now, and say — Uncle! they are devoted to each other; you must give your consent to their marriage, for if you separate them they will die.”

Monsieur d’Avrigny shook his head, and without saying a word in reply, pointed with his finger to the last lines he had just written, and Antoinette read aloud:

“Therefore in three months Amaury shall wed Madeleine, unless — Ah! God! I dare write no more — .”

“Dear uncle,” said Antoinette, “take courage, she has not coughed once.”

“Good Heavens! “Monsieur d’Avrigny exclaimed, looking at his niece in profound amazement, “the girl reads my every thought!”

“Yes! dear, good, darling uncle. Yes! I understand well all the fond tenderness, all the wealth of love in your heart. But, listen to me, must we not reconcile ourselves to the thought that some day Madeleine will marry and leave us? And since this must be, tell me, is it not best that her choice should fall on Amaury rather than on anyone else? What is for his happiness can never be a misfortune for us, and is it right that we should grudge him so great a joy? No! on the contrary, let them be happy in each other’s love. Even then you will not be left alone, father dear; Antoinette will still be with you, the child of your dear sister, your little girl who loves you, and you alone, and who will never leave you. I know that I can never be to you what Madeleine is; but I will be like a daughter to you, only a daughter who is neither rich nor beautiful, like Madeleine; a daughter, rest assured, whom no one will love. And even if anyone did, had she ten times Madeleine’s grace and beauty, she, I swear, would never love anyone; she will devote her life to you, she will comfort you and you will comfort her.”

“But,” said Monsieur d’Avrigny, “is not Philip Auvray in love with you, and do you not love him?”

“Oh! my dear uncle,” Antoinette answered reproachfully. “Oh, how... have you ever...”

“Well! well! dear child, let us say nothing more about it. Yes! I shall do as you wish, which is, after all, only what I had resolved to do. But, at least, Amaury must declare his intentions; supposing after all we were mistaken; if he should not love Madeleine!”

“Ah! there is no mistake, dear father. Alas! he loves her! you and I know that but too well!”

Monsieur d’Avrigny made no reply, because he, too, had the same conviction as Antoinette. At this moment the study door opened, and Joseph, Monsieur d’Avrigny’s confidential servant, informed him that the valet of Amaury, Count de Léoville, asked permission to give into his own hand a letter from his master.

Monsieur d’Avrigny and Antoinette exchanged a look, which plainly said that they both already knew what the letter contained.

Then, with an effort made even more apparent by Antoinette’s sad smile. Monsieur d’Avrigny said:

“Joseph, bring me the letter, and tell Germain to wait for a reply.”

Five minutes afterwards the letter was in Monsieur d’Avrigny’s hands, who looked at it without speaking, unable to summon up courage even to break the seal.

“Come, dear uncle, rouse yourself,” said Antoinette, “open it and read what he says.”

Monsieur d’Avrigny mechanically obeyed, broke open the letter, quickly scanned its contents, read it a second time, then passed the letter to Antoinette, who pushed it aside with her hand, murmuring:

“Dear uncle, I can guess its contents.”

“Yes! that is true! “Monsieur d’Avrigny answered bitterly, replying to Antoinette as Hamlet did to Polonius — ‘words, words, words.’

“Is his letter then only empty words to you? “Antoinette replied hastily, taking it from her uncle and hurriedly looking it over.

“Yes! only words!” replied Monsieur d’Avrigny; “but it is with words that these clever phrasemongers, these elegant rhetoricians, supplant us in our children’s affections. We love them and ask for nothing in return, and they choose this eloquence in preference to us.”

“But, uncle,” Antoinette gravely replied, returning the letter to Monsieur d’Avrigny, “do not deceive yourself. Amaury loves Madeleine with a deep, loyal, true love. I too have read this letter, and I tell you that it is a letter written not from the head, but straight from the heart.”

“Therefore, Antoinette...?”

She handed a pen to her uncle, who took it and wrote this single line:

“Dear Amaury, come to me to-morrow at eleven, “Your father, “LEOPOLD D’AVRIGNY.”

“And why not to-night?” asked Antoinette, who watched him write the note.

“Because it would be too much excitement for her in one day. All that you need tell her, Antoinette, is that I have written to him this evening, and you think he is to come in the morning.”

And summoning Germain, Monsieur d’Avrigny gave him the answer for which he had told him to wait.

CHAPTER VII.

NEXT day, Madeleine awoke with the sun and the birds, or rather when the sun and birds of Paris awake, at nine o’clock in the morning.

She rang for her maid to open the windows.

A large jessamine in full bloom, climbed against the wall, and she often drew the long trailing branches into her bedroom, revelling in their delicate perfume.

Like most nervous people, Madeleine was fond of scents, although they were not good for her; she now asked to have some jessamine brought in.

As to Antoinette, she was already walking in the garden, dressed in a simple muslin gown.

She enjoyed such perfect health that she was allowed to do many things which were forbidden to her more delicate cousin.

Madeleine was still in bed, well protected from the slightest draught, and obliged to have the flowers brought to her; whilst bright, healthy Antoinette was darting from flower to flower like a bird of the meadows, fearing neither morning breeze nor evening dews. There- ‘fore, though Madeleine was richer and more beautiful than Antoinette, she often envied her this exuberant health.

But to-day, instead of going from flower to flower like the butterflies and the bees, Antoinette walked thoughtfully along in sad and pensive mood.

As Madeleine raised herself up in bed, she followed her cousin anxiously with her eyes, and as Antoinette disappeared for a moment on nearing the house, only to reappear a little further on, the young girl sank back on her pillows with a sigh.

“What is the matter with my darling?” asked Monsieur d’Avrigny, who, knowing that she was awake, had softly opened the door, and had been a silent witness to the struggle against envy in his daughter’s usually unselfish nature.

“The matter, dear father, is that I think Antoinette a very lucky girl; she is perfectly free, whilst I am for ever hampered. For me, the noonday sun is too hot, and the morning and evening air too cold. What use are my feet, which long to join her in her rambles? I am like a poor hot-house plant doomed always to breathe the same atmosphere. Is it because I am ill, father?”

“No, my dear child; but you are naturally weak and delicate; you have guessed right, you are like a hot-house plant. But you must remember, dear, that the flowers which we keep under glass are those which we prize and cherish the most. What more can they desire? Have not these flowers the same advantages as their more hardy companions? Have they not equally the light of heaven, the warmth of the sun? All it is true are under glass, but this glass protects them from the wind and rain, which buffet and bruise the other flowers.”

“Ah! kind good father, there is truth in what you say, but I would far rather be a garden violet or a simple wayside daisy like Antoinette, than one of these precious but tender plants. See how the wind ruffles her hair, how this lovely breeze must cool her brow, whilst mine is burning so, feel for yourself, dear father;” and Madeleine drew his hand up to her forehead.

“Well! my dear child,” said her father, “it is just because your forehead is so hot, that I dread this cold air for you. When your day-dreams no longer cause your cheeks to flush, I will allow you to run about like Antoinette, with your hair floating in the breeze. Or rather, my dear Madeleine, if you no longer wish to be a hot-house plant but to live in the open-air, I will take you to Hyères, or Nice, or Naples, one or other of those three Arcadias where the golden apples grow, and there you may roam about at will.”

“And — and — ” said Madeleine, looking up earnestly at her father, “he will come with us too?”

“Yes! certainly, dear, since you cannot do without him.”

“And you will not scold him again as you did yesterday, you naughty father?”

“Of course not; you see that I am no longer angry, for I have written him to come to us as usual.”

“And you have acted wisely, father, for if you prevent him from loving me, he will love Antoinette, and if he were to love Antoinette, I should die of grief.”

“Come, never talk of dying, Madeleine,” said Monsieur d’Avrigny, as he tenderly pressed her hand, “for, though I know you only speak in jest, still your words remind me of an unsuspicious child playing with a sharp, poisoned weapon.”

“But I assure you, father dear, I have no wish to die, I am far too happy for that. Besides are you not the most famous doctor in Paris? So you will not let your own daughter die.”

Monsieur d’Avrigny sighed deeply.

“Alas!” said he, “if I were possessed of that power, dear child, your mother would still be with you. But why are you wasting so much time in bed? It is now nearly ten o’clock, and Amaury will be here at eleven.”

“Oh yes, father I know; but I will ask Antoinette to help me, and then I shall soon be ready. You know you always call me your lazy little girl.”

“Yes!”

“Yes! you see, father, only when I am in bed, do I feel perfectly well; as soon as I am up, I am always tired or suffering.”

“Have you felt ill these last few days, then, Madeleine? Have you really been suffering without letting me know?”

“No! father dear; you know I never have any actual pain, only at times such a feverish unrest; but I do not feel it now. Now you are beside me, and I am going to see Amaury again. Oh! I am happy, I am well.”

“And see, here comes your dear Amaury!”

“Where is he?”

“In the garden with Antoinette! He must have mistaken the hour,” said Monsieur d’Avrigny, with a smile. “I wrote him to be here at eleven, but he must have read ten.”

“In the garden with Antoinette!” cried Madeleine, sitting up quickly in bed.

“Why yes! so he is — Father dear, will you call Antoinette to come at once, as I want to get up, and she will help me dress.”

Monsieur d’Avrigny called to the young girl from the window.

Amaury, who did not wish it known that he had arrived before the hour named, hid behind a clump of bushes, hoping no one had seen him.

A moment later, Antoinette entered the room, and Monsieur d’Avrigny went away, leaving the two girls alone.

In less than half-an-hour, it was Antoinette who was left alone in the room, whilst Monsieur d’Avrigny and Madeleine awaited Amaury in the small drawing-room in which the painful scene of the previous day had taken place.

Soon the Comte de Léoville was formally announced, and Amaury appeared.

Monsieur d’Avrigny went to meet him c with a smile; Amaury timidly held out his hand, which Monsieur d’Avrigny retained in his own, and leading him up to Madeleine, who was watching him with astonishment, said:

“Madeleine, I present to you Amaury de Léoville, your future husband.”

Then turning to the young man, he said:

“This is Madeleine d’Avrigny, your future wife.”

Madeleine gave a cry of joy, Amaury fell on his knees before father and daughter; but he started up suddenly, for he noticed that Madeleine staggered.

Monsieur d’Avrigny had only just time to draw forward an armchair, into which the girl sank with a smile, in a half- fainting condition. All these sudden emotions shook this frail girl, and joy was almost as fatal to her as sorrow.

When Madeleine had sufficiently recovered to open her eyes, she saw her lover at her feet, and felt her father pressing her to his heart.

Amaury was kissing her hands, and Monsieur d’Avrigny showering on her his most loving pet names.

Her first kiss was for her father, but her first glance for her lover.

Even then both men were jealous.

“You are my prisoner for the remainder of the day, my dear boy,” said Monsieur d’Avrigny, “and we three are going to spend it together, making plans and building castles in the air; that is, if you are willing to admit a cruel father into your confidence.”

“Then, my dear father,” said Amaury, “for now I may always call you by that name, may I not? Then, the only reason for your coldness during the last few days was no other than that which I had already surmised, that is to say, my want of confidence in you.”

“Yes! yes! my dear ward,” said Monsieur d’Avrigny with a smile; “yes, yes, that is all forgotten now! I will forgive your dissimulation, if you will forgive my ill-humour; and now, unnatural tyrant that I am, and ungrateful rebels that you are, let bygones be bygones.”

Matters having reached this point, the next thing to be decided upon was the date of the wedding.

At first Amaury was most impatient, and would hear of no delay; but eventually the certainty of his happiness made him more reasonable, and he listened quietly to Monsieur d’Avrigny’s arguments.

Besides, Monsieur d’Avrigny was very firm.

“Society,” he said, “does not like to be taken by surprise in these matters, and it is often apt to avenge itself by spreading abroad some slander. Moreover I want sufficient time in which to introduce you as my future son-in-law.”

Amaury consented to this, stipulating only that it should be done as soon as possible. It was finally decided that the engagement should be announced in a week’s time, and the wedding take place in two months.

All these arrangements were discussed in Madeleine’s presence, and although she made no comment, it was evident that not a word escaped her. The girl’s face was bright and charming in its half-blushing, half-embarrassed candour. Happiness suited her to perfection; her eyes strayed from her lover to her father, from her father to her lover, and she distributed her favours from one to the other with the finished manner of a born coquette.

When all was satisfactorily arranged, Monsieur d’Avrigny rose, and signed to his future son-in-law to follow him; then turning to Madeleine, he said gaily, “And now, you spoilt child, mind that you are not ill, or you will have me to reckon with.”

“Ah! you have cured me to-day, father dear,” cried the happy girl, “and I am now perfectly well for life. But where are you taking Amaury?”

“Oh! I am very sorry, but I must have a private talk with him; however, you need not be uneasy, dear child, it is only to make arrangements for your future happiness that we leave you now. After the poetry of love, comes the prose of matrimony.”

“Well, then, off with you,” said Madeleine, who understood what was the subject in hand.

“Never fear, Madeleine, I shall not be away long,” said Amaury, taking advantage of the few steps which his guardian had already made towards the door, to stoop down and kiss her cheek tenderly.

In fact, it only remained now to discuss the marriage settlement. Of course Monsieur d’Avrigny was well aware how much property Amaury possessed, since under his able management it had almost doubled in amount, but Amaury was quite ignorant as to what might be the fortune of his future father-in-law; as a matter of fact it almost equalled his own.

Monsieur d’Avrigny’s marriage portion to his daughter was a million francs.

Then, with this unexpected fortune almost within his grasp, did Amaury think that he had at last solved the reason of Monsieur d’Avrigny’s unavowed but determined opposition to his suit. Perhaps he had hoped to marry Madeleine to some one, if not more wealthy, yet in a higher station in life than himself; some one whose position was assured already rather than still to be made. As this seemed the only possible conclusion, Amaury did not question further.

Besides, he soon dismissed from his mind all these retrospective thoughts. It is only those to whom the future is closed, who live the past over again; all to whom it is still open, dash fearlessly forward. About half-an-hour was spent in settling these business matters; then Monsieur d’Avrigny, taking pity on Amaury’s impatience, left him free to return to Madeleine.

CHAPTER VIII.

MADELEINE was in the garden, and Antoinette alone had remained in the drawing-room.

On seeing the young man, she was about to leave the room; then, believing that were she to retire without speaking to him, she would seem to look coldly on his happiness, she stood still, and turning towards him with a bright smile, said:

“Well! dear Amaury, you are very happy, are you not?”

“Oh! yes, Antoinette dear, and though I obtained from you this morning some inkling of the truth, I was still far from suspecting anything like the reality.”

Amaury took the young girl’s hand, and led her back to the chair from which she had just risen, and as she seated herself with a sigh, he said: “Come, what about yourself, when may I have the pleasure of congratulating you as well?”

“Congratulate me, Amaury? What are you thinking about? Why should there ever be any occasion for you to congratulate me ‘“

“Why, of course, on your probable engagement; it seems to me that a young and beautiful girl like you, of good family too, is not likely to remain an old maid.”

“I, Amaury,” the girl answered. “Listen well to what I have to say. This is a solemn day for you, therefore a day which will always have a special place in your memory; I shall never marry!”

There was something in the girl’s earnest and decided answer that startled Amaury.

“Oh! what nonsense!” he exclaimed, trying to turn the matter into a jest, “tell that to another, who may perhaps believe you; but I, knowing the happy mortal who will make you change your mind — ”

“I know whom you mean,” replied Antoinette, with a sad smile; “but you are mistaken, Amaury, he whom you refer to does not think of me in the least. No one wants a penniless orphan, and I would have nothing to do with anyone — .”

“Without a fortune,” Amaury interrupted; “but you are wrong, Antoinette; to be the niece of Monsieur d’Avrigny and the sister of

Madeleine is a fortune in itself. Besides you have a dowry of two hundred thousand francs, and nowadays that is treble the usual fortune of a French nobleman's daughter."

"I know my uncle is a noble-hearted man, Amaury, and it needed not this additional proof of his generosity to convince me of it, but," she added, "that is all the more reason that I should not be ungrateful to him. My uncle will soon be alone; therefore I shall continue to live with him, if he is willing to let me. After him, my future belongs to God."

Antoinette said this with such an air of full determination, Amaury felt that, for the present at least, he could offer no further objection, but he pressed her hand tenderly, for indeed he loved her as a sister.

Antoinette withdrew her hand so quickly that Amaury turned to see what could be the cause of this sudden movement.

Madeleine stood on the verandah watching them both; she was as pale as the white rose she had just gathered from the garden, and which, with a girl's exquisite taste, she had placed in her hair.

Her lover ran towards her, exclaiming: "Are you ill, my darling? In Heaven's name, are you in pain, that you are so pale?"

"No, Amaury," she replied, "it is rather Antoinette who is ill, look at her."

"Yes," he said, "I was just asking her the cause of her sadness. Do you know what it can be? "Then, lowering his voice, "she says she will never marry," and he added in a whisper, "can she be in love?"

"

"Yes, surely, Amaury," replied Madeleine, with a strange look, "I believe you have guessed right; Antoinette must be in love. But let us go to her, for see," she added smiling, "our whispered conversation keeps her on the rack."

In truth Antoinette seemed to be very uncomfortable, and, notwithstanding all their entreaties, they could not prevail on her to resume her seat; she declared she had some writing to do, and retired to her own room.

Madeleine breathed more freely when Antoinette had gone, and bright plans for the future were again talked over. There were to be frequent journeys to Italy, endless *tête-à-têtes* and loving words, always the same, yet ever new, and all this great happiness would be theirs within two short months. In the meanwhile they would see each other every day, and always be together as they were now.

All too quickly the moments flew by, and it was evening ere Madeleine and Amaury were aware of it; for, to them, it seemed they had only been a few moments together. The dinner-bell rang, and Monsieur d’Avrigny and Antoinette smilingly entered, each by a different door.

Once more was Amaury lying at Madeleine’s feet, but Monsieur d’Avrigny, instead of losing his temper as on the previous evening, motioned him to remain where he was. He looked at them steadfastly for a moment, noticing the pretty group they made, then, going up to them with a hand outstretched to each, he said:

“My children! my dear, dear children!”

Whether it were the result of self- restraint or her own bright temperament, Antoinette was full of charming gaiety and sparkling wit; an unprejudiced observer might however have doubted whether this gaiety were not somewhat forced.

Madeleine and Amaury, lost in the natural selfishness of lovers, and completely absorbed in their own feelings, were utterly unable to concern themselves with what others might feel or think, but now and then Madeleine nudged Amaury to remind him that her father was present.

Then at a word from her, the conversation became general, but only for a moment, as they soon appeared to forget that there was anyone in all the world but themselves; their self-absorption caused the poor old man to be doubly conscious of the sacrifice his children made in bestowing upon him a word, a look, or a caress.

It was impossible that Monsieur d’Avrigny could long maintain sufficient control over himself, whilst Madeleine, with Amaury’s gracious consent, doled out to him his share of her filial affection; so, pleading fatigue from the previous evening, he retired at nine o’clock, leaving the young people in charge of Miss Brown.

Before leaving the room, he went up to his daughter, took her hand and in doing so felt her pulse; then, his hitherto anxious face suddenly lighted up with a look of ineffable joy and gratitude.

Her blood flowed smoothly and calmly; her pulse betrayed no agitation, whilst her beautiful eyes, so often feverishly bright, were now clear and sparkling with happiness.

Turning to Amaury, he pressed him to his heart, murmuring:

“Oh! if only you could save her!”

With a glad happiness, almost equal to that of his children, he retired to his study, to record in his diary the various impressions of this eventful day of his life.

A few minutes later, Antoinette in her turn, quietly retired, unperceived by the lovers, who thought her still in the room when, at eleven o’clock Miss Brown drew near, and reminded Madeleine that her father never allowed her to sit up beyond that hour.

The young people then parted, looking forward to a like happy day on the morrow.

Amaury returned home, the happiest of men.

This had been to him one of those bright days of perfect happiness such as come to men but once in a lifetime; one of those rare days without a shadow or a cloud; a day on which the fleeting hours blend harmoniously together, each event as it passes forming a perfect whole, just as the details of a beautiful landscape melt into the far distance of the horizon.

Not a ripple had disturbed the peace of this glorious day, not a thought of sadness marred the bright memories which it was destined to leave behind.

Amaury therefore returned to his home bewildered, and almost afraid of his great happiness, vainly seeking from whence should come the first cloud that might darken his radiant sky.

CHAPTER IX.

DREAMS of a bright future succeeded to the blissful evening b we have just attempted to describe, and Amaury woke in a right frame of mind for the happy reception of his friend Philip, whom Germain, as soon as his master rang, announced was waiting to see him.

Then he at once remembered that two days ago Philip had called, to ask, so he said, his advice, and that being at the time unable to interest himself in anyone’s affairs but his own, he had asked him to postpone his confidences to another day.

With characteristic persistence Philip had now come to see whether his friend were more inclined to listen to him than he had been the day before yesterday.

Amaury was in such high spirits that he would gladly have seen everyone as happy as himself; he therefore gave orders for Philip to be shown in at once, and welcomed him with a bright smile.

Philip, on the contrary, came into the room with measured tread, and a remarkably grave look on his face; although it was barely nine o’clock in the morning, he was dressed entirely in black and wore white gloves.

He remained standing until Germain had left the room; then, after assuring himself that the valet had really gone, he turned to Amaury, and said in a solemn voice:

“Well, my dear Amaury, are you more in the humour to listen to me to-day than you were two days ago?”

“My dear Philip,” replied Amaury, “you must not bear me any ill-will for the slight delay, because it must have been evident to you, when you called two days ago, that I was nearly out of my mind; you chose an unfortunate time, that was all. But to-day, on the contrary, you come just at the right moment. I am delighted to see you this morning; so sit down, and unburden yourself of this serious business which makes you so stiff and formal.”

A forced smile appeared on Philip’s lips, and with the air of an actor who takes breath before beginning his speech, uncertain of the effect he will produce on his audience, he said:

“I must ask you to remember, my dear Amaury, that I am an advocate; therefore I pray you, give me a patient hearing, and do not interrupt nor make any comments until I have finished speaking. I, on my side, promise that my speech will not take more than a quarter of an hour.”

“Be careful,” Amaury said laughingly, “I face the clock, and at this moment it is ten minutes after nine.”

Philip looked at his watch, and compared the two time-keepers with his usual imperturbable gravity, then turning to Amaury, he said:

“That clock is five minutes fast.”

“Are you sure?” said Amaury, now laughing outright, “are you positive it is not your watch that is slow? My poor Philip, you always remind me of the man who was born one day too late, and has ever since spent his time trying to catch up with it.”

“Yes,” said Philip, “I know that is an unfortunate fault of mine, or rather the fault of my indecision of character. I can never make up my mind until long after others have come to a decision. But this time, thank God, I think I am in time.”

“Take care; if you waste your time in holding forth, perhaps some one else will take advantage of your dilatoriness, and once more you will find yourself too late.”

“If that is so,” said Philip, “it will be your fault, because I had asked you not to interrupt me, and that is the very first thing you do.”

“Well! go on, then; this time I am listening. Now what do you want to tell me?”

“A story which you know just as well as I do, but it is necessary for me to go over it again in order to lead up to the sequel.”

“Now, my dear boy,” said Amaury, “are you and I going to act over again the scene between Augustus and Cinna? Do you, by chance, suspect me of conspiracy?”

“This is the second time you have interrupted me, Amaury, in spite of your promise; then you will reproach me directly and say that my speech has lasted longer than I said it would.”

“No! old fellow, I shall bear in mind the great fact that you are an advocate.”

“Do not be frivolous, Amaury, when we are discussing things of importance which should be listened to seriously.”

“Look here, old boy,” said Amaury, leaning on his elbow in bed, and looking as grave as a judge. “Does that suit you? Yes! Well, then, I shall not move a muscle the whole time you are speaking.”

“Amaury,” replied Philip, half serious from the resolution he had taken, half laughing in spite of himself, “do you remember our first year together reading for the bar? We were fresh from college, the first bloom not yet rubbed off our philosophy, wise as Socrates, logical as Aristotle. Your heart and mine would have been the envy of Hippolytus, for if we loved an Aricia, it was but in fancy, and, at our first legal examination, three white balls, symbols of our single-hearted devotion to the Law, were the reward of our zeal, to the great joy of our respective families. As for me, flattered by the praises of my masters and the blessings of my parents, I began to think that, like Saint Anselm, I would die in my maiden gown, but I reckoned without taking into consideration the devil, the month of April, and my eighteen years. The result was that this brilliant plan soon received a sharp check. There were opposite my own windows, two other windows, at which appeared, from time to time, the frowning face of a horrid creature, a perfect type of a Spanish duenna, old, ugly, scowling; her only companion was a dog as hideous as herself, who, if by chance the window opened, would put his two paws on her shoulder, and stare at me curiously through his long, matted hair. I had taken a violent dislike to both dog and mistress, and, I may say, my brilliant start at the end of last year in the career illustrated by Cujas and Delvincourt, was in no slight degree due to my hermetically closed windows and tightly drawn curtains. One day, towards the beginning of March, I noticed with delight a board, six inches by twelve, on which figured the consoling words:

BEDROOM AND DRESSING-ROOM

TO LET

FOR THE APRIL QUARTER.

“Evidently I would soon be rid of my neighbour, and some other human being take the place of this horrid creature who, for two whole years, had marred my view. I therefore looked forward impatiently to the first of April, which is the date of removal for short leases. On the thirty- first of March I received a letter from my kind old uncle, the one who has just left me twenty thousand francs a year, inviting me to spend the next day, which was a Sunday, at his country-house at Enghien. As I was behindhand with my week’s work, I spent part of the night studying, in order to find myself even with you and my comrades on the Monday morning. So instead of waking at seven o’clock, I woke at eight; instead of leaving at eight, I left at nine; and instead of arriving at ten, I arrived at eleven. Breakfast was just about over. Of course the delay had not affected my appetite; I therefore sat down to table, promising the other guests that I would have finished as soon as they; but, though I did my best, and set my jaws to work in right good earnest, everyone had finished long before I had, and as it was a glorious morning, and plans were already made for an excursion on the lake, they said that, whilst waiting for me, they would take a turn on the little pier before embarking.

“They then gave me ten minutes’ grace, and after calculating, I felt certain this would be more than enough.

“But I was reckoning without my coffee; instead of leaving the coffee on the table, the too-officious cook, fearing it might get cold, had placed it on the stove, and now brought it to me boiling hot. I had allowed myself two minutes in which to drink it, and certainly this was a longer time than was necessary in the ordinary way; but, thanks to the extra heat, I had to waste one minute and a half blowing it, and, even then, it was still so hot, that it took me another minute and a half to drink it. I was thus one minute late.

“Unfortunately among the party was a mathematician, the sort of man who is as punctual as a sun-dial, who always reckons by his watch, and who regulates his watch by the sun.

“When the ten minutes agreed upon had elapsed, he took out his watch, remarked to the party that I was late, induced them all to embark and began to loose the boat from her moorings. Just then I appeared in the doorway, and in a moment perceived the joke which they were about to enjoy at my expense, the point of which lay in leaving me on the landing-stage.

“I at once took to my heels, and reached the pier just as the boat was putting off.

“There were scarcely four feet between me and the boat; I therefore thought that it depended only on myself, to turn the laugh with which I was greeted, into a shout of victory.

“I remembered all my gymnastic feats, took a leap, and found myself floundering in the lake.”

“Poor Philip!” cried Amaury, “luckily you can swim like a fish.”

“Yes! but I reckoned without my host again; unluckily the water was two or three degrees below zero; I reached the bank shivering, whilst the mathematician calculated by how many millimetres I had missed alighting on board instead of in the water. Now, as you know, a cold bath, taken under certain conditions is very dangerous, and soon my shiverings developed into a feverish attack, which detained me three days at Enghien. The doctor, however, pronounced me practically cured on the evening of the third day, and at a hint from my uncle that this three days' delay might endanger my chances for my degree, I left for Paris, and at about ten o'clock at night once more found myself installed in my room in the Rue Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonneret.

"Before turning in, I knocked at your door, but you were either out or in bed. This detail, which I did not notice at the time, came back to my mind later."

"But what the devil are you driving at?"

"You will soon see. I then went to bed, respecting either your absence or your slumber, and slept like a man who is just recovering from illness. I woke with the song of birds in my ears, and thought myself still in the country. The goldfinch after which my street is named having died long ago, or, perhaps, who knows, having never been anything better than a myth, I opened my eyes, wondering whether I should see grass, flowers, and the 'winged songster,' as Monsieur Delille would say, whose melodious voice reached my ear, and to my great amazement I did see it all. There was even more than I expected, because through my windows, — I had quite forgotten the previous night to draw the curtains, — I caught sight of the prettiest little grisette imaginable, her face framed in wall-flowers and roses; she was sentimentally decorating with pimpernel a cage containing five or six different kinds of birds, — linnets, canaries, goldfinches, who, thanks probably to the mild rule under which they existed, seemed, spite of their different species, to live most happily together. It was a regular Dutch interior after Van Mieris. As you know, I am a lover of pictures. I must have been quite an hour studying this one, which appeared to me all the more attractive in that it took the place of a vision which, for two years, had been particularly distasteful to me, that of my old woman and her old dog. During my absence, my Tisiphoné had removed bag and baggage, and this charming grisette taken her place. That very day I felt that I should fall violently in love with my charming neighbour, and that I must seize the first opportunity to let her know it."

"I see perfectly what is coming, my dear Philip," said Amaury, laughing heartily; "but I hope you have forgotten this little episode in which I had the misfortune to be your rival, and to forestall you by three or four days.”

“Quite the reverse, my dear Amaury, I remember too well every detail; and as you have forgotten these details, it is well that I should remind you of them, so that you may realize how much you have wronged me.”

“Really do you wish to challenge me to a retrospective duel?”

“No! on the contrary, I have come to ask you to do me a favour; but first of all I wish to tell you my past history, so that, in addition to the strong friendship which exists between us, and which predisposes you to help me, you may understand that you also owe me reparation for many wrongs.”

“Well! to go back to Florence.”

“Was her name Florence? ‘cried Philip, “what a charming name; well, would you believe it? I never even knew her name. However, let us go back to Florence, as you call her. As I have told you once or twice before, I immediately resolved on two things, which was a great deal for me to do, as you know I often have trouble to make a single resolution; though true it is, that once this resolution taken, no one follows it up *more perseveraciously* than I. Why, I do believe I have just coined a new adverb.”

“You have a perfect right to do so,” Amaury replied gravely.

“The first resolution was to fall violently in love with my neighbour,” Philip continued; “this was much the easier of the two, and that very day I put it into execution.

“The second was to declare my passion at the first opportunity, and this was not so easy of accomplishment.

“To begin with, I had to find the opportunity, and then to take advantage of it.

“For three days I kept a watch on her, — the first day, through my curtains, for I feared to startle her by letting her see me too suddenly.

“The second day, through my window- panes, for I did not dare yet to open my window.

“The third day, with my window open, I saw with delight that my boldness did not scare her.

“At the end of the third day, I watched her throw a light shawl over her shoulders and button her boots; evidently she was preparing to go out.

“Here was the longed-for moment; I made up my mind to follow her.”

CHAPTER X.

PHILIP continued: — “I had decided on my plan of action.

“I was to accost her, if I dared, give her my arm and offer to accompany her to her destination, and on the way, tell her of the ravages which in these three days her little saucy nose, bright smile and white teeth had wrought in me.

“I took first my stick, then my hat, and lastly my overcoat, and hurried down the five flights as quickly as I could. But although I made all possible haste, she was already thirty paces ahead of me when I reached the door.

“Instantly I set out in pursuit of her. But in order not to alarm her, you will understand that I had to be discreet, and only overtake her gradually.

“At the corner of the Rue Saint- Jacques I had gained ten paces on her, at the corner of the Rue Racine, twenty, finally in the Rue Vaugirard I was just going to join her, when suddenly she darted through a *porte cochère*, ran across the court and up a staircase, of which only the bottom steps were visible from the road.

“For a moment I thought I would not give up the chase, and decided to wait for her in the court, but at sight of a porter engaged in sweeping it out, my courage failed me.

“He would certainly ask what I was doing there, and I should not know in the least what to reply, or to say for whom I was waiting; in fact I did not even know the name of my charmer. I therefore had to content myself with waiting outside, — and mounted sentry there, which inspired me once for all with a rooted dislike to the national guard.

“One hour, two hours, two hours and a half passed away, and still no signs of the idol of my heart. Had I scared the timid gazelle?

“Night came and still I waited; I had neither Joshua’s secret nor his power to command the sun to stand still.

“At last, by the light of the oil-lamp burning on the staircase, appeared the cotton dress of my fugitive fair, and at the same time I saw the bottom of a young man’s cloak, the ferrule of whose stick I heard resound against the stairs at each step he took.

“Was it her lover? was it her brother? Probably the former, possibly the latter. I recalled the wise man’s proverb:

"'Forbear, when in doubt,' and I forbore.

"The grisette and her escort passed within four paces without seeing me, it was such a dark night.

"This event decided me to change my tactics; the same thing might happen again.

"Besides, in the bottom of my heart, and although reproaching myself for such pusillanimity, I knew that when the critical moment came for accosting her, my courage, which when away from her was unassailable, might very possibly fail me; therefore my wisest plan would be to write.

"Accordingly I sat down at once to carry out my scheme.

"But to write a love letter — a letter on which would depend my fair neighbour's opinion of me, and consequently decide what progress I made in her affections, — was no easy thing; besides, this was the first I had ever written.

"I spent the greater part of the night making a rough draft, which, on reading over next morning, seemed to me detestable.

"I wrote a second, I wrote a third, and eventually decided on the one I have here."

Philip took the copy from his pocket- book, and read the following: — "MADEMOISELLE, "To see you is to love you; I have seen you and I love you.

"Each morning I watch you feeding your birds, lucky creatures to be tended by such lovely hands, watering your roses, less brilliant than the roses in your cheeks, and your wall-flowers, less sweetly-scented than the breath which stirs your bosom, and these few moments suffice to fill my days with fancies, my nights with dreams.

"Mademoiselle, you do not know who I am, nor do I know who you are; but one who has but caught a glimpse of you may easily guess how tender and loving a heart is hidden by so attractive an exterior. Surely your mind is as poetical as your beauty, and your thoughts as bewildering as your looks. Happy is the man in whose power it will be to realize these dreams, sacrilegious he who could be so cruel as to destroy these charming illusions."

"I have, I think, succeeded fairly well in imitating the literature of the day," said Philip, well pleased with himself.

"That is just what I was wishing to remark," Amaury replied, "only you implored me not to interrupt you."

Philip continued:

"You see, Mademoiselle, how well I love you. And you — has no secret instinct yet whispered to you that here, near you, in the opposite house, a little above the level of your windows, lives a young man, who, though possessed of a fair fortune, is alone and isolated in this world, and longs for the companionship of a heart that loves and understands him. That he will gladly give his blood, his life, his soul, to the angel who will descend from heaven to fill his lonely life, and that his love will be, not a silly, passing fancy, but an adoration for every day, every hour, every moment.

"Mademoiselle, if you have never seen me, have you never felt my presence?"

Philip stopped a second time, and looked at Amaury, as if to ask his opinion on this second part of the letter.

Amaury nodded his head approvingly, and Philip continued:

"Therefore, I beseech you, forgive the impassioned longing I cannot resist to tell you the deep and unchangeable feelings which the mere sight of you have inspired in me.

"Forgive my having dared to reveal this humble and passionate love, which is my very life.

"Do not be offended by the avowal of one who respects you truly; if you consent to believe in the sincerity of this heart's devotion, grant me permission to express in person, and not in cold words only, all the tenderness and respect I bear you.

"Mademoiselle, grant me the boon of admitting me to my adored one's presence.

"I do not ask you to reply to this, oh, no! I do not soar so high; but one word, one sign, one gesture, and I will fly to your feet and remain there till my life's end.

"PHILIPPE AUVRAY.

"Rue Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonneret, fifth floor. There are three doors; mine is the one that has a hare's foot hung on it."

"Do you follow me, Amaury? although I did not ask for a reply, which perhaps might have been over presumptuous, I took care to give my address, because how could I tell that my lovely neighbour might not perhaps be softened by my letter, and surprise me by sending a reply?"

"Why, certainly," replied Amaury, "it was a wise precaution."

“A useless one, at any rate, my friend, as you will soon see.

“This ingenious and impassioned letter concluded, there only remained to send it to its destination; but how? by what means? By special delivery? But I did not know my divinity’s name.

“By giving the porter half-a-crown to deliver it to her? But I had heard of porters who could not be bribed.

“By an errand boy? This was rather prosaic and a trifle risky, because he might present himself when the brother was there.

“I had long since made up my mind that this young man must be her brother.

“I thought at one time of confiding in you, but as I felt that you knew much more about these things than I, I was afraid you might laugh at me. The result was that although the letter was written, sealed, and ready on the table, two days passed by, and still I was undecided.

“On the evening of the third day, taking advantage of an hour when my charmer was away from home, to sit at my window, and look into her room, the casement of which stood open, I noticed a leaf drop from one of her roses, and borne by the wind, fly across the road, and bruise itself against the window panes of the lower floor.

“An acorn falling on Newton’s nose, revealed to him the law of gravitation. A rose-leaf blown by the caprice of the wind disclosed to me the means of communication which I sought.

“I rolled my letter round a stick of sealing-wax, and threw it dexterously across the road, from my room into that of my neighbour; then, quite excited by my unusual boldness, I closed my window hurriedly and waited.

“No sooner had I put this bold plan into execution than I shuddered from fear of the consequences.

“Should my neighbour return with her brother, and should this brother find the letter, she would be terribly compromised.

“I waited, therefore, hidden behind the curtains, and consumed with anxiety, until she should return home. Suddenly she appeared, and I breathed more freely when I saw she was alone.

“She walked about her room as usual, with a light, jaunty step, without seeing my letter.

“But at last she stepped on it accidentally — stooped and picked it up.

“My heart beat to suffocation, and I compared myself to Lauzun, Richelieu, or Lovelace.

“As I have already said, it was getting dusk; she came to the window to try and reconnoitre from what part of the street could come this letter which she held in her hands, then she began to read it.

“I thought that now was the time to show myself, and thus by my presence complete the effect which my letter could not fail to produce. I therefore threw open my window.

“At the sound my neighbour turned towards me, looking from me to the letter, and from the letter to me.

“By a series of suggestive signs, I gave her to understand that I was the author of the epistle, and clasped my hands together, as if beseeching her to read it.

“For one moment she seemed to hesitate, then eventually made up her mind.

“What to do?

“By Jove! to read it!

“I watched her unroll my letter with the tips of her fingers, then look at me again, then smile, then read the first lines, then smile more broadly, then continue reading, and finally laugh outright.

“This merriment at first somewhat disconcerted me.

“But as she read the letter from beginning to end, by the time she had finished, I took heart again — when, to my horror, I saw her about to tear it up. I was going to shout, when it suddenly occurred to me that the reason for this extraordinary precaution on her part with regard to my letter was the fear her brother might come in and surprise her. I thought this showed wonderful foresight, and clapped my hands. Yet she seemed to set about tearing up my letter with unaccountable spitefulness; she first tore it in four, good; in eight, good again; but in sixteen, in thirty-two, in sixty-four, in tiny pieces, that was beyond a joke; and when she ended by reducing it to atoms, it was sheer cruelty.

“Nevertheless, this is what she did; when the minuteness of the pieces no longer allowed her to multiply them any more, she opened her hand and dropped this epistolary shower on the passers-by. Then, frankly laughing in my face for the second time, she closed her window, whilst an insolent puff of wind blew back to me a shred of my paper and my eloquence. And which was it? my dear boy! that on which the word ‘silly’ stood out as plain as print.

“I was furious; but as, after all, she was innocent of this last mischance, and seeing that I could only avenge myself for this insult on one of the four winds of heaven, I too closed my window in a most dignified manner, and set myself to think- out the best way to overcome such unusual reluctance on the part of a member of the honourable company of grisettes.

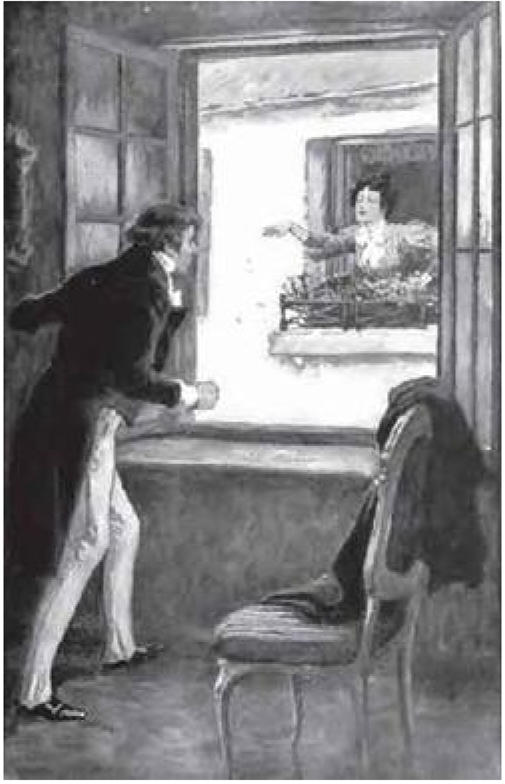

CHAPTER XI.

“THE first ideas that came into my head were a natural result of the state of exasperation in which I now found - myself, — a series of the most extravagant combinations, the wildest resolutions. I went over in my mind all the famous love catastrophes which have astonished the world, from Othello to Antony.

“Still, before resolving on any definite plan of action, I decided to wait till morning, remembering the old adage:

“‘Sleep on it ‘ —

“And, in truth, next morning I woke perfectly calm.

“My wild plans had given place to resolutions infinitely more parliamentary, as we say nowadays, and I determined upon the following course of action, — to wait till evening, then go and knock at her door; as soon as it was opened, draw the bolts behind me, throw myself at her feet, and repeat to her in person all that I had told her in writing.

“Should she reject me, well, it would then be time to have recourse to more extreme measures.

“The plan did not lack in boldness, but the author of it did.

“That evening I went resolutely as far as the bottom of my staircase, but could I get no farther.

“The next day, I went up to the second floor, but could not summon up courage to go any higher.

“The third day, I got as far as her landing, but once arrived there, my audacity had reached its limit; like Cherubino, I dared not dare.

“Finally, on the fourth evening, I vowed to go through with it, cursing my stupidity and cowardice in having behaved so foolishly on the previous evenings.

“I then went into a café and drank off, one after the other, six cups of black coffee, then, strengthened by this three francs’ worth of energy, I dashed up the three flights, and with a feverish hand, not allowing myself time either to reflect or to grope about, I pulled at the bell.

“The moment I heard it ring, I felt ready to throw myself from the top to bottom of the staircase, but I remembered my oath.

"Some one was coming — the door opened — I rushed headlong into a dimly- lit passage, turned the key in the lock, and in a fairly resolute voice, considering the exceptional position in which I found myself, I cried:

"'Mademoiselle!'

"But scarcely had I uttered the word ere a strong hand seized me; I was hurried into a front room, and brought face to face with her whom I sought, and who at my approach rose graciously, whilst my friend Amaury said:

"'My little girl, allow me to introduce to you my friend, Philip Auvray, a thoroughly good fellow who lives opposite you, and who has been wishing to know you for a long time.'

"You know the rest, my dear Amaury; I stayed ten minutes in your delightful society, but heard nothing, my ears tingled so; neither did I see anything, such a mist was there before my eyes; eventually I got up, mumbled something, and took myself off, followed by gusts of uncontrollable laughter from pretty Miss Florence, and a request to come again some other day."

"Well! old man, of what use to recall this episode? I remember you were cool towards me for a long time after; but I thought you had long since forgiven me."

"And so I have, old fellow, but I frankly own that nothing less than your offer to introduce me into your guardian's home, together with your solemn promise that in future you would do anything for me which lay in your power, would have satisfied me. Well! I wished to remind you of your offence, Amaury, before reminding you of your promise."

"My dear Philip," Amaury laughingly replied, "I repent of the one, I remember the other, and I await my day of expiation."

"Well! the day has now arrived," solemnly replied Philip. "I am in love, Amaury! — "

"Ah! nonsense!" cried Amaury, "can you be in earnest?"

"Yes! "Philip resumed, in the same magisterial tone, "but this time I do not mean a student's love. Mine is an earnest, deep, lasting love, which can only end with my life."

Amaury smiled, he was thinking of Antoinette.

"And you wish me," said he "to act as interpreter of your love? Unhappy man, you make me quake! However, go on. Since when have you been in love, and who is the object of your affection?"

“Who is she, Amaury? It is no longer question of a grisette, whose heart can be taken by storm, but of a girl of gentle birth, to whom nothing less than a sacred tie can unite me. I have hesitated long before mentioning the subject even to you, my best friend; but, after all, though not of noble birth, I come from a good and honourable family. Last year, when my dear old uncle died, he left me twenty thousand francs a year, and his house at Enghien; I therefore come to you, Amaury, my friend, my brother, to you who owe me, as you have already acknowledged, reparation for ancient wrongs, — wrongs which were greater than you knew; I come to beg of you to solicit the hand of Mademoiselle Madeleine from your guardian.”

“Good Heavens! what are you talking about, my poor Philip!” exclaimed Amaury.

“I tell you,” repeated Philip in the same solemn tone, “I tell you that I come to beg you, my friend, my brother, you who owe me, as you have already acknowledged, reparation for many wrongs, I repeat, that I come to beg of you to solicit for me the hand — ”

“Of Madeleine?” continued Amaury. “Exactly.”

“Of Madeleine d’Avrigny?”

“Yes, exactly.”

“Then it is not Antoinette you are in love with?”

“I have never given her a thought.”

“And you love Madeleine?”

“Yes! Madeleine; and I come to beg you — ”

“But, unlucky man,” cried Amaury, “you are again too late! I love her too.”

“You love her?”

“Yes! and — ”

“And what?”

“I made proposals for her yesterday, and was accepted.”

“For Madeleine?”

“Yes! exactly.”

“Madeleine d’Avrigny?”

“Exactly.”

Philip flung up his arms, like a man struck with apoplexy; then dazed, stunned, choking, he rose unsteadily to his feet, mechanically took up his hat and went away without saying another word.

Full of pity, Amaury thought at first of going after him. But just then ten o’clock struck, and he remembered that Madeleine expected him at eleven.

CHAPTER XII.

MONSIEUR D’AVRIGNY’S DIARY

“15th May.”

“THANK God! I may still be with my child. It is decided that they are to stay with me, or rather I shall stay with them; I am to go where they go; live where they live.

“They wish to winter in Italy, or rather, with anxious foresight, I have suggested this to them; I shall therefore resign my post of physician to the King, and go with them.

“Since Madeleine considers herself sufficiently wealthy, I too am satisfied.

“Good Heavens! what do I want with more money? If I have accumulated, it was only that I might have still more to give her.

“I know that many people will be astonished at my departure; that in the interests of science they will wish to retain my services, and will reproach me for forsaking my practice. But what care I for all this?

“The only one who needs my entire care is my daughter. Not only is this my greatest happiness, it is likewise my duty; I am indispensable to my two children; I shall look after their money matters.

“My darling is one of the most beautiful women, she must also be one of the most envied, and for all this, and more, their fortune must suffice.

“We shall take a palace at Naples, on the Villa Reale, with a good Southern aspect.

“There my Madeleine will blossom like a flower transplanted to its native soil.

“I shall arrange their entertainments, look after their household, be in fact their steward; it is all arranged; I am to free them from all the material cares of life.

“All they will have to do will be to love each other, and be happy; and that will be quite enough for them.

“This is not all; I intend that this journey, which at first sight seems but a pleasure trip, may serve to arouse Amaury’s ambition. Though he knows nothing of it, I asked the Minister yesterday to entrust him with a secret mission of the highest importance, and this I have obtained for him.

"And the experience I have gained in my thirty years' association with men of good position, in my thirty years' close observation of men and manners, I shall now put at his service. Not only will I help in this work he is given to do, I will do it entirely for him. I will sow the seed, that he may reap the harvest.

"In short, as my fortune, my life, my self belong to my daughter, on him too I bestow the same.

"Everything to them, everything for them; for myself I keep nothing except the right to see Madeleine sometimes smile upon me, to hear her voice, to know that she is happy.

"I shall be with her, that is my constant thought; so incessantly do I dwell upon this that I forget the *Institut*, my practice, the King himself, who has to-day sent to enquire whether I am ill. I forget all else, except my hospitals; my other patients are wealthy, and can easily call in another doctor, but my poor, if I were not there, who would look after them?

"And yet I shall have to leave them when I accompany my daughter. Sometimes I question whether it is right of me to go. And yet it were strange if my first duty were to others in preference to my own child.

"It is incredible, so weak-minded are we, how sometimes we men question the very simplest things.

"I must ask Cruveilhier or Jaubert to replace me, and then my mind will be at rest."

"16th May.

"They are really so joyous that I feel the reflex of their gladness, so happy that my heart warms at sight of their felicity, and although I know that the added warmth in her affection for me is but the overflow of her great love for him, there are moments when, poor forgetful fellow that I am, I deceive myself, — just as sometimes, when listening to a comedy, we are deceived by a story which we know has no truth in it.

"He came here to-day, looking so radiant with joy that I, who was just then on my way to Madeleine's room, remained in the hall, not wishing to mar the joy of their meeting.

"Life holds so few such moments that it were a sinful shame, as people say, to begrudge them to those to whom they come.

“Two minutes later they were walking in the garden — to them a Paradise.

“They are more quiet there, and yet they are never alone. Still there are large trees behind which hand clasps hand, and shady walks where each may draw closer to the other.

“I watched them from behind my window-curtain, and through the masses of lilac bloom saw their hands meet, their loving gaze melt in one another’s eyes; they seemed like everything around them to bud and grow and blossom.

“Oh! springtime! childhood of the year 1

“Oh! childhood! springtime of life.

“And yet I dare not think without dread of the emotions which await my poor child, even though they may be happy ones; she is so weak, that she is crushed by joy as others are by sorrow.

“Will her lover spare her, as her father would? Will he temper the wind, as I would, to the shorn lamb? Will he surround this fragile delicate flower with a warm, even atmosphere, — not too much sun, not too much storm?

“This ardent young fellow, in the excess of his passionate love for my darling, may destroy in one short month the patient work of seventeen years.

“Go then, my poor frail bark, since it must be so, breast the fury of this storm; happily I shall be your pilot, happily I shall not leave you. Were I to leave you, my poor Madeleine, of what use would be my life? Fragile and delicate as I know you to be, I should always be fretting lest you were in pain or on the verge of illness.

“Who would be near to tell you at each hour of the day:

“‘Madeleine, this noonday sun is too hot.’

“‘Madeleine, this evening breeze is too chill.’

“‘Madeleine, throw a scarf over your head.’

“‘Madeleine, throw a shawl over your shoulders.’

“No! he will love you, but will think of love alone; I shall think of how to prolong her life.”

CHAPTER XIII

“17th May.”

ALAS! once again all my dreams have vanished! When I rose this morning, I thought this would have been one of the happiest days of my life, but God willed that it should be full of trouble.

“Amaury came this morning, bright and gay as usual, and as usual I left them with Miss Brown, whilst I made my daily morning visits.

“All day long, I have been happy in the thought that this evening I would tell Amaury of my plans, and of the appointment which I have secured for him. It was five o’clock when I came in, and they were just going to sit down to table.

“Amaury had already gone, in order, no doubt, that he might return the sooner, but one could see by Madeleine’s beaming face, which was radiant with happiness, that he had only just that moment left her.

“Dear child! she says she has never felt better in all her life.

“Have I indeed been mistaken, and is this love destined to strengthen her feeble constitution, which I had so greatly feared it might crush? Nature has its depths, into which the most practised eye and the deepest learning can never penetrate.

“All day long I had dwelt on the thought of the happiness which I had in store for them; I was like a child overjoyed at the idea of surprising someone whom he loves, and who has the secret for ever on the tip of his tongue. So, to avoid the temptation to tell Madeleine all about it, I left her in the drawing-room, and went out into the garden. She had sat down to the piano, and as I walked about, the music she played was borne faintly to my ears, and this melody coming straight from my child’s soul, entered into mine.

“This continued for about a quarter-of- an-hour; I found pleasure in going farther away and then again drawing nearer to these entrancing harmonies.

“On reaching the extreme end of the garden the music was almost inaudible, though notwithstanding the distance the high notes still faintly reached me; then when I drew nearer and re-entered the, circle of harmony, the melody rose and fell as I advanced or retreated.

“Night was gradually coming on, enveloping all things in its friendly darkness.

“Suddenly the music ceased. I smiled to myself; Amaury had come.

“I turned to retrace my steps to the drawing-room, but took a different path, a more lonely one which ran along the wall.

“Here I came across Antoinette, seated on a bench, deep in thought. For the last two days I had been wishing to speak to her privately; so thinking this a favourable opportunity, I sat down beside her.

“Dear Antoinette! I had often felt that her presence would somewhat mar the delightful trio to which I had so looked forward, that the warm affection of so close an intimacy did not allow of any witness, whosoever it might be, and that the journey would be all the more enjoyable if Antoinette were not of the party.

“Still, I had no intention of leaving the dear child here alone; I could not go away comfortably until her future were assured, until she also was surrounded by the same affection to which we three, Madeleine, Amaury and I, owed our happiness. I love the child; moreover I loved my sister too dearly to act differently. Therefore, just as I had arranged everything for Amaury and Madeleine, so I had settled matters for Antoinette.

“She looked up on seeing me, smiled and held out her hand.

“‘Well! dear uncle,’ she said, ‘did I not foretell that in their happiness you would find your own? Have not my words come true? Are you not happy?’

“‘Yes! my dear child,’ I replied, ‘but that they and I should be happy is not all-sufficient; we must see that you are happy too?’

“‘Well, dear uncle, and so I am; what can I desire more? You love me as a father, Madeleine and Amaury as a sister; what more can I ask?’

“‘Someone who will give you a husband’s love, dear niece, and this ‘someone ‘I have found.’

“‘My dear uncle! ‘Antoinette exclaimed, in a tone which seemed to forbid any further discussion on the subject.

“‘Listen to what I have to say, Antoinette, and then you will give me your answer.’

“‘What is it, uncle?’

“‘You know Monsieur Jules Raymond?’

“‘The young solicitor who is your man of business?’

“‘Yes! what do you think of him?’

“‘I think him charming — *as a solicitor,* dear uncle.’

"'Come, do not jest, Antoinette. Do you feel any repugnance towards this young man?'

"'Dear uncle, it is only such as love, who can experience the reverse of that I passion; and as I love no one in particular, to me all men are equally indifferent.'

"'Listen, dear, Monsieur Jules Raymond came to see me yesterday, and if you are indifferent to him, he, at any rate, is not indifferent to you. Monsieur Jules Raymond is one of those men whose future is assured, because it lies in their own hands. And he asks to share this future with you. — He knows that you have a marriage portion of two hundred thousand francs, and--'

"'My dear uncle!' interrupted Antoinette, 'you are in this, as in everything, so generous to me, that I cannot allow you to say anything more on the subject without thanking you from my heart. Monsieur Jules Raymond is, I know, far superior to most business men, and I esteem him highly, but have I not already told you that my sole wish is to remain with you? I can imagine no greater happiness, and unless you insist upon a different future for me, it is the one which I should choose.'

"I tried to insist, and pointed out to her how very advantageous this marriage would be; that the man whom I wished her to marry was young, rich, and greatly respected; that I could not live for ever, and when I was gone, what would become of her, alone in the world, with no one to love and protect her?

"Antoinette listened with an air of quiet determination, and when I had finished, she said:

"'Uncle, dear! as my dying parents bequeathed to you the authority which they had over me, I therefore owe you the same implicit obedience which I gave to my father and mother.

"'I am ready to comply with your wishes; but do not try to convince me, for in my present frame of mind, if I am allowed free will, I shall refuse whoever is introduced to me as a future husband, be he a millionaire or a prince.'

"Her voice and manner were so determined that I realized, were I to insist, I should be commanding rather than persuading her. I therefore set her mind entirely at rest.

"After telling her that she would always be free to marry whom she would, I unfolded to her all the plans which I was going to impart in a few moments to my two children. I told her that she would accompany us on our journey, and that instead of being three happy mortals together, we should be four.

"But she shook her head and answered that, although thanking me from the bottom of her heart, she would not form one of the party.

"At this I expostulated.

"'Listen, dear uncle,' she said, 'God, who orders all things, has destined happiness for some, sorrow for others. My lot is loneliness. Fifteen years ago, when I was still a child, I lost my father and mother. Let me stay on here alone with Miss Brown; I feel that the noise and bustle of a long journey, and the continued change of scene and people would be irksome to me.

"'I shall await your return to Paris; and will only leave my room to go to church, and will walk about the garden in the evening. Then when you come home again, you will still find me here, with the same peace at my heart, the same smile on my lips; but all this I shall lose, dear uncle, if you try to shape my life into other forms than what it is destined to take.'

"I no longer insisted; but for a few moments wondered what motive could possibly actuate Antoinette, although in the world, to lead the life of a recluse, and thus to turn into a nun a young girl, handsome, clever and full of fun, and possessed moreover of a dowry of two hundred thousand francs.

"But after all what did it matter? why should I worry over a girl's whims? why waste my time in trying to comfort, pity, or cheer Antoinette, instead of going straight back to the drawing-room?

"And God only knows how long I should have remained there, if Antoinette herself had not taken the initiative, and feeling at a loss how to answer the. questions which she saw hovering on my lips, asked permission to go to her own room.

"'No! dear child,' I answered, 'do not trouble to move, for I am going in myself. I only wish that Madeleine were able to sit out in the evening air as you can, without risk of taking cold.'

"'And, uncle dear,' exclaimed Antoinette, rising as she spoke, 'I swear to you by the stars shining down upon us, by the soft moonlight which surrounds us, that were it in my power, I would give Madeleine the perfect health which I enjoy. Were it not far better that I, a poor orphan, should be threatened by the danger which menaces her, who is so rich in all else, especially love.'"

“I kissed Antoinette tenderly, for the dear child had spoken with a warmth of feeling which left no doubt as to the sincerity of her words, and as she sank back on the seat I took my way towards the house.

CHAPTER XIV.

“AS I put my foot on the first step leading to the balcony, Madeleine’s voice, as soft and sweet as an angel’s, broke in on my sad musings. I stood still to hear, not her words, but merely to listen to the music of her tones. A few words, however, travelled from my hearing to my consciousness, and then I was no longer satisfied with hearing her voice, I listened to what she was saying.

“The window which led into the garden stood open, with the curtains drawn across it to shut off the night air; and the shadow of their two heads close together was silhouetted on the curtains.

“They were talking in an undertone. I listened.

“I listened, dumb, motionless, stupefied, scarce daring to breathe, for each word they said fell on my heart with an icy chill.

“‘Madeleine,’ Amaury was saying, ‘what happiness is in store for me; to see you every day and always, and to watch your dear face grow ever more beautiful under the blue sky of Naples or Sorrento.’

“‘Yes, Amaury dear,’ Madeleine replied, ‘I shall be able to say with Mignon:

“‘How fair is the land where the orange trees bloom.’

But best of all is your great love, the reflex of heaven itself.’

“‘Oh, dear! ‘said Amaury, with a sigh in which could be detected a faint note of impatience.

“‘Why do your sigh,’ Madeleine asked.

“‘I was only wondering why we can never know unclouded happiness.’

“‘What do you mean?’

“‘I mean that Italy would be to us an Eldorado, that I could repeat with you and Mignon:

“‘There, there is the land of love, —
The land of the joy of life,’ —

if it were not for one thing which will spoil our life, sadden our love.’

“‘And what is that?’

“‘I dare not tell you, Madeleine.

"'Come, you must.'

"'Well, then! I feel that for us to be perfectly happy we should be absolutely alone. I feel that love is such a tender and holy thing, that it is tarnished and desecrated by the presence of a third person, whoever he may be, and that to merge completely in each other, to become, in fact, one, we should not be three.'

"'What do you mean, Amaury?'

"'Oh! you must see what I mean.'

"'Do you speak in this way because my father is to go with us? But reflect one moment; how very ungrateful we should be if we allowed him to have the least suspicion that his presence was a bar to our complete happiness. My father! we owe all our happiness to him; besides, he is not a stranger, not a third person, but a third part of our two selves. For he loves us, one as well as the other, Amaury, and we should love him equally.'

"'Oh, very well,' Amaury answered, rather coldly, 'as you and I feel differently on this subject, we had best say no more about it, and forget that I ever mentioned it.'

"'My darling,' Madeleine said quickly,.' have I wounded you? If so, forgive me! Have you not yet discovered, you stupid, jealous boy, that love for one's lover and love for one's father are two very different things?"

"'Oh! Good Heavens! yes,' replied Amaury; 'I know all that: but a father's love is not jealous and exclusive as ours is, the difference lies in your being used to it; whereas I never get used to seeing you, to me you are an absolute necessity. Did not the Bible, that great voice of humanity, proclaim two thousand years ago:

"'Thou shalt leave father and mother and cleave to thy husband.'

"I longed to interrupt them, to cry out: 'But the Bible says also, in speaking of Rachel:

"'And she would not be comforted because her children were not.'

"But I was chained to the spot, without power of movement or speech; I felt a painful satisfaction in hearing my child take my part, but it seemed to me that she should do more than simply defend me. I longed to hear her tell her lover that I was as necessary to her as she to me; I still hoped to hear her say this.

I" She continued:

"'Yes! Amaury, perhaps you are right; but I know that we cannot dispense with my father's company without wounding him terribly, —

besides if at times his I presence is a restraint upon us, at others he will be a link with the past.”

“‘My dear Madeleine,’ said Amaury, ‘do not deceive yourself; do you think that when Monsieur d’Avrigny is with us, I shall be able to tell you, as I do now, that I love you? When we stroll through the dim orange groves of which we were just now speaking, or along the shore of that clear, sparkling sea, not just we two, but we three, if he walks behind, shall I be able to slip my arm round your waist, and steal from your lips the kiss they even; now refuse to give? Will not his grave ‘face frighten away our gladness? Is he of our own age, that he can understand our foolish ways? You will see, Madeleine, how his serious face will throw a shadow:: over all our gladness.

“‘If, on the other hand, we were alone in our post-chaise, how at times we would chatter, at others keep perfect silence! But with your father, we shall never feel free; we shall have to say nothing, when we would wish to talk, and talk when we would wish to be silent.

“‘With him, we shall always have to keep up the conversation, and for ever in the same tone; with him, no adventures, no hazardous expeditions, no piquant incognitos, but always the straight road — the law of order — the proprieties of life. But, Madeleine, understand me well; I am most grateful to your father; I respect — I may say — love him; but need a feeling of veneration prompt us to have a companion on our travels? do you not think it very uncomfortable to be always under surveillance?

‘“You, my dear Madeleine, in your maiden modesty, and with your affection for your father, had not given all this a thought, but I see by your pensive air, that you do think of it now.

“‘Well! the longer you reflect upon it, the more will you be convinced that I am right, and that when three people travel together, two, at any rate, feel bored.’

“I listened anxiously for Madeleine’s reply — it was long in coming; at last, however, she said:

“‘But, Amaury, even supposing that I share your opinion, tell me what is to be done? Everything is arranged for the journey, and meanwhile, my father has made all his plans to accompany us. Would it be reasonable to say anything, now that it is too late? Besides, poor dear father, who would dare give him to understand that he was in our way? Would you, Amaury? One thing is certain, I would not.’

"'Good Heavens! I know all this,' said Amaury, 'and it is just what makes me feel so desperate.

"'Monsieur d'Avrigny, whose intellect is so superior, so acute, so penetrating as regards the physical and material part of our organization, should be equally so as regards the mind, and should know better than to allow himself that cruel habit old people often have, of imposing their society on young folk.

'"I do not wish to offend you in accusing him, but really are not some fathers unpleasantly blind to the natural desires of their children, and the amusements due to their age? They seem to expect them to enjoy the same pleasures as themselves, and to forget what they were in their own youth. Well! this journey which might have been so gloriously happy for us, will be spoiled by this fatal — '

"'Hush! 'whispered Madeleine, placing a finger on Amaury's lips,' hush! naughty boy, you must not talk like that. Listen, dear, I cannot be angry with you for being so exacting, as this but proves your love, but — '

"'But I seem to you foolishly exacting, is it not so? 'Amaury said, with a suspicion of ill-humour.

"'No! no! 'answered Madeleine, 'but let us speak quite low, for what I am about to tell you seems almost wicked, and I dread to hear myself say it.'

"And Madeleine accordingly lowered her voice. 'No, far from your objections appearing to me foolish, well, Amaury, I also share them; but hitherto I have not wished to own it to myself, much less to you.

"'But what would you have, Amaury, dear? I promise to be so good to you, to repeat to you so often how great is my love, that you in turn, will feel bound to do something to please me, and you must resign yourself to the inevitable as I do.'

"On hearing these words, I felt that I could bear no more; they pierced me to the heart.

"How blind, how selfish I had been; I had readily seen that Antoinette would be in my way, yet had not realized that I would be in theirs. However, the re-action was quick and sure.

"A sadder but a wiser man, I stepped on to the balcony and into the drawing- room, the noise my boots made on the steps giving warning of my approach.

‘‘As I entered the room they both rose; I kissed Madeleine and shook hands with Amaury; then said:

“‘I have bad news for you, my dear children.’ I noticed that they both started, although my tone must have led them to understand that the misfortune did not immediately concern themselves.

find that I must give up all idea of being with you on your travels. You will have to go without me, as the King will on no account grant me leave of absence. His Majesty is good enough to say that I am of use to him, — a necessity even, and has desired me to remain here.

“‘So what can I do? When a King expresses a desire, it is practically a command.’

“‘Oh, father! how unfortunate!” said Madeleine; “you are willing to do more for the King than for your own child.’

“‘At all events, dear guardian,” Amaury replied, unable under his apparent regret, to conceal his real delight, ‘although absent in body, you will yet be always with us in our thoughts.’

“They were going to enlarge on the subject, but I at once changed the conversation, or rather, turned it into a different channel, for their innocent hypocrisy hurt me horribly.

“I told Amaury all my wishes; of the mission which I had procured for him, and the hope I had entertained of making this pleasure tour one which would prove of use to him in his diplomatic career.

“He appeared very grateful for what I had done; but just then the dear boy was absorbed by one thought alone, — his great love.

“When he left, Madeleine accompanied him out of the room.

“As chance would have it, I was at that moment behind the door, having walked over to fetch a book from one of the small tables. Madeleine did not see me.

“‘Really, Amaury,’ she said, ‘does it not seem as if circumstances had guessed our wishes, and complied with them? What say you?’

“‘I think,’ Amaury replied, ‘that evidently we had left ambition out of our calculations, and that it is a mistake to. slander the said quality of ambition. Does it not seem at times as if some faults yield better results than many virtues?’

“So my daughter will believe that ambition is my reason for staying behind. Well, so be it; perhaps it is just as well.”

CHAPTER XV.

FROM this time forward the young people were perfectly happy, and during the next few days everyone appeared smiling and gay; but the minds of two’ out of the four persons concerned were full of anxious thoughts which, when they were alone, found expression on their faces.

Although Monsieur d’Avrigny was outwardly cheerful, he was none the less very anxious about Madeleine’s state of health, and whenever he could spare a few moments to be with her, he watched her most carefully.

To all appearances, Madeleine seemed stronger and brighter since the date of her marriage with Amaury had been fixed, but her father, as a medical man, noticed in her appearance unmistakable symptoms of physical and mental disease.

The colour had returned to her usually pale cheeks, but this hectic flush, which might easily be mistaken for a sign of perfect health, was rather too pronounced, leaving the remainder of her face deadly pale, so that the tracery of blueish veins, scarcely perceptible in others, was plainly visible beneath the girl’s clear transparent skin.

By everyone but Monsieur d’Avrigny the brilliancy of his daughter’s looks was attributed to youth and love, but to his experienced eye these were but indications of latent fever.

Throughout the day Madeleine was strong and well, skipping happily about the house or running in and out of the garden like a wild thing.

But in the morning, before Amaury had arrived, or after he had left in the evening, all this youthful energy, which the advent of her lover alone seemed to rouse, died out in the young girl, and her feeble frame, like a reed borne down by its own weight, needed assistance not merely to walk, but even to rest.

Besides, she who was usually so sweet- tempered and thoughtful for others, had, during the last week or so, sadly altered. True, this was only with regard to one person. When, two years ago, Monsieur d’Avrigny had brought Antoinette to his house to be a companion to Madeleine, she had welcomed her as a sister, but although Antoinette had never been different to Madeleine, Monsieur d’Avrigny’s watchful eye had perceived that Madeleine had greatly changed towards Antoinette.

Whenever the young brunette came into the room, with her brilliant colouring, hair black as a raven's wing, eyes full of life, and her whole appearance betokening youth and health, at once a feeling of pain, which might have been mistaken for one of envy in anyone less angelic than Madeleine, took possession of her, all unknown to herself, and perverted in her mind all her friend's doings.

If Antoinette remained in her room, and Amaury asked about her, his friendly inquiry was met by a few stinging words.

If Antoinette were present, and Amaury allowed his eyes for one moment to rest on her, Madeleine, in a fret, hurried her lover off to the garden.

If Antoinette were in the garden, and Amaury, without even knowing that Antoinette were there, suggested to Madeleine that they should go into it, she would at once invent some plausible excuse for remaining in the drawing-room, — either the sun was too hot, or the air too chilly.

In fact, Madeleine, usually so charming and pleasant to everyone, behaved towards her cousin with all the waywardness which a spoilt child shows towards another whom she dislikes, and thinks in her way.

It is true that Antoinette appeared quite unconscious of all these petty slights, and seemed to think her cousin's behaviour perfectly natural, although at any other time both her feelings and her pride would have been greatly hurt by Madeleine's unkindness. On the contrary, it was Antoinette who made excuses for Madeleine's imaginary wrongs. Antoinette, who was in reality the injured one, seemed to plead for pardon; it was Antoinette who, if Amaury had not yet arrived, or if he had just left, would draw near to Madeleine, who, appearing only then to realize how unkind she had been, and how greatly she had wronged her, would press her hand, and sometimes even throw her arms round her neck, almost ready to cry.

Was there, then, deep in the hearts of these two young girls, a voice which, unheard by others, spoke to each of them alone?

Often Monsieur d'Avrigny had tried to explain away Madeleine's unkindness, but directly he began to speak, Antoinette would smilingly place her finger on his lips and impose silence.

The day fixed for the ball was approaching; on the evening before, both girls had a long discussion about their gowns, and greatly to Amaury's surprise, Madeleine seemed to take more interest in her cousin's dress than in her own.

At first Antoinette had suggested that Madeleine and she should dress alike, as they usually did, and wear white net over satin. But Madeleine protested that Antoinette looked best in pink, and the other agreed with her at once, and said that she would certainly wear pink; after that nothing further was said on the matter, and everything seemed settled.

The day following this conversation Amaury and Madeleine spent together, and on that same evening Monsieur d'Avrigny intended to announce to his friends the betrothal of his two children.

But Amaury, who knew how unaffected his betrothed usually was, could not account for the unusual state of agitation into which Madeleine now threw herself over the slightest thing, and he particularly noticed how excited she was about her dress for the coming evening's festivities. What could be the matter with her? Did she not know that in his eyes she was invariably the most beautiful of all.

Amaury left Madeleine at about five o'clock, and was at the house again by seven. He wanted to have her to himself at least for one hour before the other guests arrived, that they might be quite alone and he might feast his eyes on her beauty, and whisper in her ear without fear of what the world might say.

When Amaury came in Madeleine's toilette was complete, and there only remained to fasten in her hair a wreath of white camellias, which was lying on a table near by. But she was dissatisfied with her appearance. Her extreme pallor alarmed Amaury; the day had been full of petty annoyances, which had used up her strength, and it was only by a strong effort of will, and much wear and tear of nervous energy, that she was able to compose herself at all.

Instead of greeting Amaury with her usual bright smile, a movement of impatience escaped her on perceiving him; like himself, she was struck by her own excessive pallor, and said with a bitter smile:

"You think me very pale to-night, do you not, Amaury? but some days everything seems to go wrong, and it is so to-night. My hair is unbecomingly dressed, my gown a failure, and altogether I look horrid."

The unfortunate dressmaker was in the room, and protested it was not so.

"You look horrid?" said Amaury, "why, Madeleine, it is quite the reverse, your *coiffure* suits you admirably, your dress is most becoming, you are beautiful and graceful as ever."

"Then," said Madeleine, "evidently the fault is not in my dressmaker, nor my hairdresser, but in myself; it is I who suit neither the arrangement of my hair, nor my dress. My dear Amaury, why have you the bad taste to love me?"

Amaury drew near to kiss her hand, but although Madeleine was standing in front of the looking-glass, she pretended not to see him, and turning to the dressmaker, pointed out an almost imperceptible crease in her bodice.

"Just look at that crease, Mademoiselle; you really must alter it, or I warn you that I shall throw this dress aside, and wear the first that comes to hand."

"But really, Mademoiselle," said the poor woman, "it is a mere nothing, and if you wish, I can alter it in a moment; but if so, you must take off the bodice."

"Do you hear, Amaury, you must leave us; I must certainly have this disfiguring crease removed."

"And you wish me to go, Madeleine? Well! then, I will; I do not wish to be accused of a crime against beauty."

And Amaury passed into the adjoining room, whilst Madeleine seemed so taken up with the fit of her gown, that she made no attempt to detain him.

As the necessary alteration would take but a few moments, Amaury went into the room adjoining Madeleine's dressing- room, and, to wile away the time, he took up a magazine which was lying on a table.

But though following the lines with his eyes, the words conveyed no meaning to Amaury's mind, for, in spite of himself, he listened to what was passing in the next room, from which only a door separated him. Not a word of the reproaches which Madeleine continued to heap on her dressmaker therefore escaped him. he heard everything, even to the impatient tap of her small foot on the oak flooring Just then the door opposite the dressing-room opened and Antoinette appeared. She had followed Madeleine's advice, and was attired in a simple gown of pink, *crêpe de chine*, but wore neither flowers jewels, nor ornaments of any kind; it was impossible to be more simply dressed than she was, and yet she looked charming.

"Oh! are you there?" she said to Amaury, "I did not know it," and she I turned away.

“Why are you going away? at least, allow me to compliment you; truly, Antoinette, you look your very best this evening.”

“Hush! Amaury,” said the young girl, putting her finger to her lips, and lowering her voice, “do not say anything about that.”

“Who is with you, Amaury?” and, as she spoke, Madeleine opened the door, wrapped in a large cashmere shawl, and she looked at poor Antoinette from head to foot, who hastily turned away.

“As you see, dear,” replied the young man, “I am with Antoinette, and was just complimenting her on her appearance.”

“Probably you were as sincere in what you said to her as in what you said to me; it would be much better, Antoinette, if you came and helped me, instead of listening to this idle flatterer.”

“I have but just entered the room, Madeleine,” the young girl said, “and had I known you wanted me, I should have !come to you sooner.”

“Who made that dress for you?” Madeleine asked.

“I made it myself; you know I never trust anyone to do that for me.”

“You are wise, for no dressmaker could turn you out a gown equal to that.”

“I offered to make yours too, Madeleine, but you refused.”

“And who helped you to dress?”

“No one.”

“Who dressed your hair?”

“Why, of course, I did; you can see I have dressed it just as usual.”

“You are right,” Madeleine said, with an envious smile, “you need nothing to enhance your beauty.”

Antoinette went up to her cousin, and whispered so low that Amaury could not hear what she said, “Madeleine, if you have any reason for wishing me not to appear at this dance, say but the word, and I will remain in my room.”

“Why should I deprive you of this pleasure? “Madeleine answered aloud.

“I do assure you, my dear cousin, this dance is no pleasure to me.”

“I should have thought,” Madeleine said pettishly, “that whatever is a pleasure to me, would also be one to my friend! Antoinette.”

“Is the splendour of a ball, with its glitter of lights and sound of music, necessary to make ‘me share your happiness, Madeleine? No! alone in my room, my prayers for you are as sincere as in the gay and crowded throng; but this evening I feel ill.”

“You ill? “Madeleine cried, “with your bright eyes and flushed cheeks; and what of me, then, with my pale face and heavy eyes?”

“Will you kindly come, Mademoiselle,” said the dressmaker, “your gown is ready.”

“You told me I could help you,” Antoinette timidly said, “what can I do?”

“Oh! do as you like,” Madeleine replied, “I have no orders to give you; come with me if you like, or stay with Amaury, if you prefer it.”

And she walked back into her dressing- room in such evident ill-humour that it could not escape even Amaury’s notice.

CHAPTER XVI.

“HERE I am,” said Antoinette, following her cousin into her boudoir, and closing the door behind her.

“But what ails her to-day? “Amaury murmured, still looking at the closed door.

And from behind a voice answered the young man’s question — ” She is ill; all these different emotions drive her into a fever, and this fever is killing her.”

“Ah! is that you, father?” said Amaury, recognising Monsieur d’Avrigny’s voice; the latter had watched this little scene from behind the *portiere.*

“Believe me, I had no intention of implying any blame to Madeleine, but was only questioning myself; I was only afraid I had annoyed her in some way.”

“No! be consoled, Amaury; you are no more to blame than Antoinette; the fault lies in your being loved too well.”

“I am thankful, dear father, that you are able to reassure me on this point,” said Amaury.

“Now,” Monsieur d’Avrigny continued, “promise me one thing; do not tempt her to dance, above all she must not waltz; apart from the square dances, in which you must join, sit out with her and speak of your future life together.”

“Oh yes! you may trust me to do so.”

Just then Madeleine’s voice was heard saying impatiently: “Oh! good Heavens! Madame Leroux, how clumsy you are to-day; let Antoinette take your place and get it over.”

There was a moment’s silence, then she cried: “Well! Antoinette, what are you doing?”

And the exclamation was accompanied by a sound as of material being torn.

“Oh! it is nothing,” Antoinette said with a laugh, “only a pin scratching against the satin, that is all. Never fear, — you will still be belle of the ball.”

“Belle of the ball! oh yes! Antoinette, it is so kind of you to make fun at my expense.”

“The honour of being belle of the ball will fall to her who is most becomingly dressed, not to me, whom nothing seems to suit.”

“My dear Madeleine! what are you saying? “Antoinette said reproachfully.

“I say that it will be time enough when in the ball-room to crow over me as you are doing, and crush me with your conquests and coquettish ways, without following me into my own room. It is ungenerous of you to pursue me here and flaunt your anticipated conquest in my face.”

“Do you wish me to go?” said Antoinette with tears in her voice.

Madeleine said nothing; this was the most cruel thing of all, and Antoinette left the room, sobbing bitterly.

Monsieur d’Avrigny stopped her, whilst Amaury, amazed at the scene, remained motionless in his chair.

“Come, come, my dear child, my poor Antoinette.”

“Oh! father dear, I am so unhappy,” the poor girl murmured.

“That is not what you would mean to say, or what you ought to say,” replied Monsieur d’Avrigny, “you should say that Madeleine is most unjust, but she is not responsible for what she says; the poor child is in a high fever. You must rather pity than blame her; with returning health she will be more reasonable, she will be sorry for her anger and ask your forgiveness.”

Madeleine heard two voices whispering together, and probably thought that Antoinette and Amaury were talking of her.

Therefore, pushing open the door, which Antoinette had forgotten to close behind her, she said impatiently: “Amaury!”

As Amaury rose to obey her summons, she saw that he was alone, whilst Antoinette and her father were talking together at the opposite end of the room; so the two voices she had heard must have been those of Monsieur d’Avrigny and his niece.

She flushed hotly, whilst Amaury, taking her hand, led her back to her boudoir.

“In Heaven’s name, my darling,” Amaury said, failing entirely to conceal the real anxiety which he felt, “what is the matter with you? I can no longer recognise in you my sweet Madeleine.”

At these words from him, all her anger melted away; she threw herself into an armchair and burst into a flood of tears.

“Oh yes!” she said, “how wicked I am! I know you are thinking so, but you don’t like to tell me. Yes! I have cut dear Antoinette to the heart, and I make you all, the very people I love best, suffer. Why is it I can see no good in anything, not even in inanimate objects? everything hurts me; everything gives me pain; the furniture which I jostle against, the air which I breathe, the words which are said to me; things to which I am indifferent as well as those which I care for most. When everything goes well, and happiness seems almost within my grasp, what is the cause of this bitterness, which wells up in me and spends itself on my surroundings? Why are my irritated nerves at war with all things, daylight and darkness, silence and noise? Sometimes I get fits of deep depression, at others I fly into a passion without cause or reason. If I were ill or unhappy, I might understand myself, but we two are happy, are we not, Amaury dear? Oh! comfort me, repeat to me that we really are happy.”

“Yes! my own darling; of course we are happy. And why should we not be happy? I love you, and am beloved by you; in one short month we shall belong to each other, be united for ever. What more can any mortals ask of God than the power to arrange their lives according to their own heart’s desire?”

“Oh!” she said, “I know that your great love will make excuses for all my shortcomings; but what about my poor Antoinette, to whom I have been so cruel?”

“I can answer for her, dear; she forgives you as readily as I do. Why! do not moments of loneliness and sadness come to every one of us at times? Therefore, I do beseech you not to worry about it at all. Rain, a thunder-storm, a passing cloud, all these things cause us to experience a certain uneasiness for which we cannot account; and I truly believe these are the real causes of our variable tempers.”

“Come here, my dear guardian,” Amaury continued, on seeing Madeleine’s father, “and try to help me convince this dear child that we know her natural goodness too well to allow ourselves to be wounded by a passing whim or a moment’s ill-temper.”

Without making any reply, Monsieur d’Avrigny approached Madeleine anxiously, looked at her attentively and felt her pulse.

After a few moments’ silence, during which his whole attention was concentrated on the examination he was making, he looked up and said:

"My dear child, I am going to ask you to make a sacrifice. Listen, Madeleine," he went on, drawing her close to him, "you must promise to grant your old father's request."

"Oh! my dear father," Madeleine cried, "you alarm me."

Amaury turned pale, because he could see from Monsieur d'Avrigny's beseeching tone, how very real was his anxiety.

There was another silence, and although Monsieur d'Avrigny tried hard to conceal his feelings, his brow grew more and more gloomy.

"Tell me, father," and Madeleine trembled as she spoke, "what do you wish me to do? Am I worse than I thought?"

"My darling child," Monsieur d'Avrigny replied, ignoring Madeleine's question, "I do not wish to ask you to forego the pleasure of appearing at the ball to-night, although that would be wisest and best; but were I to ask this, you would think me over-exacting. I do however, implore you, Madeleine, not to dance, particularly not to waltz. Without being actually ill, you are in too nervous and excited a state for me to permit you to indulge in any exercise which might still further excite you."

"Oh! but, father, you ask of me a very hard thing," Madeleine exclaimed pettishly.

"I shall neither dance nor waltz," Amaury whispered to her.

Amaury said truly that Madeleine, although at times unlike herself through feverish excitement, was in reality good at heart.

The unselfishness shown by all who loved her deeply touched the girl.

"Very well," she said, her eyes dim with unshed tears of tenderness and regret, whilst a sweet smile appeared and died away again on her lips. "Well, I resign myself, and will comply with your request, it is the least I can do to make amends for my recent unkindness, and prove to you all that I am not always capricious and selfish. Dear father, I promise neither to dance nor waltz this evening."

Monsieur d'Avrigny gave a sigh of relief.

"And," continued Madeleine, "as above all things we must respect the ways of the world, and yield to the proprieties, I give you permission, Monsieur Amaury, to dance — even to waltz — with anyone you like. But you must not do so too often; then I hope you will sometimes consent to be my carpet knight, and share with me the *rôle* of inactivity to which fatherly anxiety and professional solicitude condemn me."

“My darling Madeleine, thank you a thousand times,” Monsieur d’Avrigny cried.

“You are adorable, and I love you better than my life,” Amaury whispered to her.

A footman entered, and announced that the guests were beginning to arrive. It was therefore time to go down to the reception rooms; but first Madeleine asked to see Antoinette. She had scarcely expressed the wish before the curtain was gently drawn aside, and Antoinette herself appeared, smiling brightly, although her eyes were still red with weeping.

“Ah! my dear, long-suffering sister,” Madeleine said, and she advanced towards her cousin, “if you only knew — ”

But Antoinette would not allow her to finish her sentence; she threw her arms round her cousin’s neck, and interrupted by a kiss each word which she attempted to say.

Thus they were soon reconciled to each other, and the two girls came into the ball-room arm in arm; Madeleine still pale and subdued, Antoinette already full of animation and spirits.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT first all went well.

In spite of what Madeleine had said, and notwithstanding her evident dejection and extreme pallor, she was so perfectly beautiful and distinguished looking that she remained indisputably the belle of the ball. Antoinette, with her exuberance of high spirits and health, was the only one who might perhaps have shared that honour with her.

Moreover, directly the music struck up, Madeleine thrilled with the excitement which a spirited and well-conducted band invariably produces. Her colour and her smile came back to her face, and she who was so weak but ten minutes earlier, seemed to regain strength as if by magic.

But one thing more than aught else was flooding Madeleine's heart with unspeakable joy. As each guest of any importance was announced, Monsieur d'Avrigny introduced Amaury to them as his future son-in-law, and all who heard the news, looking first at Madeleine, then at Amaury, seemed to think that he was indeed lucky in being the chosen husband of such a charming girl.

Amaury kept his promise to Madeleine. He danced a few square dances at long intervals with two or three different partners, whom courtesy required that he should ask. But during these intervals he was constantly at Madeleine's side, and the gentle pressure of her hand and the evident happiness in her face, thanked him more eloquently than any words.

Now and again Antoinette too would come up to her cousin, like a subject paying homage to her queen, and, after inquiring how she was feeling, would joke with her over the dowdily-dressed women who figured at this ball as at every other, and who form a constant topic of conversation to those dancers who would otherwise have nothing to say to each other. After one of these flying visits from Antoinette, Amaury, who was standing beside Madeleine, said:

"Now, my unselfish little girl, as I know you wish to make full amends, had I not better ask Antoinette to dance?"

"Antoinette? why, of course," said Madeleine. "As a matter of fact, I had not thought of it, but you are right; else she would be vexed with me."

"What! vexed with you?"

“Of course! she would think it was I who had prevented your asking her to dance.”

“What an absurd idea! “Amaury exclaimed. “I cannot think your cousin would be so foolish.”

“After all, neither do I,” Madeleine replied, forcing a laugh. “Of course it would be too absurd on her part; however, to avoid the possibility of such a thing, I am glad you have thought of asking her. Do not therefore delay any longer, for already the men are crowding round her.”

Amaury, not noticing the slightly bitter accent in her voice, took her at her word, and went at once towards Antoinette, thus adding one more to her train of followers; then, after a fairly long chat with her, he returned to Madeleine, who had been watching him the whole time.

“Well!” she said, trying to speak as naturally as she could, “which quadrille is it to be?”

“My darling,” Amaury answered, “if you are queen of the ball, Antoinette is vice-queen. Evidently I came upon the scene too late, for she was surrounded by would-be partners, and had her programme full to overflowing.”

“Then she could not give you a dance? “Madeleine said quickly.

“Yes, she is giving me one as a special favour; as I asked for it in your name, she is throwing over one of her admirers — my old friend Philip, I believe — and is giving me the fifth on the programme.

“The fifth dance!” said Madeleine.

She remained deep in thought a moment, then said: “That will be a waltz.”

“Possibly! “Amaury replied carelessly.

From that moment, Madeleine became absent-minded and preoccupied; she scarcely replied to anything her lover said, but followed Antoinette’s every movement. The latter, restored by the music, lights and animated scene, to her natural brightness, was courted by all, and full of life and laughter, her light sylph-like movements bringing sunshine and brightness wherever she went.

Philip treated Amaury coldly, and held aloof from him. Thinking it due to his offended dignity to refuse the invitation, he had at first decided not to attend the ball, but, on second thoughts, he could not resist the temptation of being able to say on the following day: “I was at the ball given by

Monsieur d’Avrigny in honour of his daughter’s engagement — ” and so he had come.

Then, after what had passed, he thought the best thing for him to do, was to be effusive to Antoinette and cold to Madeleine.

Unfortunately for him, as Amaury had kept his secret, neither of the young girls knew of his disappointment, consequently his reserve, as well as his gallantry, passed unnoticed by each.

Monsieur d’Avrigny watched his daughter from a distance. During one of the intervals, he came up to her and said: “You had better go to your room, dear; I can see you are not well.”

“Quite the contrary, father dear; I am feeling very well, very well indeed, I assure you,” Madeleine replied in a hard voice, and smiling absently; “besides it is interesting to watch the dancers, and I wish to remain.”

“Madeleine!”

“My dear father, do not, I implore you, insist on my leaving; you are mistaken if you think I am suffering; I have never felt better in my life.”

And indeed, by this time, Madeleine had worked herself up to such a pitch of nervous excitement that she was looking radiantly beautiful, and she heard everyone around her remarking upon it.

As the waltz promised to Amaury drew near, Antoinette also watched Madeleine uneasily; now and again the eyes of the two young girls met, and whilst Antoinette would at once withdraw her gaze, Madeleine’s eyes glittered dangerously.

When the quadrille, preceding the fifth dance was over, Antoinette came and sat down beside her cousin.

As to Monsieur d’Avrigny, he had not lost sight of his daughter for one single moment; he noted with alarm the unusual glitter in her eyes, which seemed to burn up her tears; he watched the nervous tremors which she could not repress, and he too trembled. At last, unable to contain himself longer, he came up to her, took her hand in his, and said in a tone of intolerable pain and distress:

“Madeleine, what is troubling you? Do what you wish, child; anything will be less hurtful to you than this mental strain.”

“Do you really give me permission to do what I wish? “Madeleine exclaimed.

“Alas! I must, — you leave me no alternative.”

“Then may I waltz once — just once, with Amaury?”

“If you wish it — yes! “Monsieur d’Avrigny repeated.

“Then, Amaury “ — Madeleine cried, “shall we have the next waltz together.”

“But “ — Amaury replied, at once delighted and embarrassed — ”that is the very dance Antoinette promised to give me.”

Madeleine turned quickly round, and without saying a single word, questioned her cousin with a haughty glance.

“Oh! I am so tired! “Antoinette hastened to say, “that if, with Amaury’s consent, Madeleine will kindly replace me, I shall be very glad of a few moments’ rest.”

A flash of joy shot into Madeleine’s burning eyes. Just then, the band struck up a waltz, she rose, feverishly seized Amaury’s hand, and drew him into the circle of dancers.

“Be careful with her,” said Monsieur d’Avrigny in an undertone, as the young fellow passed him.

“I will,” Amaury replied, “we shall only take a few turns.”

And off they went.

It was a waltz of Weber’s: at once spirited and sad as the genius of the musician who composed it, one of those dreamy yet haunting waltzes which we all know; at first the movement was slow, then grew gradually quicker as the dance drew to a close.

Although Amaury supported his betrothed as much as he could, it seemed to him that, after three or four turns, she was losing strength.

“Madeleine,” he said, “let us stop now.”

“No! no!” the young girl replied; “never fear, I am quite strong; and if we stop now, my father will not allow us to go on again.”

And she herself induced Amaury to continue dancing to the music which had now become much quicker.

Although their beauty was of a different type, they made a handsome couple, as with arms entwined, they glided noiselessly over the oak floor; Madeleine’s willowy form, so supple and graceful, bent to Amaury’s encircling arm, who, blinded by happiness, and oblivious of the crowd, the noise, the music, everything in the world, merged his gaze in Madeleine’s half-closed eyes, mingled his breath with hers, listened to the beating of their two hearts, which throbbed together in unspoken magnetic sympathy. The intoxication which had first taken possession of Madeleine had now communicated itself to him: Monsieur d’Avrigny’s advice, the promise he had given, all was forgotten. In a strange and hitherto unknown delirium, they both seemed carried away by the haunting measure. Each moment Madeleine would murmur: “Faster, Amaury, faster!” and Amaury would obey; Madeleine was no longer pale and languid, but a radiant girl with sparkling eyes, and brimming over with the joy of living.

The pair continued dancing when even the most energetic had paused to rest two or three times; faster and faster they went, seeing nothing, hearing nothing. Everything turned with them, the lights, the people, the room; once or twice Amaury fancied he heard Monsieur d’Avrigny’s trembling voice, crying:

“Stop Amaury, stop; it is enough.”

But simultaneously Madeleine’s voice murmured in his ear: “Faster, Amaury, faster.”

Carried away in a dream of love, swept along in a whirlwind of happiness and love, neither of them seemed to belong to earth; their eyes were fastened on each other as they breathlessly murmured: “I love you, I love you! “Then gathering from these whispered words new and frantic strength, they but danced the faster, as if hoping that in this mad gyration they might die, as if believing that even now they were no longer on earth but in heaven.

Suddenly Amaury felt Madeleine fall heavily against him: he stopped. Pale, bent like a broken lily, with closed eyes and parted lips, she was in a dead faint.

Amaury gave a cry of alarm, for the young girl’s heart had quite ceased beating; he thought she was dead.

His blood seemed to freeze in his veins, then suddenly rushed in a torrent back to his brain; he stood for one moment as if turned to stone, then raised Madeleine in his arms and carried her quickly from the scene where they had known such great happiness.

Monsieur d’Avrigny rushed after them, but not a single word of reproach did he address to Amaury.

On reaching the boudoir, he lighted a candle, and preceded them into his daughter’s room; then, when Amaury had laid her on the bed, he devoted his whole attention to her, feeling her pulse with one hand, whilst with the other he applied restoratives.

In a few moments Madeleine regained consciousness, but although her father was bending over her, and Amaury, as he knelt beside the bed, was quite in shadow, nevertheless it was on him her eyes first fell.

“Ah! my love,” she said, “what has happened? are we dead and in heaven with the angels?”

Heavy sobs burst from Amaury; Madeleine looked at him with surprise.

“My dear boy,” Monsieur d’Avrigny said gently, “will you go and dismiss our guests? Antoinette and the maid are now coming in, and will put Madeleine to bed, then I will send later to let you know how she is. Do not go far, as I know you wish to be at hand, in case Madeleine should ask for you; you had better tell them at the same time to make you up a bed in your old room.”

Amaury kissed Madeleine’s hand; the poor girl smiled and followed him with her eyes until he had left the room.

As Amaury expected, all the guests had already gone; then, after giving orders for his room to be prepared, he wandered disconsolately about the passages, listening at Madeleine’s door, and trying to distinguish the faintest sound. After waiting about half-an-hour, Monsieur d’Avrigny came out of the room, and, holding out his hand to the young fellow, said:

“She is doing well; but I shall stay the night with her. As you, my boy, can do nothing more for us, go to bed, and let us hope for better news in the morning.”

Amaury went back to his old room; but in case he should be hastily summoned, he did not get into bed, but threw himself into an easy chair by the fireside. As to Monsieur d’Avrigny, he went into his study, and looked carefully over his collection of medical books, but as he read the title of each, he shook his head with the air of a man to whom the book could teach nothing new.

Suddenly, however, on coming across a small book bound in leather, and with a silver cross on the cover, he took it up, and going back to the room where his daughter lay asleep, he sat down beside the bed. The book he had taken up was “The Imitation of Christ.”

Monsieur d’Avrigny felt that human skill was now of no avail; God alone could help him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MONSIEUR D’AVRIGNY’S DIARY.

“22nd May,
“After midnight.”

“THE struggle between me and death JL has begun. For the second time must I help my child fight her way back to life.

“If God be on my side, I may succeed; if He deserts me, she must die.

“Her slumber is feverish and broken, but, thank God, she sleeps; she calls Amaury in her dreams — Amaury, always Amaury. Ah! why did I allow them to waltz together? and yet, if it were all to come over again, I should do the same. In Madeleine’s case, it is the mental which needs more careful treatment than the physical; the effect of unhappiness upon her is more to be feared than actual disease, and she would have fainted from jealousy even sooner than from exhaustion.

“Did I say ‘jealousy ‘? then my suspicions are correct, and she is jealous of her cousin. Poor Antoinette! she like myself has noticed it, and has behaved throughout the evening with unparalleled goodness and unselfishness.

“Amaury is the only one who sees nothing; really! men are often very blind.

“I have thought of speaking to him about it; but perhaps if I did, he would be even more considerate in his behaviour towards Antoinette; therefore it is best to say nothing.

“Ah! —

“I thought she was waking, but after muttering a few disconnected words, she has turned over on her pillow and fallen asleep again. I long for, and yet dread her waking; she may be better, but what if she were worse? I must therefore watch patiently.

“When I realize that, just because Amaury has held her in his arms, this is the second time she is so ill! Oh, God! I fear this man will be her death.

“It seems hard to think that, had she never known him, she might yet live. And yet, no! for if it were not Amaury, it would be some other; such is the inevitable law of Nature. Every heart seeks its mate, every soul longs for its twin soul. Unhappy are they whose heart and soul are imprisoned in a feeble frame; they are crushed by the embrace.

“No! marriage must not be thought of for her. Happiness would kill her; does she not lie there almost dying because of a moment’s bliss?”

“30th May.

“For the past week I have not dared write in this diary. For the last week my life hangs on each breath that she draws, on each throb of her pulse; for the last week I have not left this house, this room, this bedside, yet, although absorbed but by one single thought, never in all my life have the hours been filled with so many events, such a flood of emotions, so many thoughts. I have given up all my patients, so that I may devote my whole attention to her.

“Twice has the King sent to tell me that he does not feel well and is in pain; but I sent word to his messenger, ‘Inform the King that my daughter is dying.’

“Thank God! she is now a little better. It was time that the Angel of Death should loose his hold. Jacob wrestled one night only, but my struggle has lasted eight days and eight nights.

“Oh, God! what words can depict the excitement of those moments when I thought the victory was mine; when I watched Nature, that beneficent helper whom God has given to science, assert her supremacy over disease; when after a crisis, I might almost say, a battle, I noted with relief a marked improvement; or when I consoled myself with vain hopes, only to have them dispelled an hour later by a fit of coughing or a rise of temperature.

“Then would my mind be filled once more with misgivings; once more must I go down into the Valley of Despair; the enemy, kept at bay for a moment, now returned only the more furiously to the charge.

“This cruel Vulture, who tears at my darling’s lungs, had settled anew on his prey; then I fell on my knees, and with head bowed down to the ground cried: ‘Oh! my God, my God! if Thine all- powerful providence will not come to the assistance of my poor limited skill, all is indeed lost!’

“I have the reputation of being a clever physician; in Paris alone hundreds owe their lives to my skill; I have restored wives to their husbands, mothers to their daughters, daughters to their fathers, and yet I — my own child is dying, and I cannot say: ‘I am going to save her!’

“Every day, as I go along the street, I pass people who look at me carelessly, who barely even acknowledge me, because they consider their debt to me wiped out by the few crowns they have paid me; and yet, had I deserted them, they would now be lying in the grave, instead of sunning themselves in the light of day. Can it be possible that when fighting, like a condottiere, for strangers, for people I do not know, for the man who passes me in the street, I have conquered grim Death; yet must fail when the life of my own child is at stake? Good God! she is my very life.

“Alas! what a bitter mockery it all is; and what a cruel blow Fate deals my pride as a man of science.

“Ah! the reason is that these other people were attacked by diseases — terrible it is true — but not absolutely fatal; diseases for which there is a known cure. We can cure typhoid fever by prescribing for the patient thin soups and Seidlitz water; or fight the most acute attack of meningitis by applications of antiphlogiston, or most gastric affections by Valsava’s treatment; but consumption!

“There is one disease, and one alone, which God Himself must work a miracle to cure; and that is the disease with which God has stricken my child.

“I know that there are one or two cases of phthisis on record which have been cured; but these were taken in the first stages of the disease. I myself have come across one such case at the hospital; it was that of a little orphan, whose father and mother were both dead, and whom no one would have missed; perhaps God took pity on him because he was else so desolate.

“Sometimes I feel so thankful that fate ordained that I should be a doctor, it almost seems as if God knew beforehand that I should have to watch over my daughter’s life. Who, for the simple love of his profession, would have patiently watched by the bedside of this poor invalid, without leaving her for a moment? Who, for the sake of gold or fame, would be willing to do what I do for fatherly love alone? No one but myself!

“Already her life would have been more than once in peril, had I not been always at hand, like her shadow, ready to forestall, to avert, to overcome all dangers.

“Truly the anguish of watching the fight between life and death waged in the breast of one’s own child is a martyrdom unimagined even in Dante’s Inferno; perhaps to see that life pursued, vanquished, finally overcome, and the field abandoned to her implacable enemy.

“Happily, as I have already said, for the present the disease is arrested; this is a respite for me, — I hope again.”

CHAPTER XIX.

“5th June.

“THERE is an improvement, and this improvement, dear Antoinette, is due to you. Amaury has behaved splendidly; if this illness is attributable to him, at least no one could have done more than he has to repair the mischief. Every moment that he could spend with Madeleine, he has been with her; and I am certain that his one thought is of her.

“One thing, however, I have noticed, and that is that when Antoinette and Amaury were in Madeleine’s room at the same time, she became restless, and her her eyes wandered from Antoinette to Amaury, as if trying to surprise a look between them. She did not know, poor child, that, as from force of habit her hand was in mine, I could read by her quick pulse the jealousy she felt; if one or other were alone with her, her pulse became normal; but if, by chance, neither of them were in the room at the same time, then, poor little girl, how she suffered. How the fever burned in her veins until one or the other returned!

“Amaury had to be always with her; just now his presence is as necessary to her as the air she breathes. Perhaps later it may be different.

“I dare not keep Antoinette away; for how could I say to this young innocent girl: ‘Antoinette, you had best not come into the room!’

“She has however guessed everything. The day before yesterday, she followed me into my study and said: ‘Uncle dear, you were saying the other day that, as soon as the fine weather had come, and Madeleine were stronger, you would take her to Ville d’Auray; well, the nice long days have come now, and Madeleine is better. But as the house has been uninhabited since last year, it must be prepared before it can be fit for you to go into it. Now that Madeleine is so delicate, her room in particular must be carefully seen to. So, uncle dear, I come to ask your permission to go and see to all this for you.’

“From the moment she began to speak, I had fixed my eyes upon her; she bent her head under my steady gaze, and when she looked up again, my arms were open to receive her; she threw herself into them and burst into tears.

"'Oh! my dear good uncle,' she cried, 'indeed it is not my fault. Amaury never notices me, never thinks of me, and since Madeleine is ill, he has even forgotten my very existence; and yet she is jealous, and this jealousy is bad for her. Do not contradict me, you know it as well as I do. One can read this jealousy in her whole appearance; in her passionate eyes, her trembling speech, and her disordered gestures. Dear uncle, it is best that I should go; you know it is; and, perhaps, were you not so thoroughly good, you would long ago have sent me away.'

"My only answer was to press her to my heart.

"Then we went back together to Madeleine's room, where we found her restless and excited.

"Amaury had been absent half-an-hour, and evidently Madeleine believed they were together.

"'My dear child,' I said, 'as you are now so much better, and as I hope, in another fortnight, we may all be able to go into the country together, our good Antoinette has offered to act as our *courier*, and is going on ahead to see that the house is properly prepared.'

"'What! 'Madeleine exclaimed, 'is Antoinette going to Ville d'Auray.'

"'Yes dear; as your father says, you are now going on well, and have your maid, Miss Brown and Amaury to look after you — quite a sufficient number of nurses for a convalescent; in the meantime, I shall have your room got ready, see to your flowers, arrange your conservatories, and you will find everything ready for you on your arrival.'

'"Then when do you leave,' Madeleine asked, unable to conceal her emotion.

"'Immediately! the carriage is coming round at once.'

"Then whether from a feeling of remorse or gratitude, or perhaps from a mixture of both, Madeleine threw her arms round Antoinette's neck and kissed her; it even seemed to me that Madeleine whispered in her cousin s ear: 'Forgive me.'

"Then, with an evident effort, Madeleine asked Antoinette: 'Will you wait to wish Amaury goodbye?'

"'Why should I? 'said Antoinette, 'we shall be seeing each other again in two or three weeks. You must wish him goodbye and give him a kiss for me; he will like that much better, I assure you.'

"And with these words Antoinette went away.

“Ten minutes later, we heard the sound of wheels, and Joseph announced that Antoinette had gone.

“Oddly enough, all this time I had my finger on Madeleine’s pulse. There was a marked change in the beats as soon as she knew that Antoinette had gone; from ninety it dropped to seventy-five. Then, worn out with emotions, which to a stranger seeing only on the surface of things, would have seemed slight enough, she fell into a calmer, quieter sleep than she had perhaps known since that fatal evening when we laid her on the bed from which she had not yet risen.

“As I expected Amaury at any moment, I set her bedroom door ajar, so that he should not wake her in coming into the room. I was only just in time, as in another moment he appeared. I made him a sign to take his place on that side of the bed where my daughter’s head rested, so that when she woke, her eyes might rest first on him.,.

“Ah! my God! Thou knowest that I am no longer jealous; may her eyes not close until she has lived a long life, and let her thoughts be all for him.

“Since that moment she has taken a turn for the better.”

“9th June.

“Thank God! the improvement continues.”

“10th June.

“Now her life is in Amaury’s hands. If he consents to what I suggest, she will be saved!”

CHAPTER XX.

THE events just narrated we have quoted from Monsieur d’Avrigny’s diary itself, as no other account could have given so accurate an idea of what had passed at poor Madeleine’s bedside, and also in the minds of those by whom she was surrounded.

As Monsieur d’Avrigny had said, the patient was decidedly better, thanks to the father’s scrupulous care, and the physician’s penetration and profound knowledge. And yet in spite of his knowledge — or rather because of this knowledge which enabled him so thoroughly to understand the mysteries of the human frame, Monsieur d’Avrigny had come to realize that besides himself and the disease, the good and evil geniuses who fought one against the other, there was yet a third influence, which sometimes sided with the disease, sometimes with the doctor; this was Amaury.

This was why he had written in his diary that henceforth Madeleine’s life was in the hands of her lover.

The day after he had written these lines, and when he and Amaury had both left Madeleine’s room, he sent to tell the young man that he wished to speak to him.

Amaury, who had not yet retired, immediately joined Monsieur d’Avrigny in his study.

The old man was sitting at the corner of the fire, his head thrown back against the marble chimney-piece, and plunged in so deep a reverie that he did not hear the door open and close, nor even the sound of the young man’s footsteps, deadened, it is true, by a thick carpet, as he came and stood beside him.

Amaury waited a few moments in silence, then unable longer to conceal his anxiety, he said: “You wished to see me, dear father, has anything new happened? is Madeleine worse?”

“No, on the contrary, my boy,” Monsieur d’Avrigny replied, “it is just because she is better that I have sent for you.”

“Sit down,” he continued, motioning him to a chair, “and let us have a chat.”

Amaury complied in silence, but not without a feeling of anxiety, because although Monsieur d’Avrigny’s words were reassuring, his tone was solemn and conveyed the impression that the subject he wished to discuss was a serious one.

As soon as Amaury was seated, Monsieur d’Avrigny took his hand, and gazing at him with the look of mixed gentleness and firmness which the young man had often seen in his face during his long vigils beside Madeleine’s bedside, he said: “My dear Amaury, we may compare ourselves to two soldiers who have met on a field of battle; we have matched our strength,. we know the extent of our forces and we may speak openly to each other.”

“Alas! father dear,” Amaury replied, “during all this long struggle, in which, let us hope, you have conquered, I have, I fear, been an auxiliary of but little use. If, however, the power of a boundless love, and of earnest heart-felt prayers, are of any avail in God’s sight, and may claim a place beside the miracles wrought by science, then I too may venture to hope that I have been instrumental in aiding Madeleine’s convalescence.”

“Yes! Amaury; and therefore knowing the full extent of your love, I hope you will consent to make a small sacrifice for her sake.”

“I am willing to do anything you wish, dear father, except give her up.”

“You may reassure yourself on that point, my son; Madeleine is yours, or rather she shall never belong to anyone but you.”

“Then what, in Heaven’s name, do you mean?”

“Listen to me, Amaury,” the old man continued, taking the young man’s other hand in his and holding them both in a warm grasp, “do not think that, as a father, I wish to reproach you, I merely wish, as a doctor, to state a fact. Although since my child’s earliest days, I have carefully watched over her health, only twice have I had any real cause for serious anxiety; the first time was when, in the small drawing-room, you told her of your love — the second time — ”

“Oh yes! dear father! do not, I implore you, remind me of it; I remember it all only too well; and very often, in the silence of night, when you are watching beside Madeleine, and I weeping alone in my room, this recollection has haunted me with a feeling of remorse; but what is to be done? When I am with Madeleine, I am no longer master of myself, reason itself is overthrown, I am carried away by the force of my love, and everything is forgotten; it is not my fault — you must forgive me?”

“And so I do, my dear boy, because were it otherwise, you could not love her. Alas! there lies the difference between your love and mine. My love constantly foresees troubles to come; yours quickly forgets those that are past. And this is why, my dear Amaury, for some time, she must be deprived of your blind, selfish love, and surrounded only by my watchful, anxious affection."

"Good Heavens! what are you saying? Must I indeed leave Madeleine?"

"Only for a few months."

"But, my dear father, Madeleine loves me as much as I do her; no! not quite as much, I know, for that would be impossible (Monsieur d'Avrigny smiled). Are you not afraid that my absence will do your child more harm than my presence would?"

"No! Amaury; for she will always be looking forward to your meeting, and hope is a gentle nurse."

"But where can I go? What excuse can I give her?"

"The excuse is already found, and it is not even an excuse. I have obtained an appointment for you at the Court of Naples; you must tell her, or rather I will, so that she will in no way blame you, that the success of your future depends on the manner in which you accomplish the mission entrusted to you. Then, if she begins to expostulate, I shall whisper to her: 'Hush, hush! Madeleine; we shall go and meet him; 'so that instead of being parted for three months, you will only be separated six weeks."

"You will meet me on my way home, father?"

"Yes! we will go as far as Nice; Madeleine needs the warm sunny air of Italy; I shall take her to Nice because we can accomplish the journey there with very little fatigue, by going up the Seine, and along the canal to Briare, then down the Saône and Rhone. Once at Nice, I shall send you word whether to come at once, or delay a little, — according as my poor child is strong or weak; in this way, you can see that your absence will not be a misfortune, because the hope of a speedy re-union will turn it into a soothing joy, and she will be free from these sudden emotions which the mere sight of you produces in her, free from these sudden shocks which shatter her nerves so completely. Twice have I saved her life; but, I warn you, Amaury, a third shock will kill her; and if you remain here, that third shock is inevitable."

"Oh God! oh! God!"

"Amaury, I do not ask you to do this for your sake or for mine, but for hers; have pity on my poor broken lily, and help me to save her; can you compare the separation of a moment, of a short time only, with the separation of death which would be eternal?”

“Oh! father, father, I will do whatever you wish,” cried Amaury.

“Very well, my son, and thank you,” said the old man, and a smile parted his lips for the first time in a fortnight; “until this moment I had not dared to bid you hope, but now I think we may do so at last.”

CHAPTER XXI.

THE following morning Monsieur d’Avrigny went out, after satisfying himself that the improvement in Madeleine’s condition was maintained; he had first to make his excuses to the King, then to remind the Minister of Foreign Affairs of his promise. Certainly Monsieur d’Avrigny might have said, without fear of contradiction, that he was the invalid, as during the last fortnight he had aged fifteen years, and though he was barely fifty-five, his hair had turned quite white.

An hour later he returned with the assurance that the diplomatic letter would be ready as soon as he required it.

He met Philip at the door, who ever since the evening when Madeleine had so nearly died, had called daily, and enquired personally as to how she was getting on; it was Antoinette who at first received him, but when she had gone away, he addressed himself to Joseph, asking news of both Antoinette and Madeleine.

As to Amaury, Philip thought it due to his dignity to ignore him; but, unfortunately, during the last fortnight Amaury had been so pre-occupied that he had completely forgotten the existence of his friend.

Monsieur d’Avrigny knew of Philip’s enquiries and thanked him with the warm gratitude of a father.

Then he returned to Madeleine.

It was now mid-day, and the warmest hour of a bright day in early June. Having for the first time allowed Madeleine’s windows to be opened, Monsieur d’Avrigny found her sitting up in bed, inhaling, with long-drawn breaths, the air which she was not yet permitted to breathe outside, and eagerly gazing through the open window at the grass upon which she vainly longed to run, or to recline at full-length. But, as if in compensation, her bed was strewn with flowers, and looked like one of the beautiful altars which we all have seen in our young days, set up in the streets, and which we hope to see again, when men will once more glorify God at the Corpus Christi, that beautiful and poetic fête which they have now suppressed.

Each morning Madeleine chose the flowers that she wished to be gathered, and Amaury brought them in to her from the garden.

“Oh! father,” she exclaimed, on seeing Monsieur d’Avrigny, “how I thank you for the pleasant surprise you have given me through Amaury, in allowing me to breathe the fresh air and to see the flowers; I feel as if the summer scents help me to breathe more freely, and I am like that poor bird, do you remember, father? — which you placed with a rose bush under an air pump. Every time that you removed the rose-tree, it nearly died, and whenever you put it back, the poor little thing fluttered back to life? Tell me, father, when I cannot breathe, when I feel suffocating as if I were under a machine, could you not give me renewed life by surrounding me with flowers?”

“Yes! dear child,” said Monsieur d’Avrigny, “rest assured that we shall do so; I shall take you to a beautiful country, where neither the young girls, nor the roses die, and you will live there surrounded by flowers like a bird or a bee.”

“Do you mean Naples, father?” asked Madeleine.

“Oh! no, dear; Naples is too far for a first journey; besides the sirocco blows there, which kills the flowers; and the scorching cinders of Vesuvius dry up the chest of a young girl. No! we shall stay at Nice.”

Monsieur d’Avrigny looked hesitatingly at Madeleine.

“And then?” said she, whilst Amaury looked down.

“Amaury will go on to Naples by himself.”

“What! Amaury will leave us?” exclaimed Madeleine.

“Do you call that leaving us, my child?” her father quickly replied.

And then little by little, and with infinite precautions, he unfolded his plans’ to her; they consisted, as we have already said, in going to Nice, and awaiting the return of Amaury in that hot-house of Europe.

Madeleine listened to all these plans with bent head, as though but one thought filled her mind, and then when her father had finished speaking, she said:

“Antoinette of course comes with us?”

“My dear Madeleine,” replied Monsieur d’Avrigny, “I am really grieved to separate you from your friend, in fact your sister; but you can well understand that I cannot leave strangers to look after my house in Paris, nor the house at Ville d’Auray; so Antoinette must remain.”

A flash of joy lighted up Madeleine’s eyes, — the knowledge that Antoinette would not be there consoled her for the absence of Amaury.

“And when do we start,” she asked, almost impatiently.

Amaury raised his head, and looked at her with bewildered astonishment; he, with a lover's selfish affection, guessed none of the secret thoughts which the paternal love of Monsieur d'Avrigny had fathomed.

"But our departure depends entirely upon you, dear," said her father; "be careful of your health, my darling, and as soon as you are strong enough to bear a drive, or when, with the help of Amaury's arm or mine, you can walk twice round the garden without feeling tired, then we will start.

"Oh! be content, father," Madeleine said, "I will do everything you tell me, and we shall soon set off, I assure you."

Monsieur d'Avrigny had guessed right, and at Ville d'Auray, Madeleine was still too near to Antoinette.

AMAURY TO ANTOINETTE

"You ask me for particulars regarding Madeleine's convalescence, dear Antoinette, and I quite understand this; it is not sufficient that you should know she is better, you also wish to know in what the improvement consists. I am, indeed, the right person to keep you well-informed, because as I cannot speak to you about her, it is a comfort to me to be able to write, the more so, as strange to say, when I am with her father, who loves her with a love almost equal to my own, I know not why, but I feel constrained, and can neither confide in him, nor speak freely to him. This is probably due to the difference in age between us, or to his naturally serious disposition; but it is not so with you, dear Antoinette. I could speak of her to you for ever.

"For the first week after you left, every evening I asked myself, 'Shall I live, or shall I die? 'For during those eight days Madeleine's life was in danger; but to-day, dear Antoinette, I may tell you, 'I shall live,' because I can say 'She will I live.'

"Believe me, my love for her is no boyish passion; in marrying Madeleine I. make neither a *mariage de convenance,* nor even a love-match, in the usual sense of the word; what binds me to her is a purer love, without precedent, unique; and Madeleine dead, I must needs die too.

"But it was not God's will; and I say, thank God!

"Not until the day before yesterday would Monsieur d'Avrigny pronounce her out of danger, and, even then, strangely enough, he insisted on my going away, if we wished to ensure her more speedy recovery.

“At first I thought this news would seriously affect Madeleine, but no doubt the poor child is too weak to feel keenly, as no sooner did she understand that she was to remain at Nice until I joined her there, than she seemed in a hurry to go, and what added to my surprise was the fact that her father had but just told her that you would not be able to accompany her.

“How like grown-up children invalids are! Since yesterday she looks upon this journey as a holiday.

“It is true that she believes we will travel together; whilst Monsieur d’ Avrigny has already told me that I am to leave a week hence.

“Even supposing the improvement be maintained, it is evident that Madeleine will not be well enough to travel for another three or four weeks.

“How will he persuade Madeleine to allow me to go? I own that I cannot tell, but Monsieur d’Avrigny undertakes to arrange everything.

“Madeleine got up to-day for the first time, or rather her father carried her from the bed to a large easy chair which had been prepared for her near the window; the poor girl is so weak that even this slight exertion was too much for her, and she would certainly have fainted, had not Miss Brown at once used restoratives. When she was comfortably settled, I was permitted to enter the room. Oh! Antoinette dear, not until then did I realize the havoc which this dreadful illness has made in my beloved Madeleine. She is beautiful, more beautiful than ever, and in her long loose gown just fastened at the throat, she looks like one of Fra Angelico’s beautiful angels with translucent faces and ethereal bodies, but these beautiful angels are already in heaven, whilst Madeleine, thank God, is still with us; the beauty which, in them, is divine, is almost startling in Madeleine.

“If you could but have seen how happily and contentedly she sat near that open window! one might have thought it the first time she had ever seen the sky, breathed the pure air, inhaled the sweet perfume of the flowers, whilst beneath her white transparent skin, one could almost watch her, as it were, coming back to life.

“Ah! God! will my darling ever be spared to live an earthly life? will this frail creature ever be able to bear human joy or sorrow without being crushed by them?

“Her father seems to share this fear, for every quarter of an hour he draws near, and taking her hand, he feels her pulse.

“He was quite delighted last night as, during the day, the pulse had diminished by three or four beats.

“At four o’clock, when the sun had completely gone off the garden, notwithstanding ail Madeleine’s entreaties, Monsieur d’Avrigny insisted on her going back to bed again, and he once more took her up in his arms, and lifted her on to the bed, and to his joyful surprise, this time she was better able to bear the slight fatigue. She herself held the bottle of salts in her hand, but did not need to use them, a sure proof that the air and the sun were helping to bring back her strength.

“Whilst they were putting her back to bed, I sat in the drawing-room, playing one of Schubert’s melodies, and as I was about to leave off, Miss Brown came in with a message from Madeleine that I should continue playing. This was the first time she had heard any music since that fatal night when it almost killed her; I acceded to her wish, and continued, and when I went back to her, I found her almost in raptures.

“‘Ah! Amaury,’ she exclaimed, ‘since this dreadful illness causes you all so much anxiety, you can have no idea of all the painful happiness it brings to me; it seems that not only have all my senses become more acute, but also that other senses, hitherto latent, have awakened in me, senses of the soul, if I may call them so.

“‘In the music which you have just played, and which I have heard twenty times before, I have discovered melodies which, until to-day, I had not perceived, just as in the scent of the roses and the jessamine, I now detect perfumes which I have never noticed before, and which, when my health is restored, I may never detect again “‘For instance yesterday (do not laugh at me, Amaury) a bird was singing in a bush beside its nest; well, it seemed to me that, had I been alone instead of with you and my father, if I had concentrated all my faculties on this song. I should have ended by understanding what the bird said to his mate and to his little ones.’

“I looked at Monsieur d’Avrigny, trembling lest Madeleine should still be suffering from slight delirium, but he quieted me with a glance, and the next moment left the room.

“Madeleine stooped towards me and whispered in my ear: ‘Amaury, play me that waltz of Weber’s which we danced together. Do you know it?’

“Seeing that Madeleine had waited until her father had gone before making this request, I feared the danger of allowing her to hear the same melody which had already caused her such terrible nervous excitement, so I replied that I did not remember the music. ‘Well then, send for it,’ she said, ‘and you will play it to me to-morrow;’ I promised that I would do so.

“Ah! God! can Monsieur d’Avrigny be right? Is emotion really necessary to her, seeing that it is emotion which is killing her.

“When I left her that evening, she again made me promise that I would play that waltz of Weber’s on the morrow.

“She had a good night’s rest, and slept more quietly than usual.

“Between ten o’clock in the evening and six o’clock the next morning, Monsieur d’Avrigny went three times into his daughter’s room, and each time he found her sleeping peacefully. Miss Brown, whose turn it was to sit up, assured him that during all that time, that is for nearly eight hours, Madeleine only woke up twice. Each time she had taken a few drops of a soothing mixture which had been prepared by her father, and went off to sleep again, telling Miss Brown how much better she felt.

“Next day, that is to say, this morning, after Monsieur d’Avrigny had as usual given me the night’s bulletin before allowing me to see Madeleine, I told him of her request of the previous evening respecting Weber’s waltz.

“He reflected for a moment, then shook his head. ‘Was I not right, Amaury,’ he replied, ‘when I spoke of the necessity of emotion which I so dread for her, and which your presence only fosters. Ah! my dear boy, do not mistake my meaning, but I wish you were gone.’

“‘Well, what then?’ I asked, ‘am I to play this waltz or not?’

“‘You may play it, there is nothing to fear, as I shall not be far off; only just obey me in this and stop playing or continue, as I shall direct.’

“I went into Madeleine’s room, and found her radiant.

“As Monsieur d’Avrigny had told me, she had had a good night, and her temperature this morning was lower than the night before.

“‘Do you know, Amaury dear,’ she said, ‘I have slept so well that I feel quite strong this morning. It seems to me that if only my tyrant gave me permission,’ and as she said this, she looked lovingly I towards her father, ‘I would walk — rather I would fly — like a bird; but he pretends to know me better than I do myself, and he chains me to this horrid chair for still another day.’

‘“You- forget, dear Madeleine,’ I said, ‘that the day before yesterday your most earnest desire was to be there; that to sit in that chair near the open window seemed like Heaven upon earth to you. You were quite happy there all day.’

“‘Yes! no doubt, but what was good yesterday no longer serves to-day. If you did not love me more to-day than you did yesterday, that would not be enough, I should not be satisfied with such love. All feelings which do not grow, diminish. Do you know where I would like to be?

I — wish I were lying on that cool green turf, in the shade of that rose-bush.’

“‘Well dear,’ said Monsieur d’Avrigny, II — am glad you are so easily satisfied, for you will be there in three days.’

‘“Do you really mean it, father? ‘cried Madeleine, clapping her hands like a child to whom one promises a long-coveted toy.

“‘To-day, if you wish, you may walk to that horrid chair. You must first try your feet, before trying your wings; I only stipulate that Miss Brown and I should help you.’

‘“I think it may be as well, father dear,’ Madeleine replied, ‘as I must own to feeling rather like a coward who boasts a good deal while he is safe, but in the face of danger immediately changes front.’

“‘What time may I get up? must I still wait till twelve o’clock? it seems such a long time to wait, father; it is only just ten now.

“‘To-day, dear, you may get up an hour earlier than yesterday; and as it is a warm morning, the window shall be opened at once. This will help you to be patient.’

“The sun and air soon came in through the open window, and bending towards me, she whispered in my ear, ‘what about Weber’s waltz?’

“I gave an affirmative nod, and after that she appeared to be quite content.

“Breakfast was announced. During the last few days Monsieur d’Avrigny and I had taken our meals together; before this, as you know, dear, we breakfasted and dined each in turn, so that one or the other should always be with her. But now she is better, this precaution is unnecessary.

“A few minutes before eleven, Monsieur d’Avrigny rose from the table saying: ‘In order that children and invalids may yield to our wishes, it is necessary to keep faith with them, even more so than with men. I am going to help Madeleine get up, and in ten minutes you may come in.’

“A few minutes later Madeleine seated near the open window, was looking perfectly delighted.

“With the help of Miss Brown and her father she had walked from her bed to the easy-chair; it is true that without this double support she could not have moved a step forward. But what a difference from the evening before, when she had to be carried even that short distance.

"I went and sat down beside her.

"A few minutes later she showed signs of impatience which Monsieur d'Avrigny, who seems to read her inmost thoughts, immediately understood.

"'As you are going to stay with Madeleine, my dear boy,' said Monsieur d'Avrigny rising, 'I shall go out for an hour or two.'

"'Do, father!' I replied, 'and you will find me here on your return.'

"'Very well,' he said, and kissing Madeleine's cheek, he went out of the room.

"'Quick, quick,' said Madeleine as soon as the *portière* had fallen behind Monsieur d'Avrigny, 'play Weber's waltz now. Ever since yesterday that melody has filled my brain, and I have heard it all night.'

"'But you cannot come into the drawing-room, dear,' I said.

"'I know that, since it is only with difficulty I can stand, but leave both the doors open, then I can hear quite plainly.'

"Remembering what Monsieur d'Avrigny had told me, I did not doubt but that he would be there, and would watch over his daughter, so I rose and went to the piano.

"Sitting there, I could see Madeleine through the two open doors, and framed in the tapestries of the curtains, she looked like some dainty picture by Greuze. She motioned with her hand and I opened the music.

"'Begin,' said a voice behind me.

"I turned and saw Monsieur d'Avrigny sitting behind the *portière* of the drawing- room.

"I began to play. As I said before it was one of those haunting melodies with a strain of sadness running through it, such as only the composer of *Der Freyschiitz* could write. I did not know the waltz from memory and was therefore obliged to keep my eyes fixed on the music.

"As in a mist, I fancied I saw Madeleine rise from her chair; immediately I turned round, and found that I was not mistaken, she was standing up.

"I was about to stop playing, but Monsieur d'Avrigny noticing my hesitation, said quickly, 'continue.' I went on again at once, so that Madeleine remained quite unaware of this slight interruption.

"It really seemed as if music brought new life to this delicate and sensitive girl, and she appeared to gain fresh strength as the music quickened.

“After standing still for a moment, I saw her move; the frail invalid who, with the help of her father and her governess had with difficulty walked from her bed to the chair, now slowly advanced, but with a firm step, walking noiselessly as a shadow, but without seeking support from either the furniture or the walls.

“I turned towards Monsieur d’Avrigny and seeing his pale set face, I was again ready to stop, but he said: ‘Go on, go on; remember the Violin of Cremona.’

“I therefore went on playing; and as the music gained in fullness and grandeur, filling the room with its glorious harmonies, so did Madeleine become stronger, until, walking quickly towards me, she leaned upon my shoulder; in the meanwhile, her father having gone round through the small drawing-room, appeared behind her.

“‘Go on, Amaury, go on,’ he said.

“‘Bravo! Madeleine; what did you mean this morning, child, when you said you had no strength?’

“And the poor father laughed and trembled at the same time, whilst great drops of anguish stood upon his brow.

“‘Ah! father dear,’ said Madeleine; ‘it is magical. But such is the effect of music upon me; I think if I were dead, certain melodies would have the power to bring me back from the grave. That is why the nuns in *Robert le Diable* and the weird air of the spirit-maidens in *Gisèle* have always impressed me so much.’

“‘Yes! ‘Monsieur d’Avrigny replied, ‘but we must not abuse this strength. Take my arm, dear, and you, Amaury, continue playing; that music is enchanting; but,’ he added in a whisper, ‘glide gently from this waltz into a soft soothing melody, and let it gradually die away in the distance.’

“I obeyed, for now I clearly understood that the powerful strains of music which had so excited her must be maintained until she had regained her chair. Should the music cease suddenly, something in Madeleine would give way, therefore it must gradually diminish both in sound and time until it finally died away entirely.

“And so it was; Madeleine got back to her chair with apparently little fatigue, and sat down beaming with happiness.

“When I saw her comfortably seated in her great armchair, I played more slowly and softly, and just as the music had hitherto increased, so now it gradually diminished. Then I saw her lean back and close her eyes.

“Her father followed her every movement, and motioned to me to play *piano,* then *pianissimo;* finally I glided gently from the waltz into a few soft chords which gradually died away like the song of a bird soaring away in the distance.

“I rose from the piano and approached Madeleine, but her father met me at the door, and drawing me into the ante-room, said:

“‘She is asleep — do not wake her. You see, Amaury, it is absolutely necessary that you should go. If such a thing had happened in my absence, if I had not been near to direct and manage it all, I dare not think what might have happened — I therefore repeat, Amaury, you must go-’

‘“Oh! Heavens,’ I cried, ‘but Madeleine has no idea that I shall be leaving so soon; how can I tell her — ’

“‘Do not be afraid,’ said Monsieur d’Avrigny, ‘she herself will ask you to go; ‘and gently pushing me away, he went back to his daughter.

“I went up to my room and sat down to write to you, Antoinette. Tell me, dear, how will he manage things so that it shall be Madeleine herself will ask me to go.”

CHAPTER XXII.

AMAURY TO ANTOINETTE

"I AM to leave in six days, dear Antoinette, and Monsieur d'Avrigny was quite right; Madeleine herself asked me to go.

"We were together in Madeleine's room, last evening; happily the music of yesterday has had no ill-effect upon her and she is improving daily; after Monsieur d'Avrigny had spoken of you a great deal, and Madeleine had said things of her friend which would put your modesty to the blush, he told her of your intended return on Monday next.

"Madeleine started; and the blood rushed to her face, then receded quickly, leaving her paler than before.

"I tried to draw Monsieur d'Avrigny's attention to his daughter's evident emotion, but on seeing that he held Madeleine's hand, I felt that nothing had escaped him.

"Nothing more was said on the subject.

"Next day Madeleine was to go into the garden, there to seek among the lilacs and roses that delicious air and perfume which she had so longed for two days previously.

"But see, Antoinette dear, how right Monsieur d' Avrigny is when he compares invalids to grown-up children; she now seemed to derive no pleasure from her father's promise.

"I intended to take the first opportunity to ask her what was the matter, but the door opened and Joseph came in with an official letter addressed to me; I at once opened it.

"It was from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, asking me to wait upon him.

"I showed the letter to Madeleine.

"My mind was filled with misgivings, as I understood the analogy which this letter might bear to what Monsieur d'Avrigny had said to me on the previous evening. I looked anxiously at Madeleine, but to my amazement her face brightened.

"I supposed therefore she saw nothing unusual in this message; so determined not to undeceive her, I went out, promising only to go there and back, and left her with her father.

“I was not mistaken. The Minister was, as usual, most kind in every way; he wished to tell me personally that, owing to certain political events which had recently taken place, the mission entrusted to me had become more imperative, and I must therefore be prepared to leave as soon as possible. Having however heard of my engagement to Monsieur d’Avrigny’s daughter, he kindly permitted me to use my own discretion as to the earliest date on which I could be ready to leave.

“I thanked him for his kind consideration and promised to give him my reply that very day.

“I returned to Monsieur d’Avrigny’s, wondering how in the world to break this news to Madeleine. I must own that I reckoned on help from Monsieur d’Avrigny, as he had promised to take all responsibility; but on reaching the house, the maid told me he had gone out, and that Madeleine had given orders that immediately on my return I should be shown up to her room.

“Whilst I was cogitating what to do, Madeleine rang to enquire whether I had returned.

“It was therefore useless to make any further delay; so I drew aside the curtain and found Madeleine, who had evidently heard my footsteps, watching expectantly for me.

“As soon as I came in, she said:

“‘Ah! come along, dear Amaury, you have seen the Minister, have you not?’

“‘Yes,’ I replied hesitatingly.

“‘I know what he wanted to see you about; he met my father yesterday at the Palace and informed him that you would soon have to leave.’

“‘My dear Madeleine,’ I cried, ‘believe me, I am willing to give up this appointment, even my career itself, rather than leave you.’

“‘Whatever are you saying,’ Madeleine replied quickly, ‘what folly are you contemplating now?’

“‘No, no! dear Amaury; you must not do any such thing. We must be wise; I should be sorry to think that you might some day reproach me with having spoilt your career just at a time when it promised so well.’

“I looked at her in amazement.

“‘Well,’ said she smiling, ‘what is the matter? My dear Amaury, you cannot understand why it is that your little girl, who is usually so unreasonable, should for once in her life be sensible.’

“I drew near and took my usual seat at her feet.

“‘My father and I,’ she said, ‘have been deciding everything.’

“I took her small wasted hands in mine and listened to what she had to say.

“‘I am not yet strong enough to bear a drive, much less a sea-journey; but my father is confident that in a fortnight I shall be well enough to travel.

“‘Well! you are leaving now, and I shall follow; you are going to carry out your mission at Naples, and I shall await you at Nice, where thanks to the steam-boats, you will arrive almost as soon as I. Is not steam a splendid invention; I really think Fulton is the greatest man of modern times.’

“‘Then when am I to leave? ‘I asked.

“‘On Sunday morning,’ Madeleine replied quickly.

“It struck me that as you are to arrive here on Monday morning from Ville d’Auray, I should not see you before leaving; and I was about to mention this to Madeleine, but she went on:

“‘You are to leave here Sunday morning, and travel by post-chaise to Châlon; you see my father has just been explaining it all to me. Arrived at Châlon, you have your carriage sent on to the boat, and reach Marseilles the following day. You will be at Marseilles in time to take the mail-steamer which leaves on the first of next month; and in six days from that date, you will arrive at Naples. I give you ten days in which to get through your work; one can do a great deal, you know, dear, in ten days. You leave again on the eleventh day, and should be at Nice by the 26th or 28th July; we shall arrive there five or six days earlier. This means a separation of only six weeks, and once together again, under that glorious sky, there will be no more parting. Nice will be our Promised Land, our Paradise Regained. Then, after being kissed by the suns of Italy, cradled in your love, we shall be married; my father will then return to Paris, and we two shall continue our journey. Now is not that a delightful programme?’

“‘Yes! ‘I said ruefully, ‘it is charming; but unfortunately it begins with a parting.’

“‘My dear boy! ‘Madeleine replied, ‘as I have already told you, this separation is necessary to your future, and in my great love for you, I am perfectly willing to consent to it.’

“I could not understand it: there was something inexplicable in such ready acquiescence from a girl usually so self- willed and spoilt as

Madeleine, but although I questioned her closely and in every possible way, she never once swerved from her original plea of unselfishness, but insisted on the necessity of conciliating the Minister, seeing that he took so lively an interest in me.

“Does not all this seem as strange to you as it does to me, Antoinette. I have thought of nothing else all day long; I who dreaded so to tell her a word about my departure and our separation, and now it is she who hurries it on.

“One may truly say, dear Antoinette, that a woman’s heart is a mystery!

“We spent the remainder of the day in discussing plans.

“Madeleine grows bright again, as health and strength return to her.

Monsieur d’Avrigny watches her every movement.

“I have noticed him smile three or four times, and this has rejoiced my heart.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

“WE have accomplished a great feat to-day; as this is the day on which we had promised to take Madeleine into the garden.

“The weather was glorious — I have never seen a more cloudless sky; it seemed as if all Nature were in sympathy with us, and there was just sufficient breeze to temper the heat of one of the first days of summer.

“So to prevent all possible accident, I suggested to Monsieur d’Avrigny that we two should carry Madeleine out in her easy-chair. But at first she would not hear of it; with the perversity of an invalid the mere idea irritated her; however, on condition that we should keep to the promise we had made of allowing her to walk round the garden, she yielded without further opposition, and we took her up, arm-chair and all, and carried her to her long desired nook.

“Had you been here, Antoinette dear, you would have seen a sight to rejoice your heart, — that of a young girl struggling back to life, back to a future happy, blest and bright.

“Her breathing, which has so long been difficult, grew visibly easier as she inhaled the fresh air.

“Without rising from her chair, she filled her arms with bunches of lilac, honeysuckle, and roses, and kissed the blossoms as if they were companions whom she had not seen for long, old friends from whom she had thought herself parted for ever; she rejoiced in the beauties of Nature, gave heartfelt thanks to God, and her eyes filled with tears of gratitude to her father.

“She herself looked like a flower among the flowers, — a graceful lily covered with dew.

“Her father and I were affected almost to tears, yet conscious of a sense of deep happiness; happiness, free from any earthly feeling. We only needed you, my dear Antoinette, to complete our joy.

“Very soon, however, this quiet rest- fullness seemed no longer to satisfy her; she motioned me to come near, and rising, leaned on my arm.

“Monsieur d’Avrigny made a hasty movement, and she turned to him saying: ‘My dear father, you promised that I might walk once round the garden.’

"'Yes! 'Monsieur d'Avrigny replied, 'you may do so, but, above all things, walk slowly.'

"'Dear father,' I said, 'had not Madeleine better lean on me?'

"He nodded his head in reply.

"It flashed across me that perhaps he felt jealous, because Madeleine had taken my arm; but if he did, it can have been but a passing feeling, for he soon motioned to us to walk on.

"We strolled quietly along. You might have imagined this was the first time Madeleine had gazed on flowers, trees, or grass; she went into raptures over everything; the scarabees, which crawled along the path like living emeralds, the butterflies, winged flowers which were borne on the light breeze from one bush to another; the hawk-moths, with their long proboscis, and endowed with such rapid flight that they do not seem to move at all. Nature had never before appeared to her so filled with life. Each clump of grass, each bush, each espalier seemed peopled with a whole world of insects, birds and reptiles, and all were beautiful, joyous, animated, buzzing, singing, as if they too wished to give thanks to God, to Him to whom we owe so much.

"Would you believe it, Antoinette, we went round the garden without speaking a single word. Madeleine now and again gave an exclamation of delight, whilst I feasted my eyes on my darling.

"Once only did I catch sight of her father; then he was sitting in the armchair from which she had risen, and kissing the flowers which her lips had touched. He came towards us, as we finished our first round, and looked anxiously at his daughter; but this slight exertion had not tired her, and the faint colour which it had brought into her cheeks, had all the appearance of health. Madeleine begged him to let her go round a second time, but he would not hear of it, and led her back to the easy chair.

"We remained in the garden until three o'clock in the afternoon, and these five or six hours in the open air have visibly strengthened her; so I hope, that by the time I leave, all cause for anxiety will be over.

"I shall not say goodbye now, Antoinette dear, for I shall send you another long farewell letter: then I have to impress upon you my wishes that you will not let one single day go by without speaking of me to Madeleine."

"Saturday, 5 p m.

"I leave to-morrow, Antoinette dear; I have not written you for four days, as I had no news to give, and knew that you must have heard, from

Monsieur d’

Avrigny’s last two letters, of Madeleine’s continued improvement.

“Since last I wrote, each day has been but a repetition of the preceding one, excepting that each day Madeleine has taxed her strength a little more, always under the watchful care of Monsieur d’Avrigny, who is truly a model of fatherly affection.

“Now she gets up alone — goes into the garden alone — and comes back alone; I feel almost jealous of this renewed health, as, like a child just escaped from leading strings, Madeleine will no longer allow anyone to help her.

“I may tell you, my dear Antoinette, that these last days have proved to me what a true and sincere friend you have in Madeleine.

“Whenever she looks sad at the thought of my approaching departure, Monsieur d’Avrigny has but to say: ‘Courage, dearest, you will not be alone; I shall be with you, and Antoinette returns on Monday; ‘then as soon as your return is mentioned, the cloud passes from her face, and she is the first to say: ‘Yes! yes! he must go.’ Even to-day she has said the same, although my departure is fixed for to-morrow.

“And yet I can see that as the time draws near for me to leave, Monsieur d’Avrigny dreads the thought of it.

“When I left Madeleine to-day at five o’clock, her father followed me from the room, and drawing me aside, said: ‘My dear Amaury, you are soon going away; you can see for yourself how reasonable Madeleine is, and that, in the absence of all emotion, she becomes quite herself again; well, be careful, spare her the pain of parting, and even if necessary, appear cool towards her. There is nothing I dread for her more than any outward exhibition of your love.

“‘Twice already have you witnessed the effect of anything like excessive emotion. The first time was when you declared your love and she nearly fainted; the second, when you waltzed with her and she nearly died.

“‘Your every word, your every breath has an almost fatal effect on this nervous, sensitive constitution.

“‘Be as careful of her as you would be of a flower. As I surround her with an even affection, so you must show her an unemotional love.

“‘I know that, young and ardent as you are, this is no easy thing for you to do; but remember, Amaury, her life depends upon it; and had she to go through another crisis like the two last, I could not answer for the consequences.

“However, I shall be with her when you leave.’

“I promised faithfully to remember his wishes.

“Of course, I cannot disguise from myself that the life of this frail child hangs on a thread, which may at any moment be snapped by sudden emotion; and thank God I love Madeleine well enough to consent that I should pretend to love her less than I do.

“I left Monsieur d’Avrigny, and came up into my own room, to write you these few lines, Antoinette dear; but I hear Madeleine asking for me, so shall finish this letter.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

“10 o’clock.”

“SCOLD me, Antoinette, for I very greatly fear that I have just committed a great folly.

“I found Madeleine alone; she had sent for me to say that she hoped we would have one more *tête-à-tête* before I left.

“The dear child, in the innocence of her heart, wished me to arrange a meeting; had I suggested this to any other girl, it would have been refused me.

“Believe me, if you can, dear Antoinette, but with the promise I had made to Monsieur d’Avrigny still ringing in my ears, I at first honestly tried to put from me this tempting hour of happiness, for which, at any other time, I would have given my life.

“I told her that in all probability Miss Brown had received instructions from Monsieur d’Avrigny, and would not lend herself to such a thing.

“‘But why mention it to Miss Brown,’ was Madeleine’s reply.

“‘How can you help it? only a thin partition separates your room from Miss Brown’s, and if she hears the faintest sound, she will come in thinking you are ill, and find me with you.’

“‘Oh! of course, if you come here, Madeleine replied.

“‘But where else can we meet?’

“‘Can you not go into the garden, and I would join you there.’

“‘The garden? you must not think of it, Madeleine; why, what of the evening dews?’

“‘Did you not hear my father say ! yesterday that the only time to be feared was between eight and nine o’clock in the evening, when the dew is falling, but this first chilliness once over, the nights are almost as warm as the day; besides I shall wrap myself up well in my large cashmere shawl.’

“Although, in spite of myself, I felt my power of resistance growing weaker, yet I still tried to make some objection.

“‘But,’ I said, ‘is it right that we should meet alone like this at night?’

“‘Why not? we are alone together during the day,’ she replied, with that charming naïveté you know so well.

“‘But the day — the day ‘ — I replied.

"'Well! where is the difference? 'Madeleine asked.

"'There is a great difference, my child,' I answered with a smile.

"'Why, only the other day were you not complaining that if my father accompanied us on our journey, he would be in our way? you therefore expected to be with me night and day.'

"'But we were to travel together only after our marriage?'

"'Yes! I have often noticed that married women are permitted many privileges which we young girls are denied; as if the mere fact of a marriage ceremony had the power instantly to change a foolish child into a reasoning woman. Besides, are we not even now as good as married? Does not everyone know that we are soon to become husband and wife; in fact, had it not been for this cruel illness, would we not now be married?'

"I really did not know what reply to make.

"'Come now,' said Madeleine,' you are not going to refuse me? It would be so very kind of you now when you are going away, and should have thousands of things to say to me, and endless promises to make. You who are leaving, cannot know how unhappy I shall be; the least that you can do is to leave me some sweet tender words to think about, which, coming from you, always make me glad.'

"I found myself in a ridiculous position, which would have made any further objections on my part an impertinence. I therefore silently vowed that I would keep a strict watch over us both, and agreed to be in the garden punctually at eleven o'clock. Truly, dear Antoinette, it would have required the wisdom of all the Seven Sages of Greece to resist so tempting a request. I only begged that she would wrap up warmly, and she was just agreeing to do so, when Monsieur d'Avrigny came into the room.

"At ten o'clock we both left her.

"'You see, Amaury,' her father said, 'I have kept my word and left you alone with Madeleine. Poor child! I felt that on this last evening you would have much to say to each other. You, on your side, have acted most discreetly. The result you see is that dear Madeleine is calm and will have a good night's rest.

"'To-morrow morning I shall again leave you alone, and then in six weeks' time you will find your future wife strong and happy, waiting to meet you at Nice.'

"A feeling of remorse came over me, and I felt almost tempted to confess all; but what would Madeleine say? Probably such an annoyance would be more hurtful to her than our stolen interview.

“Besides, as I have sworn, I shall keep watch over myself.

“Eleven o’clock is striking”; good-night, Antoinette; I leave you to go to Madeleine.”

10 a m.

“Immediately on receipt of this letter, Antoinette, leave Ville d’Auray and come at once to Paris; we need you sadly here. Good God! Madeleine is dying!

“Oh! miserable wretch that I am — come, oh! come quickly!

“AMAURY.”

MONSIEUR D’AVRIGNY TO ANTOINETTE.

“However much we may need you, however anxious you may feel on hearing of my daughter’s condition, do not come, dear Antoinette, until Madeleine asks for you.

“Alas! I fear that will soon be.

“Pity me, you who know how I love her!

“Your uncle, “LEOPOLD D’AVRIGNY.”

CHAPTER XXV.

THIS is what had happened.

After finishing his letter to Antoinette, Amaury left his rooms; no one saw him; no one met him; he went through the drawing-room and listened at Madeleine’s door, but heard no sound.

Doubtless Madeleine had pretended to go to bed, so as to get rid of Miss Brown, he had then gone on to the balcony and into the garden.

The shutters and curtains of Madeleine’s room were so closely drawn that not a glimmer of light was to be seen; along the whole front of the house, there was but one window lighted up, and that was Monsieur d’Avrigny’s.

Amaury fixed his eyes on the window with a feeling almost of remorse. Both father and lover were keeping watch for Madeleine, but what a difference in the two vigils.

The one watched, filled with self-sacrificing love, trying to wrest from science some hidden way of snatching his child from death.

The other with nothing but a selfish affection, had agreed to keep his tryst, although he knew that the result might prove fatal to her.

For one instant Amaury thought he would go in again, and tell Madeleine, from outside her bedroom door, “Stay in your room, dear; your father is up, and may see us.”

But just then the light in Monsieur d’Avrigny’s room was suddenly extinguished, and simultaneously a shadow appeared on the balcony, hesitated a moment, then glided down the steps. Amaury rushed towards her, forgetting everything, for the shadow was Madeleine.

She gave a little cry, and threw herself into her lover’s arms, trembling violently, for she instinctively knew that she was doing wrong. Amaury could feel the beating of her heart, as she leaned against him.

So great was their emotion that for a moment they both stood still, speechless and almost breathless.

Then Amaury led the young girl to her favourite nook under the lilacs, roses and honeysuckle, and sat down, drawing her to his side.

Madeleine was right when she said there was nothing to fear from the night air. It was one of those glorious summer nights, warm, bright and starry; on looking up at the sky studded with myriads of stars which sparkled like diamonds, the soul was filled with a sublime sense of the infinite and the unknown.

A gentle breeze, soft as the breath of love, stirred the branches of the trees.

The noisy hum of Paris had died away into that distant murmur, which never ceases, but which sounds like the mighty breathing of the sleeping city.

At the farther end of the garden, a nightingale was singing, at times his note would suddenly cease, then as suddenly he would again break out into song, now swelling in sweet, melodious tones, now trilling in sharp, clear, reverberating, notes. It was truly one of those ideal nights which seem made for nightingales, lovers and poets.

Such a night could not fail to produce a deep impression on so sensitive a nature as Madeleine’s. She seemed for the first time to inhale this gentle breeze, to see this starry sky, to listen to these accents of love. Her whole self was steeped in the beauty of the night.

With head thrown back, she gazed rapturously at the sky, and two tears, which looked like two drops of dew from the bunches of lilac overhead coursed down her cheeks.

The witchery of the night had also taken full possession of Amaury; he to had inhaled the magic of it all, and whilst its effect upon Madeleine was to produce in her a gentle languor, it stirred Amaury’s blood, and made it course like fire through his veins.

Madeleine was the first to break the silence.

“What a glorious night, Amaury? can you believe that Nice, with its much vaunted climate, can offer us anything lovelier than this.

“Does it not seem as if, before we part, God has granted us this boon, that the memory of it may remain with us when we are far apart.”

“Yes,” Amaury said, “you are right, Madeleine, for it seems to me as if only now do I begin to live; only since tonight do I begin to love you. This heavenly night awakes in me emotions hitherto unknown. Can it be that I have ever said ‘I love you, Madeleine ‘ — then I lied, or else I did not say it as I should have done. Listen, dearest, I love you! I love you!”

There was such passion in the young man’s voice, that she to whom these words were spoken trembled from head to foot.

“And I too love you,” she murmured, letting her head fall on to Amaury’s shoulder, “I too love you dearly.”

As Amaury felt the light burden rest on his shoulder, his eyes closed in ecstasy; he felt as if such happiness were too great.

“Oh God!” said he, “when I think- that to-morrow I must leave you, my beloved; that for six long weeks, perhaps two months, I shall not see your dear face; and that when we do meet again, the presence of your father will prevent my falling at your knees, kissing your feet, pressing you to my heart; oh! I feel as if I must give up everything for your sweet sake.”

And Amaury put his arm round Madeleine, who nestled closer to him.

“No, no,” she murmured, “my father is right, Amaury, you must go; I must grow stronger before I can bear the weight of our great love; you know that twice already it has nearly killed me, poor broken reed that I am, oh God! nearly killed me. Do you realize, Amaury, that I might have died, and that, instead of being here, close to you, ‘alive, glad and happy, I should now be lying with folded hands, in the grave. Why! what is the matter, my beloved?”

“Oh! my darling,” Amaury cried, “do not say such things or you will drive me mad.”

“Well! be comforted! I am here beside you, dearest, happy, and thank God, strong again; close to you on this heavenly night, which breathes only of love. Does it not seem to you that we can hear the angels whispering such words as we say to each other.”

And the young girl paused as if to listen.

Just then a gentle breeze caught Madeleine’s long curls and swept them across Amaury’s face; almost beside himself with emotion, he threw back his head with a long-drawn sigh.

“Oh! in pity, Madeleine, in pity, spare me!”

“Spare you? Are you not happy? I cannot understand you? to me, my beloved, this night is like a dream of heaven. Tell me, is it not a happiness such as this which awaits us in paradise? Can there possibly be a greater?”

“Oh yes!” the young fellow whispered, opening his eyes, and seeing Madeleine’s dainty head turned towards him, “yes! there is a greater!”

And he threw his two arms round the young girl’s neck, gently drew her face to his, until her hair again touched his brow, and her breath mingled with his. “What is it? “Madeleine asked. “It is to let our love meet in one single kiss. I love you, Madeleine!”

“I love you, Am--”

“At this moment the young man’s lips touched her own, and the word begun in a tone of unspeakable love, ended in a cry of pain.

On hearing the cry, Amaury drew back hastily, the sweat of anguish on his brow. Madeleine had fallen back, one hand pressed to her heart, the other holding a handkerchief to her lips.

A terrible thought flashed across Amaury; he flung himself at Madeleine’s feet, put his arm round her, and snatched the handkerchief from her lips.

Through the darkness, he saw that it was stained with blood.

Taking Madeleine up in his arms, and running like a madman, he carried her, breathless and choking, into her own room, placed her on the bed, and snatching at the bell which communicated with Monsieur d’Avrigny’s study, he pulled it violently.

Then, feeling that he could not face the unhappy father, he rushed from the room, and like one who had committed a crime, he fled to his own room.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FOR an hour Amaury remained by the half-open door in breathless suspense, listening to every sound that re-echoed in the house; he dared not go down to ask what had happened, and passed through all the agony which separates uncertainty from despair.

At last he heard footsteps coming up the stairs, and approaching his room, and then he saw old Joseph appear on the threshold.

“Joseph!” he whispered, “how is Madeleine?”

Without a word, Joseph handed him a letter; it contained but one line, in Monsieur d’Avrigny’s handwriting: “This time she will die, and you will have killed her.”

One can easily understand what a terrible night Amaury passed.

His bedroom was immediately above Madeleine’s, and all night long he sat up straining his ears to catch any sound from the room below, rising only to open the door in the hope that one of the servants might pass from whom he might ask news of the invalid.

From time to time the sound of rapid footsteps coming and going told him that a fresh crisis had occurred; or sometimes he heard fearful fits of coughing which seemed to tear his breast.

At length day dawned, and little by little the sounds in Madeleine’s room ceased, and Amaury hoped that she had fallen asleep.

He came down to the small drawing- room and listened for a long time at the bedroom door as if riveted to the spot; not daring to enter and yet not wishing to go back to his own room.

As the door opened suddenly, Amaury stepped backwards; it was Monsieur d’Avrigny who was coming out of the room, and whose grave face hardened perceptibly at sight of Amaury.

A feeling of despair came over him, and he fell on his knees exclaiming, “Forgive me.”

He remained thus for some time, his head buried in his hands, not daring to raise his face, whilst his breast heaved with sobs, and tears fell unheeded to the floor. At last he felt Monsieur d’Avrigny draw his two clasped hands within his own, which were cold as marble.

“Rise, dear Amaury,” said he, “the fault does not lie with you, but with nature, which has ordained that love, which to some brings new life, should have a fatal effect upon others. All this I had foreseen, and that is why I was anxious that you should go.”

“Father, dearest father,” cried Amaury, “save her, oh, save her; even though I should never see her again.”

“You ask me to save her! “Monsieur d’Avrigny replied, “you ask me such a thing, when you know that I would gladly give my life for hers? no, it is to God that you must pray, not to me.”

“Have you no hope then? Is our doom irrevocably sealed?”

“Rest assured, Amaury, that all that human skill can do in such a case shall be done; but, take it from me, science can do nothing where the ravages of disease have made such terrible strides.”

And two big tears rolled down the old man’s face. Amaury wrung his hands with such despair that Monsieur d’Avrigny. took compassion on him, and passing his arm through his, he said: “Listen, Amaury; there is now but one thing we can do, and that is to make her last days on earth as peaceful as possible, I, by my skill, and you, by your love; let us therefore each fulfil our part; go back to your own room, and as soon as Madeleine is able to see you, I will send for you.”

The poor young man, who had expected bitter reproaches, was overwhelmed by this touching kindness; he would far have preferred reproach and abuse to this grave and solemn sadness.

He returned to his room and decided to write to Antoinette, but finding that he could not collect his thoughts, he flung away his pen, and buried his head in his hands.

He remained thus mute, motionless, and totally oblivious of time; at last he was roused by the sound of Joseph’s voice.

“Monsieur d’Avrigny,” said he, “wishes me to inform you that Mademoiselle Madeleine is able to see you now.”

Without a word Amaury rose, and followed the old servant, but stopped short on reaching the door, not daring to enter.

“Come in, Amaury,” Madeleine said, making an effort to raise her voice; “do come in, dear.” The poor invalid had recognised her lover’s step.

Amaury was just going to rush impetuously into the room, but suddenly remembered that any such emotion would be injurious to her. So he composed his features, gently pushed open the door, and entered with a smile on his face, though his heart was nearly breaking.

Madeleine stretched out her hands to him, and tried to sit up, but the effort was too great, and she sank back exhausted on the pillow.

On seeing this, all the young man’s composure deserted him, and he gave a cry of alarm and sank down beside her.

Monsieur d’Avrigny rose; but Madeleine stretched out her hand with such a gesture of touching entreaty that he fell back into his chair, leaning his head against her weak little hand.

Then followed a long silence, broken only by Amaury’s sobs.

She was in the same critical state as a fortnight ago, only this time it was a relapse.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AMAURY TO ANTOINETTE

“Q HALL I live or shall I die? Each day I ask myself this question as I see Madeleine growing gradually weaker, and all my dreams vanishing away. I assure you, Antoinette, it is not a mere figure of speech which makes me ask her father as soon as I see him: ‘How are we to-day?’

“Then when he answers: ‘She is worse; ‘I almost expect him to say ‘You are worse.’

“Besides, I can no longer deceive myself; although at first I was tempted to disbelieve the doctor’s verdict, my hopes grow less and less every day. Before the leaves have fallen, Madeleine will no longer be of this world. And believe me, Antoinette, there will be two graves instead of one.

“Oh, God! I am not rebellious, and yet it seems to me that my lot will have been very sad and wretched. I shall only have reached the threshold of happiness to fall ere I reach the goal; I shall have tasted the joys of life but to lose them, and fortune’s choicest gifts will have failed me one by one; rich, beloved, what more should I desire but to live, and yet, when my darling draws her last breath, I too shall die.

“And when I think that — »--

“Oh, God! oh, God! if only I had had the courage to refuse that last meeting.

“But then she would have thought I no longer loved her, or her love might have grown cold at my refusal! truly I could almost wish it had been so, rather than as it is, since I am sure to die with her.

“What a noble-hearted man is Monsieur d’Avrigny, Antoinette! when I consider that since he wrote me that letter, he has not uttered one word of reproach.

“He still calls me his son, as if aware that Madeleine is mine not only in this world but also in the next.

“Poor Madeleine! she does not seem to realize that now our days together are numbered.

“Thanks to one of the strange phases of her disease, she does not see the danger; she speaks brightly of the future and makes all sorts of plans.

“Never have I known her sweeter or more loving to me, and she often upbraids me for not helping her build her castles in the air.

“She startled me this morning by saying: ‘My darling! while we two are alone, give me some paper and ink; I want to write something.’

“‘Oh! nonsense, Madeleine,’ I exclaimed, ‘do not attempt such a thing in your weak state.’

“‘But you will hold me up, Amaury dear.’ I was speechless, and utterly crushed. Had she at last realized our impending fate. Did some strange presentiment warn her that her end was near? Did she desire to write her last wishes before leaving this world and was she going to make her will.

“I brought her what she wanted, but, as I had foreseen, she was too weak, and although I supported her she turned dizzy, the pen fell from her hand and she sank back on the pillow.

“‘You are right, Amaury,’ she said after a moment’s pause, ‘I cannot write, but, at my dictation you must do so for me.’

“Overcome with anguish, I prepared to carry out her wishes. She unfolded to me a plan of the life we two were going to spend together, in which each hour was portioned out, each day’s duty allotted. And I know that to-morrow Monsieur d’Avrigny has arranged for a consultation, because, being her father, he has no faith in his diagnosis as a doctor; yes, a consultation; that is to say that six men dressed in black, six judges, will come and solemnly pronounce sentence of life or death on the poor innocent invalid. Terrible tribunal, whose duty it is to declare the decree of God.

“I have given instructions that I am to be immediately informed of their arrival. They are not to see Madeleine; as Monsieur d’Avrigny fears that the shock of seeing them might disillusion her.

“They are not to know that the patient in question is their *confrere’s* daughter, for Monsieur d’Avrigny is afraid that, out of compassion, they might keep something from him.

“*I* too shall be present, but hidden behind some curtains; neither the father nor the doctors will know that I am there.

“I asked him yesterday what was his object in having this consultation, and he replied: ‘I have no object in view, only a faint hope.’

"'What hope have you? 'I cried, like a poor shipwrecked mariner clinging to his last plank.

"'My hope is that perhaps I may have been mistaken, either in the disease or in the treatment of it. That is also why I have summoned together some who advocate treatments of which I do not approve. God grant that their knowledge may surpass mine; God grant that they may humiliate me; God grant that they may crush me; in a word, God grant that they may prove me to be more ignorant as a practitioner than a village barber.

"'Then, Amaury, I swear to you I shall rejoice at my ignorance. Let one of them but restore to me my daughter, to you, your wife, and I shall not be like one of those ungrateful patients who promise you half their fortune, and send you twenty pounds by their footman; no, to him who restores life to my child, I shall say:

"'You are the king of our profession, the all-powerful healer; to you belongs this practice, these honours, these titles, this reputation, this glory which I had usurped; you and you only, deserve it all.

"'But alas! 'he added, after a moment of pained silence, and shaking his head sadly, 'I very much fear I have made no mistake.

"Madeleine will soon be awake, so I must go down to her. Good-bye, until to-morrow.

"At ten o'clock this morning, Joseph came to inform me that the doctors were assembled in Monsieur d'Avrigny's study. I hurried into his library, and there, hidden behind a glass door, I knew that I should see and hear all that went on.

"They were all there, all the celebrities of the faculty, all the pioneers of science; six men whose fame was unsurpassed in the whole of Europe, yet, at Monsieur d'Avrigny's entrance, they all bowed before him, like subjects before their King.

"At a casual glance, one might have thought him perfectly calm; but I, who for the last two months have watched him 'over this fight with death, saw, by his set mouth and strained voice, that he was deeply moved.

"Monsieur d'Avrigny was the first to speak; he explained what had called them together in consultation, told them of the death of Madeleine's mother, of the dear child's delicate infancy and precarious childhood and youth, of his fears as she approached womanhood, and of her love for me; all these details he set before them without giving any names.

“Then he spoke of the father’s reluctance to allow his daughter to marry, of the successive mishaps which had almost proved fatal to her; then as he drew near to the end of his story, to that final catastrophe which had again endangered the invalid’s life, that life which had been snatched from death almost ever since its birth; a feeling of horror came over me, for I believed he would lay the blame on me.

“Oh! I own, Antoinette, that I trembled and had to lean against the wall for support. But, no! he did not blame me, he simply stated the facts.

“After having given the history of his patient, he proceeded to diagnose the case in all its phases, analysing all its symptoms; he also pointed out to them the disease in the lungs, in fact made, as it were, an autopsy of his living daughter, and that with such emphasis, clearness and precision, that even I, who knew nothing whatever of science, could understand only too well the fearful ravages which the disease had made.

“Good God! this unhappy father had seen, and guessed all this, and yet endured it all.

“And, sad irony of it all, each word that he uttered, each phase of the malady that he described evoked congratulations and enthusiastic applause from his hearers.

“When he had accomplished his painful task, when he had described, pang by pang, his child’s malady, when he had drawn up an accurate inventory of these sufferings that are killing us all three, they acknowledged him their chief, their king.

“Of course he was quite right! What penetration! nothing had escaped his notice, nothing! It was a marvel of investigation; he had seen like God Himself.

“And all this time, he was wiping the sweat from his brow, for now his last hope had fled; it was evident that he had made no mistake, no error whatsoever.

“But if he had made no mistake as to the origin and progress of the malady, perhaps he had erred in the treatment of it.

“He now stated the means which he had employed for fighting the disease; put before them a list of the remedies which he had applied, drawn as well from his own experience, as from that of others, and of the weapons with which he had untiringly fought the ever-increasing phthisis.

“And now what more could be done?

“True he had also thought of such and such a treatment, but it was too harsh, and of such another, but it was too mild.

“Therefore he now appealed to his fellow-practitioners, for he had to own that he had now reached that insurmountable barrier which limits human science.

“For one moment the learned conclave remained silent, and I noticed a gleam of hope light up Monsieur d’Avrigny’s countenance. No doubt he had erred grossly; had possibly overlooked some certain cure, and now his learned *con- frères*, enlightened by this precise analysis, would propose some simple remedy, easy and efficacious, which would save his child’s life: and this was why, before consulting together, they were silent and reserved their opinion.

“But the silence was one of admiration and amazement; and soon the chorus of praise was renewed, more flattering, — and more heartrending.

“Monsieur d’Avrigny was the recognised authority on medicine in France.

“All that human skill could suggest, he had attempted. In treating the case, he had neither hesitated, faltered, nor erred; in placing before them this long sustained struggle between man and nature, he had unfolded to them a wonderful spectacle; the limits of science he had stretched to their utmost; there was now nothing further to be done, all the resources of science were exhausted.

“Had the patient not been attacked by an essentially fatal disease, he could have cured her; but no matter what fresh miracle he might perform, it was plainly evident that in a fortnight the patient would be dead.

“On hearing this sentence, I saw Monsieur d’Avrigny grow pale, his strength failed him, and he sank back in his chair, sobbing bitterly.

But,” said they, “What is this patient to you?’

“‘Gentlemen,’ replied the poor father, in a heartrending voice, ‘she is my own daughter.’

“I could bear no more, but entered the room and threw myself down beside him.

“Then the physicians, realizing the truth, retired in silence, excepting one who now approached Monsieur d’Avrigny.

“He was a specialist, who as a rule had no faith in any other treatments but his own, and had always been hostile to Monsieur d’Avrigny, and always depreciated him.

"'Sir,' said he, 'my mother, like your daughter, is dying. Just as you have done your utmost to cure your daughter, I also have done all in my power to cure my mother. Only this morning, on my way here, did I feel convinced that there was nothing further to be done for her, but now hope returns; I entrust my mother to your care, sir, you can save her.'

"Monsieur d'Avrigny sighed heavily, and held out his hand.

"Then we went back to Madeleine, who received us with a smile, little thinking that in our eyes she was a woman doomed to death already.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

“THE night before last Monsieur d’Avrigny sat up, but although I was in my room and in bed, I never closed my eyes.

“I think I may say that during the last five weeks I have not slept forty-eight hours in all. Very soon, thank God, I shall enter on a long rest.

“Those who knew me gay, impetuous, full of life and hope would not recognize in the pale haggard man of to-day, the happy careless youth of two months ago; I feel utterly broken, and have aged terribly; I seem to have lived forty years in forty days.

“As I was unable to sleep, I came downstairs this morning at about seven o’clock; Monsieur d’Avrigny was just leaving his daughter’s room, but scarcely noticed me; he now seems unable to think but of the one thing.

“For the last six weeks he has not written one word in the diary, where hitherto it has been his habit to record the events of each day.

“It must be because each day is now too full of incident, too full of pain. The day after the relapse he wrote:! She is ill again! ‘ — nothing more.

“Alas! I foresee only too well what the next words in his diary will be.

“I went up to him, and asked what news of Madeleine.

“‘There is no improvement, but she is now asleep,’ he said, in an absent way, and without looking at me; ‘I have left Miss Brown with her, whilst I go myself to prepare her some medicine.’

“Since the night of the ball, Monsieur d’Avrigny has turned one of the rooms here into a dispensary, and everything that Madeleine takes is prepared by his own hands.

“I walked towards the door of the sickroom; but he stopped me, still without looking at me.

“‘Do not go in now,’ he said, ‘you will wake her!’

“Then without paying any further attention to me, he passed on, with head bent, fixed gaze, his finger to his lips, still following out his one and only thought.

“So, not knowing what to do with myself until my darling woke, I went to the stables, saddled Sturm with my own hands, flung myself into the saddle, and giving him his head, let him gallop off as he liked. For the last month, I have not set foot outside the door, and sadly felt the need of fresh air.

"On reaching the Bois and crossing the Avenue de Madrid, I recalled a ride which I had taken three months ago, but under such different conditions. That day I stood on the threshold of happiness — to-day, I stand on the brink of despair.

"September is barely here, and already the leaves are beginning to fall. We have had a hot summer, with no cool breezes, no gentle rains, and this year the autumn will set in early and kill Madeleine's flowers.

"Although barely ten o'clock and a cold grey morning, the Bois was even then too gay for my sad mood; so I turned my horse towards Marly, clearing at a bound both ditches and gates, and only returned at eleven o'clock, worn out with fatigue and grief; but I felt that the physical fatigue seemed to ease the mental pain.

"Madeleine had just awoke.

"Dear child! she does not suffer, but is quietly fading away, little suspecting that death is so near. She scolded me for being absent so long, and said she was feeling anxious about me.

"You are the only one whom she never mentions; can you understand this silence.

"I stood at the bedside, and excused my absence on the plea that I thought her still asleep. But she interrupted my excuses by giving me her small feverish hand to kiss, and asked me to read her a few chapters from *Paul and Virginia.*

"I happened to open the book at the parting scene between the two poor children, and at times had difficulty in restraining my sobs.

"Now and then Monsieur d'Avrigny would come into the room, but only to go out again in a few moments absorbed in his thoughts. Madeleine rallied him gently on this pre-occupation, but he seemed scarcely to hear what she said and made no reply.

"In fact by dint of watching the patient he appears to lose sight of the daughter.

"At six o'clock he came into the room with a soothing draught which he desired her to take, then he ordered complete rest."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"THAT night it was my turn to watch. Monsieur d'Avrigny, Miss Brown and I sit up in rotation, with a nurse in attendance. Although worn out with fatigue and grief, I had claimed my right, and Monsieur d'Avrigny retired without making any further objection.

"Madeleine fell asleep as peacefully as if her days were not already numbered. As to me, sad thoughts kept me awake.

"At mid-night, however, my head grew heavy, and I had trouble to keep my eyes open, so after vainly struggling against the drowsiness which was overpowering me, I let my head fall on to the edge of Madeleine's bed. Then, as if to compensate for my weary vigils, I drifted into a beautiful dream.

"It was night — a peaceful June night. Under a starry sky, Madeleine and I were walking together in a strange and yet familiar land; we were wandering along the sea-shore, following the curve of a beautiful bay, and revelling in the light of the moon-beams as they played on the silver sea.

"I thought we were married, and in my dreams she said: 'Amaury,' in a voice sweet as the celestial melody of the angels.

"Suddenly, in the midst of this dream, I awoke. I saw the dark room, the white bed, the shaded night lamp, and standing beside me was Monsieur d'Avrigny, grave and still; he was studying his sleeping daughter with a stern impassive face, almost terrible in its expression of fixed intensity.

"'You see, Amaury,' he said coldly, 'you were wrong in insisting on sitting up to-night. I know well that at twenty- four one has more need of sleep than at sixty. Go to bed, my boy, I will watch.'

"There was neither bitterness nor mockery in his tone, but rather a fatherly compassion for my weakness. And yet, I know not why, but as he spoke a feeling of blind rage and intense jealousy took possession of me. It is, I think, because he seems almost superhuman, an intermediate being between man and God; upon whom human emotions have no effect, who needs neither sleep nor food. His bed has not been slept in for the last month; he is always watching — watching ceaselessly, thoughtful, sad and enquiring. The man must be made of iron.

“I did not care to go up to my room, so went into the garden, and made my way to the bench where we two had sat so happily together. I went over in my own mind every detail of that fatal night, which is indelibly fixed in my memory.

“The whole house was in darkness except for a faint light in one of the windows — it was Madeleine’s.

“As I watched that trembling fitful light, I compared it to the feeble spark of life which still animated my poor darling, when suddenly the light disappeared, leaving me in darkness. I shuddered; was it not the symbol of my own fate? Even this will fade away, the only light which has brightened the dark shadow of my life.

“I went back to my room weeping bitterly.”

AMAURY TO ANTOINETTE.

“I was mistaken, Antoinette; Monsieur d’Avrigny, like myself, has his moments of weakness and despair. When I entered his study this morning, I found him bent over his writing table, with his head buried in his hands.

“In my turn, I believed him to have fallen asleep, and approached softly, feeling a little less ashamed of myself, now that I found that, after all, there was something human about this man; but I was soon undeceived, for at the sound of my footsteps he raised his head, and turned towards me a sad and tearful face.

“My heart stood still, for I had never seen him weep before.

“So long as he remained calm, I had concluded that he still entertained hopes of Madeleine’s recovery; but now I cried: ‘Is all chance of saving her over? are you then at the end of your resources? is there no new remedy you can attempt? ‘“‘She now responds to nothing — nothing! ‘he replied, ‘yesterday I tried a new mixture only to find it as useless and ineffectual as the others. Ah! what is the use of knowledge,’ he continued, rising and pacing the room, ‘a shadow, a meaningless word; if it were a question of recalling to life a worn-out old age which the weight of years is dragging down towards the grave, to renew the blood weakened by age; if, for instance, it were a question of myself, one could understand the helplessness of man to overcome nature or to fight against the inevitable. But no, the life we wish to save is that of a child born yesterday, a young life, fresh and sweet, only asking to be allowed to follow its own course, to be snatched from this fatal disease, and yet one can do nothing, — nothing!’

V And the unhappy father wrung his hands, whilst I, equally powerless in my ignorance as he in his learning, looked helplessly at him.

“‘And yet,’ he continued, as if speaking to himself, ‘if all those who have interested themselves in the art of healing, had only done their duty, and worked as earnestly as I have done, science would now be more advanced — the cowards! But, good heavens! in its present stage of advancement of what possible use is it. All it can do, is to teach me that in one short week my child will be dead.’

“I moaned.

“‘No! no! ‘he went on, half-fiercely, «surely not; before the week is over, I shall have saved her; I shall discover some elixir, some potion, the secret of defying even death; I shall find it, were it to be composed of blood from my own veins; she shall not die, she shall not die!’

“I went up to him, and fearing he might fall, passed my arm round him.

“‘Listen, Amaury,’ he said, ‘my brain is everlastingly filled with two thoughts, which I sometimes fear will drive me mad. The first is, that if we could convey my child without loss of time, sparing her any fatigue or shock, to a milder climate, Nice, Madeira or Padua, she might still live.

“‘Since God has bestowed on fathers a love, divine in its essence, why has he not also given them power in proportion to their love, — the power to rule the hours, to annihilate space, to overturn the world. Good heavens! it is unjust! unfair!

“‘The other thought which haunts me is that perhaps on the very day after my child’s death, a cure will be found for the disease which has killed her — who knows? perhaps I myself may discover it.

‘“Oh! believe me, Amaury; if I were the man to discover it, I think I should keep it to myself; what have the daughters of others to do with me; the other fathers should have saved my child’s life.’

“Just then Miss Brown came into the room to tell Monsieur d’Avrigny that Madeleine had just awoke.

“Then Antoinette, I witnessed a wonderful thing, — the self-control which this man has over himself. By sheer strength of will, he composed his tortured features to their usually calm expression.

“But, day by day, I notice that this calmness is gradually becoming the calmness of despair. He left the room, asking whether I intended to accompany him.

“But this strong stoicism is not mine to command at will. It takes me longer to regain my ordinary composure, and half- an-hour had passed away before my face had regained its usual serenity, and this half hour I have employed in writing to you, dear Antoinette.”

AMAURY TO ANTOINETTE.

“What an angel is lost to earth!

“I gazed at Madeleine this morning, as she lay in bed with her long hair scattered over the pillow, her skin of creamy whiteness, her large melancholy eyes, her whole beauty of that unearthly kind which is so often seen on the faces of those near death, and I questioned with myself whether this voice, this expression, this deep love which illumines her smile, — whether all these are not attributes of the soul; can they emanate from anything but the soul; and is it possible for the soul to die?

“Yet she will die!

“All this beauty will fade away without ever having been mine, without having belonged to me. And on the judgment- day, when the recording angel calls my darling, to make of her an angel like himself, she will not bear my name.

“Dear child! she realizes now that the noontide of her life is declining, and she is filled with vague forebodings.

“This morning when, as usual, I stood for a moment outside her door, trying to compose myself before entering the room, I heard her say to Monsieur d’Avrigny, in her sweet childish voice: ‘Oh! I feel so ill! but you will save me, dear father, will you not? Because,’ — and she lowered her voice, — ’ were I to die, I know that he would not outlive me long’?

“‘Yes! yes! my beloved; if you die, I too shall die.’

“I came into the room at this moment, and knelt beside her.

“Then as she saw that her father was about to reply, she silenced him by a look.

“Evidently my poor darling does not think that I know how ill she really is, and she wishes to hide her fears from me.

“She stretched out her hand, in token that I should rise, then when I stood beside her, she begged me to go into the drawing-room, and play once again that waltz of Weber’s of which she is so fond.

“I hesitated, but Monsieur d’Avrigny bade me do as she wished.

“Alas! poor dear Madeleine, this time she did not come to me, sustained by the magic of that haunting melody.

“It was as much as she could do to raise herself in bed; then as the last note died away, she sank back on her pillows with closed eyes, and a deep sigh broke from her.

“But thoughts of a deeper nature soon occupied her mind, and she asked her father to send to Ville d’Auray for the priest, who assisted at her first communion. And as Monsieur d’Avrigny left the room to write to the good father, she and I remained alone together.

“Oh, God! is not all this heart-breaking! Yes, heart-breaking! that is the word.

“But can you understand one thing, Antoinette; she never mentions you, never asks for you, neither does Monsieur d’Avrigny ever remind her of your existence.

“Ah! were it not for your express wish that your name should never be mentioned in her presence, long ere this I would have found out the reason of this strange silence.”

MONSIEUR DAVRIGNY TO THE CURE OF THE VILLAGE OF VILLE D’AVRAY.

“DEAR SIR, “My daughter is dying, and desires, before she returns to God, to see her spiritual father. Come then, I beseech you, as soon as possible; I know you well enough to say no more than this, feeling sure that when anyone is suffering, and, in her need, calls upon you for help, the one word ‘Come! ‘will bring you to her side.

“I would also ask another service at your hands; do not wonder at the nature of my strange request, and above all, dear sir, forget, I pray you, that this strange request is made by a man who has the reputation, very undeservedly, I own, of being one of the first physicians of the day.

“This is the favour which I ask of you: We have at Ville d’Auray, I believe, a poor shepherd, André by name, who is supposed to be in possession of some wonderful cures, and, if the peasants are to be believed, this man has been known, by the simple admixture of certain herbs, to restore life to those whose recovery I was despaired of by the doctors.

“Surely I have heard this said; I cannot have dreamt it? although my memory is failing, I may trust it thus far.

“All these wonders were told to me at a time when all things smiled upon me, therefore at a time of unbelief.

“Now, my dear sir, I implore you bring this man to me.

“LEOPOLD D’AVRIGNY.”

CHAPTER XXX.

MONSIEUR d'Avrigny had despatched one of the grooms with a letter to the priest; and that same evening at five o'clock, he and the shepherd arrived together.

The shepherd in question was a coarse, ignorant peasant, and if Monsieur d'Avrigny had really expected help from that quarter, it was plain to him at the man's first words, how futile were the hopes he had entertained.

Nevertheless he took him in to see the girl, on the pretext that the peasant had come to say that the priest would arrive on the following day.

When a child, Madeleine had often seen the shepherd come to the house at Ville d'Auray, and she greeted him with a pleasant smile.

Monsieur d'Avrigny, on leaving Madeleine's room with the man, asked of him what he thought of his daughter.

He, with all the stupidity of ignorance, replied that she was very ill, but that by means of the herbs which he had brought he had cured many who were far worse.

The old shepherd then took the herbs out of his bag; these according to him, were doubly efficacious by reason of the time of year in which they had been gathered.

"Monsieur d'Avrigny saw at a glance that these herbs could only have the effect of an ordinary *tisane;* but as, in any case, it could do no harm, he allowed the shepherd to prepare the beverage, and having lost all hope in this direction, he went back to the priest.

"Monsieur le Curé," said he, "the remedy which André suggests is ridiculous; but as it is not dangerous, he may have his way. It will neither hasten nor retard Madeleine's death by one single hour, and her death will take place on Thursday night or Friday morning at latest. I know enough for that," he added with a bitter smile; "yes! I am a sufficiently clever physician to be sure I make no mistake in predicting so much."

"You see, Monsieur le Curé," he continued, "I have nothing further to hope for from this world."

"Trust in God, Monsieur d'Avrigny," replied the priest.

"Well," said Monsieur d'Avrigny hesitatingly, "that is exactly what I wished to hear you say, Monsieur le Curé. Yes! I have always had faith, always believed in God, especially since he gave me my daughter, and yet, I own to you, that doubts have often crossed my mind. Truly, analysis leads to scepticism; by continually dwelling on material things, we end by becoming doubtful of the existence of the soul, and he who doubts the existence of the soul, is very near to doubting the existence of God. To deny the shade is to deny the sun. How often have I, in my poor human pride, dared to question the Divinity of our Lord Himself. Do not be shocked, my Father, for, at this present moment, I truly repent of my disbelief — I am guilty, ungrateful, odious! I believe--"

"Only believe, and you will be saved," said the priest.

"Well! my Father, it is this promise of the Holy Gospel which I now invoke; because to-day, I not only believe in the spirit of it, like the wise, but I believe in the letter of it, like the simple.

"I believe that God is good, great, merciful, everlasting, and ever-present, even in the smallest and most insignificant events of life.

"I believe that the Gospel of our Blessed Lord comprises not only symbols but facts.

"I believe that the story of Lazarus and of Jaïrus' daughter are not parables, but events from real life; I do not wish to question the probability of collective resurrection, but rather the possibility of bringing back individuals to light and life.

"Finally, I believe in the power bestowed by Him on His Apostles, and consequently in the miracles performed by the divine intercession of Saints."

"If this be true, you are indeed happy, my son," said the priest.

"Oh yes!" cried Monsieur d'Avrigny, falling on his knees, "yes! for, having this blind faith, I can kneel at your feet and say: 'My Father, none have better deserved the halo of a Saint than you, for your whole life has been one of charity and prayer, and all your actions can pass pure and holy before the Lord; holy man that you are, perform a miracle, restore health to my daughter, restore life to my child — now what will you do? '"

"Alas! alas!" replied the priest, "I pity you, and I am sorely grieved I am not the blameless man you believe me to be; that I have not the power to perform so wondrous a miracle, and that all I can do is to pray to Him who holds our destinies in His hands."

"Then, all is lost!" cried Monsieur d'Avrigny rising. "God will allow my child to die. He did not save His own Son.'; With these words Monsieur d’Avrigny left his study, followed by the worthy priest, who was inexpressibly shocked at his blasphemy.

As Monsieur d’Avrigny had foreseen, the beverage prepared by André produced no effect upon Madeleine. She passed a restless night, but it was evident that even now her sleep was broken by troubled dreams.

Towards morning she woke with a cry; Monsieur d’Avrigny was as usual standing beside her; she held out her arms to him, and exclaimed: “Oh! father! my dear good father! can you not save me?”

Monsieur d’Avrigny took her in his arms, but tears choked his utterance.

By a great effort, Madeleine regained control over herself, and enquired whether the priest had arrived.

“Yes! my darling,” replied her father.

“Then I should like to see him,” she said.

As soon as the priest entered, Madeleine turned to him, saying: “Monsieur le Curé, you have always been my spiritual adviser, therefore I have sent for you as I desire to make confession. Are you ready to hear me now?”

The priest made an affirmative sign, and Madeleine turning towards Monsieur d’Avrigny, said: “My dear father, leave me now for a few moments with my other father, who is our spiritual father.”

Monsieur d’Avrigny kissed his child on the forehead and went out of the room.

Meeting Amaury at the door, he took him by the hand, and, without a word, conducted him to Madeleine’s oratory; then arrived in front of the cross, he fell on his knees and drawing Amaury down beside him, he simply said, “Let us pray.”

“Oh, God! God!” exclaimed Amaury, “is she dead! dead! and I was not beside her?”

“No! no!” said Monsieur d’Avrigny, “be calm, Amaury; she will be with us in this world twenty-four hours longer, and I promise you that when she dies, you shall be there.”

Amaury dropped his head on the *prie-dieu,* and burst into bitter sobs.

They had remained thus about a quarter-of-an-hour, when the door slowly opened, and the sound of approaching footsteps roused them.

Amaury turned and saw it was the old priest.

“Well!” he asked.

“She is an angel,” said the priest.

Monsieur d'Avrigny raised his head, saying, "At what time will you administer extreme unction?"

"This evening at five o'clock. Madeleine desires that Antoinette be present at this last solemn rite."

"Then," said Monsieur d'Avrigny, "she knows that she is very near death;" and he rose and gave instructions that Antoinette should be fetched from Ville d'Auray; then he went back to Madeleine's room, with Amaury and the priest.

When Antoinette arrived at about four o'clock in the afternoon, the room presented a sad spectacle.

At one side of the bed stood Monsieur d'Avrigny, gloomy, despairing, almost fierce, holding the dying girl's hand in his own, whilst with fixed gaze he was still seeking in the depths of his soul for something which might be tried as a last resource — almost like a gambler risking his last coin.

Amaury, seated on the other side, vainly tried to smile at Madeleine through his fast flowing tears. At the foot of the bed stood the priest, a grave and noble figure, now looking towards the dying girl, and now raising his eyes to the heaven which was so soon to receive her.

Antoinette lifted the curtains, and for a few moments remained unperceived in the dimly lighted corner of the room.

"Do not try to hide your tears, dear Amaury," Madeleine softly said, "if I did not see them in your eyes I should feel ashamed of those which are in my own. It is not our fault if we weep, we cannot help it, because it is so sad, at our age, to be forced to part. Life seemed to me so beautiful and good.

It is so sad, so sad to think that I shall see you no more, dear, that I shall no longer touch your hand, no longer thank you for all your tender love, no more lie down to sleep hoping to see you in my dreams. Oh! it is all too dreadful! Let me look at you, my darling, that I may remember your dear face when I shall be alone in the darkness of the grave."

"My child," said the priest, "the glories of heaven will compensate for all that you leave on earth."

"Alas! I had his love," Madeleine murmured, in a low tone, then raising her voice, she said, "Amaury, who will love or understand you as I do, who will submit all her actions, her feelings, her thoughts to your sweet control; who, like your own trusting Madeleine, will lose herself in your love? Oh!

if I knew such an one, I swear to you, Amaury, I would bequeath you to her, for now I am no longer jealous.

“Oh! my poor darling, I pity you almost as much as I do myself, for, to you, the world will be as lonely as my grave.”

Amaury sobbed aloud, Antoinette felt great tears rolling down her cheeks, the priest prayed in broken accents.

You are talking too much, Madeleine,” said Monsieur d’Avrigny tenderly; at the near approach of death, he alone, in the strength of his great love, was able to maintain his composure.

“And what shall I say to you father?” she continued, “to you, whose words and actions during the last two months, have been so sublime a preparation, that I shall not be dazzled by the great love of God; you whose love is so boundless and merciful as to harbour no thought of jealousy, or what is nobler still, to allow no suspicion of it to appear.

And now of whom can you be jealous, unless it be of God? Nevertheless this disinterested affection is sublime; I revere it, and — ” she added softly, “I envy it.”

“My child,” said the priest, “your friend Antoinette, your sister Antoinette, whom you have sent for, is here.”‘

CHAPTER XXXI.

FINDING that her presence was discovered, Antoinette uttered a cry, and with tears streaming down her cheeks advanced towards Madeleine, who at first drew back; but regaining her self-control in a moment, she stretched out her arms to her cousin who threw herself beside her on the bed.

For the next few moments the two girls remained clasped in each other's arms; then Antoinette drew back, and the priest having disappeared, she took his place at the foot of the bed.

Notwithstanding the anxiety of the past two months, and the pain and sorrow which she felt at this moment, Antoinette, resplendent in her youth and beauty, seemed destined to a long and brilliant future, and might well expect the homage of every free and earnest young heart; it was therefore easy to interpret Madeleine's jealous thought, as her eyes travelled from her despairing lover to the bright and brilliant girl whom she would so soon be leaving beside him.

Monsieur d'Avrigny stooped towards her, and whispered: "It was you, dear, who wished her to come back."

"Yes, yes! dear father," Madeleine murmured, "and indeed I am glad to see her again."

And the dying girl smiled at Antoinette with an expression of angelic sweetness.

As for Amaury, he only saw in Madeleine's action the very natural jealousy of a dying girl, towards another who is full of life and strength. And as he looked from his pale, stricken Madeleine, to Antoinette brimming over with health and vitality, he experienced what he believed to be the same feeling as Madeleine's — anger and hatred of the insolent beauty which contrasted so cruelly with this sad and painful death. It seemed to him that if he did not die with Madeleine, as he had resolved to do, he would for ever detest Antoinette — a living irony; as much as he would love Madeleine — an ideal remembrance.

He was about to reassure the dying girl by whispering in her ear a vow to this effect, when he was suddenly startled by the ringing of a little bell.

It signalled the approach of the Curé of Ville d'Auray who, assisted by the sacristan of St. Philippe du Roule, and two choristers, was coming to administer the last sacrament to Madeleine.

At the sound of this bell there was complete silence, and each one fell on his knees where he stood. Madeleine alone half raised herself, as if to go forward and meet that God who was coming to her.

First came the sacristan bearing the cross, followed by the choristers with their lighted tapers, whilst the venerable priest, carrying the *viaticum*, closed the mournful procession.

“My father,” said Madeleine, “even on the threshold of eternity, our souls may be assailed by guilty thoughts. My father, since I confessed this morning I very much fear that I have sinned. Before I receive the body of our Blessed Lord, draw near to me, I pray, that I may unburden myself to you once more.”

Monsieur d’Avrigny and Amaury drew back simultaneously, and the priest approached Madeleine.

Glancing towards Amaury and Antoinette, the white-souled child whispered a few words to the good priest, whose only reply was a blessing.

Then the holy ceremony began.

One must have passed through a moment like this, and knelt beside the bed of one dearer to us than life itself, to realize how the murmured words of the priest and the responses of the assistants penetrate into the inmost recesses of the soul.

It seemed to Amaury that his heart was breaking. With clenched hands, his head thrown back and great tears streaming down his face, he looked like a statue of despair.

Motionless, without a sigh, without a moan, without even a tear, stood Monsieur d’Avrigny, tearing his handkerchief between his teeth, and vainly trying to recall the long-forgotten prayers of his childhood.

Antoinette alone, in her woman’s weakness, could not restrain her sobs.

In the midst of the grief so differently expressed by these three people, the ceremony went on to its sad close.

At last the priest approached Madeleine, who slightly raised herself, and with clasped hands, and eyes raised to heaven, received on her parched lips the host which only six years before she had received for the first time in her life.

Then exhausted by this effort, she sank back upon her pillows, murmuring:

"Oh, gracious God! grant that he may never know that, when I sent away Antoinette, I wished that he might die with me."

The priest then left the room, followed by the sacristan and the choristers.

After a few moments of gloomy silence, Madeleine unclasped her hands and let them fall on either side of the bed. Monsieur d' Avrigny and Amaury each seized one of these little wasted hands. Nothing therefore remained for Antoinette, who continued to pray.

Then began a silent mournful vigil.

Madeleine made one more effort to speak; she wished to bid a last adieu to the two beings she loved best on earth; but she was rapidly sinking, and these few words cost her so great an effort that bending his white head towards her, Monsieur d'Avrigny, who knelt beside the bed, entreated her not to speak.

It was plain to his practiced eye that all was over, and the only thing he desired now was to do all that lay in his power to retard the hour of the eternal separation.

He had at first asked God to spare Madeleine's life, then that she might live a few years longer, then a few months, and finally a few days; now he only prayed that the Lord would spare her to him a few hours more.

"I am cold," murmured Madeleine.

Antoinette seated herself at the foot of the bed, and tried to warm the feet of the dying girl in her hands.

Madeleine murmured something, but she was now too far gone to speak.

It was impossible to depict the anguish and despair of the three breaking hearts; only such as have experienced the supreme anguish of such a terrible night, only such as have watched the last hours of a beloved daughter or mother, can understand. Let those whom fate has spared such bitter sorrow, thank God, that they do not understand.

The eyes of both Amaury and Antoinette were fixed on Monsieur d'Avrigny's face; hope is so strong within the human breast that neither of them could understand that all was nearly over, and they watched Monsieur d'Avrigny, still hoping against hope.

But the same gloom rested on his brow, no ray of hope lighted up the despairing grief of that sad face.

Towards four o'clock in the morning, Madeleine fell into a doze. On seeing her eyes close, Amaury started up, but Monsieur d'Avrigny reassured him by a glance.

“She only sleeps,” he said; “be calm, Amaury, she has still an hour to live.”

In truth, beautiful, fragile and delicate Madeleine slumbered, whilst the night changed into morning twilight, and the stars melted and disappeared one after the other in the whiteness of the dawn.

Monsieur d’Avrigny held Madeleine’s hand in one of his own, whilst, with the other, he felt the action of the pulse, which, growing feebler at the extremities, became stronger again at the wrist.

At five o’clock the bell of the Angelus rang from a neighbouring Church, summoning souls to God and the faithful to prayer.

A bird rested a moment on the window sill, sang its little song and flew away.

Madeleine opened her eyes, tried to raise herself, and gasping; “Give me air, give me air,” she fell back with a sigh. It was her last.

Monsieur d’Avrigny rose, and, in a choking voice, said: “Farewell, Madeleine.”

Amaury uttered a cry; Antoinette sobbed.

Madeleine was indeed gone; she had softly faded away with the stars; she had gently glided from sleep to death with no greater struggle than a sigh.

Father, lover, and sister gazed quietly on their darling for a few moments.

Then as those beautiful eyes, which now only looked on the glories of heaven, still remained open, Amaury stretched out his hand to close them. But Monsieur d’Avrigny seized it, saying: “I am her father, sir.”

And he performed this last sad service to the dead.

After a few moments of sad, silent contemplation, he drew up over the dead face of his beloved daughter, the sheet which had now become her shroud, and covered the beautiful features which were already stiffening in the clasp of death.

Then, all three weeping bitterly fell on their knees, and prayed together on earth, for her who even now was praying for them in heaven.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ON returning to his room, Amaury found that everything around him — the furniture, the pictures, the very atmosphere — was filled with such heartbreaking memories, such bitter thoughts, that he could not bear it. So, merely to get away from his sad surroundings, he went out of the house and wandered aimlessly about.

It was six o'clock in the morning. He walked along with his eyes fixed on the ground, and, in the loneliness and desolation of his soul, he saw but one thing, — the form of Madeleine lying in her shroud; heard but one fatal echo repeating over and over the sad word "Dead! dead!"

He had reached, not knowing how, the Boulevard des Italiens, when some obstacle came across his path.

Looking up, he saw three young fellows obstructing his way. They were three friends of his, boon companions of his bachelor days, who, looking very fast and dissipated, came swaggering along, and were just in that half-tipsy condition when a man is eager to recognise his friend, and expects him to shake hands in return.

"Why! it is Amaury," cried one, in that loud, blatant voice which' indicates profound contempt of what is passing around; "whither are you bound, Amaury, and how is it that for the last two months no one has seen anything of you?"

"To begin with, gentlemen," said another, cutting short what his friend was saying, "and before we go on to anything else, as Amaury is rather straight-laced, let us clear ourselves in his eyes of the seeming crime of roaming about town at the unheard-of hour of seven o'clock in the morning! Do not imagine, my dear boy, that we have just got up; no! the fact is, we have not yet gone to bed, do you understand? so you see us now on our way thither. We have all three — three and three makes six, of course — spent the night at Albert's place, feasting right royally, and now we are innocently wending our way home, and on foot, so as to inhale the morning air."

"All this only goes to prove," continued the third, who was rather more tipsy than the two others, "the profundity and truth of that wise dictum of Monsieur de Talleyrand's:

“When at man was always happy... —

Amaury stared wildly at them, hearing what they were saying without taking in the sense of the words.

“And now, Amaury,” said the first speaker, “now it is your turn to account to us for your morning airing, also for your total disappearance for the last two months.”

“Ah! but, I know, gentlemen,” continued the other; “I can give you the reason; and this proves the truth of what I have been maintaining for the last hour, that, although I, alone, have drunk as much as you two put together, still I am the least drunk of the three. Amaury is suffering from a love fever for the daughter of Doctor d’Avrigny.”

“Precisely so! if I remember right, and if the good old father-in-law gave us the correct date on the night of the ball, to-day, the nth September, he is to wed the beautiful Madeleine.”

“Yes!” said one of them, “but have you forgotten that on that very night the dear child in question fainted in our friend’s arms?”

“Really! I hope that she has now quite recovered from the effects of it — ”

“Yes! gentlemen! “Amaury replied.

“Is she quite cured?”

“She is dead!”

“When did she die?”

“An hour ago.”

“Great God!” gasped the three young rakes, sobered for the moment.

“An hour ago!” repeated Albert; “poor old chap! and I who was just on the point of inviting you to breakfast with us — ”

“I could not think of it; but I, in turn, have an invitation to give you; will you be present with me to-morrow at Madeleine’s funeral?”

And grasping them each in turn by the hand, he went on his way.

The three friends remained staring at each other.

“He is terribly mad!” said one.

“Or terribly strong-minded!” said another.

“Which means the same thing,” added Albert.

“Never mind, gentlemen,” said the first speaker; “at any rate we are all agreed that, to meet a widowed lover after one has been drinking, is not conducive to liveliness.”

“Will you go to the funeral?” said his friend.

“We cannot help ourselves,” Albert replied.

“Gentlemen, gentlemen,” said the ‘other, “let us not forget that to-morrow Grisi makes her re appearance in *Othello.*”

“That is true. Well, gentlemen, we will just put in an appearance at the church; so long as Amaury sees us, that will be all sufficient.”

And, re-lighting their cigars, which had gone out during the discussion, the three I continued on their way.

After Amaury had left his three friends, the idea which had hitherto lain dormant in his mind, began to take form. He [wished to die.

For, Madeleine dead, what was life henceforth to him? What desire, what ‘affection had power to make him cling to life?

In losing his loved one, had he not lost his all? The only hope left him was to rejoin her soon, as he had so often resolved to do.

“There are but two alternatives,” Amaury said to himself, “either there is a hereafter or there is not.”

“If there is another life, I shall rejoin my darling, and in finding her, regain my joy and happiness.”

“If there is not, my misery is at an end, and I cease to mourn; therefore either way, I have everything to gain and nothing to lose, since I can only lose my life.”

This resolution once taken, it behoved Amaury to assume an attitude of calm, almost joyful, resignation. This purpose once irrevocably decided upon, there was no longer any reason why he should alter his usual habits, why he should not take up the ordinary routine of life.

Besides, when the news of his death ! became known, he did not wish it said that he had done away with himself in a moment of despair, like a madman or a fool. On the contrary, it must be thought that he had arrived at this decision in cold blood, that it was a proof not of weakness, but of strength.

This accordingly is what Amaury decided to do.

To-day he will set his affairs in order, pay off his debts, write his last wishes, visit those friends whom he cared for most, and simply inform them that he is about to start on a long journey.

On the morrow, sad yet calm, he will attend the funeral of his darling; in the evening, he will go to the Opera, sit at the back of his box, and listen to the last act of *Othello*, to the ballad of the willow, the last swan-song, Rossini's masterpiece, which Madeleine so dearly loved. The Muses produce a sombre pleasure, fitting preparation for death.

On leaving the Opera-house, he will return home, and there blow his brains out.

Before proceeding, let us say at once that Amaury had a true heart, a well- regulated mind; and that he had thus arranged the details of his end in perfect good faith and with no after-thought; he did not even see that his plan was somewhat theatrical, and that one could die much more simply.

On the contrary, he was at an age when everything he intended doing seemed to him very simple and very grand, and in proof of this, being firmly convinced in his own mind that he had but two days more to live, he stifled his grief, returned quietly to his house, went to bed, and, worn out with varied emotions and longstanding fatigue, slept as soundly as he hoped to sleep on the following night.

He awoke at three o'clock, dressed himself with care, visited the friends he had intended to see, left his card on those who were not at home, announced to the others his projected journey, embraced one or two, shook hands with the rest, returned home, and dined alone — as he saw neither Monsieur d'Avrigny nor Antoinette that whole day — and all this he did with an air of such strange calmness that the servants kept asking themselves if he were not mad.

At ten o'clock, he retired to his own house in the Rue des Mathurins, and there began to make his will, by which he left the half of his fortune to Antoinette, and a legacy of four thousand pounds to Philip, who had called regularly up to the last day to enquire after Madeleine; the remainder of his fortune he divided into different legacies.

Then he continued his diary from where he had left off, wrote it up to the last hour, inserting in it his last resolution. All this he did with the utmost composure, even his handwriting losing none of its usual firmness.

He had slept the greater part of the day, in order to prepare for the vigil. When eight o'clock struck, all his preparations were complete.

He took down his duelling pistols, loaded each with two bullets, put them in his coat-pocket, and drove to Monsieur d'Avrigny's.

Since the preceding night, Monsieur d'Avrigny had not left his daughter's room.

Amaury met Antoinette on the stairs. On seeing him the young girl was about to turn away, but he seized her hand, drew her gently to him, and kissed her on the forehead.

Antoinette was amazed at his self- possession, and watched him attentively as he disappeared into his own room.

He placed his pistols in the drawer of his writing desk, and put the key into his pocket. Then he dressed for the funeral.

His toilet complete, he went downstairs and came face to face with Monsieur d’Avrigny, who, this night also, had kept watch over his dead child, just as he had watched beside her when alive.

The poor father’s eyes were sunken, his face pale and haggard, and it seemed as if he himself were just risen from the dead. He started back on coming out of Madeleine’s room, dazzled by the bright light of day.

“Already twenty-four hours have passed away,” he said thoughtfully.

Stretching out his hand to Amaury, he looked fixedly at him without speaking; doubtless his thoughts were too deep for words. And yet, since the previous day, he had issued his orders with calmness, and self-possession. According to his instructions, the body of Madeleine, after lying in state in the hall, was to be borne to the Church of his own parish, St. Philippe du Roule; the funeral service was to take place at noon, then the body was to be transferred to Ville d’Auray.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE mourning-coaches arrived at half-past eleven, Monsieur d’Avrigny was in the first coach, alone with the bereaved Amaury, and although custom no longer permits parents to follow the mortal remains of their children, he accompanied his daughter’s body to the church.

The nave, the choir, and the side-chapels were entirely draped in white.

The father and the lover were the only two who followed into the chancel those mortal remains which were so soon to be committed to the earth; the friends, and those assembled out of curiosity, if indeed it be necessary to use different words in order to define two classes of people which so closely resemble each other, the friends and the curious gazers placed themselves in the side-aisles.

The service for the dead was performed with solemn pomp and grandeur.

Thalberg, who was a friend of both Amaury’s and the doctor’s, had offered to preside at the organ, and one can understand that, when this became known, it contributed in no small degree to attract large crowds to the Church.

The three young fellows who had accosted Amaury on the previous day, and who, like himself, intended to go to the Opera in the evening, simply looked upon this service as a second concert in the same day.

Nevertheless, only the father and the lover, of all those present, could fully understand the terrible significance of the words of the funeral service, which found so mournful an echo in their hearts.

Especially did Monsieur d’Avrigny appropriate to himself the interpretation of the saddest texts, and, with a full heart, repeated the sacred words after the priest.

“I will give thee rest, saith the Lord, because thou hast found favour in My sight, and I know thee by thy name.”

“Blessed are they which die in the Lord, for they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.”

With what zealous fervour did the childless father exclaim: “Oh! Lord God! deliver my life; alas! how long shall mine exile last? I wait, oh, God! that my time shall come; my soul longs for Thee like a parched land for the rain, and as the hart pants after the living waters, so longs my heart after Thee, oh, God.”

The old and the young man were overcome with emotion when the appalling “Dies Irae “rolled out under the master- touch of Thalberg, and thundered up to the vaulted roof; yet the impression which the music produced on each was: utterly different.

Impetuous Amaury felt himself rise superior to this hymn of God’s anger, and it seemed to him a cry from his own overburdened heart. Whilst Monsieur d’Avrigny, utterly crushed, felt the full terror of this righteous anger, and meekly bowed his head under its menace. The lover wove his feeling of despair into the music, and armed with these formidable harmonies, he doomed to nothingness this world where Madeleine no longer had a place.

Let it perish! this world which, now that the sun no longer shines upon it, now that love no longer glorifies it, must for ever remain a desert! let it be destroyed! let it return to chaos. Now appears the supreme Judge, seated upon His throne of thunder, to mete out punishment to all the ungodly and the guilty; Madeleine once gone from this world, then this world becomes a hell!

Less powerfully angered than the young man of twenty-five, the desolate heart of the father trembled before the tremendous canticle, and the outraged majesty of God, which had just absolved his child and would soon pronounce judgment upon him; he now felt himself mean and of no account, he, the haughty, the unbelieving, the sceptic.

Terrified, he probed into the depths of his conscience, and, saw with horror, how full of sins and faults his life had been; and a feeling of fear came over him, not lest God should strike him with His thunders, but lest He should separate him from his child.

But when the psalm of vengeance was succeeded by the one of hope, with what living faith, what anxious fervour, did he lay hold on the sweet promises of Infinite Love, with what tears of repentance did he beseech our merciful Father to forget His justice and only remember His mercy.

Then, when the last sad service was over, Amaury walked out with head erect, as if defying the universe; whereas Monsieur d’Avrigny followed the coffin of his child with bent head, as if to disarm the displeasure of an avenging God.

As we have already said, Madeleine was to be buried at Ville d'Auray; Monsieur d'Avrigny felt that, in a country churchyard, solitary and alone, he would have his darling much more to himself.

But one can understand that the guests, most of whom were the same as those invited to the ball, were not, for the most part, anxious to follow the body to its last resting-place.

Perè-la-Chaise, happily, is only a walk; but Ville d'Auray — why, one would have had to waste a whole day, and a whole day in Paris is of value.

Therefore, as Monsieur d'Avrigny had hoped and foreseen, only three or four intimate friends, amongst whom was Philip Auvray, got into the third mourning coach.

Monsieur d'Avrigny and Amaury were seated in the second, and the priests occupied the first. Neither father nor lover exchanged a single word during the whole drive.

The Curé of Ville d'Auray awaited the funeral procession at the porch of the house of God.

The body was to make a final halt in the small chapel where the girl had taken her first communion; it seemed to Monsieur d'Avrigny that so long as the earth did not hide her from his sight, he was not yet altogether separated from his child.

Here, no music, no pomp; only a simple prayer, uttered in low tones, a last farewell whispered in the ear of the maiden who had left earth for heaven.

Then the solemn *cortege* started again, this time on foot; and five minutes later the churchyard gate was reached.

The cemetery at Ville d'Auray is a beautiful country churchyard, such an one as Gray and Lamartine would have loved, quiet and restful, adjoining the apse of the parish church.

One should sleep peacefully there; there are no heavy monuments, no lying epitaphs; only wooden crosses bearing a simple name, that is all; here and there are fine old trees which keep the earth cool for the dead, and quite near is the little church where, every Sunday, those lying around are recommended to the prayers of the faithful.

It is not imposing, but it is all very sweet to see; the moment we step into the hallowed place a feeling of peace and rest steals over us, and we can say with Luther at Worms:

"I envy them, because they are at rest."

But when Luther pronounced the words, he was not following to the grave the body of his darling child, or his beloved wife; he spoke as a philosopher, not as a father, or a husband.

Oh God! who can portray the poignant grief which overcomes the stricken soul of him who follows his beloved dead to the grave; first the chanting of the priests, so solemn and so mournful; then, in the distance, looms the newly dug grave making a dull blot on the brilliant green of the turf; then the thud of the first spadefuls of earth, which resound dully on the coffin-lid, and gradually grow fainter, as if the coffin were drawing farther away from us, swallowed up in the depths of eternity.

Monsieur d’Avrigny was present throughout the whole of this last sad rite, kneeling beside the grave.

Amaury stood erect, leaning against a cypress tree, and supporting himself by one of its branches.

Then, when the last spadeful of earth had been laid on the mound which marks a newly-made grave, and which in turn is levelled by the hand of Time, a slab of white marble was placed at the side of the grave; it did not rest upon the grave, but ran the whole length of the mound, and bore the following double epitaph:

Here lies Madeleine d’Avrigny,

Died 10th September, 1839.
Aged 18 years, 3 months and 5 days.

Here lies Doctor d’Avrigny,
her father,
who died on the same day.
Buried

The date was not filled in, but Monsieur d’Avrigny hoped that it would be inserted within a year.

Then in the newly-turned earth which hid the coffin from sight, they proceeded at once to plant white rose trees, because white roses had always been Madeleine’s favourites, and the father’s grief, poetical as Ronsard’s verses, wished to give these flowers to his child, “Afin que vif et mort son corps ne fût que roses.”

When all was over, the doctor threw a kiss to his darling.

"Until to-morrow," he half whispered — " only until to-morrow, Madeleine — never to part from you again."

And, with a firm step, he left the churchyard, with his friends.

The sacristan closed the door after him.

"Gentlemen," said the old man, to the few friends who had had the courage to accompany him to Ville d'Auray, "you may have read on Madeleine's tomb that the man now speaking to you is no longer living. From to-day, I do not belong to this world, but only to my child. From to-morrow, Paris and Society will know me no more, nor will I again see Paris or the world. Alone, in this house of mine, the windows of which, as you may see, overlook the churchyard, I shall wait, without ever receiving anyone inside my doors, until God fills in the date which is now a blank on our tombstone.

"Therefore, gentlemen, for the last time, accept my thanks, and my farewells."

His tone was so assured, his manner so decided, that no one dreamed of replying to his words; sad and sorrowful, each silently pressed his hand and withdrew.

When he had watched out of sight the carriage which conveyed them back to Paris, Monsieur d'Avrigny turned to Amaury, who alone remained beside him, erect and bare-headed.

"Amaury," he said, "I have just declared openly that I shall never see Paris again, but I wish to return thither with you to-day, to settle my accounts, and set all my affairs in order."

"So do I," Amaury coldly answered; "if you have forgotten me when inscribing Madeleine's epitaph, at any rate I am glad to see that there is room for two names — one on each side of her own."

"Ah!" replied Monsieur d'Avrigny, looking attentively at the young fellow, but without betraying any surprise at his reply, "ah, that is well!"

Then stepping forward, he added, "Come, then."

They got into the last carriage, which had waited for them, and drove towards Paris, not speaking more to each other during this long drive than they had done in the morning.

Arrived at the "Rond Point," Amaury ordered the coachman to stop.

"Excuse me," said he, to Monsieur d'Avrigny, but I also have something to do this evening. May I have the honour of seeing you when I come in?"

The doctor nodded his head in reply.

Amaury alighted, and the carriage proceeded towards the Rue d’Angoulême.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IT was nine o’clock in the evening.

Amaury got into a cab, and drove to the Opera; he entered his box and sat quite at the back, pale and sad.

The house was bright, and dazzling with lights and diamonds. He looked coldly on all this glitter with a wondering gaze and a disdainful smile.

Apart from the surprise excited by his presence, those of his friends who saw him were so impressed by the stern, set look on his face, that none of them dared go near him.

He had mentioned his fatal resolution to no one, and yet everyone was appalled at the thought that possibly this young man was saying to the world, as of old the gladiators said to Caesar:

“One who is about to die salutes thee.”

He sat throughout the trying third act of *Othello,* listening to the music of Rossini which made so fitting a compliment to that of Thalberg, and seemed like a continuation of the “Dies Irae” of the morning; he had taken the whole scene so seriously that when, after strangling Desdemona, the Moor kills himself, he was tempted to cry out, like Arria to Paetus:

“It does not hurt, Othello, does it?”

The play over, Amaury quietly left the Opera-house, without being accosted by any of his friends. He again got into a cab and drove to the Rue d’Angoulême.

The servants were waiting up for him. Seeing a light in Monsieur d’Avrigny’s room, he knocked at the door, and in answer to the question, “Is that you, Amaury?” he walked in.

Monsieur d’Avrigny was seated at his writing-table, but he rose at the other’s approach.

“I have come to wish you good-night before going to sleep,” Amaury said, calmly, ‘“Good-bye! father, good-bye!”

Monsieur d’Avrigny looked fixedly at him, and grasping his out-stretched hand said:

“Good-bye, Amaury, good-bye!”

Then slipping his arm through his, Monsieur d’Avrigny placed his hand over the young man’s heart, and felt that it was perfectly quiet.

This action passed unperceived by the young man, who now turned away to retire from the room, but, as he reached the door Monsieur d’Avrigny, who had followed him with his eyes, said, in a voice trembling with emotion:

“Amaury! one word more.”

“Yes! sir, what is it?” asked Amaury.

“I will join you in your own room in five minutes, as I have still a few words to say to you.”

“I shall be there, father,” and Amaury bowed and went out.

His room and Monsieur d’Avrigny’s were situated in the same corridor; on entering, he went straight to his writing table, and opened the drawer, to assure himself that his pistols had not been tampered with, and that they were still loaded and primed as he had left them. He smiled to himself as he played with the triggers.

On hearing Monsieur d’Avrigny’s approaching footsteps, he put back the pistols, and closed the drawer.

Monsieur d’Avrigny opened the door, closed it carefully, and coming quietly forward, placed his hand on Amaury’s shoulder.

For a few moments the two men looked one another in the face in silence.

“You had something to say to me, father,” said Amaury.

“Yes!” replied the old man.

“What is it?”

“Can you suppose, my dear boy, that I have not understood that it is your intention to take your own life to-night — this evening — perhaps this very moment?”

Amaury started, and involuntarily glanced at the drawer which contained the loaded pistols.

“Yes! you wish to do away with yourself,” Monsieur d’Avrigny continued; “the pistols, the dagger, or the poison are in that drawer.

“Although you have not faltered, or rather, because you have not faltered, I saw through it all.

“Well! my son, I can enter into your feelings; I admire you because of your great love for Madeleine, and I say now that she had good reason to love you, and that you thoroughly deserved her pure affection. Yes! is it not true that one cannot live without her?

“Oh! rest assured, that in future we shall understand each other well; but, Amaury, I do not wish you to commit suicide.”

“Sir,” interrupted Amaury.

“Let me explain myself, my dear, dear boy. Do you think I am going to bid you console yourself, or seek for distraction? These conventional phrases, these vain attempts at consolation are not worthy either of your grief or of mine.

“I feel with you, Amaury, that our Madeleine being no longer here below, the only thing left us now is to rejoin her above.

“But I have thought much on this subject, not merely to-day or yesterday, or the day before yesterday, but always. It is not by laying violent hands upon ourselves that we shall be able to meet her; certainly it is the shortest way, but not the surest, for it is not the Lord’s way.”

“Nevertheless, father — ” said Amaury.

“Do not interrupt me.

“Did you not hear the ‘Dies Irae’ this morning in church, Amaury? yes, you must have heard it.”

Amaury passed his hand wearily across his brow.

“Surely you must have heard it; for its awful harmony strikes even into the coldest heart, and daunts the boldest imagination; well, since hearing it, I have reflected seriously, and now I am afraid.

“What if, after all, the Church should be right; if the Lord, in His wrath at our having destroyed the gift which He Himself bestows, will not admit among His elect those who have violently severed the thread of life; if, in fact, He should separate us from Madeleine, which is possible. Were there but one chance in twenty of this awful threat being realized, to avoid this possibility, I would suffer the fiercest torments, I would live ten years longer if need be; yes, ten years, that is how I feel,” said the old man; “to be sure of meeting her in eternity, I would live ten years longer.”

“Live! live!” mournfully exclaimed Amaury, “live without air, without sun, without love, live without Madeleine.”

“It must be, Amaury; listen to me: In the name of Madeleine, in the name of her who is sacred to us both, I, her father, forbid you to take your life.”

Amaury, with a gesture of despair, let his head fall between his hands.

.” Listen, Amaury,” the old man went on, after a moment’s silence: “do you know that God, or the angel which I have given back to Him, flashed a thought through my mind, just as she was being lowered into her grave, as I heard the earth which separated me from her fall with a dull thud on to her coffin? Ever since I caught that thought, ever since it flashed across my mind, I am reassured; let me tell you that thought.

"Then I shall leave you to yourself, that you may have time to reflect and take heed to my warning; and I feel confident that to-morrow morning you will come down as usual, prepared to listen to the few words which I wish to say to you and Antoinette, before going back to Ville d'Auray."

"But what is this reassuring thought?" the young man asked.

"Amaury," gravely replied Monsieur d'Avrigny, "Amaury, we cannot but let grief have its way; Amaury, do not doubt the probable result of your despair, then you will have no cause to feel desperate. Remember these words, the last, I believe, which she addressed to me:

"Why kill oneself? we must all die."'

Without another word, the old man retired as silently and gravely as he had come.

It is nothing to die when full of years, when life has worn us out, illness mastered us, and we are already bowed down by weight of years.

It is nothing to die when our keenest feelings are already dead within us, when illusions, fond hopes, clinging affections have one by one vanished away; when nothing is left of the soul but the cold ashes of the fire that once burned within us. Only the body remains — what matter if the body follows a little sooner or a little later? It is forsaken by everything which gave it life; all that smiled and sang, and flourished within it, has now disappeared. One single root retains the tree to the soil, one single breath retains life in the body, and to loosen either entirely requires neither a great shock nor a great sorrow.

But to die when only twenty-five young, healthy, and strong, not only to die, but to kill oneself, which is a very different thing; at one fell stroke to tear up all the roots which bind us to this world, break all the links which make us cling to earth, stifle the very breath o: life, to feel the blood flowing through one's veins, one's muscles full of strength one's imagination full of dreams, one heart full of love, and then to shed this blood, crush this strength, dispel these dreams, stifle this love after our first in toxicating draught, reject the overflowing cup, give up power when power lies within our grasp, renounce the future when all the long future stretches before us, bid farewell to life when one has scarcely lived, carry into eternity one's faith, one's innocence, one's illusions, to destroy oneself whilst still the life-blood courses through the veins, this must indeed be cruel suffering, this truly may be called death.

And so notwithstanding all reasoning, we instinctively cling to life; in spite of your brave heart, your hand shrinks at the cold touch of steel, in spite of your will, your better self rebels, in spite of your courage, you are afraid.

It is merely the uncertainty of a future life which led Hamlet to say:

> To be, or not to be: that is the question:
> Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer
> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
> Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
> And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;
> No more; and by a sleep to say we end
> The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
> That flesh is heir to, ‘tis a consummation
> Devoutly to be wish’d. To die, to sleep;
> To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there’s the rub;
> For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
> When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
> Must give us pause: there’s the respect
> That makes calamity of so long life;
> For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
> The oppressor’s wrong, the proud man’s contumely,
> The pangs of despised love, the law’s delay,
> The insolence of office and the spurns
> That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
> When he himself might his quietus make
> With a bare bodkin? who would fardels bear,
> To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
> But that the dread of something after death,
> The undiscover’d country from whose bourn
> No traveller returns, puzzles the will
> And makes us rather bear those ills we have
> Than fly to others that we know not of?
> Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
> And thus the native hue of resolution
> Is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought,
> And enterprises of great pith and moment
> With this regard their currents turn awry,
> And lose the name of action.

Oh! do not feel ashamed, all you, who like Hamlet, have grasped the dagger in your hand, then yielded to the doubt in your heart, have pointed the steel at your breast, then withdrawn, and pointed it again; God Himself has implanted this love of life within you, to preserve you to his world which has need of you. Certainly, no soldier throwing himself with sublime frenzy at the cannon's mouth, no martyr facing with undaunted courage the lions in the arena, was more determined to die than Amaury, when he returned to the house in which Madeleine had passed away.

His pistol was loaded, his will resolved, his resolution so firmly fixed, that already he could think of the event as composedly as if it were an accomplished fact.

He was not one to deceive himself, and it is very certain, that had he not yielded to an irresistible longing to see once more the man, who had been to him like a father, he would without hesitation and without faltering, have blown out his brains.

But the tone of authority adopted by Monsieur d'Avrigny, the solemn words used by him, and the sacred name of Madeleine, which he had invoked, demanded careful consideration, and when Amaury once more found himself alone, after a few moments of quiet reflection, he seemed to come back to his right mind, and, pacing up and down the room, he determined again to take up the burden of life, although his heart was torn by a thousand conflicting emotions.

After all did it not seem a cruel thing to live on without aim, without hope, without happiness; how much wiser to have put an end to the whole thing! Yes! undoubtedly.

But if, for those who commit suicide, life does not recommence in eternity, if the thirteenth Canto of Dante be not a dream, if they who lay violent hands upon themselves *("violenti contro loro stessi"),* as the poet says, be really thrown into the bottomless pit where he has pictured them; if it be displeasing to God that any should desert the ranks of those who suffer in this world, and if He turn away His gracious countenance from the renegades of humanity, the outcasts of society; if to such it be not permitted to rejoin those they love, then Monsieur d'Avrigny was right. Were there the faintest chance of such a thing, better to live a thousand years. Better entrust to despair the work of the dagger, trust to the slow poison of tears rather than opium, die in a year and not kill oneself in a second.

Besides, on thinking over it, the result must be the same; a sorrow such as his could never be healed; the wound was fatal and had pierced the heart, so death must follow. Therefore the question was one of ways and means.

Amaury was a man of quick decided character, and had never been used to study closely the pros and cons of a question. So at the end of an hour he had decided to live on. Just as previously he had decided to die. The only thing demanded of him, was a little more courage, that was all.

This decision once arrived at, he set himself dispassionately to review his altered position.

One thing only was clear to him, that he must, so far as he could, further the end which he expected grief to work in him, and for this he must shun the world and shut himself up with his sorrow. Besides the world repelled him now.

True he had been able to face it this very night, but then he thought he was bidding it a last farewell. Now that he was to remain in it, the friends of circumstance, the pleasures of society, and above all the meaningless attempts at consolation, were so much anguish to him.

The only thing he now longed for, was to hide himself away from the bitter compensations which the world offers to affections of an ordinary nature.

Then Amaury would bury himself in his own thoughts, live over again his past life, revolve in the sieve of memory his dead hopes, his destroyed illusions, never allow his wound to heal, and by these means he would help on the fatal cure for which he longed.

And besides, would there not be, in these yearnings after his lost happiness, this retrospective life of which he dreamed, a wealth of bitter joys, and poignant delights.

Yes! for when he drew from his breast the faded bunch of flowers which Madeleine had worn on the night of the ball, a passion of tears came over him, and after the feverish excitement of the last forty- eight hours, these tears soothed his irritated nerves, like a cooling shower after a hot day in June.

Thanks to these tears, when day dawned, he felt so crushed and worn out, that *he* was able to repeat in a tone of conviction equal to Monsieur d’Avrigny’s, the comforting words: “Why kill oneself; we must all die.”

CHAPTER XXXV.

AT eight o’clock the next morning, Joseph came with a message from Monsieur d’Avrigny, asking Amaury to come down to the drawing-room. He obeyed at once.

As he entered the room, his guardian came towards him, and embraced him tenderly. “Thank you, Amaury,” said he, “I see I was justified in relying on your courage.”

At these words of approval Amaury shook his head sadly, smiled bitterly, and was about to reply, when Antoinette, who had also been summoned by her uncle, entered the room. For a moment these three sorrow-stricken souls remained speechless, each seeming as though afraid to break the silence.

With deep emotion the old man gazed on the two young people, to whom grief had lent but an added charm, whilst the young people looked with awe on the old man who bore his sorrow with such quiet dignity. — :

Monsieur d’Avrigny having made Antoinette and Amaury sit one on either side of him, took their two hands in his own trembling ones, and said in a tone of mingled sadness and benevolence: “My children, you are both of you young, handsome and full of charm; you are, to me, the emblem of spring; life and the future lie all before you, and only to look upon you, brings comfort to my poor, aching heart.

“I love you both dearly. You are all I have left to love in this world, and I know full well that you also care for me; but, forgive me, my children, I can no longer stay with you.”

“What! dear uncle,” cried Antoinette, “you are going to leave us? do explain yourself, whatever do you mean?”

“Let me finish what I have to say, dear child,” said Monsieur d’Avrigny; and he continued: “You have, I repeat, life and the future all before you, whereas all that I can look forward to is death.

“The only two whom I love in this world cannot compensate for her who awaits me above. Therefore it is but fitting that we should part, for you have the future before you, whilst I can only live in the past.

“I can anticipate all that you would say, but whatever plans you may have made for yourselves, it is none the less true that henceforth our paths lie in different directions, and that for the future I have decided to live alone.

"Once again I ask you to forgive me, for I know you will think me very selfish; but what can I do? To witness your bright exuberant youth would, I know, be painful to me, and to watch my despairing old age would certainly be depressing to you. Let us therefore part, it is better so; we must each go our separate ways, — you into the world, I towards the grave."

There was a moment of profound silence. Then Monsieur d'Avrigny continued: "I should like to tell you how I have arranged to spend the few remaining days which God ordains that I should live; then you may have your say afterwards.

"For the future I shall live alone at Ville d'Auray with my old servant, Joseph, and shall not leave the house except to go to the cemetery where Madeleine lies, and where I too shall soon be at rest.

"I shall receive no one there, not even my most intimate friends. They must look upon me as dead now, for I no longer belong to this world. On the first of each month, I shall receive you both — you two only; you can then tell me all about yourselves, and will see how I am getting on."

"But, uncle dear, what is to become of me?" cried Antoinette, bursting into tears, "whatever shall I do without you, alone and friendless! oh! what shall I do?"

"Can you then think, dear child, that I have not considered your welfare? you, who have always proved yourself so devoted a sister to my child?

"As Amaury is wealthy enough in his own right, I have made a will, leaving the whole of my fortune to you at my death, and from to-day, you will inherit what belonged to Madeleine."

Antoinette moved uneasily.

"Yes!" continued Monsieur d'Avrigny, "I know what you would say; that you care little for all this wealth; a warm-hearted girl like you craves for affection above all things. Well! Antoinette, listen to me; you must get married; do you understand me, dear?"

The girl attempted to speak, but Monsieur d'Avrigny silenced her and continued.

"Since you can no longer help your old uncle, have you the right to renounce the sweet and sacred duties of wife and mother? When God demands an account of your life, what will be your reply? It is your duty, Antoinette, to marry.

"I no longer advise you to marry a barrister, you may aspire higher. Although retired from the world, I still have influence and friends there. Do you remember, dear, that about a year ago, my old friend, the Comte de Mengis, asked me for the hand of Madeleine in marriage for his only son. I refused at the time; but listen to me, I can easily get into correspondence with him again, and, failing my daughter, he will, I am sure, gladly accept my niece, who is as young, as rich, and as beautiful as was Madeleine.

"Come, Antoinette, what do you think of the young Viscomte de Mengis? You have often seen him here, and he is a charming, intellectual man, and of gentle birth."

Monsieur d'Avrigny waited for a reply, but none came; Antoinette remained silent and abashed.

Meanwhile Amaury was watching her, not without emotion.

Of the two companions in affliction which fate had given him, one, Monsieur d'Avrigny, had already determined to bury himself with his sorrow. Therefore it was but natural that the young man should be anxious to know whether the other, who was nearer to him in age and drawn closer to him by sorrow, would likewise wish to break the links of sad associations which bound them together, and by leaving him alone in his grief, would finally dispel and destroy everything which reminded him of his happy childhood, of his love for Madeleine, and of the dear home-life of other days. One can therefore understand that he awaited Antoinette's reply with some anxiety.

Antoinette noticed this, and as if she understood his unspoken concern, she answered in a trembling voice:

"My dear uncle, thank you indeed for your unfailing kindness and generosity, which is truly that of a father. Your advice must always be sacred to me, and I bow before it; but give me a little time in which to reflect. You have decided, for the future, to be blind and deaf to the things of this world, and I know that to-day you are putting a great strain upon yourself, so as to settle definitely everything unconnected with Madeleine, and to interest yourself, for the last time, in the only two beings on earth who have any claim upon you.

"God bless you for it, dear uncle, and rest assured that, so far as lies in my power, I shall always obey your wishes; I do not attempt to oppose them, all I ask for is a little delay, for some little time to elapse that I may not be married whilst in such deep mourning, for some little pause between this future, which, to me, seems wrong, but to you appears full of promise, and a past to which I owe many regrets, many tears.

"In the meanwhile, since my affection might perhaps become burdensome to you, — oh God! that I should live to say such a thing! — with your approval, this is what I should wish to do, what it appears to me might be some consolation. Just as you are going yonder to live beside Madeleine's grave, so let me remain here where everything reminds me of her; let me be guardian of the souvenirs which she has left behind; let me finger with a tender loving hand all the things which she has touched; live in these rooms where her beauty faded away, in this atmosphere eloquent of her sweet self. Thus in fancy I shall live again the days of long ago.

"I hope that Miss Brown will consent to remain with me, and we two will speak of Madeleine as of some dear absent one, whose return may be expected at any moment, whom we are certain to rejoin if she cannot return to us. We will speak of her as we should have done, had your intended journey been an accomplished fact.

"I shall not leave the house except to go to church, shall receive no one but your oldest and most trusted friends, — those whom you prefer above all others, and as you no longer wish to see them I can at least speak to them of you.

"Between you and them I shall be a last link, and thus they will not seem to have quite lost you. Ah! it seems to me that, such a life, without being altogether happy, which is I know impossible, might still have a certain sweetness.

"So, if you have confidence in me, and deem me worthy to be the guardian of our precious past, if, though I am still young and inexperienced, you have faith in me, then permit me to choose this life, the only one which has any attraction for me now."

"Let it be as you wish, Antoinette," Monsieur d'Avrigny replied tenderly, "your suggestion has touched me deeply, and has my full approval. Yes! look after this house, which, from to-day, belongs to you, and, if possible, keep on our old servants, for they are devoted to you. Miss Brown will help you to manage everything; besides, was it not you, with the help of Madeleine and your governess, who looked after the house in the old days. I interfered very little in it.

"Every quarter you will receive an ample allowance; then, if at any time, you are in need of my advice, dear child, you know that each month one day of my life is set apart for you; besides, amongst my old friends, I know of one who, at my request, will undertake to act as your guardian, your adviser, and will continue to help you when I am no more.

"I mean the Comte de Mengis; he is such a kind fatherly man, and his wife such a good woman, and I know you are a favourite of theirs. We will say nothing of his son, as you do not like that subject mentioned; besides he is abroad at present. "My dear uncle, whoever you may suggest — "

"But have you any objection to Mengis and his wife, Antoinette?"

"Oh no! uncle, God knows that after you, these are the people, not directly connected with our family, whom I care for most."

"Very well, then, that is settled, Antoinette," Monsieur d'Avrigny replied, "The Count and Countess will chaperone and advise you. Now, my child, at any rate, for some time, your future is assured;"

"But what about you, Amaury? "It was now Antoinette's turn to look up and await Amaury's reply with a beating heart, actuated, no doubt, by the same feelings which, a moment before, had so strangely affected the friend of her childhood.

"My dear guardian," said Amaury, in a tone of conviction, "it is clear to me, that sorrow affects 'different natures in different ways, even though it be equally deep and bitter.

"You have decided to live near Madeleine's grave, Antoinette cannot tear herself away from the rooms which are saturated with her presence. "For myself, Madeleine is here, in my heart; all places are equally indifferent to me.

"Wherever I may be, she is with me, and her grave is in my heart.

"My one desire is that my grief be not profaned by contact with a scoffing and ungodly world. The frivolity of fashionable circles, the friendship of the curious crowd repels me.

"Like you, Antoinette, like you, my good guardian, I crave to be alone; we three therefore, but each in our own way, and although parted by thousands of miles, may be alone with Madeleine."

"Then you intend to travel?" the old man asked.

"I wish to feed on my grief; to cherish my despair, unmolested by any chance intruder who may consider he has the right to offer me consolation. I wish to suffer alone, to let my breaking heart bleed at will, and since there is nothing now to keep me in Paris, not even the hope of seeing you, I shall leave Paris, possibly leave France altogether.

“I shall go to some country entirely new to me, where, safe from all intrusion, I may indulge in my sad thoughts.”

“And what place have you fixed upon for your exile, Amaury? “Antoinette asked in a tone of mixed sadness and concern — ” Will you go to Italy?”

“Italy! where we were to have gone together!” the young man exclaimed, betraying, by the break in his voice and his gesture of despair, how deeply he felt. “Oh no! no! that would be impossible.

“Italy, with its sunny skies, its blue sea, its scented air, its songs and dances, would seem too hideous a mockery to my sorrow.

“Good God! when I think of it all! I was to go to Italy with her; at this very hour we were to have been at Nice, whilst now — ”

And the poor young fellow, wringing his hands, burst into bitter sobs.

Monsieur d’Avrigny rose, and touched him on the shoulder.

“Amaury,” he said, “be a man.”

“Amaury, my dear brother,” said Antoinette pressing his hand tenderly.

But his heart was full to overflowing.

It is always thus in great sorrows, — the assumed calm is nearly always a deceptive surface, gradually the tears accumulate, then at a given moment, the barriers are broken down and swept away in a flood of bitter weeping.

The old man and the young girl looked sadly at each other, powerless to do anything in the face of this overwhelming grief.

Gradually the sobs ceased, the nervous tremblings disappeared; only the great tears coursed silently and quickly down the young man’s cheeks. At last he turned to them with a smile and said:

“Forgive my selfishness in adding my sorrow to your own, but if you knew what I suffer,” — Monsieur d’Avrigny smiled gently.

“Poor Amaury,” Antoinette murmured.

“But now, as you see, I am myself again,” Amaury went on. “Well, I was saying that Italy, with its brilliant sunshine, is not the place for me now; what I want is a country sad and desolute as myself, with fog and shade, and wintry cold, — Holland, with its swamps, the Rhine, with its ruins, or Germany with its fogs.

“This evening then, dear father, with your permission, I shall start alone, not even taking my valet, for Amsterdam and the Hague; and shall make my way back by Cologne and Heidelberg.”

Antoinette looked anxiously at Amaury, as he thus tersely and coldly stated his plans.

Monsieur d’Avrigny, once Amaury’s outburst of grief was over, had gone back to his seat, and was again absorbed in his own sad reflections, scarcely hearing what he said, and certainly thinking of other things.

However, on becoming aware that his ward had ceased speaking, he passed his hand across his brow as if to remove some cloud which grief had raised up between his mind and the outer world.

“So everything is decided,” he said, “you, Amaury, are bound for Germany, whither Madeleine will follow you; you, Antoinette, wish to remain here where she has lived; I, go to Ville d’Auray, where now she rests.

“It is necessary that I should remain a few hours more in Paris, in order to write to the Comte de Mengis, and make all final arrangements.

“If you are agreeable, my children, we will all three meet at table as in the old days, at five o’clock, then each of us will go our separate ways.”

“Good-bye sir, till to-night,” said Amaury.

“Good-bye, till to-night,” echoed Antoinette.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AMAURY then went to have his passport signed, called at his bankers to provide himself with circular notes and money, gave orders that his travelling carriage should be brought round to Monsieur d’Avrigny’s, with fresh horses, at six o’clock, and, in fact, spent the remainder of the day in completing all necessary arrangements.

Nevertheless, he arrived punctually at the hour agreed upon.

Then came a terrible moment for all of them; when, on sitting down at table, each one looked instinctively at the place where Madeleine used to sit. There the triple gaze of father, sister, and lover met.

Amaury felt that he must break down again, so rising from his seat, he rushed from the room, and passing through the drawing-room, went out into the garden.

Ten minutes later, Monsieur d’Avrigny said to Antoinette: “Antoinette, go and ask your brother to come in.”

The young girl rose, and passing through the drawing-room, as he had done, went out into the garden.

She found the young man seated in the arbor of lilac, honeysuckle, and roses, now however stripped bare of flowers, as if it too were in mourning; he was sitting on the bench where he had given Madeleine that fatal kiss. One of his hands was thrust in his hair, and with the other he was holding his handkerchief between his clenched teeth.

“Amaury!” and as the girl spoke, she held out her hand, “you are making both my uncle and me very miserable.”

Without a word Amaury rose and followed Antoinette like a child into the dining-room.

They both resumed their seats at table; but Amaury refused all food. Monsieur d’Avrigny tried to coax him to take at least a little soup, as he himself had done, but Amaury declared that it would choke him.

Monsieur d’Avrigny, who had made a strong effort to throw off all sad thoughts, immediately fell back into his sad musings.

A deep silence succeeded to the few words exchanged between them. Monsieur d’Avrigny let his head fall between his hands, oblivious to all around him, and seeing nothing but the form of his beloved child.

But the two young people although sincerely mourning their beloved dead, were still young enough to experience a less self-centred grief, and to think regretfully of the coming parting.

Doubtless each could read in the other’s heart, besides true sorrow for the dead, sincere regret for the separation which lay before them. Amaury was the first to break the silence.

“It seems to me that, of all three, I shall be the most lonely. You two will see each other at least once a month, whilst I, good Heavens! — who will give me news of you, or send you a word from me?”

“Do not write to me, Amaury,” cried Monsieur d’Avrigny, roused from his abstraction by the pain in the young man’s voice, “for I warn you that all letters sent to me will be returned.”

“You see I have cause to speak as I do,” Amaury said brokenly.

“But there is nothing to prevent your writing to Antoinette,” continued Monsieur d’Avrigny, “and surely Antoinette can reply to your letters?”

“Will you really give your consent to this, dear guardian? “Amaury asked, whilst Antoinette looked anxiously at Monsieur d’Avrigny.

“What right have I to prevent a brother and sister from consoling each other, and sharing a mutual sorrow?”

“Will you agree to this, Antoinette? “Amaury asked.

“If I can be of any comfort to you, Amaury — ” Antoinette faltered, lowering her eyes, whilst the hot blood rushed to her cheeks.

“Oh! thank you, from the bottom of my heart, Antoinette,” said Amaury, “thanks to you I shall go away, if not less sad, at least, more content.”

Throughout the remainder of the meal, they sat in complete silence, with hearts too full for speech.

At half-past six o’clock Amaury’s travelling-chaise was announced — Monsieur d’Avrigny’s carriage was already awaiting him. Joseph announced that both carriages were now in readiness. Monsieur d’Avrigny smiled sadly, Amaury sighed, whilst Antoinette grew pale.

Monsieur d’Avrigny rose, and both the young people came towards him; then, as he fell back in his chair, they found themselves kneeling beside him.

“Dear guardian, embrace me once before I go,” cried Amaury.

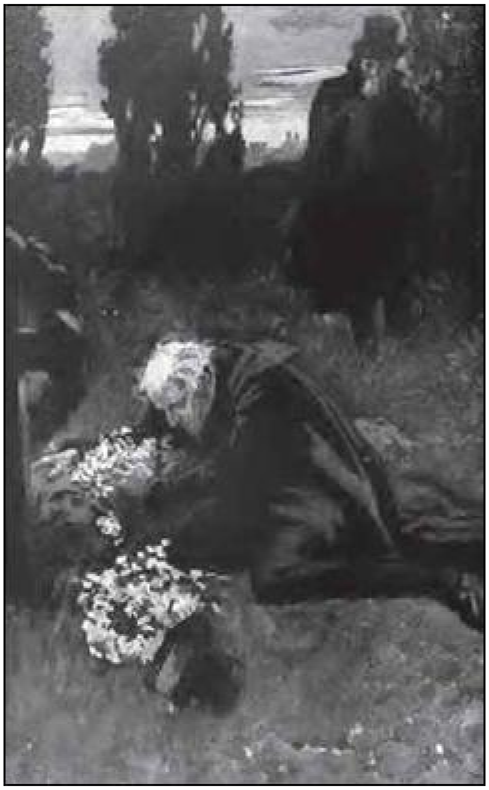

“Uncle dear, give me your blessing,” said Antoinette.

With tears in his eyes, Monsieur d’Avrigny folded his arms about them.

“Be happy — be content,” he said, “my last-loved ones; content in the present, happy in eternity.”

And he kissed them both on the forehead; as he did so, their hands met, and they trembled at the touch.

For a moment they gazed at each other, filled with emotion.

“Will you not kiss Antoinette, Amaury?” said the doctor. And he gently pushed Antoinette, until her brow was touching the young man’s lips.

“Farewell, Antoinette!”

“Farewell, Amaury!”

Their trembling voices betrayed the emotion they felt.

At last Monsieur d’Avrigny, who was the most composed of the three, rose to put an end to the pain of this last parting. Antoinette and Amaury rose too, and pressed each other’s hands in silence.

Then Monsieur d’Avrigny said, “Come, Amaury, we must be going, — good-bye, my boy, good-bye!”

“Yes! we must be going,” Amaury repeated mechanically. “Do not fail to write to me, Antoinette.”

But Antoinette’s strength was failing her, and she could make no reply, nor could she even go with them to the door; so, with a parting wave of the hand, they left her, and the door closed behind them.

But, by a strange reaction, scarcely had they gone before her strength returned; she quickly ran to her window, which looked on to the court, and threw it open, to take a last look at them both. She saw them grasp each other’s hands, and exchange a few words, which she indistinctly heard.

“To Ville d’Auray, with my child!” she heard the doctor say.

“To Germany, with my beloved!” Amaury exclaimed.

“And I,” — Antoinette cried aloud to them, “I stay on here, in this lonely house, with my sister, — and with remorse at my heart,” she added to herself, drawing away from the window, so as not to see the carriages drive off, and placing her hand on her heart to still its wild beating.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AMAURY TO ANTOINETTE.

“Lille.
16th September.

“I AM obliged to remain some hours at Lille, so shall employ the time in writing to you, dear Antoinette.

“When passing through the gates of the city, my axle broke, I therefore drew up at the first inn we came to, and now am selfish enough to add to your own trouble the full weight of my own.

“Scarcely had we passed the Paris barriers ere I felt how impossible it was for me to start on my long journey without bidding Madeleine a last farewell. I therefore gave orders to drive outside the fortifications, and in two hours reached Ville d’Auray.

“You remember the cemetery, surrounded by a low wall. As I did not wish anyone to know of my visit, instead of asking the sacristan for the key of the gate I jumped over the wall and found myself in the hallowed place.

“It was half-past eight in the evening, and therefore growing dusk.

“I tried to find my way by myself, and walked noiselessly through the gloom, feeling thankful for this darkness which hid me from all eyes, this solitude, which left me alone with my grief.

“But, on drawing near the grave, I saw what appeared to me a shadow, lying upon it. I drew nearer yet, and then recognized Monsieur d’Avrigny.

“For a moment a feeling of mad rage took possession of me. What! must this man dispute my claim to his child even in the grave itself? Alive! he was always with her; and dead, he could not leave her.

“I leaned against a cypress tree, determined to wait until he had gone.

“He was kneeling on the ground, his head bent so low that his lips were almost touching the freshly turned earth; and he was speaking softly to himself.

“‘Madeleine,’ he was saying, ‘if it is true that after death some part of us still survives, if the soul outlives the body, if the shade succeeds the corpse, if, by some merciful dispensation of Providence, it is permitted to the dead to re-visit the living, be it at night, or in the day, or in the evening twilight, I adjure you to appear to me as often and as soon as you can; for until the hour comes for me to rejoin you, Madeleine, at each moment of each day, I shall expect to see you.’

“Truly the man forestalled me in every way, for this was the request I too had come to make.

“Monsieur d’Avrigny added a few words more in an undertone, then he rose and to my great astonishment came towards me.

“He had seen and recognised me.

“‘Amaury,’ he said, ‘I leave you alone with Madeleine, for I can understand the jealousy of tears, the selfishness of grief, which causes you to wait until I have gone before you in turn kneel beside her grave.

“‘Besides, you are going far away, whilst I am remaining here. I shall see her grave to-morrow, and the day after, and every day. Whilst you will not see her again until you return. Farewell, Amaury.’

“And casting a loving glance upon the grave which contained all that was left of her he held so dear, he walked slowly away, and was lost to view behind a corner of the wall.

“As soon as I felt sure of being alone, I threw myself on the grave, and repeated the same prayer which had just issued from Monsieur d’Avrigny’s lips. Not, however, in as calm and resigned a voice as his, but with all the tears and lamentations of despair. This relieved me; I needed this last outburst, and believe me, Antoinette, even now when I think of it, my sobs and tears burst out afresh, and I almost doubt whether you will be able to read this tear-stained letter.

“How long I remained there, I cannot tell; probably I should have stayed there the whole night, had not the postillion roused me.

“I broke off a branch from one of the rose-trees which have been planted on her grave, and as I walked away from the hallowed spot, pressed to my lips the flowers which seemed to breathe of her sweet presence.”

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MONSIEUR D'AVRIGNY'S DIARY

"OH! Antoinette, Antoinette, what an angel was our Madeleine.

"I have watched for her all through the night, all through the day, and again all through the night; but she has not come.

"Thank God! I shall go to her."

AMAURY TO ANTOINETTE

"Ostend, "20th September.

"I am at Ostend.

"One day at Ville d'Auray, when she was only eight years old, and I was twelve, an idea came to us, at the bare thought of which our hearts beat high with mingled fear and joy; we decided, unknown to anyone, to go alone through the wood, to buy some flowers at a well- known florist's at Glatigny, as a surprise for the doctor's birthday.

"Can you remember Madeleine when she was eight years old? can you remember her little pink and white cherub face, framed in curly golden hair; it seemed as if she only wanted wings.

"Oh! my dear, my darling Madeleine!

"The plan was a very serious one to us, and so very tempting that we could not resist it. On the eve of his birthday, favoured by the loveliest weather imaginable, as well as by the absence of Monsieur d'Avrigny, who was in Paris that day, we slipped into the garden, under pretence of playing together, and ran along into the park, then through the little green door of the park and out into the forest.

"Once there, we stopped, breathless, and looked at each other, as if astonished at our own temerity.

"I see her now as if it were but yesterday; she was wearing, a white muslin frock, with a pale blue sash.

"I remembered the way, more or less, through our having gone there once before with Monsieur d'Avrigny; Madeleine was with us too, but the dear child had then given her whole attention to butterflies, birds and flowers.

We plunged boldly into the wood, and I, proud as Lucifer at the responsibility which I was taking upon myself, — I offered my arm — not my hand, if you please, — to Madeleine, who was trembling a little, and most likely beginning to repent; we were both of us, however, too high spirited to turn back, and guided by the sign posts, we continued on our way to Glatigny.

"I remember the road seemed very long to us, that we took a deer which crossed our path for a wolf, and three peasants for robbers. However, on seeing that the wolf did not attack us, and that the robbers proceeded quietly on their way, our courage revived, and we walked along briskly, till, at the end of an hour, we arrived without any further misadventures at Glatigny.

"Our first care was to inquire for the florist.

"His house was pointed out to us at the end of a narrow lane not far off. We went in, and saw, standing in the middle of magnificent flower beds, lost in a perfect forest of dahlias, a benevolent-looking old man, who smiled at us and asked what we wanted.

"'Some flowers, please,' I said, coming towards him, 'and for all that money,' I continued, proudly showing him two five franc pieces, the sum total of our united fortunes.

"As to Madeleine, she lingered a little behind, very nervous, and very red.

"'You want some flowers,' replied the good old man, 'and for all that money.'

"'Yes! 'said Madeleine, 'and if possible, they must be lovely ones; because we want them for a birthday gift to my father, Doctor d'Avrigny.'

"'Oh! if they are for Doctor d'Avrigny,' said the gardener, 'you are quite right, my children, nothing can be too good for him; choose therefore, what you like, the flower beds are at your disposal; and you may also go into the hot-houses, and, with the exception of a few especially rare specimens, which I will point out to you, you may pick what you like.'

"'All the flowers we like! 'I cried, clapping my hands.

"'All, all, all! 'said Madeleine.

"'Well! all that you can carry, my dear children.'

'"Oh! be careful what you say, for we are very strong.'

"'Yes! but Ville d'Auray is far from here.'

"We, however, did not wait to hear more, but ran hither and thither, and, followed by the kind old gardener, we gathered our harvest of flowers.

“It was a race as to which should find the finest; the bees and the butterflies must have been alarmed at our depredations.

“Then we would shower questions on our good old friend:

“‘May we pick this one?’

“‘Of course you may!’

“‘And that one?’

“‘Assuredly.’

“‘And this one too?’

“‘Yes!’

“‘Ah! but here is the finest of all. It is surely, surely too beautiful for me to have; you want to keep this one? ‘“‘No! here it is.’

“We were beside ourselves with joy; we were not laden with bouquets, but with perfect haystacks of flowers.

“‘But you will never be able to carry all that,’ the florist said to me.

“‘Oh yes! yes,’ we both cried, as we each took up our *mazzo. (bouquet)*

“‘And they let you walk through the wood alone? ‘asked the gardener.

“‘Of course,’ I replied proudly, ‘my people know that the road is familiar to me.’

“‘Then you are not afraid to return alone?’

“‘I should think not.’ “‘Well! my little ones, a pleasant walk to you, and tell the doctor that these flowers are from the gardener at Glatigny, whose daughter’s life he saved.’

“He had no need to say this twice; but off we went, our arms well-filled, and our little selves in high glee.

“Can you understand it, Antoinette; the doctor, had saved this man’s child, a perfect stranger, and yet he has not been able to save his own daughter.

“We were afraid of but one thing. Supposing our absence had been noticed! supposing Monsieur d’Avrigny had returned and asked for us! — merely in gathering the flowers, we had spent quite two hours; we must therefore have been away at least three hours.

“Looking about, in my perplexity, I had the misfortune to catch sight of a cross-road which I thought would certainly shorten our way home. Madeleine’s fears about wolves and robbers had somewhat died away.

“Besides, you remember, Antoinette, what absolute confidence my beloved Madeleine had in me. She therefore followed me unquestioningly.

“The result of this blind confidence was that we started fearlessly along a path which I thought I knew, and which brought us to another path, then to some cross-roads, eventually into a perfect maze of delightful but lonely roads. However, after walking about for a whole hour, I was obliged to own that I had lost my way, and no longer knew where we were, nor in which direction we should go.

“Madeleine began to cry.

“Can you imagine how I felt, Antoinette; we were getting very hungry, so I knew it must be nearly dinner-time; then, our enormous bouquets were weighing us down, and we began to feel very tired.

“I thought of Paul and Virginia, poor thoughtless children, who had lost themselves as we had done, but who, unlike our unfortunate selves, had still Domingo and his dog to rely upon. True, the woods at Ville d’Auray are not so lonely as the forests of the Isle of France, but you can understand that to our childish minds, there was’ no great difference between them.

“However, as bemoaning our fate could not help us out of our difficulty, we pluckily walked along for another hour, but the maze grew more puzzling than ever. We were certainly lost; Madeleine fell exhausted and miserable at the foot of a tree, and I began to feel decidedly uncomfortable.

“For a quarter of an hour we gave ourselves up to despair, instead of trying to rest; but, suddenly hearing a slight noise behind us, we turned, and saw a poor woman with her child, coming out of the wood. We gave a cry of joy; we were saved.

“The shipwrecked mariners of the Medusa cannot have embraced each other with greater joy when they saw the sails of the Argus looming on the horizon, than we did at the approach of this woman.

“I hurried up to her, intending to ask the way, but her misery outstripped my fears, and before I could say a word she exclaimed: ‘Alas! my dear young gentleman, and pretty little lady, have pity on me and my poor child.

“‘Help us, please help us!’

“I felt in my pockets, Madeleine did the same, but alas! our ten shillings worth of flowers had drained our purses.

“We looked shamefacedly at each other; but the beggar mistook our awkwardness for reluctance.

“‘Have pity on us,’ she went on, ‘I have been a widow for three months, the little money we had was all spent during my husband’s illness, and his death has exhausted our last resources; besides which I have two children, one an infant in arms, and this little one.

"'The poor little angel has had nothing to eat since yesterday, because work is scarce and help is rare., '"Take pity on us/my dear little gentleman, and my bonny little lady.'

"The child, who was no doubt trained to her rôle, began to cry.

"Madeleine and I, moved to compassion, looked helplessly at each other.

"We, who had eaten nothing since early morning, were feeling hungry, but this poor child, younger and weaker than ourselves, had not had a morsel to eat since the previous evening.

"'Oh! how sad for them! 'cried Madeleine in her sweet voice.

"Two tears trembled on her lashes, but with her accustomed promptitude and grace she had soon decided what to do.

"'My good woman,' she said, 'we have no money at all with us, and besides, in returning from Glatigny to Ville d'Auray, we have lost our way; will you set us on our right road. Then if you will come with us as far as the house of Doctor d'Avrigny, who is our father, I am sure if anyone in the world can and will help you, — he will.'

"'Oh! thank you! in the name of my orphan children,' said the poor woman, clasping her hands.

"'But how came you to lose your way? you are within two minutes' walk of Ville d'Auray; by taking the turning on the left you will be almost within sight of the first houses of the village.'

"On hearing this, our courage and our strength suddenly revived, and we jumped up briskly and gladly. But our joy quickly changed to fear, when we thought of the probable reception which awaited us. As for me, I own that I followed Madeleine very sheepishly as she walked on ahead with her protégée, who was pouring her tale of woe into my little girl's sympathetic ears.

"However when, after passing through the green door, we found ourselves inside the park, and heard Miss Brown calling us anxiously, Madeleine turned to me, biting her lips.

"'Now, Amaury,' she said, 'what are we going to do, and above all, what are we going to say?'

"Miss Brown had seen us and was now hurrying towards us.

"'You naughty children,' she cried, 'how anxious you have made me! I feel more dead than alive! Wherever have you been? Monsieur d'Avrigny has just come home and is asking for you; fortunately, he knows nothing of what has happened.

"'I pretended that I was coming here to fetch you, and as you have come back, I am willing to say nothing about your escapade; especially as he would blame me for it, although, thank God, it is no fault of mine,' she added as if to herself.'

"'Oh! what luck!' I cried on first thoughts.

"'Yes! but what of the poor woman? 'Madeleine said to me.

"'Well!'

"'How are we to procure the help we have promised her, if we do not own that we lost our way, and she set us on our road again!'

"'But we shall be scolded,' I replied.

"'Yes! but she and her child are hungry,' said Madeleine; 'is it not best that we should have a scolding, and these poor people be fed.'

"My lost darling! her whole soul was in this reply.

"Of course, you can guess that Monsieur d'Avrigny scolded and petted us at one and the same time.

"As to the poor widow, after making careful enquiries about her, she was sent to the home farm at Meursan, and now there are three more grateful hearts who pray to God for the soul of our Madeleine.

"When I realize that this little episode occurred only ten years ago!

"That is all I can find to write you about, Antoinette; although the vast ocean is before me —

"Alas! my great sorrow finds relief in these reminiscences of childhood, just as the boundless ocean finds amusement in playing with the shells on its shores.

"*'Nessutt maggior dolore Che ricordarsi del tempo felice Nella miseria!'*

"AMAURY."

MONSIEUR D'AVRIGNY'S DIARY

"How strange it is! so long as I was childless, I denied the existence of a future life.

"From the day Madeleine was born, I hoped. From the day she died, I believed.

“I thank Thee, my God, that Thou hast granted to me faith, at a time when I might have met with nothing but despair.”

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ANTOINETTE TO AMAURY

“October 3rd.”

“I HAVE nothing to tell you about myself, Amaury, so must be content with chatting to you about my good uncle, Madeleine, and yourself.

“I saw Monsieur d’Avrigny yesterday, the first of October; as you will remember, it was arranged that we should see each other on the first of every month.

“Of course I often hear of him through old Joseph, whom he frequently sends to Paris for news of me.

“My uncle scarcely spoke to me, and the day passed silently between us; he seemed so absent, and I was afraid to annoy him by my presence — so I was obliged to content myself with looking at him stealthily.

“He is changed — greatly changed, although to a casual observer it might not at first appear so. But his face is more deeply lined, his eyes less clear, his whole appearance careworn.

“Alas! the two months of Madeleine’s illness had already aged him greatly.

“When I arrived, he embraced me in his old loving way, and asked whether I had anything special to tell him about myself or my new life.

“I told him no; that I had had but two letters from you, Amaury, and I asked him to read the last one, as it was filled with memories of Madeleine.

“But he pushed it away with his hand, refusing to read it, although I pressed him to!

“‘Yes! yes,’ he said as if to himself, ‘I already know all that he can say; he lives in the past as I do.

“‘However, as I am thirty-five years older than he, I shall reach the goal first.’

“After this, he did not say a single word, except on general subjects. Good Heavens! it alarms me to see him so self- absorbed, so estranged from the things of this world.

“We dined together, but said nothing except a few common-places; our lips were mute, if our thoughts were active. I kissed him with tears in my eyes, then he saw me into the carriage, and Joseph escorted Miss Brown and me back to Paris, just as he had driven us out in the morning.

“That was my whole interview with my uncle, dear Amaury, but when Joseph comes to Paris, I question him closely about his master. My uncle has not forbidden him to reply to me; he seems equally indifferent to everything now. Therefore I have a fair idea as to what he does, and how he lives.

“Whatever the weather may be, he goes every morning into the cemetery, and, to use his own expression, wishes Madeleine good-morning. He remains there about an hour.

“On his return, after breakfasting in about five minutes, for he only eats just sufficient to keep himself alive, he shuts himself up in his study, and takes out the diary, in which, since he reached the age of manhood, he has written each night the history of his life.

“Now seeing that during all the eighteen years Madeleine lived, the life of the child was that of the father, he has never failed, when writing down his own doings, to chronicle also those of his beloved child. If she went out for a walk, and where she went; if she were at work, and what she was doing; if she said anything in particular, and what it was. He is therefore able to live over each day of the past. Five, ten, fifteen years ago to-day, she was here or there; we went to such a place together; we chatted about such and such a thing.

“Thus gay, tender, and grave scenes of the past pass each in turn before him, and he listens, smiling or weeping, but he always ends by weeping, because the conclusion of all these memories is invariably the same; because, when he has reminded himself: ‘At five years old, she was so full of fun, at ten years so intelligent, at fifteen so full of grace,’ he must always come back to the sad fact, — ’ To-day, all this brightness, all this intelligence, all this grace have vanished; to-day, she is no more,’ and if a doubt arises in his mind whether all these charms can die, he has but to open his windows, and her grave is there before him.

“And every hour of my poor uncle’s life is passed in this sad retrospection, — the source of countless emotions; he never retires to rest without going to wish Madeleine good-night, in the same way as he wishes her good-morning, Then he returns at ten or eleven o’clock at night, with roses from her grave, — he usually brings one white rose which he places in a Bohemian vase that used to be in Madeleine's room, and keeps it beside him until the following morning.

"They tell me, too, that he is often heard talking to his daughter's picture, you remember the one, that charming portrait by Champmartin, which you have so often coveted.

"Besides all this, he never opens a book, or a newspaper, or a parcel, or a letter; he receives no one and goes nowhere.

"In fact he is dead to the whole world, and living only to her who is dead.

"You now know as much as I do, Amaury, of what goes on in the house at Ville d'Auray; Madeleine is mourned all day and every day.

"It is the same thing at the Rue d'Angoulême, where I am, and the same where you are.

"Who could have known her for one single hour and not have mourned her.

"I am therefore truly grateful to you, Amaury, for speaking of her to me, you who knew her even better than I. Always speak of her to me.

"Even now when I dream of her, she seems like some celestial being appearing, in a dream. Was she not indeed an angel whom God lent us for awhile that we might follow in her footsteps? You were a witness of one of her good actions, Amaury; but I, her friend, I who was privileged to share them with her, know of a thousand others, and many of the poor love her dear name.

"Once I only prayed to God, now I pray to God and to her.

"Speak to me often of Madeleine Amaury, very often.

"Tell me of yourself too. Ah! even to ask you this makes my hand tremble and my heart beat, for I fear lest I should offend or displease you! What shall I do if you think me guilty of curiosity or indiscretion I "Wounds like yours need a tender gentle touch; Madeleine, would have known how to write you such a letter as I now attempt to write; but where is there a second Madeleine?

"I can only speak to you from the depth of my heart, and as an old and trusted friend.

"Ah! if only I were really your sister? I would tell you, and you would have to listen to me.

"Amaury, my dear brother, I certainly would not wish you to forget or be false to a sacred memory. I know that love can never come into your life again, that never more will your whole being thrill at the touch, or voice of a woman. Be therefore faithful to your beloved dead; it is only right, only fair, only loyal.

"But if love be the best thing in the whole world, is it the only good? Are not science, art, and the government of men, duties with noble aims.

"You are young, you are influential, do you not owe some duty to your fellow men? Were you to devote your life to charity, tell me, is not charity akin to love?

"You have the wherewithal to bring happiness to many, you are rich; and as now, alas, your sister Antoinette is rich too, then are you not doubly so? I did not care at the time to grieve my uncle by a refusal, but my life now is too sad to permit me to link it with any other life. What better use can I make of this fortune than by confiding it to you, Amaury?

"Use it for generous deeds and noble aims. It can be in no better hands than yours, my brother, and as for me —

"But I do not wish to write about myself, only about you. Let me think of you alone; can any words of mine have the power to touch you.

"You never think now of doing away with yourself, do you? it would be terrible, a crime. My uncle often dwells on the probable length of his life; but you, my dear Amaury, are but at the beginning of yours.

"I do not know, but then I know very little of these matters, but it seems to me there is a wide difference between your lot and his, your duties and his. You can never love again, I know, but others may love you, and after all it is a great blessing to be loved.

"You must not die, Amaury, you must not — always remember Madeleine; but when the ocean lies before you, compare its vastness with your trouble. Oh! that I could find words to express what I would say. Let your thoughts dwell on the beauties which surround you, on that eternal nature whose winters are but harbingers of spring, whose apparent deaths conceal as many resurrections.

"Just as beneath these snows and frosts, Amaury, there beats, beneath your sorrow and your anguish, life full and free and strong. Do not misuse the gifts of God, be comforted if it be His will, live, if He so ordains.

"Forgive me, Amaury, for writing as I do in the fullness of my heart; but when I think of you, far away, alone, desolate and sad, such a world of sisterly, I had almost said motherly, compassion, wells up in my heart for you, that it gives me courage and strength to send this message to the friend of my youth, the betrothed of Madeleine:

“You must live, Amaury! —

“ANTOINETTE DE VALGENCEUSE.’

CHAPTER XL.

AMAURY TO ANTOINETTE

“15th October.

“HERE I am at Amsterdam.

“Although I have estranged myself as much as I dare from the outside world, although self-absorbed, and ceaselessly weighed down by the burden of my wrecked hopes, I cannot refrain from watching and studying this Dutch people, at once methodical and active, avaricious and careless, sedentary and birds of passage, going gladly to Java, Malabar or Japan, — but never to Paris.

“The Dutch are the Chinese of Europe, the beavers of the human race.

“Your letter reached me at Antwerp, dear Antoinette, and did me a world of good.

“Your sympathy is sweet to me, but my wound is deep. Never mind, send me again some comforting words and tell me about yourself. I ask, I implore, I beseech you to do so. It is wrong of you to consider me indifferent to what concerns you.

“You find Monsieur d’Avrigny sadly altered. Do not let yourself be unhappy about it, Antoinette, for after all it is but kind to hope for each what he most desires for himself. The more depressed he feels, the happier will he be; and the worse you find him, the better, I know, will he find himself.

“You ask me to tell you again and always of Madeleine. This affords me an opportunity of writing you much oftener; for, of whom should I write you, if not of her. She is ever before me, within me, around me; therefore nothing comforts me more than to recall to memory sweet visions of my darling.

“Now I will tell you how we first became aware of our love for each other, and how it was revealed to each of us. It was on an evening in spring; now two years and a half ago. We two were sitting in the garden under the group of lime-trees; from the window of your dressing-room you can see the very spot.

“Greet it in my name, Antoinette; greet the whole garden, for there is not an inch of ground in it which her dear foot has not pressed, not a single tree which her veil, her scarf, her handkerchief, or her hand has not touched, not a nook where her sweet voice has not waked an echo.

“It was then, on an evening in spring, when we two were alone and chatting merrily together, that having exhausted the present, we plunged gaily into the future.

“You know, though my darling had a sad look, she was usually very bright! Well we began to talk laughingly about marriage; we did not yet speak of love. What qualities were necessary to win the heart of Madeleine?

“What charms to touch mine?

“And we drew up a programme of the perfections we should exact from the chosen one, the lucky mortal; then, on comparing notes, we found our ideas much alike.

“‘First of all,’ I said, ‘I can only bestow my love on one whom I have known for many years, whose mind is an open book to me.’

“‘Oh! I am of your opinion,’ said Madeleine; ‘when a stranger makes love to us, to use the old-time expression, we may often be deceived by a face which is nothing but a mask. The unknown puts on with his black coat a set ideal, and not until the day after the marriage, do we really know the man whom we have married.’

“‘Then,’ I replied with a smile, ‘we are agreed on that point I should wish to have satisfied myself, through a long friendship, of the worth and virtues of my loved one. Of course, I should expect to find in her, — though it would perhaps be over-exacting, the three indispensable qualifications of beauty, goodness, and wit; this would surely be the easiest thing in the world.’

“‘Yes! but alas! the rarest! ‘Madeleine replied.

“‘You evidently have a good opinion of yourself,’ I replied.

“‘On the contrary,’ she said, ‘perhaps you would consider me too ambitious, in demanding, from my future husband, the corresponding qualities to those which you require in your wife — namely, elegance, devotion, manliness.’

“‘Oh! if that is so, my dear Madeleine, you will have to wait a long time.’

“‘Do not be so vain, Amaury,’ Madeleine laughingly replied, ‘but finish the description of your ideal.’

"'Well! 'I continued, 'I do not think I have anything more to add, unless it be one or two minor considerations; for instance, is it childish to wish that she should be of as good birth as myself.'

"'Indeed no, Amaury, and if ever you mention this subject to my father, who is as you know, both of gentle birth and undoubted intelligence, he will bring forward in support of your theory, his own ideas on the importance of equality of social position; and although I may not understand his theories, yet I instinctively share them, for I sincerely wish my husband may be a gentleman born.'

"'Well,' I went on, 'although thank God, I am not covetous, yet I would wish, for my wife's sake, and in the interests of our moral equality, so that our minds should not be troubled by any question of material advantage, I would wish that my chosen one should be about as rich as myself. Do you not agree with me, Madeleine?'

"'I do, Amaury, though I must admit that I have never given this question a thought, as I am rich enough for both; still I think you are right.'

"'Then there remains but one question to solve.'

"'And that is?'

"'Whether, when I have discovered the fairy of my fancy, and grown to love her, whether she will return my love.' "'Can you doubt it, Amaury?'

"'Well! can you reassure me on this point?'

"'Decidedly I can, Amaury, I will answer for her — but what about me, will he love me?'

"'He will worship you, Madeleine, I am certain.'

"'Very well,' said Madeleine, 'now let us try to convert fancy into fact; let us look around us; amongst those whom we know, can you think of anyone who answers to your description, Amaury?

As to me — '

"She stopped short, and a hot flush rose to her face.

We looked at each other in complete silence. The truth was beginning to dawn upon us.

"I fixed my eyes on Madeleine, and as if speaking to myself, repeated the words: "'A dear friend, one known from childhood.'

"'A friend whose heart I may read as I do my own,' said Madeleine.

"'Sweet, beautiful, intellectual — '

"'Charming, generous, manly — '

"'Rich and of good birth — '

"'Of good birth and rich — '

"'That is to say with all the charms that you possess, Madeleine.'

"'That is to say, one who has all your virtues, Amaury.'

"'Oh! 'I cried with a beating heart, 'if only a woman like yourself loved me.'

"'Why! 'said Madeleine, growing pale, 'have you ever thought of me?'

"'Madeleine!'

"'Amaury!'

"'Yes, Madeleine, I love you! '"'Amaury, I love you! '"With these words we were folded in each other's arms, and heaven seemed to open before us; then for the first time we saw clearly into each other's hearts.

"But is it wise of me to revive these memories, Antoinette; they are very sweet, but very heart-breaking.

"Will you address your next letter to Cologne, and I will write you from there.

"Good-bye, my sister, love me a little and pity me much.

"Your brother,

"AMAURY."

"It is strange," said Amaury to himself, sealing his letter and going over its contents in his mind, "it is strange, but, of all the women I know, Antoinette is now the only one in the world who might in any way realize my former dreams, if these dreams, these dear old dreams, were not buried with my beloved Madeleine. Antoinette too has been my friend since childhood, sweet, beautiful, intellectual, rich and of gentle birth.

"It is true," he added with a sad smile, "that Antoinette does not love me, nor do I love her."

CHAPTER XLI.

ANTOINETTE TO AMAURY

"5th November.

"I HAVE seen my uncle again, Amaury, have spent another day with him just like the previous one, noticed the same symptoms of depression, said and listened to almost the same words. Therefore I have absolutely nothing fresh to tell you about him.

"Nor have I any news about myself.

"With your usual thoughtfulness, you wish that I should speak to you about myself. But what can I have to say on this subject! — God alone is witness and judge of my thoughts; and as to my doings, I assure you they are very simple and very monotonous.

"My days are filled up with household cares, a girl's ordinary occupations, embroidery and music.

"Occasional visits from some of Monsieur d'Avrigny's old friends come as a welcome break in the monotony of my life.

"But there are only two names which now have power to give me real pleasure; the one is that of Monsieur de Mengis, for the Count and his wife are kindness itself, and treat me, in every way, as their own daughter.

"The other, I may own it to you, Amaury, is that of your friend Philip Auvray.

"Yes! M. Philippe Auvray is the only visitor, under sixty years of age, whom I receive, — of course in the presence of Miss Brown; and why is he so privileged? certainly not on account of his powers of conversation, for he is deadly dull and bores me terribly.

"But, since I must be frank, because of his friendship for you, my brother.

"Not that he ever says much about you; but it gives me an opportunity of talking about you to one who knows you well, and I do not miss it.

"He comes, bows, sits down, and when anyone else is there, maintains a solemn silence, whilst they are in the room, simply looking at me in a persistent manner which I sometimes find somewhat embarrassing.

“If I am alone with Miss Brown, he grows bolder; but, I own to you, that even then he is bold but to the extent of saying a few occasional words, leaving the whole burden of the conversation to me, and I assure you, Amaury, you and Madeleine form our only topic of conversation.

“Because why should I conceal the truth from so sensitive, so noble a heart as yours, Amaury? The soul craves for affection as the lungs do for air, and my love for you is part of my past life, and probably the only affection which I may hope for in the future.

“To be perfectly frank, the loneliness of my life appals me, and I complain of it to you because I am unable to hide the truth either from others or myself; perhaps it is wrong of me to feel as I do, but I long for some distraction, long to get about, to walk in the sunshine, to see the world, — in fact to live —

“I feel cold and rather frightened in these great rooms, and face to face with these white busts and inscrutable portraits, alas! the old Antoinette comes to life again.

“Therefore Philip, who as you know, is stolid and taciturn, gives me an opportunity of having a little quiet fun at his expense, for I am inwardly laughing at him when he is here, and Miss Brown and I joke over him when he has gone. I cannot respect him — I am sorry to say —

“Scold me, my friend, scold me for indulging in this habit of laughing at some one whom you care for.

“Scold me, Amaury, for I believe you are the only being who would be able, if you cared to take the trouble, to correct my many faults.

“But, Amaury, I am weary of hearing about you through him, I want you to write and tell me about yourself; are you feeling better in mind? what do you think about? what do you feel?

“Between you and my uncle, my life is a sad one. I am crushed and overwhelmed by the sorrow of you both.

“Do have confidence in me, my dear brother, I beseech you, and help me to feel less lonely; make some allowance for this weaker mind, which is afraid, and weeps alone.

“Do you know, there are some days when I envy Madeleine; she died surrounded by love, and is now happy in heaven, whilst I am buried alive, in solitude and forgetfulness.

“ANTOINETTE DE VALGENCEUSE.”

CHAPTER XLII.

AMAURY TO ANTOINETTE

"Cologne,"
10th December."

"YOU reproach me, Antoinette, with not telling you much about myself; so to punish you, I am going to write the most selfish letter imaginable, and shall begin by filling two or three sheets with nothing but my own doings, and afterwards drift into two or three lines about yourself at the end.

"Then will you be satisfied? "Here I am at Cologne, or rather just opposite Cologne at Deutz.

"I am staying at the Hotel Bellevue, and from my windows have a good view of the Rhine and the town. It is a glorious outlook; the sun is setting behind the old town, and in these clear wintry days, its massive houses and church spires stand out with magnificent effect, gloomy and dark, against the brilliant background.

"The river flows noisily below, alive with many-hued reflections, now red, now black, almost always sinister, but in either case, of surpassing beauty.

"I spend hours in ecstasies over this marvellous picture dominated by the two massive fragments of the, fortunately, still unfinished Cathedral.

"Alas! when the masons, instigated by vanity, shall have completed the work of the old architects inspired by faith, then no longer will the sun be able to shed the light of God through the midst of the edifice built by human hands, nor change into a fiery furnace the abyss, formed by those two sublime fragments.

"All these pictures have an artistic interest for me.

"Truly, I love this town; it is both ancient and modern, venerable and gay; it both thinks and acts.

"Ah! if only Madeleine were here, watching with me the sun go down behind the Cathedral of Cologne.

“My banker insisted on providing me with a letter of introduction to the Casino; of course I do not attend any of the evening performances, but during the day, that is to say when these large halls are empty because the season-ticket holders are about their daily business, I am glad to spend an hour or two reading the papers.

“And yet, I own to you, Antoinette, I had at first great difficulty in overcoming my unwillingness to look at a newspaper again; to wade through these twelve columns which contained not a single word of any interest to me; this gay Parisian world which laughs and takes its pleasures; all this European equipoise which the sorrow of the individual however deep, however terrible it be, affects not one iota in its appointed course, all this roused in me a feeling of disgust, amounting almost to rage. Finally I said to myself, ‘After all what is the death of my darling Madeleine to all these people? Only one woman less on earth, one angel more in heaven.’--

“How selfish I am to wish that other men should share my grief, when I do not participate in their sorrow.

“So I gradually took up these papers which I had discarded at one fell swoop, and now feel interested in reading them again.

“Do you know that I have been almost three months away from France. Truly, it appals me sometimes when I see, that in a given time the days pass as quickly to a soul in trouble as to one in joy.

“It seems but yesterday that Madeleine lay stretched on her bed, I holding one of her hands, her father the other, while you, Antoinette, were vainly trying to warm her feet, already grown cold in the icy clasp of death.

“Only when abroad, Antoinette, do we realize this great truth, that the life in Paris is the only real life; everywhere else one vegetates more or less.

“But only in Paris do we find true growth of mind and advancement of thought; and yet Antoinette, I think I could be content to remain here a long while, if only there were some one with me to whom I might speak of her, if you were here to see and enjoy with me these beauties of nature, and to revel as I do in these beautiful landscapes which are unfolded before my eyes when I watch the Rhine bathed in this glorious sun.

“Oh! for a hand to press within my own, when, in rapturous silence, I stand, for hours together, at my window, for a sympathetic look to reflect back my own impressions, a heart into which to pour them.

“But no — my destiny now is to live and die alone.

“You ask me to tell you of myself, Antoinette; why should I sadden you with all my sorrows, you who frankly own that loneliness is unbearable to you, and that you long to share another’s life? —

“I sincerely hope that you will have your wish, Antoinette. May you find this other heart which your heart seeks! May God bestow upon you all the blessings of love and spare you all its trials, for if I, a man, am crushed by these storms, how would it be with you? Ah! you do not know yet what love is, Antoinette!

“Love! ah, it is joy and sorrow, intoxication and fever! philtre and poison! it exhilarates, but it kills.

“From the balcony of Juliet to her grave, how many smiles; but how many tears! —

“Happy the one to whom death comes first!

“But when Romeo finds his beloved, dead and cold on her tomb, what is there left for him but to die too?

“For my own part I now trust to life for this happy consummation.

“Do you know, Antoinette, when one loves truly, one’s heart no longer beats in one’s own breast, but in that of another! When one loves, one sacrifices self, merges one’s life in that of another, and yet in that other life we find our own.

“When we love, we anticipate the joys of heaven, until death, taking one of the two halves of our soul, changes heaven into hell.

“Then all is over, and for the one who is left, hope lies only in death, which, having parted those who love, can alone re-unite them.

“But you, Antoinette, with life, youth and the future all before you! do not let your bright little self be saddened by the terrible sorrows which press Monsieur d’Avrigny and me towards the grave.

“The loss of a sister should not have the same power to crush you as that of a lover or a child.

“There are the possibilities of so many affections still before you — and yet you are sad! Poor child! I can read between the lines; your loving heart demands affection, your active mind calls for movement, life, love; you long to live, for so far you have but reached the preface of life, and its mysterious pages have remained closed to your modest gaze.

“You long to use the rich and powerful gifts with which God has endowed you — and what more natural, Antoinette? Do not therefore feel ashamed, dear sister; all these longings are holy and divine, and in their realisation will you find not only your own happiness, but the happiness of another.

"Do not therefore attempt to curb your destiny, nor your nature, Antoinette; go out into the world which is open to receive you; and under the guidance of your old and trusted friends, seek amongst the crowd for a heart worthy of your own.

"From the brink of Madeleine's grave, I shall follow your career with brotherly interest.

"But let me hasten to tell you one thing; you will not easily find a heart worthy of your own, Antoinette. And remember, one mistake is fatal; one's whole life depends on the cast of the die; the greater the freedom of choice, the greater chance of mistake. It is appalling!

"I who was fortunate enough to meet at the threshold of life, at the very gate of love, my darling Madeleine, known and loved from childhood, I say on looking back on the past, that one has no right to risk the happiness of one's whole life on the hasty decision of a moment, on blind instinct alone.

"Be careful, Antoinette, be careful — I only wish that I were in Paris to advise you, for although quite disinterested as a spectator, yet I am devoted as a brother.

"Ah! I would be difficult to please where you are concerned, Antoinette; the man lucky enough to win my approval would have to be possessed of many qualities, "But tell me — what can you want more than you have? You are blest with health, beauty, wealth; nature has endowed you with grace, and all the advantages which education can give, all the gifts which God can bestow, are yours.

"You are a living blessing; are we called upon to give up this blessing to one who can neither deserve nor appreciate it? Although we are far apart, Antoinette, let me always have your full confidence; although far apart, I shall try to watch over you, for afar or near, "I am yours, body and soul, "AMAURY."

"P.S. — Let me caution you about Philip. I know him well, and he is just the sort of fellow to fall in love with you.

"Although he is, I know, very ridiculous, yet one can never quite fathom him; it takes a long time to rouse him, but once he is roused, nothing will stop him, and one lives in constant dread of some tremendous explosion.

“Frankly, I should be very sorry to see a refined girl, like yourself, tied to such a prosy fellow.”

MONSIEUR D’AVRIGNY’S DIARY.

“At last God has heard my prayers, I begin to feel within me the germs of that decay, which, in eight or ten months, must inevitably bring me to the grave.

“Surely it cannot be displeasing to God that I should allow myself to die of the disease which it has pleased Him to send me; I am but fulfilling His will, that is all.

“Madeleine, wait for me!”

CHAPTER XLIII.

ANTOINETTE TO AMAURY.

“6th January.

“HOW eloquently you speak of love, Amaury, how well you know its emotions! Each time I read over your letter, and I have done so many times, I cannot help thinking how happy was the woman whose life was crowned with such a love as yours, and to me it seems so sad that all this love and devotion, stored in your heart for her, should now be wasted and lost!

“You advise me to go out more, to mix again in society, and to seek there a love which may compensate for the lost affections of past years; but can you not understand that you yourself disenchant me of it all beforehand, Amaury? Where is it possible for me to find, among all who whisper words of love into my ear, another lover like Madeleine’s, who still is hers in death? This chivalrous forget- fullness of self, this nobility of heart, do not these belong to a different age than ours?

“Public men, puffed up with a sense of their own importance, and indolent ones, weary of everything, these are the sort of men I see around me.

“Do not therefore speak of Romeo and Juliet in the midst of this thick-witted and commonplace crowd. Amaury, believe me, Romeo and Juliet are creatures of a poet’s fancy, not beings of this world.

“Therefore all my wealth, dear brother, will go to the poor, as all my heart will return to God. That is my destiny, Amaury. That is why I am always laughing and joking. When one laughs, one has no time to think; when one jokes, one has no time to pity oneself.

“But it hurts me to speak of this, so let us change the subject.

“This other subject is M. Philippe Auvray.

“You guessed right, Amaury, Philip loves me; not that he has told me of his love, I am thankful to say, he is too self- contained, too cautious to risk an avowal; but, it is apparent to all, and when such a discovery dawns upon me, forgive me, but I cannot keep it to myself.

“Besides, why should I?

“Ah! but I am forgetting; you say one may be deceived in him. My dear Amaury, you are a hundred miles from here, and from the truth.

“If you could only see the poor fellow and how pitifully he watches my every movement, you would agree with me that there is a greater chance of his deceiving himself than others. If he is aware of his passion, he certainly fights against it.

“At times he seems seized with some strange feeling of remorse, and quite suddenly asks my permission to retire; as if he were afraid of being caught in the act of loving me. I begin to think that he wishes to put himself out of the way of temptation.

“In any case, he is far more ill at ease than I am, and when he happens to be Monsieur de Mengis’ partner at whist, he looks such a martyr that I feel quite sorry for him.

“However, as there is not much harm in it all, I must ask you, Amaury, not to deprive me of my victim; I can promise that quite six months will elapse before timorous Philip will say one single word which might be construed into a proposal.

“I have not even thought it worthwhile to worry Monsieur d’Avrigny by mentioning these meaningless attentions.

“Besides my poor uncle is sadder and more self-absorbed than ever. I very much fear that it will not be long before he rejoins his child.

“But that is what he longs for, is it not? That is the happiness which awaits him. Still, the fact remains, that the day which will bring happiness to him will bring me many tears.

“There is one thing I must tell you, Amaury; I feel convinced that my uncle is suffering from some incurable disease. Is it caused by grief only? is it some sickness which may be brought on by a rooted sorrow?

“I was speaking about this to that young doctor, Monsieur Gaston, in whom you have such confidence, and he told me that when anyone experiences a great mental upheaval, and nurses it, it invariably breeds germs of disease, especially in people of a certain age. He cited to me two or three diseases which may be entirely brought about through a sorrow which refuses to be comforted, and asked whether I could not arrange for him to have five minutes’ talk with my uncle.

“He said that five minutes would be quite long enough for him to recognise the symptoms of the disease from which Monsieur d’Avrigny is suffering, if indeed he may be said to be suffering from anything but sorrow.

"So on the first of the month, when I again saw my uncle, I tried to bring about this interview.

"I told him that Doctor Gaston, who had obtained an appointment at the Palace through his influence, and was, as you know, one of his favourite pupils, wished to consult him with reference to the treatment of a patient whom he was attending, but he saw through our little ruse.

"'Yes! yes!' he said, 'I know the patient whom he is anxious to cure; but tell him, my child, his is a cure beyond all remedy, a fatal malady.'

"And when, on hearing this reply, I began to weep, he said, 'Ah, but if you are keenly interested in this patient, Antoinette, be comforted, for he has still between four and five months to live, and between now and then Amaury will have returned.'

"Ah! but if my uncle were to die whilst you are still far away and I should find myself alone, quite alone!

"You were longing for a companion, Amaury, to share with you the beauties of town and country; but can you not understand how infinitely more I stand in need of a friend who will share my sorrow and mingle his tears with mine. Such a friend I have, but miles divide us, and his sorrows form an even more effectual barrier than any distance.

"Amaury, Amaury, what are you doing so far away from us all? How can you willingly condemn yourself to an isolation which weighs so terribly upon me? What good can it do you to estrange yourself so completely from all your surroundings.

"If only you would come back, Amaury, you and I would share each other's troubles.

"Oh! do come. —

"Your sister, "ANTOINETTE."

ANTOINETTE TO AMAURY.

"2nd March.

"I am told by Monsieur de Mengis that one of his nephews, when passing through Heidelberg, heard that you were living in that town.

“I am therefore addressing this to Heidelberg, in the hope that this letter may be more fortunate than my previous ones, and bring me some reply.

“What can be the matter with you; and why do you cut yourself off in this way from all who love you?

“Do you know that for the last two months I have not the least idea where you are living, nor even whether you are alive.

“I swear to you that if I were not a woman, I should have started in search of you long ago, and I should soon have discovered your whereabouts; oh! yes! I am certain I should, however carefully you might have hidden yourself, Amaury.

“I have written you three letters, have you not received them? this is the fourth, and I wonder whether it will reach you. In each I have told you of my increasing anxieties.

“Oh! surely if you had received them you would have sent some reply, knowing full well how your continued silence must wound me.

“But at least I know that you are not dead, since Monsieur Léonce de Mengis heard of you when passing through Heidelberg; at least, I know where to write to you, and this time, if you do not reply, I shall understand that my letters are unwelcome to you, and shall in my turn, maintain as complete a silence as you have done.

“Oh! Amaury! I am indeed most unhappy; of the three who used to love me, one is dead, another is dying, and the third forgets me.

“It is unlike you, who are usually so thoughtful, so kind, so unselfish, to be so forgetful of those who are in trouble. Should you delay your return until my uncle is dead, Amaury, then you will find me in a convent.

“Should you send no reply to this letter, then it is the last which I shall ever write you.

“Amaury, have pity on your sister

“ANTOINETTE.”

AMAURY TO ANTOINETTE.

“10th March.

“You say that you have written me several letters, Antoinette, several letters to which I have not even replied, and in which you told me of your many anxieties.

“These letters have never reached me.

(These letters having been lost, cannot be submitted to the eye of the reader.)

"Now, let me make a clean breast of it all, Antoinette;

"I did not wish to receive them.

"The letter before the last which I received from you, made a terrible impression upon me; I left Cologne without a word as to where I was going, not even knowing myself, and leaving no address at the post office where to forward any letters which might come addressed to me; Antoinette, I longed to get away from everyone, even from you —

"So it is true, Antoinette, Monsieur d'Avrigny is dying, whilst I — I cannot die.

"This man has the advantage over me in everything — in grief as in love.

"Madeleine was waiting for us both, and he who swore he loved her best, will be the last to rejoin her.

"Ah! why did Monsieur d'Avrigny prevent my taking my life when I wanted to? why did he snatch the pistol from my hand, with the lying phrase:

"Why kill oneself? we must all die."

"It is, of course, quite true, that we must all die, since he himself is dying; but I suppose we two are differently constituted, and perhaps his greater age makes dying less difficult.

"Perhaps, too, nature, who thrusts onward the old man, holds the young one back.

"However it may be, I cannot die.

"Oh! it was your last letter which caused the truth to burst upon me; gradually, without my even being aware of it, nature had re-asserted her rights, life had regained her hold upon me.

"Day by day, without noticing it myself, I took more interest in the life which surrounded me. One day, to my surprise, I found myself in a drawing-room; in truth, except for the crape band round my hat, I was not different from other men.

"On my return, I found your letter containing the news that Monsieur d'Avrigny is growing weaker each day, and drawing visibly hearer to the grave, whilst I, on the contrary, seem each day to take a stronger hold on life, a greater interest in my surroundings.

"There are therefore two very distinct sorts of love; the love of a father, and that of a lover; the love from which a man dies and the love from which a man does not die.

"I had already made a few friends at Cologne and accepted several invitations.

"I longed to fly from everything, to be free, alone with myself, that in solitude and silence, I might try to understand the change which had come over me in six short months.

"So I secretly withdrew to Heidelberg.

"There, I searched my mind; there, I probed my wound.

"Was it possible that my tears were well nigh exhausted, and my wound beginning to heal?

"Was there a possibility of my recovery, and could human nature be so poor a thing that nothing in us is eternal, not even sorrow?

"However it may be, I cannot die.

"Sometimes to escape from the noise, the bustle, the pleasures of this gay university town, I bury myself in the mountains, or in this glorious valley of the Neckar, flying from living nature to still life.

"But even there, beneath all that apparent stillness, I find vigour, vitality, energy, forerunners of the coming spring; the buds begin to burst, the earth assumes her mantle of green, all things are quickened; life seems bursting around me everywhere, and yet I am seeking but one thing — death.

"Yes! life courses through my veins, buzzes in my brain, carries me along on its intoxicating stream; I am furious with myself, angry at my cowardice, filled with rage at this human weakness, to which, for a moment, I had fondly imagined myself superior.

"Sometimes a mad longing seizes me to go out to Africa, and risk the chance of losing my life out there; for now I doubt whether I should have the courage to take my own life.

"Really I think I am losing my head, Antoinette, and of course you are unable to enter into my feelings; forgive me, dear, forgive me everything; the incoherence of this letter, my long silence, and the unhappiness which this silence has caused you. You must forgive me, for indeed I suffer terribly.

"Do you remember the advice which Hamlet gave to Ophelia:

"'Get thee to a nunnery!'

“Well! I can only repeat these same words to you — ‘Get thee to a nunnery.’

“Yes! yes! the best thing you can do, my poor Antoinette, is to enter a convent, for there is no vow which cannot be broken, no sorrow which time cannot heal, no love which is eternal.

“Some day you will meet a man who will love you, or will think he does. He will swear that you are his very life, that if you die, he too must die; you will die, and he will long to die too. But six months later, to his infinite disgust, he will still be strong and well.

“‘Get thee to a nunnery!’

“I must see Monsieur d’Avrigny before he dies, that I may throw myself at his feet and ask his forgiveness. So one of these days, I shall leave for Paris. When, I cannot say, but certainly before May.

“Now the fine days are coming, people will begin to travel again, and then the Rhine will become the happy hunting-ground of many by whom I am too well known to hope to escape recognition. They who wish to get away from Paris in the summer, must take refuge in Paris itself.

“Besides, are you not there, Antoinette? and I long to make amends for all that you have suffered. All those letters, which were sent on to me here, have deeply touched me, for they tell me of a sisterly affection, strong and true, of a sorrow bravely borne. As I read each line, I can picture you standing before me, charming in your sadness, attractive in your artlessness, laughing and crying at one and the same time.

“Yes! to win your forgiveness, I shall entrust my future to you, live but to minister to your generous impulses, place my stricken heart in your dear hands.

“AMAURY.”

MONSIEUR D’AVRIGNY’S DIARY

“Doctor Gaston called a few days ago, under pretext of asking my advice, but in reality to see me; I understood it all; Antoinette must have told him that I am ill, and he wanted to know what I am suffering from. I therefore refused to see him.

“Oh God I thou knowest how jealously I guard the earthly treasure thou hast sent me; I keep it to myself alone, and hide it from the eyes of others.

“For a long while, I was in doubt, but at last the symptoms have declared themselves, and during the last eight or ten days, they have become so pronounced, that I am now quite convinced; I am suffering from an affection of the brain, one of the few diseases which may be brought on through great mental trouble.

“The history of my own case, which will be found at my death, should be a curious study; medical men will be interested in following up the development of a malady which has been allowed to work its way freely in a human organisation, a disease entirely unchecked and running unhindered through its every phase.

“I am now at the first stage of the disease; occasional fits of absent-mindedness, which are followed by feelings of curious exaltation, together with sharp shooting pains in the head; nervous twitchings which seize me when I least expect it, and often cause me to fall back in my chair, or which paralyse my arm when I stretch it out to take up something.

“In two or three months all will be over.

“It seems a long time to wait, two or three months!

“How ungrateful I am! Oh God! forgive me.”

CHAPTER XLIV.

ON the 1st May, Antoinette arrived at Ville d' Auray, at her usual hour, eleven o'clock in the morning.

She was more than ever struck by Monsieur d'Avrigny's appearance, for he looked as if he had one foot in the grave already. During the last two months she had noticed in this strong intellect a strange absence of mind, and even what seemed to her certain symptoms of mental decay.

By continually dwelling on the same subject, the mind becomes as confused as the sight, when the eyes are ever fixed on the same spot.

One ever-present thought shone through the darkness of his desolate existence, and, like a will-o'-the-wisp, lured him on to the verge of irrationality, and to the contemplation of death alone. Monsieur d'Avrigny was fast becoming blind to the interests of life. However, on this 1st May, as though he felt he had no time to lose, he made an unusual effort to collect his thoughts, and showed a greater solicitude than on former occasions, as to the life and future prospects of his niece.

This subject was always a painful one to Antoinette, and she tried to turn the conversation, but Monsieur d'Avrigny was persistent.

"Listen, Antoinette," he said, with a smile of calm content, "you must not deceive yourself; better to face the truth as I do.

"I feel my days are numbered, my soul, impatient to be gone, already far outstrips my body, and even now at times leaves this earth and soars to realms above, quits the shadow for the substance, the dream for the reality.

"Yes! it is indeed so, Antoinette, and I rejoice at it.

"The fact that my brain often refuses to obey my will, is a proof of my approaching death; therefore, my child, before the power of consecutive thought is quite taken from me, I wish to consider your future, so that when I meet your mother in Heaven, she may greet me with a smile. Happily, my mind is pretty clear to-day, and I shall try to keep my thoughts from wandering, whilst you tell me all about yourself.

"Come, dear; tell me first of all, who are the friends who most often call upon you?"

Antoinette named those of her old friends who had continued to visit at the house in the Rue d'Angoulème, and Philip Auvray's name was mentioned among others.

Monsieur d'Avrigny made an effort to refresh his failing memory.

"Is not this Philip Auvray a friend of Amaury's," he asked.

"Yes, uncle."

"He is a young man of fashion then?"

"Oh! no, uncle."

"Young, however, and rich I believe?"

"Oh, yes! certainly,"

"Of gentle birth?"

"No !"

"Does he love you?"

"I am afraid he does."

"And you, do you love him?"

"Not the least in the world."

"Your answers are, at least, clear and to the point," replied Monsieur d'Avrigny; "but come now, is there no one you care for, Antoinette."

"No one but you," replied the girl with a smile.

"That is not sufficient, dear," said the old man, "for, as I have just told you, in a month or two I shall be no more, and if you love no one but me, when I am dead, there will be no one left for you to love."

"Oh! my dear uncle, surely you are mistaken?"

"No, dear child, I feel that I grow weaker each day: even now when I go to visit my poor Madeleine's last resting place at night and in the morning, I need the support of Joseph's arm, and he is five years older than I. Fortunately," he continued, turning towards the cemetery, "this window overlooks her grave, so that, at least my last gaze will rest upon it."

As he spoke, the old man looked towards the place in the cemetery where Madeleine lay buried, then suddenly, with an amount of energy of which, but a moment before, he had seemed incapable, he raised himself, leaning his whole weight on the arm of his chair, and cried excitedly: "There is someone at Madeleine's grave; who is this stranger — "

Then falling back again, he said: "Ah! it is no stranger, it is he!"

"He! who?" exclaimed Antoinette, rushing to the window.

"Amaury!" replied the old man.

"Amaury !" she repeated, and she leant against the wall, trembling in every limb.

"Yes! doubtless he has returned, and his first visit is to her grave, — well, that is but right."

Then Monsieur d'Avrigny relapsed into his habitual apathy; as to Antoinette, she remained where she stood, mute and motionless, but from quite an opposite cause. Monsieur d'Avrigny was past feeling anything; but she felt all too keenly.

It was indeed Amaury who had but just arrived, and had gone at once to the cemetery.

He had approached the grave bareheaded, and had knelt there for about ten minutes, evidently praying; then rising from his knees he walked towards the gate and disappeared. Antoinette guessed that he would soon be coming in, and a feeling of faintness came over her. A few minutes later she heard footsteps coming up the stairs, the door opened and Amaury entered.

Although prepared to see him, Antoinette could not prevent a cry from escaping her. On hearing this cry, Monsieur d'Avrigny seemed to rouse himself from his stupor and turned towards the door.

"Amaury!" exclaimed Antoinette.

"It is you, Amaury?" said Monsieur d'Avrigny, as quietly as though he had only parted from him the day before. He held out his hand, and Amaury approached the old man and knelt before him.

"Bless me, father," he said.

Monsieur d'Avrigny placed his hands, without a word, on the young man's bowed head.

Amaury remained thus a few moments. Both he and Antoinette were in tears, and only Monsieur d'Avrigny remained unmoved.

At last the young man rose and, going up to Antoinette, he kissed her hand, and for some little time they all three remained silently observing each other.

Amaury noticed that these eight months had wrought a greater change in Monsieur d'Avrigny than if eight years had passed over his head.

His hair was snow-white, his chest sunken, his eyes glassy, his face deeply lined, his voice weak and tremulous. He was but a shadow of his former self.

And what of Antoinette?

Each day, which had added one wrinkle the more to the old man's face, had lent but a greater charm to the young girl's.

Eight months at seventeen years may work as great change as eight months at sixty.

Antoinette was now more charming than ever.

The eyes rested with delight on the graceful flowing curves of her willowy figure. Her delicate nostrils dilated with every breath she drew, her dark liquid eyes were eloquent both of sadness and of mirth, and gave an expression of gentleness and merriment to her sweet face.

Her cheeks were fresh and velvety as a peach, her lips red as a cherry; her hands were small, plump, white, and delicately veined, and her feet seemed no larger than when she was twelve years old.

She was, in fact, beautiful; a fairy, a peri.

Amaury looked at Antoinette, and did not know her again. The fact is, when Madeleine had been near, he had rarely looked at Antoinette.

Amaury, too, had greatly altered, but Antoinette thought for the better.

Sorrow, far from ageing him, had set a seal of gravity on the young man’s face which suited him well; solitude, too, had done him no harm, but by imposing upon him habits of thought, hitherto unknown to his indolent nature, had added breadth and depth to his expression. Then his long excursions into the mountains had improved him physically, as change of thought and ideas had improved him mentally.

He had grown paler, more serious, more unassuming, — in a word, more manly.

Antoinette looked at him furtively, her mind filled with a thousand conflicting emotions.

The doctor was the first to speak.

“You are looking better, Amaury,” he said to the young man, “and,” he added, significantly, “I am sure you find me looking better too.”

“Yes,” answered the young man. gravely, “and you are very fortunate, I congratulate you; but, what would you have? God rules over all, and I have not the power to control nature as you have.” And now,” he continued, seriously, “I have resolved to live so long as it pleases God.”

“Thank God!” Antoinette murmured in a low voice and with tears in her eyes.”

“You will live on,” the doctor replied; “that is well done and wisely spoken, Amaury; I have always known you to be brave and true. Live! I admire you for it. Let me be perfectly frank; I feel somehow ashamed of a senseless gladness, a sort of petty vanity which comes over me at times, when I realize that, after all, the father's grief has proved more deep, more deadly than the lover's. And yet, when I reflect upon it, perhaps it is less brave to die of grief than to live on with grief, to live on in widowed loneliness, grave and sad, and yet resigned, trying to be helpful to others, to take a kindly interest in their lives and thoughts, yet without their affecting one's own."

"That is, indeed, the only course which the future now holds out to me," Amaury replied, "that is the life which I wish to lead; and tell me this, father, will not he who has waited longest, have suffered most?"

"Forgive me for interrupting you," put in Antoinette, overwhelmed by the stoicism of these two men; "you two, my uncle and you, Amaury, are men off stronger calibre than most, therefore you think nothing of talking as you do; but please remember that I am here, and cannot help listening to all you say.

"So do not, I pray you, discuss such strange subjects, the meaning of which is only clear to you, before a timid, sensitive woman like myself.

"Such grave questions as those of life and death are best left in God's hands alone; let us simply talk of your return, Amaury, and of the joy it gives us to have you here again, after so long an absence.

"Oh! I am so, so glad to see you again," she said, with the unrestrained delight of a child, and taking Amaury's two hands in her own.

What could the two men do, on seeing the unfeigned delight and charming frankness of the girl, but join in her unconstrained pleasure; Monsieur d' Aurigny himself could no longer resist Antoinette's tender caresses.

"Come, my dear children," he said, "as this is one of our last days together, let us enjoy it to the full; I know that I shall not be able to spare you many more!"

And from that moment he gave himself up unreservedly to the two young people.

Amaury and Antoinette chatted with him, as in the old days, long and familiarly.

The doctor questioned Amaury as to his future plans, entered fully into his views, and with all the finished courtesy of a man of the world, set him right on certain rash and immature ideas, and greeted with nothing more than an indulgent smile, some of the old-time errors and foolish delusions which are common to us all when in our twentieth year. He noticed, with marked pleasure, how this young mind, ignorant of its own possibilities, was yet possessed of power and energy.

Meanwhile Amaury held forth enthusiastically on his disillusion with life, on the dead embers of his passion; his great wish now was to live for others, not for himself; he accepted life from a philanthropic point of view.

The far-seeing Doctor shook his head gravely on hearing all these dreams, and obligingly acquiesced in all these Utopian ideas.

As for Antoinette, she was enraptured at finding Amaury so noble-hearted, generous and unselfish.

After dinner, the conversation, which had hitherto been confined to Amaury’s doings, now drifted to Antoinette’s affairs.

“Amaury,” said Monsieur d’Avrigny, when at about seven o’clock in the evening, they again found themselves alone, “Amaury, when I am gone, I entrust her to your care. You have now passed through the fire of sorrow. As you intend in the future to live retired from the world, you will be a better judge of men and things; advise her, my boy, and watch over her interests; be to her as a brother.”

“Yes! “Amaury replied effusively, “I promise to be a most devoted brother; I gladly accept the duties of a young father which you impose upon me, and shall resign them to no one, until she is claimed by a husband who will love her truly and be worthy of her.”

As soon as this subject was broached, Antoinette became silent and subdued, and lowered her eyes; but the Doctor hastened to say:

“That is the very subject we were discussing, Amaury, when you arrived. It would be a great comfort to me, if before I am taken from you, I felt her happy and beloved in the home of a husband worthy of her.”

“Now Amaury,” the old man went on, “amongst your many friends, is there no one you can suggest?”

But Amaury was silent.

CHAPTER XLV.

“WELL,” said Monsieur d’Avrigny, looking up.

“Well!” replied Amaury, “this is a serious question, sir, and one that requires consideration. Most of the young men of our aristocracy, alas! but too few in number, are personally known to me.”

“Then, name us some of them,” said the Doctor.

Amaury looked questioningly at Antoinette, but she obstinately refused to meet his gaze.

“Well,” continued Amaury, feeling obliged to reply to his guardian, “to begin with there is Arthur de Lancy.”

“Yes!” Monsieur d’Avrigny replied quickly, “yes, to be sure; he is young, handsome, and clever; also he has inherited a good name, and is possessed of considerable wealth.”

“But unfortunately he will never do for Antoinette; he is a libertine, a roué, and aims at the reputation of a Don Juan or a Lovelace, which, in the nineteenth century, is to my mind simply ridiculous and absurd; these may be attractive qualities in the eyes of hair-brained fops like himself, but certainly are a very doubtful guarantee for the happiness of a wife.”

Antoinette drew a long breath of relief, and seemed to thank Amaury with her eyes.

“Then let us think of someone else,” said the old man.”

“I should prefer Gaston de Sommervieux,” said Amaury.

“Truly,” replied Monsieur d’Avrigny, “he is of equal fortune, and of equally good birth with Arthur de Lancy, and besides I remember hearing him spoken of as a good, steady, unassuming young fellow.”

“Yes! but had anyone taken the trouble to enumerate his good qualities to you,” said Amaury, “they might have added that he is a fool, with a good deal of surface polish, it is true; but, just by way of amusement, try to break through his majestic silence, and his commanding dignity, and, take my word for it, you will find him very commonplace indeed.”

“But,” Monsieur d’Avrigny replied, as if trying to refresh his memory, since Amaury’s appeared so defective, “did you not once introduce to me a young man, called Léonce de Guérignou?”

“I did, sir,” Amaury said, the blood rushing to his face as he spoke.

“This young man seemed to me to have a brilliant career before him; is he not already a Councillor of State?”

“Assuredly! but he is not rich.”

“That is unfortunate,” said Monsieur d’Avrigny, “but surely Antoinette is rich enough for both.”

“Besides,” continued Amaury, almost ill-temperedly, “rumour has it that his father did not play too honourable a rôle during the Revolution.”. “Even allowing that were true,” Monsieur d’Avrigny replied, “it could not be his father, but his grandfather; and even were these slanders proved, in these days descendants are not responsible for the faults of their ancestors. Therefore, Amaury, you must introduce this young man to Antoinette, of course, under the auspices of Monsieur de Mengis, and if she likes him — ”

“Oh! what a fool I must be!” exclaimed Amaury, “evidently a few months’ absence has quite confused my memory; I was forgetting that Léonce has sworn to live and die a bachelor. It is quite a mania with him, and even the most fascinating, the most charming beauties of the Faubourg St. Germain have failed to captivate his fastidious fancy.”

“Well then!” said Monsieur d’Avrigny, “we must fall back after all on M. Philippe Auvray.”

“I have already told you, Uncle,” interrupted Antoinette —

“Allow Amaury to speak, my child,” Monsieur d’Avrigny said.

“Oh! my dear guardian,” replied Amaury, with a show of temper, “do not question me about this Philippe, whom I am never likely to see again. Notwithstanding my advice, Antoinette has received him, and may see him as often as she pleases, for aught I care; but, personally, I can never forgive him his unworthy shortness of memory.”

“What do you mean by his shortness of memory? “Monsieur d’Avrigny and Antoinette exclaimed together.

“Well! in two words, you may judge of the man; he loved Madeleine, he himself told me so, he even begged that I should ask you for her hand in marriage, and that was on the very day on which you had accepted my suit.

“So to-day, he loves Antoinette, as he had loved Madeleine, as he has loved, and probably will love half a score of others. Can one have any confidence in an affection which is capable of changing so quickly and so completely. He swore that his love was one of a life-time, yet in less than twelve months he has apparently forgotten.”

Antoinette seemed thunderstruck, and. bent her head on hearing Amaury’s tone of indignation.

“You judge him harshly, Amaury,” said Monsieur d’Avrigny.

“Yes! so I think; very harshly indeed,” Antoinette said nervously.

“You take his part, Antoinette?” Amaury rejoined hastily.

“I take the part of poor frail human nature,” the young girl replied; “all men have not your strength of mind and unchangeable constancy, Amaury; and it were more generous of you to feel for the weaknesses of others, which you do not share.”

“I see,” Amaury replied with bitterness, “Philip has found favour in your eyes — and it is Antoinette — ”

“Antoinette is quite right,” said Monsieur d’Avrigny, looking at the young man as if he would read his very soul. “You are far too harsh in your judgment, Amaury.”

“But it seems to me,” — the latter replied hastily.

“Yes!” the old man interrupted, “you are just at the age when men are hot-blooded themselves, yet far from lenient, and make few allowances for the failings of others; my white hairs have taught me to be indulgent, and some day you too may learn to your cost, and, I fear, with much sorrow, that time breaks the strongest will, and that, where our passions are concerned, even the surest cannot answer for himself, the proudest cannot say: ‘To-morrow I shall be in such or such a state of mind.’ Let us not therefore judge anyone too severely, lest we in turn be severely judged; we are all guided by fate, not by our own will.”

“Then you mean to imply,” cried Amaury, “that, some day I, also, shall be faithless to the memory of Madeleine?”

Antoinette turned pale, and supported herself against the mantelpiece.

“I imply nothing, Amaury,” the old man said, shaking his head; “but I have lived, I have seen, and I know. Whatever may happen, my boy, as you have undertaken to act as a young father towards Antoinette, be, above all things, compassionate and kind.”

“And I hope you will bear me no ill- will,” Antoinette added, with a suspicion of bitterness in her voice, “for having, even for a moment, admitted, that after having loved Madeleine, it might be possible to love another; I am sorry to have said this, please forgive me.”

“Oh! who could be angry with you, Antoinette; you, such an angel of gentleness?” said Amaury, whose scathing remarks were responsible for the young girl’s words, which he had interpreted literally.

Just then Joseph, faithful to the instructions given him, announced that the carriage was ready for Antoinette.

“Shall I accompany Antoinette? “Amaury asked the doctor.

“No, my boy,” replied Monsieur d’Avrigny; “notwithstanding your wish to undertake your fatherly duties, you are still very young, Amaury; therefore it is necessary, not for your own sakes, of course, but for what the world might say, that you should act with the utmost discretion towards each other.”

“But,” said Amaury, “I travelled by post-chaise, and have sent back the horses.”

“That need cause you no inconvenience, Amaury, for I will place a second carriage at your disposal; I should like to mention another thing, as you cannot continue living in the Rue d’Angoulême, but will wish, I suppose, to visit Antoinette in Paris, I must ask you not to call upon her, unless accompanied by one of my old friends. De Mengis, for example, goes to see her three times a week, and at stated times; he will, I know, be happy for you to accompany him. From what Antoinette has told me, this is always what he does for M. Philippe Auvray.”

“Am I then to be treated as a stranger?”

“Not at all, Amaury; in the eyes of Antoinette and myself you are my son; but, in the eyes of the world, you are a young man of twenty-five, that is all.”

“It will be very pleasant truly to be constantly meeting this M. Philippe, who is so distasteful to me, and whom I had made up my mind never to see again.”

“Oh! let him come, Amaury,” cried Antoinette, if only that you may see what sort of a welcome I give him, and how dense he must be to continue his visits, considering the little encouragement he receives.”

“Is that so?” said Amaury.

“You will see for yourself.’”

“When?”

“Why, to-morrow; the Comte de Mengis and his wife are good enough to devote every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday evening to their poor little recluse. To-morrow is Saturday, so come to-morrow.”

“To-morrow — ,” Amaury murmured hesitatingly.

“Yes! do come,” replied Antoinette, “we have not seen each other for a long time, and must have so many things to talk about.”

“Yes! go, Amaury, go!” said Monsieur d’Avrigny.

“Well! good-bye until to-morrow, Antoinette,” said the young man.

“Until to-morrow, brother,” said Antoinette.

“And I, my dear children, shall not see you for another month,” said Monsieur d’Avrigny, who had listened to their discussion with a sad smile; “but if, during this month, either of you should need my advice on anything important, I authorise you to come and see me.”

And, supported by Joseph, he saw them into their different carriages; then, embracing each of them, he said; “Good-bye, my dear children.”

“Good-bye, kind father,” the young people answered.

“Amaury,” cried Antoinette, as Joseph was closing the door, “do not forget Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.”

Then she told the coachman to drive to the Rue d’Angoulême.

“To the Rue des Mathurins,” said Amaury.

“And I,” said Monsieur d’Avrigny sadly, after watching them both out of sight, “I, to the grave of my child.”

And, leaning on Joseph’s arm, the old man wended his way to the cemetery, to go, as was his habit every day, to wish Madeleine good-night.

CHAPTER XLVI.

ACCORDINGLY on the following day, Amaury called on the Comte de Mengis, who, however, was no stranger to him, as they had met more than a score of times at Monsieur d’Avrigny’s.

True they had hitherto been rather cold and distant to each other; there is a magnet which attracts young people to each other, whilst there is on the contrary, a repulsive power which estranges the young from the old.

Antoinette had sent a letter to the Count, announcing that Amaury intended to call upon him; she wished to apprize her old friend of Monsieur d’Avrigny’s intentions concerning the rôle of guardianship, which he had confided to, or rather permitted, his ward to assume and thus anticipate any questions or suspicions, or expressions of surprise, which might embarrass Amaury or hurt his feelings.

So when he reached the house the Count was expecting him, and welcomed him as a friend in whom Monsieur d’Avrigny placed implicit confidence.

“I am delighted,” Monsieur de Mengis said to him, “that my good kind doctor has given me, as coadjutor in the semi-official guardianship of Antoinette, one who, thanks to his youth, will be in a position to judge, better than I, of the needs of a girl of eighteen, and who, through being privileged to see Monsieur d’Avrigny, will be able to enlighten me somewhat as to my friend’s intentions.”

“Unfortunately, my dear sir,” replied Amaury with a sad smile, “I have grown considerably older since I last had the honour of seeing you, and during the past six months I have searched so profoundly into the depths of my own heart, that I doubt whether I have any power left to probe into the hearts of others.”

“Yes! I have heard of your trouble,” the Count replied, “and what a terrible blow it has been to you. You loved Madeleine with that whole-hearted devotion which comes but once in a life-time. But the greater your love for Madeleine, the more is it your duty to watch over her cousin, her sister, I may say, for, if I remember rightly, Madeleine always looked upon our dear Antoinette as such.”

“Yes! sir, Madeleine indeed loved our ward devotedly, although towards the last, it seemed as if her affection had somewhat cooled. But Monsieur d’Avrigny attributed this to a phase of her illness, a whim for which she was not responsible.”

“Well, let us discuss the matter seriously. I believe that our dear doctor is anxious that his niece should marry; is, it not so?”

“I believe it is.”

“And I am certain it is. Has he not mentioned a certain young man to you — ”

“He spoke to me of several, sir.”

“But did he not mention the son of one of his friends?”

Amaury saw there was no drawing back.

“Yesterday, in my presence, he spoke of Viscount Raoul de Mengis.”

“Of my nephew! Yes! I knew that was his wish, dear old d’Avrigny.”

“I suppose that he also informed you that I, too, had thought of Raoul for Madeleine.”

“He did, sir.”

“Of course, I had no idea that d’Avrigny had given his word to you, and you will readily understand, that as soon as I heard of the engagement, I withdrew my proposals.

“I may as well own, that I have now renewed them with regard to Antoinette, and my good old friend has replied that he will throw no impediment in my way. May I hope, my dear sir, to be equally fortunate in obtaining your consent as I already have his?”

“Certainly, sir, certainly,” Amaury replied, somewhat confusedly; “if Antoinette loves your nephew — . But I was under the impression that the Viscount was attached to the embassy of St. Petersburg.”

“And you are quite right, he is Second Secretary, but he has just arrived home on leave.”

“When did he arrive? “Amaury asked, with a tightening at the heart.

“Only yesterday, and I shall have the pleasure of introducing him to you at once, for he is now coming in.”

And as he spoke a young man entered the room; he was tall and dark, with a quiet, composed manner, and dressed in the latest fashion; he wore at his buttonhole the ribands of the Legion of Honour, of The Polar Star of Sweden, and of St. Anne of Russia.”

Amaury took in at a glance all the physical advantages of his brother in diplomacy.

When the Count de Mengis had formally introduced them, the two young men bowed coldly to each other, but, as in some circles of society, coldness is considered a mark of good breeding, Monsieur de Mengis seemed unaware of the instinctive dislike which his nephew and Amaury took to each other.

Meanwhile the two men exchanged a few commonplace remarks. Amaury was well acquainted with the Ambassador under whom De Mengis served.

The position which the French Embassy held at the Russian Court therefore formed the topic of conversation.

The Viscount was warm in his praises of the Czar.

Just as the conversation began to flag, a servant opened the door and announced M. Philippe Auvray.

The reader will remember that Philip was in the habit of calling on the Comte de Mengis every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, in order to accompany him to Antoinette's house. The old Comtesse de Mengis always looked forward to his visit, for he lavished on her countless little attentions.

As to Philip Auvray, Amaury was more than cold to him — he was almost insulting.

Having no idea that his old friend had returned, poor Philip was at first quite taken aback on seeing him.

He approached Amaury however, and stammered out a few words of friendly greeting.

But Amaury's only reply was an aggravating nod, and as the other, polite and obsequious, continued to address him, he finally turned his back upon him, and leaning against the mantel piece, took up a screen and amused himself by counting the number of feathers on it.

The young Viscount, intensely amused, looked at Philip, who still remained, hat in hand, in the same place, and with a bewildered expression on his face, seemed to ask the protection of some charitable soul.

As Madame de Mengis entered the room, Philip drew a breath of relief, and went hurriedly towards her.

"Gentlemen," said the Count, "I do not think we can all five get into the one carriage; but I believe Amaury has his own brougham.

"I have," cried Amaury, "and shall be very happy to offer the Viscount a seat."

"That is just what I was going to suggest," said Monsieur de Mengis.

The two young men bowed to each other.

The reason for Amaury's hurried decision was, as the reader will readily understand, that he feared lest he should be called upon to give M. Philippe a seat.

All therefore happened, if not for the best, at any rate for the best that was possible.

Monsieur de Mengis, the Countess and Philip drove off in the Count's ancient chariot, and Raoul and Amaury followed in the brougham.

The small house in the Rue d'Angoulême, which Amaury had not entered for six months, was soon reached; the servants, the same as in the old days, greeted him with expressions of delight, and he responded with his usual liberality, smiling sadly as he passed along.

CHAPTER XLVII.

JUST before entering the drawing) room, the Comte de Mengis turned to the young men and said:

“Gentlemen, I may tell you that you will meet here to-night five or six of my contemporaries who are some of Antoinette’s warmest admirers, and who, like myself, have undertaken the pleasant duty of devoting at least three evenings a week to her society; and I think it well to impress upon you, gentlemen, that the surest way of winning Antoinette’s favour is by making yourselves agreeable to the old people. And now, gentlemen, that I have made my little speech and that you are warned, shall we go into the room.”

As may be supposed, “at homes “given by a young girl of eighteen to old men of seventy were very quiet and unpretentious; there were two tables for cards in one corner of the room, Antoinette’s and Miss Brown’s embroidery frames in the centre, while armchairs were scattered about for those who preferred to chat rather than play whist or boston; such were the accessories to these simple little evenings.

Tea was handed round at nine o’clock; and at eleven all took their leave.

As we already know, Philip was the only young man who, up to the present, had been admitted to these friendly gatherings.

Even under these admittedly monotonous conditions, Antoinette had succeeded in making these small receptions so far successful that her sexagenarian friends were unanimous in declaring that they had never spent more delightful evenings than at her house, not even in the days when their white hairs were black or brown. This was indeed a triumph, and to obtain it Antoinette had needed an ever-responsive brightness, an ever smiling charm, an ever ready wit.

Great was the impression made upon Amaury on coming into the drawing- room. Antoinette was seated in her accustomed place, and this was the very place where Madeleine had been used to sit.

It was exactly a year since the time we unfolded to our readers the first pages of this story, when Amaury, it will be remembered, had entered this same room on tip-toe, and been greeted by a double cry from the two cousins.

Alas! this time no one uttered a cry; only, as each guest was announced, Antoinette could not refrain from blushing and trembling a little when she heard Amaury's name.

It will be readily understood that the emotion felt by the two young people did not end here.

The drawing-room, it will be again remembered, opened on to the garden. This garden held a world of memories for Amaury.

Whilst the tables of whist and boston were being arranged, and the other guests, who wished to chat, grouped themselves around Antoinette and Miss Brown, Amaury, who could not forget that this was once his home, glided along the verandah, and from the verandah into the garden.

It was a beautifully clear night, the air scented and warm. One felt that Spring was hovering over the earth, struggling to be free. Nature exhaled that nameless something, which imparts strength and beauty to all things, and of which we become so deeply conscious during the first days of May. Already the days were warm and sunny and the nights mild. The flowers were beginning to open and the lilac was already over.

But, strangely enough, this garden did not rouse in Amaury such painful emotions as he had thought it would.

Here, as at Heidelberg, life throbbed within him and around him.

Of course the whole garden was eloquent of Madeleine, but these memories were of a calm, consoling nature.

It was Madeleine who spoke to him in the passing breeze, who caressed him in the scent of the flowers, who caught the lappet of his coat in the thorns of the rose-tree, from which she had so often gathered the roses.

But all this was far from being sad or even melancholy; on the contrary, all these living memories of the young girl were joyous and seemed as if crying aloud to Amaury:

"There is no death, Amaury; there are two existences, that is all; one existence on this earth, one existence in heaven, one life in this world, one life in the next. Unhappy they who are still chained to earth, happy they who are already in heaven."

Amaury thought himself under the influence of a charm; he felt ashamed of his sensations, ashamed at finding himself so pleasantly impressed on revisiting this garden, the paradise of his childhood, linked to the childhood of Madeleine. He looked at the group of linden trees where they first told each other of their love, and the remembrance of his first love was full of sweetness, and free from all bitterness. He then sat himself down under the bank of lilacs, on the very seat where he had given Madeleine that fatal kiss. There, he tried to revive in his memory the most harrowing details of her illness; he would have given worlds to feel the hot tears coursing down his cheeks as they had done six months ago. But all that he felt now was a tender melancholy; he leaned his head against the trellis work, closed his eyes, wrapped himself in his own thoughts, and tried to rouse within his heart a sense of sadness, but nothing was of any avail.

He felt as if Madeleine was there beside him; the air which kissed his cheek, was the young girl's breath; the bunches of laburnum which caressed his brow were her flowing tresses; the illusion was strange, unheard of, living; it seemed as if the bench on which he sat bent beneath a light weight which nestled to his side; he panted for breath as on that fatal night; his bosom rose and fell under the stress of emotion; the illusion was complete.

A few low-spoken words broke from him, and he stretched out his hand; it was clasped by another.

Amaury opened his eyes and gave a cry of alarm; a woman was there beside him.

"Madeleine!" he cried.

"Alas! no," a voice replied; "it is only Antoinette."

"Oh! Antoinette, Antoinette!" cried the young man, pressing her to his heart, and finding, in the fullness of perhaps too great a joy, the tears which he had vainly sought in his grief.

"You see, Antoinette, I was thinking of her."

It was the cry of gratified vanity; Amaury wept, for there was someone to see him weep, someone to hear him say he was suffering, and there was such an accent of truth in his voice, that he almost began to believe it himself.

"I know," said Antoinette, "I suspected you were here, giving way to feelings of despair, so pretended that I wanted a reel of silk; then I slipped through the small drawing-room, out into the garden, and ran here. You will come in now, will you not?"

"Yes! of course I will," — Amaury answered — " just allow me time for the traces of tears to disappear. Thanks for your friendly solicitude, thanks for your sisterly friendship, my sister."

And the girl, feeling that her absence must not be noticed, bounded away light as a gazelle.

Amaury followed with his eyes her white dress, as it now appeared, now disappeared, among the bushes; he watched her run up the steps rapidly and furtively as a shadow, then the drawing-room door closed upon her.

Ten minutes later, Amaury came into the room, and the Comte de Mengis remarked to his wife, with a sigh, how red the young man’s eyes were.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

IT will be remembered that in the previous chapter we spoke in praise of Antoinette’s usual evenness of temper.

Either we were premature in our praises, or the arrival of the new-comers dealt a serious blow to the calm serenity of mind of which we spoke, and which soon gave place — or at least appeared to do so — to coquettish, capricious ways and variable moods.

Be that as it may, seeing we are here as a historian, a plain recorder of facts, we must chronicle this certain fact, that Antoinette’s favours, her airs and graces, were bestowed, three times in the course of a month, on a different object.

Amaury, Raoul and Philip were in favour each in turn, and reminded one somewhat of the Emperors of the Lower Empire, whose history is systematically divided into the periods of success, of decadence, and of downfall.

Amaury, the first favourite, reigned from the 1st to the 10th, Raoul from the nth to the 20th, Philip from the 21st to the 30th.

Let us go a little into the details of these strange reversals, and astonishing revolutions; so that some one more clear-sighted than ourselves, the learned reader for example, may perhaps explain their cause; we shall confine ourselves to a plain and accurate account, in all innocence of mind, of the events which actually took place.

During the four first evenings which followed that of which we have just given an account, Amaury met with all the success. Raoul, who was a very distinguished man, showed himself equally agreeable and amusing. As to Philip, he remained hopelessly dull, in the midst of the brilliant sallies of wit maintained by the other two young men.

Antoinette was charming to the first, gracious to the second, and polite, but frigid, to the third.

When the card parties were made up, when those who wished to chat were comfortably ensconced in their chairs, it invariably happened that Amaury occupied the seat nearest to Antoinette, and that frequently, under cover of general conversation, the two carried on a confidential chat between themselves in an undertone.

Nor was this all; as Antoinette had happened to mention an Italian book, which she was wishing to read, the “Ultime Letere di Jacopo Ortis,” Amaury, who had the book, made it an excuse to call the next day, on pretence of leaving the work with Miss Brown; but, as luck would have it, just as he was ushered into the drawing room, Antoinette came in too.

Of course they had to exchange a few words. Then the question arose of an album, the blank pages of which she wished to have filled in, with autographs of famous men, then of a bracelet which Froment Meurice, the noted silversmith, the Benvenuto of the nineteenth century, would not get finished till Amaury had extorted it from him, and presented it in triumph to the delighted girl. Finally, one evening, Amaury, when twisting a small steel key about in his fingers, absently put it into his pocket, and of course it was imperative that he should return it, as soon as possible on the following day; Antoinette might be wanting it.

Nor was this all.

During the whole time Amaury was travelling in Germany, he had not made a single new acquaintance, nor had he once gone out riding, at least not well mounted. Amaury was one of the best horsemen in Paris, and he loved riding, as a man always loves any sport in which he excels.

So Amaury rode out every morning, mounted on his faithful Sturm, and as formerly he had been accustomed to go in one direction, Amaury, — or rather Sturm, oh, you understand! he had but to give Sturm his head, and Sturm would gallop off in the old direction; The only difference was that Antoinette was an earlier riser than poor Madeleine had ever been.

The natural result was, that every morning Amaury would see Antoinette at her window, the same window from which she had watched the departure of Monsieur d’Avrigny and himself.

So she and Amaury would exchange a nod and a smile; then Sturm, who had long since learnt his lesson by heart, would go on at a walking pace, till he reached the end of the Rue d’Angoulême. Arrived there, he needed neither whip nor spur; Sturm set off at full gallop, of his own free will. The same little pantomime was gone through on the way home; Amaury allowed his horse to do as he liked, and Sturm was a particularly intelligent animal!

The truth was that Amaury was experiencing the reaction consequent on his long, lonely winter in Germany; he felt as if he had taken a new lease of life, which still held glorious possibilities for him.

It is true he himself could have given no reason for his gladness, he only knew that he felt happy; that once again he, who had been so long weighed down by sorrow, could look the world bravely in the face. He was now strangely indulgent to the failing of others, kindly disposed towards all mankind.

But he was soon to be rudely awakened.

That very evening, Amaury had been more than ever polite and attentive to Antoinette; their whispered asides had been more frequent, more prolonged than usual.

Although Monsieur de Mengis had appeared to be entirely absorbed in his game, nothing had escaped his notice, and on leaving, he gently drew Antoinette into a corner of the room, and kissing her on the forehead, whispered:

“Why have you kept us so entirely in the dark, you little hypocrite? I see now that Amaury, the inconsolable, whilst claiming to be his ward’s guardian, was in reality her admirer, and that with him, the brother was but a cloak for the lover.

“Well, well! he is not old enough to fear being taken for a Bartolo, nor am I fool enough to play the part of a Géronte. — Come, come, you must not be offended at what I say! Why! he is quite right, quite right, since he loves you.”

“He would be very much in the wrong, if what you say were true, my dear Count,” Antoinette replied in decided tones, although a tell-tale pallor suddenly overspread her face; “he would be quite wrong, for I do not love him.”

Monsieur de Mengis made a gesture of surprise and perplexity; but just then some one else drew near, and he was perforce obliged to retire without hearing, or saying anything more on the subject.

Amaury’s downfall dated from that evening, and Raoul’s triumph began.

In point of fact as, after Amaury, the Viscount de Mengis was Antoinette’s most ardent and closest admirer, all her smiles and glances were now reserved for him.

Amaury was puzzled how to account for it. The following day he called with a novel which Antoinette had particularly asked him for the previous week; he was received by Miss Brown. He came again each day, under various pretexts, and at different hours, but instead of the attractive charming girl he hoped to see, only the withered face of the governess greeted him.

Then there was another curious thing; it was in vain that he passed the house every morning at the usual hour, the window from which a face had been wont to smile upon him, was now rigidly shut, and the blinds being closely drawn, shewed plainly that this was done of set purpose, that no glance might penetrate into the room.

Amaury was in despair.

Philip remained always the same, silent, passive and taciturn.

Amaury made some advances to him, and treated the poor fellow less coolly, which seemed to give him pleasure. In fact, when in the presence of his old comrade, he behaved like a culprit pleading for forgiveness; he listened, with exaggerated attention, to whatever he said, and invariably approved of whatever he did; in truth, the confession of some wrong, and the burden of some remorse, seemed always hovering on his lips.

But all this was lost upon Amaury; all he had eyes for were the attentions of Raoul de Mengis, which each day became more marked, — the progress of his suit, which each day became more evident. For now Antoinette devoted herself entirely to him; she took greater pains to give him pleasure than anyone else, and, although somewhat kinder than usual to Philip, relegated him to the second place in her good graces. As to Amaury, on facing his position, the utmost he could boast of, was the third place.

As a grave and responsible guardian, he considered the whole affair most unbecoming, and determined to put a stop to it.

At the end of the fifth evening of his martyrdom, taking advantage of a moment, when, in the confusion of her guests' departure, Antoinette came back into the room after giving some order, he drew her aside, and said, in a low voice, but in a very hurt tone, "Do you know that you appear to have but little confidence in me, your friend, your brother. You are perfectly aware that the Comte de Mengis is trying to arrange a marriage between you and his nephew; his proposal has your full consent — ?"

Antoinette shook her head.

"Good heavens! do not think I disapprove of your choice; the Viscount is a most charming and attractive man, of princely appearance, and suited to you in every way, unless it be in age — as he is twelve years your senior.

"But because you have met the man whom you deem worthy of your love, is this any reason why you should treat me in such a distant manner, and even refuse to see me, as if I were a mere stranger? I am quite of your opinion, my dear Antoinette, as regards the Viscount de Mengis, and am sure that you can never meet a better, richer, or a more intelligent husband.”

Antoinette listened to what Amaury had to say in evident amazement, but did not interrupt him by a word. When he ceased speaking, she felt constrained to make some reply, but could only say confusedly:

“M. Raoul, my husband — !” she stammered.

“Why! of course,” Amaury replied.

“Surely, Antoinette, you need not feign surprise, is there anything astonishing in the fact that the Comte de Mengis should hint to you an idea of which he has not allowed me to remain in ignorance? And the moment that his views coincide with your own inclinations — ”

“But Amaury, I do assure you — ”

“Why should you protest and make excuses, when I tell you that you are quite right and could not make a better choice?”

Antoinette was now anxious to speak and explain, but someone claimed her attention, then she had to wish her guests good-bye, and was obliged to watch Amaury leave, without having found an opportunity of saying anything further.

CHAPTER XLIX.

DURING the whole of the next day, Amaury half expected a note; she would wish to see him, and give some explanation.

Amaury however was doomed to disappointment, nothing came.

But the evening of the next day, which was a Thursday, ushered in the third period; Antoinette’s manner towards Raoul was very reserved.

It is true that Amaury did not come in for a greater share of her attention than in the past.

But Philip suddenly found himself transported to the first place in Antoinette’s favour, all her fascinations which had hitherto been lavished upon Amaury and Raoul each in turn, were now bestowed upon him, and the poor fellow was quite dazzled at the unexpected honour done him.

It was most amusing to watch Philip’s expression, when he thus found himself, almost against his will, promoted to the first place in a plot in which were engaged two such men as Amaury de Léoville and Raoul de Mengis.

Poor Philip had not been a moment at the height of his good fortune ere he seemed anxious to resign it, as if afraid of his happiness; he appeared to be actuated by some feeling of modesty, some sort of shame or remorse which compelled him, in spite of himself, to avoid Antoinette’s gracious advances; he seemed as if anxious to apologise to the two other young men for his happiness, whilst they, coldly apathetic, affected an indifference they were far from feeling.

Each was questioning himself as to the reason for Antoinette’s strange caprice.

How could Antoinette single out a man so unsuited to her in every way — she so proud, so accomplished, and, at heart, so critical? It was incomprehensible, unheard of, most strange, of course there was some mistake, and this one evening’s whim would not be repeated; they both looked forward anxiously to the Saturday.

But Saturday only confirmed the programme of Thursday; the same attentions on Antoinette’s part, the same embarrassment on Philip’s, the same evident marks of favour; there could be no mistake, Auvray was now the chosen one.

The poor fellow did not know what to do; he certainly had not suffered as much during the whole seven months of Antoinette's scorn, as he had during these two evenings of her favour.

Needless to say, that although Philip became more apologetic than ever, Amaury had relapsed, and more markedly so in proportion as over-scrupulous Philip grew more deferential, into his first haughty, displeased manner.

Besides, the reader will understand that Amaury had good cause to be displeased, when he hears that on three different occasions, as he rode past his ward's house, this vigilant guardian saw an individual prowling about the vicinity, who slunk off as soon as he perceived him! but neither so quickly, nor, above all, so cleverly, but that Amaury had time to observe that this impertinent prowler bore a marked resemblance to his old friend Philip.

This encounter, which took place almost every time Amaury passed along that particular street, brought his indignation to a climax; would this miserable Philip, whose natural timidity he well knew, have behaved thus, if he had received no encouragement?

Truly Antoinette was no longer the same girl, to be openly flirting with such a fool; she would certainly end by compromising herself, and this, Amaury, her guardian, her friend, her brother, would not permit.

Therefore, he reserved to himself the right to speak to her frankly and seriously on the subject, as, in his place, Monsieur d'Avrigny would have done.

In the meantime, he felt it his duty to pass down the street in question ten times rather than once, so as to make quite sure whether the importunate stranger were other than Philip.

All this time, Raoul de Mengis was also greatly exercised in mind, and very ill at ease.

He had begun by being very much astonished at the sudden changes of temperature in the feminine barometer; then with the shrewdness and penetration of a diplomatist, he had carefully observed what went on around him; finally, when, at the end of May, his uncle, who had watched him gradually work his way into favour, and who thought he was still at the zenith in Antoinette's good graces, — when his uncle questioned him as to how he stood with the young girl, he replied:

“Upon my word, my dear uncle, I think you have induced me to travel two thousand miles on a wild goose chase, if the real object of my journey was to find a wife in the Rue d’Augoulême; in any case, I willingly resign all pretentions to the hand of an Isabelle, beneath whose balcony may be seen every morning such a Léandre as Philip, and such a Lindor as Amaury.”

“Raoul,” Monsieur de Mengis replied gravely, “you should not believe all that you hear.”

“Egad, uncle,” said Raoul, “this time I am not trusting to the Embassy police; I only believe what my own eyes see.”

But the Count, instead of asking his nephew to explain himself, scolded him roundly; he could not bear that the least shadow of a doubt should be cast on his beloved “protégée.”

Raoul did not press the point; he, on his part, was very discreet, and held his tongue with the respect which any well brought-up nephew would shew to an uncle possessed of fifty thousand francs a year, and whose sole heir he was.

The truth of the matter was that Raoul de Mengis had a friend who lived immediately opposite the house in the Rue d’Angoulême, and that he went every morning to smoke a cigar with this friend; the result of this cementing of friendship, of this daily consumption of cigars, was, that, failing to see what took place inside the house, the curtains of which were as closely drawn for him as for the others. Raoul was careful to notice whatever happened in the street outside.

However, although Monsieur de Mengis had at first paid but little attention, or rather, had appeared to pay but little attention, to his nephew’s disclosures, he had nevertheless been impressed by them, and that so deeply, that he at once wrote to Amaury, asking him for a short interview.

This took place on the 30th May, a Thursday.

Amaury received Monsieur de Mengis’ letter as he was leaving the house, and at once complied with the request of an old gentleman whom he truly respected, and who, at all times, had shown him an almost fatherly affection.

“My dear sir,” said the Count, on seeing him, “allow me first to thank you for your speedy reply to my invitation; I know that you were about to go out when my message reached you, but I shall not detain you long, and am sure you will understand, without my entering into lengthy details, what I wish to consult you about.

"Am I right in believing that you have promised Monsieur d'Avrigny to watch over his niece? to be her adviser, her guide, her brother?"

"Yes! sir, I have made such a promise, and I hope to keep it."

"Then her good name is dear and sacred to you?"

"Dearer than my own, sir."

"Then I must tell you that a young man," — and Monsieur de Mengis laid stress on every single word, "blinded no doubt by his passion, for we must make allowance for those who love deeply, is seriously compromising Antoinette by continually walking up and down the street in which she lives; he even pushes his impudence so far as to stop now and again, probably without thinking what he is doing, opposite her windows."

"My dear Count, what you tell me is nothing new, I have been aware of this for some time."

"But," Monsieur de Mengis continued, wishing to impress upon one of the two culprits the full gravity of the position, "did you really suppose that, with the exception of yourself, no one knew of this?"

"I did, sir," replied Amaury, growing more and more severe, "I thought that I alone knew of this foolery; evidently, I was mistaken."

"Well then, you can understand, my dear Monsieur de Léoville," the Count went on, "that the honour of Antoinette is, indeed, far above any suspicions which such behaviour might give rise to. But — "

"But," interrupted Amaury, "I believe, my dear Count, that you are of my opinion, that such unseemly attentions must be put a stop to, as they are distinctly ill-advised."

"This I will admit (and I hope, my dear Monsieur Amaury, that you will pardon my frankness) was my object in asking you to call and see me."

"Well! sir," said Amaury, "I give you my word of honour that, from to-day, this will not happen again."

"Your word is quite sufficient, my dear Monsieur Amaury," replied Monsieur de Mengis, "and from this very moment my eyes and my ears are shut."

"And I, sir, can only thank you for having been so frank with me; and for having entrusted me with the task of repressing the attention of a hare-brained and insolent fellow."

"Why! what do you mean?"

“Sir,” said Amaury, bowing gravely, “I have the honour to wish you a very good morning.”

“Excuse me, my young friend; but I think you must be labouring under some misapprehension, — that you have not Understood my meaning.”

“Not at all, my dear sir, I have understood you perfectly.”

And bowing a second time, he waved his hand to Monsieur de Mengis, as if to imply that any more words were unnecessary.

“Ah! unhappy Philip!” cried Amaury, as he threw himself into his brougham, never doubting for a moment that he was the guilty party; so I was not mistaken, and it really was your royal highness whom I have seen prowling about the house in the Rue d’Angoulême. So you are compromising Antoinette! Egad! I have been itching to lay hands on you this long time, and since a man like Monsieur de Mengis advises me to do so, I shall not spare you.” As the footman closed the door he asked for instructions where to drive, as his master had given no orders.

“Drive to M. Philippe Auvray’s,” Amaury replied, in a tone which, to a keen observer, was full of menace.

CHAPTER L.

IT was a long drive, because Philip, doubtless on account of his being wedded to old habits, still lived in the Quartier Latin.

Consequently there was ample time, during the drive, for Amaury's ill-humour to turn into positive anger, and when Orestes reached the door of his former Pylades, we make no exaggeration when we say that a perfect hurricane was raging in his bosom.

Amaury pulled the bell violently, not even noticing, in his perturbation, that the hare's foot of St. Nicolas-du-Chardonneret fame, had been transformed into a deer's foot.

The door was opened by a stout blousy servant girl.

With his ever-juvenile freshness, Philip had maintained his old custom of being waited upon by a woman.

Philip was in his study, his two elbows on his desk, his head buried in his hands, his fingers clutching desperately at his hair; he was studying the legal intricacies connected with a party wall.

The stout maid, who had not even considered it necessary to ask Amaury his name, before enquiring whether Philip were at home or not, marched on in front of him, and opened the door, announcing the visitor in this simple formula:

"Sir, here is a gentleman who wishes to see you."

Philip looked up with a sigh, which proves that the question of ownership is more fraught with melancholy than might at first appear probable, and a cry of astonishment escaped him on recognising Amaury.

"What! you, is it?" he exclaimed. "Oh! my dear Amaury, how delighted I am to see you."

But Amaury, unmoved by these demonstrations of delight, remained cold and stern.

"Do you know what brings me here, sir," he said.

"Not yet; all I do know is that for the last four or five days I have been trying to make up my mind whether to go and see you or not, and was still undecided."

Amaury's lips curled scornfully and a bitter smile passed across his face.

"I can understand," he said, "that you should hesitate."

“You can understand that I should hesitate” — the poor young fellow murmured, turning suddenly pale, “then you know — .”

I know, Monsieur Phillippe,” interrupted Amaury, in a harsh, grating voice, “that Monsieur d’Avrigny has commissioned me to watch over his niece.”

“I know that I am responsible if any circumstance should arise which might, in any way, be hurtful to this young girl’s reputation.”

“Apart from this, I know that I have met you three or four times acting the lover beneath her windows, I know that others besides myself have seen you; finally, I know that in all this you are guilty of most culpable thoughtlessness, to say the least, and I come to ask you what you mean by it.”

“My dear friend,” said Philip, closing his book with the air of a man anxious to give his undivided attention for the time to the subject under discussion, “that is the very reason why, for the last three or four days, I have been hesitating whether to call upon you; I wished to ask your advice on these little matters.”

“What! little matters !” Amaury indignantly exclaimed; “you designate as ‘little matters ‘such questions as a lady’s honour, reputation, future welfare.”

“My dear Amaury, surely you know that when I say ‘little matters,’ it is merely a figure of speech; I should have made use of the term ‘great things,’ for true love is indeed a great thing.”

“Ah! so you have at last put it into words. You admit that you are in love with Antoinette?”

At once Philippe’s face assumed a most contrite expression.

“Well! yes! I do admit it, my friend,” said he.

Amaury crossed his arms, and indignantly raised his eyes to heaven.

“But, of course, my pretensions are strictly honourable,” Philip continued.

“You love Antoinette!”

“My friend,” said Philip, “you may not have heard that another uncle of mine died lately, so I have now an income of fifty thousand francs a year.”

“What has that to do with the question?”

“Well! I thought it would be no detriment.”

“No, of course not, but what complicates matters is that eight months ago you loved Madeleine with as ardent an affection as you now love

Antoinette.”

“Alas! Amaury,” cried Philippe in the saddest tone imaginable, “you open my wound afresh, you torture my already goaded conscience; but allow me ten minutes in which to explain everything, and then instead of blaming me, you will see that I am the first to be pitied.”

Amaury nodded his head as a sign that he was quite ready to listen, but at the same time pursed up his lips incredulously, as if to imply that he was not so ready to believe.

“To begin with,” said Philip, “if we are to believe the words of the Gospel, and if to them that love much, much is forgiven, then I hope much will be forgiven me; because I am naturally of a most amorous disposition, to quote our great Molière, and have loved often and passionately. I may truly say, and surely this will but accentuate my claim to Divine indulgence, that up to the present I have loved without the least hope of return. Why! you yourself are aware that I have loved Florence and that I have loved Madeleine. Of course neither suffered any inconvenience from my affection, because, unless you yourself told them of it, they never suspected that I loved them; nevertheless my passion, for the latter in particular, was as deep as it was reverential.

“You appear not to believe what I say, Amaury, because this last deep affection has not prevented my falling victim to a third passion for a third object. Oh! but if you only knew with what pangs of anguish and remorse this new love has been born in my heart.

“As to Madeleine, listen well to what I have to say, and let my words be a warning to you, should you ever find yourself in a similar position; as regards Madeleine, I myself was unaware of it. Had anyone warned me of it I should have denied it; had anyone proved it to me, I think I should have felt horrified.

“But I saw Mademoiselle Antoinette nearly every day, I spoke of Madeleine, of her grace, of her beauty, and -even as we talked of this, I perceived more and more that Antoinette was as graceful, and as beautiful as her cousin. Now, tell me, Amaury, do you think it possible to feast one’s eyes for long on such grace and beauty and not fall madly in love?”

Amaury, who had grown more and more pensive, sat with his head bent and his hand pressed to his heart, and only replied by a sigh so deep it might have been mistaken for a groan. Philip waited some moments for an explanation of this dismal groan, but seeing that none was forthcoming, he went on, in a solemn voice; “And now I am going to tell you how your unfortunate and too weak-minded friend first became aware of his love.”

Philip heaved a sigh, compared with which Amaury’s dull groan was the merest trifle, then he continued:

“To begin with, in spite of myself, and without my being aware of it, my steps invariably strayed, so to speak, in the direction of the Rue d’Angoulême.”

“Every time I left home, were it in the morning on my way to the *Palais de Justice*, or in the evening on my way to the *Opéra-Comique*, for you will remember, Amaury, how fond I have always been of this style of national entertainment, I invariably found myself, after walking absently about for an hour or so, opposite Monsieur d’Avrigny’s house.”

“I had no hope of seeing her who reigned over my heart, I had no aim, no definite idea; I was drawn, led, guided, by some irresistible power; and this irresistible power, I was compelled to own it to myself, Amaury, was the power of love.”

Philip paused again, to see what impression this phrase, upon which he rather congratulated himself, had produced upon Amaury; but Amaury contented himself with adding one more wrinkle to the many wrinkles on his brow, and by allowing a second sigh to escape him, deeper and more heart-broken than the first.

Philip, nothing doubting that the deep meditation in which Amaury was plunged, was the result of his eloquence, continued:

“The second symptom which revealed me to myself,” and now the speaker attempted to lend to his speaking countenance an expression in harmony with the words he was about to say, “The second symptom was jealousy.

“When, at the beginning of this month, I saw how charming Miss Antoinette was to you, Amaury, I felt as if I almost hated you; yes, even you, the friend of my childhood. But I soon reflected that, even were you beloved, you, faithful adorer of a cherished memory, could never love again.”

Amaury shuddered.

“Oh! “Philip hastened to add, “the suspicion was but short-lived, and, as you see, I hastened to do you justice.

“But I was filled with something more than spite, more than hatred, more than rage, when it dawned upon me that that coxcomb De Mengis had, in his turn, ingratiated himself in the esteem of her, who, all unknown to myself, had already become so dear to me. He leaned familiarly over the back of her chair, he chatted to her in low tones, he joked with her; in fact he behaved in such a manner as, in the light of my amended ideas regarding yourself, I considered that you alone, her friend from childhood, had any right to do.

"You cannot imagine how I fumed when I noticed these unmistakeable signs of the good understanding which existed between them; then only did I realize that this anger was the anger of love. 'But, Amaury, you are not listening.'"

On the contrary, Amaury was listening only too well. Each word of Philip's found a mournful echo in his own heart; the hot blood rushed to his head, coursed feverishly through his veins, and buzzed in his ears.

Philip continued, crushed by this condemnatory silence: "Of course, Amaury, I do not pretend that all this is not a forgetting of old vows, an acknowledgment of unfaithfulness to the memory of Madeleine; but how can it be helped. All men are not, like you, a model of constancy and inflexibility.

"Then she loved you; she was to be your wife; she had promised to be yours for ever; the sweet thought that you were to be Madeleine's husband, had twined itself round your heart. Whilst to me it had been but a fond, momentary hope, which you had destroyed at one fell stroke. I am none the less guilty, and have sincerely grieved over my fault and deplored it, and were you to heap upon me the harshest names possible, I should not murmur.

"Give me a few moment's more attention, and you will see that there are perhaps some extenuating circumstances, which should be taken into consideration, and should plead for the man who, after having loved Madeleine, has the misfortune to fall in love with Antoinette."

"I am listening," Amaury said with the keenest interest, as he drew his chair nearer to Philip's.

CHAPTER LI.

“IMPRIMIS,” resumed the rival of Cicero and Monsieur Dupin, flattered by the impression which he appeared to be making on his friend, “imprimis, the infidelity of which, at first sight, I seem to be guilty towards Madeleine, is lessened by the fact that my new passion is not offered to a stranger, but to one who has lived beside her; to her friend, her cousin, her sister, who is, so to say, a duplicate of herself, and in whose every gesture, every word, she lives again.

“To love her, who was her sister, is but to love her again; to love Antoinette, is to continue loving Madeleine.”

“There is some truth in what you say,” replied Amaury thoughtfully, while unknown to himself, his expression visibly brightened.

“You see,” Philip cried, with delight, “you admit the justice of my theory yourself.

“Now you will agree, *sccutido,* that love is the most uncontrollable, the most spontaneous, the most independent expression of our will, in the whole world.”

“Unfortunately, yes! “Amaury muttered.

“That is not all,” Philip rejoined with increasing eloquence; “that is not yet all; if, *tertio,* my youthful spirit and power of loving have revived in me a strong, living passion, have I the right to sacrifice this natural, legitimate, divine instinct, to conventional ideas which are against all the laws of nature, to false notions of constancy, foreign to mankind, and which Bacon would have classed in his category of *idola fori.”*

“Quite true,” Amaury stammered out.

“Therefore,” Philip continued triumphant in his conclusion of the whole matter, “then you do not entirely blame me, my dear Amaury, you think, do you not, that there are many excuses to be made for my loving Mlle. Antoinette?”

“But what is it to me, after all,” cried Amaury, “whether you do, or do not love Antoinette.”

At these words a slight smile of infinite self-conceit played on Philip’s lips.

“Ah! my dear Amaury,” said Philip mincingly, “that is my own affair.”

“What! “Amaury exclaimed, “after having compromised Antoinette by your indiscreet behaviour, would your dare insinuate that she has a preference for you?”

“I say nothing, my dear Amaury; and if I compromise myself by my indiscretions, for I presume you allude to my walks in the Rue d’Angoulême, at least, I do not compromise myself by my words.”

“Listen to me, sir,” said Amaury, “have you the impertinence to say to my face that you are beloved?”

“Well! it seems to me that I should say it to you, who are her guardian, rather than to anyone else.”

“Yes! but still, you would *not* say it.”

“And why should I not say it, if it were true? “Philip hastily replied, feeling the blood rush to his head at this unexpected turn of the conversation.

“You would not say it! — because you would not dare.”

“But, on the contrary, I repeat that if it were so, I should be proud, honoured, delighted to say it to the whole world, to proclaim it from the house-tops; and after all, I do not know why I should hesitate to say it, since it is true.”

“What, true! — you dare to say — ”

“I dare to say the truth.”

“You dare to say that Antoinette loves you?”

“I dare to say, that she has, at least, consented to my suit, and that only yesterday — ”

» Well! only yesterday? “Amaury impatiently interrupted.

“She gave me permission to ask her hand in marriage from Monsieur d’Avrigny.”

“It is not true!” cried Amaury. “What! you say it is not true! “Philip replied in amazement; “do you know that you are giving me the lie direct?”

“Yes! I know it well enough.”

“And you deliberately call me a liar.” « I do.”

“You will not retract this insult, which you fling at me without any reason, any provocation?”

“You may rest assured I shall not.”

“But Amaury,” replied Philip, becoming more and more excited; “be reasonable; I admit that, in spite of my arguments, I am, perhaps, somewhat to blame, but, between friends, between men of the world, it is not usual to treat each other so summarily.

"Had you given me the lie direct in Court, it is often done, and I should have said nothing; but here it is a different thing, here it is a wrong, it is an insult which I cannot allow to pass, even from you, and if you persist — "

"Yes! I do persist," cried Amaury, even more vehemently than before, "and will say it again: I you lie, you lie! '"

"I warn you, Amaury," Philip exclaimed, exasperated in his turn, "that although I am but a lawyer, I can boast of more than a civilian's courage, and am quite ready to engage in a duel."

"Well! you are at full liberty to do so, can you not see that I give you every advantage, since in insulting you I give you the choice of weapons."

"The choice of weapons," said Philip, "is quite immaterial to me; I have no preference, for I have never touched either sword or pistol."

"I will bring both," said Amaury, "your seconds shall choose. And now you have but to appoint the hour."

"Seven o'clock in the morning, if agreeable to you."

"Your place of meeting?"

"The Bois de Boulogne."

"Which avenue?"

"The *Avenue de la Muette."*

"Very well; one second on either side, will, I presume, be sufficient; as it is a question of slanders which might injure the reputation of a young girl, it will be advisable to keep the affair as quiet as possible."

"What, slanders! you dare to say that I have slandered Antoinette?"

"I say nothing at all, except that tomorrow morning at seven o'clock I shall be in the Bois de Boulogne, *Avenue de la Muette*, with my second and weapons."

"Until to-morrow, Monsieur Philippe."

"Until to-morrow, Monsieur Amaury, — or rather until this evening; for to-day is Thursday, Mlle. Antoinette's reception day, and I see no reason why I should deprive myself of the pleasure of seeing her."

"Then until this evening, when we shall see her; until to-morrow, when we shall see each other," said Amaury.

And he went away, both furious and delighted.

CHAPTER LII.

‘“THAT evening was, for Philip, both the happiest and the most painful he had ever spent.

Antoinette was most charming to him, and to him alone.

Raoul had not come, and Amaury had, on arrival, seated himself at one of the card tables, and was losing with unusual recklessness.

Philip remained therefore almost alone beside Antoinette, and Antoinette did not seem to complain — far from it.

Now and again, Amaury would cast a furtive glance at Antoinette and Philip and seeing them chatting and laughing together, he swore to himself that on the morrow he would not spare his friend.

As to the latter, he had almost forgotten his impending duel. Joy and remorse were choking him. It was in vain that he felt remorseful at his happiness, his success was none the less apparent, and, after all, he was forced to possess his soul in patience. It is true that when Antoinette smiled upon him, he felt that on the morrow that smile would probably cost him very dear, it is true that at each coquettish glance from his charming neighbour, one of those terrible looks of Amaury we have before mentioned, would dawn on his mental vision, like a flash on the horizon of his memory. He was indeed a worthless fellow to be unfaithful to the memory of the poor dead girl. But at this crisis, remembrances of Madeleine in the past, Amaury’s vengeance in the future, all was little by little swept away in the intoxicating present, and he gave himself up entirely to the sweetness of his conquest.

He was only recalled to the gravity of his position at the moment of leaving, when Antoinette graciously extended her hand to say farewell. Then it flashed across him that perhaps this was the last time he should ever see her; he felt strangely moved, and as he kissed her soft little hand, he could not restrain a few sad, disconnected words from bursting from him.

“Mademoiselle, your goodness — so much happiness — Ah! should fate be unkind to me, should I fall to-morrow with your dear name on my lips, will you not grant me — a thought — a smile — a sigh of regret.”

“What do you mean, M. Philippe?” asked Antoinette, both startled and surprised.

But Philip contented himself with giving her a last look as he bowed himself out with a tragic air, not wishing to say more, and already reproaching himself for having said too much.

Antoinette, haunted by one of those presentiments which women often have, then approached Amaury, who, hat in hand, was about to leave.

“To-morrow is the first of June,” said Antoinette, “you will not forget, Amaury, that Monsieur d’Avrigny will expect to see us.”

“No, I shall not forget,” said Amaury.

“Then we shall meet there, as usual, at ten o’clock in the morning.”

“Yes! at ten o’clock,” said Amaury absently.

“If I should not be there by twelve o’clock, tell Monsieur d’Avrigny not to expect me, as I shall have been detained in Paris on important business.”

Amaury said these few words in such cold deliberate tones, that Antoinette, pale and trembling, dared not ask him anything further; but, turning to Monsieur de Mengis, she begged the old gentleman to remain with her a few moments after everyone had left.

Once left alone with him, she confided to his sympathetic ear the broken words which had escaped Philip, Amaury’s reticence, and her instinctive fears. The Count, taking all this in conjunction with his interview with Amaury on that very morning, could not help feeling some alarm; but he did not allow Antoinette to see this, and even pretended to treat the affair lightly, promising her that on the very next day he would see the two harebrained young men, and hear what they had to say for themselves.

True to his word, he left home early the next morning, and hastened to call on Amaury; he was told he had just left the house on horseback, leaving no word as to his destination, and only accompanied by his English groom.

Monsieur de Mengis then drove as quickly as possible to Philip’s rooms.

The *concierge* was standing on the door-step in the act of relating to his friend how M. Auvray had left the house an hour earlier, accompanied by his solicitor; at Monsieur de Mengis’ request he readily enough repeated his story, adding, that on this occasion, the solemn solicitor, instead of carrying under his arm a bundle of stamped papers, was provided with a pair of swords and a case of pistols. They had then hailed a cab, and as Auvray threw himself into the ancient vehicle, he had shouted to the driver:

“Bois de Boulogne — Avenue de 1a Muette.”

Monsieur de Mengis instantly gave the same order to his man, who at once set his horse at a gallop. Unfortunately it was already after half-past six, and the rendezvous was for seven o’clock.

CHAPTER LIII.

PUNCTUALLY at seven o’clock, Philip and his solicitor, whom, as we have already said, he had chosen as his second, reached the pine-wood in the *Avenue de la Muette;* and almost at the same moment, Amaury dismounted from his horse, and his friend jumped out of a smart cabriolet.

Philip’s friend was well-versed in affairs of this kind, and therefore it was on his suggestion that they had come provided with swords and pistols, as he maintained that Philip, being the one insulted, had the right to use weapons of his own.

Albert offered no objection to this; he had received special instructions from Amaury to yield on all points; therefore all preliminaries were soon arranged.

It was agreed that they were to fight with swords, and that Philip’s weapons were to be used, — these were ordinary military swords.

All this being settled, Albert drew out his case, politely offered the solicitor a cigar, and on his refusing it, he returned the case to his pocket, lit his cigar and went back to Amaury.

“Well!” said he, “everything is arranged, you are to fight with swords; I recommend the poor devil to your mercy.”

Amaury bowed, divested himself of his hat, coat, waistcoat and braces; Philip followed his example. The two swords were then presented to Philip, who took one, in much the same way as he would have taken up his walking stick; the other was handed to Amaury, who received it without affectation, but with an elegant bow.

Then the two adversaries approached each other, crossed swords at six inches from the point, and the seconds withdrew one to the right, the other to the left, and gave the signal — ” Now, Gentlemen.”

Philip at once put himself on the defensive with undaunted clumsiness; but was disarmed by Amaury at the first stroke, his sword twisting in the air and striking the ground, ten feet away from the scene of the encounter.

“Are you really such a formidable adversary, Philip? “Amaury questioned, whilst Philip looked around to see what could have become of his sword.

"Egad, — I beg your pardon," replied Philip, "but I warned you how it would be."

"Let us fight with pistols, then," said Amaury, "the chances will, at least, be more even."

"Very well," said Philip, who was indeed agreeable to anything.

"Look here!" exclaimed Albert, "do you really wish to continue the duel, Amaury?"

"Ask Philip."

Albert, addressing himself exclusively to his opponents, repeated the question.

"What! do I hold to it!" said Philip, "most certainly I do. I have been grossly insulted, and unless Amaury offers me an apology — "

"Oh! well then, go on and kill each other," said Albert; "I have done what I could to prevent any shedding of blood, and shall now have nothing to reproach myself with."

He then beckoned to Amaury's groom to approach and hold his cigar, whilst he loaded the pistols.

All this time, Amaury was pacing up and down, switching off with the edge of his sword the tops of buttercups and daisies.

"Of course, Albert, it is well understood," said Amaury, suddenly turning round, "that, as this gentleman is the injured party, he will fire first."

"Very well," said Albert; and he concluded his task, whilst Amaury continued his holocaust of buttercups and daisies.

The preparations completed, the terms of the duel were next arranged; it was agreed that the two opponents should be placed at forty paces from each other. Then both were to take ten paces forward, thus leaving a distance between them of twenty paces.

Everything being now arranged, two sticks were dug into the ground to mark the starting point, the combatants were placed at the distance agreed upon, the pistols handed to them, and the seconds, having taken their stand one on either side, clapped their hands three times, and at the third time, the opponents stepped towards each other.

They had not taken four paces in advance before Philip's pistol went off; Amaury did not move, but Albert's cigar fell from between his lips and he hastily took off his hat.

"What is the matter?" asked Philip, uneasy at the direction in which his shot had travelled.

"The matter is, sir," said Albert, putting his finger through a hole in his hat, "that if you wished to make a cannon, you did fairly well, but if your aim was a straight hit, you are a deuced awkward shot, damme."

"What the devil are you talking about?" exclaimed Amaury, half alarmed, half laughing in spite of himself.

"I am saying," said Albert, "that it is my place, not yours, to fire on this gentleman, since it is evidently with me he is fighting a duel. So just hand me over your pistol, that we may make an end of the matter."

All eyes were turned on poor Philip, who, covered with confusion, was pouring out such a volume of sincere, and yet most absurd excuses, to Albert, that everyone, seconds and opponents, could not help a hearty fit of laughter.

Just at this moment, a carriage, approaching from one of the neighbouring avenues, was hastily driven down the *Avenue de la Muette*, and a man, leaning half out of the window, was heard crying at the top of his voice:

"Stop! gentlemen, stop!"

Both Amaury and Philip immediately recognised their friend, the Comte de Mengis.

Amaury threw down his pistol, and strode towards Albert, who was just then approaching Philip — the poor fellow still held the discharged pistol in his hand.

"Give this weapon to me," the solicitor said to him!

"Plague on you! there is a law against duelling, don't you know that?" and he snatched the pistol out of Philip's hand, who was still making profuse apologies to Albert, and did not hear a word of what was said to him.

"Good Heavens! gentlemen," said the Comte de Mengis, coming up to them, "you give me a goodish deal of running about. However, I believe that, thank God, I am in time, though I did hear the sound of a pistol-shot."

"Ah! yes, my dear Count," said Philip, "it was I. I know nothing about firearms, and it appears, I placed my finger too soon on the trigger, the pistol went off, and I narrowly escaped killing M. Albert, to whom I sincerely tender my most humble apologies."

"What! then your duel is with this gentleman?" asked the Count.

"No! it is with Amaury; but the shot cannoned to the left: and I do not know how it happened, but although I was facing Amaury, it was this gentleman whom I only just escaped shooting."

"Gentlemen," said the Count, thinking it time to treat the affair with the gravity which it demanded; "Gentlemen, will you be good enough to allow me five minutes talk with Messieurs Auvray and Amaury?"

The dandy lit another cigar, and the solicitor bowed, and they both retired to a short distance, leaving Amaury, Philip and the Comte de Mengis together.

"Now, gentlemen," said Monsieur de Mengis to the two young men, "what does this duel mean? Is this what we had agreed upon, Amaury? Good Heavens! what are you fighting about, and especially with your friend, M. Philippe?"

"I am fighting a duel with M. Philippe, because M. Philippe is compromising Antoinette."

"And you, Philip, what is your reason for fighting with Amaury."

"Because he has deeply insulted me."

"I insulted you because you were compromising Antoinette, and because Monsieur de Mengis himself informed me — "

"Excuse me, M. Philippe," said the Count, "will you permit me to say two words to Amaury?"

"Why, as for that, sir — "

"Do not go far away, because I shall wish to speak to you afterwards."

Philip bowed, and withdrew a short distance, leaving Monsieur de Mengis and Amaury together.

"Evidently you have misunderstood me, Amaury," said Monsieur de Mengis; "there was, besides M. Philippe, another person who was compromising Mlle. Antoinette."

"Another person? "Amaury exclaimed.

"Yes! and that other person is yourself. M. Philippe was compromising her by his excursions on foot, and you by your excursions on horseback."

"Whatever are you talking about?" cried Amaury; "how could anyone imagine that I was a suitor for Antoinette's hand?"

"Others have imagined it very well, sir, — so much so that my nephew looks upon you as the only serious aspirant to the hand of Mademoiselle de Valgenceuse, and retires in your favour, not in that of M. Philippe."

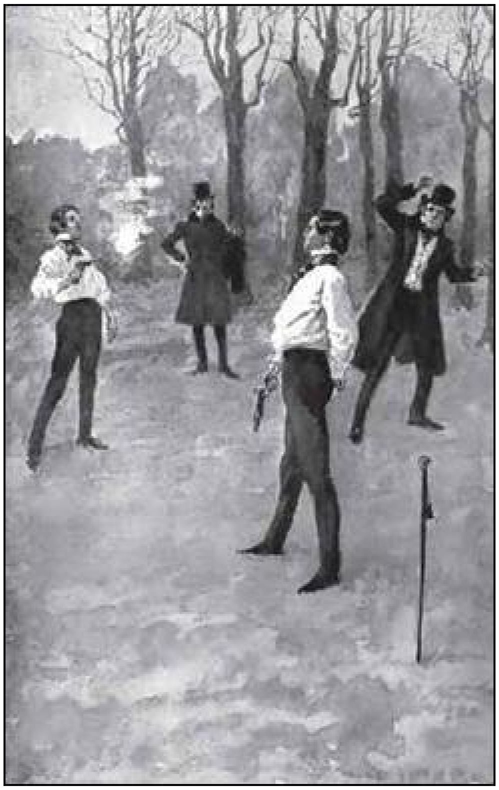

“In my favour! sir “ — Amaury replied in stupefaction; “in my favour! — why, how could anyone think — ”

“Come now! why should you be so astonished?”

“You say that he retires in my favour?”

“Yes, unless you can positively declare to me that you were not serious in your attentions to Antoinette.”

“Sir,” said Amaury controlling himself by a visible effort, “I shall do more than that, you may rest assured. I am a man of quick decision, and by this evening you will know whether I am worthy of the confidence you have reposed in me, and of the advice which, I now understand, you were giving me.”

And, with a bow to Monsieur de Mengis, Amaury turned as if to go.

“Come! Amaury,” said Monsieur de Mengis, “are you going away without a word to Philip?”

“You are right,” said Amaury, “some apology is due to him.”

“Monsieur Auvray, will you come here a moment,” said the Count.

“My dear Philip,” said Amaury, “now that you have fired upon me, or rather in my direction, I may tell you that I deeply regret having insulted you.”

“My friend,” cried Philip, pressing Amaury’s hand, “God knows I had no intention of killing you; in proof of which I shot a hole through your second’s hat, — a piece of awkwardness I am truly sorry for.”

“So much the better,” said Monsieur de Mengis; “I am glad to hear you speak to each other in this way. Now shake hands, and let bygones be bygones.”

The two young men shook hands with a smile.

“I believe,” said Amaury, “I heard you say you wished to have a few moments private talk with Philip. I will therefore leave you, and do what I wish to do.”

Amaury bowed, and withdrew slowly with the air of a man weighed down by the responsibility, of a step which he is about to take, said a few words of thanks to Albert, mounted his horse and galloped off.

“Now that we are alone, M. Philippe,” said the Count, “I will admit to you that Monsieur de Léoville had good cause to let you know that your attentions were compromising Antoinette; another affair like this, and I doubt whether Antoinette, with all her wealth and beauty, would ever have a chance of being married.”

“Sir,” said Philip, “I owned a few moments ago, that I was in the wrong, and I repeat it; but I know how to repair my mistake. I am a man of slow resolution, but once my resolve taken, nothing moves me from my purpose.

“Sir, I have the honour to wish you good-morning.”

“But what are you going to do?” asked Monsieur de Mengis, anxious lest this serious air of Philip’s should conceal some fresh folly.

“You will be well satisfied with what I do, sir; that is all I can say,” Philip replied.

And with a low bow, he too retired, leaving Monsieur de Mengis in a state of bewilderment.

“My dear friend,” said Philip to his second, “you must oblige me by walking to the Arc de Triomphe, or will you still further prove your devotion to me, by taking an omnibus. I have a long distance to go and must make use of the cab.”

“But, listen to me, sir,” said Albert, who was still holding Amaury’s pistol in his hand, “do you imagine that you are going off without a single shot being fired at you.”

“Ah! that is true,” said Philippe, “I beg your pardon, sir, I was forgetting — ”

“If you will kindly measure the distance at which we were — ”

“That is quite unnecessary,” said Albert, remain where you are; only, do not move.”

Philip stood straight as a rod, as Albert took aim.

“But what are you going to do?” cried the solicitor and Monsieur de Mengis both at once, walking hurriedly towards Albert.

But they had not taken four steps when a report rang out, and Philip’s hat rolled on the grass, pierced in exactly the same spot, where Philip’s shot had made a hole in Albert’s.

“Now, Monsieur Auvray,” said the young man, with a laugh, “you may go about your business; we are quits.”

Philip did not need to be told twice, he picked up his hat, jumped into the cab, said a few words to the coachman, and drove off in the direction of the Bois de Boulogne.

Then Albert walked up to the solicitor, and offered him a cigar, and also a seat in his tilbury.

The solicitor accepted both, and as the carriage was drawn up at the other end of the Avenue, they bowed politely to the Count, and went off arm in arm.

“Upon my word,” said Monsieur de Mengis, as he now went back to his carriage, “I verily believe, God forgive me, that the rising generation is a generation of crack-brained lunatics.

CHAPTER LIV.

AN hour later, that is to say at about half-past ten o’clock, Amaury rode up to Monsieur d’Avrigny’s house; he had lost no time on the road, doubtless dreading, should he have too much time to think, lest his generous resolve might melt on the road.

Antoinette’s carriage drove up at the same moment, and drew up at the entrance.

On seeing that it was Amaury who offered her his hand to alight, the girl could not repress a cry of joy, and a vivid blush suffused her hitherto pale cheeks.

“You, Amaury,” she cried; “is it really you? But, how pale you are, are you hurt?”

“No! Antoinette, do not be uneasy,”

said Amaury, “neither I, nor Philip — ”

Antoinette did not allow him to finish his sentence.

“But why are you so serious, so preoccupied, what does it all mean?”

“I have something important to say to Monsieur d’Avrigny.”

“Ah!” said Antoinette with a sigh, “and so have I.”

They went up the steps in silence, and preceded by Joseph, entered the room where Monsieur d’Avrigny was waiting to receive them.

Directly they were ushered into his presence, as the old man tenderly kissed Antoinette, and extended his hand to Amaury, they noticed such a terrible change in him — his face was so drawn, so unrecognisable — that, in spite of themselves, both started with surprise, and exchanged a look expressive of their secret fears. But in contrast to these two, who appeared so anxious and troubled at his altered looks, Monsieur d’Avrigny seemed calm and happy.

They who were in the heyday of life were sad, he who was so near to death was cheerful.

“So there you are, my dear children,” he said to his niece and to his ward, “I was expecting you with impatience; yes, now I am indeed glad to see you, and it is with feelings of unmixed pleasure that I devote this entire day to you. Believe me, you are very dear to me; for you are both young, good, and handsome. But what is the matter? Your faces are troubled, it seems to me; are you afraid that your old father is going to leave you?"

"Ah! you will be spared to us for a long time yet, I trust," cried Amaury, forgetting that he was addressing one who was different to other men. "But," he added, "I wish to speak to you on an important subject, and it appears that Antoinette too has something serious to say to you."

"Well, my dear children, I am at your service," Monsieur d'Avrigny replied, rousing himself from his usual abstraction and assuming an interested and attentive air. "Come and sit beside me, you Antoinette in this chair, and you, Amaury, take this seat. Now place your hands in mine; we three are comfortable now, are we not? The weather is glorious, the sky cloudless, and Madeleine's peaceful resting-place lies there before us."

The eyes of the two young people turned to Madeleine's grave, and that look seemed but to strengthen in each a fixed resolve; neither however spoke.

"Well !" resumed Monsieur d'Avrigny, "you both have something to tell me; I am quite ready to listen to you now. Antoinette, you had best begin."

"But — " the young girl murmured, with a confused look.

"I understand, Antoinette," said Amaury, rising quickly; "I beg your pardon, I will go into the next room."

The colour rose and again retreated from Antoinette's cheeks, she stammered out a few words of excuse, but made no attempt to detain Amaury, who bowed and left the room, Monsieur d'Avrigny looking affectionately after him as he withdrew.

"Now Antoinette," said Monsieur d'Avrigny, turning to look at the young girl, "now, my dear child, we are alone, so tell me what it is you wish to say."

"My dear uncle," said Antoinette, lowering her eyes whilst her voice trembled with emotion, "you have often impressed upon me that your greatest wish is to see me the wife of a man, whom I could respect, and who would love me. As you know, I have hesitated a long while; but experience proves to me that the position of a woman alone is often very difficult, very awkward, and so I have made my choice, dear uncle, neither a very brilliant nor a very ambitious one, but one which, at least assures me that I shall be well- loved, and one which will make my duties of a wife easy and pleasant. The man whom reason bids me decide upon, dear father, and who is well-known to you," continued Antoinette, her voice trembling more and more as she went on (she turned her eyes on Madeleine’s grave, and gathered fresh strength from that look) “is M. Philippe Auvray.”

The doctor had allowed Antoinette to speak without in anyway interrupting or encouraging her, he simply looked long and lovingly at her, his lips parted in a kindly smile.

“M. Auvray! So Antoinette,” he said, after a moment’s silence, “amongst all the young men whom you know, your choice has fallen on M. Philippe Auvray.”

“Yes! uncle,” Antoinette murmured.

“But I thought, my child,” Monsieur d’Avrigny went on, “I thought you had told me twenty times at least that, so far as you knew, this young man was not serious in his attentions, you even laughed, if I remember rightly, at the poor lover’s wasted endeavours.”

“Well! dear uncle, with your leave, my opinion has changed; this faithful affection, without hope of return, this lasting devotion, has deeply touched me, and I tell you again, — ” Antoinette’s voice faltered more and more as she spoke, “I am ready, dear uncle, to be his wife.”

t “Very well, Antoinette,” said Monsieur d’Avrigny, and since your mind is made up — ”

“Yes! father,” Antoinette replied, bursting into tears, “my mind is irrevocably made up.”

“Will you, my child,” said Monsieur d’Avrigny, “go into the next room. It is now Amaury’s turn to speak with me, as he says he has something important to communicate. I shall send for you soon, and then we can have a chat.” And Monsieur d’Avrigny took the beautiful young face, all bathed in tears, between his hands and kissed it tenderly.

CHAPTER LV.

AS soon as she had disappeared into the adjoining room, he called loudly to Amaury, who at once came in.

“Come my son,” said Monsieur d’Avrigny, “motioning him to the seat beside him which he had occupied a few moments before, now tell me what you may have to say.”

“Sir,” said Amaury, trying to speak in a firm voice, although in spite of all his efforts, it was harsh and broken, “I am going to tell you in two words not what brings me to see you, for what has brought me to your side is really the wish to profit by the only day which you devote to us each month, but the subject which I am anxious to speak to you about — .”

“Go on, my boy,” said Monsieur d’Avrigny, who detected in Amaury’s voice the same symptoms of agitation which had been so apparent in Antoinette’s; “speak on, I am listening attentively.”

“Sir,” continued Amaury, making a fresh attempt to speak with indifference, “it was your wish, although I am so young a man, that I should act as a second guardian to Antoinette.”

“Yes, because I felt you loved her as a brother.”

“You also requested me to look about amongst my friends for some young man of birth and fortune who would be worthy of her.”

“Quite true.”

“Well, sir, having seriously considered what man would be most worthy of Antoinette, both as regards birth and fortune, I am come to request the hand of your niece for — Amaury stopped, almost choking.”

“‘For whom?” asked Monsieur d’Avrigny, whilst Amaury strengthened himself in his resolve by looking fixedly into the cemetery.

“For Viscount Raoul de Mengis,” said Amaury.

“Very well,” replied Monsieur d’Avrigny; “the proposal is a serious one, and well worthy of consideration.”

Then turning round he called to Antoinette.

Antoinette opened the door nervously.

“Come here my child,” said Monsieur d’Avrigny, holding out his hand to her, whilst with the other he motioned to Amaury, that he wished him to remain seated; “Come and sit down here.”

“Now given me your hand, as Amaury has given me his; “Antoinette complied.

Monsieur d’Avrigny looked at them both for some time, long and lovingly, then, still without speaking, he kissed them both on the forehead.

“You are both noble-hearted,” he said, “both generous minded, and I am rejoiced at what is going to happen.”

“But what is going to happen? “Antoinette asked in trembling tones.

“The truth of the matter is, that Amaury loves you and you love Amaury.”

An exclamation of surprise burst from them both and they attempted to rise.

“Uncle,” cried Antoinette.

“Sir,” exclaimed Amaury.

“Let the father speak, the old man, now so near the grave,” Monsieur d’Avrigny went on, with a strange solemnity of manner; “do not interrupt me, but now that we three find ourselves together again, as we were nine months ago, immediately after Madeleine’s death, allow me to tell you the story of your hearts during the last nine months.

“I have read what you have written, Amaury: I have listened to what you have said, Antoinette.

“I have carefully watched and studied you in my solitude, and after passing through the troubled life which God had marked out for me, I have gained experience not only in diseases, which are pains of the body, but in things pertaining to the passions, which are the sufferings of the soul. Therefore, I tell you, my children, and this is the happiness on which I congratulate you, you love each other, and if you still have any doubts about it, I will very soon dispel them.”

The two young people remained as if turned to stone.

Monsieur d’Avrigny continued:

“Amaury, you are a generous-minded fellow, with a loyal, noble heart.

“After my daughter’s death, you earnestly wished to put an end to your life, and when you went away, you truly longed to die. Your first letters spoke of a strong distaste for life.

“You only looked within yourself, never around you, but little by little outside things assumed an interest for you; the gift of admiration, of enthusiasm, which at twenty years is so deeply rooted in the human soul, began once again to stir and wake in your heart. At last you were wearied of this loneliness; dreams of the future began to revive in you. Yours is a very loving nature, and unknown to yourself, a craving for affection awoke in you, and as you are one of those with whom memory is all powerful, the first face which haunted your dreams, was that of a friend known from childhood.

"And the voice of this friend was the only voice which reached you in your exile, and as the words which she sent were sweet and alluring, you were not able to withstand her, and overcome by loneliness, carried away by secret hopes, you returned to Paris, to the life from which, nine months ago, you thought you had severed yourself for ever.

"There you sunned yourself in the presence of her who had become to you the whole world, and roused by jealousy, animated by the resistance which you imposed upon yourself, enlightened by some chance event, at a moment when you probably least expected it, the truth flashed across you. You realised, with dismay, the true state of your feelings, and appalled at your own weakness, convinced that, should you continue to struggle, you would but yield in the strife, you decided to take extreme measures, a desperate resolution, and came here to ask Antoinette's hand in marriage for Viscount Raoul de Mengis."

"My hand for Raoul de Mengis?" exclaimed Antoinette.

"Yes! for Raoul de Mengis, whom you knew she did not love, in the vague hope, perhaps, that should I propose this marriage to her, she might then acknowledge that you were the man she loved."

Amaury buried his face in his hands and groaned aloud.

"Am I not right?" continued Monsieur d'Avrigny; "have I not correctly diagnosed your heart, analysed your feelings? I have. Well then! Amaury, you may feel justly proud, for you have acted like a noble fellow, like a loyal gentleman."

"Oh! my dear, dear father!" cried Amaury, "it is useless to try to conceal anything from you. Not a thing escapes you; and your watchful eye, like the eye of God, reads into the inmost recesses of the soul."

"For you, my Antoinette," said Monsieur d'Avrigny, turning to the blushing girl, "for you it is quite another thing, you have loved Amaury ever since you knew him."

Antoinette started and hid her burning face against Monsieur d'Avrigny's breast.

“My dear child,” he went on, “why should you deny it? This hidden love was too pure, too unselfish, for you to need to blush for it.

“Poor little girl, you have indeed suffered.

“Slighted and misunderstood without cause, jealous, yet angry with yourself because of this jealousy, finding nothing but pain and remorse in the very thing that is most sacred in the world, — a maiden’s first love.

“Ah! you have indeed suffered, and with no one to help you in your trouble, with no one in whom you could confide, with no one to sustain you in your weakness and to cry: ‘Take courage! you are fighting a gallant fight! ‘There was one, however, who was a witness of your brave silence — one who appreciated it. That one was your old uncle, whose eyes would often fill with tears as he saw your noble unselfishness; whose arms would often fall open to receive you, and close again with a sigh; and even when God took your rival (Antoinette moved uneasily), your sister to Himself,” Monsieur d’Avrigny continued, “you still tried to crush out all hope, as if it were a crime. All this time Amaury suffered; you watched his suffering with anguish, and could ‘not refrain from doing all in your power to console him, and though far away, you constituted yourself a Sister of Mercy to his sick soul. Then, you met again, and the struggle was renewed more sharply, more poignantly than ever; at last there came a day when you realized that he, too, loved you. And so, to resist this last temptation, to remain faithful, to the end, to your grand ideal of renunciation, of fidelity to the dead, you decided to sacrifice your life, bestow it on the first comer; you sought Philip in order to avoid Amaury, and without bringing happiness to the one, you struck a mortal blow to the other, all this without considering your own affections, which you felt had been sacrificed long ago.”

“But, thank God,” resumed Monsieur d’Avrigny, looking from one to the other, “I am still here, to bring you together, to show you your own hearts, to save you both from a fatal mistake, to tell you, happy children that you are, ‘You love one another! You love one another! ‘“

The doctor paused a moment, gazing alternately at Amaury on his right, and Antoinette on his left; both looked confused, and sat with bent heads, not venturing to look at him, nor at each other.

A smile lit up Monsieur d’Avrigny’s face, and he went on speaking in a tone of fatherly kindness and solicitude —

“And now you sit here before me, dear children, with bent heads and not a word to say, because you do not know whether I am blaming you, whether

I think you faithless! Ah! it is precisely this super- sensitiveness which absolves you, this questioning which justifies you.

"No! my dearly loved ones, do not regret loving each other; you do no wrong to our beloved dead whose grave we see from here. In the sublime light of Heaven, where she now watches over us, all the narrow affections and petty jealousies of earth disappear, and her forgiveness is more complete and less selfish than my own; because, if I must be perfectly frank with you, Amaury," the doctor added, lowering his voice, "if I must lay bare to you the heart of the man whom, rightly or wrongly you accept as your judge, my reason for giving you such easy absolution is only because of a sort of vain and foolish joy, a feeling of selfish egotism.

"Yes! I am more to be blamed, less pure-hearted than you, in that I often tell myself proudly, that I shall be the only one to rejoin my daughter, virgin on earth, virgin in Heaven; that she will thus be more my own, that she will know that, after all, I was the one who loved her best.

"It is wrong, it is unfair," Monsieur d'Avrigny went on, shaking his head and speaking as if to himself, "the father is old, the lover is young. I have experienced a long and painful existence and have now reached the end of my journey.

"You are on the threshold of life, have but begun your journey; the future holds for you all that the past holds for me, and at your age one does not die of love — one lives.

"Therefore, my children, put behind you all shame, all regrets, do not struggle against your interests, do not fight against your nature, do not rebel against God. Impute no blame to your youth, to your power of loving. You have struggled enough, have suffered enough, have made ample atonement.

"Take hold of the future, of love, of happiness, and kneel before me, that my hands may rest upon your dear heads, and that I may bless you in Madeleine's name."

The two young people fell at the old man's feet, who placed his hands on their bowed heads, and lifted his eyes to heaven with a smile of ineffable joy; whilst they, still kneeling, whispered timidly to each other:

"Then you have loved me this long while, Antoinette?"

"Your love is not a dream, Amaury?"

"Can you not read my happiness in my face?" whispered Amaury.

"Can you not see it in my tears?" murmured Antoinette.

And for some moments only a few broken words escaped the young people, who with clasped hands, and looks of love, were overwhelmed with their own happiness, whilst the old man, so soon to die, invoked blessings from God upon his children, who were so full of life.

"Come, spare my feelings a little, dear children," said the doctor. "Since I feel that you are perfectly happy, I shall die happy.

"Now we have no time to lose, I in particular; for I may have even less time than you.

"You must be married this very month; I am not able, neither do I wish, to leave Ville d'Auray; but I shall send all necessary instructions to Monsieur de Mengis. You need only think of your love.

"One thing only do I ask, Amaury, that on the 1st August, you will bring your wife to me, and spend the whole of that day here, as you are doing to-day."

Just at this moment, as Amaury and Antoinette replied by covering the old man's hands with tears and kisses, a great disturbance was heard in the hall, the door opened and old Joseph appeared.

"Well! what is the matter "? asked Monsieur d'Avrigny, "who comes to disturb us?"

"Sir," said Joseph, "a young man has just driven up and insists upon seeing you; he asserts that it is on business affecting the happiness of Mlle. Antoinette. The footmen, both of them, had the greatest trouble to prevent his forcing his way into your presence. Why! here he is."

And in fact, as he said the words, Philip Auvray entered the room, flushed and breathless; he bowed to Monsieur d'Avrigny and Antoinette, and held out his hand to Amaury.

Joseph retired on seeing him.

"Ah! there you are, my poor Amaury," said Philip, "I am very glad that you preceded me, for you will, at least, be able to inform the Comte de Mengis how Philip Auvray makes amends for his acts of thoughtlessness."

The two young people stole a glance at each other.

Philip turned solemnly towards the doctor.

"Sir," said he, "I must ask your forgiveness for appearing before you in this careless attire, and with a hat from which the crown has been dislodged; but under the circumstances which have brought me here, I could make no delay.

“Sir, I have the honour to ask for the hand of your niece, Mlle. Antoinette de Valgenceuse, in marriage.”

“And I, sir,” the doctor replied, “have the honour to invite you to the marriage of Mlle. Antoinette de Valgenceuse with Comte Amaury de Léoville, which will take place between the 25th and 30th of the present month.”

One cry escaped Philip — deep, desperate, piercing — then, without a bow, without taking leave of anyone, without a single word, he rushed from the room, and threw himself, like a madman, into his cab.

The unfortunate Philip had, as usual, arrived just half-an-hour too late.

CONCLUSION.

THE following 1st August Amaury and Antoinette, installed in the small house in the Rue des Mathurins, and wholly given up to the dreams and bliss of a newly-married couple, were quite oblivious of the fact that the morning was already far advanced.

They had been married only the previous evening at the Church of Sainte Croix d’ Antin.

“Come, dear Amaury,” said Antoinette, “we really must be starting; twelve o’clock is striking and my uncle will be expecting us.”

“He will never expect you again,” said the voice of old Joseph behind them.

“Monsieur d’Avrigny had been feeling rather worse for several days, but gave positive orders that you were not to be informed of his condition, as he did not wish to sadden you; but yesterday afternoon, at half-past four o’clock, he passed peacefully away.”

This was the precise hour at which the marriage blessing was pronounced upon Antoinette and Amaury.

*****

There was a moment’s silence, as the Comte de M — ’s Secretary concluded his reading of the manuscript.

“Well!” said M — at last, “now you know the difference between a love that kills and a love that does not.”

“Yes! but,” interposed one of the guests, a young man, “what if I were to’ assure you that next Thursday evening I could tell you another tale, if I liked, where the lover was killed off remorselessly, while the father lived on happily and prosperously?”

“That would only go to show,” said the Count with a laugh, “that while stories may prove a great deal in books, in actual life they prove nothing whatsoever.”

THE END

THE THREE MUSKETEERS

Anonymous translation, 1844-8

Dumas' most famous novel was first published in serial format in 1844. Set in the 17th century, it concerns the adventures of the young and hotheaded d'Artagnan, who travels to Paris to join the Musketeers of the Guard. The story is continued in two sequels: *Twenty Years After* and *The Vicomte of Bragelonne: Ten Years Later*. When Dumas wrote the novel he was a practising fencer and like many other French gentlemen of his generation, he attended the schools for Canne de combat and Savate of Michel Casseux, which went on to inspire his writing of the novel.

In his preface, Dumas indicates the source of the novel as being *Mémoires de Monsieur d'Artagnan*, printed by Pierre Rouge in Amsterdam. It was in this book that d'Artagnan relates his first visit to M. de Tréville, captain of the Musketeers, where in the antechamber he met the three musketeers Athos, Porthos and Aramis. The novel became an instant bestseller and is one of the most widely read novels of the nineteenth century, inspiring countless adaptations across many forms of media.

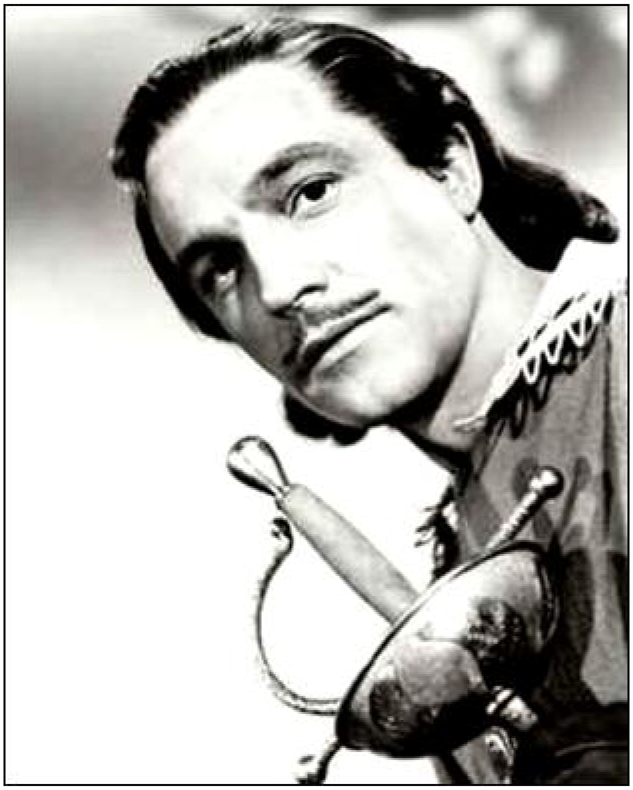

Gene Kelly playing the famous character d’Artagnan

A statue of d’Artagnan in Auch

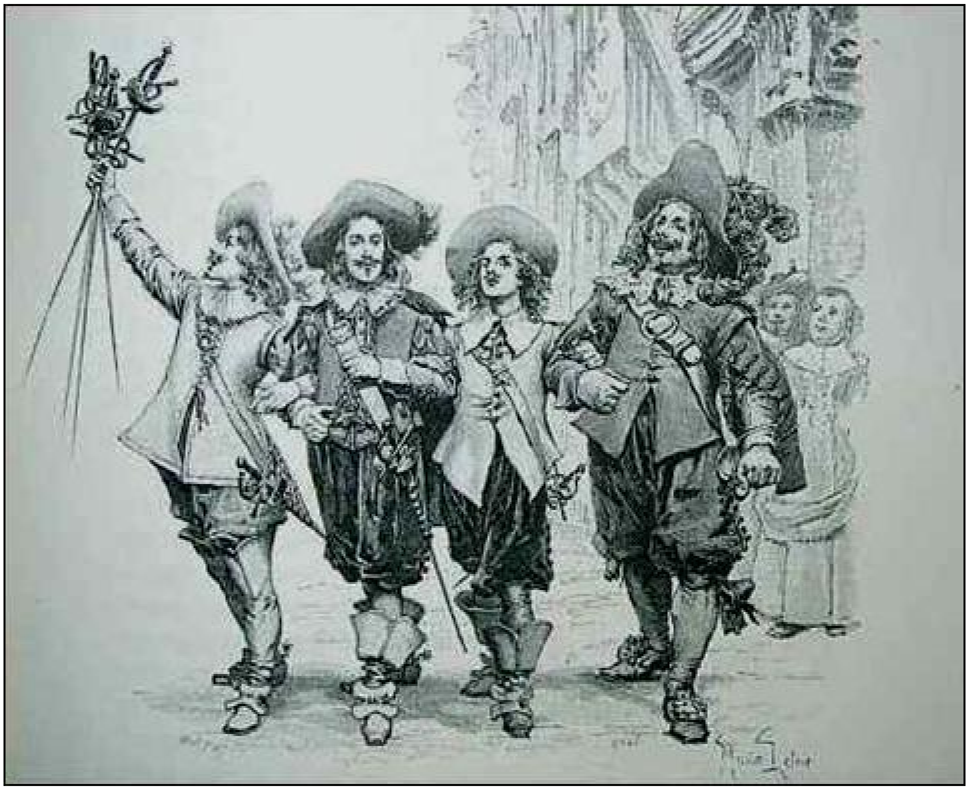

An illustration from an English 1894 edition

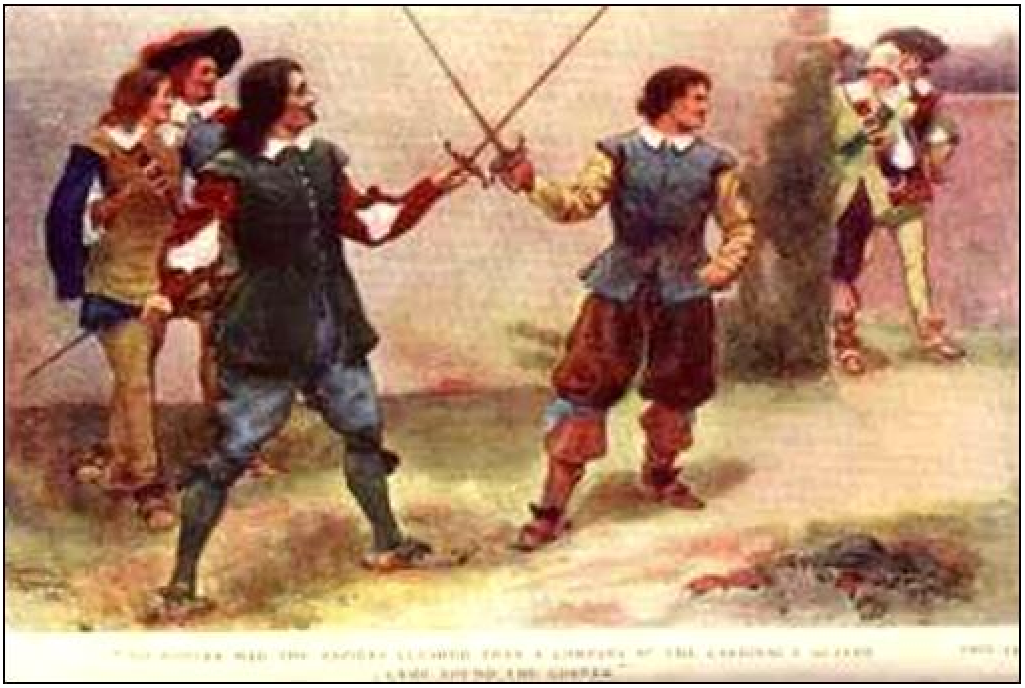

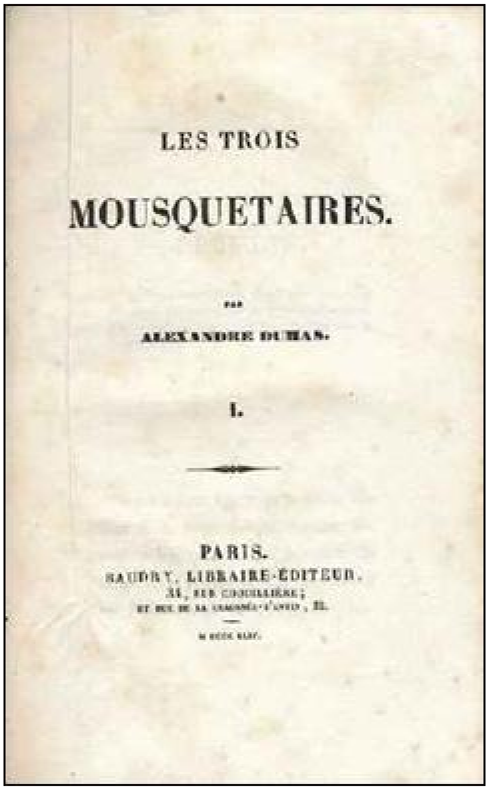

LES TROIS
MOUSQUETAIRES.

PAR
ALEXANDRE DUMAS.

I.

PARIS.
BAUDRY, LIBRAIRE-ÉDITEUR.

The first edition titlepage

LE MOUSQUETAIRE

JOURNAL DE M. ALEXANDRE DUMAS

LES MOHICANS DE PARIS

PAR ALEXANDRE DUMAS

How the novel first appeared in serial format

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A 1951 theatre adaptation, starring Serge Reggiani as d’Artagnan

The 1959 TV adaptation

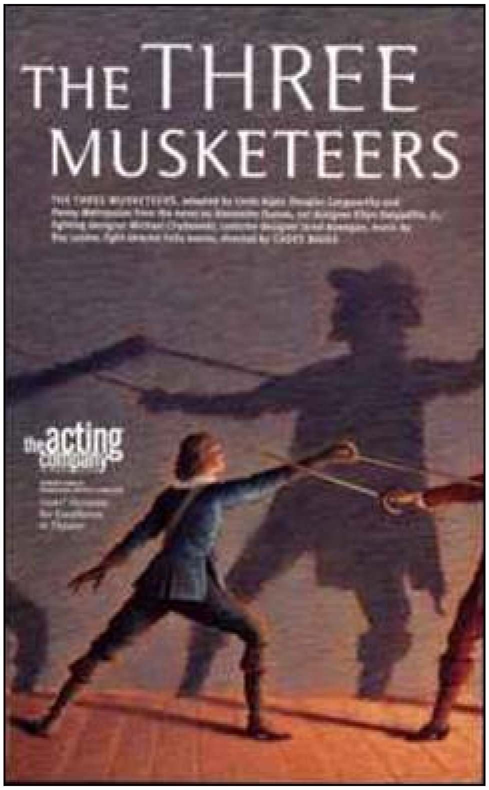
THE THREE MUSKETEERS
the acting company

A Broadway adaptation of the famous novel

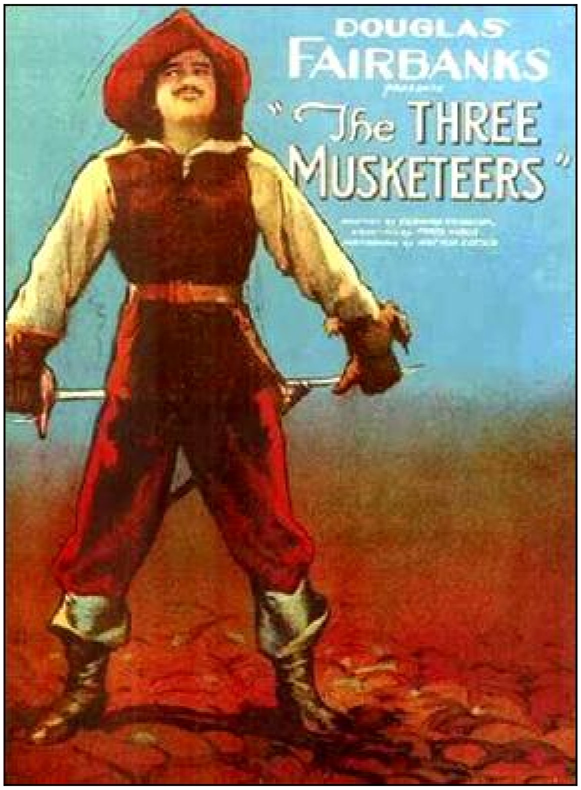
DOUGLAS
FAIRBANKS
presents
"The THREE
MUSKETEERS"

The 1921 film adaptation

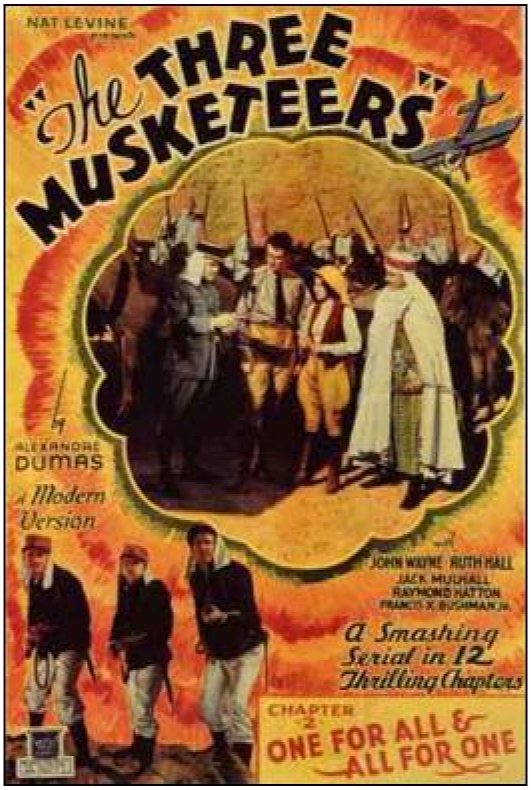
NAT LEVINE
presents
"The THREE MUSKETEERS"
by
ALEXANDRE DUMAS
A Modern Version
with
JOHN WAYNE RUTH HALL
JACK MULHALL
RAYMOND HATTON
FRANCIS X. BUSHMAN JR.
A Smashing Serial in 12 Thrilling Chapters
CHAPTER 2
ONE FOR ALL & ALL FOR ONE

The 1933 film adaptation

A Musical Comedy Version of
ALEXANDRE DUMAS'
THE
THREE MUSKETEERS
DARRYL F. ZANUCK
IN CHARGE OF PRODUCTION

The 1939 comedy film version

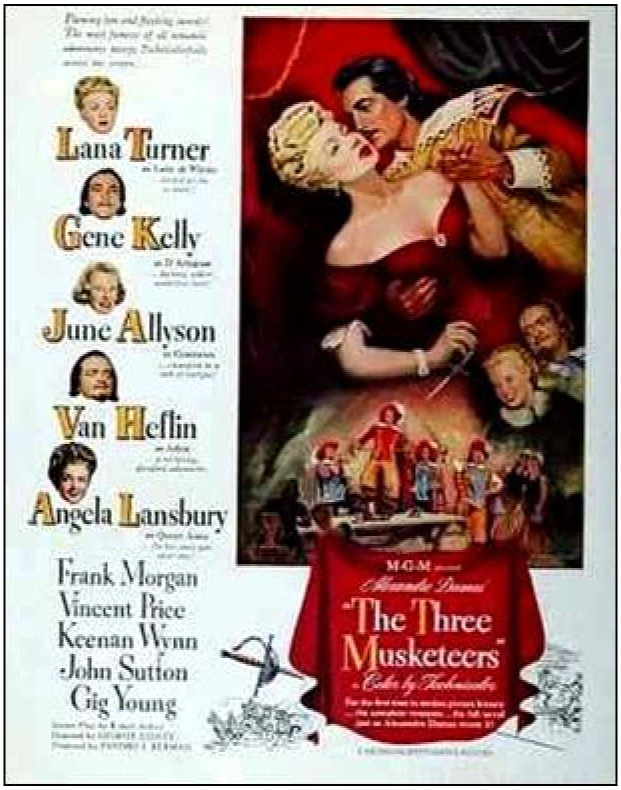
Lana Turner
Gene Kelly
June Allyson
Van Heflin
Angela Lansbury
Frank Morgan
Vincent Price
Keenan Wynn
John Sutton
Gig Young
M-G-M
"The Three Musketeers"

The 1948 film version

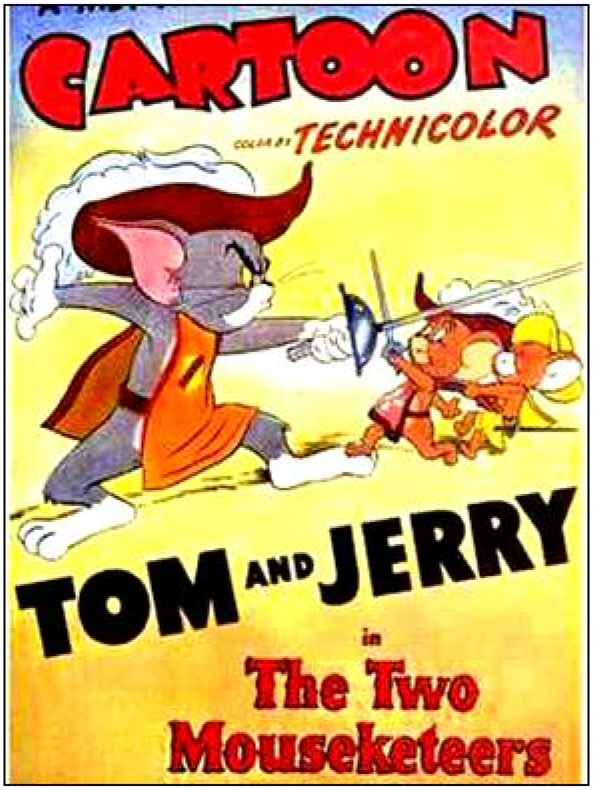
CARTOON
COLOR BY TECHNICOLOR
TOM AND JERRY
in
The Two Mouseketeers

The 1952 cartoon adaptation

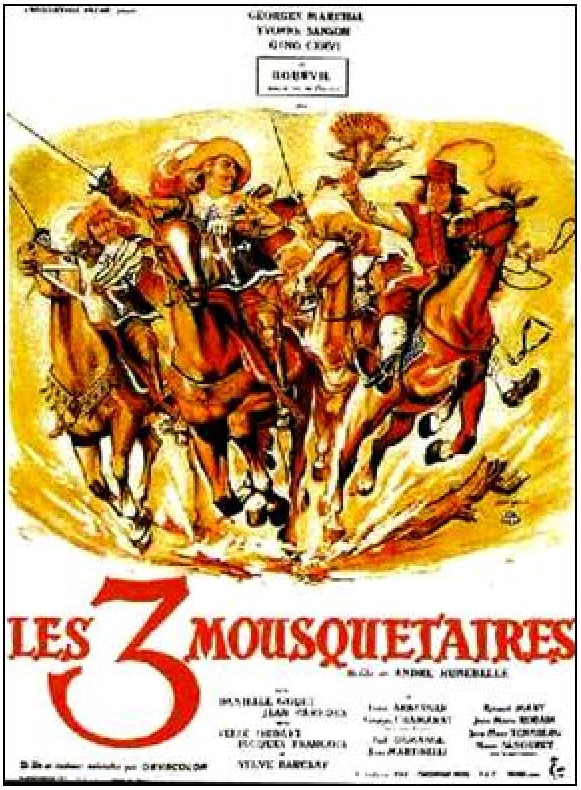
LES 3 MOUSQUETAIRES

The 1953 French movie adaptation

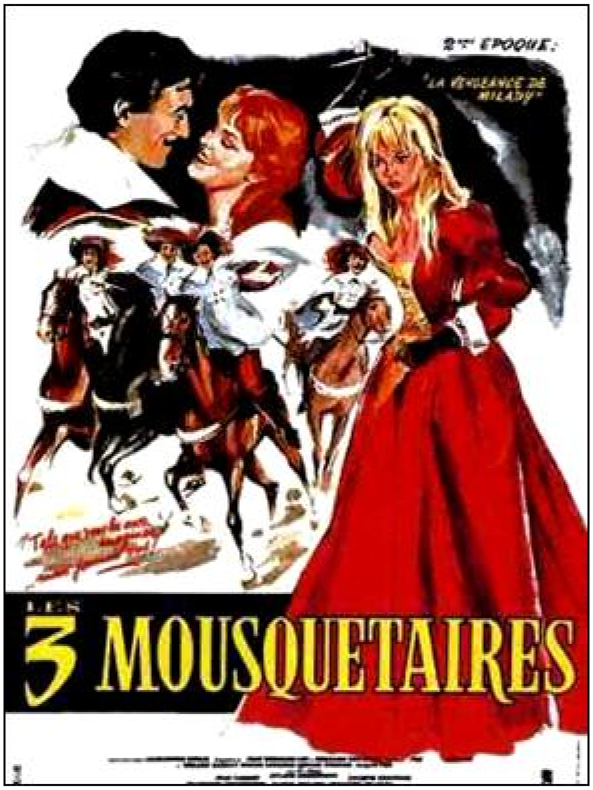
2me EPOQUE:
"LA VENGEANCE DE MILADY"
LES
3 MOUSQUETAIRES

The 1961 French film version

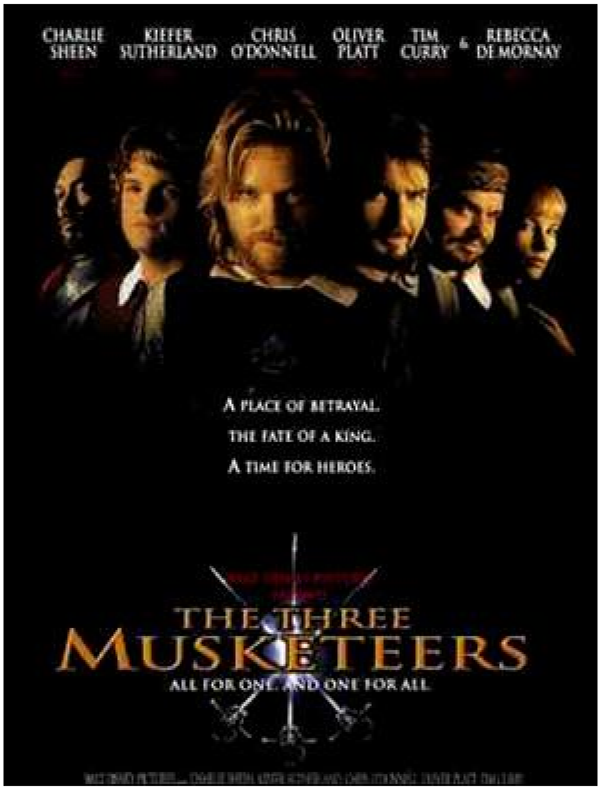
CHARLIE SHEEN
KIEFER SUTHERLAND
CHRIS O'DONNELL
OLIVER PLATT
TIM CURRY
& REBECCA DE MORNAY
A PLACE OF BETRAYAL.
THE FATE OF A KING.
A TIME FOR HEROES.
THE THREE MUSKETEERS
ALL FOR ONE. AND ONE FOR ALL.

The 1993 Hollywood version

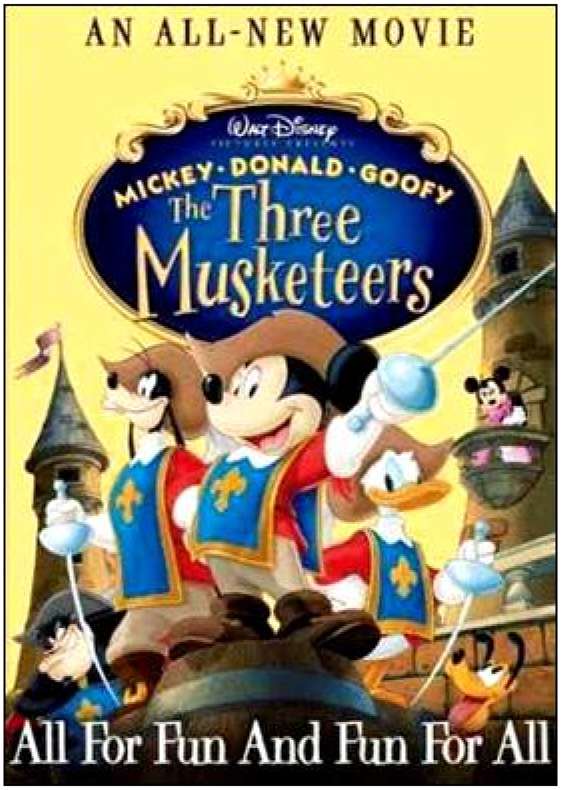
AN ALL-NEW MOVIE
Walt Disney Pictures presents
MICKEY · DONALD · GOOFY
The Three Musketeers
All For Fun And Fun For All

A 2004 Disney adaptation

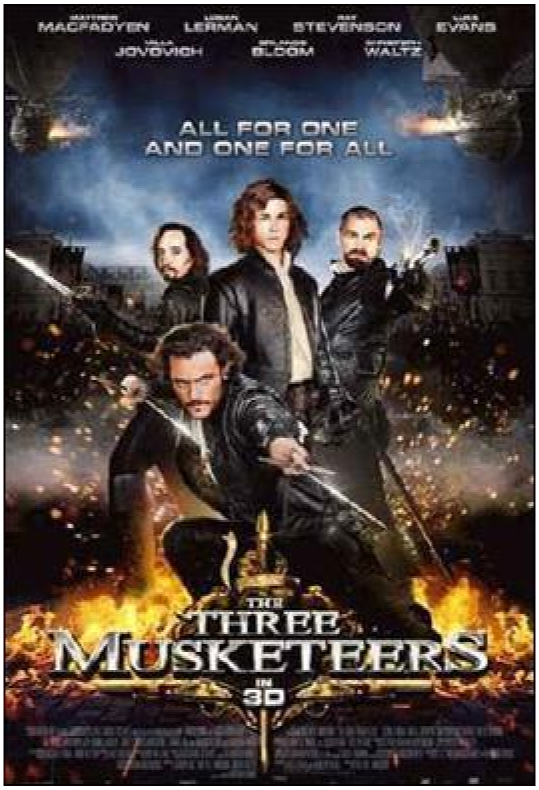
MACFADYEN
LERMAN
STEVENSON
EVANS
JOVOVICH
BLOOM
WALTZ
ALL FOR ONE
AND ONE FOR ALL
THE
THREE
MUSKETEERS
IN
3D

The 2011 adaptation, filmed in 3D

AUTHOR’S PREFACE

In which it is proved that, notwithstanding their names’ ending in OS and IS, the heroes of the story which we are about to have the honor to relate to our readers have nothing mythological about them.

A short time ago, while making researches in the Royal Library for my History of Louis XIV, I stumbled by chance upon the *Memoirs of M. d’Artagnan*, printed--as were most of the works of that period, in which authors could not tell the truth without the risk of a residence, more or less long, in the Bastille--at Amsterdam, by Pierre Rouge. The title attracted me; I took them home with me, with the permission of the guardian, and devoured them.

It is not my intention here to enter into an analysis of this curious work; and I shall satisfy myself with referring such of my readers as appreciate the pictures of the period to its pages. They will therein find portraits penciled by the hand of a master; and although these squibs may be, for the most part, traced upon the doors of barracks and the walls of cabarets, they will not find the likenesses of Louis XIII, Anne of Austria, Richelieu, Mazarin, and the courtiers of the period, less faithful than in the history of M. Anquetil.

But, it is well known, what strikes the capricious mind of the poet is not always what affects the mass of readers. Now, while admiring, as others doubtless will admire, the details we have to relate, our main preoccupation concerned a matter to which no one before ourselves had given a thought.

D’Artagnan relates that on his first visit to M. de Treville, captain of the king’s Musketeers, he met in the antechamber three young men, serving in the illustrious corps into which he was soliciting the honor of being received, bearing the names of Athos, Porthos, and Aramis.

We must confess these three strange names struck us; and it immediately occurred to us that they were but pseudonyms, under which d’Artagnan had disguised names perhaps illustrious, or else that the bearers of these borrowed names had themselves chosen them on the day in which, from caprice, discontent, or want of fortune, they had donned the simple Musketeer’s uniform.

From the moment we had no rest till we could find some trace in contemporary works of these extraordinary names which had so strongly awakened our curiosity.

The catalogue alone of the books we read with this object would fill a whole chapter, which, although it might be very instructive, would certainly afford our readers but little amusement. It will suffice, then, to tell them that at the moment at which, discouraged by so many fruitless investigations, we were about to abandon our search, we at length found, guided by the counsels of our illustrious friend Paulin Paris, a manuscript in folio, endorsed 4772 or 4773, we do not recollect which, having for title, “Memoirs of the Comte de la Fere, Touching Some Events Which Passed in France Toward the End of the Reign of King Louis XIII and the Commencement of the Reign of King Louis XIV.”

It may be easily imagined how great was our joy when, in turning over this manuscript, our last hope, we found at the twentieth page the name of Athos, at the twenty-seventh the name of Porthos, and at the thirty-first the name of Aramis.

The discovery of a completely unknown manuscript at a period in which historical science is carried to such a high degree appeared almost miraculous. We hastened, therefore, to obtain permission to print it, with the view of presenting ourselves someday with the pack of others at the doors of the Academie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, if we should not succeed--a very probable thing, by the by--in gaining admission to the Academie Francaise with our own proper pack. This permission, we feel bound to say, was graciously granted; which compels us here to give a public contradiction to the slanderers who pretend that we live under a government but moderately indulgent to men of letters.

Now, this is the first part of this precious manuscript which we offer to our readers, restoring it to the title which belongs to it, and entering into an engagement that if (of which we have no doubt) this first part should obtain the success it merits, we will publish the second immediately.

In the meanwhile, as the godfather is a second father, we beg the reader to lay to our account, and not to that of the Comte de la Fere, the pleasure or the ENNUI he may experience.

This being understood, let us proceed with our history.

CHAPTER 1

THE THREE PRESENTS OF D’ARTAGNAN THE ELDER

On the first Monday of the month of April, 1625, the market town of Meung, in which the author of ROMANCE OF THE ROSE was born, appeared to be in as perfect a state of revolution as if the Huguenots had just made a second La Rochelle of it. Many citizens, seeing the women flying toward the High Street, leaving their children crying at the open doors, hastened to don the cuirass, and supporting their somewhat uncertain courage with a musket or a partisan, directed their steps toward the hostelry of the Jolly Miller, before which was gathered, increasing every minute, a compact group, vociferous and full of curiosity.

In those times panics were common, and few days passed without some city or other registering in its archives an event of this kind. There were nobles, who made war against each other; there was the king, who made war against the cardinal; there was Spain, which made war against the king. Then, in addition to these concealed or public, secret or open wars, there were robbers, mendicants, Huguenots, wolves, and scoundrels, who made war upon everybody. The citizens always took up arms readily against thieves, wolves or scoundrels, often against nobles or Huguenots, sometimes against the king, but never against cardinal or Spain. It resulted, then, from this habit that on the said first Monday of April, 1625, the citizens, on hearing the clamor, and seeing neither the red-and-yellow standard nor the livery of the Duc de Richelieu, rushed toward the hostel of the Jolly Miller. When arrived there, the cause of the hubbub was apparent to all.

A young man--we can sketch his portrait at a dash. Imagine to yourself a Don Quixote of eighteen; a Don Quixote without his corselet, without his coat of mail, without his cuisses; a Don Quixote clothed in a woolen doublet, the blue color of which had faded into a nameless shade between lees of wine and a heavenly azure; face long and brown; high cheek bones, a sign of sagacity; the maxillary muscles enormously developed, an infallible sign by which a Gascon may always be detected, even without his cap--and our young man wore a cap set off with a sort of feather; the eye open and intelligent; the nose hooked, but finely chiseled. Too big for a youth, too small for a grown man, an experienced eye might have taken him for a farmer's son upon a journey had it not been for the long sword which, dangling from a leather baldric, hit against the calves of its owner as he walked, and against the rough side of his steed when he was on horseback.

For our young man had a steed which was the observed of all observers. It was a Bearn pony, from twelve to fourteen years old, yellow in his hide, without a hair in his tail, but not without windgalls on his legs, which, though going with his head lower than his knees, rendering a martingale quite unnecessary, contrived nevertheless to perform his eight leagues a day. Unfortunately, the qualities of this horse were so well concealed under his strange-colored hide and his unaccountable gait, that at a time when everybody was a connoisseur in horseflesh, the appearance of the aforesaid pony at Meung--which place he had entered about a quarter of an hour before, by the gate of Beaugency--produced an unfavorable feeling, which extended to his rider.

And this feeling had been more painfully perceived by young d'Artagnan--for so was the Don Quixote of this second Rosinante named--from his not being able to conceal from himself the ridiculous appearance that such a steed gave him, good horseman as he was. He had sighed deeply, therefore, when accepting the gift of the pony from M. d'Artagnan the elder. He was not ignorant that such a beast was worth at least twenty livres; and the words which had accompanied the present were above all price.

"My son," said the old Gascon gentleman, in that pure Bearn PATOIS of which Henry IV could never rid himself, "this horse was born in the house of your father about thirteen years ago, and has remained in it ever since, which ought to make you love it. Never sell it; allow it to die tranquilly and honorably of old age, and if you make a campaign with it, take as much care of it as you would of an old servant. At court, provided you have ever the honor to go there," continued M. d'Artagnan the elder, "--an honor to which, remember, your ancient nobility gives you the right--sustain worthily your name of gentleman, which has been worthily borne by your ancestors for five hundred years, both for your own sake and the sake of those who belong to you. By the latter I mean your relatives and friends.

Endure nothing from anyone except Monsieur the Cardinal and the king. It is by his courage, please observe, by his courage alone, that a gentleman can make his way nowadays. Whoever hesitates for a second perhaps allows the bait to escape which during that exact second fortune held out to him. You are young. You ought to be brave for two reasons: the first is that you are a Gascon, and the second is that you are my son. Never fear quarrels, but seek adventures. I have taught you how to handle a sword; you have thews of iron, a wrist of steel. Fight on all occasions. Fight the more for duels being forbidden, since consequently there is twice as much courage in fighting. I have nothing to give you, my son, but fifteen crowns, my horse, and the counsels you have just heard. Your mother will add to them a recipe for a certain balsam, which she had from a Bohemian and which has the miraculous virtue of curing all wounds that do not reach the heart. Take advantage of all, and live happily and long. I have but one word to add, and that is to propose an example to you--not mine, for I myself have never appeared at court, and have only taken part in religious wars as a volunteer; I speak of Monsieur de Treville, who was formerly my neighbor, and who had the honor to be, as a child, the play-fellow of our king, Louis XIII, whom God preserve! Sometimes their play degenerated into battles, and in these battles the king was not always the stronger. The blows which he received increased greatly his esteem and friendship for Monsieur de Treville. Afterward, Monsieur de Treville fought with others: in his first journey to Paris, five times; from the death of the late king till the young one came of age, without reckoning wars and sieges, seven times; and from that date up to the present day, a hundred times, perhaps! So that in spite of edicts, ordinances, and decrees, there he is, captain of the Musketeers; that is to say, chief of a legion of Caesars, whom the king holds in great esteem and whom the cardinal dreads--he who dreads nothing, as it is said. Still further, Monsieur de Treville gains ten thousand crowns a year; he is therefore a great noble. He began as you begin. Go to him with this letter, and make him your model in order that you may do as he has done.”

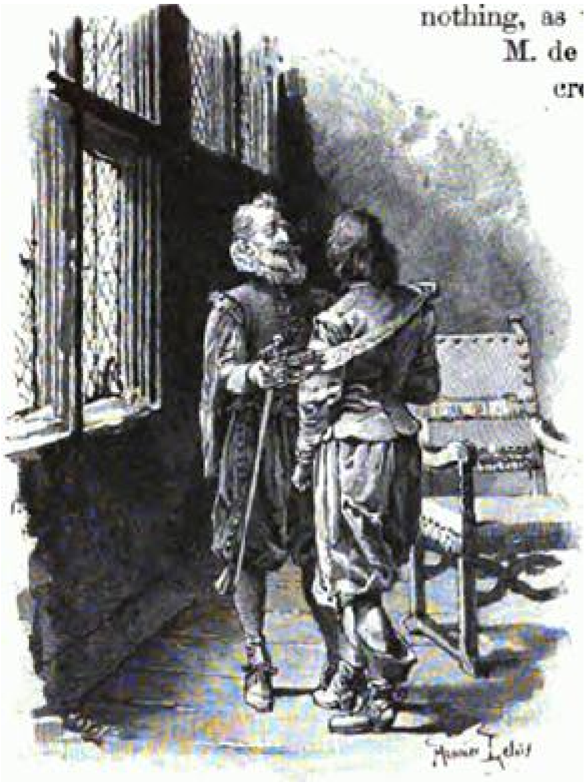

Upon which M. d’Artagnan the elder girded his own sword round his son, kissed him tenderly on both cheeks, and gave him his benediction.

On leaving the paternal chamber, the young man found his mother, who was waiting for him with the famous recipe of which the counsels we have just repeated would necessitate frequent employment. The adieux were on this side longer and more tender than they had been on the other--not that M. d’Artagnan did not love his son, who was his only offspring, but M. d’Artagnan was a man, and he would have considered it unworthy of a man to give way to his feelings; whereas Mme. d’Artagnan was a woman, and still more, a mother. She wept abundantly; and--let us speak it to the praise of M. d’Artagnan the younger--notwithstanding the efforts he made to remain firm, as a future Musketeer ought, nature prevailed, and he shed many tears, of which he succeeded with great difficulty in concealing the half.

The same day the young man set forward on his journey, furnished with the three paternal gifts, which consisted, as we have said, of fifteen crowns, the horse, and the letter for M. de Treville--the counsels being thrown into the bargain.

With such a VADE MECUM d’Artagnan was morally and physically an exact copy of the hero of Cervantes, to whom we so happily compared him when our duty of an historian placed us under the necessity of sketching his portrait. Don Quixote took windmills for giants, and sheep for armies; d’Artagnan took every smile for an insult, and every look as a provocation--whence it resulted that from Tarbes to Meung his fist was constantly doubled, or his hand on the hilt of his sword; and yet the fist did not descend upon any jaw, nor did the sword issue from its scabbard. It was not that the sight of the wretched pony did not excite numerous smiles on the countenances of passers-by; but as against the side of this pony rattled a sword of respectable length, and as over this sword gleamed an eye rather ferocious than haughty, these passers-by repressed their hilarity, or if hilarity prevailed over prudence, they endeavored to laugh only on one side, like the masks of the ancients. D’Artagnan, then, remained majestic and intact in his susceptibility, till he came to this unlucky city of Meung.

But there, as he was alighting from his horse at the gate of the Jolly Miller, without anyone--host, waiter, or hostler--coming to hold his stirrup or take his horse, d’Artagnan spied, though an open window on the ground floor, a gentleman, well-made and of good carriage, although of rather a stern countenance, talking with two persons who appeared to listen to him with respect. d’Artagnan fancied quite naturally, according to his custom, that he must be the object of their conversation, and listened. This time d’Artagnan was only in part mistaken; he himself was not in question, but his horse was. The gentleman appeared to be enumerating all his qualities to his auditors; and, as I have said, the auditors seeming to have great deference for the narrator, they every moment burst into fits of laughter. Now, as a half-smile was sufficient to awaken the irascibility of the young man, the effect produced upon him by this vociferous mirth may be easily imagined.

Nevertheless, d’Artagnan was desirous of examining the appearance of this impertinent personage who ridiculed him. He fixed his haughty eye upon the stranger, and perceived a man of from forty to forty-five years of age, with black and piercing eyes, pale complexion, a strongly marked nose, and a black and well-shaped mustache. He was dressed in a doublet and hose of a violet color, with aiguillettes of the same color, without any other ornaments than the customary slashes, through which the shirt appeared. This doublet and hose, though new, were creased, like traveling clothes for a long time packed in a portmanteau. d’Artagnan made all these remarks with the rapidity of a most minute observer, and doubtless from an instinctive feeling that this stranger was destined to have a great influence over his future life.

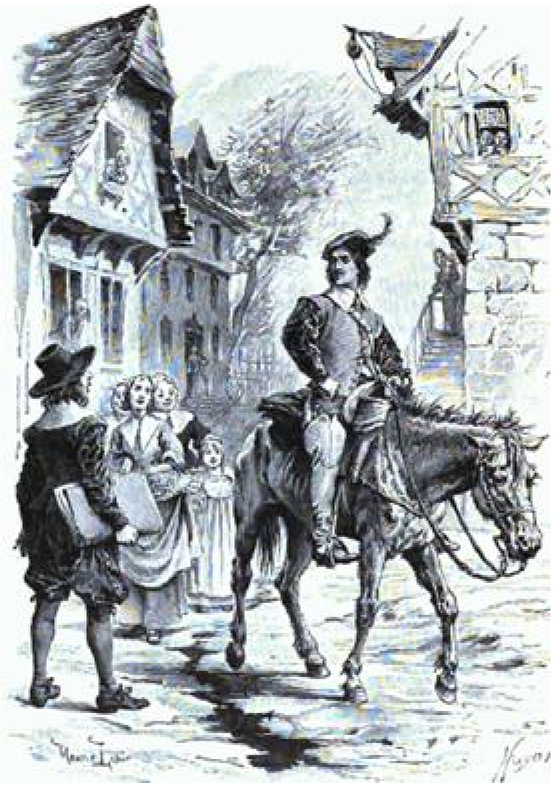

Now, as at the moment in which d’Artagnan fixed his eyes upon the gentleman in the violet doublet, the gentleman made one of his most knowing and profound remarks respecting the Bearnese pony, his two auditors laughed even louder than before, and he himself, though contrary to his custom, allowed a pale smile (if I may allowed to use such an expression) to stray over his countenance. This time there could be no doubt; d’Artagnan was really insulted. Full, then, of this conviction, he pulled his cap down over his eyes, and endeavoring to copy some of the court airs he had picked up in Gascony among young traveling nobles, he advanced with one hand on the hilt of his sword and the other resting on his hip. Unfortunately, as he advanced, his anger increased at every step; and instead of the proper and lofty speech he had prepared as a prelude to his challenge, he found nothing at the tip of his tongue but a gross personality, which he accompanied with a furious gesture.

“I say, sir, you sir, who are hiding yourself behind that shutter--yes, you, sir, tell me what you are laughing at, and we will laugh together!”

The gentleman raised his eyes slowly from the nag to his cavalier, as if he required some time to ascertain whether it could be to him that such strange reproaches were addressed; then, when he could not possibly entertain any doubt of the matter, his eyebrows slightly bent, and with an accent of irony and insolence impossible to be described, he replied to d'Artagnan, "I was not speaking to you, sir."

"But I am speaking to you!" replied the young man, additionally exasperated with this mixture of insolence and good manners, of politeness and scorn.

The stranger looked at him again with a slight smile, and retiring from the window, came out of the hostelry with a slow step, and placed himself before the horse, within two paces of d'Artagnan. His quiet manner and the ironical expression of his countenance redoubled the mirth of the persons with whom he had been talking, and who still remained at the window.

D'Artagnan, seeing him approach, drew his sword a foot out of the scabbard.

"This horse is decidedly, or rather has been in his youth, a buttercup," resumed the stranger, continuing the remarks he had begun, and addressing himself to his auditors at the window, without paying the least attention to the exasperation of d'Artagnan, who, however placed himself between him and them. "It is a color very well known in botany, but till the present time very rare among horses."

"There are people who laugh at the horse that would not dare to laugh at the master," cried the young emulator of the furious Treville.

"I do not often laugh, sir," replied the stranger, "as you may perceive by the expression of my countenance; but nevertheless I retain the privilege of laughing when I please."

"And I," cried d'Artagnan, "will allow no man to laugh when it displeases me!"

"Indeed, sir," continued the stranger, more calm than ever; "well, that is perfectly right!" and turning on his heel, was about to re-enter the hostelry by the front gate, beneath which d'Artagnan on arriving had observed a saddled horse.

But, d'Artagnan was not of a character to allow a man to escape him thus who had the insolence to ridicule him. He drew his sword entirely from the scabbard, and followed him, crying, "Turn, turn, Master Joker, lest I strike you behind!"

"Strike me!" said the other, turning on his heels, and surveying the young man with as much astonishment as contempt. "Why, my good fellow, you must be mad!” Then, in a suppressed tone, as if speaking to himself, “This is annoying,” continued he. “What a godsend this would be for his Majesty, who is seeking everywhere for brave fellows to recruit for his Musketeers!”

He had scarcely finished, when d’Artagnan made such a furious lunge at him that if he had not sprung nimbly backward, it is probable he would have jested for the last time. The stranger, then perceiving that the matter went beyond raillery, drew his sword, saluted his adversary, and seriously placed himself on guard. But at the same moment, his two auditors, accompanied by the host, fell upon d’Artagnan with sticks, shovels and tongs. This caused so rapid and complete a diversion from the attack that d’Artagnan’s adversary, while the latter turned round to face this shower of blows, sheathed his sword with the same precision, and instead of an actor, which he had nearly been, became a spectator of the fight--a part in which he acquitted himself with his usual impassiveness, muttering, nevertheless, “A plague upon these Gascons! Replace him on his orange horse, and let him begone!”

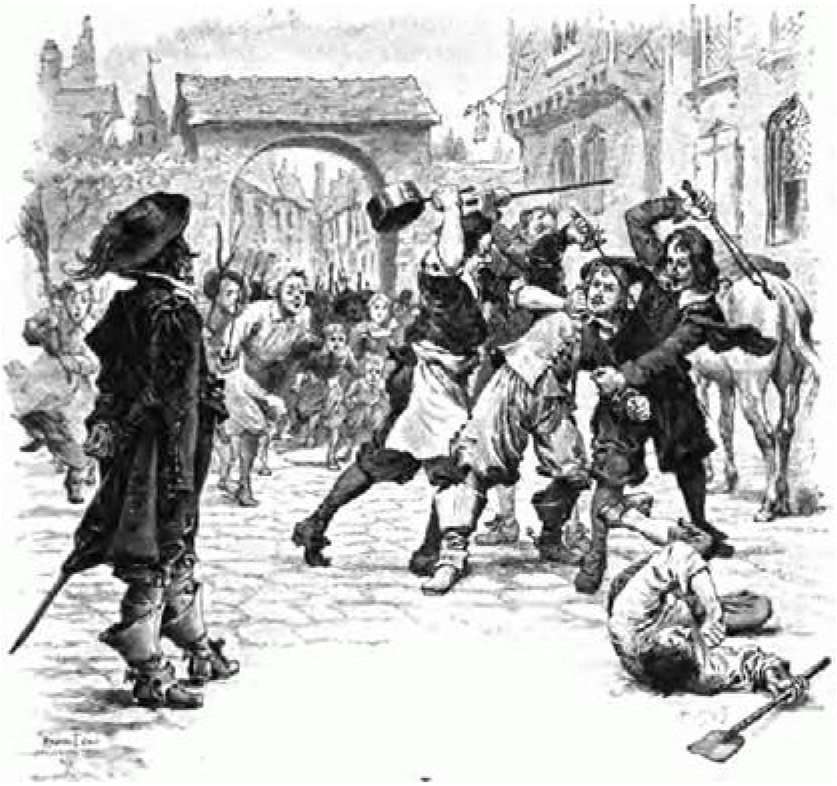

“Not before I have killed you, poltroon!” cried d’Artagnan, making the best face possible, and never retreating one step before his three assailants, who continued to shower blows upon him.

"Another gasconade!" murmured the gentleman. "By my honor, these Gascons are incorrigible! Keep up the dance, then, since he will have it so. When he is tired, he will perhaps tell us that he has had enough of it."

But the stranger knew not the headstrong personage he had to do with; d'Artagnan was not the man ever to cry for quarter. The fight was therefore prolonged for some seconds; but at length d'Artagnan dropped his sword, which was broken in two pieces by the blow of a stick. Another blow full upon his forehead at the same moment brought him to the ground, covered with blood and almost fainting.

It was at this moment that people came flocking to the scene of action from all sides. The host, fearful of consequences, with the help of his servants carried the wounded man into the kitchen, where some trifling attentions were bestowed upon him.

As to the gentleman, he resumed his place at the window, and surveyed the crowd with a certain impatience, evidently annoyed by their remaining undispersed.

"Well, how is it with this madman?" exclaimed he, turning round as the noise of the door announced the entrance of the host, who came in to inquire if he was unhurt.

"Your excellency is safe and sound?" asked the host.

"Oh, yes! Perfectly safe and sound, my good host; and I wish to know what has become of our young man."

"He is better," said the host, "he fainted quite away."

"Indeed!" said the gentleman.

"But before he fainted, he collected all his strength to challenge you, and to defy you while challenging you."

"Why, this fellow must be the devil in person!" cried the stranger.

"Oh, no, your Excellency, he is not the devil," replied the host, with a grin of contempt; "for during his fainting we rummaged his valise and found nothing but a clean shirt and eleven crowns--which however, did not prevent his saying, as he was fainting, that if such a thing had happened in Paris, you should have cause to repent of it at a later period."

"Then," said the stranger coolly, "he must be some prince in disguise."

"I have told you this, good sir," resumed the host, "in order that you may be on your guard."

"Did he name no one in his passion?"

“Yes; he struck his pocket and said, ‘We shall see what Monsieur de Treville will think of this insult offered to his protege.’“

“Monsieur de Treville?” said the stranger, becoming attentive, “he put his hand upon his pocket while pronouncing the name of Monsieur de Treville? Now, my dear host, while your young man was insensible, you did not fail, I am quite sure, to ascertain what that pocket contained. What was there in it?”

“A letter addressed to Monsieur de Treville, captain of the Musketeers.”

“Indeed!”

“Exactly as I have the honor to tell your Excellency.”

The host, who was not endowed with great perspicacity, did not observe the expression which his words had given to the physiognomy of the stranger. The latter rose from the front of the window, upon the sill of which he had leaned with his elbow, and knitted his brow like a man disquieted.

“The devil!” murmured he, between his teeth. “Can Treville have set this Gascon upon me? He is very young; but a sword thrust is a sword thrust, whatever be the age of him who gives it, and a youth is less to be suspected than an older man,” and the stranger fell into a reverie which lasted some minutes. “A weak obstacle is sometimes sufficient to overthrow a great design.

“Host,” said he, “could you not contrive to get rid of this frantic boy for me? In conscience, I cannot kill him; and yet,” added he, with a coldly menacing expression, “he annoys me. Where is he?”

“In my wife’s chamber, on the first flight, where they are dressing his wounds.”

“His things and his bag are with him? Has he taken off his doublet?”

“On the contrary, everything is in the kitchen. But if he annoys you, this young fool--”

“To be sure he does. He causes a disturbance in your hostelry, which respectable people cannot put up with. Go; make out my bill and notify my servant.”

“What, monsieur, will you leave us so soon?”

“You know that very well, as I gave my order to saddle my horse. Have they not obeyed me?”

“It is done; as your Excellency may have observed, your horse is in the great gateway, ready saddled for your departure.”

“That is well; do as I have directed you, then.”

"What the devil!" said the host to himself. "Can he be afraid of this boy?" But an imperious glance from the stranger stopped him short; he bowed humbly and retired.

"It is not necessary for Milady* to be seen by this fellow," continued the stranger. "She will soon pass; she is already late. I had better get on horseback, and go and meet her. I should like, however, to know what this letter addressed to Treville contains."

We are well aware that this term, milady, is only properly used when followed by a family name. But we find it thus in the manuscript, and we do not choose to take upon ourselves to alter it.

And the stranger, muttering to himself, directed his steps toward the kitchen.

In the meantime, the host, who entertained no doubt that it was the presence of the young man that drove the stranger from his hostelry, re-ascended to his wife's chamber, and found d'Artagnan just recovering his senses. Giving him to understand that the police would deal with him pretty severely for having sought a quarrel with a great lord--for the opinion of the host the stranger could be nothing less than a great lord--he insisted that notwithstanding his weakness d'Artagnan should get up and depart as quickly as possible. D'Artagnan, half stupefied, without his doublet, and with his head bound up in a linen cloth, arose then, and urged by the host, began to descend the stairs; but on arriving at the kitchen, the first thing he saw was his antagonist talking calmly at the step of a heavy carriage, drawn by two large Norman horses.

His interlocutor, whose head appeared through the carriage window, was a woman of from twenty to two-and-twenty years. We have already observed with what rapidity d'Artagnan seized the expression of a countenance. He perceived then, at a glance, that this woman was young and beautiful; and her style of beauty struck him more forcibly from its being totally different from that of the southern countries in which d'Artagnan had hitherto resided. She was pale and fair, with long curls falling in profusion over her shoulders, had large, blue, languishing eyes, rosy lips, and hands of alabaster. She was talking with great animation with the stranger.

"His Eminence, then, orders me--" said the lady.

"To return instantly to England, and to inform him as soon as the duke leaves London."

“And as to my other instructions?” asked the fair traveler.

“They are contained in this box, which you will not open until you are on the other side of the Channel.”

“Very well; and you--what will you do?”

“I--I return to Paris.”

“What, without chastising this insolent boy?” asked the lady.

The stranger was about to reply; but at the moment he opened his mouth, d’Artagnan, who had heard all, precipitated himself over the threshold of the door.

“This insolent boy chastises others,” cried he; “and I hope that this time he whom he ought to chastise will not escape him as before.”

“Will not escape him?” replied the stranger, knitting his brow.

“No; before a woman you would dare not fly, I presume?”

“Remember,” said Milady, seeing the stranger lay his hand on his sword, “the least delay may ruin everything.”

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“You are right,” cried the gentleman; “begone then, on your part, and I will depart as quickly on mine.” And bowing to the lady, sprang into his saddle, while her coachman applied his whip vigorously to his horses. The two interlocutors thus separated, taking opposite directions, at full gallop.

“Pay him, booby!” cried the stranger to his servant, without checking the speed of his horse; and the man, after throwing two or three silver pieces at the foot of mine host, galloped after his master.

“Base coward! false gentleman!” cried d’Artagnan, springing forward, in his turn, after the servant. But his wound had rendered him too weak to support such an exertion. Scarcely had he gone ten steps when his ears began to tingle, a faintness seized him, a cloud of blood passed over his eyes, and he fell in the middle of the street, crying still, “Coward! coward! coward!”

“He is a coward, indeed,” grumbled the host, drawing near to d’Artagnan, and endeavoring by this little flattery to make up matters with the young man, as the heron of the fable did with the snail he had despised the evening before.

“Yes, a base coward,” murmured d’Artagnan; “but she--she was very beautiful.”

“What she?” demanded the host.

“Milady,” faltered d’Artagnan, and fainted a second time.

“Ah, it’s all one,” said the host; “I have lost two customers, but this one remains, of whom I am pretty certain for some days to come. There will be eleven crowns gained.”

It is to be remembered that eleven crowns was just the sum that remained in d’Artagnan’s purse.

The host had reckoned upon eleven days of confinement at a crown a day, but he had reckoned without his guest. On the following morning at five o’clock d’Artagnan arose, and descending to the kitchen without help, asked, among other ingredients the list of which has not come down to us, for some oil, some wine, and some rosemary, and with his mother’s recipe in his hand composed a balsam, with which he anointed his numerous wounds, replacing his bandages himself, and positively refusing the assistance of any doctor, d’Artagnan walked about that same evening, and was almost cured by the morrow.

But when the time came to pay for his rosemary, this oil, and the wine, the only expense the master had incurred, as he had preserved a strict abstinence--while on the contrary, the yellow horse, by the account of the hostler at least, had eaten three times as much as a horse of his size could reasonably supposed to have done--d’Artagnan found nothing in his pocket but his little old velvet purse with the eleven crowns it contained; for as to the letter addressed to M. de Treville, it had disappeared.

The young man commenced his search for the letter with the greatest patience, turning out his pockets of all kinds over and over again, rummaging and rerummaging in his valise, and opening and reopening his purse; but when he found that he had come to the conviction that the letter was not to be found, he flew, for the third time, into such a rage as was near costing him a fresh consumption of wine, oil, and rosemary--for upon seeing this hot-headed youth become exasperated and threaten to destroy everything in the establishment if his letter were not found, the host seized a spit, his wife a broom handle, and the servants the same sticks they had used the day before.

“My letter of recommendation!” cried d’Artagnan, “my letter of recommendation! or, the holy blood, I will spit you all like ortolans!”

Unfortunately, there was one circumstance which created a powerful obstacle to the accomplishment of this threat; which was, as we have related, that his sword had been in his first conflict broken in two, and which he had entirely forgotten. Hence, it resulted when d’Artagnan proceeded to draw his sword in earnest, he found himself purely and simply armed with a stump of a sword about eight or ten inches in length, which the host had carefully placed in the scabbard. As to the rest of the blade, the master had slyly put that on one side to make himself a larding pin.

But this deception would probably not have stopped our fiery young man if the host had not reflected that the reclamation which his guest made was perfectly just.

“But, after all,” said he, lowering the point of his spit, “where is this letter?”

“Yes, where is this letter?” cried d’Artagnan. “In the first place, I warn you that that letter is for Monsieur de Treville, and it must be found, he will know how to find it.”

His threat completed the intimidation of the host. After the king and the cardinal, M. de Treville was the man whose name was perhaps most frequently repeated by the military, and even by citizens. There was, to be sure, Father Joseph, but his name was never pronounced but with a subdued voice, such was the terror inspired by his Gray Eminence, as the cardinal’s familiar was called.

Throwing down his spit, and ordering his wife to do the same with her broom handle, and the servants with their sticks, he set the first example of commencing an earnest search for the lost letter.

“Does the letter contain anything valuable?” demanded the host, after a few minutes of useless investigation.

“Zounds! I think it does indeed!” cried the Gascon, who reckoned upon this letter for making his way at court. “It contained my fortune!”

“Bills upon Spain?” asked the disturbed host.

“Bills upon his Majesty’s private treasury,” answered d’Artagnan, who, reckoning upon entering into the king’s service in consequence of this recommendation, believed he could make this somewhat hazardous reply without telling of a falsehood.

“The devil!” cried the host, at his wit’s end.

“But it’s of no importance,” continued d’Artagnan, with natural assurance; “it’s of no importance. The money is nothing; that letter was everything. I would rather have lost a thousand pistoles than have lost it.” He would not have risked more if he had said twenty thousand; but a certain juvenile modesty restrained him.

A ray of light all at once broke upon the mind of the host as he was giving himself to the devil upon finding nothing.

“That letter is not lost!” cried he.

“What!” cried d’Artagnan.

“No, it has been stolen from you.”

“Stolen? By whom?”

“By the gentleman who was here yesterday. He came down into the kitchen, where your doublet was. He remained there some time alone. I would lay a wager he has stolen it.”

“Do you think so?” answered d’Artagnan, but little convinced, as he knew better than anyone else how entirely personal the value of this letter was, and was nothing in it likely to tempt cupidity. The fact was that none of his servants, none of the travelers present, could have gained anything by being possessed of this paper.

“Do you say,” resumed d’Artagnan, “that you suspect that impertinent gentleman?”

“I tell you I am sure of it,” continued the host. “When I informed him that your lordship was the protege of Monsieur de Treville, and that you even had a letter for that illustrious gentleman, he appeared to be very much disturbed, and asked me where that letter was, and immediately came down into the kitchen, where he knew your doublet was."

"Then that's my thief," replied d'Artagnan. "I will complain to Monsieur de Treville, and Monsieur de Treville will complain to the king." He then drew two crowns majestically from his purse and gave them to the host, who accompanied him, cap in hand, to the gate, and remounted his yellow horse, which bore him without any further accident to the gate of St. Antoine at Paris, where his owner sold him for three crowns, which was a very good price, considering that d'Artagnan had ridden him hard during the last stage. Thus the dealer to whom d'Artagnan sold him for the nine livres did not conceal from the young man that he only gave that enormous sum for him on the account of the originality of his color.

Thus d'Artagnan entered Paris on foot, carrying his little packet under his arm, and walked about till he found an apartment to be let on terms suited to the scantiness of his means. This chamber was a sort of garret, situated in the Rue des Fossoyeurs, near the Luxembourg.

As soon as the earnest money was paid, d'Artagnan took possession of his lodging, and passed the remainder of the day in sewing onto his doublet and hose some ornamental braiding which his mother had taken off an almost-new doublet of the elder M. d'Artagnan, and which she had given her son secretly. Next he went to the Quai de Feraille to have a new blade put to his sword, and then returned toward the Louvre, inquiring of the first Musketeer he met for the situation of the hotel of M. de Treville, which proved to be in the Rue du Vieux-Colombier; that is to say, in the immediate vicinity of the chamber hired by d'Artagnan--a circumstance which appeared to furnish a happy augury for the success of his journey.

After this, satisfied with the way in which he had conducted himself at Meung, without remorse for the past, confident in the present, and full of hope for the future, he retired to bed and slept the sleep of the brave.

This sleep, provincial as it was, brought him to nine o'clock in the morning; at which hour he rose, in order to repair to the residence of M. de Treville, the third personage in the kingdom, in the paternal estimation.

[redacted]

CHAPTER 2

THE ANTECHAMBER OF M. DE TREVILLE

M de Troisville, as his family was still called in Gascony, or M. de Treville, as he has ended by styling himself in Paris, had really commenced life as d’Artagnan now did; that is to say, without a sou in his pocket, but with a fund of audacity, shrewdness, and intelligence which makes the poorest Gascon gentleman often derive more in his hope from the paternal inheritance than the richest Perigordian or Berrichan gentleman derives in reality from his. His insolent bravery, his still more insolent success at a time when blows poured down like hail, had borne him to the top of that difficult ladder called Court Favor, which he had climbed four steps at a time.

He was the friend of the king, who honored highly, as everyone knows, the memory of his father, Henry IV. The father of M. de Treville had served him so faithfully in his wars against the league that in default of money--a thing to which the Bearnais was accustomed all his life, and who constantly paid his debts with that of which he never stood in need of borrowing, that is to say, with ready wit--in default of money, we repeat, he authorized him, after the reduction of Paris, to assume for his arms a golden lion passant upon gules, with the motto FIDELIS ET FORTIS. This was a great matter in the way of honor, but very little in the way of wealth; so that when the illustrious companion of the great Henry died, the only inheritance he was able to leave his son was his sword and his motto. Thanks to this double gift and the spotless name that accompanied it, M. de Treville was admitted into the household of the young prince where he made such good use of his sword, and was so faithful to his motto, that Louis XIII, one of the good blades of his kingdom, was accustomed to say that if he had a friend who was about to fight, he would advise him to choose as a second, himself first, and Treville next--or even, perhaps, before himself.

Thus Louis XIII had a real liking for Treville--a royal liking, a self-interested liking, it is true, but still a liking. At that unhappy period it was an important consideration to be surrounded by such men as Treville. Many might take for their device the epithet STRONG, which formed the second part of his motto, but very few gentlemen could lay claim to the FAITHFUL, which constituted the first. Treville was one of these latter. His was one of those rare organizations, endowed with an obedient intelligence like that of the dog; with a blind valor, a quick eye, and a prompt hand; to whom sight appeared only to be given to see if the king were dissatisfied with anyone, and the hand to strike this displeasing personage, whether a Besme, a Maurevers, a Poltiot de Mere, or a Vitry. In short, up to this period nothing had been wanting to Treville but opportunity; but he was ever on the watch for it, and he faithfully promised himself that he would not fail to seize it by its three hairs whenever it came within reach of his hand. At last Louis XIII made Treville the captain of his Musketeers, who were to Louis XIII in devotedness, or rather in fanaticism, what his Ordinaries had been to Henry III, and his Scotch Guard to Louis XI.

On his part, the cardinal was not behind the king in this respect. When he saw the formidable and chosen body with which Louis XIII had surrounded himself, this second, or rather this first king of France, became desirous that he, too, should have his guard. He had his Musketeers therefore, as Louis XIII had his, and these two powerful rivals vied with each other in procuring, not only from all the provinces of France, but even from all foreign states, the most celebrated swordsmen. It was not uncommon for Richelieu and Louis XIII to dispute over their evening game of chess upon the merits of their servants. Each boasted the bearing and the courage of his own people. While exclaiming loudly against duels and brawls, they excited them secretly to quarrel, deriving an immoderate satisfaction or genuine regret from the success or defeat of their own combatants. We learn this from the memoirs of a man who was concerned in some few of these defeats and in many of these victories.

Treville had grasped the weak side of his master; and it was to this address that he owed the long and constant favor of a king who has not left the reputation behind him of being very faithful in his friendships. He paraded his Musketeers before the Cardinal Armand Duplessis with an insolent air which made the gray moustache of his Eminence curl with ire. Treville understood admirably the war method of that period, in which he who could not live at the expense of the enemy must live at the expense of his compatriots. His soldiers formed a legion of devil-may-care fellows, perfectly undisciplined toward all but himself.

Loose, half-drunk, imposing, the king’s Musketeers, or rather M. de Treville’s, spread themselves about in the cabarets, in the public walks, and the public sports, shouting, twisting their mustaches, clanking their swords, and taking great pleasure in annoying the Guards of the cardinal whenever they could fall in with them; then drawing in the open streets, as if it were the best of all possible sports; sometimes killed, but sure in that case to be both wept and avenged; often killing others, but then certain of not rotting in prison, M. de Treville being there to claim them. Thus M. de Treville was praised to the highest note by these men, who adored him, and who, ruffians as they were, trembled before him like scholars before their master, obedient to his least word, and ready to sacrifice themselves to wash out the smallest insult.

M de Treville employed this powerful weapon for the king, in the first place, and the friends of the king--and then for himself and his own friends. For the rest, in the memoirs of this period, which has left so many memoirs, one does not find this worthy gentleman blamed even by his enemies; and he had many such among men of the pen as well as among men of the sword. In no instance, let us say, was this worthy gentleman accused of deriving personal advantage from the cooperation of his minions. Endowed with a rare genius for intrigue which rendered him the equal of the ablest intriguers, he remained an honest man. Still further, in spite of sword thrusts which weaken, and painful exercises which fatigue, he had become one of the most gallant frequenters of revels, one of the most insinuating lady’s men, one of the softest whisperers of interesting nothings of his day; the BONNES FORTUNES of de Treville were talked of as those of M. de Bassompierre had been talked of twenty years before, and that was not saying a little. The captain of the Musketeers was therefore admired, feared, and loved; and this constitutes the zenith of human fortune.

Louis XIV absorbed all the smaller stars of his court in his own vast radiance; but his father, a sun PLURIBUS IMPAR, left his personal splendor to each of his favorites, his individual value to each of his courtiers. In addition to the leeves of the king and the cardinal, there might be reckoned in Paris at that time more than two hundred smaller but still noteworthy leeves. Among these two hundred leeves, that of Treville was one of the most sought.

The court of his hotel, situated in the Rue du Vieux-Colombier, resembled a camp from by six o’clock in the morning in summer and eight o’clock in winter. From fifty to sixty Musketeers, who appeared to replace one another in order always to present an imposing number, paraded constantly, armed to the teeth and ready for anything. On one of those immense staircases, upon whose space modern civilization would build a whole house, ascended and descended the office seekers of Paris, who ran after any sort of favor--gentlemen from the provinces anxious to be enrolled, and servants in all sorts of liveries, bringing and carrying messages between their masters and M. de Treville. In the antechamber, upon long circular benches, reposed the elect; that is to say, those who were called. In this apartment a continued buzzing prevailed from morning till night, while M. de Treville, in his office contiguous to this antechamber, received visits, listened to complaints, gave his orders, and like the king in his balcony at the Louvre, had only to place himself at the window to review both his men and arms.

The day on which d’Artagnan presented himself the assemblage was imposing, particularly for a provincial just arriving from his province. It is true that this provincial was a Gascon; and that, particularly at this period, the compatriots of d’Artagnan had the reputation of not being easily intimidated. When he had once passed the massive door covered with long square-headed nails, he fell into the midst of a troop of swordsmen, who crossed one another in their passage, calling out, quarreling, and playing tricks one with another. In order to make one’s way amid these turbulent and conflicting waves, it was necessary to be an officer, a great noble, or a pretty woman.

It was, then, into the midst of this tumult and disorder that our young man advanced with a beating heat, ranging his long rapier up his lanky leg, and keeping one hand on the edge of his cap, with that half-smile of the embarrassed a provincial who wishes to put on a good face. When he had passed one group he began to breathe more freely; but he could not help observing that they turned round to look at him, and for the first time in his life d’Artagnan, who had till that day entertained a very good opinion of himself, felt ridiculous.

Arrived at the staircase, it was still worse. There were four Musketeers on the bottom steps, amusing themselves with the following exercise, while ten or twelve of their comrades waited upon the landing place to take their turn in the sport.

One of them, stationed upon the top stair, naked sword in hand, prevented, or at least endeavored to prevent, the three others from ascending.

These three others fenced against him with their agile swords.

D'Artagnan at first took these weapons for foils, and believed them to be buttoned; but he soon perceived by certain scratches that every weapon was pointed and sharpened, and that at each of these scratches not only the spectators, but even the actors themselves, laughed like so many madmen.

He who at the moment occupied the upper step kept his adversaries marvelously in check. A circle was formed around them. The conditions required that at every hit the man touched should quit the game, yielding his turn for the benefit of the adversary who had hit him. In five minutes three were slightly wounded, one on the hand, another on the ear, by the defender of the stair, who himself remained intact--a piece of skill which was worth to him, according to the rules agreed upon, three turns of favor.

However difficult it might be, or rather as he pretended it was, to astonish our young traveler, this pastime really astonished him. He had seen in his province--that land in which heads become so easily heated--a few of the preliminaries of duels; but the daring of these four fencers appeared to him the strongest he had ever heard of even in Gascony. He believed himself transported into that famous country of giants into which Gulliver afterward went and was so frightened; and yet he had not gained the goal, for there were still the landing place and the antechamber.

On the landing they were no longer fighting, but amused themselves with stories about women, and in the antechamber, with stories about the court. On the landing d'Artagnan blushed; in the antechamber he trembled. His warm and fickle imagination, which in Gascony had rendered formidable to young chambermaids, and even sometimes their mistresses, had never dreamed, even in moments of delirium, of half the amorous wonders or a quarter of the feats of gallantry which were here set forth in connection with names the best known and with details the least concealed. But if his morals were shocked on the landing, his respect for the cardinal was scandalized in the antechamber. There, to his great astonishment, d'Artagnan heard the policy which made all Europe tremble criticized aloud and openly, as well as the private life of the cardinal, which so many great nobles had been punished for trying to pry into. That great man who was so revered by d'Artagnan the elder served as an object of ridicule to the Musketeers of

Treville, who cracked their jokes upon his bandy legs and his crooked back. Some sang ballads about Mme. d’Aguillon, his mistress, and Mme. Cambalet, his niece; while others formed parties and plans to annoy the pages and guards of the cardinal duke--all things which appeared to d’Artagnan monstrous impossibilities.

Nevertheless, when the name of the king was now and then uttered unthinkingly amid all these cardinal jests, a sort of gag seemed to close for a moment on all these jeering mouths. They looked hesitatingly around them, and appeared to doubt the thickness of the partition between them and the office of M. de Treville; but a fresh allusion soon brought back the conversation to his Eminence, and then the laughter recovered its loudness and the light was not withheld from any of his actions.

“Certes, these fellows will all either be imprisoned or hanged,” thought the terrified d’Artagnan, “and I, no doubt, with them; for from the moment I have either listened to or heard them, I shall be held as an accomplice. What would my good father say, who so strongly pointed out to me the respect due to the cardinal, if he knew I was in the society of such pagans?”

We have no need, therefore, to say that d’Artagnan dared not join in the conversation, only he looked with all his eyes and listened with all his ears, stretching his five senses so as to lose nothing; and despite his confidence on the paternal admonitions, he felt himself carried by his tastes and led by his instincts to praise rather than to blame the unheard-of things which were taking place.

Although he was a perfect stranger in the court of M. de Treville’s courtiers, and this his first appearance in that place, he was at length noticed, and somebody came and asked him what he wanted. At this demand d’Artagnan gave his name very modestly, emphasized the title of compatriot, and begged the servant who had put the question to him to request a moment’s audience of M. de Treville--a request which the other, with an air of protection, promised to transmit in due season.

D’Artagnan, a little recovered from his first surprise, had now leisure to study costumes and physiognomy.

The center of the most animated group was a Musketeer of great height and haughty countenance, dressed in a costume so peculiar as to attract general attention. He did not wear the uniform cloak--which was not obligatory at that epoch of less liberty but more independence--but a cerulean-blue doublet, a little faded and worn, and over this a magnificent baldric, worked in gold, which shone like water ripples in the sun. A long cloak of crimson velvet fell in graceful folds from his shoulders, disclosing in front the splendid baldric, from which was suspended a gigantic rapier. This Musketeer had just come off guard, complained of having a cold, and coughed from time to time affectedly. It was for this reason, as he said to those around him, that he had put on his cloak; and while he spoke with a lofty air and twisted his mustache disdainfully, all admired his embroidered baldric, and d'Artagnan more than anyone.

"What would you have?" said the Musketeer. "This fashion is coming in. It is a folly, I admit, but still it is the fashion. Besides, one must lay out one's inheritance somehow."

"Ah, Porthos!" cried one of his companions, "don't try to make us believe you obtained that baldric by paternal generosity. It was given to you by that veiled lady I met you with the other Sunday, near the gate St. Honor."

"No, upon honor and by the faith of a gentleman, I bought it with the contents of my own purse," answered he whom they designated by the name Porthos.

"Yes; about in the same manner," said another Musketeer, "that I bought this new purse with what my mistress put into the old one."

"It's true, though," said Porthos; "and the proof is that I paid twelve pistoles for it."

The wonder was increased, though the doubt continued to exist.

"Is it not true, Aramis?" said Porthos, turning toward another Musketeer.

This other Musketeer formed a perfect contrast to his interrogator, who had just designated him by the name of Aramis. He was a stout man, of about two- or three-and-twenty, with an open, ingenuous countenance, a black, mild eye, and cheeks rosy and downy as an autumn peach. His delicate mustache marked a perfectly straight line upon his upper lip; he appeared to dread to lower his hands lest their veins should swell, and he pinched the tips of his ears from time to time to preserve their delicate pink transparency. Habitually he spoke little and slowly, bowed frequently, laughed without noise, showing his teeth, which were fine and of which, as the rest of his person, he appeared to take great care. He answered the appeal of his friend by an affirmative nod of the head.

This affirmation appeared to dispel all doubts with regard to the baldric. They continued to admire it, but said no more about it; and with a rapid change of thought, the conversation passed suddenly to another subject.

“What do you think of the story Chalais’s esquire relates?” asked another Musketeer, without addressing anyone in particular, but on the contrary speaking to everybody.

“And what does he say?” asked Porthos, in a self-sufficient tone.

“He relates that he met at Brussels Rochefort, the AME DAMNEE of the cardinal disguised as a Capuchin, and that this cursed Rochefort, thanks to his disguise, had tricked Monsieur de Laigues, like a ninny as he is.”

“A ninny, indeed!” said Porthos; “but is the matter certain?”

“I had it from Aramis,” replied the Musketeer.

“Indeed?”

“Why, you knew it, Porthos,” said Aramis. “I told you of it yesterday. Let us say no more about it.”

“Say no more about it? That’s YOUR opinion!” replied Porthos.

“Say no more about it! PESTE! You come to your conclusions quickly. What! The cardinal sets a spy upon a gentleman, has his letters stolen from him by means of a traitor, a brigand, a rascal-has, with the help of this spy and thanks to this correspondence, Chalais’s throat cut, under the stupid pretext that he wanted to kill the king and marry Monsieur to the queen! Nobody knew a word of this enigma. You unraveled it yesterday to the great satisfaction of all; and while we are still gaping with wonder at the news, you come and tell us today, ‘Let us say no more about it.’“

“Well, then, let us talk about it, since you desire it,” replied Aramis, patiently.

“This Rochefort,” cried Porthos, “if I were the esquire of poor Chalais, should pass a minute or two very uncomfortably with me.”

“And you--you would pass rather a sad quarter-hour with the Red Duke,” replied Aramis.

“Oh, the Red Duke! Bravo! Bravo! The Red Duke!” cried Porthos, clapping his hands and nodding his head. “The Red Duke is capital. I’ll circulate that saying, be assured, my dear fellow. Who says this Aramis is not a wit? What a misfortune it is you did not follow your first vocation; what a delicious abbe you would have made!”

“Oh, it’s only a temporary postponement,” replied Aramis; “I shall be one someday. You very well know, Porthos, that I continue to study theology for that purpose.”

“He will be one, as he says,” cried Porthos; “he will be one, sooner or later.”

“Sooner.” said Aramis.

“He only waits for one thing to determine him to resume his cassock, which hangs behind his uniform,” said another Musketeer.

“What is he waiting for?” asked another.

“Only till the queen has given an heir to the crown of France.”

“No jesting upon that subject, gentlemen,” said Porthos; “thank God the queen is still of an age to give one!”

“They say that Monsieur de Buckingham is in France,” replied Aramis, with a significant smile which gave to this sentence, apparently so simple, a tolerably scandalous meaning.

“Aramis, my good friend, this time you are wrong,” interrupted Porthos. “Your wit is always leading you beyond bounds; if Monsieur de Treville heard you, you would repent of speaking thus.”

“Are you going to give me a lesson, Porthos?” cried Aramis, from whose usually mild eye a flash passed like lightning.

“My dear fellow, be a Musketeer or an abbe. Be one or the other, but not both,” replied Porthos. “You know what Athos told you the other day; you eat at everybody’s mess. Ah, don’t be angry, I beg of you, that would be useless; you know what is agreed upon between you, Athos and me. You go to Madame d’Aguillon’s, and you pay your court to her; you go to Madame de Bois-Tracy’s, the cousin of Madame de Chevreuse, and you pass for being far advanced in the good graces of that lady. Oh, good Lord! Don’t trouble yourself to reveal your good luck; no one asks for your secret-all the world knows your discretion. But since you possess that virtue, why the devil don’t you make use of it with respect to her Majesty? Let whoever likes talk of the king and the cardinal, and how he likes; but the queen is sacred, and if anyone speaks of her, let it be respectfully.”

“Porthos, you are as vain as Narcissus; I plainly tell you so,” replied Aramis. “You know I hate moralizing, except when it is done by Athos. As to you, good sir, you wear too magnificent a baldric to be strong on that head. I will be an abbe if it suits me. In the meanwhile I am a Musketeer; in that quality I say what I please, and at this moment it pleases me to say that you weary me.”

“Aramis!”

“Porthos!”

“Gentlemen! Gentlemen!” cried the surrounding group.

“Monsieur de Treville awaits Monsieur d’Artagnan,” cried a servant, throwing open the door of the cabinet.

At this announcement, during which the door remained open, everyone became mute, and amid the general silence the young man crossed part of the length of the antechamber, and entered the apartment of the captain of the Musketeers, congratulating himself with all his heart at having so narrowly escaped the end of this strange quarrel.

CHAPTER 3

THE AUDIENCE

M de Treville was at the moment in rather ill-humor, nevertheless he saluted the young man politely, who bowed to the very ground; and he smiled on receiving d’Artagnan’s response, the Bearnese accent of which recalled to him at the same time his youth and his country--a double remembrance which makes a man smile at all ages; but stepping toward the antechamber and making a sign to d’Artagnan with his hand, as if to ask his permission to finish with others before he began with him, he called three times, with a louder voice at each time, so that he ran through the intervening tones between the imperative accent and the angry accent.

“Athos! Porthos! Aramis!”

The two Musketeers with whom we have already made acquaintance, and who answered to the last of these three names, immediately quitted the group of which they had formed a part, and advanced toward the cabinet, the door of which closed after them as soon as they had entered. Their appearance, although it was not quite at ease, excited by its carelessness, at once full of dignity and submission, the admiration of d’Artagnan, who beheld in these two men demigods, and in their leader an Olympian Jupiter, armed with all his thunders.

When the two Musketeers had entered; when the door was closed behind them; when the buzzing murmur of the antechamber, to which the summons which had been made had doubtless furnished fresh food, had recommenced; when M. de Treville had three or four times paced in silence, and with a frowning brow, the whole length of his cabinet, passing each time before Porthos and Aramis, who were as upright and silent as if on parade--he stopped all at once full in front of them, and covering them from head to foot with an angry look, “Do you know what the king said to me,” cried he, “and that no longer ago than yesterday evening--do you know, gentlemen?”

“No,” replied the two Musketeers, after a moment’s silence, “no, sir, we do not.”

"But I hope that you will do us the honor to tell us," added Aramis, in his politest tone and with his most graceful bow.

"He told me that he should henceforth recruit his Musketeers from among the Guards of Monsieur the Cardinal."

"The Guards of the cardinal! And why so?" asked Porthos, warmly.

"Because he plainly perceives that his piquette* stands in need of being enlivened by a mixture of good wine."

A watered liquor, made from the second pressing of the grape.

The two Musketeers reddened to the whites of their eyes. d'Artagnan did not know where he was, and wished himself a hundred feet underground.

"Yes, yes," continued M. de Treville, growing warmer as he spoke, "and his majesty was right; for, upon my honor, it is true that the Musketeers make but a miserable figure at court. The cardinal related yesterday while playing with the king, with an air of condolence very displeasing to me, that the day before yesterday those DAMNED MUSKETEERS, those DAREDEVILS--he dwelt upon those words with an ironical tone still more displeasing to me--those BRAGGARTS, added he, glancing at me with his tiger-cat's eye, had made a riot in the Rue Ferou in a cabaret, and that a party of his Guards (I thought he was going to laugh in my face) had been forced to arrest the rioters! MORBLEU! You must know something about it. Arrest Musketeers! You were among them--you were! Don't deny it; you were recognized, and the cardinal named you. But it's all my fault; yes, it's all my fault, because it is myself who selects my men. You, Aramis, why the devil did you ask me for a uniform when you would have been so much better in a cassock? And you, Porthos, do you only wear such a fine golden baldric to suspend a sword of straw from it? And Athos--I don't see Athos. Where is he?"

"Ill--"

"Very ill, say you? And of what malady?"

"It is feared that it may be the smallpox, sir," replied Porthos, desirous of taking his turn in the conversation; "and what is serious is that it will certainly spoil his face."

"The smallpox! That's a great story to tell me, Porthos! Sick of the smallpox at his age! No, no; but wounded without doubt, killed, perhaps. Ah, if I knew! S'blood! Messieurs Musketeers, I will not have this haunting of bad places, this quarreling in the streets, this swordplay at the crossways; and above all, I will not have occasion given for the cardinal's Guards, who are brave, quiet, skillful men who never put themselves in a position to be arrested, and who, besides, never allow themselves to be arrested, to laugh at you! I am sure of it--they would prefer dying on the spot to being arrested or taking back a step. To save yourselves, to scamper away, to flee--that is good for the king's Musketeers!"

Porthos and Aramis trembled with rage. They could willingly have strangled M. de Treville, if, at the bottom of all this, they had not felt it was the great love he bore them which made him speak thus. They stamped upon the carpet with their feet; they bit their lips till the blood came, and grasped the hilts of their swords with all their might. All without had heard, as we have said, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis called, and had guessed, from M. de Treville's tone of voice, that he was very angry about something. Ten curious heads were glued to the tapestry and became pale with fury; for their ears, closely applied to the door, did not lose a syllable of what he said, while their mouths repeated as he went on, the insulting expressions of the captain to all the people in the antechamber. In an instant, from the door of the cabinet to the street gate, the whole hotel was boiling.

"Ah! The king's Musketeers are arrested by the Guards of the cardinal, are they?" continued M. de Treville, as furious at heart as his soldiers, but emphasizing his words and plunging them, one by one, so to say, like so many blows of a stiletto, into the bosoms of his auditors. "What! Six of his Eminence's Guards arrest six of his Majesty's Musketeers! MORBLEU! My part is taken! I will go straight to the louvre; I will give in my resignation as captain of the king's Musketeers to take a lieutenancy in the cardinal's Guards, and if he refuses me, MORBLEU! I will turn abbe."

At these words, the murmur without became an explosion; nothing was to be heard but oaths and blasphemies. The MORBLEUS, the SANG DIEUS, the MORTS TOUTS LES DIABLES, crossed one another in the air. D'Artagnan looked for some tapestry behind which he might hide himself, and felt an immense inclination to crawl under the table.

"Well, my Captain," said Porthos, quite beside himself, "the truth is that we were six against six. But we were not captured by fair means; and before we had time to draw our swords, two of our party were dead, and Athos, grievously wounded, was very little better. For you know Athos. Well, Captain, he endeavored twice to get up, and fell again twice. And we did not surrender--no! They dragged us away by force. On the way we escaped. As for Athos, they believed him to be dead, and left him very quiet on the field of battle, not thinking it worth the trouble to carry him away. That’s the whole story. What the devil, Captain, one cannot win all one’s battles! The great Pompey lost that of Pharsalia; and Francis the First, who was, as I have heard say, as good as other folks, nevertheless lost the Battle of Pavia.”

“And I have the honor of assuring you that I killed one of them with his own sword,” said Aramis; “for mine was broken at the first parry. Killed him, or poniarded him, sir, as is most agreeable to you.”

“I did not know that,” replied M. de Treville, in a somewhat softened tone. “The cardinal exaggerated, as I perceive.”

“But pray, sir,” continued Aramis, who, seeing his captain become appeased, ventured to risk a prayer, “do not say that Athos is wounded. He would be in despair if that should come to the ears of the king; and as the wound is very serious, seeing that after crossing the shoulder it penetrates into the chest, it is to be feared--”

At this instant the tapestry was raised and a noble and handsome head, but frightfully pale, appeared under the fringe.

“Athos!” cried the two Musketeers.

“Athos!” repeated M. de Treville himself.

“You have sent for me, sir,” said Athos to M. de Treville, in a feeble yet perfectly calm voice, “you have sent for me, as my comrades inform me, and I have hastened to receive your orders. I am here; what do you want with me?”

And at these words, the Musketeer, in irreproachable costume, belted as usual, with a tolerably firm step, entered the cabinet. M. de Treville, moved to the bottom of his heart by this proof of courage, sprang toward him.

“I was about to say to these gentlemen,” added he, “that I forbid my Musketeers to expose their lives needlessly; for brave men are very dear to the king, and the king knows that his Musketeers are the bravest on the earth. Your hand, Athos!”

And without waiting for the answer of the newcomer to this proof of affection, M. de Treville seized his right hand and pressed it with all his might, without perceiving that Athos, whatever might be his self-command, allowed a slight murmur of pain to escape him, and if possible, grew paler than he was before.

The door had remained open, so strong was the excitement produced by the arrival of Athos, whose wound, though kept as a secret, was known to all. A burst of satisfaction hailed the last words of the captain; and two or three heads, carried away by the enthusiasm of the moment, appeared through the openings of the tapestry. M. de Treville was about to reprehend this breach of the rules of etiquette, when he felt the hand of Athos, who had rallied all his energies to contend against pain, at length overcome by it, fell upon the floor as if he were dead.

“A surgeon!” cried M. de Treville, “mine! The king’s! The best! A surgeon! Or, s’blood, my brave Athos will die!”

At the cries of M. de Treville, the whole assemblage rushed into the cabinet, he not thinking to shut the door against anyone, and all crowded round the wounded man. But all this eager attention might have been useless if the doctor so loudly called for had not chanced to be in the hotel. He pushed through the crowd, approached Athos, still insensible, and as all this noise and commotion inconvenienced him greatly, he required, as the first and most urgent thing, that the Musketeer should be carried into an adjoining chamber. Immediately M. de Treville opened and pointed the way to Porthos and Aramis, who bore their comrade in their arms. Behind this group walked the surgeon; and behind the surgeon the door closed.

The cabinet of M. de Treville, generally held so sacred, became in an instant the annex of the antechamber. Everyone spoke, harangued, and vociferated, swearing, cursing, and consigning the cardinal and his Guards to all the devils.

An instant after, Porthos and Aramis re-entered, the surgeon and M. de Treville alone remaining with the wounded.

At length, M. de Treville himself returned. The injured man had recovered his senses. The surgeon declared that the situation of the Musketeer had nothing in it to render his friends uneasy, his weakness having been purely and simply caused by loss of blood.

Then M. de Treville made a sign with his hand, and all retired except d'Artagnan, who did not forget that he had an audience, and with the tenacity of a Gascon remained in his place.

When all had gone out and the door was closed, M. de Treville, on turning round, found himself alone with the young man. The event which had occurred had in some degree broken the thread of his ideas. He inquired what was the will of his persevering visitor. d'Artagnan then repeated his name, and in an instant recovering all his remembrances of the present and the past, M. de Treville grasped the situation.

"Pardon me," said he, smiling, "pardon me my dear compatriot, but I had wholly forgotten you. But what help is there for it! A captain is nothing but a father of a family, charged with even a greater responsibility than the father of an ordinary family. Soldiers are big children; but as I maintain that the orders of the king, and more particularly the orders of the cardinal, should be executed--"

D'Artagnan could not restrain a smile. By this smile M. de Treville judged that he had not to deal with a fool, and changing the conversation, came straight to the point.

"I respected your father very much," said he. "What can I do for the son? Tell me quickly; my time is not my own."

"Monsieur," said d'Artagnan, "on quitting Tarbes and coming hither, it was my intention to request of you, in remembrance of the friendship which you have not forgotten, the uniform of a Musketeer; but after all that I have seen during the last two hours, I comprehend that such a favor is enormous, and tremble lest I should not merit it."

"It is indeed a favor, young man," replied M. de Treville, "but it may not be so far beyond your hopes as you believe, or rather as you appear to believe. But his majesty's decision is always necessary; and I inform you with regret that no one becomes a Musketeer without the preliminary ordeal of several campaigns, certain brilliant actions, or a service of two years in some other regiment less favored than ours."

D'Artagnan bowed without replying, feeling his desire to don the Musketeer's uniform vastly increased by the great difficulties which preceded the attainment of it.

"But," continued M. de Treville, fixing upon his compatriot a look so piercing that it might be said he wished to read the thoughts of his heart, "on account of my old companion, your father, as I have said, I will do something for you, young man. Our recruits from Bearn are not generally very rich, and I have no reason to think matters have much changed in this respect since I left the province. I dare say you have not brought too large a stock of money with you?"

D'Artagnan drew himself up with a proud air which plainly said, "I ask alms of no man."

"Oh, that's very well, young man," continued M. de Treville, "that's all very well. I know these airs; I myself came to Paris with four crowns in my purse, and would have fought with anyone who dared to tell me I was not in a condition to purchase the Louvre."

D'Artagnan's bearing became still more imposing. Thanks to the sale of his horse, he commenced his career with four more crowns than M. de Treville possessed at the commencement of his.

"You ought, I say, then, to husband the means you have, however large the sum may be; but you ought also to endeavor to perfect yourself in the exercises becoming a gentleman. I will write a letter today to the Director of the Royal Academy, and tomorrow he will admit you without any expense to yourself. Do not refuse this little service. Our best-born and richest gentlemen sometimes solicit it without being able to obtain it. You will learn horsemanship, swordsmanship in all its branches, and dancing. You will make some desirable acquaintances; and from time to time you can call upon me, just to tell me how you are getting on, and to say whether I can be of further service to you."

D'Artagnan, stranger as he was to all the manners of a court, could not but perceive a little coldness in this reception.

"Alas, sir," said he, "I cannot but perceive how sadly I miss the letter of introduction which my father gave me to present to you."

“I certainly am surprised,” replied M. de Treville, “that you should undertake so long a journey without that necessary passport, the sole resource of us poor Bearnese.”

“I had one, sir, and, thank God, such as I could wish,” cried d’Artagnan; “but it was perfidiously stolen from me.”

He then related the adventure of Meung, described the unknown gentleman with the greatest minuteness, and all with a warmth and truthfulness that delighted M. de Treville.

“This is all very strange,” said M. de Treville, after meditating a minute; “you mentioned my name, then, aloud?”

“Yes, sir, I certainly committed that imprudence; but why should I have done otherwise? A name like yours must be as a buckler to me on my way. Judge if I should not put myself under its protection.”

Flattery was at that period very current, and M. de Treville loved incense as well as a king, or even a cardinal. He could not refrain from a smile of visible satisfaction; but this smile soon disappeared, and returning to the adventure of Meung, “Tell me,” continued he, “had not this gentlemen a slight scar on his cheek?”

“Yes, such a one as would be made by the grazing of a ball.”

“Was he not a fine-looking man?”

“Yes.”

“Of lofty stature.”

“Yes.”

“Of complexion and brown hair?”

“Yes, yes, that is he; how is it, sir, that you are acquainted with this man? If I ever find him again--and I will find him, I swear, were it in hell!”

“He was waiting for a woman,” continued Treville.

“He departed immediately after having conversed for a minute with her whom he awaited.”

“You know not the subject of their conversation?”

“He gave her a box, told her not to open it except in London.”

“Was this woman English?”

“He called her Milady.”

“It is he; it must be he!” murmured Treville. “I believed him still at Brussels.”

“Oh, sir, if you know who this man is,” cried d’Artagnan, “tell me who he is, and whence he is. I will then release you from all your promises--

even that of procuring my admission into the Musketeers; for before everything, I wish to avenge myself.”

“Beware, young man!” cried Treville. “If you see him coming on one side of the street, pass by on the other. Do not cast yourself against such a rock; he would break you like glass.”

“That will not prevent me,” replied d’Artagnan, “if ever I find him.”

“In the meantime,” said Treville, “seek him not--if I have a right to advise you.”

All at once the captain stopped, as if struck by a sudden suspicion. This great hatred which the young traveler manifested so loudly for this man, who--a rather improbable thing--had stolen his father’s letter from him--was there not some perfidy concealed under this hatred? Might not this young man be sent by his Eminence? Might he not have come for the purpose of laying a snare for him? This pretended d’Artagnan--was he not an emissary of the cardinal, whom the cardinal sought to introduce into Treville’s house, to place near him, to win his confidence, and afterward to ruin him as had been done in a thousand other instances? He fixed his eyes upon d’Artagnan even more earnestly than before. He was moderately reassured however, by the aspect of that countenance, full of astute intelligence and affected humility. “I know he is a Gascon,” reflected he, “but he may be one for the cardinal as well as for me. Let us try him.”

“My friend,” said he, slowly, “I wish, as the son of an ancient friend--for I consider this story of the lost letter perfectly true--I wish, I say, in order to repair the coldness you may have remarked in my reception of you, to discover to you the secrets of our policy. The king and the cardinal are the best of friends; their apparent bickerings are only feints to deceive fools. I am not willing that a compatriot, a handsome cavalier, a brave youth, quite fit to make his way, should become the dupe of all these artifices and fall into the snare after the example of so many others who have been ruined by it. Be assured that I am devoted to both these all-powerful masters, and that my earnest endeavors have no other aim than the service of the king, and also the cardinal--one of the most illustrious geniuses that France has ever produced.

“Now, young man, regulate your conduct accordingly; and if you entertain, whether from your family, your relations, or even from your instincts, any of these enmities which we see constantly breaking out against the cardinal, bid me adieu and let us separate. I will aid you in many ways, but without attaching you to my person. I hope that my frankness at least will make you my friend; for you are the only young man to whom I have hitherto spoken as I have done to you.”

Treville said to himself: “If the cardinal has set this young fox upon me, he will certainly not have failed--he, who knows how bitterly I execrate him--to tell his spy that the best means of making his court to me is to rail at him. Therefore, in spite of all my protestations, if it be as I suspect, my cunning gossip will assure me that he holds his Eminence in horror.”

It, however, proved otherwise. D’Artagnan answered, with the greatest simplicity: “I came to Paris with exactly such intentions. My father advised me to stoop to nobody but the king, the cardinal, and yourself--whom he considered the first three personages in France.”

D’Artagnan added M. de Treville to the others, as may be perceived; but he thought this addition would do no harm.

“I have the greatest veneration for the cardinal,” continued he, “and the most profound respect for his actions. So much the better for me, sir, if you speak to me, as you say, with frankness--for then you will do me the honor to esteem the resemblance of our opinions; but if you have entertained any doubt, as naturally you may, I feel that I am ruining myself by speaking the truth. But I still trust you will not esteem me the less for it, and that is my object beyond all others.”

M de Treville was surprised to the greatest degree. So much penetration, so much frankness, created admiration, but did not entirely remove his suspicions. The more this young man was superior to others, the more he was to be dreaded if he meant to deceive him; “You are an honest youth; but at the present moment I can only do for you that which I just now offered. My hotel will be always open to you. Hereafter, being able to ask for me at all hours, and consequently to take advantage of all opportunities, you will probably obtain that which you desire.”

“That is to say,” replied d’Artagnan, “that you will wait until I have proved myself worthy of it. Well, be assured,” added he, with the familiarity of a Gascon, “you shall not wait long.” And he bowed in order to retire, and as if he considered the future in his own hands.

“But wait a minute,” said M. de Treville, stopping him. “I promised you a letter for the director of the Academy. Are you too proud to accept it, young gentleman?”

“No, sir,” said d’Artagnan; “and I will guard it so carefully that I will be sworn it shall arrive at its address, and woe be to him who shall attempt to take it from me!”

M de Treville smiled at this flourish; and leaving his young man compatriot in the embrasure of the window, where they had talked together, he seated himself at a table in order to write the promised letter of recommendation. While he was doing this, d’Artagnan, having no better employment, amused himself with beating a march upon the window and with looking at the Musketeers, who went away, one after another, following them with his eyes until they disappeared.

M de Treville, after having written the letter, sealed it, and rising, approached the young man in order to give it to him. But at the very moment when d’Artagnan stretched out his hand to receive it, M. de Treville was highly astonished to see his protege make a sudden spring, become crimson with passion, and rush from the cabinet crying, “S’blood, he shall not escape me this time!”

“And who?” asked M. de Treville.

“He, my thief!” replied d’Artagnan. “Ah, the traitor!” and he disappeared.

“The devil take the madman!” murmured M. de Treville, “unless,” added he, “this is a cunning mode of escaping, seeing that he had failed in his purpose!”

CHAPTER 4

THE SHOULDER OF ATHOS, THE BALDRIC OF PORTHOS AND THE HANDKERCHIEF OF ARAMIS

D’Artagnan, in a state of fury, crossed the antechamber at three bounds, and was darting toward the stairs, which he reckoned upon descending four at a time, when, in his heedless course, he ran head foremost against a Musketeer who was coming out of one of M. de Treville’s private rooms, and striking his shoulder violently, made him utter a cry, or rather a howl.

“Excuse me,” said d’Artagnan, endeavoring to resume his course, “excuse me, but I am in a hurry.”

Scarcely had he descended the first stair, when a hand of iron seized him by the belt and stopped him.

“You are in a hurry?” said the Musketeer, as pale as a sheet. “Under that pretense you run against me! You say. ‘Excuse me,’ and you believe that is sufficient? Not at all my young man. Do you fancy because you have heard Monsieur de Treville speak to us a little cavalierly today that other people are to treat us as he speaks to us? Undeceive yourself, comrade, you are not Monsieur de Treville.”

“My faith!” replied d’Artagnan, recognizing Athos, who, after the dressing performed by the doctor, was returning to his own apartment. “I did not do it intentionally, and not doing it intentionally, I said ‘Excuse me.’ It appears to me that this is quite enough. I repeat to you, however, and this time on my word of honor--I think perhaps too often--that I am in haste, great haste. Leave your hold, then, I beg of you, and let me go where my business calls me.”

“Monsieur,” said Athos, letting him go, “you are not polite; it is easy to perceive that you come from a distance.”

D’Artagnan had already strode down three or four stairs, but at Athos’s last remark he stopped short.

“MORBLEU, monsieur!” said he, “however far I may come, it is not you who can give me a lesson in good manners, I warn you.”

“Perhaps,” said Athos.

“Ah! If I were not in such haste, and if I were not running after someone,” said d’Artagnan.

“Monsieur Man-in-a-hurry, you can find me without running--ME, you understand?”

“And where, I pray you?”

“Near the Carmes-Deschaux.”

“At what hour?”

“About noon.”

“About noon? That will do; I will be there.”

“Endeavor not to make me wait; for at quarter past twelve I will cut off your ears as you run.”

“Good!” cried d’Artagnan, “I will be there ten minutes before twelve.” And he set off running as if the devil possessed him, hoping that he might yet find the stranger, whose slow pace could not have carried him far.

But at the street gate, Porthos was talking with the soldier on guard. Between the two talkers there was just enough room for a man to pass. D’Artagnan thought it would suffice for him, and he sprang forward like a dart between them. But d’Artagnan had reckoned without the wind. As he was about to pass, the wind blew out Porthos’s long cloak, and d’Artagnan rushed straight into the middle of it. Without doubt, Porthos had reasons for not abandoning this part of his vestments, for instead of quitting his hold on the flap in his hand, he pulled it toward him, so that d’Artagnan rolled himself up in the velvet by a movement of rotation explained by the persistency of Porthos.

D’Artagnan, hearing the Musketeer swear, wished to escape from the cloak, which blinded him, and sought to find his way from under the folds of it. He was particularly anxious to avoid marring the freshness of the magnificent baldric we are acquainted with; but on timidly opening his eyes, he found himself with his nose fixed between the two shoulders of Porthos--that is to say, exactly upon the baldric.

Alas, like most things in this world which have nothing in their favor but appearances, the baldric was glittering with gold in the front, but was nothing but simple buff behind. Vainglorious as he was, Porthos could not afford to have a baldric wholly of gold, but had at least half. One could comprehend the necessity of the cold and the urgency of the cloak.

“Bless me!” cried Porthos, making strong efforts to disembarrass himself of d’Artagnan, who was wriggling about his back; “you must be mad to run against people in this manner.”

“Excuse me,” said d’Artagnan, reappearing under the shoulder of the giant, “but I am in such haste--I was running after someone and--”

“And do you always forget your eyes when you run?” asked Porthos.

“No,” replied d’Artagnan, piqued, “and thanks to my eyes, I can see what other people cannot see.”

Whether Porthos understood him or did not understand him, giving way to his anger, “Monsieur,” said he, “you stand a chance of getting chastised if you rub Musketeers in this fashion.”

[redacted]

“Chastised, Monsieur!” said d’Artagnan, “the expression is strong.”

“It is one that becomes a man accustomed to look his enemies in the face.”

“Ah, PARDIEU! I know full well that you don’t turn your back to yours.”

And the young man, delighted with his joke, went away laughing loudly.

Porthos foamed with rage, and made a movement to rush after d’Artagnan.

“Presently, presently,” cried the latter, “when you haven’t your cloak on.”

“At one o’clock, then, behind the Luxembourg.”

“Very well, at one o’clock, then,” replied d’Artagnan, turning the angle of the street.

But neither in the street he had passed through, nor in the one which his eager glance pervaded, could he see anyone; however slowly the stranger had walked, he was gone on his way, or perhaps had entered some house. D’Artagnan inquired of everyone he met with, went down to the ferry, came up again by the Rue de Seine, and the Red Cross; but nothing, absolutely nothing! This chase was, however, advantageous to him in one sense, for in proportion as the perspiration broke from his forehead, his heart began to cool.

He began to reflect upon the events that had passed; they were numerous and inauspicious. It was scarcely eleven o’clock in the morning, and yet this morning had already brought him into disgrace with M. de Treville, who could not fail to think the manner in which d’Artagnan had left him a little cavalier.

Besides this, he had drawn upon himself two good duels with two men, each capable of killing three d’Artagnans--with two Musketeers, in short, with two of those beings whom he esteemed so greatly that he placed them in his mind and heart above all other men.

The outlook was sad. Sure of being killed by Athos, it may easily be understood that the young man was not very uneasy about Porthos. As hope, however, is the last thing extinguished in the heart of man, he finished by hoping that he might survive, even though with terrible wounds, in both these duels; and in case of surviving, he made the following reprehensions upon his own conduct:

“What a madcap I was, and what a stupid fellow I am! That brave and unfortunate Athos was wounded on that very shoulder against which I must run head foremost, like a ram. The only thing that astonishes me is that he did not strike me dead at once. He had good cause to do so; the pain I gave him must have been atrocious. As to Porthos--oh, as to Porthos, faith, that’s a droll affair!”

And in spite of himself, the young man began to laugh aloud, looking round carefully, however, to see that his solitary laugh, without a cause in the eyes of passers-by, offended no one.

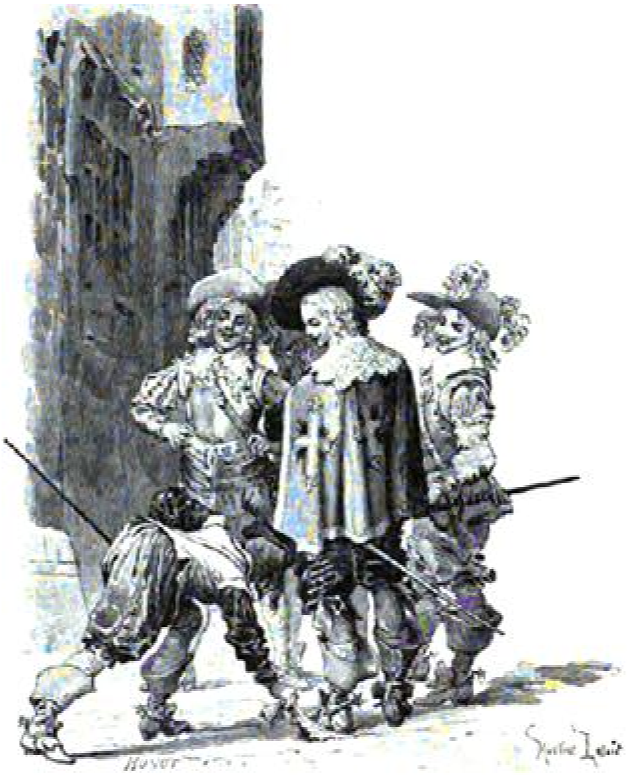

“As to Porthos, that is certainly droll; but I am not the less a giddy fool. Are people to be run against without warning? No! And have I any right to go and peep under their cloaks to see what is not there? He would have pardoned me, he would certainly have pardoned me, if I had not said anything to him about that cursed baldric--in ambiguous words, it is true, but rather drolly ambiguous. Ah, cursed Gascon that I am, I get from one hobble into another. Friend d’Artagnan,” continued he, speaking to himself with all the amenity that he thought due himself, “if you escape, of which there is not much chance, I would advise you to practice perfect politeness for the future. You must henceforth be admired and quoted as a model of it. To be obliging and polite does not necessarily make a man a coward. Look at Aramis, now; Aramis is mildness and grace personified. Well, did anybody ever dream of calling Aramis a coward? No, certainly not, and from this moment I will endeavor to model myself after him. Ah! That’s strange! Here he is!”

D’Artagnan, walking and soliloquizing, had arrived within a few steps of the hotel d’Arguillon and in front of that hotel perceived Aramis, chatting gaily with three gentlemen; but as he had not forgotten that it was in presence of this young man that M. de Treville had been so angry in the morning, and as a witness of the rebuke the Musketeers had received was not likely to be at all agreeable, he pretended not to see him. D’Artagnan, on the contrary, quite full of his plans of conciliation and courtesy, approached the young men with a profound bow, accompanied by a most gracious smile. All four, besides, immediately broke off their conversation.

D’Artagnan was not so dull as not to perceive that he was one too many; but he was not sufficiently broken into the fashions of the gay world to know how to extricate himself gallantly from a false position, like that of a man who begins to mingle with people he is scarcely acquainted with and in a conversation that does not concern him. He was seeking in his mind, then, for the least awkward means of retreat, when he remarked that Aramis had let his handkerchief fall, and by mistake, no doubt, had placed his foot upon it. This appeared to be a favorable opportunity to repair his intrusion. He stooped, and with the most gracious air he could assume, drew the handkerchief from under the foot of the Musketeer in spite of the efforts the latter made to detain it, and holding it out to him, said, “I believe, monsieur, that this is a handkerchief you would be sorry to lose?”

The handkerchief was indeed richly embroidered, and had a coronet and arms at one of its corners. Aramis blushed excessively, and snatched rather than took the handkerchief from the hand of the Gascon.

“Ah, ah!” cried one of the Guards, “will you persist in saying, most discreet Aramis, that you are not on good terms with Madame de Bois-Tracy, when that gracious lady has the kindness to lend you one of her handkerchiefs?”

Aramis darted at d’Artagnan one of those looks which inform a man that he has acquired a mortal enemy. Then, resuming his mild air, “You are deceived, gentlemen,” said he, “this handkerchief is not mine, and I cannot fancy why Monsieur has taken it into his head to offer it to me rather than to one of you; and as a proof of what I say, here is mine in my pocket.”

So saying, he pulled out his own handkerchief, likewise a very elegant handkerchief, and of fine cambric--though cambric was dear at the period--but a handkerchief without embroidery and without arms, only ornamented with a single cipher, that of its proprietor.

This time d’Artagnan was not hasty. He perceived his mistake; but the friends of Aramis were not at all convinced by his denial, and one of them addressed the young Musketeer with affected seriousness. “If it were as you pretend it is,” said he, “I should be forced, my dear Aramis, to reclaim it myself; for, as you very well know, Bois-Tracy is an intimate friend of mine, and I cannot allow the property of his wife to be sported as a trophy.”

“You make the demand badly,” replied Aramis; “and while acknowledging the justice of your reclamation, I refuse it on account of the form.”

“The fact is,” hazarded d’Artagnan, timidly, “I did not see the handkerchief fall from the pocket of Monsieur Aramis. He had his foot upon it, that is all; and I thought from having his foot upon it the handkerchief was his.”

“And you were deceived, my dear sir,” replied Aramis, coldly, very little sensible to the reparation. Then turning toward that one of the guards who had declared himself the friend of Bois-Tracy, “Besides,” continued he, “I have reflected, my dear intimate of Bois-Tracy, that I am not less tenderly his friend than you can possibly be; so that decidedly this handkerchief is as likely to have fallen from your pocket as mine.”

“No, upon my honor!” cried his Majesty’s Guardsman.

“You are about to swear upon your honor and I upon my word, and then it will be pretty evident that one of us will have lied. Now, here, Montaran, we will do better than that--let each take a half.”

“Of the handkerchief?”

“Yes.”

“Perfectly just,” cried the other two Guardsmen, “the judgment of King Solomon! Aramis, you certainly are full of wisdom!”

The young men burst into a laugh, and as may be supposed, the affair had no other sequel. In a moment or two the conversation ceased, and the three Guardsmen and the Musketeer, after having cordially shaken hands, separated, the Guardsmen going one way and Aramis another.

“Now is my time to make peace with this gallant man,” said d’Artagnan to himself, having stood on one side during the whole of the latter part of the conversation; and with this good feeling drawing near to Aramis, who was departing without paying any attention to him, “Monsieur,” said he, “you will excuse me, I hope.”

“Ah, monsieur,” interrupted Aramis, “permit me to observe to you that you have not acted in this affair as a gallant man ought.”

“What, monsieur!” cried d’Artagnan, “and do you suppose--”

“I suppose, monsieur that you are not a fool, and that you knew very well, although coming from Gascony, that people do not tread upon handkerchiefs without a reason. What the devil! Paris is not paved with cambric!”

“Monsieur, you act wrongly in endeavoring to mortify me,” said d’Artagnan, in whom the natural quarrelsome spirit began to speak more loudly than his pacific resolutions. “I am from Gascony, it is true; and since you know it, there is no occasion to tell you that Gascons are not very patient, so that when they have begged to be excused once, were it even for a folly, they are convinced that they have done already at least as much again as they ought to have done.”

“Monsieur, what I say to you about the matter,” said Aramis, “is not for the sake of seeking a quarrel. Thank God, I am not a bravo! And being a Musketeer but for a time, I only fight when I am forced to do so, and always with great repugnance; but this time the affair is serious, for here is a lady compromised by you.”

“By US, you mean!” cried d’Artagnan.

“Why did you so maladroitly restore me the handkerchief?”

“Why did you so awkwardly let it fall?”

“I have said, monsieur, and I repeat, that the handkerchief did not fall from my pocket.”

“And thereby you have lied twice, monsieur, for I saw it fall.”

“Ah, you take it with that tone, do you, Master Gascon? Well, I will teach you how to behave yourself.”

“And I will send you back to your Mass book, Master Abbe. Draw, if you please, and instantly--”

“Not so, if you please, my good friend--not here, at least. Do you not perceive that we are opposite the Hotel d’Arguillon, which is full of the cardinal’s creatures? How do I know that this is not his Eminence who has honored you with the commission to procure my head? Now, I entertain a ridiculous partiality for my head, it seems to suit my shoulders so correctly. I wish to kill you, be at rest as to that, but to kill you quietly in a snug, remote place, where you will not be able to boast of your death to anybody.”

“I agree, monsieur; but do not be too confident. Take your handkerchief; whether it belongs to you or another, you may perhaps stand in need of it.”

“Monsieur is a Gascon?” asked Aramis.

“Yes. Monsieur does not postpone an interview through prudence?”

“Prudence, monsieur, is a virtue sufficiently useless to Musketeers, I know, but indispensable to churchmen; and as I am only a Musketeer provisionally, I hold it good to be prudent. At two o’clock I shall have the honor of expecting you at the hotel of Monsieur de Treville. There I will indicate to you the best place and time.”

The two young men bowed and separated, Aramis ascending the street which led to the Luxembourg, while d’Artagnan, perceiving the appointed hour was approaching, took the road to the Carmes-Deschaux, saying to himself, “Decidedly I can’t draw back; but at least, if I am killed, I shall be killed by a Musketeer.”

CHAPTER 5

THE KING’S MUSKETEERS AND THE CARDINAL’S GUARDS

D’Artagnan was acquainted with nobody in Paris. He went therefore to his appointment with Athos without a second, determined to be satisfied with those his adversary should choose. Besides, his intention was formed to make the brave Musketeer all suitable apologies, but without meanness or weakness, fearing that might result from this duel which generally results from an affair of this kind, when a young and vigorous man fights with an adversary who is wounded and weakened--if conquered, he doubles the triumph of his antagonist; if a conqueror, he is accused of foul play and want of courage.

Now, we must have badly painted the character of our adventure seeker, or our readers must have already perceived that d’Artagnan was not an ordinary man; therefore, while repeating to himself that his death was inevitable, he did not make up his mind to die quietly, as one less courageous and less restrained might have done in his place. He reflected upon the different characters of men he had to fight with, and began to view his situation more clearly. He hoped, by means of loyal excuses, to make a friend of Athos, whose lordly air and austere bearing pleased him much. He flattered himself he should be able to frighten Porthos with the adventure of the baldric, which he might, if not killed upon the spot, relate to everybody a recital which, well managed, would cover Porthos with ridicule. As to the astute Aramis, he did not entertain much dread of him; and supposing he should be able to get so far, he determined to dispatch him in good style or at least, by hitting him in the face, as Caesar recommended his soldiers do to those of Pompey, to damage forever the beauty of which he was so proud.

In addition to this, d’Artagnan possessed that invincible stock of resolution which the counsels of his father had implanted in his heart: “Endure nothing from anyone but the king, the cardinal, and Monsieur de Treville.” He flew, then, rather than walked, toward the convent of the

Carmes Dechausses, or rather Deschaux, as it was called at that period, a sort of building without a window, surrounded by barren fields--an accessory to the Preaux-Clercs, and which was generally employed as the place for the duels of men who had no time to lose.

When d’Artagnan arrived in sight of the bare spot of ground which extended along the foot of the monastery, Athos had been waiting about five minutes, and twelve o’clock was striking. He was, then, as punctual as the Samaritan woman, and the most rigorous casuist with regard to duels could have nothing to say.

Athos, who still suffered grievously from his wound, though it had been dressed anew by M. de Treville’s surgeon, was seated on a post and waiting for his adversary with hat in hand, his feather even touching the ground.

“Monsieur,” said Athos, “I have engaged two of my friends as seconds; but these two friends are not yet come, at which I am astonished, as it is not at all their custom.”

“I have no seconds on my part, monsieur,” said d’Artagnan; “for having only arrived yesterday in Paris, I as yet know no one but Monsieur de Treville, to whom I was recommended by my father, who has the honor to be, in some degree, one of his friends.”

Athos reflected for an instant. “You know no one but Monsieur de Treville?” he asked.

“Yes, monsieur, I know only him.”

“Well, but then,” continued Athos, speaking half to himself, “if I kill you, I shall have the air of a boy-slayer.”

“Not too much so,” replied d’Artagnan, with a bow that was not deficient in dignity, “since you do me the honor to draw a sword with me while suffering from a wound which is very inconvenient.”

“Very inconvenient, upon my word; and you hurt me devilishly, I can tell you. But I will take the left hand--it is my custom in such circumstances. Do not fancy that I do you a favor; I use either hand easily. And it will be even a disadvantage to you; a left-handed man is very troublesome to people who are not prepared for it. I regret I did not inform you sooner of this circumstance.”

“You have truly, monsieur,” said d’Artagnan, bowing again, “a courtesy, for which, I assure you, I am very grateful.”

“You confuse me,” replied Athos, with his gentlemanly air; “let us talk of something else, if you please. Ah, s’blood, how you have hurt me! My shoulder quite burns.”

“If you would permit me--” said d’Artagnan, with timidity.

“What, monsieur?”

“I have a miraculous balsam for wounds--a balsam given to me by my mother and of which I have made a trial upon myself.”

“Well?”

“Well, I am sure that in less than three days this balsam would cure you; and at the end of three days, when you would be cured--well, sir, it would still do me a great honor to be your man.”

D’Artagnan spoke these words with a simplicity that did honor to his courtesy, without throwing the least doubt upon his courage.

“PARDIEU, monsieur!” said Athos, “that’s a proposition that pleases me; not that I can accept it, but a league off it savors of the gentleman. Thus spoke and acted the gallant knights of the time of Charlemagne, in whom every cavalier ought to seek his model. Unfortunately, we do not live in the times of the great emperor, we live in the times of the cardinal; and three days hence, however well the secret might be guarded, it would be known, I say, that we were to fight, and our combat would be prevented. I think these fellows will never come.”

“If you are in haste, monsieur,” said d’Artagnan, with the same simplicity with which a moment before he had proposed to him to put off the duel for three days, “and if it be your will to dispatch me at once, do not inconvenience yourself, I pray you.”

“There is another word which pleases me,” cried Athos, with a gracious nod to d’Artagnan. “That did not come from a man without a heart. Monsieur, I love men of your kidney; and I foresee plainly that if we don’t kill each other, I shall hereafter have much pleasure in your conversation. We will wait for these gentlemen, so please you; I have plenty of time, and it will be more correct. Ah, here is one of them, I believe.”

In fact, at the end of the Rue Vaugirard the gigantic Porthos appeared.

“What!” cried d’Artagnan, “is your first witness Monsieur Porthos?”

“Yes, that disturbs you?”

“By no means.”

“And here is the second.”

D’Artagnan turned in the direction pointed to by Athos, and perceived Aramis.

“What!” cried he, in an accent of greater astonishment than before, “your second witness is Monsieur Aramis?”

“Doubtless! Are you not aware that we are never seen one without the others, and that we are called among the Musketeers and the Guards, at court and in the city, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, or the Three Inseparables? And yet, as you come from Dax or Pau--”

“From Tarbes,” said d’Artagnan.

“It is probable you are ignorant of this little fact,” said Athos.

“My faith!” replied d’Artagnan, “you are well named, gentlemen; and my adventure, if it should make any noise, will prove at least that your union is not founded upon contrasts.”

In the meantime, Porthos had come up, waved his hand to Athos, and then turning toward d’Artagnan, stood quite astonished.

Let us say in passing that he had changed his baldric and relinquished his cloak.

“Ah, ah!” said he, “what does this mean?”

“This is the gentleman I am going to fight with,” said Athos, pointing to d’Artagnan with his hand and saluting him with the same gesture.

“Why, it is with him I am also going to fight,” said Porthos.

“But not before one o’clock,” replied d’Artagnan.

“And I also am to fight with this gentleman,” said Aramis, coming in his turn onto the place.

“But not until two o’clock,” said d’Artagnan, with the same calmness.

“But what are you going to fight about, Athos?” asked Aramis.

“Faith! I don’t very well know. He hurt my shoulder. And you, Porthos?”

“Faith! I am going to fight--because I am going to fight,” answered Porthos, reddening.

Athos, whose keen eye lost nothing, perceived a faintly sly smile pass over the lips of the young Gascon as he replied, “We had a short discussion upon dress.”

“And you, Aramis?” asked Athos.

“Oh, ours is a theological quarrel,” replied Aramis, making a sign to d’Artagnan to keep secret the cause of their duel.

Athos indeed saw a second smile on the lips of d’Artagnan.

“Indeed?” said Athos.

“Yes; a passage of St. Augustine, upon which we could not agree,” said the Gascon.

“Decidedly, this is a clever fellow,” murmured Athos.

“And now you are assembled, gentlemen,” said d’Artagnan, “permit me to offer you my apologies.”

At this word APOLOGIES, a cloud passed over the brow of Athos, a haughty smile curled the lip of Porthos, and a negative sign was the reply of Aramis.

“You do not understand me, gentlemen,” said d’Artagnan, throwing up his head, the sharp and bold lines of which were at the moment gilded by a bright ray of the sun. “I asked to be excused in case I should not be able to discharge my debt to all three; for Monsieur Athos has the right to kill me first, which must much diminish the face-value of your bill, Monsieur Porthos, and render yours almost null, Monsieur Aramis. And now, gentlemen, I repeat, excuse me, but on that account only, and--on guard!”

At these words, with the most gallant air possible, d’Artagnan drew his sword.

The blood had mounted to the head of d’Artagnan, and at that moment he would have drawn his sword against all the Musketeers in the kingdom as willingly as he now did against Athos, Porthos, and Aramis.

It was a quarter past midday. The sun was in its zenith, and the spot chosen for the scene of the duel was exposed to its full ardor.

“It is very hot,” said Athos, drawing his sword in its turn, “and yet I cannot take off my doublet; for I just now felt my wound begin to bleed again, and I should not like to annoy Monsieur with the sight of blood which he has not drawn from me himself.”

“That is true, Monsieur,” replied d’Artagnan, “and whether drawn by myself or another, I assure you I shall always view with regret the blood of so brave a gentleman. I will therefore fight in my doublet, like yourself.”

“Come, come, enough of such compliments!” cried Porthos. “Remember, we are waiting for our turns.”

“Speak for yourself when you are inclined to utter such incongruities,” interrupted Aramis. “For my part, I think what they say is very well said, and quite worthy of two gentlemen.”

“When you please, monsieur,” said Athos, putting himself on guard.

“I waited your orders,” said d’Artagnan, crossing swords.

But scarcely had the two rapiers clashed, when a company of the Guards of his Eminence, commanded by M. de Jussac, turned the corner of the convent.

“The cardinal’s Guards!” cried Aramis and Porthos at the same time. “Sheathe your swords, gentlemen, sheathe your swords!”

But it was too late. The two combatants had been seen in a position which left no doubt of their intentions.

“Halloo!” cried Jussac, advancing toward them and making a sign to his men to do so likewise, “halloo, Musketeers? Fighting here, are you? And the edicts? What is become of them?”

“You are very generous, gentlemen of the Guards,” said Athos, full of rancor, for Jussac was one of the aggressors of the preceding day. “If we were to see you fighting, I can assure you that we would make no effort to prevent you. Leave us alone, then, and you will enjoy a little amusement without cost to yourselves.”

“Gentlemen,” said Jussac, “it is with great regret that I pronounce the thing impossible. Duty before everything. Sheathe, then, if you please, and follow us.”

“Monsieur,” said Aramis, parodying Jussac, “it would afford us great pleasure to obey your polite invitation if it depended upon ourselves; but unfortunately the thing is impossible--Monsieur de Treville has forbidden it. Pass on your way, then; it is the best thing to do.”

This raillery exasperated Jussac. “We will charge upon you, then,” said he, “if you disobey.”

“There are five of them,” said Athos, half aloud, “and we are but three; we shall be beaten again, and must die on the spot, for, on my part, I declare I will never appear again before the captain as a conquered man.”

Athos, Porthos, and Aramis instantly drew near one another, while Jussac drew up his soldiers.

This short interval was sufficient to determine d’Artagnan on the part he was to take. It was one of those events which decide the life of a man; it was a choice between the king and the cardinal--the choice made, it must be persisted in. To fight, that was to disobey the law, that was to risk his head, that was to make at one blow an enemy of a minister more powerful than the king himself. All this young man perceived, and yet, to his praise we speak it, he did not hesitate a second. Turning towards Athos and his friends, “Gentlemen,” said he, “allow me to correct your words, if you please. You said you were but three, but it appears to me we are four.”

“But you are not one of us,” said Porthos.

“That’s true,” replied d’Artagnan; “I have not the uniform, but I have the spirit. My heart is that of a Musketeer; I feel it, monsieur, and that impels me on.”

“Withdraw, young man,” cried Jussac, who doubtless, by his gestures and the expression of his countenance, had guessed d’Artagnan’s design. “You may retire; we consent to that. Save your skin; begone quickly.”

D’Artagnan did not budge.

“Decidedly, you are a brave fellow,” said Athos, pressing the young man’s hand.

“Come, come, choose your part,” replied Jussac.

“Well,” said Porthos to Aramis, “we must do something.”

“Monsieur is full of generosity,” said Athos.

But all three reflected upon the youth of d’Artagnan, and dreaded his inexperience.

“We should only be three, one of whom is wounded, with the addition of a boy,” resumed Athos; “and yet it will not be the less said we were four men.”

“Yes, but to yield!” said Porthos.

“That IS difficult,” replied Athos.

D’Artagnan comprehended their irresolution.

“Try me, gentlemen,” said he, “and I swear to you by my honor that I will not go hence if we are conquered.”

“What is your name, my brave fellow?” said Athos.

“d’Artagnan, monsieur.”

“Well, then, Athos, Porthos, Aramis, and d’Artagnan, forward!” cried Athos.

“Come, gentlemen, have you decided?” cried Jussac for the third time.

“It is done, gentlemen,” said Athos.

“And what is your choice?” asked Jussac.

“We are about to have the honor of charging you,” replied Aramis, lifting his hat with one hand and drawing his sword with the other.

“Ah! You resist, do you?” cried Jussac.

“S’blood; does that astonish you?”

And the nine combatants rushed upon each other with a fury which however did not exclude a certain degree of method.

Athos fixed upon a certain Cahusac, a favorite of the cardinal’s. Porthos had Bicarat, and Aramis found himself opposed to two adversaries. As to d’Artagnan, he sprang toward Jussac himself.

The heart of the young Gascon beat as if it would burst through his side--not from fear, God be thanked, he had not the shade of it, but with emulation; he fought like a furious tiger, turning ten times round his adversary, and changing his ground and his guard twenty times. Jussac was, as was then said, a fine blade, and had had much practice; nevertheless it required all his skill to defend himself against an adversary who, active and energetic, departed every instant from received rules, attacking him on all sides at once, and yet parrying like a man who had the greatest respect for his own epidermis.

This contest at length exhausted Jussac’s patience. Furious at being held in check by one whom he had considered a boy, he became warm and began to make mistakes. D’Artagnan, who though wanting in practice had a sound theory, redoubled his agility. Jussac, anxious to put an end to this, springing forward, aimed a terrible thrust at his adversary, but the latter parried it; and while Jussac was recovering himself, glided like a serpent beneath his blade, and passed his sword through his body. Jussac fell like a dead mass.

D’Artagnan then cast an anxious and rapid glance over the field of battle.

Aramis had killed one of his adversaries, but the other pressed him warmly. Nevertheless, Aramis was in a good situation, and able to defend himself.

Bicarat and Porthos had just made counterhits. Porthos had received a thrust through his arm, and Bicarat one through his thigh. But neither of these two wounds was serious, and they only fought more earnestly.

Athos, wounded anew by Cahusac, became evidently paler, but did not give way a foot. He only changed his sword hand, and fought with his left hand.

According to the laws of dueling at that period, d’Artagnan was at liberty to assist whom he pleased. While he was endeavoring to find out which of his companions stood in greatest need, he caught a glance from Athos. The glance was of sublime eloquence. Athos would have died rather than appeal for help; but he could look, and with that look ask assistance. D’Artagnan interpreted it; with a terrible bound he sprang to the side of Cahusac, crying, “To me, Monsieur Guardsman; I will slay you!”

Cahusac turned. It was time; for Athos, whose great courage alone supported him, sank upon his knee.

“S’blood!” cried he to d’Artagnan, “do not kill him, young man, I beg of you. I have an old affair to settle with him when I am cured and sound again. Disarm him only--make sure of his sword. That’s it! Very well done!”

The exclamation was drawn from Athos by seeing the sword of Cahusac fly twenty paces from him. D’Artagnan and Cahusac sprang forward at the same instant, the one to recover, the other to obtain, the sword; but d’Artagnan, being the more active, reached it first and placed his foot upon it.

Cahusac immediately ran to the Guardsman whom Aramis had killed, seized his rapier, and returned toward d’Artagnan; but on his way he met Athos, who during his relief which d’Artagnan had procured him had recovered his breath, and who, for fear that d’Artagnan would kill his enemy, wished to resume the fight.

D’Artagnan perceived that it would be disobliging Athos not to leave him alone; and in a few minutes Cahusac fell, with a sword thrust through his throat.

At the same instant Aramis placed his sword point on the breast of his fallen enemy, and forced him to ask for mercy.

There only then remained Porthos and Bicarat. Porthos made a thousand flourishes, asking Bicarat what o'clock it could be, and offering him his compliments upon his brother's having just obtained a company in the regiment of Navarre; but, jest as he might, he gained nothing. Bicarat was one of those iron men who never fell dead.

Nevertheless, it was necessary to finish. The watch might come up and take all the combatants, wounded or not, royalists or cardinalists. Athos, Aramis, and d'Artagnan surrounded Bicarat, and required him to surrender. Though alone against all and with a wound in his thigh, Bicarat wished to hold out; but Jussac, who had risen upon his elbow, cried out to him to yield. Bicarat was a Gascon, as d'Artagnan was; he turned a deaf ear, and contented himself with laughing, and between two parries finding time to point to a spot of earth with his sword, "Here," cried he, parodying a verse of the Bible, "here will Bicarat die; for I only am left, and they seek my life."

"But there are four against you; leave off, I command you."

"Ah, if you command me, that's another thing," said Bicarat. "As you are my commander, it is my duty to obey." And springing backward, he broke his sword across his knee to avoid the necessity of surrendering it, threw the pieces over the convent wall, and crossed him arms, whistling a cardinalist air.

Bravery is always respected, even in an enemy. The Musketeers saluted Bicarat with their swords, and returned them to their sheaths. D'Artagnan did the same. Then, assisted by Bicarat, the only one left standing, he bore Jussac, Cahusac, and one of Aramis's adversaries who was only wounded, under the porch of the convent. The fourth, as we have said, was dead. They then rang the bell, and carrying away four swords out of five, they took their road, intoxicated with joy, toward the hotel of M. de Treville.

They walked arm in arm, occupying the whole width of the street and taking in every Musketeer they met, so that in the end it became a triumphal march. The heart of d'Artagnan swam in delirium; he marched between Athos and Porthos, pressing them tenderly.

"If I am not yet a Musketeer," said he to his new friends, as he passed through the gateway of M. de Treville's hotel, "at least I have entered upon my apprenticeship, haven’t I?”

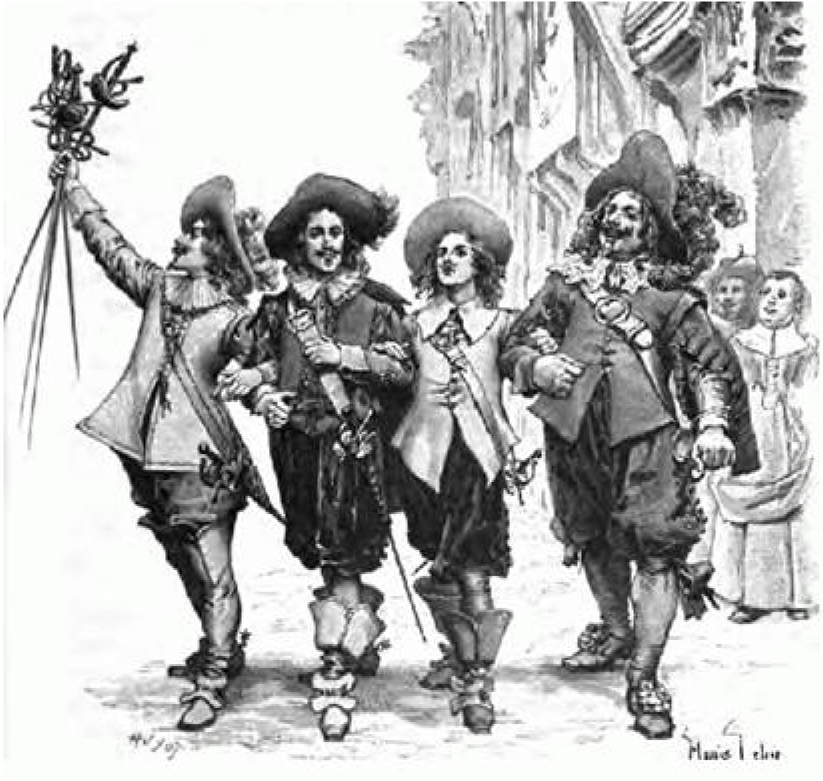
Maurice Leloir

CHAPTER 6

HIS MAJESTY KING LOUIS XIII

This affair made a great noise. M. de Treville scolded his Musketeers in public, and congratulated them in private; but as no time was to be lost in gaining the king, M. de Treville hastened to report himself at the Louvre. It was already too late. The king was closeted with the cardinal, and M. de Treville was informed that the king was busy and could not receive him at that moment. In the evening M. de Treville attended the king's gaming table. The king was winning; and as he was very avaricious, he was in an excellent humor. Perceiving M. de Treville at a distance--

"Come here, Monsieur Captain," said he, "come here, that I may growl at you. Do you know that his Eminence has been making fresh complaints against your Musketeers, and that with so much emotion, that this evening his Eminence is indisposed? Ah, these Musketeers of yours are very devils--fellows to be hanged."

"No, sire," replied Treville, who saw at the first glance how things would go, "on the contrary, they are good creatures, as meek as lambs, and have but one desire, I'll be their warranty. And that is that their swords may never leave their scabbards but in your majesty's service. But what are they to do? The Guards of Monsieur the Cardinal are forever seeking quarrels with them, and for the honor of the corps even, the poor young men are obliged to defend themselves."

"Listen to Monsieur de Treville," said the king; "listen to him! Would not one say he was speaking of a religious community? In truth, my dear Captain, I have a great mind to take away your commission and give it to Mademoiselle de Chemerault, to whom I promised an abbey. But don't fancy that I am going to take you on your bare word. I am called Louis the Just, Monsieur de Treville, and by and by, by and by we will see."

"Ah, sire; it is because I confide in that justice that I shall wait patiently and quietly the good pleasure of your Majesty."

"Wait, then, monsieur, wait," said the king; "I will not detain you long."

In fact, fortune changed; and as the king began to lose what he had won, he was not sorry to find an excuse for playing Charlemagne--if we may use a gaming phrase of whose origin we confess our ignorance. The king therefore arose a minute after, and putting the money which lay before him into his pocket, the major part of which arose from his winnings, “La Vieuville,” said he, “take my place; I must speak to Monsieur de Treville on an affair of importance. Ah, I had eighty louis before me; put down the same sum, so that they who have lost may have nothing to complain of. Justice before everything.”

Then turning toward M. de Treville and walking with him toward the embrasure of a window, “Well, monsieur,” continued he, “you say it is his Eminence’s Guards who have sought a quarrel with your Musketeers?”

“Yes, sire, as they always do.”

“And how did the thing happen? Let us see, for you know, my dear Captain, a judge must hear both sides.”

“Good Lord! In the most simple and natural manner possible. Three of my best soldiers, whom your Majesty knows by name, and whose devotedness you have more than once appreciated, and who have, I dare affirm to the king, his service much at heart--three of my best soldiers, I say, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, had made a party of pleasure with a young fellow from Gascony, whom I had introduced to them the same morning. The party was to take place at St. Germain, I believe, and they had appointed to meet at the Carmes-Deschaux, when they were disturbed by de Jussac, Cahusac, Bicarat, and two other Guardsmen, who certainly did not go there in such a numerous company without some ill intention against the edicts.”

“Ah, ah! You incline me to think so,” said the king. “There is no doubt they went thither to fight themselves.”

“I do not accuse them, sire; but I leave your Majesty to judge what five armed men could possibly be going to do in such a deserted place as the neighborhood of the Convent des Carmes.”

“Yes, you are right, Treville, you are right!”

“Then, upon seeing my Musketeers they changed their minds, and forgot their private hatred for partisan hatred; for your Majesty cannot be ignorant that the Musketeers, who belong to the king and nobody but the king, are the natural enemies of the Guardsmen, who belong to the cardinal.”

"Yes, Treville, yes," said the king, in a melancholy tone; "and it is very sad, believe me, to see thus two parties in France, two heads to royalty. But all this will come to an end, Treville, will come to an end. You say, then, that the Guardsmen sought a quarrel with the Musketeers?"

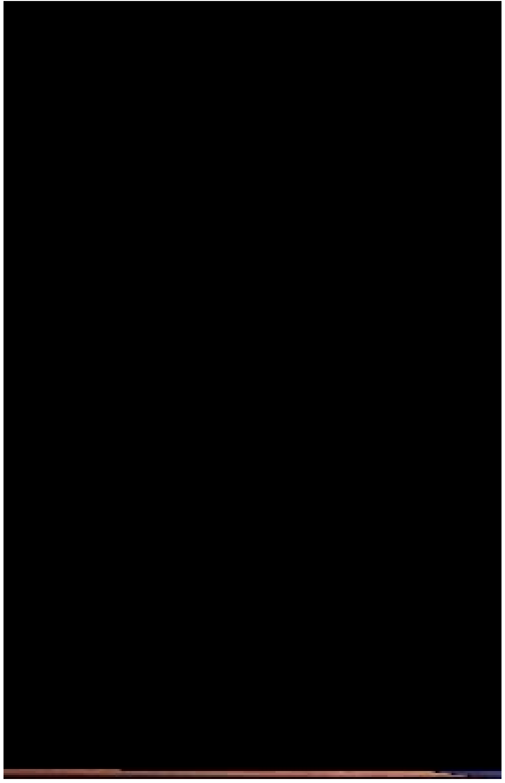

"I say that it is probable that things have fallen out so, but I will not swear to it, sire. You know how difficult it is to discover the truth; and unless a man be endowed with that admirable instinct which causes Louis XIII to be named the Just--"

"You are right, Treville; but they were not alone, your Musketeers. They had a youth with them?"

"Yes, sire, and one wounded man; so that three of the king's Musketeers--one of whom was wounded--and a youth not only maintained their ground against five of the most terrible of the cardinal's Guardsmen, but absolutely brought four of them to earth."

"Why, this is a victory!" cried the king, all radiant, "a complete victory!"

"Yes, sire; as complete as that of the Bridge of Ce."

"Four men, one of them wounded, and a youth, say you?"

"One hardly a young man; but who, however, behaved himself so admirably on this occasion that I will take the liberty of recommending him to your Majesty."

"How does he call himself?"

"d'Artagnan, sire; he is the son of one of my oldest friends--the son of a man who served under the king your father, of glorious memory, in the civil war."

"And you say this young man behaved himself well? Tell me how, Treville--you know how I delight in accounts of war and fighting."

And Louis XIII twisted his mustache proudly, placing his hand upon his hip.

"Sire," resumed Treville, "as I told you, Monsieur d'Artagnan is little more than a boy; and as he has not the honor of being a Musketeer, he was dressed as a citizen. The Guards of the cardinal, perceiving his youth and that he did not belong to the corps, invited him to retire before they attacked."

"So you may plainly see, Treville," interrupted the king, "it was they who attacked?"

"That is true, sire; there can be no more doubt on that head. They called upon him then to retire; but he answered that he was a Musketeer at heart, entirely devoted to your Majesty, and that therefore he would remain with Messieurs the Musketeers."

"Brave young man!" murmured the king.

"Well, he did remain with them; and your Majesty has in him so firm a champion that it was he who gave Jussac the terrible sword thrust which has made the cardinal so angry."

"He who wounded Jussac!" cried the king, "he, a boy! Treville, that's impossible!"

"It is as I have the honor to relate it to your Majesty."

"Jussac, one of the first swordsmen in the kingdom?"

"Well, sire, for once he found his master."

"I will see this young man, Treville--I will see him; and if anything can be done--well, we will make it our business."

"When will your Majesty deign to receive him?"

"Tomorrow, at midday, Treville."

"Shall I bring him alone?"

"No, bring me all four together. I wish to thank them all at once. Devoted men are so rare, Treville, by the back staircase. It is useless to let the cardinal know."

"Yes, sire."

“You understand, Treville--an edict is still an edict, it is forbidden to fight, after all.”

“But this encounter, sire, is quite out of the ordinary conditions of a duel. It is a brawl; and the proof is that there were five of the cardinal’s Guardsmen against my three Musketeers and Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

“That is true,” said the king; “but never mind, Treville, come still by the back staircase.”

Treville smiled; but as it was indeed something to have prevailed upon this child to rebel against his master, he saluted the king respectfully, and with this agreement, took leave of him.

That evening the three Musketeers were informed of the honor accorded them. As they had long been acquainted with the king, they were not much excited; but d’Artagnan, with his Gascon imagination, saw in it his future fortune, and passed the night in golden dreams. By eight o’clock in the morning he was at the apartment of Athos.

D’Artagnan found the Musketeer dressed and ready to go out. As the hour to wait upon the king was not till twelve, he had made a party with Porthos and Aramis to play a game at tennis in a tennis court situated near the stables of the Luxembourg. Athos invited d’Artagnan to follow them; and although ignorant of the game, which he had never played, he accepted, not knowing what to do with his time from nine o’clock in the morning, as it then scarcely was, till twelve.

The two Musketeers were already there, and were playing together. Athos, who was very expert in all bodily exercises, passed with d’Artagnan to the opposite side and challenged them; but at the first effort he made, although he played with his left hand, he found that his wound was yet too recent to allow of such exertion. D’Artagnan remained, therefore, alone; and as he declared he was too ignorant of the game to play it regularly they only continued giving balls to one another without counting. But one of these balls, launched by Porthos’ herculean hand, passed so close to d’Artagnan’s face that he thought that if, instead of passing near, it had hit him, his audience would have been probably lost, as it would have been impossible for him to present himself before the king. Now, as upon this audience, in his Gascon imagination, depended his future life, he saluted Aramis and Porthos politely, declaring that he would not resume the game until he should be prepared to play with them on more equal terms, and went and took his place near the cord and in the gallery.

Unfortunately for d’Artagnan, among the spectators was one of his Eminence’s Guardsmen, who, still irritated by the defeat of his companions, which had happened only the day before, had promised himself to seize the first opportunity of avenging it. He believed this opportunity was now come and addressed his neighbor: “It is not astonishing that that young man should be afraid of a ball, for he is doubtless a Musketeer apprentice.”

D’Artagnan turned round as if a serpent had stung him, and fixed his eyes intensely upon the Guardsman who had just made this insolent speech.

“PARDIEU,” resumed the latter, twisting his mustache, “look at me as long as you like, my little gentleman! I have said what I have said.”

“And as since that which you have said is too clear to require any explanation,” replied d’Artagnan, in a low voice, “I beg you to follow me.”

“And when?” asked the Guardsman, with the same jeering air.

“At once, if you please.”

“And you know who I am, without doubt?”

“I? I am completely ignorant; nor does it much disquiet me.”

“You’re in the wrong there; for if you knew my name, perhaps you would not be so pressing.”

“What is your name?”

“Bernajoux, at your service.”

"Well, then, Monsieur Bernajoux," said d'Artagnan, tranquilly, "I will wait for you at the door."

"Go, monsieur, I will follow you."

"Do not hurry yourself, monsieur, lest it be observed that we go out together. You must be aware that for our undertaking, company would be in the way."

"That's true," said the Guardsman, astonished that his name had not produced more effect upon the young man.

Indeed, the name of Bernajoux was known to all the world, d'Artagnan alone excepted, perhaps; for it was one of those which figured most frequently in the daily brawls which all the edicts of the cardinal could not repress.

Porthos and Aramis were so engaged with their game, and Athos was watching them with so much attention, that they did not even perceive their young companion go out, who, as he had told the Guardsman of his Eminence, stopped outside the door. An instant after, the Guardsman descended in his turn. As d'Artagnan had no time to lose, on account of the audience of the king, which was fixed for midday, he cast his eyes around, and seeing that the street was empty, said to his adversary, "My faith! It is fortunate for you, although your name is Bernajoux, to have only to deal with an apprentice Musketeer. Never mind; be content, I will do my best. On guard!"

"But," said he whom d'Artagnan thus provoked, "it appears to me that this place is badly chosen, and that we should be better behind the Abbey St. Germain or in the Pre-aux-Clercs."

"What you say is full of sense," replied d'Artagnan; "but unfortunately I have very little time to spare, having an appointment at twelve precisely. On guard, then, monsieur, on guard!"

Bernajoux was not a man to have such a compliment paid to him twice. In an instant his sword glittered in his hand, and he sprang upon his adversary, whom, thanks to his great youthfulness, he hoped to intimidate.

But d'Artagnan had on the preceding day served his apprenticeship. Fresh sharpened by his victory, full of hopes of future favor, he was resolved not to recoil a step. So the two swords were crossed close to the hilts, and as d'Artagnan stood firm, it was his adversary who made the retreating step; but d'Artagnan seized the moment at which, in this movement, the sword of Bernajoux deviated from the line. He freed his weapon, made a lunge, and touched his adversary on the shoulder. d’Artagnan immediately made a step backward and raised his sword; but Bernajoux cried out that it was nothing, and rushing blindly upon him, absolutely spitted himself upon d’Artagnan’s sword. As, however, he did not fall, as he did not declare himself conquered, but only broke away toward the hotel of M. de la Tremouille, in whose service he had a relative, d’Artagnan was ignorant of the seriousness of the last wound his adversary had received, and pressing him warmly, without doubt would soon have completed his work with a third blow, when the noise which arose from the street being heard in the tennis court, two of the friends of the Guardsman, who had seen him go out after exchanging some words with d’Artagnan, rushed, sword in hand, from the court, and fell upon the conqueror. But Athos, Porthos, and Aramis quickly appeared in their turn, and the moment the two Guardsmen attacked their young companion, drove them back. Bernajoux now fell, and as the Guardsmen were only two against four, they began to cry, “To the rescue! The Hotel de la Tremouille!” At these cries, all who were in the hotel rushed out and fell upon the four companions, who on their side cried aloud, “To the rescue, Musketeers!”

This cry was generally heeded; for the Musketeers were known to be enemies of the cardinal, and were beloved on account of the hatred they bore to his Eminence. Thus the soldiers of other companies than those which belonged to the Red Duke, as Aramis had called him, often took part with the king’s Musketeers in these quarrels. Of three Guardsmen of the company of M. Dessessart who were passing, two came to the assistance of the four companions, while the other ran toward the hotel of M. de Treville, crying, “To the rescue, Musketeers! To the rescue!” As usual, this hotel was full of soldiers of this company, who hastened to the succor of their comrades. The MELEE became general, but strength was on the side of the Musketeers. The cardinal’s Guards and M. de la Tremouille’s people retreated into the hotel, the doors of which they closed just in time to prevent their enemies from entering with them. As to the wounded man, he had been taken in at once, and, as we have said, in a very bad state.

Excitement was at its height among the Musketeers and their allies, and they even began to deliberate whether they should not set fire to the hotel to punish the insolence of M. de la Tremouille’s domestics in daring to make a SORTIE upon the king’s Musketeers. The proposition had been made, and received with enthusiasm, when fortunately eleven o’clock struck.

D’Artagnan and his companions remembered their audience, and as they would very much have regretted that such an opportunity should be lost, they succeeded in calming their friends, who contented themselves with hurling some paving stones against the gates; but the gates were too strong. They soon tired of the sport. Besides, those who must be considered the leaders of the enterprise had quit the group and were making their way toward the hotel of M. de Treville, who was waiting for them, already informed of this fresh disturbance.

“Quick to the Louvre,” said he, “to the Louvre without losing an instant, and let us endeavor to see the king before he is prejudiced by the cardinal. We will describe the thing to him as a consequence of the affair of yesterday, and the two will pass off together.”

M de Treville, accompanied by the four young fellows, directed his course toward the Louvre; but to the great astonishment of the captain of the Musketeers, he was informed that the king had gone stag hunting in the forest of St. Germain. M. de Treville required this intelligence to be repeated to him twice, and each time his companions saw his brow become darker.

“Had his Majesty,” asked he, “any intention of holding this hunting party yesterday?”

“No, your Excellency,” replied the valet de chambre, “the Master of the Hounds came this morning to inform him that he had marked down a stag. At first the king answered that he would not go; but he could not resist his love of sport, and set out after dinner.”

“And the king has seen the cardinal?” asked M. de Treville.

“In all probability he has,” replied the valet, “for I saw the horses harnessed to his Eminence’s carriage this morning, and when I asked where he was going, they told me, ‘To St. Germain.’“

“He is beforehand with us,” said M. de Treville. “Gentlemen, I will see the king this evening; but as to you, I do not advise you to risk doing so.”

This advice was too reasonable, and moreover came from a man who knew the king too well, to allow the four young men to dispute it. M. de Treville recommended everyone to return home and wait for news.

On entering his hotel, M. de Treville thought it best to be first in making the complaint. He sent one of his servants to M. de la Tremouille with a letter in which he begged of him to eject the cardinal’s Guardsmen from his house, and to reprimand his people for their audacity in making SORTIE against the king’s Musketeers. But M. de la Tremouille--already prejudiced by his esquire, whose relative, as we already know, Bernajoux was--replied that it was neither for M. de Treville nor the Musketeers to complain, but, on the contrary, for him, whose people the Musketeers had assaulted and whose hotel they had endeavored to burn. Now, as the debate between these two nobles might last a long time, each becoming, naturally, more firm in his own opinion, M. de Treville thought of an expedient which might terminate it quietly. This was to go himself to M. de la Tremouille.

He repaired, therefore, immediately to his hotel, and caused himself to be announced.

The two nobles saluted each other politely, for if no friendship existed between them, there was at least esteem. Both were men of courage and honor; and as M. de la Tremouille--a Protestant, and seeing the king seldom--was of no party, he did not, in general, carry any bias into his social relations. This time, however, his address, although polite, was cooler than usual.

“Monsieur,” said M. de Treville, “we fancy that we have each cause to complain of the other, and I am come to endeavor to clear up this affair.”

“I have no objection,” replied M. de la Tremouille, “but I warn you that I am well informed, and all the fault is with your Musketeers.”

“You are too just and reasonable a man, monsieur!” said Treville, “not to accept the proposal I am about to make to you.”

“Make it, monsieur, I listen.”

“How is Monsieur Bernajoux, your esquire’s relative?”

“Why, monsieur, very ill indeed! In addition to the sword thrust in his arm, which is not dangerous, he has received another right through his lungs, of which the doctor says bad things.”

“But has the wounded man retained his senses?”

“Perfectly.”

“Does he talk?”

“With difficulty, but he can speak.”

“Well, monsieur, let us go to him. Let us adjure him, in the name of the God before whom he must perhaps appear, to speak the truth. I will take him for judge in his own cause, monsieur, and will believe what he will say.”

M de la Tremouille reflected for an instant; then as it was difficult to suggest a more reasonable proposal, he agreed to it.

Both descended to the chamber in which the wounded man lay. The latter, on seeing these two noble lords who came to visit him, endeavored to raise himself up in his bed; but he was too weak, and exhausted by the effort, he fell back again almost senseless.

M de la Tremouille approached him, and made him inhale some salts, which recalled him to life. Then M. de Treville, unwilling that it should be thought that he had influenced the wounded man, requested M. de la Tremouille to interrogate him himself.

That happened which M. de Treville had foreseen. Placed between life and death, as Bernajoux was, he had no idea for a moment of concealing the truth; and he described to the two nobles the affair exactly as it had passed.

This was all that M. de Treville wanted. He wished Bernajoux a speedy convalescence, took leave of M. de la Tremouille, returned to his hotel, and immediately sent word to the four friends that he awaited their company at dinner.

M de Treville entertained good company, wholly anticardinalist, though. It may easily be understood, therefore, that the conversation during the whole of dinner turned upon the two checks that his Eminence’s Guardsmen had received. Now, as d’Artagnan had been the hero of these two fights, it was upon him that all the felicitations fell, which Athos, Porthos, and Aramis abandoned to him, not only as good comrades, but as men who had so often had their turn that could very well afford him his.

Toward six o’clock M. de Treville announced that it was time to go to the Louvre; but as the hour of audience granted by his Majesty was past, instead of claiming the ENTREE by the back stairs, he placed himself with the four young men in the antechamber. The king had not yet returned from hunting. Our young men had been waiting about half an hour, amid a crowd of courtiers, when all the doors were thrown open, and his Majesty was announced.

At his announcement d’Artagnan felt himself tremble to the very marrow of his bones. The coming instant would in all probability decide the rest of his life. His eyes therefore were fixed in a sort of agony upon the door through which the king must enter.

Louis XIII appeared, walking fast. He was in hunting costume covered with dust, wearing large boots, and holding a whip in his hand. At the first glance, d’Artagnan judged that the mind of the king was stormy.

This disposition, visible as it was in his Majesty, did not prevent the courtiers from ranging themselves along his pathway. In royal antechambers it is worth more to be viewed with an angry eye than not to be seen at all. The three Musketeers therefore did not hesitate to make a step forward. D'Artagnan on the contrary remained concealed behind them; but although the king knew Athos, Porthos, and Aramis personally, he passed before them without speaking or looking--indeed, as if he had never seen them before. As for M. de Treville, when the eyes of the king fell upon him, he sustained the look with so much firmness that it was the king who dropped his eyes; after which his Majesty, grumbling, entered his apartment.

"Matters go but badly," said Athos, smiling; "and we shall not be made Chevaliers of the Order this time."

"Wait here ten minutes," said M. de Treville; "and if at the expiration of ten minutes you do not see me come out, return to my hotel, for it will be useless for you to wait for me longer."

The four young men waited ten minutes, a quarter of an hour, twenty minutes; and seeing that M. de Treville did not return, went away very uneasy as to what was going to happen.

M de Treville entered the king's cabinet boldly, and found his Majesty in a very ill humor, seated on an armchair, beating his boot with the handle of his whip. This, however, did not prevent his asking, with the greatest coolness, after his Majesty's health.

"Bad, monsieur, bad!" replied the king; "I am bored."

This was, in fact, the worst complaint of Louis XIII, who would sometimes take one of his courtiers to a window and say, "Monsieur So-and-so, let us weary ourselves together."

"How! Your Majesty is bored? Have you not enjoyed the pleasures of the chase today?"

"A fine pleasure, indeed, monsieur! Upon my soul, everything degenerates; and I don't know whether it is the game which leaves no scent, or the dogs that have no noses. We started a stag of ten branches. We chased him for six hours, and when he was near being taken--when St.-Simon was already putting his horn to his mouth to sound the mort--crack, all the pack takes the wrong scent and sets off after a two-year-older. I shall be obliged to give up hunting, as I have given up hawking. Ah, I am an unfortunate king, Monsieur de Treville! I had but one gerfalcon, and he died day before yesterday.”

“Indeed, sire, I wholly comprehend your disappointment. The misfortune is great; but I think you have still a good number of falcons, sparrow hawks, and tiercets.”

“And not a man to instruct them. Falconers are declining. I know no one but myself who is acquainted with the noble art of venery. After me it will all be over, and people will hunt with gins, snares, and traps. If I had but the time to train pupils! But there is the cardinal always at hand, who does not leave me a moment’s repose; who talks to me about Spain, who talks to me about Austria, who talks to me about England! Ah! A PROPOS of the cardinal, Monsieur de Treville, I am vexed with you!”

This was the chance at which M. de Treville waited for the king. He knew the king of old, and he knew that all these complaints were but a preface--a sort of excitation to encourage himself--and that he had now come to his point at last.

“And in what have I been so unfortunate as to displease your Majesty?” asked M. de Treville, feigning the most profound astonishment.

“Is it thus you perform your charge, monsieur?” continued the king, without directly replying to de Treville’s question. “Is it for this I name you captain of my Musketeers, that they should assassinate a man, disturb a whole quarter, and endeavor to set fire to Paris, without your saying a word? But yet,” continued the king, “undoubtedly my haste accuses you wrongfully; without doubt the rioters are in prison, and you come to tell me justice is done.”

“Sire,” replied M. de Treville, calmly, “on the contrary, I come to demand it of you.”

“And against whom?” cried the king.

“Against calumniators,” said M. de Treville.

“Ah! This is something new,” replied the king. “Will you tell me that your three damned Musketeers, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, and your youngster from Bearn, have not fallen, like so many furies, upon poor Bernajoux, and have not maltreated him in such a fashion that probably by this time he is dead? Will you tell me that they did not lay siege to the hotel of the Duc de la Tremouille, and that they did not endeavor to burn it?--which would not, perhaps, have been a great misfortune in time of war, seeing that it is nothing but a nest of Huguenots, but which is, in time of peace, a frightful example. Tell me, now, can you deny all this?"

"And who told you this fine story, sire?" asked Treville, quietly.

"Who has told me this fine story, monsieur? Who should it be but he who watches while I sleep, who labors while I amuse myself, who conducts everything at home and abroad--in France as in Europe?"

"Your Majesty probably refers to God," said M. de Treville; "for I know no one except God who can be so far above your Majesty."

"No, monsieur; I speak of the prop of the state, of my only servant, of my only friend--of the cardinal."

"His Eminence is not his holiness, sire."

"What do you mean by that, monsieur?"

"That it is only the Pope who is infallible, and that this infallibility does not extend to cardinals."

"You mean to say that he deceives me; you mean to say that he betrays me? You accuse him, then? Come, speak; avow freely that you accuse him!"

"No, sire, but I say that he deceives himself. I say that he is ill-informed. I say that he has hastily accused your Majesty's Musketeers, toward whom he is unjust, and that he has not obtained his information from good sources."

"The accusation comes from Monsieur de la Tremouille, from the duke himself. What do you say to that?"

"I might answer, sire, that he is too deeply interested in the question to be a very impartial witness; but so far from that, sire, I know the duke to be a royal gentleman, and I refer the matter to him--but upon one condition, sire."

"What?"

"It is that your Majesty will make him come here, will interrogate him yourself, TETE-A-TETE, without witnesses, and that I shall see your Majesty as soon as you have seen the duke."

"What, then! You will bind yourself," cried the king, "by what Monsieur de la Tremouille shall say?"

"Yes, sire."

"You will accept his judgment?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Any you will submit to the reparation he may require?"

"Certainly."

"La Chesnaye," said the king. "La Chesnaye!"

Louis XIII's confidential valet, who never left the door, entered in reply to the call.

"La Chesnaye," said the king, "let someone go instantly and find Monsieur de la Tremouille; I wish to speak with him this evening."

"Your Majesty gives me your word that you will not see anyone between Monsieur de la Tremouille and myself?"

"Nobody, by the faith of a gentleman."

"Tomorrow, then, sire?"

"Tomorrow, monsieur."

"At what o'clock, please your Majesty?"

"At any hour you will."

"But in coming too early I should be afraid of awakening your Majesty."

"Awaken me! Do you think I ever sleep, then? I sleep no longer, monsieur. I sometimes dream, that's all. Come, then, as early as you like--at seven o'clock; but beware, if you and your Musketeers are guilty."

"If my Musketeers are guilty, sire, the guilty shall be placed in your Majesty's hands, who will dispose of them at your good pleasure. Does your Majesty require anything further? Speak, I am ready to obey."

"No, monsieur, no; I am not called Louis the Just without reason. Tomorrow, then, monsieur--tomorrow."

"Till then, God preserve your Majesty!"

However ill the king might sleep, M. de Treville slept still worse. He had ordered his three Musketeers and their companion to be with him at half past six in the morning. He took them with him, without encouraging them or promising them anything, and without concealing from them that their luck, and even his own, depended upon the cast of the dice.

Arrived at the foot of the back stairs, he desired them to wait. If the king was still irritated against them, they would depart without being seen; if the king consented to see them, they would only have to be called.

On arriving at the king's private antechamber, M. de Treville found La Chesnaye, who informed him that they had not been able to find M. de la Tremouille on the preceding evening at his hotel, that he returned too late to present himself at the Louvre, that he had only that moment arrived and that he was at that very hour with the king.

This circumstance pleased M. de Treville much, as he thus became certain that no foreign suggestion could insinuate itself between M. de la Tremouille's testimony and himself.

In fact, ten minutes had scarcely passed away when the door of the king's closet opened, and M. de Treville saw M. de la Tremouille come out. The duke came straight up to him, and said: "Monsieur de Treville, his Majesty has just sent for me in order to inquire respecting the circumstances which took place yesterday at my hotel. I have told him the truth; that is to say, that the fault lay with my people, and that I was ready to offer you my excuses. Since I have the good fortune to meet you, I beg you to receive them, and to hold me always as one of your friends."

"Monsieur the Duke," said M. de Treville, "I was so confident of your loyalty that I required no other defender before his Majesty than yourself. I find that I have not been mistaken, and I thank you that there is still one man in France of whom may be said, without disappointment, what I have said of you."

"That's well said," cried the king, who had heard all these compliments through the open door; "only tell him, Treville, since he wishes to be considered your friend, that I also wish to be one of his, but he neglects me; that it is nearly three years since I have seen him, and that I never do see him unless I send for him. Tell him all this for me, for these are things which a king cannot say for himself."

"Thanks, sire, thanks," said the duke; "but your Majesty may be assured that it is not those--I do not speak of Monsieur de Treville--whom your Majesty sees at all hours of the day that are most devoted to you."

"Ah! You have heard what I said? So much the better, Duke, so much the better," said the king, advancing toward the door. "Ah! It is you, Treville. Where are your Musketeers? I told you the day before yesterday to bring them with you; why have you not done so?"

"They are below, sire, and with your permission La Chesnaye will bid them come up."

"Yes, yes, let them come up immediately. It is nearly eight o'clock, and at nine I expect a visit. Go, Monsieur Duke, and return often. Come in, Treville."

The Duke saluted and retired. At the moment he opened the door, the three Musketeers and d'Artagnan, conducted by La Chesnaye, appeared at the top of the staircase.

“Come in, my braves,” said the king, “come in; I am going to scold you.”

The Musketeers advanced, bowing, d’Artagnan following closely behind them.

“What the devil!” continued the king. “Seven of his Eminence’s Guards placed HORS DE COMBAT by you four in two days! That’s too many, gentlemen, too many! If you go on so, his Eminence will be forced to renew his company in three weeks, and I to put the edicts in force in all their rigor. One now and then I don’t say much about; but seven in two days, I repeat, it is too many, it is far too many!”

“Therefore, sire, your Majesty sees that they are come, quite contrite and repentant, to offer you their excuses.”

“Quite contrite and repentant! Hem!” said the king. “I place no confidence in their hypocritical faces. In particular, there is one yonder of a Gascon look. Come hither, monsieur.”

D’Artagnan, who understood that it was to him this compliment was addressed, approached, assuming a most deprecating air.

“Why you told me he was a young man? This is a boy, Treville, a mere boy! Do you mean to say that it was he who bestowed that severe thrust at Jussac?”

“And those two equally fine thrusts at Bernajoux.”

“Truly!”

“Without reckoning,” said Athos, “that if he had not rescued me from the hands of Cahusac, I should not now have the honor of making my very humble reverence to your Majesty.”

“Why he is a very devil, this Bearnais! VENTRE-SAINT-GRIS, Monsieur de Treville, as the king my father would have said. But at this sort of work, many doublets must be slashed and many swords broken. Now, Gascons are always poor, are they not?”

“Sire, I can assert that they have hitherto discovered no gold mines in their mountains; though the Lord owes them this miracle in recompense for the manner in which they supported the pretensions of the king your father.”

“Which is to say that the Gascons made a king of me, myself, seeing that I am my father’s son, is it not, Treville? Well, happily, I don’t say nay to it. La Chesnaye, go and see if by rummaging all my pockets you can find forty pistoles; and if you can find them, bring them to me. And now let us see, young man, with your hand upon your conscience, how did all this come to pass?”

D’Artagnan related the adventure of the preceding day in all its details; how, not having been able to sleep for the joy he felt in the expectation of seeing his Majesty, he had gone to his three friends three hours before the hour of audience; how they had gone together to the tennis court, and how, upon the fear he had manifested lest he receive a ball in the face, he had been jeered at by Bernajoux who had nearly paid for his jeer with his life and M. de la Tremouille, who had nothing to do with the matter, with the loss of his hotel.

“This is all very well,” murmured the king, “yes, this is just the account the duke gave me of the affair. Poor cardinal! Seven men in two days, and those of his very best! But that’s quite enough, gentlemen; please to understand, that’s enough. You have taken your revenge for the Rue Ferou, and even exceeded it; you ought to be satisfied.”

“If your Majesty is so,” said Treville, “we are.”

“Oh, yes; I am,” added the king, taking a handful of gold from La Chesnaye, and putting it into the hand of d’Artagnan. “Here,” said he, “is a proof of my satisfaction.”

At this epoch, the ideas of pride which are in fashion in our days did not prevail. A gentleman received, from hand to hand, money from the king, and was not the least in the world humiliated. D’Artagnan put his forty pistoles into his pocket without any scruple--on the contrary, thanking his Majesty greatly.

“There,” said the king, looking at a clock, “there, now, as it is half past eight, you may retire; for as I told you, I expect someone at nine. Thanks for your devotedness, gentlemen. I may continue to rely upon it, may I not?”

“Oh, sire!” cried the four companions, with one voice, “we would allow ourselves to be cut to pieces in your Majesty’s service.”

“Well, well, but keep whole; that will be better, and you will be more useful to me. Treville,” added the king, in a low voice, as the others were retiring, “as you have no room in the Musketeers, and as we have besides decided that a novitiate is necessary before entering that corps, place this young man in the company of the Guards of Monsieur Dessessart, your brother-in-law. Ah, PARDIEU, Treville! I enjoy beforehand the face the cardinal will make. He will be furious; but I don’t care. I am doing what is right.”

The king waved his hand to Treville, who left him and rejoined the Musketeers, whom he found sharing the forty pistoles with d'Artagnan.

The cardinal, as his Majesty had said, was really furious, so furious that during eight days he absented himself from the king's gaming table. This did not prevent the king from being as complacent to him as possible whenever he met him, or from asking in the kindest tone, “Well, Monsieur Cardinal, how fares it with that poor Jussac and that poor Bernajoux of yours?”

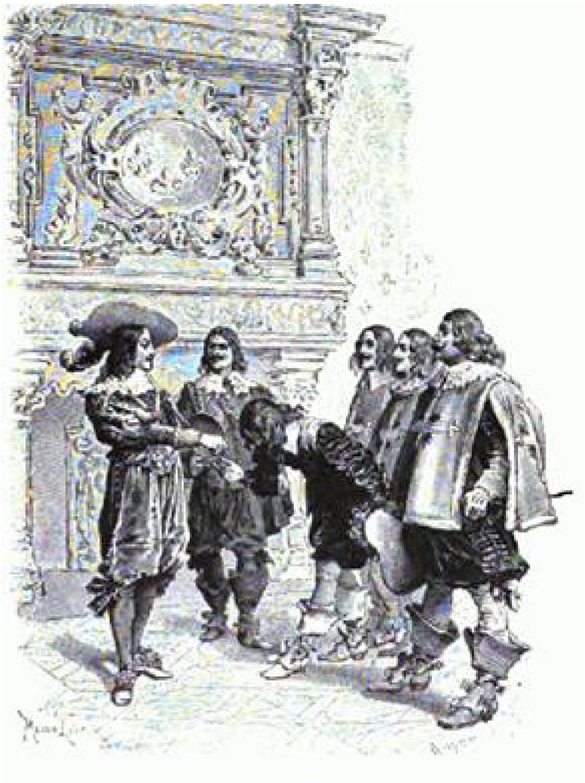

CHAPTER 7

THE INTERIOR OF “THE MUSKETEERS”

When d’Artagnan was out of the Louvre, and consulted his friends upon the use he had best make of his share of the forty pistoles, Athos advised him to order a good repast at the Pomme-de-Pin, Porthos to engage a lackey, and Aramis to provide himself with a suitable mistress.

The repast was carried into effect that very day, and the lackey waited at table. The repast had been ordered by Athos, and the lackey furnished by Porthos. He was a Picard, whom the glorious Musketeer had picked up on the Bridge Tournelle, making rings and plashing in the water.

Porthos pretended that this occupation was proof of a reflective and contemplative organization, and he had brought him away without any other recommendation. The noble carriage of this gentleman, for whom he believed himself to be engaged, had won Planchet--that was the name of the Picard. He felt a slight disappointment, however, when he saw that this place was already taken by a compeer named Mousqueton, and when Porthos signified to him that the state of his household, though great, would not support two servants, and that he must enter into the service of d’Artagnan. Nevertheless, when he waited at the dinner given by his master, and saw him take out a handful of gold to pay for it, he believed his fortune made, and returned thanks to heaven for having thrown him into the service of such a Croesus. He preserved this opinion even after the feast, with the remnants of which he repaired his own long abstinence; but when in the evening he made his master’s bed, the chimeras of Planchet faded away. The bed was the only one in the apartment, which consisted of an antechamber and a bedroom. Planchet slept in the antechamber upon a coverlet taken from the bed of d’Artagnan, and which d’Artagnan from that time made shift to do without.

Athos, on his part, had a valet whom he had trained in his service in a thoroughly peculiar fashion, and who was named Grimaud. He was very taciturn, this worthy signor. Be it understood we are speaking of Athos. During the five or six years that he had lived in the strictest intimacy with his companions, Porthos and Aramis, they could remember having often seen him smile, but had never heard him laugh. His words were brief and expressive, conveying all that was meant, and no more; no embellishments, no embroidery, no arabesques. His conversation a matter of fact, without a single romance.

Although Athos was scarcely thirty years old, and was of great personal beauty and intelligence of mind, no one knew whether he had ever had a mistress. He never spoke of women. He certainly did not prevent others from speaking of them before him, although it was easy to perceive that this kind of conversation, in which he only mingled by bitter words and misanthropic remarks, was very disagreeable to him. His reserve, his roughness, and his silence made almost an old man of him. He had, then, in order not to disturb his habits, accustomed Grimaud to obey him upon a simple gesture or upon a simple movement of his lips. He never spoke to him, except under the most extraordinary occasions.

Sometimes, Grimaud, who feared his master as he did fire, while entertaining a strong attachment to his person and a great veneration for his talents, believed he perfectly understood what he wanted, flew to execute the order received, and did precisely the contrary. Athos then shrugged his shoulders, and, without putting himself in a passion, thrashed Grimaud. On these days he spoke a little.

Porthos, as we have seen, had a character exactly opposite to that of Athos. He not only talked much, but he talked loudly, little caring, we must render him that justice, whether anybody listened to him or not. He talked for the pleasure of talking and for the pleasure of hearing himself talk. He spoke upon all subjects except the sciences, alleging in this respect the inveterate hatred he had borne to scholars from his childhood. He had not so noble an air as Athos, and the commencement of their intimacy often rendered him unjust toward that gentleman, whom he endeavored to eclipse by his splendid dress. But with his simple Musketeer’s uniform and nothing but the manner in which he threw back his head and advanced his foot, Athos instantly took the place which was his due and consigned the ostentatious Porthos to the second rank. Porthos consoled himself by filling the antechamber of M. de Treville and the guardroom of the Louvre with the accounts of his love scrapes, after having passed from professional ladies to military ladies, from the lawyer’s dame to the baroness, there was question of nothing less with Porthos than a foreign princess, who was enormously fond of him.

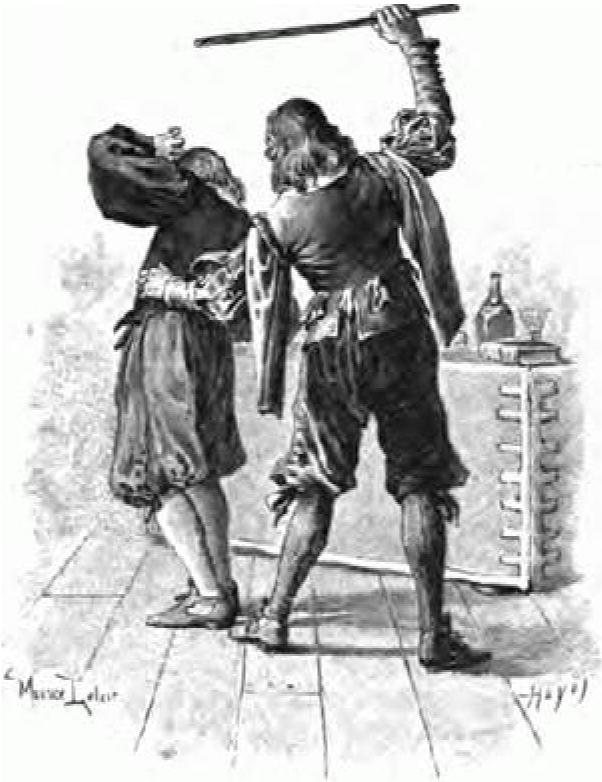

An old proverb says, “Like master, like man.” Let us pass, then, from the valet of Athos to the valet of Porthos, from Grimaud to Mousqueton.

Mousqueton was a Norman, whose pacific name of Boniface his master had changed into the infinitely more sonorous name of Mousqueton. He had entered the service of Porthos upon condition that he should only be clothed and lodged, though in a handsome manner; but he claimed two hours a day to himself, consecrated to an employment which would provide for his other wants. Porthos agreed to the bargain; the thing suited him wonderfully well. He had doublets cut out of his old clothes and cast-off cloaks for Mousqueton, and thanks to a very intelligent tailor, who made his clothes look as good as new by turning them, and whose wife was suspected of wishing to make Porthos descend from his aristocratic habits, Mousqueton made a very good figure when attending on his master.

As for Aramis, of whom we believe we have sufficiently explained the character--a character which, like that of his lackey was called Bazin. Thanks to the hopes which his master entertained of someday entering into orders, he was always clothed in black, as became the servant of a churchman. He was a Berrichon, thirty-five or forty years old, mild, peaceable, sleek, employing the leisure his master left him in the perusal of pious works, providing rigorously for two a dinner of few dishes, but excellent. For the rest, he was dumb, blind, and deaf, and of unimpeachable fidelity.

And now that we are acquainted, superficially at least, with the masters and the valets, let us pass on to the dwellings occupied by each of them.

Athos dwelt in the Rue Ferou, within two steps of the Luxembourg. His apartment consisted of two small chambers, very nicely fitted up, in a furnished house, the hostess of which, still young and still really handsome, cast tender glances uselessly at him. Some fragments of past splendor appeared here and there upon the walls of this modest lodging; a sword, for example, richly embossed, which belonged by its make to the times of Francis I, the hilt of which alone, encrusted with precious stones, might be worth two hundred pistoles, and which, nevertheless, in his moments of greatest distress Athos had never pledged or offered for sale. It had long been an object of ambition for Porthos. Porthos would have given ten years of his life to possess this sword.

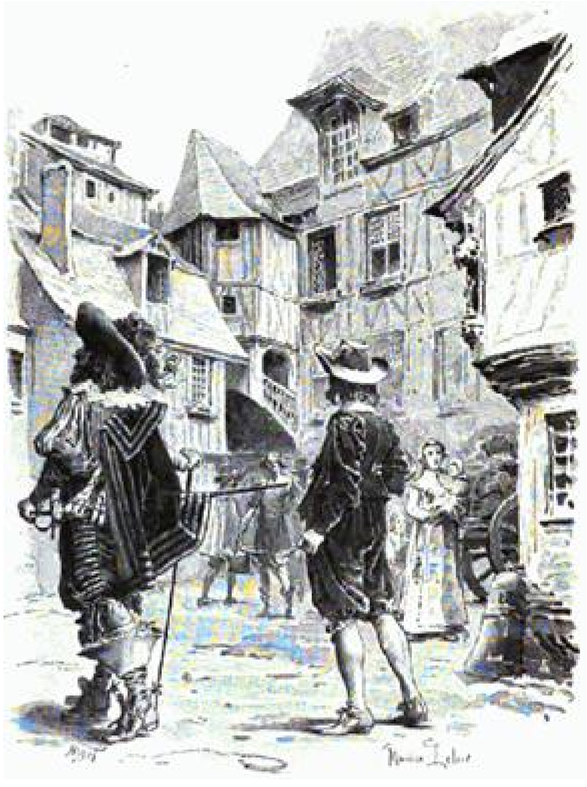

One day, when he had an appointment with a duchess, he endeavored even to borrow it of Athos. Athos, without saying anything, emptied his pockets, got together all his jewels, purses, aiguillettes, and gold chains, and offered them all to Porthos; but as to the sword, he said it was sealed to its place and should never quit it until its master should himself quit his lodgings. In addition to the sword, there was a portrait representing a nobleman of the time of Henry III, dressed with the greatest elegance, and who wore the Order of the Holy Ghost; and this portrait had certain resemblances of lines with Athos, certain family likenesses which indicated that this great noble, a knight of the Order of the King, was his ancestor.

Besides these, a casket of magnificent goldwork, with the same arms as the sword and the portrait, formed a middle ornament to the mantelpiece, and assorted badly with the rest of the furniture. Athos always carried the key of this coffer about him; but he one day opened it before Porthos, and Porthos was convinced that this coffer contained nothing but letters and papers--love letters and family papers, no doubt.

Porthos lived in an apartment, large in size and of very sumptuous appearance, in the Rue du Vieux-Colombier. Every time he passed with a friend before his windows, at one of which Mousqueton was sure to be placed in full livery, Porthos raised his head and his hand, and said, “That is my abode!” But he was never to be found at home; he never invited anybody to go up with him, and no one could form an idea of what his sumptuous apartment contained in the shape of real riches.

As to Aramis, he dwelt in a little lodging composed of a boudoir, an eating room, and a bedroom, which room, situated, as the others were, on the ground floor, looked out upon a little fresh green garden, shady and impenetrable to the eyes of his neighbors.

With regard to d’Artagnan, we know how he was lodged, and we have already made acquaintance with his lackey, Master Planchet.

D’Artagnan, who was by nature very curious--as people generally are who possess the genius of intrigue--did all he could to make out who Athos, Porthos, and Aramis really were (for under these pseudonyms each of these young men concealed his family name)--Athos in particular, who, a league away, savored of nobility. He addressed himself then to Porthos to gain information respecting Athos and Aramis, and to Aramis in order to learn something of Porthos.

Unfortunately Porthos knew nothing of the life of his silent companion but what revealed itself. It was said Athos had met with great crosses in love, and that a frightful treachery had forever poisoned the life of this gallant man. What could this treachery be? All the world was ignorant of it.

As to Porthos, except his real name (as was the case with those of his two comrades), his life was very easily known. Vain and indiscreet, it was as easy to see through him as through a crystal. The only thing to mislead the investigator would have been belief in all the good things he said of himself.

With respect to Aramis, though having the air of having nothing secret about him, he was a young fellow made up of mysteries, answering little to questions put to him about others, and having learned from him the report which prevailed concerning the success of the Musketeer with a princess, wished to gain a little insight into the amorous adventures of his interlocutor. “And you, my dear companion,” said he, “you speak of the baronesses, countesses, and princesses of others?”

“PARDIEU! I spoke of them because Porthos talked of them himself, because he had paraded all these fine things before me. But be assured, my dear Monsieur d’Artagnan, that if I had obtained them from any other source, or if they had been confided to me, there exists no confessor more discreet than myself.”

“Oh, I don’t doubt that,” replied d’Artagnan; “but it seems to me that you are tolerably familiar with coats of arms--a certain embroidered handkerchief, for instance, to which I owe the honor of your acquaintance?”

This time Aramis was not angry, but assumed the most modest air and replied in a friendly tone, “My dear friend, do not forget that I wish to belong to the Church, and that I avoid all mundane opportunities. The handkerchief you saw had not been given to me, but it had been forgotten and left at my house by one of my friends. I was obliged to pick it up in order not to compromise him and the lady he loves. As for myself, I neither have, nor desire to have, a mistress, following in that respect the very judicious example of Athos, who has none any more than I have.”

“But what the devil! You are not a priest, you are a Musketeer!”

“A Musketeer for a time, my friend, as the cardinal says, a Musketeer against my will, but a churchman at heart, believe me. Athos and Porthos dragged me into this to occupy me. I had, at the moment of being ordained, a little difficulty with--But that would not interest you, and I am taking up your valuable time.”

“Not at all; it interests me very much,” cried d’Artagnan; “and at this moment I have absolutely nothing to do.”

“Yes, but I have my breviary to repeat,” answered Aramis; “then some verses to compose, which Madame d’Aiguillon begged of me. Then I must go to the Rue St. Honore in order to purchase some rouge for Madame de Chevreuse. So you see, my dear friend, that if you are not in a hurry, I am very much in a hurry.”

Aramis held out his hand in a cordial manner to his young companion, and took leave of him.

Notwithstanding all the pains he took, d’Artagnan was unable to learn any more concerning his three new-made friends. He formed, therefore, the resolution of believing for the present all that was said of their past, hoping for more certain and extended revelations in the future. In the meanwhile, he looked upon Athos as an Achilles, Porthos as an Ajax, and Aramis as a Joseph.

As to the rest, the life of the four young friends was joyous enough. Athos played, and that as a rule unfortunately. Nevertheless, he never borrowed a sou of his companions, although his purse was ever at their service; and when he had played upon honor, he always awakened his creditor by six o’clock the next morning to pay the debt of the preceding evening.

Porthos had his fits. On the days when he won he was insolent and ostentatious; if he lost, he disappeared completely for several days, after which he reappeared with a pale face and thinner person, but with money in his purse.

As to Aramis, he never played. He was the worst Musketeer and the most unconvivial companion imaginable. He had always something or other to do. Sometimes in the midst of dinner, when everyone, under the attraction of wine and in the warmth of conversation, believed they had two or three hours longer to enjoy themselves at table, Aramis looked at his watch, arose with a bland smile, and took leave of the company, to go, as he said, to consult a casuist with whom he had an appointment. At other times he would return home to write a treatise, and requested his friends not to disturb him.

At this Athos would smile, with his charming, melancholy smile, which so became his noble countenance, and Porthos would drink, swearing that Aramis would never be anything but a village CURE.

Planchet, d’Artagnan’s valet, supported his good fortune nobly. He received thirty sous per day, and for a month he returned to his lodgings gay as a chaffinch, and affable toward his master. When the wind of adversity began to blow upon the housekeeping of the Rue des Fossoyeurs--that is to say, when the forty pistoles of King Louis XIII were consumed or nearly so--he commenced complaints which Athos thought nauseous, Porthos indecent, and Aramis ridiculous. Athos counseled d'Artagnan to dismiss the fellow; Porthos was of opinion that he should give him a good thrashing first; and Aramis contended that a master should never attend to anything but the civilities paid to him.

"This is all very easy for you to say," replied d'Artagnan, "for you, Athos, who live like a dumb man with Grimaud, who forbid him to speak, and consequently never exchange ill words with him; for you, Porthos, who carry matters in such a magnificent style, and are a god to your valet, Mousqueton; and for you, Aramis, who, always abstracted by your theological studies, inspire your servant, Bazin, a mild, religious man, with a profound respect; but for me, who am without any settled means and without resources--for me, who am neither a Musketeer nor even a Guardsman, what I am to do to inspire either the affection, the terror, or the respect in Planchet?"

"This is serious," answered the three friends; "it is a family affair. It is with valets as with wives, they must be placed at once upon the footing in which you wish them to remain. Reflect upon it."

D'Artagnan did reflect, and resolved to thrash Planchet provisionally; which he did with the conscientiousness that d'Artagnan carried into everything. After having well beaten him, he forbade him to leave his service without his permission. "For," added he, "the future cannot fail to mend; I inevitably look for better times. Your fortune is therefore made if you remain with me, and I am too good a master to allow you to miss such a chance by granting you the dismissal you require."

This manner of acting roused much respect for d'Artagnan's policy among the Musketeers. Planchet was equally seized with admiration, and said no more about going away.

The life of the four young men had become fraternal. D'Artagnan, who had no settled habits of his own, as he came from his province into the midst of his world quite new to him, fell easily into the habits of his friends.

They rose about eight o'clock in the winter, about six in summer, and went to take the countersign and see how things went on at M. de Treville's. D'Artagnan, although he was not a Musketeer, performed the duty of one with remarkable punctuality. He went on guard because he always kept company with whoever of his friends was on duty. He was well known at the Hotel of the Musketeers, where everyone considered him a good comrade. M. de Treville, who had appreciated him at the first glance and who bore him a real affection, never ceased recommending him to the king.

On their side, the three Musketeers were much attached to their young comrade. The friendship which united these four men, and the need they felt of seeing another three or four times a day, whether for dueling, business, or pleasure, caused them to be continually running after one another like shadows; and the Inseparables were constantly to be met with seeking one another, from the Luxembourg to the Place St. Sulpice, or from the Rue du Vieux-Colombier to the Luxembourg.

In the meanwhile the promises of M. de Treville went on prosperously. One fine morning the king commanded M. de Chevalier Dessessart to admit d’Artagnan as a cadet in his company of Guards. D’Artagnan, with a sigh, donned his uniform, which he would have exchanged for that of a Musketeer at the expense of ten years of his existence. But M. de Treville promised this favor after a novitiate of two years--a novitiate which might besides be abridged if an opportunity should present itself for d’Artagnan to render the king any signal service, or to distinguish himself by some brilliant action. Upon this promise d’Artagnan withdrew, and the next day he began service.

Then it became the turn of Athos, Porthos, and Aramis to mount guard with d’Artagnan when he was on duty. The company of M. le Chevalier Dessessart thus received four instead of one when it admitted d’Artagnan.

CHAPTER 8

CONCERNING A COURT INTRIGUE

In the meantime, the forty pistoles of King Louis XIII, like all other things of this world, after having had a beginning had an end, and after this end our four companions began to be somewhat embarrassed. At first, Athos supported the association for a time with his own means.

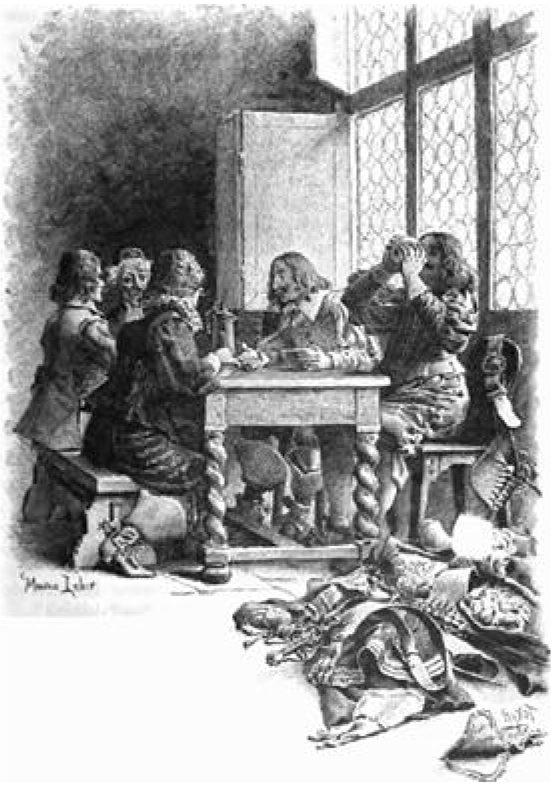

Porthos succeeded him; and thanks to one of those disappearances to which he was accustomed, he was able to provide for the wants of all for a fortnight. At last it became Aramis's turn, who performed it with a good grace and who succeeded--as he said, by selling some theological books--in procuring a few pistoles.

Then, as they had been accustomed to do, they had recourse to M. de Treville, who made some advances on their pay; but these advances could not go far with three Musketeers who were already much in arrears and a Guardsman who as yet had no pay at all.

At length when they found they were likely to be really in want, they got together, as a last effort, eight or ten pistoles, with which Porthos went to the gaming table. Unfortunately he was in a bad vein; he lost all, together with twenty-five pistoles for which he had given his word.

Then the inconvenience became distress. The hungry friends, followed by their lackeys, were seen haunting the quays and Guard rooms, picking up among their friends abroad all the dinners they could meet with; for according to the advice of Aramis, it was prudent to sow repasts right and left in prosperity, in order to reap a few in time of need.

Athos was invited four times, and each time took his friends and their lackeys with him. Porthos had six occasions, and contrived in the same manner that his friends should partake of them; Aramis had eight of them. He was a man, as must have been already perceived, who made but little noise, and yet was much sought after.

As to d’Artagnan, who as yet knew nobody in the capital, he only found one chocolate breakfast at the house of a priest of his own province, and one dinner at the house of a cornet of the Guards. He took his army to the priest’s, where they devoured as much provision as would have lasted him for two months, and to the cornet’s, who performed wonders; but as Planchet said, “People do not eat at once for all time, even when they eat a good deal.”

D’Artagnan thus felt himself humiliated in having only procured one meal and a half for his companions--as the breakfast at the priest’s could only be counted as half a repast--in return for the feasts which Athos, Porthos, and Aramis had procured him. He fancied himself a burden to the society, forgetting in his perfectly juvenile good faith that he had fed this society for a month; and he set his mind actively to work. He reflected that this coalition of four young, brave, enterprising, and active men ought to have some other object than swaggering walks, fencing lessons, and practical jokes, more or less witty.

In fact, four men such as they were--four men devoted to one another, from their purses to their lives; four men always supporting one another, never yielding, executing singly or together the resolutions formed in common; four arms threatening the four cardinal points, or turning toward a single point--must inevitably, either subterraneously, in open day, by mining, in the trench, by cunning, or by force, open themselves a way toward the object they wished to attain, however well it might be defended, or however distant it may seem. The only thing that astonished d’Artagnan was that his friends had never thought of this.

He was thinking by himself, and even seriously racking his brain to find a direction for this single force four times multiplied, with which he did not doubt, as with the lever for which Archimedes sought, they should succeed in moving the world, when someone tapped gently at his door. D’Artagnan awakened Planchet and ordered him to open it.

From this phrase, “d’Artagnan awakened Planchet,” the reader must not suppose it was night, or that day was hardly come. No, it had just struck four. Planchet, two hours before, had asked his master for some dinner, and he had answered him with the proverb, “He who sleeps, dines.” And Planchet dined by sleeping.

A man was introduced of simple mien, who had the appearance of a tradesman. Planchet, by way of dessert, would have liked to hear the conversation; but the citizen declared to d’Artagnan that what he had to say being important and confidential, he desired to be left alone with him.

D’Artagnan dismissed Planchet, and requested his visitor to be seated. There was a moment of silence, during which the two men looked at each other, as if to make a preliminary acquaintance, after which d’Artagnan bowed, as a sign that he listened.

“I have heard Monsieur d’Artagnan spoken of as a very brave young man,” said the citizen; “and this reputation which he justly enjoys had decided me to confide a secret to him.”

“Speak, monsieur, speak,” said d’Artagnan, who instinctively scented something advantageous.

The citizen made a fresh pause and continued, “I have a wife who is seamstress to the queen, monsieur, and who is not deficient in either virtue or beauty. I was induced to marry her about three years ago, although she had but very little dowry, because Monsieur Laporte, the queen’s cloak bearer, is her godfather, and befriends her.”

“Well, monsieur?” asked d’Artagnan.

“Well!” resumed the citizen, “well, monsieur, my wife was abducted yesterday morning, as she was coming out of her workroom.”

“And by whom was your wife abducted?”

“I know nothing surely, monsieur, but I suspect someone.”

“And who is the person whom you suspect?”

“A man who has pursued her a long time.”

“The devil!”

“But allow me to tell you, monsieur,” continued the citizen, “that I am convinced that there is less love than politics in all this.”

“Less love than politics,” replied d’Artagnan, with a reflective air; “and what do you suspect?”

“I do not know whether I ought to tell you what I suspect.”

“Monsieur, I beg you to observe that I ask you absolutely nothing. It is you who have come to me. It is you who have told me that you had a secret to confide in me. Act, then, as you think proper; there is still time to withdraw."

"No, monsieur, no; you appear to be an honest young man, and I will have confidence in you. I believe, then, that it is not on account of any intrigues of her own that my wife has been arrested, but because of those of a lady much greater than herself."

"Ah, ah! Can it be on account of the amours of Madame de Bois-Tracy?" said d'Artagnan, wishing to have the air, in the eyes of the citizen, of being posted as to court affairs.

"Higher, monsieur, higher."

"Of Madame d'Aiguillon?"

"Still higher."

"Of Madame de Chevreuse?"

"Of the--" d'Artagnan checked himself.

"Yes, monsieur," replied the terrified citizen, in a tone so low that he was scarcely audible.

"And with whom?"

"With whom can it be, if not the Duke of--"

"The Duke of--"

"Yes, monsieur," replied the citizen, giving a still fainter intonation to his voice.

"But how do you know all this?"

"How do I know it?"

"Yes, how do you know it? No half-confidence, or--you understand!"

"I know it from my wife, monsieur--from my wife herself."

"Who learns it from whom?"

"From Monsieur Laporte. Did I not tell you that she was the goddaughter of Monsieur Laporte, the confidential man of the queen? Well, Monsieur Laporte placed her near her Majesty in order that our poor queen might at least have someone in whom she could place confidence, abandoned as she is by the king, watched as she is by the cardinal, betrayed as she is by everybody."

"Ah, ah! It begins to develop itself," said d'Artagnan.

"Now, my wife came home four days ago, monsieur. One of her conditions was that she should come and see me twice a week; for, as I had the honor to tell you, my wife loves me dearly--my wife, then, came and confided to me that the queen at that very moment entertained great fears."

“Truly!”

“Yes. The cardinal, as it appears, pursues he and persecutes her more than ever. He cannot pardon her the history of the Saraband. You know the history of the Saraband?”

“PARDIEU! Know it!” replied d’Artagnan, who knew nothing about it, but who wished to appear to know everything that was going on.

“So that now it is no longer hatred, but vengeance.”

“Indeed!”

“And the queen believes--”

“Well, what does the queen believe?”

“She believes that someone has written to the Duke of Buckingham in her name.”

“In the queen’s name?”

“Yes, to make him come to Paris; and when once come to Paris, to draw him into some snare.”

“The devil! But your wife, monsieur, what has she to do with all this?”

“Her devotion to the queen is known; and they wish either to remove her from her mistress, or to intimidate her, in order to obtain her Majesty’s secrets, or to seduce her and make use of her as a spy.”

“That is likely,” said d’Artagnan; “but the man who has abducted her--do you know him?”

“I have told you that I believe I know him.”

“His name?”

“I do not know that; what I do know is that he is a creature of the cardinal, his evil genius.”

“But you have seen him?”

“Yes, my wife pointed him out to me one day.”

“Has he anything remarkable about him by which one may recognize him?”

“Oh, certainly; he is a noble of very lofty carriage, black hair, swarthy complexion, piercing eye, white teeth, and has a scar on his temple.”

“A scar on his temple!” cried d’Artagnan; “and with that, white teeth, a piercing eye, dark complexion, black hair, and haughty carriage--why, that’s my man of Meung.”

“He is your man, do you say?”

“Yes, yes; but that has nothing to do with it. No, I am wrong. On the contrary, that simplifies the matter greatly. If your man is mine, with one blow I shall obtain two revenges, that’s all; but where to find this man?”

“I know not.”

“Have you no information as to his abiding place?”

“None. One day, as I was conveying my wife back to the Louvre, he was coming out as she was going in, and she showed him to me.”

“The devil! The devil!” murmured d’Artagnan; “all this is vague enough. From whom have you learned of the abduction of your wife?”

“From Monsieur Laporte.”

“Did he give you any details?”

“He knew none himself.”

“And you have learned nothing from any other quarter?”

“Yes, I have received--”

“What?”

“I fear I am committing a great imprudence.”

“You always come back to that; but I must make you see this time that it is too late to retreat.”

“I do not retreat, MORDIEU!” cried the citizen, swearing in order to rouse his courage. “Besides, by the faith of Bonacieux--”

“You call yourself Bonacieux?” interrupted d’Artagnan.

“Yes, that is my name.”

“You said, then, by the word of Bonacieux. Pardon me for interrupting you, but it appears to me that that name is familiar to me.”

“Possibly, monsieur. I am your landlord.”

“Ah, ah!” said d’Artagnan, half rising and bowing; “you are my landlord?”

“Yes, monsieur, yes. And as it is three months since you have been here, and though, distracted as you must be in your important occupations, you have forgotten to pay me my rent--as, I say, I have not tormented you a single instant, I thought you would appreciate my delicacy.”

“How can it be otherwise, my dear Bonacieux?” replied d’Artagnan; “trust me, I am fully grateful for such unparalleled conduct, and if, as I told you, I can be of any service to you--”

“I believe you, monsieur, I believe you; and as I was about to say, by the word of Bonacieux, I have confidence in you.”

“Finish, then, what you were about to say.”

The citizen took a paper from his pocket, and presented it to d’Artagnan.

“A letter?” said the young man.

“Which I received this morning.”

D’Artagnan opened it, and as the day was beginning to decline, he approached the window to read it. The citizen followed him.

“‘Do not seek your wife,’“ read d’Artagnan; “‘she will be restored to you when there is no longer occasion for her. If you make a single step to find her you are lost.’

“That’s pretty positive,” continued d’Artagnan; “but after all, it is but a menace.”

“Yes; but that menace terrifies me. I am not a fighting man at all, monsieur, and I am afraid of the Bastille.”

“Hum!” said d’Artagnan. “I have no greater regard for the Bastille than you. If it were nothing but a sword thrust, why then--”

“I have counted upon you on this occasion, monsieur.”

“Yes?”

“Seeing you constantly surrounded by Musketeers of a very superb appearance, and knowing that these Musketeers belong to Monsieur de Treville, and were consequently enemies of the cardinal, I thought that you and your friends, while rendering justice to your poor queen, would be pleased to play his Eminence an ill turn.”

“Without doubt.”

“And then I have thought that considering three months’ lodging, about which I have said nothing--”

“Yes, yes; you have already given me that reason, and I find it excellent.”

“Reckoning still further, that as long as you do me the honor to remain in my house I shall never speak to you about rent--”

“Very kind!”

“And adding to this, if there be need of it, meaning to offer you fifty pistoles, if, against all probability, you should be short at the present moment.”

“Admirable! You are rich then, my dear Monsieur Bonacieux?”

“I am comfortably off, monsieur, that’s all; I have scraped together some such thing as an income of two or three thousand crown in the haberdashery business, but more particularly in venturing some funds in the last voyage of the celebrated navigator Jean Moquet; so that you understand, monsieur-- But--” cried the citizen.

“What!” demanded d’Artagnan.

“Whom do I see yonder?”

"Where?"

"In the street, facing your window, in the embrasure of that door--a man wrapped in a cloak."

"It is he!" cried d'Artagnan and the citizen at the same time, each having recognized his man.

"Ah, this time," cried d'Artagnan, springing to his sword, "this time he will not escape me!"

Drawing his sword from its scabbard, he rushed out of the apartment. On the staircase he met Athos and Porthos, who were coming to see him. They separated, and d'Artagnan rushed between them like a dart.

"Pah! Where are you going?" cried the two Musketeers in a breath.

"The man of Meung!" replied d'Artagnan, and disappeared.

D'Artagnan had more than once related to his friends his adventure with the stranger, as well as the apparition of the beautiful foreigner, to whom this man had confided some important missive.

The opinion of Athos was that d'Artagnan had lost his letter in the skirmish. A gentleman, in his opinion--and according to d'Artagnan's portrait of him, the stranger must be a gentleman--would be incapable of the baseness of stealing a letter.

Porthos saw nothing in all this but a love meeting, given by a lady to a cavalier, or by a cavalier to a lady, which had been disturbed by the presence of d'Artagnan and his yellow horse.

Aramis said that as these sorts of affairs were mysterious, it was better not to fathom them.

They understood, then, from the few words which escaped from d'Artagnan, what affair was in hand, and as they thought that overtaking his man, or losing sight of him, d'Artagnan would return to his rooms, they kept on their way.

When they entered d'Artagnan's chamber, it was empty; the landlord, dreading the consequences of the encounter which was doubtless about to take place between the young man and the stranger, had, consistent with the character he had given himself, judged it prudent to decamp.

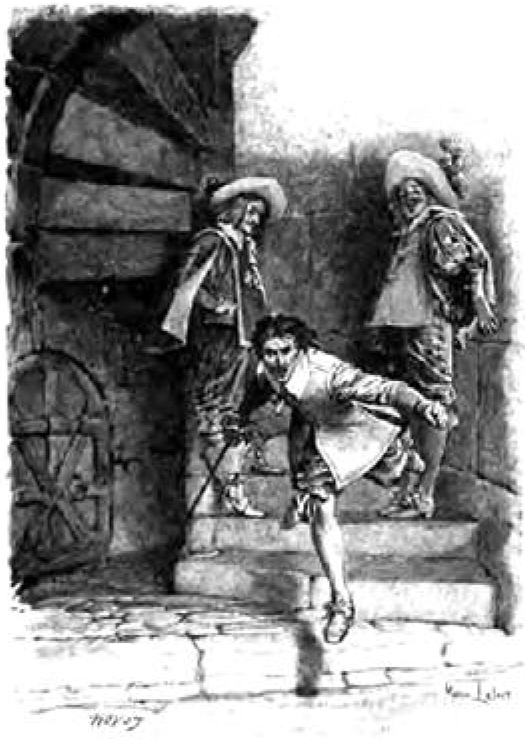

CHAPTER 9

D’ARTAGNAN SHOWS HIMSELF

As Athos and Porthos had foreseen, at the expiration of a half hour, d’Artagnan returned. He had again missed his man, who had disappeared as if by enchantment. D’Artagnan had run, sword in hand, through all the neighboring streets, but had found nobody resembling the man he sought for. Then he came back to the point where, perhaps, he ought to have begun, and that was to knock at the door against which the stranger had leaned; but this proved useless--for though he knocked ten or twelve times in succession, no one answered, and some of the neighbors, who put their noses out of their windows or were brought to their doors by the noise, had assured him that that house, all the openings of which were tightly closed, had not been inhabited for six months.

While d’Artagnan was running through the streets and knocking at doors, Aramis had joined his companions; so that on returning home d’Artagnan found the reunion complete.

“Well!” cried the three Musketeers all together, on seeing d’Artagnan enter with his brow covered with perspiration and his countenance upset with anger.

“Well!” cried he, throwing his sword upon the bed, “this man must be the devil in person; he has disappeared like a phantom, like a shade, like a specter.”

“Do you believe in apparitions?” asked Athos of Porthos.

“I never believe in anything I have not seen, and as I never have seen apparitions, I don’t believe in them.”

“The Bible,” said Aramis, “make our belief in them a law; the ghost of Samuel appeared to Saul, and it is an article of faith that I should be very sorry to see any doubt thrown upon, Porthos.”

“At all events, man or devil, body or shadow, illusion or reality, this man is born for my damnation; for his flight has caused us to miss a glorious affair, gentlemen--an affair by which there were a hundred pistoles, and perhaps more, to be gained.”

“How is that?” cried Porthos and Aramis in a breath.

As to Athos, faithful to his system of reticence, he contented himself with interrogating d’Artagnan by a look.

“Planchet,” said d’Artagnan to his domestic, who just then insinuated his head through the half-open door in order to catch some fragments of the conversation, “go down to my landlord, Monsieur Bonacieux, and ask him to send me half a dozen bottles of Beaugency wine; I prefer that.”

“Ah, ah! You have credit with your landlord, then?” asked Porthos.

“Yes,” replied d’Artagnan, “from this very day; and mind, if the wine is bad, we will send him to find better.”

“We must use, and not abuse,” said Aramis, sententiously.

“I always said that d’Artagnan had the longest head of the four,” said Athos, who, having uttered his opinion, to which d’Artagnan replied with a bow, immediately resumed his accustomed silence.

“But come, what is this about?” asked Porthos.

“Yes,” said Aramis, “impart it to us, my dear friend, unless the honor of any lady be hazarded by this confidence; in that case you would do better to keep it to yourself.”

“Be satisfied,” replied d’Artagnan; “the honor of no one will have cause to complain of what I have to tell.”

He then related to his friends, word for word, all that had passed between him and his host, and how the man who had abducted the wife of his worthy landlord was the same with whom he had had the difference at the hostelry of the Jolly Miller.

“Your affair is not bad,” said Athos, after having tasted like a connoisseur and indicated by a nod of his head that he thought the wine good; “and one may draw fifty or sixty pistoles from this good man. Then there only remains to ascertain whether these fifty or sixty pistoles are worth the risk of four heads.”

“But observe,” cried d’Artagnan, “that there is a woman in the affair--a woman carried off, a woman who is doubtless threatened, tortured perhaps, and all because she is faithful to her mistress.”

“Beware, d’Artagnan, beware,” said Aramis. “You grow a little too warm, in my opinion, about the fate of Madame Bonacieux. Woman was created for our destruction, and it is from her we inherit all our miseries.”

At this speech of Aramis, the brow of Athos became clouded and he bit his lips.

"It is not Madame Bonacieux about whom I am anxious," cried d'Artagnan, "but the queen, whom the king abandons, whom the cardinal persecutes, and who sees the heads of all her friends fall, one after the other."

"Why does she love what we hate most in the world, the Spaniards and the English?"

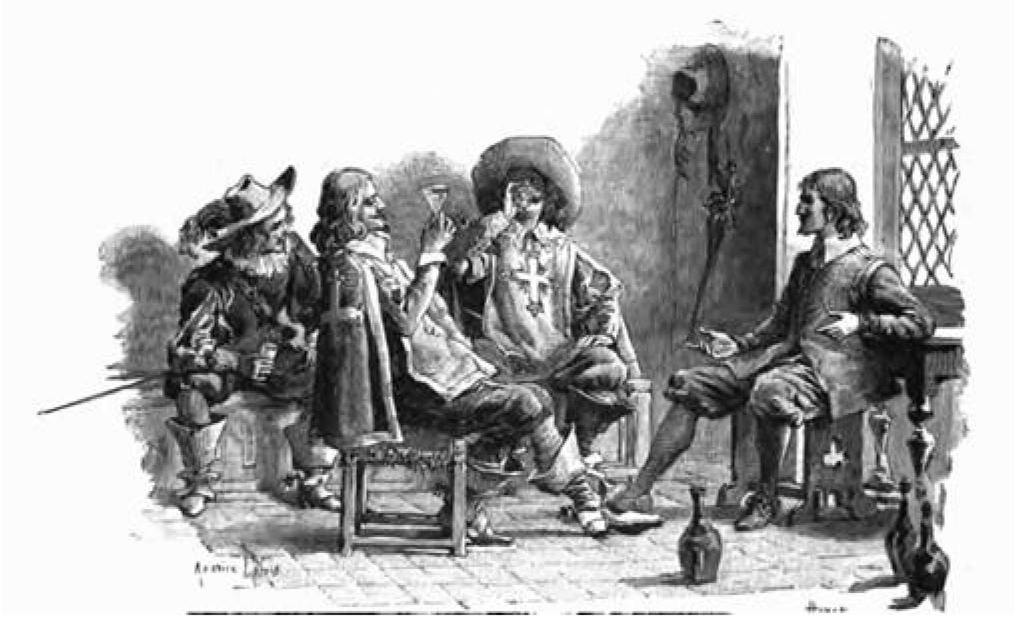

"Spain is her country," replied d'Artagnan; "and it is very natural that she should love the Spanish, who are the children of the same soil as herself. As to the second reproach, I have heard it said that she does not love the English, but an Englishman."

"Well, and by my faith," said Athos, "it must be acknowledged that this Englishman is worthy of being loved. I never saw a man with a nobler air than his."

"Without reckoning that he dresses as nobody else can," said Porthos. "I was at the Louvre on the day when he scattered his pearls; and, PARDIEU, I picked up two that I sold for ten pistoles each. Do you know him, Aramis?"

"As well as you do, gentlemen; for I was among those who seized him in the garden at Amiens, into which Monsieur Putange, the queen's equerry, introduced me. I was at school at the time, and the adventure appeared to me to be cruel for the king."

"Which would not prevent me," said d'Artagnan, "if I knew where the Duke of Buckingham was, from taking him by the hand and conducting him to the queen, were it only to enrage the cardinal, and if we could find means to play him a sharp turn, I vow that I would voluntarily risk my head in doing it."

"And did the mercer*," rejoined Athos, "tell you, d'Artagnan, that the queen thought that Buckingham had been brought over by a forged letter?"

**Haberdasher*

"She is afraid so."

"Wait a minute, then," said Aramis.

"What for?" demanded Porthos.

"Go on, while I endeavor to recall circumstances."

"And now I am convinced," said d'Artagnan, "that this abduction of the queen's woman is connected with the events of which we are speaking, and perhaps with the presence of Buckingham in Paris."

"The Gascon is full of ideas," said Porthos, with admiration.

"I like to hear him talk," said Athos; "his dialect amuses me."

"Gentlemen," cried Aramis, "listen to this."

"Listen to Aramis," said his three friends.

"Yesterday I was at the house of a doctor of theology, whom I sometimes consult about my studies."

Athos smiled.

"He resides in a quiet quarter," continued Aramis; "his tastes and his profession require it. Now, at the moment when I left his house--"

Here Aramis paused.

"Well," cried his auditors; "at the moment you left his house?"

Aramis appeared to make a strong inward effort, like a man who, in the full relation of a falsehood, finds himself stopped by some unforeseen obstacle; but the eyes of his three companions were fixed upon him, their ears were wide open, and there were no means of retreat.

"This doctor has a niece," continued Aramis.

"Ah, he has a niece!" interrupted Porthos.

"A very respectable lady," said Aramis.

The three friends burst into laughter.

"Ah, if you laugh, if you doubt me," replied Aramis, "you shall know nothing."

"We believe like Mohammedans, and are as mute as tombstones," said Athos.

"I will continue, then," resumed Aramis. "This niece comes sometimes to see her uncle; and by chance was there yesterday at the same time that I was, and it was my duty to offer to conduct her to her carriage.”

“Ah! She has a carriage, then, this niece of the doctor?” interrupted Porthos, one of whose faults was a great looseness of tongue. “A nice acquaintance, my friend!”

“Porthos,” replied Aramis, “I have had the occasion to observe to you more than once that you are very indiscreet; and that is injurious to you among the women.”

“Gentlemen, gentlemen,” cried d’Artagnan, who began to get a glimpse of the result of the adventure, “the thing is serious. Let us try not to jest, if we can. Go on Aramis, go on.”

“All at once, a tall, dark gentleman--just like yours, d’Artagnan.”

“The same, perhaps,” said he.

“Possibly,” continued Aramis, “came toward me, accompanied by five or six men who followed about ten paces behind him; and in the politest tone, ‘Monsieur Duke,’ said he to me, ‘and you madame,’ continued he, addressing the lady on my arm--”

“The doctor’s niece?”

“Hold your tongue, Porthos,” said Athos; “you are insupportable.”

“‘--will you enter this carriage, and that without offering the least resistance, without making the least noise?’“

“He took you for Buckingham!” cried d’Artagnan.

“I believe so,” replied Aramis.

“But the lady?” asked Porthos.

“He took her for the queen!” said d’Artagnan.

“Just so,” replied Aramis.

“The Gascon is the devil!” cried Athos; “nothing escapes him.”

“The fact is,” said Porthos, “Aramis is of the same height, and something of the shape of the duke; but it nevertheless appears to me that the dress of a Musketeer--”

“I wore an enormous cloak,” said Aramis.

“In the month of July? The devil!” said Porthos. “Is the doctor afraid that you may be recognized?”

“I can comprehend that the spy may have been deceived by the person; but the face--”

“I had a large hat,” said Aramis.

“Oh, good lord,” cried Porthos, “what precautions for the study of theology!”

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," said d'Artagnan, "do not let us lose our time in jesting. Let us separate, and let us seek the mercer's wife--that is the key of the intrigue."

"A woman of such inferior condition! Can you believe so?" said Porthos, protruding his lips with contempt.

"She is goddaughter to Laporte, the confidential valet of the queen. Have I not told you so, gentlemen? Besides, it has perhaps been her Majesty's calculation to seek on this occasion for support so lowly. High heads expose themselves from afar, and the cardinal is longsighted."

"Well," said Porthos, "in the first place make a bargain with the mercer, and a good bargain."

"That's useless," said d'Artagnan; "for I believe if he does not pay us, we shall be well enough paid by another party."

At this moment a sudden noise of footsteps was heard upon the stairs; the door was thrown violently open, and the unfortunate mercer rushed into the chamber in which the council was held.

"Save me, gentlemen, for the love of heaven, save me!" cried he. "There are four men come to arrest me. Save me! Save me!"

Porthos and Aramis arose.

"A moment," cried d'Artagnan, making them a sign to replace in the scabbard their half-drawn swords. "It is not courage that is needed; it is prudence."

"And yet," cried Porthos, "we will not leave--"

"You will leave d'Artagnan to act as he thinks proper," said Athos. "He has, I repeat, the longest head of the four, and for my part I declare that I will obey him. Do as you think best, d'Artagnan."

At this moment the four Guards appeared at the door of the antechamber, but seeing four Musketeers standing, and their swords by their sides, they hesitated about going farther.

"Come in, gentlemen, come in," called d'Artagnan; "you are here in my apartment, and we are all faithful servants of the king and cardinal."

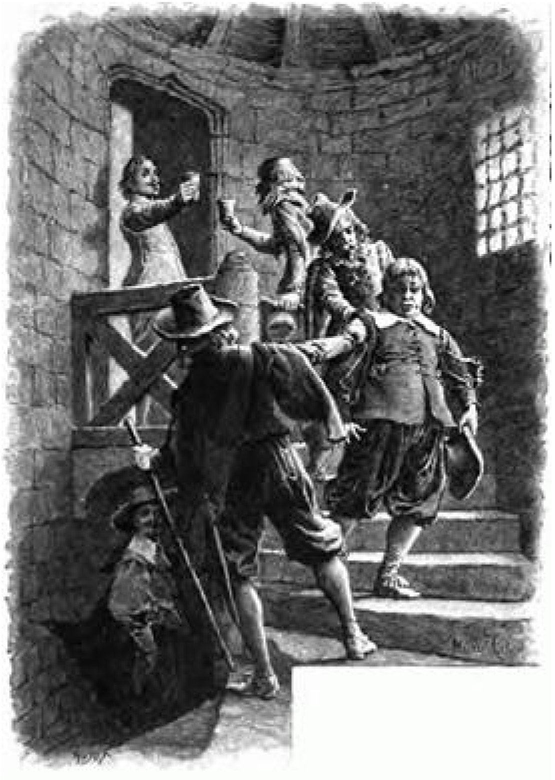

“Then, gentlemen, you will not oppose our executing the orders we have received?” asked one who appeared to be the leader of the party.

“On the contrary, gentlemen, we would assist you if it were necessary.”

“What does he say?” grumbled Porthos.

“You are a simpleton,” said Athos. “Silence!”

“But you promised me--” whispered the poor mercer.

“We can only save you by being free ourselves,” replied d’Artagnan, in a rapid, low tone; “and if we appear inclined to defend you, they will arrest us with you.”

“It seems, nevertheless--”

“Come, gentlemen, come!” said d’Artagnan, aloud; “I have no motive for defending Monsieur. I saw him today for the first time, and he can tell you on what occasion; he came to demand the rent of my lodging. Is that not true, Monsieur Bonacieux? Answer!”

“That is the very truth,” cried the mercer; “but Monsieur does not tell you--”

“Silence, with respect to me, silence, with respect to my friends; silence about the queen, above all, or you will ruin everybody without saving yourself! Come, come, gentlemen, remove the fellow.” And d’Artagnan pushed the half-stupefied mercer among the Guards, saying to him, “You are a shabby old fellow, my dear. You come to demand money of me--of a Musketeer! To prison with him! Gentlemen, once more, take him to prison, and keep him under key as long as possible; that will give me time to pay him."

The officers were full of thanks, and took away their prey. As they were going down d'Artagnan laid his hand on the shoulder of their leader.

"May I not drink to your health, and you to mine?" said d'Artagnan, filling two glasses with the Beaugency wine which he had obtained from the liberality of M. Bonacieux.

"That will do me great honor," said the leader of the posse, "and I accept thankfully."

"Then to yours, monsieur--what is your name?"

"Boisrenard."

"Monsieur Boisrenard."

"To yours, my gentlemen! What is your name, in your turn, if you please?"

"d'Artagnan."

"To yours, monsieur."

"And above all others," cried d'Artagnan, as if carried away by his enthusiasm, "to that of the king and the cardinal."

The leader of the posse would perhaps have doubted the sincerity of d'Artagnan if the wine had been bad; but the wine was good, and he was convinced.

"What diabolical villainy you have performed here," said Porthos, when the officer had rejoined his companions and the four friends found themselves alone. "Shame, shame, for four Musketeers to allow an unfortunate fellow who cried for help to be arrested in their midst! And a gentleman to hobnob with a bailiff!"

"Porthos," said Aramis, "Athos has already told you that you are a simpleton, and I am quite of his opinion. D'Artagnan, you are a great man; and when you occupy Monsieur de Treville's place, I will come and ask your influence to secure me an abbey."

"Well, I am in a maze," said Porthos; "do YOU approve of what d'Artagnan has done?"

"PARBLEU! Indeed I do," said Athos; "I not only approve of what he has done, but I congratulate him upon it."

“And now, gentlemen,” said d’Artagnan, without stopping to explain his conduct to Porthos, “All for one, one for all--that is our motto, is it not?”

“And yet--” said Porthos.

“Hold out your hand and swear!” cried Athos and Aramis at once.

Overcome by example, grumbling to himself, nevertheless, Porthos stretched out his hand, and the four friends repeated with one voice the formula dictated by d’Artagnan:

“All for one, one for all.”

“That’s well! Now let us everyone retire to his own home,” said d’Artagnan, as if he had done nothing but command all his life; “and attention! For from this moment we are at feud with the cardinal.”

CHAPTER 10

A MOUSETRAP IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

The invention of the mousetrap does not date from our days; as soon as societies, in forming, had invented any kind of police, that police invented mousetraps.

As perhaps our readers are not familiar with the slang of the Rue de Jerusalem, and as it is fifteen years since we applied this word for the first time to this thing, allow us to explain to them what is a mousetrap.

When in a house, of whatever kind it may be, an individual suspected of any crime is arrested, the arrest is held secret. Four or five men are placed in ambuscade in the first room. The door is opened to all who knock. It is closed after them, and they are arrested; so that at the end of two or three days they have in their power almost all the HABITUES of the establishment. And that is a mousetrap.

The apartment of M. Bonacieux, then, became a mousetrap; and whoever appeared there was taken and interrogated by the cardinal’s people. It must be observed that as a separate passage led to the first floor, in which d’Artagnan lodged, those who called on him were exempted from this detention.

Besides, nobody came thither but the three Musketeers; they had all been engaged in earnest search and inquiries, but had discovered nothing. Athos had even gone so far as to question M. de Treville--a thing which, considering the habitual reticence of the worthy Musketeer, had very much astonished his captain. But M. de Treville knew nothing, except that the last time he had seen the cardinal, the king, and the queen, the cardinal looked very thoughtful, the king uneasy, and the redness of the queen’s eyes donated that she had been sleepless or tearful. But this last circumstance was not striking, as the queen since her marriage had slept badly and wept much.

M de Treville requested Athos, whatever might happen, to be observant of his duty to the king, but particularly to the queen, begging him to convey his desires to his comrades.

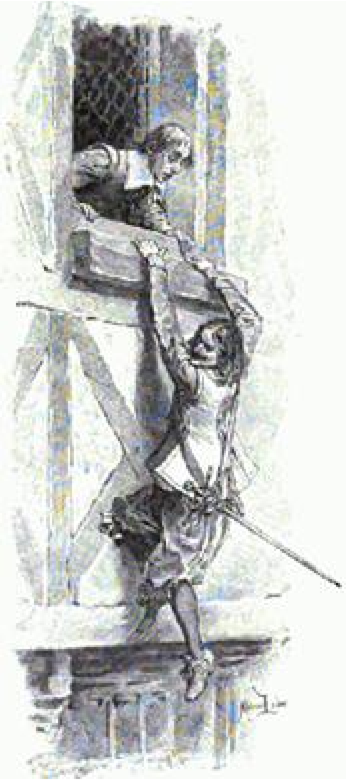

As to d’Artagnan, he did not budge from his apartment. He converted his chamber into an observatory. From his windows he saw all the visitors who were caught. Then, having removed a plank from his floor, and nothing remaining but a simple ceiling between him and the room beneath, in which the interrogatories were made, he heard all that passed between the inquisitors and the accused.

The interrogatories, preceded by a minute search operated upon the persons arrested, were almost always framed thus: “Has Madame Bonacieux sent anything to you for her husband, or any other person? Has Monsieur Bonacieux sent anything to you for his wife, or for any other person? Has either of them confided anything to you by word of mouth?”

“If they knew anything, they would not question people in this manner,” said d’Artagnan to himself. “Now, what is it they want to know? Why, they want to know if the Duke of Buckingham is in Paris, and if he has had, or is likely to have, an interview with the queen.”

D’Artagnan held onto this idea, which, from what he had heard, was not wanting in probability.

In the meantime, the mousetrap continued in operation, and likewise d’Artagnan’s vigilance.

On the evening of the day after the arrest of poor Bonacieux, as Athos had just left d’Artagnan to report at M. de Treville’s, as nine o’clock had just struck, and as Planchet, who had not yet made the bed, was beginning his task, a knocking was heard at the street door. The door was instantly opened and shut; someone was taken in the mousetrap.

D’Artagnan flew to his hole, laid himself down on the floor at full length, and listened.

Cries were soon heard, and then moans, which someone appeared to be endeavoring to stifle. There were no questions.

“The devil!” said d’Artagnan to himself. “It seems like a woman! They search her; she resists; they use force--the scoundrels!”

In spite of his prudence, d’Artagnan restrained himself with great difficulty from taking a part in the scene that was going on below.

“But I tell you that I am the mistress of the house, gentlemen! I tell you I am Madame Bonacieux; I tell you I belong to the queen!” cried the unfortunate woman.

“Madame Bonacieux!” murmured d’Artagnan. “Can I be so lucky as to find what everybody is seeking for?”

The voice became more and more indistinct; a tumultuous movement shook the partition. The victim resisted as much as a woman could resist four men.

“Pardon, gentlemen--par--” murmured the voice, which could now only be heard in inarticulate sounds.

“They are binding her; they are going to drag her away,” cried d’Artagnan to himself, springing up from the floor. “My sword! Good, it is by my side! Planchet!”

“Monsieur.”

“Run and seek Athos, Porthos and Aramis. One of the three will certainly be at home, perhaps all three. Tell them to take arms, to come here, and to run! Ah, I remember, Athos is at Monsieur de Treville’s.”

“But where are you going, monsieur, where are you going?”

“I am going down by the window, in order to be there the sooner,” cried d’Artagnan. “You put back the boards, sweep the floor, go out at the door, and run as I told you.”

“Oh, monsieur! Monsieur! You will kill yourself,” cried Planchet.

“Hold your tongue, stupid fellow,” said d’Artagnan; and laying hold of the casement, he let himself gently down from the first story, which fortunately was not very elevated, without doing himself the slightest injury.

He then went straight to the door and knocked, murmuring, “I will go myself and be caught in the mousetrap, but woe be to the cats that shall pounce upon such a mouse!”

The knocker had scarcely sounded under the hand of the young man before the tumult ceased, steps approached, the door was opened, and d’Artagnan, sword in hand, rushed into the rooms of M. Bonacieux, the door of which doubtless acted upon by a spring, closed after him.

Then those who dwelt in Bonacieux’s unfortunate house, together with the nearest neighbors, heard loud cries, stamping of feet, clashing of swords, and breaking of furniture. A moment after, those who, surprised by this tumult, had gone to their windows to learn the cause of it, saw the door open, and four men, clothed in black, not COME out of it, but FLY, like so many frightened crows, leaving on the ground and on the corners of the furniture, feathers from their wings; that is to say, patches of their clothes and fragments of their cloaks.

D’Artagnan was conqueror--without much effort, it must be confessed, for only one of the officers was armed, and even he defended himself for form’s sake. It is true that the three others had endeavored to knock the young man down with chairs, stools, and crockery; but two or three scratches made by the Gascon’s blade terrified them. Ten minutes sufficed for their defeat, and d’Artagnan remained master of the field of battle.

The neighbors who had opened their windows, with the coolness peculiar to the inhabitants of Paris in these times of perpetual riots and disturbances, closed them again as soon as they saw the four men in black flee--their instinct telling them that for the time all was over. Besides, it began to grow late, and then, as today, people went to bed early in the quarter of the Luxembourg.

On being left alone with Mme. Bonacieux, d’Artagnan turned toward her; the poor woman reclined where she had been left, half-fainting upon an armchair. D’Artagnan examined her with a rapid glance.

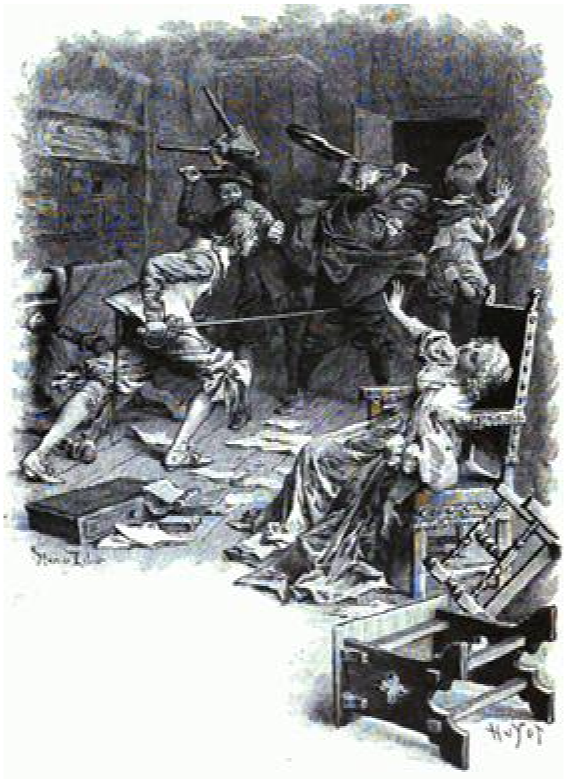

She was a charming woman of twenty-five or twenty-six years, with dark hair, blue eyes, and a nose slightly turned up, admirable teeth, and a complexion marbled with rose and opal. There, however, ended the signs which might have confounded her with a lady of rank. The hands were white, but without delicacy; the feet did not bespeak the woman of quality. Happily, d’Artagnan was not yet acquainted with such niceties.

While d’Artagnan was examining Mme. Bonacieux, and was, as we have said, close to her, he saw on the ground a fine cambric handkerchief, which he picked up, as was his habit, and at the corner of which he recognized the same cipher he had seen on the handkerchief which had nearly caused him and Aramis to cut each other’s throat.

From that time, d’Artagnan had been cautious with respect to handkerchiefs with arms on them, and he therefore placed in the pocket of Mme. Bonacieux the one he had just picked up.

At that moment Mme. Bonacieux recovered her senses. She opened her eyes, looked around her with terror, saw that the apartment was empty and that she was alone with her liberator. She extended her hands to him with a smile. Mme. Bonacieux had the sweetest smile in the world.

“Ah, monsieur!” said she, “you have saved me; permit me to thank you.”

"Madame," said d'Artagnan, "I have only done what every gentleman would have done in my place; you owe me no thanks."

"Oh, yes, monsieur, oh, yes; and I hope to prove to you that you have not served an ingrate. But what could these men, whom I at first took for robbers, want with me, and why is Monsieur Bonacieux not here?"

"Madame, those men were more dangerous than any robbers could have been, for they are the agents of the cardinal; and as to your husband, Monsieur Bonacieux, he is not here because he was yesterday evening conducted to the Bastille."

"My husband in the Bastille!" cried Mme. Bonacieux. "Oh, my God! What has he done? Poor dear man, he is innocence itself!"

And something like a faint smile lighted the still-terrified features of the young woman.

"What has he done, madame?" said d'Artagnan. "I believe that his only crime is to have at the same time the good fortune and the misfortune to be your husband."

"But, monsieur, you know then--"

"I know that you have been abducted, madame."

"And by whom? Do you know him? Oh, if you know him, tell me!"

"By a man of from forty to forty-five years, with black hair, a dark complexion, and a scar on his left temple."

"That is he, that is he; but his name?"

"Ah, his name? I do not know that."

"And did my husband know I had been carried off?"

"He was informed of it by a letter, written to him by the abductor himself."

"And does he suspect," said Mme. Bonacieux, with some embarrassment, "the cause of this event?"

"He attributed it, I believe, to a political cause."

"I doubted from the first; and now I think entirely as he does. Then my dear Monsieur Bonacieux has not suspected me a single instant?"

"So far from it, madame, he was too proud of your prudence, and above all, of your love."

A second smile, almost imperceptible, stole over the rosy lips of the pretty young woman.

“But,” continued d’Artagnan, “how did you escape?”

“I took advantage of a moment when they left me alone; and as I had known since morning the reason of my abduction, with the help of the sheets I let myself down from the window. Then, as I believed my husband would be at home, I hastened hither.”

“To place yourself under his protection?”

“Oh, no, poor dear man! I knew very well that he was incapable of defending me; but as he could serve us in other ways, I wished to inform him.”

“Of what?”

“Oh, that is not my secret; I must not, therefore, tell you.”

“Besides,” said d’Artagnan, “pardon me, madame, if, guardsman as I am, I remind you of prudence--besides, I believe we are not here in a very proper place for imparting confidences. The men I have put to flight will return reinforced; if they find us here, we are lost. I have sent for three of my friends, but who knows whether they were at home?”

“Yes, yes! You are right,” cried the affrighted Mme. Bonacieux; “let us fly! Let us save ourselves.”

At these words she passed her arm under that of d’Artagnan, and urged him forward eagerly.

“But whither shall we fly--whither escape?”

“Let us first withdraw from this house; afterward we shall see.”

The young woman and the young man, without taking the trouble to shut the door after them, descended the Rue des Fossoyeurs rapidly, turned into the Rue des Fosses-Monsieur-le-Prince, and did not stop till they came to the Place St. Sulpice.

“And now what are we to do, and where do you wish me to conduct you?” asked d’Artagnan.

“I am at quite a loss how to answer you, I admit,” said Mme. Bonacieux. “My intention was to inform Monsieur Laporte, through my husband, in order that Monsieur Laporte might tell us precisely what had taken place at the Louvre in the last three days, and whether there is any danger in presenting myself there.”

“But I,” said d’Artagnan, “can go and inform Monsieur Laporte.”

“No doubt you could, only there is one misfortune, and that is that Monsieur Bonacieux is known at the Louvre, and would be allowed to pass; whereas you are not known there, and the gate would be closed against you.”

“Ah, bah!” said d’Artagnan; “you have at some wicket of the Louvre a CONCIERGE who is devoted to you, and who, thanks to a password, would--”

Mme. Bonacieux looked earnestly at the young man.

“And if I give you this password,” said she, “would you forget it as soon as you used it?”

“By my honor, by the faith of a gentleman!” said d’Artagnan, with an accent so truthful that no one could mistake it.

“Then I believe you. You appear to be a brave young man; besides, your fortune may perhaps be the result of your devotedness.”

“I will do, without a promise and voluntarily, all that I can do to serve the king and be agreeable to the queen. Dispose of me, then, as a friend.”

“But I--where shall I go meanwhile?”

“Is there nobody from whose house Monsieur Laporte can come and fetch you?”

“No, I can trust nobody.”

“Stop,” said d’Artagnan; “we are near Athos’s door. Yes, here it is.”

“Who is this Athos?”

“One of my friends.”

"But if he should be at home and see me?"

"He is not at home, and I will carry away the key, after having placed you in his apartment."

"But if he should return?"

"Oh, he won't return; and if he should, he will be told that I have brought a woman with me, and that woman is in his apartment."

"But that will compromise me sadly, you know."

"Of what consequence? Nobody knows you. Besides, we are in a situation to overlook ceremony."

"Come, then, let us go to your friend's house. Where does he live?"

"Rue Ferou, two steps from here."

"Let us go!"

Both resumed their way. As d'Artagnan had foreseen, Athos was not within. He took the key, which was customarily given him as one of the family, ascended the stairs, and introduced Mme. Bonacieux into the little apartment of which we have given a description.

"You are at home," said he. "Remain here, fasten the door inside, and open it to nobody unless you hear three taps like this;" and he tapped thrice--two taps close together and pretty hard, the other after an interval, and lighter.

"That is well," said Mme. Bonacieux. "Now, in my turn, let me give you my instructions."

"I am all attention."

"Present yourself at the wicket of the Louvre, on the side of the Rue de l'Echelle, and ask for Germain."

"Well, and then?"

"He will ask you what you want, and you will answer by these two words, 'Tours' and 'Bruxelles.' He will at once put himself at your orders."

"And what shall I command him?"

"To go and fetch Monsieur Laporte, the queen's VALET DE CHAMBRE."

"And when he shall have informed him, and Monsieur Laporte is come?"

"You will send him to me."

"That is well; but where and how shall I see you again?"

"Do you wish to see me again?"

"Certainly."

"Well, let that care be mine, and be at ease."

“I depend upon your word.”

“You may.”

D’Artagnan bowed to Mme. Bonacieux, darting at her the most loving glance that he could possibly concentrate upon her charming little person; and while he descended the stairs, he heard the door closed and double-locked. In two bounds he was at the Louvre; as he entered the wicket of L’Echelle, ten o’clock struck. All the events we have described had taken place within a half hour.

Everything fell out as Mme. Bonacieux prophesied. On hearing the password, Germain bowed. In a few minutes, Laporte was at the lodge; in two words d’Artagnan informed him where Mme. Bonacieux was. Laporte assured himself, by having it twice repeated, of the accurate address, and set off at a run. Hardly, however, had he taken ten steps before he returned.

“Young man,” said he to d’Artagnan, “a suggestion.”

“What?”

“You may get into trouble by what has taken place.”

“You believe so?”

“Yes. Have you any friend whose clock is too slow?”

“Well?”

“Go and call upon him, in order that he may give evidence of your having been with him at half past nine. In a court of justice that is called an alibi.”

D’Artagnan found his advice prudent. He took to his heels, and was soon at M. de Treville’s; but instead of going into the saloon with the rest of the crowd, he asked to be introduced to M. de Treville’s office. As d’Artagnan so constantly frequented the hotel, no difficulty was made in complying with his request, and a servant went to inform M. de Treville that his young compatriot, having something important to communicate, solicited a private audience. Five minutes after, M. de Treville was asking d’Artagnan what he could do to serve him, and what caused his visit at so late an hour.

“Pardon me, monsieur,” said d’Artagnan, who had profited by the moment he had been left alone to put back M. de Treville’s clock three-quarters of an hour, “but I thought, as it was yet only twenty-five minutes past nine, it was not too late to wait upon you.”

“Twenty-five minutes past nine!” cried M. de Treville, looking at the clock; “why, that’s impossible!”

“Look, rather, monsieur,” said d’Artagnan, “the clock shows it.”

“That’s true,” said M. de Treville; “I believed it later. But what can I do for you?”

Then d’Artagnan told M. de Treville a long history about the queen. He expressed to him the fears he entertained with respect to her Majesty; he related to him what he had heard of the projects of the cardinal with regard to Buckingham, and all with a tranquillity and candor of which M. de Treville was the more the dupe, from having himself, as we have said, observed something fresh between the cardinal, the king, and the queen.

As ten o’clock was striking, d’Artagnan left M. de Treville, who thanked him for his information, recommended him to have the service of the king and queen always at heart, and returned to the saloon; but at the foot of the stairs, d’Artagnan remembered he had forgotten his cane. He consequently sprang up again, re-entered the office, with a turn of his finger set the clock right again, that it might not be perceived the next day that it had been put wrong, and certain from that time that he had a witness to prove his alibi, he ran downstairs and soon found himself in the street.

CHAPTER 11

IN WHICH THE PLOT THICKENS

His visit to M. de Treville being paid, the pensive d’Artagnan took the longest way homeward.

On what was d’Artagnan thinking, that he strayed thus from his path, gazing at the stars of heaven, and sometimes sighing, sometimes smiling?

He was thinking of Mme. Bonacieux. For an apprentice Musketeer the young woman was almost an ideal of love. Pretty, mysterious, initiated in almost all the secrets of the court, which reflected such a charming gravity over her pleasing features, it might be surmised that she was not wholly unmoved; and this is an irresistible charm to novices in love. Moreover, d’Artagnan had delivered her from the hands of the demons who wished to search and ill treat her; and this important service had established between them one of those sentiments of gratitude which so easily assume a more tender character.

D’Artagnan already fancied himself, so rapid is the flight of our dreams upon the wings of imagination, accosted by a messenger from the young woman, who brought him some billet appointing a meeting, a gold chain, or a diamond. We have observed that young cavaliers received presents from their king without shame. Let us add that in these times of lax morality they had no more delicacy with respect to the mistresses; and that the latter almost always left them valuable and durable remembrances, as if they essayed to conquer the fragility of their sentiments by the solidity of their gifts.

Without a blush, men made their way in the world by the means of women blushing. Such as were only beautiful gave their beauty, whence, without doubt, comes the proverb, “The most beautiful girl in the world can only give what she has.” Such as were rich gave in addition a part of their money; and a vast number of heroes of that gallant period may be cited who would neither have won their spurs in the first place, nor their battles afterward, without the purse, more or less furnished, which their mistress fastened to the saddle bow.

D’Artagnan owned nothing. Provincial diffidence, that slight varnish, the ephemeral flower, that down of the peach, had evaporated to the winds through the little orthodox counsels which the three Musketeers gave their friend. D’Artagnan, following the strange custom of the times, considered himself at Paris as on a campaign, neither more nor less than if he had been in Flanders--Spain yonder, woman here. In each there was an enemy to contend with, and contributions to be levied.

But, we must say, at the present moment d’Artagnan was ruled by a feeling much more noble and disinterested. The mercer had said that he was rich; the young man might easily guess that with so weak a man as M. Bonacieux; and interest was almost foreign to this commencement of love, which had been the consequence of it. We say ALMOST, for the idea that a young, handsome, kind, and witty woman is at the same time rich takes nothing from the beginning of love, but on the contrary strengthens it.

There are in affluence a crowd of aristocratic cares and caprices which are highly becoming to beauty. A fine and white stocking, a silken robe, a lace kerchief, a pretty slipper on the foot, a tasty ribbon on the head do not make an ugly woman pretty, but they make a pretty woman beautiful, without reckoning the hands, which gain by all this; the hands, among women particularly, to be beautiful must be idle.

Then d’Artagnan, as the reader, from whom we have not concealed the state of his fortune, very well knows--d’Artagnan was not a millionaire; he hoped to become one someday, but the time which in his own mind he fixed upon for this happy change was still far distant. In the meanwhile, how disheartening to see the woman one loves long for those thousands of nothings which constitute a woman’s happiness, and be unable to give her those thousands of nothings. At least, when the woman is rich and the lover is not, that which he cannot offer she offers to herself; and although it is generally with her husband’s money that she procures herself this indulgence, the gratitude for it seldom reverts to him.

Then d’Artagnan, disposed to become the most tender of lovers, was at the same time a very devoted friend, In the midst of his amorous projects for the mercer’s wife, he did not forget his friends. The pretty Mme. Bonacieux was just the woman to walk with in the Plain St. Denis or in the fair of St. Germain, in company with Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, to whom d’Artagnan had often remarked this. Then one could enjoy charming little dinners, where one touches on one side the hand of a friend, and on the other the foot of a mistress. Besides, on pressing occasions, in extreme difficulties, d'Artagnan would become the preserver of his friends.

And M. Bonacieux? whom d'Artagnan had pushed into the hands of the officers, denying him aloud although he had promised in a whisper to save him. We are compelled to admit to our readers that d'Artagnan thought nothing about him in any way; or that if he did think of him, it was only to say to himself that he was very well where he was, wherever it might be. Love is the most selfish of all the passions.

Let our readers reassure themselves. IF d'Artagnan forgets his host, or appears to forget him, under the pretense of not knowing where he has been carried, we will not forget him, and we know where he is. But for the moment, let us do as did the amorous Gascon; we will see after the worthy mercer later.

D'Artagnan, reflecting on his future amours, addressing himself to the beautiful night, and smiling at the stars, ascended the Rue Cherish-Midi, or Chase-Midi, as it was then called. As he found himself in the quarter in which Aramis lived, he took it into his head to pay his friend a visit in order to explain the motives which had led him to send Planchet with a request that he would come instantly to the mousetrap. Now, if Aramis had been at home when Planchet came to his abode, he had doubtless hastened to the Rue des Fossoyeurs, and finding nobody there but his other two companions perhaps, they would not be able to conceive what all this meant. This mystery required an explanation; at least, so d'Artagnan declared to himself.

He likewise thought this was an opportunity for talking about pretty little Mme. Bonacieux, of whom his head, if not his heart, was already full. We must never look for discretion in first love. First love is accompanied by such excessive joy that unless the joy be allowed to overflow, it will stifle you.

Paris for two hours past had been dark, and seemed a desert. Eleven o'clock sounded from all the clocks of the Faubourg St. Germain. It was delightful weather. D'Artagnan was passing along a lane on the spot where the Rue d'Assas is now situated, breathing the balmy emanations which were borne upon the wind from the Rue de Vaugirard, and which arose from the gardens refreshed by the dews of evening and the breeze of night. From a distance resounded, deadened, however, by good shutters, the songs of the tipplers, enjoying themselves in the cabarets scattered along the plain.

Arrived at the end of the lane, d’Artagnan turned to the left. The house in which Aramis dwelt was situated between the Rue Cassette and the Rue Servandoni.

D’Artagnan had just passed the Rue Cassette, and already perceived the door of his friend’s house, shaded by a mass of sycamores and clematis which formed a vast arch opposite the front of it, when he perceived something like a shadow issuing from the Rue Servandoni. This something was enveloped in a cloak, and d’Artagnan at first believed it was a man; but by the smallness of the form, the hesitation of the walk, and the indecision of the step, he soon discovered that it was a woman. Further, this woman, as if not certain of the house she was seeking, lifted up her eyes to look around her, stopped, went backward, and then returned again. D’Artagnan was perplexed.

“Shall I go and offer her my services?” thought he. “By her step she must be young; perhaps she is pretty. Oh, yes! But a woman who wanders in the streets at this hour only ventures out to meet her lover. If I should disturb a rendezvous, that would not be the best means of commencing an acquaintance.”

Meantime the young woman continued to advance, counting the houses and windows. This was neither long nor difficult. There were but three hotels in this part of the street; and only two windows looking toward the road, one of which was in a pavilion parallel to that which Aramis occupied, the other belonging to Aramis himself.

“PARIDIEU!” said d’Artagnan to himself, to whose mind the niece of the theologian reverted, “PARDIEU, it would be droll if this belated dove should be in search of our friend’s house. But on my soul, it looks so. Ah, my dear Aramis, this time I shall find you out.” And d’Artagnan, making himself as small as he could, concealed himself in the darkest side of the street near a stone bench placed at the back of a niche.

The young woman continued to advance; and in addition to the lightness of her step, which had betrayed her, she emitted a little cough which denoted a sweet voice. D’Artagnan believed this cough to be a signal.

Nevertheless, whether the cough had been answered by a similar signal which had fixed the irresolution of the nocturnal seeker, or whether without this aid she saw that she had arrived at the end of her journey, she resolutely drew near to Aramis’s shutter, and tapped, at three equal intervals, with her bent finger.

“This is all very fine, dear Aramis,” murmured d’Artagnan. “Ah, Monsieur Hypocrite, I understand how you study theology.”

The three blows were scarcely struck, when the inside blind was opened and a light appeared through the panes of the outside shutter.

“Ah, ah!” said the listener, “not through doors, but through windows! Ah, this visit was expected. We shall see the windows open, and the lady enter by escalade. Very pretty!”

But to the great astonishment of d’Artagnan, the shutter remained closed. Still more, the light which had shone for an instant disappeared, and all was again in obscurity.

D’Artagnan thought this could not last long, and continued to look with all his eyes and listen with all his ears.

He was right; at the end of some seconds two sharp taps were heard inside. The young woman in the street replied by a single tap, and the shutter was opened a little way.

It may be judged whether d’Artagnan looked or listened with avidity. Unfortunately the light had been removed into another chamber; but the eyes of the young man were accustomed to the night. Besides, the eyes of the Gascons have, as it is asserted, like those of cats, the faculty of seeing in the dark.

D’Artagnan then saw that the young woman took from her pocket a white object, which she unfolded quickly, and which took the form of a handkerchief. She made her interlocutor observe the corner of this unfolded object.

This immediately recalled to d’Artagnan’s mind the handkerchief which he had found at the feet of Mme. Bonacieux, which had reminded him of that which he had dragged from under the feet of Aramis.

“What the devil could that handkerchief signify?”

Placed where he was, d’Artagnan could not perceive the face of Aramis. We say Aramis, because the young man entertained no doubt that it was his friend who held this dialogue from the interior with the lady of the exterior. Curiosity prevailed over prudence; and profiting by the preoccupation into which the sight of the handkerchief appeared to have plunged the two personages now on the scene, he stole from his hiding place, and quick as lightning, but stepping with utmost caution, he ran and placed himself close to the angle of the wall, from which his eye could pierce the interior of Aramis’s room.

Upon gaining this advantage d’Artagnan was near uttering a cry of surprise; it was not Aramis who was conversing with the nocturnal visitor, it was a woman! D’Artagnan, however, could only see enough to recognize the form of her vestments, not enough to distinguish her features.

At the same instant the woman inside drew a second handkerchief from her pocket, and exchanged it for that which had just been shown to her. Then some words were spoken by the two women. At length the shutter closed. The woman who was outside the window turned round, and passed within four steps of d’Artagnan, pulling down the hood of her mantle; but the precaution was too late, d’Artagnan had already recognized Mme. Bonacieux.

Mme. Bonacieux! The suspicion that it was she had crossed the mind of d’Artagnan when she drew the handkerchief from her pocket; but what probability was there that Mme. Bonacieux, who had sent for M. Laporte in order to be reconducted to the Louvre, should be running about the streets of Paris at half past eleven at night, at the risk of being abducted a second time?

This must be, then, an affair of importance; and what is the most important affair to a woman of twenty-five! Love.

But was it on her own account, or on account of another, that she exposed herself to such hazards? This was a question the young man asked himself, whom the demon of jealousy already gnawed, being in heart neither more nor less than an accepted lover.

There was a very simple means of satisfying himself whither Mme. Bonacieux was going; that was to follow her. This method was so simple that d’Artagnan employed it quite naturally and instinctively.

But at the sight of the young man, who detached himself from the wall like a statue walking from its niche, and at the noise of the steps which she heard resound behind her, Mme. Bonacieux uttered a little cry and fled.

D’Artagnan ran after her. It was not difficult for him to overtake a woman embarrassed with her cloak. He came up with her before she had traversed a third of the street. The unfortunate woman was exhausted, not by fatigue, but by terror, and when d’Artagnan placed his hand upon her shoulder, she sank upon one knee, crying in a choking voice, “Kill me, if you please, you shall know nothing!”

D’Artagnan raised her by passing his arm round her waist; but as he felt by her weight she was on the point of fainting, he made haste to reassure her by protestations of devotedness. These protestations were nothing for Mme. Bonacieux, for such protestations may be made with the worst intentions in the world; but the voice was all. Mme. Bonacieux thought she recognized the sound of that voice; she reopened her eyes, cast a quick glance upon the man who had terrified her so, and at once perceiving it was d’Artagnan, she uttered a cry of joy, “Oh, it is you, it is you! Thank God, thank God!”

“Yes, it is I,” said d’Artagnan, “it is I, whom God has sent to watch over you.”

“Was it with that intention you followed me?” asked the young woman, with a coquettish smile, whose somewhat bantering character resumed its influence, and with whom all fear had disappeared from the moment in which she recognized a friend in one she had taken for an enemy.

“No,” said d’Artagnan; “no, I confess it. It was chance that threw me in your way; I saw a woman knocking at the window of one of my friends.”

“One of your friends?” interrupted Mme. Bonacieux.

“Without doubt; Aramis is one of my best friends.”

“Aramis! Who is he?”

“Come, come, you won’t tell me you don’t know Aramis?”

“This is the first time I ever heard his name pronounced.”

“It is the first time, then, that you ever went to that house?”

“Undoubtedly.”

“And you did not know that it was inhabited by a young man?”

“No.”

“By a Musketeer?”

“No, indeed!”

“It was not he, then, you came to seek?”

“Not the least in the world. Besides, you must have seen that the person to whom I spoke was a woman.”

“That is true; but this woman is a friend of Aramis--”

“I know nothing of that.”

“--since she lodges with him.”

“That does not concern me.”

“But who is she?”

“Oh, that is not my secret.”

“My dear Madame Bonacieux, you are charming; but at the same time you are one of the most mysterious women.”

“Do I lose by that?”

“No; you are, on the contrary, adorable.”

“Give me your arm, then.”

“Most willingly. And now?”

“Now escort me.”

“Where?”

“Where I am going.”

“But where are you going?”

“You will see, because you will leave me at the door.”

“Shall I wait for you?”

“That will be useless.”

“You will return alone, then?”

“Perhaps yes, perhaps no.”

“But will the person who shall accompany you afterward be a man or a woman?”

“I don’t know yet.”

“But I will know it!”

“How so?”

“I will wait until you come out.”

"In that case, adieu."

"Why so?"

"I do not want you."

"But you have claimed--"

"The aid of a gentleman, not the watchfulness of a spy."

"The word is rather hard."

"How are they called who follow others in spite of them?"

"They are indiscreet."

"The word is too mild."

"Well, madame, I perceive I must do as you wish."

"Why did you deprive yourself of the merit of doing so at once?"

"Is there no merit in repentance?"

"And do you really repent?"

"I know nothing about it myself. But what I know is that I promise to do all you wish if you allow me to accompany you where you are going."

"And you will leave me then?"

"Yes."

"Without waiting for my coming out again?"

"Yes."

"Word of honor?"

"By the faith of a gentleman. Take my arm, and let us go."

D'Artagnan offered his arm to Mme. Bonacieux, who willingly took it, half laughing, half trembling, and both gained the top of Rue de la Harpe. Arriving there, the young woman seemed to hesitate, as she had before done in the Rue Vaugirard. She seemed, however, by certain signs, to recognize a door, and approaching that door, "And now, monsieur," said she, "it is here I have business; a thousand thanks for your honorable company, which has saved me from all the dangers to which, alone I was exposed. But the moment is come to keep your word; I have reached my destination."

"And you will have nothing to fear on your return?"

"I shall have nothing to fear but robbers."

"And that is nothing?"

"What could they take from me? I have not a penny about me."

"You forget that beautiful handkerchief with the coat of arms."

"Which?"

"That which I found at your feet, and replaced in your pocket."

“Hold your tongue, imprudent man! Do you wish to destroy me?”

“You see very plainly that there is still danger for you, since a single word makes you tremble; and you confess that if that word were heard you would be ruined. Come, come, madame!” cried d’Artagnan, seizing her hands, and surveying her with an ardent glance, “come, be more generous. Confide in me. Have you not read in my eyes that there is nothing but devotion and sympathy in my heart?”

“Yes,” replied Mme. Bonacieux; “therefore, ask my own secrets, and I will reveal them to you; but those of others--that is quite another thing.”

“Very well,” said d’Artagnan, “I shall discover them; as these secrets may have an influence over your life, these secrets must become mine.”

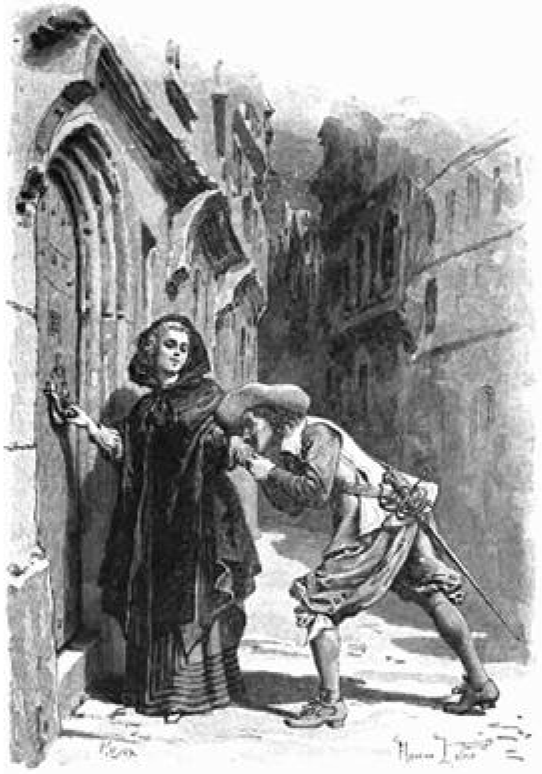

“Beware of what you do!” cried the young woman, in a manner so serious as to make d’Artagnan start in spite of himself. “Oh, meddle in nothing which concerns me. Do not seek to assist me in that which I am accomplishing. This I ask of you in the name of the interest with which I inspire you, in the name of the service you have rendered me and which I never shall forget while I have life. Rather, place faith in what I tell you. Have no more concern about me; I exist no longer for you, any more than if you had never seen me.”

"Must Aramis do as much as I, madame?" said d'Artagnan, deeply piqued.

"This is the second or third time, monsieur, that you have repeated that name, and yet I have told you that I do not know him."

"You do not know the man at whose shutter you have just knocked? Indeed, madame, you believe me too credulous!"

"Confess that it is for the sake of making me talk that you invent this story and create this personage."

"I invent nothing, madame; I create nothing. I only speak that exact truth."

"And you say that one of your friends lives in that house?"

"I say so, and I repeat it for the third time; that house is one inhabited by my friend, and that friend is Aramis."

"All this will be cleared up at a later period," murmured the young woman; "no, monsieur, be silent."

"If you could see my heart," said d'Artagnan, "you would there read so much curiosity that you would pity me and so much love that you would instantly satisfy my curiosity. We have nothing to fear from those who love us."

"You speak very suddenly of love, monsieur," said the young woman, shaking her head.

"That is because love has come suddenly upon me, and for the first time; and because I am only twenty."

The young woman looked at him furtively.

"Listen; I am already upon the scent," resumed d'Artagnan. "About three months ago I was near having a duel with Aramis concerning a handkerchief resembling the one you showed to the woman in his house--for a handkerchief marked in the same manner, I am sure."

"Monsieur," said the young woman, "you weary me very much, I assure you, with your questions."

"But you, madame, prudent as you are, think, if you were to be arrested with that handkerchief, and that handkerchief were to be seized, would you not be compromised?"

"In what way? The initials are only mine--C. B., Constance Bonacieux."

"Or Camille de Bois-Tracy."

"Silence, monsieur! Once again, silence! Ah, since the dangers I incur on my own account cannot stop you, think of those you may yourself run!"

“Me?”

“Yes; there is peril of imprisonment, risk of life in knowing me.”

“Then I will not leave you.”

“Monsieur!” said the young woman, supplicating him and clasping her hands together, “monsieur, in the name of heaven, by the honor of a soldier, by the courtesy of a gentleman, depart! There, there midnight sounds! That is the hour when I am expected.”

“Madame,” said the young man, bowing; “I can refuse nothing asked of me thus. Be content; I will depart.”

“But you will not follow me; you will not watch me?”

“I will return home instantly.”

“Ah, I was quite sure you were a good and brave young man,” said Mme. Bonacieux, holding out her hand to him, and placing the other upon the knocker of a little door almost hidden in the wall.

D’Artagnan seized the hand held out to him, and kissed it ardently.

“Ah! I wish I had never seen you!” cried d’Artagnan, with that ingenuous roughness which women often prefer to the affectations of politeness, because it betrays the depths of the thought and proves that feeling prevails over reason.

“Well!” resumed Mme. Bonacieux, in a voice almost caressing, and pressing the hand of d’Artagnan, who had not relinquished hers, “well: I will not say as much as you do; what is lost for today may not be lost forever. Who knows, when I shall be at liberty, that I may not satisfy your curiosity?”

“And will you make the same promise to my love?” cried d’Artagnan, beside himself with joy.

“Oh, as to that, I do not engage myself. That depends upon the sentiments with which you may inspire me.”

“Then today, madame--”

“Oh, today, I am no further than gratitude.”

“Ah! You are too charming,” said d’Artagnan, sorrowfully; “and you abuse my love.”

“No, I use your generosity, that’s all. But be of good cheer; with certain people, everything comes round.”

“Oh, you render me the happiest of men! Do not forget this evening--do not forget that promise.”

“Be satisfied. In the proper time and place I will remember everything. Now then, go, go, in the name of heaven! I was expected at sharp midnight, and I am late.”

“By five minutes.”

“Yes; but in certain circumstances five minutes are five ages.”

“When one loves.”

“Well! And who told you I had no affair with a lover?”

“It is a man, then, who expects you?” cried d’Artagnan. “A man!”

“The discussion is going to begin again!” said Mme. Bonacieux, with a half-smile which was not exempt from a tinge of impatience.

“No, no; I go, I depart! I believe in you, and I would have all the merit of my devotion, even if that devotion were stupidity. Adieu, madame, adieu!”

And as if he only felt strength to detach himself by a violent effort from the hand he held, he sprang away, running, while Mme. Bonacieux knocked, as at the shutter, three light and regular taps. When he had gained the angle of the street, he turned. The door had been opened, and shut again; the mercer’s pretty wife had disappeared.

D’Artagnan pursued his way. He had given his word not to watch Mme. Bonacieux, and if his life had depended upon the spot to which she was going or upon the person who should accompany her, d’Artagnan would have returned home, since he had so promised. Five minutes later he was in the Rue des Fossoyeurs.

“Poor Athos!” said he; “he will never guess what all this means. He will have fallen asleep waiting for me, or else he will have returned home, where he will have learned that a woman had been there. A woman with Athos! After all,” continued d’Artagnan, “there was certainly one with Aramis. All this is very strange; and I am curious to know how it will end.”

“Badly, monsieur, badly!” replied a voice which the young man recognized as that of Planchet; for, soliloquizing aloud, as very preoccupied people do, he had entered the alley, at the end of which were the stairs which led to his chamber.

“How badly? What do you mean by that, you idiot?” asked d’Artagnan. “What has happened?”

“All sorts of misfortunes.”

“What?”

“In the first place, Monsieur Athos is arrested.”

“Arrested! Athos arrested! What for?”

“He was found in your lodging; they took him for you.”

“And by whom was he arrested?”

“By Guards brought by the men in black whom you put to flight.”

“Why did he not tell them his name? Why did he not tell them he knew nothing about this affair?”

“He took care not to do so, monsieur; on the contrary, he came up to me and said, ‘It is your master that needs his liberty at this moment and not I, since he knows everything and I know nothing. They will believe he is arrested, and that will give him time; in three days I will tell them who I am, and they cannot fail to let me go.’“

“Bravo, Athos! Noble heart!” murmured d’Artagnan. “I know him well there! And what did the officers do?”

“Four conveyed him away, I don’t know where--to the Bastille or Fort l’Eveque. Two remained with the men in black, who rummaged every place and took all the papers. The last two mounted guard at the door during this examination; then, when all was over, they went away, leaving the house empty and exposed.”

“And Porthos and Aramis?”

“I could not find them; they did not come.”

“But they may come any moment, for you left word that I awaited them?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Well, don’t budge, then; if they come, tell them what has happened. Let them wait for me at the Pomme-de-Pin. Here it would be dangerous; the house may be watched. I will run to Monsieur de Treville to tell them all this, and will meet them there.”

“Very well, monsieur,” said Planchet.

“But you will remain; you are not afraid?” said d’Artagnan, coming back to recommend courage to his lackey.

“Be easy, monsieur,” said Planchet; “you do not know me yet. I am brave when I set about it. It is all in beginning. Besides, I am a Picard.”

“Then it is understood,” said d’Artagnan; “you would rather be killed than desert your post?”

“Yes, monsieur; and there is nothing I would not do to prove to Monsieur that I am attached to him.”

“Good!” said d’Artagnan to himself. “It appears that the method I have adopted with this boy is decidedly the best. I shall use it again upon occasion.”

And with all the swiftness of his legs, already a little fatigued however, with the perambulations of the day, d’Artagnan directed his course toward M. de Treville’s.

M de Treville was not at his hotel. His company was on guard at the Louvre; he was at the Louvre with his company.

It was necessary to reach M. de Treville; it was important that he should be informed of what was passing. D’Artagnan resolved to try and enter the Louvre. His costume of Guardsman in the company of M. Dessessart ought to be his passport.

He therefore went down the Rue des Petits Augustins, and came up to the quay, in order to take the New Bridge. He had at first an idea of crossing by the ferry; but on gaining the riverside, he had mechanically put his hand into his pocket, and perceived that he had not wherewithal to pay his passage.

As he gained the top of the Rue Guenegaud, he saw two persons coming out of the Rue Dauphine whose appearance very much struck him. Of the two persons who composed this group, one was a man and the other a woman. The woman had the outline of Mme. Bonacieux; the man resembled Aramis so much as to be mistaken for him.

Besides, the woman wore that black mantle which d’Artagnan could still see outlined on the shutter of the Rue de Vaugirard and on the door of the Rue de la Harpe; still further, the man wore the uniform of a Musketeer.

The woman’s hood was pulled down, and the man held a handkerchief to his face. Both, as this double precaution indicated, had an interest in not being recognized.

They took the bridge. That was d’Artagnan’s road, as he was going to the Louvre. D’Artagnan followed them.

He had not gone twenty steps before he became convinced that the woman was really Mme. Bonacieux and that the man was Aramis.

He felt at that instant all the suspicions of jealousy agitating his heart. He felt himself doubly betrayed, by his friend and by her whom he already loved like a mistress. Mme. Bonacieux had declared to him, by all the gods, that she did not know Aramis; and a quarter of an hour after having made this assertion, he found her hanging on the arm of Aramis.

D’Artagnan did not reflect that he had only known the mercer’s pretty wife for three hours; that she owed him nothing but a little gratitude for having delivered her from the men in black, who wished to carry her off, and that she had promised him nothing. He considered himself an outraged, betrayed, and ridiculed lover. Blood and anger mounted to his face; he was resolved to unravel the mystery.

The young man and young woman perceived they were watched, and redoubled their speed. D'Artagnan determined upon his course. He passed them, then returned so as to meet them exactly before the Samaritaine. Which was illuminated by a lamp which threw its light over all that part of the bridge.

D'Artagnan stopped before them, and they stopped before him.

"What do you want, monsieur?" demanded the Musketeer, recoiling a step, and with a foreign accent, which proved to d'Artagnan that he was deceived in one of his conjectures.

"It is not Aramis!" cried he.

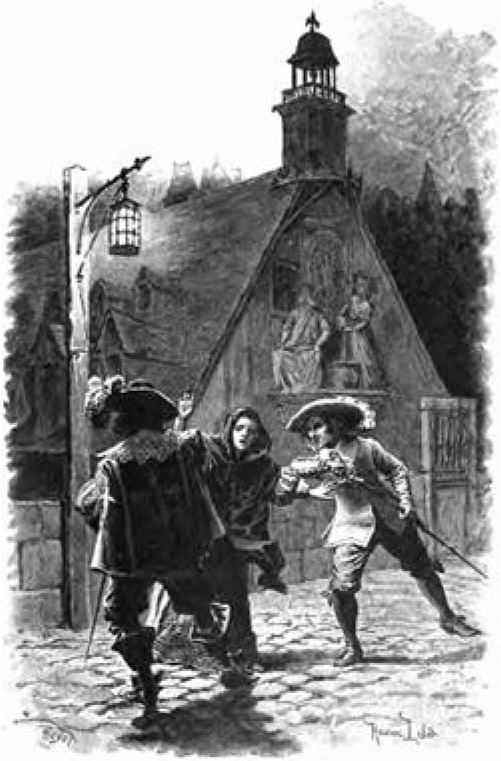

"No, monsieur, it is not Aramis; and by your exclamation I perceive you have mistaken me for another, and pardon you."

"You pardon me?" cried d'Artagnan.

"Yes," replied the stranger. "Allow me, then, to pass on, since it is not with me you have anything to do."

“You are right, monsieur, it is not with you that I have anything to do; it is with Madame.”

“With Madame! You do not know her,” replied the stranger.

“You are deceived, monsieur; I know her very well.”

“Ah,” said Mme. Bonacieux; in a tone of reproach, “ah, monsieur, I had your promise as a soldier and your word as a gentleman. I hoped to be able to rely upon that.”

“And I, madame!” said d’Artagnan, embarrassed; “you promised me--”

“Take my arm, madame,” said the stranger, “and let us continue our way.”

D’Artagnan, however, stupefied, cast down, annihilated by all that happened, stood, with crossed arms, before the Musketeer and Mme. Bonacieux.

The Musketeer advanced two steps, and pushed d’Artagnan aside with his hand. D’Artagnan made a spring backward and drew his sword. At the same time, and with the rapidity of lightning, the stranger drew his.

“In the name of heaven, my Lord!” cried Mme. Bonacieux, throwing herself between the combatants and seizing the swords with her hands.

“My Lord!” cried d’Artagnan, enlightened by a sudden idea, “my Lord! Pardon me, monsieur, but you are not--”

“My Lord the Duke of Buckingham,” said Mme. Bonacieux, in an undertone; “and now you may ruin us all.”

“My Lord, Madame, I ask a hundred pardons! But I love her, my Lord, and was jealous. You know what it is to love, my Lord. Pardon me, and then tell me how I can risk my life to serve your Grace?”

“You are a brave young man,” said Buckingham, holding out his hand to d’Artagnan, who pressed it respectfully. “You offer me your services; with the same frankness I accept them. Follow us at a distance of twenty paces, as far as the Louvre, and if anyone watches us, slay him!”

D’Artagnan placed his naked sword under his arm, allowed the duke and Mme. Bonacieux to take twenty steps ahead, and then followed them, ready to execute the instructions of the noble and elegant minister of Charles I.

Fortunately, he had no opportunity to give the duke this proof of his devotion, and the young woman and the handsome Musketeer entered the Louvre by the wicket of the Echelle without any interference.

As for d’Artagnan, he immediately repaired to the cabaret of the Pomme-de-Pin, where he found Porthos and Aramis awaiting him. Without giving them any explanation of the alarm and inconvenience he had caused them, he told them that he had terminated the affair alone in which he had for a moment believed he should need their assistance.

Meanwhile, carried away as we are by our narrative, we must leave our three friends to themselves, and follow the Duke of Buckingham and his guide through the labyrinths of the Louvre.

CHAPTER 12

GEORGE VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM

Mme. Bonacieux and the duke entered the Louvre without difficulty. Mme. Bonacieux was known to belong to the queen; the duke wore the uniform of the Musketeers of M. de Treville, who, as we have said, were that evening on guard. Besides, Germain was in the interests of the queen; and if anything should happen, Mme. Bonacieux would be accused of having introduced her lover into the Louvre, that was all. She took the risk upon herself. Her reputation would be lost, it is true; but of what value in the world was the reputation of the little wife of a mercer?

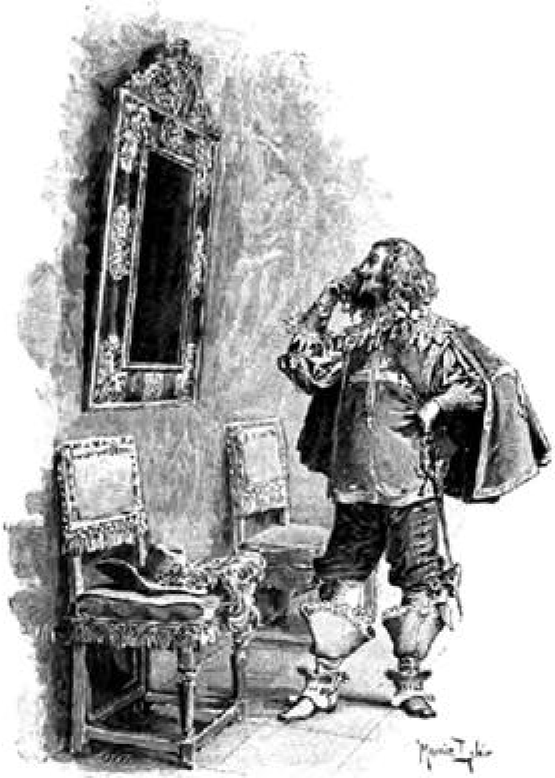

Once within the interior of the court, the duke and the young woman followed the wall for the space of about twenty-five steps. This space passed, Mme. Bonacieux pushed a little servants’ door, open by day but generally closed at night. The door yielded. Both entered, and found themselves in darkness; but Mme. Bonacieux was acquainted with all the turnings and windings of this part of the Louvre, appropriated for the people of the household. She closed the door after her, took the duke by the hand, and after a few experimental steps, grasped a balustrade, put her foot upon the bottom step, and began to ascend the staircase. The duke counted two stories. She then turned to the right, followed the course of a long corridor, descended a flight, went a few steps farther, introduced a key into a lock, opened a door, and pushed the duke into an apartment lighted only by a lamp, saying, “Remain here, my Lord Duke; someone will come.” She then went out by the same door, which she locked, so that the duke found himself literally a prisoner.

Nevertheless, isolated as he was, we must say that the Duke of Buckingham did not experience an instant of fear. One of the salient points of his character was the search for adventures and a love of romance. Brave, rash, and enterprising, this was not the first time he had risked his life in such attempts. He had learned that the pretended message from Anne of Austria, upon the faith of which he had come to Paris, was a snare; but instead of regaining England, he had, abusing the position in which he had been placed, declared to the queen that he would not depart without seeing her. The queen had at first positively refused; but at length became afraid that the duke, if exasperated, would commit some folly. She had already decided upon seeing him and urging his immediate departure, when, on the very evening of coming to this decision, Mme. Bonacieux, who was charged with going to fetch the duke and conducting him to the Louvre, was abducted. For two days no one knew what had become of her, and everything remained in suspense; but once free, and placed in communication with Laporte, matters resumed their course, and she accomplished the perilous enterprise which, but for her arrest, would have been executed three days earlier.

Buckingham, left alone, walked toward a mirror. His Musketeer’s uniform became him marvelously.

At thirty-five, which was then his age, he passed, with just title, for the handsomest gentleman and the most elegant cavalier of France or England.

The favorite of two kings, immensely rich, all-powerful in a kingdom which he disordered at his fancy and calmed again at his caprice, George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, had lived one of those fabulous existences which survive, in the course of centuries, to astonish posterity.

Sure of himself, convinced of his own power, certain that the laws which rule other men could not reach him, he went straight to the object he aimed at, even were this object were so elevated and so dazzling that it would have been madness for any other even to have contemplated it. It was thus he had succeeded in approaching several times the beautiful and proud Anne of Austria, and in making himself loved by dazzling her.

George Villiers placed himself before the glass, as we have said, restored the undulations to his beautiful hair, which the weight of his hat had disordered, twisted his mustache, and, his heart swelling with joy, happy and proud at being near the moment he had so long sighed for, he smiled upon himself with pride and hope.

At this moment a door concealed in the tapestry opened, and a woman appeared. Buckingham saw this apparition in the glass; he uttered a cry. It was the queen!

Anne of Austria was then twenty-six or twenty-seven years of age; that is to say, she was in the full splendor of her beauty.

Her carriage was that of a queen or a goddess; her eyes, which cast the brilliancy of emeralds, were perfectly beautiful, and yet were at the same time full of sweetness and majesty.

Her mouth was small and rosy; and although her underlip, like that of all princes of the House of Austria, protruded slightly beyond the other, it was eminently lovely in its smile, but as profoundly disdainful in its contempt.

Her skin was admired for its velvety softness; her hands and arms were of surpassing beauty, all the poets of the time singing them as incomparable.

Lastly, her hair, which, from being light in her youth, had become chestnut, and which she wore curled very plainly, and with much powder, admirably set off her face, in which the most rigid critic could only have desired a little less rouge, and the most fastidious sculptor a little more fineness in the nose.

Buckingham remained for a moment dazzled. Never had Anne of Austria appeared to him so beautiful, amid balls, fetes, or carousals, as she appeared to him at this moment, dressed in a simple robe of white satin, and accompanied by Donna Estafania--the only one of her Spanish women who had not been driven from her by the jealousy of the king or by the persecutions of Richelieu.

Anne of Austria took two steps forward. Buckingham threw himself at her feet, and before the queen could prevent him, kissed the hem of her robe.

“Duke, you already know that it is not I who caused you to be written to.”

“Yes, yes, madame! Yes, your Majesty!” cried the duke. “I know that I must have been mad, senseless, to believe that snow would become animated or marble warm; but what then! They who love believe easily in love. Besides, I have lost nothing by this journey because I see you.”

“Yes,” replied Anne, “but you know why and how I see you; because, insensible to all my sufferings, you persist in remaining in a city where, by remaining, you run the risk of your life, and make me run the risk of my honor. I see you to tell you that everything separates us--the depths of the sea, the enmity of kingdoms, the sanctity of vows. It is sacrilege to struggle against so many things, my Lord. In short, I see you to tell you that we must never see each other again.”

“Speak on, madame, speak on, Queen,” said Buckingham; “the sweetness of your voice covers the harshness of your words. You talk of sacrilege! Why, the sacrilege is the separation of two hearts formed by God for each other.”

“My Lord,” cried the queen, “you forget that I have never said that I love you.”

“But you have never told me that you did not love me; and truly, to speak such words to me would be, on the part of your Majesty, too great an ingratitude. For tell me, where can you find a love like mine--a love which neither time, nor absence, nor despair can extinguish, a love which contents itself with a lost ribbon, a stray look, or a chance word? It is now three years, madame, since I saw you for the first time, and during those three years I have loved you thus. Shall I tell you each ornament of your toilet? Mark! I see you now. You were seated upon cushions in the Spanish fashion; you wore a robe of green satin embroidered with gold and silver, hanging sleeves knotted upon your beautiful arms--those lovely arms--with large diamonds. You wore a close ruff, a small cap upon your head of the same color as your robe, and in that cap a heron’s feather. Hold! Hold! I shut my eyes, and I can see you as you then were; I open them again, and I see what you are now--a hundred time more beautiful!”

“What folly,” murmured Anne of Austria, who had not the courage to find fault with the duke for having so well preserved her portrait in his heart, “what folly to feed a useless passion with such remembrances!”

“And upon what then must I live? I have nothing but memory. It is my happiness, my treasure, my hope. Every time I see you is a fresh diamond which I enclose in the casket of my heart. This is the fourth which you have let fall and I have picked up; for in three years, madame, I have only seen you four times--the first, which I have described to you; the second, at the mansion of Madame de Chevreuse; the third, in the gardens of Amiens.”

“Duke,” said the queen, blushing, “never speak of that evening.”

“Oh, let us speak of it; on the contrary, let us speak of it! That is the most happy and brilliant evening of my life! You remember what a beautiful night it was? How soft and perfumed was the air; how lovely the blue heavens and star-enameled sky! Ah, then, madame, I was able for one instant to be alone with you. Then you were about to tell me all--the isolation of your life, the griefs of your heart. You leaned upon my arm--upon this, madame! I felt, in bending my head toward you, your beautiful hair touch my cheek; and every time that it touched me I trembled from head to foot. Oh, Queen! Queen! You do not know what felicity from heaven, what joys from paradise, are comprised in a moment like that. Take my wealth, my fortune, my glory, all the days I have to live, for such an instant, for a night like that. For that night, madame, that night you loved me, I will swear it.”

“My Lord, yes; it is possible that the influence of the place, the charm of the beautiful evening, the fascination of your look--the thousand circumstances, in short, which sometimes unite to destroy a woman--were grouped around me on that fatal evening; but, my Lord, you saw the queen come to the aid of the woman who faltered. At the first word you dared to utter, at the first freedom to which I had to reply, I called for help.”

“Yes, yes, that is true. And any other love but mine would have sunk beneath this ordeal; but my love came out from it more ardent and more eternal. You believed that you would fly from me by returning to Paris; you believed that I would not dare to quit the treasure over which my master had charged me to watch. What to me were all the treasures in the world, or all the kings of the earth! Eight days after, I was back again, madame. That time you had nothing to say to me; I had risked my life and favor to see you but for a second. I did not even touch your hand, and you pardoned me on seeing me so submissive and so repentant.”

“Yes, but calumny seized upon all those follies in which I took no part, as you well know, my Lord. The king, excited by the cardinal, made a terrible clamor. Madame de Vernet was driven from me, Putange was exiled, Madame de Chevreuse fell into disgrace, and when you wished to come back as ambassador to France, the king himself--remember, my lord--the king himself opposed to it."

"Yes, and France is about to pay for her king's refusal with a war. I am not allowed to see you, madame, but you shall every day hear of me. What object, think you, have this expedition to Re and this league with the Protestants of La Rochelle which I am projecting? The pleasure of seeing you. I have no hope of penetrating, sword in hand, to Paris, I know that well. But this war may bring round a peace; this peace will require a negotiator; that negotiator will be me. They will not dare to refuse me then; and I will return to Paris, and will see you again, and will be happy for an instant. Thousands of men, it is true, will have to pay for my happiness with their lives; but what is that to me, provided I see you again! All this is perhaps folly--perhaps insanity; but tell me what woman has a lover more truly in love; what queen a servant more ardent?"

"My Lord, my Lord, you invoke in your defense things which accuse you more strongly. All these proofs of love which you would give me are almost crimes."

"Because you do not love me, madame! If you loved me, you would view all this otherwise. If you loved me, oh, if you loved me, that would be too great happiness, and I should run mad. Ah, Madame de Chevreuse was less cruel than you. Holland loved her, and she responded to his love."

"Madame de Chevreuse was not queen," murmured Anne of Austria, overcome, in spite of herself, by the expression of so profound a passion.

"You would love me, then, if you were not queen! Madame, say that you would love me then! I can believe that it is the dignity of your rank alone which makes you cruel to me; I can believe that you had been Madame de Chevreuse, poor Buckingham might have hoped. Thanks for those sweet words! Oh, my beautiful sovereign, a hundred times, thanks!"

"Oh, my Lord! You have ill understood, wrongly interpreted; I did not mean to say--"

"Silence, silence!" cried the duke. "If I am happy in an error, do not have the cruelty to lift me from it. You have told me yourself, madame, that I have been drawn into a snare; I, perhaps, may leave my life in it--for, although it may be strange, I have for some time had a presentiment that I should shortly die.” And the duke smiled, with a smile at once sad and charming.

“Oh, my God!” cried Anne of Austria, with an accent of terror which proved how much greater an interest she took in the duke than she ventured to tell.

“I do not tell you this, madame, to terrify you; no, it is even ridiculous for me to name it to you, and, believe me, I take no heed of such dreams. But the words you have just spoken, the hope you have almost given me, will have richly paid all--were it my life.”

“Oh, but I,” said Anne, “I also, duke, have had presentiments; I also have had dreams. I dreamed that I saw you lying bleeding, wounded.”

“In the left side, was it not, and with a knife?” interrupted Buckingham.

“Yes, it was so, my Lord, it was so--in the left side, and with a knife. Who can possibly have told you I had had that dream? I have imparted it to no one but my God, and that in my prayers.”

“I ask for no more. You love me, madame; it is enough.”

“I love you, I?”

“Yes, yes. Would God send the same dreams to you as to me if you did not love me? Should we have the same presentiments if our existences did not touch at the heart? You love me, my beautiful queen, and you will weep for me?”

“Oh, my God, my God!” cried Anne of Austria, “this is more than I can bear. In the name of heaven, Duke, leave me, go! I do not know whether I love you or love you not; but what I know is that I will not be perjured. Take pity on me, then, and go! Oh, if you are struck in France, if you die in France, if I could imagine that your love for me was the cause of your death, I could not console myself; I should run mad. Depart then, depart, I implore you!”

“Oh, how beautiful you are thus! Oh, how I love you!” said Buckingham.

“Go, go, I implore you, and return hereafter! Come back as ambassador, come back as minister, come back surrounded with guards who will defend you, with servants who will watch over you, and then I shall no longer fear for your days, and I shall be happy in seeing you.”

“Oh, is this true what you say?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, then, some pledge of your indulgence, some object which came from you, and may remind me that I have not been dreaming; something you have worn, and that I may wear in my turn--a ring, a necklace, a chain."

"Will you depart--will you depart, if I give you that you demand?"

"Yes."

"This very instant?"

"Yes."

"You will leave France, you will return to England?"

"I will, I swear to you."

"Wait, then, wait."

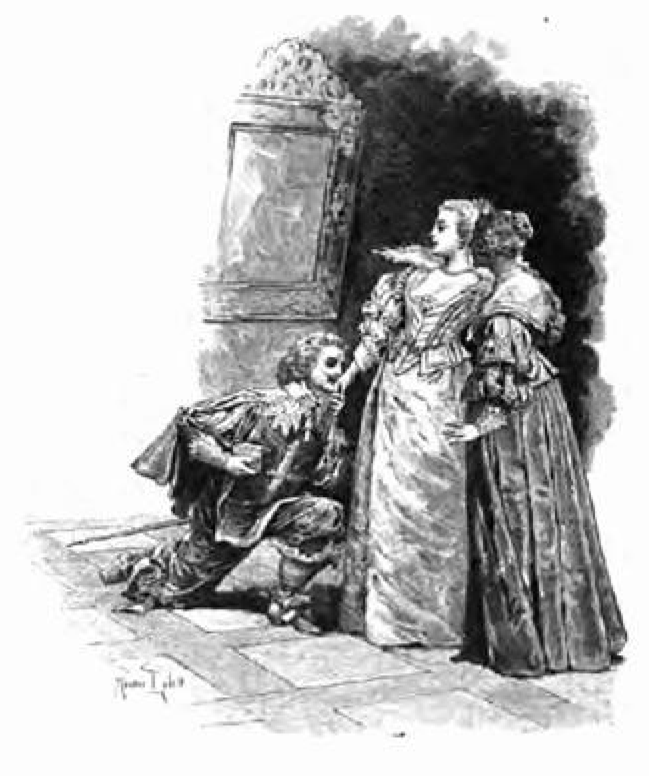

Anne of Austria re-entered her apartment, and came out again almost immediately, holding a rosewood casket in her hand, with her cipher encrusted with gold.

"Here, my Lord, here," said she, "keep this in memory of me."

Buckingham took the casket, and fell a second time on his knees.

"You have promised me to go," said the queen.

"And I keep my word. Your hand, madame, your hand, and I depart!"

Anne of Austria stretched forth her hand, closing her eyes, and leaning with the other upon Estafania, for she felt that her strength was about to fail her.

Buckingham pressed his lips passionately to that beautiful hand, and then rising, said, "Within six months, if I am not dead, I shall have seen you again, madame--even if I have to overturn the world.” And faithful to the promise he had made, he rushed out of the apartment.

In the corridor he met Mme. Bonacieux, who waited for him, and who, with the same precautions and the same good luck, conducted him out of the Louvre.

CHAPTER 13

MONSIEUR BONACIEUX

There was in all this, as may have been observed, one personage concerned, of whom, notwithstanding his precarious position, we have appeared to take but very little notice. This personage was M. Bonacieux, the respectable martyr of the political and amorous intrigues which entangled themselves so nicely together at this gallant and chivalric period.

Fortunately, the reader may remember, or may not remember--fortunately we have promised not to lose sight of him.

The officers who arrested him conducted him straight to the Bastille, where he passed trembling before a party of soldiers who were loading their muskets. Thence, introduced into a half-subterranean gallery, he became, on the part of those who had brought him, the object of the grossest insults and the harshest treatment. The officers perceived that they had not to deal with a gentleman, and they treated him like a very peasant.

At the end of half an hour or thereabouts, a clerk came to put an end to his tortures, but not to his anxiety, by giving the order to conduct M. Bonacieux to the Chamber of Examination. Ordinarily, prisoners were interrogated in their cells; but they did not do so with M. Bonacieux.

Two guards attended the mercer who made him traverse a court and enter a corridor in which were three sentinels, opened a door and pushed him unceremoniously into a low room, where the only furniture was a table, a chair, and a commissary. The commissary was seated in the chair, and was writing at the table.

The two guards led the prisoner toward the table, and upon a sign from the commissary drew back so far as to be unable to hear anything.

The commissary, who had till this time held his head down over his papers, looked up to see what sort of person he had to do with. This commissary was a man of very repulsive mien, with a pointed nose, with yellow and salient cheek bones, with eyes small but keen and penetrating, and an expression of countenance resembling at once the polecat and the fox. His head, supported by a long and flexible neck, issued from his large black robe, balancing itself with a motion very much like that of the tortoise thrusting his head out of his shell. He began by asking M. Bonacieux his name, age, condition, and abode.

The accused replied that his name was Jacques Michel Bonacieux, that he was fifty-one years old, a retired mercer, and lived Rue des Fossoyeurs, No. 14.

The commissary then, instead of continuing to interrogate him, made him a long speech upon the danger there is for an obscure citizen to meddle with public matters. He complicated this exordium by an exposition in which he painted the power and the deeds of the cardinal, that incomparable minister, that conqueror of past ministers, that example for ministers to come--deeds and power which none could thwart with impunity.

After this second part of his discourse, fixing his hawk's eye upon poor Bonacieux, he bade him reflect upon the gravity of his situation.

The reflections of the mercer were already made; he cursed the instant when M. Laporte formed the idea of marrying him to his goddaughter, and particularly the moment when that goddaughter had been received as Lady of the Linen to her Majesty.

At bottom the character of M. Bonacieux was one of profound selfishness mixed with sordid avarice, the whole seasoned with extreme cowardice. The love with which his young wife had inspired him was a secondary sentiment, and was not strong enough to contend with the primitive feelings we have just enumerated. Bonacieux indeed reflected on what had just been said to him.

“But, Monsieur Commissary,” said he, calmly, “believe that I know and appreciate, more than anybody, the merit of the incomparable eminence by whom we have the honor to be governed.”

“Indeed?” asked the commissary, with an air of doubt. “If that is really so, how came you in the Bastille?”

“How I came there, or rather why I am there,” replied Bonacieux, “that is entirely impossible for me to tell you, because I don't know myself; but to a certainty it is not for having, knowingly at least, disobliged Monsieur the Cardinal.”

“You must, nevertheless, have committed a crime, since you are here and are accused of high treason.”

“Of high treason!” cried Bonacieux, terrified; “of high treason! How is it possible for a poor mercer, who detests Huguenots and who abhors

Spaniards, to be accused of high treason? Consider, monsieur, the thing is absolutely impossible."

"Monsieur Bonacieux," said the commissary, looking at the accused as if his little eyes had the faculty of reading to the very depths of hearts, "you have a wife?"

"Yes, monsieur," replied the mercer, in a tremble, feeling that it was at this point affairs were likely to become perplexing; "that is to say, I HAD one."

"What, you 'had one'? What have you done with her, then, if you have her no longer?"

"They have abducted her, monsieur."

"They have abducted her? Ah!"

Bonacieux inferred from this "Ah" that the affair grew more and more intricate.

"They have abducted her," added the commissary; "and do you know the man who has committed this deed?"

"I think I know him."

"Who is he?"

"Remember that I affirm nothing, Monsieur the Commissary, and that I only suspect."

"Whom do you suspect? Come, answer freely."

M Bonacieux was in the greatest perplexity possible. Had he better deny everything or tell everything? By denying all, it might be suspected that he must know too much to avow; by confessing all he might prove his good will. He decided, then, to tell all.

"I suspect," said he, "a tall, dark man, of lofty carriage, who has the air of a great lord. He has followed us several times, as I think, when I have waited for my wife at the wicket of the Louvre to escort her home."

The commissary now appeared to experience a little uneasiness.

"And his name?" said he.

"Oh, as to his name, I know nothing about it; but if I were ever to meet him, I should recognize him in an instant, I will answer for it, were he among a thousand persons."

The face of the commissary grew still darker.

"You should recognize him among a thousand, say you?" continued he.

"That is to say," cried Bonacieux, who saw he had taken a false step, "that is to say--"

“You have answered that you should recognize him,” said the commissary. “That is all very well, and enough for today; before we proceed further, someone must be informed that you know the ravisher of your wife.”

“But I have not told you that I know him!” cried Bonacieux, in despair. “I told you, on the contrary--”

“Take away the prisoner,” said the commissary to the two guards.

“Where must we place him?” demanded the chief.

“In a dungeon.”

“Which?”

“Good Lord! In the first one handy, provided it is safe,” said the commissary, with an indifference which penetrated poor Bonacieux with horror.

“Alas, alas!” said he to himself, “misfortune is over my head; my wife must have committed some frightful crime. They believe me her accomplice, and will punish me with her. She must have spoken; she must have confessed everything--a woman is so weak! A dungeon! The first he comes to! That’s it! A night is soon passed; and tomorrow to the wheel, to the gallows! Oh, my God, my God, have pity on me!”

Without listening the least in the world to the lamentations of M. Bonacieux--lamentations to which, besides, they must have been pretty well accustomed--the two guards took the prisoner each by an arm, and led him away, while the commissary wrote a letter in haste and dispatched it by an officer in waiting.

Bonacieux could not close his eyes; not because his dungeon was so very disagreeable, but because his uneasiness was so great. He sat all night on his stool, starting at the least noise; and when the first rays of the sun penetrated into his chamber, the dawn itself appeared to him to have taken funereal tints.

All at once he heard his bolts drawn, and made a terrified bound. He believed they were come to conduct him to the scaffold; so that when he saw merely and simply, instead of the executioner he expected, only his commissary of the preceding evening, attended by his clerk, he was ready to embrace them both.

“Your affair has become more complicated since yesterday evening, my good man, and I advise you to tell the whole truth; for your repentance alone can remove the anger of the cardinal.”

“Why, I am ready to tell everything,” cried Bonacieux, “at least, all that I know. Interrogate me, I entreat you!”

“Where is your wife, in the first place?”

“Why, did not I tell you she had been stolen from me?”

“Yes, but yesterday at five o’clock in the afternoon, thanks to you, she escaped.”

“My wife escaped!” cried Bonacieux. “Oh, unfortunate creature! Monsieur, if she has escaped, it is not my fault, I swear.”

“What business had you, then, to go into the chamber of Monsieur d’Artagnan, your neighbor, with whom you had a long conference during the day?”

“Ah, yes, Monsieur Commissary; yes, that is true, and I confess that I was in the wrong. I did go to Monsieur d’Artagnan’s.”

“What was the aim of that visit?”

“To beg him to assist me in finding my wife. I believed I had a right to endeavor to find her. I was deceived, as it appears, and I ask your pardon.”

“And what did Monsieur d’Artagnan reply?”

“Monsieur d’Artagnan promised me his assistance; but I soon found out that he was betraying me.”

“You impose upon justice. Monsieur d’Artagnan made a compact with you; and in virtue of that compact put to flight the police who had arrested your wife, and has placed her beyond reach.”

“Fortunately, Monsieur d’Artagnan is in our hands, and you shall be confronted with him.”

“By my faith, I ask no better,” cried Bonacieux; “I shall not be sorry to see the face of an acquaintance.”

“Bring in the Monsieur d’Artagnan,” said the commissary to the guards. The two guards led in Athos.

“Monsieur d’Artagnan,” said the commissary, addressing Athos, “declare all that passed yesterday between you and Monsieur.”

“But,” cried Bonacieux, “this is not Monsieur d’Artagnan whom you show me.”

“What! Not Monsieur d’Artagnan?” exclaimed the commissary.

“Not the least in the world,” replied Bonacieux.

“What is this gentleman’s name?” asked the commissary.

“I cannot tell you; I don’t know him.”

“How! You don’t know him?”

“No.”

“Did you never see him?”

“Yes, I have seen him, but I don’t know what he calls himself.”

“Your name?” replied the commissary.

“Athos,” replied the Musketeer.

“But that is not a man’s name; that is the name of a mountain,” cried the poor questioner, who began to lose his head.

“That is my name,” said Athos, quietly.

“But you said that your name was d’Artagnan.”

“Who, I?”

“Yes, you.”

“Somebody said to me, ‘You are Monsieur d’Artagnan?’ I answered, ‘You think so?’ My guards exclaimed that they were sure of it. I did not wish to contradict them; besides, I might be deceived.”

“Monsieur, you insult the majesty of justice.”

“Not at all,” said Athos, calmly.

“You are Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

“You see, monsieur, that you say it again.”

“But I tell you, Monsieur Commissary,” cried Bonacieux, in his turn, “there is not the least doubt about the matter. Monsieur d’Artagnan is my tenant, although he does not pay me my rent--and even better on that account ought I to know him. Monsieur d’Artagnan is a young man, scarcely nineteen or twenty, and this gentleman must be thirty at least. Monsieur d’Artagnan is in Monsieur Dessessart’s Guards, and this gentleman is in the company of Monsieur de Treville’s Musketeers. Look at his uniform, Monsieur Commissary, look at his uniform!”

“That’s true,” murmured the commissary; “PARDIEU, that’s true.”

At this moment the door was opened quickly, and a messenger, introduced by one of the gatekeepers of the Bastille, gave a letter to the commissary.

“Oh, unhappy woman!” cried the commissary.

“How? What do you say? Of whom do you speak? It is not of my wife, I hope!”

“On the contrary, it is of her. Yours is a pretty business.”

“But,” said the agitated mercer, “do me the pleasure, monsieur, to tell me how my own proper affair can become worse by anything my wife does while I am in prison?”

“Because that which she does is part of a plan concerted between you--of an infernal plan.”

“I swear to you, Monsieur Commissary, that you are in the profoundest error, that I know nothing in the world about what my wife had to do, that I am entirely a stranger to what she has done; and that if she has committed any follies, I renounce her, I abjure her, I curse her!”

“Bah!” said Athos to the commissary, “if you have no more need of me, send me somewhere. Your Monsieur Bonacieux is very tiresome.”

The commissary designated by the same gesture Athos and Bonacieux, “Let them be guarded more closely than ever.”

“And yet,” said Athos, with his habitual calmness, “if it be Monsieur d’Artagnan who is concerned in this matter, I do not perceive how I can take his place.”

“Do as I bade you,” cried the commissary, “and preserve absolute secrecy. You understand!”

Athos shrugged his shoulders, and followed his guards silently, while M. Bonacieux uttered lamentations enough to break the heart of a tiger.

They locked the mercer in the same dungeon where he had passed the night, and left him to himself during the day. Bonacieux wept all day, like a true mercer, not being at all a military man, as he himself informed us. In the evening, about nine o’clock, at the moment he had made up his mind to go to bed, he heard steps in his corridor. These steps drew near to his dungeon, the door was thrown open, and the guards appeared.

“Follow me,” said an officer, who came up behind the guards.

“Follow you!” cried Bonacieux, “follow you at this hour! Where, my God?”

“Where we have orders to lead you.”

“But that is not an answer.”

“It is, nevertheless, the only one we can give.”

“Ah, my God, my God!” murmured the poor mercer, “now, indeed, I am lost!” And he followed the guards who came for him, mechanically and without resistance.

He passed along the same corridor as before, crossed one court, then a second side of a building; at length, at the gate of the entrance court he found a carriage surrounded by four guards on horseback. They made him enter this carriage, the officer placed himself by his side, the door was locked, and they were left in a rolling prison. The carriage was put in motion as slowly as a funeral car. Through the closely fastened windows the prisoner could perceive the houses and the pavement, that was all; but, true Parisian as he was, Bonacieux could recognize every street by the milestones, the signs, and the lamps. At the moment of arriving at St. Paul--the spot where such as were condemned at the Bastille were executed--he was near fainting and crossed himself twice. He thought the carriage was about to stop there. The carriage, however, passed on.

Farther on, a still greater terror seized him on passing by the cemetery of St. Jean, where state criminals were buried. One thing, however, reassured him; he remembered that before they were buried their heads were generally cut off, and he felt that his head was still on his shoulders. But when he saw the carriage take the way to La Greve, when he perceived the pointed roof of the Hotel de Ville, and the carriage passed under the arcade, he believed it was over with him. He wished to confess to the officer, and upon his refusal, uttered such pitiable cries that the officer told him that if he continued to deafen him thus, he should put a gag in his mouth.

This measure somewhat reassured Bonacieux. If they meant to execute him at La Greve, it could scarcely be worth while to gag him, as they had nearly reached the place of execution. Indeed, the carriage crossed the fatal spot without stopping. There remained, then, no other place to fear but the Traitor’s Cross; the carriage was taking the direct road to it.

This time there was no longer any doubt; it was at the Traitor’s Cross that lesser criminals were executed. Bonacieux had flattered himself in believing himself worthy of St. Paul or of the Place de Greve; it was at the Traitor’s Cross that his journey and his destiny were about to end! He could not yet see that dreadful cross, but he felt somehow as if it were coming to meet him. When he was within twenty paces of it, he heard a noise of people and the carriage stopped. This was more than poor Bonacieux could endure, depressed as he was by the successive emotions which he had experienced; he uttered a feeble groan which night have been taken for the last sigh of a dying man, and fainted.

CHAPTER 14

THE MAN OF MEUNG

The crowd was caused, not by the expectation of a man to be hanged, but by the contemplation of a man who was hanged.

The carriage, which had been stopped for a minute, resumed its way, passed through the crowd, threaded the Rue St. Honore, turned into the Rue des Bons Enfants, and stopped before a low door.

The door opened; two guards received Bonacieux in their arms from the officer who supported him. They carried him through an alley, up a flight of stairs, and deposited him in an antechamber.

All these movements had been effected mechanically, as far as he was concerned. He had walked as one walks in a dream; he had a glimpse of objects as through a fog. His ears had perceived sounds without comprehending them; he might have been executed at that moment without his making a single gesture in his own defense or uttering a cry to implore mercy.

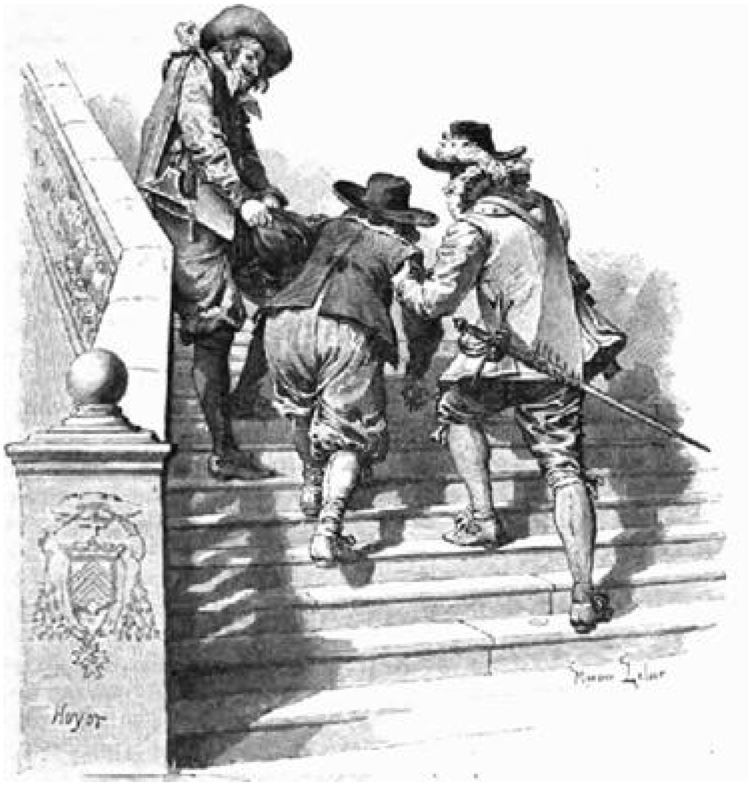

He remained on the bench, with his back leaning against the wall and his hands hanging down, exactly on the spot where the guards placed him.

On looking around him, however, as he could perceive no threatening object, as nothing indicated that he ran any real danger, as the bench was comfortably covered with a well-stuffed cushion, as the wall was ornamented with a beautiful Cordova leather, and as large red damask curtains, fastened back by gold clasps, floated before the window, he perceived by degrees that his fear was exaggerated, and he began to turn his head to the right and the left, upward and downward.

At this movement, which nobody opposed, he resumed a little courage, and ventured to draw up one leg and then the other. At length, with the help of his two hands he lifted himself from the bench, and found himself on his feet.

At this moment an officer with a pleasant face opened a door, continued to exchange some words with a person in the next chamber and then came up to the prisoner. “Is your name Bonacieux?” said he.

“Yes, Monsieur Officer,” stammered the mercer, more dead than alive, “at your service.”

“Come in,” said the officer.

And he moved out of the way to let the mercer pass. The latter obeyed without reply, and entered the chamber, where he appeared to be expected.

It was a large cabinet, close and stifling, with the walls furnished with arms offensive and defensive, and in which there was already a fire, although it was scarcely the end of the month of September. A square table, covered with books and papers, upon which was unrolled an immense plan of the city of La Rochelle, occupied the center of the room.

Standing before the chimney was a man of middle height, of a haughty, proud mien; with piercing eyes, a large brow, and a thin face, which was made still longer by a ROYAL (or IMPERIAL, as it is now called), surmounted by a pair of mustaches. Although this man was scarcely thirty-six or thirty-seven years of age, hair, mustaches, and royal, all began to be gray. This man, except a sword, had all the appearance of a soldier; and his buff boots still slightly covered with dust, indicated that he had been on horseback in the course of the day.

This man was Armand Jean Duplessis, Cardinal de Richelieu; not such as he is now represented--broken down like an old man, suffering like a martyr, his body bent, his voice failing, buried in a large armchair as in an anticipated tomb; no longer living but by the strength of his genius, and no longer maintaining the struggle with Europe but by the eternal application of his thoughts--but such as he really was at this period; that is to say, an active and gallant cavalier, already weak of body, but sustained by that moral power which made of him one of the most extraordinary men that ever lived, preparing, after having supported the Duc de Nevers in his duchy of Mantua, after having taken Nimes, Castres, and Uzes, to drive the English from the Isle of Re and lay siege to La Rochelle.

At first sight, nothing denoted the cardinal; and it was impossible for those who did not know his face to guess in whose presence they were.

The poor mercer remained standing at the door, while the eyes of the personage we have just described were fixed upon him, and appeared to wish to penetrate even into the depths of the past.

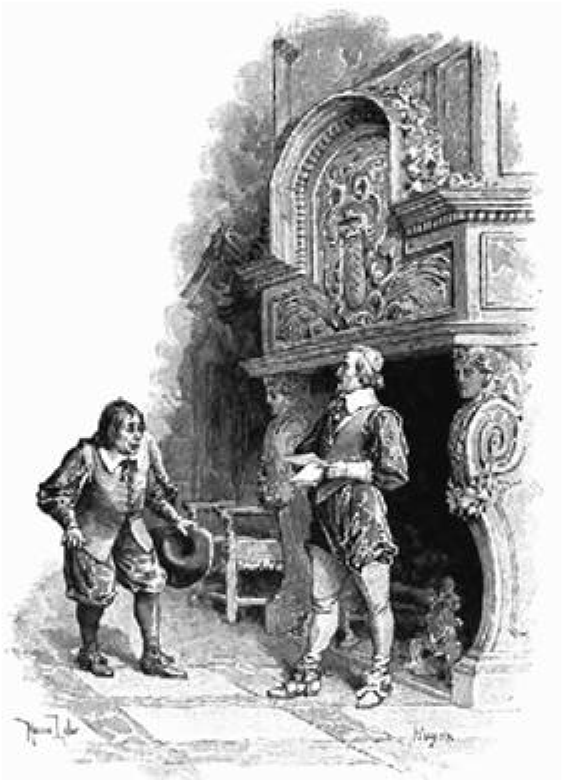

“Is this that Bonacieux?” asked he, after a moment of silence.

“Yes, monseigneur,” replied the officer.

“That’s well. Give me those papers, and leave us.”

The officer took from the table the papers pointed out, gave them to him who asked for them, bowed to the ground, and retired.

Bonacieux recognized in these papers his interrogatories of the Bastille. From time to time the man by the chimney raised his eyes from the writings, and plunged them like poniards into the heart of the poor mercer.

At the end of ten minutes of reading and ten seconds of examination, the cardinal was satisfied.

“That head has never conspired,” murmured he, “but it matters not; we will see.”

“You are accused of high treason,” said the cardinal, slowly.

“So I have been told already, monseigneur,” cried Bonacieux, giving his interrogator the title he had heard the officer give him, “but I swear to you that I know nothing about it.”

The cardinal repressed a smile.

“You have conspired with your wife, with Madame de Chevreuse, and with my Lord Duke of Buckingham.”

“Indeed, monseigneur,” responded the mercer, “I have heard her pronounce all those names.”

“And on what occasion?”

“She said that the Cardinal de Richelieu had drawn the Duke of Buckingham to Paris to ruin him and to ruin the queen.”

“She said that?” cried the cardinal, with violence.

“Yes, monseigneur, but I told her she was wrong to talk about such things; and that his Eminence was incapable--”

“Hold your tongue! You are stupid,” replied the cardinal.

“That’s exactly what my wife said, monseigneur.”

“Do you know who carried off your wife?”

“No, monseigneur.”

“You have suspicions, nevertheless?”

“Yes, monseigneur; but these suspicions appeared to be disagreeable to Monsieur the Commissary, and I no longer have them.”

“Your wife has escaped. Did you know that?”

“No, monseigneur. I learned it since I have been in prison, and that from the conversation of Monsieur the Commissary--an amiable man.”

The cardinal repressed another smile.

“Then you are ignorant of what has become of your wife since her flight.”

“Absolutely, monseigneur; but she has most likely returned to the Louvre.”

“At one o’clock this morning she had not returned.”

“My God! What can have become of her, then?”

“We shall know, be assured. Nothing is concealed from the cardinal; the cardinal knows everything.”

“In that case, monseigneur, do you believe the cardinal will be so kind as to tell me what has become of my wife?”

“Perhaps he may; but you must, in the first place, reveal to the cardinal all you know of your wife’s relations with Madame de Chevreuse.”

“But, monseigneur, I know nothing about them; I have never seen her.”

“When you went to fetch your wife from the Louvre, did you always return directly home?”

“Scarcely ever; she had business to transact with linen drapers, to whose houses I conducted her.”

“And how many were there of these linen drapers?”

“Two, monseigneur.”

“And where did they live?”

“One in Rue de Vaugirard, the other Rue de la Harpe.”

“Did you go into these houses with her?”

“Never, monseigneur; I waited at the door.”

“And what excuse did she give you for entering all alone?”

“She gave me none; she told me to wait, and I waited.”

“You are a very complacent husband, my dear Monsieur Bonacieux,” said the cardinal.

“He calls me his dear Monsieur,” said the mercer to himself. “PESTE! Matters are going all right.”

“Should you know those doors again?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know the numbers?”

“Yes.”

“What are they?”

“No. 25 in the Rue de Vaugirard; 75 in the Rue de la Harpe.”

“That’s well,” said the cardinal.

At these words he took up a silver bell, and rang it; the officer entered.

“Go,” said he, in a subdued voice, “and find Rochefort. Tell him to come to me immediately, if he has returned.”

“The count is here,” said the officer, “and requests to speak with your Eminence instantly.”

“Let him come in, then!” said the cardinal, quickly.

The officer sprang out of the apartment with that alacrity which all the servants of the cardinal displayed in obeying him.

“To your Eminence!” murmured Bonacieux, rolling his eyes round in astonishment.

Five seconds has scarcely elapsed after the disappearance of the officer, when the door opened, and a new personage entered.

“It is he!” cried Bonacieux.

“He! What he?” asked the cardinal.

“The man who abducted my wife.”

The cardinal rang a second time. The officer reappeared.

“Place this man in the care of his guards again, and let him wait till I send for him.”

“No, monseigneur, no, it is not he!” cried Bonacieux; “no, I was deceived. This is quite another man, and does not resemble him at all. Monsieur is, I am sure, an honest man.”

“Take away that fool!” said the cardinal.

The officer took Bonacieux by the arm, and led him into the antechamber, where he found his two guards.

The newly introduced personage followed Bonacieux impatiently with his eyes till he had gone out; and the moment the door closed, “They have seen each other;” said he, approaching the cardinal eagerly.

“Who?” asked his Eminence.

“He and she.”

“The queen and the duke?” cried Richelieu.

“Yes.”

“Where?”

“At the Louvre.”

“Are you sure of it?”

“Perfectly sure.”

“Who told you of it?”

“Madame de Lannoy, who is devoted to your Eminence, as you know.”

“Why did she not let me know sooner?”

“Whether by chance or mistrust, the queen made Madame de Surgis sleep in her chamber, and detained her all day.”

“Well, we are beaten! Now let us try to take our revenge.”

“I will assist you with all my heart, monseigneur; be assured of that.”

“How did it come about?”

“At half past twelve the queen was with her women--”

“Where?”

“In her bedchamber--”

“Go on.”

“When someone came and brought her a handkerchief from her laundress.”

“And then?”

“The queen immediately exhibited strong emotion; and despite the rouge with which her face was covered evidently turned pale--”

“And then, and then?”

“She then arose, and with altered voice, ‘Ladies,’ said she, ‘wait for me ten minutes, I shall soon return.’ She then opened the door of her alcove, and went out.”

“Why did not Madame de Lannoy come and inform you instantly?”

“Nothing was certain; besides, her Majesty had said, ‘Ladies, wait for me,’ and she did not dare to disobey the queen.”

“How long did the queen remain out of the chamber?”

“Three-quarters of an hour.”

“None of her women accompanied her?”

“Only Donna Estafania.”

“Did she afterward return?”

“Yes; but only to take a little rosewood casket, with her cipher upon it, and went out again immediately.”

“And when she finally returned, did she bring that casket with her?”

“No.”

“Does Madame de Lannoy know what was in that casket?”

“Yes; the diamond studs which his Majesty gave the queen.”

“And she came back without this casket?”

“Yes.”

“Madame de Lannoy, then, is of opinion that she gave them to Buckingham?”

“She is sure of it.”

“How can she be so?”

“In the course of the day Madame de Lannoy, in her quality of tire-woman of the queen, looked for this casket, appeared uneasy at not finding it, and at length asked information of the queen.”

“And then the queen?”

“The queen became exceedingly red, and replied that having in the evening broken one of those studs, she had sent it to her goldsmith to be repaired.”

“He must be called upon, and so ascertain if the thing be true or not.”

“I have just been with him.”

“And the goldsmith?”

“The goldsmith has heard nothing of it.”

“Well, well! Rochefort, all is not lost; and perhaps--perhaps everything is for the best.”

“The fact is that I do not doubt your Eminence’s genius--”

“Will repair the blunders of his agent--is that it?”

“That is exactly what I was going to say, if your Eminence had let me finish my sentence.”

“Meanwhile, do you know where the Duchesse de Chevreuse and the Duke of Buckingham are now concealed?”

“No, monseigneur; my people could tell me nothing on that head.”

“But I know.”

“You, monseigneur?”

“Yes; or at least I guess. They were, one in the Rue de Vaugirard, No. 25; the other in the Rue de la Harpe, No. 75.”

“Does your Eminence command that they both be instantly arrested?”

“It will be too late; they will be gone.”

“But still, we can make sure that they are so.”

“Take ten men of my Guardsmen, and search the two houses thoroughly.”

“Instantly, monseigneur.” And Rochefort went hastily out of the apartment.

The cardinal being left alone, reflected for an instant and then rang the bell a third time. The same officer appeared.

“Bring the prisoner in again,” said the cardinal.

M Bonacieux was introduced afresh, and upon a sign from the cardinal, the officer retired.

“You have deceived me!” said the cardinal, sternly.

“I,” cried Bonacieux, “I deceive your Eminence!”

“Your wife, in going to Rue de Vaugirard and Rue de la Harpe, did not go to find linen drapers.”

“Then why did she go, just God?”

“She went to meet the Duchesse de Chevreuse and the Duke of Buckingham.”

“Yes,” cried Bonacieux, recalling all his remembrances of the circumstances, “yes, that’s it. Your Eminence is right. I told my wife several times that it was surprising that linen drapers should live in such houses as those, in houses that had no signs; but she always laughed at me. Ah, monseigneur!” continued Bonacieux, throwing himself at his Eminence’s feet, “ah, how truly you are the cardinal, the great cardinal, the man of genius whom all the world reveres!”

The cardinal, however contemptible might be the triumph gained over so vulgar a being as Bonacieux, did not the less enjoy it for an instant; then, almost immediately, as if a fresh thought has occurred, a smile played upon his lips, and he said, offering his hand to the mercer, “Rise, my friend, you are a worthy man.”

“The cardinal has touched me with his hand! I have touched the hand of the great man!” cried Bonacieux. “The great man has called me his friend!”

“Yes, my friend, yes,” said the cardinal, with that paternal tone which he sometimes knew how to assume, but which deceived none who knew him; “and as you have been unjustly suspected, well, you must be indemnified. Here, take this purse of a hundred pistoles, and pardon me.”

“I pardon you, monseigneur!” said Bonacieux, hesitating to take the purse, fearing, doubtless, that this pretended gift was but a pleasantry. “But you are able to have me arrested, you are able to have me tortured, you are able to have me hanged; you are the master, and I could not have the least word to say. Pardon you, monseigneur! You cannot mean that!”

“Ah, my dear Monsieur Bonacieux, you are generous in this matter. I see it and I thank you for it. Thus, then, you will take this bag, and you will go away without being too malcontent.”

“I go away enchanted.”

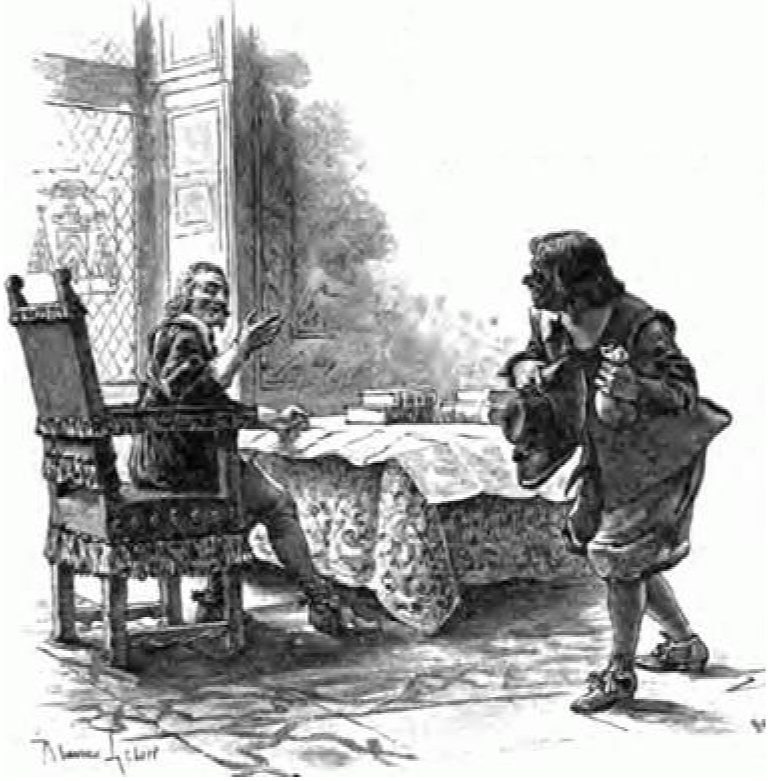

“Farewell, then, or rather, AU REVOIR!”

And the cardinal made him a sign with his hand, to which Bonacieux replied by bowing to the ground. He then went out backward, and when he was in the antechamber the cardinal heard him, in his enthusiasm, crying aloud, “Long life to the Monseigneur! Long life to his Eminence! Long life to the great cardinal!” The cardinal listened with a smile to this vociferous manifestation of the feelings of M. Bonacieux; and then, when Bonacieux’s cries were no longer audible, “Good!” said he, “that man would henceforward lay down his life for me.” And the cardinal began to examine with the greatest attention the map of La Rochelle, which, as we have said, lay open on the desk, tracing with a pencil the line in which the famous dyke was to pass which, eighteen months later, shut up the port of the besieged city. As he was in the deepest of his strategic meditations, the door opened, and Rochefort returned.

“Well?” said the cardinal, eagerly, rising with a promptitude which proved the degree of importance he attached to the commission with which he had charged the count.

“Well,” said the latter, “a young woman of about twenty-six or twenty-eight years of age, and a man of from thirty-five to forty, have indeed lodged at the two houses pointed out by your Eminence; but the woman left last night, and the man this morning.”

“It was they!” cried the cardinal, looking at the clock; “and now it is too late to have them pursued. The duchess is at Tours, and the duke at Boulogne. It is in London they must be found.”

“What are your Eminence’s orders?”

“Not a word of what has passed. Let the queen remain in perfect security; let her be ignorant that we know her secret. Let her believe that we are in search of some conspiracy or other. Send me the keeper of the seals, Seguier.”

“And that man, what has your Eminence done with him?”

“What man?” asked the cardinal.

“That Bonacieux.”

“I have done with him all that could be done. I have made him a spy upon his wife.”

The Comte de Rochefort bowed like a man who acknowledges the superiority of the master as great, and retired.

Left alone, the cardinal seated himself again and wrote a letter, which he secured with his special seal. Then he rang. The officer entered for the fourth time.

“Tell Vitray to come to me,” said he, “and tell him to get ready for a journey.”

An instant after, the man he asked for was before him, booted and spurred.

“Vitray,” said he, “you will go with all speed to London. You must not stop an instant on the way. You will deliver this letter to Milady. Here is an order for two hundred pistoles; call upon my treasurer and get the money. You shall have as much again if you are back within six days, and have executed your commission well.”

The messenger, without replying a single word, bowed, took the letter, with the order for the two hundred pistoles, and retired.

Here is what the letter contained:

MILADY, Be at the first ball at which the Duke of Buckingham shall be present. He will wear on his doublet twelve diamond studs; get as near to him as you can, and cut off two.

As soon as these studs shall be in your possession, inform me.

CHAPTER 15

MEN OF THE ROBE AND MEN OF THE SWORD

On the day after these events had taken place, Athos not having reappeared, M. de Treville was informed by d’Artagnan and Porthos of the circumstance. As to Aramis, he had asked for leave of absence for five days, and was gone, it was said, to Rouen on family business.

M de Treville was the father of his soldiers. The lowest or the least known of them, as soon as he assumed the uniform of the company, was as sure of his aid and support as if he had been his own brother.

He repaired, then, instantly to the office of the LIEUTENANT-CRIMINEL. The officer who commanded the post of the Red Cross was sent for, and by successive inquiries they learned that Athos was then lodged in the Fort l’Eveque.

Athos had passed through all the examinations we have seen Bonacieux undergo.

We were present at the scene in which the two captives were confronted with each other. Athos, who had till that time said nothing for fear that d’Artagnan, interrupted in his turn, should not have the time necessary, from this moment declared that his name was Athos, and not d’Artagnan. He added that he did not know either M. or Mme. Bonacieux; that he had never spoken to the one or the other; that he had come, at about ten o’clock in the evening, to pay a visit to his friend M. d’Artagnan, but that till that hour he had been at M. de Treville’s, where he had dined. “Twenty witnesses,” added he, “could attest the fact”; and he named several distinguished gentlemen, and among them was M. le Duc de la Tremouille.

The second commissary was as much bewildered as the first had been by the simple and firm declaration of the Musketeer, upon whom he was anxious to take the revenge which men of the robe like at all times to gain over men of the sword; but the name of M. de Treville, and that of M. de la Tremouille, commanded a little reflection.

Athos was then sent to the cardinal; but unfortunately the cardinal was at the Louvre with the king.

It was precisely at this moment that M. de Treville, on leaving the residence of the LIEUTENANT-CRIMINEL and the governor of the Fort l'Eveque without being able to find Athos, arrived at the palace.

As captain of the Musketeers, M. de Treville had the right of entry at all times.

It is well known how violent the king's prejudices were against the queen, and how carefully these prejudices were kept up by the cardinal, who in affairs of intrigue mistrusted women infinitely more than men. One of the grand causes of this prejudice was the friendship of Anne of Austria for Mme. de Chevreuse. These two women gave him more uneasiness than the war with Spain, the quarrel with England, or the embarrassment of the finances. In his eyes and to his conviction, Mme. de Chevreuse not only served the queen in her political intrigues, but, what tormented him still more, in her amorous intrigues.

At the first word the cardinal spoke of Mme. de Chevreuse--who, though exiled to Tours and believed to be in that city, had come to Paris, remained there five days, and outwitted the police--the king flew into a furious passion. Capricious and unfaithful, the king wished to be called Louis the Just and Louis the Chaste. Posterity will find a difficulty in understanding this character, which history explains only by facts and never by reason.

But when the cardinal added that not only Mme. de Chevreuse had been in Paris, but still further, that the queen had renewed with her one of those mysterious correspondences which at that time was named a CABAL; when he affirmed that he, the cardinal, was about to unravel the most closely twisted thread of this intrigue; that at the moment of arresting in the very act, with all the proofs about her, the queen's emissary to the exiled duchess, a Musketeer had dared to interrupt the course of justice violently, by falling sword in hand upon the honest men of the law, charged with investigating impartially the whole affair in order to place it before the eyes of the king--Louis XIII could not contain himself, and he made a step toward the queen's apartment with that pale and mute indignation which, when in broke out, led this prince to the commission of the most pitiless cruelty. And yet, in all this, the cardinal had not yet said a word about the Duke of Buckingham.

At this instant M. de Treville entered, cool, polite, and in irreproachable costume.

Informed of what had passed by the presence of the cardinal and the alteration in the king's countenance, M. de Treville felt himself something like Samson before the Philistines.

Louis XIII had already placed his hand on the knob of the door; at the noise of M. de Treville's entrance he turned round. "You arrive in good time, monsieur," said the king, who, when his passions were raised to a certain point, could not dissemble; "I have learned some fine things concerning your Musketeers."

"And I," said Treville, coldly, "I have some pretty things to tell your Majesty concerning these gownsmen."

"What?" said the king, with hauteur.

"I have the honor to inform your Majesty," continued M. de Treville, in the same tone, "that a party of PROCUREURS, commissaries, and men of the police--very estimable people, but very inveterate, as it appears, against the uniform--have taken upon themselves to arrest in a house, to lead away through the open street, and throw into the Fort l'Eveque, all upon an order which they have refused to show me, one of my, or rather your Musketeers, sire, of irreproachable conduct, of an almost illustrious reputation, and whom your Majesty knows favorably, Monsieur Athos."

"Athos," said the king, mechanically; "yes, certainly I know that name."

"Let your Majesty remember," said Treville, "that Monsieur Athos is the Musketeer who, in the annoying duel which you are acquainted with, had the misfortune to wound Monsieur de Cahusac so seriously. A PROPOS, monseigneur," continued Treville. Addressing the cardinal, "Monsieur de Cahusac is quite recovered, is he not?"

"Thank you," said the cardinal, biting his lips with anger.

"Athos, then, went to pay a visit to one of his friends absent at the time," continued Treville, "to a young Bearnais, a cadet in his Majesty's Guards, the company of Monsieur Dessessart, but scarcely had he arrived at his friend's and taken up a book, while waiting his return, when a mixed crowd of bailiffs and soldiers came and laid siege to the house, broke open several doors--"

The cardinal made the king a sign, which signified, "That was on account of the affair about which I spoke to you."

"We all know that," interrupted the king; "for all that was done for our service."

"Then," said Treville, "it was also for your Majesty's service that one of my Musketeers, who was innocent, has been seized, that he has been placed between two guards like a malefactor, and that this gallant man, who has ten times shed his blood in your Majesty's service and is ready to shed it again, has been paraded through the midst of an insolent populace?"

"Bah!" said the king, who began to be shaken, "was it so managed?"

"Monsieur de Treville," said the cardinal, with the greatest phlegm, "does not tell your Majesty that this innocent Musketeer, this gallant man, had only an hour before attacked, sword in hand, four commissaries of inquiry, who were delegated by myself to examine into an affair of the highest importance."

"I defy your Eminence to prove it," cried Treville, with his Gascon freedom and military frankness; "for one hour before, Monsieur Athos, who, I will confide it to your Majesty, is really a man of the highest quality, did me the honor after having dined with me to be conversing in the saloon of my hotel, with the Duc de la Tremouille and the Comte de Chalus, who happened to be there."

The king looked at the cardinal.

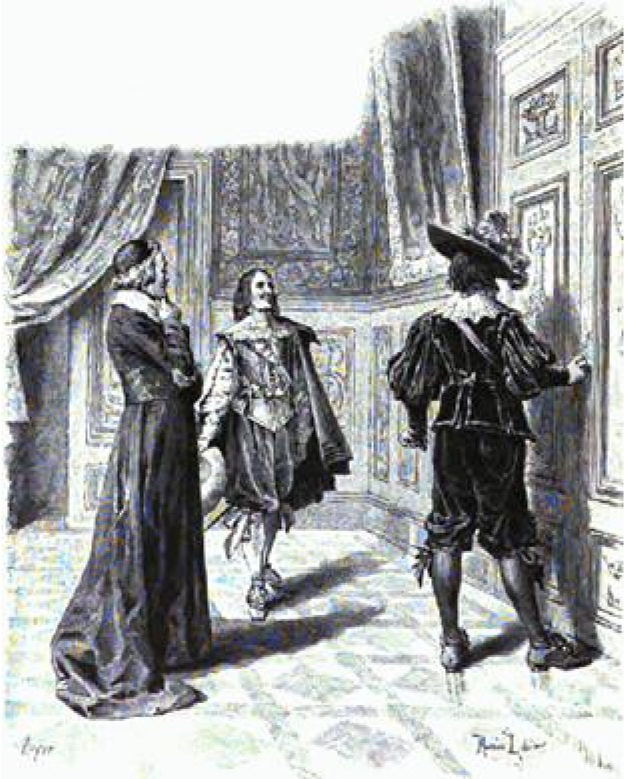

“A written examination attests it,” said the cardinal, replying aloud to the mute interrogation of his Majesty; “and the ill-treated people have drawn up the following, which I have the honor to present to your Majesty.”

“And is the written report of the gownsmen to be placed in comparison with the word of honor of a swordsman?” replied Treville haughtily.

“Come, come, Treville, hold your tongue,” said the king.

“If his Eminence entertains any suspicion against one of my Musketeers,” said Treville, “the justice of Monsieur the Cardinal is so well known that I demand an inquiry.”

“In the house in which the judicial inquiry was made,” continued the impassive cardinal, “there lodges, I believe, a young Bearnais, a friend of the Musketeer.”

“Your Eminence means Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

“I mean a young man whom you patronize, Monsieur de Treville.”

“Yes, your Eminence, it is the same.”

“Do you not suspect this young man of having given bad counsel?”

“To Athos, to a man double his age?” interrupted Treville. “No, monseigneur. Besides, d’Artagnan passed the evening with me.”

“Well,” said the cardinal, “everybody seems to have passed the evening with you.”

“Does your Eminence doubt my word?” said Treville, with a brow flushed with anger.

“No, God forbid,” said the cardinal; “only, at what hour was he with you?”

“Oh, as to that I can speak positively, your Eminence; for as he came in I remarked that it was but half past nine by the clock, although I had believed it to be later.”

“At what hour did he leave your hotel?”

“At half past ten--an hour after the event.”

“Well,” replied the cardinal, who could not for an instant suspect the loyalty of Treville, and who felt that the victory was escaping him, “well, but Athos WAS taken in the house in the Rue des Fossoyeurs.”

“Is one friend forbidden to visit another, or a Musketeer of my company to fraternize with a Guard of Dessessart’s company?”

“Yes, when the house where he fraternizes is suspected.”

“That house is suspected, Treville,” said the king; “perhaps you did not know it?”

“Indeed, sire, I did not. The house may be suspected; but I deny that it is so in the part of it inhabited my Monsieur d’Artagnan, for I can affirm, sire, if I can believe what he says, that there does not exist a more devoted servant of your Majesty, or a more profound admirer of Monsieur the Cardinal.”

“Was it not this d’Artagnan who wounded Jussac one day, in that unfortunate encounter which took place near the Convent of the Carmes-Dechausses?” asked the king, looking at the cardinal, who colored with vexation.

“And the next day, Bernajoux. Yes, sire, yes, it is the same; and your Majesty has a good memory.”

“Come, how shall we decide?” said the king.

“That concerns your Majesty more than me,” said the cardinal. “I should affirm the culpability.”

“And I deny it,” said Treville. “But his Majesty has judges, and these judges will decide.”

“That is best,” said the king. “Send the case before the judges; it is their business to judge, and they shall judge.”

“Only,” replied Treville, “it is a sad thing that in the unfortunate times in which we live, the purest life, the most incontestable virtue, cannot exempt a man from infamy and persecution. The army, I will answer for it, will be but little pleased at being exposed to rigorous treatment on account of police affairs.”

The expression was imprudent; but M. de Treville launched it with knowledge of his cause. He was desirous of an explosion, because in that case the mine throws forth fire, and fire enlightens.

“Police affairs!” cried the king, taking up Treville’s words, “police affairs! And what do you know about them, Monsieur? Meddle with your Musketeers, and do not annoy me in this way. It appears, according to your account, that if by mischance a Musketeer is arrested, France is in danger. What a noise about a Musketeer! I would arrest ten of them, VENTREBLEU, a hundred, even, all the company, and I would not allow a whisper.”

“From the moment they are suspected by your Majesty,” said Treville, “the Musketeers are guilty; therefore, you see me prepared to surrender my sword--for after having accused my soldiers, there can be no doubt that Monsieur the Cardinal will end by accusing me. It is best to constitute myself at once a prisoner with Athos, who is already arrested, and with d’Artagnan, who most probably will be.”

“Gascon-headed man, will you have done?” said the king.

“Sire,” replied Treville, without lowering his voice in the least, “either order my Musketeer to be restored to me, or let him be tried.”

“He shall be tried,” said the cardinal.

“Well, so much the better; for in that case I shall demand of his Majesty permission to plead for him.”

The king feared an outbreak.

[redacted]

“If his Eminence,” said he, “did not have personal motives--”

The cardinal saw what the king was about to say and interrupted him:

“Pardon me,” said he; “but the instant your Majesty considers me a prejudiced judge, I withdraw.”

“Come,” said the king, “will you swear, by my father, that Athos was at your residence during the event and that he took no part in it?”

“By your glorious father, and by yourself, whom I love and venerate above all the world, I swear it.”

“Be so kind as to reflect, sire,” said the cardinal. “If we release the prisoner thus, we shall never know the truth.”

“Athos may always be found,” replied Treville, “ready to answer, when it shall please the gownsmen to interrogate him. He will not desert, Monsieur the Cardinal, be assured of that; I will answer for him.”

“No, he will not desert,” said the king; “he can always be found, as Treville says. Besides,” added he, lowering his voice and looking with a suppliant air at the cardinal, “let us give them apparent security; that is policy.”

This policy of Louis XIII made Richelieu smile.

“Order it as you please, sire; you possess the right of pardon.”

“The right of pardoning only applies to the guilty,” said Treville, who was determined to have the last word, “and my Musketeer is innocent. It is not mercy, then, that you are about to accord, sire, it is justice.”

“And he is in the Fort l’Eveque?” said the king.

“Yes, sire, in solitary confinement, in a dungeon, like the lowest criminal.”

“The devil!” murmured the king; “what must be done?”

“Sign an order for his release, and all will be said,” replied the cardinal. “I believe with your Majesty that Monsieur de Treville’s guarantee is more than sufficient.”

Treville bowed very respectfully, with a joy that was not unmixed with fear; he would have preferred an obstinate resistance on the part of the cardinal to this sudden yielding.

The king signed the order for release, and Treville carried it away without delay. As he was about to leave the presence, the cardinal gave him a friendly smile, and said, “A perfect harmony reigns, sire, between the leaders and the soldiers of your Musketeers, which must be profitable for the service and honorable to all.”

“He will play me some dog’s trick or other, and that immediately,” said Treville. “One has never the last word with such a man. But let us be quick--the king may change his mind in an hour; and at all events it is more difficult to replace a man in the Fort l’Eveque or the Bastille who has got out, than to keep a prisoner there who is in.”

M de Treville made his entrance triumphantly into the Fort l’Eveque, whence he delivered the Musketeer, whose peaceful indifference had not for a moment abandoned him.

The first time he saw d’Artagnan, “You have come off well,” said he to him; “there is your Jussac thrust paid for. There still remains that of

Bernajoux, but you must not be too confident.”

As to the rest, M. de Treville had good reason to mistrust the cardinal and to think that all was not over, for scarcely had the captain of the Musketeers closed the door after him, than his Eminence said to the king, “Now that we are at length by ourselves, we will, if your Majesty pleases, converse seriously. Sire, Buckingham has been in Paris five days, and only left this morning.”

CHAPTER 16

IN WHICH M. SEGUIER, KEEPER OF THE SEALS, LOOKS MORE THAN ONCE FOR THE BELL

It is impossible to form an idea of the impression these few words made upon Louis XIII. He grew pale and red alternately; and the cardinal saw at once that he had recovered by a single blow all the ground he had lost.

“Buckingham in Paris!” cried he, “and why does he come?”

“To conspire, no doubt, with your enemies, the Huguenots and the Spaniards.”

“No, PARDIEU, no! To conspire against my honor with Madame de Chevreuse, Madame de Longueville, and the Condes.”

“Oh, sire, what an idea! The queen is too virtuous; and besides, loves your Majesty too well.”

“Woman is weak, Monsieur Cardinal,” said the king; “and as to loving me much, I have my own opinion as to that love.”

“I not the less maintain,” said the cardinal, “that the Duke of Buckingham came to Paris for a project wholly political.”

“And I am sure that he came for quite another purpose, Monsieur Cardinal; but if the queen be guilty, let her tremble!”

“Indeed,” said the cardinal, “whatever repugnance I may have to directing my mind to such a treason, your Majesty compels me to think of it. Madame de Lannoy, whom, according to your Majesty’s command, I have frequently interrogated, told me this morning that the night before last her Majesty sat up very late, that this morning she wept much, and that she was writing all day.”

“That’s it!” cried the king; “to him, no doubt. Cardinal, I must have the queen’s papers.”

“But how to take them, sire? It seems to me that it is neither your Majesty nor myself who can charge himself with such a mission.”

“How did they act with regard to the Marechale d’Ancre?” cried the king, in the highest state of choler; “first her closets were thoroughly searched, and then she herself.”

“The Marechale d’Ancre was no more than the Marechale d’Ancre. A Florentine adventurer, sire, and that was all; while the august spouse of your Majesty is Anne of Austria, Queen of France--that is to say, one of the greatest princesses in the world.”

“She is not the less guilty, Monsieur Duke! The more she has forgotten the high position in which she was placed, the more degrading is her fall. Besides, I long ago determined to put an end to all these petty intrigues of policy and love. She has near her a certain Laporte.”

“Who, I believe, is the mainspring of all this, I confess,” said the cardinal.

“You think then, as I do, that she deceives me?” said the king.

“I believe, and I repeat it to your Majesty, that the queen conspires against the power of the king, but I have not said against his honor.”

“And I--I tell you against both. I tell you the queen does not love me; I tell you she loves another; I tell you she loves that infamous Buckingham! Why did you not have him arrested while in Paris?”

“Arrest the Duke! Arrest the prime minister of King Charles I! Think of it, sire! What a scandal! And if the suspicions of your Majesty, which I still continue to doubt, should prove to have any foundation, what a terrible disclosure, what a fearful scandal!”

“But as he exposed himself like a vagabond or a thief, he should have been--”

Louis XIII stopped, terrified at what he was about to say, while Richelieu, stretching out his neck, waited uselessly for the word which had died on the lips of the king.

“He should have been--?”

“Nothing,” said the king, “nothing. But all the time he was in Paris, you, of course, did not lose sight of him?”

“No, sire.”

“Where did he lodge?”

“Rue de la Harpe. No. 75.”

“Where is that?”

“By the side of the Luxembourg.”

“And you are certain that the queen and he did not see each other?”

"I believe the queen to have too high a sense of her duty, sire."

"But they have corresponded; it is to him that the queen has been writing all the day. Monsieur Duke, I must have those letters!"

"Sire, notwithstanding--"

"Monsieur Duke, at whatever price it may be, I will have them."

"I would, however, beg your Majesty to observe--"

"Do you, then, also join in betraying me, Monsieur Cardinal, by thus always opposing my will? Are you also in accord with Spain and England, with Madame de Chevreuse and the queen?"

"Sire," replied the cardinal, sighing, "I believed myself secure from such a suspicion."

"Monsieur Cardinal, you have heard me; I will have those letters."

"There is but one way."

"What is that?"

"That would be to charge Monsieur de Seguier, the keeper of the seals, with this mission. The matter enters completely into the duties of the post."

"Let him be sent for instantly."

"He is most likely at my hotel. I requested him to call, and when I came to the Louvre I left orders if he came, to desire him to wait."

"Let him be sent for instantly."

"Your Majesty's orders shall be executed; but--"

"But what?"

"But the queen will perhaps refuse to obey."

"My orders?"

"Yes, if she is ignorant that these orders come from the king."

"Well, that she may have no doubt on that head, I will go and inform her myself."

"Your Majesty will not forget that I have done everything in my power to prevent a rupture."

"Yes, Duke, yes, I know you are very indulgent toward the queen, too indulgent, perhaps; we shall have occasion, I warn you, at some future period to speak of that."

"Whenever it shall please your Majesty; but I shall be always happy and proud, sire, to sacrifice myself to the harmony which I desire to see reign between you and the Queen of France."

"Very well, Cardinal, very well; but, meantime, send for Monsieur the Keeper of the Seals. I will go to the queen."

And Louis XIII, opening the door of communication, passed into the corridor which led from his apartments to those of Anne of Austria.

The queen was in the midst of her women--Mme. de Guitaut, Mme. de Sable, Mme. de Montbazon, and Mme. de Guemene. In a corner was the Spanish companion, Donna Estafania, who had followed her from Madrid. Mme. Guemene was reading aloud, and everybody was listening to her with attention with the exception of the queen, who had, on the contrary, desired this reading in order that she might be able, while feigning to listen, to pursue the thread of her own thoughts.

These thoughts, gilded as they were by a last reflection of love, were not the less sad. Anne of Austria, deprived of the confidence of her husband, pursued by the hatred of the cardinal, who could not pardon her for having repulsed a more tender feeling, having before her eyes the example of the queen-mother whom that hatred had tormented all her life--though Marie de Medicis, if the memoirs of the time are to be believed, had begun by according to the cardinal that sentiment which Anne of Austria always refused him--Anne of Austria had seen her most devoted servants fall around her, her most intimate confidants, her dearest favorites. Like those unfortunate persons endowed with a fatal gift, she brought misfortune upon everything she touched. Her friendship was a fatal sign which called down persecution. Mme. de Chevreuse and Mme. de Bernet were exiled, and Laporte did not conceal from his mistress that he expected to be arrested every instant.

It was at the moment when she was plunged in the deepest and darkest of these reflections that the door of the chamber opened, and the king entered.

The reader hushed herself instantly. All the ladies rose, and there was a profound silence. As to the king, he made no demonstration of politeness, only stopping before the queen. “Madame,” said he, “you are about to receive a visit from the chancellor, who will communicate certain matters to you with which I have charged him.”

The unfortunate queen, who was constantly threatened with divorce, exile, and trial even, turned pale under her rouge, and could not refrain from saying, “But why this visit, sire? What can the chancellor have to say to me that your Majesty could not say yourself?”

The king turned upon his heel without reply, and almost at the same instant the captain of the Guards, M. de Guitant, announced the visit of the chancellor.

When the chancellor appeared, the king had already gone out by another door.

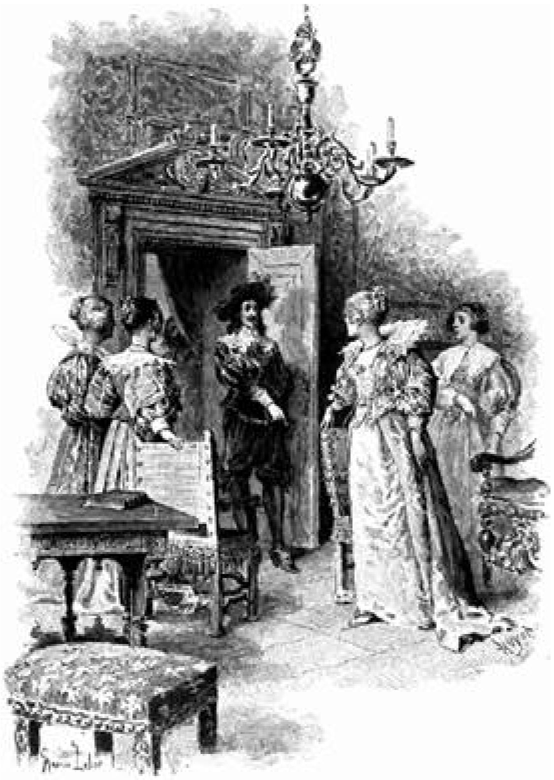

The chancellor entered, half smiling, half blushing. As we shall probably meet with him again in the course of our history, it may be well for our readers to be made at once acquainted with him.

This chancellor was a pleasant man. He was Des Roches le Masle, canon of Notre Dame, who had formerly been valet of a bishop, who introduced him to his Eminence as a perfectly devout man. The cardinal trusted him, and therein found his advantage.

There are many stories related of him, and among them this. After a wild youth, he had retired into a convent, there to expiate, at least for some time, the follies of adolescence. On entering this holy place, the poor penitent was unable to shut the door so close as to prevent the passions he fled from entering with him. He was incessantly attacked by them, and the superior, to whom he had confided this misfortune, wishing as much as in him lay to free him from them, had advised him, in order to conjure away the tempting demon, to have recourse to the bell rope, and ring with all his might. At the denunciating sound, the monks would be rendered aware that temptation was besieging a brother, and all the community would go to prayers.

This advice appeared good to the future chancellor. He conjured the evil spirit with abundance of prayers offered up by the monks. But the devil does not suffer himself to be easily dispossessed from a place in which he has fixed his garrison. In proportion as they redoubled the exorcisms he redoubled the temptations; so that day and night the bell was ringing full swing, announcing the extreme desire for mortification which the penitent experienced.

The monks had no longer an instant of repose. By day they did nothing but ascend and descend the steps which led to the chapel; at night, in addition to complines and matins, they were further obliged to leap twenty times out of their beds and prostrate themselves on the floor of their cells.

It is not known whether it was the devil who gave way, or the monks who grew tired; but within three months the penitent reappeared in the world with the reputation of being the most terrible POSSESSED that ever existed.

On leaving the convent he entered into the magistracy, became president on the place of his uncle, embraced the cardinal’s party, which did not prove want of sagacity, became chancellor, served his Eminence with zeal in his hatred against the queen-mother and his vengeance against Anne of Austria, stimulated the judges in the affair of Calais, encouraged the attempts of M. de Laffemas, chief gamekeeper of France; then, at length, invested with the entire confidence of the cardinal--a confidence which he had so well earned--he received the singular commission for the execution of which he presented himself in the queen’s apartments.

The queen was still standing when he entered; but scarcely had she perceived him then she reseated herself in her armchair, and made a sign to her women to resume their cushions and stools, and with an air of supreme hauteur, said, “What do you desire, monsieur, and with what object do you present yourself here?”

“To make, madame, in the name of the king, and without prejudice to the respect which I have the honor to owe to your Majesty a close examination into all your papers.”

“How, monsieur, an investigation of my papers--mine! Truly, this is an indignity!”

“Be kind enough to pardon me, madame; but in this circumstance I am but the instrument which the king employs. Has not his Majesty just left you, and has he not himself asked you to prepare for this visit?”

“Search, then, monsieur! I am a criminal, as it appears. Estafania, give up the keys of my drawers and my desks.”

For form’s sake the chancellor paid a visit to the pieces of furniture named; but he well knew that it was not in a piece of furniture that the queen would place the important letter she had written that day.

When the chancellor had opened and shut twenty times the drawers of the secretaries, it became necessary, whatever hesitation he might experience--it became necessary, I say, to come to the conclusion of the affair; that is to say, to search the queen herself. The chancellor advanced, therefore, toward Anne of Austria, and said with a very perplexed and embarrassed air, “And now it remains for me to make the principal examination.”

“What is that?” asked the queen, who did not understand, or rather was not willing to understand.

“His majesty is certain that a letter has been written by you during the day; he knows that it has not yet been sent to its address. This letter is not in your table nor in your secretary; and yet this letter must be somewhere.”

“Would you dare to lift your hand to your queen?” said Anne of Austria, drawing herself up to her full height, and fixing her eyes upon the chancellor with an expression almost threatening.

“I am a faithful subject of the king, madame, and all that his Majesty commands I shall do.”

“Well, it is true!” said Anne of Austria; “and the spies of the cardinal have served him faithfully. I have written a letter today; that letter is not yet gone. The letter is here.” And the queen laid her beautiful hand on her bosom.

“Then give me that letter, madame,” said the chancellor.

“I will give it to none but the king monsieur,” said Anne.

“If the king had desired that the letter should be given to him, madame, he would have demanded it of you himself. But I repeat to you, I am charged with reclaiming it; and if you do not give it up--”

“Well?”

“He has, then, charged me to take it from you.”

“How! What do you say?”

“That my orders go far, madame; and that I am authorized to seek for the suspected paper, even on the person of your Majesty.”

“What horror!” cried the queen.

“Be kind enough, then, madame, to act more compliantly.”

“The conduct is infamously violent! Do you know that, monsieur?”

“The king commands it, madame; excuse me.”

“I will not suffer it! No, no, I would rather die!” cried the queen, in whom the imperious blood of Spain and Austria began to rise.

The chancellor made a profound reverence. Then, with the intention quite patent of not drawing back a foot from the accomplishment of the commission with which he was charged, and as the attendant of an executioner might have done in the chamber of torture, he approached Anne of Austria, for whose eyes at the same instant sprang tears of rage.

The queen was, as we have said, of great beauty. The commission might well be called delicate; and the king had reached, in his jealousy of Buckingham, the point of not being jealous of anyone else.

Without doubt the chancellor, Seguier looked about at that moment for the rope of the famous bell; but not finding it he summoned his resolution, and stretched forth his hands toward the place where the queen had acknowledged the paper was to be found.

Anne of Austria took one step backward, became so pale that it might be said she was dying, and leaning with her left hand upon a table behind her to keep herself from falling, she with her right hand drew the paper from her bosom and held it out to the keeper of the seals.

“There, monsieur, there is that letter!” cried the queen, with a broken and trembling voice; “take it, and deliver me from your odious presence.”

The chancellor, who, on his part, trembled with an emotion easily to be conceived, took the letter, bowed to the ground, and retired. The door was scarcely closed upon him, when the queen sank, half fainting, into the arms of her women.

The chancellor carried the letter to the king without having read a single word of it. The king took it with a trembling hand, looked for the address, which was wanting, became very pale, opened it slowly, then seeing by the first words that it was addressed to the King of Spain, he read it rapidly.

It was nothing but a plan of attack against the cardinal. The queen pressed her brother and the Emperor of Austria to appear to be wounded, as they really were, by the policy of Richelieu--the eternal object of which was the abasement of the house of Austria--to declare war against France, and as a condition of peace, to insist upon the dismissal of the cardinal; but as to love, there was not a single word about it in all the letter.

The king, quite delighted, inquired if the cardinal was still at the Louvre; he was told that his Eminence awaited the orders of his Majesty in the business cabinet.

The king went straight to him.

“There, Duke,” said he, “you were right and I was wrong. The whole intrigue is political, and there is not the least question of love in this letter; but, on the other hand, there is abundant question of you.”

The cardinal took the letter, and read it with the greatest attention; then, when he had arrived at the end of it, he read it a second time. “Well, your Majesty,” said he, “you see how far my enemies go; they menace you with two wars if you do not dismiss me. In your place, in truth, sire, I should yield to such powerful instance; and on my part, it would be a real happiness to withdraw from public affairs.”

“What say you, Duke?”

“I say, sire, that my health is sinking under these excessive struggles and these never-ending labors. I say that according to all probability I shall not be able to undergo the fatigues of the siege of La Rochelle, and that it would be far better that you should appoint there either Monsieur de Conde, Monsieur de Bassopierre, or some valiant gentleman whose business is war, and not me, who am a churchman, and who am constantly turned aside for my real vocation to look after matters for which I have no aptitude. You would be the happier for it at home, sire, and I do not doubt you would be the greater for it abroad.”

“Monsieur Duke,” said the king, “I understand you. Be satisfied, all who are named in that letter shall be punished as they deserve, even the queen herself.”

“What do you say, sire? God forbid that the queen should suffer the least inconvenience or uneasiness on my account! She has always believed me, sire, to be her enemy; although your Majesty can bear witness that I have always taken her part warmly, even against you. Oh, if she betrayed your Majesty on the side of your honor, it would be quite another thing, and I should be the first to say, ‘No grace, sire--no grace for the guilty!’ Happily, there is nothing of the kind, and your Majesty has just acquired a new proof of it.”

“That is true, Monsieur Cardinal,” said the king, “and you were right, as you always are; but the queen, not the less, deserves all my anger.”

“It is you, sire, who have now incurred hers. And even if she were to be seriously offended, I could well understand it; your Majesty has treated her with a severity--”

“It is thus I will always treat my enemies and yours, Duke, however high they may be placed, and whatever peril I may incur in acting severely toward them.”

“The queen is my enemy, but is not yours, sire; on the contrary, she is a devoted, submissive, and irreproachable wife. Allow me, then, sire, to intercede for her with your Majesty.”

“Let her humble herself, then, and come to me first.”

“On the contrary, sire, set the example. You have committed the first wrong, since it was you who suspected the queen.”

“What! I make the first advances?” said the king. “Never!”

“Sire, I entreat you to do so.”

“Besides, in what manner can I make advances first?”

“By doing a thing which you know will be agreeable to her.”

“What is that?”

“Give a ball; you know how much the queen loves dancing. I will answer for it, her resentment will not hold out against such an attention.”

“Monsieur Cardinal, you know that I do not like worldly pleasures.”

“The queen will only be the more grateful to you, as she knows your antipathy for that amusement; besides, it will be an opportunity for her to wear those beautiful diamonds which you gave her recently on her birthday and with which she has since had no occasion to adorn herself.”

“We shall see, Monsieur Cardinal, we shall see,” said the king, who, in his joy at finding the queen guilty of a crime which he cared little about, and innocent of a fault of which he had great dread, was ready to make up all differences with her, “we shall see, but upon my honor, you are too indulgent toward her.”

“Sire,” said the cardinal, “leave severity to your ministers. Clemency is a royal virtue; employ it, and you will find that you derive advantage therein.”

Thereupon the cardinal, hearing the clock strike eleven, bowed low, asking permission of the king to retire, and supplicating him to come to a good understanding with the queen.

Anne of Austria, who, in consequence of the seizure of her letter, expected reproaches, was much astonished the next day to see the king make some attempts at reconciliation with her. Her first movement was repellent. Her womanly pride and her queenly dignity had both been so cruelly offended that she could not come round at the first advance; but, overpersuaded by the advice of her women, she at last had the appearance of beginning to forget. The king took advantage of this favorable moment to tell her that her had the intention of shortly giving a fete.

A fete was so rare a thing for poor Anne of Austria that at this announcement, as the cardinal had predicted, the last trace of her resentment disappeared, if not from her heart at least from her countenance. She asked upon what day this fete would take place, but the king replied that he must consult the cardinal upon that head.

Indeed, every day the king asked the cardinal when this fete should take place; and every day the cardinal, under some pretext, deferred fixing it. Ten days passed away thus.

On the eighth day after the scene we have described, the cardinal received a letter with the London stamp which only contained these lines: “I have them; but I am unable to leave London for want of money. Send me five hundred pistoles, and four or five days after I have received them I shall be in Paris.”

On the same day the cardinal received this letter the king put his customary question to him.

Richelieu counted on his fingers, and said to himself, “She will arrive, she says, four or five days after having received the money. It will require four or five days for the transmission of the money, four or five days for her to return; that makes ten days. Now, allowing for contrary winds, accidents, and a woman’s weakness, there are twelve days.”

“Well, Monsieur Duke,” said the king, “have you made your calculations?”

“Yes, sire. Today is the twentieth of September. The aldermen of the city give a fete on the third of October. That will fall in wonderfully well; you will not appear to have gone out of your way to please the queen.”

Then the cardinal added, “A PROPOS, sire, do not forget to tell her Majesty the evening before the fete that you should like to see how her diamond studs become her.”

CHAPTER 17

BONACIEUX AT HOME

It was the second time the cardinal had mentioned these diamond studs to the king. Louis XIII was struck with this insistence, and began to fancy that this recommendation concealed some mystery.

More than once the king had been humiliated by the cardinal, whose police, without having yet attained the perfection of the modern police, were excellent, being better informed than himself, even upon what was going on in his own household. He hoped, then, in a conversation with Anne of Austria, to obtain some information from that conversation, and afterward to come upon his Eminence with some secret which the cardinal either knew or did not know, but which, in either case, would raise him infinitely in the eyes of his minister.

He went then to the queen, and according to custom accosted her with fresh menaces against those who surrounded her. Anne of Austria lowered her head, allowed the torrent to flow on without replying, hoping that it would cease of itself; but this was not what Louis XIII meant. Louis XIII wanted a discussion from which some light or other might break, convinced as he was that the cardinal had some afterthought and was preparing for him one of those terrible surprises which his Eminence was so skillful in getting up. He arrived at this end by his persistence in accusation.

“But,” cried Anne of Austria, tired of these vague attacks, “but, sire, you do not tell me all that you have in your heart. What have I done, then? Let me know what crime I have committed. It is impossible that your Majesty can make all this ado about a letter written to my brother.”

The king, attacked in a manner so direct, did not know what to answer; and he thought that this was the moment for expressing the desire which he was not going to have made until the evening before the fete.

“Madame,” said he, with dignity, “there will shortly be a ball at the Hotel de Ville. I wish, in order to honor our worthy aldermen, you should appear in ceremonial costume, and above all, ornamented with the diamond studs which I gave you on your birthday. That is my answer.”

The answer was terrible. Anne of Austria believed that Louis XIII knew all, and that the cardinal had persuaded him to employ this long dissimulation of seven or eight days, which, likewise, was characteristic. She became excessively pale, leaned her beautiful hand upon a CONSOLE, which hand appeared then like one of wax, and looking at the king with terror in her eyes, she was unable to reply by a single syllable.

“You hear, madame,” said the king, who enjoyed the embarrassment to its full extent, but without guessing the cause. “You hear, madame?”

“Yes, sire, I hear,” stammered the queen.

“You will appear at this ball?”

“Yes.”

“With those studs?”

“Yes.”

The queen’s paleness, if possible, increased; the king perceived it, and enjoyed it with that cold cruelty which was one of the worst sides of his character.

“Then that is agreed,” said the king, “and that is all I had to say to you.”

“But on what day will this ball take place?” asked Anne of Austria.

Louis XIII felt instinctively that he ought not to reply to this question, the queen having put it in an almost dying voice.

“Oh, very shortly, madame,” said he; “but I do not precisely recollect the date of the day. I will ask the cardinal.”

“It was the cardinal, then, who informed you of this fete?”

“Yes, madame,” replied the astonished king; “but why do you ask that?”

“It was he who told you to invite me to appear with these studs?”

“That is to say, madame--”

“It was he, sire, it was he!”

“Well, and what does it signify whether it was he or I? Is there any crime in this request?”

“No, sire.”

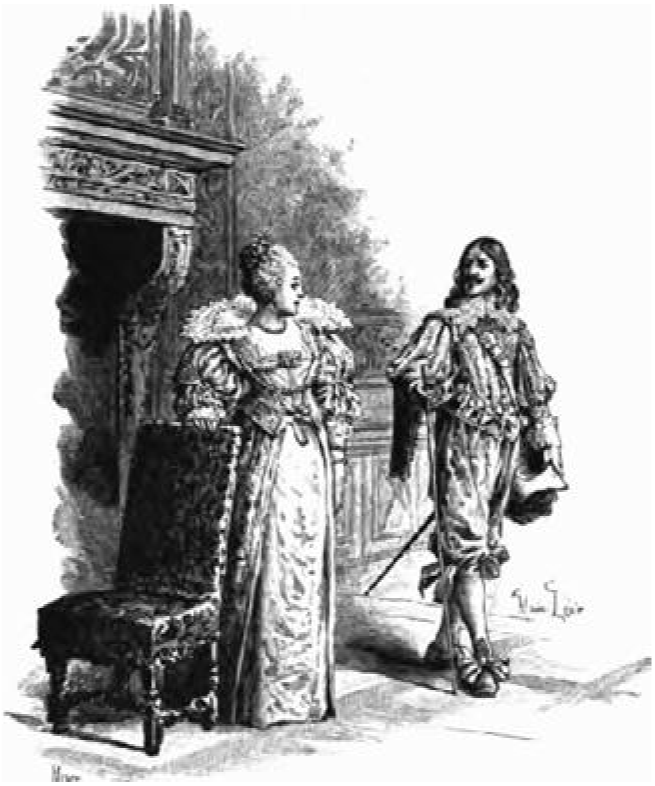

“Then you will appear?”

“Yes, sire.”

“That is well,” said the king, retiring, “that is well; I count upon it.”

The queen made a curtsy, less from etiquette than because her knees were sinking under her. The king went away enchanted.

“I am lost,” murmured the queen, “lost!--for the cardinal knows all, and it is he who urges on the king, who as yet knows nothing but will soon know everything. I am lost! My God, my God, my God!”

She knelt upon a cushion and prayed, with her head buried between her palpitating arms.

In fact, her position was terrible. Buckingham had returned to London; Mme. Chevreuse was at Tours. More closely watched than ever, the queen felt certain, without knowing how to tell which, that one of her women had betrayed her. Laporte could not leave the Louvre; she had not a soul in the world in whom she could confide. Thus, while contemplating the misfortune which threatened her and the abandonment in which she was left, she broke out into sobs and tears.

“Can I be of service to your Majesty?” said all at once a voice full of sweetness and pity.

The queen turned sharply round, for there could be no deception in the expression of that voice; it was a friend who spoke thus.

In fact, at one of the doors which opened into the queen's apartment appeared the pretty Mme. Bonacieux. She had been engaged in arranging the dresses and linen in a closet when the king entered; she could not get out and had heard all.

The queen uttered a piercing cry at finding herself surprised--for in her trouble she did not at first recognize the young woman who had been given to her by Laporte.

"Oh, fear nothing, madame!" said the young woman, clasping her hands and weeping herself at the queen's sorrows; "I am your Majesty's, body and soul, and however far I may be from you, however inferior may be my position, I believe I have discovered a means of extricating your Majesty from your trouble."

"You, oh, heaven, you!" cried the queen; "but look me in the face. I am betrayed on all sides. Can I trust in you?"

"Oh, madame!" cried the young woman, falling on her knees; "upon my soul, I am ready to die for your Majesty!"

This expression sprang from the very bottom of the heart, and, like the first, there was no mistaking it.

"Yes," continued Mme. Bonacieux, "yes, there are traitors here; but by the holy name of the Virgin, I swear that no one is more devoted to your Majesty than I am. Those studs which the king speaks of, you gave them to the Duke of Buckingham, did you not? Those studs were enclosed in a little rosewood box which he held under his arm? Am I deceived? Is it not so, madame?"

"Oh, my God, my God!" murmured the queen, whose teeth chattered with fright.

"Well, those studs," continued Mme. Bonacieux, "we must have them back again."

"Yes, without doubt, it is necessary," cried the queen; "but how am I to act? How can it be effected?"

"Someone must be sent to the duke."

"But who, who? In whom can I trust?"

"Place confidence in me, madame; do me that honor, my queen, and I will find a messenger."

"But I must write."

“Oh, yes; that is indispensable. Two words from the hand of your Majesty and your private seal.”

“But these two words would bring about my condemnation, divorce, exile!”

“Yes, if they fell into infamous hands. But I will answer for these two words being delivered to their address.”

“Oh, my God! I must then place my life, my honor, my reputation, in your hands?”

“Yes, yes, madame, you must; and I will save them all.”

“But how? Tell me at least the means.”

“My husband had been at liberty these two or three days. I have not yet had time to see him again. He is a worthy, honest man who entertains neither love nor hatred for anybody. He will do anything I wish. He will set out upon receiving an order from me, without knowing what he carries, and he will carry your Majesty’s letter, without even knowing it is from your Majesty, to the address which is on it.”

The queen took the two hands of the young woman with a burst of emotion, gazed at her as if to read her very heart, and seeing nothing but sincerity in her beautiful eyes, embraced her tenderly.

“Do that,” cried she, “and you will have saved my life, you will have saved my honor!”

“Do not exaggerate the service I have the happiness to render your Majesty. I have nothing to save for your Majesty; you are only the victim of perfidious plots.”

“That is true, that is true, my child,” said the queen, “you are right.”

“Give me then, that letter, madame; time presses.”

The queen ran to a little table, on which were ink, paper, and pens. She wrote two lines, sealed the letter with her private seal, and gave it to Mme. Bonacieux.

“And now,” said the queen, “we are forgetting one very necessary thing.”

“What is that, madame?”

“Money.”

Mme. Bonacieux blushed.

“Yes, that is true,” said she, “and I will confess to your Majesty that my husband--”

“Your husband has none. Is that what you would say?”

"He has some, but he is very avaricious; that is his fault. Nevertheless, let not your Majesty be uneasy, we will find means."

"And I have none, either," said the queen. Those who have read the MEMOIRS of Mme. de Motteville will not be astonished at this reply. "But wait a minute."

Anne of Austria ran to her jewel case.

"Here," said she, "here is a ring of great value, as I have been assured. It came from my brother, the King of Spain. It is mine, and I am at liberty to dispose of it. Take this ring; raise money with it, and let your husband set out."

"In an hour you shall be obeyed."

"You see the address," said the queen, speaking so low that Mme. Bonacieux could hardly hear what she said, "To my Lord Duke of Buckingham, London."

"The letter shall be given to himself."

"Generous girl!" cried Anne of Austria.

Mme. Bonacieux kissed the hands of the queen, concealed the paper in the bosom of her dress, and disappeared with the lightness of a bird.

Ten minutes afterward she was at home. As she told the queen, she had not seen her husband since his liberation; she was ignorant of the change that had taken place in him with respect to the cardinal--a change which had since been strengthened by two or three visits from the Comte de Rochefort, who had become the best friend of Bonacieux, and had persuaded him, without much trouble, was putting his house in order, the furniture of which he had found mostly broken and his closets nearly empty--justice not being one of the three things which King Solomon names as leaving no traces of their passage. As to the servant, she had run away at the moment of her master's arrest. Terror had had such an effect upon the poor girl that she had never ceased walking from Paris till she reached Burgundy, her native place.

The worthy mercer had, immediately upon re-entering his house, informed his wife of his happy return, and his wife had replied by congratulating him, and telling him that the first moment she could steal from her duties should be devoted to paying him a visit.

This first moment had been delayed five days, which, under any other circumstances, might have appeared rather long to M. Bonacieux; but he had, in the visit he had made to the cardinal and in the visits Rochefort had made him, ample subjects for reflection, and as everybody knows, nothing makes time pass more quickly than reflection.

This was the more so because Bonacieux’s reflections were all rose-colored. Rochefort called him his friend, his dear Bonacieux, and never ceased telling him that the cardinal had a great respect for him. The mercer fancied himself already on the high road to honors and fortune.

On her side Mme. Bonacieux had also reflected; but, it must be admitted, upon something widely different from ambition. In spite of herself her thoughts constantly reverted to that handsome young man who was so brave and appeared to be so much in love. Married at eighteen to M. Bonacieux, having always lived among her husband’s friends--people little capable of inspiring any sentiment whatever in a young woman whose heart was above her position--Mme. Bonacieux had remained insensible to vulgar seductions; but at this period the title of gentleman had great influence with the citizen class, and d’Artagnan was a gentleman. Besides, he wore the uniform of the Guards, which next to that of the Musketeers was most admired by the ladies. He was, we repeat, handsome, young, and bold; he spoke of love like a man who did love and was anxious to be loved in return. There was certainly enough in all this to turn a head only twenty-three years old, and Mme. Bonacieux had just attained that happy period of life.

The couple, then, although they had not seen each other for eight days, and during that time serious events had taken place in which both were concerned, accosted each other with a degree of preoccupation. Nevertheless, Bonacieux manifested real joy, and advanced toward his wife with open arms. Madame Bonacieux presented her cheek to him.

“Let us talk a little,” said she.

“How!” said Bonacieux, astonished.

“Yes, I have something of the highest importance to tell you.”

“True,” said he, “and I have some questions sufficiently serious to put to you. Describe to me your abduction, I pray you.”

“Oh, that’s of no consequence just now,” said Mme. Bonacieux.

“And what does it concern, then--my captivity?”

“I heard of it the day it happened; but as you were not guilty of any crime, as you were not guilty of any intrigue, as you, in short, knew nothing that could compromise yourself or anybody else, I attached no more importance to that event than it merited.”

“You speak very much at your ease, madame,” said Bonacieux, hurt at the little interest his wife showed in him. “Do you know that I was plunged during a day and night in a dungeon of the Bastille?”

“Oh, a day and night soon pass away. Let us return to the object that brings me here.”

“What, that which brings you home to me? Is it not the desire of seeing a husband again from whom you have been separated for a week?” asked the mercer, piqued to the quick.

“Yes, that first, and other things afterward.”

“Speak.”

“It is a thing of the highest interest, and upon which our future fortune perhaps depends.”

“The complexion of our fortune has changed very much since I saw you, Madam Bonacieux, and I should not be astonished if in the course of a few months it were to excite the envy of many folks.”

“Yes, particularly if you follow the instructions I am about to give you.”

“Me?”

“Yes, you. There is good and holy action to be performed, monsieur, and much money to be gained at the same time.”

Mme. Bonacieux knew that in talking of money to her husband, she took him on his weak side. But a man, were he even a mercer, when he had talked for ten minutes with Cardinal Richelieu, is no longer the same man.

“Much money to be gained?” said Bonacieux, protruding his lip.

“Yes, much.”

“About how much?”

“A thousand pistoles, perhaps.”

“What you demand of me is serious, then?”

“It is indeed.”

“What must be done?”

“You must go away immediately. I will give you a paper which you must not part with on any account, and which you will deliver into the proper hands.”

“And whither am I to go?”

“To London.”

“I go to London? Go to! You jest! I have no business in London.”

“But others wish that you should go there.”

“But who are those others? I warn you that I will never again work in the dark, and that I will know not only to what I expose myself, but for whom I expose myself.”

“An illustrious person sends you; an illustrious person awaits you. The recompense will exceed your expectations; that is all I promise you.”

“More intrigues! Nothing but intrigues! Thank you, madame, I am aware of them now; Monsieur Cardinal has enlightened me on that head.”

“The cardinal?” cried Mme. Bonacieux. “Have you seen the cardinal?”

“He sent for me,” answered the mercer, proudly.

“And you responded to his bidding, you imprudent man?”

“Well, I can’t say I had much choice of going or not going, for I was taken to him between two guards. It is true also, that as I did not then know his Eminence, if I had been able to dispense with the visit, I should have been enchanted.”

“He ill-treated you, then; he threatened you?”

“He gave me his hand, and called me his friend. His friend! Do you hear that, madame? I am the friend of the great cardinal!”

“Of the great cardinal!”

“Perhaps you would contest his right to that title, madame?”

“I would contest nothing; but I tell you that the favor of a minister is ephemeral, and that a man must be mad to attach himself to a minister. There are powers above his which do not depend upon a man or the issue of an event; it is to these powers we should rally.”

“I am sorry for it, madame, but I acknowledge not her power but that of the great man whom I have the honor to serve.”

“You serve the cardinal?”

“Yes, madame; and as his servant, I will not allow you to be concerned in plots against the safety of the state, or to serve the intrigues of a woman who is not French and who has a Spanish heart. Fortunately we have the great cardinal; his vigilant eye watches over and penetrates to the bottom of the heart.”

Bonacieux was repeating, word for word, a sentence which he had heard from the Comte de Rochefort; but the poor wife, who had reckoned on her husband, and who, in that hope, had answered for him to the queen, did not tremble the less, both at the danger into which she had nearly cast herself and at the helpless state to which she was reduced. Nevertheless, knowing the weakness of her husband, and more particularly his cupidity, she did not despair of bringing him round to her purpose.

“Ah, you are a cardinalist, then, monsieur, are you?” cried she; “and you serve the party of those who maltreat your wife and insult your queen?”

“Private interests are as nothing before the interests of all. I am for those who save the state,” said Bonacieux, emphatically.

“And what do you know about the state you talk of?” said Mme. Bonacieux, shrugging her shoulders. “Be satisfied with being a plain, straightforward citizen, and turn to that side which offers the most advantages.”

“Eh, eh!” said Bonacieux, slapping a plump, round bag, which returned a sound a money; “what do you think of this, Madame Preacher?”

“Whence comes that money?”

“You do not guess?”

“From the cardinal?”

“From him, and from my friend the Comte de Rochefort.”

“The Comte de Rochefort! Why it was he who carried me off!”

“That may be, madame!”

“And you receive silver from that man?”

“Have you not said that that abduction was entirely political?”

“Yes; but that abduction had for its object the betrayal of my mistress, to draw from me by torture confessions that might compromise the honor, and perhaps the life, of my august mistress.”

“Madame,” replied Bonacieux, “your august mistress is a perfidious Spaniard, and what the cardinal does is well done.”

“Monsieur,” said the young woman, “I know you to be cowardly, avaricious, and foolish, but I never till now believed you infamous!”

“Madame,” said Bonacieux, who had never seen his wife in a passion, and who recoiled before this conjugal anger, “madame, what do you say?”

“I say you are a miserable creature!” continued Mme. Bonacieux, who saw she was regaining some little influence over her husband. “You meddle with politics, do you--and still more, with cardinalist politics? Why, you sell yourself, body and soul, to the demon, the devil, for money!”

“No, to the cardinal.”

“It’s the same thing,” cried the young woman. “Who calls Richelieu calls Satan.”

“Hold your tongue, hold your tongue, madame! You may be overheard.”

“Yes, you are right; I should be ashamed for anyone to know your baseness.”

“But what do you require of me, then? Let us see.”

“I have told you. You must depart instantly, monsieur. You must accomplish loyally the commission with which I deign to charge you, and on that condition I pardon everything, I forget everything; and what is more,” and she held out her hand to him, “I restore my love.”

Bonacieux was cowardly and avaricious, but he loved his wife. He was softened. A man of fifty cannot long bear malice with a wife of twenty-three. Mme. Bonacieux saw that he hesitated.

“Come! Have you decided?” said she.

“But, my dear love, reflect a little upon what you require of me. London is far from Paris, very far, and perhaps the commission with which you charge me is not without dangers?”

“What matters it, if you avoid them?”

“Hold, Madame Bonacieux,” said the mercer, “hold! I positively refuse; intrigues terrify me. I have seen the Bastille. My! Whew! That’s a frightful place, that Bastille! Only to think of it makes my flesh crawl. They threatened me with torture. Do you know what torture is? Wooden points that they stick in between your legs till your bones stick out! No, positively I will not go. And, MORBLEU, why do you not go yourself? For in truth, I think I have hitherto been deceived in you. I really believe you are a man, and a violent one, too.”

“And you, you are a woman--a miserable woman, stupid and brutal. You are afraid, are you? Well, if you do not go this very instant, I will have you arrested by the queen’s orders, and I will have you placed in the Bastille which you dread so much.”

Bonacieux fell into a profound reflection. He weighed the two angers in his brain--that of the cardinal and that of the queen; that of the cardinal predominated enormously.

“Have me arrested on the part of the queen,” said he, “and I--I will appeal to his Eminence.”

At once Mme. Bonacieux saw that she had gone too far, and she was terrified at having communicated so much. She for a moment contemplated with fright that stupid countenance, impressed with the invincible resolution of a fool that is overcome by fear.

“Well, be it so!” said she. “Perhaps, when all is considered, you are right. In the long run, a man knows more about politics than a woman, particularly such as, like you, Monsieur Bonacieux, have conversed with the cardinal. And yet it is very hard,” added she, “that a man upon whose affection I thought I might depend, treats me thus unkindly and will not comply with any of my fancies.”

“That is because your fancies go too far,” replied the triumphant Bonacieux, “and I mistrust them.”

“Well, I will give it up, then,” said the young woman, sighing. “It is well as it is; say no more about it.”

“At least you should tell me what I should have to do in London,” replied Bonacieux, who remembered a little too late that Rochefort had desired him to endeavor to obtain his wife’s secrets.

“It is of no use for you to know anything about it,” said the young woman, whom an instinctive mistrust now impelled to draw back. “It was about one of those purchases that interest women--a purchase by which much might have been gained.”

But the more the young woman excused herself, the more important Bonacieux thought the secret which she declined to confide to him. He resolved then to hasten immediately to the residence of the Comte de Rochefort, and tell him that the queen was seeking for a messenger to send to London.

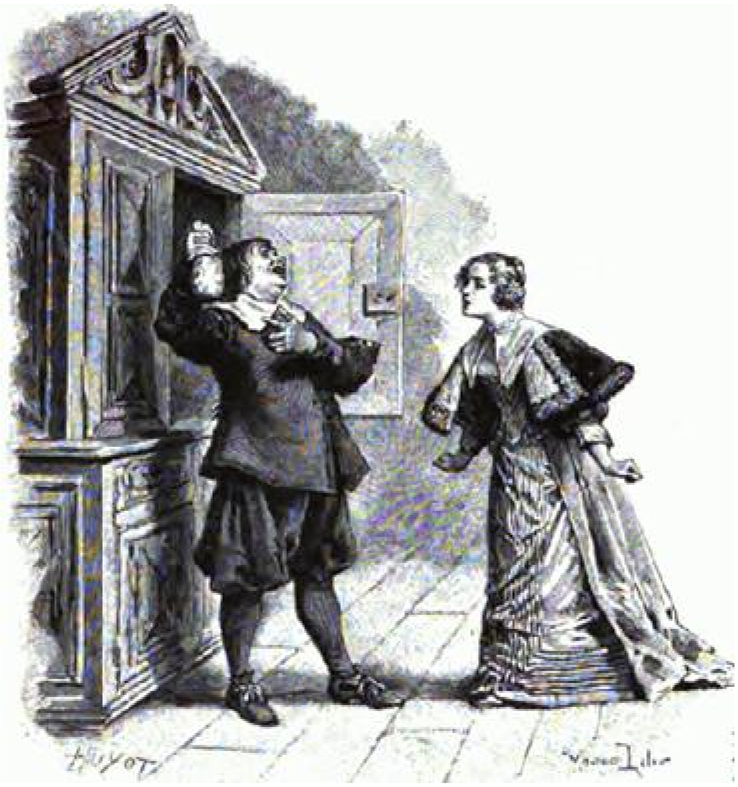

"Pardon me for quitting you, my dear Madame Bonacieux," said he; "but, not knowing you would come to see me, I had made an engagement with a friend. I shall soon return; and if you will wait only a few minutes for me, as soon as I have concluded my business with that friend, as it is growing late, I will come back and reconduct you to the Louvre."

"Thank you, monsieur, you are not brave enough to be of any use to me whatever," replied Mme. Bonacieux. "I shall return very safely to the Louvre all alone."

"As you please, Madame Bonacieux," said the ex-mercer. "Shall I see you again soon?"

"Next week I hope my duties will afford me a little liberty, and I will take advantage of it to come and put things in order here, as they must necessarily be much deranged."

"Very well; I shall expect you. You are not angry with me?"

"Not the least in the world."

"Till then, then?"

"Till then."

Bonacieux kissed his wife's hand, and set off at a quick pace.

"Well," said Mme. Bonacieux, when her husband had shut the street door and she found herself alone; "that imbecile lacked but one thing to become a cardinalist. And I, who have answered for him to the queen--I, who have promised my poor mistress--ah, my God, my God! She will take me for one of those wretches with whom the palace swarms and who are placed about her as spies! Ah, Monsieur Bonacieux, I never did love you much, but now it is worse than ever. I hate you, and on my word you shall pay for this!"

At the moment she spoke these words a rap on the ceiling made her raise her head, and a voice which reached her through the ceiling cried, "Dear Madame Bonacieux, open for me the little door on the alley, and I will come down to you."

CHAPTER 18

LOVER AND HUSBAND

Ah, Madame,” said d’Artagnan, entering by the door which the young woman opened for him, “allow me to tell you that you have a bad sort of a husband.”

“You have, then, overheard our conversation?” asked Mme. Bonacieux, eagerly, and looking at d’Artagnan with disquiet.

“The whole.”

“But how, my God?”

“By a mode of proceeding known to myself, and by which I likewise overheard the more animated conversation which he had with the cardinal’s police.”

“And what did you understand by what we said?”

“A thousand things. In the first place, that, unfortunately, your husband is a simpleton and a fool; in the next place, you are in trouble, of which I am very glad, as it gives me a opportunity of placing myself at your service, and God knows I am ready to throw myself into the fire for you; finally, that the queen wants a brave, intelligent, devoted man to make a journey to London for her. I have at least two of the three qualities you stand in need of, and here I am.”

Mme. Bonacieux made no reply; but her heart beat with joy and secret hope shone in her eyes.

“And what guarantee will you give me,” asked she, “if I consent to confide this message to you?”

“My love for you. Speak! Command! What is to be done?”

“My God, my God!” murmured the young woman, “ought I to confide such a secret to you, monsieur? You are almost a boy.”

“I see that you require someone to answer for me?”

“I admit that would reassure me greatly.”

“Do you know Athos?”

“No.”

“Porthos?”

"No."

"Aramis?"

"No. Who are these gentleman?"

"Three of the king's Musketeers. Do you know Monsieur de Treville, their captain?"

"Oh, yes, him! I know him; not personally, but from having heard the queen speak of him more than once as a brave and loyal gentleman."

"You do not fear lest he should betray you to the cardinal?"

"Oh, no, certainly not!"

"Well, reveal your secret to him, and ask him whether, however important, however valuable, however terrible it may be, you may not confide it to me."

"But this secret is not mine, and I cannot reveal it in this manner."

"You were about to confide it to Monsieur Bonacieux," said d'Artagnan, with chagrin.

"As one confides a letter to the hollow of a tree, to the wing of a pigeon, to the collar of a dog."

"And yet, me--you see plainly that I love you."

"You say so."

"I am an honorable man."

"You say so."

"I am a gallant fellow."

"I believe it."

"I am brave."

"Oh, I am sure of that!"

"Then, put me to the proof."

Mme. Bonacieux looked at the young man, restrained for a minute by a last hesitation; but there was such an ardor in his eyes, such persuasion in his voice, that she felt herself constrained to confide in him. Besides, she found herself in circumstances where everything must be risked for the sake of everything. The queen might be as much injured by too much reticence as by too much confidence; and--let us admit it--the involuntary sentiment which she felt for her young protector decided her to speak.

"Listen," said she; "I yield to your protestations, I yield to your assurances. But I swear to you, before God who hears us, that if you betray me, and my enemies pardon me, I will kill myself, while accusing you of my death."

“And I--I swear to you before God, madame,” said d’Artagnan, “that if I am taken while accomplishing the orders you give me, I will die sooner than do anything that may compromise anyone.”

Then the young woman confided in him the terrible secret of which chance had already communicated to him a part in front of the Samaritaine. This was their mutual declaration of love.

D’Artagnan was radiant with joy and pride. This secret which he possessed, this woman whom he loved! Confidence and love made him a giant.

“I go,” said he; “I go at once.”

“How, you will go!” said Mme. Bonacieux; “and your regiment, your captain?”

“By my soul, you had made me forget all that, dear Constance! Yes, you are right; a furlough is needful.”

“Still another obstacle,” murmured Mme. Bonacieux, sorrowfully.

“As to that,” cried d’Artagnan, after a moment of reflection, “I shall surmount it, be assured.”

“How so?”

“I will go this very evening to Treville, whom I will request to ask this favor for me of his brother-in-law, Monsieur Dessessart.”

“But another thing.”

“What?” asked d’Artagnan, seeing that Mme. Bonacieux hesitated to continue.

“You have, perhaps, no money?”

“PERHAPS is too much,” said d’Artagnan, smiling.

“Then,” replied Mme. Bonacieux, opening a cupboard and taking from it the very bag which a half hour before her husband had caressed so affectionately, “take this bag.”

“The cardinal’s?” cried d’Artagnan, breaking into a loud laugh, he having heard, as may be remembered, thanks to the broken boards, every syllable of the conversation between the mercer and his wife.

“The cardinal’s,” replied Mme. Bonacieux. “You see it makes a very respectable appearance.”

“PARDIEU,” cried d’Artagnan, “it will be a double amusing affair to save the queen with the cardinal’s money!”

“You are an amiable and charming young man,” said Mme. Bonacieux. “Be assured you will not find her Majesty ungrateful.”

“Oh, I am already grandly recompensed!” cried d’Artagnan. “I love you; you permit me to tell you that I do--that is already more happiness than I dared to hope.”

“Silence!” said Mme. Bonacieux, starting.

“What!”

“Someone is talking in the street.”

“It is the voice of--”

“Of my husband! Yes, I recognize it!”

D’Artagnan ran to the door and pushed the bolt.

“He shall not come in before I am gone,” said he; “and when I am gone, you can open to him.”

“But I ought to be gone, too. And the disappearance of his money; how am I to justify it if I am here?”

“You are right; we must go out.”

“Go out? How? He will see us if we go out.”

“Then you must come up into my room.”

“Ah,” said Mme. Bonacieux, “you speak that in a tone that frightens me!”

Mme. Bonacieux pronounced these words with tears in her eyes. d’Artagnan saw those tears, and much disturbed, softened, he threw himself at her feet.

“With me you will be as safe as in a temple; I give you my word of a gentleman.”

“Let us go,” said she, “I place full confidence in you, my friend!”

D’Artagnan drew back the bolt with precaution, and both, light as shadows, glided through the interior door into the passage, ascended the stairs as quietly as possible, and entered d’Artagnan’s chambers.

Once there, for greater security, the young man barricaded the door. They both approached the window, and through a slit in the shutter they saw Bonacieux talking with a man in a cloak.

At sight of this man, d’Artagnan started, and half drawing his sword, sprang toward the door.

It was the man of Meung.

“What are you going to do?” cried Mme. Bonacieux; “you will ruin us all!”

“But I have sworn to kill that man!” said d’Artagnan.

“Your life is devoted from this moment, and does not belong to you. In the name of the queen I forbid you to throw yourself into any peril which is foreign to that of your journey.”

“And do you command nothing in your own name?”

“In my name,” said Mme. Bonacieux, with great emotion, “in my name I beg you! But listen; they appear to be speaking of me.”

D’Artagnan drew near the window, and lent his ear.

M Bonacieux had opened his door, and seeing the apartment, had returned to the man in the cloak, whom he had left alone for an instant.

“She is gone,” said he; “she must have returned to the Louvre.”

“You are sure,” replied the stranger, “that she did not suspect the intentions with which you went out?”

“No,” replied Bonacieux, with a self-sufficient air, “she is too superficial a woman.”

“Is the young Guardsman at home?”

“I do not think he is; as you see, his shutter is closed, and you can see no light shine through the chinks of the shutters.”

“All the same, it is well to be certain.”

“How so?”

“By knocking at his door. Go.”

“I will ask his servant.”

Bonacieux re-entered the house, passed through the same door that had afforded a passage for the two fugitives, went up to d’Artagnan’s door, and knocked.

No one answered. Porthos, in order to make a greater display, had that evening borrowed Planchet. As to d’Artagnan, he took care not to give the least sign of existence.

The moment the hand of Bonacieux sounded on the door, the two young people felt their hearts bound within them.

“There is nobody within,” said Bonacieux.

“Never mind. Let us return to your apartment. We shall be safer there than in the doorway.”

“Ah, my God!” whispered Mme. Bonacieux, “we shall hear no more.”

“On the contrary,” said d’Artagnan, “we shall hear better.”

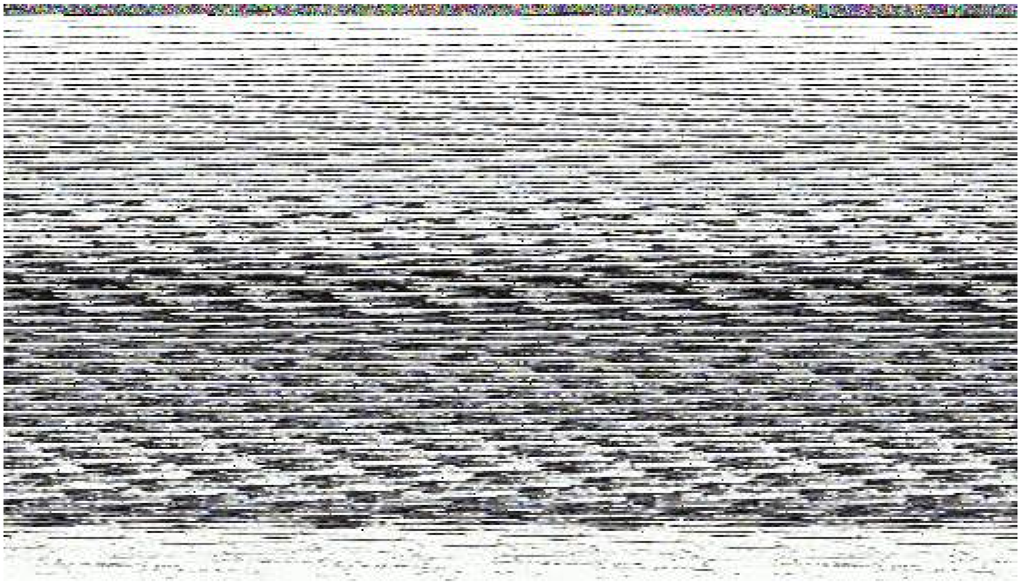

D’Artagnan raised the three or four boards which made his chamber another ear of Dionysius, spread a carpet on the floor, went upon his knees, and made a sign to Mme. Bonacieux to stoop as he did toward the opening.

“You are sure there is nobody there?” said the stranger.

“I will answer for it,” said Bonacieux.

“And you think that your wife--”

“Has returned to the Louvre.”

“Without speaking to anyone but yourself?”

“I am sure of it.”

“That is an important point, do you understand?”

“Then the news I brought you is of value?”

“The greatest, my dear Bonacieux; I don’t conceal this from you.”

“Then the cardinal will be pleased with me?”

“I have no doubt of it.”

“The great cardinal!”

“Are you sure, in her conversation with you, that your wife mentioned no names?”

“I think not.”

“She did not name Madame de Chevreuse, the Duke of Buckingham, or Madame de Vernet?”

“No; she only told me she wished to send me to London to serve the interests of an illustrious personage.”

“The traitor!” murmured Mme. Bonacieux.

“Silence!” said d’Artagnan, taking her hand, which, without thinking of it, she abandoned to him.

“Never mind,” continued the man in the cloak; “you were a fool not to have pretended to accept the mission. You would then be in present possession of the letter. The state, which is now threatened, would be safe, and you--”

“And I?”

“Well you--the cardinal would have given you letters of nobility.”

“Did he tell you so?”

“Yes, I know that he meant to afford you that agreeable surprise.”

“Be satisfied,” replied Bonacieux; “my wife adores me, and there is yet time.”

“The ninny!” murmured Mme. Bonacieux.

“Silence!” said d’Artagnan, pressing her hand more closely.

“How is there still time?” asked the man in the cloak.

“I go to the Louvre; I ask for Mme. Bonacieux; I say that I have reflected; I renew the affair; I obtain the letter, and I run directly to the cardinal.”

“Well, go quickly! I will return soon to learn the result of your trip.”

The stranger went out.

“Infamous!” said Mme. Bonacieux, addressing this epithet to her husband.

“Silence!” said d’Artagnan, pressing her hand still more warmly.

A terrible howling interrupted these reflections of d’Artagnan and Mme. Bonacieux. It was her husband, who had discovered the disappearance of the moneybag, and was crying “Thieves!”

“Oh, my God!” cried Mme. Bonacieux, “he will rouse the whole quarter.”

Bonacieux called a long time; but as such cries, on account of their frequency, brought nobody in the Rue des Fossoyeurs, and as lately the mercer’s house had a bad name, finding that nobody came, he went out continuing to call, his voice being heard fainter and fainter as he went in the direction of the Rue du Bac.

“Now he is gone, it is your turn to get out,” said Mme. Bonacieux. “Courage, my friend, but above all, prudence, and think what you owe to the queen.”

“To her and to you!” cried d’Artagnan. “Be satisfied, beautiful Constance. I shall become worthy of her gratitude; but shall I likewise return worthy of your love?”

The young woman only replied by the beautiful glow which mounted to her cheeks. A few seconds afterward d’Artagnan also went out enveloped in a large cloak, which ill-concealed the sheath of a long sword.

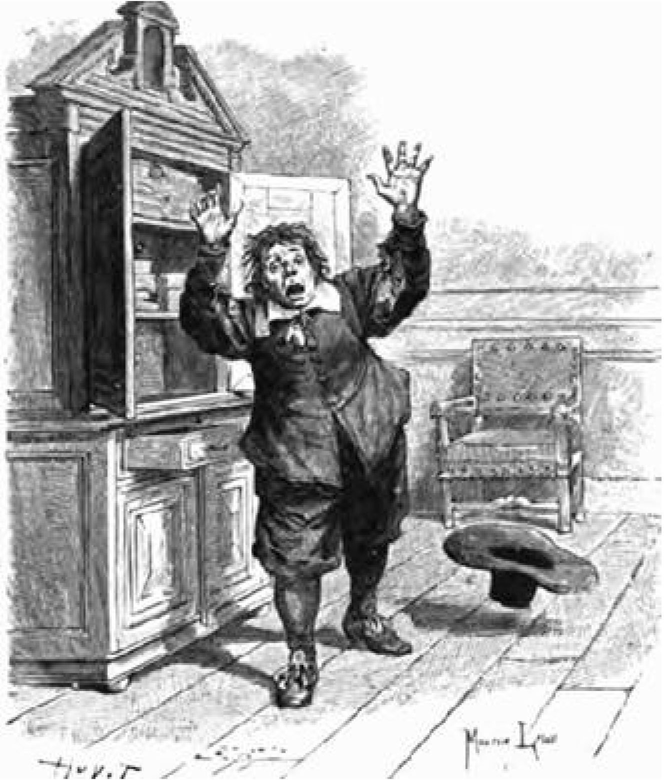

Mme. Bonacieux followed him with her eyes, with that long, fond look with which he had turned the angle of the street, she fell on her knees, and clasping her hands, “Oh, my God,” cried she, “protect the queen, protect me!”

CHAPTER 19

PLAN OF CAMPAIGN

D’Artagnan went straight to M. de Treville’s. He had reflected that in a few minutes the cardinal would be warned by this cursed stranger, who appeared to be his agent, and he judged, with reason, he had not a moment to lose.

The heart of the young man overflowed with joy. An opportunity presented itself to him in which there would be at the same time glory to be acquired, and money to be gained; and as a far higher encouragement, it brought him into close intimacy with a woman he adored. This chance did, then, for him at once more than he would have dared to ask of Providence.

M de Treville was in his saloon with his habitual court of gentlemen. D’Artagnan, who was known as a familiar of the house, went straight to his office, and sent word that he wished to see him on something of importance.

D’Artagnan had been there scarcely five minutes when M. de Treville entered. At the first glance, and by the joy which was painted on his countenance, the worthy captain plainly perceived that something new was on foot.

All the way along d’Artagnan had been consulting with himself whether he should place confidence in M. de Treville, or whether he should only ask him to give him CARTE BLANCHE for some secret affair. But M. de Treville had always been so thoroughly his friend, had always been so devoted to the king and queen, and hated the cardinal so cordially, that the young man resolved to tell him everything.

“Did you ask for me, my good friend?” said M. de Treville.

“Yes, monsieur,” said d’Artagnan, lowering his voice, “and you will pardon me, I hope, for having disturbed you when you know the importance of my business.”

“Speak, then, I am all attention.”

“It concerns nothing less,” said d’Artagnan, “than the honor, perhaps the life of the queen.”

“What did you say?” asked M. de Treville, glancing round to see if they were surely alone, and then fixing his questioning look upon d’Artagnan.

“I say, monsieur, that chance has rendered me master of a secret--”

“Which you will guard, I hope, young man, as your life.”

“But which I must impart to you, monsieur, for you alone can assist me in the mission I have just received from her Majesty.”

“Is this secret your own?”

“No, monsieur; it is her Majesty’s.”

“Are you authorized by her Majesty to communicate it to me?”

“No, monsieur, for, on the contrary, I am desired to preserve the profoundest mystery.”

“Why, then, are you about to betray it to me?”

“Because, as I said, without you I can do nothing; and I am afraid you will refuse me the favor I come to ask if you do not know to what end I ask it.”

“Keep your secret, young man, and tell me what you wish.”

“I wish you to obtain for me, from Monsieur Dessessart, leave of absence for fifteen days.”

“When?”

“This very night.”

“You leave Paris?”

“I am going on a mission.”

“May you tell me whither?”

“To London.”

“Has anyone an interest in preventing your arrival there?”

“The cardinal, I believe, would give the world to prevent my success.”

“And you are going alone?”

“I am going alone.”

“In that case you will not get beyond Bondy. I tell you so, by the faith of de Treville.”

“How so?”

“You will be assassinated.”

“And I shall die in the performance of my duty.”

“But your mission will not be accomplished.”

“That is true,” replied d’Artagnan.

“Believe me,” continued Treville, “in enterprises of this kind, in order that one may arrive, four must set out.”

"Ah, you are right, monsieur," said d'Artagnan; "but you know Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, and you know if I can dispose of them."

"Without confiding to them the secret which I am not willing to know?"

"We are sworn, once for all, to implicit confidence and devotedness against all proof. Besides, you can tell them that you have full confidence in me, and they will not be more incredulous than you."

"I can send to each of them leave of absence for fifteen days, that is all--to Athos, whose wound still makes him suffer, to go to the waters of Forges; to Porthos and Aramis to accompany their friend, whom they are not willing to abandon in such a painful condition. Sending their leave of absence will be proof enough that I authorize their journey."

"Thanks, monsieur. You are a hundred times too good."

"Begone, then, find them instantly, and let all be done tonight! Ha! But first write your request to Dessessart. Perhaps you had a spy at your heels; and your visit, if it should ever be known to the cardinal, will thus seem legitimate."

D'Artagnan drew up his request, and M. de Treville, on receiving it, assured him that by two o'clock in the morning the four leaves of absence should be at the respective domiciles of the travelers.

"Have the goodness to send mine to Athos's residence. I should dread some disagreeable encounter if I were to go home."

"Be easy. Adieu, and a prosperous voyage. A PROPOS," said M. de Treville, calling him back.

D'Artagnan returned.

"Have you any money?"

D'Artagnan tapped the bag he had in his pocket.

"Enough?" asked M. de Treville.

"Three hundred pistoles."

"Oh, plenty! That would carry you to the end of the world. Begone, then!"

D'Artagnan saluted M. de Treville, who held out his hand to him; d'Artagnan pressed it with a respect mixed with gratitude. Since his first arrival at Paris, he had had constant occasion to honor this excellent man, whom he had always found worthy, loyal, and great.

His first visit was to Aramis, at whose residence he had not been since the famous evening on which he had followed Mme. Bonacieux. Still further, he had seldom seen the young Musketeer; but every time he had seen him, he had remarked a deep sadness imprinted on his countenance.

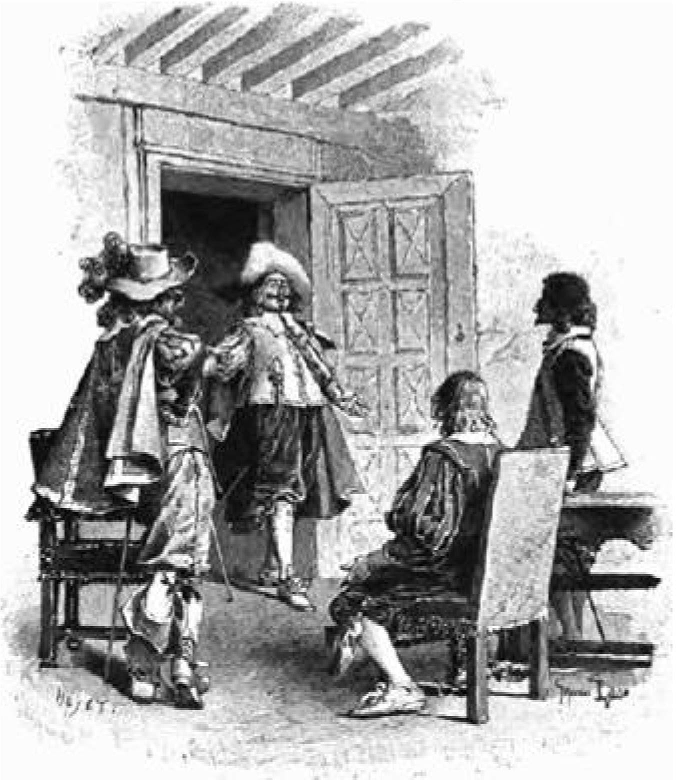

This evening, especially, Aramis was melancholy and thoughtful. d’Artagnan asked some questions about this prolonged melancholy. Aramis pleaded as his excuse a commentary upon the eighteenth chapter of St. Augustine, which he was forced to write in Latin for the following week, and which preoccupied him a good deal.

After the two friends had been chatting a few moments, a servant from M. de Treville entered, bringing a sealed packet.

“What is that?” asked Aramis.

“The leave of absence Monsieur has asked for,” replied the lackey.

“For me! I have asked for no leave of absence.”

“Hold your tongue and take it!” said d’Artagnan. “And you, my friend, there is a demipistole for your trouble; you will tell Monsieur de Treville that Monsieur Aramis is very much obliged to him. Go.”

The lackey bowed to the ground and departed.

“What does all this mean?” asked Aramis.

“Pack up all you want for a journey of a fortnight, and follow me.”

“But I cannot leave Paris just now without knowing--”

Aramis stopped.

“What is become of her? I suppose you mean--” continued d’Artagnan.

“Become of whom?” replied Aramis.

“The woman who was here--the woman with the embroidered handkerchief.”

“Who told you there was a woman here?” replied Aramis, becoming as pale as death.

“I saw her.”

“And you know who she is?”

“I believe I can guess, at least.”

“Listen!” said Aramis. “Since you appear to know so many things, can you tell me what is become of that woman?”

“I presume that she has returned to Tours.”

“To Tours? Yes, that may be. You evidently know her. But why did she return to Tours without telling me anything?”

“Because she was in fear of being arrested.”

“Why has she not written to me, then?”

“Because she was afraid of compromising you.”

“d’Artagnan, you restore me to life!” cried Aramis. “I fancied myself despised, betrayed. I was so delighted to see her again! I could not have believed she would risk her liberty for me, and yet for what other cause could she have returned to Paris?”

“For the cause which today takes us to England.”

“And what is this cause?” demanded Aramis.

“Oh, you’ll know it someday, Aramis; but at present I must imitate the discretion of ‘the doctor’s niece.’“

Aramis smiled, as he remembered the tale he had told his friends on a certain evening. “Well, then, since she has left Paris, and you are sure of it, d’Artagnan, nothing prevents me, and I am ready to follow you. You say we are going--”

“To see Athos now, and if you will come thither, I beg you to make haste, for we have lost much time already. A PROPOS, inform Bazin.”

“Will Bazin go with us?” asked Aramis.

“Perhaps so. At all events, it is best that he should follow us to Athos’s.”

Aramis called Bazin, and, after having ordered him to join them at Athos’s residence, said “Let us go then,” at the same time taking his cloak, sword, and three pistols, opening uselessly two or three drawers to see if he could not find stray coin. When well assured this search was superfluous, he followed d’Artagnan, wondering to himself how this young Guardsman should know so well who the lady was to whom he had given hospitality, and that he should know better than himself what had become of her.

Only as they went out Aramis placed his hand upon the arm of d’Artagnan, and looking at him earnestly, “You have not spoken of this lady?” said he.

“To nobody in the world.”

“Not even to Athos or Porthos?”

“I have not breathed a syllable to them.”

“Good enough!”

Tranquil on this important point, Aramis continued his way with d’Artagnan, and both soon arrived at Athos’s dwelling. They found him holding his leave of absence in one hand, and M. de Treville’s note in the other.

“Can you explain to me what signify this leave of absence and this letter, which I have just received?” said the astonished Athos.

My dear Athos,

I wish, as your health absolutely requires it, that you should rest for a fortnight. Go, then, and take the waters of Forges, or any that may be more agreeable to you, and recuperate yourself as quickly as possible.

Yours affectionate,

de Treville

“Well, this leave of absence and that letter mean that you must follow me, Athos.”

“To the waters of Forges?”

“There or elsewhere.”

“In the king’s service?”

“Either the king’s or the queen’s. Are we not their Majesties’ servants?”

At that moment Porthos entered. “PARDIEU!” said he, “here is a strange thing! Since when, I wonder, in the Musketeers, did they grant men leave of absence without their asking for it?”

“Since,” said d’Artagnan, “they have friends who ask it for them.”

“Ah, ah!” said Porthos, “it appears there’s something fresh here.”

“Yes, we are going--” said Aramis.

“To what country?” demanded Porthos.

“My faith! I don’t know much about it,” said Athos. “Ask d’Artagnan.”

“To London, gentlemen,” said d’Artagnan.

"To London!" cried Porthos; "and what the devil are we going to do in London?"

"That is what I am not at liberty to tell you, gentlemen; you must trust to me."

"But in order to go to London," added Porthos, "money is needed, and I have none."

"Nor I," said Aramis.

"Nor I," said Athos.

"I have," replied d'Artagnan, pulling out his treasure from his pocket, and placing it on the table. "There are in this bag three hundred pistoles. Let each take seventy-five; that is enough to take us to London and back. Besides, make yourselves easy; we shall not all arrive at London."

"Why so?"

"Because, in all probability, some one of us will be left on the road."

"Is this, then, a campaign upon which we are now entering?"

"One of a most dangerous kind, I give you notice."

"Ah! But if we do risk being killed," said Porthos, "at least I should like to know what for."

"You would be all the wiser," said Athos.

"And yet," said Aramis, "I am somewhat of Porthos's opinion."

"Is the king accustomed to give you such reasons? No. He says to you jauntily, 'Gentlemen, there is fighting going on in Gascony or in Flanders; go and fight,' and you go there. Why? You need give yourselves no more uneasiness about this."

"d'Artagnan is right," said Athos; "here are our three leaves of absence which came from Monsieur de Treville, and here are three hundred pistoles which came from I don't know where. So let us go and get killed where we are told to go. Is life worth the trouble of so many questions? D'Artagnan, I am ready to follow you."

"And I also," said Porthos.

"And I also," said Aramis. "And, indeed, I am not sorry to quit Paris; I had need of distraction."

"Well, you will have distractions enough, gentlemen, be assured," said d'Artagnan.

"And, now, when are we to go?" asked Athos.

"Immediately," replied d'Artagnan; "we have not a minute to lose."

“Hello, Grimaud! Planchet! Mousqueton! Bazin!” cried the four young men, calling their lackeys, “clean my boots, and fetch the horses from the hotel.”

Each Musketeer was accustomed to leave at the general hotel, as at a barrack, his own horse and that of his lackey. Planchet, Grimaud, Mousqueton, and Bazin set off at full speed.

“Now let us lay down the plan of campaign,” said Porthos. “Where do we go first?”

“To Calais,” said d’Artagnan; “that is the most direct line to London.”

“Well,” said Porthos, “this is my advice--”

“Speak!”

“Four men traveling together would be suspected. D’Artagnan will give each of us his instructions. I will go by the way of Boulogne to clear the way; Athos will set out two hours after, by that of Amiens; Aramis will follow us by that of Noyon; as to d’Artagnan, he will go by what route he thinks is best, in Planchet’s clothes, while Planchet will follow us like d’Artagnan, in the uniform of the Guards.”

“Gentlemen,” said Athos, “my opinion is that it is not proper to allow lackeys to have anything to do in such an affair. A secret may, by chance, be betrayed by gentlemen; but it is almost always sold by lackeys.”

“Porthos’s plan appears to me to be impracticable,” said d’Artagnan, “inasmuch as I am myself ignorant of what instructions I can give you. I am the bearer of a letter, that is all. I have not, and I cannot make three copies of that letter, because it is sealed. We must, then, as it appears to me, travel in company. This letter is here, in this pocket,” and he pointed to the pocket which contained the letter. “If I should be killed, one of you must take it, and continue the route; if he be killed, it will be another’s turn, and so on--provided a single one arrives, that is all that is required.”

“Bravo, d’Artagnan, your opinion is mine,” cried Athos, “Besides, we must be consistent; I am going to take the waters, you will accompany me. Instead of taking the waters of Forges, I go and take sea waters; I am free to do so. If anyone wishes to stop us, I will show Monsieur de Treville’s letter, and you will show your leaves of absence. If we are attacked, we will defend ourselves; if we are tried, we will stoutly maintain that we were only anxious to dip ourselves a certain number of times in the sea. They would have an easy bargain of four isolated men; whereas four men together make a troop. We will arm our four lackeys with pistols and musketoons; if they send an army out against us, we will give battle, and the survivor, as d’Artagnan says, will carry the letter.”

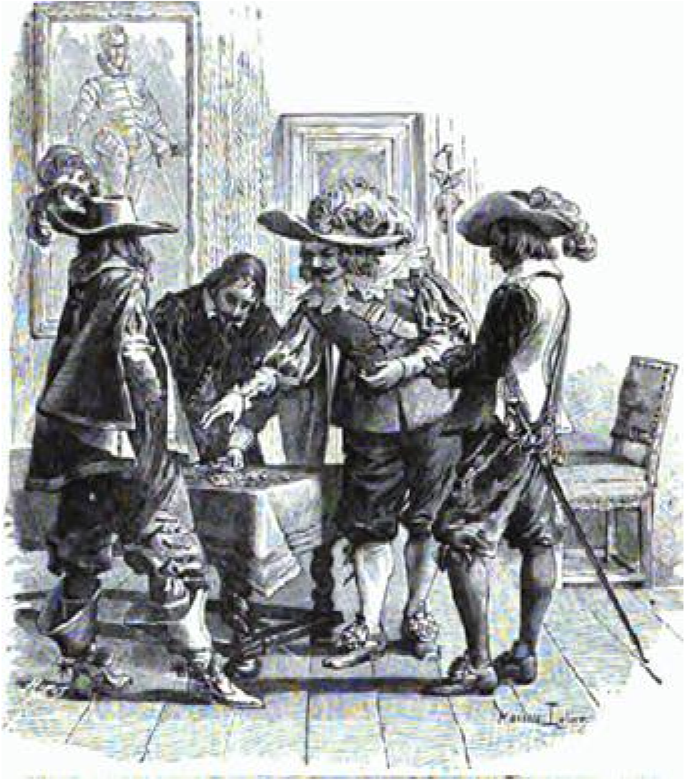

“Well said,” cried Aramis; “you don’t often speak, Athos, but when you do speak, it is like St. John of the Golden Mouth. I agree to Athos’s plan. And you, Porthos?”

“I agree to it, too,” said Porthos, “if d’Artagnan approves of it. D’Artagnan, being the bearer of the letter, is naturally the head of the enterprise; let him decide, and we will execute.”

“Well,” said d’Artagnan, “I decide that we should adopt Athos’s plan, and that we set off in half an hour.”

“Agreed!” shouted the three Musketeers in chorus.

Each one, stretching out his hand to the bag, took his seventy-five pistoles, and made his preparations to set out at the time appointed.

CHAPTER 20

THE JOURNEY

At two o’clock in the morning, our four adventurers left Paris by the Barriere St. Denis. As long as it was dark they remained silent; in spite of themselves they submitted to the influence of the obscurity, and apprehended ambushes on every side.

With the first rays of day their tongues were loosened; with the sun gaiety revived. It was like the eve of a battle; the heart beat, the eyes laughed, and they felt that the life they were perhaps going to lose, was, after all, a good thing.

Besides, the appearance of the caravan was formidable. The black horses of the Musketeers, their martial carriage, with the regimental step of these noble companions of the soldier, would have betrayed the most strict incognito. The lackeys followed, armed to the teeth.

All went well till they arrived at Chantilly, which they reached about eight o’clock in the morning. They needed breakfast, and alighted at the door of an AUBERGE, recommended by a sign representing St. Martin giving half his cloak to a poor man. They ordered the lackeys not to unsaddle the horses, and to hold themselves in readiness to set off again immediately.

They entered the common hall, and placed themselves at table. A gentleman, who had just arrived by the route of Dammartin, was seated at the same table, and was breakfasting. He opened the conversation about rain and fine weather; the travelers replied. He drank to their good health, and the travelers returned his politeness.

But at the moment Mousqueton came to announce that the horses were ready, and they were arising from table, the stranger proposed to Porthos to drink the health of the cardinal. Porthos replied that he asked no better if the stranger, in his turn, would drink the health of the king. The stranger cried that he acknowledged no other king but his Eminence. Porthos called him drunk, and the stranger drew his sword.

“You have committed a piece of folly,” said Athos, “but it can’t be helped; there is no drawing back. Kill the fellow, and rejoin us as soon as you can.”

All three remounted their horses, and set out at a good pace, while Porthos was promising his adversary to perforate him with all the thrusts known in the fencing schools.

“There goes one!” cried Athos, at the end of five hundred paces.

“But why did that man attack Porthos rather than any other one of us?” asked Aramis.

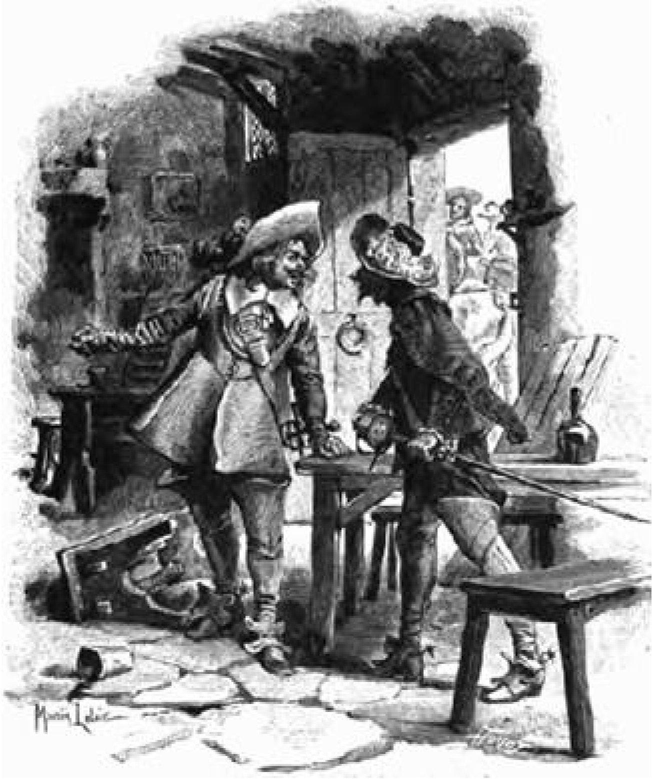

“Because, as Porthos was talking louder than the rest of us, he took him for the chief,” said d’Artagnan.

“I always said that this cadet from Gascony was a well of wisdom,” murmured Athos; and the travelers continued their route.

At Beauvais they stopped two hours, as well to breathe their horses a little as to wait for Porthos. At the end of two hours, as Porthos did not come, not any news of him, they resumed their journey.

At a league from Beauvais, where the road was confined between two high banks, they fell in with eight or ten men who, taking advantage of the road being unpaved in this spot, appeared to be employed in digging holes and filling up the ruts with mud.

Aramis, not liking to soil his boots with this artificial mortar, apostrophized them rather sharply. Athos wished to restrain him, but it was too late. The laborers began to jeer the travelers and by their insolence disturbed the equanimity even of the cool Athos, who urged on his horse against one of them.

Then each of these men retreated as far as the ditch, from which each took a concealed musket; the result was that our seven travelers were outnumbered in weapons. Aramis received a ball which passed through his shoulder, and Mousqueton another ball which lodged in the fleshy part which prolongs the lower portion of the loins. Therefore Mousqueton alone fell from his horse, not because he was severely wounded, but not being able to see the wound, he judged it to be more serious than it really was.

"It was an ambuscade!" shouted d'Artagnan. "Don't waste a charge! Forward!"

Aramis, wounded as he was, seized the mane of his horse, which carried him on with the others. Mousqueton's horse rejoined them, and galloped by the side of his companions.

"That will serve us for a relay," said Athos.

"I would rather have had a hat," said d'Artagnan. "Mine was carried away by a ball. By my faith, it is very fortunate that the letter was not in it."

"They'll kill poor Porthos when he comes up," said Aramis.

“If Porthos were on his legs, he would have rejoined us by this time,” said Athos.

“My opinion is that on the ground the drunken man was not intoxicated.”

They continued at their best speed for two hours, although the horses were so fatigued that it was to be feared they would soon refuse service.

The travelers had chosen crossroads in the hope that they might meet with less interruption; but at Crevecoeur, Aramis declared he could proceed no farther. In fact, it required all the courage which he concealed beneath his elegant form and polished manners to bear him so far. He grew more pale every minute, and they were obliged to support him on his horse. They lifted him off at the door of a cabaret, left Bazin with him, who, besides, in a skirmish was more embarrassing than useful, and set forward again in the hope of sleeping at Amiens.

“MORBLEU,” said Athos, as soon as they were again in motion, “reduced to two masters and Grimaud and Planchet! MORBLEU! I won’t be their dupe, I will answer for it. I will neither open my mouth nor draw my sword between this and Calais. I swear by--”

“Don’t waste time in swearing,” said d’Artagnan; “let us gallop, if our horses will consent.”

And the travelers buried their rowels in their horses' flanks, who thus vigorously stimulated recovered their energies. They arrived at Amiens at midnight, and alighted at the AUBERGE of the Golden Lily.

The host had the appearance of as honest a man as any on earth. He received the travelers with his candlestick in one hand and his cotton nightcap in the other. He wished to lodge the two travelers each in a charming chamber; but unfortunately these charming chambers were at the opposite extremities of the hotel. d'Artagnan and Athos refused them. The host replied that he had no other worthy of their Excellencies; but the travelers declared they would sleep in the common chamber, each on a mattress which might be thrown upon the ground. The host insisted; but the travelers were firm, and he was obliged to do as they wished.

They had just prepared their beds and barricaded their door within, when someone knocked at the yard shutter; they demanded who was there, and recognizing the voices of their lackeys, opened the shutter. It was indeed Planchet and Grimaud.

"Grimaud can take care of the horses," said Planchet. "If you are willing, gentlemen, I will sleep across your doorway, and you will then be certain that nobody can reach you."

"And on what will you sleep?" said d'Artagnan.

"Here is my bed," replied Planchet, producing a bundle of straw.

"Come, then," said d'Artagnan, "you are right. Mine host's face does not please me at all; it is too gracious."

"Nor me either," said Athos.

Planchet mounted by the window and installed himself across the doorway, while Grimaud went and shut himself up in the stable, undertaking that by five o'clock in the morning he and the four horses should be ready.

The night was quiet enough. Toward two o'clock in the morning somebody endeavored to open the door; but as Planchet awoke in an instant and cried, "Who goes there?" somebody replied that he was mistaken, and went away.

At four o'clock in the morning they heard a terrible riot in the stables. Grimaud had tried to waken the stable boys, and the stable boys had beaten him. When they opened the window, they saw the poor lad lying senseless, with his head split by a blow with a pitchfork.

Planchet went down into the yard, and wished to saddle the horses; but the horses were all used up. Mousqueton's horse which had traveled for five or six hours without a rider the day before, might have been able to pursue the journey; but by an inconceivable error the veterinary surgeon, who had been sent for, as it appeared, to bleed one of the host's horses, had bled Mousqueton's.

This began to be annoying. All these successive accidents were perhaps the result of chance; but they might be the fruits of a plot. Athos and d'Artagnan went out, while Planchet was sent to inquire if there were not three horses for sale in the neighborhood. At the door stood two horses, fresh, strong, and fully equipped. These would just have suited them. He asked where their masters were, and was informed that they had passed the night in the inn, and were then settling their bill with the host.

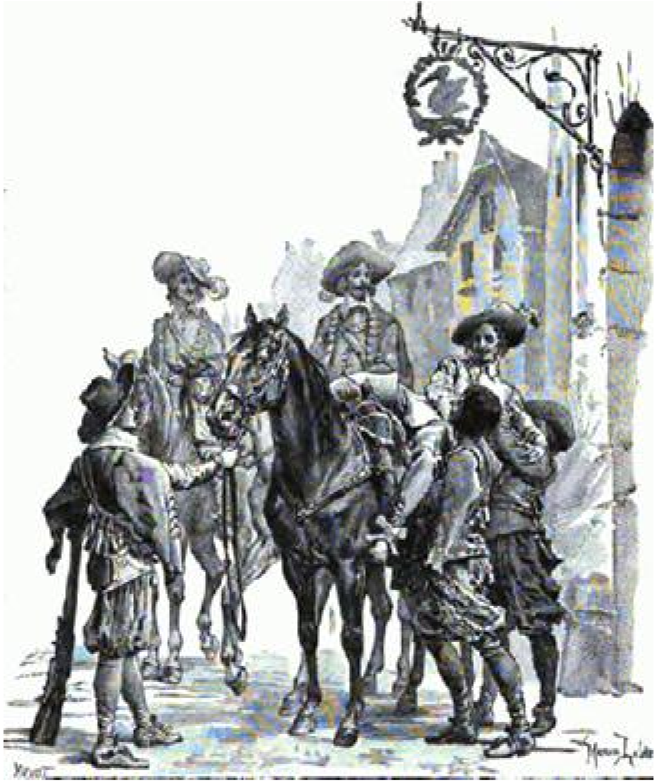

Athos went down to pay the reckoning, while d'Artagnan and Planchet stood at the street door. The host was in a lower and back room, to which Athos was requested to go.

Athos entered without the least mistrust, and took out two pistoles to pay the bill. The host was alone, seated before his desk, one of the drawers of which was partly open. He took the money which Athos offered to him, and after turning and turning it over and over in his hands, suddenly cried out that it was bad, and that he would have him and his companions arrested as forgers.

"You blackguard!" cried Athos, going toward him, "I'll cut your ears off!"

At the same instant, four men, armed to the teeth, entered by side doors, and rushed upon Athos.

"I am taken!" shouted Athos, with all the power of his lungs. "Go on, d'Artagnan! Spur, spur!" and he fired two pistols.

D'Artagnan and Planchet did not require twice bidding; they unfastened the two horses that were waiting at the door, leaped upon them, buried their spurs in their sides, and set off at full gallop.

"Do you know what has become of Athos?" asked d'Artagnan of Planchet, as they galloped on.

"Ah, monsieur," said Planchet, "I saw one fall at each of his two shots, and he appeared to me, through the glass door, to be fighting with his sword with the others."

"Brave Athos!" murmured d'Artagnan, "and to think that we are compelled to leave him; maybe the same fate awaits us two paces hence. Forward, Planchet, forward! You are a brave fellow."

"As I told you, monsieur," replied Planchet, "Picards are found out by being used. Besides, I am here in my own country, and that excites me."

And both, with free use of the spur, arrived at St. Omer without drawing bit. At St. Omer they breathed their horses with the bridles passed under their arms for fear of accident, and ate a morsel from their hands on the stones of the street, after they departed again.

At a hundred paces from the gates of Calais, d'Artagnan's horse gave out, and could not by any means be made to get up again, the blood flowing from his eyes and his nose. There still remained Planchet's horse; but he stopped short, and could not be made to move a step.

Fortunately, as we have said, they were within a hundred paces of the city; they left their two nags upon the high road, and ran toward the quay. Planchet called his master's attention to a gentleman who had just arrived with his lackey, and only preceded them by about fifty paces. They made all speed to come up to this gentleman, who appeared to be in great haste. His boots were covered with dust, and he inquired if he could not instantly cross over to England.

“Nothing would be more easy,” said the captain of a vessel ready to set sail, “but this morning came an order to let no one leave without express permission from the cardinal.”

“I have that permission,” said the gentleman, drawing the paper from his pocket; “here it is.”

“Have it examined by the governor of the port,” said the shipmaster, “and give me the preference.”

“Where shall I find the governor?”

“At his country house.”

“And that is situated?”

“At a quarter of a league from the city. Look, you may see it from here--at the foot of that little hill, that slated roof.”

“Very well,” said the gentleman. And, with his lackey, he took the road to the governor’s country house.

D’Artagnan and Planchet followed the gentleman at a distance of five hundred paces. Once outside the city, d’Artagnan overtook the gentleman as he was entering a little wood.

“Monsieur, you appear to be in great haste?”

“No one can be more so, monsieur.”

“I am sorry for that,” said d’Artagnan; “for as I am in great haste likewise, I wish to beg you to render me a service.”

“What?”

“To let me sail first.”

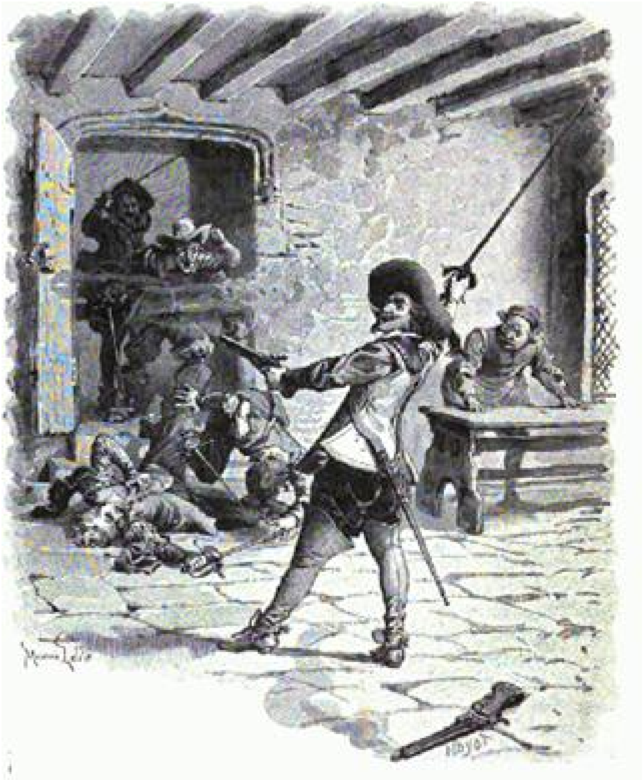

“That’s impossible,” said the gentleman; “I have traveled sixty leagues in forty hours, and by tomorrow at midday I must be in London.”

“I have performed that same distance in forty hours, and by ten o’clock in the morning I must be in London.”

“Very sorry, monsieur; but I was here first, and will not sail second.”

“I am sorry, too, monsieur; but I arrived second, and must sail first.”

“The king’s service!” said the gentleman.

“My own service!” said d’Artagnan.

“But this is a needless quarrel you seek with me, as it seems to me.”

“PARBLEU! What do you desire it to be?”

“What do you want?”

“Would you like to know?”

“Certainly.”

“Well, then, I wish that order of which you are bearer, seeing that I have not one of my own and must have one.”

“You jest, I presume.”

“I never jest.”

“Let me pass!”

“You shall not pass.”

“My brave young man, I will blow out your brains. HOLA, Lubin, my pistols!”

“Planchet,” called out d’Artagnan, “take care of the lackey; I will manage the master.”

Planchet, emboldened by the first exploit, sprang upon Lubin; and being strong and vigorous, he soon got him on the broad of his back, and placed his knee upon his breast.

“Go on with your affair, monsieur,” cried Planchet; “I have finished mine.”

Seeing this, the gentleman drew his sword, and sprang upon d’Artagnan; but he had too strong an adversary. In three seconds d’Artagnan had wounded him three times, exclaiming at each thrust, “One for Athos, one for Porthos; and one for Aramis!”

At the third hit the gentleman fell like a log. D’Artagnan believed him to be dead, or at least insensible, and went toward him for the purpose of taking the order; but the moment he extended his hand to search for it, the wounded man, who had not dropped his sword, plunged the point into d’Artagnan’s breast, crying, “One for you!”

“And one for me--the best for last!” cried d’Artagnan, furious, nailing him to the earth with a fourth thrust through his body.

This time the gentleman closed his eyes and fainted. D’Artagnan searched his pockets, and took from one of them the order for the passage. It was in the name of Comte de Wardes.

Then, casting a glance on the handsome young man, who was scarcely twenty-five years of age, and whom he was leaving in his gore, deprived of sense and perhaps dead, he gave a sigh for that unaccountable destiny which leads men to destroy each other for the interests of people who are strangers to them and who often do not even know that they exist. But he was soon aroused from these reflections by Lubin, who uttered loud cries and screamed for help with all his might.

Planchet grasped him by the throat, and pressed as hard as he could. “Monsieur,” said he, “as long as I hold him in this manner, he can’t cry, I’ll be bound; but as soon as I let go he will howl again. I know him for a Norman, and Normans are obstinate.”

In fact, tightly held as he was, Lubin endeavored still to cry out.

“Stay!” said d’Artagnan; and taking out his handkerchief, he gagged him.

“Now,” said Planchet, “let us bind him to a tree.”

This being properly done, they drew the Comte de Wardes close to his servant; and as night was approaching, and as the wounded man and the bound man were at some little distance within the wood, it was evident they were likely to remain there till the next day.

“And now,” said d’Artagnan, “to the Governor’s.”

“But you are wounded, it seems,” said Planchet.

“Oh, that’s nothing! Let us attend to what is more pressing first, and then we will attend to my wound; besides, it does not seem very dangerous.”

And they both set forward as fast as they could toward the country house of the worthy functionary.

The Comte de Wardes was announced, and d’Artagnan was introduced.

“You have an order signed by the cardinal?” said the governor.

“Yes, monsieur,” replied d’Artagnan; “here it is.”

“Ah, ah! It is quite regular and explicit,” said the governor.

“Most likely,” said d’Artagnan; “I am one of his most faithful servants.”

“It appears that his Eminence is anxious to prevent someone from crossing to England?”

“Yes; a certain d’Artagnan, a Bearnese gentleman who left Paris in company with three of his friends, with the intention of going to London.”

“Do you know him personally?” asked the governor.

“Whom?”

“This d’Artagnan.”

“Perfectly well.”

“Describe him to me, then.”

“Nothing more easy.”

And d’Artagnan gave, feature for feature, a description of the Comte de Wardes.

“Is he accompanied?”

“Yes; by a lackey named Lubin.”

“We will keep a sharp lookout for them; and if we lay hands on them his Eminence may be assured they will be reconducted to Paris under a good escort.”

“And by doing so, Monsieur the Governor,” said d’Artagnan, “you will deserve well of the cardinal.”

“Shall you see him on your return, Monsieur Count?”

“Without a doubt.”

“Tell him, I beg you, that I am his humble servant.”

“I will not fail.”

Delighted with this assurance the governor countersigned the passport and delivered it to d’Artagnan. D’Artagnan lost no time in useless compliments. He thanked the governor, bowed, and departed. Once outside, he and Planchet set off as fast as they could; and by making a long detour avoided the wood and reentered the city by another gate.

The vessel was quite ready to sail, and the captain was waiting on the wharf. “Well?” said he, on perceiving d’Artagnan.

“Here is my pass countersigned,” said the latter.

“And that other gentleman?

“He will not go today,” said d’Artagnan; “but here, I’ll pay you for us two.”

“In that case let us go,” said the shipmaster.

“Let us go,” repeated d’Artagnan.

He leaped with Planchet into the boat, and five minutes after they were on board. It was time; for they had scarcely sailed half a league, when d’Artagnan saw a flash and heard a detonation. It was the cannon which announced the closing of the port.

He had now leisure to look to his wound. Fortunately, as d’Artagnan had thought, it was not dangerous. The point of the sword had touched a rib, and glanced along the bone. Still further, his shirt had stuck to the wound, and he had lost only a few drops of blood.

D’Artagnan was worn out with fatigue. A mattress was laid upon the deck for him. He threw himself upon it, and fell asleep.

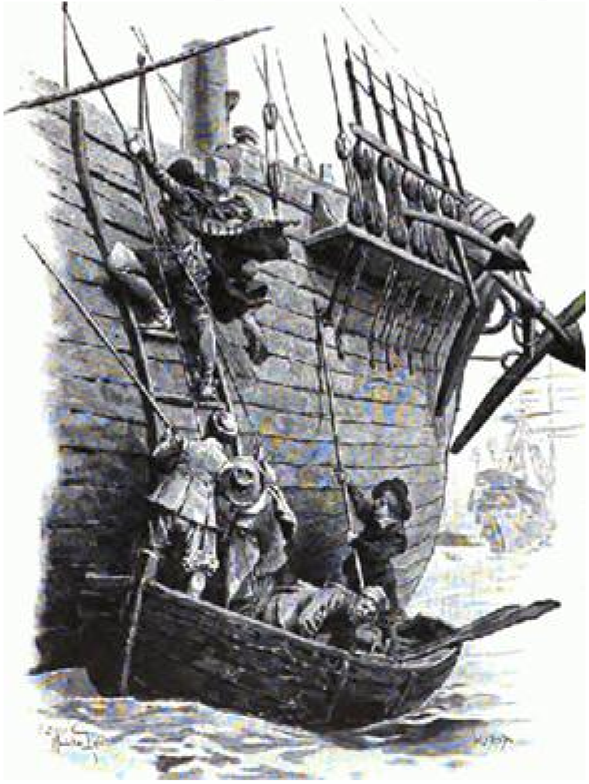

On the morrow, at break of day, they were still three or four leagues from the coast of England. The breeze had been so light all night, they had made but little progress. At ten o'clock the vessel cast anchor in the harbor of Dover, and at half past ten d'Artagnan placed his foot on English land, crying, "Here I am at last!"

But that was not all; they must get to London. In England the post was well served. D'Artagnan and Planchet took each a post horse, and a postillion rode before them. In a few hours they were in the capital.

D'Artagnan did not know London; he did not know a word of English; but he wrote the name of Buckingham on a piece of paper, and everyone pointed out to him the way to the duke's hotel.

The duke was at Windsor hunting with the king. D'Artagnan inquired for the confidential valet of the duke, who, having accompanied him in all his voyages, spoke French perfectly well; he told him that he came from Paris on an affair of life and death, and that he must speak with his master instantly.

The confidence with which d'Artagnan spoke convinced Patrick, which was the name of this minister of the minister. He ordered two horses to be saddled, and himself went as guide to the young Guardsman. As for Planchet, he had been lifted from his horse as stiff as a rush; the poor lad's strength was almost exhausted. d'Artagnan seemed iron.

On their arrival at the castle they learned that Buckingham and the king were hawking in the marshes two or three leagues away. In twenty minutes they were on the spot named. Patrick soon caught the sound of his master's voice calling his falcon.

"Whom must I announce to my Lord Duke?" asked Patrick.

"The young man who one evening sought a quarrel with him on the Pont Neuf, opposite the Samaritaine."

"A singular introduction!"

"You will find that it is as good as another."

Patrick galloped off, reached the duke, and announced to him in the terms directed that a messenger awaited him.

Buckingham at once remembered the circumstance, and suspecting that something was going on in France of which it was necessary he should be informed, he only took the time to inquire where the messenger was, and recognizing from afar the uniform of the Guards, he put his horse into a gallop, and rode straight up to d'Artagnan. Patrick discreetly kept in the background.

“No misfortune has happened to the queen?” cried Buckingham, the instant he came up, throwing all his fear and love into the question.

“I believe not; nevertheless I believe she runs some great peril from which your Grace alone can extricate her.”

“I!” cried Buckingham. “What is it? I should be too happy to be of any service to her. Speak, speak!”

“Take this letter,” said d’Artagnan.

“This letter! From whom comes this letter?”

“From her Majesty, as I think.”

“From her Majesty!” said Buckingham, becoming so pale that d’Artagnan feared he would faint as he broke the seal.

“What is this rent?” said he, showing d’Artagnan a place where it had been pierced through.

“Ah,” said d’Artagnan, “I did not see that; it was the sword of the Comte de Wardes which made that hole, when he gave me a good thrust in the breast.”

“You are wounded?” asked Buckingham, as he opened the letter.

“Oh, nothing but a scratch,” said d’Artagnan.

“Just heaven, what have I read?” cried the duke. “Patrick, remain here, or rather join the king, wherever he may be, and tell his Majesty that I humbly beg him to excuse me, but an affair of the greatest importance recalls me to London. Come, monsieur, come!” and both set off towards the capital at full gallop.

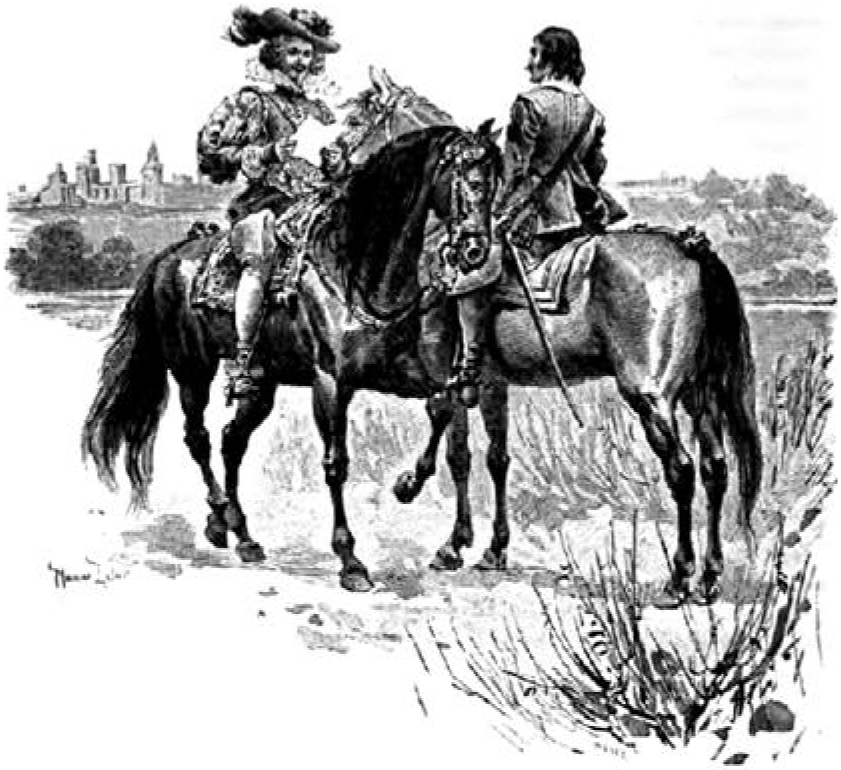

CHAPTER 21

THE COUNTESS DE WINTER

As they rode along, the duke endeavored to draw from d'Artagnan, not all that had happened, but what d'Artagnan himself knew. By adding all that he heard from the mouth of the young man to his own remembrances, he was enabled to form a pretty exact idea of a position of the seriousness of which, for the rest, the queen's letter, short but explicit, gave him the clue. But that which astonished him most was that the cardinal, so deeply interested in preventing this young man from setting his foot in England, had not succeeded in arresting him on the road. It was then, upon the manifestation of this astonishment, that d'Artagnan related to him the precaution taken, and how, thanks to the devotion of his three friends, whom he had left scattered and bleeding on the road, he had succeeded in coming off with a single sword thrust, which had pierced the queen's letter and for which he had repaid M. de Wardes with such terrible coin. While he was listening to this recital, delivered with the greatest simplicity, the duke looked from time to time at the young man with astonishment, as if he could not comprehend how so much prudence, courage, and devotedness could be allied with a countenance which indicated not more than twenty years.

The horses went like the wind, and in a few minutes they were at the gates of London. D'Artagnan imagined that on arriving in town the duke would slacken his pace, but it was not so. He kept on his way at the same rate, heedless about upsetting those whom he met on the road. In fact, in crossing the city two or three accidents of this kind happened; but Buckingham did not even turn his head to see what became of those he had knocked down. d'Artagnan followed him amid cries which strongly resembled curses.

On entering the court of his hotel, Buckingham sprang from his horse, and without thinking what became of the animal, threw the bridle on his neck, and sprang toward the vestibule. D'Artagnan did the same, with a little more concern, however, for the noble creatures, whose merits he fully appreciated; but he had the satisfaction of seeing three or four grooms run from the kitchens and the stables, and busy themselves with the steeds.

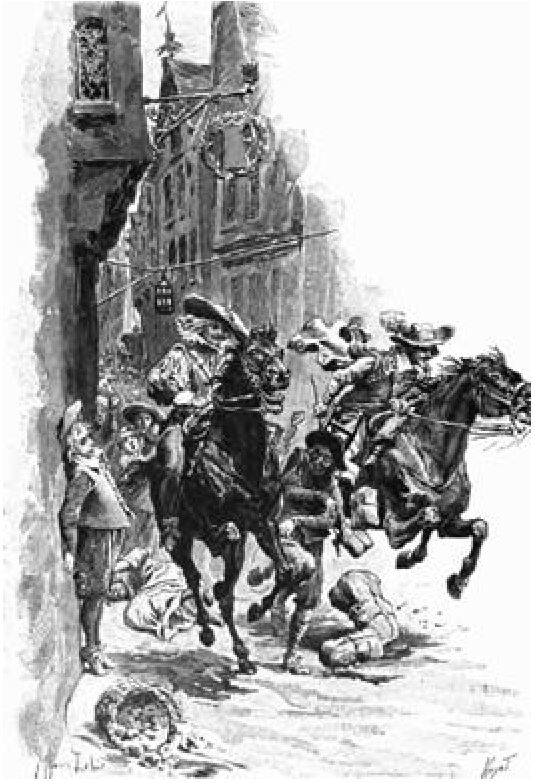

The duke walked so fast that d’Artagnan had some trouble in keeping up with him. He passed through several apartments, of an elegance of which even the greatest nobles of France had not even an idea, and arrived at length in a bedchamber which was at once a miracle of taste and of richness. In the alcove of this chamber was a door concealed in the tapestry which the duke opened with a little gold key which he wore suspended from his neck by a chain of the same metal. With discretion d’Artagnan remained behind; but at the moment when Buckingham crossed the threshold, he turned round, and seeing the hesitation of the young man, “Come in!” cried he, “and if you have the good fortune to be admitted to her Majesty’s presence, tell her what you have seen.”

Encouraged by this invitation, d’Artagnan followed the duke, who closed the door after them. The two found themselves in a small chapel covered with a tapestry of Persian silk worked with gold, and brilliantly lighted with a vast number of candles. Over a species of altar, and beneath a canopy of blue velvet, surmounted by white and red plumes, was a full-length portrait of Anne of Austria, so perfect in its resemblance that d’Artagnan uttered a cry of surprise on beholding it. One might believe the queen was about to speak. On the altar, and beneath the portrait, was the casket containing the diamond studs.

The duke approached the altar, knelt as a priest might have done before a crucifix, and opened the casket. “There,” said he, drawing from the casket a large bow of blue ribbon all sparkling with diamonds, “there are the precious studs which I have taken an oath should be buried with me. The queen gave them to me, the queen requires them again. Her will be done, like that of God, in all things.”

Then, he began to kiss, one after the other, those dear studs with which he was about to part. All at once he uttered a terrible cry.

“What is the matter?” exclaimed d’Artagnan, anxiously; “what has happened to you, my Lord?”

“All is lost!” cried Buckingham, becoming as pale as a corpse; “two of the studs are wanting, there are only ten.”

“Can you have lost them, my Lord, or do you think they have been stolen?”

“They have been stolen,” replied the duke, “and it is the cardinal who has dealt this blow. Hold; see! The ribbons which held them have been cut with scissors.”

“If my Lord suspects they have been stolen, perhaps the person who stole them still has them in his hands.”

“Wait, wait!” said the duke. “The only time I have worn these studs was at a ball given by the king eight days ago at Windsor. The Comtesse de Winter, with whom I had quarreled, became reconciled to me at that ball. That reconciliation was nothing but the vengeance of a jealous woman. I have never seen her from that day. The woman is an agent of the cardinal.”

“He has agents, then, throughout the world?” cried d’Artagnan.

“Oh, yes,” said Buckingham, grating his teeth with rage. “Yes, he is a terrible antagonist. But when is this ball to take place?”

“Monday next.”

“Monday next! Still five days before us. That’s more time than we want. Patrick!” cried the duke, opening the door of the chapel, “Patrick!” His confidential valet appeared.

“My jeweler and my secretary.”

The valet went out with a mute promptitude which showed him accustomed to obey blindly and without reply.

But although the jeweler had been mentioned first, it was the secretary who first made his appearance. This was simply because he lived in the hotel. He found Buckingham seated at a table in his bedchamber, writing orders with his own hand.

"Mr. Jackson," said he, "go instantly to the Lord Chancellor, and tell him that I charge him with the execution of these orders. I wish them to be promulgated immediately."

"But, my Lord, if the Lord Chancellor interrogates me upon the motives which may have led your Grace to adopt such an extraordinary measure, what shall I reply?"

"That such is my pleasure, and that I answer for my will to no man."

"Will that be the answer," replied the secretary, smiling, "which he must transmit to his Majesty if, by chance, his Majesty should have the curiosity to know why no vessel is to leave any of the ports of Great Britain?"

"You are right, Mr. Jackson," replied Buckingham. "He will say, in that case, to the king that I am determined on war, and that this measure is my first act of hostility against France."

The secretary bowed and retired.

"We are safe on that side," said Buckingham, turning toward d'Artagnan. "If the studs are not yet gone to Paris, they will not arrive till after you."

"How so?"

"I have just placed an embargo on all vessels at present in his Majesty's ports, and without particular permission, not one dare lift an anchor."

D'Artagnan looked with stupefaction at a man who thus employed the unlimited power with which he was clothed by the confidence of a king in the prosecution of his intrigues. Buckingham saw by the expression of the young man's face what was passing in his mind, and he smiled.

"Yes," said he, "yes, Anne of Austria is my true queen. Upon a word from her, I would betray my country, I would betray my king, I would betray my God. She asked me not to send the Protestants of La Rochelle the assistance I promised them; I have not done so. I broke my word, it is true; but what signifies that? I obeyed my love; and have I not been richly paid for that obedience? It was to that obedience I owe her portrait."

D'Artagnan was amazed to note by what fragile and unknown threads the destinies of nations and the lives of men are suspended. He was lost in these reflections when the goldsmith entered. He was an Irishman--one of the most skillful of his craft, and who himself confessed that he gained a hundred thousand livres a year by the Duke of Buckingham.

“Mr. O’Reilly,” said the duke, leading him into the chapel, “look at these diamond studs, and tell me what they are worth apiece.”

The goldsmith cast a glance at the elegant manner in which they were set, calculated, one with another, what the diamonds were worth, and without hesitation said, “Fifteen hundred pistoles each, my Lord.”

“How many days would it require to make two studs exactly like them? You see there are two wanting.”

“Eight days, my Lord.”

“I will give you three thousand pistoles apiece if I can have them by the day after tomorrow.”

“My Lord, they shall be yours.”

“You are a jewel of a man, Mr. O’Reilly; but that is not all. These studs cannot be trusted to anybody; it must be done in the palace.”

“Impossible, my Lord! There is no one but myself can so execute them that one cannot tell the new from the old.”

“Therefore, my dear Mr. O’Reilly, you are my prisoner. And if you wish ever to leave my palace, you cannot; so make the best of it. Name to me such of your workmen as you need, and point out the tools they must bring.”

The goldsmith knew the duke. He knew all objection would be useless, and instantly determined how to act.

“May I be permitted to inform my wife?” said he.

“Oh, you may even see her if you like, my dear Mr. O’Reilly. Your captivity shall be mild, be assured; and as every inconvenience deserves its indemnification, here is, in addition to the price of the studs, an order for a thousand pistoles, to make you forget the annoyance I cause you.”

D’Artagnan could not get over the surprise created in him by this minister, who thus open-handed, sported with men and millions.

As to the goldsmith, he wrote to his wife, sending her the order for the thousand pistoles, and charging her to send him, in exchange, his most skillful apprentice, an assortment of diamonds, of which he gave the names and the weight, and the necessary tools.

Buckingham conducted the goldsmith to the chamber destined for him, and which, at the end of half an hour, was transformed into a workshop. Then he placed a sentinel at each door, with an order to admit nobody upon any pretense but his VALET DE CHAMBRE, Patrick. We need not add that the goldsmith, O’Reilly, and his assistant, were prohibited from going out under any pretext. This point, settled, the duke turned to d’Artagnan. “Now, my young friend,” said he, “England is all our own. What do you wish for? What do you desire?”

“A bed, my Lord,” replied d’Artagnan. “At present, I confess, that is the thing I stand most in need of.”

Buckingham gave d’Artagnan a chamber adjoining his own. He wished to have the young man at hand--not that he at all mistrusted him, but for the sake of having someone to whom he could constantly talk of the queen.

In one hour after, the ordinance was published in London that no vessel bound for France should leave port, not even the packet boat with letters. In the eyes of everybody this was a declaration of war between the two kingdoms.

On the day after the morrow, by eleven o’clock, the two diamond studs were finished, and they were so completely imitated, so perfectly alike, that Buckingham could not tell the new ones from the old ones, and experts in such matters would have been deceived as he was. He immediately called d’Artagnan. “Here,” said he to him, “are the diamond studs that you came to bring; and be my witness that I have done all that human power could do.”

“Be satisfied, my Lord, I will tell all that I have seen. But does your Grace mean to give me the studs without the casket?”

“The casket would encumber you. Besides, the casket is the more precious from being all that is left to me. You will say that I keep it.”

“I will perform your commission, word for word, my Lord.”

“And now,” resumed Buckingham, looking earnestly at the young man, “how shall I ever acquit myself of the debt I owe you?”

D’Artagnan blushed up to the whites of his eyes. He saw that the duke was searching for a means of making him accept something and the idea that the blood of his friends and himself was about to be paid for with English gold was strangely repugnant to him.

“Let us understand each other, my Lord,” replied d’Artagnan, “and let us make things clear beforehand in order that there may be no mistake. I am in the service of the King and Queen of France, and form part of the company of Monsieur Dessessart, who, as well as his brother-in-law, Monsieur de Treville, is particularly attached to their Majesties. What I have done, then, has been for the queen, and not at all for your Grace. And still further, it is very probable I should not have done anything of this, if it had not been to make myself agreeable to someone who is my lady, as the queen is yours.”

“Yes,” said the duke, smiling, “and I even believe that I know that other person; it is--”

“My Lord, I have not named her!” interrupted the young man, warmly.

“That is true,” said the duke; “and it is to this person I am bound to discharge my debt of gratitude.”

“You have said, my Lord; for truly, at this moment when there is question of war, I confess to you that I see nothing in your Grace but an Englishman, and consequently an enemy whom I should have much greater pleasure in meeting on the field of battle than in the park at Windsor or the corridors of the Louvre--all which, however, will not prevent me from executing to the very point my commission or from laying down my life, if there be need of it, to accomplish it; but I repeat it to your Grace, without your having personally on that account more to thank me for in this second interview than for what I did for you in the first.”

“We say, ‘Proud as a Scotsman,’“ murmured the Duke of Buckingham.

“And we say, ‘Proud as a Gascon,’“ replied d’Artagnan. “The Gascons are the Scots of France.”

D’Artagnan bowed to the duke, and was retiring.

“Well, are you going away in that manner? Where, and how?”

“That’s true!”

“Fore Gad, these Frenchmen have no consideration!”

“I had forgotten that England was an island, and that you were the king of it.”

“Go to the riverside, ask for the brig SUND, and give this letter to the captain; he will convey you to a little port, where certainly you are not expected, and which is ordinarily only frequented by fishermen.”

“The name of that port?”

“St. Valery; but listen. When you have arrived there you will go to a mean tavern, without a name and without a sign--a mere fisherman’s hut. You cannot be mistaken; there is but one.”

“Afterward?”

“You will ask for the host, and will repeat to him the word ‘Forward!’“

“Which means?”

“In French, EN AVANT. It is the password. He will give you a horse all saddled, and will point out to you the road you ought to take. You will find, in the same way, four relays on your route. If you will give at each of these relays your address in Paris, the four horses will follow you thither. You already know two of them, and you appeared to appreciate them like a judge. They were those we rode on; and you may rely upon me for the others not being inferior to them. These horses are equipped for the field.

However proud you may be, you will not refuse to accept one of them, and to request your three companions to accept the others--that is, in order to make war against us. Besides, the end justified the means, as you Frenchmen say, does it not?”

“Yes, my Lord, I accept them,” said d’Artagnan; “and if it please God, we will make a good use of your presents.”

“Well, now, your hand, young man. Perhaps we shall soon meet on the field of battle; but in the meantime we shall part good friends, I hope.”

“Yes, my Lord; but with the hope of soon becoming enemies.”

“Be satisfied; I promise you that.”

“I depend upon your word, my Lord.”

D’Artagnan bowed to the duke, and made his way as quickly as possible to the riverside. Opposite the Tower of London he found the vessel that had been named to him, delivered his letter to the captain, who after having it examined by the governor of the port made immediate preparations to sail.

Fifty vessels were waiting to set out. Passing alongside one of them, d’Artagnan fancied he perceived on board it the woman of Meung--the same whom the unknown gentleman had called Milady, and whom d’Artagnan had thought so handsome; but thanks to the current of the stream and a fair wind, his vessel passed so quickly that he had little more than a glimpse of her.

The next day about nine o’clock in the morning, he landed at St. Valery. D’Artagnan went instantly in search of the inn, and easily discovered it by the riotous noise which resounded from it. War between England and France was talked of as near and certain, and the jolly sailors were having a carousal.

D’Artagnan made his way through the crowd, advanced toward the host, and pronounced the word “Forward!” The host instantly made him a sign to follow, went out with him by a door which opened into a yard, led him to the stable, where a saddled horse awaited him, and asked him if he stood in need of anything else.

“I want to know the route I am to follow,” said d’Artagnan.

“Go from hence to Blangy, and from Blangy to Neufchatel. At Neufchatel, go to the tavern of the Golden Harrow, give the password to the landlord, and you will find, as you have here, a horse ready saddled.”

“Have I anything to pay?” demanded d’Artagnan.

“Everything is paid,” replied the host, “and liberally. Begone, and may God guide you!”

“Amen!” cried the young man, and set off at full gallop.

Four hours later he was in Neufchatel. He strictly followed the instructions he had received. At Neufchatel, as at St. Valery, he found a horse quite ready and awaiting him. He was about to remove the pistols from the saddle he had quit to the one he was about to fill, but he found the holsters furnished with similar pistols.

“Your address at Paris?”

“Hotel of the Guards, company of Dessessart.”

“Enough,” replied the questioner.

“Which route must I take?” demanded d’Artagnan, in his turn.

“That of Rouen; but you will leave the city on your right. You must stop at the little village of Eccuis, in which there is but one tavern--the Shield of France. Don’t condemn it from appearances; you will find a horse in the stables quite as good as this.”

“The same password?”

“Exactly.”

“Adieu, master!”

“A good journey, gentlemen! Do you want anything?”

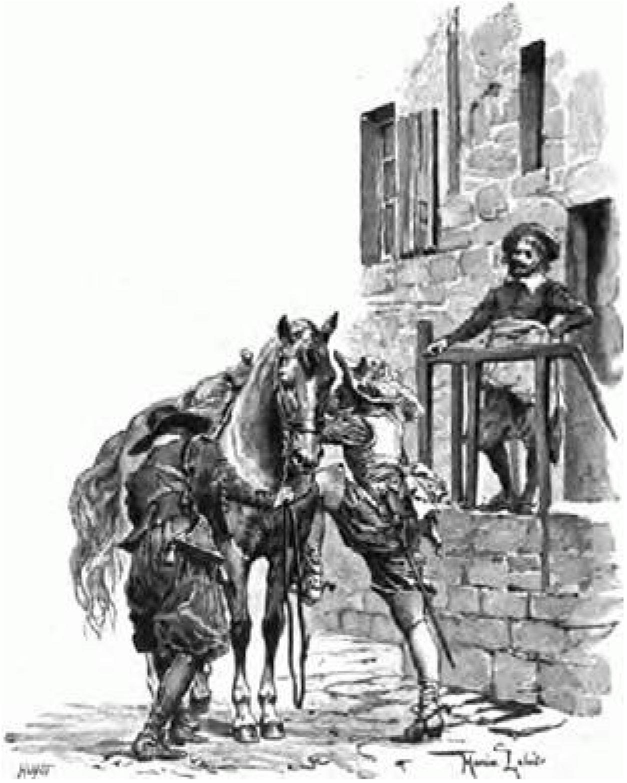

D’Artagnan shook his head, and set off at full speed. At Eccuis, the same scene was repeated. He found as provident a host and a fresh horse. He left his address as he had done before, and set off again at the same pace for Pontoise. At Pontoise he changed his horse for the last time, and at nine o’clock galloped into the yard of Treville’s hotel. He had made nearly sixty leagues in little more than twelve hours.

M de Treville received him as if he had seen him that same morning; only, when pressing his hand a little more warmly than usual, he informed him that the company of Dessessart was on duty at the Louvre, and that he might repair at once to his post.

CHAPTER 22

THE BALLET OF LA MERLAISON

On the morrow, nothing was talked of in Paris but the ball which the aldermen of the city were to give to the king and queen, and in which their Majesties were to dance the famous La Merlaison--the favorite ballet of the king.

Eight days had been occupied in preparations at the Hotel de Ville for this important evening. The city carpenters had erected scaffolds upon which the invited ladies were to be placed; the city grocer had ornamented the chambers with two hundred FLAMBEAUX of white wax, a piece of luxury unheard of at that period; and twenty violins were ordered, and the price for them fixed at double the usual rate, upon condition, said the report, that they should be played all night.

At ten o’clock in the morning the Sieur de la Coste, ensign in the king’s Guards, followed by two officers and several archers of that body, came to the city registrar, named Clement, and demanded of him all the keys of the rooms and offices of the hotel. These keys were given up to him instantly. Each of them had ticket attached to it, by which it might be recognized; and from that moment the Sieur de la Coste was charged with the care of all the doors and all the avenues.

At eleven o’clock came in his turn Duhallier, captain of the Guards, bringing with him fifty archers, who were distributed immediately through the Hotel de Ville, at the doors assigned them.

At three o’clock came two companies of the Guards, one French, the other Swiss. The company of French guards was composed of half of M. Duhallier’s men and half of M. Dessessart’s men.

At six in the evening the guests began to come. As fast as they entered, they were placed in the grand saloon, on the platforms prepared for them.

At nine o’clock Madame la Premiere Presidente arrived. As next to the queen, she was the most considerable personage of the fete, she was received by the city officials, and placed in a box opposite to that which the queen was to occupy.

At ten o’clock, the king’s collation, consisting of preserves and other delicacies, was prepared in the little room on the side of the church of St. Jean, in front of the silver buffet of the city, which was guarded by four archers.

At midnight great cries and loud acclamations were heard. It was the king, who was passing through the streets which led from the Louvre to the Hotel de Ville, and which were all illuminated with colored lanterns.

Immediately the aldermen, clothed in their cloth robes and preceded by six sergeants, each holding a FLAMBEAU in his hand, went to attend upon the king, whom they met on the steps, where the provost of the merchants made him the speech of welcome--a compliment to which his Majesty replied with an apology for coming so late, laying the blame upon the cardinal, who had detained him till eleven o’clock, talking of affairs of state.

His Majesty, in full dress, was accompanied by his royal Highness, M. le Comte de Soissons, by the Grand Prior, by the Duc de Longueville, by the Duc d’Euboeuf, by the Comte d’Harcourt, by the Comte de la Roche-Guyon, by M. de Liancourt, by M. de Baradas, by the Comte de Cramail, and by the Chevalier de Souveray. Everybody noticed that the king looked dull and preoccupied.

A private room had been prepared for the king and another for Monsieur. In each of these closets were placed masquerade dresses. The same had been done for the queen and Madame the President. The nobles and ladies of their Majesties’ suites were to dress, two by two, in chambers prepared for the purpose. Before entering his closet the king desired to be informed the moment the cardinal arrived.

Half an hour after the entrance of the king, fresh acclamations were heard; these announced the arrival of the queen. The aldermen did as they had done before, and preceded by their sergeants, advanced to receive their illustrious guest. The queen entered the great hall; and it was remarked that, like the king, she looked dull and even weary.

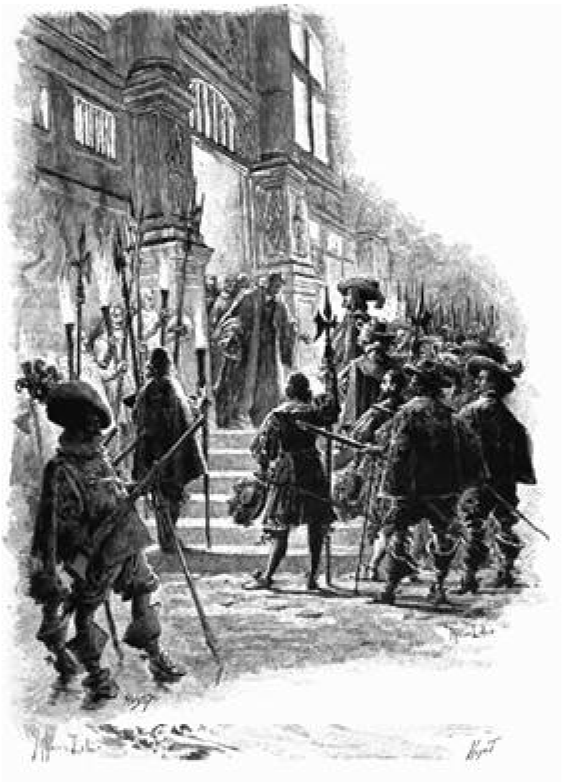

At the moment she entered, the curtain of a small gallery which to that time had been closed, was drawn, and the pale face of the cardinal appeared, he being dressed as a Spanish cavalier. His eyes were fixed upon those of the queen, and a smile of terrible joy passed over his lips; the queen did not wear her diamond studs.

The queen remained for a short time to receive the compliments of the city dignitaries and to reply to the salutations of the ladies. All at once the king appeared with the cardinal at one of the doors of the hall. The cardinal was speaking to him in a low voice, and the king was very pale.

The king made his way through the crowd without a mask, and the ribbons of his doublet scarcely tied. He went straight to the queen, and in an altered voice said, “Why, madame, have you not thought proper to wear your diamond studs, when you know it would give me so much gratification?”

The queen cast a glance around her, and saw the cardinal behind, with a diabolical smile on his countenance.

“Sire,” replied the queen, with a faltering voice, “because, in the midst of such a crowd as this, I feared some accident might happen to them.”

“And you were wrong, madame. If I made you that present it was that you might adorn yourself therewith. I tell you that you were wrong.”

The voice of the king was tremulous with anger. Everybody looked and listened with astonishment, comprehending nothing of what passed.

“Sire,” said the queen, “I can send for them to the Louvre, where they are, and thus your Majesty’s wishes will be complied with.”

“Do so, madame, do so, and that at once; for within an hour the ballet will commence.”

The queen bent in token of submission, and followed the ladies who were to conduct her to her room. On his part the king returned to his apartment.

There was a moment of trouble and confusion in the assembly. Everybody had remarked that something had passed between the king and queen; but both of them had spoken so low that everybody, out of respect, withdrew several steps, so that nobody had heard anything. The violins began to sound with all their might, but nobody listened to them.

The king came out first from his room. He was in a most elegant hunting costume; and Monsieur and the other nobles were dressed like him. This was the costume that best became the king. So dressed, he really appeared the first gentleman of his kingdom.

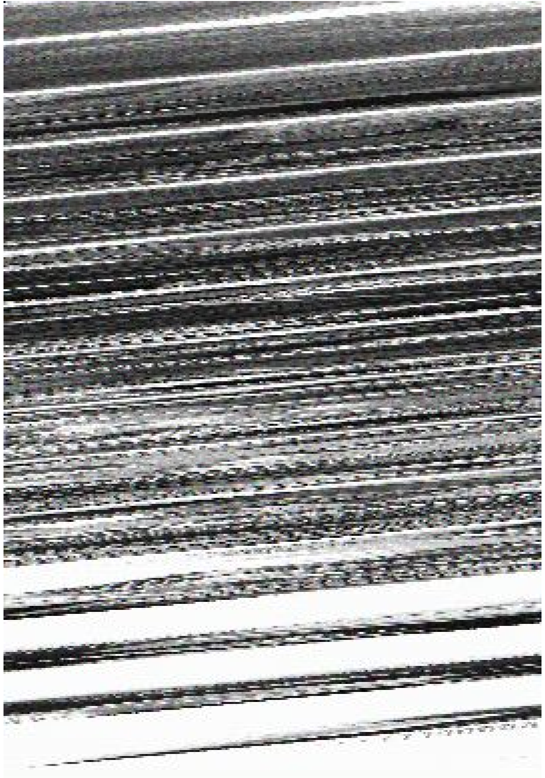

The cardinal drew near to the king, and placed in his hand a small casket. The king opened it, and found in it two diamond studs.

“What does this mean?” demanded he of the cardinal.

“Nothing,” replied the latter; “only, if the queen has the studs, which I very much doubt, count them, sire, and if you only find ten, ask her Majesty who can have stolen from her the two studs that are here.”

The king looked at the cardinal as if to interrogate him; but he had not time to address any question to him--a cry of admiration burst from every mouth. If the king appeared to be the first gentleman of his kingdom, the queen was without doubt the most beautiful woman in France.

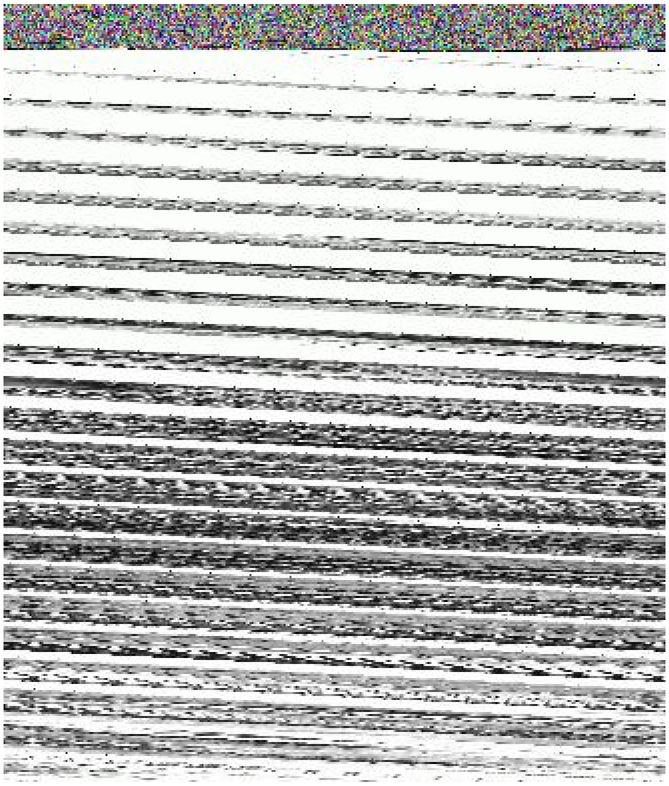

It is true that the habit of a huntress became her admirably. She wore a beaver hat with blue feathers, a surtout of gray-pearl velvet, fastened with diamond clasps, and a petticoat of blue satin, embroidered with silver. On her left shoulder sparkled the diamond studs, on a bow of the same color as the plumes and the petticoat.

The king trembled with joy and the cardinal with vexation; although, distant as they were from the queen, they could not count the studs. The queen had them. The only question was, had she ten or twelve?

At that moment the violins sounded the signal for the ballet. The king advanced toward Madame the President, with whom he was to dance, and his Highness Monsieur with the queen. They took their places, and the ballet began.

The king danced facing the queen, and every time he passed by her, he devoured with his eyes those studs of which he could not ascertain the number. A cold sweat covered the brow of the cardinal.

The ballet lasted an hour, and had sixteen ENTREES. The ballet ended amid the applause of the whole assemblage, and everyone reconducted his lady to her place; but the king took advantage of the privilege he had of leaving his lady, to advance eagerly toward the queen.

“I thank you, madame,” said he, “for the deference you have shown to my wishes, but I think you want two of the studs, and I bring them back to you.”

With these words he held out to the queen the two studs the cardinal had given him.

“How, sire?” cried the young queen, affecting surprise, “you are giving me, then, two more: I shall have fourteen.”

In fact the king counted them, and the twelve studs were all on her Majesty’s shoulder.

The king called the cardinal.

“What does this mean, Monsieur Cardinal?” asked the king in a severe tone.

“This means, sire,” replied the cardinal, “that I was desirous of presenting her Majesty with these two studs, and that not daring to offer them myself, I adopted this means of inducing her to accept them.”

“And I am the more grateful to your Eminence,” replied Anne of Austria, with a smile that proved she was not the dupe of this ingenious gallantry, “from being certain that these two studs alone have cost you as much as all the others cost his Majesty.”

Then saluting the king and the cardinal, the queen resumed her way to the chamber in which she had dressed, and where she was to take off her costume.

The attention which we have been obliged to give, during the commencement of the chapter, to the illustrious personages we have introduced into it, has diverted us for an instant from him to whom Anne of Austria owed the extraordinary triumph she had obtained over the cardinal; and who, confounded, unknown, lost in the crowd gathered at one of the doors, looked on at this scene, comprehensible only to four persons--the king, the queen, his Eminence, and himself.

The queen had just regained her chamber, and d’Artagnan was about to retire, when he felt his shoulder lightly touched. He turned and saw a young woman, who made him a sign to follow her. The face of this young woman was covered with a black velvet mask; but notwithstanding this precaution, which was in fact taken rather against others than against him, he at once recognized his usual guide, the light and intelligent Mme. Bonacieux.

On the evening before, they had scarcely seen each other for a moment at the apartment of the Swiss guard, Germain, whither d’Artagnan had sent for her. The haste which the young woman was in to convey to the queen the excellent news of the happy return of her messenger prevented the two lovers from exchanging more than a few words. D’Artagnan therefore followed Mme. Bonacieux moved by a double sentiment--love and curiosity. All the way, and in proportion as the corridors became more deserted, d’Artagnan wished to stop the young woman, seize her and gaze upon her, were it only for a minute; but quick as a bird she glided between his hands, and when he wished to speak to her, her finger placed upon her mouth, with a little imperative gesture full of grace, reminded him that he was under the command of a power which he must blindly obey, and which forbade him even to make the slightest complaint. At length, after winding about for a minute or two, Mme. Bonacieux opened the door of a closet, which was entirely dark, and led d’Artagnan into it. There she made a fresh sign of silence, and opened a second door concealed by tapestry. The opening of this door disclosed a brilliant light, and she disappeared.

D’Artagnan remained for a moment motionless, asking himself where he could be; but soon a ray of light which penetrated through the chamber, together with the warm and perfumed air which reached him from the same aperture, the conversation of two of three ladies in language at once respectful and refined, and the word “Majesty” several times repeated, indicated clearly that he was in a closet attached to the queen’s apartment. The young man waited in comparative darkness and listened.

The queen appeared cheerful and happy, which seemed to astonish the persons who surrounded her and who were accustomed to see her almost always sad and full of care. The queen attributed this joyous feeling to the beauty of the fete, to the pleasure she had experienced in the ballet; and as it is not permissible to contradict a queen, whether she smile or weep, everybody expatiated on the gallantry of the aldermen of the city of Paris.

Although d’Artagnan did not at all know the queen, he soon distinguished her voice from the others, at first by a slightly foreign accent, and next by that tone of domination naturally impressed upon all royal words. He heard her approach and withdraw from the partially open door; and twice or three times he even saw the shadow of a person intercept the light.

At length a hand and an arm, surpassingly beautiful in their form and whiteness, glided through the tapestry. D’Artagnan at once comprehended that this was his recompense. He cast himself on his knees, seized the hand, and touched it respectfully with his lips. Then the hand was withdrawn, leaving in his an object which he perceived to be a ring. The door immediately closed, and d’Artagnan found himself again in complete obscurity.

D’Artagnan placed the ring on his finger, and again waited; it was evident that all was not yet over. After the reward of his devotion, that of his love was to come. Besides, although the ballet was danced, the evening had scarcely begun. Supper was to be served at three, and the clock of St. Jean had struck three quarters past two.

The sound of voices diminished by degrees in the adjoining chamber. The company was then heard departing; then the door of the closet in which d’Artagnan was, was opened, and Mme. Bonacieux entered.

“You at last?” cried d’Artagnan.

“Silence!” said the young woman, placing her hand upon his lips; “silence, and go the same way you came!”

“But where and when shall I see you again?” cried d’Artagnan.

“A note which you will find at home will tell you. Begone, begone!”

At these words she opened the door of the corridor, and pushed d’Artagnan out of the room. D’Artagnan obeyed like a child, without the least resistance or objection, which proved that he was really in love.

CHAPTER 23

THE RENDEZVOUS

D’Artagnan ran home immediately, and although it was three o’clock in the morning and he had some of the worst quarters of Paris to traverse, he met with no misadventure. Everyone knows that drunkards and lovers have a protecting deity.

He found the door of his passage open, sprang up the stairs and knocked softly in a manner agreed upon between him and his lackey. Planchet*, whom he had sent home two hours before from the Hotel de Ville, telling him to sit up for him, opened the door for him.

The reader may ask, “How came Planchet here?” when he was left “stiff as a rush” in London. In the intervening time Buckingham perhaps sent him to Paris, as he did the horses.

“Has anyone brought a letter for me?” asked d’Artagnan, eagerly.

“No one has BROUGHT a letter, monsieur,” replied Planchet; “but one has come of itself.”

“What do you mean, blockhead?”

“I mean to say that when I came in, although I had the key of your apartment in my pocket, and that key had never quit me, I found a letter on the green table cover in your bedroom.”

“And where is that letter?”

“I left it where I found it, monsieur. It is not natural for letters to enter people’s houses in this manner. If the window had been open or even ajar, I should think nothing of it; but, no--all was hermetically sealed. Beware, monsieur; there is certainly some magic underneath.”

Meanwhile, the young man had darted in to his chamber, and opened the letter. It was from Mme. Bonacieux, and was expressed in these terms:

“There are many thanks to be offered to you, and to be transmitted to you. Be this evening about ten o’clock at St. Cloud, in front of the pavilion which stands at the corner of the house of M. d’Estrees.--C.B.”

While reading this letter, d’Artagnan felt his heart dilated and compressed by that delicious spasm which tortures and caresses the hearts of lovers.

It was the first billet he had received; it was the first rendezvous that had been granted him. His heart, swelled by the intoxication of joy, felt ready to dissolve away at the very gate of that terrestrial paradise called Love!

“Well, monsieur,” said Planchet, who had observed his master grow red and pale successively, “did I not guess truly? Is it not some bad affair?”

“You are mistaken, Planchet,” replied d’Artagnan; “and as a proof, there is a crown to drink my health.”

“I am much obliged to Monsieur for the crown he had given me, and I promise him to follow his instructions exactly; but it is not the less true that letters which come in this way into shut-up houses--”

“Fall from heaven, my friend, fall from heaven.”

“Then Monsieur is satisfied?” asked Planchet.

“My dear Planchet, I am the happiest of men!”

“And I may profit by Monsieur’s happiness, and go to bed?”

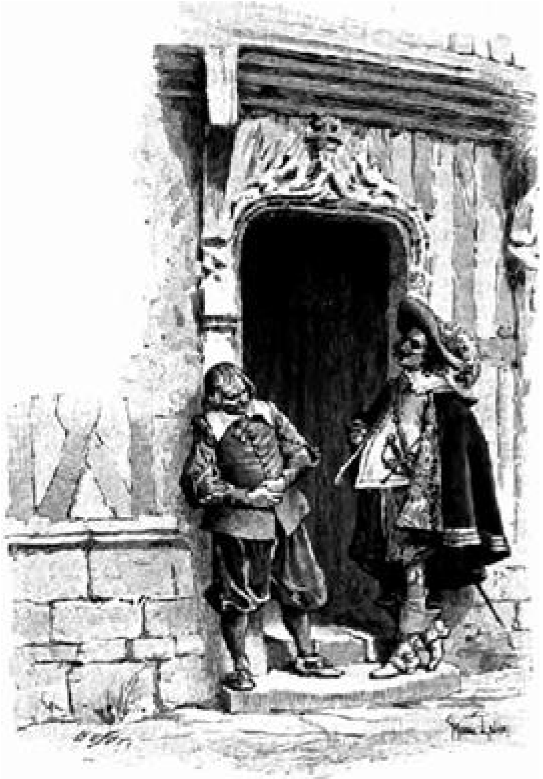

“Yes, go.”

“May the blessings of heaven fall upon Monsieur! But it is not the less true that that letter--”

And Planchet retired, shaking his head with an air of doubt, which the liberality of d’Artagnan had not entirely effaced.

Left alone, d’Artagnan read and reread his billet. Then he kissed and rekissed twenty times the lines traced by the hand of his beautiful mistress. At length he went to bed, fell asleep, and had golden dreams.

At seven o’clock in the morning he arose and called Planchet, who at the second summons opened the door, his countenance not yet quite freed from the anxiety of the preceding night.

“Planchet,” said d’Artagnan, “I am going out for all day, perhaps. You are, therefore, your own master till seven o’clock in the evening; but at seven o’clock you must hold yourself in readiness with two horses.”

“There!” said Planchet. “We are going again, it appears, to have our hides pierced in all sorts of ways.”

“You will take your musketoon and your pistols.”

“There, now! Didn’t I say so?” cried Planchet. “I was sure of it--the cursed letter!”

“Don’t be afraid, you idiot; there is nothing in hand but a party of pleasure.”

“Ah, like the charming journey the other day, when it rained bullets and produced a crop of steel traps!”

“Well, if you are really afraid, Monsieur Planchet,” resumed d’Artagnan, “I will go without you. I prefer traveling alone to having a companion who entertains the least fear.”

“Monsieur does me wrong,” said Planchet; “I thought he had seen me at work.”

“Yes, but I thought perhaps you had worn out all your courage the first time.”

“Monsieur shall see that upon occasion I have some left; only I beg Monsieur not to be too prodigal of it if he wishes it to last long.”

“Do you believe you have still a certain amount of it to expend this evening?”

“I hope so, monsieur.”

“Well, then, I count on you.”

“At the appointed hour I shall be ready; only I believed that Monsieur had but one horse in the Guard stables.”

“Perhaps there is but one at this moment; but by this evening there will be four.”

“It appears that our journey was a remounting journey, then?”

“Exactly so,” said d’Artagnan; and nodding to Planchet, he went out.

M Bonacieux was at his door. D’Artagnan’s intention was to go out without speaking to the worthy mercer; but the latter made so polite and friendly a salutation that his tenant felt obliged, not only to stop, but to enter into conversation with him.

Besides, how is it possible to avoid a little condescension toward a husband whose pretty wife has appointed a meeting with you that same evening at St. Cloud, opposite D’Estrees’s pavilion? D’Artagnan approached him with the most amiable air he could assume.

The conversation naturally fell upon the incarceration of the poor man. M. Bonacieux, who was ignorant that d’Artagnan had overheard his conversation with the stranger of Meung, related to his young tenant the persecutions of that monster, M. de Laffemas, whom he never ceased to designate, during his account, by the title of the “cardinal’s executioner,” and expatiated at great length upon the Bastille, the bolts, the wickets, the dungeons, the gratings, the instruments of torture.

D’Artagnan listened to him with exemplary complaisance, and when he had finished said, “And Madame Bonacieux, do you know who carried her off?--For I do not forget that I owe to that unpleasant circumstance the good fortune of having made your acquaintance.”

“Ah!” said Bonacieux, “they took good care not to tell me that; and my wife, on her part, has sworn to me by all that’s sacred that she does not know. But you,” continued M. Bonacieux, in a tine of perfect good fellowship, “what has become of you all these days? I have not seen you nor your friends, and I don’t think you could gather all that dust that I saw Planchet brush off your boots yesterday from the pavement of Paris.”

“You are right, my dear Monsieur Bonacieux, my friends and I have been on a little journey.”

“Far from here?”

“Oh, Lord, no! About forty leagues only. We went to take Monsieur Athos to the waters of Forges, where my friends still remain.”

“And you have returned, have you not?” replied M. Bonacieux, giving to his countenance a most sly air. “A handsome young fellow like you does not obtain long leaves of absence from his mistress; and we were impatiently waited for at Paris, were we not?”

“My faith!” said the young man, laughing, “I confess it, and so much more the readily, my dear Bonacieux, as I see there is no concealing anything from you. Yes, I was expected, and very impatiently, I acknowledge."

A slight shade passed over the brow of Bonacieux, but so slight that d'Artagnan did not perceive it.

"And we are going to be recompensed for our diligence?" continued the mercer, with a trifling alteration in his voice--so trifling, indeed, that d'Artagnan did not perceive it any more than he had the momentary shade which, an instant before, had darkened the countenance of the worthy man.

"Ah, may you be a true prophet!" said d'Artagnan, laughing.

"No; what I say," replied Bonacieux, "is only that I may know whether I am delaying you."

"Why that question, my dear host?" asked d'Artagnan. "Do you intend to sit up for me?"

"No; but since my arrest and the robbery that was committed in my house, I am alarmed every time I hear a door open, particularly in the night. What the deuce can you expect? I am no swordsman."

"Well, don't be alarmed if I return at one, two or three o'clock in the morning; indeed, do not be alarmed if I do not come at all."

This time Bonacieux became so pale that d'Artagnan could not help perceiving it, and asked him what was the matter.

"Nothing," replied Bonacieux, "nothing. Since my misfortunes I have been subject to faintnesses, which seize me all at once, and I have just felt a cold shiver. Pay no attention to it; you have nothing to occupy yourself with but being happy."

"Then I have full occupation, for I am so."

"Not yet; wait a little! This evening, you said."

"Well, this evening will come, thank God! And perhaps you look for it with as much impatience as I do; perhaps this evening Madame Bonacieux will visit the conjugal domicile."

"Madame Bonacieux is not at liberty this evening," replied the husband, seriously; "she is detained at the Louvre this evening by her duties."

"So much the worse for you, my dear host, so much the worse! When I am happy, I wish all the world to be so; but it appears that is not possible."

The young man departed, laughing at the joke, which he thought he alone could comprehend.

“Amuse yourself well!” replied Bonacieux, in a sepulchral tone.

But d’Artagnan was too far off to hear him; and if he had heard him in the disposition of mind he then enjoyed, he certainly would not have remarked it.

He took his way toward the hotel of M. de Treville; his visit of the day before, it is to be remembered, had been very short and very little explicative.

He found Treville in a joyful mood. He had thought the king and queen charming at the ball. It is true the cardinal had been particularly ill-tempered. He had retired at one o’clock under the pretense of being indisposed. As to their Majesties, they did not return to the Louvre till six o’clock in the morning.

“Now,” said Treville, lowering his voice, and looking into every corner of the apartment to see if they were alone, “now let us talk about yourself, my young friend; for it is evident that your happy return has something to do with the joy of the king, the triumph of the queen, and the humiliation of his Eminence. You must look out for yourself.”

“What have I to fear,” replied d’Artagnan, “as long as I shall have the luck to enjoy the favor of their Majesties?”

“Everything, believe me. The cardinal is not the man to forget a mystification until he has settled account with the mystifier; and the mystifier appears to me to have the air of being a certain young Gascon of my acquaintance.”

“Do you believe that the cardinal is as well posted as yourself, and knows that I have been to London?”

“The devil! You have been to London! Was it from London you brought that beautiful diamond that glitters on your finger? Beware, my dear d’Artagnan! A present from an enemy is not a good thing. Are there not some Latin verses upon that subject? Stop!”

“Yes, doubtless,” replied d’Artagnan, who had never been able to cram the first rudiments of that language into his head, and who had by his ignorance driven his master to despair, “yes, doubtless there is one.”

“There certainly is one,” said M. de Treville, who had a tincture of literature, “and Monsieur de Benserade was quoting it to me the other day. Stop a minute--ah, this is it: ‘Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes,’ which means, ‘Beware of the enemy who makes you presents.”

“This diamond does not come from an enemy, monsieur,” replied d’Artagnan, “it comes from the queen.”

“From the queen! Oh, oh!” said M. de Treville. “Why, it is indeed a true royal jewel, which is worth a thousand pistoles if it is worth a denier. By whom did the queen send you this jewel?”

“She gave it to me herself.”

“Where?”

“In the room adjoining the chamber in which she changed her toilet.”

“How?”

“Giving me her hand to kiss.”

“You have kissed the queen’s hand?” said M. de Treville, looking earnestly at d’Artagnan.

“Her Majesty did me the honor to grant me that favor.”

“And that in the presence of witnesses! Imprudent, thrice imprudent!”

“No, monsieur, be satisfied; nobody saw her,” replied d’Artagnan, and he related to M. de Treville how the affair came to pass.

“Oh, the women, the women!” cried the old soldier. “I know them by their romantic imagination. Everything that savors of mystery charms them. So you have seen the arm, that was all. You would meet the queen, and she would not know who you are?”

“No; but thanks to this diamond,” replied the young man.

“Listen,” said M. de Treville; “shall I give you counsel, good counsel, the counsel of a friend?”

“You will do me honor, monsieur,” said d’Artagnan.

“Well, then, off to the nearest goldsmith’s, and sell that diamond for the highest price you can get from him. However much of a Jew he may be, he will give you at least eight hundred pistoles. Pistoles have no name, young man, and that ring has a terrible one, which may betray him who wears it.”

“Sell this ring, a ring which comes from my sovereign? Never!” said d’Artagnan.

“Then, at least turn the gem inside, you silly fellow; for everybody must be aware that a cadet from Gascony does not find such stones in his mother’s jewel case.”

“You think, then, I have something to dread?” asked d’Artagnan.

“I mean to say, young man, that he who sleeps over a mine the match of which is already lighted, may consider himself in safety in comparison with you.”

“The devil!” said d’Artagnan, whom the positive tone of M. de Treville began to disquiet, “the devil! What must I do?”

“Above all things be always on your guard. The cardinal has a tenacious memory and a long arm; you may depend upon it, he will repay you by some ill turn.”

“But of what sort?”

“Eh! How can I tell? Has he not all the tricks of a demon at his command? The least that can be expected is that you will be arrested.”

“What! Will they dare to arrest a man in his Majesty’s service?”

“PARDIEU! They did not scruple much in the case of Athos. At all events, young man, rely upon one who has been thirty years at court. Do not lull yourself in security, or you will be lost; but, on the contrary--and it is I who say it--see enemies in all directions. If anyone seeks a quarrel with you, shun it, were it with a child of ten years old. If you are attacked by day or by night, fight, but retreat, without shame; if you cross a bridge, feel every plank of it with your foot, lest one should give way beneath you; if you pass before a house which is being built, look up, for fear a stone should fall upon your head; if you stay out late, be always followed by your lackey, and let your lackey be armed--if, by the by, you can be sure of your lackey. Mistrust everybody, your friend, your brother, your mistress--your mistress above all.”

D’Artagnan blushed.

“My mistress above all,” repeated he, mechanically; “and why her rather than another?”

“Because a mistress is one of the cardinal’s favorite means; he has not one that is more expeditious. A woman will sell you for ten pistoles, witness Delilah. You are acquainted with the Scriptures?”

D’Artagnan thought of the appointment Mme. Bonacieux had made with him for that very evening; but we are bound to say, to the credit of our hero, that the bad opinion entertained by M. de Treville of women in general, did not inspire him with the least suspicion of his pretty hostess.

“But, A PROPOS,” resumed M. de Treville, “what has become of your three companions?”

“I was about to ask you if you had heard any news of them?”

“None, monsieur.”

“Well, I left them on my road--Porthos at Chantilly, with a duel on his hands; Aramis at Crevecoeur, with a ball in his shoulder; and Athos at Amiens, detained by an accusation of coining.”

“See there, now!” said M. de Treville; “and how the devil did you escape?”

“By a miracle, monsieur, I must acknowledge, with a sword thrust in my breast, and by nailing the Comte de Wardes on the byroad to Calais, like a butterfly on a tapestry.”

“There again! De Wardes, one of the cardinal’s men, a cousin of Rochefort! Stop, my friend, I have an idea.”

“Speak, monsieur.”

“In your place, I would do one thing.”

“What?”

“While his Eminence was seeking for me in Paris, I would take, without sound of drum or trumpet, the road to Picardy, and would go and make some inquiries concerning my three companions. What the devil! They merit richly that piece of attention on your part.”

“The advice is good, monsieur, and tomorrow I will set out.”

“Tomorrow! Any why not this evening?”

“This evening, monsieur, I am detained in Paris by indispensable business.”

“Ah, young man, young man, some flirtation or other. Take care, I repeat to you, take care. It is woman who has ruined us, still ruins us, and will ruin us, as long as the world stands. Take my advice and set out this evening.”

“Impossible, monsieur.”

“You have given your word, then?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Ah, that’s quite another thing; but promise me, if you should not be killed tonight, that you will go tomorrow.”

“I promise it.”

“Do you need money?”

“I have still fifty pistoles. That, I think, is as much as I shall want.”

“But your companions?”

“I don’t think they can be in need of any. We left Paris, each with seventy-five pistoles in his pocket.”

“Shall I see you again before your departure?”

“I think not, monsieur, unless something new should happen.”

“Well, a pleasant journey.”

“Thanks, monsieur.”

D’Artagnan left M. de Treville, touched more than ever by his paternal solicitude for his Musketeers.

He called successively at the abodes of Athos, Porthos, and Aramis. Neither of them had returned. Their lackeys likewise were absent, and nothing had been heard of either the one or the other. He would have inquired after them of their mistresses, but he was neither acquainted with Porthos’s nor Aramis’s, and as to Athos, he had none.

As he passed the Hotel des Gardes, he took a glance in to the stables. Three of the four horses had already arrived. Planchet, all astonishment, was busy grooming them, and had already finished two.

“Ah, monsieur,” said Planchet, on perceiving d’Artagnan, “how glad I am to see you.”

“Why so, Planchet?” asked the young man.

“Do you place confidence in our landlord--Monsieur Bonacieux?”

“I? Not the least in the world.”

“Oh, you do quite right, monsieur.”

“But why this question?”

“Because, while you were talking with him, I watched you without listening to you; and, monsieur, his countenance changed color two or three times!”

“Bah!”

"Preoccupied as Monsieur was with the letter he had received, he did not observe that; but I, whom the strange fashion in which that letter came into the house had placed on my guard--I did not lose a movement of his features."

"And you found it?"

"Traitorous, monsieur."

"Indeed!"

"Still more; as soon as Monsieur had left and disappeared round the corner of the street, Monsieur Bonacieux took his hat, shut his door, and set off at a quick pace in an opposite direction."

"It seems you are right, Planchet; all this appears to be a little mysterious; and be assured that we will not pay him our rent until the matter shall be categorically explained to us."

"Monsieur jests, but Monsieur will see."

"What would you have, Planchet? What must come is written."

"Monsieur does not then renounce his excursion for this evening?"

"Quite the contrary, Planchet; the more ill will I have toward Monsieur Bonacieux, the more punctual I shall be in keeping the appointment made by that letter which makes you so uneasy."

"Then that is Monsieur's determination?"

"Undeniably, my friend. At nine o'clock, then, be ready here at the hotel, I will come and take you."

Planchet seeing there was no longer any hope of making his master renounce his project, heaved a profound sigh and set to work to groom the third horse.

As to d'Artagnan, being at bottom a prudent youth, instead of returning home, went and dined with the Gascon priest, who, at the time of the distress of the four friends, had given them a breakfast of chocolate.

CHAPTER 24

THE PAVILION

At nine o’clock d’Artagnan was at the Hotel des Gardes; he found Planchet all ready. The fourth horse had arrived.

Planchet was armed with his musketoon and a pistol. D’Artagnan had his sword and placed two pistols in his belt; then both mounted and departed quietly. It was quite dark, and no one saw them go out. Planchet took place behind his master, and kept at a distance of ten paces from him.

D’Artagnan crossed the quays, went out by the gate of La Conference and followed the road, much more beautiful then than it is now, which leads to St. Cloud.

As long as he was in the city, Planchet kept at the respectful distance he had imposed upon himself; but as soon as the road began to be more lonely and dark, he drew softly nearer, so that when they entered the Bois de Boulogne he found himself riding quite naturally side by side with his master. In fact, we must not dissemble that the oscillation of the tall trees and the reflection of the moon in the dark underwood gave him serious uneasiness. D’Artagnan could not help perceiving that something more than usual was passing in the mind of his lackey and said, “Well, Monsieur Planchet, what is the matter with us now?”

“Don’t you think, monsieur, that woods are like churches?”

“How so, Planchet?”

“Because we dare not speak aloud in one or the other.”

“But why did you not dare to speak aloud, Planchet--because you are afraid?”

“Afraid of being heard? Yes, monsieur.”

“Afraid of being heard! Why, there is nothing improper in our conversation, my dear Planchet, and no one could find fault with it.”

“Ah, monsieur!” replied Planchet, recurring to his besetting idea, “that Monsieur Bonacieux has something vicious in his eyebrows, and something very unpleasant in the play of his lips.”

“What the devil makes you think of Bonacieux?”

“Monsieur, we think of what we can, and not of what we will.”

“Because you are a coward, Planchet.”

“Monsieur, we must not confound prudence with cowardice; prudence is a virtue.”

“And you are very virtuous, are you not, Planchet?”

“Monsieur, is not that the barrel of a musket which glitters yonder? Had we not better lower our heads?”

“In truth,” murmured d’Artagnan, to whom M. de Treville’s recommendation recurred, “this animal will end by making me afraid.” And he put his horse into a trot.

Planchet followed the movements of his master as if he had been his shadow, and was soon trotting by his side.

“Are we going to continue this pace all night?” asked Planchet.

“No; you are at your journey’s end.”

“How, monsieur! And you?”

“I am going a few steps farther.”

“And Monsieur leaves me here alone?”

“You are afraid, Planchet?”

“No; I only beg leave to observe to Monsieur that the night will be very cold, that chills bring on rheumatism, and that a lackey who has the rheumatism makes but a poor servant, particularly to a master as active as Monsieur.”

“Well, if you are cold, Planchet, you can go into one of those cabarets that you see yonder, and be in waiting for me at the door by six o’clock in the morning.”

“Monsieur, I have eaten and drunk respectfully the crown you gave me this morning, so that I have not a sou left in case I should be cold.”

“Here’s half a pistole. Tomorrow morning.”

D’Artagnan sprang from his horse, threw the bridle to Planchet, and departed at a quick pace, folding his cloak around him.

“Good Lord, how cold I am!” cried Planchet, as soon as he had lost sight of his master; and in such haste was he to warm himself that he went straight to a house set out with all the attributes of a suburban tavern, and knocked at the door.

In the meantime d’Artagnan, who had plunged into a bypath, continued his route and reached St. Cloud; but instead of following the main street he turned behind the chateau, reached a sort of retired lane, and found himself soon in front of the pavilion named. It was situated in a very private spot. A high wall, at the angle of which was the pavilion, ran along one side of this lane, and on the other was a little garden connected with a poor cottage which was protected by a hedge from passers-by.

He gained the place appointed, and as no signal had been given him by which to announce his presence, he waited.

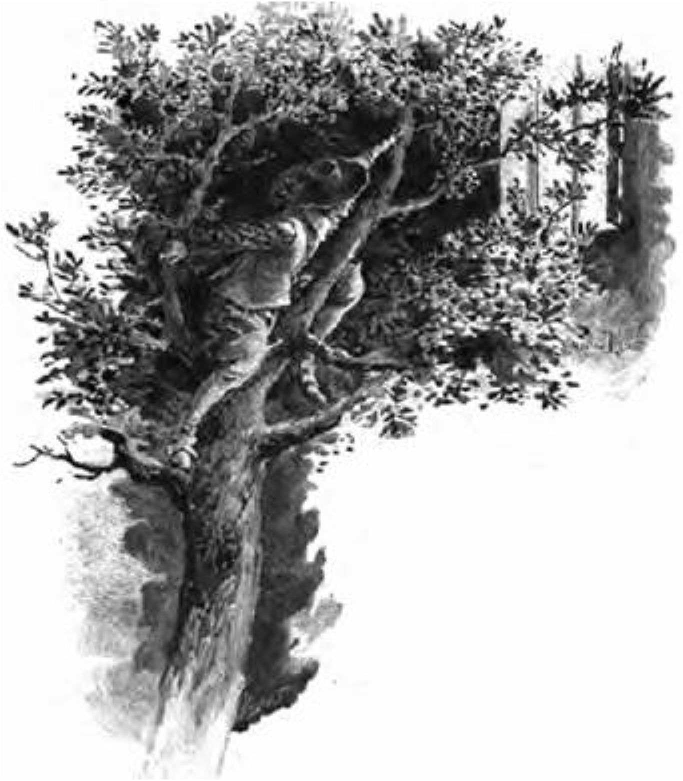

Not the least noise was to be heard; it might be imagined that he was a hundred miles from the capital. D’Artagnan leaned against the hedge, after having cast a glance behind it. Beyond that hedge, that garden, and that cottage, a dark mist enveloped with its folds that immensity where Paris slept--a vast void from which glittered a few luminous points, the funeral stars of that hell!

But for d’Artagnan all aspects were clothed happily, all ideas wore a smile, all shades were diaphanous. The appointed hour was about to strike. In fact, at the end of a few minutes the belfry of St. Cloud let fall slowly ten strokes from its sonorous jaws. There was something melancholy in this brazen voice pouring out its lamentations in the middle of the night; but each of those strokes, which made up the expected hour, vibrated harmoniously to the heart of the young man.

His eyes were fixed upon the little pavilion situated at the angle of the wall, of which all the windows were closed with shutters, except one on the first story. Through this window shone a mild light which silvered the foliage of two or three linden trees which formed a group outside the park. There could be no doubt that behind this little window, which threw forth such friendly beams, the pretty Mme. Bonacieux expected him.

Wrapped in this sweet idea, d’Artagnan waited half an hour without the least impatience, his eyes fixed upon that charming little abode of which he could perceive a part of the ceiling with its gilded moldings, attesting the elegance of the rest of the apartment.

The belfry of St. Cloud sounded half past ten.

This time, without knowing why, d’Artagnan felt a cold shiver run through his veins. Perhaps the cold began to affect him, and he took a perfectly physical sensation for a moral impression.

Then the idea seized him that he had read incorrectly, and that the appointment was for eleven o’clock. He drew near to the window, and placing himself so that a ray of light should fall upon the letter as he held it, he drew it from his pocket and read it again; but he had not been mistaken, the appointment was for ten o’clock. He went and resumed his post, beginning to be rather uneasy at this silence and this solitude.

Eleven o’clock sounded.

D’Artagnan began now really to fear that something had happened to Mme. Bonacieux. He clapped his hands three times--the ordinary signal of lovers; but nobody replied to him, not even an echo.

He then thought, with a touch of vexation, that perhaps the young woman had fallen asleep while waiting for him. He approached the wall, and tried to climb it; but the wall had been recently pointed, and d’Artagnan could get no hold.

At that moment he thought of the trees, upon whose leaves the light still shone; and as one of them drooped over the road, he thought that from its branches he might get a glimpse of the interior of the pavilion.

The tree was easy to climb. Besides, d’Artagnan was but twenty years old, and consequently had not yet forgotten his schoolboy habits. In an instant he was among the branches, and his keen eyes plunged through the transparent panes into the interior of the pavilion.

It was a strange thing, and one which made d’Artagnan tremble from the sole of his foot to the roots of his hair, to find that this soft light, this calm lamp, enlightened a scene of fearful disorder. One of the windows was broken, the door of the chamber had been beaten in and hung, split in two, on its hinges. A table, which had been covered with an elegant supper, was overturned. The decanters broken in pieces, and the fruits crushed, strewed the floor. Everything in the apartment gave evidence of a violent and desperate struggle. D'Artagnan even fancied he could recognize amid this strange disorder, fragments of garments, and some bloody spots staining the cloth and the curtains. He hastened to descend into the street, with a frightful beating at his heart; he wished to see if he could find other traces of violence.

The little soft light shone on in the calmness of the night. d'Artagnan then perceived a thing that he had not before remarked--for nothing had led him to the examination--that the ground, trampled here and hoofmarked there, presented confused traces of men and horses. Besides, the wheels of a carriage, which appeared to have come from Paris, had made a deep impression in the soft earth, which did not extend beyond the pavilion, but turned again toward Paris.

At length d'Artagnan, in pursuing his researches, found near the wall a woman's torn glove. This glove, wherever it had not touched the muddy ground, was of irreproachable odor. It was one of those perfumed gloves that lovers like to snatch from a pretty hand.

As d'Artagnan pursued his investigations, a more abundant and more icy sweat rolled in large drops from his forehead; his heart was oppressed by a horrible anguish; his respiration was broken and short. And yet he said, to reassure himself, that this pavilion perhaps had nothing in common with Mme. Bonacieux; that the young woman had made an appointment with him before the pavilion, and not in the pavilion; that she might have been detained in Paris by her duties, or perhaps by the jealousy of her husband.

But all these reasons were combated, destroyed, overthrown, by that feeling of intimate pain which, on certain occasions, takes possession of our being, and cries to us so as to be understood unmistakably that some great misfortune is hanging over us.

Then d'Artagnan became almost wild. He ran along the high road, took the path he had before taken, and reaching the ferry, interrogated the boatman.

About seven o'clock in the evening, the boatman had taken over a young woman, wrapped in a black mantle, who appeared to be very anxious not to be recognized; but entirely on account of her precautions, the boatman had paid more attention to her and discovered that she was young and pretty.

There were then, as now, a crowd of young and pretty women who came to St. Cloud, and who had reasons for not being seen, and yet d’Artagnan did not for an instant doubt that it was Mme. Bonacieux whom the boatman had noticed.

D’Artagnan took advantage of the lamp which burned in the cabin of the ferryman to read the billet of Mme. Bonacieux once again, and satisfy himself that he had not been mistaken, that the appointment was at St. Cloud and not elsewhere, before the D’Estrees’s pavilion and not in another street. Everything conspired to prove to d’Artagnan that his presentiments had not deceived him, and that a great misfortune had happened.

He again ran back to the chateau. It appeared to him that something might have happened at the pavilion in his absence, and that fresh information awaited him. The lane was still deserted, and the same calm soft light shone through the window.

D’Artagnan then thought of that cottage, silent and obscure, which had no doubt seen all, and could tell its tale. The gate of the enclosure was shut; but he leaped over the hedge, and in spite of the barking of a chained-up dog, went up to the cabin.

No one answered to his first knocking. A silence of death reigned in the cabin as in the pavilion; but as the cabin was his last resource, he knocked again.

It soon appeared to him that he heard a slight noise within--a timid noise which seemed to tremble lest it should be heard.

Then d’Artagnan ceased knocking, and prayed with an accent so full of anxiety and promises, terror and cajolery, that his voice was of a nature to reassure the most fearful. At length an old, worm-eaten shutter was opened, or rather pushed ajar, but closed again as soon as the light from a miserable lamp which burned in the corner had shone upon the baldric, sword belt, and pistol pommels of d’Artagnan. Nevertheless, rapid as the movement had been, d’Artagnan had had time to get a glimpse of the head of an old man.

“In the name of heaven!” cried he, “listen to me; I have been waiting for someone who has not come. I am dying with anxiety. Has anything particular happened in the neighborhood? Speak!”

The window was again opened slowly, and the same face appeared, only it was now still more pale than before.

D'Artagnan related his story simply, with the omission of names. He told how he had a rendezvous with a young woman before that pavilion, and how, not seeing her come, he had climbed the linden tree, and by the light of the lamp had seen the disorder of the chamber.

The old man listened attentively, making a sign only that it was all so; and then, when d'Artagnan had ended, he shook his head with an air that announced nothing good.

"What do you mean?" cried d'Artagnan. "In the name of heaven, explain yourself!"

"Oh! Monsieur," said the old man, "ask me nothing; for if I dared tell you what I have seen, certainly no good would befall me."

"You have, then, seen something?" replied d'Artagnan. "In that case, in the name of heaven," continued he, throwing him a pistole, "tell me what you have seen, and I will pledge you the word of a gentleman that not one of your words shall escape from my heart."

The old man read so much truth and so much grief in the face of the young man that he made him a sign to listen, and repeated in a low voice: "It was scarcely nine o'clock when I heard a noise in the street, and was wondering what it could be, when on coming to my door, I found that somebody was endeavoring to open it. As I am very poor and am not afraid of being robbed, I went and opened the gate and saw three men at a few paces from it. In the shadow was a carriage with two horses, and some saddlehorses. These horses evidently belonged to the three men, who were dressed as cavaliers. 'Ah, my worthy gentlemen,' cried I, 'what do you want?' 'You must have a ladder?' said he who appeared to be the leader of the party. 'Yes, monsieur, the one with which I gather my fruit.' 'Lend it to us, and go into your house again; there is a crown for the annoyance we have caused you. Only remember this--if you speak a word of what you may see or what you may hear (for you will look and you will listen, I am quite sure, however we may threaten you), you are lost.' At these words he threw me a crown, which I picked up, and he took the ladder. After shutting the gate behind them, I pretended to return to the house, but I immediately went out a back door, and stealing along in the shade of the hedge, I gained yonder clump of elder, from which I could hear and see everything. The three men brought the carriage up quietly, and took out of it a little man, stout, short, elderly, and commonly dressed in clothes of a dark color, who ascended the ladder very carefully, looked suspiciously in at the window of the pavilion, came down as quietly as he had gone up, and whispered, ‘It is she!’ Immediately, he who had spoken to me approached the door of the pavilion, opened it with a key he had in his hand, closed the door and disappeared, while at the same time the other two men ascended the ladder. The little old man remained at the coach door; the coachman took care of his horses, the lackey held the saddlehorses. All at once great cries resounded in the pavilion, and a woman came to the window, and opened it, as if to throw herself out of it; but as soon as she perceived the other two men, she fell back and they went into the chamber. Then I saw no more; but I heard the noise of breaking furniture. The woman screamed, and cried for help; but her cries were soon stifled. Two of the men appeared, bearing the woman in their arms, and carried her to the carriage, into which the little old man got after her. The leader closed the window, came out an instant after by the door, and satisfied himself that the woman was in the carriage. His two companions were already on horseback. He sprang into his saddle; the lackey took his place by the coachman; the carriage went off at a quick pace, escorted by the three horsemen, and all was over. From that moment I have neither seen nor heard anything.”

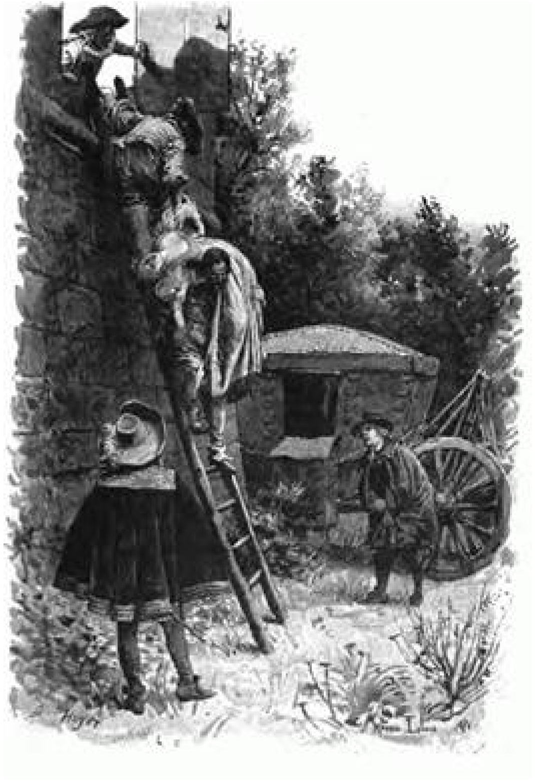

D’Artagnan, entirely overcome by this terrible story, remained motionless and mute, while all the demons of anger and jealousy were howling in his heart.

“But, my good gentleman,” resumed the old man, upon whom this mute despair certainly produced a greater effect than cries and tears would have done, “do not take on so; they did not kill her, and that’s a comfort.”

“Can you guess,” said d’Artagnan, “who was the man who headed this infernal expedition?”

“I don’t know him.”

“But as you spoke to him you must have seen him.”

“Oh, it’s a description you want?”

“Exactly so.”

“A tall, dark man, with black mustaches, dark eyes, and the air of a gentleman.”

“That’s the man!” cried d’Artagnan, “again he, forever he! He is my demon, apparently. And the other?”

“Which?”

“The short one.”

“Oh, he was not a gentleman, I’ll answer for it; besides, he did not wear a sword, and the others treated him with small consideration.”

“Some lackey,” murmured d’Artagnan. “Poor woman, poor woman, what have they done with you?”

“You have promised to be secret, my good monsieur?” said the old man.

“And I renew my promise. Be easy, I am a gentleman. A gentleman has but his word, and I have given you mine.”

With a heavy heart, d’Artagnan again bent his way toward the ferry. Sometimes he hoped it could not be Mme. Bonacieux, and that he should find her next day at the Louvre; sometimes he feared she had had an intrigue with another, who, in a jealous fit, had surprised her and carried her off. His mind was torn by doubt, grief, and despair.

“Oh, if I had my three friends here,” cried he, “I should have, at least, some hopes of finding her; but who knows what has become of them?”

It was past midnight; the next thing was to find Planchet. d’Artagnan went successively into all the cabarets in which there was a light, but could not find Planchet in any of them.

At the sixth he began to reflect that the search was rather dubious. D’Artagnan had appointed six o’clock in the morning for his lackey, and wherever he might be, he was right.

Besides, it came into the young man’s mind that by remaining in the environs of the spot on which this sad event had passed, he would, perhaps, have some light thrown upon the mysterious affair. At the sixth cabaret, then, as we said, d’Artagnan stopped, asked for a bottle of wine of the best quality, and placing himself in the darkest corner of the room, determined thus to wait till daylight; but this time again his hopes were disappointed, and although he listened with all his ears, he heard nothing, amid the oaths, coarse jokes, and abuse which passed between the laborers, servants, and carters who comprised the honorable society of which he formed a part, which could put him upon the least track of her who had been stolen from him. He was compelled, then, after having swallowed the contents of his bottle, to pass the time as well as to evade suspicion, to fall into the easiest position in his corner and to sleep, whether well or ill. D’Artagnan, be it remembered, was only twenty years old, and at that age sleep has its imprescriptible rights which it imperiously insists upon, even with the saddest hearts.

Toward six o’clock d’Artagnan awoke with that uncomfortable feeling which generally accompanies the break of day after a bad night. He was not long in making his toilet. He examined himself to see if advantage had been taken of his sleep, and having found his diamond ring on his finger, his purse in his pocket, and his pistols in his belt, he rose, paid for his bottle, and went out to try if he could have any better luck in his search after his lackey than he had had the night before. The first thing he perceived through the damp gray mist was honest Planchet, who, with the two horses in hand, awaited him at the door of a little blind cabaret, before which d’Artagnan had passed without even a suspicion of its existence.

CHAPTER 25

PORTHOS

Instead of returning directly home, d’Artagnan alighted at the door of M. de Treville, and ran quickly up the stairs. This time he had decided to relate all that had passed. M. de Treville would doubtless give him good advice as to the whole affair. Besides, as M. de Treville saw the queen almost daily, he might be able to draw from her Majesty some intelligence of the poor young woman, whom they were doubtless making pay very dearly for her devotedness to her mistress.

M de Treville listened to the young man’s account with a seriousness which proved that he saw something else in this adventure besides a love affair. When d’Artagnan had finished, he said, “Hum! All this savors of his Eminence, a league off.”

“But what is to be done?” said d’Artagnan.

“Nothing, absolutely nothing, at present, but quitting Paris, as I told you, as soon as possible. I will see the queen; I will relate to her the details of the disappearance of this poor woman, of which she is no doubt ignorant. These details will guide her on her part, and on your return, I shall perhaps have some good news to tell you. Rely on me.”

D’Artagnan knew that, although a Gascon, M. de Treville was not in the habit of making promises, and that when by chance he did promise, he more than kept his word. He bowed to him, then, full of gratitude for the past and for the future; and the worthy captain, who on his side felt a lively interest in this young man, so brave and so resolute, pressed his hand kindly, wishing him a pleasant journey.

Determined to put the advice of M. de Treville in practice instantly, d’Artagnan directed his course toward the Rue des Fossoyeurs, in order to superintend the packing of his valise. On approaching the house, he perceived M. Bonacieux in morning costume, standing at his threshold. All that the prudent Planchet had said to him the preceding evening about the sinister character of the old man recurred to the mind of d’Artagnan, who looked at him with more attention than he had done before. In fact, in addition to that yellow, sickly paleness which indicates the insinuation of the bile in the blood, and which might, besides, be accidental, d’Artagnan remarked something perfidiously significant in the play of the wrinkled features of his countenance. A rogue does not laugh in the same way that an honest man does; a hypocrite does not shed the tears of a man of good faith. All falsehood is a mask; and however well made the mask may be, with a little attention we may always succeed in distinguishing it from the true face.

It appeared, then, to d’Artagnan that M. Bonacieux wore a mask, and likewise that that mask was most disagreeable to look upon. In consequence of this feeling of repugnance, he was about to pass without speaking to him, but, as he had done the day before, M. Bonacieux accosted him.

“Well, young man,” said he, “we appear to pass rather gay nights! Seven o’clock in the morning! PESTE! You seem to reverse ordinary customs, and come home at the hour when other people are going out.”

“No one can reproach you for anything of the kind, Monsieur Bonacieux,” said the young man; “you are a model for regular people. It is true that when a man possesses a young and pretty wife, he has no need to seek happiness elsewhere. Happiness comes to meet him, does it not, Monsieur Bonacieux?”

Bonacieux became as pale as death, and grinned a ghastly smile.

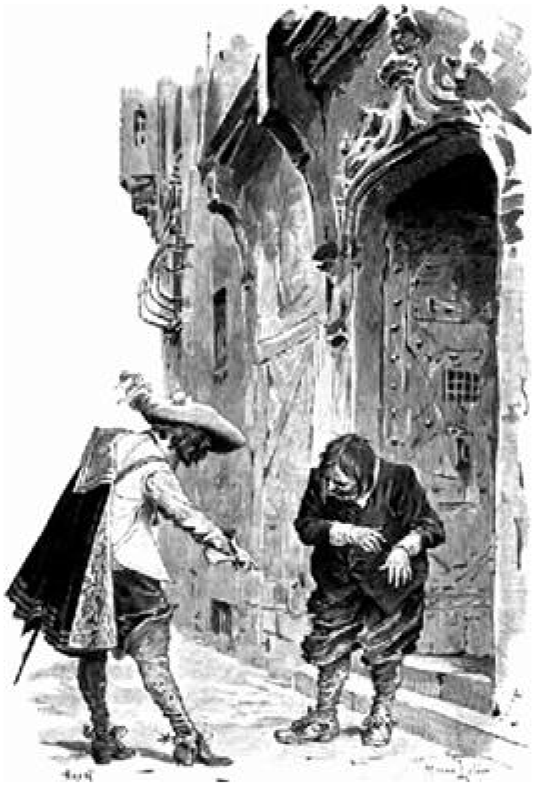

“Ah, ah!” said Bonacieux, “you are a jocular companion! But where the devil were you gladding last night, my young master? It does not appear to be very clean in the crossroads.”

D’Artagnan glanced down at his boots, all covered with mud; but that same glance fell upon the shoes and stockings of the mercer, and it might have been said they had been dipped in the same mud heap. Both were stained with splashes of mud of the same appearance.

Then a sudden idea crossed the mind of d’Artagnan. That little stout man, short and elderly, that sort of lackey, dressed in dark clothes, treated without ceremony by the men wearing swords who composed the escort, was Bonacieux himself. The husband had presided at the abduction of his wife.

A terrible inclination seized d’Artagnan to grasp the mercer by the throat and strangle him; but, as we have said, he was a very prudent youth, and he restrained himself. However, the revolution which appeared upon his countenance was so visible that Bonacieux was terrified at it, and he endeavored to draw back a step or two; but as he was standing before the half of the door which was shut, the obstacle compelled him to keep his place.

“Ah, but you are joking, my worthy man!” said d’Artagnan. “It appears to me that if my boots need a sponge, your stockings and shoes stand in equal need of a brush. May you not have been philandering a little also, Monsieur Bonacieux? Oh, the devil! That’s unpardonable in a man of your age, and who besides, has such a pretty wife as yours.”

“Oh, Lord! no,” said Bonacieux, “but yesterday I went to St. Mande to make some inquiries after a servant, as I cannot possibly do without one; and the roads were so bad that I brought back all this mud, which I have not yet had time to remove.”

The place named by Bonacieux as that which had been the object of his journey was a fresh proof in support of the suspicions d’Artagnan had conceived. Bonacieux had named Mande because Mande was in an exactly opposite direction from St. Cloud. This probability afforded him his first consolation. If Bonacieux knew where his wife was, one might, by extreme means, force the mercer to open his teeth and let his secret escape. The question, then, was how to change this probability into a certainty.

“Pardon, my dear Monsieur Bonacieux, if I don’t stand upon ceremony,” said d’Artagnan, “but nothing makes one so thirsty as want of sleep. I am parched with thirst. Allow me to take a glass of water in your apartment; you know that is never refused among neighbors.”

Without waiting for the permission of his host, d’Artagnan went quickly into the house, and cast a rapid glance at the bed. It had not been used. Bonacieux had not been abed. He had only been back an hour or two; he had accompanied his wife to the place of her confinement, or else at least to the first relay.

“Thanks, Monsieur Bonacieux,” said d’Artagnan, emptying his glass, “that is all I wanted of you. I will now go up into my apartment. I will make Planchet brush my boots; and when he has done, I will, if you like, send him to you to brush your shoes.”

He left the mercer quite astonished at his singular farewell, and asking himself if he had not been a little inconsiderate.

At the top of the stairs he found Planchet in a great fright.

“Ah, monsieur!” cried Planchet, as soon as he perceived his master, “here is more trouble. I thought you would never come in.”

“What’s the matter now, Planchet?” demanded d’Artagnan.

“Oh! I give you a hundred, I give you a thousand times to guess, monsieur, the visit I received in your absence.”

“When?”

“About half an hour ago, while you were at Monsieur de Treville’s.”

“Who has been here? Come, speak.”

“Monsieur de Cavois.”

“Monsieur de Cavois?”

“In person.”

“The captain of the cardinal’s Guards?”

“Himself.”

“Did he come to arrest me?”

“I have no doubt that he did, monsieur, for all his wheedling manner.”

“Was he so sweet, then?”

“Indeed, he was all honey, monsieur.”

“Indeed!”

“He came, he said, on the part of his Eminence, who wished you well, and to beg you to follow him to the Palais-Royal.” [*]

**It was called the Palais-Cardinal before Richelieu gave it to the King.*

“What did you answer him?”

“That the thing was impossible, seeing that you were not at home, as he could see.”

“Well, what did he say then?”

“That you must not fail to call upon him in the course of the day; and then he added in a low voice, ‘Tell your master that his Eminence is very well disposed toward him, and that his fortune perhaps depends upon this interview.’“

“The snare is rather MALADROIT for the cardinal,” replied the young man, smiling.

“Oh, I saw the snare, and I answered you would be quite in despair on your return.

“‘Where has he gone?’ asked Monsieur de Cavois.

“‘To Troyes, in Champagne,’ I answered.

“‘And when did he set out?’

“‘Yesterday evening.’“

“Planchet, my friend,” interrupted d’Artagnan, “you are really a precious fellow.”

“You will understand, monsieur, I thought there would be still time, if you wish, to see Monsieur de Cavois to contradict me by saying you were not yet gone. The falsehood would then lie at my door, and as I am not a gentleman, I may be allowed to lie.”

“Be of good heart, Planchet, you shall preserve your reputation as a veracious man. In a quarter of an hour we set off.”

“That’s the advice I was about to give Monsieur; and where are we going, may I ask, without being too curious?”

“PARDIEU! In the opposite direction to that which you said I was gone. Besides, are you not as anxious to learn news of Grimaud, Mousqueton, and Bazin as I am to know what has become of Athos, Porthos, and Aramis?”

“Yes, monsieur,” said Planchet, “and I will go as soon as you please. Indeed, I think provincial air will suit us much better just now than the air of Paris. So then--”

“So then, pack up our luggage, Planchet, and let us be off. On my part, I will go out with my hands in my pockets, that nothing may be suspected. You may join me at the Hotel des Gardes. By the way, Planchet, I think you are right with respect to our host, and that he is decidedly a frightfully low wretch.”

“Ah, monsieur, you may take my word when I tell you anything. I am a physiognomist, I assure you.”

D’Artagnan went out first, as had been agreed upon. Then, in order that he might have nothing to reproach himself with, he directed his steps, for the last time, toward the residences of his three friends. No news had been received of them; only a letter, all perfumed and of an elegant writing in small characters, had come for Aramis. D’Artagnan took charge of it. Ten minutes afterward Planchet joined him at the stables of the Hotel des Gardes. D’Artagnan, in order that there might be no time lost, had saddled his horse himself.

“That’s well,” said he to Planchet, when the latter added the portmanteau to the equipment. “Now saddle the other three horses.”

“Do you think, then, monsieur, that we shall travel faster with two horses apiece?” said Planchet, with his shrewd air.

“No, Monsieur Jester,” replied d’Artagnan; “but with our four horses we may bring back our three friends, if we should have the good fortune to find them living.”

“Which is a great chance,” replied Planchet, “but we must not despair of the mercy of God.”

“Amen!” said d’Artagnan, getting into his saddle.

As they went from the Hotel des Gardes, they separated, leaving the street at opposite ends, one having to quit Paris by the Barriere de la Villette and the other by the Barriere Montmartre, to meet again beyond St. Denis--a strategic maneuver which, having been executed with equal punctuality, was crowned with the most fortunate results. D’Artagnan and Planchet entered Pierrefitte together.

Planchet was more courageous, it must be admitted, by day than by night. His natural prudence, however, never forsook him for a single instant. He had forgotten not one of the incidents of the first journey, and he looked upon everybody he met on the road as an enemy. It followed that his hat was forever in his hand, which procured him some severe reprimands from d’Artagnan, who feared that his excess of politeness would lead people to think he was the lackey of a man of no consequence.

Nevertheless, whether the passengers were really touched by the urbanity of Planchet or whether this time nobody was posted on the young man’s road, our two travelers arrived at Chantilly without any accident, and alighted at the tavern of Great St. Martin, the same at which they had stopped on their first journey.

The host, on seeing a young man followed by a lackey with two extra horses, advanced respectfully to the door. Now, as they had already traveled eleven leagues, d’Artagnan thought it time to stop, whether Porthos were or were not in the inn. Perhaps it would not be prudent to ask at once what had become of the Musketeer. The result of these reflections was that d’Artagnan, without asking information of any kind, alighted, commended the horses to the care of his lackey, entered a small room destined to receive those who wished to be alone, and desired the host to bring him a bottle of his best wine and as good a breakfast as possible--a desire which further corroborated the high opinion the innkeeper had formed of the traveler at first sight.

D’Artagnan was therefore served with miraculous celerity. The regiment of the Guards was recruited among the first gentlemen of the kingdom; and d’Artagnan, followed by a lackey, and traveling with four magnificent horses, despite the simplicity of his uniform, could not fail to make a sensation. The host desired himself to serve him; which d’Artagnan perceiving, ordered two glasses to be brought, and commenced the following conversation.

“My faith, my good host,” said d’Artagnan, filling the two glasses, “I asked for a bottle of your best wine, and if you have deceived me, you will be punished in what you have sinned; for seeing that I hate drinking my myself, you shall drink with me. Take your glass, then, and let us drink. But what shall we drink to, so as to avoid wounding any susceptibility? Let us drink to the prosperity of your establishment.”

“Your Lordship does me much honor,” said the host, “and I thank you sincerely for your kind wish.”

“But don’t mistake,” said d’Artagnan, “there is more selfishness in my toast than perhaps you may think--for it is only in prosperous establishments that one is well received. In hotels that do not flourish, everything is in confusion, and the traveler is a victim to the embarrassments of his host. Now, I travel a great deal, particularly on this road, and I wish to see all innkeepers making a fortune.”

“It seems to me,” said the host, “that this is not the first time I have had the honor of seeing Monsieur.”

“Bah, I have passed perhaps ten times through Chantilly, and out of the ten times I have stopped three or four times at your house at least. Why I was here only ten or twelve days ago. I was conducting some friends, Musketeers, one of whom, by the by, had a dispute with a stranger--a man who sought a quarrel with him, for I don’t know what.”

“Exactly so,” said the host; “I remember it perfectly. It is not Monsieur Porthos that your Lordship means?”

“Yes, that is my companion’s name. My God, my dear host, tell me if anything has happened to him?”

“Your Lordship must have observed that he could not continue his journey.”

“Why, to be sure, he promised to rejoin us, and we have seen nothing of him.”

“He has done us the honor to remain here.”

“What, he had done you the honor to remain here?”

“Yes, monsieur, in this house; and we are even a little uneasy--”

“On what account?”

“Of certain expenses he has contracted.”

“Well, but whatever expenses he may have incurred, I am sure he is in a condition to pay them.”

“Ah, monsieur, you infuse genuine balm into my blood. We have made considerable advances; and this very morning the surgeon declared that if Monsieur Porthos did not pay him, he should look to me, as it was I who had sent for him.”

“Porthos is wounded, then?”

“I cannot tell you, monsieur.”

“What! You cannot tell me? Surely you ought to be able to tell me better than any other person.”

“Yes; but in our situation we must not say all we know--particularly as we have been warned that our ears should answer for our tongues.”

“Well, can I see Porthos?”

“Certainly, monsieur. Take the stairs on your right; go up the first flight and knock at Number One. Only warn him that it is you.”

“Why should I do that?”

“Because, monsieur, some mischief might happen to you.”

“Of what kind, in the name of wonder?”

“Monsieur Porthos may imagine you belong to the house, and in a fit of passion might run his sword through you or blow out your brains.”

“What have you done to him, then?”

“We have asked him for money.”

“The devil! Ah, I can understand that. It is a demand that Porthos takes very ill when he is not in funds; but I know he must be so at present.”

[redacted]

“We thought so, too, monsieur. As our house is carried on very regularly, and we make out our bills every week, at the end of eight days we presented our account; but it appeared we had chosen an unlucky moment, for at the first word on the subject, he sent us to all the devils. It is true he had been playing the day before.”

“Playing the day before! And with whom?”

“Lord, who can say, monsieur? With some gentleman who was traveling this way, to whom he proposed a game of LANSQUENET.”

“That’s it, then, and the foolish fellow lost all he had?”

“Even to his horse, monsieur; for when the gentleman was about to set out, we perceived that his lackey was saddling Monsieur Porthos’s horse, as well as his master’s. When we observed this to him, he told us all to trouble ourselves about our own business, as this horse belonged to him. We also informed Monsieur Porthos of what was going on; but he told us we were scoundrels to doubt a gentleman’s word, and that as he had said the horse was his, it must be so.”

“That’s Porthos all over,” murmured d’Artagnan.

“Then,” continued the host, “I replied that as from the moment we seemed not likely to come to a good understanding with respect to payment, I hoped that he would have at least the kindness to grant the favor of his custom to my brother host of the Golden Eagle; but Monsieur Porthos replied that, my house being the best, he should remain where he was. This reply was too flattering to allow me to insist on his departure. I confined myself then to begging him to give up his chamber, which is the handsomest in the hotel, and to be satisfied with a pretty little room on the third floor; but to this Monsieur Porthos replied that as he every moment expected his mistress, who was one of the greatest ladies in the court, I might easily comprehend that the chamber he did me the honor to occupy in my house was itself very mean for the visit of such a personage. Nevertheless, while acknowledging the truth of what he said, I thought proper to insist; but without even giving himself the trouble to enter into any discussion with me, he took one of his pistols, laid it on his table, day and night, and said that at the first word that should be spoken to him about removing, either within the house or out of it, he would blow out the brains of the person who should be so imprudent as to meddle with a matter which only concerned himself. Since that time, monsieur, nobody entered his chamber but his servant.”

“What! Mousqueton is here, then?”

“Oh, yes, monsieur. Five days after your departure, he came back, and in a very bad condition, too. It appears that he had met with disagreeableness, likewise, on his journey. Unfortunately, he is more nimble than his master; so that for the sake of his master, he puts us all under his feet, and as he thinks we might refuse what he asked for, he takes all he wants without asking at all.”

“The fact is,” said d’Artagnan, “I have always observed a great degree of intelligence and devotedness in Mousqueton.”

“That is possible, monsieur; but suppose I should happen to be brought in contact, even four times a year, with such intelligence and devotedness--why, I should be a ruined man!”

“No, for Porthos will pay you.”

“Hum!” said the host, in a doubtful tone.

“The favorite of a great lady will not be allowed to be inconvenienced for such a paltry sum as he owes you.”

“If I durst say what I believe on that head--”

“What you believe?”

“I ought rather to say, what I know.”

“What you know?”

“And even what I am sure of.”

“And of what are you so sure?”

“I would say that I know this great lady.”

“You?”

“Yes; I.”

“And how do you know her?”

“Oh, monsieur, if I could believe I might trust in your discretion.”

“Speak! By the word of a gentleman, you shall have no cause to repent of your confidence.”

“Well, monsieur, you understand that uneasiness makes us do many things.”

“What have you done?”

“Oh, nothing which was not right in the character of a creditor.”

“Well?”

“Monsieur Porthos gave us a note for his duchess, ordering us to put it in the post. This was before his servant came. As he could not leave his chamber, it was necessary to charge us with this commission.”

“And then?”

"Instead of putting the letter in the post, which is never safe, I took advantage of the journey of one of my lads to Paris, and ordered him to convey the letter to this duchess himself. This was fulfilling the intentions of Monsieur Porthos, who had desired us to be so careful of this letter, was it not?"

"Nearly so."

"Well, monsieur, do you know who this great lady is?"

"No; I have heard Porthos speak of her, that's all."

"Do you know who this pretended duchess is?

"I repeat to you, I don't know her."

"Why, she is the old wife of a procurator* of the Chatelet, monsieur, named Madame Coquenard, who, although she is at least fifty, still gives herself jealous airs. It struck me as very odd that a princess should live in the Rue aux Ours."

** Attorney*

"But how do you know all this?"

"Because she flew into a great passion on receiving the letter, saying that Monsieur Porthos was a weathercock, and that she was sure it was for some woman he had received this wound."

"Has he been wounded, then?"

"Oh, good Lord! What have I said?"

"You said that Porthos had received a sword cut."

"Yes, but he has forbidden me so strictly to say so."

"And why so."

"Zounds, monsieur! Because he had boasted that he would perforate the stranger with whom you left him in dispute; whereas the stranger, on the contrary, in spite of all his rodomontades quickly threw him on his back. As Monsieur Porthos is a very boastful man, he insists that nobody shall know he has received this wound except the duchess, whom he endeavored to interest by an account of his adventure."

"It is a wound that confines him to his bed?"

"Ah, and a master stroke, too, I assure you. Your friend's soul must stick tight to his body."

"Were you there, then?"

"Monsieur, I followed them from curiosity, so that I saw the combat without the combatants seeing me."

"And what took place?"

“Oh! The affair was not long, I assure you. They placed themselves on guard; the stranger made a feint and a lunge, and that so rapidly that when Monsieur Porthos came to the PARADE, he had already three inches of steel in his breast. He immediately fell backward. The stranger placed the point of his sword at his throat; and Monsieur Porthos, finding himself at the mercy of his adversary, acknowledged himself conquered. Upon which the stranger asked his name, and learning that it was Porthos, and not d’Artagnan, he assisted him to rise, brought him back to the hotel, mounted his horse, and disappeared.”

“So it was with Monsieur d’Artagnan this stranger meant to quarrel?”

“It appears so.”

“And do you know what has become of him?”

“No, I never saw him until that moment, and have not seen him since.”

“Very well; I know all that I wish to know. Porthos’s chamber is, you say, on the first story, Number One?”

“Yes, monsieur, the handsomest in the inn--a chamber that I could have let ten times over.”

“Bah! Be satisfied,” said d’Artagnan, laughing, “Porthos will pay you with the money of the Duchess Coquenard.”

“Oh, monsieur, procurator’s wife or duchess, if she will but loosen her pursestrings, it will be all the same; but she positively answered that she was tired of the exigencies and infidelities of Monsieur Porthos, and that she would not send him a denier.”

“And did you convey this answer to your guest?”

“We took good care not to do that; he would have found in what fashion we had executed his commission.”

“So that he still expects his money?”

“Oh, Lord, yes, monsieur! Yesterday he wrote again; but it was his servant who this time put the letter in the post.”

“Do you say the procurator’s wife is old and ugly?”

“Fifty at least, monsieur, and not at all handsome, according to Pathaud’s account.”

“In that case, you may be quite at ease; she will soon be softened. Besides, Porthos cannot owe you much.”

“How, not much! Twenty good pistoles, already, without reckoning the doctor. He denies himself nothing; it may easily be seen he has been accustomed to live well.”

“Never mind; if his mistress abandons him, he will find friends, I will answer for it. So, my dear host, be not uneasy, and continue to take all the care of him that his situation requires.”

“Monsieur has promised me not to open his mouth about the procurator’s wife, and not to say a word of the wound?”

“That’s agreed; you have my word.”

“Oh, he would kill me!”

“Don’t be afraid; he is not so much of a devil as he appears.”

Saying these words, d’Artagnan went upstairs, leaving his host a little better satisfied with respect to two things in which he appeared to be very much interested--his debt and his life.

At the top of the stairs, upon the most conspicuous door of the corridor, was traced in black ink a gigantic number “1.” d’Artagnan knocked, and upon the bidding to come in which came from inside, he entered the chamber.

Porthos was in bed, and was playing a game at LANSQUENET with Mousqueton, to keep his hand in; while a spit loaded with partridges was turning before the fire, and on each side of a large chimneypiece, over two chafing dishes, were boiling two stewpans, from which exhaled a double odor of rabbit and fish stews, rejoicing to the smell. In addition to this he perceived that the top of a wardrobe and the marble of a commode were covered with empty bottles.

At the sight of his friend, Porthos uttered a loud cry of joy; and Mousqueton, rising respectfully, yielded his place to him, and went to give an eye to the two stewpans, of which he appeared to have the particular inspection.

“Ah, PARDIEU! Is that you?” said Porthos to d’Artagnan. “You are right welcome. Excuse my not coming to meet you; but,” added he, looking at d’Artagnan with a certain degree of uneasiness, “you know what has happened to me?”

“No.”

“Has the host told you nothing, then?”

“I asked after you, and came up as soon as I could.”

Porthos seemed to breathe more freely.

“And what has happened to you, my dear Porthos?” continued d’Artagnan.

"Why, on making a thrust at my adversary, whom I had already hit three times, and whom I meant to finish with the fourth, I put my foot on a stone, slipped, and strained my knee."

"Truly?"

"Honor! Luckily for the rascal, for I should have left him dead on the spot, I assure you."

"And what has became of him?"

"Oh, I don't know; he had enough, and set off without waiting for the rest. But you, my dear d'Artagnan, what has happened to you?"

"So that this strain of the knee," continued d'Artagnan, "my dear Porthos, keeps you in bed?"

"My God, that's all. I shall be about again in a few days."

"Why did you not have yourself conveyed to Paris? You must be cruelly bored here."

"That was my intention; but, my dear friend, I have one thing to confess to you."

"What's that?"

"It is that as I was cruelly bored, as you say, and as I had the seventy-five pistoles in my pocket which you had distributed to me, in order to amuse myself I invited a gentleman who was traveling this way to walk up, and proposed a cast of dice. He accepted my challenge, and, my faith, my seventy-five pistoles passed from my pocket to his, without reckoning my horse, which he won into the bargain. But you, my dear d'Artagnan?"

"What can you expect, my dear Porthos; a man is not privileged in all ways," said d'Artagnan. "You know the proverb 'Unlucky at play, lucky in love.' You are too fortunate in your love for play not to take its revenge. What consequence can the reverses of fortune be to you? Have you not, happy rogue that you are--have you not your duchess, who cannot fail to come to your aid?"

"Well, you see, my dear d'Artagnan, with what ill luck I play," replied Porthos, with the most careless air in the world. "I wrote to her to send me fifty louis or so, of which I stood absolutely in need on account of my accident."

"Well?"

"Well, she must be at her country seat, for she has not answered me."

"Truly?"

"No; so I yesterday addressed another epistle to her, still more pressing than the first. But you are here, my dear fellow, let us speak of you. I confess I began to be very uneasy on your account."

"But your host behaves very well toward you, as it appears, my dear Porthos," said d'Artagnan, directing the sick man's attention to the full stewpans and the empty bottles.

"So, so," replied Porthos. "Only three or four days ago the impertinent jackanapes gave me his bill, and I was forced to turn both him and his bill out of the door; so that I am here something in the fashion of a conqueror, holding my position, as it were, my conquest. So you see, being in constant fear of being forced from that position, I am armed to the teeth."

"And yet," said d'Artagnan, laughing, "it appears to me that from time to time you must make SORTIES." And he again pointed to the bottles and the stewpans.

"Not I, unfortunately!" said Porthos. "This miserable strain confines me to my bed; but Mousqueton forages, and brings in provisions. Friend Mousqueton, you see that we have a reinforcement, and we must have an increase of supplies."

"Mousqueton," said d'Artagnan, "you must render me a service."

"What, monsieur?"

"You must give your recipe to Planchet. I may be besieged in my turn, and I shall not be sorry for him to be able to let me enjoy the same advantages with which you gratify your master."

"Lord, monsieur! There is nothing more easy," said Mousqueton, with a modest air. "One only needs to be sharp, that's all. I was brought up in the country, and my father in his leisure time was something of a poacher."

"And what did he do the rest of his time?"

"Monsieur, he carried on a trade which I have always thought satisfactory."

"Which?"

"As it was a time of war between the Catholics and the Huguenots, and as he saw the Catholics exterminate the Huguenots and the Huguenots exterminate the Catholics--all in the name of religion--he adopted a mixed belief which permitted him to be sometimes Catholic, sometimes a Huguenot. Now, he was accustomed to walk with his fowling piece on his shoulder, behind the hedges which border the roads, and when he saw a Catholic coming alone, the Protestant religion immediately prevailed in his mind. He lowered his gun in the direction of the traveler; then, when he was within ten paces of him, he commenced a conversation which almost always ended by the traveler’s abandoning his purse to save his life. It goes without saying that when he saw a Huguenot coming, he felt himself filled with such ardent Catholic zeal that he could not understand how, a quarter of an hour before, he had been able to have any doubts upon the superiority of our holy religion. For my part, monsieur, I am Catholic--my father, faithful to his principles, having made my elder brother a Huguenot.”

“And what was the end of this worthy man?” asked d’Artagnan.

“Oh, of the most unfortunate kind, monsieur. One day he was surprised in a lonely road between a Huguenot and a Catholic, with both of whom he had before had business, and who both knew him again; so they united against him and hanged him on a tree. Then they came and boasted of their fine exploit in the cabaret of the next village, where my brother and I were drinking.”

“And what did you do?” said d’Artagnan.

“We let them tell their story out,” replied Mousqueton. “Then, as in leaving the cabaret they took different directions, my brother went and hid himself on the road of the Catholic, and I on that of the Huguenot. Two hours after, all was over; we had done the business of both, admiring the foresight of our poor father, who had taken the precaution to bring each of us up in a different religion.”

“Well, I must allow, as you say, your father was a very intelligent fellow. And you say in his leisure moments the worthy man was a poacher?”

“Yes, monsieur, and it was he who taught me to lay a snare and ground a line. The consequence is that when I saw our laborers, which did not at all suit two such delicate stomachs as ours, I had recourse to a little of my old trade. While walking near the wood of Monsieur le Prince, I laid a few snare in the runs; and while reclining on the banks of his Highness’s pieces of water, I slipped a few lines into his fish ponds. So that now, thanks be to God, we do not want, as Monsieur can testify, for partridges, rabbits, carp or eels--all light, wholesome food, suitable for the sick.”

“But the wine,” said d’Artagnan, “who furnishes the wine? Your host?”

“That is to say, yes and no.”

“How yes and no?”

“He furnishes it, it is true, but he does not know that he has that honor.”

“Explain yourself, Mousqueton; your conversation is full of instructive things.”

“That is it, monsieur. It has so chanced that I met with a Spaniard in my peregrinations who had seen many countries, and among them the New World.”

“What connection can the New World have with the bottles which are on the commode and the wardrobe?”

“Patience, monsieur, everything will come in its turn.”

“This Spaniard had in his service a lackey who had accompanied him in his voyage to Mexico. This lackey was my compatriot; and we became the more intimate from there being many resemblances of character between us. We loved sporting of all kinds better than anything; so that he related to me how in the plains of the Pampas the natives hunt the tiger and the wild bull with simple running nooses which they throw to a distance of twenty or thirty paces the end of a cord with such nicety; but in face of the proof I was obliged to acknowledge the truth of the recital. My friend placed a bottle at the distance of thirty paces, and at each cast he caught the neck of the bottle in his running noose. I practiced this exercise, and as nature has endowed me with some faculties, at this day I can throw the lasso with any man in the world. Well, do you understand, monsieur? Our host has a well-furnished cellar the key of which never leaves him; only this cellar has a ventilating hole. Now through this ventilating hole I throw my lasso, and as I now know in which part of the cellar is the best wine, that’s my point for sport. You see, monsieur, what the New World has to do with the bottles which are on the commode and the wardrobe. Now, will you taste our wine, and without prejudice say what you think of it?”

“Thank you, my friend, thank you; unfortunately, I have just breakfasted.”

“Well,” said Porthos, “arrange the table, Mousqueton, and while we breakfast, d’Artagnan will relate to us what has happened to him during the ten days since he left us.”

“Willingly,” said d’Artagnan.

While Porthos and Mousqueton were breakfasting, with the appetites of convalescents and with that brotherly cordiality which unites men in misfortune, d’Artagnan related how Aramis, being wounded, was obliged to stop at Crevecoeur, how he had left Athos fighting at Amiens with four men who accused him of being a coiner, and how he, d’Artagnan, had been forced to run the Comtes de Wardes through the body in order to reach England.

But there the confidence of d'Artagnan stopped. He only added that on his return from Great Britain he had brought back four magnificent horses--one for himself, and one for each of his companions; then he informed Porthos that the one intended for him was already installed in the stable of the tavern.

At this moment Planchet entered, to inform his master that the horses were sufficiently refreshed and that it would be possible to sleep at Clermont.

As d'Artagnan was tolerably reassured with regard to Porthos, and as he was anxious to obtain news of his two other friends, he held out his hand to the wounded man, and told him he was about to resume his route in order to continue his researches. For the rest, as he reckoned upon returning by the same route in seven or eight days, if Porthos were still at the Great St. Martin, he would call for him on his way.

Porthos replied that in all probability his sprain would not permit him to depart yet awhile. Besides, it was necessary he should stay at Chantilly to wait for the answer from his duchess.

D'Artagnan wished that answer might be prompt and favorable; and having again recommended Porthos to the care of Mousqueton, and paid his bill to the host, he resumed his route with Planchet, already relieved of one of his led horses.

CHAPTER 26

ARAMIS AND HIS THESIS

D'Artagnan had said nothing to Porthos of his wound or of his procurator's wife. Our Bearnais was a prudent lad, however young he might be. Consequently he had appeared to believe all that the vainglorious Musketeer had told him, convinced that no friendship will hold out against a surprised secret. Besides, we feel always a sort of mental superiority over those whose lives we know better than they suppose. In his projects of intrigue for the future, and determined as he was to make his three friends the instruments of his fortune, d'Artagnan was not sorry at getting into his grasp beforehand the invisible strings by which he reckoned upon moving them.

And yet, as he journeyed along, a profound sadness weighed upon his heart. He thought of that young and pretty Mme. Bonacieux who was to have paid him the price of his devotedness; but let us hasten to say that this sadness possessed the young man less from the regret of the happiness he had missed, than from the fear he entertained that some serious misfortune had befallen the poor woman. For himself, he had no doubt she was a victim of the cardinal's vengeance; and, and as was well known, the vengeance of his Eminence was terrible. How he had found grace in the eyes of the minister, he did not know; but without doubt M. de Cavois would have revealed this to him if the captain of the Guards had found him at home.

Nothing makes time pass more quickly or more shortens a journey than a thought which absorbs in itself all the faculties of the organization of him who thinks. External existence then resembles a sleep of which this thought is the dream. By its influence, time has no longer measure, space has no longer distance. We depart from one place, and arrive at another, that is all. Of the interval passed, nothing remains in the memory but a vague mist in which a thousand confused images of trees, mountains, and landscapes are lost. It was as a prey to this hallucination that d'Artagnan traveled, at whatever pace his horse pleased, the six or eight leagues that separated

Chantilly from Crevecoeur, without his being able to remember on his arrival in the village any of the things he had passed or met with on the road.

There only his memory returned to him. He shook his head, perceived the cabaret at which he had left Aramis, and putting his horse to the trot, he shortly pulled up at the door.

This time it was not a host but a hostess who received him. d’Artagnan was a physiognomist. His eye took in at a glance the plump, cheerful countenance of the mistress of the place, and he at once perceived there was no occasion for dissembling with her, or of fearing anything from one blessed with such a joyous physiognomy.

“My good dame,” asked d’Artagnan, “can you tell me what has become of one of my friends, whom we were obliged to leave here about a dozen days ago?”

“A handsome young man, three- or four-and-twenty years old, mild, amiable, and well made?”

“That is he--wounded in the shoulder.”

“Just so. Well, monsieur, he is still here.”

“Ah, PARDIEU! My dear dame,” said d’Artagnan, springing from his horse, and throwing the bridle to Planchet, “you restore me to life; where is this dear Aramis? Let me embrace him, I am in a hurry to see him again.”

“Pardon, monsieur, but I doubt whether he can see you at this moment.”

“Why so? Has he a lady with him?”

“Jesus! What do you mean by that? Poor lad! No, monsieur, he has not a lady with him.”

“With whom is he, then?”

“With the curate of Montdidier and the superior of the Jesuits of Amiens.”

“Good heavens!” cried d’Artagnan, “is the poor fellow worse, then?”

“No, monsieur, quite the contrary; but after his illness grace touched him, and he determined to take orders.”

“That’s it!” said d’Artagnan, “I had forgotten that he was only a Musketeer for a time.”

“Monsieur still insists upon seeing him?”

“More than ever.”

“Well, monsieur has only to take the right-hand staircase in the courtyard, and knock at Number Five on the second floor.”

D’Artagnan walked quickly in the direction indicated, and found one of those exterior staircases that are still to be seen in the yards of our old-fashioned taverns. But there was no getting at the place of sojourn of the future abbe; the defiles of the chamber of Aramis were as well guarded as the gardens of Armida. Bazin was stationed in the corridor, and barred his passage with the more intrepidity that, after many years of trial, Bazin found himself near a result of which he had ever been ambitious.

In fact, the dream of poor Bazin had always been to serve a churchman; and he awaited with impatience the moment, always in the future, when Aramis would throw aside the uniform and assume the cassock. The daily-renewed promise of the young man that the moment would not long be delayed, had alone kept him in the service of a Musketeer--a service in which, he said, his soul was in constant jeopardy.

Bazin was then at the height of joy. In all probability, this time his master would not retract. The union of physical pain with moral uneasiness had produced the effect so long desired. Aramis, suffering at once in body and mind, had at length fixed his eyes and his thoughts upon religion, and he had considered as a warning from heaven the double accident which had happened to him; that is to say, the sudden disappearance of his mistress and the wound in his shoulder.

It may be easily understood that in the present disposition of his master nothing could be more disagreeable to Bazin than the arrival of d’Artagnan, which might cast his master back again into that vortex of mundane affairs which had so long carried him away. He resolved, then, to defend the door bravely; and as, betrayed by the mistress of the inn, he could not say that Aramis was absent, he endeavored to prove to the newcomer that it would be the height of indiscretion to disturb his master in his pious conference, which had commenced with the morning and would not, as Bazin said, terminate before night.

But d’Artagnan took very little heed of the eloquent discourse of M. Bazin; and as he had no desire to support a polemic discussion with his friend’s valet, he simply moved him out of the way with one hand, and with the other turned the handle of the door of Number Five. The door opened, and d’Artagnan went into the chamber.

Aramis, in a black gown, his head enveloped in a sort of round flat cap, not much unlike a CALOTTE, was seated before an oblong table, covered with rolls of paper and enormous volumes in folio. At his right hand was placed the superior of the Jesuits, and on his left the curate of Montdidier. The curtains were half drawn, and only admitted the mysterious light calculated for beatific reveries. All the mundane objects that generally strike the eye on entering the room of a young man, particularly when that young man is a Musketeer, had disappeared as if by enchantment; and for fear, no doubt, that the sight of them might bring his master back to ideas of this world, Bazin had laid his hands upon sword, pistols, plumed hat, and embroideries and laces of all kinds and sorts. In their stead d’Artagnan thought he perceived in an obscure corner a discipline cord suspended from a nail in the wall.

At the noise made by d’Artagnan in entering, Aramis lifted up his head, and beheld his friend; but to the great astonishment of the young man, the sight of him did not produce much effect upon the Musketeer, so completely was his mind detached from the things of this world.

“Good day, dear d’Artagnan,” said Aramis; “believe me, I am glad to see you.”

“So am I delighted to see you,” said d’Artagnan, “although I am not yet sure that it is Aramis I am speaking to.”

“To himself, my friend, to himself! But what makes you doubt it?”

“I was afraid I had made a mistake in the chamber, and that I had found my way into the apartment of some churchman. Then another error seized me on seeing you in company with these gentlemen--I was afraid you were dangerously ill.”

The two men in black, who guessed d’Artagnan’s meaning, darted at him a glance which might have been thought threatening; but d’Artagnan took no heed of it.

“I disturb you, perhaps, my dear Aramis,” continued d’Artagnan, “for by what I see, I am led to believe that you are confessing to these gentlemen.”

Aramis colored imperceptibly. “You disturb me? Oh, quite the contrary, dear friend, I swear; and as a proof of what I say, permit me to declare I am rejoiced to see you safe and sound.”

“Ah, he’ll come round,” thought d’Artagnan; “that’s not bad!”

“This gentleman, who is my friend, has just escaped from a serious danger,” continued Aramis, with unction, pointing to d’Artagnan with his hand, and addressing the two ecclesiastics.

“Praise God, monsieur,” replied they, bowing together.

“I have not failed to do so, your Reverences,” replied the young man, returning their salutation.

“You arrive in good time, dear d’Artagnan,” said Aramis, “and by taking part in our discussion may assist us with your intelligence. Monsieur the Principal of Amiens, Monsieur the Curate of Montdidier, and I are arguing certain theological questions in which we have been much interested; I shall be delighted to have your opinion.”

“The opinion of a swordsman can have very little weight,” replied d’Artagnan, who began to be uneasy at the turn things were taking, “and you had better be satisfied, believe me, with the knowledge of these gentlemen.”

The two men in black bowed in their turn.

“On the contrary,” replied Aramis, “your opinion will be very valuable. The question is this: Monsieur the Principal thinks that my thesis ought to be dogmatic and didactic.”

“Your thesis! Are you then making a thesis?”

“Without doubt,” replied the Jesuit. “In the examination which precedes ordination, a thesis is always a requisite.”

“Ordination!” cried d’Artagnan, who could not believe what the hostess and Bazin had successively told him; and he gazed, half stupefied, upon the three persons before him.

"Now," continued Aramis, taking the same graceful position in his easy chair that he would have assumed in bed, and complacently examining his hand, which was as white and plump as that of a woman, and which he held in the air to cause the blood to descend, "now, as you have heard, d'Artagnan, Monsieur the Principal is desirous that my thesis should be dogmatic, while I, for my part, would rather it should be ideal. This is the reason why Monsieur the Principal has proposed to me the following subject, which has not yet been treated upon, and in which I perceive there is matter for magnificent elaboration-'UTRAQUE MANUS IN BENEDICENDO CLERICIS INFERIORIBUS NECESSARIA EST.'"

D'Artagnan, whose erudition we are well acquainted with, evinced no more interest on hearing this quotation than he had at that of M. de Treville in allusion to the gifts he pretended that d'Artagnan had received from the Duke of Buckingham.

"Which means," resumed Aramis, that he might perfectly understand, "'The two hands are indispensable for priests of the inferior orders, when they bestow the benediction.'"

"An admirable subject!" cried the Jesuit.

"Admirable and dogmatic!" repeated the curate, who, about as strong as d'Artagnan with respect to Latin, carefully watched the Jesuit in order to keep step with him, and repeated his words like an echo.

As to d'Artagnan, he remained perfectly insensible to the enthusiasm of the two men in black.

"Yes, admirable! PRORSUS ADMIRABILE!" continued Aramis; "but which requires a profound study of both the Scriptures and the Fathers. Now, I have confessed to these learned ecclesiastics, and that in all humility, that the duties of mounting guard and the service of the king have caused me to neglect study a little. I should find myself, therefore, more at my ease, FACILUS NATANS, in a subject of my own choice, which would be to these hard theological questions what morals are to metaphysics in philosophy."

D'Artagnan began to be tired, and so did the curate.

"See what an exordium!" cried the Jesuit.

"Exordium," repeated the curate, for the sake of saying something. "QUEMADMODUM INTER COELORUM IMMNSITATEM."

Aramis cast a glance upon d'Artagnan to see what effect all this produced, and found his friend gaping enough to split his jaws.

“Let us speak French, my father,” said he to the Jesuit; “Monsieur d’Artagnan will enjoy our conversation better.”

“Yes,” replied d’Artagnan; “I am fatigued with reading, and all this Latin confuses me.”

“Certainly,” replied the Jesuit, a little put out, while the curate, greatly delighted, turned upon d’Artagnan a look full of gratitude. “Well, let us see what is to be derived from this gloss. Moses, the servant of God-he was but a servant, please to understand-Moses blessed with the hands; he held out both his arms while the Hebrews beat their enemies, and then he blessed them with his two hands. Besides, what does the Gospel say? IMPONITE MANUS, and not MANUM-place the HANDS, not the HAND.”

“Place the HANDS,” repeated the curate, with a gesture.

“St. Peter, on the contrary, of whom the Popes are the successors,” continued the Jesuit; “PORRIGE DIGITOS-present the fingers. Are you there, now?”

“CERTES,” replied Aramis, in a pleased tone, “but the thing is subtle.”

“The FINGERS,” resumed the Jesuit, “St. Peter blessed with the FINGERS. The Pope, therefore blesses with the fingers. And with how many fingers does he bless? With THREE fingers, to be sure-one for the Father, one for the Son, and one for the Holy Ghost.”

All crossed themselves. D’Artagnan thought it was proper to follow this example.

“The Pope is the successor of St. Peter, and represents the three divine powers; the rest-ORDINES INFERIORES-of the ecclesiastical hierarchy bless in the name of the holy archangels and angels. The most humble clerks such as our deacons and sacristans, bless with holy water sprinklers, which resemble an infinite number of blessing fingers. There is the subject simplified. ARGUMENTUM OMNI DENUDATUM ORNAMENTO. I could make of that subject two volumes the size of this,” continued the Jesuit; and in his enthusiasm he struck a St. Chrysostom in folio, which made the table bend beneath its weight.

D’Artagnan trembled.

“CERTES,” said Aramis, “I do justice to the beauties of this thesis; but at the same time I perceive it would be overwhelming for me. I had chosen this text-tell me, dear d’Artagnan, if it is not to your taste-’NON INUTILE EST DESIDERIUM IN OBLATIONE’; that is, ‘A little regret is not unsuitable in an offering to the Lord.’“

“Stop there!” cried the Jesuit, “for that thesis touches closely upon heresy. There is a proposition almost like it in the AUGUSTINUS of the heresiarch Jansenius, whose book will sooner or later be burned by the hands of the executioner. Take care, my young friend. You are inclining toward false doctrines, my young friend; you will be lost.”

“You will be lost,” said the curate, shaking his head sorrowfully.

“You approach that famous point of free will which is a mortal rock. You face the insinuations of the Pelagians and the semi-Pelagians.”

“But, my Reverend-” replied Aramis, a little amazed by the shower of arguments that poured upon his head.

“How will you prove,” continued the Jesuit, without allowing him time to speak, “that we ought to regret the world when we offer ourselves to God? Listen to this dilemma: God is God, and the world is the devil. To regret the world is to regret the devil; that is my conclusion.”

“And that is mine also,” said the curate.

“But, for heaven’s sake-” resumed Aramis.

“DESIDERAS DIABOLUM, unhappy man!” cried the Jesuit.

“He regrets the devil! Ah, my young friend,” added the curate, groaning, “do not regret the devil, I implore you!”

D’Artagnan felt himself bewildered. It seemed to him as though he were in a madhouse, and was becoming as mad as those he saw. He was, however, forced to hold his tongue from not comprehending half the language they employed.

“But listen to me, then,” resumed Aramis with politeness mingled with a little impatience. “I do not say I regret; no, I will never pronounce that sentence, which would not be orthodox.”

The Jesuit raised his hands toward heaven, and the curate did the same.

“No; but pray grant me that it is acting with an ill grace to offer to the Lord only that with which we are perfectly disgusted! Don’t you think so, d’Artagnan?”

“I think so, indeed,” cried he.

The Jesuit and the curate quite started from their chairs.

“This is the point of departure; it is a syllogism. The world is not wanting in attractions. I quit the world; then I make a sacrifice. Now, the Scripture says positively, ‘Make a sacrifice unto the Lord.’“

“That is true,” said his antagonists.

“And then,” said Aramis, pinching his ear to make it red, as he rubbed his hands to make them white, “and then I made a certain RONDEAU upon it last year, which I showed to Monsieur Voiture, and that great man paid me a thousand compliments.”

“A RONDEAU!” said the Jesuit, disdainfully.

“A RONDEAU!” said the curate, mechanically.

“Repeat it! Repeat it!” cried d’Artagnan; “it will make a little change.”

“Not so, for it is religious,” replied Aramis; “it is theology in verse.”

“The devil!” said d’Artagnan.

“Here it is,” said Aramis, with a little look of diffidence, which, however, was not exempt from a shade of hypocrisy:

“Vous qui pleurez un passe plein de charmes, Et qui trainez des jours infortunes, Tous vos malheurs se verront termines, Quand a Dieu seul vous offrirez vos larmes, Vous qui pleurez!”

“You who weep for pleasures fled, While dragging on a life of care, All your woes will melt in air, If to God your tears are shed, You who weep!”

d’Artagnan and the curate appeared pleased. The Jesuit persisted in his opinion. “Beware of a profane taste in your theological style. What says Augustine on this subject: ‘SEVERUS SIT CLERICORUM VERBO.’“

“Yes, let the sermon be clear,” said the curate.

“Now,” hastily interrupted the Jesuit, on seeing that his acolyte was going astray, “now your thesis would please the ladies; it would have the success of one of Monsieur Patru’s pleadings.”

“Please God!” cried Aramis, transported.

“There it is,” cried the Jesuit; “the world still speaks within you in a loud voice, ALTISIMM VOCE. You follow the world, my young friend, and I tremble lest grace prove not efficacious.”

“Be satisfied, my reverend father, I can answer for myself.”

“Mundane presumption!”

“I know myself, Father; my resolution is irrevocable.”

“Then you persist in continuing that thesis?”

“I feel myself called upon to treat that, and no other. I will see about the continuation of it, and tomorrow I hope you will be satisfied with the corrections I shall have made in consequence of your advice.”

“Work slowly,” said the curate; “we leave you in an excellent tone of mind.”

“Yes, the ground is all sown,” said the Jesuit, “and we have not to fear that one portion of the seed may have fallen upon stone, another upon the highway, or that the birds of heaven have eaten the rest, AVES COELI COMEDERUNT ILLAM.”

“Plague stifle you and your Latin!” said d’Artagnan, who began to feel all his patience exhausted.

“Farewell, my son,” said the curate, “till tomorrow.”

“Till tomorrow, rash youth,” said the Jesuit. “You promise to become one of the lights of the Church. Heaven grant that this light prove not a devouring fire!”

D’Artagnan, who for an hour past had been gnawing his nails with impatience, was beginning to attack the quick.

The two men in black rose, bowed to Aramis and d’Artagnan, and advanced toward the door. Bazin, who had been standing listening to all this controversy with a pious jubilation, sprang toward them, took the breviary of the curate and the missal of the Jesuit, and walked respectfully before them to clear their way.

Aramis conducted them to the foot of the stairs, and then immediately came up again to d’Artagnan, whose senses were still in a state of confusion.

When left alone, the two friends at first kept an embarrassed silence. It however became necessary for one of them to break it first, and as d’Artagnan appeared determined to leave that honor to his companion, Aramis said, “you see that I am returned to my fundamental ideas.”

“Yes, efficacious grace has touched you, as that gentleman said just now.”

“Oh, these plans of retreat have been formed for a long time. You have often heard me speak of them, have you not, my friend?”

“Yes; but I confess I always thought you jested.”

“With such things! Oh, d’Artagnan!”

“The devil! Why, people jest with death.”

“And people are wrong, d’Artagnan; for death is the door which leads to perdition or to salvation.”

“Granted; but if you please, let us not theologize, Aramis. You must have had enough for today. As for me, I have almost forgotten the little Latin I have ever known. Then I confess to you that I have eaten nothing since ten o’clock this morning, and I am devilish hungry.”

“We will dine directly, my friend; only you must please to remember that this is Friday. Now, on such a day I can neither eat flesh nor see it eaten. If you can be satisfied with my dinner-it consists of cooked tetragones and fruits.”

“What do you mean by tetragones?” asked d’Artagnan, uneasily.

“I mean spinach,” replied Aramis; “but on your account I will add some eggs, and that is a serious infraction of the rule-for eggs are meat, since they engender chickens.”

“This feast is not very succulent; but never mind, I will put up with it for the sake of remaining with you.”

“I am grateful to you for the sacrifice,” said Aramis; “but if your body be not greatly benefited by it, be assured your soul will.”

“And so, Aramis, you are decidedly going into the Church? What will our two friends say? What will Monsieur de Treville say? They will treat you as a deserter, I warn you.”

“I do not enter the Church; I re-enter it. I deserted the Church for the world, for you know that I forced myself when I became a Musketeer.”

“I? I know nothing about it.”

“You don’t know I quit the seminary?”

“Not at all.”

“This is my story, then. Besides, the Scriptures say, ‘Confess yourselves to one another,’ and I confess to you, d’Artagnan.”

“And I give you absolution beforehand. You see I am a good sort of a man.”

“Do not jest about holy things, my friend.”

“Go on, then, I listen.”

“I had been at the seminary from nine years old; in three days I should have been twenty. I was about to become an abbe, and all was arranged. One evening I went, according to custom, to a house which I frequented with much pleasure: when one is young, what can be expected?--one is weak. An officer who saw me, with a jealous eye, reading the LIVES OF THE SAINTS to the mistress of the house, entered suddenly and without being announced. That evening I had translated an episode of Judith, and had just communicated my verses to the lady, who gave me all sorts of compliments, and leaning on my shoulder, was reading them a second time with me. Her pose, which I must admit was rather free, wounded this officer. He said nothing; but when I went out he followed, and quickly came up with me. ‘Monsieur the Abbe,’ said he, ‘do you like blows with a cane?’ ‘I cannot say, monsieur,’ answered I; ‘no one has ever dared to give me any.’ ‘Well, listen to me, then, Monsieur the Abbe! If you venture again into the house in which I have met you this evening, I will dare it myself.’ I really think I must have been frightened. I became very pale; I felt my legs fail me; I sought for a reply, but could find none-I was silent. The officer waited for his reply, and seeing it so long coming, he burst into a laugh, turned upon his heel, and re-entered the house. I returned to the seminary.

“I am a gentleman born, and my blood is warm, as you may have remarked, my dear d’Artagnan. The insult was terrible, and although unknown to the rest of the world, I felt it live and fester at the bottom of my heart. I informed my superiors that I did not feel myself sufficiently prepared for ordination, and at my request the ceremony was postponed for a year. I sought out the best fencing master in Paris, I made an agreement with him to take a lesson every day, and every day for a year I took that lesson. Then, on the anniversary of the day on which I had been insulted, I hung my cassock on a peg, assumed the costume of a cavalier, and went to a ball given by a lady friend of mine and to which I knew my man was invited. It was in the Rue des France-Bourgeois, close to La Force. As I expected, my officer was there. I went up to him as he was singing a love ditty and looking tenderly at a lady, and interrupted him exactly in the middle of the second couplet. ‘Monsieur,’ said I, ‘does it still displease you that I should frequent a certain house of La Rue Payenne? And would you still cane me if I took it into my head to disobey you? The officer looked at me with astonishment, and then said, ‘What is your business with me, monsieur? I do not know you.’ ‘I am,’ said I, ‘the little abbe who reads LIVES OF THE SAINTS, and translates Judith into verse.’ ‘Ah, ah! I recollect now,’ said the officer, in a jeering tone; ‘well, what do you want with me?’ ‘I want you to spare time to take a walk with me.’ ‘Tomorrow morning, if you like, with the greatest pleasure.’ ‘No, not tomorrow morning, if you please, but immediately.’ ‘If you absolutely insist.’ ‘I do insist upon it.’ ‘Come, then. Ladies,’ said the officer, ‘do not disturb yourselves; allow me time just to kill this gentleman, and I will return and finish the last couplet.’

“We went out. I took him to the Rue Payenne, to exactly the same spot where, a year before, at the very same hour, he had paid me the compliment

I have related to you. It was a superb moonlight night. We immediately drew, and at the first pass I laid him stark dead.”

“The devil!” cried d’Artagnan.

“Now,” continued Aramis, “as the ladies did not see the singer come back, and as he was found in the Rue Payenne with a great sword wound through his body, it was supposed that I had accommodated him thus; and the matter created some scandal which obliged me to renounce the cassock for a time. Athos, whose acquaintance I made about that period, and Porthos, who had in addition to my lessons taught me some effective tricks of fence, prevailed upon me to solicit the uniform of a Musketeer. The king entertained great regard for my father, who had fallen at the siege of Arras, and the uniform was granted. You may understand that the moment has come for me to re-enter the bosom of the Church.”

“And why today, rather than yesterday or tomorrow? What has happened to you today, to raise all these melancholy ideas?”

“This wound, my dear d’Artagnan, has been a warning to me from heaven.”

“This wound? Bah, it is now nearly healed, and I am sure it is not that which gives you the most pain.”

“What, then?” said Aramis, blushing.

“You have one at heart, Aramis, one deeper and more painful--a wound made by a woman.”

The eye of Aramis kindled in spite of himself.

“Ah,” said he, dissembling his emotion under a feigned carelessness, “do not talk of such things, and suffer love pains? VANITAS VANITATUM! According to your idea, then, my brain is turned. And for whom-for some GRISETTE, some chambermaid with whom I have trifled in some garrison? Fie!”

“Pardon, my dear Aramis, but I thought you carried your eyes higher.”

“Higher? And who am I, to nourish such ambition? A poor Musketeer, a beggar, an unknown-who hates slavery, and finds himself ill-placed in the world.”

“Aramis, Aramis!” cried d’Artagnan, looking at his friend with an air of doubt.

“Dust I am, and to dust I return. Life is full of humiliations and sorrows,” continued he, becoming still more melancholy; “all the ties which attach him to life break in the hand of man, particularly the golden ties. Oh, my dear d’Artagnan,” resumed Aramis, giving to his voice a slight tone of bitterness, “trust me! Conceal your wounds when you have any; silence is the last joy of the unhappy. Beware of giving anyone the clue to your griefs; the curious suck our tears as flies suck the blood of a wounded hart.”

“Alas, my dear Aramis,” said d’Artagnan, in his turn heaving a profound sigh, “that is my story you are relating!”

“How?”

“Yes; a woman whom I love, whom I adore, has just been torn from me by force. I do not know where she is or whither they have conducted her. She is perhaps a prisoner; she is perhaps dead!”

“Yes, but you have at least this consolation, that you can say to yourself she has not quit you voluntarily, that if you learn no news of her, it is because all communication with you is interdicted; while I--”

“Well?”

“Nothing,” replied Aramis, “nothing.”

“So you renounce the world, then, forever; that is a settled thing--a resolution registered!”

“Forever! You are my friend today; tomorrow you will be no more to me than a shadow, or rather, even, you will no longer exist. As for the world, it is a sepulcher and nothing else.”

“The devil! All this is very sad which you tell me.”

“What will you? My vocation commands me; it carries me away.”

D’Artagnan smiled, but made no answer.

Aramis continued, “And yet, while I do belong to the earth, I wish to speak of you--of our friends.”

“And on my part,” said d’Artagnan, “I wished to speak of you, but I find you so completely detached from everything! To love you cry, ‘Fie! Friends are shadows! The world is a sepulcher!’“

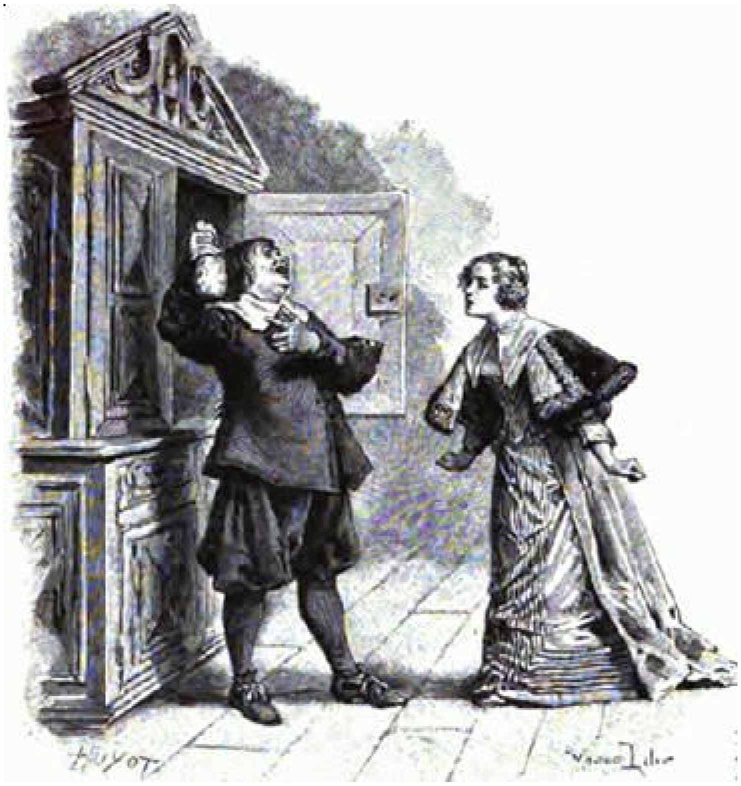

“Alas, you will find it so yourself,” said Aramis, with a sigh.

“Well, then, let us say no more about it,” said d’Artagnan; “and let us burn this letter, which, no doubt, announces to you some fresh infidelity of your GRISETTE or your chambermaid.”

“What letter?” cried Aramis, eagerly.

“A letter which was sent to your abode in your absence, and which was given to me for you.”

“But from whom is that letter?”

“Oh, from some heartbroken waiting woman, some desponding GRISETTE; from Madame de Chevreuse’s chambermaid, perhaps, who was obliged to return to Tours with her mistress, and who, in order to appear smart and attractive, stole some perfumed paper, and sealed her letter with a duchess’s coronet.”

“What do you say?”

“Hold! I must have lost it,” said the young man maliciously, pretending to search for it. “But fortunately the world is a sepulcher; the men, and consequently the women, are but shadows, and love is a sentiment to which you cry, ‘Fie! Fie!’“

“d’Artagnan, d’Artagnan,” cried Aramis, “you are killing me!”

“Well, here it is at last!” said d’Artagnan, as he drew the letter from his pocket.

Aramis made a bound, seized the letter, read it, or rather devoured it, his countenance radiant.

“This same waiting maid seems to have an agreeable style,” said the messenger, carelessly.

“Thanks, d’Artagnan, thanks!” cried Aramis, almost in a state of delirium. “She was forced to return to Tours; she is not faithless; she still loves me! Come, my friend, come, let me embrace you. Happiness almost stifles me!”

The two friends began to dance around the venerable St. Chrysostom, kicking about famously the sheets of the thesis, which had fallen on the floor.

At that moment Bazin entered with the spinach and the omelet.

“Be off, you wretch!” cried Aramis, throwing his skullcap in his face. “Return whence you came; take back those horrible vegetables, and that poor kickshaw! Order a larded hare, a fat capon, mutton leg dressed with garlic, and four bottles of old Burgundy.”

Bazin, who looked at his master, without comprehending the cause of this change, in a melancholy manner, allowed the omelet to slip into the spinach, and the spinach onto the floor.

“Now this is the moment to consecrate your existence to the King of kings,” said d’Artagnan, “if you persist in offering him a civility. NON INUTILE DESIDERIUM OBLATIONE.”

“Go to the devil with your Latin. Let us drink, my dear d’Artagnan, MORBLEU! Let us drink while the wine is fresh! Let us drink heartily, and while we do so, tell me a little of what is going on in the world yonder.”

CHAPTER 27

THE WIFE OF ATHOS

We have now to search for Athos," said d'Artagnan to the vivacious Aramis, when he had informed him of all that had passed since their departure from the capital, and an excellent dinner had made one of them forget his thesis and the other his fatigue.

"Do you think, then, that any harm can have happened to him?" asked Aramis. "Athos is so cool, so brave, and handles his sword so skillfully."

"No doubt. Nobody has a higher opinion of the courage and skill of Athos than I have; but I like better to hear my sword clang against lances than against staves. I fear lest Athos should have been beaten down by serving men. Those fellows strike hard, and don't leave off in a hurry. This is why I wish to set out again as soon as possible."

"I will try to accompany you," said Aramis, "though I scarcely feel in a condition to mount on horseback. Yesterday I undertook to employ that cord which you see hanging against the wall, but pain prevented my continuing the pious exercise."

"That's the first time I ever heard of anybody trying to cure gunshot wounds with cat-o'-nine-tails; but you were ill, and illness renders the head weak, therefore you may be excused."

"When do you mean to set out?"

"Tomorrow at daybreak. Sleep as soundly as you can tonight, and tomorrow, if you can, we will take our departure together."

"Till tomorrow, then," said Aramis; "for iron-nerved as you are, you must need repose."

The next morning, when d'Artagnan entered Aramis's chamber, he found him at the window.

"What are you looking at?" asked d'Artagnan.

"My faith! I am admiring three magnificent horses which the stable boys are leading about. It would be a pleasure worthy of a prince to travel upon such horses."

“Well, my dear Aramis, you may enjoy that pleasure, for one of those three horses is yours.”

“Ah, bah! Which?”

“Whichever of the three you like, I have no preference.”

“And the rich caparison, is that mine, too?”

“Without doubt.”

“You laugh, d’Artagnan.”

“No, I have left off laughing, now that you speak French.”

“What, those rich holsters, that velvet housing, that saddle studded with silver-are they all for me?”

“For you and nobody else, as the horse which paws the ground is mine, and the other horse, which is caracoling, belongs to Athos.”

“PESTE! They are three superb animals!”

“I am glad they please you.”

“Why, it must have been the king who made you such a present.”

“Certainly it was not the cardinal; but don’t trouble yourself whence they come, think only that one of the three is your property.”

“I choose that which the red-headed boy is leading.”

“It is yours!”

“Good heaven! That is enough to drive away all my pains; I could mount him with thirty balls in my body. On my soul, handsome stirrups! HOLA, Bazin, come here this minute.”

Bazin appeared on the threshold, dull and spiritless.

“That last order is useless,” interrupted d’Artagnan; “there are loaded pistols in your holsters.”

Bazin sighed.

“Come, Monsieur Bazin, make yourself easy,” said d’Artagnan; “people of all conditions gain the kingdom of heaven.”

“Monsieur was already such a good theologian,” said Bazin, almost weeping; “he might have become a bishop, and perhaps a cardinal.”

“Well, but my poor Bazin, reflect a little. Of what use is it to be a churchman, pray? You do not avoid going to war by that means; you see, the cardinal is about to make the next campaign, helm on head and partisan in hand. And Monsieur de Nogaret de la Valette, what do you say of him? He is a cardinal likewise. Ask his lackey how often he has had to prepare lint of him.”

“Alas!” sighed Bazin. “I know it, monsieur; everything is turned topsy-turvy in the world nowadays.”

While this dialogue was going on, the two young men and the poor lackey descended.

“Hold my stirrup, Bazin,” cried Aramis; and Aramis sprang into the saddle with his usual grace and agility, but after a few vaults and curvets of the noble animal his rider felt his pains come on so insupportably that he turned pale and became unsteady in his seat. D’Artagnan, who, foreseeing such an event, had kept his eye on him, sprang toward him, caught him in his arms, and assisted him to his chamber.

“That’s all right, my dear Aramis, take care of yourself,” said he; “I will go alone in search of Athos.”

“You are a man of brass,” replied Aramis.

“No, I have good luck, that is all. But how do you mean to pass your time till I come back? No more theses, no more glosses upon the fingers or upon benedictions, hey?”

Aramis smiled. “I will make verses,” said he.

“Yes, I dare say; verses perfumed with the odor of the billet from the attendant of Madame de Chevreuse. Teach Bazin prosody; that will console him. As to the horse, ride him a little every day, and that will accustom you to his maneuvers.”

“Oh, make yourself easy on that head,” replied Aramis. “You will find me ready to follow you.”

They took leave of each other, and in ten minutes, after having commended his friend to the cares of the hostess and Bazin, d’Artagnan was trotting along in the direction of Amiens.

How was he going to find Athos? Should he find him at all? The position in which he had left him was critical. He probably had succumbed. This idea, while darkening his brow, drew several sighs from him, and caused him to formulate to himself a few vows of vengeance. Of all his friends, Athos was the eldest, and the least resembling him in appearance, in his tastes and sympathies.

Yet he entertained a marked preference for this gentleman. The noble and distinguished air of Athos, those flashes of greatness which from time to time broke out from the shade in which he voluntarily kept himself, that unalterable equality of temper which made him the most pleasant companion in the world, that forced and cynical gaiety, that bravery which might have been termed blind if it had not been the result of the rarest coolness--such qualities attracted more than the esteem, more than the friendship of d’Artagnan; they attracted his admiration.

Indeed, when placed beside M. de Treville, the elegant and noble courtier, Athos in his most cheerful days might advantageously sustain a comparison. He was of middle height; but his person was so admirably shaped and so well proportioned that more than once in his struggles with Porthos he had overcome the giant whose physical strength was proverbial among the Musketeers. His head, with piercing eyes, a straight nose, a chin cut like that of Brutus, had altogether an indefinable character of grandeur and grace. His hands, of which he took little care, were the despair of Aramis, who cultivated his with almond paste and perfumed oil. The sound of his voice was at once penetrating and melodious; and then, that which was inconceivable in Athos, who was always retiring, was that delicate knowledge of the world and of the usages of the most brilliant society--those manners of a high degree which appeared, as if unconsciously to himself, in his least actions.

If a repast were on foot, Athos presided over it better than any other, placing every guest exactly in the rank which his ancestors had earned for him or that he had made for himself. If a question in heraldry were started, Athos knew all the noble families of the kingdom, their genealogy, their alliances, their coats of arms, and the origin of them. Etiquette had no minutiae unknown to him. He knew what were the rights of the great land owners. He was profoundly versed in hunting and falconry, and had one day when conversing on this great art astonished even Louis XIII himself, who took a pride in being considered a past master therein.

Like all the great nobles of that period, Athos rode and fenced to perfection. But still further, his education had been so little neglected, even with respect to scholastic studies, so rare at this time among gentlemen, that he smiled at the scraps of Latin which Aramis sported and which Porthos pretended to understand. Two or three times, even, to the great astonishment of his friends, he had, when Aramis allowed some rudimental error to escape him, replaced a verb in its right tense and a noun in its case. Besides, his probity was irreproachable, in an age in which soldiers compromised so easily with their religion and their consciences, lovers with the rigorous delicacy of our era, and the poor with God’s Seventh Commandment. This Athos, then, was a very extraordinary man.

And yet this nature so distinguished, this creature so beautiful, this essence so fine, was seen to turn insensibly toward material life, as old men turn toward physical and moral imbecility. Athos, in his hours of gloom--and these hours were frequent--was extinguished as to the whole of the luminous portion of him, and his brilliant side disappeared as into profound darkness.

Then the demigod vanished; he remained scarcely a man. His head hanging down, his eye dull, his speech slow and painful, Athos would look for hours together at his bottle, his glass, or at Grimaud, who, accustomed to obey him by signs, read in the faint glance of his master his least desire, and satisfied it immediately. If the four friends were assembled at one of these moments, a word, thrown forth occasionally with a violent effort, was the share Athos furnished to the conversation. In exchange for his silence Athos drank enough for four, and without appearing to be otherwise affected by wine than by a more marked constriction of the brow and by a deeper sadness.

D’Artagnan, whose inquiring disposition we are acquainted with, had not--whatever interest he had in satisfying his curiosity on this subject--been able to assign any cause for these fits of for the periods of their recurrence. Athos never received any letters; Athos never had concerns which all his friends did not know.

It could not be said that it was wine which produced this sadness; for in truth he only drank to combat this sadness, which wine however, as we have said, rendered still darker. This excess of bilious humor could not be attributed to play; for unlike Porthos, who accompanied the variations of chance with songs or oaths, Athos when he won remained as unmoved as when he lost. He had been known, in the circle of the Musketeers, to win in one night three thousand pistoles; to lose them even to the gold-embroidered belt for gala days, win all this again with the addition of a hundred louis, without his beautiful eyebrow being heightened or lowered half a line, without his hands losing their pearly hue, without his conversation, which was cheerful that evening, ceasing to be calm and agreeable.

Neither was it, as with our neighbors, the English, an atmospheric influence which darkened his countenance; for the sadness generally became more intense toward the fine season of the year. June and July were the terrible months with Athos.

For the present he had no anxiety. He shrugged his shoulders when people spoke of the future. His secret, then, was in the past, as had often been vaguely said to d’Artagnan.

This mysterious shade, spread over his whole person, rendered still more interesting the man whose eyes or mouth, even in the most complete intoxication, had never revealed anything, however skillfully questions had been put to him.

“Well,” thought d’Artagnan, “poor Athos is perhaps at this moment dead, and dead by my fault--for it was I who dragged him into this affair, of which he did not know the origin, of which he is ignorant of the result, and from which he can derive no advantage.”

“Without reckoning, monsieur,” added Planchet to his master’s audibly expressed reflections, “that we perhaps owe our lives to him. Do you remember how he cried, ‘On, d’Artagnan, on, I am taken’? And when he had discharged his two pistols, what a terrible noise he made with his sword! One might have said that twenty men, or rather twenty mad devils, were fighting.”

These words redoubled the eagerness of d’Artagnan, who urged his horse, though he stood in need of no incitement, and they proceeded at a rapid pace. About eleven o’clock in the morning they perceived Ameins, and at half past eleven they were at the door of the cursed inn.

D’Artagnan had often meditated against the perfidious host one of those hearty vengeances which offer consolation while they are hoped for. He entered the hostelry with his hat pulled over his eyes, his left hand on the pommel of the sword, and cracking his whip with his right hand.

“Do you remember me?” said he to the host, who advanced to greet him.

“I have not that honor, monseigneur,” replied the latter, his eyes dazzled by the brilliant style in which d’Artagnan traveled.

“What, you don’t know me?”

“No, monseigneur.”

“Well, two words will refresh your memory. What have you done with that gentleman against whom you had the audacity, about twelve days ago, to make an accusation of passing false money?”

The host became as pale as death; for d’Artagnan had assumed a threatening attitude, and Planchet modeled himself after his master.

“Ah, monseigneur, do not mention it!” cried the host, in the most pitiable voice imaginable. “Ah, monseigneur, how dearly have I paid for that fault, unhappy wretch as I am!”

“That gentleman, I say, what has become of him?”

“Deign to listen to me, monseigneur, and be merciful! Sit down, in mercy!”

D’Artagnan, mute with anger and anxiety, took a seat in the threatening attitude of a judge. Planchet glared fiercely over the back of his armchair.

“Here is the story, monseigneur,” resumed the trembling host; “for I now recollect you. It was you who rode off at the moment I had that unfortunate difference with the gentleman you speak of.”

“Yes, it was I; so you may plainly perceive that you have no mercy to expect if you do not tell me the whole truth.”

“Condescend to listen to me, and you shall know all.”

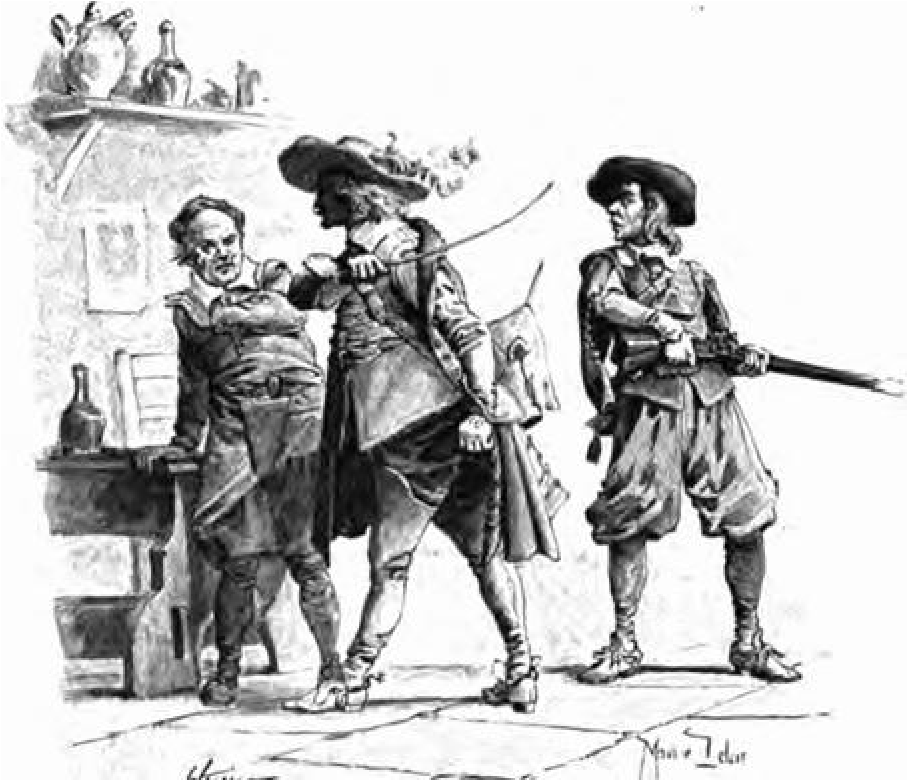

“I listen.”

“I had been warned by the authorities that a celebrated coiner of bad money would arrive at my inn, with several of his companions, all disguised as Guards or Musketeers. Monseigneur, I was furnished with a description of your horses, your lackeys, your countenances--nothing was omitted.”

“Go on, go on!” said d’Artagnan, who quickly understood whence such an exact description had come.

“I took then, in conformity with the orders of the authorities, who sent me a reinforcement of six men, such measures as I thought necessary to get possession of the persons of the pretended coiners.”

“Again!” said d’Artagnan, whose ears chafed terribly under the repetition of this word COINERs.

“Pardon me, monseigneur, for saying such things, but they form my excuse. The authorities had terrified me, and you know that an innkeeper must keep on good terms with the authorities.”

“But once again, that gentleman--where is he? What has become of him? Is he dead? Is he living?”

“Patience, monseigneur, we are coming to it. There happened then that which you know, and of which your precipitate departure,” added the host, with an acuteness that did not escape d’Artagnan, “appeared to authorize the issue. That gentleman, your friend, defended himself desperately. His lackey, who, by an unforeseen piece of ill luck, had quarreled with the officers, disguised as stable lads--”

“Miserable scoundrel!” cried d’Artagnan, “you were all in the plot, then! And I really don’t know what prevents me from exterminating you all.”

“Alas, monseigneur, we were not in the plot, as you will soon see. Monsieur your friend (pardon for not calling him by the honorable name which no doubt he bears, but we do not know that name), Monsieur your friend, having disabled two men with his pistols, retreated fighting with his sword, with which he disabled one of my men, and stunned me with a blow of the flat side of it.”

“You villain, will you finish?” cried d’Artagnan, “Athos--what has become of Athos?”

“While fighting and retreating, as I have told Monseigneur, he found the door of the cellar stairs behind him, and as the door was open, he took out the key, and barricaded himself inside. As we were sure of finding him there, we left him alone.”

“Yes,” said d’Artagnan, “you did not really wish to kill; you only wished to imprison him.”

“Good God! To imprison him, monseigneur? Why, he imprisoned himself, I swear to you he did. In the first place he had made rough work of it; one man was killed on the spot, and two others were severely wounded. The dead man and the two wounded were carried off by their comrades, and I have heard nothing of either of them since. As for myself, as soon as I recovered my senses I went to Monsieur the Governor, to whom I related all that had passed, and asked, what I should do with my prisoner. Monsieur the Governor was all astonishment. He told me he knew nothing about the matter, that the orders I had received did not come from him, and that if I had the audacity to mention his name as being concerned in this disturbance he would have me hanged. It appears that I had made a mistake, monsieur, that I had arrested the wrong person, and that he whom I ought to have arrested had escaped."

"But Athos!" cried d'Artagnan, whose impatience was increased by the disregard of the authorities, "Athos, where is he?"

"As I was anxious to repair the wrongs I had done the prisoner," resumed the innkeeper, "I took my way straight to the cellar in order to set him at liberty. Ah, monsieur, he was no longer a man, he was a devil! To my offer of liberty, he replied that it was nothing but a snare, and that before he came out he intended to impose his own conditions. I told him very humbly--for I could not conceal from myself the scrape I had got into by laying hands on one of his Majesty's Musketeers--I told him I was quite ready to submit to his conditions.

"'In the first place,' said he, 'I wish my lackey placed with me, fully armed.' We hastened to obey this order; for you will please to understand, monsieur, we were disposed to do everything your friend could desire. Monsieur Grimaud (he told us his name, although he does not talk much)--Monsieur Grimaud, then, went down to the cellar, wounded as he was; then his master, having admitted him, barricaded the door afresh, and ordered us to remain quietly in our own bar."

"But where is Athos now?" cried d'Artagnan. "Where is Athos?"

"In the cellar, monsieur."

"What, you scoundrel! Have you kept him in the cellar all this time?"

"Merciful heaven! No, monsieur! We keep him in the cellar! You do not know what he is about in the cellar. Ah! If you could but persuade him to come out, monsieur, I should owe you the gratitude of my whole life; I should adore you as my patron saint!"

"Then he is there? I shall find him there?"

"Without doubt you will, monsieur; he persists in remaining there. We every day pass through the air hole some bread at the end of a fork, and some meat when he asks for it; but alas! It is not of bread and meat of which he makes the greatest consumption. I once endeavored to go down with two of my servants; but he flew into terrible rage. I heard the noise he made in loading his pistols, and his servant in loading his musketoon. Then, when we asked them what were their intentions, the master replied that he had forty charges to fire, and that he and his lackey would fire to the last one before he would allow a single soul of us to set foot in the cellar. Upon this I went and complained to the governor, who replied that I only had what I deserved, and that it would teach me to insult honorable gentlemen who took up their abode in my house."

"So that since that time--" replied d'Artagnan, totally unable to refrain from laughing at the pitiable face of the host.

"So from that time, monsieur," continued the latter, "we have led the most miserable life imaginable; for you must know, monsieur, that all our provisions are in the cellar. There is our wine in bottles, and our wine in casks; the beer, the oil, and the spices, the bacon, and sausages. And as we are prevented from going down there, we are forced to refuse food and drink to the travelers who come to the house; so that our hostelry is daily going to ruin. If your friend remains another week in my cellar I shall be a ruined man."

"And not more than justice, either, you ass! Could you not perceive by our appearance that we were people of quality, and not coiners--say?"

"Yes, monsieur, you are right," said the host. "But, hark, hark! There he is!"

"Somebody has disturbed him, without doubt," said d'Artagnan.

"But he must be disturbed," cried the host; "Here are two English gentlemen just arrived."

"Well?"

"Well, the English like good wine, as you may know, monsieur; these have asked for the best. My wife has perhaps requested permission of Monsieur Athos to go into the cellar to satisfy these gentlemen; and he, as usual, has refused. Ah, good heaven! There is the hullabaloo louder than ever!"

D'Artagnan, in fact, heard a great noise on the side next the cellar. He rose, and preceded by the host wringing his hands, and followed by Planchet with his musketoon ready for use, he approached the scene of action.

The two gentlemen were exasperated; they had had a long ride, and were dying with hunger and thirst.

“But this is tyranny!” cried one of them, in very good French, though with a foreign accent, “that this madman will not allow these good people access to their own wine! Nonsense, let us break open the door, and if he is too far gone in his madness, well, we will kill him!”

“Softly, gentlemen!” said d’Artagnan, drawing his pistols from his belt, “you will kill nobody, if you please!”

“Good, good!” cried the calm voice of Athos, from the other side of the door, “let them just come in, these devourers of little children, and we shall see!”

Brave as they appeared to be, the two English gentlemen looked at each other hesitatingly. One might have thought there was in that cellar one of those famished ogres--the gigantic heroes of popular legends, into whose cavern nobody could force their way with impunity.

There was a moment of silence; but at length the two Englishmen felt ashamed to draw back, and the angrier one descended the five or six steps which led to the cellar, and gave a kick against the door enough to split a wall.

“Planchet,” said d’Artagnan, cocking his pistols, “I will take charge of the one at the top; you look to the one below. Ah, gentlemen, you want battle; and you shall have it.”

“Good God!” cried the hollow voice of Athos, “I can hear d’Artagnan, I think.”

“Yes,” cried d’Artagnan, raising his voice in turn, “I am here, my friend.”

“Ah, good, then,” replied Athos, “we will teach them, these door breakers!”

The gentlemen had drawn their swords, but they found themselves taken between two fires. They still hesitated an instant; but, as before, pride prevailed, and a second kick split the door from bottom to top.

“Stand on one side, d’Artagnan, stand on one side,” cried Athos. “I am going to fire!”

“Gentlemen,” exclaimed d’Artagnan, whom reflection never abandoned, “gentlemen, think of what you are about. Patience, Athos! You are running your heads into a very silly affair; you will be riddled. My lackey and I will have three shots at you, and you will get as many from the cellar. You will then have our swords, with which, I can assure you, my friend and I can play tolerably well. Let me conduct your business and my own. You shall soon have something to drink; I give you my word.”

“If there is any left,” grumbled the jeering voice of Athos.

The host felt a cold sweat creep down his back.

“How! ‘If there is any left!’“ murmured he.

“What the devil! There must be plenty left,” replied d’Artagnan. “Be satisfied of that; these two cannot have drunk all the cellar. Gentlemen, return your swords to their scabbards.”

“Well, provided you replace your pistols in your belt.”

“Willingly.”

And d’Artagnan set the example. Then, turning toward Planchet, he made him a sign to uncock his musketoon.

The Englishmen, convinced of these peaceful proceedings, sheathed their swords grumblingly. The history of Athos’s imprisonment was then related to them; and as they were really gentlemen, they pronounced the host in the wrong.

“Now, gentlemen,” said d’Artagnan, “go up to your room again; and in ten minutes, I will answer for it, you shall have all you desire.”

The Englishmen bowed and went upstairs.

“Now I am alone, my dear Athos,” said d’Artagnan; “open the door, I beg of you.”

“Instantly,” said Athos.

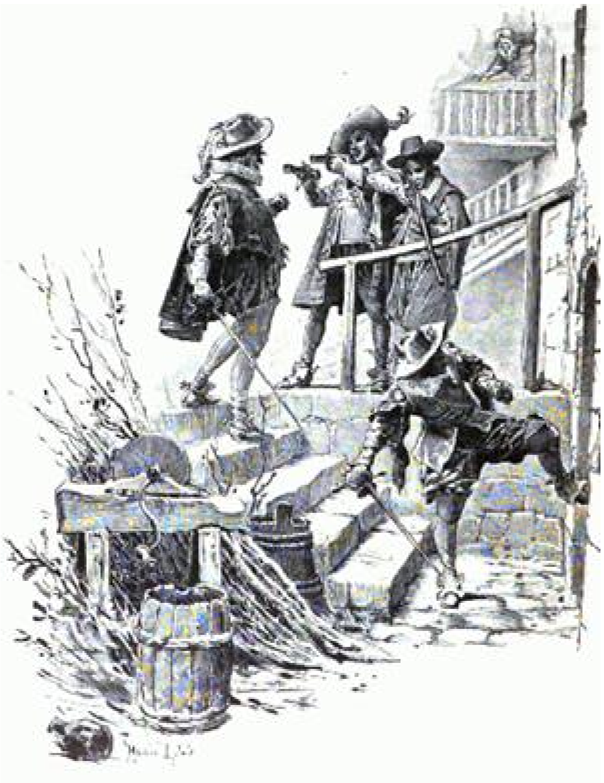

Then was heard a great noise of fagots being removed and of the groaning of posts; these were the counterscarps and bastions of Athos, which the besieged himself demolished.

An instant after, the broken door was removed, and the pale face of Athos appeared, who with a rapid glance took a survey of the surroundings.

D’Artagnan threw himself on his neck and embraced him tenderly. He then tried to draw him from his moist abode, but to his surprise he perceived that Athos staggered.

“You are wounded,” said he.

“I! Not at all. I am dead drunk, that’s all, and never did a man more strongly set about getting so. By the Lord, my good host! I must at least have drunk for my part a hundred and fifty bottles.”

“Mercy!” cried the host, “if the lackey has drunk only half as much as the master, I am a ruined man.”

“Grimaud is a well-bred lackey. He would never think of faring in the same manner as his master; he only drank from the cask. Hark! I don’t think he put the faucet in again. Do you hear it? It is running now.”

D’Artagnan burst into a laugh which changed the shiver of the host into a burning fever.

In the meantime, Grimaud appeared in his turn behind his master, with the musketoon on his shoulder, and his head shaking. Like one of those drunken satyrs in the pictures of Rubens. He was moistened before and behind with a greasy liquid which the host recognized as his best olive oil.

The four crossed the public room and proceeded to take possession of the best apartment in the house, which d’Artagnan occupied with authority.

In the meantime the host and his wife hurried down with lamps into the cellar, which had so long been interdicted to them and where a frightful spectacle awaited them.

Beyond the fortifications through which Athos had made a breach in order to get out, and which were composed of fagots, planks, and empty casks, heaped up according to all the rules of the strategic art, they found, swimming in puddles of oil and wine, the bones and fragments of all the hams they had eaten; while a heap of broken bottles filled the whole left-hand corner of the cellar, and a tun, the cock of which was left running, was yielding, by this means, the last drop of its blood. “The image of devastation and death,” as the ancient poet says, “reigned as over a field of battle.”

Of fifty large sausages, suspended from the joists, scarcely ten remained.

Then the lamentations of the host and hostess pierced the vault of the cellar. D’Artagnan himself was moved by them. Athos did not even turn his head.

To grief succeeded rage. The host armed himself with a spit, and rushed into the chamber occupied by the two friends.

“Some wine!” said Athos, on perceiving the host.

“Some wine!” cried the stupefied host, “some wine? Why you have drunk more than a hundred pistoles’ worth! I am a ruined man, lost, destroyed!”

“Bah,” said Athos, “we were always dry.”

“If you had been contented with drinking, well and good; but you have broken all the bottles.”

“You pushed me upon a heap which rolled down. That was your fault.”

“All my oil is lost!”

“Oil is a sovereign balm for wounds; and my poor Grimaud here was obliged to dress those you had inflicted on him.”

“All my sausages are gnawed!”

“There is an enormous quantity of rats in that cellar.”

“You shall pay me for all this,” cried the exasperated host.

“Triple ass!” said Athos, rising; but he sank down again immediately. He had tried his strength to the utmost. d’Artagnan came to his relief with his whip in his hand.

The host drew back and burst into tears.

“This will teach you,” said d’Artagnan, “to treat the guests God sends you in a more courteous fashion.”

“God? Say the devil!”

“My dear friend,” said d’Artagnan, “if you annoy us in this manner we will all four go and shut ourselves up in your cellar, and we will see if the mischief is as great as you say.”

“Oh, gentlemen,” said the host, “I have been wrong. I confess it, but pardon to every sin! You are gentlemen, and I am a poor innkeeper. You will have pity on me.”

“Ah, if you speak in that way,” said Athos, “you will break my heart, and the tears will flow from my eyes as the wine flowed from the cask. We are not such devils as we appear to be. Come hither, and let us talk.”

The host approached with hesitation.

“Come hither, I say, and don’t be afraid,” continued Athos. “At the very moment when I was about to pay you, I had placed my purse on the table.”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“That purse contained sixty pistoles; where is it?”

“Deposited with the justice; they said it was bad money.”

“Very well; get me my purse back and keep the sixty pistoles.”

“But Monseigneur knows very well that justice never lets go that which it once lays hold of. If it were bad money, there might be some hopes; but unfortunately, those were all good pieces.”

“Manage the matter as well as you can, my good man; it does not concern me, the more so as I have not a livre left.”

“Come,” said d’Artagnan, “let us inquire further. Athos’s horse, where is that?”

“In the stable.”

“How much is it worth?”

“Fifty pistoles at most.”

“It’s worth eighty. Take it, and there ends the matter.”

“What,” cried Athos, “are you selling my horse--my Bajazet? And pray upon what shall I make my campaign; upon Grimaud?”

“I have brought you another,” said d’Artagnan.

“Another?”

“And a magnificent one!” cried the host.

“Well, since there is another finer and younger, why, you may take the old one; and let us drink.”

“What?” asked the host, quite cheerful again.

“Some of that at the bottom, near the laths. There are twenty-five bottles of it left; all the rest were broken by my fall. Bring six of them.”

“Why, this man is a cask!” said the host, aside. “If he only remains here a fortnight, and pays for what he drinks, I shall soon re-establish my business.”

“And don’t forget,” said d’Artagnan, “to bring up four bottles of the same sort for the two English gentlemen.”

“And now,” said Athos, “while they bring the wine, tell me, d’Artagnan, what has become of the others, come!”

D’Artagnan related how he had found Porthos in bed with a strained knee, and Aramis at a table between two theologians. As he finished, the host entered with the wine ordered and a ham which, fortunately for him, had been left out of the cellar.

“That’s well!” said Athos, filling his glass and that of his friend; “here’s to Porthos and Aramis! But you, d’Artagnan, what is the matter with you, and what has happened to you personally? You have a sad air.”

“Alas,” said d’Artagnan, “it is because I am the most unfortunate.”

“Tell me.”

“Presently,” said d’Artagnan.

“Presently! And why presently? Because you think I am drunk? d’Artagnan, remember this! My ideas are never so clear as when I have had plenty of wine. Speak, then, I am all ears.”

D’Artagnan related his adventure with Mme. Bonacieux. Athos listened to him without a frown; and when he had finished, said, “Trifles, only trifles!” That was his favorite word.

“You always say TRIFLES, my dear Athos!” said d’Artagnan, “and that come very ill from you, who have never loved.”

The drink-deadened eye of Athos flashed out, but only for a moment; it became as dull and vacant as before.

“That’s true,” said he, quietly, “for my part I have never loved.”

“Acknowledge, then, you stony heart,” said d’Artagnan, “that you are wrong to be so hard upon us tender hearts.”

“Tender hearts! Pierced hearts!” said Athos.

“What do you say?”

“I say that love is a lottery in which he who wins, wins death! You are very fortunate to have lost, believe me, my dear d’Artagnan. And if I have any counsel to give, it is, always lose!”

“She seemed to love me so!”

“She SEEMED, did she?”

“Oh, she DID love me!”

“You child, why, there is not a man who has not believed, as you do, that his mistress loved him, and there lives not a man who has not been deceived by his mistress.”

“Except you, Athos, who never had one.”

“That’s true,” said Athos, after a moment’s silence, “that’s true! I never had one! Let us drink!”

“But then, philosopher that you are,” said d’Artagnan, “instruct me, support me. I stand in need of being taught and consoled.”

“Consoled for what?”

“For my misfortune.”

“Your misfortune is laughable,” said Athos, shrugging his shoulders; “I should like to know what you would say if I were to relate to you a real tale of love!”

“Which has happened to you?”

“Or one of my friends, what matters?”

“Tell it, Athos, tell it.”

“Better if I drink.”

“Drink and relate, then.”

“Not a bad idea!” said Athos, emptying and refilling his glass. “The two things agree marvelously well.”

“I am all attention,” said d’Artagnan.

Athos collected himself, and in proportion as he did so, d’Artagnan saw that he became pale. He was at that period of intoxication in which vulgar drinkers fall on the floor and go to sleep. He kept himself upright and dreamed, without sleeping. This somnambulism of drunkenness had something frightful in it.

“You particularly wish it?” asked he.

“I pray for it,” said d’Artagnan.

“Be it then as you desire. One of my friends--one of my friends, please to observe, not myself,” said Athos, interrupting himself with a melancholy smile, “one of the counts of my province--that is to say, of Berry--noble as a Dandolo or a Montmorency, at twenty-five years of age fell in love with a girl of sixteen, beautiful as fancy can paint. Through the ingenuousness of her age beamed an ardent mind, not of the woman, but of the poet. She did not please; she intoxicated. She lived in a small town with her brother, who was a curate. Both had recently come into the country. They came nobody knew whence; but when seeing her so lovely and her brother so pious, nobody thought of asking whence they came. They were said, however, to be of good extraction. My friend, who was seigneur of the country, might have seduced her, or taken her by force, at his will--for he was master. Who would have come to the assistance of two strangers, two unknown persons? Unfortunately he was an honorable man; he married her. The fool! The ass! The idiot!”

“How so, if he love her?” asked d’Artagnan.

“Wait,” said Athos. “He took her to his chateau, and made her the first lady in the province; and in justice it must be allowed that she supported her rank becomingly.”

“Well?” asked d’Artagnan.

“Well, one day when she was hunting with her husband,” continued Athos, in a low voice, and speaking very quickly, “she fell from her horse and fainted. The count flew to her to help, and as she appeared to be oppressed by her clothes, he ripped them open with his ponaird, and in so doing laid bare her shoulder. d’Artagnan,” said Athos, with a maniacal burst of laughter, “guess what she had on her shoulder.”

“How can I tell?” said d’Artagnan.

"A FLEUR-DE-LIS," said Athos. "She was branded."

Athos emptied at a single draught the glass he held in his hand.

"Horror!" cried d'Artagnan. "What do you tell me?"

"Truth, my friend. The angel was a demon; the poor young girl had stolen the sacred vessels from a church."

"And what did the count do?"

"The count was of the highest nobility. He had on his estates the rights of high and low tribunals. He tore the dress of the countess to pieces; he tied her hands behind her, and hanged her on a tree."

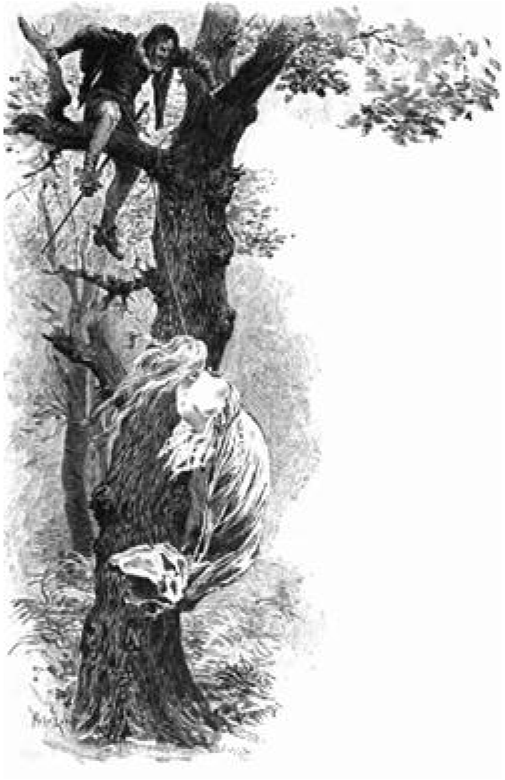

"Heavens, Athos, a murder?" cried d'Artagnan.

"No less," said Athos, as pale as a corpse. "But methinks I need wine!" and he seized by the neck the last bottle that was left, put it to his mouth, and emptied it at a single draught, as he would have emptied an ordinary glass.

Then he let his head sink upon his two hands, while d'Artagnan stood before him, stupefied.

"That has cured me of beautiful, poetical, and loving women," said Athos, after a considerable pause, raising his head, and forgetting to continue the fiction of the count. "God grant you as much! Let us drink."

"Then she is dead?" stammered d'Artagnan.

“PARBLEU!” said Athos. “But hold out your glass. Some ham, my boy, or we can’t drink.”

“And her brother?” added d’Artagnan, timidly.

“Her brother?” replied Athos.

“Yes, the priest.”

“Oh, I inquired after him for the purpose of hanging him likewise; but he was beforehand with me, he had quit the curacy the night before.”

“Was it ever known who this miserable fellow was?”

“He was doubtless the first lover and accomplice of the fair lady. A worthy man, who had pretended to be a curate for the purpose of getting his mistress married, and securing her a position. He has been hanged and quartered, I hope.”

“My God, my God!” cried d’Artagnan, quite stunned by the relation of this horrible adventure.

“Taste some of this ham, d’Artagnan; it is exquisite,” said Athos, cutting a slice, which he placed on the young man’s plate.

“What a pity it is there were only four like this in the cellar. I could have drunk fifty bottles more.”

D’Artagnan could no longer endure this conversation, which had made him bewildered. Allowing his head to sink upon his two hands, he pretended to sleep.

“These young fellows can none of them drink,” said Athos, looking at him with pity, “and yet this is one of the best!”

CHAPTER 28

THE RETURN

D’Artagnan was astounded by the terrible confidence of Athos; yet many things appeared very obscure to him in this half revelation. In the first place it had been made by a man quite drunk to one who was half drunk; and yet, in spite of the incertainty which the vapor of three or four bottles of Burgundy carries with it to the brain, d’Artagnan, when awaking on the following morning, had all the words of Athos as present to his memory as if they then fell from his mouth--they had been so impressed upon his mind. All this doubt only gave rise to a more lively desire of arriving at a certainty, and he went into his friend’s chamber with a fixed determination of renewing the conversation of the preceding evening; but he found Athos quite himself again--that is to say, the most shrewd and impenetrable of men. Besides which, the Musketeer, after having exchanged a hearty shake of the hand with him, broached the matter first.

“I was pretty drunk yesterday, d’Artagnan,” said he, “I can tell that by my tongue, which was swollen and hot this morning, and by my pulse, which was very tremulous. I wager that I uttered a thousand extravagances.”

While saying this he looked at his friend with an earnestness that embarrassed him.

“No,” replied d’Artagnan, “if I recollect well what you said, it was nothing out of the common way.”

“Ah, you surprise me. I thought I had told you a most lamentable story.” And he looked at the young man as if he would read the bottom of his heart.

“My faith,” said d’Artagnan, “it appears that I was more drunk than you, since I remember nothing of the kind.”

Athos did not trust this reply, and he resumed; “you cannot have failed to remark, my dear friend, that everyone has his particular kind of drunkenness, sad or gay. My drunkenness is always sad, and when I am thoroughly drunk my mania is to relate all the lugubrious stories which my foolish nurse inculcated into my brain. That is my failing--a capital failing, I admit; but with that exception, I am a good drinker.”

Athos spoke this in so natural a manner that d’Artagnan was shaken in his conviction.

“It is that, then,” replied the young man, anxious to find out the truth, “it is that, then, I remember as we remember a dream. We were speaking of hanging.”

“Ah, you see how it is,” said Athos, becoming still paler, but yet attempting to laugh; “I was sure it was so--the hanging of people is my nightmare.”

“Yes, yes,” replied d’Artagnan. “I remember now; yes, it was about--stop a minute--yes, it was about a woman.”

“That’s it,” replied Athos, becoming almost livid; “that is my grand story of the fair lady, and when I relate that, I must be very drunk.”

“Yes, that was it,” said d’Artagnan, “the story of a tall, fair lady, with blue eyes.”

“Yes, who was hanged.”

“By her husband, who was a nobleman of your acquaintance,” continued d’Artagnan, looking intently at Athos.

“Well, you see how a man may compromise himself when he does not know what he says,” replied Athos, shrugging his shoulders as if he thought himself an object of pity. “I certainly never will get drunk again, d’Artagnan; it is too bad a habit.”

D’Artagnan remained silent; and then changing the conversation all at once, Athos said:

“By the by, I thank you for the horse you have brought me.”

“Is it to your mind?” asked d’Artagnan.

“Yes; but it is not a horse for hard work.”

“You are mistaken; I rode him nearly ten leagues in less than an hour and a half, and he appeared no more distressed than if he had only made the tour of the Place St. Sulpice.”

“Ah, you begin to awaken my regret.”

“Regret?”

“Yes; I have parted with him.”

“How?”

“Why, here is the simple fact. This morning I awoke at six o’clock. You were still fast asleep, and I did not know what to do with myself; I was still stupid from our yesterday’s debauch. As I came into the public room, I saw one of our Englishman bargaining with a dealer for a horse, his own having died yesterday from bleeding. I drew near, and found he was bidding a hundred pistoles for a chestnut nag. ‘PARDIEU,’ said I, ‘my good gentleman, I have a horse to sell, too.’ ‘Ay, and a very fine one! I saw him yesterday; your friend’s lackey was leading him.’ ‘Do you think he is worth a hundred pistoles?’ ‘Yes! Will you sell him to me for that sum?’ ‘No; but I will play for him.’ ‘What?’ ‘At dice.’ No sooner said than done, and I lost the horse. Ah, ah! But please to observe I won back the equipage,” cried Athos.

D’Artagnan looked much disconcerted.

“This vexes you?” said Athos.

“Well, I must confess it does,” replied d’Artagnan. “That horse was to have identified us in the day of battle. It was a pledge, a remembrance. Athos, you have done wrong.”

“But, my dear friend, put yourself in my place,” replied the Musketeer. “I was hipped to death; and still further, upon my honor, I don’t like English horses. If it is only to be recognized, why the saddle will suffice for that; it is quite remarkable enough. As to the horse, we can easily find some excuse for its disappearance. Why the devil! A horse is mortal; suppose mine had had the glanders or the farcy?”

D’Artagnan did not smile.

“It vexes me greatly,” continued Athos, “that you attach so much importance to these animals, for I am not yet at the end of my story.”

“What else have you done.”

“After having lost my own horse, nine against ten--see how near--I formed an idea of staking yours.”

“Yes; but you stopped at the idea, I hope?”

“No; for I put it in execution that very minute.”

“And the consequence?” said d’Artagnan, in great anxiety.

“I threw, and I lost.”

“What, my horse?”

“Your horse, seven against eight; a point short--you know the proverb.”

“Athos, you are not in your right senses, I swear.”

“My dear lad, that was yesterday, when I was telling you silly stories, it was proper to tell me that, and not this morning. I lost him then, with all his appointments and furniture.”

“Really, this is frightful.”

“Stop a minute; you don’t know all yet. I should make an excellent gambler if I were not too hot-headed; but I was hot-headed, just as if I had been drinking. Well, I was not hot-headed then--”

“Well, but what else could you play for? You had nothing left?”

“Oh, yes, my friend; there was still that diamond left which sparkles on your finger, and which I had observed yesterday.”

“This diamond!” said d’Artagnan, placing his hand eagerly on his ring.

“And as I am a connoisseur in such things, having had a few of my own once, I estimated it at a thousand pistoles.”

“I hope,” said d’Artagnan, half dead with fright, “you made no mention of my diamond?”

“On the contrary, my dear friend, this diamond became our only resource; with it I might regain our horses and their harnesses, and even money to pay our expenses on the road.”

“Athos, you make me tremble!” cried d’Artagnan.

“I mentioned your diamond then to my adversary, who had likewise remarked it. What the devil, my dear, do you think you can wear a star from heaven on your finger, and nobody observe it? Impossible!”

“Go on, go on, my dear fellow!” said d’Artagnan; “for upon my honor, you will kill me with your indifference.”

“We divided, then, this diamond into ten parts of a hundred pistoles each.”

“You are laughing at me, and want to try me!” said d’Artagnan, whom anger began to take by the hair, as Minerva takes Achilles, in the ILLIAD.

“No, I do not jest, MORDIEU! I should like to have seen you in my place! I had been fifteen days without seeing a human face, and had been left to brutalize myself in the company of bottles.”

“That was no reason for staking my diamond!” replied d’Artagnan, closing his hand with a nervous spasm.

“Hear the end. Ten parts of a hundred pistoles each, in ten throws, without revenge; in thirteen throws I had lost all--in thirteen throws. The number thirteen was always fatal to me; it was on the thirteenth of July that--”

“VENTREBLEU!” cried d’Artagnan, rising from the table, the story of the present day making him forget that of the preceding one.

“Patience!” said Athos; “I had a plan. The Englishman was an original; I had seen him conversing that morning with Grimaud, and Grimaud had told me that he had made him proposals to enter into his service. I staked Grimaud, the silent Grimaud, divided into ten portions.”

“Well, what next?” said d’Artagnan, laughing in spite of himself.

“Grimaud himself, understand; and with the ten parts of Grimaud, which are not worth a ducatoon, I regained the diamond. Tell me, now, if persistence is not a virtue?”

“My faith! But this is droll,” cried d’Artagnan, consoled, and holding his sides with laughter.

“You may guess, finding the luck turned, that I again staked the diamond.”

“The devil!” said d’Artagnan, becoming angry again.

“I won back your harness, then your horse, then my harness, then my horse, and then I lost again. In brief, I regained your harness and then mine. That’s where we are. That was a superb throw, so I left off there.”

D’Artagnan breathed as if the whole hostelry had been removed from his breast.

“Then the diamond is safe?” said he, timidly.

“Intact, my dear friend; besides the harness of your Bucephalus and mine.”

“But what is the use of harnesses without horses?”

“I have an idea about them.”

“Athos, you make me shudder.”

“Listen to me. You have not played for a long time, d’Artagnan.”

“And I have no inclination to play.”

“Swear to nothing. You have not played for a long time, I said; you ought, then, to have a good hand.”

“Well, what then?”

“Well; the Englishman and his companion are still here. I remarked that he regretted the horse furniture very much. You appear to think much of your horse. In your place I would stake the furniture against the horse.”

“But he will not wish for only one harness.”

“Stake both, PARDIEU! I am not selfish, as you are.”

“You would do so?” said d’Artagnan, undecided, so strongly did the confidence of Athos begin to prevail, in spite of himself.

“On my honor, in one single throw.”

“But having lost the horses, I am particularly anxious to preserve the harnesses.”

“Stake your diamond, then.”

“This? That’s another matter. Never, never!”

“The devil!” said Athos. “I would propose to you to stake Planchet, but as that has already been done, the Englishman would not, perhaps, be willing.”

“Decidedly, my dear Athos,” said d’Artagnan, “I should like better not to risk anything.”

“That’s a pity,” said Athos, coolly. “The Englishman is overflowing with pistoles. Good Lord, try one throw! One throw is soon made!”

[redacted]

“And if I lose?”

“You will win.”

“But if I lose?”

“Well, you will surrender the harnesses.”

“Have with you for one throw!” said d’Artagnan.

Athos went in quest of the Englishman, whom he found in the stable, examining the harnesses with a greedy eye. The opportunity was good. He proposed the conditions--the two harnesses, either against one horse or a hundred pistoles. The Englishman calculated fast; the two harnesses were worth three hundred pistoles. He consented.

D’Artagnan threw the dice with a trembling hand, and turned up the number three; his paleness terrified Athos, who, however, consented himself with saying, “That’s a sad throw, comrade; you will have the horses fully equipped, monsieur.”

The Englishman, quite triumphant, did not even give himself the trouble to shake the dice. He threw them on the table without looking at them, so sure was he of victory; d’Artagnan turned aside to conceal his ill humor.

“Hold, hold, hold!” said Athos, wit his quiet tone; “that throw of the dice is extraordinary. I have not seen such a one four times in my life. Two aces!”

The Englishman looked, and was seized with astonishment. d’Artagnan looked, and was seized with pleasure.

“Yes,” continued Athos, “four times only; once at the house of Monsieur Crequy; another time at my own house in the country, in my chateau at--when I had a chateau; a third time at Monsieur de Treville’s where it surprised us all; and the fourth time at a cabaret, where it fell to my lot, and where I lost a hundred louis and a supper on it.”

“Then Monsieur takes his horse back again,” said the Englishman.

“Certainly,” said d’Artagnan.

“Then there is no revenge?”

“Our conditions said, ‘No revenge,’ you will please to recollect.”

“That is true; the horse shall be restored to your lackey, monsieur.”

“A moment,” said Athos; “with your permission, monsieur, I wish to speak a word with my friend.”

“Say on.”

Athos drew d’Artagnan aside.

“Well, Tempter, what more do you want with me?” said d’Artagnan. “You want me to throw again, do you not?”

“No, I would wish you to reflect.”

“On what?”

“You mean to take your horse?”

“Without doubt.”

“You are wrong, then. I would take the hundred pistoles. You know you have staked the harnesses against the horse or a hundred pistoles, at your choice.”

“Yes.”

“Well, then, I repeat, you are wrong. What is the use of one horse for us two? I could not ride behind. We should look like the two sons of Anmon, who had lost their brother. You cannot think of humiliating me by prancing along by my side on that magnificent charger. For my part, I should not hesitate a moment; I should take the hundred pistoles. We want money for our return to Paris.”

“I am much attached to that horse, Athos.”

“And there again you are wrong. A horse slips and injures a joint; a horse stumbles and breaks his knees to the bone; a horse eats out of a manger in which a glandered horse has eaten. There is a horse, while on the contrary, the hundred pistoles feed their master.”

“But how shall we get back?”

“Upon our lackey’s horses, PARDIEU. Anybody may see by our bearing that we are people of condition.”

“Pretty figures we shall cut on ponies while Aramis and Porthos caracole on their steeds.”

“Aramis! Porthos!” cried Athos, and laughed aloud.

“What is it?” asked d’Artagnan, who did not at all comprehend the hilarity of his friend.

“Nothing, nothing! Go on!”

“Your advice, then?”

“To take the hundred pistoles, d’Artagnan. With the hundred pistoles we can live well to the end of the month. We have undergone a great deal of fatigue, remember, and a little rest will do no harm.”

“I rest? Oh, no, Athos. Once in Paris, I shall prosecute my search for that unfortunate woman!”

“Well, you may be assured that your horse will not be half so serviceable to you for that purpose as good golden louis. Take the hundred pistoles, my friend; take the hundred pistoles!”

D’Artagnan only required one reason to be satisfied. This last reason appeared convincing. Besides, he feared that by resisting longer he should appear selfish in the eyes of Athos. He acquiesced, therefore, and chose the hundred pistoles, which the Englishman paid down on the spot.

They then determined to depart. Peace with the landlord, in addition to Athos’s old horse, cost six pistoles. D’Artagnan and Athos took the nags of Planchet and Grimaud, and the two lackeys started on foot, carrying the saddles on their heads.

However ill our two friends were mounted, they were soon far in advance of their servants, and arrived at Creveccoeur. From a distance they perceived Aramis, seated in a melancholy manner at his window, looking out, like Sister Anne, at the dust in the horizon.

"HOLA, Aramis! What the devil are you doing there?" cried the two friends.

"Ah, is that you, d'Artagnan, and you, Athos?" said the young man. "I was reflecting upon the rapidity with which the blessings of this world leave us. My English horse, which has just disappeared amid a cloud of dust, has furnished me with a living image of the fragility of the things of the earth. Life itself may be resolved into three words: ERAT, EST, FUIT."

"Which means--" said d'Artagnan, who began to suspect the truth.

"Which means that I have just been duped-sixty louis for a horse which by the manner of his gait can do at least five leagues an hour."

D'Artagnan and Athos laughed aloud.

"My dear d'Artagnan," said Aramis, "don't be too angry with me, I beg. Necessity has no law; besides, I am the person punished, as that rascally horsedealer has robbed me of fifty louis, at least. Ah, you fellows are good managers! You ride on our lackey's horses, and have your own gallant steeds led along carefully by hand, at short stages."

At the same instant a market cart, which some minutes before had appeared upon the Amiens road, pulled up at the inn, and Planchet and Grimaud came out of it with the saddles on their heads. The cart was returning empty to Paris, and the two lackeys had agreed, for their transport, to slake the wagoner's thirst along the route.

"What is this?" said Aramis, on seeing them arrive. "Nothing but saddles?"

"Now do you understand?" said Athos.

"My friends, that's exactly like me! I retained my harness by instinct. HOLA, Bazin! Bring my new saddle and carry it along with those of these gentlemen."

"And what have you done with your ecclesiastics?" asked d'Artagnan.

"My dear fellow, I invited them to a dinner the next day," replied Aramis. "They have some capital wine here--please to observe that in passing. I did my best to make them drunk. Then the curate forbade me to quit my uniform, and the Jesuit entreated me to get him made a Musketeer."

“Without a thesis?” cried d’Artagnan, “without a thesis? I demand the suppression of the thesis.”

“Since then,” continued Aramis, “I have lived very agreeably. I have begun a poem in verses of one syllable. That is rather difficult, but the merit in all things consists in the difficulty. The matter is gallant. I will read you the first canto. It has four hundred lines, and lasts a minute.”

“My faith, my dear Aramis,” said d’Artagnan, who detested verses almost as much as he did Latin, “add to the merit of the difficulty that of the brevity, and you are sure that your poem will at least have two merits.”

“You will see,” continued Aramis, “that it breathes irreproachable passion. And so, my friends, we return to Paris? Bravo! I am ready. We are going to rejoin that good fellow, Porthos. So much the better. You can’t think how I have missed him, the great simpleton. To see him so self-satisfied reconciles me with myself. He would not sell his horse; not for a kingdom! I think I can see him now, mounted upon his superb animal and seated in his handsome saddle. I am sure he will look like the Great Mogul!”

They made a halt for an hour to refresh their horses. Aramis discharged his bill, placed Bazin in the cart with his comrades, and they set forward to join Porthos.

They found him up, less pale than when d’Artagnan left him after his first visit, and seated at a table on which, though he was alone, was spread enough for four persons. This dinner consisted of meats nicely dressed, choice wines, and superb fruit.

“Ah, PARDIEU!” said he, rising, “you come in the nick of time, gentlemen. I was just beginning the soup, and you will dine with me.”

“Oh, oh!” said d’Artagnan, “Mousqueton has not caught these bottles with his lasso. Besides, here is a piquant FRICANDEAU and a fillet of beef.”

“I am recruiting myself,” said Porthos, “I am recruiting myself. Nothing weakens a man more than these devilish strains. Did you ever suffer from a strain, Athos?”

“Never! Though I remember, in our affair of the Rue Ferou, I received a sword wound which at the end of fifteen or eighteen days produced the same effect.”

“But this dinner was not intended for you alone, Porthos?” said Aramis.

“No,” said Porthos, “I expected some gentlemen of the neighborhood, who have just sent me word they could not come. You will take their places and I shall not lose by the exchange. HOLA, Mousqueton, seats, and order double the bottles!”

“Do you know what we are eating here?” said Athos, at the end of ten minutes.

“PARDIEU!” replied d’Artagnan, “for my part, I am eating veal garnished with shrimps and vegetables.”

“And I some lamb chops,” said Porthos.

“And I a plain chicken,” said Aramis.

“You are all mistaken, gentlemen,” answered Athos, gravely; “you are eating horse.”

“Eating what?” said d’Artagnan.

“Horse!” said Aramis, with a grimace of disgust.

Porthos alone made no reply.

“Yes, horse. Are we not eating a horse, Porthos? And perhaps his saddle, therewith.”

“No, gentlemen, I have kept the harness,” said Porthos.

“My faith,” said Aramis, “we are all alike. One would think we had tipped the wink.”

“What could I do?” said Porthos. “This horse made my visitors ashamed of theirs, and I don’t like to humiliate people.”

“Then your duchess is still at the waters?” asked d’Artagnan.

“Still,” replied Porthos. “And, my faith, the governor of the province--one of the gentlemen I expected today--seemed to have such a wish for him, that I gave him to him.”

“Gave him?” cried d’Artagnan.

“My God, yes, GAVE, that is the word,” said Porthos; “for the animal was worth at least a hundred and fifty louis, and the stingy fellow would only give me eighty.”

“Without the saddle?” said Aramis.

“Yes, without the saddle.”

“You will observe, gentlemen,” said Athos, “that Porthos has made the best bargain of any of us.”

And then commenced a roar of laughter in which they all joined, to the astonishment of poor Porthos; but when he was informed of the cause of their hilarity, he shared it vociferously according to his custom.

“There is one comfort, we are all in cash,” said d’Artagnan.

“Well, for my part,” said Athos, “I found Aramis’s Spanish wine so good that I sent on a hamper of sixty bottles of it in the wagon with the lackeys. That has weakened my purse.”

“And I,” said Aramis, “imagined that I had given almost my last sou to the church of Montdidier and the Jesuits of Amiens, with whom I had made engagements which I ought to have kept. I have ordered Masses for myself, and for you, gentlemen, which will be said, gentlemen, for which I have not the least doubt you will be marvelously benefited.”

“And I,” said Porthos, “do you think my strain cost me nothing?--without reckoning Mousqueton’s wound, for which I had to have the surgeon twice a day, and who charged me double on account of that foolish Mousqueton having allowed himself a ball in a part which people generally only show to an apothecary; so I advised him to try never to get wounded there any more.”

“Ay, ay!” said Athos, exchanging a smile with d’Artagnan and Aramis, “it is very clear you acted nobly with regard to the poor lad; that is like a good master.”

“In short,” said Porthos, “when all my expenses are paid, I shall have, at most, thirty crowns left.”

“And I about ten pistoles,” said Aramis.

“Well, then it appears that we are the Croesuses of the society. How much have you left of your hundred pistoles, d’Artagnan?”

“Of my hundred pistoles? Why, in the first place I gave you fifty.”

“You think so?”

“PARDIEU!” “Ah, that is true. I recollect.”

“Then I paid the host six.”

“What a brute of a host! Why did you give him six pistoles?”

“You told me to give them to him.”

“It is true; I am too good-natured. In brief, how much remains?”

“Twenty-five pistoles,” said d’Artagnan.

“And I,” said Athos, taking some small change from his pocket, “I--”

“You? Nothing!”

“My faith! So little that it is not worth reckoning with the general stock.”

“Now, then, let us calculate how much we posses in all.”

“Porthos?”

“Thirty crowns.”

“Aramis?”

“Ten pistoles.”

“And you, d’Artagnan?”

“Twenty-five.”

“That makes in all?” said Athos.

“Four hundred and seventy-five livres,” said d’Artagnan, who reckoned like Archimedes.

“On our arrival in Paris, we shall still have four hundred, besides the harnesses,” said Porthos.

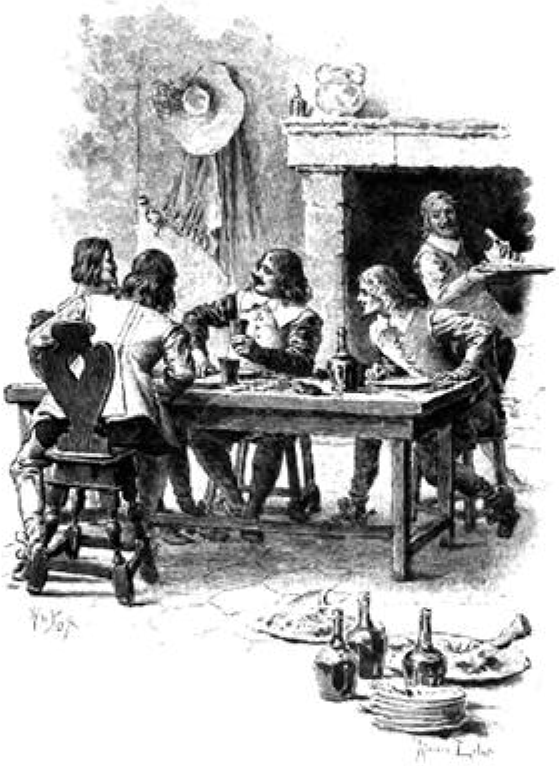

“But our troop horses?” said Aramis.

“Well, of the four horses of our lackeys we will make two for the masters, for which we will draw lots. With the four hundred livres we will make the half of one for one of the unmounted, and then we will give the turnings out of our pockets to d’Artagnan, who has a steady hand, and will go and play in the first gaming house we come to. There!”

“Let us dine, then,” said Porthos; “it is getting cold.”

The friends, at ease with regard to the future, did honor to the repast, the remains of which were abandoned to Mousqueton, Bazin, Planchet, and Grimaud.

On arriving in Paris, d’Artagnan found a letter from M. de Treville, which informed him that, at his request, the king had promised that he should enter the company of the Musketeers.

As this was the height of d’Artagnan’s worldly ambition--apart, be it well understood, from his desire of finding Mme. Bonacieux--he ran, full of joy, to seek his comrades, whom he had left only half an hour before, but whom he found very sad and deeply preoccupied. They were assembled in council at the residence of Athos, which always indicated an event of some gravity. M. de Treville had intimated to them his Majesty’s fixed intention to open the campaign on the first of May, and they must immediately prepare their outfits.

The four philosophers looked at one another in a state of bewilderment. M. de Treville never jested in matters relating to discipline.

“And what do you reckon your outfit will cost?” said d’Artagnan.

“Oh, we can scarcely say. We have made our calculations with Spartan economy, and we each require fifteen hundred livres.”

“Four times fifteen makes sixty--six thousand livres,” said Athos.

“It seems to me,” said d’Artagnan, “with a thousand livres each--I do not speak as a Spartan, but as a procurator--”

This word PROCURATOR roused Porthos. “Stop,” said he, “I have an idea.”

“Well, that’s something, for I have not the shadow of one,” said Athos coolly; “but as to d’Artagnan, gentlemen, the idea of belonging to OURS has driven him out of his senses. A thousand livres! For my part, I declare I want two thousand.”

“Four times two makes eight,” then said Aramis; “it is eight thousand that we want to complete our outfits, toward which, it is true, we have already the saddles.”

“Besides,” said Athos, waiting till d’Artagnan, who went to thank Monsieur de Treville, had shut the door, “besides, there is that beautiful ring which beams from the finger of our friend. What the devil! D’Artagnan is too good a comrade to leave his brothers in embarrassment while he wears the ransom of a king on his finger.”

CHAPTER 29

HUNTING FOR THE EQUIPMENTS

The most preoccupied of the four friends was certainly d'Artagnan, although he, in his quality of Guardsman, would be much more easily equipped than Messieurs the Musketeers, who were all of high rank; but our Gascon cadet was, as may have been observed, of a provident and almost avaricious character, and with that (explain the contradiction) so vain as almost to rival Porthos. To this preoccupation of his vanity, d'Artagnan at this moment joined an uneasiness much less selfish. Notwithstanding all his inquiries respecting Mme. Bonacieux, he could obtain no intelligence of her. M. de Treville had spoken of her to the queen. The queen was ignorant where the mercer's young wife was, but had promised to have her sought for; but this promise was very vague and did not at all reassure d'Artagnan.

Athos did not leave his chamber; he made up his mind not to take a single step to equip himself.

"We have still fifteen days before us," said he to his friends, "well, if at the end of a fortnight I have found nothing, or rather if nothing has come to find me, as I, too good a Catholic to kill myself with a pistol bullet, I will seek a good quarrel with four of his Eminence's Guards or with eight Englishmen, and I will fight until one of them has killed me, which, considering the number, cannot fail to happen. It will then be said of me that I died for the king; so that I shall have performed my duty without the expense of an outfit."

Porthos continued to walk about with his hands behind him, tossing his head and repeating, "I shall follow up on my idea."

Aramis, anxious and negligently dressed, said nothing.

It may be seen by these disastrous details that desolation reigned in the community.

The lackeys on their part, like the coursers of Hippolytus, shared the sadness of their masters. Mousqueton collected a store of crusts; Bazin, who had always been inclined to devotion, never quit the churches; Planchet watched the flight of flies; and Grimaud, whom the general distress could not induce to break the silence imposed by his master, heaved sighs enough to soften the stones.

The three friends--for, as we have said, Athos had sworn not to stir a foot to equip himself--went out early in the morning, and returned late at night. They wandered about the streets, looking at the pavement as if to see whether the passengers had not left a purse behind them. They might have been supposed to be following tracks, so observant were they wherever they went. When they met they looked desolately at one another, as much as to say, “Have you found anything?”

However, as Porthos had first found an idea, and had thought of it earnestly afterward, he was the first to act. He was a man of execution, this worthy Porthos. D’Artagnan perceived him one day walking toward the church of St. Leu, and followed him instinctively. He entered, after having twisted his mustache and elongated his imperial, which always announced on his part the most triumphant resolutions. As d’Artagnan took some precautions to conceal himself, Porthos believed he had not been seen. d’Artagnan entered behind him. Porthos went and leaned against the side of a pillar. D’Artagnan, still unperceived, supported himself against the other side.

There happened to be a sermon, which made the church very full of people. Porthos took advantage of this circumstance to ogle the women. Thanks to the cares of Mousqueton, the exterior was far from announcing the distress of the interior. His hat was a little napless, his feather was a little faded, his gold lace was a little tarnished, his laces were a trifle frayed; but in the obscurity of the church these things were not seen, and Porthos was still the handsome Porthos.

D’Artagnan observed, on the bench nearest to the pillar against which Porthos leaned, a sort of ripe beauty, rather yellow and rather dry, but erect and haughty under her black hood. The eyes of Porthos were furtively cast upon this lady, and then roved about at large over the nave.

On her side the lady, who from time to time blushed, darted with the rapidity of lightning a glance toward the inconstant Porthos; and then immediately the eyes of Porthos wandered anxiously. It was plain that this mode of proceeding piqued the lady in the black hood, for she bit her lips till they bled, scratched the end of her nose, and could not sit still in her seat.

Porthos, seeing this, retwisted his mustache, elongated his imperial a second time, and began to make signals to a beautiful lady who was near the choir, and who not only was a beautiful lady, but still further, no doubt, a great lady--for she had behind her a Negro boy who had brought the cushion on which she knelt, and a female servant who held the emblazoned bag in which was placed the book from which she read the Mass.

The lady with the black hood followed through all their wanderings the looks of Porthos, and perceived that they rested upon the lady with the velvet cushion, the little Negro, and the maid-servant.

During this time Porthos played close. It was almost imperceptible motions of his eyes, fingers placed upon the lips, little assassinating smiles, which really did assassinate the disdained beauty.

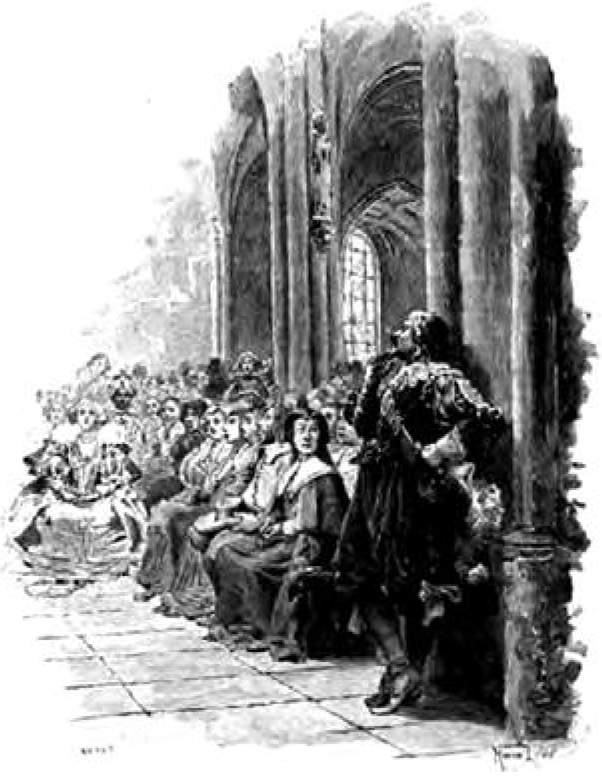

Then she cried, “Ahem!” under cover of the MEA CULPA, striking her breast so vigorously that everybody, even the lady with the red cushion, turned round toward her. Porthos paid no attention. Nevertheless, he understood it all, but was deaf.

The lady with the red cushion produced a great effect--for she was very handsome--upon the lady with the black hood, who saw in her a rival really to be dreaded; a great effect upon Porthos, who thought her much prettier than the lady with the black hood; a great effect upon d’Artagnan, who recognized in her the lady of Meung, of Calais, and of Dover, whom his persecutor, the man with the scar, had saluted by the name of Milady.

D’Artagnan, without losing sight of the lady of the red cushion, continued to watch the proceedings of Porthos, which amused him greatly. He guessed that the lady of the black hood was the procurator’s wife of the Rue aux Ours, which was the more probable from the church of St. Leu being not far from that locality.

He guessed, likewise, by induction, that Porthos was taking his revenge for the defeat of Chantilly, when the procurator’s wife had proved so refractory with respect to her purse.

Amid all this, d’Artagnan remarked also that not one countenance responded to the gallantries of Porthos. There were only chimeras and illusions; but for real love, for true jealousy, is there any reality except illusions and chimeras?

The sermon over, the procurator’s wife advanced toward the holy font. Porthos went before her, and instead of a finger, dipped his whole hand in. The procurator’s wife smiled, thinking that it was for her Porthos had put himself to this trouble; but she was cruelly and promptly undeceived. When she was only about three steps from him, he turned his head round, fixing his eyes steadfastly upon the lady with the red cushion, who had risen and was approaching, followed by her black boy and her woman.

When the lady of the red cushion came close to Porthos, Porthos drew his dripping hand from the font. The fair worshipper touched the great hand of Porthos with her delicate fingers, smiled, made the sign of the cross, and left the church.

This was too much for the procurator’s wife; she doubted not there was an intrigue between this lady and Porthos. If she had been a great lady she would have fainted; but as she was only a procurator’s wife, she contented herself saying to the Musketeer with concentrated fury, “Eh, Monsieur Porthos, you don’t offer me any holy water?”

Porthos, at the sound of that voice, started like a man awakened from a sleep of a hundred years.

“Ma-madame!” cried he; “is that you? How is your husband, our dear Monsieur Coquenard? Is he still as stingy as ever? Where can my eyes have been not to have seen you during the two hours of the sermon?”

“I was within two paces of you, monsieur,” replied the procurator’s wife; “but you did not perceive me because you had no eyes but for the pretty lady to whom you just now gave the holy water."

Porthos pretended to be confused. "Ah," said he, "you have remarked--"

"I must have been blind not to have seen."

"Yes," said Porthos, "that is a duchess of my acquaintance whom I have great trouble to meet on account of the jealousy of her husband, and who sent me word that she should come today to this poor church, buried in this vile quarter, solely for the sake of seeing me."

"Monsieur Porthos," said the procurator's wife, "will you have the kindness to offer me your arm for five minutes? I have something to say to you."

"Certainly, madame," said Porthos, winking to himself, as a gambler does who laughs at the dupe he is about to pluck.

At that moment d'Artagnan passed in pursuit of Milady; he cast a passing glance at Porthos, and beheld this triumphant look.

"Eh, eh!" said he, reasoning to himself according to the strangely easy morality of that gallant period, "there is one who will be equipped in good time!"

Porthos, yielding to the pressure of the arm of the procurator's wife, as a bark yields to the rudder, arrived at the cloister St. Magloire--a little-frequented passage, enclosed with a turnstile at each end. In the daytime nobody was seen there but mendicants devouring their crusts, and children at play.

"Ah, Monsieur Porthos," cried the procurator's wife, when she was assured that no one who was a stranger to the population of the locality could either see or hear her, "ah, Monsieur Porthos, you are a great conqueror, as it appears!"

"I, madame?" said Porthos, drawing himself up proudly; "how so?"

"The signs just now, and the holy water! But that must be a princess, at least--that lady with her Negro boy and her maid!"

"My God! Madame, you are deceived," said Porthos; "she is simply a duchess."

"And that running footman who waited at the door, and that carriage with a coachman in grand livery who sat waiting on his seat?"

Porthos had seen neither the footman nor the carriage, but with the eye of a jealous woman, Mme. Coquenard had seen everything.

Porthos regretted that he had not at once made the lady of the red cushion a princess.

“Ah, you are quite the pet of the ladies, Monsieur Porthos!” resumed the procurator’s wife, with a sigh.

“Well,” responded Porthos, “you may imagine, with the physique with which nature has endowed me, I am not in want of good luck.”

“Good Lord, how quickly men forget!” cried the procurator’s wife, raising her eyes toward heaven.

“Less quickly than the women, it seems to me,” replied Porthos; “for I, madame, I may say I was your victim, when wounded, dying, I was abandoned by the surgeons. I, the offspring of a noble family, who placed reliance upon your friendship--I was near dying of my wounds at first, and of hunger afterward, in a beggarly inn at Chantilly, without you ever deigning once to reply to the burning letters I addressed to you.”

“But, Monsieur Porthos,” murmured the procurator’s wife, who began to feel that, to judge by the conduct of the great ladies of the time, she was wrong.

“I, who had sacrificed for you the Baronne de--”

“I know it well.”

“The Comtesse de--”

“Monsieur Porthos, be generous!”

“You are right, madame, and I will not finish.”

“But it was my husband who would not hear of lending.”

“Madame Coquenard,” said Porthos, “remember the first letter you wrote me, and which I preserve engraved in my memory.”

The procurator’s wife uttered a groan.

“Besides,” said she, “the sum you required me to borrow was rather large.”

“Madame Coquenard, I gave you the preference. I had but to write to the Duchesse--but I won’t repeat her name, for I am incapable of compromising a woman; but this I know, that I had but to write to her and she would have sent me fifteen hundred.”

The procurator’s wife shed a tear.

“Monsieur Porthos,” said she, “I can assure you that you have severely punished me; and if in the time to come you should find yourself in a similar situation, you have but to apply to me.”

“Fie, madame, fie!” said Porthos, as if disgusted. “Let us not talk about money, if you please; it is humiliating.”

“Then you no longer love me!” said the procurator’s wife, slowly and sadly.

Porthos maintained a majestic silence.

“And that is the only reply you make? Alas, I understand.”

“Think of the offense you have committed toward me, madame! It remains HERE!” said Porthos, placing his hand on his heart, and pressing it strongly.

“I will repair it, indeed I will, my dear Porthos.”

“Besides, what did I ask of you?” resumed Porthos, with a movement of the shoulders full of good fellowship. “A loan, nothing more! After all, I am not an unreasonable man. I know you are not rich, Madame Coquenard, and that your husband is obliged to bleed his poor clients to squeeze a few paltry crowns from them. Oh! If you were a duchess, a marchioness, or a countess, it would be quite a different thing; it would be unpardonable.”

The procurator’s wife was piqued.

“Please to know, Monsieur Porthos,” said she, “that my strongbox, the strongbox of a procurator’s wife though it may be, is better filled than those of your affected minxes.”

“The doubles the offense,” said Porthos, disengaging his arm from that of the procurator’s wife; “for if you are rich, Madame Coquenard, then there is no excuse for your refusal.”

“When I said rich,” replied the procurator’s wife, who saw that she had gone too far, “you must not take the word literally. I am not precisely rich, though I am pretty well off.”

“Hold, madame,” said Porthos, “let us say no more upon the subject, I beg of you. You have misunderstood me, all sympathy is extinct between us.”

“Ingrate that you are!”

“Ah! I advise you to complain!” said Porthos.

“Begone, then, to your beautiful duchess; I will detain you no longer.”

“And she is not to be despised, in my opinion.”

“Now, Monsieur Porthos, once more, and this is the last! Do you love me still?”

“Ah, madame,” said Porthos, in the most melancholy tone he could assume, “when we are about to enter upon a campaign--a campaign, in which my presentiments tell me I shall be killed--”

“Oh, don’t talk of such things!” cried the procurator’s wife, bursting into tears.

“Something whispers me so,” continued Porthos, becoming more and more melancholy.

“Rather say that you have a new love.”

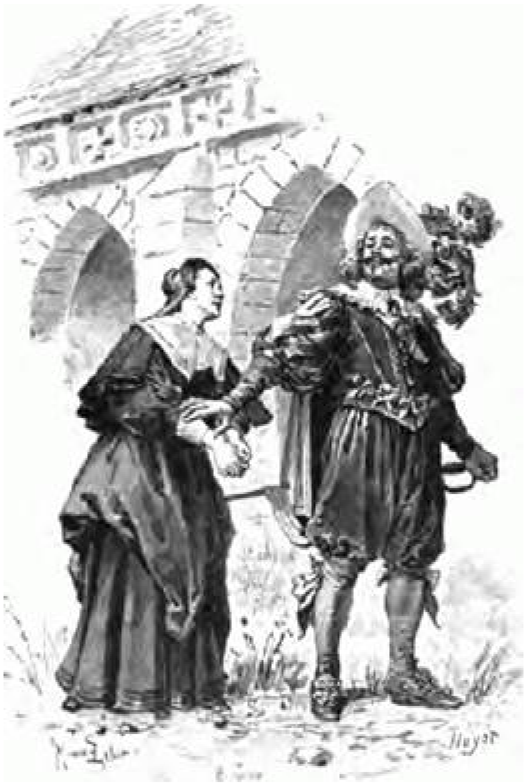

“Not so; I speak frankly to you. No object affects me; and I even feel here, at the bottom of my heart, something which speaks for you. But in fifteen days, as you know, or as you do not know, this fatal campaign is to open. I shall be fearfully preoccupied with my outfit. Then I must make a journey to see my family, in the lower part of Brittany, to obtain the sum necessary for my departure.”

Porthos observed a last struggle between love and avarice.

“And as,” continued he, “the duchess whom you saw at the church has estates near to those of my family, we mean to make the journey together. Journeys, you know, appear much shorter when we travel two in company.”

“Have you no friends in Paris, then, Monsieur Porthos?” said the procurator’s wife.

“I thought I had,” said Porthos, resuming his melancholy air; “but I have been taught my mistake.”

“You have some!” cried the procurator’s wife, in a transport that surprised even herself. “Come to our house tomorrow. You are the son of my aunt, consequently my cousin; you come from Noyon, in Picardy; you have several lawsuits and no attorney. Can you recollect all that?”

“Perfectly, madame.”

“Come at dinnertime.”

“Very well.”

“And be upon your guard before my husband, who is rather shrewd, notwithstanding his seventy-six years.”

“Seventy-six years! PESTE! That’s a fine age!” replied Porthos.

“A great age, you mean, Monsieur Porthos. Yes, the poor man may be expected to leave me a widow, any hour,” continued she, throwing a significant glance at Porthos. “Fortunately, by our marriage contract, the survivor takes everything.”

“All?”

“Yes, all.”

“You are a woman of precaution, I see, my dear Madame Coquenard,” said Porthos, squeezing the hand of the procurator’s wife tenderly.

“We are then reconciled, dear Monsieur Porthos?” said she, simpering.

“For life,” replied Porthos, in the same manner.

“Till we meet again, then, dear traitor!”

“Till we meet again, my forgetful charmer!”

“Tomorrow, my angel!”

“Tomorrow, flame of my life!”

CHAPTER 30

D’ARTAGNAN AND THE ENGLISHMAN

D’Artagnan followed Milady without being perceived by her. He saw her get into her carriage, and heard her order the coachman to drive to St. Germain.

It was useless to try to keep pace on foot with a carriage drawn by two powerful horses. D’Artagnan therefore returned to the Rue Ferou.

In the Rue de Seine he met Planchet, who had stopped before the house of a pastry cook, and was contemplating with ecstasy a cake of the most appetizing appearance.

He ordered him to go and saddle two horses in M. de Treville’s stables--one for himself, d’Artagnan, and one for Planchet--and bring them to Athens’s place. Once for all, Treville had placed his stable at d’Artagnan’s service.

Planchet proceeded toward the Rue du Colombier, and d’Artagnan toward the Rue Ferou. Athos was at home, emptying sadly a bottle of the famous Spanish wine he had brought back with him from his journey into Picardy. He made a sign for Grimaud to bring a glass for d’Artagnan, and Grimaud obeyed as usual.

D’Artagnan related to Athos all that had passed at the church between Porthos and the procurator’s wife, and how their comrade was probably by that time in a fair way to be equipped.

“As for me,” replied Athos to this recital, “I am quite at my ease; it will not be women that will defray the expense of my outfit.”

“Handsome, well-bred, noble lord as you are, my dear Athos, neither princesses nor queens would be secure from your amorous solicitations.”

“How young this d’Artagnan is!” said Athos, shrugging his shoulders; and he made a sign to Grimaud to bring another bottle.

At that moment Planchet put his head modestly in at the half-open door, and told his master that the horses were ready.

“What horses?” asked Athos.

“Two horses that Monsieur de Treville lends me at my pleasure, and with which I am now going to take a ride to St. Germain.”

“Well, and what are you going to do at St. Germain?” then demanded Athos.

Then d’Artagnan described the meeting which he had at the church, and how he had found that lady who, with the seigneur in the black cloak and with the scar near his temple, filled his mind constantly.

“That is to say, you are in love with this lady as you were with Madame Bonacieux,” said Athos, shrugging his shoulders contemptuously, as if he pitied human weakness.

“I? not at all!” said d’Artagnan. “I am only curious to unravel the mystery to which she is attached. I do not know why, but I imagine that this woman, wholly unknown to me as she is, and wholly unknown to her as I am, has an influence over my life.”

“Well, perhaps you are right,” said Athos. “I do not know a woman that is worth the trouble of being sought for when she is once lost. Madame Bonacieux is lost; so much the worse for her if she is found.”

“No, Athos, no, you are mistaken,” said d’Artagnan; “I love my poor Constance more than ever, and if I knew the place in which she is, were it at the end of the world, I would go to free her from the hands of her enemies; but I am ignorant. All my researches have been useless. What is to be said? I must divert my attention!”

“Amuse yourself with Milady, my dear d’Artagnan; I wish you may with all my heart, if that will amuse you.”

“Hear me, Athos,” said d’Artagnan. “Instead of shutting yourself up here as if you were under arrest, get on horseback and come and take a ride with me to St. Germain.”

“My dear fellow,” said Athos, “I ride horses when I have any; when I have none, I go afoot.”

“Well,” said d’Artagnan, smiling at the misanthropy of Athos, which from any other person would have offended him, “I ride what I can get; I am not so proud as you. So AU REVOIR, dear Athos.”

“AU REVOIR,” said the Musketeer, making a sign to Grimaud to uncork the bottle he had just brought.

D’Artagnan and Planchet mounted, and took the road to St. Germain.

All along the road, what Athos had said respecting Mme. Bonacieux recurred to the mind of the young man. Although d’Artagnan was not of a very sentimental character, the mercer’s pretty wife had made a real impression upon his heart. As he said, he was ready to go to the end of the world to seek her; but the world, being round, has many ends, so that he did not know which way to turn. Meantime, he was going to try to find out Milady. Milady had spoken to the man in the black cloak; therefore she knew him. Now, in the opinion of d’Artagnan, it was certainly the man in the black cloak who had carried off Mme. Bonacieux the second time, as he had carried her off the first. d’Artagnan then only half-lied, which is lying but little, when he said that by going in search of Milady he at the same time went in search of Constance.

Thinking of all this, and from time to time giving a touch of the spur to his horse, d’Artagnan completed his short journey, and arrived at St. Germain. He had just passed by the pavilion in which ten years later Louis XIV was born. He rode up a very quiet street, looking to the right and the left to see if he could catch any vestige of his beautiful Englishwoman, when from the ground floor of a pretty house, which, according to the fashion of the time, had no window toward the street, he saw a face peep out with which he thought he was acquainted. This person walked along the terrace, which was ornamented with flowers. Planchet recognized him first.

“Eh, monsieur!” said he, addressing d’Artagnan, “don’t you remember that face which is blinking yonder?”

“No,” said d’Artagnan, “and yet I am certain it is not the first time I have seen that visage.”

“PARBLEU, I believe it is not,” said Planchet. “Why, it is poor Lubin, the lackey of the Comte de Wardes--he whom you took such good care of a month ago at Calais, on the road to the governor’s country house!”

“So it is!” said d’Artagnan; “I know him now. Do you think he would recollect you?”

“My faith, monsieur, he was in such trouble that I doubt if he can have retained a very clear recollection of me.”

“Well, go and talk with the boy,” said d’Artagnan, “and make out if you can from his conversation whether his master is dead.”

Planchet dismounted and went straight up to Lubin, who did not at all remember him, and the two lackeys began to chat with the best understanding possible; while d’Artagnan turned the two horses into a lane, went round the house, and came back to watch the conference from behind a hedge of filberts.

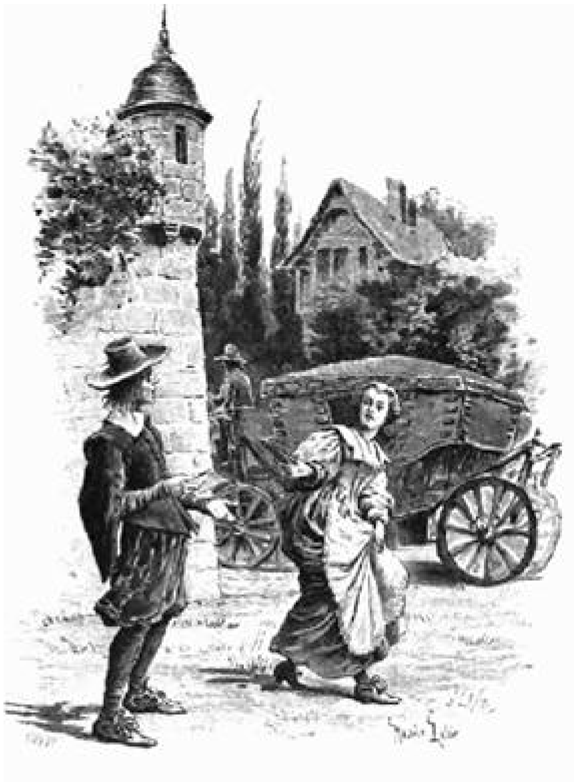

At the end of an instant’s observation he heard the noise of a vehicle, and saw Milady’s carriage stop opposite to him. He could not be mistaken; Milady was in it. D’Artagnan leaned upon the neck of his horse, in order that he might see without being seen.

Milady put her charming blond head out at the window, and gave her orders to her maid.

The latter--a pretty girl of about twenty or twenty-two years, active and lively, the true SOUBRETTE of a great lady--jumped from the step upon which, according to the custom of the time, she was seated, and took her way toward the terrace upon which d’Artagnan had perceived Lubin.

D’Artagnan followed the soubrette with his eyes, and saw her go toward the terrace; but it happened that someone in the house called Lubin, so that Planchet remained alone, looking in all directions for the road where d’Artagnan had disappeared.

The maid approached Planchet, whom she took for Lubin, and holding out a little billet to him said, “For your master.”

“For my master?” replied Planchet, astonished.

“Yes, and important. Take it quickly.”

Thereupon she ran toward the carriage, which had turned round toward the way it came, jumped upon the step, and the carriage drove off.

Planchet turned and returned the billet. Then, accustomed to passive obedience, he jumped down from the terrace, ran toward the lane, and at the end of twenty paces met d’Artagnan, who, having seen all, was coming to him.

“For you, monsieur,” said Planchet, presenting the billet to the young man.

“For me?” said d’Artagnan; “are you sure of that?”

“PARDIEU, monsieur, I can’t be more sure. The SOUBRETTE said, ‘For your master.’ I have no other master but you; so--a pretty little lass, my faith, is that SOUBRETTE!”

D’Artagnan opened the letter, and read these words:

“A person who takes more interest in you than she is willing to confess wishes to know on what day it will suit you to walk in the forest? Tomorrow, at the Hotel Field of the Cloth of Gold, a lackey in black and red will wait for your reply.”

“Oh!” said d’Artagnan, “this is rather warm; it appears that Milady and I are anxious about the health of the same person. Well, Planchet, how is the good Monsieur de Wardes? He is not dead, then?”

“No, monsieur, he is as well as a man can be with four sword wounds in his body; for you, without question, inflicted four upon the dear gentleman, and he is still very weak, having lost almost all his blood. As I said, monsieur, Lubin did not know me, and told me our adventure from one end to the other.”

“Well done, Planchet! you are the king of lackeys. Now jump onto your horse, and let us overtake the carriage.”

This did not take long. At the end of five minutes they perceived the carriage drawn up by the roadside; a cavalier, richly dressed, was close to the door.

The conversation between Milady and the cavalier was so animated that d’Artagnan stopped on the other side of the carriage without anyone but the pretty SOUBRETTE perceiving his presence.

The conversation took place in English--a language which d’Artagnan could not understand; but by the accent the young man plainly saw that the beautiful Englishwoman was in a great rage. She terminated it by an action which left no doubt as to the nature of this conversation; this was a blow with her fan, applied with such force that the little feminine weapon flew into a thousand pieces.

The cavalier laughed aloud, which appeared to exasperate Milady still more.

D'Artagnan thought this was the moment to interfere. He approached the other door, and taking off his hat respectfully, said, “Madame, will you permit me to offer you my services? It appears to me that this cavalier has made you very angry. Speak one word, madame, and I take upon myself to punish him for his want of courtesy.”

At the first word Milady turned, looking at the young man with astonishment; and when he had finished, she said in very good French, “Monsieur, I should with great confidence place myself under your protection if the person with whom I quarrel were not my brother.”

“Ah, excuse me, then,” said d'Artagnan. “You must be aware that I was ignorant of that, madame.”

“What is that stupid fellow troubling himself about?” cried the cavalier whom Milady had designated as her brother, stooping down to the height of the coach window. “Why does not he go about his business?”

“Stupid fellow yourself!” said d'Artagnan, stooping in his turn on the neck of his horse, and answering on his side through the carriage window. “I do not go on because it pleases me to stop here.”

The cavalier addressed some words in English to his sister.

“I speak to you in French,” said d'Artagnan; “be kind enough, then, to reply to me in the same language. You are Madame's brother, I learn--be it so; but fortunately you are not mine.”

It might be thought that Milady, timid as women are in general, would have interposed in this commencement of mutual provocations in order to prevent the quarrel from going too far; but on the contrary, she threw herself back in her carriage, and called out coolly to the coachman, “Go on--home!”

The pretty SOUBRETTE cast an anxious glance at d'Artagnan, whose good looks seemed to have made an impression on her.

The carriage went on, and left the two men facing each other; no material obstacle separated them.

The cavalier made a movement as if to follow the carriage; but d'Artagnan, whose anger, already excited, was much increased by recognizing in him the Englishman of Amiens who had won his horse and had been very near winning his diamond of Athos, caught at his bridle and stopped him.

“Well, monsieur,” said he, “you appear to be more stupid than I am, for you forget there is a little quarrel to arrange between us two.”

“Ah,” said the Englishman, “is it you, my master? It seems you must always be playing some game or other.”

“Yes; and that reminds me that I have a revenge to take. We will see, my dear monsieur, if you can handle a sword as skillfully as you can a dice box.”

“You see plainly that I have no sword,” said the Englishman. “Do you wish to play the braggart with an unarmed man?”

“I hope you have a sword at home; but at all events, I have two, and if you like, I will throw with you for one of them.”

“Needless,” said the Englishman; “I am well furnished with such playthings.”

“Very well, my worthy gentleman,” replied d’Artagnan, “pick out the longest, and come and show it to me this evening.”

“Where, if you please?”

“Behind the Luxembourg; that’s a charming spot for such amusements as the one I propose to you.”

“That will do; I will be there.”

“Your hour?”

“Six o’clock.”

“A PROPOS, you have probably one or two friends?”

“I have three, who would be honored by joining in the sport with me.”

“Three? Marvelous! That falls out oddly! Three is just my number!”

“Now, then, who are you?” asked the Englishman.

“I am Monsieur d’Artagnan, a Gascon gentleman, serving in the king’s Musketeers. And you?”

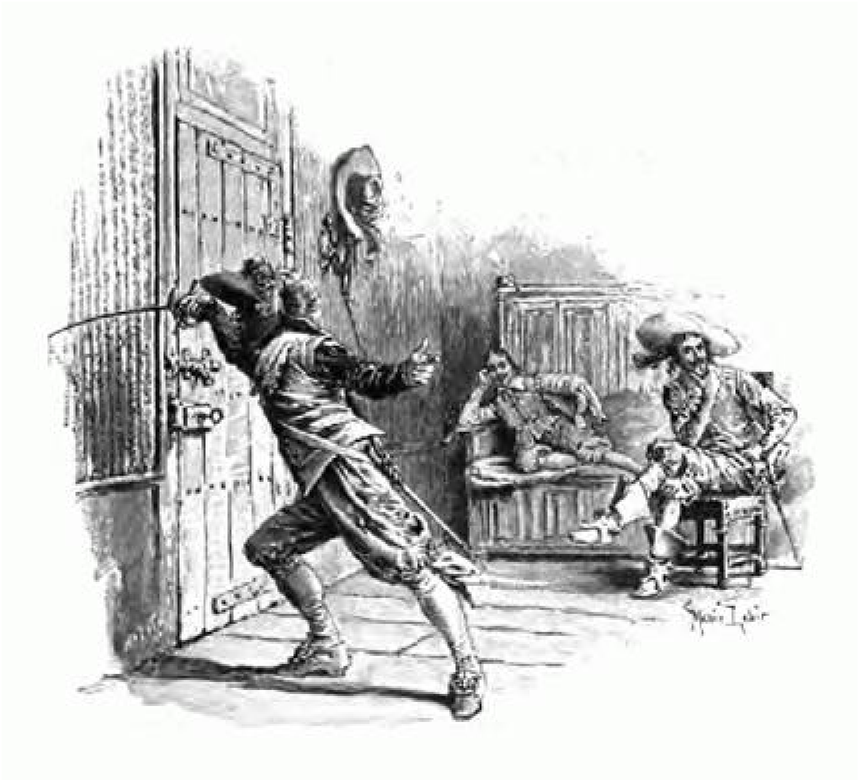

“I am Lord de Winter, Baron Sheffield.”

“Well, then, I am your servant, Monsieur Baron,” said d’Artagnan, “though you have names rather difficult to recollect.” And touching his horse with the spur, he cantered back to Paris. As he was accustomed to do in all cases of any consequence, d’Artagnan went straight to the residence of Athos.

He found Athos reclining upon a large sofa, where he was waiting, as he said, for his outfit to come and find him. He related to Athos all that had passed, except the letter to M. de Wardes.

Athos was delighted to find he was going to fight an Englishman. We might say that was his dream.

They immediately sent their lackeys for Porthos and Aramis, and on their arrival made them acquainted with the situation.

Porthos drew his sword from the scabbard, and made passes at the wall, springing back from time to time, and making contortions like a dancer.

Aramis, who was constantly at work at his poem, shut himself up in Athos’s closet, and begged not to be disturbed before the moment of drawing swords.

Athos, by signs, desired Grimaud to bring another bottle of wine.

D’Artagnan employed himself in arranging a little plan, of which we shall hereafter see the execution, and which promised him some agreeable adventure, as might be seen by the smiles which from time to time passed over his countenance, whose thoughtfulness they animated.

CHAPTER 31

ENGLISH AND FRENCH

The hour having come, they went with their four lackeys to a spot behind the Luxembourg given up to the feeding of goats. Athos threw a piece of money to the goatkeeper to withdraw. The lackeys were ordered to act as sentinels.

A silent party soon drew near to the same enclosure, entered, and joined the Musketeers. Then, according to foreign custom, the presentations took place.

The Englishmen were all men of rank; consequently the odd names of their adversaries were for them not only a matter of surprise, but of annoyance.

"But after all," said Lord de Winter, when the three friends had been named, "we do not know who you are. We cannot fight with such names; they are names of shepherds."

“Therefore your lordship may suppose they are only assumed names,” said Athos.

“Which only gives us a greater desire to know the real ones,” replied the Englishman.

“You played very willingly with us without knowing our names,” said Athos, “by the same token that you won our horses.”

“That is true, but we then only risked our pistoles; this time we risk our blood. One plays with anybody; but one fights only with equals.”

“And that is but just,” said Athos, and he took aside the one of the four Englishmen with whom he was to fight, and communicated his name in a low voice.

Porthos and Aramis did the same.

“Does that satisfy you?” said Athos to his adversary. “Do you find me of sufficient rank to do me the honor of crossing swords with me?”

“Yes, monsieur,” said the Englishman, bowing.

“Well! now shall I tell you something?” added Athos, coolly.

“What?” replied the Englishman.

“Why, that is that you would have acted much more wisely if you had not required me to make myself known.”

“Why so?”

“Because I am believed to be dead, and have reasons for wishing nobody to know I am living; so that I shall be obliged to kill you to prevent my secret from roaming over the fields.”

The Englishman looked at Athos, believing that he jested, but Athos did not jest the least in the world.

“Gentlemen,” said Athos, addressing at the same time his companions and their adversaries, “are we ready?”

“Yes!” answered the Englishmen and the Frenchmen, as with one voice.

“On guard, then!” cried Athos.

Immediately eight swords glittered in the rays of the setting sun, and the combat began with an animosity very natural between men twice enemies.

Athos fenced with as much calmness and method as if he had been practicing in a fencing school.

Porthos, abated, no doubt, of his too-great confidence by his adventure of Chantilly, played with skill and prudence. Aramis, who had the third canto of his poem to finish, behaved like a man in haste.

Athos killed his adversary first. He hit him but once, but as he had foretold, that hit was a mortal one; the sword pierced his heart.

Second, Porthos stretched his upon the grass with a wound through his thigh, As the Englishman, without making any further resistance, then surrendered his sword, Porthos took him up in his arms and bore him to his carriage.

Aramis pushed his so vigorously that after going back fifty paces, the man ended by fairly taking to his heels, and disappeared amid the hooting of the lackeys.

As to d’Artagnan, he fought purely and simply on the defensive; and when he saw his adversary pretty well fatigued, with a vigorous side thrust sent his sword flying. The baron, finding himself disarmed, took two or three steps back, but in this movement his foot slipped and he fell backward.

D’Artagnan was over him at a bound, and said to the Englishman, pointing his sword to his throat, “I could kill you, my Lord, you are completely in my hands; but I spare your life for the sake of your sister.”

D’Artagnan was at the height of joy; he had realized the plan he had imagined beforehand, whose picturing had produced the smiles we noted upon his face.

The Englishman, delighted at having to do with a gentleman of such a kind disposition, pressed d’Artagnan in his arms, and paid a thousand compliments to the three Musketeers, and as Porthos’s adversary was already installed in the carriage, and as Aramis’s had taken to his heels, they had nothing to think about but the dead.

As Porthos and Aramis were undressing him, in the hope of finding his wound not mortal, a large purse dropped from his clothes. D’Artagnan picked it up and offered it to Lord de Winter.

“What the devil would you have me do with that?” said the Englishman.

“You can restore it to his family,” said d’Artagnan.

“His family will care much about such a trifle as that! His family will inherit fifteen thousand louis a year from him. Keep the purse for your lackeys.”

D’Artagnan put the purse into his pocket.

“And now, my young friend, for you will permit me, I hope, to give you that name,” said Lord de Winter, “on this very evening, if agreeable to you, I will present you to my sister, Milady Clarik, for I am desirous that she should take you into her good graces; and as she is not in bad odor at court, she may perhaps on some future day speak a word that will not prove useless to you.”

D’Artagnan blushed with pleasure, and bowed a sign of assent.

At this time Athos came up to d’Artagnan.

“What do you mean to do with that purse?” whispered he.

“Why, I meant to pass it over to you, my dear Athos.”

“Me! why to me?”

“Why, you killed him! They are the spoils of victory.”

“I, the heir of an enemy!” said Athos; “for whom, then, do you take me?”

“It is the custom in war,” said d’Artagnan, “why should it not be the custom in a duel?”

“Even on the field of battle, I have never done that.”

Porthos shrugged his shoulders; Aramis by a movement of his lips endorsed Athos.

“Then,” said d’Artagnan, “let us give the money to the lackeys, as Lord de Winter desired us to do.”

“Yes,” said Athos; “let us give the money to the lackeys--not to our lackeys, but to the lackeys of the Englishmen.”

Athos took the purse, and threw it into the hand of the coachman. “For you and your comrades.”

This greatness of spirit in a man who was quite destitute struck even Porthos; and this French generosity, repeated by Lord de Winter and his friend, was highly applauded, except by MM Grimaud, Bazin, Mousqueton and Planchet.

Lord de Winter, on quitting d’Artagnan, gave him his sister’s address. She lived in the Place Royale--then the fashionable quarter--at Number 6, and he undertook to call and take d’Artagnan with him in order to introduce him. d’Artagnan appointed eight o’clock at Athos’s residence.

This introduction to Milady Clarik occupied the head of our Gascon greatly. He remembered in what a strange manner this woman had hitherto been mixed up in his destiny. According to his conviction, she was some creature of the cardinal, and yet he felt himself invincibly drawn toward her by one of those sentiments for which we cannot account. His only fear was that Milady would recognize in him the man of Meung and of Dover. Then she knew that he was one of the friends of M. de Treville, and consequently, that he belonged body and soul to the king; which would make him lose a part of his advantage, since when known to Milady as he knew her, he played only an equal game with her. As to the commencement of an intrigue between her and M. de Wardes, our presumptuous hero gave but little heed to that, although the marquis was young, handsome, rich, and high in the cardinal’s favor. It is not for nothing we are but twenty years old, above all if we were born at Tarbes.

D’Artagnan began by making his most splendid toilet, then returned to Athos’s, and according to custom, related everything to him. Athos listened to his projects, then shook his head, and recommended prudence to him with a shade of bitterness.

“What!” said he, “you have just lost one woman, whom you call good, charming, perfect; and here you are, running headlong after another.”

D’Artagnan felt the truth of this reproach.

“I loved Madame Bonacieux with my heart, while I only love Milady with my head,” said he. “In getting introduced to her, my principal object is to ascertain what part she plays at court.”

“The part she plays, PARDIEU! It is not difficult to divine that, after all you have told me. She is some emissary of the cardinal; a woman who will draw you into a snare in which you will leave your head.”

“The devil! my dear Athos, you view things on the dark side, methinks.”

“My dear fellow, I mistrust women. Can it be otherwise? I bought my experience dearly--particularly fair women. Milady is fair, you say?”

“She has the most beautiful light hair imaginable!”

“Ah, my poor d’Artagnan!” said Athos.

“Listen to me! I want to be enlightened on a subject; then, when I shall have learned what I desire to know, I will withdraw.”

“Be enlightened!” said Athos, phlegmatically.

Lord de Winter arrived at the appointed time; but Athos, being warned of his coming, went into the other chamber. He therefore found d’Artagnan alone, and as it was nearly eight o’clock he took the young man with him.

An elegant carriage waited below, and as it was drawn by two excellent horses, they were soon at the Place Royale.

Milady Clarik received d’Artagnan ceremoniously. Her hotel was remarkably sumptuous, and while the most part of the English had quit, or were about to quit, France on account of the war, Milady had just been laying out much money upon her residence; which proved that the general measure which drove the English from France did not affect her.

“You see,” said Lord de Winter, presenting d’Artagnan to his sister, “a young gentleman who has held my life in his hands, and who has not abused his advantage, although we have been twice enemies, although it was I who insulted him, and although I am an Englishman. Thank him, then, madame, if you have any affection for me.”

Milady frowned slightly; a scarcely visible cloud passed over her brow, and so peculiar a smile appeared upon her lips that the young man, who saw and observed this triple shade, almost shuddered at it.

The brother did not perceive this; he had turned round to play with Milady’s favorite monkey, which had pulled him by the doublet.

“You are welcome, monsieur,” said Milady, in a voice whose singular sweetness contrasted with the symptoms of ill-humor which d’Artagnan had just remarked; “you have today acquired eternal rights to my gratitude.”

The Englishman then turned round and described the combat without omitting a single detail. Milady listened with the greatest attention, and yet it was easily to be perceived, whatever effort she made to conceal her impressions, that this recital was not agreeable to her. The blood rose to her head, and her little foot worked with impatience beneath her robe.

Lord de Winter perceived nothing of this. When he had finished, he went to a table upon which was a salver with Spanish wine and glasses. He filled two glasses, and by a sign invited d’Artagnan to drink.

D’Artagnan knew it was considered disobliging by an Englishman to refuse to pledge him. He therefore drew near to the table and took the second glass. He did not, however, lose sight of Milady, and in a mirror he perceived the change that came over her face. Now that she believed herself to be no longer observed, a sentiment resembling ferocity animated her countenance. She bit her handkerchief with her beautiful teeth.

That pretty little SOUBRETTE whom d’Artagnan had already observed then came in. She spoke some words to Lord de Winter in English, who thereupon requested d’Artagnan’s permission to retire, excusing himself on account of the urgency of the business that had called him away, and charging his sister to obtain his pardon.

D’Artagnan exchanged a shake of the hand with Lord de Winter, and then returned to Milady. Her countenance, with surprising mobility, had recovered its gracious expression; but some little red spots on her handkerchief indicated that she had bitten her lips till the blood came. Those lips were magnificent; they might be said to be of coral.

The conversation took a cheerful turn. Milady appeared to have entirely recovered. She told d'Artagnan that Lord de Winter was her brother-in-law, and not her brother. She had married a younger brother of the family, who had left her a widow with one child. This child was the only heir to Lord de Winter, if Lord de Winter did not marry. All this showed d'Artagnan that there was a veil which concealed something; but he could not yet see under this veil.

In addition to this, after a half hour's conversation d'Artagnan was convinced that Milady was his compatriot; she spoke French with an elegance and a purity that left no doubt on that head.

D'Artagnan was profuse in gallant speeches and protestations of devotion. To all the simple things which escaped our Gascon, Milady replied with a smile of kindness. The hour came for him to retire. D'Artagnan took leave of Milady, and left the saloon the happiest of men.

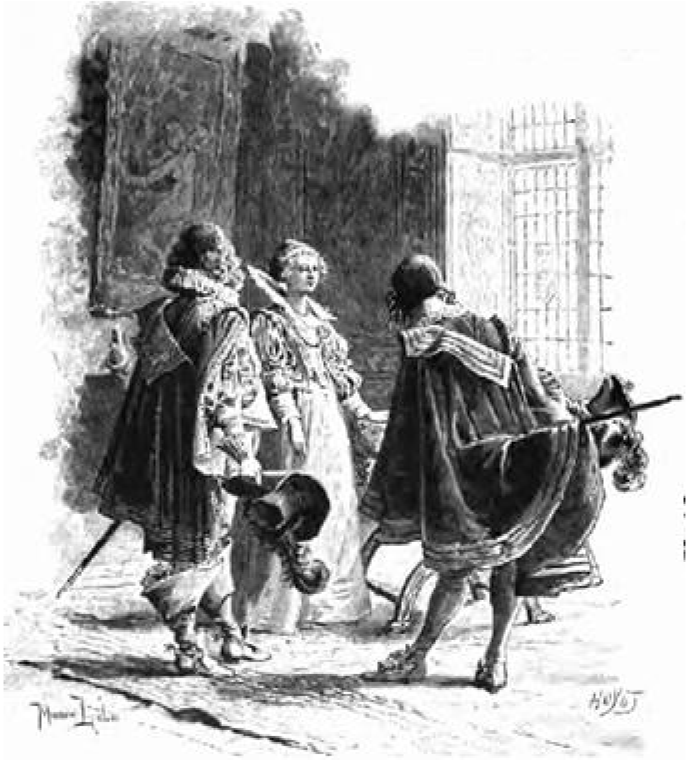

On the staircase he met the pretty SOUBRETTE, who brushed gently against him as she passed, and then, blushing to the eyes, asked his pardon for having touched him in a voice so sweet that the pardon was granted instantly.

D'Artagnan came again on the morrow, and was still better received than on the evening before. Lord de Winter was not at home; and it was Milady who this time did all the honors of the evening. She appeared to take a great interest in him, asked him whence he came, who were his friends, and whether he had not sometimes thought of attaching himself to the cardinal.

D’Artagnan, who, as we have said, was exceedingly prudent for a young man of twenty, then remembered his suspicions regarding Milady. He launched into a eulogy of his Eminence, and said that he should not have failed to enter into the Guards of the cardinal instead of the king’s Guards if he had happened to know M. de Cavois instead of M. de Treville.

Milady changed the conversation without any appearance of affectation, and asked d’Artagnan in the most careless manner possible if he had ever been in England.

D’Artagnan replied that he had been sent thither by M. de Treville to treat for a supply of horses, and that he had brought back four as specimens.

Milady in the course of the conversation twice or thrice bit her lips; she had to deal with a Gascon who played close.

At the same hour as on the preceding evening, d’Artagnan retired. In the corridor he again met the pretty Kitty; that was the name of the SOUBRETTE. She looked at him with an expression of kindness which it was impossible to mistake; but d’Artagnan was so preoccupied by the mistress that he noticed absolutely nothing but her.

D’Artagnan came again on the morrow and the day after that, and each day Milady gave him a more gracious reception.

Every evening, either in the antechamber, the corridor, or on the stairs, he met the pretty SOUBRETTE. But, as we have said, d’Artagnan paid no attention to this persistence of poor Kitty.

CHAPTER 32

A PROCURATOR’S DINNER

However brilliant had been the part played by Porthos in the duel, it had not made him forget the dinner of the procurator’s wife.

On the morrow he received the last touches of Mousqueton’s brush for an hour, and took his way toward the Rue aux Ours with the steps of a man who was doubly in favor with fortune.

His heart beat, but not like d’Artagnan’s with a young and impatient love. No; a more material interest stirred his blood. He was about at last to pass that mysterious threshold, to climb those unknown stairs by which, one by one, the old crowns of M. Coquenard had ascended. He was about to see in reality a certain coffer of which he had twenty times beheld the image in his dreams--a coffer long and deep, locked, bolted, fastened in the wall; a coffer of which he had so often heard, and which the hands--a little wrinkled, it is true, but still not without elegance--of the procurator’s wife were about to open to his admiring looks.

And then he--a wanderer on the earth, a man without fortune, a man without family, a soldier accustomed to inns, cabarets, taverns, and restaurants, a lover of wine forced to depend upon chance treats--was about to partake of family meals, to enjoy the pleasures of a comfortable establishment, and to give himself up to those little attentions which “the harder one is, the more they please,” as old soldiers say.

To come in the capacity of a cousin, and seat himself every day at a good table; to smooth the yellow, wrinkled brow of the old procurator; to pluck the clerks a little by teaching them BASSETTE, PASSE-DIX, and LANSQUENET, in their utmost nicety, and winning from them, by way of fee for the lesson he would give them in an hour, their savings of a month--all this was enormously delightful to Porthos.

The Musketeer could not forget the evil reports which then prevailed, and which indeed have survived them, of the procurators of the period--meanness, stinginess, fasts; but as, after all, excepting some few acts of economy which Porthos had always found very unseasonable, the procurator’s wife had been tolerably liberal--that is, be it understood, for a procurator’s wife--he hoped to see a household of a highly comfortable kind.

And yet, at the very door the Musketeer began to entertain some doubts. The approach was not such as to prepossess people--an ill-smelling, dark passage, a staircase half-lighted by bars through which stole a glimmer from a neighboring yard; on the first floor a low door studded with enormous nails, like the principal gate of the Grand Chatelet.

Porthos knocked with his hand. A tall, pale clerk, his face shaded by a forest of virgin hair, opened the door, and bowed with the air of a man forced at once to respect in another lofty stature, which indicated strength, the military dress, which indicated rank, and a ruddy countenance, which indicated familiarity with good living.

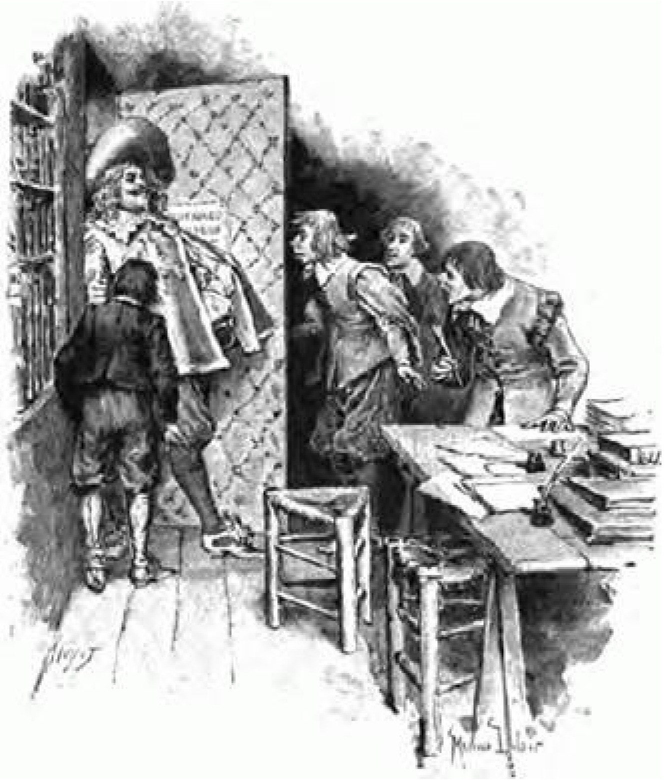

A shorter clerk came behind the first, a taller clerk behind the second, a stripling of a dozen years rising behind the third. In all, three clerks and a half, which, for the time, argued a very extensive clientage.

Although the Musketeer was not expected before one o’clock, the procurator’s wife had been on the watch ever since midday, reckoning that the heart, or perhaps the stomach, of her lover would bring him before his time.

Mme. Coquenard therefore entered the office from the house at the same moment her guest entered from the stairs, and the appearance of the worthy lady relieved him from an awkward embarrassment. The clerks surveyed him with great curiosity, and he, not knowing well what to say to this ascending and descending scale, remained tongue-tied.

“It is my cousin!” cried the procurator’s wife. “Come in, come in, Monsieur Porthos!”

The name of Porthos produced its effect upon the clerks, who began to laugh; but Porthos turned sharply round, and every countenance quickly recovered its gravity.

They reached the office of the procurator after having passed through the antechamber in which the clerks were, and the study in which they ought to have been. This last apartment was a sort of dark room, littered with papers. On quitting the study they left the kitchen on the right, and entered the reception room.

All these rooms, which communicated with one another, did not inspire Porthos favorably. Words might be heard at a distance through all these open doors. Then, while passing, he had cast a rapid, investigating glance into the kitchen; and he was obliged to confess to himself, to the shame of the procurator’s wife and his own regret, that he did not see that fire, that animation, that bustle, which when a good repast is on foot prevails generally in that sanctuary of good living.

The procurator had without doubt been warned of his visit, as he expressed no surprise at the sight of Porthos, who advanced toward him with a sufficiently easy air, and saluted him courteously.

“We are cousins, it appears, Monsieur Porthos?” said the procurator, rising, yet supporting his weight upon the arms of his cane chair.

The old man, wrapped in a large black doublet, in which the whole of his slender body was concealed, was brisk and dry. His little gray eyes shone like carbuncles, and appeared, with his grinning mouth, to be the only part of his face in which life survived. Unfortunately the legs began to refuse their service to this bony machine. During the last five or six months that this weakness had been felt, the worthy procurator had nearly become the slave of his wife.

The cousin was received with resignation, that was all. M. Coquenard, firm upon his legs, would have declined all relationship with M. Porthos.

“Yes, monsieur, we are cousins,” said Porthos, without being disconcerted, as he had never reckoned upon being received enthusiastically by the husband.

“By the female side, I believe?” said the procurator, maliciously.

Porthos did not feel the ridicule of this, and took it for a piece of simplicity, at which he laughed in his large mustache. Mme. Coquenard, who knew that a simple-minded procurator was a very rare variety in the species, smiled a little, and colored a great deal.

M Coquenard had, since the arrival of Porthos, frequently cast his eyes with great uneasiness upon a large chest placed in front of his oak desk. Porthos comprehended that this chest, although it did not correspond in shape with that which he had seen in his dreams, must be the blessed coffer, and he congratulated himself that the reality was several feet higher than the dream.

M Coquenard did not carry his genealogical investigations any further; but withdrawing his anxious look from the chest and fixing it upon Porthos, he contented himself with saying, “Monsieur our cousin will do us the favor of dining with us once before his departure for the campaign, will he not, Madame Coquenard?”

This time Porthos received the blow right in his stomach, and felt it. It appeared likewise that Mme. Coquenard was not less affected by it on her part, for she added, “My cousin will not return if he finds that we do not treat him kindly; but otherwise he has so little time to pass in Paris, and consequently to spare to us, that we must entreat him to give us every instant he can call his own previous to his departure.”

“Oh, my legs, my poor legs! where are you?” murmured Coquenard, and he tried to smile.

This succor, which came to Porthos at the moment in which he was attacked in his gastronomic hopes, inspired much gratitude in the Musketeer toward the procurator’s wife.

The hour of dinner soon arrived. They passed into the eating room--a large dark room situated opposite the kitchen.

The clerks, who, as it appeared, had smelled unusual perfumes in the house, were of military punctuality, and held their stools in hand quite ready to sit down. Their jaws moved preliminarily with fearful threatenings.

“Indeed!” thought Porthos, casting a glance at the three hungry clerks--for the errand boy, as might be expected, was not admitted to the honors of the magisterial table, “in my cousin’s place, I would not keep such gourmands! They look like shipwrecked sailors who have not eaten for six weeks.”

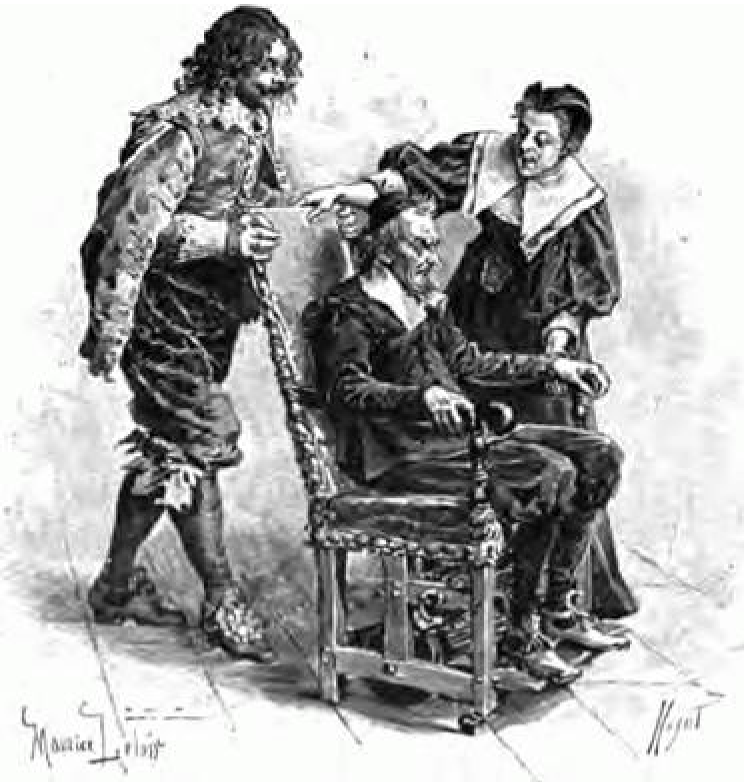

M Coquenard entered, pushed along upon his armchair with casters by Mme. Coquenard, whom Porthos assisted in rolling her husband up to the table. He had scarcely entered when he began to agitate his nose and his jaws after the example of his clerks.

“Oh, oh!” said he; “here is a soup which is rather inviting.”

“What the devil can they smell so extraordinary in this soup?” said Porthos, at the sight of a pale liquid, abundant but entirely free from meat, on the surface of which a few crusts swam about as rare as the islands of an archipelago.

Mme. Coquenard smiled, and upon a sign from her everyone eagerly took his seat.

M Coquenard was served first, then Porthos. Afterward Mme. Coquenard filled her own plate, and distributed the crusts without soup to the impatient clerks. At this moment the door of the dining room unclosed with a creak, and Porthos perceived through the half-open flap the little clerk who, not being allowed to take part in the feast, ate his dry bread in the passage with the double odor of the dining room and kitchen.

After the soup the maid brought a boiled fowl--a piece of magnificence which caused the eyes of the diners to dilate in such a manner that they seemed ready to burst.

“One may see that you love your family, Madame Coquenard,” said the procurator, with a smile that was almost tragic. “You are certainly treating your cousin very handsomely!”

The poor fowl was thin, and covered with one of those thick, bristly skins through which the teeth cannot penetrate with all their efforts. The fowl must have been sought for a long time on the perch, to which it had retired to die of old age.

“The devil!” thought Porthos, “this is poor work. I respect old age, but I don’t much like it boiled or roasted.”

And he looked round to see if anybody partook of his opinion; but on the contrary, he saw nothing but eager eyes which were devouring, in anticipation, that sublime fowl which was the object of his contempt.

Mme. Coquenard drew the dish toward her, skillfully detached the two great black feet, which she placed upon her husband’s plate, cut off the neck, which with the head she put on one side for herself, raised the wing for Porthos, and then returned the bird otherwise intact to the servant who had brought it in, who disappeared with it before the Musketeer had time to examine the variations which disappointment produces upon faces, according to the characters and temperaments of those who experience it.

In the place of the fowl a dish of haricot beans made its appearance--an enormous dish in which some bones of mutton that at first sight one might have believed to have some meat on them pretended to show themselves.

But the clerks were not the dupes of this deceit, and their lugubrious looks settled down into resigned countenances.

Mme. Coquenard distributed this dish to the young men with the moderation of a good housewife.

The time for wine came. M. Coquenard poured from a very small stone bottle the third of a glass for each of the young men, served himself in about the same proportion, and passed the bottle to Porthos and Mme. Coquenard.

The young men filled up their third of a glass with water; then, when they had drunk half the glass, they filled it up again, and continued to do so. This brought them, by the end of the repast, to swallowing a drink which from the color of the ruby had passed to that of a pale topaz.

Porthos ate his wing of the fowl timidly, and shuddered when he felt the knee of the procurator’s wife under the table, as it came in search of his. He also drank half a glass of this sparingly served wine, and found it to be nothing but that horrible Montreuil--the terror of all expert palates.

M Coquenard saw him swallowing this wine undiluted, and sighed deeply.

“Will you eat any of these beans, Cousin Porthos?” said Mme. Coquenard, in that tone which says, “Take my advice, don’t touch them.”

“Devil take me if I taste one of them!” murmured Porthos to himself, and then said aloud, “Thank you, my cousin, I am no longer hungry.”

There was silence. Porthos could hardly keep his countenance.

The procurator repeated several times, “Ah, Madame Coquenard! Accept my compliments; your dinner has been a real feast. Lord, how I have eaten!”

M Coquenard had eaten his soup, the black feet of the fowl, and the only mutton bone on which there was the least appearance of meat.

Porthos fancied they were mystifying him, and began to curl his mustache and knit his eyebrows; but the knee of Mme. Coquenard gently advised him to be patient.

This silence and this interruption in serving, which were unintelligible to Porthos, had, on the contrary, a terrible meaning for the clerks. Upon a look from the procurator, accompanied by a smile from Mme. Coquenard, they arose slowly from the table, folded their napkins more slowly still, bowed, and retired.

“Go, young men! go and promote digestion by working,” said the procurator, gravely.

The clerks gone, Mme. Coquenard rose and took from a buffet a piece of cheese, some preserved quinces, and a cake which she had herself made of almonds and honey.

M Coquenard knit his eyebrows because there were too many good things. Porthos bit his lips because he saw not the wherewithal to dine. He looked to see if the dish of beans was still there; the dish of beans had disappeared.

“A positive feast!” cried M. Coquenard, turning about in his chair, “a real feast, EPULCE EPULORUM. Lucullus dines with Lucullus.”

Porthos looked at the bottle, which was near him, and hoped that with wine, bread, and cheese, he might make a dinner; but wine was wanting, the bottle was empty. M. and Mme. Coquenard did not seem to observe it.

“This is fine!” said Porthos to himself; “I am prettily caught!”

He passed his tongue over a spoonful of preserves, and stuck his teeth into the sticky pastry of Mme. Coquenard.

“Now,” said he, “the sacrifice is consummated! Ah! if I had not the hope of peeping with Madame Coquenard into her husband’s chest!”

M Coquenard, after the luxuries of such a repast, which he called an excess, felt the want of a siesta. Porthos began to hope that the thing would take place at the present sitting, and in that same locality; but the procurator would listen to nothing, he would be taken to his room, and was not satisfied till he was close to his chest, upon the edge of which, for still greater precaution, he placed his feet.

The procurator’s wife took Porthos into an adjoining room, and they began to lay the basis of a reconciliation.

“You can come and dine three times a week,” said Mme. Coquenard.

“Thanks, madame!” said Porthos, “but I don’t like to abuse your kindness; besides, I must think of my outfit!”

“That’s true,” said the procurator’s wife, groaning, “that unfortunate outfit!”

“Alas, yes,” said Porthos, “it is so.”

“But of what, then, does the equipment of your company consist, Monsieur Porthos?”

“Oh, of many things!” said Porthos. “The Musketeers are, as you know, picked soldiers, and they require many things useless to the Guardsmen or the Swiss.”

“But yet, detail them to me.”

“Why, they may amount to--”, said Porthos, who preferred discussing the total to taking them one by one.

The procurator’s wife waited tremblingly.

“To how much?” said she. “I hope it does not exceed--” She stopped; speech failed her.

“Oh, no,” said Porthos, “it does not exceed two thousand five hundred livres! I even think that with economy I could manage it with two thousand livres.”

“Good God!” cried she, “two thousand livres! Why, that is a fortune!”

Porthos made a most significant grimace; Mme. Coquenard understood it.

“I wished to know the detail,” said she, “because, having many relatives in business, I was almost sure of obtaining things at a hundred per cent less than you would pay yourself.”

“Ah, ah!” said Porthos, “that is what you meant to say!”

“Yes, dear Monsieur Porthos. Thus, for instance, don’t you in the first place want a horse?”

“Yes, a horse.”

“Well, then! I can just suit you.”

“Ah!” said Porthos, brightening, “that’s well as regards my horse; but I must have the appointments complete, as they include objects which a Musketeer alone can purchase, and which will not amount, besides, to more than three hundred livres.”

“Three hundred livres? Then put down three hundred livres,” said the procurator’s wife, with a sigh.

Porthos smiled. It may be remembered that he had the saddle which came from Buckingham. These three hundred livres he reckoned upon putting snugly into his pocket.

“Then,” continued he, “there is a horse for my lackey, and my valise. As to my arms, it is useless to trouble you about them; I have them.”

“A horse for your lackey?” resumed the procurator’s wife, hesitatingly; “but that is doing things in lordly style, my friend.”

“Ah, madame!” said Porthos, haughtily; “do you take me for a beggar?”

“No; I only thought that a pretty mule makes sometimes as good an appearance as a horse, and it seemed to me that by getting a pretty mule for Mousqueton--”

“Well, agreed for a pretty mule,” said Porthos; “you are right, I have seen very great Spanish nobles whose whole suite were mounted on mules. But then you understand, Madame Coquenard, a mule with feathers and bells.”

“Be satisfied,” said the procurator’s wife.

“There remains the valise,” added Porthos.

“Oh, don’t let that disturb you,” cried Mme. Coquenard. “My husband has five or six valises; you shall choose the best. There is one in particular which he prefers in his journeys, large enough to hold all the world.”

“Your valise is then empty?” asked Porthos, with simplicity.

“Certainly it is empty,” replied the procurator’s wife, in real innocence.

“Ah, but the valise I want,” cried Porthos, “is a well-filled one, my dear.”

Madame uttered fresh sighs. Moliere had not written his scene in “L’Avare” then. Mme. Coquenard was in the dilemma of Harpagan.

Finally, the rest of the equipment was successively debated in the same manner; and the result of the sitting was that the procurator’s wife should give eight hundred livres in money, and should furnish the horse and the mule which should have the honor of carrying Porthos and Mousqueton to glory.

These conditions being agreed to, Porthos took leave of Mme. Coquenard. The latter wished to detain him by darting certain tender glances; but Porthos urged the commands of duty, and the procurator’s wife was obliged to give place to the king.

The Musketeer returned home hungry and in bad humor.

CHAPTER 33

SOUBRETTE AND MISTRESS

Meantime, as we have said, despite the cries of his conscience and the wise counsels of Athos, d’Artagnan became hourly more in love with Milady. Thus he never failed to pay his diurnal court to her; and the self-satisfied Gascon was convinced that sooner or later she could not fail to respond.

One day, when he arrived with his head in the air, and as light at heart as a man who awaits a shower of gold, he found the SOUBRETTE under the gateway of the hotel; but this time the pretty Kitty was not contented with touching him as he passed, she took him gently by the hand.

“Good!” thought d’Artagnan, “She is charged with some message for me from her mistress; she is about to appoint some rendezvous of which she had not courage to speak.” And he looked down at the pretty girl with the most triumphant air imaginable.

“I wish to say three words to you, Monsieur Chevalier,” stammered the SOUBRETTE.

“Speak, my child, speak,” said d’Artagnan; “I listen.”

“Here? Impossible! That which I have to say is too long, and above all, too secret.”

“Well, what is to be done?”

“If Monsieur Chevalier would follow me?” said Kitty, timidly.

“Where you please, my dear child.”

“Come, then.”

And Kitty, who had not let go the hand of d’Artagnan, led him up a little dark, winding staircase, and after ascending about fifteen steps, opened a door.

“Come in here, Monsieur Chevalier,” said she; “here we shall be alone, and can talk.”

“And whose room is this, my dear child?”

“It is mine, Monsieur Chevalier; it communicates with my mistress’s by that door. But you need not fear. She will not hear what we say; she never goes to bed before midnight.”

D’Artagnan cast a glance around him. The little apartment was charming for its taste and neatness; but in spite of himself, his eyes were directed to that door which Kitty said led to Milady’s chamber.

Kitty guessed what was passing in the mind of the young man, and heaved a deep sigh.

“You love my mistress, then, very dearly, Monsieur Chevalier?” said she.

“Oh, more than I can say, Kitty! I am mad for her!”

Kitty breathed a second sigh.

“Alas, monsieur,” said she, “that is too bad.”

“What the devil do you see so bad in it?” said d’Artagnan.

“Because, monsieur,” replied Kitty, “my mistress loves you not at all.”

“HEIN!” said d’Artagnan, “can she have charged you to tell me so?”

“Oh, no, monsieur; but out of the regard I have for you, I have taken the resolution to tell you so.”

“Much obliged, my dear Kitty; but for the intention only--for the information, you must agree, is not likely to be at all agreeable.”

“That is to say, you don’t believe what I have told you; is it not so?”

“We have always some difficulty in believing such things, my pretty dear, were it only from self-love.”

“Then you don’t believe me?”

“I confess that unless you deign to give me some proof of what you advance--”

“What do you think of this?”

Kitty drew a little note from her bosom.

“For me?” said d’Artagnan, seizing the letter.

“No; for another.”

“For another?”

“Yes.”

“His name; his name!” cried d’Artagnan.

“Read the address.”

“Monsieur El Comte de Wardes.”

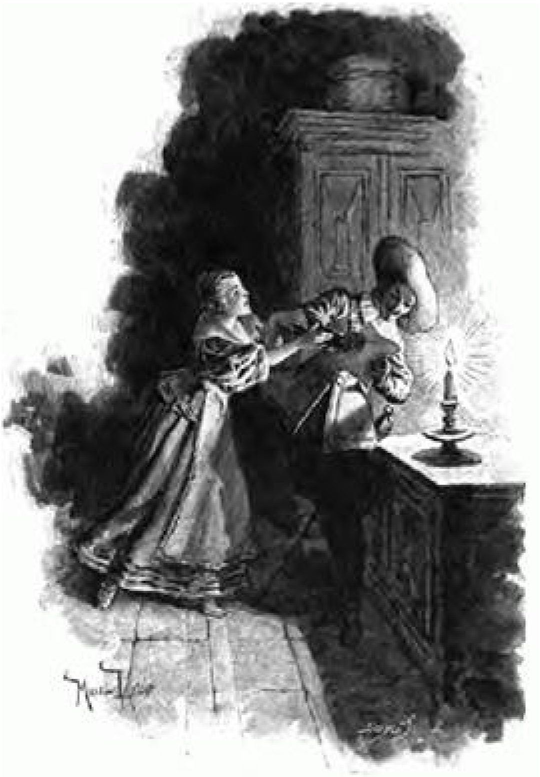

The remembrance of the scene at St. Germain presented itself to the mind of the presumptuous Gascon. As quick as thought, he tore open the letter, in spite of the cry which Kitty uttered on seeing what he was going to do, or rather, what he was doing.

“Oh, good Lord, Monsieur Chevalier,” said she, “what are you doing?”

“I?” said d’Artagnan; “nothing,” and he read,

“You have not answered my first note. Are you indisposed, or have you forgotten the glances you favored me with at the ball of Mme. de Guise? You have an opportunity now, Count; do not allow it to escape.”

d’Artagnan became very pale; he was wounded in his SELF-love: he thought that it was in his LOVE.

“Poor dear Monsieur d’Artagnan,” said Kitty, in a voice full of compassion, and pressing anew the young man’s hand.

“You pity me, little one?” said d’Artagnan.

“Oh, yes, and with all my heart; for I know what it is to be in love.”

“You know what it is to be in love?” said d’Artagnan, looking at her for the first time with much attention.

“Alas, yes.”

“Well, then, instead of pitying me, you would do much better to assist me in avenging myself on your mistress.”

“And what sort of revenge would you take?”

“I would triumph over her, and supplant my rival.”

“I will never help you in that, Monsieur Chevalier,” said Kitty, warmly.

“And why not?” demanded d’Artagnan.

“For two reasons.”

“What ones?”

“The first is that my mistress will never love you.”

“How do you know that?”

“You have cut her to the heart.”

“I? In what can I have offended her--I who ever since I have known her have lived at her feet like a slave? Speak, I beg you!”

“I will never confess that but to the man--who should read to the bottom of my soul!”

D’Artagnan looked at Kitty for the second time. The young girl had freshness and beauty which many duchesses would have purchased with their coronets.

“Kitty,” said he, “I will read to the bottom of your soul when-ever you like; don’t let that disturb you.” And he gave her a kiss at which the poor girl became as red as a cherry.

“Oh, no,” said Kitty, “it is not me you love! It is my mistress you love; you told me so just now.”

“And does that hinder you from letting me know the second reason?”

“The second reason, Monsieur the Chevalier,” replied Kitty, emboldened by the kiss in the first place, and still further by the expression of the eyes of the young man, “is that in love, everyone for herself!”

Then only d’Artagnan remembered the languishing glances of Kitty, her constantly meeting him in the antechamber, the corridor, or on the stairs, those touches of the hand every time she met him, and her deep sighs; but absorbed by his desire to please the great lady, he had disdained the soubrette. He whose game is the eagle takes no heed of the sparrow.

But this time our Gascon saw at a glance all the advantage to be derived from the love which Kitty had just confessed so innocently, or so boldly: the interception of letters addressed to the Comte de Wardes, news on the spot, entrance at all hours into Kitty’s chamber, which was contiguous to her mistress’s. The perfidious deceiver was, as may plainly be perceived, already sacrificing, in intention, the poor girl in order to obtain Milady, willy-nilly.

“Well,” said he to the young girl, “are you willing, my dear Kitty, that I should give you a proof of that love which you doubt?”

“What love?” asked the young girl.

“Of that which I am ready to feel toward you.”

“And what is that proof?”

“Are you willing that I should this evening pass with you the time I generally spend with your mistress?”

“Oh, yes,” said Kitty, clapping her hands, “very willing.”

“Well, then, come here, my dear,” said d’Artagnan, establishing himself in an easy chair; “come, and let me tell you that you are the prettiest SOUBRETTE I ever saw!”

And he did tell her so much, and so well, that the poor girl, who asked nothing better than to believe him, did believe him. Nevertheless, to d’Artagnan’s great astonishment, the pretty Kitty defended herself resolutely.

Time passes quickly when it is passed in attacks and defenses. Midnight sounded, and almost at the same time the bell was rung in Milady’s chamber.

“Good God,” cried Kitty, “there is my mistress calling me! Go; go directly!”

D’Artagnan rose, took his hat, as if it had been his intention to obey, then, opening quickly the door of a large closet instead of that leading to the staircase, he buried himself amid the robes and dressing gowns of Milady.

“What are you doing?” cried Kitty.

D’Artagnan, who had secured the key, shut himself up in the closet without reply.

“Well,” cried Milady, in a sharp voice. “Are you asleep, that you don’t answer when I ring?”

And d’Artagnan heard the door of communication opened violently.

“Here am I, Milady, here am I!” cried Kitty, springing forward to meet her mistress.

Both went into the bedroom, and as the door of communication remained open, d’Artagnan could hear Milady for some time scolding her maid. She was at length appeased, and the conversation turned upon him while Kitty was assisting her mistress.

“Well,” said Milady, “I have not seen our Gascon this evening.”

“What, Milady! has he not come?” said Kitty. “Can he be inconstant before being happy?”

“Oh, no; he must have been prevented by Monsieur de Treville or Monsieur Dessessart. I understand my game, Kitty; I have this one safe.”

“What will you do with him, madame?”

“What will I do with him? Be easy, Kitty, there is something between that man and me that he is quite ignorant of: he nearly made me lose my credit with his Eminence. Oh, I will be revenged!”

“I believed that Madame loved him.”

“I love him? I detest him! An idiot, who held the life of Lord de Winter in his hands and did not kill him, by which I missed three hundred thousand livres’ income.”

“That’s true,” said Kitty; “your son was the only heir of his uncle, and until his majority you would have had the enjoyment of his fortune.”

D’Artagnan shuddered to the marrow at hearing this suave creature reproach him, with that sharp voice which she took such pains to conceal in conversation, for not having killed a man whom he had seen load her with kindnesses.

“For all this,” continued Milady, “I should long ago have revenged myself on him if, and I don’t know why, the cardinal had not requested me to conciliate him.”

“Oh, yes; but Madame has not conciliated that little woman he was so fond of.”

“What, the mercer’s wife of the Rue des Fossoyeurs? Has he not already forgotten she ever existed? Fine vengeance that, on my faith!”

A cold sweat broke from d’Artagnan’s brow. Why, this woman was a monster! He resumed his listening, but unfortunately the toilet was finished.

“That will do,” said Milady; “go into your own room, and tomorrow endeavor again to get me an answer to the letter I gave you.”

“For Monsieur de Wardes?” said Kitty.

“To be sure; for Monsieur de Wardes.”

“Now, there is one,” said Kitty, “who appears to me quite a different sort of a man from that poor Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

“Go to bed, mademoiselle,” said Milady; “I don’t like comments.”

D’Artagnan heard the door close; then the noise of two bolts by which Milady fastened herself in. On her side, but as softly as possible, Kitty turned the key of the lock, and then d’Artagnan opened the closet door.

“Oh, good Lord!” said Kitty, in a low voice, “what is the matter with you? How pale you are!”

“The abominable creature,” murmured d’Artagnan.

“Silence, silence, begone!” said Kitty. “There is nothing but a wainscot between my chamber and Milady’s; every word that is uttered in one can be heard in the other.”

“That’s exactly the reason I won’t go,” said d’Artagnan.

“What!” said Kitty, blushing.

“Or, at least, I will go--later.”

He drew Kitty to him. She had the less motive to resist, resistance would make so much noise. Therefore Kitty surrendered.

It was a movement of vengeance upon Milady. D’Artagnan believed it right to say that vengeance is the pleasure of the gods. With a little more heart, he might have been contented with this new conquest; but the principal features of his character were ambition and pride. It must, however, be confessed in his justification that the first use he made of his influence over Kitty was to try and find out what had become of Mme. Bonacieux; but the poor girl swore upon the crucifix to d’Artagnan that she was entirely ignorant on that head, her mistress never admitting her into half her secrets--only she believed she could say she was not dead.

As to the cause which was near making Milady lose her credit with the cardinal, Kitty knew nothing about it; but this time d’Artagnan was better informed than she was. As he had seen Milady on board a vessel at the moment he was leaving England, he suspected that it was, almost without a doubt, on account of the diamond studs.

But what was clearest in all this was that the true hatred, the profound hatred, the inveterate hatred of Milady, was increased by his not having killed her brother-in-law.

D’Artagnan came the next day to Milady’s, and finding her in a very ill-humor, had no doubt that it was lack of an answer from M. de Wardes that provoked her thus. Kitty came in, but Milady was very cross with her. The poor girl ventured a glance at d’Artagnan which said, “See how I suffer on your account!”

Toward the end of the evening, however, the beautiful lioness became milder; she smilingly listened to the soft speeches of d’Artagnan, and even gave him her hand to kiss.

D’Artagnan departed, scarcely knowing what to think, but as he was a youth who did not easily lose his head, while continuing to pay his court to Milady, he had framed a little plan in his mind.

He found Kitty at the gate, and, as on the preceding evening, went up to her chamber. Kitty had been accused of negligence and severely scolded. Milady could not at all comprehend the silence of the Comte de Wardes, and she ordered Kitty to come at nine o’clock in the morning to take a third letter.

D’Artagnan made Kitty promise to bring him that letter on the following morning. The poor girl promised all her lover desired; she was mad.

Things passed as on the night before. D’Artagnan concealed himself in his closet; Milady called, undressed, sent away Kitty, and shut the door. As the night before, d’Artagnan did not return home till five o’clock in the morning.

At eleven o’clock Kitty came to him. She held in her hand a fresh billet from Milady. This time the poor girl did not even argue with d’Artagnan; she gave it to him at once. She belonged body and soul to her handsome soldier.

D’Artagnan opened the letter and read as follows:

This is the third time I have written to you to tell you that I love you. Beware that I do not write to you a fourth time to tell you that I detest you.

If you repent of the manner in which you have acted toward me, the young girl who brings you this will tell you how a man of spirit may obtain his pardon.

d’Artagnan colored and grew pale several times in reading this billet.

“Oh, you love her still,” said Kitty, who had not taken her eyes off the young man’s countenance for an instant.

“No, Kitty, you are mistaken. I do not love her, but I will avenge myself for her contempt.”

“Oh, yes, I know what sort of vengeance! You told me that!”

“What matters it to you, Kitty? You know it is you alone whom I love.”

“How can I know that?”

“By the scorn I will throw upon her.”

D’Artagnan took a pen and wrote:

Madame, Until the present moment I could not believe that it was to me your first two letters were addressed, so unworthy did I feel myself of such an honor; besides, I was so seriously indisposed that I could not in any case have replied to them.

But now I am forced to believe in the excess of your kindness, since not only your letter but your servant assures me that I have the good fortune to be beloved by you.

She has no occasion to teach me the way in which a man of spirit may obtain his pardon. I will come and ask mine at eleven o’clock this evening.

To delay it a single day would be in my eyes now to commit a fresh offense.

From him whom you have rendered the happiest of men, Comte de Wardes

This note was in the first place a forgery; it was likewise an indelicacy. It was even, according to our present manners, something like an infamous action; but at that period people did not manage affairs as they do today. Besides, d’Artagnan from her own admission knew Milady culpable of treachery in matters more important, and could entertain no respect for her. And yet, notwithstanding this want of respect, he felt an uncontrollable passion for this woman boiling in his veins--passion drunk with contempt; but passion or thirst, as the reader pleases.

D’Artagnan’s plan was very simple. By Kitty’s chamber he could gain that of her mistress. He would take advantage of the first moment of surprise, shame, and terror, to triumph over her. He might fail, but something must be left to chance. In eight days the campaign would open, and he would be compelled to leave Paris; d’Artagnan had no time for a prolonged love siege.

“There,” said the young man, handing Kitty the letter sealed; “give that to Milady. It is the count’s reply.”

Poor Kitty became as pale as death; she suspected what the letter contained.

“Listen, my dear girl,” said d’Artagnan; “you cannot but perceive that all this must end, some way or other. Milady may discover that you gave the first billet to my lackey instead of to the count’s; that it is I who have opened the others which ought to have been opened by de Wardes. Milady will then turn you out of doors, and you know she is not the woman to limit her vengeance.”

“Alas!” said Kitty, “for whom have I exposed myself to all that?”

“For me, I well know, my sweet girl,” said d’Artagnan. “But I am grateful, I swear to you.”

“But what does this note contain?”

“Milady will tell you.”

“Ah, you do not love me!” cried Kitty, “and I am very wretched.”

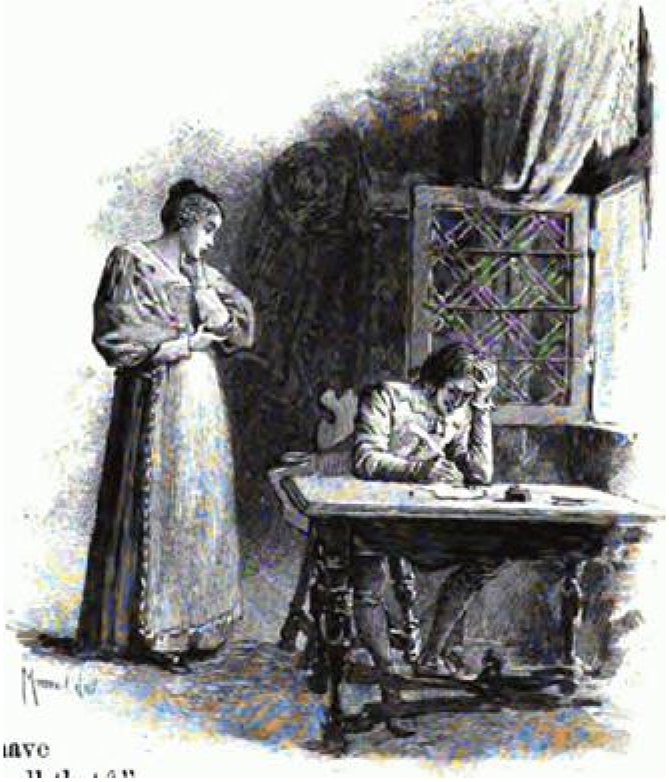

To this reproach there is always one response which deludes women. D’Artagnan replied in such a manner that Kitty remained in her great delusion. Although she cried freely before deciding to transmit the letter to her mistress, she did at last so decide, which was all d’Artagnan wished. Finally he promised that he would leave her mistress’s presence at an early hour that evening, and that when he left the mistress he would ascend with the maid. This promise completed poor Kitty’s consolation.

CHAPTER 34

IN WHICH THE EQUIPMENT OF ARAMIS AND PORTHOS IS TREATED OF

Since the four friends had been each in search of his equipments, there had been no fixed meeting between them. They dined apart from one another, wherever they might happen to be, or rather where they could. Duty likewise on its part took a portion of that precious time which was gliding away so rapidly--only they had agreed to meet once a week, about one o’clock, at the residence of Athos, seeing that he, in agreement with the vow he had formed, did not pass over the threshold of his door.

This day of reunion was the same day as that on which Kitty came to find d’Artagnan. Soon as Kitty left him, d’Artagnan directed his steps toward the Rue Ferou.

He found Athos and Aramis philosophizing. Aramis had some slight inclination to resume the cassock. Athos, according to his system, neither encouraged nor dissuaded him. Athos believed that everyone should be left to his own free will. He never gave advice but when it was asked, and even then he required to be asked twice.

“People, in general,” he said, “only ask advice not to follow it; or if they do follow it, it is for the sake of having someone to blame for having given it.”

Porthos arrived a minute after d’Artagnan. The four friends were reunited.

The four countenances expressed four different feelings: that of Porthos, tranquillity; that of d’Artagnan, hope; that of Aramis, uneasiness; that of Athos, carelessness.

At the end of a moment’s conversation, in which Porthos hinted that a lady of elevated rank had condescended to relieve him from his embarrassment, Mousqueton entered. He came to request his master to return to his lodgings, where his presence was urgent, as he piteously said.

“Is it my equipment?”

“Yes and no,” replied Mousqueton.

“Well, but can’t you speak?”

“Come, monsieur.”

Porthos rose, saluted his friends, and followed Mousqueton. An instant after, Bazin made his appearance at the door.

“What do you want with me, my friend?” said Aramis, with that mildness of language which was observable in him every time that his ideas were directed toward the Church.

“A man wishes to see Monsieur at home,” replied Bazin.

“A man! What man?”

“A mendicant.”

“Give him alms, Bazin, and bid him pray for a poor sinner.”

“This mendicant insists upon speaking to you, and pretends that you will be very glad to see him.”

“Has he sent no particular message for me?”

“Yes. If Monsieur Aramis hesitates to come,” he said, “tell him I am from Tours.”

“From Tours!” cried Aramis. “A thousand pardons, gentlemen; but no doubt this man brings me the news I expected.” And rising also, he went off at a quick pace. There remained Athos and d’Artagnan.

“I believe these fellows have managed their business. What do you think, d’Artagnan?” said Athos.

“I know that Porthos was in a fair way,” replied d’Artagnan; “and as to Aramis to tell you the truth, I have never been seriously uneasy on his account. But you, my dear Athos--you, who so generously distributed the Englishman’s pistoles, which were our legitimate property--what do you mean to do?”

“I am satisfied with having killed that fellow, my boy, seeing that it is blessed bread to kill an Englishman; but if I had pocketed his pistoles, they would have weighed me down like a remorse.

“Go to, my dear Athos; you have truly inconceivable ideas.”

“Let it pass. What do you think of Monsieur de Treville telling me, when he did me the honor to call upon me yesterday, that you associated with the suspected English, whom the cardinal protects?”

“That is to say, I visit an Englishwoman--the one I named.”

“Oh, ay! the fair woman on whose account I gave you advice, which naturally you took care not to adopt.”

“I gave you my reasons.”

“Yes; you look there for your outfit, I think you said.”

“Not at all. I have acquired certain knowledge that that woman was concerned in the abduction of Madame Bonacieux.”

“Yes, I understand now: to find one woman, you court another. It is the longest road, but certainly the most amusing.”

D’Artagnan was on the point of telling Athos all; but one consideration restrained him. Athos was a gentleman, punctilious in points of honor; and there were in the plan which our lover had devised for Milady, he was sure, certain things that would not obtain the assent of this Puritan. He was therefore silent; and as Athos was the least inquisitive of any man on earth, d’Artagnan’s confidence stopped there. We will therefore leave the two friends, who had nothing important to say to each other, and follow Aramis.

Upon being informed that the person who wanted to speak to him came from Tours, we have seen with what rapidity the young man followed, or rather went before, Bazin; he ran without stopping from the Rue Ferou to the Rue de Vaugirard. On entering he found a man of short stature and intelligent eyes, but covered with rags.

“You have asked for me?” said the Musketeer.

“I wish to speak with Monsieur Aramis. Is that your name, monsieur?”

“My very own. You have brought me something?”

“Yes, if you show me a certain embroidered handkerchief.”

“Here it is,” said Aramis, taking a small key from his breast and opening a little ebony box inlaid with mother of pearl, “here it is. Look.”

“That is right,” replied the mendicant; “dismiss your lackey.”

In fact, Bazin, curious to know what the mendicant could want with his master, kept pace with him as well as he could, and arrived almost at the same time he did; but his quickness was not of much use to him. At the hint from the mendicant his master made him a sign to retire, and he was obliged to obey.

Bazin gone, the mendicant cast a rapid glance around him in order to be sure that nobody could either see or hear him, and opening his ragged vest, badly held together by a leather strap, he began to rip the upper part of his doublet, from which he drew a letter.

Aramis uttered a cry of joy at the sight of the seal, kissed the superscription with an almost religious respect, and opened the epistle, which contained what follows:

“My Friend, it is the will of fate that we should be still for some time separated; but the delightful days of youth are not lost beyond return. Perform your duty in camp; I will do mine elsewhere. Accept that which the bearer brings you; make the campaign like a handsome true gentleman, and think of me, who kisses tenderly your black eyes.

“Adieu; or rather, AU REVOIR.”

The mendicant continued to rip his garments; and drew from amid his rags a hundred and fifty Spanish double pistoles, which he laid down on the table; then he opened the door, bowed, and went out before the young man, stupefied by his letter, had ventured to address a word to him.

Aramis then reperused the letter, and perceived a postscript:

PS. You may behave politely to the bearer, who is a count and a grandee of Spain!

“Golden dreams!” cried Aramis. “Oh, beautiful life! Yes, we are young; yes, we shall yet have happy days! My love, my blood, my life! all, all, all, are thine, my adored mistress!”

And he kissed the letter with passion, without even vouchsafing a look at the gold which sparkled on the table.

Bazin scratched at the door, and as Aramis had no longer any reason to exclude him, he bade him come in.

Bazin was stupefied at the sight of the gold, and forgot that he came to announce d’Artagnan, who, curious to know who the mendicant could be, came to Aramis on leaving Athos.

Now, as d’Artagnan used no ceremony with Aramis, seeing that Bazin forgot to announce him, he announced himself.

“The devil! my dear Aramis,” said d’Artagnan, “if these are the prunes that are sent to you from Tours, I beg you will make my compliments to the gardener who gathers them.”

“You are mistaken, friend d’Artagnan,” said Aramis, always on his guard; “this is from my publisher, who has just sent me the price of that poem in one-syllable verse which I began yonder.”

“Ah, indeed,” said d’Artagnan. “Well, your publisher is very generous, my dear Aramis, that’s all I can say.”

“How, monsieur?” cried Bazin, “a poem sell so dear as that! It is incredible! Oh, monsieur, you can write as much as you like; you may become equal to Monsieur de Voiture and Monsieur de Benserade. I like that. A poet is as good as an abbe. Ah! Monsieur Aramis, become a poet, I beg of you."

"Bazin, my friend," said Aramis, "I believe you meddle with my conversation."

Bazin perceived he was wrong; he bowed and went out.

"Ah!" said d'Artagnan with a smile, "you sell your productions at their weight in gold. You are very fortunate, my friend; but take care or you will lose that letter which is peeping from your doublet, and which also comes, no doubt, from your publisher."

Aramis blushed to the eyes, crammed in the letter, and re-buttoned his doublet.

"My dear d'Artagnan," said he, "if you please, we will join our friends; as I am rich, we will today begin to dine together again, expecting that you will be rich in your turn."

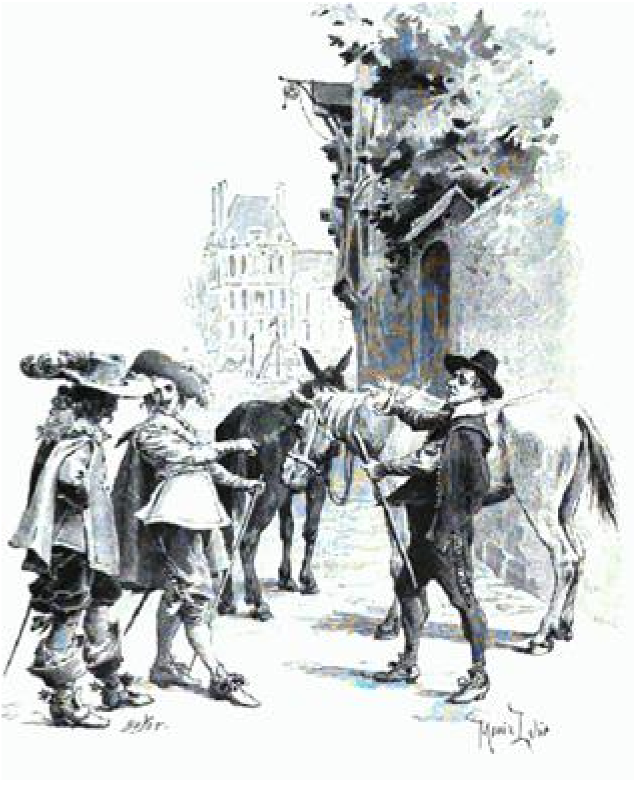

"My faith!" said d'Artagnan, with great pleasure. "It is long since we have had a good dinner; and I, for my part, have a somewhat hazardous expedition for this evening, and shall not be sorry, I confess, to fortify myself with a few glasses of good old Burgundy."

"Agreed, as to the old Burgundy; I have no objection to that," said Aramis, from whom the letter and the gold had removed, as by magic, his ideas of conversion.

And having put three or four double pistoles into his pocket to answer the needs of the moment, he placed the others in the ebony box, inlaid with mother of pearl, in which was the famous handkerchief which served him as a talisman.

The two friends repaired to Athos's, and he, faithful to his vow of not going out, took upon him to order dinner to be brought to them. As he was perfectly acquainted with the details of gastronomy, d'Artagnan and Aramis made no objection to abandoning this important care to him.

They went to find Porthos, and at the corner of the Rue Bac met Mousqueton, who, with a most pitiable air, was driving before him a mule and a horse.

D'Artagnan uttered a cry of surprise, which was not quite free from joy.

"Ah, my yellow horse," cried he. "Aramis, look at that horse!"

"Oh, the frightful brute!" said Aramis.

"Ah, my dear," replied d'Artagnan, "upon that very horse I came to Paris."

"What, does Monsieur know this horse?" said Mousqueton.

"It is of an original color," said Aramis; "I never saw one with such a hide in my life."

"I can well believe it," replied d'Artagnan, "and that was why I got three crowns for him. It must have been for his hide, for, CERTES, the carcass is not worth eighteen livres. But how did this horse come into your bands, Mousqueton?"

"Pray," said the lackey, "say nothing about it, monsieur; it is a frightful trick of the husband of our duchess!"

"How is that, Mousqueton?"

"Why, we are looked upon with a rather favorable eye by a lady of quality, the Duchesse de--but, your pardon; my master has commanded me to be discreet. She had forced us to accept a little souvenir, a magnificent Spanish GENET and an Andalusian mule, which were beautiful to look upon. The husband heard of the affair; on their way he confiscated the two magnificent beasts which were being sent to us, and substituted these horrible animals."

"Which you are taking back to him?" said d'Artagnan.

"Exactly!" replied Mousqueton. "You may well believe that we will not accept such steeds as these in exchange for those which had been promised to us.”

“No, PARDIEU; though I should like to have seen Porthos on my yellow horse. That would give me an idea of how I looked when I arrived in Paris. But don’t let us hinder you, Mousqueton; go and perform your master’s orders. Is he at home?”

“Yes, monsieur,” said Mousqueton, “but in a very ill humor. Get up!”

He continued his way toward the Quai des Grands Augustins, while the two friends went to ring at the bell of the unfortunate Porthos. He, having seen them crossing the yard, took care not to answer, and they rang in vain.

Meanwhile Mousqueton continued on his way, and crossing the Pont Neuf, still driving the two sorry animals before him, he reached the Rue aux Ours. Arrived there, he fastened, according to the orders of his master, both horse and mule to the knocker of the procurator’s door; then, without taking any thought for their future, he returned to Porthos, and told him that his commission was completed.

In a short time the two unfortunate beasts, who had not eaten anything since the morning, made such a noise in raising and letting fall the knocker that the procurator ordered his errand boy to go and inquire in the neighborhood to whom this horse and mule belonged.

Mme. Coquenard recognized her present, and could not at first comprehend this restitution; but the visit of Porthos soon enlightened her. The anger which fired the eyes of the Musketeer, in spite of his efforts to suppress it, terrified his sensitive inamorata. In fact, Mousqueton had not concealed from his master that he had met d’Artagnan and Aramis, and that d’Artagnan in the yellow horse had recognized the Bearnese pony upon which he had come to Paris, and which he had sold for three crowns.

Porthos went away after having appointed a meeting with the procurator’s wife in the cloister of St. Magloire. The procurator, seeing he was going, invited him to dinner--an invitation which the Musketeer refused with a majestic air.

Mme. Coquenard repaired trembling to the cloister of St. Magloire, for she guessed the reproaches that awaited her there; but she was fascinated by the lofty airs of Porthos.

All that which a man wounded in his self-love could let fall in the shape of imprecations and reproaches upon the head of a woman Porthos let fall upon the bowed head of the procurator’s wife.

“Alas,” said she, “I did all for the best! One of our clients is a horsedealer; he owes money to the office, and is backward in his pay. I took the mule and the horse for what he owed us; he assured me that they were two noble steeds.”

“Well, madame,” said Porthos, “if he owed you more than five crowns, your horsedealer is a thief.”

“There is no harm in trying to buy things cheap, Monsieur Porthos,” said the procurator’s wife, seeking to excuse herself.

“No, madame; but they who so assiduously try to buy things cheap ought to permit others to seek more generous friends.” And Porthos, turning on his heel, made a step to retire.

“Monsieur Porthos! Monsieur Porthos!” cried the procurator’s wife. “I have been wrong; I see it. I ought not to have driven a bargain when it was to equip a cavalier like you.”

Porthos, without reply, retreated a second step. The procurator’s wife fancied she saw him in a brilliant cloud, all surrounded by duchesses and marchionesses, who cast bags of money at his feet.

“Stop, in the name of heaven, Monsieur Porthos!” cried she. “Stop, and let us talk.”

“Talking with you brings me misfortune,” said Porthos.

“But, tell me, what do you ask?”

“Nothing; for that amounts to the same thing as if I asked you for something.”

The procurator’s wife hung upon the arm of Porthos, and in the violence of her grief she cried out, “Monsieur Porthos, I am ignorant of all such matters! How should I know what a horse is? How should I know what horse furniture is?”

“You should have left it to me, then, madame, who know what they are; but you wished to be frugal, and consequently to lend at usury.”

“It was wrong, Monsieur Porthos; but I will repair that wrong, upon my word of honor.”

“How so?” asked the Musketeer.

“Listen. This evening M. Coquenard is going to the house of the Due de Chaulnes, who has sent for him. It is for a consultation, which will last three hours at least. Come! We shall be alone, and can make up our accounts.”

“In good time. Now you talk, my dear.”

“You pardon me?”

“We shall see,” said Porthos, majestically; and the two separated saying, “Till this evening.”

“The devil!” thought Porthos, as he walked away, “it appears I am getting nearer to Monsieur Coquenard’s strongbox at last.”

CHAPTER 35

A GASCON A MATCH FOR CUPID

The evening so impatiently waited for by Porthos and by d’Artagnan at last arrived.

As was his custom, d’Artagnan presented himself at Milady’s at about nine o’clock. He found her in a charming humor. Never had he been so well received. Our Gascon knew, by the first glance of his eye, that his billet had been delivered, and that this billet had had its effect.

Kitty entered to bring some sherbet. Her mistress put on a charming face, and smiled on her graciously; but alas! the poor girl was so sad that she did not even notice Milady’s condescension.

D’Artagnan looked at the two women, one after the other, and was forced to acknowledge that in his opinion Dame Nature had made a mistake in their formation. To the great lady she had given a heart vile and venal; to the SOUBRETTE she had given the heart of a duchess.

At ten o’clock Milady began to appear restless. D’Artagnan knew what she wanted. She looked at the clock, rose, reseated herself, smiled at d’Artagnan with an air which said, “You are very amiable, no doubt, but you would be charming if you would only depart.”

D’Artagnan rose and took his hat; Milady gave him her hand to kiss. The young man felt her press his hand, and comprehended that this was a sentiment, not of coquetry, but of gratitude because of his departure.

“She loves him devilishly,” he murmured. Then he went out.

This time Kitty was nowhere waiting for him; neither in the antechamber, nor in the corridor, nor beneath the great door. It was necessary that d’Artagnan should find alone the staircase and the little chamber. She heard him enter, but she did not raise her head. The young man went to her and took her hands; then she sobbed aloud.

As d’Artagnan had presumed, on receiving his letter, Milady in a delirium of joy had told her servant everything; and by way of recompense for the manner in which she had this time executed the commission, she had given Kitty a purse.

Returning to her own room, Kitty had thrown the purse into a corner, where it lay open, disgorging three or four gold pieces on the carpet. The poor girl, under the caresses of d'Artagnan, lifted her head. D'Artagnan himself was frightened by the change in her countenance. She joined her hands with a suppliant air, but without venturing to speak a word. As little sensitive as was the heart of d'Artagnan, he was touched by this mute sorrow; but he held too tenaciously to his projects, above all to this one, to change the program which he had laid out in advance. He did not therefore allow her any hope that he would flinch; only he represented his action as one of simple vengeance.

For the rest this vengeance was very easy; for Milady, doubtless to conceal her blushes from her lover, had ordered Kitty to extinguish all the lights in the apartment, and even in the little chamber itself. Before daybreak M. de Wardes must take his departure, still in obscurity.

Presently they heard Milady retire to her room. D'Artagnan slipped into the wardrobe. Hardly was he concealed when the little bell sounded. Kitty went to her mistress, and did not leave the door open; but the partition was so thin that one could hear nearly all that passed between the two women.

Milady seemed overcome with joy, and made Kitty repeat the smallest details of the pretended interview of the soubrette with de Wardes when he received the letter; how he had responded; what was the expression of his face; if he seemed very amorous. And to all these questions poor Kitty, forced to put on a pleasant face, responded in a stifled voice whose dolorous accent her mistress did not however remark, solely because happiness is egotistical.

Finally, as the hour for her interview with the count approached, Milady had everything about her darkened, and ordered Kitty to return to her own chamber, and introduce de Wardes whenever he presented himself.

Kitty's detention was not long. Hardly had d'Artagnan seen, through a crevice in his closet, that the whole apartment was in obscurity, than he slipped out of his concealment, at the very moment when Kitty reclosed the door of communication.

“What is that noise?” demanded Milady.

“It is I,” said d'Artagnan in a subdued voice, “I, the Comte de Wardes.”

“Oh, my God, my God!” murmured Kitty, “he has not even waited for the hour he himself named!”

“Well,” said Milady, in a trembling voice, “why do you not enter? Count, Count,” added she, “you know that I wait for you.”

At this appeal d’Artagnan drew Kitty quietly away, and slipped into the chamber.

If rage or sorrow ever torture the heart, it is when a lover receives under a name which is not his own protestations of love addressed to his happy rival. D’Artagnan was in a dolorous situation which he had not foreseen. Jealousy gnawed his heart; and he suffered almost as much as poor Kitty, who at that very moment was crying in the next chamber.

“Yes, Count,” said Milady, in her softest voice, and pressing his hand in her own, “I am happy in the love which your looks and your words have expressed to me every time we have met. I also--I love you. Oh, tomorrow, tomorrow, I must have some pledge from you which will prove that you think of me; and that you may not forget me, take this!” and she slipped a ring from her finger onto d’Artagnan’s. d’Artagnan remembered having seen this ring on the finger of Milady; it was a magnificent sapphire, encircled with brilliants.

The first movement of d’Artagnan was to return it, but Milady added, “No, no! Keep that ring for love of me. Besides, in accepting it,” she added, in a voice full of emotion, “you render me a much greater service than you imagine.”

“This woman is full of mysteries,” murmured d’Artagnan to himself. At that instant he felt himself ready to reveal all. He even opened his mouth to tell Milady who he was, and with what a revengeful purpose he had come; but she added, “Poor angel, whom that monster of a Gascon barely failed to kill.”

The monster was himself.

“Oh,” continued Milady, “do your wounds still make you suffer?”

“Yes, much,” said d’Artagnan, who did not well know how to answer.

“Be tranquil,” murmured Milady; “I will avenge you--and cruelly!”

“PESTE!” said d’Artagnan to himself, “the moment for confidences has not yet come.”

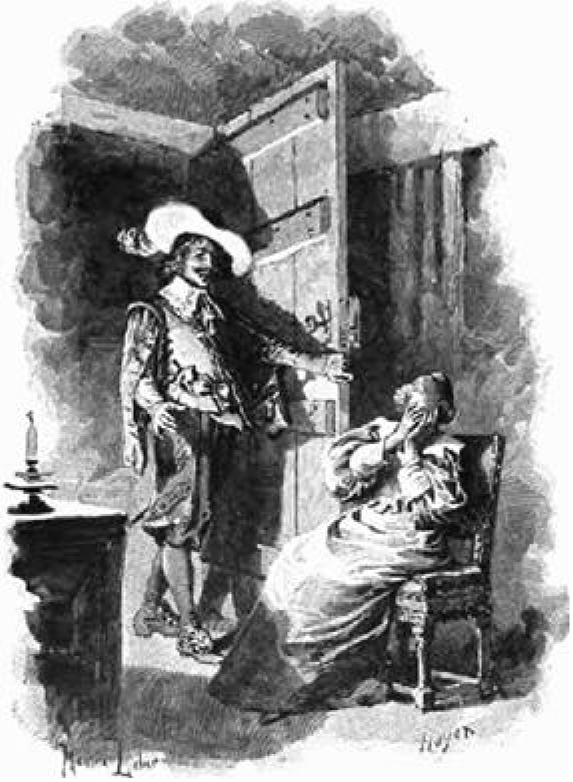

It took some time for d’Artagnan to resume this little dialogue; but then all the ideas of vengeance which he had brought with him had completely vanished. This woman exercised over him an unaccountable power; he hated and adored her at the same time. He would not have believed that two sentiments so opposite could dwell in the same heart, and by their union constitute a passion so strange, and as it were, diabolical.

Presently it sounded one o’clock. It was necessary to separate. D’Artagnan at the moment of quitting Milady felt only the liveliest regret at the parting; and as they addressed each other in a reciprocally passionate adieu, another interview was arranged for the following week.

Poor Kitty hoped to speak a few words to d’Artagnan when he passed through her chamber; but Milady herself reconducted him through the darkness, and only quit him at the staircase.

The next morning d’Artagnan ran to find Athos. He was engaged in an adventure so singular that he wished for counsel. He therefore told him all.

“Your Milady,” said he, “appears to be an infamous creature, but not the less you have done wrong to deceive her. In one fashion or another you have a terrible enemy on your hands.”

While thus speaking Athos regarded with attention the sapphire set with diamonds which had taken, on d’Artagnan’s finger, the place of the queen’s ring, carefully kept in a casket.

“You notice my ring?” said the Gascon, proud to display so rich a gift in the eyes of his friends.

“Yes,” said Athos, “it reminds me of a family jewel.”

“It is beautiful, is it not?” said d’Artagnan.

“Yes,” said Athos, “magnificent. I did not think two sapphires of such a fine water existed. Have you traded it for your diamond?”

“No. It is a gift from my beautiful Englishwoman, or rather Frenchwoman--for I am convinced she was born in France, though I have not questioned her.”

“That ring comes from Milady?” cried Athos, with a voice in which it was easy to detect strong emotion.

“Her very self; she gave it me last night. Here it is,” replied d’Artagnan, taking it from his finger.

Athos examined it and became very pale. He tried it on his left hand; it fit his finger as if made for it.

A shade of anger and vengeance passed across the usually calm brow of this gentleman.

“It is impossible it can be she,” said he. “How could this ring come into the hands of Milady Clarik? And yet it is difficult to suppose such a resemblance should exist between two jewels.”

“Do you know this ring?” said d’Artagnan.

“I thought I did,” replied Athos; “but no doubt I was mistaken.” And he returned d’Artagnan the ring without, however, ceasing to look at it.

“Pray, d’Artagnan,” said Athos, after a minute, “either take off that ring or turn the mounting inside; it recalls such cruel recollections that I shall have no head to converse with you. Don’t ask me for counsel; don’t tell me you are perplexed what to do. But stop! let me look at that sapphire again; the one I mentioned to you had one of its faces scratched by accident.”

D’Artagnan took off the ring, giving it again to Athos.

Athos started. “Look,” said he, “is it not strange?” and he pointed out to d’Artagnan the scratch he had remembered.

“But from whom did this ring come to you, Athos?”

“From my mother, who inherited it from her mother. As I told you, it is an old family jewel.”

“And you--sold it?” asked d’Artagnan, hesitatingly.

“No,” replied Athos, with a singular smile. “I gave it away in a night of love, as it has been given to you.”

D’Artagnan became pensive in his turn; it appeared as if there were abysses in Milady’s soul whose depths were dark and unknown. He took back the ring, but put it in his pocket and not on his finger.

“d’Artagnan,” said Athos, taking his hand, “you know I love you; if I had a son I could not love him better. Take my advice, renounce this woman. I do not know her, but a sort of intuition tells me she is a lost creature, and that there is something fatal about her.”

“You are right,” said d’Artagnan; “I will have done with her. I own that this woman terrifies me.”

“Shall you have the courage?” said Athos.

“I shall,” replied d’Artagnan, “and instantly.”

“In truth, my young friend, you will act rightly,” said the gentleman, pressing the Gascon’s hand with an affection almost paternal; “and God grant that this woman, who has scarcely entered into your life, may not leave a terrible trace in it!” And Athos bowed to d’Artagnan like a man who wishes it understood that he would not be sorry to be left alone with his thoughts.

On reaching home d’Artagnan found Kitty waiting for him. A month of fever could not have changed her more than this one night of sleeplessness and sorrow.

She was sent by her mistress to the false de Wardes. Her mistress was mad with love, intoxicated with joy. She wished to know when her lover would meet her a second night; and poor Kitty, pale and trembling, awaited d’Artagnan’s reply. The counsels of his friend, joined to the cries of his own heart, made him determine, now his pride was saved and his vengeance satisfied, not to see Milady again. As a reply, he wrote the following letter:

Do not depend upon me, madame, for the next meeting. Since my convalescence I have so many affairs of this kind on my hands that I am forced to regulate them a little. When your turn comes, I shall have the honor to inform you of it. I kiss your hands.

Comte de Wardes

Not a word about the sapphire. Was the Gascon determined to keep it as a weapon against Milady, or else, let us be frank, did he not reserve the sapphire as a last resource for his outfit? It would be wrong to judge the actions of one period from the point of view of another. That which would now be considered as disgraceful to a gentleman was at that time quite a simple and natural affair, and the younger sons of the best families were frequently supported by their mistresses. D’Artagnan gave the open letter to Kitty, who at first was unable to comprehend it, but who became almost wild with joy on reading it a second time. She could scarcely believe in her happiness; and d’Artagnan was forced to renew with the living voice the assurances which he had written. And whatever might be--considering the violent character of Milady--the danger which the poor girl incurred in giving this billet to her mistress, she ran back to the Place Royale as fast as her legs could carry her.

The heart of the best woman is pitiless toward the sorrows of a rival.

Milady opened the letter with eagerness equal to Kitty’s in bringing it; but at the first words she read she became livid. She crushed the paper in her hand, and turning with flashing eyes upon Kitty, she cried, “What is this letter?”

“The answer to Madame’s,” replied Kitty, all in a tremble.

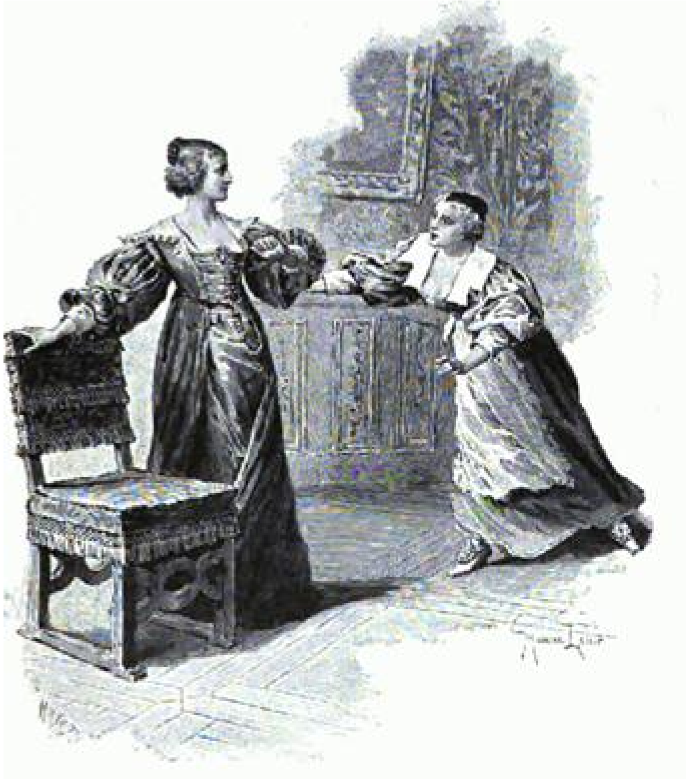

“Impossible!” cried Milady. “It is impossible a gentleman could have written such a letter to a woman.” Then all at once, starting, she cried, “My God! can he have--” and she stopped. She ground her teeth; she was of the color of ashes. She tried to go toward the window for air, but she could only stretch forth her arms; her legs failed her, and she sank into an armchair. Kitty, fearing she was ill, hastened toward her and was beginning to open her dress; but Milady started up, pushing her away. “What do you want with me?” said she, “and why do you place your hand on me?”

“I thought that Madame was ill, and I wished to bring her help,” responded the maid, frightened at the terrible expression which had come over her mistress’s face.

“I faint? I? I? Do you take me for half a woman? When I am insulted I do not faint; I avenge myself!”

And she made a sign for Kitty to leave the room.

CHAPTER 36

DREAM OF VENGEANCE

That evening Milady gave orders that when M. d’Artagnan came as usual, he should be immediately admitted; but he did not come.

The next day Kitty went to see the young man again, and related to him all that had passed on the preceding evening. d’Artagnan smiled; this jealous anger of Milady was his revenge.

That evening Milady was still more impatient than on the preceding evening. She renewed the order relative to the Gascon; but as before she expected him in vain.

The next morning, when Kitty presented herself at d’Artagnan’s, she was no longer joyous and alert as on the two preceding days; but on the contrary sad as death.

D’Artagnan asked the poor girl what was the matter with her; but she, as her only reply, drew a letter from her pocket and gave it to him.

This letter was in Milady’s handwriting; only this time it was addressed to M. d’Artagnan, and not to M. de Wardes.

He opened it and read as follows:

Dear M. d’Artagnan, It is wrong thus to neglect your friends, particularly at the moment you are about to leave them for so long a time. My brother-in-law and myself expected you yesterday and the day before, but in vain. Will it be the same this evening?

Your very grateful, Milady Clarik

“That’s all very simple,” said d’Artagnan; “I expected this letter. My credit rises by the fall of that of the Comte de Wardes.”

“And will you go?” asked Kitty.

“Listen to me, my dear girl,” said the Gascon, who sought for an excuse in his own eyes for breaking the promise he had made Athos; “you must understand it would be impolitic not to accept such a positive invitation. Milady, not seeing me come again, would not be able to understand what could cause the interruption of my visits, and might suspect something; who could say how far the vengeance of such a woman would go?”

“Oh, my God!” said Kitty, “you know how to represent things in such a way that you are always in the right. You are going now to pay your court to her again, and if this time you succeed in pleasing her in your own name and with your own face, it will be much worse than before.”

Instinct made poor Kitty guess a part of what was to happen. d’Artagnan reassured her as well as he could, and promised to remain insensible to the seductions of Milady.

He desired Kitty to tell her mistress that he could not be more grateful for her kindnesses than he was, and that he would be obedient to her orders. He did not dare to write for fear of not being able--to such experienced eyes as those of Milady--to disguise his writing sufficiently.

As nine o’clock sounded, d’Artagnan was at the Place Royale. It was evident that the servants who waited in the antechamber were warned, for as soon as d’Artagnan appeared, before even he had asked if Milady were visible, one of them ran to announce him.

“Show him in,” said Milady, in a quick tone, but so piercing that d’Artagnan heard her in the antechamber.

He was introduced.

“I am at home to nobody,” said Milady; “observe, to nobody.” The servant went out.

D’Artagnan cast an inquiring glance at Milady. She was pale, and looked fatigued, either from tears or want of sleep. The number of lights had been intentionally diminished, but the young woman could not conceal the traces of the fever which had devoured her for two days.

D’Artagnan approached her with his usual gallantry. She then made an extraordinary effort to receive him, but never did a more distressed countenance give the lie to a more amiable smile.

To the questions which d’Artagnan put concerning her health, she replied, “Bad, very bad.”

“Then,” replied he, “my visit is ill-timed; you, no doubt, stand in need of repose, and I will withdraw.”

“No, no!” said Milady. “On the contrary, stay, Monsieur d’Artagnan; your agreeable company will divert me.”

“Oh, oh!” thought d’Artagnan. “She has never been so kind before. On guard!”

Milady assumed the most agreeable air possible, and conversed with more than her usual brilliancy. At the same time the fever, which for an instant abandoned her, returned to give luster to her eyes, color to her cheeks, and vermillion to her lips. D’Artagnan was again in the presence of the Circe who had before surrounded him with her enchantments. His love, which he believed to be extinct but which was only asleep, awoke again in his heart. Milady smiled, and d’Artagnan felt that he could damn himself for that smile. There was a moment at which he felt something like remorse.

By degrees, Milady became more communicative. She asked d’Artagnan if he had a mistress.

“Alas!” said d’Artagnan, with the most sentimental air he could assume, “can you be cruel enough to put such a question to me--to me, who, from the moment I saw you, have only breathed and sighed through you and for you?”

Milady smiled with a strange smile.

“Then you love me?” said she.

“Have I any need to tell you so? Have you not perceived it?”

“It may be; but you know the more hearts are worth the capture, the more difficult they are to be won.”

“Oh, difficulties do not affright me,” said d’Artagnan. “I shrink before nothing but impossibilities.”

“Nothing is impossible,” replied Milady, “to true love.”

“Nothing, madame?”

“Nothing,” replied Milady.

“The devil!” thought d’Artagnan. “The note is changed. Is she going to fall in love with me, by chance, this fair inconstant; and will she be disposed to give me myself another sapphire like that which she gave me for de Wardes?”

D’Artagnan rapidly drew his seat nearer to Milady’s.

“Well, now,” she said, “let us see what you would do to prove this love of which you speak.”

“All that could be required of me. Order; I am ready.”

“For everything?”

“For everything,” cried d’Artagnan, who knew beforehand that he had not much to risk in engaging himself thus.

“Well, now let us talk a little seriously,” said Milady, in her turn drawing her armchair nearer to d’Artagnan’s chair.

“I am all attention, madame,” said he.

Milady remained thoughtful and undecided for a moment; then, as if appearing to have formed a resolution, she said, “I have an enemy.”

“You, madame!” said d’Artagnan, affecting surprise; “is that possible, my God?--good and beautiful as you are!”

“A mortal enemy.”

“Indeed!”

“An enemy who has insulted me so cruelly that between him and me it is war to the death. May I reckon on you as an auxiliary?”

D’Artagnan at once perceived the ground which the vindictive creature wished to reach.

“You may, madame,” said he, with emphasis. “My arm and my life belong to you, like my love.”

“Then,” said Milady, “since you are as generous as you are loving--”

She stopped.

“Well?” demanded d’Artagnan.

“Well,” replied Milady, after a moment of silence, “from the present time, cease to talk of impossibilities.”

“Do not overwhelm me with happiness,” cried d’Artagnan, throwing himself on his knees, and covering with kisses the hands abandoned to him.

“Avenge me of that infamous de Wardes,” said Milady, between her teeth, “and I shall soon know how to get rid of you--you double idiot, you animated sword blade!”

“Fall voluntarily into my arms, hypocritical and dangerous woman,” said d’Artagnan, likewise to himself, “after having abused me with such effrontery, and afterward I will laugh at you with him whom you wish me to kill.”

D’Artagnan lifted up his head.

“I am ready,” said he.

“You have understood me, then, dear Monsieur d’Artagnan,” said Milady.

“I could interpret one of your looks.”

“Then you would employ for me your arm which has already acquired so much renown?”

“Instantly!”

“But on my part,” said Milady, “how should I repay such a service? I know these lovers. They are men who do nothing for nothing.”

“You know the only reply that I desire,” said d’Artagnan, “the only one worthy of you and of me!”

And he drew nearer to her.

She scarcely resisted.

“Interested man!” cried she, smiling.

“Ah,” cried d’Artagnan, really carried away by the passion this woman had the power to kindle in his heart, “ah, that is because my happiness appears so impossible to me; and I have such fear that it should fly away from me like a dream that I pant to make a reality of it.”

“Well, merit this pretended happiness, then!”

“I am at your orders,” said d’Artagnan.

“Quite certain?” said Milady, with a last doubt.

“Only name to me the base man that has brought tears into your beautiful eyes!”

“Who told you that I had been weeping?” said she.

“It appeared to me--”

“Such women as I never weep,” said Milady.

“So much the better! Come, tell me his name!”

“Remember that his name is all my secret.”

“Yet I must know his name.”

“Yes, you must; see what confidence I have in you!”

“You overwhelm me with joy. What is his name?”

“You know him.”

“Indeed.”

“Yes.”

“It is surely not one of my friends?” replied d’Artagnan, affecting hesitation in order to make her believe him ignorant.

“If it were one of your friends you would hesitate, then?” cried Milady; and a threatening glance darted from her eyes.

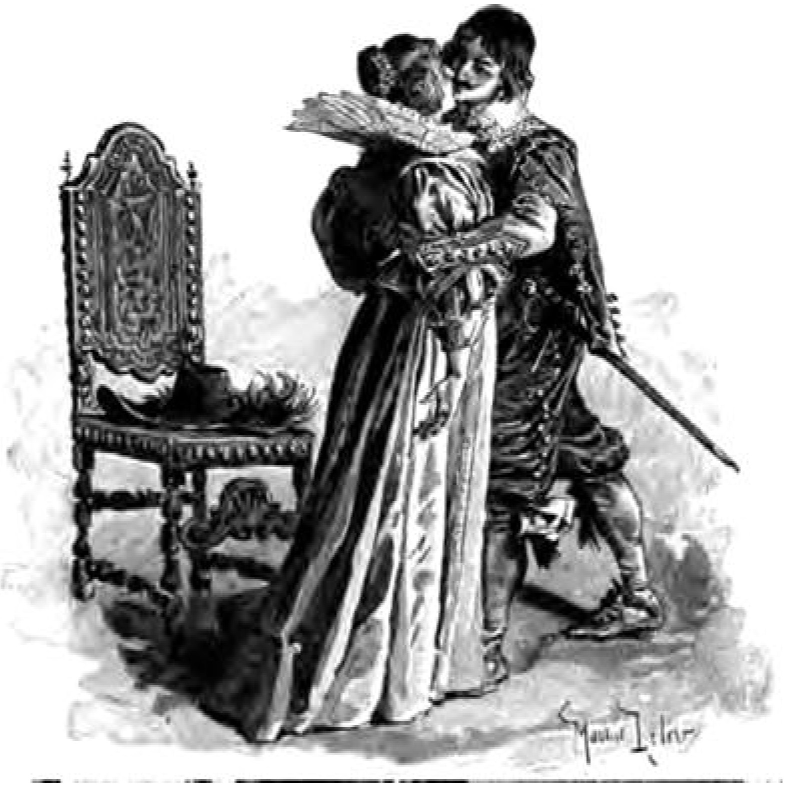

“Not if it were my own brother!” cried d’Artagnan, as if carried away by his enthusiasm.

Our Gascon promised this without risk, for he knew all that was meant.

“I love your devotedness,” said Milady.

“Alas, do you love nothing else in me?” asked d’Artagnan.

“I love you also, YOU!” said she, taking his hand.

The warm pressure made d’Artagnan tremble, as if by the touch that fever which consumed Milady attacked himself.

“You love me, you!” cried he. “Oh, if that were so, I should lose my reason!”

And he folded her in his arms. She made no effort to remove her lips from his kisses; only she did not respond to them. Her lips were cold; it appeared to d’Artagnan that he had embraced a statue.

He was not the less intoxicated with joy, electrified by love. He almost believed in the tenderness of Milady; he almost believed in the crime of de Wardes. If de Wardes had at that moment been under his hand, he would have killed him.

Milady seized the occasion.

“His name is--” said she, in her turn.

“De Wardes; I know it,” cried d’Artagnan.

“And how do you know it?” asked Milady, seizing both his hands, and endeavoring to read with her eyes to the bottom of his heart.

D’Artagnan felt he had allowed himself to be carried away, and that he had committed an error.

“Tell me, tell me, tell me, I say,” repeated Milady, “how do you know it?”

“How do I know it?” said d’Artagnan.

“Yes.”

“I know it because yesterday Monsieur de Wardes, in a saloon where I was, showed a ring which he said he had received from you.”

“Wretch!” cried Milady.

The epithet, as may be easily understood, resounded to the very bottom of d’Artagnan’s heart.

“Well?” continued she.

“Well, I will avenge you of this wretch,” replied d’Artagnan, giving himself the airs of Don Japhet of Armenia.

“Thanks, my brave friend!” cried Milady; “and when shall I be avenged?”

“Tomorrow--immediately--when you please!”

Milady was about to cry out, “Immediately,” but she reflected that such precipitation would not be very gracious toward d’Artagnan.

Besides, she had a thousand precautions to take, a thousand counsels to give to her defender, in order that he might avoid explanations with the count before witnesses. All this was answered by an expression of d’Artagnan’s. “Tomorrow,” said he, “you will be avenged, or I shall be dead.”

“No,” said she, “you will avenge me; but you will not be dead. He is a coward.”

“With women, perhaps; but not with men. I know something of him.”

“But it seems you had not much reason to complain of your fortune in your contest with him.”

“Fortune is a courtesan; favorable yesterday, she may turn her back tomorrow.”

“Which means that you now hesitate?”

“No, I do not hesitate; God forbid! But would it be just to allow me to go to a possible death without having given me at least something more than hope?”

Milady answered by a glance which said, “Is that all?--speak, then.” And then accompanying the glance with explanatory words, “That is but too just,” said she, tenderly.

“Oh, you are an angel!” exclaimed the young man.

“Then all is agreed?” said she.

“Except that which I ask of you, dear love.”

“But when I assure you that you may rely on my tenderness?”

“I cannot wait till tomorrow.”

“Silence! I hear my brother. It will be useless for him to find you here.”

She rang the bell and Kitty appeared.

“Go out this way,” said she, opening a small private door, “and come back at eleven o’clock; we will then terminate this conversation. Kitty will conduct you to my chamber.”

The poor girl almost fainted at hearing these words.

“Well, mademoiselle, what are you thinking about, standing there like a statue? Do as I bid you: show the chevalier out; and this evening at eleven o’clock--you have heard what I said.”

“It appears that these appointments are all made for eleven o’clock,” thought d’Artagnan; “that’s a settled custom.”

Milady held out her hand to him, which he kissed tenderly.

“But,” said he, as he retired as quickly as possible from the reproaches of Kitty, “I must not play the fool. This woman is certainly a great liar. I must take care.”

CHAPTER 37

MILADY’S SECRET

D’Artagnan left the hotel instead of going up at once to Kitty’s chamber, as she endeavored to persuade him to do--and that for two reasons: the first, because by this means he should escape reproaches, recriminations, and prayers; the second, because he was not sorry to have an opportunity of reading his own thoughts and endeavoring, if possible, to fathom those of this woman.

What was most clear in the matter was that d’Artagnan loved Milady like a madman, and that she did not love him at all. In an instant d’Artagnan perceived that the best way in which he could act would be to go home and write Milady a long letter, in which he would confess to her that he and de Wardes were, up to the present moment absolutely the same, and that consequently he could not undertake, without committing suicide, to kill the Comte de Wardes. But he also was spurred on by a ferocious desire of vengeance. He wished to subdue this woman in his own name; and as this vengeance appeared to him to have a certain sweetness in it, he could not make up his mind to renounce it.

He walked six or seven times round the Place Royale, turning at every ten steps to look at the light in Milady’s apartment, which was to be seen through the blinds. It was evident that this time the young woman was not in such haste to retire to her apartment as she had been the first.

At length the light disappeared. With this light was extinguished the last irresolution in the heart of d’Artagnan. He recalled to his mind the details of the first night, and with a beating heart and a brain on fire he re-entered the hotel and flew toward Kitty’s chamber.

The poor girl, pale as death and trembling in all her limbs, wished to delay her lover; but Milady, with her ear on the watch, had heard the noise d’Artagnan had made, and opening the door, said, “Come in.”

All this was of such incredible immodesty, of such monstrous effrontery, that d’Artagnan could scarcely believe what he saw or what he heard. He imagined himself to be drawn into one of those fantastic intrigues one meets in dreams. He, however, darted not the less quickly toward Milady, yielding to that magnetic attraction which the loadstone exercises over iron.

As the door closed after them Kitty rushed toward it. Jealousy, fury, offended pride, all the passions in short that dispute the heart of an outraged woman in love, urged her to make a revelation; but she reflected that she would be totally lost if she confessed having assisted in such a machination, and above all, that d’Artagnan would also be lost to her forever. This last thought of love counseled her to make this last sacrifice.

D’Artagnan, on his part, had gained the summit of all his wishes. It was no longer a rival who was beloved; it was himself who was apparently beloved. A secret voice whispered to him, at the bottom of his heart, that he was but an instrument of vengeance, that he was only caressed till he had given death; but pride, but self-love, but madness silenced this voice and stifled its murmurs. And then our Gascon, with that large quantity of conceit which we know he possessed, compared himself with de Wardes, and asked himself why, after all, he should not be beloved for himself?

He was absorbed entirely by the sensations of the moment. Milady was no longer for him that woman of fatal intentions who had for a moment terrified him; she was an ardent, passionate mistress, abandoning herself to love which she also seemed to feel. Two hours thus glided away. When the transports of the two lovers were calmer, Milady, who had not the same motives for forgetfulness that d’Artagnan had, was the first to return to reality, and asked the young man if the means which were on the morrow to bring on the encounter between him and de Wardes were already arranged in his mind.

But d’Artagnan, whose ideas had taken quite another course, forgot himself like a fool, and answered gallantly that it was too late to think about duels and sword thrusts.

This coldness toward the only interests that occupied her mind terrified Milady, whose questions became more pressing.

Then d’Artagnan, who had never seriously thought of this impossible duel, endeavored to turn the conversation; but he could not succeed. Milady kept him within the limits she had traced beforehand with her irresistible spirit and her iron will.

D’Artagnan fancied himself very cunning when advising Milady to renounce, by pardoning de Wardes, the furious projects she had formed.

But at the first word the young woman started, and exclaimed in a sharp, bantering tone, which sounded strangely in the darkness, “Are you afraid, dear Monsieur d’Artagnan?”

“You cannot think so, dear love!” replied d’Artagnan; “but now, suppose this poor Comte de Wardes were less guilty than you think him?”

“At all events,” said Milady, seriously, “he has deceived me, and from the moment he deceived me, he merited death.”

“He shall die, then, since you condemn him!” said d’Artagnan, in so firm a tone that it appeared to Milady an undoubted proof of devotion. This reassured her.

We cannot say how long the night seemed to Milady, but d’Artagnan believed it to be hardly two hours before the daylight peeped through the window blinds, and invaded the chamber with its paleness. Seeing d’Artagnan about to leave her, Milady recalled his promise to avenge her on the Comte de Wardes.

“I am quite ready,” said d’Artagnan; “but in the first place I should like to be certain of one thing.”

“And what is that?” asked Milady.

“That is, whether you really love me?”

“I have given you proof of that, it seems to me.”

“And I am yours, body and soul!”

“Thanks, my brave lover; but as you are satisfied of my love, you must, in your turn, satisfy me of yours. Is it not so?”

“Certainly; but if you love me as much as you say,” replied d’Artagnan, “do you not entertain a little fear on my account?”

“What have I to fear?”

“Why, that I may be dangerously wounded--killed even.”

“Impossible!” cried Milady, “you are such a valiant man, and such an expert swordsman.”

“You would not, then, prefer a method,” resumed d’Artagnan, “which would equally avenge you while rendering the combat useless?”

Milady looked at her lover in silence. The pale light of the first rays of day gave to her clear eyes a strangely frightful expression.

“Really,” said she, “I believe you now begin to hesitate.”

“No, I do not hesitate; but I really pity this poor Comte de Wardes, since you have ceased to love him. I think that a man must be so severely punished by the loss of your love that he stands in need of no other chastisement.”

“Who told you that I loved him?” asked Milady, sharply.

“At least, I am now at liberty to believe, without too much fatuity, that you love another,” said the young man, in a caressing tone, “and I repeat that I am really interested for the count.”

“You?” asked Milady.

“Yes, I.”

“And why YOU?”

“Because I alone know--”

“What?”

“That he is far from being, or rather having been, so guilty toward you as he appears.”

“Indeed!” said Milady, in an anxious tone; “explain yourself, for I really cannot tell what you mean.”

And she looked at d’Artagnan, who embraced her tenderly, with eyes which seemed to burn themselves away.

“Yes; I am a man of honor,” said d’Artagnan, determined to come to an end, “and since your love is mine, and I am satisfied I possess it--for I do possess it, do I not?”

“Entirely; go on.”

“Well, I feel as if transformed--a confession weighs on my mind.”

“A confession!”

“If I had the least doubt of your love I would not make it, but you love me, my beautiful mistress, do you not?”

“Without doubt.”

“Then if through excess of love I have rendered myself culpable toward you, you will pardon me?”

“Perhaps.”

D’Artagnan tried with his sweetest smile to touch his lips to Milady’s, but she evaded him.

“This confession,” said she, growing paler, “what is this confession?”

“You gave de Wardes a meeting on Thursday last in this very room, did you not?”

“No, no! It is not true,” said Milady, in a tone of voice so firm, and with a countenance so unchanged, that if d’Artagnan had not been in such perfect possession of the fact, he would have doubted.

“Do not lie, my angel,” said d’Artagnan, smiling; “that would be useless.”

“What do you mean? Speak! you kill me.”

“Be satisfied; you are not guilty toward me, and I have already pardoned you.”

“What next? what next?”

“De Wardes cannot boast of anything.”

“How is that? You told me yourself that that ring--”

“That ring I have! The Comte de Wardes of Thursday and the d’Artagnan of today are the same person.”

The imprudent young man expected a surprise, mixed with shame--a slight storm which would resolve itself into tears; but he was strangely deceived, and his error was not of long duration.

Pale and trembling, Milady repulsed d’Artagnan’s attempted embrace by a violent blow on the chest, as she sprang out of bed.

It was almost broad daylight.

D’Artagnan detained her by her night dress of fine India linen, to implore her pardon; but she, with a strong movement, tried to escape. Then the cambric was torn from her beautiful shoulders; and on one of those lovely shoulders, round and white, d’Artagnan recognized, with inexpressible astonishment, the FLEUR-DE-LIS--that indelible mark which the hand of the infamous executioner had imprinted.

“Great God!” cried d’Artagnan, loosing his hold of her dress, and remaining mute, motionless, and frozen.

But Milady felt herself denounced even by his terror. He had doubtless seen all. The young man now knew her secret, her terrible secret--the secret she concealed even from her maid with such care, the secret of which all the world was ignorant, except himself.

She turned upon him, no longer like a furious woman, but like a wounded panther.

“Ah, wretch!” cried she, “you have basely betrayed me, and still more, you have my secret! You shall die.”

And she flew to a little inlaid casket which stood upon the dressing table, opened it with a feverish and trembling hand, drew from it a small poniard, with a golden haft and a sharp thin blade, and then threw herself with a bound upon d’Artagnan.

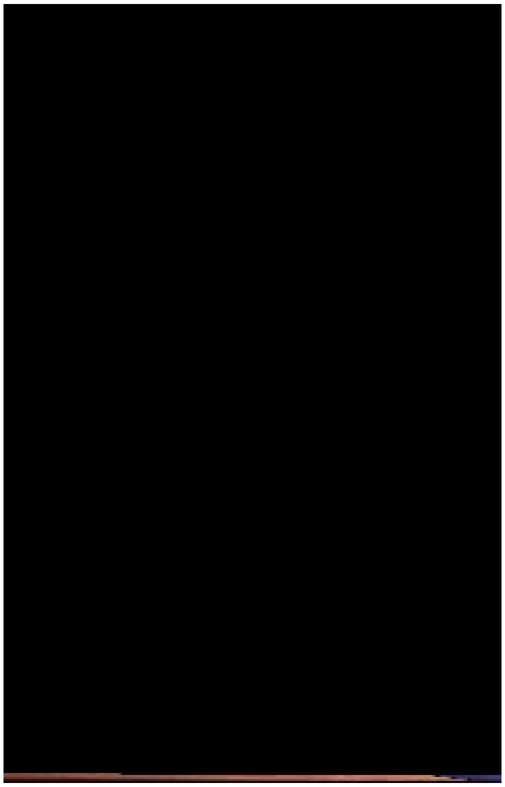

Although the young man was brave, as we know, he was terrified at that wild countenance, those terribly dilated pupils, those pale cheeks, and those bleeding lips. He recoiled to the other side of the room as he would have done from a serpent which was crawling toward him, and his sword coming in contact with his nervous hand, he drew it almost unconsciously from the scabbard. But without taking any heed of the sword, Milady endeavored to get near enough to him to stab him, and did not stop till she felt the sharp point at her throat.

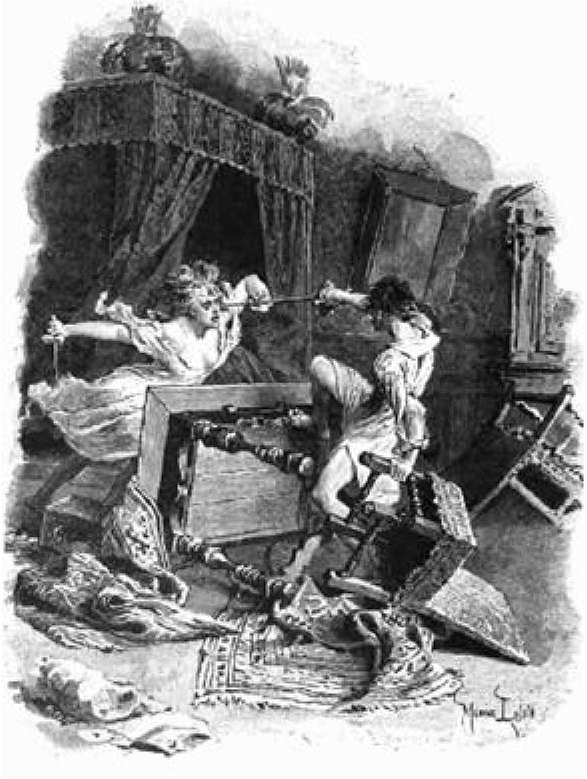

She then tried to seize the sword with her hands; but d’Artagnan kept it free from her grasp, and presenting the point, sometimes at her eyes, sometimes at her breast, compelled her to glide behind the bedstead, while he aimed at making his retreat by the door which led to Kitty’s apartment.

Milady during this time continued to strike at him with horrible fury, screaming in a formidable way.

As all this, however, bore some resemblance to a duel, d’Artagnan began to recover himself little by little.

“Well, beautiful lady, very well,” said he; “but, PARDIEU, if you don’t calm yourself, I will design a second FLEUR-DE-LIS upon one of those pretty cheeks!”

“Scoundrel, infamous scoundrel!” howled Milady.

But d’Artagnan, still keeping on the defensive, drew near to Kitty’s door. At the noise they made, she in overturning the furniture in her efforts to get at him, he in screening himself behind the furniture to keep out of her reach, Kitty opened the door. D’Artagnan, who had unceasingly maneuvered to gain this point, was not at more than three paces from it. With one spring he flew from the chamber of Milady into that of the maid, and quick as lightning, he slammed to the door, and placed all his weight against it, while Kitty pushed the bolts.

Then Milady attempted to tear down the doorcase, with a strength apparently above that of a woman; but finding she could not accomplish this, she in her fury stabbed at the door with her poniard, the point of which repeatedly glittered through the wood. Every blow was accompanied with terrible imprecations.

“Quick, Kitty, quick!” said d’Artagnan, in a low voice, as soon as the bolts were fast, “let me get out of the hotel; for if we leave her time to turn round, she will have me killed by the servants.”

“But you can’t go out so,” said Kitty; “you are naked.”

“That’s true,” said d’Artagnan, then first thinking of the costume he found himself in, “that’s true. But dress me as well as you are able, only make haste; think, my dear girl, it’s life and death!”

Kitty was but too well aware of that. In a turn of the hand she muffled him up in a flowered robe, a large hood, and a cloak. She gave him some slippers, in which he placed his naked feet, and then conducted him down the stairs. It was time. Milady had already rung her bell, and roused the whole hotel. The porter was drawing the cord at the moment Milady cried from her window, “Don’t open!”

The young man fled while she was still threatening him with an impotent gesture. The moment she lost sight of him, Milady tumbled fainting into her chamber.

CHAPTER 38

HOW, WITHOUT INCOMMDING HIMSELF, ATHOS PROCURES HIS EQUIPMENT

D’Artagnan was so completely bewildered that without taking any heed of what might become of Kitty he ran at full speed across half Paris, and did not stop till he came to Athos’s door. The confusion of his mind, the terror which spurred him on, the cries of some of the patrol who started in pursuit of him, and the hooting of the people who, notwithstanding the early hour, were going to their work, only made him precipitate his course.

He crossed the court, ran up the two flights to Athos’s apartment, and knocked at the door enough to break it down.

Grimaud came, rubbing his half-open eyes, to answer this noisy summons, and d’Artagnan sprang with such violence into the room as nearly to overturn the astonished lackey.

In spite of his habitual silence, the poor lad this time found his speech.

“Holloa, there!” cried he; “what do you want, you strumpet? What’s your business here, you hussy?”

D’Artagnan threw off his hood, and disengaged his hands from the folds of the cloak. At sight of the mustaches and the naked sword, the poor devil perceived he had to deal with a man. He then concluded it must be an assassin.

“Help! murder! help!” cried he.

“Hold your tongue, you stupid fellow!” said the young man; “I am d’Artagnan; don’t you know me? Where is your master?”

“You, Monsieur d’Artagnan!” cried Grimaud, “impossible.”

“Grimaud,” said Athos, coming out of his apartment in a dressing gown, “Grimaud, I thought I heard you permitting yourself to speak?”

“Ah, monsieur, it is--”

“Silence!”

Grimaud contented himself with pointing d’Artagnan out to his master with his finger.

Athos recognized his comrade, and phlegmatic as he was, he burst into a laugh which was quite excused by the strange masquerade before his eyes--petticoats falling over his shoes, sleeves tucked up, and mustaches stiff with agitation.

"Don't laugh, my friend!" cried d'Artagnan; "for heaven's sake, don't laugh, for upon my soul, it's no laughing matter!"

And he pronounced these words with such a solemn air and with such a real appearance of terror, that Athos eagerly seized his hand, crying, "Are you wounded, my friend? How pale you are!"

"No, but I have just met with a terrible adventure! Are you alone, Athos?"

"PARBLEU! whom do you expect to find with me at this hour?"

"Well, well!" and d'Artagnan rushed into Athos's chamber.

"Come, speak!" said the latter, closing the door and bolting it, that they might not be disturbed. "Is the king dead? Have you killed the cardinal? You are quite upset! Come, come, tell me; I am dying with curiosity and uneasiness!"

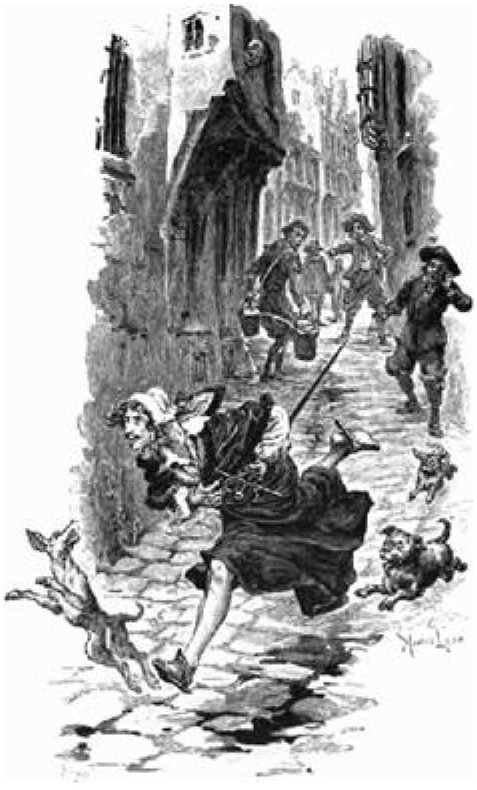

"Athos," said d'Artagnan, getting rid of his female garments, and appearing in his shirt, "prepare yourself to hear an incredible, an unheard-of story."

“Well, but put on this dressing gown first,” said the Musketeer to his friend.

D’Artagnan donned the robe as quickly as he could, mistaking one sleeve for the other, so greatly was he still agitated.

“Well?” said Athos.

“Well,” replied d’Artagnan, bending his mouth to Athos’s ear, and lowering his voice, “Milady is marked with a FLEUR-DE-LIS upon her shoulder!”

“Ah!” cried the Musketeer, as if he had received a ball in his heart.

“Let us see,” said d’Artagnan. “Are you SURE that the OTHER is dead?”

“THE OTHER?” said Athos, in so stifled a voice that d’Artagnan scarcely heard him.

“Yes, she of whom you told me one day at Amiens.”

Athos uttered a groan, and let his head sink on his hands.

“This is a woman of twenty-six or twenty-eight years.”

“Fair,” said Athos, “is she not?”

“Very.”

“Blue and clear eyes, of a strange brilliancy, with black eyelids and eyebrows?”

“Yes.”

“Tall, well-made? She has lost a tooth, next to the eyetooth on the left?”

“Yes.”

“The FLEUR-DE-LIS is small, rosy in color, and looks as if efforts had been made to efface it by the application of poultices?”

“Yes.”

“But you say she is English?”

“She is called Milady, but she may be French. Lord de Winter is only her brother-in-law.”

“I will see her, d’Artagnan!”

“Beware, Athos, beware. You tried to kill her; she is a woman to return you the like, and not to fail.”

“She will not dare to say anything; that would be to denounce herself.”

“She is capable of anything or everything. Did you ever see her furious?”

“No,” said Athos.

“A tigress, a panther! Ah, my dear Athos, I am greatly afraid I have drawn a terrible vengeance on both of us!”

D’Artagnan then related all--the mad passion of Milady and her menaces of death.

“You are right; and upon my soul, I would give my life for a hair,” said Athos. “Fortunately, the day after tomorrow we leave Paris. We are going according to all probability to La Rochelle, and once gone--”

“She will follow you to the end of the world, Athos, if she recognizes you. Let her, then, exhaust her vengeance on me alone!”

“My dear friend, of what consequence is it if she kills me?” said Athos. “Do you, perchance, think I set any great store by life?”

“There is something horribly mysterious under all this, Athos; this woman is one of the cardinal’s spies, I am sure of that.”

“In that case, take care! If the cardinal does not hold you in high admiration for the affair of London, he entertains a great hatred for you; but as, considering everything, he cannot accuse you openly, and as hatred must be satisfied, particularly when it’s a cardinal’s hatred, take care of yourself. If you go out, do not go out alone; when you eat, use every precaution. Mistrust everything, in short, even your own shadow.”

“Fortunately,” said d’Artagnan, “all this will be only necessary till after tomorrow evening, for when once with the army, we shall have, I hope, only men to dread.”

“In the meantime,” said Athos, “I renounce my plan of seclusion, and wherever you go, I will go with you. You must return to the Rue des Fossoyeurs; I will accompany you.”

“But however near it may be,” replied d’Artagnan, “I cannot go thither in this guise.”

“That’s true,” said Athos, and he rang the bell.

Grimaud entered.

Athos made him a sign to go to d’Artagnan’s residence, and bring back some clothes. Grimaud replied by another sign that he understood perfectly, and set off.

“All this will not advance your outfit,” said Athos; “for if I am not mistaken, you have left the best of your apparel with Milady, and she will certainly not have the politeness to return it to you. Fortunately, you have the sapphire.”

“The jewel is yours, my dear Athos! Did you not tell me it was a family jewel?”

“Yes, my grandfather gave two thousand crowns for it, as he once told me. It formed part of the nuptial present he made his wife, and it is magnificent. My mother gave it to me, and I, fool as I was, instead of keeping the ring as a holy relic, gave it to this wretch.”

“Then, my friend, take back this ring, to which I see you attach much value.”

“I take back the ring, after it has passed through the hands of that infamous creature? Never; that ring is defiled, d’Artagnan.”

“Sell it, then.”

“Sell a jewel which came from my mother! I vow I should consider it a profanation.”

“Pledge it, then; you can borrow at least a thousand crowns on it. With that sum you can extricate yourself from your present difficulties; and when you are full of money again, you can redeem it, and take it back cleansed from its ancient stains, as it will have passed through the hands of usurers.”

Athos smiled.

“You are a capital companion, d’Artagnan,” said be; “your never-failing cheerfulness raises poor souls in affliction. Well, let us pledge the ring, but upon one condition.”

“What?”

“That there shall be five hundred crowns for you, and five hundred crowns for me.”

“Don’t dream it, Athos. I don’t need the quarter of such a sum--I who am still only in the Guards--and by selling my saddles, I shall procure it. What do I want? A horse for Planchet, that’s all. Besides, you forget that I have a ring likewise.”

“To which you attach more value, it seems, than I do to mine; at least, I have thought so.”

“Yes, for in any extreme circumstance it might not only extricate us from some great embarrassment, but even a great danger. It is not only a valuable diamond, but it is an enchanted talisman.”

“I don’t at all understand you, but I believe all you say to be true. Let us return to my ring, or rather to yours. You shall take half the sum that will be advanced upon it, or I will throw it into the Seine; and I doubt, as was the case with Polycrates, whether any fish will be sufficiently complaisant to bring it back to us.”

“Well, I will take it, then,” said d’Artagnan.

At this moment Grimaud returned, accompanied by Planchet; the latter, anxious about his master and curious to know what had happened to him, had taken advantage of the opportunity and brought the garments himself.

d’Artagnan dressed himself, and Athos did the same. When the two were ready to go out, the latter made Grimaud the sign of a man taking aim, and the lackey immediately took down his musketoon, and prepared to follow his master.

They arrived without accident at the Rue des Fossoyeurs. Bonacieux was standing at the door, and looked at d’Artagnan hatefully.

“Make haste, dear lodger,” said he; “there is a very pretty girl waiting for you upstairs; and you know women don’t like to be kept waiting.”

“That’s Kitty!” said d’Artagnan to himself, and darted into the passage.

Sure enough! Upon the landing leading to the chamber, and crouching against the door, he found the poor girl, all in a tremble. As soon as she perceived him, she cried, “You have promised your protection; you have promised to save me from her anger. Remember, it is you who have ruined me!”

“Yes, yes, to be sure, Kitty,” said d’Artagnan; “be at ease, my girl. But what happened after my departure?”

“How can I tell!” said Kitty. “The lackeys were brought by the cries she made. She was mad with passion. There exist no imprecations she did not pour out against you. Then I thought she would remember it was through my chamber you had penetrated hers, and that then she would suppose I was your accomplice; so I took what little money I had and the best of my things, and I got away.

“Poor dear girl! But what can I do with you? I am going away the day after tomorrow.”

“Do what you please, Monsieur Chevalier. Help me out of Paris; help me out of France!”

“I cannot take you, however, to the siege of La Rochelle,” aid d’Artagnan.

“No; but you can place me in one of the provinces with some lady of your acquaintance--in your own country, for instance.”

“My dear little love! In my country the ladies do without chambermaids. But stop! I can manage your business for you. Planchet, go and find Aramis. Request him to come here directly. We have something very important to say to him.”

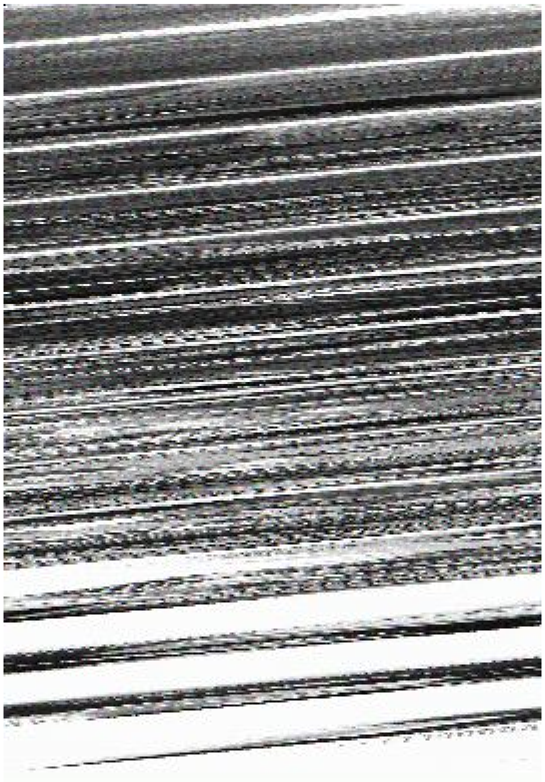

“I understand,” said Athos; “but why not Porthos? I should have thought that his duchess--”

“Oh, Porthos’s duchess is dressed by her husband’s clerks,” said d’Artagnan, laughing. “Besides, Kitty would not like to live in the Rue aux Ours. Isn’t it so, Kitty?”

“I do not care where I live,” said Kitty, “provided I am well concealed, and nobody knows where I am.”

“Meanwhile, Kitty, when we are about to separate, and you are no longer jealous of me--”

“Monsieur Chevalier, far off or near,” said Kitty, “I shall always love you.”

“Where the devil will constancy niche itself next?” murmured Athos.

“And I, also,” said d’Artagnan, “I also. I shall always love you; be sure of that. But now answer me. I attach great importance to the question I am about to put to you. Did you never hear talk of a young woman who was carried off one night?”

“There, now! Oh, Monsieur Chevalier, do you love that woman still?”

“No, no; it is one of my friends who loves her--Monsieur Athos, this gentleman here.”

"I?" cried Athos, with an accent like that of a man who perceives he is about to tread upon an adder.

"You, to be sure!" said d'Artagnan, pressing Athos's hand. "You know the interest we both take in this poor little Madame Bonacieux. Besides, Kitty will tell nothing; will you, Kitty? You understand, my dear girl," continued d'Artagnan, "she is the wife of that frightful baboon you saw at the door as you came in."

"Oh, my God! You remind me of my fright! If he should have known me again!"

"How? know you again? Did you ever see that man before?"

"He came twice to Milady's."

"That's it. About what time?"

"Why, about fifteen or eighteen days ago."

"Exactly so."

"And yesterday evening he came again."

"Yesterday evening?"

"Yes, just before you came."

"My dear Athos, we are enveloped in a network of spies. And do you believe he knew you again, Kitty?"

"I pulled down my hood as soon as I saw him, but perhaps it was too late."

"Go down, Athos--he mistrusts you less than me--and see if he be still at his door."

Athos went down and returned immediately.

"He has gone," said he, "and the house door is shut."

"He has gone to make his report, and to say that all the pigeons are at this moment in the dovecot."

"Well, then, let us all fly," said Athos, "and leave nobody here but Planchet to bring us news."

"A minute. Aramis, whom we have sent for!"

"That's true," said Athos; "we must wait for Aramis."

At that moment Aramis entered.

The matter was all explained to him, and the friends gave him to understand that among all his high connections he must find a place for Kitty.

Aramis reflected for a minute, and then said, coloring, "Will it be really rendering you a service, d'Artagnan?"

“I shall be grateful to you all my life.”

“Very well. Madame de Bois-Tracy asked me, for one of her friends who resides in the provinces, I believe, for a trustworthy maid. If you can, my dear d’Artagnan, answer for Mademoiselle-”

“Oh, monsieur, be assured that I shall be entirely devoted to the person who will give me the means of quitting Paris.”

“Then,” said Aramis, “this falls out very well.”

He placed himself at the table and wrote a little note which he sealed with a ring, and gave the billet to Kitty.

“And now, my dear girl,” said d’Artagnan, “you know that it is not good for any of us to be here. Therefore let us separate. We shall meet again in better days.”

“And whenever we find each other, in whatever place it may be,” said Kitty, “you will find me loving you as I love you today.”

“Dicers’ oaths!” said Athos, while d’Artagnan went to conduct Kitty downstairs.

An instant afterward the three young men separated, agreeing to meet again at four o’clock with Athos, and leaving Planchet to guard the house.

Aramis returned home, and Athos and d’Artagnan busied themselves about pledging the sapphire.

As the Gascon had foreseen, they easily obtained three hundred pistoles on the ring. Still further, the Jew told them that if they would sell it to him, as it would make a magnificent pendant for earrings, he would give five hundred pistoles for it.

Athos and d’Artagnan, with the activity of two soldiers and the knowledge of two connoisseurs, hardly required three hours to purchase the entire equipment of the Musketeer. Besides, Athos was very easy, and a noble to his fingers’ ends. When a thing suited him he paid the price demanded, without thinking to ask for any abatement. D’Artagnan would have remonstrated at this; but Athos put his hand upon his shoulder, with a smile, and d’Artagnan understood that it was all very well for such a little Gascon gentleman as himself to drive a bargain, but not for a man who had the bearing of a prince. The Musketeer met with a superb Andalusian horse, black as jet, nostrils of fire, legs clean and elegant, rising six years. He examined him, and found him sound and without blemish. They asked a thousand livres for him.

He might perhaps have been bought for less; but while d’Artagnan was discussing the price with the dealer, Athos was counting out the money on the table.

Grimaud had a stout, short Picard cob, which cost three hundred livres.

But when the saddle and arms for Grimaud were purchased, Athos had not a sou left of his hundred and fifty pistoles. d’Artagnan offered his friend a part of his share which he should return when convenient.

But Athos only replied to this proposal by shrugging his shoulders.

“How much did the Jew say he would give for the sapphire if he purchased it?” said Athos.

“Five hundred pistoles.”

“That is to say, two hundred more--a hundred pistoles for you and a hundred pistoles for me. Well, now, that would be a real fortune to us, my friend; let us go back to the Jew’s again.”

“What! will you--”

“This ring would certainly only recall very bitter remembrances; then we shall never be masters of three hundred pistoles to redeem it, so that we really should lose two hundred pistoles by the bargain. Go and tell him the ring is his, d’Artagnan, and bring back the two hundred pistoles with you.”

“Reflect, Athos!”

“Ready money is needful for the present time, and we must learn how to make sacrifices. Go, d’Artagnan, go; Grimaud will accompany you with his musketoon.”

A half hour afterward, d’Artagnan returned with the two thousand livres, and without having met with any accident.

It was thus Athos found at home resources which he did not expect.

CHAPTER 39

A VISION

At four o’clock the four friends were all assembled with Athos. Their anxiety about their outfits had all disappeared, and each countenance only preserved the expression of its own secret disquiet--for behind all present happiness is concealed a fear for the future.

Suddenly Planchet entered, bringing two letters for d’Artagnan.

The one was a little billet, genteelly folded, with a pretty seal in green wax on which was impressed a dove bearing a green branch.

The other was a large square epistle, resplendent with the terrible arms of his Eminence the cardinal duke.

At the sight of the little letter the heart of d’Artagnan bounded, for he believed he recognized the handwriting, and although he had seen that writing but once, the memory of it remained at the bottom of his heart.

He therefore seized the little epistle, and opened it eagerly.

“Be,” said the letter, “on Thursday next, at from six to seven o’clock in the evening, on the road to Chaillot, and look carefully into the carriages that pass; but if you have any consideration for your own life or that of those who love you, do not speak a single word, do not make a movement which may lead anyone to believe you have recognized her who exposes herself to everything for the sake of seeing you but for an instant.”

No signature.

“That’s a snare,” said Athos; “don’t go, d’Artagnan.”

“And yet,” replied d’Artagnan, “I think I recognize the writing.”

“It may be counterfeit,” said Athos. “Between six and seven o’clock the road of Chaillot is quite deserted; you might as well go and ride in the forest of Bondy.”

“But suppose we all go,” said d’Artagnan; “what the devil! They won’t devour us all four, four lackeys, horses, arms, and all!”

“And besides, it will be a chance for displaying our new equipments,” said Porthos.

“But if it is a woman who writes,” said Aramis, “and that woman desires not to be seen, remember, you compromise her, d’Artagnan; which is not the part of a gentleman.”

“We will remain in the background,” said Porthos, “and he will advance alone.”

“Yes; but a pistol shot is easily fired from a carriage which goes at a gallop.”

“Bah!” said d’Artagnan, “they will miss me; if they fire we will ride after the carriage, and exterminate those who may be in it. They must be enemies.”

“He is right,” said Porthos; “battle. Besides, we must try our own arms.”

“Bah, let us enjoy that pleasure,” said Aramis, with his mild and careless manner.

“As you please,” said Athos.

“Gentlemen,” said d’Artagnan, “it is half past four, and we have scarcely time to be on the road of Chaillot by six.”

“Besides, if we go out too late, nobody will see us,” said Porthos, “and that will be a pity. Let us get ready, gentlemen.”

“But this second letter,” said Athos, “you forget that; it appears to me, however, that the seal denotes that it deserves to be opened. For my part, I declare, d’Artagnan, I think it of much more consequence than the little piece of waste paper you have so cunningly slipped into your bosom.”

D’Artagnan blushed.

“Well,” said he, “let us see, gentlemen, what are his Eminence’s commands,” and d’Artagnan unsealed the letter and read,

“M. d’Artagnan, of the king’s Guards, company Dessessart, is expected at the Palais-Cardinal this evening, at eight o’clock.

“La Houdiniere, CAPTAIN OF THE GUARDS”

“The devil!” said Athos; “here’s a rendezvous much more serious than the other.”

“I will go to the second after attending the first,” said d’Artagnan. “One is for seven o’clock, and the other for eight; there will be time for both.”

“Hum! I would not go at all,” said Aramis. “A gallant knight cannot decline a rendezvous with a lady; but a prudent gentleman may excuse himself from not waiting on his Eminence, particularly when he has reason to believe he is not invited to make his compliments.”

“I am of Aramis’s opinion,” said Porthos.

"Gentlemen," replied d'Artagnan, "I have already received by Monsieur de Cavois a similar invitation from his Eminence. I neglected it, and on the morrow a serious misfortune happened to me--Constance disappeared. Whatever may ensue, I will go."

"If you are determined," said Athos, "do so."

"But the Bastille?" said Aramis.

"Bah! you will get me out if they put me there," said d'Artagnan.

"To be sure we will," replied Aramis and Porthos, with admirable promptness and decision, as if that were the simplest thing in the world, "to be sure we will get you out; but meantime, as we are to set off the day after tomorrow, you would do much better not to risk this Bastille."

"Let us do better than that," said Athos; "do not let us leave him during the whole evening. Let each of us wait at a gate of the palace with three Musketeers behind him; if we see a close carriage, at all suspicious in appearance, come out, let us fall upon it. It is a long time since we have had a skirmish with the Guards of Monsieur the Cardinal; Monsieur de Treville must think us dead."

"To a certainty, Athos," said Aramis, "you were meant to be a general of the army! What do you think of the plan, gentlemen?"

"Admirable!" replied the young men in chorus.

"Well," said Porthos, "I will run to the hotel, and engage our comrades to hold themselves in readiness by eight o'clock; the rendezvous, the Place du Palais-Cardinal. Meantime, you see that the lackeys saddle the horses."

"I have no horse," said d'Artagnan; "but that is of no consequence, I can take one of Monsieur de Treville's."

"That is not worth while," said Aramis, "you can have one of mine."

"One of yours! how many have you, then?" asked d'Artagnan.

"Three," replied Aramis, smiling.

"Certes," cried Athos, "you are the best-mounted poet of France or Navarre."

"Well, my dear Aramis, you don't want three horses? I cannot comprehend what induced you to buy three!"

"Therefore I only purchased two," said Aramis.

"The third, then, fell from the clouds, I suppose?"

"No, the third was brought to me this very morning by a groom out of livery, who would not tell me in whose service he was, and who said he had received orders from his master."

“Or his mistress,” interrupted d’Artagnan.

“That makes no difference,” said Aramis, coloring; “and who affirmed, as I said, that he had received orders from his master or mistress to place the horse in my stable, without informing me whence it came.”

“It is only to poets that such things happen,” said Athos, gravely.

“Well, in that case, we can manage famously,” said d’Artagnan; “which of the two horses will you ride--that which you bought or the one that was given to you?”

“That which was given to me, assuredly. You cannot for a moment imagine, d’Artagnan, that I would commit such an offense toward--”

“The unknown giver,” interrupted d’Artagnan.

“Or the mysterious benefactress,” said Athos.

“The one you bought will then become useless to you?”

“Nearly so.”

“And you selected it yourself?”

“With the greatest care. The safety of the horseman, you know, depends almost always upon the goodness of his horse.”

“Well, transfer it to me at the price it cost you?”

“I was going to make you the offer, my dear d’Artagnan, giving you all the time necessary for repaying me such a trifle.”

“How much did it cost you?”

“Eight hundred livres.”

“Here are forty double pistoles, my dear friend,” said d’Artagnan, taking the sum from his pocket; “I know that is the coin in which you were paid for your poems.”

“You are rich, then?” said Aramis.

“Rich? Richest, my dear fellow!”

And d’Artagnan chinked the remainder of his pistoles in his pocket.

“Send your saddle, then, to the hotel of the Musketeers, and your horse can be brought back with ours.”

“Very well; but it is already five o’clock, so make haste.”

A quarter of an hour afterward Porthos appeared at the end of the Rue Ferou on a very handsome genet. Mousqueton followed him upon an Auvergne horse, small but very handsome. Porthos was resplendent with joy and pride.

At the same time, Aramis made his appearance at the other end of the street upon a superb English charger. Bazin followed him upon a roan, holding by the halter a vigorous Mecklenburg horse; this was d’Artagnan’s mount.

The two Musketeers met at the gate. Athos and d’Artagnan watched their approach from the window.

“The devil!” cried Aramis, “you have a magnificent horse there, Porthos.”

“Yes,” replied Porthos, “it is the one that ought to have been sent to me at first. A bad joke of the husband’s substituted the other; but the husband has been punished since, and I have obtained full satisfaction.”

Planchet and Grimaud appeared in their turn, leading their masters’ steeds. D’Artagnan and Athos put themselves into saddle with their companions, and all four set forward; Athos upon a horse he owed to a woman, Aramis on a horse he owed to his mistress, Porthos on a horse he owed to his procurator’s wife, and d’Artagnan on a horse he owed to his good fortune--the best mistress possible.

The lackeys followed.

As Porthos had foreseen, the cavalcade produced a good effect; and if Mme. Coquenard had met Porthos and seen what a superb appearance he made upon his handsome Spanish genet, she would not have regretted the bleeding she had inflicted upon the strongbox of her husband.

Near the Louvre the four friends met with M. de Treville, who was returning from St. Germain; he stopped them to offer his compliments upon their appointments, which in an instant drew round them a hundred gapers.

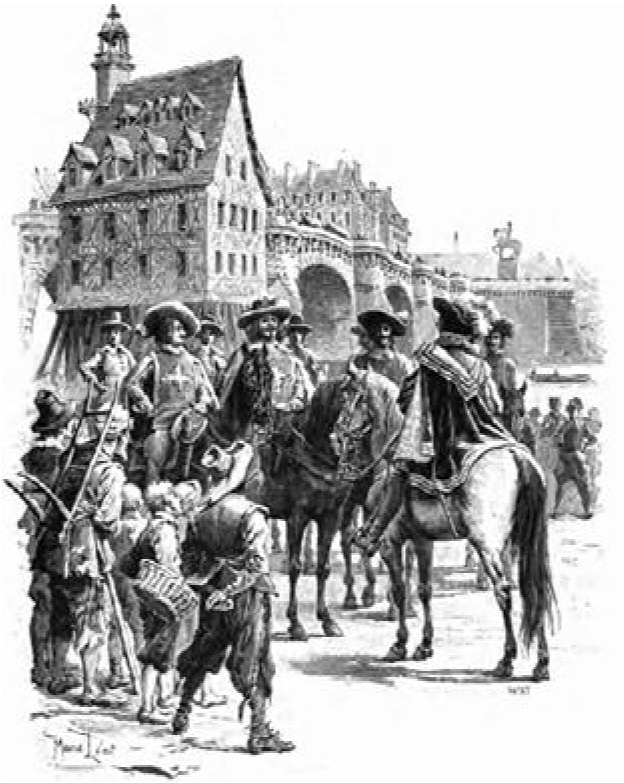

D’Artagnan profited by the circumstance to speak to M. de Treville of the letter with the great red seal and the cardinal’s arms. It is well understood that he did not breathe a word about the other.

M de Treville approved of the resolution he had adopted, and assured him that if on the morrow he did not appear, he himself would undertake to find him, let him be where he might.

At this moment the clock of La Samaritaine struck six; the four friends pleaded an engagement, and took leave of M. de Treville.

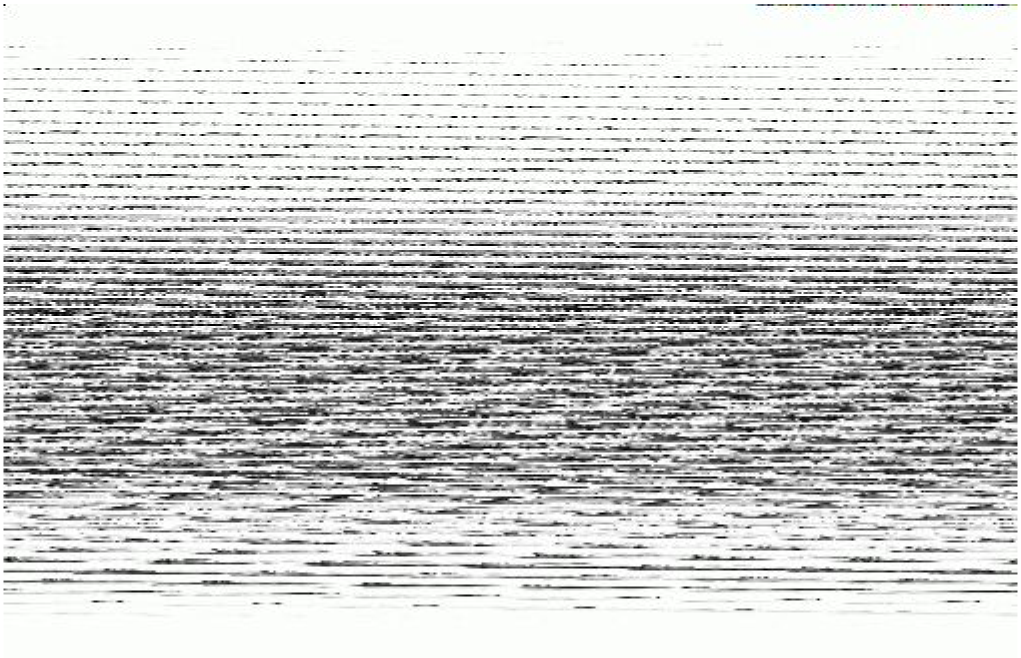

A short gallop brought them to the road of Chaillot; the day began to decline, carriages were passing and repassing. d’Artagnan, keeping at some distance from his friends, darted a scrutinizing glance into every carriage that appeared, but saw no face with which he was acquainted.

At length, after waiting a quarter of an hour and just as twilight was beginning to thicken, a carriage appeared, coming at a quick pace on the road of Sevres. A presentiment instantly told d’Artagnan that this carriage contained the person who had appointed the rendezvous; the young man was himself astonished to find his heart beat so violently. Almost instantly a female head was put out at the window, with two fingers placed upon her mouth, either to enjoin silence or to send him a kiss. D’Artagnan uttered a slight cry of joy; this woman, or rather this apparition--for the carriage passed with the rapidity of a vision--was Mme. Bonacieux.

By an involuntary movement and in spite of the injunction given, d’Artagnan put his horse into a gallop, and in a few strides overtook the carriage; but the window was hermetically closed, the vision had disappeared.

D’Artagnan then remembered the injunction: “If you value your own life or that of those who love you, remain motionless, and as if you had seen nothing.”

He stopped, therefore, trembling not for himself but for the poor woman who had evidently exposed herself to great danger by appointing this rendezvous.

The carriage pursued its way, still going at a great pace, till it dashed into Paris, and disappeared.

D'Artagnan remained fixed to the spot, astounded and not knowing what to think. If it was Mme. Bonacieux and if she was returning to Paris, why this fugitive rendezvous, why this simple exchange of a glance, why this lost kiss? If, on the other side, it was not she--which was still quite possible--for the little light that remained rendered a mistake easy--might it not be the commencement of some plot against him through the allurement of this woman, for whom his love was known?

His three companions joined him. All had plainly seen a woman's head appear at the window, but none of them, except Athos, knew Mme. Bonacieux. The opinion of Athos was that it was indeed she; but less preoccupied by that pretty face than d'Artagnan, he had fancied he saw a second head, a man's head, inside the carriage.

"If that be the case," said d'Artagnan, "they are doubtless transporting her from one prison to another. But what can they intend to do with the poor creature, and how shall I ever meet her again?"

"Friend," said Athos, gravely, "remember that it is the dead alone with whom we are not likely to meet again on this earth. You know something of that, as well as I do, I think. Now, if your mistress is not dead, if it is she we have just seen, you will meet with her again some day or other. And perhaps, my God!" added he, with that misanthropic tone which was peculiar to him, "perhaps sooner than you wish."

Half past seven had sounded. The carriage had been twenty minutes behind the time appointed. D'Artagnan's friends reminded him that he had a visit to pay, but at the same time bade him observe that there was yet time to retract.

But d'Artagnan was at the same time impetuous and curious. He had made up his mind that he would go to the Palais-Cardinal, and that he would learn what his Eminence had to say to him. Nothing could turn him from his purpose.

They reached the Rue St. Honore, and in the Place du Palais-Cardinal they found the twelve invited Musketeers, walking about in expectation of their comrades. There only they explained to them the matter in hand.

D'Artagnan was well known among the honorable corps of the king's Musketeers, in which it was known he would one day take his place; he was considered beforehand as a comrade. It resulted from these antecedents that everyone entered heartily into the purpose for which they met; besides, it would not be unlikely that they would have an opportunity of playing either the cardinal or his people an ill turn, and for such expeditions these worthy gentlemen were always ready.

Athos divided them into three groups, assumed the command of one, gave the second to Aramis, and the third to Porthos; and then each group went and took their watch near an entrance.

D’Artagnan, on his part, entered boldly at the principal gate.

Although he felt himself ably supported, the young man was not without a little uneasiness as he ascended the great staircase, step by step. His conduct toward Milady bore a strong resemblance to treachery, and he was very suspicious of the political relations which existed between that woman and the cardinal. Still further, de Wardes, whom he had treated so ill, was one of the tools of his Eminence; and d’Artagnan knew that while his Eminence was terrible to his enemies, he was strongly attached to his friends.

“If de Wardes has related all our affair to the cardinal, which is not to be doubted, and if he has recognized me, as is probable, I may consider myself almost as a condemned man,” said d’Artagnan, shaking his head. “But why has he waited till now? That’s all plain enough. Milady has laid her complaints against me with that hypocritical grief which renders her so interesting, and this last offense has made the cup overflow.”

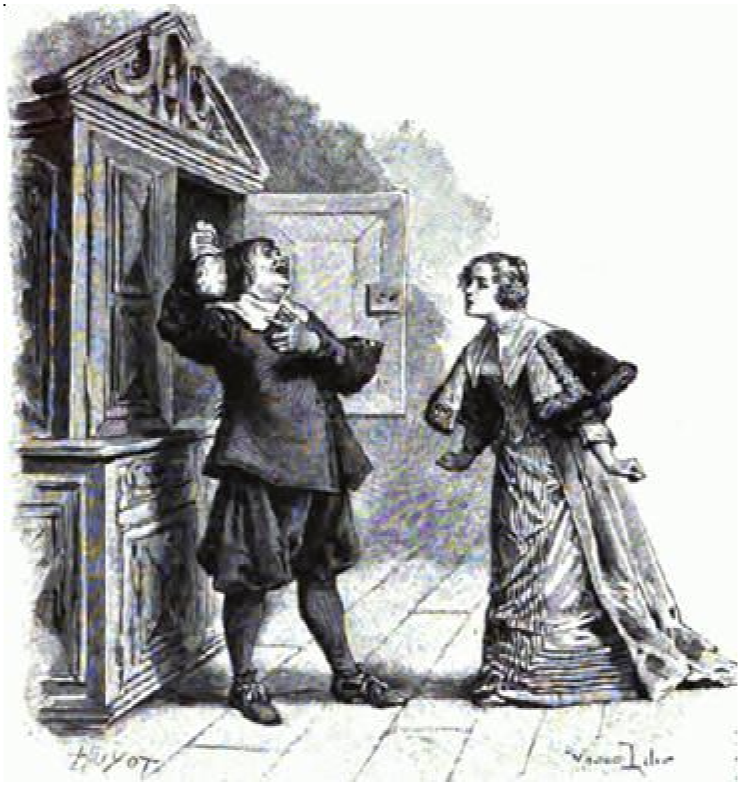

“Fortunately,” added he, “my good friends are down yonder, and they will not allow me to be carried away without a struggle. Nevertheless, Monsieur de Treville’s company of Musketeers alone cannot maintain a war against the cardinal, who disposes of the forces of all France, and before whom the queen is without power and the king without will. d’Artagnan, my friend, you are brave, you are prudent, you have excellent qualities; but the women will ruin you!”

He came to this melancholy conclusion as he entered the antechamber. He placed his letter in the hands of the usher on duty, who led him into the waiting room and passed on into the interior of the palace.

In this waiting room were five or six of the cardinals Guards, who recognized d’Artagnan, and knowing that it was he who had wounded Jussac, they looked upon him with a smile of singular meaning.

This smile appeared to d’Artagnan to be of bad augury. Only, as our Gascon was not easily intimidated--or rather, thanks to a great pride natural to the men of his country, he did not allow one easily to see what was passing in his mind when that which was passing at all resembled fear--he placed himself haughtily in front of Messieurs the Guards, and waited with his hand on his hip, in an attitude by no means deficient in majesty.

The usher returned and made a sign to d’Artagnan to follow him. It appeared to the young man that the Guards, on seeing him depart, chuckled among themselves.

He traversed a corridor, crossed a grand saloon, entered a library, and found himself in the presence of a man seated at a desk and writing.

The usher introduced him, and retired without speaking a word. D’Artagnan remained standing and examined this man.

D’Artagnan at first believed that he had to do with some judge examining his papers; but he perceived that the man at the desk wrote, or rather corrected, lines of unequal length, scanning the words on his fingers. He saw then that he was with a poet. At the end of an instant the poet closed his manuscript, upon the cover of which was written “Mirame, a Tragedy in Five Acts,” and raised his head.

D’Artagnan recognized the cardinal.

CHAPTER 40

A TERRIBLE VISION

The cardinal leaned his elbow on his manuscript, his cheek upon his hand, and looked intently at the young man for a moment. No one had a more searching eye than the Cardinal de Richelieu, and d’Artagnan felt this glance run through his veins like a fever.

He however kept a good countenance, holding his hat in his hand and awaiting the good pleasure of his Eminence, without too much assurance, but also without too much humility.

“Monsieur,” said the cardinal, “are you a d’Artagnan from Bearn?”

“Yes, monseigneur,” replied the young man.

“There are several branches of the d’Artagnans at Tarbes and in its environs,” said the cardinal; “to which do you belong?”

“I am the son of him who served in the Religious Wars under the great King Henry, the father of his gracious Majesty.”

“That is well. It is you who set out seven or eight months ago from your country to seek your fortune in the capital?”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“You came through Meung, where something befell you. I don’t very well know what, but still something.”

“Monseigneur,” said d’Artagnan, “this was what happened to me--”

“Never mind, never mind!” resumed the cardinal, with a smile which indicated that he knew the story as well as he who wished to relate it. “You were recommended to Monsieur de Treville, were you not?”

“Yes, monseigneur; but in that unfortunate affair at Meung--”

“The letter was lost,” replied his Eminence; “yes, I know that. But Monsieur de Treville is a skilled physiognomist, who knows men at first sight; and he placed you in the company of his brother-in-law, Monsieur Dessessart, leaving you to hope that one day or other you should enter the Musketeers.”

“Monseigneur is correctly informed,” said d’Artagnan.

"Since that time many things have happened to you. You were walking one day behind the Chartreux, when it would have been better if you had been elsewhere. Then you took with your friends a journey to the waters of Forges; they stopped on the road, but you continued yours. That is all very simple: you had business in England."

"Monseigneur," said d'Artagnan, quite confused, "I went--"

"Hunting at Windsor, or elsewhere--that concerns nobody. I know, because it is my office to know everything. On your return you were received by an august personage, and I perceive with pleasure that you preserve the souvenir she gave you."

D'Artagnan placed his hand upon the queen's diamond, which he wore, and quickly turned the stone inward; but it was too late.

"The day after that, you received a visit from Cavois," resumed the cardinal. "He went to desire you to come to the palace. You have not returned that visit, and you were wrong."

"Monseigneur, I feared I had incurred disgrace with your Eminence."

"How could that be, monsieur? Could you incur my displeasure by having followed the orders of your superiors with more intelligence and courage than another would have done? It is the people who do not obey that I punish, and not those who, like you, obey--but too well. As a proof, remember the date of the day on which I had you bidden to come to me, and seek in your memory for what happened to you that very night."

That was the very evening when the abduction of Mme. Bonacieux took place. D'Artagnan trembled; and he likewise recollected that during the past half hour the poor woman had passed close to him, without doubt carried away by the same power that had caused her disappearance.

"In short," continued the cardinal, "as I have heard nothing of you for some time past, I wished to know what you were doing. Besides, you owe me some thanks. You must yourself have remarked how much you have been considered in all the circumstances."

D'Artagnan bowed with respect.

"That," continued the cardinal, "arose not only from a feeling of natural equity, but likewise from a plan I have marked out with respect to you."

D'Artagnan became more and more astonished.

"I wished to explain this plan to you on the day you received my first invitation; but you did not come. Fortunately, nothing is lost by this delay, and you are now about to hear it. Sit down there, before me, d'Artagnan;

you are gentleman enough not to listen standing.” And the cardinal pointed with his finger to a chair for the young man, who was so astonished at what was passing that he awaited a second sign from his interlocutor before he obeyed.

“You are brave, Monsieur d’Artagnan,” continued his Eminence; “you are prudent, which is still better. I like men of head and heart. Don’t be afraid,” said he, smiling. “By men of heart I mean men of courage. But young as you are, and scarcely entering into the world, you have powerful enemies; if you do not take great heed, they will destroy you.”

“Alas, monseigneur!” replied the young man, “very easily, no doubt, for they are strong and well supported, while I am alone.”

“Yes, that’s true; but alone as you are, you have done much already, and will do still more, I don’t doubt. Yet you have need, I believe, to be guided in the adventurous career you have undertaken; for, if I mistake not, you came to Paris with the ambitious idea of making your fortune.”

“I am at the age of extravagant hopes, monseigneur,” said d’Artagnan.

“There are no extravagant hopes but for fools, monsieur, and you are a man of understanding. Now, what would you say to an ensign’s commission in my Guards, and a company after the campaign?”

“Ah, monseigneur.”

“You accept it, do you not?”

“Monseigneur,” replied d’Artagnan, with an embarrassed air.

“How? You refuse?” cried the cardinal, with astonishment.

“I am in his Majesty’s Guards, monseigneur, and I have no reason to be dissatisfied.”

“But it appears to me that my Guards--mine--are also his Majesty’s Guards; and whoever serves in a French corps serves the king.”

“Monseigneur, your Eminence has ill understood my words.”

“You want a pretext, do you not? I comprehend. Well, you have this excuse: advancement, the opening campaign, the opportunity which I offer you--so much for the world. As regards yourself, the need of protection; for it is fit you should know, Monsieur d’Artagnan, that I have received heavy and serious complaints against you. You do not consecrate your days and nights wholly to the king’s service.”

D’Artagnan colored.

“In fact,” said the cardinal, placing his hand upon a bundle of papers, “I have here a whole pile which concerns you. I know you to be a man of resolution; and your services, well directed, instead of leading you to ill, might be very advantageous to you. Come; reflect, and decide."

"Your goodness confounds me, monseigneur," replied d'Artagnan, "and I am conscious of a greatness of soul in your Eminence that makes me mean as an earthworm; but since Monseigneur permits me to speak freely--"

D'Artagnan paused.

"Yes; speak."

"Then, I will presume to say that all my friends are in the king's Musketeers and Guards, and that by an inconceivable fatality my enemies are in the service of your Eminence; I should, therefore, be ill received here and ill regarded there if I accepted what Monseigneur offers me."

"Do you happen to entertain the haughty idea that I have not yet made you an offer equal to your value?" asked the cardinal, with a smile of disdain.

"Monseigneur, your Eminence is a hundred times too kind to me; and on the contrary, I think I have not proved myself worthy of your goodness. The siege of La Rochelle is about to be resumed, monseigneur. I shall serve under the eye of your Eminence, and if I have the good fortune to conduct myself at the siege in such a manner as merits your attention, then I shall at least leave behind me some brilliant action to justify the protection with which you honor me. Everything is best in its time, monseigneur. Hereafter, perhaps, I shall have the right of giving myself; at present I shall appear to sell myself."

"That is to say, you refuse to serve me, monsieur," said the cardinal, with a tone of vexation, through which, however, might be seen a sort of esteem; "remain free, then, and guard your hatreds and your sympathies."

"Monseigneur--"

"Well, well," said the cardinal, "I don't wish you any ill; but you must be aware that it is quite trouble enough to defend and recompense our friends. We owe nothing to our enemies; and let me give you a piece of advice; take care of yourself, Monsieur d'Artagnan, for from the moment I withdraw my hand from behind you, I would not give an obolus for your life."

"I will try to do so, monseigneur," replied the Gascon, with a noble confidence.

"Remember at a later period and at a certain moment, if any mischance should happen to you," said Richelieu, significantly, "that it was I who came to seek you, and that I did all in my power to prevent this misfortune befalling you.”

“I shall entertain, whatever may happen,” said d’Artagnan, placing his hand upon his breast and bowing, “an eternal gratitude toward your Eminence for that which you now do for me.”

“Well, let it be, then, as you have said, Monsieur d’Artagnan; we shall see each other again after the campaign. I will have my eye upon you, for I shall be there,” replied the cardinal, pointing with his finger to a magnificent suit of armor he was to wear, “and on our return, well--we will settle our account!”

“Young man,” said Richelieu, “if I shall be able to say to you at another time what I have said to you today, I promise you to do so.”

This last expression of Richelieu’s conveyed a terrible doubt; it alarmed d’Artagnan more than a menace would have done, for it was a warning. The cardinal, then, was seeking to preserve him from some misfortune which threatened him. He opened his mouth to reply, but with a haughty gesture the cardinal dismissed him.

D’Artagnan went out, but at the door his heart almost failed him, and he felt inclined to return. Then the noble and severe countenance of Athos crossed his mind; if he made the compact with the cardinal which he required, Athos would no more give him his hand--Athos would renounce him.

It was this fear that restrained him, so powerful is the influence of a truly great character on all that surrounds it.

D’Artagnan descended by the staircase at which he had entered, and found Athos and the four Musketeers waiting his appearance, and beginning to grow uneasy. With a word, d’Artagnan reassured them; and Planchet ran to inform the other sentinels that it was useless to keep guard longer, as his master had come out safe from the Palais-Cardinal.

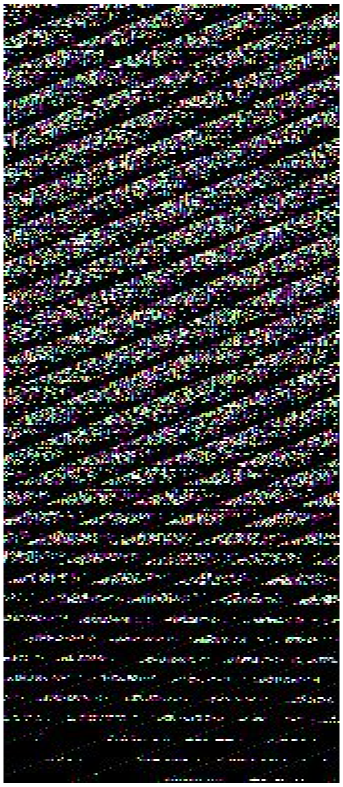

Returned home with Athos, Aramis and Porthos inquired eagerly the cause of the strange interview; but d'Artagnan confined himself to telling them that M. de Richelieu had sent for him to propose to him to enter into his guards with the rank of ensign, and that he had refused.

"And you were right," cried Aramis and Porthos, with one voice.

Athos fell into a profound reverie and answered nothing. But when they were alone he said, "You have done that which you ought to have done, d'Artagnan; but perhaps you have been wrong."

D'Artagnan sighed deeply, for this voice responded to a secret voice of his soul, which told him that great misfortunes awaited him.

The whole of the next day was spent in preparations for departure. D'Artagnan went to take leave of M. de Treville. At that time it was believed that the separation of the Musketeers and the Guards would be but momentary, the king holding his Parliament that very day and proposing to set out the day after. M. de Treville contented himself with asking d'Artagnan if he could do anything for him, but d'Artagnan answered that he was supplied with all he wanted.

That night brought together all those comrades of the Guards of M. Dessessart and the company of Musketeers of M. de Treville who had been accustomed to associate together. They were parting to meet again when it pleased God, and if it pleased God. That night, then, was somewhat riotous, as may be imagined. In such cases extreme preoccupation is only to be combated by extreme carelessness.

At the first sound of the morning trumpet the friends separated; the Musketeers hastening to the hotel of M. de Treville, the Guards to that of M. Dessessart. Each of the captains then led his company to the Louvre, where the king held his review.

The king was dull and appeared ill, which detracted a little from his usual lofty bearing. In fact, the evening before, a fever had seized him in the midst of the Parliament, while he was holding his Bed of Justice. He had, not the less, decided upon setting out that same evening; and in spite of the remonstrances that had been offered to him, he persisted in having the review, hoping by setting it at defiance to conquer the disease which began to lay hold upon him.

The review over, the Guards set forward alone on their march, the Musketeers waiting for the king, which allowed Porthos time to go and take a turn in his superb equipment in the Rue aux Ours.

The procurator’s wife saw him pass in his new uniform and on his fine horse. She loved Porthos too dearly to allow him to part thus; she made him a sign to dismount and come to her. Porthos was magnificent; his spurs jingled, his cuirass glittered, his sword knocked proudly against his ample limbs. This time the clerks evinced no inclination to laugh, such a real ear clipper did Porthos appear.

The Musketeer was introduced to M. Coquenard, whose little gray eyes sparkled with anger at seeing his cousin all blazing new. Nevertheless, one thing afforded him inward consolation; it was expected by everybody that the campaign would be a severe one. He whispered a hope to himself that this beloved relative might be killed in the field.

Porthos paid his compliments to M. Coquenard and bade him farewell. M. Coquenard wished him all sorts of prosperities. As to Mme. Coquenard, she could not restrain her tears; but no evil impressions were taken from her grief as she was known to be very much attached to her relatives, about whom she was constantly having serious disputes with her husband.

But the real adieux were made in Mme. Coquenard’s chamber; they were heartrending.

As long as the procurator’s wife could follow him with her eyes, she waved her handkerchief to him, leaning so far out of the window as to lead people to believe she wished to precipitate herself. Porthos received all these attentions like a man accustomed to such demonstrations, only on turning the corner of the street he lifted his hat gracefully, and waved it to her as a sign of adieu.

On his part Aramis wrote a long letter. To whom? Nobody knew. Kitty, who was to set out that evening for Tours, was waiting in the next chamber.

Athos sipped the last bottle of his Spanish wine.

In the meantime d’Artagnan was defiling with his company. Arriving at the Faubourg St. Antoine, he turned round to look gaily at the Bastille; but as it was the Bastille alone he looked at, he did not observe Milady, who, mounted upon a light chestnut horse, designated him with her finger to two ill-looking men who came close up to the ranks to take notice of him. To a look of interrogation which they made, Milady replied by a sign that it was he. Then, certain that there could be no mistake in the execution of her orders, she started her horse and disappeared.

The two men followed the company, and on leaving the Faubourg St. Antoine, mounted two horses properly equipped, which a servant without livery had waiting for them.

CHAPTER 41

THE SEIGE OF LA ROCHELLE

The Siege of La Rochelle was one of the great political events of the reign of Louis XIII, and one of the great military enterprises of the cardinal. It is, then, interesting and even necessary that we should say a few words about it, particularly as many details of this siege are connected in too important a manner with the story we have undertaken to relate to allow us to pass it over in silence.

The political plans of the cardinal when he undertook this siege were extensive. Let us unfold them first, and then pass on to the private plans which perhaps had not less influence upon his Eminence than the others.

Of the important cities given up by Henry IV to the Huguenots as places of safety, there only remained La Rochelle. It became necessary, therefore, to destroy this last bulwark of Calvinism--a dangerous leaven with which the ferments of civil revolt and foreign war were constantly mingling.

Spaniards, Englishmen, and Italian malcontents, adventurers of all nations, and soldiers of fortune of every sect, flocked at the first summons under the standard of the Protestants, and organized themselves like a vast association, whose branches diverged freely over all parts of Europe.

La Rochelle, which had derived a new importance from the ruin of the other Calvinist cities, was, then, the focus of dissensions and ambition. Moreover, its port was the last in the kingdom of France open to the English, and by closing it against England, our eternal enemy, the cardinal completed the work of Joan of Arc and the Duc de Guise.

Thus Bassompierre, who was at once Protestant and Catholic--Protestant by conviction and Catholic as commander of the order of the Holy Ghost; Bassompierre, who was a German by birth and a Frenchman at heart--in short, Bassompierre, who had a distinguished command at the siege of La Rochelle, said, in charging at the head of several other Protestant nobles like himself, “You will see, gentlemen, that we shall be fools enough to take La Rochelle.”

And Bassompierre was right. The cannonade of the Isle of Re presaged to him the dragonnades of the Cevennes; the taking of La Rochelle was the preface to the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

We have hinted that by the side of these views of the leveling and simplifying minister, which belong to history, the chronicler is forced to recognize the lesser motives of the amorous man and jealous rival.

Richelieu, as everyone knows, had loved the queen. Was this love a simple political affair, or was it naturally one of those profound passions which Anne of Austria inspired in those who approached her? That we are not able to say; but at all events, we have seen, by the anterior developments of this story, that Buckingham had the advantage over him, and in two or three circumstances, particularly that of the diamond studs, had, thanks to the devotedness of the three Musketeers and the courage and conduct of d'Artagnan, cruelly mystified him.

It was, then, Richelieu's object, not only to get rid of an enemy of France, but to avenge himself on a rival; but this vengeance must be grand and striking and worthy in every way of a man who held in his hand, as his weapon for combat, the forces of a kingdom.

Richelieu knew that in combating England he combated Buckingham; that in triumphing over England he triumphed over Buckingham--in short, that in humiliating England in the eyes of Europe he humiliated Buckingham in the eyes of the queen.

On his side Buckingham, in pretending to maintain the honor of England, was moved by interests exactly like those of the cardinal. Buckingham also was pursuing a private vengeance. Buckingham could not under any pretense be admitted into France as an ambassador; he wished to enter it as a conqueror.

It resulted from this that the real stake in this game, which two most powerful kingdoms played for the good pleasure of two amorous men, was simply a kind look from Anne of Austria.

The first advantage had been gained by Buckingham. Arriving unexpectedly in sight of the Isle of Re with ninety vessels and nearly twenty thousand men, he had surprised the Comte de Toiras, who commanded for the king in the Isle, and he had, after a bloody conflict, effected his landing.

Allow us to observe in passing that in this fight perished the Baron de Chantal; that the Baron de Chantal left a little orphan girl eighteen months old, and that this little girl was afterward Mme. de Sevigne.

The Comte de Toiras retired into the citadel St. Martin with his garrison, and threw a hundred men into a little fort called the fort of La Pree.

This event had hastened the resolutions of the cardinal; and till the king and he could take the command of the siege of La Rochelle, which was determined, he had sent Monsieur to direct the first operations, and had ordered all the troops he could dispose of to march toward the theater of war. It was of this detachment, sent as a vanguard, that our friend d’Artagnan formed a part.

The king, as we have said, was to follow as soon as his Bed of Justice had been held; but on rising from his Bed of Justice on the twenty-eighth of June, he felt himself attacked by fever. He was, notwithstanding, anxious to set out; but his illness becoming more serious, he was forced to stop at Villeroy.

Now, whenever the king halted, the Musketeers halted. It followed that d’Artagnan, who was as yet purely and simply in the Guards, found himself, for the time at least, separated from his good friends--Athos, Porthos, and Aramis. This separation, which was no more than an unpleasant circumstance, would have certainly become a cause of serious uneasiness if he had been able to guess by what unknown dangers he was surrounded.

He, however, arrived without accident in the camp established before La Rochelle, of the tenth of the month of September of the year 1627.

Everything was in the same state. The Duke of Buckingham and his English, masters of the Isle of Re, continued to besiege, but without success, the citadel St. Martin and the fort of La Pree; and hostilities with La Rochelle had commenced, two or three days before, about a fort which the Duc d’Angouleme had caused to be constructed near the city.

The Guards, under the command of M. Dessessart, took up their quarters at the Minimes; but, as we know, d’Artagnan, possessed with ambition to enter the Musketeers, had formed but few friendships among his comrades, and he felt himself isolated and given up to his own reflections.

His reflections were not very cheerful. From the time of his arrival in Paris, he had been mixed up with public affairs; but his own private affairs had made no great progress, either in love or fortune. As to love, the only woman he could have loved was Mme. Bonacieux; and Mme. Bonacieux had disappeared, without his being able to discover what had become of her. As to fortune, he had made--he, humble as he was--an enemy of the cardinal; that is to say, of a man before whom trembled the greatest men of the kingdom, beginning with the king.

That man had the power to crush him, and yet he had not done so. For a mind so perspicuous as that of d'Artagnan, this indulgence was a light by which he caught a glimpse of a better future.

Then he had made himself another enemy, less to be feared, he thought; but nevertheless, he instinctively felt, not to be despised. This enemy was Milady.

In exchange for all this, he had acquired the protection and good will of the queen; but the favor of the queen was at the present time an additional cause of persecution, and her protection, as it was known, protected badly--as witness Chalais and Mme. Bonacieux.

What he had clearly gained in all this was the diamond, worth five or six thousand livres, which he wore on his finger; and even this diamond--supposing that d'Artagnan, in his projects of ambition, wished to keep it, to make it someday a pledge for the gratitude of the queen--had not in the meanwhile, since he could not part with it, more value than the gravel he trod under his feet.

We say the gravel he trod under his feet, for d'Artagnan made these reflections while walking solitarily along a pretty little road which led from the camp to the village of Angoutin. Now, these reflections had led him further than he intended, and the day was beginning to decline when, by the last ray of the setting sun, he thought he saw the barrel of a musket glitter from behind a hedge.

D'Artagnan had a quick eye and a prompt understanding. He comprehended that the musket had not come there of itself, and that he who bore it had not concealed himself behind a hedge with any friendly intentions. He determined, therefore, to direct his course as clear from it as he could when, on the opposite side of the road, from behind a rock, he perceived the extremity of another musket.

This was evidently an ambuscade.

The young man cast a glance at the first musket and saw, with a certain degree of inquietude, that it was leveled in his direction; but as soon as he perceived that the orifice of the barrel was motionless, he threw himself upon the ground. At the same instant the gun was fired, and he heard the whistling of a ball pass over his head.

No time was to be lost. D’Artagnan sprang up with a bound, and at the same instant the ball from the other musket tore up the gravel on the very spot on the road where he had thrown himself with his face to the ground.

D’Artagnan was not one of those foolhardy men who seek a ridiculous death in order that it may be said of them that they did not retreat a single step. Besides, courage was out of the question here; d’Artagnan had fallen into an ambush.

“If there is a third shot,” said he to himself, “I am a lost man.”

He immediately, therefore, took to his heels and ran toward the camp, with the swiftness of the young men of his country, so renowned for their agility; but whatever might be his speed, the first who fired, having had time to reload, fired a second shot, and this time so well aimed that it struck his hat, and carried it ten paces from him.

As he, however, had no other hat, he picked up this as he ran, and arrived at his quarters very pale and quite out of breath. He sat down without saying a word to anybody, and began to reflect.

This event might have three causes:

The first and the most natural was that it might be an ambuscade of the Rochellais, who might not be sorry to kill one of his Majesty’s Guards, because it would be an enemy the less, and this enemy might have a well-furnished purse in his pocket.

D’Artagnan took his hat, examined the hole made by the ball, and shook his head. The ball was not a musket ball--it was an arquebus ball. The accuracy of the aim had first given him the idea that a special weapon had been employed. This could not, then, be a military ambuscade, as the ball was not of the regular caliber.

This might be a kind remembrance of Monsieur the Cardinal. It may be observed that at the very moment when, thanks to the ray of the sun, he perceived the gun barrel, he was thinking with astonishment on the forbearance of his Eminence with respect to him.

But d’Artagnan again shook his head. For people toward whom he had but to put forth his hand, his Eminence had rarely recourse to such means.

It might be a vengeance of Milady; that was most probable.

He tried in vain to remember the faces or dress of the assassins; he had escaped so rapidly that he had not had leisure to notice anything.

“Ah, my poor friends!” murmured d’Artagnan; “where are you? And that you should fail me!”

D’Artagnan passed a very bad night. Three or four times he started up, imagining that a man was approaching his bed for the purpose of stabbing him. Nevertheless, day dawned without darkness having brought any accident.

But d’Artagnan well suspected that that which was deferred was not relinquished.

D’Artagnan remained all day in his quarters, assigning as a reason to himself that the weather was bad.

At nine o’clock the next morning, the drums beat to arms. The Duc d’Orleans visited the posts. The guards were under arms, and d’Artagnan took his place in the midst of his comrades.

[redacted]

Monsieur passed along the front of the line; then all the superior officers approached him to pay their compliments, M. Dessessart, captain of the Guards, as well as the others.

At the expiration of a minute or two, it appeared to d’Artagnan that M. Dessessart made him a sign to approach. He waited for a fresh gesture on the part of his superior, for fear he might be mistaken; but this gesture being repeated, he left the ranks, and advanced to receive orders.

“Monsieur is about to ask for some men of good will for a dangerous mission, but one which will do honor to those who shall accomplish it; and I made you a sign in order that you might hold yourself in readiness.”

“Thanks, my captain!” replied d’Artagnan, who wished for nothing better than an opportunity to distinguish himself under the eye of the lieutenant general.

In fact the Rochellais had made a sortie during the night, and had retaken a bastion of which the royal army had gained possession two days before. The matter was to ascertain, by reconnoitering, how the enemy guarded this bastion.

At the end of a few minutes Monsieur raised his voice, and said, “I want for this mission three or four volunteers, led by a man who can be depended upon.”

“As to the man to be depended upon, I have him under my hand, monsieur,” said M. Dessessart, pointing to d’Artagnan; “and as to the four or five volunteers, Monsieur has but to make his intentions known, and the men will not be wanting.”

“Four men of good will who will risk being killed with me!” said d’Artagnan, raising his sword.

Two of his comrades of the Guards immediately sprang forward, and two other soldiers having joined them, the number was deemed sufficient. D’Artagnan declined all others, being unwilling to take the first chance from those who had the priority.

It was not known whether, after the taking of the bastion, the Rochellais had evacuated it or left a garrison in it; the object then was to examine the place near enough to verify the reports.

D’Artagnan set out with his four companions, and followed the trench; the two Guards marched abreast with him, and the two soldiers followed behind.

They arrived thus, screened by the lining of the trench, till they came within a hundred paces of the bastion. There, on turning round, d’Artagnan perceived that the two soldiers had disappeared.

He thought that, beginning to be afraid, they had stayed behind, and he continued to advance.

At the turning of the counterscarp they found themselves within about sixty paces of the bastion. They saw no one, and the bastion seemed abandoned.

The three composing our forlorn hope were deliberating whether they should proceed any further, when all at once a circle of smoke enveloped the giant of stone, and a dozen balls came whistling around d’Artagnan and his companions.

They knew all they wished to know; the bastion was guarded. A longer stay in this dangerous spot would have been useless imprudence. D’Artagnan and his two companions turned their backs, and commenced a retreat which resembled a flight.

On arriving at the angle of the trench which was to serve them as a rampart, one of the Guardsmen fell. A ball had passed through his breast. The other, who was safe and sound, continued his way toward the camp.

D’Artagnan was not willing to abandon his companion thus, and stooped to raise him and assist him in regaining the lines; but at this moment two shots were fired. One ball struck the head of the already-wounded guard, and the other flattened itself against a rock, after having passed within two inches of d'Artagnan.

The young man turned quickly round, for this attack could not have come from the bastion, which was hidden by the angle of the trench. The idea of the two soldiers who had abandoned him occurred to his mind, and with them he remembered the assassins of two evenings before. He resolved this time to know with whom he had to deal, and fell upon the body of his comrade as if he were dead.

He quickly saw two heads appear above an abandoned work within thirty paces of him; they were the heads of the two soldiers. D'Artagnan had not been deceived; these two men had only followed for the purpose of assassinating him, hoping that the young man's death would be placed to the account of the enemy.

As he might be only wounded and might denounce their crime, they came up to him with the purpose of making sure. Fortunately, deceived by d'Artagnan's trick, they neglected to reload their guns.

When they were within ten paces of him, d'Artagnan, who in falling had taken care not to let go his sword, sprang up close to them.

The assassins comprehended that if they fled toward the camp without having killed their man, they should be accused by him; therefore their first idea was to join the enemy. One of them took his gun by the barrel, and used it as he would a club. He aimed a terrible blow at d'Artagnan, who avoided it by springing to one side; but by this movement he left a passage free to the bandit, who darted off toward the bastion. As the Rochellais who guarded the bastion were ignorant of the intentions of the man they saw coming toward them, they fired upon him, and he fell, struck by a ball which broke his shoulder.

Meantime d'Artagnan had thrown himself upon the other soldier, attacking him with his sword. The conflict was not long; the wretch had nothing to defend himself with but his discharged arquebus. The sword of the Guardsman slipped along the barrel of the now-useless weapon, and passed through the thigh of the assassin, who fell.

D'Artagnan immediately placed the point of his sword at his throat.

"Oh, do not kill me!" cried the bandit. "Pardon, pardon, my officer, and I will tell you all."

“Is your secret of enough importance to me to spare your life for it?” asked the young man, withholding his arm.

“Yes; if you think existence worth anything to a man of twenty, as you are, and who may hope for everything, being handsome and brave, as you are.”

“Wretch,” cried d’Artagnan, “speak quickly! Who employed you to assassinate me?”

“A woman whom I don’t know, but who is called Milady.”

“But if you don’t know this woman, how do you know her name?”

“My comrade knows her, and called her so. It was with him she agreed, and not with me; he even has in his pocket a letter from that person, who attaches great importance to you, as I have heard him say.”

“But how did you become concerned in this villainous affair?”

“He proposed to me to undertake it with him, and I agreed.”

“And how much did she give you for this fine enterprise?”

“A hundred louis.”

“Well, come!” said the young man, laughing, “she thinks I am worth something. A hundred louis? Well, that was a temptation for two wretches like you. I understand why you accepted it, and I grant you my pardon; but upon one condition.”

"What is that?" said the soldier, uneasy at perceiving that all was not over.

"That you will go and fetch me the letter your comrade has in his pocket."

"But," cried the bandit, "that is only another way of killing me. How can I go and fetch that letter under the fire of the bastion?"

"You must nevertheless make up your mind to go and get it, or I swear you shall die by my hand."

"Pardon, monsieur; pity! In the name of that young lady you love, and whom you perhaps believe dead but who is not!" cried the bandit, throwing himself upon his knees and leaning upon his hand--for he began to lose his strength with his blood.

"And how do you know there is a young woman whom I love, and that I believed that woman dead?" asked d'Artagnan.

"By that letter which my comrade has in his pocket."

"You see, then," said d'Artagnan, "that I must have that letter. So no more delay, no more hesitation; or else whatever may be my repugnance to soiling my sword a second time with the blood of a wretch like you, I swear by my faith as an honest man--" and at these words d'Artagnan made so fierce a gesture that the wounded man sprang up.

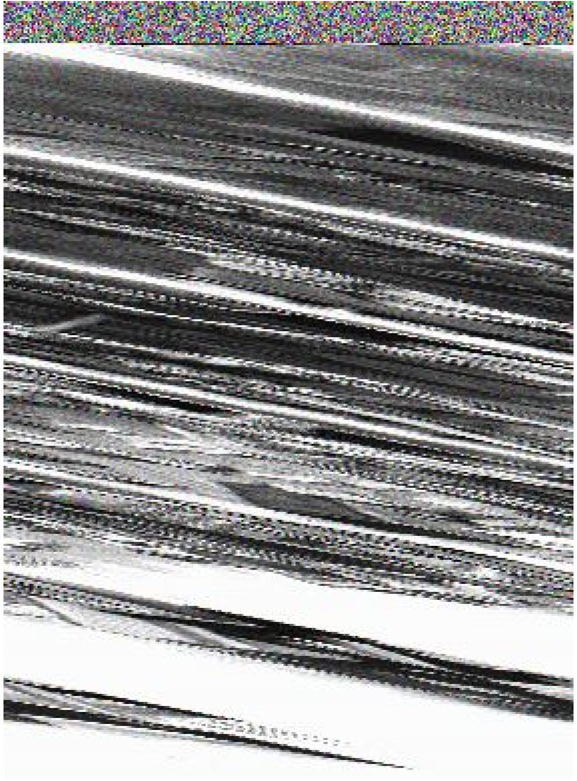

“Stop, stop!” cried he, regaining strength by force of terror. “I will go--I will go!”

D’Artagnan took the soldier’s arquebus, made him go on before him, and urged him toward his companion by pricking him behind with his sword.

It was a frightful thing to see this wretch, leaving a long track of blood on the ground he passed over, pale with approaching death, trying to drag himself along without being seen to the body of his accomplice, which lay twenty paces from him.

Terror was so strongly painted on his face, covered with a cold sweat, that d’Artagnan took pity on him, and casting upon him a look of contempt, “Stop,” said he, “I will show you the difference between a man of courage and such a coward as you. Stay where you are; I will go myself.”

And with a light step, an eye on the watch, observing the movements of the enemy and taking advantage of the accidents of the ground, d’Artagnan succeeded in reaching the second soldier.

There were two means of gaining his object--to search him on the spot, or to carry him away, making a buckler of his body, and search him in the trench.

D’Artagnan preferred the second means, and lifted the assassin onto his shoulders at the moment the enemy fired.

A slight shock, the dull noise of three balls which penetrated the flesh, a last cry, a convulsion of agony, proved to d’Artagnan that the would-be assassin had saved his life.

D’Artagnan regained the trench, and threw the corpse beside the wounded man, who was as pale as death.

Then he began to search. A leather pocketbook, a purse, in which was evidently a part of the sum which the bandit had received, with a dice box and dice, completed the possessions of the dead man.

He left the box and dice where they fell, threw the purse to the wounded man, and eagerly opened the pocketbook.

Among some unimportant papers he found the following letter, that which he had sought at the risk of his life:

“Since you have lost sight of that woman and she is now in safety in the convent, which you should never have allowed her to reach, try, at least, not to miss the man. If you do, you know that my hand stretches far, and that you shall pay very dearly for the hundred louis you have from me.”

No signature. Nevertheless it was plain the letter came from Milady. He consequently kept it as a piece of evidence, and being in safety behind the angle of the trench, he began to interrogate the wounded man. He confessed that he had undertaken with his comrade--the same who was killed--to carry off a young woman who was to leave Paris by the Barriere de La Villette; but having stopped to drink at a cabaret, they had missed the carriage by ten minutes.

“But what were you to do with that woman?” asked d’Artagnan, with anguish.

“We were to have conveyed her to a hotel in the Place Royale,” said the wounded man.

“Yes, yes!” murmured d’Artagnan; “that’s the place--Milady’s own residence!”

Then the young man tremblingly comprehended what a terrible thirst for vengeance urged this woman on to destroy him, as well as all who loved him, and how well she must be acquainted with the affairs of the court, since she had discovered all. There could be no doubt she owed this information to the cardinal.

But amid all this he perceived, with a feeling of real joy, that the queen must have discovered the prison in which poor Mme. Bonacieux was explaining her devotion, and that she had freed her from that prison; and the letter he had received from the young woman, and her passage along the road of Chaillot like an apparition, were now explained.

Then also, as Athos had predicted, it became possible to find Mme. Bonacieux, and a convent was not impregnable.

This idea completely restored clemency to his heart. He turned toward the wounded man, who had watched with intense anxiety all the various expressions of his countenance, and holding out his arm to him, said, “Come, I will not abandon you thus. Lean upon me, and let us return to the camp.”

“Yes,” said the man, who could scarcely believe in such magnanimity, “but is it not to have me hanged?”

“You have my word,” said he; “for the second time I give you your life.”

The wounded man sank upon his knees, to again kiss the feet of his preserver; but d’Artagnan, who had no longer a motive for staying so near the enemy, abridged the testimonials of his gratitude.

The Guardsman who had returned at the first discharge announced the death of his four companions. They were therefore much astonished and delighted in the regiment when they saw the young man come back safe and sound.

D’Artagnan explained the sword wound of his companion by a sortie which he improvised. He described the death of the other soldier, and the perils they had encountered. This recital was for him the occasion of veritable triumph. The whole army talked of this expedition for a day, and Monsieur paid him his compliments upon it. Besides this, as every great action bears its recompense with it, the brave exploit of d’Artagnan resulted in the restoration of the tranquility he had lost. In fact, d’Artagnan believed that he might be tranquil, as one of his two enemies was killed and the other devoted to his interests.

This tranquillity proved one thing--that d’Artagnan did not yet know Milady.

CHAPTER 42

THE ANJOU WINE

After the most disheartening news of the king’s health, a report of his convalescence began to prevail in the camp; and as he was very anxious to be in person at the siege, it was said that as soon as he could mount a horse he would set forward.

Meantime, Monsieur, who knew that from one day to the other he might expect to be removed from his command by the Duc d’Angouleme, by Bassompierre, or by Schomberg, who were all eager for his post, did but little, lost his days in wavering, and did not dare to attempt any great enterprise to drive the English from the Isle of Re, where they still besieged the citadel St. Martin and the fort of La Pree, as on their side the French were besieging La Rochelle.

D’Artagnan, as we have said, had become more tranquil, as always happens after a past danger, particularly when the danger seems to have vanished. He only felt one uneasiness, and that was at not hearing any tidings from his friends.

But one morning at the commencement of the month of November everything was explained to him by this letter, dated from Villeroy:

M d’Artagnan,

MM Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, after having had an entertainment at my house and enjoying themselves very much, created such a disturbance that the provost of the castle, a rigid man, has ordered them to be confined for some days; but I accomplish the order they have given me by forwarding to you a dozen bottles of my Anjou wine, with which they are much pleased. They are desirous that you should drink to their health in their favorite wine. I have done this, and am, monsieur, with great respect,

Your very humble and obedient servant,

Godeau, Purveyor of the Musketeers

“That’s all well!” cried d’Artagnan. “They think of me in their pleasures, as I thought of them in my troubles. Well, I will certainly drink to their health with all my heart, but I will not drink alone.”

And d’Artagnan went among those Guardsmen with whom he had formed greater intimacy than with the others, to invite them to enjoy with him this present of delicious Anjou wine which had been sent him from Villeroy.

One of the two Guardsmen was engaged that evening, and another the next, so the meeting was fixed for the day after that.

D’Artagnan, on his return, sent the twelve bottles of wine to the refreshment room of the Guards, with strict orders that great care should be taken of it; and then, on the day appointed, as the dinner was fixed for midday d’Artagnan sent Planchet at nine in the morning to assist in preparing everything for the entertainment.

Planchet, very proud of being raised to the dignity of landlord, thought he would make all ready, like an intelligent man; and with this view called in the assistance of the lackey of one of his master’s guests, named Fourreau, and the false soldier who had tried to kill d’Artagnan and who, belonging to no corps, had entered into the service of d’Artagnan, or rather of Planchet, after d’Artagnan had saved his life.

The hour of the banquet being come, the two guards arrived, took their places, and the dishes were arranged on the table. Planchet waited, towel on arm; Fourreau uncorked the bottles; and Brisemont, which was the name of the convalescent, poured the wine, which was a little shaken by its journey, carefully into decanters. Of this wine, the first bottle being a little thick at the bottom, Brisemont poured the lees into a glass, and d’Artagnan desired him to drink it, for the poor devil had not yet recovered his strength.

The guests having eaten the soup, were about to lift the first glass of wine to their lips, when all at once the cannon sounded from Fort Louis and Fort Neuf. The Guardsmen, imagining this to be caused by some unexpected attack, either of the besieged or the English, sprang to their swords. D’Artagnan, not less forward than they, did likewise, and all ran out, in order to repair to their posts.

But scarcely were they out of the room before they were made aware of the cause of this noise. Cries of “Live the king! Live the cardinal!” resounded on every side, and the drums were beaten in all directions.

In short, the king, impatient, as has been said, had come by forced marches, and had that moment arrived with all his household and a reinforcement of ten thousand troops. His Musketeers proceeded and followed him. D’Artagnan, placed in line with his company, saluted with an expressive gesture his three friends, whose eyes soon discovered him, and M. de Treville, who detected him at once.

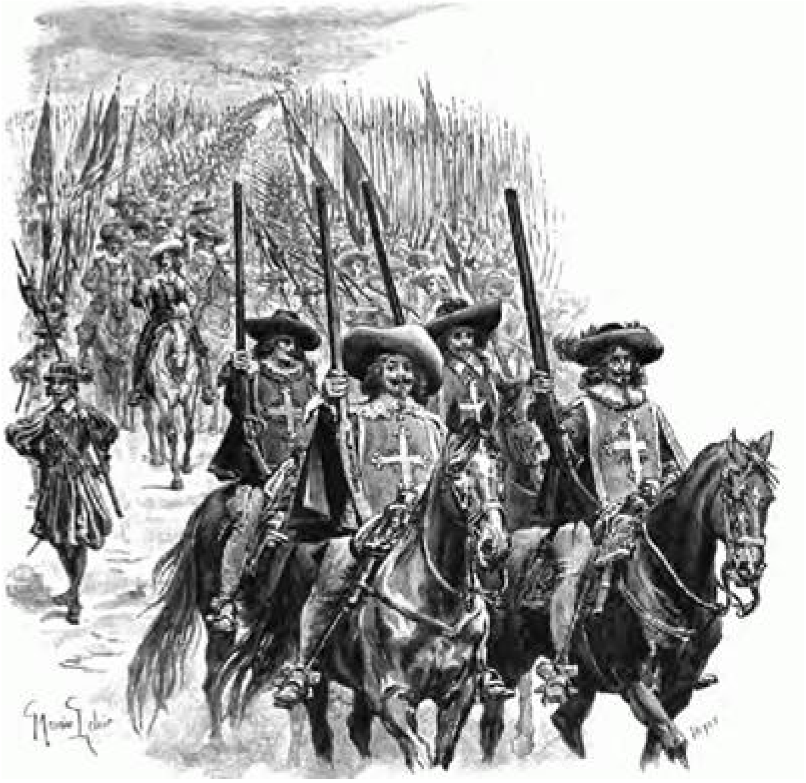

The ceremony of reception over, the four friends were soon in one another’s arms.

“Pardieu!” cried d’Artagnan, “you could not have arrived in better time; the dinner cannot have had time to get cold! Can it, gentlemen?” added the young man, turning to the two Guards, whom he introduced to his friends.

“Ah, ah!” said Porthos, “it appears we are feasting!”

“I hope,” said Aramis, “there are no women at your dinner.”

“Is there any drinkable wine in your tavern?” asked Athos.

“Well, pardieu! there is yours, my dear friend,” replied d’Artagnan.

“Our wine!” said Athos, astonished.

“Yes, that you sent me.”

“We sent you wine?”

“You know very well--the wine from the hills of Anjou.”

“Yes, I know what brand you are talking about.”

“The wine you prefer.”

“Well, in the absence of champagne and chambertin, you must content yourselves with that.”

"And so, connoisseurs in wine as we are, we have sent you some Anjou wine?" said Porthos.

"Not exactly, it is the wine that was sent by your order."

"On our account?" said the three Musketeers.

"Did you send this wine, Aramis?" said Athos.

"No; and you, Porthos?"

"No; and you, Athos?"

"No!"

"If it was not you, it was your purveyor," said d'Artagnan.

"Our purveyor!"

"Yes, your purveyor, Godeau--the purveyor of the Musketeers."

"My faith! never mind where it comes from," said Porthos, "let us taste it, and if it is good, let us drink it."

"No," said Athos; "don't let us drink wine which comes from an unknown source."

"You are right, Athos," said d'Artagnan. "Did none of you charge your purveyor, Godeau, to send me some wine?"

"No! And yet you say he has sent you some as from us?"

"Here is his letter," said d'Artagnan, and he presented the note to his comrades.

"This is not his writing!" said Athos. "I am acquainted with it; before we left Villeroy I settled the accounts of the regiment."

"A false letter altogether," said Porthos, "we have not been disciplined."

"d'Artagnan," said Aramis, in a reproachful tone, "how could you believe that we had made a disturbance?"

D'Artagnan grew pale, and a convulsive trembling shook all his limbs.

"Thou alarmest me!" said Athos, who never used thee and thou but upon very particular occasions, "what has happened?"

"Look you, my friends!" cried d'Artagnan, "a horrible suspicion crosses my mind! Can this be another vengeance of that woman?"

It was now Athos who turned pale.

D'Artagnan rushed toward the refreshment room, the three Musketeers and the two Guards following him.

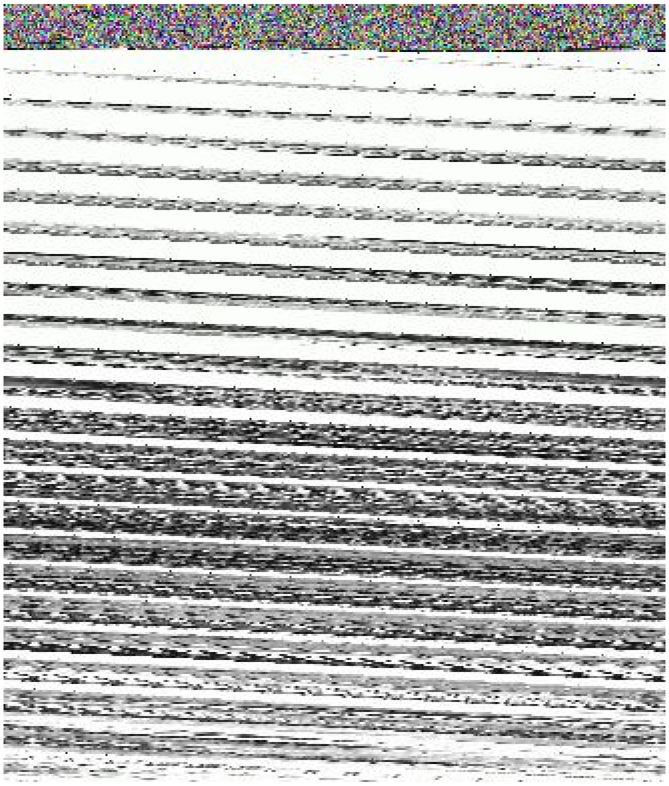

The first object that met the eyes of d’Artagnan on entering the room was Brisemont, stretched upon the ground and rolling in horrible convulsions.

Planchet and Fourreau, as pale as death, were trying to give him succor; but it was plain that all assistance was useless--all the features of the dying man were distorted with agony.

“Ah!” cried he, on perceiving d’Artagnan, “ah! this is frightful! You pretend to pardon me, and you poison me!”

“I!” cried d’Artagnan. “I, wretch? What do you say?”

“I say that it was you who gave me the wine; I say that it was you who desired me to drink it. I say you wished to avenge yourself on me, and I say that it is horrible!”

“Do not think so, Brisemont,” said d’Artagnan; “do not think so. I swear to you, I protest--”

“Oh, but God is above! God will punish you! My God, grant that he may one day suffer what I suffer!”

“Upon the Gospel,” said d’Artagnan, throwing himself down by the dying man, “I swear to you that the wine was poisoned and that I was going to drink of it as you did.”

“I do not believe you,” cried the soldier, and he expired amid horrible tortures.

“Frightful! frightful!” murmured Athos, while Porthos broke the bottles and Aramis gave orders, a little too late, that a confessor should be sent for.

“Oh, my friends,” said d’Artagnan, “you come once more to save my life, not only mine but that of these gentlemen. Gentlemen,” continued he, addressing the Guardsmen, “I request you will be silent with regard to this adventure. Great personages may have had a hand in what you have seen, and if talked about, the evil would only recoil upon us.”

“Ah, monsieur!” stammered Planchet, more dead than alive, “ah, monsieur, what an escape I have had!”

“How, sirrah! you were going to drink my wine?”

“To the health of the king, monsieur; I was going to drink a small glass of it if Fourreau had not told me I was called.”

“Alas!” said Fourreau, whose teeth chattered with terror, “I wanted to get him out of the way that I might drink myself.”

“Gentlemen,” said d’Artagnan, addressing the Guardsmen, “you may easily comprehend that such a feast can only be very dull after what has taken place; so accept my excuses, and put off the party till another day, I beg of you.”

The two Guardsmen courteously accepted d’Artagnan’s excuses, and perceiving that the four friends desired to be alone, retired.

When the young Guardsman and the three Musketeers were without witnesses, they looked at one another with an air which plainly expressed that each of them perceived the gravity of their situation.

“In the first place,” said Athos, “let us leave this chamber; the dead are not agreeable company, particularly when they have died a violent death.”

“Planchet,” said d’Artagnan, “I commit the corpse of this poor devil to your care. Let him be interred in holy ground. He committed a crime, it is true; but he repented of it.”

And the four friends quit the room, leaving to Planchet and Fourreau the duty of paying mortuary honors to Brisemont.

The host gave them another chamber, and served them with fresh eggs and some water, which Athos went himself to draw at the fountain. In a few words, Porthos and Aramis were posted as to the situation.

“Well,” said d’Artagnan to Athos, “you see, my dear friend, that this is war to the death.”

Athos shook his head.

“Yes, yes,” replied he, “I perceive that plainly; but do you really believe it is she?”

“I am sure of it.”

“Nevertheless, I confess I still doubt.”

“But the fleur-de-lis on her shoulder?”

“She is some Englishwoman who has committed a crime in France, and has been branded in consequence.”

“Athos, she is your wife, I tell you,” repeated d’Artagnan; “only reflect how much the two descriptions resemble each other.”

“Yes; but I should think the other must be dead, I hanged her so effectually.”

It was d’Artagnan who now shook his head in his turn.

“But in either case, what is to be done?” said the young man.

“The fact is, one cannot remain thus, with a sword hanging eternally over his head,” said Athos. “We must extricate ourselves from this position.”

“But how?”

“Listen! You must try to see her, and have an explanation with her. Say to her: ‘Peace or war! My word as a gentleman never to say anything of you, never to do anything against you; on your side, a solemn oath to remain neutral with respect to me. If not, I will apply to the chancellor, I will apply to the king, I will apply to the hangman, I will move the courts against you, I will denounce you as branded, I will bring you to trial; and if you are acquitted, well, by the faith of a gentleman, I will kill you at the corner of some wall, as I would a mad dog.’“

“I like the means well enough,” said d’Artagnan, “but where and how to meet with her?”

“Time, dear friend, time brings round opportunity; opportunity is the martingale of man. The more we have ventured the more we gain, when we know how to wait.”

“Yes; but to wait surrounded by assassins and poisoners.”

“Bah!” said Athos. “God has preserved us hitherto, God will preserve us still.”

“Yes, we. Besides, we are men; and everything considered, it is our lot to risk our lives; but she,” asked he, in an undertone.

“What she?” asked Athos.

“Constance.”

“Madame Bonacieux! Ah, that’s true!” said Athos. “My poor friend, I had forgotten you were in love.”

“Well, but,” said Aramis, “have you not learned by the letter you found on the wretched corpse that she is in a convent? One may be very comfortable in a convent; and as soon as the siege of La Rochelle is terminated, I promise you on my part--”

“Good,” cried Athos, “good! Yes, my dear Aramis, we all know that your views have a religious tendency.”

“I am only temporarily a Musketeer,” said Aramis, humbly.

“It is some time since we heard from his mistress,” said Athos, in a low voice. “But take no notice; we know all about that.”

“Well,” said Porthos, “it appears to me that the means are very simple.”

“What?” asked d’Artagnan.

“You say she is in a convent?” replied Porthos.

“Yes.”

“Very well. As soon as the siege is over, we’ll carry her off from that convent.”

“But we must first learn what convent she is in.”

“That’s true,” said Porthos.

“But I think I have it,” said Athos. “Don’t you say, dear d’Artagnan, that it is the queen who has made choice of the convent for her?”

“I believe so, at least.”

“In that case Porthos will assist us.”

“And how so, if you please?”

“Why, by your marchioness, your duchess, your princess. She must have a long arm.”

“Hush!” said Porthos, placing a finger on his lips. “I believe her to be a cardinalist; she must know nothing of the matter.”

“Then,” said Aramis, “I take upon myself to obtain intelligence of her.”

“You, Aramis?” cried the three friends. “You! And how?”

“By the queen’s almoner, to whom I am very intimately allied,” said Aramis, coloring.

And on this assurance, the four friends, who had finished their modest repast, separated, with the promise of meeting again that evening. D’Artagnan returned to less important affairs, and the three Musketeers repaired to the king’s quarters, where they had to prepare their lodging.

CHAPTER 43

THE SIGN OF THE RED DOVECOT

Meanwhile the king, who, with more reason than the cardinal, showed his hatred for Buckingham, although scarcely arrived was in such a haste to meet the enemy that he commanded every disposition to be made to drive the English from the Isle of Re, and afterward to press the siege of La Rochelle; but notwithstanding his earnest wish, he was delayed by the dissensions which broke out between MM Bassompierre and Schomberg, against the Duc d'Angouleme.

MM Bassompierre and Schomberg were marshals of France, and claimed their right of commanding the army under the orders of the king; but the cardinal, who feared that Bassompierre, a Huguenot at heart, might press but feebly the English and Rochellais, his brothers in religion, supported the Duc d'Angouleme, whom the king, at his instigation, had named lieutenant general. The result was that to prevent MM Bassompierre and Schomberg from deserting the army, a separate command had to be given to each. Bassompierre took up his quarters on the north of the city, between Leu and Dompierre; the Duc d'Angouleme on the east, from Dompierre to Perigny; and M. de Schomberg on the south, from Perigny to Angoutin.

The quarters of Monsieur were at Dompierre; the quarters of the king were sometimes at Estree, sometimes at Jarrie; the cardinal's quarters were upon the downs, at the bridge of La Pierre, in a simple house without any entrenchment. So that Monsieur watched Bassompierre; the king, the Duc d'Angouleme; and the cardinal, M. de Schomberg.

As soon as this organization was established, they set about driving the English from the Isle.

The juncture was favorable. The English, who require, above everything, good living in order to be good soldiers, only eating salt meat and bad biscuit, had many invalids in their camp. Still further, the sea, very rough at this period of the year all along the sea coast, destroyed every day some little vessel; and the shore, from the point of l'Aiguillon to the trenches, was at every tide literally covered with the wrecks of pinnacles, roberges, and feluccas. The result was that even if the king’s troops remained quietly in their camp, it was evident that some day or other, Buckingham, who only continued in the Isle from obstinacy, would be obliged to raise the siege.

But as M. de Toiras gave information that everything was preparing in the enemy’s camp for a fresh assault, the king judged that it would be best to put an end to the affair, and gave the necessary orders for a decisive action.

As it is not our intention to give a journal of the siege, but on the contrary only to describe such of the events of it as are connected with the story we are relating, we will content ourselves with saying in two words that the expedition succeeded, to the great astonishment of the king and the great glory of the cardinal. The English, repulsed foot by foot, beaten in all encounters, and defeated in the passage of the Isle of Loie, were obliged to re-embark, leaving on the field of battle two thousand men, among whom were five colonels, three lieutenant colonels, two hundred and fifty captains, twenty gentlemen of rank, four pieces of cannon, and sixty flags, which were taken to Paris by Claude de St. Simon, and suspended with great pomp in the arches of Notre Dame.

Te Deums were chanted in camp, and afterward throughout France.

The cardinal was left free to carry on the siege, without having, at least at the present, anything to fear on the part of the English.

But it must be acknowledged, this response was but momentary. An envoy of the Duke of Buckingham, named Montague, was taken, and proof was obtained of a league between the German Empire, Spain, England, and Lorraine. This league was directed against France.

Still further, in Buckingham’s lodging, which he had been forced to abandon more precipitately than he expected, papers were found which confirmed this alliance and which, as the cardinal asserts in his memoirs, strongly compromised Mme. de Chevreuse and consequently the queen.

It was upon the cardinal that all the responsibility fell, for one is not a despotic minister without responsibility. All, therefore, of the vast resources of his genius were at work night and day, engaged in listening to the least report heard in any of the great kingdoms of Europe.

The cardinal was acquainted with the activity, and more particularly the hatred, of Buckingham. If the league which threatened France triumphed, all his influence would be lost. Spanish policy and Austrian policy would have their representatives in the cabinet of the Louvre, where they had as yet but partisans; and he, Richelieu--the French minister, the national minister--would be ruined. The king, even while obeying him like a child, hated him as a child hates his master, and would abandon him to the personal vengeance of Monsieur and the queen. He would then be lost, and France, perhaps, with him. All this must be prepared against.

Courtiers, becoming every instant more numerous, succeeded one another, day and night, in the little house of the bridge of La Pierre, in which the cardinal had established his residence.

There were monks who wore the frock with such an ill grace that it was easy to perceive they belonged to the church militant; women a little inconvenienced by their costume as pages and whose large trousers could not entirely conceal their rounded forms; and peasants with blackened hands but with fine limbs, savoring of the man of quality a league off.

There were also less agreeable visits--for two or three times reports were spread that the cardinal had nearly been assassinated.

It is true that the enemies of the cardinal said that it was he himself who set these bungling assassins to work, in order to have, if wanted, the right of using reprisals; but we must not believe everything ministers say, nor everything their enemies say.

These attempts did not prevent the cardinal, to whom his most inveterate detractors have never denied personal bravery, from making nocturnal excursions, sometimes to communicate to the Duc d’Angouleme important orders, sometimes to confer with the king, and sometimes to have an interview with a messenger whom he did not wish to see at home.

On their part the Musketeers, who had not much to do with the siege, were not under very strict orders and led a joyous life. The was the more easy for our three companions in particular; for being friends of M. de Treville, they obtained from him special permission to be absent after the closing of the camp.

Now, one evening when d’Artagnan, who was in the trenches, was not able to accompany them, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, mounted on their battle steeds, enveloped in their war cloaks, with their hands upon their pistol butts, were returning from a drinking place called the Red Dovecot, which Athos had discovered two days before upon the route to Jarrie, following the road which led to the camp and quite on their guard, as we have stated, for fear of an ambuscade, when, about a quarter of a league from the village of Boisnau, they fancied they heard the sound of horses approaching them. They immediately all three halted, closed in, and waited, occupying the middle of the road. In an instant, and as the moon broke from behind a cloud, they saw at a turning of the road two horsemen who, on perceiving them, stopped in their turn, appearing to deliberate whether they should continue their route or go back. The hesitation created some suspicion in the three friends, and Athos, advancing a few paces in front of the others, cried in a firm voice, “Who goes there?”

“Who goes there, yourselves?” replied one of the horsemen.

“That is not an answer,” replied Athos. “Who goes there? Answer, or we charge.”

“Beware of what you are about, gentlemen!” said a clear voice which seemed accustomed to command.

“It is some superior officer making his night rounds,” said Athos. “What do you wish, gentlemen?”

“Who are you?” said the same voice, in the same commanding tone. “Answer in your turn, or you may repent of your disobedience.”

“King’s Musketeers,” said Athos, more and more convinced that he who interrogated them had the right to do so.

“What company?”

“Company of Treville.”

“Advance, and give an account of what you are doing here at this hour.”

The three companions advanced rather humbly--for all were now convinced that they had to do with someone more powerful than themselves--leaving Athos the post of speaker.

One of the two riders, he who had spoken second, was ten paces in front of his companion. Athos made a sign to Porthos and Aramis also to remain in the rear, and advanced alone.

“Your pardon, my officer,” said Athos; “but we were ignorant with whom we had to do, and you may see that we were good guard.”

“Your name?” said the officer, who covered a part of his face with his cloak.

“But yourself, monsieur,” said Athos, who began to be annoyed by this inquisition, “give me, I beg you, the proof that you have the right to question me.”

“Your name?” repeated the cavalier a second time, letting his cloak fall, and leaving his face uncovered.

“Monsieur the Cardinal!” cried the stupefied Musketeer.

“Your name?” cried his Eminence, for the third time.

“Athos,” said the Musketeer.

The cardinal made a sign to his attendant, who drew near. “These three Musketeers shall follow us,” said he, in an undertone. “I am not willing it should be known I have left the camp; and if they follow us we shall be certain they will tell nobody.”

“We are gentlemen, monseigneur,” said Athos; “require our parole, and give yourself no uneasiness. Thank God, we can keep a secret.”

The cardinal fixed his piercing eyes on this courageous speaker.

“You have a quick ear, Monsieur Athos,” said the cardinal; “but now listen to this. It is not from mistrust that I request you to follow me, but for my security. Your companions are no doubt Messieurs Porthos and Aramis.”

“Yes, your Eminence,” said Athos, while the two Musketeers who had remained behind advanced hat in hand.

“I know you, gentlemen,” said the cardinal, “I know you. I know you are not quite my friends, and I am sorry you are not so; but I know you are brave and loyal gentlemen, and that confidence may be placed in you. Monsieur Athos, do me, then, the honor to accompany me; you and your two friends, and then I shall have an escort to excite envy in his Majesty, if we should meet him.”

The three Musketeers bowed to the necks of their horses.

“Well, upon my honor,” said Athos, “your Eminence is right in taking us with you; we have seen several ill-looking faces on the road, and we have even had a quarrel at the Red Dovecot with four of those faces.”

“A quarrel, and what for, gentlemen?” said the cardinal; “you know I don’t like quarrelers.”

“And that is the reason why I have the honor to inform your Eminence of what has happened; for you might learn it from others, and upon a false account believe us to be in fault.”

“What have been the results of your quarrel?” said the cardinal, knitting his brow.

“My friend, Aramis, here, has received a slight sword wound in the arm, but not enough to prevent him, as your Eminence may see, from mounting to the assault tomorrow, if your Eminence orders an escalade.”

“But you are not the men to allow sword wounds to be inflicted upon you thus,” said the cardinal. “Come, be frank, gentlemen, you have settled accounts with somebody! Confess; you know I have the right of giving absolution.”

“I, monseigneur?” said Athos. “I did not even draw my sword, but I took him who offended me round the body, and threw him out of the window. It appears that in falling,” continued Athos, with some hesitation, “he broke his thigh.”

“Ah, ah!” said the cardinal; “and you, Monsieur Porthos?”

“I, monseigneur, knowing that dueling is prohibited--I seized a bench, and gave one of those brigands such a blow that I believe his shoulder is broken.”

“Very well,” said the cardinal; “and you, Monsieur Aramis?”

“Monseigneur, being of a very mild disposition, and being, likewise, of which Monseigneur perhaps is not aware, about to enter into orders, I endeavored to appease my comrades, when one of these wretches gave me a wound with a sword, treacherously, across my left arm. Then I admit my patience failed me; I drew my sword in my turn, and as he came back to the charge, I fancied I felt that in throwing himself upon me, he let it pass through his body. I only know for a certainty that he fell; and it seemed to me that he was borne away with his two companions.”

“The devil, gentlemen!” said the cardinal, “three men placed hors de combat in a cabaret squabble! You don’t do your work by halves. And pray what was this quarrel about?”

“These fellows were drunk,” said Athos, “and knowing there was a lady who had arrived at the cabaret this evening, they wanted to force her door.”

“Force her door!” said the cardinal, “and for what purpose?”

“To do her violence, without doubt,” said Athos. “I have had the honor of informing your Eminence that these men were drunk.”

“And was this lady young and handsome?” asked the cardinal, with a certain degree of anxiety.

“We did not see her, monseigneur,” said Athos.

“You did not see her? Ah, very well,” replied the cardinal, quickly. “You did well to defend the honor of a woman; and as I am going to the Red Dovecot myself, I shall know if you have told me the truth.”

“Monseigneur,” said Athos, haughtily, “we are gentlemen, and to save our heads we would not be guilty of a falsehood.”

“Therefore I do not doubt what you say, Monsieur Athos, I do not doubt it for a single instant; but,” added he, “to change the conversation, was this lady alone?”

“The lady had a cavalier shut up with her,” said Athos, “but as notwithstanding the noise, this cavalier did not show himself, it is to be presumed that he is a coward.”

“‘Judge not rashly’, says the Gospel,” replied the cardinal.

Athos bowed.

“And now, gentlemen, that’s well,” continued the cardinal. “I know what I wish to know; follow me.”

The three Musketeers passed behind his Eminence, who again enveloped his face in his cloak, and put his horse in motion, keeping from eight to ten paces in advance of his four companions.

They soon arrived at the silent, solitary inn. No doubt the host knew what illustrious visitor was expected, and had consequently sent intruders out of the way.

Ten paces from the door the cardinal made a sign to his esquire and the three Musketeers to halt. A saddled horse was fastened to the window shutter. The cardinal knocked three times, and in a peculiar manner.

A man, enveloped in a cloak, came out immediately, and exchanged some rapid words with the cardinal; after which he mounted his horse, and set off in the direction of Surgeres, which was likewise the way to Paris.

“Advance, gentlemen,” said the cardinal.

“You have told me the truth, my gentlemen,” said he, addressing the Musketeers, “and it will not be my fault if our encounter this evening be not advantageous to you. In the meantime, follow me.”

The cardinal alighted; the three Musketeers did likewise. The cardinal threw the bridle of his horse to his esquire; the three Musketeers fastened the horses to the shutters.

The host stood at the door. For him, the cardinal was only an officer coming to visit a lady.

“Have you any chamber on the ground floor where these gentlemen can wait near a good fire?” said the cardinal.

The host opened the door of a large room, in which an old stove had just been replaced by a large and excellent chimney.

“I have this,” said he.

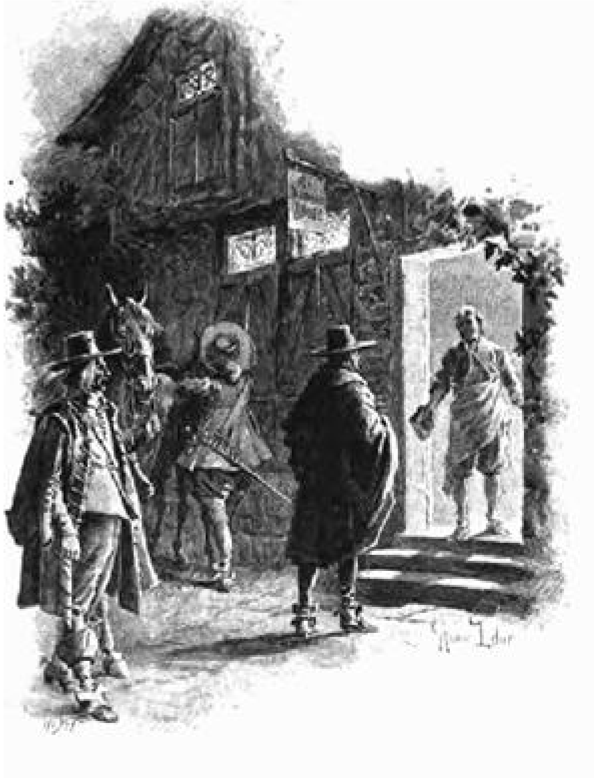

“That will do,” replied the cardinal. “Enter, gentlemen, and be kind enough to wait for me; I shall not be more than half an hour.”

And while the three Musketeers entered the ground floor room, the cardinal, without asking further information, ascended the staircase like a man who has no need of having his road pointed out to him.

CHAPTER 44

THE UTILITY OF STOVEPIPES

It was evident that without suspecting it, and actuated solely by their chivalrous and adventurous character, our three friends had just rendered a service to someone the cardinal honored with his special protection.

Now, who was that someone? That was the question the three Musketeers put to one another. Then, seeing that none of their replies could throw any light on the subject, Porthos called the host and asked for dice.

Porthos and Aramis placed themselves at the table and began to play. Athos walked about in a contemplative mood.

While thinking and walking, Athos passed and repassed before the pipe of the stove, broken in halves, the other extremity passing into the chamber above; and every time he passed and repassed he heard a murmur of words, which at length fixed his attention. Athos went close to it, and distinguished some words that appeared to merit so great an interest that he made a sign to his friends to be silent, remaining himself bent with his ear directed to the opening of the lower orifice.

“Listen, Milady,” said the cardinal, “the affair is important. Sit down, and let us talk it over.”

“Milady!” murmured Athos.

“I listen to your Eminence with greatest attention,” replied a female voice which made the Musketeer start.

“A small vessel with an English crew, whose captain is on my side, awaits you at the mouth of Charente, at fort of the Point. He will set sail tomorrow morning.”

“I must go thither tonight?”

“Instantly! That is to say, when you have received my instructions. Two men, whom you will find at the door on going out, will serve you as escort. You will allow me to leave first; then, after half an hour, you can go away in your turn.”

“Yes, monseigneur. Now let us return to the mission with which you wish to charge me; and as I desire to continue to merit the confidence of your

Eminence, deign to unfold it to me in terms clear and precise, that I may not commit an error.”

There was an instant of profound silence between the two interlocutors. It was evident that the cardinal was weighing beforehand the terms in which he was about to speak, and that Milady was collecting all her intellectual faculties to comprehend the things he was about to say, and to engrave them in her memory when they should be spoken.

Athos took advantage of this moment to tell his two companions to fasten the door inside, and to make them a sign to come and listen with him.

The two Musketeers, who loved their ease, brought a chair for each of themselves and one for Athos. All three then sat down with their heads together and their ears on the alert.

“You will go to London,” continued the cardinal. “Arrived in London, you will seek Buckingham.”

“I must beg your Eminence to observe,” said Milady, “that since the affair of the diamond studs, about which the duke always suspected me, his Grace distrusts me.”

“Well, this time,” said the cardinal, “it is not necessary to steal his confidence, but to present yourself frankly and loyally as a negotiator.”

“Frankly and loyally,” repeated Milady, with an unspeakable expression of duplicity.

“Yes, frankly and loyally,” replied the cardinal, in the same tone. “All this negotiation must be carried on openly.”

“I will follow your Eminence’s instructions to the letter. I only wait till you give them.”

“You will go to Buckingham in my behalf, and you will tell him I am acquainted with all the preparations he has made; but that they give me no uneasiness, since at the first step he takes I will ruin the queen.”

“Will he believe that your Eminence is in a position to accomplish the threat thus made?”

“Yes; for I have the proofs.”

“I must be able to present these proofs for his appreciation.”

“Without doubt. And you will tell him I will publish the report of Bois-Robert and the Marquis de Beautru, upon the interview which the duke had at the residence of Madame the Constable with the queen on the evening Madame the Constable gave a masquerade. You will tell him, in order that he may not doubt, that he came there in the costume of the Great Mogul, which the Chevalier de Guise was to have worn, and that he purchased this exchange for the sum of three thousand pistoles."

"Well, monseigneur?"

"All the details of his coming into and going out of the palace--on the night when he introduced himself in the character of an Italian fortune teller--you will tell him, that he may not doubt the correctness of my information; that he had under his cloak a large white robe dotted with black tears, death's heads, and crossbones--for in case of a surprise, he was to pass for the phantom of the White Lady who, as all the world knows, appears at the Louvre every time any great event is impending."

"Is that all, monseigneur?"

"Tell him also that I am acquainted with all the details of the adventure at Amiens; that I will have a little romance made of it, wittily turned, with a plan of the garden and portraits of the principal actors in that nocturnal romance."

"I will tell him that."

"Tell him further that I hold Montague in my power; that Montague is in the Bastille; that no letters were found upon him, it is true, but that torture may make him tell much of what he knows, and even what he does not know."

"Exactly."

"Then add that his Grace has, in the precipitation with which he quit the Isle of Re, forgotten and left behind him in his lodging a certain letter from Madame de Chevreuse which singularly compromises the queen, inasmuch as it proves not only that her Majesty can love the enemies of the king but that she can conspire with the enemies of France. You recollect perfectly all I have told you, do you not?"

"Your Eminence will judge: the ball of Madame the Constable; the night at the Louvre; the evening at Amiens; the arrest of Montague; the letter of Madame de Chevreuse."

"That's it," said the cardinal, "that's it. You have an excellent memory, Milady."

"But," resumed she to whom the cardinal addressed this flattering compliment, "if, in spite of all these reasons, the duke does not give way and continues to menace France?"

"The duke is in love to madness, or rather to folly," replied Richelieu, with great bitterness. "Like the ancient paladins, he has only undertaken this war to obtain a look from his lady love. If he becomes certain that this war will cost the honor, and perhaps the liberty, of the lady of his thoughts, as he says, I will answer for it he will look twice.”

“And yet,” said Milady, with a persistence that proved she wished to see clearly to the end of the mission with which she was about to be charged, “if he persists?”

“If he persists?” said the cardinal. “That is not probable.”

“It is possible,” said Milady.

“If he persists--” His Eminence made a pause, and resumed: “If he persists--well, then I shall hope for one of those events which change the destinies of states.”

“If your Eminence would quote to me some one of these events in history,” said Milady, “perhaps I should partake of your confidence as to the future.”

“Well, here, for example,” said Richelieu: “when, in 1610, for a cause similar to that which moves the duke, King Henry IV, of glorious memory, was about, at the same time, to invade Flanders and Italy, in order to attack Austria on both sides. Well, did there not happen an event which saved Austria? Why should not the king of France have the same chance as the emperor?”

“Your Eminence means, I presume, the knife stab in the Rue de la Feronnerie?”

“Precisely,” said the cardinal.

“Does not your Eminence fear that the punishment inflicted upon Ravaillac may deter anyone who might entertain the idea of imitating him?”

“There will be, in all times and in all countries, particularly if religious divisions exist in those countries, fanatics who ask nothing better than to become martyrs. Ay, and observe--it just occurs to me that the Puritans are furious against Buckingham, and their preachers designate him as the Antichrist.”

“Well?” said Milady.

“Well,” continued the cardinal, in an indifferent tone, “the only thing to be sought for at this moment is some woman, handsome, young, and clever, who has cause of quarrel with the duke. The duke has had many affairs of gallantry; and if he has fostered his amours by promises of eternal constancy, he must likewise have sown the seeds of hatred by his eternal infidelities.”

“No doubt,” said Milady, coolly, “such a woman may be found.”

“Well, such a woman, who would place the knife of Jacques Clement or of Ravaillac in the hands of a fanatic, would save France.”

“Yes; but she would then be the accomplice of an assassination.”

“Were the accomplices of Ravaillac or of Jacques Clement ever known?”

“No; for perhaps they were too high-placed for anyone to dare look for them where they were. The Palace of Justice would not be burned down for everybody, monseigneur.”

“You think, then, that the fire at the Palace of Justice was not caused by chance?” asked Richelieu, in the tone with which he would have put a question of no importance.

“I, monseigneur?” replied Milady. “I think nothing; I quote a fact, that is all. Only I say that if I were named Madame de Montpensier, or the Queen Marie de Medicis, I should use less precautions than I take, being simply called Milady Clarik.”

“That is just,” said Richelieu. “What do you require, then?”

“I require an order which would ratify beforehand all that I should think proper to do for the greatest good of France.”

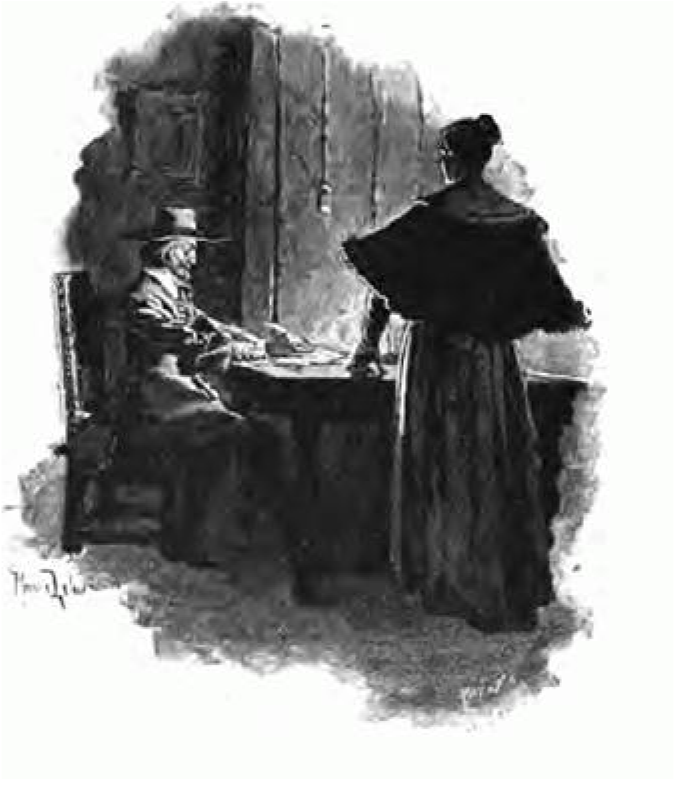

“But in the first place, this woman I have described must be found who is desirous of avenging herself upon the duke.”

“She is found,” said Milady.

“Then the miserable fanatic must be found who will serve as an instrument of God’s justice.”

“He will be found.”

“Well,” said the cardinal, “then it will be time to claim the order which you just now required.”

“Your Eminence is right,” replied Milady; “and I have been wrong in seeing in the mission with which you honor me anything but that which it really is--that is, to announce to his Grace, on the part of your Eminence, that you are acquainted with the different disguises by means of which he succeeded in approaching the queen during the fete given by Madame the Constable; that you have proofs of the interview granted at the Louvre by the queen to a certain Italian astrologer who was no other than the Duke of Buckingham; that you have ordered a little romance of a satirical nature to be written upon the adventures of Amiens, with a plan of the gardens in which those adventures took place, and portraits of the actors who figured in them; that Montague is in the Bastille, and that the torture may make him say things he remembers, and even things he has forgotten; that you possess a certain letter from Madame de Chevreuse, found in his Grace’s lodging, which singularly compromises not only her who wrote it, but her in whose name it was written. Then, if he persists, notwithstanding all this--as that is, as I have said, the limit of my mission--I shall have nothing to do but to pray God to work a miracle for the salvation of France. That is it, is it not, monseigneur, and I shall have nothing else to do?”

“That is it,” replied the cardinal, dryly.

“And now,” said Milady, without appearing to remark the change of the duke’s tone toward her--”now that I have received the instructions of your Eminence as concerns your enemies, Monseigneur will permit me to say a few words to him of mine?”

“Have you enemies, then?” asked Richelieu.

“Yes, monseigneur, enemies against whom you owe me all your support, for I made them by serving your Eminence.”

“Who are they?” replied the duke.

“In the first place, there is a little intrigante named Bonacieux.”

“She is in the prison of Nantes.”

“That is to say, she was there,” replied Milady; “but the queen has obtained an order from the king by means of which she has been conveyed to a convent.”

“To a convent?” said the duke.

“Yes, to a convent.”

“And to which?”

“I don’t know; the secret has been well kept.”

“But I will know!”

“And your Eminence will tell me in what convent that woman is?”

“I can see nothing inconvenient in that,” said the cardinal.

“Well, now I have an enemy much more to be dreaded by me than this little Madame Bonacieux.”

“Who is that?”

“Her lover.”

“What is his name?”

“Oh, your Eminence knows him well,” cried Milady, carried away by her anger. “He is the evil genius of both of us. It is he who in an encounter with your Eminence’s Guards decided the victory in favor of the king’s Musketeers; it is he who gave three desperate wounds to de Wardes, your emissary, and who caused the affair of the diamond studs to fail; it is he who, knowing it was I who had Madame Bonacieux carried off, has sworn my death.”

"Ah, ah!" said the cardinal, "I know of whom you speak."

"I mean that miserable d'Artagnan."

"He is a bold fellow," said the cardinal.

"And it is exactly because he is a bold fellow that he is the more to be feared."

"I must have," said the duke, "a proof of his connection with Buckingham."

"A proof?" cried Milady; "I will have ten."

"Well, then, it becomes the simplest thing in the world; get me that proof, and I will send him to the Bastille."

"So far good, monseigneur; but afterwards?"

"When once in the Bastille, there is no afterward!" said the cardinal, in a low voice. "Ah, pardieu!" continued he, "if it were as easy for me to get rid of my enemy as it is easy to get rid of yours, and if it were against such people you require impunity--"

"Monseigneur," replied Milady, "a fair exchange. Life for life, man for man; give me one, I will give you the other."

"I don't know what you mean, nor do I even desire to know what you mean," replied the cardinal; "but I wish to please you, and see nothing out of the way in giving you what you demand with respect to so infamous a creature--the more so as you tell me this d'Artagnan is a libertine, a duelist, and a traitor."

"An infamous scoundrel, monseigneur, a scoundrel!"

"Give me paper, a quill, and some ink, then," said the cardinal.

"Here they are, monseigneur."

There was a moment of silence, which proved that the cardinal was employed in seeking the terms in which he should write the note, or else in writing it. Athos, who had not lost a word of the conversation, took his two companions by the hand, and led them to the other end of the room.

"Well," said Porthos, "what do you want, and why do you not let us listen to the end of the conversation?"

"Hush!" said Athos, speaking in a low voice. "We have heard all it was necessary we should hear; besides, I don't prevent you from listening, but I must be gone."

"You must be gone!" said Porthos; "and if the cardinal asks for you, what answer can we make?"

“You will not wait till he asks; you will speak first, and tell him that I am gone on the lookout, because certain expressions of our host have given me reason to think the road is not safe. I will say two words about it to the cardinal’s esquire likewise. The rest concerns myself; don’t be uneasy about that.”

“Be prudent, Athos,” said Aramis.

“Be easy on that head,” replied Athos; “you know I am cool enough.”

Porthos and Aramis resumed their places by the stovepipe.

As to Athos, he went out without any mystery, took his horse, which was tied with those of his friends to the fastenings of the shutters, in four words convinced the attendant of the necessity of a vanguard for their return, carefully examined the priming of his pistols, drew his sword, and took, like a forlorn hope, the road to the camp.

CHAPTER 45

A CONJUGAL SCENE

As Athos had foreseen, it was not long before the cardinal came down. He opened the door of the room in which the Musketeers were, and found Porthos playing an earnest game of dice with Aramis. He cast a rapid glance around the room, and perceived that one of his men was missing.

"What has become of Monseigneur Athos?" asked he.

"Monseigneur," replied Porthos, "he has gone as a scout, on account of some words of our host, which made him believe the road was not safe."

"And you, what have you done, Monsieur Porthos?"

"I have won five pistoles of Aramis."

"Well; now will you return with me?"

"We are at your Eminence's orders."

"To horse, then, gentlemen; for it is getting late."

The attendant was at the door, holding the cardinal's horse by the bridle. At a short distance a group of two men and three horses appeared in the shade. These were the two men who were to conduct Milady to the fort of the Point, and superintend her embarkation.

The attendant confirmed to the cardinal what the two Musketeers had already said with respect to Athos. The cardinal made an approving gesture, and retraced his route with the same precautions he had used incoming.

Let us leave him to follow the road to the camp protected by his esquire and the two Musketeers, and return to Athos.

For a hundred paces he maintained the speed at which he started; but when out of sight he turned his horse to the right, made a circuit, and came back within twenty paces of a high hedge to watch the passage of the little troop. Having recognized the laced hats of his companions and the golden fringe of the cardinal's cloak, he waited till the horsemen had turned the angle of the road, and having lost sight of them, he returned at a gallop to the inn, which was opened to him without hesitation.

The host recognized him.

“My officer,” said Athos, “has forgotten to give a piece of very important information to the lady, and has sent me back to repair his forgetfulness.”

“Go up,” said the host; “she is still in her chamber.”

Athos availed himself of the permission, ascended the stairs with his lightest step, gained the landing, and through the open door perceived Milady putting on her hat.

He entered the chamber and closed the door behind him. At the noise he made in pushing the bolt, Milady turned round.

Athos was standing before the door, enveloped in his cloak, with his hat pulled down over his eyes. On seeing this figure, mute and immovable as a statue, Milady was frightened.

“Who are you, and what do you want?” cried she.

“Humph,” murmured Athos, “it is certainly she!”

And letting fall his cloak and raising his hat, he advanced toward Milady.

“Do you know me, madame?” said he.

Milady made one step forward, and then drew back as if she had seen a serpent.

“So far, well,” said Athos, “I perceive you know me.”

“The Comte de la Fere!” murmured Milady, becoming exceedingly pale, and drawing back till the wall prevented her from going any farther.

“Yes, Milady,” replied Athos; “the Comte de la Fere in person, who comes expressly from the other world to have the pleasure of paying you a visit. Sit down, madame, and let us talk, as the cardinal said.”

Milady, under the influence of inexpressible terror, sat down without uttering a word.

“You certainly are a demon sent upon the earth!” said Athos. “Your power is great, I know; but you also know that with the help of God men have often conquered the most terrible demons. You have once before thrown yourself in my path. I thought I had crushed you, madame; but either I was deceived or hell has resuscitated you!”

Milady at these words, which recalled frightful remembrances, hung down her head with a suppressed groan.

“Yes, hell has resuscitated you,” continued Athos. “Hell has made you rich, hell has given you another name, hell has almost made you another face; but it has neither effaced the stains from your soul nor the brand from your body.”

Milady arose as if moved by a powerful spring, and her eyes flashed lightning. Athos remained sitting.

"You believed me to be dead, did you not, as I believed you to be? And the name of Athos as well concealed the Comte de la Fere, as the name Milady Clarik concealed Anne de Breuil. Was it not so you were called when your honored brother married us? Our position is truly a strange one," continued Athos, laughing. "We have only lived up to the present time because we believed each other dead, and because a remembrance is less oppressive than a living creature, though a remembrance is sometimes devouring."

"But," said Milady, in a hollow, faint voice, "what brings you back to me, and what do you want with me?"

"I wish to tell you that though remaining invisible to your eyes, I have not lost sight of you."

"You know what I have done?"

"I can relate to you, day by day, your actions from your entrance to the service of the cardinal to this evening."

A smile of incredulity passed over the pale lips of Milady.

"Listen! It was you who cut off the two diamond studs from the shoulder of the Duke of Buckingham; it was you had the Madame Bonacieux carried off; it was you who, in love with de Wardes and thinking to pass the night with him, opened the door to Monsieur d'Artagnan; it was you who, believing that de Wardes had deceived you, wished to have him killed by his rival; it was you who, when this rival had discovered your infamous secret, wished to have him killed in his turn by two assassins, whom you sent in pursuit of him; it was you who, finding the balls had missed their mark, sent poisoned wine with a forged letter, to make your victim believe that the wine came from his friends. In short, it was you who have but now in this chamber, seated in this chair I now fill, made an engagement with Cardinal Richelieu to cause the Duke of Buckingham to be assassinated, in exchange for the promise he has made you to allow you to assassinate d'Artagnan."

Milady was livid.

"You must be Satan!" cried she.

"Perhaps," said Athos; "But at all events listen well to this. Assassinate the Duke of Buckingham, or cause him to be assassinated--I care very little about that! I don't know him. Besides, he is an Englishman. But do not touch with the tip of your finger a single hair of d'Artagnan, who is a faithful friend whom I love and defend, or I swear to you by the head of my father the crime which you shall have endeavored to commit, or shall have committed, shall be the last."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan has cruelly insulted me," said Milady, in a hollow tone; "Monsieur d'Artagnan shall die!"

"Indeed! Is it possible to insult you, madame?" said Athos, laughing; "he has insulted you, and he shall die!"

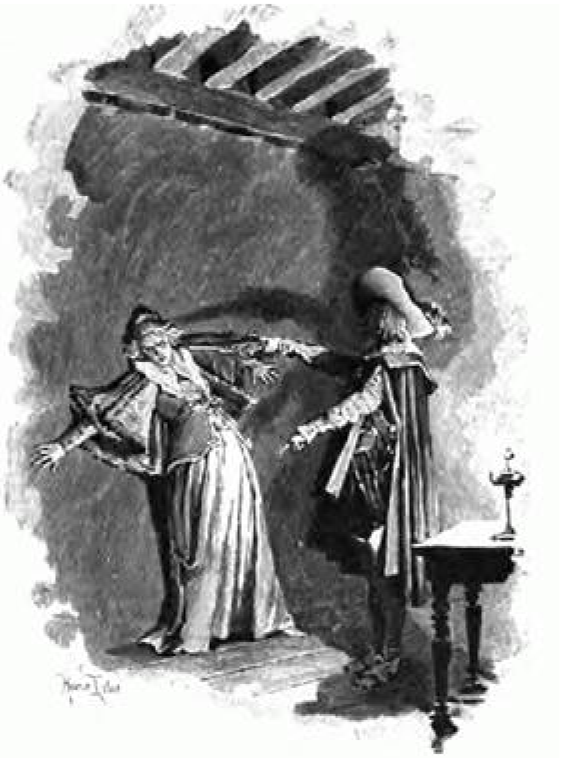

“He shall die!” replied Milady; “she first, and he afterward.”

Athos was seized with a kind of vertigo. The sight of this creature, who had nothing of the woman about her, recalled awful remembrances. He thought how one day, in a less dangerous situation than the one in which he was now placed, he had already endeavored to sacrifice her to his honor. His desire for blood returned, burning his brain and pervading his frame like a raging fever; he arose in his turn, reached his hand to his belt, drew forth a pistol, and cocked it.

Milady, pale as a corpse, endeavored to cry out; but her swollen tongue could utter no more than a hoarse sound which had nothing human in it and resembled the rattle of a wild beast. Motionless against the dark tapestry, with her hair in disorder, she appeared like a horrid image of terror.

Athos slowly raised his pistol, stretched out his arm so that the weapon almost touched Milady’s forehead, and then, in a voice the more terrible from having the supreme calmness of a fixed resolution, “Madame,” said he, “you will this instant deliver to me the paper the cardinal signed; or upon my soul, I will blow your brains out.”

With another man, Milady might have preserved some doubt; but she knew Athos. Nevertheless, she remained motionless.

“You have one second to decide,” said he.

Milady saw by the contraction of his countenance that the trigger was about to be pulled; she reached her hand quickly to her bosom, drew out a paper, and held it toward Athos.

“Take it,” said she, “and be accursed!”

Athos took the paper, returned the pistol to his belt, approached the lamp to be assured that it was the paper, unfolded it, and read:

Dec. 3, 1627

It is by my order and for the good of the state that the bearer of this has done what he has done.

Richelieu

“And now,” said Athos, resuming his cloak and putting on his hat, “now that I have drawn your teeth, viper, bite if you can.”

And he left the chamber without once looking behind him.

At the door he found the two men and the spare horse which they held.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “Monseigneur’s order is, you know, to conduct that woman, without losing time, to the fort of the Point, and never to leave her till she is on board.”

As these words agreed wholly with the order they had received, they bowed their heads in sign of assent.

With regard to Athos, he leaped lightly into the saddle and set out at full gallop; only instead of following the road, he went across the fields, urging his horse to the utmost and stopping occasionally to listen.

In one of those halts he heard the steps of several horses on the road. He had no doubt it was the cardinal and his escort. He immediately made a new point in advance, rubbed his horse down with some heath and leaves of trees, and placed himself across the road, about two hundred paces from the camp.

“Who goes there?” cried he, as soon as he perceived the horsemen.

“That is our brave Musketeer, I think,” said the cardinal.

“Yes, monseigneur,” said Porthos, “it is he.”

“Monsieur Athos,” said Richelieu, “receive my thanks for the good guard you have kept. Gentlemen, we are arrived; take the gate on the left. The watchword is, ‘King and Re.’“

Saying these words, the cardinal saluted the three friends with an inclination of his head, and took the right hand, followed by his attendant--for that night he himself slept in the camp.

“Well!” said Porthos and Aramis together, as soon as the cardinal was out of hearing, “well, he signed the paper she required!”

“I know it,” said Athos, coolly, “since here it is.”

And the three friends did not exchange another word till they reached their quarters, except to give the watchword to the sentinels. Only they sent Mousqueton to tell Planchet that his master was requested, the instant that he left the trenches, to come to the quarters of the Musketeers.

Milady, as Athos had foreseen, on finding the two men that awaited her, made no difficulty in following them. She had had for an instant an inclination to be reconducted to the cardinal, and relate everything to him; but a revelation on her part would bring about a revelation on the part of Athos. She might say that Athos had hanged her; but then Athos would tell that she was branded. She thought it was best to preserve silence, to discreetly set off to accomplish her difficult mission with her usual skill; and then, all things being accomplished to the satisfaction of the cardinal, to come to him and claim her vengeance.

In consequence, after having traveled all night, at seven o’clock she was at the fort of the Point; at eight o’clock she had embarked; and at nine, the vessel, which with letters of marque from the cardinal was supposed to be sailing for Bayonne, raised anchor, and steered its course toward England.

CHAPTER 46

THE BASTION SAINT-GERVAIS

On arriving at the lodgings of his three friends, d'Artagnan found them assembled in the same chamber. Athos was meditating; Porthos was twisting his mustache; Aramis was saying his prayers in a charming little Book of Hours, bound in blue velvet.

"Pardieu, gentlemen," said he. "I hope what you have to tell me is worth the trouble, or else, I warn you, I will not pardon you for making me come here instead of getting a little rest after a night spent in taking and dismantling a bastion. Ah, why were you not there, gentlemen? It was warm work."

"We were in a place where it was not very cold," replied Porthos, giving his mustache a twist which was peculiar to him.

"Hush!" said Athos.

"Oh, oh!" said d'Artagnan, comprehending the slight frown of the Musketeer. "It appears there is something fresh aboard."

"Aramis," said Athos, "you went to breakfast the day before yesterday at the inn of the Parpaillot, I believe?"

"Yes."

"How did you fare?"

"For my part, I ate but little. The day before yesterday was a fish day, and they had nothing but meat."

"What," said Athos, "no fish at a seaport?"

"They say," said Aramis, resuming his pious reading, "that the dyke which the cardinal is making drives them all out into the open sea."

"But that is not quite what I mean to ask you, Aramis," replied Athos. "I want to know if you were left alone, and nobody interrupted you."

"Why, I think there were not many intruders. Yes, Athos, I know what you mean: we shall do very well at the Parpaillot."

"Let us go to the Parpaillot, then, for here the walls are like sheets of paper."

D’Artagnan, who was accustomed to his friend’s manner of acting, and who perceived immediately, by a word, a gesture, or a sign from him, that the circumstances were serious, took Athos’s arm, and went out without saying anything. Porthos followed, chatting with Aramis.

On their way they met Grimaud. Athos made him a sign to come with them. Grimaud, according to custom, obeyed in silence; the poor lad had nearly come to the pass of forgetting how to speak.

They arrived at the drinking room of the Parpaillot. It was seven o’clock in the morning, and daylight began to appear. The three friends ordered breakfast, and went into a room in which the host said they would not be disturbed.

Unfortunately, the hour was badly chosen for a private conference. The morning drum had just been beaten; everyone shook off the drowsiness of night, and to dispel the humid morning air, came to take a drop at the inn. Dragoons, Swiss, Guardsmen, Musketeers, light-horsemen, succeeded one another with a rapidity which might answer the purpose of the host very well, but agreed badly with the views of the four friends. Thus they applied very curtly to the salutations, healths, and jokes of their companions.

“I see how it will be,” said Athos: “we shall get into some pretty quarrel or other, and we have no need of one just now. D’Artagnan, tell us what sort of a night you have had, and we will describe ours afterward.”

“Ah, yes,” said a light-horseman, with a glass of brandy in his hand, which he sipped slowly. “I hear you gentlemen of the Guards have been in the trenches tonight, and that you did not get much the best of the Rochellais.”

D’Artagnan looked at Athos to know if he ought to reply to this intruder who thus mixed unasked in their conversation.

“Well,” said Athos, “don’t you hear Monsieur de Busigny, who does you the honor to ask you a question? Relate what has passed during the night, since these gentlemen desire to know it.”

“Have you not taken a bastion?” said a Swiss, who was drinking rum out of a beer glass.

“Yes, monsieur,” said d’Artagnan, bowing, “we have had that honor. We even have, as you may have heard, introduced a barrel of powder under one of the angles, which in blowing up made a very pretty breach. Without reckoning that as the bastion was not built yesterday all the rest of the building was badly shaken.”

"And what bastion is it?" asked a dragoon, with his saber run through a goose which he was taking to be cooked.

"The bastion St. Gervais," replied d'Artagnan, "from behind which the Rochellais annoyed our workmen."

"Was that affair hot?"

"Yes, moderately so. We lost five men, and the Rochellais eight or ten."

"Balzempleu!" said the Swiss, who, notwithstanding the admirable collection of oaths possessed by the German language, had acquired a habit of swearing in French.

"But it is probable," said the light-horseman, "that they will send pioneers this morning to repair the bastion."

"Yes, that's probable," said d'Artagnan.

"Gentlemen," said Athos, "a wager!"

"Ah, wooi, a vager!" cried the Swiss.

"What is it?" said the light-horseman.

"Stop a bit," said the dragoon, placing his saber like a spit upon the two large iron dogs which held the firebrands in the chimney, "stop a bit, I am in it. You cursed host! a dripping pan immediately, that I may not lose a drop of the fat of this estimable bird."

"You was right," said the Swiss; "goose grease is kood with basdry."

"There!" said the dragoon. "Now for the wager! We listen, Monsieur Athos."

"Yes, the wager!" said the light-horseman.

“Well, Monsieur de Busigny, I will bet you,” said Athos, “that my three companions, Messieurs Porthos, Aramis, and d’Artagnan, and myself, will go and breakfast in the bastion St. Gervais, and we will remain there an hour, by the watch, whatever the enemy may do to dislodge us.”

Porthos and Aramis looked at each other; they began to comprehend.

“But,” said d’Artagnan, in the ear of Athos, “you are going to get us all killed without mercy.”

“We are much more likely to be killed,” said Athos, “if we do not go.”

“My faith, gentlemen,” said Porthos, turning round upon his chair and twisting his mustache, “that’s a fair bet, I hope.”

“I take it,” said M. de Busigny; “so let us fix the stake.”

“You are four gentlemen,” said Athos, “and we are four; an unlimited dinner for eight. Will that do?”

“Capitally,” replied M. de Busigny.

“Perfectly,” said the dragoon.

“That shoots me,” said the Swiss.

The fourth auditor, who during all this conversation had played a mute part, made a sign of the head in proof that he acquiesced in the proposition.

“The breakfast for these gentlemen is ready,” said the host.

“Well, bring it,” said Athos.

The host obeyed. Athos called Grimaud, pointed to a large basket which lay in a corner, and made a sign to him to wrap the viands up in the napkins.

Grimaud understood that it was to be a breakfast on the grass, took the basket, packed up the viands, added the bottles, and then took the basket on his arm.

“But where are you going to eat my breakfast?” asked the host.

“What matter, if you are paid for it?” said Athos, and he threw two pistoles majestically on the table.

“Shall I give you the change, my officer?” said the host.

“No, only add two bottles of champagne, and the difference will be for the napkins.”

The host had not quite so good a bargain as he at first hoped for, but he made amends by slipping in two bottles of Anjou wine instead of two bottles of champagne.

“Monsieur de Busigny,” said Athos, “will you be so kind as to set your watch with mine, or permit me to regulate mine by yours?”

“Which you please, monsieur!” said the light-horseman, drawing from his fob a very handsome watch, studded with diamonds; “half past seven.”

“Thirty-five minutes after seven,” said Athos, “by which you perceive I am five minutes faster than you.”

And bowing to all the astonished persons present, the young men took the road to the bastion St. Gervais, followed by Grimaud, who carried the basket, ignorant of where he was going but in the passive obedience which Athos had taught him not even thinking of asking.

As long as they were within the circle of the camp, the four friends did not exchange one word; besides, they were followed by the curious, who, hearing of the wager, were anxious to know how they would come out of it. But when once they passed the line of circumvallation and found themselves in the open plain, d’Artagnan, who was completely ignorant of what was going forward, thought it was time to demand an explanation.

“And now, my dear Athos,” said he, “do me the kindness to tell me where we are going?”

“Why, you see plainly enough we are going to the bastion.”

“But what are we going to do there?”

“You know well that we go to breakfast there.”

“But why did we not breakfast at the Parpaillot?”

“Because we have very important matters to communicate to one another, and it was impossible to talk five minutes in that inn without being annoyed by all those importunate fellows, who keep coming in, saluting you, and addressing you. Here at least,” said Athos, pointing to the bastion, “they will not come and disturb us.”

“It appears to me,” said d’Artagnan, with that prudence which allied itself in him so naturally with excessive bravery, “that we could have found some retired place on the downs or the seashore.”

“Where we should have been seen all four conferring together, so that at the end of a quarter of an hour the cardinal would have been informed by his spies that we were holding a council.”

“Yes,” said Aramis, “Athos is right: ANIMADVERTUNTUR IN DESERTIS.”

“A desert would not have been amiss,” said Porthos; “but it behooved us to find it.”

“There is no desert where a bird cannot pass over one’s head, where a fish cannot leap out of the water, where a rabbit cannot come out of its burrow, and I believe that bird, fish, and rabbit each becomes a spy of the cardinal. Better, then, pursue our enterprise; from which, besides, we cannot retreat without shame. We have made a wager--a wager which could not have been foreseen, and of which I defy anyone to divine the true cause. We are going, in order to win it, to remain an hour in the bastion. Either we shall be attacked, or not. If we are not, we shall have all the time to talk, and nobody will hear us--for I guarantee the walls of the bastion have no ears; if we are, we will talk of our affairs just the same. Moreover, in defending ourselves, we shall cover ourselves with glory. You see that everything is to our advantage.”

“Yes,” said d’Artagnan; “but we shall indubitably attract a ball.”

“Well, my dear,” replied Athos, “you know well that the balls most to be dreaded are not from the enemy.”

“But for such an expedition we surely ought to have brought our muskets.”

“You are stupid, friend Porthos. Why should we load ourselves with a useless burden?”

“I don’t find a good musket, twelve cartridges, and a powder flask very useless in the face of an enemy.”

“Well,” replied Athos, “have you not heard what d’Artagnan said?”

“What did he say?” demanded Porthos.

“d’Artagnan said that in the attack of last night eight or ten Frenchmen were killed, and as many Rochellais.”

“What then?”

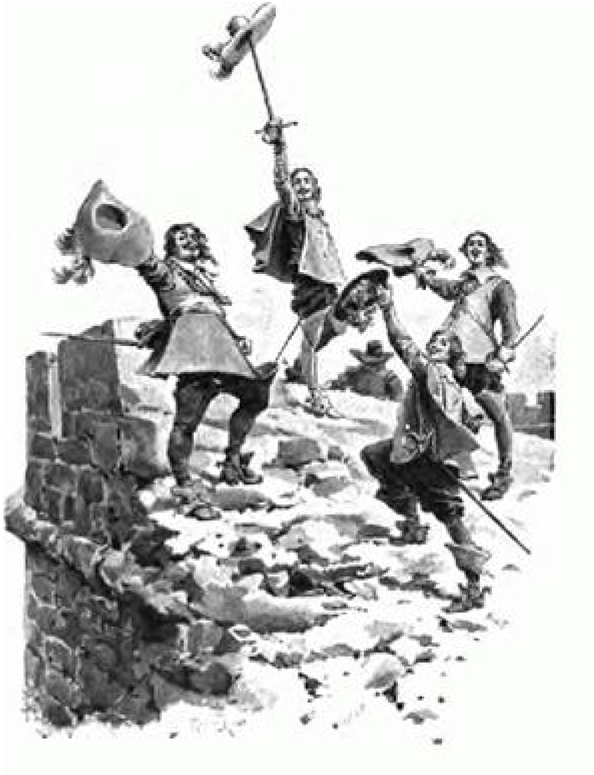

“The bodies were not plundered, were they? It appears the conquerors had something else to do.”

“Well?”

“Well, we shall find their muskets, their cartridges, and their flasks; and instead of four musketoons and twelve balls, we shall have fifteen guns and a hundred charges to fire.”

“Oh, Athos!” said Aramis, “truly you are a great man.”

Porthos nodded in sign of agreement. D’Artagnan alone did not seem convinced.

Grimaud no doubt shared the misgivings of the young man, for seeing that they continued to advance toward the bastion--something he had till then doubted--he pulled his master by the skirt of his coat.

“Where are we going?” asked he, by a gesture.

Athos pointed to the bastion.

“But,” said Grimaud, in the same silent dialect, “we shall leave our skins there.”

Athos raised his eyes and his finger toward heaven.

Grimaud put his basket on the ground and sat down with a shake of the head.

Athos took a pistol from his belt, looked to see if it was properly primed, cocked it, and placed the muzzle close to Grimaud’s ear.

Grimaud was on his legs again as if by a spring. Athos then made him a sign to take up his basket and to walk on first. Grimaud obeyed. All that Grimaud gained by this momentary pantomime was to pass from the rear guard to the vanguard.

Arrived at the bastion, the four friends turned round.

More than three hundred soldiers of all kinds were assembled at the gate of the camp; and in a separate group might be distinguished M. de Busigny, the dragoon, the Swiss, and the fourth bettor.

Athos took off his hat, placed it on the end of his sword, and waved it in the air.

All the spectators returned him his salute, accompanying this courtesy with a loud hurrah which was audible to the four; after which all four disappeared in the bastion, whither Grimaud had preceded them.

CHAPTER 47

THE COUNCIL OF THE MUSKETEERS

As Athos had foreseen, the bastion was only occupied by a dozen corpses, French and Rochellais.

“Gentlemen,” said Athos, who had assumed the command of the expedition, “while Grimaud spreads the table, let us begin by collecting the guns and cartridges together. We can talk while performing that necessary task. These gentlemen,” added he, pointing to the bodies, “cannot hear us.”

“But we could throw them into the ditch,” said Porthos, “after having assured ourselves they have nothing in their pockets.”

“Yes,” said Athos, “that’s Grimaud’s business.”

“Well, then,” cried d’Artagnan, “pray let Grimaud search them and throw them over the walls.”

“Heaven forfend!” said Athos; “they may serve us.”

“These bodies serve us?” said Porthos. “You are mad, dear friend.”

“Judge not rashly, say the gospel and the cardinal,” replied Athos. “How many guns, gentlemen?”

“Twelve,” replied Aramis.

“How many shots?”

“A hundred.”

“That’s quite as many as we shall want. Let us load the guns.”

The four Musketeers went to work; and as they were loading the last musket Grimaud announced that the breakfast was ready.

Athos replied, always by gestures, that that was well, and indicated to Grimaud, by pointing to a turret that resembled a pepper caster, that he was to stand as sentinel. Only, to alleviate the tediousness of the duty, Athos allowed him to take a loaf, two cutlets, and a bottle of wine.

“And now to table,” said Athos.

The four friends seated themselves on the ground with their legs crossed like Turks, or even tailors.

“And now,” said d’Artagnan, “as there is no longer any fear of being overheard, I hope you are going to let me into your secret.”

“I hope at the same time to procure you amusement and glory, gentlemen,” said Athos. “I have induced you to take a charming promenade; here is a delicious breakfast; and yonder are five hundred persons, as you may see through the loopholes, taking us for heroes or madmen--two classes of imbeciles greatly resembling each other.”

“But the secret!” said d’Artagnan.

“The secret is,” said Athos, “that I saw Milady last night.”

D’Artagnan was lifting a glass to his lips; but at the name of Milady, his hand trembled so, that he was obliged to put the glass on the ground again for fear of spilling the contents.”

“You saw your wi--”

“Hush!” interrupted Athos. “You forget, my dear, you forget that these gentlemen are not initiated into my family affairs like yourself. I have seen Milady.”

“Where?” demanded d’Artagnan.

“Within two leagues of this place, at the inn of the Red Dovecot.”

“In that case I am lost,” said d’Artagnan.

“Not so bad yet,” replied Athos; “for by this time she must have quit the shores of France.”

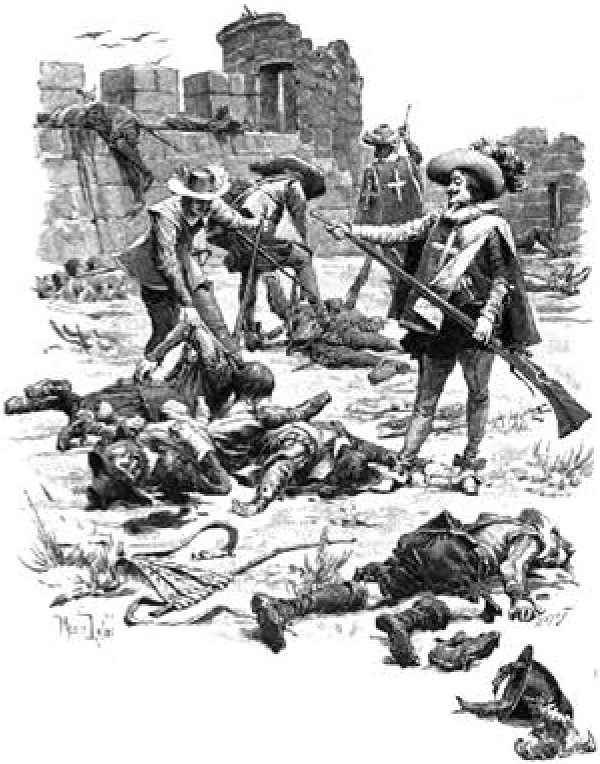

D’Artagnan breathed again.

"But after all," asked Porthos, "who is Milady?"

"A charming woman!" said Athos, sipping a glass of sparkling wine. "Villainous host!" cried he, "he has given us Anjou wine instead of champagne, and fancies we know no better! Yes," continued he, "a charming woman, who entertained kind views toward our friend d'Artagnan, who, on his part, has given her some offense for which she tried to revenge herself a month ago by having him killed by two musket shots, a week ago by trying to poison him, and yesterday by demanding his head of the cardinal."

"What! by demanding my head of the cardinal?" cried d'Artagnan, pale with terror.

"Yes, that is true as the Gospel," said Porthos; "I heard her with my own ears."

"I also," said Aramis.

"Then," said d'Artagnan, letting his arm fall with discouragement, "it is useless to struggle longer. I may as well blow my brains out, and all will be over."

"That's the last folly to be committed," said Athos, "seeing it is the only one for which there is no remedy."

"But I can never escape," said d'Artagnan, "with such enemies. First, my stranger of Meung; then de Wardes, to whom I have given three sword wounds; next Milady, whose secret I have discovered; finally, the cardinal, whose vengeance I have balked."

"Well," said Athos, "that only makes four; and we are four--one for one. Pardieu! if we may believe the signs Grimaud is making, we are about to have to do with a very different number of people. What is it, Grimaud? Considering the gravity of the occasion, I permit you to speak, my friend; but be laconic, I beg. What do you see?"

"A troop."

"Of how many persons?"

"Twenty men."

"What sort of men?"

"Sixteen pioneers, four soldiers."

"How far distant?"

"Five hundred paces."

"Good! We have just time to finish this fowl and to drink one glass of wine to your health, d'Artagnan."

“To your health!” repeated Porthos and Aramis.

“Well, then, to my health! although I am very much afraid that your good wishes will not be of great service to me.”

“Bah!” said Athos, “God is great, as say the followers of Mohammed, and the future is in his hands.”

Then, swallowing the contents of his glass, which he put down close to him, Athos arose carelessly, took the musket next to him, and drew near to one of the loopholes.

Porthos, Aramis and d’Artagnan followed his example. As to Grimaud, he received orders to place himself behind the four friends in order to reload their weapons.

“Pardieu!” said Athos, “it was hardly worth while to distribute ourselves for twenty fellows armed with pickaxes, mattocks, and shovels. Grimaud had only to make them a sign to go away, and I am convinced they would have left us in peace.”

“I doubt that,” replied d’Artagnan, “for they are advancing very resolutely. Besides, in addition to the pioneers, there are four soldiers and a brigadier, armed with muskets.”

“That’s because they don’t see us,” said Athos.

“My faith,” said Aramis, “I must confess I feel a great repugnance to fire on these poor devils of civilians.”

“He is a bad priest,” said Porthos, “who has pity for heretics.”

“In truth,” said Athos, “Aramis is right. I will warn them.”

“What the devil are you going to do?” cried d’Artagnan, “you will be shot.”

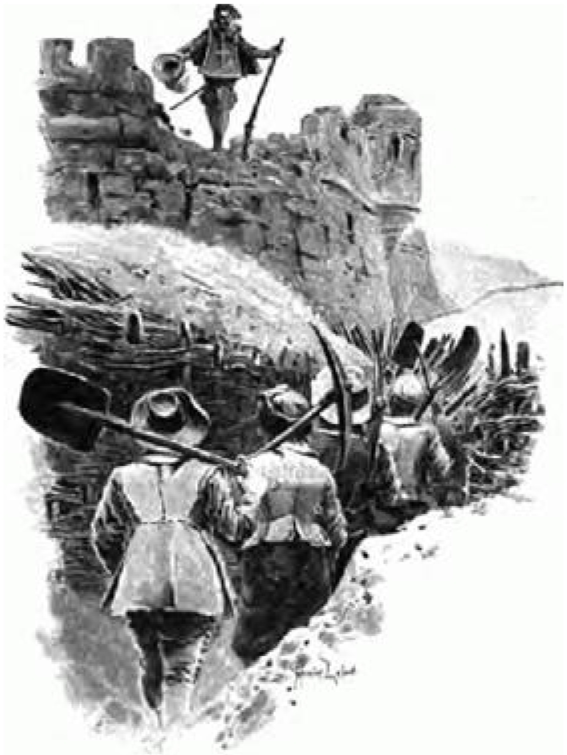

But Athos heeded not his advice. Mounting on the breach, with his musket in one hand and his hat in the other, he said, bowing courteously and addressing the soldiers and the pioneers, who, astonished at this apparition, stopped fifty paces from the bastion: “Gentlemen, a few friends and myself are about to breakfast in this bastion. Now, you know nothing is more disagreeable than being disturbed when one is at breakfast. We request you, then, if you really have business here, to wait till we have finished or repast, or to come again a short time hence, unless; unless, which would be far better, you form the salutary resolution to quit the side of the rebels, and come and drink with us to the health of the King of France.”

“Take care, Athos!” cried d’Artagnan; “don’t you see they are aiming?”

“Yes, yes,” said Athos; “but they are only civilians--very bad marksmen, who will be sure not to hit me.”

In fact, at the same instant four shots were fired, and the balls were flattened against the wall around Athos, but not one touched him.

Four shots replied to them almost instantaneously, but much better aimed than those of the aggressors; three soldiers fell dead, and one of the pioneers was wounded.

“Grimaud,” said Athos, still on the breach, “another musket!”

Grimaud immediately obeyed. On their part, the three friends had reloaded their arms; a second discharge followed the first. The brigadier and two pioneers fell dead; the rest of the troop took to flight.

“Now, gentlemen, a sortie!” cried Athos.

And the four friends rushed out of the fort, gained the field of battle, picked up the four muskets of the privates and the half-pike of the brigadier, and convinced that the fugitives would not stop till they reached the city, turned again toward the bastion, bearing with them the trophies of their victory.

“Reload the muskets, Grimaud,” said Athos, “and we, gentlemen, will go on with our breakfast, and resume our conversation. Where were we?”

“I recollect you were saying,” said d’Artagnan, “that after having demanded my head of the cardinal, Milady had quit the shores of France. Whither goes she?” added he, strongly interested in the route Milady followed.

“She goes into England,” said Athos.

“With what view?”

“With the view of assassinating, or causing to be assassinated, the Duke of Buckingham.”

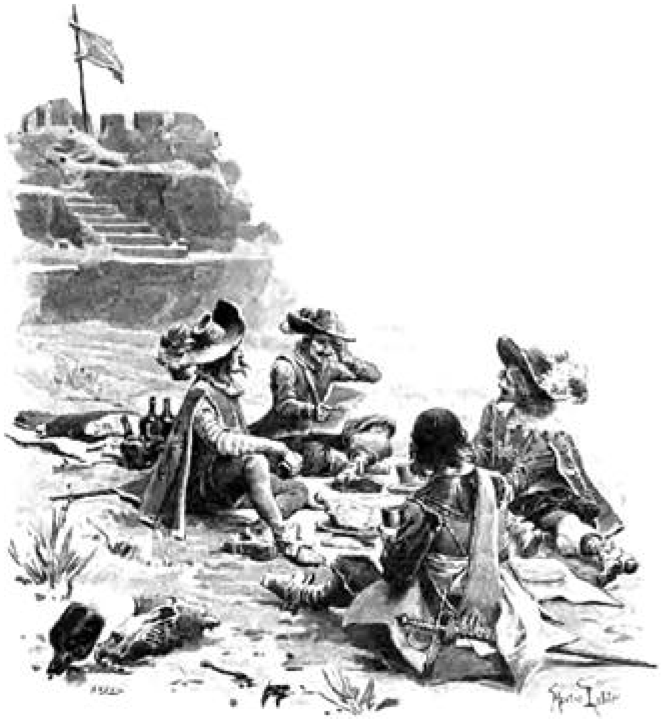

D’Artagnan uttered an exclamation of surprise and indignation.

“But this is infamous!” cried he.

“As to that,” said Athos, “I beg you to believe that I care very little about it. Now you have done, Grimaud, take our brigadier’s half-pike, tie a napkin to it, and plant it on top of our bastion, that these rebels of Rochellais may see that they have to deal with brave and loyal soldiers of the king.”

Grimaud obeyed without replying. An instant afterward, the white flag was floating over the heads of the four friends. A thunder of applause saluted its appearance; half the camp was at the barrier.

“How?” replied d’Artagnan, “you care little if she kills Buckingham or causes him to be killed? But the duke is our friend.”

“The duke is English; the duke fights against us. Let her do what she likes with the duke; I care no more about him than an empty bottle.” And Athos threw fifteen paces from him an empty bottle from which he had poured the last drop into his glass.

“A moment,” said d’Artagnan. “I will not abandon Buckingham thus. He gave us some very fine horses.”

“And moreover, very handsome saddles,” said Porthos, who at the moment wore on his cloak the lace of his own.

“Besides,” said Aramis, “God desires the conversion and not the death of a sinner.”

“Amen!” said Athos, “and we will return to that subject later, if such be your pleasure; but what for the moment engaged my attention most earnestly, and I am sure you will understand me, d’Artagnan, was the getting from this woman a kind of carte blanche which she had extorted from the cardinal, and by means of which she could with impunity get rid of you and perhaps of us.”

“But this creature must be a demon!” said Porthos, holding out his plate to Aramis, who was cutting up a fowl.

“And this carte blanche,” said d’Artagnan, “this carte blanche, does it remain in her hands?”

“No, it passed into mine; I will not say without trouble, for if I did I should tell a lie.”

“My dear Athos, I shall no longer count the number of times I am indebted to you for my life.”

“Then it was to go to her that you left us?” said Aramis.

“Exactly.”

“And you have that letter of the cardinal?” said d’Artagnan.

“Here it is,” said Athos; and he took the invaluable paper from the pocket of his uniform. D’Artagnan unfolded it with one hand, whose trembling he did not even attempt to conceal, to read:

Dec. 3, 1627

It is by my order and for the good of the state that the bearer of this has done what he has done.

“Richelieu”

“In fact,” said Aramis, “it is an absolution according to rule.”

“That paper must be torn to pieces,” said d’Artagnan, who fancied he read in it his sentence of death.

“On the contrary,” said Athos, “it must be preserved carefully. I would not give up this paper if covered with as many gold pieces.”

“And what will she do now?” asked the young man.

“Why,” replied Athos, carelessly, “she is probably going to write to the cardinal that a damned Musketeer, named Athos, has taken her safe-conduct from her by force; she will advise him in the same letter to get rid of his two friends, Aramis and Porthos, at the same time. The cardinal will remember that these are the same men who have often crossed his path; and then some fine morning he will arrest d’Artagnan, and for fear he should feel lonely, he will send us to keep him company in the Bastille.”

“Go to! It appears to me you make dull jokes, my dear,” said Porthos.

“I do not jest,” said Athos.

“Do you know,” said Porthos, “that to twist that damned Milady’s neck would be a smaller sin than to twist those of these poor devils of Huguenots, who have committed no other crime than singing in French the psalms we sing in Latin?”

“What says the abbe?” asked Athos, quietly.

“I say I am entirely of Porthos’s opinion,” replied Aramis.

“And I, too,” said d’Artagnan.

“Fortunately, she is far off,” said Porthos, “for I confess she would worry me if she were here.”

“She worries me in England as well as in France,” said Athos.

“She worries me everywhere,” said d’Artagnan.

“But when you held her in your power, why did you not drown her, strangle her, hang her?” said Porthos. “It is only the dead who do not return.”

“You think so, Porthos?” replied the Musketeer, with a sad smile which d’Artagnan alone understood.

“I have an idea,” said d’Artagnan.

“What is it?” said the Musketeers.

“To arms!” cried Grimaud.

The young men sprang up, and seized their muskets.

This time a small troop advanced, consisting of from twenty to twenty-five men; but they were not pioneers, they were soldiers of the garrison.

“Shall we return to the camp?” said Porthos. “I don’t think the sides are equal.”

“Impossible, for three reasons,” replied Athos. “The first, that we have not finished breakfast; the second, that we still have some very important things to say; and the third, that it yet wants ten minutes before the lapse of the hour.”

“Well, then,” said Aramis, “we must form a plan of battle.”

“That’s very simple,” replied Athos. “As soon as the enemy are within musket shot, we must fire upon them. If they continue to advance, we must fire again. We must fire as long as we have loaded guns. If those who remain of the troop persist in coming to the assault, we will allow the besiegers to get as far as the ditch, and then we will push down upon their heads that strip of wall which keeps its perpendicular by a miracle.”

“Bravo!” cried Porthos. “Decidedly, Athos, you were born to be a general, and the cardinal, who fancies himself a great soldier, is nothing beside you.”

“Gentlemen,” said Athos, “no divided attention, I beg; let each one pick out his man.”

“I cover mine,” said d’Artagnan.

“And I mine,” said Porthos.

“And I mine,” said Aramis.

“Fire, then,” said Athos.

The four muskets made but one report, but four men fell.

The drum immediately beat, and the little troop advanced at charging pace.

Then the shots were repeated without regularity, but always aimed with the same accuracy. Nevertheless, as if they had been aware of the numerical weakness of the friends, the Rochellais continued to advance in quick time.

With every three shots at least two men fell; but the march of those who remained was not slackened.

Arrived at the foot of the bastion, there were still more than a dozen of the enemy. A last discharge welcomed them, but did not stop them; they jumped into the ditch, and prepared to scale the breach.

“Now, my friends,” said Athos, “finish them at a blow. To the wall; to the wall!”

And the four friends, seconded by Grimaud, pushed with the barrels of their muskets an enormous sheet of the wall, which bent as if pushed by the wind, and detaching itself from its base, fell with a horrible crash into the ditch. Then a fearful crash was heard; a cloud of dust mounted toward the sky--and all was over!

“Can we have destroyed them all, from the first to the last?” said Athos.

“My faith, it appears so!” said d’Artagnan.

“No,” cried Porthos; “there go three or four, limping away.”

In fact, three or four of these unfortunate men, covered with dirt and blood, fled along the hollow way, and at length regained the city. These were all who were left of the little troop.

Athos looked at his watch.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “we have been here an hour, and our wager is won; but we will be fair players. Besides, d’Artagnan has not told us his idea yet.”

And the Musketeer, with his usual coolness, reseated himself before the remains of the breakfast.

“My idea?” said d’Artagnan.

“Yes; you said you had an idea,” said Athos.

“Oh, I remember,” said d’Artagnan. “Well, I will go to England a second time; I will go and find Buckingham.”

“You shall not do that, d’Artagnan,” said Athos, coolly.

“And why not? Have I not been there once?”

“Yes; but at that period we were not at war. At that period Buckingham was an ally, and not an enemy. What you would now do amounts to treason.”

D’Artagnan perceived the force of this reasoning, and was silent.

“But,” said Porthos, “I think I have an idea, in my turn.”

“Silence for Monsieur Porthos’s idea!” said Aramis.

“I will ask leave of absence of Monsieur de Treville, on some pretext or other which you must invent; I am not very clever at pretexts. Milady does not know me; I will get access to her without her suspecting me, and when I catch my beauty, I will strangle her.”

“Well,” replied Athos, “I am not far from approving the idea of Monsieur Porthos.”

“For shame!” said Aramis. “Kill a woman? No, listen to me; I have the true idea.”

“Let us see your idea, Aramis,” said Athos, who felt much deference for the young Musketeer.

“We must inform the queen.”

“Ah, my faith, yes!” said Porthos and d’Artagnan, at the same time; “we are coming nearer to it now.”

“Inform the queen!” said Athos; “and how? Have we relations with the court? Could we send anyone to Paris without its being known in the camp? From here to Paris it is a hundred and forty leagues; before our letter was at Angers we should be in a dungeon.”

"As to remitting a letter with safety to her Majesty," said Aramis, coloring, "I will take that upon myself. I know a clever person at Tours--"

Aramis stopped on seeing Athos smile.

"Well, do you not adopt this means, Athos?" said d'Artagnan.

"I do not reject it altogether," said Athos; "but I wish to remind Aramis that he cannot quit the camp, and that nobody but one of ourselves is trustworthy; that two hours after the messenger has set out, all the Capuchins, all the police, all the black caps of the cardinal, will know your letter by heart, and you and your clever person will be arrested."

"Without reckoning," objected Porthos, "that the queen would save Monsieur de Buckingham, but would take no heed of us."

"Gentlemen," said d'Artagnan, "what Porthos says is full of sense."

"Ah, ah! but what's going on in the city yonder?" said Athos.

"They are beating the general alarm."

The four friends listened, and the sound of the drum plainly reached them.

"You see, they are going to send a whole regiment against us," said Athos.

"You don't think of holding out against a whole regiment, do you?" said Porthos.

"Why not?" said Musketeer. "I feel myself quite in a humor for it; and I would hold out before an army if we had taken the precaution to bring a dozen more bottles of wine."

"Upon my word, the drum draws near," said d'Artagnan.

"Let it come," said Athos. "It is a quarter of an hour's journey from here to the city, consequently a quarter of an hour's journey from the city to hither. That is more than time enough for us to devise a plan. If we go from this place we shall never find another so suitable. Ah, stop! I have it, gentlemen; the right idea has just occurred to me."

"Tell us."

"Allow me to give Grimaud some indispensable orders."

Athos made a sign for his lackey to approach.

"Grimaud," said Athos, pointing to the bodies which lay under the wall of the bastion, "take those gentlemen, set them up against the wall, put their hats upon their heads, and their guns in their hands."

"Oh, the great man!" cried d'Artagnan. "I comprehend now."

"You comprehend?" said Porthos.

“And do you comprehend, Grimaud?” said Aramis.

Grimaud made a sign in the affirmative.

“That’s all that is necessary,” said Athos; “now for my idea.”

“I should like, however, to comprehend,” said Porthos.

“That is useless.”

“Yes, yes! Athos’s idea!” cried Aramis and d’Artagnan, at the same time.

“This Milady, this woman, this creature, this demon, has a brother-in-law, as I think you told me, d’Artagnan?”

“Yes, I know him very well; and I also believe that he has not a very warm affection for his sister-in-law.”

“There is no harm in that. If he detested her, it would be all the better,” replied Athos.

“In that case we are as well off as we wish.”

“And yet,” said Porthos, “I would like to know what Grimaud is about.”

“Silence, Porthos!” said Aramis.

“What is her brother-in-law’s name?”

“Lord de Winter.”

“Where is he now?”

“He returned to London at the first sound of war.”

“Well, there’s just the man we want,” said Athos. “It is he whom we must warn. We will have him informed that his sister-in-law is on the point of having someone assassinated, and beg him not to lose sight of her. There is in London, I hope, some establishment like that of the Magdalens, or of the Repentant Daughters. He must place his sister in one of these, and we shall be in peace.”

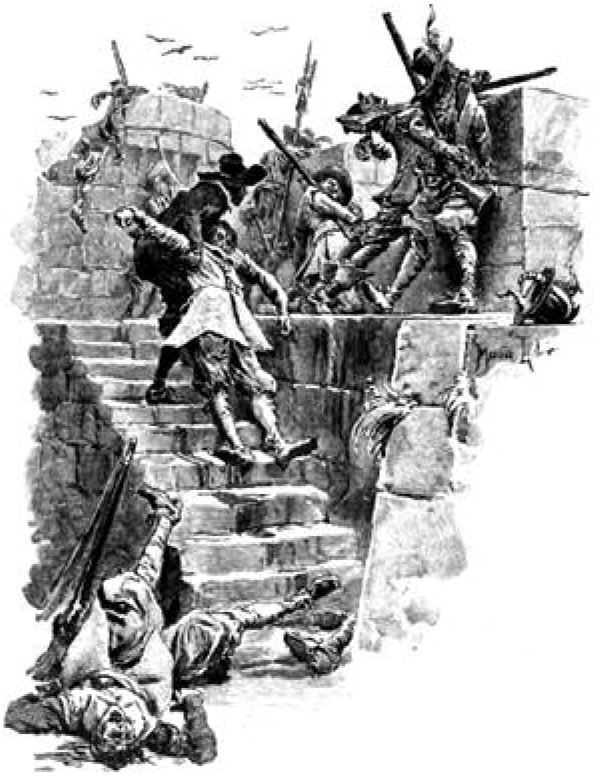

“Yes,” said d’Artagnan, “till she comes out.”

“Ah, my faith!” said Athos, “you require too much, d’Artagnan. I have given you all I have, and I beg leave to tell you that this is the bottom of my sack.”

“But I think it would be still better,” said Aramis, “to inform the queen and Lord de Winter at the same time.”

“Yes; but who is to carry the letter to Tours, and who to London?”

“I answer for Bazin,” said Aramis.

“And I for Planchet,” said d’Artagnan.

“Ay,” said Porthos, “if we cannot leave the camp, our lackeys may.”

“To be sure they may; and this very day we will write the letters,” said Aramis. “Give the lackeys money, and they will start.”

“We will give them money?” replied Athos. “Have you any money?”

The four friends looked at one another, and a cloud came over the brows which but lately had been so cheerful.

“Look out!” cried d’Artagnan, “I see black points and red points moving yonder. Why did you talk of a regiment, Athos? It is a veritable army!”

“My faith, yes,” said Athos; “there they are. See the sneaks come, without drum or trumpet. Ah, ah! have you finished, Grimaud?”

Grimaud made a sign in the affirmative, and pointed to a dozen bodies which he had set up in the most picturesque attitudes. Some carried arms, others seemed to be taking aim, and the remainder appeared merely to be sword in hand.

“Bravo!” said Athos; “that does honor to your imagination.”

“All very well,” said Porthos, “but I should like to understand.”

“Let us decamp first, and you will understand afterward.”

“A moment, gentlemen, a moment; give Grimaud time to clear away the breakfast.”

“Ah, ah!” said Aramis, “the black points and the red points are visibly enlarging. I am of d’Artagnan’s opinion; we have no time to lose in regaining our camp.”

“My faith,” said Athos, “I have nothing to say against a retreat. We bet upon one hour, and we have stayed an hour and a half. Nothing can be said; let us be off, gentlemen, let us be off!”

Grimaud was already ahead, with the basket and the dessert. The four friends followed, ten paces behind him.

“What the devil shall we do now, gentlemen?” cried Athos.

“Have you forgotten anything?” said Aramis.

“The white flag, morbleu! We must not leave a flag in the hands of the enemy, even if that flag be but a napkin.”

And Athos ran back to the bastion, mounted the platform, and bore off the flag; but as the Rochellais had arrived within musket range, they opened a terrible fire upon this man, who appeared to expose himself for pleasure’s sake.

But Athos might be said to bear a charmed life. The balls passed and whistled all around him; not one struck him.

Athos waved his flag, turning his back on the guards of the city, and saluting those of the camp. On both sides loud cries arose--on the one side cries of anger, on the other cries of enthusiasm.

A second discharge followed the first, and three balls, by passing through it, made the napkin really a flag. Cries were heard from the camp, “Come down! come down!”

Athos came down; his friends, who anxiously awaited him, saw him returned with joy.

“Come along, Athos, come along!” cried d’Artagnan; “now we have found everything except money, it would be stupid to be killed.”

But Athos continued to march majestically, whatever remarks his companions made; and they, finding their remarks useless, regulated their pace by his.

Grimaud and his basket were far in advance, out of the range of the balls.

At the end of an instant they heard a furious fusillade.

“What’s that?” asked Porthos, “what are they firing at now? I hear no balls whistle, and I see nobody!”

“They are firing at the corpses,” replied Athos.

“But the dead cannot return their fire.”

“Certainly not! They will then fancy it is an ambuscade, they will deliberate; and by the time they have found out the pleasantry, we shall be out of the range of their balls. That renders it useless to get a pleurisy by too much haste.”

“Oh, I comprehend now,” said the astonished Porthos.

“That’s lucky,” said Athos, shrugging his shoulders.

On their part, the French, on seeing the four friends return at such a step, uttered cries of enthusiasm.

At length a fresh discharge was heard, and this time the balls came rattling among the stones around the four friends, and whistling sharply in their ears. The Rochellais had at last taken possession of the bastion.

“These Rochellais are bungling fellows,” said Athos; “how many have we killed of them--a dozen?”

“Or fifteen.”

“How many did we crush under the wall?”

“Eight or ten.”

“And in exchange for all that not even a scratch! Ah, but what is the matter with your hand, d’Artagnan? It bleeds, seemingly.”

“Oh, it’s nothing,” said d’Artagnan.

“A spent ball?”

“Not even that.”

“What is it, then?”

We have said that Athos loved d’Artagnan like a child, and this somber and inflexible personage felt the anxiety of a parent for the young man.

“Only grazed a little,” replied d’Artagnan; “my fingers were caught between two stones--that of the wall and that of my ring--and the skin was broken.”

“That comes of wearing diamonds, my master,” said Athos, disdainfully.

"Ah, to be sure," cried Porthos, "there is a diamond. Why the devil, then, do we plague ourselves about money, when there is a diamond?"

"Stop a bit!" said Aramis.

"Well thought of, Porthos; this time you have an idea."

"Undoubtedly," said Porthos, drawing himself up at Athos's compliment; "as there is a diamond, let us sell it."

"But," said d'Artagnan, "it is the queen's diamond."

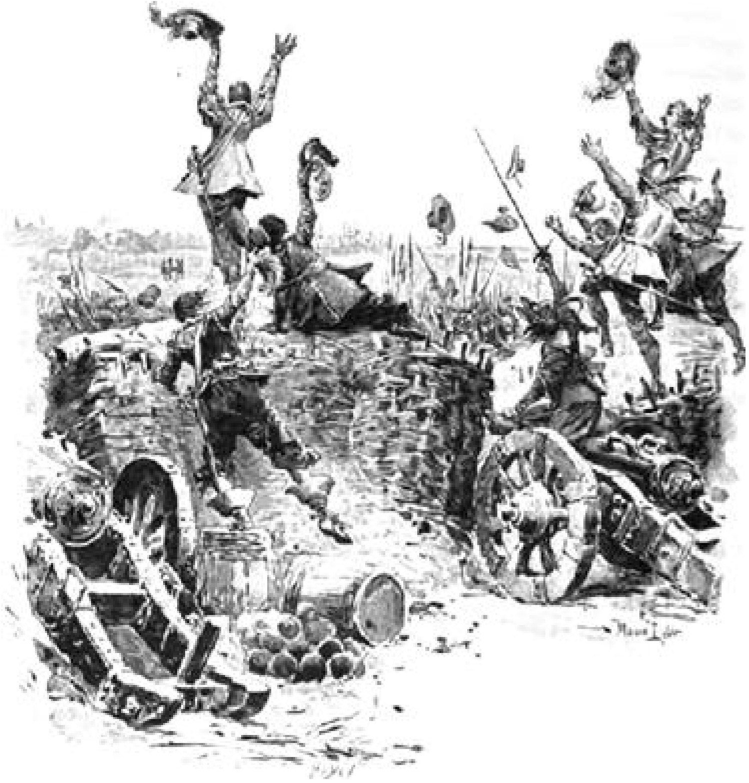

"The stronger reason why it should be sold," replied Athos. The queen saving Monsieur de Buckingham, her lover; nothing more just. The queen saving us, her friends; nothing more moral. Let us sell the diamond. What says Monsieur the Abbe? I don't ask Porthos; his opinion has been given."

"Why, I think," said Aramis, blushing as usual, "that his ring not coming from a mistress, and consequently not being a love token, d'Artagnan may sell it."

"My dear Aramis, you speak like theology personified. Your advice, then, is--"

"To sell the diamond," replied Aramis.

"Well, then," said d'Artagnan, gaily, "let us sell the diamond, and say no more about it."

The fusillade continued; but the four friends were out of reach, and the Rochellais only fired to appease their consciences.

“My faith, it was time that idea came into Porthos’s head. Here we are at the camp; therefore, gentlemen, not a word more of this affair. We are observed; they are coming to meet us. We shall be carried in triumph.”

In fact, as we have said, the whole camp was in motion. More than two thousand persons had assisted, as at a spectacle, in this fortunate but wild undertaking of the four friends--an undertaking of which they were far from suspecting the real motive. Nothing was heard but cries of “Live the Musketeers! Live the Guards!” M. de Busigny was the first to come and shake Athos by the hand, and acknowledge that the wager was lost. The dragoon and the Swiss followed him, and all their comrades followed the dragoon and the Swiss. There was nothing but felicitations, pressures of the hand, and embraces; there was no end to the inextinguishable laughter at the Rochellais. The tumult at length became so great that the cardinal fancied there must be some riot, and sent La Houdiniere, his captain of the Guards, to inquire what was going on.

The affair was described to the messenger with all the effervescence of enthusiasm.

“Well?” asked the cardinal, on seeing La Houdiniere return.

“Well, monseigneur,” replied the latter, “three Musketeers and a Guardsman laid a wager with Monsieur de Busigny that they would go and breakfast in the bastion St. Gervais; and while breakfasting they held it for two hours against the enemy, and have killed I don’t know how many Rochellais.”

“Did you inquire the names of those three Musketeers?”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“What are their names?”

“Messieurs Athos, Porthos, and Aramis.”

“Still my three brave fellows!” murmured the cardinal. “And the Guardsman?”

“d’Artagnan.”

“Still my young scapegrace. Positively, these four men must be on my side.”

The same evening the cardinal spoke to M. de Treville of the exploit of the morning, which was the talk of the whole camp. M. de Treville, who had received the account of the adventure from the mouths of the heroes of it, related it in all its details to his Eminence, not forgetting the episode of the napkin.

"That's well, Monsieur de Treville," said the cardinal; "pray let that napkin be sent to me. I will have three fleur-de-lis embroidered on it in gold, and will give it to your company as a standard."

"Monseigneur," said M. de Treville, "that will be unjust to the Guardsmen. Monsieur d'Artagnan is not with me; he serves under Monsieur Dessessart."

"Well, then, take him," said the cardinal; "when four men are so much attached to one another, it is only fair that they should serve in the same company."

That same evening M. de Treville announced this good news to the three Musketeers and d'Artagnan, inviting all four to breakfast with him next morning.

D'Artagnan was beside himself with joy. We know that the dream of his life had been to become a Musketeer. The three friends were likewise greatly delighted.

"My faith," said d'Artagnan to Athos, "you had a triumphant idea! As you said, we have acquired glory, and were enabled to carry on a conversation of the highest importance."

"Which we can resume now without anybody suspecting us, for, with the help of God, we shall henceforth pass for cardinalists."

That evening d'Artagnan went to present his respects to M. Dessessart, and inform him of his promotion.

M Dessessart, who esteemed d'Artagnan, made him offers of help, as this change would entail expenses for equipment.

D'Artagnan refused; but thinking the opportunity a good one, he begged him to have the diamond he put into his hand valued, as he wished to turn it into money.

The next day, M. Dessessart's valet came to d'Artagnan's lodging, and gave him a bag containing seven thousand livres.

This was the price of the queen's diamond.

CHAPTER 48

A FAMILY AFFAIR

Athos had invented the phrase, family affair. A family affair was not subject to the investigation of the cardinal; a family affair concerned nobody. People might employ themselves in a family affair before all the world. Therefore Athos had invented the phrase, family affair.

Aramis had discovered the idea, the lackeys.

Porthos had discovered the means, the diamond.

D'Artagnan alone had discovered nothing--he, ordinarily the most inventive of the four; but it must be also said that the very name of Milady paralyzed him.

Ah! no, we were mistaken; he had discovered a purchaser for his diamond.

The breakfast at M. de Treville's was as gay and cheerful as possible. D'Artagnan already wore his uniform--for being nearly of the same size as Aramis, and as Aramis was so liberally paid by the publisher who purchased his poem as to allow him to buy everything double, he sold his friend a complete outfit.

D'Artagnan would have been at the height of his wishes if he had not constantly seen Milady like a dark cloud hovering in the horizon.

After breakfast, it was agreed that they should meet again in the evening at Athos's lodging, and there finish their plans.

D'Artagnan passed the day in exhibiting his Musketeer's uniform in every street of the camp.

In the evening, at the appointed hour, the four friends met. There only remained three things to decide--what they should write to Milady's brother; what they should write to the clever person at Tours; and which should be the lackeys to carry the letters.

Everyone offered his own. Athos talked of the discretion of Grimaud, who never spoke a word but when his master unlocked his mouth. Porthos boasted of the strength of Mousqueton, who was big enough to thrash four men of ordinary size. Aramis, confiding in the address of Bazin, made a pompous eulogium on his candidate. Finally, d'Artagnan had entire faith in the bravery of Planchet, and reminded them of the manner in which he had conducted himself in the ticklish affair of Boulogne.

These four virtues disputed the prize for a length of time, and gave birth to magnificent speeches which we do not repeat here for fear they should be deemed too long.

"Unfortunately," said Athos, "he whom we send must possess in himself alone the four qualities united."

"But where is such a lackey to be found?"

"Not to be found!" cried Athos. "I know it well, so take Grimaud."

"Take Mousqueton."

"Take Bazin."

"Take Planchet. Planchet is brave and shrewd; they are two qualities out of the four."

"Gentlemen," said Aramis, "the principal question is not to know which of our four lackeys is the most discreet, the most strong, the most clever, or the most brave; the principal thing is to know which loves money the best."

"What Aramis says is very sensible," replied Athos; "we must speculate upon the faults of people, and not upon their virtues. Monsieur Abbe, you are a great moralist."

"Doubtless," said Aramis, "for we not only require to be well served in order to succeed, but moreover, not to fail; for in case of failure, heads are in question, not for our lackeys--"

"Speak lower, Aramis," said Athos.

"That's wise--not for the lackeys," resumed Aramis, "but for the master--for the masters, we may say. Are our lackeys sufficiently devoted to us to risk their lives for us? No."

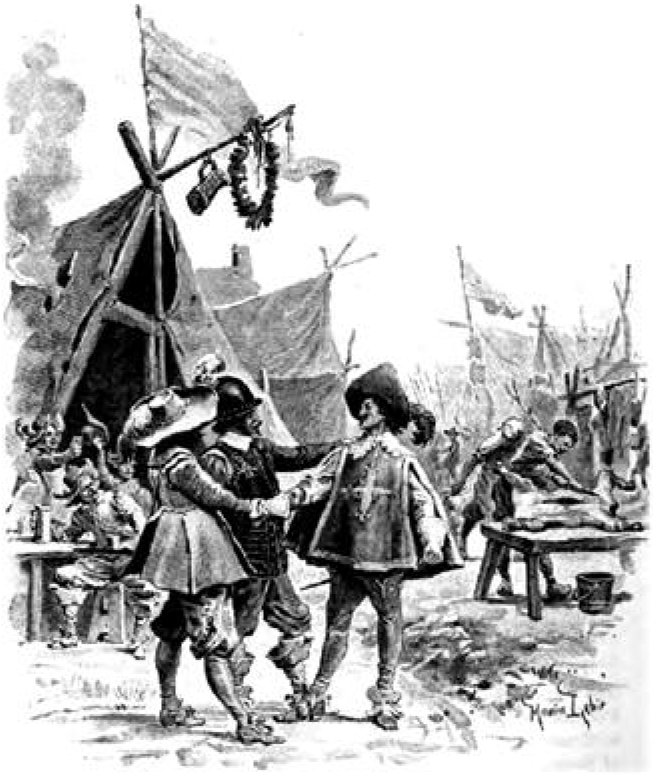

“My faith,” said d’Artagnan. “I would almost answer for Planchet.”

“Well, my dear friend, add to his natural devotedness a good sum of money, and then, instead of answering for him once, answer for him twice.”

“Why, good God! you will be deceived just the same,” said Athos, who was an optimist when things were concerned, and a pessimist when men were in question. “They will promise everything for the sake of the money, and on the road fear will prevent them from acting. Once taken, they will be pressed; when pressed, they will confess everything. What the devil! we are not children. To reach England”--Athos lowered his voice--”all France, covered with spies and creatures of the cardinal, must be crossed. A passport for embarkation must be obtained; and the party must be acquainted with English in order to ask the way to London. Really, I think the thing very difficult.”

“Not at all,” cried d’Artagnan, who was anxious the matter should be accomplished; “on the contrary, I think it very easy. It would be, no doubt, parbleu, if we write to Lord de Winter about affairs of vast importance, of the horrors of the cardinal--”

“Speak lower!” said Athos.

“--of intrigues and secrets of state,” continued d’Artagnan, complying with the recommendation. “There can be no doubt we would all be broken on the wheel; but for God's sake, do not forget, as you yourself said, Athos, that we only write to him concerning a family affair; that we only write to him to entreat that as soon as Milady arrives in London he will put it out of her power to injure us. I will write to him, then, nearly in these terms."

"Let us see," said Athos, assuming in advance a critical look.

"Monsieur and dear friend--"

"Ah, yes! Dear friend to an Englishman," interrupted Athos; "well commenced! Bravo, d'Artagnan! Only with that word you would be quartered instead of being broken on the wheel."

"Well, perhaps. I will say, then, Monsieur, quite short."

"You may even say, My Lord," replied Athos, who stickled for propriety.

"My Lord, do you remember the little goat pasture of the Luxembourg?"

"Good, the Luxembourg! One might believe this is an allusion to the queen-mother! That's ingenious," said Athos.

"Well, then, we will put simply, My Lord, do you remember a certain little enclosure where your life was spared?"

"My dear d'Artagnan, you will never make anything but a very bad secretary. Where your life was spared! For shame! that's unworthy. A man of spirit is not to be reminded of such services. A benefit reproached is an offense committed."

"The devil!" said d'Artagnan, "you are insupportable. If the letter must be written under your censure, my faith, I renounce the task."

"And you will do right. Handle the musket and the sword, my dear fellow. You will come off splendidly at those two exercises; but pass the pen over to Monsieur Abbe. That's his province."

"Ay, ay!" said Porthos; "pass the pen to Aramis, who writes theses in Latin."

"Well, so be it," said d'Artagnan. "Draw up this note for us, Aramis; but by our Holy Father the Pope, cut it short, for I shall prune you in my turn, I warn you."

"I ask no better," said Aramis, with that ingenious air of confidence which every poet has in himself; "but let me be properly acquainted with the subject. I have heard here and there that this sister-in-law was a hussy. I have obtained proof of it by listening to her conversation with the cardinal."

"Lower! SACRE BLEU!" said Athos.

"But," continued Aramis, "the details escape me."

"And me also," said Porthos.

D’Artagnan and Athos looked at each other for some time in silence. At length Athos, after serious reflection and becoming more pale than usual, made a sign of assent to d’Artagnan, who by it understood he was at liberty to speak.

“Well, this is what you have to say,” said d’Artagnan: “My Lord, your sister-in-law is an infamous woman, who wished to have you killed that she might inherit your wealth; but she could not marry your brother, being already married in France, and having been--” d’Artagnan stopped, as if seeking for the word, and looked at Athos.

“Repudiated by her husband,” said Athos.

“Because she had been branded,” continued d’Artagnan.

“Bah!” cried Porthos. “Impossible! What do you say--that she wanted to have her brother-in-law killed?”

“Yes.”

“She was married?” asked Aramis.

“Yes.”

“And her husband found out that she had a fleur-de-lis on her shoulder?” cried Porthos.

“Yes.”

These three yeses had been pronounced by Athos, each with a sadder intonation.

“And who has seen this fleur-de-lis?” inquired Aramis.

“d’Artagnan and I. Or rather, to observe the chronological order, I and d’Artagnan,” replied Athos.

“And does the husband of this frightful creature still live?” said Aramis.

“He still lives.”

“Are you quite sure of it?”

“I am he.”

There was a moment of cold silence, during which everyone was affected according to his nature.

“This time,” said Athos, first breaking the silence, “d’Artagnan has given us an excellent program, and the letter must be written at once.”

“The devil! You are right, Athos,” said Aramis; “and it is a rather difficult matter. The chancellor himself would be puzzled how to write such a letter, and yet the chancellor draws up an official report very readily. Never mind! Be silent, I will write.”

Aramis accordingly took the quill, reflected for a few moments, wrote eight or ten lines in a charming little female hand, and then with a voice soft and slow, as if each word had been scrupulously weighed, he read the following:

"My Lord, The person who writes these few lines had the honor of crossing swords with you in the little enclosure of the Rue d'Enfer. As you have several times since declared yourself the friend of that person, he thinks it his duty to respond to that friendship by sending you important information. Twice you have nearly been the victim of a near relative, whom you believe to be your heir because you are ignorant that before she contracted a marriage in England she was already married in France. But the third time, which is the present, you may succumb. Your relative left La Rochelle for England during the night. Watch her arrival, for she has great and terrible projects. If you require to know positively what she is capable of, read her past history on her left shoulder."

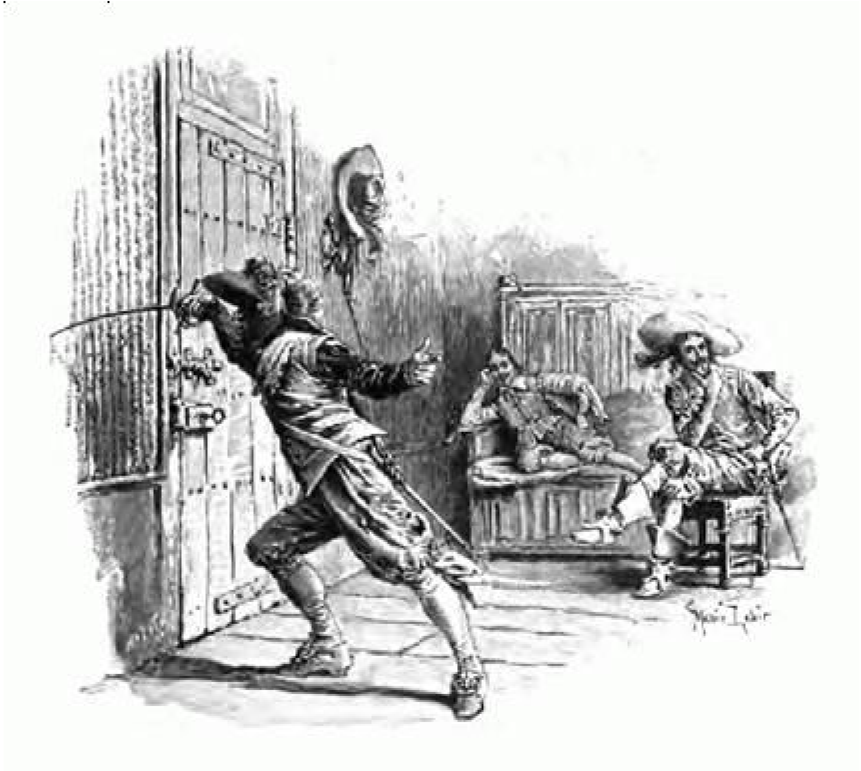

"Well, now that will do wonderfully well," said Athos. "My dear Aramis, you have the pen of a secretary of state. Lord de Winter will now be upon his guard if the letter should reach him; and even if it should fall into the hands of the cardinal, we shall not be compromised. But as the lackey who goes may make us believe he has been to London and may stop at

Chatellerault, let us give him only half the sum promised him, with the letter, with an agreement that he shall have the other half in exchange for the reply. Have you the diamond?” continued Athos.

“I have what is still better. I have the price;” and d’Artagnan threw the bag upon the table. At the sound of the gold Aramis raised his eyes and Porthos started. As to Athos, he remained unmoved.

“How much in that little bag?”

“Seven thousand livres, in louis of twelve francs.”

“Seven thousand livres!” cried Porthos. “That poor little diamond was worth seven thousand livres?”

“It appears so,” said Athos, “since here they are. I don’t suppose that our friend d’Artagnan has added any of his own to the amount.”

“But, gentlemen, in all this,” said d’Artagnan, “we do not think of the queen. Let us take some heed of the welfare of her dear Buckingham. That is the least we owe her.”

“That’s true,” said Athos; “but that concerns Aramis.”

“Well,” replied the latter, blushing, “what must I say?”

“Oh, that’s simple enough!” replied Athos. “Write a second letter for that clever personage who lives at Tours.”

Aramis resumed his pen, reflected a little, and wrote the following lines, which he immediately submitted to the approbation of his friends.

“My dear cousin.”

“Ah, ah!” said Athos. “This clever person is your relative, then?”

“Cousin-german.”

“Go on, to your cousin, then!”

Aramis continued:

“My dear Cousin, His Eminence, the cardinal, whom God preserve for the happiness of France and the confusion of the enemies of the kingdom, is on the point of putting an end to the hectic rebellion of La Rochelle. It is probable that the succor of the English fleet will never even arrive in sight of the place. I will even venture to say that I am certain M. de Buckingham will be prevented from setting out by some great event. His Eminence is the most illustrious politician of times past, of times present, and probably of times to come. He would extinguish the sun if the sun incommoded him. Give these happy tidings to your sister, my dear cousin. I have dreamed that the unlucky Englishman was dead. I cannot recollect whether it was by steel or by poison; only of this I am sure, I have dreamed he was dead, and you know my dreams never deceive me. Be assured, then, of seeing me soon return.”

“Capital!” cried Athos; “you are the king of poets, my dear Aramis. You speak like the Apocalypse, and you are as true as the Gospel. There is nothing now to do but to put the address to this letter.”

“That is easily done,” said Aramis.

He folded the letter fancifully, and took up his pen and wrote:

“To Mlle. Michon, seamstress, Tours.”

The three friends looked at one another and laughed; they were caught.

“Now,” said Aramis, “you will please to understand, gentlemen, that Bazin alone can carry this letter to Tours. My cousin knows nobody but Bazin, and places confidence in nobody but him; any other person would fail. Besides, Bazin is ambitious and learned; Bazin has read history, gentlemen, he knows that Sixtus the Fifth became Pope after having kept pigs. Well, as he means to enter the Church at the same time as myself, he does not despair of becoming Pope in his turn, or at least a cardinal. You can understand that a man who has such views will never allow himself to be taken, or if taken, will undergo martyrdom rather than speak.”

“Very well,” said d’Artagnan, “I consent to Bazin with all my heart, but grant me Planchet. Milady had him one day turned out of doors, with sundry blows of a good stick to accelerate his motions. Now, Planchet has an excellent memory; and I will be bound that sooner than relinquish any possible means of vengeance, he will allow himself to be beaten to death. If your arrangements at Tours are your arrangements, Aramis, those of London are mine. I request, then, that Planchet may be chosen, more particularly as he has already been to London with me, and knows how to speak correctly: London, sir, if you please, and my master, Lord d’Artagnan. With that you may be satisfied he can make his way, both going and returning.”

“In that case,” said Athos, “Planchet must receive seven hundred livres for going, and seven hundred livres for coming back; and Bazin, three hundred livres for going, and three hundred livres for returning--that will reduce the sum to five thousand livres. We will each take a thousand livres to be employed as seems good, and we will leave a fund of a thousand livres under the guardianship of Monsieur Abbe here, for extraordinary occasions or common wants. Will that do?”

“My dear Athos,” said Aramis, “you speak like Nestor, who was, as everyone knows, the wisest among the Greeks.”

“Well, then,” said Athos, “it is agreed. Planchet and Bazin shall go. Everything considered, I am not sorry to retain Grimaud; he is accustomed to my ways, and I am particular. Yesterday’s affair must have shaken him a little; his voyage would upset him quite.”

Planchet was sent for, and instructions were given him. The matter had been named to him by d’Artagnan, who in the first place pointed out the money to him, then the glory, and then the danger.

“I will carry the letter in the lining of my coat,” said Planchet; “and if I am taken I will swallow it.”

“Well, but then you will not be able to fulfill your commission,” said d’Artagnan.

“You will give me a copy this evening, which I shall know by heart tomorrow.”

D’Artagnan looked at his friends, as if to say, “Well, what did I tell you?”

“Now,” continued he, addressing Planchet, “you have eight days to get an interview with Lord de Winter; you have eight days to return--in all sixteen days. If, on the sixteenth day after your departure, at eight o’clock in the evening you are not here, no money--even if it be but five minutes past eight.”

“Then, monsieur,” said Planchet, “you must buy me a watch.”

“Take this,” said Athos, with his usual careless generosity, giving him his own, “and be a good lad. Remember, if you talk, if you babble, if you get drunk, you risk your master’s head, who has so much confidence in your fidelity, and who answers for you. But remember, also, that if by your fault any evil happens to d’Artagnan, I will find you, wherever you may be, for the purpose of ripping up your belly.”

“Oh, monsieur!” said Planchet, humiliated by the suspicion, and moreover, terrified at the calm air of the Musketeer.

“And I,” said Porthos, rolling his large eyes, “remember, I will skin you alive.”

“Ah, monsieur!”

“And I,” said Aramis, with his soft, melodius voice, “remember that I will roast you at a slow fire, like a savage.”

“Ah, monsieur!”

Planchet began to weep. We will not venture to say whether it was from terror created by the threats or from tenderness at seeing four friends so closely united.

D’Artagnan took his hand. “See, Planchet,” said he, “these gentlemen only say this out of affection for me, but at bottom they all like you.”

“Ah, monsieur,” said Planchet, “I will succeed or I will consent to be cut in quarters; and if they do cut me in quarters, be assured that not a morsel of me will speak.”

It was decided that Planchet should set out the next day, at eight o’clock in the morning, in order, as he had said, that he might during the night learn the letter by heart. He gained just twelve hours by this engagement; he was to be back on the sixteenth day, by eight o’clock in the evening.

In the morning, as he was mounting his horse, d’Artagnan, who felt at the bottom of his heart a partiality for the duke, took Planchet aside.

“Listen,” said he to him. “When you have given the letter to Lord de Winter and he has read it, you will further say to him: Watch over his Grace Lord Buckingham, for they wish to assassinate him. But this, Planchet, is so serious and important that I have not informed my friends that I would entrust this secret to you; and for a captain’s commission I would not write it.”

“Be satisfied, monsieur,” said Planchet, “you shall see if confidence can be placed in me.”

Mounted on an excellent horse, which he was to leave at the end of twenty leagues in order to take the post, Planchet set off at a gallop, his spirits a little depressed by the triple promise made him by the Musketeers, but otherwise as light-hearted as possible.

Bazin set out the next day for Tours, and was allowed eight days for performing his commission.

The four friends, during the period of these two absences, had, as may well be supposed, the eye on the watch, the nose to the wind, and the ear on the hark. Their days were passed in endeavoring to catch all that was said, in observing the proceeding of the cardinal, and in looking out for all the couriers who arrived. More than once an involuntary trembling seized them when called upon for some unexpected service. They had, besides, to look constantly to their own proper safety; Milady was a phantom which, when it had once appeared to people, did not allow them to sleep very quietly.

On the morning of the eighth day, Bazin, fresh as ever, and smiling, according to custom, entered the cabaret of the Parpaillot as the four friends were sitting down to breakfast, saying, as had been agreed upon: “Monsieur Aramis, the answer from your cousin.”

The four friends exchanged a joyful glance; half of the work was done. It is true, however, that it was the shorter and easier part.

Aramis, blushing in spite of himself, took the letter, which was in a large, coarse hand and not particular for its orthography.

“Good God!” cried he, laughing, “I quite despair of my poor Michon; she will never write like Monsieur de Voiture.”

“What does you mean by boor Michon?” said the Swiss, who was chatting with the four friends when the letter came.

[redacted]

“Oh, pardieu, less than nothing,” said Aramis; “a charming little seamstress, whom I love dearly and from whose hand I requested a few lines as a sort of keepsake.”

“The duvil!” said the Swiss, “if she is as great a lady as her writing is large, you are a lucky fellow, gomrade!”

Aramis read the letter, and passed it to Athos.

“See what she writes to me, Athos,” said he.

Athos cast a glance over the epistle, and to disperse all the suspicions that might have been created, read aloud:

“My cousin, My sister and I are skillful in interpreting dreams, and even entertain great fear of them; but of yours it may be said, I hope, every dream is an illusion. Adieu! Take care of yourself, and act so that we may from time to time hear you spoken of.

“Marie Michon”

“And what dream does she mean?” asked the dragoon, who had approached during the reading.

“Yez; what’s the dream?” said the Swiss.

“Well, pardieu!” said Aramis, “it was only this: I had a dream, and I related it to her.”

“Yez, yez,” said the Swiss; “it’s simple enough to dell a dream, but I neffer dream.”

“You are very fortunate,” said Athos, rising; “I wish I could say as much!”

“Neffer,” replied the Swiss, enchanted that a man like Athos could envy him anything. “Neffer, neffer!”

D’Artagnan, seeing Athos rise, did likewise, took his arm, and went out.

Porthos and Aramis remained behind to encounter the jokes of the dragoon and the Swiss.

As to Bazin, he went and lay down on a truss of straw; and as he had more imagination than the Swiss, he dreamed that Aramis, having become pope, adorned his head with a cardinal’s hat.

But, as we have said, Bazin had not, by his fortunate return, removed more than a part of the uneasiness which weighed upon the four friends. The days of expectation are long, and d’Artagnan, in particular, would have wagered that the days were forty-four hours. He forgot the necessary slowness of navigation; he exaggerated to himself the power of Milady. He credited this woman, who appeared to him the equal of a demon, with agents as supernatural as herself; at the least noise, he imagined himself about to be arrested, and that Planchet was being brought back to be confronted with himself and his friends. Still further, his confidence in the worthy Picard, at one time so great, diminished day by day. This anxiety became so great that it even extended to Aramis and Porthos. Athos alone remained unmoved, as if no danger hovered over him, and as if he breathed his customary atmosphere.

On the sixteenth day, in particular, these signs were so strong in d’Artagnan and his two friends that they could not remain quiet in one place, and wandered about like ghosts on the road by which Planchet was expected.

“Really,” said Athos to them, “you are not men but children, to let a woman terrify you so! And what does it amount to, after all? To be imprisoned. Well, but we should be taken out of prison; Madame Bonacieux was released. To be decapitated? Why, every day in the trenches we go cheerfully to expose ourselves to worse than that--for a bullet may break a leg, and I am convinced a surgeon would give us more pain in cutting off a thigh than an executioner in cutting off a head. Wait quietly, then; in two hours, in four, in six hours at latest, Planchet will be here. He promised to be here, and I have very great faith in Planchet, who appears to me to be a very good lad.”

“But if he does not come?” said d’Artagnan.

“Well, if he does not come, it will be because he has been delayed, that’s all. He may have fallen from his horse, he may have cut a caper from the deck; he may have traveled so fast against the wind as to have brought on a violent catarrh. Eh, gentlemen, let us reckon upon accidents! Life is a chaplet of little miseries which the philosopher counts with a smile. Be philosophers, as I am, gentlemen; sit down at the table and let us drink. Nothing makes the future look so bright as surveying it through a glass of chambertin.”

“That’s all very well,” replied d’Artagnan; “but I am tired of fearing when I open a fresh bottle that the wine may come from the cellar of Milady.”

“You are very fastidious,” said Athos; “such a beautiful woman!”

“A woman of mark!” said Porthos, with his loud laugh.

Athos started, passed his hand over his brow to remove the drops of perspiration that burst forth, and rose in his turn with a nervous movement he could not repress.

The day, however, passed away; and the evening came on slowly, but finally it came. The bars were filled with drinkers. Athos, who had pocketed his share of the diamond, seldom quit the Parpaillot. He had found in M. de Busigny, who, by the by, had given them a magnificent dinner, a partner worthy of his company. They were playing together, as usual, when seven o’clock sounded; the patrol was heard passing to double the posts. At half past seven the retreat was sounded.

“We are lost,” said d’Artagnan, in the ear of Athos.

“You mean to say we have lost,” said Athos, quietly, drawing four pistoles from his pocket and throwing them upon the table. “Come, gentlemen,” said he, “they are beating the tattoo. Let us to bed!”

And Athos went out of the Parpaillot, followed by d’Artagnan. Aramis came behind, giving his arm to Porthos. Aramis mumbled verses to himself, and Porthos from time to time pulled a hair or two from his mustache, in sign of despair.

But all at once a shadow appeared in the darkness the outline of which was familiar to d’Artagnan, and a well-known voice said, “Monsieur, I have brought your cloak; it is chilly this evening.”

“Planchet!” cried d’Artagnan, beside himself with joy.

“Planchet!” repeated Aramis and Porthos.

“Well, yes, Planchet, to be sure,” said Athos, “what is there so astonishing in that? He promised to be back by eight o’clock, and eight is striking. Bravo, Planchet, you are a lad of your word, and if ever you leave your master, I will promise you a place in my service.”

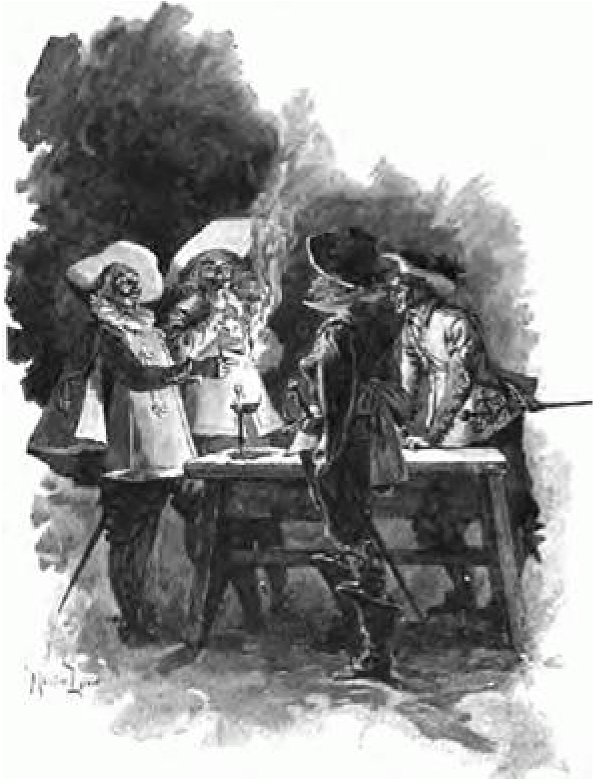

"Oh, no, never," said Planchet, "I will never leave Monsieur d'Artagnan."

At the same time d'Artagnan felt that Planchet slipped a note into his hand.

D'Artagnan felt a strong inclination to embrace Planchet as he had embraced him on his departure; but he feared lest this mark of affection, bestowed upon his lackey in the open street, might appear extraordinary to passers-by, and he restrained himself.

"I have the note," said he to Athos and to his friends.

"That's well," said Athos, "let us go home and read it."

The note burned the hand of d'Artagnan. He wished to hasten their steps; but Athos took his arm and passed it under his own, and the young man was forced to regulate his pace by that of his friend.

At length they reached the tent, lit a lamp, and while Planchet stood at the entrance that the four friends might not be surprised, d'Artagnan, with a trembling hand, broke the seal and opened the so anxiously expected letter.

It contained half a line, in a hand perfectly British, and with a conciseness as perfectly Spartan:

Thank you; be easy.

d'Artagnan translated this for the others.

Athos took the letter from the hands of d'Artagnan, approached the lamp, set fire to the paper, and did not let go till it was reduced to a cinder.

Then, calling Planchet, he said, "Now, my lad, you may claim your seven hundred livres, but you did not run much risk with such a note as that."

"I am not to blame for having tried every means to compress it," said Planchet.

"Well!" cried d'Artagnan, "tell us all about it."

"Dame, that's a long job, monsieur."

"You are right, Planchet," said Athos; "besides, the tattoo has been sounded, and we should be observed if we kept a light burning much longer than the others."

"So be it," said d'Artagnan. "Go to bed, Planchet, and sleep soundly."

"My faith, monsieur! that will be the first time I have done so for sixteen days."

"And me, too!" said d'Artagnan.

"And me, too!" said Porthos.

"And me, too!" said Aramis.

“Well, if you will have the truth, and me, too!” said Athos.

CHAPTER 49

FATALITY

Meantime Milady, drunk with passion, roaring on the deck like a lioness that has been embarked, had been tempted to throw herself into the sea that she might regain the coast, for she could not get rid of the thought that she had been insulted by d'Artagnan, threatened by Athos, and that she had quit France without being revenged on them. This idea soon became so insupportable to her that at the risk of whatever terrible consequences might result to herself from it, she implored the captain to put her on shore; but the captain, eager to escape from his false position--placed between French and English cruisers, like the bat between the mice and the birds--was in great haste to regain England, and positively refused to obey what he took for a woman's caprice, promising his passenger, who had been particularly recommended to him by the cardinal, to land her, if the sea and the French permitted him, at one of the ports of Brittany, either at Lorient or Brest. But the wind was contrary, the sea bad; they tacked and kept offshore. Nine days after leaving the Charente, pale with fatigue and vexation, Milady saw only the blue coasts of Finisterre appear.

She calculated that to cross this corner of France and return to the cardinal it would take her at least three days. Add another day for landing, and that would make four. Add these four to the nine others, that would be thirteen days lost--thirteen days, during which so many important events might pass in London. She reflected likewise that the cardinal would be furious at her return, and consequently would be more disposed to listen to the complaints brought against her than to the accusations she brought against others.

She allowed the vessel to pass Lorient and Brest without repeating her request to the captain, who, on his part, took care not to remind her of it. Milady therefore continued her voyage, and on the very day that Planchet embarked at Portsmouth for France, the messenger of his Eminence entered the port in triumph.

All the city was agitated by an extraordinary movement. Four large vessels, recently built, had just been launched. At the end of the jetty, his clothes richly laced with gold, glittering, as was customary with him, with diamonds and precious stones, his hat ornamented with a white feather which drooped upon his shoulder, Buckingham was seen surrounded by a staff almost as brilliant as himself.

It was one of those rare and beautiful days in winter when England remembers that there is a sun. The star of day, pale but nevertheless still splendid, was setting in the horizon, glorifying at once the heavens and the sea with bands of fire, and casting upon the towers and the old houses of the city a last ray of gold which made the windows sparkle like the reflection of a conflagration. Breathing that sea breeze, so much more invigorating and balsamic as the land is approached, contemplating all the power of those preparations she was commissioned to destroy, all the power of that army which she was to combat alone--she, a woman with a few bags of gold--Milady compared herself mentally to Judith, the terrible Jewess, when she penetrated the camp of the Assyrians and beheld the enormous mass of chariots, horses, men, and arms, which a gesture of her hand was to dissipate like a cloud of smoke.

They entered the roadstead; but as they drew near in order to cast anchor, a little cutter, looking like a coastguard formidably armed, approached the merchant vessel and dropped into the sea a boat which directed its course to the ladder. This boat contained an officer, a mate, and eight rowers. The officer alone went on board, where he was received with all the deference inspired by the uniform.

The officer conversed a few instants with the captain, gave him several papers, of which he was the bearer, to read, and upon the order of the merchant captain the whole crew of the vessel, both passengers and sailors, were called upon deck.

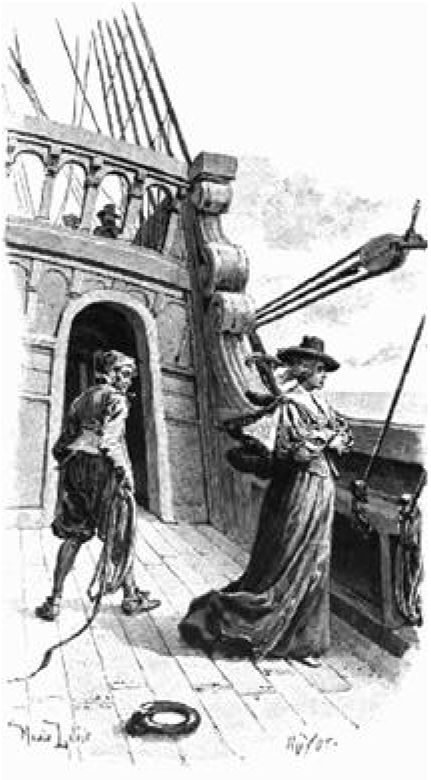

When this species of summons was made the officer inquired aloud the point of the brig’s departure, its route, its landings; and to all these questions the captain replied without difficulty and without hesitation. Then the officer began to pass in review all the people, one after the other, and stopping when he came to Milady, surveyed her very closely, but without addressing a single word to her.

He then returned to the captain, said a few words to him, and as if from that moment the vessel was under his command, he ordered a maneuver which the crew executed immediately. Then the vessel resumed its course, still escorted by the little cutter, which sailed side by side with it, menacing it with the mouths of its six cannon. The boat followed in the wake of the ship, a speck near the enormous mass.

During the examination of Milady by the officer, as may well be imagined, Milady on her part was not less scrutinizing in her glances. But however great was the power of this woman with eyes of flame in reading the hearts of those whose secrets she wished to divine, she met this time with a countenance of such impassivity that no discovery followed her investigation. The officer who had stopped in front of her and studied her with so much care might have been twenty-five or twenty-six years of age. He was of pale complexion, with clear blue eyes, rather deeply set; his mouth, fine and well cut, remained motionless in its correct lines; his chin, strongly marked, denoted that strength of will which in the ordinary Britannic type denotes mostly nothing but obstinacy; a brow a little receding, as is proper for poets, enthusiasts, and soldiers, was scarcely shaded by short thin hair which, like the beard which covered the lower part of his face, was of a beautiful deep chestnut color.

When they entered the port, it was already night. The fog increased the darkness, and formed round the sternlights and lanterns of the jetty a circle like that which surrounds the moon when the weather threatens to become rainy. The air they breathed was heavy, damp, and cold.

Milady, that woman so courageous and firm, shivered in spite of herself.

The officer desired to have Milady’s packages pointed out to him, and ordered them to be placed in the boat. When this operation was complete, he invited her to descend by offering her his hand.

Milady looked at this man, and hesitated. “Who are you, sir,” asked she, “who has the kindness to trouble yourself so particularly on my account?”

“You may perceive, madame, by my uniform, that I am an officer in the English navy,” replied the young man.

“But is it the custom for the officers in the English navy to place themselves at the service of their female compatriots when they land in a port of Great Britain, and carry their gallantry so far as to conduct them ashore?”

“Yes, madame, it is the custom, not from gallantry but prudence, that in time of war foreigners should be conducted to particular hotels, in order that they may remain under the eye of the government until full information can be obtained about them.”

These words were pronounced with the most exact politeness and the most perfect calmness. Nevertheless, they had not the power of convincing Milady.

“But I am not a foreigner, sir,” said she, with an accent as pure as ever was heard between Portsmouth and Manchester; “my name is Lady Clarik, and this measure--”

“This measure is general, madame; and you will seek in vain to evade it.”

“I will follow you, then, sir.”

Accepting the hand of the officer, she began the descent of the ladder, at the foot of which the boat waited. The officer followed her. A large cloak was spread at the stern; the officer requested her to sit down upon this cloak, and placed himself beside her.

“Row!” said he to the sailors.

The eight oars fell at once into the sea, making but a single sound, giving but a single stroke, and the boat seemed to fly over the surface of the water.

In five minutes they gained the land.

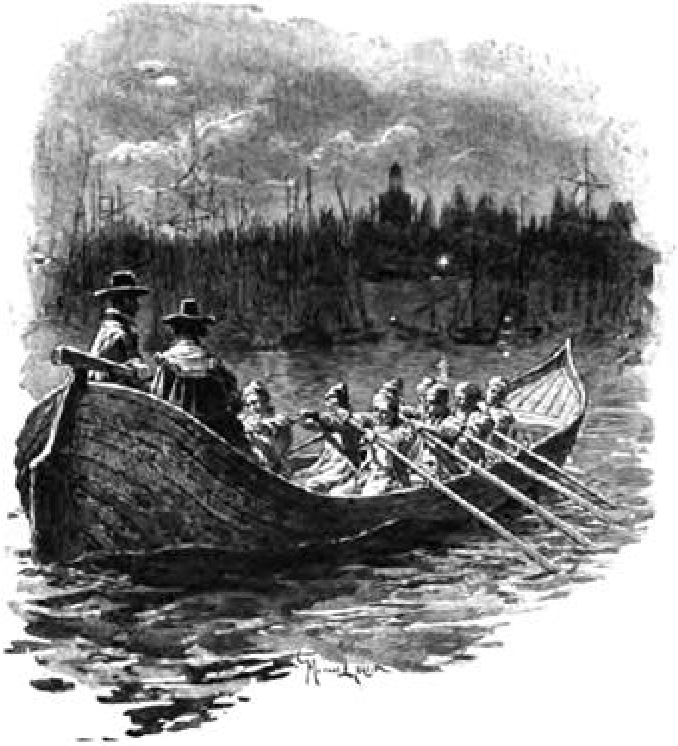

The officer leaped to the pier, and offered his hand to Milady. A carriage was in waiting.

“Is this carriage for us?” asked Milady.

“Yes, madame,” replied the officer.

“The hotel, then, is far away?”

“At the other end of the town.”

“Very well,” said Milady; and she resolutely entered the carriage.

The officer saw that the baggage was fastened carefully behind the carriage; and this operation ended, he took his place beside Milady, and shut the door.

Immediately, without any order being given or his place of destination indicated, the coachman set off at a rapid pace, and plunged into the streets of the city.

So strange a reception naturally gave Milady ample matter for reflection; so seeing that the young officer did not seem at all disposed for conversation, she reclined in her corner of the carriage, and one after the other passed in review all the surmises which presented themselves to her mind.

At the end of a quarter of an hour, however, surprised at the length of the journey, she leaned forward toward the door to see whither she was being conducted. Houses were no longer to be seen; trees appeared in the darkness like great black phantoms chasing one another. Milady shuddered.

“But we are no longer in the city, sir,” said she.

The young officer preserved silence.

“I beg you to understand, sir, I will go no farther unless you tell me whither you are taking me.”

This threat brought no reply.

“Oh, this is too much,” cried Milady. “Help! help!”

No voice replied to hers; the carriage continued to roll on with rapidity; the officer seemed a statue.

Milady looked at the officer with one of those terrible expressions peculiar to her countenance, and which so rarely failed of their effect; anger made her eyes flash in the darkness.

The young man remained immovable.

Milady tried to open the door in order to throw herself out.

“Take care, madame,” said the young man, coolly, “you will kill yourself in jumping.”

Milady reseated herself, foaming. The officer leaned forward, looked at her in his turn, and appeared surprised to see that face, just before so beautiful, distorted with passion and almost hideous. The artful creature at once comprehended that she was injuring herself by allowing him thus to read her soul; she collected her features, and in a complaining voice said: “In the name of heaven, sir, tell me if it is to you, if it is to your government, if it is to an enemy I am to attribute the violence that is done me?”

“No violence will be offered to you, madame, and what happens to you is the result of a very simple measure which we are obliged to adopt with all who land in England.”

“Then you don’t know me, sir?”

“It is the first time I have had the honor of seeing you.”

“And on your honor, you have no cause of hatred against me?”

“None, I swear to you.”

There was so much serenity, coolness, mildness even, in the voice of the young man, that Milady felt reassured.

At length after a journey of nearly an hour, the carriage stopped before an iron gate, which closed an avenue leading to a castle severe in form, massive, and isolated. Then, as the wheels rolled over a fine gravel, Milady could hear a vast roaring, which she at once recognized as the noise of the sea dashing against some steep cliff.

The carriage passed under two arched gateways, and at length stopped in a court large, dark, and square. Almost immediately the door of the carriage was opened, the young man sprang lightly out and presented his hand to Milady, who leaned upon it, and in her turn alighted with tolerable calmness.

“Still, then, I am a prisoner,” said Milady, looking around her, and bringing back her eyes with a most gracious smile to the young officer; “but I feel assured it will not be for long,” added she. “My own conscience and your politeness, sir, are the guarantees of that.”

However flattering this compliment, the officer made no reply; but drawing from his belt a little silver whistle, such as boatswains use in ships of war, he whistled three times, with three different modulations. Immediately several men appeared, who unharnessed the smoking horses, and put the carriage into a coach house.

Then the officer, with the same calm politeness, invited his prisoner to enter the house. She, with a still-smiling countenance, took his arm, and passed with him under a low arched door, which by a vaulted passage, lighted only at the farther end, led to a stone staircase around an angle of stone. They then came to a massive door, which after the introduction into the lock of a key which the young man carried with him, turned heavily upon its hinges, and disclosed the chamber destined for Milady.

With a single glance the prisoner took in the apartment in its minutest details. It was a chamber whose furniture was at once appropriate for a prisoner or a free man; and yet bars at the windows and outside bolts at the door decided the question in favor of the prison.

In an instant all the strength of mind of this creature, though drawn from the most vigorous sources, abandoned her; she sank into a large easy chair, with her arms crossed, her head lowered, and expecting every instant to see a judge enter to interrogate her.

But no one entered except two or three marines, who brought her trunks and packages, deposited them in a corner, and retired without speaking.

The officer superintended all these details with the same calmness Milady had constantly seen in him, never pronouncing a word himself, and making himself obeyed by a gesture of his hand or a sound of his whistle.

It might have been said that between this man and his inferiors spoken language did not exist, or had become useless.

At length Milady could hold out no longer; she broke the silence. “In the name of heaven, sir,” cried she, “what means all that is passing? Put an end to my doubts; I have courage enough for any danger I can foresee, for every misfortune which I understand. Where am I, and why am I here? If I am free, why these bars and these doors? If I am a prisoner, what crime have I committed?”

“You are here in the apartment destined for you, madame. I received orders to go and take charge of you on the sea, and to conduct you to this castle. This order I believe I have accomplished with all the exactness of a soldier, but also with the courtesy of a gentleman. There terminates, at least to the present moment, the duty I had to fulfill toward you; the rest concerns another person.”

“And who is that other person?” asked Milady, warmly. “Can you not tell me his name?”

At the moment a great jingling of spurs was heard on the stairs. Some voices passed and faded away, and the sound of a single footstep approached the door.

“That person is here, madame,” said the officer, leaving the entrance open, and drawing himself up in an attitude of respect.

At the same time the door opened; a man appeared on the threshold. He was without a hat, carried a sword, and flourished a handkerchief in his hand.

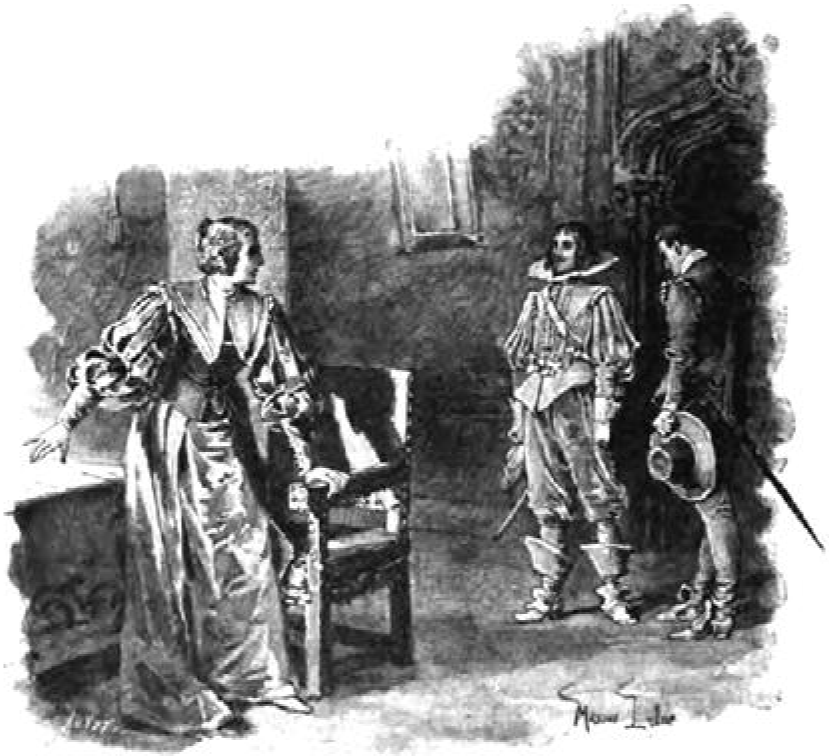

Milady thought she recognized this shadow in the gloom; she supported herself with one hand upon the arm of the chair, and advanced her head as if to meet a certainty.

The stranger advanced slowly, and as he advanced, after entering into the circle of light projected by the lamp, Milady involuntarily drew back.

Then when she had no longer any doubt, she cried, in a state of stupor, “What, my brother, is it you?”

“Yes, fair lady!” replied Lord de Winter, making a bow, half courteous, half ironical; “it is I, myself.”

“But this castle, then?”

“Is mine.”

“This chamber?”

“Is yours.”

“I am, then, your prisoner?”

“Nearly so.”

“But this is a frightful abuse of power!”

“No high-sounding words! Let us sit down and chat quietly, as brother and sister ought to do.”

Then, turning toward the door, and seeing that the young officer was waiting for his last orders, he said. “All is well, I thank you; now leave us alone, Mr. Felton.”

CHAPTER 50

CHAT BETWEEN BROTHER AND SISTER

During the time which Lord de Winter took to shut the door, close a shutter, and draw a chair near to his sister-in-law’s fauteuil, Milady, anxiously thoughtful, plunged her glance into the depths of possibility, and discovered all the plan, of which she could not even obtain a glance as long as she was ignorant into whose hands she had fallen. She knew her brother-in-law to be a worthy gentleman, a bold hunter, an intrepid player, enterprising with women, but by no means remarkable for his skill in intrigues. How had he discovered her arrival, and caused her to be seized? Why did he detain her?

Athos had dropped some words which proved that the conversation she had with the cardinal had fallen into outside ears; but she could not suppose that he had dug a countermine so promptly and so boldly. She rather feared that her preceding operations in England might have been discovered. Buckingham might have guessed that it was she who had cut off the two studs, and avenge himself for that little treachery; but Buckingham was incapable of going to any excess against a woman, particularly if that woman was supposed to have acted from a feeling of jealousy.

This supposition appeared to her most reasonable. It seemed to her that they wanted to revenge the past, and not to anticipate the future. At all events, she congratulated herself upon having fallen into the hands of her brother-in-law, with whom she reckoned she could deal very easily, rather than into the hands of an acknowledged and intelligent enemy.

“Yes, let us chat, brother,” said she, with a kind of cheerfulness, decided as she was to draw from the conversation, in spite of all the dissimulation Lord de Winter could bring, the revelations of which she stood in need to regulate her future conduct.

“You have, then, decided to come to England again,” said Lord de Winter, “in spite of the resolutions you so often expressed in Paris never to set your feet on British ground?”

Milady replied to this question by another question. “To begin with, tell me,” said she, “how have you watched me so closely as to be aware beforehand not only of my arrival, but even of the day, the hour, and the port at which I should arrive?”

Lord de Winter adopted the same tactics as Milady, thinking that as his sister-in-law employed them they must be the best.

“But tell me, my dear sister,” replied he, “what makes you come to England?”

“I come to see you,” replied Milady, without knowing how much she aggravated by this reply the suspicions to which d’Artagnan’s letter had given birth in the mind of her brother-in-law, and only desiring to gain the good will of her auditor by a falsehood.

“Ah, to see me?” said de Winter, cunningly.

“To be sure, to see you. What is there astonishing in that?”

“And you had no other object in coming to England but to see me?”

“No.”

“So it was for me alone you have taken the trouble to cross the Channel?”

“For you alone.”

“The deuce! What tenderness, my sister!”

“But am I not your nearest relative?” demanded Milady, with a tone of the most touching ingenuousness.

“And my only heir, are you not?” said Lord de Winter in his turn, fixing his eyes on those of Milady.

Whatever command she had over herself, Milady could not help starting; and as in pronouncing the last words Lord de Winter placed his hand upon the arm of his sister, this start did not escape him.

In fact, the blow was direct and severe. The first idea that occurred to Milady’s mind was that she had been betrayed by Kitty, and that she had recounted to the baron the selfish aversion toward himself of which she had imprudently allowed some marks to escape before her servant. She also recollected the furious and imprudent attack she had made upon d’Artagnan when he spared the life of her brother.

“I do not understand, my Lord,” said she, in order to gain time and make her adversary speak out. “What do you mean to say? Is there any secret meaning concealed beneath your words?”

“Oh, my God, no!” said Lord de Winter, with apparent good nature. “You wish to see me, and you come to England. I learn this desire, or rather I suspect that you feel it; and in order to spare you all the annoyances of a nocturnal arrival in a port and all the fatigues of landing, I send one of my officers to meet you, I place a carriage at his orders, and he brings you hither to this castle, of which I am governor, whither I come every day, and where, in order to satisfy our mutual desire of seeing each other, I have prepared you a chamber. What is there more astonishing in all that I have said to you than in what you have told me?"

"No; what I think astonishing is that you should expect my coming."

"And yet that is the most simple thing in the world, my dear sister. Have you not observed that the captain of your little vessel, on entering the roadstead, sent forward, in order to obtain permission to enter the port, a little boat bearing his logbook and the register of his voyagers? I am commandant of the port. They brought me that book. I recognized your name in it. My heart told me what your mouth has just confirmed--that is to say, with what view you have exposed yourself to the dangers of a sea so perilous, or at least so troublesome at this moment--and I sent my cutter to meet you. You know the rest."

Milady knew that Lord de Winter lied, and she was the more alarmed.

"My brother," continued she, "was not that my Lord Buckingham whom I saw on the jetty this evening as we arrived?"

"Himself. Ah, I can understand how the sight of him struck you," replied Lord de Winter. "You came from a country where he must be very much talked of, and I know that his armaments against France greatly engage the attention of your friend the cardinal."

"My friend the cardinal!" cried Milady, seeing that on this point as on the other Lord de Winter seemed well instructed.

"Is he not your friend?" replied the baron, negligently. "Ah, pardon! I thought so; but we will return to my Lord Duke presently. Let us not depart from the sentimental turn our conversation had taken. You came, you say, to see me?"

"Yes."

"Well, I reply that you shall be served to the height of your wishes, and that we shall see each other every day."

"Am I, then, to remain here eternally?" demanded Milady, with a certain terror.

"Do you find yourself badly lodged, sister? Demand anything you want, and I will hasten to have you furnished with it."

“But I have neither my women nor my servants.”

“You shall have all, madame. Tell me on what footing your household was established by your first husband, and although I am only your brother-in-law, I will arrange one similar.”

“My first husband!” cried Milady, looking at Lord de Winter with eyes almost starting from their sockets.

“Yes, your French husband. I don’t speak of my brother. If you have forgotten, as he is still living, I can write to him and he will send me information on the subject.”

A cold sweat burst from the brow of Milady.

“You jest!” said she, in a hollow voice.

“Do I look so?” asked the baron, rising and going a step backward.

“Or rather you insult me,” continued she, pressing with her stiffened hands the two arms of her easy chair, and raising herself upon her wrists.

“I insult you!” said Lord de Winter, with contempt. “In truth, madame, do you think that can be possible?”

“Indeed, sir,” said Milady, “you must be either drunk or mad. Leave the room, and send me a woman.”

“Women are very indiscreet, my sister. Cannot I serve you as a waiting maid? By that means all our secrets will remain in the family.”

“Insolent!” cried Milady; and as if acted upon by a spring, she bounded toward the baron, who awaited her attack with his arms crossed, but nevertheless with one hand on the hilt of his sword.

“Come!” said he. “I know you are accustomed to assassinate people; but I warn you I shall defend myself, even against you.”

“You are right,” said Milady. “You have all the appearance of being cowardly enough to lift your hand against a woman.”

“Perhaps so; and I have an excuse, for mine would not be the first hand of a man that has been placed upon you, I imagine.”

And the baron pointed, with a slow and accusing gesture, to the left shoulder of Milady, which he almost touched with his finger.

Milady uttered a deep, inward shriek, and retreated to a corner of the room like a panther which crouches for a spring.

“Oh, growl as much as you please,” cried Lord de Winter, “but don’t try to bite, for I warn you that it would be to your disadvantage. There are here no procurators who regulate successions beforehand. There is no knight-errant to come and seek a quarrel with me on account of the fair lady I detain a prisoner; but I have judges quite ready who will quickly dispose of a woman so shameless as to glide, a bigamist, into the bed of Lord de Winter, my brother. And these judges, I warn you, will soon send you to an executioner who will make both your shoulders alike.”

The eyes of Milady darted such flashes that although he was a man and armed before an unarmed woman, he felt the chill of fear glide through his whole frame. However, he continued all the same, but with increasing warmth: “Yes, I can very well understand that after having inherited the fortune of my brother it would be very agreeable to you to be my heir likewise; but know beforehand, if you kill me or cause me to be killed, my precautions are taken. Not a penny of what I possess will pass into your hands. Were you not already rich enough--you who possess nearly a million? And could you not stop your fatal career, if you did not do evil for the infinite and supreme joy of doing it? Oh, be assured, if the memory of my brother were not sacred to me, you should rot in a state dungeon or satisfy the curiosity of sailors at Tyburn. I will be silent, but you must endure your captivity quietly. In fifteen or twenty days I shall set out for La Rochelle with the army; but on the eve of my departure a vessel which I shall see depart will take you hence and convey you to our colonies in the south. And be assured that you shall be accompanied by one who will blow your brains out at the first attempt you make to return to England or the Continent."

Milady listened with an attention that dilated her inflamed eyes.

"Yes, at present," continued Lord de Winter, "you will remain in this castle. The walls are thick, the doors strong, and the bars solid; besides, your window opens immediately over the sea. The men of my crew, who are devoted to me for life and death, mount guard around this apartment, and watch all the passages that lead to the courtyard. Even if you gained the yard, there would still be three iron gates for you to pass. The order is positive. A step, a gesture, a word, on your part, denoting an effort to escape, and you are to be fired upon. If they kill you, English justice will be under an obligation to me for having saved it trouble. Ah! I see your features regain their calmness, your countenance recovers its assurance. You are saying to yourself: 'Fifteen days, twenty days? Bah! I have an inventive mind; before that is expired some idea will occur to me. I have an infernal spirit. I shall meet with a victim. Before fifteen days are gone by I shall be away from here.' Ah, try it!"

Milady, finding her thoughts betrayed, dug her nails into her flesh to subdue every emotion that might give to her face any expression except agony.

Lord de Winter continued: "The officer who commands here in my absence you have already seen, and therefore know him. He knows how, as you must have observed, to obey an order--for you did not, I am sure, come from Portsmouth hither without endeavoring to make him speak. What do you say of him? Could a statue of marble have been more impassive and more mute? You have already tried the power of your seductions upon many men, and unfortunately you have always succeeded; but I give you leave to try them upon this one. PARDIEU! if you succeed with him, I pronounce you the demon himself."

He went toward the door and opened it hastily.

“Call Mr. Felton,” said he. “Wait a minute longer, and I will introduce him to you.”

There followed between these two personages a strange silence, during which the sound of a slow and regular step was heard approaching. Shortly a human form appeared in the shade of the corridor, and the young lieutenant, with whom we are already acquainted, stopped at the threshold to receive the orders of the baron.

“Come in, my dear John,” said Lord de Winter, “come in, and shut the door.”

The young officer entered.

“Now,” said the baron, “look at this woman. She is young; she is beautiful; she possesses all earthly seductions. Well, she is a monster, who, at twenty-five years of age, has been guilty of as many crimes as you could read of in a year in the archives of our tribunals. Her voice prejudices her hearers in her favor; her beauty serves as a bait to her victims; her body even pays what she promises--I must do her that justice. She will try to seduce you, perhaps she will try to kill you. I have extricated you from misery, Felton; I have caused you to be named lieutenant; I once saved your life, you know on what occasion. I am for you not only a protector, but a friend; not only a benefactor, but a father. This woman has come back again into England for the purpose of conspiring against my life. I hold this serpent in my hands. Well, I call you, and say to you: Friend Felton, John, my child, guard me, and more particularly guard yourself, against this woman. Swear, by your hopes of salvation, to keep her safely for the chastisement she has merited. John Felton, I trust your word! John Felton, I put faith in your loyalty!”

“My Lord,” said the young officer, summoning to his mild countenance all the hatred he could find in his heart, “my Lord, I swear all shall be done as you desire.”

Milady received this look like a resigned victim; it was impossible to imagine a more submissive or a more mild expression than that which prevailed on her beautiful countenance. Lord de Winter himself could scarcely recognize the tigress who, a minute before, prepared apparently for a fight.

“She is not to leave this chamber, understand, John,” continued the baron. “She is to correspond with nobody; she is to speak to no one but you--if you will do her the honor to address a word to her.”

“That is sufficient, my Lord! I have sworn.”

“And now, madame, try to make your peace with God, for you are judged by men!”

Milady let her head sink, as if crushed by this sentence. Lord de Winter went out, making a sign to Felton, who followed him, shutting the door after him.

One instant after, the heavy step of a marine who served as sentinel was heard in the corridor--his ax in his girdle and his musket on his shoulder.

Milady remained for some minutes in the same position, for she thought they might perhaps be examining her through the keyhole; she then slowly raised her head, which had resumed its formidable expression of menace and defiance, ran to the door to listen, looked out of her window, and returning to bury herself again in her large armchair, she reflected.

CHAPTER 51

OFFICER

Meanwhile, the cardinal looked anxiously for news from England; but no news arrived that was not annoying and threatening.

Although La Rochelle was invested, however certain success might appear--thanks to the precautions taken, and above all to the dyke, which prevented the entrance of any vessel into the besieged city--the blockade might last a long time yet. This was a great affront to the king's army, and a great inconvenience to the cardinal, who had no longer, it is true, to embroil Louis XIII with Anne of Austria--for that affair was over--but he had to adjust matters for M. de Bassompierre, who was embroiled with the Duc d'Angouleme.

As to Monsieur, who had begun the siege, he left to the cardinal the task of finishing it.

The city, notwithstanding the incredible perseverance of its mayor, had attempted a sort of mutiny for a surrender; the mayor had hanged the mutineers. This execution quieted the ill-disposed, who resolved to allow themselves to die of hunger--this death always appearing to them more slow and less sure than strangulation.

On their side, from time to time, the besiegers took the messengers which the Rochellais sent to Buckingham, or the spies which Buckingham sent to the Rochellais. In one case or the other, the trial was soon over. The cardinal pronounced the single word, "Hanged!" The king was invited to come and see the hanging. He came languidly, placing himself in a good situation to see all the details. This amused him sometimes a little, and made him endure the siege with patience; but it did not prevent his getting very tired, or from talking at every moment of returning to Paris--so that if the messengers and the spies had failed, his Eminence, notwithstanding all his inventiveness, would have found himself much embarrassed.

Nevertheless, time passed on, and the Rochellais did not surrender. The last spy that was taken was the bearer of a letter. This letter told Buckingham that the city was at an extremity; but instead of adding, "If your succor does not arrive within fifteen days, we will surrender," it added, quite simply, "If your succor comes not within fifteen days, we shall all be dead with hunger when it comes."

The Rochellais, then, had no hope but in Buckingham. Buckingham was their Messiah. It was evident that if they one day learned positively that they must not count on Buckingham, their courage would fail with their hope.

The cardinal looked, then, with great impatience for the news from England which would announce to him that Buckingham would not come.

The question of carrying the city by assault, though often debated in the council of the king, had been always rejected. In the first place, La Rochelle appeared impregnable. Then the cardinal, whatever he said, very well knew that the horror of bloodshed in this encounter, in which Frenchman would combat against Frenchman, was a retrograde movement of sixty years impressed upon his policy; and the cardinal was at that period what we now call a man of progress. In fact, the sack of La Rochelle, and the assassination of three of four thousand Huguenots who allowed themselves to be killed, would resemble too closely, in 1628, the massacre of St. Bartholomew in 1572; and then, above all this, this extreme measure, which was not at all repugnant to the king, good Catholic as he was, always fell before this argument of the besieging generals--La Rochelle is impregnable except to famine.

The cardinal could not drive from his mind the fear he entertained of his terrible emissary--for he comprehended the strange qualities of this woman, sometimes a serpent, sometimes a lion. Had she betrayed him? Was she dead? He knew her well enough in all cases to know that, whether acting for or against him, as a friend or an enemy, she would not remain motionless without great impediments; but whence did these impediments arise? That was what he could not know.

And yet he reckoned, and with reason, on Milady. He had divined in the past of this woman terrible things which his red mantle alone could cover; and he felt, from one cause or another, that this woman was his own, as she could look to no other but himself for a support superior to the danger which threatened her.

He resolved, then, to carry on the war alone, and to look for no success foreign to himself, but as we look for a fortunate chance. He continued to press the raising of the famous dyke which was to starve La Rochelle.

Meanwhile, he cast his eyes over that unfortunate city, which contained so much deep misery and so many heroic virtues, and recalling the saying of Louis XI, his political predecessor, as he himself was the predecessor of Robespierre, he repeated this maxim of Tristan’s gossip: “Divide in order to reign.”

Henry IV, when besieging Paris, had loaves and provisions thrown over the walls. The cardinal had little notes thrown over in which he represented to the Rochellais how unjust, selfish, and barbarous was the conduct of their leaders. These leaders had corn in abundance, and would not let them partake of it; they adopted as a maxim--for they, too, had maxims--that it was of very little consequence that women, children, and old men should die, so long as the men who were to defend the walls remained strong and healthy. Up to that time, whether from devotedness or from want of power to act against it, this maxim, without being generally adopted, nevertheless passed from theory into practice; but the notes did it injury. The notes reminded the men that the children, women, and old men whom they allowed to die were their sons, their wives, and their fathers, and that it would be more just for everyone to be reduced to the common misery, in order that equal conditions should give birth to unanimous resolutions.

These notes had all the effect that he who wrote them could expect, in that they induced a great number of the inhabitants to open private negotiations with the royal army.

But at the moment when the cardinal saw his means already bearing fruit, and applauded himself for having put it in action, an inhabitant of La Rochelle who had contrived to pass the royal lines--God knows how, such was the watchfulness of Bassompierre, Schomberg, and the Duc d’Angouleme, themselves watched over by the cardinal--an inhabitant of La Rochelle, we say, entered the city, coming from Portsmouth, and saying that he had seen a magnificent fleet ready to sail within eight days. Still further, Buckingham announced to the mayor that at length the great league was about to declare itself against France, and that the kingdom would be at once invaded by the English, Imperial, and Spanish armies. This letter was read publicly in all parts of the city. Copies were put up at the corners of the streets; and even they who had begun to open negotiations interrupted them, being resolved to await the succor so pompously announced.

This unexpected circumstance brought back Richelieu’s former anxiety, and forced him in spite of himself once more to turn his eyes to the other side of the sea.

During this time, exempt from the anxiety of its only and true chief, the royal army led a joyous life, neither provisions nor money being wanting in the camp. All the corps rivaled one another in audacity and gaiety. To take spies and hang them, to make hazardous expeditions upon the dyke or the sea, to imagine wild plans, and to execute them coolly--such were the pastimes which made the army find these days short which were not only so long to the Rochellais, a prey to famine and anxiety, but even to the cardinal, who blockaded them so closely.

Sometimes when the cardinal, always on horseback, like the lowest GENDARME of the army, cast a pensive glance over those works, so slowly keeping pace with his wishes, which the engineers, brought from all the corners of France, were executing under his orders, if he met a Musketeer of the company of Treville, he drew near and looked at him in a peculiar manner, and not recognizing in him one of our four companions, he turned his penetrating look and profound thoughts in another direction.

One day when oppressed with a mortal weariness of mind, without hope in the negotiations with the city, without news from England, the cardinal went out, without any other aim than to be out of doors, and accompanied only by Cahusac and La Houdiniere, strolled along the beach. Mingling the immensity of his dreams with the immensity of the ocean, he came, his horse going at a foot’s pace, to a hill from the top of which he perceived behind a hedge, reclining on the sand and catching in its passage one of those rays of the sun so rare at this period of the year, seven men surrounded by empty bottles. Four of these men were our Musketeers, preparing to listen to a letter one of them had just received. This letter was so important that it made them forsake their cards and their dice on the drumhead.

The other three were occupied in opening an enormous flagon of Collicure wine; these were the lackeys of these gentlemen.

The cardinal was, as we have said, in very low spirits; and nothing when he was in that state of mind increased his depression so much as gaiety in others. Besides, he had another strange fancy, which was always to believe that the causes of his sadness created the gaiety of others. Making a sign to La Houdiniere and Cahusac to stop, he alighted from his horse, and went toward these suspected merry companions, hoping, by means of the sand which deadened the sound of his steps and of the hedge which concealed his approach, to catch some words of this conversation which appeared so interesting. At ten paces from the hedge he recognized the talkative Gascon; and as he had already perceived that these men were Musketeers, he did not doubt that the three others were those called the Inseparables; that is to say, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis.

It may be supposed that his desire to hear the conversation was augmented by this discovery. His eyes took a strange expression, and with the step of a tiger-cat he advanced toward the hedge; but he had not been able to catch more than a few vague syllables without any positive sense, when a sonorous and short cry made him start, and attracted the attention of the Musketeers.

"Officer!" cried Grimaud.

"You are speaking, you scoundrel!" said Athos, rising upon his elbow, and transfixing Grimaud with his flaming look.

Grimaud therefore added nothing to his speech, but contented himself with pointing his index finger in the direction of the hedge, announcing by this gesture the cardinal and his escort.

With a single bound the Musketeers were on their feet, and saluted with respect.

The cardinal seemed furious.

"It appears that Messieurs the Musketeers keep guard," said he. "Are the English expected by land, or do the Musketeers consider themselves superior officers?"

"Monseigneur," replied Athos, for amid the general fright he alone had preserved the noble calmness and coolness that never forsook him, "Monseigneur, the Musketeers, when they are not on duty, or when their duty is over, drink and play at dice, and they are certainly superior officers to their lackeys."

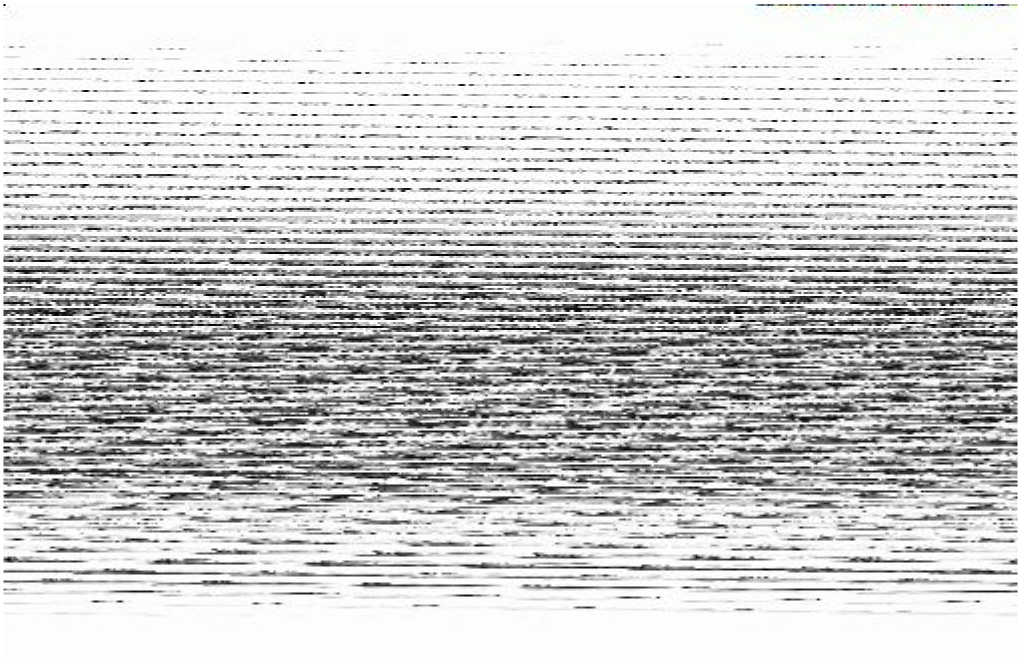

“Lackeys?” grumbled the cardinal. “Lackeys who have the order to warn their masters when anyone passes are not lackeys, they are sentinels.”

“Your Eminence may perceive that if we had not taken this precaution, we should have been exposed to allowing you to pass without presenting you our respects or offering you our thanks for the favor you have done us in uniting us. D’Artagnan,” continued Athos, “you, who but lately were so anxious for such an opportunity for expressing your gratitude to Monseigneur, here it is; avail yourself of it.”

These words were pronounced with that imperturbable phlegm which distinguished Athos in the hour of danger, and with that excessive politeness which made of him at certain moments a king more majestic than kings by birth.

D’Artagnan came forward and stammered out a few words of gratitude which soon expired under the gloomy looks of the cardinal.

“It does not signify, gentlemen,” continued the cardinal, without appearing to be in the least swerved from his first intention by the diversion which Athos had started, “it does not signify, gentlemen. I do not like to have simple soldiers, because they have the advantage of serving in a privileged corps, thus to play the great lords; discipline is the same for them as for everybody else.”

Athos allowed the cardinal to finish his sentence completely, and bowed in sign of assent. Then he resumed in his turn: “Discipline, Monseigneur, has, I hope, in no way been forgotten by us. We are not on duty, and we believed that not being on duty we were at liberty to dispose of our time as we pleased. If we are so fortunate as to have some particular duty to perform for your Eminence, we are ready to obey you. Your Eminence may perceive," continued Athos, knitting his brow, for this sort of investigation began to annoy him, "that we have not come out without our arms."

And he showed the cardinal, with his finger, the four muskets piled near the drum, on which were the cards and dice.

"Your Eminence may believe," added d'Artagnan, "that we would have come to meet you, if we could have supposed it was Monseigneur coming toward us with so few attendants."

The cardinal bit his mustache, and even his lips a little.

"Do you know what you look like, all together, as you are armed and guarded by your lackeys?" said the cardinal. "You look like four conspirators."

"Oh, as to that, Monseigneur, it is true," said Athos; "we do conspire, as your Eminence might have seen the other morning. Only we conspire against the Rochellais."

"Ah, you gentlemen of policy!" replied the cardinal, knitting his brow in his turn, "the secret of many unknown things might perhaps be found in your brains, if we could read them as you read that letter which you concealed as soon as you saw me coming."

The color mounted to the face of Athos, and he made a step toward his Eminence.

"One might think you really suspected us, monseigneur, and we were undergoing a real interrogatory. If it be so, we trust your Eminence will deign to explain yourself, and we should then at least be acquainted with our real position."

"And if it were an interrogatory!" replied the cardinal. "Others besides you have undergone such, Monsieur Athos, and have replied thereto."

"Thus I have told your Eminence that you had but to question us, and we are ready to reply."

"What was that letter you were about to read, Monsieur Aramis, and which you so promptly concealed?"

"A woman's letter, monseigneur."

"Ah, yes, I see," said the cardinal; "we must be discreet with this sort of letters; but nevertheless, we may show them to a confessor, and you know I have taken orders."

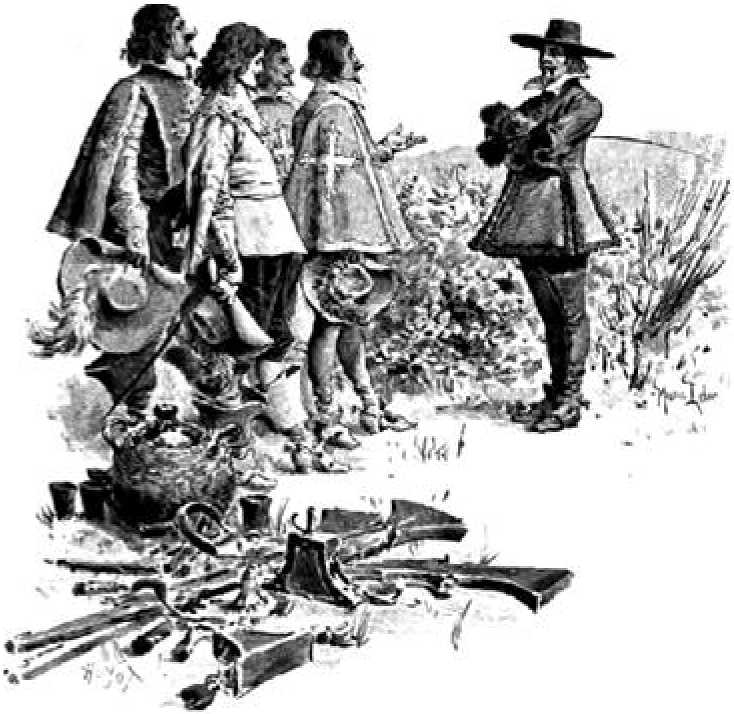

“Monseigneur,” said Athos, with a calmness the more terrible because he risked his head in making this reply, “the letter is a woman’s letter, but it is neither signed Marion de Lorme, nor Madame d’Aiguillon.”

The cardinal became as pale as death; lightning darted from his eyes. He turned round as if to give an order to Cahusac and Houdiniere. Athos saw the movement; he made a step toward the muskets, upon which the other three friends had fixed their eyes, like men ill-disposed to allow themselves to be taken. The cardinalists were three; the Musketeers, lackeys included, were seven. He judged that the match would be so much the less equal, if Athos and his companions were really plotting; and by one of those rapid turns which he always had at command, all his anger faded away into a smile.

“Well, well!” said he, “you are brave young men, proud in daylight, faithful in darkness. We can find no fault with you for watching over yourselves, when you watch so carefully over others. Gentlemen, I have not forgotten the night in which you served me as an escort to the Red Dovecot. If there were any danger to be apprehended on the road I am going, I would request you to accompany me; but as there is none, remain where you are, finish your bottles, your game, and your letter. Adieu, gentlemen!”

And remounting his horse, which Cahusac led to him, he saluted them with his hand, and rode away.

The four young men, standing and motionless, followed him with their eyes without speaking a single word until he had disappeared. Then they looked at one another.

The countenances of all gave evidence of terror, for notwithstanding the friendly adieu of his Eminence, they plainly perceived that the cardinal went away with rage in his heart.

Athos alone smiled, with a self-possessed, disdainful smile.

When the cardinal was out of hearing and sight, “That Grimaud kept bad watch!” cried Porthos, who had a great inclination to vent his ill-humor on somebody.

Grimaud was about to reply to excuse himself. Athos lifted his finger, and Grimaud was silent.

“Would you have given up the letter, Aramis?” said d’Artagnan.

“I,” said Aramis, in his most flutelike tone, “I had made up my mind. If he had insisted upon the letter being given up to him, I would have presented the letter to him with one hand, and with the other I would have run my sword through his body.”

“I expected as much,” said Athos; “and that was why I threw myself between you and him. Indeed, this man is very much to blame for talking thus to other men; one would say he had never had to do with any but women and children.”

“My dear Athos, I admire you, but nevertheless we were in the wrong, after all.”

“How, in the wrong?” said Athos. “Whose, then, is the air we breathe? Whose is the ocean upon which we look? Whose is the sand upon which we were reclining? Whose is that letter of your mistress? Do these belong to the cardinal? Upon my honor, this man fancies the world belongs to him. There you stood, stammering, stupefied, annihilated. One might have supposed the Bastille appeared before you, and that the gigantic Medusa had converted you into stone. Is being in love conspiring? You are in love with a woman whom the cardinal has caused to be shut up, and you wish to get her out of the hands of the cardinal. That’s a match you are playing with his Eminence; this letter is your game. Why should you expose your game to your adversary? That is never done. Let him find it out if he can! We can find out his!”

“Well, that’s all very sensible, Athos,” said d’Artagnan.

“In that case, let there be no more question of what’s past, and let Aramis resume the letter from his cousin where the cardinal interrupted him.”

Aramis drew the letter from his pocket; the three friends surrounded him, and the three lackeys grouped themselves again near the wine jar.

“You had only read a line or two,” said d’Artagnan; “read the letter again from the commencement.”

“Willingly,” said Aramis.

“My dear Cousin, I think I shall make up my mind to set out for Bethune, where my sister has placed our little servant in the convent of the Carmelites; this poor child is quite resigned, as she knows she cannot live elsewhere without the salvation of her soul being in danger. Nevertheless, if the affairs of our family are arranged, as we hope they will be, I believe she will run the risk of being damned, and will return to those she regrets, particularly as she knows they are always thinking of her. Meanwhile, she is not very wretched; what she most desires is a letter from her intended. I know that such viands pass with difficulty through convent gratings; but after all, as I have given you proofs, my dear cousin, I am not unskilled in such affairs, and I will take charge of the commission. My sister thanks you for your good and eternal remembrance. She has experienced much anxiety; but she is now at length a little reassured, having sent her secretary away in order that nothing may happen unexpectedly.

“Adieu, my dear cousin. Tell us news of yourself as often as you can; that is to say, as often as you can with safety. I embrace you.

“Marie Michon.”

“Oh, what do I not owe you, Aramis?” said d’Artagnan. “Dear Constance! I have at length, then, intelligence of you. She lives; she is in safety in a convent; she is at Bethune! Where is Bethune, Athos?”

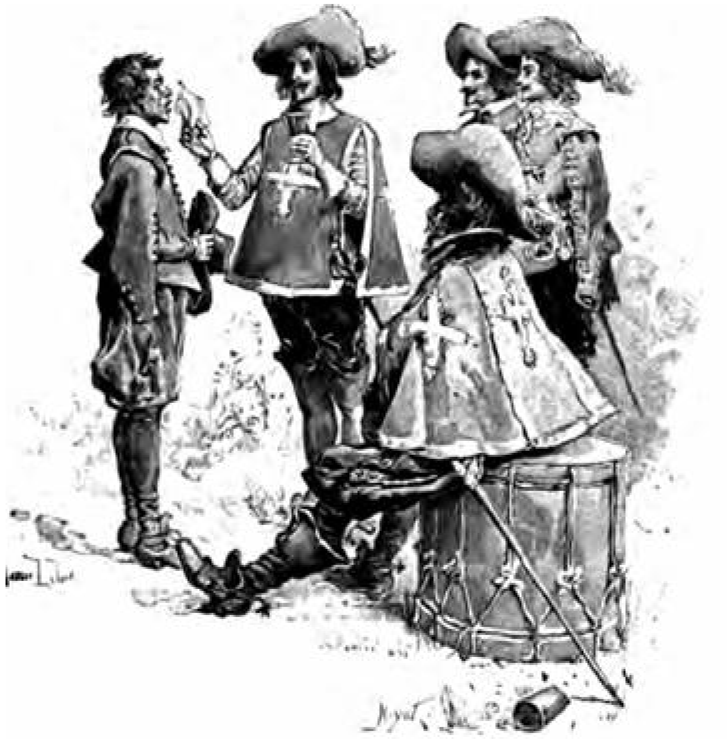

“Why, upon the frontiers of Artois and of Flanders. The siege once over, we shall be able to make a tour in that direction.”

“And that will not be long, it is to be hoped,” said Porthos; “for they have this morning hanged a spy who confessed that the Rochellais were reduced to the leather of their shoes. Supposing that after having eaten the leather they eat the soles, I cannot see much that is left unless they eat one another.”

“Poor fools!” said Athos, emptying a glass of excellent Bordeaux wine which, without having at that period the reputation it now enjoys, merited it no less, “poor fools! As if the Catholic religion was not the most advantageous and the most agreeable of all religions! All the same,” resumed he, after having clicked his tongue against his palate, “they are brave fellows! But what the devil are you about, Aramis?” continued Athos. “Why, you are squeezing that letter into your pocket!”

“Yes,” said d’Artagnan, “Athos is right, it must be burned. And yet if we burn it, who knows whether Monsieur Cardinal has not a secret to interrogate ashes?”

“He must have one,” said Athos.

“What will you do with the letter, then?” asked Porthos.

“Come here, Grimaud,” said Athos. Grimaud rose and obeyed. “As a punishment for having spoken without permission, my friend, you will please to eat this piece of paper; then to recompense you for the service you will have rendered us, you shall afterward drink this glass of wine. First, here is the letter. Eat heartily.”

Grimaud smiled; and with his eyes fixed upon the glass which Athos held in his hand, he ground the paper well between his teeth and then swallowed it.

“Bravo, Monsieur Grimaud!” said Athos; “and now take this. That’s well. We dispense with your saying grace.”

Grimaud silently swallowed the glass of Bordeaux wine; but his eyes, raised toward heaven during this delicious occupation, spoke a language which, though mute, was not the less expressive.

“And now,” said Athos, “unless Monsieur Cardinal should form the ingenious idea of ripping up Grimaud, I think we may be pretty much at our ease respecting the letter.”

Meantime, his Eminence continued his melancholy ride, murmuring between his mustaches, “These four men must positively be mine.”

CHAPTER 52

CAPTIVITY: THE FIRST DAY

Let us return to Milady, whom a glance thrown upon the coast of France has made us lose sight of for an instant.

We shall find her still in the despairing attitude in which we left her, plunged in an abyss of dismal reflection--a dark hell at the gate of which she has almost left hope behind, because for the first time she doubts, for the first time she fears.

On two occasions her fortune has failed her, on two occasions she has found herself discovered and betrayed; and on these two occasions it was to one fatal genius, sent doubtlessly by the Lord to combat her, that she has succumbed. D’Artagnan has conquered her--her, that invincible power of evil.

He has deceived her in her love, humbled her in her pride, thwarted her in her ambition; and now he ruins her fortune, deprives her of liberty, and even threatens her life. Still more, he has lifted the corner of her mask--that shield with which she covered herself and which rendered her so strong.

D’Artagnan has turned aside from Buckingham, whom she hates as she hates everyone she has loved, the tempest with which Richelieu threatened him in the person of the queen. D’Artagnan had passed himself upon her as de Wardes, for whom she had conceived one of those tigerlike fancies common to women of her character. D’Artagnan knows that terrible secret which she has sworn no one shall know without dying. In short, at the moment in which she has just obtained from Richelieu a carte blanche by the means of which she is about to take vengeance on her enemy, this precious paper is torn from her hands, and it is d’Artagnan who holds her prisoner and is about to send her to some filthy Botany Bay, some infamous Tyburn of the Indian Ocean.

All this she owes to d’Artagnan, without doubt. From whom can come so many disgraces heaped upon her head, if not from him? He alone could have transmitted to Lord de Winter all these frightful secrets which he has discovered, one after another, by a train of fatalities. He knows her brother-in-law. He must have written to him.

What hatred she distills! Motionless, with her burning and fixed glances, in her solitary apartment, how well the outbursts of passion which at times escape from the depths of her chest with her respiration, accompany the sound of the surf which rises, growls, roars, and breaks itself like an eternal and powerless despair against the rocks on which is built this dark and lofty castle! How many magnificent projects of vengeance she conceives by the light of the flashes which her tempestuous passion casts over her mind against Mme. Bonacieux, against Buckingham, but above all against d’Artagnan--projects lost in the distance of the future.

Yes; but in order to avenge herself she must be free. And to be free, a prisoner has to pierce a wall, detach bars, cut through a floor--all undertakings which a patient and strong man may accomplish, but before which the feverish irritations of a woman must give way. Besides, to do all this, time is necessary--months, years; and she has ten or twelve days, as Lord de Winter, her fraternal and terrible jailer, has told her.

And yet, if she were a man she would attempt all this, and perhaps might succeed; why, then, did heaven make the mistake of placing that manlike soul in that frail and delicate body?

The first moments of her captivity were terrible; a few convulsions of rage which she could not suppress paid her debt of feminine weakness to nature. But by degrees she overcame the outbursts of her mad passion; and nervous tremblings which agitated her frame disappeared, and she remained folded within herself like a fatigued serpent in repose.

“Go to, go to! I must have been mad to allow myself to be carried away so,” says she, gazing into the glass, which reflects back to her eyes the burning glance by which she appears to interrogate herself. “No violence; violence is the proof of weakness. In the first place, I have never succeeded by that means. Perhaps if I employed my strength against women I might perchance find them weaker than myself, and consequently conquer them; but it is with men that I struggle, and I am but a woman to them. Let me fight like a woman, then; my strength is in my weakness.”

Then, as if to render an account to herself of the changes she could place upon her countenance, so mobile and so expressive, she made it take all expressions from that of passionate anger, which convulsed her features, to that of the most sweet, most affectionate, and most seducing smile. Then her hair assumed successively, under her skillful hands, all the undulations she thought might assist the charms of her face. At length she murmured, satisfied with herself, “Come, nothing is lost; I am still beautiful.”

It was then nearly eight o’clock in the evening. Milady perceived a bed; she calculated that the repose of a few hours would not only refresh her head and her ideas, but still further, her complexion. A better idea, however, came into her mind before going to bed. She had heard something said about supper. She had already been an hour in this apartment; they could not long delay bringing her a repast. The prisoner did not wish to lose time; and she resolved to make that very evening some attempts to ascertain the nature of the ground she had to work upon, by studying the characters of the men to whose guardianship she was committed.

A light appeared under the door; this light announced the reappearance of her jailers. Milady, who had arisen, threw herself quickly into the armchair, her head thrown back, her beautiful hair unbound and disheveled, her bosom half bare beneath her crumpled lace, one hand on her heart, and the other hanging down.

The bolts were drawn; the door groaned upon its hinges. Steps sounded in the chamber, and drew near.

“Place that table there,” said a voice which the prisoner recognized as that of Felton.

The order was executed.

“You will bring lights, and relieve the sentinel,” continued Felton.

And this double order which the young lieutenant gave to the same individuals proved to Milady that her servants were the same men as her guards; that is to say, soldiers.

Felton’s orders were, for the rest, executed with a silent rapidity that gave a good idea of the way in which he maintained discipline.

At length Felton, who had not yet looked at Milady, turned toward her.

“Ah, ah!” said he, “she is asleep; that’s well. When she wakes she can sup.” And he made some steps toward the door.

“But, my lieutenant,” said a soldier, less stoical than his chief, and who had approached Milady, “this woman is not asleep.”

“What, not asleep!” said Felton; “what is she doing, then?”

“She has fainted. Her face is very pale, and I have listened in vain; I do not hear her breathe.”

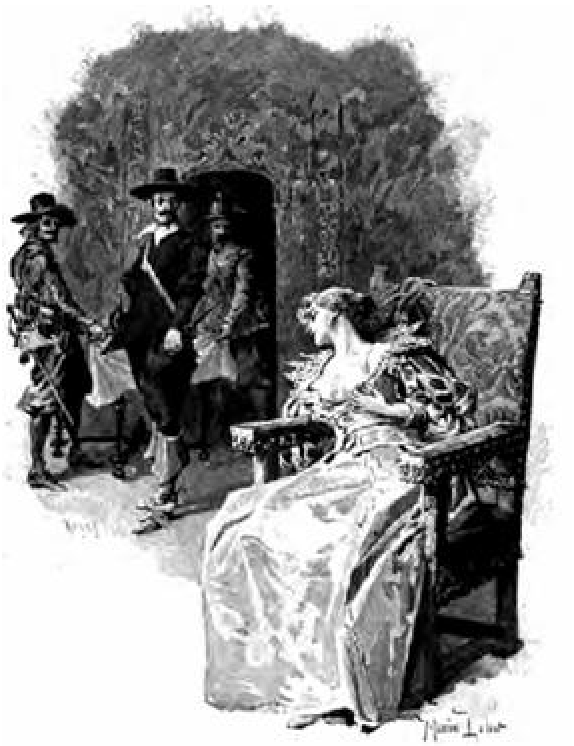

“You are right,” said Felton, after having looked at Milady from the spot on which he stood without moving a step toward her. “Go and tell Lord de Winter that his prisoner has fainted--for this event not having been foreseen, I don’t know what to do.”

The soldier went out to obey the orders of his officer. Felton sat down upon an armchair which happened to be near the door, and waited without speaking a word, without making a gesture. Milady possessed that great art, so much studied by women, of looking through her long eyelashes without appearing to open the lids. She perceived Felton, who sat with his back toward her. She continued to look at him for nearly ten minutes, and in these ten minutes the immovable guardian never turned round once.

She then thought that Lord de Winter would come, and by his presence give fresh strength to her jailer. Her first trial was lost; she acted like a woman who reckons up her resources. As a result she raised her head, opened her eyes, and sighed deeply.

At this sigh Felton turned round.

“Ah, you are awake, madame,” he said; “then I have nothing more to do here. If you want anything you can ring.”

“Oh, my God, my God! how I have suffered!” said Milady, in that harmonious voice which, like that of the ancient enchantresses, charmed all whom she wished to destroy.

And she assumed, upon sitting up in the armchair, a still more graceful and abandoned position than when she reclined.

Felton arose.

“You will be served, thus, madame, three times a day,” said he. “In the morning at nine o’clock, in the day at one o’clock, and in the evening at eight. If that does not suit you, you can point out what other hours you prefer, and in this respect your wishes will be complied with.”

“But am I to remain always alone in this vast and dismal chamber?” asked Milady.

“A woman of the neighbourhood has been sent for, who will be tomorrow at the castle, and will return as often as you desire her presence.”

“I thank you, sir,” replied the prisoner, humbly.

Felton made a slight bow, and directed his steps toward the door. At the moment he was about to go out, Lord de Winter appeared in the corridor, followed by the soldier who had been sent to inform him of the swoon of Milady. He held a vial of salts in his hand.

“Well, what is it--what is going on here?” said he, in a jeering voice, on seeing the prisoner sitting up and Felton about to go out. “Is this corpse come to life already? Felton, my lad, did you not perceive that you were taken for a novice, and that the first act was being performed of a comedy of which we shall doubtless have the pleasure of following out all the developments?”

“I thought so, my lord,” said Felton; “but as the prisoner is a woman, after all, I wish to pay her the attention that every man of gentle birth owes to a woman, if not on her account, at least on my own.”

Milady shuddered through her whole system. These words of Felton’s passed like ice through her veins.

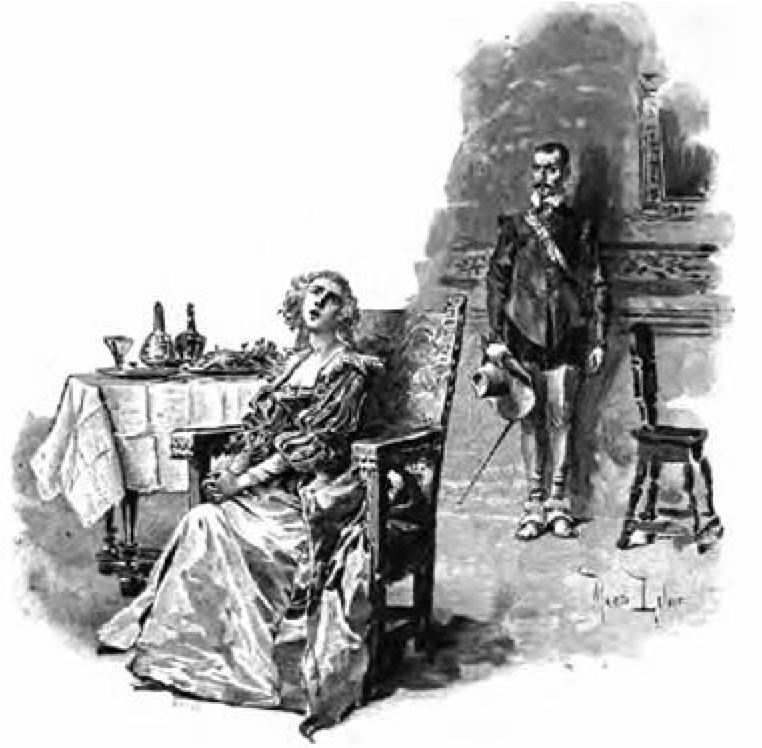

“So,” replied de Winter, laughing, “that beautiful hair so skillfully disheveled, that white skin, and that languishing look, have not yet seduced you, you heart of stone?”

“No, my Lord,” replied the impassive young man; “your Lordship may be assured that it requires more than the tricks and coquetry of a woman to corrupt me.”

“In that case, my brave lieutenant, let us leave Milady to find out something else, and go to supper; but be easy! She has a fruitful imagination, and the second act of the comedy will not delay its steps after the first.”

And at these words Lord de Winter passed his arm through that of Felton, and led him out, laughing.

“Oh, I will be a match for you!” murmured Milady, between her teeth; “be assured of that, you poor spoiled monk, you poor converted soldier, who has cut his uniform out of a monk’s frock!”

“By the way,” resumed de Winter, stopping at the threshold of the door, “you must not, Milady, let this check take away your appetite. Taste that fowl and those fish. On my honor, they are not poisoned. I have a very good cook, and he is not to be my heir; I have full and perfect confidence in him. Do as I do. Adieu, dear sister, till your next swoon!”

This was all that Milady could endure. Her hands clutched her armchair; she ground her teeth inwardly; her eyes followed the motion of the door as it closed behind Lord de Winter and Felton, and the moment she was alone a fresh fit of despair seized her. She cast her eyes upon the table, saw the glittering of a knife, rushed toward it and clutched it; but her disappointment was cruel. The blade was round, and of flexible silver.

A burst of laughter resounded from the other side of the ill-closed door, and the door reopened.

“Ha, ha!” cried Lord de Winter; “ha, ha! Don’t you see, my brave Felton; don’t you see what I told you? That knife was for you, my lad; she would have killed you. Observe, this is one of her peculiarities, to get rid thus, after one fashion or another, of all the people who bother her. If I had listened to you, the knife would have been pointed and of steel. Then no more of Felton; she would have cut your throat, and after that everybody else’s. See, John, see how well she knows how to handle a knife.”

In fact, Milady still held the harmless weapon in her clenched hand; but these last words, this supreme insult, relaxed her hands, her strength, and even her will. The knife fell to the ground.

“You were right, my Lord,” said Felton, with a tone of profound disgust which sounded to the very bottom of the heart of Milady, “you were right, my Lord, and I was wrong.”

And both again left the room.

But this time Milady lent a more attentive ear than the first, and she heard their steps die away in the distance of the corridor.

“I am lost,” murmured she; “I am lost! I am in the power of men upon whom I can have no more influence than upon statues of bronze or granite; they know me by heart, and are steeled against all my weapons. It is, however, impossible that this should end as they have decreed!”

In fact, as this last reflection indicated--this instinctive return to hope--sentiments of weakness or fear did not dwell long in her ardent spirit. Milady sat down to table, ate from several dishes, drank a little Spanish wine, and felt all her resolution return.

Before she went to bed she had pondered, analyzed, turned on all sides, examined on all points, the words, the steps, the gestures, the signs, and even the silence of her interlocutors; and of this profound, skillful, and anxious study the result was that Felton, everything considered, appeared the more vulnerable of her two persecutors.

One expression above all recurred to the mind of the prisoner: “If I had listened to you,” Lord de Winter had said to Felton.

Felton, then, had spoken in her favor, since Lord de Winter had not been willing to listen to him.

“Weak or strong,” repeated Milady, “that man has, then, a spark of pity in his soul; of that spark I will make a flame that shall devour him. As to the other, he knows me, he fears me, and knows what he has to expect of me if ever I escape from his hands. It is useless, then, to attempt anything with him. But Felton--that’s another thing. He is a young, ingenuous, pure man who seems virtuous; him there are means of destroying.”

And Milady went to bed and fell asleep with a smile upon her lips. Anyone who had seen her sleeping might have said she was a young girl dreaming of the crown of flowers she was to wear on her brow at the next festival.

CHAPTER 53

CAPTIVITY: THE SECOND DAY

Milady dreamed that she at length had d’Artagnan in her power, that she was present at his execution; and it was the sight of his odious blood, flowing beneath the ax of the headsman, which spread that charming smile upon her lips.

She slept as a prisoner sleeps, rocked by his first hope.

In the morning, when they entered her chamber she was still in bed. Felton remained in the corridor. He brought with him the woman of whom he had spoken the evening before, and who had just arrived; this woman entered, and approaching Milady’s bed, offered her services.

Milady was habitually pale; her complexion might therefore deceive a person who saw her for the first time.

“I am in a fever,” said she; “I have not slept a single instant during all this long night. I suffer horribly. Are you likely to be more humane to me than others were yesterday? All I ask is permission to remain abed.”

“Would you like to have a physician called?” said the woman.

Felton listened to this dialogue without speaking a word.

Milady reflected that the more people she had around her the more she would have to work upon, and Lord de Winter would redouble his watch. Besides, the physician might declare the ailment feigned; and Milady, after having lost the first trick, was not willing to lose the second.

“Go and fetch a physician?” said she. “What could be the good of that? These gentlemen declared yesterday that my illness was a comedy; it would be just the same today, no doubt--for since yesterday evening they have had plenty of time to send for a doctor.”

“Then,” said Felton, who became impatient, “say yourself, madame, what treatment you wish followed.”

“Eh, how can I tell? My God! I know that I suffer, that’s all. Give me anything you like, it is of little consequence.”

“Go and fetch Lord de Winter,” said Felton, tired of these eternal complaints.

“Oh, no, no!” cried Milady; “no, sir, do not call him, I conjure you. I am well, I want nothing; do not call him.”

She gave so much vehemence, such magnetic eloquence to this exclamation, that Felton in spite of himself advanced some steps into the room.

“He has come!” thought Milady.

“Meanwhile, madame, if you really suffer,” said Felton, “a physician shall be sent for; and if you deceive us--well, it will be the worse for you. But at least we shall not have to reproach ourselves with anything.”

Milady made no reply, but turning her beautiful head round upon her pillow, she burst into tears, and uttered heartbreaking sobs.

Felton surveyed her for an instant with his usual impassiveness; then, seeing that the crisis threatened to be prolonged, he went out. The woman followed him, and Lord de Winter did not appear.

“I fancy I begin to see my way,” murmured Milady, with a savage joy, burying herself under the clothes to conceal from anybody who might be watching her this burst of inward satisfaction.

Two hours passed away.

“Now it is time that the malady should be over,” said she; “let me rise, and obtain some success this very day. I have but ten days, and this evening two of them will be gone.”

In the morning, when they entered Milady’s chamber they had brought her breakfast. Now, she thought, they could not long delay coming to clear the table, and that Felton would then reappear.

Milady was not deceived. Felton reappeared, and without observing whether Milady had or had not touched her repast, made a sign that the table should be carried out of the room, it having been brought in ready spread.

Felton remained behind; he held a book in his hand.

Milady, reclining in an armchair near the chimney, beautiful, pale, and resigned, looked like a holy virgin awaiting martyrdom.

Felton approached her, and said, “Lord de Winter, who is a Catholic, like yourself, madame, thinking that the deprivation of the rites and ceremonies of your church might be painful to you, has consented that you should read every day the ordinary of your Mass; and here is a book which contains the ritual.”

At the manner in which Felton laid the book upon the little table near which Milady was sitting, at the tone in which he pronounced the two words, YOUR MASS, at the disdainful smile with which he accompanied them, Milady raised her head, and looked more attentively at the officer.

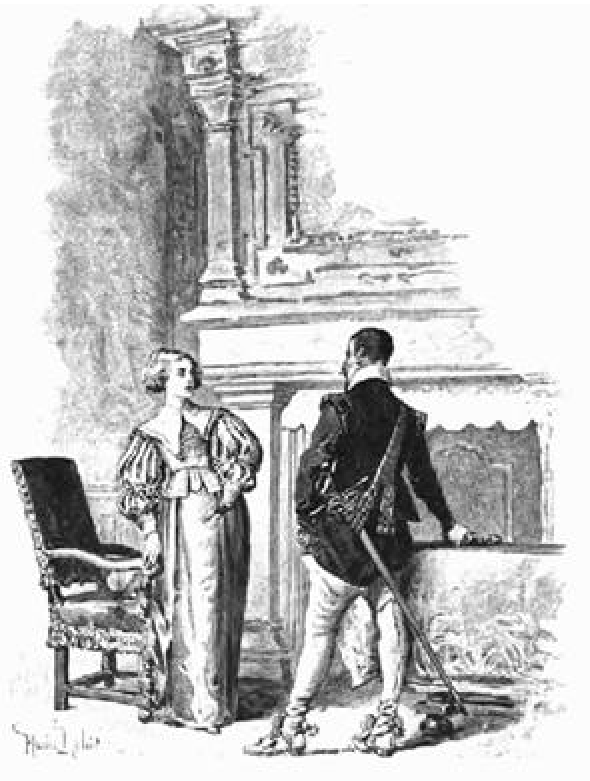

By that plain arrangement of the hair, by that costume of extreme simplicity, by the brow polished like marble and as hard and impenetrable, she recognized one of those gloomy Puritans she had so often met, not only in the court of King James, but in that of the King of France, where, in spite of the remembrance of the St. Bartholomew, they sometimes came to seek refuge.

She then had one of those sudden inspirations which only people of genius receive in great crises, in supreme moments which are to decide their fortunes or their lives.

Those two words, YOUR MASS, and a simple glance cast upon Felton, revealed to her all the importance of the reply she was about to make; but with that rapidity of intelligence which was peculiar to her, this reply, ready arranged, presented itself to her lips:

“I?” said she, with an accent of disdain in unison with that which she had remarked in the voice of the young officer, “I, sir? MY MASS? Lord de

Winter, the corrupted Catholic, knows very well that I am not of his religion, and this is a snare he wishes to lay for me!”

“And of what religion are you, then, madame?” asked Felton, with an astonishment which in spite of the empire he held over himself he could not entirely conceal.

“I will tell it,” cried Milady, with a feigned exultation, “on the day when I shall have suffered sufficiently for my faith.”

The look of Felton revealed to Milady the full extent of the space she had opened for herself by this single word.

The young officer, however, remained mute and motionless; his look alone had spoken.

“I am in the hands of my enemies,” continued she, with that tone of enthusiasm which she knew was familiar to the Puritans. “Well, let my God save me, or let me perish for my God! That is the reply I beg you to make to Lord de Winter. And as to this book,” added she, pointing to the manual with her finger but without touching it, as if she must be contaminated by it, “you may carry it back and make use of it yourself, for doubtless you are doubly the accomplice of Lord de Winter--the accomplice in his persecutions, the accomplice in his heresies.”

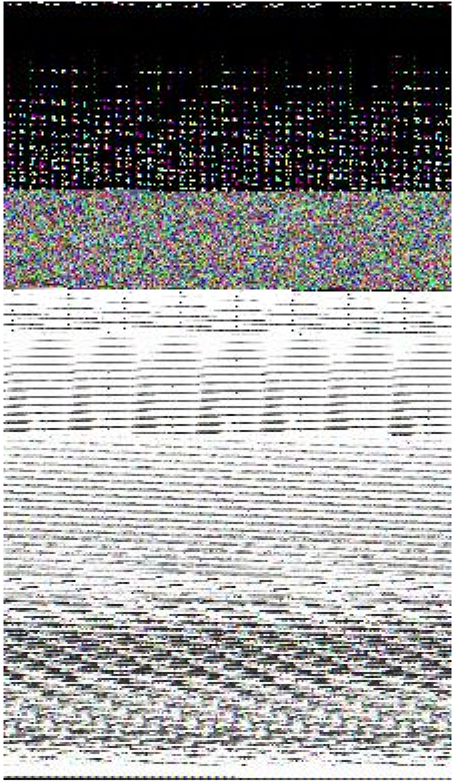

Felton made no reply, took the book with the same appearance of repugnance which he had before manifested, and retired pensively.

Lord de Winter came toward five o'clock in the evening. Milady had had time, during the whole day, to trace her plan of conduct. She received him like a woman who had already recovered all her advantages.

"It appears," said the baron, seating himself in the armchair opposite that occupied by Milady, and stretching out his legs carelessly upon the hearth, "it appears we have made a little apostasy!"

"What do you mean, sir!"

"I mean to say that since we last met you have changed your religion. You have not by chance married a Protestant for a third husband, have you?"

"Explain yourself, my Lord," replied the prisoner, with majesty; "for though I hear your words, I declare I do not understand them."

"Then you have no religion at all; I like that best," replied Lord de Winter, laughing.

"Certainly that is most in accord with your own principles," replied Milady, frigidly.

"Oh, I confess it is all the same to me."

"Oh, you need not avow this religious indifference, my Lord; your debaucheries and crimes would vouch for it."

"What, you talk of debaucheries, Madame Messalina, Lady Macbeth! Either I misunderstand you or you are very shameless!"

"You only speak thus because you are overheard," coolly replied Milady; "and you wish to interest your jailers and your hangmen against me."

"My jailers and my hangmen! Heyday, madame! you are taking a poetical tone, and the comedy of yesterday turns to a tragedy this evening. As to the rest, in eight days you will be where you ought to be, and my task will be completed."

"Infamous task! impious task!" cried Milady, with the exultation of a victim who provokes his judge.

"My word," said de Winter, rising, "I think the hussy is going mad! Come, come, calm yourself, Madame Puritan, or I'll remove you to a dungeon. It's my Spanish wine that has got into your head, is it not? But never mind; that sort of intoxication is not dangerous, and will have no bad effects."

And Lord de Winter retired swearing, which at that period was a very knightly habit.

Felton was indeed behind the door, and had not lost one word of this scene. Milady had guessed aright.

“Yes, go, go!” said she to her brother; “the effects ARE drawing near, on the contrary; but you, weak fool, will not see them until it is too late to shun them.”

Silence was re-established. Two hours passed away. Milady’s supper was brought in, and she was found deeply engaged in saying her prayers aloud--prayers which she had learned of an old servant of her second husband, a most austere Puritan. She appeared to be in ecstasy, and did not pay the least attention to what was going on around her. Felton made a sign that she should not be disturbed; and when all was arranged, he went out quietly with the soldiers.

Milady knew she might be watched, so she continued her prayers to the end; and it appeared to her that the soldier who was on duty at her door did not march with the same step, and seemed to listen. For the moment she wished nothing better. She arose, came to the table, ate but little, and drank only water.

An hour after, her table was cleared; but Milady remarked that this time Felton did not accompany the soldiers. He feared, then, to see her too often.

She turned toward the wall to smile--for there was in this smile such an expression of triumph that this smile alone would have betrayed her.

She allowed, therefore, half an hour to pass away; and as at that moment all was silence in the old castle, as nothing was heard but the eternal murmur of the waves--that immense breaking of the ocean--with her pure, harmonious, and powerful voice, she began the first couplet of the psalm then in great favor with the Puritans:

“Thou leavest thy servants, Lord, To see if they be strong; But soon thou dost afford Thy hand to lead them on.”

These verses were not excellent--very far from it; but as it is well known, the Puritans did not pique themselves upon their poetry.

While singing, Milady listened. The soldier on guard at her door stopped, as if he had been changed into stone. Milady was then able to judge of the effect she had produced.

Then she continued her singing with inexpressible fervor and feeling. It appeared to her that the sounds spread to a distance beneath the vaulted roofs, and carried with them a magic charm to soften the hearts of her jailers. It however likewise appeared that the soldier on duty--a zealous Catholic, no doubt--shook off the charm, for through the door he called: "Hold your tongue, madame! Your song is as dismal as a 'De profundis'; and if besides the pleasure of being in garrison here, we must hear such things as these, no mortal can hold out."

"Silence!" then exclaimed another stern voice which Milady recognized as that of Felton. "What are you meddling with, stupid? Did anybody order you to prevent that woman from singing? No. You were told to guard her--to fire at her if she attempted to fly. Guard her! If she flies, kill her; but don't exceed your orders."

An expression of unspeakable joy lightened the countenance of Milady; but this expression was fleeting as the reflection of lightning. Without appearing to have heard the dialogue, of which she had not lost a word, she began again, giving to her voice all the charm, all the power, all the seduction the demon had bestowed upon it:

"For all my tears, my cares, My exile, and my chains, I have my youth, my prayers, And God, who counts my pains."

Her voice, of immense power and sublime expression, gave to the rude, unpolished poetry of these psalms a magic and an effect which the most exalted Puritans rarely found in the songs of their brethren, and which they were forced to ornament with all the resources of their imagination. Felton believed he heard the singing of the angel who consoled the three Hebrews in the furnace.

Milady continued:

"One day our doors will ope, With God come our desire; And if betrays that hope, To death we can aspire."

This verse, into which the terrible enchantress threw her whole soul, completed the trouble which had seized the heart of the young officer. He opened the door quickly; and Milady saw him appear, pale as usual, but with his eye inflamed and almost wild.

"Why do you sing thus, and with such a voice?" said he.

"Your pardon, sir," said Milady, with mildness. "I forgot that my songs are out of place in this castle. I have perhaps offended you in your creed; but it was without wishing to do so, I swear. Pardon me, then, a fault which is perhaps great, but which certainly was involuntary."

Milady was so beautiful at this moment, the religious ecstasy in which she appeared to be plunged gave such an expression to her countenance, that Felton was so dazzled that he fancied he beheld the angel whom he had only just before heard.

“Yes, yes,” said he; “you disturb, you agitate the people who live in the castle.”

The poor, senseless young man was not aware of the incoherence of his words, while Milady was reading with her lynx’s eyes the very depths of his heart.

“I will be silent, then,” said Milady, casting down her eyes with all the sweetness she could give to her voice, with all the resignation she could impress upon her manner.

“No, no, madame,” said Felton, “only do not sing so loud, particularly at night.”

And at these words Felton, feeling that he could not long maintain his severity toward his prisoner, rushed out of the room.

“You have done right, Lieutenant,” said the soldier. “Such songs disturb the mind; and yet we become accustomed to them, her voice is so beautiful.”

CHAPTER 54

CAPTIVITY: THE THIRD DAY

Felton had fallen; but there was still another step to be taken. He must be retained, or rather he must be left quite alone; and Milady but obscurely perceived the means which could lead to this result.

Still more must be done. He must be made to speak, in order that he might be spoken to--for Milady very well knew that her greatest seduction was in her voice, which so skillfully ran over the whole gamut of tones from human speech to language celestial.

Yet in spite of all this seduction Milady might fail--for Felton was forewarned, and that against the least chance. From that moment she watched all his actions, all his words, from the simplest glance of his eyes to his gestures--even to a breath that could be interpreted as a sigh. In short, she studied everything, as a skillful comedian does to whom a new part has been assigned in a line to which he is not accustomed.

Face to face with Lord de Winter her plan of conduct was more easy. She had laid that down the preceding evening. To remain silent and dignified in his presence; from time to time to irritate him by affected disdain, by a contemptuous word; to provoke him to threats and violence which would produce a contrast with her own resignation--such was her plan. Felton would see all; perhaps he would say nothing, but he would see.

In the morning, Felton came as usual; but Milady allowed him to preside over all the preparations for breakfast without addressing a word to him. At the moment when he was about to retire, she was cheered with a ray of hope, for she thought he was about to speak; but his lips moved without any sound leaving his mouth, and making a powerful effort to control himself, he sent back to his heart the words that were about to escape from his lips, and went out. Toward midday, Lord de Winter entered.

It was a tolerably fine winter’s day, and a ray of that pale English sun which lights but does not warm came through the bars of her prison.

Milady was looking out at the window, and pretended not to hear the door as it opened.

"Ah, ah!" said Lord de Winter, "after having played comedy, after having played tragedy, we are now playing melancholy?"

The prisoner made no reply.

"Yes, yes," continued Lord de Winter, "I understand. You would like very well to be at liberty on that beach! You would like very well to be in a good ship dancing upon the waves of that emerald-green sea; you would like very well, either on land or on the ocean, to lay for me one of those nice little ambuscades you are so skillful in planning. Patience, patience! In four days' time the shore will be beneath your feet, the sea will be open to you--more open than will perhaps be agreeable to you, for in four days England will be relieved of you."

Milady folded her hands, and raising her fine eyes toward heaven, "Lord, Lord," said she, with an angelic meekness of gesture and tone, "pardon this man, as I myself pardon him."

"Yes, pray, accursed woman!" cried the baron; "your prayer is so much the more generous from your being, I swear to you, in the power of a man who will never pardon you!" and he went out.

At the moment he went out a piercing glance darted through the opening of the nearly closed door, and she perceived Felton, who drew quickly to one side to prevent being seen by her.

Then she threw herself upon her knees, and began to pray.

"My God, my God!" said she, "thou knowest in what holy cause I suffer; give me, then, strength to suffer."

The door opened gently; the beautiful supplicant pretended not to hear the noise, and in a voice broken by tears, she continued:

"God of vengeance! God of goodness! wilt thou allow the frightful projects of this man to be accomplished?"

Then only she pretended to hear the sound of Felton's steps, and rising quick as thought, she blushed, as if ashamed of being surprised on her knees.

"I do not like to disturb those who pray, madame," said Felton, seriously; "do not disturb yourself on my account, I beseech you."

"How do you know I was praying, sir?" said Milady, in a voice broken by sobs. "You were deceived, sir; I was not praying."

"Do you think, then, madame," replied Felton, in the same serious voice, but with a milder tone, "do you think I assume the right of preventing a creature from prostrating herself before her Creator? God forbid! Besides, repentance becomes the guilty; whatever crimes they may have committed, for me the guilty are sacred at the feet of God!"

"Guilty? I?" said Milady, with a smile which might have disarmed the angel of the last judgment. "Guilty? Oh, my God, thou knowest whether I am guilty! Say I am condemned, sir, if you please; but you know that God, who loves martyrs, sometimes permits the innocent to be condemned."

"Were you condemned, were you innocent, were you a martyr," replied Felton, "the greater would be the necessity for prayer; and I myself would aid you with my prayers."

"Oh, you are a just man!" cried Milady, throwing herself at his feet. "I can hold out no longer, for I fear I shall be wanting in strength at the moment when I shall be forced to undergo the struggle, and confess my faith. Listen, then, to the supplication of a despairing woman. You are abused, sir; but that is not the question. I only ask you one favor; and if you grant it me, I will bless you in this world and in the next."

"Speak to the master, madame," said Felton; "happily I am neither charged with the power of pardoning nor punishing. It is upon one higher placed than I am that God has laid this responsibility."

"To you--no, to you alone! Listen to me, rather than add to my destruction, rather than add to my ignominy!"

"If you have merited this shame, madame, if you have incurred this ignominy, you must submit to it as an offering to God."

"What do you say? Oh, you do not understand me! When I speak of ignominy, you think I speak of some chastisement, of imprisonment or death. Would to heaven! Of what consequence to me is imprisonment or death?"

"It is I who no longer understand you, madame," said Felton.

"Or, rather, who pretend not to understand me, sir!" replied the prisoner, with a smile of incredulity.

"No, madame, on the honor of a soldier, on the faith of a Christian."

"What, you are ignorant of Lord de Winter's designs upon me?"

"I am."

"Impossible; you are his confidant!"

"I never lie, madame."

"Oh, he conceals them too little for you not to divine them."

"I seek to divine nothing, madame; I wait till I am confided in, and apart from that which Lord de Winter has said to me before you, he has confided nothing to me.”

“Why, then,” cried Milady, with an incredible tone of truthfulness, “you are not his accomplice; you do not know that he destines me to a disgrace which all the punishments of the world cannot equal in horror?”

“You are deceived, madame,” said Felton, blushing; “Lord de Winter is not capable of such a crime.”

“Good,” said Milady to herself; “without thinking what it is, he calls it a crime!” Then aloud, “The friend of THAT WRETCH is capable of everything.”

“Whom do you call ‘that wretch’?” asked Felton.

“Are there, then, in England two men to whom such an epithet can be applied?”

“You mean George Villiers?” asked Felton, whose looks became excited.

“Whom Pagans and unbelieving Gentiles call Duke of Buckingham,” replied Milady. “I could not have thought that there was an Englishman in all England who would have required so long an explanation to make him understand of whom I was speaking.”

“The hand of the Lord is stretched over him,” said Felton; “he will not escape the chastisement he deserves.”

Felton only expressed, with regard to the duke, the feeling of execration which all the English had declared toward him whom the Catholics themselves called the extortioner, the pillager, the debauchee, and whom the Puritans styled simply Satan.

“Oh, my God, my God!” cried Milady; “when I supplicate thee to pour upon this man the chastisement which is his due, thou knowest it is not my own vengeance I pursue, but the deliverance of a whole nation that I implore!”

“Do you know him, then?” asked Felton.

“At length he interrogates me!” said Milady to herself, at the height of joy at having obtained so quickly such a great result. “Oh, know him? Yes, yes! to my misfortune, to my eternal misfortune!” and Milady twisted her arms as if in a paroxysm of grief.

Felton no doubt felt within himself that his strength was abandoning him, and he made several steps toward the door; but the prisoner, whose eye never left him, sprang in pursuit of him and stopped him.

“Sir,” cried she, “be kind, be clement, listen to my prayer! That knife, which the fatal prudence of the baron deprived me of, because he knows the use I would make of it! Oh, hear me to the end! that knife, give it to me for a minute only, for mercy's, for pity's sake! I will embrace your knees! You shall shut the door that you may be certain I contemplate no injury to you! My God! to you--the only just, good, and compassionate being I have met with! To you--my preserver, perhaps! One minute that knife, one minute, a single minute, and I will restore it to you through the grating of the door. Only one minute, Mr. Felton, and you will have saved my honor!"

"To kill yourself?" cried Felton, with terror, forgetting to withdraw his hands from the hands of the prisoner, "to kill yourself?"

"I have told, sir," murmured Milady, lowering her voice, and allowing herself to sink overpowered to the ground; "I have told my secret! He knows all! My God, I am lost!"

Felton remained standing, motionless and undecided.

"He still doubts," thought Milady; "I have not been earnest enough."

Someone was heard in the corridor; Milady recognized the step of Lord de Winter.

Felton recognized it also, and made a step toward the door.

Milady sprang toward him. "Oh, not a word," said she in a concentrated voice, "not a word of all that I have said to you to this man, or I am lost, and it would be you--you--"

Then as the steps drew near, she became silent for fear of being heard, applying, with a gesture of infinite terror, her beautiful hand to Felton's mouth.

Felton gently repulsed Milady, and she sank into a chair.

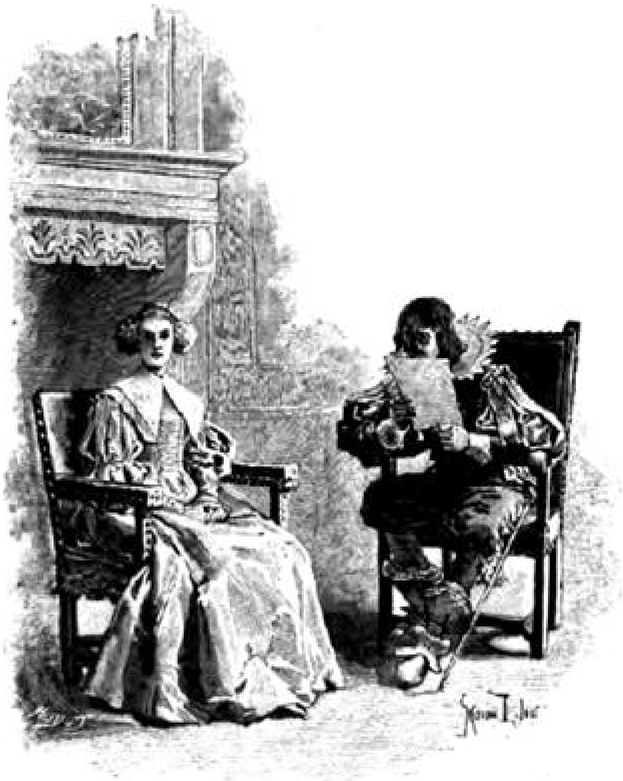

Lord de Winter passed before the door without stopping, and they heard the noise of his footsteps soon die away.

Felton, as pale as death, remained some instants with his ear bent and listening; then, when the sound was quite extinct, he breathed like a man awaking from a dream, and rushed out of the apartment.

“Ah!” said Milady, listening in her turn to the noise of Felton’s steps, which withdrew in a direction opposite to those of Lord de Winter; “at length you are mine!”

Then her brow darkened. “If he tells the baron,” said she, “I am lost--for the baron, who knows very well that I shall not kill myself, will place me before him with a knife in my hand, and he will discover that all this despair is but acted.”

She placed herself before the glass, and regarded herself attentively; never had she appeared more beautiful.

“Oh, yes,” said she, smiling, “but we won’t tell him!”

In the evening Lord de Winter accompanied the supper.

“Sir,” said Milady, “is your presence an indispensable accessory of my captivity? Could you not spare me the increase of torture which your visits cause me?”

“How, dear sister!” said Lord de Winter. “Did not you sentimentally inform me with that pretty mouth of yours, so cruel to me today, that you came to England solely for the pleasure of seeing me at your ease, an enjoyment of which you told me you so sensibly felt the deprivation that you had risked everything for it--seasickness, tempest, captivity? Well, here I am; be satisfied. Besides, this time, my visit has a motive.”

Milady trembled; she thought Felton had told all. Perhaps never in her life had this woman, who had experienced so many opposite and powerful emotions, felt her heart beat so violently.

She was seated. Lord de Winter took a chair, drew it toward her, and sat down close beside her. Then taking a paper out of his pocket, he unfolded it slowly.

“Here,” said he, “I want to show you the kind of passport which I have drawn up, and which will serve you henceforward as the rule of order in the life I consent to leave you.”

Then turning his eyes from Milady to the paper, he read: “‘Order to conduct--’ The name is blank,” interrupted Lord de Winter. “If you have any preference you can point it out to me; and if it be not within a thousand leagues of London, attention will be paid to your wishes. I will begin again, then:

“‘Order to conduct to--the person named Charlotte Backson, branded by the justice of the kingdom of France, but liberated after chastisement. She is to dwell in this place without ever going more than three leagues from it. In case of any attempt to escape, the penalty of death is to be applied. She will receive five shillings per day for lodging and food’“.

“That order does not concern me,” replied Milady, coldly, “since it bears another name than mine.”

“A name? Have you a name, then?”

“I bear that of your brother.”

“Ay, but you are mistaken. My brother is only your second husband; and your first is still living. Tell me his name, and I will put it in the place of the name of Charlotte Backson. No? You will not? You are silent? Well, then you must be registered as Charlotte Backson.”

Milady remained silent; only this time it was no longer from affectation, but from terror. She believed the order ready for execution. She thought that Lord de Winter had hastened her departure; she thought she was condemned to set off that very evening. Everything in her mind was lost for an instant;

when all at once she perceived that no signature was attached to the order. The joy she felt at this discovery was so great she could not conceal it.

"Yes, yes," said Lord de Winter, who perceived what was passing in her mind; "yes, you look for the signature, and you say to yourself: 'All is not lost, for that order is not signed. It is only shown to me to terrify me, that's all.' You are mistaken. Tomorrow this order will be sent to the Duke of Buckingham. The day after tomorrow it will return signed by his hand and marked with his seal; and four-and-twenty hours afterward I will answer for its being carried into execution. Adieu, madame. That is all I had to say to you."

"And I reply to you, sir, that this abuse of power, this exile under a fictitious name, are infamous!"

"Would you like better to be hanged in your true name, Milady? You know that the English laws are inexorable on the abuse of marriage. Speak freely. Although my name, or rather that of my brother, would be mixed up with the affair, I will risk the scandal of a public trial to make myself certain of getting rid of you."

Milady made no reply, but became as pale as a corpse.

"Oh, I see you prefer peregrination. That's well madame; and there is an old proverb that says, 'Traveling trains youth.' My faith! you are not wrong after all, and life is sweet. That's the reason why I take such care you shall not deprive me of mine. There only remains, then, the question of the five shillings to be settled. You think me rather parsimonious, don't you? That's because I don't care to leave you the means of corrupting your jailers. Besides, you will always have your charms left to seduce them with. Employ them, if your check with regard to Felton has not disgusted you with attempts of that kind."

"Felton has not told him," said Milady to herself. "Nothing is lost, then."

"And now, madame, till I see you again! Tomorrow I will come and announce to you the departure of my messenger."

Lord de Winter rose, saluted her ironically, and went out.

Milady breathed again. She had still four days before her. Four days would quite suffice to complete the seduction of Felton.

A terrible idea, however, rushed into her mind. She thought that Lord de Winter would perhaps send Felton himself to get the order signed by the Duke of Buckingham. In that case Felton would escape her--for in order to secure success, the magic of a continuous seduction was necessary.

Nevertheless, as we have said, one circumstance reassured her. Felton had not spoken.

As she would not appear to be agitated by the threats of Lord de Winter, she placed herself at the table and ate.

Then, as she had done the evening before, she fell on her knees and repeated her prayers aloud. As on the evening before, the soldier stopped his march to listen to her.

Soon after she heard lighter steps than those of the sentinel, which came from the end of the corridor and stopped before her door.

“It is he,” said she. And she began the same religious chant which had so strongly excited Felton the evening before.

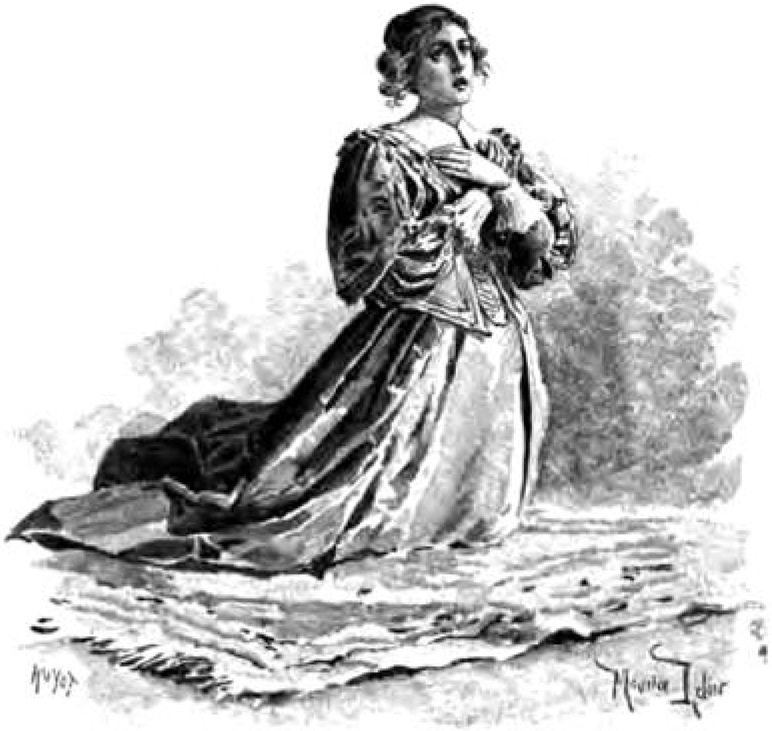

But although her voice--sweet, full, and sonorous--vibrated as harmoniously and as affectingly as ever, the door remained shut. It appeared however to Milady that in one of the furtive glances she darted from time to time at the grating of the door she thought she saw the ardent eyes of the young man through the narrow opening. But whether this was reality or vision, he had this time sufficient self-command not to enter.

However, a few instants after she had finished her religious song, Milady thought she heard a profound sigh. Then the same steps she had heard approach slowly withdrew, as if with regret.

CHAPTER 55

CAPTIVITY: THE FOURTH DAY

The next day, when Felton entered Milady’s apartment he found her standing, mounted upon a chair, holding in her hands a cord made by means of torn cambric handkerchiefs, twisted into a kind of rope one with another, and tied at the ends. At the noise Felton made in entering, Milady leaped lightly to the ground, and tried to conceal behind her the improvised cord she held in her hand.

The young man was more pale than usual, and his eyes, reddened by want of sleep, denoted that he had passed a feverish night. Nevertheless, his brow was armed with a severity more austere than ever.

He advanced slowly toward Milady, who had seated herself, and taking an end of the murderous rope which by neglect, or perhaps by design, she allowed to be seen, “What is this, madame?” he asked coldly.

“That? Nothing,” said Milady, smiling with that painful expression which she knew so well how to give to her smile. “Ennui is the mortal enemy of prisoners; I had ennui, and I amused myself with twisting that rope.”

Felton turned his eyes toward the part of the wall of the apartment before which he had found Milady standing in the armchair in which she was now seated, and over her head he perceived a gilt-headed screw, fixed in the wall for the purpose of hanging up clothes or weapons.

He started, and the prisoner saw that start--for though her eyes were cast down, nothing escaped her.

“What were you doing on that armchair?” asked he.

“Of what consequence?” replied Milady.

“But,” replied Felton, “I wish to know.”

“Do not question me,” said the prisoner; “you know that we who are true Christians are forbidden to lie.”

“Well, then,” said Felton, “I will tell you what you were doing, or rather what you meant to do; you were going to complete the fatal project you cherish in your mind. Remember, madame, if our God forbids falsehood, he much more severely condemns suicide.”

"When God sees one of his creatures persecuted unjustly, placed between suicide and dishonor, believe me, sir," replied Milady, in a tone of deep conviction, "God pardons suicide, for then suicide becomes martyrdom."

"You say either too much or too little; speak, madame. In the name of heaven, explain yourself."

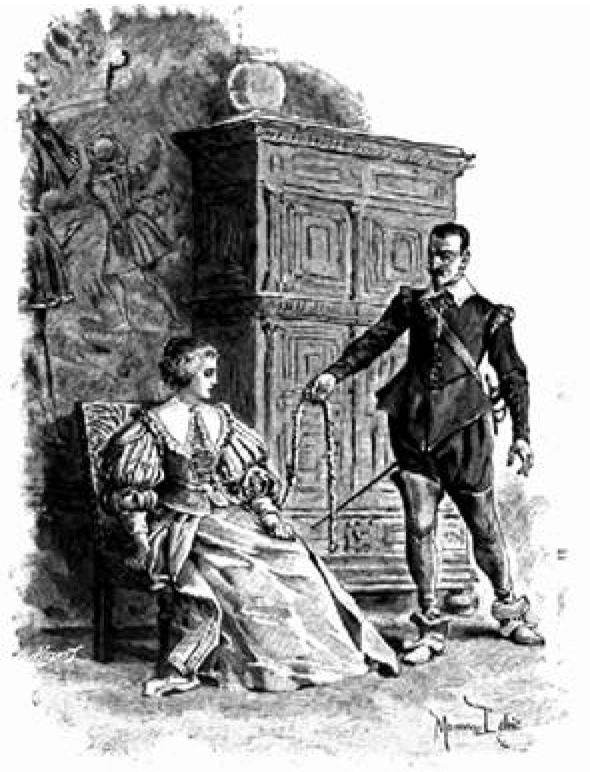

"That I may relate my misfortunes for you to treat them as fables; that I may tell you my projects for you to go and betray them to my persecutor? No, sir. Besides, of what importance to you is the life or death of a condemned wretch? You are only responsible for my body, is it not so? And provided you produce a carcass that may be recognized as mine, they will require no more of you; nay, perhaps you will even have a double reward."

"I, madame, I?" cried Felton. "You suppose that I would ever accept the price of your life? Oh, you cannot believe what you say!"

"Let me act as I please, Felton, let me act as I please," said Milady, elated. "Every soldier must be ambitious, must he not? You are a lieutenant? Well, you will follow me to the grave with the rank of captain."

"What have I, then, done to you," said Felton, much agitated, "that you should load me with such a responsibility before God and before men? In a few days you will be away from this place; your life, madame, will then no longer be under my care, and," added he, with a sigh, "then you can do what you will with it."

"So," cried Milady, as if she could not resist giving utterance to a holy indignation, "you, a pious man, you who are called a just man, you ask but one thing--and that is that you may not be inculpated, annoyed, by my death!"

"It is my duty to watch over your life, madame, and I will watch."

"But do you understand the mission you are fulfilling? Cruel enough, if I am guilty; but what name can you give it, what name will the Lord give it, if I am innocent?"

"I am a soldier, madame, and fulfill the orders I have received."

"Do you believe, then, that at the day of the Last Judgment God will separate blind executioners from iniquitous judges? You are not willing that I should kill my body, and you make yourself the agent of him who would kill my soul."

"But I repeat it again to you," replied Felton, in great emotion, "no danger threatens you; I will answer for Lord de Winter as for myself."

"Dunce," cried Milady, "dunce! who dares to answer for another man, when the wisest, when those most after God's own heart, hesitate to answer for themselves, and who ranges himself on the side of the strongest and the most fortunate, to crush the weakest and the most unfortunate."

"Impossible, madame, impossible," murmured Felton, who felt to the bottom of his heart the justness of this argument. "A prisoner, you will not recover your liberty through me; living, you will not lose your life through me."

"Yes," cried Milady, "but I shall lose that which is much dearer to me than life, I shall lose my honor, Felton; and it is you, you whom I make responsible, before God and before men, for my shame and my infamy."

This time Felton, immovable as he was, or appeared to be, could not resist the secret influence which had already taken possession of him. To see this woman, so beautiful, fair as the brightest vision, to see her by turns overcome with grief and threatening; to resist at once the ascendancy of grief and beauty--it was too much for a visionary; it was too much for a brain weakened by the ardent dreams of an ecstatic faith; it was too much for a heart furrowed by the love of heaven that burns, by the hatred of men that devours.

Milady saw the trouble. She felt by intuition the flame of the opposing passions which burned with the blood in the veins of the young fanatic. As a skillful general, seeing the enemy ready to surrender, marches toward him with a cry of victory, she rose, beautiful as an antique priestess, inspired like a Christian virgin, her arms extended, her throat uncovered, her hair disheveled, holding with one hand her robe modestly drawn over her breast, her look illumined by that fire which had already created such disorder in the veins of the young Puritan, and went toward him, crying out with a vehement air, and in her melodious voice, to which on this occasion she communicated a terrible energy:

"Let this victim to Baal be sent, To the lions the martyr be thrown! Thy God shall teach thee to repent! From th' abyss he'll give ear to my moan."

Felton stood before this strange apparition like one petrified.

"Who art thou? Who art thou?" cried he, clasping his hands. "Art thou a messenger from God; art thou a minister from hell; art thou an angel or a demon; callest thou thyself Eloa or Astarte?"

"Do you not know me, Felton? I am neither an angel nor a demon; I am a daughter of earth, I am a sister of thy faith, that is all."

"Yes, yes!" said Felton, "I doubted, but now I believe."

"You believe, and still you are an accomplice of that child of Belial who is called Lord de Winter! You believe, and yet you leave me in the hands of mine enemies, of the enemy of England, of the enemy of God! You believe, and yet you deliver me up to him who fills and defiles the world with his heresies and debaucheries--to that infamous Sardanapalus whom the blind call the Duke of Buckingham, and whom believers name Antichrist!"

"I deliver you up to Buckingham? I? what mean you by that?"

"They have eyes," cried Milady, "but they see not; ears have they, but they hear not."

"Yes, yes!" said Felton, passing his hands over his brow, covered with sweat, as if to remove his last doubt. "Yes, I recognize the voice which speaks to me in my dreams; yes, I recognize the features of the angel who appears to me every night, crying to my soul, which cannot sleep: 'Strike, save England, save thyself--for thou wilt die without having appeased God!' Speak, speak!" cried Felton, "I can understand you now."

A flash of terrible joy, but rapid as thought, gleamed from the eyes of Milady.

However fugitive this homicide flash, Felton saw it, and started as if its light had revealed the abysses of this woman's heart. He recalled, all at once, the warnings of Lord de Winter, the seductions of Milady, her first attempts after her arrival. He drew back a step, and hung down his head, without, however, ceasing to look at her, as if, fascinated by this strange creature, he could not detach his eyes from her eyes.

Milady was not a woman to misunderstand the meaning of this hesitation. Under her apparent emotions her icy coolness never abandoned her. Before Felton replied, and before she should be forced to resume this conversation, so difficult to be sustained in the same exalted tone, she let her hands fall; and as if the weakness of the woman overpowered the enthusiasm of the inspired fanatic, she said: "But no, it is not for me to be the Judith to deliver Bethulia from this Holofernes. The sword of the eternal is too heavy for my arm. Allow me, then, to avoid dishonor by death; let me take refuge in martyrdom. I do not ask you for liberty, as a guilty one would, nor for vengeance, as would a pagan. Let me die; that is all. I supplicate you, I implore you on my knees--let me die, and my last sigh shall be a blessing for my preserver."

Hearing that voice, so sweet and suppliant, seeing that look, so timid and downcast, Felton reproached himself. By degrees the enchantress had clothed herself with that magic adornment which she assumed and threw aside at will; that is to say, beauty, meekness, and tears--and above all, the irresistible attraction of mystical voluptuousness, the most devouring of all voluptuousness.

"Alas!" said Felton, "I can do but one thing, which is to pity you if you prove to me you are a victim! But Lord de Winter makes cruel accusations against you. You are a Christian; you are my sister in religion. I feel myself drawn toward you--I, who have never loved anyone but my benefactor--I who have met with nothing but traitors and impious men. But you, madame, so beautiful in reality, you, so pure in appearance, must have committed great iniquities for Lord de Winter to pursue you thus."

"They have eyes," repeated Milady, with an accent of indescribable grief, "but they see not; ears have they, but they hear not."

"But," cried the young officer, "speak, then, speak!"

"Confide my shame to you," cried Milady, with the blush of modesty upon her countenance, "for often the crime of one becomes the shame of another--confide my shame to you, a man, and I a woman? Oh," continued she, placing her hand modestly over her beautiful eyes, “never! never!--I could not!”

“To me, to a brother?” said Felton.

Milady looked at him for some time with an expression which the young man took for doubt, but which, however, was nothing but observation, or rather the wish to fascinate.

Felton, in his turn a suppliant, clasped his hands.

“Well, then,” said Milady, “I confide in my brother; I will dare to--”

At this moment the steps of Lord de Winter were heard; but this time the terrible brother-in-law of Milady did not content himself, as on the preceding day, with passing before the door and going away again. He paused, exchanged two words with the sentinel; then the door opened, and he appeared.

During the exchange of these two words Felton drew back quickly, and when Lord de Winter entered, he was several paces from the prisoner.

The baron entered slowly, sending a scrutinizing glance from Milady to the young officer.

“You have been here a very long time, John,” said he. “Has this woman been relating her crimes to you? In that case I can comprehend the length of the conversation.”

Felton started; and Milady felt she was lost if she did not come to the assistance of the disconcerted Puritan.

“Ah, you fear your prisoner should escape!” said she. “Well, ask your worthy jailer what favor I this instant solicited of him.”

“You demanded a favor?” said the baron, suspiciously.

“Yes, my Lord,” replied the young man, confused.

“And what favor, pray?” asked Lord de Winter.

“A knife, which she would return to me through the grating of the door a minute after she had received it,” replied Felton.

“There is someone, then, concealed here whose throat this amiable lady is desirous of cutting,” said de Winter, in an ironical, contemptuous tone.

“There is myself,” replied Milady.

“I have given you the choice between America and Tyburn,” replied Lord de Winter. “Choose Tyburn, madame. Believe me, the cord is more certain than the knife.”

Felton grew pale, and made a step forward, remembering that at the moment he entered Milady had a rope in her hand.

“You are right,” said she, “I have often thought of it.” Then she added in a low voice, “And I will think of it again.”

Felton felt a shudder run to the marrow of his bones; probably Lord de Winter perceived this emotion.

“Mistrust yourself, John,” said he. “I have placed reliance upon you, my friend. Beware! I have warned you! But be of good courage, my lad; in three days we shall be delivered from this creature, and where I shall send her she can harm nobody.”

“You hear him!” cried Milady, with vehemence, so that the baron might believe she was addressing heaven, and that Felton might understand she was addressing him.

Felton lowered his head and reflected.

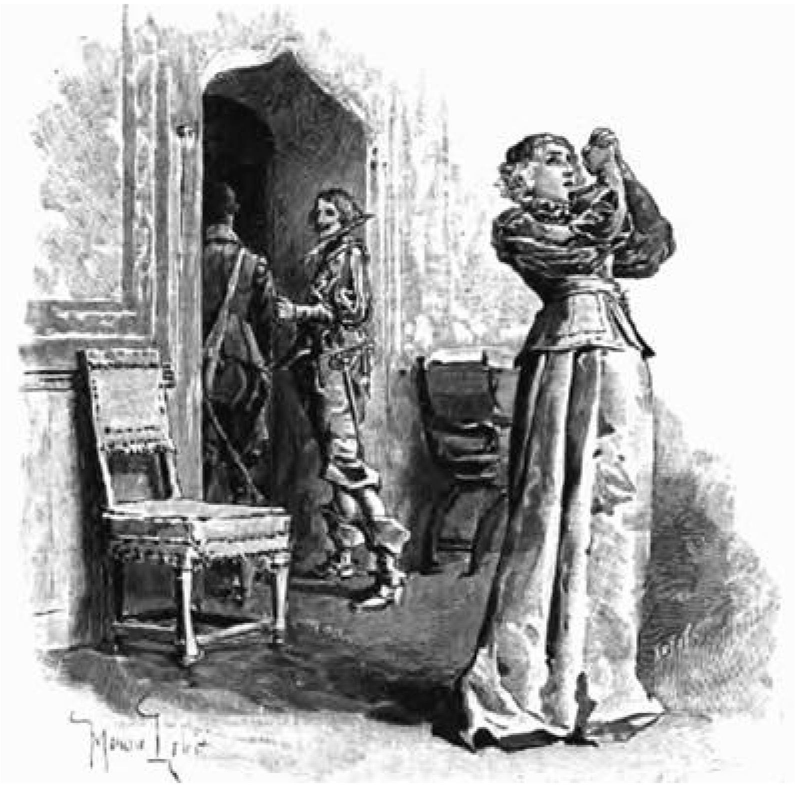

The baron took the young officer by the arm, and turned his head over his shoulder, so as not to lose sight of Milady till he was gone out.

“Well,” said the prisoner, when the door was shut, “I am not so far advanced as I believed. De Winter has changed his usual stupidity into a strange prudence. It is the desire of vengeance, and how desire molds a man! As to Felton, he hesitates. Ah, he is not a man like that cursed d’Artagnan. A Puritan only adores virgins, and he adores them by clasping his hands. A Musketeer loves women, and he loves them by clasping his arms round them."

Milady waited, then, with much impatience, for she feared the day would pass away without her seeing Felton again. At last, in an hour after the scene we have just described, she heard someone speaking in a low voice at the door. Presently the door opened, and she perceived Felton.

The young man advanced rapidly into the chamber, leaving the door open behind him, and making a sign to Milady to be silent; his face was much agitated.

"What do you want with me?" said she.

"Listen," replied Felton, in a low voice. "I have just sent away the sentinel that I might remain here without anybody knowing it, in order to speak to you without being overheard. The baron has just related a frightful story to me."

Milady assumed her smile of a resigned victim, and shook her head.

"Either you are a demon," continued Felton, "or the baron--my benefactor, my father--is a monster. I have known you four days; I have loved him four years. I therefore may hesitate between you. Be not alarmed at what I say; I want to be convinced. Tonight, after twelve, I will come and see you, and you shall convince me."

"No, Felton, no, my brother," said she; "the sacrifice is too great, and I feel what it must cost you. No, I am lost; do not be lost with me. My death will be much more eloquent than my life, and the silence of the corpse will convince you much better than the words of the prisoner."

"Be silent, madame," cried Felton, "and do not speak to me thus; I came to entreat you to promise me upon your honor, to swear to me by what you hold most sacred, that you will make no attempt upon your life."

"I will not promise," said Milady, "for no one has more respect for a promise or an oath than I have; and if I make a promise I must keep it."

"Well," said Felton, "only promise till you have seen me again. If, when you have seen me again, you still persist--well, then you shall be free, and I myself will give you the weapon you desire."

"Well," said Milady, "for you I will wait."

"Swear."

"I swear it, by our God. Are you satisfied?"

"Well," said Felton, "till tonight."

And he darted out of the room, shut the door, and waited in the corridor, the soldier’s half-pike in his hand, and as if he had mounted guard in his place.

The soldier returned, and Felton gave him back his weapon.

Then, through the grating to which she had drawn near, Milady saw the young man make a sign with delirious fervor, and depart in an apparent transport of joy.

As for her, she returned to her place with a smile of savage contempt upon her lips, and repeated, blaspheming, that terrible name of God, by whom she had just sworn without ever having learned to know Him.

“My God,” said she, “what a senseless fanatic! My God, it is I--I--and this fellow who will help me to avenge myself.”

CHAPTER 56

CAPTIVITY: THE FIFTH DAY

Milady had however achieved a half-triumph, and success doubled her forces.

It was not difficult to conquer, as she had hitherto done, men prompt to let themselves be seduced, and whom the gallant education of a court led quickly into her net. Milady was handsome enough not to find much resistance on the part of the flesh, and she was sufficiently skillful to prevail over all the obstacles of the mind.

But this time she had to contend with an unpolished nature, concentrated and insensible by force of austerity. Religion and its observances had made Felton a man inaccessible to ordinary seductions. There fermented in that sublimated brain plans so vast, projects so tumultuous, that there remained no room for any capricious or material love--that sentiment which is fed by leisure and grows with corruption. Milady had, then, made a breach by her false virtue in the opinion of a man horribly prejudiced against her, and by her beauty in the heart of a man hitherto chaste and pure. In short, she had taken the measure of motives hitherto unknown to herself, through this experiment, made upon the most rebellious subject that nature and religion could submit to her study.

Many a time, nevertheless, during the evening she despaired of fate and of herself. She did not invoke God, we very well know, but she had faith in the genius of evil--that immense sovereignty which reigns in all the details of human life, and by which, as in the Arabian fable, a single pomegranate seed is sufficient to reconstruct a ruined world.

Milady, being well prepared for the reception of Felton, was able to erect her batteries for the next day. She knew she had only two days left; that when once the order was signed by Buckingham--and Buckingham would sign it the more readily from its bearing a false name, and he could not, therefore, recognize the woman in question--once this order was signed, we say, the baron would make her embark immediately, and she knew very well that women condemned to exile employ arms much less powerful in their seductions than the pretendedly virtuous woman whose beauty is lighted by the sun of the world, whose style the voice of fashion lauds, and whom a halo of aristocracy gilds with enchanting splendors. To be a woman condemned to a painful and disgraceful punishment is no impediment to beauty, but it is an obstacle to the recovery of power. Like all persons of real genius, Milady knew what suited her nature and her means. Poverty was repugnant to her; degradation took away two-thirds of her greatness. Milady was only a queen while among queens. The pleasure of satisfied pride was necessary to her domination. To command inferior beings was rather a humiliation than a pleasure for her.

She should certainly return from her exile--she did not doubt that a single instant; but how long might this exile last? For an active, ambitious nature, like that of Milady, days not spent in climbing are inauspicious days. What word, then, can be found to describe the days which they occupy in descending? To lose a year, two years, three years, is to talk of an eternity; to return after the death or disgrace of the cardinal, perhaps; to return when d’Artagnan and his friends, happy and triumphant, should have received from the queen the reward they had well acquired by the services they had rendered her--these were devouring ideas that a woman like Milady could not endure. For the rest, the storm which raged within her doubled her strength, and she would have burst the walls of her prison if her body had been able to take for a single instant the proportions of her mind.

Then that which spurred her on additionally in the midst of all this was the remembrance of the cardinal. What must the mistrustful, restless, suspicious cardinal think of her silence--the cardinal, not merely her only support, her only prop, her only protector at present, but still further, the principal instrument of her future fortune and vengeance? She knew him; she knew that at her return from a fruitless journey it would be in vain to tell him of her imprisonment, in vain to enlarge upon the sufferings she had undergone. The cardinal would reply, with the sarcastic calmness of the skeptic, strong at once by power and genius, “You should not have allowed yourself to be taken.”

Then Milady collected all her energies, murmuring in the depths of her soul the name of Felton--the only beam of light that penetrated to her in the hell into which she had fallen; and like a serpent which folds and unfolds its rings to ascertain its strength, she enveloped Felton beforehand in the thousand meshes of her inventive imagination.

Time, however, passed away; the hours, one after another, seemed to awaken the clock as they passed, and every blow of the brass hammer resounded upon the heart of the prisoner. At nine o’clock, Lord de Winter made his customary visit, examined the window and the bars, sounded the floor and the walls, looked to the chimney and the doors, without, during this long and minute examination, he or Milady pronouncing a single word.

Doubtless both of them understood that the situation had become too serious to lose time in useless words and aimless wrath.

“Well,” said the baron, on leaving her “you will not escape tonight!”

At ten o’clock Felton came and placed the sentinel. Milady recognized his step. She was as well acquainted with it now as a mistress is with that of the lover of her heart; and yet Milady at the same time detested and despised this weak fanatic.

That was not the appointed hour. Felton did not enter.

Two hours after, as midnight sounded, the sentinel was relieved. This time it WAS the hour, and from this moment Milady waited with impatience. The new sentinel commenced his walk in the corridor. At the expiration of ten minutes Felton came.

Milady was all attention.

“Listen,” said the young man to the sentinel. “On no pretense leave the door, for you know that last night my Lord punished a soldier for having quit his post for an instant, although I, during his absence, watched in his place.”

“Yes, I know it,” said the soldier.

“I recommend you therefore to keep the strictest watch. For my part I am going to pay a second visit to this woman, who I fear entertains sinister intentions upon her own life, and I have received orders to watch her.”

“Good!” murmured Milady; “the austere Puritan lies.”

As to the soldier, he only smiled.

“Zounds, Lieutenant!” said he; “you are not unlucky in being charged with such commissions, particularly if my Lord has authorized you to look into her bed.”

Felton blushed. Under any other circumstances he would have reprimanded the soldier for indulging in such pleasantry, but his conscience murmured too loud for his mouth to dare speak.

“If I call, come,” said he. “If anyone comes, call me.”

“I will, Lieutenant,” said the soldier.

Felton entered Milady's apartment. Milady arose.

"You are here!" said she.

"I promised to come," said Felton, "and I have come."

"You promised me something else."

"What, my God!" said the young man, who in spite of his self-command felt his knees tremble and the sweat start from his brow.

"You promised to bring a knife, and to leave it with me after our interview."

"Say no more of that, madame," said Felton. "There is no situation, however terrible it may be, which can authorize a creature of God to inflict death upon himself. I have reflected, and I cannot, must not be guilty of such a sin."

"Ah, you have reflected!" said the prisoner, sitting down in her armchair, with a smile of disdain; "and I also have reflected."

"Upon what?"

"That I can have nothing to say to a man who does not keep his word."

"Oh, my God!" murmured Felton.

"You may retire," said Milady. "I will not talk."

"Here is the knife," said Felton, drawing from his pocket the weapon which he had brought, according to his promise, but which he hesitated to give to his prisoner.

"Let me see it," said Milady.

"For what purpose?"

"Upon my honor, I will instantly return it to you. You shall place it on that table, and you may remain between it and me."

Felton offered the weapon to Milady, who examined the temper of it attentively, and who tried the point on the tip of her finger.

"Well," said she, returning the knife to the young officer, "this is fine and good steel. You are a faithful friend, Felton."

Felton took back the weapon, and laid it upon the table, as he had agreed with the prisoner.

Milady followed him with her eyes, and made a gesture of satisfaction.

"Now," said she, "listen to me."

The request was needless. The young officer stood upright before her, awaiting her words as if to devour them.

"Felton," said Milady, with a solemnity full of melancholy, "imagine that your sister, the daughter of your father, speaks to you. While yet young, unfortunately handsome, I was dragged into a snare. I resisted. Ambushes and violences multiplied around me, but I resisted. The religion I serve, the God I adore, were blasphemed because I called upon that religion and that God, but still I resisted. Then outrages were heaped upon me, and as my soul was not subdued they wished to defile my body forever. Finally--”

Milady stopped, and a bitter smile passed over her lips.

“Finally,” said Felton, “finally, what did they do?”

“At length, one evening my enemy resolved to paralyze the resistance he could not conquer. One evening he mixed a powerful narcotic with my water. Scarcely had I finished my repast, when I felt myself sink by degrees into a strange torpor. Although I was without mistrust, a vague fear seized me, and I tried to struggle against sleepiness. I arose. I wished to run to the window and call for help, but my legs refused their office. It appeared as if the ceiling sank upon my head and crushed me with its weight. I stretched out my arms. I tried to speak. I could only utter inarticulate sounds, and irresistible faintness came over me. I supported myself by a chair, feeling that I was about to fall, but this support was soon insufficient on account of my weak arms. I fell upon one knee, then upon both. I tried to pray, but my tongue was frozen. God doubtless neither heard nor saw me, and I sank upon the floor a prey to a slumber which resembled death.

“Of all that passed in that sleep, or the time which glided away while it lasted, I have no remembrance. The only thing I recollect is that I awoke in bed in a round chamber, the furniture of which was sumptuous, and into which light only penetrated by an opening in the ceiling. No door gave entrance to the room. It might be called a magnificent prison.

“It was a long time before I was able to make out what place I was in, or to take account of the details I describe. My mind appeared to strive in vain to shake off the heavy darkness of the sleep from which I could not rouse myself. I had vague perceptions of space traversed, of the rolling of a carriage, of a horrible dream in which my strength had become exhausted; but all this was so dark and so indistinct in my mind that these events seemed to belong to another life than mine, and yet mixed with mine in fantastic duality.

“At times the state into which I had fallen appeared so strange that I believed myself dreaming. I arose trembling. My clothes were near me on a chair; I neither remembered having undressed myself nor going to bed. Then by degrees the reality broke upon me, full of chaste terrors. I was no longer in the house where I had dwelt. As well as I could judge by the light of the sun, the day was already two-thirds gone. It was the evening before when I had fallen asleep; my sleep, then, must have lasted twenty-four hours! What had taken place during this long sleep?

“I dressed myself as quickly as possible; my slow and stiff motions all attested that the effects of the narcotic were not yet entirely dissipated. The chamber was evidently furnished for the reception of a woman; and the most finished coquette could not have formed a wish, but on casting her eyes about the apartment, she would have found that wish accomplished.

“Certainly I was not the first captive that had been shut up in this splendid prison; but you may easily comprehend, Felton, that the more superb the prison, the greater was my terror.

“Yes, it was a prison, for I tried in vain to get out of it. I sounded all the walls, in the hopes of discovering a door, but everywhere the walls returned a full and flat sound.

“I made the tour of the room at least twenty times, in search of an outlet of some kind; but there was none. I sank exhausted with fatigue and terror into an armchair.

“Meantime, night came on rapidly, and with night my terrors increased. I did not know but I had better remain where I was seated. It appeared that I was surrounded with unknown dangers into which I was about to fall at every instant. Although I had eaten nothing since the evening before, my fears prevented my feeling hunger.

“No noise from without by which I could measure the time reached me; I only supposed it must be seven or eight o’clock in the evening, for it was in the month of October and it was quite dark.

“All at once the noise of a door, turning on its hinges, made me start. A globe of fire appeared above the glazed opening of the ceiling, casting a strong light into my chamber; and I perceived with terror that a man was standing within a few paces of me.

“A table, with two covers, bearing a supper ready prepared, stood, as if by magic, in the middle of the apartment.

“That man was he who had pursued me during a whole year, who had vowed my dishonor, and who, by the first words that issued from his mouth, gave me to understand he had accomplished it the preceding night.”

“Scoundrel!” murmured Felton.

“Oh, yes, scoundrel!” cried Milady, seeing the interest which the young officer, whose soul seemed to hang on her lips, took in this strange recital. “Oh, yes, scoundrel! He believed, having triumphed over me in my sleep, that all was completed. He came, hoping that I would accept my shame, as my shame was consummated; he came to offer his fortune in exchange for my love.

“All that the heart of a woman could contain of haughty contempt and disdainful words, I poured out upon this man. Doubtless he was accustomed to such reproaches, for he listened to me calm and smiling, with his arms crossed over his breast. Then, when he thought I had said all, he advanced toward me; I sprang toward the table, I seized a knife, I placed it to my breast.

“Take one step more,” said I, “and in addition to my dishonor, you shall have my death to reproach yourself with.”

“There was, no doubt, in my look, my voice, my whole person, that sincerity of gesture, of attitude, of accent, which carries conviction to the most perverse minds, for he paused.

“‘Your death?’ said he; ‘oh, no, you are too charming a mistress to allow me to consent to lose you thus, after I have had the happiness to possess you only a single time. Adieu, my charmer; I will wait to pay you my next visit till you are in a better humor.’

“At these words he blew a whistle; the globe of fire which lighted the room reascended and disappeared. I found myself again in complete darkness. The same noise of a door opening and shutting was repeated the instant afterward; the flaming globe descended afresh, and I was completely alone.

“This moment was frightful; if I had any doubts as to my misfortune, these doubts had vanished in an overwhelming reality. I was in the power of a man whom I not only detested, but despised--of a man capable of anything, and who had already given me a fatal proof of what he was able to do.”

“But who, then was this man?” asked Felton.

“I passed the night on a chair, starting at the least noise, for toward midnight the lamp went out, and I was again in darkness. But the night passed away without any fresh attempt on the part of my persecutor. Day came; the table had disappeared, only I had still the knife in my hand.

“This knife was my only hope.

“I was worn out with fatigue. Sleeplessness inflamed my eyes; I had not dared to sleep a single instant. The light of day reassured me; I went and threw myself on the bed, without parting with the emancipating knife, which I concealed under my pillow.

“When I awoke, a fresh meal was served.

“This time, in spite of my terrors, in spite of my agony, I began to feel a devouring hunger. It was forty-eight hours since I had taken any nourishment. I ate some bread and some fruit; then, remembering the narcotic mixed with the water I had drunk, I would not touch that which was placed on the table, but filled my glass at a marble fountain fixed in the wall over my dressing table.

“And yet, notwithstanding these precautions, I remained for some time in a terrible agitation of mind. But my fears were this time ill-founded; I passed the day without experiencing anything of the kind I dreaded.

“I took the precaution to half empty the carafe, in order that my suspicions might not be noticed.

“The evening came on, and with it darkness; but however profound was this darkness, my eyes began to accustom themselves to it. I saw, amid the shadows, the table sink through the floor; a quarter of an hour later it reappeared, bearing my supper. In an instant, thanks to the lamp, my chamber was once more lighted.

“I was determined to eat only such things as could not possibly have anything soporific introduced into them. Two eggs and some fruit composed my repast; then I drew another glass of water from my protecting fountain, and drank it.

“At the first swallow, it appeared to me not to have the same taste as in the morning. Suspicion instantly seized me. I paused, but I had already drunk half a glass.

“I threw the rest away with horror, and waited, with the dew of fear upon my brow.

“No doubt some invisible witness had seen me draw the water from that fountain, and had taken advantage of my confidence in it, the better to assure my ruin, so coolly resolved upon, so cruelly pursued.

“Half an hour had not passed when the same symptoms began to appear; but as I had only drunk half a glass of the water, I contended longer, and instead of falling entirely asleep, I sank into a state of drowsiness which left me a perception of what was passing around me, while depriving me of the strength either to defend myself or to fly.

“I dragged myself toward the bed, to seek the only defense I had left--my saving knife; but I could not reach the bolster. I sank on my knees, my hands clasped round one of the bedposts; then I felt that I was lost.”

Felton became frightfully pale, and a convulsive tremor crept through his whole body.

“And what was most frightful,” continued Milady, her voice altered, as if she still experienced the same agony as at that awful minute, “was that at this time I retained a consciousness of the danger that threatened me; was that my soul, if I may say so, waked in my sleeping body; was that I saw, that I heard. It is true that all was like a dream, but it was not the less frightful.

“I saw the lamp ascend, and leave me in darkness; then I heard the well-known creaking of the door although I had heard that door open but twice.

“I felt instinctively that someone approached me; it is said that the doomed wretch in the deserts of America thus feels the approach of the serpent.

“I wished to make an effort; I attempted to cry out. By an incredible effort of will I even raised myself up, but only to sink down again immediately, and to fall into the arms of my persecutor.”

“Tell me who this man was!” cried the young officer.

Milady saw at a single glance all the painful feelings she inspired in Felton by dwelling on every detail of her recital; but she would not spare him a single pang. The more profoundly she wounded his heart, the more certainly he would avenge her. She continued, then, as if she had not heard his exclamation, or as if she thought the moment was not yet come to reply to it.

“Only this time it was no longer an inert body, without feeling, that the villain had to deal with. I have told you that without being able to regain the complete exercise of my faculties, I retained the sense of my danger. I struggled, then, with all my strength, and doubtless opposed, weak as I was, a long resistance, for I heard him cry out, ‘These miserable Puritans! I knew very well that they tired out their executioners, but I did not believe them so strong against their lovers!’

“Alas! this desperate resistance could not last long. I felt my strength fail, and this time it was not my sleep that enabled the coward to prevail, but my swoon.”

Felton listened without uttering any word or sound, except an inward expression of agony. The sweat streamed down his marble forehead, and his hand, under his coat, tore his breast.

“My first impulse, on coming to myself, was to feel under my pillow for the knife I had not been able to reach; if it had not been useful for defense, it might at least serve for expiation.

“But on taking this knife, Felton, a terrible idea occurred to me. I have sworn to tell you all, and I will tell you all. I have promised you the truth; I will tell it, were it to destroy me.”

“The idea came into your mind to avenge yourself on this man, did it not?” cried Felton.

“Yes,” said Milady. “The idea was not that of a Christian, I knew; but without doubt, that eternal enemy of our souls, that lion roaring constantly around us, breathed it into my mind. In short, what shall I say to you, Felton?” continued Milady, in the tone of a woman accusing herself of a crime. “This idea occurred to me, and did not leave me; it is of this homicidal thought that I now bear the punishment.”

“Continue, continue!” said Felton; “I am eager to see you attain your vengeance!”

“Oh, I resolved that it should take place as soon as possible. I had no doubt he would return the following night. During the day I had nothing to fear.

“When the hour of breakfast came, therefore, I did not hesitate to eat and drink. I had determined to make believe sup, but to eat nothing. I was forced, then, to combat the fast of the evening with the nourishment of the morning.

“Only I concealed a glass of water, which remained after my breakfast, thirst having been the chief of my sufferings when I remained forty-eight hours without eating or drinking.

“The day passed away without having any other influence on me than to strengthen the resolution I had formed; only I took care that my face should not betray the thoughts of my heart, for I had no doubt I was watched. Several times, even, I felt a smile on my lips. Felton, I dare not tell you at what idea I smiled; you would hold me in horror--”

“Go on! go on!” said Felton; “you see plainly that I listen, and that I am anxious to know the end.”

“Evening came; the ordinary events took place. During the darkness, as before, my supper was brought. Then the lamp was lighted, and I sat down to table. I only ate some fruit. I pretended to pour out water from the jug, but I only drank that which I had saved in my glass. The substitution was made so carefully that my spies, if I had any, could have no suspicion of it.

“After supper I exhibited the same marks of languor as on the preceding evening; but this time, as I yielded to fatigue, or as if I had become familiarized with danger, I dragged myself toward my bed, let my robe fall, and lay down.

“I found my knife where I had placed it, under my pillow, and while feigning to sleep, my hand grasped the handle of it convulsively.

“Two hours passed away without anything fresh happening. Oh, my God! who could have said so the evening before? I began to fear that he would not come.

“At length I saw the lamp rise softly, and disappear in the depths of the ceiling; my chamber was filled with darkness and obscurity, but I made a strong effort to penetrate this darkness and obscurity.

“Nearly ten minutes passed; I heard no other noise but the beating of my own heart. I implored heaven that he might come.

"At length I heard the well-known noise of the door, which opened and shut; I heard, notwithstanding the thickness of the carpet, a step which made the floor creak; I saw, notwithstanding the darkness, a shadow which approached my bed."

"Haste! haste!" said Felton; "do you not see that each of your words burns me like molten lead?"

"Then," continued Milady, "then I collected all my strength; I recalled to my mind that the moment of vengeance, or rather, of justice, had struck. I looked upon myself as another Judith; I gathered myself up, my knife in my hand, and when I saw him near me, stretching out his arms to find his victim, then, with the last cry of agony and despair, I struck him in the middle of his breast.

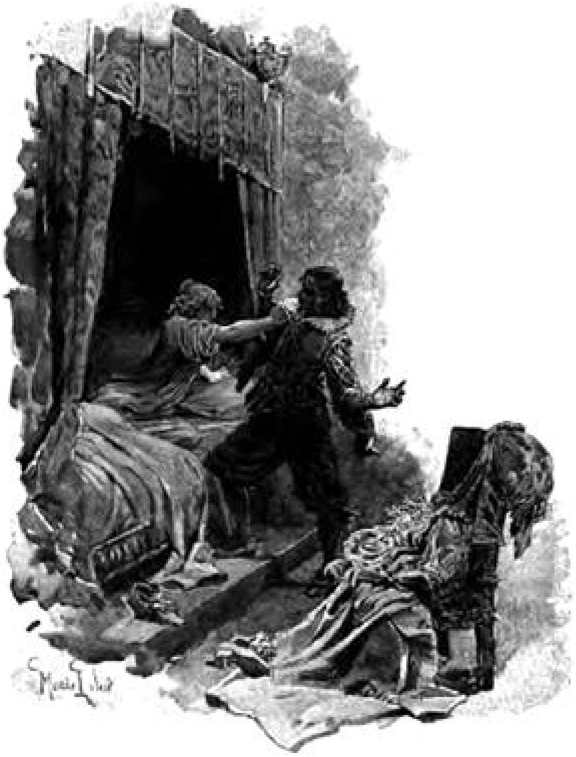

"The miserable villain! He had foreseen all. His breast was covered with a coat-of-mail; the knife was bent against it.

"'Ah, ah!' cried he, seizing my arm, and wresting from me the weapon that had so badly served me, 'you want to take my life, do you, my pretty Puritan? But that's more than dislike, that's ingratitude! Come, come, calm yourself, my sweet girl! I thought you had softened. I am not one of those tyrants who detain women by force. You don't love me. With my usual fatuity I doubted it; now I am convinced. Tomorrow you shall be free.'

“I had but one wish; that was that he should kill me.

“‘Beware!’ said I, ‘for my liberty is your dishonor.’

“‘Explain yourself, my pretty sibyl!’

“‘Yes; for as soon as I leave this place I will tell everything. I will proclaim the violence you have used toward me. I will describe my captivity. I will denounce this place of infamy. You are placed on high, my Lord, but tremble! Above you there is the king; above the king there is God!’

“However perfect master he was over himself, my persecutor allowed a movement of anger to escape him. I could not see the expression of his countenance, but I felt the arm tremble upon which my hand was placed.

“‘Then you shall not leave this place,’ said he.

“‘Very well,’ cried I, ‘then the place of my punishment will be that of my tomb. I will die here, and you will see if a phantom that accuses is not more terrible than a living being that threatens!’

“‘You shall have no weapon left in your power.’

“‘There is a weapon which despair has placed within the reach of every creature who has the courage to use it. I will allow myself to die with hunger.’

“‘Come,’ said the wretch, ‘is not peace much better than such a war as that? I will restore you to liberty this moment; I will proclaim you a piece of immaculate virtue; I will name you the Lucretia of England.’

“‘And I will say that you are the Sextus. I will denounce you before men, as I have denounced you before God; and if it be necessary that, like Lucretia, I should sign my accusation with my blood, I will sign it.’

“‘Ah!’ said my enemy, in a jeering tone, ‘that’s quite another thing. My faith! everything considered, you are very well off here. You shall want for nothing, and if you let yourself die of hunger that will be your own fault.’

“At these words he retired. I heard the door open and shut, and I remained overwhelmed, less, I confess it, by my grief than by the mortification of not having avenged myself.

“He kept his word. All the day, all the next night passed away without my seeing him again. But I also kept my word with him, and I neither ate nor drank. I was, as I told him, resolved to die of hunger.

“I passed the day and the night in prayer, for I hoped that God would pardon me my suicide.

“The second night the door opened; I was lying on the floor, for my strength began to abandon me.

“At the noise I raised myself up on one hand.

“‘Well,’ said a voice which vibrated in too terrible a manner in my ear not to be recognized, ‘well! Are we softened a little? Will we not pay for our liberty with a single promise of silence? Come, I am a good sort of a prince,’ added he, ‘and although I like not Puritans I do them justice; and it is the same with Puritanesses, when they are pretty. Come, take a little oath for me on the cross; I won’t ask anything more of you.’

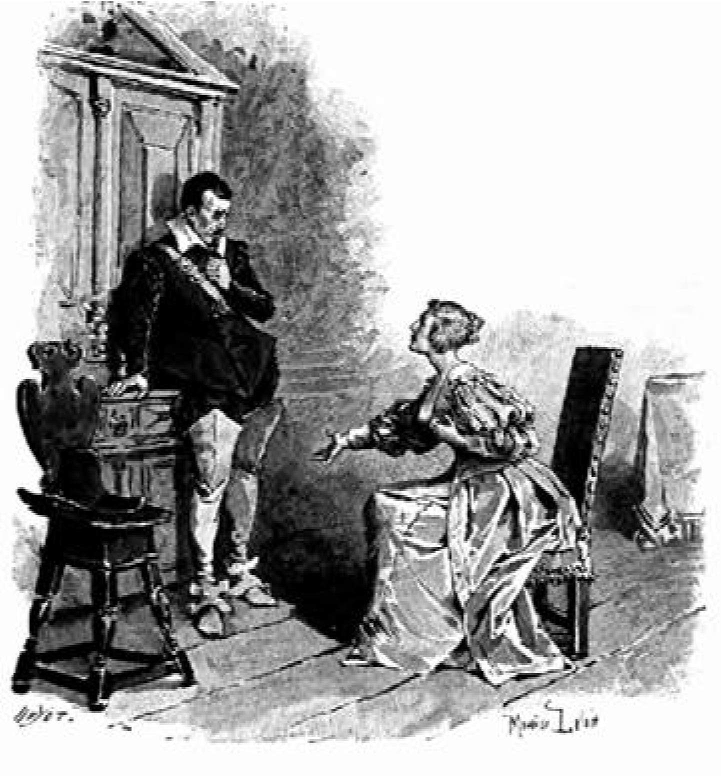

“‘On the cross,’ cried I, rising, for at that abhorred voice I had recovered all my strength, ‘on the cross I swear that no promise, no menace, no force, no torture, shall close my mouth! On the cross I swear to denounce you everywhere as a murderer, as a thief of honor, as a base coward! On the cross I swear, if I ever leave this place, to call down vengeance upon you from the whole human race!’

“‘Beware!’ said the voice, in a threatening accent that I had never yet heard. ‘I have an extraordinary means which I will not employ but in the last extremity to close your mouth, or at least to prevent anyone from believing a word you may utter.’

“I mustered all my strength to reply to him with a burst of laughter.

“He saw that it was a merciless war between us--a war to the death.

“‘Listen!’ said he. ‘I give you the rest of tonight and all day tomorrow. Reflect: promise to be silent, and riches, consideration, even honor, shall surround you; threaten to speak, and I will condemn you to infamy.’

“‘You?’ cried I. ‘You?’

“‘To interminable, ineffaceable infamy!’

“‘You?’ repeated I. Oh, I declare to you, Felton, I thought him mad!

“‘Yes, yes, I!’ replied he.

“‘Oh, leave me!’ said I. ‘Begone, if you do not desire to see me dash my head against that wall before your eyes!’

“‘Very well, it is your own doing. Till tomorrow evening, then!’

“‘Till tomorrow evening, then!’ replied I, allowing myself to fall, and biting the carpet with rage.”

Felton leaned for support upon a piece of furniture; and Milady saw, with the joy of a demon, that his strength would fail him perhaps before the end of her recital.

CHAPTER 57

MEANS FOR CLASSICAL TRAGEDY

After a moment of silence employed by Milady in observing the young man who listened to her, Milady continued her recital.

“It was nearly three days since I had eaten or drunk anything. I suffered frightful torments. At times there passed before me clouds which pressed my brow, which veiled my eyes; this was delirium.

“When the evening came I was so weak that every time I fainted I thanked God, for I thought I was about to die.

“In the midst of one of these swoons I heard the door open. Terror recalled me to myself.

“He entered the apartment followed by a man in a mask. He was masked likewise; but I knew his step, I knew his voice, I knew him by that imposing bearing which hell has bestowed upon his person for the curse of humanity.

“‘Well,’ said he to me, ‘have you made your mind up to take the oath I requested of you?’

“‘You have said Puritans have but one word. Mine you have heard, and that is to pursue you--on earth to the tribunal of men, in heaven to the tribunal of God.’

“‘You persist, then?’

“‘I swear it before the God who hears me. I will take the whole world as a witness of your crime, and that until I have found an avenger.’

“‘You are a prostitute,’ said he, in a voice of thunder, ‘and you shall undergo the punishment of prostitutes! Branded in the eyes of the world you invoke, try to prove to that world that you are neither guilty nor mad!’

“Then, addressing the man who accompanied him, ‘Executioner,’ said he, ‘do your duty.’“

“Oh, his name, his name!” cried Felton. “His name, tell it me!”

“Then in spite of my cries, in spite of my resistance--for I began to comprehend that there was a question of something worse than death--the executioner seized me, threw me on the floor, fastened me with his bonds, and suffocated by sobs, almost without sense, invoking God, who did not listen to me, I uttered all at once a frightful cry of pain and shame. A burning fire, a red-hot iron, the iron of the executioner, was imprinted on my shoulder."

Felton uttered a groan.

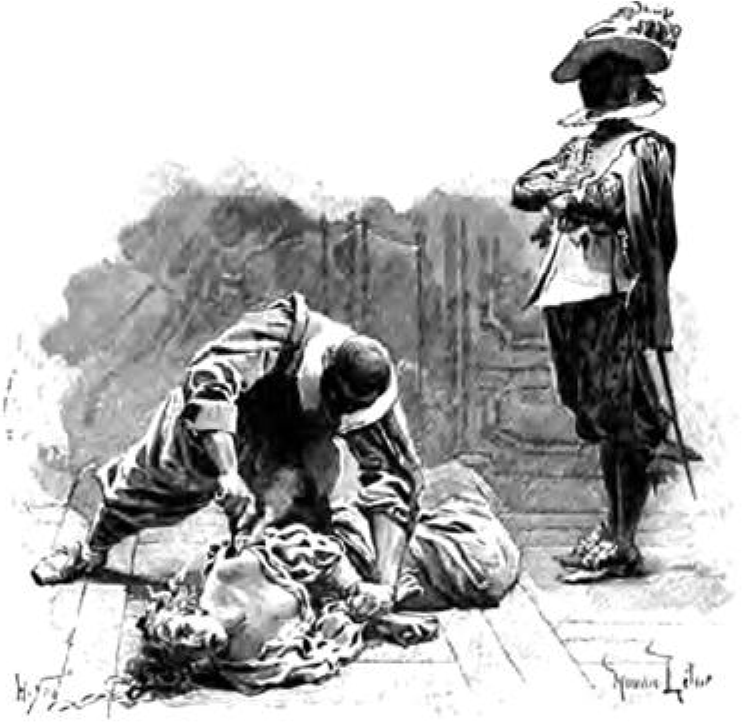

"Here," said Milady, rising with the majesty of a queen, "here, Felton, behold the new martyrdom invented for a pure young girl, the victim of the brutality of a villain. Learn to know the heart of men, and henceforth make yourself less easily the instrument of their unjust vengeance."

Milady, with a rapid gesture, opened her robe, tore the cambric that covered her bosom, and red with feigned anger and simulated shame, showed the young man the ineffaceable impression which dishonored that beautiful shoulder.

"But," cried Felton, "that is a FLEUR-DE-LIS which I see there."

"And therein consisted the infamy," replied Milady. "The brand of England!--it would be necessary to prove what tribunal had imposed it on me, and I could have made a public appeal to all the tribunals of the kingdom; but the brand of France!--oh, by that, by THAT I was branded indeed!"

This was too much for Felton.

Pale, motionless, overwhelmed by this frightful revelation, dazzled by the superhuman beauty of this woman who unveiled herself before him with an immodesty which appeared to him sublime, he ended by falling on his knees before her as the early Christians did before those pure and holy martyrs whom the persecution of the emperors gave up in the circus to the sanguinary sensuality of the populace. The brand disappeared; the beauty alone remained.

“Pardon! Pardon!” cried Felton, “oh, pardon!”

Milady read in his eyes LOVE! LOVE!

“Pardon for what?” asked she.

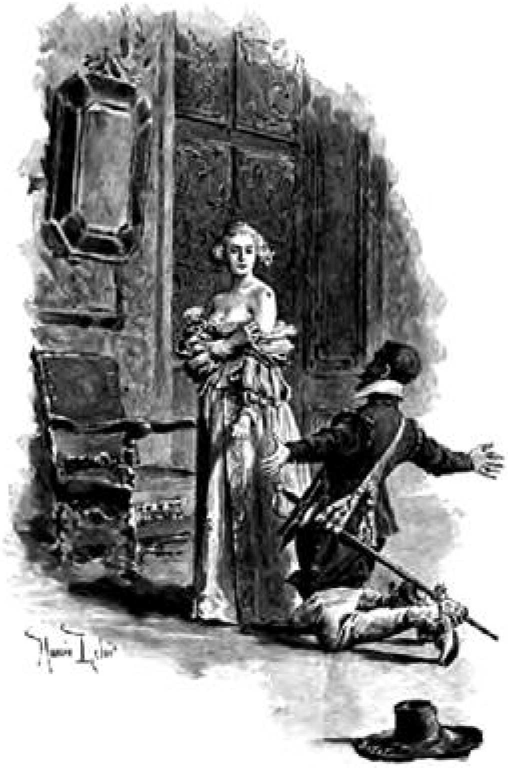

“Pardon me for having joined with your persecutors.”

Milady held out her hand to him.

“So beautiful! so young!” cried Felton, covering that hand with his kisses.

Milady let one of those looks fall upon him which make a slave of a king.

Felton was a Puritan; he abandoned the hand of this woman to kiss her feet.

He no longer loved her; he adored her.

When this crisis was past, when Milady appeared to have resumed her self-possession, which she had never lost; when Felton had seen her recover with the veil of chastity those treasures of love which were only concealed from him to make him desire them the more ardently, he said, “Ah, now! I have only one thing to ask of you; that is, the name of your true executioner. For to me there is but one; the other was an instrument, that was all.”

“What, brother!” cried Milady, “must I name him again? Have you not yet divined who he is?”

“What?” cried Felton, “he--again he--always he? What--the truly guilty?”

“The truly guilty,” said Milady, “is the ravager of England, the persecutor of true believers, the base ravisher of the honor of so many women--he who, to satisfy a caprice of his corrupt heart, is about to make England shed so much blood, who protects the Protestants today and will betray them tomorrow--”

“Buckingham! It is, then, Buckingham!” cried Felton, in a high state of excitement.

Milady concealed her face in her hands, as if she could not endure the shame which this name recalled to her.

“Buckingham, the executioner of this angelic creature!” cried Felton. “And thou hast not hurled thy thunder at him, my God! And thou hast left him noble, honored, powerful, for the ruin of us all!”

“God abandons him who abandons himself,” said Milady.

“But he will draw upon his head the punishment reserved for the damned!” said Felton, with increasing exultation. “He wills that human vengeance should precede celestial justice.”

“Men fear him and spare him.”

“I,” said Felton, “I do not fear him, nor will I spare him.”

The soul of Milady was bathed in an infernal joy.

“But how can Lord de Winter, my protector, my father,” asked Felton, “possibly be mixed up with all this?”

“Listen, Felton,” resumed Milady, “for by the side of base and contemptible men there are often found great and generous natures. I had an affianced husband, a man whom I loved, and who loved me--a heart like yours, Felton, a man like you. I went to him and told him all; he knew me, that man did, and did not doubt an instant. He was a nobleman, a man equal to Buckingham in every respect. He said nothing; he only girded on his sword, wrapped himself in his cloak, and went straight to Buckingham Palace.

“Yes, yes,” said Felton; “I understand how he would act. But with such men it is not the sword that should be employed; it is the poniard.”

“Buckingham had left England the day before, sent as ambassador to Spain, to demand the hand of the Infanta for King Charles I, who was then only Prince of Wales. My affianced husband returned.

“‘Hear me,’ said he; ‘this man has gone, and for the moment has consequently escaped my vengeance; but let us be united, as we were to have been, and then leave it to Lord de Winter to maintain his own honor and that of his wife.’“

“Lord de Winter!” cried Felton.

“Yes,” said Milady, “Lord de Winter; and now you can understand it all, can you not? Buckingham remained nearly a year absent. A week before his return Lord de Winter died, leaving me his sole heir. Whence came the blow? God who knows all, knows without doubt; but as for me, I accuse nobody.”

“Oh, what an abyss; what an abyss!” cried Felton.

“Lord de Winter died without revealing anything to his brother. The terrible secret was to be concealed till it burst, like a clap of thunder, over the head of the guilty. Your protector had seen with pain this marriage of his elder brother with a portionless girl. I was sensible that I could look for no support from a man disappointed in his hopes of an inheritance. I went to France, with a determination to remain there for the rest of my life. But all my fortune is in England. Communication being closed by the war, I was in want of everything. I was then obliged to come back again. Six days ago, I landed at Portsmouth.”

“Well?” said Felton.

“Well; Buckingham heard by some means, no doubt, of my return. He spoke of me to Lord de Winter, already prejudiced against me, and told him that his sister-in-law was a prostitute, a branded woman. The noble and pure voice of my husband was no longer here to defend me. Lord de Winter believed all that was told him with so much the more ease that it was his interest to believe it. He caused me to be arrested, had me conducted hither, and placed me under your guard. You know the rest. The day after tomorrow he banishes me, he transports me; the day after tomorrow he exiles me among the infamous. Oh, the train is well laid; the plot is clever. My honor will not survive it! You see, then, Felton, I can do nothing but die. Felton, give me that knife!”

And at these words, as if all her strength was exhausted, Milady sank, weak and languishing, into the arms of the young officer, who, intoxicated with love, anger, and voluptuous sensations hitherto unknown, received her with transport, pressed her against his heart, all trembling at the breath from that charming mouth, bewildered by the contact with that palpitating bosom.

“No, no,” said he. “No, you shall live honored and pure; you shall live to triumph over your enemies.”

Milady put him from her slowly with her hand, while drawing him nearer with her look; but Felton, in his turn, embraced her more closely, imploring her like a divinity.

“Oh, death, death!” said she, lowering her voice and her eyelids, “oh, death, rather than shame! Felton, my brother, my friend, I conjure you!”

“No,” cried Felton, “no; you shall live and you shall be avenged.”

“Felton, I bring misfortune to all who surround me! Felton, abandon me! Felton, let me die!”

“Well, then, we will live and die together!” cried he, pressing his lips to those of the prisoner.

Several strokes resounded on the door; this time Milady really pushed him away from her.

“Hark,” said she, “we have been overheard! Someone is coming! All is over! We are lost!”

“No,” said Felton; it is only the sentinel warning me that they are about to change the guard.”

“Then run to the door, and open it yourself.”

Felton obeyed; this woman was now his whole thought, his whole soul.

He found himself face to face with a sergeant commanding a watch-patrol.

“Well, what is the matter?” asked the young lieutenant.

“You told me to open the door if I heard anyone cry out,” said the soldier; “but you forgot to leave me the key. I heard you cry out, without understanding what you said. I tried to open the door, but it was locked inside; then I called the sergeant.”

“And here I am,” said the sergeant.

Felton, quite bewildered, almost mad, stood speechless.

Milady plainly perceived that it was now her turn to take part in the scene. She ran to the table, and seizing the knife which Felton had laid down, exclaimed, “And by what right will you prevent me from dying?”

“Great God!” exclaimed Felton, on seeing the knife glitter in her hand.

At that moment a burst of ironical laughter resounded through the corridor. The baron, attracted by the noise, in his chamber gown, his sword under his arm, stood in the doorway.

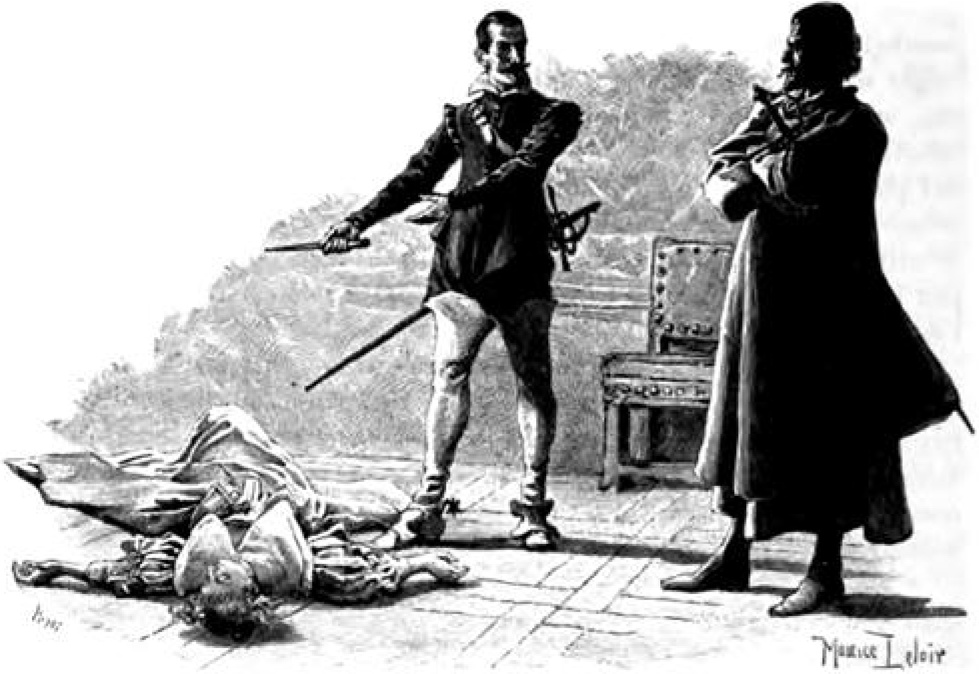

“Ah,” said he, “here we are, at the last act of the tragedy. You see, Felton, the drama has gone through all the phases I named; but be easy, no blood will flow.”

Milady perceived that all was lost unless she gave Felton an immediate and terrible proof of her courage.

“You are mistaken, my Lord, blood will flow; and may that blood fall back on those who cause it to flow!”

Felton uttered a cry, and rushed toward her. He was too late; Milady had stabbed herself.

But the knife had fortunately, we ought to say skillfully, come in contact with the steel busk, which at that period, like a cuirass, defended the chests of women. It had glided down it, tearing the robe, and had penetrated slantingly between the flesh and the ribs. Milady’s robe was not the less stained with blood in a second.

Milady fell down, and seemed to be in a swoon.

Felton snatched away the knife.

“See, my Lord,” said he, in a deep, gloomy tone, “here is a woman who was under my guard, and who has killed herself!”

“Be at ease, Felton,” said Lord de Winter. “She is not dead; demons do not die so easily. Be tranquil, and go wait for me in my chamber.”

“But, my Lord--”

“Go, sir, I command you!”

At this injunction from his superior, Felton obeyed; but in going out, he put the knife into his bosom.

As to Lord de Winter, he contented himself with calling the woman who waited on Milady, and when she was come, he recommended the prisoner, who was still fainting, to her care, and left them alone.

Meanwhile, all things considered and notwithstanding his suspicions, as the wound might be serious, he immediately sent off a mounted man to find a physician.

CHAPTER 58

ESCAPE

As Lord de Winter had thought, Milady’s wound was not dangerous. So soon as she was left alone with the woman whom the baron had summoned to her assistance she opened her eyes.

It was, however, necessary to affect weakness and pain--not a very difficult task for so finished an actress as Milady. Thus the poor woman was completely the dupe of the prisoner, whom, notwithstanding her hints, she persisted in watching all night.

But the presence of this woman did not prevent Milady from thinking.

There was no longer a doubt that Felton was convinced; Felton was hers. If an angel appeared to that young man as an accuser of Milady, he would take him, in the mental disposition in which he now found himself, for a messenger sent by the devil.

Milady smiled at this thought, for Felton was now her only hope--her only means of safety.

But Lord de Winter might suspect him; Felton himself might now be watched!

Toward four o’clock in the morning the doctor arrived; but since the time Milady stabbed herself, however short, the wound had closed. The doctor could therefore measure neither the direction nor the depth of it; he only satisfied himself by Milady’s pulse that the case was not serious.

In the morning Milady, under the pretext that she had not slept well in the night and wanted rest, sent away the woman who attended her.

She had one hope, which was that Felton would appear at the breakfast hour; but Felton did not come.

Were her fears realized? Was Felton, suspected by the baron, about to fail her at the decisive moment? She had only one day left. Lord de Winter had announced her embarkation for the twenty-third, and it was now the morning of the twenty-second.

Nevertheless she still waited patiently till the hour for dinner.

Although she had eaten nothing in the morning, the dinner was brought in at its usual time. Milady then perceived, with terror, that the uniform of the soldiers who guarded her was changed.

Then she ventured to ask what had become of Felton.

She was told that he had left the castle an hour before on horseback. She inquired if the baron was still at the castle. The soldier replied that he was, and that he had given orders to be informed if the prisoner wished to speak to him.

Milady replied that she was too weak at present, and that her only desire was to be left alone.

The soldier went out, leaving the dinner served.

Felton was sent away. The marines were removed. Felton was then mistrusted.

This was the last blow to the prisoner.

Left alone, she arose. The bed, which she had kept from prudence and that they might believe her seriously wounded, burned her like a bed of fire. She cast a glance at the door; the baron had had a plank nailed over the grating. He no doubt feared that by this opening she might still by some diabolical means corrupt her guards.

Milady smiled with joy. She was free now to give way to her transports without being observed. She traversed her chamber with the excitement of a furious maniac or of a tigress shut up in an iron cage. CERTES, if the knife had been left in her power, she would now have thought, not of killing herself, but of killing the baron.

At six o’clock Lord de Winter came in. He was armed at all points. This man, in whom Milady till that time had only seen a very simple gentleman, had become an admirable jailer. He appeared to foresee all, to divine all, to anticipate all.

A single look at Milady apprised him of all that was passing in her mind.

“Ay!” said he, “I see; but you shall not kill me today. You have no longer a weapon; and besides, I am on my guard. You had begun to pervert my poor Felton. He was yielding to your infernal influence; but I will save him. He will never see you again; all is over. Get your clothes together. Tomorrow you will go. I had fixed the embarkation for the twenty-fourth; but I have reflected that the more promptly the affair takes place the more sure it will be. Tomorrow, by twelve o’clock, I shall have the order for your exile, signed, BUCKINGHAM. If you speak a single word to anyone before going aboard ship, my sergeant will blow your brains out. He has orders to do so. If when on the ship you speak a single word to anyone before the captain permits you, the captain will have you thrown into the sea. That is agreed upon.

“AU REVOIR; then; that is all I have to say today. Tomorrow I will see you again, to take my leave.” With these words the baron went out. Milady had listened to all this menacing tirade with a smile of disdain on her lips, but rage in her heart.

Supper was served. Milady felt that she stood in need of all her strength. She did not know what might take place during this night which approached so menacingly--for large masses of cloud rolled over the face of the sky, and distant lightning announced a storm.

The storm broke about ten o’clock. Milady felt a consolation in seeing nature partake of the disorder of her heart. The thunder growled in the air like the passion and anger in her thoughts. It appeared to her that the blast as it swept along disheveled her brow, as it bowed the branches of the trees and bore away their leaves. She howled as the hurricane howled; and her voice was lost in the great voice of nature, which also seemed to groan with despair.

All at once she heard a tap at her window, and by the help of a flash of lightning she saw the face of a man appear behind the bars.

She ran to the window and opened it.

“Felton!” cried she. “I am saved.”

“Yes,” said Felton; “but silence, silence! I must have time to file through these bars. Only take care that I am not seen through the wicket.”

“Oh, it is a proof that the Lord is on our side, Felton,” replied Milady. “They have closed up the grating with a board.”

“That is well; God has made them senseless,” said Felton.

“But what must I do?” asked Milady.

“Nothing, nothing, only shut the window. Go to bed, or at least lie down in your clothes. As soon as I have done I will knock on one of the panes of glass. But will you be able to follow me?”

“Oh, yes!”

[redacted]

“Your wound?”

“Gives me pain, but will not prevent my walking.”

“Be ready, then, at the first signal.”

Milady shut the window, extinguished the lamp, and went, as Felton had desired her, to lie down on the bed. Amid the moaning of the storm she heard the grinding of the file upon the bars, and by the light of every flash she perceived the shadow of Felton through the panes.

She passed an hour without breathing, panting, with a cold sweat upon her brow, and her heart oppressed by frightful agony at every movement she heard in the corridor.

There are hours which last a year.

At the expiration of an hour, Felton tapped again.

Milady sprang out of bed and opened the window. Two bars removed formed an opening for a man to pass through.

“Are you ready?” asked Felton.

“Yes. Must I take anything with me?”

“Money, if you have any.”

“Yes; fortunately they have left me all I had.”

“So much the better, for I have expended all mine in chartering a vessel.”

“Here!” said Milady, placing a bag full of louis in Felton’s hands.

Felton took the bag and threw it to the foot of the wall.

“Now,” said he, “will you come?”

“I am ready.”

Milady mounted upon a chair and passed the upper part of her body through the window. She saw the young officer suspended over the abyss by a ladder of ropes. For the first time an emotion of terror reminded her that she was a woman.

The dark space frightened her.

“I expected this,” said Felton.

“It’s nothing, it’s nothing!” said Milady. “I will descend with my eyes shut.”

“Have you confidence in me?” said Felton.

“You ask that?”

“Put your two hands together. Cross them; that’s right!”

Felton tied her two wrists together with his handkerchief, and then with a cord over the handkerchief.

“What are you doing?” asked Milady, with surprise.

“Pass your arms around my neck, and fear nothing.”

“But I shall make you lose your balance, and we shall both be dashed to pieces.”

“Don’t be afraid. I am a sailor.”

Not a second was to be lost. Milady passed her two arms round Felton’s neck, and let herself slip out of the window. Felton began to descend the ladder slowly, step by step. Despite the weight of two bodies, the blast of the hurricane shook them in the air.

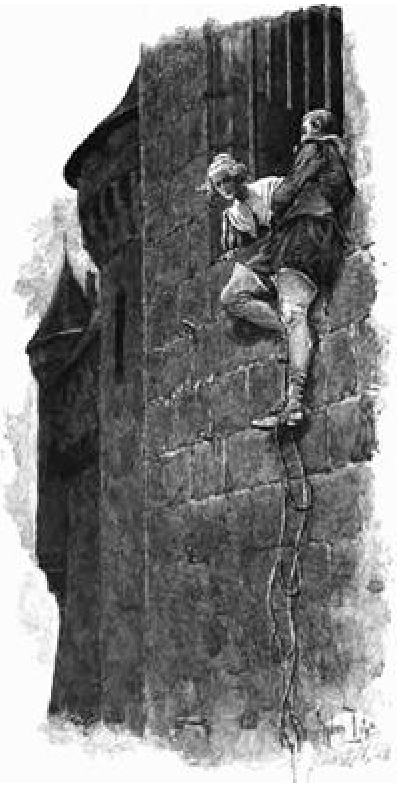

All at once Felton stopped.

“What is the matter?” asked Milady.

“Silence,” said Felton, “I hear footsteps.”

“We are discovered!”

There was a silence of several seconds.

“No,” said Felton, “it is nothing.”

“But what, then, is the noise?”

“That of the patrol going their rounds.”

“Where is their road?”

“Just under us.”

“They will discover us!”

“No, if it does not lighten.”

“But they will run against the bottom of the ladder.”

“Fortunately it is too short by six feet.”

“Here they are! My God!”

“Silence!”

Both remained suspended, motionless and breathless, within twenty paces of the ground, while the patrol passed beneath them laughing and talking. This was a terrible moment for the fugitives.

The patrol passed. The noise of their retreating footsteps and the murmur of their voices soon died away.

“Now,” said Felton, “we are safe.”

Milady breathed a deep sigh and fainted.

Felton continued to descend. Near the bottom of the ladder, when he found no more support for his feet, he clung with his hands; at length, arrived at the last step, he let himself hang by the strength of his wrists, and touched the ground. He stooped down, picked up the bag of money, and placed it between his teeth. Then he took Milady in his arms, and set off briskly in the direction opposite to that which the patrol had taken. He soon left the pathway of the patrol, descended across the rocks, and when arrived on the edge of the sea, whistled.

A similar signal replied to him; and five minutes after, a boat appeared, rowed by four men.

The boat approached as near as it could to the shore; but there was not depth enough of water for it to touch land. Felton walked into the sea up to his middle, being unwilling to trust his precious burden to anybody.

Fortunately the storm began to subside, but still the sea was disturbed. The little boat bounded over the waves like a nut-shell.

“To the sloop,” said Felton, “and row quickly.”

The four men bent to their oars, but the sea was too high to let them get much hold of it.

However, they left the castle behind; that was the principal thing. The night was extremely dark. It was almost impossible to see the shore from the boat; they would therefore be less likely to see the boat from the shore.

A black point floated on the sea. That was the sloop. While the boat was advancing with all the speed its four rowers could give it, Felton untied the cord and then the handkerchief which bound Milady's hands together. When her hands were loosed he took some sea water and sprinkled it over her face.

Milady breathed a sigh, and opened her eyes.

"Where am I?" said she.

"Saved!" replied the young officer.

"Oh, saved, saved!" cried she. "Yes, there is the sky; here is the sea! The air I breathe is the air of liberty! Ah, thanks, Felton, thanks!"

The young man pressed her to his heart.

"But what is the matter with my hands!" asked Milady; "it seems as if my wrists had been crushed in a vice."

Milady held out her arms; her wrists were bruised.

"Alas!" said Felton, looking at those beautiful hands, and shaking his head sorrowfully.

"Oh, it's nothing, nothing!" cried Milady. "I remember now."

Milady looked around her, as if in search of something.

"It is there," said Felton, touching the bag of money with his foot.

They drew near to the sloop. A sailor on watch hailed the boat; the boat replied.

"What vessel is that?" asked Milady.

"The one I have hired for you."

"Where will it take me?"

"Where you please, after you have put me on shore at Portsmouth."

"What are you going to do at Portsmouth?" asked Milady.

"Accomplish the orders of Lord de Winter," said Felton, with a gloomy smile.

"What orders?" asked Milady.

"You do not understand?" asked Felton.

"No; explain yourself, I beg."

"As he mistrusted me, he determined to guard you himself, and sent me in his place to get Buckingham to sign the order for your transportation."

"But if he mistrusted you, how could he confide such an order to you?"

"How could I know what I was the bearer of?"

"That's true! And you are going to Portsmouth?"

"I have no time to lose. Tomorrow is the twenty-third, and Buckingham sets sail tomorrow with his fleet."

"He sets sail tomorrow! Where for?"

"For La Rochelle."

"He need not sail!" cried Milady, forgetting her usual presence of mind.

"Be satisfied," replied Felton; "he will not sail."

Milady started with joy. She could read to the depths of the heart of this young man; the death of Buckingham was written there at full length.

"Felton," cried she, "you are as great as Judas Maccabeus! If you die, I will die with you; that is all I can say to you."

"Silence!" cried Felton; "we are here."

In fact, they touched the sloop.

Felton mounted the ladder first, and gave his hand to Milady, while the sailors supported her, for the sea was still much agitated.

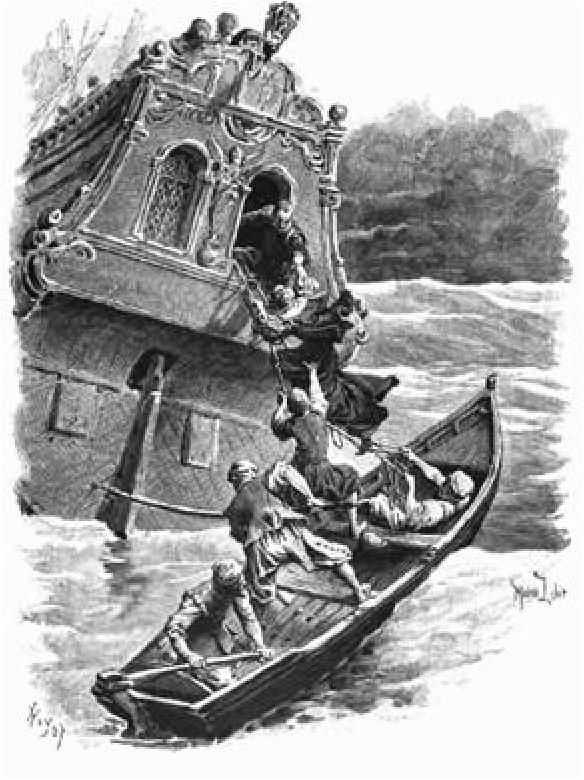

An instant after they were on the deck.

“Captain,” said Felton, “this is the person of whom I spoke to you, and whom you must convey safe and sound to France.”

“For a thousand pistoles,” said the captain.

“I have paid you five hundred of them.”

“That’s correct,” said the captain.

“And here are the other five hundred,” replied Milady, placing her hand upon the bag of gold.

“No,” said the captain, “I make but one bargain; and I have agreed with this young man that the other five hundred shall not be due to me till we arrive at Boulogne.”

“And shall we arrive there?”

“Safe and sound, as true as my name’s Jack Butler.”

“Well,” said Milady, “if you keep your word, instead of five hundred, I will give you a thousand pistoles.”

“Hurrah for you, then, my beautiful lady,” cried the captain; “and may God often send me such passengers as your Ladyship!”

“Meanwhile,” said Felton, “convey me to the little bay of--; you know it was agreed you should put in there.”

The captain replied by ordering the necessary maneuvers, and toward seven o’clock in the morning the little vessel cast anchor in the bay that had been named.

During this passage, Felton related everything to Milady--how, instead of going to London, he had chartered the little vessel; how he had returned; how he had scaled the wall by fastening cramps in the interstices of the stones, as he ascended, to give him foothold; and how, when he had reached the bars, he fastened his ladder. Milady knew the rest.

On her side, Milady tried to encourage Felton in his project; but at the first words which issued from her mouth, she plainly saw that the young fanatic stood more in need of being moderated than urged.

It was agreed that Milady should wait for Felton till ten o’clock; if he did not return by ten o’clock she was to sail.

In that case, and supposing he was at liberty, he was to rejoin her in France, at the convent of the Carmelites at Bethune.

CHAPTER 59

WHAT TOOK PLACE AT PORTSMOUTH AUGUST 23, 1628

Felton took leave of Milady as a brother about to go for a mere walk takes leave of his sister, kissing her hand.

His whole body appeared in its ordinary state of calmness, only an unusual fire beamed from his eyes, like the effects of a fever; his brow was more pale than it generally was; his teeth were clenched, and his speech had a short dry accent which indicated that something dark was at work within him.

As long as he remained in the boat which conveyed him to land, he kept his face toward Milady, who, standing on the deck, followed him with her eyes. Both were free from the fear of pursuit; nobody ever came into Milady’s apartment before nine o’clock, and it would require three hours to go from the castle to London.

Felton jumped onshore, climbed the little ascent which led to the top of the cliff, saluted Milady a last time, and took his course toward the city.

At the end of a hundred paces, the ground began to decline, and he could only see the mast of the sloop.

He immediately ran in the direction of Portsmouth, which he saw at nearly half a league before him, standing out in the haze of the morning, with its houses and towers.

Beyond Portsmouth the sea was covered with vessels whose masts, like a forest of poplars despoiled by the winter, bent with each breath of the wind.

Felton, in his rapid walk, reviewed in his mind all the accusations against the favorite of James I and Charles I, furnished by two years of premature meditation and a long sojourn among the Puritans.

When he compared the public crimes of this minister--startling crimes, European crimes, if so we may say--with the private and unknown crimes with which Milady had charged him, Felton found that the more culpable of the two men which formed the character of Buckingham was the one of whom the public knew not the life. This was because his love, so strange, so new, and so ardent, made him view the infamous and imaginary accusations of Milady de Winter as, through a magnifying glass, one views as frightful monsters atoms in reality imperceptible by the side of an ant.

The rapidity of his walk heated his blood still more; the idea that he left behind him, exposed to a frightful vengeance, the woman he loved, or rather whom he adored as a saint, the emotion he had experienced, present fatigue--all together exalted his mind above human feeling.

He entered Portsmouth about eight o'clock in the morning. The whole population was on foot; drums were beating in the streets and in the port; the troops about to embark were marching toward the sea.

Felton arrived at the palace of the Admiralty, covered with dust, and streaming with perspiration. His countenance, usually so pale, was purple with heat and passion. The sentinel wanted to repulse him; but Felton called to the officer of the post, and drawing from his pocket the letter of which he was the bearer, he said, "A pressing message from Lord de Winter."

At the name of Lord de Winter, who was known to be one of his Grace's most intimate friends, the officer of the post gave orders to let Felton pass, who, besides, wore the uniform of a naval officer.

Felton darted into the palace.

At the moment he entered the vestibule, another man was entering likewise, dusty, out of breath, leaving at the gate a post horse, which, on reaching the palace, tumbled on his foreknees.

Felton and he addressed Patrick, the duke's confidential lackey, at the same moment. Felton named Lord de Winter; the unknown would not name anybody, and pretended that it was to the duke alone he would make himself known. Each was anxious to gain admission before the other.

Patrick, who knew Lord de Winter was in affairs of the service, and in relations of friendship with the duke, gave the preference to the one who came in his name. The other was forced to wait, and it was easily to be seen how he cursed the delay.

The valet led Felton through a large hall in which waited the deputies from La Rochelle, headed by the Prince de Soubise, and introduced him into a closet where Buckingham, just out of the bath, was finishing his toilet, upon which, as at all times, he bestowed extraordinary attention.

"Lieutenant Felton, from Lord de Winter," said Patrick.

"From Lord de Winter!" repeated Buckingham; "let him come in."

Felton entered. At that moment Buckingham was throwing upon a couch a rich toilet robe, worked with gold, in order to put on a blue velvet doublet embroidered with pearls.

“Why didn’t the baron come himself?” demanded Buckingham. “I expected him this morning.”

“He desired me to tell your Grace,” replied Felton, “that he very much regretted not having that honor, but that he was prevented by the guard he is obliged to keep at the castle.”

“Yes, I know that,” said Buckingham; “he has a prisoner.”

“It is of that prisoner that I wish to speak to your Grace,” replied Felton.

“Well, then, speak!”

“That which I have to say of her can only be heard by yourself, my Lord!”

“Leave us, Patrick,” said Buckingham; “but remain within sound of the bell. I shall call you presently.”

Patrick went out.

“We are alone, sir,” said Buckingham; “speak!”

“My Lord,” said Felton, “the Baron de Winter wrote to you the other day to request you to sign an order of embarkation relative to a young woman named Charlotte Backson.”

“Yes, sir; and I answered him, to bring or send me that order and I would sign it.”

“Here it is, my Lord.”

“Give it to me,” said the duke.

And taking it from Felton, he cast a rapid glance over the paper, and perceiving that it was the one that had been mentioned to him, he placed it on the table, took a pen, and prepared to sign it.

“Pardon, my Lord,” said Felton, stopping the duke; “but does your Grace know that the name of Charlotte Backson is not the true name of this young woman?”

“Yes, sir, I know it,” replied the duke, dipping the quill in the ink.

“Then your Grace knows her real name?” asked Felton, in a sharp tone.

“I know it”; and the duke put the quill to the paper. Felton grew pale.

“And knowing that real name, my Lord,” replied Felton, “will you sign it all the same?”

“Doubtless,” said Buckingham, “and rather twice than once.”

“I cannot believe,” continued Felton, in a voice that became more sharp and rough, “that your Grace knows that it is to Milady de Winter this relates.”

“I know it perfectly, although I am astonished that you know it.”

“And will your Grace sign that order without remorse?”

Buckingham looked at the young man haughtily.

“Do you know, sir, that you are asking me very strange questions, and that I am very foolish to answer them?”

“Reply to them, my Lord,” said Felton; “the circumstances are more serious than you perhaps believe.”

Buckingham reflected that the young man, coming from Lord de Winter, undoubtedly spoke in his name, and softened.

“Without remorse,” said he. “The baron knows, as well as myself, that Milady de Winter is a very guilty woman, and it is treating her very favorably to commute her punishment to transportation.” The duke put his pen to the paper.

“You will not sign that order, my Lord!” said Felton, making a step toward the duke.

“I will not sign this order! And why not?”

“Because you will look into yourself, and you will do justice to the lady.”

“I should do her justice by sending her to Tyburn,” said Buckingham. “This lady is infamous.”

“My Lord, Milady de Winter is an angel; you know that she is, and I demand her liberty of you.”

“Bah! Are you mad, to talk to me thus?” said Buckingham.

“My Lord, excuse me! I speak as I can; I restrain myself. But, my Lord, think of what you’re about to do, and beware of going too far!”

“What do you say? God pardon me!” cried Buckingham, “I really think he threatens me!”

“No, my Lord, I still plead. And I say to you: one drop of water suffices to make the full vase overflow; one slight fault may draw down punishment upon the head spared, despite many crimes.”

“Mr. Felton,” said Buckingham, “you will withdraw, and place yourself at once under arrest.”

“You will hear me to the end, my Lord. You have seduced this young girl; you have outraged, defiled her. Repair your crimes toward her; let her go free, and I will exact nothing else from you.”

“You will exact!” said Buckingham, looking at Felton with astonishment, and dwelling upon each syllable of the three words as he pronounced them.

“My Lord,” continued Felton, becoming more excited as he spoke, “my Lord, beware! All England is tired of your iniquities; my Lord, you have abused the royal power, which you have almost usurped; my Lord, you are held in horror by God and men. God will punish you hereafter, but I will punish you here!”

“Ah, this is too much!” cried Buckingham, making a step toward the door.

Felton barred his passage.

“I ask it humbly of you, my Lord,” said he; “sign the order for the liberation of Milady de Winter. Remember that she is a woman whom you have dishonored.”

“Withdraw, sir,” said Buckingham, “or I will call my attendant, and have you placed in irons.”

“You shall not call,” said Felton, throwing himself between the duke and the bell placed on a stand encrusted with silver. “Beware, my Lord, you are in the hands of God!”

“In the hands of the devil, you mean!” cried Buckingham, raising his voice so as to attract the notice of his people, without absolutely shouting.

“Sign, my Lord; sign the liberation of Milady de Winter,” said Felton, holding out a paper to the duke.

“By force? You are joking! Holloa, Patrick!”

“Sign, my Lord!”

“Never.”

“Never?”

“Help!” shouted the duke; and at the same time he sprang toward his sword.

But Felton did not give him time to draw it. He held the knife with which Milady had stabbed herself, open in his bosom; at one bound he was upon the duke.

At that moment Patrick entered the room, crying, “A letter from France, my Lord.”

“From France!” cried Buckingham, forgetting everything in thinking from whom that letter came.

Felton took advantage of this moment, and plunged the knife into his side up to the handle.

“Ah, traitor,” cried Buckingham, “you have killed me!”

“Murder!” screamed Patrick.

Felton cast his eyes round for means of escape, and seeing the door free, he rushed into the next chamber, in which, as we have said, the deputies from La Rochelle were waiting, crossed it as quickly as possible, and rushed toward the staircase; but upon the first step he met Lord de Winter, who, seeing him pale, confused, livid, and stained with blood both on his hands and face, seized him by the throat, crying, “I knew it! I guessed it! But too late by a minute, unfortunate, unfortunate that I am!”

Felton made no resistance. Lord de Winter placed him in the hands of the guards, who led him, while awaiting further orders, to a little terrace commanding the sea; and then the baron hastened to the duke’s chamber.

At the cry uttered by the duke and the scream of Patrick, the man whom Felton had met in the antechamber rushed into the chamber.

He found the duke reclining upon a sofa, with his hand pressed upon the wound.

“Laporte,” said the duke, in a dying voice, “Laporte, do you come from her?”

“Yes, monseigneur,” replied the faithful cloak bearer of Anne of Austria, “but too late, perhaps.”

“Silence, Laporte, you may be overheard. Patrick, let no one enter. Oh, I cannot tell what she says to me! My God, I am dying!”

And the duke swooned.

Meanwhile, Lord de Winter, the deputies, the leaders of the expedition, the officers of Buckingham’s household, had all made their way into the chamber. Cries of despair resounded on all sides. The news, which filled the palace with tears and groans, soon became known, and spread itself throughout the city.

The report of a cannon announced that something new and unexpected had taken place.

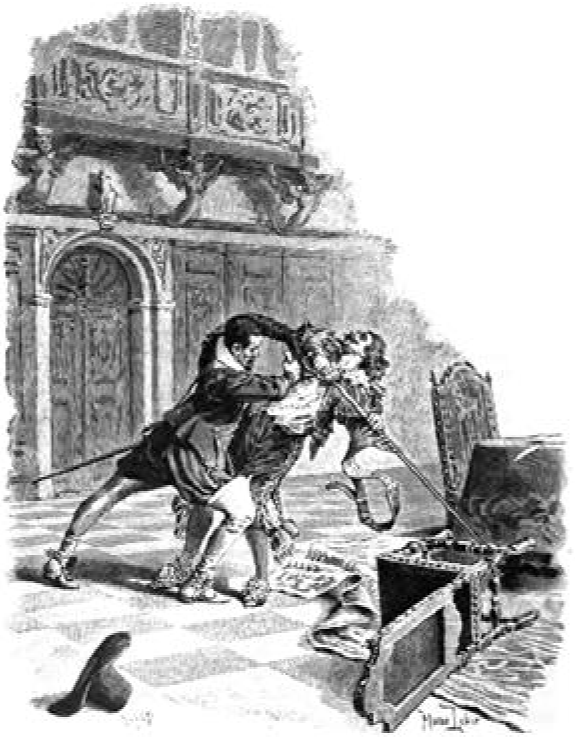

Lord de Winter tore his hair.

“Too late by a minute!” cried he, “too late by a minute! Oh, my God, my God! what a misfortune!”

He had been informed at seven o’clock in the morning that a rope ladder floated from one of the windows of the castle; he had hastened to Milady’s chamber, had found it empty, the window open, and the bars filed, had remembered the verbal caution d’Artagnan had transmitted to him by his messenger, had trembled for the duke, and running to the stable without taking time to have a horse saddled, had jumped upon the first he found, had galloped off like the wind, had alighted below in the courtyard, had ascended the stairs precipitately, and on the top step, as we have said, had encountered Felton.

The duke, however, was not dead. He recovered a little, reopened his eyes, and hope revived in all hearts.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “leave me alone with Patrick and Laporte--ah, is that you, de Winter? You sent me a strange madman this morning! See the state in which he has put me.”

“Oh, my Lord!” cried the baron, “I shall never console myself.”

“And you would be quite wrong, my dear de Winter,” said Buckingham, holding out his hand to him. “I do not know the man who deserves being regretted during the whole life of another man; but leave us, I pray you.”

The baron went out sobbing.

There only remained in the closet of the wounded duke Laporte and Patrick. A physician was sought for, but none was yet found.

“You will live, my Lord, you will live!” repeated the faithful servant of Anne of Austria, on his knees before the duke’s sofa.

“What has she written to me?” said Buckingham, feebly, streaming with blood, and suppressing his agony to speak of her he loved, “what has she written to me? Read me her letter.”

“Oh, my Lord!” said Laporte.

“Obey, Laporte, do you not see I have no time to lose?”

Laporte broke the seal, and placed the paper before the eyes of the duke; but Buckingham in vain tried to make out the writing.

“Read!” said he, “read! I cannot see. Read, then! For soon, perhaps, I shall not hear, and I shall die without knowing what she has written to me.”

Laporte made no further objection, and read:

“My Lord, By that which, since I have known you, have suffered by you and for you, I conjure you, if you have any care for my repose, to countermand those great armaments which you are preparing against France, to put an end to a war of which it is publicly said religion is the ostensible cause, and of which, it is generally whispered, your love for me is the concealed cause. This war may not only bring great catastrophes upon England and France, but misfortune upon you, my Lord, for which I should never console myself.

“Be careful of your life, which is menaced, and which will be dear to me from the moment I am not obliged to see an enemy in you.

“Your affectionate

[redacted]

"ANNE" Buckingham collected all his remaining strength to listen to the reading of the letter; then, when it was ended, as if he had met with a bitter disappointment, he asked, "Have you nothing else to say to me by the living voice, Laporte?"

"The queen charged me to tell you to watch over yourself, for she had advice that your assassination would be attempted."

"And is that all--is that all?" replied Buckingham, impatiently.

"She likewise charged me to tell you that she still loved you."

"Ah," said Buckingham, "God be praised! My death, then, will not be to her as the death of a stranger!"

Laporte burst into tears.

"Patrick," said the due, "bring me the casket in which the diamond studs were kept."

Patrick brought the object desired, which Laporte recognized as having belonged to the queen.

"Now the scent bag of white satin, on which her cipher is embroidered in pearls."

Patrick again obeyed.

"Here, Laporte," said Buckingham, "these are the only tokens I ever received from her--this silver casket and these two letters. You will restore them to her Majesty; and as a last memorial"--he looked round for some valuable object--"you will add--"

He still sought; but his eyes, darkened by death, encountered only the knife which had fallen from the hand of Felton, still smoking with the blood spread over its blade.

“And you will add to them this knife,” said the duke, pressing the hand of Laporte. He had just strength enough to place the scent bag at the bottom of the silver casket, and to let the knife fall into it, making a sign to Laporte that he was no longer able to speak; than, in a last convulsion, which this time he had not the power to combat, he slipped from the sofa to the floor.

Patrick uttered a loud cry.

Buckingham tried to smile a last time; but death checked his thought, which remained engraved on his brow like a last kiss of love.

At this moment the duke’s surgeon arrived, quite terrified; he was already on board the admiral’s ship, where they had been obliged to seek him.

He approached the duke, took his hand, held it for an instant in his own, and letting it fall, “All is useless,” said he, “he is dead.”

“Dead, dead!” cried Patrick.

At this cry all the crowd re-entered the apartment, and throughout the palace and town there was nothing but consternation and tumult.

As soon as Lord de Winter saw Buckingham was dead, he ran to Felton, whom the soldiers still guarded on the terrace of the palace.

“Wretch!” said he to the young man, who since the death of Buckingham had regained that coolness and self-possession which never after abandoned him, “wretch! what have you done?”

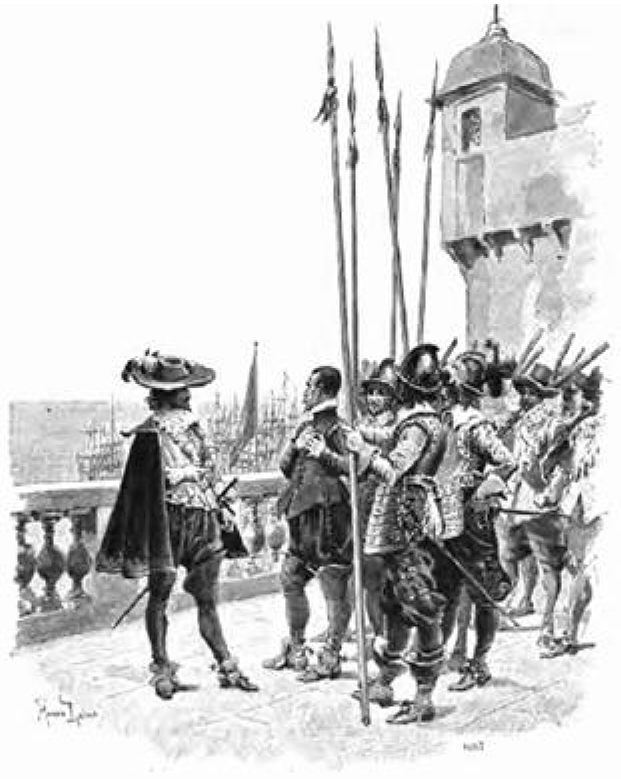

"I have avenged myself!" said he.

"Avenged yourself," said the baron. "Rather say that you have served as an instrument to that accursed woman; but I swear to you that this crime shall be her last."

"I don't know what you mean," replied Felton, quietly, "and I am ignorant of whom you are speaking, my Lord. I killed the Duke of Buckingham because he twice refused you yourself to appoint me captain; I have punished him for his injustice, that is all."

De Winter, stupefied, looked on while the soldiers bound Felton, and could not tell what to think of such insensibility.

One thing alone, however, threw a shade over the pallid brow of Felton. At every noise he heard, the simple Puritan fancied he recognized the step and voice of Milady coming to throw herself into his arms, to accuse herself, and die with him.

All at once he started. His eyes became fixed upon a point of the sea, commanded by the terrace where he was. With the eagle glance of a sailor he had recognized there, where another would have seen only a gull hovering over the waves, the sail of a sloop which was directed toward the cost of France.

He grew deadly pale, placed his hand upon his heart, which was breaking, and at once perceived all the treachery.

“One last favor, my Lord!” said he to the baron.

“What?” asked his Lordship.

“What o’clock is it?”

The baron drew out his watch. “It wants ten minutes to nine,” said he.

Milady had hastened her departure by an hour and a half. As soon as she heard the cannon which announced the fatal event, she had ordered the anchor to be weighed. The vessel was making way under a blue sky, at great distance from the coast.

“God has so willed it!” said he, with the resignation of a fanatic; but without, however, being able to take his eyes from that ship, on board of which he doubtless fancied he could distinguish the white outline of her to whom he had sacrificed his life.

De Winter followed his look, observed his feelings, and guessed all.

“Be punished ALONE, for the first, miserable man!” said Lord de Winter to Felton, who was being dragged away with his eyes turned toward the sea; “but I swear to you by the memory of my brother whom I have loved so much that your accomplice is not saved.”

Felton lowered his head without pronouncing a syllable.

As to Lord de Winter, he descended the stairs rapidly, and went straight to the port.

CHAPTER 60

IN FRANCE

The first fear of the King of England, Charles I, on learning of the death of the duke, was that such terrible news might discourage the Rochellais; he tried, says Richelieu in his Memoirs, to conceal it from them as long as possible, closing all the ports of his kingdom, and carefully keeping watch that no vessel should sail until the army which Buckingham was getting together had gone, taking upon himself, in default of Buckingham, to superintend the departure.

He carried the strictness of this order so far as to detain in England the ambassadors of Denmark, who had taken their leave, and the regular ambassador of Holland, who was to take back to the port of Flushing the Indian merchantmen of which Charles I had made restitution to the United Provinces.

But as he did not think of giving this order till five hours after the event--that is to say, till two o’clock in the afternoon--two vessels had already left the port, the one bearing, as we know, Milady, who, already anticipating the event, was further confirmed in that belief by seeing the black flag flying at the masthead of the admiral’s ship.

As to the second vessel, we will tell hereafter whom it carried, and how it set sail.

During this time nothing new occurred in the camp at La Rochelle; only the king, who was bored, as always, but perhaps a little more so in camp than elsewhere, resolved to go incognito and spend the festival of St. Louis at St. Germain, and asked the cardinal to order him an escort of only twenty Musketeers. The cardinal, who sometimes became weary of the king, granted this leave of absence with great pleasure to his royal lieutenant, who promised to return about the fifteenth of September.

M de Treville, being informed of this by his Eminence, packed his portmanteau; and as without knowing the cause he knew the great desire and even imperative need which his friends had of returning to Paris, it goes without saying that he fixed upon them to form part of the escort.

The four young men heard the news a quarter of an hour after M. de Treville, for they were the first to whom he communicated it. It was then that d'Artagnan appreciated the favor the cardinal had conferred upon him in making him at last enter the Musketeers--for without that circumstance he would have been forced to remain in the camp while his companions left it.

It goes without saying that this impatience to return toward Paris had for a cause the danger which Mme. Bonacieux would run of meeting at the convent of Bethune with Milady, her mortal enemy. Aramis therefore had written immediately to Marie Michon, the seamstress at Tours who had such fine acquaintances, to obtain from the queen authority for Mme. Bonacieux to leave the convent, and to retire either into Lorraine or Belgium. They had not long to wait for an answer. Eight or ten days afterward Aramis received the following letter:

My Dear Cousin, Here is the authorization from my sister to withdraw our little servant from the convent of Bethune, the air of which you think is bad for her. My sister sends you this authorization with great pleasure, for she is very partial to the little girl, to whom she intends to be more serviceable hereafter.

I salute you,

To this letter was added an order, conceived in these terms:

At the Louvre, August 10, 1628 The superior of the convent of Bethune will place in the hands of the person who shall present this note to her the novice who entered the convent upon my recommendation and under my patronage.

ANNE

It may be easily imagined how the relationship between Aramis and a seamstress who called the queen her sister amused the young men; but Aramis, after having blushed two or three times up to the whites of his eyes at the gross pleasantry of Porthos, begged his friends not to revert to the subject again, declaring that if a single word more was said to him about it, he would never again implore his cousins to interfere in such affairs.

There was no further question, therefore, about Marie Michon among the four Musketeers, who besides had what they wanted: that was, the order to withdraw Mme. Bonacieux from the convent of the Carmelites of Bethune. It was true that this order would not be of great use to them while they were in camp at La Rochelle; that is to say, at the other end of France. Therefore d’Artagnan was going to ask leave of absence of M. de Treville, confiding to him candidly the importance of his departure, when the news was transmitted to him as well as to his three friends that the king was about to set out for Paris with an escort of twenty Musketeers, and that they formed part of the escort.

Their joy was great. The lackeys were sent on before with the baggage, and they set out on the morning of the sixteenth.

The cardinal accompanied his Majesty from Surgeres to Mauzes; and there the king and his minister took leave of each other with great demonstrations of friendship.

The king, however, who sought distraction, while traveling as fast as possible--for he was anxious to be in Paris by the twenty-third--stopped from time to time to fly the magpie, a pastime for which the taste had been formerly inspired in him by de Luynes, and for which he had always preserved a great predilection. Out of the twenty Musketeers sixteen, when this took place, rejoiced greatly at this relaxation; but the other four cursed it heartily. D’Artagnan, in particular, had a perpetual buzzing in his ears, which Porthos explained thus: “A very great lady has told me that this means that somebody is talking of you somewhere.”

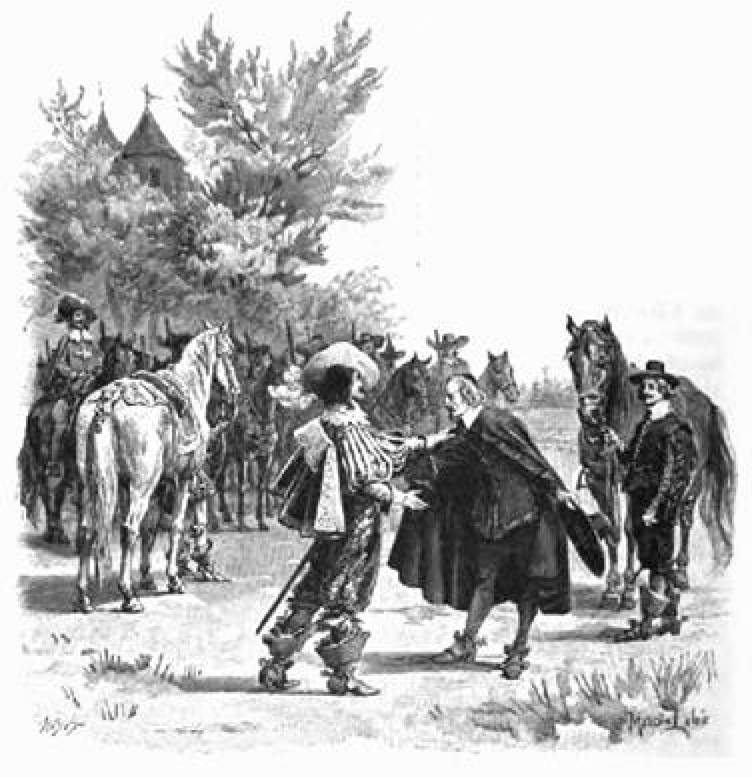

At length the escort passed through Paris on the twenty-third, in the night. The king thanked M. de Treville, and permitted him to distribute furloughs for four days, on condition that the favored parties should not appear in any public place, under penalty of the Bastille.

The first four furloughs granted, as may be imagined, were to our four friends. Still further, Athos obtained of M. de Treville six days instead of four, and introduced into these six days two more nights--for they set out on the twenty-fourth at five o’clock in the evening, and as a further kindness M. de Treville post-dated the leave to the morning of the twenty-fifth.

“Good Lord!” said d’Artagnan, who, as we have often said, never stumbled at anything. “It appears to me that we are making a great trouble of a very simple thing. In two days, and by using up two or three horses (that’s nothing; I have plenty of money), I am at Bethune. I present my letter from the queen to the superior, and I bring back the dear treasure I go to seek--not into Lorraine, not into Belgium, but to Paris, where she will be much better concealed, particularly while the cardinal is at La Rochelle. Well, once returned from the country, half by the protection of her cousin, half through what we have personally done for her, we shall obtain from the queen what we desire. Remain, then, where you are, and do not exhaust yourselves with useless fatigue. Myself and Planchet are all that such a simple expedition requires.”

To this Athos replied quietly: “We also have money left--for I have not yet drunk all my share of the diamond, and Porthos and Aramis have not eaten all theirs. We can therefore use up four horses as well as one. But consider, d’Artagnan,” added he, in a tone so solemn that it made the young man shudder, “consider that Bethune is a city where the cardinal has given rendezvous to a woman who, wherever she goes, brings misery with her. If you had only to deal with four men, d’Artagnan, I would allow you to go alone. You have to do with that woman! We four will go; and I hope to God that with our four lackeys we may be in sufficient number.”

“You terrify me, Athos!” cried d’Artagnan. “My God! what do you fear?”

“Everything!” replied Athos.

D’Artagnan examined the countenances of his companions, which, like that of Athos, wore an impression of deep anxiety; and they continued their route as fast as their horses could carry them, but without adding another word.

On the evening of the twenty-fifth, as they were entering Arras, and as d'Artagnan was dismounting at the inn of the Golden Harrow to drink a glass of wine, a horseman came out of the post yard, where he had just had a relay, started off at a gallop, and with a fresh horse took the road to Paris. At the moment he passed through the gateway into the street, the wind blew open the cloak in which he was wrapped, although it was in the month of August, and lifted his hat, which the traveler seized with his hand the moment it had left his head, pulling it eagerly over his eyes.

D'Artagnan, who had his eyes fixed upon this man, became very pale, and let his glass fall.

"What is the matter, monsieur?" said Planchet. "Oh, come, gentlemen, my master is ill!"

The three friends hastened toward d'Artagnan, who, instead of being ill, ran toward his horse. They stopped him at the door.

"Well, where the devil are you going now?" cried Athos.

"It is he!" cried d'Artagnan, pale with anger, and with the sweat on his brow, "it is he! let me overtake him!"

"He? What he?" asked Athos.

"He, that man!"

"What man?"

"That cursed man, my evil genius, whom I have always met with when threatened by some misfortune, he who accompanied that horrible woman when I met her for the first time, he whom I was seeking when I offended our Athos, he whom I saw on the very morning Madame Bonacieux was abducted. I have seen him; that is he! I recognized him when the wind blew upon his cloak."

"The devil!" said Athos, musingly.

"To saddle, gentlemen! to saddle! Let us pursue him, and we shall overtake him!"

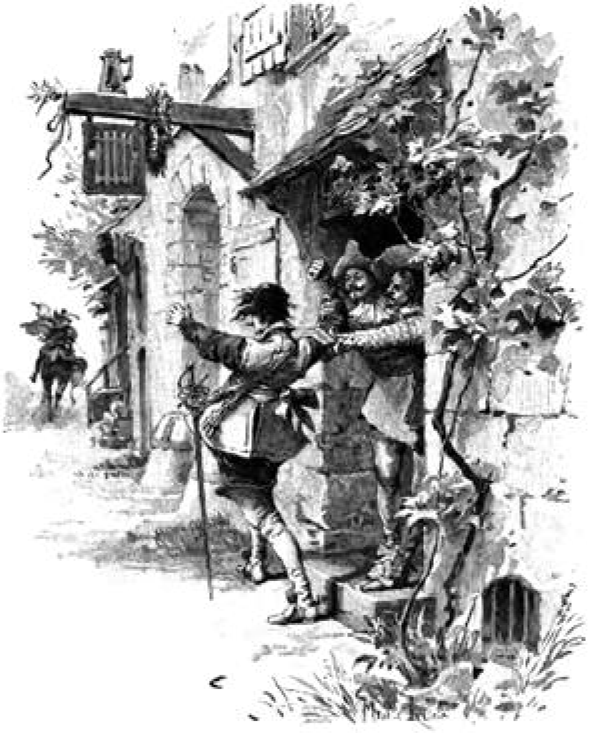

“My dear friend,” said Aramis, “remember that he goes in an opposite direction from that in which we are going, that he has a fresh horse, and ours are fatigued, so that we shall disable our own horses without even a chance of overtaking him. Let the man go, d’Artagnan; let us save the woman.”

“Monsieur, monsieur!” cried a hostler, running out and looking after the stranger, “monsieur, here is a paper which dropped out of your hat! Eh, monsieur, eh!”

“Friend,” said d’Artagnan, “a half-pistole for that paper!”

“My faith, monsieur, with great pleasure! Here it is!”

The hostler, enchanted with the good day’s work he had done, returned to the yard. D’Artagnan unfolded the paper.

“Well?” eagerly demanded all his three friends.

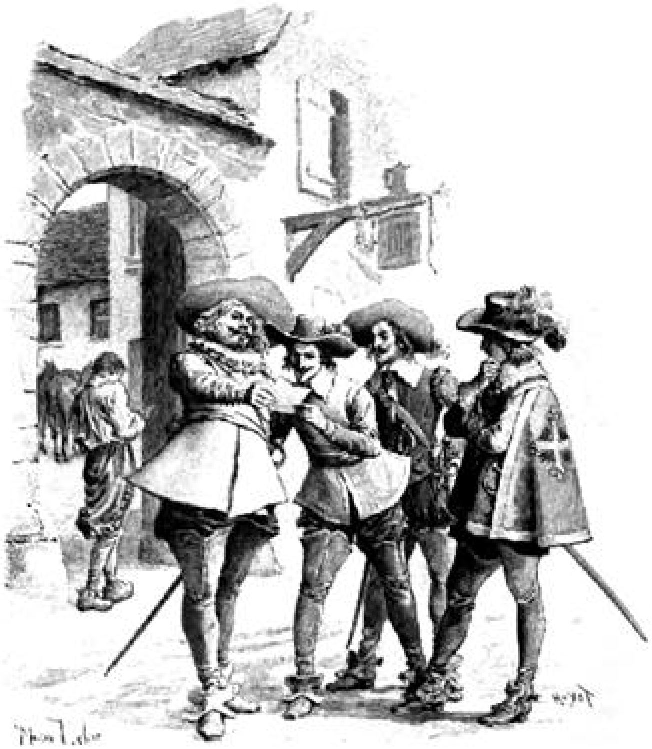

“Nothing but one word!” said d’Artagnan.

“Yes,” said Aramis, “but that one word is the name of some town or village.”

“Armentieres,” read Porthos; “Armentieres? I don’t know such a place.”

“And that name of a town or village is written in her hand!” cried Athos.

“Come on, come on!” said d’Artagnan; “let us keep that paper carefully, perhaps I have not thrown away my half-pistole. To horse, my friends, to horse!”

And the four friends flew at a gallop along the road to Bethune.

CHAPTER 61

THE CARMELITE CONVENT AT BETHUNE

Great criminals bear about them a kind of predestination which makes them surmount all obstacles, which makes them escape all dangers, up to the moment which a wearied Providence has marked as the rock of their impious fortunes.

It was thus with Milady. She escaped the cruisers of both nations, and arrived at Boulogne without accident.

When landing at Portsmouth, Milady was an Englishwoman whom the persecutions of the French drove from La Rochelle; when landing at Boulogne, after a two days’ passage, she passed for a Frenchwoman whom the English persecuted at Portsmouth out of their hatred for France.

Milady had, likewise, the best of passports--her beauty, her noble appearance, and the liberality with which she distributed her pistoles. Freed from the usual formalities by the affable smile and gallant manners of an old governor of the port, who kissed her hand, she only remained long enough at Boulogne to put into the post a letter, conceived in the following terms:

“To his Eminence Monseigneur the Cardinal Richelieu, in his camp before La Rochelle.

“Monseigneur, Let your Eminence be reassured. His Grace the Duke of Buckingham WILL NOT SET OUT for France.

“MILADY DE ---- “BOULOGNE, evening of the twenty-fifth.

“P.S.--According to the desire of your Eminence, I report to the convent of the Carmelites at Bethune, where I will await your orders.”

Accordingly, that same evening Milady commenced her journey. Night overtook her; she stopped, and slept at an inn. At five o’clock the next morning she again proceeded, and in three hours after entered Bethune. She inquired for the convent of the Carmelites, and went thither immediately.

The superior met her; Milady showed her the cardinal’s order. The abbess assigned her a chamber, and had breakfast served.

All the past was effaced from the eyes of this woman; and her looks, fixed on the future, beheld nothing but the high fortunes reserved for her by the cardinal, whom she had so successfully served without his name being in any way mixed up with the sanguinary affair. The ever-new passions which consumed her gave to her life the appearance of those clouds which float in the heavens, reflecting sometimes azure, sometimes fire, sometimes the opaque blackness of the tempest, and which leave no traces upon the earth behind them but devastation and death.

After breakfast, the abbess came to pay her a visit. There is very little amusement in the cloister, and the good superior was eager to make the acquaintance of her new boarder.

Milady wished to please the abbess. This was a very easy matter for a woman so really superior as she was. She tried to be agreeable, and she was charming, winning the good superior by her varied conversation and by the graces of her whole personality.

The abbess, who was the daughter of a noble house, took particular delight in stories of the court, which so seldom travel to the extremities of the kingdom, and which, above all, have so much difficulty in penetrating the walls of convents, at whose threshold the noise of the world dies away.

Milady, on the contrary, was quite conversant with all aristocratic intrigues, amid which she had constantly lived for five or six years. She made it her business, therefore, to amuse the good abbess with the worldly practices of the court of France, mixed with the eccentric pursuits of the king; she made for her the scandalous chronicle of the lords and ladies of the court, whom the abbess knew perfectly by name, touched lightly on the amours of the queen and the Duke of Buckingham, talking a great deal to induce her auditor to talk a little.

But the abbess contented herself with listening and smiling without replying a word. Milady, however, saw that this sort of narrative amused her very much, and kept at it; only she now let her conversation drift toward the cardinal.

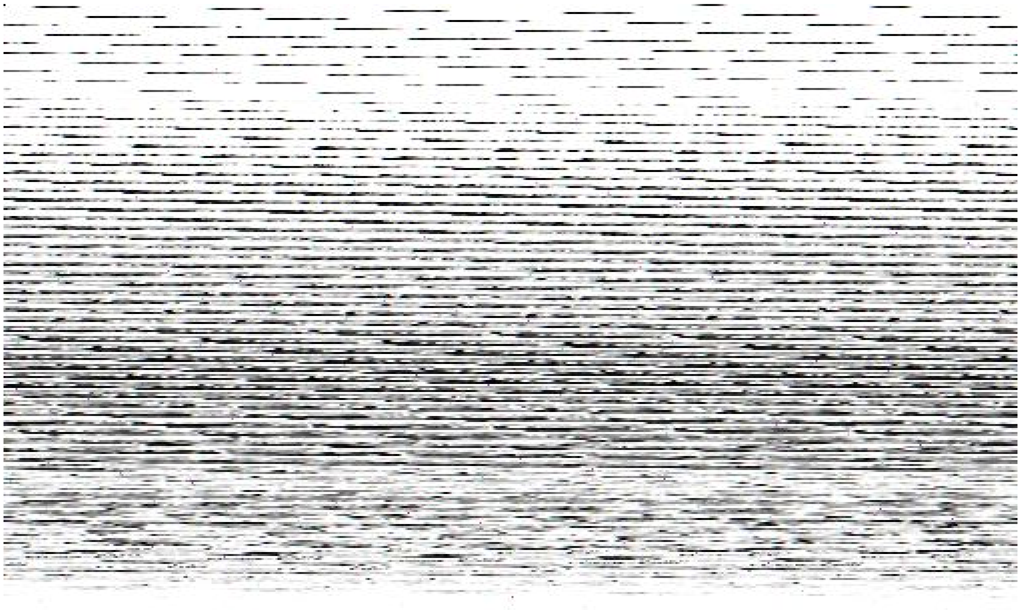

But she was greatly embarrassed. She did not know whether the abbess was a royalist or a cardinalist; she therefore confined herself to a prudent middle course. But the abbess, on her part, maintained a reserve still more prudent, contenting herself with making a profound inclination of the head every time the fair traveler pronounced the name of his Eminence.

Milady began to think she should soon grow weary of a convent life; she resolved, then, to risk something in order that she might know how to act afterward. Desirous of seeing how far the discretion of the good abbess would go, she began to tell a story, obscure at first, but very circumstantial afterward, about the cardinal, relating the amours of the minister with Mme. d’Aiguillon, Marion de Lorme, and several other gay women.

The abbess listened more attentively, grew animated by degrees, and smiled.

“Good,” thought Milady; “she takes a pleasure in my conversation. If she is a cardinalist, she has no fanaticism, at least.”

She then went on to describe the persecutions exercised by the cardinal upon his enemies. The abbess only crossed herself, without approving or disapproving.

This confirmed Milady in her opinion that the abbess was rather royalist than cardinalist. Milady therefore continued, coloring her narrations more and more.

“I am very ignorant of these matters,” said the abbess, at length; “but however distant from the court we may be, however remote from the interests of the world we may be placed, we have very sad examples of what you have related. And one of our boarders has suffered much from the vengeance and persecution of the cardinal!”

“One of your boarders?” said Milady; “oh, my God! Poor woman! I pity her, then.”

“And you have reason, for she is much to be pitied. Imprisonment, menaces, ill treatment-she has suffered everything. But after all,” resumed the abbess, “Monsieur Cardinal has perhaps plausible motives for acting thus; and though she has the look of an angel, we must not always judge people by the appearance.”

“Good!” said Milady to herself; “who knows! I am about, perhaps, to discover something here; I am in the vein.”

She tried to give her countenance an appearance of perfect candor.

“Alas,” said Milady, “I know it is so. It is said that we must not trust to the face; but in what, then, shall we place confidence, if not in the most beautiful work of the Lord? As for me, I shall be deceived all my life perhaps, but I shall always have faith in a person whose countenance inspires me with sympathy.”

“You would, then, be tempted to believe,” said the abbess, “that this young person is innocent?”

“The cardinal pursues not only crimes,” said she: “there are certain virtues which he pursues more severely than certain offenses.”

“Permit me, madame, to express my surprise,” said the abbess.

“At what?” said Milady, with the utmost ingenuousness.

“At the language you use.”

“What do you find so astonishing in that language?” said Milady, smiling.

“You are the friend of the cardinal, for he sends you hither, and yet--”

“And yet I speak ill of him,” replied Milady, finishing the thought of the superior.

“At least you don’t speak well of him.”

“That is because I am not his friend,” said she, sighing, “but his victim!”

“But this letter in which he recommends you to me?”

“Is an order for me to confine myself to a sort of prison, from which he will release me by one of his satellites.”

“But why have you not fled?”

“Whither should I go? Do you believe there is a spot on the earth which the cardinal cannot reach if he takes the trouble to stretch forth his hand? If

I were a man, that would barely be possible; but what can a woman do? This young boarder of yours, has she tried to fly?"

"No, that is true; but she--that is another thing; I believe she is detained in France by some love affair."

"Ah," said Milady, with a sigh, "if she loves she is not altogether wretched."

"Then," said the abbess, looking at Milady with increasing interest, "I behold another poor victim?"

"Alas, yes," said Milady.

The abbess looked at her for an instant with uneasiness, as if a fresh thought suggested itself to her mind.

"You are not an enemy of our holy faith?" said she, hesitatingly.

"Who--I?" cried Milady; "I a Protestant? Oh, no! I call to witness the God who hears us, that on the contrary I am a fervent Catholic!"

"Then, madame," said the abbess, smiling, "be reassured; the house in which you are shall not be a very hard prison, and we will do all in our power to make you cherish your captivity. You will find here, moreover, the young woman of whom I spoke, who is persecuted, no doubt, in consequence of some court intrigue. She is amiable and well-behaved."

"What is her name?"

"She was sent to me by someone of high rank, under the name of Kitty. I have not tried to discover her other name."

"Kitty!" cried Milady. "What? Are you sure?"

"That she is called so? Yes, madame. Do you know her?"

Milady smiled to herself at the idea which had occurred to her that this might be her old chambermaid. There was connected with the remembrance of this girl a remembrance of anger; and a desire of vengeance disordered the features of Milady, which, however, immediately recovered the calm and benevolent expression which this woman of a hundred faces had for a moment allowed them to lose.

"And when can I see this young lady, for whom I already feel so great a sympathy?" asked Milady.

"Why, this evening," said the abbess; "today even. But you have been traveling these four days, as you told me yourself. This morning you rose at five o'clock; you must stand in need of repose. Go to bed and sleep; at dinnertime we will rouse you."

Although Milady would very willingly have gone without sleep, sustained as she was by all the excitements which a new adventure awakened in her heart, ever thirsting for intrigues, she nevertheless accepted the offer of the superior. During the last fifteen days she had experienced so many and such various emotions that if her frame of iron was still capable of supporting fatigue, her mind required repose.

She therefore took leave of the abbess, and went to bed, softly rocked by the ideas of vengeance which the name of Kitty had naturally brought to her thoughts. She remembered that almost unlimited promise which the cardinal had given her if she succeeded in her enterprise. She had succeeded; d’Artagnan was then in her power!

One thing alone frightened her; that was the remembrance of her husband, the Comte de la Fere, whom she had believed dead, or at least expatriated, and whom she found again in Athos-the best friend of d’Artagnan.

But alas, if he was the friend of d’Artagnan, he must have lent him his assistance in all the proceedings by whose aid the queen had defeated the project of his Eminence; if he was the friend of d’Artagnan, he was the enemy of the cardinal; and she doubtless would succeed in involving him in the vengeance by which she hoped to destroy the young Musketeer.

All these hopes were so many sweet thoughts for Milady; so, rocked by them, she soon fell asleep.

She was awakened by a soft voice which sounded at the foot of her bed. She opened her eyes, and saw the abbess, accompanied by a young woman with light hair and delicate complexion, who fixed upon her a look full of benevolent curiosity.

The face of the young woman was entirely unknown to her. Each examined the other with great attention, while exchanging the customary compliments; both were very handsome, but of quite different styles of beauty. Milady, however, smiled in observing that she excelled the young woman by far in her high air and aristocratic bearing. It is true that the habit of a novice, which the young woman wore, was not very advantageous in a contest of this kind.

The abbess introduced them to each other. When this formality was ended, as her duties called her to chapel, she left the two young women alone.

The novice, seeing Milady in bed, was about to follow the example of the superior; but Milady stopped her.

“How, madame,” said she, “I have scarcely seen you, and you already wish to deprive me of your company, upon which I had counted a little, I must confess, for the time I have to pass here?”

“No, madame,” replied the novice, “only I thought I had chosen my time ill; you were asleep, you are fatigued.”

“Well,” said Milady, “what can those who sleep wish for--a happy awakening? This awakening you have given me; allow me, then, to enjoy it at my ease,” and taking her hand, she drew her toward the armchair by the bedside.

The novice sat down.

“How unfortunate I am!” said she; “I have been here six months without the shadow of recreation. You arrive, and your presence was likely to afford me delightful company; yet I expect, in all probability, to quit the convent at any moment.”

“How, you are going soon?” asked Milady.

“At least I hope so,” said the novice, with an expression of joy which she made no effort to disguise.

“I think I learned you had suffered persecutions from the cardinal,” continued Milady; “that would have been another motive for sympathy between us.”

“What I have heard, then, from our good mother is true; you have likewise been a victim of that wicked priest.”

“Hush!” said Milady; “let us not, even here, speak thus of him. All my misfortunes arise from my having said nearly what you have said before a woman whom I thought my friend, and who betrayed me. Are you also the victim of a treachery?”

“No,” said the novice, “but of my devotion--of a devotion to a woman I loved, for whom I would have laid down my life, for whom I would give it still.”

“And who has abandoned you--is that it?”

“I have been sufficiently unjust to believe so; but during the last two or three days I have obtained proof to the contrary, for which I thank God--for it would have cost me very dear to think she had forgotten me. But you, madame, you appear to be free,” continued the novice; “and if you were inclined to fly it only rests with yourself to do so.”

"Whither would you have me go, without friends, without money, in a part of France with which I am unacquainted, and where I have never been before?"

"Oh," cried the novice, "as to friends, you would have them wherever you want, you appear so good and are so beautiful!"

"That does not prevent," replied Milady, softening her smile so as to give it an angelic expression, "my being alone or being persecuted."

"Hear me," said the novice; "we must trust in heaven. There always comes a moment when the good you have done pleads your cause before God; and see, perhaps it is a happiness for you, humble and powerless as I am, that you have met with me, for if I leave this place, well-I have powerful friends, who, after having exerted themselves on my account, may also exert themselves for you."

"Oh, when I said I was alone," said Milady, hoping to make the novice talk by talking of herself, "it is not for want of friends in high places; but these friends themselves tremble before the cardinal. The queen herself does not dare to oppose the terrible minister. I have proof that her Majesty, notwithstanding her excellent heart, has more than once been obliged to abandon to the anger of his Eminence persons who had served her."

"Trust me, madame; the queen may appear to have abandoned those persons, but we must not put faith in appearances. The more they are persecuted, the more she thinks of them; and often, when they least expect it, they have proof of a kind remembrance."

"Alas!" said Milady, "I believe so; the queen is so good!"

"Oh, you know her, then, that lovely and noble queen, that you speak of her thus!" cried the novice, with enthusiasm.

"That is to say," replied Milady, driven into her entrenchment, "that I have not the honor of knowing her personally; but I know a great number of her most intimate friends. I am acquainted with Monsieur de Putange; I met Monsieur Dujart in England; I know Monsieur de Treville."

"Monsieur de Treville!" exclaimed the novice, "do you know Monsieur de Treville?"

"Yes, perfectly well--intimately even."

"The captain of the king's Musketeers?"

"The captain of the king's Musketeers."

"Why, then, only see!" cried the novice; "we shall soon be well acquainted, almost friends. If you know Monsieur de Treville, you must have visited him?”

“Often!” said Milady, who, having entered this track, and perceiving that falsehood succeeded, was determined to follow it to the end.

“With him, then, you must have seen some of his Musketeers?”

“All those he is in the habit of receiving!” replied Milady, for whom this conversation began to have a real interest.

“Name a few of those whom you know, and you will see if they are my friends.”

“Well!” said Milady, embarrassed, “I know Monsieur de Louvigny, Monsieur de Courtivron, Monsieur de Ferussac.”

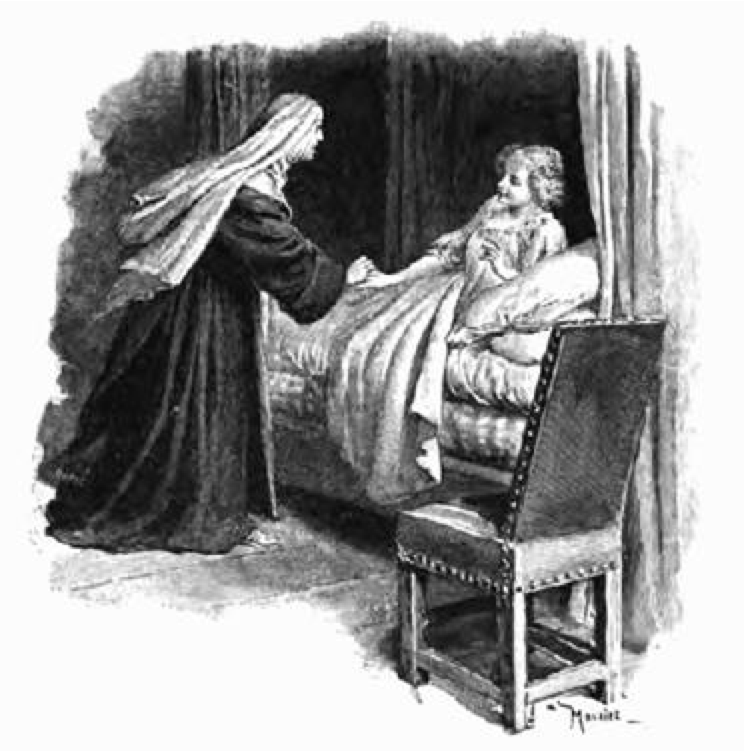

The novice let her speak, then seeing that she paused, she said, “Don’t you know a gentleman named Athos?”

Milady became as pale as the sheets in which she was lying, and mistress as she was of herself, could not help uttering a cry, seizing the hand of the novice, and devouring her with looks.

“What is the matter? Good God!” asked the poor woman, “have I said anything that has wounded you?”

“No; but the name struck me, because I also have known that gentleman, and it appeared strange to me to meet with a person who appears to know him well.”

“Oh, yes, very well; not only him, but some of his friends, Messieurs Porthos and Aramis!”

“Indeed! you know them likewise? I know them,” cried Milady, who began to feel a chill penetrate her heart.

“Well, if you know them, you know that they are good and free companions. Why do you not apply to them, if you stand in need of help?”

“That is to say,” stammered Milady, “I am not really very intimate with any of them. I know them from having heard one of their friends, Monsieur d’Artagnan, say a great deal about them.”

“You know Monsieur d’Artagnan!” cried the novice, in her turn seizing the hands of Milady and devouring her with her eyes.

Then remarking the strange expression of Milady’s countenance, she said, “Pardon me, madame; you know him by what title?”

“Why,” replied Milady, embarrassed, “why, by the title of friend.”

“You deceive me, madame,” said the novice; “you have been his mistress!”

“It is you who have been his mistress, madame!” cried Milady, in her turn.

“I?” said the novice.

“Yes, you! I know you now. You are Madame Bonacieux!”

The young woman drew back, filled with surprise and terror.

“Oh, do not deny it! Answer!” continued Milady.

“Well, yes, madame,” said the novice, “Are we rivals?”

The countenance of Milady was illumined by so savage a joy that under any other circumstances Mme. Bonacieux would have fled in terror; but she was absorbed by jealousy.

“Speak, madame!” resumed Mme. Bonacieux, with an energy of which she might not have been believed capable. “Have you been, or are you, his mistress?”

“Oh, no!” cried Milady, with an accent that admitted no doubt of her truth. “Never, never!”

“I believe you,” said Mme. Bonacieux; “but why, then, did you cry out so?”

“Do you not understand?” said Milady, who had already overcome her agitation and recovered all her presence of mind.

“How can I understand? I know nothing.”

“Can you not understand that Monsieur d’Artagnan, being my friend, might take me into his confidence?”

“Truly?”

“Do you not perceive that I know all--your abduction from the little house at St. Germain, his despair, that of his friends, and their useless inquiries up to this moment? How could I help being astonished when, without having the least expectation of such a thing, I meet you face to face--you, of whom we have so often spoken together, you whom he loves with all his soul, you whom he had taught me to love before I had seen you! Ah, dear Constance, I have found you, then; I see you at last!”

And Milady stretched out her arms to Mme. Bonacieux, who, convinced by what she had just said, saw nothing in this woman whom an instant before she had believed her rival but a sincere and devoted friend.

“Oh, pardon me, pardon me!” cried she, sinking upon the shoulders of Milady. “Pardon me, I love him so much!”

These two women held each other for an instant in a close embrace. Certainly, if Milady’s strength had been equal to her hatred, Mme. Bonacieux would never have left that embrace alive. But not being able to stifle her, she smiled upon her.

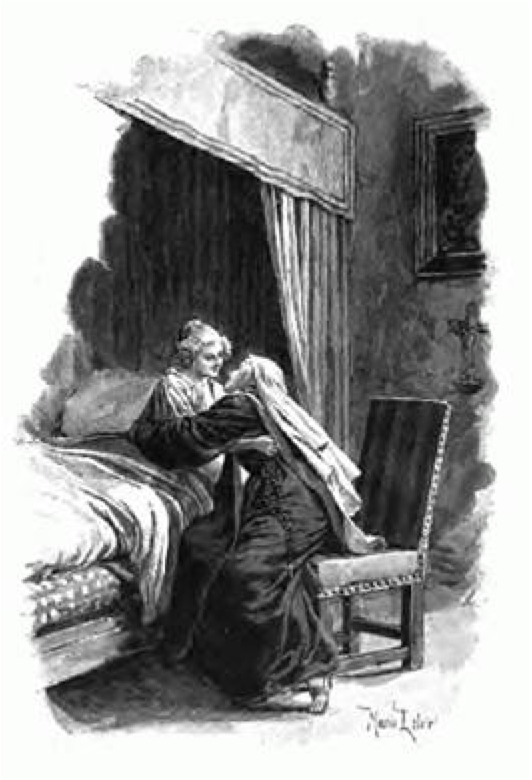

“Oh, you beautiful, good little creature!” said Milady. “How delighted I am to have found you! Let me look at you!” and while saying these words, she absolutely devoured her by her looks. “Oh, yes it is you indeed! From what he has told me, I know you now. I recognize you perfectly.”

The poor young woman could not possibly suspect what frightful cruelty was behind the rampart of that pure brow, behind those brilliant eyes in which she read nothing but interest and compassion.

“Then you know what I have suffered,” said Mme. Bonacieux, “since he has told you what he has suffered; but to suffer for him is happiness.”

Milady replied mechanically, “Yes, that is happiness.” She was thinking of something else.

“And then,” continued Mme. Bonacieux, “my punishment is drawing to a close. Tomorrow, this evening, perhaps, I shall see him again; and then the past will no longer exist.”

“This evening?” asked Milady, roused from her reverie by these words. “What do you mean? Do you expect news from him?”

“I expect himself.”

“Himself? D’Artagnan here?”

“Himself!”

“But that’s impossible! He is at the siege of La Rochelle with the cardinal. He will not return till after the taking of the city.”

“Ah, you fancy so! But is there anything impossible for my d’Artagnan, the noble and loyal gentleman?”

“Oh, I cannot believe you!”

“Well, read, then!” said the unhappy young woman, in the excess of her pride and joy, presenting a letter to Milady.

“The writing of Madame de Chevreuse!” said Milady to herself. “Ah, I always thought there was some secret understanding in that quarter!” And she greedily read the following few lines:

My Dear Child, Hold yourself ready. OUR FRIEND will see you soon, and he will only see you to release you from that imprisonment in which your safety required you should be concealed. Prepare, then, for your departure, and never despair of us.

Our charming Gascon has just proved himself as brave and faithful as ever. Tell him that certain parties are grateful for the warning he has given.

“Yes, yes,” said Milady; “the letter is precise. Do you know what that warning was?”

“No, I only suspect he has warned the queen against some fresh machinations of the cardinal.”

“Yes, that’s it, no doubt!” said Milady, returning the letter to Mme. Bonacieux, and letting her head sink pensively upon her bosom.

At that moment they heard the gallop of a horse.

“Oh!” cried Mme. Bonacieux, darting to the window, “can it be he?”

Milady remained still in bed, petrified by surprise; so many unexpected things happened to her all at once that for the first time she was at a loss.

“He, he!” murmured she; “can it be he?” And she remained in bed with her eyes fixed.

“Alas, no!” said Mme. Bonacieux; “it is a man I don’t know, although he seems to be coming here. Yes, he checks his pace; he stops at the gate; he rings.”

Milady sprang out of bed.

“You are sure it is not he?” said she.

“Yes, yes, very sure!”

“Perhaps you did not see well.”

“Oh, if I were to see the plume of his hat, the end of his cloak, I should know HIM!”

Milady was dressing herself all the time.

“Yes, he has entered.”

“It is for you or me!”

“My God, how agitated you seem!”

“Yes, I admit it. I have not your confidence; I fear the cardinal.”

“Hush!” said Mme. Bonacieux; “somebody is coming.”

Immediately the door opened, and the superior entered.

“Did you come from Boulogne?” demanded she of Milady.

“Yes,” replied she, trying to recover her self-possession. “Who wants me?”

“A man who will not tell his name, but who comes from the cardinal.”

“And who wishes to speak with me?”

“Who wishes to speak to a lady recently come from Boulogne.”

“Then let him come in, if you please.”

“Oh, my God, my God!” cried Mme. Bonacieux. “Can it be bad news?”

“I fear it.”

“I will leave you with this stranger; but as soon as he is gone, if you will permit me, I will return.”

“PERMIT you? I BESEECH you.”

The superior and Mme. Bonacieux retired.

Milady remained alone, with her eyes fixed upon the door. An instant later, the jingling of spurs was heard upon the stairs, steps drew near, the door opened, and a man appeared.

Milady uttered a cry of joy; this man was the Comte de Rochefort--the demoniacal tool of his Eminence.

CHAPTER 62

TWO VARIETIES OF DEMONS

Ah,” cried Milady and Rochefort together, “it is you!”

“Yes, it is I.”

“And you come?” asked Milady.

“From La Rochelle; and you?”

“From England.”

“Buckingham?”

“Dead or desperately wounded, as I left without having been able to hear anything of him. A fanatic has just assassinated him.”

“Ah,” said Rochefort, with a smile; “this is a fortunate chance--one that will delight his Eminence! Have you informed him of it?”

“I wrote to him from Boulogne. But what brings you here?”

“His Eminence was uneasy, and sent me to find you.”

“I only arrived yesterday.”

“And what have you been doing since yesterday?”

“I have not lost my time.”

“Oh, I don’t doubt that.”

“Do you know whom I have encountered here?”

“No.”

“Guess.”

“How can I?”

“That young woman whom the queen took out of prison.”

“The mistress of that fellow d’Artagnan?”

“Yes; Madame Bonacieux, with whose retreat the cardinal was unacquainted.”

“Well, well,” said Rochefort, “here is a chance which may pair off with the other! Monsieur Cardinal is indeed a privileged man!”

“Imagine my astonishment,” continued Milady, “when I found myself face to face with this woman!”

“Does she know you?”

“No.”

“Then she looks upon you as a stranger?”

Milady smiled. “I am her best friend.”

“Upon my honor,” said Rochefort, “it takes you, my dear countess, to perform such miracles!”

“And it is well I can, Chevalier,” said Milady, “for do you know what is going on here?”

“No.”

“They will come for her tomorrow or the day after, with an order from the queen.”

“Indeed! And who?”

“d’Artagnan and his friends.”

“Indeed, they will go so far that we shall be obliged to send them to the Bastille.”

“Why is it not done already?”

“What would you? The cardinal has a weakness for these men which I cannot comprehend.”

“Indeed!”

“Yes.”

“Well, then, tell him this, Rochefort. Tell him that our conversation at the inn of the Red Dovecot was overheard by these four men; tell him that after his departure one of them came up to me and took from me by violence the safe-conduct which he had given me; tell him they warned Lord de Winter of my journey to England; that this time they nearly foiled my mission as they foiled the affair of the studs; tell him that among these four men two only are to be feared--d’Artagnan and Athos; tell him that the third, Aramis, is the lover of Madame de Chevreuse--he may be left alone, we know his secret, and it may be useful; as to the fourth, Porthos, he is a fool, a simpleton, a blustering booby, not worth troubling himself about.”

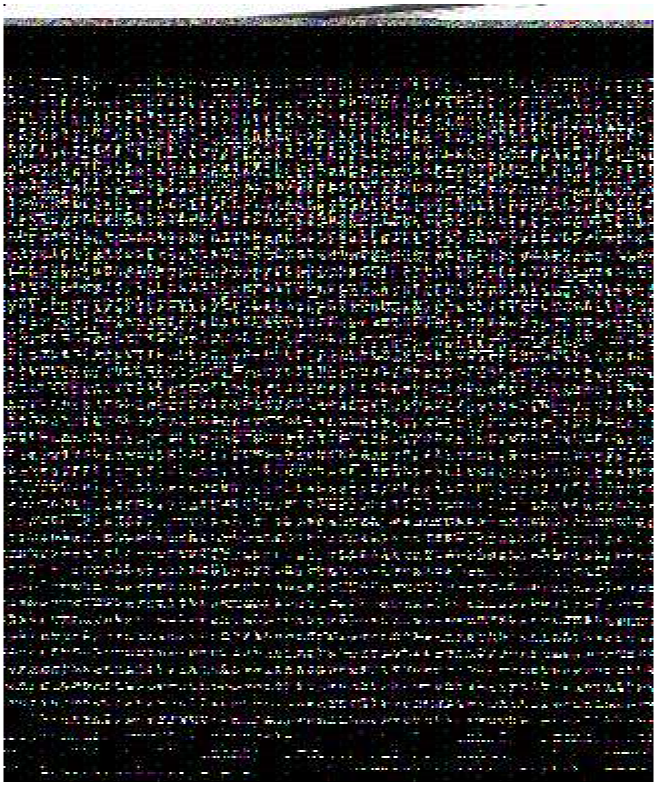

“But these four men must be now at the siege of La Rochelle?”

“I thought so, too; but a letter which Madame Bonacieux has received from Madame the Constable, and which she has had the imprudence to show me, leads me to believe that these four men, on the contrary, are on the road hither to take her away.”

“The devil! What’s to be done?”

“What did the cardinal say about me?”

“I was to take your dispatches, written or verbal, and return by post; and when he shall know what you have done, he will advise what you have to do.”

“I must, then, remain here?”

“Here, or in the neighborhood.”

“You cannot take me with you?”

“No, the order is imperative. Near the camp you might be recognized; and your presence, you must be aware, would compromise the cardinal.”

“Then I must wait here, or in the neighborhood?”

“Only tell me beforehand where you will wait for intelligence from the cardinal; let me know always where to find you.”

“Observe, it is probable that I may not be able to remain here.”

“Why?”

“You forget that my enemies may arrive at any minute.”

“That’s true; but is this little woman, then, to escape his Eminence?”

“Bah!” said Milady, with a smile that belonged only to herself; “you forget that I am her best friend.”

“Ah, that’s true! I may then tell the cardinal, with respect to this little woman--”

“That he may be at ease.”

“Is that all?”

“He will know what that means.”

“He will guess, at least. Now, then, what had I better do?”

“Return instantly. It appears to me that the news you bear is worth the trouble of a little diligence.”

“My chaise broke down coming into Lilliers.”

“Capital!”

“What, CAPITAL?”

“Yes, I want your chaise.”

“And how shall I travel, then?”

“On horseback.”

“You talk very comfortably,--a hundred and eighty leagues!”

“What’s that?”

“One can do it! Afterward?”

“Afterward? Why, in passing through Lilliers you will send me your chaise, with an order to your servant to place himself at my disposal.”

“Well.”

“You have, no doubt, some order from the cardinal about you?”

“I have my FULL POWER.”

“Show it to the abbess, and tell her that someone will come and fetch me, either today or tomorrow, and that I am to follow the person who presents himself in your name.”

“Very well.”

“Don’t forget to treat me harshly in speaking of me to the abbess.”

“To what purpose?”

“I am a victim of the cardinal. It is necessary to inspire confidence in that poor little Madame Bonacieux.”

“That’s true. Now, will you make me a report of all that has happened?”

“Why, I have related the events to you. You have a good memory; repeat what I have told you. A paper may be lost.”

"You are right; only let me know where to find you that I may not run needlessly about the neighborhood."

"That's correct; wait!"

"Do you want a map?"

"Oh, I know this country marvelously!"

"You? When were you here?"

"I was brought up here."

"Truly?"

"It is worth something, you see, to have been brought up somewhere."

"You will wait for me, then?"

"Let me reflect a little! Ay, that will do--at Armentieres."

"Where is that Armentieres?"

"A little town on the Lys; I shall only have to cross the river, and I shall be in a foreign country."

"Capital! but it is understood you will only cross the river in case of danger."

"That is well understood."

"And in that case, how shall I know where you are?"

"You do not want your lackey?"

"Is he a sure man?"

"To the proof."

"Give him to me. Nobody knows him. I will leave him at the place I quit, and he will conduct you to me."

"And you say you will wait for me at Armentieres?"

"At Armentieres."

"Write that name on a bit of paper, lest I should forget it. There is nothing compromising in the name of a town. Is it not so?"

"Eh, who knows? Never mind," said Milady, writing the name on half a sheet of paper; "I will compromise myself."

"Well," said Rochefort, taking the paper from Milady, folding it, and placing it in the lining of his hat, "you may be easy. I will do as children do, for fear of losing the paper--repeat the name along the route. Now, is that all?"

"I believe so."

"Let us see: Buckingham dead or grievously wounded; your conversation with the cardinal overheard by the four Musketeers; Lord de Winter warned of your arrival at Portsmouth; d'Artagnan and Athos to the Bastille; Aramis the lover of Madame de Chevreuse; Porthos an ass; Madame Bonacieux found again; to send you the chaise as soon as possible; to place my lackey at your disposal; to make you out a victim of the cardinal in order that the abbess may entertain no suspicion; Armentieres, on the banks of the Lys. Is that all, then?”

“In truth, my dear Chevalier, you are a miracle of memory. A PROPOS, add one thing--”

“What?”

“I saw some very pretty woods which almost touch the convent garden. Say that I am permitted to walk in those woods. Who knows? Perhaps I shall stand in need of a back door for retreat.”

“You think of everything.”

“And you forget one thing.”

“What?”

“To ask me if I want money.”

“That’s true. How much do you want?”

“All you have in gold.”

“I have five hundred pistoles, or thereabouts.”

“I have as much. With a thousand pistoles one may face everything. Empty your pockets.”

“There.”

“Right. And you go--”

“In an hour--time to eat a morsel, during which I shall send for a post horse.”

“Capital! Adieu, Chevalier.”

“Adieu, Countess.”

“Commend me to the cardinal.”

“Commend me to Satan.”

Milady and Rochefort exchanged a smile and separated. An hour afterward Rochefort set out at a grand gallop; five hours after that he passed through Arras.

Our readers already know how he was recognized by d’Artagnan, and how that recognition by inspiring fear in the four Musketeers had given fresh activity to their journey.

CHAPTER 63

THE DROP OF WATER

Rochefort had scarcely departed when Mme. Bonacieux re-entered. She found Milady with a smiling countenance.

“Well,” said the young woman, “what you dreaded has happened. This evening, or tomorrow, the cardinal will send someone to take you away.”

“Who told you that, my dear?” asked Milady.

“I heard it from the mouth of the messenger himself.”

“Come and sit down close to me,” said Milady.

“Here I am.”

“Wait till I assure myself that nobody hears us.”

“Why all these precautions?”

“You shall know.”

Milady arose, went to the door, opened it, looked in the corridor, and then returned and seated herself close to Mme. Bonacieux.

“Then,” said she, “he has well played his part.”

“Who has?”

“He who just now presented himself to the abbess as a messenger from the cardinal.”

“It was, then, a part he was playing?”

“Yes, my child.”

“That man, then, was not--”

“That man,” said Milady, lowering her voice, “is my brother.”

“Your brother!” cried Mme. Bonacieux.

“No one must know this secret, my dear, but yourself. If you reveal it to anyone in the world, I shall be lost, and perhaps yourself likewise.”

“Oh, my God!”

“Listen. This is what has happened: My brother, who was coming to my assistance to take me away by force if it were necessary, met with the emissary of the cardinal, who was coming in search of me. He followed him. At a solitary and retired part of the road he drew his sword, and required the messenger to deliver up to him the papers of which he was the bearer. The messenger resisted; my brother killed him."

"Oh!" said Mme. Bonacieux, shuddering.

"Remember, that was the only means. Then my brother determined to substitute cunning for force. He took the papers, and presented himself here as the emissary of the cardinal, and in an hour or two a carriage will come to take me away by the orders of his Eminence."

"I understand. It is your brother who sends this carriage."

"Exactly; but that is not all. That letter you have received, and which you believe to be from Madame de Chevreuse--"

"Well?"

"It is a forgery."

"How can that be?"

"Yes, a forgery; it is a snare to prevent your making any resistance when they come to fetch you."

"But it is d'Artagnan that will come."

"Do not deceive yourself. D'Artagnan and his friends are detained at the siege of La Rochelle."

"How do you know that?"

"My brother met some emissaries of the cardinal in the uniform of Musketeers. You would have been summoned to the gate; you would have believed yourself about to meet friends; you would have been abducted, and conducted back to Paris."

"Oh, my God! My senses fail me amid such a chaos of iniquities. I feel, if this continues," said Mme. Bonacieux, raising her hands to her forehead, "I shall go mad!"

"Stop--"

"What?"

"I hear a horse's steps; it is my brother setting off again. I should like to offer him a last salute. Come!"

Milady opened the window, and made a sign to Mme. Bonacieux to join her. The young woman complied.

Rochefort passed at a gallop.

"Adieu, brother!" cried Milady.

The chevalier raised his head, saw the two young women, and without stopping, waved his hand in a friendly way to Milady.

“The good George!” said she, closing the window with an expression of countenance full of affection and melancholy. And she resumed her seat, as if plunged in reflections entirely personal.

“Dear lady,” said Mme. Bonacieux, “pardon me for interrupting you; but what do you advise me to do? Good heaven! You have more experience than I have. Speak; I will listen.”

“In the first place,” said Milady, “it is possible I may be deceived, and that d’Artagnan and his friends may really come to your assistance.”

“Oh, that would be too much!” cried Mme. Bonacieux, “so much happiness is not in store for me!”

“Then you comprehend it would be only a question of time, a sort of race, which should arrive first. If your friends are the more speedy, you are to be saved; if the satellites of the cardinal, you are lost.”

“Oh, yes, yes; lost beyond redemption! What, then, to do? What to do?”

“There would be a very simple means, very natural--”

“Tell me what!”

“To wait, concealed in the neighborhood, and assure yourself who are the men who come to ask for you.”

“But where can I wait?”

“Oh, there is no difficulty in that. I shall stop and conceal myself a few leagues hence until my brother can rejoin me. Well, I take you with me; we conceal ourselves, and wait together.”

“But I shall not be allowed to go; I am almost a prisoner.”

“As they believe that I go in consequence of an order from the cardinal, no one will believe you anxious to follow me.”

“Well?”

“Well! The carriage is at the door; you bid me adieu; you mount the step to embrace me a last time; my brother’s servant, who comes to fetch me, is told how to proceed; he makes a sign to the postillion, and we set off at a gallop.”

“But d’Artagnan! D’Artagnan! if he comes?”

“Shall we not know it?”

“How?”

“Nothing easier. We will send my brother’s servant back to Bethune, whom, as I told you, we can trust. He shall assume a disguise, and place himself in front of the convent. If the emissaries of the cardinal arrive, he will take no notice; if it is Monsieur d’Artagnan and his friends, he will bring them to us.”

“He knows them, then?”

“Doubtless. Has he not seen Monsieur d’Artagnan at my house?”

“Oh, yes, yes; you are right. Thus all may go well--all may be for the best; but we do not go far from this place?”

“Seven or eight leagues at the most. We will keep on the frontiers, for instance; and at the first alarm we can leave France.”

“And what can we do there?”

“Wait.”

“But if they come?”

“My brother’s carriage will be here first.”

“If I should happen to be any distance from you when the carriage comes for you--at dinner or supper, for instance?”

“Do one thing.”

“What is that?”

“Tell your good superior that in order that we may be as much together as possible, you ask her permission to share my repast.”

“Will she permit it?”

“What inconvenience can it be?”

“Oh, delightful! In this way we shall not be separated for an instant.”

“Well, go down to her, then, to make your request. I feel my head a little confused; I will take a turn in the garden.”

“Go and where shall I find you?”

“Here, in an hour.”

“Here, in an hour. Oh, you are so kind, and I am so grateful!”

“How can I avoid interesting myself for one who is so beautiful and so amiable? Are you not the beloved of one of my best friends?”

“Dear d’Artagnan! Oh, how he will thank you!”

“I hope so. Now, then, all is agreed; let us go down.”

“You are going into the garden?”

“Yes.”

“Go along this corridor, down a little staircase, and you are in it.”

“Excellent; thank you!”

And the two women parted, exchanging charming smiles.

Milady had told the truth--her head was confused, for her ill-arranged plans clashed one another like chaos. She required to be alone that she might put her thoughts a little into order. She saw vaguely the future; but she stood in need of a little silence and quiet to give all her ideas, as yet confused, a distinct form and a regular plan.

What was most pressing was to get Mme. Bonacieux away, and convey her to a place of safety, and there, if matters required, make her a hostage. Milady began to have doubts of the issue of this terrible duel, in which her enemies showed as much perseverance as she did animosity.

Besides, she felt as we feel when a storm is coming on--that this issue was near, and could not fail to be terrible.

The principal thing for her, then, was, as we have said, to keep Mme. Bonacieux in her power. Mme. Bonacieux was the very life of d’Artagnan. This was more than his life, the life of the woman he loved; this was, in case of ill fortune, a means of temporizing and obtaining good conditions.

Now, this point was settled; Mme. Bonacieux, without any suspicion, accompanied her. Once concealed with her at Armentieres, it would be easy to make her believe that d’Artagnan had not come to Bethune. In fifteen days at most, Rochefort would be back; besides, during that fifteen days she would have time to think how she could best avenge herself on the four friends. She would not be weary, thank God! for she should enjoy the sweetest pastime such events could accord a woman of her character--perfecting a beautiful vengeance.

Revolving all this in her mind, she cast her eyes around her, and arranged the topography of the garden in her head. Milady was like a good general who contemplates at the same time victory and defeat, and who is quite prepared, according to the chances of the battle, to march forward or to beat a retreat.

At the end of an hour she heard a soft voice calling her; it was Mme. Bonacieux’s. The good abbess had naturally consented to her request; and as a commencement, they were to sup together.

On reaching the courtyard, they heard the noise of a carriage which stopped at the gate.

Milady listened.

“Do you hear anything?” said she.

“Yes, the rolling of a carriage.”

“It is the one my brother sends for us.”

“Oh, my God!”

“Come, come! courage!”

The bell of the convent gate was sounded; Milady was not mistaken.

“Go to your chamber,” said she to Mme. Bonacieux; “you have perhaps some jewels you would like to take.”

“I have his letters,” said she.

“Well, go and fetch them, and come to my apartment. We will snatch some supper; we shall perhaps travel part of the night, and must keep our strength up.”

“Great God!” said Mme. Bonacieux, placing her hand upon her bosom, “my heart beats so I cannot walk.”

“Courage, courage! remember that in a quarter of an hour you will be safe; and think that what you are about to do is for HIS sake.”

“Yes, yes, everything for him. You have restored my courage by a single word; go, I will rejoin you.”

Milady ran up to her apartment quickly; she there found Rochefort’s lackey, and gave him his instructions.

He was to wait at the gate; if by chance the Musketeers should appear, the carriage was to set off as fast as possible, pass around the convent, and go and wait for Milady at a little village which was situated at the other side of the wood. In this case Milady would cross the garden and gain the village on foot. As we have already said, Milady was admirably acquainted with this part of France.

If the Musketeers did not appear, things were to go on as had been agreed; Mme. Bonacieux was to get into the carriage as if to bid her adieu, and she was to take away Mme. Bonacieux.

Mme. Bonacieux came in; and to remove all suspicion, if she had any, Milady repeated to the lackey, before her, the latter part of her instructions.

Milady asked some questions about the carriage. It was a chaise drawn by three horses, driven by a postillion; Rochefort’s lackey would precede it, as courier.

Milady was wrong in fearing that Mme. Bonacieux would have any suspicion. The poor young woman was too pure to suppose that any female could be guilty of such perfidy; besides, the name of the Comtesse de Winter, which she had heard the abbess pronounce, was wholly unknown to her, and she was even ignorant that a woman had had so great and so fatal a share in the misfortune of her life.

“You see,” said she, when the lackey had gone out, “everything is ready. The abbess suspects nothing, and believes that I am taken by order of the cardinal. This man goes to give his last orders; take the least thing, drink a finger of wine, and let us be gone."

"Yes," said Mme. Bonacieux, mechanically, "yes, let us be gone."

Milady made her a sign to sit down opposite, poured her a small glass of Spanish wine, and helped her to the wing of a chicken.

"See," said she, "if everything does not second us! Here is night coming on; by daybreak we shall have reached our retreat, and nobody can guess where we are. Come, courage! take something."

Mme. Bonacieux ate a few mouthfuls mechanically, and just touched the glass with her lips.

"Come, come!" said Milady, lifting hers to her mouth, "do as I do."

But at the moment the glass touched her lips, her hand remained suspended; she heard something on the road which sounded like the rattling of a distant gallop. Then it grew nearer, and it seemed to her, almost at the same time, that she heard the neighing of horses.

This noise acted upon her joy like the storm which awakens the sleeper in the midst of a happy dream; she grew pale and ran to the window, while Mme. Bonacieux, rising all in a tremble, supported herself upon her chair to avoid falling. Nothing was yet to be seen, only they heard the galloping draw nearer.

"Oh, my God!" said Mme. Bonacieux, "what is that noise?"

"That of either our friends or our enemies," said Milady, with her terrible coolness. "Stay where you are, I will tell you."

Mme. Bonacieux remained standing, mute, motionless, and pale as a statue.

The noise became louder; the horses could not be more than a hundred and fifty paces distant. If they were not yet to be seen, it was because the road made an elbow. The noise became so distinct that the horses might be counted by the rattle of their hoofs.

Milady gazed with all the power of her attention; it was just light enough for her to see who was coming.

All at once, at the turning of the road she saw the glitter of laced hats and the waving of feathers; she counted two, then five, then eight horsemen. One of them preceded the rest by double the length of his horse.

Milady uttered a stifled groan. In the first horseman she recognized d'Artagnan.

"Oh, my God, my God," cried Mme. Bonacieux, "what is it?"

“It is the uniform of the cardinal’s Guards. Not an instant to be lost! Fly, fly!”

“Yes, yes, let us fly!” repeated Mme. Bonacieux, but without being able to make a step, glued as she was to the spot by terror.

They heard the horsemen pass under the windows.

“Come, then, come, then!” cried Milady, trying to drag the young woman along by the arm. “Thanks to the garden, we yet can flee; I have the key, but make haste! in five minutes it will be too late!”

Mme. Bonacieux tried to walk, made two steps, and sank upon her knees. Milady tried to raise and carry her, but could not do it.

At this moment they heard the rolling of the carriage, which at the approach of the Musketeers set off at a gallop. Then three or four shots were fired.

“For the last time, will you come?” cried Milady.

“Oh, my God, my God! you see my strength fails me; you see plainly I cannot walk. Flee alone!”

“Flee alone, and leave you here? No, no, never!” cried Milady.

All at once she paused, a livid flash darted from her eyes; she ran to the table, emptied into Mme. Bonacieux’s glass the contents of a ring which she opened with singular quickness. It was a grain of a reddish color, which dissolved immediately.

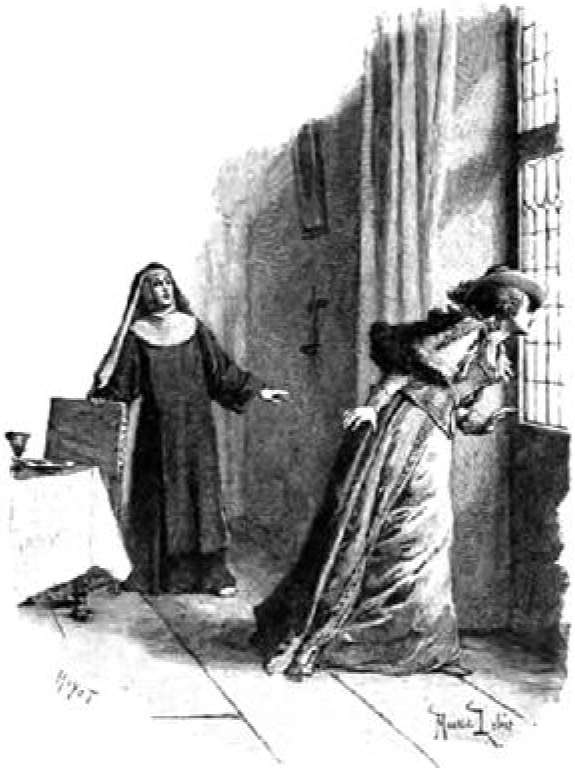

Then, taking the glass with a firm hand, she said, “Drink. This wine will give you strength, drink!” And she put the glass to the lips of the young woman, who drank mechanically.

“This is not the way that I wished to avenge myself,” said Milady, replacing the glass upon the table, with an infernal smile, “but, my faith! we do what we can!” And she rushed out of the room.

Mme. Bonacieux saw her go without being able to follow her; she was like people who dream they are pursued, and who in vain try to walk.

A few moments passed; a great noise was heard at the gate. Every instant Mme. Bonacieux expected to see Milady, but she did not return. Several times, with terror, no doubt, the cold sweat burst from her burning brow.

At length she heard the grating of the hinges of the opening gates; the noise of boots and spurs resounded on the stairs. There was a great murmur of voices which continued to draw near, amid which she seemed to hear her own name pronounced.

All at once she uttered a loud cry of joy, and darted toward the door; she had recognized the voice of d’Artagnan.

“d’Artagnan! D’Artagnan!” cried she, “is it you? This way! this way!”

“Constance? Constance?” replied the young man, “where are you? where are you? My God!”

At the same moment the door of the cell yielded to a shock, rather than opened; several men rushed into the chamber. Mme. Bonacieux had sunk into an armchair, without the power of moving.

D’Artagnan threw down a yet-smoking pistol which he held in his hand, and fell on his knees before his mistress. Athos replaced his in his belt; Porthos and Aramis, who held their drawn swords in their hands, returned them to their scabbards.

“Oh, d’Artagnan, my beloved d’Artagnan! You have come, then, at last! You have not deceived me! It is indeed thee!”

“Yes, yes, Constance. Reunited!”

“Oh, it was in vain she told me you would not come! I hoped in silence. I was not willing to fly. Oh, I have done well! How happy I am!”

At this word SHE, Athos, who had seated himself quietly, started up.

“SHE! What she?” asked d’Artagnan.

“Why, my companion. She who out of friendship for me wished to take me from my persecutors. She who, mistaking you for the cardinal’s Guards, has just fled away.”

“Your companion!” cried d’Artagnan, becoming more pale than the white veil of his mistress. “Of what companion are you speaking, dear Constance?”

“Of her whose carriage was at the gate; of a woman who calls herself your friend; of a woman to whom you have told everything.”

“Her name, her name!” cried d’Artagnan. “My God, can you not remember her name?”

“Yes, it was pronounced in my hearing once. Stop--but--it is very strange--oh, my God, my head swims! I cannot see!”

“Help, help, my friends! her hands are icy cold,” cried d’Artagnan. “She is ill! Great God, she is losing her senses!”

While Porthos was calling for help with all the power of his strong voice, Aramis ran to the table to get a glass of water; but he stopped at seeing the horrible alteration that had taken place in the countenance of Athos, who, standing before the table, his hair rising from his head, his eyes fixed in stupor, was looking at one of the glasses, and appeared a prey to the most horrible doubt.

“Oh!” said Athos, “oh, no, it is impossible! God would not permit such a crime!”

“Water, water!” cried d’Artagnan. “Water!”

“Oh, poor woman, poor woman!” murmured Athos, in a broken voice.

Mme. Bonacieux opened her eyes under the kisses of d’Artagnan.

“She revives!” cried the young man. “Oh, my God, my God, I thank thee!”

“Madame!” said Athos, “madame, in the name of heaven, whose empty glass is this?”

“Mine, monsieur,” said the young woman, in a dying voice.

“But who poured the wine for you that was in this glass?”

“She.”

“But who is SHE?”

“Oh, I remember!” said Mme. Bonacieux, “the Comtesse de Winter.”

The four friends uttered one and the same cry, but that of Athos dominated all the rest.

At that moment the countenance of Mme. Bonacieux became livid; a fearful agony pervaded her frame, and she sank panting into the arms of Porthos and Aramis.

D’Artagnan seized the hands of Athos with an anguish difficult to be described.

“And what do you believe?’ His voice was stifled by sobs.

“I believe everything,” said Athos biting his lips till the blood sprang to avoid sighing.

“d’Artagnan, d’Artagnan!” cried Mme. Bonacieux, “where art thou? Do not leave me! You see I am dying!”

D’Artagnan released the hands of Athos which he still held clasped in both his own, and hastened to her. Her beautiful face was distorted with agony; her glassy eyes had no longer their sight; a convulsive shuddering shook her whole body; the sweat rolled from her brow.

“In the name of heaven, run, call! Aramis! Porthos! Call for help!”

“Useless!” said Athos, “useless! For the poison which SHE pours there is no antidote.”

“Yes, yes! Help, help!” murmured Mme. Bonacieux; “help!”

Then, collecting all her strength, she took the head of the young man between her hands, looked at him for an instant as if her whole soul passed into that look, and with a sobbing cry pressed her lips to his.

“Constance, Constance!” cried d’Artagnan.

A sigh escaped from the mouth of Mme. Bonacieux, and dwelt for an instant on the lips of d’Artagnan. That sigh was the soul, so chaste and so loving, which reascended to heaven.

D’Artagnan pressed nothing but a corpse in his arms. The young man uttered a cry, and fell by the side of his mistress as pale and as icy as herself.

Porthos wept; Aramis pointed toward heaven; Athos made the sign of the cross.

At that moment a man appeared in the doorway, almost as pale as those in the chamber. He looked around him and saw Mme. Bonacieux dead, and d’Artagnan in a swoon. He appeared just at that moment of stupor which follows great catastrophes.

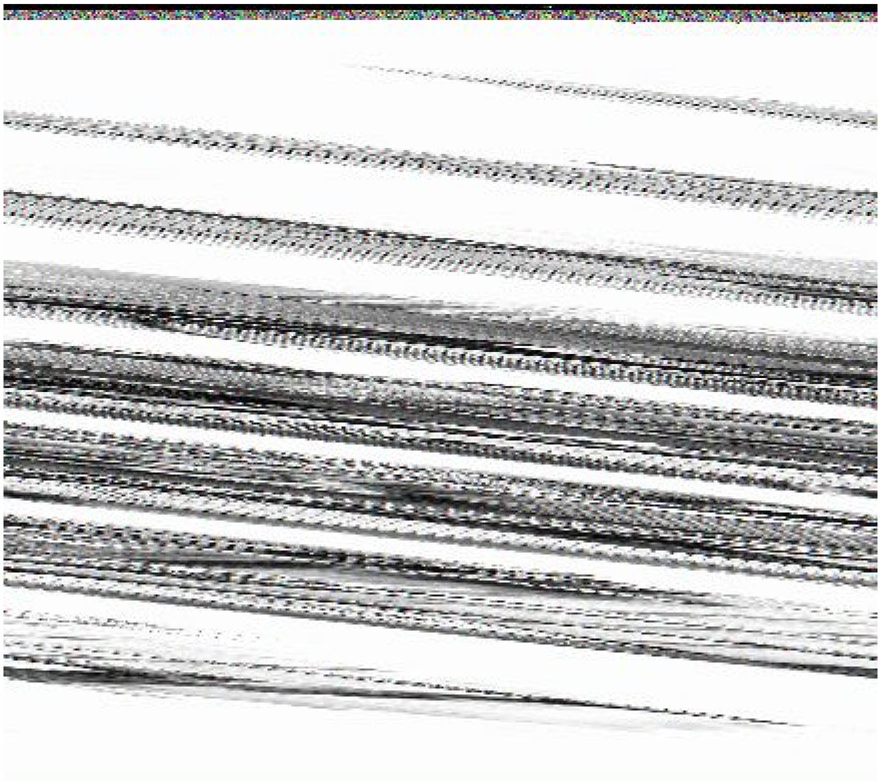

“I was not deceived,” said he; “here is Monsieur d’Artagnan; and you are his friends, Messieurs Athos, Porthos, and Aramis.”

The persons whose names were thus pronounced looked at the stranger with astonishment. It seemed to all three that they knew him.

“Gentlemen,” resumed the newcomer, “you are, as I am, in search of a woman who,” added he, with a terrible smile, “must have passed this way, for I see a corpse.”

The three friends remained mute--for although the voice as well as the countenance reminded them of someone they had seen, they could not remember under what circumstances.

“Gentlemen,” continued the stranger, “since you do not recognize a man who probably owes his life to you twice, I must name myself. I am Lord de Winter, brother-in-law of THAT WOMAN.”

The three friends uttered a cry of surprise.

Athos rose, and offering him his hand, “Be welcome, my Lord,” said he, “you are one of us.”

“I set out five hours after her from Portsmouth,” said Lord de Winter. “I arrived three hours after her at Boulogne. I missed her by twenty minutes at St. Omer. Finally, at Lilliers I lost all trace of her. I was going about at random, inquiring of everybody, when I saw you gallop past. I recognized

Monsieur d’Artagnan. I called to you, but you did not answer me; I wished to follow you, but my horse was too much fatigued to go at the same pace with yours. And yet it appears, in spite of all your diligence, you have arrived too late.”

“You see!” said Athos, pointing to Mme. Bonacieux dead, and to d’Artagnan, whom Porthos and Aramis were trying to recall to life.

“Are they both dead?” asked Lord de Winter, sternly.

“No,” replied Athos, “fortunately Monsieur d’Artagnan has only fainted.”

“Ah, indeed, so much the better!” said Lord de Winter.

At that moment d’Artagnan opened his eyes. He tore himself from the arms of Porthos and Aramis, and threw himself like a madman on the corpse of his mistress.

Athos rose, walked toward his friend with a slow and solemn step, embraced him tenderly, and as he burst into violent sobs, he said to him with his noble and persuasive voice, “Friend, be a man! Women weep for the dead; men avenge them!”

“Oh, yes!” cried d’Artagnan, “yes! If it be to avenge her, I am ready to follow you.”

Athos profited by this moment of strength which the hope of vengeance restored to his unfortunate friend to make a sign to Porthos and Aramis to go and fetch the superior.

The two friends met her in the corridor, greatly troubled and much upset by such strange events; she called some of the nuns, who against all monastic custom found themselves in the presence of five men.

“Madame,” said Athos, passing his arm under that of d’Artagnan, “we abandon to your pious care the body of that unfortunate woman. She was an angel on earth before being an angel in heaven. Treat her as one of your sisters. We will return someday to pray over her grave.”

D’Artagnan concealed his face in the bosom of Athos, and sobbed aloud.

“Weep,” said Athos, “weep, heart full of love, youth, and life! Alas, would I could weep like you!”

And he drew away his friend, as affectionate as a father, as consoling as a priest, noble as a man who has suffered much.

All five, followed by their lackeys leading their horses, took their way to the town of Bethune, whose outskirts they perceived, and stopped before the first inn they came to.

“But,” said d’Artagnan, “shall we not pursue that woman?”

"Later," said Athos. "I have measures to take."

"She will escape us," replied the young man; "she will escape us, and it will be your fault, Athos."

"I will be accountable for her," said Athos.

D'Artagnan had so much confidence in the word of his friend that he lowered his head, and entered the inn without reply.

Porthos and Aramis regarded each other, not understanding this assurance of Athos.

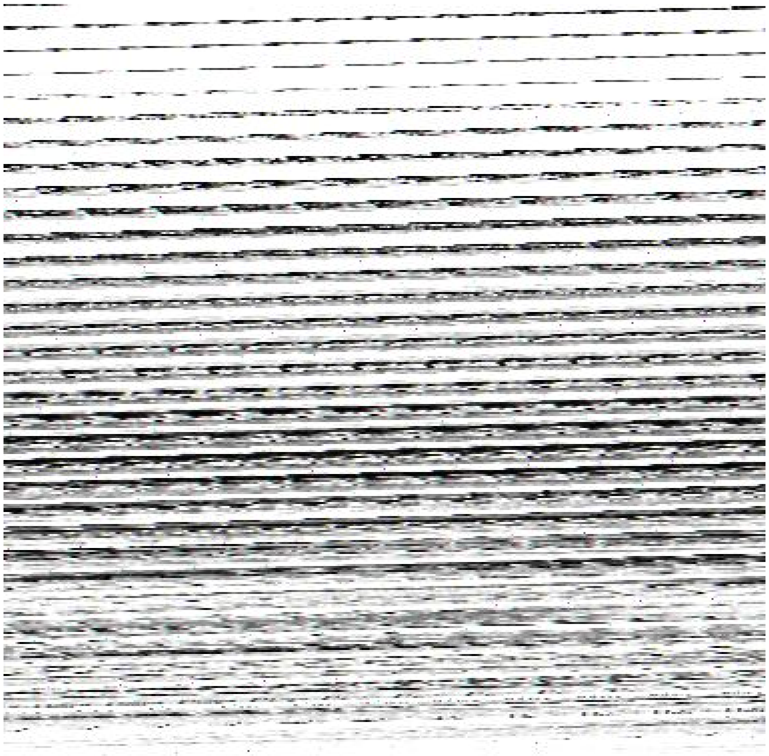

Lord de Winter believed he spoke in this manner to soothe the grief of d'Artagnan.

"Now, gentlemen," said Athos, when he had ascertained there were five chambers free in the hotel, "let everyone retire to his own apartment. d'Artagnan needs to be alone, to weep and to sleep. I take charge of everything; be easy."

"It appears, however," said Lord de Winter, "if there are any measures to take against the countess, it concerns me; she is my sister-in-law."

"And me," said Athos, "--she is my wife!"

D'Artagnan smiled--for he understood that Athos was sure of his vengeance when he revealed such a secret. Porthos and Aramis looked at each other, and grew pale. Lord de Winter thought Athos was mad.

“Now, retire to your chambers,” said Athos, “and leave me to act. You must perceive that in my quality of a husband this concerns me. Only, d’Artagnan, if you have not lost it, give me the paper which fell from that man’s hat, upon which is written the name of the village of--”

“Ah,” said d’Artagnan, “I comprehend! that name written in her hand.”

“You see, then,” said Athos, “there is a god in heaven still!”

CHAPTER 64

THE MAN IN THE RED CLOAK

The despair of Athos had given place to a concentrated grief which only rendered more lucid the brilliant mental faculties of that extraordinary man.

Possessed by one single thought--that of the promise he had made, and of the responsibility he had taken--he retired last to his chamber, begged the host to procure him a map of the province, bent over it, examined every line traced upon it, perceived that there were four different roads from Bethune to Armentieres, and summoned the lackeys.

Planchet, Grimaud, Bazin, and Mousqueton presented themselves, and received clear, positive, and serious orders from Athos.

They must set out the next morning at daybreak, and go to Armentieres--each by a different route. Planchet, the most intelligent of the four, was to follow that by which the carriage had gone upon which the four friends had fired, and which was accompanied, as may be remembered, by Rochefort’s servant.

Athos set the lackeys to work first because, since these men had been in the service of himself and his friends he had discovered in each of them different and essential qualities. Then, lackeys who ask questions inspire less mistrust than masters, and meet with more sympathy among those to whom they address themselves. Besides, Milady knew the masters, and did not know the lackeys; on the contrary, the lackeys knew Milady perfectly.

All four were to meet the next day at eleven o’clock. If they had discovered Milady’s retreat, three were to remain on guard; the fourth was to return to Bethune in order to inform Athos and serve as a guide to the four friends. These arrangements made, the lackeys retired.

Athos then arose from his chair, girded on his sword, enveloped himself in his cloak, and left the hotel. It was nearly ten o’clock. At ten o’clock in the evening, it is well known, the streets in provincial towns are very little frequented. Athos nevertheless was visibly anxious to find someone of whom he could ask a question. At length he met a belated passenger, went up to him, and spoke a few words to him. The man he addressed recoiled with terror, and only answered the few words of the Musketeer by pointing. Athos offered the man half a pistole to accompany him, but the man refused.

Athos then plunged into the street the man had indicated with his finger; but arriving at four crossroads, he stopped again, visibly embarrassed. Nevertheless, as the crossroads offered him a better chance than any other place of meeting somebody, he stood still. In a few minutes a night watch passed. Athos repeated to him the same question he had asked the first person he met. The night watch evinced the same terror, refused, in his turn, to accompany Athos, and only pointed with his hand to the road he was to take.

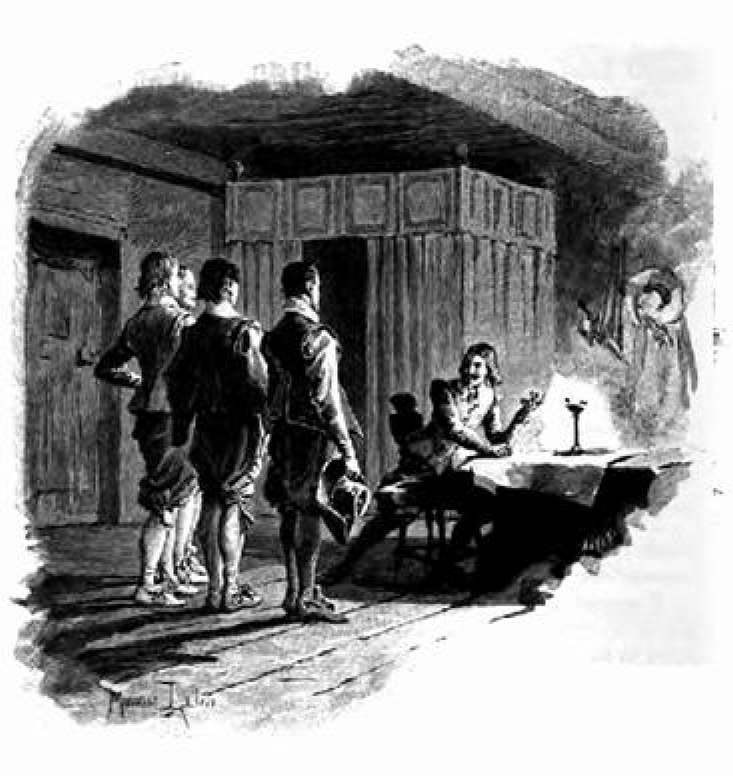

Athos walked in the direction indicated, and reached the suburb situated at the opposite extremity of the city from that by which he and his friends had entered it. There he again appeared uneasy and embarrassed, and stopped for the third time.

Fortunately, a mendicant passed, who, coming up to Athos to ask charity, Athos offered him half a crown to accompany him where he was going. The mendicant hesitated at first, but at the sight of the piece of silver which shone in the darkness he consented, and walked on before Athos.

Arrived at the angle of a street, he pointed to a small house, isolated, solitary, and dismal. Athos went toward the house, while the mendicant, who had received his reward, left as fast as his legs could carry him.

Athos went round the house before he could distinguish the door, amid the red color in which the house was painted. No light appeared through the chinks of the shutters; no noise gave reason to believe that it was inhabited. It was dark and silent as the tomb.

Three times Athos knocked without receiving an answer. At the third knock, however, steps were heard inside. The door at length was opened, and a man appeared, of high stature, pale complexion, and black hair and beard.

Athos and he exchanged some words in a low voice, then the tall man made a sign to the Musketeer that he might come in. Athos immediately profited by the permission, and the door was closed behind him.

The man whom Athos had come so far to seek, and whom he had found with so much trouble, introduced him into his laboratory, where he was engaged in fastening together with iron wire the dry bones of a skeleton. All the frame was adjusted except the head, which lay on the table.

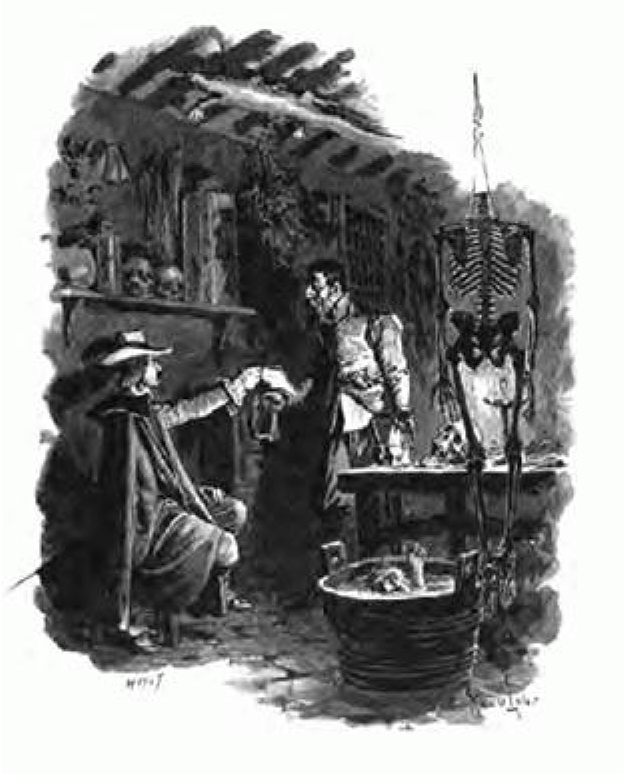

All the rest of the furniture indicated that the dweller in this house occupied himself with the study of natural science. There were large bottles filled with serpents, ticketed according to their species; dried lizards shone like emeralds set in great squares of black wood, and bunches of wild odoriferous herbs, doubtless possessed of virtues unknown to common men, were fastened to the ceiling and hung down in the corners of the apartment. There was no family, no servant; the tall man alone inhabited this house.

Athos cast a cold and indifferent glance upon the objects we have described, and at the invitation of him whom he came to seek sat down near him.

Then he explained to him the cause of his visit, and the service he required of him. But scarcely had he expressed his request when the unknown, who remained standing before the Musketeer, drew back with signs of terror, and refused. Then Athos took from his pocket a small paper, on which two lines were written, accompanied by a signature and a seal, and presented them to him who had made too prematurely these signs of repugnance. The tall man had scarcely read these lines, seen the signature, and recognized the seal, when he bowed to denote that he had no longer any objection to make, and that he was ready to obey.

Athos required no more. He arose, bowed, went out, returned by the same way he came, re-entered the hotel, and went to his apartment.

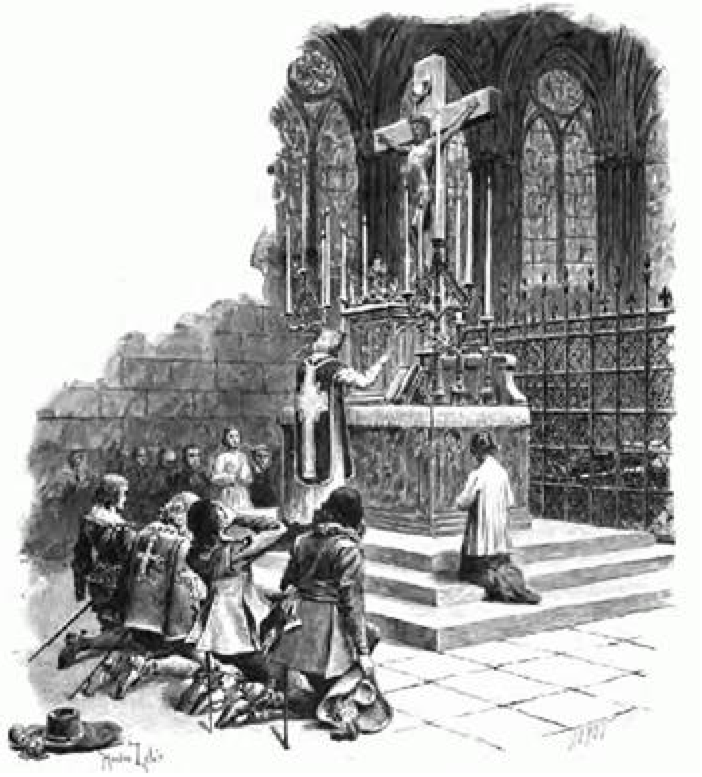

At daybreak d’Artagnan entered the chamber, and demanded what was to be done.

“To wait,” replied Athos.

Some minutes after, the superior of the convent sent to inform the Musketeers that the burial would take place at midday. As to the poisoner, they had heard no tidings of her whatever, only that she must have made her escape through the garden, on the sand of which her footsteps could be traced, and the door of which had been found shut. As to the key, it had disappeared.

At the hour appointed, Lord de Winter and the four friends repaired to the convent; the bells tolled, the chapel was open, the grating of the choir was closed. In the middle of the choir the body of the victim, clothed in her novitiate dress, was exposed. On each side of the choir and behind the gratings opening into the convent was assembled the whole community of the Carmelites, who listened to the divine service, and mingled their chant with the chant of the priests, without seeing the profane, or being seen by them.

At the door of the chapel d’Artagnan felt his courage fall anew, and returned to look for Athos; but Athos had disappeared.

Faithful to his mission of vengeance, Athos had requested to be conducted to the garden; and there upon the sand following the light steps of this woman, who left sharp tracks wherever she went, he advanced toward the gate which led into the wood, and causing it to be opened, he went out into the forest.

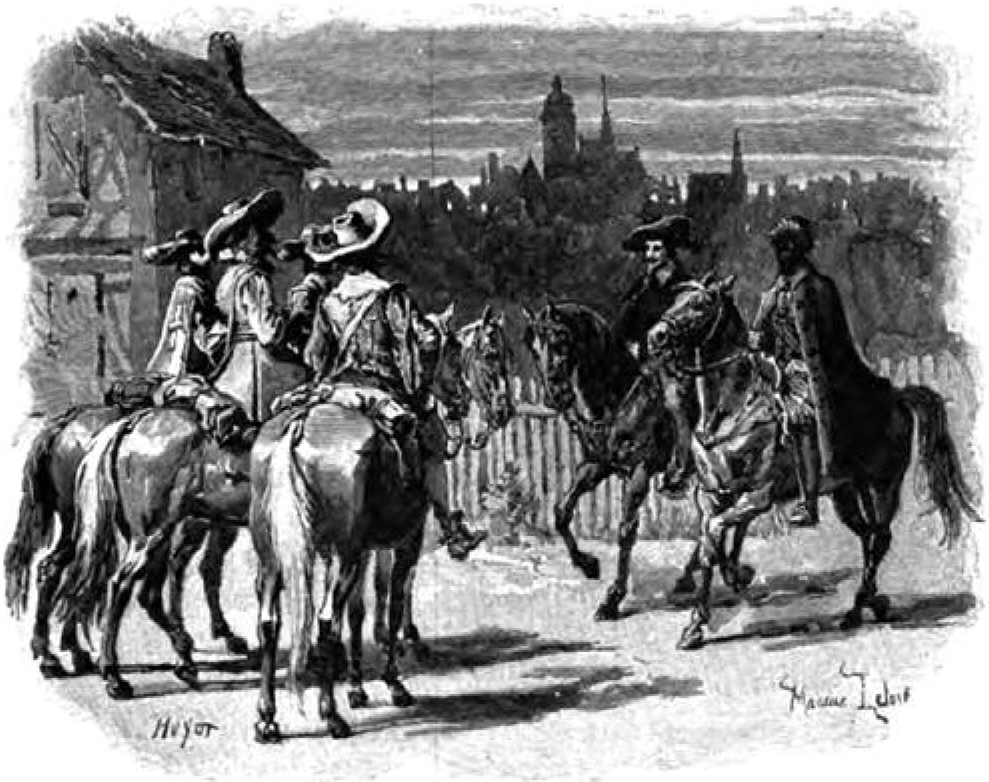

Then all his suspicions were confirmed; the road by which the carriage had disappeared encircled the forest. Athos followed the road for some time, his eyes fixed upon the ground; slight stains of blood, which came from the wound inflicted upon the man who accompanied the carriage as a courier, or from one of the horses, dotted the road. At the end of three-quarters of a league, within fifty paces of Festubert, a larger bloodstain appeared; the ground was trampled by horses. Between the forest and this accursed spot, a little behind the trampled ground, was the same track of small feet as in the garden; the carriage had stopped here. At this spot Milady had come out of the wood, and entered the carriage.

Satisfied with this discovery which confirmed all his suspicions, Athos returned to the hotel, and found Planchet impatiently waiting for him.

Everything was as Athos had foreseen.

Planchet had followed the road; like Athos, he had discovered the stains of blood; like Athos, he had noted the spot where the horses had halted. But he had gone farther than Athos--for at the village of Festubert, while drinking at an inn, he had learned without needing to ask a question that the evening before, at half-past eight, a wounded man who accompanied a lady traveling in a post-chaise had been obliged to stop, unable to go further. The accident was set down to the account of robbers, who had stopped the chaise in the wood. The man remained in the village; the woman had had a relay of horses, and continued her journey.

Planchet went in search of the postillion who had driven her, and found him. He had taken the lady as far as Fromelles; and from Fromelles she had set out for Armentieres. Planchet took the crossroad, and by seven o'clock in the morning he was at Armentieres.

There was but one tavern, the Post. Planchet went and presented himself as a lackey out of a place, who was in search of a situation. He had not chatted ten minutes with the people of the tavern before he learned that a woman had come there alone about eleven o'clock the night before, had engaged a chamber, had sent for the master of the hotel, and told him she desired to remain some time in the neighborhood.

Planchet had no need to learn more. He hastened to the rendezvous, found the lackeys at their posts, placed them as sentinels at all the outlets of the hotel, and came to find Athos, who had just received this information when his friends returned.

All their countenances were melancholy and gloomy, even the mild countenance of Aramis.

"What is to be done?" asked d'Artagnan.

"To wait!" replied Athos.

Each retired to his own apartment.

At eight o'clock in the evening Athos ordered the horses to be saddled, and Lord de Winter and his friends notified that they must prepare for the expedition.

In an instant all five were ready. Each examined his arms, and put them in order. Athos came down last, and found d'Artagnan already on horseback, and growing impatient.

"Patience!" cried Athos; "one of our party is still wanting."

The four horsemen looked round them with astonishment, for they sought vainly in their minds to know who this other person could be.

At this moment Planchet brought out Athos's house; the Musketeer leaped lightly into the saddle.

"Wait for me," cried he, "I will soon be back," and he set off at a gallop.

In a quarter of an hour he returned, accompanied by a tall man, masked, and wrapped in a large red cloak.

Lord de Winter and the three Musketeers looked at one another inquiringly. Neither could give the others any information, for all were ignorant who this man could be; nevertheless, they felt convinced that all was as it should be, as it was done by the order of Athos.

At nine o’clock, guided by Planchet, the little cavalcade set out, taking the route the carriage had taken.

It was a melancholy sight--that of these six men, traveling in silence, each plunged in his own thoughts, sad as despair, gloomy as chastisement.

CHAPTER 65

TRIAL

It was a stormy and dark night; vast clouds covered the heavens, concealing the stars; the moon would not rise till midnight.

Occasionally, by the light of a flash of lightning which gleamed along the horizon, the road stretched itself before them, white and solitary; the flash extinct, all remained in darkness.

Every minute Athos was forced to restrain d'Artagnan, constantly in advance of the little troop, and to beg him to keep in the line, which in an instant he again departed from. He had but one thought--to go forward; and he went.

They passed in silence through the little village of Festubert, where the wounded servant was, and then skirted the wood of Richebourg. At Herlier, Planchet, who led the column, turned to the left.

Several times Lord de Winter, Porthos, or Aramis, tried to talk with the man in the red cloak; but to every interrogation which they put to him he bowed, without response. The travelers then comprehended that there must be some reason why the unknown preserved such a silence, and ceased to address themselves to him.

The storm increased, the flashes succeeded one another more rapidly, the thunder began to growl, and the wind, the precursor of a hurricane, whistled in the plumes and the hair of the horsemen.

The cavalcade trotted on more sharply.

A little before they came to Fromelles the storm burst. They spread their cloaks. There remained three leagues to travel, and they did it amid torrents of rain.

D'Artagnan took off his hat, and could not be persuaded to make use of his cloak. He found pleasure in feeling the water trickle over his burning brow and over his body, agitated by feverish shudders.

The moment the little troop passed Goskal and were approaching the Port, a man sheltered beneath a tree detached himself from the trunk with which he had been confounded in the darkness, and advanced into the middle of the road, putting his finger on his lips.

Athos recognized Grimaud.

“What’s the manner?” cried Athos. “Has she left Armentieres?”

Grimaud made a sign in the affirmative. D’Artagnan groaned his teeth.

“Silence, d’Artagnan!” said Athos. “I have charged myself with this affair. It is for me, then, to interrogate Grimaud.”

“Where is she?” asked Athos.

Grimaud extended his hands in the direction of the Lys. “Far from here?” asked Athos.

Grimaud showed his master his forefinger bent.

“Alone?” asked Athos.

Grimaud made the sign yes.

“Gentlemen,” said Athos, “she is alone within half a league of us, in the direction of the river.”

“That’s well,” said d’Artagnan. “Lead us, Grimaud.”

Grimaud took his course across the country, and acted as guide to the cavalcade.

At the end of five hundred paces, more or less, they came to a rivulet, which they forded.

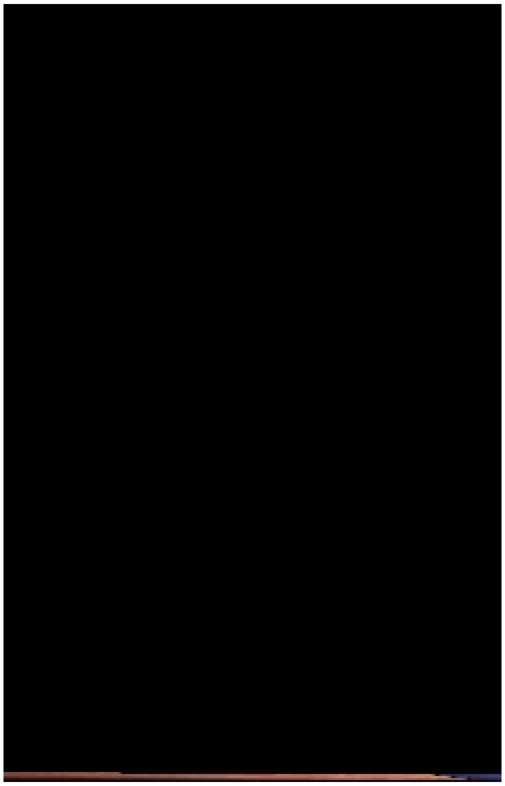

By the aid of the lightning they perceived the village of Erquinheim.

“Is she there, Grimaud?” asked Athos.

Grimaud shook his head negatively.

“Silence, then!” cried Athos.

And the troop continued their route.

Another flash illuminated all around them. Grimaud extended his arm, and by the bluish splendor of the fiery serpent they distinguished a little isolated house on the banks of the river, within a hundred paces of a ferry.

One window was lighted.

“Here we are!” said Athos.

At this moment a man who had been crouching in a ditch jumped up and came towards them. It was Mousqueton. He pointed his finger to the lighted window.

“She is there,” said he.

“And Bazin?” asked Athos.

“While I watched the window, he guarded the door.”

“Good!” said Athos. “You are good and faithful servants.”

Athos sprang from his horse, gave the bridle to Grimaud, and advanced toward the window, after having made a sign to the rest of the troop to go toward the door.

The little house was surrounded by a low, quickset hedge, two or three feet high. Athos sprang over the hedge and went up to the window, which was without shutters, but had the half-curtains closely drawn.

He mounted the skirting stone that his eyes might look over the curtain.

By the light of a lamp he saw a woman, wrapped in a dark mantle, seated upon a stool near a dying fire. Her elbows were placed upon a mean table, and she leaned her head upon her two hands, which were white as ivory.

He could not distinguish her countenance, but a sinister smile passed over the lips of Athos. He was not deceived; it was she whom he sought.

At this moment a horse neighed. Milady raised her head, saw close to the panes the pale face of Athos, and screamed.

Athos, perceiving that she knew him, pushed the window with his knee and hand. The window yielded. The squares were broken to shivers; and Athos, like the spectre of vengeance, leaped into the room.

Milady rushed to the door and opened it. More pale and menacing than Athos, d’Artagnan stood on the threshold.

Milady recoiled, uttering a cry. D’Artagnan, believing she might have means of flight and fearing she should escape, drew a pistol from his belt; but Athos raised his hand.

“Put back that weapon, d’Artagnan!” said he; “this woman must be tried, not assassinated. Wait an instant, my friend, and you shall be satisfied. Come in, gentlemen.”

D’Artagnan obeyed; for Athos had the solemn voice and the powerful gesture of a judge sent by the Lord himself. Behind d’Artagnan entered Porthos, Aramis, Lord de Winter, and the man in the red cloak.

The four lackeys guarded the door and the window.

Milady had sunk into a chair, with her hands extended, as if to conjure this terrible apparition. Perceiving her brother-in-law, she uttered a terrible cry.

“What do you want?” screamed Milady.

“We want,” said Athos, “Charlotte Backson, who first was called Comtesse de la Fere, and afterwards Milady de Winter, Baroness of Sheffield.”

“That is I! that is I!” murmured Milady, in extreme terror; “what do you want?”

“We wish to judge you according to your crime,” said Athos; “you shall be free to defend yourself. Justify yourself if you can. M. d’Artagnan, it is for you to accuse her first.”

[redacted]

D’Artagnan advanced.

“Before God and before men,” said he, “I accuse this woman of having poisoned Constance Bonacieux, who died yesterday evening.”

He turned towards Porthos and Aramis.

“We bear witness to this,” said the two Musketeers, with one voice.

D’Artagnan continued: “Before God and before men, I accuse this woman of having attempted to poison me, in wine which she sent me from Villeroy, with a forged letter, as if that wine came from my friends. God preserved me, but a man named Brisemont died in my place.”

“We bear witness to this,” said Porthos and Aramis, in the same manner as before.

“Before God and before men, I accuse this woman of having urged me to the murder of the Baron de Wardes; but as no one else can attest the truth of this accusation, I attest it myself. I have done.” And d’Artagnan passed to the other side of the room with Porthos and Aramis.

“Your turn, my Lord,” said Athos.

The baron came forward.

“Before God and before men,” said he, “I accuse this woman of having caused the assassination of the Duke of Buckingham.”

“The Duke of Buckingham assassinated!” cried all present, with one voice.

“Yes,” said the baron, “assassinated. On receiving the warning letter you wrote to me, I had this woman arrested, and gave her in charge to a loyal servant. She corrupted this man; she placed the poniard in his hand; she made him kill the duke. And at this moment, perhaps, Felton is paying with his head for the crime of this fury!”

A shudder crept through the judges at the revelation of these unknown crimes.

“That is not all,” resumed Lord de Winter. “My brother, who made you his heir, died in three hours of a strange disorder which left livid traces all over the body. My sister, how did your husband die?”

“Horror!” cried Porthos and Aramis.

“Assassin of Buckingham, assassin of Felton, assassin of my brother, I demand justice upon you, and I swear that if it be not granted to me, I will execute it myself.”

And Lord de Winter ranged himself by the side of d’Artagnan, leaving the place free for another accuser.

Milady let her head sink between her two hands, and tried to recall her ideas, whirling in a mortal vertigo.

“My turn,” said Athos, himself trembling as the lion trembles at the sight of the serpent--”my turn. I married that woman when she was a young girl; I married her in opposition to the wishes of all my family; I gave her my wealth, I gave her my name; and one day I discovered that this woman was branded--this woman was marked with a FLEUR-DE-LIS on her left shoulder.”

“Oh,” said Milady, raising herself, “I defy you to find any tribunal which pronounced that infamous sentence against me. I defy you to find him who executed it.”

“Silence!” said a hollow voice. “It is for me to reply to that!” And the man in the red cloak came forward in his turn.

“What man is that? What man is that?” cried Milady, suffocated by terror, her hair loosening itself, and rising above her livid countenance as if alive.

All eyes were turned towards this man--for to all except Athos he was unknown.

Even Athos looked at him with as much stupefaction as the others, for he knew not how he could in any way find himself mixed up with the horrible drama then unfolded.

After approaching Milady with a slow and solemn step, so that the table alone separated them, the unknown took off his mask.

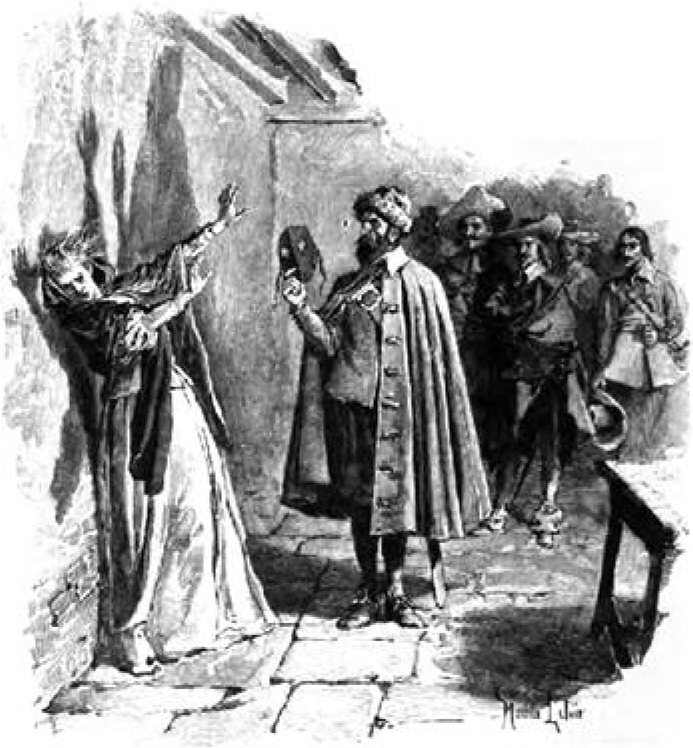

Milady for some time examined with increasing terror that pale face, framed with black hair and whiskers, the only expression of which was icy impassibility. Then she suddenly cried, “Oh, no, no!” rising and retreating to the very wall. “No, no! it is an infernal apparition! It is not he! Help, help!” screamed she, turning towards the wall, as if she would tear an opening with her hands.

“Who are you, then?” cried all the witnesses of this scene.

“Ask that woman,” said the man in the red cloak, “for you may plainly see she knows me!”

“The executioner of Lille, the executioner of Lille!” cried Milady, a prey to insensate terror, and clinging with her hands to the wall to avoid falling.

Every one drew back, and the man in the red cloak remained standing alone in the middle of the room.

“Oh, grace, grace, pardon!” cried the wretch, falling on her knees.

The unknown waited for silence, and then resumed, “I told you well that she would know me. Yes, I am the executioner of Lille, and this is my history.”

All eyes were fixed upon this man, whose words were listened to with anxious attention.

“That woman was once a young girl, as beautiful as she is today. She was a nun in the convent of the Benedictines of Templemar. A young priest, with a simple and trustful heart, performed the duties of the church of that convent. She undertook his seduction, and succeeded; she would have seduced a saint.

“Their vows were sacred and irrevocable. Their connection could not last long without ruining both. She prevailed upon him to leave the country; but to leave the country, to fly together, to reach another part of France, where they might live at ease because unknown, money was necessary. Neither had any. The priest stole the sacred vases, and sold them; but as they were preparing to escape together, they were both arrested.

“Eight days later she had seduced the son of the jailer, and escaped. The young priest was condemned to ten years of imprisonment, and to be branded. I was executioner of the city of Lille, as this woman has said. I was obliged to brand the guilty one; and he, gentlemen, was my brother!

“I then swore that this woman who had ruined him, who was more than his accomplice, since she had urged him to the crime, should at least share his punishment. I suspected where she was concealed. I followed her, I caught her, I bound her; and I imprinted the same disgraceful mark upon her that I had imprinted upon my poor brother.

“The day after my return to Lille, my brother in his turn succeeded in making his escape; I was accused of complicity, and was condemned to remain in his place till he should be again a prisoner. My poor brother was ignorant of this sentence. He rejoined this woman; they fled together into Berry, and there he obtained a little curacy. This woman passed for his sister.

“The Lord of the estate on which the chapel of the curacy was situated saw this pretend sister, and became enamoured of her--amorous to such a degree that he proposed to marry her. Then she quitted him she had ruined for him she was destined to ruin, and became the Comtesse de la Fere--”

All eyes were turned towards Athos, whose real name that was, and who made a sign with his head that all was true which the executioner had said.

“Then,” resumed he, “mad, desperate, determined to get rid of an existence from which she had stolen everything, honor and happiness, my poor brother returned to Lille, and learning the sentence which had condemned me in his place, surrendered himself, and hanged himself that same night from the iron bar of the loophole of his prison.

"To do justice to them who had condemned me, they kept their word. As soon as the identity of my brother was proved, I was set at liberty.

"That is the crime of which I accuse her; that is the cause for which she was branded."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," said Athos, "what is the penalty you demand against this woman?"

"The punishment of death," replied d'Artagnan.

"My Lord de Winter," continued Athos, "what is the penalty you demand against this woman?"

"The punishment of death," replied Lord de Winter.

"Messieurs Porthos and Aramis," repeated Athos, "you who are her judges, what is the sentence you pronounce upon this woman?"

"The punishment of death," replied the Musketeers, in a hollow voice.

Milady uttered a frightful shriek, and dragged herself along several paces upon her knees toward her judges.

Athos stretched out his hand toward her.

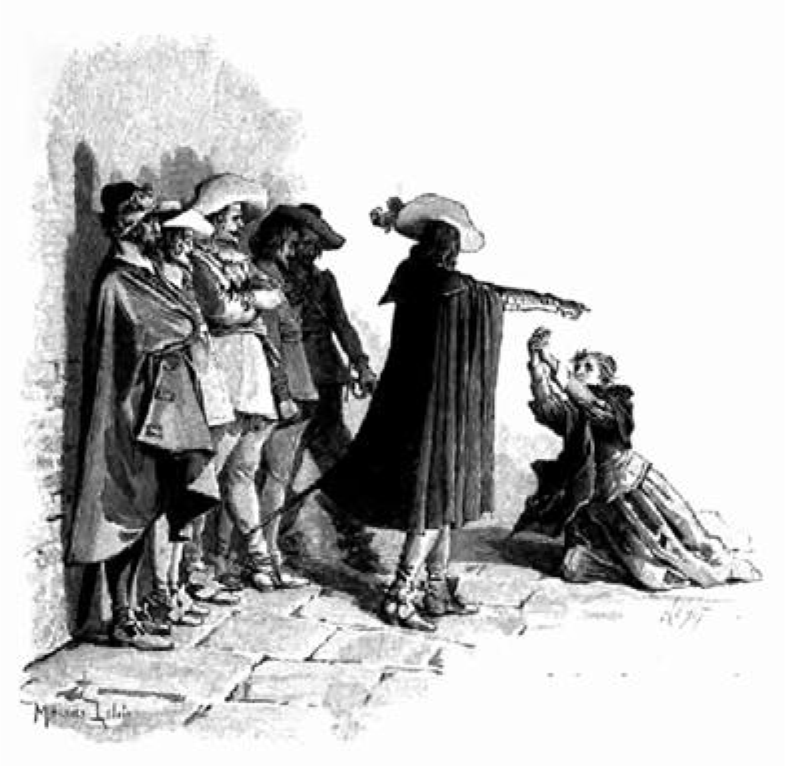

"Charlotte Backson, Comtesse de la Fere, Milady de Winter," said he, "your crimes have wearied men on earth and God in heaven. If you know a prayer, say it--for you are condemned, and you shall die.”

At these words, which left no hope, Milady raised herself in all her pride, and wished to speak; but her strength failed her. She felt that a powerful and implacable hand seized her by the hair, and dragged her away as irrevocably as fatality drags humanity. She did not, therefore, even attempt the least resistance, and went out of the cottage.

Lord de Winter, d’Artagnan, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, went out close behind her. The lackeys followed their masters, and the chamber was left solitary, with its broken window, its open door, and its smoky lamp burning sadly on the table.

CHAPTER 66

EXECUTION

It was near midnight; the moon, lessened by its decline, and reddened by the last traces of the storm, arose behind the little town of Armentieres, which showed against its pale light the dark outline of its houses, and the skeleton of its high belfry. In front of them the Lys rolled its waters like a river of molten tin; while on the other side was a black mass of trees, profiled on a stormy sky, invaded by large coppery clouds which created a sort of twilight amid the night. On the left was an old abandoned mill, with its motionless wings, from the ruins of which an owl threw out its shrill, periodical, and monotonous cry. On the right and on the left of the road, which the dismal procession pursued, appeared a few low, stunted trees, which looked like deformed dwarfs crouching down to watch men traveling at this sinister hour.

From time to time a broad sheet of lightning opened the horizon in its whole width, darted like a serpent over the black mass of trees, and like a terrible scimitar divided the heavens and the waters into two parts. Not a breath of wind now disturbed the heavy atmosphere. A deathlike silence oppressed all nature. The soil was humid and glittering with the rain which had recently fallen, and the refreshed herbs sent forth their perfume with additional energy.

Two lackeys dragged Milady, whom each held by one arm. The executioner walked behind them, and Lord de Winter, d’Artagnan, Porthos, and Aramis walked behind the executioner. Planchet and Bazin came last.

The two lackeys conducted Milady to the bank of the river. Her mouth was mute; but her eyes spoke with their inexpressible eloquence, supplicating by turns each of those on whom she looked.

Being a few paces in advance she whispered to the lackeys, “A thousand pistoles to each of you, if you will assist my escape; but if you deliver me up to your masters, I have near at hand avengers who will make you pay dearly for my death.”

Grimaud hesitated. Mousqueton trembled in all his members.

Athos, who heard Milady’s voice, came sharply up. Lord de Winter did the same.

“Change these lackeys,” said he; “she has spoken to them. They are no longer sure.”

Planchet and Bazin were called, and took the places of Grimaud and Mousqueton.

On the bank of the river the executioner approached Milady, and bound her hands and feet.

Then she broke the silence to cry out, “You are cowards, miserable assassins--ten men combined to murder one woman. Beware! If I am not saved I shall be avenged.”

“You are not a woman,” said Athos, coldly and sternly. “You do not belong to the human species; you are a demon escaped from hell, whither we send you back again.”

“Ah, you virtuous men!” said Milady; “please to remember that he who shall touch a hair of my head is himself an assassin.”

“The executioner may kill, without being on that account an assassin,” said the man in the red cloak, rapping upon his immense sword. “This is the last judge; that is all. NACHRICHTER, as say our neighbors, the Germans.”

And as he bound her while saying these words, Milady uttered two or three savage cries, which produced a strange and melancholy effect in flying away into the night, and losing themselves in the depths of the woods.

“If I am guilty, if I have committed the crimes you accuse me of,” shrieked Milady, “take me before a tribunal. You are not judges! You cannot condemn me!”

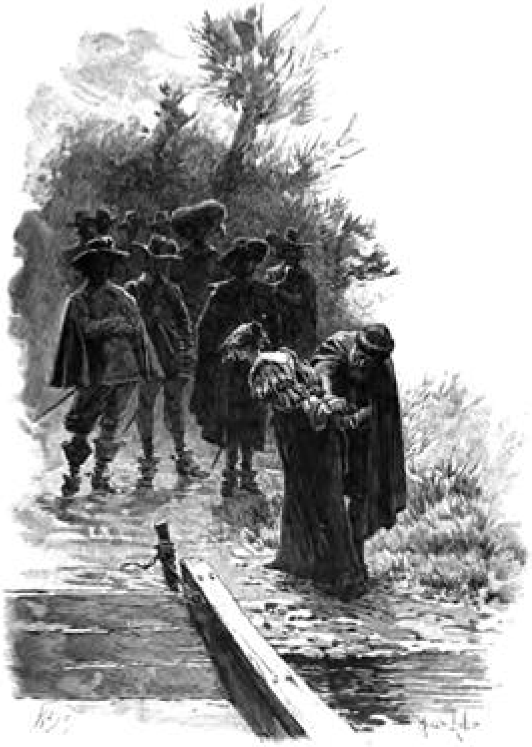

“I offered you Tyburn,” said Lord de Winter. “Why did you not accept it?”

“Because I am not willing to die!” cried Milady, struggling. “Because I am too young to die!”

“The woman you poisoned at Bethune was still younger than you, madame, and yet she is dead,” said d’Artagnan.

“I will enter a cloister; I will become a nun,” said Milady.

“You were in a cloister,” said the executioner, “and you left it to ruin my brother.”

Milady uttered a cry of terror and sank upon her knees. The executioner took her up in his arms and was carrying her toward the boat.

“Oh, my God!” cried she, “my God! are you going to drown me?”

These cries had something so heartrending in them that M. d’Artagnan, who had been at first the most eager in pursuit of Milady, sat down on the stump of a tree and hung his head, covering his ears with the palms of his hands; and yet, notwithstanding, he could still hear her cry and threaten.

D’Artagnan was the youngest of all these men. His heart failed him.

“Oh, I cannot behold this frightful spectacle!” said he. “I cannot consent that this woman should die thus!”

Milady heard these few words and caught at a shadow of hope.

“d’Artagnan, d’Artagnan!” cried she; “remember that I loved you!”

The young man rose and took a step toward her.

But Athos rose likewise, drew his sword, and placed himself in the way.

“If you take one step farther, d’Artagnan,” said he, “we shall cross swords together.”

D’Artagnan sank on his knees and prayed.

“Come,” continued Athos, “executioner, do your duty.”

“Willingly, monseigneur,” said the executioner; “for as I am a good Catholic, I firmly believe I am acting justly in performing my functions on this woman.”

“That’s well.”

[redacted]

Athos made a step toward Milady.

“I pardon you,” said he, “the ill you have done me. I pardon you for my blasted future, my lost honor, my defiled love, and my salvation forever compromised by the despair into which you have cast me. Die in peace!”

Lord de Winter advanced in his turn.

“I pardon you,” said he, “for the poisoning of my brother, and the assassination of his Grace, Lord Buckingham. I pardon you for the death of poor Felton; I pardon you for the attempts upon my own person. Die in peace!”

“And I,” said M. d’Artagnan. “Pardon me, madame, for having by a trick unworthy of a gentleman provoked your anger; and I, in exchange, pardon you the murder of my poor love and your cruel vengeance against me. I pardon you, and I weep for you. Die in peace!”

“I am lost!” murmured Milady in English. “I must die!”

Then she arose of herself, and cast around her one of those piercing looks which seemed to dart from an eye of flame.

She saw nothing; she listened, and she heard nothing.

“Where am I to die?” said she.

“On the other bank,” replied the executioner.

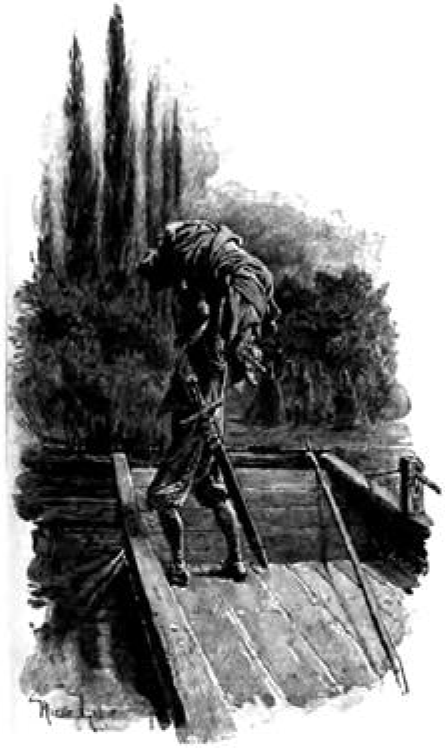

Then he placed her in the boat, and as he was going to set foot in it himself, Athos handed him a sum of silver.

“Here,” said he, “is the price of the execution, that it may be plain we act as judges.”

“That is correct,” said the executioner; “and now in her turn, let this woman see that I am not fulfilling my trade, but my debt.”

And he threw the money into the river.

The boat moved off toward the left-hand shore of the Lys, bearing the guilty woman and the executioner; all the others remained on the right-hand bank, where they fell on their knees.

The boat glided along the ferry rope under the shadow of a pale cloud which hung over the water at that moment.

The troop of friends saw it gain the opposite bank; the figures were defined like black shadows on the red-tinted horizon.

Milady, during the passage had contrived to untie the cord which fastened her feet. On coming near the bank, she jumped lightly on shore and took to flight. But the soil was moist; on reaching the top of the bank, she slipped and fell upon her knees.

She was struck, no doubt, with a superstitious idea; she conceived that heaven denied its aid, and she remained in the attitude in which she had fallen, her head drooping and her hands clasped.

Then they saw from the other bank the executioner raise both his arms slowly; a moonbeam fell upon the blade of the large sword. The two arms fell with a sudden force; they heard the hissing of the scimitar and the cry of the victim, then a truncated mass sank beneath the blow.

The executioner then took off his red cloak, spread it upon the ground, laid the body in it, threw in the head, tied all up by the four corners, lifted it on his back, and entered the boat again.

In the middle of the stream he stopped the boat, and suspending his burden over the water cried in a loud voice, “Let the justice of God be done!” and he let the corpse drop into the depths of the waters, which closed over it.

Three days afterward the four Musketeers were in Paris; they had not exceeded their leave of absence, and that same evening they went to pay their customary visit to M. de Treville.

“Well, gentlemen,” said the brave captain, “I hope you have been well amused during your excursion.”

“Prodigiously,” replied Athos in the name of himself and his comrades.

CHAPTER 67

CONCLUSION

On the sixth of the following month the king, in compliance with the promise he had made the cardinal to return to La Rochelle, left his capital still in amazement at the news which began to spread itself of Buckingham’s assassination.

Although warned that the man she had loved so much was in great danger, the queen, when his death was announced to her, would not believe the fact, and even imprudently exclaimed, “it is false; he has just written to me!”

But the next day she was obliged to believe this fatal intelligence; Laporte, detained in England, as everyone else had been, by the orders of Charles I, arrived, and was the bearer of the duke’s dying gift to the queen.

The joy of the king was lively. He did not even give himself the trouble to dissemble, and displayed it with affectation before the queen. Louis XIII, like every weak mind, was wanting in generosity.

But the king soon again became dull and indisposed; his brow was not one of those that long remain clear. He felt that in returning to camp he should re-enter slavery; nevertheless, he did return.

The cardinal was for him the fascinating serpent, and himself the bird which flies from branch to branch without power to escape.

The return to La Rochelle, therefore, was profoundly dull. Our four friends, in particular, astonished their comrades; they traveled together, side by side, with sad eyes and heads lowered. Athos alone from time to time raised his expansive brow; a flash kindled in his eyes, and a bitter smile passed over his lips, then, like his comrades, he sank again into reverie.

As soon as the escort arrived in a city, when they had conducted the king to his quarters the four friends either retired to their own or to some secluded cabaret, where they neither drank nor played; they only conversed in a low voice, looking around attentively to see that no one overheard them.

One day, when the king had halted to fly the magpie, and the four friends, according to their custom, instead of following the sport had stopped at a cabaret on the high road, a man coming from la Rochelle on horseback pulled up at the door to drink a glass of wine, and darted a searching glance into the room where the four Musketeers were sitting.

“Holloa, Monsieur d’Artagnan!” said he, “is not that you whom I see yonder?”

D’Artagnan raised his head and uttered a cry of joy. It was the man he called his phantom; it was his stranger of Meung, of the Rue des Fossoyeurs and of Arras.

D’Artagnan drew his sword, and sprang toward the door.

But this time, instead of avoiding him the stranger jumped from his horse, and advanced to meet d’Artagnan.

“Ah, monsieur!” said the young man, “I meet you, then, at last! This time you shall not escape me!”

“Neither is it my intention, monsieur, for this time I was seeking you; in the name of the king, I arrest you.”

“How! what do you say?” cried d’Artagnan.

“I say that you must surrender your sword to me, monsieur, and that without resistance. This concerns your head, I warn you.”

“Who are you, then?” demanded d’Artagnan, lowering the point of his sword, but without yet surrendering it.

“I am the Chevalier de Rochefort,” answered the other, “the equerry of Monsieur le Cardinal Richelieu, and I have orders to conduct you to his Eminence.”

“We are returning to his Eminence, monsieur the Chevalier,” said Athos, advancing; “and you will please to accept the word of Monsieur d’Artagnan that he will go straight to La Rochelle.”

“I must place him in the hands of guards who will take him into camp.”

“We will be his guards, monsieur, upon our word as gentlemen; but likewise, upon our word as gentlemen,” added Athos, knitting his brow, “Monsieur d’Artagnan shall not leave us.”

The Chevalier de Rochefort cast a glance backward, and saw that Porthos and Aramis had placed themselves between him and the gate; he understood that he was completely at the mercy of these four men.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “if Monsieur d’Artagnan will surrender his sword to me and join his word to yours, I shall be satisfied with your promise to convey Monsieur d’Artagnan to the quarters of Monseigneur the Cardinal.”

“You have my word, monsieur, and here is my sword.”

“This suits me the better,” said Rochefort, “as I wish to continue my journey.”

“If it is for the purpose of rejoining Milady,” said Athos, coolly, “it is useless; you will not find her.”

“What has become of her, then?” asked Rochefort, eagerly.

“Return to camp and you shall know.”

Rochefort remained for a moment in thought; then, as they were only a day’s journey from Surgeres, whither the cardinal was to come to meet the king, he resolved to follow the advice of Athos and go with them. Besides, this return offered him the advantage of watching his prisoner.

They resumed their route.

On the morrow, at three o’clock in the afternoon, they arrived at Surgeres. The cardinal there awaited Louis XIII. The minister and the king exchanged numerous caresses, felicitating each other upon the fortunate chance which had freed France from the inveterate enemy who set all Europe against her. After which, the cardinal, who had been informed that d’Artagnan was arrested and who was anxious to see him, took leave of the king, inviting him to come the next day to view the work already done upon the dyke.

On returning in the evening to his quarters at the bridge of La Pierre, the cardinal found, standing before the house he occupied, d’Artagnan, without his sword, and the three Musketeers armed.

This time, as he was well attended, he looked at them sternly, and made a sign with his eye and hand for d’Artagnan to follow him.

D’Artagnan obeyed.

“We shall wait for you, d’Artagnan,” said Athos, loud enough for the cardinal to hear him.

His Eminence bent his brow, stopped for an instant, and then kept on his way without uttering a single word.

D’Artagnan entered after the cardinal, and behind d’Artagnan the door was guarded.

His Eminence entered the chamber which served him as a study, and made a sign to Rochefort to bring in the young Musketeer.

Rochefort obeyed and retired.

D’Artagnan remained alone in front of the cardinal; this was his second interview with Richelieu, and he afterward confessed that he felt well assured it would be his last.

Richelieu remained standing, leaning against the mantelpiece; a table was between him and d’Artagnan.

“Monsieur,” said the cardinal, “you have been arrested by my orders.”

“So they tell me, monseigneur.”

“Do you know why?”

“No, monseigneur, for the only thing for which I could be arrested is still unknown to your Eminence.”

Richelieu looked steadfastly at the young man.

“Holloa!” said he, “what does that mean?”

“If Monseigneur will have the goodness to tell me, in the first place, what crimes are imputed to me, I will then tell him the deeds I have really done.”

“Crimes are imputed to you which had brought down far loftier heads than yours, monsieur,” said the cardinal.

“What, monseigneur?” said d’Artagnan, with a calmness which astonished the cardinal himself.

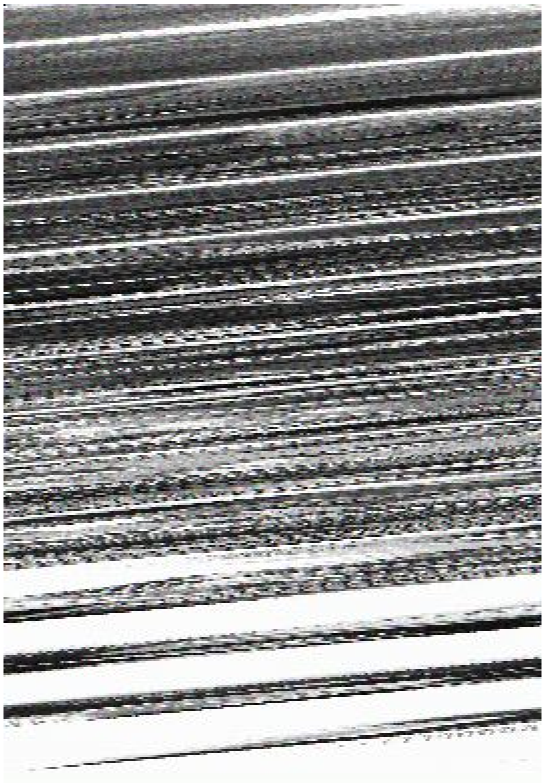

“You are charged with having corresponded with the enemies of the kingdom; you are charged with having surprised state secrets; you are charged with having tried to thwart the plans of your general.”

“And who charges me with this, monseigneur?” said d’Artagnan, who had no doubt the accusation came from Milady, “a woman branded by the justice of the country; a woman who has espoused one man in France and another in England; a woman who poisoned her second husband and who attempted both to poison and assassinate me!”

“What do you say, monsieur?” cried the cardinal, astonished; “and of what woman are you speaking thus?”

“Of Milady de Winter,” replied d’Artagnan, “yes, of Milady de Winter, of whose crimes your Eminence is doubtless ignorant, since you have honored her with your confidence.”

“Monsieur,” said the cardinal, “if Milady de Winter has committed the crimes you lay to her charge, she shall be punished.”

“She has been punished, monseigneur.”

“And who has punished her?”

“We.”

“She is in prison?”

“She is dead.”

“Dead!” repeated the cardinal, who could not believe what he heard, “dead! Did you not say she was dead?”

“Three times she attempted to kill me, and I pardoned her; but she murdered the woman I loved. Then my friends and I took her, tried her, and condemned her.”

D’Artagnan then related the poisoning of Mme. Bonacieux in the convent of the Carmelites at Bethune, the trial in the isolated house, and the execution on the banks of the Lys.

A shudder crept through the body of the cardinal, who did not shudder readily.

But all at once, as if undergoing the influence of an unspoken thought, the countenance of the cardinal, till then gloomy, cleared up by degrees, and recovered perfect serenity.

“So,” said the cardinal, in a tone that contrasted strongly with the severity of his words, “you have constituted yourselves judges, without remembering that they who punish without license to punish are assassins?”

“Monseigneur, I swear to you that I never for an instant had the intention of defending my head against you. I willingly submit to any punishment your Eminence may please to inflict upon me. I do not hold life dear enough to be afraid of death.”

“Yes, I know you are a man of a stout heart, monsieur,” said the cardinal, with a voice almost affectionate; “I can therefore tell you beforehand you shall be tried, and even condemned.”

“Another might reply to your Eminence that he had his pardon in his pocket. I content myself with saying: Command, monseigneur; I am ready.”

“Your pardon?” said Richelieu, surprised.

“Yes, monseigneur,” said d’Artagnan.

“And signed by whom--by the king?” And the cardinal pronounced these words with a singular expression of contempt.

“No, by your Eminence.”

“By me? You are insane, monsieur.”

“Monseigneur will doubtless recognize his own handwriting.”

And d’Artagnan presented to the cardinal the precious piece of paper which Athos had forced from Milady, and which he had given to d’Artagnan to serve him as a safeguard.

His Eminence took the paper, and read in a slow voice, dwelling upon every syllable:

“Dec. 3, 1627

“It is by my order and for the good of the state that the bearer of this has done what he has done.

“RICHELIEU” The cardinal, after having read these two lines, sank into a profound reverie; but he did not return the paper to d’Artagnan.

“He is meditating by what sort of punishment he shall cause me to die,” said the Gascon to himself. “Well, my faith! he shall see how a gentleman can die.”

The young Musketeer was in excellent disposition to die heroically.

Richelieu still continued thinking, rolling and unrolling the paper in his hands.

At length he raised his head, fixed his eagle look upon that loyal, open, and intelligent countenance, read upon that face, furrowed with tears, all the sufferings its possessor had endured in the course of a month, and reflected for the third or fourth time how much there was in that youth of twenty-one years before him, and what resources his activity, his courage, and his shrewdness might offer to a good master. On the other side, the crimes, the power, and the infernal genius of Milady had more than once terrified him.

He felt something like a secret joy at being forever relieved of this dangerous accomplice.

Richelieu slowly tore the paper which d'Artagnan had generously relinquished.

"I am lost!" said d'Artagnan to himself. And he bowed profoundly before the cardinal, like a man who says, "Lord, Thy will be done!"

The cardinal approached the table, and without sitting down, wrote a few lines upon a parchment of which two-thirds were already filled, and affixed his seal.

"That is my condemnation," thought d'Artagnan; "he will spare me the ENNUI of the Bastille, or the tediousness of a trial. That's very kind of him."

"Here, monsieur," said the cardinal to the young man. "I have taken from you one CARTE BLANCHE to give you another. The name is wanting in this commission; you can write it yourself."

D'Artagnan took the paper hesitatingly and cast his eyes over it; it was a lieutenant's commission in the Musketeers.

D'Artagnan fell at the feet of the cardinal.

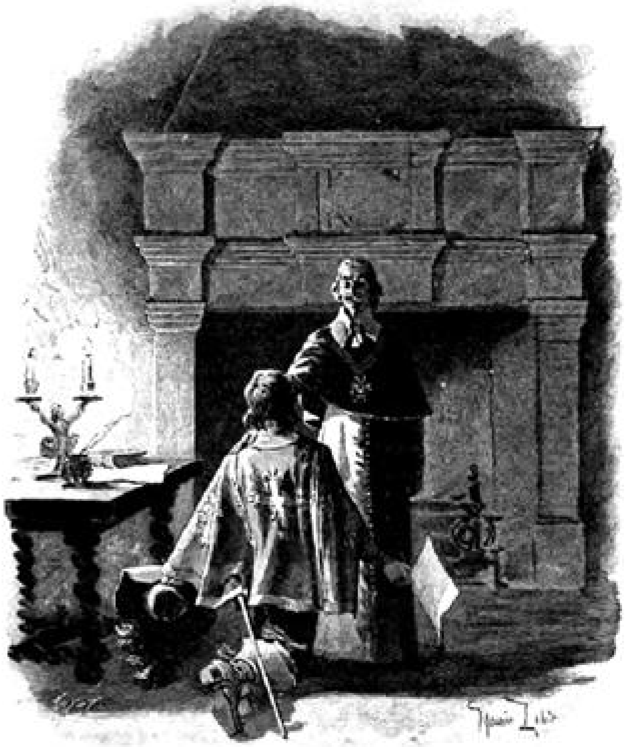

"Monseigneur," said he, "my life is yours; henceforth dispose of it. But this favor which you bestow upon me I do not merit. I have three friends who are more meritorious and more worthy--"

"You are a brave youth, d'Artagnan," interrupted the cardinal, tapping him familiarly on the shoulder, charmed at having vanquished this rebellious nature. "Do with this commission what you will; only remember, though the name be blank, it is to you I give it."

"I shall never forget it," replied d'Artagnan. "Your Eminence may be certain of that."

The cardinal turned and said in a loud voice, "Rochefort!" The chevalier, who no doubt was near the door, entered immediately.

"Rochefort," said the cardinal, "you see Monsieur d'Artagnan. I receive him among the number of my friends. Greet each other, then; and be wise if you wish to preserve your heads."

Rochefort and d'Artagnan coolly greeted each other with their lips; but the cardinal was there, observing them with his vigilant eye.

They left the chamber at the same time.

"We shall meet again, shall we not, monsieur?"

"When you please," said d'Artagnan.

"An opportunity will come," replied Rochefort.

"Hey?" said the cardinal, opening the door.

The two men smiled at each other, shook hands, and saluted his Eminence.

"We were beginning to grow impatient," said Athos.

"Here I am, my friends," replied d'Artagnan; "not only free, but in favor."

"Tell us about it."

"This evening; but for the moment, let us separate."

Accordingly, that same evening d'Artagnan repaired to the quarters of Athos, whom he found in a fair way to empty a bottle of Spanish wine--an occupation which he religiously accomplished every night.

D'Artagnan related what had taken place between the cardinal and himself, and drawing the commission from his pocket, said, "Here, my dear Athos, this naturally belongs to you."

Athos smiled with one of his sweet and expressive smiles.

"Friend," said he, "for Athos this is too much; for the Comte de la Fere it is too little. Keep the commission; it is yours. Alas! you have purchased it dearly enough."

D’Artagnan left Athos’s chamber and went to that of Porthos. He found him clothed in a magnificent dress covered with splendid embroidery, admiring himself before a glass.

“Ah, ah! is that you, dear friend?” exclaimed Porthos. “How do you think these garments fit me?”

“Wonderfully,” said d’Artagnan; “but I come to offer you a dress which will become you still better.”

“What?” asked Porthos.

“That of a lieutenant of Musketeers.”

D’Artagnan related to Porthos the substance of his interview with the cardinal, and said, taking the commission from his pocket, “Here, my friend, write your name upon it and become my chief.”

Porthos cast his eyes over the commission and returned it to d’Artagnan, to the great astonishment of the young man.

“Yes,” said he, “yes, that would flatter me very much; but I should not have time enough to enjoy the distinction. During our expedition to Bethune the husband of my duchess died; so, my dear, the coffer of the defunct holding out its arms to me, I shall marry the widow. Look here! I was trying on my wedding suit. Keep the lieutenancy, my dear, keep it.”

The young man then entered the apartment of Aramis. He found him kneeling before a PRIEDIEU with his head leaning on an open prayer book.

He described to him his interview with the cardinal, and said, for the third time drawing his commission from his pocket, “You, our friend, our intelligence, our invisible protector, accept this commission. You have merited it more than any of us by your wisdom and your counsels, always followed by such happy results.”

“Alas, dear friend!” said Aramis, “our late adventures have disgusted me with military life. This time my determination is irrevocably taken. After the siege I shall enter the house of the Lazarists. Keep the commission, d’Artagnan; the profession of arms suits you. You will be a brave and adventurous captain.”

D’Artagnan, his eye moist with gratitude though beaming with joy, went back to Athos, whom he found still at table contemplating the charms of his last glass of Malaga by the light of his lamp.

“Well,” said he, “they likewise have refused me.”

“That, dear friend, is because nobody is more worthy than yourself.”

He took a quill, wrote the name of d’Artagnan in the commission, and returned it to him.

“I shall then have no more friends,” said the young man. “Alas! nothing but bitter recollections.”

And he let his head sink upon his hands, while two large tears rolled down his cheeks.

“You are young,” replied Athos; “and your bitter recollections have time to change themselves into sweet remembrances.”

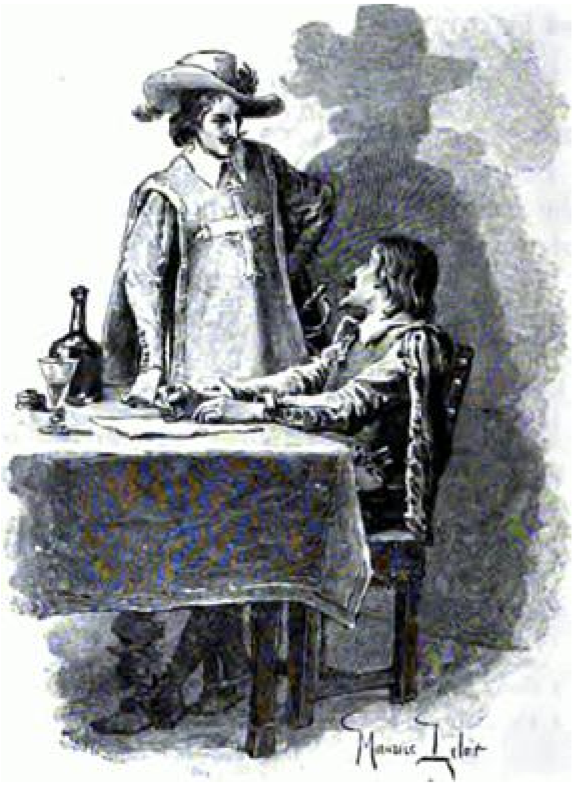

EPILOGUE

La Rochelle, deprived of the assistance of the English fleet and of the diversion promised by Buckingham, surrendered after a siege of a year. On the twenty-eighth of October, 1628, the capitulation was signed.

The king made his entrance into Paris on the twenty-third of December of the same year. He was received in triumph, as if he came from conquering an enemy and not Frenchmen. He entered by the Faubourg St. Jacques, under verdant arches.

D'Artagnan took possession of his command. Porthos left the service, and in the course of the following year married Mme. Coquenard; the coffer so much coveted contained eight hundred thousand livres.

Mousqueton had a magnificent livery, and enjoyed the satisfaction of which he had been ambitious all his life--that of standing behind a gilded carriage.

Aramis, after a journey into Lorraine, disappeared all at once, and ceased to write to his friends; they learned at a later period through Mme. de

Chevreuse, who told it to two or three of her intimates, that, yielding to his vocation, he had retired into a convent--only into which, nobody knew.

Bazin became a lay brother.

Athos remained a Musketeer under the command of d’Artagnan till the year 1633, at which period, after a journey he made to Touraine, he also quit the service, under the pretext of having inherited a small property in Roussillon.

Grimaud followed Athos.

D’Artagnan fought three times with Rochefort, and wounded him three times.

“I shall probably kill you the fourth,” said he to him, holding out his hand to assist him to rise.

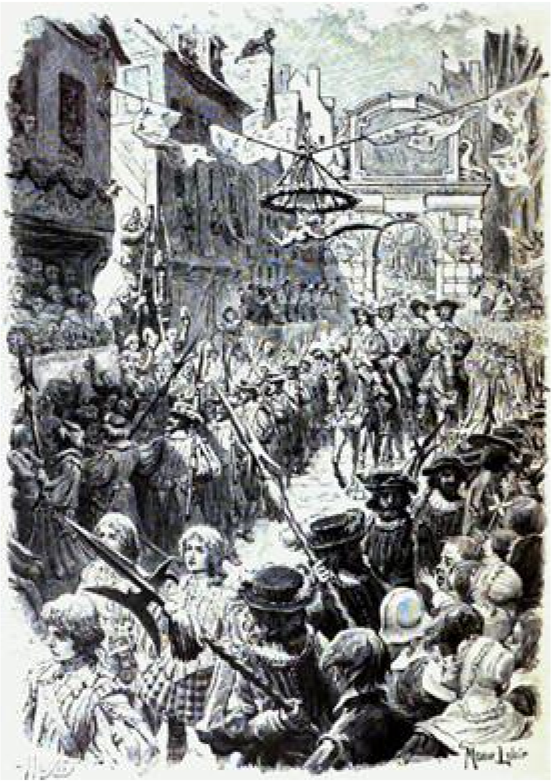

“It is much better both for you and for me to stop where we are,” answered the wounded man. “CORBLEU--I am more your friend than you think--for after our very first encounter, I could by saying a word to the cardinal have had your throat cut!”

They this time embraced heartily, and without retaining any malice.

Planchet obtained from Rochefort the rank of sergeant in the Piedmont regiment.

M Bonacieux lived on very quietly, wholly ignorant of what had become of his wife, and caring very little about it. One day he had the imprudence to recall himself to the memory of the cardinal. The cardinal had him informed that he would provide for him so that he should never want for anything in future. In fact, M. Bonacieux, having left his house at seven o’clock in the evening to go to the Louvre, never appeared again in the Rue des Fossoyeurs; the opinion of those who seemed to be best informed was that he was fed and lodged in some royal castle, at the expense of his generous Eminence.

THE END

FIN
Maurice Leloir

TWENTY YEARS AFTER

Anonymous translation, 1893

First serialised from January to August 1845, this novel is the sequel to *The Three Musketeers* and is followed by *The Vicomte de Bragelonne*. It concerns events in France during the childhood reign of Louis XIV and in England near the end of the English Civil War, leading up to the victory of Oliver Cromwell and the execution of King Charles I.

In the narrative, d'Artagnan, who had had a promising career ahead of him at the end of *The Three Musketeers*, has remained for twenty years a lieutenant in the Musketeers, seeming unlikely to progress, despite his ambition and the debt the queen owes him. By chance, however, he is summoned by Mazarin, who requires an escort, as the French people detest Mazarin, and are on the brink of rebellion (La Fronde). D'Artagnan is sent to the Bastille to retrieve a prisoner, who turns out to be his former adversary, the Comte de Rochefort.

D’Artagnan played on the screen by Michael York in 1989

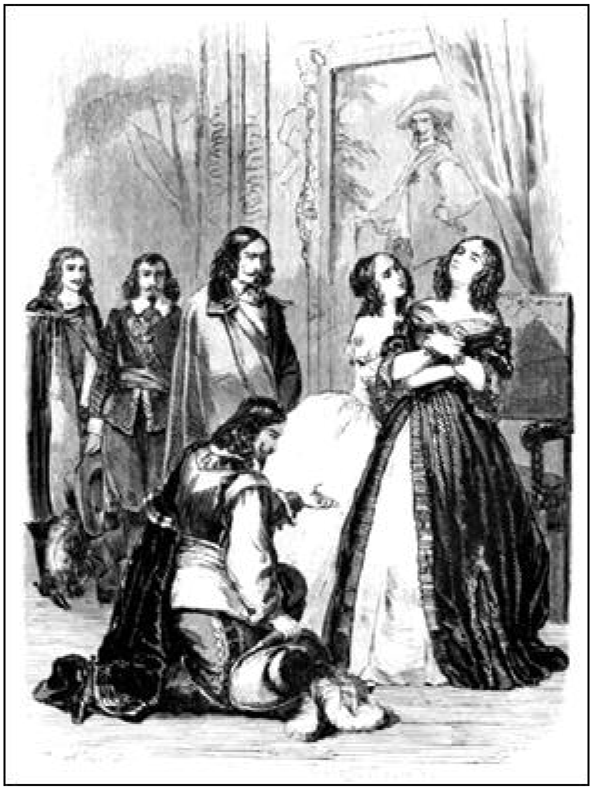

An original illustration

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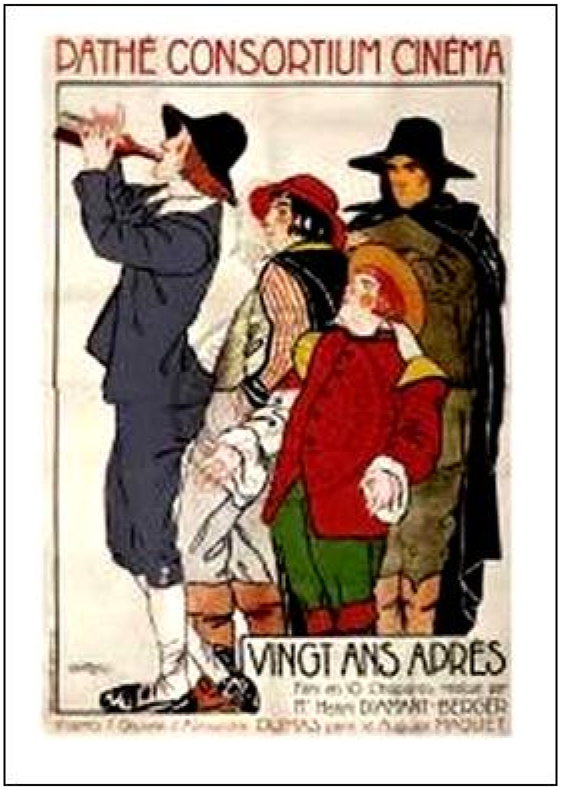
PATHÉ CONSORTIUM CINÉMA
VINGT ANS APRÈS
Film en 10 Chapitres réalisé par
Mr Henri DIAMANT-BERGER
DUMAS père et Auguste MAQUET

The 1922 film adaptation

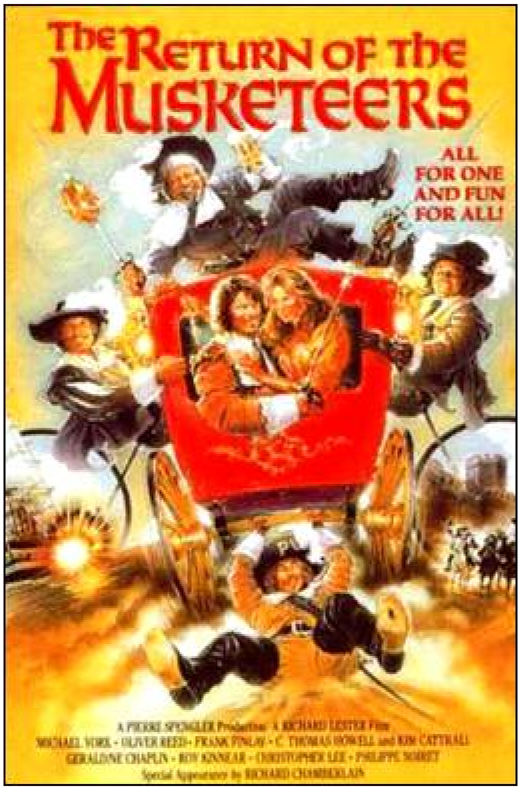
The Return of the Musketeers
ALL FOR ONE AND FUN FOR ALL!
A PIERRE SPENGLER Production · A RICHARD LESTER Film
MICHAEL YORK · OLIVER REED · FRANK FINLAY · C. THOMAS HOWELL and KIM CATTRALL
GERALDINE CHAPLIN · ROY KINNEAR · CHRISTOPHER LEE · PHILIPPE NOIRET
Special Appearance by RICHARD CHAMBERLAIN

The 1989 film adaptation

CHAPTER 1.

The Shade of Cardinal Richelieu.

In a splendid chamber of the Palais Royal, formerly styled the Palais Cardinal, a man was sitting in deep reverie, his head supported on his hands, leaning over a gilt and inlaid table which was covered with letters and papers. Behind this figure glowed a vast fireplace alive with leaping flames; great logs of oak blazed and crackled on the polished brass andirons whose flicker shone upon the superb habiliments of the lonely tenant of the room, which was illumined grandly by twin candelabra rich with wax-lights.

Any one who happened at that moment to contemplate that red simar--the gorgeous robe of office--and the rich lace, or who gazed on that pale brow, bent in anxious meditation, might, in the solitude of that apartment, combined with the silence of the ante-chambers and the measured paces of the guards upon the landing-place, have fancied that the shade of Cardinal Richelieu lingered still in his accustomed haunt.

It was, alas! the ghost of former greatness. France enfeebled, the authority of her sovereign contemned, her nobles returning to their former turbulence and insolence, her enemies within her frontiers--all proved the great Richelieu no longer in existence.

In truth, that the red simar which occupied the wonted place was his no longer, was still more strikingly obvious from the isolation which seemed, as we have observed, more appropriate to a phantom than a living creature--from the corridors deserted by courtiers, and courts crowded with guards--from that spirit of bitter ridicule, which, arising from the streets below, penetrated through the very casements of the room, which resounded with the murmurs of a whole city leagued against the minister; as well as from the distant and incessant sounds of guns firing--let off, happily, without other end or aim, except to show to the guards, the Swiss troops and the military who surrounded the Palais Royal, that the people were possessed of arms.

The shade of Richelieu was Mazarin. Now Mazarin was alone and defenceless, as he well knew.

“Foreigner!” he ejaculated, “Italian! that is their mean yet mighty byword of reproach--the watchword with which they assassinated, hanged, and made away with Concini; and if I gave them their way they would assassinate, hang, and make away with me in the same manner, although they have nothing to complain of except a tax or two now and then. Idiots! ignorant of their real enemies, they do not perceive that it is not the Italian who speaks French badly, but those who can say fine things to them in the purest Parisian accent, who are their real foes.

“Yes, yes,” Mazarin continued, whilst his wonted smile, full of subtlety, lent a strange expression to his pale lips; “yes, these noises prove to me, indeed, that the destiny of favorites is precarious; but ye shall know I am no ordinary favorite. No! The Earl of Essex, ‘tis true, wore a splendid ring, set with diamonds, given him by his royal mistress, whilst I--I have nothing but a simple circlet of gold, with a cipher on it and a date; but that ring has been blessed in the chapel of the Palais Royal, * so they will never ruin me, as they long to do, and whilst they shout, ‘Down with Mazarin!’ I, unknown, and unperceived by them, incite them to cry out, ‘Long live the Duke de Beaufort’ one day; another, ‘Long live the Prince de Conde;’ and again, ‘Long live the parliament!’“ And at this word the smile on the cardinal’s lips assumed an expression of hatred, of which his mild countenance seemed incapable. “The parliament! We shall soon see how to dispose,” he continued, “of the parliament! Both Orleans and Montargis are ours. It will be a work of time, but those who have begun by crying out: Down with Mazarin! will finish by shouting out, Down with all the people I have mentioned, each in his turn.

** It is said that Mazarin, who, though a cardinal, had not*
taken such vows as to prevent it, was secretly married to
Anne of Austria.--La Porte’s Memoirs.

“Richelieu, whom they hated during his lifetime and whom they now praise after his death, was even less popular than I am. Often he was driven away, oftener still had he a dread of being sent away. The queen will never banish me, and even were I obliged to yield to the populace she would yield with me; if I fly, she will fly; and then we shall see how the rebels will get on without either king or queen.

“Oh, were I not a foreigner! were I but a Frenchman! were I but of gentle birth!”

The position of the cardinal was indeed critical, and recent events had added to his difficulties. Discontent had long pervaded the lower ranks of society in France. Crushed and impoverished by taxation--imposed by Mazarin, whose avarice impelled him to grind them down to the very dust--the people, as the Advocate-General Talon described it, had nothing left to them except their souls; and as those could not be sold by auction, they began to murmur. Patience had in vain been recommended to them by reports of brilliant victories gained by France; laurels, however, were not meat and drink, and the people had for some time been in a state of discontent.

Had this been all, it might not, perhaps, have greatly signified; for when the lower classes alone complained, the court of France, separated as it was from the poor by the intervening classes of the gentry and the bourgeoisie, seldom listened to their voice; but unluckily, Mazarin had had the imprudence to attack the magistrates and had sold no less than twelve appointments in the Court of Requests, at a high price; and as the officers of that court paid very dearly for their places, and as the addition of twelve new colleagues would necessarily lower the value of each place, the old functionaries formed a union amongst themselves, and, enraged, swore on the Bible not to allow of this addition to their number, but to resist all the persecutions which might ensue; and should any one of them chance to forfeit his post by this resistance, to combine to indemnify him for his loss.

Now the following occurrences had taken place between the two contending parties.

On the seventh of January between seven and eight hundred tradesmen had assembled in Paris to discuss a new tax which was to be levied on house property. They deputed ten of their number to wait upon the Duke of Orleans, who, according to his custom, affected popularity. The duke received them and they informed him that they were resolved not to pay this tax, even if they were obliged to defend themselves against its collectors by force of arms. They were listened to with great politeness by the duke, who held out hopes of easier measures, promised to speak in their behalf to the queen, and dismissed them with the ordinary expression of royalty, “We will see what we can do.”

Two days afterward these same magistrates appeared before the cardinal and their spokesman addressed Mazarin with so much fearlessness and determination that the minister was astounded and sent the deputation away with the same answer as it had received from the Duke of Orleans--that he would see what could be done; and in accordance with that intention a council of state was assembled and the superintendent of finance was summoned.

This man, named Emery, was the object of popular detestation, in the first place because he was superintendent of finance, and every superintendent of finance deserved to be hated; in the second place, because he rather deserved the odium which he had incurred.

He was the son of a banker at Lyons named Particelli, who, after becoming a bankrupt, chose to change his name to Emery; and Cardinal Richelieu having discovered in him great financial aptitude, had introduced him with a strong recommendation to Louis XIII. under his assumed name, in order that he might be appointed to the post he subsequently held.

“You surprise me!” exclaimed the monarch. “I am rejoiced to hear you speak of Monsieur d’Emery as calculated for a post which requires a man of probity. I was really afraid that you were going to force that villain Particelli upon me.”

“Sire,” replied Richelieu, “rest assured that Particelli, the man to whom your majesty refers, has been hanged.”

“Ah; so much the better!” exclaimed the king. “It is not for nothing that I am styled Louis the Just.” and he signed Emery’s appointment.

This was the same Emery who became eventually superintendent of finance.

He was sent for by the ministers and he came before them pale and trembling, declaring that his son had very nearly been assassinated the day before, near the palace. The mob had insulted him on account of the ostentatious luxury of his wife, whose house was hung with red velvet edged with gold fringe. This lady was the daughter of Nicholas de Camus, who arrived in Paris with twenty francs in his pocket, became secretary of state, and accumulated wealth enough to divide nine millions of francs among his children and to keep an income of forty thousand for himself.

The fact was that Emery’s son had run a great chance of being suffocated, one of the rioters having proposed to squeeze him until he gave up all the gold he had swallowed. Nothing, therefore, was settled that day, as Emery’s head was not steady enough for business after such an occurrence.

On the next day Mathieu Mole, the chief president, whose courage at this crisis, says the Cardinal de Retz, was equal to that of the Duc de Beaufort and the Prince de Conde--in other words, of the two men who were considered the bravest in France--had been attacked in his turn. The people threatened to hold him responsible for the evils that hung over them. But the chief president had replied with his habitual coolness, without betraying either disturbance or surprise, that should the agitators refuse obedience to the king's wishes he would have gallows erected in the public squares and proceed at once to hang the most active among them. To which the others had responded that they would be glad to see the gallows erected; they would serve for the hanging of those detestable judges who purchased favor at court at the price of the people's misery.

Nor was this all. On the eleventh the queen in going to mass at Notre Dame, as she always did on Saturdays, was followed by more than two hundred women demanding justice. These poor creatures had no bad intentions. They wished only to be allowed to fall on their knees before their sovereign, and that they might move her to compassion; but they were prevented by the royal guard and the queen proceeded on her way, haughtily disdainful of their entreaties.

At length parliament was convoked; the authority of the king was to be maintained.

One day--it was the morning of the day my story begins--the king, Louis XIV., then ten years of age, went in state, under pretext of returning thanks for his recovery from the small-pox, to Notre Dame. He took the opportunity of calling out his guard, the Swiss troops and the musketeers, and he had planted them round the Palais Royal, on the quays, and on the Pont Neuf. After mass the young monarch drove to the Parliament House, where, upon the throne, he hastily confirmed not only such edicts as he had already passed, but issued new ones, each one, according to Cardinal de Retz, more ruinous than the others--a proceeding which drew forth a strong remonstrance from the chief president, Mole--whilst President Blancmesnil and Councillor Broussel raised their voices in indignation against fresh taxes.

The king returned amidst the silence of a vast multitude to the Palais Royal. All minds were uneasy, most were foreboding, many of the people used threatening language.

At first, indeed, they were doubtful whether the king's visit to the parliament had been in order to lighten or increase their burdens; but scarcely was it known that the taxes were to be still further increased, when cries of “Down with Mazarin!” “Long live Broussel!” “Long live Blancmesnil!” resounded through the city. For the people had learned that Broussel and Blancmesnil had made speeches in their behalf, and, although the eloquence of these deputies had been without avail, it had none the less won for them the people’s good-will. All attempts to disperse the groups collected in the streets, or silence their exclamations, were in vain. Orders had just been given to the royal guards and the Swiss guards, not only to stand firm, but to send out patrols to the streets of Saint Denis and Saint Martin, where the people thronged and where they were the most vociferous, when the mayor of Paris was announced at the Palais Royal.

He was shown in directly; he came to say that if these offensive precautions were not discontinued, in two hours Paris would be under arms.

Deliberations were being held when a lieutenant in the guards, named Comminges, made his appearance, with his clothes all torn, his face streaming with blood. The queen on seeing him uttered a cry of surprise and asked him what was going on.

As the mayor had foreseen, the sight of the guards had exasperated the mob. The tocsin was sounded. Comminges had arrested one of the ringleaders and had ordered him to be hanged near the cross of Du Trahoir; but in attempting to execute this command the soldiery were attacked in the market-place with stones and halberds; the delinquent had escaped to the Rue des Lombards and rushed into a house. They broke open the doors and searched the dwelling, but in vain. Comminges, wounded by a stone which had struck him on the forehead, had left a picket in the street and returned to the Palais Royal, followed by a menacing crowd, to tell his story.

This account confirmed that of the mayor. The authorities were not in a condition to cope with serious revolt. Mazarin endeavored to circulate among the people a report that troops had only been stationed on the quays and on the Pont Neuf, on account of the ceremonial of the day, and that they would soon withdraw. In fact, about four o’clock they were all concentrated about the Palais Royal, the courts and ground floors of which were filled with musketeers and Swiss guards, and there awaited the outcome of all this disturbance.

Such was the state of affairs at the very moment we introduced our readers to the study of Cardinal Mazarin--once that of Cardinal Richelieu. We have seen in what state of mind he listened to the murmurs from below, which even reached him in his seclusion, and to the guns, the firing of which resounded through that room. All at once he raised his head; his brow slightly contracted like that of a man who has formed a resolution; he fixed his eyes upon an enormous clock that was about to strike ten, and taking up a whistle of silver gilt that stood upon the table near him, he shrilled it twice.

A door hidden in the tapestry opened noiselessly and a man in black silently advanced and stood behind the chair on which Mazarin sat.

“Bernouin,” said the cardinal, not turning round, for having whistled, he knew that it was his valet-de-chambre who was behind him; “what musketeers are now within the palace?”

“The Black Musketeers, my lord.”

“What company?”

“Treville’s company.”

“Is there any officer belonging to this company in the ante-chamber?”

“Lieutenant d’Artagnan.”

“A man on whom we can depend, I hope.”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Give me a uniform of one of these musketeers and help me to put it on.”

The valet went out as silently as he had entered and appeared in a few minutes bringing the dress demanded.

The cardinal, in deep thought and in silence, began to take off the robes of state he had assumed in order to be present at the sitting of parliament, and to attire himself in the military coat, which he wore with a certain degree of easy grace, owing to his former campaigns in Italy. When he was completely dressed he said:

“Send hither Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

The valet went out of the room, this time by the centre door, but still as silently as before; one might have fancied him an apparition.

When he was left alone the cardinal looked at himself in the glass with a feeling of self-satisfaction. Still young--for he was scarcely forty-six years of age--he possessed great elegance of form and was above the middle height; his complexion was brilliant and beautiful; his glance full of expression; his nose, though large, was well proportioned; his forehead broad and majestic; his hair, of a chestnut color, was curled slightly; his beard, which was darker than his hair, was turned carefully with a curling iron, a practice that greatly improved it. After a short time the cardinal arranged his shoulder belt, then looked with great complacency at his hands, which were most elegant and of which he took the greatest care; and throwing on one side the large kid gloves tried on at first, as belonging to the uniform, he put on others of silk only. At this instant the door opened.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," said the valet-de-chambre.

An officer, as he spoke, entered the apartment. He was a man between thirty-nine and forty years of age, of medium height but a very well proportioned figure; with an intellectual and animated physiognomy; his beard black, and his hair turning gray, as often happens when people have found life either too gay or too sad, more especially when they happen to be of swart complexion.

D'Artagnan advanced a few steps into the apartment.

How perfectly he remembered his former entrance into that very room! Seeing, however, no one there except a musketeer of his own troop, he fixed his eyes upon the supposed soldier, in whose dress, nevertheless, he recognized at the first glance the cardinal.

The lieutenant remained standing in a dignified but respectful posture, such as became a man of good birth, who had in the course of his life been frequently in the society of the highest nobles.

The cardinal looked at him with a cunning rather than serious glance, yet he examined his countenance with attention and after a momentary silence said:

"You are Monsieur d'Artagnan?"

"I am that individual," replied the officer.

Mazarin gazed once more at a countenance full of intelligence, the play of which had been, nevertheless, subdued by age and experience; and D'Artagnan received the penetrating glance like one who had formerly sustained many a searching look, very different, indeed, from those which were inquiringly directed on him at that instant.

"Sir," resumed the cardinal, "you are to come with me, or rather, I am to go with you."

"I am at your command, my lord," returned D'Artagnan.

"I wish to visit in person the outposts which surround the Palais Royal; do you suppose that there is any danger in so doing?"

"Danger, my lord!" exclaimed D'Artagnan with a look of astonishment, "what danger?"

"I am told that there is a general insurrection."

“The uniform of the king’s musketeers carries a certain respect with it, and even if that were not the case I would engage with four of my men to put to flight a hundred of these clowns.”

“Did you witness the injury sustained by Comminges?”

“Monsieur de Comminges is in the guards and not in the musketeers----”

“Which means, I suppose, that the musketeers are better soldiers than the guards.” The cardinal smiled as he spoke.

“Every one likes his own uniform best, my lord.”

“Myself excepted,” and again Mazarin smiled; “for you perceive that I have left off mine and put on yours.”

“Lord bless us! this is modesty indeed!” cried D’Artagnan. “Had I such a uniform as your eminence possesses, I protest I should be mightily content, and I would take an oath never to wear any other costume----”

“Yes, but for to-night’s adventure I don’t suppose my dress would have been a very safe one. Give me my felt hat, Bernouin.”

The valet instantly brought to his master a regimental hat with a wide brim. The cardinal put it on in military style.

“Your horses are ready saddled in their stables, are they not?” he said, turning to D’Artagnan.

“Yes, my lord.”

“Well, let us set out.”

“How many men does your eminence wish to escort you?”

“You say that with four men you will undertake to disperse a hundred low fellows; as it may happen that we shall have to encounter two hundred, take eight----”

“As many as my lord wishes.”

“I will follow you. This way--light us downstairs Bernouin.”

The valet held a wax-light; the cardinal took a key from his bureau and opening the door of a secret stair descended into the court of the Palais Royal.

CHAPTER 2.

A Nightly Patrol.

In ten minutes Mazarin and his party were traversing the street “Les Bons Enfants” behind the theatre built by Richelieu expressly for the play of “Mirame,” and in which Mazarin, who was an amateur of music, but not of literature, had introduced into France the first opera that was ever acted in that country.

The appearance of the town denoted the greatest agitation. Numberless groups paraded the streets and, whatever D’Artagnan might think of it, it was obvious that the citizens had for the night laid aside their usual forbearance, in order to assume a warlike aspect. From time to time noises came in the direction of the public markets. The report of firearms was heard near the Rue Saint Denis and occasionally church bells began to ring indiscriminately and at the caprice of the populace. D’Artagnan, meantime, pursued his way with the indifference of a man upon whom such acts of folly made no impression. When he approached a group in the middle of the street he urged his horse upon it without a word of warning; and the members of the group, whether rebels or not, as if they knew with what sort of a man they had to deal, at once gave place to the patrol. The cardinal envied that composure, which he attributed to the habit of meeting danger; but none the less he conceived for the officer under whose orders he had for the moment placed himself, that consideration which even prudence pays to careless courage. On approaching an outpost near the Barriere des Sergens, the sentinel cried out, “Who’s there?” and D’Artagnan answered--having first asked the word of the cardinal--”Louis and Rocroy.” After which he inquired if Lieutenant Comminges were not the commanding officer at the outpost. The soldier replied by pointing out to him an officer who was conversing, on foot, his hand upon the neck of a horse on which the individual to whom he was talking sat. Here was the officer D’Artagnan was seeking.

“Here is Monsieur Comminges,” said D’Artagnan, returning to the cardinal. He instantly retired, from a feeling of respectful delicacy; it was, however, evident that the cardinal was recognized by both Comminges and the other officers on horseback.

“Well done, Guitant,” cried the cardinal to the equestrian; “I see plainly that, notwithstanding the sixty-four years that have passed over your head, you are still the same man, active and zealous. What were you saying to this youngster?”

“My lord,” replied Guitant, “I was observing that we live in troublous times and that to-day’s events are very like those in the days of the Ligue, of which I heard so much in my youth. Are you aware that the mob have even suggested throwing up barricades in the Rue Saint Denis and the Rue Saint Antoine?”

“And what was Comminges saying to you in reply, my good Guitant?”

“My lord,” said Comminges, “I answered that to compose a Ligue only one ingredient was wanting--in my opinion an essential one--a Duc de Guise; moreover, no generation ever does the same thing twice.”

“No, but they mean to make a Fronde, as they call it,” said Guitant.

“And what is a Fronde?” inquired Mazarin.

“My lord, Fronde is the name the discontented give to their party.”

“And what is the origin of this name?”

“It seems that some days since Councillor Bachaumont remarked at the palace that rebels and agitators reminded him of schoolboys slinging--qui frondent--stones from the moats round Paris, young urchins who run off the moment the constable appears, only to return to their diversion the instant his back is turned. So they have picked up the word and the insurrectionists are called ‘Frondeurs,’ and yesterday every article sold was ‘a la Fronde;’ bread ‘a la Fronde,’ hats ‘a la Fronde,’ to say nothing of gloves, pocket-handkerchiefs, and fans; but listen----”

At that moment a window opened and a man began to sing:

“A tempest from the Fronde Did blow to-day: I think ‘twill blow Sieur Mazarin away.”

“Insolent wretch!” cried Guitant.

“My lord,” said Comminges, who, irritated by his wounds, wished for revenge and longed to give back blow for blow, “shall I fire off a ball to punish that jester, and to warn him not to sing so much out of tune in the future?”

And as he spoke he put his hand on the holster of his uncle’s saddle-bow.

“Certainly not! certainly not,” exclaimed Mazarin. “Diavolo! my dear friend, you are going to spoil everything--everything is going on famously. I know the French as well as if I had made them myself. They sing--let them pay the piper. During the Ligue, about which Guitant was speaking just now, the people chanted nothing except the mass, so everything went to destruction. Come, Guitant, come along, and let’s see if they keep watch at the Quinze-Vingts as at the Barriere des Sergens.”

And waving his hand to Comminges he rejoined D’Artagnan, who instantly put himself at the head of his troop, followed by the cardinal, Guitant and the rest of the escort.

“Just so,” muttered Comminges, looking after Mazarin. “True, I forgot; provided he can get money out of the people, that is all he wants.”

The street of Saint Honore, when the cardinal and his party passed through it, was crowded by an assemblage who, standing in groups, discussed the edicts of that memorable day. They pitied the young king, who was unconsciously ruining his country, and threw all the odium of his proceedings on Mazarin. Addresses to the Duke of Orleans and to Conde were suggested. Blancmesnil and Broussel seemed in the highest favor.

D’Artagnan passed through the very midst of this discontented mob just as if his horse and he had been made of iron. Mazarin and Guitant conversed together in whispers. The musketeers, who had already discovered who Mazarin was, followed in profound silence. In the street of Saint Thomas-du-Louvre they stopped at the barrier distinguished by the name of Quinze-Vingts. Here Guitant spoke to one of the subalterns, asking how matters were progressing.

“Ah, captain!” said the officer, “everything is quiet hereabout--if I did not know that something is going on in yonder house!”

And he pointed to a magnificent hotel situated on the very spot whereon the Vaudeville now stands.

“In that hotel? it is the Hotel Rambouillet,” cried Guitant.

“I really don’t know what hotel it is; all I do know is that I observed some suspicious looking people go in there----”

“Nonsense!” exclaimed Guitant, with a burst of laughter; “those men must be poets.”

“Come, Guitant, speak, if you please, respectfully of these gentlemen,” said Mazarin; “don’t you know that I was in my youth a poet? I wrote verses in the style of Benserade----”

“You, my lord?”

“Yes, I; shall I repeat to you some of my verses?”

“Just as you please, my lord. I do not understand Italian.”

“Yes, but you understand French,” and Mazarin laid his hand upon Guitant’s shoulder. “My good, my brave Guitant, whatsoever command I may give you in that language--in French--whatever I may order you to do, will you not perform it?”

“Certainly. I have already answered that question in the affirmative; but that command must come from the queen herself.”

“Yes! ah yes!” Mazarin bit his lips as he spoke; “I know your devotion to her majesty.”

“I have been a captain in the queen’s guards for twenty years,” was the reply.

“En route, Monsieur d’Artagnan,” said the cardinal; “all goes well in this direction.”

D’Artagnan, in the meantime, had taken the head of his detachment without a word and with that ready and profound obedience which marks the character of an old soldier.

He led the way toward the hill of Saint Roche. The Rue Richelieu and the Rue Villedot were then, owing to their vicinity to the ramparts, less frequented than any others in that direction, for the town was thinly inhabited thereabout.

“Who is in command here?” asked the cardinal.

“Villequier,” said Guitant.

“Diavolo! Speak to him yourself, for ever since you were deputed by me to arrest the Duc de Beaufort, this officer and I have been on bad terms. He laid claim to that honor as captain of the royal guards.”

“I am aware of that, and I have told him a hundred times that he was wrong. The king could not give that order, since at that time he was hardly four years old.”

“Yes, but I could give him the order--I, Guitant--and I preferred to give it to you.”

Guitant, without reply, rode forward and desired the sentinel to call Monsieur de Villequier.

“Ah! so you are here!” cried the officer, in the tone of ill-humor habitual to him; “what the devil are you doing here?”

“I wish to know--can you tell me, pray--is anything fresh occurring in this part of the town?”

“What do you mean? People cry out, ‘Long live the king! down with Mazarin!’ That’s nothing new; no, we’ve been used to those acclamations for some time.”

“And you sing chorus,” replied Guitant, laughing.

“Faith, I’ve half a mind to do it. In my opinion the people are right; and cheerfully would I give up five years of my pay--which I am never paid, by the way--to make the king five years older.”

“Really! And pray what would come to pass, supposing the king were five years older than he is?”

“As soon as ever the king comes of age he will issue his commands himself, and ‘tis far pleasanter to obey the grandson of Henry IV. than the son of Peter Mazarin. ‘Sdeath! I would die willingly for the king, but supposing I happened to be killed on account of Mazarin, as your nephew came near being to-day, there could be nothing in Paradise, however well placed I might be there, that could console me for it.”

“Well, well, Monsieur de Villequier,” Mazarin interposed, “I shall make it my care the king hears of your loyalty. Come, gentlemen,” addressing the troop, “let us return.”

“Stop,” exclaimed Villequier, “so Mazarin was here! so much the better. I have been waiting for a long time to tell him what I think of him. I am obliged to you Guitant, although your intention was perhaps not very favorable to me, for such an opportunity.”

He turned away and went off to his post, whistling a tune then popular among the party called the “Fronde,” whilst Mazarin returned, in a pensive mood, toward the Palais Royal. All that he had heard from these three different men, Comminges, Guitant and Villequier, confirmed him in his conviction that in case of serious tumults there would be no one on his side except the queen; and then Anne of Austria had so often deserted her friends that her support seemed most precarious. During the whole of this nocturnal ride, during the whole time that he was endeavoring to understand the various characters of Comminges, Guitant and Villequier, Mazarin was, in truth, studying more especially one man. This man, who had remained immovable as bronze when menaced by the mob--not a muscle of whose face was stirred, either at Mazarin’s witticisms or by the jests of the multitude--seemed to the cardinal a peculiar being, who, having participated in past events similar to those now occurring, was calculated to cope with those now on the eve of taking place.

The name of D’Artagnan was not altogether new to Mazarin, who, although he did not arrive in France before the year 1634 or 1635, that is to say, about eight or nine years after the events which we have related in a preceding narrative, * fancied he had heard it pronounced as that of one who was said to be a model of courage, address and loyalty.

* *“The Three Musketeers.”*

Possessed by this idea, the cardinal resolved to know all about D’Artagnan immediately; of course he could not inquire from D’Artagnan himself who he was and what had been his career; he remarked, however, in the course of conversation that the lieutenant of musketeers spoke with a Gascon accent. Now the Italians and the Gascons are too much alike and know each other too well ever to trust what any one of them may say of himself; so in reaching the walls which surrounded the Palais Royal, the cardinal knocked at a little door, and after thanking D’Artagnan and requesting him to wait in the court of the Palais Royal, he made a sign to Guitant to follow him.

They both dismounted, consigned their horses to the lackey who had opened the door, and disappeared in the garden.

“My dear friend,” said the cardinal, leaning, as they walked through the garden, on his friend’s arm, “you told me just now that you had been twenty years in the queen’s service.”

“Yes, it’s true. I have,” returned Guitant.

“Now, my dear Guitant, I have often remarked that in addition to your courage, which is indisputable, and your fidelity, which is invincible, you possess an admirable memory.”

“You have found that out, have you, my lord? Deuce take it--all the worse for me!”

“How?”

“There is no doubt but that one of the chief accomplishments of a courtier is to know when to forget.”

“But you, Guitant, are not a courtier. You are a brave soldier, one of the few remaining veterans of the days of Henry IV. Alas! how few to-day exist!”

“Plague on’t, my lord, have you brought me here to get my horoscope out of me?”

“No; I only brought you here to ask you,” returned Mazarin, smiling, “if you have taken any particular notice of our lieutenant of musketeers?”

“Monsieur d’Artagnan? I have had no occasion to notice him particularly; he’s an old acquaintance. He’s a Gascon. De Treville knows him and esteems him very highly, and De Treville, as you know, is one of the queen’s greatest friends. As a soldier the man ranks well; he did his whole duty and even more, at the siege of Rochelle--as at Suze and Perpignan.”

“But you know, Guitant, we poor ministers often want men with other qualities besides courage; we want men of talent. Pray, was not Monsieur d’Artagnan, in the time of the cardinal, mixed up in some intrigue from which he came out, according to report, quite cleverly?”

“My lord, as to the report you allude to”--Guitant perceived that the cardinal wished to make him speak out--”I know nothing but what the public knows. I never meddle in intrigues, and if I occasionally become a confidant of the intrigues of others I am sure your eminence will approve of my keeping them secret.”

Mazarin shook his head.

“Ah!” he said; “some ministers are fortunate and find out all that they wish to know.”

“My lord,” replied Guitant, “such ministers do not weigh men in the same balance; they get their information on war from warriors; on intrigues, from intriguers. Consult some politician of the period of which you speak, and if you pay well for it you will certainly get to know all you want.”

“Eh, pardieu!” said Mazarin, with a grimace which he always made when spoken to about money. “They will be paid, if there is no way of getting out of it.”

“Does my lord seriously wish me to name any one who was mixed up in the cabals of that day?”

“By Bacchus!” rejoined Mazarin, impatiently, “it’s about an hour since I asked you for that very thing, wooden-head that you are.”

“There is one man for whom I can answer, if he will speak out.”

“That’s my concern; I will make him speak.”

“Ah, my lord, ‘tis not easy to make people say what they don’t wish to let out.”

“Pooh! with patience one must succeed. Well, this man. Who is he?”

“The Comte de Rochefort.”

“The Comte de Rochefort!”

“Unfortunately he has disappeared these four or five years and I don’t know where he is.”

“I know, Guitant,” said Mazarin.

“Well, then, how is it that your eminence complained just now of want of information?”

“You think,” resumed Mazarin, “that Rochefort----”

“He was Cardinal Richelieu’s creature, my lord. I warn you, however, his services will cost you something. The cardinal was lavish to his underlings.”

“Yes, yes, Guitant,” said Mazarin; “Richelieu was a great man, a very great man, but he had that defect. Thanks, Guitant; I shall benefit by your advice this very evening.”

Here they separated and bidding adieu to Guitant in the court of the Palais Royal, Mazarin approached an officer who was walking up and down within that inclosure.

It was D’Artagnan, who was waiting for him.

“Come hither,” said Mazarin in his softest voice; “I have an order to give you.”

D’Artagnan bent low and following the cardinal up the secret staircase, soon found himself in the study whence they had first set out.

The cardinal seated himself before his bureau and taking a sheet of paper wrote some lines upon it, whilst D’Artagnan stood imperturbable, without showing either impatience or curiosity. He was like a soldierly automaton, or rather, like a magnificent marionette.

The cardinal folded and sealed his letter.

“Monsieur d’Artagnan,” he said, “you are to take this dispatch to the Bastile and bring back here the person it concerns. You must take a carriage and an escort, and guard the prisoner with the greatest care.”

D’Artagnan took the letter, touched his hat with his hand, turned round upon his heel like a drill-sergeant, and a moment afterward was heard, in his dry and monotonous tone, commanding “Four men and an escort, a carriage and a horse.” Five minutes afterward the wheels of the carriage and the horses’ shoes were heard resounding on the pavement of the courtyard.

CHAPTER 3.

Dead Animosities.

D’Artagnan arrived at the Bastile just as it was striking half-past eight. His visit was announced to the governor, who, on hearing that he came from the cardinal, went to meet him and received him at the top of the great flight of steps outside the door. The governor of the Bastile was Monsieur du Tremblay, the brother of the famous Capuchin, Joseph, that fearful favorite of Richelieu’s, who went by the name of the Gray Cardinal.

During the period that the Duc de Bassompierre passed in the Bastile--where he remained for twelve long years--when his companions, in their dreams of liberty, said to each other: “As for me, I shall go out of the prison at such a time,” and another, at such and such a time, the duke used to answer, “As for me, gentlemen, I shall leave only when Monsieur du Tremblay leaves;” meaning that at the death of the cardinal Du Tremblay would certainly lose his place at the Bastile and De Bassompierre regain his at court.

His prediction was nearly fulfilled, but in a very different way from that which De Bassompierre supposed; for after the death of Richelieu everything went on, contrary to expectation, in the same way as before; and Bassompierre had little chance of leaving his prison.

Monsieur du Tremblay received D’Artagnan with extreme politeness and invited him to sit down with him to supper, of which he was himself about to partake.

“I should be delighted to do so,” was the reply; “but if I am not mistaken, the words ‘In haste,’ are written on the envelope of the letter which I brought.”

“You are right,” said Du Tremblay. “Halloo, major! tell them to order Number 25 to come downstairs.”

The unhappy wretch who entered the Bastile ceased, as he crossed the threshold, to be a man--he became a number.

D’Artagnan shuddered at the noise of the keys; he remained on horseback, feeling no inclination to dismount, and sat looking at the bars, at the buttressed windows and the immense walls he had hitherto only seen from the other side of the moat, but by which he had for twenty years been awe-struck.

A bell resounded.

“I must leave you,” said Du Tremblay; “I am sent for to sign the release of a prisoner. I shall be happy to meet you again, sir.”

“May the devil annihilate me if I return thy wish!” murmured D’Artagnan, smiling as he pronounced the imprecation; “I declare I feel quite ill after only being five minutes in the courtyard. Go to! go to! I would rather die on straw than hoard up a thousand a year by being governor of the Bastile.”

He had scarcely finished this soliloquy before the prisoner arrived. On seeing him D’Artagnan could hardly suppress an exclamation of surprise. The prisoner got into the carriage without seeming to recognize the musketeer.

“Gentlemen,” thus D’Artagnan addressed the four musketeers, “I am ordered to exercise the greatest possible care in guarding the prisoner, and since there are no locks to the carriage, I shall sit beside him. Monsieur de Lillebonne, lead my horse by the bridle, if you please.” As he spoke he dismounted, gave the bridle of his horse to the musketeer and placing himself by the side of the prisoner said, in a voice perfectly composed, “To the Palais Royal, at full trot.”

The carriage drove on and D’Artagnan, availing himself of the darkness in the archway under which they were passing, threw himself into the arms of the prisoner.

“Rochefort!” he exclaimed; “you! is it you, indeed? I am not mistaken?”

“D’Artagnan!” cried Rochefort.

“Ah! my poor friend!” resumed D’Artagnan, “not having seen you for four or five years I concluded you were dead.”

“I’faith,” said Rochefort, “there’s no great difference, I think, between a dead man and one who has been buried alive; now I have been buried alive, or very nearly so.”

“And for what crime are you imprisoned in the Bastile.”

“Do you wish me to speak the truth?”

“Yes.”

“Well, then, I don’t know.”

“Have you any suspicion of me, Rochefort?”

“No! on the honor of a gentleman; but I cannot be imprisoned for the reason alleged; it is impossible.”

“What reason?” asked D’Artagnan.

“For stealing.”

“For stealing! you, Rochefort! you are laughing at me.”

“I understand. You mean that this demands explanation, do you not?”

“I admit it.”

“Well, this is what actually took place: One evening after an orgy in Reinard’s apartment at the Tuileries with the Duc d’Harcourt, Fontrailles, De Rieux and others, the Duc d’Harcourt proposed that we should go and pull cloaks on the Pont Neuf; that is, you know, a diversion which the Duc d’Orleans made quite the fashion.”

“Were you crazy, Rochefort? at your age!”

“No, I was drunk. And yet, since the amusement seemed to me rather tame, I proposed to Chevalier de Rieux that we should be spectators instead of actors, and, in order to see to advantage, that we should mount the bronze horse. No sooner said than done. Thanks to the spurs, which served as stirrups, in a moment we were perched upon the croupe; we were well placed and saw everything. Four or five cloaks had already been lifted, with a dexterity without parallel, and not one of the victims had dared to say a word, when some fool of a fellow, less patient than the others, took it into his head to cry out, ‘Guard!’ and drew upon us a patrol of archers. Duc d’Harcourt, Fontrailles, and the others escaped; De Rieux was inclined to do likewise, but I told him they wouldn’t look for us where we were. He wouldn’t listen, put his foot on the spur to get down, the spur broke, he fell with a broken leg, and, instead of keeping quiet, took to crying out like a gallows-bird. I then was ready to dismount, but it was too late; I descended into the arms of the archers. They conducted me to the Chatelet, where I slept soundly, being very sure that on the next day I should go forth free. The next day came and passed, the day after, a week; I then wrote to the cardinal. The same day they came for me and took me to the Bastile. That was five years ago. Do you believe it was because I committed the sacrilege of mounting en croupe behind Henry IV.?”

“No; you are right, my dear Rochefort, it couldn’t be for that; but you will probably learn the reason soon.”

“Ah, indeed! I forgot to ask you--where are you taking me?”

“To the cardinal.”

“What does he want with me?”

“I do not know. I did not even know that you were the person I was sent to fetch.”

“Impossible--you--a favorite of the minister!”

“A favorite! no, indeed!” cried D’Artagnan. “Ah, my poor friend! I am just as poor a Gascon as when I saw you at Meung, twenty-two years ago, you know; alas!” and he concluded his speech with a deep sigh.

“Nevertheless, you come as one in authority.”

“Because I happened to be in the ante-chamber when the cardinal called me, by the merest chance. I am still a lieutenant in the musketeers and have been so these twenty years.”

“Then no misfortune has happened to you?”

“And what misfortune could happen to me? To quote some Latin verses I have forgotten, or rather, never knew well, ‘the thunderbolt never falls on the valleys,’ and I am a valley, dear Rochefort,--one of the lowliest of the low.”

“Then Mazarin is still Mazarin?”

“The same as ever, my friend; it is said that he is married to the queen.”

“Married?”

“If not her husband, he is unquestionably her lover.”

“You surprise me. Rebuff Buckingham and consent to Mazarin!”

“Just like the women,” replied D’Artagnan, coolly.

“Like women, not like queens.”

“Egad! queens are the weakest of their sex, when it comes to such things as these.”

“And M. de Beaufort--is he still in prison?”

“Yes. Why?”

“Oh, nothing, but that he might get me out of this, if he were favorably inclined to me.”

“You are probably nearer freedom than he is, so it will be your business to get him out.”

“And,” said the prisoner, “what talk is there of war with Spain?”

“With Spain, no,” answered D’Artagnan; “but Paris.”

“What do you mean?” cried Rochefort.

“Do you hear the guns, pray? The citizens are amusing themselves in the meantime.”

“And you--do you really think that anything could be done with these bourgeois?”

“Yes, they might do well if they had any leader to unite them in one body.”

“How miserable not to be free!”

“Don’t be downcast. Since Mazarin has sent for you, it is because he wants you. I congratulate you! Many a long year has passed since any one has wanted to employ me; so you see in what a situation I am.”

“Make your complaints known; that’s my advice.”

“Listen, Rochefort; let us make a compact. We are friends, are we not?”

“Egad! I bear the traces of our friendship--three slits or slashes from your sword.”

“Well, if you should be restored to favor, don’t forget me.”

“On the honor of a Rochefort; but you must do the like for me.”

“There’s my hand,--I promise.”

“Therefore, whenever you find any opportunity of saying something in my behalf----”

“I shall say it, and you?”

“I shall do the same.”

“Apropos, are we to speak of your friends also, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis? or have you forgotten them?”

“Almost.”

“What has become of them?”

“I don’t know; we separated, as you know. They are alive, that’s all that I can say about them; from time to time I hear of them indirectly, but in what part of the world they are, devil take me if I know, No, on my honor, I have not a friend in the world but you, Rochefort.”

“And the illustrious--what’s the name of the lad whom I made a sergeant in Piedmont’s regiment?”

“Planchet!”

“The illustrious Planchet. What has become of him?”

“I shouldn’t wonder if he were at the head of the mob at this very moment. He married a woman who keeps a confectioner’s shop in the Rue des Lombards, for he’s a lad who was always fond of sweetmeats; he’s now a citizen of Paris. You’ll see that that queer fellow will be a sheriff before I shall be a captain.”

“Come, dear D’Artagnan, look up a little! Courage! It is when one is lowest on the wheel of fortune that the merry-go-round wheels and rewards us. This evening your destiny begins to change.”

“Amen!” exclaimed D’Artagnan, stopping the carriage.

“What are you doing?” asked Rochefort.

“We are almost there and I want no one to see me getting out of your carriage; we are supposed not to know each other.”

“You are right. Adieu.”

“Au revoir. Remember your promise.”

In five minutes the party entered the courtyard and D’Artagnan led the prisoner up the great staircase and across the corridor and ante-chamber.

As they stopped at the door of the cardinal’s study, D’Artagnan was about to be announced when Rochefort slapped him on his shoulder.

“D’Artagnan, let me confess to you what I’ve been thinking about during the whole of my drive, as I looked out upon the parties of citizens who perpetually crossed our path and looked at you and your four men with fiery eyes.”

“Speak out,” answered D’Artagnan.

“I had only to cry out ‘Help!’ for you and for your companions to be cut to pieces, and then I should have been free.”

“Why didn’t you do it?” asked the lieutenant.

“Come, come!” cried Rochefort. “Did we not swear friendship? Ah! had any one but you been there, I don’t say----”

D’Artagnan bowed. “Is it possible that Rochefort has become a better man than I am?” he said to himself. And he caused himself to be announced to the minister.

“Let M. de Rochefort enter,” said Mazarin, eagerly, on hearing their names pronounced; “and beg M. d’Artagnan to wait; I shall have further need of him.”

These words gave great joy to D’Artagnan. As he had said, it had been a long time since any one had needed him; and that demand for his services on the part of Mazarin seemed to him an auspicious sign.

Rochefort, rendered suspicious and cautious by these words, entered the apartment, where he found Mazarin sitting at the table, dressed in his ordinary garb and as one of the prelates of the Church, his costume being similar to that of the abbes in that day, excepting that his scarf and stockings were violet.

As the door was closed Rochefort cast a glance toward Mazarin, which was answered by one, equally furtive, from the minister.

There was little change in the cardinal; still dressed with sedulous care, his hair well arranged and curled, his person perfumed, he looked, owing to his extreme taste in dress, only half his age. But Rochefort, who had passed five years in prison, had become old in the lapse of a few years; the dark locks of this estimable friend of the defunct Cardinal Richelieu were now white; the deep bronze of his complexion had been succeeded by a mortal pallor which betokened debility. As he gazed at him Mazarin shook his head slightly, as much as to say, “This is a man who does not appear to me fit for much.”

After a pause, which appeared an age to Rochefort, Mazarin took from a bundle of papers a letter, and showing it to the count, he said:

“I find here a letter in which you sue for liberty, Monsieur de Rochefort. You are in prison, then?”

Rochefort trembled in every limb at this question. “But I thought,” he said, “that your eminence knew that circumstance better than any one----”

“I? Oh no! There is a congestion of prisoners in the Bastile, who were cooped up in the time of Monsieur de Richelieu; I don’t even know their names.”

“Yes, but in regard to myself, my lord, it cannot be so, for I was removed from the Chatelet to the Bastile owing to an order from your eminence.”

“You think you were.”

“I am certain of it.”

“Ah, stay! I fancy I remember it. Did you not once refuse to undertake a journey to Brussels for the queen?”

“Ah! ah!” exclaimed Rochefort. “There is the true reason! Idiot that I am, though I have been trying to find it out for five years, I never found it out.”

“But I do not say it was the cause of your imprisonment. I merely ask you, did you not refuse to go to Brussels for the queen, whilst you had consented to go there to do some service for the late cardinal?”

“That is the very reason I refused to go back to Brussels. I was there at a fearful moment. I was sent there to intercept a correspondence between Chalais and the archduke, and even then, when I was discovered I was nearly torn to pieces. How could I, then, return to Brussels? I should injure the queen instead of serving her.”

“Well, since the best motives are liable to misconstruction, the queen saw in your refusal nothing but a refusal--a distinct refusal she had also much to complain of you during the lifetime of the late cardinal; yes, her majesty the queen----”

Rochefort smiled contemptuously.

“Since I was a faithful servant, my lord, to Cardinal Richelieu during his life, it stands to reason that now, after his death, I should serve you well, in defiance of the whole world.”

“With regard to myself, Monsieur de Rochefort,” replied Mazarin, “I am not, like Monsieur de Richelieu, all-powerful. I am but a minister, who wants no servants, being myself nothing but a servant of the queen’s. Now, the queen is of a sensitive nature. Hearing of your refusal to obey her she looked upon it as a declaration of war, and as she considers you a man of superior talent, and consequently dangerous, she desired me to make sure of you; that is the reason of your being shut up in the Bastile. But your release can be managed. You are one of those men who can comprehend certain matters and having understood them, can act with energy----”

“Such was Cardinal Richelieu’s opinion, my lord.”

“The cardinal,” interrupted Mazarin, “was a great politician and therein shone his vast superiority over me. I am a straightforward, simple man; that’s my great disadvantage. I am of a frankness of character quite French.”

Rochefort bit his lips in order to prevent a smile.

“Now to the point. I want friends; I want faithful servants. When I say I want, I mean the queen wants them. I do nothing without her commands--pray understand that; not like Monsieur de Richelieu, who went on just as he pleased. So I shall never be a great man, as he was, but to compensate for that, I shall be a good man, Monsieur de Rochefort, and I hope to prove it to you.”

Rochefort knew well the tones of that soft voice, in which sounded sometimes a sort of gentle lisp, like the hissing of young vipers.

“I am disposed to believe your eminence,” he replied; “though I have had but little evidence of that good-nature of which your eminence speaks. Do not forget that I have been five years in the Bastile and that no medium of viewing things is so deceptive as the grating of a prison.”

“Ah, Monsieur de Rochefort! have I not told you already that I had nothing to do with that? The queen--cannot you make allowances for the pettishness of a queen and a princess? But that has passed away as suddenly as it came, and is forgotten.”

“I can easily suppose, sir, that her majesty has forgotten it amid the fetes and the courtiers of the Palais Royal, but I who have passed those years in the Bastile----”

“Ah! mon Dieu! my dear Monsieur de Rochefort! do you absolutely think that the Palais Royal is the abode of gayety? No. We have had great annoyances there. As for me, I play my game squarely, fairly, and above board, as I always do. Let us come to some conclusion. Are you one of us, Monsieur de Rochefort?”

“I am very desirous of being so, my lord, but I am totally in the dark about everything. In the Bastile one talks politics only with soldiers and jailers, and you have not an idea, my lord, how little is known of what is going on by people of that sort; I am of Monsieur de Bassompierre’s party. Is he still one of the seventeen peers of France?”

“He is dead, sir; a great loss. His devotion to the queen was boundless; men of loyalty are scarce.”

“I think so, forsooth,” said Rochefort, “and when you find any of them, you march them off to the Bastile. However, there are plenty in the world, but you don’t look in the right direction for them, my lord.”

“Indeed! explain to me. Ah! my dear Monsieur de Rochefort, how much you must have learned during your intimacy with the late cardinal! Ah! he was a great man.”

“Will your eminence be angry if I read you a lesson?”

“I! never! you know you may say anything to me. I try to be beloved, not feared.”

“Well, there is on the wall of my cell, scratched with a nail, a proverb, which says, ‘Like master, like servant.’“

“Pray, what does that mean?”

“It means that Monsieur de Richelieu was able to find trusty servants, dozens and dozens of them.”

“He! the point aimed at by every poniard! Richelieu, who passed his life in warding off blows which were forever aimed at him!”

“But he did ward them off,” said De Rochefort, “and the reason was, that though he had bitter enemies he possessed also true friends. I have known persons,” he continued--for he thought he might avail himself of the opportunity of speaking of D’Artagnan--”who by their sagacity and address have deceived the penetration of Cardinal Richelieu; who by their valor have got the better of his guards and spies; persons without money, without support, without credit, yet who have preserved to the crowned head its crown and made the cardinal crave pardon."

"But those men you speak of," said Mazarin, smiling inwardly on seeing Rochefort approach the point to which he was leading him, "those men were not devoted to the cardinal, for they contended against him."

"No; in that case they would have met with more fitting reward. They had the misfortune to be devoted to that very queen for whom just now you were seeking servants."

"But how is it that you know so much of these matters?"

"I know them because the men of whom I speak were at that time my enemies; because they fought against me; because I did them all the harm I could and they returned it to the best of their ability; because one of them, with whom I had most to do, gave me a pretty sword-thrust, now about seven years ago, the third that I received from the same hand; it closed an old account."

"Ah!" said Mazarin, with admirable suavity, "could I but find such men!"

"My lord, there has stood for six years at your very door a man such as I describe, and during those six years he has been unappreciated and unemployed by you."

"Who is it?"

"It is Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"That Gascon!" cried Mazarin, with well acted surprise.

"'That Gascon' has saved a queen and made Monsieur de Richelieu confess that in point of talent, address and political skill, to him he was only a tyro."

"Really?"

"It is as I have the honor of telling it to your excellency."

"Tell me a little about it, my dear Monsieur de Rochefort."

"That is somewhat difficult, my lord," said Rochefort, with a smile.

"Then he will tell it me himself."

"I doubt it, my lord."

"Why do you doubt it?"

"Because the secret does not belong to him; because, as I have told you, it has to do with a great queen."

"And he was alone in achieving an enterprise like that?"

“No, my lord, he had three colleagues, three brave men, men such as you were wishing for just now.”

“And were these four men attached to each other, true in heart, really united?”

“As if they had been one man--as if their four hearts had pulsated in one breast.”

“You pique my curiosity, dear Rochefort; pray tell me the whole story.”

“That is impossible; but I will tell you a true story, my lord.”

“Pray do so, I delight in stories,” cried the cardinal.

“Listen, then,” returned Rochefort, as he spoke endeavoring to read in that subtle countenance the cardinal’s motive. “Once upon a time there lived a queen--a powerful monarch--who reigned over one of the greatest kingdoms of the universe; and a minister; and this minister wished much to injure the queen, whom once he had loved too well. (Do not try, my lord, you cannot guess who it is; all this happened long before you came into the country where this queen reigned.) There came to the court an ambassador so brave, so magnificent, so elegant, that every woman lost her heart to him; and the queen had even the indiscretion to give him certain ornaments so rare that they could never be replaced by any like them.

“As these ornaments were given by the king the minister persuaded his majesty to insist upon the queen’s appearing in them as part of her jewels at a ball which was soon to take place. There is no occasion to tell you, my lord, that the minister knew for a fact that these ornaments had sailed away with the ambassador, who was far away, beyond seas. This illustrious queen had fallen low as the least of her subjects--fallen from her high estate.”

“Indeed!”

“Well, my lord, four men resolved to save her. These four men were not princes, neither were they dukes, neither were they men in power; they were not even rich. They were four honest soldiers, each with a good heart, a good arm and a sword at the service of those who wanted it. They set out. The minister knew of their departure and had planted people on the road to prevent them ever reaching their destination. Three of them were overwhelmed and disabled by numerous assailants; one of them alone arrived at the port, having either killed or wounded those who wished to stop him. He crossed the sea and brought back the set of ornaments to the great queen, who was able to wear them on her shoulder on the appointed day; and this very nearly ruined the minister. What do you think of that exploit, my lord?”

“It is magnificent!” said Mazarin, thoughtfully.

“Well, I know of ten such men.”

Mazarin made no reply; he reflected.

Five or six minutes elapsed.

“You have nothing more to ask of me, my lord?” said Rochefort.

“Yes. And you say that Monsieur d’Artagnan was one of those four men?”

“He led the enterprise.”

“And who were the others?”

“I leave it to Monsieur d’Artagnan to name them, my lord. They were his friends and not mine. He alone would have any influence with them; I do not even know them under their true names.”

“You suspect me, Monsieur de Rochefort; I want him and you and all to aid me.”

“Begin with me, my lord; for after five or six years of imprisonment it is natural to feel some curiosity as to one’s destination.”

“You, my dear Monsieur de Rochefort, shall have the post of confidence; you shall go to Vincennes, where Monsieur de Beaufort is confined; you will guard him well for me. Well, what is the matter?”

“The matter is that you have proposed to me what is impossible,” said Rochefort, shaking his head with an air of disappointment.

“What! impossible? And why is it impossible?”

“Because Monsieur de Beaufort is one of my friends, or rather, I am one of his. Have you forgotten, my lord, that it is he who answered for me to the queen?”

“Since then Monsieur de Beaufort has become an enemy of the State.”

“That may be, my lord; but since I am neither king nor queen nor minister, he is not my enemy and I cannot accept your offer.”

“This, then, is what you call devotion! I congratulate you. Your devotion does not commit you too far, Monsieur de Rochefort.”

“And then, my lord,” continued Rochefort, “you understand that to emerge from the Bastile in order to enter Vincennes is only to change one’s prison.”

“Say at once that you are on the side of Monsieur de Beaufort; that will be the most sincere line of conduct,” said Mazarin.

“My lord, I have been so long shut up, that I am only of one party--I am for fresh air. Employ me in any other way; employ me even actively, but let it be on the high roads.”

“My dear Monsieur de Rochefort,” Mazarin replied in a tone of raillery, “you think yourself still a young man; your spirit is that of the phoenix, but your strength fails you. Believe me, you ought now to take a rest. Here!”

“You decide, then, nothing about me, my lord?”

“On the contrary, I have come to a decision.”

Bernouin came into the room.

“Call an officer of justice,” he said; “and stay close to me,” he added, in a low tone.

The officer entered. Mazarin wrote a few words, which he gave to this man; then he bowed.

“Adieu, Monsieur de Rochefort,” he said.

Rochefort bent low.

“I see, my lord, I am to be taken back to the Bastile.”

“You are sagacious.”

“I shall return thither, my lord, but it is a mistake on your part not to employ me.”

“You? the friend of my greatest foes? Don’t suppose that you are the only person who can serve me, Monsieur de Rochefort. I shall find many men as able as you are.”

“I wish you may, my lord,” replied De Rochefort.

He was then reconducted by the little staircase, instead of passing through the ante-chamber where D’Artagnan was waiting. In the courtyard the carriage and the four musketeers were ready, but he looked around in vain for his friend.

“Ah!” he muttered to himself, “this changes the situation, and if there is still a crowd of people in the streets we will try to show Mazarin that we are still, thank God, good for something else than keeping guard over a prisoner;” and he jumped into the carriage with the alacrity of a man of five-and-twenty.

CHAPTER 4.

Anne of Austria at the Age of Forty-six.

When left alone with Bernouin, Mazarin was for some minutes lost in thought. He had gained much information, but not enough. Mazarin was a cheat at the card-table. This is a detail preserved to us by Brienne. He called it using his advantages. He now determined not to begin the game with D’Artagnan till he knew completely all his adversary’s cards.

“My lord, have you any commands?” asked Bernouin.

“Yes, yes,” replied Mazarin. “Light me; I am going to the queen.”

Bernouin took up a candlestick and led the way.

There was a secret communication between the cardinal’s apartments and those of the queen; and through this corridor* Mazarin passed whenever he wished to visit Anne of Austria.

**This secret passage is still to be seen in the Palais Royal.*

In the bedroom in which this passage ended, Bernouin encountered Madame de Beauvais, like himself intrusted with the secret of these subterranean love affairs; and Madame de Beauvais undertook to prepare Anne of Austria, who was in her oratory with the young king, Louis XIV., to receive the cardinal.

Anne, reclining in a large easy-chair, her head supported by her hand, her elbow resting on a table, was looking at her son, who was turning over the leaves of a large book filled with pictures. This celebrated woman fully understood the art of being dull with dignity. It was her practice to pass hours either in her oratory or in her room, without either reading or praying.

When Madame de Beauvais appeared at the door and announced the cardinal, the child, who had been absorbed in the pages of Quintus Curtius, enlivened as they were by engravings of Alexander’s feats of arms, frowned and looked at his mother.

“Why,” he said, “does he enter without first asking for an audience?”

Anne colored slightly.

“The prime minister,” she said, “is obliged in these unsettled days to inform the queen of all that is happening from time to time, without exciting the curiosity or remarks of the court.”

“But Richelieu never came in this manner,” said the pertinacious boy.

“How can you remember what Monsieur de Richelieu did? You were too young to know about such things.”

“I do not remember what he did, but I have inquired and I have been told all about it.”

“And who told you about it?” asked Anne of Austria, with a movement of impatience.

“I know that I ought never to name the persons who answer my questions,” answered the child, “for if I do I shall learn nothing further.”

At this very moment Mazarin entered. The king rose immediately, took his book, closed it and went to lay it down on the table, near which he continued standing, in order that Mazarin might be obliged to stand also.

Mazarin contemplated these proceedings with a thoughtful glance. They explained what had occurred that evening.

He bowed respectfully to the king, who gave him a somewhat cavalier reception, but a look from his mother reproved him for the hatred which, from his infancy, Louis XIV. had entertained toward Mazarin, and he endeavored to receive the minister’s homage with civility.

Anne of Austria sought to read in Mazarin’s face the occasion of this unexpected visit, since the cardinal usually came to her apartment only after every one had retired.

The minister made a slight sign with his head, whereupon the queen said to Madame Beauvais:

“It is time for the king to go to bed; call Laporte.”

The queen had several times already told her son that he ought to go to bed, and several times Louis had coaxingly insisted on staying where he was; but now he made no reply, but turned pale and bit his lips with anger.

In a few minutes Laporte came into the room. The child went directly to him without kissing his mother.

“Well, Louis,” said Anne, “why do you not kiss me?”

“I thought you were angry with me, madame; you sent me away.”

“I do not send you away, but you have had the small-pox and I am afraid that sitting up late may tire you.”

“You had no fears of my being tired when you ordered me to go to the palace to-day to pass the odious decrees which have raised the people to rebellion.”

"Sire!" interposed Laporte, in order to turn the subject, "to whom does your majesty wish me to give the candle?"

"To any one, Laporte," the child said; and then added in a loud voice, "to any one except Mancini."

Now Mancini was a nephew of Mazarin's and was as much hated by Louis as the cardinal himself, although placed near his person by the minister.

And the king went out of the room without either embracing his mother or even bowing to the cardinal.

"Good," said Mazarin, "I am glad to see that his majesty has been brought up with a hatred of dissimulation."

"Why do you say that?" asked the queen, almost timidly.

"Why, it seems to me that the way in which he left us needs no explanation. Besides, his majesty takes no pains to conceal how little affection he has for me. That, however, does not hinder me from being entirely devoted to his service, as I am to that of your majesty."

"I ask your pardon for him, cardinal," said the queen; "he is a child, not yet able to understand his obligations to you."

The cardinal smiled.

"But," continued the queen, "you have doubtless come for some important purpose. What is it, then?"

Mazarin sank into a chair with the deepest melancholy painted on his countenance.

"It is likely," he replied, "that we shall soon be obliged to separate, unless you love me well enough to follow me to Italy."

"Why," cried the queen; "how is that?"

"Because, as they say in the opera of 'Thisbe,' 'The whole world conspires to break our bonds.'"

"You jest, sir!" answered the queen, endeavoring to assume something of her former dignity.

"Alas! I do not, madame," rejoined Mazarin. "Mark well what I say. The whole world conspires to break our bonds. Now as you are one of the whole world, I mean to say that you also are deserting me."

"Cardinal!"

"Heavens! did I not see you the other day smile on the Duke of Orleans? or rather at what he said?"

"And what was he saying?"

“He said this, madame: ‘Mazarin is a stumbling-block. Send him away and all will then be well.’“

“What do you wish me to do?”

“Oh, madame! you are the queen!”

“Queen, forsooth! when I am at the mercy of every scribbler in the Palais Royal who covers waste paper with nonsense, or of every country squire in the kingdom.”

“Nevertheless, you have still the power of banishing from your presence those whom you do not like!”

“That is to say, whom you do not like,” returned the queen.

“I! persons whom I do not like!”

“Yes, indeed. Who sent away Madame de Chevreuse after she had been persecuted twelve years under the last reign?”

“A woman of intrigue, who wanted to keep up against me the spirit of cabal she had raised against M. de Richelieu.”

“Who dismissed Madame de Hautefort, that friend so loyal that she refused the favor of the king that she might remain in mine?”

“A prude, who told you every night, as she undressed you, that it was a sin to love a priest, just as if one were a priest because one happens to be a cardinal.”

“Who ordered Monsieur de Beaufort to be arrested?”

“An incendiary the burden of whose song was his intention to assassinate me.”

“You see, cardinal,” replied the queen, “that your enemies are mine.”

“That is not enough madame, it is necessary that your friends should be also mine.”

“My friends, monsieur?” The queen shook her head. “Alas, I have them no longer!”

“How is it that you have no friends in your prosperity when you had many in adversity?”

“It is because in my prosperity I forgot those old friends, monsieur; because I have acted like Queen Marie de Medicis, who, returning from her first exile, treated with contempt all those who had suffered for her and, being proscribed a second time, died at Cologne abandoned by every one, even by her own son.”

“Well, let us see,” said Mazarin; “isn’t there still time to repair the evil? Search among your friends, your oldest friends.”

“What do you mean, monsieur?”

“Nothing else than I say--search.”

“Alas, I look around me in vain! I have no influence with any one. Monsieur is, as usual, led by his favorite; yesterday it was Choisy, to-day it is La Riviere, to-morrow it will be some one else. Monsieur le Prince is led by the coadjutor, who is led by Madame de Guemenee.”

“Therefore, madame, I ask you to look, not among your friends of to-day, but among those of other times.”

“Among my friends of other times?” said the queen.

“Yes, among your friends of other times; among those who aided you to contend against the Duc de Richelieu and even to conquer him.”

“What is he aiming at?” murmured the queen, looking uneasily at the cardinal.

“Yes,” continued his eminence; “under certain circumstances, with that strong and shrewd mind your majesty possesses, aided by your friends, you were able to repel the attacks of that adversary.”

“I!” said the queen. “I suffered, that is all.”

“Yes.” said Mazarin, “as women suffer in avenging themselves. Come, let us come to the point. Do you know Monsieur de Rochefort?”

“One of my bitterest enemies--the faithful friend of Cardinal Richelieu.”

“I know that, and we sent him to the Bastile,” said Mazarin.

“Is he at liberty?” asked the queen.

“No; still there, but I only speak of him in order that I may introduce the name of another man. Do you know Monsieur d’Artagnan?” he added, looking steadfastly at the queen.

Anne of Austria received the blow with a beating heart.

“Has the Gascon been indiscreet?” she murmured to herself, then said aloud:

“D’Artagnan! stop an instant, the name seems certainly familiar. D’Artagnan! there was a musketeer who was in love with one of my women. Poor young creature! she was poisoned on my account.”

“That’s all you know of him?” asked Mazarin.

The queen looked at him, surprised.

“You seem, sir,” she remarked, “to be making me undergo a course of cross-examination.”

“Which you answer according to your fancy,” replied Mazarin.

“Tell me your wishes and I will comply with them.”

The queen spoke with some impatience.

"Well, madame," said Mazarin, bowing, "I desire that you give me a share in your friends, as I have shared with you the little industry and talent that Heaven has given me. The circumstances are grave and it will be necessary to act promptly."

"Still!" said the queen. "I thought that we were finally quit of Monsieur de Beaufort."

"Yes, you saw only the torrent that threatened to overturn everything and you gave no attention to the still water. There is, however, a proverb current in France relating to water which is quiet."

"Continue," said the queen.

"Well, then, madame, not a day passes in which I do not suffer affronts from your princes and your lordly servants, all of them automata who do not perceive that I wind up the spring that makes them move, nor do they see that beneath my quiet demeanor lies the still scorn of an injured, irritated man, who has sworn to himself to master them one of these days. We have arrested Monsieur de Beaufort, but he is the least dangerous among them. There is the Prince de Conde----"

"The hero of Rocroy. Do you think of him?"

"Yes, madame, often and often, but pazienza, as we say in Italy; next, after Monsieur de Conde, comes the Duke of Orleans."

"What are you saying? The first prince of the blood, the king's uncle!"

"No! not the first prince of the blood, not the king's uncle, but the base conspirator, the soul of every cabal, who pretends to lead the brave people who are weak enough to believe in the honor of a prince of the blood--not the prince nearest to the throne, not the king's uncle, I repeat, but the murderer of Chalais, of Montmorency and of Cinq-Mars, who is playing now the same game he played long ago and who thinks that he will win the game because he has a new adversary--instead of a man who threatened, a man who smiles. But he is mistaken; I shall not leave so near the queen that source of discord with which the deceased cardinal so often caused the anger of the king to rage above the boiling point."

Anne blushed and buried her face in her hands.

"What am I to do?" she said, bowed down beneath the voice of her tyrant.

"Endeavor to remember the names of those faithful servants who crossed the Channel, in spite of Monsieur de Richelieu, tracking the roads along which they passed by their blood, to bring back to your majesty certain jewels given by you to Buckingham."

Anne arose, full of majesty, and as if touched by a spring, and looking at the cardinal with the haughty dignity which in the days of her youth had made her so powerful: "You are insulting me!" she said.

"I wish," continued Mazarin, finishing, as it were, the speech this sudden movement of the queen had cut; "I wish, in fact, that you should now do for your husband what you formerly did for your lover."

"Again that accusation!" cried the queen. "I thought that calumny was stifled or extinct; you have spared me till now, but since you speak of it, once for all, I tell you----"

"Madame, I do not ask you to tell me," said Mazarin, astounded by this returning courage.

"I will tell you all," replied Anne. "Listen: there were in truth, at that epoch, four devoted hearts, four loyal spirits, four faithful swords, who saved more than my life--my honor----"

"Ah! you confess it!" exclaimed Mazarin.

"Is it only the guilty whose honor is at the sport of others, sir? and cannot women be dishonored by appearances? Yes, appearances were against me and I was about to suffer dishonor. However, I swear I was not guilty, I swear it by----"

The queen looked around her for some sacred object by which she could swear, and taking out of a cupboard hidden in the tapestry, a small coffer of rosewood set in silver, and laying it on the altar:

"I swear," she said, "by these sacred relics that Buckingham was not my lover."

"What relics are those by which you swear?" asked Mazarin, smiling. "I am incredulous."

The queen untied from around her throat a small golden key which hung there, and presented it to the cardinal.

"Open, sir," she said, "and look for yourself."

Mazarin opened the coffer; a knife, covered with rust, and two letters, one of which was stained with blood, alone met his gaze.

"What are these things?" he asked.

"What are these things?" replied Anne, with queen-like dignity, extending toward the open coffer an arm, despite the lapse of years, still beautiful. "These two letters are the only ones I ever wrote to him. This knife is the knife with which Felton stabbed him. Read the letters and see if I have lied or spoken the truth."

But Mazarin, notwithstanding this permission, instead of reading the letters, took the knife which the dying Buckingham had snatched out of the wound and sent by Laporte to the queen. The blade was red, for the blood had become rust; after a momentary examination during which the queen became as white as the cloth which covered the altar on which she was leaning, he put it back into the coffer with an involuntary shudder.

"It is well, madame, I believe your oath."

"No, no, read," exclaimed the queen, indignantly; "read, I command you, for I am resolved that everything shall be finished to-night and never will I recur to this subject again. Do you think," she said, with a ghastly smile, "that I shall be inclined to reopen this coffer to answer any future accusations?"

Mazarin, overcome by this determination, read the two letters. In one the queen asked for the ornaments back again. This letter had been conveyed by D'Artagnan and had arrived in time. The other was that which Laporte had placed in the hands of the Duke of Buckingham, warning him that he was about to be assassinated; that communication had arrived too late.

"It is well, madame," said Mazarin; "nothing can gainsay such testimony."

"Sir," replied the queen, closing the coffer and leaning her hand upon it, "if there is anything to be said, it is that I have always been ungrateful to the brave men who saved me--that I have given nothing to that gallant officer, D'Artagnan, you were speaking of just now, but my hand to kiss and this diamond."

As she spoke she extended her beautiful hand to the cardinal and showed him a superb diamond which sparkled on her finger.

"It appears," she resumed, "that he sold it---he sold it in order to save me another time--to be able to send a messenger to the duke to warn him of his danger--he sold it to Monsieur des Essarts, on whose finger I remarked it. I bought it from him, but it belongs to D'Artagnan. Give it back to him, sir, and since you have such a man in your service, make him useful."

"Thank you, madame," said Mazarin. "I will profit by the advice."

"And now," added the queen, her voice broken by her emotion, "have you any other question to ask me?"

"Nothing,"--the cardinal spoke in his most conciliatory manner--"except to beg of you to forgive my unworthy suspicions. I love you so tenderly that I cannot help being jealous, even of the past."

A smile, which was indefinable, passed over the lips of the queen.

"Since you have no further interrogations to make, leave me, I beseech you," she said. "I wish, after such a scene, to be alone."

Mazarin bent low before her.

"I will retire, madame. Do you permit me to return?"

"Yes, to-morrow."

The cardinal took the queen's hand and pressed it with an air of gallantry to his lips.

Scarcely had he left her when the queen went into her son's room, and inquired from Laporte if the king was in bed. Laporte pointed to the child, who was asleep.

Anne ascended the steps side of the bed and softly kissed the placid forehead of her son; then she retired as silently as she had come, merely saying to Laporte:

"Try, my dear Laporte, to make the king more courteous to Monsieur le Cardinal, to whom both he and I are under such important obligations."

CHAPTER 5.

The Gascon and the Italian.

Meanwhile the cardinal returned to his own room; and after asking Bernouin, who stood at the door, whether anything had occurred during his absence, and being answered in the negative, he desired that he might be left alone.

When he was alone he opened the door of the corridor and then that of the ante-chamber. There D’Artagnan was asleep upon a bench.

The cardinal went up to him and touched his shoulder. D’Artagnan started, awakened himself, and as he awoke, stood up exactly like a soldier under arms.

“Here I am,” said he. “Who calls me?”

“I,” said Mazarin, with his most smiling expression.

“I ask pardon of your eminence,” said D’Artagnan, “but I was so fatigued----”

“Don’t ask my pardon, monsieur,” said Mazarin, “for you fatigued yourself in my service.”

D’Artagnan admired Mazarin’s gracious manner. “Ah,” said he, between his teeth, “is there truth in the proverb that fortune comes while one sleeps?”

“Follow me, monsieur,” said Mazarin.

“Come, come,” murmured D’Artagnan, “Rochefort has kept his promise, but where in the devil is he?” And he searched the cabinet even to the smallest recesses, but there was no sign of Rochefort.

“Monsieur d’Artagnan,” said the cardinal, sitting down on a fauteuil, “you have always seemed to me to be a brave and honorable man.”

“Possibly,” thought D’Artagnan, “but he has taken a long time to let me know his thoughts;” nevertheless, he bowed to the very ground in gratitude for Mazarin’s compliment.

“Well,” continued Mazarin, “the time has come to put to use your talents and your valor.”

There was a sudden gleam of joy in the officer’s eyes, which vanished immediately, for he knew nothing of Mazarin’s purpose.

“Order, my lord,” he said; “I am ready to obey your eminence.”

“Monsieur d’Artagnan,” continued the cardinal, “you performed sundry superb exploits in the last reign.”

“Your eminence is too good to remember such trifles in my favor. It is true I fought with tolerable success.”

“I don’t speak of your warlike exploits, monsieur,” said Mazarin; “although they gained you much reputation, they were surpassed by others.”

D’Artagnan pretended astonishment.

“Well, you do not reply?” resumed Mazarin.

“I am waiting, my lord, till you tell me of what exploits you speak.”

“I speak of the adventure--Eh, you know well what I mean.”

“Alas, no, my lord!” replied D’Artagnan, surprised.

“You are discreet--so much the better. I speak of that adventure in behalf of the queen, of the ornaments, of the journey you made with three of your friends.”

“Aha!” thought the Gascon; “is this a snare or not? Let me be on my guard.”

And he assumed a look of stupidity which Mendori or Bellerose, two of the first actors of the day, might have envied.

“Bravo!” cried Mazarin; “they told me that you were the man I wanted. Come, let us see what you will do for me.”

“Everything that your eminence may please to command me,” was the reply.

“You will do for me what you have done for the queen?”

“Certainly,” D’Artagnan said to himself, “he wishes to make me speak out. He’s not more cunning than De Richelieu was! Devil take him!” Then he said aloud:

“The queen, my lord? I don’t comprehend.”

“You don’t comprehend that I want you and your three friends to be of use to me?”

“Which of my friends, my lord?”

“Your three friends--the friends of former days.”

“Of former days, my lord! In former days I had not only three friends, I had thirty; at two-and-twenty one calls every man one’s friend.”

“Well, sir,” returned Mazarin, “prudence is a fine thing, but to-day you might regret having been too prudent.”

“My lord, Pythagoras made his disciples keep silence for five years that they might learn to hold their tongues.”

“But you have been silent for twenty years, sir. Speak, now the queen herself releases you from your promise.”

“The queen!” said D’Artagnan, with an astonishment which this time was not pretended.

“Yes, the queen! And as a proof of what I say she commanded me to show you this diamond, which she thinks you know.”

And so saying, Mazarin extended his hand to the officer, who sighed as he recognized the ring so gracefully given to him by the queen on the night of the ball at the Hotel de Ville and which she had repurchased from Monsieur des Essarts.

“‘Tis true. I remember well that diamond, which belonged to the queen.”

“You see, then, that I speak to you in the queen’s name. Answer me without acting as if you were on the stage; your interests are concerned in your so doing.”

“Faith, my lord, it is very necessary for me to make my fortune, your eminence has so long forgotten me.”

“We need only a week to amend all that. Come, you are accounted for, you are here, but where are your friends?”

“I do not know, my lord. We have parted company this long time; all three have left the service.”

“Where can you find them, then?”

“Wherever they are, that’s my business.”

“Well, now, what are your conditions, if I employ you?”

“Money, my lord, as much money as what you wish me to undertake will require. I remember too well how sometimes we were stopped for want of money, and but for that diamond, which I was obliged to sell, we should have remained on the road.”

“The devil he does! Money! and a large sum!” said Mazarin. “Pray, are you aware that the king has no money in his treasury?”

“Do then as I did, my lord. Sell the crown diamonds. Trust me, don’t let us try to do things cheaply. Great undertakings come poorly off with paltry means.”

“Well,” returned Mazarin, “we will satisfy you.”

“Richelieu,” thought D’Artagnan, “would have given me five hundred pistoles in advance.”

“You will then be at my service?” asked Mazarin.

“Yes, if my friends agree.”

“But if they refuse can I count on you?”

“I have never accomplished anything alone,” said D’Artagnan, shaking his head.

“Go, then, and find them.”

“What shall I say to them by way of inducement to serve your eminence?”

“You know them better than I. Adapt your promises to their respective characters.”

“What shall I promise?”

“That if they serve me as well as they served the queen my gratitude shall be magnificent.”

“But what are we to do?”

“Make your mind easy; when the time for action comes you shall be put in full possession of what I require from you; wait till that time arrives and find out your friends.”

“My lord, perhaps they are not in Paris. It is even probable that I shall have to make a journey. I am only a lieutenant of musketeers, very poor, and journeys cost money.

“My intention,” said Mazarin, “is not that you go with a great following; my plans require secrecy, and would be jeopardized by a too extravagant equipment.”

“Still, my lord, I can’t travel on my pay, for it is now three months behind; and I can’t travel on my savings, for in my twenty-two years of service I have accumulated nothing but debts.”

Mazarin remained some moments in deep thought, as if he were fighting with himself; then, going to a large cupboard closed with a triple lock, he took from it a bag of silver, and weighing it twice in his hands before he gave it to D’Artagnan:

“Take this,” he said with a sigh, “‘tis merely for your journey.”

“If these are Spanish doubloons, or even gold crowns,” thought D’Artagnan, “we shall yet be able to do business together.” He saluted the cardinal and plunged the bag into the depths of an immense pocket.

“Well, then, all is settled; you are to set off,” said the cardinal.

"Yes, my lord."

"Apropos, what are the names of your friends?"

"The Count de la Fere, formerly styled Athos; Monsieur du Vallon, whom we used to call Porthos; the Chevalier d'Herblay, now the Abbe d'Herblay, whom we styled Aramis----"

The cardinal smiled.

"Younger sons," he said, "who enlisted in the musketeers under feigned names in order not to lower their family names. Long swords but light purses. Was that it?"

"If, God willing, these swords should be devoted to the service of your eminence," said D'Artagnan, "I shall venture to express a wish, which is, that in its turn the purse of your eminence may become light and theirs heavy--for with these three men your eminence may rouse all Europe if you like."

"These Gascons," said the cardinal, laughing, "almost beat the Italians in effrontery."

"At all events," answered D'Artagnan, with a smile almost as crafty as the cardinal's, "they beat them when they draw their swords."

He then withdrew, and as he passed into the courtyard he stopped near a lamp and dived eagerly into the bag of money.

"Crown pieces only--silver pieces! I suspected it. Ah! Mazarin! Mazarin! thou hast no confidence in me! so much the worse for thee, for harm may come of it!"

Meanwhile the cardinal was rubbing his hands in great satisfaction.

"A hundred pistoles! a hundred pistoles! for a hundred pistoles I have discovered a secret for which Richelieu would have paid twenty thousand crowns; without reckoning the value of that diamond"--he cast a complacent look at the ring, which he had kept, instead of restoring to D'Artagnan--"which is worth, at least, ten thousand francs."

He returned to his room, and after depositing the ring in a casket filled with brilliants of every sort, for the cardinal was a connoisseur in precious stones, he called to Bernouin to undress him, regardless of the noises of gun-fire that, though it was now near midnight, continued to resound through Paris.

In the meantime D'Artagnan took his way toward the Rue Tiquetonne, where he lived at the Hotel de la Chevrette.

We will explain in a few words how D’Artagnan had been led to choose that place of residence.

CHAPTER 6.

D’Artagnan in his Fortieth Year.

Years have elapsed, many events have happened, alas! since, in our romance of “The Three Musketeers,” we took leave of D’Artagnan at No. 12 Rue des Fossoyeurs. D’Artagnan had not failed in his career, but circumstances had been adverse to him. So long as he was surrounded by his friends he retained his youth and the poetry of his character. He was one of those fine, ingenuous natures which assimilate themselves easily to the dispositions of others. Athos imparted to him his greatness of soul, Porthos his enthusiasm, Aramis his elegance. Had D’Artagnan continued his intimacy with these three men he would have become a superior character. Athos was the first to leave him, in order that he might retire to a little property he had inherited near Blois; Porthos, the second, to marry an attorney’s wife; and lastly, Aramis, the third, to take orders and become an abbe. From that day D’Artagnan felt lonely and powerless, without courage to pursue a career in which he could only distinguish himself on condition that each of his three companions should endow him with one of the gifts each had received from Heaven.

Notwithstanding his commission in the musketeers, D’Artagnan felt completely solitary. For a time the delightful remembrance of Madame Bonancieux left on his character a certain poetic tinge, perishable indeed; for like all other recollections in this world, these impressions were, by degrees, effaced. A garrison life is fatal even to the most aristocratic organization; and imperceptibly, D’Artagnan, always in the camp, always on horseback, always in garrison, became (I know not how in the present age one would express it) a typical trooper. His early refinement of character was not only not lost, it grew even greater than ever; but it was now applied to the little, instead of to the great things of life--to the martial condition of the soldier--comprised under the head of a good lodging, a rich table, a congenial hostess. These important advantages D’Artagnan found to his own taste in the Rue Tiquetonne at the sign of the Roe.

From the time D’Artagnan took quarters in that hotel, the mistress of the house, a pretty and fresh looking Flemish woman, twenty-five or twenty-six years old, had been singularly interested in him; and after certain love passages, much obstructed by an inconvenient husband to whom a dozen times D’Artagnan had made a pretence of passing a sword through his body, that husband had disappeared one fine morning, after furtively selling certain choice lots of wine, carrying away with him money and jewels. He was thought to be dead; his wife, especially, who cherished the pleasing idea that she was a widow, stoutly maintained that death had taken him. Therefore, after the connection had continued three years, carefully fostered by D’Artagnan, who found his bed and his mistress more agreeable every year, each doing credit to the other, the mistress conceived the extraordinary desire of becoming a wife and proposed to D’Artagnan that he should marry her.

“Ah, fie!” D’Artagnan replied. “Bigamy, my dear! Come now, you don’t really wish it?”

“But he is dead; I am sure of it.”

“He was a very contrary fellow and might come back on purpose to have us hanged.”

“All right; if he comes back you will kill him, you are so skillful and so brave.”

“Peste! my darling! another way of getting hanged.”

“So you refuse my request?”

“To be sure I do--furiously!”

The pretty landlady was desolate. She would have taken D’Artagnan not only as her husband, but as her God, he was so handsome and had so fierce a mustache.

Then along toward the fourth year came the expedition of Franche-Comte. D’Artagnan was assigned to it and made his preparations to depart. There were then great griefs, tears without end and solemn promises to remain faithful--all of course on the part of the hostess. D’Artagnan was too grand to promise anything; he purposed only to do all that he could to increase the glory of his name.

As to that, we know D’Artagnan’s courage; he exposed himself freely to danger and while charging at the head of his company he received a ball through the chest which laid him prostrate on the field of battle. He had been seen falling from his horse and had not been seen to rise; every one, therefore, believed him to be dead, especially those to whom his death would give promotion. One believes readily what he wishes to believe. Now in the army, from the division-generals who desire the death of the general-in-chief, to the soldiers who desire the death of the corporals, all desire some one's death.

But D'Artagnan was not a man to let himself be killed like that. After he had remained through the heat of the day unconscious on the battle-field, the cool freshness of the night brought him to himself. He gained a village, knocked at the door of the finest house and was received as the wounded are always and everywhere received in France. He was petted, tended, cured; and one fine morning, in better health than ever before, he set out for France. Once in France he turned his course toward Paris, and reaching Paris went straight to Rue Tiquetonne.

But D'Artagnan found in his chamber the personal equipment of a man, complete, except for the sword, arranged along the wall.

"He has returned," said he. "So much the worse, and so much the better!"

It need not be said that D'Artagnan was still thinking of the husband. He made inquiries and discovered that the servants were new and that the mistress had gone for a walk.

"Alone?" asked D'Artagnan.

"With monsieur."

"Monsieur has returned, then?"

"Of course," naively replied the servant.

"If I had any money," said D'Artagnan to himself, "I would go away; but I have none. I must stay and follow the advice of my hostess, while thwarting the conjugal designs of this inopportune apparition."

He had just completed this monologue--which proves that in momentous circumstances nothing is more natural than the monologue--when the servant-maid, watching at the door, suddenly cried out:

"Ah! see! here is madame returning with monsieur."

D'Artagnan looked out and at the corner of Rue Montmartre saw the hostess coming along hanging to the arm of an enormous Swiss, who tiptoed in his walk with a magnificent air which pleasantly reminded him of his old friend Porthos.

"Is that monsieur?" said D'Artagnan to himself. "Oh! oh! he has grown a good deal, it seems to me." And he sat down in the hall, choosing a conspicuous place.

The hostess, as she entered, saw D’Artagnan and uttered a little cry, whereupon D’Artagnan, judging that he had been recognized, rose, ran to her and embraced her tenderly. The Swiss, with an air of stupefaction, looked at the hostess, who turned pale.

“Ah, it is you, monsieur! What do you want of me?” she asked, in great distress.

“Is monsieur your cousin? Is monsieur your brother?” said D’Artagnan, not in the slightest degree embarrassed in the role he was playing. And without waiting for her reply he threw himself into the arms of the Helvetian, who received him with great coldness.

“Who is that man?” he asked.

The hostess replied only by gasps.

“Who is that Swiss?” asked D’Artagnan.

“Monsieur is going to marry me,” replied the hostess, between two gasps.

“Your husband, then, is at last dead?”

“How does that concern you?” replied the Swiss.

“It concerns me much,” said D’Artagnan, “since you cannot marry madame without my consent and since----”

“And since?” asked the Swiss.

“And since--I do not give it,” said the musketeer.

The Swiss became as purple as a peony. He wore his elegant uniform, D’Artagnan was wrapped in a sort of gray cloak; the Swiss was six feet high, D’Artagnan was hardly more than five; the Swiss considered himself on his own ground and regarded D’Artagnan as an intruder.

“Will you go away from here?” demanded the Swiss, stamping violently, like a man who begins to be seriously angry.

“I? By no means!” said D’Artagnan.

“Some one must go for help,” said a lad, who could not comprehend that this little man should make a stand against that other man, who was so large.

D’Artagnan, with a sudden accession of wrath, seized the lad by the ear and led him apart, with the injunction:

“Stay you where you are and don’t you stir, or I will pull this ear off. As for you, illustrious descendant of William Tell, you will straightway get together your clothes which are in my room and which annoy me, and go out quickly to another lodging.”

The Swiss began to laugh boisterously. “I go out?” he said. “And why?”

“Ah, very well!” said D’Artagnan; “I see that you understand French. Come then, and take a turn with me and I will explain.”

The hostess, who knew D’Artagnan’s skill with the sword, began to weep and tear her hair. D’Artagnan turned toward her, saying, “Then send him away, madame.”

“Pooh!” said the Swiss, who had needed a little time to take in D’Artagnan’s proposal, “pooh! who are you, in the first place, to ask me to take a turn with you?”

“I am lieutenant in his majesty’s musketeers,” said D’Artagnan, “and consequently your superior in everything; only, as the question now is not of rank, but of quarters--you know the custom--come and seek for yours; the first to return will recover his chamber.”

D’Artagnan led away the Swiss in spite of lamentations on the part of the hostess, who in reality found her heart inclining toward her former lover, though she would not have been sorry to give a lesson to that haughty musketeer who had affronted her by the refusal of her hand.

It was night when the two adversaries reached the field of battle. D’Artagnan politely begged the Swiss to yield to him the disputed chamber; the Swiss refused by shaking his head, and drew his sword.

“Then you will lie here,” said D’Artagnan. “It is a wretched bed, but that is not my fault, and it is you who have chosen it.” With these words he drew in his turn and crossed swords with his adversary.

He had to contend against a strong wrist, but his agility was superior to all force. The Swiss received two wounds and was not aware of it, by reason of the cold; but suddenly feebleness, occasioned by loss of blood, obliged him to sit down.

“There!” said: D’Artagnan, “what did I tell you? Fortunately, you won’t be laid up more than a fortnight. Remain here and I will send you your clothes by the boy. Good-by! Oh, by the way, you’d better take lodging in the Rue Montorgueil at the Chat Qui Pelote. You will be well fed there, if the hostess remains the same. Adieu.”

Thereupon he returned in a lively mood to his room and sent to the Swiss the things that belonged to him. The boy found him sitting where D’Artagnan had left him, still overwhelmed by the coolness of his adversary.

The boy, the hostess, and all the house had the same regard for D’Artagnan that one would have for Hercules should he return to earth to repeat his twelve labors.

But when he was alone with the hostess he said: “Now, pretty Madeleine, you know the difference between a Swiss and a gentleman. As for you, you have acted like a barmaid. So much the worse for you, for by such conduct you have lost my esteem and my patronage. I have driven away the Swiss to humiliate you, but I shall lodge here no longer. I will not sleep where I must scorn. Ho, there, boy! Have my valise carried to the Muid d’Amour, Rue des Bourdonnais. Adieu, madame.”

In saying these words D’Artagnan appeared at the same time majestic and grieved. The hostess threw herself at his feet, asked his pardon and held him back with a sweet violence. What more need be said? The spit turned, the stove roared, the pretty Madeleine wept; D’Artagnan felt himself invaded by hunger, cold and love. He pardoned, and having pardoned he remained.

And this explains how D’Artagnan had quarters in the Rue Tiquetonne, at the Hotel de la Chevrette.

D’Artagnan then returned home in thoughtful mood, finding a somewhat lively pleasure in carrying Mazarin’s bag of money and thinking of that fine diamond which he had once called his own and which he had seen on the minister’s finger that night.

“Should that diamond ever fall into my hands again,” he reflected, “I would turn it at once into money; I would buy with the proceeds certain lands around my father’s chateau, which is a pretty place, well enough, but with no land to it at all, except a garden about the size of the Cemetery des Innocents; and I should wait in all my glory till some rich heiress, attracted by my good looks, rode along to marry me. Then I should like to have three sons; I should make the first a nobleman, like Athos; the second a good soldier, like Porthos; the third an excellent abbe, like Aramis. Faith! that would be a far better life than I lead now; but Monsieur Mazarin is a mean wretch, who won’t dispossess himself of his diamond in my favor.”

On entering the Rue Tiquetonne he heard a tremendous noise and found a dense crowd near the house.

“Oho!” said he, “is the hotel on fire?” On approaching the hotel of the Roe he found, however, that it was in front of the next house the mob was collected. The people were shouting and running about with torches. By the light of one of these torches D’Artagnan perceived men in uniform.

He asked what was going on.

He was told that twenty citizens, headed by one man, had attacked a carriage which was escorted by a troop of the cardinal’s bodyguard; but a reinforcement having come up, the assailants had been put to flight and the leader had taken refuge in the hotel next to his lodgings; the house was now being searched.

In his youth D’Artagnan had often headed the bourgeoisie against the military, but he was cured of all those hot-headed propensities; besides, he had the cardinal’s hundred pistoles in his pocket, so he went into the hotel without a word. There he found Madeleine alarmed for his safety and anxious to tell him all the events of the evening, but he cut her short by ordering her to put his supper in his room and give him with it a bottle of good Burgundy.

He took his key and candle and went upstairs to his bedroom. He had been contented, for the convenience of the house, to lodge in the fourth story; and truth obliges us even to confess that his chamber was just above the gutter and below the roof. His first care on entering it was to lock up in an old bureau with a new lock his bag of money, and then as soon as supper was ready he sent away the waiter who brought it up and sat down to table.

Not to reflect on what had passed, as one might fancy. No, D’Artagnan considered that things are never well done when they are not reserved to their proper time. He was hungry; he supped, he went to bed. Neither was he one of those who think that the necessary silence of the night brings counsel with it. In the night he slept, but in the morning, refreshed and calm, he was inspired with his clearest views of everything. It was long since he had any reason for his morning’s inspiration, but he always slept all night long. At daybreak he awoke and took a turn around his room.

“In ‘43,” he said, “just before the death of the late cardinal, I received a letter from Athos. Where was I then? Let me see. Oh! at the siege of Besancon I was in the trenches. He told me--let me think--what was it? That he was living on a small estate--but where? I was just reading the name of the place when the wind blew my letter away, I suppose to the Spaniards; there’s no use in thinking any more about Athos. Let me see: with regard to Porthos, I received a letter from him, too. He invited me to a hunting party on his property in the month of September, 1646. Unluckily, as I was then in Bearn, on account of my father’s death, the letter followed me there. I had left Bearn when it arrived and I never received it until the month of

April, 1647; and as the invitation was for September, 1646, I couldn’t accept it. Let me look for this letter; it must be with my title deeds.”

D’Artagnan opened an old casket which stood in a corner of the room, and which was full of parchments referring to an estate during a period of two hundred years lost to his family. He uttered an exclamation of delight, for the large handwriting of Porthos was discernible, and underneath some lines traced by his worthy spouse.

D’Artagnan eagerly searched for the heading of this letter; it was dated from the Chateau du Vallon.

Porthos had forgotten that any other address was necessary; in his pride he fancied that every one must know the Chateau du Vallon.

“Devil take the vain fellow,” said D’Artagnan. “However, I had better find him out first, since he can’t want money. Athos must have become an idiot by this time from drinking. Aramis must have worn himself to a shadow of his former self by constant genuflexion.”

He cast his eyes again on the letter. There was a postscript:

“I write by the same courier to our worthy friend Aramis in his convent.”

“In his convent! What convent? There are about two hundred in Paris and three thousand in France; and then, perhaps, on entering the convent he changed his name. Ah! if I were but learned in theology I should recollect what it was he used to dispute about with the curate of Montdidier and the superior of the Jesuits, when we were at Crevecoeur; I should know what doctrine he leans to and I should glean from that what saint he has adopted as his patron.

“Well, suppose I go back to the cardinal and ask him for a passport into all the convents one can find, even into the nunneries? It would be a curious idea, and maybe I should find my friend under the name of Achilles. But, no! I should lose myself in the cardinal’s opinion. Great people only thank you for doing the impossible; what’s possible, they say, they can effect themselves, and they are right. But let us wait a little and reflect. I received a letter from him, the dear fellow, in which he even asked me for some small service, which, in fact, I rendered him. Yes, yes; but now what did I do with that letter?”

D’Artagnan thought a moment and then went to the wardrobe in which hung his old clothes. He looked for his doublet of the year 1648 and as he had orderly habits, he found it hanging on its nail. He felt in the pocket and drew from it a paper; it was the letter of Aramis:

“Monsieur D’Artagnan: You know that I have had a quarrel with a certain gentleman, who has given me an appointment for this evening in the Place Royale. As I am of the church, and the affair might injure me if I should share it with any other than a sure friend like you, I write to beg that you will serve me as second.

“You will enter by the Rue Neuve Sainte Catherine; under the second lamp on the right you will find your adversary. I shall be with mine under the third.

“Wholly yours,

“Aramis.”

D’Artagnan tried to recall his remembrances. He had gone to the rendezvous, had encountered there the adversary indicated, whose name he had never known, had given him a pretty sword-stroke on the arm, then had gone toward Aramis, who at the same time came to meet him, having already finished his affair. “It is over,” Aramis had said. “I think I have killed the insolent fellow. But, dear friend, if you ever need me you know that I am entirely devoted to you.” Thereupon Aramis had given him a clasp of the hand and had disappeared under the arcades.

So, then, he no more knew where Aramis was than where Athos and Porthos were, and the affair was becoming a matter of great perplexity, when he fancied he heard a pane of glass break in his room window. He thought directly of his bag and rushed from the inner room where he was sleeping. He was not mistaken; as he entered his bedroom a man was getting in by the window.

“Ah! you scoundrel!” cried D’Artagnan, taking the man for a thief and seizing his sword.

“Sir!” cried the man, “in the name of Heaven put your sword back into the sheath and don’t kill me unheard. I’m no thief, but an honest citizen, well off in the world, with a house of my own. My name is--ah! but surely you are Monsieur d’Artagnan?”

“And thou--Planchet!” cried the lieutenant.

“At your service, sir,” said Planchet, overwhelmed with joy; “if I were still capable of serving you.”

“Perhaps so,” replied D’Artagnan. “But why the devil dost thou run about the tops of houses at seven o’clock of the morning in the month of January?”

“Sir,” said Planchet, “you must know; but, perhaps you ought not to know----”

“Tell us what,” returned D’Artagnan, “but first put a napkin against the window and draw the curtains.”

“Sir,” said the prudent Planchet, “in the first place, are you on good terms with Monsieur de Rochefort?”

“Perfectly; one of my dearest friends.”

“Ah! so much the better!”

“But what has De Rochefort to do with this manner you have of invading my room?”

“Ah, sir! I must first tell you that Monsieur de Rochefort is----”

Planchet hesitated.

“Egad, I know where he is,” said D’Artagnan. “He’s in the Bastile.”

“That is to say, he was there,” replied Planchet. “But in returning thither last night, when fortunately you did not accompany him, as his carriage was crossing the Rue de la Ferronnerie his guards insulted the people, who began to abuse them. The prisoner thought this a good opportunity for escape; he called out his name and cried for help. I was there. I heard the name of Rochefort. I remembered him well. I said in a loud voice that he was a prisoner, a friend of the Duc de Beaufort, who called for help. The people were infuriated; they stopped the horses and cut the escort to pieces, whilst I opened the doors of the carriage and Monsieur de Rochefort jumped out and soon was lost amongst the crowd. At this moment a patrol passed by. I was obliged to sound a retreat toward the Rue Tiquetonne; I was pursued and took refuge in the house next to this, where I have been concealed between two mattresses. This morning I ventured to run along the gutters and----”

“Well,” interrupted D’Artagnan, “I am delighted that De Rochefort is free, but as for thee, if thou shouldst fall into the hands of the king’s servants they will hang thee without mercy. Nevertheless, I promise thee thou shalt be hidden here, though I risk by concealing thee neither more nor less than my lieutenancy, if it was found out that I gave one rebel an asylum.”

“Ah! sir, you know well I would risk my life for you.”

“Thou mayst add that thou hast risked it, Planchet. I have not forgotten all I owe thee. Sit down there and eat in security. I see thee cast expressive glances at the remains of my supper.”

“Yes, sir; for all I’ve had since yesterday was a slice of bread and butter, with preserves on it. Although I don’t despise sweet things in proper time and place, I found the supper rather light.”

“Poor fellow!” said D’Artagnan. “Well, come; set to.”

“Ah, sir, you are going to save my life a second time!” cried Planchet.

And he seated himself at the table and ate as he did in the merry days of the Rue des Fossoyeurs, whilst D’Artagnan walked to and fro and thought how he could make use of Planchet under present circumstances. While he turned this over in his mind Planchet did his best to make up for lost time at table. At last he uttered a sigh of satisfaction and paused, as if he had partially appeased his hunger.

“Come,” said D’Artagnan, who thought that it was now a convenient time to begin his interrogations, “dost thou know where Athos is?”

“No, sir,” replied Planchet.

“The devil thou dost not! Dost know where Porthos is?”

“No--not at all.”

“And Aramis?”

“Not in the least.”

“The devil! the devil! the devil!”

“But, sir,” said Planchet, with a look of shrewdness, “I know where Bazin is.”

“Where is he?”

“At Notre Dame.”

“What has he to do at Notre Dame?”

“He is beadle.”

“Bazin beadle at Notre Dame! He must know where his master is!”

“Without a doubt he must.”

D’Artagnan thought for a moment, then took his sword and put on his cloak to go out.

“Sir,” said Planchet, in a mournful tone, “do you abandon me thus to my fate? Think, if I am found out here, the people of the house, who have not seen me enter it, will take me for a thief.”

“True,” said D’Artagnan. “Let’s see. Canst thou speak any patois?”

“I can do something better than that, sir, I can speak Flemish.”

“Where the devil didst thou learn it?”

“In Artois, where I fought for years. Listen, sir. Goeden morgen, mynheer, eth teen begeeray le weeten the ge sond heets omstand.”

"Which means?"

"Good-day, sir! I am anxious to know the state of your health."

"He calls that a language! But never mind, that will do capitally."

D'Artagnan opened the door and called out to a waiter to desire Madeleine to come upstairs.

When the landlady made her appearance she expressed much astonishment at seeing Planchet.

"My dear landlady," said D'Artagnan, "I beg to introduce to you your brother, who is arrived from Flanders and whom I am going to take into my service."

"My brother?"

"Wish your sister good-morning, Master Peter."

"Wilkom, suster," said Planchet.

"Goeden day, broder," replied the astonished landlady.

"This is the case," said D'Artagnan; "this is your brother, Madeleine; you don't know him perhaps, but I know him; he has arrived from Amsterdam. You must dress him up during my absence. When I return, which will be in about an hour, you must offer him to me as a servant, and upon your recommendation, though he doesn't speak a word of French, I take him into my service. You understand?"

"That is to say, I guess your wishes, and that is all that's necessary," said Madeleine.

"You are a precious creature, my pretty hostess, and I am much obliged to you."

The next moment D'Artagnan was on his way to Notre Dame.

CHAPTER 7.

Touches upon the Strange Effects a Half-pistole may have.

D’Artagnan, as he crossed the Pont Neuf, congratulated himself on having found Planchet again, for at that time an intelligent servant was essential to him; nor was he sorry that through Planchet and the situation which he held in Rue des Lombards, a connection with the bourgeoisie might be commenced, at that critical period when that class were preparing to make war with the court party. It was like having a spy in the enemy’s camp. In this frame of mind, grateful for the accidental meeting with Planchet, pleased with himself, D’Artagnan reached Notre Dame. He ran up the steps, entered the church, and addressing a verger who was sweeping the chapel, asked him if he knew Monsieur Bazin.

“Monsieur Bazin, the beadle?” said the verger. “Yes. There he is, attending mass, in the chapel of the Virgin.”

D’Artagnan nearly jumped for joy; he had despaired of finding Bazin, but now, he thought, since he held one end of the thread he would be pretty sure to reach the other end.

He knelt down just opposite the chapel in order not to lose sight of his man; and as he had almost forgotten his prayers and had omitted to take a book with him, he made use of his time in gazing at Bazin.

Bazin wore his dress, it may be observed, with equal dignity and saintly propriety. It was not difficult to understand that he had gained the crown of his ambition and that the silver-mounted wand he brandished was in his eyes as honorable a distinction as the marshal’s baton which Conde threw, or did not throw, into the enemy’s line of battle at Fribourg. His person had undergone a change, analogous to the change in his dress; his figure had grown rotund and, as it were, canonical. The striking points of his face were effaced; he had still a nose, but his cheeks, fattened out, each took a portion of it unto themselves; his chin had joined his throat; his eyes were swelled up with the puffiness of his cheeks; his hair, cut straight in holy guise, covered his forehead as far as his eyebrows.

The officiating priest was just finishing mass whilst D’Artagnan was looking at Bazin; he pronounced the words of the holy Sacrament and retired, giving the benediction, which was received by the kneeling communicants, to the astonishment of D’Artagnan, who recognized in the priest the coadjutor* himself, the famous Jean Francois Gondy, who at that time, having a presentiment of the part he was to play, was beginning to court popularity by almsgiving. It was to this end that he performed from time to time some of those early masses which the common people, generally, alone attended.

** A sacerdotal officer.*

D’Artagnan knelt as well as the rest, received his share of the benediction and made the sign of the cross; but when Bazin passed in his turn, with his eyes raised to Heaven and walking, in all humility, the very last, D’Artagnan pulled him by the hem of his robe.

Bazin looked down and started, as if he had seen a serpent.

“Monsieur d’Artagnan!” he cried; “Vade retro Satanas!”

“So, my dear Bazin!” said the officer, laughing, “this is the way you receive an old friend.”

“Sir,” replied Bazin, “the true friends of a Christian are those who aid him in working out his salvation, not those who hinder him in doing so.”

“I don’t understand you, Bazin; nor can I see how I can be a stumbling-block in the way of your salvation,” said D’Artagnan.

“You forget, sir, that you very nearly ruined forever that of my master; and that it was owing to you that he was very nearly being damned eternally for remaining a musketeer, whilst all the time his true vocation was the church.”

“My dear Bazin, you ought to perceive,” said D’Artagnan, “from the place in which you find me, that I am greatly changed in everything. Age produces good sense, and, as I doubt not but that your master is on the road to salvation, I want you to tell me where he is, that he may help me to mine.”

“Rather say, to take him back with you into the world. Fortunately, I don’t know where he is.”

“How!” cried D’Artagnan; “you don’t know where Aramis is?”

“Formerly,” replied Bazin, “Aramis was his name of perdition. By Aramis is meant Simara, which is the name of a demon. Happily for him he has ceased to bear that name.”

“And therefore,” said D’Artagnan, resolved to be patient to the end, “it is not Aramis I seek, but the Abbe d’Herblay. Come, my dear Bazin, tell me where he is.”

“Didn’t you hear me tell you, Monsieur d’Artagnan, that I don’t know where he is?”

“Yes, certainly; but to that I answer that it is impossible.”

“It is, nevertheless, the truth, monsieur--the pure truth, the truth of the good God.”

D’Artagnan saw clearly that he would get nothing out of this man, who was evidently telling a falsehood in his pretended ignorance of the abode of Aramis, but whose lies were bold and decided.

“Well, Bazin,” said D’Artagnan, “since you do not know where your master lives, let us speak of it no more; let us part good friends. Accept this half-pistole to drink to my health.”

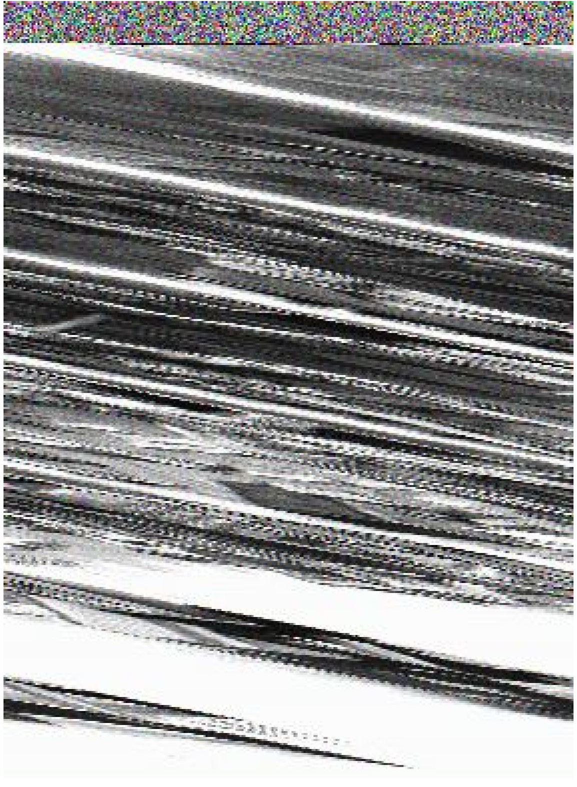

“I do not drink”--Bazin pushed away with dignity the officer’s hand--”‘tis good only for the laity.”

“Incorruptible!” murmured D’Artagnan; “I am unlucky;” and whilst he was lost in thought Bazin retreated toward the sacristy, and even there he could not think himself safe until he had shut and locked the door behind him.

D’Artagnan was still in deep thought when some one touched him on the shoulder. He turned and was about to utter an exclamation of surprise when the other made to him a sign of silence.

“You here, Rochefort?” he said, in a low voice.

“Hush!” returned Rochefort. “Did you know that I am at liberty?”

“I knew it from the fountain-head--from Planchet. And what brought you here?”

“I came to thank God for my happy deliverance,” said Rochefort.

“And nothing more? I suppose that is not all.”

“To take my orders from the coadjutor and to see if we cannot wake up Mazarin a little.”

“A bad plan; you’ll be shut up again in the Bastile.”

“Oh, as to that, I shall take care, I assure you. The air, the fresh, free air is so good; besides,” and Rochefort drew a deep breath as he spoke, “I am going into the country to make a tour.”

“Stop,” cried D’Artagnan; “I, too, am going.”

“And if I may without impertinence ask--where are you going?”

“To seek my friends.”

“What friends?”

“Those that you asked about yesterday.”

“Athos, Porthos and Aramis--you are looking for them?”

“Yes.”

“On honor?”

“What, then, is there surprising in that?”

“Nothing. Queer, though. And in whose behalf are you looking for them?”

“You are in no doubt on that score.”

“That is true.”

“Unfortunately, I have no idea where they are.”

“And you have no way to get news of them? Wait a week and I myself will give you some.”

“A week is too long. I must find them within three days.”

“Three days are a short time and France is large.”

“No matter; you know the word must; with that word great things are done.”

“And when do you set out?”

“I am now on my road.”

“Good luck to you.”

“And to you--a good journey.”

“Perhaps we shall meet on our road.”

“That is not probable.”

“Who knows? Chance is so capricious. Adieu, till we meet again! Apropos, should Mazarin speak to you about me, tell him that I should have requested you to acquaint him that in a short time he will see whether I am, as he says, too old for action.”

And Rochefort went away with one of those diabolical smiles which used formerly to make D’Artagnan shudder, but D’Artagnan could now see it without alarm, and smiling in his turn, with an expression of melancholy which the recollections called up by that smile could, perhaps, alone give to his countenance, he said:

“Go, demon, do what thou wilt! It matters little now to me. There’s no second Constance in the world.”

On his return to the cathedral, D’Artagnan saw Bazin, who was conversing with the sacristan. Bazin was making, with his spare little short arms, ridiculous gestures. D’Artagnan perceived that he was enforcing prudence with respect to himself.

D’Artagnan slipped out of the cathedral and placed himself in ambuscade at the corner of the Rue des Canettes; it was impossible that Bazin should go out of the cathedral without his seeing him.

In five minutes Bazin made his appearance, looking in every direction to see if he were observed, but he saw no one. Calmed by appearances he ventured to walk on through the Rue Notre Dame. Then D’Artagnan rushed out of his hiding place and arrived in time to see Bazin turn down the Rue de la Juiverie and enter, in the Rue de la Calandre, a respectable looking house; and this D’Artagnan felt no doubt was the habitation of the worthy beadle. Afraid of making any inquiries at this house, D’Artagnan entered a small tavern at the corner of the street and asked for a cup of hypocras. This beverage required a good half-hour to prepare. And D’Artagnan had time, therefore, to watch Bazin unsuspected.

He perceived in the tavern a pert boy between twelve and fifteen years of age whom he fancied he had seen not twenty minutes before under the guise of a chorister. He questioned him, and as the boy had no interest in deceiving, D’Artagnan learned that he exercised, from six o’clock in the morning until nine, the office of chorister, and from nine o’clock till midnight that of a waiter in the tavern.

Whilst he was talking to this lad a horse was brought to the door of Bazin’s house. It was saddled and bridled. Almost immediately Bazin came downstairs.

“Look!” said the boy, “there’s our beadle, who is going a journey.”

“And where is he going?” asked D’Artagnan.

“Forsooth, I don’t know.”

“Half a pistole if you can find out,” said D’Artagnan.

“For me?” cried the boy, his eyes sparkling with joy, “if I can find out where Bazin is going? That is not difficult. You are not joking, are you?”

“No, on the honor of an officer; there is the half-pistole;” and he showed him the seductive coin, but did not give it him.

“I shall ask him.”

“Just the very way not to know. Wait till he is set out and then, marry, come up, ask, and find out. The half-pistole is ready,” and he put it back again into his pocket.

“I understand,” said the child, with that jeering smile which marks especially the “gamin de Paris.” “Well, we must wait.”

They had not long to wait. Five minutes afterward Bazin set off on a full trot, urging on his horse by the blows of a parapluie, which he was in the habit of using instead of a riding whip.

Scarcely had he turned the corner of the Rue de la Juiverie when the boy rushed after him like a bloodhound on full scent.

Before ten minutes had elapsed the child returned.

“Well!” said D’Artagnan.

“Well!” answered the boy, “the thing is done.”

“Where is he gone?”

“The half-pistole is for me?”

“Doubtless, answer me.”

“I want to see it. Give it me, that I may see it is not false.”

“There it is.”

The child put the piece of money into his pocket.

“And now, where is he gone?” inquired D’Artagnan.

“He is gone to Noisy.”

“How dost thou know?”

“Ah, faith! there was no great cunning necessary. I knew the horse he rode; it belonged to the butcher, who lets it out now and then to M. Bazin. Now I thought that the butcher would not let his horse out like that without knowing where it was going. And he answered ‘that Monsieur Bazin went to Noisy.’ ‘Tis his custom. He goes two or three times a week.”

“Dost thou know Noisy well?”

“I think so, truly; my nurse lives there.”

“Is there a convent at Noisy?”

“Isn’t there a great and grand one--the convent of Jesuits?”

“What is thy name?”

“Friquet.”

D’Artagnan wrote the child’s name in his tablets.

“Please, sir,” said the boy, “do you think I can gain any more half-pistoles in any way?”

“Perhaps,” replied D’Artagnan.

And having got out all he wanted, he paid for the hypocras, which he did not drink, and went quickly back to the Rue Tiquetonne.

CHAPTER 8.

D’Artagnan, Going to a Distance to discover Aramis.

On entering the hotel D’Artagnan saw a man sitting in a corner by the fire. It was Planchet, but so completely transformed, thanks to the old clothes that the departing husband had left behind, that D’Artagnan himself could hardly recognize him. Madeleine introduced him in presence of all the servants. Planchet addressed the officer with a fine Flemish phrase; the officer replied in words that belonged to no language at all, and the bargain was concluded; Madeleine’s brother entered D’Artagnan’s service.

The plan adopted by D’Artagnan was soon perfected. He resolved not to reach Noisy in the day, for fear of being recognized; he had therefore plenty of time before him, for Noisy is only three or four leagues from Paris, on the road to Meaux.

He began his day by breakfasting substantially--a bad beginning when one wants to employ the head, but an excellent precaution when one wants to work the body; and about two o’clock he had his two horses saddled, and followed by Planchet he quitted Paris by the Barriere de la Villete. A most active search was still prosecuted in the house near the Hotel de la Chevrette for the discovery of Planchet.

At about a league and a half from the city, D’Artagnan, finding that in his impatience he had set out too soon, stopped to give the horses breathing time. The inn was full of disreputable looking people, who seemed as if they were on the point of commencing some nightly expedition. A man, wrapped in a cloak, appeared at the door, but seeing a stranger he beckoned to his companions, and two men who were drinking in the inn went out to speak to him.

D’Artagnan, on his side, went up to the landlady, praised her wine--which was a horrible production from the country of Montreuil--and heard from her that there were only two houses of importance in the village; one of these belonged to the Archbishop of Paris, and was at that time the abode of his niece the Duchess of Longueville; the other was a convent of Jesuits and was the property--a by no means unusual circumstance--of these worthy fathers.

At four o’clock D’Artagnan recommenced his journey. He proceeded slowly and in deep reverie. Planchet also was lost in thought, but the subject of their reflections was not the same.

One word which their landlady had pronounced had given a particular turn to D’Artagnan’s deliberations; this was the name of Madame de Longueville.

That name was indeed one to inspire imagination and produce thought. Madame de Longueville was one of the highest ladies in the realm; she was also one of the greatest beauties at court. She had formerly been suspected of an intimacy of too tender a nature with Coligny, who, for her sake, had been killed in a duel, in the Place Royale, by the Duc de Guise. She was now connected by bonds of a political nature with the Prince de Marsillac, the eldest son of the old Duc de Rochefoucauld, whom she was trying to inspire with an enmity toward the Duc de Conde, her brother-in-law, whom she now hated mortally.

D’Artagnan thought of all these matters. He remembered how at the Louvre he had often seen, as she passed by him in the full radiance of her dazzling charms, the beautiful Madame de Longueville. He thought of Aramis, who, without possessing any greater advantages than himself, had formerly been the lover of Madame de Chevreuse, who had been to a former court what Madame de Longueville was in that day; and he wondered how it was that there should be in the world people who succeed in every wish, some in ambition, others in love, whilst others, either from chance, or from ill-luck, or from some natural defect or impediment, remain half-way upon the road toward fulfilment of their hopes and expectations.

He was confessing to himself that he belonged to the latter unhappy class, when Planchet approached and said:

“I will lay a wager, your honor, that you and I are thinking of the same thing.”

“I doubt it, Planchet,” replied D’Artagnan, “but what are you thinking of?”

“I am thinking, sir, of those desperate looking men who were drinking in the inn where we rested.”

“Always cautious, Planchet.”

“‘Tis instinct, your honor.”

“Well, what does your instinct tell you now?”

“Sir, my instinct told me that those people were assembled there for some bad purpose; and I was reflecting on what my instinct had told me, in the darkest corner of the stable, when a man wrapped in a cloak and followed by two other men, came in.”

“Ah ah!” said D’Artagnan, Planchet’s recital agreeing with his own observations. “Well?”

“One of these two men said, ‘He must certainly be at Noisy, or be coming there this evening, for I have seen his servant.’

“‘Art thou sure?’ said the man in the cloak.

“‘Yes, my prince.’“

“My prince!” interrupted D’Artagnan.

“Yes, ‘my prince;’ but listen. ‘If he is here’--this is what the other man said--’let’s see decidedly what to do with him.’

“‘What to do with him?’ answered the prince.

“‘Yes, he’s not a man to allow himself to be taken anyhow; he’ll defend himself.’

“‘Well, we must try to take him alive. Have you cords to bind him with and a gag to stop his mouth?’

“‘We have.’

“‘Remember that he will most likely be disguised as a horseman.’

“‘Yes, yes, my lord; don’t be uneasy.’

“‘Besides, I shall be there.’

“‘You will assure us that justice----’

“‘Yes, yes! I answer for all that,’ the prince said.

“‘Well, then, we’ll do our best.’ Having said that, they went out of the stable.”

“Well, what matters all that to us?” said D’Artagnan. “This is one of those attempts that happen every day.”

“Are you sure that we are not its objects?”

“We? Why?”

“Just remember what they said. ‘I have seen his servant,’ said one, and that applies very well to me.”

“Well?”

“‘He must certainly be at Noisy, or be coming there this evening,’ said the other; and that applies very well to you.”

“What else?”

"Then the prince said: 'Take notice that in all probability he will be disguised as a cavalier;' which seems to me to leave no room for doubt, since you are dressed as a cavalier and not as an officer of musketeers. Now then, what do you say to that?"

"Alas! my dear Planchet," said D'Artagnan, sighing, "we are unfortunately no longer in those times in which princes would care to assassinate me. Those were good old days; never fear--these people owe us no grudge."

"Is your honor sure?"

"I can answer for it they do not."

"Well, we won't speak of it any more, then;" and Planchet took his place in D'Artagnan's suite with that sublime confidence he had always had in his master, which even fifteen years of separation had not destroyed.

They had traveled onward about half a mile when Planchet came close up to D'Artagnan.

"Stop, sir, look yonder," he whispered; "don't you see in the darkness something pass by, like shadows? I fancy I hear horses' feet."

"Impossible!" returned D'Artagnan. "The ground is soaking wet; yet I fancy, as thou sayest, that I see something."

At this moment the neighing of a horse struck his ear, coming through darkness and space.

"There are men somewhere about, but that's of no consequence to us," said D'Artagnan; "let us ride onward."

At about half-past eight o'clock they reached the first houses in Noisy; every one was in bed and not a light was to be seen in the village. The obscurity was broken only now and then by the still darker lines of the roofs of houses. Here and there a dog barked behind a door or an affrighted cat fled precipitately from the midst of the pavement to take refuge behind a pile of faggots, from which retreat her eyes would shine like peridores. These were the only living creatures that seemed to inhabit the village.

Toward the middle of the town, commanding the principal open space, rose a dark mass, separated from the rest of the world by two lanes and overshadowed in the front by enormous lime-trees. D'Artagnan looked attentively at the building.

"This," he said to Planchet, "must be the archbishop's chateau, the abode of the fair Madame de Longueville; but the convent, where is that?"

“The convent, your honor, is at the other end of the village; I know it well.”

“Well, then, Planchet, gallop up to it whilst I tighten my horse’s girth, and come back and tell me if there is a light in any of the Jesuits’ windows.”

In about five minutes Planchet returned.

“Sir,” he said, “there is one window of the convent lighted up.”

“Hem! If I were a ‘Frondeur,’“ said D’Artagnan, “I should knock here and should be sure of a good supper. If I were a monk I should knock yonder and should have a good supper there, too; whereas, ‘tis very possible that between the castle and the convent we shall sleep on hard beds, dying with hunger and thirst.”

“Yes,” added Planchet, “like the famous ass of Buridan. Shall I knock?”

“Hush!” replied D’Artagnan; “the light no longer burns in yonder window.”

“Do you hear nothing?” whispered Planchet.

“What is that noise?”

There came a sound like a whirlwind, at the same time two troops of horsemen, each composed of ten men, sallied forth from each of the lanes which encompassed the house and surrounded D’Artagnan and Planchet.

“Heyday!” cried D’Artagnan, drawing his sword and taking refuge behind his horse; “are you not mistaken? is it really for us that you mean your attack?”

“Here he is! we have him!” cried the horsemen, rushing on D’Artagnan with naked swords.

“Don’t let him escape!” said a loud voice.

“No, my lord; be assured we shall not.”

D’Artagnan thought it was now time for him to join in the conversation.

“Halloo, gentlemen!” he called out in his Gascon accent, “what do you want? what do you demand?”

“That thou shalt soon know,” shouted a chorus of horsemen.

“Stop, stop!” cried he whom they had addressed as “my lord;” “‘tis not his voice.”

“Ah! just so, gentlemen! pray, do people get into a passion at random at Noisy? Take care, for I warn you that the first man that comes within the length of my sword--and my sword is long--I rip him up.”

The chieftain of the party drew near.

“What are you doing here?” he asked in a lofty tone, as that of one accustomed to command.

“And you--what are you doing here?” replied D’Artagnan.

“Be civil, or I shall beat you; for although one may not choose to proclaim oneself, one insists on respect suitable to one’s rank.”

“You don’t choose to discover yourself, because you are the leader of an ambuscade,” returned D’Artagnan; “but with regard to myself, who am traveling quietly with my own servant, I have not the same reasons as you have to conceal my name.”

“Enough! enough! what is your name?”

“I shall tell you my name in order that you may know where to find me, my lord, or my prince, as it may suit you best to be called,” said our Gascon, who did not choose to seem to yield to a threat. “Do you know Monsieur d’Artagnan?”

“Lieutenant in the king’s musketeers?” said the voice; “you are Monsieur d’Artagnan?”

“I am.”

“Then you came here to defend him?”

“Him? whom?”

“The man we are seeking.”

“It seems,” said D’Artagnan, “that whilst I thought I was coming to Noisy I have entered, without suspecting it, into the kingdom of mysteries.”

“Come,” replied the same lofty tone, “answer! Are you waiting for him underneath these windows? Did you come to Noisy to defend him?”

“I am waiting for no one,” replied D’Artagnan, who was beginning to be angry. “I propose to defend no one but myself, and I shall defend myself vigorously, I give you warning.”

“Very well,” said the voice; “go away from here and leave the place to us.”

“Go away from here!” said D’Artagnan, whose purposes were in conflict with that order, “that is not so easy, since I am on the point of falling, and my horse, too, through fatigue; unless, indeed, you are disposed to offer me a supper and a bed in the neighborhood.”

“Rascal!”

“Eh! monsieur!” said D’Artagnan, “I beg you will have a care what you say; for if you utter another word like that, be you marquis, duke, prince or king, I will thrust it down your throat! do you hear?”

“Well, well,” rejoined the leader, “there’s no doubt ‘tis a Gascon who is speaking, and therefore not the man we are looking for. Our blow has failed for to-night; let us withdraw. We shall meet again, Master d’Artagnan,” continued the leader, raising his voice.

“Yes, but never with the same advantages,” said D’Artagnan, in a tone of raillery; “for when you meet me again you will perhaps be alone and there will be daylight.”

“Very good, very good,” said the voice. “En route, gentlemen.”

And the troop, grumbling angrily, disappeared in the darkness and took the road to Paris. D’Artagnan and Planchet remained for some moments still on the defensive; then, as the noise of the horsemen became more and more distant, they sheathed their swords.

“Thou seest, simpleton,” said D’Artagnan to his servant, “that they wished no harm to us.”

“But to whom, then?”

“I’faith! I neither know nor care. What I do care for now, is to make my way into the Jesuits’ convent; so to horse and let us knock at their door. Happen what will, the devil take them, they can’t eat us.”

And he mounted his horse. Planchet had just done the same when an unexpected weight fell upon the back of the horse, which sank down.

“Hey! your honor!” cried Planchet, “I’ve a man behind me.”

D’Artagnan turned around and plainly saw two human forms on Planchet’s horse.

“‘Tis then the devil that pursues!” he cried; drawing his sword and preparing to attack the new foe.

“No, no, dear D’Artagnan,” said the figure, “‘tis not the devil, ‘tis Aramis; gallop fast, Planchet, and when you come to the end of the village turn swiftly to the left.”

And Planchet, with Aramis behind him, set off at full gallop, followed by D’Artagnan, who began to think he was in the merry maze of some fantastic dream.

CHAPTER 9.

The Abbe D’Herblay.

At the extremity of the village Planchet turned to the left in obedience to the orders of Aramis, and stopped underneath the window which had light in it. Aramis alighted and clapped his hands three times. Immediately the window was opened and a ladder of rope was let down from it.

“My friend,” said Aramis, “if you like to ascend I shall be delighted to receive you.”

“Ah,” said D’Artagnan, “is that the way you return to your apartment?”

“After nine at night, pardieu!” said Aramis, “the rule of the convent is very severe.”

“Pardon me, my dear friend,” said D’Artagnan, “I think you said ‘pardieu!’“

“Do you think so?” said Aramis, smiling; “it is possible. You have no idea, my dear fellow, how one acquires bad habits in these cursed convents, or what evil ways all these men of the church have, with whom I am obliged to live. But will you not go up?”

“Pass on before me, I beg of you.”

“As the late cardinal used to say to the late king, ‘only to show you the way, sire.’“ And Aramis ascended the ladder quickly and reached the window in an instant.

D’Artagnan followed, but less nimbly, showing plainly that this mode of ascent was not one to which he was accustomed.

“I beg your pardon,” said Aramis, noticing his awkwardness; “if I had known that I was to have the honor of your visit I should have procured the gardener’s ladder; but for me alone this is good enough.”

“Sir,” said Planchet when he saw D’Artagnan on the summit of the ladder, “this way is easy for Monsieur Aramis and even for you; in case of necessity I might also climb up, but my two horses cannot mount the ladder.”

“Take them to yonder shed, my friend,” said Aramis, pointing to a low building on the plain; “there you will find hay and straw for them; then come back here and clap your hands three times, and we will give you wine and food. Marry, forsooth, people don’t die of hunger here.”

And Aramis, drawing in the ladder, closed the window. D’Artagnan then looked around attentively.

Never was there an apartment at the same time more warlike and more elegant. At each corner were arranged trophies, presenting to view swords of all sorts, and on the walls hung four great pictures representing in their ordinary military costume the Cardinal de Lorraine, the Cardinal de Richelieu, the Cardinal de la Valette, and the Archbishop of Bordeaux. Exteriorly, nothing in the room showed that it was the habitation of an abbe. The hangings were of damask, the carpets from Alencon, and the bed, especially, had more the look of a fine lady’s couch, with its trimmings of fine lace and its embroidered counterpane, than that of a man who had made a vow that he would endeavor to gain Heaven by fasting and mortification.

“You are examining my den,” said Aramis. “Ah, my dear fellow, excuse me; I am lodged like a Chartreux. But what are you looking for?”

“I am looking for the person who let down the ladder. I see no one and yet the ladder didn’t come down of itself.”

“No, it is Bazin.”

“Ah! ah!” said D’Artagnan.

“But,” continued Aramis, “Bazin is a well trained servant, and seeing that I was not alone he discreetly retired. Sit down, my dear friend, and let us talk.” And Aramis pushed forward a large easy-chair, in which D’Artagnan stretched himself out.

“In the first place, you will sup with me, will you not?” asked Aramis.

“Yes, if you really wish it,” said D’Artagnan, “and even with great pleasure, I confess; the journey has given me a devil of an appetite.”

“Ah, my poor friend!” said Aramis, “you will find meagre fare; you were not expected.”

“Am I then threatened with the omelet of Crevecoeur?”

“Oh, let us hope,” said Aramis, “that with the help of God and of Bazin we shall find something better than that in the larder of the worthy Jesuit fathers. Bazin, my friend, come here.”

The door opened and Bazin entered; on perceiving the musketeer he uttered an exclamation that was almost a cry of despair.

“My dear Bazin,” said D’Artagnan, “I am delighted to see with what wonderful composure you can tell a lie even in church!”

“Sir,” replied Bazin, “I have been taught by the good Jesuit fathers that it is permitted to tell a falsehood when it is told in a good cause.”

“So far well,” said Aramis; “we are dying of hunger. Serve us up the best supper you can, and especially give us some good wine.”

Bazin bowed low, sighed, and left the room.

“Now we are alone, dear Aramis,” said D’Artagnan, “tell me how the devil you managed to alight upon the back of Planchet’s horse.”

“I’faith!” answered Aramis, “as you see, from Heaven.”

“From Heaven,” replied D’Artagnan, shaking his head; “you have no more the appearance of coming from thence than you have of going there.”

“My friend,” said Aramis, with a look of imbecility on his face which D’Artagnan had never observed whilst he was in the musketeers, “if I did not come from Heaven, at least I was leaving Paradise, which is almost the same.”

“Here, then, is a puzzle for the learned,” observed D’Artagnan, “until now they have never been able to agree as to the situation of Paradise; some place it on Mount Ararat, others between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates; it seems that they have been looking very far away for it, while it was actually very near. Paradise is at Noisy le Sec, upon the site of the archbishop’s chateau. People do not go out from it by the door, but by the window; one doesn’t descend here by the marble steps of a peristyle, but by the branches of a lime-tree; and the angel with a flaming sword who guards this elysium seems to have changed his celestial name of Gabriel into that of the more terrestrial one of the Prince de Marsillac.”

Aramis burst into a fit of laughter.

“You were always a merry companion, my dear D’Artagnan,” he said, “and your witty Gascon fancy has not deserted you. Yes, there is something in what you say; nevertheless, do not believe that it is Madame de Longueville with whom I am in love.”

“A plague on’t! I shall not do so. After having been so long in love with Madame de Chevreuse, you would hardly lay your heart at the feet of her mortal enemy!”

“Yes,” replied Aramis, with an absent air; “yes, that poor duchess! I once loved her much, and to do her justice, she was very useful to us. Eventually she was obliged to leave France. He was a relentless enemy, that damned cardinal," continued Aramis, glancing at the portrait of the old minister. "He had even given orders to arrest her and would have cut off her head had she not escaped with her waiting-maid--poor Kitty! I have heard that she met with a strange adventure in I don't know what village, with I don't know what cure, of whom she asked hospitality and who, having but one chamber, and taking her for a cavalier, offered to share it with her. For she had a wonderful way of dressing as a man, that dear Marie; I know only one other woman who can do it as well. So they made this song about her: 'Laboissiere, dis moi.' You know it, don't you?"

"No, sing it, please."

Aramis immediately complied, and sang the song in a very lively manner.

"Bravo!" cried D'Artagnan, "you sing charmingly, dear Aramis. I do not perceive that singing masses has spoiled your voice."

"My dear D'Artagnan," replied Aramis, "you understand, when I was a musketeer I mounted guard as seldom as I could; now when I am an abbe I say as few masses as I can. But to return to our duchess."

"Which--the Duchess de Chevreuse or the Duchess de Longueville?"

"Have I not already told you that there is nothing between me and the Duchess de Longueville? Little flirtations, perhaps, and that's all. No, I spoke of the Duchess de Chevreuse; did you see her after her return from Brussels, after the king's death?"

"Yes, she is still beautiful."

"Yes," said Aramis, "I saw her also at that time. I gave her good advice, by which she did not profit. I ventured to tell her that Mazarin was the lover of Anne of Austria. She wouldn't believe me, saying that she knew Anne of Austria, who was too proud to love such a worthless coxcomb. After that she plunged into the cabal headed by the Duke of Beaufort; and the 'coxcomb' arrested De Beaufort and banished Madame de Chevreuse."

"You know," resumed D'Artagnan, "that she has had leave to return to France?"

"Yes she is come back and is going to commit some fresh folly or another."

"Oh, but this time perhaps she will follow your advice."

"Oh, this time," returned Aramis, "I haven't seen her; she is much changed."

"In that respect unlike you, my dear Aramis, for you are still the same; you have still your beautiful dark hair, still your elegant figure, still your feminine hands, which are admirably suited to a prelate.”

“Yes,” replied Aramis, “I am extremely careful of my appearance. Do you know that I am growing old? I am nearly thirty-seven.”

“Mind, Aramis”--D’Artagnan smiled as he spoke--”since we are together again, let us agree on one point: what age shall we be in future?”

“How?”

“Formerly I was your junior by two or three years, and if I am not mistaken I am turned forty years old.”

“Indeed! Then ‘tis I who am mistaken, for you have always been a good chronologist. By your reckoning I must be forty-three at least. The devil I am! Don’t let it out at the Hotel Rambouillet; it would ruin me,” replied the abbe.

“Don’t be afraid,” said D’Artagnan. “I never go there.”

“Why, what in the world,” cried Aramis, “is that animal Bazin doing? Bazin! Hurry up there, you rascal; we are mad with hunger and thirst!”

Bazin entered at that moment carrying a bottle in each hand.

“At last,” said Aramis, “we are ready, are we?”

“Yes, monsieur, quite ready,” said Bazin; “but it took me some time to bring up all the----”

“Because you always think you have on your shoulders your beadle’s robe, and spend all your time reading your breviary. But I give you warning that if in polishing your chapel utensils you forget how to brighten up my sword, I will make a great fire of your blessed images and will see that you are roasted on it.”

Bazin, scandalized, made a sign of the cross with the bottle in his hand. D’Artagnan, more surprised than ever at the tone and manners of the Abbe d’Herblay, which contrasted so strongly with those of the Musketeer Aramis, remained staring with wide-open eyes at the face of his friend.

Bazin quickly covered the table with a damask cloth and arranged upon it so many things, gilded, perfumed, appetizing, that D’Artagnan was quite overcome.

“But you expected some one then?” asked the officer.

“Oh,” said Aramis, “I always try to be prepared; and then I knew you were seeking me.”

“From whom?”

“From Master Bazin, to be sure; he took you for the devil, my dear fellow, and hastened to warn me of the danger that threatened my soul if I should meet again a companion so wicked as an officer of musketeers."

"Oh, monsieur!" said Bazin, clasping his hands supplicatingly.

"Come, no hypocrisy! you know that I don't like it. You will do much better to open the window and let down some bread, a chicken and a bottle of wine to your friend Planchet, who has been this last hour killing himself clapping his hands."

Planchet, in fact, had bedded and fed his horses, and then coming back under the window had repeated two or three times the signal agreed upon.

Bazin obeyed, fastened to the end of a cord the three articles designated and let them down to Planchet, who then went satisfied to his shed.

"Now to supper," said Aramis.

The two friends sat down and Aramis began to cut up fowls, partridges and hams with admirable skill.

"The deuce!" cried D'Artagnan; "do you live in this way always?"

"Yes, pretty well. The coadjutor has given me dispensations from fasting on the jours maigres, on account of my health; then I have engaged as my cook the cook who lived with Lafollone--you know the man I mean?--the friend of the cardinal, and the famous epicure whose grace after dinner used to be, 'Good Lord, do me the favor to cause me to digest what I have eaten.'"

"Nevertheless he died of indigestion, in spite of his grace," said D'Artagnan.

"What can you expect?" replied Aramis, in a tone of resignation. "Every man that's born must fulfil his destiny."

"If it be not an indelicate question," resumed D'Artagnan, "have you grown rich?"

"Oh, Heaven! no. I make about twelve thousand francs a year, without counting a little benefice of a thousand crowns the prince gave me."

"And how do you make your twelve thousand francs? By your poems?"

"No, I have given up poetry, except now and then to write a drinking song, some gay sonnet or some innocent epigram; I compose sermons, my friend."

"What! sermons? Do you preach them?"

"No; I sell them to those of my cloth who wish to become great orators."

"Ah, indeed! and you have not been tempted by the hopes of reputation yourself?"

“I should, my dear D’Artagnan, have been so, but nature said ‘No.’ When I am in the pulpit, if by chance a pretty woman looks at me, I look at her again: if she smiles, I smile too. Then I speak at random; instead of preaching about the torments of hell I talk of the joys of Paradise. An event took place in the Church of St. Louis au Marais. A gentleman laughed in my face. I stopped short to tell him that he was a fool; the congregation went out to get stones to stone me with, but whilst they were away I found means to conciliate the priests who were present, so that my foe was pelted instead of me. ‘Tis true that he came the next morning to my house, thinking that he had to do with an abbe--like all other abbes.”

“And what was the end of the affair?”

“We met in the Place Royale--Egad! you know about it.”

“Was I not your second?” cried D’Artagnan.

“You were; you know how I settled the matter.”

“Did he die?”

“I don’t know. But, at all events, I gave him absolution in articulo mortis. ‘Tis enough to kill the body, without killing the soul.”

Bazin made a despairing sign which meant that while perhaps he approved the moral he altogether disapproved the tone in which it was uttered.

“Bazin, my friend,” said Aramis, “you don’t seem to be aware that I can see you in that mirror, and you forget that once for all I have forbidden all signs of approbation or disapprobation. You will do me the favor to bring us some Spanish wine and then to withdraw. Besides, my friend D’Artagnan has something to say to me privately, have you not, D’Artagnan?”

D’Artagnan nodded his head and Bazin retired, after placing on the table the Spanish wine.

The two friends, left alone, remained silent, face to face. Aramis seemed to await a comfortable digestion; D’Artagnan, to be preparing his exordium. Each of them, when the other was not looking, hazarded a sly glance. It was Aramis who broke the silence.

“What are you thinking of, D’Artagnan?” he began.

“I was thinking, my dear old friend, that when you were a musketeer you turned your thoughts incessantly to the church, and now that you are an abbe you are perpetually longing to be once more a musketeer.”

“‘Tis true; man, as you know,” said Aramis, “is a strange animal, made up of contradictions. Since I became an abbe I dream of nothing but battles.”

“That is apparent in your surroundings; you have rapiers here of every form and to suit the most exacting taste. Do you still fence well?”

“I--I fence as well as you did in the old time--better still, perhaps; I do nothing else all day.”

“And with whom?”

“With an excellent master-at-arms that we have here.”

“What! here?”

“Yes, here, in this convent, my dear fellow. There is everything in a Jesuit convent.”

“Then you would have killed Monsieur de Marsillac if he had come alone to attack you, instead of at the head of twenty men?”

“Undoubtedly,” said Aramis, “and even at the head of his twenty men, if I could have drawn without being recognized.”

“God pardon me!” said D’Artagnan to himself, “I believe he has become more Gascon than I am!” Then aloud: “Well, my dear Aramis, do you ask me why I came to seek you?”

“No, I have not asked you that,” said Aramis, with his subtle manner; “but I have expected you to tell me.”

“Well, I sought you for the single purpose of offering you a chance to kill Monsieur de Marsillac whenever you please, prince though he is.”

“Hold on! wait!” said Aramis; “that is an idea!”

“Of which I invite you to take advantage, my friend. Let us see; with your thousand crowns from the abbey and the twelve thousand francs you make by selling sermons, are you rich? Answer frankly.”

“I? I am as poor as Job, and were you to search my pockets and my boxes I don’t believe you would find a hundred pistoles.”

“Peste! a hundred pistoles!” said D’Artagnan to himself; “he calls that being as poor as Job! If I had them I should think myself as rich as Croesus.” Then aloud: “Are you ambitious?”

“As Enceladus.”

“Well, my friend, I bring you the means of becoming rich, powerful, and free to do whatever you wish.”

The shadow of a cloud passed over Aramis’s face as quickly as that which in August passes over the field of grain; but quick as it was, it did not escape D’Artagnan’s observation.

“Speak on,” said Aramis.

“One question first. Do you take any interest in politics?”

A gleam of light shone in Aramis’s eyes, as brief as the shadow that had passed over his face, but not so brief but that it was seen by D’Artagnan.

“No,” Aramis replied.

“Then proposals from any quarter will be agreeable to you, since for the moment you have no master but God?”

“It is possible.”

“Have you, my dear Aramis, thought sometimes of those happy, happy, happy days of youth we passed laughing, drinking, and fighting each other for play?”

“Certainly, and more than once regretted them; it was indeed a glorious time.”

“Well, those splendidly wild days may chance to come again; I am commissioned to find out my companions and I began by you, who were the very soul of our society.”

Aramis bowed, rather with respect than pleasure at the compliment.

“To meddle in politics,” he exclaimed, in a languid voice, leaning back in his easy-chair. “Ah! dear D’Artagnan! see how regularly I live and how easy I am here. We have experienced the ingratitude of ‘the great,’ as you well know.”

“‘Tis true,” replied D’Artagnan. “Yet the great sometimes repent of their ingratitude.”

“In that case it would be quite another thing. Come! let’s be merciful to every sinner! Besides, you are right in another respect, which is in thinking that if we were to meddle in politics there could not be a better time than the present.”

“How can you know that? You who never interest yourself in politics?”

“Ah! without caring about them myself, I live among those who are much occupied in them. Poet as I am, I am intimate with Sarazin, who is devoted to the Prince de Conti, and with Monsieur de Bois-Robert, who, since the death of Cardinal Richelieu, is of all parties or any party; so that political discussions have not altogether been uninteresting to me.”

“I have no doubt of it,” said D’Artagnan.

“Now, my dear friend, look upon all I tell you as merely the statement of a monk--of a man who resembles an echo--repeating simply what he hears. I understand that Mazarin is at this very moment extremely uneasy as to the state of affairs; that his orders are not respected like those of our former bugbear, the deceased cardinal, whose portrait as you see hangs yonder--for whatever may be thought of him, it must be allowed that Richelieu was great."

"I will not contradict you there," said D'Artagnan.

"My first impressions were favorable to the minister; I said to myself that a minister is never loved, but that with the genius this one was said to have he would eventually triumph over his enemies and would make himself feared, which in my opinion is much more to be desired than to be loved----"

D'Artagnan made a sign with his head which indicated that he entirely approved that doubtful maxim.

"This, then," continued Aramis, "was my first opinion; but as I am very ignorant in matters of this kind and as the humility which I profess obliges me not to rest on my own judgment, but to ask the opinion of others, I have inquired--Eh!--my friend----"

Aramis paused.

"Well? what?" asked his friend.

"Well, I must mortify myself. I must confess that I was mistaken. Monsieur de Mazarin is not a man of genius, as I thought, he is a man of no origin--once a servant of Cardinal Bentivoglio, and he got on by intrigue. He is an upstart, a man of no name, who will only be the tool of a party in France. He will amass wealth, he will injure the king's revenue and pay to himself the pensions which Richelieu paid to others. He is neither a gentleman in manner nor in feeling, but a sort of buffoon, a punchinello, a pantaloon. Do you know him? I do not."

"Hem!" said D'Artagnan, "there is some truth in what you say."

"Ah! it fills me with pride to find that, thanks to a common sort of penetration with which I am endowed, I am approved by a man like you, fresh from the court."

"But you speak of him, not of his party, his resources."

"It is true--the queen is for him."

"Something in his favor."

"But he will never have the king."

"A mere child."

"A child who will be of age in four years. Then he has neither the parliament nor the people with him--they represent the wealth of the country; nor the nobles nor the princes, who are the military power of France."

D'Artagnan scratched his ear. He was forced to confess to himself that this reasoning was not only comprehensive, but just.

"You see, my poor friend, that I am sometimes bereft of my ordinary thoughtfulness; perhaps I am wrong in speaking thus to you, who have evidently a leaning to Mazarin."

"I!" cried D'Artagnan, "not in the least."

"You spoke of a mission."

"Did I? I was wrong then, no, I said what you say--there is a crisis at hand. Well! let's fly the feather before the wind; let us join with that side to which the wind will carry it and resume our adventurous life. We were once four valiant knights--four hearts fondly united; let us unite again, not our hearts, which have never been severed, but our courage and our fortunes. Here's a good opportunity for getting something better than a diamond."

"You are right, D'Artagnan; I held a similar project, but as I had not nor ever shall have your fruitful, vigorous imagination, the idea was suggested to me. Every one nowadays wants auxiliaries; propositions have been made to me and I confess to you frankly that the coadjutor has made me speak out."

"Monsieur de Gondy! the cardinal's enemy?"

"No; the king's friend," said Aramis; "the king's friend, you understand. Well, it is a question of serving the king, the gentleman's duty."

"But the king is with Mazarin."

"He is, but not willingly; in appearance, not heart; and that is exactly the snare the king's enemies are preparing for the poor child."

"Ah! but this is, indeed, civil war which you propose to me, dear Aramis."

"War for the king."

"Yet the king will be at the head of the army on Mazarin's side."

"But his heart will be in the army commanded by the Duc de Beaufort."

"Monsieur de Beaufort? He is at Vincennes."

"Did I say Monsieur de Beaufort? Monsieur de Beaufort or another. Monsieur de Beaufort or Monsieur le Prince."

"But Monsieur le Prince is to set out for the army; he is entirely devoted to the cardinal."

“Oh oh!” said Aramis, “there are questions between them at this very moment. And besides, if it is not the prince, then Monsieur de Gondy----”

“But Monsieur de Gondy is to be made a cardinal; they are soliciting the hat for him.”

“And are there no cardinals that can fight? Come now, recall the four cardinals that at the head of armies have equalled Monsieur de Guebriant and Monsieur de Gassion.”

“But a humpbacked general!

“Under the cuirass the hump will not be seen. Besides, remember that Alexander was lame and Hannibal had but one eye.”

“Do you see any great advantage in adhering to this party?” asked D’Artagnan.

“I foresee in it the aid of powerful princes.”

“With the enmity of the government.”

“Counteracted by parliament and insurrections.”

“That may be done if they can separate the king from his mother.”

“That may be done,” said Aramis.

“Never!” cried D’Artagnan. “You, Aramis, know Anne of Austria better than I do. Do you think she will ever forget that her son is her safeguard, her shield, the pledge for her dignity, for her fortune and her life? Should she forsake Mazarin she must join her son and go over to the princes’ side; but you know better than I do that there are certain reasons why she can never abandon Mazarin.”

“Perhaps you are right,” said Aramis, thoughtfully; “therefore I shall not pledge myself.”

“To them or to us, do you mean, Aramis?”

“To no one. I am a priest,” resumed Aramis. “What have I to do with politics? I am not obliged to read any breviary. I have a jolly little circle of witty abbes and pretty women; everything goes on smoothly, so certainly, dear friend, I shall not meddle in politics.”

“Well, listen, my dear Aramis,” said D’Artagnan; “your philosophy convinces me, on my honor. I don’t know what devil of an insect stung me and made me ambitious. I have a post by which I live; at the death of Monsieur de Treville, who is old, I may be a captain, which is a very snug berth for a once penniless Gascon. Instead of running after adventures I shall accept an invitation from Porthos; I shall go and shoot on his estate. You know he has estates--Porthos?”

“I should think so, indeed. Ten leagues of wood, of marsh land and valleys; he is lord of the hill and the plain and is now carrying on a suit for his feudal rights against the Bishop of Noyon!”

“Good,” said D’Artagnan to himself. “That’s what I wanted to know. Porthos is in Picardy.”

Then aloud:

“And he has taken his ancient name of Vallon?”

“To which he adds that of Bracieux, an estate which has been a barony, by my troth.”

“So that Porthos will be a baron.”

“I don’t doubt it. The ‘Baroness Porthos’ will sound particularly charming.”

And the two friends began to laugh.

“So,” D’Artagnan resumed, “you will not become a partisan of Mazarin’s?”

“Nor you of the Prince de Conde?”

“No, let us belong to no party, but remain friends; let us be neither Cardinalists nor Frondists.”

“Adieu, then.” And D’Artagnan poured out a glass of wine.

“To old times,” he said.

“Yes,” returned Aramis. “Unhappily, those times are past.”

“Nonsense! They will return,” said D’Artagnan. “At all events, if you want me, remember the Rue Tiquetonne, Hotel de la Chevrette.”

“And I shall be at the convent of Jesuits; from six in the morning to eight at night come by the door. From eight in the evening until six in the morning come in by the window.”

“Adieu, dear friend.”

“Oh, I can’t let you go so! I will go with you.” And he took his sword and cloak.

“He wants to be sure that I go away,” said D’Artagnan to himself.

Aramis whistled for Bazin, but Bazin was asleep in the ante-chamber, and Aramis was obliged to shake him by the ear to awake him.

Bazin stretched his arms, rubbed his eyes, and tried to go to sleep again.

“Come, come, sleepy head; quick, the ladder!”

“But,” said Bazin, yawning portentously, “the ladder is still at the window.”

“The other one, the gardener’s. Didn’t you see that Monsieur d’Artagnan mounted with difficulty? It will be even more difficult to descend.”

D’Artagnan was about to assure Aramis that he could descend easily, when an idea came into his head which silenced him.

Bazin uttered a profound sigh and went out to look for the ladder. Presently a good, solid, wooden ladder was placed against the window.

“Now then,” said D’Artagnan, “this is something like; this is a means of communication. A woman could go up a ladder like that.”

Aramis’s searching look seemed to seek his friend’s thought even at the bottom of his heart, but D’Artagnan sustained the inquisition with an air of admirable simplicity. Besides, at that moment he put his foot on the first step of the ladder and began his descent. In a moment he was on the ground. Bazin remained at the window.

“Stay there,” said Aramis; “I shall return immediately.”

The two friends went toward the shed. At their approach Planchet came out leading the two horses.

“That is good to see,” said Aramis. “There is a servant active and vigilant, not like that lazy fellow Bazin, who is no longer good for anything since he became connected with the church. Follow us, Planchet; we shall continue our conversation to the end of the village.”

They traversed the width of the village, talking of indifferent things, then as they reached the last houses:

“Go, then, dear friend,” said Aramis, “follow your own career. Fortune lavishes her smiles upon you; do not let her flee from your embrace. As for me, I remain in my humility and indolence. Adieu!”

“Thus ‘tis quite decided,” said D’Artagnan, “that what I have to offer to you does not tempt you?”

“On the contrary, it would tempt me were I any other man,” rejoined Aramis; “but I repeat, I am made up of contradictions. What I hate to-day I adore to-morrow, and vice versa. You see that I cannot, like you, for instance, settle on any fixed plan.”

“Thou liest, subtile one,” said D’Artagnan to himself. “Thou alone, on the contrary, knowest how to choose thy object and to gain it stealthily.”

The friends embraced. They descended into the plain by the ladder. Planchet met them hard by the shed. D’Artagnan jumped into the saddle, then the old companions in arms again shook hands. D’Artagnan and Planchet spurred their steeds and took the road to Paris.

But after he had gone about two hundred steps D’Artagnan stopped short, alighted, threw the bridle of his horse over the arm of Planchet and took the pistols from his saddle-bow to fasten them to his girdle.

“What’s the matter?” asked Planchet.

“This is the matter: be he ever so cunning he shall never say I was his dupe. Stand here, don’t stir, turn your back to the road and wait for me.”

Having thus spoken, D’Artagnan cleared the ditch by the roadside and crossed the plain so as to wind around the village. He had observed between the house that Madame de Longueville inhabited and the convent of the Jesuits, an open space surrounded by a hedge.

The moon had now risen and he could see well enough to retrace his road.

He reached the hedge and hid himself behind it; in passing by the house where the scene which we have related took place, he remarked that the window was again lighted up and he was convinced that Aramis had not yet returned to his own apartment and that when he did it would not be alone.

In truth, in a few minutes he heard steps approaching and low whispers.

Close to the hedge the steps stopped.

D’Artagnan knelt down near the thickest part of the hedge.

Two men, to the astonishment of D’Artagnan, appeared shortly; soon, however, his surprise vanished, for he heard the murmurs of a soft, harmonious voice; one of these two men was a woman disguised as a cavalier.

“Calm yourself, dear Rene,” said the soft voice, “the same thing will never happen again. I have discovered a sort of subterranean passage which runs beneath the street and we shall only have to raise one of the marble slabs before the door to open you an entrance and an outlet.”

“Oh!” answered another voice, which D’Artagnan instantly recognized as that of Aramis. “I swear to you, princess, that if your reputation did not depend on precautions and if my life alone were jeopardized----”

“Yes, yes! I know you are as brave and venturesome as any man in the world, but you do not belong to me alone; you belong to all our party. Be prudent! sensible!”

“I always obey, madame, when I am commanded by so gentle a voice.”

He kissed her hand tenderly.

“Ah!” exclaimed the cavalier with a soft voice.

“What’s the matter?” asked Aramis.

“Do you not see that the wind has blown off my hat?”

Aramis rushed after the fugitive hat. D’Artagnan took advantage of the circumstance to find a place in the hedge not so thick, where his glance could penetrate to the supposed cavalier. At that instant, the moon, inquisitive, perhaps, like D’Artagnan, came from behind a cloud and by her light D’Artagnan recognized the large blue eyes, the golden hair and the classic head of the Duchess de Longueville.

Aramis returned, laughing, one hat on his head and the other in his hand; and he and his companion resumed their walk toward the convent.

“Good!” said D’Artagnan, rising and brushing his knees; “now I have thee--thou art a Frondeur and the lover of Madame de Longueville.”

CHAPTER 10.

Monsieur Porthos du Vallon de Bracieux de Pierrefonds.

Thanks to what Aramis had told him, D’Artagnan, who knew already that Porthos called himself Du Vallon, was now aware that he styled himself, from his estate, De Bracieux; and that he was, on account of this estate, engaged in a lawsuit with the Bishop of Noyon. It was, then, in the neighborhood of Noyon that he must seek that estate. His itinerary was promptly determined: he would go to Dammartin, from which place two roads diverge, one toward Soissons, the other toward Compiegne; there he would inquire concerning the Bracieux estate and go to the right or to the left according to the information obtained.

Planchet, who was still a little concerned for his safety after his recent escapade, declared that he would follow D’Artagnan even to the end of the world, either by the road to the right or by that to the left; only he begged his former master to set out in the evening, for greater security to himself. D’Artagnan suggested that he should send word to his wife, so that she might not be anxious about him, but Planchet replied with much sagacity that he was very sure his wife would not die of anxiety through not knowing where he was, while he, Planchet, remembering her incontinence of tongue, would die of anxiety if she did know.

This reasoning seemed to D’Artagnan so satisfactory that he no further insisted; and about eight o’clock in the evening, the time when the vapors of night begin to thicken in the streets, he left the Hotel de la Chevrette, and followed by Planchet set forth from the capital by way of the Saint Denis gate.

At midnight the two travelers were at Dammartin, but it was then too late to make inquiries--the host of the Cygne de la Croix had gone to bed.

The next morning D’Artagnan summoned the host, one of those sly Normans who say neither yes nor no and fear to commit themselves by giving a direct answer. D’Artagnan, however, gathered from his equivocal replies that the road to the right was the one he ought to take, and on that uncertain information he resumed his journey. At nine in the morning he reached Nanteuil and stopped for breakfast. His host here was a good fellow from Picardy, who gave him all the information he needed. The Bracieux estate was a few leagues from Villars-Cotterets.

D’Artagnan was acquainted with Villars-Cotterets, having gone thither with the court on several occasions; for at that time Villars-Cotterets was a royal residence. He therefore shaped his course toward that place and dismounted at the Dauphin d’Or. There he ascertained that the Bracieux estate was four leagues distant, but that Porthos was not at Bracieux. Porthos had, in fact, been involved in a dispute with the Bishop of Noyon in regard to the Pierrefonds property, which adjoined his own, and weary at length of a legal controversy which was beyond his comprehension, he put an end to it by purchasing Pierrefonds and added that name to his others. He now called himself Du Vallon de Bracieux de Pierrefonds, and resided on his new estate.

The travelers were therefore obliged to stay at the hotel until the next day; the horses had done ten leagues that day and needed rest. It is true they might have taken others, but there was a great forest to pass through and Planchet, as we have seen, had no liking for forests after dark.

There was another thing that Planchet had no liking for and that was starting on a journey with a hungry stomach. Accordingly, D’Artagnan, on awaking, found his breakfast waiting for him. It need not be said that Planchet in resuming his former functions resumed also his former humility and was not ashamed to make his breakfast on what was left by D’Artagnan.

It was nearly eight o’clock when they set out again. Their course was clearly defined: they were to follow the road toward Compiegne and on emerging from the forest turn to the right.

The morning was beautiful, and in this early springtime the birds sang on the trees and the sunbeams shone through the misty glades, like curtains of golden gauze.

In other parts of the forest the light could scarcely penetrate through the foliage, and the stems of two old oak trees, the refuge of the squirrel, startled by the travelers, were in deep shadow.

There came up from all nature in the dawn of day a perfume of herbs, flowers and leaves, which delighted the heart. D’Artagnan, sick of the closeness of Paris, thought that when a man had three names of his different estates joined one to another, he ought to be very happy in such a paradise;

then he shook his head, saying, “If I were Porthos and D’Artagnan came to make me such a proposition as I am going to make to him, I know what I should say to it.”

As to Planchet, he thought of little or nothing, but was happy as a hunting-hound in his old master’s company.

At the extremity of the wood D’Artagnan perceived the road that had been described to him, and at the end of the road he saw the towers of an immense feudal castle.

“Oh! oh!” he said, “I fancied this castle belonged to the ancient branch of Orleans. Can Porthos have negotiated for it with the Duc de Longueville?”

“Faith!” exclaimed Planchet, “here’s land in good condition; if it belongs to Monsieur Porthos I wish him joy.”

“Zounds!” cried D’Artagnan, “don’t call him Porthos, nor even Vallon; call him De Bracieux or De Pierrefonds; thou wilt knell out damnation to my mission otherwise.”

As he approached the castle which had first attracted his eye, D’Artagnan was convinced that it could not be there that his friend dwelt; the towers, though solid and as if built yesterday, were open and broken. One might have fancied that some giant had cleaved them with blows from a hatchet.

On arriving at the extremity of the castle D’Artagnan found himself overlooking a beautiful valley, in which, at the foot of a charming little lake, stood several scattered houses, which, humble in their aspect, and covered, some with tiles, others with thatch, seemed to acknowledge as their sovereign lord a pretty chateau, built about the beginning of the reign of Henry IV., and surmounted by four stately, gilded weather-cocks. D’Artagnan no longer doubted that this was Porthos’s pleasant dwelling place.

The road led straight up to the chateau which, compared to its ancestor on the hill, was exactly what a fop of the coterie of the Duc d’Enghein would have been beside a knight in steel armor in the time of Charles VII. D’Artagnan spurred his horse on and pursued his road, followed by Planchet at the same pace.

In ten minutes D’Artagnan reached the end of an alley regularly planted with fine poplars and terminating in an iron gate, the points and crossed bars of which were gilt. In the midst of this avenue was a nobleman, dressed in green and with as much gilding about him as the iron gate, riding on a tall horse. On his right hand and his left were two footmen, with the seams of their dresses laced. A considerable number of clowns were assembled and rendered homage to their lord.

“Ah!” said D’Artagnan to himself, “can this be the Seigneur du Vallon de Bracieux de Pierrefonds? Well-a-day! how he has shrunk since he gave up the name of Porthos!”

“This cannot be Monsieur Porthos,” observed Planchet replying, as it were, to his master’s thoughts. “Monsieur Porthos was six feet high; this man is scarcely five.”

“Nevertheless,” said D’Artagnan, “the people are bowing very low to this person.”

As he spoke, he rode toward the tall horse--to the man of importance and his valets. As he approached he seemed to recognize the features of this individual.

“Jesu!” cried Planchet, “can it be?”

At this exclamation the man on horseback turned slowly and with a lofty air, and the two travelers could see, displayed in all their brilliancy, the large eyes, the vermilion visage, and the eloquent smile of--Mousqueton.

It was indeed Mousqueton--Mousqueton, as fat as a pig, rolling about with rude health, puffed out with good living, who, recognizing D’Artagnan and acting very differently from the hypocrite Bazin, slipped off his horse and approached the officer with his hat off, so that the homage of the assembled crowd was turned toward this new sun, which eclipsed the former luminary.

“Monsieur d’Artagnan! Monsieur d’Artagnan!” cried Mousqueton, his fat cheeks swelling out and his whole frame perspiring with joy; “Monsieur d’Artagnan! oh! what joy for my lord and master, Du Vallon de Bracieux de Pierrefonds!”

“Thou good Mousqueton! where is thy master?”

“You stand upon his property!”

“But how handsome thou art--how fat! thou hast prospered and grown stout!” and D’Artagnan could not restrain his astonishment at the change good fortune had produced on the once famished one.

“Hey, yes, thank God, I am pretty well,” said Mousqueton.

“But hast thou nothing to say to thy friend Planchet?”

“How, my friend Planchet? Planchet--art thou there?” cried Mousqueton, with open arms and eyes full of tears.

"My very self," replied Planchet; "but I wanted first to see if thou wert grown proud."

"Proud toward an old friend? never, Planchet! thou wouldst not have thought so hadst thou known Mousqueton well."

"So far so well," answered Planchet, alighting, and extending his arms to Mousqueton, the two servants embraced with an emotion which touched those who were present and made them suppose that Planchet was a great lord in disguise, so highly did they estimate the position of Mousqueton.

"And now, sir," resumed Mousqueton, when he had rid himself of Planchet, who had in vain tried to clasp his hands behind his friend's fat back, "now, sir, allow me to leave you, for I could not permit my master to hear of your arrival from any but myself; he would never forgive me for not having preceded you."

"This dear friend," said D'Artagnan, carefully avoiding to utter either the former name borne by Porthos or his new one, "then he has not forgotten me?"

"Forgotten--he!" cried Mousqueton; "there's not a day, sir, that we don't expect to hear that you were made marshal either instead of Monsieur de Gassion, or of Monsieur de Bassompierre."

On D'Artagnan's lips there played one of those rare and melancholy smiles which seemed to emanate from the depth of his soul--the last trace of youth and happiness that had survived life's disillusions.

"And you--fellows," resumed Mousqueton, "stay near Monsieur le Comte d'Artagnan and pay him every attention in your power whilst I go to prepare my lord for his visit."

And mounting his horse Mousqueton rode off down the avenue on the grass at a hand gallop.

"Ah, there! there's something promising," said D'Artagnan. "No mysteries, no cloak to hide one's self in, no cunning policy here; people laugh outright, they weep for joy here. I see nothing but faces a yard broad; in short, it seems to me that nature herself wears a holiday garb, and that the trees, instead of leaves and flowers, are covered with red and green ribbons as on gala days."

"As for me," said Planchet, "I seem to smell, from this place, even, a most delectable perfume of fine roast meat, and to see the scullions in a row by the hedge, hailing our approach. Ah! sir, what a cook must Monsieur

Pierrefonds have, when he was so fond of eating and drinking, even whilst he was only called Monsieur Porthos!”

“Say no more!” cried D’Artagnan. “If the reality corresponds with appearances I am lost; for a man so well off will never change his happy condition, and I shall fail with him, as I have already done with Aramis.”

CHAPTER 11.

Wealth does not necessarily produce Happiness.

D’Artagnan passed through the iron gate and arrived in front of the chateau. He alighted as he saw a species of giant on the steps. Let us do justice to D’Artagnan. Independently of every selfish wish, his heart palpitated with joy when he saw that tall form and martial demeanor, which recalled to him a good and brave man.

He ran to Porthos and threw himself into his arms; the whole body of servants, arranged in a semi-circle at a respectful distance, looked on with humble curiosity. Mousqueton, at the head of them, wiped his eyes. Porthos linked his arm in that of his friend.

“Ah! how delightful to see you again, dear friend!” he cried, in a voice which was now changed from a baritone into a bass, “you’ve not then forgotten me?”

“Forget you! oh! dear Du Vallon, does one forget the happiest days of flowery youth, one’s dearest friends, the dangers we have dared together? On the contrary, there is not an hour we have passed together that is not present to my memory.”

“Yes, yes,” said Porthos, trying to give to his mustache a curl which it had lost whilst he had been alone. “Yes, we did some fine things in our time and we gave that poor cardinal a few threads to unravel.”

And he heaved a sigh.

“Under any circumstances,” he resumed, “you are welcome, my dear friend; you will help me to recover my spirits; to-morrow we will hunt the hare on my plain, which is a superb tract of land, or pursue the deer in my woods, which are magnificent. I have four harriers which are considered the swiftest in the county, and a pack of hounds which are unequalled for twenty leagues around.”

And Porthos heaved another sigh.

“But, first,” interposed D’Artagnan, “you must present me to Madame du Vallon.”

A third sigh from Porthos.

"I lost Madame du Vallon two years ago," he said, "and you find me still in affliction on that account. That was the reason why I left my Chateau du Vallon near Corbeil, and came to my estate, Bracieux. Poor Madame du Vallon! her temper was uncertain, but she came at last to accustom herself to my little ways and understand my little wishes."

"So you are free now, and rich?"

"Alas!" groaned Porthos, "I am a widower and have forty thousand francs a year. Let us go to breakfast."

"I shall be happy to do so; the morning air has made me hungry."

"Yes," said Porthos; "my air is excellent."

They went into the chateau; there was nothing but gilding, high and low; the cornices were gilt, the mouldings were gilt, the legs and arms of the chairs were gilt. A table, ready set out, awaited them.

"You see," said Porthos, "this is my usual style."

"Devil take me!" answered D'Artagnan, "I wish you joy of it. The king has nothing like it."

"No," answered Porthos, "I hear it said that he is very badly fed by the cardinal, Monsieur de Mazarin. Taste this cutlet, my dear D'Artagnan; 'tis off one of my sheep."

"You have very tender mutton and I wish you joy of it." said D'Artagnan.

"Yes, the sheep are fed in my meadows, which are excellent pasture."

"Give me another cutlet."

"No, try this hare, which I had killed yesterday in one of my warrens."

"Zounds! what a flavor!" cried D'Artagnan; "ah! they are fed on thyme only, your hares."

"And how do you like my wine?" asked Porthos; "it is pleasant, isn't it?"

"Capital!"

"It is nothing, however, but a wine of the country."

"Really?"

"Yes, a small declivity to the south, yonder on my hill, gives me twenty hogsheads."

"Quite a vineyard, hey?"

Porthos sighed for the fifth time--D'Artagnan had counted his sighs. He became curious to solve the problem.

"Well now," he said, "it seems, my dear friend, that something vexes you; you are ill, perhaps? That health, which----"

“Excellent, my dear friend; better than ever. I could kill an ox with a blow of my fist.”

“Well, then, family affairs, perhaps?”

“Family! I have, happily, only myself in the world to care for.”

“But what makes you sigh?”

“My dear fellow,” replied Porthos, “to be candid with you, I am not happy.”

“You are not happy, Porthos? You who have chateau, meadows, mountains, woods--you who have forty thousand francs a year--you--are--not--happy?”

“My dear friend, all those things I have, but I am a hermit in the midst of superfluity.”

“Surrounded, I suppose, only by clodhoppers, with whom you could not associate.”

Porthos turned rather pale and drank off a large glass of wine.

“No; but just think, there are paltry country squires who have all some title or another and pretend to go back as far as Charlemagne, or at least to Hugh Capet. When I first came here; being the last comer, it was for me to make the first advances. I made them, but you know, my dear friend, Madame du Vallon----”

Porthos, in pronouncing these words, seemed to gulp down something.

“Madame du Vallon was of doubtful gentility. She had, in her first marriage--I don’t think, D’Artagnan, I am telling you anything new--married a lawyer; they thought that ‘nauseous;’ you can understand that’s a word bad enough to make one kill thirty thousand men. I have killed two, which has made people hold their tongues, but has not made me their friend. So that I have no society; I live alone; I am sick of it--my mind preys on itself.”

D’Artagnan smiled. He now saw where the breastplate was weak, and prepared the blow.

“But now,” he said, “that you are a widower, your wife’s connection cannot injure you.”

“Yes, but understand me; not being of a race of historic fame, like the De Courcys, who were content to be plain sirs, or the Rohans, who didn’t wish to be dukes, all these people, who are all either vicomtes or comtes go before me at church in all the ceremonies, and I can say nothing to them. Ah! If I only were a----”

"A baron, don't you mean?" cried D'Artagnan, finishing his friend's sentence.

"Ah!" cried Porthos; "would I were but a baron!"

"Well, my friend, I am come to give you this very title which you wish for so much."

Porthos gave a start that shook the room; two or three bottles fell and were broken. Mousqueton ran thither, hearing the noise.

Porthos waved his hand to Mousqueton to pick up the bottles.

"I am glad to see," said D'Artagnan, "that you have still that honest lad with you."

"He is my steward," replied Porthos; "he will never leave me. Go away now, Mouston."

"So he's called Mouston," thought D'Artagnan; "'tis too long a word to pronounce 'Mousqueton.'"

"Well," he said aloud, "let us resume our conversation later, your people may suspect something; there may be spies about. You can suppose, Porthos, that what I have to say relates to most important matters."

"Devil take them; let us walk in the park," answered Porthos, "for the sake of digestion."

"Egad," said D'Artagnan, "the park is like everything else and there are as many fish in your pond as rabbits in your warren; you are a happy man, my friend since you have not only retained your love of the chase, but acquired that of fishing."

"My friend," replied Porthos, "I leave fishing to Mousqueton,--it is a vulgar pleasure,--but I shoot sometimes; that is to say, when I am dull, and I sit on one of those marble seats, have my gun brought to me, my favorite dog, and I shoot rabbits."

"Really, how very amusing!"

"Yes," replied Porthos, with a sigh, "it is amusing."

D'Artagnan now no longer counted the sighs. They were innumerable.

"However, what had you to say to me?" he resumed; "let us return to that subject."

"With pleasure," replied D'Artagnan; "I must, however, first frankly tell you that you must change your mode of life."

"How?"

"Go into harness again, gird on your sword, run after adventures, and leave as in old times a little of your fat on the roadside."

“Ah! hang it!” said Porthos.

“I see you are spoiled, dear friend; you are corpulent, your arm has no longer that movement of which the late cardinal’s guards have so many proofs.”

“Ah! my fist is strong enough I swear,” cried Porthos, extending a hand like a shoulder of mutton.

“So much the better.”

“Are we then to go to war?”

“By my troth, yes.”

“Against whom?”

“Are you a politician, friend?”

“Not in the least.”

“Are you for Mazarin or for the princes?”

“I am for no one.”

“That is to say, you are for us. Well, I tell you that I come to you from the cardinal.”

This speech was heard by Porthos in the same sense as if it had still been in the year 1640 and related to the true cardinal.

“Ho! ho! What are the wishes of his eminence?”

“He wishes to have you in his service.”

“And who spoke to him of me?”

“Rochefort--you remember him?”

“Yes, pardieu! It was he who gave us so much trouble and kept us on the road so much; you gave him three sword-wounds in three separate engagements.”

“But you know he is now our friend?”

“No, I didn’t know that. So he cherishes no resentment?”

“You are mistaken, Porthos,” said D’Artagnan. “It is I who cherish no resentment.”

Porthos didn’t understand any too clearly; but then we know that understanding was not his strong point. “You say, then,” he continued, “that the Count de Rochefort spoke of me to the cardinal?”

“Yes, and the queen, too.”

“The queen, do you say?”

“To inspire us with confidence she has even placed in Mazarin’s hands that famous diamond--you remember all about it--that I once sold to

Monsieur des Essarts and of which, I don’t know how, she has regained possession.”

“But it seems to me,” said Porthos, “that she would have done much better if she had given it back to you.”

“So I think,” replied D’Artagnan; “but kings and queens are strange beings and have odd fancies; nevertheless, since they are the ones who have riches and honors, we are devoted to them.”

“Yes, we are devoted to them,” repeated Porthos; “and you--to whom are you devoted now?”

“To the king, the queen, and to the cardinal; moreover, I have answered for your devotion also.”

“And you say that you have made certain conditions on my behalf?”

“Magnificent, my dear fellow, magnificent! In the first place you have plenty of money, haven’t you? forty thousand francs income, I think you said.”

Porthos began to be suspicious. “Eh! my friend,” said he, “one never has too much money. Madame du Vallon left things in much disorder; I am not much of a hand at figures, so that I live almost from hand to mouth.”

“He is afraid I have come to borrow money,” thought D’Artagnan. “Ah, my friend,” said he, “it is all the better if you are in difficulties.”

“How is it all the better?”

“Yes, for his eminence will give you all that you want--land, money, and titles.”

“Ah! ah! ah!” said Porthos, opening his eyes at that last word.

“Under the other cardinal,” continued D’Artagnan, “we didn’t know enough to make our profits; this, however, doesn’t concern you, with your forty thousand francs income, the happiest man in the world, it seems to me.”

Porthos sighed.

“At the same time,” continued D’Artagnan, “notwithstanding your forty thousand francs a year, and perhaps even for the very reason that you have forty thousand francs a year, it seems to me that a little coronet would do well on your carriage, hey?”

“Yes indeed,” said Porthos.

“Well, my dear friend, win it--it is at the point of your sword. We shall not interfere with each other--your object is a title; mine, money. If I can get enough to rebuild Artagnan, which my ancestors, impoverished by the

Crusades, allowed to fall into ruins, and to buy thirty acres of land about it, that is all I wish. I shall retire and die tranquilly--at home.”

“For my part,” said Porthos, “I desire to be made a baron.”

“You shall be one.”

“And have you not seen any of our other friends?”

“Yes, I have seen Aramis.”

“And what does he wish? To be a bishop?”

“Aramis,” answered D’Artagnan, who did not wish to undeceive Porthos, “Aramis, fancy, has become a monk and a Jesuit, and lives like a bear. My offers did not arouse him,--did not even tempt him.”

“So much the worse! He was a clever man. And Athos?”

“I have not yet seen him. Do you know where I shall find him?”

“Near Blois. He is called Bragelonne. Only imagine, my dear friend. Athos, who was of as high birth as the emperor and who inherits one estate which gives him the title of comte, what is he to do with all those dignities--the Comte de la Fere, Comte de Bragelonne?”

“And he has no children with all these titles?”

“Ah!” said Porthos, “I have heard that he had adopted a young man who resembles him greatly.”

“What, Athos? Our Athos, who was as virtuous as Scipio? Have you seen him?

“No.”

“Well, I shall see him to-morrow and tell him about you; but I’m afraid, entre nous, that his liking for wine has aged and degraded him.”

“Yes, he used to drink a great deal,” replied Porthos.

“And then he was older than any of us,” added D’Artagnan.

“Some years only. His gravity made him look older than he was.”

“Well then, if we can get Athos, all will be well. If we cannot, we will do without him. We two are worth a dozen.”

“Yes,” said Porthos, smiling at the remembrance of his former exploits; “but we four, altogether, would be equal to thirty-six, more especially as you say the work will not be child’s play. Will it last long?”

“By’r Lady! two or three years perhaps.”

“So much the better,” cried Porthos. “You have no idea, my friend, how my bones ache since I came here. Sometimes on a Sunday, I take a ride in the fields and on the property of my neighbours, in order to pick up a nice little quarrel, which I am really in want of, but nothing happens. Either they respect or they fear me, which is more likely, but they let me trample down the clover with my dogs, insult and obstruct every one, and I come back still more weary and low-spirited, that's all. At any rate, tell me: there's more chance of fighting in Paris, is there not?"

"In that respect, my dear friend, it's delightful. No more edicts, no more of the cardinal's guards, no more De Jussacs, nor other bloodhounds. I'Gad! underneath a lamp in an inn, anywhere, they ask 'Are you one of the Fronde?' They unsheathe, and that's all that is said. The Duke de Guise killed Monsieur de Coligny in the Place Royale and nothing was said of it."

"Ah, things go on gaily, then," said Porthos.

"Besides which, in a short time," resumed D'Artagnan, "We shall have set battles, cannonades, conflagrations and there will be great variety."

"Well, then, I decide."

"I have your word, then?"

"Yes, 'tis given. I shall fight heart and soul for Mazarin; but----"

"But?"

"But he must make me a baron."

"Zounds!" said D'Artagnan, "that's settled already; I will be responsible for the barony."

On this promise being given, Porthos, who had never doubted his friend's assurance, turned back with him toward the castle.

CHAPTER 12.

Porthos was Discontented with his Condition.

As they returned toward the castle, D’Artagnan thought of the miseries of poor human nature, always dissatisfied with what it has, ever desirous of what it has not.

In the position of Porthos, D’Artagnan would have been perfectly happy; and to make Porthos contented there was wanting--what? five letters to put before his three names, a tiny coronet to paint upon the panels of his carriage!

“I shall pass all my life,” thought D’Artagnan, “in seeking for a man who is really contented with his lot.”

Whilst making this reflection, chance seemed, as it were, to give him the lie direct. When Porthos had left him to give some orders he saw Mousqueton approaching. The face of the steward, despite one slight shade of care, light as a summer cloud, seemed a physiognomy of absolute felicity.

“Here is what I am looking for,” thought D’Artagnan; “but alas! the poor fellow does not know the purpose for which I am here.”

He then made a sign for Mousqueton to come to him.

“Sir,” said the servant, “I have a favour to ask you.”

“Speak out, my friend.”

“I am afraid to do so. Perhaps you will think, sir, that prosperity has spoiled me?”

“Art thou happy, friend?” asked D’Artagnan.

“As happy as possible; and yet, sir, you may make me even happier than I am.”

“Well, speak, if it depends on me.”

“Oh, sir! it depends on you only.”

“I listen--I am waiting to hear.”

“Sir, the favor I have to ask of you is, not to call me ‘Mousqueton’ but ‘Mouston.’ Since I have had the honor of being my lord’s steward I have taken the last name as more dignified and calculated to make my inferiors respect me. You, sir, know how necessary subordination is in any large establishment of servants.”

D’Artagnan smiled; Porthos wanted to lengthen out his names, Mousqueton to cut his short.

“Well, my dear Mouston,” he said, “rest satisfied. I will call thee Mouston; and if it makes thee happy I will not ‘tutoyer’ you any longer.”

“Oh!” cried Mousqueton, reddening with joy; “if you do me, sir, such honor, I shall be grateful all my life; it is too much to ask.”

“Alas!” thought D’Artagnan, “it is very little to offset the unexpected tribulations I am bringing to this poor devil who has so warmly welcomed me.”

“Will monsieur remain long with us?” asked Mousqueton, with a serene and glowing countenance.

“I go to-morrow, my friend,” replied D’Artagnan.

“Ah, monsieur,” said Mousqueton, “then you have come here only to awaken our regrets.”

“I fear that is true,” said D’Artagnan, in a low tone.

D’Artagnan was secretly touched with remorse, not at inducing Porthos to enter into schemes in which his life and fortune would be in jeopardy, for Porthos, in the title of baron, had his object and reward; but poor Mousqueton, whose only wish was to be called Mouston--was it not cruel to snatch him from the delightful state of peace and plenty in which he was?

He was thinking of these matters when Porthos summoned him to dinner.

“What! to dinner?” said D’Artagnan. “What time is it, then?”

“Eh! why, it is after one o’clock.”

“Your home is a paradise, Porthos; one takes no note of time. I follow you, though I am not hungry.”

“Come, if one can’t always eat, one can always drink--a maxim of poor Athos, the truth of which I have discovered since I began to be lonely.”

D’Artagnan, who as a Gascon, was inclined to sobriety, seemed not so sure as his friend of the truth of Athos’s maxim, but he did his best to keep up with his host. Meanwhile his misgivings in regard to Mousqueton recurred to his mind and with greater force because Mousqueton, though he did not himself wait on the table, which would have been beneath him in his new position, appeared at the door from time to time and evinced his gratitude to D’Artagnan by the quality of the wine he directed to be served.

Therefore, when, at dessert, upon a sign from D'Artagnan, Porthos had sent away his servants and the two friends were alone:

"Porthos," said D'Artagnan, "who will attend you in your campaigns?"

"Why," replied Porthos, "Mouston, of course."

This was a blow to D'Artagnan. He could already see the intendant's beaming smile change to a contortion of grief. "But," he said, "Mouston is not so young as he was, my dear fellow; besides, he has grown fat and perhaps has lost his fitness for active service."

"That may be true," replied Porthos; "but I am used to him, and besides, he wouldn't be willing to let me go without him, he loves me so much."

"Oh, blind self-love!" thought D'Artagnan.

"And you," asked Porthos, "haven't you still in your service your old lackey, that good, that brave, that intelligent---what, then, is his name?"

"Planchet--yes, I have found him again, but he is lackey no longer."

"What is he, then?"

"With his sixteen hundred francs--you remember, the sixteen hundred francs he earned at the siege of La Rochelle by carrying a letter to Lord de Winter--he has set up a little shop in the Rue des Lombards and is now a confectioner."

"Ah, he is a confectioner in the Rue des Lombards! How does it happen, then, that he is in your service?"

"He has been guilty of certain escapades and fears he may be disturbed." And the musketeer narrated to his friend Planchet's adventure.

"Well," said Porthos, "if any one had told you in the old times that the day would come when Planchet would rescue Rochefort and that you would protect him in it----"

"I should not have believed him; but men are changed by events."

"There is nothing truer than that," said Porthos; "but what does not change, or changes for the better, is wine. Taste of this; it is a Spanish wine which our friend Athos thought much of."

At that moment the steward came in to consult his master upon the proceedings of the next day and also with regard to the shooting party which had been proposed.

"Tell me, Mouston," said Porthos, "are my arms in good condition?"

"Your arms, my lord--what arms?"

"Zounds! my weapons."

"What weapons?"

“My military weapons.”

“Yes, my lord; at any rate, I think so.”

“Make sure of it, and if they want it, have them burnished up. Which is my best cavalry horse?”

“Vulcan.”

“And the best hack?”

“Bayard.”

“What horse dost thou choose for thyself?”

“I like Rustaud, my lord; a good animal, whose paces suit me.”

“Strong, thinkest thou?”

“Half Norman, half Mecklenburger; will go night and day.”

“That will do for us. See to these horses. Polish up or make some one else polish my arms. Then take pistols with thee and a hunting-knife.”

“Are we then going to travel, my lord?” asked Mousqueton, rather uneasy.

“Something better still, Mouston.”

“An expedition, sir?” asked the steward, whose roses began to change into lilies.

“We are going to return to the service, Mouston,” replied Porthos, still trying to restore his mustache to the military curl it had long lost.

“Into the service--the king’s service?” Mousqueton trembled; even his fat, smooth cheeks shook as he spoke, and he looked at D’Artagnan with an air of reproach; he staggered, and his voice was almost choked.

“Yes and no. We shall serve in a campaign, seek out all sorts of adventures--return, in short, to our former life.”

These last words fell on Mousqueton like a thunderbolt. It was those very terrible old days that made the present so excessively delightful, and the blow was so great he rushed out, overcome, and forgot to shut the door.

The two friends remained alone to speak of the future and to build castles in the air. The good wine which Mousqueton had placed before them traced out in glowing drops to D’Artagnan a fine perspective, shining with quadruples and pistoles, and showed to Porthos a blue ribbon and a ducal mantle; they were, in fact, asleep on the table when the servants came to light them to their bed.

Mousqueton was, however, somewhat consoled by D’Artagnan, who the next day told him that in all probability war would always be carried on in the heart of Paris and within reach of the Chateau du Vallon, which was near Corbeil, or Bracieux, which was near Melun, and of Pierrefonds, which was between Compiegne and Villars-Cotterets.

"But--formerly--it appears," began Mousqueton timidly.

"Oh!" said D'Artagnan, "we don't now make war as we did formerly. To-day it's a sort of diplomatic arrangement; ask Planchet."

Mousqueton inquired, therefore, the state of the case of his old friend, who confirmed the statement of D'Artagnan. "But," he added, "in this war prisoners stand a chance of being hung."

"The deuce they do!" said Mousqueton; "I think I should like the siege of Rochelle better than this war, then!"

Porthos, meantime, asked D'Artagnan to give him his instructions how to proceed on his journey.

"Four days," replied his friend, "are necessary to reach Blois; one day to rest there; three or four days to return to Paris. Set out, therefore, in a week, with your suite, and go to the Hotel de la Chevrette, Rue Tiquetonne, and there await me."

"That's agreed," said Porthos.

"As to myself, I shall go around to see Athos; for though I don't think his aid worth much, one must with one's friends observe all due politeness," said D'Artagnan.

The friends then took leave of each other on the very border of the estate of Pierrefonds, to which Porthos escorted his friend.

"At least," D'Artagnan said to himself, as he took the road to Villars-Cotterets, "at least I shall not be alone in my undertaking. That devil, Porthos, is a man of prodigious strength; still, if Athos joins us, well, we shall be three of us to laugh at Aramis, that little coxcomb with his too good luck."

At Villars-Cotterets he wrote to the cardinal:

"My Lord,--I have already one man to offer to your eminence, and he is well worth twenty men. I am just setting out for Blois. The Comte de la Fere inhabits the Castle of Bragelonne, in the environs of that city."

CHAPTER 13.

Two Angelic Faces.

The road was long, but the horses upon which D’Artagnan and Planchet rode had been refreshed in the well supplied stables of the Lord of Bracieux; the master and servant rode side by side, conversing as they went, for D’Artagnan had by degrees thrown off the master and Planchet had entirely ceased to assume the manners of a servant. He had been raised by circumstances to the rank of a confidant to his master. It was many years since D’Artagnan had opened his heart to any one; it happened, however, that these two men, on meeting again, assimilated perfectly. Planchet was in truth no vulgar companion in these new adventures; he was a man of uncommonly sound sense. Without courting danger he never shrank from an encounter; in short, he had been a soldier and arms ennoble a man; it was, therefore, on the footing of friends that D’Artagnan and Planchet arrived in the neighborhood of Blois.

Going along, D’Artagnan, shaking his head, said:

“I know that my going to Athos is useless and absurd; but still I owe this courtesy to my old friend, a man who had in him material for the most noble and generous of characters.”

“Oh, Monsieur Athos was a noble gentleman,” said Planchet, “was he not? Scattering money round about him as Heaven sprinkles rain. Do you remember, sir, that duel with the Englishman in the inclosure des Carmes? Ah! how lofty, how magnificent Monsieur Athos was that day, when he said to his adversary: ‘You have insisted on knowing my name, sir; so much the worse for you, since I shall be obliged to kill you.’ I was near him, those were his exact words, when he stabbed his foe as he said he would, and his adversary fell without saying, ‘Oh!’ ‘Tis a noble gentleman--Monsieur Athos.”

“Yes, true as Gospel,” said D’Artagnan; “but one single fault has swallowed up all these fine qualities.”

“I remember well,” said Planchet, “he was fond of drinking--in truth, he drank, but not as other men drink. One seemed, as he raised the wine to his lips, to hear him say, ‘Come, juice of the grape, and chase away my sorrows.’ And how he used to break the stem of a glass or the neck of a bottle! There was no one like him for that.”

“And now,” replied D’Artagnan, “behold the sad spectacle that awaits us. This noble gentleman with his lofty glance, this handsome cavalier, so brilliant in feats of arms that every one was surprised that he held in his hand a sword only instead of a baton of command! Alas! we shall find him changed into a broken down old man, with garnet nose and eyes that slobber; we shall find him extended on some lawn, whence he will look at us with a languid eye and peradventure will not recognize us. God knows, Planchet, that I should fly from a sight so sad if I did not wish to show my respect for the illustrious shadow of what was once the Comte de la Fere, whom we loved so much.”

Planchet shook his head and said nothing. It was evident that he shared his master’s apprehensions.

“And then,” resumed D’Artagnan, “to this decrepitude is probably added poverty, for he must have neglected the little that he had, and the dirty scoundrel, Grimaud, more taciturn than ever and still more drunken than his master--stay, Planchet, it breaks my heart to merely think of it.”

“I fancy myself there and that I see him staggering and hear him stammering,” said Planchet, in a piteous tone, “but at all events we shall soon know the real state of things, for I imagine that those lofty walls, now turning ruby in the setting sun, are the walls of Blois.”

“Probably; and those steeples, pointed and sculptured, that we catch a glimpse of yonder, are similar to those that I have heard described at Chambord.”

At this moment one of those heavy wagons, drawn by bullocks, which carry the wood cut in the fine forests of the country to the ports of the Loire, came out of a byroad full of ruts and turned on that which the two horsemen were following. A man carrying a long switch with a nail at the end of it, with which he urged on his slow team, was walking with the cart.

“Ho! friend,” cried Planchet.

“What’s your pleasure, gentlemen?” replied the peasant, with a purity of accent peculiar to the people of that district and which might have put to shame the cultured denizens of the Sorbonne and the Rue de l’Universite.

“We are looking for the house of Monsieur de la Fere,” said D’Artagnan.

The peasant took off his hat on hearing this revered name.

"Gentlemen," he said, "the wood that I am carting is his; I cut it in his copse and I am taking it to the chateau."

D'Artagnan determined not to question this man; he did not wish to hear from another what he had himself said to Planchet.

"The chateau!" he said to himself, "what chateau? Ah, I understand! Athos is not a man to be thwarted; he, like Porthos, has obliged his peasantry to call him 'my lord,' and to dignify his pettifogging place by the name of chateau. He had a heavy hand--dear old Athos--after drinking."

D'Artagnan, after asking the man the right way, continued his route, agitated in spite of himself at the idea of seeing once more that singular man whom he had so truly loved and who had contributed so much by advice and example to his education as a gentleman. He checked by degrees the speed of his horse and went on, his head drooping as if in deep thought.

Soon, as the road turned, the Chateau de la Valliere appeared in view; then, a quarter of a mile beyond, a white house, encircled in sycamores, was visible at the farther end of a group of trees, which spring had powdered with a snow of flowers.

On beholding this house, D'Artagnan, calm as he was in general, felt an unusual disturbance within his heart--so powerful during the whole course of life are the recollections of youth. He proceeded, nevertheless, and came opposite to an iron gate, ornamented in the taste of the period.

Through the gate was seen kitchen-gardens, carefully attended to, a spacious courtyard, in which neighed several horses held by valets in various liveries, and a carriage, drawn by two horses of the country.

"We are mistaken," said D'Artagnan. "This cannot be the establishment of Athos. Good heavens! suppose he is dead and that this property now belongs to some one who bears his name. Alight, Planchet, and inquire, for I confess that I have scarcely courage so to do."

Planchet alighted.

"Thou must add," said D'Artagnan, "that a gentleman who is passing by wishes to have the honor of paying his respects to the Comte de la Fere, and if thou art satisfied with what thou hearest, then mention my name!"

Planchet, leading his horse by the bridle, drew near to the gate and rang the bell, and immediately a servant-man with white hair and of erect stature, notwithstanding his age, presented himself.

"Does Monsieur le Comte de la Fere live here?" asked Planchet.

“Yes, monsieur, it is here he lives,” the servant replied to Planchet, who was not in livery.

“A nobleman retired from service, is he not?”

“Yes.”

“And who had a lackey named Grimaud?” persisted Planchet, who had prudently considered that he couldn’t have too much information.

“Monsieur Grimaud is absent from the chateau for the time being,” said the servitor, who, little used as he was to such inquiries, began to examine Planchet from head to foot.

“Then,” cried Planchet joyously, “I see well that it is the same Comte de la Fere whom we seek. Be good enough to open to me, for I wish to announce to monsieur le comte that my master, one of his friends, is here, and wishes to greet him.”

“Why didn’t you say so?” said the servitor, opening the gate. “But where is your master?”

“He is following me.”

The servitor opened the gate and walked before Planchet, who made a sign to D’Artagnan. The latter, his heart palpitating more than ever, entered the courtyard without dismounting.

Whilst Planchet was standing on the steps before the house he heard a voice say:

“Well, where is this gentleman and why do they not bring him here?”

This voice, the sound of which reached D’Artagnan, reawakened in his heart a thousand sentiments, a thousand recollections that he had forgotten. He vaulted hastily from his horse, whilst Planchet, with a smile on his lips, advanced toward the master of the house.

“But I know you, my lad,” said Athos, appearing on the threshold.

“Oh, yes, monsieur le comte, you know me and I know you. I am Planchet--Planchet, whom you know well.” But the honest servant could say no more, so much was he overcome by this unexpected interview.

“What, Planchet, is Monsieur d’Artagnan here?”

“Here I am, my friend, dear Athos!” cried D’Artagnan, in a faltering voice and almost staggering from agitation.

At these words a visible emotion was expressed on the beautiful countenance and calm features of Athos. He rushed toward D’Artagnan with eyes fixed upon him and clasped him in his arms. D’Artagnan, equally moved, pressed him also closely to him, whilst tears stood in his eyes.

Athos then took him by the hand and led him into the drawing-room, where there were several people. Every one arose.

"I present to you," he said, "Monsieur le Chevalier D'Artagnan, lieutenant of his majesty's musketeers, a devoted friend and one of the most excellent, brave gentlemen that I have ever known."

D'Artagnan received the compliments of those who were present in his own way, and whilst the conversation became general he looked earnestly at Athos.

Strange! Athos was scarcely aged at all! His fine eyes, no longer surrounded by that dark line which nights of dissipation pencil too infallibly, seemed larger, more liquid than ever. His face, a little elongated, had gained in calm dignity what it had lost in feverish excitement. His hand, always wonderfully beautiful and strong, was set off by a ruffle of lace, like certain hands by Titian and Vandyck. He was less stiff than formerly. His long, dark hair, softly powdered here and there with silver tendrils, fell elegantly over his shoulders in wavy curls; his voice was still youthful, as if belonging to a Hercules of twenty-five, and his magnificent teeth, which he had preserved white and sound, gave an indescribable charm to his smile.

Meanwhile the guests, seeing that the two friends were longing to be alone, prepared to depart, when a noise of dogs barking resounded through the courtyard and many persons said at the same moment:

"Ah! 'tis Raoul, who is come home."

Athos, as the name of Raoul was pronounced, looked inquisitively at D'Artagnan, in order to see if any curiosity was painted on his face. But D'Artagnan was still in confusion and turned around almost mechanically when a fine young man of fifteen years of age, dressed simply, but in perfect taste, entered the room, raising, as he came, his hat, adorned with a long plume of scarlet feathers.

Nevertheless, D'Artagnan was struck by the appearance of this new personage. It seemed to explain to him the change in Athos; a resemblance between the boy and the man explained the mystery of this regenerated existence. He remained listening and gazing.

"Here you are, home again, Raoul," said the comte.

"Yes, sir," replied the youth, with deep respect, "and I have performed the commission that you gave me."

"But what's the matter, Raoul?" said Athos, very anxiously. "You are pale and agitated."

“Sir,” replied the young man, “it is on account of an accident which has happened to our little neighbor.”

“To Mademoiselle de la Valliere?” asked Athos, quickly.

“What is it?” cried many persons present.

“She was walking with her nurse Marceline, in the place where the woodmen cut the wood, when, passing on horseback, I stopped. She saw me also and in trying to jump from the end of a pile of wood on which she had mounted, the poor child fell and was not able to rise again. I fear that she has badly sprained her ankle.”

“Oh, heavens!” cried Athos. “And her mother, Madame de Saint-Remy, have they yet told her of it?”

“No, sir, Madame de Saint-Remy is at Blois with the Duchess of Orleans. I am afraid that what was first done was unskillful, if not worse than useless. I am come, sir, to ask your advice.”

“Send directly to Blois, Raoul; or, rather, take horse and ride immediately yourself.”

Raoul bowed.

“But where is Louise?” asked the comte.

“I have brought her here, sir, and I have deposited her in charge of Charlotte, who, till better advice comes, has bathed the foot in cold well-water.”

The guests now all took leave of Athos, excepting the old Duc de Barbe, who, as an old friend of the family of La Valliere, went to see little Louise and offered to take her to Blois in his carriage.

“You are right, sir,” said Athos. “She will be the sooner with her mother. As for you, Raoul, I am sure it is your fault, some giddiness or folly.”

“No, sir, I assure you,” muttered Raoul, “it is not.”

“Oh, no, no, I declare it is not!” cried the young girl, while Raoul turned pale at the idea of his being perhaps the cause of her disaster.

“Nevertheless, Raoul, you must go to Blois and you must make your excuses and mine to Madame de Saint-Remy.”

The youth looked pleased. He again took in his strong arms the little girl, whose pretty golden head and smiling face rested on his shoulder, and placed her gently in the carriage; then jumping on his horse with the elegance of a first-rate esquire, after bowing to Athos and D’Artagnan, he went off close by the door of the carriage, on somebody inside of which his eyes were riveted.

CHAPTER 14.

The Castle of Bragelonne.

Whilst this scene was going on, D’Artagnan remained with open mouth and a confused gaze. Everything had turned out so differently from what he expected that he was stupefied with wonder.

Athos, who had been observing him and guessing his thoughts, took his arm and led him into the garden.

“Whilst supper is being prepared,” he said, smiling, “you will not, my friend, be sorry to have the mystery which so puzzles you cleared up.”

“True, monsieur le comte,” replied D’Artagnan, who felt that by degrees Athos was resuming that great influence which aristocracy had over him.

Athos smiled.

“First and foremost, dear D’Artagnan, we have no title such as count here. When I call you ‘chevalier,’ it is in presenting you to my guests, that they may know who you are. But to you, D’Artagnan, I am, I hope, still dear Athos, your comrade, your friend. Do you intend to stand on ceremony because you are less attached to me than you were?”

“Oh! God forbid!”

“Then let us be as we used to be; let us be open with each other. You are surprised at what you see here?”

“Extremely.”

“But above all things, I am a marvel to you?”

“I confess it.”

“I am still young, am I not? Should you not have known me again, in spite of my eight-and-forty years of age?”

“On the contrary, I do not find you the same person at all.”

“I understand,” cried Athos, with a gentle blush. “Everything, D’Artagnan, even folly, has its limit.”

“Then your means, it appears, are improved; you have a capital house--your own, I presume? You have a park, and horses, servants.”

Athos smiled.

"Yes, I inherited this little property when I quitted the army, as I told you. The park is twenty acres--twenty, comprising kitchen-gardens and a common. I have two horses,--I do not count my servant's bobtailed nag. My sporting dogs consist of two pointers, two harriers and two setters. But then all this extravagance is not for myself," added Athos, laughing.

"Yes, I see, for the young man Raoul," said D'Artagnan.

"You guess aright, my friend; this youth is an orphan, deserted by his mother, who left him in the house of a poor country priest. I have brought him up. It is Raoul who has worked in me the change you see; I was dried up like a miserable tree, isolated, attached to nothing on earth; it was only a deep affection that could make me take root again and drag me back to life. This child has caused me to recover what I had lost. I had no longer any wish to live for myself, I have lived for him. I have corrected the vices that I had; I have assumed the virtues that I had not. Precept something, but example more. I may be mistaken, but I believe that Raoul will be as accomplished a gentleman as our degenerate age could display."

The remembrance of Milady recurred to D'Artagnan.

"And you are happy?" he said to his friend.

"As happy as it is allowed to one of God's creatures to be on this earth; but say out all you think, D'Artagnan, for you have not yet done so."

"You are too bad, Athos; one can hide nothing from you," answered D'Artagnan. "I wished to ask you if you ever feel any emotions of terror resembling----"

"Remorse! I finish your phrase. Yes and no. I do not feel remorse, because that woman, I profoundly hold, deserved her punishment. Had she one redeeming trait? I doubt it. I do not feel remorse, because had we allowed her to live she would have persisted in her work of destruction. But I do not mean, my friend that we were right in what we did. Perhaps all blood demands some expiation. Hers had been accomplished; it remains, possibly, for us to accomplish ours."

"I have sometimes thought as you do, Athos."

"She had a son, that unhappy woman?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever heard of him?"

"Never."

"He must be about twenty-three years of age," said Athos, in a low tone. "I often think of that young man, D'Artagnan."

“Strange! for I had forgotten him,” said the lieutenant.

Athos smiled; the smile was melancholy.

“And Lord de Winter--do you know anything about him?”

“I know that he is in high favor with Charles I.”

“The fortunes of that monarch now are at low water. He shed the blood of Strafford; that confirms what I said just now--blood will have blood. And the queen?”

“What queen?”

“Madame Henrietta of England, daughter of Henry IV.”

“She is at the Louvre, as you know.”

“Yes, and I hear in bitter poverty. Her daughter, during the severest cold, was obliged for want of fire to remain in bed. Do you grasp that?” said Athos, shrugging his shoulders; “the daughter of Henry IV. shivering for want of a fagot! Why did she not ask from any one of us a home instead of from Mazarin? She should have wanted nothing.”

“Have you ever seen the queen of England?” inquired D’Artagnan.

“No; but my mother, as a child, saw her. Did I ever tell you that my mother was lady of honor to Marie de Medici?”

“Never. You know, Athos, you never spoke much of such matters.”

“Ah, mon Dieu, yes, you are right,” Athos replied; “but then there must be some occasion for speaking.”

“Porthos wouldn’t have waited for it so patiently,” said D’Artagnan, with a smile.

“Every one according to his nature, my dear D’Artagnan. Porthos, in spite of a touch of vanity, has many excellent qualities. Have you seen him?”

“I left him five days ago,” said D’Artagnan, and he portrayed with Gascon wit and sprightliness the magnificence of Porthos in his Chateau of Pierrefonds; nor did he neglect to launch a few arrows of wit at the excellent Monsieur Mouston.

“I sometimes wonder,” replied Athos, smiling at that gayety which recalled the good old days, “that we could form an association of men who would be, after twenty years of separation, still so closely bound together. Friendship throws out deep roots in honest hearts, D’Artagnan. Believe me, it is only the evil-minded who deny friendship; they cannot understand it. And Aramis?”

“I have seen him also,” said D’Artagnan; “but he seemed to me cold.”

"Ah, you have seen Aramis?" said Athos, turning on D'Artagnan a searching look. "Why, it is a veritable pilgrimage, my dear friend, that you are making to the Temple of Friendship, as the poets would say."

"Why, yes," replied D'Artagnan, with embarrassment.

"Aramis, you know," continued Athos, "is naturally cold, and then he is always involved in intrigues with women."

"I believe he is at this moment in a very complicated one," said D'Artagnan.

Athos made no reply.

"He is not curious," thought D'Artagnan.

Athos not only failed to reply, he even changed the subject of conversation.

"You see," said he, calling D'Artagnan's attention to the fact that they had come back to the chateau after an hour's walk, "we have made a tour of my domains."

"All is charming and everything savors of nobility," replied D'Artagnan.

At this instant they heard the sound of horses' feet.

"'Tis Raoul who has come back," said Athos; "and we can now hear how the poor child is."

In fact, the young man appeared at the gate, covered with dust, entered the courtyard, leaped from his horse, which he consigned to the charge of a groom, and then went to greet the count and D'Artagnan.

"Monsieur," said Athos, placing his hand on D'Artagnan's shoulder, "monsieur is the Chevalier D'Artagnan of whom you have often heard me speak, Raoul."

"Monsieur," said the young man, saluting again and more profoundly, "monsieur le comte has pronounced your name before me as an example whenever he wished to speak of an intrepid and generous gentleman."

That little compliment could not fail to move D'Artagnan. He extended a hand to Raoul and said:

"My young friend, all the praises that are given me should be passed on to the count here; for he has educated me in everything and it is not his fault that his pupil profited so little from his instructions. But he will make it up in you I am sure. I like your manner, Raoul, and your politeness has touched me."

Athos was more delighted than can be told. He looked at D'Artagnan with an expression of gratitude and then bestowed on Raoul one of those strange smiles, of which children are so proud when they receive them.

"Now," said D'Artagnan to himself, noticing that silent play of countenance, "I am sure of it."

"I hope the accident has been of no consequence?"

"They don't yet know, sir, on account of the swelling; but the doctor is afraid some tendon has been injured."

At this moment a little boy, half peasant, half foot-boy, came to announce supper.

Athos led his guest into a dining-room of moderate size, the windows of which opened on one side on a garden, on the other on a hot-house full of magnificent flowers.

D'Artagnan glanced at the dinner service. The plate was magnificent, old, and appertaining to the family. D'Artagnan stopped to look at a sideboard on which was a superb ewer of silver.

"That workmanship is divine!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, a chef d'oeuvre of the great Florentine sculptor, Benvenuto Cellini," replied Athos.

"What battle does it represent?"

"That of Marignan, just at the point where one of my forefathers is offering his sword to Francis I., who has broken his. It was on that occasion that my ancestor, Enguerrand de la Fere, was made a knight of the Order of St. Michael; besides which, the king, fifteen years afterward, gave him also this ewer and a sword which you may have seen formerly in my house, also a lovely specimen of workmanship. Men were giants in those times," said Athos; "now we are pigmies in comparison. Let us sit down to supper. Call Charles," he added, addressing the boy who waited.

"My good Charles, I particularly recommend to your care Planchet, the laquais of Monsieur D'Artagnan. He likes good wine; now you have the key of the cellar. He has slept a long time on a hard bed, so he won't object to a soft one; take every care of him, I beg of you." Charles bowed and retired.

"You think of everything," said D'Artagnan; "and I thank you for Planchet, my dear Athos."

Raoul stared on hearing this name and looked at the count to be quite sure that it was he whom the lieutenant thus addressed.

"That name sounds strange to you," said Athos, smiling; "it was my nom de guerre when Monsieur D'Artagnan, two other gallant friends and myself performed some feats of arms at the siege of La Rochelle, under the deceased cardinal and Monsieur de Bassompierre. My friend is still so kind as to address me by that old and well beloved appellation, which makes my heart glad when I hear it."

"'Tis an illustrious name," said the lieutenant, "and had one day triumphal honors paid to it."

"What do you mean, sir?" inquired Raoul.

"You have not forgotten St. Gervais, Athos, and the napkin which was converted into a banner?" and he then related to Raoul the story of the bastion, and Raoul fancied he was listening to one of those deeds of arms belonging to days of chivalry, so gloriously recounted by Tasso and Ariosto.

"D'Artagnan does not tell you, Raoul," said Athos, in his turn, "that he was reckoned one of the finest swordsmen of his time--a knuckle of iron, a wrist of steel, a sure eye and a glance of fire; that's what his adversary met with. He was eighteen, only three years older than you are, Raoul, when I saw him set to work, pitted against tried men."

"And did Monsieur D'Artagnan come off the conqueror?" asked the young man, with glistening eye.

"I killed one man, if I recollect rightly," replied D'Artagnan, with a look of inquiry directed to Athos; "another I disarmed or wounded, I don't remember which."

"Wounded!" said Athos; "it was a phenomenon of skill."

The young man would willingly have prolonged this conversation far into the night, but Athos pointed out to him that his guest must need repose. D'Artagnan would fain have declared that he was not fatigued, but Athos insisted on his retiring to his chamber, conducted thither by Raoul.

CHAPTER 15.

Athos as a Diplomatist.

D’Artagnan retired to bed--not to sleep, but to think over all he had heard that evening. Being naturally goodhearted, and having had once a liking for Athos, which had grown into a sincere friendship, he was delighted at thus meeting a man full of intelligence and moral strength, instead of a drunkard. He admitted without annoyance the continued superiority of Athos over himself, devoid as he was of that jealousy which might have saddened a less generous disposition; he was delighted also that the high qualities of Athos appeared to promise favorably for his mission. Nevertheless, it seemed to him that Athos was not in all respects sincere and frank. Who was the youth he had adopted and who bore so striking a resemblance to him? What could explain Athos’s having re-entered the world and the extreme sobriety he had observed at table? The absence of Grimaud, whose name had never once been uttered by Athos, gave D’Artagnan uneasiness. It was evident either that he no longer possessed the confidence of his friend, or that Athos was bound by some invisible chain, or that he had been forewarned of the lieutenant’s visit.

He could not help thinking of M. Rochefort, whom he had seen in Notre Dame; could De Rochefort have forestalled him with Athos? Again, the moderate fortune which Athos possessed, concealed as it was, so skillfully, seemed to show a regard for appearances and to betray a latent ambition which might be easily aroused. The clear and vigorous intellect of Athos would render him more open to conviction than a less able man would be. He would enter into the minister’s schemes with the more ardor, because his natural activity would be doubled by necessity.

Resolved to seek an explanation on all these points on the following day, D’Artagnan, in spite of his fatigue, prepared for an attack and determined that it should take place after breakfast. He determined to cultivate the good-will of the youth Raoul and, either whilst fencing with him or when out shooting, to extract from his simplicity some information which would connect the Athos of old times with the Athos of the present. But

D’Artagnan at the same time, being a man of extreme caution, was quite aware what injury he should do himself, if by any indiscretion or awkwardness he should betray has manoeuvering to the experienced eye of Athos. Besides, to tell truth, whilst D’Artagnan was quite disposed to adopt a subtle course against the cunning of Aramis or the vanity of Porthos, he was ashamed to equivocate with Athos, true-hearted, open Athos. It seemed to him that if Porthos and Aramis deemed him superior to them in the arts of diplomacy, they would like him all the better for it; but that Athos, on the contrary, would despise him.

“Ah! why is not Grimaud, the taciturn Grimaud, here?” thought D’Artagnan, “there are so many things his silence would have told me; with Grimaud silence was another form of eloquence!”

There reigned a perfect stillness in the house. D’Artagnan had heard the door shut and the shutters barred; the dogs became in their turn silent. At last a nightingale, lost in a thicket of shrubs, in the midst of its most melodious cadences had fluted low and lower into stillness and fallen asleep. Not a sound was heard in the castle, except of a footstep up and down, in the chamber above--as he supposed, the bedroom of Athos.

“He is walking about and thinking,” thought D’Artagnan; “but of what? It is impossible to know; everything else might be guessed, but not that.”

At length Athos went to bed, apparently, for the noise ceased.

Silence and fatigue together overcame D’Artagnan and sleep overtook him also. He was not, however, a good sleeper. Scarcely had dawn gilded his window curtains when he sprang out of bed and opened the windows. Somebody, he perceived, was in the courtyard, moving stealthily. True to his custom of never passing anything over that it was within his power to know, D’Artagnan looked out of the window and perceived the close red coat and brown hair of Raoul.

The young man was opening the door of the stable. He then, with noiseless haste, took out the horse that he had ridden on the previous evening, saddled and bridled it himself and led the animal into the alley to the right of the kitchen-garden, opened a side door which conducted him to a bridle road, shut it after him, and D’Artagnan saw him pass by like a dart, bending, as he went, beneath the pendent flowery branches of maple and acacia. The road, as D’Artagnan had observed, was the way to Blois.

“So!” thought the Gascon “here’s a young blade who has already his love affair, who doesn’t at all agree with Athos in his hatred to the fair sex. He’s not going to hunt, for he has neither dogs nor arms; he's not going on a message, for he goes secretly. Why does he go in secret? Is he afraid of me or of his father? for I am sure the count is his father. By Jove! I shall know about that soon, for I shall soon speak out to Athos."

Day was now advanced; all the noises that had ceased the night before reawakened, one after the other. The bird on the branch, the dog in his kennel, the sheep in the field, the boats moored in the Loire, even, became alive and vocal. The latter, leaving the shore, abandoned themselves gaily to the current. The Gascon gave a last twirl to his mustache, a last turn to his hair, brushed, from habit, the brim of his hat with the sleeve of his doublet, and went downstairs. Scarcely had he descended the last step of the threshold when he saw Athos bent down toward the ground, as if he were looking for a crown-piece in the dust.

"Good-morning, my dear host," cried D'Artagnan.

"Good-day to you; have you slept well?"

"Excellently, Athos, but what are you looking for? You are perhaps a tulip fancier?"

"My dear friend, if I am, you must not laugh at me for being so. In the country people alter; one gets to like, without knowing it, all those beautiful objects that God causes to spring from the earth, which are despised in cities. I was looking anxiously for some iris roots I planted here, close to this reservoir, and which some one has trampled upon this morning. These gardeners are the most careless people in the world; in bringing the horse out to the water they've allowed him to walk over the border."

D'Artagnan began to smile.

"Ah! you think so, do you?"

And he took his friend along the alley, where a number of tracks like those which had trampled down the flowerbeds, were visible.

"Here are the horse's hoofs again, it seems, Athos," he said carelessly.

"Yes, indeed, the marks are recent."

"Quite so," replied the lieutenant.

"Who went out this morning?" Athos asked, uneasily. "Has any horse got loose?"

"Not likely," answered the Gascon; "these marks are regular."

"Where is Raoul?" asked Athos; "how is it that I have not seen him?"

"Hush!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, putting his finger on his lips; and he related what he had seen, watching Athos all the while.

“Ah, he’s gone to Blois; the poor boy----”

“Wherefore?”

“Ah, to inquire after the little La Valliere; she has sprained her foot, you know.”

“You think he has?”

“I am sure of it,” said Athos; “don’t you see that Raoul is in love?”

“Indeed! with whom--with a child seven years old?”

“Dear friend, at Raoul’s age the heart is so expansive that it must encircle one object or another, fancied or real. Well, his love is half real, half fanciful. She is the prettiest little creature in the world, with flaxen hair, blue eyes,--at once saucy and languishing.”

“But what say you to Raoul’s fancy?”

“Nothing--I laugh at Raoul; but this first desire of the heart is imperious. I remember, just at his age, how deep in love I was with a Grecian statue which our good king, then Henry IV., gave my father, insomuch that I was mad with grief when they told me that the story of Pygmalion was nothing but a fable.”

“It is mere want of occupation. You do not make Raoul work, so he takes his own way of employing himself.”

“Exactly; therefore I think of sending him away from here.”

“You will be wise to do so.”

“No doubt of it; but it will break his heart. So long as three or four years ago he used to adorn and adore his little idol, whom he will some day fall in love with in right earnest if he remains here. The parents of little La Valliere have for a long time perceived and been amused at it; now they begin to look concerned.”

“Nonsense! However, Raoul must be diverted from this fancy. Send him away or you will never make a man of him.”

“I think I shall send him to Paris.”

“So!” thought D’Artagnan, and it seemed to him that the moment for attack had arrived.

“Suppose,” he said, “we roughly chalk out a career for this young man. I wish to consult you about some thing.”

“Do so.”

“Do you think it is time for us to enter the service?”

“But are you not still in the service--you, D’Artagnan?”

"I mean active service. Our former life, has it still no attractions for you? would you not be happy to begin anew in my society and in that of Porthos, the exploits of our youth?"

"Do you propose to me to do so, D'Artagnan?"

"Decidedly and honestly."

"On whose side?" asked Athos, fixing his clear, benevolent glance on the countenance of the Gascon.

"Ah, devil take it, you speak in earnest----"

"And must have a definite answer. Listen, D'Artagnan. There is but one person, or rather, one cause, to whom a man like me can be useful--that of the king."

"Exactly," answered the musketeer.

"Yes, but let us understand each other," returned Athos, seriously. "If by the cause of the king you mean that of Monsieur de Mazarin, we do not understand each other."

"I don't say exactly," answered the Gascon, confused.

"Come, D'Artagnan, don't let us play a sidelong game; your hesitation, your evasion, tells me at once on whose side you are; for that party no one dares openly to recruit, and when people recruit for it, it is with averted eyes and humble voice."

"Ah! my dear Athos!"

"You know that I am not alluding to you; you are the pearl of brave, bold men. I speak of that spiteful and intriguing Italian--of the pedant who has tried to put on his own head a crown which he stole from under a pillow--of the scoundrel who calls his party the party of the king--who wants to send the princes of the blood to prison, not daring to kill them, as our great cardinal--our cardinal did--of the miser, who weighs his gold pieces and keeps the clipped ones for fear, though he is rich, of losing them at play next morning--of the impudent fellow who insults the queen, as they say--so much the worse for her--and who is going in three months to make war upon us, in order that he may retain his pensions; is that the master whom you propose to me? I thank you, D'Artagnan."

"You are more impetuous than you were," returned D'Artagnan. "Age has warmed, not chilled your blood. Who informed you this was the master I propose to you? Devil take it," he muttered to himself, "don't let me betray my secrets to a man not inclined to entertain them."

“Well, then,” said Athos, “what are your schemes? what do you propose?”

“Zounds! nothing more than natural. You live on your estate, happy in golden mediocrity. Porthos has, perhaps, sixty thousand francs income. Aramis has always fifty duchesses quarreling over the priest, as they quarreled formerly over the musketeer; but I--what have I in the world? I have worn my cuirass these twenty years, kept down in this inferior rank, without going forward or backward, hardly half living. In fact, I am dead. Well! when there is some idea of being resuscitated, you say he’s a scoundrel, an impudent fellow, a miser, a bad master! By Jove! I am of your opinion, but find me a better one or give me the means of living.”

Athos was for a few moments thoughtful.

“Good! D’Artagnan is for Mazarin,” he said to himself.

From that moment he grew very guarded.

On his side D’Artagnan became more cautious also.

“You spoke to me,” Athos resumed, “of Porthos; have you persuaded him to seek his fortune? But he has wealth, I believe, already.”

“Doubtless he has. But such is man, we always want something more than we already have.”

“What does Porthos wish for?”

“To be a baron.”

“Ah, true! I forgot,” said Athos, laughing.

“‘Tis true!” thought the Gascon, “where has he heard it? Does he correspond with Aramis? Ah! if I knew that he did I should know all.”

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Raoul.

“Is our little neighbor worse?” asked D’Artagnan, seeing a look of vexation on the face of the youth.

“Ah, sir!” replied Raoul, “her fall is a very serious one, and without any ostensible injury, the physician fears she will be lame for life.”

“This is terrible,” said Athos.

“And what makes me all the more wretched, sir, is, that I was the cause of this misfortune.”

“How so?” asked Athos.

“It was to run to meet me that she leaped from that pile of wood.”

“There’s only one remedy, dear Raoul--that is, to marry her as a compensation.” remarked D’Artagnan.

"Ah, sir!" answered Raoul, "you joke about a real misfortune; that is cruel, indeed."

The good understanding between the two friends was not in the least altered by the morning's skirmish. They breakfasted with a good appetite, looking now and then at poor Raoul, who with moist eyes and a full heart, scarcely ate at all.

After breakfast two letters arrived for Athos, who read them with profound attention, whilst D'Artagnan could not restrain himself from jumping up several times on seeing him read these epistles, in one of which, there being at the time a very strong light, he perceived the fine writing of Aramis. The other was in a feminine hand, long, and crossed.

"Come," said D'Artagnan to Raoul, seeing that Athos wished to be alone, "come, let us take a turn in the fencing gallery; that will amuse you."

And they both went into a low room where there were foils, gloves, masks, breastplates, and all the accessories for a fencing match.

In a quarter of an hour Athos joined them and at the same moment Charles brought in a letter for D'Artagnan, which a messenger had just desired might be instantly delivered.

It was now Athos's turn to take a sly look.

D'Artagnan read the letter with apparent calmness and said, shaking his head:

"See, dear friend, what it is to belong to the army. Faith, you are indeed right not to return to it. Monsieur de Treville is ill, so my company can't do without me; there! my leave is at an end!"

"Do you return to Paris?" asked Athos, quickly.

"Egad! yes; but why don't you come there also?"

Athos colored a little and answered:

"Should I go, I shall be delighted to see you there."

"Halloo, Planchet!" cried the Gascon from the door, "we must set out in ten minutes; give the horses some hay."

Then turning to Athos he added:

"I seem to miss something here. I am really sorry to go away without having seen Grimaud."

"Grimaud!" replied Athos. "I'm surprised you have never so much as asked after him. I have lent him to a friend----"

"Who will understand the signs he makes?" returned D'Artagnan.

"I hope so."

The friends embraced cordially; D'Artagnan pressed Raoul's hand.

"Will you not come with me?" he said; "I shall pass by Blois."

Raoul turned toward Athos, who showed him by a secret sign that he did not wish him to go.

"No, monsieur," replied the young man; "I will remain with monsieur le comte."

"Adieu, then, to both, my good friends," said D'Artagnan; "may God preserve you! as we used to say when we said good-bye to each other in the late cardinal's time."

Athos waved his hand, Raoul bowed, and D'Artagnan and Planchet set out.

The count followed them with his eyes, his hands resting on the shoulders of the youth, whose height was almost equal to his own; but as soon as they were out of sight he said:

"Raoul, we set out to-night for Paris."

"Eh?" cried the young man, turning pale.

"You may go and offer your adieux and mine to Madame de Saint-Remy. I shall wait for you here till seven."

The young man bent low, with an expression of sorrow and gratitude mingled, and retired in order to saddle his horse.

As to D'Artagnan, scarcely, on his side, was he out of sight when he drew from his pocket a letter, which he read over again:

"Return immediately to Paris.--J. M----."

"The epistle is laconic," said D'Artagnan; "and if there had not been a postscript, probably I should not have understood it; but happily there is a postscript."

And he read that welcome postscript, which made him forget the abruptness of the letter.

"P. S.--Go to the king's treasurer, at Blois; tell him your name and show him this letter; you will receive two hundred pistoles."

"Assuredly," said D'Artagnan, "I admire this piece of prose. The cardinal writes better than I thought. Come, Planchet, let us pay a visit to the king's treasurer and then set off."

"Toward Paris, sir?"

"Toward Paris."

And they set out at as hard a canter as their horses could maintain.

CHAPTER 16.

The Duc de Beaufort.

The circumstances that had hastened the return of D’Artagnan to Paris were as follows:

One evening, when Mazarin, according to custom, went to visit the queen, in passing the guard-chamber he heard loud voices; wishing to know on what topic the soldiers were conversing, he approached with his wonted wolf-like step, pushed open the door and put his head close to the chink.

There was a dispute among the guards.

“I tell you,” one of them was saying, “that if Coysel predicted that, ‘tis as good as true; I know nothing about it, but I have heard say that he’s not only an astrologer, but a magician.”

“Deuce take it, friend, if he’s one of thy friends thou wilt ruin him in saying so.”

“Why?”

“Because he may be tried for it.”

“Ah! absurd! they don’t burn sorcerers nowadays.”

“No? ‘Tis not a long time since the late cardinal burnt Urban Grandier, though.”

“My friend, Urban Grandier wasn’t a sorcerer, he was a learned man. He didn’t predict the future, he knew the past--often a more dangerous thing.”

Mazarin nodded an assent, but wishing to know what this prediction was, about which they disputed, he remained in the same place.

“I don’t say,” resumed the guard, “that Coysel is not a sorcerer, but I say that if his prophecy gets wind, it’s a sure way to prevent it’s coming true.”

“How so?”

“Why, in this way: if Coysel says loud enough for the cardinal to hear him, on such or such a day such a prisoner will escape, ‘tis plain that the cardinal will take measures of precaution and that the prisoner will not escape.”

“Good Lord!” said another guard, who might have been thought asleep on a bench, but who had lost not a syllable of the conversation, “do you suppose that men can escape their destiny? If it is written yonder, in Heaven, that the Duc de Beaufort is to escape, he will escape; and all the precautions of the cardinal will not prevent it.”

Mazarin started. He was an Italian and therefore superstitious. He walked straight into the midst of the guards, who on seeing him were silent.

“What were you saying?” he asked with his flattering manner; “that Monsieur de Beaufort had escaped, were you not?”

“Oh, no, my lord!” said the incredulous soldier. “He’s well guarded now; we only said he would escape.”

“Who said so?”

“Repeat your story, Saint Laurent,” replied the man, turning to the originator of the tale.

“My lord,” said the guard, “I have simply mentioned the prophecy I heard from a man named Coysel, who believes that, be he ever so closely watched and guarded, the Duke of Beaufort will escape before Whitsuntide.”

“Coysel is a madman!” returned the cardinal.

“No,” replied the soldier, tenacious in his credulity; “he has foretold many things which have come to pass; for instance, that the queen would have a son; that Monsieur Coligny would be killed in a duel with the Duc de Guise; and finally, that the coadjutor would be made cardinal. Well! the queen has not only one son, but two; then, Monsieur de Coligny was killed, and----”

“Yes,” said Mazarin, “but the coadjutor is not yet made cardinal!”

“No, my lord, but he will be,” answered the guard.

Mazarin made a grimace, as if he meant to say, “But he does not wear the cardinal’s cap;” then he added:

“So, my friend, it’s your opinion that Monsieur de Beaufort will escape?”

“That’s my idea, my lord; and if your eminence were to offer to make me at this moment governor of the castle of Vincennes, I should refuse it. After Whitsuntide it would be another thing.”

There is nothing so convincing as a firm conviction. It has its own effect upon the most incredulous; and far from being incredulous, Mazarin was superstitious. He went away thoughtful and anxious and returned to his own room, where he summoned Bernouin and desired him to fetch thither in the morning the special guard he had placed over Monsieur de Beaufort and to awaken him whenever he should arrive.

The guard had, in fact, touched the cardinal in the tenderest point. During the whole five years in which the Duc de Beaufort had been in prison not a day had passed in which the cardinal had not felt a secret dread of his escape. It was not possible, as he knew well, to confine for the whole of his life the grandson of Henry IV., especially when this young prince was scarcely thirty years of age. But however and whensoever he did escape, what hatred he must cherish against him to whom he owed his long imprisonment; who had taken him, rich, brave, glorious, beloved by women, feared by men, to cut off his life's best, happiest years; for it is not life, it is merely existence, in prison! Meantime, Mazarin redoubled his surveillance over the duke. But like the miser in the fable, he could not sleep for thinking of his treasure. Often he awoke in the night, suddenly, dreaming that he had been robbed of Monsieur de Beaufort. Then he inquired about him and had the vexation of hearing that the prisoner played, drank, sang, but that whilst playing, drinking, singing, he often stopped short to vow that Mazarin should pay dear for all the amusements he had forced him to enter into at Vincennes.

So much did this one idea haunt the cardinal even in his sleep, that when at seven in the morning Bernouin came to arouse him, his first words were: "Well, what's the matter? Has Monsieur de Beaufort escaped from Vincennes?"

"I do not think so, my lord," said Bernouin; "but you will hear about him, for La Ramee is here and awaits the commands of your eminence."

"Tell him to come in," said Mazarin, arranging his pillows, so that he might receive the visitor sitting up in bed.

The officer entered, a large fat man, with an open physiognomy. His air of perfect serenity made Mazarin uneasy.

"Approach, sir," said the cardinal.

The officer obeyed.

"Do you know what they are saying here?"

"No, your eminence."

"Well, they say that Monsieur de Beaufort is going to escape from Vincennes, if he has not done so already."

The officer's face expressed complete stupefaction. He opened at once his little eyes and his great mouth, to inhale better the joke his eminence deigned to address to him, and ended by a burst of laughter, so violent that his great limbs shook in hilarity as they would have done in an ague.

“Escape! my lord--escape! Your eminence does not then know where Monsieur de Beaufort is?”

“Yes, I do, sir; in the donjon of Vincennes.”

“Yes, sir; in a room, the walls of which are seven feet thick, with grated windows, each bar as thick as my arm.”

“Sir,” replied Mazarin, “with perseverance one may penetrate through a wall; with a watch-spring one may saw through an iron bar.”

“Then my lord does not know that there are eight guards about him, four in his chamber, four in the antechamber, and that they never leave him.”

“But he leaves his room, he plays at tennis at the Mall?”

“Sir, those amusements are allowed; but if your eminence wishes it, we will discontinue the permission.”

“No, no!” cried Mazarin, fearing that should his prisoner ever leave his prison he would be the more exasperated against him if he thus retrenched his amusement. He then asked with whom he played.

“My lord, either with the officers of the guard, with the other prisoners, or with me.”

“But does he not approach the walls while playing?”

“Your eminence doesn’t know those walls; they are sixty feet high and I doubt if Monsieur de Beaufort is sufficiently weary of life to risk his neck by jumping off.”

“Hum!” said the cardinal, beginning to feel more comfortable. “You mean to say, then, my dear Monsieur la Ramee----”

“That unless Monsieur de Beaufort can contrive to metamorphose himself into a little bird, I will continue answerable for him.”

“Take care! you assert a great deal,” said Mazarin. “Monsieur de Beaufort told the guards who took him to Vincennes that he had often thought what he should do in case he were put into prison, and that he had found out forty ways of escaping.”

“My lord, if among these forty there had been one good way he would have been out long ago.”

“Come, come; not such a fool as I fancied!” thought Mazarin.

“Besides, my lord must remember that Monsieur de Chavigny is governor of Vincennes,” continued La Ramee, “and that Monsieur de Chavigny is not friendly to Monsieur de Beaufort.”

“Yes, but Monsieur de Chavigny is sometimes absent.”

“When he is absent I am there.”

“But when you leave him, for instance?”

“Oh! when I leave him, I place in my stead a bold fellow who aspires to be his majesty’s special guard. I promise you he keeps a good watch over the prisoner. During the three weeks that he has been with me, I have only had to reproach him with one thing--being too severe with the prisoners.”

“And who is this Cerberus?”

“A certain Monsieur Grimaud, my lord.”

“And what was he before he went to Vincennes?”

“He was in the country, as I was told by the person who recommended him to me.”

“And who recommended this man to you?”

“The steward of the Duc de Grammont.”

“He is not a gossip, I hope?”

“Lord a mercy, my lord! I thought for a long time that he was dumb; he answers only by signs. It seems his former master accustomed him to that.”

“Well, dear Monsieur la Ramee,” replied the cardinal “let him prove a true and thankful keeper and we will shut our eyes upon his rural misdeeds and put on his back a uniform to make him respectable, and in the pockets of that uniform some pistoles to drink to the king’s health.”

Mazarin was large in promises,--quite unlike the virtuous Monsieur Grimaud so bepraised by La Ramee; for he said nothing and did much.

It was now nine o’clock. The cardinal, therefore, got up, perfumed himself, dressed, and went to the queen to tell her what had detained him. The queen, who was scarcely less afraid of Monsieur de Beaufort than the cardinal himself, and who was almost as superstitious as he was, made him repeat word for word all La Ramee’s praises of his deputy. Then, when the cardinal had ended:

“Alas, sir! why have we not a Grimaud near every prince?”

“Patience!” replied Mazarin, with his Italian smile; “that may happen one day; but in the meantime----”

“Well, in the meantime?”

“I shall still take precautions.”

And he wrote to D’Artagnan to hasten his return.

CHAPTER 17.

Duc de Beaufort amused his Leisure Hours in the Donjon of Vincennes.

The captive who was the source of so much alarm to the cardinal and whose means of escape disturbed the repose of the whole court, was wholly unconscious of the terror he caused at the Palais Royal.

He had found himself so strictly guarded that he soon perceived the fruitlessness of any attempt at escape. His vengeance, therefore, consisted in coining curses on the head of Mazarin; he even tried to make some verses on him, but soon gave up the attempt, for Monsieur de Beaufort had not only not received from Heaven the gift of versifying, he had the greatest difficulty in expressing himself in prose.

The duke was the grandson of Henry VI. and Gabrielle d’Estrees--as good-natured, as brave, as proud, and above all, as Gascon as his ancestor, but less elaborately educated. After having been for some time after the death of Louis XIII. the favorite, the confidant, the first man, in short, at the court, he had been obliged to yield his place to Mazarin and so became the second in influence and favor; and eventually, as he was stupid enough to be vexed at this change of position, the queen had had him arrested and sent to Vincennes in charge of Guitant, who made his appearance in these pages in the beginning of this history and whom we shall see again. It is understood, of course, that when we say “the queen,” Mazarin is meant.

During the five years of this seclusion, which would have improved and matured the intellect of any other man, M. de Beaufort, had he not affected to brave the cardinal, despise princes, and walk alone without adherents or disciples, would either have regained his liberty or made partisans. But these considerations never occurred to the duke and every day the cardinal received fresh accounts of him which were as unpleasant as possible to the minister.

After having failed in poetry, Monsieur de Beaufort tried drawing. He drew portraits, with a piece of coal, of the cardinal; and as his talents did not enable him to produce a very good likeness, he wrote under the picture that there might be little doubt regarding the original: “Portrait of the

Illustrious Coxcomb, Mazarin.” Monsieur de Chavigny, the governor of Vincennes, waited upon the duke to request that he would amuse himself in some other way, or that at all events, if he drew likenesses, he would not put mottoes underneath them. The next day the prisoner’s room was full of pictures and mottoes. Monsieur de Beaufort, in common with many other prisoners, was bent upon doing things that were prohibited; and the only resource the governor had was, one day when the duke was playing at tennis, to efface all these drawings, consisting chiefly of profiles. M. de Beaufort did not venture to draw the cardinal’s fat face.

The duke thanked Monsieur de Chavigny for having, as he said, cleaned his drawing-paper for him; he then divided the walls of his room into compartments and dedicated each of these compartments to some incident in Mazarin’s life. In one was depicted the “Illustrious Coxcomb” receiving a shower of blows from Cardinal Bentivoglio, whose servant he had been; another, the “Illustrious Mazarin” acting the part of Ignatius Loyola in a tragedy of that name; a third, the “Illustrious Mazarin” stealing the portfolio of prime minister from Monsieur de Chavigny, who had expected to have it; a fourth, the “Illustrious Coxcomb Mazarin” refusing to give Laporte, the young king’s valet, clean sheets, and saving that “it was quite enough for the king of France to have clean sheets every three months.”

The governor, of course, thought proper to threaten his prisoner that if he did not give up drawing such pictures he should be obliged to deprive him of all the means of amusing himself in that manner. To this Monsieur de Beaufort replied that since every opportunity of distinguishing himself in arms was taken from him, he wished to make himself celebrated in the arts; since he could not be a Bayard, he would become a Raphael or a Michael Angelo. Nevertheless, one day when Monsieur de Beaufort was walking in the meadow his fire was put out, his charcoal all removed, taken away; and thus his means of drawing utterly destroyed.

The poor duke swore, fell into a rage, yelled, and declared that they wished to starve him to death as they had starved the Marechal Ornano and the Grand Prior of Vendome; but he refused to promise that he would not make any more drawings and remained without any fire in the room all the winter.

His next act was to purchase a dog from one of his keepers. With this animal, which he called Pistache, he was often shut up for hours alone, superintending, as every one supposed, its education. At last, when Pistache was sufficiently well trained, Monsieur de Beaufort invited the governor and officers of Vincennes to attend a representation which he was going to have in his apartment.

The party assembled, the room was lighted with waxlights, and the prisoner, with a bit of plaster he had taken out of the wall of his room, had traced a long white line, representing a cord, on the floor. Pistache, on a signal from his master, placed himself on this line, raised himself on his hind paws, and holding in his front paws a wand with which clothes used to be beaten, he began to dance upon the line with as many contortions as a rope-dancer. Having been several times up and down it, he gave the wand back to his master and began without hesitation to perform the same evolutions over again.

The intelligent creature was received with loud applause.

The first part of the entertainment being concluded Pistache was desired to say what o'clock it was; he was shown Monsieur de Chavigny's watch; it was then half-past six; the dog raised and dropped his paw six times; the seventh he let it remain upraised. Nothing could be better done; a sun-dial could not have shown the hour with greater precision.

Then the question was put to him who was the best jailer in all the prisons in France.

The dog performed three evolutions around the circle and laid himself, with the deepest respect, at the feet of Monsieur de Chavigny, who at first seemed inclined to like the joke and laughed long and loud, but a frown succeeded, and he bit his lips with vexation.

Then the duke put to Pistache this difficult question, who was the greatest thief in the world?

Pistache went again around the circle, but stopped at no one, and at last went to the door and began to scratch and bark.

"See, gentlemen," said M. de Beaufort, "this wonderful animal, not finding here what I ask for, seeks it out of doors; you shall, however, have his answer. Pistache, my friend, come here. Is not the greatest thief in the world, Monsieur (the king's secretary) Le Camus, who came to Paris with twenty francs in his pocket and who now possesses ten millions?"

The dog shook his head.

"Then is it not," resumed the duke, "the Superintendent Emery, who gave his son, when he was married, three hundred thousand francs and a house, compared to which the Tuileries are a heap of ruins and the Louvre a paltry building?”

The dog again shook his head as if to say “no.”

“Then,” said the prisoner, “let’s think who it can be. Can it be, can it possibly be, the ‘Illustrious Coxcomb, Mazarin de Piscina,’ hey?”

Pistache made violent signs that it was, by raising and lowering his head eight or ten times successively.

“Gentlemen, you see,” said the duke to those present, who dared not even smile, “that it is the ‘Illustrious Coxcomb’ who is the greatest thief in the world; at least, according to Pistache.”

“Let us go on to another of his exercises.”

“Gentlemen!”--there was a profound silence in the room when the duke again addressed them--”do you not remember that the Duc de Guise taught all the dogs in Paris to jump for Mademoiselle de Pons, whom he styled ‘the fairest of the fair?’ Pistache is going to show you how superior he is to all other dogs. Monsieur de Chavigny, be so good as to lend me your cane.”

Monsieur de Chavigny handed his cane to Monsieur de Beaufort. Monsieur de Beaufort placed it horizontally at the height of one foot.

“Now, Pistache, my good dog, jump the height of this cane for Madame de Montbazon.”

“But,” interposed Monsieur de Chavigny, “it seems to me that Pistache is only doing what other dogs have done when they jumped for Mademoiselle de Pons.”

“Stop,” said the duke, “Pistache, jump for the queen.” And he raised his cane six inches higher.

The dog sprang, and in spite of the height jumped lightly over it.

“And now,” said the duke, raising it still six inches higher, “jump for the king.”

The dog obeyed and jumped quickly over the cane.

“Now, then,” said the duke, and as he spoke, lowered the cane almost level with the ground; “Pistache, my friend, jump for the ‘Illustrious Coxcomb, Mazarin de Piscina.’“

The dog turned his back to the cane.

“What,” asked the duke, “what do you mean?” and he gave him the cane again, first making a semicircle from the head to the tail of Pistache. “Jump then, Monsieur Pistache.”

But Pistache, as at first, turned round on his legs and stood with his back to the cane.

Monsieur de Beaufort made the experiment a third time, but by this time Pistache's patience was exhausted; he threw himself furiously upon the cane, wrested it from the hands of the prince and broke it with his teeth.

Monsieur de Beaufort took the pieces out of his mouth and presented them with great formality to Monsieur de Chavigny, saying that for that evening the entertainment was ended, but in three months it should be repeated, when Pistache would have learned a few new tricks.

Three days afterward Pistache was found dead--poisoned.

Then the duke said openly that his dog had been killed by a drug with which they meant to poison him; and one day after dinner he went to bed, calling out that he had pains in his stomach and that Mazarin had poisoned him.

This fresh impertinence reached the ears of the cardinal and alarmed him greatly. The donjon of Vincennes was considered very unhealthy and Madame de Rambouillet had said that the room in which the Marechal Ornano and the Grand Prior de Vendome had died was worth its weight in arsenic--a bon mot which had great success. So it was ordered the prisoner was henceforth to eat nothing that had not previously been tasted, and La Ramee was in consequence placed near him as taster.

Every kind of revenge was practiced upon the duke by the governor in return for the insults of the innocent Pistache. De Chavigny, who, according to report, was a son of Richelieu's, and had been a creature of the late cardinal's, understood tyranny. He took from the duke all the steel knives and silver forks and replaced them with silver knives and wooden forks, pretending that as he had been informed that the duke was to pass all his life at Vincennes, he was afraid of his prisoner attempting suicide. A fortnight afterward the duke, going to the tennis court, found two rows of trees about the size of his little finger planted by the roadside; he asked what they were for and was told that they were to shade him from the sun on some future day. One morning the gardener went to him and told him, as if to please him, that he was going to plant a bed of asparagus for his especial use. Now, since, as every one knows, asparagus takes four years in coming to perfection, this civility infuriated Monsieur de Beaufort.

At last his patience was exhausted. He assembled his keepers, and notwithstanding his well-known difficulty of utterance, addressed them as follows:

"Gentlemen! will you permit a grandson of Henry IV. to be overwhelmed with insults and ignominy?

"Odds fish! as my grandfather used to say, I once reigned in Paris! do you know that? I had the king and Monsieur the whole of one day in my care. The queen at that time liked me and called me the most honest man in the kingdom. Gentlemen and citizens, set me free; I shall go to the Louvre and strangle Mazarin. You shall be my body-guard. I will make you all captains, with good pensions! Odds fish! On! march forward!"

But eloquent as he might be, the eloquence of the grandson of Henry IV. did not touch those hearts of stone; not one man stirred, so Monsieur de Beaufort was obliged to be satisfied with calling them all kinds of rascals underneath the sun.

Sometimes, when Monsieur de Chavigny paid him a visit, the duke used to ask him what he should think if he saw an army of Parisians, all fully armed, appear at Vincennes to deliver him from prison.

"My lord," answered De Chavigny, with a low bow, "I have on the ramparts twenty pieces of artillery and in my casemates thirty thousand guns. I should bombard the troops till not one grain of gunpowder was unexploded."

"Yes, but after you had fired off your thirty thousand guns they would take the donjon; the donjon being taken, I should be obliged to let them hang you--at which I should be most unhappy, certainly."

And in his turn the duke bowed low to Monsieur de Chavigny.

"For myself, on the other hand, my lord," returned the governor, "when the first rebel should pass the threshold of my postern doors I should be obliged to kill you with my own hand, since you were confided peculiarly to my care and as I am obliged to give you up, dead or alive."

And once more he bowed low before his highness.

These bitter-sweet pleasantries lasted ten minutes, sometimes longer, but always finished thus:

Monsieur de Chavigny, turning toward the door, used to call out: "Halloo! La Ramee!"

La Ramee came into the room.

"La Ramee, I recommend Monsieur le Duc to you, particularly; treat him as a man of his rank and family ought to be treated; that is, never leave him alone an instant."

La Ramee became, therefore, the duke’s dinner guest by compulsion--an eternal keeper, the shadow of his person; but La Ramee--gay, frank, convivial, fond of play, a great hand at tennis, had one defect in the duke’s eyes--his incorruptibility.

Now, although La Ramee appreciated, as of a certain value, the honor of being shut up with a prisoner of so great importance, still the pleasure of living in intimacy with the grandson of Henry IV. hardly compensated for the loss of that which he had experienced in going from time to time to visit his family.

One may be a jailer or a keeper and at the same time a good father and husband. La Ramee adored his wife and children, whom now he could only catch a glimpse of from the top of the wall, when in order to please him they used to walk on the opposite side of the moat. ‘Twas too brief an enjoyment, and La Ramee felt that the gayety of heart he had regarded as the cause of health (of which it was perhaps rather the result) would not long survive such a mode of life.

He accepted, therefore, with delight, an offer made to him by his friend the steward of the Duc de Grammont, to give him a substitute; he also spoke of it to Monsieur de Chavigny, who promised that he would not oppose it in any way--that is, if he approved of the person proposed.

We consider it useless to draw a physical or moral portrait of Grimaud; if, as we hope, our readers have not wholly forgotten the first part of this work, they must have preserved a clear idea of that estimable individual, who is wholly unchanged, except that he is twenty years older, an advance in life that has made him only more silent; although, since the change that had been working in himself, Athos had given Grimaud permission to speak.

But Grimaud had for twelve or fifteen years preserved habitual silence, and a habit of fifteen or twenty years’ duration becomes second nature.

CHAPTER 18.

Grimaud begins his Functions.

Grimaud thereupon presented himself with his smooth exterior at the donjon of Vincennes. Now Monsieur de Chavigny piqued himself on his infallible penetration; for that which almost proved that he was the son of Richelieu was his everlasting pretension; he examined attentively the countenance of the applicant for place and fancied that the contracted eyebrows, thin lips, hooked nose, and prominent cheek-bones of Grimaud were favorable signs. He addressed about twelve words to him; Grimaud answered in four.

“Here’s a promising fellow and it is I who have found out his merits,” said Monsieur de Chavigny. “Go,” he added, “and make yourself agreeable to Monsieur la Ramee, and tell him that you suit me in all respects.”

Grimaud had every quality that could attract a man on duty who wishes to have a deputy. So, after a thousand questions which met with only a word in reply, La Ramee, fascinated by this sobriety in speech, rubbed his hands and engaged Grimaud.

“My orders?” asked Grimaud.

“They are these; never to leave the prisoner alone; to keep away from him every pointed or cutting instrument, and to prevent his conversing any length of time with the keepers.”

“Those are all?” asked Grimaud.

“All now,” replied La Ramee.

“Good,” answered Grimaud; and he went right to the prisoner.

The duke was in the act of combing his beard, which he had allowed to grow, as well as his hair, in order to reproach Mazarin with his wretched appearance and condition. But having some days previously seen from the top of the donjon Madame de Montbazon pass in her carriage, and still cherishing an affection for that beautiful woman, he did not wish to be to her what he wished to be to Mazarin, and in the hope of seeing her again, had asked for a leaden comb, which was allowed him. The comb was to be a leaden one, because his beard, like that of most fair people, was rather red; he therefore dyed it thus whilst combing it.

As Grimaud entered he saw this comb on the tea-table; he took it up, and as he took it he made a low bow.

The duke looked at this strange figure with surprise. The figure put the comb in its pocket.

“Ho! hey! what’s that?” cried the duke. “Who is this creature?”

Grimaud did not answer, but bowed a second time.

“Art thou dumb?” cried the duke.

Grimaud made a sign that he was not.

“What art thou, then? Answer! I command thee!” said the duke.

“A keeper,” replied Grimaud.

“A keeper!” reiterated the duke; “there was nothing wanting in my collection, except this gallows-bird. Halloo! La Ramee! some one!”

La Ramee ran in haste to obey the call.

“Who is this wretch who takes my comb and puts it in his pocket?” asked the duke.

“One of your guards, my prince; a man of talent and merit, whom you will like, as I and Monsieur de Chavigny do, I am sure.”

“Why does he take my comb?”

“Why do you take my lord’s comb?” asked La Ramee.

Grimaud drew the comb from his pocket and passing his fingers over the largest teeth, pronounced this one word, “Pointed.”

“True,” said La Ramee.

“What does the animal say?” asked the duke.

“That the king has forbidden your lordship to have any pointed instrument.”

“Are you mad, La Ramee? You yourself gave me this comb.”

“I was very wrong, my lord, for in giving it to you I acted in opposition to my orders.”

The duke looked furiously at Grimaud.

“I perceive that this creature will be my particular aversion,” he muttered.

Grimaud, nevertheless, was resolved for certain reasons not at once to come to a full rupture with the prisoner; he wanted to inspire, not a sudden repugnance, but a good, sound, steady hatred; he retired, therefore, and gave place to four guards, who, having breakfasted, could attend on the prisoner.

A fresh practical joke now occurred to the duke. He had asked for crawfish for his breakfast on the following morning; he intended to pass the day in making a small gallows and hang one of the finest of these fish in the middle of his room--the red color evidently conveying an allusion to the cardinal--so that he might have the pleasure of hanging Mazarin in effigy without being accused of having hung anything more significant than a crawfish.

The day was employed in preparations for the execution. Every one grows childish in prison, but the character of Monsieur de Beaufort was particularly disposed to become so. In the course of his morning's walk he collected two or three small branches from a tree and found a small piece of broken glass, a discovery that quite delighted him. When he came home he formed his handkerchief into a loop.

Nothing of all this escaped Grimaud, but La Ramee looked on with the curiosity of a father who thinks that he may perhaps get a cheap idea concerning a new toy for his children. The guards looked on it with indifference. When everything was ready, the gallows hung in the middle of the room, the loop made, and when the duke had cast a glance upon the plate of crawfish, in order to select the finest specimen among them, he looked around for his piece of glass; it had disappeared.

"Who has taken my piece of glass?" asked the duke, frowning. Grimaud made a sign to denote that he had done so.

"What! thou again! Why didst thou take it?"

"Yes--why?" asked La Ramee.

Grimaud, who held the piece of glass in his hand, said: "Sharp."

"True, my lord!" exclaimed La Ramee. "Ah! deuce take it! we have a precious fellow here!"

"Monsieur Grimaud!" said the duke, "for your sake I beg of you, never come within the reach of my fist!"

"Hush! hush!" cried La Ramee, "give me your gibbet, my lord. I will shape it out for you with my knife."

And he took the gibbet and shaped it out as neatly as possible.

"That's it," said the duke, "now make me a little hole in the floor whilst I go and fetch the culprit."

La Ramee knelt down and made a hole in the floor; meanwhile the duke hung the crawfish up by a thread. Then he placed the gibbet in the middle of the room, bursting with laughter.

La Ramee laughed also and the guards laughed in chorus; Grimaud, however, did not even smile. He approached La Ramee and showing him the crawfish hung up by the thread:

“Cardinal,” he said.

“Hung by order of his Highness the Duc de Beaufort!” cried the prisoner, laughing violently, “and by Master Jacques Chrysostom La Ramee, the king’s commissioner.”

La Ramee uttered a cry of horror and rushed toward the gibbet, which he broke at once and threw the pieces out of the window. He was going to throw the crawfish out also, when Grimaud snatched it from his hands.

“Good to eat!” he said, and put it in his pocket.

This scene so enchanted the duke that at the moment he forgave Grimaud for his part in it; but on reflection he hated him more and more, being convinced he had some evil motive for his conduct.

But the story of the crab made a great noise through the interior of the donjon and even outside. Monsieur de Chavigny, who at heart detested the cardinal, took pains to tell the story to two or three friends, who put it into immediate circulation.

The prisoner happened to remark among the guards one man with a very good countenance; and he favored this man the more as Grimaud became the more and more odious to him. One morning he took this man on one side and had succeeded in speaking to him, when Grimaud entered and seeing what was going on approached the duke respectfully, but took the guard by the arm.

“Go away,” he said.

The guard obeyed.

“You are insupportable!” cried the duke; “I shall beat you.”

Grimaud bowed.

“I will break every bone in your body!” cried the duke.

Grimaud bowed, but stepped back.

“Mr. Spy,” cried the duke, more and more enraged, “I will strangle you with my own hands.”

And he extended his hands toward Grimaud, who merely thrust the guard out and shut the door behind him. At the same time he felt the duke’s arms on his shoulders like two iron claws; but instead either of calling out or defending himself, he placed his forefinger on his lips and said in a low tone:

“Hush!” smiling as he uttered the word.

A gesture, a smile and a word from Grimaud, all at once, were so unusual that his highness stopped short, astounded.

Grimaud took advantage of that instant to draw from his vest a charming little note with an aristocratic seal, and presented it to the duke without a word.

The duke, more and more bewildered, let Grimaud loose and took the note.

“From Madame de Montbazon?” he cried.

Grimaud nodded assent.

The duke tore open the note, passed his hands over his eyes, for he was dazzled and confused, and read:

“My Dear Duke,--You may entirely confide in the brave lad who will give you this note; he has consented to enter the service of your keeper and to shut himself up at Vincennes with you, in order to prepare and assist your escape, which we are contriving. The moment of your deliverance is at hand; have patience and courage and remember that in spite of time and absence all your friends continue to cherish for you the sentiments they have so long professed and truly entertained.

“Yours wholly and most affectionately

“Marie de Montbazon.

“P.S.--I sign my full name, for I should be vain if I could suppose that after five years of absence you would remember my initials.”

The poor duke became perfectly giddy. What for five years he had been wanting--a faithful servant, a friend, a helping hand--seemed to have fallen from Heaven just when he expected it the least.

“Oh, dearest Marie! she thinks of me, then, after five years of separation! Heavens! there is constancy!” Then turning to Grimaud, he said:

“And thou, my brave fellow, thou consentest thus to aid me?”

Grimaud signified his assent.

“And you have come here with that purpose?”

Grimaud repeated the sign.

“And I was ready to strangle you!” cried the duke.

Grimaud smiled.

“Wait, then,” said the duke, fumbling in his pocket. “Wait,” he continued, renewing his fruitless search; “it shall not be said that such devotion to a grandson of Henry IV. went without recompense.”

The duke’s endeavors evinced the best intention in the world, but one of the precautions taken at Vincennes was that of allowing prisoners to keep no money. Whereupon Grimaud, observing the duke’s disappointment, drew from his pocket a purse filled with gold and handed it to him.

“Here is what you are looking for,” he said.

The duke opened the purse and wanted to empty it into Grimaud’s hands, but Grimaud shook his head.

“Thank you, monseigneur,” he said, drawing back; “I am paid.”

The duke went from one surprise to another. He held out his hand. Grimaud drew near and kissed it respectfully. The grand manner of Athos had left its mark on Grimaud.

“What shall we do? and when? and how proceed?”

“It is now eleven,” answered Grimaud. “Let my lord at two o’clock ask leave to make up a game at tennis with La Ramee and let him send two or three balls over the ramparts.”

“And then?”

“Your highness will approach the walls and call out to a man who works in the moat to send them back again.”

“I understand,” said the duke.

Grimaud made a sign that he was going away.

“Ah!” cried the duke, “will you not accept any money from me?”

“I wish my lord would make me one promise.”

“What! speak!”

“‘Tis this: when we escape together, that I shall go everywhere and be always first; for if my lord should be overtaken and caught, there’s every chance of his being brought back to prison, whereas if I am caught the least that can befall me is to be--hung.”

“True, on my honor as a gentleman it shall be as thou dost suggest.”

“Now,” resumed Grimaud, “I’ve only one thing more to ask--that your highness will continue to detest me.”

“I’ll try,” said the duke.

At this moment La Ramee, after the interview we have described with the cardinal, entered the room. The duke had thrown himself, as he was wont to do in moments of dullness and vexation, on his bed. La Ramee cast an inquiring look around him and observing the same signs of antipathy between the prisoner and his guardian he smiled in token of his inward satisfaction. Then turning to Grimaud:

“Very good, my friend, very good. You have been spoken of in a promising quarter and you will soon, I hope, have news that will be agreeable to you.”

Grimaud saluted in his politest manner and withdrew, as was his custom on the entrance of his superior.

“Well, my lord,” said La Ramee, with his rude laugh, “you still set yourself against this poor fellow?”

“So! ‘tis you, La Ramee; in faith, ‘tis time you came back again. I threw myself on the bed and turned my nose to the wall, that I mightn’t break my promise and strangle Grimaud.”

“I doubt, however,” said La Ramee, in sprightly allusion to the silence of his subordinate, “if he has said anything disagreeable to your highness.”

“Pardieu! you are right--a mute from the East! I swear it was time for you to come back, La Ramee, and I was eager to see you again.”

“Monseigneur is too good,” said La Ramee, flattered by the compliment.

“Yes,” continued the duke, “really, I feel bored today beyond the power of description.”

“Then let us have a match in the tennis court,” exclaimed La Ramee.

“If you wish it.”

“I am at your service, my lord.”

“I protest, my dear La Ramee,” said the duke, “that you are a charming fellow and that I would stay forever at Vincennes to have the pleasure of your society.”

“My lord,” replied La Ramee, “I think if it depended on the cardinal your wishes would be fulfilled.”

“What do you mean? Have you seen him lately?”

“He sent for me to-day.”

“Really! to speak to you about me?”

“Of what else do you imagine he would speak to me? Really, my lord, you are his nightmare.”

The duke smiled with bitterness.

“Ah, La Ramee! if you would but accept my offers! I would make your fortune.”

“How? you would no sooner have left prison than your goods would be confiscated.”

“I shall no sooner be out of prison than I shall be master of Paris.”

“Pshaw! pshaw! I cannot hear such things said as that; this is a fine conversation with an officer of the king! I see, my lord, I shall be obliged to fetch a second Grimaud!”

“Very well, let us say no more about it. So you and the cardinal have been talking about me? La Ramee, some day when he sends for you, you must let me put on your clothes; I will go in your stead; I will strangle him, and upon my honor, if that is made a condition I will return to prison.”

“Monseigneur, I see well that I must call Grimaud.”

“Well, I am wrong. And what did the cuistre [pettifogger] say about me?”

“I admit the word, monseigneur, because it rhymes with ministre [minister]. What did he say to me? He told me to watch you.”

“And why so? why watch me?” asked the duke uneasily.

“Because an astrologer had predicted that you would escape.”

“Ah! an astrologer predicted that?” said the duke, starting in spite of himself.

“Oh, mon Dieu! yes! those imbeciles of magicians can only imagine things to torment honest people.”

“And what did you reply to his most illustrious eminence?”

“That if the astrologer in question made almanacs I would advise him not to buy one.”

“Why not?”

“Because before you could escape you would have to be turned into a bird.”

“Unfortunately, that is true. Let us go and have a game at tennis, La Ramee.”

“My lord--I beg your highness’s pardon--but I must beg for half an hour’s leave of absence.”

“Why?”

“Because Monseigneur Mazarin is a prouder man than his highness, though not of such high birth: he forgot to ask me to breakfast.”

“Well, shall I send for some breakfast here?”

“No, my lord; I must tell you that the confectioner who lived opposite the castle--Daddy Marteau, as they called him----”

“Well?”

“Well, he sold his business a week ago to a confectioner from Paris, an invalid, ordered country air for his health.”

“Well, what have I to do with that?”

“Why, good Lord! this man, your highness, when he saw me stop before his shop, where he has a display of things which would make your mouth water, my lord, asked me to get him the custom of the prisoners in the donjon. ‘I bought,’ said he, ‘the business of my predecessor on the strength of his assurance that he supplied the castle; whereas, on my honor, Monsieur de Chavigny, though I’ve been here a week, has not ordered so much as a tartlet.’ ‘But,’ I then replied, ‘probably Monsieur de Chavigny is afraid your pastry is not good.’ ‘My pastry not good! Well, Monsieur La Ramee, you shall judge of it yourself and at once.’ ‘I cannot,’ I replied; ‘it is absolutely necessary for me to return to the chateau.’ ‘Very well,’ said he, ‘go and attend to your affairs, since you seem to be in a hurry, but come back in half an hour.’ ‘In half an hour?’ ‘Yes, have you breakfasted?’ ‘Faith, no.’ ‘Well, here is a pate that will be ready for you, with a bottle of old Burgundy.’ So, you see, my lord, since I am hungry, I would, with your highness’s leave----” And La Ramee bent low.

“Go, then, animal,” said the duke; “but remember, I only allow you half an hour.”

“May I promise your custom to the successor of Father Marteau, my lord?”

“Yes, if he does not put mushrooms in his pies; thou knowest that mushrooms from the wood of Vincennes are fatal to my family.”

La Ramee went out, but in five minutes one of the officers of the guard entered in compliance with the strict orders of the cardinal that the prisoner should never be left alone a moment.

But during these five minutes the duke had had time to read again the note from Madame de Montbazon, which proved to the prisoner that his friends were concerting plans for his deliverance, but in what way he knew not.

But his confidence in Grimaud, whose petty persecutions he now perceived were only a blind, increased, and he conceived the highest opinion of his intellect and resolved to trust entirely to his guidance.

CHAPTER 19.

Pates made by the Successor of Father Marteau are described.

In half an hour La Ramee returned, full of glee, like most men who have eaten, and more especially drank to their heart’s content. The pates were excellent, the wine delicious.

The weather was fine and the game at tennis took place in the open air.

At two o’clock the tennis balls began, according to Grimaud’s directions, to take the direction of the moat, much to the joy of La Ramee, who marked fifteen whenever the duke sent a ball into the moat; and very soon balls were wanting, so many had gone over. La Ramee then proposed to send some one to pick them up, but the duke remarked that it would be losing time; and going near the rampart himself and looking over, he saw a man working in one of the numerous little gardens cleared out by the peasants on the opposite side of the moat.

“Hey, friend!” cried the duke.

The man raised his head and the duke was about to utter a cry of surprise. The peasant, the gardener, was Rochefort, whom he believed to be in the Bastile.

“Well? Who’s up there?” said the man.

“Be so good as to collect and throw us back our balls,” said the duke.

The gardener nodded and began to fling up the balls, which were picked up by La Ramee and the guard. One, however, fell at the duke’s feet, and seeing that it was intended for him, he put it into his pocket.

La Ramee was in ecstasies at having beaten a prince of the blood.

The duke went indoors and retired to bed, where he spent, indeed, the greater part of every day, as they had taken his books away. La Ramee carried off all his clothes, in order to be certain that the duke would not stir. However, the duke contrived to hide the ball under his bolster and as soon as the door was closed he tore off the cover of the ball with his teeth and found underneath the following letter:

My Lord,--Your friends are watching over you and the hour of your deliverance is at hand. Ask day after to-morrow to have a pie supplied you by the new confectioner opposite the castle, and who is no other than Noirmont, your former maitre d'hotel. Do not open the pie till you are alone. I hope you will be satisfied with its contents.

"Your highness's most devoted servant,

"In the Bastile, as elsewhere,

"Comte de Rochefort."

The duke, who had latterly been allowed a fire, burned the letter, but kept the ball, and went to bed, hiding the ball under his bolster. La Ramee entered; he smiled kindly on the prisoner, for he was an excellent man and had taken a great liking for the captive prince. He endeavored to cheer him up in his solitude.

"Ah, my friend!" cried the duke, "you are so good; if I could but do as you do, and eat pates and drink Burgundy at the house of Father Marteau's successor."

"'Tis true, my lord," answered La Ramee, "that his pates are famous and his wine magnificent."

"In any case," said the duke, "his cellar and kitchen might easily excel those of Monsieur de Chavigny."

"Well, my lord," said La Ramee, falling into the trap, "what is there to prevent your trying them? Besides, I have promised him your patronage."

"You are right," said the duke. "If I am to remain here permanently, as Monsieur Mazarin has kindly given me to understand, I must provide myself with a diversion for my old age, I must turn gourmand."

"My lord," said La Ramee, "if you will take a bit of good advice, don't put that off till you are old."

"Good!" said the Duc de Beaufort to himself, "every man in order that he may lose his heart and soul, must receive from celestial bounty one of the seven capital sins, perhaps two; it seems that Master La Ramee's is gluttony. Let us then take advantage of it." Then, aloud:

"Well, my dear La Ramee! the day after to-morrow is a holiday."

"Yes, my lord--Pentecost."

"Will you give me a lesson the day after to-morrow?"

"In what?"

"In gastronomy?"

"Willingly, my lord."

"But tete-a-tete. Send the guards to take their meal in the canteen of Monsieur de Chavigny; we'll have a supper here under your direction."

"Hum!" said La Ramee.

The proposal was seductive, but La Ramee was an old stager, acquainted with all the traps a prisoner was likely to set. Monsieur de Beaufort had said that he had forty ways of getting out of prison. Did this proposed breakfast cover some stratagem? He reflected, but he remembered that he himself would have charge of the food and the wine and therefore that no powder could be mixed with the food, no drug with the wine. As to getting him drunk, the duke couldn't hope to do that, and he laughed at the mere thought of it. Then an idea came to him which harmonized everything.

The duke had followed with anxiety La Ramee's unspoken soliloquy, reading it from point to point upon his face. But presently the exempt's face suddenly brightened.

"Well," he asked, "that will do, will it not?"

"Yes, my lord, on one condition."

"What?"

"That Grimaud shall wait on us at table."

Nothing could be more agreeable to the duke, however, he had presence of mind enough to exclaim:

"To the devil with your Grimaud! He will spoil the feast."

"I will direct him to stand behind your chair, and since he doesn't speak, your highness will neither see nor hear him and with a little effort can imagine him a hundred miles away."

"Do you know, my friend, I find one thing very evident in all this, you distrust me."

"My lord, the day after to-morrow is Pentecost."

"Well, what is Pentecost to me? Are you afraid that the Holy Spirit will come as a tongue of fire to open the doors of my prison?"

"No, my lord; but I have already told you what that damned magician predicted."

"And what was it?"

"That the day of Pentecost would not pass without your highness being out of Vincennes."

"You believe in sorcerers, then, you fool?"

"I---I mind them no more than that----" and he snapped his fingers; "but it is my Lord Giulio who cares about them; as an Italian he is superstitious."

The duke shrugged his shoulders.

“Well, then,” with well acted good-humor, “I allow Grimaud, but no one else; you must manage it all. Order whatever you like for supper--the only thing I specify is one of those pies; and tell the confectioner that I will promise him my custom if he excels this time in his pies--not only now, but when I leave my prison.”

“Then you think you will some day leave it?” said La Ramee.

“The devil!” replied the prince; “surely, at the death of Mazarin. I am fifteen years younger than he is. At Vincennes, ‘tis true, one lives faster----”

“My lord,” replied La Ramee, “my lord----”

“Or dies sooner, for it comes to the same thing.”

La Ramee was going out. He stopped, however, at the door for an instant.

“Whom does your highness wish me to send to you?”

“Any one, except Grimaud.”

“The officer of the guard, then, with his chessboard?”

“Yes.”

Five minutes afterward the officer entered and the duke seemed to be immersed in the sublime combinations of chess.

A strange thing is the mind, and it is wonderful what revolutions may be wrought in it by a sign, a word, a hope. The duke had been five years in prison, and now to him, looking back upon them, those five years, which had passed so slowly, seemed not so long a time as were the two days, the forty-eight hours, which still parted him from the time fixed for his escape. Besides, there was one thing that engaged his most anxious thought--in what way was the escape to be effected? They had told him to hope for it, but had not told him what was to be hidden in the mysterious pate. And what friends awaited him without? He had friends, then, after five years in prison? If that were so he was indeed a highly favored prince. He forgot that besides his friends of his own sex, a woman, strange to say, had remembered him. It is true that she had not, perhaps, been scrupulously faithful to him, but she had remembered him; that was something.

So the duke had more than enough to think about; accordingly he fared at chess as he had fared at tennis; he made blunder upon blunder and the officer with whom he played found him easy game.

But his successive defeats did service to the duke in one way--they killed time for him till eight o’clock in the evening; then would come night, and with night, sleep. So, at least, the duke believed; but sleep is a capricious fairy, and it is precisely when one invokes her presence that she is most likely to keep him waiting. The duke waited until midnight, turning on his mattress like St. Laurence on his gridiron. Finally he slept.

But at daybreak he awoke. Wild dreams had disturbed his repose. He dreamed that he was endowed with wings--he wished to fly away. For a time these wings supported him, but when he reached a certain height this new aid failed him. His wings were broken and he seemed to sink into a bottomless abyss, whence he awoke, bathed in perspiration and nearly as much overcome as if he had really fallen. He fell asleep again and another vision appeared. He was in a subterranean passage by which he was to leave Vincennes. Grimaud was walking before him with a lantern. By degrees the passage narrowed, yet the duke continued his course. At last it became so narrow that the fugitive tried in vain to proceed. The sides of the walls seem to close in, even to press against him. He made fruitless efforts to go on; it was impossible. Nevertheless, he still saw Grimaud with his lantern in front, advancing. He wished to call out to him but could not utter a word. Then at the other extremity he heard the footsteps of those who were pursuing him. These steps came on, came fast. He was discovered; all hope of flight was gone. Still the walls seemed to be closing on him; they appeared to be in concert with his enemies. At last he heard the voice of La Ramee. La Ramee took his hand and laughed aloud. He was captured again, and conducted to the low and vaulted chamber, in which Ornano, Puylaurens, and his uncle had died. Their three graves were there, rising above the ground, and a fourth was also there, yawning for its ghastly tenant.

The duke was obliged to make as many efforts to awake as he had done to go to sleep; and La Ramee found him so pale and fatigued that he inquired whether he was ill.

“In fact,” said one of the guards who had remained in the chamber and had been kept awake by a toothache, brought on by the dampness of the atmosphere, “my lord has had a very restless night and two or three times, while dreaming, he called for help.”

“What is the matter with your highness?” asked La Ramee.

“‘Tis your fault, you simpleton,” answered the duke. “With your idle nonsense yesterday about escaping, you worried me so that I dreamed that I was trying to escape and broke my neck in doing so.”

La Ramee laughed.

“Come,” he said, “‘tis a warning from Heaven. Never commit such an imprudence as to try to escape, except in your dreams.”

“And you are right, my dear La Ramee,” said the duke, wiping away the sweat that stood on his brow, wide awake though he was; “after this I will think of nothing but eating and drinking.”

“Hush!” said La Ramee; and one by one he sent away the guards, on various pretexts.

“Well?” asked the duke when they were alone.

“Well!” replied La Ramee, “your supper is ordered.”

“Ah! and what is it to be? Monsieur, my majordomo, will there be a pie?”

“I should think so, indeed--almost as high as a tower.”

“You told him it was for me?”

“Yes, and he said he would do his best to please your highness.”

“Good!” exclaimed the duke, rubbing his hands.

“Devil take it, my lord! what a gourmand you are growing; I haven’t seen you with so cheerful a face these five years.”

The duke saw that he had not controlled himself as he ought, but at that moment, as if he had listened at the door and comprehended the urgent need of diverting La Ramee’s ideas, Grimaud entered and made a sign to La Ramee that he had something to say to him.

La Ramee drew near to Grimaud, who spoke to him in a low voice.

The duke meanwhile recovered his self-control.

“I have already forbidden that man,” he said, “to come in here without my permission.”

“You must pardon him, my lord,” said La Ramee, “for I directed him to come.”

“And why did you so direct when you know that he displeases me?”

“My lord will remember that it was agreed between us that he should wait upon us at that famous supper. My lord has forgotten the supper.”

“No, but I have forgotten Monsieur Grimaud.”

“My lord understands that there can be no supper unless he is allowed to be present.”

“Go on, then; have it your own way.”

“Come here, my lad,” said La Ramee, “and hear what I have to say.”

Grimaud approached, with a very sullen expression on his face.

La Ramee continued: “My lord has done me the honor to invite me to a supper to-morrow en tete-a-tete.”

Grimaud made a sign which meant that he didn’t see what that had to do with him.

“Yes, yes,” said La Ramee, “the matter concerns you, for you will have the honor to serve us; and besides, however good an appetite we may have and however great our thirst, there will be something left on the plates and in the bottles, and that something will be yours.”

Grimaud bowed in thanks.

“And now,” said La Ramee, “I must ask your highness’s pardon, but it seems that Monsieur de Chavigny is to be away for a few days and he has sent me word that he has certain directions to give me before his departure.”

The duke tried to exchange a glance with Grimaud, but there was no glance in Grimaud’s eyes.

“Go, then,” said the duke, “and return as soon as possible.”

“Does your highness wish to take revenge for the game of tennis yesterday?”

Grimaud intimated by a scarcely perceptible nod that he should consent.

“Yes,” said the duke, “but take care, my dear La Ramee, for I propose to beat you badly.”

La Ramee went out. Grimaud looked after him, and when the door was closed he drew out of his pocket a pencil and a sheet of paper.

“Write, my lord,” he said.

“And what?”

Grimaud dictated.

“All is ready for to-morrow evening. Keep watch from seven to nine. Have two riding horses ready. We shall descend by the first window in the gallery.”

“What next?”

“Sign your name, my lord.”

The duke signed.

“Now, my lord, give me, if you have not lost it, the ball--that which contained the letter.”

The duke took it from under his pillow and gave it to Grimaud. Grimaud gave a grim smile.

“Well?” asked the duke.

“Well, my lord, I sew up the paper in the ball and you, in your game of tennis, will send the ball into the ditch.”

“But will it not be lost?”

“Oh no; there will be some one at hand to pick it up.”

“A gardener?”

Grimaud nodded.

“The same as yesterday?”

Another nod on the part of Grimaud.

“The Count de Rochefort?”

Grimaud nodded the third time.

“Come, now,” said the duke, “give some particulars of the plan for our escape.”

“That is forbidden me,” said Grimaud, “until the last moment.”

“Who will be waiting for me beyond the ditch?”

“I know nothing about it, my lord.”

“But at least, if you don’t want to see me turn crazy, tell what that famous pate will contain.”

“Two poniards, a knotted rope and a poire d’angoisse.” *

** This poire d’angoisse was a famous gag, in the form of a pear,*
which, being thrust into the mouth, by the aid of a spring, dilated,
so as to distend the jaws to their greatest width.

“Yes, I understand.”

“My lord observes that there will be enough to go around.”

“We shall take to ourselves the poniards and the rope,” replied the duke.

“And make La Ramee eat the pear,” answered Grimaud.

“My dear Grimaud, thou speakest seldom, but when thou dost, one must do thee justice--thy words are words of gold.”

CHAPTER 20.

One of Marie Michon’s Adventures.

Whilst these projects were being formed by the Duc de Beaufort and Grimaud, the Comte de la Fere and the Vicomte de Bragelonne were entering Paris by the Rue du Faubourg Saint Marcel.

They stopped at the sign of the Fox, in the Rue du Vieux Colombier, a tavern known for many years by Athos, and asked for two bedrooms.

“You must dress yourself, Raoul,” said Athos, “I am going to present you to some one.”

“To-day, monsieur?” asked the young man.

“In half an hour.”

The young man bowed. Perhaps, not being endowed with the endurance of Athos, who seemed to be made of iron, he would have preferred a bath in the river Seine of which he had heard so much, and afterward his bed; but the Comte de la Fere had spoken and he had no thought but to obey.

“By the way,” said Athos, “take some pains with your toilet, Raoul; I want you to be approved.”

“I hope, sir,” replied the youth, smiling, “that there’s no idea of a marriage for me; you know of my engagement to Louise?”

Athos, in his turn, smiled also.

“No, don’t be alarmed, although it is to a lady that I am going to present you, and I am anxious that you should love her----”

The young man looked at the count with a certain uneasiness, but at a smile from Athos he was quickly reassured.

“How old is she?” inquired the Vicomte de Bragelonne.

“My dear Raoul, learn, once for all, that that is a question which is never asked. When you can find out a woman’s age by her face, it is useless to ask it; when you cannot do so, it is indiscreet.”

“Is she beautiful?”

“Sixteen years ago she was deemed not only the prettiest, but the most graceful woman in France.”

This reply reassured the vicomte. A woman who had been a reigning beauty a year before he was born could not be the subject of any scheme for him. He retired to his toilet. When he reappeared, Athos received him with the same paternal smile as that which he had often bestowed on D’Artagnan, but a more profound tenderness for Raoul was now visibly impressed upon his face.

Athos cast a glance at his feet, hands and hair--those three marks of race. The youth’s dark hair was neatly parted and hung in curls, forming a sort of dark frame around his face; such was the fashion of the day. Gloves of gray kid, matching the hat, well displayed the form of a slender and elegant hand; whilst his boots, similar in color to the hat and gloves, confined feet small as those of a boy twelve years old.

“Come,” murmured Athos, “if she is not proud of him, she must be hard to please.”

It was three o’clock in the afternoon. The two travelers proceeded to the Rue Saint Dominique and stopped at the door of a magnificent hotel, surmounted with the arms of De Luynes.

“‘Tis here,” said Athos.

He entered the hotel and ascended the front steps, and addressing a footman who waited there in a grand livery, asked if the Duchess de Chevreuse was visible and if she could receive the Comte de la Fere?

The servant returned with a message to say, that, though the duchess had not the honor of knowing Monsieur de la Fere, she would receive him.

Athos followed the footman, who led him through a long succession of apartments and paused at length before a closed door. Athos made a sign to the Vicomte de Bragelonne to remain where he was.

The footman opened the door and announced Monsieur le Comte de la Fere.

Madame de Chevreuse, whose name appears so often in our story “The Three Musketeers,” without her actually having appeared in any scene, was still a beautiful woman. Although about forty-four or forty-five years old, she might have passed for thirty-five. She still had her rich fair hair; her large, animated, intelligent eyes, so often opened by intrigue, so often closed by the blindness of love. She had still her nymph-like form, so that when her back was turned she still was not unlike the girl who had jumped, with Anne of Austria, over the moat of the Tuileries in 1563. In all other respects she was the same mad creature who threw over her amours such an air of originality as to make them proverbial for eccentricity in her family.

She was in a little boudoir, hung with blue damask, adorned by red flowers, with a foliage of gold, looking upon a garden; and reclined upon a sofa, her head supported on the rich tapestry which covered it. She held a book in her hand and her arm was supported by a cushion.

At the footman's announcement she raised herself a little and peeped out, with some curiosity.

Athos appeared.

He was dressed in violet-tinted velvet, trimmed with silk of the same color. His shoulder-knots were of burnished silver, his mantle had no gold nor embroidery on it; a simple plume of violet feathers adorned his hat; his boots were of black leather, and at his girdle hung that sword with a magnificent hilt that Porthos had so often admired in the Rue Feron. Splendid lace adorned the falling collar of his shirt, and lace fell also over the top of his boots.

In his whole person he bore such an impress of high degree, that Madame de Chevreuse half rose from her seat when she saw him and made him a sign to sit down near her.

Athos bowed and obeyed. The footman was withdrawing, but Athos stopped him by a sign.

"Madame," he said to the duchess, "I have had the boldness to present myself at your hotel without being known to you; it has succeeded, since you deign to receive me. I have now the boldness to ask you for an interview of half an hour."

"I grant it, monsieur," replied Madame de Chevreuse with her most gracious smile.

"But that is not all, madame. Oh, I am very presuming, I am aware. The interview for which I ask is of us two alone, and I very earnestly wish that it may not be interrupted."

"I am not at home to any one," said the Duchess de Chevreuse to the footman. "You may go."

The footman went out

There ensued a brief silence, during which these two persons, who at first sight recognized each other so clearly as of noble race, examined each other without embarrassment on either side.

The duchess was the first to speak.

“Well, sir, I am waiting with impatience to hear what you wish to say to me.”

“And I, madame,” replied Athos, “am looking with admiration.”

“Sir,” said Madame de Chevreuse, “you must excuse me, but I long to know to whom I am talking. You belong to the court, doubtless, yet I have never seen you at court. Have you, by any chance, been in the Bastile?”

“No, madame, I have not; but very likely I am on the road to it.”

“Ah! then tell me who you are, and get along with you upon your journey,” replied the duchess, with the gayety which made her so charming, “for I am sufficiently in bad odor already, without compromising myself still more.”

“Who I am, madame? My name has been mentioned to you--the Comte de la Fere; you do not know that name. I once bore another, which you knew, but you have certainly forgotten it.”

“Tell it me, sir.”

“Formerly,” said the count, “I was Athos.”

Madame de Chevreuse looked astonished. The name was not wholly forgotten, but mixed up and confused with ancient recollections.

“Athos?” said she; “wait a moment.”

And she placed her hands on her brow, as if to force the fugitive ideas it contained to concentration in a moment.

“Shall I help you, madame?” asked Athos.

“Yes, do,” said the duchess.

“This Athos was connected with three young musketeers, named Porthos, D’Artagnan, and----”

He stopped short.

“And Aramis,” said the duchess, quickly.

“And Aramis; I see you have not forgotten the name.”

“No,” she said; “poor Aramis; a charming man, elegant, discreet, and a writer of poetical verses. I am afraid he has turned out ill,” she added.

“He has; he is an abbe.”

“Ah, what a misfortune!” exclaimed the duchess, playing carelessly with her fan. “Indeed, sir, I thank you; you have recalled one of the most agreeable recollections of my youth.”

“Will you permit me, then, to recall another to you?”

“Relating to him?”

“Yes and no.”

“Faith!” said Madame de Chevreuse, “say on. With a man like you I fear nothing.”

Athos bowed. “Aramis,” he continued, “was intimate with a young needlewoman from Tours, a cousin of his, named Marie Michon.”

“Ah, I knew her!” cried the duchess. “It was to her he wrote from the siege of Rochelle, to warn her of a plot against the Duke of Buckingham.”

“Exactly so; will you allow me to speak to you of her?”

“If,” replied the duchess, with a meaning look, “you do not say too much against her.”

“I should be ungrateful,” said Athos, “and I regard ingratitude, not as a fault or a crime, but as a vice, which is much worse.”

“You ungrateful to Marie Michon, monsieur?” said Madame de Chevreuse, trying to read in Athos’s eyes. “But how can that be? You never knew her.”

“Eh, madame, who knows?” said Athos. “There is a popular proverb to the effect that it is only mountains that never meet; and popular proverbs contain sometimes a wonderful amount of truth.”

“Oh, go on, monsieur, go on!” said Madame de Chevreuse eagerly; “you can’t imagine how much this conversation interests me.”

“You encourage me,” said Athos, “I will continue, then. That cousin of Aramis, that Marie Michon, that needlewoman, notwithstanding her low condition, had acquaintances in the highest rank; she called the grandest ladies of the court her friend, and the queen--proud as she is, in her double character as Austrian and as Spaniard--called her her sister.”

“Alas!” said Madame de Chevreuse, with a slight sigh and a little movement of her eyebrows that was peculiarly her own, “since that time everything has changed.”

“And the queen had reason for her affection, for Marie was devoted to her--devoted to that degree that she served her as medium of intercourse with her brother, the king of Spain.”

“Which,” interrupted the duchess, “is now brought up against her as a great crime.”

“And therefore,” continued Athos, “the cardinal--the true cardinal, the other one--determined one fine morning to arrest poor Marie Michon and send her to the Chateau de Loches. Fortunately the affair was not managed so secretly but that it became known to the queen. The case had been provided for: if Marie Michon should be threatened with any danger the queen was to send her a prayer-book bound in green velvet."

"That is true, monsieur, you are well informed."

"One morning the green book was brought to her by the Prince de Marsillac. There was no time to lose. Happily Marie and a follower of hers named Kitty could disguise themselves admirably in men's clothes. The prince procured for Marie Michon the dress of a cavalier and for Kitty that of a lackey; he sent them two excellent horses, and the fugitives went out hastily from Tours, shaping their course toward Spain, trembling at the least noise, following unfrequented roads, and asking for hospitality when they found themselves where there was no inn."

"Why, really, it was all exactly as you say!" cried Madame de Chevreuse, clapping her hands. "It would indeed be strange if----" she checked herself.

"If I should follow the two fugitives to the end of their journey?" said Athos. "No, madame, I will not thus waste your time. We will accompany them only to a little village in Limousin, lying between Tulle and Angouleme--a little village called Roche-l'Abeille."

Madame de Chevreuse uttered a cry of surprise, and looked at Athos with an expression of astonishment that made the old musketeer smile.

"Wait, madame," continued Athos, "what remains for me to tell you is even more strange than what I have narrated."

"Monsieur," said Madame de Chevreuse, "I believe you are a sorcerer; I am prepared for anything. But really--No matter, go on."

"The journey of that day had been long and wearing; it was a cold day, the eleventh of October, there was no inn or chateau in the village and the homes of the peasants were poor and unattractive. Marie Michon was a very aristocratic person; like her sister the queen, she had been accustomed to pleasing perfumes and fine linen; she resolved, therefore, to seek hospitality of the priest."

Athos paused.

"Oh, continue!" said the duchess. "I have told you that I am prepared for anything."

"The two travelers knocked at the door. It was late; the priest, who had gone to bed, cried out to them to come in. They entered, for the door was not locked--there is much confidence among villagers. A lamp burned in the chamber occupied by the priest. Marie Michon, who made the most charming cavalier in the world, pushed open the door, put her head in and asked for hospitality. ‘Willingly, my young cavalier,’ said the priest, ‘if you will be content with the remains of my supper and with half my chamber.’

“The two travelers consulted for a moment. The priest heard a burst of laughter and then the master, or rather, the mistress, replied: ‘Thank you, monsieur le cure, I accept.’ ‘Sup, then, and make as little noise as possible,’ said the priest, ‘for I, too, have been on the go all day and shall not be sorry to sleep to-night.’“

Madame de Chevreuse evidently went from surprise to astonishment, and from astonishment to stupefaction. Her face, as she looked at Athos, had taken on an expression that cannot be described. It could be seen that she had wished to speak, but she had remained silent through fear of losing one of her companion’s words.

“What happened then?” she asked.

“Then?” said Athos. “Ah, I have come now to what is most difficult.”

“Speak, speak! One can say anything to me. Besides, it doesn’t concern me; it relates to Mademoiselle Marie Michon.”

“Ah, that is true,” said Athos. “Well, then, Marie Michon had supper with her follower, and then, in accordance with the permission given her, she entered the chamber of her host, Kitty meanwhile taking possession of an armchair in the room first entered, where they had taken their supper.”

“Really, monsieur,” said Madame de Chevreuse, “unless you are the devil in person I don’t know how you could become acquainted with all these details.”

“A charming woman was that Marie Michon,” resumed Athos, “one of those wild creatures who are constantly conceiving the strangest ideas. Now, thinking that her host was a priest, that coquette took it into her head that it would be a happy souvenir for her old age, among the many happy souvenirs she already possessed, if she could win that of having damned an abbe.”

“Count,” said the duchess, “upon my word, you frighten me.”

“Alas!” continued Athos, “the poor abbe was not a St. Ambroise, and I repeat, Marie Michon was an adorable creature.”

“Monsieur!” cried the duchess, seizing Athos’s hands, “tell me this moment how you know all these details, or I will send to the convent of the Vieux Augustins for a monk to come and exorcise you.”

Athos laughed. “Nothing is easier, madame. A cavalier, charged with an important mission, had come an hour before your arrival, seeking hospitality, at the very moment that the cure, summoned to the bedside of a dying person, left not only his house but the village, for the entire night. The priest having all confidence in his guest, who, besides, was a nobleman, had left to him his house, his supper and his chamber. And therefore Marie came seeking hospitality from the guest of the good abbe and not from the good abbe himself."

"And that cavalier, that guest, that nobleman who arrived before she came?"

"It was I, the Comte de la Fere," said Athos, rising and bowing respectfully to the Duchess de Chevreuse.

The duchess remained a moment stupefied; then, suddenly bursting into laughter:

"Ah! upon my word," said she, "it is very droll, and that mad Marie Michon fared better than she expected. Sit down, dear count, and go on with your story."

"At this point I have to accuse myself of a fault, madame. I have told you that I was traveling on an important mission. At daybreak I left the chamber without noise, leaving my charming companion asleep. In the front room the follower was also still asleep, her head leaning back on the chair, in all respects worthy of her mistress. Her pretty face arrested my attention; I approached and recognized that little Kitty whom our friend Aramis had placed with her. In that way I discovered that the charming traveler was----"

"Marie Michon!" said Madame de Chevreuse, hastily.

"Marie Michon," continued Athos. "Then I went out of the house; I proceeded to the stable and found my horse saddled and my lackey ready. We set forth on our journey."

"And have you never revisited that village?" eagerly asked Madame de Chevreuse.

"A year after, madame."

"Well?"

"I wanted to see the good cure again. I found him much preoccupied with an event that he could not at all comprehend. A week before he had received, in a cradle, a beautiful little boy three months old, with a purse filled with gold and a note containing these simple words: '11 October, 1633.'"

"It was the date of that strange adventure," interrupted Madame de Chevreuse.

“Yes, but he couldn’t understand what it meant, for he had spent that night with a dying person and Marie Michon had left his house before his return.”

“You must know, monsieur, that Marie Michon, when she returned to France in 1643, immediately sought for information about that child; as a fugitive she could not take care of it, but on her return she wished to have it near her.”

“And what said the abbe?” asked Athos.

“That a nobleman whom he did not know had wished to take charge of it, had answered for its future, and had taken it away.”

“That was true.”

“Ah! I see! That nobleman was you; it was his father!”

“Hush! do not speak so loud, madame; he is there.”

“He is there! my son! the son of Marie Michon! But I must see him instantly.”

“Take care, madame,” said Athos, “for he knows neither his father nor his mother.”

“You have kept the secret! you have brought him to see me, thinking to make me happy. Oh, thanks! sir, thanks!” cried Madame de Chevreuse, seizing his hand and trying to put it to her lips; “you have a noble heart.”

“I bring him to you, madame,” said Athos, withdrawing his hand, “hoping that in your turn you will do something for him; till now I have watched over his education and I have made him, I hope, an accomplished gentleman; but I am now obliged to return to the dangerous and wandering life of party faction. To-morrow I plunge into an adventurous affair in which I may be killed. Then it will devolve on you to push him on in that world where he is called on to occupy a place.”

“Rest assured,” cried the duchess, “I shall do what I can. I have but little influence now, but all that I have shall most assuredly be his. As to his title and fortune----”

“As to that, madame, I have made over to him the estate of Bragelonne, my inheritance, which will give him ten thousand francs a year and the title of vicomte.”

“Upon my soul, monsieur,” said the duchess, “you are a true nobleman! But I am eager to see our young vicomte. Where is he?”

“There, in the salon. I will have him come in, if you really wish it.”

Athos moved toward the door; the duchess held him back.

“Is he handsome?” she asked.

Athos smiled.

“He resembles his mother.”

So he opened the door and beckoned the young man in.

The duchess could not restrain a cry of joy on seeing so handsome a young cavalier, so far surpassing all that her maternal pride had been able to conceive.

“Vicomte, come here,” said Athos; “the duchess permits you to kiss her hand.”

The youth approached with his charming smile and his head bare, and kneeling down, kissed the hand of the Duchess de Chevreuse.

“Sir,” he said, turning to Athos, “was it not in compassion to my timidity that you told me that this lady was the Duchess de Chevreuse, and is she not the queen?”

“No, vicomte,” said Madame de Chevreuse, taking his hand and making him sit near her, while she looked at him with eyes sparkling with pleasure; “no, unhappily, I am not the queen. If I were I should do for you at once the most that you deserve. But let us see; whatever I may be,” she added, hardly restraining herself from kissing that pure brow, “let us see what profession you wish to follow.”

Athos, standing, looked at them both with indescribable pleasure.

“Madame,” answered the youth in his sweet voice, “it seems to me that there is only one career for a gentleman--that of the army. I have been brought up by monsieur le comte with the intention, I believe, of making me a soldier; and he gave me reason to hope that at Paris he would present me to some one who would recommend me to the favor of the prince.”

“Yes, I understand it well. Personally, I am on bad terms with him, on account of the quarrels between Madame de Montbazon, my mother-in-law, and Madame de Longueville. But the Prince de Marsillac! Yes, indeed, that’s the right thing. The Prince de Marsillac--my old friend--will recommend our young friend to Madame de Longueville, who will give him a letter to her brother, the prince, who loves her too tenderly not to do what she wishes immediately.”

“Well, that will do charmingly,” said the count; “but may I beg that the greatest haste may be made, for I have reasons for wishing the vicomte not to sleep longer than to-morrow night in Paris!”

"Do you wish it known that you are interested about him, monsieur le comte?"

"Better for him in future that he should be supposed never to have seen me."

"Oh, sir!" cried Raoul.

"You know, Bragelonne," said Athos, "I never speak without reflection."

"Well, comte, I am going instantly," interrupted the duchess, "to send for the Prince de Marsillac, who is happily, in Paris just now. What are you going to do this evening?"

"We intend to visit the Abbe Scarron, for whom I have a letter of introduction and at whose house I expect to meet some of my friends."

"'Tis well; I will go there also, for a few minutes," said the duchess; "do not quit his salon until you have seen me."

Athos bowed and prepared to leave.

"Well, monsieur le comte," said the duchess, smiling, "does one leave so solemnly his old friends?"

"Ah," murmured Athos, kissing her hand, "had I only sooner known that Marie Michon was so charming a creature!" And he withdrew, sighing.

CHAPTER 21.

The Abbe Scarron.

There was once in the Rue des Tournelles a house known by all the sedan chairmen and footmen of Paris, and yet, nevertheless, this house was neither that of a great lord nor of a rich man. There was neither dining, nor playing at cards, nor dancing in that house. Nevertheless, it was the rendezvous of the great world and all Paris went there. It was the abode of the little Abbe Scarron.

In the home of the witty abbe dwelt incessant laughter; there all the items of the day had their source and were so quickly transformed, misrepresented, metamorphosed, some into epigrams, some into falsehoods, that every one was anxious to pass an hour with little Scarron, listening to what he said, reporting it to others.

The diminutive Abbe Scarron, who, however, was an abbe only because he owned an abbey, and not because he was in orders, had formerly been one of the gayest prebendaries in the town of Mans, which he inhabited. On a day of the carnival he had taken a notion to provide an unusual entertainment for that good town, of which he was the life and soul. He had made his valet cover him with honey; then, opening a feather bed, he had rolled in it and had thus become the most grotesque fowl it is possible to imagine. He then began to visit his friends of both sexes, in that strange costume. At first he had been followed through astonishment, then with derisive shouts, then the porters had insulted him, then children had thrown stones at him, and finally he was obliged to run, to escape the missiles. As soon as he took to flight every one pursued him, until, pressed on all sides, Scarron found no way of escaping his escort, except by throwing himself into the river; but the water was icy cold. Scarron was heated, the cold seized on him, and when he reached the farther bank he found himself crippled.

Every means had been employed in vain to restore the use of his limbs. He had been subjected to a severe disciplinary course of medicine, at length he sent away all his doctors, declaring that he preferred the disease to the treatment, and came to Paris, where the fame of his wit had preceded him. There he had a chair made on his own plan, and one day, visiting Anne of Austria in this chair, she asked him, charmed as she was with his wit, if he did not wish for a title.

"Yes, your majesty, there is a title which I covet much," replied Scarron.

"And what is that?"

"That of being your invalid," answered Scarron.

So he was called the queen's invalid, with a pension of fifteen hundred francs.

From that lucky moment Scarron led a happy life, spending both income and principal. One day, however, an emissary of the cardinal's gave him to understand that he was wrong in receiving the coadjutor so often.

"And why?" asked Scarron; "is he not a man of good birth?"

"Certainly."

"Agreeable?"

"Undeniably."

"Witty?"

"He has, unfortunately, too much wit."

"Well, then, why do you wish me to give up seeing such a man?"

"Because he is an enemy."

"Of whom?"

"Of the cardinal."

"What?" answered Scarron, "I continue to receive Monsieur Gilles Despreaux, who thinks ill of me, and you wish me to give up seeing the coadjutor, because he thinks ill of another man. Impossible!"

The conversation had rested there and Scarron, through sheer obstinacy, had seen Monsieur de Gondy only the more frequently.

Now, the very morning of which we speak was that of his quarter-day payment, and Scarron, as usual, had sent his servant to get his money at the pension-office, but the man had returned and said that the government had no more money to give Monsieur Scarron.

It was on Thursday, the abbe's reception day; people went there in crowds. The cardinal's refusal to pay the pension was known about the town in half an hour and he was abused with wit and vehemence.

In the Rue Saint Honore Athos fell in with two gentlemen whom he did not know, on horseback like himself, followed by a lackey like himself, and going in the same direction that he was. One of them, hat in hand, said to him:

“Would you believe it, monsieur? that contemptible Mazarin has stopped poor Scarron’s pension.”

“That is unreasonable,” said Athos, saluting in his turn the two cavaliers. And they separated with courteous gestures.

“It happens well that we are going there this evening,” said Athos to the vicomte; “we will pay our compliments to that poor man.”

“What, then, is this Monsieur Scarron, who thus puts all Paris in commotion? Is he some minister out of office?”

“Oh, no, not at all, vicomte,” Athos replied; “he is simply a gentleman of great genius who has fallen into disgrace with the cardinal through having written certain verses against him.”

“Do gentlemen, then, make verses?” asked Raoul, naively, “I thought it was derogatory.”

“So it is, my dear vicomte,” said Athos, laughing, “to make bad ones; but to make good ones increases fame--witness Monsieur de Rotrou. Nevertheless,” he continued, in the tone of one who gives wholesome advice, “I think it is better not to make them.”

“Then,” said Raoul, “this Monsieur Scarron is a poet?”

“Yes; you are warned, vicomte. Consider well what you do in that house. Talk only by gestures, or rather always listen.”

“Yes, monsieur,” replied Raoul.

“You will see me talking with one of my friends, the Abbe d’Herblay, of whom you have often heard me speak.”

“I remember him, monsieur.”

“Come near to us from time to time, as if to speak; but do not speak, and do not listen. That little stratagem may serve to keep off interlopers.”

“Very well, monsieur; I will obey you at all points.”

Athos made two visits in Paris; at seven o’clock he and Raoul directed their steps to the Rue des Tournelles; it was stopped by porters, horses and footmen. Athos forced his way through and entered, followed by the young man. The first person that struck him on his entrance was Aramis, planted near a great chair on castors, very large, covered with a canopy of tapestry, under which there moved, enveloped in a quilt of brocade, a little face, youngish, very merry, somewhat pallid, whilst its eyes never ceased to express a sentiment at once lively, intellectual, and amiable. This was the

Abbe Scarron, always laughing, joking, complimenting--yet suffering--and toying nervously with a small switch.

Around this kind of rolling tent pressed a crowd of gentlemen and ladies. The room was neatly, comfortably furnished. Large valances of silk, embroidered with flowers of gay colors, which were rather faded, fell from the wide windows; the fittings of the room were simple, but in excellent taste. Two well trained servingmen were in attendance on the company. On perceiving Athos, Aramis advanced toward him, took him by the hand and presented him to Scarron. Raoul remained silent, for he was not prepared for the dignity of the bel esprit.

After some minutes the door opened and a footman announced Mademoiselle Paulet.

Athos touched the shoulder of the vicomte.

"Look at this lady, Raoul, she is an historic personage; it was to visit her King Henry IV. was going when he was assassinated."

Every one thronged around Mademoiselle Paulet, for she was always very much the fashion. She was a tall woman, with a slender figure and a forest of golden curls, such as Raphael was fond of and Titian has painted all his Magdalens with. This fawn-colored hair, or, perhaps the sort of ascendancy which she had over other women, gave her the name of "La Lionne." Mademoiselle Paulet took her accustomed seat, but before sitting down, she cast, in all her queen-like grandeur, a look around the room, and her eyes rested on Raoul.

Athos smiled.

"Mademoiselle Paulet has observed you, vicomte; go and bow to her; don't try to appear anything but what you are, a true country youth; on no account speak to her of Henry IV."

"When shall we two walk together?" Athos then said to Aramis.

"Presently--there are not a sufficient number of people here yet; we shall be remarked."

At this moment the door opened and in walked the coadjutor.

At this name every one looked around, for his was already a very celebrated name. Athos did the same. He knew the Abbe de Gondy only by report.

He saw a little dark man, ill made and awkward with his hands in everything--except drawing a sword and firing a pistol--with something haughty and contemptuous in his face.

Scarron turned around toward him and came to meet him in his chair.

“Well,” said the coadjutor, on seeing him, “you are in disgrace, then, abbe?”

This was the orthodox phrase. It had been said that evening a hundred times--and Scarron was at his hundredth bon mot on the subject; he was very nearly at the end of his humoristic tether, but one despairing effort saved him.

“Monsieur, the Cardinal Mazarin has been so kind as to think of me,” he said.

“But how can you continue to receive us?” asked the coadjutor; “if your income is lessened I shall be obliged to make you a canon of Notre Dame.”

“Oh, no!” cried Scarron, “I should compromise you too much.”

“Perhaps you have resources of which we are ignorant?”

“I shall borrow from the queen.”

“But her majesty has no property,” interposed Aramis.

At this moment the door opened and Madame de Chevreuse was announced. Every one arose. Scarron turned his chair toward the door, Raoul blushed, Athos made a sign to Aramis, who went and hid himself in the enclosure of a window.

In the midst of all the compliments that awaited her on her entrance, the duchess seemed to be looking for some one; at last she found out Raoul and her eyes sparkled; she perceived Athos and became thoughtful; she saw Aramis in the seclusion of the window and gave a start of surprise behind her fan.

“Apropos,” she said, as if to drive away thoughts that pursued her in spite of herself, “how is poor Voiture, do you know, Scarron?”

“What, is Monsieur Voiture ill?” inquired a gentleman who had spoken to Athos in the Rue Saint Honore; “what is the matter with him?”

“He was acting, but forgot to take the precaution to have a change of linen ready after the performance,” said the coadjutor, “so he took cold and is about to die.”

“Is he then so ill, dear Voiture?” asked Aramis, half hidden by the window curtain.

“Die!” cried Mademoiselle Paulet, bitterly, “he! Why, he is surrounded by sultanas, like a Turk. Madame de Saintot has hastened to him with broth; La Renaudot warms his sheets; the Marquise de Rambouillet sends him his tisanes.”

“You don’t like him, my dear Parthenie,” said Scarron.

“What an injustice, my dear invalid! I hate him so little that I should be delighted to order masses for the repose of his soul.”

“You are not called ‘Lionne’ for nothing,” observed Madame de Chevreuse, “your teeth are terrible.”

“You are unjust to a great poet, it seems to me,” Raoul ventured to say.

“A great poet! come, one may easily see, vicomte, that you are lately from the provinces and have never so much as seen him. A great poet! he is scarcely five feet high.”

“Bravo bravo!” cried a tall man with an enormous mustache and a long rapier, “bravo, fair Paulet, it is high time to put little Voiture in his right place. For my part, I always thought his poetry detestable, and I think I know something about poetry.”

“Who is this officer,” inquired Raoul of Athos, “who is speaking?”

“Monsieur de Scudery, the author of ‘Clelie,’ and of ‘Le Grand Cyrus,’ which were composed partly by him and partly by his sister, who is now talking to that pretty person yonder, near Monsieur Scarron.”

Raoul turned and saw two faces just arrived. One was perfectly charming, delicate, pensive, shaded by beautiful dark hair, and eyes soft as velvet, like those lovely flowers, the heartsease, in which shine out the golden petals. The other, of mature age, seemed to have the former one under her charge, and was cold, dry and yellow--the true type of a duenna or a devotee.

Raoul resolved not to quit the room without having spoken to the beautiful girl with the soft eyes, who by a strange fancy, although she bore no resemblance, reminded him of his poor little Louise, whom he had left in the Chateau de la Valliere and whom, in the midst of all the party, he had never for one moment quite forgotten. Meantime Aramis had drawn near to the coadjutor, who, smiling all the while, contrived to drop some words into his ear. Aramis, notwithstanding his self-control, could not refrain from a slight movement of surprise.

“Laugh, then,” said Monsieur de Retz; “they are looking at us.” And leaving Aramis he went to talk with Madame de Chevreuse, who was in the midst of a large group.

Aramis affected a laugh, to divert the attention of certain curious listeners, and perceiving that Athos had betaken himself to the embrasure of a window and remained there, he proceeded to join him, throwing out a few words carelessly as he moved through the room.

As soon as the two friends met they began a conversation which was emphasized by frequent gesticulation.

Raoul then approached them as Athos had directed him to do.

"'Tis a rondeau by Monsieur Voiture that monsieur l'abbe is repeating to me." said Athos in a loud voice, "and I confess I think it incomparable."

Raoul stayed only a few minutes near them and then mingled with the group round Madame de Chevreuse.

"Well, then?" asked Athos, in a low tone.

"It is to be to-morrow," said Aramis hastily.

"At what time?"

"Six o'clock."

"Where?"

"At Saint Mande."

"Who told you?"

"The Count de Rochefort."

Some one drew near.

"And then philosophic ideas are wholly wanting in Voiture's works, but I am of the same opinion as the coadjutor--he is a poet, a true poet." Aramis spoke so as to be heard by everybody.

"And I, too," murmured the young lady with the velvet eyes. "I have the misfortune also to admire his poetry exceedingly."

"Monsieur Scarron, do me the honor," said Raoul, blushing, "to tell me the name of that young lady whose opinion seems so different from that of others of the company."

"Ah! my young vicomte," replied Scarron, "I suppose you wish to propose to her an alliance offensive and defensive."

Raoul blushed again.

"You asked the name of that young lady. She is called the fair Indian."

"Excuse me, sir," returned Raoul, blushing still more deeply, "I know no more than I did before. Alas! I am from the country."

"Which means that you know very little about the nonsense which here flows down our streets. So much the better, young man! so much the better! Don't try to understand it--you will only lose your time."

"You forgive me, then, sir," said Raoul, "and you will deign to tell me who is the person that you call the young Indian?"

"Certainly; one of the most charming persons that lives--Mademoiselle Frances d'Aubigne."

“Does she belong to the family of the celebrated Agrippa, the friend of Henry IV.?”

“His granddaughter. She comes from Martinique, so I call her the beautiful Indian.”

Raoul looked surprised and his eyes met those of the young lady, who smiled.

The company went on speaking of the poet Voiture.

“Monsieur,” said Mademoiselle d’Aubigne to Scarron, as if she wished to join in the conversation he was engaged in with Raoul, “do you not admire Monsieur Voiture’s friends? Listen how they pull him to pieces even whilst they praise him; one takes away from him all claim to good sense, another robs him of his poetry, a third of his originality, another of his humor, another of his independence of character, a sixth--but, good heavens! what will they leave him? as Mademoiselle de Scudery remarks.”

Scarron and Raoul laughed. The fair Indian, astonished at the sensation her observation produced, looked down and resumed her air of naivete.

Athos, still within the inclosure of the window, watched this scene with a smile of disdain on his lips.

“Tell the Comte de la Fere to come to me,” said Madame de Chevreuse, “I want to speak to him.”

“And I,” said the coadjutor, “want it to be thought that I do not speak to him. I admire, I love him--for I know his former adventures--but I shall not speak to him until the day after to-morrow.”

“And why day after to-morrow?” asked Madame de Chevreuse.

“You will know that to-morrow evening,” said the coadjutor, smiling.

“Really, my dear Gondy,” said the duchess, “you remind one of the Apocalypse. Monsieur d’Herblay,” she added, turning toward Aramis, “will you be my servant once more this evening?”

“How can you doubt it?” replied Aramis; “this evening, to-morrow, always; command me.”

“I will, then. Go and look for the Comte de la Fere; I wish to speak with him.”

Aramis found Athos and brought him.

“Monsieur le comte,” said the duchess, giving him a letter, “here is what I promised you; our young friend will be extremely well received.”

“Madame, he is very happy in owing any obligation to you.”

“You have no reason to envy him on that score, for I owe to you the pleasure of knowing him,” replied the witty woman, with a smile which recalled Marie Michon to Aramis and to Athos.

As she uttered that bon mot, she arose and asked for her carriage. Mademoiselle Paulet had already gone; Mademoiselle de Scudery was going.

“Vicomte,” said Athos to Raoul, “follow the duchess; beg her to do you the favor to take your arm in going downstairs, and thank her as you descend.”

The fair Indian approached Scarron.

“You are going already?” he said.

“One of the last, as you see; if you hear anything of Monsieur Voiture, be so kind as to send me word to-morrow.”

“Oh!” said Scarron, “he may die now.”

“Why?” asked the young girl with the velvet eyes.

“Certainly; his panegyric has been uttered.”

They parted, laughing, she turning back to gaze at the poor paralytic man with interest, he looking after her with eyes of love.

One by one the several groups broke up. Scarron seemed not to observe that certain of his guests had talked mysteriously, that letters had passed from hand to hand and that the assembly had seemed to have a secret purpose quite apart from the literary discussion carried on with so much ostentation. What was all that to Scarron? At his house rebellion could be planned with impunity, for, as we have said, since that morning he had ceased to be “the queen’s invalid.”

As to Raoul, he had attended the duchess to her carriage, where, as she took her seat, she gave him her hand to kiss; then, by one of those wild caprices which made her so adorable and at the same time so dangerous, she had suddenly put her arm around his neck and kissed his forehead, saying:

“Vicomte, may my good wishes and this kiss bring you good fortune!”

Then she had pushed him away and directed the coachman to stop at the Hotel de Luynes. The carriage had started, Madame de Chevreuse had made a parting gesture to the young man, and Raoul had returned in a state of stupefaction.

Athos surmised what had taken place and smiled. “Come, vicomte,” he said, “it is time for you to go to bed; you will start in the morning for the army of monsieur le prince. Sleep well your last night as citizen.”

“I am to be a soldier then?” said the young man. “Oh, monsieur, I thank you with all my heart.”

“Adieu, count,” said the Abbe d’Herblay; “I return to my convent.”

“Adieu, abbe,” said the coadjutor, “I am to preach to-morrow and have twenty texts to examine this evening.”

“Adieu, gentlemen,” said the count; “I am going to sleep twenty-four hours; I am just falling down with fatigue.”

The three men saluted one another, whilst exchanging a last look.

Scarron followed their movements with a glance from the corner of his eye.

“Not one of them will do as he says,” he murmured, with his little monkey smile; “but they may do as they please, the brave gentlemen! Who knows if they will not manage to restore to me my pension? They can move their arms, they can, and that is much. Alas, I have only my tongue, but I will try to show that it is good for something. Ho, there, Champenois! here, it is eleven o’clock. Come and roll me to bed. Really, that Demoiselle d’Aubigne is very charming!”

So the invalid disappeared soon afterward and went into his sleeping-room; and one by one the lights in the salon of the Rue des Tournelles were extinguished.

CHAPTER 22.

Saint Denis.

The day had begun to break when Athos arose and dressed himself. It was plain, by a paleness still greater than usual, and by those traces which loss of sleep leaves on the face, that he must have passed almost the whole of the night without sleeping. Contrary to the custom of a man so firm and decided, there was this morning in his personal appearance something tardy and irresolute.

He was occupied with the preparations for Raoul’s departure and was seeking to gain time. In the first place he himself furbished a sword, which he drew from its perfumed leather sheath; he examined it to see if its hilt was well guarded and if the blade was firmly attached to the hilt. Then he placed at the bottom of the valise belonging to the young man a small bag of louis, called Olivain, the lackey who had followed him from Blois, and made him pack the valise under his own eyes, watchful to see that everything should be put in which might be useful to a young man entering on his first campaign.

At length, after occupying about an hour in these preparations, he opened the door of the room in which the vicomte slept, and entered.

The sun, already high, penetrated into the room through the window, the curtains of which Raoul had neglected to close on the previous evening. He was still sleeping, his head gracefully reposing on his arm.

Athos approached and hung over the youth in an attitude full of tender melancholy; he looked long on this young man, whose smiling mouth and half closed eyes bespoke soft dreams and lightest slumber, as if his guardian angel watched over him with solicitude and affection. By degrees Athos gave himself up to the charms of his reverie in the proximity of youth, so pure, so fresh. His own youth seemed to reappear, bringing with it all those savoury remembrances, which are like perfumes more than thoughts. Between the past and the present was an ineffable abyss. But imagination has the wings of an angel of light and travels safely through or over the seas where we have been almost shipwrecked, the darkness in which our illusions are lost, the precipice whence our happiness has been hurled and swallowed up. He remembered that all the first part of his life had been embittered by a woman and he thought with alarm of the influence love might assume over so fine, and at the same time so vigorous an organization as that of Raoul.

In recalling all he had been through, he foresaw all that Raoul might suffer; and the expression of the deep and tender compassion which throbbed in his heart was pictured in the moist eye with which he gazed on the young man.

At this moment Raoul awoke, without a cloud on his face without weariness or lassitude; his eyes were fixed on those of Athos and perhaps he comprehended all that passed in the heart of the man who was awaiting his awakening as a lover awaits the awakening of his mistress, for his glance, in return, had all the tenderness of love.

“You are there, sir?” he said, respectfully.

“Yes, Raoul,” replied the count.

“And you did not awaken me?”

“I wished to leave you still to enjoy some moments of sleep, my child; you must be fatigued from yesterday.”

“Oh, sir, how good you are!”

Athos smiled.

“How do you feel this morning?” he inquired.

“Perfectly well; quite rested, sir.”

“You are still growing,” Athos continued, with that charming and paternal interest felt by a grown man for a youth.

“Oh, sir, I beg your pardon!” exclaimed Raoul, ashamed of so much attention; “in an instant I shall be dressed.”

Athos then called Olivain.

“Everything,” said Olivain to Athos, “has been done according to your directions; the horses are waiting.”

“And I was asleep,” cried Raoul, “whilst you, sir, you had the kindness to attend to all these details. Truly, sir, you overwhelm me with benefits!”

“Therefore you love me a little, I hope,” replied Athos, in a tone of emotion.

“Oh, sir! God knows how much I love, revere you.”

“See that you forget nothing,” said Athos, appearing to look about him, that he might hide his emotion.

“No, indeed, sir,” answered Raoul.

The servant then approached Athos and said, hesitatingly:

“Monsieur le vicomte has no sword.”

“‘Tis well,” said Athos, “I will take care of that.”

They went downstairs, Raoul looking every now and then at the count to see if the moment of farewell was at hand, but Athos was silent. When they reached the steps Raoul saw three horses.

“Oh, sir! then you are going with me?”

“I will accompany you a portion of the way,” said Athos.

Joy shone in Raoul’s eyes and he leaped lightly to his saddle.

Athos mounted more slowly, after speaking in a low voice to the lackey, who, instead of following them immediately, returned to their rooms. Raoul, delighted at the count’s companionship, perceived, or affected to perceive nothing of this byplay.

They set out, passing over the Pont Neuf; they pursued their way along the quay then called L’Abreuvoir Pepin, and went along by the walls of the Grand Chatelet. They proceeded to the Rue Saint Denis.

After passing through the Porte Saint Denis, Athos looked at Raoul’s way of riding and observed:

“Take care, Raoul! I have already often told you of this; you must not forget it, for it is a great defect in a rider. See! your horse is tired already, he froths at the mouth, whilst mine looks as if he had only just left the stable. You hold the bit too tight and so make his mouth hard, so that you will not be able to make him manoeuvre quickly. The safety of a cavalier often depends on the prompt obedience of his horse. In a week, remember, you will no longer be performing your manoeuvres for practice, but on a field of battle.”

Then suddenly, in order not to give too uncomfortable an importance to this observation:

“See, Raoul!” he resumed; “what a fine plain for partridge shooting.”

The young man stored in his mind the admonition whilst he admired the delicate tenderness with which it was bestowed.

“I have remarked also another thing,” said Athos, “which is, that in firing off your pistol you hold your arm too far outstretched. This tension lessens the accuracy of the aim. So in twelve times you thrice missed the mark.”

“Which you, sir, struck twelve times,” answered Raoul, smiling.

"Because I bent my arm and rested my hand on my elbow--so; do you understand what I mean?"

"Yes, sir. I have fired since in that manner and have been quite successful."

"What a cold wind!" resumed Athos; "a wintry blast. Apropos, if you fire--and you will do so, for you are recommended to a young general who is very fond of powder--remember that in single combat, which often takes place in the cavalry, never to fire the first shot. He who fires the first shot rarely hits his man, for he fires with the apprehension of being disarmed, before an armed foe; then, whilst he fires, make your horse rear; that manoeuvre has saved my life several times."

"I shall do so, if only in gratitude----"

"Eh!" cried Athos, "are not those fellows poachers they have arrested yonder? They are. Then another important thing, Raoul: should you be wounded in a battle, and fall from your horse, if you have any strength left, disentangle yourself from the line that your regiment has formed; otherwise, it may be driven back and you will be trampled to death by the horses. At all events, should you be wounded, write to me that very instant, or get some one at once to write to me. We are judges of wounds, we old soldiers," Athos added, smiling.

"Thank you, sir," answered the young man, much moved.

They arrived that very moment at the gate of the town, guarded by two sentinels.

"Here comes a young gentleman," said one of them, "who seems as if he were going to join the army."

"How do you make that out?" inquired Athos.

"By his manner, sir, and his age; he's the second to-day."

"Has a young man, such as I am, gone through this morning, then?" asked Raoul.

"Faith, yes, with a haughty presence, a fine equipage; such as the son of a noble house would have."

"He will be my companion on the journey, sir," cried Raoul. "Alas! he cannot make me forget what I shall have lost!"

Thus talking, they traversed the streets, full of people on account of the fete, and arrived opposite the old cathedral, where first mass was going on.

"Let us alight; Raoul," said Athos. "Olivain, take care of our horses and give me my sword."

The two gentlemen then went into the church. Athos gave Raoul some of the holy water. A love as tender as that of a lover for his mistress dwells, undoubtedly, in some paternal hearts toward a son.

Athos said a word to one of the vergers, who bowed and proceeded toward the basement.

“Come, Raoul,” he said, “let us follow this man.”

The verger opened the iron grating that guarded the royal tombs and stood on the topmost step, whilst Athos and Raoul descended. The sepulchral depths of the descent were dimly lighted by a silver lamp on the lowest step; and just below this lamp there was laid, wrapped in a flowing mantle of violet velvet, worked with fleurs-de-lis of gold, a catafalque resting on trestles of oak. The young man, prepared for this scene by the state of his own feelings, which were mournful, and by the majesty of the cathedral which he had passed through, descended in a slow and solemn manner and stood with head uncovered before these mortal spoils of the last king, who was not to be placed by the side of his forefathers until his successor should take his place there; and who appeared to abide on that spot, that he might thus address human pride, so sure to be exalted by the glories of a throne: “Dust of the earth! Here I await thee!”

There was profound silence.

Then Athos raised his hand and pointing to the coffin:

“This temporary sepulture is,” he said, “that of a man who was of feeble mind, yet one whose reign was full of great events; because over this king watched the spirit of another man, even as this lamp keeps vigil over this coffin and illumines it. He whose intellect was thus supreme, Raoul, was the actual sovereign; the other, nothing but a phantom to whom he lent a soul; and yet, so powerful is majesty amongst us, this man has not even the honor of a tomb at the feet of him in whose service his life was worn away. Remember, Raoul, this! If Richelieu made the king, by comparison, seem small, he made royalty great. The Palace of the Louvre contains two things--the king, who must die, and royalty, which never dies. The minister, so feared, so hated by his master, has descended into the tomb, drawing after him the king, whom he would not leave alone on earth, lest his work should be destroyed. So blind were his contemporaries that they regarded the cardinal’s death as a deliverance; and I, even I, opposed the designs of the great man who held the destinies of France within the hollow of his hand. Raoul, learn how to distinguish the king from royalty; the king is but a man;

royalty is the gift of God. Whenever you hesitate as to whom you ought to serve, abandon the exterior, the material appearance for the invisible principle, for the invisible principle is everything. Raoul, I seem to read your future destiny as through a cloud. It will be happier, I think, than ours has been. Different in your fate from us, you will have a king without a minister, whom you may serve, love, respect. Should the king prove a tyrant, for power begets tyranny, serve, love, respect royalty, that Divine right, that celestial spark which makes this dust still powerful and holy, so that we--gentlemen, nevertheless, of rank and condition--are as nothing in comparison with the cold corpse there extended."

"I shall adore God, sir," said Raoul, "respect royalty and ever serve the king. And if death be my lot, I hope to die for the king, for royalty and for God. Have I, sir, comprehended your instructions?"

Athos smiled.

"Yours is a noble nature." he said; "here is your sword."

Raoul bent his knee to the ground.

"It was worn by my father, a loyal gentleman. I have worn it in my turn and it has sometimes not been disgraced when the hilt was in my hand and the sheath at my side. Should your hand still be too weak to use this sword, Raoul, so much the better. You will have the more time to learn to draw it only when it ought to be used."

"Sir," replied Raoul, putting the sword to his lips as he received it from the count, "I owe you everything and yet this sword is the most precious gift you have yet made me. I will wear it, I swear to you, as a grateful man should do."

"'Tis well; arise, vicomte, embrace me."

Raoul arose and threw himself with emotion into the count's arms.

"Adieu," faltered the count, who felt his heart die away within him; "adieu, and think of me."

"Oh! for ever and ever!" cried the youth; "oh! I swear to you, sir, should any harm befall me, your name will be the last name that I shall utter, the remembrance of you my last thought."

Athos hastened upstairs to conceal his emotion, and regained with hurried steps the porch where Olivain was waiting with the horses.

"Olivain," said Athos, showing the servant Raoul's shoulder-belt, "tighten the buckle of the sword, it falls too low. You will accompany monsieur le vicomte till Grimaud rejoins you. You know, Raoul, Grimaud is an old and zealous servant; he will follow you."

"Yes, sir," answered Raoul.

"Now to horse, that I may see you depart!"

Raoul obeyed.

"Adieu, Raoul," said the count; "adieu, my dearest boy!"

"Adieu, sir, adieu, my beloved protector."

Athos waved his hand--he dared not trust himself to speak: and Raoul went away, his head uncovered. Athos remained motionless, looking after him until he turned the corner of the street.

Then the count threw the bridle of his horse into the hands of a peasant, remounted the steps, went into the cathedral, there to kneel down in the darkest corner and pray.

CHAPTER 23.

One of the Forty Methods of Escape of the Duc de Beaufort.

Meanwhile time was passing on for the prisoner, as well as for those who were preparing his escape; only for him it passed more slowly. Unlike other men, who enter with ardor upon a perilous resolution and grow cold as the moment of execution approaches, the Duc de Beaufort, whose buoyant courage had become a proverb, seemed to push time before him and sought most eagerly to hasten the hour of action. In his escape alone, apart from his plans for the future, which, it must be admitted, were for the present sufficiently vague and uncertain, there was a beginning of vengeance which filled his heart. In the first place his escape would be a serious misfortune to Monsieur de Chavigny, whom he hated for the petty persecutions he owed to him. It would be a still worse affair for Mazarin, whom he execrated for the greater offences he had committed. It may be observed that there was a proper proportion in his sentiments toward the governor of the prison and the minister--toward the subordinate and the master.

Then Monsieur de Beaufort, who was so familiar with the interior of the Palais Royal, though he did not know the relations existing between the queen and the cardinal, pictured to himself, in his prison, all that dramatic excitement which would ensue when the rumor should run from the minister’s cabinet to the chamber of Anne of Austria: “Monsieur de Beaufort has escaped!” Whilst saying that to himself, Monsieur de Beaufort smiled pleasantly and imagined himself already outside, breathing the air of the plains and the forests, pressing a strong horse between his knees and crying out in a loud voice, “I am free!”

It is true that on coming to himself he found that he was still within four walls; he saw La Ramee twirling his thumbs ten feet from him, and his guards laughing and drinking in the ante-chamber. The only thing that was pleasant to him in that odious tableau--such is the instability of the human mind--was the sullen face of Grimaud, for whom he had at first conceived such a hatred and who now was all his hope. Grimaud seemed to him an Antinous. It is needless to say that this transformation was visible only to the prisoner’s feverish imagination. Grimaud was still the same, and therefore he retained the entire confidence of his superior, La Ramee, who now relied upon him more than he did upon himself, for, as we have said, La Ramee felt at the bottom of his heart a certain weakness for Monsieur de Beaufort.

And so the good La Ramee made a festivity of the little supper with his prisoner. He had but one fault--he was a gourmand; he had found the pates good, the wine excellent. Now the successor of Pere Marteau had promised him a pate of pheasant instead of a pate of fowl, and Chambertin wine instead of Macon. All this, set off by the presence of that excellent prince, who was so good-natured, who invented so droll tricks against Monsieur de Chavigny and so fine jokes against Mazarin, made for La Ramee the approaching Pentecost one of the four great feasts of the year. He therefore looked forward to six o’clock with as much impatience as the duke himself.

Since daybreak La Ramee had been occupied with the preparations, and trusting no one but himself, he had visited personally the successor of Pere Marteau. The latter had surpassed himself; he showed La Ramee a monstrous pate, ornamented with Monsieur de Beaufort’s coat-of-arms. It was empty as yet, but a pheasant and two partridges were lying near it. La Ramee’s mouth watered and he returned to the duke’s chamber rubbing his hands. To crown his happiness, Monsieur de Chavigny had started on a journey that morning and in his absence La Ramee was deputy-governor of the chateau.

As for Grimaud, he seemed more sullen than ever.

In the course of the forenoon Monsieur de Beaufort had a game of tennis with La Ramee; a sign from Grimaud put him on the alert. Grimaud, going in advance, followed the course which they were to take in the evening. The game was played in an inclosure called the little court of the chateau, a place quite deserted except when Monsieur de Beaufort was playing; and even then the precaution seemed superfluous, the wall was so high.

There were three gates to open before reaching the inclosure, each by a different key. When they arrived Grimaud went carelessly and sat down by a loophole in the wall, letting his legs dangle outside. It was evident that there the rope ladder was to be attached.

This manoeuvre, transparent to the Duc de Beaufort, was quite unintelligible to La Ramee.

The game at tennis, which, upon a sign from Grimaud, Monsieur de Beaufort had consented to play, began in the afternoon. The duke was in full strength and beat La Ramee completely.

Four of the guards, who were constantly near the prisoner, assisted in picking up the tennis balls. When the game was over, the duke, laughing at La Ramee for his bad play, offered these men two louis d'or to go and drink his health, with their four other comrades.

The guards asked permission of La Ramee, who gave it to them, but not till the evening, however; until then he had business and the prisoner was not to be left alone.

Six o'clock came and, although they were not to sit down to table until seven o'clock, dinner was ready and served up. Upon a sideboard appeared the colossal pie with the duke's arms on it, and seemingly cooked to a turn, as far as one could judge by the golden color which illuminated the crust.

The rest of the dinner was to come.

Every one was impatient, La Ramee to sit down to table, the guards to go and drink, the duke to escape.

Grimaud alone was calm as ever. One might have fancied that Athos had educated him with the express forethought of such a great event.

There were moments when, looking at Grimaud, the duke asked himself if he was not dreaming and if that marble figure was really at his service and would grow animated when the moment came for action.

La Ramee sent away the guards, desiring them to drink to the duke's health, and as soon as they were gone shut all the doors, put the keys in his pocket and showed the table to the prince with an air that signified:

"Whenever my lord pleases."

The prince looked at Grimaud, Grimaud looked at the clock; it was hardly a quarter-past six. The escape was fixed to take place at seven o'clock; there was therefore three-quarters of an hour to wait.

The duke, in order to pass away another quarter of an hour, pretended to be reading something that interested him and muttered that he wished they would allow him to finish his chapter. La Ramee went up to him and looked over his shoulder to see what sort of a book it was that had so singular an influence over the prisoner as to make him put off taking his dinner.

It was "Caesar's Commentaries," which La Ramee had lent him, contrary to the orders of the governor; and La Ramee resolved never again to disobey these injunctions.

Meantime he uncorked the bottles and went to smell if the pie was good.

At half-past six the duke arose and said very gravely:

“Certainly, Caesar was the greatest man of ancient times.”

“You think so, my lord?” answered La Ramee.

“Yes.”

“Well, as for me, I prefer Hannibal.”

“And why, pray, Master La Ramee?” asked the duke.

“Because he left no Commentaries,” replied La Ramee, with his coarse laugh.

The duke vouchsafed no reply, but sitting down at the table made a sign that La Ramee should seat himself opposite. There is nothing so expressive as the face of an epicure who finds himself before a well spread table, so La Ramee, when receiving his plate of soup from Grimaud, presented a type of perfect bliss.

The duke smiled.

“Zounds!” he said; “I don’t suppose there is a more contented man at this moment in all the kingdom than yourself!”

“You are right, my lord duke,” answered the officer; “I don’t know any pleasanter sight on earth than a well covered table; and when, added to that, he who does the honors is the grandson of Henry IV., you will, my lord duke, easily comprehend that the honor fairly doubles the pleasure one enjoys.”

The duke, in his turn, bowed, and an imperceptible smile appeared on the face of Grimaud, who kept behind La Ramee.

“My dear La Ramee,” said the duke, “you are the only man to turn such faultless compliments.”

“No, my lord duke,” replied La Ramee, in the fullness of his heart; “I say what I think; there is no compliment in what I say to you----”

“Then you are attached to me?” asked the duke.

“To own the truth, I should be inconsolable if you were to leave Vincennes.”

“A droll way of showing your affliction.” The duke meant to say “affection.”

“But, my lord,” returned La Ramee, “what would you do if you got out? Every folly you committed would embroil you with the court and they would put you into the Bastile, instead of Vincennes. Now, Monsieur de

Chavigny is not amiable, I allow, but Monsieur du Tremblay is considerably worse."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the duke, who from time to time looked at the clock, the fingers of which seemed to move with sickening slowness.

"But what can you expect from the brother of a capuchin monk, brought up in the school of Cardinal Richelieu? Ah, my lord, it is a great happiness that the queen, who always wished you well, had a fancy to send you here, where there's a promenade and a tennis court, good air, and a good table."

"In short," answered the duke, "if I comprehend you aright, La Ramee, I am ungrateful for having ever thought of leaving this place?"

"Oh! my lord duke, 'tis the height of ingratitude; but your highness has never seriously thought of it?"

"Yes," returned the duke, "I must confess I sometimes think of it."

"Still by one of your forty methods, your highness?"

"Yes, yes, indeed."

"My lord," said La Ramee, "now we are quite at our ease and enjoying ourselves, pray tell me one of those forty ways invented by your highness."

"Willingly," answered the duke, "give me the pie!"

"I am listening," said La Ramee, leaning back in his armchair and raising his glass of Madeira to his lips, and winking his eye that he might see the sun through the rich liquid that he was about to taste.

The duke glanced at the clock. In ten minutes it would strike seven.

Grimaud placed the pie before the duke, who took a knife with a silver blade to raise the upper crust; but La Ramee, who was afraid of any harm happening to this fine work of art, passed his knife, which had an iron blade, to the duke.

"Thank you, La Ramee," said the prisoner.

"Well, my lord! this famous invention of yours?"

"Must I tell you," replied the duke, "on what I most reckon and what I determine to try first?"

"Yes, that's the thing, my lord!" cried his custodian, gaily.

"Well, I should hope, in the first instance, to have for keeper an honest fellow like you."

"And you have me, my lord. Well?"

"Having, then, a keeper like La Ramee, I should try also to have introduced to him by some friend or other a man who would be devoted to me, who would assist me in my flight."

“Come, come,” said La Ramee, “that’s not a bad idea.”

“Capital, isn’t it? for instance, the former servingman of some brave gentleman, an enemy himself to Mazarin, as every gentleman ought to be.”

“Hush! don’t let us talk politics, my lord.”

“Then my keeper would begin to trust this man and to depend upon him, and I should have news from those without the prison walls.”

“Ah, yes! but how can the news be brought to you?”

“Nothing easier; in a game of tennis, for example.”

“In a game of tennis?” asked La Ramee, giving more serious attention to the duke’s words.

“Yes; see, I send a ball into the moat; a man is there who picks it up; the ball contains a letter. Instead of returning the ball to me when I call for it from the top of the wall, he throws me another; that other ball contains a letter. Thus we have exchanged ideas and no one has seen us do it.”

“The devil it does! The devil it does!” said La Ramee, scratching his head; “you are in the wrong to tell me that, my lord. I shall have to watch the men who pick up balls.”

The duke smiled.

“But,” resumed La Ramee, “that is only a way of corresponding.”

“And that is a great deal, it seems to me.”

“But not enough.”

“Pardon me; for instance, I say to my friends, Be on a certain day, on a certain hour, at the other side of the moat with two horses.”

“Well, what then?” La Ramee began to be uneasy; “unless the horses have wings to mount the ramparts and come and fetch you.”

“That’s not needed. I have,” replied the duke, “a way of descending from the ramparts.”

“What?”

“A rope ladder.”

“Yes, but,” answered La Ramee, trying to laugh, “a ladder of ropes can’t be sent around a ball, like a letter.”

“No, but it may be sent in something else.”

“In something else--in something else? In what?”

“In a pate, for example.”

“In a pate?” said La Ramee.

“Yes. Let us suppose one thing,” replied the duke “let us suppose, for instance, that my maitre d’hotel, Noirmont, has purchased the shop of Pere

Marteau----”

“Well?” said La Ramee, shuddering.

“Well, La Ramee, who is a gourmand, sees his pates, thinks them more attractive than those of Pere Marteau and proposes to me that I shall try them. I consent on condition that La Ramee tries them with me. That we may be more at our ease, La Ramee removes the guards, keeping only Grimaud to wait on us. Grimaud is the man whom a friend has sent to second me in everything. The moment for my escape is fixed--seven o’clock. Well, at a few minutes to seven----”

“At a few minutes to seven?” cried La Ramee, cold sweat upon his brow.

“At a few minutes to seven,” returned the duke (suiting the action to the words), “I raise the crust of the pie; I find in it two poniards, a ladder of rope, and a gag. I point one of the poniards at La Ramee’s breast and I say to him, ‘My friend, I am sorry for it, but if thou stirrest, if thou utterest one cry, thou art a dead man!’“

The duke, in pronouncing these words, suited, as we have said, the action to the words. He was standing near the officer and he directed the point of the poniard in such a manner, close to La Ramee’s heart, that there could be no doubt in the mind of that individual as to his determination. Meanwhile, Grimaud, still mute as ever, drew from the pie the other poniard, the rope ladder and the gag.

La Ramee followed all these objects with his eyes, his alarm every moment increasing.

“Oh, my lord,” he cried, with an expression of stupefaction in his face; “you haven’t the heart to kill me!”

“No; not if thou dost not oppose my flight.”

“But, my lord, if I allow you to escape I am a ruined man.”

“I will compensate thee for the loss of thy place.”

“You are determined to leave the chateau?”

“By Heaven and earth! This night I am determined to be free.”

“And if I defend myself, or call, or cry out?”

“I will kill thee, on the honor of a gentleman.”

At this moment the clock struck.

“Seven o’clock!” said Grimaud, who had not spoken a word.

La Ramee made one movement, in order to satisfy his conscience. The duke frowned, the officer felt the point of the poniard, which, having penetrated through his clothes, was close to his heart.

“Let us dispatch,” said the duke.

“My lord, one last favor.”

“What? speak, make haste.”

“Bind my arms, my lord, fast.”

“Why bind thee?”

“That I may not be considered as your accomplice.”

“Your hands?” asked Grimaud.

“Not before me, behind me.”

“But with what?” asked the duke.

“With your belt, my lord!” replied La Ramee.

The duke undid his belt and gave it to Grimaud, who tied La Ramee in such a way as to satisfy him.

“Your feet, too,” said Grimaud.

La Ramee stretched out his legs, Grimaud took a table-cloth, tore it into strips and tied La Ramee’s feet together.

“Now, my lord,” said the poor man, “let me have the poire d’angoisse. I ask for it; without it I should be tried in a court of justice because I did not raise the alarm. Thrust it into my mouth, my lord, thrust it in.”

Grimaud prepared to comply with this request, when the officer made a sign as if he had something to say.

“Speak,” said the duke.

“Now, my lord, do not forget, if any harm happens to me on your account, that I have a wife and four children.”

“Rest assured; put the gag in, Grimaud.”

In a second La Ramee was gagged and laid prostrate. Two or three chairs were thrown down as if there had been a struggle. Grimaud then took from the pocket of the officer all the keys it contained and first opened the door of the room in which they were, then shut it and double-locked it, and both he and the duke proceeded rapidly down the gallery which led to the little inclosure. At last they reached the tennis court. It was completely deserted. No sentinels, no one at any of the windows. The duke ran to the rampart and perceived on the other side of the ditch, three cavaliers with two riding horses. The duke exchanged a signal with them. It was indeed for him that they were there.

Grimaud, meantime, undid the means of escape.

This was not, however, a rope ladder, but a ball of silk cord, with a narrow board which was to pass between the legs, the ball to unwind itself by the weight of the person who sat astride upon the board.

“Go!” said the duke.

“First, my lord?” inquired Grimaud.

“Certainly. If I am caught, I risk nothing but being taken back again to prison. If they catch thee, thou wilt be hung.”

“True,” replied Grimaud.

And instantly, Grimaud, sitting upon the board as if on horseback, commenced his perilous descent.

The duke followed him with his eyes, with involuntary terror. He had gone down about three-quarters of the length of the wall when the cord broke. Grimaud fell--precipitated into the moat.

The duke uttered a cry, but Grimaud did not give a single moan. He must have been dreadfully hurt, for he did not stir from the place where he fell.

Immediately one of the men who were waiting slipped down into the moat, tied under Grimaud’s shoulders the end of a cord, and the remaining two, who held the other end, drew Grimaud to them.

“Descend, my lord,” said the man in the moat. “There are only fifteen feet more from the top down here, and the grass is soft.”

The duke had already begun to descend. His task was the more difficult, as there was no board to support him. He was obliged to let himself down by his hands and from a height of fifty feet. But as we have said he was active, strong, and full of presence of mind. In less than five minutes he arrived at the end of the cord. He was then only fifteen feet from the ground, as the gentlemen below had told him. He let go the rope and fell upon his feet, without receiving any injury.

He instantly began to climb up the slope of the moat, on the top of which he met De Rochefort. The other two gentlemen were unknown to him. Grimaud, in a swoon, was tied securely to a horse.

“Gentlemen,” said the duke, “I will thank you later; now we have not a moment to lose. On, then! on! those who love me, follow me!”

And he jumped on his horse and set off at full gallop, snuffing the fresh air in his triumph and shouting out, with an expression of face which it would be impossible to describe:

“Free! free! free!”

CHAPTER 24.

The timely Arrival of D’Artagnan in Paris.

At Blois, D’Artagnan received the money paid to him by Mazarin for any future service he might render the cardinal.

From Blois to Paris was a journey of four days for ordinary travelers, but D’Artagnan arrived on the third day at the Barriere Saint Denis. In turning the corner of the Rue Montmartre, in order to reach the Rue Tiquetonne and the Hotel de la Chevrette, where he had appointed Porthos to meet him, he saw at one of the windows of the hotel, that friend himself dressed in a sky-blue waistcoat, embroidered with silver, and gaping, till he showed every one of his white teeth; whilst the people passing by admiringly gazed at this gentleman, so handsome and so rich, who seemed to weary of his riches and his greatness.

D’Artagnan and Planchet had hardly turned the corner when Porthos recognized them.

“Eh! D’Artagnan!” he cried. “Thank God you have come!”

“Eh! good-day, dear friend!” replied D’Artagnan.

Porthos came down at once to the threshold of the hotel.

“Ah, my dear friend!” he cried, “what bad stabling for my horses here.”

“Indeed!” said D’Artagnan; “I am most unhappy to hear it, on account of those fine animals.”

“And I, also--I was also wretchedly off,” he answered, moving backward and forward as he spoke; “and had it not been for the hostess,” he added, with his air of vulgar self-complacency, “who is very agreeable and understands a joke, I should have got a lodging elsewhere.”

The pretty Madeleine, who had approached during this colloquy, stepped back and turned pale as death on hearing Porthos’s words, for she thought the scene with the Swiss was about to be repeated. But to her great surprise D’Artagnan remained perfectly calm, and instead of being angry he laughed, and said to Porthos:

“Yes, I understand, the air of La Rue Tiquetonne is not like that of Pierrefonds; but console yourself, I will soon conduct you to one much better.”

“When will you do that?”

“Immediately, I hope.”

“Ah! so much the better!”

To that exclamation of Porthos’s succeeded a groaning, low and profound, which seemed to come from behind a door. D’Artagnan, who had just dismounted, then saw, outlined against the wall, the enormous stomach of Mousqueton, whose down-drawn mouth emitted sounds of distress.

“And you, too, my poor Monsieur Mouston, are out of place in this poor hotel, are you not?” asked D’Artagnan, in that rallying tone which may indicate either compassion or mockery.

“He finds the cooking detestable,” replied Porthos.

“Why, then, doesn’t he attend to it himself, as at Chantilly?”

“Ah, monsieur, I have not here, as I had there, the ponds of monsieur le prince, where I could catch those beautiful carp, nor the forests of his highness to provide me with partridges. As for the cellar, I have searched every part and poor stuff I found.”

“Monsieur Mouston,” said D’Artagnan, “I should indeed condole with you had I not at this moment something very pressing to attend to.”

Then taking Porthos aside:

“My dear Du Vallon,” he said, “here you are in full dress most fortunately, for I am going to take you to the cardinal’s.”

“Gracious me! really!” exclaimed Porthos, opening his great wondering eyes.

“Yes, my friend.”

“A presentation? indeed!”

“Does that alarm you?”

“No, but it agitates me.”

“Oh! don’t be distressed; you have to deal with a cardinal of another kind. This one will not oppress you by his dignity.”

“‘Tis the same thing--you understand me, D’Artagnan--a court.”

“There’s no court now. Alas!”

“The queen!”

“I was going to say, there’s no longer a queen. The queen! Rest assured, we shall not see her.”

“And you say that we are going from here to the Palais Royal?”

“Immediately. Only, that there may be no delay, I shall borrow one of your horses.”

“Certainly; all the four are at your service.”

“Oh, I need only one of them for the time being.”

“Shall we take our valets?”

“Yes, you may as well take Mousqueton. As to Planchet, he has certain reasons for not going to court.”

“And what are they?”

“Oh, he doesn’t stand well with his eminence.”

“Mouston,” said Porthos, “saddle Vulcan and Bayard.”

“And for myself, monsieur, shall I saddle Rustaud?”

“No, take a more stylish horse, Phoebus or Superbe; we are going with some ceremony.”

“Ah,” said Mousqueton, breathing more freely, “you are only going, then, to make a visit?”

“Oh! yes, of course, Mouston; nothing else. But to avoid risk, put the pistols in the holsters. You will find mine on my saddle, already loaded.”

Mouston breathed a sigh; he couldn’t understand visits of ceremony made under arms.

“Indeed,” said Porthos, looking complacently at his old lackey as he went away, “you are right, D’Artagnan; Mouston will do; Mouston has a very fine appearance.”

D’Artagnan smiled.

“But you, my friend--are you not going to change your dress?”

“No, I shall go as I am. This traveling dress will serve to show the cardinal my haste to obey his commands.”

They set out on Vulcan and Bayard, followed by Mousqueton on Phoebus, and arrived at the Palais Royal at about a quarter to seven. The streets were crowded, for it was the day of Pentecost, and the crowd looked in wonder at these two cavaliers; one as fresh as if he had come out of a bandbox, the other so covered with dust that he looked as if he had but just come off a field of battle.

Mousqueton also attracted attention; and as the romance of Don Quixote was then the fashion, they said that he was Sancho, who, after having lost one master, had found two.

On reaching the palace, D’Artagnan sent to his eminence the letter in which he had been ordered to return without delay. He was soon ordered to the presence of the cardinal.

"Courage!" he whispered to Porthos, as they proceeded. "Do not be intimidated. Believe me, the eye of the eagle is closed forever. We have only the vulture to deal with. Hold yourself as bolt upright as on the day of the bastion of St. Gervais, and do not bow too low to this Italian; that might give him a poor idea of you."

"Good!" answered Porthos. "Good!"

Mazarin was in his study, working at a list of pensions and benefices, of which he was trying to reduce the number. He saw D'Artagnan and Porthos enter with internal pleasure, yet showed no joy in his countenance.

"Ah! you, is it? Monsieur le lieutenant, you have been very prompt. 'Tis well. Welcome to ye."

"Thanks, my lord. Here I am at your eminence's service, as well as Monsieur du Vallon, one of my old friends, who used to conceal his nobility under the name of Porthos."

Porthos bowed to the cardinal.

"A magnificent cavalier," remarked Mazarin.

Porthos turned his head to the right and to the left, and drew himself up with a movement full of dignity.

"The best swordsman in the kingdom, my lord," said D'Artagnan.

Porthos bowed to his friend.

Mazarin was as fond of fine soldiers as, in later times, Frederick of Prussia used to be. He admired the strong hands, the broad shoulders and the steady eye of Porthos. He seemed to see before him the salvation of his administration and of the kingdom, sculptured in flesh and bone. He remembered that the old association of musketeers was composed of four persons.

"And your two other friends?" he asked.

Porthos opened his mouth, thinking it a good opportunity to put in a word in his turn; D'Artagnan checked him by a glance from the corner of his eye.

"They are prevented at this moment, but will join us later."

Mazarin coughed a little.

"And this gentleman, being disengaged, takes to the service willingly?" he asked.

"Yes, my lord, and from pure devotion to the cause, for Monsieur de Bracieux is rich."

"Rich!" said Mazarin, whom that single word always inspired with a great respect.

"Fifty thousand francs a year," said Porthos.

These were the first words he had spoken.

"From pure zeal?" resumed Mazarin, with his artful smile; "from pure zeal and devotion then?"

"My lord has, perhaps, no faith in those words?" said D'Artagnan.

"Have you, Monsieur le Gascon?" asked Mazarin, supporting his elbows on his desk and his chin on his hands.

"I," replied the Gascon, "I believe in devotion as a word at one's baptism, for instance, which naturally comes before one's proper name; every one is naturally more or less devout, certainly; but there should be at the end of one's devotion something to gain."

"And your friend, for instance; what does he expect to have at the end of his devotion?"

"Well, my lord, my friend has three magnificent estates: that of Vallon, at Corbeil; that of Bracieux, in the Soissonais; and that of Pierrefonds, in the Valois. Now, my lord, he would like to have one of his three estates erected into a barony."

"Only that?" said Mazarin, his eyes twinkling with joy on seeing that he could pay for Porthos's devotion without opening his purse; "only that? That can be managed."

"I shall be baron!" explained Porthos, stepping forward.

"I told you so," said D'Artagnan, checking him with his hand; "and now his eminence confirms it."

"And you, Monsieur D'Artagnan, what do you want?"

"My lord," said D'Artagnan, "it is twenty years since Cardinal de Richelieu made me lieutenant."

"Yes, and you would be gratified if Cardinal Mazarin should make you captain."

D'Artagnan bowed.

"Well, that is not impossible. We will see, gentlemen, we will see. Now, Monsieur de Vallon," said Mazarin, "what service do you prefer, in the town or in the country?"

Porthos opened his mouth to reply.

"My lord," said D'Artagnan, "Monsieur de Vallon is like me, he prefers service extraordinary--that is to say, enterprises that are considered mad and impossible.”

That boastfulness was not displeasing to Mazarin; he fell into meditation.

“And yet,” he said, “I must admit that I sent for you to appoint you to quiet service; I have certain apprehensions--well, what is the meaning of that?”

In fact, a great noise was heard in the ante-chamber; at the same time the door of the study was burst open and a man, covered with dust, rushed into it, exclaiming:

“My lord the cardinal! my lord the cardinal!”

Mazarin thought that some one was going to assassinate him and he drew back, pushing his chair on the castors. D’Artagnan and Porthos moved so as to plant themselves between the person entering and the cardinal.

“Well, sir,” exclaimed Mazarin, “what’s the matter? and why do you rush in here, as if you were about to penetrate a crowded market-place?”

“My lord,” replied the messenger, “I wish to speak to your eminence in secret. I am Monsieur du Poins, an officer in the guards, on duty at the donjon of Vincennes.”

Mazarin, perceiving by the paleness and agitation of the messenger that he had something of importance to say, made a sign that D’Artagnan and Porthos should give place.

D’Artagnan and Porthos withdrew to a corner of the cabinet.

“Speak, monsieur, speak at once!” said Mazarin “What is the matter?”

“The matter is, my lord, that the Duc de Beaufort has contrived to escape from the Chateau of Vincennes.”

Mazarin uttered a cry and became paler than the man who had brought the news. He fell back, almost fainting, in his chair.

“Escaped? Monsieur de Beaufort escaped?”

“My lord, I saw him run off from the top of the terrace.”

“And you did not fire on him?”

“He was out of range.”

“Monsieur de Chavigny--where was he?”

“Absent.”

“And La Ramee?”

“Was found locked up in the prisoner’s room, a gag in his mouth and a poniard near him.”

“But the man who was under him?”

“Was an accomplice of the duke’s and escaped along with him.”

Mazarin groaned.

"My lord," said D'Artagnan, advancing toward the cardinal, "it seems to me that your eminence is losing precious time. It may still be possible to overtake the prisoner. France is large; the nearest frontier is sixty leagues distant."

"And who is to pursue him?" cried Mazarin.

"I, pardieu!"

"And you would arrest him?"

"Why not?"

"You would arrest the Duc de Beaufort, armed, in the field?"

"If your eminence should order me to arrest the devil, I would seize him by the horns and would bring him in."

"So would I," said Porthos.

"So would you!" said Mazarin, looking with astonishment at those two men. "But the duke will not yield himself without a furious battle."

"Very well," said D'Artagnan, his eyes aflame, "battle! It is a long time since we have had a battle, eh, Porthos?"

"Battle!" cried Porthos.

"And you think you can catch him?"

"Yes, if we are better mounted than he."

"Go then, take what guards you find here, and pursue him."

"You command us, my lord, to do so?"

"And I sign my orders," said Mazarin, taking a piece of paper and writing some lines; "Monsieur du Vallon, your barony is on the back of the Duc de Beaufort's horse; you have nothing to do but to overtake it. As for you, my dear lieutenant, I promise you nothing; but if you bring him back to me, dead or alive, you may ask all you wish."

"To horse, Porthos!" said D'Artagnan, taking his friend by the hand.

"Here I am," smiled Porthos, with his sublime composure.

They descended the great staircase, taking with them all the guards they found on their road, and crying out, "To arms! To arms!" and immediately put spur to horse, which set off along the Rue Saint Honore with the speed of the whirlwind.

"Well, baron, I promise you some good exercise!" said the Gascon.

"Yes, my captain."

As they went, the citizens, awakened, left their doors and the street dogs followed the cavaliers, barking. At the corner of the Cimetiere Saint Jean, D’Artagnan upset a man; it was too insignificant an occurrence to delay people so eager to get on. The troop continued its course as though their steeds had wings.

Alas! there are no unimportant events in this world and we shall see that this apparently slight incident came near endangering the monarchy.

CHAPTER 25.

An Adventure on the High Road.

The musketeers rode the whole length of the Faubourg Saint Antoine and of the road to Vincennes, and soon found themselves out of the town, then in a forest and then within sight of a village.

The horses seemed to become more lively with each successive step; their nostrils reddened like glowing furnaces. D’Artagnan, freely applying his spurs, was in advance of Porthos two feet at the most; Mousqueton followed two lengths behind; the guards were scattered according to the varying excellence of their respective mounts.

From the top of an eminence D’Artagnan perceived a group of people collected on the other side of the moat, in front of that part of the donjon which looks toward Saint Maur. He rode on, convinced that in this direction he would gain intelligence of the fugitive. In five minutes he had arrived at the place, where the guards joined him, coming up one by one.

The several members of that group were much excited. They looked at the cord, still hanging from the loophole and broken at about twenty feet from the ground. Their eyes measured the height and they exchanged conjectures. On the top of the wall sentinels went and came with a frightened air.

A few soldiers, commanded by a sergeant, drove away idlers from the place where the duke had mounted his horse. D’Artagnan went straight to the sergeant.

“My officer,” said the sergeant, “it is not permitted to stop here.”

“That prohibition is not for me,” said D’Artagnan. “Have the fugitives been pursued?”

“Yes, my officer; unfortunately, they are well mounted.”

“How many are there?”

“Four, and a fifth whom they carried away wounded.”

“Four!” said D’Artagnan, looking at Porthos. “Do you hear, baron? They are only four!”

A joyous smile lighted Porthos’s face.

“How long a start have they?”

“Two hours and a quarter, my officer.”

“Two hours and a quarter--that is nothing; we are well mounted, are we not, Porthos?”

Porthos breathed a sigh; he thought of what was in store for his poor horses.

“Very good,” said D’Artagnan; “and now in what direction did they set out?”

“That I am forbidden to tell.”

D’Artagnan drew from his pocket a paper. “Order of the king,” he said.

“Speak to the governor, then.”

“And where is the governor?”

“In the country.”

Anger mounted to D’Artagnan’s face; he frowned and his cheeks were colored.

“Ah, you scoundrel!” he said to the sergeant, “I believe you are impudent to me! Wait!”

He unfolded the paper, presented it to the sergeant with one hand and with the other took a pistol from his holsters and cocked it.

“Order of the king, I tell you. Read and answer, or I will blow out your brains!”

The sergeant saw that D’Artagnan was in earnest. “The Vendomois road,” he replied.

“And by what gate did they go out?”

“By the Saint Maur gate.”

“If you are deceiving me, rascal, you will be hanged to-morrow.”

“And if you catch up with them you won’t come back to hang me,” murmured the sergeant.

D’Artagnan shrugged his shoulders, made a sign to his escort and started.

“This way, gentlemen, this way!” he cried, directing his course toward the gate that had been pointed out.

But, now that the duke had escaped, the concierge had seen fit to fasten the gate with a double lock. It was necessary to compel him to open it, as the sergeant had been compelled to speak, and this took another ten minutes. This last obstacle having been overcome, the troop pursued their course with their accustomed ardor; but some of the horses could no longer sustain this pace; three of them stopped after an hour's gallop, and one fell down.

D'Artagnan, who never turned his head, did not perceive it. Porthos told him of it in his calm manner.

"If only we two arrive," said D'Artagnan, "it will be enough, since the duke's troop are only four in number."

"That is true," said Porthos

And he spurred his courser on.

At the end of another two hours the horses had gone twelve leagues without stopping; their legs began to tremble, and the foam they shed whitened the doublets of their masters.

"Let us rest here an instant to give these poor creatures breathing time," said Porthos.

"Let us rather kill them! yes, kill them!" cried D'Artagnan; "I see fresh tracks; 'tis not a quarter of an hour since they passed this place."

In fact, the road was trodden by horses' feet, visible even in the approaching gloom of evening.

They set out; after a run of two leagues, Mousqueton's horse sank.

"Gracious me!" said Porthos, "there's Phoebus ruined."

"The cardinal will pay you a hundred pistoles."

"I'm above that."

"Let us set out again, at full gallop."

"Yes, if we can."

But at last the lieutenant's horse refused to go on; he could not breathe; one last spur, instead of making him advance, made him fall.

"The devil!" exclaimed Porthos; "there's Vulcan foundered."

"Zounds!" cried D'Artagnan, "then we must stop! Give me your horse, Porthos. What the devil are you doing?"

"By Jove, I am falling, or rather, Bayard is falling," answered Porthos.

All three then cried: "All's over."

"Hush!" said D'Artagnan.

"What is it?"

"I hear a horse."

"It belongs to one of our companions, who is overtaking us."

"No," said D'Artagnan, "it is in advance."

"That is another thing," said Porthos; and he listened toward the quarter indicated by D'Artagnan.

“Monsieur,” said Mousqueton, who, abandoning his horse on the high road, had come on foot to rejoin his master, “Phoebus could no longer hold out and----”

“Silence!” said Porthos.

In fact, at that moment a second neighing was borne to them on the night wind.

“It is five hundred feet from here, in advance,” said D’Artagnan.

“True, monsieur,” said Mousqueton; “and five hundred feet from here is a small hunting-house.”

“Mousqueton, thy pistols,” said D’Artagnan.

“I have them at hand, monsieur.”

“Porthos, take yours from your holsters.”

“I have them.”

“Good!” said D’Artagnan, seizing his own; “now you understand, Porthos?”

“Not too well.”

“We are out on the king’s service.”

“Well?”

“For the king’s service we need horses.”

“That is true,” said Porthos.

“Then not a word, but set to work!”

They went on through the darkness, silent as phantoms; they saw a light glimmering in the midst of some trees.

“Yonder is the house, Porthos,” said the Gascon; “let me do what I please and do you what I do.”

They glided from tree to tree till they arrived at twenty steps from the house unperceived and saw by means of a lantern suspended under a hut, four fine horses. A groom was rubbing them down; near them were saddles and bridles.

D’Artagnan approached quickly, making a sign to his two companions to remain a few steps behind.

“I buy those horses,” he said to the groom.

The groom turned toward him with a look of surprise, but made no reply.

“Didn’t you hear, fellow?”

“Yes, I heard.”

“Why, then, didn’t you reply?”

“Because these horses are not to be sold,” was the reply.

“I take them, then,” said the lieutenant.

And he took hold of one within his reach; his two companions did the same thing.

“Sir,” cried the groom, “they have traversed six leagues and have only been unsaddled half an hour.”

“Half an hour’s rest is enough,” replied the Gascon.

The groom cried aloud for help. A kind of steward appeared, just as D’Artagnan and his companions were prepared to mount. The steward attempted to expostulate.

“My dear friend,” cried the lieutenant, “if you say a word I will blow out your brains.”

“But, sir,” answered the steward, “do you know that these horses belong to Monsieur de Montbazon?”

“So much the better; they must be good animals, then.”

“Sir, I shall call my people.”

“And I, mine; I’ve ten guards behind me, don’t you hear them gallop? and I’m one of the king’s musketeers. Come, Porthos; come, Mousqueton.”

They all mounted the horses as quickly as possible.

“Halloo! hi! hi!” cried the steward; “the house servants, with the carbines!”

“On! on!” cried D’Artagnan; “there’ll be firing! on!”

They all set off, swift as the wind.

“Here!” cried the steward, “here!” whilst the groom ran to a neighboring building.

“Take care of your horses!” cried D’Artagnan to him.

“Fire!” replied the steward.

A gleam, like a flash of lightning, illumined the road, and with the flash was heard the whistling of balls, which were fired wildly in the air.

“They fire like grooms,” said Porthos. “In the time of the cardinal people fired better than that, do you remember the road to Crevecoeur, Mousqueton?”

“Ah, sir! my left side still pains me!”

“Are you sure we are on the right track, lieutenant?”

“Egad, didn’t you hear? these horses belong to Monsieur de Montbazon; well, Monsieur de Montbazon is the husband of Madame de Montbazon----”

“And----”

"And Madame de Montbazon is the mistress of the Duc de Beaufort."

"Ah! I understand," replied Porthos; "she has ordered relays of horses."

"Exactly so."

"And we are pursuing the duke with the very horses he has just left?"

"My dear Porthos, you are really a man of most superior understanding," said D'Artagnan, with a look as if he spoke against his conviction.

"Pooh!" replied Porthos, "I am what I am."

They rode on for an hour, till the horses were covered with foam and dust.

"Zounds! what is yonder?" cried D'Artagnan.

"You are very lucky if you see anything such a night as this," said Porthos.

"Something bright."

"I, too," cried Mousqueton, "saw them also."

"Ah! ah! have we overtaken them?"

"Good! a dead horse!" said D'Artagnan, pulling up his horse, which shied; "it seems their horses, too, are breaking down, as well as ours."

"I seem to hear the noise of a troop of horsemen," exclaimed Porthos, leaning over his horse's mane.

"Impossible."

"They appear to be numerous."

"Then 'tis something else."

"Another horse!" said Porthos.

"Dead?"

"No, dying."

"Saddled?"

"Yes, saddled and bridled."

"Then we are upon the fugitives."

"Courage, we have them!"

"But if they are numerous," observed Mousqueton, "'tis not we who have them, but they who have us."

"Nonsense!" cried D'Artagnan, "they'll suppose us to be stronger than themselves, as we're in pursuit; they'll be afraid and will disperse."

"Certainly," remarked Porthos.

"Ah! do you see?" cried the lieutenant.

"The lights again! this time I, too, saw them," said Porthos.

“On! on! forward! forward!” cried D’Artagnan, in his stentorian voice; “we shall laugh over all this in five minutes.”

And they darted on anew. The horses, excited by pain and emulation, raced over the dark road, in the midst of which was now seen a moving mass, denser and more obscure than the rest of the horizon.

CHAPTER 26.

The Rencontre.

They rode on in this way for ten minutes. Suddenly two dark forms seemed to separate from the mass, advanced, grew in size, and as they loomed up larger and larger, assumed the appearance of two horsemen.

“Aha!” cried D’Artagnan, “they’re coming toward us.”

“So much the worse for them,” said Porthos.

“Who goes there?” cried a hoarse voice.

The three horsemen made no reply, stopped not, and all that was heard was the noise of swords drawn from the scabbards and the cocking of the pistols with which the two phantoms were armed.

“Bridle in mouth!” said D’Artagnan.

Porthos understood him and he and the lieutenant each drew with the left hand a pistol from their bolsters and cocked it in their turn.

“Who goes there?” was asked a second time. “Not a step forward, or you’re dead men.”

“Stuff!” cried Porthos, almost choked with dust and chewing his bridle as a horse chews his bit. “Stuff and nonsense; we have seen plenty of dead men in our time.”

Hearing these words, the two shadows blockaded the road and by the light of the stars might be seen the shining of their arms.

“Back!” shouted D’Artagnan, “or you are dead!”

Two shots were the reply to this threat; but the assailants attacked their foes with such velocity that in a moment they were upon them; a third pistol-shot was heard, aimed by D’Artagnan, and one of his adversaries fell. As for Porthos, he assaulted the foe with such violence that, although his sword was thrust aside, the enemy was thrown off his horse and fell about ten steps from it.

“Finish, Mouston, finish the work!” cried Porthos. And he darted on beside his friend, who had already begun a fresh pursuit.

“Well?” said Porthos.

“I’ve broken my man’s skull,” cried D’Artagnan. “And you----”

"I've only thrown the fellow down, but hark!"

Another shot of a carbine was heard. It was Mousqueton, who was obeying his master's command.

"On! on!" cried D'Artagnan; "all goes well! we have the first throw."

"Ha! ha!" answered Porthos, "behold, other players appear."

And in fact, two other cavaliers made their appearance, detached, as it seemed, from the principal group; they again disputed the road.

This time the lieutenant did not wait for the opposite party to speak.

"Stand aside!" he cried; "stand off the road!"

"What do you want?" asked a voice.

"The duke!" Porthos and D'Artagnan roared out both at once.

A burst of laughter was the answer, but finished with a groan. D'Artagnan had, with his sword, cut in two the poor wretch who had laughed.

At the same time Porthos and his adversary fired on each other and D'Artagnan turned to him.

"Bravo! you've killed him, I think."

"No, wounded his horse only."

"What would you have, my dear fellow? One doesn't hit the bull's-eye every time; it is something to hit inside the ring. Ho! parbleau! what is the matter with my horse?"

"Your horse is falling," said Porthos, reining in his own.

In truth, the lieutenant's horse stumbled and fell on his knees; then a rattling in his throat was heard and he lay down to die. He had received in the chest the bullet of D'Artagnan's first adversary. D'Artagnan swore loud enough to be heard in the skies.

"Does your honor want a horse?" asked Mousqueton.

"Zounds! want one!" cried the Gascon.

"Here's one, your honor----"

"How the devil hast thou two horses?" asked D'Artagnan, jumping on one of them.

"Their masters are dead! I thought they might be useful, so I took them."

Meantime Porthos had reloaded his pistols.

"Be on the qui vive!" cried D'Artagnan. "Here are two other cavaliers."

As he spoke, two horsemen advanced at full speed.

"Ho! your honor!" cried Mousqueton, "the man you upset is getting up."

"Why didn't thou do as thou didst to the first man?" said Porthos.

“I held the horses, my hands were full, your honor.”

A shot was fired that moment; Mousqueton shrieked with pain.

“Ah, sir! I’m hit in the other side! exactly opposite the other! This hurt is just the fellow of the one I had on the road to Amiens.”

Porthos turned around like a lion, plunged on the dismounted cavalier, who tried to draw his sword; but before it was out of the scabbard, Porthos, with the hilt of his had struck him such a terrible blow on the head that he fell like an ox beneath the butcher’s knife.

Mousqueton, groaning, slipped from his horse, his wound not allowing him to keep the saddle.

On perceiving the cavaliers, D’Artagnan had stopped and charged his pistol afresh; besides, his horse, he found, had a carbine on the bow of the saddle.

“Here I am!” exclaimed Porthos. “Shall we wait, or shall we charge?”

“Let us charge them,” answered the Gascon.

“Charge!” cried Porthos.

They spurred on their horses; the other cavaliers were only twenty steps from them.

“For the king!” cried D’Artagnan.

“The king has no authority here!” answered a deep voice, which seemed to proceed from a cloud, so enveloped was the cavalier in a whirlwind of dust.

“‘Tis well, we will see if the king’s name is not a passport everywhere,” replied the Gascon.

“See!” answered the voice.

Two shots were fired at once, one by D’Artagnan, the other by the adversary of Porthos. D’Artagnan’s ball took off his enemy’s hat. The ball fired by Porthos’s foe went through the throat of his horse, which fell, groaning.

“For the last time, where are you going?”

“To the devil!” answered D’Artagnan.

“Good! you may be easy, then--you’ll get there.”

D’Artagnan then saw a musket-barrel leveled at him; he had no time to draw from his holsters. He recalled a bit of advice which Athos had once given him, and made his horse rear.

The ball struck the animal full in front. D’Artagnan felt his horse giving way under him and with his wonderful agility threw himself to one side.

“Ah! this,” cried the voice, the tone of which was at once polished and jeering, “this is nothing but a butchery of horses and not a combat between men. To the sword, sir! the sword!”

And he jumped off his horse.

“To the swords! be it so!” replied D’Artagnan; “that is exactly what I want.”

D’Artagnan, in two steps, was engaged with the foe, whom, according to custom, he attacked impetuously, but he met this time with a skill and a strength of arm that gave him pause. Twice he was obliged to step back; his opponent stirred not one inch. D’Artagnan returned and again attacked him.

Twice or thrice thrusts were attempted on both sides, without effect; sparks were emitted from the swords like water spouting forth.

At last D’Artagnan thought it was time to try one of his favorite feints in fencing. He brought it to bear, skillfully executed it with the rapidity of lightning, and struck the blow with a force which he fancied would prove irresistible.

The blow was parried.

“‘Sdeath!” he cried, with his Gascon accent.

At this exclamation his adversary bounded back and, bending his bare head, tried to distinguish in the gloom the features of the lieutenant.

As to D’Artagnan, afraid of some feint, he still stood on the defensive.

“Have a care,” cried Porthos to his opponent; “I’ve still two pistols charged.”

“The more reason you should fire the first!” cried his foe.

Porthos fired; the flash threw a gleam of light over the field of battle.

As the light shone on them a cry was heard from the other two combatants.

“Athos!” exclaimed D’Artagnan.

“D’Artagnan!” ejaculated Athos.

Athos raised his sword; D’Artagnan lowered his.

“Aramis!” cried Athos, “don’t fire!”

“Ah! ha! is it you, Aramis?” said Porthos.

And he threw away his pistol.

Aramis pushed his back into his saddle-bags and sheathed his sword.

“My son!” exclaimed Athos, extending his hand to D’Artagnan.

This was the name which he gave him in former days, in their moments of tender intimacy.

“Athos!” cried D’Artagnan, wringing his hands. “So you defend him! And I, who have sworn to take him dead or alive, I am dishonored--and by you!”

“Kill me!” replied Athos, uncovering his breast, “if your honor requires my death.”

“Oh! woe is me! woe is me!” cried the lieutenant; “there’s only one man in the world who could stay my hand; by a fatality that very man bars my way. What shall I say to the cardinal?”

“You can tell him, sir,” answered a voice which was the voice of high command in the battle-field, “that he sent against me the only two men capable of getting the better of four men; of fighting man to man, without discomfiture, against the Comte de la Fere and the Chevalier d’Herblay, and of surrendering only to fifty men!

“The prince!” exclaimed at the same moment Athos and Aramis, unmasking as they addressed the Duc de Beaufort, whilst D’Artagnan and Porthos stepped backward.

“Fifty cavaliers!” cried the Gascon and Porthos.

“Look around you, gentlemen, if you doubt the fact,” said the duke.

The two friends looked to the right, to the left; they were encompassed by a troop of horsemen.

“Hearing the noise of the fight,” resumed the duke, “I fancied you had about twenty men with you, so I came back with those around me, tired of always running away, and wishing to draw my sword in my own cause; but you are only two.”

“Yes, my lord; but, as you have said, two that are a match for twenty,” said Athos.

“Come, gentlemen, your swords,” said the duke.

“Our swords!” cried D’Artagnan, raising his head and regaining his self-possession. “Never!”

“Never!” added Porthos.

Some of the men moved toward them.

“One moment, my lord,” whispered Athos, and he said something in a low voice.

“As you will,” replied the duke. “I am too much indebted to you to refuse your first request. Gentlemen,” he said to his escort, “withdraw. Monsieur d’Artagnan, Monsieur du Vallon, you are free.”

The order was obeyed; D'Artagnan and Porthos then found themselves in the centre of a large circle.

"Now, D'Herblay," said Athos, "dismount and come here."

Aramis dismounted and went to Porthos, whilst Athos approached D'Artagnan.

All four once more together.

"Friends!" said Athos, "do you regret you have not shed our blood?"

"No," replied D'Artagnan; "I regret to see that we, hitherto united, are opposed to each other. Ah! nothing will ever go well with us hereafter!"

"Oh, Heaven! No, all is over!" said Porthos.

"Well, be on our side now," resumed Aramis.

"Silence, D'Herblay!" cried Athos; "such proposals are not to be made to gentlemen such as these. 'Tis a matter of conscience with them, as with us."

"Meantime, here we are, enemies!" said Porthos. "Gramercy! who would ever have thought it?"

D'Artagnan only sighed.

Athos looked at them both and took their hands in his.

"Gentlemen," he said, "this is a serious business and my heart bleeds as if you had pierced it through and through. Yes, we are severed; there is the great, the distressing truth! But we have not as yet declared war; perhaps we shall have to make certain conditions, therefore a solemn conference is indispensable."

"For my own part, I demand it," said Aramis.

"I accept it," interposed D'Artagnan, proudly.

Porthos bowed, as if in assent.

"Let us choose a place of rendezvous," continued Athos, "and in a last interview arrange our mutual position and the conduct we are to maintain toward each other."

"Good!" the other three exclaimed.

"Well, then, the place?"

"Will the Place Royale suit you?" asked D'Artagnan.

"In Paris?"

"Yes."

Athos and Aramis looked at each other.

"The Place Royale--be it so!" replied Athos.

"When?"

"To-morrow evening, if you like!"

“At what hour?”

“At ten in the evening, if that suits you; by that time we shall have returned.”

“Good.”

“There,” continued Athos, “either peace or war will be decided; honor, at all events, will be maintained!”

“Alas!” murmured D’Artagnan, “our honor as soldiers is lost to us forever!”

“D’Artagnan,” said Athos, gravely, “I assure you that you do me wrong in dwelling so upon that. What I think of is, that we have crossed swords as enemies. Yes,” he continued, sadly shaking his head, “Yes, it is as you said, misfortune, indeed, has overtaken us. Come, Aramis.”

“And we, Porthos,” said D’Artagnan, “will return, carrying our shame to the cardinal.”

“And tell him,” cried a voice, “that I am not too old yet for a man of action.”

D’Artagnan recognized the voice of De Rochefort.

“Can I do anything for you, gentlemen?” asked the duke.

“Bear witness that we have done all that we could.”

“That shall be testified to, rest assured. Adieu! we shall meet soon, I trust, in Paris, where you shall have your revenge.” The duke, as he spoke, kissed his hand, spurred his horse into a gallop and disappeared, followed by his troop, who were soon lost in distance and darkness.

D’Artagnan and Porthos were now alone with a man who held by the bridles two horses; they thought it was Mousqueton and went up to him.

“What do I see?” cried the lieutenant. “Grimaud, is it thou?”

Grimaud signified that he was not mistaken.

“And whose horses are these?” cried D’Artagnan.

“Who has given them to us?” said Porthos.

“The Comte de la Fere.”

“Athos! Athos!” muttered D’Artagnan; “you think of every one; you are indeed a nobleman! Whither art thou going, Grimaud?”

“To join the Vicomte de Bragelonne in Flanders, your honor.”

They were taking the road toward Paris, when groans, which seemed to proceed from a ditch, attracted their attention.

“What is that?” asked D’Artagnan.

“It is I--Mousqueton,” said a mournful voice, whilst a sort of shadow arose out of the side of the road.

Porthos ran to him. “Art thou dangerously wounded, my dear Mousqueton?” he said.

“No, sir, but I am severely.”

“What can we do?” said D’Artagnan; “we must return to Paris.”

“I will take care of Mousqueton,” said Grimaud; and he gave his arm to his old comrade, whose eyes were full of tears, nor could Grimaud tell whether the tears were caused by wounds or by the pleasure of seeing him again.

D’Artagnan and Porthos went on, meantime, to Paris. They were passed by a sort of courier, covered with dust, the bearer of a letter from the duke to the cardinal, giving testimony to the valor of D’Artagnan and Porthos.

Mazarin had passed a very bad night when this letter was brought to him, announcing that the duke was free and that he would henceforth raise up mortal strife against him.

“What consoles me,” said the cardinal after reading the letter, “is that, at least, in this chase, D’Artagnan has done me one good turn--he has destroyed Broussel. This Gascon is a precious fellow; even his misadventures are of use.”

The cardinal referred to that man whom D’Artagnan upset at the corner of the Cimetiere Saint Jean in Paris, and who was no other than the Councillor Broussel.

CHAPTER 27.

The four old Friends prepare to meet again.

Well,” said Porthos, seated in the courtyard of the Hotel de la Chevrette, to D’Artagnan, who, with a long and melancholy face, had returned from the Palais Royal; “did he receive you ungraciously, my dear friend?”

“I’faith, yes! a brute, that cardinal. What are you eating there, Porthos?”

“I am dipping a biscuit in a glass of Spanish wine; do the same.”

“You are right. Gimblou, a glass of wine.”

“Well, how has all gone off?”

“Zounds! you know there’s only one way of saying things, so I went in and said, ‘My lord, we were not the strongest party.’

“‘Yes, I know that,’ he said, ‘but give me the particulars.’

“You know, Porthos, I could not give him the particulars without naming our friends; to name them would be to commit them to ruin, so I merely said they were fifty and we were two.

“‘There was firing, nevertheless, I heard,’ he said; ‘and your swords--they saw the light of day, I presume?’

“‘That is, the night, my lord,’ I answered.

“‘Ah!’ cried the cardinal, ‘I thought you were a Gascon, my friend?’

“‘I am a Gascon,’ said I, ‘only when I succeed.’ The answer pleased him and he laughed.

“‘That will teach me,’ he said, ‘to have my guards provided with better horses; for if they had been able to keep up with you and if each one of them had done as much as you and your friend, you would have kept your word and would have brought him back to me dead or alive.’“

“Well, there’s nothing bad in that, it seems to me,” said Porthos.

“Oh, mon Dieu! no, nothing at all. It was the way in which he spoke. It is incredible how these biscuit soak up wine! They are veritable sponges! Gimblou, another bottle.”

The bottle was brought with a promptness which showed the degree of consideration D’Artagnan enjoyed in the establishment. He continued:

“So I was going away, but he called me back.

"'You have had three horses foundered or killed?' he asked me.

"'Yes, my lord.'

"'How much were they worth?'"

"Why," said Porthos, "that was very good of him, it seems to me."

"'A thousand pistoles,' I said."

"A thousand pistoles!" Porthos exclaimed. "Oh! oh! that is a large sum. If he knew anything about horses he would dispute the price."

"Faith! he was very much inclined to do so, the contemptible fellow. He made a great start and looked at me. I also looked at him; then he understood, and putting his hand into a drawer, he took from it a quantity of notes on a bank in Lyons."

"For a thousand pistoles?"

"For a thousand pistoles--just that amount, the beggar; not one too many."

"And you have them?"

"They are here."

"Upon my word, I think he acted very generously."

"Generously! to men who had risked their lives for him, and besides had done him a great service?"

"A great service--what was that?"

"Why, it seems that I crushed for him a parliament councillor."

"What! that little man in black that you upset at the corner of Saint Jean Cemetery?"

"That's the man, my dear fellow; he was an annoyance to the cardinal. Unfortunately, I didn't crush him flat. It seems that he came to himself and that he will continue to be an annoyance."

"See that, now!" said Porthos; "and I turned my horse aside from going plump on to him! That will be for another time."

"He owed me for the councillor, the pettifogger!"

"But," said Porthos, "if he was not crushed completely----"

"Ah! Monsieur de Richelieu would have said, 'Five hundred crowns for the councillor.' Well, let's say no more about it. How much were your animals worth, Porthos?"

"Ah, if poor Mousqueton were here he could tell you to a fraction."

"No matter; you can tell within ten crowns."

"Why, Vulcan and Bayard cost me each about two hundred pistoles, and putting Phoebus at a hundred and fifty, we should be pretty near the amount.”

“There will remain, then, four hundred and fifty pistoles,” said D’Artagnan, contentedly.

“Yes,” said Porthos, “but there are the equipments.”

“That is very true. Well, how much for the equipments?”

“If we say one hundred pistoles for the three----”

“Good for the hundred pistoles; there remains, then, three hundred and fifty.”

Porthos made a sign of assent.

“We will give the fifty pistoles to the hostess for our expenses,” said D’Artagnan, “and share the three hundred.”

“We will share,” said Porthos.

“A paltry piece of business!” murmured D’Artagnan crumpling his note.

“Pooh!” said Porthos, “it is always that. But tell me----”

“What?”

“Didn’t he speak of me in any way?”

“Ah! yes, indeed!” cried D’Artagnan, who was afraid of disheartening his friend by telling him that the cardinal had not breathed a word about him; “yes, surely, he said----”

“He said?” resumed Porthos.

“Stop, I want to remember his exact words. He said, ‘As to your friend, tell him he may sleep in peace.’“

“Good, very good,” said Porthos; “that signified as clear as daylight that he still intends to make me a baron.”

At this moment nine o’clock struck. D’Artagnan started.

“Ah, yes,” said Porthos, “there is nine o’clock. We have a rendezvous, you remember, at the Place Royale.”

“Ah! stop! hold your peace, Porthos, don’t remind me of it; ‘tis that which has made me so cross since yesterday. I shall not go.”

“Why?” asked Porthos.

“Because it is a grievous thing for me to meet again those two men who caused the failure of our enterprise.”

“And yet,” said Porthos, “neither of them had any advantage over us. I still had a loaded pistol and you were in full fight, sword in hand.”

“Yes,” said D’Artagnan; “but what if this rendezvous had some hidden purpose?”

“Oh!” said Porthos, “you can’t think that, D’Artagnan!”

D’Artagnan did not believe Athos to be capable of a deception, but he sought an excuse for not going to the rendezvous.

“We must go,” said the superb lord of Bracieux, “lest they should say we were afraid. We who have faced fifty foes on the high road can well meet two in the Place Royale.”

“Yes, yes, but they took part with the princes without apprising us of it. Athos and Aramis have played a game with me which alarms me. We discovered yesterday the truth; what is the use of going to-day to learn something else?”

“You really have some distrust, then?” said Porthos.

“Of Aramis, yes, since he has become an abbe. You can’t imagine, my dear fellow, the sort of man he is. He sees us on the road which leads him to a bishopric, and perhaps will not be sorry to get us out of his way.”

“Ah, as regards Aramis, that is another thing,” said Porthos, “and it wouldn’t surprise me at all.”

“Perhaps Monsieur de Beaufort will try, in his turn, to lay hands on us.”

“Nonsense! He had us in his power and he let us go. Besides we can be on our guard; let us take arms, let Planchet post himself behind us with his carbine.”

“Planchet is a Frondeur,” answered D’Artagnan.

“Devil take these civil wars! one can no more now reckon on one’s friends than on one’s footmen,” said Porthos. “Ah! if Mousqueton were here! there’s a fellow who will never desert me!”

“So long as you are rich! Ah! my friend! ‘tis not civil war that disunites us. It is that we are each of us twenty years older; it is that the honest emotions of youth have given place to suggestions of interest, whispers of ambition, counsels of selfishness. Yes, you are right; let us go, Porthos, but let us go well armed; were we not to keep the rendezvous, they would declare we were afraid. Halloo! Planchet! here! saddle our horses, take your carbine.”

“Whom are we going to attack, sir?”

“No one; a mere matter of precaution,” answered the Gascon.

“You know, sir, that they wished to murder that good councillor, Broussel, the father of the people?”

“Really, did they?” said D’Artagnan.

“Yes, but he has been avenged. He was carried home in the arms of the people. His house has been full ever since. He has received visits from the coadjutor, from Madame de Longueville, and the Prince de Conti; Madame de Chevreuse and Madame de Vendome have left their names at his door. And now, whenever he wishes----”

“Well, whenever he wishes?”

Planchet began to sing:

“Un vent de fronde S’est leve ce matin; Je crois qu’il gronde Contre le Mazarin. Un vent de fronde S’est leve ce matin.”

“It doesn’t surprise me,” said D’Artagnan, in a low tone to Porthos, “that Mazarin would have been much better satisfied had I crushed the life out of his councillor.”

“You understand, then, monsieur,” resumed Planchet, “that if it were for some enterprise like that undertaken against Monsieur Broussel that you should ask me to take my carbine----”

“No, don’t be alarmed; but where did you get all these details?”

“From a good source, sir; I heard it from Friquet.”

“From Friquet? I know that name----”

“A son of Monsieur de Broussel’s servant, and a lad that, I promise you, in a revolt will not give away his share to the dogs.”

“Is he not a singing boy at Notre Dame?” asked D’Artagnan.

“Yes, that is the very boy; he’s patronized by Bazin.”

“Ah, yes, I know.”

“Of what importance is this little reptile to you?” asked Porthos.

“Gad!” replied D’Artagnan; “he has already given me good information and he may do the same again.”

Whilst all this was going on, Athos and Aramis were entering Paris by the Faubourg St. Antoine. They had taken some refreshment on the road and hastened on, that they might not fail at the appointed place. Bazin was their only attendant, for Grimaud had stayed behind to take care of Mousqueton. As they were passing onward, Athos proposed that they should lay aside their arms and military costume, and assume a dress more suited to the city.

“Oh, no, dear count!” cried Aramis, “is it not a warlike encounter that we are going to?”

“What do you mean, Aramis?”

“That the Place Royale is the termination to the main road to Vendomois, and nothing else.”

“What! our friends?”

“Are become our most dangerous enemies, Athos. Let us be on our guard.”

“Oh! my dear D’Herblay!”

“Who can say whether D’Artagnan may not have betrayed us to the cardinal? who can tell whether Mazarin may not take advantage of this rendezvous to seize us?”

“What! Aramis, you think that D’Artagnan, that Porthos, would lend their hands to such an infamy?”

“Among friends, my dear Athos, no, you are right; but among enemies it would be only a stratagem.”

Athos crossed his arms and bowed his noble head.

“What can you expect, Athos? Men are so made; and we are not always twenty years old. We have cruelly wounded, as you know, that personal pride by which D’Artagnan is blindly governed. He has been beaten. Did you not observe his despair on the journey? As to Porthos, his barony was perhaps dependent on that affair. Well, he found us on his road and will not be baron this time. Perhaps that famous barony will have something to do with our interview this evening. Let us take our precautions, Athos.”

“But suppose they come unarmed? What a disgrace to us.”

“Oh, never fear! besides, if they do, we can easily make an excuse; we came straight off a journey and are insurgents, too.”

“An excuse for us! to meet D’Artagnan with a false excuse! to have to make a false excuse to Porthos! Oh, Aramis!” continued Athos, shaking his head mournfully, “upon my soul, you make me the most miserable of men; you disenchant a heart not wholly dead to friendship. Go in whatever guise you choose; for my part, I shall go unarmed.”

“No, for I will not allow you to do so. ‘Tis not one man, not Athos only, not the Comte de la Fere whom you will ruin by this amiable weakness, but a whole party to whom you belong and who depend upon you.”

“Be it so then,” replied Athos, sorrowfully.

And they pursued their road in mournful silence.

Scarcely had they reached by the Rue de la Mule the iron gate of the Place Royale, when they perceived three cavaliers, D’Artagnan, Porthos, and Planchet, the two former wrapped up in their military cloaks under which their swords were hidden, and Planchet, his musket by his side. They were waiting at the entrance of the Rue Sainte Catharine, and their horses were fastened to the rings of the arcade. Athos, therefore, commanded Bazin to fasten up his horse and that of Aramis in the same manner.

They then advanced two and two, and saluted each other politely.

“Now where will it be agreeable to you that we hold our conference?” inquired Aramis, perceiving that people were stopping to look at them, supposing that they were going to engage in one of those far-famed duels still extant in the memory of the Parisians, and especially the inhabitants of the Place Royale.

“The gate is shut,” said Aramis, “but if these gentlemen like a cool retreat under the trees, and perfect seclusion, I will get the key from the Hotel de Rohan and we shall be well suited.”

D’Artagnan darted a look into the obscurity of the Place. Porthos ventured to put his head between the railings, to try if his glance could penetrate the gloom.

“If you prefer any other place,” said Athos, in his persuasive voice, “choose for yourselves.”

“This place, if Monsieur d’Herblay can procure the key, is the best that we can have,” was the answer.

Aramis went off at once, begging Athos not to remain alone within reach of D’Artagnan and Porthos; a piece of advice which was received with a contemptuous smile.

Aramis returned soon with a man from the Hotel de Rohan, who was saying to him:

“You swear, sir, that it is not so?”

“Stop,” and Aramis gave him a louis d’or.

“Ah! you will not swear, my master,” said the concierge, shaking his head.

“Well, one can never say what may happen; at present we and these gentlemen are excellent friends.”

“Yes, certainly,” added Athos and the other two.

D’Artagnan had heard the conversation and had understood it.

“You see?” he said to Porthos.

“What do I see?”

“That he wouldn’t swear.”

“Swear what?”

“That man wanted Aramis to swear that we are not going to the Place Royale to fight.”

“And Aramis wouldn’t swear?”

“No.”

“Attention, then!”

Athos did not lose sight of the two speakers. Aramis opened the gate and faced around in order that D’Artagnan and Porthos might enter. In passing through the gate, the hilt of the lieutenant’s sword was caught in the grating and he was obliged to pull off his cloak; in doing so he showed the butt end of his pistols and a ray of the moon was reflected on the shining metal.

“Do you see?” whispered Aramis to Athos, touching his shoulder with one hand and pointing with the other to the arms which the Gascon wore under his belt.

“Alas! I do!” replied Athos, with a deep sigh.

He entered third, and Aramis, who shut the gate after him, last. The two serving-men waited without; but as if they likewise mistrusted each other, they kept their respective distances.

CHAPTER 28.

The Place Royale.

They proceeded silently to the centre of the Place, but as at this very moment the moon had just emerged from behind a cloud, they thought they might be observed if they remained on that spot and therefore regained the shade of the lime-trees.

There were benches here and there; the four gentlemen stopped near them; at a sign from Athos, Porthos and D'Artagnan sat down, the two others stood in front of them.

After a few minutes of silent embarrassment, Athos spoke.

"Gentlemen," he said, "our presence here is the best proof of former friendship; not one of us has failed the others at this rendezvous; not one has, therefore, to reproach himself."

"Hear me, count," replied D'Artagnan; "instead of making compliments to each other, let us explain our conduct to each other, like men of right and honest hearts."

"I wish for nothing more; have you any cause of complaint against me or Monsieur d'Herblay? If so, speak out," answered Athos.

"I have," replied D'Artagnan. "When I saw you at your chateau at Bragelonne, I made certain proposals to you which you perfectly understood; instead of answering me as a friend, you played with me as a child; the friendship, therefore, that you boast of was not broken yesterday by the shock of swords, but by your dissimulation at your castle."

"D'Artagnan!" said Athos, reproachfully.

"You asked for candor and you have it. You ask what I have against you; I tell you. And I have the same sincerity to show you, if you wish, Monsieur d'Herblay; I acted in a similar way to you and you also deceived me."

"Really, monsieur, you say strange things," said Aramis. "You came seeking me to make to me certain proposals, but did you make them? No, you sounded me, nothing more. Very well what did I say to you? that Mazarin was contemptible and that I wouldn't serve Mazarin. But that is all. Did I tell you that I wouldn't serve any other? On the contrary, I gave you to understand, I think, that I adhered to the princes. We even joked very pleasantly, if I remember rightly, on the very probable contingency of your being charged by the cardinal with my arrest. Were you a party man? There is no doubt of that. Well, why should not we, too, belong to a party? You had your secret and we had ours; we didn't exchange them. So much the better; it proves that we know how to keep our secrets."

"I do not reproach you, monsieur," said D'Artagnan; "'tis only because Monsieur de la Fere has spoken of friendship that I question your conduct."

"And what do you find in it that is worthy of blame?" asked Aramis, haughtily.

The blood mounted instantly to the temples of D'Artagnan, who arose, and replied:

"I consider it worthy conduct of a pupil of Jesuits."

On seeing D'Artagnan rise, Porthos rose also; these four men were therefore all standing at the same time, with a menacing aspect, opposite to each other.

Upon hearing D'Artagnan's reply, Aramis seemed about to draw his sword, when Athos prevented him.

"D'Artagnan," he said, "you are here to-night, still infuriated by yesterday's adventure. I believed your heart noble enough to enable a friendship of twenty years to overcome an affront of a quarter of an hour. Come, do you really think you have anything to say against me? Say it then; if I am in fault I will avow the error."

The grave and harmonious tones of that beloved voice seemed to have still its ancient influence, whilst that of Aramis, which had become harsh and tuneless in his moments of ill-humor, irritated him. He answered therefore:

"I think, monsieur le comte, that you had something to communicate to me at your chateau of Bragelonne, and that gentleman"--he pointed to Aramis--"had also something to tell me when I was in his convent. At that time I was not concerned in the adventure, in the course of which you have so successfully estopped me! However, because I was prudent you must not take me for a fool. If I had wished to widen the breach between those whom Monsieur d'Herblay chooses to receive with a rope ladder and those whom he receives with a wooden ladder, I could have spoken out."

"What are you meddling with?" cried Aramis, pale with anger, suspecting that D'Artagnan had acted as a spy on him and had seen him with Madame de Longueville.

“I never meddle save with what concerns me, and I know how to make believe that I haven’t seen what does not concern me; but I hate hypocrites, and among that number I place musketeers who are abbes and abbes who are musketeers; and,” he added, turning to Porthos “here’s a gentleman who’s of the same opinion as myself.”

Porthos, who had not spoken one word, answered merely by a word and a gesture.

He said “yes” and he put his hand on his sword.

Aramis started back and drew his. D’Artagnan bent forward, ready either to attack or to stand on his defense.

Athos at that moment extended his hand with the air of supreme command which characterized him alone, drew out his sword and the scabbard at the same time, broke the blade in the sheath on his knee and threw the pieces to his right. Then turning to Aramis:

“Aramis,” he said, “break your sword.”

Aramis hesitated.

“It must be done,” said Athos; then in a lower and more gentle voice, he added. “I wish it.”

Then Aramis, paler than before, but subdued by these words, snapped the serpent blade between his hands, and then folding his arms, stood trembling with rage.

These proceedings made D’Artagnan and Porthos draw back. D’Artagnan did not draw his sword; Porthos put his back into the sheath.

“Never!” exclaimed Athos, raising his right hand to Heaven, “never! I swear before God, who seeth us, and who, in the darkness of this night heareth us, never shall my sword cross yours, never my eye express a glance of anger, nor my heart a throb of hatred, at you. We lived together, we loved, we hated together; we shed, we mingled our blood together, and too probably, I may still add, that there may be yet a bond between us closer even than that of friendship; perhaps there may be the bond of crime; for we four, we once did condemn, judge and slay a human being whom we had not any right to cut off from this world, although apparently fitter for hell than for this life. D’Artagnan, I have always loved you as my son; Porthos, we slept six years side by side; Aramis is your brother as well as mine, and Aramis has once loved you, as I love you now and as I have ever loved you. What can Cardinal Mazarin be to us, to four men who compelled such a man as Richelieu to act as we pleased? What is such or such a prince to us, who fixed the diadem upon a great queen’s head? D’Artagnan, I ask your pardon for having yesterday crossed swords with you; Aramis does the same to Porthos; now hate me if you can; but for my own part, I shall ever, even if you do hate me, retain esteem and friendship for you. I repeat my words, Aramis, and then, if you desire it, and if they desire it, let us separate forever from our old friends.”

There was a solemn, though momentary silence, which was broken by Aramis.

“I swear,” he said, with a calm brow and kindly glance, but in a voice still trembling with recent emotion, “I swear that I no longer bear animosity to those who were once my friends. I regret that I ever crossed swords with you, Porthos; I swear not only that it shall never again be pointed at your breast, but that in the bottom of my heart there will never in future be the slightest hostile sentiment; now, Athos, come.”

Athos was about to retire.

“Oh! no! no! do not go away!” exclaimed D’Artagnan, impelled by one of those irresistible impulses which showed the nobility of his nature, the native brightness of his character; “I swear that I would give the last drop of my blood and the last fragment of my limbs to preserve the friendship of such a friend as you, Athos--of such a man as you, Aramis.” And he threw himself into the arms of Athos.

“My son!” exclaimed Athos, pressing him in his arms.

“And as for me,” said Porthos, “I swear nothing, but I’m choked. Forsooth! If I were obliged to fight against you, I think I should allow myself to be pierced through and through, for I never loved any one but you in the wide world;” and honest Porthos burst into tears as he embraced Athos.

“My friends,” said Athos, “this is what I expected from such hearts as yours. Yes, I have said it and I now repeat it: our destinies are irrevocably united, although we now pursue divergent roads. I respect your convictions, and whilst we fight for opposite sides, let us remain friends. Ministers, princes, kings, will pass away like mountain torrents; civil war, like a forest flame; but we--we shall remain; I have a presentiment that we shall.”

“Yes,” replied D’Artagnan, “let us still be musketeers, and let us retain as our battle-standard that famous napkin of the bastion St. Gervais, on which the great cardinal had three fleurs-de-lis embroidered.”

“Be it so,” cried Aramis. “Cardinalists or Frondeurs, what matters it? Let us meet again as capital seconds in a duel, devoted friends in business, merry companions in our ancient pleasures.”

“And whenever,” added Athos, “we meet in battle, at this word, ‘Place Royale!’ let us put our swords into our left hands and shake hands with the right, even in the very lust and music of the hottest carnage.”

“You speak charmingly,” said Porthos.

“And are the first of men!” added D’Artagnan. “You excel us all.”

Athos smiled with ineffable pleasure.

“‘Tis then all settled. Gentlemen, your hands; are we not pretty good Christians?”

“Egad!” said D’Artagnan, “by Heaven! yes.”

“We should be so on this occasion, if only to be faithful to our oath,” said Aramis.

“Ah, I’m ready to do what you will,” cried Porthos; “even to swear by Mahomet. Devil take me if I’ve ever been so happy as at this moment.”

And he wiped his eyes, still moist.

“Has not one of you a cross?” asked Athos.

Aramis smiled and drew from his vest a cross of diamonds, which was hung around his neck by a chain of pearls. “Here is one,” he said.

“Well,” resumed Athos, “swear on this cross, which, in spite of its magnificent material, is still a cross; swear to be united in spite of everything, and forever, and may this oath bind us to each other, and even, also, our descendants! Does this oath satisfy you?”

“Yes,” said they all, with one accord.

“Ah, traitor!” muttered D’Artagnan, leaning toward Aramis and whispering in his ear, “you have made us swear on the crucifix of a Frondeuse.”

CHAPTER 29.

The Ferry across the Oise.

We hope that the reader has not quite forgotten the young traveler whom we left on the road to Flanders.

In losing sight of his guardian, whom he had quitted, gazing after him in front of the royal basilican, Raoul spurred on his horse, in order not only to escape from his own melancholy reflections, but also to hide from Olivain the emotion his face might betray.

One hour's rapid progress, however, sufficed to disperse the gloomy fancies that had clouded the young man's bright anticipations; and the hitherto unfelt pleasure of freedom--a pleasure which is sweet even to those who have never known dependence--seemed to Raoul to gild not only Heaven and earth, but especially that blue but dim horizon of life we call the future.

Nevertheless, after several attempts at conversation with Olivain he foresaw that many days passed thus would prove exceedingly dull; and the count's agreeable voice, his gentle and persuasive eloquence, recurred to his mind at the various towns through which they journeyed and about which he had no longer any one to give him those interesting details which he would have drawn from Athos, the most amusing and the best informed of guides. Another recollection contributed also to sadden Raoul: on their arrival at Sonores he had perceived, hidden behind a screen of poplars, a little chateau which so vividly recalled that of La Valliere to his mind that he halted for nearly ten minutes to gaze at it, and resumed his journey with a sigh too abstracted even to reply to Olivain's respectful inquiry about the cause of so much fixed attention. The aspect of external objects is often a mysterious guide communicating with the fibres of memory, which in spite of us will arouse them at times; this thread, like that of Ariadne, when once unraveled will conduct one through a labyrinth of thought, in which one loses one's self in endeavoring to follow that phantom of the past which is called recollection.

Now the sight of this chateau had taken Raoul back fifty leagues westward and had caused him to review his life from the moment when he had taken leave of little Louise to that in which he had seen her for the first time; and every branch of oak, every gilded weathercock on roof of slates, reminded him that, instead of returning to the friends of his childhood, every instant estranged him further and that perhaps he had even left them forever.

With a full heart and burning head he desired Olivain to lead on the horses to a wayside inn, which he observed within gunshot range, a little in advance of the place they had reached.

As for himself, he dismounted and remained under a beautiful group of chestnuts in flower, amidst which were murmuring a multitude of happy bees, and bade Olivain send the host to him with writing paper and ink, to be placed on a table which he found there, conveniently ready. Olivain obeyed and continued on his way, whilst Raoul remained sitting, with his elbow leaning on the table, from time to time gently shaking the flowers from his head, which fell upon him like snow, and gazing vaguely on the charming landscape spread out before him, dotted over with green fields and groups of trees. Raoul had been there about ten minutes, during five of which he was lost in reverie, when there appeared within the circle comprised in his rolling gaze a man with a rubicund face, who, with a napkin around his body, another under his arm, and a white cap upon his head, approached him, holding paper, pen and ink in hand.

“Ha! ha!” laughed the apparition, “every gentleman seems to have the same fancy, for not a quarter of an hour ago a young lad, well mounted like you, as tall as you and of about your age, halted before this clump of trees and had this table and this chair brought here, and dined here, with an old gentleman who seemed to be his tutor, upon a pie, of which they haven’t left a mouthful, and two bottles of Macon wine, of which they haven’t left a drop, but fortunately we have still some of the same wine and some of the same pies left, and if your worship will but give your orders----”

“No, friend,” replied Raoul, smiling, “I am obliged to you, but at this moment I want nothing but the things for which I have asked--only I shall be very glad if the ink prove black and the pen good; upon these conditions I will pay for the pen the price of the bottle, and for the ink the price of the pie.”

“Very well, sir,” said the host, “I’ll give the pie and the bottle of wine to your servant, and in this way you will have the pen and ink into the bargain.”

“Do as you like,” said Raoul, who was beginning his apprenticeship with that particular class of society, who, when there were robbers on the highroads, were connected with them, and who, since highwaymen no longer exist, have advantageously and aptly filled their vacant place.

The host, his mind at ease about his bill, placed pen, ink and paper upon the table. By a lucky chance the pen was tolerably good and Raoul began to write. The host remained standing in front of him, looking with a kind of involuntary admiration at his handsome face, combining both gravity and sweetness of expression. Beauty has always been and always will be all-powerful.

“He’s not a guest like the other one here just now,” observed mine host to Olivain, who had rejoined his master to see if he wanted anything, “and your young master has no appetite.”

“My master had appetite enough three days ago, but what can one do? he lost it the day before yesterday.”

And Olivain and the host took their way together toward the inn, Olivain, according to the custom of serving-men well pleased with their place, relating to the tavern-keeper all that he could say in favor of the young gentleman; whilst Raoul wrote on thus:

“Sir,--After a four hours’ march I stop to write to you, for I miss you every moment, and I am always on the point of turning my head as if to reply when you speak to me. I was so bewildered by your departure and so overcome with grief at our separation, that I am sure I was able to but very feebly express all the affection and gratitude I feel toward you. You will forgive me, sir, for your heart is of such a generous nature that you can well understand all that has passed in mine. I entreat you to write to me, for you form a part of my existence, and, if I may venture to tell you so, I also feel anxious. It seemed to me as if you were yourself preparing for some dangerous undertaking, about which I did not dare to question you, since you told me nothing. I have, therefore, as you see, great need of hearing from you. Now that you are no longer beside me I am afraid every moment of erring. You sustained me powerfully, sir, and I protest to you that to-day I feel very lonely. Will you have the goodness, sir, should you receive news from Blois, to send me a few lines about my little friend Mademoiselle de la

Valliere, about whose health, when we left, so much anxiety was felt? You can understand, honored and dear guardian, how precious and indispensable to me is the remembrance of the years that I have passed with you. I hope that you will sometimes, too, think of me, and if at certain hours you should miss me, if you should feel any slight regret at my absence, I shall be overwhelmed with joy at the thought that you appreciate my affection for and my devotion to yourself, and that I have been able to prove them to you whilst I had the happiness of living with you."

After finishing this letter Raoul felt more composed; he looked well around him to see if Olivain and the host might not be watching him, whilst he impressed a kiss upon the paper, a mute and touching caress, which the heart of Athos might well divine on opening the letter.

During this time Olivain had finished his bottle and eaten his pie; the horses were also refreshed. Raoul motioned to the host to approach, threw a crown upon the table, mounted his horse, and posted his letter at Senlis. The rest that had been thus afforded to men and horses enabled them to continue their journey at a good round pace. At Verberie, Raoul desired Olivain to make some inquiry about the young man who was preceding them; he had been observed to pass only three-quarters of an hour previously, but he was well mounted, as the tavern-keeper had already said, and rode at a rapid pace.

"Let us try and overtake this gentleman," said Raoul to Olivain; "like ourselves he is on his way to join the army and may prove agreeable company."

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when Raoul arrived at Compiegne; there he dined heartily and again inquired about the young gentleman who was in advance of them. He had stopped, like Raoul, at the Hotel of the Bell and Bottle, the best at Compiegne; and had started again on his journey, saying that he should sleep at Noyon.

"Well, let us sleep at Noyon," said Raoul.

"Sir," replied Olivain, respectfully, "allow me to remark that we have already much fatigued the horses this morning. I think it would be well to sleep here and to start again very early to-morrow. Eighteen leagues is enough for the first stage."

"The Comte de la Fere wished me to hasten on," replied Raoul, "that I might rejoin the prince on the morning of the fourth day; let us push on, then, to Noyon; it will be a stage similar to those we traveled from Blois to

Paris. We shall arrive at eight o’clock. The horses will have a long night’s rest, and at five o’clock to-morrow morning we can be again on the road.”

Olivain dared offer no opposition to this determination but he followed his master, grumbling.

“Go on, go on,” said he, between his teeth, “expend your ardor the first day; to-morrow, instead of journeying twenty leagues, you will travel ten, the day after to-morrow, five, and in three days you will be in bed. There you must rest; young people are such braggarts.”

It was easy to see that Olivain had not been taught in the school of the Planchets and the Grimauds. Raoul really felt tired, but he was desirous of testing his strength, and, brought up in the principles of Athos and certain of having heard him speak a thousand times of stages of twenty-five leagues, he did not wish to fall far short of his model. D’Artagnan, that man of iron, who seemed to be made of nerve and muscle only, had struck him with admiration. Therefore, in spite of Olivain’s remarks, he continued to urge his steed more and more, and following a pleasant little path, leading to a ferry, and which he had been assured shortened the journey by the distance of one league, he arrived at the summit of a hill and perceived the river flowing before him. A little troop of men on horseback were waiting on the edge of the stream, ready to embark. Raoul did not doubt this was the gentleman and his escort; he called out to him, but they were too distant to be heard; then, in spite of the weariness of his beast, he made it gallop but the rising ground soon deprived him of all sight of the travelers, and when he had again attained a new height, the ferryboat had left the shore and was making for the opposite bank. Raoul, seeing that he could not arrive in time to cross the ferry with the travelers, halted to wait for Olivain. At this moment a shriek was heard that seemed to come from the river. Raoul turned toward the side whence the cry had sounded, and shaded his eyes from the glare of the setting sun with his hand.

“Olivain!” he exclaimed, “what do I see below there?”

A second scream, more piercing than the first, now sounded.

“Oh, sir!” cried Olivain, “the rope which holds the ferryboat has broken and the boat is drifting. But what do I see in the water--something struggling?”

“Oh, yes,” exclaimed Raoul, fixing his glance on one point in the stream, splendidly illumined by the setting sun, “a horse, a rider!”

“They are sinking!” cried Olivain in his turn.

It was true, and Raoul was convinced that some accident had happened and that a man was drowning; he gave his horse its head, struck his spurs into its sides, and the animal, urged by pain and feeling that he had space open before him, bounded over a kind of paling which inclosed the landing place, and fell into the river, scattering to a distance waves of white froth.

"Ah, sir!" cried Olivain, "what are you doing? Good God!"

Raoul was directing his horse toward the unhappy man in danger. This was, in fact, a custom familiar to him. Having been brought up on the banks of the Loire, he might have been said to have been cradled on its waves; a hundred times he had crossed it on horseback, a thousand times had swum across. Athos, foreseeing the period when he should make a soldier of the viscount, had inured him to all kinds of arduous undertakings.

"Oh, heavens!" continued Olivain, in despair, "what would the count say if he only saw you now!"

"The count would do as I do," replied Raoul, urging his horse vigorously forward.

"But I--but I," cried Olivain, pale and disconsolate rushing about on the shore, "how shall I cross?"

"Leap, coward!" cried Raoul, swimming on; then addressing the traveler, who was struggling twenty yards in front of him: "Courage, sir!" said he, "courage! we are coming to your aid."

Olivain advanced, retired, then made his horse rear--turned it and then, struck to the core by shame, leaped, as Raoul had done, only repeating:

"I am a dead man! we are lost!"

In the meantime, the ferryboat had floated away, carried down by the stream, and the shrieks of those whom it contained resounded more and more. A man with gray hair had thrown himself from the boat into the river and was swimming vigorously toward the person who was drowning; but being obliged to go against the current he advanced but slowly. Raoul continued his way and was visibly gaining ground; but the horse and its rider, of whom he did not lose sight, were evidently sinking. The nostrils of the horse were no longer above water, and the rider, who had lost the reins in struggling, fell with his head back and his arms extended. One moment longer and all would disappear.

"Courage!" cried Raoul, "courage!"

"Too late!" murmured the young man, "too late!"

The water closed above his head and stifled his voice.

Raoul sprang from his horse, to which he left the charge of its own preservation, and in three or four strokes was at the gentleman's side; he seized the horse at once by the curb and raised its head above water; the animal began to breathe again and, as if he comprehended that they had come to his aid, redoubled his efforts. Raoul at the same time seized one of the young man's hands and placed it on the mane, which it grasped with the tenacity of a drowning man. Thus, sure that the rider would not release his hold, Raoul now only directed his attention to the horse, which he guided to the opposite bank, helping it to cut through the water and encouraging it with words.

All at once the horse stumbled against a ridge and then placed its foot on the sand.

"Saved!" exclaimed the man with gray hair, who also touched bottom.

"Saved!" mechanically repeated the young gentleman, releasing the mane and sliding from the saddle into Raoul's arms; Raoul was but ten yards from the shore; there he bore the fainting man, and laying him down upon the grass, unfastened the buttons of his collar and unhooked his doublet. A moment later the gray-headed man was beside him. Olivain managed in his turn to land, after crossing himself repeatedly; and the people in the ferryboat guided themselves as well as they were able toward the bank, with the aid of a pole which chanced to be in the boat.

Thanks to the attentions of Raoul and the man who accompanied the young gentleman, the color gradually returned to the pale cheeks of the dying man, who opened his eyes, at first entirely bewildered, but who soon fixed his gaze upon the person who had saved him.

"Ah, sir," he exclaimed, "it was you! Without you I was a dead man--thrice dead."

"But one recovers, sir, as you perceive," replied Raoul, "and we have but had a little bath."

"Oh! sir, what gratitude I feel!" exclaimed the man with gray hair.

"Ah, there you are, my good D'Arminges; I have given you a great fright, have I not? but it is your own fault. You were my tutor, why did you not teach me to swim?"

"Oh, monsieur le comte," replied the old man, "had any misfortune happened to you, I should never have dared to show myself to the marshal again."

"But how did the accident happen?" asked Raoul.

“Oh, sir, in the most natural way possible,” replied he to whom they had given the title of count. “We were about a third of the way across the river when the cord of the ferryboat broke. Alarmed by the cries and gestures of the boatmen, my horse sprang into the water. I cannot swim, and dared not throw myself into the river. Instead of aiding the movements of my horse, I paralyzed them; and I was just going to drown myself with the best grace in the world, when you arrived just in time to pull me out of the water; therefore, sir, if you will agree, henceforward we are friends until death.”

“Sir,” replied Raoul, bowing, “I am entirely at your service, I assure you.”

“I am called the Count de Guiche,” continued the young man; “my father is the Marechal de Grammont; and now that you know who I am, do me the honor to inform me who you are.”

“I am the Viscount de Bragelonne,” answered Raoul, blushing at being unable to name his father, as the Count de Guiche had done.

“Viscount, your countenance, your goodness and your courage incline me toward you; my gratitude is already due. Shake hands--I crave your friendship.”

“Sir,” said Raoul, returning the count’s pressure of the hand, “I like you already, from my heart; pray regard me as a devoted friend, I beseech you.”

“And now, where are you going, viscount?” inquired De Guiche.

“To join the army, under the prince, count.”

“And I, too!” exclaimed the young man, in a transport of joy. “Oh, so much the better, we will fire the first shot together.”

“It is well; be friends,” said the tutor; “young as you both are, you were perhaps born under the same star and were destined to meet. And now,” continued he, “you must change your clothes; your servants, to whom I gave directions the moment they had left the ferryboat, ought to be already at the inn. Linen and wine are both being warmed; come.”

The young men had no objection to this proposition; on the contrary, they thought it very timely.

They mounted again at once, whilst looks of admiration passed between them. They were indeed two elegant horsemen, with figures slight and upright, noble faces, bright and proud looks, loyal and intelligent smiles.

De Guiche might have been about eighteen years of age, but he was scarcely taller than Raoul, who was only fifteen.

CHAPTER 30.

Skirmishing.

The halt at Noyon was but brief, every one there being wrapped in profound sleep. Raoul had desired to be awakened should Grimaud arrive, but Grimaud did not arrive. Doubtless, too, the horses on their part appreciated the eight hours of repose and the abundant stabling which was granted them. The Count de Guiche was awakened at five o'clock in the morning by Raoul, who came to wish him good-day. They breakfasted in haste, and at six o'clock had already gone ten miles.

The young count's conversation was most interesting to Raoul, therefore he listened much, whilst the count talked well and long. Brought up in Paris, where Raoul had been but once; at the court, which Raoul had never seen; his follies as page; two duels, which he had already found the means of fighting, in spite of the edicts against them and, more especially, in spite of his tutor's vigilance--these things excited the greatest curiosity in Raoul. Raoul had only been at M. Scarron's house; he named to Guiche the people whom he had seen there. Guiche knew everybody--Madame de Neuillan, Mademoiselle d'Aubigne, Mademoiselle de Scudery, Mademoiselle Paulet, Madame de Chevreuse. He criticised everybody humorously. Raoul trembled, lest he should laugh among the rest at Madame de Chevreuse, for whom he entertained deep and genuine sympathy, but either instinctively, or from affection for the duchess, he said everything in her favor. His praises increased Raoul's friendship twofold. Then came the question of gallantry and love affairs. Under this head, also, Bragelonne had much more to hear than to tell. He listened attentively and fancied that he discovered through three or four rather frivolous adventures, that the count, like himself, had a secret to hide in the depths of his heart.

De Guiche, as we have said before, had been educated at the court, and the intrigues of this court were not unknown to him. It was the same court of which Raoul had so often heard the Comte de la Fere speak, except that its aspect had much changed since the period when Athos had himself been part of it; therefore everything which the Count de Guiche related was new to his traveling companion. The young count, witty and caustic, passed all the world in review; the queen herself was not spared, and Cardinal Mazarin came in for his share of ridicule.

The day passed away as rapidly as an hour. The count's tutor, a man of the world and a bon vivant, up to his eyes in learning, as his pupil described him, often recalled the profound erudition, the witty and caustic satire of Athos to Raoul; but as regarded grace, delicacy, and nobility of external appearance, no one in these points was to be compared to the Comte de la Fere.

The horses, which were more kindly used than on the previous day, stopped at Arras at four o'clock in the evening. They were approaching the scene of war; and as bands of Spaniards sometimes took advantage of the night to make expeditions even as far as the neighborhood of Arras, they determined to remain in the town until the morrow. The French army held all between Pont-a-Marc as far as Valenciennes, falling back upon Douai. The prince was said to be in person at Bethune.

The enemy's army extended from Cassel to Courtray; and as there was no species of violence or pillage it did not commit, the poor people on the frontier quitted their isolated dwellings and fled for refuge into the strong cities which held out a shelter to them. Arras was encumbered with fugitives. An approaching battle was much spoken of, the prince having manoeuvred, until that movement, only in order to await a reinforcement that had just reached him.

The young men congratulated themselves on having arrived so opportunely. The evening was employed in discussing the war; the grooms polished their arms; the young men loaded the pistols in case of a skirmish, and they awoke in despair, having both dreamed that they had arrived too late to participate in the battle. In the morning it was rumored that Prince de Conde had evacuated Bethune and fallen back on Carvin, leaving, however, a strong garrison in the former city.

But as there was nothing positively certain in this report, the young warriors decided to continue their way toward Bethune, free on the road to diverge to the right and march to Carvin if necessary.

The count's tutor was well acquainted with the country; he consequently proposed to take a crossroad, which lay between that of Lens and that of Bethune. They obtained information at Ablain, and a statement of their route was left for Grimaud. About seven o'clock in the morning they set out. De Guiche, who was young and impulsive, said to Raoul, “Here we are, three masters and three servants. Our valets are well armed and yours seems to be tough enough.”

“I have never seen him put to the test,” replied Raoul, “but he is a Breton, which promises something.”

“Yes, yes,” resumed De Guiche; “I am sure he can fire a musket when required. On my side I have two sure men, who have been in action with my father. We therefore represent six fighting men; if we should meet a little troop of enemies, equal or even superior in number to our own, shall we charge them, Raoul?”

“Certainly, sir,” replied the viscount.

“Holloa! young people--stop there!” said the tutor, joining in the conversation. “Zounds! how you manoeuvre my instructions, count! You seem to forget the orders I received to conduct you safe and sound to his highness the prince! Once with the army you may be killed at your good pleasure; but until that time, I warn you that in my capacity of general of the army I shall order a retreat and turn my back on the first red coat we come across.” De Guiche and Raoul glanced at each other, smiling.

They arrived at Ablain without accident. There they inquired and learned that the prince had in reality quitted Bethune and stationed himself between Cambria and La Venthie. Therefore, leaving directions at every place for Grimaud, they took a crossroad which conducted the little troop by the bank of a small stream flowing into the Lys. The country was beautiful, intersected by valleys as green as the emerald. Here and there they passed little copses crossing the path which they were following. In anticipation of some ambuscade in each of these little woods the tutor placed his two servants at the head of the band, thus forming the advance guard. Himself and the two young men represented the body of the army, whilst Olivain, with his rifle upon his knee and his eyes upon the watch, protected the rear.

They had observed for some time before them, on the horizon, a rather thick wood; and when they had arrived at a distance of a hundred steps from it, Monsieur d’Arminges took his usual precautions and sent on in advance the count’s two grooms. The servants had just disappeared under the trees, followed by the tutor, and the young men were laughing and talking about a hundred yards off. Olivain was at the same distance in the rear, when suddenly there resounded five or six musket-shots. The tutor cried halt; the young men obeyed, pulling up their steeds, and at the same moment the two valets were seen returning at a gallop.

The young men, impatient to learn the cause of the firing, spurred on toward the servants. The tutor followed them.

“Were you stopped?” eagerly inquired the two youths.

“No,” replied the servants, “it is even probable that we have not been seen; the shots were fired about a hundred paces in advance of us, in the thickest part of the wood, and we returned to ask your advice.”

“My advice is this,” said Monsieur d’Arminges, “and if needs be, my will, that we beat a retreat. There may be an ambuscade concealed in this wood.”

“Did you see nothing there?” asked the count.

“I thought I saw,” said one of the servants, “horsemen dressed in yellow, creeping along the bed of the stream.

“That’s it,” said the tutor. “We have fallen in with a party of Spaniards. Come back, sirs, back.”

The two youths looked at each other, and at this moment a pistol-shot and cries for help were heard. Another glance between the young men convinced them both that neither had any wish to go back, and as the tutor had already turned his horse’s head, they both spurred forward, Raoul crying: “Follow me, Olivain!” and the Count de Guiche: “Follow, Urban and Planchet!” And before the tutor could recover from his surprise they had both disappeared into the forest. Whilst they spurred their steeds they held their pistols ready also. In five minutes they arrived at the spot whence the noise had proceeded, and then restraining their horses, they advanced cautiously.

“Hush,” whispered De Guiche, “these are cavaliers.”

“Yes, three on horseback and three who have dismounted.”

“Can you see what they are doing?”

“Yes, they appear to be searching a wounded or dead man.”

“It is some cowardly assassination,” said De Guiche.

“They are soldiers, though,” resumed De Bragelonne.

“Yes, skirmishers; that is to say, highway robbers.”

“At them!” cried Raoul. “At them!” echoed De Guiche.

“Oh! gentlemen! gentlemen! in the name of Heaven!” cried the poor tutor.

But he was not listened to, and his cries only served to arouse the attention of the Spaniards.

The men on horseback at once rushed at the two youths, leaving the three others to complete the plunder of the dead or wounded travelers; for on approaching nearer, instead of one extended figure, the young men discovered two. De Guiche fired the first shot at ten paces and missed his man; and the Spaniard, who had advanced to meet Raoul, aimed in his turn, and Raoul felt a pain in the left arm, similar to that of a blow from a whip. He let off his fire at but four paces. Struck in the breast and extending his arms, the Spaniard fell back on the crupper, and the terrified horse, turning around, carried him off.

Raoul at this moment perceived the muzzle of a gun pointed at him, and remembering the recommendation of Athos, he, with the rapidity of lightning, made his horse rear as the shot was fired. His horse bounded to one side, losing its footing, and fell, entangling Raoul’s leg under its body. The Spaniard sprang forward and seized the gun by its muzzle, in order to strike Raoul on the head with the butt. In the position in which Raoul lay, unfortunately, he could neither draw his sword from the scabbard, nor his pistols from their holsters. The butt end of the musket hovered over his head, and he could scarcely restrain himself from closing his eyes, when with one bound Guiche reached the Spaniard and placed a pistol at his throat. “Yield!” he cried, “or you are a dead man!” The musket fell from the soldier’s hands, who yielded on the instant. Guiche summoned one of his grooms, and delivering the prisoner into his charge, with orders to shoot him through the head if he attempted to escape, he leaped from his horse and approached Raoul.

“Faith, sir,” said Raoul, smiling, although his pallor betrayed the excitement consequent on a first affair, “you are in a great hurry to pay your debts and have not been long under any obligation to me. Without your aid,” continued he, repeating the count’s words “I should have been a dead man--thrice dead.”

“My antagonist took flight,” replied De Guiche “and left me at liberty to come to your assistance. But are you seriously wounded? I see you are covered with blood!”

“I believe,” said Raoul, “that I have got something like a scratch on the arm. If you will help me to drag myself from under my horse I hope nothing need prevent us continuing our journey.”

Monsieur d’Arminges and Olivain had already dismounted and were attempting to raise the struggling horse. At last Raoul succeeded in drawing his foot from the stirrup and his leg from under the animal, and in a second he was on his feet again.

“Nothing broken?” asked De Guiche.

“Faith, no, thank Heaven!” replied Raoul; “but what has become of the poor wretches whom these scoundrels were murdering?”

“I fear we arrived too late. They have killed them, I think, and taken flight, carrying off their booty. My servants are examining the bodies.”

“Let us go and see whether they are quite dead, or if they can still be helped,” suggested Raoul. “Olivain, we have come into possession of two horses, but I have lost my own. Take for yourself the better of the two and give me yours.”

They approached the spot where the unfortunate victims lay.

CHAPTER 31.

The Monk.

Two men lay prone upon the ground, one bathed in blood and motionless, with his face toward the earth; this one was dead. The other leaned against a tree, supported there by the two valets, and was praying fervently, with clasped hands and eyes raised to Heaven. He had received a ball in his thigh, which had broken the bone. The young men first approached the dead man.

"He is a priest," said Bragelonne, "he has worn the tonsure. Oh, the scoundrels! to lift their hands against a minister of God."

"Come here, sir," said Urban, an old soldier who had served under the cardinal duke in all his campaigns; "come here, there is nothing to be done with him, whilst we may perhaps be able to save the other."

The wounded man smiled sadly. "Save me! Oh, no!" said he, "but help me to die, if you can."

"Are you a priest?" asked Raoul.

"No sir."

"I ask, as your unfortunate companion appeared to me to belong to the church."

"He is the curate of Bethune, sir, and was carrying the holy vessels belonging to his church, and the treasure of the chapter, to a safe place, the prince having abandoned our town yesterday; and as it was known that bands of the enemy were prowling about the country, no one dared to accompany the good man, so I offered to do so.

"And, sir," continued the wounded man, "I suffer much and would like, if possible, to be carried to some house."

"Where you can be relieved?" asked De Guiche.

"No, where I can confess."

"But perhaps you are not so dangerously wounded as you think," said Raoul.

"Sir," replied the wounded man, "believe me, there is no time to lose; the ball has broken the thigh bone and entered the intestines."

“Are you a surgeon?” asked De Guiche.

“No, but I know a little about wounds, and mine, I know, is mortal. Try, therefore, either to carry me to some place where I may see a priest or take the trouble to send one to me here. It is my soul that must be saved; as for my body, it is lost.”

“To die whilst doing a good deed! It is impossible. God will help you.”

“Gentlemen, in the name of Heaven!” said the wounded man, collecting all his forces, as if to get up, “let us not lose time in useless words. Either help me to gain the nearest village or swear to me on your salvation that you will send me the first monk, the first cure, the first priest you may meet. But,” he added in a despairing tone, “perhaps no one will dare to come for it is known that the Spaniards are ranging through the country, and I shall die without absolution. My God! my God! Good God! good God!” added the wounded man, in an accent of terror which made the young men shudder; “you will not allow that? that would be too terrible!”

“Calm yourself, sir,” replied De Guiche. “I swear to you, you shall receive the consolation that you ask. Only tell us where we shall find a house at which we can demand aid and a village from which we can fetch a priest.”

“Thank you, and God reward you! About half a mile from this, on the same road, there is an inn, and about a mile further on, after leaving the inn, you will reach the village of Greney. There you must find the curate, or if he is not at home, go to the convent of the Augustines, which is the last house on the right, and bring me one of the brothers. Monk or priest, it matters not, provided only that he has received from holy church the power of absolving in articulo mortis.”

“Monsieur d’Arminges,” said De Guiche, “remain beside this unfortunate man and see that he is removed as gently as possible. The vicomte and myself will go and find a priest.”

“Go, sir,” replied the tutor; “but in Heaven’s name do not expose yourself to danger!”

“Do not fear. Besides, we are safe for to-day; you know the axiom, ‘Non bis in idem.’“

“Courage, sir,” said Raoul to the wounded man. “We are going to execute your wishes.”

“May Heaven prosper you!” replied the dying man, with an accent of gratitude impossible to describe.

The two young men galloped off in the direction mentioned and in ten minutes reached the inn. Raoul, without dismounting, called to the host and announced that a wounded man was about to be brought to his house and begged him in the meantime to prepare everything needful. He desired him also, should he know in the neighborhood any doctor or chirurgeon, to fetch him, taking on himself the payment of the messenger.

The host, who saw two young noblemen, richly clad, promised everything they required, and our two cavaliers, after seeing that preparations for the reception were actually begun, started off again and proceeded rapidly toward Greney.

They had gone rather more than a league and had begun to descry the first houses of the village, the red-tiled roofs of which stood out from the green trees which surrounded them, when, coming toward them mounted on a mule, they perceived a poor monk, whose large hat and gray worsted dress made them take him for an Augustine brother. Chance for once seemed to favor them in sending what they were so assiduously seeking. He was a man about twenty-two or twenty-three years old, but who appeared much older from ascetic exercises. His complexion was pale, not of that deadly pallor which is a kind of neutral beauty, but of a bilious, yellow hue; his colorless hair was short and scarcely extended beyond the circle formed by the hat around his head, and his light blue eyes seemed destitute of any expression.

“Sir,” began Raoul, with his usual politeness, “are you an ecclesiastic?”

“Why do you ask me that?” replied the stranger, with a coolness which was barely civil.

“Because we want to know,” said De Guiche, haughtily.

The stranger touched his mule with his heel and continued his way.

In a second De Guiche had sprung before him and barred his passage. “Answer, sir,” exclaimed he; “you have been asked politely, and every question is worth an answer.”

“I suppose I am free to say or not to say who I am to two strangers who take a fancy to ask me.”

It was with difficulty that De Guiche restrained the intense desire he had of breaking the monk’s bones.

“In the first place,” he said, making an effort to control himself, “we are not people who may be treated anyhow; my friend there is the Viscount of Bragelonne and I am the Count de Guiche. Nor was it from caprice we asked the question, for there is a wounded and dying man who demands the succor of the church. If you be a priest, I conjure you in the name of humanity to follow me to aid this man; if you be not, it is a different matter, and I warn you in the name of courtesy, of which you appear profoundly ignorant, that I shall chastise you for your insolence."

The pale face of the monk became so livid and his smile so strange, that Raoul, whose eyes were still fixed upon him, felt as if this smile had struck to his heart like an insult.

"He is some Spanish or Flemish spy," said he, putting his hand to his pistol. A glance, threatening and transient as lightning, replied to Raoul.

"Well, sir," said De Guiche, "are you going to reply?"

"I am a priest," said the young man.

"Then, father," said Raoul, forcing himself to convey a respect by speech that did not come from his heart, "if you are a priest you have an opportunity, as my friend has told you, of exercising your vocation. At the next inn you will find a wounded man, now being attended by our servants, who has asked the assistance of a minister of God."

"I will go," said the monk.

And he touched his mule.

"If you do not go, sir," said De Guiche, "remember that we have two steeds able to catch your mule and the power of having you seized wherever you may be; and then I swear your trial will be summary; one can always find a tree and a cord."

The monk's eye again flashed, but that was all; he merely repeated his phrase, "I will go,"--and he went.

"Let us follow him," said De Guiche; "it will be the surest plan."

"I was about to propose so doing," answered De Bragelonne.

In the space of five minutes the monk turned around to ascertain whether he was followed or not.

"You see," said Raoul, "we have done wisely."

"What a horrible face that monk has," said De Guiche.

"Horrible!" replied Raoul, "especially in expression."

"Yes, yes," said De Guiche, "a strange face; but these monks are subject to such degrading practices; their fasts make them pale, the blows of the discipline make them hypocrites, and their eyes become inflamed through weeping for the good things of this life we common folk enjoy, but they have lost."

"Well," said Raoul, "the poor man will get his priest, but, by Heaven, the penitent appears to me to have a better conscience than the confessor. I confess I am accustomed to priests of a very different appearance."

"Ah!" exclaimed De Guiche, "you must understand that this is one of those wandering brothers, who go begging on the high road until some day a benefice falls down from Heaven on them; they are mostly foreigners--Scotch, Irish or Danish. I have seen them before."

"As ugly?"

"No, but reasonably hideous."

"What a misfortune for the wounded man to die under the hands of such a friar!"

"Pshaw!" said De Guiche. "Absolution comes not from him who administers it, but from God. However, for my part, I would rather die unshriven than have anything to say to such a confessor. You are of my opinion, are you not, viscount? and I see you playing with the pommel of your sword, as if you had a great inclination to break the holy father's head."

"Yes, count, it is a strange thing and one which might astonish you, but I feel an indescribable horror at the sight of yonder man. Have you ever seen a snake rise up on your path?"

"Never," answered De Guiche.

"Well, it has happened to me to do so in our Blaisois forests, and I remember that the first time I encountered one with its eyes fixed upon me, curled up, swinging its head and pointing its tongue, I remained fixed, pale and as though fascinated, until the moment when the Comte de la Fere----"

"Your father?" asked De Guiche.

"No, my guardian," replied Raoul, blushing.

"Very well----"

"Until the moment when the Comte de la Fere," resumed Raoul, "said, 'Come, Bragelonne, draw your sword;' then only I rushed upon the reptile and cut it in two, just at the moment when it was rising on its tail and hissing, ere it sprang upon me. Well, I vow I felt exactly the same sensation at sight of that man when he said, 'Why do you ask me that?' and looked so strangely at me."

"Then you regret that you did not cut your serpent in two morsels?"

"Faith, yes, almost," said Raoul.

They had now arrived within sight of the little inn and could see on the opposite side the procession bearing the wounded man and guided by Monsieur d'Arminges. The youths spurred on.

"There is the wounded man," said De Guiche, passing close to the Augustine brother. "Be good enough to hurry yourself a little, monsieur monk."

As for Raoul, he avoided the monk by the whole width of the road and passed him, turning his head away in repulsion.

The young men rode up to the wounded man to announce that they were followed by the priest. He raised himself to glance in the direction which they pointed out, saw the monk, and fell back upon the litter, his face illumined by joy.

"And now," said the youths, "we have done all we can for you; and as we are in haste to rejoin the prince's army we must continue our journey. You will excuse us, sir, but we are told that a battle is expected and we do not wish to arrive the day after it."

"Go, my young sirs," said the sick man, "and may you both be blessed for your piety. You have done for me, as you promised, all that you could do. As for me I can only repeat, may God protect you and all dear to you!"

"Sir," said De Guiche to his tutor, "we will precede you, and you can rejoin us on the road to Cambrin."

The host was at his door and everything was prepared--bed, bandages, and lint; and a groom had gone to Lens, the nearest village, for a doctor.

"Everything," said he to Raoul, "shall be done as you desire; but you will not stop to have your wound dressed?"

"Oh, my wound--mine--'tis nothing," replied the viscount; "it will be time to think about it when we next halt; only have the goodness, should you see a cavalier who makes inquiries about a young man on a chestnut horse followed by a servant, to tell him, in fact, that you have seen me, but that I have continued my journey and intend to dine at Mazingarbe and to stop at Cambrin. This cavalier is my attendant."

"Would it not be safer and more certain if I should ask him his name and tell him yours?" demanded the host.

"There is no harm in over-precaution. I am the Viscount de Bragelonne and he is called Grimaud."

At this moment the wounded man arrived from one direction and the monk from the other, the latter dismounting from his mule and desiring that it should be taken to the stables without being unharnessed.

"Sir monk," said De Guiche, "confess well that brave man; and be not concerned for your expenses or for those of your mule; all is paid."

"Thanks, monsieur," said the monk, with one of those smiles that made Bragelonne shudder.

"Come, count," said Raoul, who seemed instinctively to dislike the vicinity of the Augustine; "come, I feel ill here," and the two young men spurred on.

The litter, borne by two servants, now entered the house. The host and his wife were standing on the steps, whilst the unhappy man seemed to suffer dreadful pain and yet to be concerned only to know if he was followed by the monk. At sight of this pale, bleeding man, the wife grasped her husband's arm.

"Well, what's the matter?" asked the latter, "are you going to be ill just now?"

"No, but look," replied the hostess, pointing to the wounded man; "I ask you if you recognize him?"

"That man--wait a bit."

"Ah! I see you know him," exclaimed the wife; "for you have become pale in your turn."

"Truly," cried the host, "misfortune is coming on our house; it is the former executioner of Bethune."

"The former executioner of Bethune!" murmured the young monk, shrinking back and showing on his countenance the feeling of repugnance which his penitent inspired.

Monsieur d'Arminges, who was at the door, perceived his hesitation.

"Sir monk," said he, "whether he is now or has been an executioner, this unfortunate being is none the less a man. Render to him, then, the last service he can by any possibility ask of you, and your work will be all the more meritorious."

The monk made no reply, but silently wended his way to the room where the two valets had deposited the dying man on a bed. D'Arminges and Olivain and the two grooms then mounted their horses, and all four started off at a quick trot to rejoin Raoul and his companion. Just as the tutor and his escort disappeared in their turn, a new traveler stopped on the threshold of the inn.

“What does your worship want?” demanded the host, pale and trembling from the discovery he had just made.

The traveler made a sign as if he wished to drink, and then pointed to his horse and gesticulated like a man who is brushing something.

“Ah, diable!” said the host to himself; “this man seems dumb. And where will your worship drink?”

“There,” answered the traveler, pointing to the table.

“I was mistaken,” said the host, “he’s not quite dumb. And what else does your worship wish for?”

“To know if you have seen a young man pass, fifteen years of age, mounted on a chestnut horse and followed by a groom?”

“The Viscount de Bragelonne?

“Just so.”

“Then you are called Monsieur Grimaud?”

The traveler made a sign of assent.

“Well, then,” said the host, “your young master was here a quarter of an hour ago; he will dine at Mazingarbe and sleep at Cambrin.”

“How far is Mazingarbe?”

“Two miles and a half.”

“Thank you.”

Grimaud was drinking his wine silently and had just placed his glass on the table to be filled a second time, when a terrific scream resounded from the room occupied by the monk and the dying man. Grimaud sprang up.

“What is that?” said he; “whence comes that cry?”

“From the wounded man’s room,” replied the host.

“What wounded man?”

“The former executioner of Bethune, who has just been brought in here, assassinated by Spaniards, and who is now being confessed by an Augustine friar.”

“The old executioner of Bethune,” muttered Grimaud; “a man between fifty-five and sixty, tall, strong, swarthy, black hair and beard?”

“That is he, except that his beard has turned gray and his hair is white; do you know him?” asked the host.

“I have seen him once,” replied Grimaud, a cloud darkening his countenance at the picture so suddenly summoned to the bar of recollection.

At this instant a second cry, less piercing than the first, but followed by prolonged groaning, was heard.

The three listeners looked at one another in alarm.

“We must see what it is,” said Grimaud.

“It sounds like the cry of one who is being murdered,” murmured the host.

“Mon Dieu!” said the woman, crossing herself.

If Grimaud was slow in speaking, we know that he was quick to act; he sprang to the door and shook it violently, but it was bolted on the other side.

“Open the door!” cried the host; “open it instantly, sir monk!”

No reply.

“Unfasten it, or I will break it in!” said Grimaud.

The same silence, and then, ere the host could oppose his design, Grimaud seized a pair of pincers he perceived in a corner and forced the bolt. The room was inundated with blood, dripping from the mattresses upon which lay the wounded man, speechless; the monk had disappeared.

“The monk!” cried the host; “where is the monk?”

Grimaud sprang toward an open window which looked into the courtyard.

“He has escaped by this means,” exclaimed he.

“Do you think so?” said the host, bewildered; “boy, see if the mule belonging to the monk is still in the stable.”

“There is no mule,” cried he to whom this question was addressed.

The host clasped his hands and looked around him suspiciously, whilst Grimaud knit his brows and approached the wounded man, whose worn, hard features awoke in his mind such awful recollections of the past.

“There can be no longer any doubt but that it is himself,” said he.

“Does he still live?” inquired the innkeeper.

Making no reply, Grimaud opened the poor man’s jacket to feel if the heart beat, whilst the host approached in his turn; but in a moment they both fell back, the host uttering a cry of horror and Grimaud becoming pallid. The blade of a dagger was buried up to the hilt in the left side of the executioner.

“Run! run for help!” cried Grimaud, “and I will remain beside him here.”

The host quitted the room in agitation, and as for his wife, she had fled at the sound of her husband’s cries.

CHAPTER 32.

The Absolution.

This is what had taken place: We have seen that it was not of his own free will, but, on the contrary, very reluctantly, that the monk attended the wounded man who had been recommended to him in so strange a manner. Perhaps he would have sought to escape by flight had he seen any possibility of doing so. He was restrained by the threats of the two gentlemen and by the presence of their attendants, who doubtless had received their instructions. And besides, he considered it most expedient, without exhibiting too much ill-will, to follow to the end his role as confessor.

The monk entered the chamber and approached the bed of the wounded man. The executioner searched his face with the quick glance peculiar to those who are about to die and have no time to lose. He made a movement of surprise and said:

“Father, you are very young.”

“Men who bear my robe have no age,” replied the monk, dryly.

“Alas, speak to me more gently, father; in my last moments I need a friend.”

“Do you suffer much?” asked the monk.

“Yes, but in my soul much more than in my body.”

“We will save your soul,” said the young man; “but are you really the executioner of Bethune, as these people say?”

“That is to say,” eagerly replied the wounded man, who doubtless feared that the name of executioner would take from him the last help that he could claim--”that is to say, I was, but am no longer; it is fifteen years since I gave up the office. I still assist at executions, but no longer strike the blow myself--no, indeed.”

“You have, then, a repugnance to your profession?”

“So long as I struck in the name of the law and of justice my profession allowed me to sleep quietly, sheltered as I was by justice and law; but since that terrible night when I became an instrument of private vengeance and when with personal hatred I raised the sword over one of God's creatures--since that day----"

The executioner paused and shook his head with an expression of despair.

"Tell me about it," said the monk, who, sitting on the foot of the bed, began to be interested in a story so strangely introduced.

"Ah!" cried the dying man, with all the effusiveness of a grief declared after long suppression, "ah! I have sought to stifle remorse by twenty years of good deeds; I have assuaged the natural ferocity of those who shed blood; on every occasion I have exposed my life to save those who were in danger, and I have preserved lives in exchange for that I took away. That is not all; the money gained in the exercise of my profession I have distributed to the poor; I have been assiduous in attending church and those who formerly fled from me have become accustomed to seeing me. All have forgiven me, some have even loved me; but I think that God has not pardoned me, for the memory of that execution pursues me constantly and every night I see that woman's ghost rising before me."

"A woman! You have assassinated a woman, then?" cried the monk.

"You also!" exclaimed the executioner, "you use that word which sounds ever in my ears--'assassinated!' I have assassinated, then, and not executed! I am an assassin, then, and not an officer of justice!" and he closed his eyes with a groan.

The monk doubtless feared that he would die without saying more, for he exclaimed eagerly:

"Go on, I know nothing, as yet; when you have finished your story, God and I will judge."

"Oh, father," continued the executioner, without opening his eyes, as if he feared on opening them to see some frightful object, "it is especially when night comes on and when I have to cross a river, that this terror which I have been unable to conquer comes upon me; it then seems as if my hand grew heavy, as if the cutlass was still in its grasp, as if the water had the color of blood, and all the voices of nature--the whispering of the trees, the murmur of the wind, the lapping of the wave--united in a voice tearful, despairing, terrible, crying to me, 'Place for the justice of God!'"

"Delirium!" murmured the monk, shaking his head.

The executioner opened his eyes, turned toward the young man and grasped his arm.

“‘Delirium,’“ he repeated; “‘delirium,’ do you say? Oh, no! I remember too well. It was evening; I had thrown the body into the river and those words which my remorse repeats to me are those which I in my pride pronounced. After being the instrument of human justice I aspired to be that of the justice of God.”

“But let me see, how was it done? Speak,” said the monk.

“It was at night. A man came to me and showed me an order and I followed him. Four other noblemen awaited me. They led me away masked. I reserved the right of refusing if the office they required of me should seem unjust. We traveled five or six leagues, serious, silent, and almost without speaking. At length, through the window of a little hut, they showed me a woman sitting, leaning on a table, and said, ‘there is the person to be executed.’“

“Horrible!” said the monk. “And you obeyed?”

“Father, that woman was a monster. It was said that she had poisoned her second husband; she had tried to assassinate her brother-in-law; she had just poisoned a young woman who was her rival, and before leaving England she had, it was believed, caused the favorite of the king to be murdered.”

“Buckingham?” cried the monk.

“Yes, Buckingham.”

“The woman was English, then?”

“No, she was French, but she had married in England.”

The monk turned pale, wiped his brow and went and bolted the door. The executioner thought that he had abandoned him and fell back, groaning, upon his bed.

“No, no; I am here,” said the monk, quickly coming back to him. “Go on; who were those men?”

“One of them was a foreigner, English, I think. The four others were French and wore the uniform of musketeers.”

“Their names?” asked the monk.

“I don’t know them, but the four other noblemen called the Englishman ‘my lord.’“

“Was the woman handsome?”

“Young and beautiful. Oh, yes, especially beautiful. I see her now, as on her knees at my feet, with her head thrown back, she begged for life. I have never understood how I could have laid low a head so beautiful, with a face so pale.”

The monk seemed agitated by a strange emotion; he trembled all over; he seemed eager to put a question which yet he dared not ask. At length, with a violent effort at self-control:

“The name of that woman?” he said.

“I don’t know what it was. As I have said, she was twice married, once in France, the second time in England.”

“She was young, you say?”

“Twenty-five years old.”

“Beautiful?”

“Ravishingly.”

“Blond?”

“Yes.”

“Abundance of hair--falling over her shoulders?”

“Yes.”

“Eyes of an admirable expression?”

“When she chose. Oh, yes, it is she!”

“A voice of strange sweetness?”

“How do you know it?”

The executioner raised himself on his elbow and gazed with a frightened air at the monk, who became livid.

“And you killed her?” the monk exclaimed. “You were the tool of those cowards who dared not kill her themselves? You had no pity for that youthfulness, that beauty, that weakness? you killed that woman?”

“Alas! I have already told you, father, that woman, under that angelic appearance, had an infernal soul, and when I saw her, when I recalled all the evil she had done to me----”

“To you? What could she have done to you? Come, tell me!”

“She had seduced and ruined my brother, a priest. She had fled with him from her convent.”

“With your brother?”

“Yes, my brother was her first lover, and she caused his death. Oh, father, do not look in that way at me! Oh, I am guilty, then; you will not pardon me?”

The monk recovered his usual expression.

“Yes, yes,” he said, “I will pardon you if you tell me all.”

“Oh!” cried the executioner, “all! all! all!”

“Answer, then. If she seduced your brother--you said she seduced him, did you not?”

“Yes.”

“If she caused his death--you said that she caused his death?”

“Yes,” repeated the executioner.

“Then you must know what her name was as a young girl.”

“Oh, mon Dieu!” cried the executioner, “I think I am dying. Absolution, father! absolution.”

“Tell me her name and I will give it.”

“Her name was----My God, have pity on me!” murmured the executioner; and he fell back on the bed, pale, trembling, and apparently about to die.

“Her name!” repeated the monk, bending over him as if to tear from him the name if he would not utter it; “her name! Speak, or no absolution!”

The dying man collected all his forces.

The monk’s eyes glittered.

“Anne de Bueil,” murmured the wounded man.

“Anne de Bueil!” cried the monk, standing up and lifting his hands to Heaven. “Anne de Bueil! You said Anne de Bueil, did you not?”

“Yes, yes, that was her name; and now absolve me, for I am dying.”

“I, absolve you!” cried the priest, with a laugh which made the dying man’s hair stand on end; “I, absolve you? I am not a priest.”

“You are not a priest!” cried the executioner. “What, then, are you?”

“I am about to tell you, wretched man.”

“Oh, mon Dieu!”

“I am John Francis de Winter.”

“I do not know you,” said the executioner.

“Wait, wait; you are going to know me. I am John Francis de Winter,” he repeated, “and that woman----”

“Well, that woman?”

“Was my mother!”

The executioner uttered the first cry, that terrible cry which had been first heard.

“Oh, pardon me, pardon me!” he murmured; “if not in the name of God, at least in your own name; if not as priest, then as son.”

“Pardon you!” cried the pretended monk, “pardon you! Perhaps God will pardon you, but I, never!”

“For pity’s sake,” said the executioner, extending his arms.

“No pity for him who had no pity! Die, impenitent, die in despair, die and be damned!” And drawing a poniard from beneath his robe he thrust it into the breast of the wounded man, saying, “Here is my absolution!”

Then was heard that second cry, not so loud as the first and followed by a long groan.

The executioner, who had lifted himself up, fell back upon his bed. As to the monk, without withdrawing the poniard from the wound, he ran to the window, opened it, leaped out into the flowers of a small garden, glided onward to the stable, took out his mule, went out by a back gate, ran to a neighbouring thicket, threw off his monkish garb, took from his valise the complete habiliment of a cavalier, clothed himself in it, went on foot to the first post, secured there a horse and continued with a loose rein his journey to Paris.

CHAPTER 33.

Grimaud Speaks.

Grimaud was left alone with the executioner, who in a few moments opened his eyes.

“Help, help,” he murmured; “oh, God! have I not a single friend in the world who will aid me either to live or to die?”

“Take courage,” said Grimaud; “they are gone to find assistance.”

“Who are you?” asked the wounded man, fixing his half opened eyes on Grimaud.

“An old acquaintance,” replied Grimaud.

“You?” and the wounded man sought to recall the features of the person now before him.

“Under what circumstances did we meet?” he asked again.

“One night, twenty years ago, my master fetched you from Bethune and conducted you to Armentieres.”

“I know you well now,” said the executioner; “you were one of the four grooms.”

“Just so.”

“Where do you come from now?”

“I was passing by and drew up at this inn to rest my horse. They told me the executioner of Bethune was here and wounded, when you uttered two piercing cries. At the first we ran to the door and at the second forced it open.”

“And the monk?” exclaimed the executioner, “did you see the monk?”

“What monk?”

“The monk that was shut in with me.”

“No, he was no longer here; he appears to have fled by the window. Was he the man that stabbed you?”

“Yes,” said the executioner.

Grimaud moved as if to leave the room.

“What are you going to do?” asked the wounded man.

“He must be apprehended.”

“Do not attempt it; he has revenged himself and has done well. Now I may hope that God will forgive me, since my crime is expiated.”

“Explain yourself.” said Grimaud.

“The woman whom you and your masters commanded me to kill----”

“Milady?”

“Yes, Milady; it is true you called her thus.”

“What has the monk to do with this Milady?”

“She was his mother.”

Grimaud trembled and stared at the dying man in a dull and leaden manner.

“His mother!” he repeated.

“Yes, his mother.”

“But does he know this secret, then?”

“I mistook him for a monk and revealed it to him in confession.”

“Unhappy man!” cried Grimaud, whose face was covered with sweat at the bare idea of the evil results such a revelation might cause; “unhappy man, you named no one, I hope?”

“I pronounced no name, for I knew none, except his mother’s, as a young girl, and it was by this name that he recognized her, but he knows that his uncle was among her judges.”

Thus speaking, he fell back exhausted. Grimaud, wishing to relieve him, advanced his hand toward the hilt of the dagger.

“Touch me not!” said the executioner; “if this dagger is withdrawn I shall die.”

Grimaud remained with his hand extended; then, striking his forehead, he exclaimed:

“Oh! if this man should ever discover the names of the others, my master is lost.”

“Haste! haste to him and warn him,” cried the wounded man, “if he still lives; warn his friends, too. My death, believe me, will not be the end of this atrocious misadventure.”

“Where was the monk going?” asked Grimaud.

“Toward Paris.”

“Who stopped him?”

“Two young gentlemen, who were on their way to join the army and the name of one of whom I heard his companion mention--the Viscount de Bragelonne.”

“And it was this young man who brought the monk to you? Then it was the will of God that it should be so and this it is which makes it all so awful,” continued Grimaud. “And yet that woman deserved her fate; do you not think so?”

“On one’s death-bed the crimes of others appear very small in comparison with one’s own,” said the executioner; and falling back exhausted he closed his eyes.

Grimaud was reluctant to leave the man alone and yet he perceived the necessity of starting at once to bear these tidings to the Comte de la Fere. Whilst he thus hesitated the host re-entered the room, followed not only by a surgeon, but by many other persons, whom curiosity had attracted to the spot. The surgeon approached the dying man, who seemed to have fainted.

“We must first extract the steel from the side,” said he, shaking his head in a significant manner.

The prophecy which the wounded man had just uttered recurred to Grimaud, who turned away his head. The weapon, as we have already stated, was plunged into the body to the hilt, and as the surgeon, taking it by the end, drew it forth, the wounded man opened his eyes and fixed them on him in a manner truly frightful. When at last the blade had been entirely withdrawn, a red froth issued from the mouth of the wounded man and a stream of blood spouted afresh from the wound when he at length drew breath; then, fixing his eyes upon Grimaud with a singular expression, the dying man uttered the last death-rattle and expired.

Then Grimaud, lifting the dagger from the pool of blood which was gliding along the room, to the horror of all present, made a sign to the host to follow him, paid him with a generosity worthy of his master and again mounted his horse. Grimaud’s first intention had been to return to Paris, but he remembered the anxiety which his prolonged absence might occasion Raoul, and reflecting that there were now only two miles between the vicomte and himself and a quarter of an hour’s riding would unite them, and that the going, returning and explanation would not occupy an hour, he put spurs to his horse and a few minutes after had reached the only inn of Mazingarbe.

Raoul was seated at table with the Count de Guiche and his tutor, when all at once the door opened and Grimaud presented himself, travel-stained, dirty, and sprinkled with the blood of the unhappy executioner.

"Grimaud, my good Grimaud!" exclaimed Raoul "here you are at last! Excuse me, sirs, this is not a servant, but a friend. How did you leave the count?" continued he. "Does he regret me a little? Have you seen him since I left him? Answer, for I have many things to tell you, too; indeed, the last three days some odd adventures have happened--but what is the matter? how pale you are! and blood, too! What is this?"

"It is the blood of the unfortunate man whom you left at the inn and who died in my arms."

"In your arms?--that man! but know you who he was?"

"He used to be the headsman of Bethune."

"You knew him? and he is dead?"

"Yes."

"Well, sir," said D'Arminges, "it is the common lot; even an executioner is not exempted. I had a bad opinion of him the moment I saw his wound, and since he asked for a monk you know that it was his opinion, too, that death would follow."

At the mention of the monk, Grimaud became pale.

"Come, come," continued D'Arminges, "to dinner;" for like most men of his age and generation he did not allow sentiment or sensibility to interfere with a repast.

"You are right, sir," said Raoul. "Come, Grimaud, order dinner for yourself and when you have rested a little we can talk."

"No, sir, no," said Grimaud. "I cannot stop a moment; I must start for Paris again immediately."

"What? You start for Paris? You are mistaken; it is Olivain who leaves me; you are to remain."

"On the contrary, Olivain is to stay and I am to go. I have come for nothing else but to tell you so."

"But what is the meaning of this change?"

"I cannot tell you."

"Explain yourself."

"I cannot explain myself."

"Come, tell me, what is the joke?"

"Monsieur le vicomte knows that I never joke."

"Yes, but I know also that Monsieur le Comte de la Fere arranged that you were to remain with me and that Olivain should return to Paris. I shall follow the count's directions."

“Not under present circumstances, monsieur.”

“Perhaps you mean to disobey me?”

“Yes, monsieur, I must.”

“You persist, then?”

“Yes, I am going; may you be happy, monsieur,” and Grimaud saluted and turned toward the door to go out.

Raoul, angry and at the same time uneasy, ran after him and seized him by the arm. “Grimaud!” he cried; “remain; I wish it.”

“Then,” replied Grimaud, “you wish me to allow monsieur le comte to be killed.” He saluted and made a movement to depart.

“Grimaud, my friend,” said the viscount, “will you leave me thus, in such anxiety? Speak, speak, in Heaven’s name!” And Raoul fell back trembling upon his chair.

“I can tell you but one thing, sir, for the secret you wish to know is not my own. You met a monk, did you not?”

“Yes.”

The young men looked at each other with an expression of fear.

“You conducted him to the wounded man and you had time to observe him, and perhaps you would know him again were you to meet him.”

“Yes, yes!” cried both young men.

“Very well; if ever you meet him again, wherever it may be, whether on the high road or in the street or in a church, anywhere that he or you may be, put your foot on his neck and crush him without pity, without mercy, as you would crush a viper or a scorpion! destroy him utterly and quit him not until he is dead; the lives of five men are not safe, in my opinion, as long as he is on the earth.”

And without adding another word, Grimaud, profiting by the astonishment and terror into which he had thrown his auditors, rushed from the room. Two minutes later the thunder of a horse’s hoofs was heard upon the road; it was Grimaud, on his way to Paris. When once in the saddle Grimaud reflected on two things; first, that at the pace he was going his horse would not carry him ten miles, and secondly, that he had no money. But Grimaud’s ingenuity was more prolific than his speech, and therefore at the first halt he sold his steed and with the money obtained from the purchase took post horses.

CHAPTER 34.

On the Eve of Battle.

Raoul was aroused from his sombre reflections by his host, who rushed into the apartment crying out, “The Spaniards! the Spaniards!”

That cry was of such importance as to overcome all preoccupation. The young men made inquiries and ascertained that the enemy was advancing by way of Houdin and Bethune.

While Monsieur d’Arminges gave orders for the horses to be made ready for departure, the two young men ascended to the upper windows of the house and saw in the direction of Marsin and of Lens a large body of infantry and cavalry. This time it was not a wandering troop of partisans; it was an entire army. There was therefore nothing for them to do but to follow the prudent advice of Monsieur d’Arminges and beat a retreat. They quickly went downstairs. Monsieur d’Arminges was already mounted. Olivain had ready the horses of the young men, and the lackeys of the Count de Guiche guarded carefully between them the Spanish prisoner, mounted on a pony which had been bought for his use. As a further precaution they had bound his hands.

The little company started off at a trot on the road to Cambrin, where they expected to find the prince. But he was no longer there, having withdrawn on the previous evening to La Bassee, misled by false intelligence of the enemy’s movements. Deceived by this intelligence he had concentrated his forces between Vieille-Chapelle and La Venthie; and after a reconnoissance along the entire line, in company with Marshal de Grammont, he had returned and seated himself before a table, with his officers around him. He questioned them as to the news they had each been charged to obtain, but nothing positive had been learned. The hostile army had disappeared two days before and seemed to have gone out of existence.

Now an enemy is never so near and consequently so threatening, as when he has completely disappeared. The prince was, therefore, contrary to his custom, gloomy and anxious, when an officer entered and announced to Marshal de Grammont that some one wished to see him.

The Duc de Grammont received permission from the prince by a glance and went out. The prince followed him with his eyes and continued looking at the door; no one ventured to speak, for fear of disturbing him.

Suddenly a dull and heavy noise was heard. The prince leaped to his feet, extending his hand in the direction whence came the sound, there was no mistaking it--it was the noise of cannon. Every one stood up.

At that moment the door opened.

“Monseigneur,” said Marshal de Grammont, with a radiant face, “will your highness permit my son, Count de Guiche, and his traveling companion, Viscount de Bragelonne, to come in and give news of the enemy, whom they have found while we were looking for him?”

“What!” eagerly replied the prince, “will I permit? I not only permit, I desire; let them come in.”

The marshal introduced the two young men and placed them face to face with the prince.

“Speak, gentlemen,” said the prince, saluting them; “first speak; we shall have time afterward for the usual compliments. The most urgent thing now is to learn where the enemy is and what he is doing.”

It fell naturally to the Count de Guiche to make reply; not only was he the elder, but he had been presented to the prince by his father. Besides, he had long known the prince, whilst Raoul now saw him for the first time. He therefore narrated to the prince what they had seen from the inn at Mazingarbe.

Meanwhile Raoul closely observed the young general, already made so famous by the battles of Rocroy, Fribourg, and Nordlingen.

Louis de Bourbon, Prince de Conde, who, since the death of his father, Henri de Bourbon, was called, in accordance with the custom of that period, Monsieur le Prince, was a young man, not more than twenty-six or twenty-seven years old, with the eye of an eagle--agl’ occhi grifani, as Dante says--aquiline nose, long, waving hair, of medium height, well formed, possessed of all the qualities essential to the successful soldier--that is to say, the rapid glance, quick decision, fabulous courage. At the same time he was a man of elegant manners and strong mind, so that in addition to the revolution he had made in war, by his new contributions to its methods, he had also made a revolution at Paris, among the young noblemen of the court, whose natural chief he was and who, in distinction from the social leaders of the ancient court, modeled after Bassompierre, Bellegarde and the Duke d'Angouleme, were called the petits-maitres.

At the first words of the Count de Guiche, the prince, having in mind the direction whence came the sound of cannon, had understood everything. The enemy was marching upon Lens, with the intention, doubtless, of securing possession of that town and separating from France the army of France. But in what force was the enemy? Was it a corps sent out to make a diversion? Was it an entire army? To this question De Guiche could not respond.

Now, as these questions involved matters of gravest consequence, it was these to which the prince had especially desired an answer, exact, precise, positive.

Raoul conquered the very natural feeling of timidity he experienced and approaching the prince:

"My lord," he said, "will you permit me to hazard a few words on that subject, which will perhaps relieve you of your uncertainty?"

The prince turned and seemed to cover the young man with a single glance; he smiled on perceiving that he was a child hardly fifteen years old.

"Certainly, monsieur, speak," he said, softening his stern, accented tones, as if he were speaking to a woman.

"My lord," said Raoul, blushing, "might examine the Spanish prisoner."

"Have you a Spanish prisoner?" cried the prince.

"Yes, my lord."

"Ah, that is true," said De Guiche; "I had forgotten it."

"That is easily understood; it was you who took him, count," said Raoul, smiling.

The old marshal turned toward the viscount, grateful for that praise of his son, whilst the prince exclaimed:

"The young man is right; let the prisoner be brought in."

Meanwhile the prince took De Guiche aside and asked him how the prisoner had been taken and who this young man was.

"Monsieur," said the prince, turning toward Raoul, "I know that you have a letter from my sister, Madame de Longueville; but I see that you have preferred commending yourself to me by giving me good counsel."

"My lord," said Raoul, coloring up, "I did not wish to interrupt your highness in a conversation so important as that in which you were engaged with the count. But here is the letter."

“Very well,” said the prince; “give it to me later. Here is the prisoner; let us attend to what is most pressing.”

The prisoner was one of those military adventurers who sold their blood to whoever would buy, and grew old in stratagems and spoils. Since he had been taken he had not uttered a word, so that it was not known to what country he belonged. The prince looked at him with unspeakable distrust.

“Of what country are you?” asked the prince.

The prisoner muttered a few words in a foreign tongue.

“Ah! ah! it seems that he is a Spaniard. Do you speak Spanish, Grammont?”

“Faith, my lord, but indifferently.”

“And I not at all,” said the prince, laughing. “Gentlemen,” he said, turning to those who were near him “can any one of you speak Spanish and serve me as interpreter?”

“I can, my lord,” said Raoul.

“Ah, you speak Spanish?”

“Enough, I think, to fulfill your highness’s wishes on this occasion.”

Meanwhile the prisoner had remained impassive and as if he had no understanding of what was taking place.

“My lord asks of what country you are,” said the young man, in the purest Castilian.

“Ich bin ein Deutscher,” replied the prisoner.

“What in the devil does he say?” asked the prince. “What new gibberish is that?”

“He says he is German, my lord,” replied Raoul; “but I doubt it, for his accent is bad and his pronunciation defective.”

“Then you speak German, also?” asked the prince.

“Yes, my lord.”

“Well enough to question him in that language?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Question him, then.”

Raoul began the examination, but the result justified his opinion. The prisoner did not understand, or seemed not to understand, what Raoul said to him; and Raoul could hardly understand his replies, containing a mixture of Flemish and Alsatian. However, amidst all the prisoner’s efforts to elude a systematic examination, Raoul had recognized his natural accent.

“Non siete Spagnuolo,” he said; “non siete Tedesco; siete Italiano.”

The prisoner started and bit his lips.

“Ah, that,” said the prince, “I understand that language thoroughly; and since he is Italian I will myself continue the examination. Thank you, viscount,” continued the prince, laughing, “and I appoint you from this moment my interpreter.”

But the prisoner was not less unwilling to respond in Italian than in the other languages; his aim was to elude the examination. Therefore, he knew nothing either of the enemy’s numbers, or of those in command, or of the purpose of the army.

“Very good,” said the prince, understanding the reason of that ignorance; “the man was caught in the act of assassination and robbery; he might have purchased his life by speaking; he doesn’t wish to speak. Take him out and shoot him.”

The prisoner turned pale. The two soldiers who had brought him in took him, each by one arm, and led him toward the door, whilst the prince, turning to Marshal de Grammont, seemed to have already forgotten the order he had given.

When he reached the threshold of the door the prisoner stopped. The soldiers, who knew only their orders, attempted to force him along.

“One moment,” said the prisoner, in French. “I am ready to speak, my lord.”

“Ah! ah!” said the prince, laughing, “I thought we should come to that. I have a sure method of limbering tongues. Young men, take advantage of it against the time when you may be in command.”

“But on condition,” continued the prisoner, “that your highness will swear that my life shall be safe.”

“Upon my honor,” said the prince.

“Question, then, my lord.”

“Where did the army cross the Lys?”

“Between Saint-Venant and Aire.”

“By whom is it commanded?”

“By Count de Fuonsaldagna, General Beck and the archduke.”

“Of how many does it consist?”

“Eighteen thousand men and thirty-six cannon.”

“And its aim is?”

“Lens.”

"You see; gentlemen!" said the prince, turning with a triumphant air toward Marshal de Grammont and the other officers.

"Yes, my lord," said the marshal, "you have divined all that was possible to human genius."

"Recall Le Plessis, Bellievre, Villequier and D'Erlac," said the prince, "recall all the troops that are on this side of the Lys. Let them hold themselves in readiness to march to-night. To-morrow, according to all probability, we shall attack the enemy."

"But, my lord," said Marshal de Grammont, "consider that when we have collected all our forces we shall have hardly thirteen thousand men."

"Monsieur le marechal," said the prince, with that wonderful glance that was peculiar to him, "it is with small armies that great battles are won."

Then turning toward the prisoner, "Take away that man," he said, "and keep him carefully in sight. His life is dependent on the information he has given us; if it is true, he shall be free; if false, let him be shot."

The prisoner was led away.

"Count de Guiche," said the prince, "it is a long time since you saw your father, remain here with him. Monsieur," he continued, addressing Raoul, "if you are not too tired, follow me."

"To the end of the world, my lord!" cried Raoul, feeling an unknown enthusiasm for that young general, who seemed to him so worthy of his renown.

The prince smiled; he despised flatterers, but he appreciated enthusiasts.

"Come, monsieur," he said, "you are good in council, as we have already discovered; to-morrow we shall know if you are good in action."

"And I," said the marshal, "what am I to do?"

"Wait here to receive the troops. I shall either return for them myself or shall send a courier directing you to bring them to me. Twenty guards, well mounted, are all that I shall need for my escort."

"That is very few," said the marshal.

"It is enough," replied the prince. "Have you a good horse, Monsieur de Bragelonne?"

"My horse was killed this morning, my lord, and I am mounted provisionally on my lackey's."

"Choose for yourself in my stables the horse you like best. No false modesty; take the best horse you can find. You will need it this evening, perhaps; you will certainly need it to-morrow."

Raoul didn’t wait to be told twice; he knew that with superiors, especially when those superiors are princes, the highest politeness is to obey without delay or argument; he went down to the stables, picked out a pie-bald Andalusian horse, saddled and bridled it himself, for Athos had advised him to trust no one with those important offices at a time of danger, and went to rejoin the prince, who at that moment mounted his horse.

“Now, monsieur,” he said to Raoul, “will you give me the letter you have brought?”

Raoul handed the letter to the prince.

“Keep near me,” said the latter.

The prince threw his bridle over the pommel of the saddle, as he was wont to do when he wished to have both hands free, unsealed the letter of Madame de Longueville and started at a gallop on the road to Lens, attended by Raoul and his small escort, whilst messengers sent to recall the troops set out with a loose rein in other directions. The prince read as he hastened on.

“Monsieur,” he said, after a moment, “they tell me great things of you. I have only to say, after the little that I have seen and heard, that I think even better of you than I have been told.”

Raoul bowed.

Meanwhile, as the little troop drew nearer to Lens, the noise of the cannon sounded louder. The prince kept his gaze fixed in the direction of the sound with the steadfastness of a bird of prey. One would have said that his gaze could pierce the branches of trees which limited his horizon. From time to time his nostrils dilated as if eager for the smell of powder, and he panted like a horse.

At length they heard the cannon so near that it was evident they were within a league of the field of battle, and at a turn of the road they perceived the little village of Aunay.

The peasants were in great commotion. The report of Spanish cruelty had gone out and every one was frightened. The women had already fled, taking refuge in Vitry; only a few men remained. On seeing the prince they hastened to meet him. One of them recognized him.

“Ah, my lord,” he said, “have you come to drive away those rascal Spaniards and those Lorraine robbers?”

“Yes,” said the prince, “if you will serve me as guide.”

“Willingly, my lord. Where does your highness wish to go?”

“To some elevated spot whence I can look down on Lens and the surrounding country----”

“In that case, I’m your man.”

“I can trust you--you are a true Frenchman?”

“I am an old soldier of Rocroy, my lord.”

“Here,” said the prince, handing him a purse, “here is for Rocroy. Now, do you want a horse, or will you go afoot?”

“Afoot, my lord; I have served always in the infantry. Besides, I expect to lead your highness into places where you will have to walk.”

“Come, then,” said the prince; “let us lose no time.”

The peasant started off, running before the prince’s horse; then, a hundred steps from the village, he took a narrow road hidden at the bottom of the valley. For a half league they proceeded thus, the cannon-shot sounding so near that they expected at each discharge to hear the hum of the balls. At length they entered a path which, going out from the road, skirted the mountainside. The prince dismounted, ordered one of his aids and Raoul to follow his example, and directed the others to await his orders, keeping themselves meanwhile on the alert. He then began to ascend the path.

In about ten minutes they reached the ruins of an old chateau; those ruins crowned the summit of a hill which overlooked the surrounding country. At a distance of hardly a quarter of a league they looked down on Lens, at bay, and before Lens the enemy’s entire army.

With a single glance the prince took in the extent of country that lay before him, from Lens as far as Vimy. In a moment the plan of the battle which on the following day was to save France the second time from invasion was unrolled in his mind. He took a pencil, tore a page from his tablets and wrote:

“My Dear Marshal,--In an hour Lens will be in the enemy’s possession. Come and rejoin me; bring with you the whole army. I shall be at Vendin to place it in position. To-morrow we shall retake Lens and beat the enemy.”

Then, turning toward Raoul: “Go, monsieur,” he said; “ride fast and give this letter to Monsieur de Grammont.”

Raoul bowed, took the letter, went hastily down the mountain, leaped on his horse and set out at a gallop. A quarter of an hour later he was with the marshal.

A portion of the troops had already arrived and the remainder was expected from moment to moment. Marshal de Grammont put himself at the head of all the available cavalry and infantry and took the road to Vendin, leaving the Duc de Chatillon to await and bring on the rest. All the artillery was ready to move, and started off at a moment's notice.

It was seven o'clock in the evening when the marshal arrived at the appointed place. The prince awaited him there. As he had foreseen, Lens had fallen into the hands of the enemy immediately after Raoul's departure. The event was announced by the cessation of the firing.

As the shadows of night deepened the troops summoned by the prince arrived in successive detachments. Orders were given that no drum should be beaten, no trumpet sounded.

At nine o'clock the night had fully come. Still a last ray of twilight lighted the plain. The army marched silently, the prince at the head of the column. Presently the army came in sight of Lens; two or three houses were in flames and a dull noise was heard which indicated what suffering was endured by a town taken by assault.

The prince assigned to every one his post. Marshal de Grammont was to hold the extreme left, resting on Mericourt. The Duc de Chatillon commanded the centre. Finally, the prince led the right wing, resting on Aunay. The order of battle on the morrow was to be that of the positions taken in the evening. Each one, on awaking, would find himself on the field of battle.

The movement was executed in silence and with precision. At ten o'clock every one was in his appointed position; at half-past ten the prince visited the posts and gave his final orders for the following day.

Three things were especially urged upon the officers, who were to see that the soldiers observed them scrupulously: the first, that the different corps should so march that cavalry and infantry should be on the same line and that each body should protect its gaps; the second, to go to the charge no faster than a walk; the third, to let the enemy fire first.

The prince assigned the Count de Guiche to his father and kept Bragelonne near his own person; but the two young men sought the privilege of passing the night together and it was accorded them. A tent was erected for them near that of the marshal.

Although the day had been fatiguing, neither of them was inclined to sleep. And besides, even for old soldiers the evening before a battle is a serious time; it was so with greater reason to two young men who were about to witness for the first time that terrible spectacle. On the evening before a battle one thinks of a thousand things forgotten till then; those who are indifferent to one another become friends and those who are friends become brothers. It need not be said that if in the depths of the heart there is a sentiment more tender, it reaches then, quite naturally, the highest exaltation of which it is capable. Some sentiment of this kind must have been cherished by each one of these two friends, for each of them almost immediately sat down by himself at an end of the tent and began to write.

The letters were long--the four pages were covered with closely written words. The writers sometimes looked up at each other and smiled; they understood without speaking, their organizations were so delicate and sympathetic. The letters being finished, each put his own into two envelopes, so that no one, without tearing the first envelope, could discover to whom the second was addressed; then they drew near to each other and smilingly exchanged their letters.

“In case any evil should happen to me,” said Bragelonne.

“In case I should be killed,” said De Guiche.

They then embraced each other like two brothers, and each wrapping himself in his cloak they soon passed into that kindly sleep of youth which is the prerogative of birds, flowers and infants.

CHAPTER 35.

A Dinner in the Old Style.

The second interview between the former musketeers was not so formal and threatening as the first. Athos, with his superior understanding, wisely deemed that the supper table would be the most complete and satisfactory point of reunion, and at the moment when his friends, in deference to his deportment and sobriety, dared scarcely speak of some of their former good dinners, he was the first to propose that they should all assemble around some well spread table and abandon themselves unreservedly to their own natural character and manners--a freedom which had formerly contributed so much to that good understanding between them which gave them the name of the inseparables. For different reasons this was an agreeable proposition to them all, and it was therefore agreed that each should leave a very exact address and that upon the request of any of the associates a meeting should be convoked at a famous eating house in the Rue de la Monnaie, of the sign of the Hermitage. The first rendezvous was fixed for the following Wednesday, at eight o'clock in the evening precisely.

On that day, in fact, the four friends arrived punctually at the hour, each from his own abode or occupation. Porthos had been trying a new horse; D'Artagnan was on guard at the Louvre; Aramis had been to visit one of his penitents in the neighborhood; and Athos, whose domicile was established in the Rue Guenegaud, found himself close at hand. They were, therefore, somewhat surprised to meet altogether at the door of the Hermitage, Athos starting out from the Pont Neuf, Porthos by the Rue de la Roule, D'Artagnan by the Rue des Fosse Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, and Aramis by the Rue de Bethisy.

The first words exchanged between the four friends, on account of the ceremony which each of them mingled with their demonstration, were somewhat forced and even the repast began with a kind of stiffness. Athos perceived this embarrassment, and by way of supplying an effectual remedy, called for four bottles of champagne.

At this order, given in Athos's habitually calm manner, the face of the Gascon relaxed and Porthos's brow grew smooth. Aramis was astonished. He knew that Athos not only never drank, but more, that he had a kind of repugnance to wine. This astonishment was doubled when Aramis saw Athos fill a bumper and toss it off with all his former enthusiasm. His companions followed his example. In a very few minutes the four bottles were empty and this excellent specific succeeded in dissipating even the slightest cloud that might have rested on their spirits. Now the four friends began to speak loud, scarcely waiting till one had finished before another began, and each assumed his favorite attitude on or at the table. Soon--strange fact--Aramis undid two buttons of his doublet, seeing which, Porthos unfastened his entirely.

Battles, long journeys, blows given and received, sufficed for the first themes of conversation, which turned upon the silent struggles sustained against him who was now called the great cardinal.

"Faith," said Aramis, laughing, "we have praised the dead enough, let us revile the living a little; I should like to say something evil of Mazarin; is it permissible?"

"Go on, go on," replied D'Artagnan, laughing heartily; "relate your story and I will applaud it if it is a good one."

"A great prince," said Aramis, "with whom Mazarin sought an alliance, was invited by him to send him a list of the conditions on which he would do him the honor to negotiate with him. The prince, who had a great repugnance to treat with such an ill-bred fellow, made out a list, against the grain, and sent it. In this list there were three conditions which displeased Mazarin and he offered the prince ten thousand crowns to renounce them."

"Ah, ha, ha!" laughed the three friends, "not a bad bargain; and there was no fear of being taken at his word; what did the prince do then?"

"The prince immediately sent fifty thousand francs to Mazarin, begging him never to write to him again, and offered twenty thousand francs more, on condition that he would never speak to him. What did Mazarin do?"

"Stormed!" suggested Athos.

"Beat the messenger!" cried Porthos.

"Accepted the money!" said D'Artagnan.

"You have guessed it," answered Aramis; and they all laughed so heartily that the host appeared in order to inquire whether the gentlemen wanted anything; he thought they were fighting.

At last their hilarity calmed down and:

"Faith!" exclaimed D'Artagnan to the two friends, "you may well wish ill to Mazarin; for I assure you, on his side he wishes you no good."

"Pooh! really?" asked Athos. "If I thought the fellow knew me by my name I would be rebaptized, for fear it might be thought I knew him."

"He knows you better by your actions than your name; he is quite aware that there are two gentlemen who greatly aided the escape of Monsieur de Beaufort, and he has instigated an active search for them, I can answer for it."

"By whom?"

"By me; and this morning he sent for me to ask me if I had obtained any information."

"And what did you reply?"

"That I had none as yet; but that I was to dine to-day with two gentlemen, who would be able to give me some."

"You told him that?" said Porthos, a broad smile spreading over his honest face. "Bravo! and you are not afraid of that, Athos?"

"No," replied Athos, "it is not the search of Mazarin that I fear."

"Now," said Aramis, "tell me a little what you do fear."

"Nothing for the present; at least, nothing in good earnest."

"And with regard to the past?" asked Porthos.

"Oh! the past is another thing," said Athos, sighing; "the past and the future."

"Are you afraid for your young Raoul?" asked Aramis.

"Well," said D'Artagnan, "one is never killed in a first engagement."

"Nor in the second," said Aramis

"Nor in the third," returned Porthos; "and even when one is killed, one rises again, the proof of which is, that here we are!"

"No," said Athos, "it is not Raoul about whom I am anxious, for I trust he will conduct himself like a gentleman; and if he is killed--well, he will die bravely; but hold--should such a misfortune happen--well--" Athos passed his hand across his pale brow.

"Well?" asked Aramis.

"Well, I shall look upon it as an expiation."

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan; "I know what you mean."

"And I, too," added Aramis; "but you must not think of that, Athos; what is past, is past."

“I don’t understand,” said Porthos.

“The affair at Armentieres,” whispered D’Artagnan.

“The affair at Armentieres?” asked he again.

“Milady.”

“Oh, yes!” said Porthos; “true, I had forgotten it!”

Athos looked at him intently.

“You have forgotten it, Porthos?” said he.

“Faith! yes, it is so long ago,” answered Porthos.

“This affair does not, then, weigh upon your conscience?”

“Faith, no.”

“And you, D’Artagnan?”

“I--I own that when my mind returns to that terrible period I have no recollection of anything but the rigid corpse of poor Madame Bonancieux. Yes, yes,” murmured he, “I have often felt regret for the victim, but never the very slightest remorse for the assassin.”

Athos shook his dead doubtfully.

“Consider,” said Aramis, “if you admit divine justice and its participation in the things of this world, that woman was punished by the will of heaven. We were but the instruments, that is all.”

“But as to free will, Aramis?”

“How acts the judge? He has a free will, yet he fearlessly condemns. What does the executioner? He is master of his arm, yet he strikes without remorse.”

“The executioner!” muttered Athos, as if arrested by some recollection.

“I know that it is terrible,” said D’Artagnan; “but when I reflect that we have killed English, Rochellais, Spaniards, nay, even French, who never did us any other harm but to aim at and to miss us, whose only fault was to cross swords with us and to be unable to ward off our blows--I can, on my honor, find an excuse for my share in the murder of that woman.”

“As for me,” said Porthos, “now that you have reminded me of it, Athos, I have the scene again before me, as if I now were there. Milady was there, as it were, where you sit.” (Athos changed color.) “I--I was where D’Artagnan stands. I wore a long sword which cut like a Damascus--you remember it, Aramis for you always called it Balizarde. Well, I swear to you, all three, that had the executioner of Bethune--was he not of Bethune?--yes, egad! of Bethune!--not been there, I would have cut off the head of that infamous being without thinking of it, or even after thinking of it. She was a most atrocious woman.”

“And then,” said Aramis, with the tone of philosophical indifference which he had assumed since he had belonged to the church and in which there was more atheism than confidence in God, “what is the use of thinking of it all? At the last hour we must confess this action and God knows better than we can whether it is a crime, a fault, or a meritorious deed. I repent of it? Egad! no. Upon my honor and by the holy cross; I only regret it because she was a woman.”

“The most satisfactory part of the matter,” said D’Artagnan, “is that there remains no trace of it.”

“She had a son,” observed Athos.

“Oh! yes, I know that,” said D’Artagnan, “and you mentioned it to me; but who knows what has become of him? If the serpent be dead, why not its brood? Do you think his uncle De Winter would have brought up that young viper? De Winter probably condemned the son as he had done the mother.”

“Then,” said Athos, “woe to De Winter, for the child had done no harm.”

“May the devil take me, if the child be not dead,” said Porthos. “There is so much fog in that detestable country, at least so D’Artagnan declares.”

Just as the quaint conclusion reached by Porthos was about to bring back hilarity to faces now more or less clouded, hasty footsteps were heard upon the stair and some one knocked at the door.

“Come in,” cried Athos.

“Please your honors,” said the host, “a person in a great hurry wishes to speak to one of you.”

“To which of us?” asked all the four friends.

“To him who is called the Comte de la Fere.”

“It is I,” said Athos, “and what is the name of the person?”

“Grimaud.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Athos, turning pale. “Back already! What can have happened, then, to Bragelonne?”

“Let him enter,” cried D’Artagnan; “let him come up.”

But Grimaud had already mounted the staircase and was waiting on the last step; so springing into the room he motioned the host to leave it. The door being closed, the four friends waited in expectation. Grimaud’s agitation, his pallor, the sweat which covered his face, the dust which soiled his clothes, all indicated that he was the messenger of some important and terrible news.

"Your honors," said he, "that woman had a child; that child has become a man; the tigress had a little one, the tiger has roused himself; he is ready to spring upon you--beware!"

Athos glanced around at his friends with a melancholy smile. Porthos turned to look at his sword, which was hanging on the wall; Aramis seized his knife; D'Artagnan arose.

"What do you mean, Grimaud?" he exclaimed.

"That Milady's son has left England, that he is in France, on his road to Paris, if he be not here already."

"The devil he is!" said Porthos. "Are you sure of it?"

"Certain," replied Grimaud.

This announcement was received in silence. Grimaud was so breathless, so exhausted, that he had fallen back upon a chair. Athos filled a beaker with champagne and gave it to him.

"Well, after all," said D'Artagnan, "supposing that he lives, that he comes to Paris; we have seen many other such. Let him come."

"Yes," echoed Porthos, glancing affectionately at his sword, still hanging on the wall; "we can wait for him; let him come."

"Moreover, he is but a child," said Aramis.

Grimaud rose.

"A child!" he exclaimed. "Do you know what he has done, this child? Disguised as a monk he discovered the whole history in confession from the executioner of Bethune, and having confessed him, after having learned everything from him, he gave him absolution by planting this dagger into his heart. See, it is on fire yet with his hot blood, for it is not thirty hours since it was drawn from the wound."

And Grimaud threw the dagger on the table.

D'Artagnan, Porthos and Aramis rose and in one spontaneous motion rushed to their swords. Athos alone remained seated, calm and thoughtful.

"And you say he is dressed as a monk, Grimaud?"

"Yes, as an Augustine monk."

"What sized man is he?"

"About my height; thin, pale, with light blue eyes and tawny flaxen hair."

"And he did not see Raoul?" asked Athos.

“Yes, on the contrary, they met, and it was the viscount himself who conducted him to the bed of the dying man.”

Athos, in his turn, rising without speaking, went and unhooked his sword.

“Heigh, sir,” said D’Artagnan, trying to laugh, “do you know we look very much like a flock of silly, mouse-evading women! How is it that we, four men who have faced armies without blinking, begin to tremble at the mention of a child?”

“It is true,” said Athos, “but this child comes in the name of Heaven.”

And very soon they left the inn.

CHAPTER 36.

A Letter from Charles the First.

The reader must now cross the Seine with us and follow us to the door of the Carmelite Convent in the Rue Saint Jacques. It is eleven o'clock in the morning and the pious sisters have just finished saying mass for the success of the armies of King Charles I. Leaving the church, a woman and a young girl dressed in black, the one as a widow and the other as an orphan, have re-entered their cell.

The woman kneels on a prie-dieu of painted wood and at a short distance from her stands the young girl, leaning against a chair, weeping.

The woman must have once been handsome, but traces of sorrow have aged her. The young girl is lovely and her tears only embellish her; the lady appears to be about forty years of age, the girl about fourteen.

"Oh, God!" prayed the kneeling suppliant, "protect my husband, guard my son, and take my wretched life instead!"

"Oh, God!" murmured the girl, "leave me my mother!"

"Your mother can be of no use to you in this world, Henrietta," said the lady, turning around. "Your mother has no longer either throne or husband; she has neither son, money nor friends; the whole world, my poor child, has abandoned your mother!" And she fell back, weeping, into her daughter's arms.

"Courage, take courage, my dear mother!" said the girl.

"Ah! 'tis an unfortunate year for kings," said the mother. "And no one thinks of us in this country, for each must think about his own affairs. As long as your brother was with me he kept me up; but he is gone and can no longer send us news of himself, either to me or to your father. I have pledged my last jewels, sold your clothes and my own to pay his servants, who refused to accompany him unless I made this sacrifice. We are now reduced to live at the expense of these daughters of Heaven; we are the poor, succored by God."

"But why not address yourself to your sister, the queen?" asked the girl.

"Alas! the queen, my sister, is no longer queen, my child. Another reigns in her name. One day you will be able to understand how all this is."

"Well, then, to the king, your nephew. Shall I speak to him? You know how much he loves me, my mother.

"Alas! my nephew is not yet king, and you know Laporte has told us twenty times that he himself is in need of almost everything."

"Then let us pray to Heaven," said the girl.

The two women who thus knelt in united prayer were the daughter and grand-daughter of Henry IV., the wife and daughter of Charles I.

They had just finished their double prayer, when a nun softly tapped at the door of the cell.

"Enter, my sister," said the queen.

"I trust your majesty will pardon this intrusion on her meditations, but a foreign lord has arrived from England and waits in the parlor, demanding the honor of presenting a letter to your majesty."

"Oh, a letter! a letter from the king, perhaps. News from your father, do you hear, Henrietta? And the name of this lord?"

"Lord de Winter."

"Lord de Winter!" exclaimed the queen, "the friend of my husband. Oh, bid him enter!"

And the queen advanced to meet the messenger, whose hand she seized affectionately, whilst he knelt down and presented a letter to her, contained in a case of gold.

"Ah! my lord!" said the queen, "you bring us three things which we have not seen for a long time. Gold, a devoted friend, and a letter from the king, our husband and master."

De Winter bowed again, unable to reply from excess of emotion.

On their side the mother and daughter retired into the embrasure of a window to read eagerly the following letter:

"Dear Wife,--We have now reached the moment of decision. I have concentrated here at Naseby camp all the resources Heaven has left me, and I write to you in haste from thence. Here I await the army of my rebellious subjects. I am about to struggle for the last time with them. If victorious, I shall continue the struggle; if beaten, I am lost. I shall try, in the latter case (alas! in our position, one must provide for everything), I shall try to gain the coast of France. But can they, will they receive an unhappy king, who will bring such a sad story into a country already agitated by civil discord?

Your wisdom and your affection must serve me as guides. The bearer of this letter will tell you, madame, what I dare not trust to pen and paper and the risks of transit. He will explain to you the steps that I expect you to pursue. I charge him also with my blessing for my children and with the sentiments of my soul for yourself, my dearest sweetheart.”

The letter bore the signature, not of “Charles, King,” but of “Charles--still king.”

“And let him be no longer king,” cried the queen. “Let him be conquered, exiled, proscribed, provided he still lives. Alas! in these days the throne is too dangerous a place for me to wish him to retain it. But my lord, tell me,” she continued, “hide nothing from me--what is, in truth, the king’s position? Is it as hopeless as he thinks?”

“Alas! madame, more hopeless than he thinks. His majesty has so good a heart that he cannot understand hatred; is so loyal that he does not suspect treason! England is torn in twain by a spirit of disturbance which, I greatly fear, blood alone can exorcise.”

“But Lord Montrose,” replied the queen, “I have heard of his great and rapid successes of battles gained. I heard it said that he was marching to the frontier to join the king.”

“Yes, madame; but on the frontier he was met by Lesly; he had tried victory by means of superhuman undertakings. Now victory has abandoned him. Montrose, beaten at Philiphaugh, was obliged to disperse the remains of his army and to fly, disguised as a servant. He is at Bergen, in Norway.”

“Heaven preserve him!” said the queen. “It is at least a consolation to know that some who have so often risked their lives for us are safe. And now, my lord, that I see how hopeless the position of the king is, tell me with what you are charged on the part of my royal husband.”

“Well, then, madame,” said De Winter, “the king wishes you to try and discover the dispositions of the king and queen toward him.”

“Alas! you know that even now the king is but a child and the queen a woman weak enough. Here, Monsieur Mazarin is everything.”

“Does he desire to play the part in France that Cromwell plays in England?”

“Oh, no! He is a subtle, conscienceless Italian, who though he very likely dreams of crime, dares not commit it; and unlike Cromwell, who disposes of both Houses, Mazarin has had the queen to support him in his struggle with the parliament.”

“More reason, then, he should protect a king pursued by parliament.”

The queen shook her head despairingly.

“If I judge for myself, my lord,” she said, “the cardinal will do nothing, and will even, perhaps, act against us. The presence of my daughter and myself in France is already irksome to him; much more so would be that of the king. My lord,” added Henrietta, with a melancholy smile, “it is sad and almost shameful to be obliged to say that we have passed the winter in the Louvre without money, without linen, almost without bread, and often not rising from bed because we wanted fire.”

“Horrible!” cried De Winter; “the daughter of Henry IV., and the wife of King Charles! Wherefore did you not apply, then, madame, to the first person you saw from us?”

“Such is the hospitality shown to a queen by the minister from whom a king demands it.”

“But I heard that a marriage between the Prince of Wales and Mademoiselle d’Orleans was spoken of,” said De Winter.

“Yes, for an instant I hoped it was so. The young people felt a mutual esteem; but the queen, who at first sanctioned their affection, changed her mind, and Monsieur, the Duc d’Orleans, who had encouraged the familiarity between them, has forbidden his daughter to think any more about the union. Oh, my lord!” continued the queen, without restraining her tears, “it is better to fight as the king has done, and to die, as perhaps he will, than live in beggary like me.”

“Courage, madame! courage! Do not despair! The interests of the French crown, endangered at this moment, are to discountenance rebellion in a neighboring nation. Mazarin, as a statesman, will understand the politic necessity.”

“Are you sure,” said the queen doubtfully, “that you have not been forestalled?”

“By whom?”

“By the Joices, the Prinns, the Cromwells?”

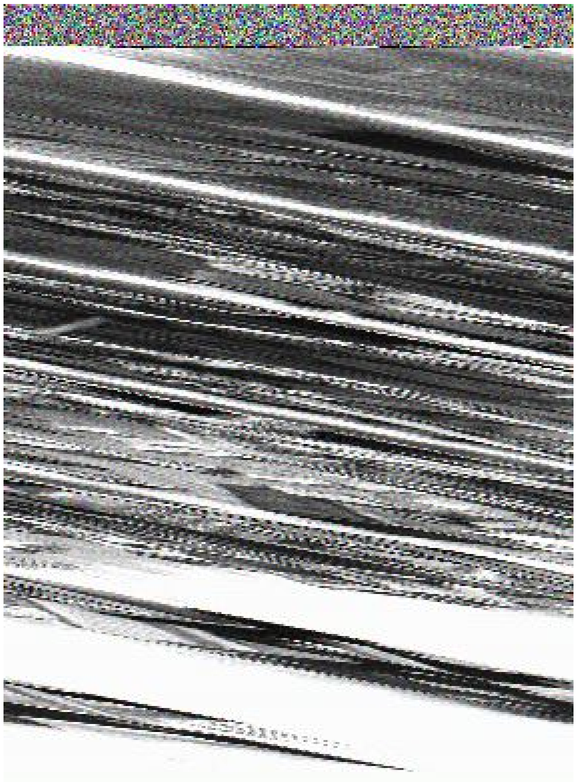

“By a tailor, a coachmaker, a brewer! Ah! I hope, madame, that the cardinal will not enter into negotiations with such men!”

“Ah! what is he himself?” asked Madame Henrietta.

“But for the honor of the king--of the queen.”

“Well, let us hope he will do something for the sake of their honor,” said the queen. “A true friend’s eloquence is so powerful, my lord, that you have reassured me. Give me your hand and let us go to the minister; and yet,” she added, “suppose he should refuse and that the king loses the battle?”

“His majesty will then take refuge in Holland, where I hear his highness the Prince of Wales now is.”

“And can his majesty count upon many such subjects as yourself for his flight?”

“Alas! no, madame,” answered De Winter; “but the case is provided for and I am come to France to seek allies.”

“Allies!” said the queen, shaking her head.

“Madame,” replied De Winter, “provided I can find some of my good old friends of former times I will answer for anything.”

“Come then, my lord,” said the queen, with the painful doubt that is felt by those who have suffered much; “come, and may Heaven hear you.”

CHAPTER 37.

Cromwell’s Letter.

At the very moment when the queen quitted the convent to go to the Palais Royal, a young man dismounted at the gate of this royal abode and announced to the guards that he had something of importance to communicate to Cardinal Mazarin. Although the cardinal was often tormented by fear, he was more often in need of counsel and information, and he was therefore sufficiently accessible. The true difficulty of being admitted was not to be found at the first door, and even the second was passed easily enough; but at the third watched, besides the guard and the doorkeepers, the faithful Bernouin, a Cerberus whom no speech could soften, no wand, even of gold, could charm.

It was therefore at the third door that those who solicited or were bidden to an audience underwent their formal interrogatory.

The young man having left his horse tied to the gate in the court, mounted the great staircase and addressed the guard in the first chamber.

“Cardinal Mazarin?” said he.

“Pass on,” replied the guard.

The cavalier entered the second hall, which was guarded by the musketeers and doorkeepers.

“Have you a letter of audience?” asked a porter, advancing to the new arrival.

“I have one, but not one from Cardinal Mazarin.”

“Enter, and ask for Monsieur Bernouin,” said the porter, opening the door of the third room. Whether he only held his usual post or whether it was by accident, Monsieur Bernouin was found standing behind the door and must have heard all that had passed.

“You seek me, sir,” said he. “From whom may the letter be you bear to his eminence?”

“From General Oliver Cromwell,” said the new comer. “Be so good as to mention this name to his eminence and to bring me word whether he will receive me--yes or no.”

Saying which, he resumed the proud and sombre bearing peculiar at that time to Puritans. Bernouin cast an inquisitorial glance at the person of the young man and entered the cabinet of the cardinal, to whom he transmitted the messenger's words.

"A man bringing a letter from Oliver Cromwell?" said Mazarin. "And what kind of a man?"

"A genuine Englishman, your eminence. Hair sandy-red--more red than sandy; gray-blue eyes--more gray than blue; and for the rest, stiff and proud."

"Let him give in his letter."

"His eminence asks for the letter," said Bernouin, passing back into the ante-chamber.

"His eminence cannot see the letter without the bearer of it," replied the young man; "but to convince you that I am really the bearer of a letter, see, here it is; and kindly add," continued he, "that I am not a simple messenger, but an envoy extraordinary."

Bernouin re-entered the cabinet, returning in a few seconds. "Enter, sir," said he.

The young man appeared on the threshold of the minister's closet, in one hand holding his hat, in the other the letter. Mazarin rose. "Have you, sir," asked he, "a letter accrediting you to me?"

"There it is, my lord," said the young man.

Mazarin took the letter and read it thus:

"Mr. Mordaunt, one of my secretaries, will remit this letter of introduction to His Eminence, the Cardinal Mazarin, in Paris. He is also the bearer of a second confidential epistle for his eminence.

"Oliver Cromwell."

"Very well, Monsieur Mordaunt," said Mazarin, "give me this second letter and sit down."

The young man drew from his pocket a second letter, presented it to the cardinal, and took his seat. The cardinal, however, did not unseal the letter at once, but continued to turn it again and again in his hand; then, in accordance with his usual custom and judging from experience that few people could hide anything from him when he began to question them, fixing his eyes upon them at the same time, he thus addressed the messenger:

“You are very young, Monsieur Mordaunt, for this difficult task of ambassador, in which the oldest diplomatists often fail.”

“My lord, I am twenty-three years of age; but your eminence is mistaken in saying that I am young. I am older than your eminence, although I possess not your wisdom. Years of suffering, in my opinion, count double, and I have suffered for twenty years.”

“Ah, yes, I understand,” said Mazarin; “want of fortune, perhaps. You are poor, are you not?” Then he added to himself: “These English Revolutionists are all beggars and ill-bred.”

“My lord, I ought to have a fortune of six millions, but it has been taken from me.”

“You are not, then, a man of the people?” said Mazarin, astonished.

“If I bore my proper title I should be a lord. If I bore my name you would have heard one of the most illustrious names of England.”

“What is your name, then?” asked Mazarin.

“My name is Mordaunt,” replied the young man, bowing.

Mazarin now understood that Cromwell’s envoy desired to retain his incognito. He was silent for an instant, and during that time he scanned the young man even more attentively than he had done at first. The messenger was unmoved.

“Devil take these Puritans,” said Mazarin aside; “they are carved from granite.” Then he added aloud, “But you have relations left you?”

“I have one remaining. Three times I presented myself to ask his support and three times he ordered his servants to turn me away.”

“Oh, mon Dieu! my dear Mr. Mordaunt,” said Mazarin, hoping by a display of affected pity to catch the young man in a snare, “how extremely your history interests me! You know not, then, anything of your birth--you have never seen your mother?”

“Yes, my lord; she came three times, whilst I was a child, to my nurse’s house; I remember the last time she came as well as if it were to-day.”

“You have a good memory,” said Mazarin.

“Oh! yes, my lord,” said the young man, with such peculiar emphasis that the cardinal felt a shudder run through every vein.

“And who brought you up?” he asked again.

“A French nurse, who sent me away when I was five years old because no one paid her for me, telling me the name of a relation of whom she had heard my mother often speak.”

“What became of you?”

“As I was weeping and begging on the high road, a minister from Kingston took me in, instructed me in the Calvinistic faith, taught me all he knew himself and aided me in my researches after my family.”

“And these researches?”

“Were fruitless; chance did everything.”

“You discovered what had become of your mother?”

“I learned that she had been assassinated by my relation, aided by four friends, but I was already aware that I had been robbed of my wealth and degraded from my nobility by King Charles I.”

“Oh! I now understand why you are in the service of Cromwell; you hate the king.”

“Yes, my lord, I hate him!” said the young man.

Mazarin marked with surprise the diabolical expression with which the young man uttered these words. Just as, ordinarily, faces are colored by blood, his face seemed dyed by hatred and became livid.

“Your history is a terrible one, Mr. Mordaunt, and touches me keenly; but happily for you, you serve an all-powerful master; he ought to aid you in your search; we have so many means of gaining information.”

“My lord, to a well-bred dog it is only necessary to show one end of a track; he is certain to reach the other.”

“But this relation you mentioned--do you wish me to speak to him?” said Mazarin, who was anxious to make a friend about Cromwell’s person.

“Thanks, my lord, I will speak to him myself. He will treat me better the next time I see him.”

“You have the means, then, of touching him?”

“I have the means of making myself feared.”

Mazarin looked at the young man, but at the fire which shot from his glance he bent his head; then, embarrassed how to continue such a conversation, he opened Cromwell’s letter.

The young man’s eyes gradually resumed their dull and glassy appearance and he fell into a profound reverie. After reading the first lines of the letter Mazarin gave a side glance at him to see if he was watching the expression of his face as he read. Observing his indifference, he shrugged his shoulders, saying:

“Send on your business those who do theirs at the same time! Let us see what this letter contains.”

We here present the letter verbatim:

“To his Eminence, Monseigneur le Cardinal Mazarini:

“I have wished, monseigneur, to learn your intentions relating to the existing state of affairs in England. The two kingdoms are so near that France must be interested in our situation, as we are interested in that of France. The English are almost of one mind in contending against the tyranny of Charles and his adherents. Placed by popular confidence at the head of that movement, I can appreciate better than any other its significance and its probable results. I am at present in the midst of war, and am about to deliver a decisive battle against King Charles. I shall gain it, for the hope of the nation and the Spirit of the Lord are with me. This battle won by me, the king will have no further resources in England or in Scotland; and if he is not captured or killed, he will endeavor to pass over into France to recruit soldiers and to refurnish himself with arms and money. France has already received Queen Henrietta, and, unintentionally, doubtless, has maintained a centre of inextinguishable civil war in my country. But Madame Henrietta is a daughter of France and was entitled to the hospitality of France. As to King Charles, the question must be viewed differently; in receiving and aiding him, France will censure the acts of the English nation, and thus so essentially harm England, and especially the well-being of the government, that such a proceeding will be equivalent to pronounced hostilities.”

At this moment Mazarin became very uneasy at the turn which the letter was taking and paused to glance under his eyes at the young man. The latter continued in thought. Mazarin resumed his reading:

“It is important, therefore, monseigneur, that I should be informed as to the intentions of France. The interests of that kingdom and those of England, though taking now diverse directions, are very nearly the same. England needs tranquillity at home, in order to consummate the expulsion of her king; France needs tranquillity to establish on solid foundations the throne of her young monarch. You need, as much as we do, that interior condition of repose which, thanks to the energy of our government, we are about to attain.

“Your quarrels with the parliament, your noisy dissensions with the princes, who fight for you to-day and to-morrow will fight against you, the popular following directed by the coadjutor, President Blancmesnil, and Councillor Broussel--all that disorder, in short, which pervades the several departments of the state, must lead you to view with uneasiness the possibility of a foreign war; for in that event England, exalted by the enthusiasm of new ideas, will ally herself with Spain, already seeking that alliance. I have therefore believed, monseigneur, knowing your prudence and your personal relation to the events of the present time, that you will choose to hold your forces concentrated in the interior of the French kingdom and leave to her own the new government of England. That neutrality consists simply in excluding King Charles from the territory of France and in refraining from helping him--a stranger to your country--with arms, with money or with troops.

"My letter is private and confidential, and for that reason I send it to you by a man who shares my most intimate counsels. It anticipates, through a sentiment which your eminence will appreciate, measures to be taken after the events. Oliver Cromwell considered it more expedient to declare himself to a mind as intelligent as Mazarin's than to a queen admirable for firmness, without doubt, but too much guided by vain prejudices of birth and of divine right.

"Farewell, monseigneur; should I not receive a reply in the space of fifteen days, I shall presume my letter will have miscarried.

"Oliver Cromwell."

"Mr. Mordaunt," said the cardinal, raising his voice, as if to arouse the dreamer, "my reply to this letter will be more satisfactory to General Cromwell if I am convinced that all are ignorant of my having given one; go, therefore, and await it at Boulogne-sur-Mer, and promise me to set out to-morrow morning."

"I promise, my lord," replied Mordaunt; "but how many days does your eminence expect me to await your reply?"

"If you do not receive it in ten days you can leave."

Mordaunt bowed.

"That is not all, sir," continued Mazarin; "your private adventures have touched me to the quick; besides, the letter from Mr. Cromwell makes you an important person as ambassador; come, tell me, what can I do for you?"

Mordaunt reflected a moment and, after some hesitation, was about to speak, when Bernouin entered hastily and bending down to the ear of the cardinal, whispered:

"My lord, the Queen Henrietta Maria, accompanied by an English noble, is entering the Palais Royal at this moment."

Mazarin made a bound from his chair, which did not escape the attention of the young man and suppressed the confidence he was about to make.

“Sir,” said the cardinal, “you have heard me? I fix on Boulogne because I presume that every town in France is indifferent to you; if you prefer another, name it; but you can easily conceive that, surrounded as I am by influences I can only muzzle by discretion, I desire your presence in Paris to be unknown.”

“I go, sir,” said Mordaunt, advancing a few steps to the door by which he had entered.

“No, not that way, I beg, sir,” quickly exclaimed the cardinal, “be so good as to pass by yonder gallery, by which you can regain the hall. I do not wish you to be seen leaving; our interview must be kept secret.”

Mordaunt followed Bernouin, who led him through the adjacent chamber and left him with a doorkeeper, showing him the way out.

CHAPTER 38.

Henrietta Maria and Mazarin.

The cardinal rose, and advanced in haste to receive the queen of England. He showed the more respect to this queen, deprived of every mark of pomp and stripped of followers, as he felt some self-reproach for his own want of heart and his avarice. But supplicants for favor know how to accommodate the expression of their features, and the daughter of Henry IV. smiled as she advanced to meet a man she hated and despised.

"Ah!" said Mazarin to himself, "what a sweet face; does she come to borrow money of me?"

And he threw an uneasy glance at his strong box; he even turned inside the bevel of the magnificent diamond ring, the brilliancy of which drew every eye upon his hand, which indeed was white and handsome.

"Your eminence," said the august visitor, "it was my first intention to speak of the matters that have brought me here to the queen, my sister, but I have reflected that political affairs are more especially the concern of men."

"Madame," said Mazarin, "your majesty overwhelms me with flattering distinction."

"He is very gracious," thought the queen; "can he have guessed my errand?"

"Give," continued the cardinal, "your commands to the most respectful of your servants."

"Alas, sir," replied the queen, "I have lost the habit of commanding and have adopted instead that of making petitions. I am here to petition you, too happy should my prayer be favorably heard."

"I am listening, madame, with the greatest interest," said Mazarin.

"Your eminence, it concerns the war which the king, my husband, is now sustaining against his rebellious subjects. You are perhaps ignorant that they are fighting in England," added she, with a melancholy smile, "and that in a short time they will fight in a much more decided fashion than they have done hitherto."

"I am completely ignorant of it, madame," said the cardinal, accompanying his words with a slight shrug of the shoulders; "alas, our own wars quite absorb the time and the mind of a poor, incapable, infirm old minister like me."

"Well, then, your eminence," said the queen, "I must inform you that Charles I., my husband, is on the eve of a decisive engagement. In case of a check" (Mazarin made a slight movement), "one must foresee everything; in the case of a check, he desires to retire into France and to live here as a private individual. What do you say to this project?"

The cardinal had listened without permitting a single fibre of his face to betray what he felt, and his smile remained as it ever was--false and flattering; and when the queen finished speaking, he said:

"Do you think, madame, that France, agitated and disturbed as it is, would be a safe retreat for a dethroned king? How will the crown, which is scarce firmly set on the head of Louis XIV., support a double weight?"

"The weight was not so heavy when I was in peril," interrupted the queen, with a sad smile, "and I ask no more for my husband than has been done for me; you see that we are very humble monarchs, sir."

"Oh, you, madame," the cardinal hastened to say, in order to cut short the explanation he foresaw was coming, "with regard to you, that is another thing. A daughter of Henry IV., of that great, that sublime sovereign----"

"All which does not prevent you refusing hospitality to his son-in-law, sir! Nevertheless, you ought to remember that that great, that sublime monarch, when proscribed at one time, as my husband may be, demanded aid from England and England accorded it to him; and it is but just to say that Queen Elizabeth was not his niece."

"Peccato!" said Mazarin, writhing beneath this simple eloquence, "your majesty does not understand me; you judge my intentions wrongly, and that is partly because, doubtless, I explain myself in French."

"Speak Italian, sir. Ere the cardinal, your predecessor, sent our mother, Marie de Medicis, to die in exile, she taught us that language. If anything yet remains of that great, that sublime king, Henry, of whom you have just spoken, he would be much surprised at so little pity for his family being united to such a profound admiration of himself."

The perspiration stood in large drops on Mazarin's brow.

"That admiration is, on the contrary, so great, so real, madame," returned Mazarin, without noticing the change of language offered to him by the queen, “that if the king, Charles I.--whom Heaven protect from evil!--came into France, I would offer him my house--my own house; but, alas! it would be but an unsafe retreat. Some day the people will burn that house, as they burned that of the Marechal d’Ancre. Poor Concino Concini! And yet he but desired the good of the people.”

“Yes, my lord, like yourself!” said the queen, ironically.

Mazarin pretended not to understand the double meaning of his own sentence, but continued to compassionate the fate of Concino Concini.

“Well then, your eminence,” said the queen, becoming impatient, “what is your answer?”

“Madame,” cried Mazarin, more and more moved, “will your majesty permit me to give you counsel?”

“Speak, sir,” replied the queen; “the counsels of so prudent a man as yourself ought certainly to be available.”

“Madame, believe me, the king ought to defend himself to the last.”

“He has done so, sir, and this last battle, which he encounters with resources much inferior to those of the enemy, proves that he will not yield without a struggle; but in case he is beaten?”

“Well, madame, in that case, my advice--I know that I am very bold to offer advice to your majesty--my advice is that the king should not leave his kingdom. Absent kings are very soon forgotten; if he passes over into France his cause is lost.”

“But,” persisted the queen, “if such be your advice and you have his interest at heart, send him help of men and money, for I can do nothing for him; I have sold even to my last diamond to aid him. If I had had a single ornament left, I should have bought wood this winter to make a fire for my daughter and myself.”

“Oh, madame,” said Mazarin, “your majesty knows not what you ask. On the day when foreign succor follows in the train of a king to replace him on his throne, it is an avowal that he no longer possesses the help and love of his own subjects.”

“To the point, sir,” said the queen, “to the point, and answer me, yes or no; if the king persists in remaining in England will you send him succor? If he comes to France will you accord him hospitality? What do you intend to do? Speak.”

“Madame,” said the cardinal, affecting an effusive frankness of speech, “I shall convince your majesty, I trust, of my devotion to you and my desire to terminate an affair which you have so much at heart. After which your majesty will, I think, no longer doubt my zeal in your behalf.”

The queen bit her lips and moved impatiently on her chair.

“Well, what do you propose to do?” she, said at length; “come, speak.”

“I will go this instant and consult the queen, and we will refer the affair at once to parliament.”

“With which you are at war--is it not so? You will charge Broussel to report it. Enough, sir, enough. I understand you or rather, I am wrong. Go to the parliament, for it was from this parliament, the enemy of monarchs, that the daughter of the great, the sublime Henry IV., whom you so much admire, received the only relief this winter which prevented her from dying of hunger and cold!”

And with these words Henrietta rose in majestic indignation, whilst the cardinal, raising his hands clasped toward her, exclaimed, “Ah, madame, madame, how little you know me, mon Dieu!”

But Queen Henrietta, without even turning toward him who made these hypocritical pretensions, crossed the cabinet, opened the door for herself and passing through the midst of the cardinal’s numerous guards, courtiers eager to pay homage, the luxurious show of a competing royalty, she went and took the hand of De Winter, who stood apart in isolation. Poor queen, already fallen! Though all bowed before her, as etiquette required, she had now but a single arm on which she could lean.

“It signifies little,” said Mazarin, when he was alone. “It gave me pain and it was an ungracious part to play, but I have said nothing either to the one or to the other. Bernouin!”

Bernouin entered.

“See if the young man with the black doublet and the short hair, who was with me just now, is still in the palace.”

Bernouin went out and soon returned with Comminges, who was on guard.

“Your eminence,” said Comminges, “as I was re-conducting the young man for whom you have asked, he approached the glass door of the gallery, and gazed intently upon some object, doubtless the picture by Raphael, which is opposite the door. He reflected for a second and then descended the stairs. I believe I saw him mount a gray horse and leave the palace court. But is not your eminence going to the queen?”

“For what purpose?”

"Monsieur de Guitant, my uncle, has just told me that her majesty had received news of the army."

"It is well; I will go."

Comminges had seen rightly, and Mordaunt had really acted as he had related. In crossing the gallery parallel to the large glass gallery, he perceived De Winter, who was waiting until the queen had finished her negotiation.

At this sight the young man stopped short, not in admiration of Raphael's picture, but as if fascinated at the sight of some terrible object. His eyes dilated and a shudder ran through his body. One would have said that he longed to break through the wall of glass which separated him from his enemy; for if Comminges had seen with what an expression of hatred the eyes of this young man were fixed upon De Winter, he would not have doubted for an instant that the Englishman was his eternal foe.

But he stopped, doubtless to reflect; for instead of allowing his first impulse, which had been to go straight to Lord de Winter, to carry him away, he leisurely descended the staircase, left the palace with his head down, mounted his horse, which he reined in at the corner of the Rue Richelieu, and with his eyes fixed on the gate, waited until the queen's carriage had left the court.

He had not long to wait, for the queen scarcely remained a quarter of an hour with Mazarin, but this quarter of an hour of expectation appeared a century to him. At last the heavy machine, which was called a chariot in those days, came out, rumbling against the gates, and De Winter, still on horseback, bent again to the door to converse with her majesty.

The horses started on a trot and took the road to the Louvre, which they entered. Before leaving the convent of the Carmelites, Henrietta had desired her daughter to attend her at the palace, which she had inhabited for a long time and which she had only left because their poverty seemed to them more difficult to bear in gilded chambers.

Mordaunt followed the carriage, and when he had watched it drive beneath the sombre arches he went and stationed himself under a wall over which the shadow was extended, and remained motionless, amidst the moldings of Jean Goujon, like a bas-relievo, representing an equestrian statue.

CHAPTER 39.

How, sometimes, the Unhappy mistake Chance for Providence.

Well, madame," said De Winter, when the queen had dismissed her attendants.

"Well, my lord, what I foresaw has come to pass."

"What? does the cardinal refuse to receive the king? France refuse hospitality to an unfortunate prince? Ay, but it is for the first time, madame!"

"I did not say France, my lord; I said the cardinal, and the cardinal is not even a Frenchman."

"But did you see the queen?"

"It is useless," replied Henrietta, "the queen will not say yes when the cardinal says no. Are you not aware that this Italian directs everything, both indoors and out? And moreover, I should not be surprised had we been forestalled by Cromwell. He was embarrassed whilst speaking to me and yet quite firm in his determination to refuse. Then did you not observe the agitation in the Palais Royal, the passing to and fro of busy people? Can they have received any news, my lord?"

"Not from England, madame. I made such haste that I am certain of not having been forestalled. I set out three days ago, passing miraculously through the Puritan army, and I took post horses with my servant Tony; the horses upon which we were mounted were bought in Paris. Besides, the king, I am certain, awaits your majesty's reply before risking anything."

"You will tell him, my lord," resumed the queen, despairingly, "that I can do nothing; that I have suffered as much as himself--more than he has--obliged as I am to eat the bread of exile and to ask hospitality from false friends who smile at my tears; and as regards his royal person, he must sacrifice it generously and die like a king. I shall go and die by his side."

"Madame, madame," exclaimed De Winter, "your majesty abandons yourself to despair; and yet, perhaps, there still remains some hope."

"No friends left, my lord; no other friends left in the wide world but yourself! Oh, God!" exclaimed the poor queen, raising her eyes to Heaven, “have You indeed taken back all the generous hearts that once existed in the world?”

“I hope not, madame,” replied De Winter, thoughtfully; “I once spoke to you of four men.”

“What can be done with four?”

“Four devoted, resolute men can do much, assure yourself, madame; and those of whom I speak performed great things at one time.”

“And where are these four men?”

“Ah, that is what I do not know. It is twenty years since I saw them, and yet whenever I have seen the king in danger I have thought of them.”

“And these men were your friends?”

“One of them held my life in his hands and gave it to me. I know not whether he is still my friend, but since that time I have remained his.”

“And these men are in France, my lord?”

“I believe so.”

“Tell me their names; perhaps I may have heard them mentioned and might be able to aid you in finding them.”

“One of them was called the Chevalier d’Artagnan.”

“Ah, my lord, if I mistake not, the Chevalier d’Artagnan is lieutenant of royal guards; but take care, for I fear that this man is entirely devoted to the cardinal.”

“That would be a misfortune,” said De Winter, “and I shall begin to think that we are really doomed.”

“But the others,” said the queen, who clung to this last hope as a shipwrecked man clings to the hull of his vessel. “The others, my lord!”

“The second--I heard his name by chance; for before fighting us, these four gentlemen told us their names; the second was called the Comte de la Fere. As for the two others, I had so much the habit of calling them by nicknames that I have forgotten their real ones.”

“Oh, mon Dieu, it is a matter of the greatest urgency to find them out,” said the queen, “since you think these worthy gentlemen might be so useful to the king.”

“Oh, yes,” said De Winter, “for they are the same men. Listen, madame, and recall your remembrances. Have you never heard that Queen Anne of Austria was once saved from the greatest danger ever incurred by a queen?”

“Yes, at the time of her relations with Monsieur de Buckingham; it had to do in some way with certain studs and diamonds.”

“Well, it was that affair, madame; these men are the ones who saved her; and I smile with pity when I reflect that if the names of those gentlemen are unknown to you it is because the queen has forgotten them, who ought to have made them the first noblemen of the realm.”

“Well, then, my lord, they must be found; but what can four men, or rather three men do--for I tell you, you must not count on Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

“It will be one valiant sword the less, but there will remain still three, without reckoning my own; now four devoted men around the king to protect him from his enemies, to be at his side in battle, to aid him with counsel, to escort him in flight, are sufficient, not to make the king a conqueror, but to save him if conquered; and whatever Mazarin may say, once on the shores of France your royal husband may find as many retreats and asylums as the seabird finds in a storm.”

“Seek, then, my lord, seek these gentlemen; and if they will consent to go with you to England, I will give to each a duchy the day that we reascend the throne, besides as much gold as would pave Whitehall. Seek them, my lord, and find them, I conjure you.”

“I will search for them, madame,” said De Winter “and doubtless I shall find them; but time fails me. Has your majesty forgotten that the king expects your reply and awaits it in agony?”

“Then indeed we are lost!” cried the queen, in the fullness of a broken heart.

At this moment the door opened and the young Henrietta appeared; then the queen, with that wonderful strength which is the privilege of parents, repressed her tears and motioned to De Winter to change the subject.

But that act of self-control, effective as it was, did not escape the eyes of the young princess. She stopped on the threshold, breathed a sigh, and addressing the queen:

“Why, then, do you always weep, mother, when I am away from you?” she said.

The queen smiled, but instead of answering:

“See, De Winter,” she said, “I have at least gained one thing in being only half a queen; and that is that my children call me ‘mother’ instead of ‘madame.’“

Then turning toward her daughter:

“What do you want, Henrietta?” she demanded.

“My mother,” replied the young princess, “a cavalier has just entered the Louvre and wishes to present his respects to your majesty; he arrives from the army and has, he says, a letter to remit to you, on the part of the Marechal de Grammont, I think.”

“Ah!” said the queen to De Winter, “he is one of my faithful adherents; but do you not observe, my dear lord, that we are so poorly served that it is left to my daughter to fill the office of doorkeeper?”

“Madame, have pity on me,” exclaimed De Winter; “you wring my heart!”

“And who is this cavalier, Henrietta?” asked the queen.

“I saw him from the window, madame; he is a young man that appears scarce sixteen years of age, and is called the Viscount de Bragelonne.”

The queen, smiling, made a sign with her head; the young princess opened the door and Raoul appeared on the threshold.

Advancing a few steps toward the queen, he knelt down.

“Madame,” said he, “I bear to your majesty a letter from my friend the Count de Guiche, who told me he had the honor of being your servant; this letter contains important news and the expression of his respect.”

At the name of the Count de Guiche a blush spread over the cheeks of the young princess and the queen glanced at her with some degree of severity.

“You told me that the letter was from the Marechal de Grammont, Henrietta!” said the queen.

“I thought so, madame,” stammered the young girl.

“It is my fault, madame,” said Raoul. “I did announce myself, in truth, as coming on the part of the Marechal de Grammont; but being wounded in the right arm he was unable to write and therefore the Count de Guiche acted as his secretary.”

“There has been fighting, then?” asked the queen, motioning to Raoul to rise.

“Yes, madame,” said the young man.

At this announcement of a battle having taken place, the princess opened her mouth as though to ask a question of interest; but her lips closed again without articulating a word, while the color gradually faded from her cheeks.

The queen saw this, and doubtless her maternal heart translated the emotion, for addressing Raoul again:

“And no evil has happened to the young Count de Guiche?” she asked; “for not only is he our servant, as you say, sir, but more--he is one of our friends.”

“No, madame,” replied Raoul; “on the contrary, he gained great glory and had the honor of being embraced by his highness, the prince, on the field of battle.”

The young princess clapped her hands; and then, ashamed of having been betrayed into such a demonstration of joy, she half turned away and bent over a vase of roses, as if to inhale their odor.

“Let us see,” said the queen, “what the count says.” And she opened the letter and read:

“Madame,--Being unable to have the honor of writing to you myself, by reason of a wound I have received in my right hand, I have commanded my son, the Count de Guiche, who, with his father, is equally your humble servant, to write to tell you that we have just gained the battle of Lens, and that this victory cannot fail to give great power to Cardinal Mazarin and to the queen over the affairs of Europe. If her majesty will have faith in my counsels she ought to profit by this event to address at this moment, in favor of her august husband, the court of France. The Vicomte de Bragelonne, who will have the honor of remitting this letter to your majesty, is the friend of my son, who owes to him his life; he is a gentleman in whom your majesty may confide entirely, in case your majesty may have some verbal or written order to remit to me.

“I have the honor to be, with respect, etc.,

“Marechal de Grammont.”

At the moment mention occurred of his having rendered a service to the count, Raoul could not help turning his glance toward the young princess, and then he saw in her eyes an expression of infinite gratitude to the young man; he no longer doubted that the daughter of King Charles I. loved his friend.

“The battle of Lens gained!” said the queen; “they are lucky here indeed; they can gain battles! Yes, the Marechal de Grammont is right; this will change the aspect of French affairs, but I much fear it will do nothing for English, even if it does not harm them. This is recent news, sir,” continued she, “and I thank you for having made such haste to bring it to me; without this letter I should not have heard till to-morrow, perhaps after to-morrow--the last of all Paris.”

“Madame,” said Raoul, “the Louvre is but the second palace this news has reached; it is as yet unknown to all, and I had sworn to the Count de Guiche to remit this letter to your majesty before even I should embrace my guardian.”

“Your guardian! is he, too, a Bragelonne?” asked Lord de Winter. “I once knew a Bragelonne--is he still alive?”

“No, sir, he is dead; and I believe it is from him my guardian, whose near relation he was, inherited the estate from which I take my name.”

“And your guardian, sir,” asked the queen, who could not help feeling some interest in the handsome young man before her, “what is his name?”

“The Comte de la Fere, madame,” replied the young man, bowing.

De Winter made a gesture of surprise and the queen turned to him with a start of joy.

“The Comte de la Fere!” she cried. “Have you not mentioned that name to me?”

As for De Winter he could scarcely believe that he had heard aright. “The Comte de la Fere!” he cried in his turn. “Oh, sir, reply, I entreat you--is not the Comte de la Fere a noble whom I remember, handsome and brave, a musketeer under Louis XIII., who must be now about forty-seven or forty-eight years of age?”

“Yes, sir, you are right in every particular!”

“And who served under an assumed name?”

“Under the name of Athos. Latterly I heard his friend, Monsieur d’Artagnan, give him that name.”

“That is it, madame, that is the same. God be praised! And he is in Paris?” continued he, addressing Raoul; then turning to the queen: “We may still hope. Providence has declared for us, since I have found this brave man again in so miraculous a manner. And, sir, where does he reside, pray?”

“The Comte de la Fere lodges in the Rue Guenegaud, Hotel du Grand Roi Charlemagne.”

“Thanks, sir. Inform this dear friend that he may remain within, that I shall go and see him immediately.”

“Sir, I obey with pleasure, if her majesty will permit me to depart.”

“Go, Monsieur de Bragelonne,” said the queen, “and rest assured of our affection.”

Raoul bent respectfully before the two princesses, and bowing to De Winter, departed.

The queen and De Winter continued to converse for some time in low voices, in order that the young princess should not overhear them; but the precaution was needless: she was in deep converse with her own thoughts.

Then, when De Winter rose to take leave:

“Listen, my lord,” said the queen; “I have preserved this diamond cross which came from my mother, and this order of St. Michael which came from my husband. They are worth about fifty thousand pounds. I had sworn to die of hunger rather than part with these precious pledges; but now that this ornament may be useful to him or his defenders, everything must be sacrificed. Take them, and if you need money for your expedition, sell them fearlessly, my lord. But should you find the means of retaining them, remember, my lord, that I shall esteem you as having rendered the greatest service that a gentleman can render to a queen; and in the day of my prosperity he who brings me this order and this cross shall be blessed by me and my children.”

“Madame,” replied De Winter, “your majesty will be served by a man devoted to you. I hasten to deposit these two objects in a safe place, nor should I accept them if the resources of our ancient fortune were left to us, but our estates are confiscated, our ready money is exhausted, and we are reduced to turn to service everything we possess. In an hour hence I shall be with the Comte de la Fere, and to-morrow your majesty shall have a definite reply.”

The queen tendered her hand to Lord de Winter, who, kissing it respectfully, went out and traversed alone and unconducted those large, dark and deserted apartments, brushing away tears which, blase as he was by fifty years spent as a courtier, he could not withhold at the spectacle of royal distress so dignified, yet so intense.

CHAPTER 40.

Uncle and Nephew.

The horse and servant belonging to De Winter were waiting for him at the door; he proceeded toward his abode very thoughtfully, looking behind him from time to him to contemplate the dark and silent frontage of the Louvre. It was then that he saw a horseman, as it were, detach himself from the wall and follow him at a little distance. In leaving the Palais Royal he remembered to have observed a similar shadow.

"Tony," he said, motioning to his groom to approach.

"Here I am, my lord."

"Did you remark that man who is following us?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Who is he?"

"I do not know, only he has followed your grace from the Palais Royal, stopped at the Louvre to wait for you, and now leaves the Louvre with you."

"Some spy of the cardinal," said De Winter to him, aside. "Let us pretend not to notice that he is watching us."

And spurring on he plunged into the labyrinth of streets which led to his hotel, situated near the Marais, for having for so long a time lived near the Place Royale, Lord de Winter naturally returned to lodge near his ancient dwelling.

The unknown spurred his horse to a gallop.

De Winter dismounted at his hotel and went up into his apartment, intending to watch the spy; but as he was about to place his gloves and hat on a table, he saw reflected in a glass opposite to him a figure which stood on the threshold of the room. He turned around and Mordaunt stood before him.

There was a moment of frozen silence between these two.

"Sir," said De Winter, "I thought I had already made you aware that I am weary of this persecution; withdraw, then, or I shall call and have you turned out as you were in London. I am not your uncle, I know you not."

“My uncle,” replied Mordaunt, with his harsh and bantering tone, “you are mistaken; you will not have me turned out this time as you did in London--you dare not. As for denying that I am your nephew, you will think twice about it, now that I have learned some things of which I was ignorant a year ago.”

“And how does it concern me what you have learned?” said De Winter.

“Oh, it concerns you very closely, my uncle, I am sure, and you will soon be of my opinion,” added he, with a smile which sent a shudder through the veins of him he thus addressed. “When I presented myself before you for the first time in London, it was to ask you what had become of my fortune; the second time it was to demand who had sullied my name; and this time I come before you to ask a question far more terrible than any other, to say to you as God said to the first murderer: ‘Cain, what hast thou done to thy brother Abel?’ My lord, what have you done with your sister--your sister, who was my mother?”

De Winter shrank back from the fire of those scorching eyes.

“Your mother?” he said.

“Yes, my lord, my mother,” replied the young man, advancing into the room until he was face to face with Lord de Winter, and crossing his arms. “I have asked the headsman of Bethune,” he said, his voice hoarse and his face livid with passion and grief. “And the headsman of Bethune gave me a reply.”

De Winter fell back in a chair as though struck by a thunderbolt and in vain attempted a reply.

“Yes,” continued the young man; “all is now explained; with this key I open the abyss. My mother inherited an estate from her husband, you have assassinated her; my name would have secured me the paternal estate, you have deprived me of it; you have despoiled me of my fortune. I am no longer astonished that you knew me not. I am not surprised that you refused to recognize me. When a man is a robber it is hard to call him nephew whom he has impoverished; when one is a murderer, to recognize the man whom one has made an orphan.”

These words produced a contrary effect to that which Mordaunt had anticipated. De Winter remembered the monster that Milady had been; he rose, dignified and calm, restraining by the severity of his look the wild glance of the young man.

“You desire to fathom this horrible secret?” said De Winter; “well, then, so be it. Know, then, what manner of woman it was for whom to-day you call me to account. That woman had, in all probability, poisoned my brother, and in order to inherit from me she was about to assassinate me in my turn. I have proof of it. What say you to that?”

“I say that she was my mother.”

“She caused the unfortunate Duke of Buckingham to be stabbed by a man who was, ere that, honest, good and pure. What say you to that crime, of which I have the proof?”

“She was my mother.”

“On our return to France she had a young woman who was attached to one of her opponents poisoned in the convent of the Augustines at Bethune. Will this crime persuade you of the justice of her punishment--for of all this I have the proofs?”

“She was my mother!” cried the young man, who uttered these three successive exclamations with constantly increasing force.

“At last, charged with murders, with debauchery, hated by every one and yet threatening still, like a panther thirsting for blood, she fell under the blows of men whom she had rendered desperate, though they had never done her the least injury; she met with judges whom her hideous crimes had evoked; and that executioner you saw--that executioner who you say told you everything--that executioner, if he told you everything, told you that he leaped with joy in avenging on her his brother’s shame and suicide. Depraved as a girl, adulterous as a wife, an unnatural sister, homicide, poisoner, execrated by all who knew her, by every nation that had been visited by her, she died accursed by Heaven and earth.”

A sob which Mordaunt could not repress burst from his throat and his livid face became suffused with blood; he clenched his fists, sweat covered his face, his hair, like Hamlet’s, stood on end, and racked with fury he cried out:

“Silence, sir! she was my mother! Her crimes, I know them not; her disorders, I know them not; her vices, I know them not. But this I know, that I had a mother, that five men leagued against one woman, murdered her clandestinely by night--silently--like cowards. I know that you were one of them, my uncle, and that you cried louder than the others: ‘She must die.’ Therefore I warn you, and listen well to my words, that they may be engraved upon your memory, never to be forgotten: this murder, which has robbed me of everything--this murder, which has deprived me of my name--this murder, which has impoverished me--this murder, which has made me corrupt, wicked, implacable--I shall summon you to account for it first and then those who were your accomplices, when I discover them!”

With hatred in his eyes, foaming at his mouth, and his fist extended, Mordaunt had advanced one more step, a threatening, terrible step, toward De Winter. The latter put his hand to his sword, and said, with the smile of a man who for thirty years has jested with death:

“Would you assassinate me, sir? Then I shall recognize you as my nephew, for you would be a worthy son of such a mother.”

“No,” replied Mordaunt, forcing his features and the muscles of his body to resume their usual places and be calm; “no, I shall not kill you; at least not at this moment, for without you I could not discover the others. But when I have found them, then tremble, sir. I stabbed to the heart the headsman of Bethune, without mercy or pity, and he was the least guilty of you all.”

With these words the young man went out and descended the stairs with sufficient calmness to pass unobserved; then upon the lowest landing place he passed Tony, leaning over the balustrade, waiting only for a call from his master to mount to his room.

But De Winter did not call; crushed, enfeebled, he remained standing and with listening ear; then only when he had heard the step of the horse going away he fell back on a chair, saying:

“My God, I thank Thee that he knows me only.”

CHAPTER 41.

Paternal Affection.

Whilst this terrible scene was passing at Lord de Winter’s, Athos, seated near his window, his elbow on the table and his head supported on his hand, was listening intently to Raoul’s account of the adventures he met with on his journey and the details of the battle.

Listening to the relation of those emotions so fresh and pure, the fine, noble face of Athos betrayed indescribable pleasure; he inhaled the tones of that young voice, as harmonious music. He forgot all that was dark in the past and that was cloudy in the future. It almost seemed as if the return of this much loved boy had changed his fears to hopes. Athos was happy--happy as he had never been before.

“And you assisted and took part in this great battle, Bragelonne!” cried the former musketeer.

“Yes, sir.”

“And it was a fierce one?”

“His highness the prince charged eleven times in person.”

“He is a great commander, Bragelonne.”

“He is a hero, sir. I did not lose sight of him for an instant. Oh! how fine it is to be called Conde and to be so worthy of such a name!”

“He was calm and radiant, was he not?”

“As calm as at parade, radiant as at a fete. When we went up to the enemy it was slowly; we were forbidden to draw first and we were marching toward the Spaniards, who were on a height with lowered muskets. When we arrived about thirty paces from them the prince turned around to the soldiers: ‘Comrades,’ he said, ‘you are about to suffer a furious discharge; but after that you will make short work with those fellows.’ There was such dead silence that friends and enemies could have heard these words; then raising his sword, ‘Sound trumpets!’ he cried.”

“Well, very good; you will do as much when the opportunity occurs, will you, Raoul?”

“I know not, sir, but I thought it really very fine and grand!”

“Were you afraid, Raoul?” asked the count.

“Yes, sir,” replied the young man naively; “I felt a great chill at my heart, and at the word ‘fire,’ which resounded in Spanish from the enemy’s ranks, I closed my eyes and thought of you.”

“In honest truth, Raoul?” said Athos, pressing his hand.

“Yes, sir; at that instant there was such a rataplan of musketry that one might have imagined the infernal regions had opened. Those who were not killed felt the heat of the flames. I opened my eyes, astonished to find myself alive and even unhurt; a third of the squadron were lying on the ground, wounded, dead or dying. At that moment I encountered the eye of the prince. I had but one thought and that was that he was observing me. I spurred on and found myself in the enemy’s ranks.”

“And the prince was pleased with you?”

“He told me so, at least, sir, when he desired me to return to Paris with Monsieur de Chatillon, who was charged to carry the news to the queen and to bring the colors we had taken. ‘Go,’ said he; ‘the enemy will not rally for fifteen days and until that time I have no need of your service. Go and see those whom you love and who love you, and tell my sister De Longueville that I thank her for the present that she made me of you.’ And I came, sir,” added Raoul, gazing at the count with a smile of real affection, “for I thought you would be glad to see me again.”

Athos drew the young man toward him and pressed his lips to his brow, as he would have done to a young daughter.

“And now, Raoul,” said he, “you are launched; you have dukes for friends, a marshal of France for godfather, a prince of the blood as commander, and on the day of your return you have been received by two queens; it is not so bad for a novice.”

“Oh sir,” said Raoul, suddenly, “you recall something, which, in my haste to relate my exploits, I had forgotten; it is that there was with Her Majesty the Queen of England, a gentleman who, when I pronounced your name, uttered a cry of surprise and joy; he said he was a friend of yours, asked your address, and is coming to see you.”

“What is his name?”

“I did not venture to ask, sir; he spoke elegantly, although I thought from his accent he was an Englishman.”

“Ah!” said Athos, leaning down his head as if to remember who it could be. Then, when he raised it again, he was struck by the presence of a man who was standing at the open door and was gazing at him with a compassionate air.

“Lord de Winter!” exclaimed the count.

“Athos, my friend!”

And the two gentlemen were for an instant locked in each other’s arms; then Athos, looking into his friend’s face and taking him by both hands, said:

“What ails you, my lord? you appear as unhappy as I am the reverse.”

“Yes, truly, dear friend; and I may even say the sight of you increases my dismay.”

And De Winter glancing around him, Raoul quickly understood that the two friends wished to be alone and he therefore left the room unaffectedly.

“Come, now that we are alone,” said Athos, “let us talk of yourself.”

“Whilst we are alone let us speak of ourselves,” replied De Winter. “He is here.”

“Who?”

“Milady’s son.”

Athos, again struck by this name, which seemed to pursue him like an echo, hesitated for a moment, then slightly knitting his brows, he calmly said:

“I know it, Grimaud met him between Bethune and Arras and then came here to warn me of his presence.”

“Does Grimaud know him, then?”

“No; but he was present at the deathbed of a man who knew him.”

“The headsman of Bethune?” exclaimed De Winter.

“You know about that?” cried Athos, astonished.

“He has just left me,” replied De Winter, “after telling me all. Ah! my friend! what a horrible scene! Why did we not destroy the child with the mother?”

“What need you fear?” said Athos, recovering from the instinctive fear he had at first experienced, by the aid of reason; “are we not men accustomed to defend ourselves? Is this young man an assassin by profession--a murderer in cold blood? He has killed the executioner of Bethune in an access of passion, but now his fury is assuaged.”

De Winter smiled sorrowfully and shook his head.

“Do you not know the race?” said he.

“Pooh!” said Athos, trying to smile in his turn. “It must have lost its ferocity in the second generation. Besides, my friend, Providence has warned us, that we may be on our guard. All we can now do is to wait. Let us wait; and, as I said before, let us speak of yourself. What brings you to Paris?”

“Affairs of importance which you shall know later. But what is this that I hear from Her Majesty the Queen of England? Monsieur d’Artagnan sides with Mazarin! Pardon my frankness, dear friend. I neither hate nor blame the cardinal, and your opinions will be held ever sacred by me. But do you happen to belong to him?”

“Monsieur d’Artagnan,” replied Athos, “is in the service; he is a soldier and obeys all constitutional authority. Monsieur d’Artagnan is not rich and has need of his position as lieutenant to enable him to live. Millionaires like yourself, my lord, are rare in France.”

“Alas!” said De Winter, “I am at this moment as poor as he is, if not poorer. But to return to our subject.”

“Well, then, you wish to know if I am of Mazarin’s party? No. Pardon my frankness, too, my lord.”

“I am obliged to you, count, for this pleasing intelligence! You make me young and happy again by it. Ah! so you are not a Mazarinist? Delightful! Indeed, you could not belong to him. But pardon me, are you free? I mean to ask if you are married?”

“Ah! as to that, no,” replied Athos, laughing.

“Because that young man, so handsome, so elegant, so polished----”

“Is a child I have adopted and who does not even know who was his father.”

“Very well; you are always the same, Athos, great and generous. Are you still friends with Monsieur Porthos and Monsieur Aramis?”

“Add Monsieur d’Artagnan, my lord. We still remain four friends devoted to each other; but when it becomes a question of serving the cardinal or of fighting him, of being Mazarinists or Frondists, then we are only two.”

“Is Monsieur Aramis with D’Artagnan?” asked Lord de Winter.

“No,” said Athos; “Monsieur Aramis does me the honor to share my opinions.”

“Could you put me in communication with your witty and agreeable friend? Is he much changed?”

“He has become an abbe, that is all.”

“You alarm me; his profession must have made him renounce any great undertakings.”

“On the contrary,” said Athos, smiling, “he has never been so much a musketeer as since he became an abbe, and you will find him a veritable soldier.”

“Could you engage to bring him to me to-morrow morning at ten o’clock, on the Pont du Louvre?”

“Oh, oh!” exclaimed Athos, smiling, “you have a duel in prospect.”

“Yes, count, and a splendid duel, too; a duel in which I hope you will take your part.”

“Where are we to go, my lord?”

“To Her Majesty the Queen of England, who has desired me to present you to her.”

“This is an enigma,” said Athos, “but it matters not; since you know the solution of it I ask no further. Will your lordship do me the honor to sup with me?”

“Thanks, count, no,” replied De Winter. “I own to you that that young man’s visit has subdued my appetite and probably will rob me of my sleep. What undertaking can have brought him to Paris? It was not to meet me that he came, for he was ignorant of my journey. This young man terrifies me, my lord; there lies in him a sanguinary predisposition.”

“What occupies him in England?”

“He is one of Cromwell’s most enthusiastic disciples.”

“But what attached him to the cause? His father and mother were Catholics, I believe?”

“His hatred of the king, who deprived him of his estates and forbade him to bear the name of De Winter.”

“And what name does he now bear?”

“Mordaunt.”

“A Puritan, yet disguised as a monk he travels alone in France.”

“Do you say as a monk?”

“It was thus, and by mere accident--may God pardon me if I blaspheme--that he heard the confession of the executioner of Bethune.”

“Then I understand it all! he has been sent by Cromwell to Mazarin, and the queen guessed rightly; we have been forestalled. Everything is clear to me now. Adieu, count, till to-morrow.”

"But the night is dark," said Athos, perceiving that Lord de Winter seemed more uneasy than he wished to appear; "and you have no servant."

"I have Tony, a safe if simple youth."

"Halloo, there, Grimaud, Olivain, and Blaisois! call the viscount and take the musket with you."

Blaisois was the tall youth, half groom, half peasant, whom we saw at the Chateau de Bragelonne, whom Athos had christened by the name of his province.

"Viscount," said Athos to Raoul, as he entered, "you will conduct my lord as far as his hotel and permit no one to approach him."

"Oh! count," said De Winter, "for whom do you take me?"

"For a stranger who does not know Paris," said Athos, "and to whom the viscount will show the way."

De Winter shook him by the hand.

"Grimaud," said Athos, "put yourself at the head of the troop and beware of the monk."

Grimaud shuddered, and nodding, awaited the departure, regarding the butt of his musket with silent eloquence. Then obeying the orders given him by Athos, he headed the small procession, bearing the torch in one hand and the musket in the other, until it reached De Winter's inn, when pounding on the portal with his fist, he bowed to my lord and faced about without a word.

The same order was followed in returning, nor did Grimaud's searching glance discover anything of a suspicious appearance, save a dark shadow, as it were, in ambuscade, at the corner of the Rue Guenegaud and of the Quai. He fancied, also, that in going he had already observed the street watcher who had attracted his attention. He pushed on toward him, but before he could reach it the shadow had disappeared into an alley, into which Grimaud deemed it scarcely prudent to pursue it.

The next day, on awaking, the count perceived Raoul by his bedside. The young man was already dressed and was reading a new book by M. Chapelain.

"Already up, Raoul?" exclaimed the count.

"Yes, sir," replied Raoul, with slight hesitation; "I did not sleep well."

"You, Raoul, not sleep well! then you must have something on your mind!" said Athos.

"Sir, you will perhaps think that I am in a great hurry to leave you when I have only just arrived, but----"

"Have you only two days of leave, Raoul?"

"On the contrary, sir, I have ten; nor is it to the camp I wish to go."

"Where, then?" said Athos, smiling, "if it be not a secret. You are now almost a man, since you have made your first passage of arms, and have acquired the right to go where you will without consulting me."

"Never, sir," said Raoul, "as long as I possess the happiness of having you for a protector, shall I deem I have the right of freeing myself from a guardianship so valuable to me. I have, however, a wish to go and pass a day at Blois. You look at me and you are going to laugh at me."

"No, on the contrary, I am not inclined to laugh," said Athos, suppressing a sigh. "You wish to see Blois again; it is but natural."

"Then you permit me to go, you are not angry in your heart?" exclaimed Raoul, joyously.

"Certainly; and why should I regret what gives you pleasure?"

"Oh! how kind you are," exclaimed the young man, pressing his guardian's hand; "and I can set out immediately?"

"When you like, Raoul."

"Sir," said Raoul, as he turned to leave the room, "I have thought of one thing, and that is about the Duchess of Chevreuse, who was so kind to me and to whom I owe my introduction to the prince."

"And you ought to thank her, Raoul. Well, try the Hotel de Luynes, Raoul, and ask if the duchess can receive you. I am glad to see you pay attention to the usages of the world. You must take Grimaud and Olivain."

"Both, sir?" asked Raoul, astonished.

"Both."

Raoul went out, and when Athos heard his young, joyous voice calling to Grimaud and Olivain, he sighed.

"It is very soon to leave me," he thought, "but he follows the common custom. Nature has made us thus; she makes the young look ever forward, not behind. He certainly likes the child, but will he love me less as his affection grows for her?"

And Athos confessed to himself that, he was unprepared for so prompt a departure; but Raoul was so happy that this reflection effaced everything else from the consideration of his guardian.

Everything was ready at ten o’clock for the departure, and as Athos was watching Raoul mount, a groom rode up from the Duchess de Chevreuse. He was charged to tell the Comte de la Fere, that she had learned of the return of her youthful protege, and also the manner he had conducted himself on the field, and she added that she should be very glad to offer him her congratulations.

“Tell her grace,” replied Athos, “that the viscount has just mounted his horse to proceed to the Hotel de Luynes.”

Then, with renewed instructions to Grimaud, Athos signified to Raoul that he could set out, and ended by reflecting that it was perhaps better that Raoul should be away from Paris at that moment.

CHAPTER 42.

Another Queen in Want of Help.

Athos had not failed to send early to Aramis and had given his letter to Blaisois, the only serving-man whom he had left. Blaisois found Bazin donning his beadle’s gown, his services being required that day at Notre Dame.

Athos had desired Blaisois to try to speak to Aramis himself. Blaisois, a tall, simple youth, who understood nothing but what he was expressly told, asked, therefore for the Abbe d’Herblay, and in spite of Bazin’s assurances that his master was not at home, he persisted in such a manner as to put Bazin into a passion. Blaisois seeing Bazin in clerical guise, was a little discomposed at his denials and wanted to pass at all risks, believing too, that the man with whom he had to do was endowed with the virtues of his cloth, namely, patience and Christian charity.

But Bazin, still the servant of a musketeer, when once the blood mounted to his fat cheeks, seized a broomstick and began belaboring Blaisois, saying:

“You have insulted the church, my friend, you have insulted the church!”

At this moment Aramis, aroused by this unusual disturbance, cautiously opened the door of his room; and Blaisois, looking reproachfully at the Cerberus, drew the letter from his pocket and presented it to Aramis.

“From the Comte de la Fere,” said Aramis. “All right.” And he retired into his room without even asking the cause of so much noise.

Blaisois returned disconsolate to the Hotel of the Grand Roi Charlemagne and when Athos inquired if his commission was executed, he related his adventure.

“You foolish fellow!” said Athos, laughing. “And you did not tell him that you came from me?”

“No, sir.”

At ten o’clock Athos, with his habitual exactitude, was waiting on the Pont du Louvre and was almost immediately joined by Lord de Winter.

They waited ten minutes and then his lordship began to fear Aramis was not coming to join them.

“Patience,” said Athos, whose eyes were fixed in the direction of the Rue du Bac, “patience; I see an abbe cuffing a man, then bowing to a woman; it must be Aramis.”

It was indeed Aramis. Having run against a young shopkeeper who was gaping at the crows and who had splashed him, Aramis with one blow of his fist had distanced him ten paces.

At this moment one of his penitents passed, and as she was young and pretty Aramis took off his cap to her with his most gracious smile.

A most affectionate greeting, as one can well believe took place between him and Lord de Winter.

“Where are we going?” inquired Aramis; “are we going to fight, perchance? I carry no sword this morning and cannot return home to procure one.”

“No,” said Lord de Winter, “we are going to pay a visit to Her Majesty the Queen of England.”

“Oh, very well,” replied Aramis; then bending his face down to Athos’s ear, “what is the object of this visit?” continued he.

“Nay, I know not; some evidence required from us, perhaps.”

“May it not be about that cursed affair?” asked Aramis, “in which case I do not greatly care to go, for it will be to pocket a lecture; and since it is my function to give them to others I am rather averse to receiving them myself.”

“If it were so,” answered Athos, “we should not be taken there by Lord de Winter, for he would come in for his share; he was one of us.”

“You’re right; yes, let us go.”

On arriving at the Louvre Lord de Winter entered first; indeed, there was but one porter there to receive them at the gate.

It was impossible in daylight for the impoverished state of the habitation grudging charity had conceded to an unfortunate queen to pass unnoticed by Athos, Aramis, and even the Englishman. Large rooms, completely stripped of furniture, bare walls upon which, here and there, shone the old gold moldings which had resisted time and neglect, windows with broken panes (impossible to close), no carpets, neither guards nor servants: this is what first met the eyes of Athos, to which he, touching his companion’s elbow, directed his attention by his glances.

“Mazarin is better lodged,” said Aramis.

“Mazarin is almost king,” answered Athos; “Madame Henrietta is almost no longer queen.”

“If you would condescend to be clever, Athos,” observed Aramis, “I really do think you would be wittier than poor Monsieur de Voiture.”

Athos smiled.

The queen appeared to be impatiently expecting them, for at the first slight noise she heard in the hall leading to her room she came herself to the door to receive these courtiers in the corridors of Misfortune.

“Enter. You are welcome, gentlemen,” she said.

The gentlemen entered and remained standing, but at a motion from the queen they seated themselves. Athos was calm and grave, but Aramis was furious; the sight of such royal misery exasperated him and his eyes examined every new trace of poverty that presented itself.

“You are examining the luxury I enjoy,” said the queen, glancing sadly around her.

“Madame,” replied Aramis, “I must ask your pardon, but I know not how to hide my indignation at seeing how a daughter of Henry IV. is treated at the court of France.”

“Monsieur Aramis is not an officer?” asked the queen of Lord de Winter.

“That gentleman is the Abbe d’Herblay,” replied he.

Aramis blushed. “Madame,” he said, “I am an abbe, it is true, but I am so against my will. I never had a vocation for the bands; my cassock is fastened by one button only, and I am always ready to become a musketeer once more. This morning, being ignorant that I should have the honor of seeing your majesty, I encumbered myself with this dress, but you will find me none the less a man devoted to your majesty’s service, in whatever way you may see fit to use me.”

“The Abbe d’Herblay,” resumed De Winter, “is one of those gallant musketeers formerly belonging to His Majesty King Louis XIII., of whom I have spoken to you, madame.” Then turning to Athos, he continued, “And this gentleman is that noble Comte de la Fere, whose high reputation is so well known to your majesty.”

“Gentlemen,” said the queen, “a few years ago I had around me ushers, treasures, armies; and by the lifting of a finger all these were busied in my service. To-day, look around you, and it may astonish you, that in order to accomplish a plan which is dearer to me than life I have only Lord de

Winter, the friend of twenty years, and you, gentlemen, whom I see for the first time and whom I know but as my countrymen.”

“It is enough,” said Athos, bowing low, “if the lives of three men can purchase yours, madame.”

“I thank you, gentlemen. But hear me,” continued she. “I am not only the most miserable of queens, but the most unhappy of mothers, the most wretched of wives. My children, two of them, at least, the Duke of York and the Princess Elizabeth, are far away from me, exposed to the blows of the ambitious and our foes; my husband, the king, is leading in England so wretched an existence that it is no exaggeration to aver that he seeks death as a thing to be desired. Hold! gentlemen, here is the letter conveyed to me by Lord de Winter. Read it.”

Obeying the queen, Athos read aloud the letter which we have already seen, in which King Charles demanded to know whether the hospitality of France would be accorded him.

“Well?” asked Athos, when he had closed the letter.

“Well,” said the queen, “it has been refused.”

The two friends exchanged a smile of contempt.

“And now,” said Athos, “what is to be done? I have the honor to inquire from your majesty what you desire Monsieur d’Herblay and myself to do in your service. We are ready.”

“Ah, sir, you have a noble heart!” exclaimed the queen, with a burst of gratitude; whilst Lord de Winter turned to her with a glance which said, “Did I not answer for them?”

“But you, sir?” said the queen to Aramis.

“I, madame,” replied he, “follow Monsieur de la Fere wherever he leads, even were it on to death, without demanding wherefore; but when it concerns your majesty’s service, then,” added he, looking at the queen with all the grace of former days, “I precede the count.”

“Well, then, gentlemen,” said the queen, “since it is thus, and since you are willing to devote yourselves to the service of a poor princess whom the whole world has abandoned, this is what is required to be done for me. The king is alone with a few gentlemen, whom he fears to lose every day; surrounded by the Scotch, whom he distrusts, although he be himself a Scotchman. Since Lord de Winter left him I am distracted, sirs. I ask much, too much, perhaps, for I have no title to request it. Go to England, join the king, be his friends, protectors, march to battle at his side, and be near him in his house, where conspiracies, more dangerous than the perils of war, are hatching every day. And in exchange for the sacrifice that you make, gentlemen, I promise--not to reward you, I believe that word would offend you--but to love you as a sister, to prefer you, next to my husband and my children, to every one. I swear it before Heaven."

And the queen raised her eyes solemnly upward.

"Madame," said Athos, "when must we set out?"

"You consent then?" exclaimed the queen, joyfully.

"Yes, madame; only it seems to me that your majesty goes too far in engaging to load us with a friendship so far above our merit. We render service to God, madame, in serving a prince so unfortunate, a queen so virtuous. Madame, we are yours, body and soul."

"Oh, sirs," said the queen, moved even to tears, "this is the first time for five years I have felt the least approach to joy or hope. God, who can read my heart, all the gratitude I feel, will reward you! Save my husband! Save the king, and although you care not for the price that is placed upon a good action in this world, leave me the hope that we shall meet again, when I may be able to thank you myself. In the meantime, I remain here. Have you anything to ask of me? From this moment I become your friend, and since you are engaged in my affairs I ought to occupy myself in yours."

"Madame," replied Athos, "I have only to ask your majesty's prayers."

"And I," said Aramis, "I am alone in the world and have only your majesty to serve."

The queen held out her hand, which they kissed, and she said in a low tone to De Winter:

"If you need money, my lord, separate the jewels I have given you; detach the diamonds and sell them to some Jew. You will receive for them fifty or sixty thousand francs; spend them if necessary, but let these gentlemen be treated as they deserve, that is to say, like kings."

The queen had two letters ready, one written by herself, the other by her daughter, the Princess Henrietta. Both were addressed to King Charles. She gave the first to Athos and the other to Aramis, so that should they be separated by chance they might make themselves known to the king; after which they withdrew.

At the foot of the staircase De Winter stopped.

"Not to arouse suspicions, gentlemen," said he, "go your way and I will go mine, and this evening at nine o'clock we will assemble again at the

Gate Saint Denis. We will travel on horseback as far as our horses can go and afterward we can take the post. Once more, let me thank you, my good friends, both in my own name and the queen's."

The three gentlemen then shook hands, Lord de Winter taking the Rue Saint Honore, and Athos and Aramis remaining together.

"Well," said Aramis, when they were alone, "what do you think of this business, my dear count?"

"Bad," replied Athos, "very bad."

"But you received it with enthusiasm."

"As I shall ever receive the defense of a great principle, my dear D'Herblay. Monarchs are only strong by the assistance of the aristocracy, but aristocracy cannot survive without the countenance of monarchs. Let us, then, support monarchy, in order to support ourselves.

"We shall be murdered there," said Aramis. "I hate the English--they are coarse, like every nation that swills beer."

"Would it be better to remain here," said Athos, "and take a turn in the Bastile or the dungeon of Vincennes for having favored the escape of Monsieur de Beaufort? I'faith, Aramis, believe me, there is little left to regret. We avoid imprisonment and we play the part of heroes; the choice is easy."

"It is true; but in everything, friend, one must always return to the same question--a stupid one, I admit, but very necessary--have you any money?"

"Something like a hundred pistoles, that my farmer sent to me the day before I left Bragelonne; but out of that sum I ought to leave fifty for Raoul--a young man must live respectably. I have then about fifty pistoles. And you?"

"As for me, I am quite sure that after turning out all my pockets and emptying my drawers I shall not find ten louis at home. Fortunately Lord de Winter is rich."

"Lord de Winter is ruined for the moment; Oliver Cromwell has annexed his income resources."

"Now is the time when Baron Porthos would be useful."

"Now it is that I regret D'Artagnan."

"Let us entice them away."

"This secret, Aramis, does not belong to us; take my advice, then, and let no one into our confidence. And moreover, in taking such a step we should appear to be doubtful of ourselves. Let us regret their absence to ourselves for our own sakes, but not speak of it.”

“You are right; but what are you going to do until this evening? I have two things to postpone.”

“And what are they?”

“First, a thrust with the coadjutor, whom I met last night at Madame de Rambouillet’s and whom I found particular in his remarks respecting me.”

“Oh, fie--a quarrel between priests, a duel between allies!”

“What can I do, friend? he is a bully and so am I; his cassock is a burden to him and I imagine I have had enough of mine; in fact, there is so much resemblance between us that I sometimes believe he is Aramis and I am the coadjutor. This kind of life fatigues and oppresses me; besides, he is a turbulent fellow, who will ruin our party. I am convinced that if I gave him a box on the ear, such as I gave this morning to the little citizen who splashed me, it would change the appearance of things.”

“And I, my dear Aramis,” quietly replied Athos, “I think it would only change Monsieur de Retz’s appearance. Take my advice, leave things just as they are; besides, you are neither of you now your own masters; he belongs to the Fronde and you to the queen of England. So, if the second matter which you regret being unable to attend to is not more important than the first----”

“Oh! that is of the first importance.”

“Attend to it, then, at once.”

“Unfortunately, it is a thing that I can’t perform at any time I choose. It was arranged for the evening and no other time will serve.”

“I understand,” said Athos smiling, “midnight.”

“About that time.”

“But, my dear fellow, those are things that bear postponement and you must put it off, especially with so good an excuse to give on your return----”

“Yes, if I return.”

“If you do not return, how does it concern you? Be reasonable. Come, you are no longer twenty years old.”

“To my great regret, mordieu! Ah, if I were but twenty years old!”

“Yes,” said Athos, “doubtless you would commit great follies! But now we must part. I have one or two visits to make and a letter yet to write. Call for me at eight o’clock or shall I wait supper for you at seven?”

"That will do very well," said Aramis. "I have twenty visits to make and as many letters to write."

They then separated. Athos went to pay a visit to Madame de Vendome, left his name at Madame de Chevreuse's and wrote the following letter to D'Artagnan:

"Dear Friend,--I am about to set off with Aramis on important business. I wished to make my adieux to you, but time does not permit. Remember that I write to you now to repeat how much affection for you I still cherish.

"Raoul is gone to Blois and is ignorant of my departure; watch over him in my absence as much as you possibly can; and if by chance you receive no news of me three months hence, tell him to open a packet which he will find addressed to him in my bronze casket at Blois, of which I send you now the key.

"Embrace Porthos from Aramis and myself. Adieu, perhaps farewell."

At the hour agreed upon Aramis arrived; he was dressed as an officer and had the old sword at his side which he had drawn so often and which he was more than ever ready to draw.

"By-the-bye," he said, "I think that we are decidedly wrong to depart thus, without leaving a line for Porthos and D'Artagnan."

"The thing is done, dear friend," said Athos; "I foresaw that and have embraced them both from you and myself."

"You are a wonderful man, my dear count," said Aramis; "you think of everything."

"Well, have you made up your mind to this journey?"

"Quite; and now that I reflect about it, I am glad to leave Paris at this moment."

"And so am I," replied Athos; "my only regret is not having seen D'Artagnan; but the rascal is so cunning, he might have guessed our project."

When supper was over Blaisois entered. "Sir," said he, "here is Monsieur d'Artagnan's answer."

"But I did not tell you there would be an answer, stupid!" said Athos.

"And I set off without waiting for one, but he called me back and gave me this;" and he presented a little leather bag, plump and giving out a golden jingle.

Athos opened it and began by drawing forth a little note, written in these terms:

"My dear Count,--When one travels, and especially for three months, one never has a superfluity of money. Now, recalling former times of mutual distress, I send you half my purse; it is money to obtain which I made Mazarin sweat. Don't make a bad use of it, I entreat you.

"As to what you say about not seeing you again, I believe not a word of it; with such a heart as yours--and such a sword--one passes through the valley of the shadow of death a dozen times, unscathed and unalarmed. Au revoir, not farewell.

"It is unnecessary to say that from the day I saw Raoul I loved him; nevertheless, believe that I heartily pray that I may not become to him a father, however much I might be proud of such a son.

"Your

"D'Artagnan.

"P.S.--Be it well understood that the fifty louis which I send are equally for Aramis as for you--for you as Aramis."

Athos smiled, and his fine eye was dimmed by a tear. D'Artagnan, who had loved him so tenderly, loved him still, although a Mazarinist.

"There are the fifty louis, i'faith," said Aramis, emptying the purse on the table, all bearing the effigy of Louis XIII. "Well, what shall you do with this money, count? Shall you keep it or send it back?"

"I shall keep it, Aramis, and even though I had no need of it I still should keep it. What is offered from a generous heart should be accepted generously. Take twenty-five of them, Aramis, and give me the remaining twenty-five."

"All right; I am glad to see you are of my opinion. There now, shall we start?"

"When you like; but have you no groom?"

"No; that idiot Bazin had the folly to make himself verger, as you know, and therefore cannot leave Notre Dame.

"Very well, take Blaisois, with whom I know not what to do, since I already have Grimaud."

"Willingly," said Aramis.

At this moment Grimaud appeared at the door. "Ready," said he, with his usual curtness.

"Let us go, then," said Athos.

The two friends mounted, as did their servants. At the corner of the Quai they encountered Bazin, who was running breathlessly.

“Oh, sir!” exclaimed he, “thank Heaven I have arrived in time. Monsieur Porthos has just been to your house and has left this for you, saying that the letter was important and must be given to you before you left.”

“Good,” said Aramis, taking a purse which Bazin presented to him. “What is this?”

“Wait, your reverence, there is a letter.”

“You know I have already told you that if you ever call me anything but chevalier I will break every bone in your body. Give me the letter.”

“How can you read?” asked Athos, “it is as dark as a cold oven.”

“Wait,” said Bazin, striking a flint, and setting afire a twisted wax-light, with which he started the church candles. Thus illumined, Aramis read the following epistle:

“My dear D’Herblay,--I learned from D’Artagnan who has embraced me on the part of the Comte de la Fere and yourself, that you are setting out on a journey which may perhaps last two or three months; as I know that you do not like to ask money of your friends I offer you some of my own accord. Here are two hundred pistoles, which you can dispose of as you wish and return to me when opportunity occurs. Do not fear that you put me to inconvenience; if I want money I can send for some to any of my chateaux; at Bracieux alone, I have twenty thousand francs in gold. So, if I do not send you more it is because I fear you would not accept a larger sum.

“I address you, because you know, that although I esteem him from my heart I am a little awed by the Comte de la Fere; but it is understood that what I offer you I offer him at the same time.

“I am, as I trust you do not doubt, your devoted

“Du Vallon de Bracieux de Pierrefonds.”

“Well,” said Aramis, “what do you say to that?”

“I say, my dear D’Herblay, that it is almost sacrilege to distrust Providence when one has such friends, and therefore we will divide the pistoles from Porthos, as we divided the louis sent by D’Artagnan.”

The division being made by the light of Bazin’s taper, the two friends continued their road and a quarter of an hour later they had joined De Winter at the Porte Saint Denis.

CHAPTER 43.

In which it is proved that first Impulses are oftentimes the best.

The three gentlemen took the road to Picardy, a road so well known to them and which recalled to Athos and Aramis some of the most picturesque adventures of their youth.

“If Mousqueton were with us,” observed Athos, on reaching the spot where they had had a dispute with the paviers, “how he would tremble at passing this! Do you remember, Aramis, that it was here he received that famous bullet wound?”

“By my faith, ‘twould be excusable in him to tremble,” replied Aramis, “for even I feel a shudder at the recollection; hold, just above that tree is the little spot where I thought I was killed.”

It was soon time for Grimaud to recall the past. Arriving before the inn at which his master and himself had made such an enormous repast, he approached Athos and said, showing him the airhole of the cellar:

“Sausages!”

Athos began to laugh, for this juvenile escapade of his appeared to be as amusing as if some one had related it of another person.

At last, after traveling two days and a night, they arrived at Boulogne toward the evening, favored by magnificent weather. Boulogne was a strong position, then almost a deserted town, built entirely on the heights; what is now called the lower town did not then exist.

“Gentlemen,” said De Winter, on reaching the gate of the town, “let us do here as at Paris--let us separate to avoid suspicion. I know an inn, little frequented, but of which the host is entirely devoted to me. I will go there, where I expect to find letters, and you go to the first tavern in the town, to L’Epee du Grand Henri for instance, refresh yourselves, and in two hours be upon the jetty; our boat is waiting for us there.”

The matter being thus decided, the two friends found, about two hundred paces further, the tavern indicated. Their horses were fed, but not unsaddled; the grooms supped, for it was already late, and their two masters, impatient to return, appointed a place of meeting with them on the jetty and desired them on no account to exchange a word with any one. It is needless to say that this caution concerned Blaisois alone--long enough since it had been a useless one to Grimaud.

Athos and Aramis walked down toward the port. From their dress, covered with dust, and from a certain easy manner by means of which a man accustomed to travel is always recognizable, the two friends excited the attention of a few promenaders. There was more especially one upon whom their arrival had produced a decided impression. This man, whom they had noticed from the first for the same reason they had themselves been remarked by others, was walking in a listless way up and down the jetty. From the moment he perceived them he did not cease to look at them and seemed to burn with the wish to speak to them.

On reaching the jetty Athos and Aramis stopped to look at a little boat made fast to a pile and ready rigged as if waiting to start.

“That is doubtless our boat,” said Athos.

“Yes,” replied Aramis, “and the sloop out there making ready to sail must be that which is to take us to our destination; now,” continued he, “if only De Winter does not keep us waiting. It is not at all amusing here; there is not a single woman passing.”

“Hush!” said Athos, “we are overheard.”

In truth, the walker, who, during the observations of the two friends, had passed and repassed behind them several times, stopped at the name of De Winter; but as his face betrayed no emotion at mention of this name, it might have been by chance he stood so still.

“Gentlemen,” said the man, who was young and pale, bowing with ease and courtesy, “pardon my curiosity, but I see you come from Paris, or at least that you are strangers at Boulogne.”

“We come from Paris, yes,” replied Athos, with the same courtesy; “what is there we can do for you?”

“Sir,” said the young man, “will you be so good as to tell me if it be true that Cardinal Mazarin is no longer minister?”

“That is a strange question,” said Aramis.

“He is and he is not,” replied Athos; “that is to say, he is dismissed by one-half of France, but by intrigues and promises he makes the other half sustain him; you will perceive that this may last a long time.”

“However, sir,” said the stranger, “he has neither fled nor is in prison?”

“No, sir, not at this moment at least.”

"Sirs, accept my thanks for your politeness," said the young man, retreating.

"What do you think of that interrogator?" asked Aramis.

"I think he is either a dull provincial person or a spy in search of information."

"And you replied to him with that notion?"

"Nothing warranted me to answer him otherwise; he was polite to me and I was so to him."

"But if he be a spy----"

"What do you think a spy would be about here? We are not living in the time of Cardinal Richelieu, who would have closed the ports on bare suspicion."

"It matters not; you were wrong to reply to him as you did," continued Aramis, following with his eyes the young man, now vanishing behind the cliffs.

"And you," said Athos, "you forget that you committed a very different kind of imprudence in pronouncing Lord de Winter's name. Did you not see that at that name the young man stopped?"

"More reason, then, when he spoke to you, for sending him about his business."

"A quarrel?" asked Athos.

"And since when have you become afraid of a quarrel?"

"I am always afraid of a quarrel when I am expected at any place and when such a quarrel might possibly prevent my reaching it. Besides, let me own something to you. I am anxious to see that young man nearer."

"And wherefore?"

"Aramis, you will certainly laugh at me, you will say that I am always repeating the same thing, you will call me the most timorous of visionaries; but to whom do you see a resemblance in that young man?"

"In beauty or on the contrary?" asked Aramis, laughing.

"In ugliness, in so far as a man can resemble a woman."

"Ah! Egad!" cried Aramis, "you set me thinking. No, in truth you are no visionary, my dear friend, and now I think of it--you--yes, i'faith, you're right--those delicate, yet firm-set lips, those eyes which seem always at the command of the intellect and never of the heart! Yes, it is one of Milady's bastards!"

"You laugh Aramis."

"From habit, that is all. I swear to you, I like no better than yourself to meet that viper in my path."

"Ah! here is De Winter coming," said Athos.

"Good! one thing now is only awanting and that is, that our grooms should not keep us waiting."

"No," said Athos. "I see them about twenty paces behind my lord. I recognize Grimaud by his long legs and his determined slouch. Tony carries our muskets."

"Then we set sail to-night?" asked Aramis, glancing toward the west, where the sun had left a single golden cloud, which, dipping into the ocean, appeared by degrees to be extinguished.

"Probably," said Athos.

"Diable!" resumed Aramis, "I have little fancy for the sea by day, still less at night; the sounds of wind and wave, the frightful movements of the vessel; I confess I prefer the convent of Noisy."

Athos smiled sadly, for it was evident that he was thinking of other things as he listened to his friend and moved toward De Winter.

"What ails our friend?" said Aramis, "he resembles one of Dante's damned, whose neck Apollyon has dislocated and who are ever looking at their heels. What the devil makes him glower thus behind him?"

When De Winter perceived them, in his turn he advanced toward them with surprising rapidity.

"What is the matter, my lord?" said Athos, "and what puts you out of breath thus?"

"Nothing," replied De Winter; "nothing; and yet in passing the heights it seemed to me----" and he again turned round.

Athos glanced at Aramis.

"But let us go," continued De Winter; "let us be off; the boat must be waiting for us and there is our sloop at anchor--do you see it there? I wish I were on board already," and he looked back again.

"He has seen him," said Athos, in a low tone, to Aramis.

They had reached the ladder which led to the boat. De Winter made the grooms who carried the arms and the porters with the luggage descend first and was about to follow them.

At this moment Athos perceived a man walking on the seashore parallel to the jetty, and hastening his steps, as if to reach the other side of the port, scarcely twenty steps from the place of embarking. He fancied in the darkness that he recognized the young man who had questioned him. Athos now descended the ladder in his turn, without losing sight of the young man. The latter, to make a short cut, had appeared on a sluice.

“He certainly bodes us no good,” said Athos; “but let us embark; once out at sea, let him come.”

And Athos sprang into the boat, which was immediately pushed off and which soon sped seawards under the efforts of four stalwart rowers.

But the young man had begun to follow, or rather to advance before the boat. She was obliged to pass between the point of the jetty, surmounted by a beacon just lighted, and a rock which jutted out. They saw him in the distance climbing the rock in order to look down upon the boat as it passed.

“Ay, but,” said Aramis, “that young fellow is decidedly a spy.”

“Which is the young man?” asked De Winter, turning around.

“He who followed us and spoke to us awaits us there; behold!”

De Winter turned and followed the direction of Aramis’s finger. The beacon bathed with light the little strait through which they were about to pass and the rock where the young man stood with bare head and crossed arms.

“It is he!” exclaimed De Winter, seizing the arm of Athos; “it is he! I thought I recognized him and I was not mistaken.”

“Whom do you mean?” asked Aramis.

“Milady’s son,” replied Athos.

“The monk!” exclaimed Grimaud.

The young man heard these words and bent so forward over the rock that one might have supposed he was about to precipitate himself from it.

“Yes, it is I, my uncle--I, the son of Milady--I, the monk--I, the secretary and friend of Cromwell--I know you now, both you and your companions.”

In that boat sat three men, unquestionably brave, whose courage no man would have dared dispute; nevertheless, at that voice, that accent and those gestures, they felt a chill access of terror cramp their veins. As for Grimaud, his hair stood on end and drops of sweat ran down his brow.

“Ah!” exclaimed Aramis, “that is the nephew, the monk, and the son of Milady, as he says himself.”

“Alas, yes,” murmured De Winter.

“Then wait,” said Aramis; and with the terrible coolness which on important occasions he showed, he took one of the muskets from Tony, shouldered and aimed it at the young man, who stood, like the accusing angel, upon the rock.

"Fire!" cried Grimaud, unconsciously.

Athos threw himself on the muzzle of the gun and arrested the shot which was about to be fired.

"The devil take you," said Aramis. "I had him so well at the point of my gun I should have sent a ball into his breast."

"It is enough to have killed the mother," said Athos, hoarsely.

"The mother was a wretch, who struck at us all and at those dear to us."

"Yes, but the son has done us no harm."

Grimaud, who had risen to watch the effect of the shot, fell back hopeless, wringing his hands.

The young man burst into a laugh.

"Ah, it is certainly you!" he cried. "I know you even better now."

His mocking laugh and threatening words passed over their heads, carried by the breeze, until lost in the depths of the horizon. Aramis shuddered.

"Be calm," exclaimed Athos, "for Heaven's sake! have we ceased to be men?"

"No," said Aramis, "but that fellow is a fiend; and ask the uncle whether I was wrong to rid him of his dear nephew."

De Winter only replied by a groan.

"It was all up with him," continued Aramis; "ah I much fear that with all your wisdom such mercy yet will prove supernal folly."

Athos took Lord de Winter's hand and tried to turn the conversation.

"When shall we land in England?" he asked; but De Winter seemed not to hear his words and made no reply.

"Hold, Athos," said Aramis, "perhaps there is yet time. See if he is still in the same place."

Athos turned around with an effort; the sight of the young man was evidently painful to him, and there he still was, in fact, on the rock, the beacon shedding around him, as it were, a doubtful aureole.

"Decidedly, Aramis," said Athos, "I think I was wrong not to let you fire."

"Hold your tongue," replied Aramis; "you would make me weep, if such a thing were possible."

At this moment they were hailed by a voice from the sloop and a few seconds later men, servants and baggage were aboard. The captain was only waiting for his passengers; hardly had they put foot on deck ere her head was turned towards Hastings, where they were to disembark. At this instant the three friends turned, in spite of themselves, a last look on the rock, upon the menacing figure which pursued them and now stood out with a distinctness still. Then a voice reached them once more, sending this threat: “To our next meeting, sirs, in England.”

CHAPTER 44.

Te Deum for the Victory of Lens.

The bustle which had been observed by Henrietta Maria and for which she had vainly sought to discover a reason, was occasioned by the battle of Lens, announced by the prince’s messenger, the Duc de Chatillon, who had taken such a noble part in the engagement; he was, besides, charged to hang five and twenty flags, taken from the Lorraine party, as well as from the Spaniards, upon the arches of Notre Dame.

Such news was decisive; it destroyed, in favor of the court, the struggle commenced with parliament. The motive given for all the taxes summarily imposed and to which the parliament had made opposition, was the necessity of sustaining the honor of France and the uncertain hope of beating the enemy. Now, since the affair of Nordlingen, they had experienced nothing but reverses; the parliament had a plea for calling Mazarin to account for imaginary victories, always promised, ever deferred; but this time there really had been fighting, a triumph and a complete one. And this all knew so well that it was a double victory for the court, a victory at home and abroad; so that even when the young king learned the news he exclaimed, “Ah, gentlemen of the parliament, we shall see what you will say now!” Upon which the queen had pressed the royal child to her heart, whose haughty and unruly sentiments were in such harmony with her own. A council was called on the same evening, but nothing transpired of what had been decided on. It was only known that on the following Sunday a Te Deum would be sung at Notre Dame in honor of the victory of Lens.

The following Sunday, then, the Parisians arose with joy; at that period a Te Deum was a grand affair; this kind of ceremony had not then been abused and it produced a great effect. The shops were deserted, houses closed; every one wished to see the young king with his mother, and the famous Cardinal Mazarin whom they hated so much that no one wished to be deprived of his presence. Moreover, great liberty prevailed throughout the immense crowd; every opinion was openly expressed and chorused, so to speak, of coming insurrection, as the thousand bells of all the Paris churches rang out the Te Deum. The police belonging to the city being formed by the city itself, nothing threatening presented itself to disturb this concert of universal hatred or freeze the frequent scoffs of slanderous lips.

Nevertheless, at eight o'clock in the morning the regiment of the queen's guards, commanded by Guitant, under whom was his nephew Comminges, marched publicly, preceded by drums and trumpets, filing off from the Palais Royal as far as Notre Dame, a manoeuvre which the Parisians witnessed tranquilly, delighted as they were with military music and brilliant uniforms.

Friquet had put on his Sunday clothes, under the pretext of having a swollen face which he had managed to simulate by introducing a handful of cherry kernels into one side of his mouth, and had procured a whole holiday from Bazin. On leaving Bazin, Friquet started off to the Palais Royal, where he arrived at the moment of the turning out of the regiment of guards; and as he had only gone there for the enjoyment of seeing it and hearing the music, he took his place at their head, beating the drum on two pieces of slate and passing from that exercise to that of the trumpet, which he counterfeited quite naturally with his mouth in a manner which had more than once called forth the praises of amateurs of imitative harmony.

This amusement lasted from the Barriere des Sergens to the place of Notre Dame, and Friquet found in it very real enjoyment; but when at last the regiment separated, penetrated the heart of the city and placed itself at the extremity of the Rue Saint Christophe, near the Rue Cocatrix, in which Broussel lived, then Friquet remembered that he had not had breakfast; and after thinking in which direction he had better turn his steps in order to accomplish this important act of the day, he reflected deeply and decided that Councillor Broussel should bear the cost of this repast.

In consequence he took to his heels, arrived breathlessly at the councillor's door, and knocked violently.

His mother, the councillor's old servant, opened it.

"What doest thou here, good-for-nothing?" she said, "and why art thou not at Notre Dame?"

"I have been there, mother," said Friquet, "but I saw things happen of which Master Broussel ought to be warned, and so with Monsieur Bazin's permission--you know, mother, Monsieur Bazin, the verger--I came to speak to Monsieur Broussel."

"And what hast thou to say, boy, to Monsieur Broussel?"

“I wish to tell him,” replied Friquet, screaming with all his might, “that there is a whole regiment of guards coming this way. And as I hear everywhere that at the court they are ill-disposed to him, I wish to warn him, that he may be on his guard.”

Broussel heard the scream of the young oddity, and, enchanted with this excess of zeal, came down to the first floor, for he was, in truth, working in his room on the second.

“Well,” said he, “friend, what matters the regiment of guards to us, and art thou not mad to make such a disturbance? Knowest thou not that it is the custom of these soldiers to act thus and that it is usual for the regiment to form themselves into two solid walls when the king goes by?”

Friquet counterfeited surprise, and twisting his new cap around in his fingers, said:

“It is not astonishing for you to know it, Monsieur Broussel, who knows everything; but as for me, by holy truth, I did not know it and I thought I would give you good advice; you must not be angry with me for that, Monsieur Broussel.”

“On the contrary, my boy, on the contrary, I am pleased with your zeal. Dame Nanette, look for those apricots which Madame de Longueville sent to us yesterday from Noisy and give half a dozen of them to your son, with a crust of new bread.”

“Oh, thank you, sir, thank you, Monsieur Broussel,” said Friquet; “I am so fond of apricots!”

Broussel then proceeded to his wife’s room and asked for breakfast; it was nine o’clock. The councillor placed himself at the window; the street was completely deserted, but in the distance was heard, like the noise of the tide rushing in, the deep hum of the populous waves increasing now around Notre Dame.

This noise redoubled when D’Artagnan, with a company of musketeers, placed himself at the gates of Notre Dame to secure the service of the church. He had instructed Porthos to profit by this opportunity to see the ceremony; and Porthos, in full dress, mounted his finest horse, taking the part of supernumerary musketeer, as D’Artagnan had so often done formerly. The sergeant of this company, a veteran of the Spanish wars, had recognized Porthos, his old companion, and very soon all those who served under him were placed in possession of startling facts concerning the honor of the ancient musketeers of Treville. Porthos had not only been well received by the company, but he was moreover looked on with great admiration.

At ten o’clock the guns of the Louvre announced the departure of the king, and then a movement, similar to that of trees in a stormy wind that bend and writhe with agitated tops, ran though the multitude, which was compressed behind the immovable muskets of the guard. At last the king appeared with the queen in a gilded chariot. Ten other carriages followed, containing the ladies of honor, the officers of the royal household, and the court.

“God save the king!” was the cry in every direction; the young monarch gravely put his head out of the window, looked sufficiently grateful and even bowed; at which the cries of the multitude were renewed.

Just as the court was settling down in the cathedral, a carriage, bearing the arms of Comminges, quitted the line of the court carriages and proceeded slowly to the end of the Rue Saint Christophe, now entirely deserted. When it arrived there, four guards and a police officer, who accompanied it, mounted into the heavy machine and closed the shutters; then through an opening cautiously made, the policeman began to watch the length of the Rue Cocatrix, as if he was waiting for some one.

All the world was occupied with the ceremony, so that neither the chariot nor the precautions taken by those who were within it had been observed. Friquet, whose eye, ever on the alert, could alone have discovered them, had gone to devour his apricots upon the entablature of a house in the square of Notre Dame. Thence he saw the king, the queen and Monsieur Mazarin, and heard the mass as well as if he had been on duty.

Toward the end of the service, the queen, seeing Comminges standing near her, waiting for a confirmation of the order she had given him before quitting the Louvre, said in a whisper:

“Go, Comminges, and may God aid you!”

Comminges immediately left the church and entered the Rue Saint Christophe. Friquet, seeing this fine officer thus walk away, followed by two guards, amused himself by pursuing them and did this so much the more gladly as the ceremony ended at that instant and the king remounted his carriage.

Hardly had the police officer observed Comminges at the end of the Rue Cocatrix when he said one word to the coachman, who at once put his vehicle into motion and drove up before Broussel’s door. Comminges knocked at the door at the same moment, and Friquet was waiting behind Comminges until the door should be opened.

“What dost thou there, rascal?” asked Comminges.

“I want to go into Master Broussel’s house, captain,” replied Friquet, in that wheedling way the “gamins” of Paris know so well how to assume when necessary.

“And on what floor does he live?” asked Comminges.

“In the whole house,” said Friquet; “the house belongs to him; he occupies the second floor when he works and descends to the first to take his meals; he must be at dinner now; it is noon.”

“Good,” said Comminges.

At this moment the door was opened, and having questioned the servant the officer learned that Master Broussel was at home and at dinner.

Broussel was seated at the table with his family, having his wife opposite to him, his two daughters by his side, and his son, Louvieres, whom we have already seen when the accident happened to the councillor--an accident from which he had quite recovered--at the bottom of the table. The worthy man, restored to perfect health, was tasting the fine fruit which Madame de Longueville had sent to him.

At sight of the officer Broussel was somewhat moved, but seeing him bow politely he rose and bowed also. Still, in spite of this reciprocal politeness, the countenances of the women betrayed a certain amount of uneasiness; Louvieres became very pale and waited impatiently for the officer to explain himself.

“Sir,” said Comminges, “I am the bearer of an order from the king.”

“Very well, sir,” replied Broussel, “what is this order?” And he held out his hand.

“I am commissioned to seize your person, sir,” said Comminges, in the same tone and with the same politeness; “and if you will believe me you had better spare yourself the trouble of reading that long letter and follow me.”

A thunderbolt falling in the midst of these good people, so peacefully assembled there, would not have produced a more appalling effect. It was a horrible thing at that period to be imprisoned by the enmity of the king. Louvieres sprang forward to snatch his sword, which stood against a chair in a corner of the room; but a glance from the worthy Broussel, who in the midst of it all did not lose his presence of mind, checked this foolhardy action of despair. Madame Broussel, separated by the width of the table from her husband, burst into tears, and the young girls clung to their father's arms.

"Come, sir," said Comminges, "make haste; you must obey the king."

"Sir," said Broussel, "I am in bad health and cannot give myself up a prisoner in this state; I must have time."

"It is impossible," said Comminges; "the order is strict and must be put into execution this instant."

"Impossible!" said Louvieres; "sir, beware of driving us to despair."

"Impossible!" cried a shrill voice from the end of the room.

Comminges turned and saw Dame Nanette, her eyes flashing with anger and a broom in her hand.

"My good Nanette, be quiet, I beseech you," said Broussel.

"Me! keep quiet while my master is being arrested! he, the support, the liberator, the father of the people! Ah! well, yes; you have to know me yet. Are you going?" added she to Comminges.

The latter smiled.

"Come, sir," said he, addressing Broussel, "silence that woman and follow me."

"Silence me! me! me!" said Nanette. "Ah! yet one wants some one besides you for that, my fine king's cockatoo! You shall see." And Dame Nanette sprang to the window, threw it open, and in such a piercing voice that it might have been heard in the square of Notre Dame:

"Help!" she screamed, "my master is being arrested; the Councillor Broussel is being arrested! Help!"

"Sir," said Comminges, "declare yourself at once; will you obey or do you intend to rebel against the king?"

"I obey, I obey, sir!" cried Broussel, trying to disengage himself from the grasp of his two daughters and by a look restrain his son, who seemed determined to dispute authority.

"In that case," commanded Comminges, "silence that old woman."

"Ah! old woman!" screamed Nanette.

And she began to shriek more loudly, clinging to the bars of the window:

"Help! help! for Master Broussel, who is arrested because he has defended the people! Help!"

Comminges seized the servant around the waist and would have dragged her from her post; but at that instant a treble voice, proceeding from a kind of entresol, was heard screeching:

"Murder! fire! assassins! Master Broussel is being killed! Master Broussel is being strangled."

It was Friquet's voice; and Dame Nanette, feeling herself supported, recommenced with all her strength to sound her shrilly squawk.

Many curious faces had already appeared at the windows and the people attracted to the end of the street began to run, first men, then groups, and then a crowd of people; hearing cries and seeing a chariot they could not understand it; but Friquet sprang from the entresol on to the top of the carriage.

"They want to arrest Master Broussel!" he cried; "the guards are in the carriage and the officer is upstairs!"

The crowd began to murmur and approached the house. The two guards who had remained in the lane mounted to the aid of Comminges; those who were in the chariot opened the doors and presented arms.

"Don't you see them?" cried Friquet, "don't you see? there they are!"

The coachman turning around, gave Friquet a slash with his whip which made him scream with pain.

"Ah! devil's coachman!" cried Friquet, "you're meddling too! Wait!"

And regaining his entresol he overwhelmed the coachman with every projectile he could lay hands on.

The tumult now began to increase; the street was not able to contain the spectators who assembled from every direction; the crowd invaded the space which the dreaded pikes of the guards had till then kept clear between them and the carriage. The soldiers, pushed back by these living walls, were in danger of being crushed against the spokes of the wheels and the panels of the carriages. The cries which the police officer repeated twenty times: "In the king's name," were powerless against this formidable multitude--seemed, on the contrary, to exasperate it still more; when, at the shout, "In the name of the king," an officer ran up, and seeing the uniforms ill-treated, he sprang into the scuffle sword in hand, and brought unexpected help to the guards. This gentleman was a young man, scarcely sixteen years of age, now white with anger. He leaped from his charger, placed his back against the shaft of the carriage, making a rampart of his horse, drew his pistols from their holsters and fastened them to his belt, and began to fight with the back sword, like a man accustomed to the handling of his weapon.

During ten minutes he alone kept the crowd at bay; at last Comminges appeared, pushing Broussel before him.

"Let us break the carriage!" cried the people.

"In the king's name!" cried Comminges.

"The first who advances is a dead man!" cried Raoul, for it was in fact he, who, feeling himself pressed and almost crushed by a gigantic citizen, pricked him with the point of his sword and sent him howling back.

Comminges, so to speak, threw Broussel into the carriage and sprang in after him. At this moment a shot was fired and a ball passed through the hat of Comminges and broke the arm of one of the guards. Comminges looked up and saw amidst the smoke the threatening face of Louvieres appearing at the window of the second floor.

"Very well, sir," said Comminges, "you shall hear of this anon."

"And you of me, sir," said Louvieres; "and we shall see then who can speak the loudest."

Friquet and Nanette continued to shout; the cries, the noise of the shot and the intoxicating smell of powder produced their usual maddening effects.

"Down with the officer! down with him!" was the cry.

"One step nearer," said Comminges, putting down the sashes, that the interior of the carriage might be well seen, and placing his sword on his prisoner's breast, "one step nearer, and I kill the prisoner; my orders were to carry him off alive or dead. I will take him dead, that's all."

A terrible cry was heard, and the wife and daughters of Broussel held up their hands in supplication to the people; the latter knew that this officer, who was so pale, but who appeared so determined, would keep his word; they continued to threaten, but they began to disperse.

"Drive to the palace," said Comminges to the coachman, who was by then more dead than alive.

The man whipped his animals, which cleared a way through the crowd; but on arriving on the Quai they were obliged to stop; the carriage was upset, the horses carried off, stifled, mangled by the crowd. Raoul, on foot, for he had not time to mount his horse again, tired, like the guards, of distributing blows with the flat of his sword, had recourse to its point. But this last and dreaded resource served only to exasperate the multitude. From time to time a shot from a musket or the blade of a rapier flashed among the crowd; projectiles continued to hail down from the windows and some shots were heard, the echo of which, though they were probably fired in the air, made all hearts vibrate. Voices, unheard except on days of revolution, were distinguished; faces were seen that only appeared on days of bloodshed. Cries of “Death! death to the guards! to the Seine with the officer!” were heard above all the noise, deafening as it was. Raoul, his hat in ribbons, his face bleeding, felt not only his strength but also his reason going; a red mist covered his sight, and through this mist he saw a hundred threatening arms stretched over him, ready to seize upon him when he fell. The guards were unable to help any one--each one was occupied with his self-preservation. All was over; carriages, horses, guards, and perhaps even the prisoner were about to be torn to shreds, when all at once a voice well known to Raoul was heard, and suddenly a great sword glittered in the air; at the same time the crowd opened, upset, trodden down, and an officer of the musketeers, striking and cutting right and left, rushed up to Raoul and took him in his arms just as he was about to fall.

“God’s blood!” cried the officer, “have they killed him? Woe to them if it be so!”

And he turned around, so stern with anger, strength and threat, that the most excited rebels hustled back on one another, in order to escape, and some of them even rolled into the Seine.

“Monsieur d’Artagnan!” murmured Raoul.

“Yes, ‘sdeath! in person, and fortunately it seems for you, my young friend. Come on, here, you others,” he continued, rising in his stirrups, raising his sword, and addressing those musketeers who had not been able to follow his rapid onslaught. “Come, sweep away all that for me! Shoulder muskets! Present arms! Aim----”

At this command the mountain of populace thinned so suddenly that D’Artagnan could not repress a burst of Homeric laughter.

“Thank you, D’Artagnan,” said Comminges, showing half of his body through the window of the broken vehicle, “thanks, my young friend; your name--that I may mention it to the queen.”

Raoul was about to reply when D’Artagnan bent down to his ear.

“Hold your tongue,” said he, “and let me answer. Do not lose time, Comminges,” he continued; “get out of the carriage if you can and make another draw up; be quick, or in five minutes the mob will be on us again with swords and muskets and you will be killed. Hold! there’s a carriage coming over yonder.”

Then bending again to Raoul, he whispered: “Above all things do not divulge your name.”

“That’s right. I will go,” said Comminges; “and if they come back, fire!”

“Not at all--not at all,” replied D’Artagnan; “let no one move. On the contrary, one shot at this moment would be paid for dearly to-morrow.”

Comminges took his four guards and as many musketeers and ran to the carriage, from which he made the people inside dismount, and brought them to the vehicle which had upset. But when it was necessary to convey the prisoner from one carriage to the other, the people, catching sight of him whom they called their liberator, uttered every imaginable cry and knotted themselves once more around the vehicle.

“Start, start!” said D’Artagnan. “There are ten men to accompany you. I will keep twenty to hold in check the mob; go, and lose not a moment. Ten men for Monsieur de Comminges.”

As the carriage started off the cries were redoubled and more than ten thousand people thronged the Quai and overflowed the Pont Neuf and adjacent streets. A few shots were fired and one musketeer was wounded.

“Forward!” cried D’Artagnan, driven to extremities, biting his moustache; and then he charged with his twenty men and dispersed them in fear. One man alone remained in his place, gun in hand.

“Ah!” he exclaimed, “it is thou who wouldst have him assassinated? Wait an instant.” And he pointed his gun at D’Artagnan, who was riding toward him at full speed. D’Artagnan bent down to his horse’s neck, the young man fired, and the ball severed the feathers from the hat. The horse started, brushed against the imprudent man, who thought by his strength alone to stay the tempest, and he fell against the wall. D’Artagnan pulled up his horse, and whilst his musketeers continued to charge, he returned and bent with drawn sword over the man he had knocked down.

“Oh, sir!” exclaimed Raoul, recognizing the young man as having seen him in the Rue Cocatrix, “spare him! it is his son!”

D’Artagnan’s arm dropped to his side. “Ah, you are his son!” he said; “that is a different thing.”

“Sir, I surrender,” said Louvieres, presenting his unloaded musket to the officer.

“Eh, no! do not surrender, egad! On the contrary, be off, and quickly. If I take you, you will be hung!”

The young man did not wait to be told twice, but passing under the horse's head disappeared at the corner of the Rue Guenegaud.

"I'faith!" said D'Artagnan to Raoul, "you were just in time to stay my hand. He was a dead man; and on my honor, if I had discovered that it was his son, I should have regretted having killed him."

"Ah! sir!" said Raoul, "allow me, after thanking you for that poor fellow's life, to thank you on my own account. I too, sir, was almost dead when you arrived."

"Wait, wait, young man; do not fatigue yourself with speaking. We can talk of it afterward."

Then seeing that the musketeers had cleared the Quai from the Pont Neuf to the Quai Saint Michael, he raised his sword for them to double their speed. The musketeers trotted up, and at the same time the ten men whom D'Artagnan had given to Comminges appeared.

"Halloo!" cried D'Artagnan; "has something fresh happened?"

"Eh, sir!" replied the sergeant, "their vehicle has broken down a second time; it really must be doomed."

"They are bad managers," said D'Artagnan, shrugging his shoulders. "When a carriage is chosen, it ought to be strong. The carriage in which a Broussel is to be arrested ought to be able to bear ten thousand men."

"What are your commands, lieutenant?"

"Take the detachment and conduct him to his place."

"But you will be left alone?"

"Certainly. So you suppose I have need of an escort? Go."

The musketeers set off and D'Artagnan was left alone with Raoul.

"Now," he said, "are you in pain?"

"Yes; my head is not only swimming but burning."

"What's the matter with this head?" said D'Artagnan, raising the battered hat. "Ah! ah! a bruise."

"Yes, I think I received a flower-pot upon my head."

"Brutes!" said D'Artagnan. "But were you not on horseback? you have spurs."

"Yes, but I got down to defend Monsieur de Comminges and my horse was taken away. Here it is, I see."

At this very moment Friquet passed, mounted on Raoul's horse, waving his parti-colored cap and crying, "Broussel! Broussel!"

"Halloo! stop, rascal!" cried D'Artagnan. "Bring hither that horse."

Friquet heard perfectly, but he pretended not to do so and tried to continue his road. D’Artagnan felt inclined for an instant to pursue Master Friquet, but not wishing to leave Raoul alone he contented himself with taking a pistol from the holster and cocking it.

Friquet had a quick eye and a fine ear. He saw D’Artagnan’s movement, heard the sound of the click, and stopped at once.

“Ah! it is you, your honor,” he said, advancing toward D’Artagnan; “and I am truly pleased to meet you.”

D’Artagnan looked attentively at Friquet and recognized the little chorister of the Rue de la Calandre.

“Ah! ‘tis thou, rascal!” said he, “come here: so thou hast changed thy trade; thou art no longer a choir boy nor a tavern boy; thou hast become a horse stealer?”

“Ah, your honor, how can you say so?” exclaimed Friquet. “I was seeking the gentleman to whom this horse belongs--an officer, brave and handsome as a youthful Caesar;” then, pretending to see Raoul for the first time:

“Ah! but if I mistake not,” continued he, “here he is; you won’t forget the boy, sir.”

Raoul put his hand in his pocket.

“What are you about?” asked D’Artagnan.

“To give ten francs to this honest fellow,” replied Raoul, taking a pistole from his pocket.

“Ten kicks on his back!” said D’Artagnan; “be off, you little villain, and forget not that I have your address.”

Friquet, who did not expect to be let off so cheaply, bounded off like a gazelle up the Quai a la Rue Dauphine, and disappeared. Raoul mounted his horse, and both leisurely took their way to the Rue Tiquetonne.

D’Artagnan watched over the youth as if he had been his own son.

They arrived without accident at the Hotel de la Chevrette.

The handsome Madeleine announced to D’Artagnan that Planchet had returned, bringing Mousqueton with him, who had heroically borne the extraction of the ball and was as well as his state would permit.

D’Artagnan desired Planchet to be summoned, but he had disappeared.

“Then bring some wine,” said D’Artagnan. “You are much pleased with yourself,” said he to Raoul when they were alone, “are you not?”

“Well, yes,” replied Raoul. “It seems to me I did my duty. I defended the king.”

“And who told you to defend the king?”

“The Comte de la Fere himself.”

“Yes, the king; but to-day you have not fought for the king, you have fought for Mazarin; which is not quite the same thing.”

“But you yourself?”

“Oh, for me; that is another matter. I obey my captain’s orders. As for you, your captain is the prince, understand that rightly; you have no other. But has one ever seen such a wild fellow,” continued he, “making himself a Mazarinist and helping to arrest Broussel! Breathe not a word of that, or the Comte de la Fere will be furious.”

“You think the count will be angry with me?”

“Think it? I’m certain of it; were it not for that, I should thank you, for you have worked for us. However, I scold you instead of him, and in his place; the storm will blow over more easily, believe me. And moreover, my dear child,” continued D’Artagnan, “I am making use of the privilege conceded to me by your guardian.”

“I do not understand you, sir,” said Raoul.

D’Artagnan rose, and taking a letter from his writing-desk, presented it to Raoul. The face of the latter became serious when he had cast his eyes upon the paper.

“Oh, mon Dieu!” he said, raising his fine eyes to D’Artagnan, moist with tears, “the count has left Paris without seeing me?”

“He left four days ago,” said D’Artagnan.

“But this letter seems to intimate that he is about to incur danger, perhaps death.”

“He--he--incur danger of death! No, be not anxious; he is traveling on business and will return ere long. I hope you have no repugnance to accept me as your guardian in the interim.”

“Oh, no, Monsieur d’Artagnan,” said Raoul, “you are such a brave gentleman and the Comte de la Fere has so much affection for you!”

“Eh! Egad! love me too; I will not torment you much, but only on condition that you become a Frondist, my young friend, and a hearty Frondist, too.”

“But can I continue to visit Madame de Chevreuse?”

“I should say you could! and the coadjutor and Madame de Longueville; and if the worthy Broussel were there, whom you so stupidly helped arrest, I should tell you to excuse yourself to him at once and kiss him on both cheeks.”

“Well, sir, I will obey you, although I do not understand you.”

“It is unnecessary for you to understand. Hold,” continued D’Artagnan, turning toward the door, which had just opened, “here is Monsieur du Vallon, who comes with his coat torn.”

“Yes, but in exchange,” said Porthos, covered with perspiration and soiled by dust, “in exchange, I have torn many skins. Those wretches wanted to take away my sword! Deuce take ‘em, what a popular commotion!” continued the giant, in his quiet manner; “but I knocked down more than twenty with the hilt of Balizarde. A draught of wine, D’Artagnan.”

“Oh, I’ll answer for you,” said the Gascon, filling Porthos’s glass to the brim; “but when you have drunk, give me your opinion.”

“Upon what?” asked Porthos.

“Look here,” resumed D’Artagnan; “here is Monsieur de Bragelonne, who determined at all risks to aid the arrest of Broussel and whom I had great difficulty to prevent defending Monsieur de Comminges.”

“The devil!” said Porthos; “and his guardian, what would he have said to that?”

“Do you hear?” interrupted D’Artagnan; “become a Frondist, my friend, belong to the Fronde, and remember that I fill the count’s place in everything;” and he jingled his money.

“Will you come?” said he to Porthos.

“Where?” asked Porthos, filling a second glass of wine.

“To present our respects to the cardinal.”

Porthos swallowed the second glass with the same grace with which he had imbibed the first, took his beaver and followed D’Artagnan. As for Raoul, he remained bewildered with what he had seen, having been forbidden by D’Artagnan to leave the room until the tumult was over.

CHAPTER 45.

The Beggar of St. Eustache.

D’Artagnan had calculated that in not going at once to the Palais Royal he would give Comminges time to arrive before him, and consequently to make the cardinal acquainted with the eminent services which he, D’Artagnan, and his friend had rendered to the queen’s party in the morning.

They were indeed admirably received by Mazarin, who paid them numerous compliments, and announced that they were more than half on their way to obtain what they desired, namely, D’Artagnan his captaincy, Porthos his barony.

D’Artagnan would have preferred money in hand to all that fine talk, for he knew well that to Mazarin it was easy to promise and hard to perform. But, though he held the cardinal’s promises as of little worth, he affected to be completely satisfied, for he was unwilling to discourage Porthos.

Whilst the two friends were with the cardinal, the queen sent for him. Mazarin, thinking that it would be the means of increasing the zeal of his two defenders if he procured them personal thanks from the queen, motioned them to follow him. D’Artagnan and Porthos pointed to their dusty and torn dresses, but the cardinal shook his head.

“Those costumes,” he said, “are of more worth than most of those which you will see on the backs of the queen’s courtiers; they are costumes of battle.”

D’Artagnan and Porthos obeyed. The court of Anne of Austria was full of gayety and animation; for, after having gained a victory over the Spaniard, it had just gained another over the people. Broussel had been conducted out of Paris without further resistance, and was at this time in the prison of Saint Germain; while Blancmesnil, who was arrested at the same time, but whose arrest had been made without difficulty or noise, was safe in the Castle of Vincennes.

Comminges was near the queen, who was questioning him upon the details of his expedition, and every one was listening to his account, when

D’Artagnan and Porthos were perceived at the door, behind the cardinal.

“Ah, madame,” said Comminges, hastening to D’Artagnan, “here is one who can tell you better than myself, for he was my protector. Without him I should probably at this moment be a dead fish in the nets at Saint Cloud, for it was a question of nothing less than throwing me into the river. Speak, D’Artagnan, speak.”

D’Artagnan had been a hundred times in the same room with the queen since he had become lieutenant of the musketeers, but her majesty had never once spoken to him.

“Well, sir,” at last said Anne of Austria, “you are silent, after rendering such a service?”

“Madame,” replied D’Artagnan, “I have nought to say, save that my life is ever at your majesty’s service, and that I shall only be happy the day I lose it for you.”

“I know that, sir; I have known that,” said the queen, “a long time; therefore I am delighted to be able thus publicly to mark my gratitude and my esteem.”

“Permit me, madame,” said D’Artagnan, “to reserve a portion for my friend; like myself” (he laid an emphasis on these words) “an ancient musketeer of the company of Treville; he has done wonders.”

“His name?” asked the queen.

“In the regiment,” said D’Artagnan, “he is called Porthos” (the queen started), “but his true name is the Chevalier du Vallon.”

“De Bracieux de Pierrefonds,” added Porthos.

“These names are too numerous for me to remember them all, and I will content myself with the first,” said the queen, graciously. Porthos bowed. At this moment the coadjutor was announced; a cry of surprise ran through the royal assemblage. Although the coadjutor had preached that same morning it was well known that he leaned much to the side of the Fronde; and Mazarin, in requesting the archbishop of Paris to make his nephew preach, had evidently had the intention of administering to Monsieur de Retz one of those Italian kicks he so much enjoyed giving.

The fact was, in leaving Notre Dame the coadjutor had learned the event of the day. Although almost engaged to the leaders of the Fronde he had not gone so far but that retreat was possible should the court offer him the advantages for which he was ambitious and to which the coadjutorship was but a stepping-stone. Monsieur de Retz wished to become archbishop in his uncle’s place, and cardinal, like Mazarin; and the popular party could with difficulty accord him favors so entirely royal. He therefore hastened to the palace to congratulate the queen on the battle of Lens, determined beforehand to act with or against the court, as his congratulations were well or ill received.

The coadjutor possessed, perhaps, as much wit as all those put together who were assembled at the court to laugh at him. His speech, therefore, was so well turned, that in spite of the great wish felt by the courtiers to laugh, they could find no point on which to vent their ridicule. He concluded by saying that he placed his feeble influence at her majesty’s command.

During the whole time he was speaking, the queen appeared to be well pleased with the coadjutor’s harangue; but terminating as it did with such a phrase, the only one which could be caught at by the jokers, Anne turned around and directed a glance toward her favorites, which announced that she delivered up the coadjutor to their tender mercies. Immediately the wits of the court plunged into satire. Nogent-Beautin, the fool of the court, exclaimed that “the queen was very happy to have the succor of religion at such a moment.” This caused a universal burst of laughter. The Count de Villeroy said that “he did not know how any fear could be entertained for a moment, when the court had, to defend itself against the parliament and the citizens of Paris, his holiness the coadjutor, who by a signal could raise an army of curates, church porters and vergers.”

The Marechal de la Meilleraie added that in case the coadjutor should appear on the field of battle it would be a pity that he should not be distinguished in the melee by wearing a red hat, as Henry IV. had been distinguished by his white plume at the battle of Ivry.

During this storm, Gondy, who had it in his power to make it most unpleasant for the jesters, remained calm and stern. The queen at last asked him if he had anything to add to the fine discourse he had just made to her.

“Yes, madame,” replied the coadjutor; “I have to beg you to reflect twice ere you cause a civil war in the kingdom.”

The queen turned her back and the laughing recommenced.

The coadjutor bowed and left the palace, casting upon the cardinal such a glance as is best understood by mortal foes. That glance was so sharp that it penetrated the heart of Mazarin, who, reading in it a declaration of war, seized D’Artagnan by the arm and said:

"If occasion requires, monsieur, you will remember that man who has just gone out, will you not?"

"Yes, my lord," he replied. Then, turning toward Porthos, "The devil!" said he, "this has a bad look. I dislike these quarrels among men of the church."

Gondy withdrew, distributing benedictions on his way, and finding a malicious satisfaction in causing the adherents of his foes to prostrate themselves at his feet.

"Oh!" he murmured, as he left the threshold of the palace: "ungrateful court! faithless court! cowardly court! I will teach you how to laugh to-morrow--but in another manner."

But whilst they were indulging in extravagant joy at the Palais Royal, to increase the hilarity of the queen, Mazarin, a man of sense, and whose fear, moreover, gave him foresight, lost no time in making idle and dangerous jokes; he went out after the coadjutor, settled his account, locked up his gold, and had confidential workmen to contrive hiding places in his walls.

On his return home the coadjutor was informed that a young man had come in after his departure and was waiting for him; he started with delight when, on demanding the name of this young man, he learned that it was Louvieres. He hastened to his cabinet. Broussel's son was there, still furious, and still bearing bloody marks of his struggle with the king's officers. The only precaution he had taken in coming to the archbishopric was to leave his arquebuse in the hands of a friend.

The coadjutor went to him and held out his hand. The young man gazed at him as if he would have read the secret of his heart.

"My dear Monsieur Louvieres," said the coadjutor, "believe me, I am truly concerned for the misfortune which has happened to you."

"Is that true, and do you speak seriously?" asked Louvieres.

"From the depth of my heart," said Gondy.

"In that case, my lord, the time for words has passed and the hour for action is at hand; my lord, in three days, if you wish it, my father will be out of prison and in six months you may be cardinal."

The coadjutor started.

"Oh! let us speak frankly," continued Louvieres, "and act in a straightforward manner. Thirty thousand crowns in alms is not given, as you have done for the last six months, out of pure Christian charity; that would be too grand. You are ambitious--it is natural; you are a man of genius and you know your worth. As for me, I hate the court and have but one desire at this moment--vengeance. Give us the clergy and the people, of whom you can dispose, and I will bring you the citizens and the parliament; with these four elements Paris is ours in a week; and believe me, monsieur coadjutor, the court will give from fear what it will not give from good-will."

It was now the coadjutor's turn to fix his piercing eyes on Louvieres.

"But, Monsieur Louvieres, are you aware that it is simply civil war you are proposing to me?"

"You have been preparing long enough, my lord, for it to be welcome to you now."

"Never mind," said the coadjutor; "you must be well aware that this requires reflection."

"And how many hours of reflection do you ask?"

"Twelve hours, sir; is it too long?"

"It is now noon; at midnight I will be at your house."

"If I should not be in, wait for me."

"Good! at midnight, my lord."

"At midnight, my dear Monsieur Louvieres."

When once more alone Gondy sent to summon all the curates with whom he had any connection to his house. Two hours later, thirty officiating ministers from the most populous, and consequently the most disturbed parishes of Paris had assembled there. Gondy related to them the insults he had received at the Palais Royal and retailed the jests of Beautin, the Count de Villeroy and Marechal de la Meilleraie. The curates asked him what was to be done.

"Simply this," said the coadjutor. "You are the directors of all consciences. Well, undermine in them the miserable prejudice of respect and fear of kings; teach your flocks that the queen is a tyrant; and repeat often and loudly, so that all may know it, that the misfortunes of France are caused by Mazarin, her lover and her destroyer; begin this work to-day, this instant even, and in three days I shall expect the result. For the rest, if any one of you have further or better counsel to expound, I will listen to him with the greatest pleasure."

Three curates remained--those of St. Merri, St. Sulpice and St. Eustache. The others withdrew.

"You think, then, that you can help me more efficaciously than your brothers?" said Gondy.

"We hope so," answered the curates.

"Let us hear. Monsieur de St. Merri, you begin."

"My lord, I have in my parish a man who might be of the greatest use to you."

"Who and what is this man?"

"A shopkeeper in the Rue des Lombards, who has great influence upon the commerce of his quarter."

"What is his name?"

"He is named Planchet, who himself also caused a rising about six weeks ago; but as he was searched for after this emeute he disappeared."

"And can you find him?"

"I hope so. I think he has not been arrested, and as I am his wife's confessor, if she knows where he is I shall know it too."

"Very well, sir, find this man, and when you have found him bring him to me."

"We will be with you at six o'clock, my lord."

"Go, my dear curate, and may God assist you!"

"And you, sir?" continued Gondy, turning to the curate of St. Sulpice.

"I, my lord," said the latter, "I know a man who has rendered great services to a very popular prince and who would make an excellent leader of revolt. Him I can place at your disposal; it is Count de Rochefort."

"I know him also, but unfortunately he is not in Paris."

"My lord, he has been for three days at the Rue Cassette."

"And wherefore has he not been to see me?"

"He was told--my lord will pardon me----"

"Certainly, speak."

"That your lordship was about to treat with the court."

Gondy bit his lips.

"They are mistaken; bring him here at eight o'clock, sir, and may Heaven bless you as I bless you!"

"And now 'tis your turn," said the coadjutor, turning to the last that remained; "have you anything as good to offer me as the two gentlemen who have left us?"

"Better, my lord."

"Diable! think what a solemn engagement you are making; one has offered a wealthy shopkeeper, the other a count; you are going, then, to offer a prince, are you?"

“I offer you a beggar, my lord.”

“Ah! ah!” said Gondy, reflecting, “you are right, sir; some one who could raise the legion of paupers who choke up the crossings of Paris; some one who would know how to cry aloud to them, that all France might hear it, that it is Mazarin who has reduced them to poverty.”

“Exactly your man.”

“Bravo! and the man?”

“A plain and simple beggar, as I have said, my lord, who asks for alms, as he gives holy water; a practice he has carried on for six years on the steps of St. Eustache.”

“And you say that he has a great influence over his compeers?”

“Are you aware, my lord, that mendacity is an organized body, a kind of association of those who have nothing against those who have everything; an association in which every one takes his share; one that elects a leader?”

“Yes, I have heard it said,” replied the coadjutor.

“Well, the man whom I offer you is a general syndic.”

“And what do you know of him?”

“Nothing, my lord, except that he is tormented with remorse.”

“What makes you think so?”

“On the twenty-eighth of every month he makes me say a mass for the repose of the soul of one who died a violent death; yesterday I said this mass again.”

“And his name?”

“Maillard; but I do not think it is his right one.”

“And think you that we should find him at this hour at his post?”

“Certainly.”

“Let us go and see your beggar, sir, and if he is such as you describe him, you are right--it will be you who have discovered the true treasure.”

Gondy dressed himself as an officer, put on a felt cap with a red feather, hung on a long sword, buckled spurs to his boots, wrapped himself in an ample cloak and followed the curate.

The coadjutor and his companion passed through all the streets lying between the archbishopric and the St. Eustache Church, watching carefully to ascertain the popular feeling. The people were in an excited mood, but, like a swarm of frightened bees, seemed not to know at what point to concentrate; and it was very evident that if leaders of the people were not provided all this agitation would pass off in idle buzzing.

On arriving at the Rue des Prouvaires, the curate pointed toward the square before the church.

"Stop!" he said, "there he is at his post."

Gondy looked at the spot indicated and perceived a beggar seated in a chair and leaning against one of the moldings; a little basin was near him and he held a holy water brush in his hand.

"Is it by permission that he remains there?" asked Gondy.

"No, my lord; these places are bought. I believe this man paid his predecessor a hundred pistoles for his."

"The rascal is rich, then?"

"Some of those men sometimes die worth twenty thousand and twenty-five and thirty thousand francs and sometimes more."

"Hum!" said Gondy, laughing; "I was not aware my alms were so well invested."

In the meantime they were advancing toward the square, and the moment the coadjutor and the curate put their feet on the first church step the mendicant arose and proffered his brush.

He was a man between sixty-six and sixty-eight years of age, little, rather stout, with gray hair and light eyes. His countenance denoted the struggle between two opposite principles--a wicked nature, subdued by determination, perhaps by repentance.

He started on seeing the cavalier with the curate. The latter and the coadjutor touched the brush with the tips of their fingers and made the sign of the cross; the coadjutor threw a piece of money into the hat, which was on the ground.

"Maillard," began the curate, "this gentleman and I have come to talk with you a little."

"With me!" said the mendicant; "it is a great honor for a poor distributor of holy water."

There was an ironical tone in his voice which he could not quite disguise and which astonished the coadjutor.

"Yes," continued the curate, apparently accustomed to this tone, "yes, we wish to know your opinion of the events of to-day and what you have heard said by people going in and out of the church."

The mendicant shook his head.

"These are melancholy doings, your reverence, which always fall again upon the poor. As to what is said, everybody is discontented, everybody complains, but ‘everybody’ means ‘nobody.’“

“Explain yourself, my good friend,” said the coadjutor.

“I mean that all these cries, all these complaints, these curses, produce nothing but storms and flashes and that is all; but the lightning will not strike until there is a hand to guide it.”

“My friend,” said Gondy, “you seem to be a clever and a thoughtful man; are you disposed to take a part in a little civil war, should we have one, and put at the command of the leader, should we find one, your personal influence and the influence you have acquired over your comrades?”

“Yes, sir, provided this war were approved of by the church and would advance the end I wish to attain--I mean, the remission of my sins.”

“The war will not only be approved of, but directed by the church. As for the remission of your sins, we have the archbishop of Paris, who has the very greatest power at the court of Rome, and even the coadjutor, who possesses some plenary indulgences; we will recommend you to him.”

“Consider, Maillard,” said the curate, “that I have recommended you to this gentleman, who is a powerful lord, and that I have made myself responsible for you.”

“I know, monsieur le cure,” said the beggar, “that you have always been very kind to me, and therefore I, in my turn, will be serviceable to you.”

“And do you think your power as great with the fraternity as monsieur le cure told me it was just now?”

“I think they have some esteem for me,” said the mendicant with pride, “and that not only will they obey me, but wherever I go they will follow me.”

“And could you count on fifty resolute men, good, unemployed, but active souls, brawlers, capable of bringing down the walls of the Palais Royal by crying, ‘Down with Mazarin,’ as fell those at Jericho?”

“I think,” said the beggar, “I can undertake things more difficult and more important than that.”

“Ah, ah,” said Gondy, “you will undertake, then, some night, to throw up some ten barricades?”

“I will undertake to throw up fifty, and when the day comes, to defend them.”

“I’faith!” exclaimed Gondy, “you speak with a certainty that gives me pleasure; and since monsieur le cure can answer for you----”

“I answer for him,” said the curate.

“Here is a bag containing five hundred pistoles in gold; make all your arrangements, and tell me where I shall be able to find you this evening at ten o’clock.”

“It must be on some elevated place, whence a given signal may be seen in every part of Paris.”

“Shall I give you a line for the vicar of St. Jacques de la Boucherie? he will let you into the rooms in his tower,” said the curate.

“Capital,” answered the mendicant.

“Then,” said the coadjutor, “this evening, at ten o’clock, and if I am pleased with you another bag of five hundred pistoles will be at your disposal.”

The eyes of the mendicant dashed with cupidity, but he quickly suppressed his emotion.

“This evening, sir,” he replied, “all will be ready.”

CHAPTER 46.

The Tower of St. Jacques de la Boucherie.

At a quarter to six o’clock, Monsieur de Gondy, having finished his business, returned to the archiepiscopal palace.

At six o’clock the curate of St. Merri was announced.

The coadjutor glanced rapidly behind and saw that he was followed by another man. The curate then entered, followed by Planchet.

“Your holiness,” said the curate, “here is the person of whom I had the honor to speak to you.”

Planchet saluted in the manner of one accustomed to fine houses.

“And you are disposed to serve the cause of the people?” asked Gondy.

“Most undoubtedly,” said Planchet. “I am a Frondist from my heart. You see in me, such as I am, a person sentenced to be hung.”

“And on what account?”

“I rescued from the hands of Mazarin’s police a noble lord whom they were conducting back to the Bastile, where he had been for five years.”

“Will you name him?”

“Oh, you know him well, my lord--it is Count de Rochefort.”

“Ah! really, yes,” said the coadjutor, “I have heard this affair mentioned. You raised the whole district, so they told me!”

“Very nearly,” replied Planchet, with a self-satisfied air.

“And your business is----”

“That of a confectioner, in the Rue des Lombards.”

“Explain to me how it happens that, following so peaceful a business, you had such warlike inclinations.”

“Why does my lord, belonging to the church, now receive me in the dress of an officer, with a sword at his side and spurs to his boots?”

“Not badly answered, i’faith,” said Gondy, laughing; “but I have, you must know, always had, in spite of my bands, warlike inclinations.”

“Well, my lord, before I became a confectioner I myself was three years sergeant in the Piedmontese regiment, and before I became sergeant I was for eighteen months the servant of Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

“The lieutenant of musketeers?” asked Gondy.

“Himself, my lord.”

“But he is said to be a furious Mazarinist.”

“Phew!” whistled Planchet.

“What do you mean by that?”

“Nothing, my lord; Monsieur d’Artagnan belongs to the service; Monsieur d’Artagnan makes it his business to defend the cardinal, who pays him, as much as we make it ours, we citizens, to attack him, whom he robs.”

“You are an intelligent fellow, my friend; can we count upon you?”

“You may count upon me, my lord, provided you want to make a complete upheaval of the city.”

“‘Tis that exactly. How many men, think you, you could collect together to-night?”

“Two hundred muskets and five hundred halberds.”

“Let there be only one man in every district who can do as much and by to-morrow we shall have quite a powerful army. Are you disposed to obey Count de Rochefort?”

“I would follow him to hell, and that is saying not a little, as I believe him entirely capable of the descent.”

“Bravo!”

“By what sign to-morrow shall we be able to distinguish friends from foes?”

“Every Frondist must put a knot of straw in his hat.”

“Good! Give the watchword.”

“Do you want money?”

“Money never comes amiss at any time, my lord; if one has it not, one must do without it; with it, matters go on much better and more rapidly.”

Gondy went to a box and drew forth a bag.

“Here are five hundred pistoles,” he said; “and if the action goes off well you may reckon upon a similar sum to-morrow.”

“I will give a faithful account of the sum to your lordship,” said Planchet, putting the bag under his arm.

“That is right; I recommend the cardinal to your attention.”

“Make your mind easy, he is in good hands.”

Planchet went out, the curate remaining for a moment.

“Are you satisfied, my lord?” he asked.

“Yes; he appears to be a resolute fellow.”

“Well, he will do more than he has promised.”

“He will do wonders then.”

The curate rejoined Planchet, who was waiting for him on the stairs. Ten minutes later the curate of St. Sulpice was announced. As soon as the door of Gondy’s study was opened a man rushed in. It was the Count de Rochefort.

“‘Tis you, then, my dear count,” cried Gondy, offering his hand.

“You have made up your mind at last, my lord?” said Rochefort.

“It has been made up a long time,” said Gondy.

“Let us say no more on the subject; you tell me so, I believe you. Well, we are going to give a ball to Mazarin.”

“I hope so.”

“And when will the dance begin?”

“The invitations are given for this evening,” said the coadjutor, “but the violins will not begin to play until to-morrow morning.”

“You may reckon upon me and upon fifty soldiers which the Chevalier d’Humieres has promised me whenever I need them.”

“Upon fifty soldiers?”

“Yes, he is making recruits and he will lend them to me; if any are missing when the fete is over, I shall replace them.”

“Good, my dear Rochefort; but that is not all. What have you done with Monsieur de Beaufort?”

“He is in Vendome, where he will wait until I write to him to return to Paris.”

“Write to him; now’s the time.”

“You are sure of your enterprise?”

“Yes, but he must make haste; for hardly will the people of Paris have revolted before we shall have a score of princes begging to lead them. If he defers he will find the place of honor taken.”

“Shall I send word to him as coming from you?”

“Yes certainly.”

“Shall I tell him that he can count on you?”

“To the end.”

“And you will leave the command to him?”

“Of the war, yes, but in politics----”

“You must know it is not his element.”

“He must leave me to negotiate for my cardinal’s hat in my own fashion.”

“You care about it, then, so much?”

“Since they force me to wear a hat of a form which does not become me,” said Gondy, “I wish at least that the hat should be red.”

“One must not dispute matters of taste and colors,” said Rochefort, laughing. “I answer for his consent.”

“How soon can he be here?”

“In five days.”

“Let him come and he will find a change, I will answer for it.”

“Therefore, go and collect your fifty men and hold yourself in readiness.”

“For what?”

“For everything.”

“Is there any signal for the general rally?”

“A knot of straw in the hat.”

“Very good. Adieu, my lord.”

“Adieu, my dear Rochefort.”

“Ah, Monsieur Mazarin, Monsieur Mazarin,” said Rochefort, leading off his curate, who had not found an opportunity of uttering a single word during the foregoing dialogue, “you will see whether I am too old to be a man of action.”

It was half-past nine o’clock and the coadjutor required half an hour to go from the archbishop’s palace to the tower of St. Jacques de la Boucherie. He remarked that a light was burning in one of the highest windows of the tower. “Good,” said he, “our syndic is at his post.”

He knocked and the door was opened. The vicar himself awaited him, conducted him to the top of the tower, and when there pointed to a little door, placed the light which he had brought with him in a corner of the wall, that the coadjutor might be able to find it on his return, and went down again. Although the key was in the door the coadjutor knocked.

“Come in,” said a voice which he recognized as that of the mendicant, whom he found lying on a kind of truckle bed. He rose on the entrance of the coadjutor, and at that moment ten o’clock struck.

“Well,” said Gondy, “have you kept your word with me?”

“Not exactly,” replied the mendicant.

“How is that?”

“You asked me for five hundred men, did you not? Well, I have ten thousand for you.”

"You are not boasting?"

"Do you wish for a proof?"

"Yes."

There were three candles alight, each of which burnt before a window, one looking upon the city, the other upon the Palais Royal, and a third upon the Rue Saint Denis.

The man went silently to each of the candles and blew them out one after the other.

"What are you doing?" asked the coadjutor.

"I have given the signal."

"For what?"

"For the barricades. When you leave this you will behold my men at work. Only take care you do not break your legs in stumbling over some chain or your neck by falling in a hole."

"Good! there is your money, the same sum as that you have received already. Now remember that you are a general and do not go and drink."

"For twenty years I have tasted nothing but water."

The man took the bag from the hands of the coadjutor, who heard the sound of his fingers counting and handling the gold pieces.

"Ah! ah!" said the coadjutor, "you are avaricious, my good fellow."

The mendicant sighed and threw down the bag.

"Must I always be the same?" said he, "and shall I never succeed in overcoming the old leaven? Oh, misery, oh, vanity!"

"You take it, however."

"Yes, but I make hereby a vow in your presence, to employ all that remains to me in pious works."

His face was pale and drawn, like that of a man who had just undergone some inward struggle.

"Singular man!" muttered Gondy, taking his hat to go away; but on turning around he saw the beggar between him and the door. His first idea was that this man intended to do him some harm, but on the contrary he saw him fall on his knees before him with his hands clasped.

"Your blessing, your holiness, before you go, I beseech you!" he cried.

"Your holiness!" said Gondy; "my friend, you take me for some one else."

"No, your holiness, I take you for what you are, that is to say, the coadjutor; I recognized you at the first glance."

Gondy smiled. “And you want my blessing?” he said.

“Yes, I have need of it.”

The mendicant uttered these words in a tone of such humility, such earnest repentance, that Gondy placed his hand upon him and gave him his benediction with all the unction of which he was capable.

“Now,” said Gondy, “there is a communion between us. I have blessed you and you are sacred to me. Come, have you committed some crime, pursued by human justice, from which I can protect you?”

The beggar shook his head. “The crime which I have committed, my lord, has no call upon human justice, and you can only deliver me from it by blessing me frequently, as you have just done.”

“Come, be candid,” said the coadjutor, “you have not all your life followed the trade which you do now?”

“No, my lord. I have pursued it for six years only.”

“And previously, where were you?”

“In the Bastile.”

“And before you went to the Bastile?”

“I will tell you, my lord, on the day when you are willing to hear my confession.”

“Good! At whatsoever hour of the day or night you may present yourself, remember that I shall be ready to give you absolution.”

“Thank you, my lord,” said the mendicant in a hoarse voice. “But I am not yet ready to receive it.”

“Very well. Adieu.”

“Adieu, your holiness,” said the mendicant, opening the door and bending low before the prelate.

CHAPTER 47.

The Riot.

It was about eleven o’clock at night. Gondy had not walked a hundred steps ere he perceived the strange change which had been made in the streets of Paris.

The whole city seemed peopled with fantastic beings; silent shadows were seen unpaving the streets and others dragging and upsetting great wagons, whilst others again dug ditches large enough to ingulf whole regiments of horsemen. These active beings flitted here and there like so many demons completing some unknown labor; these were the beggars of the Court of Miracles--the agents of the giver of holy water in the Square of Saint Eustache, preparing barricades for the morrow.

Gondy gazed on these deeds of darkness, on these nocturnal laborers, with a kind of fear; he asked himself, if, after having called forth these foul creatures from their dens, he should have the power of making them retire again. He felt almost inclined to cross himself when one of these beings happened to approach him. He reached the Rue Saint Honore and went up it toward the Rue de la Ferronnerie; there the aspect changed; here it was the tradesmen who were running from shop to shop; their doors seemed closed like their shutters, but they were only pushed to in such a manner as to open and allow the men, who seemed fearful of showing what they carried, to enter, closing immediately. These men were shopkeepers, who had arms to lend to those who had none.

One individual went from door to door, bending under the weight of swords, guns, muskets and every kind of weapon, which he deposited as fast as he could. By the light of a lantern the coadjutor recognized Planchet.

The coadjutor proceeded onward to the quay by way of the Rue de la Monnaie; there he found groups of bourgeois clad in black cloaks or gray, according as they belonged to the upper or lower bourgeoisie. They were standing motionless, while single men passed from one group to another. All these cloaks, gray or black, were raised behind by the point of a sword, or before by the barrel of an arquebuse or a musket.

On reaching the Pont Neuf the coadjutor found it strictly guarded and a man approached him.

"Who are you?" asked the man. "I do not know you for one of us."

"Then it is because you do not know your friends, my dear Monsieur Louvieres," said the coadjutor, raising his hat.

Louvieres recognized him and bowed.

Gondy continued his way and went as far as the Tour de Nesle. There he saw a lengthy chain of people gliding under the walls. They might be said to be a procession of ghosts, for they were all wrapped in white cloaks. When they reached a certain spot these men appeared to be annihilated, one after the other, as if the earth had opened under their feet. Gondy, edged into a corner, saw them vanish from the first until the last but one. The last raised his eyes, to ascertain, doubtless, that neither his companions nor himself had been watched, and, in spite of the darkness, he perceived Gondy. He walked straight up to him and placed a pistol to his throat.

"Halloo! Monsieur de Rochefort," said Gondy, laughing, "are you a boy to play with firearms?"

Rochefort recognized the voice.

"Ah, it is you, my lord!" said he.

"The very same. What people are you leading thus into the bowels of the earth?"

"My fifty recruits from the Chevalier d'Humieres, who are destined to enter the light cavalry and who have only received as yet for their equipment their white cloaks."

"And where are you going?"

"To the house of one of my friends, a sculptor, only we enter by the trap through which he lets down his marble."

"Very good," said Gondy, shaking Rochefort by the hand, who descended in his turn and closed the trap after him.

It was now one o'clock in the morning and the coadjutor returned home. He opened a window and leaned out to listen. A strange, incomprehensible, unearthly sound seemed to pervade the whole city; one felt that something unusual and terrible was happening in all the streets, now dark as ocean's most unfathomable caves. From time to time a dull sound was heard, like that of a rising tempest or a billow of the sea; but nothing clear, nothing distinct, nothing intelligible; it was like those mysterious subterraneous noises that precede an earthquake.

The work of revolt continued the whole night thus. The next morning, on awaking, Paris seemed to be startled at her own appearance. It was like a besieged town. Armed men, shouldering muskets, watched over the barricades with menacing looks; words of command, patrols, arrests, executions, even, were encountered at every step. Those bearing plumed hats and gold swords were stopped and made to cry, “Long live Broussel!” “Down with Mazarin!” and whoever refused to comply with this ceremony was hooted at, spat upon and even beaten. They had not yet begun to slay, but it was well felt that the inclination to do so was not wanting.

The barricades had been pushed as far as the Palais Royal. From the Rue de Bons Enfants to that of the Ferronnerie, from the Rue Saint Thomas-du-Louvre to the Pont Neuf, from the Rue Richelieu to the Porte Saint Honore, there were more than ten thousand armed men; those who were at the front hurled defiance at the impassive sentinels of the regiment of guards posted around the Palais Royal, the gates of which were closed behind them, a precaution which made their situation precarious. Among these thousands moved, in bands numbering from one hundred to two hundred, pale and haggard men, clothed in rags, who bore a sort of standard on which was inscribed these words: “Behold the misery of the people!” Wherever these men passed, frenzied cries were heard; and there were so many of these bands that the cries were to be heard in all directions.

The astonishment of Mazarin and of Anne of Austria was great when it was announced to them that the city, which the previous evening they had left entirely tranquil, had awakened to such feverish commotion; nor would either the one or the other believe the reports that were brought to them, declaring they would rather rely on the evidence of their own eyes and ears. Then a window was opened and when they saw and heard they were convinced.

Mazarin shrugged his shoulders and pretended to despise the populace; but he turned visibly pale and ran to his closet, trembling all over, locked up his gold and jewels in his caskets and put his finest diamonds on his fingers. As for the queen, furious, and left to her own guidance, she went for the Marechal de la Meilleraie and desired him to take as many men as he pleased and to go and see what was the meaning of this pleasantry.

The marshal was ordinarily very adventurous and was wont to hesitate at nothing; and he had that lofty contempt for the populace which army officers usually profess. He took a hundred and fifty men and attempted to go out by the Pont du Louvre, but there he met Rochefort and his fifty horsemen, attended by more than five hundred men. The marshal made no attempt to force that barrier and returned up the quay. But at Pont Neuf he found Louvieres and his bourgeois. This time the marshal charged, but he was welcomed by musket shots, while stones fell like hail from all the windows. He left there three men.

He beat a retreat toward the market, but there he met Planchet with his halberdiers; their halberds were leveled at him threateningly. He attempted to ride over those gray cloaks, but the gray cloaks held their ground and the marshal retired toward the Rue Saint Honore, leaving four of his guards dead on the field of battle.

The marshal then entered the Rue Saint Honore, but there he was opposed by the barricades of the mendicant of Saint Eustache. They were guarded, not only by armed men, but even by women and children. Master Friquet, the owner of a pistol and of a sword which Louvieres had given him, had organized a company of rogues like himself and was making a tremendous racket.

The marshal thought this barrier not so well fortified as the others and determined to break through it. He dismounted twenty men to make a breach in the barricade, whilst he and others, remaining on their horses, were to protect the assailants. The twenty men marched straight toward the barrier, but from behind the beams, from among the wagon-wheels and from the heights of the rocks a terrible fusillade burst forth and at the same time Planchet’s halberdiers appeared at the corner of the Cemetery of the Innocents, and Louvieres’s bourgeois at the corner of the Rue de la Monnaie.

The Marechal de la Meilleraie was caught between two fires, but he was brave and made up his mind to die where he was. He returned blow for blow and cries of pain began to be heard in the crowd. The guards, more skillful, did greater execution; but the bourgeois, more numerous, overwhelmed them with a veritable hurricane of iron. Men fell around him as they had fallen at Rocroy or at Lerida. Fontrailles, his aide-de-camp, had an arm broken; his horse had received a bullet in his neck and he had difficulty in controlling him, maddened by pain. In short, he had reached that supreme moment when the bravest feel a shudder in their veins, when suddenly, in the direction of the Rue de l’Arbre-Sec, the crowd opened, crying: “Long live the coadjutor!” and Gondy, in surplice and cloak, appeared, moving tranquilly in the midst of the fusillade and bestowing his benedictions to the right and left, as undisturbed as if he were leading a procession of the Fete Dieu.

All fell to their knees. The marshal recognized him and hastened to meet him.

“Get me out of this, in Heaven’s name!” he said, “or I shall leave my carcass here and those of all my men.”

A great tumult arose, in the midst of which even the noise of thunder could not have been heard. Gondy raised his hand and demanded silence. All were still.

“My children,” he said, “this is the Marechal de la Meilleraie, as to whose intentions you have been deceived and who pledges himself, on returning to the Louvre, to demand of the queen, in your name, our Broussel’s release. You pledge yourself to that, marshal?” added Gondy, turning to La Meilleraie.

“Morbleu!” cried the latter, “I should say that I do pledge myself to it! I had no hope of getting off so easily.”

“He gives you his word of honor,” said Gondy.

The marshal raised his hand in token of assent.

“Long live the coadjutor!” cried the crowd. Some voices even added: “Long live the marshal!” But all took up the cry in chorus: “Down with Mazarin!”

The crowd gave place, the barricade was opened, and the marshal, with the remnant of his company, retreated, preceded by Friquet and his bandits, some of them making a presence of beating drums and others imitating the sound of the trumpet. It was almost a triumphal procession; only, behind the guards the barricades were closed again. The marshal bit his fingers.

In the meantime, as we have said, Mazarin was in his closet, putting his affairs in order. He called for D’Artagnan, but in the midst of such tumult he little expected to see him, D’Artagnan not being on service. In about ten minutes D’Artagnan appeared at the door, followed by the inseparable Porthos.

“Ah, come in, come in, Monsieur d’Artagnan!” cried the cardinal, “and welcome your friend too. But what is going on in this accursed Paris?”

“What is going on, my lord? nothing good,” replied D’Artagnan, shaking his head. “The town is in open revolt, and just now, as I was crossing the Rue Montorgueil with Monsieur du Vallon, who is here, and is your humble servant, they wanted in spite of my uniform, or perhaps because of my uniform, to make us cry ‘Long live Broussel!’ and must I tell you, my lord what they wished us to cry as well?”

“Speak, speak.”

“‘Down with Mazarin!’ I’faith, the treasonable word is out.”

Mazarin smiled, but became very pale.

“And you did cry?” he asked.

“I’faith, no,” said D’Artagnan; “I was not in voice; Monsieur du Vallon has a cold and did not cry either. Then, my lord----”

“Then what?” asked Mazarin.

“Look at my hat and cloak.”

And D’Artagnan displayed four gunshot holes in his cloak and two in his beaver. As for Porthos’s coat, a blow from a halberd had cut it open on the flank and a pistol shot had cut his feather in two.

“Diavolo!” said the cardinal, pensively gazing at the two friends with lively admiration; “I should have cried, I should.”

At this moment the tumult was heard nearer.

Mazarin wiped his forehead and looked around him. He had a great desire to go to the window, but he dared not.

“See what is going on, Monsieur D’Artagnan,” said he.

D’Artagnan went to the window with his habitual composure. “Oho!” said he, “what is this? Marechal de la Meilleraie returning without a hat--Fontrailles with his arm in a sling--wounded guards--horses bleeding; eh, then, what are the sentinels about? They are aiming--they are going to fire!”

“They have received orders to fire on the people if the people approach the Palais Royal!” exclaimed Mazarin.

“But if they fire, all is lost!” cried D’Artagnan.

“We have the gates.”

“The gates! to hold for five minutes--the gates, they will be torn down, twisted into iron wire, ground to powder! God’s death, don’t fire!” screamed D’Artagnan, throwing open the window.

In spite of this recommendation, which, owing to the noise, could scarcely have been heard, two or three musket shots resounded, succeeded by a terrible discharge. The balls might be heard peppering the facade of the Palais Royal, and one of them, passing under D’Artagnan’s arm, entered and broke a mirror, in which Porthos was complacently admiring himself.

“Alack! alack!” cried the cardinal, “a Venetian glass!”

“Oh, my lord,” said D’Artagnan, quietly shutting the window, “it is not worth while weeping yet, for probably an hour hence there will not be one of your mirrors remaining in the Palais Royal, whether they be Venetian or Parisian.”

“But what do you advise, then?” asked Mazarin, trembling.

“Eh, egad, to give up Broussel as they demand! What the devil do you want with a member of the parliament? He is of no earthly use to anybody.”

“And you, Monsieur du Vallon, is that your advice? What would you do?”

“I should give up Broussel,” said Porthos.

“Come, come with me, gentlemen!” exclaimed Mazarin. “I will go and discuss the matter with the queen.”

He stopped at the end of the corridor and said:

“I can count upon you, gentlemen, can I not?”

“We do not give ourselves twice over,” said D’Artagnan; “we have given ourselves to you; command, we shall obey.”

“Very well, then,” said Mazarin; “enter this cabinet and wait till I come back.”

And turning off he entered the drawing-room by another door.

CHAPTER 48.

The Riot becomes a Revolution.

The closet into which D’Artagnan and Porthos had been ushered was separated from the drawing-room where the queen was by tapestried curtains only, and this thin partition enabled them to hear all that passed in the adjoining room, whilst the aperture between the two hangings, small as it was, permitted them to see.

The queen was standing in the room, pale with anger; her self-control, however, was so great that it might have been imagined that she was calm. Comminges, Villequier and Guitant were behind her and the women again were behind the men. The Chancellor Sequier, who twenty years previously had persecuted her so ruthlessly, stood before her, relating how his carriage had been smashed, how he had been pursued and had rushed into the Hotel d’O----, that the hotel was immediately invaded, pillaged and devastated; happily he had time to reach a closet hidden behind tapestry, in which he was secreted by an old woman, together with his brother, the Bishop of Meaux. Then the danger was so imminent, the rioters came so near, uttering such threats, that the chancellor thought his last hour had come and confessed himself to his brother priest, so as to be all ready to die in case he was discovered. Fortunately, however, he had not been taken; the people, believing that he had escaped by some back entrance, retired and left him at liberty to retreat. Then, disguised in he clothes of the Marquis d’O----, he had left the hotel, stumbling over the bodies of an officer and two guards who had been killed whilst defending the street door.

During the recital Mazarin entered and glided noiselessly up to the queen to listen.

“Well,” said the queen, when the chancellor had finished speaking; “what do you think of it all?”

“I think that matters look very gloomy, madame.”

“But what step would you propose to me?”

“I could propose one to your majesty, but I dare not.”

"You may, you may, sir," said the queen with a bitter smile; "you were not so timid once."

The chancellor reddened and stammered some words.

"It is not a question of the past, but of the present," said the queen; "you said you could give me advice--what is it?"

"Madame," said the chancellor, hesitating, "it would be to release Broussel."

The queen, although already pale, became visibly paler and her face was contracted.

"Release Broussel!" she cried, "never!"

At this moment steps were heard in the ante-room and without any announcement the Marechal de la Meilleraie appeared at the door.

"Ah, there you are, marechal," cried Anne of Austria joyfully. "I trust you have brought this rabble to reason."

"Madame," replied the marechal, "I have left three men on the Pont Neuf, four at the Halle, six at the corner of the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec and two at the door of your palace--fifteen in all. I have brought away ten or twelve wounded. I know not where I have left my hat, and in all probability I should have been left with my hat, had the coadjutor not arrived in time to rescue me."

"Ah, indeed," said the queen, "it would have much astonished me if that low cur, with his distorted legs, had not been mixed up with all this."

"Madame," said La Meilleraie, "do not say too much against him before me, for the service he rendered me is still fresh."

"Very good," said the queen, "be as grateful as you like, it does not implicate me; you are here safe and sound, that is all I wished for; you are not only welcome, but welcome back."

"Yes, madame; but I only came back on one condition--that I would transmit to your majesty the will of the people."

"The will!" exclaimed the queen, frowning. "Oh! oh! monsieur marechal, you must indeed have found yourself in wondrous peril to have undertaken so strange a commission!"

The irony with which these words were uttered did not escape the marechal.

"Pardon, madame," he said, "I am not a lawyer, I am a mere soldier, and probably, therefore, I do not quite comprehend the value of certain words; I ought to have said the wishes, and not the will, of the people. As for what you do me the honor to say, I presume you mean I was afraid?”

The queen smiled.

“Well, then, madame, yes, I did feel fear; and though I have been through twelve pitched battles and I cannot count how many charges and skirmishes, I own for the third time in my life I was afraid. Yes, and I would rather face your majesty, however threatening your smile, than face those demons who accompanied me hither and who sprung from I know not whence, unless from deepest hell.”

(“Bravo,” said D’Artagnan in a whisper to Porthos; “well answered.”)

“Well,” said the queen, biting her lips, whilst her courtiers looked at each other with surprise, “what is the desire of my people?”

“That Broussel shall be given up to them, madame.”

“Never!” said the queen, “never!”

“Your majesty is mistress,” said La Meilleraie, retreating a few steps.

“Where are you going, marechal?” asked the queen.

“To give your majesty’s reply to those who await it.”

“Stay, marechal; I will not appear to parley with rebels.”

“Madame, I have pledged my word, and unless you order me to be arrested I shall be forced to return.”

Anne of Austria’s eyes shot glances of fire.

“Oh! that is no impediment, sir,” said she; “I have had greater men than you arrested--Guitant!”

Mazarin sprang forward.

“Madame,” said he, “if I dared in my turn advise----”

“Would it be to give up Broussel, sir? If so, you can spare yourself the trouble.”

“No,” said Mazarin; “although, perhaps, that counsel is as good as any other.”

“Then what may it be?”

“To call for monsieur le coadjuteur.”

“The coadjutor!” cried the queen, “that dreadful mischief maker! It is he who has raised all this revolt.”

“The more reason,” said Mazarin; “if he has raised it he can put it down.”

“And hold, madame,” suggested Comminges, who was near a window, out of which he could see; “hold, the moment is a happy one, for there he is now, giving his blessing in the square of the Palais Royal.”

The queen sprang to the window.

“It is true,” she said, “the arch hypocrite--see!”

“I see,” said Mazarin, “that everybody kneels before him, although he be but coadjutor, whilst I, were I in his place, though I am cardinal, should be torn to pieces. I persist, then, madame, in my wish” (he laid an emphasis on the word), “that your majesty should receive the coadjutor.”

“And wherefore do you not say, like the rest, your will?” replied the queen, in a low voice.

Mazarin bowed.

“Monsieur le marechal,” said the queen, after a moment’s reflection, “go and find the coadjutor and bring him to me.”

“And what shall I say to the people?”

“That they must have patience,” said Anne, “as I have.”

The fiery Spanish woman spoke in a tone so imperative that the marechal made no reply; he bowed and went out.

(D’Artagnan turned to Porthos. “How will this end?” he said.

“We shall soon see,” said Porthos, in his tranquil way.)

In the meantime Anne of Austria approached Comminges and conversed with him in a subdued tone, whilst Mazarin glanced uneasily at the corner occupied by D’Artagnan and Porthos. Ere long the door opened and the marechal entered, followed by the coadjutor.

“There, madame,” he said, “is Monsieur Gondy, who hastens to obey your majesty’s summons.”

The queen advanced a few steps to meet him, and then stopped, cold, severe, unmoved, with her lower lip scornfully protruded.

Gondy bowed respectfully.

“Well, sir,” said the queen, “what is your opinion of this riot?”

“That it is no longer a riot, madame,” he replied, “but a revolt.”

“The revolt is at the door of those who think my people can rebel,” cried Anne, unable to dissimulate before the coadjutor, whom she looked upon, and probably with reason, as the promoter of the tumult. “Revolt! thus it is called by those who have wished for this demonstration and who are, perhaps, the cause of it; but, wait, wait! the king’s authority will put all this to rights.”

“Was it to tell me that, madame,” coldly replied Gondy, “that your majesty admitted me to the honor of entering your presence?”

“No, my dear coadjutor,” said Mazarin; “it was to ask your advice in the unhappy dilemma in which we find ourselves.”

“Is it true,” asked Gondy, feigning astonishment, “that her majesty summoned me to ask for my opinion?”

“Yes,” said the queen, “it is requested.”

The coadjutor bowed.

“Your majesty wishes, then----”

“You to say what you would do in her place,” Mazarin hastened to reply.

The coadjutor looked at the queen, who replied by a sign in the affirmative.

“Were I in her majesty’s place,” said Gondy, coldly, “I should not hesitate; I should release Broussel.”

“And if I do not give him up, what think you will be the result?” exclaimed the queen.

“I believe that not a stone in Paris will remain unturned,” put in the marechal.

“It was not your opinion that I asked,” said the queen, sharply, without even turning around.

“If it is I whom your majesty interrogates,” replied the coadjutor in the same calm manner, “I reply that I hold monsieur le marechal’s opinion in every respect.”

The color mounted to the queen’s face; her fine blue eyes seemed to start out of her head and her carmine lips, compared by all the poets of the day to a pomegranate in flower, were trembling with anger. Mazarin himself, who was well accustomed to the domestic outbreaks of this disturbed household, was alarmed.

“Give up Broussel!” she cried; “fine counsel, indeed. Upon my word! one can easily see it comes from a priest.”

Gondy remained firm, and the abuse of the day seemed to glide over his head as the sarcasms of the evening before had done; but hatred and revenge were accumulating in his heart silently and drop by drop. He looked coldly at the queen, who nudged Mazarin to make him say something in his turn.

Mazarin, according to his custom, was thinking much and saying little.

“Ho! ho!” said he, “good advice, advice of a friend. I, too, would give up that good Monsieur Broussel, dead or alive, and all would be at an end.”

“If you yield him dead, all will indeed be at an end, my lord, but quite otherwise than you mean.”

“Did I say ‘dead or alive?’“ replied Mazarin. “It was only a way of speaking. You know I am not familiar with the French language, which you, monsieur le coadjuteur, both speak and write so well.”

(“This is a council of state,” D’Artagnan remarked to Porthos; “but we held better ones at La Rochelle, with Athos and Aramis.”

“At the Saint Gervais bastion,” said Porthos.

“There and elsewhere.”)

The coadjutor let the storm pass over his head and resumed, still with the same tranquillity:

“Madame, if the opinion I have submitted to you does not please you it is doubtless because you have better counsels to follow. I know too well the wisdom of the queen and that of her advisers to suppose that they will leave the capital long in trouble that may lead to a revolution.”

“Thus, then, it is your opinion,” said Anne of Austria, with a sneer and biting her lips with rage, “that yesterday’s riot, which to-day is already a rebellion, to-morrow may become a revolution?”

“Yes, madame,” replied the coadjutor, gravely.

“But if I am to believe you, sir, the people seem to have thrown off all restraint.”

“It is a bad year for kings,” said Gondy, shaking his head; “look at England, madame.”

“Yes; but fortunately we have no Oliver Cromwell in France,” replied the queen.

“Who knows?” said Gondy; “such men are like thunderbolts--one recognizes them only when they have struck.”

Every one shuddered and there was a moment of silence, during which the queen pressed her hand to her side, evidently to still the beatings of her heart.

(“Porthos,” murmured D’Artagnan, “look well at that priest.”

“Yes,” said Porthos, “I see him. What then?”

“Well, he is a man.”

Porthos looked at D’Artagnan in astonishment. Evidently he did not understand his meaning.)

“Your majesty,” continued the coadjutor, pitilessly, “is about to take such measures as seem good to you, but I foresee that they will be violent and such as will still further exasperate the rioters.”

“In that case, you, monsieur le coadjuteur, who have such power over them and are at the same time friendly to us,” said the queen, ironically, “will quiet them by bestowing your blessing upon them.”

“Perhaps it will be too late,” said Gondy, still unmoved; “perhaps I shall have lost all influence; while by giving up Broussel your majesty will strike at the root of the sedition and will gain the right to punish severely any revival of the revolt.”

“Have I not, then, that right?” cried the queen.

“If you have it, use it,” replied Gondy.

(“Peste!” said D’Artagnan to Porthos. “There is a man after my own heart. Oh! if he were minister and I were his D’Artagnan, instead of belonging to that beast of a Mazarin, mordieu! what fine things we would do together!”

“Yes,” said Porthos.)

The queen made a sign for every one, except Mazarin, to quit the room; and Gondy bowed, as if to leave with the rest.

“Stay, sir,” said Anne to him.

“Good,” thought Gondy, “she is going to yield.”

(“She is going to have him killed,” said D’Artagnan to Porthos, “but at all events it shall not be by me. I swear to Heaven, on the contrary, that if they fall upon him I will fall upon them.”

“And I, too,” said Porthos.)

“Good,” muttered Mazarin, sitting down, “we shall soon see something startling.”

The queen’s eyes followed the retreating figures and when the last had closed the door she turned away. It was evident that she was making unnatural efforts to subdue her anger; she fanned herself, smelled at her vinaigrette and walked up and down. Gondy, who began to feel uneasy, examined the tapestry with his eyes, touched the coat of mail which he wore under his long gown and felt from time to time to see if the handle of a good Spanish dagger, which was hidden under his cloak, was well within reach.

“And now,” at last said the queen, “now that we are alone, repeat your counsel, monsieur le coadjuteur.”

“It is this, madame: that you should appear to have reflected, and publicly acknowledge an error, which constitutes the extra strength of a strong government; release Broussel from prison and give him back to the people.”

“Oh!” cried Anne, “to humble myself thus! Am I, or am I not, the queen? This screaming mob, are they, or are they not, my subjects? Have I friends? Have I guards? Ah! by Notre Dame! as Queen Catherine used to say,” continued she, excited by her own words, “rather than give up this infamous Broussel to them I will strangle him with my own hands!”

And she sprang toward Gondy, whom assuredly at that moment she hated more than Broussel, with outstretched arms. The coadjutor remained immovable and not a muscle of his face was discomposed; only his glance flashed like a sword in returning the furious looks of the queen.

(“He were a dead man” said the Gascon, “if there were still a Vitry at the court and if Vitry entered at this moment; but for my part, before he could reach the good prelate I would kill Vitry at once; the cardinal would be infinitely pleased with me.”

“Hush!” said Porthos; “listen.”)

“Madame,” cried the cardinal, seizing hold of Anne and drawing her back, “Madame, what are you about?”

Then he added in Spanish, “Anne, are you mad? You, a queen to quarrel like a washerwoman! And do you not perceive that in the person of this priest is represented the whole people of Paris and that it is dangerous to insult him at this moment, and if this priest wished it, in an hour you would be without a crown? Come, then, on another occasion you can be firm and strong; but to-day is not the proper time; to-day, flatter and caress, or you are only a common woman.”

(At the first words of this address D’Artagnan had seized Porthos’s arm, which he pressed with gradually increasing force. When Mazarin ceased speaking he said to Porthos in a low tone:

“Never tell Mazarin that I understand Spanish, or I am a lost man and you are also.”

“All right,” said Porthos.)

This rough appeal, marked by the eloquence which characterized Mazarin when he spoke in Italian or Spanish and which he lost entirely in speaking French, was uttered with such impenetrable expression that Gondy, clever physiognomist as he was, had no suspicion of its being more than a simple warning to be more subdued.

The queen, on her part, thus chided, softened immediately and sat down, and in an almost weeping voice, letting her arms fall by her side, said:

“Pardon me, sir, and attribute this violence to what I suffer. A woman, and consequently subject to the weaknesses of my sex, I am alarmed at the idea of civil war; a queen, accustomed to be obeyed, I am excited at the first opposition.”

“Madame,” replied Gondy, bowing, “your majesty is mistaken in qualifying my sincere advice as opposition. Your majesty has none but submissive and respectful subjects. It is not the queen with whom the people are displeased; they ask for Broussel and are only too happy, if you release him to them, to live under your government.”

Mazarin, who at the words, “It is not the queen with whom the people are displeased,” had pricked up his ears, thinking that the coadjutor was about to speak of the cries, “Down with Mazarin,” and pleased with Gondy’s suppression of this fact, he said with his sweetest voice and his most gracious expression:

“Madame, credit the coadjutor, who is one of the most able politicians we have; the first available cardinal’s hat seems to belong already to his noble brow.”

“Ah! how much you have need of me, cunning rogue!” thought Gondy.

(“And what will he promise us?” said D’Artagnan. “Peste, if he is giving away hats like that, Porthos, let us look out and both demand a regiment to-morrow. Corbleu! let the civil war last but one year and I will have a constable’s sword gilt for me.”

“And for me?” put in Porthos.

“For you? I will give you the baton of the Marechal de la Meilleraie, who does not seem to be much in favor just now.”)

“And so, sir,” said the queen, “you are seriously afraid of a public tumult.”

“Seriously,” said Gondy, astonished at not having further advanced; “I fear that when the torrent has broken its embankment it will cause fearful destruction.”

“And I,” said the queen, “think that in such a case other embankments should be raised to oppose it. Go; I will reflect.”

Gondy looked at Mazarin, astonished, and Mazarin approached the queen to speak to her, but at this moment a frightful tumult arose from the square of the Palais Royal.

Gondy smiled, the queen’s color rose and Mazarin grew even paler.

“What is that again?” he asked.

At this moment Comminges rushed into the room.

“Pardon, your majesty,” he cried, “but the people have dashed the sentinels against the gates and they are now forcing the doors; what are your commands?”

“Listen, madame,” said Gondy.

The moaning of waves, the noise of thunder, the roaring of a volcano, cannot be compared with the tempest of cries heard at that moment.

“What are my commands?” said the queen.

“Yes, for time presses.”

“How many men have you about the Palais Royal?”

“Six hundred.”

“Place a hundred around the king and with the remainder sweep away this mob for me.”

“Madame,” cried Mazarin, “what are you about?”

“Go!” said the queen.

Comminges went out with a soldier’s passive obedience.

At this moment a monstrous battering was heard. One of the gates began to yield.

“Oh! madame,” cried Mazarin, “you have ruined us all--the king, yourself and me.”

At this cry from the soul of the frightened cardinal, Anne became alarmed in her turn and would have recalled Comminges.

“It is too late,” said Mazarin, tearing his hair, “too late!”

The gale had given way. Hoarse shouts were heard from the excited mob. D’Artagnan put his hand to his sword, motioning to Porthos to follow his example.

“Save the queen!” cried Mazarin to the coadjutor.

Gondy sprang to the window and threw it open; he recognized Louvieres at the head of a troop of about three or four thousand men.

“Not a step further,” he shouted, “the queen is signing!”

“What are you saying?” asked the queen.

“The truth, madame,” said Mazarin, placing a pen and a paper before her, “you must;” then he added: “Sign, Anne, I implore you--I command you.”

The queen fell into a chair, took the pen and signed.

The people, kept back by Louvieres, had not made another step forward; but the awful murmuring, which indicates an angry people, continued.

The queen had written, “The keeper of the prison at Saint Germain will set Councillor Broussel at liberty;” and she had signed it.

The coadjutor, whose eyes devoured her slightest movements, seized the paper immediately the signature had been affixed to it, returned to the window and waved it in his hand.

“This is the order,” he said.

All Paris seemed to shout with joy, and then the air resounded with the cries of “Long live Broussel!” “Long live the coadjutor!”

“Long live the queen!” cried De Gondy; but the cries which replied to his were poor and few, and perhaps he had but uttered it to make Anne of Austria sensible of her weakness.

“And now that you have obtained what you want, go,” said she, “Monsieur de Gondy.”

“Whenever her majesty has need of me,” replied the coadjutor, bowing, “her majesty knows I am at her command.”

“Ah, cursed priest!” cried Anne, when he had retired, stretching out her arm to the scarcely closed door, “one day I will make you drink the dregs of the atrocious gall you have poured out on me to-day.”

Mazarin wished to approach her. “Leave me!” she exclaimed; “you are not a man!” and she went out of the room.

“It is you who are not a woman,” muttered Mazarin.

Then, after a moment of reverie, he remembered where he had left D’Artagnan and Porthos and that they must have overheard everything. He knit his brows and went direct to the tapestry, which he pushed aside. The closet was empty.

At the queen’s last word, D’Artagnan had dragged Porthos into the gallery. Thither Mazarin went in his turn and found the two friends walking up and down.

“Why did you leave the closet, Monsieur d’Artagnan?” asked the cardinal.

“Because,” replied D’Artagnan, “the queen desired every one to leave and I thought that this command was intended for us as well as for the rest.”

“And you have been here since----”

“About a quarter of an hour,” said D’Artagnan, motioning to Porthos not to contradict him.

Mazarin saw the sign and remained convinced that D’Artagnan had seen and heard everything; but he was pleased with his falsehood.

“Decidedly, Monsieur d’Artagnan, you are the man I have been seeking. You may reckon upon me and so may your friend.” Then bowing to the two musketeers with his most gracious smile, he re-entered his closet more calmly, for on the departure of De Gondy the uproar had ceased as though by enchantment.

CHAPTER 49.

Misfortune refreshes the Memory.

Anne of Austria returned to her oratory, furious.

"What!" she cried, wringing her beautiful hands, "What! the people have seen Monsieur de Conde, a prince of the blood royal, arrested by my mother-in-law, Maria de Medicis; they saw my mother-in-law, their former regent, expelled by the cardinal; they saw Monsieur de Vendome, that is to say, the son of Henry IV., a prisoner at Vincennes; and whilst these great personages were imprisoned, insulted and threatened, they said nothing; and now for a Broussel--good God! what, then, is to become of royalty?"

The queen unconsciously touched here upon the exciting question. The people had made no demonstration for the princes, but they had risen for Broussel; they were taking the part of a plebeian and in defending Broussel they instinctively felt they were defending themselves.

During this time Mazarin walked up and down the study, glancing from time to time at his beautiful Venetian mirror, starred in every direction. "Ah!" he said, "it is sad, I know well, to be forced to yield thus; but, pshaw! we shall have our revenge. What matters it about Broussel--it is a name, not a thing."

Mazarin, clever politician as he was, was for once mistaken; Broussel was a thing, not a name.

The next morning, therefore, when Broussel made his entrance into Paris in a large carriage, having his son Louvieres at his side and Friquet behind the vehicle, the people threw themselves in his way and cries of "Long live Broussel!" "Long live our father!" resounded from all parts and was death to Mazarin's ears; and the cardinal's spies brought bad news from every direction, which greatly agitated the minister, but was calmly received by the queen. The latter seemed to be maturing in her mind some great stroke, a fact which increased the uneasiness of the cardinal, who knew the proud princess and dreaded much the determination of Anne of Austria.

The coadjutor returned to parliament more a monarch than king, queen, and cardinal, all three together. By his advice a decree from parliament summoned the citizens to lay down their arms and demolish the barricades. They now knew that it required but one hour to take up arms again and one night to reconstruct the barricades.

Rochefort had returned to the Chevalier d’Humieres his fifty horsemen, less two, missing at roll call. But the chevalier was himself at heart a Frondist and would hear nothing said of compensation.

The mendicant had gone to his old place on the steps of Saint Eustache and was again distributing holy water with one hand and asking alms with the other. No one could suspect that those two hands had been engaged with others in drawing out from the social edifice the keystone of royalty.

Louvieres was proud and satisfied; he had taken revenge on Mazarin and had aided in his father’s deliverance from prison. His name had been mentioned as a name of terror at the Palais Royal. Laughingly he said to the councillor, restored to his family:

“Do you think, father, that if now I should ask for a company the queen would give it to me?”

D’Artagnan profited by this interval of calm to send away Raoul, whom he had great difficulty in keeping shut up during the riot, and who wished positively to strike a blow for one party or the other. Raoul had offered some opposition at first; but D’Artagnan made use of the Comte de la Fere’s name, and after paying a visit to Madame de Chevreuse, Raoul started to rejoin the army.

Rochefort alone was dissatisfied with the termination of affairs. He had written to the Duc de Beaufort to come and the duke was about to arrive, and he world find Paris tranquil. He went to the coadjutor to consult with him whether it would not be better to send word to the duke to stop on the road, but Gondy reflected for a moment, and then said:

“Let him continue his journey.”

“All is not then over?” asked Rochefort.

“My dear count, we have only just begun.”

“What induces you to think so?”

“The knowledge that I have of the queen’s heart; she will not rest contented beaten.”

“Is she, then, preparing for a stroke?”

“I hope so.”

“Come, let us see what you know.”

“I know that she has written to the prince to return in haste from the army.”

“Ah! ha!” said Rochefort, “you are right. We must let Monsieur de Beaufort come.”

In fact, the evening after this conversation the report was circulated that the Prince de Conde had arrived. It was a very simple, natural circumstance and yet it created a profound sensation. It was said that Madame de Longueville, for whom the prince had more than a brother’s affection and in whom he had confided, had been indiscreet. His confidence had unveiled the sinister project of the queen.

Even on the night of the prince’s return, some citizens, bolder than the rest, such as the sheriffs, captains and the quartermaster, went from house to house among their friends, saying:

“Why do we not take the king and place him in the Hotel de Ville? It is a shame to leave him to be educated by our enemies, who will give him evil counsel; whereas, brought up by the coadjutor, for instance, he would imbibe national principles and love his people.”

That night the question was secretly agitated and on the morrow the gray and black cloaks, the patrols of armed shop-people, and the bands of mendicants reappeared.

The queen had passed the night in lonely conference with the prince, who had entered the oratory at midnight and did not leave till five o’clock in the morning.

At five o’clock Anne went to the cardinal’s room. If she had not yet taken any repose, he at least was already up. Six days had already passed out of the ten he had asked from Mordaunt; he was therefore occupied in revising his reply to Cromwell, when some one knocked gently at the door of communication with the queen’s apartments. Anne of Austria alone was permitted to enter by that door. The cardinal therefore rose to open it.

The queen was in a morning gown, but it became her still; for, like Diana of Poictiers and Ninon, Anne of Austria enjoyed the privilege of remaining ever beautiful; nevertheless, this morning she looked handsomer than usual, for her eyes had all the sparkle inward satisfaction adds to expression.

“What is the matter, madame?” said Mazarin, uneasily. “You seem secretly elated.”

“Yes, Giulio,” she said, “proud and happy; for I have found the means of strangling this hydra.”

"You are a great politician, my queen," said Mazarin; "let us hear the means." And he hid what he had written by sliding the letter under a folio of blank paper.

"You know," said the queen, "that they want to take the king away from me?"

"Alas! yes, and to hang me."

"They shall not have the king."

"Nor hang me."

"Listen. I want to carry off my son from them, with yourself. I wish that this event, which on the day it is known will completely change the aspect of affairs, should be accomplished without the knowledge of any others but yourself, myself, and a third person."

"And who is this third person?"

"Monsieur le Prince."

"He has come, then, as they told me?"

"Last evening."

"And you have seen him?"

"He has just left me."

"And will he aid this project?"

"The plan is his own."

"And Paris?"

"He will starve it out and force it to surrender at discretion."

"The plan is not wanting in grandeur; I see but one impediment."

"What is it?"

"Impossibility."

"A senseless word. Nothing is impossible."

"On paper."

"In execution. We have money?"

"A little," said Mazarin, trembling, lest Anne should ask to draw upon his purse.

"Troops?"

"Five or six thousand men."

"Courage?"

"Plenty."

"Then the thing is easy. Oh! do think of it, Giulio! Paris, this odious Paris, waking up one morning without queen or king, surrounded, besieged, famished--having for its sole resource its stupid parliament and their coadjutor with crooked limbs!”

“Charming! charming!” said Mazarin. “I can imagine the effect, I do not see the means.”

“I will find the means myself.”

“You are aware it will be war, civil war, furious, devouring, implacable?”

“Oh! yes, yes, war,” said Anne of Austria. “Yes, I will reduce this rebellious city to ashes. I will extinguish the fire with blood! I will perpetuate the crime and punishment by making a frightful example. Paris!; I--I detest, I loathe it!”

“Very fine, Anne. You are now sanguinary; but take care. We are not in the time of Malatesta and Castruccio Castracani. You will get yourself decapitated, my beautiful queen, and that would be a pity.”

“You laugh.”

“Faintly. It is dangerous to go to war with a nation. Look at your brother monarch, Charles I. He is badly off, very badly.”

“We are in France, and I am Spanish.”

“So much the worse; I had much rather you were French and myself also; they would hate us both less.”

“Nevertheless, you consent?”

“Yes, if the thing be possible.”

“It is; it is I who tell you so; make preparations for departure.”

“I! I am always prepared to go, only, as you know, I never do go, and perhaps shall go this time as little as before.”

“In short, if I go, will you go too?”

“I will try.”

“You torment me, Giulio, with your fears; and what are you afraid of, then?”

“Of many things.”

“What are they?”

Mazarin’s face, smiling as it was, became clouded.

“Anne,” said he, “you are but a woman and as a woman you may insult men at your ease, knowing that you can do it with impunity. You accuse me of fear; I have not so much as you have, since I do not fly as you do. Against whom do they cry out? is it against you or against myself? Whom would they hang, yourself or me? Well, I can weather the storm--I, whom, notwithstanding, you tax with fear--not with bravado, that is not my way;

but I am firm. Imitate me. Make less hubbub and think more deeply. You cry very loud, you end by doing nothing; you talk of flying----"

Mazarin shrugged his shoulders and taking the queen's hand led her to the window.

"Look!" he said.

"Well?" said the queen, blinded by her obstinacy.

"Well, what do you see from this window? If I am not mistaken those are citizens, helmeted and mailed, armed with good muskets, as in the time of the League, and whose eyes are so intently fixed on this window that they will see you if you raise that curtain much; and now come to the other side--what do you see? Creatures of the people, armed with halberds, guarding your doors. You will see the same at every opening from this palace to which I should lead you. Your doors are guarded, the airholes of your cellars are guarded, and I could say to you, as that good La Ramee said to me of the Duc de Beaufort, you must be either bird or mouse to get out."

"He did get out, nevertheless."

"Do you think of escaping in the same way?"

"I am a prisoner, then?"

"Parbleu!" said Mazarin, "I have been proving it to you this last hour."

And he quietly resumed his dispatch at the place where he had been interrupted.

Anne, trembling with anger and scarlet with humiliation, left the room, shutting the door violently after her. Mazarin did not even turn around. When once more in her own apartment Anne fell into a chair and wept; then suddenly struck with an idea:

"I am saved!" she exclaimed, rising; "oh, yes! yes! I know a man who will find the means of taking me from Paris, a man I have too long forgotten." Then falling into a reverie, she added, however, with an expression of joy, "Ungrateful woman that I am, for twenty years I have forgotten this man, whom I ought to have made a marechal of France. My mother-in-law expended gold, caresses, dignities on Concini, who ruined her; the king made Vitry marechal of France for an assassination: while I have left in obscurity, in poverty, the noble D'Artagnan, who saved me!"

And running to a table, on which were paper, pens and ink, she hastily began to write.

CHAPTER 50.

The Interview.

It had been D’Artagnan’s practice, ever since the riots, to sleep in the same room as Porthos, and on this eventful morning he was still there, sleeping, and dreaming that a yellow cloud had overspread the sky and was raining gold pieces into his hat, which he held out till it was overflowing with pistoles. As for Porthos, he dreamed that the panels of his carriage were not capacious enough to contain the armorial bearings he had ordered to be painted on them. They were both aroused at seven o’clock by the entrance of an unliveried servant, who brought a letter for D’Artagnan.

“From whom?” asked the Gascon.

“From the queen,” replied the servant.

“Ho!” said Porthos, raising himself in his bed; “what does she say?”

D’Artagnan requested the servant to wait in the next room and when the door was closed he sprang up from his bed and read rapidly, whilst Porthos looked at him with starting eyes, not daring to ask a single question.

“Friend Porthos,” said D’Artagnan, handing the letter to him, “this time, at least, you are sure of your title of baron, and I of my captaincy. Read for yourself and judge.”

Porthos took the letter and with a trembling voice read the following words:

“The queen wishes to speak to Monsieur d’Artagnan, who must follow the bearer.”

“Well!” exclaimed Porthos; “I see nothing in that very extraordinary.”

“But I see much that is very extraordinary in it,” replied D’Artagnan. “It is evident, by their sending for me, that matters are becoming complicated. Just reflect a little what an agitation the queen’s mind must be in for her to have remembered me after twenty years.”

“It is true,” said Porthos.

“Sharpen your sword, baron, load your pistols, and give some corn to the horses, for I will answer for it, something lightning-like will happen ere to-morrow.”

"But, stop; do you think it can be a trap that they are laying for us?" suggested Porthos, incessantly thinking how his greatness must be irksome to inferior people.

"If it is a snare," replied D'Artagnan, "I shall scent it out, be assured. If Mazarin is an Italian, I am a Gascon."

And D'Artagnan dressed himself in an instant.

Whilst Porthos, still in bed, was hooking on his cloak for him, a second knock at the door was heard.

"Come in," exclaimed D'Artagnan; and another servant entered.

"From His Eminence, Cardinal Mazarin," presenting a letter.

D'Artagnan looked at Porthos.

"A complicated affair," said Porthos; "where will you begin?"

"It is arranged capitally; his eminence expects me in half an hour."

"Good."

"My friend," said D'Artagnan, turning to the servant, "tell his eminence that in half an hour I shall be at his command."

"It is very fortunate," resumed the Gascon, when the valet had retired, "that he did not meet the other one."

"Do you not think that they have sent for you, both for the same thing?"

"I do not think it, I am certain of it."

"Quick, quick, D'Artagnan. Remember that the queen awaits you, and after the queen, the cardinal, and after the cardinal, myself."

D'Artagnan summoned Anne of Austria's servant and signified that he was ready to follow him into the queen's presence.

The servant conducted him by the Rue des Petits Champs and turning to the left entered the little garden gate leading into the Rue Richelieu; then they gained the private staircase and D'Artagnan was ushered into the oratory. A certain emotion, for which he could not account, made the lieutenant's heart beat: he had no longer the assurance of youth; experience had taught him the importance of past events. Formerly he would have approached the queen as a young man who bends before a woman; but now it was a different thing; he answered her summons as an humble soldier obeys an illustrious general.

The silence of the oratory was at last disturbed by the slight rustling of silk, and D'Artagnan started when he perceived the tapestry raised by a white hand, which, by its form, its color and its beauty he recognized as that royal hand which had one day been presented to him to kiss. The queen entered.

"It is you, Monsieur d'Artagnan," she said, fixing a gaze full of melancholy interest on the countenance of the officer, "and I know you well. Look at me well in your turn. I am the queen; do you recognize me?"

"No, madame," replied D'Artagnan.

"But are you no longer aware," continued Anne, giving that sweet expression to her voice which she could do at will, "that in former days the queen had once need of a young, brave and devoted cavalier--that she found this cavalier--and that, although he might have thought that she had forgotten him, she had kept a place for him in the depths of her heart?"

"No, madame, I was ignorant of that," said the musketeer.

"So much the worse, sir," said Anne of Austria; "so much the worse, at least for the queen, for to-day she has need of the same courage and the same devotion."

"What!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "does the queen, surrounded as she is by such devoted servants, such wise counselors, men, in short, so great by merit or position--does she deign to cast her eyes on an obscure soldier?"

Anne understood this covert reproach and was more moved than irritated by it. She had many a time felt humiliated by the self-sacrifice and disinterestedness shown by the Gascon gentleman. She had allowed herself to be exceeded in generosity.

"All that you tell me of those by whom I am surrounded, Monsieur d'Artagnan, is doubtless true," said the queen, "but I have confidence in you alone. I know that you belong to the cardinal, but belong to me as well, and I will take upon myself the making of your fortune. Come, will you do to-day what formerly the gentleman you do not know did for the queen?"

"I will do everything your majesty commands," replied D'Artagnan.

The queen reflected for a moment and then, seeing the cautious demeanor of the musketeer:

"Perhaps you like repose?" she said.

"I do not know, for I have never had it, madame."

"Have you any friends?"

"I had three, two of whom have left Paris, to go I know not where. One alone is left to me, but he is one of those known, I believe, to the cavalier of whom your majesty did me the honor to speak."

"Very good," said the queen; "you and your friend are worth an army."

“What am I to do, madame?”

“Return at five o’clock and I will tell you; but do not breathe to a living soul, sir, the rendezvous which I give you.”

“No, madame.”

“Swear it upon the cross.”

“Madame, I have never been false to my word; when I say I will not do a thing, I mean it.”

The queen, although astonished at this language, to which she was not accustomed from her courtiers, argued from it a happy omen of the zeal with which D’Artagnan would serve her in the accomplishment of her project. It was one of the Gascon’s artifices to hide his deep cunning occasionally under an appearance of rough loyalty.

“Has the queen any further commands for me now?” asked D’Artagnan.

“No, sir,” replied Anne of Austria, “and you may retire until the time that I mentioned to you.”

D’Artagnan bowed and went out.

“Diable!” he exclaimed when the door was shut, “they seem to have the greatest need of me just now.”

Then, as the half hour had already glided by, he crossed the gallery and knocked at the cardinal’s door.

Bernouin introduced him.

“I come for your commands, my lord,” he said.

And according to his custom D’Artagnan glanced rapidly around and remarked that Mazarin had a sealed letter before him. But it was so placed on the desk that he could not see to whom it was addressed.

“You come from the queen?” said Mazarin, looking fixedly at D’Artagnan.

“I! my lord--who told you that?”

“Nobody, but I know it.”

“I regret infinitely to tell you, my lord, that you are mistaken,” replied the Gascon, impudently, firm to the promise he had just made to Anne of Austria.

“I opened the door of the ante-room myself and I saw you enter at the end of the corridor.”

“Because I was shown up the private stairs.”

“How so?”

“I know not; it must have been a mistake.”

Mazarin was aware that it was not easy to make D’Artagnan reveal anything he was desirous of hiding, so he gave up, for the time, the discovery of the mystery the Gascon was concealing.

“Let us speak of my affairs,” said Mazarin, “since you will tell me naught of yours. Are you fond of traveling?”

“My life has been passed on the high road.”

“Would anything retain you particularly in Paris?”

“Nothing but an order from a superior would retain me in Paris.”

“Very well. Here is a letter, which must be taken to its address.”

“To its address, my lord? But it has none.”

In fact, the side of the letter opposite the seal was blank.

“I must tell you,” resumed Mazarin, “that it is in a double envelope.”

“I understand; and I am to take off the first one when I have reached a certain place?”

“Just so, take it and go. You have a friend, Monsieur du Vallon, whom I like much; let him accompany you.”

“The devil!” said D’Artagnan to himself. “He knows that we overheard his conversation yesterday and he wants to get us away from Paris.”

“Do you hesitate?” asked Mazarin.

“No, my lord, and I will set out at once. There is one thing only which I must request.”

“What is it? Speak.”

“That your eminence will go at once to the queen.”

“What for?”

“Merely to say these words: ‘I am going to send Monsieur d’Artagnan away and I wish him to set out directly.’“

“I told you,” said Mazarin, “that you had seen the queen.”

“I had the honor of saying to your eminence that there had been some mistake.”

“What is the meaning of that?”

“May I venture to repeat my prayer to your eminence?”

“Very well; I will go. Wait here for me.” And looking attentively around him, to see if he had left any of his keys in his closets, Mazarin went out. Ten minutes elapsed, during which D’Artagnan made every effort to read through the first envelope what was written on the second. But he did not succeed.

Mazarin returned, pale, and evidently thoughtful. He seated himself at his desk and D’Artagnan proceeded to examine his face, as he had just examined the letter he held, but the envelope which covered his countenance appeared as impenetrable as that which covered the letter.

“Ah!” thought the Gascon; “he looks displeased. Can it be with me? He meditates. Is it about sending me to the Bastile? All very fine, my lord, but at the very first hint you give of such a thing I will strangle you and become Frondist. I should be carried home in triumph like Monsieur Broussel and Athos would proclaim me the French Brutus. It would be exceedingly droll.”

The Gascon, with his vivid imagination, had already seen the advantage to be derived from his situation. Mazarin gave, however, no order of the kind, but on the contrary began to be insinuating.

“You were right,” he said, “my dear Monsieur d’Artagnan, and you cannot set out yet. I beg you to return me that dispatch.”

D’Artagnan obeyed, and Mazarin ascertained that the seal was intact.

“I shall want you this evening,” he said “Return in two hours.”

“My lord,” said D’Artagnan, “I have an appointment in two hours which I cannot miss.”

“Do not be uneasy,” said Mazarin; “it is the same.”

“Good!” thought D’Artagnan; “I fancied it was so.”

“Return, then, at five o’clock and bring that worthy Monsieur du Vallon with you. Only, leave him in the ante-room, as I wish to speak to you alone.”

D’Artagnan bowed, and thought: “Both at the same hour; both commands alike; both at the Palais Royal. Monsieur de Gondy would pay a hundred thousand francs for such a secret!”

“You are thoughtful,” said Mazarin, uneasily.

“Yes, I was thinking whether we ought to come armed or not.”

“Armed to the teeth!” replied Mazarin.

“Very well, my lord; it shall be so.”

D’Artagnan saluted, went out and hastened to repeat to his friend Mazarin’s flattering promises, which gave Porthos an indescribable happiness.

CHAPTER 51.

The Flight.

When D’Artagnan returned to the Palais Royal at five o’clock, it presented, in spite of the excitement which reigned in the town, a spectacle of the greatest rejoicing. Nor was that surprising. The queen had restored Broussel and Blancmesnil to the people and had therefore nothing to fear, since the people had nothing more just then to ask for. The return, also, of the conqueror of Lens was the pretext for giving a grand banquet. The princes and princesses were invited and their carriages had crowded the court since noon; then after dinner the queen was to have a play in her apartment. Anne of Austria had never appeared more brilliant than on that day--radiant with grace and wit. Mazarin disappeared as they rose from table. He found D’Artagnan waiting for him already at his post in the ante-room.

The cardinal advanced to him with a smile and taking him by the hand led him into his study.

“My dear M. d’Artagnan,” said the minister, sitting down, “I am about to give you the greatest proof of confidence that a minister can give an officer.”

“I hope,” said D’Artagnan, bowing, “that you give it, my lord, without hesitation and with the conviction that I am worthy of it.”

“More worthy than any one in Paris my dear friend; therefore I apply to you. We are about to leave this evening,” continued Mazarin. “My dear M. d’Artagnan, the welfare of the state is deposited in your hands.” He paused.

“Explain yourself, my lord, I am listening.”

“The queen has resolved to make a little excursion with the king to Saint Germain.”

“Aha!” said D’Artagnan, “that is to say, the queen wishes to leave Paris.”

“A woman’s caprice--you understand.”

“Yes, I understand perfectly,” said D’Artagnan.

“It was for this she summoned you this morning and that she told you to return at five o’clock.”

"Was it worth while to wish me to swear this morning that I would mention the appointment to no one?" muttered D'Artagnan. "Oh, women! women! whether queens or not, they are always the same."

"Do you disapprove of this journey, my dear M. d'Artagnan?" asked Mazarin, anxiously.

"I, my lord?" said D'Artagnan; "why should I?"

"Because you shrug your shoulders."

"It is a way I have of speaking to myself. I neither approve nor disapprove, my lord; I merely await your commands."

"Good; it is you, accordingly, that I have pitched upon to conduct the king and the queen to Saint Germain."

"Liar!" thought D'Artagnan.

"You see, therefore," continued the cardinal, perceiving D'Artagnan's composure, "that, as I have told you, the welfare of the state is placed in your hands."

"Yes, my lord, and I feel the whole responsibility of such a charge."

"You accept, however?"

"I always accept."

"Do you think the thing possible?"

"Everything is possible."

"Shall you be attacked on the road?"

"Probably."

"And what will you do in that case?"

"I shall pass through those who attack me."

"And suppose you cannot pass through them?"

"So much the worse for them; I shall pass over them."

"And you will place the king and queen in safety also, at Saint Germain?"

"Yes."

"On your life?"

"On my life."

"You are a hero, my friend," said Mazarin, gazing at the musketeer with admiration.

D'Artagnan smiled.

"And I?" asked Mazarin, after a moment's silence.

"How? and you, my lord?"

"If I wish to leave?"

“That would be much more difficult.”

“Why so?”

“Your eminence might be recognized.”

“Even under this disguise?” asked Mazarin, raising a cloak which covered an arm-chair, upon which lay a complete dress for an officer, of pearl-gray and red, entirely embroidered with silver.

“If your eminence is disguised it will be almost easy.”

“Ah!” said Mazarin, breathing more freely.

“But it will be necessary for your eminence to do what the other day you declared you should have done in our place--cry, ‘Down with Mazarin!’“

“I will: ‘Down with Mazarin’“

“In French, in good French, my lord, take care of your accent; they killed six thousand Angevins in Sicily because they pronounced Italian badly. Take care that the French do not take their revenge on you for the Sicilian vespers.”

“I will do my best.”

“The streets are full of armed men,” continued D’Artagnan. “Are you sure that no one is aware of the queen’s project?”

Mazarin reflected.

“This affair would give a fine opportunity for a traitor, my lord; the chance of being attacked would be an excuse for everything.”

Mazarin shuddered, but he reflected that a man who had the least intention to betray would not warn first.

“And therefore,” added he, quietly, “I have not confidence in every one; the proof of which is, that I have fixed upon you to escort me.”

“Shall you not go with the queen?”

“No,” replied Mazarin.

“Then you will start after the queen?”

“No,” said Mazarin again.

“Ah!” said D’Artagnan, who began to understand.

“Yes,” continued the cardinal. “I have my plan. With the queen I double her risk; after the queen her departure would double mine; then, the court once safe, I might be forgotten. The great are often ungrateful.”

“Very true,” said D’Artagnan, fixing his eyes, in spite of himself, on the queen’s diamond, which Mazarin wore on his finger. Mazarin followed the direction of his eyes and gently turned the hoop of the ring inside.

"I wish," he said, with his cunning smile, "to prevent them from being ungrateful to me."

"It is but Christian charity," replied D'Artagnan, "not to lead one's neighbors into temptation."

"It is exactly for that reason," said Mazarin, "that I wish to start before them."

D'Artagnan smiled--he was just the man to understand the astute Italian. Mazarin saw the smile and profited by the moment.

"You will begin, therefore, by taking me first out of Paris, will you not, my dear M. d'Artagnan?"

"A difficult commission, my lord," replied D'Artagnan, resuming his serious manner.

"But," said Mazarin, "you did not make so many difficulties with regard to the king and queen."

"The king and the queen are my king and queen," replied the musketeer, "my life is theirs and I must give it for them. If they ask it what have I to say?"

"That is true," murmured Mazarin, in a low tone, "but as thy life is not mine I suppose I must buy it, must I not?" and sighing deeply he began to turn the hoop of his ring outside again. D'Artagnan smiled. These two men met at one point and that was, cunning; had they been actuated equally by courage, the one would have done great things for the other.

"But, also," said Mazarin, "you must understand that if I ask this service from you it is with the intention of being grateful."

"Is it still only an intention, your eminence?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Stay," said Mazarin, drawing the ring from his finger, "my dear D'Artagnan, there is a diamond which belonged to you formerly, it is but just it should return to you; take it, I pray."

D'Artagnan spared Mazarin the trouble of insisting, and after looking to see if the stone was the same and assuring himself of the purity of its water, he took it and passed it on his finger with indescribable pleasure.

"I valued it much," said Mazarin, giving a last look at it; "nevertheless, I give it to you with great pleasure."

"And I, my lord," said D'Artagnan, "accept it as it is given. Come, let us speak of your little affairs. You wish to leave before everybody and at what hour?"

"At ten o'clock."

“And the queen, at what time is it her wish to start?”

“At midnight.”

“Then it is possible. I can get you out of Paris and leave you beyond the barriere, and can return for her.”

“Capital; but how will you get me out of Paris?”

“Oh! as to that, you must leave it to me.”

“I give you absolute power, therefore; take as large an escort as you like.”

D’Artagnan shook his head.

“It seems to me, however,” said Mazarin, “the safest method.”

“Yes, for you, my lord, but not for the queen; you must leave it to me and give me the entire direction of the undertaking.”

“Nevertheless----”

“Or find some one else,” continued D’Artagnan, turning his back.

“Oh!” muttered Mazarin, “I do believe he is going off with the diamond! M. d’Artagnan, my dear M. d’Artagnan,” he called out in a coaxing voice, “will you answer for everything?”

“I will answer for nothing. I will do my best.”

“Well, then, let us go--I must trust to you.”

“It is very fortunate,” said D’Artagnan to himself.

“You will be here at half-past nine.”

“And I shall find your eminence ready?”

“Certainly, quite ready.”

“Well, then, it is a settled thing; and now, my lord, will you obtain for me an audience with the queen?”

“For what purpose?”

“I wish to receive her majesty’s commands from her own lips.”

“She desired me to give them to you.”

“She may have forgotten something.”

“You really wish to see her?”

“It is indispensable, my lord.”

Mazarin hesitated for one instant, but D’Artagnan was firm.

“Come, then,” said the minister; “I will conduct you to her, but remember, not one word of our conversation.”

“What has passed between us concerns ourselves alone, my lord,” replied D’Artagnan.

“Swear to be mute.”

“I never swear, my lord, I say yes or no; and, as I am a gentleman, I keep my word.”

“Come, then, I see that I must trust unreservedly to you.”

“Believe me, my lord, it will be your best plan.”

“Come,” said Mazarin, conducting D’Artagnan into the queen’s oratory and desiring him to wait there. He did not wait long, for in five minutes the queen entered in full gala costume. Thus dressed she scarcely appeared thirty-five years of age. She was still exceedingly handsome.

“It is you, Monsieur D’Artagnan,” she said, smiling graciously; “I thank you for having insisted on seeing me.”

“I ought to ask your majesty’s pardon, but I wished to receive your commands from your own mouth.”

“Do you accept the commission which I have intrusted to you?”

“With gratitude.”

“Very well, be here at midnight.”

“I will not fail.”

“Monsieur d’Artagnan,” continued the queen, “I know your disinterestedness too well to speak of my own gratitude at such a moment, but I swear to you that I shall not forget this second service as I forgot the first.”

“Your majesty is free to forget or to remember, as it pleases you; and I know not what you mean,” said D’Artagnan, bowing.

“Go, sir,” said the queen, with her most bewitching smile, “go and return at midnight.”

And D’Artagnan retired, but as he passed out he glanced at the curtain through which the queen had entered and at the bottom of the tapestry he remarked the tip of a velvet slipper.

“Good,” thought he; “Mazarin has been listening to discover whether I betrayed him. In truth, that Italian puppet does not deserve the services of an honest man.”

D’Artagnan was not less exact to his appointment and at half-past nine o’clock he entered the ante-room.

He found the cardinal dressed as an officer, and he looked very well in that costume, which, as we have already said, he wore elegantly; only he was very pale and trembled slightly.

“Quite alone?” he asked.

“Yes, my lord.”

“And that worthy Monsieur du Vallon, are we not to enjoy his society?”

“Certainly, my lord; he is waiting in his carriage at the gate of the garden of the Palais Royal.”

“And we start in his carriage, then?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“And with us no other escort but you two?”

“Is it not enough? One of us would suffice.”

“Really, my dear Monsieur d’Artagnan,” said the cardinal, “your coolness startles me.”

“I should have thought, on the contrary, that it ought to have inspired you with confidence.”

“And Bernouin--do I not take him with me?”

“There is no room for him, he will rejoin your eminence.”

“Let us go,” said Mazarin, “since everything must be done as you wish.”

“My lord, there is time to draw back,” said D’Artagnan, “and your eminence is perfectly free.”

“Not at all, not at all,” said Mazarin; “let us be off.”

And so they descended the private stair, Mazarin leaning on the arm of D’Artagnan a hand the musketeer felt trembling. At last, after crossing the courts of the Palais Royal, where there still remained some of the conveyances of late guests, they entered the garden and reached the little gate. Mazarin attempted to open it by a key which he took from his pocket, but with such shaking fingers that he could not find the keyhole.

“Give it to me,” said D’Artagnan, who when the gate was open deposited the key in his pocket, reckoning upon returning by that gate.

The steps were already down and the door open. Mousqueton stood at the door and Porthos was inside the carriage.

“Mount, my lord,” said D’Artagnan to Mazarin, who sprang into the carriage without waiting for a second bidding. D’Artagnan followed him, and Mousqueton, having closed the door, mounted behind the carriage with many groans. He had made some difficulties about going, under pretext that he still suffered from his wound, but D’Artagnan had said to him:

“Remain if you like, my dear Monsieur Mouston, but I warn you that Paris will be burnt down to-night;” upon which Mousqueton had declared, without asking anything further, that he was ready to follow his master and Monsieur d’Artagnan to the end of the world.

The carriage started at a measured pace, without betraying by the slightest sign that it contained people in a hurry. The cardinal wiped his forehead with his handkerchief and looked around him. On his left was Porthos, whilst D'Artagnan was on his right; each guarded a door and served as a rampart to him on either side. Before him, on the front seat, lay two pairs of pistols--one in front of Porthos and the other of D'Artagnan. About a hundred paces from the Palais Royal a patrol stopped the carriage.

"Who goes?" asked the captain.

"Mazarin!" replied D'Artagnan, bursting into a laugh. The cardinal's hair stood on end. But the joke appeared an excellent one to the citizens, who, seeing the conveyance without escort and unarmed, would never have believed in the possibility of so great an imprudence.

"A good journey to ye," they cried, allowing it to pass.

"Hem!" said D'Artagnan, "what does my lord think of that reply?"

"Man of talent!" cried Mazarin.

"In truth," said Porthos, "I understand; but now----"

About the middle of the Rue des Petits Champs they were stopped by a second patrol.

"Who goes there?" inquired the captain of the patrol.

"Keep back, my lord," said D'Artagnan. And Mazarin buried himself so far behind the two friends that he disappeared, completely hidden between them.

"Who goes there?" cried the same voice, impatiently whilst D'Artagnan perceived that they had rushed to the horses' heads. But putting his head out of the carriage:

"Eh! Planchet," said he.

The chief approached, and it was indeed Planchet; D'Artagnan had recognized the voice of his old servant.

"How, sir!" said Planchet, "is it you?"

"Eh! mon Dieu! yes, my good friend, this worthy Porthos has just received a sword wound and I am taking him to his country house at Saint Cloud."

"Oh! really," said Planchet.

"Porthos," said D'Artagnan, "if you can still speak, say a word, my dear Porthos, to this good Planchet."

"Planchet, my friend," said Porthos, in a melancholy voice, "I am very ill; should you meet a doctor you will do me a favor by sending him to me."

“Oh! good Heaven,” said Planchet, “what a misfortune! and how did it happen?”

“I will tell you all about it,” replied Mousqueton.

Porthos uttered a deep groan.

“Make way for us, Planchet,” said D’Artagnan in a whisper to him, “or he will not arrive alive; the lungs are attacked, my friend.”

Planchet shook his head with the air of a man who says, “In that case things look ill.” Then he exclaimed, turning to his men:

“Let them pass; they are friends.”

The carriage resumed its course, and Mazarin, who had held his breath, ventured to breathe again.

“Bricconi!” muttered he.

A few steps in advance of the gate of Saint Honore they met a third troop; this latter party was composed of ill-looking fellows, who resembled bandits more than anything else; they were the men of the beggar of Saint Eustache.

“Attention, Porthos!” cried D’Artagnan.

Porthos placed his hand on the pistols.

“What is it?” asked Mazarin.

“My lord, I think we are in bad company.”

A man advanced to the door with a kind of scythe in his hand. “Qui vive?” he asked.

“Eh, rascal!” said D’Artagnan, “do you not recognize his highness the prince’s carriage?”

“Prince or not,” said the man, “open. We are here to guard the gate, and no one whom we do not know shall pass.”

“What is to be done?” said Porthos.

“Pardieu! pass,” replied D’Artagnan.

“But how?” asked Mazarin.

“Through or over; coachman, gallop on.”

The coachman raised his whip.

“Not a step further,” said the man, who appeared to be the captain, “or I will hamstring your horses.”

“Peste!” said Porthos, “it would be a pity; animals which cost me a hundred pistoles each.”

“I will pay you two hundred for them,” said Mazarin.

“Yes, but when once they are hamstrung, our necks will be strung next.”

“If one of them comes to my side,” asked Porthos, “must I kill him?”

“Yes, by a blow of your fist, if you can; we will not fire but at the last extremity.”

“I can do it,” said Porthos.

“Come and open, then!” cried D’Artagnan to the man with the scythe, taking one of the pistols up by the muzzle and preparing to strike with the handle. And as the man approached, D’Artagnan, in order to have more freedom for his actions, leaned half out of the door; his eyes were fixed upon those of the mendicant, which were lighted up by a lantern. Without doubt he recognized D’Artagnan, for he became deadly pale; doubtless the musketeer knew him, for his hair stood up on his head.

“Monsieur d’Artagnan!” he cried, falling back a step; “it is Monsieur d’Artagnan! let him pass.”

D’Artagnan was perhaps about to reply, when a blow, similar to that of a mallet falling on the head of an ox, was heard. The noise was caused by Porthos, who had just knocked down his man.

D’Artagnan turned around and saw the unfortunate man upon his back about four paces off.

“‘Sdeath!” cried he to the coachman. “Spur your horses! whip! get on!”

The coachman bestowed a heavy blow of the whip upon his horses; the noble animals bounded forward; then cries of men who were knocked down were heard; then a double concussion was felt, and two of the wheels seemed to pass over a round and flexible body. There was a moment’s silence, then the carriage cleared the gate.

“To Cours la Reine!” cried D’Artagnan to the coachman; then turning to Mazarin he said, “Now, my lord, you can say five paters and five aves, in thanks to Heaven for your deliverance. You are safe--you are free.”

Mazarin replied only by a groan; he could not believe in such a miracle. Five minutes later the carriage stopped, having reached Cours la Reine.

“Is my lord pleased with his escort?” asked D’Artagnan.

“Enchanted, monsieur,” said Mazarin, venturing his head out of one of the windows; “and now do as much for the queen.”

“It will not be so difficult,” replied D’Artagnan, springing to the ground. “Monsieur du Vallon, I commend his eminence to your care.”

“Be quite at ease,” said Porthos, holding out his hand, which D’Artagnan took and shook in his.

“Oh!” cried Porthos, as if in pain.

D’Artagnan looked with surprise at his friend.

“What is the matter, then?” he asked.

“I think I have sprained my wrist,’ said Porthos.

“The devil! why, you strike like a blind or a deaf man.”

“It was necessary; my man was going to fire a pistol at me; but you--how did you get rid of yours?”

“Oh, mine,” replied D’Artagnan, “was not a man.”

“What was it then?”

“It was an apparition.”

“And----”

“I charmed it away.”

Without further explanation D’Artagnan took the pistols which were upon the front seat, placed them in his belt, wrapped himself in his cloak, and not wishing to enter by the same gate as that through which they had left, he took his way toward the Richelieu gate.

CHAPTER 52.

The Carriage of Monsieur le Coadjuteur.

Instead of returning, then, by the Saint Honore gate, D’Artagnan, who had time before him, walked around and re-entered by the Porte Richelieu. He was approached to be examined, and when it was discovered by his plumed hat and his laced coat, that he was an officer of the musketeers, he was surrounded, with the intention of making him cry, “Down with Mazarin!” The demonstration did not fail to make him uneasy at first; but when he discovered what it meant, he shouted it in such a voice that even the most exacting were satisfied. He walked down the Rue Richelieu, meditating how he should carry off the queen in her turn, for to take her in a carriage bearing the arms of France was not to be thought of, when he perceived an equipage standing at the door of the hotel belonging to Madame de Guemenee.

He was struck by a sudden idea.

“Ah, pardieu!” he exclaimed; “that would be fair play.”

And approaching the carriage, he examined the arms on the panels and the livery of the coachman on his box. This scrutiny was so much the more easy, the coachman being sound asleep.

“It is, in truth, monsieur le coadjuteur’s carriage,” said D’Artagnan; “upon my honor I begin to think that Heaven favors us.”

He mounted noiselessly into the chariot and pulled the silk cord which was attached to the coachman’s little finger.

“To the Palais Royal,” he called out.

The coachman awoke with a start and drove off in the direction he was desired, never doubting but that the order had come from his master. The porter at the palace was about to close the gates, but seeing such a handsome equipage he fancied that it was some visit of importance and the carriage was allowed to pass and to stop beneath the porch. It was then only the coachman perceived the grooms were not behind the vehicle; he fancied monsieur le coadjuteur had sent them back, and without dropping the reins he sprang from his box to open the door. D’Artagnan, in his turn, sprang to the ground, and just at the moment when the coachman, alarmed at not seeing his master, fell back a step, he seized him by his collar with the left, whilst with the right hand he placed the muzzle of a pistol at his breast.

"Pronounce one single word," muttered D'Artagnan, "and you are a dead man."

The coachman perceived at once, by the expression of the man who thus addressed him, that he had fallen into a trap, and he remained with his mouth wide open and his eyes portentously staring.

Two musketeers were pacing the court, to whom D'Artagnan called by their names.

"Monsieur de Belliere," said he to one of them, "do me the favor to take the reins from the hands of this worthy man, mount upon the box and drive to the door of the private stair, and wait for me there; it is an affair of importance on the service of the king."

The musketeer, who knew that his lieutenant was incapable of jesting with regard to the service, obeyed without a word, although he thought the order strange. Then turning toward the second musketeer, D'Artagnan said:

"Monsieur du Verger, help me to place this man in a place of safety."

The musketeer, thinking that his lieutenant had just arrested some prince in disguise, bowed, and drawing his sword, signified that he was ready. D'Artagnan mounted the staircase, followed by his prisoner, who in his turn was followed by the soldier, and entered Mazarin's ante-room. Bernouin was waiting there, impatient for news of his master.

"Well, sir?" he said.

"Everything goes on capitally, my dear Monsieur Bernouin, but here is a man whom I must beg you to put in a safe place."

"Where, then, sir?"

"Where you like, provided that the place which you shall choose has iron shutters secured by padlocks and a door that can be locked."

"We have that, sir," replied Bernouin; and the poor coachman was conducted to a closet, the windows of which were barred and which looked very much like a prison.

"And now, my good friend," said D'Artagnan to him, "I must invite you to deprive yourself, for my sake, of your hat and cloak."

The coachman, as we can well understand, made no resistance; in fact, he was so astonished at what had happened to him that he stammered and reeled like a drunken man; D'Artagnan deposited his clothes under the arm of one of the valets.

"And now, Monsieur du Verger," he said, "shut yourself up with this man until Monsieur Bernouin returns to open the door. The duty will be tolerably long and not very amusing, I know; but," added he, seriously, "you understand, it is on the king's service."

"At your command, lieutenant," replied the musketeer, who saw the business was a serious one.

"By-the-bye," continued D'Artagnan, "should this man attempt to fly or to call out, pass your sword through his body."

The musketeer signified by a nod that these commands should be obeyed to the letter, and D'Artagnan went out, followed by Bernouin. Midnight struck.

"Lead me into the queen's oratory," said D'Artagnan, "announce to her I am here, and put this parcel, with a well-loaded musket, under the seat of the carriage which is waiting at the foot of the private stair."

Bernouin conducted D'Artagnan to the oratory, where he sat down pensively. Everything had gone on as usual at the Palais Royal. As we said before, by ten o'clock almost all the guests had dispersed; those who were to fly with the court had the word of command and they were each severally desired to be from twelve o'clock to one at Cours la Reine.

At ten o'clock Anne of Austria had entered the king's room. Monsieur had just retired, and the youthful Louis, remaining the last, was amusing himself by placing some lead soldiers in a line of battle, a game which delighted him much. Two royal pages were playing with him.

"Laporte," said the queen, "it is time for his majesty to go to bed."

The king asked to remain up, having, he said, no wish to sleep; but the queen was firm.

"Are you not going to-morrow morning at six o'clock, Louis, to bathe at Conflans? I think you wished to do so of your own accord?"

"You are right, madame," said the king, "and I am ready to retire to my room when you have kissed me. Laporte, give the light to Monsieur the Chevalier de Coislin."

The queen touched with her lips the white, smooth brow the royal child presented to her with a gravity which already partook of etiquette.

"Go to sleep soon, Louis," said the queen, "for you must be awakened very early."

“I will do my best to obey you, madame,” said the youthful king, “but I have no inclination to sleep.”

“Laporte,” said Anne of Austria, in an undertone, “find some very dull book to read to his majesty, but do not undress yourself.”

The king went out, accompanied by the Chevalier de Coislin, bearing the candlestick, and then the queen returned to her own apartment. Her ladies--that is to say Madame de Bregy, Mademoiselle de Beaumont, Madame de Motteville, and Socratine, her sister, so called on account of her sense--had just brought into her dressing-room the remains of the dinner, on which, according to her usual custom, she supped. The queen then gave her orders, spoke of a banquet which the Marquis de Villequier was to give to her on the day after the morrow, indicated the persons she would admit to the honor of partaking of it, announced another visit on the following day to Val-de-Grace, where she intended to pay her devotions, and gave her commands to her senior valet to accompany her. When the ladies had finished their supper the queen feigned extreme fatigue and passed into her bedroom. Madame de Motteville, who was on especial duty that evening, followed to aid and undress her. The queen then began to read, and after conversing with her affectionately for a few minutes, dismissed her.

It was at this moment D’Artagnan entered the courtyard of the palace, in the coadjutor’s carriage, and a few seconds later the carriages of the ladies-in-waiting drove out and the gates were shut after them.

A few minutes after twelve o’clock Bernouin knocked at the queen’s bedroom door, having come by the cardinal’s secret corridor. Anne of Austria opened the door to him herself. She was dressed, that is to say, in dishabille, wrapped in a long, warm dressing-gown.

“It is you, Bernouin,” she said. “Is Monsieur d’Artagnan there?”

“Yes, madame, in your oratory. He is waiting till your majesty is ready.”

“I am. Go and tell Laporte to wake and dress the king, and then pass on to the Marechal de Villeroy and summon him to me.”

Bernouin bowed and retired.

The queen entered her oratory, which was lighted by a single lamp of Venetian crystal, She saw D’Artagnan, who stood expecting her.

“Is it you?” she said.

“Yes, madame.”

“Are you ready?”

“I am.”

“And his eminence, the cardinal?”

“Has got off without any accident. He is awaiting your majesty at Cours la Reine.”

“But in what carriage do we start?”

“I have provided for everything; a carriage below is waiting for your majesty.”

“Let us go to the king.”

D’Artagnan bowed and followed the queen. The young Louis was already dressed, with the exception of his shoes and doublet; he had allowed himself to be dressed, in great astonishment, overwhelming Laporte with questions, who replied only in these words, “Sire, it is by the queen’s commands.”

The bedclothes were thrown back, exposing the king’s bed linen, which was so worn that here and there holes could be seen. It was one of the results of Mazarin’s niggardliness.

The queen entered and D’Artagnan remained at the door. As soon as the child perceived the queen he escaped from Laporte and ran to meet her. Anne then motioned to D’Artagnan to approach, and he obeyed.

“My son,” said Anne of Austria, pointing to the musketeer, calm, standing uncovered, “here is Monsieur d’Artagnan, who is as brave as one of those ancient heroes of whom you like so much to hear from my women. Remember his name well and look at him well, that his face may not be forgotten, for this evening he is going to render us a great service.”

The young king looked at the officer with his large-formed eye, and repeated:

“Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

“That is it, my son.”

The young king slowly raised his little hand and held it out to the musketeer; the latter bent on his knee and kissed it.

“Monsieur d’Artagnan,” repeated Louis; “very well, madame.”

At this moment they were startled by a noise as if a tumult were approaching.

“What is that?” exclaimed the queen.

“Oh, oh!” replied D’Artagnan, straining both at the same time his quick ear and his intelligent glance, “it is the murmur of the populace in revolution.”

“We must fly,” said the queen.

"Your majesty has given me the control of this business; we had better wait and see what they want."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan!"

"I will answer for everything."

Nothing is so catching as confidence. The queen, full of energy and courage, was quickly alive to these two virtues in others.

"Do as you like," she said, "I rely upon you."

"Will your majesty permit me to give orders in your name throughout this business?"

"Command, sir."

"What do the people want this time?" demanded the king.

"We are about to ascertain, sire," replied D'Artagnan, as he rapidly left the room.

The tumult continued to increase and seemed to surround the Palais Royal entirely. Cries were heard from the interior, of which they could not comprehend the sense. It was evident that there was clamor and sedition.

The king, half dressed, the queen and Laporte remained each in the same state and almost in the same place, where they were listening and waiting. Comminges, who was on guard that night at the Palais Royal, ran in. He had about two hundred men in the courtyards and stables, and he placed them at the queen's disposal.

"Well," asked Anne of Austria, when D'Artagnan reappeared, "what does it mean?"

"It means, madame, that the report has spread that the queen has left the Palais Royal, carrying off the king, and the people ask to have proof to the contrary, or threaten to demolish the Palais Royal."

"Oh, this time it is too much!" exclaimed the queen, "and I will prove to them I have not left."

D'Artagnan saw from the expression of the queen's face that she was about to issue some violent command. He approached her and said in a low voice:

"Has your majesty still confidence in me?"

This voice startled her. "Yes, sir," she replied, "every confidence; speak."

"Will the queen deign to follow my advice?"

"Speak."

"Let your majesty dismiss M. de Comminges and desire him to shut himself up with his men in the guardhouse and in the stables."

Comminges glanced at D’Artagnan with the envious look with which every courtier sees a new favorite spring up.

“You hear, Comminges?” said the queen.

D’Artagnan went up to him; with his usual quickness he caught the anxious glance.

“Monsieur de Comminges,” he said, “pardon me; we both are servants of the queen, are we not? It is my turn to be of use to her; do not envy me this happiness.”

Comminges bowed and left.

“Come,” said D’Artagnan to himself, “I have got one more enemy.”

“And now,” said the queen, addressing D’Artagnan, “what is to be done? for you hear that, instead of becoming calmer, the noise increases.”

“Madame,” said D’Artagnan, “the people want to see the king and they must see him.”

“What! must see him! Where--on the balcony?”

“Not at all, madame, but here, sleeping in his bed.”

“Oh, your majesty,” exclaimed Laporte, “Monsieur d’Artagnan is right.”

The queen became thoughtful and smiled, like a woman to whom duplicity is no stranger.

“Without doubt,” she murmured.

“Monsieur Laporte,” said D’Artagnan, “go and announce to the people through the grating that they are going to be satisfied and that in five minutes they shall not only see the king, but they shall see him in bed; add that the king sleeps and that the queen begs that they will keep silence, so as not to awaken him.”

“But not every one; a deputation of two or four people.”

“Every one, madame.”

“But reflect, they will keep us here till daybreak.”

“It shall take but a quarter of an hour, I answer for everything, madame; believe me, I know the people; they are like a great child, who only wants humoring. Before the sleeping king they will be mute, gentle and timid as lambs.”

“Go, Laporte,” said the queen.

The young king approached his mother and said, “Why do as these people ask?”

“It must be so, my son,” said Anne of Austria.

“But if they say, ‘it must be’ to me, am I no longer king?”

The queen remained silent.

“Sire,” said D’Artagnan, “will your majesty permit me to ask you a question?”

Louis XIV. turned around, astonished that any one should dare to address him. But the queen pressed the child’s hand.

“Yes, sir.” he said.

“Does your majesty remember, when playing in the park of Fontainebleau, or in the palace courts at Versailles, ever to have seen the sky grow suddenly dark and heard the sound of thunder?”

“Yes, certainly.”

“Well, then, this noise of thunder, however much your majesty may have wished to continue playing, has said, ‘go in, sire. You must do so.’“

“Certainly, sir; but they tell me that the noise of thunder is the voice of God.”

“Well then, sire,” continued D’Artagnan, “listen to the noise of the people; you will perceive that it resembles that of thunder.”

In truth at that moment a terrible murmur was wafted to them by the night breeze; then all at once it ceased.

“Hold, sire,” said D’Artagnan, “they have just told the people that you are asleep; you see, you still are king.”

The queen looked with surprise at this strange man, whose brilliant courage made him the equal of the bravest, and who was, by his fine and quick intelligence, the equal of the most astute.

Laporte entered.

“Well, Laporte?” asked the queen.

“Madame,” he replied, “Monsieur d’Artagnan’s prediction has been accomplished; they are calm, as if by enchantment. The doors are about to be opened and in five minutes they will be here.”

“Laporte,” said the queen, “suppose you put one of your sons in the king’s place; we might be off during the time.”

“If your majesty desires it,” said Laporte, “my sons, like myself, are at the queen’s service.”

“Not at all,” said D’Artagnan; “should one of them know his majesty and discover but a substitute, all would be lost.”

“You are right, sir, always right,” said Anne of Austria. “Laporte, place the king in bed.”

Laporte placed the king, dressed as he was, in the bed and then covered him as far as the shoulders with the sheet. The queen bent over him and kissed his brow.

“Pretend to sleep, Louis,” said she.

“Yes,” said the king, “but I do not wish to be touched by any of those men.”

“Sire, I am here,” said D’Artagnan, “and I give you my word, that if a single man has the audacity, his life shall pay for it.”

“And now what is to be done?” asked the queen, “for I hear them.”

“Monsieur Laporte, go to them and again recommend silence. Madame, wait at the door, whilst I shall be at the head of the king’s bed, ready to die for him.”

Laporte went out; the queen remained standing near the hangings, whilst D’Artagnan glided behind the curtains.

Then the heavy and collected steps of a multitude of men were heard, and the queen herself raised the tapestry hangings and put her finger on her lips.

On seeing the queen, the men stopped short, respectfully.

“Enter, gentlemen, enter,” said the queen.

There was then amongst that crowd a moment’s hesitation, which looked like shame. They had expected resistance, they had expected to be thwarted, to have to force the gates, to overturn the guards. The gates had opened of themselves, and the king, ostensibly at least, had no other guard at his bed-head but his mother. The foremost of them stammered and attempted to fall back.

“Enter, gentlemen,” said Laporte, “since the queen desires you so to do.”

Then one more bold than the rest ventured to pass the door and to advance on tiptoe. This example was imitated by the rest, until the room filled silently, as if these men had been the humblest, most devoted courtiers. Far beyond the door the heads of those who were not able to enter could be seen, all craning to their utmost height to try and see.

D’Artagnan saw it all through an opening he had made in the curtain, and in the very first man who entered he recognized Planchet.

“Sir,” said the queen to him, thinking he was the leader of the band, “you wished to see the king and therefore I determined to show him to you myself. Approach and look at him and say if we have the appearance of people who wish to run away.”

“No, certainly,” replied Planchet, rather astonished at the unexpected honor conferred upon him.

“You will say, then, to my good and faithful Parisians,” continued Anne, with a smile, the expression of which did not deceive D’Artagnan, “that you have seen the king in bed, asleep, and the queen also ready to retire.”

“I shall tell them, madame, and those who accompany me will say the same thing; but----”

“But what?” asked Anne of Austria.

“Will your majesty pardon me,” said Planchet, “but is it really the king who is lying there?”

Anne of Austria started. “If,” she said, “there is one among you who knows the king, let him approach and say whether it is really his majesty lying there.”

A man wrapped in a cloak, in the folds of which his face was hidden, approached and leaned over the bed and looked.

For one second, D’Artagnan thought the man had some evil design and he put his hand to his sword; but in the movement made by the man in stooping a portion of his face was uncovered and D’Artagnan recognized the coadjutor.

“It is certainly the king,” said the man, rising again. “God bless his majesty!”

“Yes,” repeated the leader in a whisper, “God bless his majesty!” and all these men, who had entered enraged, passed from anger to pity and blessed the royal infant in their turn.

“Now,” said Planchet, “let us thank the queen. My friends, retire.”

They all bowed, and retired by degrees as noiselessly as they had entered. Planchet, who had been the first to enter, was the last to leave. The queen stopped him.

“What is your name, my friend?” she said.

Planchet, much surprised at the inquiry, turned back.

“Yes,” continued the queen, “I think myself as much honored to have received you this evening as if you had been a prince, and I wish to know your name.”

“Yes,” thought Planchet, “to treat me as a prince. No, thank you.”

D’Artagnan trembled lest Planchet, seduced, like the crow in the fable, should tell his name, and that the queen, knowing his name, would discover that Planchet had belonged to him.

“Madame,” replied Planchet, respectfully, “I am called Dulaurier, at your service.”

“Thank you, Monsieur Dulaurier,” said the queen; “and what is your business?”

“Madame, I am a clothier in the Rue Bourdonnais.”

“That is all I wished to know,” said the queen. “Much obliged to you, Monsieur Dulaurier. You will hear again from me.”

“Come, come,” thought D’Artagnan, emerging from behind the curtain, “decidedly Monsieur Planchet is no fool; it is evident he has been brought up in a good school.”

The different actors in this strange scene remained facing one another, without uttering a single word; the queen standing near the door, D’Artagnan half out of his hiding place, the king raised on his elbow, ready to fall down on his bed again at the slightest sound that would indicate the return of the multitude, but instead of approaching, the noise became more and more distant and very soon it died entirely away.

The queen breathed more freely. D’Artagnan wiped his damp forehead and the king slid off his bed, saying, “Let us go.”

At this moment Laporte reappeared.

“Well?” asked the queen

“Well, madame,” replied the valet, “I followed them as far as the gates. They announced to all their comrades that they had seen the king and that the queen had spoken to them; and, in fact, they went away quite proud and happy.”

“Oh, the miserable wretches!” murmured the queen, “they shall pay dearly for their boldness, and it is I who promise this.”

Then turning to D’Artagnan, she said:

“Sir, you have given me this evening the best advice I have ever received. Continue, and say what we must do now.”

“Monsieur Laporte,” said D’Artagnan, “finish dressing his majesty.”

“We may go, then?” asked the queen.

“Whenever your majesty pleases. You have only to descend by the private stairs and you will find me at the door.”

“Go, sir,” said the queen; “I will follow you.”

D’Artagnan went down and found the carriage at its post and the musketeer on the box. D’Artagnan took out the parcel which he had desired

Bernouin to place under the seat. It may be remembered that it was the hat and cloak belonging to Monsieur de Gondy's coachman.

He placed the cloak on his shoulders and the hat on his head, whilst the musketeer got off the box.

"Sir," said D'Artagnan, "you will go and release your companion, who is guarding the coachman. You must mount your horse and proceed to the Rue Tiquetonne, Hotel de la Chevrette, whence you will take my horse and that of Monsieur du Vallon, which you must saddle and equip as if for war, and then you will leave Paris, bringing them with you to Cours la Reine. If, when you arrive at Cours la Reine, you find no one, you must go on to Saint Germain. On the king's service."

The musketeer touched his cap and went away to execute the orders thus received.

D'Artagnan mounted the box, having a pair of pistols in his belt, a musket under his feet and a naked sword behind him.

The queen appeared, and was followed by the king and the Duke d'Anjou, his brother.

"Monsieur the coadjutor's carriage!" she exclaimed, falling back.

"Yes, madame," said D'Artagnan; "but get in fearlessly, for I myself will drive you."

The queen uttered a cry of surprise and entered the carriage, and the king and monsieur took their places at her side.

"Come, Laporte," said the queen.

"How, madame!" said the valet, "in the same carriage as your majesties?"

"It is not a matter of royal etiquette this evening, but of the king's safety. Get in, Laporte."

Laporte obeyed.

"Pull down the blinds," said D'Artagnan.

"But will that not excite suspicion, sir?" asked the queen.

"Your majesty's mind may be quite at ease," replied the officer; "I have my answer ready."

The blinds were pulled down and they started at a gallop by the Rue Richelieu. On reaching the gate the captain of the post advanced at the head of a dozen men, holding a lantern in his hand.

D'Artagnan signed to them to draw near.

"Do you recognize the carriage?" he asked the sergeant.

"No," replied the latter.

“Look at the arms.”

The sergeant put the lantern near the panel.

“They are those of monsieur le coadjuteur,” he said.

“Hush; he is enjoying a ride with Madame de Guemenee.”

The sergeant began to laugh.

“Open the gate,” he cried. “I know who it is!” Then putting his face to the lowered blinds, he said:

“I wish you joy, my lord!”

“Impudent fellow!” cried D’Artagnan, “you will get me turned off.”

The gate groaned on its hinges, and D’Artagnan, seeing the way clear, whipped his horses, who started at a canter, and five minutes later they had rejoined the cardinal.

“Mousqueton!” exclaimed D’Artagnan, “draw up the blinds of his majesty’s carriage.”

“It is he!” cried Porthos.

“Disguised as a coachman!” exclaimed Mazarin.

“And driving the coadjutor’s carriage!” said the queen.

“Corpo di Dio! Monsieur d’Artagnan!” said Mazarin, “you are worth your weight in gold.”

CHAPTER 53.

How D’Artagnan and Porthos earned by selling Straw.

Mazarin was desirous of setting out instantly for Saint Germain, but the queen declared that she should wait for the people whom she had appointed to meet her. However, she offered the cardinal Laporte’s place, which he accepted and went from one carriage to the other.

It was not without foundation that a report of the king’s intention to leave Paris by night had been circulated. Ten or twelve persons had been in the secret since six o’clock, and howsoever great their prudence might be, they could not issue the necessary orders for the departure without suspicion being generated. Besides, each individual had one or two others for whom he was interested; and as there could be no doubt but that the queen was leaving Paris full of terrible projects of vengeance, every one had warned parents and friends of what was about to transpire; so that the news of the approaching exit ran like a train of lighted gunpowder along the streets.

The first carriage which arrived after that of the queen was that of the Prince de Conde, with the princess and dowager princess. Both these ladies had been awakened in the middle of the night and did not know what it all was about. The second contained the Duke and Duchess of Orleans, the tall young Mademoiselle and the Abbe de la Riviere; and the third, the Duke de Longueville and the Prince de Conti, brother and brother-in-law of Conde. They all alighted and hastened to pay their respects to the king and queen in their coach. The queen fixed her eyes upon the carriage they had left, and seeing that it was empty, she said:

“But where is Madame de Longueville?”

“Ah, yes, where is my sister?” asked the prince.

“Madame de Longueville is ill,” said the duke, “and she desired me to excuse her to your majesty.”

Anne gave a quick glance to Mazarin, who answered by an almost imperceptible shake of his head.

“What do you say of this?” asked the queen.

“I say that she is a hostage for the Parisians,” answered the cardinal.

“Why is she not come?” asked the prince in a low voice, addressing his brother.

“Silence,” whispered the duke, “she has her reasons.”

“She will ruin us!” returned the prince.

“She will save us,” said Conti.

Carriages now arrived in crowds; those of the Marechal de Villeroy, Guitant, Villequier and Comminges came into the line. The two musketeers arrived in their turn, holding the horses of D’Artagnan and Porthos in their hands. These two instantly mounted, the coachman of the latter replacing D’Artagnan on the coach-box of the royal coach. Mousqueton took the place of the coachman, and drove standing, for reasons known to himself, like Automedon of antiquity.

The queen, though occupied by a thousand details, tried to catch the Gascon’s eye; but he, with his wonted prudence, had mingled with the crowd.

“Let us be the avant guard,” said he to Porthos, “and find good quarters at Saint Germain; nobody will think of us, and for my part I am greatly fatigued.”

“As for me,” replied Porthos, “I am falling asleep, which is strange, considering we have not had any fighting; truly the Parisians are idiots.”

“Or rather, we are very clever,” said D’Artagnan.

“Perhaps.”

“And how is your wrist?”

“Better; but do you think that we’ve got them this time?”

“Got what?”

“You your command, and I my title?”

“I’faith! yes--I should expect so; besides, if they forget, I shall take the liberty of reminding them.”

“The queen’s voice! she is speaking,” said Porthos; “I think she wants to ride on horseback.”

“Oh, she would like it, but----”

“But what?”

“The cardinal won’t allow it. Gentlemen,” he said, addressing the two musketeers, “accompany the royal carriage, we are going forward to look for lodgings.”

D’Artagnan started off for Saint Germain, followed by Porthos.

“We will go on, gentlemen,” said the queen.

And the royal carriage drove on, followed by the other coaches and about fifty horsemen.

They reached Saint German without any accident; on descending, the queen found the prince awaiting her, bare-headed, to offer her his hand.

“What an awakening for the Parisians!” said the queen, radiant.

“It is war,” said the prince.

“Well, then, let it be war! Have we not on our side the conqueror of Rocroy, of Nordlingen, of Lens?”

The prince bowed low.

It was then three o’clock in the morning. The queen walked first, every one followed her. About two hundred persons had accompanied her in her flight.

“Gentlemen,” said the queen, laughing, “pray take up your abode in the chateau; it is large, and there will be no want of room for you all; but, as we never thought of coming here, I am informed that there are, in all, only three beds in the whole establishment, one for the king, one for me----”

“And one for the cardinal,” muttered the prince.

“Am I--am I, then, to sleep on the floor?” asked Gaston d’Orleans, with a forced smile.

“No, my prince,” replied Mazarin, “the third bed is intended for your highness.”

“But your eminence?” replied the prince.

“I,” answered Mazarin, “I shall not sleep at all; I have work to do.”

Gaston desired that he should be shown into the room wherein he was to sleep, without in the least concerning himself as to where his wife and daughter were to repose.

“Well, for my part, I shall go to bed,” said D’Artagnan; “come, Porthos.”

Porthos followed the lieutenant with that profound confidence he ever had in the wisdom of his friend. They walked from one end of the chateau to the other, Porthos looking with wondering eyes at D’Artagnan, who was counting on his fingers.

“Four hundred, at a pistole each, four hundred pistoles.”

“Yes,” interposed Porthos, “four hundred pistoles; but who is to make four hundred pistoles?”

“A pistole is not enough,” said D’Artagnan, “‘tis worth a louis.”

“What is worth a louis?”

“Four hundred, at a louis each, make four hundred louis.”

“Four hundred?” said Porthos.

“Yes, there are two hundred of them, and each of them will need two, which will make four hundred.”

“But four hundred what?”

“Listen!” cried D’Artagnan.

But as there were all kinds of people about, who were in a state of stupefaction at the unexpected arrival of the court, he whispered in his friend’s ear.

“I understand,” answered Porthos, “I understand you perfectly, on my honor; two hundred louis, each of us, would be making a pretty thing of it; but what will people say?”

“Let them say what they will; besides, how will they know that we are doing it?”

“But who will distribute these things?” asked Porthos.

“Isn’t Mousqueton there?”

“But he wears my livery; my livery will be known,” replied Porthos.

“He can turn his coat inside out.”

“You are always in the right, my dear friend,” cried Porthos; “but where the devil do you discover all the notions you put into practice?”

D’Artagnan smiled. The two friends turned down the first street they came to. Porthos knocked at the door of a house to the right, whilst D’Artagnan knocked at the door of a house to the left.

“Some straw,” they said.

“Sir, we don’t keep any,” was the reply of the people who opened the doors; “but please ask at the hay dealer’s.”

“Where is the hay dealer’s?”

“At the last large door in the street.”

“Are there any other people in Saint Germain who sell straw?”

“Yes; there’s the landlord of the Lamb, and Gros-Louis the farmer; they both live in the Rue des Ursulines.”

“Very well.”

D’Artagnan went instantly to the hay dealer and bargained with him for a hundred and fifty trusses of straw, which he obtained, at the rate of three pistoles each. He went afterward to the innkeeper and bought from him two hundred trusses at the same price. Finally, Farmer Louis sold them eighty trusses, making in all four hundred and thirty.

There was no more to be had in Saint Germain. This foraging did not occupy more than half an hour. Mousqueton, duly instructed, was put at the head of this sudden and new business. He was cautioned not to let a bit of straw out of his hands under a louis the truss, and they intrusted to him straw to the amount of four hundred and thirty louis. D'Artagnan, taking with him three trusses of straw, returned to the chateau, where everybody, freezing with cold and more than half asleep, envied the king, the queen, and the Duke of Orleans, on their camp beds. The lieutenant's entrance produced a burst of laughter in the great drawing-room; but he did not appear to notice that he was the object of general attention, but began to arrange, with so much cleverness, nicety and gayety, his straw bed, that the mouths of all these poor creatures, who could not go to sleep, began to water.

"Straw!" they all cried out, "straw! where is there any to be found?"

"I can show you," answered the Gascon.

And he conducted them to Mousqueton, who freely distributed the trusses at the rate of a louis apiece. It was thought rather dear, but people wanted to sleep, and who would not give even two or three louis for a few hours of sound sleep?

D'Artagnan gave up his bed to any one who wanted it, making it over about a dozen times; and since he was supposed to have paid, like the others, a louis for his truss of straw, he pocketed in that way thirty louis in less than half an hour. At five o'clock in the morning the straw was worth eighty francs a truss and there was no more to be had.

D'Artagnan had taken the precaution to set apart four trusses for his own use. He put in his pocket the key of the room where he had hidden them, and accompanied by Porthos returned to settle with Mousqueton, who, naively, and like the worthy steward that he was, handed them four hundred and thirty louis and kept one hundred for himself.

Mousqueton, who knew nothing of what was going on in the chateau, wondered that the idea had not occurred to him sooner. D'Artagnan put the gold in his hat, and in going back to the chateau settled the reckoning with Porthos, each of them had cleared two hundred and fifteen louis.

Porthos, however, found that he had no straw left for himself. He returned to Mousqueton, but the steward had sold the last wisp. He then repaired to D'Artagnan, who, thanks to his four trusses of straw, was in the act of making up and tasting, by anticipation, the luxury of a bed so soft, so well stuffed at the head, so well covered at the foot, that it would have excited the envy of the king himself, if his majesty had not been fast asleep in his own. D'Artagnan could on no account consent to pull his bed to pieces again for Porthos, but for a consideration of four louis that the latter paid him for it, he consented that Porthos should share his couch with him. He laid his sword at the head, his pistols by his side, stretched his cloak over his feet, placed his felt hat on the top of his cloak and extended himself luxuriously on the straw, which rustled under him. He was already enjoying the sweet dream engendered by the possession of two hundred and nineteen louis, made in a quarter of an hour, when a voice was heard at the door of the hall, which made him stir.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan!" it cried.

"Here!" cried Porthos, "here!"

Porthos foresaw that if D'Artagnan was called away he should remain the sole possessor of the bed. An officer approached.

"I am come to fetch you, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"From whom?"

"His eminence sent me."

"Tell my lord that I'm going to sleep, and I advise him, as a friend, to do the same."

"His eminence is not gone to bed and will not go to bed, and wants you instantly."

"The devil take Mazarin, who does not know when to sleep at the proper time. What does he want with me? Is it to make me a captain? In that case I will forgive him."

And the musketeer rose, grumbling, took his sword, hat, pistols, and cloak, and followed the officer, whilst Porthos, alone and sole possessor of the bed, endeavored to follow the good example of falling asleep, which his predecessor had set him.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," said the cardinal, on perceiving him, "I have not forgotten with what zeal you have served me. I am going to prove to you that I have not."

"Good," thought the Gascon, "this is a promising beginning."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," he resumed, "do you wish to become a captain?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And your friend still longs to be made a baron?"

"At this very moment, my lord, he no doubt dreams that he is one already."

"Then," said Mazarin, taking from his portfolio the letter which he had already shown D'Artagnan, "take this dispatch and carry it to England."

D'Artagnan looked at the envelope; there was no address on it.

"Am I not to know to whom to present it?"

"You will know when you reach London; at London you may tear off the outer envelope."

"And what are my instructions?"

"To obey in every particular the man to whom this letter is addressed. You must set out for Boulogne. At the Royal Arms of England you will find a young gentleman named Mordaunt."

"Yes, my lord; and what am I to do with this young gentleman?"

"Follow wherever he leads you."

D'Artagnan looked at the cardinal with a stupefied air.

"There are your instructions," said Mazarin; "go!"

"Go! 'tis easy to say so, but that requires money, and I haven't any."

"Ah!" replied Mazarin, "so you have no money?"

"None, my lord."

"But the diamond I gave you yesterday?"

"I wish to keep it in remembrance of your eminence."

Mazarin sighed.

"'Tis very dear living in England, my lord, especially as envoy extraordinary."

"Zounds!" replied Mazarin, "the people there are very sedate, and their habits, since the revolution, simple; but no matter."

He opened a drawer and took out a purse.

"What do you say to a thousand crowns?"

D'Artagnan pouted out his lower lip in a most extraordinary manner.

"I reply, my lord, 'tis but little, as certainly I shall not go alone."

"I suppose not. Monsieur du Vallon, that worthy gentleman, for, with the exception of yourself, Monsieur d'Artagnan, there's not a man in France that I esteem and love so much as him----"

"Then, my lord," replied D'Artagnan, pointing to the purse which Mazarin still held, "if you love and esteem him so much, you--understand me?"

"Be it so! on his account I add two hundred crowns."

“Scoundrel!” muttered D’Artagnan. “But on our return,” he said aloud, “may we, that is, my friend and I, depend on having, he his barony, and I my promotion?”

“On the honor of Mazarin.”

“I should like another sort of oath better,” said D’Artagnan to himself; then aloud, “May I not offer my duty to her majesty the queen?”

“Her majesty is asleep and you must set off directly,” replied Mazarin; “go, pray, sir----”

“One word more, my lord; if there’s any fighting where I’m going, must I fight?”

“You are to obey the commands of the personage to whom I have addressed the inclosed letter.”

“‘Tis well,” said D’Artagnan, holding out his hand to receive the money. “I offer my best respects and services to you, my lord.”

D’Artagnan then, returning to the officer, said:

“Sir, have the kindness also to awaken Monsieur du Vallon and to say ‘tis by his eminence’s order, and that I shall await him at the stables.”

The officer went off with an eagerness that showed the Gascon that he had some personal interest in the matter.

Porthos was snoring most musically when some one touched him on the shoulder.

“I come from the cardinal,” said the officer.

“Heigho!” said Porthos, opening his large eyes; “what have you got to say?”

“That his eminence has ordered you to England and that Monsieur d’Artagnan is waiting for you in the stables.”

Porthos sighed heavily, arose, took his hat, his pistols, and his cloak, and departed, casting a look of regret upon the couch where he had hoped to sleep so well.

No sooner had he turned his back than the officer laid himself down in it, and he had scarcely crossed the threshold before his successor, in his turn, was snoring immoderately. It was very natural, he being the only person in the whole assemblage, except the king, the queen, and the Duke of Orleans, who slept gratuitously.

CHAPTER 54.

In which we hear Tidings of Aramis.

D’Artagnan went straight to the stables; day was just dawning. He found his horse and that of Porthos fastened to the manger, but to an empty manger. He took pity on these poor animals and went to a corner of the stable, where he saw a little straw, but in doing so he struck his foot against a human body, which uttered a cry and arose on its knees, rubbing its eyes. It was Mousqueton, who, having no straw to lie upon, had helped himself to that of the horses.

“Mousqueton,” cried D’Artagnan, “let us be off! Let us set off.”

Mousqueton, recognizing the voice of his master’s friend, got up suddenly, and in doing so let fall some louis which he had appropriated to himself illegally during the night.

“Ho! ho!” exclaimed D’Artagnan, picking up a louis and displaying it; “here’s a louis that smells confoundedly of straw.”

Mousqueton blushed so confusedly that the Gascon began to laugh at him and said:

“Porthos would be angry, my dear Monsieur Mousqueton, but I pardon you, only let us remember that this gold must serve us as a joke, so be gay--come along.”

Mousqueton instantly assumed a jovial countenance, saddled the horses quickly and mounted his own without making faces over it.

Whilst this went on, Porthos arrived with a very cross look on his face, and was astonished to find the lieutenant resigned and Mousqueton almost merry.

“Ah, that’s it!” he cried, “you have your promotion and I my barony.”

“We are going to fetch our brevets,” said D’Artagnan, “and when we come back, Master Mazarin will sign them.”

“And where are we going?” asked Porthos.

“To Paris first; I have affairs to settle.”

And they both set out for Paris.

On arriving at its gates they were astounded to see the threatening aspect of the capital. Around a broken-down carriage the people were uttering imprecations, whilst the persons who had attempted to escape were made prisoners--that is to say, an old man and two women. On the other hand, as the two friends approached to enter, they showed them every kind of civility, thinking them deserters from the royal party and wishing to bind them to their own.

"What is the king doing?" they asked.

"He is asleep."

"And the Spanish woman?"

"Dreaming."

"And the cursed Italian?"

"He is awake, so keep on the watch, as they are gone away; it's for some purpose, rely on it. But as you are the strongest, after all," continued D'Artagnan, "don't be furious with old men and women, and keep your wrath for more appropriate occasions."

The people listened to these words and let go the ladies, who thanked D'Artagnan with an eloquent look.

"Now! onward!" cried the Gascon.

And they continued their way, crossing the barricades, getting the chains about their legs, pushed about, questioning and questioned.

In the place of the Palais Royal D'Artagnan saw a sergeant, who was drilling six or seven hundred citizens. It was Planchet, who brought into play profitably the recollections of the regiment of Piedmont.

In passing before D'Artagnan he recognized his former master.

"Good-day, Monsieur d'Artagnan," said Planchet proudly.

"Good-day, Monsieur Dulaurier," replied D'Artagnan.

Planchet stopped short, staring at D'Artagnan. The first row, seeing their sergeant stop, stopped in their turn, and so on to the very last.

"These citizens are dreadfully ridiculous," observed D'Artagnan to Porthos and went on his way.

Five minutes afterward he entered the hotel of La Chevrette, where pretty Madeleine, the hostess, came to him.

"My dear Mistress Turquaine," said the Gascon, "if you happen to have any money, lock it up quickly; if you happen to have any jewels, hide them directly; if you happen to have any debtors, make them pay you, or any creditors, don't pay them."

“Why, prithee?” asked Madeleine.

“Because Paris is going to be reduced to dust and ashes like Babylon, of which you have no doubt heard tell.”

“And are you going to leave me at such a time?”

“This very instant.”

“And where are you going?”

“Ah, if you could tell me that, you would be doing me a service.”

“Ah, me! ah, me!

“Have you any letters for me?” inquired D’Artagnan, wishing to signify to the hostess that her lamentations were superfluous and that therefore she had better spare him demonstrations of her grief.

“There’s one just arrived,” and she handed the letter to D’Artagnan.

“From Athos!” cried D’Artagnan, recognizing the handwriting.

“Ah!” said Porthos, “let us hear what he says.”

D’Artagnan opened the letter and read as follows:

“Dear D’Artagnan, dear Du Vallon, my good friends, perhaps this may be the last time that you will ever hear from me. Aramis and I are very unhappy; but God, our courage, and the remembrance of our friendship sustain us. Think often of Raoul. I intrust to you certain papers which are at Blois; and in two months and a half, if you do not hear of us, take possession of them.

“Embrace, with all your heart, the vicomte, for your devoted, friend,

“ATHOS.” “I believe, by Heaven,” said D’Artagnan, “that I shall embrace him, since he’s upon our road; and if he is so unfortunate as to lose our dear Athos, from that very day he becomes my son.”

“And I,” said Porthos, “shall make him my sole heir.”

“Let us see, what more does Athos say?”

“Should you meet on your journey a certain Monsieur Mordaunt, distrust him, in a letter I cannot say more.”

“Monsieur Mordaunt!” exclaimed the Gascon, surprised.

“Monsieur Mordaunt! ‘tis well,” said Porthos, “we shall remember that; but see, there is a postscript from Aramis.”

“So there is,” said D’Artagnan, and he read:

“We conceal the place where we are, dear friends, knowing your brotherly affection and that you would come and die with us were we to reveal it.”

“Confound it,” interrupted Porthos, with an explosion of passion which sent Mousqueton to the other end of the room; “are they in danger of dying?”

D’Artagnan continued:

“Athos bequeaths to you Raoul, and I bequeath to you my revenge. If by any good luck you lay your hand on a certain man named Mordaunt, tell Porthos to take him into a corner and to wring his neck. I dare not say more in a letter.

“ARAMIS.” “If that is all, it is easily done,” said Porthos.

“On the contrary,” observed D’Artagnan, with a vexed look; “it would be impossible.”

“How so?”

“It is precisely this Monsieur Mordaunt whom we are going to join at Boulogne and with whom we cross to England.”

“Well, suppose instead of joining this Monsieur Mordaunt we were to go and join our friends?” said Porthos, with a gesture fierce enough to have frightened an army.

“I did think of it, but this letter has neither date nor postmark.”

“True,” said Porthos. And he began to wander about the room like a man beside himself, gesticulating and half drawing his sword out of the scabbard.

As to D’Artagnan, he remained standing like a man in consternation, with the deepest affliction depicted on his face.

“Ah, this is not right; Athos insults us; he wishes to die alone; it is bad, bad, bad.”

Mousqueton, witnessing this despair, melted into tears in a corner of the room.

“Come,” said D’Artagnan, “all this leads to nothing. Let us go on. We will embrace Raoul, and perhaps he will have news of Athos.”

“Stop--an idea!” cried Porthos; “indeed, my dear D’Artagnan, I don’t know how you manage, but you are always full of ideas; let us go and embrace Raoul.”

“Woe to that man who should happen to contradict my master at this moment,” said Mousqueton to himself; “I wouldn’t give a farthing for his life.”

They set out. On arriving at the Rue Saint Denis, the friends found a vast concourse of people. It was the Duc de Beaufort, who was coming from the

Vendomois and whom the coadjutor was showing to the Parisians, intoxicated with joy. With the duke's aid they already considered themselves invincible.

The two friends turned off into a side street to avoid meeting the prince, and so reached the Saint Denis gate.

"Is it true," said the guard to the two cavaliers, "that the Duc de Beaufort has arrived in Paris?"

"Nothing more certain; and the best proof of it is," said D'Artagnan, "that he has dispatched us to meet the Duc de Vendome, his father, who is coming in his turn."

"Long live De Beaufort!" cried the guards, and they drew back respectfully to let the two friends pass. Once across the barriers these two knew neither fatigue nor fear. Their horses flew, and they never ceased speaking of Athos and Aramis.

The camp had entered Saint Omer; the friends made a little detour and went to the camp, and gave the army an exact account of the flight of the king and queen. They found Raoul near his tent, reclining on a truss of hay, of which his horse stole some mouthfuls; the young man's eyes were red and he seemed dejected. The Marechal de Grammont and the Comte de Guiche had returned to Paris and he was quite lonely. And as soon as he saw the two cavaliers he ran to them with open arms.

"Oh, is it you, dear friends? Did you come here to fetch me? Will you take me away with you? Do you bring me tidings of my guardian?"

"Have you not received any?" said D'Artagnan to the youth.

"Alas! sir, no, and I do not know what has become of him; so that I am really so unhappy that I weep."

In fact, tears rolled down his cheeks.

Porthos turned aside, in order not to show by his honest round face what was passing in his mind.

"Deuce take it!" cried D'Artagnan, more moved than he had been for a long time, "don't despair, my friend, if you have not received any letters from the count, we have received one."

"Oh, really!" cried Raoul.

"And a comforting one, too," added D'Artagnan, seeing the delight that his intelligence gave the young man.

"Have you it?" asked Raoul

"Yes--that is, I had it," repined the Gascon, making believe to find it. "Wait, it ought to be there in my pocket; it speaks of his return, does it not, Porthos?"

All Gascon as he was, D'Artagnan could not bear alone the weight of that falsehood.

"Yes," replied Porthos, coughing.

"Eh, give it to me!" said the young man.

"Eh! I read it a little while since. Can I have lost it? Ah! confound it! yes, my pocket has a hole in it."

"Oh, yes, Monsieur Raoul!" said Mousqueton, "the letter was very consoling. These gentlemen read it to me and I wept for joy."

"But at any rate, you know where he is, Monsieur d'Artagnan?" asked Raoul, somewhat comforted.

"Ah! that's the thing!" replied the Gascon. "Undoubtedly I know it, but it is a mystery."

"Not to me, I hope?"

"No, not to you, so I am going to tell you where he is."

Porthos devoured D'Artagnan with wondering eyes.

"Where the devil shall I say that he is, so that he cannot try to rejoin him?" thought D'Artagnan.

"Well, where is he, sir?" asked Raoul, in a soft and coaxing voice.

"He is at Constantinople."

"Among the Turks!" exclaimed Raoul, alarmed. "Good heavens! how can you tell me that?"

"Does that alarm you?" cried D'Artagnan. "Pooh! what are the Turks to such men as the Comte de la Fere and the Abbe d'Herblay?"

"Ah, his friend is with him?" said Raoul. "That comforts me a little."

"Has he wit or not--this demon D'Artagnan?" said Porthos, astonished at his friend's deception.

"Now, sir," said D'Artagnan, wishing to change the conversation, "here are fifty pistoles that the count has sent you by the same courier. I suppose you have no more money and that they will be welcome."

"I have still twenty pistoles, sir."

"Well, take them; that makes seventy."

"And if you wish for more," said Porthos, putting his hand to his pocket----

"Thank you, sir," replied Raoul, blushing; "thank you a thousand times."

At this moment Olivain appeared. “Apropos,” said D’Artagnan, loud enough for the servant to hear him, “are you satisfied with Olivain?”

“Yes, in some respects, tolerably well.”

Olivain pretended to have heard nothing and entered the tent.

“What fault do you find with the fellow?”

“He is a glutton.”

“Oh, sir!” cried Olivain, reappearing at this accusation.

“And a little bit of a thief.”

“Oh, sir! oh!”

“And, more especially, a notorious coward.”

“Oh, oh! sir! you really vilify me!” cried Olivain.

“The deuce!” cried D’Artagnan. “Pray learn, Monsieur Olivain, that people like us are not to be served by cowards. Rob your master, eat his sweetmeats, and drink his wine; but, by Jove! don’t be a coward, or I shall cut off your ears. Look at Monsieur Mouston, see the honorable wounds he has received, observe how his habitual valor has given dignity to his countenance.”

Mousqueton was in the third heaven and would have embraced D’Artagnan had he dared; meanwhile he resolved to sacrifice his life for him on the next occasion that presented itself.

“Send away that fellow, Raoul,” said the Gascon; “for if he’s a coward he will disgrace thee some day.”

“Monsieur says I am coward,” cried Olivain, “because he wanted the other day to fight a cornet in Grammont’s regiment and I refused to accompany him.”

“Monsieur Olivain, a lackey ought never to disobey,” said D’Artagnan, sternly; then taking him aside, he whispered to him: “Thou hast done right; thy master was in the wrong; here’s a crown for thee, but should he ever be insulted and thou dost not let thyself be cut in quarters for him, I will cut out thy tongue. Remember that.”

Olivain bowed and slipped the crown into his pocket.

“And now, Raoul,” said the Gascon, “Monsieur du Vallon and I are going away as ambassadors, where, I know not; but should you want anything, write to Madame Turquaine, at La Chevrette, Rue Tiquetonne and draw upon her purse as on a banker--with economy; for it is not so well filled as that of Monsieur d’Emery.”

And having, meantime, embraced his ward, he passed him into the robust arms of Porthos, who lifted him up from the ground and held him a moment suspended near the noble heart of the formidable giant.

"Come," said D'Artagnan, "let us go."

And they set out for Boulogne, where toward evening they arrived, their horses flecked with foam and dark with perspiration.

At ten steps from the place where they halted was a young man in black, who seemed waiting for some one, and who, from the moment he saw them enter the town, never took his eyes off them.

D'Artagnan approached him, and seeing him stare so fixedly, said:

"Well, friend! I don't like people to quiz me!"

"Sir," said the young man, "do you not come from Paris, if you please?"

D'Artagnan thought it was some gossip who wanted news from the capital.

"Yes, sir," he said, in a softened tone.

"Are you not going to put up at the 'Arms of England'?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you not charged with a mission from his eminence, Cardinal Mazarin?"

"Yes, sir."

"In that case, I am the man you have to do with. I am M. Mordaunt."

"Ah!" thought D'Artagnan, "the man I am warned against by Athos."

"Ah!" thought Porthos, "the man Aramis wants me to strangle."

They both looked searchingly at the young man, who misunderstood the meaning of that inquisition.

"Do you doubt my word?" he said. "In that case I can give you proofs."

"No, sir," said D'Artagnan; "and we place ourselves at your orders."

"Well, gentlemen," resumed Mordaunt, "we must set out without delay, to-day is the last day granted me by the cardinal. My ship is ready, and had you not come I must have set off without you, for General Cromwell expects my return impatiently."

"So!" thought the lieutenant, "'tis to General Cromwell that our dispatches are addressed."

"Have you no letter for him?" asked the young man.

"I have one, the seal of which I am not to break till I reach London; but since you tell me to whom it is addressed, 'tis useless to wait till then."

D’Artagnan tore open the envelope of the letter. It was directed to “Monsieur Oliver Cromwell, General of the Army of the English Nation.”

“Ah!” said D’Artagnan; “a singular commission.”

“Who is this Monsieur Oliver Cromwell?” inquired Porthos.

“Formerly a brewer,” replied the Gascon.

“Perhaps Mazarin wishes to make a speculation in beer, as we did in straw,” said Porthos.

“Come, come, gentlemen,” said Mordaunt, impatiently, “let us depart.”

“What!” exclaimed Porthos “without supper? Cannot Monsieur Cromwell wait a little?”

“Yes, but I?” said Mordaunt.

“Well, you,” said Porthos, “what then?”

“I cannot wait.”

“Oh! as to you, that is not my concern, and I shall sup either with or without your permission.”

The young man’s eyes kindled in secret, but he restrained himself.

“Monsieur,” said D’Artagnan, “you must excuse famished travelers. Besides, our supper can’t delay you much. We will hasten on to the inn; you will meanwhile proceed on foot to the harbor. We will take a bite and shall be there as soon as you are.”

“Just as you please, gentlemen, provided we set sail,” he said.

“The name of your ship?” inquired D’Artagnan.

“The Standard.”

“Very well; in half an hour we shall be on board.”

And the friends, spurring on their horses, rode to the hotel, the “Arms of England.”

“What do you say of that young man?” asked D’Artagnan, as they hurried along.

“I say that he doesn’t suit me at all,” said Porthos, “and that I feel a strong itching to follow Aramis’s advice.”

“By no means, my dear Porthos; that man is a messenger of General Cromwell; it would insure for us a poor reception, I imagine, should it be announced to him that we had twisted the neck of his confidant.”

“Nevertheless,” said Porthos, “I have always noticed that Aramis gives good advice.”

“Listen,” returned D’Artagnan, “when our embassy is finished----”

“Well?”

“If it brings us back to France----”

“Well?”

“Well, we shall see.”

At that moment the two friends reached the hotel, “Arms of England,” where they supped with hearty appetite and then at once proceeded to the port.

There they found a brig ready to set sail, upon the deck of which they recognized Mordaunt walking up and down impatiently.

“It is singular,” said D’Artagnan, whilst the boat was taking them to the Standard, “it is astonishing how that young man resembles some one I must have known, but who it was I cannot yet remember.”

A few minutes later they were on board, but the embarkation of the horses was a longer matter than that of the men, and it was eight o’clock before they raised anchor.

The young man stamped impatiently and ordered all sail to be spread.

Porthos, completely used up by three nights without sleep and a journey of seventy leagues on horseback, retired to his cabin and went to sleep.

D’Artagnan, overcoming his repugnance to Mordaunt, walked with him upon the deck and invented a hundred stories to make him talk.

Mousqueton was seasick.

CHAPTER 55.

The Scotchman.

And now our readers must leave the Standard to sail peaceably, not toward London, where D’Artagnan and Porthos believed they were going, but to Durham, whither Mordaunt had been ordered to repair by the letter he had received during his sojourn at Boulogne, and accompany us to the royalist camp, on this side of the Tyne, near Newcastle.

There, placed between two rivers on the borders of Scotland, but still on English soil, the tents of a little army extended. It was midnight. Some Highlanders were listlessly keeping watch. The moon, which was partially obscured by heavy clouds, now and then lit up the muskets of the sentinels, or silvered the walls, the roofs, and the spires of the town that Charles I. had just surrendered to the parliamentary troops, whilst Oxford and Newark still held out for him in the hopes of coming to some arrangement.

At one of the extremities of the camp, near an immense tent, in which the Scottish officers were holding a kind of council, presided over by Lord Leven, their commander, a man attired as a cavalier lay sleeping on the turf, his right hand extended over his sword.

About fifty paces off, another man, also appareled as a cavalier, was talking to a Scotch sentinel, and, though a foreigner, he seemed to understand without much difficulty the answers given in the broad Perthshire dialect.

As the town clock of Newcastle struck one the sleeper awoke, and with all the gestures of a man rousing himself out of deep sleep he looked attentively about him; perceiving that he was alone he rose and making a little circuit passed close to the cavalier who was speaking to the sentinel. The former had no doubt finished his questions, for a moment later he said good-night and carelessly followed the same path taken by the first cavalier.

In the shadow of a tent the former was awaiting him.

“Well, my dear friend?” said he, in as pure French as has ever been uttered between Rouen and Tours.

"Well, my friend, there is not a moment to lose; we must let the king know immediately."

"Why, what is the matter?"

"It would take too long to tell you, besides, you will hear it all directly and the least word dropped here might ruin all. We must go and find Lord Winter."

They both set off to the other end of the camp, but as it did not cover more than a surface of five hundred feet they quickly arrived at the tent they were looking for.

"Tony, is your master sleeping?" said one of the two cavaliers to a servant who was lying in the outer compartment, which served as a kind of anteroom.

"No, monsieur le comte," answered the servant, "I think not; or at least he has not long been so, for he was pacing up and down for more than two hours after he left the king, and the sound of his footsteps has only ceased during the last ten minutes. However, you may look and see," added the lackey, raising the curtained entrance of the tent.

Lord Winter was seated near an aperture, arranged as a window to let in the night air, his eyes mechanically following the course of the moon, intermittently veiled, as we before observed, by heavy clouds. The two friends approached Winter, who, with his head on his hands, was gazing at the heavens; he did not hear them enter and remained in the same attitude till he felt a hand upon his shoulder.

He turned around, recognized Athos and Aramis and held out his hand to them.

"Have you observed," said he to them, "what a blood-red color the moon has to-night?"

"No," replied Athos; "I thought it looked much the same as usual."

"Look, again, chevalier," returned Lord Winter.

"I must own," said Aramis, "I am like the Comte de la Fere--I can see nothing remarkable about it."

"My lord," said Athos, "in a position so precarious as ours we must examine the earth and not the heavens. Have you studied our Scotch troops and have you confidence in them?"

"The Scotch?" inquired Winter. "What Scotch?"

"Ours, egad!" exclaimed Athos. "Those in whom the king has confided--Lord Leven's Highlanders."

"No," said Winter, then he paused; "but tell me, can you not perceive the russet tint which marks the heavens?"

"Not the least in the world," said Aramis and Athos at once.

"Tell me," continued Winter, always possessed by the same idea, "is there not a tradition in France that Henry IV., the evening before the day he was assassinated, when he was playing at chess with M. de Bassompiere, saw clots of blood upon the chessboard?"

"Yes," said Athos, "and the marechal has often told me so himself."

"Then it was so," murmured Winter, "and the next day Henry IV. was killed."

"But what has this vision of Henry IV. to do with you, my lord?" inquired Aramis.

"Nothing; and indeed I am mad to trouble you with such things, when your coming to my tent at such an hour announces that you are the bearers of important news."

"Yes, my lord," said Athos, "I wish to speak to the king."

"To the king! but the king is asleep."

"I have something important to reveal to him."

"Can it not be put off till to-morrow?"

"He must know it this moment, and perhaps it is already too late."

"Come, then," said Lord Winter.

Lord Winter's tent was pitched by the side of the royal marquee, a kind of corridor communicating between the two. This corridor was guarded, not by a sentinel, but by a confidential servant, through whom, in case of urgency, Charles could communicate instantly with his faithful subject.

"These gentlemen are with me," said Winter.

The lackey bowed and let them pass. As he had said, on a camp bed, dressed in his black doublet, booted, unbelted, with his felt hat beside him, lay the king, overcome by sleep and fatigue. They advanced, and Athos, who was the first to enter, gazed a moment in silence on that pale and noble face, framed in its long and now untidy, matted hair, the blue veins showing through the transparent temples, his eyes seemingly swollen by tears.

Athos sighed deeply; the sigh woke the king, so lightly did he sleep.

He opened his eyes.

"Ah!" said he, raising himself on his elbow, "is it you, Comte de la Fere?"

"Yes, sire," replied Athos.

“You watch while I sleep and you have come to bring me some news?”

“Alas, sire,” answered Athos, “your majesty has guessed aright.”

“It is bad news?”

“Yes, sire.”

“Never mind; the messenger is welcome. You never come to me without conferring pleasure. You whose devotion recognizes neither country nor misfortune, you who are sent to me by Henrietta; whatever news you bring, speak out.”

“Sire, Cromwell has arrived this night at Newcastle.”

“Ah!” exclaimed the king, “to fight?”

“No, sire, but to buy your majesty.”

“What did you say?”

“I said, sire, that four hundred thousand pounds are owing to the Scottish army.”

“For unpaid wages; yes, I know it. For the last year my faithful Highlanders have fought for honor alone.”

Athos smiled.

“Well, sir, though honor is a fine thing, they are tired of fighting for it, and to-night they have sold you for two hundred thousand pounds--that is to say, for half what is owing them.”

“Impossible!” cried the king, “the Scotch sell their king for two hundred thousand pounds! And who is the Judas who has concluded this infamous bargain?”

“Lord Leven.”

“Are you certain of it, sir?”

“I heard it with my own ears.”

The king sighed deeply, as if his heart would break, and then buried his face in his hands.

“Oh! the Scotch,” he exclaimed, “the Scotch I called ‘my faithful,’ to whom I trusted myself when I could have fled to Oxford! the Scotch, my brothers! But are you well assured, sir?”

“Lying behind the tent of Lord Leven, I raised it and saw all, heard all!”

“And when is this to be consummated?”

“To-day--this morning; so your majesty must perceive there is no time to lose!”

“To do what? since you say I am sold.”

“To cross the Tyne, reach Scotland and rejoin Lord Montrose, who will not sell you.”

“And what shall I do in Scotland? A war of partisans, unworthy of a king.”

“The example of Robert Bruce will absolve you, sire.”

“No, no! I have fought too long; they have sold me, they shall give me up, and the eternal shame of treble treason shall fall on their heads.”

“Sire,” said Athos, “perhaps a king should act thus, but not a husband and a father. I have come in the name of your wife and daughter and of the children you have still in London, and I say to you, ‘Live, sire,’--it is the will of Heaven.”

The king raised himself, buckled on his belt, and passing his handkerchief over his moist forehead, said:

“Well, what is to be done?”

“Sire, have you in the army one regiment on which you can implicitly rely?”

“Winter,” said the king, “do you believe in the fidelity of yours?”

“Sire, they are but men, and men are become both weak and wicked. I will not answer for them. I would confide my life to them, but I should hesitate ere I trusted them with your majesty’s.”

“Well!” said Athos, “since you have not a regiment, we are three devoted men. It is enough. Let your majesty mount on horseback and place yourself in the midst of us; we will cross the Tyne, reach Scotland, and you will be saved.”

“Is this your counsel also, Winter?” inquired the king.

“Yes, sire.”

“And yours, Monsieur d’Herblay?”

“Yes, sire.”

“As you wish, then. Winter, give the necessary orders.”

Winter then left the tent; in the meantime the king finished his toilet. The first rays of daybreak penetrated the aperture of the tent as Winter re-entered it.

“All is ready, sire,” said he.

“For us, also?” inquired Athos.

“Grimaud and Blaisois are holding your horses, ready saddled.”

“In that case,” exclaimed Athos, “let us not lose an instant, but set off.”

“Come,” added the king.

“Sire,” said Aramis, “will not your majesty acquaint some of your friends of this?”

“Friends!” answered Charles, sadly, “I have but three--one of twenty years, who has never forgotten me, and two of a week’s standing, whom I shall never forget. Come, gentlemen, come!”

The king quitted his tent and found his horse ready waiting for him. It was a chestnut that the king had ridden for three years and of which he was very fond.

The horse neighed with pleasure at seeing him.

“Ah!” said the king, “I was unjust; here is a creature that loves me. You at least will be faithful to me, Arthur.”

The horse, as if it understood these words, bent its red nostrils toward the king’s face, and parting his lips displayed all its teeth, as if with pleasure.

“Yes, yes,” said the king, caressing it with his hand, “yes, my Arthur, thou art a fond and faithful creature.”

After this little scene Charles threw himself into the saddle, and turning to Athos, Aramis and Winter, said:

“Now, gentlemen, I am at your service.”

But Athos was standing with his eyes fixed on a black line which bordered the banks of the Tyne and seemed to extend double the length of the camp.

“What is that line?” cried Athos, whose vision was still rather obscured by the uncertain shades and demi-tints of daybreak. “What is that line? I did not observe it yesterday.”

“It must be the fog rising from the river,” said the king.

“Sire, it is something more opaque than the fog.”

“Indeed!” said Winter, “it appears to me like a bar of red color.”

“It is the enemy, who have made a sortie from Newcastle and are surrounding us!” exclaimed Athos.

“The enemy!” cried the king.

“Yes, the enemy. It is too late. Stop a moment; does not that sunbeam yonder, just by the side of the town, glitter on the Ironsides?”

This was the name given the cuirassiers, whom Cromwell had made his body-guard.

“Ah!” said the king, “we shall soon see whether my Highlanders have betrayed me or not.”

“What are you going to do?” exclaimed Athos.

“To give them the order to charge, and run down these miserable rebels.”

And the king, putting spurs to his horse, set off to the tent of Lord Leven.

“Follow him,” said Athos.

“Come!” exclaimed Aramis.

“Is the king wounded?” cried Lord Winter. “I see spots of blood on the ground.” And he set off to follow the two friends.

He was stopped by Athos.

“Go and call out your regiment,” said he; “I can foresee that we shall have need of it directly.”

Winter turned his horse and the two friends rode on. It had taken but two minutes for the king to reach the tent of the Scottish commander; he dismounted and entered.

The general was there, surrounded by the more prominent chiefs.

“The king!” they exclaimed, as all rose in bewilderment.

Charles was indeed in the midst of them, his hat on his head, his brows bent, striking his boot with his riding whip.

“Yes, gentlemen, the king in person, the king who has come to ask for some account of what has happened.”

“What is the matter, sire?” exclaimed Lord Leven.

“It is this, sir,” said the king, angrily, “that General Cromwell has reached Newcastle; that you knew it and I was not informed of it; that the enemy have left the town and are now closing the passages of the Tyne against us; that our sentinels have seen this movement and I have been left unacquainted with it; that, by an infamous treaty you have sold me for two hundred thousand pounds to Parliament. Of this treaty, at least, I have been warned. This is the matter, gentlemen; answer and exculpate yourselves, for I stand here to accuse you.”

“Sire,” said Lord Leven, with hesitation, “sire, your majesty has been deceived by false reports.”

“My own eyes have seen the enemy extend itself between myself and Scotland; and I can almost say that with my own ears I have heard the clauses of the treaty debated.”

The Scotch chieftains looked at each other in their turn with frowning brows.

“Sire,” murmured Lord Leven, crushed by shame, “sire, we are ready to give you every proof of our fidelity.”

“I ask but one,” said the king; “put the army in battle array and face the enemy.”

“That cannot be, sire,” said the earl.

“How, cannot be? What hinders it?” exclaimed the king.

“Your majesty is well aware that there is a truce between us and the English army.”

“And if there is a truce the English army has broken it by quitting the town, contrary to the agreement which kept it there. Now, I tell you, you must pass with me through this army across to Scotland, and if you refuse you may choose betwixt two names, which the contempt of all honest men will brand you with--you are either cowards or traitors!”

The eyes of the Scotch flashed fire; and, as often happens on such occasions, from shame they passed to effrontery and two heads of clans advanced upon the king.

“Yes,” said they, “we have promised to deliver Scotland and England from him who for the last five-and-twenty years has sucked the blood and gold of Scotland and England. We have promised and we will keep our promise. Charles Stuart, you are our prisoner.”

And both extended their hands as if to seize the king, but before they could touch him with the tips of their fingers, both had fallen, one dead, the other stunned.

Aramis had passed his sword through the body of the first and Athos had knocked down the other with the butt end of his pistol.

Then, as Lord Leven and the other chieftains recoiled before this unexpected rescue, which seemed to come from Heaven for the prince they already thought was their prisoner, Athos and Aramis dragged the king from the perjured assembly into which he had so imprudently ventured, and throwing themselves on horseback all three returned at full gallop to the royal tent.

On their road they perceived Lord Winter marching at the head of his regiment. The king motioned him to accompany them.

CHAPTER 56.

The Avenger.

They all four entered the tent; they had no plan ready--they must think of one.

The king threw himself into an arm-chair. “I am lost,” said he.

“No, sire,” replied Athos. “You are only betrayed.”

The king sighed deeply.

“Betrayed! yes betrayed by the Scotch, amongst whom I was born, whom I have always loved better than the English. Oh, traitors that ye are!”

“Sire,” said Athos, “this is not a moment for recrimination, but a time to show yourself a king and a gentleman. Up, sire! up! for you have here at least three men who will not betray you. Ah! if we had been five!” murmured Athos, thinking of D’Artagnan and Porthos.

“What do you say?” inquired Charles, rising.

“I say, sire, that there is now but one way open. Lord Winter answers for his regiment, or at least very nearly so--we will not split straws about words--let him place himself at the head of his men, we will place ourselves at the side of your majesty, and we will mow a swath through Cromwell’s army and reach Scotland.”

“There is another method,” said Aramis. “Let one of us put on the dress and mount the king’s horse. Whilst they pursue him the king might escape.”

“It is good advice,” said Athos, “and if the king will do one of us the honor we shall be truly grateful to him.”

“What do you think of this counsel, Winter?” asked the king, looking with admiration at these two men, whose chief idea seemed to be how they could take on their shoulders all the dangers that assailed him.

“I think the only chance of saving your majesty has just been proposed by Monsieur d’Herblay. I humbly entreat your majesty to choose quickly, for we have not an instant to lose.”

“But if I accept, it is death, or at least imprisonment, for him who takes my place.”

“He will have had the glory of having saved his king,” cried Winter.

The king looked at his old friend with tears in his eyes; undid the Order of the Saint Esprit which he wore, to honor the two Frenchmen who were with him, and passed it around Winter's neck, who received on his knees this striking proof of his sovereign's confidence and friendship.

"It is right," said Athos; "he has served your majesty longer than we have."

The king overheard these words and turned around with tears in his eyes.

"Wait a moment, sir," said he; "I have an order for each of you also."

He turned to a closet where his own orders were locked up, and took out two ribbons of the Order of the Garter.

"These cannot be for us," said Athos.

"Why not, sir?" asked Charles.

"Such are for royalty, and we are simple commoners."

"Speak not of crowns. I shall not find amongst them such great hearts as yours. No, no, you do yourselves injustice; but I am here to do you justice. On your knees, count."

Athos knelt down and the king passed the ribbon down from left to right as usual, raised his sword, and instead of pronouncing the customary formula, "I make you a knight. Be brave, faithful and loyal," he said, "You are brave, faithful and loyal. I knight you, monsieur le comte."

Then turning to Aramis, he said:

"It is now your turn, monsieur le chevalier."

The same ceremony recommenced, with the same words, whilst Winter unlaced his leather cuirass, that he might disguise himself like the king. Charles, having proceeded with Aramis as with Athos, embraced them both.

"Sire," said Winter, who in this trying emergency felt all his strength and energy fire up, "we are ready."

The king looked at the three gentlemen. "Then we must fly!" said he.

"Flying through an army, sire," said Athos, "in all countries in the world is called charging."

"Then I shall die, sword in hand," said Charles. "Monsieur le comte, monsieur le chevalier, if ever I am king----"

"Sire, you have already done us more honor than simple gentlemen could ever aspire to, therefore gratitude is on our side. But we must not lose time. We have already wasted too much."

The king again shook hands with all three, exchanged hats with Winter and went out.

Winter’s regiment was ranged on some high ground above the camp. The king, followed by the three friends, turned his steps that way. The Scotch camp seemed as if at last awakened; the soldiers had come out of their tents and taken up their station in battle array.

“Do you see that?” said the king. “Perhaps they are penitent and preparing to march.”

“If they are penitent,” said Athos, “let them follow us.”

“Well!” said the king, “what shall we do?”

“Let us examine the enemy’s army.”

At the same instant the eyes of the little group were fixed on the same line which at daybreak they had mistaken for fog and which the morning sun now plainly showed was an army in order of battle. The air was soft and clear, as it generally is at that early hour of the morning. The regiments, the standards, and even the colors of the horses and uniforms were now clearly distinct.

On the summit of a rising ground, a little in advance of the enemy, appeared a short and heavy looking man; this man was surrounded by officers. He turned a spyglass toward the little group amongst which the king stood.

“Does this man know your majesty personally?” inquired Aramis.

Charles smiled.

“That man is Cromwell,” said he.

“Then draw down your hat, sire, that he may not discover the substitution.”

“Ah!” said Athos, “how much time we have lost.”

“Now,” said the king, “give the word and let us start.”

“Will you not give it, sire?” asked Athos.

“No; I make you my lieutenant-general,” said the king.

“Listen, then, Lord Winter. Proceed, sire, I beg. What we are going to say does not concern your majesty.”

The king, smiling, turned a few steps back.

“This is what I propose to do,” said Athos. “We will divide our regiments into two squadrons. You will put yourself at the head of the first. We and his majesty will lead the second. If no obstacle occurs we will both charge together, force the enemy’s line and throw ourselves into the Tyne, which we must cross, either by fording or swimming; if, on the contrary, any repulse should take place, you and your men must fight to the last man, whilst we and the king proceed on our road. Once arrived at the brink of the river, should we even find them three ranks deep, as long as you and your regiment do your duty, we will look to the rest.”

“To horse!” said Lord Winter.

“To horse!” re-echoed Athos; “everything is arranged and decided.”

“Now, gentlemen,” cried the king, “forward! and rally to the old cry of France, ‘Montjoy and St. Denis!’ The war cry of England is too often in the mouths of traitors.”

They mounted--the king on Winter’s horse and Winter on that of the king; then Winter took his place at the head of the first squadron, and the king, with Athos on his right and Aramis on his left, at the head of the second.

The Scotch army stood motionless and silent, seized with shame at sight of these preparations.

Some of the chieftains left the ranks and broke their swords in two.

“There,” said the king, “that consoles me; they are not all traitors.”

At this moment Winter’s voice was raised with the cry of “Forward!”

The first squadron moved off; the second followed, and descended from the plateau. A regiment of cuirassiers, nearly equal as to numbers, issued from behind the hill and came full gallop toward it.

The king pointed this out.

“Sire,” said Athos, “we foresaw this; and if Lord Winter’s men but do their duty, we are saved, instead of lost.”

At this moment they heard above all the galloping and neighing of the horses Winter’s voice crying out:

“Sword in hand!”

At these words every sword was drawn, and glittered in the air like lightning.

“Now, gentlemen,” said the king in his turn, excited by this sight, “come, gentlemen, sword in hand!”

But Aramis and Athos were the only ones to obey this command and the king’s example.

“We are betrayed,” said the king in a low voice.

“Wait a moment,” said Athos, “perhaps they do not recognize your majesty’s voice, and await the order of their captain.”

“Have they not heard that of their colonel? But look! look!” cried the king, drawing up his horse with a sudden jerk, which threw it on its haunches, and seizing the bridle of Athos’s horse.

“Ah, cowards! traitors!” screamed Lord Winter, whose voice they heard, whilst his men, quitting their ranks, dispersed all over the plain.

About fifteen men were ranged around him and awaited the charge of Cromwell’s cuirassiers.

“Let us go and die with them!” said the king.

“Let us go,” said Athos and Aramis.

“All faithful hearts with me!” cried out Winter.

This voice was heard by the two friends, who set off, full gallop.

“No quarter!” cried a voice in French, answering to that of Winter, which made them tremble.

As for Winter, at the sound of that voice he turned pale, and was, as it were, petrified.

It was the voice of a cavalier mounted on a magnificent black horse, who was charging at the head of the English regiment, of which, in his ardor, he was ten steps in advance.

“‘Tis he!” murmured Winter, his eyes glazed and he allowed his sword to fall to his side.

“The king! the king!” cried out several voices, deceived by the blue ribbon and chestnut horse of Winter; “take him alive.”

“No! it is not the king!” exclaimed the cavalier. “Lord Winter, you are not the king; you are my uncle.”

At the same moment Mordaunt, for it was he, leveled his pistol at Winter; it went off and the ball entered the heart of the old cavalier, who with one bound on his saddle fell back into the arms of Athos, murmuring: “He is avenged!”

“Think of my mother!” shouted Mordaunt, as his horse plunged and darted off at full gallop.

“Wretch!” exclaimed Aramis, raising his pistol as he passed by him; but the powder flashed in the pan and it did not go off.

At this moment the whole regiment came up and they fell upon the few men who had held out, surrounding the two Frenchmen. Athos, after making sure that Lord Winter was really dead, let fall the corpse and said:

“Come, Aramis, now for the honor of France!” and the two Englishmen who were nearest to them fell, mortally wounded.

At the same moment a fearful “hurrah!” rent the air and thirty blades glittered about their heads.

Suddenly a man sprang out of the English ranks, fell upon Athos, twined arms of steel around him, and tearing his sword from him, said in his ear:

"Silence! yield--you yield to me, do you not?"

A giant had seized also Aramis's two wrists, who struggled in vain to release himself from this formidable grasp.

"D'Art----" exclaimed Athos, whilst the Gascon covered his mouth with his hand.

"I am your prisoner," said Aramis, giving up his sword to Porthos.

"Fire, fire!" cried Mordaunt, returning to the group surrounding the two friends.

"And wherefore fire?" said the colonel; "every one has yielded."

"It is the son of Milady," said Athos to D'Artagnan.

"I recognize him."

"It is the monk," whispered Porthos to Aramis.

"I know it."

And now the ranks began to open. D'Artagnan held the bridle of Athos's horse and Porthos that of Aramis. Both of them attempted to lead his prisoner off the battle-field.

This movement revealed the spot where Winter's body had fallen. Mordaunt had found it out and was gazing on his dead relative with an expression of malignant hatred.

Athos, though now cool and collected, put his hand to his belt, where his loaded pistols yet remained.

"What are you about?" said D'Artagnan.

"Let me kill him."

"We are all four lost, if by the least gesture you discover that you recognize him."

Then turning to the young man he exclaimed:

"A fine prize! a fine prize, friend Mordaunt; we have both myself and Monsieur du Vallon, taken two Knights of the Garter, nothing less."

"But," said Mordaunt, looking at Athos and Aramis with bloodshot eyes, "these are Frenchmen, I imagine."

"I'faith, I don't know. Are you French, sir?" said he to Athos.

"I am," replied the latter, gravely.

"Very well, my dear sir, you are the prisoner of a fellow countryman."

"But the king--where is the king?" exclaimed Athos, anxiously.

D'Artagnan vigorously seized his prisoner's hand, saying:

"Eh! the king? We have secured him."

"Yes," said Aramis, "through an infamous act of treason."

Porthos pressed his friend's hand and said to him:

"Yes, sir, all is fair in war, stratagem as well as force; look yonder!"

At this instant the squadron, that ought to have protected Charles's retreat, was advancing to meet the English regiments. The king, who was entirely surrounded, walked alone in a great empty space. He appeared calm, but it was evidently not without a mighty effort. Drops of perspiration trickled down his face, and from time to time he put a handkerchief to his mouth to wipe away the blood that rilled from it.

"Behold Nebuchadnezzar!" exclaimed an old Puritan soldier, whose eyes flashed at the sight of the man they called the tyrant.

"Do you call him Nebuchadnezzar?" said Mordaunt, with a terrible smile; "no, it is Charles the First, the king, the good King Charles, who despoils his subjects to enrich himself."

Charles glanced a moment at the insolent creature who uttered this, but did not recognize him. Nevertheless, the calm religious dignity of his countenance abashed Mordaunt.

"Bon jour, messieurs!" said the king to the two gentlemen who were held by D'Artagnan and Porthos. "The day has been unfortunate, but it is not your fault, thank God! But where is my old friend Winter?"

The two gentlemen turned away their heads in silence.

"In Strafford's company," said Mordaunt, tauntingly.

Charles shuddered. The demon had known how to wound him. The remembrance of Strafford was a source of lasting remorse to him, the shadow that haunted him by day and night. The king looked around him. He saw a corpse at his feet. It was Winter's. He uttered not a word, nor shed a tear, but a deadly pallor spread over his face; he knelt down on the ground, raised Winter's head, and unfastening the Order of the Saint Esprit, placed it on his own breast.

"Lord Winter is killed, then?" inquired D'Artagnan, fixing his eyes on the corpse.

"Yes," said Athos, "by his own nephew."

"Come, he was the first of us to go; peace be to him! he was an honest man," said D'Artagnan.

"Charles Stuart," said the colonel of the English regiment, approaching the king, who had just put on the insignia of royalty, "do you yield yourself a prisoner?”

“Colonel Tomlison,” said Charles, “kings cannot yield; the man alone submits to force.”

“Your sword.”

The king drew his sword and broke it on his knee.

At this moment a horse without a rider, covered with foam, his nostrils extended and eyes all fire, galloped up, and recognizing his master, stopped and neighed with pleasure; it was Arthur.

The king smiled, patted it with his hand and jumped lightly into the saddle.

“Now, gentlemen,” said he, “conduct me where you will.”

Turning back again, he said, “I thought I saw Winter move; if he still lives, by all you hold most sacred, do not abandon him.”

“Never fear, King Charles,” said Mordaunt, “the bullet pierced his heart.”

“Do not breathe a word nor make the least sign to me or Porthos,” said D’Artagnan to Athos and Aramis, “that you recognize this man, for Milady is not dead; her soul lives in the body of this demon.”

The detachment now moved toward the town with the royal captive; but on the road an aide-de-camp, from Cromwell, sent orders that Colonel Tomlison should conduct him to Holdenby Castle.

At the same time couriers started in every direction over England and Europe to announce that Charles Stuart was the prisoner of Oliver Cromwell.

CHAPTER 57.

Oliver Cromwell.

Have you been to the general?” said Mordaunt to D’Artagnan and Porthos; “you know he sent for you after the action.”

“We want first to put our prisoners in a place of safety,” replied D’Artagnan. “Do you know, sir, these gentlemen are each of them worth fifteen hundred pounds?”

“Oh, be assured,” said Mordaunt, looking at them with an expression he vainly endeavoured to soften, “my soldiers will guard them, and guard them well, I promise you.”

“I shall take better care of them myself,” answered D’Artagnan; “besides, all they require is a good room, with sentinels, or their simple parole that they will not attempt escape. I will go and see about that, and then we shall have the honor of presenting ourselves to the general and receiving his commands for his eminence.”

“You think of starting at once, then?” inquired Mordaunt.

“Our mission is ended, and there is nothing more to detain us now but the good pleasure of the great man to whom we were sent.”

The young man bit his lips and whispered to his sergeant:

“You will follow these men and not lose sight of them; when you have discovered where they lodge, come and await me at the town gate.”

The sergeant made a sign of comprehension.

Instead of following the knot of prisoners that were being taken into the town, Mordaunt turned his steps toward the rising ground from whence Cromwell had witnessed the battle and on which he had just had his tent pitched.

Cromwell had given orders that no one was to be allowed admission; but the sentinel, who knew that Mordaunt was one of the most confidential friends of the general, thought the order did not extend to the young man. Mordaunt, therefore, raised the canvas, and saw Cromwell seated before a table, his head buried in his hands, his back being turned.

Whether he heard Mordaunt or not as he entered, Cromwell did not move. Mordaunt remained standing near the door. At last, after a few moments, Cromwell raised his head, and, as if he divined that some one was there, turned slowly around.

"I said I wished to be alone," he exclaimed, on seeing the young man.

"They thought this order did not concern me, sir; nevertheless, if you wish it, I am ready to go."

"Ah! is it you, Mordaunt?" said Cromwell, the cloud passing away from his face; "since you are here, it is well; you may remain."

"I come to congratulate you."

"To congratulate me--what for?"

"On the capture of Charles Stuart. You are now master of England."

"I was much more really so two hours ago."

"How so, general?"

"Because England had need of me to take the tyrant, and now the tyrant is taken. Have you seen him?"

"Yes, sir." said Mordaunt.

"What is his bearing?"

Mordaunt hesitated; but it seemed as though he was constrained to tell the truth.

"Calm and dignified," said he.

"What did he say?"

"Some parting words to his friends."

"His friends!" murmured Cromwell. "Has he any friends?" Then he added aloud, "Did he make any resistance?"

"No, sir, with the exception of two or three friends every one deserted him; he had no means of resistance."

"To whom did he give up his sword?"

"He did not give it up; he broke it."

"He did well; but instead of breaking it, he might have used it to still more advantage."

There was a momentary pause.

"I heard that the colonel of the regiment that escorted Charles was killed," said Cromwell, staring very fixedly at Mordaunt.

"Yes, sir."

"By whom?" inquired Cromwell.

"By me."

“What was his name?”

“Lord Winter.”

“Your uncle?” exclaimed Cromwell.

“My uncle,” answered Mordaunt; “but traitors to England are no longer members of my family.”

Cromwell observed the young man a moment in silence, then, with that profound melancholy Shakespeare describes so well:

“Mordaunt,” he said, “you are a terrible servant.”

“When the Lord commands,” said Mordaunt, “His commands are not to be disputed. Abraham raised the knife against Isaac, and Isaac was his son.”

“Yes,” said Cromwell, “but the Lord did not suffer that sacrifice to be accomplished.”

“I have looked around me,” said Mordaunt, “and I have seen neither goat nor kid caught among the bushes of the plain.”

Cromwell bowed. “You are strong among the strong, Mordaunt,” he said; “and the Frenchmen, how did they behave?”

“Most fearlessly.”

“Yes, yes,” murmured Cromwell; “the French fight well; and if my glass was good and I mistake not, they were foremost in the fight.”

“They were,” replied Mordaunt.

“After you, however,” said Cromwell.

“It was the fault of their horses, not theirs.”

Another pause.

“And the Scotch?”

“They kept their word and never stirred,” said Mordaunt.

“Wretched men!”

“Their officers wish to see you, sir.”

“I have no time to see them. Are they paid?”

“Yes, to-night.”

“Let them be off and return to their own country, there to hide their shame, if its hills are high enough; I have nothing more to do with them nor they with me. And now go, Mordaunt.”

“Before I go,” said Mordaunt, “I have some questions and a favor to ask you, sir.”

“A favor from me?”

Mordaunt bowed.

"I come to you, my leader, my head, my father, and I ask you, master, are you contented with me?"

Cromwell looked at him with astonishment. The young man remained immovable.

"Yes," said Cromwell; "you have done, since I knew you, not only your duty, but more than your duty; you have been a faithful friend, a cautious negotiator, a brave soldier."

"Do you remember, sir it was my idea, the Scotch treaty, for giving up the king?"

"Yes, the idea was yours. I had no such contempt for men before."

"Was I not a good ambassador in France?"

"Yes, for Mazarin has granted what I desire."

"Have I not always fought for your glory and interests?"

"Too ardently, perhaps; it is what I have just reproached you for. But what is the meaning of all these questions?"

"To tell you, my lord, that the moment has now arrived when, with a single word, you may recompense all these services."

"Oh!" said Oliver, with a slight curl of his lip, "I forgot that every service merits some reward and that up to this moment you have not been paid."

"Sir, I can take my pay at this moment, to the full extent of my wishes."

"How is that?"

"I have the payment under my hand; I almost possess it."

"What is it? Have they offered you money? Do you wish a step, or some place in the government?"

"Sir, will you grant me my request?"

"Let us hear what it is, first."

"Sir, when you have told me to obey an order did I ever answer, 'Let me see that order '?"

"If, however, your wish should be one impossible to fulfill?"

"When you have cherished a wish and have charged me with its fulfillment, have I ever replied, 'It is impossible'?"

"But a request preferred with so much preparation----"

"Ah, do not fear, sir," said Mordaunt, with apparent simplicity: "it will not ruin you."

"Well, then," said Cromwell, "I promise, as far as lies in my power, to grant your request; proceed."

"Sir, two prisoners were taken this morning, will you let me have them?"

“For their ransom? have they then offered a large one?” inquired Cromwell.

“On the contrary, I think they are poor, sir.”

“They are friends of yours, then?”

“Yes, sir,” exclaimed Mordaunt, “they are friends, dear friends of mine, and I would lay down my life for them.”

“Very well, Mordaunt,” exclaimed Cromwell, pleased at having his opinion of the young man raised once more; “I will give them to you; I will not even ask who they are; do as you like with them.”

“Thank you, sir!” exclaimed Mordaunt, “thank you; my life is always at your service, and should I lose it I should still owe you something; thank you; you have indeed repaid me munificently for my services.”

He threw himself at the feet of Cromwell, and in spite of the efforts of the Puritan general, who did not like this almost kingly homage, he took his hand and kissed it.

“What!” said Cromwell, arresting him for a moment as he arose; “is there nothing more you wish? neither gold nor rank?”

“You have given me all you can give me, and from to-day your debt is paid.”

And Mordaunt darted out of the general’s tent, his heart beating and his eyes sparkling with joy.

Cromwell gazed a moment after him.

“He has slain his uncle!” he murmured. “Alas! what are my servants? Possibly this one, who asks nothing or seems to ask nothing, has asked more in the eyes of Heaven than those who tax the country and steal the bread of the poor. Nobody serves me for nothing. Charles, who is my prisoner, may still have friends, but I have none!”

And with a deep sigh he again sank into the reverie that had been interrupted by Mordaunt.

CHAPTER 58.

Jesus Seigneur.

Whilst Mordaunt was making his way to Cromwell’s tent, D’Artagnan and Porthos had brought their prisoners to the house which had been assigned to them as their dwelling at Newcastle.

The order given by Mordaunt to the sergeant had been heard by D’Artagnan, who accordingly, by an expressive glance, warned Athos and Aramis to exercise extreme caution. The prisoners, therefore, had remained silent as they marched along in company with their conquerors--which they could do with the less difficulty since each of them had occupation enough in answering his own thoughts.

It would be impossible to describe Mousqueton’s astonishment when from the threshold of the door he saw the four friends approaching, followed by a sergeant with a dozen men. He rubbed his eyes, doubting if he really saw before him Athos and Aramis; and forced at last to yield to evidence, he was on the point of breaking forth in exclamations when he encountered a glance from the eyes of Porthos, the repressive force of which he was not inclined to dispute.

Mousqueton remained glued to the door, awaiting the explanation of this strange occurrence. What upset him completely was that the four friends seemed to have no acquaintance with one another.

The house to which D’Artagnan and Porthos conducted Athos and Aramis was the one assigned to them by General Cromwell and of which they had taken possession on the previous evening. It was at the corner of two streets and had in the rear, bordering on the side street, stables and a sort of garden. The windows on the ground floor, according to a custom in provincial villages, were barred, so that they strongly resembled the windows of a prison.

The two friends made the prisoners enter the house first, whilst they stood at the door, desiring Mousqueton to take the four horses to the stable.

“Why don’t we go in with them?” asked Porthos.

“We must first see what the sergeant wishes us to do,” replied D’Artagnan.

The sergeant and his men took possession of the little garden.

D’Artagnan asked them what they wished and why they had taken that position.

“We have had orders,” answered the man, “to help you in taking care of your prisoners.”

There could be no fault to find with this arrangement; on the contrary, it seemed to be a delicate attention, to be gratefully received; D’Artagnan, therefore, thanked the man and gave him a crown piece to drink to General Cromwell’s health.

The sergeant answered that Puritans never drank, and put the crown piece in his pocket.

“Ah!” said Porthos, “what a fearful day, my dear D’Artagnan!”

“What! a fearful day, when to-day we find our friends?”

“Yes; but under what circumstances?”

“‘Tis true that our position is an awkward one; but let us go in and see more clearly what is to be done.”

“Things look black enough,” replied Porthos; “I understand now why Aramis advised me to strangle that horrible Mordaunt.”

“Silence!” cried the Gascon; “do not utter that name.”

“But,” argued Porthos, “I speak French and they are all English.”

D’Artagnan looked at Porthos with that air of wonder which a cunning man cannot help feeling at displays of crass stupidity.

But as Porthos on his side could not comprehend his astonishment, he merely pushed him indoors, saying, “Let us go in.”

They found Athos in profound despondency; Aramis looked first at Porthos and then at D’Artagnan, without speaking, but the latter understood his meaningful look.

“You want to know how we came here? ‘Tis easily guessed. Mazarin sent us with a letter to General Cromwell.”

“But how came you to fall into company with Mordaunt, whom I bade you distrust?” asked Athos.

“And whom I advised you to strangle, Porthos,” said Aramis.

“Mazarin again. Cromwell had sent him to Mazarin. Mazarin sent us to Cromwell. There is a certain fatality in it.”

“Yes, you are right, D’Artagnan, a fatality that will separate and ruin us! So, my dear Aramis, say no more about it and let us prepare to submit to destiny.”

“Zounds! on the contrary, let us speak about it; for it was agreed among us, once for all, that we should always hold together, though engaged on opposing sides.”

“Yes,” added Athos, “I now ask you, D’Artagnan, what side you are on? Ah! behold for what end the wretched Mazarin has made use of you. Do you know in what crime you are to-day engaged? In the capture of a king, his degradation and his murder.”

“Oh! oh!” cried Porthos, “do you think so?”

“You are exaggerating, Athos; we are not so far gone as that,” replied the lieutenant.

“Good heavens! we are on the very eve of it. I say, why is the king taken prisoner? Those who wish to respect him as a master would not buy him as a slave. Do you think it is to replace him on the throne that Cromwell has paid for him two hundred thousand pounds sterling? They will kill him, you may be sure of it.”

“I don’t maintain the contrary,” said D’Artagnan. “But what’s that to us? I am here because I am a soldier and have to obey orders--I have taken an oath to obey, and I do obey; but you who have taken no such oath, why are you here and what cause do you represent?”

“That most sacred in the world,” said Athos; “the cause of misfortune, of religion, royalty. A friend, a wife, a daughter, have done us the honor to call us to their aid. We have served them to the best of our poor means, and God will recompense the will, forgive the want of power. You may see matters differently, D’Artagnan, and think otherwise. I will not attempt to argue with you, but I blame you.”

“Heyday!” cried D’Artagnan, “what matters it to me, after all, if Cromwell, who’s an Englishman, revolts against his king, who is a Scotchman? I am myself a Frenchman. I have nothing to do with these things--why hold me responsible?”

“Yes,” said Porthos.

“Because all gentlemen are brothers, because you are a gentleman, because the kings of all countries are the first among gentlemen, because the blind populace, ungrateful and brutal, always takes pleasure in pulling down what is above them. And you, you, D’Artagnan, a man sprung from the ancient nobility of France, bearing an honorable name, carrying a good sword, have helped to give up a king to beersellers, shopkeepers, and wagoners. Ah! D'Artagnan! perhaps you have done your duty as a soldier, but as a gentleman, I say that you are very culpable."

D'Artagnan was chewing the stalk of a flower, unable to reply and thoroughly uncomfortable; for when turned from the eyes of Athos he encountered those of Aramis.

"And you, Porthos," continued the count, as if in consideration for D'Artagnan's embarrassment, "you, the best heart, the best friend, the best soldier that I know--you, with a soul that makes you worthy of a birth on the steps of a throne, and who, sooner or later, must receive your reward from an intelligent king--you, my dear Porthos, you, a gentleman in manners, in tastes and in courage, you are as culpable as D'Artagnan."

Porthos blushed, but with pleasure rather than with confusion; and yet, bowing his head, as if humiliated, he said:

"Yes, yes, my dear count, I feel that you are right."

Athos arose.

"Come," he said, stretching out his hand to D'Artagnan, "come, don't be sullen, my dear son, for I have said all this to you, if not in the tone, at least with the feelings of a father. It would have been easier to me merely to have thanked you for preserving my life and not to have uttered a word of all this."

"Doubtless, doubtless, Athos. But here it is: you have sentiments, the devil knows what, such as every one can't entertain. Who could suppose that a sensible man could leave his house, France, his ward--a charming youth, for we saw him in the camp--to fly to the aid of a rotten, worm-eaten royalty, which is going to crumble one of these days like an old hovel. The sentiments you air are certainly fine, so fine that they are superhuman."

"However that may be, D'Artagnan," replied Athos, without falling into the snare which his Gascon friend had prepared for him by an appeal to his parental love, "however that may be, you know in the bottom of your heart that it is true; but I am wrong to dispute with my master. D'Artagnan, I am your prisoner--treat me as such."

"Ah! pardieu!" said D'Artagnan, "you know you will not be my prisoner very long."

"No," said Aramis, "they will doubtless treat us like the prisoners of the Philipghauts."

“And how were they treated?” asked D’Artagnan.

“Why,” said Aramis, “one-half were hanged and the other half were shot.”

“Well, I,” said D’Artagnan “I answer that while there remains a drop of blood in my veins you will be neither hanged nor shot. Sang Diou! let them come on! Besides--do you see that door, Athos?”

“Yes; what then?”

“Well, you can go out by that door whenever you please; for from this moment you are free as the air.”

“I recognize you there, my brave D’Artagnan,” replied Athos; “but you are no longer our masters. That door is guarded, D’Artagnan; you know that.”

“Very well, you will force it,” said Porthos. “There are only a dozen men at the most.”

“That would be nothing for us four; it is too much for us two. No, divided as we now are, we must perish. See the fatal example: on the Vendomois road, D’Artagnan, you so brave, and you, Porthos, so valiant and so strong--you were beaten; to-day Aramis and I are beaten in our turn. Now that never happened to us when we were four together. Let us die, then, as De Winter has died; as for me, I will fly only on condition that we all fly together.”

“Impossible,” said D’Artagnan; “we are under Mazarin’s orders.”

“I know it and I have nothing more to say; my arguments lead to nothing; doubtless they are bad, since they have not determined minds so just as yours.”

“Besides,” said Aramis, “had they taken effect it would be still better not to compromise two excellent friends like D’Artagnan and Porthos. Be assured, gentlemen, we shall do you honor in our dying. As for myself, I shall be proud to face the bullets, or even the rope, in company with you, Athos; for you have never seemed to me so grand as you are to-day.”

D’Artagnan said nothing, but, after having gnawed the flower stalk, he began to bite his nails. At last:

“Do you imagine,” he resumed, “that they mean to kill you? And wherefore should they do so? What interest have they in your death? Moreover, you are our prisoners.”

“Fool!” cried Aramis; “knowest thou not, then, Mordaunt? I have but exchanged with him one look, yet that look convinced me that we were doomed.”

“The truth is, I’m very sorry that I did not strangle him as you advised me,” said Porthos.

“Eh! I make no account of the harm Mordaunt can do!” cried D’Artagnan. “Cap de Diou! if he troubles me too much I will crush him, the insect! Do not fly, then. It is useless; for I swear to you that you are as safe here as you were twenty years, ago--you, Athos, in the Rue Ferou, and you, Aramis, in the Rue de Vaugirard.”

“Stop,” cried Athos, extending his hand to one of the grated windows by which the room was lighted; “you will soon know what to expect, for here he is.”

“Who?”

“Mordaunt.”

In fact, looking at the place to which Athos pointed, D’Artagnan saw a cavalier coming toward the house at full gallop.

It was Mordaunt.

D’Artagnan rushed out of the room.

Porthos wanted to follow him.

“Stay,” said D’Artagnan, “and do not come till you hear me drum my fingers on the door.”

When Mordaunt arrived opposite the house he saw D’Artagnan on the threshold and the soldiers lying on the grass here and there, with their arms.

“Halloo!” he cried, “are the prisoners still there?”

“Yes, sir,” answered the sergeant, uncovering.

“‘Tis well; order four men to conduct them to my lodging.”

Four men prepared to do so.

“What is it?” said D’Artagnan, with that jeering manner which our readers have so often observed in him since they made his acquaintance. “What is the matter, if you please?”

“Sir,” replied Mordaunt, “I have ordered the two prisoners we made this morning to be conducted to my lodging.”

“Wherefore, sir? Excuse curiosity, but I wish to be enlightened on the subject.”

“Because these prisoners, sir, are at my disposal and I choose to dispose of them as I like.”

“Allow me--allow me, sir,” said D’Artagnan, “to observe you are in error. The prisoners belong to those who take them and not to those who only saw them taken. You might have taken Lord Winter--who, ‘tis said, was your uncle--prisoner, but you preferred killing him; ‘tis well; we, that is, Monsieur du Vallon and I, could have killed our prisoners--we preferred taking them.”

Mordaunt’s very lips grew white with rage.

D’Artagnan now saw that affairs were growing worse and he beat the guard’s march upon the door. At the first beat Porthos rushed out and stood on the other side of the door.

This movement was observed by Mordaunt.

“Sir!” he thus addressed D’Artagnan, “your resistance is useless; these prisoners have just been given me by my illustrious patron, Oliver Cromwell.”

These words struck D’Artagnan like a thunderbolt. The blood mounted to his temples, his eyes became dim; he saw from what fountainhead the ferocious hopes of the young man arose, and he put his hand to the hilt of his sword.

As for Porthos, he looked inquiringly at D’Artagnan.

This look of Porthos’s made the Gascon regret that he had summoned the brute force of his friend to aid him in an affair which seemed to require chiefly cunning.

“Violence,” he said to himself, “would spoil all; D’Artagnan, my friend, prove to this young serpent that thou art not only stronger, but more subtle than he is.”

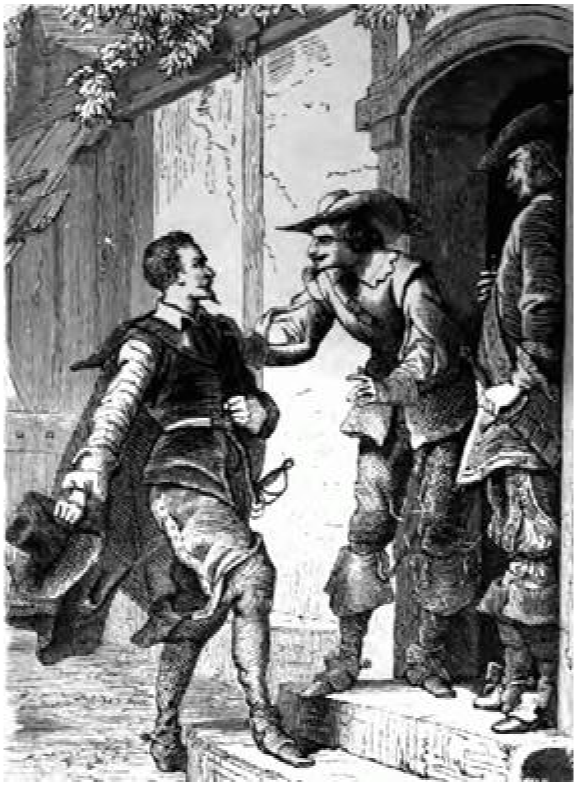

“Ah!” he said, making a low bow, “why did you not begin by saying that, Monsieur Mordaunt? What! are you sent by General Oliver Cromwell, the most illustrious captain of the age?”

“I have this instant left him,” replied Mordaunt, alighting, in order to give his horse to a soldier to hold.

“Why did you not say so at once, my dear sir! all England is with Cromwell; and since you ask for my prisoners, I bend, sir, to your wishes. They are yours; take them.”

Mordaunt, delighted, advanced, Porthos looking at D’Artagnan with open-mouthed astonishment. Then D’Artagnan trod on his foot and Porthos began to understand that this was merely acting.

Mordaunt put his foot on the first step of the door and, with his hat in hand, prepared to pass by the two friends, motioning to the four men to follow him.

“But, pardon,” said D’Artagnan, with the most charming smile and putting his hand on the young man’s shoulder, “if the illustrious General Oliver Cromwell has disposed of our prisoners in your favour, he has, of course, made that act of donation in writing.”

Mordaunt stopped short.

"He has given you some little writing for me--the least bit of paper which may show that you come in his name. Be pleased to give me that scrap of paper so that I may justify, by a pretext at least, my abandoning my countrymen. Otherwise, you see, although I am sure that General Oliver Cromwell can intend them no harm, it would have a bad appearance."

Mordaunt recoiled; he felt the blow and discharged a terrible look at D'Artagnan, who responded by the most amiable expression that ever graced a human countenance.

"When I tell you a thing, sir," said Mordaunt, "you insult me by doubting it."

"I!" cried D'Artagnan, "I doubt what you say! God keep me from it, my dear Monsieur Mordaunt! On the contrary, I take you to be a worthy and accomplished gentleman. And then, sir, do you wish me to speak freely to you?" continued D'Artagnan, with his frank expression.

"Speak out, sir," said Mordaunt.

"Monsieur du Vallon, yonder, is rich and has forty thousand francs yearly, so he does not care about money. I do not speak for him, but for myself."

"Well, sir? What more?"

"Well--I--I'm not rich. In Gascony 'tis no dishonor, sir, nobody is rich; and Henry IV., of glorious memory, who was the king of the Gascons, as His Majesty Philip IV. is the king of the Spaniards, never had a penny in his pocket."

"Go on, sir, I see what you wish to get at; and if it is simply what I think that stops you, I can obviate the difficulty."

"Ah, I knew well," said the Gascon, "that you were a man of talent. Well, here's the case, here's where the saddle hurts me, as we French say. I am an officer of fortune, nothing else; I have nothing but what my sword brings me in--that is to say, more blows than banknotes. Now, on taking prisoners, this morning, two Frenchmen, who seemed to me of high birth--in short, two knights of the Garter--I said to myself, my fortune is made. I say two, because in such circumstances, Monsieur du Vallon, who is rich, always gives me his prisoners."

Mordaunt, completely deceived by the wordy civility of D'Artagnan, smiled like a man who understands perfectly the reasons given him, and said:

"I shall have the order signed directly, sir, and with it two thousand pistoles; meanwhile, let me take these men away."

“No,” replied D’Artagnan; “what signifies a delay of half an hour? I am a man of order, sir; let us do things in order.”

“Nevertheless,” replied Mordaunt, “I could compel you; I command here.”

“Ah, sir!” said D’Artagnan, “I see that although we have had the honor of traveling in your company you do not know us. We are gentlemen; we are, both of us, able to kill you and your eight men--we two only. For Heaven’s sake don’t be obstinate, for when others are obstinate I am obstinate likewise, and then I become ferocious and headstrong, and there’s my friend, who is even more headstrong and ferocious than myself. Besides, we are sent here by Cardinal Mazarin, and at this moment represent both the king and the cardinal, and are, therefore, as ambassadors, able to act with impunity, a thing that General Oliver Cromwell, who is assuredly as great a politician as he is a general, is quite the man to understand. Ask him then, for the written order. What will that cost you my dear Monsieur Mordaunt?”

“Yes, the written order,” said Porthos, who now began to comprehend what D’Artagnan was aiming at, “we ask only for that.”

However inclined Mordaunt was to have recourse to violence, he understood the reasons D’Artagnan had given him; besides, completely ignorant of the friendship which existed between the four Frenchmen, all his uneasiness disappeared when he heard of the plausible motive of the ransom. He decided, therefore, not only to fetch the order, but the two thousand pistoles, at which he estimated the prisoners. He therefore mounted his horse and disappeared.

“Good!” thought D’Artagnan; “a quarter of an hour to go to the tent, a quarter of an hour to return; it is more than we need.” Then turning, without the least change of countenance, to Porthos, he said, looking him full in the face: “Friend Porthos, listen to this; first, not a syllable to either of our friends of what you have heard; it is unnecessary for them to know the service we are going to render them.”

“Very well; I understand.”

“Go to the stable; you will find Mousqueton there; saddle your horses, put your pistols in your saddle-bags, take out the horses and lead them to the street below this, so that there will be nothing to do but mount them; all the rest is my business.”

Porthos made no remark, but obeyed, with the sublime confidence he had in his friend.

"I go," he said, "only, shall I enter the chamber where those gentlemen are?"

"No, it is not worth while."

"Well, do me the kindness to take my purse, which I left on the mantelpiece."

"All right."

He then proceeded, with his usual calm gait, to the stable and went into the very midst of the soldiery, who, foreigner as he was, could not help admiring his height and the enormous strength of his great limbs.

At the corner of the street he met Mousqueton and took him with him.

D'Artagnan, meantime, went into the house, whistling a tune which he had begun before Porthos went away.

"My dear Athos, I have reflected on your arguments and I am convinced. I am sorry to have had anything to do with this matter. As you say, Mazarin is a knave. I have resolved to fly with you, not a word--be ready. Your swords are in the corner; do not forget them, they are in many circumstances very useful; there is Porthos's purse, too."

He put it into his pocket. The two friends were perfectly stupefied.

"Well, pray, is there anything to be so surprised at?" he said. "I was blind; Athos has made me see, that's all; come here."

The two friends went near him.

"Do you see that street? There are the horses. Go out by the door, turn to the right, jump into your saddles, all will be right; don't be uneasy at anything except mistaking the signal. That will be the signal when I call out--Jesus Seigneur!"

"But give us your word that you will come too, D'Artagnan," said Athos.

"I swear I will, by Heaven."

"'Tis settled," said Aramis; "at the cry 'Jesus Seigneur' we go out, upset all that stands in our way, run to our horses, jump into our saddles, spur them; is that all?"

"Exactly."

"See, Aramis, as I have told you, D'Artagnan is first amongst us all," said Athos.

"Very true," replied the Gascon, "but I always run away from compliments. Don't forget the signal: 'Jesus Seigneur!'" and he went out as he came in, whistling the self-same air.

The soldiers were playing or sleeping; two of them were singing in a corner, out of tune, the psalm: “On the rivers of Babylon.”

D’Artagnan called the sergeant. “My dear friend, General Cromwell has sent Monsieur Mordaunt to fetch me. Guard the prisoners well, I beg of you.”

The sergeant made a sign, as much as to say he did not understand French, and D’Artagnan tried to make him comprehend by signs and gestures. Then he went into the stable; he found the five horses saddled, his own amongst the rest.

“Each of you take a horse by the bridle,” he said to Porthos and Mousqueton; “turn to the left, so that Athos and Aramis may see you clearly from the window.”

“They are coming, then?” said Porthos.

“In a moment.”

“You didn’t forget my purse?”

“No; be easy.”

“Good.”

Porthos and Mousqueton each took a horse by the bridle and proceeded to their post.

Then D’Artagnan, being alone, struck a light and lighted a small bit of tinder, mounted his horse and stopped at the door in the midst of the soldiers. There, caressing as he pretended, the animal with his hand, he put this bit of burning tinder in his ear. It was necessary to be as good a horseman as he was to risk such a scheme, for no sooner had the animal felt the burning tinder than he uttered a cry of pain and reared and jumped as if he had been mad.

The soldiers, whom he was nearly trampling, ran away.

“Help! help!” cried D’Artagnan; “stop--my horse has the staggers.”

In an instant the horse’s eyes grew bloodshot and he was white with foam.

“Help!” cried D’Artagnan. “What! will you let me be killed? Jesus Seigneur!”

No sooner had he uttered this cry than the door opened and Athos and Aramis rushed out. The coast, owing to the Gascon’s stratagem, was clear.

“The prisoners are escaping! the prisoners are escaping!” cried the sergeant.

"Stop! stop!" cried D'Artagnan, giving rein to his famous steed, who, darting forth, overturned several men.

"Stop! stop!" cried the soldiers, and ran for their arms.

But the prisoners were in their saddles and lost no time hastening to the nearest gate.

In the middle of the street they saw Grimaud and Blaisois, who were coming to find their masters. With one wave of his hand Athos made Grimaud, who followed the little troop, understand everything, and they passed on like a whirlwind, D'Artagnan still directing them from behind with his voice.

They passed through the gate like apparitions, without the guards thinking of detaining them, and reached the open country.

All this time the soldiers were calling out, "Stop! stop!" and the sergeant, who began to see that he was the victim of an artifice, was almost in a frenzy of despair. Whilst all this was going on, a cavalier in full gallop was seen approaching. It was Mordaunt with the order in his hand.

"The prisoners!" he exclaimed, jumping off his horse.

The sergeant had not the courage to reply; he showed him the open door, the empty room. Mordaunt darted to the steps, understood all, uttered a cry, as if his very heart was pierced, and fell fainting on the stone steps.

CHAPTER 59.

Noble Natures never lose Courage, nor good Stomachs their Appetites.

The little troop, without looking behind them or exchanging a word, fled at a rapid gallop, fording a little stream, of which none of them knew the name, and leaving on their left a town which Athos declared to be Durham. At last they came in sight of a small wood, and spurring their horses afresh, rode in its direction.

As soon as they had disappeared behind a green curtain sufficiently thick to conceal them from the sight of any one who might be in pursuit they drew up to hold a council together. The two grooms held the horses, that they might take a little rest without being unsaddled, and Grimaud was posted as sentinel.

“Come, first of all,” said Athos to D’Artagnan, “my friend, that I may shake hands with you--you, our rescuer--you, the true hero of us all.”

“Athos is right--you have my adoration,” said Aramis, in his turn pressing his hand. “To what are you not equal, with your superior intelligence, infallible eye, your arm of iron and your enterprising mind!”

“Now,” said the Gascon, “that is all well, I accept for Porthos and myself everything--thanks and compliments; we have plenty of time to spare.”

The two friends, recalled by D’Artagnan to what was also due to Porthos, pressed his hand in their turn.

“And now,” said Athos, “it is not our plan to run anywhere and like madmen, but we must map up our campaign. What shall we do?”

“What are we going to do, i’faith? It is not very difficult to say.”

“Tell us, then, D’Artagnan.”

“We are going to reach the nearest seaport, unite our little resources, hire a vessel and return to France. As for me I will give my last sou for it. Life is the greatest treasure, and speaking candidly, ours hangs by a thread.”

“What do you say to this, Du Vallon?”

“I,” said Porthos, “I am entirely of D’Artagnan’s opinion; this is a ‘beastly’ country, this England.”

“You are quite decided, then, to leave it?” asked Athos of D’Artagnan.

“Egad! I don’t see what is to keep me here.”

A glance was exchanged between Athos and Aramis.

“Go, then, my friends,” said the former, sighing.

“How, go then?” exclaimed D’Artagnan. “Let us go, you mean?”

“No, my friend,” said Athos, “you must leave us.”

“Leave you!” cried D’Artagnan, quite bewildered at this unexpected announcement.

“Bah!” said Porthos, “why separate, since we are all together?”

“Because you can and ought to return to France; your mission is accomplished, but ours is not.”

“Your mission is not accomplished?” exclaimed D’Artagnan, looking in astonishment at Athos.

“No, my friend,” replied Athos, in his gentle but decided voice, “we came here to defend King Charles; we have but ill defended him--it remains for us to save him!”

“To save the king?” said D’Artagnan, looking at Aramis as he had looked at Athos.

Aramis contented himself by making a sign with his head.

D’Artagnan’s countenance took an expression of the deepest compassion; he began to think he had to do with madmen.

“You cannot be speaking seriously, Athos!” said he; “the king is surrounded by an army, which is conducting him to London. This army is commanded by a butcher, or the son of a butcher--it matters little--Colonel Harrison. His majesty, I can assure you, will be tried on his arrival in London; I have heard enough from the lips of Oliver Cromwell to know what to expect.”

A second look was exchanged between Athos and Aramis.

“And when the trial is ended there will be no delay in putting the sentence into execution,” continued D’Artagnan.

“And to what penalty do you think the king will be condemned?” asked Athos.

“The penalty of death, I greatly fear; they have gone too far for him to pardon them, and there is nothing left to them but one thing, and that is to kill him. Have you never heard what Oliver Cromwell said when he came to Paris and was shown the dungeon at Vincennes where Monsieur de Vendome was imprisoned?”

“What did he say?” asked Porthos.

“‘Princes must be knocked on the head.’“

“I remember it,” said Athos.

“And you fancy he will not put his maxim into execution, now that he has got hold of the king?”

“On the contrary, I am certain he will do so. But then that is all the more reason why we should not abandon the august head so threatened.”

“Athos, you are becoming mad.”

“No, my friend,” Athos gently replied, “but De Winter sought us out in France and introduced us, Monsieur d’Herblay and myself, to Madame Henrietta. Her majesty did us the honor to ask our aid for her husband. We engaged our word; our word included everything. It was our strength, our intelligence, our life, in short, that we promised. It remains now for us to keep our word. Is that your opinion, D’Herblay?”

“Yes,” said Aramis, “we have promised.”

“Then,” continued Athos, “we have another reason; it is this--listen: In France at this moment everything is poor and paltry. We have a king ten years old, who doesn’t yet know what he wants; we have a queen blinded by a belated passion; we have a minister who governs France as he would govern a great farm--that is to say, intent only on turning out all the gold he can by the exercise of Italian cunning and invention; we have princes who set up a personal and egotistic opposition, who will draw from Mazarin’s hands only a few ingots of gold or some shreds of power granted as bribes. I have served them without enthusiasm--God knows that I estimated them at their real value, and that they are not high in my esteem--but on principle. To-day I am engaged in a different affair. I have encountered misfortune in a high place, a royal misfortune, a European misfortune; I attach myself to it. If we can succeed in saving the king it will be good; if we die for him it will be grand.”

“So you know beforehand you must perish!” said D’Artagnan.

“We fear so, and our only regret is to die so far from both of you.”

“What will you do in a foreign land, an enemy’s country?”

“I traveled in England when I was young, I speak English like an Englishman, and Aramis, too, knows something of the language. Ah! if we had you, my friends! With you, D’Artagnan, with you, Porthos--all four reunited for the first time for twenty years--we would dare not only England, but the three kingdoms put together!”

“And did you promise the queen,” resumed D’Artagnan, petulantly, “to storm the Tower of London, to kill a hundred thousand soldiers, to fight victoriously against the wishes of the nation and the ambition of a man, and when that man is Cromwell? Do not exaggerate your duty. In Heaven’s name, my dear Athos, do not make a useless sacrifice. When I see you merely, you look like a reasonable being; when you speak, I seem to have to do with a madman. Come, Porthos, join me; say frankly, what do you think of this business?”

“Nothing good,” replied Porthos.

“Come,” continued D’Artagnan, who, irritated that instead of listening to him Athos seemed to be attending to his own thoughts, “you have never found yourself the worse for my advice. Well, then, believe me, Athos, your mission is ended, and ended nobly; return to France with us.”

“Friend,” said Athos, “our resolution is irrevocable.”

“Then you have some other motive unknown to us?”

Athos smiled and D’Artagnan struck his hand together in anger and muttered the most convincing reasons that he could discover; but to all these reasons Athos contented himself by replying with a calm, sweet smile and Aramis by nodding his head.

“Very well,” cried D’Artagnan, at last, furious, “very well, since you wish it, let us leave our bones in this beggarly land, where it is always cold, where fine weather is a fog, fog is rain, and rain a deluge; where the sun represents the moon and the moon a cream cheese; in truth, whether we die here or elsewhere matters little, since we must die.”

“Only reflect, my good fellow,” said Athos, “it is but dying rather sooner.”

“Pooh! a little sooner or a little later, it isn’t worth quarreling over.”

“If I am astonished at anything,” remarked Porthos, sententiously, “it is that it has not already happened.”

“Oh, it will happen, you may be sure,” said D’Artagnan. “So it is agreed, and if Porthos makes no objection----”

“I,” said Porthos, “I will do whatever you please; and besides, I think what the Comte de la Fere said just now is very good.”

“But your future career, D’Artagnan--your ambition, Porthos?”

“Our future, our ambition!” replied D’Artagnan, with feverish volubility. “Need we think of that since we are to save the king? The king saved--we shall assemble our friends together--we will head the Puritans--reconquer England; we shall re-enter London--place him securely on his throne----”

“And he will make us dukes and peers,” said Porthos, whose eyes sparkled with joy at this imaginary prospect.

“Or he will forget us,” added D’Artagnan.

“Oh!” said Porthos.

“Well, that has happened, friend Porthos. It seems to me that we once rendered Anne of Austria a service not much less than that which to-day we are trying to perform for Charles I.; but, none the less, Anne of Austria has forgotten us for twenty years.”

“Well, in spite of that, D’Artagnan,” said Athos, “you are not sorry that you were useful to her?”

“No, indeed,” said D’Artagnan; “I admit even that in my darkest moments I find consolation in that remembrance.”

“You see, then, D’Artagnan, though princes often are ungrateful, God never is.”

“Athos,” said D’Artagnan, “I believe that were you to fall in with the devil, you would conduct yourself so well that you would take him with you to Heaven.”

“So, then?” said Athos, offering his hand to D’Artagnan.

“‘Tis settled,” replied D’Artagnan. “I find England a charming country, and I stay--but on one condition only.”

“What is it?”

“That I am not forced to learn English.”

“Well, now,” said Athos, triumphantly, “I swear to you, my friend, by the God who hears us--I believe that there is a power watching over us, and that we shall all four see France again.”

“So be it!” said D’Artagnan, “but I--I confess I have a contrary conviction.”

“Our good D’Artagnan,” said Aramis, “represents among us the opposition in parliament, which always says no, and always does aye.”

“But in the meantime saves the country,” added Athos.

“Well, now that everything is decided,” cried Porthos, rubbing his hands, “suppose we think of dinner! It seems to me that in the most critical positions of our lives we have always dined.”

“Oh! yes, speak of dinner in a country where for a feast they eat boiled mutton, and as a treat drink beer. What the devil did you come to such a country for, Athos? But I forgot," added the Gascon, smiling, "pardon, I forgot you are no longer Athos; but never mind, let us hear your plan for dinner, Porthos."

"My plan!"

"Yes, have you a plan?"

"No! I am hungry, that is all."

"Pardieu, if that is all, I am hungry, too; but it is not everything to be hungry, one must find something to eat, unless we browse on the grass, like our horses----"

"Ah!" exclaimed Aramis, who was not quite so indifferent to the good things of the earth as Athos, "do you remember, when we were at Parpaillot, the beautiful oysters that we ate?"

"And the legs of mutton of the salt marshes," said Porthos, smacking his lips.

"But," suggested D'Artagnan, "have we not our friend Mousqueton, who managed for us so well at Chantilly, Porthos?"

"Yes," said Porthos, "we have Mousqueton, but since he has been steward, he has become very heavy; never mind, let us call him, and to make sure that he will reply agreeably----

"Here! Mouston," cried Porthos.

Mouston appeared, with a most piteous face.

"What is the matter, my dear M. Mouston?" asked D'Artagnan. "Are you ill?"

"Sir, I am very hungry," replied Mouston.

"Well, it is just for that reason that we have called you, my good M. Mouston. Could you not procure us a few of those nice little rabbits, and some of those delicious partridges, of which you used to make fricassees at the hotel----? 'Faith, I do not remember the name of the hotel."

"At the hotel of----," said Porthos; "by my faith--nor do I remember it either."

"It does not matter; and a few of those bottles of old Burgundy wine, which cured your master so quickly of his sprain!"

"Alas! sir," said Mousqueton, "I much fear that what you ask for are very rare things in this detestable and barren country, and I think we should do better to go and seek hospitality from the owner of a little house we see on the fringe of the forest."

"How! is there a house in the neighborhood?" asked D'Artagnan.

“Yes, sir,” replied Mousqueton.

“Well, let us, as you say, go and ask a dinner from the master of that house. What is your opinion, gentlemen, and does not M. Mouston’s suggestion appear to you full of sense?”

“Oh!” said Aramis, “suppose the master is a Puritan?”

“So much the better, mordioux!” replied D’Artagnan; “if he is a Puritan we will inform him of the capture of the king, and in honor of the news he will kill for us his fatted hens.”

“But if he should be a cavalier?” said Porthos.

“In that case we will put on an air of mourning and he will pluck for us his black fowls.”

“You are very happy,” exclaimed Athos, laughing, in spite of himself, at the sally of the irresistible Gascon; “for you see the bright side of everything.”

“What would you have?” said D’Artagnan. “I come from a land where there is not a cloud in the sky.”

“It is not like this, then,” said Porthos stretching out his hand to assure himself whether a chill sensation he felt on his cheek was not really caused by a drop of rain.

“Come, come,” said D’Artagnan, “more reason why we should start on our journey. Halloo, Grimaud!”

Grimaud appeared.

“Well, Grimaud, my friend, have you seen anything?” asked the Gascon.

“Nothing!” replied Grimaud.

“Those idiots!” cried Porthos, “they have not even pursued us. Oh! if we had been in their place!”

“Yes, they are wrong,” said D’Artagnan. “I would willingly have said two words to Mordaunt in this little desert. It is an excellent spot for bringing down a man in proper style.”

“I think, decidedly,” observed Aramis, “gentlemen, that the son hasn’t his mother’s energy.”

“What, my good fellow!” replied Athos, “wait awhile; we have scarcely left him two hours ago--he does not know yet in what direction we came nor where we are. We may say that he is not equal to his mother when we put foot in France, if we are not poisoned or killed before then.”

“Meanwhile, let us dine,” suggested Porthos.

“I’faith, yes,” said Athos, “for I am hungry.”

“Look out for the black fowls!” cried Aramis.

And the four friends, guided by Mousqueton, took up the way toward the house, already almost restored to their former gayety; for they were now, as Athos had said, all four once more united and of single mind.

CHAPTER 60.

Respect to Fallen Majesty.

As our fugitives approached the house, they found the ground cut up, as if a considerable body of horsemen had preceded them. Before the door the traces were yet more apparent; these horsemen, whoever they might be, had halted there.

"Egad!" cried D'Artagnan, "it's quite clear that the king and his escort have been by here."

"The devil!" said Porthos; "in that case they have eaten everything."

"Bah!" said D'Artagnan, "they will have left a chicken, at least." He dismounted and knocked on the door. There was no response.

He pushed open the door and found the first room empty and deserted.

"Well?" cried Porthos.

"I can see nobody," said D'Artagnan. "Aha!"

"What?"

"Blood!"

At this word the three friends leaped from their horses and entered. D'Artagnan had already opened the door of the second room, and from the expression of his face it was clear that he there beheld some extraordinary object.

The three friends drew near and discovered a young man stretched on the ground, bathed in a pool of blood. It was evident that he had attempted to regain his bed, but had not had sufficient strength to do so.

Athos, who imagined that he saw him move, was the first to go up to him.

"Well?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"Well, if he is dead," said Athos, "he has not been so long, for he is still warm. But no, his heart is beating. Ho, there, my friend!"

The wounded man heaved a sigh. D'Artagnan took some water in the hollow of his hand and threw it upon his face. The man opened his eyes, made an effort to raise his head, and fell back again. The wound was in the top of his skull and blood was flawing copiously.

Aramis dipped a cloth into some water and applied it to the gash. Again the wounded man opened his eyes and looked in astonishment at these strangers, who appeared to pity him.

"You are among friends," said Athos, in English; "so cheer up, and tell us, if you have the strength to do so, what has happened?"

"The king," muttered the wounded man, "the king is a prisoner."

"You have seen him?" asked Aramis, in the same language.

The man made no reply.

"Make your mind easy," resumed Athos, "we are all faithful servants of his majesty."

"Is what you tell me true?" asked the wounded man.

"On our honor as gentlemen."

"Then I may tell you all. I am brother to Parry, his majesty's lackey."

Athos and Aramis remembered that this was the name by which De Winter had called the man they had found in the passage of the king's tent.

"We know him," said Athos, "he never left the king."

"Yes, that is he. Well, he thought of me, when he saw the king was taken, and as they were passing before the house he begged in the king's name that they would stop, as the king was hungry. They brought him into this room and placed sentinels at the doors and windows. Parry knew this room, as he had often been to see me when the king was at Newcastle. He knew that there was a trap-door communicating with a cellar, from which one could get into the orchard. He made a sign, which I understood, but the king's guards must have noticed it and held themselves on guard. I went out as if to fetch wood, passed through the subterranean passage into the cellar, and whilst Parry was gently bolting the door, pushed up the board and beckoned to the king to follow me. Alas! he would not. But Parry clasped his hands and implored him, and at last he agreed. I went on first, fortunately. The king was a few steps behind me, when suddenly I saw something rise up in front of me like a huge shadow. I wanted to cry out to warn the king, but that very moment I felt a blow as if the house was falling on my head, and fell insensible. When I came to myself again, I was stretched in the same place. I dragged myself as far as the yard. The king and his escort were no longer there. I spent perhaps an hour in coming from the yard to this place; then my strength gave out and I fainted again."

"And now how are you feeling?"

"Very ill," replied the wounded man.

“Can we do anything for you?” asked Athos.

“Help to put me on the bed; I think I shall feel better there.”

“Have you any one to depend on for assistance?”

“My wife is at Durham and may return at any moment. But you--is there nothing that you want?”

“We came here with the intention of asking for something to eat.”

“Alas, they have taken everything; there isn’t a morsel of bread in the house.”

“You hear, D’Artagnan?” said Athos; “we shall have to look elsewhere for our dinner.”

“It is all one to me now,” said D’Artagnan; “I am no longer hungry.”

“Faith! neither am I,” said Porthos.

They carried the man to his bed and called Grimaud to dress the wound. In the service of the four friends Grimaud had had so frequent occasion to make lint and bandages that he had become something of a surgeon.

In the meantime the fugitives had returned to the first room, where they took counsel together.

“Now,” said Aramis, “we know how the matter stands. The king and his escort have gone this way; we had better take the opposite direction, eh?”

Athos did not reply; he reflected.

“Yes,” said Porthos, “let us take the opposite direction; if we follow the escort we shall find everything devoured and die of hunger. What a confounded country this England is! This is the first time I have gone without my dinner for ten years, and it is generally my best meal.”

“What do you think, D’Artagnan?” asked Athos. “Do you agree with Aramis?”

“Not at all,” said D’Artagnan; “I am precisely of the contrary opinion.”

“What! you would follow the escort?” exclaimed Porthos, in dismay.

“No, I would join the escort.”

Athos’s eyes shone with joy.

“Join the escort!” cried Aramis.

“Let D’Artagnan speak,” said Athos; “you know he always has wise advice to give.”

“Clearly,” said D’Artagnan, “we must go where they will not look for us. Now, they will be far from looking for us among the Puritans; therefore, with the Puritans we must go.”

"Good, my friend, good!" said Athos. "It is excellent advice. I was about to give it when you anticipated me."

"That, then, is your opinion?" asked Aramis.

"Yes. They will think we are trying to leave England and will search for us at the ports; meanwhile we shall reach London with the king. Once in London we shall be hard to find--without considering," continued Athos, throwing a glance at Aramis, "the chances that may come to us on the way."

"Yes," said Aramis, "I understand."

"I, however, do not understand," said Porthos. "But no matter; since it is at the same time the opinion of D'Artagnan and of Athos, it must be the best."

"But," said Aramis, "shall we not be suspected by Colonel Harrison?"

"Egad!" cried D'Artagnan, "he's just the man I count upon. Colonel Harrison is one of our friends. We have met him twice at General Cromwell's. He knows that we were sent from France by Monsieur Mazarin; he will consider us as brothers. Besides, is he not a butcher's son? Well, then, Porthos shall show him how to knock down an ox with a blow of the fist, and I how to trip up a bull by taking him by the horns. That will insure his confidence."

Athos smiled. "You are the best companion that I know, D'Artagnan," he said, offering his hand to the Gascon; "and I am very happy in having found you again, my dear son."

This was, as we have seen, the term which Athos applied to D'Artagnan in his more expansive moods.

At this moment Grimaud came in. He had stanched the wound and the man was better.

The four friends took leave of him and asked if they could deliver any message for him to his brother.

"Tell him," answered the brave man, "to let the king know that they have not killed me outright. However insignificant I am, I am sure that his majesty is concerned for me and blames himself for my death."

"Be easy," said D'Artagnan, "he will know all before night."

The little troop recommenced their march, and at the end of two hours perceived a considerable body of horsemen about half a league ahead.

"My dear friends," said D'Artagnan, "give your swords to Monsieur Mouston, who will return them to you at the proper time and place, and do not forget you are our prisoners."

It was not long before they joined the escort. The king was riding in front, surrounded by troopers, and when he saw Athos and Aramis a glow of pleasure lighted his pale cheeks.

D'Artagnan passed to the head of the column, and leaving his friends under the guard of Porthos, went straight to Harrison, who recognized him as having met him at Cromwell's and received him as politely as a man of his breeding and disposition could. It turned out as D'Artagnan had foreseen. The colonel neither had nor could have any suspicion.

They halted for the king to dine. This time, however, due precautions were taken to prevent any attempt at escape. In the large room of the hotel a small table was placed for him and a large one for the officers.

"Will you dine with me?" asked Harrison of D'Artagnan.

"Gad, I should be very happy, but I have my companion, Monsieur du Vallon, and the two prisoners, whom I cannot leave. Let us manage it better. Have a table set for us in a corner and send us whatever you like from yours."

"Good," answered Harrison.

The matter was arranged as D'Artagnan had suggested, and when he returned he found the king already seated at his little table, where Parry waited on him, Harrison and his officers sitting together at another table, and, in a corner, places reserved for himself and his companions.

The table at which the Puritan officers were seated was round, and whether by chance or coarse intention, Harrison sat with his back to the king.

The king saw the four gentlemen come in, but appeared to take no notice of them.

They sat down in such a manner as to turn their backs on nobody. The officers, table and that of the king were opposite to them.

"I'faith, colonel," said D'Artagnan, "we are very grateful for your gracious invitation; for without you we ran the risk of going without dinner, as we have without breakfast. My friend here, Monsieur du Vallon, shares my gratitude, for he was particularly hungry."

"And I am so still," said Porthos bowing to Harrison.

"And how," said Harrison, laughing, "did this serious calamity of going without breakfast happen to you?"

"In a very simple manner, colonel," said D'Artagnan. "I was in a hurry to join you and took the road you had already gone by. You can understand our disappointment when, arriving at a pretty little house on the skirts of a wood, which at a distance had quite a gay appearance, with its red roof and green shutters, we found nothing but a poor wretch bathed--Ah! colonel, pay my respects to the officer of yours who struck that blow.”

“Yes,” said Harrison, laughing, and looking over at one of the officers seated at his table. “When Groslow undertakes this kind of thing there’s no need to go over the ground a second time.”

“Ah! it was this gentleman?” said D’Artagnan, bowing to the officer. “I am sorry he does not speak French, that I might tender him my compliments.”

“I am ready to receive and return them, sir,” said the officer, in pretty good French, “for I resided three years in Paris.”

“Then, sir, allow me to assure you that your blow was so well directed that you have nearly killed your man.”

“Nearly? I thought I had quite,” said Groslow.

“No. It was a very near thing, but he is not dead.”

As he said this, D’Artagnan gave a glance at Parry, who was standing in front of the king, to show him that the news was meant for him.

The king, too, who had listened in the greatest agony, now breathed again.

“Hang it,” said Groslow, “I thought I had succeeded better. If it were not so far from here to the house I would return and finish him.”

“And you would do well, if you are afraid of his recovering; for you know, if a wound in the head does not kill at once, it is cured in a week.”

And D’Artagnan threw a second glance toward Parry, on whose face such an expression of joy was manifested that Charles stretched out his hand to him, smiling.

Parry bent over his master’s hand and kissed it respectfully.

“I’ve a great desire to drink the king’s health,” said Athos.

“Let me propose it, then,” said D’Artagnan.

“Do,” said Aramis.

Porthos looked at D’Artagnan, quite amazed at the resources with which his companion’s Gascon sharpness continually supplied him. D’Artagnan took up his camp tin cup, filled it with wine and arose.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “let us drink to him who presides at the repast. Here’s to our colonel, and let him know that we are always at his commands as far as London and farther.”

And as D’Artagnan, as he spoke, looked at Harrison, the colonel imagined the toast was for himself. He arose and bowed to the four friends, whose eyes were fixed on Charles, while Harrison emptied his glass without the slightest misgiving.

The king, in return, looked at the four gentlemen and drank with a smile full of nobility and gratitude.

“Come, gentlemen,” cried Harrison, regardless of his illustrious captive, “let us be off.”

“Where do we sleep, colonel?”

“At Thirsk,” replied Harrison.

“Parry,” said the king, rising too, “my horse; I desire to go to Thirsk.”

“Egad!” said D’Artagnan to Athos, “your king has thoroughly taken me, and I am quite at his service.”

“If what you say is sincere,” replied Athos, “he will never reach London.”

“How so?”

“Because before then we shall have carried him off.”

“Well, this time, Athos,” said D’Artagnan, “upon my word, you are mad.”

“Have you some plan in your head then?” asked Aramis.

“Ay!” said Porthos, “the thing would not be impossible with a good plan.”

“I have none,” said Athos; “but D’Artagnan will discover one.”

D’Artagnan shrugged his shoulders and they proceeded.

CHAPTER 61.

D’Artagnan hits on a Plan.

As night closed in they arrived at Thirsk. The four friends appeared to be entire strangers to one another and indifferent to the precautions taken for guarding the king. They withdrew to a private house, and as they had reason every moment to fear for their safety, they occupied but one room and provided an exit, which might be useful in case of an attack. The lackeys were sent to their several posts, except that Grimaud lay on a truss of straw across the doorway.

D’Artagnan was thoughtful and seemed for the moment to have lost his usual loquacity. Porthos, who could never see anything that was not self-evident, talked to him as usual. He replied in monosyllables and Athos and Aramis looked significantly at one another.

Next morning D’Artagnan was the first to rise. He had been down to the stables, already taken a look at the horses and given the necessary orders for the day, whilst Athos and Aramis were still in bed and Porthos snoring.

At eight o’clock the march was resumed in the same order as the night before, except that D’Artagnan left his friends and began to renew the acquaintance which he had already struck up with Monsieur Groslow.

Groslow, whom D’Artagnan’s praises had greatly pleased, welcomed him with a gracious smile.

“Really, sir,” D’Artagnan said to him, “I am pleased to find one with whom to talk in my own poor tongue. My friend, Monsieur du Vallon, is of a very melancholy disposition, so much so, that one can scarcely get three words out of him all day. As for our two prisoners, you can imagine that they are but little in the vein for conversation.”

“They are hot royalists,” said Groslow.

“The more reason they should be sulky with us for having captured the Stuart, for whom, I hope, you’re preparing a pretty trial.”

“Why,” said Groslow, “that is just what we are taking him to London for.”

“And you never by any chance lose sight of him, I presume?”

"I should think not, indeed. You see he has a truly royal escort."

"Ay, there's no fear in the daytime; but at night?"

"We redouble our precautions."

"And what method of surveillance do you employ?"

"Eight men remain constantly in his room."

"The deuce, he is well guarded, then. But besides these eight men, you doubtless place some guard outside?"

"Oh, no! Just think. What would you have two men without arms do against eight armed men?"

"Two men--how do you mean?"

"Yes, the king and his lackey."

"Oh! then they allow the lackey to remain with him?"

"Yes; Stuart begged this favor and Harrison consented. Under pretense that he's a king it appears he cannot dress or undress without assistance."

"Really, captain," said D'Artagnan, determined to continue on the laudatory tack on which he had commenced, "the more I listen to you the more surprised I am at the easy and elegant manner in which you speak French. You have lived three years in Paris? May I ask what you were doing there?"

"My father, who is a merchant, placed me with his correspondent, who in turn sent his son to join our house in London."

"Were you pleased with Paris, sir?"

"Yes, but you are much in want of a revolution like our own--not against your king, who is a mere child, but against that lazar of an Italian, the queen's favorite."

"Ah! I am quite of your opinion, sir, and we should soon make an end of Mazarin if we had only a dozen officers like yourself, without prejudices, vigilant and incorruptible."

"But," said the officer, "I thought you were in his service and that it was he who sent you to General Cromwell."

"That is to say I am in the king's service, and that knowing he wanted to send some one to England, I solicited the appointment, so great was my desire to know the man of genius who now governs the three kingdoms. So that when he proposed to us to draw our swords in honor of old England you see how we snapped up the proposition."

"Yes, I know that you charged by the side of Mordaunt."

"On his right and left, sir. Ah! there's another brave and excellent young man."

"Do you know him?" asked the officer.

"Yes, very well. Monsieur du Vallon and myself came from France with him."

"It appears, too, you kept him waiting a long time at Boulogne."

"What would you have? I was like you, and had a king in keeping."

"Aha!" said Groslow; "what king?"

"Our own, to be sure, the little one--Louis XIV."

"And how long had you to take care of him?"

"Three nights; and, by my troth, I shall always remember those three nights with a certain pleasure."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean that my friends, officers in the guards and mousquetaires, came to keep me company and we passed the night in feasting, drinking, dicing."

"Ah true," said the Englishman, with a sigh; "you Frenchmen are born boon companions."

"And don't you play, too, when you are on guard?"

"Never," said the Englishman.

"In that case you must be horribly bored, and have my sympathy."

"The fact is, I look to my turn for keeping guard with horror. It's tiresome work to keep awake a whole night."

"Yes, but with a jovial partner and dice, and guineas clinking on the cloth, the night passes like a dream. You don't like playing, then?"

"On the contrary, I do."

"Lansquenet, for instance?"

"Devoted to it. I used to play almost every night in France."

"And since your return to England?"

"I have not handled a card or dice-box."

"I sincerely pity you," said D'Artagnan, with an air of profound compassion.

"Look here," said the Englishman.

"Well?"

"To-morrow I am on guard."

"In Stuart's room?"

"Yes; come and pass the night with me."

"Impossible!"

“Impossible! why so?”

“I play with Monsieur du Vallon every night. Sometimes we don’t go to bed at all!”

“Well, what of that?”

“Why, he would be annoyed if I did not play with him.”

“Does he play well?”

“I have seen him lose as much as two thousand pistoles, laughing all the while till the tears rolled down.”

“Bring him with you, then.”

“But how about our prisoners?”

“Let your servants guard them.”

“Yes, and give them a chance of escaping,” said D’Artagnan. “Why, one of them is a rich lord from Touraine and the other a knight of Malta, of noble family. We have arranged the ransom of each of them--2,000 on arriving in France. We are reluctant to leave for a single moment men whom our lackeys know to be millionaires. It is true we plundered them a little when we took them, and I will even confess that it is their purse that Monsieur du Vallon and I draw on in our nightly play. Still, they may have concealed some precious stone, some valuable diamond; so that we are like those misers who are unable to absent themselves from their treasures. We have made ourselves the constant guardians of our men, and while I sleep Monsieur du Vallon watches.”

“Ah! ah!” said Groslow.

“You see, then, why I must decline your polite invitation, which is especially attractive to me, because nothing is so wearisome as to play night after night with the same person; the chances always balance and at the month’s end nothing is gained or lost.”

“Ah!” said Groslow, sighing; “there is something still more wearisome, and that is not to play at all.”

“I can understand that,” said D’Artagnan.

“But, come,” resumed the Englishman, “are these men of yours dangerous?”

“In what respect?”

“Are they capable of attempting violence?”

D’Artagnan burst out laughing at the idea.

“Jesus Dieu!” he cried; “one of them is trembling with fever, having failed to adapt himself to this charming country of yours, and the other is a knight of Malta, as timid as a young girl; and for greater security we have taken from them even their penknives and pocket scissors."

"Well, then," said Groslow, "bring them with you."

"But really----" said D'Artagnan.

"I have eight men on guard, you know. Four of them can guard the king and the other four your prisoners. I'll manage it somehow, you will see."

"But," said D'Artagnan, "now I think of it--what is to prevent our beginning to-night?"

"Nothing at all," said Groslow.

"Just so. Come to us this evening and to-morrow we'll return your visit."

"Capital! This evening with you, to-morrow at Stuart's, the next day with me."

"You see, that with a little forethought one can lead a merry life anywhere and everywhere," said D'Artagnan.

"Yes, with Frenchmen, and Frenchmen like you."

"And Monsieur du Vallon," added the other. "You will see what a fellow he is; a man who nearly killed Mazarin between two doors. They employ him because they are afraid of him. Ah, there he is calling me now. You'll excuse me, I know."

They exchanged bows and D'Artagnan returned to his companions.

"What on earth can you have been saying to that bulldog?" exclaimed Porthos.

"My dear fellow, don't speak like that of Monsieur Groslow. He's one of my most intimate friends."

"One of your friends!" cried Porthos, "this butcher of unarmed farmers!"

"Hush! my dear Porthos. Monsieur Groslow is perhaps rather hasty, it's true, but at bottom I have discovered two good qualities in him--he is conceited and stupid."

Porthos opened his eyes in amazement; Athos and Aramis looked at one another and smiled; they knew D'Artagnan, and knew that he did nothing without a purpose.

"But," continued D'Artagnan, "you shall judge of him for yourself. He is coming to play with us this evening."

"Oho!" said Porthos, his eyes glistening at the news. "Is he rich?"

"He's the son of one of the wealthiest merchants in London."

"And knows lansquenet?"

"Adores it."

“Basset?”

“His mania.”

“Biribi?”

“Revels in it.”

“Good,” said Porthos; “we shall pass an agreeable evening.”

“The more so, as it will be the prelude to a better.”

“How so?”

“We invite him to play to-night; he has invited us in return to-morrow. But wait. To-night we stop at Derby; and if there is a bottle of wine in the town let Mousqueton buy it. It will be well to prepare a light supper, of which you, Athos and Aramis, are not to partake--Athos, because I told him you had a fever; Aramis, because you are a knight of Malta and won’t mix with fellows like us. Do you understand?”

“That’s no doubt very fine,” said Porthos; “but deuce take me if I understand at all.”

“Porthos, my friend, you know I am descended on the father’s side from the Prophets and on the mother’s from the Sybils, and that I only speak in parables and riddles. Let those who have ears hear and those who have eyes see; I can tell you nothing more at present.”

“Go ahead, my friend,” said Athos; “I am sure that whatever you do is well done.”

“And you, Aramis, are you of that opinion?”

“Entirely so, my dear D’Artagnan.”

“Very good,” said D’Artagnan; “here indeed are true believers; it is a pleasure to work miracles before them; they are not like that unbelieving Porthos, who must see and touch before he will believe.”

“The fact is,” said Porthos, with an air of finesse, “I am rather incredulous.”

D’Artagnan gave him playful buffet on the shoulder, and as they had reached the station where they were to breakfast, the conversation ended there.

At five in the evening they sent Mousqueton on before as agreed upon. Blaisois went with him.

In crossing the principal street in Derby the four friends perceived Blaisois standing in the doorway of a handsome house. It was there a lodging was prepared for them.

At the hour agreed upon Groslow came. D’Artagnan received him as he would have done a friend of twenty years’ standing. Porthos scanned him from head to foot and smiled when he discovered that in spite of the blow he had administered to Parry’s brother, he was not nearly so strong as himself. Athos and Aramis suppressed as well as they could the disgust they felt in the presence of such coarseness and brutality.

In short, Groslow seemed to be pleased with his reception.

Athos and Aramis kept themselves to their role. At midnight they withdrew to their chamber, the door of which was left open on the pretext of kindly consideration. Furthermore, D’Artagnan went with them, leaving Porthos at play with Groslow.

Porthos gained fifty pistoles from Groslow, and found him a more agreeable companion than he had at first believed him to be.

As to Groslow, he promised himself that on the following evening he would recover from D’Artagnan what he had lost to Porthos, and on leaving reminded the Gascon of his appointment.

The next day was spent as usual. D’Artagnan went from Captain Groslow to Colonel Harrison and from Colonel Harrison to his friends. To any one not acquainted with him he seemed to be in his normal condition; but to his friends--to Athos and Aramis--was apparent a certain feverishness in his gayety.

“What is he contriving?” asked Aramis.

“Wait,” said Athos.

Porthos said nothing, but he handled in his pocket the fifty pistoles he had gained from Groslow with a degree of satisfaction which betrayed itself in his whole bearing.

Arrived at Ryston, D’Artagnan assembled his friends. His face had lost the expression of careless gayety it had worn like a mask the whole day. Athos pinched Aramis’s hand.

“The moment is at hand,” he said.

“Yes,” returned D’Artagnan, who had overheard him, “to-night, gentlemen, we rescue the king.”

“D’Artagnan,” said Athos, “this is no joke, I trust? It would quite cut me up.”

“You are a very odd man, Athos,” he replied, “to doubt me thus. Where and when have you seen me trifle with a friend’s heart and a king’s life? I have told you, and I repeat it, that to-night we rescue Charles I. You left it to me to discover the means and I have done so.”

Porthos looked at D’Artagnan with an expression of profound admiration. Aramis smiled as one who hopes. Athos was pale, and trembled in every limb.

“Speak,” said Athos.

“We are invited,” replied D’Artagnan, “to pass the night with M. Groslow. But do you know where?”

“No.”

“In the king’s room.”

“The king’s room?” cried Athos.

“Yes, gentlemen, in the king’s room. Groslow is on guard there this evening, and to pass the time away he has invited us to keep him company.”

“All four of us?” asked Athos.

“Pardieu! certainly, all four; we couldn’t leave our prisoners, could we?”

“Ah! ah!” said Aramis.

“Tell us about it,” said Athos, palpitating.

“We are going, then, we two with our swords, you with daggers. We four have got to master these eight fools and their stupid captain. Monsieur Porthos, what do you say to that?”

“I say it is easy enough,” answered Porthos.

“We dress the king in Groslow’s clothes. Mousqueton, Grimaud and Blaisois have our horses saddled at the end of the first street. We mount them and before daylight are twenty leagues distant.”

Athos placed his two hands on D’Artagnan’s shoulders, and gazed at him with his calm, sad smile.

“I declare, my friend,” said he, “that there is not a creature under the sky who equals you in prowess and in courage. Whilst we thought you indifferent to our sorrows, which you couldn’t share without crime, you alone among us have discovered what we were searching for in vain. I repeat it, D’Artagnan, you are the best one among us; I bless and love you, my dear son.”

“And to think that I couldn’t find that out,” said Porthos, scratching his head; “it is so simple.”

“But,” said Aramis, “if I understand rightly we are to kill them all, eh?”

Athos shuddered and turned pale.

“Mordioux!” answered D’Artagnan, “I believe we must. I confess I can discover no other safe and satisfactory way.”

“Let us see,” said Aramis, “how are we to act?”

“I have arranged two plans. Firstly, at a given signal, which shall be the words ‘At last,’ you each plunge a dagger into the heart of the soldier nearest to you. We, on our side, do the same. That will be four killed. We shall then be matched, four against the remaining five. If these five men give themselves up we gag them; if they resist, we kill them. If by chance our Amphitryon changes his mind and receives only Porthos and myself, why, then, we must resort to heroic measures and each give two strokes instead of one. It will take a little longer time and may make a greater disturbance, but you will be outside with swords and will rush in at the proper time.”

“But if you yourselves should be struck?” said Athos.

“Impossible!” said D’Artagnan; “those beer drinkers are too clumsy and awkward. Besides, you will strike at the throat, Porthos; it kills as quickly and prevents all outcry.”

“Very good,” said Porthos; “it will be a nice little throat cutting.”

“Horrible, horrible,” exclaimed Athos.

“Nonsense,” said D’Artagnan; “you would do as much, Mr. Humanity, in a battle. But if you think the king’s life is not worth what it must cost there’s an end of the matter and I send to Groslow to say I am ill.”

“No, you are right,” said Athos.

At this moment a soldier entered to inform them that Groslow was waiting for them.

“Where?” asked D’Artagnan.

“In the room of the English Nebuchadnezzar,” replied the staunch Puritan.

“Good,” replied Athos, whose blood mounted to his face at the insult offered to royalty; “tell the captain we are coming.”

The Puritan then went out. The lackeys had been ordered to saddle eight horses and to wait, keeping together and without dismounting, at the corner of a street about twenty steps from the house where the king was lodged.

It was nine o’clock in the evening; the sentinels had been relieved at eight and Captain Groslow had been on guard for an hour. D’Artagnan and Porthos, armed with their swords, and Athos and Aramis, each carrying a concealed poniard, approached the house which for the time being was

Charles Stuart’s prison. The two latter followed their captors in the humble guise of captives, without arms.

“Od’s bodikins,” said Groslow, as the four friends entered, “I had almost given you up.”

D’Artagnan went up to him and whispered in his ear:

“The fact is, we, that is, Monsieur du Vallon and I, hesitated a little.”

“And why?”

D’Artagnan looked significantly toward Athos and Aramis.

“Aha,” said Groslow; “on account of political opinions? No matter. On the contrary,” he added, laughing, “if they want to see their Stuart they shall see him.

“Are we to pass the night in the king’s room?” asked D’Artagnan.

“No, but in the one next to it, and as the door will remain open it comes to the same thing. Have you provided yourself with money? I assure you I intend to play the devil’s game to-night.”

D’Artagnan rattled the gold in his pockets.

“Very good,” said Groslow, and opened the door of the room. “I will show you the way,” and he went in first.

D’Artagnan turned to look at his friends. Porthos was perfectly indifferent; Athos, pale, but resolute; Aramis was wiping a slight moisture from his brow.

The eight guards were at their posts. Four in the king’s room, two at the door between the rooms and two at that by which the friends had entered. Athos smiled when he saw their bare swords; he felt it was no longer to be a butchery, but a fight, and he resumed his usual good humor.

Charles was perceived through the door, lying dressed upon his bed, at the head of which Parry was seated, reading in a low voice a chapter from the Bible.

A candle of coarse tallow on a black table lighted up the handsome and resigned face of the king and that of his faithful retainer, far less calm.

From time to time Parry stopped, thinking the king, whose eyes were closed, was really asleep, but Charles would open his eyes and say with a smile:

“Go on, my good Parry, I am listening.”

Groslow advanced to the door of the king’s room, replaced on his head the hat he had taken off to receive his guests, looked for a moment contemptuously at this simple, yet touching scene, then turning to D'Artagnan, assumed an air of triumph at what he had achieved.

"Capital!" cried the Gascon, "you would make a distinguished general."

"And do you think," asked Groslow, "that Stuart will ever escape while I am on guard?"

"No, to be sure," replied D'Artagnan; "unless, forsooth, the sky rains friends upon him."

Groslow's face brightened.

It is impossible to say whether Charles, who kept his eyes constantly closed, had noticed the insolence of the Puritan captain, but the moment he heard the clear tone of D'Artagnan's voice his eyelids rose, in spite of himself.

Parry, too, started and stopped reading.

"What are you thinking about?" said the king; "go on, my good Parry, unless you are tired."

Parry resumed his reading.

On a table in the next room were lighted candles, cards, two dice-boxes, and dice.

"Gentlemen," said Groslow, "I beg you will take your places. I will sit facing Stuart, whom I like so much to see, especially where he now is, and you, Monsieur d'Artagnan, opposite to me."

Athos turned red with rage. D'Artagnan frowned at him.

"That's it," said D'Artagnan; "you, Monsieur le Comte de la Fere, to the right of Monsieur Groslow. You, Chevalier d'Herblay, to his left. Du Vallon next me. You'll bet for me and those gentlemen for Monsieur Groslow."

By this arrangement D'Artagnan could nudge Porthos with his knee and make signs with his eyes to Athos and Aramis.

At the names Comte de la Fere and Chevalier d'Herblay, Charles opened his eyes, and raising his noble head, in spite of himself, threw a glance at all the actors in the scene.

At that moment Parry turned over several leaves of his Bible and read with a loud voice this verse in Jeremiah:

"God said, 'Hear ye the words of the prophets my servants, whom I have sent unto you.'"

The four friends exchanged glances. The words that Parry had read assured them that their presence was understood by the king and was assigned to its real motive. D'Artagnan's eyes sparkled with joy.

"You asked me just now if I was in funds," said D'Artagnan, placing some twenty pistoles upon the table. "Well, in my turn I advise you to keep a sharp lookout on your treasure, my dear Monsieur Groslow, for I can tell you we shall not leave this without robbing you of it."

"Not without my defending it," said Groslow.

"So much the better," said D'Artagnan. "Fight, my dear captain, fight. You know or you don't know, that that is what we ask of you."

"Oh! yes," said Groslow, bursting with his usual coarse laugh, "I know you Frenchmen want nothing but cuts and bruises."

Charles had heard and understood it all. A slight color mounted to his cheeks. The soldiers then saw him stretch his limbs, little by little, and under the pretense of much heat throw off the Scotch plaid which covered him.

Athos and Aramis started with delight to find that the king was lying with his clothes on.

The game began. The luck had turned, and Groslow, having won some hundred pistoles, was in the merriest possible humor.

Porthos, who had lost the fifty pistoles he had won the night before and thirty more besides, was very cross and questioned D'Artagnan with a nudge of the knee as to whether it would not soon be time to change the game. Athos and Aramis looked at him inquiringly. But D'Artagnan remained impassible.

It struck ten. They heard the guard going its rounds.

"How many rounds do they make a night?" asked D'Artagnan, drawing more pistoles from his pocket.

"Five," answered Groslow, "one every two hours."

D'Artagnan glanced at Athos and Aramis and for the first time replied to Porthos's nudge of the knee by a nudge responsive. Meanwhile, the soldiers whose duty it was to remain in the king's room, attracted by that love of play so powerful in all men, had stolen little by little toward the table, and standing on tiptoe, lounged, watching the game, over the shoulders of D'Artagnan and Porthos. Those on the other side had followed their example, thus favoring the views of the four friends, who preferred having them close at hand to chasing them about the chamber. The two sentinels at the door still had their swords unsheathed, but they were leaning on them while they watched the game.

Athos seemed to grow calm as the critical moment approached. With his white, aristocratic hands he played with the louis, bending and straightening them again, as if they were made of pewter. Aramis, less self-controlled, fumbled continually with his hidden poniard. Porthos, impatient at his continued losses, kept up a vigorous play with his knee.

D'Artagnan turned, mechanically looking behind him, and between the figures of two soldiers he could see Parry standing up and Charles leaning on his elbow with his hands clasped and apparently offering a fervent prayer to God.

D'Artagnan saw that the moment was come. He darted a preparatory glance at Athos and Aramis, who slyly pushed their chairs a little back so as to leave themselves more space for action. He gave Porthos a second nudge of the knee and Porthos got up as if to stretch his legs and took care at the same time to ascertain that his sword could be drawn smoothly from the scabbard.

"Hang it!" cried D'Artagnan, "another twenty pistoles lost. Really, Captain Groslow, you are too much in fortune's way. This can't last," and he drew another twenty from his pocket. "One more turn, captain; twenty pistoles on one throw--only one, the last."

"Done for twenty," replied Groslow.

And he turned up two cards as usual, a king for D'Artagnan and an ace for himself.

"A king," said D'Artagnan; "it's a good omen, Master Groslow--look out for the king."

And in spite of his extraordinary self-control there was a strange vibration in the Gascon's voice which made his partner start.

Groslow began turning the cards one after another. If he turned up an ace first he won; if a king he lost.

He turned up a king.

"At last!" cried D'Artagnan.

At this word Athos and Aramis jumped up. Porthos drew back a step. Daggers and swords were just about to shine, when suddenly the door was thrown open and Harrison appeared in the doorway, accompanied by a man enveloped in a large cloak. Behind this man could be seen the glistening muskets of half a dozen soldiers.

Groslow jumped up, ashamed at being surprised in the midst of wine, cards, and dice. But Harrison paid not the least attention to him, and entering the king’s room, followed by his companion:

“Charles Stuart,” said he, “an order has come to conduct you to London without stopping day or night. Prepare yourself, then, to start at once.”

“And by whom is this order given?” asked the king.

“By General Oliver Cromwell. And here is Mr. Mordaunt, who has brought it and is charged with its execution.”

“Mordaunt!” muttered the four friends, exchanging glances.

D’Artagnan swept up the money that he and Porthos had lost and buried it in his huge pocket. Athos and Aramis placed themselves behind him. At this movement Mordaunt turned around, recognized them, and uttered an exclamation of savage delight.

“I’m afraid we are prisoners,” whispered D’Artagnan to his friend.

“Not yet,” replied Porthos.

“Colonel, colonel,” cried Mordaunt, “you are betrayed. These four Frenchmen have escaped from Newcastle, and no doubt want to carry off the king. Arrest them.”

“Ah! my young man,” said D’Artagnan, drawing his sword, “that is an order sooner given than executed. Fly, friends, fly!” he added, whirling his sword around him.

The next moment he darted to the door and knocked down two of the soldiers who guarded it, before they had time to cock their muskets. Athos and Aramis followed him. Porthos brought up the rear, and before soldiers, officers, or colonel had time to recover their surprise all four were in the street.

“Fire!” cried Mordaunt; “fire upon them!”

Three or four shots were fired, but with no other result than to show the four fugitives turning the corner of the street safe and sound.

The horses were at the place fixed upon, and they leaped lightly into their saddles.

“Forward!” cried D’Artagnan, “and spur for your dear lives!”

They galloped away and took the road they had come by in the morning, namely, in the direction toward Scotland. A few hundred yards beyond the town D’Artagnan drew rein.

“Halt!” he cried, “this time we shall be pursued. We must let them leave the village and ride after us on the northern road, and when they have passed we will take the opposite direction.”

There was a stream close by and a bridge across it.

D’Artagnan led his horse under the arch of the bridge. The others followed. Ten minutes later they heard the rapid gallop of a troop of horsemen. A few minutes more and the troop passed over their heads.

CHAPTER 62.

London.

As soon as the noise of the hoofs was lost in the distance D'Artagnan remounted the bank of the stream and scoured the plain, followed by his three friends, directing their course, as well as they could guess, toward London.

"This time," said D'Artagnan, when they were sufficiently distant to proceed at a trot, "I think all is lost and we have nothing better to do than to reach France. What do you say, Athos, to that proposition? Isn't it reasonable?"

"Yes, dear friend," Athos replied, "but you said a word the other day that was more than reasonable--it was noble and generous. You said, 'Let us die here!' I recall to you that word."

"Oh," said Porthos, "death is nothing: it isn't death that can disquiet us, since we don't know what it is. What troubles me is the idea of defeat. As things are turning out, I foresee that we must give battle to London, to the provinces, to all England, and certainly in the end we can't fail to be beaten."

"We ought to witness this great tragedy even to its last scene," said Athos. "Whatever happens, let us not leave England before the crisis. Don't you agree with me, Aramis?"

"Entirely, my dear count. Then, too, I confess I should not be sorry to come across Mordaunt again. It appears to me that we have an account to settle with him, and that it is not our custom to leave a place without paying our debts, of this kind, at least."

"Ah! that's another thing," said D'Artagnan, "and I should not mind waiting in London a whole year for a chance of meeting this Mordaunt in question. Only let us lodge with some one on whom we can count; for I imagine, just now, that Noll Cromwell would not be inclined to trifle with us. Athos, do you know any inn in the whole town where one can find white sheets, roast beef reasonably cooked, and wine which is not made of hops and gin?"

“I think I know what you want,” replied Athos. “De Winter took us to the house of a Spaniard, who, he said, had become naturalized as an Englishman by the guineas of his new compatriots. What do you say to it, Aramis?”

“Why, the idea of taking quarters with Senor Perez seems to me very reasonable, and for my part I agree to it. We will invoke the remembrance of that poor De Winter, for whom he seemed to have a great regard; we will tell him that we have come as amateurs to see what is going on; we will spend with him a guinea each per day; and I think that by taking all these precautions we can be quite undisturbed.”

“You forget, Aramis, one precaution of considerable importance.”

“What is that?”

“The precaution of changing our clothes.”

“Changing our clothes!” exclaimed Porthos. “I don’t see why; we are very comfortable in those we wear.”

“To prevent recognition,” said D’Artagnan. “Our clothes have a cut which would proclaim the Frenchman at first sight. Now, I don’t set sufficient store on the cut of my jerkin to risk being hung at Tyburn or sent for change of scene to the Indies. I shall buy a chestnut-colored suit. I’ve remarked that your Puritans revel in that color.”

“But can you find your man?” said Aramis to Athos.

“Oh! to be sure, yes. He lives at the Bedford Tavern, Greenhall Street. Besides, I can find my way about the city with my eyes shut.”

“I wish we were already there,” said D’Artagnan; “and my advice is that we reach London before daybreak, even if we kill our horses.”

“Come on, then,” said Athos, “for unless I am mistaken in my calculations we have only eight or ten leagues to go.”

The friends urged on their horses and arrived, in fact, at about five o’clock in the morning. They were stopped and questioned at the gate by which they sought to enter the city, but Athos replied, in excellent English, that they had been sent forward by Colonel Harrison to announce to his colleague, Monsieur Bridge, the approach of the king. That reply led to several questions about the king’s capture, and Athos gave details so precise and positive that if the gatekeepers had any suspicions they vanished completely. The way was therefore opened to the four friends with all sorts of Puritan congratulations.

Athos was right. He went direct to the Bedford Tavern, and the host, who recognized him, was delighted to see him again with such a numerous and promising company.

Though it was scarcely daylight our four travelers found the town in a great bustle, owing to the reported approach of Harrison and the king.

The plan of changing their clothes was unanimously adopted. The landlord sent out for every description of garment, as if he wanted to fit up his wardrobe. Athos chose a black coat, which gave him the appearance of a respectable citizen. Aramis, not wishing to part with his sword, selected a dark-blue cloak of a military cut. Porthos was seduced by a wine-colored doublet and sea-green breeches. D'Artagnan, who had fixed on his color beforehand, had only to select the shade, and looked in his chestnut suit exactly like a retired sugar dealer.

"Now," said D'Artagnan, "for the actual man. We must cut off our hair, that the populace may not insult us. As we no longer wear the sword of the gentleman we may as well have the head of the Puritan. This, as you know, is the important point of distinction between the Covenanter and the Cavalier."

After some discussion this was agreed to and Mousqueton played the role of barber.

"We look hideous," said Athos.

"And smack of the Puritan to a frightful extent," said Aramis.

"My head feels actually cold," said Porthos.

"As for me, I feel anxious to preach a sermon," said D'Artagnan.

"Now," said Athos, "that we cannot even recognize one another and have therefore no fear of others recognizing us, let us go and see the king's entrance."

They had not been long in the crowd before loud cries announced the king's arrival. A carriage had been sent to meet him, and the gigantic Porthos, who stood a head above the entire rabble, soon announced that he saw the royal equipage approaching. D'Artagnan raised himself on tiptoe, and as the carriage passed, saw Harrison at one window and Mordaunt at the other.

The next day, Athos, leaning out of his window, which looked upon the most populous part of the city, heard the Act of Parliament, which summoned the ex-king, Charles I., to the bar, publicly cried.

“Parliament indeed!” cried Athos. “Parliament can never have passed such an act as that.”

At this moment the landlord came in.

“Did parliament pass this act?” Athos asked of him in English.

“Yes, my lord, the pure parliament.”

“What do you mean by ‘the pure parliament’? Are there, then, two parliaments?”

“My friend,” D’Artagnan interrupted, “as I don’t understand English and we all understand Spanish, have the kindness to speak to us in that language, which, since it is your own, you must find pleasure in using when you have the chance.”

“Ah! excellent!” said Aramis.

As to Porthos, all his attention was concentrated on the allurements of the breakfast table.

“You were asking, then?” said the host in Spanish.

“I asked,” said Athos, in the same language, “if there are two parliaments, a pure and an impure?”

“Why, how extraordinary!” said Porthos, slowly raising his head and looking at his friends with an air of astonishment, “I understand English, then! I understand what you say!”

“That is because we are talking Spanish, my dear friend,” said Athos.

“Oh, the devil!” said Porthos, “I am sorry for that; it would have been one language more.”

“When I speak of the pure parliament,” resumed the host, “I mean the one which Colonel Bridge has weeded.”

“Ah! really,” said D’Artagnan, “these people are very ingenious. When I go back to France I must suggest some such convenient course to Cardinal Mazarin and the coadjutor. One of them will weed the parliament in the name of the court, and the other in the name of the people; and then there won’t be any parliament at all.”

“And who is this Colonel Bridge?” asked Aramis, “and how does he go to work to weed the parliament?”

“Colonel Bridge,” replied the Spaniard, “is a retired wagoner, a man of much sense, who made one valuable observation whilst driving his team, namely, that where there happened to be a stone on the road, it was much easier to remove the stone than try and make the wheel pass over it. Now, of two hundred and fifty-one members who composed the parliament, there were one hundred and ninety-one who were in the way and might have upset his political wagon. He took them up, just as he formerly used to take up the stones from the road, and threw them out of the house.”

“Neat,” remarked D’Artagnan. “Very!”

“And all these one hundred and ninety-one were Royalists?” asked Athos.

“Without doubt, senor; and you understand that they would have saved the king.”

“To be sure,” said Porthos, with majestic common sense; “they were in the majority.”

“And you think,” said Aramis, “he will consent to appear before such a tribunal?”

“He will be forced to do so,” smiled the Spaniard.

“Now, Athos!” said D’Artagnan, “do you begin to believe that it’s a ruined cause, and that what with your Harrisons, Joyces, Bridges and Cromwells, we shall never get the upper hand?”

“The king will be delivered at the tribunal,” said Athos; “the very silence of his supporters indicates that they are at work.”

D’Artagnan shrugged his shoulders.

“But,” said Aramis, “if they dare to condemn their king, it can only be to exile or imprisonment.”

D’Artagnan whistled a little air of incredulity.

“We shall see,” said Athos, “for we shall go to the sittings, I presume.”

“You will not have long to wait,” said the landlord; “they begin to-morrow.”

“So, then, they drew up the indictments before the king was taken?”

“Of course,” said D’Artagnan; “they began the day he was sold.”

“And you know,” said Aramis, “that it was our friend Mordaunt who made, if not the bargain, at least the overtures.”

“And you know,” added D’Artagnan, “that whenever I catch him I will kill him, this Mordaunt.”

“And I, too,” exclaimed Porthos.

“And I, too,” added Aramis.

“Touching unanimity!” cried D’Artagnan, “which well becomes good citizens like us. Let us take a turn around the town and imbibe a little fog.”

“Yes,” said Porthos, “‘twill be at least a little change from beer.”

CHAPTER 63.

The Trial.

The next morning King Charles I. was haled by a strong guard before the high court which was to judge him. All London was crowding to the doors of the house. The throng was terrific, and it was not till after much pushing and some fighting that our friends reached their destination. When they did so they found the three lower rows of benches already occupied; but being anxious not to be too conspicuous, all, with the exception of Porthos, who had a fancy to display his red doublet, were quite satisfied with their places, the more so as chance had brought them to the centre of their row, so that they were exactly opposite the arm-chair prepared for the royal prisoner.

Toward eleven o'clock the king entered the hall, surrounded by guards, but wearing his head covered, and with a calm expression turned to every side with a look of complete assurance, as if he were there to preside at an assembly of submissive subjects, rather than to meet the accusations of a rebel court.

The judges, proud of having a monarch to humiliate, evidently prepared to enjoy the right they had arrogated to themselves, and sent an officer to inform the king that it was customary for the accused to uncover his head.

Charles, without replying a single word, turned his head in another direction and pulled his felt hat over it. Then when the officer was gone he sat down in the arm-chair opposite the president and struck his boots with a little cane which he carried in his hand. Parry, who accompanied him, stood behind him.

D'Artagnan was looking at Athos, whose face betrayed all those emotions which the king, possessing more self-control, had banished from his own. This agitation in one so cold and calm as Athos, frightened him.

"I hope," he whispered to him, "that you will follow his majesty's example and not get killed for your folly in this den."

"Set your mind at rest," replied Athos.

"Aha!" continued D'Artagnan, "it is clear that they are afraid of something or other; for look, the sentinels are being reinforced. They had only halberds before, now they have muskets. The halberds were for the audience in the rear; the muskets are for us."

"Thirty, forty, fifty, sixty-five men," said Porthos, counting the reinforcements.

"Ah!" said Aramis, "but you forget the officer."

D'Artagnan grew pale with rage. He recognized Mordaunt, who with bare sword was marshalling the musketeers behind the king and opposite the benches.

"Do you think they have recognized us?" said D'Artagnan. "In that case I should beat a retreat. I don't care to be shot in a box."

"No," said Aramis, "he has not seen us. He sees no one but the king. Mon Dieu! how he stares at him, the insolent dog! Does he hate his majesty as much as he does us?"

"Pardi," answered Athos "we only carried off his mother; the king has spoiled him of his name and property."

"True," said Aramis; "but silence! the president is speaking to the king."

"Stuart," Bradshaw was saying, "listen to the roll call of your judges and address to the court any observations you may have to make."

The king turned his head away, as if these words had not been intended for him. Bradshaw waited, and as there was no reply there was a moment of silence.

Out of the hundred and sixty-three members designated there were only seventy-three present, for the rest, fearful of taking part in such an act, had remained away.

When the name of Colonel Fairfax was called, one of those brief but solemn silences ensued, which announced the absence of the members who had no wish to take a personal part in the trial.

"Colonel Fairfax," repeated Bradshaw.

"Fairfax," answered a laughing voice, the silvery tone of which betrayed it as that of a woman, "is not such a fool as to be here."

A loud laugh followed these words, pronounced with that boldness which women draw from their own weakness--a weakness which removes them beyond the power of vengeance.

"It is a woman's voice," cried Aramis; "faith, I would give a good deal if she is young and pretty." And he mounted on the bench to try and get a sight of her.

“By my soul,” said Aramis, “she is charming. Look D’Artagnan; everybody is looking at her; and in spite of Bradshaw’s gaze she has not turned pale.”

“It is Lady Fairfax herself,” said D’Artagnan. “Don’t you remember, Porthos, we saw her at General Cromwell’s?”

The roll call continued.

“These rascals will adjourn when they find that they are not in sufficient force,” said the Comte de la Fere.

“You don’t know them. Athos, look at Mordaunt’s smile. Is that the look of a man whose victim is likely to escape him? Ah, cursed basilisk, it will be a happy day for me when I can cross something more than a look with you.”

“The king is really very handsome,” said Porthos; “and look, too, though he is a prisoner, how carefully he is dressed. The feather in his hat is worth at least five-and-twenty pistoles. Look at it, Aramis.”

The roll call finished, the president ordered them to read the act of accusation. Athos turned pale. A second time he was disappointed in his expectation. Notwithstanding the judges were so few the trial was to continue; the king then, was condemned in advance.

“I told you so, Athos,” said D’Artagnan, shrugging his shoulders. “Now take your courage in both hands and hear what this gentleman in black is going to say about his sovereign, with full license and privilege.”

Never till then had a more brutal accusation or meaner insults tarnished kingly majesty.

Charles listened with marked attention, passing over the insults, noting the grievances, and, when hatred overflowed all bounds and the accuser turned executioner beforehand, replying with a smile of lofty scorn.

“The fact is,” said D’Artagnan, “if men are punished for imprudence and triviality, this poor king deserves punishment. But it seems to me that that which he is just now undergoing is hard enough.”

“In any case,” Aramis replied, “the punishment should fall not on the king, but on his ministers; for the first article of the constitution is, ‘The king can do no wrong.’“

“As for me,” thought Porthos, giving Mordaunt his whole attention, “were it not for breaking in on the majesty of the situation I would leap down from the bench, reach Mordaunt in three bounds and strangle him; I would then take him by the feet and knock the life out of these wretched musketeers who parody the musketeers of France. Meantime, D'Artagnan, who is full of invention, would find some way to save the king. I must speak to him about it."

As to Athos, his face aflame, his fists clinched, his lips bitten till they bled, he sat there foaming with rage at that endless parliamentary insult and that long enduring royal patience; the inflexible arm and steadfast heart had given place to a trembling hand and a body shaken by excitement.

At this moment the accuser concluded with these words: "The present accusation is preferred by us in the name of the English people."

At these words there was a murmur along the benches, and a second voice, not that of a woman, but a man's, stout and furious, thundered behind D'Artagnan.

"You lie!" it cried. "Nine-tenths of the English people are horrified at what you say."

This voice was that of Athos, who, standing up with outstretched hand and quite out of his mind, thus assailed the public accuser.

King, judges, spectators, all turned their eyes to the bench where the four friends were seated. Mordaunt did the same and recognized the gentleman, around whom the three other Frenchmen were standing, pale and menacing. His eyes glittered with delight. He had discovered those to whose death he had devoted his life. A movement of fury called to his side some twenty of his musketeers, and pointing to the bench where his enemies were: "Fire on that bench!" he cried.

But with the rapidity of thought D'Artagnan seized Athos by the waist, and followed by Porthos with Aramis, leaped down from the benches, rushed into the passages, and flying down the staircase were lost in the crowd without, while the muskets within were pointed on some three thousand spectators, whose piteous cries and noisy alarm stopped the impulse already given to bloodshed.

Charles also had recognized the four Frenchmen. He put one hand on his heart to still its beating and the other over his eyes, that he might not witness the slaying of his faithful friends.

Mordaunt, pale and trembling with anger, rushed from the hall sword in hand, followed by six pikemen, pushing, inquiring and panting in the crowd; and then, having found nothing, returned.

The tumult was indescribable. More than half an hour passed before any one could make himself heard. The judges were looking for a new outbreak from the benches. The spectators saw the muskets leveled at them, and divided between fear and curiosity, remained noisy and excited.

Quiet was at length restored.

"What have you to say in your defense?" asked Bradshaw of the king.

Then rising, with his head still covered, in the tone of a judge rather than a prisoner, Charles began.

"Before questioning me," he said, "reply to my question. I was free at Newcastle and had there concluded a treaty with both houses. Instead of performing your part of this contract, as I performed mine, you bought me from the Scotch, cheaply, I know, and that does honor to the economic talent of your government. But because you have paid the price of a slave, do you imagine that I have ceased to be your king? No. To answer you would be to forget it. I shall only reply to you when you have satisfied me of your right to question me. To answer you would be to acknowledge you as my judges, and I only acknowledge you as my executioners." And in the middle of a deathlike silence, Charles, calm, lofty, and with his head still covered, sat down again in his arm-chair.

"Why are not my Frenchmen here?" he murmured proudly and turning his eyes to the benches where they had appeared for a moment; "they would have seen that their friend was worthy of their defense while alive, and of their tears when dead."

"Well," said the president, seeing that Charles was determined to remain silent, "so be it. We will judge you in spite of your silence. You are accused of treason, of abuse of power, and murder. The evidence will support it. Go, and another sitting will accomplish what you have postponed in this."

Charles rose and turned toward Parry, whom he saw pale and with his temples dewed with moisture.

"Well, my dear Parry," said he, "what is the matter, and what can affect you in this manner?"

"Oh, my king," said Parry, with tears in his eyes and in a tone of supplication, "do not look to the left as we leave the hall."

"And why, Parry?"

"Do not look, I implore you, my king."

"But what is the matter? Speak," said Charles, attempting to look across the hedge of guards which surrounded him.

"It is--but you will not look, will you?--it is because they have had the axe, with which criminals are executed, brought and placed there on the table. The sight is hideous."

"Fools," said Charles, "do they take me for a coward, like themselves? You have done well to warn me. Thank you, Parry."

When the moment arrived the king followed his guards out of the hall. As he passed the table on which the axe was laid, he stopped, and turning with a smile, said:

"Ah! the axe, an ingenious device, and well worthy of those who know not what a gentleman is; you frighten me not, executioner's axe," added he, touching it with the cane which he held in his hand, "and I strike you now, waiting patiently and Christianly for you to return the blow."

And shrugging his shoulders with unaffected contempt he passed on. When he reached the door a stream of people, who had been disappointed in not being able to get into the house and to make amends had collected to see him come out, stood on each side, as he passed, many among them glaring on him with threatening looks.

"How many people," thought he, "and not one true friend."

And as he uttered these words of doubt and depression within his mind, a voice beside him said:

"Respect to fallen majesty."

The king turned quickly around, with tears in his eyes and heart. It was an old soldier of the guards who could not see his king pass captive before him without rendering him this final homage. But the next moment the unfortunate man was nearly killed with heavy blows of sword-hilts, and among those who set upon him the king recognized Captain Groslow.

“Alas!” said Charles, “that is a severe chastisement for a very trifling fault.”

He continued his walk, but he had scarcely gone a hundred paces, when a furious fellow, leaning between two soldiers, spat in the king’s face, as once an infamous and accursed Jew spit in the face of Jesus of Nazareth. Loud roars of laughter and sullen murmurs arose together. The crowd opened and closed again, undulating like a stormy sea, and the king imagined that he saw shining in the midst of this living wave the bright eyes of Athos.

Charles wiped his face and said with a sad smile: “Poor wretch, for half a crown he would do as much to his own father.”

The king was not mistaken. Athos and his friends, again mingling with the throng, were taking a last look at the martyr king.

When the soldier saluted Charles, Athos’s heart bounded for joy; and that unfortunate, on coming to himself, found ten guineas that the French gentleman had slipped into his pocket. But when the cowardly insulter spat in the face of the captive monarch Athos grasped his dagger. But D’Artagnan stopped his hand and in a hoarse voice cried, “Wait!”

Athos stopped. D’Artagnan, leaning on Athos, made a sign to Porthos and Aramis to keep near them and then placed himself behind the man with the bare arms, who was still laughing at his own vile pleasantry and receiving the congratulations of several others.

The man took his way toward the city. The four friends followed him. The man, who had the appearance of being a butcher, descended a little steep and isolated street, looking on to the river, with two of his friends. Arrived at the bank of the river the three men perceived that they were followed, turned around, and looking insolently at the Frenchmen, passed some jests from one to another.

“I don’t know English, Athos,” said D’Artagnan; “but you know it and will interpret for me.”

Then quickening their steps they passed the three men, but turned back immediately, and D’Artagnan walked straight up to the butcher and touching him on the chest with the tip of his finger, said to Athos:

"Say this to him in English: 'You are a coward. You have insulted a defenseless man. You have befouled the face of your king. You must die.'"

Athos, pale as a ghost, repeated these words to the man, who, seeing the bodeful preparations that were making, put himself in an attitude of defense. Aramis, at this movement, drew his sword.

"No," cried D'Artagnan, "no steel. Steel is for gentlemen."

And seizing the butcher by the throat:

"Porthos," said he, "kill this fellow for me with a single blow."

Porthos raised his terrible fist, which whistled through the air like a sling, and the portentous mass fell with a smothered crash on the insulter's skull and crushed it. The man fell like an ox beneath the poleaxe. His companions, horror-struck, could neither move nor cry out.

"Tell them this, Athos," resumed D'Artagnan; "thus shall all die who forget that a captive man is sacred and that a captive king doubly represents the Lord."

Athos repeated D'Artagnan's words.

The fellows looked at the body of their companion, swimming in blood, and then recovering voice and legs together, ran screaming off.

"Justice is done," said Porthos, wiping his forehead.

"And now," said D'Artagnan to Athos, "entertain no further doubts about me; I undertake all that concerns the king."

CHAPTER 64.

Whitehall.

The parliament condemned Charles to death, as might have been foreseen. Political judgments are generally vain formalities, for the same passions which give rise to the accusation ordain to the condemnation. Such is the atrocious logic of revolutions.

Although our friends were expecting that condemnation, it filled them with grief. D'Artagnan, whose mind was never more fertile in resources than in critical emergencies, swore again that he would try all conceivable means to prevent the denouement of the bloody tragedy. But by what means? As yet he could form no definite plan; all must depend on circumstances. Meanwhile, it was necessary at all hazards, in order to gain time, to put some obstacle in the way of the execution on the following day--the day appointed by the judges. The only way of doing that was to cause the disappearance of the London executioner. The headsman out of the way, the sentence could not be executed. True, they could send for the headsman of the nearest town, but at least a day would be gained, and a day might be sufficient for the rescue. D'Artagnan took upon himself that more than difficult task.

Another thing, not less essential, was to warn Charles Stuart of the attempt to be made, so that he might assist his rescuers as much as possible, or at least do nothing to thwart their efforts. Aramis assumed that perilous charge. Charles Stuart had asked that Bishop Juxon might be permitted to visit him. Mordaunt had called on the bishop that very evening to apprise him of the religious desire expressed by the king and also of Cromwell's permission. Aramis determined to obtain from the bishop, through fear or by persuasion, consent that he should enter in the bishop's place, and clad in his sacerdotal robes, the prison at Whitehall.

Finally, Athos undertook to provide, in any event, the means of leaving England--in case either of failure or of success.

The night having come they made an appointment to meet at eleven o'clock at the hotel, and each started out to fulfill his dangerous mission.

The palace of Whitehall was guarded by three regiments of cavalry and by the fierce anxiety of Cromwell, who came and went or sent his generals or his agents continually. Alone in his usual room, lighted by two candles, the condemned monarch gazed sadly on the luxury of his past greatness, just as at the last hour one sees the images of life more mildly brilliant than of yore.

Parry had not quitted his master, and since his condemnation had not ceased to weep. Charles, leaning on a table, was gazing at a medallion of his wife and daughter; he was waiting first for Juxon, then for martyrdom.

At times he thought of those brave French gentlemen who had appeared to him from a distance of a hundred leagues fabulous and unreal, like the forms that appear in dreams. In fact, he sometimes asked himself if all that was happening to him was not a dream, or at least the delirium of a fever. He rose and took a few steps as if to rouse himself from his torpor and went as far as the window; he saw glittering below him the muskets of the guards. He was thereupon constrained to admit that he was indeed awake and that his bloody dream was real.

Charles returned in silence to his chair, rested his elbow on the table, bowed his head upon his hand and reflected.

“Alas!” he said to himself, “if I only had for a confessor one of those lights of the church, whose soul has sounded all the mysteries of life, all the littlenesses of greatness, perhaps his utterance would overawe the voice that wails within my soul. But I shall have a priest of vulgar mind, whose career and fortune I have ruined by my misfortune. He will speak to me of God and death, as he has spoken to many another dying man, not understanding that this one leaves his throne to an usurper, his children to the cold contempt of public charity.”

And he raised the medallion to his lips.

It was a dull, foggy night. A neighboring church clock slowly struck the hour. The flickering light of the two candles showed fitful phantom shadows in the lofty room. These were the ancestors of Charles, standing back dimly in their tarnished frames.

An awful sadness enveloped the heart of Charles. He buried his brow in his hands and thought of the world, so beautiful when one is about to leave it; of the caresses of children, so pleasing and so sweet, especially when one is parting from his children never to see them again; then of his wife, the noble and courageous woman who had sustained him to the last moment.

He drew from his breast the diamond cross and the star of the Garter which she had sent him by those generous Frenchmen; he kissed it, and then, as he reflected, that she would never again see those things till he lay cold and mutilated in the tomb, there passed over him one of those icy shivers which may be called forerunners of death.

Then, in that chamber which recalled to him so many royal souvenirs, whither had come so many courtiers, the scene of so much flattering homage, alone with a despairing servant, whose feeble soul could afford no support to his own, the king at last yielded to sorrow, and his courage sank to a level with that feebleness, those shadows, and that wintry cold. That king, who was so grand, so sublime in the hour of death, meeting his fate with a smile of resignation on his lips, now in that gloomy hour wiped away a tear which had fallen on the table and quivered on the gold embroidered cloth.

Suddenly the door opened, an ecclesiastic in episcopal robes entered, followed by two guards, to whom the king waved an imperious gesture. The guards retired; the room resumed its obscurity.

“Juxon!” cried Charles, “Juxon, thank you, my last friend; you come at a fitting moment.”

The bishop looked anxiously at the man sobbing in the ingle-nook.

“Come, Parry,” said the king, “cease your tears.”

“If it’s Parry,” said the bishop, “I have nothing to fear; so allow me to salute your majesty and to tell you who I am and for what I am come.”

At this sight and this voice Charles was about to cry out, when Aramis placed his finger on his lips and bowed low to the king of England.

“The chevalier!” murmured Charles.

“Yes, sire,” interrupted Aramis, raising his voice, “Bishop Juxon, the faithful knight of Christ, obedient to your majesty’s wishes.”

Charles clasped his hands, amazed and stupefied to find that these foreigners, without other motive than that which their conscience imposed on them, thus combated the will of a people and the destiny of a king.

“You!” he said, “you! how did you penetrate hither? If they recognize you, you are lost.”

“Care not for me, sire; think only of yourself. You see, your friends are wakeful. I know not what we shall do yet, but four determined men can do much. Meanwhile, do not be surprised at anything that happens; prepare yourself for every emergency.”

Charles shook his head.

"Do you know that I die to-morrow at ten o'clock?"

"Something, your majesty, will happen between now and then to make the execution impossible."

The king looked at Aramis with astonishment.

At this moment a strange noise, like the unloading of a cart, and followed by a cry of pain, was heard beneath the window.

"Do you hear?" said the king.

"I hear," said Aramis, "but I understand neither the noise nor the cry of pain."

"I know not who can have uttered the cry," said the king, "but the noise is easily understood. Do you know that I am to be beheaded outside this window? Well, these boards you hear unloaded are the posts and planks to build my scaffold. Some workmen must have fallen underneath them and been hurt."

Aramis shuddered in spite of himself.

"You see," said the king, "that it is useless for you to resist. I am condemned; leave me to my death."

"My king," said Aramis, "they well may raise a scaffold, but they cannot make an executioner."

"What do you mean?" asked the king.

"I mean that at this hour the headsman has been got out of the way by force or persuasion. The scaffold will be ready by to-morrow, but the headsman will be wanting and they will put it off till the day after to-morrow."

"What then?" said the king.

"To-morrow night we shall rescue you."

"How can that be?" cried the king, whose face was lighted up, in spite of himself, by a flash of joy.

"Oh! sir," cried Parry, "may you and yours be blessed!"

"How can it be?" repeated the king. "I must know, so that I may assist you if there is any chance."

"I know nothing about it," continued Aramis, "but the cleverest, the bravest, the most devoted of us four said to me when I left him, 'Tell the king that to-morrow at ten o'clock at night, we shall carry him off.' He has said it and will do it."

“Tell me the name of that generous friend,” said the king, “that I may cherish for him an eternal gratitude, whether he succeeds or not.”

“D’Artagnan, sire, the same who had so nearly rescued you when Colonel Harrison made his untimely entrance.”

“You are, indeed, wonderful men,” said the king; “if such things had been related to me I should not have believed them.”

“Now, sire,” resumed Aramis, “listen to me. Do not forget for a single instant that we are watching over your safety; observe the smallest gesture, the least bit of song, the least sign from any one near you; watch everything, hear everything, interpret everything.”

“Oh, chevalier!” cried the king, “what can I say to you? There is no word, though it should come from the profoundest depth of my heart, that can express my gratitude. If you succeed I do not say that you will save a king; no, in presence of the scaffold as I am, royalty, I assure you, is a very small affair; but you will save a husband to his wife, a father to his children. Chevalier, take my hand; it is that of a friend who will love you to his last sigh.”

Aramis stooped to kiss the king’s hand, but Charles clasped his and pressed it to his heart.

At this moment a man entered, without even knocking at the door. Aramis tried to withdraw his hand, but the king still held it. The man was one of those Puritans, half preacher and half soldier, who swarmed around Cromwell.

“What do you want, sir?” said the king.

“I desire to know if the confession of Charles Stuart is at an end?” said the stranger.

“And what is it to you?” replied the king; “we are not of the same religion.”

“All men are brothers,” said the Puritan. “One of my brothers is about to die and I come to prepare him.”

“Bear with him,” whispered Aramis; “it is doubtless some spy.”

“After my reverend lord bishop,” said the king to the man, “I shall hear you with pleasure, sir.”

The man retired, but not before examining the supposed Juxon with an attention which did not escape the king.

“Chevalier,” said the king, when the door was closed, “I believe you are right and that this man only came here with evil intentions. Take care that no misfortune befalls you when you leave.”

“I thank your majesty,” said Aramis, “but under these robes I have a coat of mail, a pistol and a dagger.”

“Go, then, sir, and God keep you!”

The king accompanied him to the door, where Aramis pronounced his benediction upon him, and passing through the ante-rooms, filled with soldiers, jumped into his carriage and drove to the bishop’s palace. Juxon was waiting for him impatiently.

“Well?” said he, on perceiving Aramis.

“Everything has succeeded as I expected; spies, guards, satellites, all took me for you, and the king blesses you while waiting for you to bless him.”

“May God protect you, my son; for your example has given me at the same time hope and courage.”

Aramis resumed his own attire and left Juxon with the assurance that he might again have recourse to him.

He had scarcely gone ten yards in the street when he perceived that he was followed by a man, wrapped in a large cloak. He placed his hand on his dagger and stopped. The man came straight toward him. It was Porthos.

“My dear friend,” cried Aramis.

“You see, we had each our mission,” said Porthos; “mine was to guard you and I am doing so. Have you seen the king?”

“Yes, and all goes well.”

“We are to meet our friends at the hotel at eleven.”

It was then striking half-past ten by St. Paul’s.

Arrived at the hotel it was not long before Athos entered.

“All’s well,” he cried, as he entered; “I have hired a cedar wherry, as light as a canoe, as easy on the wing as any swallow. It is waiting for us at Greenwich, opposite the Isle of Dogs, manned by a captain and four men, who for the sum of fifty pounds sterling will keep themselves at our disposition three successive nights. Once on board we drop down the Thames and in two hours are on the open sea. In case I am killed, the captain’s name is Roger and the skiff is called the Lightning. A handkerchief, tied at the four corners, is to be the signal.”

Next moment D’Artagnan entered.

“Empty your pockets,” said he; “I want a hundred pounds, and as for my own----” and he emptied them inside out.

The sum was collected in a minute. D’Artagnan ran out and returned directly after.

“There,” said he, “it’s done. Ough! and not without a deal of trouble, too.”

“Has the executioner left London?” asked Athos.

“Ah, you see that plan was not sure enough; he might go out by one gate and return by another.”

“Where is he, then?”

“In the cellar.”

“The cellar--what cellar?”

“Our landlord’s, to be sure. Mousqueton is propped against the door and here’s the key.”

“Bravo!” said Aramis, “how did you manage it?”

“Like everything else, with money; but it cost me dear.”

“How much?” asked Athos.

“Five hundred pounds.”

“And where did you get so much money?” said Athos. “Had you, then, that sum?”

“The queen’s famous diamond,” answered D’Artagnan, with a sigh.

“Ah, true,” said Aramis. “I recognized it on your finger.”

“You bought it back, then, from Monsieur des Essarts?” asked Porthos.

“Yes, but it was fated that I should not keep it.”

“So, then, we are all right as regards the executioner,” said Athos; “but unfortunately every executioner has his assistant, his man, or whatever you call him.”

“And this one had his,” said D’Artagnan; “but, as good luck would have it, just as I thought I should have two affairs to manage, our friend was brought home with a broken leg. In the excess of his zeal he had accompanied the cart containing the scaffolding as far as the king’s window, and one of the crossbeams fell on his leg and broke it.”

“Ah!” cried Aramis, “that accounts for the cry I heard.”

“Probably,” said D’Artagnan, “but as he is a thoughtful young man he promised to send four expert workmen in his place to help those already at the scaffold, and wrote the moment he was brought home to Master Tom Lowe, an assistant carpenter and friend of his, to go down to Whitehall, with three of his friends. Here’s the letter he sent by a messenger, for sixpence, who sold it to me for a guinea.”

“And what on earth are you going to do with it?” asked Athos.

“Can’t you guess, my dear Athos? You, who speak English like John Bull himself, are Master Tom Lowe, we, your three companions. Do you understand it now?”

Athos uttered a cry of joy and admiration, ran to a closet and drew forth workmen’s clothes, which the four friends immediately put on; they then left the hotel, Athos carrying a saw, Porthos a vise, Aramis an axe and D’Artagnan a hammer and some nails.

The letter from the executioner’s assistant satisfied the master carpenter that those were the men he expected.

CHAPTER 65.

The Workmen.

Toward midnight Charles heard a great noise beneath his window. It arose from blows of hammer and hatchet, clinking of pincers and cranching of saws.

Lying dressed upon his bed, the noise awoke him with a start and found a gloomy echo in his heart. He could not endure it, and sent Parry to ask the sentinel to beg the workmen to strike more gently and not disturb the last slumber of one who had been their king. The sentinel was unwilling to leave his post, but allowed Parry to pass.

Arriving at the window Parry found an unfinished scaffold, over which they were nailing a covering of black serge. Raised to the height of twenty feet, so as to be on a level with the window, it had two lower stories. Parry, odious as was this sight to him, sought for those among some eight or ten workmen who were making the most noise; and fixed on two men, who were loosening the last hooks of the iron balcony.

“My friends,” said Parry, mounting the scaffold and standing beside them, “would you work a little more quietly? The king wishes to get a sleep.”

One of the two, who was standing up, was of gigantic size and was driving a pick with all his might into the wall, whilst the other, kneeling beside him, was collecting the pieces of stone. The face of the first was lost to Parry in the darkness; but as the second turned around and placed his finger on his lips Parry started back in amazement.

“Very well, very well,” said the workman aloud, in excellent English. “Tell the king that if he sleeps badly to-night he will sleep better to-morrow night.”

These blunt words, so terrible if taken literally, were received by the other workmen with a roar of laughter. But Parry withdrew, thinking he was dreaming.

Charles was impatiently awaiting his return. At the moment he re-entered, the sentinel who guarded the door put his head through the opening, curious as to what the king was doing. The king was lying on his bed, resting on his elbow. Parry closed the door and approaching the king, his face radiant with joy:

"Sire," he said, in a low voice, "do you know who these workmen are who are making so much noise?"

"I? No; how would you have me know?"

Parry bent his head and whispered to the king: "It is the Comte de la Fere and his friends."

"Raising my scaffold!" cried the king, astounded.

"Yes, and at the same time making a hole in the wall."

The king clasped his hands and raised his eyes to Heaven; then leaping down from his bed he went to the window, and pulling aside the curtain tried to distinguish the figures outside, but in vain.

Parry was not wrong. It was Athos he had recognized, and Porthos who was boring a hole through the wall.

This hole communicated with a kind of loft--the space between the floor of the king's room and the ceiling of the one below it. Their plan was to pass through the hole they were making into this loft and cut out from below a piece of the flooring of the king's room, so as to form a kind of trap-door.

Through this the king was to escape the next night, and, hidden by the black covering of the scaffold, was to change his dress for that of a workman, slip out with his deliverers, pass the sentinels, who would suspect nothing, and so reach the skiff that was waiting for him at Greenwich.

Day gilded the tops of the houses. The aperture was finished and Athos passed through it, carrying the clothes destined for the king wrapped in black cloth, and the tools with which he was to open a communication with the king's room. He had only two hours' work to do to open communication with the king and, according to the calculations of the four friends, they had the entire day before them, since, the executioner being absent, another must be sent for to Bristol.

D'Artagnan returned to change his workman's clothes for his chestnut-colored suit, and Porthos to put on his red doublet. As for Aramis, he went off to the bishop's palace to see if he could possibly pass in with Juxon to the king's presence. All three agreed to meet at noon in Whitehall Place to see how things went on.

Before leaving the scaffold Aramis had approached the opening where Athos was concealed to tell him that he was about to make an attempt to gain another interview with the king.

"Adieu, then, and be of good courage," said Athos. "Report to the king the condition of affairs. Say to him that when he is alone it will help us if he will knock on the floor, for then I can continue my work in safety. Try, Aramis, to keep near the king. Speak loud, very loud, for they will be listening at the door. If there is a sentinel within the apartment, kill him without hesitation. If there are two, let Parry kill one and you the other. If there are three, let yourself be slain, but save the king."

"Be easy," said Aramis; "I will take two poniards and give one to Parry. Is that all?"

"Yes, go; but urge the king strongly not to stand on false generosity. While you are fighting if there is a fight, he must flee. The trap once replaced over his head, you being on the trap, dead or alive, they will need at least ten minutes to find the hole by which he has escaped. In those ten minutes we shall have gained the road and the king will be saved."

"Everything shall be done as you say, Athos. Your hand, for perhaps we shall not see each other again."

Athos put his arm around Aramis's neck and embraced him.

"For you," he said. "Now if I die, say to D'Artagnan that I love him as a son, and embrace him for me. Embrace also our good and brave Porthos. Adieu."

"Adieu," said Aramis. "I am as sure now that the king will be saved as I am sure that I clasp the most loyal hand in the world."

Aramis parted from Athos, went down from the scaffold in his turn and took his way to the hotel, whistling the air of a song in praise of Cromwell. He found the other two friends sitting at table before a good fire, drinking a bottle of port and devouring a cold chicken. Porthos was cursing the infamous parliamentarians; D'Artagnan ate in silence, revolving in his mind the most audacious plans.

Aramis related what had been agreed upon. D'Artagnan approved with a movement of the head and Porthos with his voice.

"Bravo!" he said; "besides, we shall be there at the time of the flight. What with D'Artagnan, Grimaud and Mousqueton, we can manage to dispatch eight of them. I say nothing about Blaisois, for he is only fit to hold the horses. Two minutes a man makes four minutes. Mousqueton will lose another, that’s five; and in five minutes we shall have galloped a quarter of a league.”

Aramis swallowed a hasty mouthful, gulped a glass of wine and changed his clothes.

“Now,” said he, “I’m off to the bishop’s. Take care of the executioner, D’Artagnan.”

“All right. Grimaud has relieved Mousqueton and has his foot on the cellar door.”

“Well, don’t be inactive.”

“Inactive, my dear fellow! Ask Porthos. I pass my life upon my legs.”

Aramis again presented himself at the bishop’s. Juxon consented the more readily to take him with him, as he would require an assistant priest in case the king should wish to communicate. Dressed as Aramis had been the night before, the bishop got into his carriage, and the former, more disguised by his pallor and sad countenance than his deacon’s dress, got in by his side. The carriage stopped at the door of the palace.

It was about nine o’clock in the morning.

Nothing was changed. The ante-rooms were still full of soldiers, the passages still lined by guards. The king was already sanguine, but when he perceived Aramis his hope turned to joy. He embraced Juxon and pressed the hand of Aramis. The bishop affected to speak in a loud voice, before every one, of their previous interview. The king replied that the words spoken in that interview had borne their fruit, and that he desired another under the same conditions. Juxon turned to those present and begged them to leave him and his assistant alone with the king. Every one withdrew. As soon as the door was closed:

“Sire,” said Aramis, speaking rapidly, “you are saved; the London executioner has vanished. His assistant broke his leg last night beneath your majesty’s window--the cry we heard was his--and there is no executioner nearer at hand than Bristol.”

“But the Comte de la Fere?” asked the king.

“Two feet below you; take the poker from the fireplace and strike three times on the floor. He will answer you.”

The king did so, and the moment after, three muffled knocks, answering the given signal, sounded beneath the floor.

“So,” said Charles, “he who knocks down there----”

“Is the Comte de la Fere, sire,” said Aramis. “He is preparing a way for your majesty to escape. Parry, for his part, will raise this slab of marble and a passage will be opened.”

“Oh, Juxon,” said the king, seizing the bishop’s two hands in his own, “promise that you will pray all your life for this gentleman and for the other that you hear beneath your feet, and for two others also, who, wherever they may be, are on the watch for my safety.”

“Sire,” replied Juxon, “you shall be obeyed.”

Meanwhile, the miner underneath was heard working away incessantly, when suddenly an unexpected noise resounded in the passage. Aramis seized the poker and gave the signal to stop; the noise came nearer and nearer. It was that of a number of men steadily approaching. The four men stood motionless. All eyes were fixed on the door, which opened slowly and with a kind of solemnity.

A parliamentary officer, clothed in black and with a gravity that augured ill, entered, bowed to the king, and unfolding a parchment, read the sentence, as is usually done to criminals before their execution.

“What is this?” said Aramis to Juxon.

Juxon replied with a sign which meant that he knew no more than Aramis about it.

“Then it is for to-day?” asked the king.

“Was not your majesty warned that it was to take place this morning?”

“Then I must die like a common criminal by the hand of the London executioner?”

“The London executioner has disappeared, your majesty, but a man has offered his services instead. The execution will therefore only be delayed long enough for you to arrange your spiritual and temporal affairs.”

A slight moisture on his brow was the only trace of emotion that Charles evinced, as he learned these tidings. But Aramis was livid. His heart ceased beating, he closed his eyes and leaned upon the table. Charles perceived it and took his hand.

“Come, my friend,” said he, “courage.” Then he turned to the officer. “Sir, I am ready. There is but little reason why I should delay you. Firstly, I wish to communicate; secondly, to embrace my children and bid them farewell for the last time. Will this be permitted me?”

“Certainly,” replied the officer, and left the room.

Aramis dug his nails into his flesh and groaned aloud.

“Oh! my lord bishop,” he cried, seizing Juxon’s hands, “where is Providence? where is Providence?”

“My son,” replied the bishop, with firmness, “you see Him not, because the passions of the world conceal Him.”

“My son,” said the king to Aramis, “do not take it so to heart. You ask what God is doing. God beholds your devotion and my martyrdom, and believe me, both will have their reward. Ascribe to men, then, what is happening, and not to God. It is men who drive me to death; it is men who make you weep.”

“Yes, sire,” said Aramis, “yes, you are right. It is men whom I should hold responsible, and I will hold them responsible.”

“Be seated, Juxon,” said the king, falling upon his knees. “I have now to confess to you. Remain, sir,” he added to Aramis, who had moved to leave the room. “Remain, Parry. I have nothing to say that cannot be said before all.”

Juxon sat down, and the king, kneeling humbly before him, began his confession.

CHAPTER 66.

Remember!

The mob had already assembled when the confession terminated. The king’s children next arrived--the Princess Charlotte, a beautiful, fair-haired child, with tears in her eyes, and the Duke of Gloucester, a boy eight or nine years old, whose tearless eyes and curling lip revealed a growing pride. He had wept all night long, but would not show his grief before the people.

Charles’s heart melted within him at the sight of those two children, whom he had not seen for two years and whom he now met at the moment of death. He turned to brush away a tear, and then, summoning up all his firmness, drew his daughter toward him, recommending her to be pious and resigned. Then he took the boy upon his knee.

“My son,” he said to him, “you saw a great number of people in the streets as you came here. These men are going to behead your father. Do not forget that. Perhaps some day they will want to make you king, instead of the Prince of Wales, or the Duke of York, your elder brothers. But you are not the king, my son, and can never be so while they are alive. Swear to me, then, never to let them put a crown upon your head unless you have a legal right to the crown. For one day--listen, my son--one day, if you do so, they will doom you to destruction, head and crown, too, and then you will not be able to die with a calm conscience, as I die. Swear, my son.”

The child stretched out his little hand toward that of his father and said, “I swear to your majesty.”

“Henry,” said Charles, “call me your father.”

“Father,” replied the child, “I swear to you that they shall kill me sooner than make me king.”

“Good, my child. Now kiss me; and you, too, Charlotte. Never forget me.”

“Oh! never, never!” cried both the children, throwing their arms around their father’s neck.

“Farewell,” said Charles, “farewell, my children. Take them away, Juxon; their tears will deprive me of the courage to die.”

Juxon led them away, and this time the doors were left open.

Meanwhile, Athos, in his concealment, waited in vain the signal to recommence his work. Two long hours he waited in terrible inaction. A deathlike silence reigned in the room above. At last he determined to discover the cause of this stillness. He crept from his hole and stood, hidden by the black drapery, beneath the scaffold. Peeping out from the drapery, he could see the rows of halberdiers and musketeers around the scaffold and the first ranks of the populace swaying and groaning like the sea.

“What is the matter, then?” he asked himself, trembling more than the wind-swayed cloth he was holding back. “The people are hurrying on, the soldiers under arms, and among the spectators I see D’Artagnan. What is he waiting for? What is he looking at? Good God! have they allowed the headsman to escape?”

Suddenly the dull beating of muffled drums filled the square. The sound of heavy steps was heard above his head. The next moment the very planks of the scaffold creaked with the weight of an advancing procession, and the eager faces of the spectators confirmed what a last hope at the bottom of his heart had prevented him till then believing. At the same moment a well-known voice above him pronounced these words:

“Colonel, I want to speak to the people.”

Athos shuddered from head to foot. It was the king speaking on the scaffold.

In fact, after taking a few drops of wine and a piece of bread, Charles, weary of waiting for death, had suddenly decided to go to meet it and had given the signal for movement. Then the two wings of the window facing the square had been thrown open, and the people had seen silently advancing from the interior of the vast chamber, first, a masked man, who, carrying an axe in his hand, was recognized as the executioner. He approached the block and laid his axe upon it. Behind him, pale indeed, but marching with a firm step, was Charles Stuart, who advanced between two priests, followed by a few superior officers appointed to preside at the execution and attended by two files of partisans who took their places on opposite sides of the scaffold.

The sight of the masked man gave rise to a prolonged sensation. Every one was full of curiosity as to who that unknown executioner could be who presented himself so opportunely to assure to the people the promised spectacle, when the people believed it had been postponed until the following day. All gazed at him searchingly.

But they could discern nothing but a man of middle height, dressed in black, apparently of a certain age, for the end of a gray beard peeped out from the bottom of the mask that hid his features.

The king's request had undoubtedly been acceded to by an affirmative sign, for in firm, sonorous accents, which vibrated in the depths of Athos's heart, the king began his speech, explaining his conduct and counseling the welfare of the kingdom.

"Oh!" said Athos to himself, "is it indeed possible that I hear what I hear and that I see what I see? Is it possible that God has abandoned His representative on earth and left him to die thus miserably? And I have not seen him! I have not said adieu to him!"

A noise was heard like that the instrument of death would make if moved upon the block.

"Do not touch the axe," said the king, and resumed his speech.

At the end of his speech the king looked tenderly around upon the people. Then unfastening the diamond ornament which the queen had sent him, he placed it in the hands of the priest who accompanied Juxon. Then he drew from his breast a little cross set in diamonds, which, like the order, had been the gift of Henrietta Maria.

"Sir," said he to the priest, "I shall keep this cross in my hand till the last moment. Take it from me when I am--dead."

"Yes, sire," said a voice, which Athos recognized as that of Aramis.

He then took his hat from his head and threw it on the ground. One by one he undid the buttons of his doublet, took it off and deposited it by the side of his hat. Then, as it was cold, he asked for his gown, which was brought to him.

All the preparations were made with a frightful calmness. One would have thought the king was going to bed and not to his coffin.

"Will these be in your way?" he said to the executioner, raising his long locks; "if so, they can be tied up."

Charles accompanied these words with a look designed to penetrate the mask of the unknown headsman. His calm, noble gaze forced the man to turn away his head. But after the searching look of the king he encountered the burning eyes of Aramis.

The king, seeing that he did not reply, repeated his question.

“It will do,” replied the man, in a tremulous voice, “if you separate them across the neck.”

The king parted his hair with his hands, and looking at the block he said:

“This block is very low, is there no other to be had?”

“It is the usual block,” answered the man in the mask.

“Do you think you can behead me with a single blow?” asked the king.

“I hope so,” was the reply. There was something so strange in these three words that everybody, except the king, shuddered.

“I do not wish to be taken by surprise,” added the king. “I shall kneel down to pray; do not strike then.”

“When shall I strike?”

“When I shall lay my head on the block and say ‘Remember!’ then strike boldly.”

“Gentlemen,” said the king to those around him, “I leave you to brave the tempest; I go before you to a kingdom which knows no storms. Farewell.”

He looked at Aramis and made a special sign to him with his head.

“Now,” he continued, “withdraw a little and let me say my prayer, I beseech you. You, also, stand aside,” he said to the masked man. “It is only for a moment and I know that I belong to you; but remember that you are not to strike till I give the signal.”

Then he knelt down, made the sign of the cross, and lowering his face to the planks, as if he would have kissed them, said in a low tone, in French, “Comte de la Fere, are you there?”

“Yes, your majesty,” he answered, trembling.

“Faithful friend, noble heart!” said the king, “I should not have been rescued. I have addressed my people and I have spoken to God; last of all I speak to you. To maintain a cause which I believed sacred I have lost the throne and my children their inheritance. A million in gold remains; it is buried in the cellars of Newcastle Keep. You only know that this money exists. Make use of it, then, whenever you think it will be most useful, for my eldest son’s welfare. And now, farewell.”

“Farewell, saintly, martyred majesty,” lisped Athos, chilled with terror.

A moment’s silence ensued and then, in a full, sonorous voice, the king exclaimed: “Remember!”

He had scarcely uttered the word when a heavy blow shook the scaffold and where Athos stood immovable a warm drop fell upon his brow. He reeled back with a shudder and the same moment the drops became a crimson cataract.

Athos fell on his knees and remained some minutes as if bewildered or stunned. At last he rose and taking his handkerchief steeped it in the blood of the martyred king. Then as the crowd gradually dispersed he leaped down, crept from behind the drapery, glided between two horses, mingled with the crowd and was the first to arrive at the inn.

Having gained his room he raised his hand to his face, and observing that his fingers were covered with the monarch’s blood, fell down insensible.

CHAPTER 67.

The Man in the Mask.

The snow was falling thick and icy. Aramis was the next to come in and to discover Athos almost insensible. But at the first words he uttered the comte roused himself from the kind of lethargy in which he had sunk.

“Well,” said Aramis, “beaten by fate!”

“Beaten!” said Athos. “Noble and unhappy king!”

“Are you wounded?” cried Aramis.

“No, this is his blood.”

“Where were you, then?”

“Where you left me--under the scaffold.”

“Did you see it all?”

“No, but I heard all. God preserve me from another such hour as I have just passed.”

“Then you know that I did not leave him?”

“I heard your voice up to the last moment.”

“Here is the order he gave me and the cross I took from his hand; he desired they should be returned to the queen.”

“Then here is a handkerchief to wrap them in,” replied Athos, drawing from his pocket the one he had steeped in the king’s blood.

“And what,” he continued, “has been done with the poor body?”

“By order of Cromwell royal honors will be accorded to it. The doctors are embalming the corpse, and when it is ready it will be placed in a lighted chapel.”

“Mockery,” muttered Athos, savagely; “royal honors to one whom they have murdered!”

“Well, cheer up!” said a loud voice from the staircase, which Porthos had just mounted. “We are all mortal, my poor friends.”

“You are late, my dear Porthos.”

“Yes, there were some people on the way who delayed me. The wretches were dancing. I took one of them by the throat and three-quarters throttled him. Just then a patrol rode up. Luckily the man I had had most to do with was some minutes before he could speak, so I took advantage of his silence to walk off."

"Have you seen D'Artagnan?"

"We got separated in the crowd and I could not find him again."

"Oh!" said Athos, satirically, "I saw him. He was in the front row of the crowd, admirably placed for seeing; and as on the whole the sight was curious, he probably wished to stay to the end."

"Ah Comte de la Fere," said a calm voice, though hoarse with running, "is it your habit to calumniate the absent?"

This reproof stung Athos to the heart, but as the impression produced by seeing D'Artagnan foremost in a coarse, ferocious crowd had been very strong, he contented himself with replying:

"I am not calumniating you, my friend. They were anxious about you here; I simply told them where you were. You didn't know King Charles; to you he was only a foreigner and you were not obliged to love him."

So saying, he stretched out his hand, but the other pretended not to see it and he let it drop again slowly by his side.

"Ugh! I am tired," cried D'Artagnan, sitting down.

"Drink a glass of port," said Aramis; "it will refresh you."

"Yes, let us drink," said Athos, anxious to make it up by hobnobbing with D'Artagnan, "let us drink and get away from this hateful country. The felucca is waiting for us, you know; let us leave to-night, we have nothing more to do here."

"You are in a hurry, sir count," said D'Artagnan.

"But what would you have us to do here, now that the king is dead?"

"Go, sir count," replied D'Artagnan, carelessly; "you see nothing to keep you a little longer in England? Well, for my part, I, a bloodthirsty ruffian, who can go and stand close to a scaffold, in order to have a better view of the king's execution--I remain."

Athos turned pale. Every reproach his friend uttered struck deeply in his heart.

"Ah! you remain in London?" said Porthos.

"Yes. And you?"

"Hang it!" said Porthos, a little perplexed between the two, "I suppose, as I came with you, I must go away with you. I can't leave you alone in this abominable country."

“Thanks, my worthy friend. So I have a little adventure to propose to you when the count is gone. I want to find out who was the man in the mask, who so obligingly offered to cut the king’s throat.”

“A man in a mask?” cried Athos. “You did not let the executioner escape, then?”

“The executioner is still in the cellar, where, I presume, he has had an interview with mine host’s bottles. But you remind me. Mousqueton!”

“Sir,” answered a voice from the depths of the earth.

“Let out your prisoner. All is over.”

“But,” said Athos, “who is the wretch that has dared to raise his hand against his king?”

“An amateur headsman,” replied Aramis, “who however, does not handle the axe amiss.”

“Did you not see his face?” asked Athos.

“He wore a mask.”

“But you, Aramis, who were close to him?”

“I could see nothing but a gray beard under the fringe of the mask.”

“Then it must be a man of a certain age.”

“Oh!” said D’Artagnan, “that matters little. When one puts on a mask, it is not difficult to wear a beard under it.”

“I am sorry I did not follow him,” said Porthos.

“Well, my dear Porthos,” said D’Artagnan, “that’s the very thing it came into my head to do.”

Athos understood all now.

“Pardon me, D’Artagnan,” he said. “I have distrusted God; I could the more easily distrust you. Pardon me, my friend.”

“We will see about that presently,” said D’Artagnan, with a slight smile.

“Well, then?” said Aramis.

“Well, while I was watching--not the king, as monsieur le comte thinks, for I know what it is to see a man led to death, and though I ought to be accustomed to the sight it always makes me ill--while I was watching the masked executioner, the idea came to me, as I said, to find out who he was. Now, as we are wont to complete ourselves each by all the rest and to depend on one another for assistance, as one calls his other hand to aid the first, I looked around instinctively to see if Porthos was there; for I had seen you, Aramis, with the king, and you, count, I knew would be under the scaffold, and for that reason I forgive you,” he added, offering Athos his hand, “for you must have suffered much. I was looking around for Porthos when I saw near me a head which had been broken, but which, for better or worse, had been patched with plaster and with black silk. ‘Humph!’ thought I, ‘that looks like my handiwork; I fancy I must have mended that skull somewhere or other.’ And, in fact, it was that unfortunate Scotchman, Parry’s brother, you know, on whom Groslow amused himself by trying his strength. Well, this man was making signs to another at my left, and turning around I recognized the honest Grimaud. ‘Oh!’ said I to him. Grimaud turned round with a jerk, recognized me, and pointed to the man in the mask. ‘Eh!’ said he, which meant, ‘Do you see him?’ ‘Parbleu!’ I answered, and we perfectly understood one another. Well, everything was finished as you know. The mob dispersed. I made a sign to Grimaud and the Scotchman, and we all three retired into a corner of the square. I saw the executioner return into the king’s room, change his clothes, put on a black hat and a large cloak and disappear. Five minutes later he came down the grand staircase.”

“You followed him?” cried Athos.

“I should think so, but not without difficulty. Every few minutes he turned around, and thus obliged us to conceal ourselves. I might have gone up to him and killed him. But I am not selfish, and I thought it might console you all a little to have a share in the matter. So we followed him through the lowest streets in the city, and in half an hour’s time he stopped before a little isolated house. Grimaud drew out a pistol. ‘Eh?’ said he, showing it. I held back his arm. The man in the mask stopped before a low door and drew out a key; but before he placed it in the lock he turned around to see if he was being followed. Grimaud and I got behind a tree, and the Scotchman having nowhere to hide himself, threw himself on his face in the road. Next moment the door opened and the man disappeared.”

“The scoundrel!” said Aramis. “While you have been returning hither he will have escaped and we shall never find him.”

“Come, now, Aramis,” said D’Artagnan, “you must be taking me for some one else.”

“Nevertheless,” said Athos, “in your absence----”

“Well, in my absence haven’t I put in my place Grimaud and the Scotchman? Before he had taken ten steps beyond the door I had examined the house on all sides. At one of the doors, that by which he had entered, I placed our Scotchman, making a sign to him to follow the man wherever he might go, if he came out again. Then going around the house I placed Grimaud at the other exit, and here I am. Our game is beaten up. Now for the tally-ho."

Athos threw himself into D'Artagnan's arms.

"Friend," he said, "you have been too good in pardoning me; I was wrong, a hundred times wrong. I ought to have known you better by this time; but we are all possessed of a malignant spirit, which bids us doubt."

"Humph!" said Porthos. "Don't you think the executioner might be Master Cromwell, who, to make sure of this affair, undertook it himself?"

"Ah! just so. Cromwell is stout and short, and this man thin and lanky, rather tall than otherwise."

"Some condemned soldier, perhaps," suggested Athos, "whom they have pardoned at the price of regicide."

"No, no," continued D'Artagnan, "it was not the measured step of a foot soldier, nor was it the gait of a horseman. If I am not mistaken we have to do with a gentleman."

"A gentleman!" exclaimed Athos. "Impossible! It would be a dishonor to all the nobility."

"Fine sport, by Jove!" cried Porthos, with a laugh that shook the windows. "Fine sport!"

"Are you still bent on departure, Athos?" asked D'Artagnan.

"No, I remain," replied Athos, with a threatening gesture that promised no good to whomsoever it was addressed.

"Swords, then!" cried Aramis, "swords! let us not lose a moment."

The four friends resumed their own clothes, girded on their swords, ordered Mousqueton and Blaisois to pay the bill and to arrange everything for immediate departure, and wrapped in their large cloaks left in search of their game.

The night was dark, snow was falling, the streets were silent and deserted. D'Artagnan led the way through the intricate windings and narrow alleys of the city and ere long they had reached the house in question. For a moment D'Artagnan thought that Parry's brother had disappeared; but he was mistaken. The robust Scotchman, accustomed to the snows of his native hills, had stretched himself against a post, and like a fallen statue, insensible to the inclemency of the weather, had allowed the snow to cover him. He rose, however, as they approached.

“Come,” said Athos, “here’s another good servant. Really, honest men are not so scarce as I thought.”

“Don’t be in a hurry to weave crowns for our Scotchman. I believe the fellow is here on his own account, for I have heard that these gentlemen born beyond the Tweed are very vindictive. I should not like to be Groslow, if he meets him.”

“Well?” said Athos, to the man, in English.

“No one has come out,” he replied.

“Then, Porthos and Aramis, will you remain with this man while we go around to Grimaud?”

Grimaud had made himself a kind of sentry box out of a hollow willow, and as they drew near he put his head out and gave a low whistle.

“Soho!” cried Athos.

“Yes,” said Grimaud.

“Well, has anybody come out?”

“No, but somebody has gone in.”

“A man or a woman?”

“A man.”

“Ah! ah!” said D’Artagnan, “there are two of them, then!”

“I wish there were four,” said Athos; “the two parties would then be equal.”

“Perhaps there are four,” said D’Artagnan.

“What do you mean?”

“Other men may have entered before them and waited for them.”

“We can find out,” said Grimaud. At the same time he pointed to a window, through the shutters of which a faint light streamed.

“That is true,” said D’Artagnan, “let us call the others.”

They returned around the house to fetch Porthos and Aramis.

“Have you seen anything?” they asked.

“No, but we are going to,” replied D’Artagnan, pointing to Grimaud, who had already climbed some five or six feet from the ground.

All four came up together. Grimaud continued to climb like a cat and succeeded at last in catching hold of a hook, which served to keep one of the shutters back when opened. Then resting his foot on a small ledge he made a sign to show all was right.

“Well?” asked D’Artagnan.

Grimaud showed his closed hand, with two fingers spread out.

“Speak,” said Athos; “we cannot see your signs. How many are there?”

“Two. One opposite to me, the other with his back to me.”

“Good. And the man opposite to you is----

“The man I saw go in.”

“Do you know him?”

“I thought I recognized him, and was not mistaken. Short and stout.”

“Who is it?” they all asked together in a low tone.

“General Oliver Cromwell.”

The four friends looked at one another.

“And the other?” asked Athos.

“Thin and lanky.”

“The executioner,” said D’Artagnan and Aramis at the same time.

“I can see nothing but his back,” resumed Grimaud. “But wait. He is moving; and if he has taken off his mask I shall be able to see. Ah----”

And as if struck in the heart he let go the hook and dropped with a groan.

“Did you see him?” they all asked.

“Yes,” said Grimaud, with his hair standing on end.

“The thin, spare man?”

“Yes.”

“The executioner, in short?” asked Aramis.

“Yes.”

“And who is it?” said Porthos.

“He--he--is----” murmured Grimaud, pale as a ghost and seizing his master’s hand.

“Who? He?” asked Athos.

“Mordaunt,” replied Grimaud.

D’Artagnan, Porthos and Aramis uttered a cry of joy.

Athos stepped back and passed his hand across his brow.

“Fatality!” he muttered.

CHAPTER 68.

Cromwell’s House.

It was, in fact, Mordaunt whom D’Artagnan had followed, without knowing it. On entering the house he had taken off his mask and imitation beard, then, mounting a staircase, had opened a door, and in a room lighted by a single lamp found himself face to face with a man seated behind a desk.

This man was Cromwell.

Cromwell had two or three of these retreats in London, unknown except to the most intimate of his friends. Mordaunt was among these.

“It is you, Mordaunt,” he said. “You are late.”

“General, I wished to see the ceremony to the end, which delayed me.”

“Ah! I scarcely thought you were so curious as that.”

“I am always curious to see the downfall of your honor’s enemies, and he was not among the least of them. But you, general, were you not at Whitehall?”

“No,” said Cromwell.

There was a moment’s silence.

“Have you had any account of it?”

“None. I have been here since the morning. I only know that there was a conspiracy to rescue the king.”

“Ah, you knew that?” said Mordaunt.

“It matters little. Four men, disguised as workmen, were to get the king out of prison and take him to Greenwich, where a vessel was waiting.”

“And knowing all that, your honor remained here, far from the city, tranquil and inactive.”

“Tranquil, yes,” replied Cromwell. “But who told you I was inactive?”

“But--if the plot had succeeded?”

“I wished it to do so.”

“I thought your excellence considered the death of Charles I. as a misfortune necessary to the welfare of England.”

“Yes, his death; but it would have been more seemly not upon the scaffold.”

“Why so?” asked Mordaunt.

Cromwell smiled. “Because it could have been said that I had had him condemned for the sake of justice and had let him escape out of pity.”

“But if he had escaped?”

“Impossible; my precautions were taken.”

“And does your honor know the four men who undertook to rescue him?”

“The four Frenchmen, of whom two were sent by the queen to her husband and two by Mazarin to me.”

“And do you think Mazarin commissioned them to act as they have done?”

“It is possible. But he will not avow it.”

“How so?”

“Because they failed.”

“Your honor gave me two of these Frenchmen when they were only guilty of fighting for Charles I. Now that they are guilty of a conspiracy against England will your honor give me all four of them?”

“Take them,” said Cromwell.

Mordaunt bowed with a smile of triumphant ferocity.

“Did the people shout at all?” Cromwell asked.

“Very little, except ‘Long live Cromwell!’“

“Where were you placed?”

Mordaunt tried for a moment to read in the general’s face if this was simply a useless question, or whether he knew everything. But his piercing eyes could by no means penetrate the sombre depths of Cromwell’s.

“I was so situated as to hear and see everything,” he answered.

It was now Cromwell’s turn to look fixedly at Mordaunt, and Mordaunt to make himself impenetrable.

“It appears,” said Cromwell, “that this improvised executioner did his duty remarkably well. The blow, so they tell me at least, was struck with a master’s hand.”

Mordaunt remembered that Cromwell had told him he had had no detailed account, and he was now quite convinced that the general had been present at the execution, hidden behind some screen or curtain.

“In fact,” said Mordaunt, with a calm voice and immovable countenance, “a single blow sufficed.”

“Perhaps it was some one in that occupation,” said Cromwell.

“Do you think so, sir? He did not look like an executioner.”

“And who else save an executioner would have wished to fill that horrible office?”

“But,” said Mordaunt, “it might have been some personal enemy of the king, who had made a vow of vengeance and accomplished it in this way. Perhaps it was some man of rank who had grave reasons for hating the fallen king, and who, learning that the king was about to flee and escape him, threw himself in the way, with a mask on his face and an axe in his hand, not as substitute for the executioner, but as an ambassador of Fate.”

“Possibly.”

“And if that were the case would your honor condemn his action?”

“It is not for me to judge. It rests between his conscience and his God.”

“But if your honor knew this man?”

“I neither know nor wish to know him. Provided Charles is dead, it is the axe, not the man, we must thank.”

“And yet, without the man, the king would have been rescued.”

Cromwell smiled.

“They would have carried him to Greenwich,” he said, “and put him on board a felucca with five barrels of powder in the hold. Once out to sea, you are too good a politician not to understand the rest, Mordaunt.”

“Yes, they would have all been blown up.”

“Just so. The explosion would have done what the axe had failed to do. Men would have said that the king had escaped human justice and been overtaken by God’s. You see now why I did not care to know your gentleman in the mask; for really, in spite of his excellent intentions, I could not thank him for what he has done.”

Mordaunt bowed humbly. “Sir,” he said, “you are a profound thinker and your plan was sublime.”

“Say absurd, since it has become useless. The only sublime ideas in politics are those which bear fruit. So to-night, Mordaunt, go to Greenwich and ask for the captain of the felucca Lightning. Show him a white handkerchief knotted at the four corners and tell the crew to disembark and carry the powder back to the arsenal, unless, indeed----”

“Unless?” said Mordaunt, whose face was lighted by a savage joy as Cromwell spoke:

“This skiff might be of use to you for personal projects.”

“Oh, my lord, my lord!”

“That title,” said Cromwell, laughing, “is all very well here, but take care a word like that does not escape your lips in public.”

“But your honor will soon be called so generally.”

“I hope so, at least,” said Cromwell, rising and putting on his cloak.

“You are going, sir?”

“Yes,” said Cromwell. “I slept here last night and the night before, and you know it is not my custom to sleep three times in the same bed.”

“Then,” said Mordaunt, “your honor gives me my liberty for to-night?”

“And even for all day to-morrow, if you want it. Since last evening,” he added, smiling, “you have done enough in my service, and if you have any personal matters to settle it is just that I should give you time.”

“Thank you, sir; it will be well employed, I hope.”

Cromwell turned as he was going.

“Are you armed?” he asked.

“I have my sword.”

“And no one waiting for you outside?”

“No.”

“Then you had better come with me.”

“Thank you, sir, but the way by the subterranean passage would take too much time and I have none to lose.”

Cromwell placed his hand on a hidden handle and opened a door so well concealed by the tapestry that the most practiced eye could not have discovered it. It closed after him with a spring. This door communicated with a subterranean passage, leading under the street to a grotto in the garden of a house about a hundred yards from that of the future Protector.

It was just before this that Grimaud had perceived the two men seated together.

D’Artagnan was the first to recover from his surprise.

“Mordaunt,” he cried. “Ah! by Heaven! it is God Himself who sent us here.”

“Yes,” said Porthos, “let us break the door in and fall upon him.”

“No,” replied D’Artagnan, “no noise. Now, Grimaud, you come here, climb up to the window again and tell us if Mordaunt is alone and whether he is preparing to go out or go to bed. If he comes out we shall catch him. If he stays in we will break in the window. It is easier and less noisy than the door.”

Grimaud began to scale the wall again.

"Keep guard at the other door, Athos and Aramis. Porthos and I will stay here."

The friends obeyed.

"He is alone," said Grimaud.

"We did not see his companion come out."

"He may have gone by the other door."

"What is he doing?"

"Putting on his cloak and gloves."

"He's ours," muttered D'Artagnan.

Porthos mechanically drew his dagger from the scabbard.

"Put it up again, my friend," said D'Artagnan. "We must proceed in an orderly manner."

"Hush!" said Grimaud, "he is coming out. He has put out the lamp, I can see nothing now."

"Get down then and quickly."

Grimaud leaped down. The snow deadened the noise of his fall.

"Now go and tell Athos and Aramis to stand on each side of the door and clap their hands if they catch him. We will do the same."

The next moment the door opened and Mordaunt appeared on the threshold, face to face with D'Artagnan. Porthos clapped his hands and the other two came running around. Mordaunt was livid, but he uttered no cry nor called for assistance. D'Artagnan quietly pushed him in again, and by the light of a lamp on the staircase made him ascend the steps backward one by one, keeping his eyes all the time on Mordaunt's hands, who, however, knowing that it was useless, attempted no resistance. At last they stood face to face in the very room where ten minutes before Mordaunt had been talking to Cromwell.

Porthos came up behind, and unhooking the lamp on the staircase relit that in the room. Athos and Aramis entered last and locked the door behind them.

"Oblige me by taking a seat," said D'Artagnan, pushing a chair toward Mordaunt, who sat down, pale but calm. Aramis, Porthos and D'Artagnan drew their chairs near him. Athos alone kept away and sat in the furthest corner of the room, as if determined to be merely a spectator of the proceedings. He seemed to be quite overcome. Porthos rubbed his hands in feverish impatience. Aramis bit his lips till the blood came.

D’Artagnan alone was calm, at least in appearance.

“Monsieur Mordaunt,” he said, “since, after running after one another so long, chance has at last brought us together, let us have a little conversation, if you please.”

CHAPTER 69.

Conversational.

Though Mordaunt had been so completely taken by surprise and had mounted the stairs in such utter confusion, when once seated he recovered himself, as it were, and prepared to seize any possible opportunity of escape. His eye wandered to a long stout sword on his flank and he instinctively slipped it around within reach of his right hand.

D’Artagnan was waiting for a reply to his remark and said nothing. Aramis muttered to himself, “We shall hear nothing but the usual commonplace things.”

Porthos sucked his mustache, muttering, “A good deal of ceremony to-night about crushing an adder.” Athos shrunk into his corner, pale and motionless as a bas-relief.

The silence, however, could not last forever. So D’Artagnan began:

“Sir,” he said, with desperate politeness, “it seems to me that you change your costume almost as rapidly as I have seen the Italian mummers do, whom the Cardinal Mazarin brought over from Bergamo and whom he doubtless took you to see during your travels in France.”

Mordaunt did not reply.

“Just now,” D’Artagnan continued, “you were disguised--I mean to say, attired--as a murderer, and now----”

“And now I look very much like a man who is going to be murdered.”

“Oh! sir,” said D’Artagnan, “how can you talk like that when you are in the company of gentlemen and have such an excellent sword at your side?”

“No sword is excellent enough to be of use against four swords and daggers.”

“Well, that is scarcely the question. I had the honor of asking you why you altered your costume. The mask and beard became you very well, and as to the axe, I do not think it would be out of keeping even at this moment. Why, then, have you laid it aside?”

“Because, remembering the scene at Armentieres, I thought I should find four axes for one, as I was to meet four executioners.”

“Sir,” replied D’Artagnan, in the calmest manner possible, “you are very young; I shall therefore overlook your frivolous remarks. What took place at Armentieres has no connection whatever with the present occasion. We could scarcely have requested your mother to take a sword and fight us.”

“Aha! It is a duel, then?” cried Mordaunt, as if disposed to reply at once to the provocation.

Porthos rose, always ready for this kind of adventure.

“Pardon me,” said D’Artagnan. “Do not let us do things in a hurry. We will arrange the matter rather better. Confess, Monsieur Mordaunt, that you are anxious to kill some of us.”

“All,” replied Mordaunt.

“Then, my dear sir; I am convinced that these gentlemen return your kind wishes and will be delighted to kill you also. Of course they will do so as honorable gentlemen, and the best proof I can furnish is this----”

So saying, he threw his hat on the ground, pushed back his chair to the wall and bowed to Mordaunt with true French grace.

“At your service, sir,” he continued. “My sword is shorter than yours, it’s true, but, bah! I think the arm will make up for the sword.”

“Halt!” cried Porthos coming forward. “I begin, and without any rhetoric.”

“Allow me, Porthos,” said Aramis.

Athos did not move. He might have been taken for a statue. Even his breathing seemed to be arrested.

“Gentlemen,” said D’Artagnan, “you shall have your turn. Monsieur Mordaunt dislikes you sufficiently not to refuse you afterward. You can see it in his eye. So pray keep your places, like Athos, whose calmness is entirely laudable. Besides, we will have no words about it. I have particular business to settle with this gentleman and I shall and will begin.”

Porthos and Aramis drew back, disappointed, and drawing his sword D’Artagnan turned to his adversary:

“Sir, I am waiting for you.”

“And for my part, gentlemen, I admire you. You are disputing which shall fight me first, but you do not consult me who am most concerned in the matter. I hate you all, but not equally. I hope to kill all four of you, but I am more likely to kill the first than the second, the second than the third, and the third than the last. I claim, then, the right to choose my opponent. If you refuse this right you may kill me, but I shall not fight.”

“It is but fair,” said Porthos and Aramis, hoping he would choose one of them.

Athos and D’Artagnan said nothing, but their silence seemed to imply consent.

“Well, then,” said Mordaunt, “I choose for my adversary the man who, not thinking himself worthy to be called Comte de la Fere, calls himself Athos.”

Athos sprang up, but after an instant of motionless silence he said, to the astonishment of his friends, “Monsieur Mordaunt, a duel between us is impossible. Submit this honour to somebody else.” And he sat down.

“Ah!” said Mordaunt, with a sneer, “there’s one who is afraid.”

“Zounds!” exclaimed D’Artagnan, bounding toward him, “who says that Athos is afraid?”

“Let him have his say, D’Artagnan,” said Athos, with a smile of sadness and contempt.

“Is it your decision, Athos?” resumed the Gascon.

“Irrevocably.”

“You hear, sir,” said D’Artagnan, turning to Mordaunt. “The Comte de la Fere will not do you the honor of fighting with you. Choose one of us to replace the Comte de la Fere.”

“As long as I don’t fight with him it is the same to me with whom I fight. Put your names into a hat and draw lots.”

“A good idea,” said D’Artagnan.

“At least that will conciliate us all,” said Aramis.

“I should never have thought of that,” said Porthos, “and yet it is very simple.”

“Come, Aramis,” said D’Artagnan, “write this for us in those neat little characters in which you wrote to Marie Michon that the mother of this gentleman intended to assassinate the Duke of Buckingham.”

Mordaunt sustained this new attack without wincing. He stood with his arms folded, apparently as calm as any man could be in such circumstances. If he had not courage he had what is very like it, namely, pride.

Aramis went to Cromwell’s desk, tore off three bits of paper of equal size, wrote on the first his own name and on the others those of his two companions, and presented them open to Mordaunt, who by a movement of his head indicated that he left the matter entirely to Aramis. He then rolled them separately and put them in a hat, which he handed to Mordaunt.

Mordaunt put his hand into the hat, took out one of the three papers and disdainfully dropped it on the table without reading it.

"Ah! serpent," muttered D'Artagnan, "I would give my chance of a captaincy in the mousquetaires for that to be my name."

Aramis opened the paper, and in a voice trembling with hate and vengeance read "D'Artagnan."

The Gascon uttered a cry of joy and turning to Mordaunt:

"I hope, sir," said he, "you have no objection to make."

"None, whatever," replied the other, drawing his sword and resting the point on his boot.

The moment that D'Artagnan saw that his wish was accomplished and his man would not escape him, he recovered his usual tranquillity. He turned up his cuffs neatly and rubbed the sole of his right boot on the floor, but did not fail, however, to remark that Mordaunt was looking about him in a singular manner.

"Are you ready, sir?" he said at last.

"I was waiting for you, sir," said Mordaunt, raising his head and casting at his opponent a look it would be impossible to describe.

"Well, then," said the Gascon, "take care of yourself, for I am not a bad hand at the rapier."

"Nor I either."

"So much the better; that sets my mind at rest. Defend yourself."

"One minute," said the young man. "Give me your word, gentlemen, that you will not attack me otherwise than one after the other."

"Is it to have the pleasure of insulting us that you say that, my little viper?"

"No, but to set my mind at rest, as you observed just now."

"It is for something else than that, I imagine," muttered D'Artagnan, shaking his head doubtfully.

"On the honor of gentlemen," said Aramis and Porthos.

"In that case, gentlemen, have the kindness to retire into the corners, so as to give us ample room. We shall require it."

"Yes, gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, "we must not leave this person the slightest pretext for behaving badly, which, with all due respect, I fancy he is anxious still to do."

This new attack made no impression on Mordaunt. The space was cleared, the two lamps placed on Cromwell's desk, in order that the combatants might have as much light as possible; and the swords crossed.

D’Artagnan was too good a swordsman to trifle with his opponent. He made a rapid and brilliant feint which Mordaunt parried.

“Aha!” he cried with a smile of satisfaction.

And without losing a minute, thinking he saw an opening, he thrust his right in and forced Mordaunt to parry a counter en quarte so fine that the point of the weapon might have turned within a wedding ring.

This time it was Mordaunt who smiled.

“Ah, sir,” said D’Artagnan, “you have a wicked smile. It must have been the devil who taught it you, was it not?”

Mordaunt replied by trying his opponent’s weapon with an amount of strength which the Gascon was astonished to find in a form apparently so feeble; but thanks to a parry no less clever than that which Mordaunt had just achieved, he succeeded in meeting his sword, which slid along his own without touching his chest.

Mordaunt rapidly sprang back a step.

“Ah! you lose ground, you are turning? Well, as you please, I even gain something by it, for I no longer see that wicked smile of yours. You have no idea what a false look you have, particularly when you are afraid. Look at my eyes and you will see what no looking-glass has ever shown you--a frank and honorable countenance.”

To this flow of words, not perhaps in the best taste, but characteristic of D’Artagnan, whose principal object was to divert his opponent’s attention, Mordaunt did not reply, but continuing to turn around he succeeded in changing places with D’Artagnan.

He smiled more and more sarcastically and his smile began to make the Gascon anxious.

“Come, come,” cried D’Artagnan, “we must finish with this,” and in his turn he pressed Mordaunt hard, who continued to lose ground, but evidently on purpose and without letting his sword leave the line for a moment. However, as they were fighting in a room and had not space to go on like that forever, Mordaunt’s foot at last touched the wall, against which he rested his left hand.

“Ah, this time you cannot lose ground, my fine friend!” exclaimed D’Artagnan. “Gentlemen, did you ever see a scorpion pinned to a wall? No. Well, then, you shall see it now.”

In a second D’Artagnan had made three terrible thrusts at Mordaunt, all of which touched, but only pricked him. The three friends looked on, panting and astonished. At last D’Artagnan, having got up too close, stepped back to prepare a fourth thrust, but the moment when, after a fine, quick feint, he was attacking as sharply as lightning, the wall seemed to give way, Mordaunt disappeared through the opening, and D’Artagnan’s blade, caught between the panels, shivered like a sword of glass. D’Artagnan sprang back; the wall had closed again.

Mordaunt, in fact, while defending himself, had manoeuvred so as to reach the secret door by which Cromwell had left, had felt for the knob with his left hand, pressed it and disappeared.

The Gascon uttered a furious imprecation, which was answered by a wild laugh on the other side of the iron panel.

“Help me, gentlemen,” cried D’Artagnan, “we must break in this door.”

“It is the devil in person!” said Aramis, hastening forward.

“He escapes us,” growled Porthos, pushing his huge shoulder against the hinges, but in vain. “‘Sblood! he escapes us.”

“So much the better,” muttered Athos.

“I thought as much,” said D’Artagnan, wasting his strength in useless efforts. “Zounds, I thought as much when the wretch kept moving around the room. I thought he was up to something.”

“It’s a misfortune, to which his friend, the devil, treats us,” said Aramis.

“It’s a piece of good fortune sent from Heaven,” said Athos, evidently much relieved.

“Really!” said D’Artagnan, abandoning the attempt to burst open the panel after several ineffectual attempts, “Athos, I cannot imagine how you can talk to us in that way. You cannot understand the position we are in. In this kind of game, not to kill is to let one’s self be killed. This fox of a fellow will be sending us a hundred iron-sided beasts who will pick us off like sparrows in this place. Come, come, we must be off. If we stay here five minutes more there’s an end of us.”

“Yes, you are right.”

“But where shall we go?” asked Porthos.

“To the hotel, to be sure, to get our baggage and horses; and from there, if it please God, to France, where, at least, I understand the architecture of the houses.”

So, suiting the action to the word, D’Artagnan thrust the remnant of his sword into its scabbard, picked up his hat and ran down the stairs, followed by the others.

CHAPTER 70.

The Skiff “Lightning.”

D’Artagnan had judged correctly; Mordaunt felt that he had no time to lose, and he lost none. He knew the rapidity of decision and action that characterized his enemies and resolved to act with reference to that. This time the musketeers had an adversary who was worthy of them.

After closing the door carefully behind him Mordaunt glided into the subterranean passage, sheathing on the way his now useless sword, and thus reached the neighboring house, where he paused to examine himself and to take breath.

“Good!” he said, “nothing, almost nothing--scratches, nothing more; two in the arm and one in the breast. The wounds that I make are better than that--witness the executioner of Bethune, my uncle and King Charles. Now, not a second to lose, for a second lost will perhaps save them. They must die--die all together--killed at one stroke by the thunder of men in default of God’s. They must disappear, broken, scattered, annihilated. I will run, then, till my legs no longer serve, till my heart bursts in my bosom but I will arrive before they do.”

Mordaunt proceeded at a rapid pace to the nearest cavalry barracks, about a quarter of a league distant. He made that quarter of a league in four or five minutes. Arrived at the barracks he made himself known, took the best horse in the stables, mounted and gained the high road. A quarter of an hour later he was at Greenwich.

“There is the port,” he murmured. “That dark point yonder is the Isle of Dogs. Good! I am half an hour in advance of them, an hour, perhaps. Fool that I was! I have almost killed myself by my needless haste. Now,” he added, rising in the stirrups and looking about him, “which, I wonder, is the Lightning?”

At this moment, as if in reply to his words, a man lying on a coil of cables rose and advanced a few steps toward him. Mordaunt drew a handkerchief from his pocket, and tying a knot at each corner--the signal agreed upon--waved it in the air and the man came up to him. He was wrapped in a large rough cape, which concealed his form and partly his face.

“Do you wish to go on the water, sir?” said the sailor.

“Yes, just so. Along the Isle of Dogs.”

“And perhaps you have a preference for one boat more than another. You would like one that sails as rapidly as----”

“Lightning,” interrupted Mordaunt.

“Then mine is the boat you want, sir. I’m your man.”

“I begin to think so, particularly if you have not forgotten a certain signal.”

“Here it is, sir,” and the sailor took from his coat a handkerchief, tied at each corner.

“Good, quite right!” cried Mordaunt, springing off his horse. “There’s not a moment to lose; now take my horse to the nearest inn and conduct me to your vessel.”

“But,” asked the sailor, “where are your companions? I thought there were four of you.”

“Listen to me, sir. I’m not the man you take me for; you are in Captain Rogers’s post, are you not? under orders from General Cromwell. Mine, also, are from him!”

“Indeed, sir, I recognize you; you are Captain Mordaunt.”

Mordaunt was startled.

“Oh, fear nothing,” said the skipper, showing his face. “I am a friend.”

“Captain Groslow!” cried Mordaunt.

“Himself. The general remembered that I had formerly been a naval officer and he gave me the command of this expedition. Is there anything new in the wind?”

“Nothing.”

“I thought, perhaps, that the king’s death----”

“Has only hastened their flight; in ten minutes they will perhaps be here.”

“What have you come for, then?”

“To embark with you.”

“Ah! ah! the general doubted my fidelity?”

“No, but I wish to have a share in my revenge. Haven’t you some one who will relieve me of my horse?”

Groslow whistled and a sailor appeared.

“Patrick,” said Groslow, “take this horse to the stables of the nearest inn. If any one asks you whose it is you can say that it belongs to an Irish gentleman.”

The sailor departed without reply.

“Now,” said Mordaunt, “are you not afraid that they will recognize you?”

“There is no danger, dressed as I am in this pilot coat, on a night as dark as this. Besides even you didn’t recognize me; they will be much less likely to.”

“That is true,” said Mordaunt, “and they will be far from thinking of you. Everything is ready, is it not?”

“Yes.”

“The cargo on board?”

“Yes.”

“Five full casks?”

“And fifty empty ones.”

“Good.”

“We are carrying port wine to Anvers.”

“Excellent. Now take me aboard and return to your post, for they will soon be here.”

“I am ready.”

“It is important that none of your crew should see me.”

“I have but one man on board, and I am as sure of him as I am of myself. Besides, he doesn’t know you; like his mates he is ready to obey our orders knowing nothing of our plan.”

“Very well; let us go.”

They then went down to the Thames. A boat was fastened to the shore by a chain fixed to a stake. Groslow jumped in, followed by Mordaunt, and in five minutes they were quite away from that world of houses which then crowded the outskirts of London; and Mordaunt could discern the little vessel riding at anchor near the Isle of Dogs. When they reached the side of this felucca, Mordaunt, dexterous in his eagerness for vengeance, seized a rope and climbed up the side of the vessel with a coolness and agility very rare among landsmen. He went with Groslow to the captain’s berth, a sort of temporary cabin of planks, for the chief apartment had been given up by Captain Rogers to the passengers, who were to be accommodated at the other end of the boat.

“They will have nothing to do, then at this end?” said Mordaunt.

“Nothing at all.”

“That’s a capital arrangement. Return to Greenwich and bring them here. I shall hide myself in your cabin. You have a longboat?”

“That in which we came.”

“It appeared light and well constructed.”

“Quite a canoe.”

“Fasten it to the poop with a rope; put the oars into it, so that it may follow in the track and there will be nothing to do except to cut the cord. Put a good supply of rum and biscuit in it for the seamen; should the night happen to be stormy they will not be sorry to find something to console themselves with.”

“Consider all this done. Do you wish to see the powder-room?”

“No. When you return I will set the fuse myself, but be careful to conceal your face, so that you cannot be recognized by them.”

“Never fear.”

“There’s ten o’clock striking at Greenwich.”

Groslow, then, having given the sailor on duty an order to be on the watch with more than usual vigilance, went down into the longboat and soon reached Greenwich. The wind was chilly and the jetty was deserted, as he approached it; but he had no sooner landed than he heard a noise of horses galloping upon the paved road.

These horsemen were our friends, or rather, an avant garde, composed of D’Artagnan and Athos. As soon as they arrived at the spot where Groslow stood they stopped, as if guessing that he was the man they wanted. Athos alighted and calmly opened the handkerchief tied at each corner, whilst D’Artagnan, ever cautious, remained on horseback, one hand upon his pistol, leaning forward watchfully.

On seeing the appointed signal, Groslow, who had at first crept behind one of the cannon planted on that spot, walked straight up to the gentlemen. He was so well wrapped up in his cloak that it would have been impossible to see his face even if the night had not been so dark as to render precaution superfluous; nevertheless, the keen glance of Athos perceived at once it was not Rogers who stood before them.

“What do you want with us?” he asked of Groslow.

“I wish to inform you, my lord,” replied Groslow, with an Irish accent, feigned of course, “that if you are looking for Captain Rogers you will not find him. He fell down this morning and broke his leg. But I’m his cousin;

he told me everything and desired me to watch instead of him, and in his place to conduct, wherever they wished to go, the gentlemen who should bring me a handkerchief tied at each corner, like that one which you hold and one which I have in my pocket.”

And he drew out the handkerchief.

“Was that all he said?” inquired Athos.

“No, my lord; he said you had engaged to pay seventy pounds if I landed you safe and sound at Boulogne or any other port you choose in France.”

“What do you think of all this?” said Athos, in a low tone to D’Artagnan, after explaining to him in French what the sailor had said in English.

“It seems a likely story to me.”

“And to me, too.”

“Besides, we can but blow out his brains if he proves false,” said the Gascon; “and you, Athos, you know something of everything and can be our captain. I dare say you know how to navigate, should he fail us.”

“My dear friend, you guess well. My father meant me for the navy and I have some vague notions about navigation.”

“You see!” cried D’Artagnan.

They then summoned their friends, who, with Blaisois, Mousqueton and Grimaud, promptly joined them, leaving Parry behind them, who was to take back to London the horses of the gentlemen and of their lackeys, which had been sold to the host in settlement of their account with him. Thanks to this stroke of business the four friends were able to take away with them a sum of money which, if not large, was sufficient as a provision against delays and accidents.

Parry parted from his friends regretfully; they had proposed his going with them to France, but he had straightway declined.

“It is very simple,” Mousqueton had said; “he is thinking of Groslow.”

It was Captain Groslow, the reader will remember, who had broken Parry’s head.

D’Artagnan resumed immediately the attitude of distrust that was habitual with him. He found the wharf too completely deserted, the night too dark, the captain too accommodating. He had reported to Aramis what had taken place, and Aramis, not less distrustful than he, had increased his suspicions. A slight click of the tongue against his teeth informed Athos of the Gascon’s uneasiness.

"We have no time now for suspicions," said Athos. "The boat is waiting for us; come."

"Besides," said Aramis, "what prevents our being distrustful and going aboard at the same time? We can watch the skipper."

"And if he doesn't go straight I will crush him, that's all."

"Well said, Porthos," replied D'Artagnan. "Let us go, then. You first, Mousqueton," and he stopped his friends, directing the valets to go first, in order to test the plank leading from the pier to the boat.

The three valets passed without accident. Athos followed them, then Porthos, then Aramis. D'Artagnan went last, still shaking his head.

"What in the devil is the matter with you, my friend?" said Porthos. "Upon my word you would make Caesar afraid."

"The matter is," replied D'Artagnan, "that I can see upon this pier neither inspector nor sentinel nor exciseman."

"And you complain of that!" said Porthos. "Everything goes as if in flowery paths."

"Everything goes too well, Porthos. But no matter; we must trust in God."

As soon as the plank was withdrawn the captain took his place at the tiller and made a sign to one of the sailors, who, boat-hook in hand, began to push out from the labyrinth of boats in which they were involved. The other sailor had already seated himself on the port side and was ready to row. As soon as there was room for rowing, his companion rejoined him and the boat began to move more rapidly.

"At last we are off!" exclaimed Porthos.

"Alas," said Athos, "we depart alone."

"Yes; but all four together and without a scratch; which is a consolation."

"We are not yet at our destination," observed the prudent D'Artagnan; "beware of misadventure."

"Ah, my friend!" cried Porthos, "like the crows, you always bring bad omens. Who could intercept us on such a night as this, pitch dark, when one does not see more than twenty yards before one?"

"Yes, but to-morrow morning----"

"To-morrow we shall be at Boulogne."

"I hope so, with all my heart," said the Gascon, "and I confess my weakness. Yes, Athos, you may laugh, but as long as we were within gunshot of the pier or of the vessels lying by it I was looking for a frightful discharge of musketry which would crush us.”

“But,” said Porthos, with great wisdom, “that was impossible, for they would have killed the captain and the sailors.”

“Bah! much Monsieur Mordaunt would care. You don’t imagine he would consider a little thing like that?”

“At any rate,” said Porthos, “I am glad to hear D’Artagnan admit that he is afraid.”

“I not only confess it, but am proud of it,” returned the Gascon; “I’m not such a rhinoceros as you are. Oho! what’s that?”

“The Lightning,” answered the captain, “our felucca.”

“So far, so good,” laughed Athos.

They went on board and the captain instantly conducted them to the berth prepared for them--a cabin which was to serve for all purposes and for the whole party; he then tried to slip away under pretext of giving orders to some one.

“Stop a moment,” cried D’Artagnan; “pray how many men have you on board, captain?”

“I don’t understand,” was the reply.

“Explain it, Athos.”

Groslow, on the question being interpreted, answered, “Three, without counting myself.”

D’Artagnan understood, for while replying the captain had raised three fingers. “Oh!” he exclaimed, “I begin to be more at my ease, however, whilst you settle yourselves, I shall make the round of the boat.”

“As for me,” said Porthos, “I will see to the supper.”

“A very good idea, Porthos,” said the Gascon. “Athos lend me Grimaud, who in the society of his friend Parry has perhaps picked up a little English, and can act as my interpreter.”

“Go, Grimaud,” said Athos.

D’Artagnan, finding a lantern on the deck, took it up and with a pistol in his hand he said to the captain, in English, “Come,” (being, with the classic English oath, the only English words he knew), and so saying he descended to the lower deck.

This was divided into three compartments--one which was covered by the floor of that room in which Athos, Porthos and Aramis were to pass the night; the second was to serve as the sleeping-room for the servants, the third, under the prow of the ship, was under the temporary cabin in which Mordaunt was concealed.

“Oho!” cried D’Artagnan, as he went down the steps of the hatchway, preceded by the lantern, “what a number of barrels! one would think one was in the cave of Ali Baba. What is there in them?” he added, putting his lantern on one of the casks.

The captain seemed inclined to go upon deck again, but controlling himself he answered:

“Port wine.”

“Ah! port wine! ‘tis a comfort,” said the Gascon, “since we shall not die of thirst. Are they all full?”

Grimaud translated the question, and Groslow, who was wiping the perspiration from off his forehead, answered:

“Some full, others empty.”

D’Artagnan struck the barrels with his hand, and having ascertained that he spoke the truth, pushed his lantern, greatly to the captain’s alarm, into the interstices between the barrels, and finding that there was nothing concealed in them:

“Come along,” he said; and he went toward the door of the second compartment.

“Stop!” said the Englishman, “I have the key of that door;” and he opened the door, with a trembling hand, into the second compartment, where Mousqueton and Blaisois were preparing supper.

Here there was evidently nothing to seek or to apprehend and they passed rapidly to examine the third compartment.

This was the room appropriated to the sailors. Two or three hammocks hung upon the ceiling, a table and two benches composed the entire furniture. D’Artagnan picked up two or three old sails hung on the walls, and meeting nothing to suspect, regained by the hatchway the deck of the vessel.

“And this room?” he asked, pointing to the captain’s cabin.

“That’s my room,” replied Groslow.

“Open the door.”

The captain obeyed. D’Artagnan stretched out his arm in which he held the lantern, put his head in at the half opened door, and seeing that the cabin was nothing better than a shed:

“Good,” he said. “If there is an army on board it is not here that it is hidden. Let us see what Porthos has found for supper.” And thanking the captain, he regained the state cabin, where his friends were.

Porthos had found nothing, and with him fatigue had prevailed over hunger. He had fallen asleep and was in a profound slumber when D’Artagnan returned. Athos and Aramis were beginning to close their eyes, which they half opened when their companion came in again.

“Well!” said Aramis.

“All is well; we may sleep tranquilly.”

On this assurance the two friends fell asleep; and D’Artagnan, who was very weary, bade good-night to Grimaud and laid himself down in his cloak, with naked sword at his side, in such a manner that his body barricaded the passage, and it should be impossible to enter the room without upsetting him.

CHAPTER 71.

Port Wine.

In ten minutes the masters slept; not so the servants---hungry, and more thirsty than hungry.

Blaisois and Mousqueton set themselves to preparing their bed which consisted of a plank and a valise. On a hanging table, which swung to and fro with the rolling of the vessel, were a pot of beer and three glasses.

“This cursed rolling!” said Blaisois. “I know it will serve me as it did when we came over.”

“And to think,” said Mousqueton, “that we have nothing to fight seasickness with but barley bread and hop beer. Pah!”

“But where is your wicker flask, Monsieur Mousqueton? Have you lost it?” asked Blaisois.

“No,” replied Mousqueton, “Parry kept it. Those devilish Scotchmen are always thirsty. And you, Grimaud,” he said to his companion, who had just come in after his round with D’Artagnan, “are you thirsty?”

“As thirsty as a Scotchman!” was Grimaud’s laconic reply.

And he sat down and began to cast up the accounts of his party, whose money he managed.

“Oh, lackadaisy! I’m beginning to feel queer!” cried Blaisois.

“If that’s the case,” said Mousqueton, with a learned air, “take some nourishment.”

“Do you call that nourishment?” said Blaisois, pointing to the barley bread and pot of beer upon the table.

“Blaisois,” replied Mousqueton, “remember that bread is the true nourishment of a Frenchman, who is not always able to get bread, ask Grimaud.”

“Yes, but beer?” asked Blaisois sharply, “is that their true drink?”

“As to that,” answered Mousqueton, puzzled how to get out of the difficulty, “I must confess that to me beer is as disagreeable as wine is to the English.”

“What! Monsieur Mousqueton! The English--do they dislike wine?”

“They hate it.”

“But I have seen them drink it.”

“As a punishment. For example, an English prince died one day because they had put him into a butt of Malmsey. I heard the Chevalier d’Herblay say so.”

“The fool!” cried Blaisois, “I wish I had been in his place.”

“Thou canst be,” said Grimaud, writing down his figures.

“How?” asked Blaisois, “I can? Explain yourself.”

Grimaud went on with his sum and cast up the whole.

“Port,” he said, extending his hand in the direction of the first compartment examined by D’Artagnan and himself.

“Eh? eh? ah? Those barrels I saw through the door?”

“Port!” replied Grimaud, beginning a fresh sum.

“I have heard,” said Blaisois, “that port is a very good wine.”

“Excellent!” exclaimed Mousqueton, smacking his lips. “Excellent; there is port wine in the cellar of Monsieur le Baron de Bracieux.”

“Suppose we ask these Englishmen to sell us a bottle,” said the honest Blaisois.

“Sell!” cried Mousqueton, about whom there was a remnant of his ancient marauding character left. “One may well perceive, young man, that you are inexperienced. Why buy what one can take?”

“Take!” said Blaisois; “covet the goods of your neighbor? That is forbidden, it seems to me.”

“Where forbidden?” asked Mousqueton.

“In the commandments of God, or of the church, I don’t know which. I only know it says, ‘Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s goods, nor yet his wife.’“

“That is a child’s reason, Monsieur Blaisois,” said Mousqueton in his most patronizing manner. “Yes, you talk like a child--I repeat the word. Where have you read in the Scriptures, I ask you, that the English are your neighbors?”

“Where, that is true,” said Blaisois; “at least, I can’t now recall it.”

“A child’s reason--I repeat it,” continued Mousqueton. “If you had been ten years engaged in war, as Grimaud and I have been, my dear Blaisois, you would know the difference there is between the goods of others and the goods of enemies. Now an Englishman is an enemy; this port wine belongs to the English, therefore it belongs to us.”

“And our masters?” asked Blaisois, stupefied by this harangue, delivered with an air of profound sagacity, “will they be of your opinion?”

Mousqueton smiled disdainfully.

“I suppose that you think it necessary that I should disturb the repose of these illustrious lords to say, ‘Gentlemen, your servant, Mousqueton, is thirsty.’ What does Monsieur Bracieux care, think you, whether I am thirsty or not?”

“‘Tis a very expensive wine,” said Blaisois, shaking his head.

“Were it liquid gold, Monsieur Blaisois, our masters would not deny themselves this wine. Know that Monsieur de Bracieux is rich enough to drink a tun of port wine, even if obliged to pay a pistole for every drop.” His manner became more and more lofty every instant; then he arose and after finishing off the beer at one draught he advanced majestically to the door of the compartment where the wine was. “Ah! locked!” he exclaimed; “these devils of English, how suspicious they are!”

“Locked!” said Blaisois; “ah! the deuce it is; unlucky, for my stomach is getting more and more upset.”

“Locked!” repeated Mousqueton.

“But,” Blaisois ventured to say, “I have heard you relate, Monsieur Mousqueton, that once on a time, at Chantilly, you fed your master and yourself by taking partridges in a snare, carp with a line, and bottles with a slipnoose.”

“Perfectly true; but there was an airhole in the cellar and the wine was in bottles. I cannot throw the loop through this partition nor move with a pack-thread a cask of wine which may perhaps weigh two hundred pounds.”

“No, but you can take out two or three boards of the partition,” answered Blaisois, “and make a hole in the cask with a gimlet.”

Mousqueton opened his great round eyes to the utmost, astonished to find in Blaisois qualities for which he did not give him credit.

“‘Tis true,” he said; “but where can I get a chisel to take the planks out, a gimlet to pierce the cask?”

“Trousers,” said Grimaud, still squaring his accounts.

“Ah, yes!” said Mousqueton.

Grimaud, in fact, was not only the accountant, but the armorer of the party; and as he was a man full of forethought, these trousers, carefully rolled up in his valise, contained every sort of tool for immediate use.

Mousqueton, therefore, was soon provided with tools and he began his task. In a few minutes he had extracted three boards. He tried to pass his body through the aperture, but not being like the frog in the fable, who thought he was larger than he really was, he found he must take out three or four more before he could get through.

He sighed and set to work again.

Grimaud had now finished his accounts. He arose and stood near Mousqueton.

“I,” he said.

“What?” said Mousqueton.

“I can pass.”

“That is true,” said Mousqueton, glancing at his friend’s long and thin body, “you will pass easily.”

“And he knows the full casks,” said Blaisois, “for he has already been in the hold with Monsieur le Chevalier d’Artagnan. Let Monsieur Grimaud go in, Monsieur Mouston.”

“I could go in as well as Grimaud,” said Mousqueton, a little piqued.

“Yes, but that would take too much time and I am thirsty. I am getting more and more seasick.”

“Go in, then, Grimaud,” said Mousqueton, handing him the beer pot and gimlet.

“Rinse the glasses,” said Grimaud. Then with a friendly gesture toward Mousqueton, that he might forgive him for finishing an enterprise so brilliantly begun by another, he glided like a serpent through the opening and disappeared.

Blaisois was in a state of great excitement; he was in ecstasies. Of all the exploits performed since their arrival in England by the extraordinary men with whom he had the honor to be associated, this seemed without question to be the most wonderful.

“You are about to see,” said Mousqueton, looking at Blaisois with an expression of superiority which the latter did not even think of questioning, “you are about to see, Blaisois, how we old soldiers drink when we are thirsty.”

“My cloak,” said Grimaud, from the bottom of the hold.

“What do you want?” asked Blaisois.

“My cloak--stop up the aperture with it.”

“Why?” asked Blaisois.

“Simpleton!” exclaimed Mousqueton; “suppose any one came into the room.”

“Ah, true,” cried Blaisois, with evident admiration; “but it will be dark in the cellar.”

“Grimaud always sees, dark or light, night as well as day,” answered Mousqueton.

“That is lucky,” said Blaisois. “As for me, when I have no candle I can’t take two steps without knocking against something.”

“That’s because you haven’t served,” said Mousqueton. “Had you been in the army you would have been able to pick up a needle on the floor of a closed oven. But hark! I think some one is coming.”

Mousqueton made, with a low whistling sound, the sign of alarm well known to the lackeys in the days of their youth, resumed his place at the table and made a sign to Blaisois to follow his example.

Blaisois obeyed.

The door of their cabin was opened. Two men, wrapped in their cloaks, appeared.

“Oho!” said they, “not in bed at a quarter past eleven. That’s against all rules. In a quarter of an hour let every one be in bed and snoring.”

These two men then went toward the compartment in which Grimaud was secreted; opened the door, entered and shut it after them.

“Ah!” cried Blaisois, “he is lost!”

“Grimaud’s a cunning fellow,” murmured Mousqueton.

They waited for ten minutes, during which time no noise was heard that might indicate that Grimaud was discovered, and at the expiration of that anxious interval the two men returned, closed the door after them, and repeating their orders that the servants should go to bed and extinguish their lights, disappeared.

“Shall we obey?” asked Blaisois. “All this looks suspicious.”

“They said a quarter of an hour. We still have five minutes,” replied Mousqueton.

“Suppose we warn the masters.”

“Let’s wait for Grimaud.”

“But perhaps they have killed him.”

“Grimaud would have cried out.”

“You know he is almost dumb.”

“We should have heard the blow, then.”

“But if he doesn’t return?”

“Here he is.”

At that very moment Grimaud drew back the cloak which hid the aperture and came in with his face livid, his eyes staring wide open with terror, so that the pupils were contracted almost to nothing, with a large circle of white around them. He held in his hand a tankard full of a dark substance, and approaching the gleam of light shed by the lamp he uttered this single monosyllable: “Oh!” with such an expression of extreme terror that Mousqueton started, alarmed, and Blaisois was near fainting from fright.

Both, however, cast an inquisitive glance into the tankard--it was full of gunpowder.

Convinced that the ship was full of powder instead of having a cargo of wine, Grimaud hastened to awake D’Artagnan, who had no sooner beheld him than he perceived that something extraordinary had taken place. Imposing silence, Grimaud put out the little night lamp, then knelt down and poured into the lieutenant’s ear a recital melodramatic enough not to require play of feature to give it pith.

This was the gist of his strange story:

The first barrel that Grimaud had found on passing into the compartment he struck--it was empty. He passed on to another--it, also, was empty, but the third which he tried was, from the dull sound it gave out, evidently full. At this point Grimaud stopped and was preparing to make a hole with his gimlet, when he found a spigot; he therefore placed his tankard under it and turned the spout; something, whatever it was the cask contained, fell silently into the tankard.

Whilst he was thinking that he should first taste the liquor which the tankard contained before taking it to his companions, the door of the cellar opened and a man with a lantern in his hands and enveloped in a cloak, came and stood just before the hogshead, behind which Grimaud, on hearing him come in, instantly crept. This was Groslow. He was accompanied by another man, who carried in his hand something long and flexible rolled up, resembling a washing line. His face was hidden under the wide brim of his hat. Grimaud, thinking that they had come, as he had, to try the port wine, effaced himself behind his cask and consoled himself with the reflection that if he were discovered the crime was not a great one.

“Have you the wick?” asked the one who carried the lantern.

“Here it is,” answered the other.

At the voice of this last speaker, Grimaud started and felt a shudder creeping through his very marrow. He rose gently, so that his head was just above the round of the barrel, and under the large hat he recognized the pale face of Mordaunt.

“How long will this fuse burn?” asked this person.

“About five minutes,” replied the captain.

That voice also was known to Grimaud. He looked from one to the other and after Mordaunt he recognized Groslow.

“Then tell the men to be in readiness--don’t tell them why now. When the clock strikes a quarter after midnight collect your men. Get down into the longboat.”

“That is, when I have lighted the match?”

“I will undertake that. I wish to be sure of my revenge. Are the oars in the boat?”

“Everything is ready.”

“‘Tis well.”

Mordaunt knelt down and fastened one end of the train to the spigot, in order that he might have nothing to do but to set it on fire at the opposite end with the match.

He then arose.

“You hear me--at a quarter past midnight--in fact, in twenty minutes.”

“I understand all perfectly, sir,” replied Groslow; “but allow me to say there is great danger in what you undertake; would it not be better to intrust one of the men to set fire to the train?”

“My dear Groslow,” answered Mordaunt, “you know the French proverb, ‘Nothing one does not do one’s self is ever well done.’ I shall abide by that rule.”

Grimaud had heard all this, if he had not understood it. But what he saw made good what he lacked in perfect comprehension of the language. He had seen the two mortal enemies of the musketeers, had seen Mordaunt adjust the fuse; he had heard the proverb, which Mordaunt had given in French. Then he felt and felt again the contents of the tankard he held in his hand; and, instead of the lively liquor expected by Blaisois and Mousqueton, he found beneath his fingers the grains of some coarse powder.

Mordaunt went away with the captain. At the door he stopped to listen.

“Do you hear how they sleep?” he asked.

In fact, Porthos could be heard snoring through the partition.

“‘Tis God who gives them into our hands,” answered Groslow.

“This time the devil himself shall not save them,” rejoined Mordaunt.

And they went out together.

CHAPTER 72.

End of the Port Wine Mystery.

Grimaud waited till he heard the bolt grind in the lock and when he was satisfied that he was alone he slowly rose from his recumbent posture.

“Ah!” he said, wiping with his sleeve large drops of sweat from his forehead, “how lucky it was that Mousqueton was thirsty!”

He made haste to pass out by the opening, still thinking himself in a dream; but the sight of the gunpowder in the tankard proved to him that his dream was a fatal nightmare.

It may be imagined that D’Artagnan listened to these details with increasing interest; before Grimaud had finished he rose without noise and putting his mouth to Aramis’s ear, and at the same time touching him on the shoulder to prevent a sudden movement:

“Chevalier,” he said, “get up and don’t make the least noise.”

Aramis awoke. D’Artagnan, pressing his hand, repeated his call. Aramis obeyed.

“Athos is near you,” said D’Artagnan; “warn him as I have warned you.”

Aramis easily aroused Athos, whose sleep was light, like that of all persons of a finely organized constitution. But there was more difficulty in arousing Porthos. He was beginning to ask full explanation of that breaking in on his sleep, which was very annoying to him, when D’Artagnan, instead of explaining, closed his mouth with his hand.

Then our Gascon, extending his arms, drew to him the heads of his three friends till they almost touched one another.

“Friends,” he said, “we must leave this craft at once or we are dead men.”

“Bah!” said Athos, “are you still afraid?”

“Do you know who is captain of this vessel?”

“No.”

“Captain Groslow.”

The shudder of the three musketeers showed to D’Artagnan that his words began to make some impression on them.

“Groslow!” said Aramis; “the devil!

“Who is this Groslow?” asked Porthos. “I don’t remember him.”

“Groslow is the man who broke Parry’s head and is now getting ready to break ours.”

“Oh! oh!”

“And do you know who is his lieutenant?”

“His lieutenant? There is none,” said Athos. “They don’t have lieutenants in a felucca manned by a crew of four.”

“Yes, but Monsieur Groslow is not a captain of the ordinary kind; he has a lieutenant, and that lieutenant is Monsieur Mordaunt.”

This time the musketeers did more than shudder--they almost cried out. Those invincible men were subject to a mysterious and fatal influence which that name had over them; the mere sound of it filled them with terror.

“What shall we do?” said Athos.

“We must seize the felucca,” said Aramis.

“And kill him,” said Porthos.

“The felucca is mined,” said D’Artagnan. “Those casks which I took for casks of port wine are filled with powder. When Mordaunt finds himself discovered he will destroy all, friends and foes; and on my word he would be bad company in going either to Heaven or to hell.”

“You have some plan, then?” asked Athos.

“Yes.”

“What is it?”

“Have you confidence in me?”

“Give your orders,” said the three musketeers.

“Very well; come this way.”

D’Artagnan went toward a very small, low window, just large enough to let a man through. He turned it gently on its hinges.

“There,” he said, “is our road.”

“The deuce! it is a very cold one, my dear friend,” said Aramis.

“Stay here, if you like, but I warn you ‘twill be rather too warm presently.”

“But we cannot swim to the shore.”

“The longboat is yonder, lashed to the felucca. We will take possession of it and cut the cable. Come, my friends.”

“A moment’s delay,” said Athos; “our servants?”

“Here we are!” they cried.

Meantime the three friends were standing motionless before the awful sight which D’Artagnan, in raising the shutters, had disclosed to them through the narrow opening of the window.

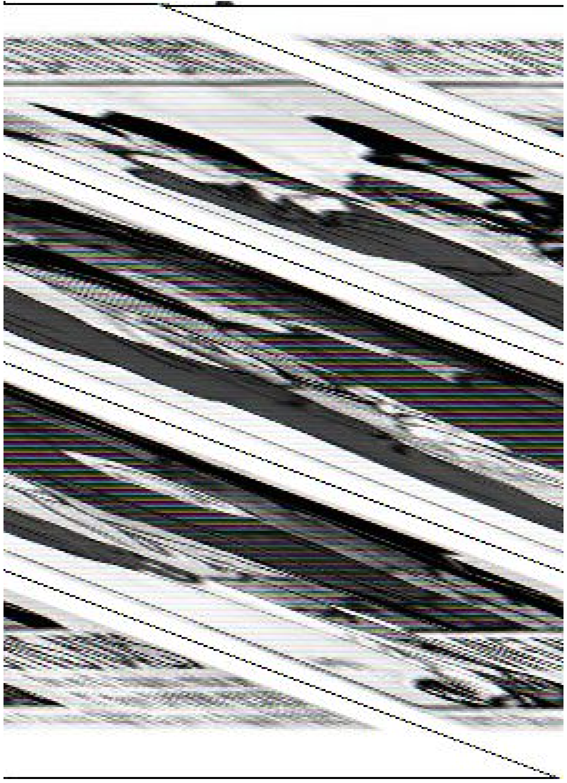

Those who have once beheld such a spectacle know that there is nothing more solemn, more striking, than the raging sea, rolling, with its deafening roar, its dark billows beneath the pale light of a wintry moon.

“Gracious Heaven, we are hesitating!” cried D’Artagnan; “if we hesitate what will the servants do?”

“I do not hesitate, you know,” said Grimaud.

“Sir,” interposed Blaisois, “I warn you that I can only swim in rivers.”

“And I not at all,” said Mousqueton.

But D’Artagnan had now slipped through the window.

“You have decided, friend?” said Athos.

“Yes,” the Gascon answered; “Athos! you, who are a perfect being, bid spirit triumph over body. Do you, Aramis, order the servants. Porthos, kill every one who stands in your way.”

And after pressing the hand of Athos, D’Artagnan chose a moment when the ship rolled backward, so that he had only to plunge into the water, which was already up to his waist.

Athos followed him before the felucca rose again on the waves; the cable which tied the boat to the vessel was then seen plainly rising out of the sea.

D'Artagnan swam to it and held it, suspending himself by this rope, his head alone out of water.

In one second Athos joined him.

Then they saw, as the felucca turned, two other heads peeping, those of Aramis and Grimaud.

"I am uneasy about Blaisois," said Athos; "he can, he says, only swim in rivers."

"When people can swim at all they can swim anywhere. To the boat! to the boat!"

"But Porthos, I do not see him."

"Porthos is coming--he swims like Leviathan."

In fact, Porthos did not appear; for a scene, half tragedy and half comedy, had been performed by him with Mousqueton and Blaisois, who, frightened by the noise of the sea, by the whistling of the wind, by the sight of that dark water yawning like a gulf beneath them, shrank back instead of going forward.

"Come, come!" said Porthos; "jump in."

"But, monsieur," said Mousqueton, "I can't swim; let me stay here."

"And me, too, monsieur," said Blaisois.

"I assure you, I shall be very much in the way in that little boat," said Mousqueton.

"And I know I shall drown before reaching it," continued Blaisois.

"Come along! I shall strangle you both if you don't get out," said Porthos at last, seizing Mousqueton by the throat. "Forward, Blaisois!"

A groan, stifled by the grasp of Porthos, was all the reply of poor Blaisois, for the giant, taking him neck and heels, plunged him into the water headforemost, pushing him out of the window as if he had been a plank.

"Now, Mousqueton," he said, "I hope you don't mean to desert your master?"

"Ah, sir," replied Mousqueton, his eyes filling with tears, "why did you re-enter the army? We were all so happy in the Chateau de Pierrefonds!"

And without any other complaint, passive and obedient, either from true devotion to his master or from the example set by Blaisois, Mousqueton leaped into the sea headforemost. A sublime action, at all events, for

Mousqueton looked upon himself as dead. But Porthos was not a man to abandon an old servant, and when Mousqueton rose above the water, blind as a new-born puppy, he found he was supported by the large hand of Porthos and that he was thus enabled, without having occasion even to move, to advance toward the cable with the dignity of a very triton.

In a few minutes Porthos had rejoined his companions, who were already in the boat; but when, after they had all got in, it came to his turn, there was great danger that in putting his huge leg over the edge of the boat he would upset the little vessel. Athos was the last to enter.

"Are you all here?" he asked.

"Ah! have you your sword, Athos?" cried D'Artagnan.

"Yes."

"Cut the cable, then."

Athos drew a sharp poniard from his belt and cut the cord. The felucca went on, the boat continued stationary, rocked only by the swashing waves.

"Come, Athos!" said D'Artagnan, giving his hand to the count; "you are going to see something curious," added the Gascon.

CHAPTER 73.

Fatality.

Scarcely had D’Artagnan uttered these words when a ringing and sudden noise was heard resounding through the felucca, which had now become dim in the obscurity of the night.

“That, you may be sure,” said the Gascon, “means something.”

They then at the same instant perceived a large lantern carried on a pole appear on the deck, defining the forms of shadows behind it.

Suddenly a terrible cry, a cry of despair, was wafted through space; and as if the shrieks of anguish had driven away the clouds, the veil which hid the moon was cleated away and the gray sails and dark shrouds of the felucca were plainly visible beneath the silvery light.

Shadows ran, as if bewildered, to and fro on the vessel, and mournful cries accompanied these delirious walkers. In the midst of these screams they saw Mordaunt upon the poop with a torch in hand.

The agitated figures, apparently wild with terror, consisted of Groslow, who at the hour fixed by Mordaunt had collected his men and the sailors. Mordaunt, after having listened at the door of the cabin to hear if the musketeers were still asleep, had gone down into the cellar, convinced by their silence that they were all in a deep slumber. Then he had run to the train, impetuous as a man who is excited by revenge, and full of confidence, as are those whom God blinds, he had set fire to the wick of nitre.

All this while Groslow and his men were assembled on deck.

“Haul up the cable and draw the boat to us,” said Groslow.

One of the sailors got down the side of the ship, seized the cable, and drew it; it came without the least resistance.

“The cable is cut!” he cried, “no boat!”

“How! no boat!” exclaimed Groslow; “it is impossible.”

“‘Tis true, however,” answered the sailor; “there’s nothing in the wake of the ship; besides, here’s the end of the cable.”

“What’s the matter?” cried Mordaunt, who, coming up out of the hatchway, rushed to the stern, waving his torch.

“Only that our enemies have escaped; they have cut the cord and gone off with the boat.”

Mordaunt bounded with one step to the cabin and kicked open the door.

“Empty!” he exclaimed; “the infernal demons!”

“We must pursue them,” said Groslow, “they can’t be gone far, and we will sink them, passing over them.”

“Yes, but the fire,” ejaculated Mordaunt; “I have lighted it.”

“Ten thousand devils!” cried Groslow, rushing to the hatchway; “perhaps there is still time to save us.”

Mordaunt answered only by a terrible laugh, threw his torch into the sea and plunged in after it. The instant Groslow put his foot upon the hatchway steps the ship opened like the crater of a volcano. A burst of flame rose toward the skies with an explosion like that of a hundred cannon; the air burned, ignited by flaming embers, then the frightful lightning disappeared, the brands sank, one after another, into the abyss, where they were extinguished, and save for a slight vibration in the air, after a few minutes had elapsed one would have thought that nothing had happened.

Only--the felucca had disappeared from the surface of the sea and Groslow and his three sailors were consumed.

The four friends saw all this--not a single detail of this fearful scene escaped them. At one moment, bathed as they were in a flood of brilliant light, which illumined the sea for the space of a league, they might each be seen, each by his own peculiar attitude and manner expressing the awe which, even in their hearts of bronze, they could not help experiencing. Soon a torrent of vivid sparks fell around them--then, at last, the volcano was extinguished--then all was dark and still--the floating bark and heaving ocean.

They sat silent and dejected.

“By Heaven!” at last said Athos, the first to speak, “by this time, I think, all must be over.”

“Here, my lords! save me! help!” cried a voice, whose mournful accents, reaching the four friends, seemed to proceed from some phantom of the ocean.

All looked around; Athos himself stared.

“‘Tis he! it is his voice!”

All still remained silent, the eyes of all were turned in the direction where the vessel had disappeared, endeavoring in vain to penetrate the darkness.

After a minute or two they were able to distinguish a man, who approached them, swimming vigorously.

Athos extended his arm toward him, pointing him out to his companions.

“Yes, yes, I see him well enough,” said D’Artagnan.

“He--again!” cried Porthos, who was breathing like a blacksmith’s bellows; “why, he is made of iron.”

“Oh, my God!” muttered Athos.

Aramis and D’Artagnan whispered to each other.

Mordaunt made several strokes more, and raising his arm in sign of distress above the waves: “Pity, pity on me, gentlemen, in Heaven’s name! my strength is failing me; I am dying.”

The voice that implored aid was so piteous that it awakened pity in the heart of Athos.

“Poor fellow!” he exclaimed.

“Indeed!” said D’Artagnan, “monsters have only to complain to gain your sympathy. I believe he’s swimming toward us. Does he think we are going to take him in? Row, Porthos, row.” And setting the example he plowed his oar into the sea; two strokes took the bark on twenty fathoms further.

“Oh! you will not abandon me! You will not leave me to perish! You will not be pitiless!” cried Mordaunt.

“Ah! ah!” said Porthos to Mordaunt, “I think we have you now, my hero! and there are no doors by which you can escape this time but those of hell.”

“Oh! Porthos!” murmured the Comte de la Fere.

“Oh, pray, for mercy’s sake, don’t fly from me. For pity’s sake!” cried the young man, whose agony-drawn breath at times, when his head went under water, under the wave, exhaled and made the icy waters bubble.

D’Artagnan, however, who had consulted with Aramis, spoke to the poor wretch. “Go away,” he said; “your repentance is too recent to inspire confidence. See! the vessel in which you wished to fry us is still smoking; and the situation in which you are is a bed of roses compared to that in which you wished to place us and in which you have placed Monsieur Groslow and his companions.”

“Sir!” replied Mordaunt, in a tone of deep despair, “my penitence is sincere. Gentlemen, I am young, scarcely twenty-three years old. I was drawn on by a very natural resentment to avenge my mother. You would have done what I did.”

Mordaunt wanted now only two or three fathoms to reach the boat, for the approach of death seemed to give him supernatural strength.

“Alas!” he said, “I am then to die? You are going to kill the son, as you killed the mother! Surely, if I am culpable and if I ask for pardon, I ought to be forgiven.”

Then, as if his strength failed him, he seemed unable to sustain himself above the water and a wave passed over his head, which drowned his voice.

“Oh! this is torture to me,” cried Athos.

Mordaunt reappeared.

“For my part,” said D’Artagnan, “I say this must come to an end; murderer, as you were, of your uncle! executioner, as you were, of King Charles! incendiary! I recommend you to sink forthwith to the bottom of the sea; and if you come another fathom nearer, I’ll stave your wicked head in with this oar.”

“D’Artagnan! D’Artagnan!” cried Athos, “my son, I entreat you; the wretch is dying, and it is horrible to let a man die without extending a hand to save him. I cannot resist doing so; he must live.”

“Zounds!” replied D’Artagnan, “why don’t you give yourself up directly, feet and hands bound, to that wretch? Ah! Comte de la Fere, you wish to perish by his hands! I, your son, as you call me--I will not let you!”

‘Twas the first time D’Artagnan had ever refused a request from Athos.

Aramis calmly drew his sword, which he had carried between his teeth as he swam.

“If he lays his hand on the boat’s edge I will cut it off, regicide that he is.”

“And I,” said Porthos. “Wait.”

“What are you going to do?” asked Aramis.

“Throw myself in the water and strangle him.”

“Oh, gentlemen!” cried Athos, “be men! be Christians! See! death is depicted on his face! Ah! do not bring on me the horrors of remorse! Grant me this poor wretch’s life. I will bless you--I----”

“I am dying!” cried Mordaunt, “come to me! come to me!”

D’Artagnan began to be touched. The boat at this moment turned around, and the dying man was by that turn brought nearer Athos.

“Monsieur the Comte de la Fere,” he cried, “I supplicate you! pity me! I call on you--where are you? I see you no longer--I am dying--help me! help me!”

“Here I am, sir!” said Athos, leaning and stretching out his arm to Mordaunt with that air of dignity and nobility of soul habitual to him; “here I am, take my hand and jump into our boat.”

Mordaunt made a last effort--rose--seized the hand thus extended to him and grasped it with the vehemence of despair.

“That’s right,” said Athos; “put your other hand here.” And he offered him his shoulder as another stay and support, so that his head almost touched that of Mordaunt; and these two mortal enemies were in as close an embrace as if they had been brothers.

“Now, sir,” said the count, “you are safe--calm yourself.”

“Ah! my mother,” cried Mordaunt, with eyes on fire with a look of hate impossible to paint, “I can only offer thee one victim, but it shall at any rate be the one thou wouldst thyself have chosen!”

And whilst D’Artagnan uttered a cry, Porthos raised the oar, and Aramis sought a place to strike, a frightful shake given to the boat precipitated Athos into the sea; whilst Mordaunt, with a shout of triumph, grasped the neck of his victim, and in order to paralyze his movements, twined arms and legs around the musketeer. For an instant, without an exclamation, without a cry for help, Athos tried to sustain himself on the surface of the waters, but the weight dragged him down; he disappeared by degrees; soon nothing was to be seen except his long, floating hair; then both men disappeared and the bubbling of the water, which, in its turn, was soon effaced, alone indicated the spot where these two had sunk.

Mute with horror, the three friends had remained open-mouthed, their eyes dilated, their arms extended like statues, and, motionless as they were, the beating of their hearts was audible. Porthos was the first who came to himself. He tore his hair.

“Oh!” he cried, “Athos! Athos! thou man of noble heart; woe is me! I have let thee perish!”

At this instant, in the midst of the silver circle illumined by the light of the moon the same whirlpool which had been made by the sinking men was again obvious, and first were seen, rising above the waves, a wisp of hair, then a pale face with open eyes, yet, nevertheless, the eyes of death; then a body, which, after rising of itself even to the waist above the sea, turned gently on its back, according to the caprice of the waves, and floated.

In the bosom of this corpse was plunged a poniard, the gold hilt of which shone in the moonbeams.

“Mordaunt! Mordaunt!” cried the three friends; “‘tis Mordaunt!”

“But Athos!” exclaimed D’Artagnan.

Suddenly the boat leaned on one side beneath a new and unexpected weight and Grimaud uttered a shout of joy; every one turned around and beheld Athos, livid, his eyes dim and his hands trembling, supporting himself on the edge of the boat. Eight vigorous arms lifted him up immediately and laid him in the boat, where directly Athos was warmed and reanimated, reviving with the caresses and cares of his friends, who were intoxicated with joy.

“You are not hurt?” asked D’Artagnan.

“No,” replied Athos; “and he----”

“Oh, he! now we may say at last, thank Heaven! he is really dead. Look!” and D’Artagnan, obliging Athos to look in the direction he pointed, showed him the body of Mordaunt floating on its back, which, sometimes submerged, sometimes rising, seemed still to pursue the four friends with looks of insult and mortal hatred.

At last he sank. Athos had followed him with a glance in which the deepest melancholy and pity were expressed.

“Bravo! Athos!” cried Aramis, with an emotion very rare in him.

“A capital blow you gave!” cried Porthos.

“I have a son. I wished to live,” said Athos.

“In short,” said D’Artagnan, “this has been the will of God.”

“It was not I who killed him,” said Athos in a soft, low tone, “‘twas destiny.”

CHAPTER 74.

How Mousqueton had a Narrow Escape of being eaten.

A deep silence reigned for a long time in the boat after the fearful scene described.

The moon, which had shone for a short time, disappeared behind the clouds; every object was again plunged in the obscurity that is so awful in the deserts and still more so in that liquid desert, the ocean, and nothing was heard save the whistling of the west wind driving along the tops of the crested billows.

Porthos was the first to speak.

“I have seen,” he said, “many dreadful things, but nothing that ever agitated me so much as what I have just witnessed. Nevertheless, even in my present state of perturbation, I protest that I feel happy. I have a hundred pounds’ weight less upon my chest. I breathe more freely.” In fact, Porthos breathed so loud as to do credit to the free play of his powerful lungs.

“For my part,” observed Aramis, “I cannot say the same as you do, Porthos. I am still terrified to such a degree that I scarcely believe my eyes. I look around the boat, expecting every moment to see that poor wretch holding between his hands the poniard plunged into his heart.”

“Oh! I feel easy,” replied Porthos. “The poniard was pointed at the sixth rib and buried up to the hilt in his body. I do not reproach you, Athos, for what you have done. On the contrary, when one aims a blow that is the regulation way to strike. So now, I breathe again--I am happy!”

“Don’t be in haste to celebrate a victory, Porthos,” interposed D’Artagnan; “never have we incurred a greater danger than we are now encountering. Men may subdue men--they cannot overcome the elements. We are now on the sea, at night, without any pilot, in a frail bark; should a blast of wind upset the boat we are lost.”

Mousqueton heaved a deep sigh.

“You are ungrateful, D’Artagnan,” said Athos; “yes, ungrateful to Providence, to whom we owe our safety in the most miraculous manner. Let us sail before the wind, and unless it changes we shall be drifted either to

Calais or Boulogne. Should our bark be upset we are five of us good swimmers, able enough to turn it over again, or if not, to hold on by it. Now we are on the very road which all the vessels between Dover and Calais take, ‘tis impossible but that we should meet with a fisherman who will pick us up.”

“But should we not find any fisherman and should the wind shift to the north?”

“That,” said Athos, “would be quite another thing; and we should nevermore see land until we were upon the other side of the Atlantic.”

“Which implies that we may die of hunger,” said Aramis.

“‘Tis more than possible,” answered the Comte de la Fere.

Mousqueton sighed again, more deeply than before.

“What is the matter? what ails you?” asked Porthos.

“I am cold, sir,” said Mousqueton.

“Impossible! your body is covered with a coating of fat which preserves it from the cold air.”

“Ah! sir, ‘tis this very coating of fat that makes me shiver.”

“How is that, Mousqueton?

“Alas! your honor, in the library of the Chateau of Bracieux there are a lot of books of travels.”

“What then?”

“Amongst them the voyages of Jean Mocquet in the time of Henry IV.”

“Well?”

“In these books, your honor, ‘tis told how hungry voyagers, drifting out to sea, have a bad habit of eating each other and beginning with----”

“The fattest among them!” cried D’Artagnan, unable in spite of the gravity of the occasion to help laughing.

“Yes, sir,” answered Mousqueton; “but permit me to say I see nothing laughable in it. However,” he added, turning to Porthos, “I should not regret dying, sir, were I sure that by doing so I might still be useful to you.”

“Mouston,” replied Porthos, much affected, “should we ever see my castle of Pierrefonds again you shall have as your own and for your descendants the vineyard that surrounds the farm.”

“And you should call it ‘Devotion,’“ added Aramis; “the vineyard of self-sacrifice, to transmit to latest ages the recollection of your devotion to your master.”

“Chevalier,” said D’Artagnan, laughing, “you could eat a piece of Mouston, couldn’t you, especially after two or three days of fasting?”

“Oh, no,” replied Aramis, “I should much prefer Blaisois; we haven’t known him so long.”

One may readily conceive that during these jokes which were intended chiefly to divert Athos from the scene which had just taken place, the servants, with the exception of Grimaud, were not silent. Suddenly Mousqueton uttered a cry of delight, taking from beneath one of the benches a bottle of wine; and on looking more closely in the same place he discovered a dozen similar bottles, bread, and a monster junk of salted beef.

“Oh, sir!” he cried, passing the bottle to Porthos, “we are saved--the bark is supplied with provisions.”

This intelligence restored every one save Athos to gayety.

“Zounds!” exclaimed Porthos, “‘tis astonishing how empty violent agitation makes the stomach.”

And he drank off half a bottle at a draught and bit great mouthfuls of the bread and meat.

“Now,” said Athos, “sleep, or try to sleep, my friends, and I will watch.”

In a few moments, notwithstanding their wet clothes, the icy blast that blew and the previous scene of terror, these hardy adventurers, with their iron frames, inured to every hardship, threw themselves down, intending to profit by the advice of Athos, who sat at the helm, pensively wakeful, guiding the little bark the way it was to go, his eyes fixed on the heavens, as if he sought to verify not only the road to France, but the benign aspect of protecting Providence. After some hours of repose the sleepers were aroused by Athos.

Dawn was shedding its pallid, placid glimmer on the purple ocean, when at the distance of a musket shot from them was seen a dark gray mass, above which gleamed a triangular sail; then masters and servants joined in a fervent cry to the crew of that vessel to hear them and to save.

“A bark!” all cried together.

It was, in fact, a small craft from Dunkirk bound for Boulogne.

A quarter of an hour afterward the rowboat of this craft took them all aboard. Grimaud tendered twenty guineas to the captain, and at nine o’clock in the morning, having a fair wind, our Frenchmen set foot on their native land.

“Egad! how strong one feels here!” said Porthos, almost burying his large feet in the sands. “Zounds! I could defy a nation!”

“Be quiet, Porthos,” said D’Artagnan, “we are observed.”

“We are admired, i’faith,” answered Porthos.

“These people who are looking at us are only merchants,” said Athos, “and are looking more at the cargo than at us.”

“I shall not trust to that,” said the lieutenant, “and I shall make for the Dunes* as soon as possible.”

** Sandy hills about Dunkirk, from which it derives its name.*

The party followed him and soon disappeared with him behind the hillocks of sand unobserved. Here, after a short conference, they proposed to separate.

“And why separate?” asked Athos.

“Because,” answered the Gascon, “we were sent, Porthos and I, by Cardinal Mazarin to fight for Cromwell; instead of fighting for Cromwell we have served Charles I.--not the same thing by any means. In returning with the Comte de la Fere and Monsieur d’Herblay our crime would be confirmed. We have circumvented Cromwell, Mordaunt, and the sea, but we shall find a certain difficulty in circumventing Mazarin.”

“You forget,” replied Athos, “that we consider ourselves your prisoners and not free from the engagement we entered into.”

“Truly, Athos,” interrupted D’Artagnan, “I am vexed that such a man as you are should talk nonsense which schoolboys would be ashamed of. Chevalier,” he continued, addressing Aramis, who, leaning proudly on his sword, seemed to agree with his companion, “Chevalier, Porthos and I run no risk; besides, should any ill-luck happen to two of us, will it not be much better that the other two should be spared to assist those who may be apprehended? Besides, who knows whether, divided, we may not obtain a pardon--you from the queen, we from Mazarin--which, were we all four together, would never be granted. Come, Athos and Aramis, go to the right; Porthos, come with me to the left; these gentlemen should file off into Normandy, whilst we, by the nearest road, reach Paris.”

He then gave his friends minute directions as to their route.

“Ah! my dear friend,” exclaimed Athos, “how I should admire the resources of your mind did I not stop to adore those of your heart.”

And he gave him his hand.

"Isn't this fox a genius, Athos?" asked the Gascon. "No! he knows how to crunch fowls, to dodge the huntsman and to find his way home by day or by night, that's all. Well, is all said?"

"All."

"Then let's count our money and divide it. Ah! hurrah! there's the sun! A merry morning to you, Sunshine. 'Tis a long time since I saw thee!"

"Come, come, D'Artagnan," said Athos, "do not affect to be strong-minded; there are tears in your eyes. Let us be open with each other and sincere."

"What!" cried the Gascon, "do you think, Athos, we can take leave, calmly, of two friends at a time not free from danger to you and Aramis?"

"No," answered Athos; "embrace me, my son."

"Zounds!" said Porthos, sobbing, "I believe I'm crying; but how foolish all this is!"

Then they embraced. At that moment their fraternal bond of union was closer than ever, and when they parted, each to take the route agreed on, they turned back to utter affectionate expressions, which the echoes of the Dunes repeated. At last they lost sight of each other.

"Sacrebleu! D'Artagnan," said Porthos, "I must out with it at once, for I can't keep to myself anything I have against you; I haven't been able to recognize you in this matter."

"Why not?" said D'Artagnan, with his wise smile.

"Because if, as you say, Athos and Aramis are in real danger, this is not the time to abandon them. For my part, I confess to you that I was all ready to follow them and am still ready to rejoin them, in spite of all the Mazarins in the world."

"You would be right, Porthos, but for one thing, which may change the current of your ideas; and that is, that it is not those gentlemen who are in the greatest danger, it is ourselves; it is not to abandon them that we have separated, but to avoid compromising them."

"Really?" said Porthos, opening his eyes in astonishment.

"Yes, no doubt. If they are arrested they will only be put in the Bastile; if we are arrested it is a matter of the Place de Greve."

"Oh! oh!" said Porthos, "there is quite a gap between that fate and the baronial coronet you promised me, D'Artagnan."

"Bah! perhaps not so great as you think, Porthos; you know the proverb, 'All roads lead to Rome.'"

“But how is it that we are incurring greater risks than Athos and Aramis?” asked Porthos.

“Because they have but fulfilled the mission confided to them by Queen Henrietta and we have betrayed that confided to us by Mazarin; because, going hence as emissaries to Cromwell, we became partisans of King Charles; because, instead of helping cut off the royal head condemned by those fellows called Mazarin, Cromwell, Joyce, Bridge, Fairfax, etc., we very nearly succeeded in saving it.”

“Upon my word that is true,” said Porthos; “but how can you suppose, my dear friend, that in the midst of his great preoccupations General Cromwell has had time to think----”

“Cromwell thinks of everything; Cromwell has time for everything; and believe me, dear friend, we ought not to lose our time--it is precious. We shall not be safe till we have seen Mazarin, and then----”

“The devil!” said Porthos; “what can we say to Mazarin?”

“Leave that to me--I have my plan. He laughs best who laughs last. Cromwell is mighty, Mazarin is tricky, but I would rather have to do with them than with the late Monsieur Mordaunt.”

“Ah!” said Porthos, “it is very pleasant to be able to say ‘the late Monsieur Mordaunt.’“

“My faith, yes,” said D’Artagnan. “But we must be going.”

The two immediately started across country toward the road to Paris, followed by Mousqueton, who, after being too cold all night, at the end of a quarter of an hour found himself too warm.

CHAPTER 75.

The Return.

During the six weeks that Athos and Aramis had been absent from France, the Parisians, finding themselves one morning without either queen or king, were greatly annoyed at being thus deserted, and the absence of Mazarin, a thing so long desired, did not compensate for that of the two august fugitives.

The first feeling that pervaded Paris on hearing of the flight to Saint Germain, was that sort of affright which seizes children when they awake in the night and find themselves alone. A deputation was therefore sent to the queen to entreat her to return to Paris; but she not only declined to receive the deputies, but sent an intimation by Chancellor Seguier, implying that if the parliament did not humble itself before her majesty by negativing all the questions that had been the cause of the quarrel, Paris would be besieged the very next day.

This threatening answer, unluckily for the court, produced quite a different effect to that which was intended. It wounded the pride of the parliament, which, supported by the citizens, replied by declaring that Cardinal Mazarin was the cause of all the discontent; denounced him as the enemy both of the king and the state, and ordered him to retire from the court that same day and from France within a week afterward; enjoining, in case of disobedience on his part, all the subjects of the king to pursue and take him.

Mazarin being thus placed beyond the pale of the protection of the law, preparations on both sides were commenced--by the queen, to attack Paris, by the citizens, to defend it. The latter were occupied in breaking up the pavement and stretching chains across the streets, when, headed by the coadjutor, appeared the Prince de Conti (the brother of the Prince de Conde) and the Duc de Longueville, his brother-in-law. This unexpected band of auxiliaries arrived in Paris on the tenth of January and the Prince of Conti was named, but not until after a stormy discussion, generalissimo of the army of the king, out of Paris.

As for the Duc de Beaufort, he arrived from Vendome, according to the annals of the day, bringing with him his high bearing and his long and beautiful hair, qualifications which gained him the sovereignty of the marketplaces.

The Parisian army had organized with the promptness characteristic of the bourgeois whenever they are moved by any sentiment whatever to disguise themselves as soldiers. On the nineteenth the impromptu army had attempted a sortie, more to assure itself and others of its actual existence than with any more serious intention. They carried a banner, on which could be read this strange device: “We are seeking our king.”

The next following days were occupied in trivial movements which resulted only in the carrying off of a few herds of cattle and the burning of two or three houses.

That was still the situation of affairs up to the early days of February. On the first day of that month our four companions had landed at Boulogne, and, in two parties, had set out for Paris. Toward the end of the fourth day of the journey Athos and Aramis reached Nanterre, which place they cautiously passed by on the outskirts, fearing that they might encounter some troop from the queen’s army.

It was against his will that Athos took these precautions, but Aramis had very judiciously reminded him that they had no right to be imprudent, that they had been charged by King Charles with a supreme and sacred mission, which, received at the foot of the scaffold, could be accomplished only at the feet of Queen Henrietta. Upon that, Athos yielded.

On reaching the capital Athos and Aramis found it in arms. The sentinel at the gate refused even to let them pass, and called his sergeant.

The sergeant, with the air of importance which such people assume when they are clad with military dignity, said:

“Who are you, gentlemen?”

“Two gentlemen.”

“And where do you come from?”

“From London.”

“And what are you going to do in Paris?”

“We are going with a mission to Her Majesty, the Queen of England.”

“Ah, every one seems to be going to see the queen of England. We have already at the station three gentlemen whose passports are under examination, who are on their way to her majesty. Where are your passports?”

“We have none; we left England, ignorant of the state of politics here, having left Paris before the departure of the king.”

“Ah!” said the sergeant, with a cunning smile, “you are Mazarinists, who are sent as spies.”

“My dear friend,” here Athos spoke, “rest assured, if we were Mazarinists we should come well prepared with every sort of passport. In your situation distrust those who are well provided with every formality.”

“Enter the guardroom,” said the sergeant; “we will lay your case before the commandant of the post.”

The guardroom was filled with citizens and common people, some playing, some drinking, some talking. In a corner, almost hidden from view, were three gentlemen, who had preceded Athos and Aramis, and an officer was examining their passports. The first impulse of these three, and of those who last entered, was to cast an inquiring glance at each other. The first arrivals wore long cloaks, in whose drapery they were carefully enveloped; one of them, shorter than the rest, remained pertinaciously in the background.

When the sergeant on entering the room announced that in all probability he was bringing in two Mazarinists, it appeared to be the unanimous opinion of the officers on guard that they ought not to pass.

“Be it so,” said Athos; “yet it is probable, on the contrary, that we shall enter, because we seem to have to do with sensible people. There seems to be only one thing to do, which is, to send our names to Her Majesty the Queen of England, and if she engages to answer for us I presume we shall be allowed to enter.”

On hearing these words the shortest of the other three men seemed more attentive than ever to what was going on, wrapping his cloak around him more carefully than before.

“Merciful goodness!” whispered Aramis to Athos, “did you see?”

“What?” asked Athos.

“The face of the shortest of those three gentlemen?”

“No.”

“He looked to me--but ‘tis impossible.”

At this instant the sergeant, who had been for his orders, returned, and pointing to the three gentlemen in cloaks, said:

“The passports are in order; let these three gentlemen pass.”

The three gentlemen bowed and hastened to take advantage of this permission.

Aramis looked after them, and as the last of them passed close to him he pressed the hand of Athos.

“What is the matter with you, my friend?” asked the latter.

“I have--doubtless I am dreaming; tell me, sir,” he said to the sergeant, “do you know those three gentlemen who are just gone out?”

“Only by their passports; they are three Frondists, who are gone to rejoin the Duc de Longueville.”

“‘Tis strange,” said Aramis, almost involuntarily; “I fancied that I recognized Mazarin himself.”

The sergeant burst into a fit of laughter.

“He!” he cried; “he venture himself amongst us, to be hung! Not so foolish as all that.”

“Ah!” muttered Athos, “I may be mistaken, I haven’t the unerring eye of D’Artagnan.”

“Who is speaking of Monsieur D’Artagnan?” asked an officer who appeared at that moment upon the threshold of the room.

“What!” cried Aramis and Athos, “what! Planchet!”

“Planchet,” added Grimaud; “Planchet, with a gorget, indeed!”

“Ah, gentlemen!” cried Planchet, “so you are back again in Paris. Oh, how happy you make us! no doubt you come to join the princes!”

“As thou seest, Planchet,” said Aramis, whilst Athos smiled on seeing what important rank was held in the city militia by the former comrade of Mousqueton, Bazin and Grimaud.

“And Monsieur d’Artagnan, of whom you spoke just now, Monsieur d’Herblay; may I ask if you have any news of him?”

“We parted from him four days ago and we have reason to believe that he has reached Paris before us.”

“No, sir; I am sure he hasn’t yet arrived. But then he may have stopped at Saint Germain.”

“I don’t think so; we appointed to meet at La Chevrette.”

“I was there this very day.”

“And had the pretty Madeleine no news?” asked Aramis, smiling.

“No, sir, and it must be admitted that she seemed very anxious.”

“In fact,” said Aramis, “there is no time lost and we made our journey quickly. Permit me, then, my dear Athos, without inquiring further about our friend, to pay my respects to M. Planchet.”

“Ah, monsieur le chevalier,” said Planchet, bowing.

“Lieutenant?” asked Aramis.

“Lieutenant, with a promise of becoming captain.”

“‘Tis capital; and pray, how did you acquire all these honors?”

“In the first place, gentlemen, you know that I was the means of Monsieur de Rochefort’s escape; well, I was very near being hung by Mazarin and that made me more popular than ever.”

“So, owing to your popularity----”

“No; thanks to something better. You know, gentlemen, that I served the Piedmont regiment and had the honor of being a sergeant?”

“Yes.”

“Well, one day when no one could drill a mob of citizens, who began to march, some with the right foot, others with the left, I succeeded, I did, in making them all begin with the same foot, and I was made lieutenant on the spot.”

“So I presume,” said Athos, “that you have a large number of the nobles with you?”

“Certainly. There are the Prince de Conti, the Duc de Longueville, the Duc de Beaufort, the Duc de Bouillon, the Marechal de la Mothe, the Marquis de Sevigne, and I don’t know who, for my part.”

“And the Vicomte Raoul de Bragelonne?” inquired Athos, in a tremulous voice. “D’Artagnan told me that he had recommended him to your care, in parting.”

“Yes, count; nor have I lost sight of him for a single instant since.”

“Then,” said Athos in a tone of delight, “he is well? no accident has happened to him?”

“None, sir.”

“And he lives?”

“Still at the Hotel of the Great Charlemagne.”

“And passes his time?”

“Sometimes with the queen of England, sometimes with Madame de Chevreuse. He and the Count de Guiche are like each other’s shadows.”

“Thanks, Planchet, thanks!” cried Athos, extending his hand to the lieutenant.

“Oh, sir!” Planchet only touched the tips of the count’s fingers.

“Well, what are you doing, count--to a former lackey?

“My friend,” said Athos, “he has given me news of Raoul.”

“And now, gentlemen,” said Planchet, who had not heard what they were saying, “what do you intend to do?”

“Re-enter Paris, if you will let us, my good Planchet.”

“Let you, sir? Now, as ever, I am nothing but your servant.” Then turning to his men:

“Allow these gentlemen to pass,” he said; “they are friends of the Duc de Beaufort.”

“Long live the Duc de Beaufort!” cried the sentinels.

The sergeant drew near to Planchet.

“What! without passports?” he murmured.

“Without passports,” said Planchet.

“Take notice, captain,” he continued, giving Planchet his expected title, “take notice that one of the three men who just now went out from here told me privately to distrust these gentlemen.”

“And I,” said Planchet, with dignity, “I know them and I answer for them.”

As he said this, he pressed Grimaud’s hand, who seemed honored by the distinction.

“Farewell till we meet again,” said Aramis, as they took leave of Planchet; “if anything happens to us we shall blame you for it.”

“Sir,” said Planchet, “I am in all things at your service.”

“That fellow is no fool,” said Aramis, as he got on his horse.

“How should he be?” replied Athos, whilst mounting also, “seeing he was used so long to brush your hats.”

CHAPTER 76.

The Ambassadors.

The two friends rode rapidly down the declivity of the Faubourg, but on arriving at the bottom were surprised to find that the streets of Paris had become rivers, and the open places lakes; after the great rains which fell in January the Seine had overflowed its banks and the river inundated half the capital. The two gentlemen were obliged, therefore, to get off their horses and take a boat; and in that strange manner they approached the Louvre.

Night had closed in, and Paris, seen thus, by the light of lanterns flickering on the pools of water, crowded with ferry-boats of every kind, including those that glittered with the armed patrols, with the watchword, passing from post to post--Paris presented such an aspect as to strongly seize the senses of Aramis, a man most susceptible to warlike impressions.

They reached the queen’s apartments, but were compelled to stop in the ante-chamber, since her majesty was at that moment giving audience to gentlemen bringing her news from England.

“We, too,” said Athos, to the footman who had given him that answer, “not only bring news from England, but have just come from there.”

“What? then, are your names, gentlemen?”

“The Comte de la Fere and the Chevalier d’Herblay,” said Aramis.

“Ah! in that case, gentlemen,” said the footman, on hearing the names which the queen had so often pronounced with hope, “in that case it is another thing, and I think her majesty will pardon me for not keeping you here a moment. Please follow me,” and he went on before, followed by Athos and Aramis.

On arriving at the door of the room where the queen was receiving he made a sign for them to wait and opening the door:

“Madame,” he said, “I hope your majesty will forgive me for disobeying your orders, when you learn that the gentlemen I have come to announce are the Comte de la Fere and the Chevalier d’Herblay.”

On hearing those two names the queen uttered a cry of joy, which the two gentlemen heard.

“Poor queen!” murmured Athos.

“Oh, let them come in! let them come in,” cried the young princess, bounding to the door.

The poor child was constant in her attendance on her mother and sought by her filial attentions to make her forget the absence of her two sons and her other daughter.

“Come in, gentlemen,” repeated the princess, opening the door herself.

The queen was seated on a fauteuil and before her were standing two or three gentlemen, and among them the Duc de Chatillon, the brother of the nobleman killed eight or nine years previously in a duel on account of Madame de Longueville, on the Place Royale. All these gentlemen had been noticed by Athos and Aramis in the guardhouse, and when the two friends were announced they started and exchanged some words in a low tone. “Well, sirs!” cried the queen, on perceiving the two friends, “you have come, faithful friends! But the royal couriers have been more expeditious than you, and here are Monsieur de Flamarens and Monsieur de Chatillon, who bring me from Her Majesty the Queen Anne of Austria, the very latest intelligence.”

Aramis and Athos were astounded by the calmness, even the gayety of the queen’s manner.

“Go on with your recital, sirs,” said the queen, turning to the Duc de Chatillon. “You said that His Majesty, King Charles, my august consort, had been condemned to death by a majority of his subjects!”

“Yes, madame,” Chatillon stammered out.

Athos and Aramis were more and more astonished.

“And that being conducted to the scaffold,” resumed the queen--”oh, my lord! oh, my king!--and that being led to the scaffold he had been saved by an indignant people.”

“Just so madame,” replied Chatillon, in so low a voice that though the two friends were listening eagerly they could hardly hear this affirmation.

The queen clasped her hands in enthusiastic gratitude, whilst her daughter threw her arms around her mother’s neck and kissed her--her own eyes streaming with tears.

“Now, madame, nothing remains to me except to proffer my respectful homage,” said Chatillon, who felt confused and ashamed beneath the stern gaze of Athos.

“One moment, yes,” answered the queen. “One moment--I beg--for here are the Chevalier d’Herblay and the Comte de la Fere, just arrived from London, and they can give you, as eye-witnesses, such details as you can convey to the queen, my royal sister. Speak, gentlemen, speak--I am listening; conceal nothing, gloss over nothing. Since his majesty still lives, since the honor of the throne is safe, everything else is a matter of indifference to me.”

Athos turned pale and laid his hand on his heart.

“Well!” exclaimed the queen, who remarked this movement and his paleness. “Speak, sir! I beg you to do so.”

“I beg you to excuse me, madame; I wish to add nothing to the recital of these gentlemen until they perceive themselves that they have perhaps been mistaken.”

“Mistaken!” cried the queen, almost suffocated by emotion; “mistaken! what has happened, then?”

“Sir,” interposed Monsieur de Flamarens to Athos, “if we are mistaken the error has originated with the queen. I do not suppose you will have the presumption to set it to rights--that would be to accuse Her Majesty, Queen Anne, of falsehood.”

“With the queen, sir?” replied Athos, in his calm, vibrating voice.

“Yes,” murmured Flamarens, lowering his eyes.

Athos sighed deeply.

“Or rather, sir,” said Aramis, with his peculiar irritating politeness, “the error of the person who was with you when we met you in the guardroom; for if the Comte de la Fere and I are not mistaken, we saw you in the company of a third gentleman.”

Chatillon and Flamarens started.

“Explain yourself, count!” cried the queen, whose anxiety grew greater every moment. “On your brow I read despair--your lips falter ere you announce some terrible tidings--your hands tremble. Oh, my God! my God! what has happened?”

“Lord!” ejaculated the young princess, falling on her knees, “have mercy on us!”

“Sir,” said Chatillon, “if you bring bad tidings it will be cruel in you to announce them to the queen.”

Aramis went so close to Chatillon as almost to touch him.

“Sir,” said he, with compressed lips and flashing eyes, “you have not the presumption to instruct the Comte de la Fere and myself what we ought to say here?”

During this brief altercation Athos, with his hands on his heart, his head bent low, approached the queen and in a voice of deepest sorrow said:

“Madame, princes--who by nature are above other men--receive from Heaven courage to support greater misfortunes than those of lower rank, for their hearts are elevated as their fortunes. We ought not, therefore, I think, to act toward a queen so illustrious as your majesty as we should act toward a woman of our lowlier condition. Queen, destined as you are to endure every sorrow on this earth, hear the result of our unhappy mission.”

Athos, kneeling down before the queen, trembling and very cold, drew from his bosom, inclosed in the same case, the order set in diamonds which the queen had given to Lord de Winter and the wedding ring which Charles I. before his death had placed in the hands of Aramis. Since the moment he had first received these two mementoes Athos had never parted with them.

He opened the case and offered them to the queen with deep and silent anguish.

The queen stretched out her hand, seized the ring, pressed it convulsively to her lips--and without being able to breathe a sigh, to give vent to a sob, she extended her arms, became deadly pale, and fell senseless in the arms of her attendants and her daughter.

Athos kissed the hem of the robe of the widowed queen and rising, with a dignity that made a deep impression on those around:

“I, the Comte de la Fere, a gentleman who has never deceived any human being, swear before God and before this unhappy queen, that all that was possible to save the king of England was done whilst we were on English ground. Now, chevalier,” he added, turning to Aramis, “let us go. Our duty is fulfilled.”

“Not yet.” said Aramis; “we have still a word to say to these gentlemen.”

And turning to Chatillon: “Sir, be so good as not to go away without giving me an opportunity to tell you something I cannot say before the queen.”

Chatillon bowed in token of assent and they all went out, stopping at the window of a gallery on the ground floor.

“Sir,” said Aramis, “you allowed yourself just now to treat us in a most extraordinary manner. That would not be endurable in any case, and is still less so on the part of those who came to bring the queen the message of a liar.”

“Sir!” cried De Chatillon.

“What have you done with Monsieur de Bruy? Has he by any possibility gone to change his face which was too like that of Monsieur de Mazarin? There is an abundance of Italian masks at the Palais Royal, from harlequin even to pantaloon.”

“Chevalier! chevalier!” said Athos.

“Leave me alone,” said Aramis impatiently. “You know well that I don’t like to leave things half finished.”

“Conclude, then, sir,” answered De Chatillon, with as much hauteur as Aramis.

“Gentlemen,” resumed Aramis, “any one but the Comte de la Fere and myself would have had you arrested--for we have friends in Paris--but we are contented with another course. Come and converse with us for just five minutes, sword in hand, upon this deserted terrace.”

“One moment, gentlemen,” cried Flamarens. “I know well that the proposition is tempting, but at present it is impossible to accept it.”

“And why not?” said Aramis, in his tone of raillery. “Is it Mazarin’s proximity that makes you so prudent?”

“Oh, you hear that, Flamarens!” said Chatillon. “Not to reply would be a blot on my name and my honor.”

“That is my opinion,” said Aramis.

“You will not reply, however, and these gentlemen, I am sure, will presently be of my opinion.”

Aramis shook his head with a motion of indescribable insolence.

Chatillon saw the motion and put his hand to his sword.

“Willingly,” replied De Chatillon.

“Duke,” said Flamarens, “you forget that to-morrow you are to command an expedition of the greatest importance, projected by the prince, assented to by the queen. Until to-morrow evening you are not at your own disposal.”

“Let it be then the day after to-morrow,” said Aramis.

“To-morrow, rather,” said De Chatillon, “if you will take the trouble of coming so far as the gates of Charenton.”

“How can you doubt it, sir? For the pleasure of a meeting with you I would go to the end of the world.”

“Very well, to-morrow, sir.”

“I shall rely on it. Are you going to rejoin your cardinal? Swear first, on your honor, not to inform him of our return.”

“Conditions?”

“Why not?”

“Because it is for victors to make conditions, and you are not yet victors, gentlemen.”

“Then let us draw on the spot. It is all one to us--to us who do not command to-morrow’s expedition.”

Chatillon and Flamarens looked at each other. There was such irony in the words and in the bearing of Aramis that the duke had great difficulty in bridling his anger, but at a word from Flamarens he restrained himself and contented himself with saying:

“You promise, sir--that’s agreed--that I shall find you to-morrow at Charenton?”

“Oh, don’t be afraid, sir,” replied Aramis; and the two gentlemen shortly afterward left the Louvre.

“For what reason is all this fume and fury?” asked Athos. “What have they done to you?”

“They--did you not see what they did?”

“No.”

“They laughed when we swore that we had done our duty in England. Now, if they believed us, they laughed in order to insult us; if they did not believe it they insulted us all the more. However, I’m glad not to fight them until to-morrow. I hope we shall have something better to do to-night than to draw the sword.”

“What have we to do?”

“Egad! to take Mazarin.”

Athos curled his lip with disdain.

“These undertakings do not suit me, as you know, Aramis.”

“Why?”

“Because it is taking people unawares.”

“Really, Athos, you would make a singular general. You would fight only by broad daylight, warn your foe before an attack, and never attempt anything by night lest you should be accused of taking advantage of the darkness.”

Athos smiled.

“You know one cannot change his nature,” he said. “Besides, do you know what is our situation, and whether Mazarin’s arrest wouldn’t be rather an encumbrance than an advantage?”

“Say at once you disapprove of my proposal.”

“I think you ought to do nothing, since you exacted a promise from these gentlemen not to let Mazarin know that we were in France.”

“I have entered into no engagement and consider myself quite free. Come, come.”

“Where?”

“Either to seek the Duc de Beaufort or the Duc de Bouillon, and to tell them about this.”

“Yes, but on one condition--that we begin by the coadjutor. He is a priest, learned in cases of conscience, and we will tell him ours.”

It was then agreed that they were to go first to Monsieur de Bouillon, as his house came first; but first of all Athos begged that he might go to the Hotel du Grand Charlemagne, to see Raoul.

They re-entered the boat which had brought them to the Louvre and thence proceeded to the Halles; and taking up Grimaud and Blaisois, they went on foot to the Rue Guenegaud.

But Raoul was not at the Hotel du Grand Charlemagne. He had received a message from the prince, to whom he had hastened with Olivain the instant he had received it.

CHAPTER 77.

The three Lieutenants of the Generalissimo.

The night was dark, but still the town resounded with those noises that disclose a city in a state of siege. Athos and Aramis did not proceed a hundred steps without being stopped by sentinels placed before the barricades, who demanded the watchword; and on their saying that they were going to Monsieur de Bouillon on a mission of importance a guide was given them under pretext of conducting them, but in fact as a spy over their movements.

On arriving at the Hotel de Bouillon they came across a little troop of three cavaliers, who seemed to know every possible password; for they walked without either guide or escort, and on arriving at the barricades had nothing to do but to speak to those who guarded them, who instantly let them pass with evident deference, due probably to their high birth.

On seeing them Athos and Aramis stood still.

“Oh!” cried Aramis, “do you see, count?”

“Yes,” said Athos.

“Who do these three cavaliers appear to you to be?”

“What do you think, Aramis?”

“Why, they are our men.”

“You are not mistaken; I recognize Monsieur de Flamarens.”

“And I, Monsieur de Chatillon.”

“As to the cavalier in the brown cloak----”

“It is the cardinal.”

“In person.”

“How the devil do they venture so near the Hotel de Bouillon?”

Athos smiled, but did not reply. Five minutes afterward they knocked at the prince’s door.

This door was guarded by a sentinel and there was also a guard placed in the courtyard, ready to obey the orders of the Prince de Conti’s lieutenant.

Monsieur de Bouillon had the gout, but notwithstanding his illness, which had prevented his mounting on horseback for the last month---that is, since Paris had been besieged--he was ready to receive the Comte de la Fere and the Chevalier d’Herblay.

He was in bed, but surrounded with all the paraphernalia of war. Everywhere were swords, pistols, cuirasses, and arquebuses, and it was plain that as soon as his gout was better Monsieur de Bouillon would give a pretty tangle to the enemies of the parliament to unravel. Meanwhile, to his great regret, as he said, he was obliged to keep his bed.

“Ah, gentlemen,” he cried, as the two friends entered, “you are very happy! you can ride, you can go and come and fight for the cause of the people. But I, as you see, am nailed to my bed--ah! this demon, gout--this demon, gout!”

“My lord,” said Athos, “we are just arrived from England and our first concern is to inquire after your health.”

“Thanks, gentlemen, thanks! As you see, my health is but indifferent. But you come from England. And King Charles is well, as I have just heard?”

“He is dead, my lord!” said Aramis.

“Pooh!” said the duke, too much astonished to believe it true.

“Dead on the scaffold; condemned by parliament.”

“Impossible!”

“And executed in our presence.”

“What, then, has Monsieur de Flamarens been telling me?”

“Monsieur de Flamarens?”

“Yes, he has just gone out.”

Athos smiled. “With two companions?” he said.

“With two companions, yes,” replied the duke. Then he added with a certain uneasiness, “Did you meet them?”

“Why, yes, I think so--in the street,” said Athos; and he looked smilingly at Aramis, who looked at him with an expression of surprise.

“The devil take this gout!” cried Monsieur de Bouillon, evidently ill at ease.

“My lord,” said Athos, “we admire your devotion to the cause you have espoused, in remaining at the head of the army whilst so ill, in so much pain.”

“One must,” replied Monsieur de Bouillon, “sacrifice one’s comfort to the public good; but I confess to you I am now almost exhausted. My spirit is willing, my head is clear, but this demon, the gout, o’ercrows me. I confess, if the court would do justice to my claims and give the head of my house the title of prince, and if my brother De Turenne were reinstated in his command I would return to my estates and leave the court and parliament to settle things between themselves as they might."

"You are perfectly right, my lord."

"You think so? At this very moment the court is making overtures to me; hitherto I have repulsed them; but since such men as you assure me that I am wrong in doing so, I've a good mind to follow your advice and to accept a proposition made to me by the Duc de Chatillon just now."

"Accept it, my lord, accept it," said Aramis.

"Faith! yes. I am even sorry that this evening I almost repulsed--but there will be a conference to-morrow and we shall see."

The two friends saluted the duke.

"Go, gentlemen," he said; "you must be much fatigued after your voyage. Poor King Charles! But, after all, he was somewhat to blame in all that business and we may console ourselves with the reflection that France has no cause of reproach in the matter and did all she could to serve him."

"Oh! as to that," said Aramis, "we are witnesses. Mazarin especially----"

"Yes, do you know, I am very glad to hear you give that testimony; the cardinal has some good in him, and if he were not a foreigner--well, he would be more justly estimated. Oh! the devil take this gout!"

Athos and Aramis took their leave, but even in the ante-chamber they could still hear the duke's cries; he was evidently suffering the tortures of the damned.

When they reached the street, Aramis said:

"Well, Athos, what do you think?"

"Of whom?"

"Pardieu! of Monsieur de Bouillon."

"My friend, I think that he is much troubled with gout."

"You noticed that I didn't breathe a word as to the purpose of our visit?"

"You did well; you would have caused him an access of his disease. Let us go to Monsieur de Beaufort."

The two friends went to the Hotel de Vendome. It was ten o'clock when they arrived. The Hotel de Vendome was not less guarded than the Hotel de Bouillon, and presented as warlike an appearance. There were sentinels, a guard in the court, stacks of arms, and horses saddled. Two horsemen going out as Athos and Aramis entered were obliged to give place to them.

"Ah! ah! gentlemen," said Aramis, "decidedly it is a night for meetings. We shall be very unfortunate if, after meeting so often this evening, we should not succeed in meeting to-morrow."

"Oh, as to that, sir," replied Chatillon (for it was he who, with Flamarens, was leaving the Duc de Beaufort), "you may be assured; for if we meet by night without seeking each other, much more shall we meet by day when wishing it."

"I hope that is true," said Aramis.

"As for me, I am sure of it," said the duke.

De Flamarens and De Chatillon continued on their way and Athos and Aramis dismounted.

Hardly had they given the bridles of their horses to their lackeys and rid themselves of their cloaks when a man approached them, and after looking at them for an instant by the doubtful light of the lantern hung in the centre of the courtyard he uttered an exclamation of joy and ran to embrace them.

"Comte de la Fere!" the man cried out; "Chevalier d'Herblay! How does it happen that you are in Paris?"

"Rochefort!" cried the two friends.

"Yes! we arrived four or five days ago from the Vendomois, as you know, and we are going to give Mazarin something to do. You are still with us, I presume?"

"More than ever. And the duke?"

"Furious against the cardinal. You know his success--our dear duke? He is really king of Paris; he can't go out without being mobbed by his admirers."

"Ah! so much the better! Can we have the honor of seeing his highness?"

"I shall be proud to present you," and Rochefort walked on. Every door was opened to him. Monsieur de Beaufort was at supper, but he rose quickly on hearing the two friends announced.

"Ah!" he cried, "by Jove! you're welcome, sirs. You are coming to sup with me, are you not? Boisgoli, tell Noirmont that I have two guests. You know Noirmont, do you not? The successor of Father Marteau who makes the excellent pies you know of. Boisgoli, let him send one of his best, but not such a one as he made for La Ramee. Thank God! we don't want either rope ladders or gag-pears now."

"My lord," said Athos, "do not let us disturb you. We came merely to inquire after your health and to take your orders."

"As to my health, since it has stood five years of prison, with Monsieur de Chavigny to boot, 'tis excellent! As to my orders, since every one gives his own commands in our party, I shall end, if this goes on, by giving none at all."

"In short, my lord," said Athos, glancing at Aramis, "your highness is discontented with your party?"

"Discontented, sir! say my highness is furious! To such a degree, I assure you, though I would not say so to others, that if the queen, acknowledging the injuries she has done me, would recall my mother and give me the reversion of the admiralty, which belonged to my father and was promised me at his death, well! it would not be long before I should be training dogs to say that there were greater traitors in France than the Cardinal Mazarin!"

At this Athos and Aramis could not help exchanging not only a look but a smile; and had they not known it for a fact, this would have told them that De Chatillon and De Flamarens had been there.

"My lord," said Athos, "we are satisfied; we came here only to express our loyalty and to say that we are at your lordship's service and his most faithful servants."

"My most faithful friends, gentlemen, my most faithful friends; you have proved it. And if ever I am reconciled with the court I shall prove to you, I hope, that I remain your friend, as well as that of--what the devil are their names--D'Artagnan and Porthos?"

"D'Artagnan and Porthos."

"Ah, yes. You understand, then, Comte de la Fere, you understand, Chevalier d'Herblay, that I am altogether and always at your service."

Athos and Aramis bowed and went out.

"My dear Athos," cried Aramis, "I think you consented to accompany me only to give me a lesson--God forgive me!"

"Wait a little, Aramis; it will be time for you to perceive my motive when we have paid our visit to the coadjutor."

"Let us then go to the archiepiscopal palace," said Aramis.

They directed their horses to the city. On arriving at the cradle from which Paris sprang they found it inundated with water, and it was again necessary to take a boat. The palace rose from the bosom of the water, and to see the number of boats around it one would have fancied one's self not in Paris, but in Venice. Some of these boats were dark and mysterious, others noisy and lighted up with torches. The friends slid in through this congestion of embarkation and landed in their turn. The palace was surrounded with water, but a kind of staircase had been fixed to the lower walls; and the only difference was, that instead of entering by the doors, people entered by the windows.

Thus did Athos and Aramis make their appearance in the ante-chamber, where about a dozen noblemen were collected in waiting.

“Good heavens!” said Aramis to Athos, “does the coadjutor intend to indulge himself in the pleasure of making us cool our hearts off in his ante-chamber?”

“My dear friend, we must take people as we find them. The coadjutor is at this moment one of the seven kings of Paris, and has a court. Let us send in our names, and if he does not send us a suitable message we will leave him to his own affairs or those of France. Let us call one of these lackeys, with a demi-pistole in the left hand.”

“Exactly so,” cried Aramis. “Ah! if I’m not mistaken here’s Bazin. Come here, fellow.”

Bazin, who was crossing the ante-chamber majestically in his clerical dress, turned around to see who the impertinent gentleman was who thus addressed him; but seeing his friends he went up to them quickly and expressed delight at seeing them.

“A truce to compliments,” said Aramis; “we want to see the coadjutor, and instantly, as we are in haste.”

“Certainly, sir--it is not such lords as you are who are allowed to wait in the ante-chamber, only just now he has a secret conference with Monsieur de Bruy.”

“De Bruy!” cried the friends, “‘tis then useless our seeing monsieur the coadjutor this evening,” said Aramis, “so we give it up.”

And they hastened to quit the palace, followed by Bazin, who was lavish of bows and compliments.

“Well,” said Athos, when Aramis and he were in the boat again, “are you beginning to be convinced that we should have done a bad turn to all these people in arresting Mazarin?”

“You are wisdom incarnate, Athos,” Aramis replied.

What had especially been observed by the two friends was the little interest taken by the court of France in the terrible events which had occurred in England, which they thought should have arrested the attention of all Europe.

In fact, aside from a poor widow and a royal orphan who wept in the corner of the Louvre, no one appeared to be aware that Charles I. had ever lived and that he had perished on the scaffold.

The two friends made an appointment for ten o'clock on the following day; for though the night was well advanced when they reached the door of the hotel, Aramis said that he had certain important visits to make and left Athos to enter alone.

At ten o'clock the next day they met again. Athos had been out since six o'clock.

"Well, have you any news?" Athos asked.

"Nothing. No one has seen D'Artagnan and Porthos has not appeared. Have you anything?"

"Nothing."

"The devil!" said Aramis.

"In fact," said Athos, "this delay is not natural; they took the shortest route and should have arrived before we did."

"Add to that D'Artagnan's rapidity in action and that he is not the man to lose an hour, knowing that we were expecting him."

"He expected, you will remember, to be here on the fifth."

"And here we are at the ninth. This evening the margin of possible delay expires."

"What do you think should be done," asked Athos, "if we have no news of them to-night?"

"Pardieu! we must go and look for them."

"All right," said Athos.

"But Raoul?" said Aramis.

A light cloud passed over the count's face.

"Raoul gives me much uneasiness," he said. "He received yesterday a message from the Prince de Conde; he went to meet him at Saint Cloud and has not returned."

"Have you seen Madame de Chevreuse?"

"She was not at home. And you, Aramis, you were going, I think, to visit Madame de Longueville."

"I did go there."

"Well?"

"She was no longer there, but she had left her new address."

"Where was she?"

“Guess; I give you a thousand chances.”

“How should I know where the most beautiful and active of the Frondists was at midnight? for I presume it was when you left me that you went to visit her.”

“At the Hotel de Ville, my dear fellow.”

“What! at the Hotel de Ville? Has she, then, been appointed provost of merchants?”

“No; but she has become queen of Paris, ad interim, and since she could not venture at once to establish herself in the Palais Royal or the Tuileries, she is installed at the Hotel de Ville, where she is on the point of giving an heir or an heiress to that dear duke.”

“You didn’t tell me of that, Aramis.”

“Really? It was my forgetfulness then; pardon me.”

“Now,” asked Athos, “what are we to do with ourselves till evening? Here we are without occupation, it seems to me.”

“You forget, my friend, that we have work cut out for us in the direction of Charenton; I hope to see Monsieur de Chatillon, whom I’ve hated for a long time, there.”

“Why have you hated him?”

“Because he is the brother of Coligny.”

“Ah, true! he who presumed to be a rival of yours, for which he was severely punished; that ought to satisfy you.”

“‘Yes, but it does not; I am rancorous--the only stigma that proves me to be a churchman. Do you understand? You understand that you are in no way obliged to go with me.”

“Come, now,” said Athos, “you are joking.”

“In that case, my dear friend, if you are resolved to accompany me there is no time to lose; the drum beats; I observed cannon on the road; I saw the citizens in order of battle on the Place of the Hotel de Ville; certainly the fight will be in the direction of Charenton, as the Duc de Chatillon said.”

“I supposed,” said Athos, “that last night’s conferences would modify those warlike arrangements.”

“No doubt; but they will fight, none the less, if only to mask the conferences.”

“Poor creatures!” said Athos, “who are going to be killed, in order that Monsieur de Bouillon may have his estate at Sedan restored to him, that the reversion of the admiralty may be given to the Duc de Beaufort, and that the coadjutor may be made a cardinal.”

“Come, come, dear Athos, confess that you would not be so philosophical if your Raoul were to be involved in this affair.”

“Perhaps you speak the truth, Aramis.”

“Well, let us go, then, where the fighting is, for that is the most likely place to meet with D’Artagnan, Porthos, and possibly even Raoul. Stop, there are a fine body of citizens passing; quite attractive, by Jupiter! and their captain--see! he has the true military style.”

“What, ho!” said Grimaud.

“What?” asked Athos.

“Planchet, sir.”

“Lieutenant yesterday,” said Aramis, “captain to-day, colonel, doubtless, to-morrow; in a fortnight the fellow will be marshal of France.”

“Question him about the fight,” said Athos.

Planchet, prouder than ever of his new duties, deigned to explain to the two gentlemen that he was ordered to take up his position on the Place Royale with two hundred men, forming the rear of the army of Paris, and to march on Charenton when necessary.

“This day will be a warm one,” said Planchet, in a warlike tone.

“No doubt,” said Aramis, “but it is far from here to the enemy.”

“Sir, the distance will be diminished,” said a subordinate.

Aramis saluted, then turning toward Athos:

“I don’t care to camp on the Place Royale with all these people,” he said. “Shall we go forward? We shall see better what is going on.”

“And then Monsieur de Chatillon will not come to the Place Royale to look for you. Come, then, my friend, we will go forward.”

“Haven’t you something to say to Monsieur de Flamarens on your own account?”

“My friend,” said Athos, “I have made a resolution never to draw my sword save when it is absolutely necessary.”

“And how long ago was that?”

“When I last drew my poniard.”

“Ah! Good! another souvenir of Monsieur Mordaunt. Well, my friend, nothing now is lacking except that you should feel remorse for having killed that fellow.”

“Hush!” said Athos, putting a finger on his lips, with the sad smile peculiar to him; “let us talk no more of Mordaunt--it will bring bad luck.” And Athos set forward toward Charenton, followed closely by Aramis.

CHAPTER 78.

The Battle of Charenton.

As Athos and Aramis proceeded, and passed different companies on the road, they became aware that they were arriving near the field of battle.

"Ah! my friend!" cried Athos, suddenly, "where have you brought us? I fancy I perceive around us faces of different officers in the royal army; is not that the Duc de Chatillon himself coming toward us with his brigadiers?"

"Good-day, sirs," said the duke, advancing; "you are puzzled by what you see here, but one word will explain everything. There is now a truce and a conference. The prince, Monsieur de Retz, the Duc de Beaufort, the Duc de Bouillon, are talking over public affairs. Now one of two things must happen: either matters will not be arranged, or they will be arranged, in which last case I shall be relieved of my command and we shall still meet again."

"Sir," said Aramis, "you speak to the point. Allow me to ask you a question: Where are the plenipotentiaries?"

"At Charenton, in the second house on the right on entering from the direction of Paris."

"And was this conference arranged beforehand?"

"No, gentlemen, it seems to be the result of certain propositions which Mazarin made last night to the Parisians."

Athos and Aramis exchanged smiles; for they well knew what those propositions were, to whom they had been made and who had made them.

"And that house in which the plenipotentiaries are," asked Athos, "belongs to----"

"To Monsieur de Chanleu, who commands your troops at Charenton. I say your troops, for I presume that you gentlemen are Frondeurs?"

"Yes, almost," said Aramis.

"We are for the king and the princes," added Athos.

"We must understand each other," said the duke. "The king is with us and his generals are the Duke of Orleans and the Prince de Conde, although I must add ‘tis almost impossible now to know to which party any one belongs.”

“Yes,” answered Athos, “but his right place is in our ranks, with the Prince de Conti, De Beaufort, D’Elbeuf, and De Bouillon; but, sir, supposing that the conference is broken off--are you going to try to take Charenton?”

“Such are my orders.”

“Sir, since you command the cavalry----”

“Pardon me, I am commander-in-chief.”

“So much the better. You must know all your officers--I mean those more distinguished.”

“Why, yes, very nearly.”

“Will you then kindly tell me if you have in your command the Chevalier d’Artagnan, lieutenant in the musketeers?”

“No, sir, he is not with us; he left Paris more than six weeks ago and is believed to have gone on a mission to England.”

“I knew that, but I supposed he had returned.”

“No, sir; no one has seen him. I can answer positively on that point, for the musketeers belong to our forces and Monsieur de Cambon, the substitute for Monsieur d’Artagnan, still holds his place.”

The two friends looked at each other.

“You see,” said Athos.

“It is strange,” said Aramis.

“It is absolutely certain that some misfortune has happened to them on the way.”

“If we have no news of them this evening, to-morrow we must start.”

Athos nodded affirmatively, then turning:

“And Monsieur de Bragelonne, a young man fifteen years of age, attached to the Prince de Conde--has he the honor of being known to you?” diffident in allowing the sarcastic Aramis to perceive how strong were his paternal feelings.

“Yes, surely, he came with the prince; a charming young man; he is one of your friends then, monsieur le comte?”

“Yes, sir,” answered Athos, agitated; “so much so that I wish to see him if possible.”

“Quite possible, sir; do me the favor to accompany me and I will conduct you to headquarters.”

“Halloo, there!” cried Aramis, turning around; “what a noise behind us!”

“A body of cavaliers is coming toward us,” said Chatillon.

“I recognize the coadjutor by his Frondist hat.”

“And I the Duc de Beaufort by his white plume of ostrich feathers.”

“They are coming, full gallop; the prince is with them--ah! he is leaving them!”

“They are beating the rappel!” cried Chatillon; “we must discover what is going on.”

In fact, they saw the soldiers running to their arms; the trumpets sounded; the drums beat; the Duc de Beaufort drew his sword. On his side the prince sounded a rappel and all the officers of the royalist army, mingling momentarily with the Parisian troops, ran to him.

“Gentlemen,” cried Chatillon, “the truce is broken, that is evident; they are going to fight; go, then, into Charenton, for I shall begin in a short time--there’s a signal from the prince!”

The cornet of a troop had in fact just raised the standard of the prince.

“Farewell, till the next time we meet,” cried Chatillon, and he set off, full gallop.

Athos and Aramis turned also and went to salute the coadjutor and the Duc de Beaufort. As to the Duc de Bouillon, he had such a fit of gout as obliged him to return to Paris in a litter; but his place was well filled by the Duc d’Elbeuf and his four sons, ranged around him like a staff. Meantime, between Charenton and the royal army was left a space which looked ready to serve as a last resting place for the dead.

“Gentlemen,” cried the coadjutor, tightening his sash, which he wore, after the fashion of the ancient military prelates, over his archiepiscopal simar, “there’s the enemy approaching. Let us save them half of their journey.”

And without caring whether he were followed or not he set off; his regiment, which bore the name of the regiment of Corinth, from the name of his archbishopric, darted after him and began the fight. Monsieur de Beaufort sent his cavalry, toward Etampes and Monsieur de Chanleu, who defended the place, was ready to resist an assault, or if the enemy were repulsed, to attempt a sortie.

The battle soon became general and the coadjutor performed miracles of valor. His proper vocation had always been the sword and he was delighted whenever he could draw it from the scabbard, no matter for whom or against whom.

Chanleu, whose fire at one time repulsed the royal regiment, thought that the moment was come to pursue it; but it was reformed and led again to the charge by the Duc de Chatillon in person. This charge was so fierce, so skillfully conducted, that Chanleu was almost surrounded. He commanded a retreat, which began, step by step, foot by foot; unhappily, in an instant he fell, mortally wounded. De Chatillon saw him fall and announced it in a loud voice to his men, which raised their spirits and completely disheartened their enemies, so that every man thought only of his own safety and tried to gain the trenches, where the coadjutor was trying to reform his disorganized regiment.

Suddenly a squadron of cavalry galloped up to encounter the royal troops, who were entering, pele-mele, the intrenchments with the fugitives. Athos and Aramis charged at the head of their squadrons; Aramis with sword and pistol in his hands, Athos with his sword in his scabbard, his pistol in his saddle-bags; calm and cool as if on the parade, except that his noble and beautiful countenance became sad as he saw slaughtered so many men who were sacrificed on the one side to the obstinacy of royalty and on the other to the personal rancor of the princes. Aramis, on the contrary, struck right and left and was almost delirious with excitement. His bright eyes kindled, and his mouth, so finely formed, assumed a wicked smile; every blow he aimed was sure, and his pistol finished the deed--annihilated the wounded wretch who tried to rise again.

On the opposite side two cavaliers, one covered with a gilt cuirass, the other wearing simply a buff doublet, from which fell the sleeves of a vest of blue velvet, charged in front. The cavalier in the gilt cuirass fell upon Aramis and struck a blow that Aramis parried with his wonted skill.

“Ah! ‘tis you, Monsieur de Chatillon,” cried the chevalier; “welcome to you--I expected you.”

“I hope I have not made you wait too long, sir,” said the duke; “at all events, here I am.”

“Monsieur de Chatillon,” cried Aramis, taking from his saddle-bags a second pistol, “I think if your pistols have been discharged you are a dead man.”

“Thank God, sir, they are not!”

And the duke, pointing his pistol at Aramis, fired. But Aramis bent his head the instant he saw the duke's finger press the trigger and the ball passed without touching him.

"Oh! you've missed me," cried Aramis, "but I swear to Heaven! I will not miss you."

"If I give you time!" cried the duke, spurring on his horse and rushing upon him with his drawn sword.

Aramis awaited him with that terrible smile which was peculiar to him on such occasions, and Athos, who saw the duke advancing toward Aramis with the rapidity of lightning, was just going to cry out, "Fire! fire, then!" when the shot was fired. De Chatillon opened his arms and fell back on the crupper of his horse.

The ball had entered his breast through a notch in the cuirass.

"I am a dead man," he said, and fell from his horse to the ground.

"I told you this, I am now grieved I have kept my word. Can I be of any use to you?"

Chatillon made a sign with his hand and Aramis was about to dismount when he received a violent shock; 'twas a thrust from a sword, but his cuirass turned aside the blow.

He turned around and seized his new antagonist by the wrist, when he started back, exclaiming, "Raoul!"

"Raoul?" cried Athos.

The young man recognized at the same instant the voices of his father and the Chevalier d'Herblay; two officers in the Parisian forces rushed at that instant on Raoul, but Aramis protected him with his sword.

"My prisoner!" he cried.

Athos took his son's horse by the bridle and led him forth out of the melee.

At this crisis of the battle, the prince, who had been seconding De Chatillon in the second line, appeared in the midst of the fight; his eagle eye made him known and his blows proclaimed the hero.

On seeing him, the regiment of Corinth, which the coadjutor had not been able to reorganize in spite of all his efforts, threw itself into the midst of the Parisian forces, put them into confusion and re-entered Charenton flying. The coadjutor, dragged along with his fugitive forces, passed near the group formed by Athos, Raoul and Aramis. Aramis could not in his jealousy avoid being pleased at the coadjutor’s misfortune, and was about to utter some bon mot more witty than correct, when Athos stopped him.

“On, on!” he cried, “this is no moment for compliments; or rather, back, for the battle seems to be lost by the Frondeurs.”

“It is a matter of indifference to me,” said Aramis; “I came here only to meet De Chatillon; I have met him, I am contented; ‘tis something to have met De Chatillon in a duel!”

“And besides, we have a prisoner,” said Athos, pointing to Raoul.

The three cavaliers continued their road on full gallop.

“What were you doing in the battle, my friend?” inquired Athos of the youth; “‘twas not your right place, I think, as you were not equipped for an engagement!”

“I had no intention of fighting to-day, sir; I was charged, indeed, with a mission to the cardinal and had set out for Rueil, when, seeing Monsieur de Chatillon charge, an invincible desire possessed me to charge at his side. It was then that he told me two cavaliers of the Parisian army were seeking me and named the Comte de la Fere.”

“What! you knew we were there and yet wished to kill your friend the chevalier?”

“I did not recognize the chevalier in armor, sir!” said Raoul, blushing; “though I might have known him by his skill and coolness in danger.”

“Thank you for the compliment, my young friend,” replied Aramis, “we can see from whom you learned courtesy. Then you were going to Rueil?”

“Yes! I have a despatch from the prince to his eminence.”

“You must still deliver it,” said Athos.

“No false generosity, count! the fate of our friends, to say nothing of our own, is perhaps in that very despatch.”

“This young man must not, however, fail in his duty,” said Athos.

“In the first place, count, this youth is our prisoner; you seem to forget that. What I propose to do is fair in war; the vanquished must not be dainty in the choice of means. Give me the despatch, Raoul.”

The young man hesitated and looked at Athos as if seeking to read in his eyes a rule of conduct.

“Give him the despatch, Raoul! you are the chevalier’s prisoner.”

Raoul gave it up reluctantly; Aramis instantly seized and read it.

“You,” he said, “you, who are so trusting, read and reflect that there is something in this letter important for us to see.”

Athos took the letter, frowning, but an idea that he should find something in this letter about D'Artagnan conquered his unwillingness to read it.

"My lord, I shall send this evening to your eminence in order to reinforce the troop of Monsieur de Comminges, the ten men you demand. They are good soldiers, fit to confront the two violent adversaries whose address and resolution your eminence is fearful of."

"Oh!" cried Athos.

"Well," said Aramis, "what think you about these two enemies whom it requires, besides Comminges's troop, ten good soldiers to confront; are they not as like as two drops of water to D'Artagnan and Porthos?"

"We'll search Paris all day long," said Athos, "and if we have no news this evening we will return to the road to Picardy; and I feel no doubt that, thanks to D'Artagnan's ready invention, we shall then find some clew which will solve our doubts."

"Yes, let us search Paris and especially inquire of Planchet if he has yet heard from his former master."

"That poor Planchet! You speak of him very much at your ease, Aramis; he has probably been killed. All those fighting citizens went out to battle and they have been massacred."

It was, then, with a sentiment of uneasiness whether Planchet, who alone could give them information, was alive or dead, that the friends returned to the Place Royale; to their great surprise they found the citizens still encamped there, drinking and bantering each other, although, doubtless, mourned by their families, who thought they were at Charenton in the thickest of the fighting.

Athos and Aramis again questioned Planchet, but he had seen nothing of D'Artagnan; they wished to take Planchet with them, but he could not leave his troop, who at five o'clock returned home, saying that they were returning from the battle, whereas they had never lost sight of the bronze equestrian statue of Louis XIII.

CHAPTER 79.

The Road to Picardy.

On leaving Paris, Athos and Aramis well knew that they would be encountering great danger; but we know that for men like these there could be no question of danger. Besides, they felt that the denouement of this second Odyssey was at hand and that there remained but a single effort to make.

Besides, there was no tranquillity in Paris itself. Provisions began to fail, and whenever one of the Prince de Conti's generals wished to gain more influence he got up a little popular tumult, which he put down again, and thus for the moment gained a superiority over his colleagues.

In one of these risings, the Duc de Beaufort pillaged the house and library of Mazarin, in order to give the populace, as he put it, something to gnaw at. Athos and Aramis left Paris after this coup-d'etat, which took place on the very evening of the day in which the Parisians had been beaten at Charenton.

They quitted Paris, beholding it abandoned to extreme want, bordering on famine; agitated by fear, torn by faction. Parisians and Frondeurs as they were, the two friends expected to find the same misery, the same fears, the same intrigue in the enemy's camp; but what was their surprise, after passing Saint Denis, to hear that at Saint Germain people were singing and laughing, and leading generally cheerful lives. The two gentlemen traveled by byways in order not to encounter the Mazarinists scattered about the Isle of France, and also to escape the Frondeurs, who were in possession of Normandy and who never failed to conduct captives to the Duc de Longueville, in order that he might ascertain whether they were friends or foes. Having escaped these dangers, they returned by the main road to Boulogne, at Abbeville, and followed it step by step, examining every track.

Nevertheless, they were still in a state of uncertainty. Several inns were visited by them, several innkeepers questioned, without a single clew being given to guide their inquiries, when at Montreuil Athos felt upon the table that something rough was touching his delicate fingers. He turned up the cloth and found these hieroglyphics carved upon the wood with a knife:

“Port.... D’Art.... 2d February.”

“This is capital!” said Athos to Aramis, “we were to have slept here, but we cannot--we must push on.” They rode forward and reached Abbeville. There the great number of inns puzzled them; they could not go to all; how could they guess in which those whom they were seeking had stayed?

“Trust me,” said Aramis, “do not expect to find anything in Abbeville. If we had only been looking for Porthos, Porthos would have stationed himself in one of the finest hotels and we could easily have traced him. But D’Artagnan is devoid of such weaknesses. Porthos would have found it very difficult even to make him see that he was dying of hunger; he has gone on his road as inexorable as fate and we must seek him somewhere else.”

They continued their route. It had now become a weary and almost hopeless task, and had it not been for the threefold motives of honor, friendship and gratitude, implanted in their hearts, our two travelers would have given up many a time their rides over the sand, their interrogatories of the peasantry and their close inspection of faces.

They proceeded thus to Peronne.

Athos began to despair. His noble nature felt that their ignorance was a sort of reflection upon them. They had not looked carefully enough for their lost friends. They had not shown sufficient pertinacity in their inquiries. They were willing and ready to retrace their steps, when, in crossing the suburb which leads to the gates of the town, upon a white wall which was at the corner of a street turning around the rampart, Athos cast his eyes upon a drawing in black chalk, which represented, with the awkwardness of a first attempt, two cavaliers riding furiously; one of them carried a roll of paper on which were written these words: “They are following us.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Athos, “here it is, as clear as day; pursued as he was, D’Artagnan would not have tarried here five minutes had he been pressed very closely, which gives us hopes that he may have succeeded in escaping.”

Aramis shook his head.

“Had he escaped we should either have seen him or have heard him spoken of.”

“You are right, Aramis, let us travel on.”

To describe the impatience and anxiety of these two friends would be impossible. Uneasiness took possession of the tender, constant heart of Athos, and fearful forecasts were the torment of the impulsive Aramis. They galloped on for two or three hours as furiously as the cavaliers on the wall. All at once, in a narrow pass, they perceived that the road was partially barricaded by an enormous stone. It had evidently been rolled across the pass by some arm of giant strength.

Aramis stopped.

“Oh!” he said, looking at the stone, “this is the work of either Hercules or Porthos. Let us get down, count, and examine this rock.”

They both alighted. The stone had been brought with the evident intention of barricading the road, but some one having perceived the obstacle had partially turned it aside.

With the assistance of Blaisois and Grimaud the friends succeeded in turning the stone over. Upon the side next the ground were scratched the following words:

“Eight of the light dragoons are pursuing us. If we reach Compiegne we shall stop at the Peacock. It is kept by a friend of ours.”

“At last we have something definite,” said Athos; “let us go to the Peacock.”

“Yes,” answered Aramis, “but if we are to get there we must rest our horses, for they are almost broken-winded.”

Aramis was right; they stopped at the first tavern and made each horse swallow a double quantity of corn steeped in wine; they gave them three hours’ rest and then set off again. The men themselves were almost dead with fatigue, but hope supported them.

In six hours they reached Compiegne and alighted at the Peacock. The host proved to be a worthy man, as bald as a Chinaman. They asked him if some time ago he had not received in his house two gentlemen who were pursued by dragoons; without answering he went out and brought in the blade of a rapier.

“Do you know that?” he asked.

Athos merely glanced at it.

“‘Tis D’Artagnan’s sword,” he said.

“Does it belong to the smaller or to the larger of the two?” asked the host.

“To the smaller.”

“I see that you are the friends of these gentlemen.”

“Well, what has happened to them?”

“They were pursued by eight of the light dragoons, who rode into the courtyard before they had time to close the gate.”

“Eight!” said Aramis; “it surprises me that two such heroes as Porthos and D’Artagnan should have allowed themselves to be arrested by eight men.”

“The eight men would doubtless have failed had they not been assisted by twenty soldiers of the regiment of Italians in the king’s service, who are in garrison in this town so that your friends were overpowered by numbers.”

“Arrested, were they?” inquired Athos; “is it known why?”

“No, sir, they were carried off instantly, and had not even time to tell me why; but as soon as they were gone I found this broken sword-blade, as I was helping to raise two dead men and five or six wounded ones.”

“‘Tis still a consolation that they were not wounded,” said Aramis.

“Where were they taken?” asked Athos.

“Toward the town of Louvres,” was the reply.

The two friends having agreed to leave Blaisois and Grimaud at Compiegne with the horses, resolved to take post horses; and having snatched a hasty dinner they continued their journey to Louvres. Here they found only one inn, in which was consumed a liqueur which preserves its reputation to our time and which is still made in that town.

“Let us alight here,” said Athos. “D’Artagnan will not have let slip an opportunity of drinking a glass of this liqueur, and at the same time leaving some trace of himself.”

They went into the town and asked for two glasses of liqueur, at the counter--as their friends must have done before them. The counter was covered with a plate of pewter; upon this plate was written with the point of a large pin: “Rueil... D..”

“They went to Rueil,” cried Aramis.

“Let us go to Rueil,” said Athos.

“It is to throw ourselves into the wolf’s jaws,” said Aramis.

“Had I been as great a friend of Jonah as I am of D’Artagnan I should have followed him even into the inside of the whale itself; and you would have done the same, Aramis.”

“Certainly--but you make me out better than I am, dear count. Had I been alone I should scarcely have gone to Rueil without great caution. But where you go, I go.”

They then set off for Rueil. Here the deputies of the parliament had just arrived, in order to enter upon those famous conferences which were to last three weeks, and produced eventually that shameful peace, at the conclusion of which the prince was arrested. Rueil was crowded with advocates, presidents and councillors, who came from the Parisians, and, on the side of the court, with officers and guards; it was therefore easy, in the midst of this confusion, to remain as unobserved as any one might wish; besides, the conferences implied a truce, and to arrest two gentlemen, even Frondeurs, at this time, would have been an attack on the rights of the people.

The two friends mingled with the crowd and fancied that every one was occupied with the same thought that tormented them. They expected to hear some mention made of D’Artagnan or of Porthos, but every one was engrossed by articles and reforms. It was the advice of Athos to go straight to the minister.

“My friend,” said Aramis, “take care; our safety lies in our obscurity. If we were to make ourselves known we should be sent to rejoin our friends in some deep ditch, from which the devil himself could not take us out. Let us try not to find them out by accident, but from our notions. Arrested at Compiegne, they have been carried to Rueil; at Rueil they have been questioned by the cardinal, who has either kept them near him or sent them to Saint Germain. As to the Bastile, they are not there, though the Bastile is especially for the Frondeurs. They are not dead, for the death of D’Artagnan would make a sensation. As for Porthos, I believe him to be eternal, like God, although less patient. Do not let us despond, but wait at Rueil, for my conviction is that they are at Rueil. But what ails you? You are pale.”

“It is this,” answered Athos, with a trembling voice.

“I remember that at the Castle of Rueil the Cardinal Richelieu had some horrible ‘oubliettes’ constructed.”

“Oh! never fear,” said Aramis. “Richelieu was a gentleman, our equal in birth, our superior in position. He could, like the king, touch the greatest of us on the head, and touching them make such heads shake on their shoulders. But Mazarin is a low-born rogue, who can at the most take us by the collar, like an archer. Be calm--for I am sure that D’Artagnan and Porthos are at Rueil, alive and well.”

“But,” resumed Athos, “I recur to my first proposal. I know no better means than to act with candor. I shall seek, not Mazarin, but the queen, and say to her, ‘Madame, restore to us your two servants and our two friends.’“

Aramis shook his head.

“‘Tis a last resource, but let us not employ it till it is imperatively called for; let us rather persevere in our researches.”

They continued their inquiries and at last met with a light dragoon who had formed one of the guard which had escorted D’Artagnan to Rueil.

Athos, however, perpetually recurred to his proposed interview with the queen.

“In order to see the queen,” said Aramis, “we must first see the cardinal; and when we have seen the cardinal--remember what I tell you, Athos--we shall be reunited to our friends, but not in the way you wish. Now, that way of joining them is not very attractive to me, I confess. Let us act in freedom, that we may act well and quickly.”

“I shall go,” he said, “to the queen.”

“Well, then,” answered Aramis, “pray tell me a day or two beforehand, that I may take that opportunity of going to Paris.”

“To whom?”

“Zounds! how do I know? perhaps to Madame de Longueville. She is all-powerful yonder; she will help me. But send me word should you be arrested, for then I will return directly.”

“Why do you not take your chance and be arrested with me?”

“No, I thank you.”

“Should we, by being arrested, be all four together again, we should not, I am not sure, be twenty-four hours in prison without getting free.”

“My friend, since I killed Chatillon, adored of the ladies of Saint Germain, I am too great a celebrity not to fear a prison doubly. The queen is likely to follow Mazarin’s counsels and to have me tried.”

“Do you think she loves this Italian so much as they say she does?”

“Did she not love an Englishman?”

“My friend, she is a woman.”

“No, no, you are deceived--she is a queen.”

“Dear friend, I shall sacrifice myself and go and see Anne of Austria.”

“Adieu, Athos, I am going to raise an army.”

“For what purpose?”

“To come back and besiege Rueil.”

“Where shall we meet again?”

“At the foot of the cardinal’s gallows.”

The two friends departed--Aramis to return to Paris, Athos to take measures preparatory to an interview with the queen.

CHAPTER 80.

The Gratitude of Anne of Austria.

Athos found much less difficulty than he had expected in obtaining an audience of Anne of Austria. It was granted, and was to take place after her morning's "levee," at which, in accordance with his rights of birth, he was entitled to be present. A vast crowd filled the apartments of Saint Germain. Anne had never at the Louvre had so large a court; but this crowd represented chiefly the second class of nobility, while the Prince de Conti, the Duc de Beaufort and the coadjutor assembled around them the first nobility of France.

The greatest possible gayety prevailed at court. The particular characteristic of this was that more songs were made than cannons fired during its continuance. The court made songs on the Parisians and the Parisians on the court; and the casualties, though not mortal, were painful, as are all wounds inflicted by the weapon of ridicule.

In the midst of this seeming hilarity, nevertheless, people's minds were uneasy. Was Mazarin to remain the favorite and minister of the queen? Was he to be carried back by the wind which had blown him there? Every one hoped so, so that the minister felt that all around him, beneath the homage of the courtiers, lay a fund of hatred, ill disguised by fear and interest. He felt ill at ease and at a loss what to do.

Conde himself, whilst fighting for him, lost no opportunity of ridiculing, of humbling him. The queen, on whom he threw himself as sole support, seemed to him now not much to be relied upon.

When the hour appointed for the audience arrived Athos was obliged to stay until the queen, who was waited upon by a new deputation from Paris, had consulted with her minister as to the propriety and manner of receiving them. All were fully engrossed with the affairs of the day; Athos could not therefore have chosen a more inauspicious moment to speak of his friends--poor atoms, lost in that raging whirlwind.

But Athos was a man of inflexible determination; he firmly adhered to a purpose once formed, when it seemed to him to spring from conscience and to be prompted by a sense of duty. He insisted on being introduced, saying that although he was not a deputy from Monsieur de Conti, or Monsieur de Beaufort, or Monsieur de Bouillon, or Monsieur d'Elbeuf, or the coadjutor, or Madame de Longueville, or Broussel, or the Parliament, and although he had come on his own private account, he nevertheless had things to say to her majesty of the utmost importance.

The conference being finished, the queen summoned him to her cabinet.

Athos was introduced and announced by name. It was a name that too often resounded in her majesty's ears and too often vibrated in her heart for Anne of Austria not to recognize it; yet she remained impassive, looking at him with that fixed stare which is tolerated only in women who are queens, either by the power of beauty or by the right of birth.

"It is then a service which you propose to render us, count?" asked Anne of Austria, after a moment's silence.

"Yes, madame, another service," said Athos, shocked that the queen did not seem to recognize him.

Athos had a noble heart, and made, therefore, but a poor courtier.

Anne frowned. Mazarin, who was sitting at a table folding up papers, as if he had only been a secretary of state, looked up.

"Speak," said the queen.

Mazarin turned again to his papers.

"Madame," resumed Athos, "two of my friends, named D'Artagnan and Monsieur du Vallon, sent to England by the cardinal, suddenly disappeared when they set foot on the shores of France; no one knows what has become of them."

"Well?" said the queen.

"I address myself, therefore, first to the benevolence of your majesty, that I may know what has become of my friends, reserving to myself, if necessary, the right of appealing hereafter to your justice."

"Sir," replied Anne, with a degree of haughtiness which to certain persons became impertinence, "this is the reason that you trouble me in the midst of so many absorbing concerns! an affair for the police! Well, sir, you ought to know that we no longer have a police, since we are no longer at Paris."

"I think your majesty will have no need to apply to the police to know where my friends are, but that if you will deign to interrogate the cardinal he can reply without any further inquiry than into his own recollections."

“But, God forgive me!” cried Anne, with that disdainful curl of the lips peculiar to her, “I believe that you are yourself interrogating.”

“Yes, madame, here I have a right to do so, for it concerns Monsieur d’Artagnan---d’Artagnan,” he repeated, in such a manner as to bow the regal brow with recollections of the weak and erring woman.

The cardinal saw that it was now high time to come to the assistance of Anne.

“Sir,” he said, “I can tell you what is at present unknown to her majesty. These individuals are under arrest. They disobeyed orders.”

“I beg of your majesty, then,” said Athos, calmly and not replying to Mazarin, “to quash these arrests of Messieurs d’Artagnan and du Vallon.”

“What you ask is merely an affair of discipline and does not concern me,” said the queen.

“Monsieur d’Artagnan never made such an answer as that when the service of your majesty was concerned,” said Athos, bowing with great dignity. He was going toward the door when Mazarin stopped him.

“You, too, have been in England, sir?” he said, making a sign to the queen, who was evidently going to issue a severe order.

“I was a witness of the last hours of Charles I. Poor king! culpable, at the most, of weakness, how cruelly punished by his subjects! Thrones are at this time shaken and it is to little purpose for devoted hearts to serve the interests of princes. This is the second time that Monsieur d’Artagnan has been in England. He went the first time to save the honor of a great queen; the second, to avert the death of a great king.”

“Sir,” said Anne to Mazarin, with an accent from which daily habits of dissimulation could not entirely chase the real expression, “see if we can do something for these gentlemen.”

“I wish to do, madame, all that your majesty pleases.”

“Do what Monsieur de la Fere requests; that is your name, is it not, sir?”

“I have another name, madame--I am called Athos.”

“Madame,” said Mazarin, with a smile, “you may rest easy; your wishes shall be fulfilled.”

“You hear, sir?” said the queen.

“Yes, madame, I expected nothing less from the justice of your majesty. May I not go and see my friends?”

“Yes, sir, you shall see them. But, apropos, you belong to the Fronde, do you not?”

“Madame, I serve the king.”

“Yes, in your own way.”

“My way is the way of all gentlemen, and I know only one way,” answered Athos, haughtily.

“Go, sir, then,” said the queen; “you have obtained what you wish and we know all we desire to know.”

Scarcely, however, had the tapestry closed behind Athos when she said to Mazarin:

“Cardinal, desire them to arrest that insolent fellow before he leaves the court.”

“Your majesty,” answered Mazarin, “desires me to do only what I was going to ask you to let me do. These bravoes who resuscitate in our epoch the traditions of another reign are troublesome; since there are two of them already there, let us add a third.”

Athos was not altogether the queen’s dupe, but he was not a man to run away on suspicion--above all, when distinctly told that he should see his friends again. He waited, then, in the ante-chamber with impatience, till he should be conducted to them.

He walked to the window and looked into the court. He saw the deputation from the Parisians enter it; they were coming to assign the definitive place for the conference and to make their bow to the queen. A very imposing escort awaited them without the gates.

Athos was looking on attentively, when some one touched him softly on the shoulder.

“Ah! Monsieur de Comminges,” he said.

“Yes, count, and charged with a commission for which I beg of you to accept my excuses.”

“What is it?”

“Be so good as to give me up your sword, count.”

Athos smiled and opened the window.

“Aramis!” he cried.

A gentleman turned around. Athos fancied he had seen him among the crowd. It was Aramis. He bowed with great friendship to the count.

“Aramis,” cried Athos, “I am arrested.”

“Good,” replied Aramis, calmly.

“Sir,” said Athos, turning to Comminges and giving him politely his sword by the hilt, “here is my sword; have the kindness to keep it safely for me until I quit my prison. I prize it--it was given to my ancestor by King Francis I. In his time they armed gentlemen, not disarmed them. Now, whither do you conduct me?”

“Into my room first,” replied Comminges; “the queen will ultimately decide your place of domicile.”

Athos followed Comminges without saying a single word.

CHAPTER 81.

Cardinal Mazarin as King.

The arrest produced no sensation, indeed was almost unknown, and scarcely interrupted the course of events. To the deputation it was formally announced that the queen would receive it.

Accordingly, it was admitted to the presence of Anne, who, silent and lofty as ever, listened to the speeches and complaints of the deputies; but when they had finished their harangues not one of them could say, so calm remained her face, whether or no she had heard them.

On the other hand, Mazarin, present at that audience, heard very well what those deputies demanded. It was purely and simply his removal, in terms clear and precise.

The discourse being finished, the queen remained silent.

“Gentlemen,” said Mazarin, “I join with you in supplicating the queen to put an end to the miseries of her subjects. I have done all in my power to ameliorate them and yet the belief of the public, you say, is that they proceed from me, an unhappy foreigner, who has been unable to please the French. Alas! I have never been understood, and no wonder. I succeeded a man of the most sublime genius that ever upheld the sceptre of France. The memory of Richelieu annihilates me. In vain--were I an ambitious man--should I struggle against such remembrances as he has left; but that I am not ambitious I am going to prove to you. I own myself conquered. I shall obey the wishes of the people. If Paris has injuries to complain of, who has not some wrongs to be redressed? Paris has been sufficiently punished; enough blood has flowed, enough misery has humbled a town deprived of its king and of justice. ‘Tis not for me, a private individual, to disunite a queen from her kingdom. Since you demand my resignation, I retire.”

“Then,” said Aramis, in his neighbor’s ear, “the conferences are over. There is nothing to do but to send Monsieur Mazarin to the most distant frontier and to take care that he does not return even by that, nor any other entrance into France.”

"One instant, sir," said the man in a gown, whom he addressed; "a plague on't! how fast you go! one may soon see that you're a soldier. There's the article of remunerations and indemnifications to be discussed and set to rights."

"Chancellor," said the queen, turning to Seguier, our old acquaintance, "you will open the conferences. They can take place at Rueil. The cardinal has said several things which have agitated me, therefore I will not speak more fully now. As to his going or staying, I feel too much gratitude to the cardinal not to leave him free in all his actions; he shall do what he wishes to do."

A transient pallor overspread the speaking countenance of the prime minister; he looked at the queen with anxiety. Her face was so passionless, that he, as every one else present, was incapable of reading her thoughts.

"But," added the queen, "in awaiting the cardinal's decision let there be, if you please, a reference to the king only."

The deputies bowed and left the room.

"What!" exclaimed the queen, when the last of them had quitted the apartment, "you would yield to these limbs of the law--these advocates?"

"To promote your majesty's welfare, madame," replied Mazarin, fixing his penetrating eyes on the queen, "there is no sacrifice that I would not make."

Anne dropped her head and fell into one of those reveries so habitual with her. A recollection of Athos came into her mind. His fearless deportment, his words, so firm, yet dignified, the shades which by one word he had evoked, recalled to her the past in all its intoxication of poetry and romance, youth, beauty, the eclat of love at twenty years of age, the bloody death of Buckingham, the only man whom she had ever really loved, and the heroism of those obscure champions who had saved her from the double hatred of Richelieu and the king.

Mazarin looked at her, and whilst she deemed herself alone and freed from the world of enemies who sought to spy into her secret thoughts, he read her thoughts in her countenance, as one sees in a transparent lake clouds pass--reflections, like thoughts, of the heavens.

"Must we, then," asked Anne of Austria, "yield to the storm, buy peace, and patiently and piously await better times?"

Mazarin smiled sarcastically at this speech, which showed that she had taken the minister's proposal seriously.

Anne’s head was bent down--she had not seen the Italian’s smile; but finding that her question elicited no reply she looked up.

“Well, you do not answer, cardinal, what do you think about it?”

“I am thinking, madame, of the allusion made by that insolent gentleman, whom you have caused to be arrested, to the Duke of Buckingham--to him whom you allowed to be assassinated--to the Duchess de Chevreuse, whom you suffered to be exiled--to the Duc de Beaufort, whom you imprisoned; but if he made allusion to me it was because he is ignorant of the relation in which I stand to you.”

Anne drew up, as she always did, when anything touched her pride. She blushed, and that she might not answer, clasped her beautiful hands till her sharp nails almost pierced them.

“That man has sagacity, honor and wit, not to mention likewise that he is a man of undoubted resolution. You know something about him, do you not, madame? I shall tell him, therefore, and in doing so I shall confer a personal favor on him, how he is mistaken in regard to me. What is proposed to me would be, in fact, almost an abdication, and an abdication requires reflection.”

“An abdication?” repeated Anne; “I thought, sir, that it was kings alone who abdicated!”

“Well,” replied Mazarin, “and am I not almost a king--king, indeed, of France? Thrown over the foot of the royal bed, my simar, madame, looks not unlike the mantle worn by kings.”

This was one of the humiliations which Mazarin made Anne undergo more frequently than any other, and one that bowed her head with shame. Queen Elizabeth and Catherine II. of Russia are the only two monarchs of their set on record who were at once sovereigns and lovers. Anne of Austria looked with a sort of terror at the threatening aspect of the cardinal--his physiognomy in such moments was not destitute of a certain grandeur.

“Sir,” she replied, “did I not say, and did you not hear me say to those people, that you should do as you pleased?”

“In that case,” said Mazarin, “I think it must please me best to remain; not only on account of my own interest, but for your safety.”

“Remain, then, sir; nothing can be more agreeable to me; only do not allow me to be insulted.”

“You are referring to the demands of the rebels and to the tone in which they stated them? Patience! They have selected a field of battle on which I am an abler general than they--that of a conference. No, we shall beat them by merely temporizing. They want food already. They will be ten times worse off in a week."

"Ah, yes! Good heavens! I know it will end in that way; but it is not they who taunt me with the most wounding reproaches, but----"

"I understand; you mean to allude to the recollections perpetually revived by these three gentlemen. However, we have them safe in prison, and they are just sufficiently culpable for us to keep them in prison as long as we find it convenient. One only is still not in our power and braves us. But, devil take him! we shall soon succeed in sending him to join his boon companions. We have accomplished more difficult things than that. In the first place I have as a precaution shut up at Rueil, near me, under my own eyes, within reach of my hand, the two most intractable ones. To-day the third will be there also."

"As long as they are in prison all will be well," said Anne, "but one of these days they will get out."

"Yes, if your majesty releases them."

"Ah!" exclaimed Anne, following the train of her own thoughts on such occasions, "one regrets Paris!"

"Why so?"

"On account of the Bastile, sir, which is so strong and so secure."

"Madame, these conferences will bring us peace; when we have peace we shall regain Paris; with Paris, the Bastile, and our four bullies shall rot therein."

Anne frowned slightly when Mazarin, in taking leave, kissed her hand.

Mazarin, after this half humble, half gallant attention, went away. Anne followed him with her eyes, and as he withdrew, at every step he took, a disdainful smile was seen playing, then gradually burst upon her lips.

"I once," she said, "despised the love of a cardinal who never said 'I shall do,' but, 'I have done so and so.' That man knew of retreats more secure than Rueil, darker and more silent even than the Bastile. Degenerate world!"

CHAPTER 82.

Precautions.

After quitting Anne, Mazarin took the road to Rueil, where he usually resided; in those times of disturbance he went about with numerous followers and often disguised himself. In military dress he was, indeed, as we have stated, a very handsome man.

In the court of the old Chateau of Saint Germain he entered his coach, and reached the Seine at Chatou. The prince had supplied him with fifty light horse, not so much by way of guard as to show the deputies how readily the queen’s generals dispersed their troops and to prove that they might be safely scattered at pleasure. Athos, on horseback, without his sword and kept in sight by Comminges, followed the cardinal in silence. Grimaud, finding that his master had been arrested, fell back into the ranks near Aramis, without saying a word and as if nothing had happened.

Grimaud had, indeed, during twenty-two years of service, seen his master extricate himself from so many difficulties that nothing less than Athos’s imminent death was likely to make him uneasy.

At the branching off of the road toward Paris, Aramis, who had followed in the cardinal’s suite, turned back. Mazarin went to the right hand and Aramis could see the prisoner disappear at the turning of the avenue. Athos, at the same moment, moved by a similar impulse, looked back also. The two friends exchanged a simple inclination of the head and Aramis put his finger to his hat, as if to bow, Athos alone comprehending by that signal that he had some project in his head.

Ten minutes afterward Mazarin entered the court of that chateau which his predecessor had built for him at Rueil; as he alighted, Comminges approached him.

“My lord,” he asked, “where does your eminence wish Monsieur Comte de la Fere to be lodged?”

“In the pavilion of the orangery, of course, in front of the pavilion where the guard is. I wish every respect to be shown the count, although he is the prisoner of her majesty the queen.”

"My lord," answered Comminges, "he begs to be taken to the place where Monsieur d'Artagnan is confined--that is, in the hunting lodge, opposite the orangery."

Mazarin thought for an instant.

Comminges saw that he was undecided.

"'Tis a very strong post," he resumed, "and we have forty good men, tried soldiers, having no connection with Frondeurs nor any interest in the Fronde."

"If we put these three men together, Monsieur Comminges," said Mazarin, "we must double the guard, and we are not rich enough in fighting men to commit such acts of prodigality."

Comminges smiled; Mazarin read and construed that smile.

"You do not know these men, Monsieur Comminges, but I know them, first personally, also by hearsay. I sent them to carry aid to King Charles and they performed prodigies to save him; had it not been for an adverse destiny, that beloved monarch would this day have been among us."

"But since they served your eminence so well, why are they, my lord cardinal, in prison?"

"In prison?" said Mazarin, "and when has Rueil been a prison?"

"Ever since there were prisoners in it," answered Comminges.

"These gentlemen, Comminges, are not prisoners," returned Mazarin, with his ironical smile, "only guests; but guests so precious that I have put a grating before each of their windows and bolts to their doors, that they may not refuse to continue my visitors. So much do I esteem them that I am going to make the Comte de la Fere a visit, that I may converse with him tete-a-tete, and that we may not be disturbed at our interview you must conduct him, as I said before, to the pavilion of the orangery; that, you know, is my daily promenade. Well, while taking my walk I will call on him and we will talk. Although he professes to be my enemy I have sympathy for him, and if he is reasonable perhaps we shall arrange matters."

Comminges bowed, and returned to Athos, who was awaiting with apparent calmness, but with real anxiety, the result of the interview.

"Well?" he said to the lieutenant.

"Sir," replied Comminges, "it seems that it is impossible."

"Monsieur de Comminges," said Athos, "I have been a soldier all my life and I know the force of orders; but outside your orders there is a service you can render me."

“I will do it with all my heart,” said Comminges; “for I know who you are and what service you once performed for her majesty; I know, too, how dear to you is the young man who came so valiantly to my aid when that old rogue of a Broussel was arrested. I am entirely at your service, except only for my orders.”

“Thank you, sir; what I am about to ask will not compromise you in any degree.”

“If it should even compromise me a little,” said Monsieur de Comminges, with a smile, “still make your demand. I don’t like Mazarin any better than you do. I serve the queen and that draws me naturally into the service of the cardinal; but I serve the one with joy and the other against my will. Speak, then, I beg of you; I wait and listen.”

“Since there is no harm,” said Athos, “in my knowing that D’Artagnan is here, I presume there will be none in his knowing that I am here.”

“I have received no orders on that point.”

“Well, then, do me the kindness to give him my regards and tell him that I am his neighbor. Tell him also what you have just told me--that Mazarin has placed me in the pavilion of the orangery in order to make me a visit, and assure him that I shall take advantage of this honor he proposes to accord to me to obtain from him some amelioration of our captivity.”

“Which cannot last,” interrupted Comminges; “the cardinal said so; there is no prison here.”

“But there are oubliettes!” replied Athos, smiling.

“Oh! that’s a different thing; yes, I know there are traditions of that sort,” said Comminges. “It was in the time of the other cardinal, who was a great nobleman; but our Mazarin--impossible! an Italian adventurer would not dare to go such lengths with such men as ourselves. Oubliettes are employed as a means of kingly vengeance, and a low-born fellow such as he is would not have recourse to them. Your arrest is known, that of your friends will soon be known; and all the nobility of France would demand an explanation of your disappearance. No, no, be easy on that score. I will, however, inform Monsieur d’Artagnan of your arrival here.”

Comminges then led the count to a room on the ground floor of a pavilion, at the end of the orangery. They passed through a courtyard as they went, full of soldiers and courtiers. In the centre of this court, in the form of a horseshoe, were the buildings occupied by Mazarin, and at each wing the pavilion (or smaller building), where D’Artagnan was confined, and that, level with the orangery, where Athos was to be. From the ends of these two wings extended the park.

Athos, when he reached his appointed room, observed through the gratings of his window, walls and roofs; and was told, on inquiry, by Comminges, that he was looking on the back of the pavilion where D’Artagnan was confined.

“Yes, ‘tis too true,” said Comminges, “‘tis almost a prison; but what a singular fancy this is of yours, count--you, who are the very flower of our nobility--to squander your valor and loyalty amongst these upstarts, the Frondists! Really, count, if ever I thought that I had a friend in the ranks of the royal army, it was you. A Frondeur! you, the Comte de la Fere, on the side of Broussel, Blancmesnil and Viole! For shame! you, a Frondeur!”

“On my word of honor,” said Athos, “one must be either a Mazarinist or a Frondeur. For a long time I had these words whispered in my ears, and I chose the latter; at any rate, it is a French word. And now, I am a Frondeur--not of Broussel’s party, nor of Blancmesnil’s, nor am I with Viole; but with the Duc de Beaufort, the Ducs de Bouillon and d’Elbeuf; with princes, not with presidents, councillors and low-born lawyers. Besides, what a charming outlook it would have been to serve the cardinal! Look at that wall--without a single window--which tells you fine things about Mazarin’s gratitude!”

“Yes,” replied De Comminges, “more especially if it could reveal how Monsieur d’Artagnan for this last week has been anathematizing him.”

“Poor D’Artagnan’“ said Athos, with the charming melancholy that was one of the traits of his character, “so brave, so good, so terrible to the enemies of those he loves. You have two unruly prisoners there, sir.”

“Unruly,” Comminges smiled; “you wish to terrify me, I suppose. When he came here, Monsieur D’Artagnan provoked and braved the soldiers and inferior officers, in order, I suppose, to have his sword back. That mood lasted some time; but now he’s as gentle as a lamb and sings Gascon songs, which make one die of laughing.”

“And Du Vallon?” asked Athos.

“Ah, he’s quite another sort of person--a formidable gentleman, indeed. The first day he broke all the doors in with a single push of his shoulder; and I expected to see him leave Rueil in the same way as Samson left Gaza. But his temper cooled down, like his friend’s; he not only gets used to his captivity, but jokes about it.”

“So much the better,” said Athos.

“Do you think anything else was to be expected of them?” asked Comminges, who, putting together what Mazarin had said of his prisoners and what the Comte de la Fere had said, began to feel a degree of uneasiness.

Athos, on the other hand, reflected that this recent gentleness of his friends most certainly arose from some plan formed by D’Artagnan. Unwilling to injure them by praising them too highly, he replied: “They? They are two hotheads--the one a Gascon, the other from Picardy; both are easily excited, but they quiet down immediately. You have had a proof of that in what you have just related to me.”

This, too, was the opinion of Comminges, who withdrew somewhat reassured. Athos remained alone in the vast chamber, where, according to the cardinal’s directions, he was treated with all the courtesy due to a nobleman. He awaited Mazarin’s promised visit to get some light on his present situation.

CHAPTER 83.

Strength and Sagacity.

Now let us pass the orangery to the hunting lodge. At the extremity of the courtyard, where, close to a portico formed of Ionic columns, were the dog kennels, rose an oblong building, the pavilion of the orangery, a half circle, inclosing the court of honor. It was in this pavilion, on the ground floor, that D'Artagnan and Porthos were confined, suffering interminable hours of imprisonment in a manner suitable to each different temperament.

D'Artagnan was pacing to and fro like a caged tiger; with dilated eyes, growling as he paced along by the bars of a window looking upon the yard of servant's offices.

Porthos was ruminating over an excellent dinner he had just demolished.

The one seemed to be deprived of reason, yet he was meditating. The other seemed to meditate, yet he was more than half asleep. But his sleep was a nightmare, which might be guessed by the incoherent manner in which he sometimes snored and sometimes snorted.

"Look," said D'Artagnan, "day is declining. It must be nearly four o'clock. We have been in this place nearly eighty-three hours."

"Hem!" muttered Porthos, with a kind of pretense of answering.

"Did you hear, eternal sleeper?" cried D'Artagnan, irritated that any one could doze during the day, when he had the greatest difficulty in sleeping during the night.

"What?" said Porthos.

"I say we have been here eighty-three hours."

"'Tis your fault," answered Porthos.

"How, my fault?"

"Yes, I offered you escape."

"By pulling out a bar and pushing down a door?"

"Certainly."

"Porthos, men like us can't go out from here purely and simply."

"Faith!" said Porthos, "as for me, I could go out with that purity and that simplicity which it seems to me you despise too much."

D'Artagnan shrugged his shoulders.

"And besides," he said, "going out of this chamber isn't all."

"Dear friend," said Porthos, "you appear to be in a somewhat better humor to-day than you were yesterday. Explain to me why going out of this chamber isn't everything."

"Because, having neither arms nor password, we shouldn't take fifty steps in the court without knocking against a sentinel."

"Very well," said Porthos, "we will kill the sentinel and we shall have his arms."

"Yes, but before we can kill him--and he will be hard to kill, that Swiss--he will shriek out and the whole picket will come, and we shall be taken like foxes, we, who are lions, and thrown into some dungeon, where we shall not even have the consolation of seeing this frightful gray sky of Rueil, which no more resembles the sky of Tarbes than the moon is like the sun. Lack-a-day! if we only had some one to instruct us about the physical and moral topography of this castle. Ah! when one thinks that for twenty years, during which time I did not know what to do with myself, it never occurred to me to come to study Rueil."

"What difference does that make?" said Porthos. "We shall go out all the same."

"Do you know, my dear fellow, why master pastrycooks never work with their hands?"

"No," said Porthos, "but I should be glad to be informed."

"It is because in the presence of their pupils they fear that some of their tarts or creams may turn out badly cooked."

"What then?"

"Why, then they would be laughed at, and a master pastrycook must never be laughed at."

"And what have master pastrycooks to do with us?"

"We ought, in our adventures, never to be defeated or give any one a chance to laugh at us. In England, lately, we failed, we were beaten, and that is a blemish on our reputation."

"By whom, then, were we beaten?" asked Porthos.

"By Mordaunt."

"Yes, but we have drowned Monsieur Mordaunt."

"That is true, and that will redeem us a little in the eyes of posterity, if posterity ever looks at us. But listen, Porthos: though Monsieur Mordaunt was a man not to be despised, Mazarin is not less strong than he, and we shall not easily succeed in drowning him. We must, therefore, watch and play a close game; for," he added with a sigh, "we two are equal, perhaps, to eight others; but we are not equal to the four that you know of."

"That is true," said Porthos, echoing D'Artagnan's sigh.

"Well, Porthos, follow my examples; walk back and forth till some news of our friends reaches us or till we are visited by a good idea. But don't sleep as you do all the time; nothing dulls the intellect like sleep. As to what may lie before us, it is perhaps less serious than we at first thought. I don't believe that Monsieur de Mazarin thinks of cutting off our heads, for heads are not taken off without previous trial; a trial would make a noise, and a noise would get the attention of our friends, who would check the operations of Monsieur de Mazarin."

"How well you reason!" said Porthos, admiringly.

"Well, yes, pretty well," replied D'Artagnan; "and besides, you see, if they put us on trial, if they cut off our heads, they must meanwhile either keep us here or transfer us elsewhere."

"Yes, that is inevitable," said Porthos.

"Well, it is impossible but that Master Aramis, that keen-scented bloodhound, and Athos, that wise and prudent nobleman, will discover our retreat. Then, believe me, it will be time to act."

"Yes, we will wait. We can wait the more contentedly, that it is not absolutely bad here, but for one thing, at least."

"What is that?"

"Did you observe, D'Artagnan, that three days running they have brought us braised mutton?"

"No; but if it occurs a fourth time I shall complain of it, so never mind."

"And then I feel the loss of my house, 'tis a long time since I visited my castles."

"Forget them for a time; we shall return to them, unless Mazarin razes them to the ground."

"Do you think that likely?"

"No, the other cardinal would have done so, but this one is too mean a fellow to risk it."

"You reconcile me, D'Artagnan."

"Well, then, assume a cheerful manner, as I do; we must joke with the guards, we must gain the good-will of the soldiers, since we can't corrupt them. Try, Porthos, to please them more than you are wont to do when they are under our windows. Thus far you have done nothing but show them your fist; and the more respectable your fist is, Porthos, the less attractive it is. Ah, I would give much to have five hundred louis, only.”

“So would I,” said Porthos, unwilling to be behind D’Artagnan in generosity; “I would give as much as a hundred pistoles.”

The two prisoners were at this point of their conversation when Comminges entered, preceded by a sergeant and two men, who brought supper in a basket with two handles, filled with basins and plates.

“What!” exclaimed Porthos, “mutton again?”

“My dear Monsieur de Comminges,” said D’Artagnan, “you will find that my friend, Monsieur du Vallon, will go to the most fatal lengths if Cardinal Mazarin continues to provide us with this sort of meat; mutton every day.”

“I declare,” said Porthos, “I shall eat nothing if they do not take it away.”

“Remove the mutton,” cried Comminges; “I wish Monsieur du Vallon to sup well, more especially as I have news to give him that will improve his appetite.”

“Is Mazarin dead?” asked Porthos.

“No; I am sorry to tell you he is perfectly well.”

“So much the worse,” said Porthos.

“What is that news?” asked D’Artagnan. “News in prison is a fruit so rare that I trust, Monsieur de Comminges, you will excuse my impatience--the more eager since you have given us to understand that the news is good.”

“Should you be glad to hear that the Comte de la Fere is well?” asked De Comminges.

D’Artagnan’s penetrating gray eyes were opened to the utmost.

“Glad!” he cried; “I should be more than glad! Happy--beyond measure!”

“Well, I am desired by him to give you his compliments and to say that he is in good health.”

D’Artagnan almost leaped with joy. A quick glance conveyed his thought to Porthos: “If Athos knows where we are, if he opens communication with us, before long Athos will act.”

Porthos was not very quick to understand the language of glances, but now since the name of Athos had suggested to him the same idea, he understood.

“Do you say,” asked the Gascon, timidly, “that the Comte de la Fere has commissioned you to give his compliments to Monsieur du Vallon and myself?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then you have seen him?”

“Certainly I have.”

“Where? if I may ask without indiscretion.”

“Near here,” replied De Comminges, smiling; “so near that if the windows which look on the orangery were not stopped up you could see him from where you are.”

“He is wandering about the environs of the castle,” thought D’Artagnan. Then he said aloud:

“You met him, I dare say, in the park--hunting, perhaps?”

“No; nearer, nearer still. Look, behind this wall,” said De Comminges, knocking against the wall.

“Behind this wall? What is there, then, behind this wall? I was brought here by night, so devil take me if I know where I am.”

“Well,” said Comminges, “suppose one thing.”

“I will suppose anything you please.”

“Suppose there were a window in this wall.”

“Well?”

“From that window you would see Monsieur de la Fere at his.”

“The count, then, is in the chateau?”

“Yes.”

“For what reason?”

“The same as yourself.”

“Athos--a prisoner?”

“You know well,” replied De Comminges, “that there are no prisoners at Rueil, because there is no prison.”

“Don’t let us play upon words, sir. Athos has been arrested.”

“Yesterday, at Saint Germain, as he came out from the presence of the queen.”

The arms of D’Artagnan fell powerless by his side. One might have supposed him thunderstruck; a paleness ran like a cloud over his dark skin, but disappeared immediately.

“A prisoner?” he reiterated.

“A prisoner,” repeated Porthos, quite dejected.

Suddenly D’Artagnan looked up and in his eyes there was a gleam which scarcely even Porthos observed; but it died away and he appeared more sorrowful than before.

“Come, come,” said Comminges, who, since D’Artagnan, on the day of Broussel’s arrest, had saved him from the hands of the Parisians, had entertained a real affection for him, “don’t be unhappy; I never thought of bringing you bad news. Laugh at the chance which has brought your friend near to you and Monsieur du Vallon, instead of being in the depths of despair about it.”

But D’Artagnan was still in a desponding mood.

“And how did he look?” asked Porthos, who, perceiving that D’Artagnan had allowed the conversation to drop, profited by it to put in a word or two.

“Very well, indeed, sir,” replied Comminges; “at first, like you, he seemed distressed; but when he heard that the cardinal was going to pay him a visit this very evening----”

“Ah!” cried D’Artagnan, “the cardinal is about to visit the Comte de la Fere?”

“Yes; and the count desired me to tell you that he should take advantage of this visit to plead for you and for himself.”

“Ah! our dear count!” said D’Artagnan.

“A fine thing, indeed!” grunted Porthos. “A great favor! Zounds! Monsieur the Comte de la Fere, whose family is allied to the Montmorency and the Rohan, is easily the equal of Monsieur de Mazarin.”

“No matter,” said D’Artagnan, in his most wheedling tone. “On reflection, my dear Du Vallon, it is a great honor for the Comte de la Fere, and gives good reason to hope. In fact, it seems to me so great an honor for a prisoner that I think Monsieur de Comminges must be mistaken.”

“What? I am mistaken?”

“Monsieur de Mazarin will not come to visit the Comte de la Fere, but the Comte de la Fere will be sent for to visit him.”

“No, no, no,” said Comminges, who made a point of having the facts appear exactly as they were, “I clearly understood what the cardinal said to me. He will come and visit the Comte de la Fere.”

D’Artagnan tried to gather from the expression of his eyes whether Porthos understood the importance of that visit, but Porthos did not even look toward him.

“It is, then, the cardinal’s custom to walk in his orangery?” asked D’Artagnan.

“Every evening he shuts himself in there. That, it seems, is where he meditates on state affairs.”

“In that case,” said D’Artagnan, “I begin to believe that Monsieur de la Fere will receive the visit of his eminence; he will, of course, have an escort.”

“Yes--two soldiers.”

“And will he talk thus of affairs in presence of two strangers?”

“The soldiers are Swiss, who understand only German. Besides, according to all probability they will wait at the door.”

D’Artagnan made a violent effort over himself to keep his face from being too expressive.

“Let the cardinal take care of going alone to visit the Comte de la Fere,” said D’Artagnan; “for the count must be furious.”

Comminges began to laugh. “Oh, oh! why, really, one would say that you four were anthropaphagi! The count is an affable man; besides, he is unarmed; at the first word from his eminence the two soldiers about him would run to his assistance.”

“Two soldiers,” said D’Artagnan, seeming to remember something, “two soldiers, yes; that, then, is why I hear two men called every evening and see them walking sometimes for half an hour, under my window.”

“That is it; they are waiting for the cardinal, or rather for Bernouin, who comes to call them when the cardinal goes out.”

“Fine-looking men, upon my word!” said D’Artagnan.

“They belong to the regiment that was at Lens, which the prince assigned to the cardinal.”

“Ah, monsieur,” said D’Artagnan, as if to sum up in a word all that conversation, “if only his eminence would relent and grant to Monsieur de la Fere our liberty.”

“I wish it with all my heart,” said Comminges.

“Then, if he should forget that visit, you would find no inconvenience in reminding him of it?”

“Not at all.”

“Ah, that gives me more confidence.”

This skillful turn of the conversation would have seemed a sublime manoeuvre to any one who could have read the Gascon’s soul.

“Now,” said D’Artagnan, “I’ve one last favor to ask of you, Monsieur de Comminges.”

“At your service, sir.”

“You will see the count again?”

“To-morrow morning.”

“Will you remember us to him and ask him to solicit for me the same favor that he will have obtained?”

“You want the cardinal to come here?”

“No; I know my place and am not so presumptuous. Let his eminence do me the honor to give me a hearing; that is all I want.”

“Oh!” muttered Porthos, shaking his head, “never should I have thought this of him! How misfortune humbles a man!”

“I promise you it shall be done,” answered De Comminges.

“Tell the count that I am well; that you found me sad, but resigned.”

“I am pleased, sir, to hear that.”

“And the same, also, for Monsieur du Vallon----”

“Not for me,” cried Porthos; “I am not by any means resigned.”

“But you will be resigned, my friend.”

“Never!”

“He will become so, monsieur; I know him better than he knows himself. Be silent, dear Du Vallon, and resign yourself.”

“Adieu, gentlemen,” said De Comminges; “sleep well!”

“We will try.”

De Comminges went away, D’Artagnan remaining apparently in the same attitude of humble resignation; but scarcely had he departed when he turned and clasped Porthos in his arms with an expression not to be doubted.

“Oh!” cried Porthos; “what’s the matter now? Have you gone mad, my dear friend?”

“What is the matter?” returned D’Artagnan; “we are saved!”

“I don’t see that at all,” answered Porthos. “I think we are all taken prisoners, except Aramis, and that our chances of getting out are lessened since one more of us is caught in Mazarin’s mousetrap.”

“Which is far too strong for two of us, but not strong enough for three of us,” returned D’Artagnan.

“I don’t understand,” said Porthos.

“Never mind; let’s sit down to table and take something to strengthen us for the night.”

“What are we to do, then, to-night?”

“To travel--perhaps.”

“But----”

“Sit down, dear friend, to table. When one is eating, ideas flow easily. After supper, when they are perfected, I will communicate my plans to you.”

So Porthos sat down to table without another word and ate with an appetite that did honor to the confidence that was ever inspired in him by D’Artagnan’s inventive imagination.

CHAPTER 84.

Strength and Sagacity--Continued.

Supper was eaten in silence, but not in sadness; for from time to time one of those sweet smiles which were habitual to him in moments of good-humor illumined the face of D’Artagnan. Not a scintilla of these was lost on Porthos; and at every one he uttered an exclamation which betrayed to his friend that he had not lost sight of the idea which possessed his brain.

At dessert D’Artagnan reposed in his chair, crossed one leg over the other and lounged about like a man perfectly at his ease.

Porthos rested his chin on his hands, placed his elbows on the table and looked at D’Artagnan with an expression of confidence which imparted to that colossus an admirable appearance of good-fellowship.

“Well?” said D’Artagnan, at last.

“Well!” repeated Porthos.

“You were saying, my dear friend----”

“No; I said nothing.”

“Yes; you were saying you wished to leave this place.”

“Ah, indeed! the will was never wanting.”

“To get away you would not mind, you added, knocking down a door or a wall.”

“‘Tis true--I said so, and I say it again.”

“And I answered you, Porthos, that it was not a good plan; that we couldn’t go a hundred steps without being recaptured, because we were without clothes to disguise ourselves and arms to defend ourselves.”

“That is true; we should need clothes and arms.”

“Well,” said D’Artagnan, rising, “we have them, friend Porthos, and even something better.”

“Bah!” said Porthos, looking around.

“Useless to look; everything will come to us when wanted. At about what time did we see the two Swiss guards walking yesterday?”

“An hour after sunset.”

“If they go out to-day as they did yesterday we shall have the honor, then, of seeing them in half an hour?”

“In a quarter of an hour at most.”

“Your arm is still strong enough, is it not, Porthos?”

Porthos unbuttoned his sleeve, raised his shirt and looked complacently on his strong arm, as large as the leg of any ordinary man.

“Yes, indeed,” said he, “I believe so.”

“So that you could without trouble convert these tongs into a hoop and yonder shovel into a corkscrew?”

“Certainly.” And the giant took up these two articles, and without any apparent effort produced in them the metamorphoses suggested by his companion.

“There!” he cried.

“Capital!” exclaimed the Gascon. “Really, Porthos, you are a gifted individual!”

“I have heard speak,” said Porthos, “of a certain Milo of Crotona, who performed wonderful feats, such as binding his forehead with a cord and bursting it--of killing an ox with a blow of his fist and carrying it home on his shoulders, et cetera. I used to learn all these feat by heart yonder, down at Pierrefonds, and I have done all that he did except breaking a cord by the corrugation of my temples.”

“Because your strength is not in your head, Porthos,” said his friend.

“No; it is in my arms and shoulders,” answered Porthos with gratified naivete.

“Well, my dear friend, let us approach the window and there you can match your strength against that of an iron bar.”

Porthos went to the window, took a bar in his hands, clung to it and bent it like a bow; so that the two ends came out of the sockets of stone in which for thirty years they had been fixed.

“Well! friend, the cardinal, although such a genius, could never have done that.”

“Shall I take out any more of them?” asked Porthos.

“No; that is sufficient; a man can pass through that.”

Porthos tried, and passed the upper portion of his body through.

“Yes,” he said.

“Now pass your arm through this opening.”

“Why?”

“You will know presently--pass it.”

Porthos obeyed with military promptness and passed his arm through the opening.

“Admirable!” said D’Artagnan.

“The scheme goes forward, it seems.”

“On wheels, dear friend.”

“Good! What shall I do now?”

“Nothing.”

“It is finished, then?”

“No, not yet.”

“I should like to understand,” said Porthos.

“Listen, my dear friend; in two words you will know all. The door of the guardhouse opens, as you see.”

“Yes, I see.”

“They are about to send into our court, which Monsieur de Mazarin crosses on his way to the orangery, the two guards who attend him.”

“There they are, coming out.”

“If only they close the guardhouse door! Good! They close it.”

“What, then?”

“Silence! They may hear us.”

“I don’t understand it at all.”

“As you execute you will understand.”

“And yet I should have preferred----”

“You will have the pleasure of the surprise.”

“Ah, that is true.”

“Hush!”

Porthos remained silent and motionless.

In fact, the two soldiers advanced on the side where the window was, rubbing their hands, for it was cold, it being the month of February.

At this moment the door of the guardhouse was opened and one of the soldiers was summoned away.

“Now,” said D’Artagnan, “I am going to call this soldier and talk to him. Don’t lose a word of what I’m going to say to you, Porthos. Everything lies in the execution.”

“Good, the execution of plots is my forte.”

“I know it well. I depend on you. Look, I shall turn to the left, so that the soldier will be at your right, as soon as he mounts on the bench to talk to us.”

“But supposing he doesn’t mount?”

“He will; rely upon it. As soon as you see him get up, stretch out your arm and seize him by the neck. Then, raising him up as Tobit raised the fish by the gills, you must pull him into the room, taking care to squeeze him so tight that he can’t cry out.”

“Oh!” said Porthos. “Suppose I happen to strangle him?”

“To be sure there would only be a Swiss the less in the world; but you will not do so, I hope. Lay him down here; we’ll gag him and tie him--no matter where--somewhere. So we shall get from him one uniform and a sword.”

“Marvelous!” exclaimed Porthos, looking at the Gascon with the most profound admiration.

“Pooh!” replied D’Artagnan.

“Yes,” said Porthos, recollecting himself, “but one uniform and one sword will not suffice for two.”

“Well; but there’s his comrade.”

“True,” said Porthos.

“Therefore, when I cough, stretch out your arm.”

“Good!”

The two friends then placed themselves as they had agreed, Porthos being completely hidden in an angle of the window.

“Good-evening, comrade,” said D’Artagnan in his most fascinating voice and manner.

“Good-evening, sir,” answered the soldier, in a strong provincial accent.

“‘Tis not too warm to walk,” resumed D’Artagnan.

“No, sir.”

“And I think a glass of wine will not be disagreeable to you?”

“A glass of wine will be extremely welcome.”

“The fish bites--the fish bites!” whispered the Gascon to Porthos.

“I understand,” said Porthos.

“A bottle, perhaps?”

“A whole bottle? Yes, sir.”

“A whole bottle, if you will drink my health.”

“Willingly,” answered the soldier.

“Come, then, and take it, friend,” said the Gascon.

“With all my heart. How convenient that there’s a bench here. Egad! one would think it had been placed here on purpose.”

“Get on it; that’s it, friend.”

And D’Artagnan coughed.

That instant the arm of Porthos fell. His hand of iron grasped, quick as lightning, firm as a pair of blacksmith’s pincers, the soldier’s throat. He raised him, almost stifling him as he drew him through the aperture, at the risk of flaying him in the passage. He then laid him down on the floor, where D’Artagnan, after giving him just time enough to draw his breath, gagged him with his long scarf; and the moment he had done so began to undress him with the promptitude and dexterity of a man who had learned his business on the field of battle. Then the soldier, gagged and bound, was placed upon the hearth, the fire of which had been previously extinguished by the two friends.

“Here’s a sword and a dress,” said Porthos.

“I take them,” said D’Artagnan, “for myself. If you want another uniform and sword you must play the same trick over again. Stop! I see the other soldier issue from the guardroom and come toward us.”

“I think,” replied Porthos, “it would be imprudent to attempt the same manoeuvre again; it is said that no man can succeed twice in the same way, and a failure would be ruinous. No; I will go down, seize the man unawares and bring him to you ready gagged.”

“That is better,” said the Gascon.

“Be ready,” said Porthos, as he slipped through the opening.

He did as he said. Porthos seized his opportunity, caught the next soldier by his neck, gagged him and pushed him like a mummy through the bars into the room, and entered after him. Then they undressed him as they had done the first, laid him on their bed and bound him with the straps which composed the bed--the bedstead being of oak. This operation proved as great a success as the first.

“There,” said D’Artagnan, “this is capital! Now let me try on the dress of yonder chap. Porthos, I doubt if you can wear it; but should it be too tight, never mind, you can wear the breastplate and the hat with the red feathers.”

It happened, however, that the second soldier was a Swiss of gigantic proportions, so, save that some few of the seams split, his uniform fitted Porthos perfectly.

They then dressed themselves.

"'Tis done!" they both exclaimed at once. "As to you, comrades," they said to the men, "nothing will happen to you if you are discreet; but if you stir you are dead men."

The soldiers were complaisant; they had found the grasp of Porthos pretty powerful and that it was no joke to fight against it.

"Now," said D'Artagnan, "you wouldn't be sorry to understand the plot, would you, Porthos?"

"Well, no, not very."

"Well, then, we shall go down into the court."

"Yes."

"We shall take the place of those two fellows."

"Well?"

"We will walk back and forth."

"That's a good idea, for it isn't warm."

"In a moment the valet-de-chambre will call the guard, as he did yesterday and the day before."

"And we shall answer?"

"No, on the contrary, we shall not answer."

"As you please; I don't insist on answering."

"We will not answer, then; we will simply settle our hats on our heads and we will escort his eminence."

"Where shall we escort him?"

"Where he is going--to visit Athos. Do you think Athos will be sorry to see us?"

"Oh!" cried Porthos, "oh! I understand."

"Wait a little, Porthos, before crying out; for, on my word, you haven't reached the end," said the Gascon, in a jesting tone.

"What is to happen?" said Porthos.

"Follow me," replied D'Artagnan. "The man who lives to see shall see."

And slipping through the aperture, he alighted in the court. Porthos followed him by the same road, but with more difficulty and less diligence. They could hear the two soldiers shivering with fear, as they lay bound in the chamber.

Scarcely had the two Frenchmen touched the ground when a door opened and the voice of the valet-de-chambre called out:

"Make ready!"

At the same moment the guardhouse was opened and a voice called out:

“La Bruyere and Du Barthois! March!”

“It seems that I am named La Bruyere,” remarked D’Artagnan.

“And I, Du Barthois,” added Porthos.

“Where are you?” asked the valet-de-chambre, whose eyes, dazzled by the light, could not clearly distinguish our heroes in the gloom.

“Here we are,” said the Gascon.

“What say you to that, Monsieur du Vallon?” he added in a low tone to Porthos.

“If it but lasts, most capital,” responded Porthos.

These two newly enlisted soldiers marched gravely after the valet-de-chambre, who opened the door of the vestibule, then another which seemed to be that of a waiting-room, and showing them two stools:

“Your orders are very simple,” he said; “don’t allow anybody, except one person, to enter here. Do you hear--not a single creature! Obey that person implicitly. On your return you cannot make a mistake. You have only to wait here till I release you.”

D’Artagnan was known to this valet-de-chambre, who was no other than Bernouin, and he had during the last six or eight months introduced the Gascon a dozen times to the cardinal. The Gascon, therefore, instead of answering, growled out “Ja! Ja!” in the most German and the least Gascon accent possible.

As for Porthos, on whom D’Artagnan had impressed the necessity of absolute silence and who did not even now begin to comprehend the scheme of his friend, which was to follow Mazarin in his visit to Athos, he was simply mute. All that he was allowed to say, in case of emergencies, was the proverbial Der Teufel!

Bernouin shut the door and went away. When Porthos heard the key turn in the lock he began to be alarmed, lest they should only have exchanged one prison for another.

“Porthos, my friend,” said D’Artagnan, “don’t distrust Providence! Let me meditate and consider.”

“Meditate and consider as much as you like,” replied Porthos, who was now quite out of humor at seeing things take this turn.

“We have walked eight paces,” whispered D’Artagnan, “and gone up six steps, so hereabouts is the pavilion called the pavilion of the orangery. The Comte de la Fere cannot be far off, only the doors are locked.”

“That is a slight difficulty,” said Porthos, “and a good push with the shoulders----”

“For God’s sake, Porthos my friend, reserve your feats of strength, or they will not have, when needed, the honor they deserve. Have you not heard that some one is coming here?”

“Yes.”

“Well, that some one will open the doors.”

“But, my dear fellow, if that some one recognizes us, if that some one cries out, we are lost; for you don’t propose, I imagine, that I shall kill that man of the church. That might do if we were dealing with Englishmen or Germans.”

“Oh, may God keep me from it, and you, too!” said D’Artagnan. “The young king would, perhaps, show us some gratitude; but the queen would never forgive us, and it is she whom we have to consider. And then, besides, the useless blood! never! no, never! I have my plan; let me carry it out and we shall laugh.”

“So much the better,” said Porthos; “I feel some need of it.”

“Hush!” said D’Artagnan; “the some one is coming.”

The sound of a light step was heard in the vestibule. The hinges of the door creaked and a man appeared in the dress of a cavalier, wrapped in a brown cloak, with a lantern in one hand and a large beaver hat pulled down over his eyes.

Porthos effaced himself against the wall, but he could not render himself invisible; and the man in the cloak said to him, giving him his lantern:

“Light the lamp which hangs from the ceiling.”

Then addressing D’Artagnan:

“You know the watchword?” he said.

“Ja!” replied the Gascon, determined to confine himself to this specimen of the German tongue.

“Tedesco!” answered the cavalier; “va bene.”

And advancing toward the door opposite to that by which he came in, he opened it and disappeared behind it, shutting it as he went.

“Now,” asked Porthos, “what are we to do?”

“Now we shall make use of your shoulder, friend Porthos, if this door proves to be locked. Everything in its proper time, and all comes right to those who know how to wait patiently. But first barricade the first door well; then we will follow yonder cavalier.”

The two friends set to work and crowded the space before the door with all the furniture in the room, as not only to make the passage impassable, but so to block the door that by no means could it open inward.

“There!” said D’Artagnan, “we can’t be overtaken. Come! forward!”

CHAPTER 85.

The Oubliettes of Cardinal Mazarin.

At first, on arriving at the door through which Mazarin had passed, D'Artagnan tried in vain to open it, but on the powerful shoulder of Porthos being applied to one of the panels, which gave way, D'Artagnan introduced the point of his sword between the bolt and the staple of the lock. The bolt gave way and the door opened.

"As I told you, everything can be attained, Porthos, women and doors, by proceeding with gentleness."

"You're a great moralist, and that's the fact," said Porthos.

They entered; behind a glass window, by the light of the cardinal's lantern, which had been placed on the floor in the midst of the gallery, they saw the orange and pomegranate trees of the Castle of Rueil, in long lines, forming one great alley and two smaller side alleys.

"No cardinal!" said D'Artagnan, "but only his lantern; where the devil, then, is he?"

Exploring, however, one of the side wings of the gallery, after making a sign to Porthos to explore the other, he saw, all at once, at his left, a tub containing an orange tree, which had been pushed out of its place and in its place an open aperture.

Ten men would have found difficulty in moving that tub, but by some mechanical contrivance it had turned with the flagstone on which it rested.

D'Artagnan, as we have said, perceived a hole in that place and in this hole the steps of a winding staircase.

He called Porthos to look at it.

"Were our object money only," he said, "we should be rich directly."

"How's that?"

"Don't you understand, Porthos? At the bottom of that staircase lies, probably, the cardinal's treasury of which folk tell such wonders, and we should only have to descend, empty a chest, shut the cardinal up in it, double lock it, go away, carrying off as much gold as we could, put back this orange-tree over the place, and no one in the world would ever ask us where our fortune came from--not even the cardinal.”

“It would be a happy hit for clowns to make, but as it seems to be unworthy of two gentlemen----” said Porthos.

“So I think; and therefore I said, ‘Were our object money only;’ but we want something else,” replied the Gascon.

At the same moment, whilst D’Artagnan was leaning over the aperture to listen, a metallic sound, as if some one was moving a bag of gold, struck on his ear; he started; instantly afterward a door opened and a light played upon the staircase.

Mazarin had left his lamp in the gallery to make people believe that he was walking about, but he had with him a waxlight, to help him to explore his mysterious strong box.

“Faith,” he said, in Italian, as he was reascending the steps and looking at a bag of reals, “faith, there’s enough to pay five councillors of parliament, and two generals in Paris. I am a great captain--that I am! but I make war in my own way.”

The two friends were crouching down, meantime, behind a tub in the side alley.

Mazarin came within three steps of D’Artagnan and pushed a spring in the wall; the slab turned and the orange tree resumed its place.

Then the cardinal put out the waxlight, slipped it into his pocket, and taking up the lantern: “Now,” he said, “for Monsieur de la Fere.”

“Very good,” thought D’Artagnan, “‘tis our road likewise; we will go together.”

All three set off on their walk, Mazarin taking the middle alley and the friends the side ones.

The cardinal reached a second door without perceiving he was being followed; the sand with which the alleys were covered deadened the sound of footsteps.

He then turned to the left, down a corridor which had escaped the attention of the two friends, but as he opened the door he paused, as if in thought.

“Ah! Diavolo!” he exclaimed, “I forgot the recommendation of De Comminges, who advised me to take a guard and place it at this door, in order not to put myself at the mercy of that four-headed combination of devils.” And with a movement of impatience he turned to retrace his steps.

“Do not give yourself the trouble, my lord,” said D’Artagnan, with his right foot forward, his beaver in his hand, a smile on his face, “we have followed your eminence step by step and here we are.”

“Yes--here we are,” said Porthos.

And he made the same friendly salute as D’Artagnan.

Mazarin gazed at each of them with an affrighted stare, recognized them, and let drop his lantern, uttering a cry of terror.

D’Artagnan picked it up; by good luck it had not been extinguished.

“Oh, what imprudence, my lord,” said D’Artagnan; “‘tis not good to be about just here without a light. Your eminence might knock against something, or fall into a hole.”

“Monsieur d’Artagnan!” muttered Mazarin, unable to recover from his astonishment.

“Yes, my lord, it is I. I have the honor to present to you Monsieur du Vallon, that excellent friend of mine, in whom your eminence had the kindness to interest yourself formerly.”

And D’Artagnan held the lamp before the merry face of Porthos, who now began to comprehend the affair and be very proud of the whole undertaking.

“You were going to visit Monsieur de la Fere?” said D’Artagnan. “Don’t let us disarrange your eminence. Be so good as to show us the way and we will follow you.”

Mazarin was by degrees recovering his senses.

“Have you been long in the orangery?” he asked in a trembling voice, remembering the visits he had been paying to his treasury.

Porthos opened his mouth to reply; D’Artagnan made him a sign, and his mouth, remaining silent, gradually closed.

“This moment come, my lord,” said D’Artagnan.

Mazarin breathed again. His fears were now no longer for his hoard, but for himself. A sort of smile played on his lips.

“Come,” he said, “you have me in a snare, gentlemen. I confess myself conquered. You wish to ask for liberty, and--I give it you.”

“Oh, my lord!” answered D’Artagnan, “you are too good; as to our liberty, we have that; we want to ask something else of you.”

“You have your liberty?” repeated Mazarin, in terror.

“Certainly; and on the other hand, my lord, you have lost it, and now, in accordance with the law of war, sir, you must buy it back again.”

Mazarin felt a shiver run through him--a chill even to his heart's core. His piercing look was fixed in vain on the satirical face of the Gascon and the unchanging countenance of Porthos. Both were in shadow and the Sybil of Cuma herself could not have read them.

"To purchase back my liberty?" said the cardinal.

"Yes, my lord."

"And how much will that cost me, Monsieur d'Artagnan?"

"Zounds, my lord, I don't know yet. We must ask the Comte de la Fere the question. Will your eminence deign to open the door which leads to the count's room, and in ten minutes all will be settled."

Mazarin started.

"My lord," said D'Artagnan, "your eminence sees that we wish to act with all formality and due respect; but I must warn you that we have no time to lose; open the door then, my lord, and be so good as to remember, once for all, that on the slightest attempt to escape or the faintest cry for help, our position being very critical indeed, you must not be angry with us if we go to extremities."

"Be assured," answered Mazarin, "that I shall attempt nothing; I give you my word of honor."

D'Artagnan made a sign to Porthos to redouble his watchfulness; then turning to Mazarin:

"Now, my lord, let us enter, if you please."

CHAPTER 86.

Conferences.

Mazarin turned the lock of a double door, on the threshold of which they found Athos ready to receive his illustrious guests according to the notice Comminges had given him.

On perceiving Mazarin he bowed.

“Your eminence,” he said, “might have dispensed with your attendants; the honor bestowed on me is too great for me to be unmindful of it.”

“And so, my dear count,” said D’Artagnan, “his eminence didn’t actually insist on our attending him; it is Du Vallon and I who have insisted, and even in a manner somewhat impolite, perhaps, so great was our longing to see you.”

At that voice, that mocking tone, and that familiar gesture, accenting voice and tone, Athos made a bound of surprise.

“D’Artagnan! Porthos!” he exclaimed.

“My very self, dear friend.”

“Me, also!” repeated Porthos.

“What means this?” asked the count.

“It means,” replied Mazarin, trying to smile and biting his lips in the attempt, “that our parts are changed, and that instead of these gentlemen being my prisoners I am theirs; but, gentlemen, I warn you, unless you kill me, your victory will be of very short duration; people will come to the rescue.”

“Ah! my lord!” cried the Gascon, “don’t threaten! ‘tis a bad example. We are so good and gentle to your eminence. Come, let us put aside all rancor and talk pleasantly.”

“There’s nothing I wish more,” replied Mazarin. “But don’t think yourselves in a better position than you are. In ensnaring me you have fallen into the trap yourselves. How are you to get away from here? remember the soldiers and sentinels who guard these doors. Now, I am going to show you how sincere I am.”

"Good," thought D'Artagnan; "we must look about us; he's going to play us a trick."

"I offered you your liberty," continued the minister; "will you take it? Before an hour has passed you will be discovered, arrested, obliged to kill me, which would be a crime unworthy of loyal gentlemen like you."

"He is right," thought Athos.

And, like every other reflection passing in a mind that entertained none but noble thoughts, this feeling was expressed in his eyes.

"And therefore," said D'Artagnan, to clip the hope which Athos's tacit adhesion had imparted to Mazarin, "we shall not proceed to that violence save in the last extremity."

"If on the contrary," resumed Mazarin, "you accept your liberty----"

"Why you, my lord, might take it away from us in less than five minutes afterward; and from my knowledge of you I believe you will so take it away from us."

"No--on the faith of a cardinal. You do not believe me?"

"My lord, I never believe cardinals who are not priests."

"Well, on the faith of a minister."

"You are no longer a minister, my lord; you are a prisoner."

"Then, on the honor of a Mazarin, as I am and ever shall be, I hope," said the cardinal.

"Hem," replied D'Artagnan. "I have heard speak of a Mazarin who had not much religion when his oaths were in question. I fear he may have been an ancestor of your eminence."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan, you are a great wit and I am really sorry to be on bad terms with you."

"My lord, let us come to terms; I ask nothing better."

"Very well," said Mazarin, "if I place you in security, in a manner evident, palpable----"

"Ah! that is another thing," said Porthos.

"Let us see," said Athos.

"Let us see," said D'Artagnan.

"In the first place, do you accept?" asked the cardinal.

"Unfold your plan, my lord, and we will see."

"Take notice that you are shut up--captured."

"You well know, my lord, that there always remains to us a last resource."

“What?”

“That of dying together.”

Mazarin shuddered.

“Listen,” he said; “at the end of yonder corridor is a door, of which I have the key, it leads into the park. Go, and take this key with you; you are active, vigorous, and you have arms. At a hundred steps, on turning to the left, you will find the wall of the park; get over it, and in three leaps you will be on the road and free.”

“Ah! by Jove, my lord,” said D’Artagnan, “you have well said, but these are only words. Where is the key you speak of?”

“Here it is.”

“Ah, my lord! You will conduct us yourself, then, to that door?”

“Very willingly, if it be necessary to reassure you,” answered the minister, and Mazarin, who was delighted to get off so cheaply, led the way, in high spirits, to the corridor and opened the door.

It led into the park, as the three fugitives perceived by the night breeze which rushed into the corridor and blew the wind into their faces.

“The devil!” exclaimed the Gascon, “‘tis a dreadful night, my lord. We don’t know the locality, and shall never find the wall. Since your eminence has come so far, come a few steps further; conduct us, my lord, to the wall.”

“Be it so,” replied the cardinal; and walking in a straight line he went to the wall, at the foot of which they all four arrived at the same instant.

“Are you satisfied, gentlemen?” asked Mazarin.

“I think so, indeed; we should be hard to please if we were not. Deuce take it! three poor gentlemen escorted by a prince of the church! Ah! apropos, my lord! you remarked that we were all active, vigorous and armed.”

“Yes.”

“You are mistaken. Monsieur du Vallon and I are the only two who are armed. The count is not; and should we meet with one of your patrol we must defend ourselves.”

“‘Tis true.”

“Where can we find another sword?” asked Porthos.

“My lord,” said D’Artagnan, “will lend his, which is of no use to him, to the Comte de la Fere.”

“Willingly,” said the cardinal; “I will even ask the count to keep it for my sake.”

“I promise you, my lord, never to part with it,” replied Athos.

“Well, well,” cried D’Artagnan, “this reconciliation is truly touching; have you not tears in your eyes, Porthos?”

“Yes,” said Porthos; “but I do not know if it is feeling or the wind that makes me weep; I think it is the wind.”

“Now climb up, Athos, quickly,” said D’Artagnan. Athos, assisted by Porthos, who lifted him up like a feather, arrived at the top.

“Now, jump down, Athos.”

Athos jumped and disappeared on the other side of the wall.

“Are you on the ground?” asked D’Artagnan.

“Yes.”

“Without accident?”

“Perfectly safe and sound.”

“Porthos, whilst I get up, watch the cardinal. No, I don’t want your help, watch the cardinal.”

“I am watching,” said Porthos. “Well?”

“You are right; it is more difficult than I thought. Lend me your back--but don’t let the cardinal go.”

Porthos lent him his back and D’Artagnan was soon on the summit of the wall, where he seated himself.

Mazarin pretended to laugh.

“Are you there?” asked Porthos.

“Yes, my friend; and now----”

“Now, what?” asked Porthos.

“Now give me the cardinal up here; if he makes any noise stifle him.”

Mazarin wished to call out, but Porthos held him tight and passed him to D’Artagnan, who seized him by the neck and made him sit down by him; then in a menacing tone, he said:

“Sir! jump directly down, close to Monsieur de la Fere, or, on the honor of a gentleman, I’ll kill you!”

“Monsieur, monsieur,” cried Mazarin, “you are breaking your word to me!”

“I--did I promise you anything, my lord?”

Mazarin groaned.

“You are free,” he said, “through me; your liberty was my ransom.”

“Agreed; but the ransom of that immense treasure buried under the gallery, to which one descends on pushing a spring hidden in the wall, which causes a tub to turn, revealing a staircase--must not one speak of that a little, my lord?”

“Diavolo!” cried Mazarin, almost choked, and clasping his hands; “I am a lost and ruined man!”

But without listening to his protestations of alarm, D'Artagnan slipped him gently down into the arms of Athos, who stood immovable at the bottom of the wall.

Porthos next made an effort which shook the solid wall, and by the aid of his friend's hand gained the summit.

"I didn't understand it all," he said, "but I understand now; how droll it is!"

"You think so? so much the better; but that it may prove laughter-worthy even to the end, let us not lose time." And he jumped off the wall.

Porthos did the same.

"Attend to monsieur le cardinal, gentlemen," said D'Artagnan; "for myself, I will reconnoitre."

The Gascon then drew his sword and marched as avant guard.

"My lord," he said, "which way do we go? Think well of your reply, for should your eminence be mistaken, there might ensue most grave results for all of us."

"Along the wall, sir," said Mazarin, "there will be no danger of losing yourselves."

The three friends hastened on, but in a short time were obliged to slacken the pace. The cardinal could not keep up with them, though with every wish to do so.

Suddenly D'Artagnan touched something warm, which moved.

"Stop! a horse!" he cried; "I have found a horse!"

"And I, likewise," said Athos.

"I, too," said Porthos, who, faithful to the instructions, still held the cardinal's arm.

"There's luck, my lord! just as you were complaining of being tired and obliged to walk."

But as he spoke the barrel of a pistol was presented at his breast and these words were pronounced:

"Touch it not!"

"Grimaud!" he cried; "Grimaud! what art thou about? Why, thou art posted here by Heaven!"

"No, sir," said the honest servant, "it was Monsieur Aramis who posted me here to take care of the horses."

"Is Aramis here?"

"Yes, sir; he has been here since yesterday."

“What are you doing?”

“On the watch----”

“What! Aramis here?” cried Athos.

“At the lesser gate of the castle; he’s posted there.”

“Are you a large party?”

“Sixty.”

“Let him know.”

“This moment, sir.”

And believing that no one could execute the commission better than himself, Grimaud set off at full speed; whilst, enchanted at being all together again, the friends awaited his return.

There was no one in the whole group in a bad humor except Cardinal Mazarin.

CHAPTER 87.

Thinking that Porthos will be at last a Baron, and D’Artagnan a Captain.

At the expiration of ten minutes Aramis arrived, accompanied by Grimaud and eight or ten followers. He was excessively delighted and threw himself into his friends’ arms.

“You are free, my brothers! free without my aid! and I shall have succeeded in doing nothing for you in spite of all my efforts.”

“Do not be unhappy, dear friend, on that account; if you have done nothing as yet, you will do something soon,” replied Athos.

“I had well concerted my plans,” pursued Aramis; “the coadjutor gave me sixty men; twenty guard the walls of the park, twenty the road from Rueil to Saint Germain, twenty are dispersed in the woods. Thus I was able, thanks to the strategic disposition of my forces, to intercept two couriers from Mazarin to the queen.”

Mazarin listened intently.

“But,” said D’Artagnan, “I trust that you honorably sent them back to monsieur le cardinal!”

“Ah, yes!” said Aramis, “toward him I should be very likely to practice such delicacy of sentiment! In one of the despatches the cardinal declares to the queen that the treasury is empty and that her majesty has no more money. In the other he announces that he is about to transport his prisoners to Melun, since Rueil seemed to him not sufficiently secure. You can understand, dear friend, with what hope I was inspired by that last letter. I placed myself in ambuscade with my sixty men; I encircled the castle; the riding horses I entrusted to Grimaud and I awaited your coming out, which I did not expect till to-morrow, and I didn’t hope to free you without a skirmish. You are free to-night, without fighting; so much the better! How did you manage to escape that scoundrel Mazarin? You must have much reason to complain of him.”

“Not very much,” said D’Artagnan.

“Really!”

“I might even say that we have some reason to praise him.”

“Impossible!”

“Yes, really; it is owing to him that we are free.”

“Owing to him?”

“Yes, he had us conducted into the orangery by Monsieur Bernouin, his valet-de-chambre, and from there we followed him to visit the Comte de la Fere. Then he offered us our liberty and we accepted it. He even went so far as to show us the way out; he led us to the park wall, which we climbed over without accident, and then we fell in with Grimaud.”

“Well!” exclaimed Aramis, “this will reconcile me to him; but I wish he were here that I might tell him that I did not believe him capable of so noble an act.”

“My lord,” said D’Artagnan, no longer able to contain himself, “allow me to introduce to you the Chevalier d’Herblay, who wishes--as you may have heard--to offer his congratulations to your eminence.”

And he retired, discovering Mazarin, who was in great confusion, to the astonished gaze of Aramis.

“Ho! ho!” exclaimed the latter, “the cardinal! a glorious prize! Halloo! halloo! friends! to horse! to horse!”

Several horsemen ran quickly to him.

“Zounds!” cried Aramis, “I may have done some good; so, my lord, deign to receive my most respectful homage! I will lay a wager that ‘twas that Saint Christopher, Porthos, who performed this feat! Apropos! I forgot----” and he gave some orders in a low voice to one of the horsemen.

“I think it will be wise to set off,” said D’Artagnan.

“Yes; but I am expecting some one, a friend of Athos.”

“A friend!” exclaimed the count.

“And here he comes, by Jupiter! galloping through the bushes.”

“The count! the count!” cried a young voice that made Athos start.

“Raoul! Raoul!” he ejaculated.

For one moment the young man forgot his habitual respect--he threw himself on his father’s neck.

“Look, my lord cardinal,” said Aramis, “would it not have been a pity to have separated men who love each other as we love? Gentlemen,” he continued, addressing the cavaliers, who became more and more numerous every instant; “gentlemen, encircle his eminence, that you may show him the greater honor. He will, indeed give us the favor of his company; you will, I hope, be grateful for it; Porthos, do not lose sight of his eminence."

Aramis then joined Athos and D'Artagnan, who were consulting together.

"Come," said D'Artagnan, after a conference of five minutes' duration, "let us begin our journey."

"Where are we to go?" asked Porthos.

"To your house, dear Porthos, at Pierrefonds; your fine chateau is worthy of affording its princely hospitality to his eminence; it is, likewise, well situated--neither too near Paris, nor too far from it; we can establish a communication between it and the capital with great facility. Come, my lord, you shall be treated like a prince, as you are."

"A fallen prince!" exclaimed Mazarin, piteously.

"The chances of war," said Athos, "are many, but be assured we shall take no improper advantage of them."

"No, but we shall make use of them," said D'Artagnan.

The rest of the night was employed by these cavaliers in traveling with the wonderful rapidity of former days. Mazarin, still sombre and pensive, permitted himself to be dragged along in this way; it looked a race of phantoms. At dawn twelve leagues had been passed without drawing rein; half the escort were exhausted and several horses fell down.

"Horses, nowadays, are not what they were formerly," observed Porthos; "everything degenerates."

"I have sent Grimaud to Dammartin," said Aramis. "He is to bring us five fresh horses--one for his eminence, four for us. We, at least, must keep close to monseigneur; the rest of the start will rejoin us later. Once beyond Saint Denis we shall have nothing to fear."

Grimaud, in fact, brought back five horses. The nobleman to whom he applied, being a friend of Porthos, was very ready, not to sell them, as was proposed, but to lend them. Ten minutes later the escort stopped at Ermenonville, but the four friends went on with well sustained ardor, guarding Mazarin carefully. At noon they rode into the avenue of Pierrefonds.

"Ah!" said Mousqueton, who had ridden by the side of D'Artagnan without speaking a word on the journey, "you may think what you will, sir, but I can breathe now for the first time since my departure from Pierrefonds;" and he put his horse to a gallop to announce to the other servants the arrival of Monsieur du Vallon and his friends.

“We are four of us,” said D’Artagnan; “we must relieve each other in mounting guard over my lord and each of us must watch three hours at a time. Athos is going to examine the castle, which it will be necessary to render impregnable in case of siege; Porthos will see to the provisions and Aramis to the troops of the garrison. That is to say, Athos will be chief engineer, Porthos purveyor-in-general, and Aramis governor of the fortress.”

Meanwhile, they gave up to Mazarin the handsomest room in the chateau.

“Gentlemen,” he said, when he was in his room, “you do not expect, I presume, to keep me here a long time incognito?”

“No, my lord,” replied the Gascon; “on the contrary, we think of announcing very soon that we have you here.”

“Then you will be besieged.”

“We expect it.”

“And what shall you do?”

“Defend ourselves. Were the late Cardinal Richelieu alive he would tell you a certain story of the Bastion Saint Gervais, which we four, with our four lackeys and twelve dead men, held out against a whole army.”

“Such feats, sir, are done once--and never repeated.”

“However, nowadays there’s no need of so much heroism. To-morrow the army of Paris will be summoned, the day after it will be here! The field of battle, instead, therefore, of being at Saint Denis or at Charenton, will be near Compiegne or Villars-Cotterets.”

“The prince will vanquish you, as he has always done.”

“‘Tis possible; my lord; but before an engagement ensues we shall move your eminence to another castle belonging to our friend Du Vallon, who has three. We will not expose your eminence to the chances of war.”

“Come,” answered Mazarin, “I see it will be necessary for me to capitulate.”

“Before a siege?”

“Yes; the conditions will be better than afterward.”

“Ah, my lord! as to conditions, you would soon see how moderate and reasonable we are!”

“Come, now, what are your conditions?”

“Rest yourself first, my lord, and we--we will reflect.”

“I do not need rest, gentlemen; I need to know whether I am among enemies or friends.”

“Friends, my lord! friends!”

“Well, then, tell me at once what you want, that I may see if any arrangement be possible. Speak, Comte de la Fere!”

“My lord,” replied Athos, “for myself I have nothing to demand. For France, were I to specify my wishes, I should have too much. I beg you to excuse me and propose to the chevalier.”

And Athos, bowing, retired and remained leaning against the mantelpiece, a spectator of the scene.

“Speak, then, chevalier!” said the cardinal. “What do you want? Nothing ambiguous, if you please. Be clear, short and precise.”

“As for me,” replied Aramis, “I have in my pocket the very programme of the conditions which the deputation--of which I formed one--went yesterday to Saint Germain to impose on you. Let us consider first the ancient rights. The demands in that programme must be granted.”

“We were almost agreed on those,” replied Mazarin; “let us pass on to private and personal stipulations.”

“You suppose, then, that there are some?” said Aramis, smiling.

“I do not suppose that you will all be quite so disinterested as Monsieur de la Fere,” replied the cardinal, bowing to Athos.

“My lord, you are right, and I am glad to see that you do justice to the count at last. The count has a mind above vulgar desires and earthly passions. He is a proud soul--he is a man by himself! You are right--he is worth us all, and we avow it to you!”

“Aramis,” said Athos, “are you jesting?”

“No, no, dear friend; I state only what we all know. You are right; it is not you alone this matter concerns, but my lord and his unworthy servant, myself.”

“Well, then, what do you require besides the general conditions before recited?”

“I require, my lord, that Normandy should be given to Madame de Longueville, with five hundred thousand francs and full absolution. I require that his majesty should deign to be godfather to the child she has just borne; and that my lord, after having been present at the christening, should go to proffer his homage to our Holy Father the Pope.”

“That is, you wish me to lay aside my ministerial functions, to quit France and be an exile.”

“I wish his eminence to become pope on the first opportunity, allowing me then the right of demanding full indulgences for myself and my friends.”

Mazarin made a grimace which was quite indescribable, and then turned to D’Artagnan.

“And you, sir?” he said.

“I, my lord,” answered the Gascon, “I differ from Monsieur d’Herblay entirely as to the last point, though I agree with him on the first. Far from wishing my lord to quit Paris, I hope he will stay there and continue to be prime minister, as he is a great statesman. I shall try also to help him to down the Fronde, but on one condition--that he sometimes remembers the king’s faithful servants and gives the first vacant company of musketeers to a man that I could name. And you, Monsieur du Vallon----”

“Yes, you, sir! Speak, if you please,” said Mazarin.

“As for me,” answered Porthos, “I wish my lord cardinal, in order to do honor to my house, which gives him an asylum, would in remembrance of this adventure erect my estate into a barony, with a promise to confer that order on one of my particular friends, whenever his majesty next creates peers.”

“You know, sir, that before receiving the order one must submit proofs.”

“My friends will submit them. Besides, should it be necessary, monseigneur will show him how that formality may be avoided.”

Mazarin bit his lips; the blow was direct and he replied rather dryly:

“All this appears to me to be ill conceived, disjointed, gentlemen; for if I satisfy some I shall displease others. If I stay in Paris I cannot go to Rome; if I became pope I could not continue to be prime minister; and it is only by continuing prime minister that I can make Monsieur d’Artagnan a captain and Monsieur du Vallon a baron.”

“True,” said Aramis, “so, as I am in a minority, I withdraw my proposition, so far as it relates to the voyage to Rome and monseigneur’s resignation.”

“I am to remain minister, then?” said Mazarin.

“You remain minister; that is understood,” said D’Artagnan; “France needs you.”

“And I desist from my pretensions,” said Aramis. “His eminence will continue to be prime minister and her majesty’s favorite, if he will grant to me and my friends what we demand for France and for ourselves.”

“Occupy yourselves with your own affairs, gentlemen, and let France settle matters as she will with me,” resumed Mazarin.

“Ho! ho!” replied Aramis. “The Frondeurs will have a treaty and your eminence must sign it before us, promising at the same time to obtain the queen’s consent to it.”

“I can answer only for myself,” said Mazarin. “I cannot answer for the queen. Suppose her majesty refuses?”

“Oh!” said D’Artagnan, “monseigneur knows very well that her majesty refuses him nothing.”

“Here, monseigneur,” said Aramis, “is the treaty proposed by the deputation of Frondeurs. Will your eminence please read and examine?”

“I am acquainted with it.”

“Sign it, then.”

“Reflect, gentlemen, that a signature given under circumstances like the present might be regarded as extorted by violence.”

“Monseigneur will be at hand to testify that it was freely given.”

“Suppose I refuse?”

“Then,” said D’Artagnan, “your eminence must expect the consequences of a refusal.”

“Would you dare to touch a cardinal?”

“You have dared, my lord, to imprison her majesty’s musketeers.”

“The queen will revenge me, gentlemen.”

“I do not think so, although inclination might lead her to do so, but we shall take your eminence to Paris, and the Parisians will defend us.”

“How uneasy they must be at this moment at Rueil and Saint Germain,” said Aramis. “How they must be asking, ‘Where is the cardinal?’ ‘What has become of the minister?’ ‘Where has the favorite gone?’ How they must be looking for monseigneur in all corners! What comments must be made; and if the Fronde knows that monseigneur has disappeared, how the Fronde must triumph!”

“It is frightful,” murmured Mazarin.

“Sign the treaty, then, monseigneur,” said Aramis.

“Suppose the queen should refuse to ratify it?”

“Ah! nonsense!” cried D’Artagnan, “I can manage so that her majesty will receive me well; I know an excellent method.”

“What?”

"I shall take her majesty the letter in which you tell her that the finances are exhausted."

"And then?" asked Mazarin, turning pale.

"When I see her majesty embarrassed, I shall conduct her to Rueil, make her enter the orangery and show her a certain spring which turns a box."

"Enough, sir," muttered the cardinal, "you have said enough; where is the treaty?"

"Here it is," replied Aramis. "Sign, my lord," and he gave him a pen.

Mazarin arose, walked some moments, thoughtful, but not dejected.

"And when I have signed," he said, "what is to be my guarantee?"

"My word of honor, sir," said Athos.

Mazarin started, turned toward the Comte de la Fere, and looking for an instant at that grand and honest countenance, took the pen.

"It is sufficient, count," he said, and signed the treaty.

"And now, Monsieur d'Artagnan," he said, "prepare to set off for Saint Germain and take a letter from me to the queen."

CHAPTER 88.

Shows how with Threat and Pen more is effected than by the Sword.

D’Artagnan knew his part well; he was aware that opportunity has a forelock only for him who will take it and he was not a man to let it go by him without seizing it. He soon arranged a prompt and certain manner of traveling, by sending relays of horses to Chantilly, so that he might be in Paris in five or six hours. But before setting out he reflected that for a lad of intelligence and experience he was in a singular predicament, since he was proceeding toward uncertainty and leaving certainty behind him.

“In fact,” he said, as he was about to mount and start on his dangerous mission, “Athos, for generosity, is a hero of romance; Porthos has an excellent disposition, but is easily influenced; Aramis has a hieroglyphic countenance, always illegible. What will come out of those three elements when I am no longer present to combine them? The deliverance of the cardinal, perhaps. Now, the deliverance of the cardinal would be the ruin of our hopes; and our hopes are thus far the only recompense we have for labors in comparison with which those of Hercules were pygmean.”

He went to find Aramis.

“You, my dear Chevalier d’Herblay,” he said, “are the Fronde incarnate. Mistrust Athos, therefore, who will not prosecute the affairs of any one, even his own. Mistrust Porthos, especially, who, to please the count whom he regards as God on earth, will assist him in contriving Mazarin’s escape, if Mazarin has the wit to weep or play the chivalric.”

Aramis smiled; his smile was at once cunning and resolute.

“Fear nothing,” he said; “I have my conditions to impose. My private ambition tends only to the profit of him who has justice on his side.”

“Good!” thought D’Artagnan: “in this direction I am satisfied.” He pressed Aramis’s hand and went in search of Porthos.

“Friend,” he said, “you have worked so hard with me toward building up our fortune, that, at the moment when we are about to reap the fruits of our labours, it would be a ridiculous piece of silliness in you to allow yourself to be controlled by Aramis, whose cunning you know--a cunning which, we may say between ourselves, is not always without egotism; or by Athos, a noble and disinterested man, but blase, who, desiring nothing further for himself, doesn’t sympathize with the desires of others. What should you say if either of these two friends proposed to you to let Mazarin go?”

“Why, I should say that we had too much trouble in taking him to let him off so easily.”

“Bravo, Porthos! and you would be right, my friend; for in losing him you would lose your barony, which you have in your grasp, to say nothing of the fact that, were he once out of this, Mazarin would have you hanged.”

“Do you think so?”

“I am sure of it.”

“Then I would kill him rather than let him go.”

“And you would act rightly. There is no question, you understand, provided we secure our own interests, of securing those of the Frondeurs; who, besides, don’t understand political matters as we old soldiers do.”

“Never fear, dear friend,” said Porthos. “I shall see you through the window as you mount your horse; I shall follow you with my eyes as long as you are in sight; then I shall place myself at the cardinal’s door--a door with glass windows. I shall see everything, and at the least suspicious sign I shall begin to exterminate.”

“Bravo!” thought D’Artagnan; “on this side I think the cardinal will be well guarded.” He pressed the hand of the lord of Pierrefonds and went in search of Athos.

“My dear Athos,” he said, “I am going away. I have only one thing to say to you. You know Anne of Austria; the captivity of Mazarin alone guarantees my life; if you let him go I am a dead man.”

“I needed nothing less than that consideration, my dear D’Artagnan, to persuade myself to adopt the role of jailer. I give you my word that you will find the cardinal where you leave him.”

“This reassures me more than all the royal signatures,” thought D’Artagnan. “Now that I have the word of Athos I can set out.”

D’Artagnan started alone on his journey, without other escort than his sword, and with a simple passport from Mazarin to secure his admission to the queen’s presence. Six hours after he left Pierrefonds he was at Saint Germain.

The disappearance of Mazarin was not as yet generally known. Anne of Austria was informed of it and concealed her uneasiness from every one. In the chamber of D'Artagnan and Porthos the two soldiers had been found bound and gagged. On recovering the use of their limbs and tongues they could, of course, tell nothing but what they knew--that they had been seized, stripped and bound. But as to what had been done by Porthos and D'Artagnan afterward they were as ignorant as all the inhabitants of the chateau.

Bernouin alone knew a little more than the others. Bernouin, seeing that his master did not return and hearing the stroke of midnight, had made an examination of the orangery. The first door, barricaded with furniture, had aroused in him certain suspicions, but without communicating his suspicions to any one he had patiently worked his way into the midst of all that confusion. Then he came to the corridor, all the doors of which he found open; so, too, was the door of Athos's chamber and that of the park. From the latter point it was easy to follow tracks on the snow. He saw that these tracks tended toward the wall; on the other side he found similar tracks, then footprints of horses and then signs of a troop of cavalry which had moved away in the direction of Enghien. He could no longer cherish any doubt that the cardinal had been carried off by the three prisoners, since the prisoners had disappeared at the same time; and he had hastened to Saint Germain to warn the queen of that disappearance.

Anne had enforced the utmost secrecy and had disclosed the event to no one except the Prince de Conde, who had sent five or six hundred horsemen into the environs of Saint Germain with orders to bring in any suspicious person who was going away from Rueil, in whatsoever direction it might be.

Now, since D'Artagnan did not constitute a body of horsemen, since he was alone, since he was not going away from Rueil and was going to Saint Germain, no one paid any attention to him and his journey was not obstructed in any way.

On entering the courtyard of the old chateau the first person seen by our ambassador was Maitre Bernouin in person, who, standing on the threshold, awaited news of his vanished master.

At the sight of D'Artagnan, who entered the courtyard on horseback, Bernouin rubbed his eyes and thought he must be mistaken. But D'Artagnan made a friendly sign to him with his head, dismounted, and throwing his bridle to a lackey who was passing, he approached the valet-de-chambre with a smile on his lips.

“Monsieur d’Artagnan!” cried the latter, like a man who has the nightmare and talks in his sleep, “Monsieur d’Artagnan!”

“Himself, Monsieur Bernouin.”

“And why have you come here?”

“To bring news of Monsieur de Mazarin--the freshest news there is.”

“What has become of him, then?”

“He is as well as you and I.”

“Nothing bad has happened to him, then?”

“Absolutely nothing. He felt the need of making a trip in the Ile de France, and begged us--the Comte de la Fere and Monsieur du Vallon--to accompany him. We were too devoted servants to refuse him a request of that sort. We set out last evening and here we are.”

“Here you are.”

“His eminence had something to communicate to her majesty, something secret and private--a mission that could be confided only to a sure man--and so has sent me to Saint Germain. And therefore, my dear Monsieur Bernouin, if you wish to do what will be pleasing to your master, announce to her majesty that I have come, and tell her with what purpose.”

Whether he spoke seriously or in jest, since it was evident that under existing circumstances D’Artagnan was the only man who could relieve the queen’s uneasiness, Bernouin went without hesitation to announce to her this strange embassy; and as he had foreseen, the queen gave orders to introduce Monsieur d’Artagnan at once.

D’Artagnan approached the sovereign with every mark of profound respect, and having fallen on his knees presented to her the cardinal’s letter

It was, however, merely a letter of introduction. The queen read it, recognized the writing, and, since there were no details in it of what had occurred, asked for particulars. D’Artagnan related everything with that simple and ingenuous air which he knew how to assume on occasions. The queen, as he went on, looked at him with increasing astonishment. She could not comprehend how a man could conceive such an enterprise and still less how he could have the audacity to disclose it to her whose interest and almost duty it was to punish him.

“How, sir!” she cried, as D’Artagnan finished, “you dare to tell me the details of your crime--to give me an account of your treason!”

“Pardon, madame, but I think that either I have expressed myself badly or your majesty has imperfectly understood me. There is here no question of crime or treason. Monsieur de Mazarin held us in prison, Monsieur du Vallon and myself, because we could not believe that he had sent us to England to quietly look on while they cut off the head of Charles I., brother-in-law of the late king, your husband, the consort of Madame Henrietta, your sister and your guest, and because we did all that we could do to save the life of the royal martyr. We were then convinced, my friend and I, that there was some error of which we were the victims, and that an explanation was called for between his eminence and ourselves. Now, that an explanation may bear fruit, it is necessary that it should be quietly conducted, far from noise and interruption. We have therefore taken away monsieur le cardinal to my friend's chateau and there we have come to an understanding. Well, madame, it proved to be as we had supposed; there was a mistake. Monsieur de Mazarin had thought that we had rendered service to General Cromwell, instead of King Charles, which would have been a disgrace, rebounding from us to him, and from him to your majesty--a dishonor which would have tainted the royalty of your illustrious son. We were able to prove the contrary, and that proof we are ready to give to your majesty, calling in support of it the august widow weeping in the Louvre, where your royal munificence has provided for her a home. That proof satisfied him so completely that, as a sign of satisfaction, he has sent me, as your majesty may see, to consider with you what reparation should be made to gentlemen unjustly treated and wrongfully persecuted."

"I listen to you, and I wonder at you, sir," said the queen. "In fact, I have rarely seen such excess of impudence."

"Your majesty, on your side," said D'Artagnan, "is as much mistaken as to our intentions as the Cardinal Mazarin has always been."

"You are in error, sir," answered the queen. "I am so little mistaken that in ten minutes you shall be arrested, and in an hour I shall set off at the head of my army to release my minister."

"I am sure your majesty will not commit such an act of imprudence, first, because it would be useless and would produce the most disastrous results. Before he could be possibly set free the cardinal would be dead; and indeed, so convinced is he of this, that he entreated me, should I find your majesty disposed to act in this way, to do all I could to induce you to change your resolution."

"Well, then, I will content myself with arresting you!"

“Madame, the possibility of my arrest has been foreseen, and should I not have returned by to-morrow, at a certain hour the next day the cardinal will be brought to Paris and delivered to the parliament.”

“It is evident, sir, that your position has kept you out of relation to men and affairs; otherwise you would know that since we left Paris monsieur le cardinal has returned thither five or six times; that he has there met De Beaufort, De Bouillon, the coadjutor and D’Elbeuf and that not one of them had any desire to arrest him.”

“Your pardon, madame, I know all that. And therefore my friends will conduct monsieur le cardinal neither to De Beaufort, nor to De Bouillon, nor to the coadjutor, nor to D’Elbeuf. These gentlemen wage war on private account, and in buying them up, by granting them what they wished, monsieur le cardinal has made a good bargain. He will be delivered to the parliament, members of which can, of course, be bought, but even Monsieur de Mazarin is not rich enough to buy the whole body.”

“I think,” returned Anne of Austria, fixing upon him a glance, which in any woman’s face would have expressed disdain, but in a queen’s, spread terror to those she looked upon, “nay, I perceive you dare to threaten the mother of your sovereign.”

“Madame,” replied D’Artagnan, “I threaten simply and solely because I am obliged to do so. Believe me, madame, as true a thing as it is that a heart beats in this bosom--a heart devoted to you--believe that you have been the idol of our lives; that we have, as you well know--good Heaven!--risked our lives twenty times for your majesty. Have you, then, madame, no compassion for your servants who for twenty years have vegetated in obscurity, without betraying in a single sigh the solemn and sacred secrets they have had the honor to share with you? Look at me, madame--at me, whom you accuse of speaking loud and threateningly. What am I? A poor officer, without fortune, without protection, without a future, unless the eye of my queen, which I have sought so long, rests on me for a moment. Look at the Comte de la Fere, a type of nobility, a flower of chivalry. He has taken part against his queen, or rather, against her minister. He has not been unreasonably exacting, it seems to me. Look at Monsieur du Vallon, that faithful soul, that arm of steel, who for twenty years has awaited the word from your lips which will make him in rank what he is in sentiment and in courage. Consider, in short, your people who love you and who yet are famished, who have no other wish than to bless you, and who, nevertheless-

-no, I am wrong, your subjects, madame, will never curse you; say one word to them and all will be ended--peace succeed war, joy tears, and happiness to misfortune!"

Anne of Austria looked with wonderment on the warlike countenance of D'Artagnan, which betrayed a singular expression of deep feeling.

"Why did you not say all this before you took action, sir?" she said.

"Because, madame, it was necessary to prove to your majesty one thing of which you doubted---that is, that we still possess amongst us some valor and are worthy of some consideration at your hands."

"And that valor would shrink from no undertaking, according to what I see."

"It has hesitated at nothing in the past; why, then, should it be less daring in the future?"

"Then, in case of my refusal, this valor, should a struggle occur, will even go the length of carrying me off in the midst of my court, to deliver me into the hands of the Fronde, as you propose to deliver my minister?"

"We have not thought about it yet, madame," answered D'Artagnan, with that Gascon effrontery which had in him the appearance of naivete; "but if we four had resolved upon it we should do it most certainly."

"I ought," muttered Anne to herself, "by this time to remember that these men are giants."

"Alas, madame!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "this proves to me that not till to-day has your majesty had a just idea of us."

"Perhaps," said Anne; "but that idea, if at last I have it----"

"Your majesty will do us justice. In doing us justice you will no longer treat us as men of vulgar stamp. You will see in me an ambassador worthy of the high interests he is authorized to discuss with his sovereign."

"Where is the treaty?"

"Here it is."

Anne of Austria cast her eyes upon the treaty that D'Artagnan presented to her.

"I do not see here," she said, "anything but general conditions; the interests of the Prince de Conti or of the Ducs de Beaufort, de Bouillon and d'Elbeuf and of the coadjutor, are herein consulted; but with regard to yours?"

"We do ourselves justice, madame, even in assuming the high position that we have. We do not think ourselves worthy to stand near such great names.”

“But you, I presume, have decided to assert your pretensions viva voce?”

“I believe you, madame, to be a great and powerful queen, and that it will be unworthy of your power and greatness if you do not recompense the arms which will bring back his eminence to Saint Germain.”

“It is my intention so to do; come, let us hear you. Speak.”

“He who has negotiated these matters (forgive me if I begin by speaking of myself, but I must claim that importance which has been given to me, not assumed by me) he who has arranged matters for the return of the cardinal, ought, it appears to me, in order that his reward may not be unworthy of your majesty, to be made commandant of the guards--an appointment something like that of captain of the musketeers.”

“‘Tis the appointment Monsieur de Treville held, you ask of me.”

“The place, madame, is vacant, and although ‘tis a year since Monsieur de Treville has left it, it has not been filled.”

“But it is one of the principal military appointments in the king’s household.”

“Monsieur de Treville was but a younger son of a simple Gascon family, like me, madame; he occupied that post for twenty years.”

“You have an answer ready for everything,” replied the queen, and she took from her bureau a document, which she filled up and signed.

“Undoubtedly, madame,” said D’Artagnan, taking the document and bowing, “this is a noble reward; but everything in the world is unstable, and the man who happened to fall into disgrace with your majesty might lose this office to-morrow.”

“What more do you want?” asked the queen, coloring, as she found that she had to deal with a mind as subtle as her own.

“A hundred thousand francs for this poor captain of musketeers, to be paid whenever his services shall no longer be acceptable to your majesty.”

Anne hesitated.

“To think of the Parisians,” soliloquized D’Artagnan, “offering only the other day, by an edict of the parliament, six hundred thousand francs to any man soever who would deliver up the cardinal to them, dead or alive--if alive, in order to hang him; if dead, to deny him the rites of Christian burial!”

“Come,” said Anne, “‘tis reasonable, since you only ask from a queen the sixth of what the parliament has proposed;” and she signed an order for a hundred thousand francs.

“Now, then,” she said, “what next?”

“Madame, my friend Du Vallon is rich and has therefore nothing in the way of fortune to desire; but I think I remember that there was a question between him and Monsieur Mazarin as to making his estate a barony. Nay, it must have been a promise.”

“A country clown,” said Anne of Austria, “people will laugh.”

“Let them,” answered D’Artagnan. “But I am sure of one thing--that those who laugh at him in his presence will never laugh a second time.”

“Here goes the barony.” said the queen; she signed a patent.

“Now there remains the chevalier, or the Abbe d’Herblay, as your majesty pleases.”

“Does he wish to be a bishop?”

“No, madame, something easier to grant.”

“What?”

“It is that the king should deign to stand godfather to the son of Madame de Longueville.”

The queen smiled.

“Monsieur de Longueville is of royal blood, madame,” said D’Artagnan.

“Yes,” said the queen; “but his son?”

“His son, madame, must be, since the husband of the son’s mother is.”

“And your friend has nothing more to ask for Madame de Longueville?”

“No, madame, for I presume that the king, standing godfather to him, could do no less than present him with five hundred thousand francs, giving his father, also, the government of Normandy.”

“As to the government of Normandy,” replied the queen, “I think I can promise; but with regard to the present, the cardinal is always telling me there is no more money in the royal coffers.”

“We shall search for some, madame, and I think we can find a little, and if your majesty approves, we will seek for some together.”

“What next?”

“What next, madame?”

“Yes.”

“That is all.”

“Haven’t you, then, a fourth companion?”

“Yes, madame, the Comte de la Fere.”

“What does he ask?”

“Nothing.”

“There is in the world, then, one man who, having the power to ask, asks--nothing!”

“There is the Comte de la Fere, madame. The Comte de la Fere is not a man.”

“What is he, then?”

“The Comte de la Fere is a demi-god.”

“Has he not a son, a young man, a relative, a nephew, of whom Comminges spoke to me as being a brave boy, and who, with Monsieur de Chatillon, brought the standards from Lens?”

“He has, as your majesty has said, a ward, who is called the Vicomte de Bragelonne.”

“If that young man should be appointed to a regiment what would his guardian say?”

“Perhaps he would accept.”

“Perhaps?”

“Yes, if your majesty herself should beg him to accept.”

“He must be indeed a strange man. Well, we will reflect and perhaps we will beg him. Are you satisfied, sir?”

“There is one thing the queen has not signed--her assent to the treaty.”

“Of what use to-day? I will sign it to-morrow.”

“I can assure her majesty that if she does not sign to-day she will not have time to sign to-morrow. Consent, then, I beg you, madame, to write at the bottom of this schedule, which has been drawn up by Mazarin, as you see:

“‘I consent to ratify the treaty proposed by the Parisians.’“

Anne was caught, she could not draw back--she signed; but scarcely had she done so when pride burst forth and she began to weep.

D’Artagnan started on seeing these tears. Since that period of history queens have shed tears, like other women.

The Gascon shook his head, these tears from royalty melted his heart.

“Madame,” he said, kneeling, “look upon the unhappy man at your feet. He begs you to believe that at a gesture of your majesty everything will be possible to him. He has faith in himself; he has faith in his friends; he wishes also to have faith in his queen. And in proof that he fears nothing, that he counts on nothing, he will restore Monsieur de Mazarin to your majesty without conditions. Behold, madame! here are the august signatures of your majesty's hand; if you think you are right in giving them to me, you shall do so, but from this very moment you are free from any obligation to keep them."

And D'Artagnan, full of splendid pride and manly intrepidity, placed in Anne's hands, in a bundle, the papers that he had one by one won from her with so much difficulty.

There are moments--for if everything is not good, everything in this world is not bad--in which the most rigid and the coldest soul is softened by the tears of strong emotion, heart-arraigning sentiment: one of these momentary impulses actuated Anne. D'Artagnan, when he gave way to his own feelings--which were in accordance with those of the queen--had accomplished more than the most astute diplomacy could have attempted. He was therefore instantly recompensed, either for his address or for his sensibility, whichever it might be termed.

"You were right, sir," said Anne. "I misunderstood you. There are the acts signed; I deliver them to you without compulsion. Go and bring me back the cardinal as soon as possible."

"Madame," faltered D'Artagnan, "'tis twenty years ago--I have a good memory--since I had the honor behind a piece of tapestry in the Hotel de Ville, of kissing one of those lovely hands."

"There is the other," replied the queen; "and that the left hand should not be less liberal than the right," she drew from her finger a diamond similar to the one formerly given to him, "take and keep this ring in remembrance of me.

"Madame," said D'Artagnan, rising, "I have only one thing more to wish, which is, that the next thing you ask from me, shall be--my life."

And with this conclusion--a way peculiar to himself--he rose and left the room.

"I never rightly understood those men," said the queen, as she watched him retiring from her presence; "and it is now too late, for in a year the king will be of age."

In twenty-four hours D'Artagnan and Porthos conducted Mazarin to the queen; and the one received his commission, the other his patent of nobility.

On the same day the Treaty of Paris was signed, and it was everywhere announced that the cardinal had shut himself up for three days in order to draw it up with the greatest care.

Here is what each of the parties concerned gained by that treaty:

Monsieur de Conti received Damvilliers, and having made his proofs as general, he succeeded in remaining a soldier, instead of being made cardinal. Moreover, something had been said of a marriage with Mazarin’s niece. The idea was welcomed by the prince, to whom it was of little importance whom he married, so long as he married some one.

The Duc de Beaufort made his entrance at court, receiving ample reparation for the wrongs he had suffered, and all the honor due to his rank. Full pardon was accorded to those who had aided in his escape. He received also the office of admiral, which had been held by his father, the Duc de Vendome and an indemnity for his houses and castles, demolished by the Parliament of Bretagne.

The Duc de Bouillon received domains of a value equal to that of his principality of Sedan, and the title of prince, granted to him and to those belonging to his house.

The Duc de Longueville gained the government of Pont-de-l’Arche, five hundred thousand francs for his wife and the honor of seeing her son held at the baptismal font by the young king and Henrietta of England.

Aramis stipulated that Bazin should officiate at that ceremony and that Planchet should furnish the christening sugar plums.

The Duc d’Elbeuf obtained payment of certain sums due to his wife, one hundred thousand francs for his eldest son and twenty-five thousand for each of the three others.

The coadjutor alone obtained nothing. They promised, indeed, to negotiate with the pope for a cardinal’s hat for him; but he knew how little reliance should be placed on such promises, made by the queen and Mazarin. Quite contrary to the lot of Monsieur de Conti, unable to be cardinal, he was obliged to remain a soldier.

And therefore, when all Paris was rejoicing in the expected return of the king, appointed for the next day, Gondy alone, in the midst of the general happiness, was dissatisfied; he sent for the two men whom he was wont to summon when in especially bad humor. Those two men were the Count de Rochefort and the mendicant of Saint Eustache. They came with their usual promptness, and the coadjutor spent with them a part of the night.

CHAPTER 89.

Difficult for Kings to return to the Capitals of their Kingdoms.

Whilst D’Artagnan and Porthos were engaged in conducting the cardinal to Saint Germain, Athos and Aramis returned to Paris.

Each had his own particular visit to make.

Aramis rushed to the Hotel de Ville, where Madame de Longueville was sojourning. The duchess loudly lamented the announcement of peace. War had made her a queen; peace brought her abdication. She declared that she would never assent to the treaty and that she wished eternal war.

But when Aramis had presented that peace to her in a true light--that is to say, with all its advantages; when he had pointed out to her, in exchange for the precarious and contested royalty of Paris, the viceroyalty of Font-de-l’Arche, in other words, of all Normandy; when he had rung in her ears the five hundred thousand francs promised by the cardinal; when he had dazzled her eyes with the honor bestowed on her by the king in holding her child at the baptismal font, Madame de Longueville contended no longer, except as is the custom with pretty women to contend, and defended herself only to surrender at last.

Aramis made a presence of believing in the reality of her opposition and was unwilling to deprive himself in his own view of the credit of her conversion.

“Madame,” he said, “you have wished to conquer the prince your brother--that is to say, the greatest captain of the age; and when women of genius wish anything they always succeed in attaining it. You have succeeded; the prince is beaten, since he can no longer fight. Now attach him to our party. Withdraw him gently from the queen, whom he does not like, from Mazarin, whom he despises. The Fronde is a comedy, of which the first act only is played. Let us wait for a denouement--for the day when the prince, thanks to you, shall have turned against the court.”

Madame de Longueville was persuaded. This Frondist duchess trusted so confidently to the power of her fine eyes, that she could not doubt their influence even over Monsieur de Conde; and the chronicles of the time aver that her confidence was justified.

Athos, on quitting Aramis, went to Madame de Chevreuse. Here was another frondeuse to persuade, and she was even less open to conviction than her younger rival. There had been no stipulation in her favor. Monsieur de Chevreuse had not been appointed governor of a province, and if the queen should consent to be godmother it could be only of her grandson or granddaughter. At the first announcement of peace Madame de Chevreuse frowned, and in spite of all the logic of Athos to show her that a prolonged war would have been impracticable, contended in favor of hostilities.

"My fair friend," said Athos, "allow me to tell you that everybody is tired of war. You will get yourself exiled, as you did in the time of Louis XIII. Believe me, we have passed the time of success in intrigue, and your fine eyes are not destined to be eclipsed by regretting Paris, where there will always be two queens as long as you are there."

"Oh," cried the duchess, "I cannot make war alone, but I can avenge myself on that ungrateful queen and most ambitious favorite-on the honor of a duchess, I will avenge myself."

"Madame," replied Athos, "do not injure the Vicomte de Bragelonne--do not ruin his prospects. Alas! excuse my weakness! There are moments when a man grows young again in his children."

The duchess smiled, half tenderly, half ironically.

"Count," she said, "you are, I fear, gained over to the court. I suppose you have a blue ribbon in your pocket?"

"Yes, madame; I have that of the Garter, which King Charles I. gave me some days before he died."

"Come, I am growing an old woman!" said the duchess, pensively.

Athos took her hand and kissed it. She sighed, as she looked at him.

"Count," she said, "Bragelonne must be a charming place. You are a man of taste. You have water--woods--flowers there?"

She sighed again and leaned her charming head, gracefully reclined, on her hand, still beautiful in form and color.

"Madame!" exclaimed Athos, "what were you saying just now about growing old? Never have I seen you look so young, so beautiful!"

The duchess shook her head.

"Does Monsieur de Bragelonne remain in Paris?" she inquired.

"What think you of it?" inquired Athos.

“Leave him with me,” replied the duchess.

“No, madame; if you have forgotten the history of Oedipus, I, at least, remember it.”

“Really, sir, you are delightful, and I should like to spend a month at Bragelonne.”

“Are you not afraid of making people envious of me, duchess?” replied Athos.

“No, I shall go incognito, count, under the name of Marie Michon.”

“You are adorable, madame.”

“But do not keep Raoul with you.”

“Why not?”

“Because he is in love.”

“He! he is quite a child!”

“And ‘tis a child he loves.”

Athos became thoughtful.

“You are right, duchess. This singular passion for a child of seven may some day make him very unhappy. There is to be war in Flanders. He shall go thither.”

“And at his return you will send him to me. I will arm him against love.”

“Alas, madame!” exclaimed Athos, “to-day love is like war--the breastplate is becoming useless.”

Raoul entered at this moment; he came to announce that the solemn entrance of the king, queen, and her ministers was to take place on the ensuing day.

The next day, in fact, at daybreak, the court made preparations to quit Saint Germain.

Meanwhile, the queen every hour had been sending for D’Artagnan.

“I hear,” she said, “that Paris is not quiet. I am afraid for the king’s safety; place yourself close to the coach door on the right.”

“Reassure yourself, madame, I will answer for the king’s safety.”

As he left the queen’s presence Bernouin summoned him to the cardinal.

“Sir,” said Mazarin to him “an emeute is spoken of in Paris. I shall be on the king’s left and as I am the chief person threatened, remain at the coach door to the left.”

“Your eminence may be perfectly easy,” replied D’Artagnan; “they will not touch a hair of your head.”

“Deuce take it!” he thought to himself, “how can I take care of both? Ah! plague on’t, I will guard the king and Porthos shall guard the cardinal.”

This arrangement pleased every one. The queen had confidence in the courage of D’Artagnan, which she knew, and the cardinal in the strength of Porthos, which he had experienced.

The royal procession set out for Paris. Guitant and Comminges, at the head of the guards, marched first; then came the royal carriage, with D’Artagnan on one side, Porthos on the other; then the musketeers, for two and twenty years staunch friends of D’Artagnan. During twenty he had been lieutenant, their captain since the night before.

The cortege proceeded to Notre Dame, where a Te Deum was chanted. All Paris were in the streets. The Swiss were drawn up along the road, but as the road was long, they were placed at six or eight feet distant from each other and one deep only. This force was therefore wholly insufficient, and from time to time the line was broken through by the people and was formed again with difficulty. Whenever this occurred, although it proceeded only from goodwill and a desire to see the king and queen, Anne looked at D’Artagnan anxiously.

Mazarin, who had dispensed a thousand louis to make the people cry “Long live Mazarin,” and who had accordingly no confidence in acclamations bought at twenty pistoles each, kept one eye on Porthos; but that gigantic body-guard replied to the look with his great bass voice, “Be tranquil, my lord,” and Mazarin became more and more composed.

At the Palais Royal, the crowd, which had flowed in from the adjacent street was still greater; like an impetuous mob, a wave of human beings came to meet the carriage and rolled tumultuously into the Rue Saint Honore.

When the procession reached the palace, loud cries of “Long live their majesties!” resounded. Mazarin leaned out of the window. One or two shouts of “Long live the cardinal” saluted his shadow; but instantly hisses and yells stifled them remorselessly. Mazarin turned pale and shrank back in the coach.

“Low-born fellows!” ejaculated Porthos.

D’Artagnan said nothing, but twirled his mustache with a peculiar gesture which showed that his fine Gascon humor was awake.

Anne of Austria bent down and whispered in the young king’s ear:

“Say something gracious to Monsieur d’Artagnan, my son.”

The young king leaned toward the door.

"I have not said good-morning to you, Monsieur d'Artagnan," he said; "nevertheless, I have remarked you. It was you who were behind my bed-curtains that night the Parisians wished to see me asleep."

"And if the king permits me," returned the Gascon, "I shall be near him always when there is danger to be encountered."

"Sir," said Mazarin to Porthos, "what would you do if the crowd fell upon us?"

"Kill as many as I could, my lord."

"Hem! brave as you are and strong as you are, you could not kill them all."

"'Tis true," answered Porthos, rising on his saddle, in order that he might appraise the immense crowd, "there are a lot of them."

"I think I should like the other fellow better than this one," said Mazarin to himself, and he threw himself back in his carriage.

The queen and her minister, more especially the latter, had reason to feel anxious. The crowd, whilst preserving an appearance of respect and even of affection for the king and queen regent, began to be tumultuous. Reports were whispered about, like certain sounds which announce, as they whistle from wave to wave, the coming storm--and when they pass athwart a multitude, presage an emeute.

D'Artagnan turned toward the musketeers and made a sign imperceptible to the crowd, but very easily understood by that chosen regiment, the flower of the army.

The ranks closed firmly in and a kind of majestic tremor ran from man to man.

At the Barriere des Sergents the procession was obliged to stop. Comminges left the head of the escort and went to the queen's carriage. Anne questioned D'Artagnan by a look. He answered in the same language.

"Proceed," she said.

Comminges returned to his post. An effort was made and the living barrier was violently broken through.

Some complaints arose from the crowd and were addressed this time to the king as well as the minister.

"Onward!" cried D'Artagnan, in a loud voice.

"Onward!" cried Porthos.

But as if the multitude had waited only for this demonstration to burst out, all the sentiments of hostility that possessed it exploded simultaneously. Cries of “Down with Mazarin!” “Death to the cardinal!” resounded on all sides.

At the same time through the streets of Grenelle, Saint Honore, and Du Coq, a double stream of people broke the feeble hedge of Swiss guards and came like a whirlwind even to the very legs of Porthos’s horse and that of D’Artagnan.

This new eruption was more dangerous than the others, being composed of armed men. It was plain that it was not the chance combination of those who had collected a number of the malcontents at the same spot, but a concerted organized attack.

Each of these mobs was led by a chief, one of whom appeared to belong, not to the people, but to the honorable corporation of mendicants, and the other, notwithstanding his affected imitation of the people, might easily be discerned to be a gentleman. Both were evidently stimulated by the same impulse.

There was a shock which was perceived even in the royal carriage. Myriads of hoarse cries, forming one vast uproar, were heard, mingled with guns firing.

“Ho! Musketeers!” cried D’Artagnan.

The escort divided into two files. One of them passed around to the right of the carriage, the other to the left. One went to support D’Artagnan, the other Porthos. Then came a skirmish, the more terrible because it had no definite object; the more melancholy, because those engaged in it knew not for whom they were fighting. Like all popular movements, the shock given by the rush of this mob was formidable. The musketeers, few in number, not being able, in the midst of this crowd, to make their horses wheel around, began to give way. D’Artagnan offered to lower the blinds of the royal carriage, but the young king stretched out his arm, saying:

“No, sir! I wish to see everything.”

“If your majesty wishes to look out--well, then, look!” replied D’Artagnan. And turning with that fury which made him so formidable, he rushed toward the chief of the insurgents, a man who, with a huge sword in his hand, was trying to hew a passage to the coach door through the musketeers.

“Make room!” cried D’Artagnan. “Zounds! give way!”

At these words the man with a pistol and sword raised his head, but it was too late. The blow was sped by D’Artagnan; the rapier had pierced his bosom.

“Ah! confound it!” cried the Gascon, trying in vain, too late, to retract the thrust. “What the devil are you doing here, count?”

“Accomplishing my destiny,” replied Rochefort, falling on one knee. “I have already got up again after three stabs from you, I shall never rise after this fourth.”

“Count!” said D’Artagnan, with some degree of emotion, “I struck without knowing that it was you. I am sorry, if you die, that you should die with sentiments of hatred toward me.”

Rochefort extended his hand to D’Artagnan, who took it. The count wished to speak, but a gush of blood stifled him. He stiffened in the last convulsions of death and expired.

“Back, people!” cried D’Artagnan, “your leader is dead; you have no longer any business here.”

Indeed, as if De Rochefort had been the very soul of the attack, the crowd who had followed and obeyed him took to flight on seeing him fall. D’Artagnan charged, with a party of musketeers, up the Rue du Coq, and the portion of the mob he assailed disappeared like smoke, dispersing near the Place Saint Germain-l’Auxerrois and taking the direction of the quays.

D’Artagnan returned to help Porthos, if Porthos needed help; but Porthos, for his part, had done his work as conscientiously as D’Artagnan. The left of the carriage was as well cleared as the right, and they drew up the blind of the window which Mazarin, less heroic than the king, had taken the precaution to lower.

Porthos looked very melancholy.

“What a devil of a face you have, Porthos! and what a strange air for a victor!”

“But you,” answered Porthos, “seem to me agitated.”

“There’s a reason! Zounds! I have just killed an old friend.”

“Indeed!” replied Porthos, “who?”

“That poor Count de Rochefort.”

“Well! exactly like me! I have just killed a man whose face is not unknown to me. Unluckily, I hit him on the head and immediately his face was covered with blood.”

“And he said nothing as he died?”

“Yes; he exclaimed, ‘Oh!’“

“I suppose,” answered D’Artagnan, laughing, “if he only said that, it did not enlighten you much.”

“Well, sir!” cried the queen.

“Madame, the passage is quite clear and your majesty can continue your road.”

In fact, the procession arrived, in safety at Notre Dame, at the front gate of which all the clergy, with the coadjutor at their head, awaited the king, the queen and the minister, for whose happy return they chanted a Te Deum.

As the service was drawing to a close a boy entered the church in great excitement, ran to the sacristy, dressed himself quickly in the choir robes, and cleaving, thanks to that uniform, the crowd that filled the temple, approached Bazin, who, clad in his blue robe, was standing gravely in his place at the entrance to the choir.

Bazin felt some one pulling his sleeve. He lowered to earth his eyes, beatifically raised to Heaven, and recognized Friquet.

“Well, you rascal, what is it? How do you dare to disturb me in the exercise of my functions?” asked the beadle.

“Monsieur Bazin,” said Friquet, “Monsieur Maillard--you know who he is, he gives holy water at Saint Eustache----”

“Well, go on.”

“Well, he received in the scrimmage a sword stroke on the head. That great giant who was there gave it to him.”

“In that case,” said Bazin, “he must be pretty sick.”

“So sick that he is dying, and he wants to confess to the coadjutor, who, they say, has power to remit great sins.”

“And does he imagine that the coadjutor will put himself out for him?”

“To be sure; the coadjutor has promised.”

“Who told you that?”

“Monsieur Maillard himself.”

“You have seen him, then?”

“Certainly; I was there when he fell.”

“What were you doing there?”

“I was shouting, ‘Down with Mazarin!’ ‘Death to the cardinal!’ ‘The Italian to the gallows!’ Isn’t that what you would have me shout?”

“Be quiet, you rascal!” said Bazin, looking uneasily around.

"So that he told me, that poor Monsieur Maillard, 'Go find the coadjutor, Friquet, and if you bring him to me you shall be my heir.' Say, then, Father Bazin--the heir of Monsieur Maillard, the giver of holy water at Saint Eustache! Hey! I shall have nothing to do but to fold my arms! All the same, I should like to do him that service--what do you say to it?"

"I will tell the coadjutor," said Bazin.

In fact, he slowly and respectfully approached the prelate and spoke to him privately a few words, to which the latter responded by an affirmative sign. He then returned with the same slow step and said:

"Go and tell the dying man that he must be patient. Monseigneur will be with him in an hour."

"Good!" said Friquet, "my fortune is made."

"By the way," said Bazin, "where was he carried?"

"To the tower Saint Jacques la Boucherie;" and delighted with the success of his embassy, Friquet started off at the top of his speed.

When the Te Deum was over, the coadjutor, without stopping to change his priestly dress, took his way toward that old tower which he knew so well. He arrived in time. Though sinking from moment to moment, the wounded man was not yet dead. The door was opened to the coadjutor of the room in which the mendicant was suffering.

A moment later Friquet went out, carrying in his hand a large leather bag; he opened it as soon as he was outside the chamber and to his great astonishment found it full of gold. The mendicant had kept his word and made Friquet his heir.

"Ah! Mother Nanette!" cried Friquet, suffocating; "ah! Mother Nanette!"

He could say no more; but though he hadn't strength to speak he had enough for action. He rushed headlong to the street, and like the Greek from Marathon who fell in the square at Athens, with his laurel in his hand, Friquet reached Councillor Broussel's threshold, and then fell exhausted, scattering on the floor the louis disgorged by his leather bag.

Mother Nanette began by picking up the louis; then she picked up Friquet.

In the meantime the cortege returned to the Palais Royal.

"That Monsieur d'Artagnan is a very brave man, mother," said the young king.

"Yes, my son; and he rendered very important services to your father. Treat him kindly, therefore, in the future."

“Captain,” said the young king to D’Artagnan, on descending from the carriage, “the queen has charged me to invite you to dinner to-day--you and your friend the Baron du Vallon.”

That was a great honor for D’Artagnan and for Porthos. Porthos was delighted; and yet during the entire repast he seemed to be preoccupied.

“What was the matter with you, baron?” D’Artagnan said to him as they descended the staircase of the Palais Royal. “You seemed at dinner to be anxious about something.”

“I was trying,” said Porthos, “to recall where I had seen that mendicant whom I must have killed.”

“And you couldn’t remember?”

“No.”

“Well, search, my friend, search; and when you have found, you will tell me, will you not?”

“Pardieu!” said Porthos.

CHAPTER 90.

Conclusion.

On going home, the two friends found a letter from Athos, who desired them to meet him at the Grand Charlemagne on the following day.

The friends went to bed early, but neither of them slept. When we arrive at the summit of our wishes, success has usually the power to drive away sleep on the first night after the fulfilment of long cherished hopes.

The next day at the appointed hour they went to see Athos and found him and Aramis in traveling costume.

“What!” cried Porthos, “are we all going away, then? I, so, have made my preparations this morning.”

“Oh, heavens! yes,” said Aramis. “There’s nothing to do in Paris now there’s no Fronde. The Duchess de Longueville has invited me to pass a few days in Normandy, and has deputed me, while her son is being baptized, to go and prepare her residence at Rouen; after which, if nothing new occurs, I shall go and bury myself in my convent at Noisy-le-Sec.”

“And I,” said Athos, “am returning to Bragelonne. You know, dear D’Artagnan, I am nothing more than a good honest country gentleman. Raoul has no fortune other than I possess, poor child! and I must take care of it for him, since I only lend him my name.”

“And Raoul--what shall you do with him?”

“I leave him with you, my friend. War has broken out in Flanders. You shall take him with you there. I am afraid that remaining at Blois would be dangerous to his youthful mind. Take him and teach him to be as brave and loyal as you are yourself.”

“Then,” replied D’Artagnan, “though I shall not have you, Athos, at all events I shall have that dear fair-haired head by me; and though he’s but a boy, yet, since your soul lives again in him, dear Athos, I shall always fancy that you are near me, sustaining and encouraging me.”

The four friends embraced with tears in their eyes.

Then they departed, without knowing whether they would ever see each other again.

D’Artagnan returned to the Rue Tiquetonne with Porthos, still possessed by the wish to find out who the man was that he had killed. On arriving at the Hotel de la Chevrette they found the baron’s equipage all really and Mousqueton on his saddle.

“Come, D’Artagnan,” said Porthos, “bid adieu to your sword and go with me to Pierrefonds, to Bracieux, or to Du Vallon. We will grow old together and talk of our companions.”

“No!” replied D’Artagnan, “deuce take it, the campaign is going to begin; I wish to be there, I expect to get something by it.”

“What do you expect to get?”

“Why, I expect to be made Marechal of France!”

“Ha! ha!” cried Porthos, who was not completely taken in by D’Artagnan’s Gasconades.

“Come my brother, go with me,” added D’Artagnan, “and I will see that you are made a duke!”

“No,” answered Porthos, “Mouston has no desire to fight; besides, they have erected a triumphal arch for me to enter my barony, which will kill my neighbors with envy.”

“To that I can say nothing,” returned D’Artagnan, who knew the vanity of the new baron. “Then, here’s to our next merry meeting!”

“Adieu, dear captain,” said Porthos, “I shall always be happy to welcome you to my barony.”

“Yes, yes, when the campaign is over,” replied the Gascon.

“His honor’s equipage is waiting,” said Mousqueton.

The two friends, after a cordial pressure of the hands, separated. D’Artagnan was standing at the door looking after Porthos with a mournful gaze, when the baron, after walking scarcely more than twenty paces, returned--stood still--struck his forehead with his finger and exclaimed:

“I recollect!”

“What?” inquired D’Artagnan.

“Who the beggar was that I killed.”

“Ah! indeed! and who was he?”

“‘Twas that low fellow, Bonacieux.”

And Porthos, enchanted at having relieved his mind, rejoined Mousqueton and they disappeared around an angle of the street. D’Artagnan stood for an instant, mute, pensive and motionless; then, as he went in, he saw the fair Madeleine, his hostess, standing on the threshold.

“Madeleine,” said the Gascon, “give me your apartment on the first floor; now that I am a captain in the royal musketeers I must make an appearance; nevertheless, reserve my old room on the fifth story for me; one never knows what may happen.”

THE END

THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO

Anonymous translation, 1846

This adventure novel was published in serial format in the *Journal des Débats* in 1844 and is one of Dumas' most popular works. The story takes place in France, Italy, certain islands in the Mediterranean and in the Levant from 1815–1838. The novel concerns the timeless tale of a man who is wrongfully imprisoned and his pursuit for vengeance. It was an instant publishing phenomenon and was reported to be the most popular novel in Europe at the time. This popularity has extended into modern times, inspiring countless adaptations in film, television and theatre.

Dumas received the idea of the revenge story from a book compiled by Jacques Peuchet, a French police archivist, published in 1838. Peuchet tells the story of a shoemaker, Pierre Picaud, living in Nîmes in 1807, who was engaged to marry a rich woman when three jealous friends falsely accused him of being a spy for England. Picaud was placed under a form of house arrest, in the Fenestrelle Fort where he served as a servant to a rich Italian cleric. When the man died, he left his fortune to Picaud whom he had begun to treat as a son. Picaud then spent years plotting his revenge on the three men who were responsible for his misfortune. He stabbed the first with a dagger on which were printed the words, "Number One", and then he poisoned the second. The third man's son he lured into crime and his daughter into prostitution, finally stabbing the man himself. This third man, named Loupian, had married Picaud's fiancée while Picaud was under arrest.

The success of Monte Cristo coincides with France's Second Empire. In the novel, Dumas tells of the 1815 return of Napoleon I, and alludes to contemporary events when the governor at the Château d'If is promoted to a position at the castle of Ham. The attitude of Dumas towards "bonapartisme" was conflicted. His father, Thomas-Alexandre Dumas, a Haitian of mixed descent, became a successful general during the French Revolution. When new racial-discrimination laws were applied in 1802, the general was dismissed from the army and became profoundly bitter toward

Napoleon. In 1840 the ashes of Napoleon I were brought to France and became an object of veneration in the church of Les Invalides, renewing popular patriotic support for the Bonaparte family.

The novel opens in 1815 with Edmond Dantès, a young and successful merchant sailor recently granted his own command, returning to Marseille to marry his fiancée Mercédès. Leclère, a supporter of the exiled Napoléon I, has charged Dantès to deliver two objects: a package to Maréchal Bertrand (exiled with Napoleon Bonaparte on Elba), and a letter from Elba to an unknown man in Paris. On the eve of his wedding to Mercédès, Fernand (Mercédès' cousin and a rival for her affections) and Danglars (who is jealous of Dantes' rapid rise to captain), upon the suggestion of Caderousse (a neighbour of Dantès), send an anonymous note accusing Dantès of being a Bonapartist traitor.

Edmond Dantès played by French actor Jacques Weber in the successful 1979 TV series

Edmond Dantès played by Gérard Depardieu in 1998

The Château d’If nowadays

The Château of Monte Cristo bought by Dumas in 1844

LE COMTE DE MONTE-CRISTO
PAR ALEXANDRE DUMAS

The titlepage of the first edition

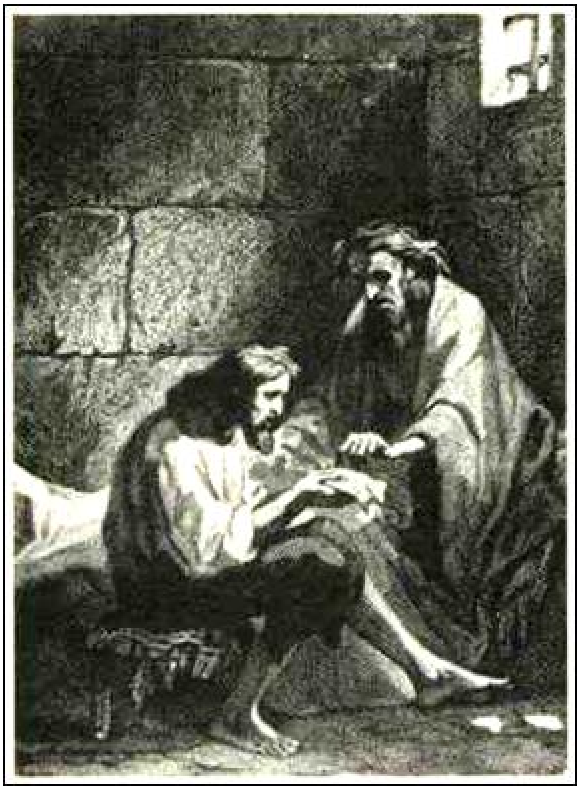

An original illustration

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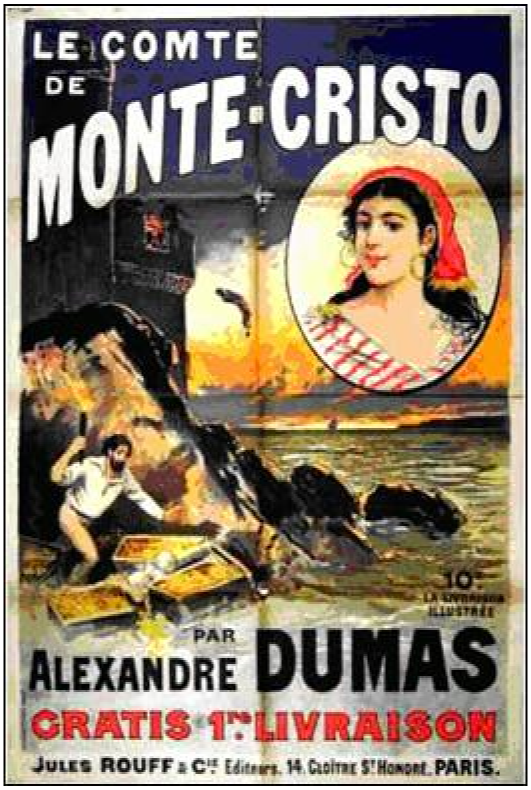
LE COMTE DE MONTE-CRISTO
10c
PAR ALEXANDRE DUMAS
GRATIS 1re LIVRAISON
JULES ROUFF & Cie Éditeurs, 14, Cloître St Honoré, PARIS.

A contemporary advert for the novel, testifying to its immense popularity

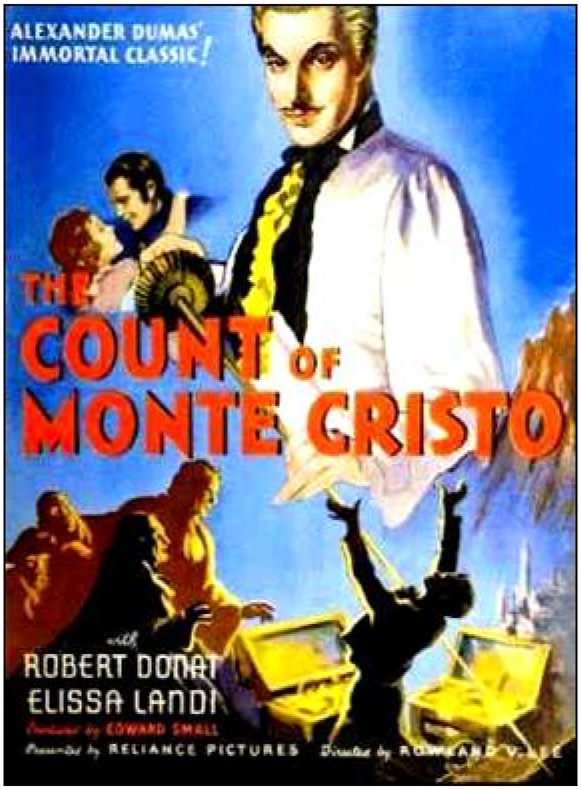
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THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO
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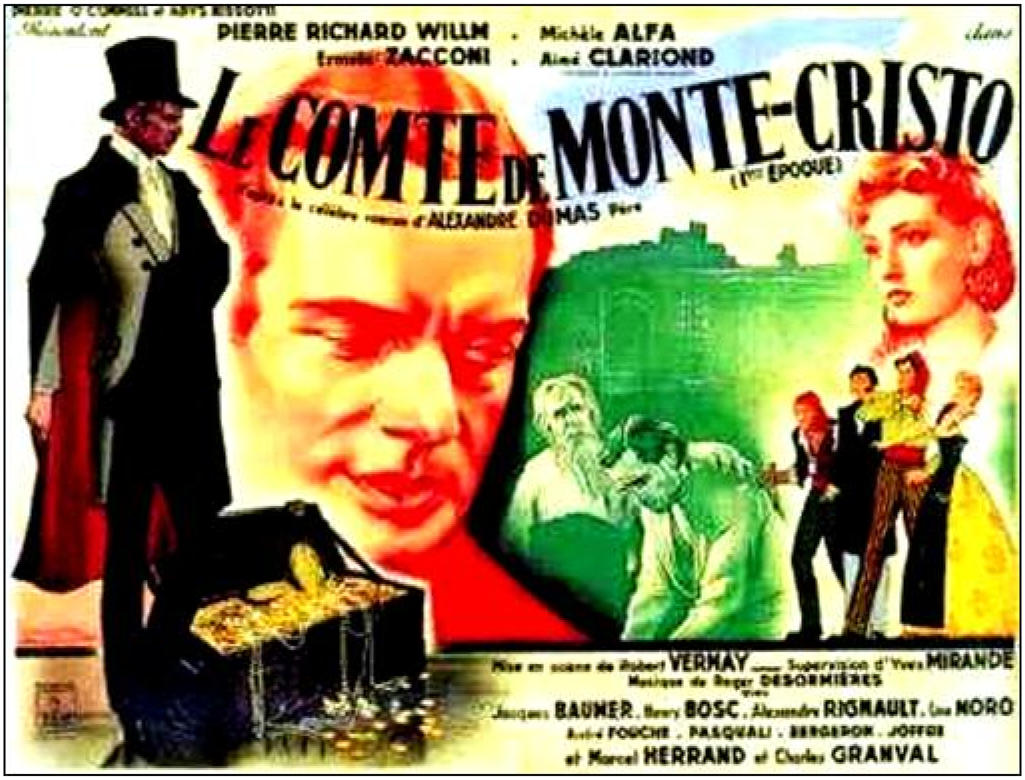
PIERRE RICHARD WILLM . Michèle ALFA
Ermete ZACCONI . Aimé CLARIOND
dans
LE COMTE DE MONTE-CRISTO
(1re EPOQUE)
d'après le célèbre roman d'ALEXANDRE DUMAS Père
Mise en scène de Robert VERNAY — Supervision d'Yves MIRANDE
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The 1943 film adaptation

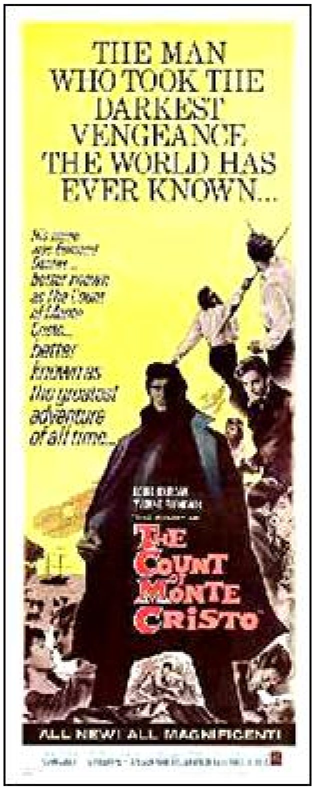
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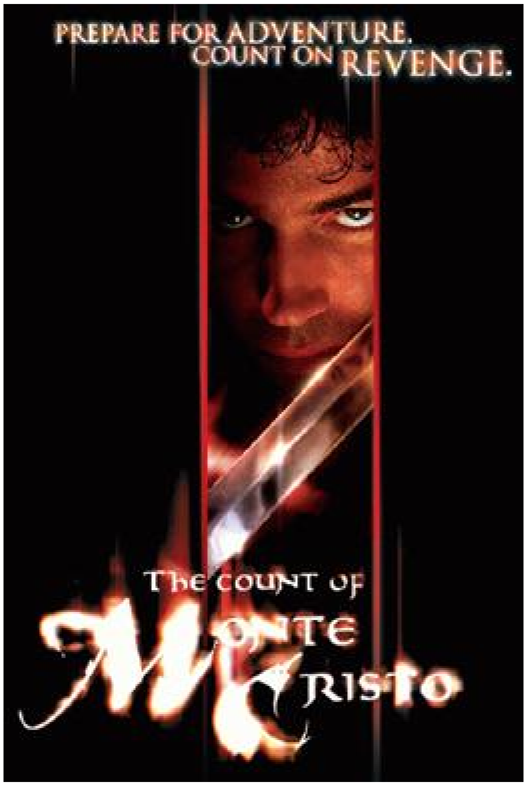
PREPARE FOR ADVENTURE.
COUNT ON REVENGE.
THE COUNT OF
MONTE
CRISTO

The 2002 film adaptation

Chapter 1

Marseilles — The Arrival.

On the 24th of February, 1815, the look-out at Notre-Dame de la Garde signalled the three-master, the Pharaon from Smyrna, Trieste, and Naples.

As usual, a pilot put off immediately, and rounding the Chateau d'If, got on board the vessel between Cape Morgion and Rion island.

Immediately, and according to custom, the ramparts of Fort Saint-Jean were covered with spectators; it is always an event at Marseilles for a ship to come into port, especially when this ship, like the Pharaon, has been built, rigged, and laden at the old Phocee docks, and belongs to an owner of the city.

The ship drew on and had safely passed the strait, which some volcanic shock has made between the Calasareigne and Jaros islands; had doubled Pomegue, and approached the harbor under topsails, jib, and spanker, but so slowly and sedately that the idlers, with that instinct which is the forerunner of evil, asked one another what misfortune could have happened on board. However, those experienced in navigation saw plainly that if any accident had occurred, it was not to the vessel herself, for she bore down with all the evidence of being skilfully handled, the anchor a-cockbill, the jib-boom guys already eased off, and standing by the side of the pilot, who was steering the Pharaon towards the narrow entrance of the inner port, was a young man, who, with activity and vigilant eye, watched every motion of the ship, and repeated each direction of the pilot.

The vague disquietude which prevailed among the spectators had so much affected one of the crowd that he did not await the arrival of the vessel in harbor, but jumping into a small skiff, desired to be pulled alongside the Pharaon, which he reached as she rounded into La Reserve basin.

When the young man on board saw this person approach, he left his station by the pilot, and, hat in hand, leaned over the ship's bulwarks.

He was a fine, tall, slim young fellow of eighteen or twenty, with black eyes, and hair as dark as a raven's wing; and his whole appearance bespoke that calmness and resolution peculiar to men accustomed from their cradle to contend with danger.

“Ah, is it you, Dantes?” cried the man in the skiff. “What’s the matter? and why have you such an air of sadness aboard?”

“A great misfortune, M. Morrel,” replied the young man, — ”a great misfortune, for me especially! Off Civita Vecchia we lost our brave Captain Leclere.”

“And the cargo?” inquired the owner, eagerly.

“Is all safe, M. Morrel; and I think you will be satisfied on that head. But poor Captain Leclere — ”

“What happened to him?” asked the owner, with an air of considerable resignation. “What happened to the worthy captain?”

“He died.”

“Fell into the sea?”

“No, sir, he died of brain-fever in dreadful agony.” Then turning to the crew, he said, “Bear a hand there, to take in sail!”

All hands obeyed, and at once the eight or ten seamen who composed the crew, sprang to their respective stations at the spanker brails and outhaul, topsail sheets and halyards, the jib downhaul, and the topsail clewlines and buntlines. The young sailor gave a look to see that his orders were promptly and accurately obeyed, and then turned again to the owner.

“And how did this misfortune occur?” inquired the latter, resuming the interrupted conversation.

“Alas, sir, in the most unexpected manner. After a long talk with the harbor-master, Captain Leclere left Naples greatly disturbed in mind. In twenty-four hours he was attacked by a fever, and died three days afterwards. We performed the usual burial service, and he is at his rest, sewn up in his hammock with a thirty-six pound shot at his head and his heels, off El Giglio island. We bring to his widow his sword and cross of honor. It was worth while, truly,” added the young man with a melancholy smile, “to make war against the English for ten years, and to die in his bed at last, like everybody else.”

“Why, you see, Edmond,” replied the owner, who appeared more comforted at every moment, “we are all mortal, and the old must make way for the young. If not, why, there would be no promotion; and since you assure me that the cargo — ”

“Is all safe and sound, M. Morrel, take my word for it; and I advise you not to take 25,000 francs for the profits of the voyage.”

Then, as they were just passing the Round Tower, the young man shouted: “Stand by there to lower the topsails and jib; brail up the spanker!”

The order was executed as promptly as it would have been on board a man-of-war.

“Let go — and clue up!” At this last command all the sails were lowered, and the vessel moved almost imperceptibly onwards.

“Now, if you will come on board, M. Morrel,” said Dantes, observing the owner’s impatience, “here is your supercargo, M. Danglars, coming out of his cabin, who will furnish you with every particular. As for me, I must look after the anchoring, and dress the ship in mourning.”

The owner did not wait for a second invitation. He seized a rope which Dantes flung to him, and with an activity that would have done credit to a sailor, climbed up the side of the ship, while the young man, going to his task, left the conversation to Danglars, who now came towards the owner. He was a man of twenty-five or twenty-six years of age, of unprepossessing countenance, obsequious to his superiors, insolent to his subordinates; and this, in addition to his position as responsible agent on board, which is always obnoxious to the sailors, made him as much disliked by the crew as Edmond Dantes was beloved by them.

“Well, M. Morrel,” said Danglars, “you have heard of the misfortune that has befallen us?”

“Yes — yes: poor Captain Leclere! He was a brave and an honest man.”

“And a first-rate seaman, one who had seen long and honorable service, as became a man charged with the interests of a house so important as that of Morrel & Son,” replied Danglars.

“But,” replied the owner, glancing after Dantes, who was watching the anchoring of his vessel, “it seems to me that a sailor needs not be so old as you say, Danglars, to understand his business, for our friend Edmond seems to understand it thoroughly, and not to require instruction from any one.”

“Yes,” said Danglars, darting at Edmond a look gleaming with hate. “Yes, he is young, and youth is invariably self-confident. Scarcely was the captain’s breath out of his body when he assumed the command without consulting any one, and he caused us to lose a day and a half at the Island of Elba, instead of making for Marseilles direct.”

“As to taking command of the vessel,” replied Morrel, “that was his duty as captain’s mate; as to losing a day and a half off the Island of Elba, he was wrong, unless the vessel needed repairs.”

“The vessel was in as good condition as I am, and as, I hope you are, M. Morrel, and this day and a half was lost from pure whim, for the pleasure of going ashore, and nothing else.”

“Dantes,” said the shipowner, turning towards the young man, “come this way!”

“In a moment, sir,” answered Dantes, “and I’m with you.” Then calling to the crew, he said — ”Let go!”

The anchor was instantly dropped, and the chain ran rattling through the port-hole. Dantes continued at his post in spite of the presence of the pilot, until this manoeuvre was completed, and then he added, “Half-mast the colors, and square the yards!”

“You see,” said Danglars, “he fancies himself captain already, upon my word.”

“And so, in fact, he is,” said the owner.

“Except your signature and your partner’s, M. Morrel.”

“And why should he not have this?” asked the owner; “he is young, it is true, but he seems to me a thorough seaman, and of full experience.”

A cloud passed over Danglars’ brow. “Your pardon, M. Morrel,” said Dantes, approaching, “the vessel now rides at anchor, and I am at your service. You hailed me, I think?”

Danglars retreated a step or two. “I wished to inquire why you stopped at the Island of Elba?”

“I do not know, sir; it was to fulfil the last instructions of Captain Leclere, who, when dying, gave me a packet for Marshal Bertrand.”

“Then did you see him, Edmond?”

“Who?”

“The marshal.”

“Yes.”

Morrel looked around him, and then, drawing Dantes on one side, he said suddenly — ”And how is the emperor?”

“Very well, as far as I could judge from the sight of him.”

“You saw the emperor, then?”

“He entered the marshal’s apartment while I was there.”

“And you spoke to him?”

"Why, it was he who spoke to me, sir," said Dantes, with a smile.

"And what did he say to you?"

"Asked me questions about the vessel, the time she left Marseilles, the course she had taken, and what was her cargo. I believe, if she had not been laden, and I had been her master, he would have bought her. But I told him I was only mate, and that she belonged to the firm of Morrel & Son. 'Ah, yes,' he said, 'I know them. The Morrels have been shipowners from father to son; and there was a Morrel who served in the same regiment with me when I was in garrison at Valence.'"

"Pardieu, and that is true!" cried the owner, greatly delighted. "And that was Policar Morrel, my uncle, who was afterwards a captain. Dantes, you must tell my uncle that the emperor remembered him, and you will see it will bring tears into the old soldier's eyes. Come, come," continued he, patting Edmond's shoulder kindly, "you did very right, Dantes, to follow Captain Leclere's instructions, and touch at Elba, although if it were known that you had conveyed a packet to the marshal, and had conversed with the emperor, it might bring you into trouble."

"How could that bring me into trouble, sir?" asked Dantes; "for I did not even know of what I was the bearer; and the emperor merely made such inquiries as he would of the first comer. But, pardon me, here are the health officers and the customs inspectors coming alongside." And the young man went to the gangway. As he departed, Danglars approached, and said, —

"Well, it appears that he has given you satisfactory reasons for his landing at Porto-Ferrajo?"

"Yes, most satisfactory, my dear Danglars."

"Well, so much the better," said the supercargo; "for it is not pleasant to think that a comrade has not done his duty."

"Dantes has done his," replied the owner, "and that is not saying much. It was Captain Leclere who gave orders for this delay."

"Talking of Captain Leclere, has not Dantes given you a letter from him?"

"To me? — no — was there one?"

"I believe that, besides the packet, Captain Leclere confided a letter to his care."

"Of what packet are you speaking, Danglars?"

"Why, that which Dantes left at Porto-Ferrajo."

"How do you know he had a packet to leave at Porto-Ferrajo?"

Danglars turned very red.

"I was passing close to the door of the captain's cabin, which was half open, and I saw him give the packet and letter to Dantes."

"He did not speak to me of it," replied the shipowner; "but if there be any letter he will give it to me."

Danglars reflected for a moment. "Then, M. Morrel, I beg of you," said he, "not to say a word to Dantes on the subject. I may have been mistaken."

At this moment the young man returned; Danglars withdrew.

"Well, my dear Dantes, are you now free?" inquired the owner.

"Yes, sir."

"You have not been long detained."

"No. I gave the custom-house officers a copy of our bill of lading; and as to the other papers, they sent a man off with the pilot, to whom I gave them."

"Then you have nothing more to do here?"

"No — everything is all right now."

"Then you can come and dine with me?"

"I really must ask you to excuse me, M. Morrel. My first visit is due to my father, though I am not the less grateful for the honor you have done me."

"Right, Dantes, quite right. I always knew you were a good son."

"And," inquired Dantes, with some hesitation, "do you know how my father is?"

"Well, I believe, my dear Edmond, though I have not seen him lately."

"Yes, he likes to keep himself shut up in his little room."

"That proves, at least, that he has wanted for nothing during your absence."

Dantes smiled. "My father is proud, sir, and if he had not a meal left, I doubt if he would have asked anything from anyone, except from Heaven."

"Well, then, after this first visit has been made we shall count on you."

"I must again excuse myself, M. Morrel, for after this first visit has been paid I have another which I am most anxious to pay."

"True, Dantes, I forgot that there was at the Catalans some one who expects you no less impatiently than your father — the lovely Mercedes."

Dantes blushed.

"Ah, ha," said the shipowner, "I am not in the least surprised, for she has been to me three times, inquiring if there were any news of the Pharaon.

Peste, Edmond, you have a very handsome mistress!”

“She is not my mistress,” replied the young sailor, gravely; “she is my betrothed.”

“Sometimes one and the same thing,” said Morrel, with a smile.

“Not with us, sir,” replied Dantes.

“Well, well, my dear Edmond,” continued the owner, “don’t let me detain you. You have managed my affairs so well that I ought to allow you all the time you require for your own. Do you want any money?”

“No, sir; I have all my pay to take — nearly three months’ wages.”

“You are a careful fellow, Edmond.”

“Say I have a poor father, sir.”

“Yes, yes, I know how good a son you are, so now hasten away to see your father. I have a son too, and I should be very wroth with those who detained him from me after a three months’ voyage.”

“Then I have your leave, sir?”

“Yes, if you have nothing more to say to me.”

“Nothing.”

“Captain Leclere did not, before he died, give you a letter for me?”

“He was unable to write, sir. But that reminds me that I must ask your leave of absence for some days.”

“To get married?”

“Yes, first, and then to go to Paris.”

“Very good; have what time you require, Dantes. It will take quite six weeks to unload the cargo, and we cannot get you ready for sea until three months after that; only be back again in three months, for the Pharaon,” added the owner, patting the young sailor on the back, “cannot sail without her captain.”

“Without her captain!” cried Dantes, his eyes sparkling with animation; “pray mind what you say, for you are touching on the most secret wishes of my heart. Is it really your intention to make me captain of the Pharaon?”

“If I were sole owner we’d shake hands on it now, my dear Dantes, and call it settled; but I have a partner, and you know the Italian proverb — Chi ha compagno ha padrone — ’He who has a partner has a master.’ But the thing is at least half done, as you have one out of two votes. Rely on me to procure you the other; I will do my best.”

“Ah, M. Morrel,” exclaimed the young seaman, with tears in his eyes, and grasping the owner’s hand, “M. Morrel, I thank you in the name of my father and of Mercedes.”

“That’s all right, Edmond. There’s a providence that watches over the deserving. Go to your father: go and see Mercedes, and afterwards come to me.”

“Shall I row you ashore?”

“No, thank you; I shall remain and look over the accounts with Danglars. Have you been satisfied with him this voyage?”

“That is according to the sense you attach to the question, sir. Do you mean is he a good comrade? No, for I think he never liked me since the day when I was silly enough, after a little quarrel we had, to propose to him to stop for ten minutes at the island of Monte Cristo to settle the dispute — a proposition which I was wrong to suggest, and he quite right to refuse. If you mean as responsible agent when you ask me the question, I believe there is nothing to say against him, and that you will be content with the way in which he has performed his duty.”

“But tell me, Dantes, if you had command of the Pharaon should you be glad to see Danglars remain?”

“Captain or mate, M. Morrel, I shall always have the greatest respect for those who possess the owners’ confidence.”

“That’s right, that’s right, Dantes! I see you are a thoroughly good fellow, and will detain you no longer. Go, for I see how impatient you are.”

“Then I have leave?”

“Go, I tell you.”

“May I have the use of your skiff?”

“Certainly.”

“Then, for the present, M. Morrel, farewell, and a thousand thanks!”

“I hope soon to see you again, my dear Edmond. Good luck to you.”

The young sailor jumped into the skiff, and sat down in the stern sheets, with the order that he be put ashore at La Canebiere. The two oarsmen bent to their work, and the little boat glided away as rapidly as possible in the midst of the thousand vessels which choke up the narrow way which leads between the two rows of ships from the mouth of the harbor to the Quai d’Orleans.

The shipowner, smiling, followed him with his eyes until he saw him spring out on the quay and disappear in the midst of the throng, which from five o’clock in the morning until nine o’clock at night, swarms in the famous street of La Canebiere, — a street of which the modern Phocaeans are so proud that they say with all the gravity in the world, and with that accent which gives so much character to what is said, “If Paris had La Canebiere, Paris would be a second Marseilles.” On turning round the owner saw Danglars behind him, apparently awaiting orders, but in reality also watching the young sailor, — but there was a great difference in the expression of the two men who thus followed the movements of Edmond Dantes.

Chapter 2

Father and Son.

We will leave Danglars struggling with the demon of hatred, and endeavoring to insinuate in the ear of the shipowner some evil suspicions against his comrade, and follow Dantes, who, after having traversed La Canebiere, took the Rue de Noailles, and entering a small house, on the left of the Allees de Meillan, rapidly ascended four flights of a dark staircase, holding the baluster with one hand, while with the other he repressed the beatings of his heart, and paused before a half-open door, from which he could see the whole of a small room.

This room was occupied by Dantes' father. The news of the arrival of the Pharaon had not yet reached the old man, who, mounted on a chair, was amusing himself by training with trembling hand the nasturtiums and sprays of clematis that clambered over the trellis at his window. Suddenly, he felt an arm thrown around his body, and a well-known voice behind him exclaimed, “Father — dear father!”

The old man uttered a cry, and turned round; then, seeing his son, he fell into his arms, pale and trembling.

“What ails you, my dearest father? Are you ill?” inquired the young man, much alarmed.

“No, no, my dear Edmond — my boy — my son! — no; but I did not expect you; and joy, the surprise of seeing you so suddenly — Ah, I feel as if I were going to die.”

“Come, come, cheer up, my dear father! ‘Tis I — really I! They say joy never hurts, and so I came to you without any warning. Come now, do smile, instead of looking at me so solemnly. Here I am back again, and we are going to be happy.”

“Yes, yes, my boy, so we will — so we will,” replied the old man; “but how shall we be happy? Shall you never leave me again? Come, tell me all the good fortune that has befallen you.”

“God forgive me,” said the young man, “for rejoicing at happiness derived from the misery of others, but, Heaven knows, I did not seek this good fortune; it has happened, and I really cannot pretend to lament it. The good Captain Leclere is dead, father, and it is probable that, with the aid of M. Morrel, I shall have his place. Do you understand, father? Only imagine me a captain at twenty, with a hundred louis pay, and a share in the profits! Is this not more than a poor sailor like me could have hoped for?"

"Yes, my dear boy," replied the old man, "it is very fortunate."

"Well, then, with the first money I touch, I mean you to have a small house, with a garden in which to plant clematis, nasturtiums, and honeysuckle. But what ails you, father? Are you not well?"

"'Tis nothing, nothing; it will soon pass away" — and as he said so the old man's strength failed him, and he fell backwards.

"Come, come," said the young man, "a glass of wine, father, will revive you. Where do you keep your wine?"

"No, no; thanks. You need not look for it; I do not want it," said the old man.

"Yes, yes, father, tell me where it is," and he opened two or three cupboards.

"It is no use," said the old man, "there is no wine."

"What, no wine?" said Dantes, turning pale, and looking alternately at the hollow cheeks of the old man and the empty cupboards. "What, no wine? Have you wanted money, father?"

"I want nothing now that I have you," said the old man.

"Yet," stammered Dantes, wiping the perspiration from his brow, — "yet I gave you two hundred francs when I left, three months ago."

"Yes, yes, Edmond, that is true, but you forgot at that time a little debt to our neighbor, Caderousse. He reminded me of it, telling me if I did not pay for you, he would be paid by M. Morrel; and so, you see, lest he might do you an injury" —

"Well?"

"Why, I paid him."

"But," cried Dantes, "it was a hundred and forty francs I owed Caderousse."

"Yes," stammered the old man.

"And you paid him out of the two hundred francs I left you?"

The old man nodded.

"So that you have lived for three months on sixty francs," muttered Edmond.

"You know how little I require," said the old man.

"Heaven pardon me," cried Edmond, falling on his knees before his father.

"What are you doing?"

"You have wounded me to the heart."

"Never mind it, for I see you once more," said the old man; "and now it's all over — everything is all right again."

"Yes, here I am," said the young man, "with a promising future and a little money. Here, father, here!" he said, "take this — take it, and send for something immediately." And he emptied his pockets on the table, the contents consisting of a dozen gold pieces, five or six five-franc pieces, and some smaller coin. The countenance of old Dantes brightened.

"Whom does this belong to?" he inquired.

"To me, to you, to us! Take it; buy some provisions; be happy, and to-morrow we shall have more."

"Gently, gently," said the old man, with a smile; "and by your leave I will use your purse moderately, for they would say, if they saw me buy too many things at a time, that I had been obliged to await your return, in order to be able to purchase them."

"Do as you please; but, first of all, pray have a servant, father. I will not have you left alone so long. I have some smuggled coffee and most capital tobacco, in a small chest in the hold, which you shall have to-morrow. But, hush, here comes somebody."

"'Tis Caderousse, who has heard of your arrival, and no doubt comes to congratulate you on your fortunate return."

"Ah, lips that say one thing, while the heart thinks another," murmured Edmond. "But, never mind, he is a neighbor who has done us a service on a time, so he's welcome."

As Edmond paused, the black and bearded head of Caderousse appeared at the door. He was a man of twenty-five or six, and held a piece of cloth, which, being a tailor, he was about to make into a coat-lining.

"What, is it you, Edmond, back again?" said he, with a broad Marseillaise accent, and a grin that displayed his ivory-white teeth.

"Yes, as you see, neighbor Caderousse; and ready to be agreeable to you in any and every way," replied Dantes, but ill-concealing his coldness under this cloak of civility.

“Thanks — thanks; but, fortunately, I do not want for anything; and it chances that at times there are others who have need of me.” Dantes made a gesture. “I do not allude to you, my boy. No! — no! I lent you money, and you returned it; that’s like good neighbors, and we are quits.”

“We are never quits with those who oblige us,” was Dantes’ reply; “for when we do not owe them money, we owe them gratitude.”

“What’s the use of mentioning that? What is done is done. Let us talk of your happy return, my boy. I had gone on the quay to match a piece of mulberry cloth, when I met friend Danglars. ‘You at Marseilles?’ — ’Yes,’ says he.

“‘I thought you were at Smyrna.’ — ’I was; but am now back again.’

“‘And where is the dear boy, our little Edmond?’

“‘Why, with his father, no doubt,’ replied Danglars. And so I came,” added Caderousse, “as fast as I could to have the pleasure of shaking hands with a friend.”

“Worthy Caderousse!” said the old man, “he is so much attached to us.”

“Yes, to be sure I am. I love and esteem you, because honest folks are so rare. But it seems you have come back rich, my boy,” continued the tailor, looking askance at the handful of gold and silver which Dantes had thrown on the table.

The young man remarked the greedy glance which shone in the dark eyes of his neighbor. “Eh,” he said, negligently, “this money is not mine. I was expressing to my father my fears that he had wanted many things in my absence, and to convince me he emptied his purse on the table. Come, father” added Dantes, “put this money back in your box — unless neighbor Caderousse wants anything, and in that case it is at his service.”

“No, my boy, no,” said Caderousse. “I am not in any want, thank God, my living is suited to my means. Keep your money — keep it, I say; — one never has too much; — but, at the same time, my boy, I am as much obliged by your offer as if I took advantage of it.”

“It was offered with good will,” said Dantes.

“No doubt, my boy; no doubt. Well, you stand well with M. Morrel I hear, — you insinuating dog, you!”

“M. Morrel has always been exceedingly kind to me,” replied Dantes.

“Then you were wrong to refuse to dine with him.”

“What, did you refuse to dine with him?” said old Dantes; “and did he invite you to dine?”

“Yes, my dear father,” replied Edmond, smiling at his father’s astonishment at the excessive honor paid to his son.

“And why did you refuse, my son?” inquired the old man.

“That I might the sooner see you again, my dear father,” replied the young man. “I was most anxious to see you.”

“But it must have vexed M. Morrel, good, worthy man,” said Caderousse. “And when you are looking forward to be captain, it was wrong to annoy the owner.”

“But I explained to him the cause of my refusal,” replied Dantes, “and I hope he fully understood it.”

“Yes, but to be captain one must do a little flattery to one’s patrons.”

“I hope to be captain without that,” said Dantes.

“So much the better — so much the better! Nothing will give greater pleasure to all your old friends; and I know one down there behind the Saint Nicolas citadel who will not be sorry to hear it.”

“Mercedes?” said the old man.

“Yes, my dear father, and with your permission, now I have seen you, and know you are well and have all you require, I will ask your consent to go and pay a visit to the Catalans.”

“Go, my dear boy,” said old Dantes: “and heaven bless you in your wife, as it has blessed me in my son!”

“His wife!” said Caderousse; “why, how fast you go on, father Dantes; she is not his wife yet, as it seems to me.”

“So, but according to all probability she soon will be,” replied Edmond.

“Yes — yes,” said Caderousse; “but you were right to return as soon as possible, my boy.”

“And why?”

“Because Mercedes is a very fine girl, and fine girls never lack followers; she particularly has them by dozens.”

“Really?” answered Edmond, with a smile which had in it traces of slight uneasiness.

“Ah, yes,” continued Caderousse, “and capital offers, too; but you know, you will be captain, and who could refuse you then?”

“Meaning to say,” replied Dantes, with a smile which but ill-concealed his trouble, “that if I were not a captain” —

“Eh — eh!” said Caderousse, shaking his head.

“Come, come,” said the sailor, “I have a better opinion than you of women in general, and of Mercedes in particular; and I am certain that, captain or not, she will remain ever faithful to me.”

“So much the better — so much the better,” said Caderousse. “When one is going to be married, there is nothing like implicit confidence; but never mind that, my boy, — go and announce your arrival, and let her know all your hopes and prospects.”

“I will go directly,” was Edmond’s reply; and, embracing his father, and nodding to Caderousse, he left the apartment.

Caderousse lingered for a moment, then taking leave of old Dantes, he went downstairs to rejoin Danglars, who awaited him at the corner of the Rue Senac.

“Well,” said Danglars, “did you see him?”

“I have just left him,” answered Caderousse.

“Did he allude to his hope of being captain?”

“He spoke of it as a thing already decided.”

“Indeed!” said Danglars, “he is in too much hurry, it appears to me.”

“Why, it seems M. Morrel has promised him the thing.”

“So that he is quite elated about it?”

“Why, yes, he is actually insolent over the matter — has already offered me his patronage, as if he were a grand personage, and proffered me a loan of money, as though he were a banker.”

“Which you refused?”

“Most assuredly; although I might easily have accepted it, for it was I who put into his hands the first silver he ever earned; but now M. Dantes has no longer any occasion for assistance — he is about to become a captain.”

“Pooh!” said Danglars, “he is not one yet.”

“Ma foi, it will be as well if he is not,” answered Caderousse; “for if he should be, there will be really no speaking to him.”

“If we choose,” replied Danglars, “he will remain what he is; and perhaps become even less than he is.”

“What do you mean?”

“Nothing — I was speaking to myself. And is he still in love with the Catalane?”

“Over head and ears; but, unless I am much mistaken, there will be a storm in that quarter.”

"Explain yourself."

"Why should I?"

"It is more important than you think, perhaps. You do not like Dantes?"

"I never like upstarts."

"Then tell me all you know about the Catalane."

"I know nothing for certain; only I have seen things which induce me to believe, as I told you, that the future captain will find some annoyance in the vicinity of the Vieilles Infirmeries."

"What have you seen? — come, tell me!"

"Well, every time I have seen Mercedes come into the city she has been accompanied by a tall, strapping, black-eyed Catalan, with a red complexion, brown skin, and fierce air, whom she calls cousin."

"Really; and you think this cousin pays her attentions?"

"I only suppose so. What else can a strapping chap of twenty-one mean with a fine wench of seventeen?"

"And you say that Dantes has gone to the Catalans?"

"He went before I came down."

"Let us go the same way; we will stop at La Reserve, and we can drink a glass of La Malgue, whilst we wait for news."

"Come along," said Caderousse; "but you pay the score."

"Of course," replied Danglars; and going quickly to the designated place, they called for a bottle of wine, and two glasses.

Pere Pamphile had seen Dantes pass not ten minutes before; and assured that he was at the Catalans, they sat down under the budding foliage of the planes and sycamores, in the branches of which the birds were singing their welcome to one of the first days of spring.

Chapter 3

The Catalans.

Beyond a bare, weather-worn wall, about a hundred paces from the spot where the two friends sat looking and listening as they drank their wine, was the village of the Catalans. Long ago this mysterious colony quitted Spain, and settled on the tongue of land on which it is to this day. Whence it came no one knew, and it spoke an unknown tongue. One of its chiefs, who understood Provencal, begged the commune of Marseilles to give them this bare and barren promontory, where, like the sailors of old, they had run their boats ashore. The request was granted; and three months afterwards, around the twelve or fifteen small vessels which had brought these gypsies of the sea, a small village sprang up. This village, constructed in a singular and picturesque manner, half Moorish, half Spanish, still remains, and is inhabited by descendants of the first comers, who speak the language of their fathers. For three or four centuries they have remained upon this small promontory, on which they had settled like a flight of seabirds, without mixing with the Marseillaise population, intermarrying, and preserving their original customs and the costume of their mother-country as they have preserved its language.

Our readers will follow us along the only street of this little village, and enter with us one of the houses, which is sunburned to the beautiful dead-leaf color peculiar to the buildings of the country, and within coated with whitewash, like a Spanish posada. A young and beautiful girl, with hair as black as jet, her eyes as velvety as the gazelle’s, was leaning with her back against the wainscot, rubbing in her slender delicately moulded fingers a bunch of heath blossoms, the flowers of which she was picking off and strewing on the floor; her arms, bare to the elbow, brown, and modelled after those of the Arlesian Venus, moved with a kind of restless impatience, and she tapped the earth with her arched and supple foot, so as to display the pure and full shape of her well-turned leg, in its red cotton, gray and blue clocked, stocking. At three paces from her, seated in a chair which he balanced on two legs, leaning his elbow on an old worm-eaten table, was a tall young man of twenty, or two-and-twenty, who was looking at her with an air in which vexation and uneasiness were mingled. He questioned her with his eyes, but the firm and steady gaze of the young girl controlled his look.

"You see, Mercedes," said the young man, "here is Easter come round again; tell me, is this the moment for a wedding?"

"I have answered you a hundred times, Fernand, and really you must be very stupid to ask me again."

"Well, repeat it, — repeat it, I beg of you, that I may at last believe it! Tell me for the hundredth time that you refuse my love, which had your mother's sanction. Make me understand once for all that you are trifling with my happiness, that my life or death are nothing to you. Ah, to have dreamed for ten years of being your husband, Mercedes, and to lose that hope, which was the only stay of my existence!"

"At least it was not I who ever encouraged you in that hope, Fernand," replied Mercedes; "you cannot reproach me with the slightest coquetry. I have always said to you, 'I love you as a brother; but do not ask from me more than sisterly affection, for my heart is another's.' Is not this true, Fernand?"

"Yes, that is very true, Mercedes," replied the young man, "Yes, you have been cruelly frank with me; but do you forget that it is among the Catalans a sacred law to intermarry?"

"You mistake, Fernand; it is not a law, but merely a custom, and, I pray of you, do not cite this custom in your favor. You are included in the conscription, Fernand, and are only at liberty on sufferance, liable at any moment to be called upon to take up arms. Once a soldier, what would you do with me, a poor orphan, forlorn, without fortune, with nothing but a half-ruined hut and a few ragged nets, the miserable inheritance left by my father to my mother, and by my mother to me? She has been dead a year, and you know, Fernand, I have subsisted almost entirely on public charity. Sometimes you pretend I am useful to you, and that is an excuse to share with me the produce of your fishing, and I accept it, Fernand, because you are the son of my father's brother, because we were brought up together, and still more because it would give you so much pain if I refuse. But I feel very deeply that this fish which I go and sell, and with the produce of which I buy the flax I spin, — I feel very keenly, Fernand, that this is charity."

"And if it were, Mercedes, poor and lone as you are, you suit me as well as the daughter of the first shipowner or the richest banker of Marseilles! What do such as we desire but a good wife and careful housekeeper, and where can I look for these better than in you?"

"Fernand," answered Mercedes, shaking her head, "a woman becomes a bad manager, and who shall say she will remain an honest woman, when she loves another man better than her husband? Rest content with my friendship, for I say once more that is all I can promise, and I will promise no more than I can bestow."

"I understand," replied Fernand, "you can endure your own wretchedness patiently, but you are afraid to share mine. Well, Mercedes, beloved by you, I would tempt fortune; you would bring me good luck, and I should become rich. I could extend my occupation as a fisherman, might get a place as clerk in a warehouse, and become in time a dealer myself."

"You could do no such thing, Fernand; you are a soldier, and if you remain at the Catalans it is because there is no war; so remain a fisherman, and contented with my friendship, as I cannot give you more."

"Well, I will do better, Mercedes. I will be a sailor; instead of the costume of our fathers, which you despise, I will wear a varnished hat, a striped shirt, and a blue jacket, with an anchor on the buttons. Would not that dress please you?"

"What do you mean?" asked Mercedes, with an angry glance, — "what do you mean? I do not understand you?"

"I mean, Mercedes, that you are thus harsh and cruel with me, because you are expecting some one who is thus attired; but perhaps he whom you await is inconstant, or if he is not, the sea is so to him."

"Fernand," cried Mercedes, "I believed you were good-hearted, and I was mistaken! Fernand, you are wicked to call to your aid jealousy and the anger of God! Yes, I will not deny it, I do await, and I do love him of whom you speak; and, if he does not return, instead of accusing him of the inconstancy which you insinuate, I will tell you that he died loving me and me only." The young girl made a gesture of rage. "I understand you, Fernand; you would be revenged on him because I do not love you; you would cross your Catalan knife with his dirk. What end would that answer? To lose you my friendship if he were conquered, and see that friendship changed into hate if you were victor. Believe me, to seek a quarrel with a man is a bad method of pleasing the woman who loves that man. No, Fernand, you will not thus give way to evil thoughts. Unable to have me for your wife, you will content yourself with having me for your friend and sister; and besides," she added, her eyes troubled and moistened with tears, "wait, wait, Fernand; you said just now that the sea was treacherous, and he has been gone four months, and during these four months there have been some terrible storms."

Fernand made no reply, nor did he attempt to check the tears which flowed down the cheeks of Mercedes, although for each of these tears he would have shed his heart's blood; but these tears flowed for another. He arose, paced a while up and down the hut, and then, suddenly stopping before Mercedes, with his eyes glowing and his hands clinched, — "Say, Mercedes," he said, "once for all, is this your final determination?"

"I love Edmond Dantes," the young girl calmly replied, "and none but Edmond shall ever be my husband."

"And you will always love him?"

"As long as I live."

Fernand let fall his head like a defeated man, heaved a sigh that was like a groan, and then suddenly looking her full in the face, with clinched teeth and expanded nostrils, said, — "But if he is dead" —

"If he is dead, I shall die too."

"If he has forgotten you" —

"Mercedes!" called a joyous voice from without, — "Mercedes!"

"Ah," exclaimed the young girl, blushing with delight, and fairly leaping in excess of love, "you see he has not forgotten me, for here he is!" And rushing towards the door, she opened it, saying, "Here, Edmond, here I am!"

Fernand, pale and trembling, drew back, like a traveller at the sight of a serpent, and fell into a chair beside him. Edmond and Mercedes were clasped in each other's arms. The burning Marseilles sun, which shot into the room through the open door, covered them with a flood of light. At first they saw nothing around them. Their intense happiness isolated them from all the rest of the world, and they only spoke in broken words, which are the tokens of a joy so extreme that they seem rather the expression of sorrow. Suddenly Edmond saw the gloomy, pale, and threatening countenance of Fernand, as it was defined in the shadow. By a movement for which he could scarcely account to himself, the young Catalan placed his hand on the knife at his belt.

“Ah, your pardon,” said Dantes, frowning in his turn; “I did not perceive that there were three of us.” Then, turning to Mercedes, he inquired, “Who is this gentleman?”

“One who will be your best friend, Dantes, for he is my friend, my cousin, my brother; it is Fernand — the man whom, after you, Edmond, I love the best in the world. Do you not remember him?”

“Yes!” said Dantes, and without relinquishing Mercedes hand clasped in one of his own, he extended the other to the Catalan with a cordial air. But Fernand, instead of responding to this amiable gesture, remained mute and trembling. Edmond then cast his eyes scrutinizingly at the agitated and embarrassed Mercedes, and then again on the gloomy and menacing Fernand. This look told him all, and his anger waxed hot.

“I did not know, when I came with such haste to you, that I was to meet an enemy here.”

“An enemy!” cried Mercedes, with an angry look at her cousin. “An enemy in my house, do you say, Edmond! If I believed that, I would place my arm under yours and go with you to Marseilles, leaving the house to return to it no more.”

Fernand’s eye darted lightning. “And should any misfortune occur to you, dear Edmond,” she continued with the same calmness which proved to Fernand that the young girl had read the very innermost depths of his sinister thought, “if misfortune should occur to you, I would ascend the highest point of the Cape de Morgion and cast myself headlong from it.”

Fernand became deadly pale. “But you are deceived, Edmond,” she continued. “You have no enemy here — there is no one but Fernand, my brother, who will grasp your hand as a devoted friend.”

And at these words the young girl fixed her imperious look on the Catalan, who, as if fascinated by it, came slowly towards Edmond, and offered him his hand. His hatred, like a powerless though furious wave, was broken against the strong ascendancy which Mercedes exercised over him. Scarcely, however, had he touched Edmond’s hand than he felt he had done all he could do, and rushed hastily out of the house.

“Oh,” he exclaimed, running furiously and tearing his hair — ”Oh, who will deliver me from this man? Wretched — wretched that I am!”

“Hallo, Catalan! Hallo, Fernand! where are you running to?” exclaimed a voice.

The young man stopped suddenly, looked around him, and perceived Caderousse sitting at table with Danglars, under an arbor.

"Well", said Caderousse, "why don't you come? Are you really in such a hurry that you have no time to pass the time of day with your friends?"

"Particularly when they have still a full bottle before them," added Danglars. Fernand looked at them both with a stupefied air, but did not say a word.

"He seems besotted," said Danglars, pushing Caderousse with his knee. "Are we mistaken, and is Dantes triumphant in spite of all we have believed?"

"Why, we must inquire into that," was Caderousse's reply; and turning towards the young man, said, "Well, Catalan, can't you make up your mind?"

Fernand wiped away the perspiration steaming from his brow, and slowly entered the arbor, whose shade seemed to restore somewhat of calmness to his senses, and whose coolness somewhat of refreshment to his exhausted body.

"Good-day," said he. "You called me, didn't you?" And he fell, rather than sat down, on one of the seats which surrounded the table.

"I called you because you were running like a madman, and I was afraid you would throw yourself into the sea," said Caderousse, laughing. "Why, when a man has friends, they are not only to offer him a glass of wine, but, moreover, to prevent his swallowing three or four pints of water unnecessarily!"

Fernand gave a groan, which resembled a sob, and dropped his head into his hands, his elbows leaning on the table.

"Well, Fernand, I must say," said Caderousse, beginning the conversation, with that brutality of the common people in which curiosity destroys all diplomacy, "you look uncommonly like a rejected lover;" and he burst into a hoarse laugh.

"Bah!" said Danglars, "a lad of his make was not born to be unhappy in love. You are laughing at him, Caderousse."

"No," he replied, "only hark how he sighs! Come, come, Fernand," said Caderousse, "hold up your head, and answer us. It's not polite not to reply to friends who ask news of your health."

"My health is well enough," said Fernand, clinching his hands without raising his head.

"Ah, you see, Danglars," said Caderousse, winking at his friend, "this is how it is; Fernand, whom you see here, is a good and brave Catalan, one of the best fishermen in Marseilles, and he is in love with a very fine girl, named Mercedes; but it appears, unfortunately, that the fine girl is in love with the mate of the Pharaon; and as the Pharaon arrived to-day — why, you understand!"

"No; I do not understand," said Danglars.

"Poor Fernand has been dismissed," continued Caderousse.

"Well, and what then?" said Fernand, lifting up his head, and looking at Caderousse like a man who looks for some one on whom to vent his anger; "Mercedes is not accountable to any person, is she? Is she not free to love whomsoever she will?"

"Oh, if you take it in that sense," said Caderousse, "it is another thing. But I thought you were a Catalan, and they told me the Catalans were not men to allow themselves to be supplanted by a rival. It was even told me that Fernand, especially, was terrible in his vengeance."

Fernand smiled piteously. "A lover is never terrible," he said.

"Poor fellow!" remarked Danglars, affecting to pity the young man from the bottom of his heart. "Why, you see, he did not expect to see Dantes return so suddenly — he thought he was dead, perhaps; or perchance faithless! These things always come on us more severely when they come suddenly."

"Ah, ma foi, under any circumstances," said Caderousse, who drank as he spoke, and on whom the fumes of the wine began to take effect, — "under any circumstances Fernand is not the only person put out by the fortunate arrival of Dantes; is he, Danglars?"

"No, you are right — and I should say that would bring him ill-luck."

"Well, never mind," answered Caderousse, pouring out a glass of wine for Fernand, and filling his own for the eighth or ninth time, while Danglars had merely sipped his. "Never mind — in the meantime he marries Mercedes — the lovely Mercedes — at least he returns to do that."

During this time Danglars fixed his piercing glance on the young man, on whose heart Caderousse's words fell like molten lead.

"And when is the wedding to be?" he asked.

"Oh, it is not yet fixed!" murmured Fernand.

"No, but it will be," said Caderousse, "as surely as Dantes will be captain of the Pharaon — eh, Danglars?"

Danglars shuddered at this unexpected attack, and turned to Caderousse, whose countenance he scrutinized, to try and detect whether the blow was premeditated; but he read nothing but envy in a countenance already rendered brutal and stupid by drunkenness.

“Well,” said he, filling the glasses, “let us drink to Captain Edmond Dantes, husband of the beautiful Catalane!”

Caderousse raised his glass to his mouth with unsteady hand, and swallowed the contents at a gulp. Fernand dashed his on the ground.

“Eh, eh, eh!” stammered Caderousse. “What do I see down there by the wall, in the direction of the Catalans? Look, Fernand, your eyes are better than mine. I believe I see double. You know wine is a deceiver; but I should say it was two lovers walking side by side, and hand in hand. Heaven forgive me, they do not know that we can see them, and they are actually embracing!”

Danglars did not lose one pang that Fernand endured.

“Do you know them, Fernand?” he said.

“Yes,” was the reply, in a low voice. “It is Edmond and Mercedes!”

“Ah, see there, now!” said Caderousse; “and I did not recognize them! Hallo, Dantes! hello, lovely damsel! Come this way, and let us know when the wedding is to be, for Fernand here is so obstinate he will not tell us.”

“Hold your tongue, will you?” said Danglars, pretending to restrain Caderousse, who, with the tenacity of drunkards, leaned out of the arbor. “Try to stand upright, and let the lovers make love without interruption. See, look at Fernand, and follow his example; he is well-behaved!”

Fernand, probably excited beyond bearing, pricked by Danglars, as the bull is by the bandilleros, was about to rush out; for he had risen from his seat, and seemed to be collecting himself to dash headlong upon his rival, when Mercedes, smiling and graceful, lifted up her lovely head, and looked at them with her clear and bright eyes. At this Fernand recollected her threat of dying if Edmond died, and dropped again heavily on his seat. Danglars looked at the two men, one after the other, the one brutalized by liquor, the other overwhelmed with love.

“I shall get nothing from these fools,” he muttered; “and I am very much afraid of being here between a drunkard and a coward. Here’s an envious fellow making himself boozy on wine when he ought to be nursing his wrath, and here is a fool who sees the woman he loves stolen from under his nose and takes on like a big baby. Yet this Catalan has eyes that glisten like those of the vengeful Spaniards, Sicilians, and Calabrians, and the other has fists big enough to crush an ox at one blow. Unquestionably, Edmond’s star is in the ascendant, and he will marry the splendid girl — he will be captain, too, and laugh at us all, unless” — a sinister smile passed over Danglars’ lips — ”unless I take a hand in the affair,” he added.

“Hallo!” continued Caderousse, half-rising, and with his fist on the table, “hallo, Edmond! do you not see your friends, or are you too proud to speak to them?”

“No, my dear fellow!” replied Dantes, “I am not proud, but I am happy, and happiness blinds, I think, more than pride.”

“Ah, very well, that’s an explanation!” said Caderousse. “How do you do, Madame Dantes?”

Mercedes courtesied gravely, and said — ”That is not my name, and in my country it bodes ill fortune, they say, to call a young girl by the name of her betrothed before he becomes her husband. So call me Mercedes, if you please.”

“We must excuse our worthy neighbor, Caderousse,” said Dantes, “he is so easily mistaken.”

“So, then, the wedding is to take place immediately, M. Dantes,” said Danglars, bowing to the young couple.

“As soon as possible, M. Danglars; to-day all preliminaries will be arranged at my father’s, and to-morrow, or next day at latest, the wedding festival here at La Reserve. My friends will be there, I hope; that is to say, you are invited, M. Danglars, and you, Caderousse.”

“And Fernand,” said Caderousse with a chuckle; “Fernand, too, is invited!”

“My wife’s brother is my brother,” said Edmond; “and we, Mercedes and I, should be very sorry if he were absent at such a time.”

Fernand opened his mouth to reply, but his voice died on his lips, and he could not utter a word.

“To-day the preliminaries, to-morrow or next day the ceremony! You are in a hurry, captain!”

“Danglars,” said Edmond, smiling, “I will say to you as Mercedes said just now to Caderousse, ‘Do not give me a title which does not belong to me’; that may bring me bad luck.”

“Your pardon,” replied Danglars, “I merely said you seemed in a hurry, and we have lots of time; the Pharaon cannot be under weigh again in less than three months.”

“We are always in a hurry to be happy, M. Danglars; for when we have suffered a long time, we have great difficulty in believing in good fortune. But it is not selfishness alone that makes me thus in haste; I must go to Paris.”

“Ah, really? — to Paris! and will it be the first time you have ever been there, Dantes?”

“Yes.”

“Have you business there?”

“Not of my own; the last commission of poor Captain Leclere; you know to what I allude, Danglars — it is sacred. Besides, I shall only take the time to go and return.”

“Yes, yes, I understand,” said Danglars, and then in a low tone, he added, “To Paris, no doubt to deliver the letter which the grand marshal gave him. Ah, this letter gives me an idea — a capital idea! Ah; Dantes, my friend, you are not yet registered number one on board the good ship Pharaon;” then turning towards Edmond, who was walking away, “A pleasant journey,” he cried.

“Thank you,” said Edmond with a friendly nod, and the two lovers continued on their way, as calm and joyous as if they were the very elect of heaven.

Chapter 4

Conspiracy.

Danglars followed Edmond and Mercedes with his eyes until the two lovers disappeared behind one of the angles of Fort Saint Nicolas, then turning round, he perceived Fernand, who had fallen, pale and trembling, into his chair, while Caderousse stammered out the words of a drinking-song.

“Well, my dear sir,” said Danglars to Fernand, “here is a marriage which does not appear to make everybody happy.”

“It drives me to despair,” said Fernand.

“Do you, then, love Mercedes?”

“I adore her!”

“For long?”

“As long as I have known her — always.”

“And you sit there, tearing your hair, instead of seeking to remedy your condition; I did not think that was the way of your people.”

“What would you have me do?” said Fernand.

“How do I know? Is it my affair? I am not in love with Mademoiselle Mercedes; but for you — in the words of the gospel, seek, and you shall find.”

“I have found already.”

“What?”

“I would stab the man, but the woman told me that if any misfortune happened to her betrothed, she would kill herself.”

“Pooh! Women say those things, but never do them.”

“You do not know Mercedes; what she threatens she will do.”

“Idiot!” muttered Danglars; “whether she kill herself or not, what matter, provided Dantes is not captain?”

“Before Mercedes should die,” replied Fernand, with the accents of unshaken resolution, “I would die myself!”

“That’s what I call love!” said Caderousse with a voice more tipsy than ever. “That’s love, or I don’t know what love is.”

“Come,” said Danglars, “you appear to me a good sort of fellow, and hang me, I should like to help you, but” —

“Yes,” said Caderousse, “but how?”

“My dear fellow,” replied Danglars, “you are three parts drunk; finish the bottle, and you will be completely so. Drink then, and do not meddle with what we are discussing, for that requires all one’s wit and cool judgment.”

“I — drunk!” said Caderousse; “well that’s a good one! I could drink four more such bottles; they are no bigger than cologne flasks. Pere Pamphile, more wine!” and Caderousse rattled his glass upon the table.

“You were saying, sir” — said Fernand, awaiting with great anxiety the end of this interrupted remark.

“What was I saying? I forget. This drunken Caderousse has made me lose the thread of my sentence.”

“Drunk, if you like; so much the worse for those who fear wine, for it is because they have bad thoughts which they are afraid the liquor will extract from their hearts;” and Caderousse began to sing the two last lines of a song very popular at the time, —

‘Tous les mechants sont beuveurs d’eau; C’est bien prouve par le deluge.’ [*]

* “The wicked are great drinkers of water; As the flood proved once for all.”

“You said, sir, you would like to help me, but” —

“Yes; but I added, to help you it would be sufficient that Dantes did not marry her you love; and the marriage may easily be thwarted, methinks, and yet Dantes need not die.”

“Death alone can separate them,” remarked Fernand.

“You talk like a noodle, my friend,” said Caderousse; “and here is Danglars, who is a wide-awake, clever, deep fellow, who will prove to you that you are wrong. Prove it, Danglars. I have answered for you. Say there is no need why Dantes should die; it would, indeed, be a pity he should. Dantes is a good fellow; I like Dantes. Dantes, your health.”

Fernand rose impatiently. “Let him run on,” said Danglars, restraining the young man; “drunk as he is, he is not much out in what he says. Absence severs as well as death, and if the walls of a prison were between Edmond and Mercedes they would be as effectually separated as if he lay under a tombstone.”

“Yes; but one gets out of prison,” said Caderousse, who, with what sense was left him, listened eagerly to the conversation, “and when one gets out and one’s name is Edmond Dantes, one seeks revenge” —

“What matters that?” muttered Fernand.

“And why, I should like to know,” persisted Caderousse, “should they put Dantes in prison? he has not robbed or killed or murdered.”

“Hold your tongue!” said Danglars.

“I won’t hold my tongue!” replied Caderousse; “I say I want to know why they should put Dantes in prison; I like Dantes; Dantes, your health!” and he swallowed another glass of wine.

Danglars saw in the muddled look of the tailor the progress of his intoxication, and turning towards Fernand, said, “Well, you understand there is no need to kill him.”

“Certainly not, if, as you said just now, you have the means of having Dantes arrested. Have you that means?”

“It is to be found for the searching. But why should I meddle in the matter? it is no affair of mine.”

“I know not why you meddle,” said Fernand, seizing his arm; “but this I know, you have some motive of personal hatred against Dantes, for he who himself hates is never mistaken in the sentiments of others.”

“I! — motives of hatred against Dantes? None, on my word! I saw you were unhappy, and your unhappiness interested me; that’s all; but since you believe I act for my own account, adieu, my dear friend, get out of the affair as best you may;” and Danglars rose as if he meant to depart.

“No, no,” said Fernand, restraining him, “stay! It is of very little consequence to me at the end of the matter whether you have any angry feeling or not against Dantes. I hate him! I confess it openly. Do you find the means, I will execute it, provided it is not to kill the man, for Mercedes has declared she will kill herself if Dantes is killed.”

Caderousse, who had let his head drop on the table, now raised it, and looking at Fernand with his dull and fishy eyes, he said, — ”Kill Dantes! who talks of killing Dantes? I won’t have him killed — I won’t! He’s my friend, and this morning offered to share his money with me, as I shared mine with him. I won’t have Dantes killed — I won’t!”

“And who has said a word about killing him, muddlehead?” replied Danglars. “We were merely joking; drink to his health,” he added, filling Caderousse’s glass, “and do not interfere with us.”

"Yes, yes, Dantes' good health!" said Caderousse, emptying his glass, "here's to his health! his health — hurrah!"

"But the means — the means?" said Fernand.

"Have you not hit upon any?" asked Danglars.

"No! — you undertook to do so."

"True," replied Danglars; "the French have the superiority over the Spaniards, that the Spaniards ruminate, while the French invent."

"Do you invent, then," said Fernand impatiently.

"Waiter," said Danglars, "pen, ink, and paper."

"Pen, ink, and paper," muttered Fernand.

"Yes; I am a supercargo; pen, ink, and paper are my tools, and without my tools I am fit for nothing."

"Pen, ink, and paper, then," called Fernand loudly.

"There's what you want on that table," said the waiter.

"Bring them here." The waiter did as he was desired.

"When one thinks," said Caderousse, letting his hand drop on the paper, "there is here wherewithal to kill a man more sure than if we waited at the corner of a wood to assassinate him! I have always had more dread of a pen, a bottle of ink, and a sheet of paper, than of a sword or pistol."

"The fellow is not so drunk as he appears to be," said Danglars. "Give him some more wine, Fernand." Fernand filled Caderousse's glass, who, like the confirmed toper he was, lifted his hand from the paper and seized the glass.

The Catalan watched him until Caderousse, almost overcome by this fresh assault on his senses, rested, or rather dropped, his glass upon the table.

"Well!" resumed the Catalan, as he saw the final glimmer of Caderousse's reason vanishing before the last glass of wine.

"Well, then, I should say, for instance," resumed Danglars, "that if after a voyage such as Dantes has just made, in which he touched at the Island of Elba, some one were to denounce him to the king's procureur as a Bonapartist agent" —

"I will denounce him!" exclaimed the young man hastily.

"Yes, but they will make you then sign your declaration, and confront you with him you have denounced; I will supply you with the means of supporting your accusation, for I know the fact well. But Dantes cannot remain forever in prison, and one day or other he will leave it, and the day when he comes out, woe betide him who was the cause of his incarceration!”

“Oh, I should wish nothing better than that he would come and seek a quarrel with me.”

“Yes, and Mercedes! Mercedes, who will detest you if you have only the misfortune to scratch the skin of her dearly beloved Edmond!”

“True!” said Fernand.

“No, no,” continued Danglars; “if we resolve on such a step, it would be much better to take, as I now do, this pen, dip it into this ink, and write with the left hand (that the writing may not be recognized) the denunciation we propose.” And Danglars, uniting practice with theory, wrote with his left hand, and in a writing reversed from his usual style, and totally unlike it, the following lines, which he handed to Fernand, and which Fernand read in an undertone: —

“The honorable, the king’s attorney, is informed by a friend of the throne and religion, that one Edmond Dantes, mate of the ship Pharaon, arrived this morning from Smyrna, after having touched at Naples and Porto-Ferrajo, has been intrusted by Murat with a letter for the usurper, and by the usurper with a letter for the Bonapartist committee in Paris. Proof of this crime will be found on arresting him, for the letter will be found upon him, or at his father’s, or in his cabin on board the Pharaon.”

“Very good,” resumed Danglars; “now your revenge looks like common-sense, for in no way can it revert to yourself, and the matter will thus work its own way; there is nothing to do now but fold the letter as I am doing, and write upon it, ‘To the king’s attorney,’ and that’s all settled.” And Danglars wrote the address as he spoke.

“Yes, and that’s all settled!” exclaimed Caderousse, who, by a last effort of intellect, had followed the reading of the letter, and instinctively comprehended all the misery which such a denunciation must entail. “Yes, and that’s all settled; only it will be an infamous shame;” and he stretched out his hand to reach the letter.

“Yes,” said Danglars, taking it from beyond his reach; “and as what I say and do is merely in jest, and I, amongst the first and foremost, should be sorry if anything happened to Dantes — the worthy Dantes — look here!” And taking the letter, he squeezed it up in his hands and threw it into a corner of the arbor.

"All right!" said Caderousse. "Dantes is my friend, and I won't have him ill-used."

"And who thinks of using him ill? Certainly neither I nor Fernand," said Danglars, rising and looking at the young man, who still remained seated, but whose eye was fixed on the denunciatory sheet of paper flung into the corner.

"In this case," replied Caderousse, "let's have some more wine. I wish to drink to the health of Edmond and the lovely Mercedes."

"You have had too much already, drunkard," said Danglars; "and if you continue, you will be compelled to sleep here, because unable to stand on your legs."

"I?" said Caderousse, rising with all the offended dignity of a drunken man, "I can't keep on my legs? Why, I'll wager I can go up into the belfry of the Accoules, and without staggering, too!"

"Done!" said Danglars, "I'll take your bet; but to-morrow — to-day it is time to return. Give me your arm, and let us go."

"Very well, let us go," said Caderousse; "but I don't want your arm at all. Come, Fernand, won't you return to Marseilles with us?"

"No," said Fernand; "I shall return to the Catalans."

"You're wrong. Come with us to Marseilles — come along."

"I will not."

"What do you mean? you will not? Well, just as you like, my prince; there's liberty for all the world. Come along, Danglars, and let the young gentleman return to the Catalans if he chooses."

Danglars took advantage of Caderousse's temper at the moment, to take him off towards Marseilles by the Porte Saint-Victor, staggering as he went.

When they had advanced about twenty yards, Danglars looked back and saw Fernand stoop, pick up the crumpled paper, and putting it into his pocket then rush out of the arbor towards Pillon.

"Well," said Caderousse, "why, what a lie he told! He said he was going to the Catalans, and he is going to the city. Hallo, Fernand!"

"Oh, you don't see straight," said Danglars; "he's gone right enough."

"Well," said Caderousse, "I should have said not — how treacherous wine is!"

"Come, come," said Danglars to himself, "now the thing is at work and it will effect its purpose unassisted."

Chapter 5

The Marriage-Feast.

The morning's sun rose clear and resplendent, touching the foamy waves into a network of ruby-tinted light.

The feast had been made ready on the second floor at La Reserve, with whose arbor the reader is already familiar. The apartment destined for the purpose was spacious and lighted by a number of windows, over each of which was written in golden letters for some inexplicable reason the name of one of the principal cities of France; beneath these windows a wooden balcony extended the entire length of the house. And although the entertainment was fixed for twelve o'clock, an hour previous to that time the balcony was filled with impatient and expectant guests, consisting of the favored part of the crew of the Pharaon, and other personal friends of the bride-groom, the whole of whom had arrayed themselves in their choicest costumes, in order to do greater honor to the occasion.

Various rumors were afloat to the effect that the owners of the Pharaon had promised to attend the nuptial feast; but all seemed unanimous in doubting that an act of such rare and exceeding condescension could possibly be intended.

Danglars, however, who now made his appearance, accompanied by Caderousse, effectually confirmed the report, stating that he had recently conversed with M. Morrel, who had himself assured him of his intention to dine at La Reserve.

In fact, a moment later M. Morrel appeared and was saluted with an enthusiastic burst of applause from the crew of the Pharaon, who hailed the visit of the shipowner as a sure indication that the man whose wedding feast he thus delighted to honor would ere long be first in command of the ship; and as Dantes was universally beloved on board his vessel, the sailors put no restraint on their tumultuous joy at finding that the opinion and choice of their superiors so exactly coincided with their own.

With the entrance of M. Morrel, Danglars and Caderousse were despatched in search of the bride-groom to convey to him the intelligence of the arrival of the important personage whose coming had created such a lively sensation, and to beseech him to make haste.

Danglars and Caderousse set off upon their errand at full speed; but ere they had gone many steps they perceived a group advancing towards them, composed of the betrothed pair, a party of young girls in attendance on the bride, by whose side walked Dantes' father; the whole brought up by Fernand, whose lips wore their usual sinister smile.

Neither Mercedes nor Edmond observed the strange expression of his countenance; they were so happy that they were conscious only of the sunshine and the presence of each other.

Having acquitted themselves of their errand, and exchanged a hearty shake of the hand with Edmond, Danglars and Caderousse took their places beside Fernand and old Dantes, — the latter of whom attracted universal notice. The old man was attired in a suit of glistening watered silk, trimmed with steel buttons, beautifully cut and polished. His thin but wiry legs were arrayed in a pair of richly embroidered clocked stockings, evidently of English manufacture, while from his three-cornered hat depended a long streaming knot of white and blue ribbons. Thus he came along, supporting himself on a curiously carved stick, his aged countenance lit up with happiness, looking for all the world like one of the aged dandies of 1796, parading the newly opened gardens of the Tuileries and Luxembourg. Beside him glided Caderousse, whose desire to partake of the good things provided for the wedding-party had induced him to become reconciled to the Dantes, father and son, although there still lingered in his mind a faint and unperfect recollection of the events of the preceding night; just as the brain retains on waking in the morning the dim and misty outline of a dream.

As Danglars approached the disappointed lover, he cast on him a look of deep meaning, while Fernand, as he slowly paced behind the happy pair, who seemed, in their own unmixed content, to have entirely forgotten that such a being as himself existed, was pale and abstracted; occasionally, however, a deep flush would overspread his countenance, and a nervous contraction distort his features, while, with an agitated and restless gaze, he would glance in the direction of Marseilles, like one who either anticipated or foresaw some great and important event.

Dantes himself was simply, but becomingly, clad in the dress peculiar to the merchant service — a costume somewhat between a military and a civil garb; and with his fine countenance, radiant with joy and happiness, a more perfect specimen of manly beauty could scarcely be imagined.

Lovely as the Greek girls of Cyprus or Chios, Mercedes boasted the same bright flashing eyes of jet, and ripe, round, coral lips. She moved with the light, free step of an Arlesienne or an Andalusian. One more practiced in the arts of great cities would have hid her blushes beneath a veil, or, at least, have cast down her thickly fringed lashes, so as to have concealed the liquid lustre of her animated eyes; but, on the contrary, the delighted girl looked around her with a smile that seemed to say: “If you are my friends, rejoice with me, for I am very happy.”

As soon as the bridal party came in sight of La Reserve, M. Morrel descended and came forth to meet it, followed by the soldiers and sailors there assembled, to whom he had repeated the promise already given, that Dantes should be the successor to the late Captain Leclere. Edmond, at the approach of his patron, respectfully placed the arm of his affianced bride within that of M. Morrel, who, forthwith conducting her up the flight of wooden steps leading to the chamber in which the feast was prepared, was gayly followed by the guests, beneath whose heavy tread the slight structure creaked and groaned for the space of several minutes.

“Father,” said Mercedes, stopping when she had reached the centre of the table, “sit, I pray you, on my right hand; on my left I will place him who has ever been as a brother to me,” pointing with a soft and gentle smile to Fernand; but her words and look seemed to inflict the direst torture on him, for his lips became ghastly pale, and even beneath the dark hue of his complexion the blood might be seen retreating as though some sudden pang drove it back to the heart.

During this time, Dantes, at the opposite side of the table, had been occupied in similarly placing his most honored guests. M. Morrel was seated at his right hand, Danglars at his left; while, at a sign from Edmond, the rest of the company ranged themselves as they found it most agreeable.

Then they began to pass around the dusky, piquant, Arlesian sausages, and lobsters in their dazzling red cuirasses, prawns of large size and brilliant color, the echinus with its prickly outside and dainty morsel within, the clovis, esteemed by the epicures of the South as more than rivalling the exquisite flavor of the oyster, — all the delicacies, in fact, that are cast up by the wash of waters on the sandy beach, and styled by the grateful fishermen “fruits of the sea.”

“A pretty silence truly!” said the old father of the bride-groom, as he carried to his lips a glass of wine of the hue and brightness of the topaz, and which had just been placed before Mercedes herself. “Now, would anybody think that this room contained a happy, merry party, who desire nothing better than to laugh and dance the hours away?”

“Ah,” sighed Caderousse, “a man cannot always feel happy because he is about to be married.”

“The truth is,” replied Dantes, “that I am too happy for noisy mirth; if that is what you meant by your observation, my worthy friend, you are right; joy takes a strange effect at times, it seems to oppress us almost the same as sorrow.”

Danglars looked towards Fernand, whose excitable nature received and betrayed each fresh impression.

“Why, what ails you?” asked he of Edmond. “Do you fear any approaching evil? I should say that you were the happiest man alive at this instant.”

“And that is the very thing that alarms me,” returned Dantes. “Man does not appear to me to be intended to enjoy felicity so unmixed; happiness is like the enchanted palaces we read of in our childhood, where fierce, fiery dragons defend the entrance and approach; and monsters of all shapes and kinds, requiring to be overcome ere victory is ours. I own that I am lost in wonder to find myself promoted to an honor of which I feel myself unworthy — that of being the husband of Mercedes.”

“Nay, nay!” cried Caderousse, smiling, “you have not attained that honor yet. Mercedes is not yet your wife. Just assume the tone and manner of a husband, and see how she will remind you that your hour is not yet come!”

The bride blushed, while Fernand, restless and uneasy, seemed to start at every fresh sound, and from time to time wiped away the large drops of perspiration that gathered on his brow.

“Well, never mind that, neighbor Caderousse; it is not worth while to contradict me for such a trifle as that. ‘Tis true that Mercedes is not actually my wife; but,” added he, drawing out his watch, “in an hour and a half she will be.”

A general exclamation of surprise ran round the table, with the exception of the elder Dantes, whose laugh displayed the still perfect beauty of his large white teeth. Mercedes looked pleased and gratified, while Fernand grasped the handle of his knife with a convulsive clutch.

“In an hour?” inquired Danglars, turning pale. “How is that, my friend?”

“Why, thus it is,” replied Dantes. “Thanks to the influence of M. Morrel, to whom, next to my father, I owe every blessing I enjoy, every difficulty his been removed. We have purchased permission to waive the usual delay; and at half-past two o’clock the mayor of Marseilles will be waiting for us at the city hall. Now, as a quarter-past one has already struck, I do not consider I have asserted too much in saying, that, in another hour and thirty minutes Mercedes will have become Madame Dantes.”

Fernand closed his eyes, a burning sensation passed across his brow, and he was compelled to support himself by the table to prevent his falling from his chair; but in spite of all his efforts, he could not refrain from uttering a deep groan, which, however, was lost amid the noisy felicitations of the company.

“Upon my word,” cried the old man, “you make short work of this kind of affair. Arrived here only yesterday morning, and married to-day at three o’clock! Commend me to a sailor for going the quick way to work!”

“But,” asked Danglars, in a timid tone, “how did you manage about the other formalities — the contract — the settlement?”

“The contract,” answered Dantes, laughingly, “it didn’t take long to fix that. Mercedes has no fortune; I have none to settle on her. So, you see, our papers were quickly written out, and certainly do not come very expensive.” This joke elicited a fresh burst of applause.

“So that what we presumed to be merely the betrothal feast turns out to be the actual wedding dinner!” said Danglars.

“No, no,” answered Dantes; “don’t imagine I am going to put you off in that shabby manner. To-morrow morning I start for Paris; four days to go, and the same to return, with one day to discharge the commission intrusted to me, is all the time I shall be absent. I shall be back here by the first of March, and on the second I give my real marriage feast.”

This prospect of fresh festivity redoubled the hilarity of the guests to such a degree, that the elder Dantes, who, at the commencement of the repast, had commented upon the silence that prevailed, now found it difficult, amid the general din of voices, to obtain a moment’s tranquillity in which to drink to the health and prosperity of the bride and bride-groom.

Dantes, perceiving the affectionate eagerness of his father, responded by a look of grateful pleasure; while Mercedes glanced at the clock and made an expressive gesture to Edmond.

Around the table reigned that noisy hilarity which usually prevails at such a time among people sufficiently free from the demands of social position not to feel the trammels of etiquette. Such as at the commencement of the repast had not been able to seat themselves according to their inclination rose unceremoniously, and sought out more agreeable companions. Everybody talked at once, without waiting for a reply and each one seemed to be contented with expressing his or her own thoughts.

Fernand's paleness appeared to have communicated itself to Danglars. As for Fernand himself, he seemed to be enduring the tortures of the damned; unable to rest, he was among the first to quit the table, and, as though seeking to avoid the hilarious mirth that rose in such deafening sounds, he continued, in utter silence, to pace the farther end of the salon.

Caderousse approached him just as Danglars, whom Fernand seemed most anxious to avoid, had joined him in a corner of the room.

"Upon my word," said Caderousse, from whose mind the friendly treatment of Dantes, united with the effect of the excellent wine he had partaken of, had effaced every feeling of envy or jealousy at Dantes' good fortune, — "upon my word, Dantes is a downright good fellow, and when I see him sitting there beside his pretty wife that is so soon to be. I cannot help thinking it would have been a great pity to have served him that trick you were planning yesterday."

"Oh, there was no harm meant," answered Danglars; "at first I certainly did feel somewhat uneasy as to what Fernand might be tempted to do; but when I saw how completely he had mastered his feelings, even so far as to become one of his rival's attendants, I knew there was no further cause for apprehension." Caderousse looked full at Fernand — he was ghastly pale.

"Certainly," continued Danglars, "the sacrifice was no trifling one, when the beauty of the bride is concerned. Upon my soul, that future captain of mine is a lucky dog! Gad, I only wish he would let me take his place."

"Shall we not set forth?" asked the sweet, silvery voice of Mercedes; "two o'clock has just struck, and you know we are expected in a quarter of an hour."

"To be sure! — to be sure!" cried Dantes, eagerly quitting the table; "let us go directly!"

His words were re-echoed by the whole party, with vociferous cheers.

At this moment Danglars, who had been incessantly observing every change in Fernand's look and manner, saw him stagger and fall back, with an almost convulsive spasm, against a seat placed near one of the open windows. At the same instant his ear caught a sort of indistinct sound on the stairs, followed by the measured tread of soldiery, with the clanking of swords and military accoutrements; then came a hum and buzz as of many voices, so as to deaden even the noisy mirth of the bridal party, among whom a vague feeling of curiosity and apprehension quelled every disposition to talk, and almost instantaneously the most deathlike stillness prevailed.

The sounds drew nearer. Three blows were struck upon the panel of the door. The company looked at each other in consternation.

“I demand admittance,” said a loud voice outside the room, “in the name of the law!” As no attempt was made to prevent it, the door was opened, and a magistrate, wearing his official scarf, presented himself, followed by four soldiers and a corporal. Uneasiness now yielded to the most extreme dread on the part of those present.

“May I venture to inquire the reason of this unexpected visit?” said M. Morrel, addressing the magistrate, whom he evidently knew; “there is doubtless some mistake easily explained.”

“If it be so,” replied the magistrate, “rely upon every reparation being made; meanwhile, I am the bearer of an order of arrest, and although I most reluctantly perform the task assigned me, it must, nevertheless, be fulfilled. Who among the persons here assembled answers to the name of Edmond Dantes?” Every eye was turned towards the young man who, spite of the agitation he could not but feel, advanced with dignity, and said, in a firm voice, “I am he; what is your pleasure with me?”

“Edmond Dantes,” replied the magistrate, “I arrest you in the name of the law!”

“Me!” repeated Edmond, slightly changing color, “and wherefore, I pray?”

“I cannot inform you, but you will be duly acquainted with the reasons that have rendered such a step necessary at the preliminary examination.”

M. Morrel felt that further resistance or remonstrance was useless. He saw before him an officer delegated to enforce the law, and perfectly well knew that it would be as unavailing to seek pity from a magistrate decked with his official scarf, as to address a petition to some cold marble effigy. Old Dantes, however, sprang forward. There are situations which the heart of a father or a mother cannot be made to understand. He prayed and supplicated in terms so moving, that even the officer was touched, and, although firm in his duty, he kindly said, “My worthy friend, let me beg of you to calm your apprehensions. Your son has probably neglected some prescribed form or attention in registering his cargo, and it is more than probable he will be set at liberty directly he has given the information required, whether touching the health of his crew, or the value of his freight.”

“What is the meaning of all this?” inquired Caderousse, frowningly, of Danglars, who had assumed an air of utter surprise.

“How can I tell you?” replied he; “I am, like yourself, utterly bewildered at all that is going on, and cannot in the least make out what it is about.” Caderousse then looked around for Fernand, but he had disappeared.

The scene of the previous night now came back to his mind with startling clearness. The painful catastrophe he had just witnessed appeared effectually to have rent away the veil which the intoxication of the evening before had raised between himself and his memory.

“So, so,” said he, in a hoarse and choking voice, to Danglars, “this, then, I suppose, is a part of the trick you were concerting yesterday? All I can say is, that if it be so, ‘tis an ill turn, and well deserves to bring double evil on those who have projected it.”

“Nonsense,” returned Danglars, “I tell you again I have nothing whatever to do with it; besides, you know very well that I tore the paper to pieces.”

“No, you did not!” answered Caderousse, “you merely threw it by — I saw it lying in a corner.”

“Hold your tongue, you fool! — what should you know about it? — why, you were drunk!”

“Where is Fernand?” inquired Caderousse.

“How do I know?” replied Danglars; “gone, as every prudent man ought to be, to look after his own affairs, most likely. Never mind where he is, let you and I go and see what is to be done for our poor friends.”

During this conversation, Dantes, after having exchanged a cheerful shake of the hand with all his sympathizing friends, had surrendered himself to the officer sent to arrest him, merely saying, “Make yourselves quite easy, my good fellows, there is some little mistake to clear up, that’s all, depend upon it; and very likely I may not have to go so far as the prison to effect that.”

“Oh, to be sure!” responded Danglars, who had now approached the group, “nothing more than a mistake, I feel quite certain.”

Dantes descended the staircase, preceded by the magistrate, and followed by the soldiers. A carriage awaited him at the door; he got in, followed by two soldiers and the magistrate, and the vehicle drove off towards Marseilles.

“Adieu, adieu, dearest Edmond!” cried Mercedes, stretching out her arms to him from the balcony.

The prisoner heard the cry, which sounded like the sob of a broken heart, and leaning from the coach he called out, “Good-by, Mercedes — we shall soon meet again!” Then the vehicle disappeared round one of the turnings of Fort Saint Nicholas.

“Wait for me here, all of you!” cried M. Morrel; “I will take the first conveyance I find, and hurry to Marseilles, whence I will bring you word how all is going on.”

“That’s right!” exclaimed a multitude of voices, “go, and return as quickly as you can!”

This second departure was followed by a long and fearful state of terrified silence on the part of those who were left behind. The old father and Mercedes remained for some time apart, each absorbed in grief; but at length the two poor victims of the same blow raised their eyes, and with a simultaneous burst of feeling rushed into each other’s arms.

Meanwhile Fernand made his appearance, poured out for himself a glass of water with a trembling hand; then hastily swallowing it, went to sit down at the first vacant place, and this was, by mere chance, placed next to the seat on which poor Mercedes had fallen half fainting, when released from the warm and affectionate embrace of old Dantes. Instinctively Fernand drew back his chair.

“He is the cause of all this misery — I am quite sure of it,” whispered Caderousse, who had never taken his eyes off Fernand, to Danglars.

“I don’t think so,” answered the other; “he’s too stupid to imagine such a scheme. I only hope the mischief will fall upon the head of whoever wrought it.”

“You don’t mention those who aided and abetted the deed,” said Caderousse.

“Surely,” answered Danglars, “one cannot be held responsible for every chance arrow shot into the air.”

“You can, indeed, when the arrow lights point downward on somebody’s head.”

Meantime the subject of the arrest was being canvassed in every different form.

“What think you, Danglars,” said one of the party, turning towards him, “of this event?”

“Why,” replied he, “I think it just possible Dantes may have been detected with some trifling article on board ship considered here as contraband.”

“But how could he have done so without your knowledge, Danglars, since you are the ship’s supercargo?”

“Why, as for that, I could only know what I was told respecting the merchandise with which the vessel was laden. I know she was loaded with cotton, and that she took in her freight at Alexandria from Pastret’s warehouse, and at Smyrna from Pascal’s; that is all I was obliged to know, and I beg I may not be asked for any further particulars.”

“Now I recollect,” said the afflicted old father; “my poor boy told me yesterday he had got a small case of coffee, and another of tobacco for me!”

“There, you see,” exclaimed Danglars. “Now the mischief is out; depend upon it the custom-house people went rummaging about the ship in our absence, and discovered poor Dantes’ hidden treasures.”

Mercedes, however, paid no heed to this explanation of her lover’s arrest. Her grief, which she had hitherto tried to restrain, now burst out in a violent fit of hysterical sobbing.

“Come, come,” said the old man, “be comforted, my poor child; there is still hope!”

“Hope!” repeated Danglars.

“Hope!” faintly murmured Fernand, but the word seemed to die away on his pale agitated lips, and a convulsive spasm passed over his countenance.

“Good news! good news!” shouted forth one of the party stationed in the balcony on the lookout. “Here comes M. Morrel back. No doubt, now, we shall hear that our friend is released!”

Mercedes and the old man rushed to meet the shipowner and greeted him at the door. He was very pale.

“What news?” exclaimed a general burst of voices.

“Alas, my friends,” replied M. Morrel, with a mournful shake of his head, “the thing has assumed a more serious aspect than I expected.”

“Oh, indeed — indeed, sir, he is innocent!” sobbed forth Mercedes.

“That I believe!” answered M. Morrel; “but still he is charged” —

“With what?” inquired the elder Dantes.

“With being an agent of the Bonapartist faction!” Many of our readers may be able to recollect how formidable such an accusation became in the period at which our story is dated.

A despairing cry escaped the pale lips of Mercedes; the old man sank into a chair.

“Ah, Danglars!” whispered Caderousse, “you have deceived me — the trick you spoke of last night has been played; but I cannot suffer a poor old man or an innocent girl to die of grief through your fault. I am determined to tell them all about it.”

“Be silent, you simpleton!” cried Danglars, grasping him by the arm, “or I will not answer even for your own safety. Who can tell whether Dantes be innocent or guilty? The vessel did touch at Elba, where he quitted it, and passed a whole day in the island. Now, should any letters or other documents of a compromising character be found upon him, will it not be taken for granted that all who uphold him are his accomplices?”

With the rapid instinct of selfishness, Caderousse readily perceived the solidity of this mode of reasoning; he gazed, doubtfully, wistfully, on Danglars, and then caution supplanted generosity.

“Suppose we wait a while, and see what comes of it,” said he, casting a bewildered look on his companion.

“To be sure!” answered Danglars. “Let us wait, by all means. If he be innocent, of course he will be set at liberty; if guilty, why, it is no use involving ourselves in a conspiracy.”

“Let us go, then. I cannot stay here any longer.”

“With all my heart!” replied Danglars, pleased to find the other so tractable. “Let us take ourselves out of the way, and leave things for the present to take their course.”

After their departure, Fernand, who had now again become the friend and protector of Mercedes, led the girl to her home, while the friends of Dantes conducted the now half-fainting man back to his abode.

The rumor of Edmond’s arrest as a Bonapartist agent was not slow in circulating throughout the city.

“Could you ever have credited such a thing, my dear Danglars?” asked M. Morrel, as, on his return to the port for the purpose of gleaning fresh tidings of Dantes, from M. de Villefort, the assistant procureur, he overtook his supercargo and Caderousse. “Could you have believed such a thing possible?”

“Why, you know I told you,” replied Danglars, “that I considered the circumstance of his having anchored at the Island of Elba as a very suspicious circumstance.”

“And did you mention these suspicions to any person beside myself?”

“Certainly not!” returned Danglars. Then added in a low whisper, “You understand that, on account of your uncle, M. Policar Morrel, who served under the other government, and who does not altogether conceal what he thinks on the subject, you are strongly suspected of regretting the abdication of Napoleon. I should have feared to injure both Edmond and yourself, had I divulged my own apprehensions to a soul. I am too well aware that though a subordinate, like myself, is bound to acquaint the shipowner with everything that occurs, there are many things he ought most carefully to conceal from all else.”

“‘Tis well, Danglars — ’tis well!” replied M. Morrel. “You are a worthy fellow; and I had already thought of your interests in the event of poor Edmond having become captain of the Pharaon.”

“Is it possible you were so kind?”

“Yes, indeed; I had previously inquired of Dantes what was his opinion of you, and if he should have any reluctance to continue you in your post, for somehow I have perceived a sort of coolness between you.”

“And what was his reply?”

“That he certainly did think he had given you offence in an affair which he merely referred to without entering into particulars, but that whoever possessed the good opinion and confidence of the ship’s owner would have his preference also.”

“The hypocrite!” murmured Danglars.

“Poor Dantes!” said Caderousse. “No one can deny his being a noble-hearted young fellow.”

“But meanwhile,” continued M. Morrel, “here is the Pharaon without a captain.”

“Oh,” replied Danglars, “since we cannot leave this port for the next three months, let us hope that ere the expiration of that period Dantes will be set at liberty.”

“No doubt; but in the meantime?”

“I am entirely at your service, M. Morrel,” answered Danglars. “You know that I am as capable of managing a ship as the most experienced captain in the service; and it will be so far advantageous to you to accept my services, that upon Edmond’s release from prison no further change will be requisite on board the Pharaon than for Dantes and myself each to resume our respective posts.”

“Thanks, Danglars — that will smooth over all difficulties. I fully authorize you at once to assume the command of the Pharaon, and look carefully to the unloading of her freight. Private misfortunes must never be allowed to interfere with business.”

“Be easy on that score, M. Morrel; but do you think we shall be permitted to see our poor Edmond?”

“I will let you know that directly I have seen M. de Villefort, whom I shall endeavor to interest in Edmond’s favor. I am aware he is a furious royalist; but, in spite of that, and of his being king’s attorney, he is a man like ourselves, and I fancy not a bad sort of one.”

“Perhaps not,” replied Danglars; “but I hear that he is ambitious, and that’s rather against him.”

“Well, well,” returned M. Morrel, “we shall see. But now hasten on board, I will join you there ere long.” So saying, the worthy shipowner quitted the two allies, and proceeded in the direction of the Palais de Justice.

“You see,” said Danglars, addressing Caderousse, “the turn things have taken. Do you still feel any desire to stand up in his defence?”

“Not the slightest, but yet it seems to me a shocking thing that a mere joke should lead to such consequences.”

“But who perpetrated that joke, let me ask? neither you nor myself, but Fernand; you knew very well that I threw the paper into a corner of the room — indeed, I fancied I had destroyed it.”

“Oh, no,” replied Caderousse, “that I can answer for, you did not. I only wish I could see it now as plainly as I saw it lying all crushed and crumpled in a corner of the arbor.”

“Well, then, if you did, depend upon it, Fernand picked it up, and either copied it or caused it to be copied; perhaps, even, he did not take the trouble of recopying it. And now I think of it, by Heavens, he may have sent the letter itself! Fortunately, for me, the handwriting was disguised.”

“Then you were aware of Dantes being engaged in a conspiracy?”

“Not I. As I before said, I thought the whole thing was a joke, nothing more. It seems, however, that I have unconsciously stumbled upon the truth.”

“Still,” argued Caderousse, “I would give a great deal if nothing of the kind had happened; or, at least, that I had had no hand in it. You will see, Danglars, that it will turn out an unlucky job for both of us.”

“Nonsense! If any harm come of it, it should fall on the guilty person; and that, you know, is Fernand. How can we be implicated in any way? All we have got to do is, to keep our own counsel, and remain perfectly quiet, not breathing a word to any living soul; and you will see that the storm will pass away without in the least affecting us.”

“Amen!” responded Caderousse, waving his hand in token of adieu to Danglars, and bending his steps towards the Allees de Meillan, moving his head to and fro, and muttering as he went, after the manner of one whose mind was overcharged with one absorbing idea.

“So far, then,” said Danglars, mentally, “all has gone as I would have it. I am, temporarily, commander of the Pharaon, with the certainty of being permanently so, if that fool of a Caderousse can be persuaded to hold his tongue. My only fear is the chance of Dantes being released. But, there, he is in the hands of Justice; and,” added he with a smile, “she will take her own.” So saying, he leaped into a boat, desiring to be rowed on board the Pharaon, where M. Morrel had agreed to meet him.

Chapter 6

The Deputy Procureur du Roi.

In one of the aristocratic mansions built by Puget in the Rue du Grand Cours opposite the Medusa fountain, a second marriage feast was being celebrated, almost at the same hour with the nuptial repast given by Dantes. In this case, however, although the occasion of the entertainment was similar, the company was strikingly dissimilar. Instead of a rude mixture of sailors, soldiers, and those belonging to the humblest grade of life, the present assembly was composed of the very flower of Marseilles society, — magistrates who had resigned their office during the usurper’s reign; officers who had deserted from the imperial army and joined forces with Conde; and younger members of families, brought up to hate and execrate the man whom five years of exile would convert into a martyr, and fifteen of restoration elevate to the rank of a god.

The guests were still at table, and the heated and energetic conversation that prevailed betrayed the violent and vindictive passions that then agitated each dweller of the South, where unhappily, for five centuries religious strife had long given increased bitterness to the violence of party feeling.

The emperor, now king of the petty Island of Elba, after having held sovereign sway over one-half of the world, counting as his subjects a small population of five or six thousand souls, — after having been accustomed to hear the “Vive Napoleons” of a hundred and twenty millions of human beings, uttered in ten different languages, — was looked upon here as a ruined man, separated forever from any fresh connection with France or claim to her throne.

The magistrates freely discussed their political views; the military part of the company talked unreservedly of Moscow and Leipsic, while the women commented on the divorce of Josephine. It was not over the downfall of the man, but over the defeat of the Napoleonic idea, that they rejoiced, and in this they foresaw for themselves the bright and cheering prospect of a revivified political existence.

An old man, decorated with the cross of Saint Louis, now rose and proposed the health of King Louis XVIII. It was the Marquis de Saint-Meran. This toast, recalling at once the patient exile of Hartwell and the peace-loving King of France, excited universal enthusiasm; glasses were elevated in the air a l’Anglais, and the ladies, snatching their bouquets from their fair bosoms, strewed the table with their floral treasures. In a word, an almost poetical fervor prevailed.

“Ah,” said the Marquise de Saint-Meran, a woman with a stern, forbidding eye, though still noble and distinguished in appearance, despite her fifty years — ”ah, these revolutionists, who have driven us from those very possessions they afterwards purchased for a mere trifle during the Reign of Terror, would be compelled to own, were they here, that all true devotion was on our side, since we were content to follow the fortunes of a falling monarch, while they, on the contrary, made their fortune by worshipping the rising sun; yes, yes, they could not help admitting that the king, for whom we sacrificed rank, wealth, and station was truly our ‘Louis the well-beloved,’ while their wretched usurper his been, and ever will be, to them their evil genius, their ‘Napoleon the accursed.’ Am I not right, Villefort?”

“I beg your pardon, madame. I really must pray you to excuse me, but — in truth — I was not attending to the conversation.”

“Marquise, marquise!” interposed the old nobleman who had proposed the toast, “let the young people alone; let me tell you, on one’s wedding day there are more agreeable subjects of conversation than dry politics.”

“Never mind, dearest mother,” said a young and lovely girl, with a profusion of light brown hair, and eyes that seemed to float in liquid crystal, “‘tis all my fault for seizing upon M. de Villefort, so as to prevent his listening to what you said. But there — now take him — he is your own for as long as you like. M. Villefort, I beg to remind you my mother speaks to you.”

“If the marquise will deign to repeat the words I but imperfectly caught, I shall be delighted to answer,” said M. de Villefort.

“Never mind, Renee,” replied the marquise, with a look of tenderness that seemed out of keeping with her harsh dry features; but, however all other feelings may be withered in a woman’s nature, there is always one bright smiling spot in the desert of her heart, and that is the shrine of maternal love. “I forgive you. What I was saying, Villefort, was, that the Bonapartists had not our sincerity, enthusiasm, or devotion.”

“They had, however, what supplied the place of those fine qualities,” replied the young man, “and that was fanaticism. Napoleon is the Mahomet of the West, and is worshipped by his commonplace but ambitions followers, not only as a leader and lawgiver, but also as the personification of equality.”

“He!” cried the marquise: “Napoleon the type of equality! For mercy’s sake, then, what would you call Robespierre? Come, come, do not strip the latter of his just rights to bestow them on the Corsican, who, to my mind, has usurped quite enough.”

“Nay, madame; I would place each of these heroes on his right pedestal — that of Robespierre on his scaffold in the Place Louis Quinze; that of Napoleon on the column of the Place Vendome. The only difference consists in the opposite character of the equality advocated by these two men; one is the equality that elevates, the other is the equality that degrades; one brings a king within reach of the guillotine, the other elevates the people to a level with the throne. Observe,” said Villefort, smiling, “I do not mean to deny that both these men were revolutionary scoundrels, and that the 9th Thermidor and the 4th of April, in the year 1814, were lucky days for France, worthy of being gratefully remembered by every friend to monarchy and civil order; and that explains how it comes to pass that, fallen, as I trust he is forever, Napoleon has still retained a train of parasitical satellites. Still, marquise, it has been so with other usurpers — Cromwell, for instance, who was not half so bad as Napoleon, had his partisans and advocates.”

“Do you know, Villefort, that you are talking in a most dreadfully revolutionary strain? But I excuse it, it is impossible to expect the son of a Girondin to be free from a small spice of the old leaven.” A deep crimson suffused the countenance of Villefort.

“‘Tis true, madame,” answered he, “that my father was a Girondin, but he was not among the number of those who voted for the king’s death; he was an equal sufferer with yourself during the Reign of Terror, and had well-nigh lost his head on the same scaffold on which your father perished.”

“True,” replied the marquise, without wincing in the slightest degree at the tragic remembrance thus called up; “but bear in mind, if you please, that our respective parents underwent persecution and proscription from diametrically opposite principles; in proof of which I may remark, that while my family remained among the stanchest adherents of the exiled princes, your father lost no time in joining the new government; and that while the Citizen Noirtier was a Girondin, the Count Noirtier became a senator.”

“Dear mother,” interposed Renee, “you know very well it was agreed that all these disagreeable reminiscences should forever be laid aside.”

“Suffer me, also, madame,” replied Villefort, “to add my earnest request to Mademoiselle de Saint-Meran’s, that you will kindly allow the veil of oblivion to cover and conceal the past. What avails recrimination over matters wholly past recall? For my own part, I have laid aside even the name of my father, and altogether disown his political principles. He was — nay, probably may still be — a Bonapartist, and is called Noirtier; I, on the contrary, am a stanch royalist, and style myself de Villefort. Let what may remain of revolutionary sap exhaust itself and die away with the old trunk, and condescend only to regard the young shoot which has started up at a distance from the parent tree, without having the power, any more than the wish, to separate entirely from the stock from which it sprung.”

“Bravo, Villefort!” cried the marquis; “excellently well said! Come, now, I have hopes of obtaining what I have been for years endeavoring to persuade the marquise to promise; namely, a perfect amnesty and forgetfulness of the past.”

“With all my heart,” replied the marquise; “let the past be forever forgotten. I promise you it affords me as little pleasure to revive it as it does you. All I ask is, that Villefort will be firm and inflexible for the future in his political principles. Remember, also, Villefort, that we have pledged ourselves to his majesty for your fealty and strict loyalty, and that at our recommendation the king consented to forget the past, as I do” (and here she extended to him her hand) — ”as I now do at your entreaty. But bear in mind, that should there fall in your way any one guilty of conspiring against the government, you will be so much the more bound to visit the offence with rigorous punishment, as it is known you belong to a suspected family.”

“Alas, madame,” returned Villefort, “my profession, as well as the times in which we live, compels me to be severe. I have already successfully conducted several public prosecutions, and brought the offenders to merited punishment. But we have not done with the thing yet.”

“Do you, indeed, think so?” inquired the marquise.

"I am, at least, fearful of it. Napoleon, in the Island of Elba, is too near France, and his proximity keeps up the hopes of his partisans. Marseilles is filled with half-pay officers, who are daily, under one frivolous pretext or other, getting up quarrels with the royalists; from hence arise continual and fatal duels among the higher classes of persons, and assassinations in the lower."

"You have heard, perhaps," said the Comte de Salvieux, one of M. de Saint-Meran's oldest friends, and chamberlain to the Comte d'Artois, "that the Holy Alliance purpose removing him from thence?"

"Yes; they were talking about it when we left Paris," said M. de Saint-Meran; "and where is it decided to transfer him?"

"To Saint Helena."

"For heaven's sake, where is that?" asked the marquise.

"An island situated on the other side of the equator, at least two thousand leagues from here," replied the count.

"So much the better. As Villefort observes, it is a great act of folly to have left such a man between Corsica, where he was born, and Naples, of which his brother-in-law is king, and face to face with Italy, the sovereignty of which he coveted for his son."

"Unfortunately," said Villefort, "there are the treaties of 1814, and we cannot molest Napoleon without breaking those compacts."

"Oh, well, we shall find some way out of it," responded M. de Salvieux. "There wasn't any trouble over treaties when it was a question of shooting the poor Duc d'Enghien."

"Well," said the marquise, "it seems probable that, by the aid of the Holy Alliance, we shall be rid of Napoleon; and we must trust to the vigilance of M. de Villefort to purify Marseilles of his partisans. The king is either a king or no king; if he be acknowledged as sovereign of France, he should be upheld in peace and tranquillity; and this can best be effected by employing the most inflexible agents to put down every attempt at conspiracy — 'tis the best and surest means of preventing mischief."

"Unfortunately, madame," answered Villefort, "the strong arm of the law is not called upon to interfere until the evil has taken place."

"Then all he has got to do is to endeavor to repair it."

"Nay, madame, the law is frequently powerless to effect this; all it can do is to avenge the wrong done."

"Oh, M. de Villefort," cried a beautiful young creature, daughter to the Comte de Salvieux, and the cherished friend of Mademoiselle de Saint-Meran, "do try and get up some famous trial while we are at Marseilles. I never was in a law-court; I am told it is so very amusing!"

"Amusing, certainly," replied the young man, "inasmuch as, instead of shedding tears as at the fictitious tale of woe produced at a theatre, you behold in a law-court a case of real and genuine distress — a drama of life. The prisoner whom you there see pale, agitated, and alarmed, instead of — as is the case when a curtain falls on a tragedy — going home to sup peacefully with his family, and then retiring to rest, that he may recommence his mimic woes on the morrow, — is removed from your sight merely to be reconducted to his prison and delivered up to the executioner. I leave you to judge how far your nerves are calculated to bear you through such a scene. Of this, however, be assured, that should any favorable opportunity present itself, I will not fail to offer you the choice of being present."

"For shame, M. de Villefort!" said Renee, becoming quite pale; "don't you see how you are frightening us? — and yet you laugh."

"What would you have? 'Tis like a duel. I have already recorded sentence of death, five or six times, against the movers of political conspiracies, and who can say how many daggers may be ready sharpened, and only waiting a favorable opportunity to be buried in my heart?"

"Gracious heavens, M. de Villefort," said Renee, becoming more and more terrified; "you surely are not in earnest."

"Indeed I am," replied the young magistrate with a smile; "and in the interesting trial that young lady is anxious to witness, the case would only be still more aggravated. Suppose, for instance, the prisoner, as is more than probable, to have served under Napoleon — well, can you expect for an instant, that one accustomed, at the word of his commander, to rush fearlessly on the very bayonets of his foe, will scruple more to drive a stiletto into the heart of one he knows to be his personal enemy, than to slaughter his fellow-creatures, merely because bidden to do so by one he is bound to obey? Besides, one requires the excitement of being hateful in the eyes of the accused, in order to lash one's self into a state of sufficient vehemence and power. I would not choose to see the man against whom I pleaded smile, as though in mockery of my words. No; my pride is to see the accused pale, agitated, and as though beaten out of all composure by the fire of my eloquence.” Renee uttered a smothered exclamation.

“Bravo!” cried one of the guests; “that is what I call talking to some purpose.”

“Just the person we require at a time like the present,” said a second.

“What a splendid business that last case of yours was, my dear Villefort!” remarked a third; “I mean the trial of the man for murdering his father. Upon my word, you killed him ere the executioner had laid his hand upon him.”

“Oh, as for parricides, and such dreadful people as that,” interposed Renee, “it matters very little what is done to them; but as regards poor unfortunate creatures whose only crime consists in having mixed themselves up in political intrigues” —

“Why, that is the very worst offence they could possibly commit; for, don’t you see, Renee, the king is the father of his people, and he who shall plot or contrive aught against the life and safety of the parent of thirty-two millions of souls, is a parricide upon a fearfully great scale?”

“I don’t know anything about that,” replied Renee; “but, M. de Villefort, you have promised me — have you not? — always to show mercy to those I plead for.”

“Make yourself quite easy on that point,” answered Villefort, with one of his sweetest smiles; “you and I will always consult upon our verdicts.”

“My love,” said the marquise, “attend to your doves, your lap-dogs, and embroidery, but do not meddle with what you do not understand. Nowadays the military profession is in abeyance and the magisterial robe is the badge of honor. There is a wise Latin proverb that is very much in point.”

“Cedant arma togae,” said Villefort with a bow.

“I cannot speak Latin,” responded the marquise.

“Well,” said Renee, “I cannot help regretting you had not chosen some other profession than your own — a physician, for instance. Do you know I always felt a shudder at the idea of even a destroying angel?”

“Dear, good Renee,” whispered Villefort, as he gazed with unutterable tenderness on the lovely speaker.

“Let us hope, my child,” cried the marquis, “that M. de Villefort may prove the moral and political physician of this province; if so, he will have achieved a noble work.”

“And one which will go far to efface the recollection of his father’s conduct,” added the incorrigible marquise.

“Madame,” replied Villefort, with a mournful smile, “I have already had the honor to observe that my father has — at least, I hope so — abjured his past errors, and that he is, at the present moment, a firm and zealous friend to religion and order — a better royalist, possibly, than his son; for he has to atone for past dereliction, while I have no other impulse than warm, decided preference and conviction.” Having made this well-turned speech, Villefort looked carefully around to mark the effect of his oratory, much as he would have done had he been addressing the bench in open court.

“Do you know, my dear Villefort,” cried the Comte de Salvieux, “that is exactly what I myself said the other day at the Tuileries, when questioned by his majesty’s principal chamberlain touching the singularity of an alliance between the son of a Girondin and the daughter of an officer of the Duc de Conde; and I assure you he seemed fully to comprehend that this mode of reconciling political differences was based upon sound and excellent principles. Then the king, who, without our suspecting it, had overheard our conversation, interrupted us by saying, ‘Villefort’ — observe that the king did not pronounce the word Noirtier, but, on the contrary, placed considerable emphasis on that of Villefort — ’Villefort,’ said his majesty, ‘is a young man of great judgment and discretion, who will be sure to make a figure in his profession; I like him much, and it gave me great pleasure to hear that he was about to become the son-in-law of the Marquis and Marquise de Saint-Meran. I should myself have recommended the match, had not the noble marquis anticipated my wishes by requesting my consent to it.’“

“Is it possible the king could have condescended so far as to express himself so favorably of me?” asked the enraptured Villefort.

“I give you his very words; and if the marquis chooses to be candid, he will confess that they perfectly agree with what his majesty said to him, when he went six months ago to consult him upon the subject of your espousing his daughter.”

“That is true,” answered the marquis.

“How much do I owe this gracious prince! What is there I would not do to evince my earnest gratitude!”

“That is right,” cried the marquise. “I love to see you thus. Now, then, were a conspirator to fall into your hands, he would be most welcome.”

“For my part, dear mother.” interposed Renee, “I trust your wishes will not prosper, and that Providence will only permit petty offenders, poor debtors, and miserable cheats to fall into M. de Villefort’s hands, — then I shall be contented.”

“Just the same as though you prayed that a physician might only be called upon to prescribe for headaches, measles, and the stings of wasps, or any other slight affection of the epidermis. If you wish to see me the king’s attorney, you must desire for me some of those violent and dangerous diseases from the cure of which so much honor redounds to the physician.”

At this moment, and as though the utterance of Villefort’s wish had sufficed to effect its accomplishment, a servant entered the room, and whispered a few words in his ear. Villefort immediately rose from table and quitted the room upon the plea of urgent business; he soon, however, returned, his whole face beaming with delight. Renee regarded him with fond affection; and certainly his handsome features, lit up as they then were with more than usual fire and animation, seemed formed to excite the innocent admiration with which she gazed on her graceful and intelligent lover.

“You were wishing just now,” said Villefort, addressing her, “that I were a doctor instead of a lawyer. Well, I at least resemble the disciples of Esculapius in one thing — that of not being able to call a day my own, not even that of my betrothal.”

“And wherefore were you called away just now?” asked Mademoiselle de Saint-Meran, with an air of deep interest.

“For a very serious matter, which bids fair to make work for the executioner.”

“How dreadful!” exclaimed Renee, turning pale.

“Is it possible?” burst simultaneously from all who were near enough to the magistrate to hear his words.

“Why, if my information prove correct, a sort of Bonaparte conspiracy has just been discovered.”

“Can I believe my ears?” cried the marquise.

“I will read you the letter containing the accusation, at least,” said Villefort: —

“‘The king’s attorney is informed by a friend to the throne and the religions institutions of his country, that one named Edmond Dantes, mate of the ship Pharaon, this day arrived from Smyrna, after having touched at

Naples and Porto-Ferrajo, has been the bearer of a letter from Murat to the usurper, and again taken charge of another letter from the usurper to the Bonapartist club in Paris. Ample corroboration of this statement may be obtained by arresting the above-mentioned Edmond Dantes, who either carries the letter for Paris about with him, or has it at his father's abode. Should it not be found in the possession of father or son, then it will assuredly be discovered in the cabin belonging to the said Dantes on board the Pharaon.'"

"But," said Renee, "this letter, which, after all, is but an anonymous scrawl, is not even addressed to you, but to the king's attorney."

"True; but that gentleman being absent, his secretary, by his orders, opened his letters; thinking this one of importance, he sent for me, but not finding me, took upon himself to give the necessary orders for arresting the accused party."

"Then the guilty person is absolutely in custody?" said the marquise.

"Nay, dear mother, say the accused person. You know we cannot yet pronounce him guilty."

"He is in safe custody," answered Villefort; "and rely upon it, if the letter is found, he will not be likely to be trusted abroad again, unless he goes forth under the especial protection of the headsman."

"And where is the unfortunate being?" asked Renee.

"He is at my house."

"Come, come, my friend," interrupted the marquise, "do not neglect your duty to linger with us. You are the king's servant, and must go wherever that service calls you."

"O Villefort!" cried Renee, clasping her hands, and looking towards her lover with piteous earnestness, "be merciful on this the day of our betrothal."

The young man passed round to the side of the table where the fair pleader sat, and leaning over her chair said tenderly, —

"To give you pleasure, my sweet Renee, I promise to show all the lenity in my power; but if the charges brought against this Bonapartist hero prove correct, why, then, you really must give me leave to order his head to be cut off." Renee shuddered.

"Never mind that foolish girl, Villefort," said the marquise. "She will soon get over these things." So saying, Madame de Saint-Meran extended her dry bony hand to Villefort, who, while imprinting a son-in-law's respectful salute on it, looked at Renee, as much as to say, “I must try and fancy ‘tis your dear hand I kiss, as it should have been.”

“These are mournful auspices to accompany a betrothal,” sighed poor Renee.

“Upon my word, child!” exclaimed the angry marquise, “your folly exceeds all bounds. I should be glad to know what connection there can possibly be between your sickly sentimentality and the affairs of the state!”

“O mother!” murmured Renee.

“Nay, madame, I pray you pardon this little traitor. I promise you that to make up for her want of loyalty, I will be most inflexibly severe;” then casting an expressive glance at his betrothed, which seemed to say, “Fear not, for your dear sake my justice shall be tempered with mercy,” and receiving a sweet and approving smile in return, Villefort quitted the room.

Chapter 7

The Examination.

No sooner had Villefort left the salon, than he assumed the grave air of a man who holds the balance of life and death in his hands. Now, in spite of the nobility of his countenance, the command of which, like a finished actor, he had carefully studied before the glass, it was by no means easy for him to assume an air of judicial severity. Except the recollection of the line of politics his father had adopted, and which might interfere, unless he acted with the greatest prudence, with his own career, Gerard de Villefort was as happy as a man could be. Already rich, he held a high official situation, though only twenty-seven. He was about to marry a young and charming woman, whom he loved, not passionately, but reasonably, as became a deputy attorney of the king; and besides her personal attractions, which were very great, Mademoiselle de Saint-Meran's family possessed considerable political influence, which they would, of course, exert in his favor. The dowry of his wife amounted to fifty thousand crowns, and he had, besides, the prospect of seeing her fortune increased to half a million at her father's death. These considerations naturally gave Villefort a feeling of such complete felicity that his mind was fairly dazzled in its contemplation.

At the door he met the commissary of police, who was waiting for him. The sight of this officer recalled Villefort from the third heaven to earth; he composed his face, as we have before described, and said, “I have read the letter, sir, and you have acted rightly in arresting this man; now inform me what you have discovered concerning him and the conspiracy.”

“We know nothing as yet of the conspiracy, monsieur; all the papers found have been sealed up and placed on your desk. The prisoner himself is named Edmond Dantes, mate on board the three-master the Pharaon, trading in cotton with Alexandria and Smyrna, and belonging to Morrel & Son, of Marseilles.”

“Before he entered the merchant service, had he ever served in the marines?”

“Oh, no, monsieur, he is very young.”

"How old?"

"Nineteen or twenty at the most."

At this moment, and as Villefort had arrived at the corner of the Rue des Conseils, a man, who seemed to have been waiting for him, approached; it was M. Morrel.

"Ah, M. de Villefort," cried he, "I am delighted to see you. Some of your people have committed the strangest mistake — they have just arrested Edmond Dantes, mate of my vessel."

"I know it, monsieur," replied Villefort, "and I am now going to examine him."

"Oh," said Morrel, carried away by his friendship, "you do not know him, and I do. He is the most estimable, the most trustworthy creature in the world, and I will venture to say, there is not a better seaman in all the merchant service. Oh, M. de Villefort, I beseech your indulgence for him."

Villefort, as we have seen, belonged to the aristocratic party at Marseilles, Morrel to the plebeian; the first was a royalist, the other suspected of Bonapartism. Villefort looked disdainfully at Morrel, and replied, —

"You are aware, monsieur, that a man may be estimable and trustworthy in private life, and the best seaman in the merchant service, and yet be, politically speaking, a great criminal. Is it not true?"

The magistrate laid emphasis on these words, as if he wished to apply them to the owner himself, while his eyes seemed to plunge into the heart of one who, interceding for another, had himself need of indulgence. Morrel reddened, for his own conscience was not quite clear on politics; besides, what Dantes had told him of his interview with the grand-marshal, and what the emperor had said to him, embarrassed him. He replied, however, —

"I entreat you, M. de Villefort, be, as you always are, kind and equitable, and give him back to us soon." This give us sounded revolutionary in the deputy's ears.

"Ah, ah," murmured he, "is Dantes then a member of some Carbonari society, that his protector thus employs the collective form? He was, if I recollect, arrested in a tavern, in company with a great many others." Then he added, "Monsieur, you may rest assured I shall perform my duty impartially, and that if he be innocent you shall not have appealed to me in vain; should he, however, be guilty, in this present epoch, impunity would furnish a dangerous example, and I must do my duty."

As he had now arrived at the door of his own house, which adjoined the Palais de Justice, he entered, after having, coldly saluted the shipowner, who stood, as if petrified, on the spot where Villefort had left him. The ante-chamber was full of police agents and gendarmes, in the midst of whom, carefully watched, but calm and smiling, stood the prisoner. Villefort traversed the ante-chamber, cast a side glance at Dantes, and taking a packet which a gendarme offered him, disappeared, saying, “Bring in the prisoner.”

Rapid as had been Villefort’s glance, it had served to give him an idea of the man he was about to interrogate. He had recognized intelligence in the high forehead, courage in the dark eye and bent brow, and frankness in the thick lips that showed a set of pearly teeth. Villefort’s first impression was favorable; but he had been so often warned to mistrust first impulses, that he applied the maxim to the impression, forgetting the difference between the two words. He stifled, therefore, the feelings of compassion that were rising, composed his features, and sat down, grim and sombre, at his desk. An instant after Dantes entered. He was pale, but calm and collected, and saluting his judge with easy politeness, looked round for a seat, as if he had been in M. Morrel’s salon. It was then that he encountered for the first time Villefort’s look, — that look peculiar to the magistrate, who, while seeming to read the thoughts of others, betrays nothing of his own.

“Who and what are you?” demanded Villefort, turning over a pile of papers, containing information relative to the prisoner, that a police agent had given to him on his entry, and that, already, in an hour’s time, had swelled to voluminous proportions, thanks to the corrupt espionage of which “the accused” is always made the victim.

“My name is Edmond Dantes,” replied the young man calmly; “I am mate of the Pharaon, belonging to Messrs. Morrel & Son.”

“Your age?” continued Villefort.

“Nineteen,” returned Dantes.

“What were you doing at the moment you were arrested?”

“I was at the festival of my marriage, monsieur,” said the young man, his voice slightly tremulous, so great was the contrast between that happy moment and the painful ceremony he was now undergoing; so great was the contrast between the sombre aspect of M. de Villefort and the radiant face of Mercedes.

"You were at the festival of your marriage?" said the deputy, shuddering in spite of himself.

"Yes, monsieur; I am on the point of marrying a young girl I have been attached to for three years." Villefort, impassive as he was, was struck with this coincidence; and the tremulous voice of Dantes, surprised in the midst of his happiness, struck a sympathetic chord in his own bosom — he also was on the point of being married, and he was summoned from his own happiness to destroy that of another. "This philosophic reflection," thought he, "will make a great sensation at M. de Saint-Meran's;" and he arranged mentally, while Dantes awaited further questions, the antithesis by which orators often create a reputation for eloquence. When this speech was arranged, Villefort turned to Dantes.

"Go on, sir," said he.

"What would you have me say?"

"Give all the information in your power."

"Tell me on which point you desire information, and I will tell all I know; only," added he, with a smile, "I warn you I know very little."

"Have you served under the usurper?"

"I was about to be mustered into the Royal Marines when he fell."

"It is reported your political opinions are extreme," said Villefort, who had never heard anything of the kind, but was not sorry to make this inquiry, as if it were an accusation.

"My political opinions!" replied Dantes. "Alas, sir, I never had any opinions. I am hardly nineteen; I know nothing; I have no part to play. If I obtain the situation I desire, I shall owe it to M. Morrel. Thus all my opinions — I will not say public, but private — are confined to these three sentiments, — I love my father, I respect M. Morrel, and I adore Mercedes. This, sir, is all I can tell you, and you see how uninteresting it is." As Dantes spoke, Villefort gazed at his ingenuous and open countenance, and recollected the words of Renee, who, without knowing who the culprit was, had besought his indulgence for him. With the deputy's knowledge of crime and criminals, every word the young man uttered convinced him more and more of his innocence. This lad, for he was scarcely a man, — simple, natural, eloquent with that eloquence of the heart never found when sought for; full of affection for everybody, because he was happy, and because happiness renders even the wicked good — extended his affection even to his judge, spite of Villefort's severe look and stern accent. Dantes seemed full of kindness.

"Pardieu," said Villefort, "he is a noble fellow. I hope I shall gain Renee's favor easily by obeying the first command she ever imposed on me. I shall have at least a pressure of the hand in public, and a sweet kiss in private." Full of this idea, Villefort's face became so joyous, that when he turned to Dantes, the latter, who had watched the change on his physiognomy, was smiling also.

"Sir," said Villefort, "have you any enemies, at least, that you know."

"I have enemies?" replied Dantes; "my position is not sufficiently elevated for that. As for my disposition, that is, perhaps, somewhat too hasty; but I have striven to repress it. I have had ten or twelve sailors under me, and if you question them, they will tell you that they love and respect me, not as a father, for I am too young, but as an elder brother."

"But you may have excited jealousy. You are about to become captain at nineteen — an elevated post; you are about to marry a pretty girl, who loves you; and these two pieces of good fortune may have excited the envy of some one."

"You are right; you know men better than I do, and what you say may possibly be the case, I confess; but if such persons are among my acquaintances I prefer not to know it, because then I should be forced to hate them."

"You are wrong; you should always strive to see clearly around you. You seem a worthy young man; I will depart from the strict line of my duty to aid you in discovering the author of this accusation. Here is the paper; do you know the writing?" As he spoke, Villefort drew the letter from his pocket, and presented it to Dantes. Dantes read it. A cloud passed over his brow as he said, —

"No, monsieur, I do not know the writing, and yet it is tolerably plain. Whoever did it writes well. I am very fortunate," added he, looking gratefully at Villefort, "to be examined by such a man as you; for this envious person is a real enemy." And by the rapid glance that the young man's eyes shot forth, Villefort saw how much energy lay hid beneath this mildness.

"Now," said the deputy, "answer me frankly, not as a prisoner to a judge, but as one man to another who takes an interest in him, what truth is there in the accusation contained in this anonymous letter?” And Villefort threw disdainfully on his desk the letter Dantes had just given back to him.

“None at all. I will tell you the real facts. I swear by my honor as a sailor, by my love for Mercedes, by the life of my father” —

“Speak, monsieur,” said Villefort. Then, internally, “If Renee could see me, I hope she would be satisfied, and would no longer call me a decapitator.”

“Well, when we quitted Naples, Captain Leclere was attacked with a brain fever. As we had no doctor on board, and he was so anxious to arrive at Elba, that he would not touch at any other port, his disorder rose to such a height, that at the end of the third day, feeling he was dying, he called me to him. ‘My dear Dantes,’ said he, ‘swear to perform what I am going to tell you, for it is a matter of the deepest importance.’

“‘I swear, captain,’ replied I.

“‘Well, as after my death the command devolves on you as mate, assume the command, and bear up for the Island of Elba, disembark at Porto-Ferrajo, ask for the grand-marshal, give him this letter — perhaps they will give you another letter, and charge you with a commission. You will accomplish what I was to have done, and derive all the honor and profit from it.’

“‘I will do it, captain; but perhaps I shall not be admitted to the grand marshal’s presence as easily as you expect?’

“‘Here is a ring that will obtain audience of him, and remove every difficulty,’ said the captain. At these words he gave me a ring. It was time — two hours after he was delirious; the next day he died.”

“And what did you do then?”

“What I ought to have done, and what every one would have done in my place. Everywhere the last requests of a dying man are sacred; but with a sailor the last requests of his superior are commands. I sailed for the Island of Elba, where I arrived the next day; I ordered everybody to remain on board, and went on shore alone. As I had expected, I found some difficulty in obtaining access to the grand-marshal; but I sent the ring I had received from the captain to him, and was instantly admitted. He questioned me concerning Captain Leclere’s death; and, as the latter had told me, gave me a letter to carry on to a person in Paris. I undertook it because it was what my captain had bade me do. I landed here, regulated the affairs of the vessel, and hastened to visit my affianced bride, whom I found more lovely than ever. Thanks to M. Morrel, all the forms were got over; in a word I was, as I told you, at my marriage-feast; and I should have been married in an hour, and to-morrow I intended to start for Paris, had I not been arrested on this charge which you as well as I now see to be unjust."

"Ah," said Villefort, "this seems to me the truth. If you have been culpable, it was imprudence, and this imprudence was in obedience to the orders of your captain. Give up this letter you have brought from Elba, and pass your word you will appear should you be required, and go and rejoin your friends.

"I am free, then, sir?" cried Dantes joyfully.

"Yes; but first give me this letter."

"You have it already, for it was taken from me with some others which I see in that packet."

"Stop a moment," said the deputy, as Dantes took his hat and gloves. "To whom is it addressed?"

"To Monsieur Noirtier, Rue Coq-Heron, Paris." Had a thunderbolt fallen into the room, Villefort could not have been more stupefied. He sank into his seat, and hastily turning over the packet, drew forth the fatal letter, at which he glanced with an expression of terror.

"M. Noirtier, Rue Coq-Heron, No. 13," murmured he, growing still paler.

"Yes," said Dantes; "do you know him?"

"No," replied Villefort; "a faithful servant of the king does not know conspirators."

"It is a conspiracy, then?" asked Dantes, who after believing himself free, now began to feel a tenfold alarm. "I have, however, already told you, sir, I was entirely ignorant of the contents of the letter."

"Yes; but you knew the name of the person to whom it was addressed," said Villefort.

"I was forced to read the address to know to whom to give it."

"Have you shown this letter to any one?" asked Villefort, becoming still more pale.

"To no one, on my honor."

"Everybody is ignorant that you are the bearer of a letter from the Island of Elba, and addressed to M. Noirtier?"

"Everybody, except the person who gave it to me."

"And that was too much, far too much," murmured Villefort. Villefort's brow darkened more and more, his white lips and clinched teeth filled

Dantes with apprehension. After reading the letter, Villefort covered his face with his hands.

“Oh,” said Dantes timidly, “what is the matter?” Villefort made no answer, but raised his head at the expiration of a few seconds, and again perused the letter.

“And you say that you are ignorant of the contents of this letter?”

“I give you my word of honor, sir,” said Dantes; “but what is the matter? You are ill — shall I ring for assistance? — shall I call?”

“No,” said Villefort, rising hastily; “stay where you are. It is for me to give orders here, and not you.”

“Monsieur,” replied Dantes proudly, “it was only to summon assistance for you.”

“I want none; it was a temporary indisposition. Attend to yourself; answer me.” Dantes waited, expecting a question, but in vain. Villefort fell back on his chair, passed his hand over his brow, moist with perspiration, and, for the third time, read the letter.

“Oh, if he knows the contents of this!” murmured he, “and that Noirtier is the father of Villefort, I am lost!” And he fixed his eyes upon Edmond as if he would have penetrated his thoughts.

“Oh, it is impossible to doubt it,” cried he, suddenly.

“In heaven’s name!” cried the unhappy young man, “if you doubt me, question me; I will answer you.” Villefort made a violent effort, and in a tone he strove to render firm, —

“Sir,” said he, “I am no longer able, as I had hoped, to restore you immediately to liberty; before doing so, I must consult the trial justice; what my own feeling is you already know.”

“Oh, monsieur,” cried Dantes, “you have been rather a friend than a judge.”

“Well, I must detain you some time longer, but I will strive to make it as short as possible. The principal charge against you is this letter, and you see” — Villefort approached the fire, cast it in, and waited until it was entirely consumed.

“You see, I destroy it?”

“Oh,” exclaimed Dantes, “you are goodness itself.”

“Listen,” continued Villefort; “you can now have confidence in me after what I have done.”

“Oh, command, and I will obey.”

"Listen; this is not a command, but advice I give you."

"Speak, and I will follow your advice."

"I shall detain you until this evening in the Palais de Justice. Should any one else interrogate you, say to him what you have said to me, but do not breathe a word of this letter."

"I promise." It was Villefort who seemed to entreat, and the prisoner who reassured him.

"You see," continued he, glancing toward the grate, where fragments of burnt paper fluttered in the flames, "the letter is destroyed; you and I alone know of its existence; should you, therefore, be questioned, deny all knowledge of it — deny it boldly, and you are saved."

"Be satisfied; I will deny it."

"It was the only letter you had?"

"It was."

"Swear it."

"I swear it."

Villefort rang. A police agent entered. Villefort whispered some words in his ear, to which the officer replied by a motion of his head.

"Follow him," said Villefort to Dantes. Dantes saluted Villefort and retired. Hardly had the door closed when Villefort threw himself half-fainting into a chair.

"Alas, alas," murmured he, "if the procureur himself had been at Marseilles I should have been ruined. This accursed letter would have destroyed all my hopes. Oh, my father, must your past career always interfere with my successes?" Suddenly a light passed over his face, a smile played round his set mouth, and his haggard eyes were fixed in thought.

"This will do," said he, "and from this letter, which might have ruined me, I will make my fortune. Now to the work I have in hand." And after having assured himself that the prisoner was gone, the deputy procureur hastened to the house of his betrothed.

Chapter 8

The Chateau D’If.

The commissary of police, as he traversed the ante-chamber, made a sign to two gendarmes, who placed themselves one on Dantes’ right and the other on his left. A door that communicated with the Palais de Justice was opened, and they went through a long range of gloomy corridors, whose appearance might have made even the boldest shudder. The Palais de Justice communicated with the prison, — a sombre edifice, that from its grated windows looks on the clock-tower of the Accoules. After numberless windings, Dantes saw a door with an iron wicket. The commissary took up an iron mallet and knocked thrice, every blow seeming to Dantes as if struck on his heart. The door opened, the two gendarmes gently pushed him forward, and the door closed with a loud sound behind him. The air he inhaled was no longer pure, but thick and mephitic, — he was in prison. He was conducted to a tolerably neat chamber, but grated and barred, and its appearance, therefore, did not greatly alarm him; besides, the words of Villefort, who seemed to interest himself so much, resounded still in his ears like a promise of freedom. It was four o’clock when Dantes was placed in this chamber. It was, as we have said, the 1st of March, and the prisoner was soon buried in darkness. The obscurity augmented the acuteness of his hearing; at the slightest sound he rose and hastened to the door, convinced they were about to liberate him, but the sound died away, and Dantes sank again into his seat. At last, about ten o’clock, and just as Dantes began to despair, steps were heard in the corridor, a key turned in the lock, the bolts creaked, the massy oaken door flew open, and a flood of light from two torches pervaded the apartment. By the torchlight Dantes saw the glittering sabres and carbines of four gendarmes. He had advanced at first, but stopped at the sight of this display of force.

“Are you come to fetch me?” asked he.

“Yes,” replied a gendarme.

“By the orders of the deputy procureur?”

"I believe so." The conviction that they came from M. de Villefort relieved all Dantes' apprehensions; he advanced calmly, and placed himself in the centre of the escort. A carriage waited at the door, the coachman was on the box, and a police officer sat beside him.

"Is this carriage for me?" said Dantes.

"It is for you," replied a gendarme.

Dantes was about to speak; but feeling himself urged forward, and having neither the power nor the intention to resist, he mounted the steps, and was in an instant seated inside between two gendarmes; the two others took their places opposite, and the carriage rolled heavily over the stones.

The prisoner glanced at the windows — they were grated; he had changed his prison for another that was conveying him he knew not whither. Through the grating, however, Dantes saw they were passing through the Rue Caisserie, and by the Rue Saint-Laurent and the Rue Taramis, to the port. Soon he saw the lights of La Consigne.

The carriage stopped, the officer descended, approached the guardhouse, a dozen soldiers came out and formed themselves in order; Dantes saw the reflection of their muskets by the light of the lamps on the quay.

"Can all this force be summoned on my account?" thought he.

The officer opened the door, which was locked, and, without speaking a word, answered Dantes' question; for he saw between the ranks of the soldiers a passage formed from the carriage to the port. The two gendarmes who were opposite to him descended first, then he was ordered to alight and the gendarmes on each side of him followed his example. They advanced towards a boat, which a custom-house officer held by a chain, near the quay.

The soldiers looked at Dantes with an air of stupid curiosity. In an instant he was placed in the stern-sheets of the boat, between the gendarmes, while the officer stationed himself at the bow; a shove sent the boat adrift, and four sturdy oarsmen impelled it rapidly towards the Pilon. At a shout from the boat, the chain that closes the mouth of the port was lowered and in a second they were, as Dantes knew, in the Frioul and outside the inner harbor.

The prisoner's first feeling was of joy at again breathing the pure air — for air is freedom; but he soon sighed, for he passed before La Reserve, where he had that morning been so happy, and now through the open windows came the laughter and revelry of a ball. Dantes folded his hands, raised his eyes to heaven, and prayed fervently.

The boat continued her voyage. They had passed the Tete de Morte, were now off the Anse du Pharo, and about to double the battery. This manoeuvre was incomprehensible to Dantes.

“Whither are you taking me?” asked he.

“You will soon know.”

“But still” —

“We are forbidden to give you any explanation.” Dantes, trained in discipline, knew that nothing would be more absurd than to question subordinates, who were forbidden to reply; and so he remained silent.

The most vague and wild thoughts passed through his mind. The boat they were in could not make a long voyage; there was no vessel at anchor outside the harbor; he thought, perhaps, they were going to leave him on some distant point. He was not bound, nor had they made any attempt to handcuff him; this seemed a good augury. Besides, had not the deputy, who had been so kind to him, told him that provided he did not pronounce the dreaded name of Noirtier, he had nothing to apprehend? Had not Villefort in his presence destroyed the fatal letter, the only proof against him?

He waited silently, striving to pierce through the darkness.

They had left the Ile Ratonneau, where the lighthouse stood, on the right, and were now opposite the Point des Catalans. It seemed to the prisoner that he could distinguish a feminine form on the beach, for it was there Mercedes dwelt. How was it that a presentiment did not warn Mercedes that her lover was within three hundred yards of her?

One light alone was visible; and Dantes saw that it came from Mercedes’ chamber. Mercedes was the only one awake in the whole settlement. A loud cry could be heard by her. But pride restrained him and he did not utter it. What would his guards think if they heard him shout like a madman?

He remained silent, his eyes fixed upon the light; the boat went on, but the prisoner thought only of Mercedes. An intervening elevation of land hid the light. Dantes turned and perceived that they had got out to sea. While he had been absorbed in thought, they had shipped their oars and hoisted sail; the boat was now moving with the wind.

In spite of his repugnance to address the guards, Dantes turned to the nearest gendarme, and taking his hand, —

"Comrade," said he, "I adjure you, as a Christian and a soldier, to tell me where we are going. I am Captain Dantes, a loyal Frenchman, thought accused of treason; tell me where you are conducting me, and I promise you on my honor I will submit to my fate."

The gendarme looked irresolutely at his companion, who returned for answer a sign that said, "I see no great harm in telling him now," and the gendarme replied, —

"You are a native of Marseilles, and a sailor, and yet you do not know where you are going?"

"On my honor, I have no idea."

"Have you no idea whatever?"

"None at all."

"That is impossible."

"I swear to you it is true. Tell me, I entreat."

"But my orders."

"Your orders do not forbid your telling me what I must know in ten minutes, in half an hour, or an hour. You see I cannot escape, even if I intended."

"Unless you are blind, or have never been outside the harbor, you must know."

"I do not."

"Look round you then." Dantes rose and looked forward, when he saw rise within a hundred yards of him the black and frowning rock on which stands the Chateau d'If. This gloomy fortress, which has for more than three hundred years furnished food for so many wild legends, seemed to Dantes like a scaffold to a malefactor.

"The Chateau d'If?" cried he, "what are we going there for?" The gendarme smiled.

"I am not going there to be imprisoned," said Dantes; "it is only used for political prisoners. I have committed no crime. Are there any magistrates or judges at the Chateau d'If?"

"There are only," said the gendarme, "a governor, a garrison, turnkeys, and good thick walls. Come, come, do not look so astonished, or you will make me think you are laughing at me in return for my good nature." Dantes pressed the gendarme's hand as though he would crush it.

"You think, then," said he, "that I am taken to the Chateau d'If to be imprisoned there?"

“It is probable; but there is no occasion to squeeze so hard.”

“Without any inquiry, without any formality?”

“All the formalities have been gone through; the inquiry is already made.”

“And so, in spite of M. de Villefort’s promises?”

“I do not know what M. de Villefort promised you,” said the gendarme, “but I know we are taking you to the Chateau d’If. But what are you doing? Help, comrades, help!”

By a rapid movement, which the gendarme’s practiced eye had perceived, Dantes sprang forward to precipitate himself into the sea; but four vigorous arms seized him as his feet quitted the bottom of the boat. He fell back cursing with rage.

“Good!” said the gendarme, placing his knee on his chest; “believe soft-spoken gentlemen again! Harkye, my friend, I have disobeyed my first order, but I will not disobey the second; and if you move, I will blow your brains out.” And he levelled his carbine at Dantes, who felt the muzzle against his temple.

For a moment the idea of struggling crossed his mind, and of so ending the unexpected evil that had overtaken him. But he bethought him of M. de Villefort’s promise; and, besides, death in a boat from the hand of a gendarme seemed too terrible. He remained motionless, but gnashing his teeth and wringing his hands with fury.

At this moment the boat came to a landing with a violent shock. One of the sailors leaped on shore, a cord creaked as it ran through a pulley, and Dantes guessed they were at the end of the voyage, and that they were mooring the boat.

His guards, taking him by the arms and coat-collar, forced him to rise, and dragged him towards the steps that lead to the gate of the fortress, while the police officer carrying a musket with fixed bayonet followed behind.

Dantes made no resistance; he was like a man in a dream: he saw soldiers drawn up on the embankment; he knew vaguely that he was ascending a flight of steps; he was conscious that he passed through a door, and that the door closed behind him; but all this indistinctly as through a mist. He did not even see the ocean, that terrible barrier against freedom, which the prisoners look upon with utter despair.

They halted for a minute, during which he strove to collect his thoughts. He looked around; he was in a court surrounded by high walls; he heard the measured tread of sentinels, and as they passed before the light he saw the barrels of their muskets shine.

They waited upwards of ten minutes. Certain Dantes could not escape, the gendarmes released him. They seemed awaiting orders. The orders came.

“Where is the prisoner?” said a voice.

“Here,” replied the gendarmes.

“Let him follow me; I will take him to his cell.”

“Go!” said the gendarmes, thrusting Dantes forward.

The prisoner followed his guide, who led him into a room almost under ground, whose bare and reeking walls seemed as though impregnated with tears; a lamp placed on a stool illumined the apartment faintly, and showed Dantes the features of his conductor, an under-jailer, ill-clothed, and of sullen appearance.

“Here is your chamber for to-night,” said he. “It is late, and the governor is asleep. To-morrow, perhaps, he may change you. In the meantime there is bread, water, and fresh straw; and that is all a prisoner can wish for. Goodnight.” And before Dantes could open his mouth — before he had noticed where the jailer placed his bread or the water — before he had glanced towards the corner where the straw was, the jailer disappeared, taking with him the lamp and closing the door, leaving stamped upon the prisoner’s mind the dim reflection of the dripping walls of his dungeon.

Dantes was alone in darkness and in silence — cold as the shadows that he felt breathe on his burning forehead. With the first dawn of day the jailer returned, with orders to leave Dantes where he was. He found the prisoner in the same position, as if fixed there, his eyes swollen with weeping. He had passed the night standing, and without sleep. The jailer advanced; Dantes appeared not to perceive him. He touched him on the shoulder. Edmond started.

“Have you not slept?” said the jailer.

“I do not know,” replied Dantes. The jailer stared.

“Are you hungry?” continued he.

“I do not know.”

“Do you wish for anything?”

“I wish to see the governor.” The jailer shrugged his shoulders and left the chamber.

Dantes followed him with his eyes, and stretched forth his hands towards the open door; but the door closed. All his emotion then burst forth; he cast himself on the ground, weeping bitterly, and asking himself what crime he had committed that he was thus punished.

The day passed thus; he scarcely tasted food, but walked round and round the cell like a wild beast in its cage. One thought in particular tormented him: namely, that during his journey hither he had sat so still, whereas he might, a dozen times, have plunged into the sea, and, thanks to his powers of swimming, for which he was famous, have gained the shore, concealed himself until the arrival of a Genoese or Spanish vessel, escaped to Spain or Italy, where Mercedes and his father could have joined him. He had no fears as to how he should live — good seamen are welcome everywhere. He spoke Italian like a Tuscan, and Spanish like a Castilian; he would have been free, and happy with Mercedes and his father, whereas he was now confined in the Chateau d'If, that impregnable fortress, ignorant of the future destiny of his father and Mercedes; and all this because he had trusted to Villefort's promise. The thought was maddening, and Dantes threw himself furiously down on his straw. The next morning at the same hour, the jailer came again.

"Well," said the jailer, "are you more reasonable to-day?" Dantes made no reply.

"Come, cheer up; is there anything that I can do for you?"

"I wish to see the governor."

"I have already told you it was impossible."

"Why so?"

"Because it is against prison rules, and prisoners must not even ask for it."

"What is allowed, then?"

"Better fare, if you pay for it, books, and leave to walk about."

"I do not want books, I am satisfied with my food, and do not care to walk about; but I wish to see the governor."

"If you worry me by repeating the same thing, I will not bring you any more to eat."

"Well, then," said Edmond, "if you do not, I shall die of hunger — that is all."

The jailer saw by his tone he would be happy to die; and as every prisoner is worth ten sous a day to his jailer, he replied in a more subdued tone.

“What you ask is impossible; but if you are very well behaved you will be allowed to walk about, and some day you will meet the governor, and if he chooses to reply, that is his affair.”

“But,” asked Dantes, “how long shall I have to wait?”

“Ah, a month — six months — a year.”

“It is too long a time. I wish to see him at once.”

“Ah,” said the jailer, “do not always brood over what is impossible, or you will be mad in a fortnight.”

“You think so?”

“Yes; we have an instance here; it was by always offering a million of francs to the governor for his liberty that an abbe became mad, who was in this chamber before you.”

“How long has he left it?”

“Two years.”

“Was he liberated, then?”

“No; he was put in a dungeon.”

“Listen!” said Dantes. “I am not an abbe, I am not mad; perhaps I shall be, but at present, unfortunately, I am not. I will make you another offer.”

“What is that?”

“I do not offer you a million, because I have it not; but I will give you a hundred crowns if, the first time you go to Marseilles, you will seek out a young girl named Mercedes, at the Catalans, and give her two lines from me.”

“If I took them, and were detected, I should lose my place, which is worth two thousand francs a year; so that I should be a great fool to run such a risk for three hundred.”

“Well,” said Dantes, “mark this; if you refuse at least to tell Mercedes I am here, I will some day hide myself behind the door, and when you enter I will dash out your brains with this stool.”

“Threats!” cried the jailer, retreating and putting himself on the defensive; “you are certainly going mad. The abbe began like you, and in three days you will be like him, mad enough to tie up; but, fortunately, there are dungeons here.” Dantes whirled the stool round his head.

“All right, all right,” said the jailer; “all right, since you will have it so. I will send word to the governor.”

“Very well,” returned Dantes, dropping the stool and sitting on it as if he were in reality mad. The jailer went out, and returned in an instant with a corporal and four soldiers.

“By the governor’s orders,” said he, “conduct the prisoner to the tier beneath.”

“To the dungeon, then,” said the corporal.

“Yes; we must put the madman with the madmen.” The soldiers seized Dantes, who followed passively.

He descended fifteen steps, and the door of a dungeon was opened, and he was thrust in. The door closed, and Dantes advanced with outstretched hands until he touched the wall; he then sat down in the corner until his eyes became accustomed to the darkness. The jailer was right; Dantes wanted but little of being utterly mad.

Chapter 9

The Evening of the Betrothal.

Villefort had, as we have said, hastened back to Madame de Saint-Meran’s in the Place du Grand Cours, and on entering the house found that the guests whom he had left at table were taking coffee in the salon. Renee was, with all the rest of the company, anxiously awaiting him, and his entrance was followed by a general exclamation.

“Well, Decapitator, Guardian of the State, Royalist, Brutus, what is the matter?” said one. “Speak out.”

“Are we threatened with a fresh Reign of Terror?” asked another.

“Has the Corsican ogre broken loose?” cried a third.

“Marquise,” said Villefort, approaching his future mother-in-law, “I request your pardon for thus leaving you. Will the marquis honor me by a few moments’ private conversation?”

“Ah, it is really a serious matter, then?” asked the marquis, remarking the cloud on Villefort’s brow.

“So serious that I must take leave of you for a few days; so,” added he, turning to Renee, “judge for yourself if it be not important.”

“You are going to leave us?” cried Renee, unable to hide her emotion at this unexpected announcement.

“Alas,” returned Villefort, “I must!”

“Where, then, are you going?” asked the marquise.

“That, madame, is an official secret; but if you have any commissions for Paris, a friend of mine is going there to-night, and will with pleasure undertake them.” The guests looked at each other.

“You wish to speak to me alone?” said the marquis.

“Yes, let us go to the library, please.” The marquis took his arm, and they left the salon.

“Well,” asked he, as soon as they were by themselves, “tell me what it is?”

“An affair of the greatest importance, that demands my immediate presence in Paris. Now, excuse the indiscretion, marquis, but have you any landed property?”

“All my fortune is in the funds; seven or eight hundred thousand francs.”

“Then sell out — sell out, marquis, or you will lose it all.”

“But how can I sell out here?”

“You have a broker, have you not?”

“Yes.”

“Then give me a letter to him, and tell him to sell out without an instant’s delay, perhaps even now I shall arrive too late.”

“The deuce you say!” replied the marquis, “let us lose no time, then!”

And, sitting down, he wrote a letter to his broker, ordering him to sell out at the market price.

“Now, then,” said Villefort, placing the letter in his pocketbook, “I must have another!”

“To whom?”

“To the king.”

“To the king?”

“Yes.”

“I dare not write to his majesty.”

“I do not ask you to write to his majesty, but ask M. de Salvieux to do so. I want a letter that will enable me to reach the king’s presence without all the formalities of demanding an audience; that would occasion a loss of precious time.”

“But address yourself to the keeper of the seals; he has the right of entry at the Tuileries, and can procure you audience at any hour of the day or night.”

“Doubtless; but there is no occasion to divide the honors of my discovery with him. The keeper would leave me in the background, and take all the glory to himself. I tell you, marquis, my fortune is made if I only reach the Tuileries the first, for the king will not forget the service I do him.”

“In that case go and get ready. I will call Salvieux and make him write the letter.”

“Be as quick as possible, I must be on the road in a quarter of an hour.”

“Tell your coachman to stop at the door.”

“You will present my excuses to the marquise and Mademoiselle Renee, whom I leave on such a day with great regret.”

“You will find them both here, and can make your farewells in person.”

“A thousand thanks — and now for the letter.”

The marquis rang, a servant entered.

“Say to the Comte de Salvieux that I would like to see him.”

“Now, then, go,” said the marquis.

“I shall be gone only a few moments.”

Villefort hastily quitted the apartment, but reflecting that the sight of the deputy procureur running through the streets would be enough to throw the whole city into confusion, he resumed his ordinary pace. At his door he perceived a figure in the shadow that seemed to wait for him. It was Mercedes, who, hearing no news of her lover, had come unobserved to inquire after him.

As Villefort drew near, she advanced and stood before him. Dantes had spoken of Mercedes, and Villefort instantly recognized her. Her beauty and high bearing surprised him, and when she inquired what had become of her lover, it seemed to him that she was the judge, and he the accused.

“The young man you speak of,” said Villefort abruptly, “is a great criminal, and I can do nothing for him, mademoiselle.” Mercedes burst into tears, and, as Villefort strove to pass her, again addressed him.

“But, at least, tell me where he is, that I may know whether he is alive or dead,” said she.

“I do not know; he is no longer in my hands,” replied Villefort.

And desirous of putting an end to the interview, he pushed by her, and closed the door, as if to exclude the pain he felt. But remorse is not thus banished; like Virgil’s wounded hero, he carried the arrow in his wound, and, arrived at the salon, Villefort uttered a sigh that was almost a sob, and sank into a chair.

Then the first pangs of an unending torture seized upon his heart. The man he sacrificed to his ambition, that innocent victim immolated on the altar of his father’s faults, appeared to him pale and threatening, leading his affianced bride by the hand, and bringing with him remorse, not such as the ancients figured, furious and terrible, but that slow and consuming agony whose pangs are intensified from hour to hour up to the very moment of death. Then he had a moment’s hesitation. He had frequently called for capital punishment on criminals, and owing to his irresistible eloquence they had been condemned, and yet the slightest shadow of remorse had never clouded Villefort’s brow, because they were guilty; at least, he believed so; but here was an innocent man whose happiness he had destroyed: in this case he was not the judge, but the executioner.

As he thus reflected, he felt the sensation we have described, and which had hitherto been unknown to him, arise in his bosom, and fill him with vague apprehensions. It is thus that a wounded man trembles instinctively at the approach of the finger to his wound until it be healed, but Villefort's was one of those that never close, or if they do, only close to reopen more agonizing than ever. If at this moment the sweet voice of Renee had sounded in his ears pleading for mercy, or the fair Mercedes had entered and said, "In the name of God, I conjure you to restore me my affianced husband," his cold and trembling hands would have signed his release; but no voice broke the stillness of the chamber, and the door was opened only by Villefort's valet, who came to tell him that the travelling carriage was in readiness.

Villefort rose, or rather sprang, from his chair, hastily opened one of the drawers of his desk, emptied all the gold it contained into his pocket, stood motionless an instant, his hand pressed to his head, muttered a few inarticulate sounds, and then, perceiving that his servant had placed his cloak on his shoulders, he sprang into the carriage, ordering the postilions to drive to M. de Saint-Meran's. The hapless Dantes was doomed.

As the marquis had promised, Villefort found the marquise and Renee in waiting. He started when he saw Renee, for he fancied she was again about to plead for Dantes. Alas, her emotions were wholly personal: she was thinking only of Villefort's departure.

She loved Villefort, and he left her at the moment he was about to become her husband. Villefort knew not when he should return, and Renee, far from pleading for Dantes, hated the man whose crime separated her from her lover.

Meanwhile what of Mercedes? She had met Fernand at the corner of the Rue de la Loge; she had returned to the Catalans, and had despairingly cast herself on her couch. Fernand, kneeling by her side, took her hand, and covered it with kisses that Mercedes did not even feel. She passed the night thus. The lamp went out for want of oil, but she paid no heed to the darkness, and dawn came, but she knew not that it was day. Grief had made her blind to all but one object — that was Edmond.

"Ah, you are there," said she, at length, turning towards Fernand.

"I have not quitted you since yesterday," returned Fernand sorrowfully.

M. Morrel had not readily given up the fight. He had learned that Dantes had been taken to prison, and he had gone to all his friends, and the influential persons of the city; but the report was already in circulation that Dantes was arrested as a Bonapartist agent; and as the most sanguine looked upon any attempt of Napoleon to remount the throne as impossible, he met with nothing but refusal, and had returned home in despair, declaring that the matter was serious and that nothing more could be done.

Caderousse was equally restless and uneasy, but instead of seeking, like M. Morrel, to aid Dantes, he had shut himself up with two bottles of black currant brandy, in the hope of drowning reflection. But he did not succeed, and became too intoxicated to fetch any more drink, and yet not so intoxicated as to forget what had happened. With his elbows on the table he sat between the two empty bottles, while spectres danced in the light of the unsnuffed candle — spectres such as Hoffmann strews over his punch-drenched pages, like black, fantastic dust.

Danglars alone was content and joyous — he had got rid of an enemy and made his own situation on the Pharaon secure. Danglars was one of those men born with a pen behind the ear, and an inkstand in place of a heart. Everything with him was multiplication or subtraction. The life of a man was to him of far less value than a numeral, especially when, by taking it away, he could increase the sum total of his own desires. He went to bed at his usual hour, and slept in peace.

Villefort, after having received M. de Salvieux' letter, embraced Renee, kissed the marquise's hand, and shaken that of the marquis, started for Paris along the Aix road.

Old Dantes was dying with anxiety to know what had become of Edmond. But we know very well what had become of Edmond.

Chapter 10

The King’s Closet at the Tuileries.

We will leave Villefort on the road to Paris, travelling — thanks to trebled fees — with all speed, and passing through two or three apartments, enter at the Tuileries the little room with the arched window, so well known as having been the favorite closet of Napoleon and Louis XVIII., and now of Louis Philippe.

There, seated before a walnut table he had brought with him from Hartwell, and to which, from one of those fancies not uncommon to great people, he was particularly attached, the king, Louis XVIII., was carelessly listening to a man of fifty or fifty-two years of age, with gray hair, aristocratic bearing, and exceedingly gentlemanly attire, and meanwhile making a marginal note in a volume of Gryphius’s rather inaccurate, but much sought-after, edition of Horace — a work which was much indebted to the sagacious observations of the philosophical monarch.

“You say, sir” — said the king.

“That I am exceedingly disquieted, sire.”

“Really, have you had a vision of the seven fat kine and the seven lean kine?”

“No, sire, for that would only betoken for us seven years of plenty and seven years of scarcity; and with a king as full of foresight as your majesty, scarcity is not a thing to be feared.”

“Then of what other scourge are you afraid, my dear Blacas?”

“Sire, I have every reason to believe that a storm is brewing in the south.”

“Well, my dear duke,” replied Louis XVIII., “I think you are wrongly informed, and know positively that, on the contrary, it is very fine weather in that direction.” Man of ability as he was, Louis XVIII. liked a pleasant jest.

“Sire,” continued M. de Blacas, “if it only be to reassure a faithful servant, will your majesty send into Languedoc, Provence, and Dauphine, trusty men, who will bring you back a faithful report as to the feeling in these three provinces?”

“Caninus surdis,” replied the king, continuing the annotations in his Horace.

“Sire,” replied the courtier, laughing, in order that he might seem to comprehend the quotation, “your majesty may be perfectly right in relying on the good feeling of France, but I fear I am not altogether wrong in dreading some desperate attempt.”

“By whom?”

“By Bonaparte, or, at least, by his adherents.”

“My dear Blacas,” said the king, “you with your alarms prevent me from working.”

“And you, sire, prevent me from sleeping with your security.”

“Wait, my dear sir, wait a moment; for I have such a delightful note on the Pastor quum traheret — wait, and I will listen to you afterwards.”

There was a brief pause, during which Louis XVIII. wrote, in a hand as small as possible, another note on the margin of his Horace, and then looking at the duke with the air of a man who thinks he has an idea of his own, while he is only commenting upon the idea of another, said, —

“Go on, my dear duke, go on — I listen.”

“Sire,” said Blacas, who had for a moment the hope of sacrificing Villefort to his own profit, “I am compelled to tell you that these are not mere rumors destitute of foundation which thus disquiet me; but a serious-minded man, deserving all my confidence, and charged by me to watch over the south” (the duke hesitated as he pronounced these words), “has arrived by post to tell me that a great peril threatens the king, and so I hastened to you, sire.”

“Mala ducis avi domum,” continued Louis XVIII., still annotating.

“Does your majesty wish me to drop the subject?”

“By no means, my dear duke; but just stretch out your hand.”

“Which?”

“Whichever you please — there to the left.”

“Here, sire?”

“I tell you to the left, and you are looking to the right; I mean on my left — yes, there. You will find yesterday’s report of the minister of police. But here is M. Dandre himself;” and M. Dandre, announced by the chamberlain-in-waiting, entered.

“Come in,” said Louis XVIII., with repressed smile, “come in, Baron, and tell the duke all you know — the latest news of M. de Bonaparte; do not conceal anything, however serious, — let us see, the Island of Elba is a volcano, and we may expect to have issuing thence flaming and bristling war — bella, horrida bella.” M. Dandre leaned very respectfully on the back of a chair with his two hands, and said, —

“Has your majesty perused yesterday’s report?”

“Yes, yes; but tell the duke himself, who cannot find anything, what the report contains — give him the particulars of what the usurper is doing in his islet.”

“Monsieur,” said the baron to the duke, “all the servants of his majesty must approve of the latest intelligence which we have from the Island of Elba. Bonaparte” — M. Dandre looked at Louis XVIII., who, employed in writing a note, did not even raise his head. “Bonaparte,” continued the baron, “is mortally wearied, and passes whole days in watching his miners at work at Porto-Longone.”

“And scratches himself for amusement,” added the king.

“Scratches himself?” inquired the duke, “what does your majesty mean?”

“Yes, indeed, my dear duke. Did you forget that this great man, this hero, this demigod, is attacked with a malady of the skin which worries him to death, prurigo?”

“And, moreover, my dear duke,” continued the minister of police, “we are almost assured that, in a very short time, the usurper will be insane.”

“Insane?”

“Raving mad; his head becomes weaker. Sometimes he weeps bitterly, sometimes laughs boisterously, at other time he passes hours on the seashore, flinging stones in the water and when the flint makes ‘duck-and-drake’ five or six times, he appears as delighted as if he had gained another Marengo or Austerlitz. Now, you must agree that these are indubitable symptoms of insanity.”

“Or of wisdom, my dear baron — or of wisdom,” said Louis XVIII., laughing; “the greatest captains of antiquity amused themselves by casting pebbles into the ocean — see Plutarch’s life of Scipio Africanus.”

M. de Blacas pondered deeply between the confident monarch and the truthful minister. Villefort, who did not choose to reveal the whole secret, lest another should reap all the benefit of the disclosure, had yet communicated enough to cause him the greatest uneasiness.

“Well, well, Dandre,” said Louis XVIII., “Blacas is not yet convinced; let us proceed, therefore, to the usurper’s conversion.” The minister of police bowed.

“The usurper’s conversion!” murmured the duke, looking at the king and Dandre, who spoke alternately, like Virgil’s shepherds. “The usurper converted!”

“Decidedly, my dear duke.”

“In what way converted?”

“To good principles. Tell him all about it, baron.”

“Why, this is the way of it,” said the minister, with the gravest air in the world: “Napoleon lately had a review, and as two or three of his old veterans expressed a desire to return to France, he gave them their dismissal, and exhorted them to ‘serve the good king.’ These were his own words, of that I am certain.”

“Well, Blacas, what think you of this?” inquired the king triumphantly, and pausing for a moment from the voluminous scholiast before him.

“I say, sire, that the minister of police is greatly deceived or I am; and as it is impossible it can be the minister of police as he has the guardianship of the safety and honor of your majesty, it is probable that I am in error. However, sire, if I might advise, your majesty will interrogate the person of whom I spoke to you, and I will urge your majesty to do him this honor.”

“Most willingly, duke; under your auspices I will receive any person you please, but you must not expect me to be too confiding. Baron, have you any report more recent than this dated the 20th February. — this is the 4th of March?”

“No, sire, but I am hourly expecting one; it may have arrived since I left my office.”

“Go thither, and if there be none — well, well,” continued Louis XVIII., “make one; that is the usual way, is it not?” and the king laughed facetiously.

“Oh, sire,” replied the minister, “we have no occasion to invent any; every day our desks are loaded with most circumstantial denunciations, coming from hosts of people who hope for some return for services which they seek to render, but cannot; they trust to fortune, and rely upon some unexpected event in some way to justify their predictions.”

“Well, sir, go”; said Louis XVIII., “and remember that I am waiting for you.”

“I will but go and return, sire; I shall be back in ten minutes.”

“And I, sire,” said M. de Blacas, “will go and find my messenger.”

"Wait, sir, wait," said Louis XVIII. "Really, M. de Blacas, I must change your armorial bearings; I will give you an eagle with outstretched wings, holding in its claws a prey which tries in vain to escape, and bearing this device — Tenax."

"Sire, I listen," said De Blacas, biting his nails with impatience.

"I wish to consult you on this passage, 'Molli fugiens anhelitu,' you know it refers to a stag flying from a wolf. Are you not a sportsman and a great wolf-hunter? Well, then, what do you think of the molli anhelitu?"

"Admirable, sire; but my messenger is like the stag you refer to, for he has posted two hundred and twenty leagues in scarcely three days."

"Which is undergoing great fatigue and anxiety, my dear duke, when we have a telegraph which transmits messages in three or four hours, and that without getting in the least out of breath."

"Ah, sire, you recompense but badly this poor young man, who has come so far, and with so much ardor, to give your majesty useful information. If only for the sake of M. de Salvieux, who recommends him to me, I entreat your majesty to receive him graciously."

"M. de Salvieux, my brother's chamberlain?"

"Yes, sire."

"He is at Marseilles."

"And writes me thence."

"Does he speak to you of this conspiracy?"

"No; but strongly recommends M. de Villefort, and begs me to present him to your majesty."

"M. de Villefort!" cried the king, "is the messenger's name M. de Villefort?"

"Yes, sire."

"And he comes from Marseilles?"

"In person."

"Why did you not mention his name at once?" replied the king, betraying some uneasiness.

"Sire, I thought his name was unknown to your majesty."

"No, no, Blacas; he is a man of strong and elevated understanding, ambitious, too, and, pardieu, you know his father's name!"

"His father?"

"Yes, Noirtier."

"Noirtier the Girondin? — Noirtier the senator?"

"He himself."

"And your majesty has employed the son of such a man?"

"Blacas, my friend, you have but limited comprehension. I told you Villefort was ambitious, and to attain this ambition Villefort would sacrifice everything, even his father."

"Then, sire, may I present him?"

"This instant, duke! Where is he?"

"Waiting below, in my carriage."

"Seek him at once."

"I hasten to do so." The duke left the royal presence with the speed of a young man; his really sincere royalism made him youthful again. Louis XVIII. remained alone, and turning his eyes on his half-opened Horace, muttered, —

"Justum et tenacem propositi virum."

M. de Blacas returned as speedily as he had departed, but in the antechamber he was forced to appeal to the king's authority. Villefort's dusty garb, his costume, which was not of courtly cut, excited the susceptibility of M. de Breze, who was all astonishment at finding that this young man had the audacity to enter before the king in such attire. The duke, however, overcame all difficulties with a word — his majesty's order; and, in spite of the protestations which the master of ceremonies made for the honor of his office and principles, Villefort was introduced.

The king was seated in the same place where the duke had left him. On opening the door, Villefort found himself facing him, and the young magistrate's first impulse was to pause.

"Come in, M. de Villefort," said the king, "come in." Villefort bowed, and advancing a few steps, waited until the king should interrogate him.

"M. de Villefort," said Louis XVIII., "the Duc de Blacas assures me you have some interesting information to communicate."

"Sire, the duke is right, and I believe your majesty will think it equally important."

"In the first place, and before everything else, sir, is the news as bad in your opinion as I am asked to believe?"

"Sire, I believe it to be most urgent, but I hope, by the speed I have used, that it is not irreparable."

"Speak as fully as you please, sir," said the king, who began to give way to the emotion which had showed itself in Blacas's face and affected

Villefort's voice. "Speak, sir, and pray begin at the beginning; I like order in everything."

"Sire," said Villefort, "I will render a faithful report to your majesty, but I must entreat your forgiveness if my anxiety leads to some obscurity in my language." A glance at the king after this discreet and subtle exordium, assured Villefort of the benignity of his august auditor, and he went on: —

"Sire, I have come as rapidly to Paris as possible, to inform your majesty that I have discovered, in the exercise of my duties, not a commonplace and insignificant plot, such as is every day got up in the lower ranks of the people and in the army, but an actual conspiracy — a storm which menaces no less than your majesty's throne. Sire, the usurper is arming three ships, he meditates some project, which, however mad, is yet, perhaps, terrible. At this moment he will have left Elba, to go whither I know not, but assuredly to attempt a landing either at Naples, or on the coast of Tuscany, or perhaps on the shores of France. Your majesty is well aware that the sovereign of the Island of Elba has maintained his relations with Italy and France?"

"I am, sir," said the king, much agitated; "and recently we have had information that the Bonapartist clubs have had meetings in the Rue Saint-Jacques. But proceed, I beg of you. How did you obtain these details?"

"Sire, they are the results of an examination which I have made of a man of Marseilles, whom I have watched for some time, and arrested on the day of my departure. This person, a sailor, of turbulent character, and whom I suspected of Bonapartism, has been secretly to the Island of Elba. There he saw the grand-marshal, who charged him with an oral message to a Bonapartist in Paris, whose name I could not extract from him; but this mission was to prepare men's minds for a return (it is the man who says this, sire) — a return which will soon occur."

"And where is this man?"

"In prison, sire."

"And the matter seems serious to you?"

"So serious, sire, that when the circumstance surprised me in the midst of a family festival, on the very day of my betrothal, I left my bride and friends, postponing everything, that I might hasten to lay at your majesty's feet the fears which impressed me, and the assurance of my devotion."

"True," said Louis XVIII., "was there not a marriage engagement between you and Mademoiselle de Saint-Meran?"

"Daughter of one of your majesty's most faithful servants."

“Yes, yes; but let us talk of this plot, M. de Villefort.”

“Sire, I fear it is more than a plot; I fear it is a conspiracy.”

“A conspiracy in these times,” said Louis XVIII., smiling, “is a thing very easy to meditate, but more difficult to conduct to an end, inasmuch as, re-established so recently on the throne of our ancestors, we have our eyes open at once upon the past, the present, and the future. For the last ten months my ministers have redoubled their vigilance, in order to watch the shore of the Mediterranean. If Bonaparte landed at Naples, the whole coalition would be on foot before he could even reach Piomoino; if he land in Tuscany, he will be in an unfriendly territory; if he land in France, it must be with a handful of men, and the result of that is easily foretold, execrated as he is by the population. Take courage, sir; but at the same time rely on our royal gratitude.”

“Ah, here is M. Dandre!” cried de Blacas. At this instant the minister of police appeared at the door, pale, trembling, and as if ready to faint. Villefort was about to retire, but M. de Blacas, taking his hand, restrained him.

Chapter 11

The Corsican Ogre.

At the sight of this agitation Louis XVIII. pushed from him violently the table at which he was sitting.

“What ails you, baron?” he exclaimed. “You appear quite aghast. Has your uneasiness anything to do with what M. de Blacas has told me, and M. de Villefort has just confirmed?” M. de Blacas moved suddenly towards the baron, but the fright of the courtier pleaded for the forbearance of the statesman; and besides, as matters were, it was much more to his advantage that the prefect of police should triumph over him than that he should humiliate the prefect.

“Sire” — stammered the baron.

“Well, what is it?” asked Louis XVIII. The minister of police, giving way to an impulse of despair, was about to throw himself at the feet of Louis XVIII., who retreated a step and frowned.

“Will you speak?” he said.

“Oh, sire, what a dreadful misfortune! I am, indeed, to be pitied. I can never forgive myself!”

“Monsieur,” said Louis XVIII., “I command you to speak.”

“Well, sire, the usurper left Elba on the 26th February, and landed on the 1st of March.”

“And where? In Italy?” asked the king eagerly.

“In France, sire, — at a small port, near Antibes, in the Gulf of Juan.”

“The usurper landed in France, near Antibes, in the Gulf of Juan, two hundred and fifty leagues from Paris, on the 1st of March, and you only acquired this information to-day, the 4th of March! Well, sir, what you tell me is impossible. You must have received a false report, or you have gone mad.”

“Alas, sire, it is but too true!” Louis made a gesture of indescribable anger and alarm, and then drew himself up as if this sudden blow had struck him at the same moment in heart and countenance.

“In France!” he cried, “the usurper in France! Then they did not watch over this man. Who knows? they were, perhaps, in league with him.”

“Oh, sire,” exclaimed the Duc de Blacas, “M. Dandre is not a man to be accused of treason! Sire, we have all been blind, and the minister of police has shared the general blindness, that is all.”

“But” — said Villefort, and then suddenly checking himself, he was silent; then he continued, “Your pardon, sire,” he said, bowing, “my zeal carried me away. Will your majesty deign to excuse me?”

“Speak, sir, speak boldly,” replied Louis. “You alone forewarned us of the evil; now try and aid us with the remedy.”

“Sire,” said Villefort, “the usurper is detested in the south; and it seems to me that if he ventured into the south, it would be easy to raise Languedoc and Provence against him.”

“Yes, assuredly,” replied the minister; “but he is advancing by Gap and Sisteron.”

“Advancing — he is advancing!” said Louis XVIII. “Is he then advancing on Paris?” The minister of police maintained a silence which was equivalent to a complete avowal.

“And Dauphine, sir?” inquired the king, of Villefort. “Do you think it possible to rouse that as well as Provence?”

“Sire, I am sorry to tell your majesty a cruel fact; but the feeling in Dauphine is quite the reverse of that in Provence or Languedoc. The mountaineers are Bonapartists, sire.”

“Then,” murmured Louis, “he was well informed. And how many men had he with him?”

“I do not know, sire,” answered the minister of police.

“What, you do not know! Have you neglected to obtain information on that point? Of course it is of no consequence,” he added, with a withering smile.

“Sire, it was impossible to learn; the despatch simply stated the fact of the landing and the route taken by the usurper.”

“And how did this despatch reach you?” inquired the king. The minister bowed his head, and while a deep color overspread his cheeks, he stammered out, —

“By the telegraph, sire.” — Louis XVIII. advanced a step, and folded his arms over his chest as Napoleon would have done.

“So then,” he exclaimed, turning pale with anger, “seven conjoined and allied armies overthrew that man. A miracle of heaven replaced me on the throne of my fathers after five-and-twenty years of exile. I have, during those five-and-twenty years, spared no pains to understand the people of France and the interests which were confided to me; and now, when I see the fruition of my wishes almost within reach, the power I hold in my hands bursts, and shatters me to atoms!”

“Sire, it is fatality!” murmured the minister, feeling that the pressure of circumstances, however light a thing to destiny, was too much for any human strength to endure.

“What our enemies say of us is then true. We have learnt nothing, forgotten nothing! If I were betrayed as he was, I would console myself; but to be in the midst of persons elevated by myself to places of honor, who ought to watch over me more carefully than over themselves, — for my fortune is theirs — before me they were nothing — after me they will be nothing, and perish miserably from incapacity — ineptitude! Oh, yes, sir, you are right — it is fatality!”

The minister quailed before this outburst of sarcasm. M. de Blacas wiped the moisture from his brow. Villefort smiled within himself, for he felt his increased importance.

“To fall,” continued King Louis, who at the first glance had sounded the abyss on which the monarchy hung suspended, — ”to fall, and learn of that fall by telegraph! Oh, I would rather mount the scaffold of my brother, Louis XVI., than thus descend the staircase at the Tuileries driven away by ridicule. Ridicule, sir — why, you know not its power in France, and yet you ought to know it!”

“Sire, sire,” murmured the minister, “for pity’s” —

“Approach, M. de Villefort,” resumed the king, addressing the young man, who, motionless and breathless, was listening to a conversation on which depended the destiny of a kingdom. “Approach, and tell monsieur that it is possible to know beforehand all that he has not known.”

“Sire, it was really impossible to learn secrets which that man concealed from all the world.”

“Really impossible! Yes — that is a great word, sir. Unfortunately, there are great words, as there are great men; I have measured them. Really impossible for a minister who has an office, agents, spies, and fifteen hundred thousand francs for secret service money, to know what is going on at sixty leagues from the coast of France! Well, then, see, here is a gentleman who had none of these resources at his disposal — a gentleman, only a simple magistrate, who learned more than you with all your police, and who would have saved my crown, if, like you, he had the power of directing a telegraph.” The look of the minister of police was turned with concentrated spite on Villefort, who bent his head in modest triumph.

“I do not mean that for you, Blacas,” continued Louis XVIII.; “for if you have discovered nothing, at least you have had the good sense to persevere in your suspicions. Any other than yourself would have considered the disclosure of M. de Villefort insignificant, or else dictated by venal ambition,” These words were an allusion to the sentiments which the minister of police had uttered with so much confidence an hour before.

Villefort understood the king’s intent. Any other person would, perhaps, have been overcome by such an intoxicating draught of praise; but he feared to make for himself a mortal enemy of the police minister, although he saw that Dandre was irrevocably lost. In fact, the minister, who, in the plenitude of his power, had been unable to unearth Napoleon’s secret, might in despair at his own downfall interrogate Dantes and so lay bare the motives of Villefort’s plot. Realizing this, Villefort came to the rescue of the crest-fallen minister, instead of aiding to crush him.

“Sire,” said Villefort, “the suddenness of this event must prove to your majesty that the issue is in the hands of Providence; what your majesty is pleased to attribute to me as profound perspicacity is simply owing to chance, and I have profited by that chance, like a good and devoted servant — that’s all. Do not attribute to me more than I deserve, sire, that your majesty may never have occasion to recall the first opinion you have been pleased to form of me.” The minister of police thanked the young man by an eloquent look, and Villefort understood that he had succeeded in his design; that is to say, that without forfeiting the gratitude of the king, he had made a friend of one on whom, in case of necessity, he might rely.

“‘Tis well,” resumed the king. “And now, gentlemen,” he continued, turning towards M. de Blacas and the minister of police, “I have no further occasion for you, and you may retire; what now remains to do is in the department of the minister of war.”

“Fortunately, sire,” said M. de Blacas, “we can rely on the army; your majesty knows how every report confirms their loyalty and attachment.”

“Do not mention reports, duke, to me, for I know now what confidence to place in them. Yet, speaking of reports, baron, what have you learned with regard to the affair in the Rue Saint-Jacques?”

“The affair in the Rue Saint-Jacques!” exclaimed Villefort, unable to repress an exclamation. Then, suddenly pausing, he added, “Your pardon, sire, but my devotion to your majesty has made me forget, not the respect I have, for that is too deeply engraved in my heart, but the rules of etiquette.”

“Go on, go on, sir,” replied the king; “you have to-day earned the right to make inquiries here.”

“Sire,” interposed the minister of police, “I came a moment ago to give your majesty fresh information which I had obtained on this head, when your majesty’s attention was attracted by the terrible event that has occurred in the gulf, and now these facts will cease to interest your majesty.”

“On the contrary, sir, — on the contrary,” said Louis XVIII., “this affair seems to me to have a decided connection with that which occupies our attention, and the death of General Quesnel will, perhaps, put us on the direct track of a great internal conspiracy.” At the name of General Quesnel, Villefort trembled.

“Everything points to the conclusion, sire,” said the minister of police, “that death was not the result of suicide, as we first believed, but of assassination. General Quesnel, it appears, had just left a Bonapartist club when he disappeared. An unknown person had been with him that morning, and made an appointment with him in the Rue Saint-Jacques; unfortunately, the general’s valet, who was dressing his hair at the moment when the stranger entered, heard the street mentioned, but did not catch the number.” As the police minister related this to the king, Villefort, who looked as if his very life hung on the speaker’s lips, turned alternately red and pale. The king looked towards him.

“Do you not think with me, M. de Villefort, that General Quesnel, whom they believed attached to the usurper, but who was really entirely devoted to me, has perished the victim of a Bonapartist ambush?”

“It is probable, sire,” replied Villefort. “But is this all that is known?”

“They are on the track of the man who appointed the meeting with him.”

“On his track?” said Villefort.

“Yes, the servant has given his description. He is a man of from fifty to fifty-two years of age, dark, with black eyes covered with shaggy eyebrows, and a thick mustache. He was dressed in a blue frock-coat, buttoned up to the chin, and wore at his button-hole the rosette of an officer of the Legion of Honor. Yesterday a person exactly corresponding with this description was followed, but he was lost sight of at the corner of the Rue de la Jussienne and the Rue Coq-Heron." Villefort leaned on the back of an arm-chair, for as the minister of police went on speaking he felt his legs bend under him; but when he learned that the unknown had escaped the vigilance of the agent who followed him, he breathed again.

"Continue to seek for this man, sir," said the king to the minister of police; "for if, as I am all but convinced, General Quesnel, who would have been so useful to us at this moment, has been murdered, his assassins, Bonapartists or not, shall be cruelly punished." It required all Villefort's coolness not to betray the terror with which this declaration of the king inspired him.

"How strange," continued the king, with some asperity; "the police think that they have disposed of the whole matter when they say, 'A murder has been committed,' and especially so when they can add, 'And we are on the track of the guilty persons.'"

"Sire, your majesty will, I trust, be amply satisfied on this point at least."

"We shall see. I will no longer detain you, M. de Villefort, for you must be fatigued after so long a journey; go and rest. Of course you stopped at your father's?" A feeling of faintness came over Villefort.

"No, sire," he replied, "I alighted at the Hotel de Madrid, in the Rue de Tournon."

"But you have seen him?"

"Sire, I went straight to the Duc de Blacas."

"But you will see him, then?"

"I think not, sire."

"Ah, I forgot," said Louis, smiling in a manner which proved that all these questions were not made without a motive; "I forgot you and M. Noirtier are not on the best terms possible, and that is another sacrifice made to the royal cause, and for which you should be recompensed."

"Sire, the kindness your majesty deigns to evince towards me is a recompense which so far surpasses my utmost ambition that I have nothing more to ask for."

"Never mind, sir, we will not forget you; make your mind easy. In the meanwhile" (the king here detached the cross of the Legion of Honor which he usually wore over his blue coat, near the cross of St. Louis, above the order of Notre-Dame-du-Mont-Carmel and St. Lazare, and gave it to Villefort) — ”in the meanwhile take this cross.”

“Sire,” said Villefort, “your majesty mistakes; this is an officer’s cross.”

“Ma foi,” said Louis XVIII., “take it, such as it is, for I have not the time to procure you another. Blacas, let it be your care to see that the brevet is made out and sent to M. de Villefort.” Villefort’s eyes were filled with tears of joy and pride; he took the cross and kissed it.

“And now,” he said, “may I inquire what are the orders with which your majesty deigns to honor me?”

“Take what rest you require, and remember that if you are not able to serve me here in Paris, you may be of the greatest service to me at Marseilles.”

“Sire,” replied Villefort, bowing, “in an hour I shall have quitted Paris.”

“Go, sir,” said the king; “and should I forget you (kings’ memories are short), do not be afraid to bring yourself to my recollection. Baron, send for the minister of war. Blacas, remain.”

“Ah, sir,” said the minister of police to Villefort, as they left the Tuileries, “you entered by luck’s door — your fortune is made.”

“Will it be long first?” muttered Villefort, saluting the minister, whose career was ended, and looking about him for a hackney-coach. One passed at the moment, which he hailed; he gave his address to the driver, and springing in, threw himself on the seat, and gave loose to dreams of ambition.

Ten minutes afterwards Villefort reached his hotel, ordered horses to be ready in two hours, and asked to have his breakfast brought to him. He was about to begin his repast when the sound of the bell rang sharp and loud. The valet opened the door, and Villefort heard some one speak his name.

“Who could know that I was here already?” said the young man. The valet entered.

“Well,” said Villefort, “what is it? — Who rang? — Who asked for me?”

“A stranger who will not send in his name.”

“A stranger who will not send in his name! What can he want with me?”

“He wishes to speak to you.”

“To me?”

“Yes.”

“Did he mention my name?”

“Yes.”

“What sort of person is he?”

“Why, sir, a man of about fifty.”

“Short or tall?”

“About your own height, sir.”

“Dark or fair?”

“Dark, — very dark; with black eyes, black hair, black eyebrows.”

“And how dressed?” asked Villefort quickly.

“In a blue frock-coat, buttoned up close, decorated with the Legion of Honor.”

“It is he!” said Villefort, turning pale.

“Eh, pardieu,” said the individual whose description we have twice given, entering the door, “what a great deal of ceremony! Is it the custom in Marseilles for sons to keep their fathers waiting in their anterooms?”

“Father!” cried Villefort, “then I was not deceived; I felt sure it must be you.”

“Well, then, if you felt so sure,” replied the new-comer, putting his cane in a corner and his hat on a chair, “allow me to say, my dear Gerard, that it was not very filial of you to keep me waiting at the door.”

“Leave us, Germain,” said Villefort. The servant quitted the apartment with evident signs of astonishment.

Chapter 12

Father and Son.

M. Noirtier — for it was, indeed, he who entered — looked after the servant until the door was closed, and then, fearing, no doubt, that he might be overheard in the ante-chamber, he opened the door again, nor was the precaution useless, as appeared from the rapid retreat of Germain, who proved that he was not exempt from the sin which ruined our first parents. M. Noirtier then took the trouble to close and bolt the ante-chamber door, then that of the bed-chamber, and then extended his hand to Villefort, who had followed all his motions with surprise which he could not conceal.

“Well, now, my dear Gerard,” said he to the young man, with a very significant look, “do you know, you seem as if you were not very glad to see me?”

“My dear father,” said Villefort, “I am, on the contrary, delighted; but I so little expected your visit, that it has somewhat overcome me.”

“But, my dear fellow,” replied M. Noirtier, seating himself, “I might say the same thing to you, when you announce to me your wedding for the 28th of February, and on the 3rd of March you turn up here in Paris.”

“And if I have come, my dear father,” said Gerard, drawing closer to M. Noirtier, “do not complain, for it is for you that I came, and my journey will be your salvation.”

“Ah, indeed!” said M. Noirtier, stretching himself out at his ease in the chair. “Really, pray tell me all about it, for it must be interesting.”

“Father, you have heard speak of a certain Bonapartist club in the Rue Saint-Jacques?”

“No. 53; yes, I am vice-president.”

“Father, your coolness makes me shudder.”

“Why, my dear boy, when a man has been proscribed by the mountaineers, has escaped from Paris in a hay-cart, been hunted over the plains of Bordeaux by Robespierre’s bloodhounds, he becomes accustomed to most things. But go on, what about the club in the Rue Saint-Jacques?”

“Why, they induced General Quesnel to go there, and General Quesnel, who quitted his own house at nine o’clock in the evening, was found the next day in the Seine.”

“And who told you this fine story?”

“The king himself.”

“Well, then, in return for your story,” continued Noirtier, “I will tell you another.”

“My dear father, I think I already know what you are about to tell me.”

“Ah, you have heard of the landing of the emperor?”

“Not so loud, father, I entreat of you — for your own sake as well as mine. Yes, I heard this news, and knew it even before you could; for three days ago I posted from Marseilles to Paris with all possible speed, half-desperate at the enforced delay.”

“Three days ago? You are crazy. Why, three days ago the emperor had not landed.”

“No matter, I was aware of his intention.”

“How did you know about it?”

“By a letter addressed to you from the Island of Elba.”

“To me?”

“To you; and which I discovered in the pocket-book of the messenger. Had that letter fallen into the hands of another, you, my dear father, would probably ere this have been shot.” Villefort’s father laughed.

“Come, come,” said he, “will the Restoration adopt imperial methods so promptly? Shot, my dear boy? What an idea! Where is the letter you speak of? I know you too well to suppose you would allow such a thing to pass you.”

“I burnt it, for fear that even a fragment should remain; for that letter must have led to your condemnation.”

“And the destruction of your future prospects,” replied Noirtier; “yes, I can easily comprehend that. But I have nothing to fear while I have you to protect me.”

“I do better than that, sir — I save you.”

“You do? Why, really, the thing becomes more and more dramatic — explain yourself.”

“I must refer again to the club in the Rue Saint-Jacques.”

“It appears that this club is rather a bore to the police. Why didn’t they search more vigilantly? they would have found” —

"They have not found; but they are on the track."

"Yes, that the usual phrase; I am quite familiar with it. When the police is at fault, it declares that it is on the track; and the government patiently awaits the day when it comes to say, with a sneaking air, that the track is lost."

"Yes, but they have found a corpse; the general has been killed, and in all countries they call that a murder."

"A murder do you call it? why, there is nothing to prove that the general was murdered. People are found every day in the Seine, having thrown themselves in, or having been drowned from not knowing how to swim."

"Father, you know very well that the general was not a man to drown himself in despair, and people do not bathe in the Seine in the month of January. No, no, do not be deceived; this was murder in every sense of the word."

"And who thus designated it?"

"The king himself."

"The king! I thought he was philosopher enough to allow that there was no murder in politics. In politics, my dear fellow, you know, as well as I do, there are no men, but ideas — no feelings, but interests; in politics we do not kill a man, we only remove an obstacle, that is all. Would you like to know how matters have progressed? Well, I will tell you. It was thought reliance might be placed in General Quesnel; he was recommended to us from the Island of Elba; one of us went to him, and invited him to the Rue Saint-Jacques, where he would find some friends. He came there, and the plan was unfolded to him for leaving Elba, the projected landing, etc. When he had heard and comprehended all to the fullest extent, he replied that he was a royalist. Then all looked at each other, — he was made to take an oath, and did so, but with such an ill grace that it was really tempting Providence to swear him, and yet, in spite of that, the general was allowed to depart free — perfectly free. Yet he did not return home. What could that mean? why, my dear fellow, that on leaving us he lost his way, that's all. A murder? really, Villefort, you surprise me. You, a deputy procureur, to found an accusation on such bad premises! Did I ever say to you, when you were fulfilling your character as a royalist, and cut off the head of one of my party, 'My son, you have committed a murder?' No, I said, 'Very well, sir, you have gained the victory; to-morrow, perchance, it will be our turn.'"

“But, father, take care; when our turn comes, our revenge will be sweeping.”

“I do not understand you.”

“You rely on the usurper’s return?”

“We do.”

“You are mistaken; he will not advance two leagues into the interior of France without being followed, tracked, and caught like a wild beast.”

“My dear fellow, the emperor is at this moment on the way to Grenoble; on the 10th or 12th he will be at Lyons, and on the 20th or 25th at Paris.”

“The people will rise.”

“Yes, to go and meet him.”

“He has but a handful of men with him, and armies will be despatched against him.”

“Yes, to escort him into the capital. Really, my dear Gerard, you are but a child; you think yourself well informed because the telegraph has told you, three days after the landing, ‘The usurper has landed at Cannes with several men. He is pursued.’ But where is he? what is he doing? You do not know at all, and in this way they will chase him to Paris, without drawing a trigger.”

“Grenoble and Lyons are faithful cities, and will oppose to him an impassable barrier.”

“Grenoble will open her gates to him with enthusiasm — all Lyons will hasten to welcome him. Believe me, we are as well informed as you, and our police are as good as your own. Would you like a proof of it? well, you wished to conceal your journey from me, and yet I knew of your arrival half an hour after you had passed the barrier. You gave your direction to no one but your postilion, yet I have your address, and in proof I am here the very instant you are going to sit at table. Ring, then, if you please, for a second knife, fork, and plate, and we will dine together.”

“Indeed!” replied Villefort, looking at his father with astonishment, “you really do seem very well informed.”

“Eh? the thing is simple enough. You who are in power have only the means that money produces — we who are in expectation, have those which devotion prompts.”

“Devotion!” said Villefort, with a sneer.

“Yes, devotion; for that is, I believe, the phrase for hopeful ambition.”

And Villefort's father extended his hand to the bell-rope, to summon the servant whom his son had not called. Villefort caught his arm.

"Wait, my dear father," said the young man, "one word more."

"Say on."

"However stupid the royalist police may be, they do know one terrible thing."

"What is that?"

"The description of the man who, on the morning of the day when General Quesnel disappeared, presented himself at his house."

"Oh, the admirable police have found that out, have they? And what may be that description?"

"Dark complexion; hair, eyebrows, and whiskers, black; blue frock-coat, buttoned up to the chin; rosette of an officer of the Legion of Honor in his button-hole; a hat with wide brim, and a cane."

"Ah, ha, that's it, is it?" said Noirtier; "and why, then, have they not laid hands on him?"

"Because yesterday, or the day before, they lost sight of him at the corner of the Rue Coq-Heron."

"Didn't I say that your police were good for nothing?"

"Yes; but they may catch him yet."

"True," said Noirtier, looking carelessly around him, "true, if this person were not on his guard, as he is;" and he added with a smile, "He will consequently make a few changes in his personal appearance." At these words he rose, and put off his frock-coat and cravat, went towards a table on which lay his son's toilet articles, lathered his face, took a razor, and, with a firm hand, cut off the compromising whiskers. Villefort watched him with alarm not devoid of admiration.

His whiskers cut off, Noirtier gave another turn to his hair; took, instead of his black cravat, a colored neckerchief which lay at the top of an open portmanteau; put on, in lieu of his blue and high-buttoned frock-coat, a coat of Villefort's of dark brown, and cut away in front; tried on before the glass a narrow-brimmed hat of his son's, which appeared to fit him perfectly, and, leaving his cane in the corner where he had deposited it, he took up a small bamboo switch, cut the air with it once or twice, and walked about with that easy swagger which was one of his principal characteristics.

"Well," he said, turning towards his wondering son, when this disguise was completed, "well, do you think your police will recognize me now."

“No, father,” stammered Villefort; “at least, I hope not.”

“And now, my dear boy,” continued Noirtier, “I rely on your prudence to remove all the things which I leave in your care.”

“Oh, rely on me,” said Villefort.

“Yes, yes; and now I believe you are right, and that you have really saved my life; be assured I will return the favor hereafter.” Villefort shook his head.

“You are not convinced yet?”

“I hope at least, that you may be mistaken.”

“Shall you see the king again?”

“Perhaps.”

“Would you pass in his eyes for a prophet?”

“Prophets of evil are not in favor at the court, father.”

“True, but some day they do them justice; and supposing a second restoration, you would then pass for a great man.”

“Well, what should I say to the king?”

“Say this to him: ‘Sire, you are deceived as to the feeling in France, as to the opinions of the towns, and the prejudices of the army; he whom in Paris you call the Corsican ogre, who at Nevers is styled the usurper, is already saluted as Bonaparte at Lyons, and emperor at Grenoble. You think he is tracked, pursued, captured; he is advancing as rapidly as his own eagles. The soldiers you believe to be dying with hunger, worn out with fatigue, ready to desert, gather like atoms of snow about the rolling ball as it hastens onward. Sire, go, leave France to its real master, to him who acquired it, not by purchase, but by right of conquest; go, sire, not that you incur any risk, for your adversary is powerful enough to show you mercy, but because it would be humiliating for a grandson of Saint Louis to owe his life to the man of Arcola, Marengo, Austerlitz.’ Tell him this, Gerard; or, rather, tell him nothing. Keep your journey a secret; do not boast of what you have come to Paris to do, or have done; return with all speed; enter Marseilles at night, and your house by the back-door, and there remain, quiet, submissive, secret, and, above all, inoffensive; for this time, I swear to you, we shall act like powerful men who know their enemies. Go, my son — go, my dear Gerard, and by your obedience to my paternal orders, or, if you prefer it, friendly counsels, we will keep you in your place. This will be,” added Noirtier, with a smile, “one means by which you may a second time save me, if the political balance should some day take another turn, and cast you aloft while hurling me down. Adieu, my dear Gerard, and at your next journey alight at my door.” Noirtier left the room when he had finished, with the same calmness that had characterized him during the whole of this remarkable and trying conversation. Villefort, pale and agitated, ran to the window, put aside the curtain, and saw him pass, cool and collected, by two or three ill-looking men at the corner of the street, who were there, perhaps, to arrest a man with black whiskers, and a blue frock-coat, and hat with broad brim.

Villefort stood watching, breathless, until his father had disappeared at the Rue Bussy. Then he turned to the various articles he had left behind him, put the black cravat and blue frock-coat at the bottom of the portmanteau, threw the hat into a dark closet, broke the cane into small bits and flung it in the fire, put on his travelling-cap, and calling his valet, checked with a look the thousand questions he was ready to ask, paid his bill, sprang into his carriage, which was ready, learned at Lyons that Bonaparte had entered Grenoble, and in the midst of the tumult which prevailed along the road, at length reached Marseilles, a prey to all the hopes and fears which enter into the heart of man with ambition and its first successes.

Chapter 13

The Hundred Days.

M. Noirtier was a true prophet, and things progressed rapidly, as he had predicted. Every one knows the history of the famous return from Elba, a return which was unprecedented in the past, and will probably remain without a counterpart in the future.

Louis XVIII. made but a faint attempt to parry this unexpected blow; the monarchy he had scarcely reconstructed tottered on its precarious foundation, and at a sign from the emperor the incongruous structure of ancient prejudices and new ideas fell to the ground. Villefort, therefore, gained nothing save the king’s gratitude (which was rather likely to injure him at the present time) and the cross of the Legion of Honor, which he had the prudence not to wear, although M. de Blacas had duly forwarded the brevet.

Napoleon would, doubtless, have deprived Villefort of his office had it not been for Noirtier, who was all powerful at court, and thus the Girondin of ‘93 and the Senator of 1806 protected him who so lately had been his protector. All Villefort’s influence barely enabled him to stifle the secret Dantes had so nearly divulged. The king’s procureur alone was deprived of his office, being suspected of royalism.

However, scarcely was the imperial power established — that is, scarcely had the emperor re-entered the Tuileries and begun to issue orders from the closet into which we have introduced our readers, — he found on the table there Louis XVIII.’s half-filled snuff-box, — scarcely had this occurred when Marseilles began, in spite of the authorities, to rekindle the flames of civil war, always smouldering in the south, and it required but little to excite the populace to acts of far greater violence than the shouts and insults with which they assailed the royalists whenever they ventured abroad.

Owing to this change, the worthy shipowner became at that moment — we will not say all powerful, because Morrel was a prudent and rather a timid man, so much so, that many of the most zealous partisans of

Bonaparte accused him of “moderation” — but sufficiently influential to make a demand in favor of Dantes.

Villefort retained his place, but his marriage was put off until a more favorable opportunity. If the emperor remained on the throne, Gerard required a different alliance to aid his career; if Louis XVIII. returned, the influence of M. de Saint-Meran, like his own, could be vastly increased, and the marriage be still more suitable. The deputy-procureur was, therefore, the first magistrate of Marseilles, when one morning his door opened, and M. Morrel was announced.

Any one else would have hastened to receive him; but Villefort was a man of ability, and he knew this would be a sign of weakness. He made Morrel wait in the ante-chamber, although he had no one with him, for the simple reason that the king’s procureur always makes every one wait, and after passing a quarter of an hour in reading the papers, he ordered M. Morrel to be admitted.

Morrel expected Villefort would be dejected; he found him as he had found him six weeks before, calm, firm, and full of that glacial politeness, that most insurmountable barrier which separates the well-bred from the vulgar man.

He had entered Villefort’s office expecting that the magistrate would tremble at the sight of him; on the contrary, he felt a cold shudder all over him when he saw Villefort sitting there with his elbow on his desk, and his head leaning on his hand. He stopped at the door; Villefort gazed at him as if he had some difficulty in recognizing him; then, after a brief interval, during which the honest shipowner turned his hat in his hands, —

“M. Morrel, I believe?” said Villefort.

“Yes, sir.”

“Come nearer,” said the magistrate, with a patronizing wave of the hand, “and tell me to what circumstance I owe the honor of this visit.”

“Do you not guess, monsieur?” asked Morrel.

“Not in the least; but if I can serve you in any way I shall be delighted.”

“Everything depends on you.”

“Explain yourself, pray.”

“Monsieur,” said Morrel, recovering his assurance as he proceeded, “do you recollect that a few days before the landing of his majesty the emperor, I came to intercede for a young man, the mate of my ship, who was accused of being concerned in correspondence with the Island of Elba? What was the other day a crime is to-day a title to favor. You then served Louis XVIII., and you did not show any favor — it was your duty; to-day you serve Napoleon, and you ought to protect him — it is equally your duty; I come, therefore, to ask what has become of him?"

Villefort by a strong effort sought to control himself. "What is his name?" said he. "Tell me his name."

"Edmond Dantes."

Villefort would probably have rather stood opposite the muzzle of a pistol at five-and-twenty paces than have heard this name spoken; but he did not blanch.

"Dantes," repeated he, "Edmond Dantes."

"Yes, monsieur." Villefort opened a large register, then went to a table, from the table turned to his registers, and then, turning to Morrel, —

"Are you quite sure you are not mistaken, monsieur?" said he, in the most natural tone in the world.

Had Morrel been a more quick-sighted man, or better versed in these matters, he would have been surprised at the king's procureur answering him on such a subject, instead of referring him to the governors of the prison or the prefect of the department. But Morrel, disappointed in his expectations of exciting fear, was conscious only of the other's condescension. Villefort had calculated rightly.

"No," said Morrel; "I am not mistaken. I have known him for ten years, the last four of which he was in my service. Do not you recollect, I came about six weeks ago to plead for clemency, as I come to-day to plead for justice. You received me very coldly. Oh, the royalists were very severe with the Bonapartists in those days."

"Monsieur," returned Villefort, "I was then a royalist, because I believed the Bourbons not only the heirs to the throne, but the chosen of the nation. The miraculous return of Napoleon has conquered me, the legitimate monarch is he who is loved by his people."

"That's right!" cried Morrel. "I like to hear you speak thus, and I augur well for Edmond from it."

"Wait a moment," said Villefort, turning over the leaves of a register; "I have it — a sailor, who was about to marry a young Catalan girl. I recollect now; it was a very serious charge."

"How so?"

"You know that when he left here he was taken to the Palais de Justice."

"Well?"

"I made my report to the authorities at Paris, and a week after he was carried off."

"Carried off!" said Morrel. "What can they have done with him?"

"Oh, he has been taken to Fenestrelles, to Pignerol, or to the Sainte-Marguerite islands. Some fine morning he will return to take command of your vessel."

"Come when he will, it shall be kept for him. But how is it he is not already returned? It seems to me the first care of government should be to set at liberty those who have suffered for their adherence to it."

"Do not be too hasty, M. Morrel," replied Villefort. "The order of imprisonment came from high authority, and the order for his liberation must proceed from the same source; and, as Napoleon has scarcely been reinstated a fortnight, the letters have not yet been forwarded."

"But," said Morrel, "is there no way of expediting all these formalities — of releasing him from arrest?"

"There has been no arrest."

"How?"

"It is sometimes essential to government to cause a man's disappearance without leaving any traces, so that no written forms or documents may defeat their wishes."

"It might be so under the Bourbons, but at present" —

"It has always been so, my dear Morrel, since the reign of Louis XIV. The emperor is more strict in prison discipline than even Louis himself, and the number of prisoners whose names are not on the register is incalculable." Had Morrel even any suspicions, so much kindness would have dispelled them.

"Well, M. de Villefort, how would you advise me to act?" asked he.

"Petition the minister."

"Oh, I know what that is; the minister receives two hundred petitions every day, and does not read three."

"That is true; but he will read a petition countersigned and presented by me."

"And will you undertake to deliver it?"

"With the greatest pleasure. Dantes was then guilty, and now he is innocent, and it is as much my duty to free him as it was to condemn him."

Villefort thus forestalled any danger of an inquiry, which, however improbable it might be, if it did take place would leave him defenceless.

“But how shall I address the minister?”

“Sit down there,” said Villefort, giving up his place to Morrel, “and write what I dictate.”

“Will you be so good?”

“Certainly. But lose no time; we have lost too much already.”

“That is true. Only think what the poor fellow may even now be suffering.” Villefort shuddered at the suggestion; but he had gone too far to draw back. Dantes must be crushed to gratify Villefort’s ambition.

Villefort dictated a petition, in which, from an excellent intention, no doubt, Dantes’ patriotic services were exaggerated, and he was made out one of the most active agents of Napoleon’s return. It was evident that at the sight of this document the minister would instantly release him. The petition finished, Villefort read it aloud.

“That will do,” said he; “leave the rest to me.”

“Will the petition go soon?”

“To-day.”

“Countersigned by you?”

“The best thing I can do will be to certify the truth of the contents of your petition.” And, sitting down, Villefort wrote the certificate at the bottom.

“What more is to be done?”

“I will do whatever is necessary.” This assurance delighted Morrel, who took leave of Villefort, and hastened to announce to old Dantes that he would soon see his son.

As for Villefort, instead of sending to Paris, he carefully preserved the petition that so fearfully compromised Dantes, in the hopes of an event that seemed not unlikely, — that is, a second restoration. Dantes remained a prisoner, and heard not the noise of the fall of Louis XVIII.’s throne, or the still more tragic destruction of the empire.

Twice during the Hundred Days had Morrel renewed his demand, and twice had Villefort soothed him with promises. At last there was Waterloo, and Morrel came no more; he had done all that was in his power, and any fresh attempt would only compromise himself uselessly.

Louis XVIII. remounted the throne; Villefort, to whom Marseilles had become filled with remorseful memories, sought and obtained the situation of king’s procureur at Toulouse, and a fortnight afterwards he married

Mademoiselle de Saint-Meran, whose father now stood higher at court than ever.

And so Dantes, after the Hundred Days and after Waterloo, remained in his dungeon, forgotten of earth and heaven. Danglars comprehended the full extent of the wretched fate that overwhelmed Dantes; and, when Napoleon returned to France, he, after the manner of mediocre minds, termed the coincidence, “a decree of Providence.” But when Napoleon returned to Paris, Danglars’ heart failed him, and he lived in constant fear of Dantes’ return on a mission of vengeance. He therefore informed M. Morrel of his wish to quit the sea, and obtained a recommendation from him to a Spanish merchant, into whose service he entered at the end of March, that is, ten or twelve days after Napoleon’s return. He then left for Madrid, and was no more heard of.

Fernand understood nothing except that Dantes was absent. What had become of him he cared not to inquire. Only, during the respite the absence of his rival afforded him, he reflected, partly on the means of deceiving Mercedes as to the cause of his absence, partly on plans of emigration and abduction, as from time to time he sat sad and motionless on the summit of Cape Pharo, at the spot from whence Marseilles and the Catalans are visible, watching for the apparition of a young and handsome man, who was for him also the messenger of vengeance. Fernand’s mind was made up; he would shoot Dantes, and then kill himself. But Fernand was mistaken; a man of his disposition never kills himself, for he constantly hopes.

During this time the empire made its last conscription, and every man in France capable of bearing arms rushed to obey the summons of the emperor. Fernand departed with the rest, bearing with him the terrible thought that while he was away, his rival would perhaps return and marry Mercedes. Had Fernand really meant to kill himself, he would have done so when he parted from Mercedes. His devotion, and the compassion he showed for her misfortunes, produced the effect they always produce on noble minds — Mercedes had always had a sincere regard for Fernand, and this was now strengthened by gratitude.

“My brother,” said she as she placed his knapsack on his shoulders, “be careful of yourself, for if you are killed, I shall be alone in the world.” These words carried a ray of hope into Fernand’s heart. Should Dantes not return, Mercedes might one day be his.

Mercedes was left alone face to face with the vast plain that had never seemed so barren, and the sea that had never seemed so vast. Bathed in tears she wandered about the Catalan village. Sometimes she stood mute and motionless as a statue, looking towards Marseilles, at other times gazing on the sea, and debating as to whether it were not better to cast herself into the abyss of the ocean, and thus end her woes. It was not want of courage that prevented her putting this resolution into execution; but her religious feelings came to her aid and saved her. Caderousse was, like Fernand, enrolled in the army, but, being married and eight years older, he was merely sent to the frontier. Old Dantes, who was only sustained by hope, lost all hope at Napoleon’s downfall. Five months after he had been separated from his son, and almost at the hour of his arrest, he breathed his last in Mercedes’ arms. M. Morrel paid the expenses of his funeral, and a few small debts the poor old man had contracted.

There was more than benevolence in this action; there was courage; the south was aflame, and to assist, even on his death-bed, the father of so dangerous a Bonapartist as Dantes, was stigmatized as a crime.

Chapter 14

The Two Prisoners.

A year after Louis XVIII.'s restoration, a visit was made by the inspector-general of prisons. Dantes in his cell heard the noise of preparation, — sounds that at the depth where he lay would have been inaudible to any but the ear of a prisoner, who could hear the splash of the drop of water that every hour fell from the roof of his dungeon. He guessed something uncommon was passing among the living; but he had so long ceased to have any intercourse with the world, that he looked upon himself as dead.

The inspector visited, one after another, the cells and dungeons of several of the prisoners, whose good behavior or stupidity recommended them to the clemency of the government. He inquired how they were fed, and if they had any request to make. The universal response was, that the fare was detestable, and that they wanted to be set free.

The inspector asked if they had anything else to ask for. They shook their heads. What could they desire beyond their liberty? The inspector turned smilingly to the governor.

"I do not know what reason government can assign for these useless visits; when you see one prisoner, you see all, — always the same thing, — ill fed and innocent. Are there any others?"

"Yes; the dangerous and mad prisoners are in the dungeons."

"Let us visit them," said the inspector with an air of fatigue. "We must play the farce to the end. Let us see the dungeons."

"Let us first send for two soldiers," said the governor. "The prisoners sometimes, through mere uneasiness of life, and in order to be sentenced to death, commit acts of useless violence, and you might fall a victim."

"Take all needful precautions," replied the inspector.

Two soldiers were accordingly sent for, and the inspector descended a stairway, so foul, so humid, so dark, as to be loathsome to sight, smell, and respiration.

"Oh," cried the inspector, "who can live here?"

"A most dangerous conspirator, a man we are ordered to keep the most strict watch over, as he is daring and resolute."

"He is alone?"

"Certainly."

"How long has he been there?"

"Nearly a year."

"Was he placed here when he first arrived?"

"No; not until he attempted to kill the turnkey, who took his food to him."

"To kill the turnkey?"

"Yes, the very one who is lighting us. Is it not true, Antoine?" asked the governor.

"True enough; he wanted to kill me!" returned the turnkey.

"He must be mad," said the inspector.

"He is worse than that, — he is a devil!" returned the turnkey.

"Shall I complain of him?" demanded the inspector.

"Oh, no; it is useless. Besides, he is almost mad now, and in another year he will be quite so."

"So much the better for him, — he will suffer less," said the inspector. He was, as this remark shows, a man full of philanthropy, and in every way fit for his office.

"You are right, sir," replied the governor; "and this remark proves that you have deeply considered the subject. Now we have in a dungeon about twenty feet distant, and to which you descend by another stair, an abbe, formerly leader of a party in Italy, who has been here since 1811, and in 1813 he went mad, and the change is astonishing. He used to weep, he now laughs; he grew thin, he now grows fat. You had better see him, for his madness is amusing."

"I will see them both," returned the inspector; "I must conscientiously perform my duty." This was the inspector's first visit; he wished to display his authority.

"Let us visit this one first," added he.

"By all means," replied the governor, and he signed to the turnkey to open the door. At the sound of the key turning in the lock, and the creaking of the hinges, Dantes, who was crouched in a corner of the dungeon, whence he could see the ray of light that came through a narrow iron grating above, raised his head. Seeing a stranger, escorted by two turnkeys holding torches and accompanied by two soldiers, and to whom the governor spoke bareheaded, Dantes, who guessed the truth, and that the moment to address himself to the superior authorities was come, sprang forward with clasped hands.

The soldiers interposed their bayonets, for they thought that he was about to attack the inspector, and the latter recoiled two or three steps. Dantes saw that he was looked upon as dangerous. Then, infusing all the humility he possessed into his eyes and voice, he addressed the inspector, and sought to inspire him with pity.

The inspector listened attentively; then, turning to the governor, observed, “He will become religious — he is already more gentle; he is afraid, and retreated before the bayonets — madmen are not afraid of anything; I made some curious observations on this at Charenton.” Then, turning to the prisoner, “What is it you want?” said he.

“I want to know what crime I have committed — to be tried; and if I am guilty, to be shot; if innocent, to be set at liberty.”

“Are you well fed?” said the inspector.

“I believe so; I don’t know; it’s of no consequence. What matters really, not only to me, but to officers of justice and the king, is that an innocent man should languish in prison, the victim of an infamous denunciation, to die here cursing his executioners.”

“You are very humble to-day,” remarked the governor; “you are not so always; the other day, for instance, when you tried to kill the turnkey.”

“It is true, sir, and I beg his pardon, for he his always been very good to me, but I was mad.”

“And you are not so any longer?”

“No; captivity has subdued me — I have been here so long.”

“So long? — when were you arrested, then?” asked the inspector.

“The 28th of February, 1815, at half-past two in the afternoon.”

“To-day is the 30th of July, 1816, — why it is but seventeen months.”

“Only seventeen months,” replied Dantes. “Oh, you do not know what is seventeen months in prison! — seventeen ages rather, especially to a man who, like me, had arrived at the summit of his ambition — to a man, who, like me, was on the point of marrying a woman he adored, who saw an honorable career opened before him, and who loses all in an instant — who sees his prospects destroyed, and is ignorant of the fate of his affianced wife, and whether his aged father be still living! Seventeen months captivity to a sailor accustomed to the boundless ocean, is a worse punishment than human crime ever merited. Have pity on me, then, and ask for me, not intelligence, but a trial; not pardon, but a verdict — a trial, sir, I ask only for a trial; that, surely, cannot be denied to one who is accused!”

“We shall see,” said the inspector; then, turning to the governor, “On my word, the poor devil touches me. You must show me the proofs against him.”

“Certainly; but you will find terrible charges.”

“Monsieur,” continued Dantes, “I know it is not in your power to release me; but you can plead for me — you can have me tried — and that is all I ask. Let me know my crime, and the reason why I was condemned. Uncertainty is worse than all.”

“Go on with the lights,” said the inspector.

“Monsieur,” cried Dantes, “I can tell by your voice you are touched with pity; tell me at least to hope.”

“I cannot tell you that,” replied the inspector; “I can only promise to examine into your case.”

“Oh, I am free — then I am saved!”

“Who arrested you?”

“M. Villefort. See him, and hear what he says.”

“M. Villefort is no longer at Marseilles; he is now at Toulouse.”

“I am no longer surprised at my detention,” murmured Dantes, “since my only protector is removed.”

“Had M. de Villefort any cause of personal dislike to you?”

“None; on the contrary, he was very kind to me.”

“I can, then, rely on the notes he has left concerning you?”

“Entirely.”

“That is well; wait patiently, then.” Dantes fell on his knees, and prayed earnestly. The door closed; but this time a fresh inmate was left with Dantes — hope.

“Will you see the register at once,” asked the governor, “or proceed to the other cell?”

“Let us visit them all,” said the inspector. “If I once went up those stairs. I should never have the courage to come down again.”

“Ah, this one is not like the other, and his madness is less affecting than this one’s display of reason.”

“What is his folly?”

“He fancies he possesses an immense treasure. The first year he offered government a million of francs for his release; the second, two; the third, three; and so on progressively. He is now in his fifth year of captivity; he will ask to speak to you in private, and offer you five millions.”

“How curious! — what is his name?”

“The Abbe Faria.”

“No. 27,” said the inspector.

“It is here; unlock the door, Antoine.” The turnkey obeyed, and the inspector gazed curiously into the chamber of the “mad abbe.”

In the centre of the cell, in a circle traced with a fragment of plaster detached from the wall, sat a man whose tattered garments scarcely covered him. He was drawing in this circle geometrical lines, and seemed as much absorbed in his problem as Archimedes was when the soldier of Marcellus slew him.

He did not move at the sound of the door, and continued his calculations until the flash of the torches lighted up with an unwonted glare the sombre walls of his cell; then, raising his head, he perceived with astonishment the number of persons present. He hastily seized the coverlet of his bed, and wrapped it round him.

“What is it you want?” said the inspector.

“I, monsieur,” replied the abbe with an air of surprise — ”I want nothing.”

“You do not understand,” continued the inspector; “I am sent here by government to visit the prison, and hear the requests of the prisoners.”

“Oh, that is different,” cried the abbe; “and we shall understand each other, I hope.”

“There, now,” whispered the governor, “it is just as I told you.”

“Monsieur,” continued the prisoner, “I am the Abbe Faria, born at Rome. I was for twenty years Cardinal Spada’s secretary; I was arrested, why, I know not, toward the beginning of the year 1811; since then I have demanded my liberty from the Italian and French government.”

“Why from the French government?”

“Because I was arrested at Piombino, and I presume that, like Milan and Florence, Piombino has become the capital of some French department.”

“Ah,” said the inspector, “you have not the latest news from Italy?”

“My information dates from the day on which I was arrested,” returned the Abbe Faria; “and as the emperor had created the kingdom of Rome for his infant son, I presume that he has realized the dream of Machiavelli and Caesar Borgia, which was to make Italy a united kingdom."

"Monsieur," returned the inspector, "providence has changed this gigantic plan you advocate so warmly."

"It is the only means of rendering Italy strong, happy, and independent."

"Very possibly; only I am not come to discuss politics, but to inquire if you have anything to ask or to complain of."

"The food is the same as in other prisons, — that is, very bad; the lodging is very unhealthful, but, on the whole, passable for a dungeon; but it is not that which I wish to speak of, but a secret I have to reveal of the greatest importance."

"We are coming to the point," whispered the governor.

"It is for that reason I am delighted to see you," continued the abbe, "although you have disturbed me in a most important calculation, which, if it succeeded, would possibly change Newton's system. Could you allow me a few words in private."

"What did I tell you?" said the governor.

"You knew him," returned the inspector with a smile.

"What you ask is impossible, monsieur," continued he, addressing Faria.

"But," said the abbe, "I would speak to you of a large sum, amounting to five millions."

"The very sum you named," whispered the inspector in his turn.

"However," continued Faria, seeing that the inspector was about to depart, "it is not absolutely necessary for us to be alone; the governor can be present."

"Unfortunately," said the governor, "I know beforehand what you are about to say; it concerns your treasures, does it not?" Faria fixed his eyes on him with an expression that would have convinced any one else of his sanity.

"Of course," said he; "of what else should I speak?"

"Mr. Inspector," continued the governor, "I can tell you the story as well as he, for it has been dinned in my ears for the last four or five years."

"That proves," returned the abbe, "that you are like those of Holy Writ, who having ears hear not, and having eyes see not."

"My dear sir, the government is rich and does not want your treasures," replied the inspector; "keep them until you are liberated." The abbe's eyes glistened; he seized the inspector's hand.

“But what if I am not liberated,” cried he, “and am detained here until my death? this treasure will be lost. Had not government better profit by it? I will offer six millions, and I will content myself with the rest, if they will only give me my liberty.”

“On my word,” said the inspector in a low tone, “had I not been told beforehand that this man was mad, I should believe what he says.”

“I am not mad,” replied Faria, with that acuteness of hearing peculiar to prisoners. “The treasure I speak of really exists, and I offer to sign an agreement with you, in which I promise to lead you to the spot where you shall dig; and if I deceive you, bring me here again, — I ask no more.”

The governor laughed. “Is the spot far from here?”

“A hundred leagues.”

“It is not ill-planned,” said the governor. “If all the prisoners took it into their heads to travel a hundred leagues, and their guardians consented to accompany them, they would have a capital chance of escaping.”

“The scheme is well known,” said the inspector; “and the abbe’s plan has not even the merit of originality.”

Then turning to Faria — ”I inquired if you are well fed?” said he.

“Swear to me,” replied Faria, “to free me if what I tell you prove true, and I will stay here while you go to the spot.”

“Are you well fed?” repeated the inspector.

“Monsieur, you run no risk, for, as I told you, I will stay here; so there is no chance of my escaping.”

“You do not reply to my question,” replied the inspector impatiently.

“Nor you to mine,” cried the abbe. “You will not accept my gold; I will keep it for myself. You refuse me my liberty; God will give it me.” And the abbe, casting away his coverlet, resumed his place, and continued his calculations.

“What is he doing there?” said the inspector.

“Counting his treasures,” replied the governor.

Faria replied to this sarcasm with a glance of profound contempt. They went out. The turnkey closed the door behind them.

“He was wealthy once, perhaps?” said the inspector.

“Or dreamed he was, and awoke mad.”

“After all,” said the inspector, “if he had been rich, he would not have been here.” So the matter ended for the Abbe Faria. He remained in his cell, and this visit only increased the belief in his insanity.

Caligula or Nero, those treasure-seekers, those desirers of the impossible, would have accorded to the poor wretch, in exchange for his wealth, the liberty he so earnestly prayed for. But the kings of modern times, restrained by the limits of mere probability, have neither courage nor desire. They fear the ear that hears their orders, and the eye that scrutinizes their actions. Formerly they believed themselves sprung from Jupiter, and shielded by their birth; but nowadays they are not inviolable.

It has always been against the policy of despotic governments to suffer the victims of their persecutions to reappear. As the Inquisition rarely allowed its victims to be seen with their limbs distorted and their flesh lacerated by torture, so madness is always concealed in its cell, from whence, should it depart, it is conveyed to some gloomy hospital, where the doctor has no thought for man or mind in the mutilated being the jailer delivers to him. The very madness of the Abbe Faria, gone mad in prison, condemned him to perpetual captivity.

The inspector kept his word with Dantes; he examined the register, and found the following note concerning him: —

Edmond Dantes:

Violent Bonapartist; took an active part in the return from Elba.

The greatest watchfulness and care to be exercised.

This note was in a different hand from the rest, which showed that it had been added since his confinement. The inspector could not contend against this accusation; he simply wrote, — ”Nothing to be done.”

This visit had infused new vigor into Dantes; he had, till then, forgotten the date; but now, with a fragment of plaster, he wrote the date, 30th July, 1816, and made a mark every day, in order not to lose his reckoning again. Days and weeks passed away, then months — Dantes still waited; he at first expected to be freed in a fortnight. This fortnight expired, he decided that the inspector would do nothing until his return to Paris, and that he would not reach there until his circuit was finished, he therefore fixed three months; three months passed away, then six more. Finally ten months and a half had gone by and no favorable change had taken place, and Dantes began to fancy the inspector’s visit but a dream, an illusion of the brain.

At the expiration of a year the governor was transferred; he had obtained charge of the fortress at Ham. He took with him several of his subordinates, and amongst them Dantes’ jailer. A new governor arrived; it would have been too tedious to acquire the names of the prisoners; he learned their numbers instead. This horrible place contained fifty cells; their inhabitants were designated by the numbers of their cell, and the unhappy young man was no longer called Edmond Dantes — he was now number 34.

Chapter 15

Number 34 and Number 27.

Dantes passed through all the stages of torture natural to prisoners in suspense. He was sustained at first by that pride of conscious innocence which is the sequence to hope; then he began to doubt his own innocence, which justified in some measure the governor’s belief in his mental alienation; and then, relaxing his sentiment of pride, he addressed his supplications, not to God, but to man. God is always the last resource. Unfortunates, who ought to begin with God, do not have any hope in him till they have exhausted all other means of deliverance.

Dantes asked to be removed from his present dungeon into another; for a change, however disadvantageous, was still a change, and would afford him some amusement. He entreated to be allowed to walk about, to have fresh air, books, and writing materials. His requests were not granted, but he went on asking all the same. He accustomed himself to speaking to the new jailer, although the latter was, if possible, more taciturn than the old one; but still, to speak to a man, even though mute, was something. Dantes spoke for the sake of hearing his own voice; he had tried to speak when alone, but the sound of his voice terrified him. Often, before his captivity, Dantes’ mind had revolted at the idea of assemblages of prisoners, made up of thieves, vagabonds, and murderers. He now wished to be amongst them, in order to see some other face besides that of his jailer; he sighed for the galleys, with the infamous costume, the chain, and the brand on the shoulder. The galley-slaves breathed the fresh air of heaven, and saw each other. They were very happy. He besought the jailer one day to let him have a companion, were it even the mad abbe.

The jailer, though rough and hardened by the constant sight of so much suffering, was yet a man. At the bottom of his heart he had often had a feeling of pity for this unhappy young man who suffered so; and he laid the request of number 34 before the governor; but the latter sapiently imagined that Dantes wished to conspire or attempt an escape, and refused his request. Dantes had exhausted all human resources, and he then turned to God.

All the pious ideas that had been so long forgotten, returned; he recollected the prayers his mother had taught him, and discovered a new meaning in every word; for in prosperity prayers seem but a mere medley of words, until misfortune comes and the unhappy sufferer first understands the meaning of the sublime language in which he invokes the pity of heaven! He prayed, and prayed aloud, no longer terrified at the sound of his own voice, for he fell into a sort of ecstasy. He laid every action of his life before the Almighty, proposed tasks to accomplish, and at the end of every prayer introduced the entreaty oftener addressed to man than to God: “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.” Yet in spite of his earnest prayers, Dantes remained a prisoner.

Then gloom settled heavily upon him. Dantes was a man of great simplicity of thought, and without education; he could not, therefore, in the solitude of his dungeon, traverse in mental vision the history of the ages, bring to life the nations that had perished, and rebuild the ancient cities so vast and stupendous in the light of the imagination, and that pass before the eye glowing with celestial colors in Martin’s Babylonian pictures. He could not do this, he whose past life was so short, whose present so melancholy, and his future so doubtful. Nineteen years of light to reflect upon in eternal darkness! No distraction could come to his aid; his energetic spirit, that would have exalted in thus revisiting the past, was imprisoned like an eagle in a cage. He clung to one idea — that of his happiness, destroyed, without apparent cause, by an unheard-of fatality; he considered and reconsidered this idea, devoured it (so to speak), as the implacable Ugolino devours the skull of Archbishop Roger in the Inferno of Dante.

Rage supplanted religious fervor. Dantes uttered blasphemies that made his jailer recoil with horror, dashed himself furiously against the walls of his prison, wreaked his anger upon everything, and chiefly upon himself, so that the least thing, — a grain of sand, a straw, or a breath of air that annoyed him, led to paroxysms of fury. Then the letter that Villefort had showed to him recurred to his mind, and every line gleamed forth in fiery letters on the wall like the mene tekel upharsin of Belshazzar. He told himself that it was the enmity of man, and not the vengeance of heaven, that had thus plunged him into the deepest misery. He consigned his unknown persecutors to the most horrible tortures he could imagine, and found them all insufficient, because after torture came death, and after death, if not repose, at least the boon of unconsciousness.

By dint of constantly dwelling on the idea that tranquillity was death, and if punishment were the end in view other tortures than death must be invented, he began to reflect on suicide. Unhappy he, who, on the brink of misfortune, broods over ideas like these!

Before him is a dead sea that stretches in azure calm before the eye; but he who unwarily ventures within its embrace finds himself struggling with a monster that would drag him down to perdition. Once thus ensnared, unless the protecting hand of God snatch him thence, all is over, and his struggles but tend to hasten his destruction. This state of mental anguish is, however, less terrible than the sufferings that precede or the punishment that possibly will follow. There is a sort of consolation at the contemplation of the yawning abyss, at the bottom of which lie darkness and obscurity.

Edmond found some solace in these ideas. All his sorrows, all his sufferings, with their train of gloomy spectres, fled from his cell when the angel of death seemed about to enter. Dantes reviewed his past life with composure, and, looking forward with terror to his future existence, chose that middle line that seemed to afford him a refuge.

“Sometimes,” said he, “in my voyages, when I was a man and commanded other men, I have seen the heavens overcast, the sea rage and foam, the storm arise, and, like a monstrous bird, beating the two horizons with its wings. Then I felt that my vessel was a vain refuge, that trembled and shook before the tempest. Soon the fury of the waves and the sight of the sharp rocks announced the approach of death, and death then terrified me, and I used all my skill and intelligence as a man and a sailor to struggle against the wrath of God. But I did so because I was happy, because I had not courted death, because to be cast upon a bed of rocks and seaweed seemed terrible, because I was unwilling that I, a creature made for the service of God, should serve for food to the gulls and ravens. But now it is different; I have lost all that bound me to life, death smiles and invites me to repose; I die after my own manner, I die exhausted and broken-spirited, as I fall asleep when I have paced three thousand times round my cell.”

No sooner had this idea taken possession of him than he became more composed, arranged his couch to the best of his power, ate little and slept less, and found existence almost supportable, because he felt that he could throw it off at pleasure, like a worn-out garment. Two methods of self-destruction were at his disposal. He could hang himself with his handkerchief to the window bars, or refuse food and die of starvation. But the first was repugnant to him. Dantes had always entertained the greatest horror of pirates, who are hung up to the yard-arm; he would not die by what seemed an infamous death. He resolved to adopt the second, and began that day to carry out his resolve. Nearly four years had passed away; at the end of the second he had ceased to mark the lapse of time.

Dantes said, “I wish to die,” and had chosen the manner of his death, and fearful of changing his mind, he had taken an oath to die. “When my morning and evening meals are brought,” thought he, “I will cast them out of the window, and they will think that I have eaten them.”

He kept his word; twice a day he cast out, through the barred aperture, the provisions his jailer brought him — at first gayly, then with deliberation, and at last with regret. Nothing but the recollection of his oath gave him strength to proceed. Hunger made viands once repugnant, now acceptable; he held the plate in his hand for an hour at a time, and gazed thoughtfully at the morsel of bad meat, of tainted fish, of black and mouldy bread. It was the last yearning for life contending with the resolution of despair; then his dungeon seemed less sombre, his prospects less desperate. He was still young — he was only four or five and twenty — he had nearly fifty years to live. What unforseen events might not open his prison door, and restore him to liberty? Then he raised to his lips the repast that, like a voluntary Tantalus, he refused himself; but he thought of his oath, and he would not break it. He persisted until, at last, he had not sufficient strength to rise and cast his supper out of the loophole. The next morning he could not see or hear; the jailer feared he was dangerously ill. Edmond hoped he was dying.

Thus the day passed away. Edmond felt a sort of stupor creeping over him which brought with it a feeling almost of content; the gnawing pain at his stomach had ceased; his thirst had abated; when he closed his eyes he saw myriads of lights dancing before them like the will-o’-the-wisps that play about the marshes. It was the twilight of that mysterious country called Death!

Suddenly, about nine o’clock in the evening, Edmond heard a hollow sound in the wall against which he was lying.

So many loathsome animals inhabited the prison, that their noise did not, in general, awake him; but whether abstinence had quickened his faculties, or whether the noise was really louder than usual, Edmond raised his head and listened. It was a continual scratching, as if made by a huge claw, a powerful tooth, or some iron instrument attacking the stones.

Although weakened, the young man’s brain instantly responded to the idea that haunts all prisoners — liberty! It seemed to him that heaven had at length taken pity on him, and had sent this noise to warn him on the very brink of the abyss. Perhaps one of those beloved ones he had so often thought of was thinking of him, and striving to diminish the distance that separated them.

No, no, doubtless he was deceived, and it was but one of those dreams that forerun death!

Edmond still heard the sound. It lasted nearly three hours; he then heard a noise of something falling, and all was silent.

Some hours afterwards it began again, nearer and more distinct. Edmond was intensely interested. Suddenly the jailer entered.

For a week since he had resolved to die, and during the four days that he had been carrying out his purpose, Edmond had not spoken to the attendant, had not answered him when he inquired what was the matter with him, and turned his face to the wall when he looked too curiously at him; but now the jailer might hear the noise and put an end to it, and so destroy a ray of something like hope that soothed his last moments.

The jailer brought him his breakfast. Dantes raised himself up and began to talk about everything; about the bad quality of the food, about the coldness of his dungeon, grumbling and complaining, in order to have an excuse for speaking louder, and wearying the patience of his jailer, who out of kindness of heart had brought broth and white bread for his prisoner.

Fortunately, he fancied that Dantes was delirious; and placing the food on the rickety table, he withdrew. Edmond listened, and the sound became more and more distinct.

“There can be no doubt about it,” thought he; “it is some prisoner who is striving to obtain his freedom. Oh, if I were only there to help him!” Suddenly another idea took possession of his mind, so used to misfortune, that it was scarcely capable of hope — the idea that the noise was made by workmen the governor had ordered to repair the neighboring dungeon.

It was easy to ascertain this; but how could he risk the question? It was easy to call his jailer’s attention to the noise, and watch his countenance as he listened; but might he not by this means destroy hopes far more important than the short-lived satisfaction of his own curiosity? Unfortunately, Edmond’s brain was still so feeble that he could not bend his thoughts to anything in particular.

He saw but one means of restoring lucidity and clearness to his judgment. He turned his eyes towards the soup which the jailer had brought, rose, staggered towards it, raised the vessel to his lips, and drank off the contents with a feeling of indescribable pleasure. He had often heard that shipwrecked persons had died through having eagerly devoured too much food. Edmond replaced on the table the bread he was about to devour, and returned to his couch — he did not wish to die. He soon felt that his ideas became again collected — he could think, and strengthen his thoughts by reasoning. Then he said to himself, “I must put this to the test, but without compromising anybody. If it is a workman, I need but knock against the wall, and he will cease to work, in order to find out who is knocking, and why he does so; but as his occupation is sanctioned by the governor, he will soon resume it. If, on the contrary, it is a prisoner, the noise I make will alarm him, he will cease, and not begin again until he thinks every one is asleep.”

Edmond rose again, but this time his legs did not tremble, and his sight was clear; he went to a corner of his dungeon, detached a stone, and with it knocked against the wall where the sound came. He struck thrice. At the first blow the sound ceased, as if by magic.

Edmond listened intently; an hour passed, two hours passed, and no sound was heard from the wall — all was silent there.

Full of hope, Edmond swallowed a few mouthfuls of bread and water, and, thanks to the vigor of his constitution, found himself well-nigh recovered.

The day passed away in utter silence — night came without recurrence of the noise.

“It is a prisoner,” said Edmond joyfully. The night passed in perfect silence. Edmond did not close his eyes.

In the morning the jailer brought him fresh provisions — he had already devoured those of the previous day; he ate these listening anxiously for the sound, walking round and round his cell, shaking the iron bars of the loophole, restoring vigor and agility to his limbs by exercise, and so preparing himself for his future destiny. At intervals he listened to learn if the noise had not begun again, and grew impatient at the prudence of the prisoner, who did not guess he had been disturbed by a captive as anxious for liberty as himself.

Three days passed — seventy-two long tedious hours which he counted off by minutes!

At length one evening, as the jailer was visiting him for the last time that night, Dantes, with his ear for the hundredth time at the wall, fancied he heard an almost imperceptible movement among the stones. He moved away, walked up and down his cell to collect his thoughts, and then went back and listened.

The matter was no longer doubtful. Something was at work on the other side of the wall; the prisoner had discovered the danger, and had substituted a lever for a chisel.

Encouraged by this discovery, Edmond determined to assist the indefatigable laborer. He began by moving his bed, and looked around for anything with which he could pierce the wall, penetrate the moist cement, and displace a stone.

He saw nothing, he had no knife or sharp instrument, the window grating was of iron, but he had too often assured himself of its solidity. All his furniture consisted of a bed, a chair, a table, a pail, and a jug. The bed had iron clamps, but they were screwed to the wood, and it would have required a screw-driver to take them off. The table and chair had nothing, the pail had once possessed a handle, but that had been removed.

Dantes had but one resource, which was to break the jug, and with one of the sharp fragments attack the wall. He let the jug fall on the floor, and it broke in pieces.

Dantes concealed two or three of the sharpest fragments in his bed, leaving the rest on the floor. The breaking of his jug was too natural an accident to excite suspicion. Edmond had all the night to work in, but in the darkness he could not do much, and he soon felt that he was working against something very hard; he pushed back his bed, and waited for day.

All night he heard the subterranean workman, who continued to mine his way. Day came, the jailer entered. Dantes told him that the jug had fallen from his hands while he was drinking, and the jailer went grumblingly to fetch another, without giving himself the trouble to remove the fragments of the broken one. He returned speedily, advised the prisoner to be more careful, and departed.

Dantes heard joyfully the key grate in the lock; he listened until the sound of steps died away, and then, hastily displacing his bed, saw by the faint light that penetrated into his cell, that he had labored uselessly the previous evening in attacking the stone instead of removing the plaster that surrounded it.

The damp had rendered it friable, and Dantes was able to break it off — in small morsels, it is true, but at the end of half an hour he had scraped off a handful; a mathematician might have calculated that in two years, supposing that the rock was not encountered, a passage twenty feet long and two feet broad, might be formed.

The prisoner reproached himself with not having thus employed the hours he had passed in vain hopes, prayer, and despondency. During the six years that he had been imprisoned, what might he not have accomplished?

In three days he had succeeded, with the utmost precaution, in removing the cement, and exposing the stone-work. The wall was built of rough stones, among which, to give strength to the structure, blocks of hewn stone were at intervals imbedded. It was one of these he had uncovered, and which he must remove from its socket.

Dantes strove to do this with his nails, but they were too weak. The fragments of the jug broke, and after an hour of useless toil, he paused.

Was he to be thus stopped at the beginning, and was he to wait inactive until his fellow workman had completed his task? Suddenly an idea occurred to him — he smiled, and the perspiration dried on his forehead.

The jailer always brought Dantes’ soup in an iron saucepan; this saucepan contained soup for both prisoners, for Dantes had noticed that it was either quite full, or half empty, according as the turnkey gave it to him or to his companion first.

The handle of this saucepan was of iron; Dantes would have given ten years of his life in exchange for it.

The jailer was accustomed to pour the contents of the saucepan into Dantes’ plate, and Dantes, after eating his soup with a wooden spoon, washed the plate, which thus served for every day. Now when evening came Dantes put his plate on the ground near the door; the jailer, as he entered, stepped on it and broke it.

This time he could not blame Dantes. He was wrong to leave it there, but the jailer was wrong not to have looked before him.

The jailer, therefore, only grumbled. Then he looked about for something to pour the soup into; Dantes' entire dinner service consisted of one plate — there was no alternative.

"Leave the saucepan," said Dantes; "you can take it away when you bring me my breakfast." This advice was to the jailer's taste, as it spared him the necessity of making another trip. He left the saucepan.

Dantes was beside himself with joy. He rapidly devoured his food, and after waiting an hour, lest the jailer should change his mind and return, he removed his bed, took the handle of the saucepan, inserted the point between the hewn stone and rough stones of the wall, and employed it as a lever. A slight oscillation showed Dantes that all went well. At the end of an hour the stone was extricated from the wall, leaving a cavity a foot and a half in diameter.

Dantes carefully collected the plaster, carried it into the corner of his cell, and covered it with earth. Then, wishing to make the best use of his time while he had the means of labor, he continued to work without ceasing. At the dawn of day he replaced the stone, pushed his bed against the wall, and lay down. The breakfast consisted of a piece of bread; the jailer entered and placed the bread on the table.

"Well, don't you intend to bring me another plate?" said Dantes.

"No," replied the turnkey; "you destroy everything. First you break your jug, then you make me break your plate; if all the prisoners followed your example, the government would be ruined. I shall leave you the saucepan, and pour your soup into that. So for the future I hope you will not be so destructive."

Dantes raised his eyes to heaven and clasped his hands beneath the coverlet. He felt more gratitude for the possession of this piece of iron than he had ever felt for anything. He had noticed, however, that the prisoner on the other side had ceased to labor; no matter, this was a greater reason for proceeding — if his neighbor would not come to him, he would go to his neighbor. All day he toiled on untiringly, and by the evening he had succeeded in extracting ten handfuls of plaster and fragments of stone. When the hour for his jailer's visit arrived, Dantes straightened the handle of the saucepan as well as he could, and placed it in its accustomed place. The turnkey poured his ration of soup into it, together with the fish — for thrice a week the prisoners were deprived of meat. This would have been a method of reckoning time, had not Dantes long ceased to do so. Having poured out the soup, the turnkey retired. Dantes wished to ascertain whether his neighbor had really ceased to work. He listened — all was silent, as it had been for the last three days. Dantes sighed; it was evident that his neighbor distrusted him. However, he toiled on all the night without being discouraged; but after two or three hours he encountered an obstacle. The iron made no impression, but met with a smooth surface; Dantes touched it, and found that it was a beam. This beam crossed, or rather blocked up, the hole Dantes had made; it was necessary, therefore, to dig above or under it. The unhappy young man had not thought of this. "O my God, my God!" murmured he, "I have so earnestly prayed to you, that I hoped my prayers had been heard. After having deprived me of my liberty, after having deprived me of death, after having recalled me to existence, my God, have pity on me, and do not let me die in despair!"

"Who talks of God and despair at the same time?" said a voice that seemed to come from beneath the earth, and, deadened by the distance, sounded hollow and sepulchral in the young man's ears. Edmond's hair stood on end, and he rose to his knees.

"Ah," said he, "I hear a human voice." Edmond had not heard any one speak save his jailer for four or five years; and a jailer is no man to a prisoner — he is a living door, a barrier of flesh and blood adding strength to restraints of oak and iron.

"In the name of heaven," cried Dantes, "speak again, though the sound of your voice terrifies me. Who are you?"

"Who are you?" said the voice.

"An unhappy prisoner," replied Dantes, who made no hesitation in answering.

"Of what country?"

"A Frenchman."

"Your name?"

"Edmond Dantes."

"Your profession?"

"A sailor."

"How long have you been here?"

"Since the 28th of February, 1815."

"Your crime?"

"I am innocent."

"But of what are you accused?"

“Of having conspired to aid the emperor’s return.”

“What! For the emperor’s return? — the emperor is no longer on the throne, then?”

“He abdicated at Fontainebleau in 1814, and was sent to the Island of Elba. But how long have you been here that you are ignorant of all this?”

“Since 1811.”

Dantes shuddered; this man had been four years longer than himself in prison.

“Do not dig any more,” said the voice; “only tell me how high up is your excavation?”

“On a level with the floor.”

“How is it concealed?”

“Behind my bed.”

“Has your bed been moved since you have been a prisoner?”

“No.”

“What does your chamber open on?”

“A corridor.”

“And the corridor?”

“On a court.”

“Alas!” murmured the voice.

“Oh, what is the matter?” cried Dantes.

“I have made a mistake owing to an error in my plans. I took the wrong angle, and have come out fifteen feet from where I intended. I took the wall you are mining for the outer wall of the fortress.”

“But then you would be close to the sea?”

“That is what I hoped.”

“And supposing you had succeeded?”

“I should have thrown myself into the sea, gained one of the islands near here — the Isle de Daume or the Isle de Tiboulen — and then I should have been safe.”

“Could you have swum so far?”

“Heaven would have given me strength; but now all is lost.”

“All?”

“Yes; stop up your excavation carefully, do not work any more, and wait until you hear from me.”

“Tell me, at least, who you are?”

“I am — I am No. 27.”

"You mistrust me, then," said Dantes. Edmond fancied he heard a bitter laugh resounding from the depths.

"Oh, I am a Christian," cried Dantes, guessing instinctively that this man meant to abandon him. "I swear to you by him who died for us that naught shall induce me to breathe one syllable to my jailers; but I conjure you do not abandon me. If you do, I swear to you, for I have got to the end of my strength, that I will dash my brains out against the wall, and you will have my death to reproach yourself with."

"How old are you? Your voice is that of a young man."

"I do not know my age, for I have not counted the years I have been here. All I do know is, that I was just nineteen when I was arrested, the 28th of February, 1815."

"Not quite twenty-six!" murmured the voice; "at that age he cannot be a traitor."

"Oh, no, no," cried Dantes. "I swear to you again, rather than betray you, I would allow myself to be hacked in pieces!"

"You have done well to speak to me, and ask for my assistance, for I was about to form another plan, and leave you; but your age reassures me. I will not forget you. Wait."

"How long?"

"I must calculate our chances; I will give you the signal."

"But you will not leave me; you will come to me, or you will let me come to you. We will escape, and if we cannot escape we will talk; you of those whom you love, and I of those whom I love. You must love somebody?"

"No, I am alone in the world."

"Then you will love me. If you are young, I will be your comrade; if you are old, I will be your son. I have a father who is seventy if he yet lives; I only love him and a young girl called Mercedes. My father has not yet forgotten me, I am sure, but God alone knows if she loves me still; I shall love you as I loved my father."

"It is well," returned the voice; "to-morrow."

These few words were uttered with an accent that left no doubt of his sincerity; Dantes rose, dispersed the fragments with the same precaution as before, and pushed his bed back against the wall. He then gave himself up to his happiness. He would no longer be alone. He was, perhaps, about to regain his liberty; at the worst, he would have a companion, and captivity that is shared is but half captivity. Plaints made in common are almost prayers, and prayers where two or three are gathered together invoke the mercy of heaven.

All day Dantes walked up and down his cell. He sat down occasionally on his bed, pressing his hand on his heart. At the slightest noise he bounded towards the door. Once or twice the thought crossed his mind that he might be separated from this unknown, whom he loved already; and then his mind was made up — when the jailer moved his bed and stooped to examine the opening, he would kill him with his water jug. He would be condemned to die, but he was about to die of grief and despair when this miraculous noise recalled him to life.

The jailer came in the evening. Dantes was on his bed. It seemed to him that thus he better guarded the unfinished opening. Doubtless there was a strange expression in his eyes, for the jailer said, “Come, are you going mad again?”

Dantes did not answer; he feared that the emotion of his voice would betray him. The jailer went away shaking his head. Night came; Dantes hoped that his neighbor would profit by the silence to address him, but he was mistaken. The next morning, however, just as he removed his bed from the wall, he heard three knocks; he threw himself on his knees.

“Is it you?” said he; “I am here.”

“Is your jailer gone?”

“Yes,” said Dantes; “he will not return until the evening; so that we have twelve hours before us.”

“I can work, then?” said the voice.

“Oh, yes, yes; this instant, I entreat you.”

In a moment that part of the floor on which Dantes was resting his two hands, as he knelt with his head in the opening, suddenly gave way; he drew back smartly, while a mass of stones and earth disappeared in a hole that opened beneath the aperture he himself had formed. Then from the bottom of this passage, the depth of which it was impossible to measure, he saw appear, first the head, then the shoulders, and lastly the body of a man, who sprang lightly into his cell.

Chapter 16

A Learned Italian.

Seizing in his arms the friend so long and ardently desired, Dantes almost carried him towards the window, in order to obtain a better view of his features by the aid of the imperfect light that struggled through the grating.

He was a man of small stature, with hair blanched rather by suffering and sorrow than by age. He had a deep-set, penetrating eye, almost buried beneath the thick gray eyebrow, and a long (and still black) beard reaching down to his breast. His thin face, deeply furrowed by care, and the bold outline of his strongly marked features, betokened a man more accustomed to exercise his mental faculties than his physical strength. Large drops of perspiration were now standing on his brow, while the garments that hung about him were so ragged that one could only guess at the pattern upon which they had originally been fashioned.

The stranger might have numbered sixty or sixty-five years; but a certain briskness and appearance of vigor in his movements made it probable that he was aged more from captivity than the course of time. He received the enthusiastic greeting of his young acquaintance with evident pleasure, as though his chilled affections were rekindled and invigorated by his contact with one so warm and ardent. He thanked him with grateful cordiality for his kindly welcome, although he must at that moment have been suffering bitterly to find another dungeon where he had fondly reckoned on discovering a means of regaining his liberty.

“Let us first see,” said he, “whether it is possible to remove the traces of my entrance here — our future tranquillity depends upon our jailers being entirely ignorant of it.” Advancing to the opening, he stooped and raised the stone easily in spite of its weight; then, fitting it into its place, he said, —

“You removed this stone very carelessly; but I suppose you had no tools to aid you.”

“Why,” exclaimed Dantes, with astonishment, “do you possess any?”

“I made myself some; and with the exception of a file, I have all that are necessary, — a chisel, pincers, and lever.”

“Oh, how I should like to see these products of your industry and patience.”

“Well, in the first place, here is my chisel.” So saying, he displayed a sharp strong blade, with a handle made of beechwood.

“And with what did you contrive to make that?” inquired Dantes.

“With one of the clamps of my bedstead; and this very tool has sufficed me to hollow out the road by which I came hither, a distance of about fifty feet.”

“Fifty feet!” responded Dantes, almost terrified.

“Do not speak so loud, young man — don’t speak so loud. It frequently occurs in a state prison like this, that persons are stationed outside the doors of the cells purposely to overhear the conversation of the prisoners.”

“But they believe I am shut up alone here.”

“That makes no difference.”

“And you say that you dug your way a distance of fifty feet to get here?”

“I do; that is about the distance that separates your chamber from mine; only, unfortunately, I did not curve aright; for want of the necessary geometrical instruments to calculate my scale of proportion, instead of taking an ellipsis of forty feet, I made it fifty. I expected, as I told you, to reach the outer wall, pierce through it, and throw myself into the sea; I have, however, kept along the corridor on which your chamber opens, instead of going beneath it. My labor is all in vain, for I find that the corridor looks into a courtyard filled with soldiers.”

“That’s true,” said Dantes; “but the corridor you speak of only bounds one side of my cell; there are three others — do you know anything of their situation?”

“This one is built against the solid rock, and it would take ten experienced miners, duly furnished with the requisite tools, as many years to perforate it. This adjoins the lower part of the governor’s apartments, and were we to work our way through, we should only get into some lock-up cellars, where we must necessarily be recaptured. The fourth and last side of your cell faces on — faces on — stop a minute, now where does it face?”

The wall of which he spoke was the one in which was fixed the loophole by which light was admitted to the chamber. This loophole, which gradually diminished in size as it approached the outside, to an opening through which a child could not have passed, was, for better security, furnished with three iron bars, so as to quiet all apprehensions even in the mind of the most suspicious jailer as to the possibility of a prisoner’s escape. As the stranger asked the question, he dragged the table beneath the window.

“Climb up,” said he to Dantes. The young man obeyed, mounted on the table, and, divining the wishes of his companion, placed his back securely against the wall and held out both hands. The stranger, whom as yet Dantes knew only by the number of his cell, sprang up with an agility by no means to be expected in a person of his years, and, light and steady on his feet as a cat or a lizard, climbed from the table to the outstretched hands of Dantes, and from them to his shoulders; then, bending double, for the ceiling of the dungeon prevented him from holding himself erect, he managed to slip his head between the upper bars of the window, so as to be able to command a perfect view from top to bottom.

An instant afterwards he hastily drew back his head, saying, “I thought so!” and sliding from the shoulders of Dantes as dextrously as he had ascended, he nimbly leaped from the table to the ground.

“What was it that you thought?” asked the young man anxiously, in his turn descending from the table.

The elder prisoner pondered the matter. “Yes,” said he at length, “it is so. This side of your chamber looks out upon a kind of open gallery, where patrols are continually passing, and sentries keep watch day and night.”

“Are you quite sure of that?”

“Certain. I saw the soldier’s shape and the top of his musket; that made me draw in my head so quickly, for I was fearful he might also see me.”

“Well?” inquired Dantes.

“You perceive then the utter impossibility of escaping through your dungeon?”

“Then,” pursued the young man eagerly —

“Then,” answered the elder prisoner, “the will of God be done!” and as the old man slowly pronounced those words, an air of profound resignation spread itself over his careworn countenance. Dantes gazed on the man who could thus philosophically resign hopes so long and ardently nourished with an astonishment mingled with admiration.

“Tell me, I entreat of you, who and what you are?” said he at length; “never have I met with so remarkable a person as yourself.”

“Willingly,” answered the stranger; “if, indeed, you feel any curiosity respecting one, now, alas, powerless to aid you in any way.”

"Say not so; you can console and support me by the strength of your own powerful mind. Pray let me know who you really are?"

The stranger smiled a melancholy smile. "Then listen," said he. "I am the Abbe Faria, and have been imprisoned as you know in this Chateau d'If since the year 1811; previously to which I had been confined for three years in the fortress of Fenestrelle. In the year 1811 I was transferred to Piedmont in France. It was at this period I learned that the destiny which seemed subservient to every wish formed by Napoleon, had bestowed on him a son, named king of Rome even in his cradle. I was very far then from expecting the change you have just informed me of; namely, that four years afterwards, this colossus of power would be overthrown. Then who reigns in France at this moment — Napoleon II.?"

"No, Louis XVIII."

"The brother of Louis XVII.! How inscrutable are the ways of providence — for what great and mysterious purpose has it pleased heaven to abase the man once so elevated, and raise up him who was so abased?"

Dantes' whole attention was riveted on a man who could thus forget his own misfortunes while occupying himself with the destinies of others.

"Yes, yes," continued he, "'Twill be the same as it was in England. After Charles I., Cromwell; after Cromwell, Charles II., and then James II., and then some son-in-law or relation, some Prince of Orange, a stadtholder who becomes a king. Then new concessions to the people, then a constitution, then liberty. Ah, my friend!" said the abbe, turning towards Dantes, and surveying him with the kindling gaze of a prophet, "you are young, you will see all this come to pass."

"Probably, if ever I get out of prison!"

"True," replied Faria, "we are prisoners; but I forget this sometimes, and there are even moments when my mental vision transports me beyond these walls, and I fancy myself at liberty."

"But wherefore are you here?"

"Because in 1807 I dreamed of the very plan Napoleon tried to realize in 1811; because, like Machiavelli, I desired to alter the political face of Italy, and instead of allowing it to be split up into a quantity of petty principalities, each held by some weak or tyrannical ruler, I sought to form one large, compact, and powerful empire; and, lastly, because I fancied I had found my Caesar Borgia in a crowned simpleton, who feigned to enter into my views only to betray me. It was the plan of Alexander VI. and

Clement VII., but it will never succeed now, for they attempted it fruitlessly, and Napoleon was unable to complete his work. Italy seems fated to misfortune.” And the old man bowed his head.

Dantes could not understand a man risking his life for such matters. Napoleon certainly he knew something of, inasmuch as he had seen and spoken with him; but of Clement VII. and Alexander VI. he knew nothing.

“Are you not,” he asked, “the priest who here in the Chateau d’If is generally thought to be — ill?”

“Mad, you mean, don’t you?”

“I did not like to say so,” answered Dantes, smiling.

“Well, then,” resumed Faria with a bitter smile, “let me answer your question in full, by acknowledging that I am the poor mad prisoner of the Chateau d’If, for many years permitted to amuse the different visitors with what is said to be my insanity; and, in all probability, I should be promoted to the honor of making sport for the children, if such innocent beings could be found in an abode devoted like this to suffering and despair.”

Dantes remained for a short time mute and motionless; at length he said, — ”Then you abandon all hope of escape?”

“I perceive its utter impossibility; and I consider it impious to attempt that which the Almighty evidently does not approve.”

“Nay, be not discouraged. Would it not be expecting too much to hope to succeed at your first attempt? Why not try to find an opening in another direction from that which has so unfortunately failed?”

“Alas, it shows how little notion you can have of all it has cost me to effect a purpose so unexpectedly frustrated, that you talk of beginning over again. In the first place, I was four years making the tools I possess, and have been two years scraping and digging out earth, hard as granite itself; then what toil and fatigue has it not been to remove huge stones I should once have deemed impossible to loosen. Whole days have I passed in these Titanic efforts, considering my labor well repaid if, by night-time I had contrived to carry away a square inch of this hard-bound cement, changed by ages into a substance unyielding as the stones themselves; then to conceal the mass of earth and rubbish I dug up, I was compelled to break through a staircase, and throw the fruits of my labor into the hollow part of it; but the well is now so completely choked up, that I scarcely think it would be possible to add another handful of dust without leading to discovery. Consider also that I fully believed I had accomplished the end and aim of my undertaking, for which I had so exactly husbanded my strength as to make it just hold out to the termination of my enterprise; and now, at the moment when I reckoned upon success, my hopes are forever dashed from me. No, I repeat again, that nothing shall induce me to renew attempts evidently at variance with the Almighty's pleasure."

Dantes held down his head, that the other might not see how joy at the thought of having a companion outweighed the sympathy he felt for the failure of the abbe's plans.

The abbe sank upon Edmond's bed, while Edmond himself remained standing. Escape had never once occurred to him. There are, indeed, some things which appear so impossible that the mind does not dwell on them for an instant. To undermine the ground for fifty feet — to devote three years to a labor which, if successful, would conduct you to a precipice overhanging the sea — to plunge into the waves from the height of fifty, sixty, perhaps a hundred feet, at the risk of being dashed to pieces against the rocks, should you have been fortunate enough to have escaped the fire of the sentinels; and even, supposing all these perils past, then to have to swim for your life a distance of at least three miles ere you could reach the shore — were difficulties so startling and formidable that Dantes had never even dreamed of such a scheme, resigning himself rather to death. But the sight of an old man clinging to life with so desperate a courage, gave a fresh turn to his ideas, and inspired him with new courage. Another, older and less strong than he, had attempted what he had not had sufficient resolution to undertake, and had failed only because of an error in calculation. This same person, with almost incredible patience and perseverance, had contrived to provide himself with tools requisite for so unparalleled an attempt. Another had done all this; why, then, was it impossible to Dantes? Faria had dug his way through fifty feet, Dantes would dig a hundred; Faria, at the age of fifty, had devoted three years to the task; he, who was but half as old, would sacrifice six; Faria, a priest and savant, had not shrunk from the idea of risking his life by trying to swim a distance of three miles to one of the islands — Daume, Rattonneau, or Lemaire; should a hardy sailer, an experienced diver, like himself, shrink from a similar task; should he, who had so often for mere amusement's sake plunged to the bottom of the sea to fetch up the bright coral branch, hesitate to entertain the same project? He could do it in an hour, and how many times had he, for pure pastime, continued in the water for more than twice as long! At once Dantes resolved to follow the brave example of his energetic companion, and to remember that what has once been done may be done again.

After continuing some time in profound meditation, the young man suddenly exclaimed, “I have found what you were in search of!”

Faria started: “Have you, indeed?” cried he, raising his head with quick anxiety; “pray, let me know what it is you have discovered?”

“The corridor through which you have bored your way from the cell you occupy here, extends in the same direction as the outer gallery, does it not?”

“It does.”

“And is not above fifteen feet from it?”

“About that.”

“Well, then, I will tell you what we must do. We must pierce through the corridor by forming a side opening about the middle, as it were the top part of a cross. This time you will lay your plans more accurately; we shall get out into the gallery you have described; kill the sentinel who guards it, and make our escape. All we require to insure success is courage, and that you possess, and strength, which I am not deficient in; as for patience, you have abundantly proved yours — you shall now see me prove mine.”

“One instant, my dear friend,” replied the abbe; “it is clear you do not understand the nature of the courage with which I am endowed, and what use I intend making of my strength. As for patience, I consider that I have abundantly exercised that in beginning every morning the task of the night before, and every night renewing the task of the day. But then, young man (and I pray of you to give me your full attention), then I thought I could not be doing anything displeasing to the Almighty in trying to set an innocent being at liberty — one who had committed no offence, and merited not condemnation.”

“And have your notions changed?” asked Dantes with much surprise; “do you think yourself more guilty in making the attempt since you have encountered me?”

“No; neither do I wish to incur guilt. Hitherto I have fancied myself merely waging war against circumstances, not men. I have thought it no sin to bore through a wall, or destroy a staircase; but I cannot so easily persuade myself to pierce a heart or take away a life.” A slight movement of surprise escaped Dantes.

“Is it possible,” said he, “that where your liberty is at stake you can allow any such scruple to deter you from obtaining it?”

“Tell me,” replied Faria, “what has hindered you from knocking down your jailer with a piece of wood torn from your bedstead, dressing yourself in his clothes, and endeavoring to escape?”

“Simply the fact that the idea never occurred to me,” answered Dantes.

“Because,” said the old man, “the natural repugnance to the commission of such a crime prevented you from thinking of it; and so it ever is because in simple and allowable things our natural instincts keep us from deviating from the strict line of duty. The tiger, whose nature teaches him to delight in shedding blood, needs but the sense of smell to show him when his prey is within his reach, and by following this instinct he is enabled to measure the leap necessary to permit him to spring on his victim; but man, on the contrary, loathes the idea of blood — it is not alone that the laws of social life inspire him with a shrinking dread of taking life; his natural construction and physiological formation” —

Dantes was confused and silent at this explanation of the thoughts which had unconsciously been working in his mind, or rather soul; for there are two distinct sorts of ideas, those that proceed from the head and those that emanate from the heart.

“Since my imprisonment,” said Faria, “I have thought over all the most celebrated cases of escape on record. They have rarely been successful. Those that have been crowned with full success have been long meditated upon, and carefully arranged; such, for instance, as the escape of the Duc de Beaufort from the Chateau de Vincennes, that of the Abbe Dubuquoi from For l’Eveque; of Latude from the Bastille. Then there are those for which chance sometimes affords opportunity, and those are the best of all. Let us, therefore, wait patiently for some favorable moment, and when it presents itself, profit by it.”

“Ah,” said Dantes, “you might well endure the tedious delay; you were constantly employed in the task you set yourself, and when weary with toil, you had your hopes to refresh and encourage you.”

“I assure you,” replied the old man, “I did not turn to that source for recreation or support.”

“What did you do then?”

“I wrote or studied.”

“Were you then permitted the use of pens, ink, and paper?”

“Oh, no,” answered the abbe; “I had none but what I made for myself.”

“You made paper, pens and ink?”

"Yes."

Dantes gazed with admiration, but he had some difficulty in believing. Faria saw this.

"When you pay me a visit in my cell, my young friend," said he, "I will show you an entire work, the fruits of the thoughts and reflections of my whole life; many of them meditated over in the shades of the Colosseum at Rome, at the foot of St. Mark's column at Venice, and on the borders of the Arno at Florence, little imagining at the time that they would be arranged in order within the walls of the Chateau d'If. The work I speak of is called 'A Treatise on the Possibility of a General Monarchy in Italy,' and will make one large quarto volume."

"And on what have you written all this?"

"On two of my shirts. I invented a preparation that makes linen as smooth and as easy to write on as parchment."

"You are, then, a chemist?"

"Somewhat; I know Lavoisier, and was the intimate friend of Cabanis."

"But for such a work you must have needed books — had you any?"

"I had nearly five thousand volumes in my library at Rome; but after reading them over many times, I found out that with one hundred and fifty well-chosen books a man possesses, if not a complete summary of all human knowledge, at least all that a man need really know. I devoted three years of my life to reading and studying these one hundred and fifty volumes, till I knew them nearly by heart; so that since I have been in prison, a very slight effort of memory has enabled me to recall their contents as readily as though the pages were open before me. I could recite you the whole of Thucydides, Xenophon, Plutarch, Titus Livius, Tacitus, Strada, Jornandes, Dante, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Spinoza, Machiavelli, and Bossuet. I name only the most important."

"You are, doubtless, acquainted with a variety of languages, so as to have been able to read all these?"

"Yes, I speak five of the modern tongues — that is to say, German, French, Italian, English, and Spanish; by the aid of ancient Greek I learned modern Greek — I don't speak it so well as I could wish, but I am still trying to improve myself."

"Improve yourself!" repeated Dantes; "why, how can you manage to do so?"

“Why, I made a vocabulary of the words I knew; turned, returned, and arranged them, so as to enable me to express my thoughts through their medium. I know nearly one thousand words, which is all that is absolutely necessary, although I believe there are nearly one hundred thousand in the dictionaries. I cannot hope to be very fluent, but I certainly should have no difficulty in explaining my wants and wishes; and that would be quite as much as I should ever require.”

Stronger grew the wonder of Dantes, who almost fancied he had to do with one gifted with supernatural powers; still hoping to find some imperfection which might bring him down to a level with human beings, he added, “Then if you were not furnished with pens, how did you manage to write the work you speak of?”

“I made myself some excellent ones, which would be universally preferred to all others if once known. You are aware what huge whitings are served to us on maigre days. Well, I selected the cartilages of the heads of these fishes, and you can scarcely imagine the delight with which I welcomed the arrival of each Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, as affording me the means of increasing my stock of pens; for I will freely confess that my historical labors have been my greatest solace and relief. While retracing the past, I forget the present; and traversing at will the path of history I cease to remember that I am myself a prisoner.”

“But the ink,” said Dantes; “of what did you make your ink?”

“There was formerly a fireplace in my dungeon,” replied Faria, “but it was closed up long ere I became an occupant of this prison. Still, it must have been many years in use, for it was thickly covered with a coating of soot; this soot I dissolved in a portion of the wine brought to me every Sunday, and I assure you a better ink cannot be desired. For very important notes, for which closer attention is required, I pricked one of my fingers, and wrote with my own blood.”

“And when,” asked Dantes, “may I see all this?”

“Whenever you please,” replied the abbe.

“Oh, then let it be directly!” exclaimed the young man.

“Follow me, then,” said the abbe, as he re-entered the subterranean passage, in which he soon disappeared, followed by Dantes.

Chapter 17

The Abbe’s Chamber.

After having passed with tolerable ease through the subterranean passage, which, however, did not admit of their holding themselves erect, the two friends reached the further end of the corridor, into which the abbe’s cell opened; from that point the passage became much narrower, and barely permitted one to creep through on hands and knees. The floor of the abbe’s cell was paved, and it had been by raising one of the stones in the most obscure corner that Faria had to been able to commence the laborious task of which Dantes had witnessed the completion.

As he entered the chamber of his friend, Dantes cast around one eager and searching glance in quest of the expected marvels, but nothing more than common met his view.

“It is well,” said the abbe; “we have some hours before us — it is now just a quarter past twelve o’clock.” Instinctively Dantes turned round to observe by what watch or clock the abbe had been able so accurately to specify the hour.

“Look at this ray of light which enters by my window,” said the abbe, “and then observe the lines traced on the wall. Well, by means of these lines, which are in accordance with the double motion of the earth, and the ellipse it describes round the sun, I am enabled to ascertain the precise hour with more minuteness than if I possessed a watch; for that might be broken or deranged in its movements, while the sun and earth never vary in their appointed paths.”

This last explanation was wholly lost upon Dantes, who had always imagined, from seeing the sun rise from behind the mountains and set in the Mediterranean, that it moved, and not the earth. A double movement of the globe he inhabited, and of which he could feel nothing, appeared to him perfectly impossible. Each word that fell from his companion’s lips seemed fraught with the mysteries of science, as worthy of digging out as the gold and diamonds in the mines of Guzerat and Golconda, which he could just recollect having visited during a voyage made in his earliest youth.

"Come," said he to the abbe, "I am anxious to see your treasures."

The abbe smiled, and, proceeding to the disused fireplace, raised, by the help of his chisel, a long stone, which had doubtless been the hearth, beneath which was a cavity of considerable depth, serving as a safe depository of the articles mentioned to Dantes.

"What do you wish to see first?" asked the abbe.

"Oh, your great work on the monarchy of Italy!"

Faria then drew forth from his hiding-place three or four rolls of linen, laid one over the other, like folds of papyrus. These rolls consisted of slips of cloth about four inches wide and eighteen long; they were all carefully numbered and closely covered with writing, so legible that Dantes could easily read it, as well as make out the sense — it being in Italian, a language he, as a Provencal, perfectly understood.

"There," said he, "there is the work complete. I wrote the word finis at the end of the sixty-eighth strip about a week ago. I have torn up two of my shirts, and as many handkerchiefs as I was master of, to complete the precious pages. Should I ever get out of prison and find in all Italy a printer courageous enough to publish what I have composed, my literary reputation is forever secured."

"I see," answered Dantes. "Now let me behold the curious pens with which you have written your work."

"Look!" said Faria, showing to the young man a slender stick about six inches long, and much resembling the size of the handle of a fine painting-brush, to the end of which was tied, by a piece of thread, one of those cartilages of which the abbe had before spoken to Dantes; it was pointed, and divided at the nib like an ordinary pen. Dantes examined it with intense admiration, then looked around to see the instrument with which it had been shaped so correctly into form.

"Ah, yes," said Faria; "the penknife. That's my masterpiece. I made it, as well as this larger knife, out of an old iron candlestick." The penknife was sharp and keen as a razor; as for the other knife, it would serve a double purpose, and with it one could cut and thrust.

Dantes examined the various articles shown to him with the same attention that he had bestowed on the curiosities and strange tools exhibited in the shops at Marseilles as the works of the savages in the South Seas from whence they had been brought by the different trading vessels.

"As for the ink," said Faria, "I told you how I managed to obtain that — and I only just make it from time to time, as I require it."

"One thing still puzzles me," observed Dantes, "and that is how you managed to do all this by daylight?"

"I worked at night also," replied Faria.

"Night! — why, for heaven's sake, are your eyes like cats', that you can see to work in the dark?"

"Indeed they are not; but God has supplied man with the intelligence that enables him to overcome the limitations of natural conditions. I furnished myself with a light."

"You did? Pray tell me how."

"I separated the fat from the meat served to me, melted it, and so made oil — here is my lamp." So saying, the abbe exhibited a sort of torch very similar to those used in public illuminations.

"But light?"

"Here are two flints and a piece of burnt linen."

"And matches?"

"I pretended that I had a disorder of the skin, and asked for a little sulphur, which was readily supplied." Dantes laid the different things he had been looking at on the table, and stood with his head drooping on his breast, as though overwhelmed by the perseverance and strength of Faria's mind.

"You have not seen all yet," continued Faria, "for I did not think it wise to trust all my treasures in the same hiding-place. Let us shut this one up." They put the stone back in its place; the abbe sprinkled a little dust over it to conceal the traces of its having been removed, rubbed his foot well on it to make it assume the same appearance as the other, and then, going towards his bed, he removed it from the spot it stood in. Behind the head of the bed, and concealed by a stone fitting in so closely as to defy all suspicion, was a hollow space, and in this space a ladder of cords between twenty-five and thirty feet in length. Dantes closely and eagerly examined it; he found it firm, solid, and compact enough to bear any weight.

"Who supplied you with the materials for making this wonderful work?"

"I tore up several of my shirts, and ripped out the seams in the sheets of my bed, during my three years' imprisonment at Fenestrelle; and when I was removed to the Chateau d'If, I managed to bring the ravellings with me, so that I have been able to finish my work here."

"And was it not discovered that your sheets were unhemmed?"

"Oh, no, for when I had taken out the thread I required, I hemmed the edges over again."

"With what?"

"With this needle," said the abbe, as, opening his ragged vestments, he showed Dantes a long, sharp fish-bone, with a small perforated eye for the thread, a small portion of which still remained in it. "I once thought," continued Faria, "of removing these iron bars, and letting myself down from the window, which, as you see, is somewhat wider than yours, although I should have enlarged it still more preparatory to my flight; however, I discovered that I should merely have dropped into a sort of inner court, and I therefore renounced the project altogether as too full of risk and danger. Nevertheless, I carefully preserved my ladder against one of those unforeseen opportunities of which I spoke just now, and which sudden chance frequently brings about." While affecting to be deeply engaged in examining the ladder, the mind of Dantes was, in fact, busily occupied by the idea that a person so intelligent, ingenious, and clear-sighted as the abbe might probably be able to solve the dark mystery of his own misfortunes, where he himself could see nothing.

"What are you thinking of?" asked the abbe smilingly, imputing the deep abstraction in which his visitor was plunged to the excess of his awe and wonder.

"I was reflecting, in the first place," replied Dantes, "upon the enormous degree of intelligence and ability you must have employed to reach the high perfection to which you have attained. What would you not have accomplished if you had been free?"

"Possibly nothing at all; the overflow of my brain would probably, in a state of freedom, have evaporated in a thousand follies; misfortune is needed to bring to light the treasures of the human intellect. Compression is needed to explode gunpowder. Captivity has brought my mental faculties to a focus; and you are well aware that from the collision of clouds electricity is produced — from electricity, lightning, from lightning, illumination."

"No," replied Dantes. "I know nothing. Some of your words are to me quite empty of meaning. You must be blessed indeed to possess the knowledge you have."

The abbe smiled. "Well," said he, "but you had another subject for your thoughts; did you not say so just now?"

"I did!"

"You have told me as yet but one of them — let me hear the other."

"It was this, — that while you had related to me all the particulars of your past life, you were perfectly unacquainted with mine."

"Your life, my young friend, has not been of sufficient length to admit of your having passed through any very important events."

"It has been long enough to inflict on me a great and undeserved misfortune. I would fain fix the source of it on man that I may no longer vent reproaches upon heaven."

"Then you profess ignorance of the crime with which you are charged?"

"I do, indeed; and this I swear by the two beings most dear to me upon earth, — my father and Mercedes."

"Come," said the abbe, closing his hiding-place, and pushing the bed back to its original situation, "let me hear your story."

Dantes obeyed, and commenced what he called his history, but which consisted only of the account of a voyage to India, and two or three voyages to the Levant until he arrived at the recital of his last cruise, with the death of Captain Leclere, and the receipt of a packet to be delivered by himself to the grand marshal; his interview with that personage, and his receiving, in place of the packet brought, a letter addressed to a Monsieur Noirtier — his arrival at Marseilles, and interview with his father — his affection for Mercedes, and their nuptual feast — his arrest and subsequent examination, his temporary detention at the Palais de Justice, and his final imprisonment in the Chateau d'If. From this point everything was a blank to Dantes — he knew nothing more, not even the length of time he had been imprisoned. His recital finished, the abbe reflected long and earnestly.

"There is," said he, at the end of his meditations, "a clever maxim, which bears upon what I was saying to you some little while ago, and that is, that unless wicked ideas take root in a naturally depraved mind, human nature, in a right and wholesome state, revolts at crime. Still, from an artificial civilization have originated wants, vices, and false tastes, which occasionally become so powerful as to stifle within us all good feelings, and ultimately to lead us into guilt and wickedness. From this view of things, then, comes the axiom that if you visit to discover the author of any bad action, seek first to discover the person to whom the perpetration of that bad action could be in any way advantageous. Now, to apply it in your case, — to whom could your disappearance have been serviceable?"

“To no one, by heaven! I was a very insignificant person.”

“Do not speak thus, for your reply evinces neither logic nor philosophy; everything is relative, my dear young friend, from the king who stands in the way of his successor, to the employee who keeps his rival out of a place. Now, in the event of the king’s death, his successor inherits a crown, — when the employee dies, the supernumerary steps into his shoes, and receives his salary of twelve thousand livres. Well, these twelve thousand livres are his civil list, and are as essential to him as the twelve millions of a king. Every one, from the highest to the lowest degree, has his place on the social ladder, and is beset by stormy passions and conflicting interests, as in Descartes’ theory of pressure and impulsion. But these forces increase as we go higher, so that we have a spiral which in defiance of reason rests upon the apex and not on the base. Now let us return to your particular world. You say you were on the point of being made captain of the Pharaon?”

“Yes.”

“And about to become the husband of a young and lovely girl?”

“Yes.”

“Now, could any one have had any interest in preventing the accomplishment of these two things? But let us first settle the question as to its being the interest of any one to hinder you from being captain of the Pharaon. What say you?”

“I cannot believe such was the case. I was generally liked on board, and had the sailors possessed the right of selecting a captain themselves, I feel convinced their choice would have fallen on me. There was only one person among the crew who had any feeling of ill-will towards me. I had quarelled with him some time previously, and had even challenged him to fight me; but he refused.”

“Now we are getting on. And what was this man’s name?”

“Danglars.”

“What rank did he hold on board?”

“He was supercargo.”

“And had you been captain, should you have retained him in his employment?”

“Not if the choice had remained with me, for I had frequently observed inaccuracies in his accounts.”

"Good again! Now then, tell me, was any person present during your last conversation with Captain Leclere?"

"No; we were quite alone."

"Could your conversation have been overheard by any one?"

"It might, for the cabin door was open — and — stay; now I recollect, — Danglars himself passed by just as Captain Leclere was giving me the packet for the grand marshal."

"That's better," cried the abbe; "now we are on the right scent. Did you take anybody with you when you put into the port of Elba?"

"Nobody."

"Somebody there received your packet, and gave you a letter in place of it, I think?"

"Yes; the grand marshal did."

"And what did you do with that letter?"

"Put it into my portfolio."

"You had your portfolio with you, then? Now, how could a sailor find room in his pocket for a portfolio large enough to contain an official letter?"

"You are right; it was left on board."

"Then it was not till your return to the ship that you put the letter in the portfolio?"

"No."

"And what did you do with this same letter while returning from Porto-Ferrajo to the vessel?"

"I carried it in my hand."

"So that when you went on board the Pharaon, everybody could see that you held a letter in your hand?"

"Yes."

"Danglars, as well as the rest?"

"Danglars, as well as others."

"Now, listen to me, and try to recall every circumstance attending your arrest. Do you recollect the words in which the information against you was formulated?"

"Oh yes, I read it over three times, and the words sank deeply into my memory."

"Repeat it to me."

Dantes paused a moment, then said, "This is it, word for word: 'The king's attorney is informed by a friend to the throne and religion, that one

Edmond Dantes, mate on board the Pharaon, this day arrived from Smyrna, after having touched at Naples and Porto-Ferrajo, has been intrusted by Murat with a packet for the usurper; again, by the usurper, with a letter for the Bonapartist Club in Paris. This proof of his guilt may be procured by his immediate arrest, as the letter will be found either about his person, at his father's residence, or in his cabin on board the Pharaon.'" The abbe shrugged his shoulders. "The thing is clear as day," said he; "and you must have had a very confiding nature, as well as a good heart, not to have suspected the origin of the whole affair."

"Do you really think so? Ah, that would indeed be infamous."

"How did Danglars usually write?"

"In a handsome, running hand."

"And how was the anonymous letter written?"

"Backhanded." Again the abbe smiled. "Disguised."

"It was very boldly written, if disguised."

"Stop a bit," said the abbe, taking up what he called his pen, and, after dipping it into the ink, he wrote on a piece of prepared linen, with his left hand, the first two or three words of the accusation. Dantes drew back, and gazed on the abbe with a sensation almost amounting to terror.

"How very astonishing!" cried he at length. "Why your writing exactly resembles that of the accusation."

"Simply because that accusation had been written with the left hand; and I have noticed that" —

"What?"

"That while the writing of different persons done with the right hand varies, that performed with the left hand is invariably uniform."

"You have evidently seen and observed everything."

"Let us proceed."

"Oh, yes, yes!"

"Now as regards the second question."

"I am listening."

"Was there any person whose interest it was to prevent your marriage with Mercedes?"

"Yes; a young man who loved her."

"And his name was" —

"Fernand."

"That is a Spanish name, I think?"

“He was a Catalan.”

“You imagine him capable of writing the letter?”

“Oh, no; he would more likely have got rid of me by sticking a knife into me.”

“That is in strict accordance with the Spanish character; an assassination they will unhesitatingly commit, but an act of cowardice, never.”

“Besides,” said Dantes, “the various circumstances mentioned in the letter were wholly unknown to him.”

“You had never spoken of them yourself to any one?”

“To no one.”

“Not even to your mistress?”

“No, not even to my betrothed.”

“Then it is Danglars.”

“I feel quite sure of it now.”

“Wait a little. Pray, was Danglars acquainted with Fernand?”

“No — yes, he was. Now I recollect” —

“What?”

“To have seen them both sitting at table together under an arbor at Pere Pamphile’s the evening before the day fixed for my wedding. They were in earnest conversation. Danglars was joking in a friendly way, but Fernand looked pale and agitated.”

“Were they alone?”

“There was a third person with them whom I knew perfectly well, and who had, in all probability made their acquaintance; he was a tailor named Caderousse, but he was very drunk. Stay! — stay! — How strange that it should not have occurred to me before! Now I remember quite well, that on the table round which they were sitting were pens, ink, and paper. Oh, the heartless, treacherous scoundrels!” exclaimed Dantes, pressing his hand to his throbbing brows.

“Is there anything else I can assist you in discovering, besides the villany of your friends?” inquired the abbe with a laugh.

“Yes, yes,” replied Dantes eagerly; “I would beg of you, who see so completely to the depths of things, and to whom the greatest mystery seems but an easy riddle, to explain to me how it was that I underwent no second examination, was never brought to trial, and, above all, was condemned without ever having had sentence passed on me?”

“That is altogether a different and more serious matter,” responded the abbe. “The ways of justice are frequently too dark and mysterious to be easily penetrated. All we have hitherto done in the matter has been child’s play. If you wish me to enter upon the more difficult part of the business, you must assist me by the most minute information on every point.”

“Pray ask me whatever questions you please; for, in good truth, you see more clearly into my life than I do myself.”

“In the first place, then, who examined you, — the king’s attorney, his deputy, or a magistrate?”

“The deputy.”

“Was he young or old?”

“About six or seven and twenty years of age, I should say.”

“So,” answered the abbe. “Old enough to be ambitions, but too young to be corrupt. And how did he treat you?”

“With more of mildness than severity.”

“Did you tell him your whole story?”

“I did.”

“And did his conduct change at all in the course of your examination?”

“He did appear much disturbed when he read the letter that had brought me into this scrape. He seemed quite overcome by my misfortune.”

“By your misfortune?”

“Yes.”

“Then you feel quite sure that it was your misfortune he deplored?”

“He gave me one great proof of his sympathy, at any rate.”

“And that?”

“He burnt the sole evidence that could at all have criminated me.”

“What? the accusation?”

“No; the letter.”

“Are you sure?”

“I saw it done.”

“That alters the case. This man might, after all, be a greater scoundrel than you have thought possible.”

“Upon my word,” said Dantes, “you make me shudder. Is the world filled with tigers and crocodiles?”

“Yes; and remember that two-legged tigers and crocodiles are more dangerous than the others.”

“Never mind; let us go on.”

“With all my heart! You tell me he burned the letter?”

“He did; saying at the same time, ‘You see I thus destroy the only proof existing against you.’“

“This action is somewhat too sublime to be natural.”

“You think so?”

“I am sure of it. To whom was this letter addressed?”

“To M. Noirtier, No. 13 Coq-Heron, Paris.”

“Now can you conceive of any interest that your heroic deputy could possibly have had in the destruction of that letter?”

“Why, it is not altogether impossible he might have had, for he made me promise several times never to speak of that letter to any one, assuring me he so advised me for my own interest; and, more than this, he insisted on my taking a solemn oath never to utter the name mentioned in the address.”

“Noirtier!” repeated the abbe; “Noirtier! — I knew a person of that name at the court of the Queen of Etruria, — a Noirtier, who had been a Girondin during the Revolution! What was your deputy called?”

“De Villefort!” The abbe burst into a fit of laughter, while Dantes gazed on him in utter astonishment.

“What ails you?” said he at length.

“Do you see that ray of sunlight?”

“I do.”

“Well, the whole thing is more clear to me than that sunbeam is to you. Poor fellow! poor young man! And you tell me this magistrate expressed great sympathy and commiseration for you?”

“He did.”

“And the worthy man destroyed your compromising letter?”

“Yes.”

“And then made you swear never to utter the name of Noirtier?”

“Yes.”

“Why, you poor short-sighted simpleton, can you not guess who this Noirtier was, whose very name he was so careful to keep concealed? Noirtier was his father.”

Had a thunderbolt fallen at the feet of Dantes, or hell opened its yawning gulf before him, he could not have been more completely transfixed with horror than he was at the sound of these unexpected words. Starting up, he clasped his hands around his head as though to prevent his very brain from bursting, and exclaimed, “His father! his father!”

“Yes, his father,” replied the abbe; “his right name was Noirtier de Villefort.” At this instant a bright light shot through the mind of Dantes, and cleared up all that had been dark and obscure before. The change that had come over Villefort during the examination, the destruction of the letter, the exacted promise, the almost supplicating tones of the magistrate, who seemed rather to implore mercy than to pronounce punishment, — all returned with a stunning force to his memory. He cried out, and staggered against the wall like a drunken man, then he hurried to the opening that led from the abbe’s cell to his own, and said, “I must be alone, to think over all this.”

When he regained his dungeon, he threw himself on his bed, where the turnkey found him in the evening visit, sitting with fixed gaze and contracted features, dumb and motionless as a statue. During these hours of profound meditation, which to him had seemed only minutes, he had formed a fearful resolution, and bound himself to its fulfilment by a solemn oath.

Dantes was at length roused from his revery by the voice of Faria, who, having also been visited by his jailer, had come to invite his fellow-sufferer to share his supper. The reputation of being out of his mind, though harmlessly and even amusingly so, had procured for the abbe unusual privileges. He was supplied with bread of a finer, whiter quality than the usual prison fare, and even regaled each Sunday with a small quantity of wine. Now this was a Sunday, and the abbe had come to ask his young companion to share the luxuries with him. Dantes followed; his features were no longer contracted, and now wore their usual expression, but there was that in his whole appearance that bespoke one who had come to a fixed and desperate resolve. Faria bent on him his penetrating eye: “I regret now,” said he, “having helped you in your late inquiries, or having given you the information I did.”

“Why so?” inquired Dantes.

“Because it has instilled a new passion in your heart — that of vengeance.”

Dantes smiled. “Let us talk of something else,” said he.

Again the abbe looked at him, then mournfully shook his head; but in accordance with Dantes’ request, he began to speak of other matters. The elder prisoner was one of those persons whose conversation, like that of all who have experienced many trials, contained many useful and important hints as well as sound information; but it was never egotistical, for the unfortunate man never alluded to his own sorrows. Dantes listened with admiring attention to all he said; some of his remarks corresponded with what he already knew, or applied to the sort of knowledge his nautical life had enabled him to acquire. A part of the good abbe’s words, however, were wholly incomprehensible to him; but, like the aurora which guides the navigator in northern latitudes, opened new vistas to the inquiring mind of the listener, and gave fantastic glimpses of new horizons, enabling him justly to estimate the delight an intellectual mind would have in following one so richly gifted as Faria along the heights of truth, where he was so much at home.

“You must teach me a small part of what you know,” said Dantes, “if only to prevent your growing weary of me. I can well believe that so learned a person as yourself would prefer absolute solitude to being tormented with the company of one as ignorant and uninformed as myself. If you will only agree to my request, I promise you never to mention another word about escaping.” The abbe smiled. “Alas, my boy,” said he, “human knowledge is confined within very narrow limits; and when I have taught you mathematics, physics, history, and the three or four modern languages with which I am acquainted, you will know as much as I do myself. Now, it will scarcely require two years for me to communicate to you the stock of learning I possess.”

“Two years!” exclaimed Dantes; “do you really believe I can acquire all these things in so short a time?”

“Not their application, certainly, but their principles you may; to learn is not to know; there are the learners and the learned. Memory makes the one, philosophy the other.”

“But cannot one learn philosophy?”

“Philosophy cannot be taught; it is the application of the sciences to truth; it is like the golden cloud in which the Messiah went up into heaven.”

“Well, then,” said Dantes, “What shall you teach me first? I am in a hurry to begin. I want to learn.”

“Everything,” said the abbe. And that very evening the prisoners sketched a plan of education, to be entered upon the following day. Dantes possessed a prodigious memory, combined with an astonishing quickness and readiness of conception; the mathematical turn of his mind rendered him apt at all kinds of calculation, while his naturally poetical feelings threw a light and pleasing veil over the dry reality of arithmetical computation, or the rigid severity of geometry. He already knew Italian, and had also picked up a little of the Romaic dialect during voyages to the East; and by the aid of these two languages he easily comprehended the construction of all the others, so that at the end of six months he began to speak Spanish, English, and German. In strict accordance with the promise made to the abbe, Dantes spoke no more of escape. Perhaps the delight his studies afforded him left no room for such thoughts; perhaps the recollection that he had pledged his word (on which his sense of honor was keen) kept him from referring in any way to the possibilities of flight. Days, even months, passed by unheeded in one rapid and instructive course. At the end of a year Dantes was a new man. Dantes observed, however, that Faria, in spite of the relief his society afforded, daily grew sadder; one thought seemed incessantly to harass and distract his mind. Sometimes he would fall into long reveries, sigh heavily and involuntarily, then suddenly rise, and, with folded arms, begin pacing the confined space of his dungeon. One day he stopped all at once, and exclaimed, “Ah, if there were no sentinel!”

“There shall not be one a minute longer than you please,” said Dantes, who had followed the working of his thoughts as accurately as though his brain were enclosed in crystal so clear as to display its minutest operations.

“I have already told you,” answered the abbe, “that I loathe the idea of shedding blood.”

“And yet the murder, if you choose to call it so, would be simply a measure of self-preservation.”

“No matter! I could never agree to it.”

“Still, you have thought of it?”

“Incessantly, alas!” cried the abbe.

“And you have discovered a means of regaining our freedom, have you not?” asked Dantes eagerly.

“I have; if it were only possible to place a deaf and blind sentinel in the gallery beyond us.”

“He shall be both blind and deaf,” replied the young man, with an air of determination that made his companion shudder.

“No, no,” cried the abbe; “impossible!” Dantes endeavored to renew the subject; the abbe shook his head in token of disapproval, and refused to make any further response. Three months passed away.

"Are you strong?" the abbe asked one day of Dantes. The young man, in reply, took up the chisel, bent it into the form of a horseshoe, and then as readily straightened it.

"And will you engage not to do any harm to the sentry, except as a last resort?"

"I promise on my honor."

"Then," said the abbe, "we may hope to put our design into execution."

"And how long shall we be in accomplishing the necessary work?"

"At least a year."

"And shall we begin at once?"

"At once."

"We have lost a year to no purpose!" cried Dantes.

"Do you consider the last twelve months to have been wasted?" asked the abbe.

"Forgive me!" cried Edmond, blushing deeply.

"Tut, tut!" answered the abbe, "man is but man after all, and you are about the best specimen of the genus I have ever known. Come, let me show you my plan." The abbe then showed Dantes the sketch he had made for their escape. It consisted of a plan of his own cell and that of Dantes, with the passage which united them. In this passage he proposed to drive a level as they do in mines; this level would bring the two prisoners immediately beneath the gallery where the sentry kept watch; once there, a large excavation would be made, and one of the flag-stones with which the gallery was paved be so completely loosened that at the desired moment it would give way beneath the feet of the soldier, who, stunned by his fall, would be immediately bound and gagged by Dantes before he had power to offer any resistance. The prisoners were then to make their way through one of the gallery windows, and to let themselves down from the outer walls by means of the abbe's ladder of cords. Dantes' eyes sparkled with joy, and he rubbed his hands with delight at the idea of a plan so simple, yet apparently so certain to succeed.

That very day the miners began their labors, with a vigor and alacrity proportionate to their long rest from fatigue and their hopes of ultimate success. Nothing interrupted the progress of the work except the necessity that each was under of returning to his cell in anticipation of the turnkey's visits. They had learned to distinguish the almost imperceptible sound of his footsteps as he descended towards their dungeons, and happily, never failed of being prepared for his coming. The fresh earth excavated during their present work, and which would have entirely blocked up the old passage, was thrown, by degrees and with the utmost precaution, out of the window in either Faria's or Dantes' cell, the rubbish being first pulverized so finely that the night wind carried it far away without permitting the smallest trace to remain. More than a year had been consumed in this undertaking, the only tools for which had been a chisel, a knife, and a wooden lever; Faria still continuing to instruct Dantes by conversing with him, sometimes in one language, sometimes in another; at others, relating to him the history of nations and great men who from time to time have risen to fame and trodden the path of glory.

The abbe was a man of the world, and had, moreover, mixed in the first society of the day; he wore an air of melancholy dignity which Dantes, thanks to the imitative powers bestowed on him by nature, easily acquired, as well as that outward polish and politeness he had before been wanting in, and which is seldom possessed except by those who have been placed in constant intercourse with persons of high birth and breeding. At the end of fifteen months the level was finished, and the excavation completed beneath the gallery, and the two workmen could distinctly hear the measured tread of the sentinel as he paced to and fro over their heads.

Compelled, as they were, to await a night sufficiently dark to favor their flight, they were obliged to defer their final attempt till that auspicious moment should arrive; their greatest dread now was lest the stone through which the sentry was doomed to fall should give way before its right time, and this they had in some measure provided against by propping it up with a small beam which they had discovered in the walls through which they had worked their way. Dantes was occupied in arranging this piece of wood when he heard Faria, who had remained in Edmond's cell for the purpose of cutting a peg to secure their rope-ladder, call to him in a tone indicative of great suffering. Dantes hastened to his dungeon, where he found him standing in the middle of the room, pale as death, his forehead streaming with perspiration, and his hands clinched tightly together.

"Gracious heavens!" exclaimed Dantes, "what is the matter? what has happened?"

"Quick! quick!" returned the abbe, "listen to what I have to say." Dantes looked in fear and wonder at the livid countenance of Faria, whose eyes, already dull and sunken, were surrounded by purple circles, while his lips were white as those of a corpse, and his very hair seemed to stand on end.

“Tell me, I beseech you, what ails you?” cried Dantes, letting his chisel fall to the floor.

“Alas,” faltered out the abbe, “all is over with me. I am seized with a terrible, perhaps mortal illness; I can feel that the paroxysm is fast approaching. I had a similar attack the year previous to my imprisonment. This malady admits but of one remedy; I will tell you what that is. Go into my cell as quickly as you can; draw out one of the feet that support the bed; you will find it has been hollowed out for the purpose of containing a small phial you will see there half-filled with a red-looking fluid. Bring it to me — or rather — no, no! — I may be found here, therefore help me back to my room while I have the strength to drag myself along. Who knows what may happen, or how long the attack may last?”

In spite of the magnitude of the misfortune which thus suddenly frustrated his hopes, Dantes did not lose his presence of mind, but descended into the passage, dragging his unfortunate companion with him; then, half-carrying, half-supporting him, he managed to reach the abbe’s chamber, when he immediately laid the sufferer on his bed.

“Thanks,” said the poor abbe, shivering as though his veins were filled with ice. “I am about to be seized with a fit of catalepsy; when it comes to its height I shall probably lie still and motionless as though dead, uttering neither sigh nor groan. On the other hand, the symptoms may be much more violent, and cause me to fall into fearful convulsions, foam at the mouth, and cry out loudly. Take care my cries are not heard, for if they are it is more than probable I should be removed to another part of the prison, and we be separated forever. When I become quite motionless, cold, and rigid as a corpse, then, and not before, — be careful about this, — force open my teeth with the knife, pour from eight to ten drops of the liquor contained in the phial down my throat, and I may perhaps revive.”

“Perhaps!” exclaimed Dantes in grief-stricken tones.

“Help! help!” cried the abbe, “I — I — die — I” —

So sudden and violent was the fit that the unfortunate prisoner was unable to complete the sentence; a violent convulsion shook his whole frame, his eyes started from their sockets, his mouth was drawn on one side, his cheeks became purple, he struggled, foamed, dashed himself about, and uttered the most dreadful cries, which, however, Dantes prevented from being heard by covering his head with the blanket. The fit lasted two hours; then, more helpless than an infant, and colder and paler than marble, more crushed and broken than a reed trampled under foot, he fell back, doubled up in one last convulsion, and became as rigid as a corpse.

Edmond waited till life seemed extinct in the body of his friend, then, taking up the knife, he with difficulty forced open the closely fixed jaws, carefully administered the appointed number of drops, and anxiously awaited the result. An hour passed away and the old man gave no sign of returning animation. Dantes began to fear he had delayed too long ere he administered the remedy, and, thrusting his hands into his hair, continued gazing on the lifeless features of his friend. At length a slight color tinged the livid cheeks, consciousness returned to the dull, open eyeballs, a faint sigh issued from the lips, and the sufferer made a feeble effort to move.

“He is saved! he is saved!” cried Dantes in a paroxysm of delight.

The sick man was not yet able to speak, but he pointed with evident anxiety towards the door. Dantes listened, and plainly distinguished the approaching steps of the jailer. It was therefore near seven o’clock; but Edmond’s anxiety had put all thoughts of time out of his head. The young man sprang to the entrance, darted through it, carefully drawing the stone over the opening, and hurried to his cell. He had scarcely done so before the door opened, and the jailer saw the prisoner seated as usual on the side of his bed. Almost before the key had turned in the lock, and before the departing steps of the jailer had died away in the long corridor he had to traverse, Dantes, whose restless anxiety concerning his friend left him no desire to touch the food brought him, hurried back to the abbe’s chamber, and raising the stone by pressing his head against it, was soon beside the sick man’s couch. Faria had now fully regained his consciousness, but he still lay helpless and exhausted.

“I did not expect to see you again,” said he feebly, to Dantes.

“And why not?” asked the young man. “Did you fancy yourself dying?”

“No, I had no such idea; but, knowing that all was ready for flight, I thought you might have made your escape.” The deep glow of indignation suffused the cheeks of Dantes.

“Without you? Did you really think me capable of that?”

“At least,” said the abbe, “I now see how wrong such an opinion would have been. Alas, alas! I am fearfully exhausted and debilitated by this attack.”

“Be of good cheer,” replied Dantes; “your strength will return.” And as he spoke he seated himself near the bed beside Faria, and took his hands. The abbe shook his head.

“The last attack I had,” said he, “lasted but half an hour, and after it I was hungry, and got up without help; now I can move neither my right arm nor leg, and my head seems uncomfortable, which shows that there has been a suffusion of blood on the brain. The third attack will either carry me off, or leave me paralyzed for life.”

“No, no,” cried Dantes; “you are mistaken — you will not die! And your third attack (if, indeed, you should have another) will find you at liberty. We shall save you another time, as we have done this, only with a better chance of success, because we shall be able to command every requisite assistance.”

“My good Edmond,” answered the abbe, “be not deceived. The attack which has just passed away, condemns me forever to the walls of a prison. None can fly from a dungeon who cannot walk.”

“Well, we will wait, — a week, a month, two months, if need be, — and meanwhile your strength will return. Everything is in readiness for our flight, and we can select any time we choose. As soon as you feel able to swim we will go.”

“I shall never swim again,” replied Faria. “This arm is paralyzed; not for a time, but forever. Lift it, and judge if I am mistaken.” The young man raised the arm, which fell back by its own weight, perfectly inanimate and helpless. A sigh escaped him.

“You are convinced now, Edmond, are you not?” asked the abbe. “Depend upon it, I know what I say. Since the first attack I experienced of this malady, I have continually reflected on it. Indeed, I expected it, for it is a family inheritance; both my father and grandfather died of it in a third attack. The physician who prepared for me the remedy I have twice successfully taken, was no other than the celebrated Cabanis, and he predicted a similar end for me.”

“The physician may be mistaken!” exclaimed Dantes. “And as for your poor arm, what difference will that make? I can take you on my shoulders, and swim for both of us.”

“My son,” said the abbe, “you, who are a sailor and a swimmer, must know as well as I do that a man so loaded would sink before he had done fifty strokes. Cease, then, to allow yourself to be duped by vain hopes, that even your own excellent heart refuses to believe in. Here I shall remain till the hour of my deliverance arrives, and that, in all human probability, will be the hour of my death. As for you, who are young and active, delay not on my account, but fly — go — I give you back your promise.”

“It is well,” said Dantes. “Then I shall also remain.” Then, rising and extending his hand with an air of solemnity over the old man’s head, he slowly added, “By the blood of Christ I swear never to leave you while you live.”

Faria gazed fondly on his noble-minded, single-hearted, high-principled young friend, and read in his countenance ample confirmation of the sincerity of his devotion and the loyalty of his purpose.

“Thanks,” murmured the invalid, extending one hand. “I accept. You may one of these days reap the reward of your disinterested devotion. But as I cannot, and you will not, quit this place, it becomes necessary to fill up the excavation beneath the soldier’s gallery; he might, by chance, hear the hollow sound of his footsteps, and call the attention of his officer to the circumstance. That would bring about a discovery which would inevitably lead to our being separated. Go, then, and set about this work, in which, unhappily, I can offer you no assistance; keep at it all night, if necessary, and do not return here to-morrow till after the jailer his visited me. I shall have something of the greatest importance to communicate to you.”

Dantes took the hand of the abbe in his, and affectionately pressed it. Faria smiled encouragingly on him, and the young man retired to his task, in the spirit of obedience and respect which he had sworn to show towards his aged friend.

Chapter 18

The Treasure.

When Dantes returned next morning to the chamber of his companion in captivity, he found Faria seated and looking composed. In the ray of light which entered by the narrow window of his cell, he held open in his left hand, of which alone, it will be recollected, he retained the use, a sheet of paper, which, from being constantly rolled into a small compass, had the form of a cylinder, and was not easily kept open. He did not speak, but showed the paper to Dantes.

“What is that?” he inquired.

“Look at it,” said the abbe with a smile.

“I have looked at it with all possible attention,” said Dantes, “and I only see a half-burnt paper, on which are traces of Gothic characters inscribed with a peculiar kind of ink.”

“This paper, my friend,” said Faria, “I may now avow to you, since I have the proof of your fidelity — this paper is my treasure, of which, from this day forth, one-half belongs to you.”

The sweat started forth on Dantes brow. Until this day and for how long a time! — he had refrained from talking of the treasure, which had brought upon the abbe the accusation of madness. With his instinctive delicacy Edmond had preferred avoiding any touch on this painful chord, and Faria had been equally silent. He had taken the silence of the old man for a return to reason; and now these few words uttered by Faria, after so painful a crisis, seemed to indicate a serious relapse into mental alienation.

“Your treasure?” stammered Dantes. Faria smiled.

“Yes,” said he. “You have, indeed, a noble nature, Edmond, and I see by your paleness and agitation what is passing in your heart at this moment. No, be assured, I am not mad. This treasure exists, Dantes, and if I have not been allowed to possess it, you will. Yes — you. No one would listen or believe me, because everyone thought me mad; but you, who must know that I am not, listen to me, and believe me so afterwards if you will.”

“Alas,” murmured Edmond to himself, “this is a terrible relapse! There was only this blow wanting.” Then he said aloud, “My dear friend, your attack has, perhaps, fatigued you; had you not better repose awhile? To-morrow, if you will, I will hear your narrative; but to-day I wish to nurse you carefully. Besides,” he said, “a treasure is not a thing we need hurry about.”

“On the contrary, it is a matter of the utmost importance, Edmond!” replied the old man. “Who knows if to-morrow, or the next day after, the third attack may not come on? and then must not all be over? Yes, indeed, I have often thought with a bitter joy that these riches, which would make the wealth of a dozen families, will be forever lost to those men who persecute me. This idea was one of vengeance to me, and I tasted it slowly in the night of my dungeon and the despair of my captivity. But now I have forgiven the world for the love of you; now that I see you, young and with a promising future, — now that I think of all that may result to you in the good fortune of such a disclosure, I shudder at any delay, and tremble lest I should not assure to one as worthy as yourself the possession of so vast an amount of hidden wealth.” Edmond turned away his head with a sigh.

“You persist in your incredulity, Edmond,” continued Faria. “My words have not convinced you. I see you require proofs. Well, then, read this paper, which I have never shown to any one.”

“To-morrow, my dear friend,” said Edmond, desirous of not yielding to the old man’s madness. “I thought it was understood that we should not talk of that until to-morrow.”

“Then we will not talk of it until to-morrow; but read this paper to-day.”

“I will not irritate him,” thought Edmond, and taking the paper, of which half was wanting, — having been burnt, no doubt, by some accident, — he read: —

“This treasure, which may amount to two... of Roman crowns in the most distant a... of the second opening wh... declare to belong to him alo... heir. “25th April, 149-”

“Well!” said Faria, when the young man had finished reading it.

“Why,” replied Dantes, “I see nothing but broken lines and unconnected words, which are rendered illegible by fire.”

“Yes, to you, my friend, who read them for the first time; but not for me, who have grown pale over them by many nights’ study, and have reconstructed every phrase, completed every thought.”

"And do you believe you have discovered the hidden meaning?"

"I am sure I have, and you shall judge for yourself; but first listen to the history of this paper."

"Silence!" exclaimed Dantes. "Steps approach — I go — adieu."

And Dantes, happy to escape the history and explanation which would be sure to confirm his belief in his friend's mental instability, glided like a snake along the narrow passage; while Faria, restored by his alarm to a certain amount of activity, pushed the stone into place with his foot, and covered it with a mat in order the more effectually to avoid discovery.

It was the governor, who, hearing of Faria's illness from the jailer, had come in person to see him.

Faria sat up to receive him, avoiding all gestures in order that he might conceal from the governor the paralysis that had already half stricken him with death. His fear was lest the governor, touched with pity, might order him to be removed to better quarters, and thus separate him from his young companion. But fortunately this was not the case, and the governor left him, convinced that the poor madman, for whom in his heart he felt a kind of affection, was only troubled with a slight indisposition.

During this time, Edmond, seated on his bed with his head in his hands, tried to collect his scattered thoughts. Faria, since their first acquaintance, had been on all points so rational and logical, so wonderfully sagacious, in fact, that he could not understand how so much wisdom on all points could be allied with madness. Was Faria deceived as to his treasure, or was all the world deceived as to Faria?

Dantes remained in his cell all day, not daring to return to his friend, thinking thus to defer the moment when he should be convinced, once for all, that the abbe was mad — such a conviction would be so terrible!

But, towards the evening after the hour for the customary visit had gone by, Faria, not seeing the young man appear, tried to move and get over the distance which separated them. Edmond shuddered when he heard the painful efforts which the old man made to drag himself along; his leg was inert, and he could no longer make use of one arm. Edmond was obliged to assist him, for otherwise he would not have been able to enter by the small aperture which led to Dantes' chamber.

"Here I am, pursuing you remorselessly," he said with a benignant smile. "You thought to escape my munificence, but it is in vain. Listen to me."

Edmond saw there was no escape, and placing the old man on his bed, he seated himself on the stool beside him.

"You know," said the abbe, "that I was the secretary and intimate friend of Cardinal Spada, the last of the princes of that name. I owe to this worthy lord all the happiness I ever knew. He was not rich, although the wealth of his family had passed into a proverb, and I heard the phrase very often, 'As rich as a Spada.' But he, like public rumor, lived on this reputation for wealth; his palace was my paradise. I was tutor to his nephews, who are dead; and when he was alone in the world, I tried by absolute devotion to his will, to make up to him all he had done for me during ten years of unremitting kindness. The cardinal's house had no secrets for me. I had often seen my noble patron annotating ancient volumes, and eagerly searching amongst dusty family manuscripts. One day when I was reproaching him for his unavailing searches, and deploring the prostration of mind that followed them, he looked at me, and, smiling bitterly, opened a volume relating to the History of the City of Rome. There, in the twentieth chapter of the Life of Pope Alexander VI., were the following lines, which I can never forget: —

"'The great wars of Romagna had ended; Caesar Borgia, who had completed his conquest, had need of money to purchase all Italy. The pope had also need of money to bring matters to an end with Louis XII. King of France, who was formidable still in spite of his recent reverses; and it was necessary, therefore, to have recourse to some profitable scheme, which was a matter of great difficulty in the impoverished condition of exhausted Italy. His holiness had an idea. He determined to make two cardinals.'

"By choosing two of the greatest personages of Rome, especially rich men — this was the return the holy father looked for. In the first place, he could sell the great appointments and splendid offices which the cardinals already held; and then he had the two hats to sell besides. There was a third point in view, which will appear hereafter. The pope and Caesar Borgia first found the two future cardinals; they were Giovanni Rospigliosi, who held four of the highest dignities of the Holy See, and Caesar Spada, one of the noblest and richest of the Roman nobility; both felt the high honor of such a favor from the pope. They were ambitious, and Caesar Borgia soon found purchasers for their appointments. The result was, that Rospigliosi and Spada paid for being cardinals, and eight other persons paid for the offices the cardinals held before their elevation, and thus eight hundred thousand crowns entered into the coffers of the speculators.

“It is time now to proceed to the last part of the speculation. The pope heaped attentions upon Rospigliosi and Spada, conferred upon them the insignia of the cardinalate, and induced them to arrange their affairs and take up their residence at Rome. Then the pope and Caesar Borgia invited the two cardinals to dinner. This was a matter of dispute between the holy father and his son. Caesar thought they could make use of one of the means which he always had ready for his friends, that is to say, in the first place, the famous key which was given to certain persons with the request that they go and open a designated cupboard. This key was furnished with a small iron point, — a negligence on the part of the locksmith. When this was pressed to effect the opening of the cupboard, of which the lock was difficult, the person was pricked by this small point, and died next day. Then there was the ring with the lion’s head, which Caesar wore when he wanted to greet his friends with a clasp of the hand. The lion bit the hand thus favored, and at the end of twenty-four hours, the bite was mortal. Caesar proposed to his father, that they should either ask the cardinals to open the cupboard, or shake hands with them; but Alexander VI., replied: ‘Now as to the worthy cardinals, Spada and Rospigliosi, let us ask both of them to dinner, something tells me that we shall get that money back. Besides, you forget, Caesar, an indigestion declares itself immediately, while a prick or a bite occasions a delay of a day or two.’ Caesar gave way before such cogent reasoning, and the cardinals were consequently invited to dinner.

“The table was laid in a vineyard belonging to the pope, near San Pierdarena, a charming retreat which the cardinals knew very well by report. Rospigliosi, quite set up with his new dignities, went with a good appetite and his most ingratiating manner. Spada, a prudent man, and greatly attached to his only nephew, a young captain of the highest promise, took paper and pen, and made his will. He then sent word to his nephew to wait for him near the vineyard; but it appeared the servant did not find him.

“Spada knew what these invitations meant; since Christianity, so eminently civilizing, had made progress in Rome, it was no longer a centurion who came from the tyrant with a message, ‘Caesar wills that you die.’ but it was a legate a latere, who came with a smile on his lips to say from the pope, ‘His holiness requests you to dine with him.’

“Spada set out about two o’clock to San Pierdarena. The pope awaited him. The first sight that attracted the eyes of Spada was that of his nephew, in full costume, and Caesar Borgia paying him most marked attentions. Spada turned pale, as Caesar looked at him with an ironical air, which proved that he had anticipated all, and that the snare was well spread. They began dinner and Spada was only able to inquire of his nephew if he had received his message. The nephew replied no; perfectly comprehending the meaning of the question. It was too late, for he had already drunk a glass of excellent wine, placed for him expressly by the pope’s butler. Spada at the same moment saw another bottle approach him, which he was pressed to taste. An hour afterwards a physician declared they were both poisoned through eating mushrooms. Spada died on the threshold of the vineyard; the nephew expired at his own door, making signs which his wife could not comprehend.

“Then Caesar and the pope hastened to lay hands on the heritage, under presence of seeking for the papers of the dead man. But the inheritance consisted in this only, a scrap of paper on which Spada had written: — ’I bequeath to my beloved nephew my coffers, my books, and, amongst others, my breviary with the gold corners, which I beg he will preserve in remembrance of his affectionate uncle.’

“The heirs sought everywhere, admired the breviary, laid hands on the furniture, and were greatly astonished that Spada, the rich man, was really the most miserable of uncles — no treasures — unless they were those of science, contained in the library and laboratories. That was all. Caesar and his father searched, examined, scrutinized, but found nothing, or at least very little; not exceeding a few thousand crowns in plate, and about the same in ready money; but the nephew had time to say to his wife before he expired: ‘Look well among my uncle’s papers; there is a will.’

“They sought even more thoroughly than the august heirs had done, but it was fruitless. There were two palaces and a vineyard behind the Palatine Hill; but in these days landed property had not much value, and the two palaces and the vineyard remained to the family since they were beneath the rapacity of the pope and his son. Months and years rolled on. Alexander VI. died, poisoned, — you know by what mistake. Caesar, poisoned at the same time, escaped by shedding his skin like a snake; but the new skin was spotted by the poison till it looked like a tiger’s. Then, compelled to quit Rome, he went and got himself obscurely killed in a night skirmish, scarcely noticed in history. After the pope’s death and his son’s exile, it was supposed that the Spada family would resume the splendid position they had held before the cardinal’s time; but this was not the case. The Spadas remained in doubtful ease, a mystery hung over this dark affair, and the public rumor was, that Caesar, a better politician than his father, had carried off from the pope the fortune of the two cardinals. I say the two, because Cardinal Rospigliosi, who had not taken any precaution, was completely despoiled.

“Up to this point,” said Faria, interrupting the thread of his narrative, “this seems to you very meaningless, no doubt, eh?”

“Oh, my friend,” cried Dantes, “on the contrary, it seems as if I were reading a most interesting narrative; go on, I beg of you.”

“I will.”

“The family began to get accustomed to their obscurity. Years rolled on, and amongst the descendants some were soldiers, others diplomatists; some churchmen, some bankers; some grew rich, and some were ruined. I come now to the last of the family, whose secretary I was — the Count of Spada. I had often heard him complain of the disproportion of his rank with his fortune; and I advised him to invest all he had in an annuity. He did so, and thus doubled his income. The celebrated breviary remained in the family, and was in the count’s possession. It had been handed down from father to son; for the singular clause of the only will that had been found, had caused it to be regarded as a genuine relic, preserved in the family with superstitious veneration. It was an illuminated book, with beautiful Gothic characters, and so weighty with gold, that a servant always carried it before the cardinal on days of great solemnity.

“At the sight of papers of all sorts, — titles, contracts, parchments, which were kept in the archives of the family, all descending from the poisoned cardinal, I in my turn examined the immense bundles of documents, like twenty servitors, stewards, secretaries before me; but in spite of the most exhaustive researches, I found — nothing. Yet I had read, I had even written a precise history of the Borgia family, for the sole purpose of assuring myself whether any increase of fortune had occurred to them on the death of the Cardinal Caesar Spada; but could only trace the acquisition of the property of the Cardinal Rospigliosi, his companion in misfortune.

“I was then almost assured that the inheritance had neither profited the Borgias nor the family, but had remained unpossessed like the treasures of the Arabian Nights, which slept in the bosom of the earth under the eyes of the genie. I searched, ransacked, counted, calculated a thousand and a thousand times the income and expenditure of the family for three hundred years. It was useless. I remained in my ignorance, and the Count of Spada in his poverty. My patron died. He had reserved from his annuity his family papers, his library, composed of five thousand volumes, and his famous breviary. All these he bequeathed to me, with a thousand Roman crowns, which he had in ready money, on condition that I would have anniversary masses said for the repose of his soul, and that I would draw up a genealogical tree and history of his house. All this I did scrupulously. Be easy, my dear Edmond, we are near the conclusion.

"In 1807, a month before I was arrested, and a fortnight after the death of the Count of Spada, on the 25th of December (you will see presently how the date became fixed in my memory), I was reading, for the thousandth time, the papers I was arranging, for the palace was sold to a stranger, and I was going to leave Rome and settle at Florence, intending to take with me twelve thousand francs I possessed, my library, and the famous breviary, when, tired with my constant labor at the same thing, and overcome by a heavy dinner I had eaten, my head dropped on my hands, and I fell asleep about three o'clock in the afternoon. I awoke as the clock was striking six. I raised my head; I was in utter darkness. I rang for a light, but as no one came, I determined to find one for myself. It was indeed but anticipating the simple manners which I should soon be under the necessity of adopting. I took a wax-candle in one hand, and with the other groped about for a piece of paper (my match-box being empty), with which I proposed to get a light from the small flame still playing on the embers. Fearing, however, to make use of any valuable piece of paper, I hesitated for a moment, then recollected that I had seen in the famous breviary, which was on the table beside me, an old paper quite yellow with age, and which had served as a marker for centuries, kept there by the request of the heirs. I felt for it, found it, twisted it up together, and putting it into the expiring flame, set light to it.

"But beneath my fingers, as if by magic, in proportion as the fire ascended, I saw yellowish characters appear on the paper. I grasped it in my hand, put out the flame as quickly as I could, lighted my taper in the fire itself, and opened the crumpled paper with inexpressible emotion, recognizing, when I had done so, that these characters had been traced in mysterious and sympathetic ink, only appearing when exposed to the fire; nearly one-third of the paper had been consumed by the flame. It was that paper you read this morning; read it again, Dantes, and then I will complete for you the incomplete words and unconnected sense."

Faria, with an air of triumph, offered the paper to Dantes, who this time read the following words, traced with an ink of a reddish color resembling rust: —

> "This 25th day of April, 1498, be...
> Alexander VI., and fearing that not...
> he may desire to become my heir, and re...
> and Bentivoglio, who were poisoned,...
> my sole heir, that I have bu...
> and has visited with me, that is, in...
> Island of Monte Cristo, all I poss...
> jewels, diamonds, gems; that I alone...
> may amount to nearly two mil...
> will find on raising the twentieth ro...
> creek to the east in a right line. Two open...
> in these caves; the treasure is in the furthest a...
> which treasure I bequeath and leave en...
> as my sole heir.
> "25th April, 1498.
> "Caes...

"And now," said the abbe, "read this other paper;" and he presented to Dantes a second leaf with fragments of lines written on it, which Edmond read as follows: —

> "...ing invited to dine by his Holiness
> ...content with making me pay for my hat,
> ...serves for me the fate of Cardinals Caprara
> ...I declare to my nephew, Guido Spada
> ...ried in a place he knows
> ...the caves of the small
> ...essed of ingots, gold, money,
> ...know of the existence of this treasure, which
> ...lions of Roman crowns, and which he
> ...ck from the small
> ...ings have been made

...ngle in the second;
...tire to him
...ar Spada.”

Faria followed him with an excited look, “and now,” he said, when he saw that Dantes had read the last line, “put the two fragments together, and judge for yourself.” Dantes obeyed, and the conjointed pieces gave the following: —

“This 25th day of April, 1498, be...ing invited to dine by his Holiness Alexander VI., and fearing that not...content with making me pay for my hat, he may desire to become my heir, and re...serves for me the fate of Cardinals Caprara and Bentivoglio, who were poisoned...I declare to my nephew, Guido Spada, my sole heir, that I have bu...ried in a place he knows and has visited with me, that is, in...the caves of the small Island of Monte Cristo all I poss...ssed of ingots, gold, money, jewels, diamonds, gems; that I alone...know of the existence of this treasure, which may amount to nearly two mil...lions of Roman crowns, and which he will find on raising the twentieth ro...ck from the small creek to the east in a right line. Two open...ings have been made in these caves; the treasure is in the furthest a...ngle in the second; which treasure I bequeath and leave en...tire to him as my sole heir. “25th April, 1498. “Caes...ar Spada.”

“Well, do you comprehend now?” inquired Faria.

“It is the declaration of Cardinal Spada, and the will so long sought for,” replied Edmond, still incredulous.

“Yes; a thousand times, yes!”

“And who completed it as it now is?”

“I did. Aided by the remaining fragment, I guessed the rest; measuring the length of the lines by those of the paper, and divining the hidden meaning by means of what was in part revealed, as we are guided in a cavern by the small ray of light above us.”

“And what did you do when you arrived at this conclusion?”

“I resolved to set out, and did set out at that very instant, carrying with me the beginning of my great work, the unity of the Italian kingdom; but for some time the imperial police (who at this period, quite contrary to what Napoleon desired so soon as he had a son born to him, wished for a partition of provinces) had their eyes on me; and my hasty departure, the cause of which they were unable to guess, having aroused their suspicions, I was arrested at the very moment I was leaving Piombino.

"Now," continued Faria, addressing Dantes with an almost paternal expression, "now, my dear fellow, you know as much as I do myself. If we ever escape together, half this treasure is yours; if I die here, and you escape alone, the whole belongs to you."

"But," inquired Dantes hesitating, "has this treasure no more legitimate possessor in the world than ourselves?"

"No, no, be easy on that score; the family is extinct. The last Count of Spada, moreover, made me his heir, bequeathing to me this symbolic breviary, he bequeathed to me all it contained; no, no, make your mind satisfied on that point. If we lay hands on this fortune, we may enjoy it without remorse."

"And you say this treasure amounts to" —

"Two millions of Roman crowns; nearly thirteen millions of our money." [*]

* $2,600,000 in 1894.

"Impossible!" said Dantes, staggered at the enormous amount.

"Impossible? and why?" asked the old man. "The Spada family was one of the oldest and most powerful families of the fifteenth century; and in those times, when other opportunities for investment were wanting, such accumulations of gold and jewels were by no means rare; there are at this day Roman families perishing of hunger, though possessed of nearly a million in diamonds and jewels, handed down by entail, and which they cannot touch." Edmond thought he was in a dream — he wavered between incredulity and joy.

"I have only kept this secret so long from you," continued Faria, "that I might test your character, and then surprise you. Had we escaped before my attack of catalepsy, I should have conducted you to Monte Cristo; now," he added, with a sigh, "it is you who will conduct me thither. Well, Dantes, you do not thank me?"

"This treasure belongs to you, my dear friend," replied Dantes, "and to you only. I have no right to it. I am no relation of yours."

"You are my son, Dantes," exclaimed the old man. "You are the child of my captivity. My profession condemns me to celibacy. God has sent you to me to console, at one and the same time, the man who could not be a father, and the prisoner who could not get free." And Faria extended the arm of which alone the use remained to him to the young man who threw himself upon his neck and wept.

Chapter 19

The Third Attack.

Now that this treasure, which had so long been the object of the abbe's meditations, could insure the future happiness of him whom Faria really loved as a son, it had doubled its value in his eyes, and every day he expatiated on the amount, explaining to Dantes all the good which, with thirteen or fourteen millions of francs, a man could do in these days to his friends; and then Dantes' countenance became gloomy, for the oath of vengeance he had taken recurred to his memory, and he reflected how much ill, in these times, a man with thirteen or fourteen millions could do to his enemies.

The abbe did not know the Island of Monte Cristo; but Dantes knew it, and had often passed it, situated twenty-five miles from Pianosa, between Corsica and the Island of Elba, and had once touched there. This island was, always had been, and still is, completely deserted. It is a rock of almost conical form, which looks as though it had been thrust up by volcanic force from the depth to the surface of the ocean. Dantes drew a plan of the island for Faria, and Faria gave Dantes advice as to the means he should employ to recover the treasure. But Dantes was far from being as enthusiastic and confident as the old man. It was past a question now that Faria was not a lunatic, and the way in which he had achieved the discovery, which had given rise to the suspicion of his madness, increased Edmond's admiration of him; but at the same time Dantes could not believe that the deposit, supposing it had ever existed, still existed; and though he considered the treasure as by no means chimerical, he yet believed it was no longer there.

However, as if fate resolved on depriving the prisoners of their last chance, and making them understand that they were condemned to perpetual imprisonment, a new misfortune befell them; the gallery on the sea side, which had long been in ruins, was rebuilt. They had repaired it completely, and stopped up with vast masses of stone the hole Dantes had partly filled in. But for this precaution, which, it will be remembered, the abbe had made to Edmond, the misfortune would have been still greater, for their attempt to escape would have been detected, and they would undoubtedly have been separated. Thus a new, a stronger, and more inexorable barrier was interposed to cut off the realization of their hopes.

"You see," said the young man, with an air of sorrowful resignation, to Faria, "that God deems it right to take from me any claim to merit for what you call my devotion to you. I have promised to remain forever with you, and now I could not break my promise if I would. The treasure will be no more mine than yours, and neither of us will quit this prison. But my real treasure is not that, my dear friend, which awaits me beneath the sombre rocks of Monte Cristo, it is your presence, our living together five or six hours a day, in spite of our jailers; it is the rays of intelligence you have elicited from my brain, the languages you have implanted in my memory, and which have taken root there with all their philological ramifications. These different sciences that you have made so easy to me by the depth of the knowledge you possess of them, and the clearness of the principles to which you have reduced them — this is my treasure, my beloved friend, and with this you have made me rich and happy. Believe me, and take comfort, this is better for me than tons of gold and cases of diamonds, even were they not as problematical as the clouds we see in the morning floating over the sea, which we take for terra firma, and which evaporate and vanish as we draw near to them. To have you as long as possible near me, to hear your eloquent speech, — which embellishes my mind, strengthens my soul, and makes my whole frame capable of great and terrible things, if I should ever be free, — so fills my whole existence, that the despair to which I was just on the point of yielding when I knew you, has no longer any hold over me; and this — this is my fortune — not chimerical, but actual. I owe you my real good, my present happiness; and all the sovereigns of the earth, even Caesar Borgia himself, could not deprive me of this."

Thus, if not actually happy, yet the days these two unfortunates passed together went quickly. Faria, who for so long a time had kept silence as to the treasure, now perpetually talked of it. As he had prophesied would be the case, he remained paralyzed in the right arm and the left leg, and had given up all hope of ever enjoying it himself. But he was continually thinking over some means of escape for his young companion, and anticipating the pleasure he would enjoy. For fear the letter might be some day lost or stolen, he compelled Dantes to learn it by heart; and Dantes knew it from the first to the last word. Then he destroyed the second portion, assured that if the first were seized, no one would be able to discover its real meaning. Whole hours sometimes passed while Faria was giving instructions to Dantes, — instructions which were to serve him when he was at liberty. Then, once free, from the day and hour and moment when he was so, he could have but one only thought, which was, to gain Monte Cristo by some means, and remain there alone under some pretext which would arouse no suspicions; and once there, to endeavor to find the wonderful caverns, and search in the appointed spot, — the appointed spot, be it remembered, being the farthest angle in the second opening.

In the meanwhile the hours passed, if not rapidly, at least tolerably. Faria, as we have said, without having recovered the use of his hand and foot, had regained all the clearness of his understanding, and had gradually, besides the moral instructions we have detailed, taught his youthful companion the patient and sublime duty of a prisoner, who learns to make something from nothing. They were thus perpetually employed, — Faria, that he might not see himself grow old; Dantes, for fear of recalling the almost extinct past which now only floated in his memory like a distant light wandering in the night. So life went on for them as it does for those who are not victims of misfortune and whose activities glide along mechanically and tranquilly beneath the eye of providence.

But beneath this superficial calm there were in the heart of the young man, and perhaps in that of the old man, many repressed desires, many stifled sighs, which found vent when Faria was left alone, and when Edmond returned to his cell. One night Edmond awoke suddenly, believing that he heard some one calling him. He opened his eyes upon utter darkness. His name, or rather a plaintive voice which essayed to pronounce his name, reached him. He sat up in bed and a cold sweat broke out upon his brow. Undoubtedly the call came from Faria’s dungeon. “Alas,” murmured Edmond; “can it be?”

He moved his bed, drew up the stone, rushed into the passage, and reached the opposite extremity; the secret entrance was open. By the light of the wretched and wavering lamp, of which we have spoken, Dantes saw the old man, pale, but yet erect, clinging to the bedstead. His features were writhing with those horrible symptoms which he already knew, and which had so seriously alarmed him when he saw them for the first time.

“Alas, my dear friend,” said Faria in a resigned tone, “you understand, do you not, and I need not attempt to explain to you?”

Edmond uttered a cry of agony, and, quite out of his senses, rushed towards the door, exclaiming, “Help, help!” Faria had just sufficient strength to restrain him.

“Silence,” he said, “or you are lost. We must now only think of you, my dear friend, and so act as to render your captivity supportable or your flight possible. It would require years to do again what I have done here, and the results would be instantly destroyed if our jailers knew we had communicated with each other. Besides, be assured, my dear Edmond, the dungeon I am about to leave will not long remain empty; some other unfortunate being will soon take my place, and to him you will appear like an angel of salvation. Perhaps he will be young, strong, and enduring, like yourself, and will aid you in your escape, while I have been but a hindrance. You will no longer have half a dead body tied to you as a drag to all your movements. At length providence has done something for you; he restores to you more than he takes away, and it was time I should die.”

Edmond could only clasp his hands and exclaim, “Oh, my friend, my friend, speak not thus!” and then resuming all his presence of mind, which had for a moment staggered under this blow, and his strength, which had failed at the words of the old man, he said, “Oh, I have saved you once, and I will save you a second time!” And raising the foot of the bed, he drew out the phial, still a third filled with the red liquor.

“See,” he exclaimed, “there remains still some of the magic draught. Quick, quick! tell me what I must do this time; are there any fresh instructions? Speak, my friend; I listen.”

“There is not a hope,” replied Faria, shaking his head, “but no matter; God wills it that man whom he has created, and in whose heart he has so profoundly rooted the love of life, should do all in his power to preserve that existence, which, however painful it may be, is yet always so dear.”

“Oh, yes, yes!” exclaimed Dantes; “and I tell you that I will save you yet.”

“Well, then, try. The cold gains upon me. I feel the blood flowing towards my brain. These horrible chills, which make my teeth chatter and seem to dislocate my bones, begin to pervade my whole frame; in five minutes the malady will reach its height, and in a quarter of an hour there will be nothing left of me but a corpse.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Dantes, his heart wrung with anguish.

“Do as you did before, only do not wait so long, all the springs of life are now exhausted in me, and death,” he continued, looking at his paralyzed arm and leg, “has but half its work to do. If, after having made me swallow twelve drops instead of ten, you see that I do not recover, then pour the rest down my throat. Now lift me on my bed, for I can no longer support myself.”

Edmond took the old man in his arms, and laid him on the bed.

“And now, my dear friend,” said Faria, “sole consolation of my wretched existence, — you whom heaven gave me somewhat late, but still gave me, a priceless gift, and for which I am most grateful, — at the moment of separating from you forever, I wish you all the happiness and all the prosperity you so well deserve. My son, I bless thee!” The young man cast himself on his knees, leaning his head against the old man’s bed.

“Listen, now, to what I say in this my dying moment. The treasure of the Spadas exists. God grants me the boon of vision unrestricted by time or space. I see it in the depths of the inner cavern. My eyes pierce the inmost recesses of the earth, and are dazzled at the sight of so much riches. If you do escape, remember that the poor abbe, whom all the world called mad, was not so. Hasten to Monte Cristo — avail yourself of the fortune — for you have indeed suffered long enough.” A violent convulsion attacked the old man. Dantes raised his head and saw Faria’s eyes injected with blood. It seemed as if a flow of blood had ascended from the chest to the head.

“Adieu, adieu!” murmured the old man, clasping Edmond’s hand convulsively — ”adieu!”

“Oh, no, — no, not yet,” he cried; “do not forsake me! Oh, succor him! Help — help — help!”

“Hush — hush!” murmured the dying man, “that they may not separate us if you save me!”

“You are right. Oh, yes, yes; be assured I shall save you! Besides, although you suffer much, you do not seem to be in such agony as you were before.”

“Do not mistake. I suffer less because there is in me less strength to endure. At your age we have faith in life; it is the privilege of youth to believe and hope, but old men see death more clearly. Oh, ‘tis here — ’tis here — ’tis over — my sight is gone — my senses fail! Your hand, Dantes! Adieu — adieu!” And raising himself by a final effort, in which he summoned all his faculties, he said, — ”Monte Cristo, forget not Monte

Cristo!” And he fell back on the bed. The crisis was terrible, and a rigid form with twisted limbs, swollen eyelids, and lips flecked with bloody foam, lay on the bed of torture, in place of the intellectual being who so lately rested there.

Dantes took the lamp, placed it on a projecting stone above the bed, whence its tremulous light fell with strange and fantastic ray on the distorted countenance and motionless, stiffened body. With steady gaze he awaited confidently the moment for administering the restorative.

When he believed that the right moment had arrived, he took the knife, pried open the teeth, which offered less resistance than before, counted one after the other twelve drops, and watched; the phial contained, perhaps, twice as much more. He waited ten minutes, a quarter of an hour, half an hour, — no change took place. Trembling, his hair erect, his brow bathed with perspiration, he counted the seconds by the beating of his heart. Then he thought it was time to make the last trial, and he put the phial to the purple lips of Faria, and without having occasion to force open his jaws, which had remained extended, he poured the whole of the liquid down his throat.

The draught produced a galvanic effect, a violent trembling pervaded the old man’s limbs, his eyes opened until it was fearful to gaze upon them, he heaved a sigh which resembled a shriek, and then his convulsed body returned gradually to its former immobility, the eyes remaining open.

Half an hour, an hour, an hour and a half elapsed, and during this period of anguish, Edmond leaned over his friend, his hand applied to his heart, and felt the body gradually grow cold, and the heart’s pulsation become more and more deep and dull, until at length it stopped; the last movement of the heart ceased, the face became livid, the eyes remained open, but the eyeballs were glazed. It was six o’clock in the morning, the dawn was just breaking, and its feeble ray came into the dungeon, and paled the ineffectual light of the lamp. Strange shadows passed over the countenance of the dead man, and at times gave it the appearance of life. While the struggle between day and night lasted, Dantes still doubted; but as soon as the daylight gained the pre-eminence, he saw that he was alone with a corpse. Then an invincible and extreme terror seized upon him, and he dared not again press the hand that hung out of bed, he dared no longer to gaze on those fixed and vacant eyes, which he tried many times to close, but in vain — they opened again as soon as shut. He extinguished the lamp, carefully concealed it, and then went away, closing as well as he could the entrance to the secret passage by the large stone as he descended.

It was time, for the jailer was coming. On this occasion he began his rounds at Dantes’ cell, and on leaving him he went on to Faria’s dungeon, taking thither breakfast and some linen. Nothing betokened that the man knew anything of what had occurred. He went on his way.

Dantes was then seized with an indescribable desire to know what was going on in the dungeon of his unfortunate friend. He therefore returned by the subterraneous gallery, and arrived in time to hear the exclamations of the turnkey, who called out for help. Other turnkeys came, and then was heard the regular tramp of soldiers. Last of all came the governor.

Edmond heard the creaking of the bed as they moved the corpse, heard the voice of the governor, who asked them to throw water on the dead man’s face; and seeing that, in spite of this application, the prisoner did not recover, they sent for the doctor. The governor then went out, and words of pity fell on Dantes’ listening ears, mingled with brutal laughter.

“Well, well,” said one, “the madman has gone to look after his treasure. Good journey to him!”

“With all his millions, he will not have enough to pay for his shroud!” said another.

“Oh,” added a third voice, “the shrouds of the Chateau d’If are not dear!”

“Perhaps,” said one of the previous speakers, “as he was a churchman, they may go to some expense in his behalf.”

“They may give him the honors of the sack.”

Edmond did not lose a word, but comprehended very little of what was said. The voices soon ceased, and it seemed to him as if every one had left the cell. Still he dared not to enter, as they might have left some turnkey to watch the dead. He remained, therefore, mute and motionless, hardly venturing to breathe. At the end of an hour, he heard a faint noise, which increased. It was the governor who returned, followed by the doctor and other attendants. There was a moment’s silence, — it was evident that the doctor was examining the dead body. The inquiries soon commenced.

The doctor analyzed the symptoms of the malady to which the prisoner had succumbed, and declared that he was dead. Questions and answers followed in a nonchalant manner that made Dantes indignant, for he felt that all the world should have for the poor abbe a love and respect equal to his own.

"I am very sorry for what you tell me," said the governor, replying to the assurance of the doctor, "that the old man is really dead; for he was a quiet, inoffensive prisoner, happy in his folly, and required no watching."

"Ah," added the turnkey, "there was no occasion for watching him: he would have stayed here fifty years, I'll answer for it, without any attempt to escape."

"Still," said the governor, "I believe it will be requisite, notwithstanding your certainty, and not that I doubt your science, but in discharge of my official duty, that we should be perfectly assured that the prisoner is dead." There was a moment of complete silence, during which Dantes, still listening, knew that the doctor was examining the corpse a second time.

"You may make your mind easy," said the doctor; "he is dead. I will answer for that."

"You know, sir," said the governor, persisting, "that we are not content in such cases as this with such a simple examination. In spite of all appearances, be so kind, therefore, as to finish your duty by fulfilling the formalities described by law."

"Let the irons be heated," said the doctor; "but really it is a useless precaution." This order to heat the irons made Dantes shudder. He heard hasty steps, the creaking of a door, people going and coming, and some minutes afterwards a turnkey entered, saying, —

"Here is the brazier, lighted." There was a moment's silence, and then was heard the crackling of burning flesh, of which the peculiar and nauseous smell penetrated even behind the wall where Dantes was listening in horror. The perspiration poured forth upon the young man's brow, and he felt as if he should faint.

"You see, sir, he is really dead," said the doctor; "this burn in the heel is decisive. The poor fool is cured of his folly, and delivered from his captivity."

"Wasn't his name Faria?" inquired one of the officers who accompanied the governor.

"Yes, sir; and, as he said, it was an ancient name. He was, too, very learned, and rational enough on all points which did not relate to his treasure; but on that, indeed, he was intractable."

"It is the sort of malady which we call monomania," said the doctor.

"You had never anything to complain of?" said the governor to the jailer who had charge of the abbe.

“Never, sir,” replied the jailer, “never; on the contrary, he sometimes amused me very much by telling me stories. One day, too, when my wife was ill, he gave me a prescription which cured her.”

“Ah, ah!” said the doctor, “I did not know that I had a rival; but I hope, governor, that you will show him all proper respect.”

“Yes, yes, make your mind easy, he shall be decently interred in the newest sack we can find. Will that satisfy you?”

“Must this last formality take place in your presence, sir?” inquired a turnkey.

“Certainly. But make haste — I cannot stay here all day.” Other footsteps, going and coming, were now heard, and a moment afterwards the noise of rustling canvas reached Dantes’ ears, the bed creaked, and the heavy footfall of a man who lifts a weight sounded on the floor; then the bed again creaked under the weight deposited upon it.

“This evening,” said the governor.

“Will there be any mass?” asked one of the attendants.

“That is impossible,” replied the governor. “The chaplain of the chateau came to me yesterday to beg for leave of absence, in order to take a trip to Hyeres for a week. I told him I would attend to the prisoners in his absence. If the poor abbe had not been in such a hurry, he might have had his requiem.”

“Pooh, pooh;” said the doctor, with the impiety usual in persons of his profession; “he is a churchman. God will respect his profession, and not give the devil the wicked delight of sending him a priest.” A shout of laughter followed this brutal jest. Meanwhile the operation of putting the body in the sack was going on.

“This evening,” said the governor, when the task was ended.

“At what hour?” inquired a turnkey.

“Why, about ten or eleven o’clock.”

“Shall we watch by the corpse?”

“Of what use would it be? Shut the dungeon as if he were alive — that is all.” Then the steps retreated, and the voices died away in the distance; the noise of the door, with its creaking hinges and bolts ceased, and a silence more sombre than that of solitude ensued, — the silence of death, which was all-pervasive, and struck its icy chill to the very soul of Dantes. Then he raised the flag-stone cautiously with his head, and looked carefully around the chamber. It was empty, and Dantes emerged from the tunnel.

Chapter 20

The Cemetery of the Chateau D’If.

On the bed, at full length, and faintly illuminated by the pale light that came from the window, lay a sack of canvas, and under its rude folds was stretched a long and stiffened form; it was Faria’s last winding-sheet, — a winding-sheet which, as the turnkey said, cost so little. Everything was in readiness. A barrier had been placed between Dantes and his old friend. No longer could Edmond look into those wide-open eyes which had seemed to be penetrating the mysteries of death; no longer could he clasp the hand which had done so much to make his existence blessed. Faria, the beneficent and cheerful companion, with whom he was accustomed to live so intimately, no longer breathed. He seated himself on the edge of that terrible bed, and fell into melancholy and gloomy revery.

Alone — he was alone again — again condemned to silence — again face to face with nothingness! Alone! — never again to see the face, never again to hear the voice of the only human being who united him to earth! Was not Faria’s fate the better, after all — to solve the problem of life at its source, even at the risk of horrible suffering? The idea of suicide, which his friend had driven away and kept away by his cheerful presence, now hovered like a phantom over the abbe’s dead body.

“If I could die,” he said, “I should go where he goes, and should assuredly find him again. But how to die? It is very easy,” he went on with a smile; “I will remain here, rush on the first person that opens the door, strangle him, and then they will guillotine me.” But excessive grief is like a storm at sea, where the frail bark is tossed from the depths to the top of the wave. Dantes recoiled from the idea of so infamous a death, and passed suddenly from despair to an ardent desire for life and liberty.

“Die? oh, no,” he exclaimed — ”not die now, after having lived and suffered so long and so much! Die? yes, had I died years ago; but now to die would be, indeed, to give way to the sarcasm of destiny. No, I want to live; I shall struggle to the very last; I will yet win back the happiness of which I have been deprived. Before I die I must not forget that I have my executioners to punish, and perhaps, too, who knows, some friends to reward. Yet they will forget me here, and I shall die in my dungeon like Faria.” As he said this, he became silent and gazed straight before him like one overwhelmed with a strange and amazing thought. Suddenly he arose, lifted his hand to his brow as if his brain were giddy, paced twice or thrice round the dungeon, and then paused abruptly by the bed.

“Just God!” he muttered, “whence comes this thought? Is it from thee? Since none but the dead pass freely from this dungeon, let me take the place of the dead!” Without giving himself time to reconsider his decision, and, indeed, that he might not allow his thoughts to be distracted from his desperate resolution, he bent over the appalling shroud, opened it with the knife which Faria had made, drew the corpse from the sack, and bore it along the tunnel to his own chamber, laid it on his couch, tied around its head the rag he wore at night around his own, covered it with his counterpane, once again kissed the ice-cold brow, and tried vainly to close the resisting eyes, which glared horribly, turned the head towards the wall, so that the jailer might, when he brought the evening meal, believe that he was asleep, as was his frequent custom; entered the tunnel again, drew the bed against the wall, returned to the other cell, took from the hiding-place the needle and thread, flung off his rags, that they might feel only naked flesh beneath the coarse canvas, and getting inside the sack, placed himself in the posture in which the dead body had been laid, and sewed up the mouth of the sack from the inside.

He would have been discovered by the beating of his heart, if by any mischance the jailers had entered at that moment. Dantes might have waited until the evening visit was over, but he was afraid that the governor would change his mind, and order the dead body to be removed earlier. In that case his last hope would have been destroyed. Now his plans were fully made, and this is what he intended to do. If while he was being carried out the grave-diggers should discover that they were bearing a live instead of a dead body, Dantes did not intend to give them time to recognize him, but with a sudden cut of the knife, he meant to open the sack from top to bottom, and, profiting by their alarm, escape; if they tried to catch him, he would use his knife to better purpose.

If they took him to the cemetery and laid him in a grave, he would allow himself to be covered with earth, and then, as it was night, the grave-diggers could scarcely have turned their backs before he would have worked his way through the yielding soil and escaped. He hoped that the weight of earth would not be so great that he could not overcome it. If he was detected in this and the earth proved too heavy, he would be stifled, and then — so much the better, all would be over. Dantes had not eaten since the preceding evening, but he had not thought of hunger, nor did he think of it now. His situation was too precarious to allow him even time to reflect on any thought but one.

The first risk that Dantes ran was, that the jailer, when he brought him his supper at seven o'clock, might perceive the change that had been made; fortunately, twenty times at least, from misanthropy or fatigue, Dantes had received his jailer in bed, and then the man placed his bread and soup on the table, and went away without saying a word. This time the jailer might not be as silent as usual, but speak to Dantes, and seeing that he received no reply, go to the bed, and thus discover all.

When seven o'clock came, Dantes' agony really began. His hand placed upon his heart was unable to redress its throbbings, while, with the other he wiped the perspiration from his temples. From time to time chills ran through his whole body, and clutched his heart in a grasp of ice. Then he thought he was going to die. Yet the hours passed on without any unusual disturbance, and Dantes knew that he had escaped the first peril. It was a good augury. At length, about the hour the governor had appointed, footsteps were heard on the stairs. Edmond felt that the moment had arrived, summoned up all his courage, held his breath, and would have been happy if at the same time he could have repressed the throbbing of his veins. The footsteps — they were double — paused at the door — and Dantes guessed that the two grave-diggers had come to seek him — this idea was soon converted into certainty, when he heard the noise they made in putting down the hand-bier. The door opened, and a dim light reached Dantes' eyes through the coarse sack that covered him; he saw two shadows approach his bed, a third remaining at the door with a torch in its hand. The two men, approaching the ends of the bed, took the sack by its extremities.

"He's heavy though for an old and thin man," said one, as he raised the head.

"They say every year adds half a pound to the weight of the bones," said another, lifting the feet.

"Have you tied the knot?" inquired the first speaker.

"What would be the use of carrying so much more weight?" was the reply, "I can do that when we get there."

"Yes, you're right," replied the companion.

"What's the knot for?" thought Dantes.

They deposited the supposed corpse on the bier. Edmond stiffened himself in order to play the part of a dead man, and then the party, lighted by the man with the torch, who went first, ascended the stairs. Suddenly he felt the fresh and sharp night air, and Dantes knew that the mistral was blowing. It was a sensation in which pleasure and pain were strangely mingled. The bearers went on for twenty paces, then stopped, putting the bier down on the ground. One of them went away, and Dantes heard his shoes striking on the pavement.

"Where am I?" he asked himself.

"Really, he is by no means a light load!" said the other bearer, sitting on the edge of the hand-barrow. Dantes' first impulse was to escape, but fortunately he did not attempt it.

"Give us a light," said the other bearer, "or I shall never find what I am looking for." The man with the torch complied, although not asked in the most polite terms.

"What can he be looking for?" thought Edmond. "The spade, perhaps." An exclamation of satisfaction indicated that the grave-digger had found the object of his search. "Here it is at last," he said, "not without some trouble though."

"Yes," was the answer, "but it has lost nothing by waiting."

As he said this, the man came towards Edmond, who heard a heavy metallic substance laid down beside him, and at the same moment a cord was fastened round his feet with sudden and painful violence.

"Well, have you tied the knot?" inquired the grave-digger, who was looking on.

"Yes, and pretty tight too, I can tell you," was the answer.

"Move on, then." And the bier was lifted once more, and they proceeded.

They advanced fifty paces farther, and then stopped to open a door, then went forward again. The noise of the waves dashing against the rocks on which the chateau is built, reached Dantes' ear distinctly as they went forward.

"Bad weather!" observed one of the bearers; "not a pleasant night for a dip in the sea."

“Why, yes, the abbe runs a chance of being wet,” said the other; and then there was a burst of brutal laughter. Dantes did not comprehend the jest, but his hair stood erect on his head.

“Well, here we are at last,” said one of them. “A little farther — a little farther,” said the other. “You know very well that the last was stopped on his way, dashed on the rocks, and the governor told us next day that we were careless fellows.”

They ascended five or six more steps, and then Dantes felt that they took him, one by the head and the other by the heels, and swung him to and fro. “One!” said the grave-diggers, “two! three!” And at the same instant Dantes felt himself flung into the air like a wounded bird, falling, falling, with a rapidity that made his blood curdle. Although drawn downwards by the heavy weight which hastened his rapid descent, it seemed to him as if the fall lasted for a century.

At last, with a horrible splash, he darted like an arrow into the ice-cold water, and as he did so he uttered a shrill cry, stifled in a moment by his immersion beneath the waves.

Dantes had been flung into the sea, and was dragged into its depths by a thirty-six pound shot tied to his feet. The sea is the cemetery of the Chateau d’If.

Chapter 21

The Island of Tiboulen.

Dantes, although stunned and almost suffocated, had sufficient presence of mind to hold his breath, and as his right hand (prepared as he was for every chance) held his knife open, he rapidly ripped up the sack, extricated his arm, and then his body; but in spite of all his efforts to free himself from the shot, he felt it dragging him down still lower. He then bent his body, and by a desperate effort severed the cord that bound his legs, at the moment when it seemed as if he were actually strangled. With a mighty leap he rose to the surface of the sea, while the shot dragged down to the depths the sack that had so nearly become his shroud.

Dantes waited only to get breath, and then dived, in order to avoid being seen. When he arose a second time, he was fifty paces from where he had first sunk. He saw overhead a black and tempestuous sky, across which the wind was driving clouds that occasionally suffered a twinkling star to appear; before him was the vast expanse of waters, sombre and terrible, whose waves foamed and roared as if before the approach of a storm. Behind him, blacker than the sea, blacker than the sky, rose phantom-like the vast stone structure, whose projecting crags seemed like arms extended to seize their prey, and on the highest rock was a torch lighting two figures. He fancied that these two forms were looking at the sea; doubtless these strange grave-diggers had heard his cry. Dantes dived again, and remained a long time beneath the water. This was an easy feat to him, for he usually attracted a crowd of spectators in the bay before the lighthouse at Marseilles when he swam there, and was unanimously declared to be the best swimmer in the port. When he came up again the light had disappeared.

He must now get his bearings. Ratonneau and Pomegue are the nearest islands of all those that surround the Chateau d’If, but Ratonneau and Pomegue are inhabited, as is also the islet of Daume. Tiboulen and Lemaire were therefore the safest for Dantes’ venture. The islands of Tiboulen and Lemaire are a league from the Chateau d’If; Dantes, nevertheless, determined to make for them. But how could he find his way in the darkness of the night? At this moment he saw the light of Planier, gleaming in front of him like a star. By leaving this light on the right, he kept the Island of Tiboulen a little on the left; by turning to the left, therefore, he would find it. But, as we have said, it was at least a league from the Chateau d'If to this island. Often in prison Faria had said to him, when he saw him idle and inactive, "Dantes, you must not give way to this listlessness; you will be drowned if you seek to escape, and your strength has not been properly exercised and prepared for exertion." These words rang in Dantes' ears, even beneath the waves; he hastened to cleave his way through them to see if he had not lost his strength. He found with pleasure that his captivity had taken away nothing of his power, and that he was still master of that element on whose bosom he had so often sported as a boy.

Fear, that relentless pursuer, clogged Dantes' efforts. He listened for any sound that might be audible, and every time that he rose to the top of a wave he scanned the horizon, and strove to penetrate the darkness. He fancied that every wave behind him was a pursuing boat, and he redoubled his exertions, increasing rapidly his distance from the chateau, but exhausting his strength. He swam on still, and already the terrible chateau had disappeared in the darkness. He could not see it, but he felt its presence. An hour passed, during which Dantes, excited by the feeling of freedom, continued to cleave the waves. "Let us see," said he, "I have swum above an hour, but as the wind is against me, that has retarded my speed; however, if I am not mistaken, I must be close to Tiboulen. But what if I were mistaken?" A shudder passed over him. He sought to tread water, in order to rest himself; but the sea was too violent, and he felt that he could not make use of this means of recuperation.

"Well," said he, "I will swim on until I am worn out, or the cramp seizes me, and then I shall sink;" and he struck out with the energy of despair.

Suddenly the sky seemed to him to become still darker and more dense, and heavy clouds seemed to sweep down towards him; at the same time he felt a sharp pain in his knee. He fancied for a moment that he had been shot, and listened for the report; but he heard nothing. Then he put out his hand, and encountered an obstacle and with another stroke knew that he had gained the shore.

Before him rose a grotesque mass of rocks, that resembled nothing so much as a vast fire petrified at the moment of its most fervent combustion. It was the Island of Tiboulen. Dantes rose, advanced a few steps, and, with a fervent prayer of gratitude, stretched himself on the granite, which seemed to him softer than down. Then, in spite of the wind and rain, he fell into the deep, sweet sleep of utter exhaustion. At the expiration of an hour Edmond was awakened by the roar of thunder. The tempest was let loose and beating the atmosphere with its mighty wings; from time to time a flash of lightning stretched across the heavens like a fiery serpent, lighting up the clouds that rolled on in vast chaotic waves.

Dantes had not been deceived — he had reached the first of the two islands, which was, in fact, Tiboulen. He knew that it was barren and without shelter; but when the sea became more calm, he resolved to plunge into its waves again, and swim to Lemaire, equally arid, but larger, and consequently better adapted for concealment.

An overhanging rock offered him a temporary shelter, and scarcely had he availed himself of it when the tempest burst forth in all its fury. Edmond felt the trembling of the rock beneath which he lay; the waves, dashing themselves against it, wetted him with their spray. He was safely sheltered, and yet he felt dizzy in the midst of the warring of the elements and the dazzling brightness of the lightning. It seemed to him that the island trembled to its base, and that it would, like a vessel at anchor, break moorings, and bear him off into the centre of the storm. He then recollected that he had not eaten or drunk for four-and-twenty hours. He extended his hands, and drank greedily of the rainwater that had lodged in a hollow of the rock.

As he rose, a flash of lightning, that seemed to rive the remotest heights of heaven, illumined the darkness. By its light, between the Island of Lemaire and Cape Croiselle, a quarter of a league distant, Dantes saw a fishing-boat driven rapidly like a spectre before the power of winds and waves. A second after, he saw it again, approaching with frightful rapidity. Dantes cried at the top of his voice to warn them of their danger, but they saw it themselves. Another flash showed him four men clinging to the shattered mast and the rigging, while a fifth clung to the broken rudder.

The men he beheld saw him undoubtedly, for their cries were carried to his ears by the wind. Above the splintered mast a sail rent to tatters was waving; suddenly the ropes that still held it gave way, and it disappeared in the darkness of the night like a vast sea-bird. At the same moment a violent crash was heard, and cries of distress. Dantes from his rocky perch saw the shattered vessel, and among the fragments the floating forms of the hapless sailors. Then all was dark again.

Dantes ran down the rocks at the risk of being himself dashed to pieces; he listened, he groped about, but he heard and saw nothing — the cries had ceased, and the tempest continued to rage. By degrees the wind abated, vast gray clouds rolled towards the west, and the blue firmament appeared studded with bright stars. Soon a red streak became visible in the horizon, the waves whitened, a light played over them, and gilded their foaming crests with gold. It was day.

Dantes stood mute and motionless before this majestic spectacle, as if he now beheld it for the first time; and indeed since his captivity in the Chateau d’If he had forgotten that such scenes were ever to be witnessed. He turned towards the fortress, and looked at both sea and land. The gloomy building rose from the bosom of the ocean with imposing majesty and seemed to dominate the scene. It was about five o’clock. The sea continued to get calmer.

“In two or three hours,” thought Dantes, “the turnkey will enter my chamber, find the body of my poor friend, recognize it, seek for me in vain, and give the alarm. Then the tunnel will be discovered; the men who cast me into the sea and who must have heard the cry I uttered, will be questioned. Then boats filled with armed soldiers will pursue the wretched fugitive. The cannon will warn every one to refuse shelter to a man wandering about naked and famished. The police of Marseilles will be on the alert by land, whilst the governor pursues me by sea. I am cold, I am hungry. I have lost even the knife that saved me. O my God, I have suffered enough surely! Have pity on me, and do for me what I am unable to do for myself.”

As Dantes (his eyes turned in the direction of the Chateau d’If) uttered this prayer, he saw off the farther point of the Island of Pomegue a small vessel with lateen sail skimming the sea like a gull in search of prey; and with his sailor’s eye he knew it to be a Genoese tartan. She was coming out of Marseilles harbor, and was standing out to sea rapidly, her sharp prow cleaving through the waves. “Oh,” cried Edmond, “to think that in half an hour I could join her, did I not fear being questioned, detected, and conveyed back to Marseilles! What can I do? What story can I invent? under pretext of trading along the coast, these men, who are in reality smugglers, will prefer selling me to doing a good action. I must wait. But I cannot — — I am starving. In a few hours my strength will be utterly exhausted; besides, perhaps I have not been missed at the fortress. I can pass as one of the sailors wrecked last night. My story will be accepted, for there is no one left to contradict me.”

As he spoke, Dantes looked toward the spot where the fishing-vessel had been wrecked, and started. The red cap of one of the sailors hung to a point of the rock and some timbers that had formed part of the vessel’s keel, floated at the foot of the crag. In an instant Dantes’ plan was formed. He swam to the cap, placed it on his head, seized one of the timbers, and struck out so as to cut across the course the vessel was taking.

“I am saved!” murmured he. And this conviction restored his strength.

He soon saw that the vessel, with the wind dead ahead, was tacking between the Chateau d’If and the tower of Planier. For an instant he feared lest, instead of keeping in shore, she should stand out to sea; but he soon saw that she would pass, like most vessels bound for Italy, between the islands of Jaros and Calaseraigne. However, the vessel and the swimmer insensibly neared one another, and in one of its tacks the tartan bore down within a quarter of a mile of him. He rose on the waves, making signs of distress; but no one on board saw him, and the vessel stood on another tack. Dantes would have shouted, but he knew that the wind would drown his voice.

It was then he rejoiced at his precaution in taking the timber, for without it he would have been unable, perhaps, to reach the vessel — certainly to return to shore, should he be unsuccessful in attracting attention.

Dantes, though almost sure as to what course the vessel would take, had yet watched it anxiously until it tacked and stood towards him. Then he advanced; but before they could meet, the vessel again changed her course. By a violent effort he rose half out of the water, waving his cap, and uttering a loud shout peculiar to sailers. This time he was both seen and heard, and the tartan instantly steered towards him. At the same time, he saw they were about to lower the boat.

An instant after, the boat, rowed by two men, advanced rapidly towards him. Dantes let go of the timber, which he now thought to be useless, and swam vigorously to meet them. But he had reckoned too much upon his strength, and then he realized how serviceable the timber had been to him. His arms became stiff, his legs lost their flexibility, and he was almost breathless.

He shouted again. The two sailors redoubled their efforts, and one of them cried in Italian, “Courage!”

The word reached his ear as a wave which he no longer had the strength to surmount passed over his head. He rose again to the surface, struggled with the last desperate effort of a drowning man, uttered a third cry, and felt himself sinking, as if the fatal cannon shot were again tied to his feet. The water passed over his head, and the sky turned gray. A convulsive movement again brought him to the surface. He felt himself seized by the hair, then he saw and heard nothing. He had fainted.

When he opened his eyes Dantes found himself on the deck of the tartan. His first care was to see what course they were taking. They were rapidly leaving the Chateau d’If behind. Dantes was so exhausted that the exclamation of joy he uttered was mistaken for a sigh.

As we have said, he was lying on the deck. A sailor was rubbing his limbs with a woollen cloth; another, whom he recognized as the one who had cried out “Courage!” held a gourd full of rum to his mouth; while the third, an old sailer, at once the pilot and captain, looked on with that egotistical pity men feel for a misfortune that they have escaped yesterday, and which may overtake them to-morrow.

A few drops of the rum restored suspended animation, while the friction of his limbs restored their elasticity.

“Who are you?” said the pilot in bad French.

“I am,” replied Dantes, in bad Italian, “a Maltese sailor. We were coming from Syracuse laden with grain. The storm of last night overtook us at Cape Morgion, and we were wrecked on these rocks.”

“Where do you come from?”

“From these rocks that I had the good luck to cling to while our captain and the rest of the crew were all lost. I saw your vessel, and fearful of being left to perish on the desolate island, I swam off on a piece of wreckage to try and intercept your course. You have saved my life, and I thank you,” continued Dantes. “I was lost when one of your sailors caught hold of my hair.”

“It was I,” said a sailor of a frank and manly appearance; “and it was time, for you were sinking.”

“Yes,” returned Dantes, holding out his hand, “I thank you again.”

“I almost hesitated, though,” replied the sailor; “you looked more like a brigand than an honest man, with your beard six inches, and your hair a foot long.” Dantes recollected that his hair and beard had not been cut all the time he was at the Chateau d’If.

“Yes,” said he, “I made a vow, to our Lady of the Grotto not to cut my hair or beard for ten years if I were saved in a moment of danger; but to-day the vow expires.”

“Now what are we to do with you?” said the captain.

“Alas, anything you please. My captain is dead; I have barely escaped; but I am a good sailor. Leave me at the first port you make; I shall be sure to find employment.”

“Do you know the Mediterranean?”

“I have sailed over it since my childhood.”

“You know the best harbors?”

“There are few ports that I could not enter or leave with a bandage over my eyes.”

“I say, captain,” said the sailor who had cried “Courage!” to Dantes, “if what he says is true, what hinders his staying with us?”

“If he says true,” said the captain doubtingly. “But in his present condition he will promise anything, and take his chance of keeping it afterwards.”

“I will do more than I promise,” said Dantes.

“We shall see,” returned the other, smiling.

“Where are you going?” asked Dantes.

“To Leghorn.”

“Then why, instead of tacking so frequently, do you not sail nearer the wind?”

“Because we should run straight on to the Island of Rion.”

“You shall pass it by twenty fathoms.”

“Take the helm, and let us see what you know.” The young man took the helm, felt to see if the vessel answered the rudder promptly and seeing that, without being a first-rate sailer, she yet was tolerably obedient, —

“To the sheets,” said he. The four seamen, who composed the crew, obeyed, while the pilot looked on. “Haul taut.” — They obeyed.

“Belay.” This order was also executed; and the vessel passed, as Dantes had predicted, twenty fathoms to windward.

“Bravo!” said the captain.

“Bravo!” repeated the sailors. And they all looked with astonishment at this man whose eye now disclosed an intelligence and his body a vigor they had not thought him capable of showing.

"You see," said Dantes, quitting the helm, "I shall be of some use to you, at least during the voyage. If you do not want me at Leghorn, you can leave me there, and I will pay you out of the first wages I get, for my food and the clothes you lend me."

"Ah," said the captain, "we can agree very well, if you are reasonable."

"Give me what you give the others, and it will be all right," returned Dantes.

"That's not fair," said the seaman who had saved Dantes; "for you know more than we do."

"What is that to you, Jacopo?" returned the Captain. "Every one is free to ask what he pleases."

"That's true," replied Jacopo; "I only make a remark."

"Well, you would do much better to find him a jacket and a pair of trousers, if you have them."

"No," said Jacopo; "but I have a shirt and a pair of trousers."

"That is all I want," interrupted Dantes. Jacopo dived into the hold and soon returned with what Edmond wanted.

"Now, then, do you wish for anything else?" said the patron.

"A piece of bread and another glass of the capital rum I tasted, for I have not eaten or drunk for a long time." He had not tasted food for forty hours. A piece of bread was brought, and Jacopo offered him the gourd.

"Larboard your helm," cried the captain to the steersman. Dantes glanced that way as he lifted the gourd to his mouth; then paused with hand in mid-air.

"Hollo! what's the matter at the Chateau d'If?" said the captain.

A small white cloud, which had attracted Dantes' attention, crowned the summit of the bastion of the Chateau d'If. At the same moment the faint report of a gun was heard. The sailors looked at one another.

"What is this?" asked the captain.

"A prisoner has escaped from the Chateau d'If, and they are firing the alarm gun," replied Dantes. The captain glanced at him, but he had lifted the rum to his lips and was drinking it with so much composure, that suspicions, if the captain had any, died away.

"At any rate," murmured he, "if it be, so much the better, for I have made a rare acquisition." Under pretence of being fatigued, Dantes asked to take the helm; the steersman, glad to be relieved, looked at the captain, and the latter by a sign indicated that he might abandon it to his new comrade. Dantes could thus keep his eyes on Marseilles.

“What is the day of the month?” asked he of Jacopo, who sat down beside him.

“The 28th of February.”

“In what year?”

“In what year — you ask me in what year?”

“Yes,” replied the young man, “I ask you in what year!”

“You have forgotten then?”

“I got such a fright last night,” replied Dantes, smiling, “that I have almost lost my memory. I ask you what year is it?”

“The year 1829,” returned Jacopo. It was fourteen years day for day since Dantes’ arrest. He was nineteen when he entered the Chateau d’If; he was thirty-three when he escaped. A sorrowful smile passed over his face; he asked himself what had become of Mercedes, who must believe him dead. Then his eyes lighted up with hatred as he thought of the three men who had caused him so long and wretched a captivity. He renewed against Danglars, Fernand, and Villefort the oath of implacable vengeance he had made in his dungeon. This oath was no longer a vain menace; for the fastest sailer in the Mediterranean would have been unable to overtake the little tartan, that with every stitch of canvas set was flying before the wind to Leghorn.

Chapter 22

The Smugglers.

Dantes had not been a day on board before he had a very clear idea of the men with whom his lot had been cast. Without having been in the school of the Abbe Faria, the worthy master of The Young Amelia (the name of the Genoese tartan) knew a smattering of all the tongues spoken on the shores of that large lake called the Mediterranean, from the Arabic to the Provencal, and this, while it spared him interpreters, persons always troublesome and frequently indiscreet, gave him great facilities of communication, either with the vessels he met at sea, with the small boats sailing along the coast, or with the people without name, country, or occupation, who are always seen on the quays of seaports, and who live by hidden and mysterious means which we must suppose to be a direct gift of providence, as they have no visible means of support. It is fair to assume that Dantes was on board a smuggler.

At first the captain had received Dantes on board with a certain degree of distrust. He was very well known to the customs officers of the coast; and as there was between these worthies and himself a perpetual battle of wits, he had at first thought that Dantes might be an emissary of these industrious guardians of rights and duties, who perhaps employed this ingenious means of learning some of the secrets of his trade. But the skilful manner in which Dantes had handled the lugger had entirely reassured him; and then, when he saw the light plume of smoke floating above the bastion of the Chateau d’If, and heard the distant report, he was instantly struck with the idea that he had on board his vessel one whose coming and going, like that of kings, was accompanied with salutes of artillery. This made him less uneasy, it must be owned, than if the new-comer had proved to be a customs officer; but this supposition also disappeared like the first, when he beheld the perfect tranquillity of his recruit.

Edmond thus had the advantage of knowing what the owner was, without the owner knowing who he was; and however the old sailor and his crew tried to “pump” him, they extracted nothing more from him; he gave accurate descriptions of Naples and Malta, which he knew as well as Marseilles, and held stoutly to his first story. Thus the Genoese, subtle as he was, was duped by Edmond, in whose favor his mild demeanor, his nautical skill, and his admirable dissimulation, pleaded. Moreover, it is possible that the Genoese was one of those shrewd persons who know nothing but what they should know, and believe nothing but what they should believe.

In this state of mutual understanding, they reached Leghorn. Here Edmond was to undergo another trial; he was to find out whether he could recognize himself, as he had not seen his own face for fourteen years. He had preserved a tolerably good remembrance of what the youth had been, and was now to find out what the man had become. His comrades believed that his vow was fulfilled. As he had twenty times touched at Leghorn, he remembered a barber in St. Ferdinand Street; he went there to have his beard and hair cut. The barber gazed in amazement at this man with the long, thick and black hair and beard, which gave his head the appearance of one of Titian’s portraits. At this period it was not the fashion to wear so large a beard and hair so long; now a barber would only be surprised if a man gifted with such advantages should consent voluntarily to deprive himself of them. The Leghorn barber said nothing and went to work.

When the operation was concluded, and Edmond felt that his chin was completely smooth, and his hair reduced to its usual length, he asked for a hand-glass. He was now, as we have said, three-and-thirty years of age, and his fourteen years’ imprisonment had produced a great transformation in his appearance. Dantes had entered the Chateau d’If with the round, open, smiling face of a young and happy man, with whom the early paths of life have been smooth, and who anticipates a future corresponding with his past. This was now all changed. The oval face was lengthened, his smiling mouth had assumed the firm and marked lines which betoken resolution; his eyebrows were arched beneath a brow furrowed with thought; his eyes were full of melancholy, and from their depths occasionally sparkled gloomy fires of misanthropy and hatred; his complexion, so long kept from the sun, had now that pale color which produces, when the features are encircled with black hair, the aristocratic beauty of the man of the north; the profound learning he had acquired had besides diffused over his features a refined intellectual expression; and he had also acquired, being naturally of a goodly stature, that vigor which a frame possesses which has so long concentrated all its force within itself.

To the elegance of a nervous and slight form had succeeded the solidity of a rounded and muscular figure. As to his voice, prayers, sobs, and imprecations had changed it so that at times it was of a singularly penetrating sweetness, and at others rough and almost hoarse. Moreover, from being so long in twilight or darkness, his eyes had acquired the faculty of distinguishing objects in the night, common to the hyena and the wolf. Edmond smiled when he beheld himself: it was impossible that his best friend — if, indeed, he had any friend left — could recognize him; he could not recognize himself.

The master of The Young Amelia, who was very desirous of retaining amongst his crew a man of Edmond’s value, had offered to advance him funds out of his future profits, which Edmond had accepted. His next care on leaving the barber’s who had achieved his first metamorphosis was to enter a shop and buy a complete sailor’s suit — a garb, as we all know, very simple, and consisting of white trousers, a striped shirt, and a cap. It was in this costume, and bringing back to Jacopo the shirt and trousers he had lent him, that Edmond reappeared before the captain of the lugger, who had made him tell his story over and over again before he could believe him, or recognize in the neat and trim sailor the man with thick and matted beard, hair tangled with seaweed, and body soaking in seabrine, whom he had picked up naked and nearly drowned. Attracted by his prepossessing appearance, he renewed his offers of an engagement to Dantes; but Dantes, who had his own projects, would not agree for a longer time than three months.

The Young Amelia had a very active crew, very obedient to their captain, who lost as little time as possible. He had scarcely been a week at Leghorn before the hold of his vessel was filled with printed muslins, contraband cottons, English powder, and tobacco on which the excise had forgotten to put its mark. The master was to get all this out of Leghorn free of duties, and land it on the shores of Corsica, where certain speculators undertook to forward the cargo to France. They sailed; Edmond was again cleaving the azure sea which had been the first horizon of his youth, and which he had so often dreamed of in prison. He left Gorgone on his right and La Pianosa on his left, and went towards the country of Paoli and Napoleon. The next morning going on deck, as he always did at an early hour, the patron found Dantes leaning against the bulwarks gazing with intense earnestness at a pile of granite rocks, which the rising sun tinged with rosy light. It was the

Island of Monte Cristo. The Young Amelia left it three-quarters of a league to the larboard, and kept on for Corsica.

Dantes thought, as they passed so closely to the island whose name was so interesting to him, that he had only to leap into the sea and in half an hour be at the promised land. But then what could he do without instruments to discover his treasure, without arms to defend himself? Besides, what would the sailors say? What would the patron think? He must wait.

Fortunately, Dantes had learned how to wait; he had waited fourteen years for his liberty, and now he was free he could wait at least six months or a year for wealth. Would he not have accepted liberty without riches if it had been offered to him? Besides, were not those riches chimerical? — offspring of the brain of the poor Abbe Faria, had they not died with him? It is true, the letter of the Cardinal Spada was singularly circumstantial, and Dantes repeated it to himself, from one end to the other, for he had not forgotten a word.

Evening came, and Edmond saw the island tinged with the shades of twilight, and then disappear in the darkness from all eyes but his own, for he, with vision accustomed to the gloom of a prison, continued to behold it last of all, for he remained alone upon deck. The next morn broke off the coast of Aleria; all day they coasted, and in the evening saw fires lighted on land; the position of these was no doubt a signal for landing, for a ship’s lantern was hung up at the mast-head instead of the streamer, and they came to within a gunshot of the shore. Dantes noticed that the captain of The Young Amelia had, as he neared the land, mounted two small culverins, which, without making much noise, can throw a four ounce ball a thousand paces or so.

But on this occasion the precaution was superfluous, and everything proceeded with the utmost smoothness and politeness. Four shallops came off with very little noise alongside the lugger, which, no doubt, in acknowledgement of the compliment, lowered her own shallop into the sea, and the five boats worked so well that by two o’clock in the morning all the cargo was out of The Young Amelia and on terra firma. The same night, such a man of regularity was the patron of The Young Amelia, the profits were divided, and each man had a hundred Tuscan livres, or about eighty francs. But the voyage was not ended. They turned the bowsprit towards Sardinia, where they intended to take in a cargo, which was to replace what had been discharged. The second operation was as successful as the first, The Young Amelia was in luck. This new cargo was destined for the coast of the Duchy of Lucca, and consisted almost entirely of Havana cigars, sherry, and Malaga wines.

There they had a bit of a skirmish in getting rid of the duties; the excise was, in truth, the everlasting enemy of the patron of The Young Amelia. A customs officer was laid low, and two sailors wounded; Dantes was one of the latter, a ball having touched him in the left shoulder. Dantes was almost glad of this affray, and almost pleased at being wounded, for they were rude lessons which taught him with what eye he could view danger, and with what endurance he could bear suffering. He had contemplated danger with a smile, and when wounded had exclaimed with the great philosopher, “Pain, thou art not an evil.” He had, moreover, looked upon the customs officer wounded to death, and, whether from heat of blood produced by the encounter, or the chill of human sentiment, this sight had made but slight impression upon him. Dantes was on the way he desired to follow, and was moving towards the end he wished to achieve; his heart was in a fair way of petrifying in his bosom. Jacopo, seeing him fall, had believed him killed, and rushing towards him raised him up, and then attended to him with all the kindness of a devoted comrade.

This world was not then so good as Doctor Pangloss believed it, neither was it so wicked as Dantes thought it, since this man, who had nothing to expect from his comrade but the inheritance of his share of the prize-money, manifested so much sorrow when he saw him fall. Fortunately, as we have said, Edmond was only wounded, and with certain herbs gathered at certain seasons, and sold to the smugglers by the old Sardinian women, the wound soon closed. Edmond then resolved to try Jacopo, and offered him in return for his attention a share of his prize-money, but Jacopo refused it indignantly.

As a result of the sympathetic devotion which Jacopo had from the first bestowed on Edmond, the latter was moved to a certain degree of affection. But this sufficed for Jacopo, who instinctively felt that Edmond had a right to superiority of position — a superiority which Edmond had concealed from all others. And from this time the kindness which Edmond showed him was enough for the brave seaman.

Then in the long days on board ship, when the vessel, gliding on with security over the azure sea, required no care but the hand of the helmsman, thanks to the favorable winds that swelled her sails, Edmond, with a chart in his hand, became the instructor of Jacopo, as the poor Abbe Faria had been his tutor. He pointed out to him the bearings of the coast, explained to him the variations of the compass, and taught him to read in that vast book opened over our heads which they call heaven, and where God writes in azure with letters of diamonds. And when Jacopo inquired of him, “What is the use of teaching all these things to a poor sailor like me?” Edmond replied, “Who knows? You may one day be the captain of a vessel. Your fellow-countryman, Bonaparte, became emperor.” We had forgotten to say that Jacopo was a Corsican.

Two months and a half elapsed in these trips, and Edmond had become as skilful a coaster as he had been a hardy seaman; he had formed an acquaintance with all the smugglers on the coast, and learned all the Masonic signs by which these half pirates recognize each other. He had passed and re-passed his Island of Monte Cristo twenty times, but not once had he found an opportunity of landing there. He then formed a resolution. As soon as his engagement with the patron of The Young Amelia ended, he would hire a small vessel on his own account — for in his several voyages he had amassed a hundred piastres — and under some pretext land at the Island of Monte Cristo. Then he would be free to make his researches, not perhaps entirely at liberty, for he would be doubtless watched by those who accompanied him. But in this world we must risk something. Prison had made Edmond prudent, and he was desirous of running no risk whatever. But in vain did he rack his imagination; fertile as it was, he could not devise any plan for reaching the island without companionship.

Dantes was tossed about on these doubts and wishes, when the patron, who had great confidence in him, and was very desirous of retaining him in his service, took him by the arm one evening and led him to a tavern on the Via del’ Oglio, where the leading smugglers of Leghorn used to congregate and discuss affairs connected with their trade. Already Dantes had visited this maritime Bourse two or three times, and seeing all these hardy free-traders, who supplied the whole coast for nearly two hundred leagues in extent, he had asked himself what power might not that man attain who should give the impulse of his will to all these contrary and diverging minds. This time it was a great matter that was under discussion, connected with a vessel laden with Turkey carpets, stuffs of the Levant, and cashmeres. It was necessary to find some neutral ground on which an exchange could be made, and then to try and land these goods on the coast of France. If the venture was successful the profit would be enormous, there would be a gain of fifty or sixty piastres each for the crew.

The patron of The Young Amelia proposed as a place of landing the Island of Monte Cristo, which being completely deserted, and having neither soldiers nor revenue officers, seemed to have been placed in the midst of the ocean since the time of the heathen Olympus by Mercury, the god of merchants and robbers, classes of mankind which we in modern times have separated if not made distinct, but which antiquity appears to have included in the same category. At the mention of Monte Cristo Dantes started with joy; he rose to conceal his emotion, and took a turn around the smoky tavern, where all the languages of the known world were jumbled in a lingua franca. When he again joined the two persons who had been discussing the matter, it had been decided that they should touch at Monte Cristo and set out on the following night. Edmond, being consulted, was of opinion that the island afforded every possible security, and that great enterprises to be well done should be done quickly. Nothing then was altered in the plan, and orders were given to get under weigh next night, and, wind and weather permitting, to make the neutral island by the following day.

Chapter 23

The Island of Monte Cristo.

Thus, at length, by one of the unexpected strokes of fortune which sometimes befall those who have for a long time been the victims of an evil destiny, Dantes was about to secure the opportunity he wished for, by simple and natural means, and land on the island without incurring any suspicion. One night more and he would be on his way.

The night was one of feverish distraction, and in its progress visions good and evil passed through Dantes' mind. If he closed his eyes, he saw Cardinal Spada's letter written on the wall in characters of flame — if he slept for a moment the wildest dreams haunted his brain. He ascended into grottos paved with emeralds, with panels of rubies, and the roof glowing with diamond stalactites. Pearls fell drop by drop, as subterranean waters filter in their caves. Edmond, amazed, wonderstruck, filled his pockets with the radiant gems and then returned to daylight, when he discovered that his prizes had all changed into common pebbles. He then endeavored to re-enter the marvellous grottos, but they had suddenly receded, and now the path became a labyrinth, and then the entrance vanished, and in vain did he tax his memory for the magic and mysterious word which opened the splendid caverns of Ali Baba to the Arabian fisherman. All was useless, the treasure disappeared, and had again reverted to the genii from whom for a moment he had hoped to carry it off. The day came at length, and was almost as feverish as the night had been, but it brought reason to the aid of imagination, and Dantes was then enabled to arrange a plan which had hitherto been vague and unsettled in his brain. Night came, and with it the preparation for departure, and these preparations served to conceal Dantes' agitation. He had by degrees assumed such authority over his companions that he was almost like a commander on board; and as his orders were always clear, distinct, and easy of execution, his comrades obeyed him with celerity and pleasure.

The old patron did not interfere, for he too had recognized the superiority of Dantes over the crew and himself. He saw in the young man his natural successor, and regretted that he had not a daughter, that he might have bound Edmond to him by a more secure alliance. At seven o’clock in the evening all was ready, and at ten minutes past seven they doubled the lighthouse just as the beacon was kindled. The sea was calm, and, with a fresh breeze from the south-east, they sailed beneath a bright blue sky, in which God also lighted up in turn his beacon lights, each of which is a world. Dantes told them that all hands might turn in, and he would take the helm. When the Maltese (for so they called Dantes) had said this, it was sufficient, and all went to their bunks contentedly. This frequently happened. Dantes, cast from solitude into the world, frequently experienced an imperious desire for solitude; and what solitude is more complete, or more poetical, than that of a ship floating in isolation on the sea during the obscurity of the night, in the silence of immensity, and under the eye of heaven?

Now this solitude was peopled with his thoughts, the night lighted up by his illusions, and the silence animated by his anticipations. When the patron awoke, the vessel was hurrying on with every sail set, and every sail full with the breeze. They were making nearly ten knots an hour. The Island of Monte Cristo loomed large in the horizon. Edmond resigned the lugger to the master’s care, and went and lay down in his hammock; but, in spite of a sleepless night, he could not close his eyes for a moment. Two hours afterwards he came on deck, as the boat was about to double the Island of Elba. They were just abreast of Mareciana, and beyond the flat but verdant Island of La Pianosa. The peak of Monte Cristo reddened by the burning sun, was seen against the azure sky. Dantes ordered the helmsman to put down his helm, in order to leave La Pianosa to starboard, as he knew that he should shorten his course by two or three knots. About five o’clock in the evening the island was distinct, and everything on it was plainly perceptible, owing to that clearness of the atmosphere peculiar to the light which the rays of the sun cast at its setting.

Edmond gazed very earnestly at the mass of rocks which gave out all the variety of twilight colors, from the brightest pink to the deepest blue; and from time to time his cheeks flushed, his brow darkened, and a mist passed over his eyes. Never did a gamester, whose whole fortune is staked on one cast of the die, experience the anguish which Edmond felt in his paroxysms of hope. Night came, and at ten o’clock they anchored. The Young Amelia was first at the rendezvous. In spite of his usual command over himself, Dantes could not restrain his impetuosity. He was the first to jump on shore; and had he dared, he would, like Lucius Brutus, have “kissed his mother earth.” It was dark, but at eleven o’clock the moon rose in the midst of the ocean, whose every wave she silvered, and then, “ascending high,” played in floods of pale light on the rocky hills of this second Pelion.

The island was familiar to the crew of The Young Amelia, — it was one of her regular haunts. As to Dantes, he had passed it on his voyage to and from the Levant, but never touched at it. He questioned Jacopo. “Where shall we pass the night?” he inquired.

“Why, on board the tartan,” replied the sailor.

“Should we not do better in the grottos?”

“What grottos?”

“Why, the grottos — caves of the island.”

“I do not know of any grottos,” replied Jacopo. The cold sweat sprang forth on Dantes’ brow.

“What, are there no grottos at Monte Cristo?” he asked.

“None.”

For a moment Dantes was speechless; then he remembered that these caves might have been filled up by some accident, or even stopped up, for the sake of greater security, by Cardinal Spada. The point was, then, to discover the hidden entrance. It was useless to search at night, and Dantes therefore delayed all investigation until the morning. Besides, a signal made half a league out at sea, and to which The Young Amelia replied by a similar signal, indicated that the moment for business had come. The boat that now arrived, assured by the answering signal that all was well, soon came in sight, white and silent as a phantom, and cast anchor within a cable’s length of shore.

Then the landing began. Dantes reflected, as he worked, on the shout of joy which, with a single word, he could evoke from all these men, if he gave utterance to the one unchanging thought that pervaded his heart; but, far from disclosing this precious secret, he almost feared that he had already said too much, and by his restlessness and continual questions, his minute observations and evident pre-occupation, aroused suspicions. Fortunately, as regarded this circumstance at least, his painful past gave to his countenance an indelible sadness, and the glimmerings of gayety seen beneath this cloud were indeed but transitory.

No one had the slightest suspicion; and when next day, taking a fowling-piece, powder, and shot, Dantes declared his intention to go and kill some of the wild goats that were seen springing from rock to rock, his wish was construed into a love of sport, or a desire for solitude. However, Jacopo insisted on following him, and Dantes did not oppose this, fearing if he did so that he might incur distrust. Scarcely, however, had they gone a quarter of a league when, having killed a kid, he begged Jacopo to take it to his comrades, and request them to cook it, and when ready to let him know by firing a gun. This and some dried fruits and a flask of Monte Pulciano, was the bill of fare. Dantes went on, looking from time to time behind and around about him. Having reached the summit of a rock, he saw, a thousand feet beneath him, his companions, whom Jacopo had rejoined, and who were all busy preparing the repast which Edmond's skill as a marksman had augmented with a capital dish.

Edmond looked at them for a moment with the sad and gentle smile of a man superior to his fellows. "In two hours' time," said he, "these persons will depart richer by fifty piastres each, to go and risk their lives again by endeavoring to gain fifty more; then they will return with a fortune of six hundred francs, and waste this treasure in some city with the pride of sultans and the insolence of nabobs. At this moment hope makes me despise their riches, which seem to me contemptible. Yet perchance to-morrow deception will so act on me, that I shall, on compulsion, consider such a contemptible possession as the utmost happiness. Oh, no!" exclaimed Edmond, "that will not be. The wise, unerring Faria could not be mistaken in this one thing. Besides, it were better to die than to continue to lead this low and wretched life." Thus Dantes, who but three months before had no desire but liberty had now not liberty enough, and panted for wealth. The cause was not in Dantes, but in providence, who, while limiting the power of man, has filled him with boundless desires.

Meanwhile, by a cleft between two walls of rock, following a path worn by a torrent, and which, in all human probability, human foot had never before trod, Dantes approached the spot where he supposed the grottos must have existed. Keeping along the shore, and examining the smallest object with serious attention, he thought he could trace, on certain rocks, marks made by the hand of man.

Time, which encrusts all physical substances with its mossy mantle, as it invests all things of the mind with forgetfulness, seemed to have respected these signs, which apparently had been made with some degree of regularity, and probably with a definite purpose. Occasionally the marks were hidden under tufts of myrtle, which spread into large bushes laden with blossoms, or beneath parasitical lichen. So Edmond had to separate the branches or brush away the moss to know where the guide-marks were. The sight of marks renewed Edmond fondest hopes. Might it not have been the cardinal himself who had first traced them, in order that they might serve as a guide for his nephew in the event of a catastrophe, which he could not foresee would have been so complete. This solitary place was precisely suited to the requirements of a man desirous of burying treasure. Only, might not these betraying marks have attracted other eyes than those for whom they were made? and had the dark and wondrous island indeed faithfully guarded its precious secret?

It seemed, however, to Edmond, who was hidden from his comrades by the inequalities of the ground, that at sixty paces from the harbor the marks ceased; nor did they terminate at any grotto. A large round rock, placed solidly on its base, was the only spot to which they seemed to lead. Edmond concluded that perhaps instead of having reached the end of the route he had only explored its beginning, and he therefore turned round and retraced his steps.

Meanwhile his comrades had prepared the repast, had got some water from a spring, spread out the fruit and bread, and cooked the kid. Just at the moment when they were taking the dainty animal from the spit, they saw Edmond springing with the boldness of a chamois from rock to rock, and they fired the signal agreed upon. The sportsman instantly changed his direction, and ran quickly towards them. But even while they watched his daring progress, Edmond’s foot slipped, and they saw him stagger on the edge of a rock and disappear. They all rushed towards him, for all loved Edmond in spite of his superiority; yet Jacopo reached him first.

He found Edmond lying prone, bleeding, and almost senseless. He had rolled down a declivity of twelve or fifteen feet. They poured a little rum down his throat, and this remedy which had before been so beneficial to him, produced the same effect as formerly. Edmond opened his eyes, complained of great pain in his knee, a feeling of heaviness in his head, and severe pains in his loins. They wished to carry him to the shore; but when they touched him, although under Jacopo’s directions, he declared, with heavy groans, that he could not bear to be moved.

It may be supposed that Dantes did not now think of his dinner, but he insisted that his comrades, who had not his reasons for fasting, should have their meal. As for himself, he declared that he had only need of a little rest, and that when they returned he should be easier. The sailors did not require much urging. They were hungry, and the smell of the roasted kid was very savory, and your tars are not very ceremonious. An hour afterwards they returned. All that Edmond had been able to do was to drag himself about a dozen paces forward to lean against a moss-grown rock.

But, instead of growing easier, Dantes' pains appeared to increase in violence. The old patron, who was obliged to sail in the morning in order to land his cargo on the frontiers of Piedmont and France, between Nice and Frejus, urged Dantes to try and rise. Edmond made great exertions in order to comply; but at each effort he fell back, moaning and turning pale.

"He has broken his ribs," said the commander, in a low voice. "No matter; he is an excellent fellow, and we must not leave him. We will try and carry him on board the tartan." Dantes declared, however, that he would rather die where he was than undergo the agony which the slightest movement cost him. "Well," said the patron, "let what may happen, it shall never be said that we deserted a good comrade like you. We will not go till evening." This very much astonished the sailors, although, not one opposed it. The patron was so strict that this was the first time they had ever seen him give up an enterprise, or even delay in its execution. Dantes would not allow that any such infraction of regular and proper rules should be made in his favor. "No, no," he said to the patron, "I was awkward, and it is just that I pay the penalty of my clumsiness. Leave me a small supply of biscuit, a gun, powder, and balls, to kill the kids or defend myself at need, and a pickaxe, that I may build a shelter if you delay in coming back for me."

"But you'll die of hunger," said the patron.

"I would rather do so," was Edmond reply, "than suffer the inexpressible agonies which the slightest movement causes me." The patron turned towards his vessel, which was rolling on the swell in the little harbor, and, with sails partly set, would be ready for sea when her toilet should be completed.

"What are we to do, Maltese?" asked the captain. "We cannot leave you here so, and yet we cannot stay."

"Go, go!" exclaimed Dantes.

“We shall be absent at least a week,” said the patron, “and then we must run out of our course to come here and take you up again.”

“Why,” said Dantes, “if in two or three days you hail any fishing-boat, desire them to come here to me. I will pay twenty-five piastres for my passage back to Leghorn. If you do not come across one, return for me.” The patron shook his head.

“Listen, Captain Baldi; there’s one way of settling this,” said Jacopo. “Do you go, and I will stay and take care of the wounded man.”

“And give up your share of the venture,” said Edmond, “to remain with me?”

“Yes,” said Jacopo, “and without any hesitation.”

“You are a good fellow and a kind-hearted messmate,” replied Edmond, “and heaven will recompense you for your generous intentions; but I do not wish any one to stay with me. A day or two of rest will set me up, and I hope I shall find among the rocks certain herbs most excellent for bruises.”

A peculiar smile passed over Dantes’ lips; he squeezed Jacopo’s hand warmly, but nothing could shake his determination to remain — and remain alone. The smugglers left with Edmond what he had requested and set sail, but not without turning about several times, and each time making signs of a cordial farewell, to which Edmond replied with his hand only, as if he could not move the rest of his body. Then, when they had disappeared, he said with a smile, — ”‘Tis strange that it should be among such men that we find proofs of friendship and devotion.” Then he dragged himself cautiously to the top of a rock, from which he had a full view of the sea, and thence he saw the tartan complete her preparations for sailing, weigh anchor, and, balancing herself as gracefully as a water-fowl ere it takes to the wing, set sail. At the end of an hour she was completely out of sight; at least, it was impossible for the wounded man to see her any longer from the spot where he was. Then Dantes rose more agile and light than the kid among the myrtles and shrubs of these wild rocks, took his gun in one hand, his pickaxe in the other, and hastened towards the rock on which the marks he had noted terminated. “And now,” he exclaimed, remembering the tale of the Arabian fisherman, which Faria had related to him, “now, open sesame!”

Chapter 24

The Secret Cave.

The sun had nearly reached the meridian, and his scorching rays fell full on the rocks, which seemed themselves sensible of the heat. Thousands of grasshoppers, hidden in the bushes, chirped with a monotonous and dull note; the leaves of the myrtle and olive trees waved and rustled in the wind. At every step that Edmond took he disturbed the lizards glittering with the hues of the emerald; afar off he saw the wild goats bounding from crag to crag. In a word, the island was inhabited, yet Edmond felt himself alone, guided by the hand of God. He felt an indescribable sensation somewhat akin to dread — that dread of the daylight which even in the desert makes us fear we are watched and observed. This feeling was so strong that at the moment when Edmond was about to begin his labor, he stopped, laid down his pickaxe, seized his gun, mounted to the summit of the highest rock, and from thence gazed round in every direction.

But it was not upon Corsica, the very houses of which he could distinguish; or on Sardinia; or on the Island of Elba, with its historical associations; or upon the almost imperceptible line that to the experienced eye of a sailor alone revealed the coast of Genoa the proud, and Leghorn the commercial, that he gazed. It was at the brigantine that had left in the morning, and the tartan that had just set sail, that Edmond fixed his eyes. The first was just disappearing in the straits of Bonifacio; the other, following an opposite direction, was about to round the Island of Corsica. This sight reassured him. He then looked at the objects near him. He saw that he was on the highest point of the island, — a statue on this vast pedestal of granite, nothing human appearing in sight, while the blue ocean beat against the base of the island, and covered it with a fringe of foam. Then he descended with cautious and slow step, for he dreaded lest an accident similar to that he had so adroitly feigned should happen in reality.

Dantes, as we have said, had traced the marks along the rocks, and he had noticed that they led to a small creek, which was hidden like the bath of some ancient nymph. This creek was sufficiently wide at its mouth, and deep in the centre, to admit of the entrance of a small vessel of the lugger class, which would be perfectly concealed from observation.

Then following the clew that, in the hands of the Abbe Faria, had been so skilfully used to guide him through the Daedalian labyrinth of probabilities, he thought that the Cardinal Spada, anxious not to be watched, had entered the creek, concealed his little barque, followed the line marked by the notches in the rock, and at the end of it had buried his treasure. It was this idea that had brought Dantes back to the circular rock. One thing only perplexed Edmond, and destroyed his theory. How could this rock, which weighed several tons, have been lifted to this spot, without the aid of many men? Suddenly an idea flashed across his mind. Instead of raising it, thought he, they have lowered it. And he sprang from the rock in order to inspect the base on which it had formerly stood. He soon perceived that a slope had been formed, and the rock had slid along this until it stopped at the spot it now occupied. A large stone had served as a wedge; flints and pebbles had been inserted around it, so as to conceal the orifice; this species of masonry had been covered with earth, and grass and weeds had grown there, moss had clung to the stones, myrtle-bushes had taken root, and the old rock seemed fixed to the earth.

Dantes dug away the earth carefully, and detected, or fancied he detected, the ingenious artifice. He attacked this wall, cemented by the hand of time, with his pickaxe. After ten minutes’ labor the wall gave way, and a hole large enough to insert the arm was opened. Dantes went and cut the strongest olive-tree he could find, stripped off its branches, inserted it in the hole, and used it as a lever. But the rock was too heavy, and too firmly wedged, to be moved by any one man, were he Hercules himself. Dantes saw that he must attack the wedge. But how? He cast his eyes around, and saw the horn full of powder which his friend Jacopo had left him. He smiled; the infernal invention would serve him for this purpose. With the aid of his pickaxe, Dantes, after the manner of a labor-saving pioneer, dug a mine between the upper rock and the one that supported it, filled it with powder, then made a match by rolling his handkerchief in saltpetre. He lighted it and retired. The explosion soon followed; the upper rock was lifted from its base by the terrific force of the powder; the lower one flew into pieces; thousands of insects escaped from the aperture Dantes had previously formed, and a huge snake, like the guardian demon of the treasure, rolled himself along in darkening coils, and disappeared.

Dantes approached the upper rock, which now, without any support, leaned towards the sea. The intrepid treasure-seeker walked round it, and, selecting the spot from whence it appeared most susceptible to attack, placed his lever in one of the crevices, and strained every nerve to move the mass. The rock, already shaken by the explosion, tottered on its base. Dantes redoubled his efforts; he seemed like one of the ancient Titans, who uprooted the mountains to hurl against the father of the gods. The rock yielded, rolled over, bounded from point to point, and finally disappeared in the ocean.

On the spot it had occupied was a circular space, exposing an iron ring let into a square flag-stone. Dantes uttered a cry of joy and surprise; never had a first attempt been crowned with more perfect success. He would fain have continued, but his knees trembled, and his heart beat so violently, and his sight became so dim, that he was forced to pause. This feeling lasted but for a moment. Edmond inserted his lever in the ring and exerted all his strength; the flag-stone yielded, and disclosed steps that descended until they were lost in the obscurity of a subterraneous grotto. Any one else would have rushed on with a cry of joy. Dantes turned pale, hesitated, and reflected. “Come,” said he to himself, “be a man. I am accustomed to adversity. I must not be cast down by the discovery that I have been deceived. What, then, would be the use of all I have suffered? The heart breaks when, after having been elated by flattering hopes, it sees all its illusions destroyed. Faria has dreamed this; the Cardinal Spada buried no treasure here; perhaps he never came here, or if he did, Caesar Borgia, the intrepid adventurer, the stealthy and indefatigable plunderer, has followed him, discovered his traces, pursued them as I have done, raised the stone, and descending before me, has left me nothing.” He remained motionless and pensive, his eyes fixed on the gloomy aperture that was open at his feet.

“Now that I expect nothing, now that I no longer entertain the slightest hopes, the end of this adventure becomes simply a matter of curiosity.” And he remained again motionless and thoughtful.

“Yes, yes; this is an adventure worthy a place in the varied career of that royal bandit. This fabulous event formed but a link in a long chain of marvels. Yes, Borgia has been here, a torch in one hand, a sword in the other, and within twenty paces, at the foot of this rock, perhaps two guards kept watch on land and sea, while their master descended, as I am about to descend, dispelling the darkness before his awe-inspiring progress.”

"But what was the fate of the guards who thus possessed his secret?" asked Dantes of himself.

"The fate," replied he, smiling, "of those who buried Alaric."

"Yet, had he come," thought Dantes, "he would have found the treasure, and Borgia, he who compared Italy to an artichoke, which he could devour leaf by leaf, knew too well the value of time to waste it in replacing this rock. I will go down."

Then he descended, a smile on his lips, and murmuring that last word of human philosophy, "Perhaps!" But instead of the darkness, and the thick and mephitic atmosphere he had expected to find, Dantes saw a dim and bluish light, which, as well as the air, entered, not merely by the aperture he had just formed, but by the interstices and crevices of the rock which were visible from without, and through which he could distinguish the blue sky and the waving branches of the evergreen oaks, and the tendrils of the creepers that grew from the rocks. After having stood a few minutes in the cavern, the atmosphere of which was rather warm than damp, Dantes' eye, habituated as it was to darkness, could pierce even to the remotest angles of the cavern, which was of granite that sparkled like diamonds. "Alas," said Edmond, smiling, "these are the treasures the cardinal has left; and the good abbe, seeing in a dream these glittering walls, has indulged in fallacious hopes."

But he called to mind the words of the will, which he knew by heart. "In the farthest angle of the second opening," said the cardinal's will. He had only found the first grotto; he had now to seek the second. Dantes continued his search. He reflected that this second grotto must penetrate deeper into the island; he examined the stones, and sounded one part of the wall where he fancied the opening existed, masked for precaution's sake. The pickaxe struck for a moment with a dull sound that drew out of Dantes' forehead large drops of perspiration. At last it seemed to him that one part of the wall gave forth a more hollow and deeper echo; he eagerly advanced, and with the quickness of perception that no one but a prisoner possesses, saw that there, in all probability, the opening must be.

However, he, like Caesar Borgia, knew the value of time; and, in order to avoid fruitless toil, he sounded all the other walls with his pickaxe, struck the earth with the butt of his gun, and finding nothing that appeared suspicious, returned to that part of the wall whence issued the consoling sound he had before heard. He again struck it, and with greater force. Then a singular thing occurred. As he struck the wall, pieces of stucco similar to that used in the ground work of arabesques broke off, and fell to the ground in flakes, exposing a large white stone. The aperture of the rock had been closed with stones, then this stucco had been applied, and painted to imitate granite. Dantes struck with the sharp end of his pickaxe, which entered someway between the interstices. It was there he must dig. But by some strange play of emotion, in proportion as the proofs that Faria, had not been deceived became stronger, so did his heart give way, and a feeling of discouragement stole over him. This last proof, instead of giving him fresh strength, deprived him of it; the pickaxe descended, or rather fell; he placed it on the ground, passed his hand over his brow, and remounted the stairs, alleging to himself, as an excuse, a desire to be assured that no one was watching him, but in reality because he felt that he was about to faint. The island was deserted, and the sun seemed to cover it with its fiery glance; afar off, a few small fishing boats studded the bosom of the blue ocean.

Dantes had tasted nothing, but he thought not of hunger at such a moment; he hastily swallowed a few drops of rum, and again entered the cavern. The pickaxe that had seemed so heavy, was now like a feather in his grasp; he seized it, and attacked the wall. After several blows he perceived that the stones were not cemented, but had been merely placed one upon the other, and covered with stucco; he inserted the point of his pickaxe, and using the handle as a lever, with joy soon saw the stone turn as if on hinges, and fall at his feet. He had nothing more to do now, but with the iron tooth of the pickaxe to draw the stones towards him one by one. The aperture was already sufficiently large for him to enter, but by waiting, he could still cling to hope, and retard the certainty of deception. At last, after renewed hesitation, Dantes entered the second grotto. The second grotto was lower and more gloomy than the first; the air that could only enter by the newly formed opening had the mephitic smell Dantes was surprised not to find in the outer cavern. He waited in order to allow pure air to displace the foul atmosphere, and then went on. At the left of the opening was a dark and deep angle. But to Dantes’ eye there was no darkness. He glanced around this second grotto; it was, like the first, empty.

The treasure, if it existed, was buried in this corner. The time had at length arrived; two feet of earth removed, and Dantes’ fate would be decided. He advanced towards the angle, and summoning all his resolution, attacked the ground with the pickaxe. At the fifth or sixth blow the pickaxe struck against an iron substance. Never did funeral knell, never did alarm-bell, produce a greater effect on the hearer. Had Dantes found nothing he could not have become more ghastly pale. He again struck his pickaxe into the earth, and encountered the same resistance, but not the same sound. “It is a casket of wood bound with iron,” thought he. At this moment a shadow passed rapidly before the opening; Dantes seized his gun, sprang through the opening, and mounted the stair. A wild goat had passed before the mouth of the cave, and was feeding at a little distance. This would have been a favorable occasion to secure his dinner; but Dantes feared lest the report of his gun should attract attention.

He thought a moment, cut a branch of a resinous tree, lighted it at the fire at which the smugglers had prepared their breakfast, and descended with this torch. He wished to see everything. He approached the hole he had dug, and now, with the aid of the torch, saw that his pickaxe had in reality struck against iron and wood. He planted his torch in the ground and resumed his labor. In an instant a space three feet long by two feet broad was cleared, and Dantes could see an oaken coffer, bound with cut steel; in the middle of the lid he saw engraved on a silver plate, which was still untarnished, the arms of the Spada family — viz., a sword, pale, on an oval shield, like all the Italian armorial bearings, and surmounted by a cardinal’s hat; Dantes easily recognized them, Faria had so often drawn them for him. There was no longer any doubt: the treasure was there — no one would have been at such pains to conceal an empty casket. In an instant he had cleared every obstacle away, and he saw successively the lock, placed between two padlocks, and the two handles at each end, all carved as things were carved at that epoch, when art rendered the commonest metals precious. Dantes seized the handles, and strove to lift the coffer; it was impossible. He sought to open it; lock and padlock were fastened; these faithful guardians seemed unwilling to surrender their trust. Dantes inserted the sharp end of the pickaxe between the coffer and the lid, and pressing with all his force on the handle, burst open the fastenings. The hinges yielded in their turn and fell, still holding in their grasp fragments of the wood, and the chest was open.

Edmond was seized with vertigo; he cocked his gun and laid it beside him. He then closed his eyes as children do in order that they may see in the resplendent night of their own imagination more stars than are visible in the firmament; then he re-opened them, and stood motionless with amazement. Three compartments divided the coffer. In the first, blazed piles of golden coin; in the second, were ranged bars of unpolished gold, which possessed nothing attractive save their value; in the third, Edmond grasped handfuls of diamonds, pearls, and rubies, which, as they fell on one another, sounded like hail against glass. After having touched, felt, examined these treasures, Edmond rushed through the caverns like a man seized with frenzy; he leaped on a rock, from whence he could behold the sea. He was alone — alone with these countless, these unheard-of treasures! was he awake, or was it but a dream?

He would fain have gazed upon his gold, and yet he had not strength enough; for an instant he leaned his head in his hands as if to prevent his senses from leaving him, and then rushed madly about the rocks of Monte Cristo, terrifying the wild goats and scaring the sea-fowls with his wild cries and gestures; then he returned, and, still unable to believe the evidence of his senses, rushed into the grotto, and found himself before this mine of gold and jewels. This time he fell on his knees, and, clasping his hands convulsively, uttered a prayer intelligible to God alone. He soon became calmer and more happy, for only now did he begin to realize his felicity. He then set himself to work to count his fortune. There were a thousand ingots of gold, each weighing from two to three pounds; then he piled up twenty-five thousand crowns, each worth about eighty francs of our money, and bearing the effigies of Alexander VI. and his predecessors; and he saw that the complement was not half empty. And he measured ten double handfuls of pearls, diamonds, and other gems, many of which, mounted by the most famous workmen, were valuable beyond their intrinsic worth. Dantes saw the light gradually disappear, and fearing to be surprised in the cavern, left it, his gun in his hand. A piece of biscuit and a small quantity of rum formed his supper, and he snatched a few hours' sleep, lying over the mouth of the cave.

It was a night of joy and terror, such as this man of stupendous emotions had already experienced twice or thrice in his lifetime.

Chapter 25

The Unknown.

Day, for which Dantes had so eagerly and impatiently waited with open eyes, again dawned. With the first light Dantes resumed his search. Again he climbed the rocky height he had ascended the previous evening, and strained his view to catch every peculiarity of the landscape; but it wore the same wild, barren aspect when seen by the rays of the morning sun which it had done when surveyed by the fading glimmer of eve. Descending into the grotto, he lifted the stone, filled his pockets with gems, put the box together as well and securely as he could, sprinkled fresh sand over the spot from which it had been taken, and then carefully trod down the earth to give it everywhere a uniform appearance; then, quitting the grotto, he replaced the stone, heaping on it broken masses of rocks and rough fragments of crumbling granite, filling the interstices with earth, into which he deftly inserted rapidly growing plants, such as the wild myrtle and flowering thorn, then carefully watering these new plantations, he scrupulously effaced every trace of footsteps, leaving the approach to the cavern as savage-looking and untrodden as he had found it. This done, he impatiently awaited the return of his companions. To wait at Monte Cristo for the purpose of watching like a dragon over the almost incalculable riches that had thus fallen into his possession satisfied not the cravings of his heart, which yearned to return to dwell among mankind, and to assume the rank, power, and influence which are always accorded to wealth — that first and greatest of all the forces within the grasp of man.

On the sixth day, the smugglers returned. From a distance Dantes recognized the rig and handling of The Young Amelia, and dragging himself with affected difficulty towards the landing-place, he met his companions with an assurance that, although considerably better than when they quitted him, he still suffered acutely from his late accident. He then inquired how they had fared in their trip. To this question the smugglers replied that, although successful in landing their cargo in safety, they had scarcely done so when they received intelligence that a guard-ship had just quitted the port of Toulon and was crowding all sail towards them. This obliged them to make all the speed they could to evade the enemy, when they could but lament the absence of Dantes, whose superior skill in the management of a vessel would have availed them so materially. In fact, the pursuing vessel had almost overtaken them when, fortunately, night came on, and enabled them to double the Cape of Corsica, and so elude all further pursuit. Upon the whole, however, the trip had been sufficiently successful to satisfy all concerned; while the crew, and particularly Jacopo, expressed great regrets that Dantes had not been an equal sharer with themselves in the profits, which amounted to no less a sum than fifty piastres each.

Edmond preserved the most admirable self-command, not suffering the faintest indication of a smile to escape him at the enumeration of all the benefits he would have reaped had he been able to quit the island; but as The Young Amelia had merely come to Monte Cristo to fetch him away, he embarked that same evening, and proceeded with the captain to Leghorn. Arrived at Leghorn, he repaired to the house of a Jew, a dealer in precious stones, to whom he disposed of four of his smallest diamonds for five thousand francs each. Dantes half feared that such valuable jewels in the hands of a poor sailor like himself might excite suspicion; but the cunning purchaser asked no troublesome questions concerning a bargain by which he gained a round profit of at least eighty per cent.

The following day Dantes presented Jacopo with an entirely new vessel, accompanying the gift by a donation of one hundred piastres, that he might provide himself with a suitable crew and other requisites for his outfit, upon condition that he would go at once to Marseilles for the purpose of inquiring after an old man named Louis Dantes, residing in the Allees de Meillan, and also a young woman called Mercedes, an inhabitant of the Catalan village. Jacopo could scarcely believe his senses at receiving this magnificent present, which Dantes hastened to account for by saying that he had merely been a sailor from whim and a desire to spite his family, who did not allow him as much money as he liked to spend; but that on his arrival at Leghorn he had come into possession of a large fortune, left him by an uncle, whose sole heir he was. The superior education of Dantes gave an air of such extreme probability to this statement that it never once occurred to Jacopo to doubt its accuracy. The term for which Edmond had engaged to serve on board The Young Amelia having expired, Dantes took leave of the captain, who at first tried all his powers of persuasion to induce him to remain as one of the crew, but having been told the history of the legacy, he ceased to importune him further. The following morning Jacopo set sail for Marseilles, with directions from Dantes to join him at the Island of Monte Cristo.

Having seen Jacopo fairly out of the harbor, Dantes proceeded to make his final adieus on board The Young Amelia, distributing so liberal a gratuity among her crew as to secure for him the good wishes of all, and expressions of cordial interest in all that concerned him. To the captain he promised to write when he had made up his mind as to his future plans. Then Dantes departed for Genoa. At the moment of his arrival a small yacht was under trial in the bay; this yacht had been built by order of an Englishman, who, having heard that the Genoese excelled all other builders along the shores of the Mediterranean in the construction of fast-sailing vessels, was desirous of possessing a specimen of their skill; the price agreed upon between the Englishman and the Genoese builder was forty thousand francs. Dantes, struck with the beauty and capability of the little vessel, applied to its owner to transfer it to him, offering sixty thousand francs, upon condition that he should be allowed to take immediate possession. The proposal was too advantageous to be refused, the more so as the person for whom the yacht was intended had gone upon a tour through Switzerland, and was not expected back in less than three weeks or a month, by which time the builder reckoned upon being able to complete another. A bargain was therefore struck. Dantes led the owner of the yacht to the dwelling of a Jew; retired with the latter for a few minutes to a small back parlor, and upon their return the Jew counted out to the shipbuilder the sum of sixty thousand francs in bright gold pieces.

The delighted builder then offered his services in providing a suitable crew for the little vessel, but this Dantes declined with many thanks, saying he was accustomed to cruise about quite alone, and his principal pleasure consisted in managing his yacht himself; the only thing the builder could oblige him in would be to contrive a sort of secret closet in the cabin at his bed’s head, the closet to contain three divisions, so constructed as to be concealed from all but himself. The builder cheerfully undertook the commission, and promised to have these secret places completed by the next day, Dantes furnishing the dimensions and plan in accordance with which they were to be constructed.

The following day Dantes sailed with his yacht from Genoa, under the inspection of an immense crowd drawn together by curiosity to see the rich Spanish nobleman who preferred managing his own yacht. But their wonder was soon changed to admiration at seeing the perfect skill with which Dantes handled the helm. The boat, indeed, seemed to be animated with almost human intelligence, so promptly did it obey the slightest touch; and Dantes required but a short trial of his beautiful craft to acknowledge that the Genoese had not without reason attained their high reputation in the art of shipbuilding. The spectators followed the little vessel with their eyes as long as it remained visible; they then turned their conjectures upon her probable destination. Some insisted she was making for Corsica, others the Island of Elba; bets were offered to any amount that she was bound for Spain; while Africa was positively reported by many persons as her intended course; but no one thought of Monte Cristo. Yet thither it was that Dantes guided his vessel, and at Monte Cristo he arrived at the close of the second day; his boat had proved herself a first-class sailer, and had come the distance from Genoa in thirty-five hours. Dantes had carefully noted the general appearance of the shore, and, instead of landing at the usual place, he dropped anchor in the little creek. The island was utterly deserted, and bore no evidence of having been visited since he went away; his treasure was just as he had left it. Early on the following morning he commenced the removal of his riches, and ere nightfall the whole of his immense wealth was safely deposited in the compartments of the secret locker.

A week passed by. Dantes employed it in manoeuvring his yacht round the island, studying it as a skilful horseman would the animal he destined for some important service, till at the end of that time he was perfectly conversant with its good and bad qualities. The former Dantes proposed to augment, the latter to remedy.

Upon the eighth day he discerned a small vessel under full sail approaching Monte Cristo. As it drew near, he recognized it as the boat he had given to Jacopo. He immediately signalled it. His signal was returned, and in two hours afterwards the new-comer lay at anchor beside the yacht. A mournful answer awaited each of Edmond’s eager inquiries as to the information Jacopo had obtained. Old Dantes was dead, and Mercedes had disappeared. Dantes listened to these melancholy tidings with outward calmness; but, leaping lightly ashore, he signified his desire to be quite alone. In a couple of hours he returned. Two of the men from Jacopo’s boat came on board the yacht to assist in navigating it, and he gave orders that she should be steered direct to Marseilles. For his father's death he was in some manner prepared; but he knew not how to account for the mysterious disappearance of Mercedes.

Without divulging his secret, Dantes could not give sufficiently clear instructions to an agent. There were, besides, other particulars he was desirous of ascertaining, and those were of a nature he alone could investigate in a manner satisfactory to himself. His looking-glass had assured him, during his stay at Leghorn, that he ran no risk of recognition; moreover, he had now the means of adopting any disguise he thought proper. One fine morning, then, his yacht, followed by the little fishing-boat, boldly entered the port of Marseilles, and anchored exactly opposite the spot from whence, on the never-to-be-forgotten night of his departure for the Chateau d'If, he had been put on board the boat destined to convey him thither. Still Dantes could not view without a shudder the approach of a gendarme who accompanied the officers deputed to demand his bill of health ere the yacht was permitted to hold communication with the shore; but with that perfect self-possession he had acquired during his acquaintance with Faria, Dantes coolly presented an English passport he had obtained from Leghorn, and as this gave him a standing which a French passport would not have afforded, he was informed that there existed no obstacle to his immediate debarkation.

The first person to attract the attention of Dantes, as he landed on the Canebiere, was one of the crew belonging to the Pharaon. Edmond welcomed the meeting with this fellow — who had been one of his own sailors — as a sure means of testing the extent of the change which time had worked in his own appearance. Going straight towards him, he propounded a variety of questions on different subjects, carefully watching the man's countenance as he did so; but not a word or look implied that he had the slightest idea of ever having seen before the person with whom he was then conversing. Giving the sailor a piece of money in return for his civility, Dantes proceeded onwards; but ere he had gone many steps he heard the man loudly calling him to stop. Dantes instantly turned to meet him. "I beg your pardon, sir," said the honest fellow, in almost breathless haste, "but I believe you made a mistake; you intended to give me a two-franc piece, and see, you gave me a double Napoleon."

“Thank you, my good friend. I see that I have made a trifling mistake, as you say; but by way of rewarding your honesty I give you another double Napoleon, that you may drink to my health, and be able to ask your messmates to join you.”

So extreme was the surprise of the sailor, that he was unable even to thank Edmond, whose receding figure he continued to gaze after in speechless astonishment. “Some nabob from India,” was his comment.

Dantes, meanwhile, went on his way. Each step he trod oppressed his heart with fresh emotion; his first and most indelible recollections were there; not a tree, not a street, that he passed but seemed filled with dear and cherished memories. And thus he proceeded onwards till he arrived at the end of the Rue de Noailles, from whence a full view of the Allees de Meillan was obtained. At this spot, so pregnant with fond and filial remembrances, his heart beat almost to bursting, his knees tottered under him, a mist floated over his sight, and had he not clung for support to one of the trees, he would inevitably have fallen to the ground and been crushed beneath the many vehicles continually passing there. Recovering himself, however, he wiped the perspiration from his brows, and stopped not again till he found himself at the door of the house in which his father had lived.

The nasturtiums and other plants, which his father had delighted to train before his window, had all disappeared from the upper part of the house. Leaning against the tree, he gazed thoughtfully for a time at the upper stories of the shabby little house. Then he advanced to the door, and asked whether there were any rooms to be let. Though answered in the negative, he begged so earnestly to be permitted to visit those on the fifth floor, that, in despite of the oft-repeated assurance of the concierge that they were occupied, Dantes succeeded in inducing the man to go up to the tenants, and ask permission for a gentleman to be allowed to look at them.

The tenants of the humble lodging were a young couple who had been scarcely married a week; and seeing them, Dantes sighed heavily. Nothing in the two small chambers forming the apartments remained as it had been in the time of the elder Dantes; the very paper was different, while the articles of antiquated furniture with which the rooms had been filled in Edmond’s time had all disappeared; the four walls alone remained as he had left them. The bed belonging to the present occupants was placed as the former owner of the chamber had been accustomed to have his; and, in spite of his efforts to prevent it, the eyes of Edmond were suffused in tears as he reflected that on that spot the old man had breathed his last, vainly calling for his son. The young couple gazed with astonishment at the sight of their visitor’s emotion, and wondered to see the large tears silently chasing each other down his otherwise stern and immovable features; but they felt the sacredness of his grief, and kindly refrained from questioning him as to its cause, while, with instinctive delicacy, they left him to indulge his sorrow alone. When he withdrew from the scene of his painful recollections, they both accompanied him downstairs, reiterating their hope that he would come again whenever he pleased, and assuring him that their poor dwelling would ever be open to him. As Edmond passed the door on the fourth floor, he paused to inquire whether Caderousse the tailor still dwelt there; but he received, for reply, that the person in question had got into difficulties, and at the present time kept a small inn on the route from Bellegarde to Beaucaire.

Having obtained the address of the person to whom the house in the Allees de Meillan belonged, Dantes next proceeded thither, and, under the name of Lord Wilmore (the name and title inscribed on his passport), purchased the small dwelling for the sum of twenty-five thousand francs, at least ten thousand more than it was worth; but had its owner asked half a million, it would unhesitatingly have been given. The very same day the occupants of the apartments on the fifth floor of the house, now become the property of Dantes, were duly informed by the notary who had arranged the necessary transfer of deeds, etc., that the new landlord gave them their choice of any of the rooms in the house, without the least augmentation of rent, upon condition of their giving instant possession of the two small chambers they at present inhabited.

This strange event aroused great wonder and curiosity in the neighborhood of the Allees de Meillan, and a multitude of theories were afloat, none of which was anywhere near the truth. But what raised public astonishment to a climax, and set all conjecture at defiance, was the knowledge that the same stranger who had in the morning visited the Allees de Meillan had been seen in the evening walking in the little village of the Catalans, and afterwards observed to enter a poor fisherman’s hut, and to pass more than an hour in inquiring after persons who had either been dead or gone away for more than fifteen or sixteen years. But on the following day the family from whom all these particulars had been asked received a handsome present, consisting of an entirely new fishing-boat, with two seines and a tender. The delighted recipients of these munificent gifts would gladly have poured out their thanks to their generous benefactor, but they had seen him, upon quitting the hut, merely give some orders to a sailor, and then springing lightly on horseback, leave Marseilles by the Porte d’Aix.

Chapter 26

The Pont du Gard Inn.

Such of my readers as have made a pedestrian excursion to the south of France may perchance have noticed, about midway between the town of Beaucaire and the village of Bellegarde, — a little nearer to the former than to the latter, — a small roadside inn, from the front of which hung, creaking and flapping in the wind, a sheet of tin covered with a grotesque representation of the Pont du Gard. This modern place of entertainment stood on the left-hand side of the post road, and backed upon the Rhone. It also boasted of what in Languedoc is styled a garden, consisting of a small plot of ground, on the side opposite to the main entrance reserved for the reception of guests. A few dingy olives and stunted fig-trees struggled hard for existence, but their withered dusty foliage abundantly proved how unequal was the conflict. Between these sickly shrubs grew a scanty supply of garlic, tomatoes, and eschalots; while, lone and solitary, like a forgotten sentinel, a tall pine raised its melancholy head in one of the corners of this unattractive spot, and displayed its flexible stem and fan-shaped summit dried and cracked by the fierce heat of the sub-tropical sun.

In the surrounding plain, which more resembled a dusty lake than solid ground, were scattered a few miserable stalks of wheat, the effect, no doubt, of a curious desire on the part of the agriculturists of the country to see whether such a thing as the raising of grain in those parched regions was practicable. Each stalk served as a perch for a grasshopper, which regaled the passers by through this Egyptian scene with its strident, monotonous note.

For about seven or eight years the little tavern had been kept by a man and his wife, with two servants, — a chambermaid named Trinette, and a hostler called Pecaud. This small staff was quite equal to all the requirements, for a canal between Beaucaire and Aiguemortes had revolutionized transportation by substituting boats for the cart and the stagecoach. And, as though to add to the daily misery which this prosperous canal inflicted on the unfortunate inn-keeper, whose utter ruin it was fast accomplishing, it was situated between the Rhone from which it had its source and the post-road it had depleted, not a hundred steps from the inn, of which we have given a brief but faithful description.

The inn-keeper himself was a man of from forty to fifty-five years of age, tall, strong, and bony, a perfect specimen of the natives of those southern latitudes; he had dark, sparkling, and deep-set eyes, hooked nose, and teeth white as those of a carnivorous animal; his hair, like his beard, which he wore under his chin, was thick and curly, and in spite of his age but slightly interspersed with a few silvery threads. His naturally dark complexion had assumed a still further shade of brown from the habit the unfortunate man had acquired of stationing himself from morning till eve at the threshold of his door, on the lookout for guests who seldom came, yet there he stood, day after day, exposed to the meridional rays of a burning sun, with no other protection for his head than a red handkerchief twisted around it, after the manner of the Spanish muleteers. This man was our old acquaintance, Gaspard Caderousse. His wife, on the contrary, whose maiden name had been Madeleine Radelle, was pale, meagre, and sickly-looking. Born in the neighborhood of Arles, she had shared in the beauty for which its women are proverbial; but that beauty had gradually withered beneath the devastating influence of the slow fever so prevalent among dwellers by the ponds of Aiguemortes and the marshes of Camargue. She remained nearly always in her second-floor chamber, shivering in her chair, or stretched languid and feeble on her bed, while her husband kept his daily watch at the door — a duty he performed with so much the greater willingness, as it saved him the necessity of listening to the endless plaints and murmurs of his helpmate, who never saw him without breaking out into bitter invectives against fate; to all of which her husband would calmly return an unvarying reply, in these philosophic words: —

“Hush, La Carconte. It is God’s pleasure that things should be so.”

The sobriquet of La Carconte had been bestowed on Madeleine Radelle from the fact that she had been born in a village, so called, situated between Salon and Lambesc; and as a custom existed among the inhabitants of that part of France where Caderousse lived of styling every person by some particular and distinctive appellation, her husband had bestowed on her the name of La Carconte in place of her sweet and euphonious name of Madeleine, which, in all probability, his rude gutteral language would not have enabled him to pronounce. Still, let it not be supposed that amid this affected resignation to the will of Providence, the unfortunate inn-keeper did not writhe under the double misery of seeing the hateful canal carry off his customers and his profits, and the daily infliction of his peevish partner’s murmurs and lamentations.

Like other dwellers in the south, he was a man of sober habits and moderate desires, but fond of external show, vain, and addicted to display. During the days of his prosperity, not a festivity took place without himself and wife being among the spectators. He dressed in the picturesque costume worn upon grand occasions by the inhabitants of the south of France, bearing equal resemblance to the style adopted both by the Catalans and Andalusians; while La Carconte displayed the charming fashion prevalent among the women of Arles, a mode of attire borrowed equally from Greece and Arabia. But, by degrees, watch-chains, necklaces, parti-colored scarfs, embroidered bodices, velvet vests, elegantly worked stockings, striped gaiters, and silver buckles for the shoes, all disappeared; and Gaspard Caderousse, unable to appear abroad in his pristine splendor, had given up any further participation in the pomps and vanities, both for himself and wife, although a bitter feeling of envious discontent filled his mind as the sound of mirth and merry music from the joyous revellers reached even the miserable hostelry to which he still clung, more for the shelter than the profit it afforded.

Caderousse, then, was, as usual, at his place of observation before the door, his eyes glancing listlessly from a piece of closely shaven grass — on which some fowls were industriously, though fruitlessly, endeavoring to turn up some grain or insect suited to their palate — to the deserted road, which led away to the north and south, when he was aroused by the shrill voice of his wife, and grumbling to himself as he went, he mounted to her chamber, first taking care, however, to set the entrance door wide open, as an invitation to any chance traveller who might be passing.

At the moment Caderousse quitted his sentry-like watch before the door, the road on which he so eagerly strained his sight was void and lonely as a desert at mid-day. There it lay stretching out into one interminable line of dust and sand, with its sides bordered by tall, meagre trees, altogether presenting so uninviting an appearance, that no one in his senses could have imagined that any traveller, at liberty to regulate his hours for journeying, would choose to expose himself in such a formidable Sahara. Nevertheless, had Caderousse but retained his post a few minutes longer, he might have caught a dim outline of something approaching from the direction of Bellegarde; as the moving object drew nearer, he would easily have perceived that it consisted of a man and horse, between whom the kindest and most amiable understanding appeared to exist. The horse was of Hungarian breed, and ambled along at an easy pace. His rider was a priest, dressed in black, and wearing a three-cornered hat; and, spite of the ardent rays of a noonday sun, the pair came on with a fair degree of rapidity.

Having arrived before the Pont du Gard, the horse stopped, but whether for his own pleasure or that of his rider would have been difficult to say. However that might have been, the priest, dismounting, led his steed by the bridle in search of some place to which he could secure him. Availing himself of a handle that projected from a half-fallen door, he tied the animal safely and having drawn a red cotton handkerchief, from his pocket, wiped away the perspiration that streamed from his brow, then, advancing to the door, struck thrice with the end of his iron-shod stick. At this unusual sound, a huge black dog came rushing to meet the daring assailant of his ordinarily tranquil abode, snarling and displaying his sharp white teeth with a determined hostility that abundantly proved how little he was accustomed to society. At that moment a heavy footstep was heard descending the wooden staircase that led from the upper floor, and, with many bows and courteous smiles, mine host of the Pont du Gard besought his guest to enter.

“You are welcome, sir, most welcome!” repeated the astonished Caderousse. “Now, then, Margotin,” cried he, speaking to the dog, “will you be quiet? Pray don’t heed him, sir! — he only barks, he never bites. I make no doubt a glass of good wine would be acceptable this dreadfully hot day.” Then perceiving for the first time the garb of the traveller he had to entertain, Caderousse hastily exclaimed: “A thousand pardons! I really did not observe whom I had the honor to receive under my poor roof. What would the abbe please to have? What refreshment can I offer? All I have is at his service.”

The priest gazed on the person addressing him with a long and searching gaze — there even seemed a disposition on his part to court a similar scrutiny on the part of the inn-keeper; then, observing in the countenance of the latter no other expression than extreme surprise at his own want of attention to an inquiry so courteously worded, he deemed it as well to terminate this dumb show, and therefore said, speaking with a strong Italian accent, “You are, I presume, M. Caderousse?”

“Yes, sir,” answered the host, even more surprised at the question than he had been by the silence which had preceded it; “I am Gaspard Caderousse, at your service.”

“Gaspard Caderousse,” rejoined the priest. “Yes, — Christian and surname are the same. You formerly lived, I believe in the Allees de Meillan, on the fourth floor?”

“I did.”

“And you followed the business of a tailor?”

“True, I was a tailor, till the trade fell off. It is so hot at Marseilles, that really I believe that the respectable inhabitants will in time go without any clothing whatever. But talking of heat, is there nothing I can offer you by way of refreshment?”

“Yes; let me have a bottle of your best wine, and then, with your permission, we will resume our conversation from where we left off.”

“As you please, sir,” said Caderousse, who, anxious not to lose the present opportunity of finding a customer for one of the few bottles of Cahors still remaining in his possession, hastily raised a trap-door in the floor of the apartment they were in, which served both as parlor and kitchen. Upon issuing forth from his subterranean retreat at the expiration of five minutes, he found the abbe seated upon a wooden stool, leaning his elbow on a table, while Margotin, whose animosity seemed appeased by the unusual command of the traveller for refreshments, had crept up to him, and had established himself very comfortably between his knees, his long, skinny neck resting on his lap, while his dim eye was fixed earnestly on the traveller’s face.

“Are you quite alone?” inquired the guest, as Caderousse placed before him the bottle of wine and a glass.

“Quite, quite alone,” replied the man — ”or, at least, practically so, for my poor wife, who is the only person in the house besides myself, is laid up with illness, and unable to render me the least assistance, poor thing!”

“You are married, then?” said the priest, with a show of interest, glancing round as he spoke at the scanty furnishings of the apartment.

“Ah, sir,” said Caderousse with a sigh, “it is easy to perceive I am not a rich man; but in this world a man does not thrive the better for being honest.” The abbe fixed on him a searching, penetrating glance.

“Yes, honest — I can certainly say that much for myself,” continued the inn-keeper, fairly sustaining the scrutiny of the abbe’s gaze; “I can boast with truth of being an honest man; and," continued he significantly, with a hand on his breast and shaking his head, "that is more than every one can say nowadays."

"So much the better for you, if what you assert be true," said the abbe; "for I am firmly persuaded that, sooner or later, the good will be rewarded, and the wicked punished."

"Such words as those belong to your profession," answered Caderousse, "and you do well to repeat them; but," added he, with a bitter expression of countenance, "one is free to believe them or not, as one pleases."

"You are wrong to speak thus," said the abbe; "and perhaps I may, in my own person, be able to prove to you how completely you are in error."

"What mean you?" inquired Caderousse with a look of surprise.

"In the first place, I must be satisfied that you are the person I am in search of."

"What proofs do you require?"

"Did you, in the year 1814 or 1815, know anything of a young sailor named Dantes?"

"Dantes? Did I know poor dear Edmond? Why, Edmond Dantes and myself were intimate friends!" exclaimed Caderousse, whose countenance flushed darkly as he caught the penetrating gaze of the abbe fixed on him, while the clear, calm eye of the questioner seemed to dilate with feverish scrutiny.

"You remind me," said the priest, "that the young man concerning whom I asked you was said to bear the name of Edmond."

"Said to bear the name!" repeated Caderousse, becoming excited and eager. "Why, he was so called as truly as I myself bore the appellation of Gaspard Caderousse; but tell me, I pray, what has become of poor Edmond? Did you know him? Is he alive and at liberty? Is he prosperous and happy?"

"He died a more wretched, hopeless, heart-broken prisoner than the felons who pay the penalty of their crimes at the galleys of Toulon."

A deadly pallor followed the flush on the countenance of Caderousse, who turned away, and the priest saw him wiping the tears from his eyes with the corner of the red handkerchief twisted round his head.

"Poor fellow, poor fellow!" murmured Caderousse. "Well, there, sir, is another proof that good people are never rewarded on this earth, and that none but the wicked prosper. Ah," continued Caderousse, speaking in the highly colored language of the south, "the world grows worse and worse.

Why does not God, if he really hates the wicked, as he is said to do, send down brimstone and fire, and consume them altogether?"

"You speak as though you had loved this young Dantes," observed the abbe, without taking any notice of his companion's vehemence.

"And so I did," replied Caderousse; "though once, I confess, I envied him his good fortune. But I swear to you, sir, I swear to you, by everything a man holds dear, I have, since then, deeply and sincerely lamented his unhappy fate." There was a brief silence, during which the fixed, searching eye of the abbe was employed in scrutinizing the agitated features of the inn-keeper.

"You knew the poor lad, then?" continued Caderousse.

"I was called to see him on his dying bed, that I might administer to him the consolations of religion."

"And of what did he die?" asked Caderousse in a choking voice.

"Of what, think you, do young and strong men die in prison, when they have scarcely numbered their thirtieth year, unless it be of imprisonment?" Caderousse wiped away the large beads of perspiration that gathered on his brow.

"But the strangest part of the story is," resumed the abbe, "that Dantes, even in his dying moments, swore by his crucified Redeemer, that he was utterly ignorant of the cause of his detention."

"And so he was," murmured Caderousse. "How should he have been otherwise? Ah, sir, the poor fellow told you the truth."

"And for that reason, he besought me to try and clear up a mystery he had never been able to penetrate, and to clear his memory should any foul spot or stain have fallen on it."

And here the look of the abbe, becoming more and more fixed, seemed to rest with ill-concealed satisfaction on the gloomy depression which was rapidly spreading over the countenance of Caderousse.

"A rich Englishman," continued the abbe, "who had been his companion in misfortune, but had been released from prison during the second restoration, was possessed of a diamond of immense value; this jewel he bestowed on Dantes upon himself quitting the prison, as a mark of his gratitude for the kindness and brotherly care with which Dantes had nursed him in a severe illness he underwent during his confinement. Instead of employing this diamond in attempting to bribe his jailers, who might only have taken it and then betrayed him to the governor, Dantes carefully preserved it, that in the event of his getting out of prison he might have wherewithal to live, for the sale of such a diamond would have quite sufficed to make his fortune."

"Then, I suppose," asked Caderousse, with eager, glowing looks, "that it was a stone of immense value?"

"Why, everything is relative," answered the abbe. "To one in Edmond's position the diamond certainly was of great value. It was estimated at fifty thousand francs."

"Bless me!" exclaimed Caderousse, "fifty thousand francs! Surely the diamond was as large as a nut to be worth all that."

"No," replied the abbe, "it was not of such a size as that; but you shall judge for yourself. I have it with me."

The sharp gaze of Caderousse was instantly directed towards the priest's garments, as though hoping to discover the location of the treasure. Calmly drawing forth from his pocket a small box covered with black shagreen, the abbe opened it, and displayed to the dazzled eyes of Caderousse the sparkling jewel it contained, set in a ring of admirable workmanship. "And that diamond," cried Caderousse, almost breathless with eager admiration, "you say, is worth fifty thousand francs?"

"It is, without the setting, which is also valuable," replied the abbe, as he closed the box, and returned it to his pocket, while its brilliant hues seemed still to dance before the eyes of the fascinated inn-keeper.

"But how comes the diamond in your possession, sir? Did Edmond make you his heir?"

"No, merely his testamentary executor. 'I once possessed four dear and faithful friends, besides the maiden to whom I was betrothed' he said; 'and I feel convinced they have all unfeignedly grieved over my loss. The name of one of the four friends is Caderousse.'" The inn-keeper shivered.

"'Another of the number,'" continued the abbe, without seeming to notice the emotion of Caderousse, "'is called Danglars; and the third, in spite of being my rival, entertained a very sincere affection for me.'" A fiendish smile played over the features of Caderousse, who was about to break in upon the abbe's speech, when the latter, waving his hand, said, "Allow me to finish first, and then if you have any observations to make, you can do so afterwards. 'The third of my friends, although my rival, was much attached to me, — his name was Fernand; that of my betrothed was' — Stay, stay," continued the abbe, "I have forgotten what he called her."

“Mercedes,” said Caderousse eagerly.

“True,” said the abbe, with a stifled sigh, “Mercedes it was.”

“Go on,” urged Caderousse.

“Bring me a carafe of water,” said the abbe.

Caderousse quickly performed the stranger’s bidding; and after pouring some into a glass, and slowly swallowing its contents, the abbe, resuming his usual placidity of manner, said, as he placed his empty glass on the table, — ”Where did we leave off?”

“The name of Edmond’s betrothed was Mercedes.”

“To be sure. ‘You will go to Marseilles,’ said Dantes, — for you understand, I repeat his words just as he uttered them. Do you understand?”

“Perfectly.”

“‘You will sell this diamond; you will divide the money into five equal parts, and give an equal portion to these good friends, the only persons who have loved me upon earth.’“

“But why into five parts?” asked Caderousse; “you only mentioned four persons.”

“Because the fifth is dead, as I hear. The fifth sharer in Edmond’s bequest, was his own father.”

“Too true, too true!” ejaculated Caderousse, almost suffocated by the contending passions which assailed him, “the poor old man did die.”

“I learned so much at Marseilles,” replied the abbe, making a strong effort to appear indifferent; “but from the length of time that has elapsed since the death of the elder Dantes, I was unable to obtain any particulars of his end. Can you enlighten me on that point?”

“I do not know who could if I could not,” said Caderousse. “Why, I lived almost on the same floor with the poor old man. Ah, yes, about a year after the disappearance of his son the poor old man died.”

“Of what did he die?”

“Why, the doctors called his complaint gastro-enteritis, I believe; his acquaintances say he died of grief; but I, who saw him in his dying moments, I say he died of” — Caderousse paused.

“Of what?” asked the priest, anxiously and eagerly.

“Why, of downright starvation.”

“Starvation!” exclaimed the abbe, springing from his seat. “Why, the vilest animals are not suffered to die by such a death as that. The very dogs that wander houseless and homeless in the streets find some pitying hand to cast them a mouthful of bread; and that a man, a Christian, should be allowed to perish of hunger in the midst of other men who call themselves Christians, is too horrible for belief. Oh, it is impossible — utterly impossible!”

“What I have said, I have said,” answered Caderousse.

“And you are a fool for having said anything about it,” said a voice from the top of the stairs. “Why should you meddle with what does not concern you?”

The two men turned quickly, and saw the sickly countenance of La Carconte peering between the baluster rails; attracted by the sound of voices, she had feebly dragged herself down the stairs, and, seated on the lower step, head on knees, she had listened to the foregoing conversation. “Mind your own business, wife,” replied Caderousse sharply. “This gentleman asks me for information, which common politeness will not permit me to refuse.”

“Politeness, you simpleton!” retorted La Carconte. “What have you to do with politeness, I should like to know? Better study a little common prudence. How do you know the motives that person may have for trying to extract all he can from you?”

“I pledge you my word, madam,” said the abbe, “that my intentions are good; and that you husband can incur no risk, provided he answers me candidly.”

“Ah, that’s all very fine,” retorted the woman. “Nothing is easier than to begin with fair promises and assurances of nothing to fear; but when poor, silly folks, like my husband there, have been persuaded to tell all they know, the promises and assurances of safety are quickly forgotten; and at some moment when nobody is expecting it, behold trouble and misery, and all sorts of persecutions, are heaped on the unfortunate wretches, who cannot even see whence all their afflictions come.”

“Nay, nay, my good woman, make yourself perfectly easy, I beg of you. Whatever evils may befall you, they will not be occasioned by my instrumentality, that I solemnly promise you.”

La Carconte muttered a few inarticulate words, then let her head again drop upon her knees, and went into a fit of ague, leaving the two speakers to resume the conversation, but remaining so as to be able to hear every word they uttered. Again the abbe had been obliged to swallow a draught of water to calm the emotions that threatened to overpower him. When he had sufficiently recovered himself, he said, “It appears, then, that the miserable old man you were telling me of was forsaken by every one. Surely, had not such been the case, he would not have perished by so dreadful a death.”

“Why, he was not altogether forsaken,” continued Caderousse, “for Mercedes the Catalan and Monsieur Morrel were very kind to him; but somehow the poor old man had contracted a profound hatred for Fernand — the very person,” added Caderousse with a bitter smile, “that you named just now as being one of Dantes’ faithful and attached friends.”

“And was he not so?” asked the abbe.

“Gaspard, Gaspard!” murmured the woman, from her seat on the stairs, “mind what you are saying!” Caderousse made no reply to these words, though evidently irritated and annoyed by the interruption, but, addressing the abbe, said, “Can a man be faithful to another whose wife he covets and desires for himself? But Dantes was so honorable and true in his own nature, that he believed everybody’s professions of friendship. Poor Edmond, he was cruelly deceived; but it was fortunate that he never knew, or he might have found it more difficult, when on his deathbed, to pardon his enemies. And, whatever people may say,” continued Caderousse, in his native language, which was not altogether devoid of rude poetry, “I cannot help being more frightened at the idea of the malediction of the dead than the hatred of the living.”

“Imbecile!” exclaimed La Carconte.

“Do you, then, know in what manner Fernand injured Dantes?” inquired the abbe of Caderousse.

“Do I? No one better.”

“Speak out then, say what it was!”

“Gaspard!” cried La Carconte, “do as you will; you are master — but if you take my advice you’ll hold your tongue.”

“Well, wife,” replied Caderousse, “I don’t know but what you’re right!”

“So you will say nothing?” asked the abbe.

“Why, what good would it do?” asked Caderousse. “If the poor lad were living, and came to me and begged that I would candidly tell which were his true and which his false friends, why, perhaps, I should not hesitate. But you tell me he is no more, and therefore can have nothing to do with hatred or revenge, so let all such feeling be buried with him.”

“You prefer, then,” said the abbe, “that I should bestow on men you say are false and treacherous, the reward intended for faithful friendship?”

"That is true enough," returned Caderousse. "You say truly, the gift of poor Edmond was not meant for such traitors as Fernand and Danglars; besides, what would it be to them? no more than a drop of water in the ocean."

"Remember," chimed in La Carconte, "those two could crush you at a single blow!"

"How so?" inquired the abbe. "Are these persons, then, so rich and powerful?"

"Do you not know their history?"

"I do not. Pray relate it to me!" Caderousse seemed to reflect for a few moments, then said, "No, truly, it would take up too much time."

"Well, my good friend," returned the abbe, in a tone that indicated utter indifference on his part, "you are at liberty, either to speak or be silent, just as you please; for my own part, I respect your scruples and admire your sentiments; so let the matter end. I shall do my duty as conscientiously as I can, and fulfil my promise to the dying man. My first business will be to dispose of this diamond." So saying, the abbe again draw the small box from his pocket, opened it, and contrived to hold it in such a light, that a bright flash of brilliant hues passed before the dazzled gaze of Caderousse.

"Wife, wife!" cried he in a hoarse voice, "come here!"

"Diamond!" exclaimed La Carconte, rising and descending to the chamber with a tolerably firm step; "what diamond are you talking about?"

"Why, did you not hear all we said?" inquired Caderousse. "It is a beautiful diamond left by poor Edmond Dantes, to be sold, and the money divided between his father, Mercedes, his betrothed bride, Fernand, Danglars, and myself. The jewel is worth at least fifty thousand francs."

"Oh, what a magnificent jewel!" cried the astonished woman.

"The fifth part of the profits from this stone belongs to us then, does it not?" asked Caderousse.

"It does," replied the abbe; "with the addition of an equal division of that part intended for the elder Dantes, which I believe myself at liberty to divide equally with the four survivors."

"And why among us four?" inquired Caderousse.

"As being the friends Edmond esteemed most faithful and devoted to him."

"I don't call those friends who betray and ruin you," murmured the wife in her turn, in a low, muttering voice.

“Of course not!” rejoined Caderousse quickly; “no more do I, and that was what I was observing to this gentleman just now. I said I looked upon it as a sacrilegious profanation to reward treachery, perhaps crime.”

“Remember,” answered the abbe calmly, as he replaced the jewel and its case in the pocket of his cassock, “it is your fault, not mine, that I do so. You will have the goodness to furnish me with the address of both Fernand and Danglars, in order that I may execute Edmond’s last wishes.” The agitation of Caderousse became extreme, and large drops of perspiration rolled from his heated brow. As he saw the abbe rise from his seat and go towards the door, as though to ascertain if his horse were sufficiently refreshed to continue his journey, Caderousse and his wife exchanged looks of deep meaning.

“There, you see, wife,” said the former, “this splendid diamond might all be ours, if we chose!”

“Do you believe it?”

“Why, surely a man of his holy profession would not deceive us!”

“Well,” replied La Carconte, “do as you like. For my part, I wash my hands of the affair.” So saying, she once more climbed the staircase leading to her chamber, her body convulsed with chills, and her teeth rattling in her head, in spite of the intense heat of the weather. Arrived at the top stair, she turned round, and called out, in a warning tone, to her husband, “Gaspard, consider well what you are about to do!”

“I have both reflected and decided,” answered he. La Carconte then entered her chamber, the flooring of which creaked beneath her heavy, uncertain tread, as she proceeded towards her arm-chair, into which she fell as though exhausted.

“Well,” asked the abbe, as he returned to the apartment below, “what have you made up your mind to do?”

“To tell you all I know,” was the reply.

“I certainly think you act wisely in so doing,” said the priest. “Not because I have the least desire to learn anything you may please to conceal from me, but simply that if, through your assistance, I could distribute the legacy according to the wishes of the testator, why, so much the better, that is all.”

“I hope it may be so,” replied Caderousse, his face flushed with cupidity.

“I am all attention,” said the abbe.

“Stop a minute,” answered Caderousse; “we might be interrupted in the most interesting part of my story, which would be a pity; and it is as well that your visit hither should be made known only to ourselves.” With these words he went stealthily to the door, which he closed, and, by way of still greater precaution, bolted and barred it, as he was accustomed to do at night. During this time the abbe had chosen his place for listening at his ease. He removed his seat into a corner of the room, where he himself would be in deep shadow, while the light would be fully thrown on the narrator; then, with head bent down and hands clasped, or rather clinched together, he prepared to give his whole attention to Caderousse, who seated himself on the little stool, exactly opposite to him.

“Remember, this is no affair of mine,” said the trembling voice of La Carconte, as though through the flooring of her chamber she viewed the scene that was enacting below.

“Enough, enough!” replied Caderousse; “say no more about it; I will take all the consequences upon myself.” And he began his story.

Chapter 27

The Story.

“First, sir,” said Caderousse, “you must make me a promise.”

“What is that?” inquired the abbe.

“Why, if you ever make use of the details I am about to give you, that you will never let any one know that it was I who supplied them; for the persons of whom I am about to talk are rich and powerful, and if they only laid the tips of their fingers on me, I should break to pieces like glass.”

“Make yourself easy, my friend,” replied the abbe. “I am a priest, and confessions die in my breast. Recollect, our only desire is to carry out, in a fitting manner, the last wishes of our friend. Speak, then, without reserve, as without hatred; tell the truth, the whole truth; I do not know, never may know, the persons of whom you are about to speak; besides, I am an Italian, and not a Frenchman, and belong to God, and not to man, and I shall shortly retire to my convent, which I have only quitted to fulfil the last wishes of a dying man.” This positive assurance seemed to give Caderousse a little courage.

“Well, then, under these circumstances,” said Caderousse, “I will, I even believe I ought to undeceive you as to the friendship which poor Edmond thought so sincere and unquestionable.”

“Begin with his father, if you please.” said the abbe; “Edmond talked to me a great deal about the old man for whom he had the deepest love.”

“The history is a sad one, sir,” said Caderousse, shaking his head; “perhaps you know all the earlier part of it?”

“Yes.” answered the abbe; “Edmond related to me everything until the moment when he was arrested in a small cabaret close to Marseilles.”

“At La Reserve! Oh, yes; I can see it all before me this moment.”

“Was it not his betrothal feast?”

“It was and the feast that began so gayly had a very sorrowful ending; a police commissary, followed by four soldiers, entered, and Dantes was arrested.”

“Yes, and up to this point I know all,” said the priest. “Dantes himself only knew that which personally concerned him, for he never beheld again the five persons I have named to you, or heard mention of any one of them.”

“Well, when Dantes was arrested, Monsieur Morrel hastened to obtain the particulars, and they were very sad. The old man returned alone to his home, folded up his wedding suit with tears in his eyes, and paced up and down his chamber the whole day, and would not go to bed at all, for I was underneath him and heard him walking the whole night; and for myself, I assure you I could not sleep either, for the grief of the poor father gave me great uneasiness, and every step he took went to my heart as really as if his foot had pressed against my breast. The next day Mercedes came to implore the protection of M. de Villefort; she did not obtain it, however, and went to visit the old man; when she saw him so miserable and heart-broken, having passed a sleepless night, and not touched food since the previous day, she wished him to go with her that she might take care of him; but the old man would not consent. ‘No,’ was the old man’s reply, ‘I will not leave this house, for my poor dear boy loves me better than anything in the world; and if he gets out of prison he will come and see me the first thing, and what would he think if I did not wait here for him?’ I heard all this from the window, for I was anxious that Mercedes should persuade the old man to accompany her, for his footsteps over my head night and day did not leave me a moment’s repose.”

“But did you not go up-stairs and try to console the poor old man?” asked the abbe.

“Ah, sir,” replied Caderousse, “we cannot console those who will not be consoled, and he was one of these; besides, I know not why, but he seemed to dislike seeing me. One night, however, I heard his sobs, and I could not resist my desire to go up to him, but when I reached his door he was no longer weeping but praying. I cannot now repeat to you, sir, all the eloquent words and imploring language he made use of; it was more than piety, it was more than grief, and I, who am no canter, and hate the Jesuits, said then to myself, ‘It is really well, and I am very glad that I have not any children; for if I were a father and felt such excessive grief as the old man does, and did not find in my memory or heart all he is now saying, I should throw myself into the sea at once, for I could not bear it.’“

“Poor father!” murmured the priest.

“From day to day he lived on alone, and more and more solitary. M. Morrel and Mercedes came to see him, but his door was closed; and, although I was certain he was at home, he would not make any answer. One day, when, contrary to his custom, he had admitted Mercedes, and the poor girl, in spite of her own grief and despair, endeavored to console him, he said to her, — ’Be assured, my dear daughter, he is dead; and instead of expecting him, it is he who is awaiting us; I am quite happy, for I am the oldest, and of course shall see him first.’ However well disposed a person may be, why you see we leave off after a time seeing persons who are in sorrow, they make one melancholy; and so at last old Dantes was left all to himself, and I only saw from time to time strangers go up to him and come down again with some bundle they tried to hide; but I guessed what these bundles were, and that he sold by degrees what he had to pay for his subsistence. At length the poor old fellow reached the end of all he had; he owed three quarters’ rent, and they threatened to turn him out; he begged for another week, which was granted to him. I know this, because the landlord came into my apartment when he left his. For the first three days I heard him walking about as usual, but, on the fourth I heard nothing. I then resolved to go up to him at all risks. The door was closed, but I looked through the keyhole, and saw him so pale and haggard, that believing him very ill, I went and told M. Morrel and then ran on to Mercedes. They both came immediately, M. Morrel bringing a doctor, and the doctor said it was inflammation of the bowels, and ordered him a limited diet. I was there, too, and I never shall forget the old man’s smile at this prescription. From that time he received all who came; he had an excuse for not eating any more; the doctor had put him on a diet.” The abbe uttered a kind of groan. “The story interests you, does it not, sir?” inquired Caderousse.

“Yes,” replied the abbe, “it is very affecting.”

“Mercedes came again, and she found him so altered that she was even more anxious than before to have him taken to her own home. This was M. Morrel’s wish also, who would fain have conveyed the old man against his consent; but the old man resisted, and cried so that they were actually frightened. Mercedes remained, therefore, by his bedside, and M. Morrel went away, making a sign to the Catalan that he had left his purse on the chimney-piece. But availing himself of the doctor’s order, the old man would not take any sustenance; at length (after nine days of despair and fasting), the old man died, cursing those who had caused his misery, and saying to Mercedes, ‘If you ever see my Edmond again, tell him I die blessing him.’“ The abbe rose from his chair, made two turns round the chamber, and pressed his trembling hand against his parched throat. “And you believe he died” —

“Of hunger, sir, of hunger,” said Caderousse. “I am as certain of it as that we two are Christians.”

The abbe, with a shaking hand, seized a glass of water that was standing by him half-full, swallowed it at one gulp, and then resumed his seat, with red eyes and pale cheeks. “This was, indeed, a horrid event.” said he in a hoarse voice.

“The more so, sir, as it was men’s and not God’s doing.”

“Tell me of those men,” said the abbe, “and remember too,” he added in an almost menacing tone, “you have promised to tell me everything. Tell me, therefore, who are these men who killed the son with despair, and the father with famine?”

“Two men jealous of him, sir; one from love, and the other from ambition, — Fernand and Danglars.”

“How was this jealousy manifested? Speak on.”

“They denounced Edmond as a Bonapartist agent.”

“Which of the two denounced him? Which was the real delinquent?”

“Both, sir; one with a letter, and the other put it in the post.”

“And where was this letter written?”

“At La Reserve, the day before the betrothal feast.”

“‘Twas so, then — ’twas so, then,” murmured the abbe. “Oh, Faria, Faria, how well did you judge men and things!”

“What did you please to say, sir?” asked Caderousse.

“Nothing, nothing,” replied the priest; “go on.”

“It was Danglars who wrote the denunciation with his left hand, that his writing might not be recognized, and Fernand who put it in the post.”

“But,” exclaimed the abbe suddenly, “you were there yourself.”

“I!” said Caderousse, astonished; “who told you I was there?”

The abbe saw he had overshot the mark, and he added quickly, — ”No one; but in order to have known everything so well, you must have been an eye-witness.”

“True, true!” said Caderousse in a choking voice, “I was there.”

“And did you not remonstrate against such infamy?” asked the abbe; “if not, you were an accomplice.”

"Sir," replied Caderousse, "they had made me drink to such an excess that I nearly lost all perception. I had only an indistinct understanding of what was passing around me. I said all that a man in such a state could say; but they both assured me that it was a jest they were carrying on, and perfectly harmless."

"Next day — next day, sir, you must have seen plain enough what they had been doing, yet you said nothing, though you were present when Dantes was arrested."

"Yes, sir, I was there, and very anxious to speak; but Danglars restrained me. 'If he should really be guilty,' said he, 'and did really put in to the Island of Elba; if he is really charged with a letter for the Bonapartist committee at Paris, and if they find this letter upon him, those who have supported him will pass for his accomplices.' I confess I had my fears, in the state in which politics then were, and I held my tongue. It was cowardly, I confess, but it was not criminal."

"I understand — you allowed matters to take their course, that was all."

"Yes, sir," answered Caderousse; "and remorse preys on me night and day. I often ask pardon of God, I swear to you, because this action, the only one with which I have seriously to reproach myself in all my life, is no doubt the cause of my abject condition. I am expiating a moment of selfishness, and so I always say to La Carconte, when she complains, 'Hold your tongue, woman; it is the will of God.'" And Caderousse bowed his head with every sign of real repentance.

"Well, sir," said the abbe, "you have spoken unreservedly; and thus to accuse yourself is to deserve pardon."

"Unfortunately, Edmond is dead, and has not pardoned me."

"He did not know," said the abbe.

"But he knows it all now," interrupted Caderousse; "they say the dead know everything." There was a brief silence; the abbe rose and paced up and down pensively, and then resumed his seat. "You have two or three times mentioned a M. Morrel," he said; "who was he?"

"The owner of the Pharaon and patron of Dantes."

"And what part did he play in this sad drama?" inquired the abbe.

"The part of an honest man, full of courage and real regard. Twenty times he interceded for Edmond. When the emperor returned, he wrote, implored, threatened, and so energetically, that on the second restoration he was persecuted as a Bonapartist. Ten times, as I told you, he came to see Dantes' father, and offered to receive him in his own house; and the night or two before his death, as I have already said, he left his purse on the mantelpiece, with which they paid the old man's debts, and buried him decently; and so Edmond's father died, as he had lived, without doing harm to any one. I have the purse still by me — a large one, made of red silk."

"And," asked the abbe, "is M. Morrel still alive?"

"Yes," replied Caderousse.

"In that case," replied the abbe, "he should be rich, happy."

Caderousse smiled bitterly. "Yes, happy as myself," said he.

"What! M. Morrel unhappy?" exclaimed the abbe.

"He is reduced almost to the last extremity — nay, he is almost at the point of dishonor."

"How?"

"Yes," continued Caderousse, "so it is; after five and twenty years of labor, after having acquired a most honorable name in the trade of Marseilles, M. Morrel is utterly ruined; he has lost five ships in two years, has suffered by the bankruptcy of three large houses, and his only hope now is in that very Pharaon which poor Dantes commanded, and which is expected from the Indies with a cargo of cochineal and indigo. If this ship founders, like the others, he is a ruined man."

"And has the unfortunate man wife or children?" inquired the abbe.

"Yes, he has a wife, who through everything has behaved like an angel; he has a daughter, who was about to marry the man she loved, but whose family now will not allow him to wed the daughter of a ruined man; he has, besides, a son, a lieutenant in the army; and, as you may suppose, all this, instead of lessening, only augments his sorrows. If he were alone in the world he would blow out his brains, and there would be an end."

"Horrible!" ejaculated the priest.

"And it is thus heaven recompenses virtue, sir," added Caderousse. "You see, I, who never did a bad action but that I have told you of — am in destitution, with my poor wife dying of fever before my very eyes, and I unable to do anything in the world for her; I shall die of hunger, as old Dantes did, while Fernand and Danglars are rolling in wealth."

"How is that?"

"Because their deeds have brought them good fortune, while honest men have been reduced to misery."

“What has become of Danglars, the instigator, and therefore the most guilty?”

“What has become of him? Why, he left Marseilles, and was taken, on the recommendation of M. Morrel, who did not know his crime, as cashier into a Spanish bank. During the war with Spain he was employed in the commissariat of the French army, and made a fortune; then with that money he speculated in the funds, and trebled or quadrupled his capital; and, having first married his banker’s daughter, who left him a widower, he has married a second time, a widow, a Madame de Nargonne, daughter of M. de Servieux, the king’s chamberlain, who is in high favor at court. He is a millionaire, and they have made him a baron, and now he is the Baron Danglars, with a fine residence in the Rue de Mont-Blanc, with ten horses in his stables, six footmen in his ante-chamber, and I know not how many millions in his strongbox.”

“Ah!” said the abbe, in a peculiar tone, “he is happy.”

“Happy? Who can answer for that? Happiness or unhappiness is the secret known but to one’s self and the walls — walls have ears but no tongue; but if a large fortune produces happiness, Danglars is happy.”

“And Fernand?”

“Fernand? Why, much the same story.”

“But how could a poor Catalan fisher-boy, without education or resources, make a fortune? I confess this staggers me.”

“And it has staggered everybody. There must have been in his life some strange secret that no one knows.”

“But, then, by what visible steps has he attained this high fortune or high position?”

“Both, sir — he has both fortune and position — both.”

“This must be impossible!”

“It would seem so; but listen, and you will understand. Some days before the return of the emperor, Fernand was drafted. The Bourbons left him quietly enough at the Catalans, but Napoleon returned, a special levy was made, and Fernand was compelled to join. I went too; but as I was older than Fernand, and had just married my poor wife, I was only sent to the coast. Fernand was enrolled in the active troop, went to the frontier with his regiment, and was at the battle of Ligny. The night after that battle he was sentry at the door of a general who carried on a secret correspondence with the enemy. That same night the general was to go over to the English. He proposed to Fernand to accompany him; Fernand agreed to do so, deserted his post, and followed the general. Fernand would have been court-martialed if Napoleon had remained on the throne, but his action was rewarded by the Bourbons. He returned to France with the epaulet of sub-lieutenant, and as the protection of the general, who is in the highest favor, was accorded to him, he was a captain in 1823, during the Spanish war — that is to say, at the time when Danglars made his early speculations. Fernand was a Spaniard, and being sent to Spain to ascertain the feeling of his fellow-countrymen, found Danglars there, got on very intimate terms with him, won over the support of the royalists at the capital and in the provinces, received promises and made pledges on his own part, guided his regiment by paths known to himself alone through the mountain gorges which were held by the royalists, and, in fact, rendered such services in this brief campaign that, after the taking of Trocadero, he was made colonel, and received the title of count and the cross of an officer of the Legion of Honor."

"Destiny! destiny!" murmured the abbe.

"Yes, but listen: this was not all. The war with Spain being ended, Fernand's career was checked by the long peace which seemed likely to endure throughout Europe. Greece only had risen against Turkey, and had begun her war of independence; all eyes were turned towards Athens — it was the fashion to pity and support the Greeks. The French government, without protecting them openly, as you know, gave countenance to volunteer assistance. Fernand sought and obtained leave to go and serve in Greece, still having his name kept on the army roll. Some time after, it was stated that the Comte de Morcerf (this was the name he bore) had entered the service of Ali Pasha with the rank of instructor-general. Ali Pasha was killed, as you know, but before he died he recompensed the services of Fernand by leaving him a considerable sum, with which he returned to France, when he was gazetted lieutenant-general."

"So that now?" — inquired the abbe.

"So that now," continued Caderousse, "he owns a magnificent house — No. 27, Rue du Helder, Paris." The abbe opened his mouth, hesitated for a moment, then, making an effort at self-control, he said, "And Mercedes — they tell me that she has disappeared?"

"Disappeared," said Caderousse, "yes, as the sun disappears, to rise the next day with still more splendor."

“Has she made a fortune also?” inquired the abbe, with an ironical smile.

“Mercedes is at this moment one of the greatest ladies in Paris,” replied Caderousse.

“Go on,” said the abbe; “it seems as if I were listening to the story of a dream. But I have seen things so extraordinary, that what you tell me seems less astonishing than it otherwise might.”

“Mercedes was at first in the deepest despair at the blow which deprived her of Edmond. I have told you of her attempts to propitiate M. de Villefort, her devotion to the elder Dantes. In the midst of her despair, a new affliction overtook her. This was the departure of Fernand — of Fernand, whose crime she did not know, and whom she regarded as her brother. Fernand went, and Mercedes remained alone. Three months passed and still she wept — no news of Edmond, no news of Fernand, no companionship save that of an old man who was dying with despair. One evening, after a day of accustomed vigil at the angle of two roads leading to Marseilles from the Catalans, she returned to her home more depressed than ever. Suddenly she heard a step she knew, turned anxiously around, the door opened, and Fernand, dressed in the uniform of a sub-lieutenant, stood before her. It was not the one she wished for most, but it seemed as if a part of her past life had returned to her. Mercedes seized Fernand’s hands with a transport which he took for love, but which was only joy at being no longer alone in the world, and seeing at last a friend, after long hours of solitary sorrow. And then, it must be confessed, Fernand had never been hated — he was only not precisely loved. Another possessed all Mercedes’ heart; that other was absent, had disappeared, perhaps was dead. At this last thought Mercedes burst into a flood of tears, and wrung her hands in agony; but the thought, which she had always repelled before when it was suggested to her by another, came now in full force upon her mind; and then, too, old Dantes incessantly said to her, ‘Our Edmond is dead; if he were not, he would return to us.’ The old man died, as I have told you; had he lived, Mercedes, perchance, had not become the wife of another, for he would have been there to reproach her infidelity. Fernand saw this, and when he learned of the old man’s death he returned. He was now a lieutenant. At his first coming he had not said a word of love to Mercedes; at the second he reminded her that he loved her. Mercedes begged for six months more in which to await and mourn for Edmond.”

"So that," said the abbe, with a bitter smile, "that makes eighteen months in all. What more could the most devoted lover desire?" Then he murmured the words of the English poet, "'Frailty, thy name is woman.'"

"Six months afterwards," continued Caderousse, "the marriage took place in the church of Accoules."

"The very church in which she was to have married Edmond," murmured the priest; "there was only a change of bride-grooms."

"Well, Mercedes was married," proceeded Caderousse; "but although in the eyes of the world she appeared calm, she nearly fainted as she passed La Reserve, where, eighteen months before, the betrothal had been celebrated with him whom she might have known she still loved had she looked to the bottom of her heart. Fernand, more happy, but not more at his ease — for I saw at this time he was in constant dread of Edmond's return — Fernand was very anxious to get his wife away, and to depart himself. There were too many unpleasant possibilities associated with the Catalans, and eight days after the wedding they left Marseilles."

"Did you ever see Mercedes again?" inquired the priest.

"Yes, during the Spanish war, at Perpignan, where Fernand had left her; she was attending to the education of her son." The abbe started. "Her son?" said he.

"Yes," replied Caderousse, "little Albert."

"But, then, to be able to instruct her child," continued the abbe, "she must have received an education herself. I understood from Edmond that she was the daughter of a simple fisherman, beautiful but uneducated."

"Oh," replied Caderousse, "did he know so little of his lovely betrothed? Mercedes might have been a queen, sir, if the crown were to be placed on the heads of the loveliest and most intelligent. Fernand's fortune was already waxing great, and she developed with his growing fortune. She learned drawing, music — everything. Besides, I believe, between ourselves, she did this in order to distract her mind, that she might forget; and she only filled her head in order to alleviate the weight on her heart. But now her position in life is assured," continued Caderousse; "no doubt fortune and honors have comforted her; she is rich, a countess, and yet" — Caderousse paused.

"And yet what?" asked the abbe.

"Yet, I am sure, she is not happy," said Caderousse.

"What makes you believe this?"

“Why, when I found myself utterly destitute, I thought my old friends would, perhaps, assist me. So I went to Danglars, who would not even receive me. I called on Fernand, who sent me a hundred francs by his valet-de-chambre.”

“Then you did not see either of them?”

“No, but Madame de Morcerf saw me.”

“How was that?”

“As I went away a purse fell at my feet — it contained five and twenty louis; I raised my head quickly, and saw Mercedes, who at once shut the blind.”

“And M. de Villefort?” asked the abbe.

“Oh, he never was a friend of mine, I did not know him, and I had nothing to ask of him.”

“Do you not know what became of him, and the share he had in Edmond’s misfortunes?”

“No; I only know that some time after Edmond’s arrest, he married Mademoiselle de Saint-Meran, and soon after left Marseilles; no doubt he has been as lucky as the rest; no doubt he is as rich as Danglars, as high in station as Fernand. I only, as you see, have remained poor, wretched, and forgotten.”

“You are mistaken, my friend,” replied the abbe; “God may seem sometimes to forget for a time, while his justice reposes, but there always comes a moment when he remembers — and behold — a proof!” As he spoke, the abbe took the diamond from his pocket, and giving it to Caderousse, said, — ”Here, my friend, take this diamond, it is yours.”

“What, for me only?” cried Caderousse, “ah, sir, do not jest with me!”

“This diamond was to have been shared among his friends. Edmond had one friend only, and thus it cannot be divided. Take the diamond, then, and sell it; it is worth fifty thousand francs, and I repeat my wish that this sum may suffice to release you from your wretchedness.”

“Oh, sir,” said Caderousse, putting out one hand timidly, and with the other wiping away the perspiration which bedewed his brow, — ”Oh, sir, do not make a jest of the happiness or despair of a man.”

“I know what happiness and what despair are, and I never make a jest of such feelings. Take it, then, but in exchange — ”

Caderousse, who touched the diamond, withdrew his hand. The abbe smiled. “In exchange,” he continued, “give me the red silk purse that M.

Morrel left on old Dantes' chimney-piece, and which you tell me is still in your hands." Caderousse, more and more astonished, went toward a large oaken cupboard, opened it, and gave the abbe a long purse of faded red silk, round which were two copper runners that had once been gilt. The abbe took it, and in return gave Caderousse the diamond.

"Oh, you are a man of God, sir," cried Caderousse; "for no one knew that Edmond had given you this diamond, and you might have kept it."

"Which," said the abbe to himself, "you would have done." The abbe rose, took his hat and gloves. "Well," he said, "all you have told me is perfectly true, then, and I may believe it in every particular."

"See, sir," replied Caderousse, "in this corner is a crucifix in holy wood — here on this shelf is my wife's testament; open this book, and I will swear upon it with my hand on the crucifix. I will swear to you by my soul's salvation, my faith as a Christian, I have told everything to you as it occurred, and as the recording angel will tell it to the ear of God at the day of the last judgment!"

"'Tis well," said the abbe, convinced by his manner and tone that Caderousse spoke the truth. "'Tis well, and may this money profit you! Adieu; I go far from men who thus so bitterly injure each other." The abbe with difficulty got away from the enthusiastic thanks of Caderousse, opened the door himself, got out and mounted his horse, once more saluted the innkeeper, who kept uttering his loud farewells, and then returned by the road he had travelled in coming. When Caderousse turned around, he saw behind him La Carconte, paler and trembling more than ever. "Is, then, all that I have heard really true?" she inquired.

"What? That he has given the diamond to us only?" inquired Caderousse, half bewildered with joy; "yes, nothing more true! See, here it is." The woman gazed at it a moment, and then said, in a gloomy voice, "Suppose it's false?" Caderousse started and turned pale. "False!" he muttered. "False! Why should that man give me a false diamond?"

"To get your secret without paying for it, you blockhead!"

Caderousse remained for a moment aghast under the weight of such an idea. "Oh!" he said, taking up his hat, which he placed on the red handkerchief tied round his head, "we will soon find out."

"In what way?"

"Why, the fair is on at Beaucaire, there are always jewellers from Paris there, and I will show it to them. Look after the house, wife, and I shall be back in two hours," and Caderousse left the house in haste, and ran rapidly in the direction opposite to that which the priest had taken. "Fifty thousand francs!" muttered La Carconte when left alone; "it is a large sum of money, but it is not a fortune."

Chapter 28

The Prison Register.

The day after that in which the scene we have just described had taken place on the road between Bellegarde and Beaucaire, a man of about thirty or two and thirty, dressed in a bright blue frock coat, nankeen trousers, and a white waistcoat, having the appearance and accent of an Englishman, presented himself before the mayor of Marseilles. “Sir,” said he, “I am chief clerk of the house of Thomson & French, of Rome. We are, and have been these ten years, connected with the house of Morrel & Son, of Marseilles. We have a hundred thousand francs or thereabouts loaned on their securities, and we are a little uneasy at reports that have reached us that the firm is on the brink of ruin. I have come, therefore, express from Rome, to ask you for information.”

“Sir,” replied the mayor. “I know very well that during the last four or five years misfortune has seemed to pursue M. Morrel. He has lost four or five vessels, and suffered by three or four bankruptcies; but it is not for me, although I am a creditor myself to the amount of ten thousand francs, to give any information as to the state of his finances. Ask of me, as mayor, what is my opinion of M. Morrel, and I shall say that he is a man honorable to the last degree, and who has up to this time fulfilled every engagement with scrupulous punctuality. This is all I can say, sir; if you wish to learn more, address yourself to M. de Boville, the inspector of prisons, No. 15, Rue de Nouailles; he has, I believe, two hundred thousand francs in Morrel’s hands, and if there be any grounds for apprehension, as this is a greater amount than mine, you will most probably find him better informed than myself.”

The Englishman seemed to appreciate this extreme delicacy, made his bow and went away, proceeding with a characteristic British stride towards the street mentioned. M. de Boville was in his private room, and the Englishman, on perceiving him, made a gesture of surprise, which seemed to indicate that it was not the first time he had been in his presence. As to M. de Boville, he was in such a state of despair, that it was evident all the faculties of his mind, absorbed in the thought which occupied him at the moment, did not allow either his memory or his imagination to stray to the past. The Englishman, with the coolness of his nation, addressed him in terms nearly similar to those with which he had accosted the mayor of Marseilles. “Oh, sir,” exclaimed M. de Boville, “your fears are unfortunately but too well founded, and you see before you a man in despair. I had two hundred thousand francs placed in the hands of Morrel & Son; these two hundred thousand francs were the dowry of my daughter, who was to be married in a fortnight, and these two hundred thousand francs were payable, half on the 15th of this month, and the other half on the 15th of next month. I had informed M. Morrel of my desire to have these payments punctually, and he has been here within the last half-hour to tell me that if his ship, the Pharaon, did not come into port on the 15th, he would be wholly unable to make this payment.”

“But,” said the Englishman, “this looks very much like a suspension of payment.”

“It looks more like bankruptcy!” exclaimed M. de Boville despairingly.

The Englishman appeared to reflect a moment, and then said, — ”From which it would appear, sir, that this credit inspires you with considerable apprehension?”

“To tell you the truth, I consider it lost.”

“Well, then, I will buy it of you!”

“You?”

“Yes, I!”

“But at a tremendous discount, of course?”

“No, for two hundred thousand francs. Our house,” added the Englishman with a laugh, “does not do things in that way.”

“And you will pay” —

“Ready money.” And the Englishman drew from his pocket a bundle of bank-notes, which might have been twice the sum M. de Boville feared to lose. A ray of joy passed across M. de Boville’s countenance, yet he made an effort at self-control, and said, — ”Sir, I ought to tell you that, in all probability, you will not realize six per cent of this sum.”

“That’s no affair of mine,” replied the Englishman, “that is the affair of the house of Thomson & French, in whose name I act. They have, perhaps, some motive to serve in hastening the ruin of a rival firm. But all I know, sir, is, that I am ready to hand you over this sum in exchange for your assignment of the debt. I only ask a brokerage."

"Of course, that is perfectly just," cried M. de Boville. "The commission is usually one and a half; will you have two — three — five per cent, or even more? Whatever you say."

"Sir," replied the Englishman, laughing, "I am like my house, and do not do such things — no, the commission I ask is quite different."

"Name it, sir, I beg."

"You are the inspector of prisons?"

"I have been so these fourteen years."

"You keep the registers of entries and departures?"

"I do."

"To these registers there are added notes relative to the prisoners?"

"There are special reports on every prisoner."

"Well, sir, I was educated at home by a poor devil of an abbe, who disappeared suddenly. I have since learned that he was confined in the Chateau d'If, and I should like to learn some particulars of his death."

"What was his name?"

"The Abbe Faria."

"Oh, I recollect him perfectly," cried M. de Boville; "he was crazy."

"So they said."

"Oh, he was, decidedly."

"Very possibly; but what sort of madness was it?"

"He pretended to know of an immense treasure, and offered vast sums to the government if they would liberate him."

"Poor devil! — and he is dead?"

"Yes, sir, five or six months ago — last February."

"You have a good memory, sir, to recollect dates so well."

"I recollect this, because the poor devil's death was accompanied by a singular incident."

"May I ask what that was?" said the Englishman with an expression of curiosity, which a close observer would have been astonished at discovering in his phlegmatic countenance.

"Oh dear, yes, sir; the abbe's dungeon was forty or fifty feet distant from that of one of Bonaparte's emissaries, — one of those who had contributed the most to the return of the usurper in 1815, — a very resolute and very dangerous man."

“Indeed!” said the Englishman.

“Yes,” replied M. de Boville; “I myself had occasion to see this man in 1816 or 1817, and we could only go into his dungeon with a file of soldiers. That man made a deep impression on me; I shall never forget his countenance!” The Englishman smiled imperceptibly.

“And you say, sir,” he interposed, “that the two dungeons” —

“Were separated by a distance of fifty feet; but it appears that this Edmond Dantes” —

“This dangerous man’s name was” —

“Edmond Dantes. It appears, sir, that this Edmond Dantes had procured tools, or made them, for they found a tunnel through which the prisoners held communication with one another.”

“This tunnel was dug, no doubt, with an intention of escape?”

“No doubt; but unfortunately for the prisoners, the Abbe Faria had an attack of catalepsy, and died.”

“That must have cut short the projects of escape.”

“For the dead man, yes,” replied M. de Boville, “but not for the survivor; on the contrary, this Dantes saw a means of accelerating his escape. He, no doubt, thought that prisoners who died in the Chateau d’If were interred in an ordinary burial-ground, and he conveyed the dead man into his own cell, took his place in the sack in which they had sewed up the corpse, and awaited the moment of interment.”

“It was a bold step, and one that showed some courage,” remarked the Englishman.

“As I have already told you, sir, he was a very dangerous man; and, fortunately, by his own act disembarrassed the government of the fears it had on his account.”

“How was that?”

“How? Do you not comprehend?”

“No.”

“The Chateau d’If has no cemetery, and they simply throw the dead into the sea, after fastening a thirty-six pound cannon-ball to their feet.”

“Well,” observed the Englishman as if he were slow of comprehension.

“Well, they fastened a thirty-six pound ball to his feet, and threw him into the sea.”

“Really!” exclaimed the Englishman.

"Yes, sir," continued the inspector of prisons. "You may imagine the amazement of the fugitive when he found himself flung headlong over the rocks! I should like to have seen his face at that moment."

"That would have been difficult."

"No matter," replied De Boville, in supreme good-humor at the certainty of recovering his two hundred thousand francs, — "no matter, I can fancy it." And he shouted with laughter.

"So can I," said the Englishman, and he laughed too; but he laughed as the English do, "at the end of his teeth."

"And so," continued the Englishman who first gained his composure, "he was drowned?"

"Unquestionably."

"So that the governor got rid of the dangerous and the crazy prisoner at the same time?"

"Precisely."

"But some official document was drawn up as to this affair, I suppose?" inquired the Englishman.

"Yes, yes, the mortuary deposition. You understand, Dantes' relations, if he had any, might have some interest in knowing if he were dead or alive."

"So that now, if there were anything to inherit from him, they may do so with easy conscience. He is dead, and no mistake about it."

"Oh, yes; and they may have the fact attested whenever they please."

"So be it," said the Englishman. "But to return to these registers."

"True, this story has diverted our attention from them. Excuse me."

"Excuse you for what? For the story? By no means; it really seems to me very curious."

"Yes, indeed. So, sir, you wish to see all relating to the poor abbe, who really was gentleness itself."

"Yes, you will much oblige me."

"Go into my study here, and I will show it to you." And they both entered M. de Boville's study. Everything was here arranged in perfect order; each register had its number, each file of papers its place. The inspector begged the Englishman to seat himself in an arm-chair, and placed before him the register and documents relative to the Chateau d'If, giving him all the time he desired for the examination, while De Boville seated himself in a corner, and began to read his newspaper. The Englishman easily found the entries relative to the Abbe Faria; but it seemed that the history which the inspector had related interested him greatly, for after having perused the first documents he turned over the leaves until he reached the deposition respecting Edmond Dantes. There he found everything arranged in due order, — the accusation, examination, Morrel's petition, M. de Villefort's marginal notes. He folded up the accusation quietly, and put it as quietly in his pocket; read the examination, and saw that the name of Noirtier was not mentioned in it; perused, too, the application dated 10th April, 1815, in which Morrel, by the deputy procureur's advice, exaggerated with the best intentions (for Napoleon was then on the throne) the services Dantes had rendered to the imperial cause — services which Villefort's certificates rendered indispensable. Then he saw through the whole thing. This petition to Napoleon, kept back by Villefort, had become, under the second restoration, a terrible weapon against him in the hands of the king's attorney. He was no longer astonished when he searched on to find in the register this note, placed in a bracket against his name: —

Edmond Dantes.

An inveterate Bonapartist; took an active part in the return from the Island of Elba.

To be kept in strict solitary confinement, and to be closely watched and guarded.

Beneath these lines was written in another hand: "See note above — nothing can be done." He compared the writing in the bracket with the writing of the certificate placed beneath Morrel's petition, and discovered that the note in the bracket was the same writing as the certificate — that is to say, was in Villefort's handwriting. As to the note which accompanied this, the Englishman understood that it might have been added by some inspector who had taken a momentary interest in Dantes' situation, but who had, from the remarks we have quoted, found it impossible to give any effect to the interest he had felt.

As we have said, the inspector, from discretion, and that he might not disturb the Abbe Faria's pupil in his researches, had seated himself in a corner, and was reading Le Drapeau Blanc. He did not see the Englishman fold up and place in his pocket the accusation written by Danglars under the arbor of La Reserve, and which had the postmark, "Marseilles, 27th Feb., delivery 6 o'clock, P.M." But it must be said that if he had seen it, he attached so little importance to this scrap of paper, and so much importance to his two hundred thousand francs, that he would not have opposed whatever the Englishman might do, however irregular it might be.

“Thanks,” said the latter, closing the register with a slam, “I have all I want; now it is for me to perform my promise. Give me a simple assignment of your debt; acknowledge therein the receipt of the cash, and I will hand you over the money.” He rose, gave his seat to M. de Boville, who took it without ceremony, and quickly drew up the required assignment, while the Englishman counted out the bank-notes on the other side of the desk.

Chapter 29

The House of Morrel & Son.

Any one who had quitted Marseilles a few years previously, well acquainted with the interior of Morrel’s warehouse, and had returned at this date, would have found a great change. Instead of that air of life, of comfort, and of happiness that permeates a flourishing and prosperous business establishment — instead of merry faces at the windows, busy clerks hurrying to and fro in the long corridors — instead of the court filled with bales of goods, re-echoing with the cries and the jokes of porters, one would have immediately perceived all aspect of sadness and gloom. Out of all the numerous clerks that used to fill the deserted corridor and the empty office, but two remained. One was a young man of three or four and twenty, who was in love with M. Morrel’s daughter, and had remained with him in spite of the efforts of his friends to induce him to withdraw; the other was an old one-eyed cashier, called “Cocles,” or “Cock-eye,” a nickname given him by the young men who used to throng this vast now almost deserted bee-hive, and which had so completely replaced his real name that he would not, in all probability, have replied to any one who addressed him by it.

Cocles remained in M. Morrel’s service, and a most singular change had taken place in his position; he had at the same time risen to the rank of cashier, and sunk to the rank of a servant. He was, however, the same Cocles, good, patient, devoted, but inflexible on the subject of arithmetic, the only point on which he would have stood firm against the world, even against M. Morrel; and strong in the multiplication-table, which he had at his fingers’ ends, no matter what scheme or what trap was laid to catch him. In the midst of the disasters that befell the house, Cocles was the only one unmoved. But this did not arise from a want of affection; on the contrary, from a firm conviction. Like the rats that one by one forsake the doomed ship even before the vessel weighs anchor, so all the numerous clerks had by degrees deserted the office and the warehouse. Cocles had seen them go without thinking of inquiring the cause of their departure. Everything was as we have said, a question of arithmetic to Cocles, and during twenty years he had always seen all payments made with such exactitude, that it seemed as impossible to him that the house should stop payment, as it would to a miller that the river that had so long turned his mill should cease to flow.

Nothing had as yet occurred to shake Cocles' belief; the last month's payment had been made with the most scrupulous exactitude; Cocles had detected an overbalance of fourteen sous in his cash, and the same evening he had brought them to M. Morrel, who, with a melancholy smile, threw them into an almost empty drawer, saying: —

"Thanks, Cocles; you are the pearl of cashiers."

Cocles went away perfectly happy, for this eulogium of M. Morrel, himself the pearl of the honest men of Marseilles, flattered him more than a present of fifty crowns. But since the end of the month M. Morrel had passed many an anxious hour. In order to meet the payments then due; he had collected all his resources, and, fearing lest the report of his distress should get bruited abroad at Marseilles when he was known to be reduced to such an extremity, he went to the Beaucaire fair to sell his wife's and daughter's jewels and a portion of his plate. By this means the end of the month was passed, but his resources were now exhausted. Credit, owing to the reports afloat, was no longer to be had; and to meet the one hundred thousand francs due on the 10th of the present month, and the one hundred thousand francs due on the 15th of the next month to M. de Boville, M. Morrel had, in reality, no hope but the return of the Pharaon, of whose departure he had learnt from a vessel which had weighed anchor at the same time, and which had already arrived in harbor. But this vessel which, like the Pharaon, came from Calcutta, had been in for a fortnight, while no intelligence had been received of the Pharaon.

Such was the state of affairs when, the day after his interview with M. de Boville, the confidential clerk of the house of Thomson & French of Rome, presented himself at M. Morrel's. Emmanuel received him; this young man was alarmed by the appearance of every new face, for every new face might be that of a new creditor, come in anxiety to question the head of the house. The young man, wishing to spare his employer the pain of this interview, questioned the new-comer; but the stranger declared that he had nothing to say to M. Emmanuel, and that his business was with M. Morrel in person. Emmanuel sighed, and summoned Cocles. Cocles appeared, and the young man bade him conduct the stranger to M. Morrel's apartment. Cocles went first, and the stranger followed him. On the staircase they met a beautiful girl of sixteen or seventeen, who looked with anxiety at the stranger.

"M. Morrel is in his room, is he not, Mademoiselle Julie?" said the cashier.

"Yes; I think so, at least," said the young girl hesitatingly. "Go and see, Cocles, and if my father is there, announce this gentleman."

"It will be useless to announce me, mademoiselle," returned the Englishman. "M. Morrel does not know my name; this worthy gentleman has only to announce the confidential clerk of the house of Thomson & French of Rome, with whom your father does business."

The young girl turned pale and continued to descend, while the stranger and Cocles continued to mount the staircase. She entered the office where Emmanuel was, while Cocles, by the aid of a key he possessed, opened a door in the corner of a landing-place on the second staircase, conducted the stranger into an ante-chamber, opened a second door, which he closed behind him, and after having left the clerk of the house of Thomson & French alone, returned and signed to him that he could enter. The Englishman entered, and found Morrel seated at a table, turning over the formidable columns of his ledger, which contained the list of his liabilities. At the sight of the stranger, M. Morrel closed the ledger, arose, and offered a seat to the stranger; and when he had seen him seated, resumed his own chair. Fourteen years had changed the worthy merchant, who, in his thirty-sixth year at the opening of this history, was now in his fiftieth; his hair had turned white, time and sorrow had ploughed deep furrows on his brow, and his look, once so firm and penetrating, was now irresolute and wandering, as if he feared being forced to fix his attention on some particular thought or person. The Englishman looked at him with an air of curiosity, evidently mingled with interest. "Monsieur," said Morrel, whose uneasiness was increased by this examination, "you wish to speak to me?"

"Yes, monsieur; you are aware from whom I come?"

"The house of Thomson & French; at least, so my cashier tells me."

"He has told you rightly. The house of Thomson & French had 300,000 or 400,000 francs to pay this month in France; and, knowing your strict punctuality, have collected all the bills bearing your signature, and charged me as they became due to present them, and to employ the money otherwise." Morrel sighed deeply, and passed his hand over his forehead, which was covered with perspiration.

“So then, sir,” said Morrel, “you hold bills of mine?”

“Yes, and for a considerable sum.”

“What is the amount?” asked Morrel with a voice he strove to render firm.

“Here is,” said the Englishman, taking a quantity of papers from his pocket, “an assignment of 200,000 francs to our house by M. de Boville, the inspector of prisons, to whom they are due. You acknowledge, of course, that you owe this sum to him?”

“Yes; he placed the money in my hands at four and a half per cent nearly five years ago.”

“When are you to pay?”

“Half the 15th of this month, half the 15th of next.”

“Just so; and now here are 32,500 francs payable shortly; they are all signed by you, and assigned to our house by the holders.”

“I recognize them,” said Morrel, whose face was suffused, as he thought that, for the first time in his life, he would be unable to honor his own signature. “Is this all?”

“No, I have for the end of the month these bills which have been assigned to us by the house of Pascal, and the house of Wild & Turner of Marseilles, amounting to nearly 55,000. francs; in all, 287,500 francs.” It is impossible to describe what Morrel suffered during this enumeration. “Two hundred and eighty-seven thousand five hundred francs,” repeated he.

“Yes, sir,” replied the Englishman. “I will not,” continued he, after a moment’s silence, “conceal from you, that while your probity and exactitude up to this moment are universally acknowledged, yet the report is current in Marseilles that you are not able to meet your liabilities.” At this almost brutal speech Morrel turned deathly pale. “Sir,” said he, “up to this time — and it is now more than four-and-twenty years since I received the direction of this house from my father, who had himself conducted it for five and thirty years — never has anything bearing the signature of Morrel & Son been dishonored.”

“I know that,” replied the Englishman. “But as a man of honor should answer another, tell me fairly, shall you pay these with the same punctuality?” Morrel shuddered, and looked at the man, who spoke with more assurance than he had hitherto shown. “To questions frankly put,” said he, “a straightforward answer should be given. Yes, I shall pay, if, as I hope, my vessel arrives safely; for its arrival will again procure me the credit which the numerous accidents, of which I have been the victim, have deprived me; but if the Pharaon should be lost, and this last resource be gone" — the poor man's eyes filled with tears.

"Well," said the other, "if this last resource fail you?"

"Well," returned Morrel, "it is a cruel thing to be forced to say, but, already used to misfortune, I must habituate myself to shame. I fear I shall be forced to suspend payment."

"Have you no friends who could assist you?" Morrel smiled mournfully. "In business, sir," said he, "one has no friends, only correspondents."

"It is true," murmured the Englishman; "then you have but one hope."

"But one."

"The last?"

"The last."

"So that if this fail" —

"I am ruined, — completely ruined!"

"As I was on my way here, a vessel was coming into port."

"I know it, sir; a young man, who still adheres to my fallen fortunes, passes a part of his time in a belvidere at the top of the house, in hopes of being the first to announce good news to me; he has informed me of the arrival of this ship."

"And it is not yours?"

"No, she is a Bordeaux vessel, La Gironde; she comes from India also; but she is not mine."

"Perhaps she has spoken to the Pharaon, and brings you some tidings of her?"

"Shall I tell you plainly one thing, sir? I dread almost as much to receive any tidings of my vessel as to remain in doubt. Uncertainty is still hope." Then in a low voice Morrel added, — "This delay is not natural. The Pharaon left Calcutta the 5th February; she ought to have been here a month ago."

"What is that?" said the Englishman. "What is the meaning of that noise?"

"Oh, oh!" cried Morrel, turning pale, "what is it?" A loud noise was heard on the stairs of people moving hastily, and half-stifled sobs. Morrel rose and advanced to the door; but his strength failed him and he sank into a chair. The two men remained opposite one another, Morrel trembling in every limb, the stranger gazing at him with an air of profound pity. The noise had ceased; but it seemed that Morrel expected something — something had occasioned the noise, and something must follow. The stranger fancied he heard footsteps on the stairs; and that the footsteps, which were those of several persons, stopped at the door. A key was inserted in the lock of the first door, and the creaking of hinges was audible.

"There are only two persons who have the key to that door," murmured Morrel, "Cocles and Julie." At this instant the second door opened, and the young girl, her eyes bathed with tears, appeared. Morrel rose tremblingly, supporting himself by the arm of the chair. He would have spoken, but his voice failed him. "Oh, father!" said she, clasping her hands, "forgive your child for being the bearer of evil tidings."

Morrel again changed color. Julie threw herself into his arms.

"Oh, father, father!" murmured she, "courage!"

"The Pharaon has gone down, then?" said Morrel in a hoarse voice. The young girl did not speak; but she made an affirmative sign with her head as she lay on her father's breast.

"And the crew?" asked Morrel.

"Saved," said the girl; "saved by the crew of the vessel that has just entered the harbor." Morrel raised his two hands to heaven with an expression of resignation and sublime gratitude. "Thanks, my God," said he, "at least thou strikest but me alone." A tear moistened the eye of the phlegmatic Englishman.

"Come in, come in," said Morrel, "for I presume you are all at the door."

Scarcely had he uttered those words than Madame Morrel entered weeping bitterly. Emmanuel followed her, and in the antechamber were visible the rough faces of seven or eight half-naked sailors. At the sight of these men the Englishman started and advanced a step; then restrained himself, and retired into the farthest and most obscure corner of the apartment. Madame Morrel sat down by her husband and took one of his hands in hers, Julie still lay with her head on his shoulder, Emmanuel stood in the centre of the chamber and seemed to form the link between Morrel's family and the sailors at the door.

"How did this happen?" said Morrel.

"Draw nearer, Penelon," said the young man, "and tell us all about it."

An old seaman, bronzed by the tropical sun, advanced, twirling the remains of a tarpaulin between his hands. "Good-day, M. Morrel," said he, as if he had just quitted Marseilles the previous evening, and had just returned from Aix or Toulon.

“Good-day, Penelon,” returned Morrel, who could not refrain from smiling through his tears, “where is the captain?”

“The captain, M. Morrel, — he has stayed behind sick at Palma; but please God, it won’t be much, and you will see him in a few days all alive and hearty.”

“Well, now tell your story, Penelon.”

Penelon rolled his quid in his cheek, placed his hand before his mouth, turned his head, and sent a long jet of tobacco-juice into the antechamber, advanced his foot, balanced himself, and began, — ”You see, M. Morrel,” said he, “we were somewhere between Cape Blanc and Cape Boyador, sailing with a fair breeze, south-south-west after a week’s calm, when Captain Gaumard comes up to me — I was at the helm I should tell you — and says, ‘Penelon, what do you think of those clouds coming up over there?’ I was just then looking at them myself. ‘What do I think, captain? Why I think that they are rising faster than they have any business to do, and that they would not be so black if they didn’t mean mischief.’ — ’That’s my opinion too,’ said the captain, ‘and I’ll take precautions accordingly. We are carrying too much canvas. Avast, there, all hands! Take in the studding-sl’s and stow the flying jib.’ It was time; the squall was on us, and the vessel began to heel. ‘Ah,’ said the captain, ‘we have still too much canvas set; all hands lower the mains’l!’ Five minutes after, it was down; and we sailed under mizzen-tops’ls and to’gall’nt sails. ‘Well, Penelon,’ said the captain, ‘what makes you shake your head?’ ‘Why,’ I says, ‘I still think you’ve got too much on.’ ‘I think you’re right,’ answered he, ‘we shall have a gale.’ ‘A gale? More than that, we shall have a tempest, or I don’t know what’s what.’ You could see the wind coming like the dust at Montredon; luckily the captain understood his business. ‘Take in two reefs in the tops’ls,’ cried the captain; ‘let go the bowlin’s, haul the brace, lower the to’gall’nt sails, haul out the reef-tackles on the yards.’“

“That was not enough for those latitudes,” said the Englishman; “I should have taken four reefs in the topsails and furled the spanker.”

His firm, sonorous, and unexpected voice made every one start. Penelon put his hand over his eyes, and then stared at the man who thus criticized the manoeuvres of his captain. “We did better than that, sir,” said the old sailor respectfully; “we put the helm up to run before the tempest; ten minutes after we struck our tops’ls and scudded under bare poles.”

“The vessel was very old to risk that,” said the Englishman.

“Eh, it was that that did the business; after pitching heavily for twelve hours we sprung a leak. ‘Penelon,’ said the captain, ‘I think we are sinking, give me the helm, and go down into the hold.’ I gave him the helm, and descended; there was already three feet of water. ‘All hands to the pumps!’ I shouted; but it was too late, and it seemed the more we pumped the more came in. ‘Ah,’ said I, after four hours’ work, ‘since we are sinking, let us sink; we can die but once.’ ‘That’s the example you set, Penelon,’ cries the captain; ‘very well, wait a minute.’ He went into his cabin and came back with a brace of pistols. ‘I will blow the brains out of the first man who leaves the pump,’ said he.”

“Well done!” said the Englishman.

“There’s nothing gives you so much courage as good reasons,” continued the sailor; “and during that time the wind had abated, and the sea gone down, but the water kept rising; not much, only two inches an hour, but still it rose. Two inches an hour does not seem much, but in twelve hours that makes two feet, and three we had before, that makes five. ‘Come,’ said the captain, ‘we have done all in our power, and M. Morrel will have nothing to reproach us with, we have tried to save the ship, let us now save ourselves. To the boats, my lads, as quick as you can.’ Now,” continued Penelon, “you see, M. Morrel, a sailor is attached to his ship, but still more to his life, so we did not wait to be told twice; the more so, that the ship was sinking under us, and seemed to say, ‘Get along — save yourselves.’ We soon launched the boat, and all eight of us got into it. The captain descended last, or rather, he did not descend, he would not quit the vessel; so I took him round the waist, and threw him into the boat, and then I jumped after him. It was time, for just as I jumped the deck burst with a noise like the broadside of a man-of-war. Ten minutes after she pitched forward, then the other way, spun round and round, and then good-by to the Pharaon. As for us, we were three days without anything to eat or drink, so that we began to think of drawing lots who should feed the rest, when we saw La Gironde; we made signals of distress, she perceived us, made for us, and took us all on board. There now, M. Morrel, that’s the whole truth, on the honor of a sailor; is not it true, you fellows there?” A general murmur of approbation showed that the narrator had faithfully detailed their misfortunes and sufferings.

“Well, well,” said M. Morrel, “I know there was no one in fault but destiny. It was the will of God that this should happen, blessed be his name. What wages are due to you?”

“Oh, don’t let us talk of that, M. Morrel.”

“Yes, but we will talk of it.”

“Well, then, three months,” said Penelon.

“Cocles, pay two hundred francs to each of these good fellows,” said Morrel. “At another time,” added he, “I should have said, Give them, besides, two hundred francs over as a present; but times are changed, and the little money that remains to me is not my own.”

Penelon turned to his companions, and exchanged a few words with them.

“As for that, M. Morrel,” said he, again turning his quid, “as for that” —

“As for what?”

“The money.”

“Well” —

“Well, we all say that fifty francs will be enough for us at present, and that we will wait for the rest.”

“Thanks, my friends, thanks!” cried Morrel gratefully; “take it — take it; and if you can find another employer, enter his service; you are free to do so.” These last words produced a prodigious effect on the seaman. Penelon nearly swallowed his quid; fortunately he recovered. “What, M. Morrel!” said he in a low voice, “you send us away; you are then angry with us!”

“No, no,” said M. Morrel, “I am not angry, quite the contrary, and I do not send you away; but I have no more ships, and therefore I do not want any sailors.”

“No more ships!” returned Penelon; “well, then, you’ll build some; we’ll wait for you.”

“I have no money to build ships with, Penelon,” said the poor owner mournfully, “so I cannot accept your kind offer.”

“No more money? Then you must not pay us; we can scud, like the Pharaon, under bare poles.”

“Enough, enough!” cried Morrel, almost overpowered; “leave me, I pray you; we shall meet again in a happier time. Emmanuel, go with them, and see that my orders are executed.”

“At least, we shall see each other again, M. Morrel?” asked Penelon.

“Yes; I hope so, at least. Now go.” He made a sign to Cocles, who went first; the seamen followed him and Emmanuel brought up the rear. “Now,” said the owner to his wife and daughter, “leave me; I wish to speak with this gentleman.” And he glanced towards the clerk of Thomson & French, who had remained motionless in the corner during this scene, in which he had taken no part, except the few words we have mentioned. The two women looked at this person whose presence they had entirely forgotten, and retired; but, as she left the apartment, Julie gave the stranger a supplicating glance, to which he replied by a smile that an indifferent spectator would have been surprised to see on his stern features. The two men were left alone. “Well, sir,” said Morrel, sinking into a chair, “you have heard all, and I have nothing further to tell you.”

“I see,” returned the Englishman, “that a fresh and unmerited misfortune his overwhelmed you, and this only increases my desire to serve you.”

“Oh, sir!” cried Morrel.

“Let me see,” continued the stranger, “I am one of your largest creditors.”

“Your bills, at least, are the first that will fall due.”

“Do you wish for time to pay?”

“A delay would save my honor, and consequently my life.”

“How long a delay do you wish for?” — Morrel reflected. “Two months,” said he.

“I will give you three,” replied the stranger.

“But,” asked Morrel, “will the house of Thomson & French consent?”

“Oh, I take everything on myself. To-day is the 5th of June.”

“Yes.”

“Well, renew these bills up to the 5th of September; and on the 5th of September at eleven o’clock (the hand of the clock pointed to eleven), I shall come to receive the money.”

“I shall expect you,” returned Morrel; “and I will pay you — or I shall be dead.” These last words were uttered in so low a tone that the stranger could not hear them. The bills were renewed, the old ones destroyed, and the poor ship-owner found himself with three months before him to collect his resources. The Englishman received his thanks with the phlegm peculiar to his nation; and Morrel, overwhelming him with grateful blessings, conducted him to the staircase. The stranger met Julie on the stairs; she pretended to be descending, but in reality she was waiting for him. “Oh, sir” — said she, clasping her hands.

“Mademoiselle,” said the stranger, “one day you will receive a letter signed ‘Sinbad the Sailor.’ Do exactly what the letter bids you, however strange it may appear.”

“Yes, sir,” returned Julie.

“Do you promise?”

“I swear to you I will.”

“It is well. Adieu, mademoiselle. Continue to be the good, sweet girl you are at present, and I have great hopes that heaven will reward you by giving you Emmanuel for a husband.”

Julie uttered a faint cry, blushed like a rose, and leaned against the baluster. The stranger waved his hand, and continued to descend. In the court he found Penelon, who, with a rouleau of a hundred francs in either hand, seemed unable to make up his mind to retain them. “Come with me, my friend,” said the Englishman; “I wish to speak to you.”

Chapter 30

The Fifth of September.

The extension provided for by the agent of Thomson & French, at the moment when Morrel expected it least, was to the poor shipowner so decided a stroke of good fortune that he almost dared to believe that fate was at length grown weary of wasting her spite upon him. The same day he told his wife, Emmanuel, and his daughter all that had occurred; and a ray of hope, if not of tranquillity, returned to the family. Unfortunately, however, Morrel had not only engagements with the house of Thomson & French, who had shown themselves so considerate towards him; and, as he had said, in business he had correspondents, and not friends. When he thought the matter over, he could by no means account for this generous conduct on the part of Thomson & French towards him; and could only attribute it to some such selfish argument as this: — ”We had better help a man who owes us nearly 300,000 francs, and have those 300,000 francs at the end of three months than hasten his ruin, and get only six or eight per cent of our money back again.” Unfortunately, whether through envy or stupidity, all Morrel’s correspondents did not take this view; and some even came to a contrary decision. The bills signed by Morrel were presented at his office with scrupulous exactitude, and, thanks to the delay granted by the Englishman, were paid by Cocles with equal punctuality. Cocles thus remained in his accustomed tranquillity. It was Morrel alone who remembered with alarm, that if he had to repay on the 15th the 50,000 francs of M. de Boville, and on the 30th the 32,500 francs of bills, for which, as well as the debt due to the inspector of prisons, he had time granted, he must be a ruined man.

The opinion of all the commercial men was that, under the reverses which had successively weighed down Morrel, it was impossible for him to remain solvent. Great, therefore, was the astonishment when at the end of the month, he cancelled all his obligations with his usual punctuality. Still confidence was not restored to all minds, and the general opinion was that the complete ruin of the unfortunate shipowner had been postponed only until the end of the month. The month passed, and Morrel made extraordinary efforts to get in all his resources. Formerly his paper, at any date, was taken with confidence, and was even in request. Morrel now tried to negotiate bills at ninety days only, and none of the banks would give him credit. Fortunately, Morrel had some funds coming in on which he could rely; and, as they reached him, he found himself in a condition to meet his engagements when the end of July came. The agent of Thomson & French had not been again seen at Marseilles; the day after, or two days after his visit to Morrel, he had disappeared; and as in that city he had had no intercourse but with the mayor, the inspector of prisons, and M. Morrel, his departure left no trace except in the memories of these three persons. As to the sailors of the Pharaon, they must have found snug berths elsewhere, for they also had disappeared.

Captain Gaumard, recovered from his illness, had returned from Palma. He delayed presenting himself at Morrel's, but the owner, hearing of his arrival, went to see him. The worthy shipowner knew, from Penelon's recital, of the captain's brave conduct during the storm, and tried to console him. He brought him also the amount of his wages, which Captain Gaumard had not dared to apply for. As he descended the staircase, Morrel met Penelon, who was going up. Penelon had, it would seem, made good use of his money, for he was newly clad. When he saw his employer, the worthy tar seemed much embarrassed, drew on one side into the corner of the landing-place, passed his quid from one cheek to the other, stared stupidly with his great eyes, and only acknowledged the squeeze of the hand which Morrel as usual gave him by a slight pressure in return. Morrel attributed Penelon's embarrassment to the elegance of his attire; it was evident the good fellow had not gone to such an expense on his own account; he was, no doubt, engaged on board some other vessel, and thus his bashfulness arose from the fact of his not having, if we may so express ourselves, worn mourning for the Pharaon longer. Perhaps he had come to tell Captain Gaumard of his good luck, and to offer him employment from his new master. "Worthy fellows!" said Morrel, as he went away, "may your new master love you as I loved you, and be more fortunate than I have been!"

August rolled by in unceasing efforts on the part of Morrel to renew his credit or revive the old. On the 20th of August it was known at Marseilles that he had left town in the mailcoach, and then it was said that the bills would go to protest at the end of the month, and that Morrel had gone away and left his chief clerk Emmanuel, and his cashier Cocles, to meet the creditors. But, contrary to all expectation, when the 31st of August came, the house opened as usual, and Cocles appeared behind the grating of the counter, examined all bills presented with the usual scrutiny, and, from first to last, paid all with the usual precision. There came in, moreover, two drafts which M. Morrel had fully anticipated, and which Cocles paid as punctually as the bills which the shipowner had accepted. All this was incomprehensible, and then, with the tenacity peculiar to prophets of bad news, the failure was put off until the end of September. On the 1st, Morrel returned; he was awaited by his family with extreme anxiety, for from this journey to Paris they hoped great things. Morrel had thought of Danglars, who was now immensely rich, and had lain under great obligations to Morrel in former days, since to him it was owing that Danglars entered the service of the Spanish banker, with whom he had laid the foundations of his vast wealth. It was said at this moment that Danglars was worth from six to eight millions of francs, and had unlimited credit. Danglars, then, without taking a crown from his pocket, could save Morrel; he had but to pass his word for a loan, and Morrel was saved. Morrel had long thought of Danglars, but had kept away from some instinctive motive, and had delayed as long as possible availing himself of this last resource. And Morrel was right, for he returned home crushed by the humiliation of a refusal. Yet, on his arrival, Morrel did not utter a complaint, or say one harsh word. He embraced his weeping wife and daughter, pressed Emmanuel’s hand with friendly warmth, and then going to his private room on the second floor had sent for Cocles. “Then,” said the two women to Emmanuel, “we are indeed ruined.”

It was agreed in a brief council held among them, that Julie should write to her brother, who was in garrison at Nimes, to come to them as speedily as possible. The poor women felt instinctively that they required all their strength to support the blow that impended. Besides, Maximilian Morrel, though hardly two and twenty, had great influence over his father. He was a strong-minded, upright young man. At the time when he decided on his profession his father had no desire to choose for him, but had consulted young Maximilian’s taste. He had at once declared for a military life, and had in consequence studied hard, passed brilliantly through the Polytechnic School, and left it as sub-lieutenant of the 53d of the line. For a year he had held this rank, and expected promotion on the first vacancy. In his regiment

Maximilian Morrel was noted for his rigid observance, not only of the obligations imposed on a soldier, but also of the duties of a man; and he thus gained the name of “the stoic.” We need hardly say that many of those who gave him this epithet repeated it because they had heard it, and did not even know what it meant. This was the young man whom his mother and sister called to their aid to sustain them under the serious trial which they felt they would soon have to endure. They had not mistaken the gravity of this event, for the moment after Morrel had entered his private office with Cocles, Julie saw the latter leave it pale, trembling, and his features betraying the utmost consternation. She would have questioned him as he passed by her, but the worthy creature hastened down the staircase with unusual precipitation, and only raised his hands to heaven and exclaimed, “Oh, mademoiselle, mademoiselle, what a dreadful misfortune! Who could ever have believed it!” A moment afterwards Julie saw him go up-stairs carrying two or three heavy ledgers, a portfolio, and a bag of money.

Morrel examined the ledgers, opened the portfolio, and counted the money. All his funds amounted to 6,000, or 8,000. francs, his bills receivable up to the 5th to 4,000 or 5,000, which, making the best of everything, gave him 14,000. francs to meet debts amounting to 287,500 francs. He had not even the means for making a possible settlement on account. However, when Morrel went down to his dinner, he appeared very calm. This calmness was more alarming to the two women than the deepest dejection would have been. After dinner Morrel usually went out and used to take his coffee at the Phocaean club, and read the Semaphore; this day he did not leave the house, but returned to his office.

As to Cocles, he seemed completely bewildered. For part of the day he went into the court-yard, seated himself on a stone with his head bare and exposed to the blazing sun. Emmanuel tried to comfort the women, but his eloquence faltered. The young man was too well acquainted with the business of the house, not to feel that a great catastrophe hung over the Morrel family. Night came, the two women had watched, hoping that when he left his room Morrel would come to them, but they heard him pass before their door, and trying to conceal the noise of his footsteps. They listened; he went into his sleeping-room, and fastened the door inside. Madame Morrel sent her daughter to bed, and half an hour after Julie had retired, she rose, took off her shoes, and went stealthily along the passage, to see through the keyhole what her husband was doing. In the passage she saw a retreating shadow; it was Julie, who, uneasy herself, had anticipated her mother. The young lady went towards Madame Morrel.

"He is writing," she said. They had understood each other without speaking. Madame Morrel looked again through the keyhole, Morrel was writing; but Madame Morrel remarked, what her daughter had not observed, that her husband was writing on stamped paper. The terrible idea that he was writing his will flashed across her; she shuddered, and yet had not strength to utter a word. Next day M. Morrel seemed as calm as ever, went into his office as usual, came to his breakfast punctually, and then, after dinner, he placed his daughter beside him, took her head in his arms, and held her for a long time against his bosom. In the evening, Julie told her mother, that although he was apparently so calm, she had noticed that her father's heart beat violently. The next two days passed in much the same way. On the evening of the 4th of September, M. Morrel asked his daughter for the key of his study. Julie trembled at this request, which seemed to her of bad omen. Why did her father ask for this key which she always kept, and which was only taken from her in childhood as a punishment? The young girl looked at Morrel.

"What have I done wrong, father," she said, "that you should take this key from me?"

"Nothing, my dear," replied the unhappy man, the tears starting to his eyes at this simple question, — "nothing, only I want it." Julie made a pretence to feel for the key. "I must have left it in my room," she said. And she went out, but instead of going to her apartment she hastened to consult Emmanuel. "Do not give this key to your father," said he, "and to-morrow morning, if possible, do not quit him for a moment." She questioned Emmanuel, but he knew nothing, or would not say what he knew. During the night, between the 4th and 5th of September, Madame Morrel remained listening for every sound, and, until three o'clock in the morning, she heard her husband pacing the room in great agitation. It was three o'clock when he threw himself on the bed. The mother and daughter passed the night together. They had expected Maximilian since the previous evening. At eight o'clock in the morning Morrel entered their chamber. He was calm; but the agitation of the night was legible in his pale and careworn visage. They did not dare to ask him how he had slept. Morrel was kinder to his wife, more affectionate to his daughter, than he had ever been. He could not cease gazing at and kissing the sweet girl. Julie, mindful of Emmanuel's request, was following her father when he quitted the room, but he said to her quickly, — ”Remain with your mother, dearest.” Julie wished to accompany him. “I wish you to do so,” said he.

This was the first time Morrel had ever so spoken, but he said it in a tone of paternal kindness, and Julie did not dare to disobey. She remained at the same spot standing mute and motionless. An instant afterwards the door opened, she felt two arms encircle her, and a mouth pressed her forehead. She looked up and uttered an exclamation of joy.

“Maximilian, my dearest brother!” she cried. At these words Madame Morrel rose, and threw herself into her son’s arms. “Mother,” said the young man, looking alternately at Madame Morrel and her daughter, “what has occurred — what has happened? Your letter has frightened me, and I have come hither with all speed.”

“Julie,” said Madame Morrel, making a sign to the young man, “go and tell your father that Maximilian has just arrived.” The young lady rushed out of the apartment, but on the first step of the staircase she found a man holding a letter in his hand.

“Are you not Mademoiselle Julie Morrel?” inquired the man, with a strong Italian accent.

“Yes, sir,” replied Julie with hesitation; “what is your pleasure? I do not know you.”

“Read this letter,” he said, handing it to her. Julie hesitated. “It concerns the best interests of your father,” said the messenger.

The young girl hastily took the letter from him. She opened it quickly and read: —

“Go this moment to the Allees de Meillan, enter the house No. 15, ask the porter for the key of the room on the fifth floor, enter the apartment, take from the corner of the mantelpiece a purse netted in red silk, and give it to your father. It is important that he should receive it before eleven o’clock. You promised to obey me implicitly. Remember your oath.

“Sinbad the Sailor.”

The young girl uttered a joyful cry, raised her eyes, looked round to question the messenger, but he had disappeared. She cast her eyes again over the note to peruse it a second time, and saw there was a postscript. She read: —

“It is important that you should fulfil this mission in person and alone. If you go accompanied by any other person, or should any one else go in your place, the porter will reply that he does not know anything about it."

This postscript decreased greatly the young girl's happiness. Was there nothing to fear? was there not some snare laid for her? Her innocence had kept her in ignorance of the dangers that might assail a young girl of her age. But there is no need to know danger in order to fear it; indeed, it may be observed, that it is usually unknown perils that inspire the greatest terror.

Julie hesitated, and resolved to take counsel. Yet, through a singular impulse, it was neither to her mother nor her brother that she applied, but to Emmanuel. She hastened down and told him what had occurred on the day when the agent of Thomson & French had come to her father's, related the scene on the staircase, repeated the promise she had made, and showed him the letter. "You must go, then, mademoiselle," said Emmanuel.

"Go there?" murmured Julie.

"Yes; I will accompany you."

"But did you not read that I must be alone?" said Julie.

"And you shall be alone," replied the young man. "I will await you at the corner of the Rue de Musee, and if you are so long absent as to make me uneasy, I will hasten to rejoin you, and woe to him of whom you shall have cause to complain to me!"

"Then, Emmanuel?" said the young girl with hesitation, "it is your opinion that I should obey this invitation?"

"Yes. Did not the messenger say your father's safety depended upon it?"

"But what danger threatens him, then, Emmanuel?" she asked.

Emmanuel hesitated a moment, but his desire to make Julie decide immediately made him reply.

"Listen," he said; "to-day is the 5th of September, is it not?"

"Yes."

"To-day, then, at eleven o'clock, your father has nearly three hundred thousand francs to pay?"

"Yes, we know that."

"Well, then," continued Emmanuel, "we have not fifteen thousand francs in the house."

"What will happen then?"

"Why, if to-day before eleven o'clock your father has not found someone who will come to his aid, he will be compelled at twelve o'clock to declare himself a bankrupt."

“Oh, come, then, come!” cried she, hastening away with the young man. During this time, Madame Morrel had told her son everything. The young man knew quite well that, after the succession of misfortunes which had befallen his father, great changes had taken place in the style of living and housekeeping; but he did not know that matters had reached such a point. He was thunderstruck. Then, rushing hastily out of the apartment, he ran up-stairs, expecting to find his father in his study, but he rapped there in vain.

While he was yet at the door of the study he heard the bedroom door open, turned, and saw his father. Instead of going direct to his study, M. Morrel had returned to his bed-chamber, which he was only this moment quitting. Morrel uttered a cry of surprise at the sight of his son, of whose arrival he was ignorant. He remained motionless on the spot, pressing with his left hand something he had concealed under his coat. Maximilian sprang down the staircase, and threw his arms round his father’s neck; but suddenly he recoiled, and placed his right hand on Morrel’s breast. “Father,” he exclaimed, turning pale as death, “what are you going to do with that brace of pistols under your coat?”

“Oh, this is what I feared!” said Morrel.

“Father, father, in heaven’s name,” exclaimed the young man, “what are these weapons for?”

“Maximilian,” replied Morrel, looking fixedly at his son, “you are a man, and a man of honor. Come, and I will explain to you.”

And with a firm step Morrel went up to his study, while Maximilian followed him, trembling as he went. Morrel opened the door, and closed it behind his son; then, crossing the anteroom, went to his desk on which he placed the pistols, and pointed with his finger to an open ledger. In this ledger was made out an exact balance-sheet of his affair’s. Morrel had to pay, within half an hour, 287,500 francs. All he possessed was 15,257 francs. “Read!” said Morrel.

The young man was overwhelmed as he read. Morrel said not a word. What could he say? What need he add to such a desperate proof in figures?” And have you done all that is possible, father, to meet this disastrous result?” asked the young man, after a moment’s pause. “I have,” replied Morrel.

“You have no money coming in on which you can rely?”

“None.”

“You have exhausted every resource?”

“All.”

“And in half an hour,” said Maximilian in a gloomy voice, “our name is dishonored!”

“Blood washes out dishonor,” said Morrel.

“You are right, father; I understand you.” Then extending his hand towards one of the pistols, he said, “There is one for you and one for me — thanks!” Morrel caught his hand. “Your mother — your sister! Who will support them?” A shudder ran through the young man’s frame. “Father,” he said, “do you reflect that you are bidding me to live?”

“Yes, I do so bid you,” answered Morrel, “it is your duty. You have a calm, strong mind, Maximilian. Maximilian, you are no ordinary man. I make no requests or commands; I only ask you to examine my position as if it were your own, and then judge for yourself.”

The young man reflected for a moment, then an expression of sublime resignation appeared in his eyes, and with a slow and sad gesture he took off his two epaulets, the insignia of his rank. “Be it so, then, my father,” he said, extending his hand to Morrel, “die in peace, my father; I will live.” Morrel was about to cast himself on his knees before his son, but Maximilian caught him in his arms, and those two noble hearts were pressed against each other for a moment. “You know it is not my fault,” said Morrel. Maximilian smiled. “I know, father, you are the most honorable man I have ever known.”

“Good, my son. And now there is no more to be said; go and rejoin your mother and sister.”

“My father,” said the young man, bending his knee, “bless me!” Morrel took the head of his son between his two hands, drew him forward, and kissing his forehead several times said, “Oh, yes, yes, I bless you in my own name, and in the name of three generations of irreproachable men, who say through me, ‘The edifice which misfortune has destroyed, providence may build up again.’ On seeing me die such a death, the most inexorable will have pity on you. To you, perhaps, they will accord the time they have refused to me. Then do your best to keep our name free from dishonor. Go to work, labor, young man, struggle ardently and courageously; live, yourself, your mother and sister, with the most rigid economy, so that from day to day the property of those whom I leave in your hands may augment and fructify. Reflect how glorious a day it will be, how grand, how solemn, that day of complete restoration, on which you will say in this very office, ‘My father died because he could not do what I have this day done; but he died calmly and peaceably, because in dying he knew what I should do.’“

“My father, my father!” cried the young man, “why should you not live?”

“If I live, all would be changed; if I live, interest would be converted into doubt, pity into hostility; if I live I am only a man who his broken his word, failed in his engagements — in fact, only a bankrupt. If, on the contrary, I die, remember, Maximilian, my corpse is that of an honest but unfortunate man. Living, my best friends would avoid my house; dead, all Marseilles will follow me in tears to my last home. Living, you would feel shame at my name; dead, you may raise your head and say, ‘I am the son of him you killed, because, for the first time, he has been compelled to break his word.’“

The young man uttered a groan, but appeared resigned.

“And now,” said Morrel, “leave me alone, and endeavor to keep your mother and sister away.”

“Will you not see my sister once more?” asked Maximilian. A last but final hope was concealed by the young man in the effect of this interview, and therefore he had suggested it. Morrel shook his head. “I saw her this morning, and bade her adieu.”

“Have you no particular commands to leave with me, my father?” inquired Maximilian in a faltering voice.

“Yes; my son, and a sacred command.”

“Say it, my father.”

“The house of Thomson & French is the only one who, from humanity, or, it may be, selfishness — it is not for me to read men’s hearts — has had any pity for me. Its agent, who will in ten minutes present himself to receive the amount of a bill of 287,500 francs, I will not say granted, but offered me three months. Let this house be the first repaid, my son, and respect this man.”

“Father, I will,” said Maximilian.

“And now, once more, adieu,” said Morrel. “Go, leave me; I would be alone. You will find my will in the secretary in my bedroom.”

The young man remained standing and motionless, having but the force of will and not the power of execution.

“Hear me, Maximilian,” said his father. “Suppose I was a soldier like you, and ordered to carry a certain redoubt, and you knew I must be killed in the assault, would you not say to me, as you said just now, ‘Go, father; for you are dishonored by delay, and death is preferable to shame!’“

“Yes, yes,” said the young man, “yes;” and once again embracing his father with convulsive pressure, he said, “Be it so, my father.”

And he rushed out of the study. When his son had left him, Morrel remained an instant standing with his eyes fixed on the door; then putting forth his arm, he pulled the bell. After a moment’s interval, Cocles appeared.

It was no longer the same man — the fearful revelations of the three last days had crushed him. This thought — the house of Morrel is about to stop payment — bent him to the earth more than twenty years would otherwise have done.

“My worthy Cocles,” said Morrel in a tone impossible to describe, “do you remain in the ante-chamber. When the gentleman who came three months ago — the agent of Thomson & French — arrives, announce his arrival to me.” Cocles made no reply; he made a sign with his head, went into the anteroom, and seated himself. Morrel fell back in his chair, his eyes fixed on the clock; there were seven minutes left, that was all. The hand moved on with incredible rapidity, he seemed to see its motion.

What passed in the mind of this man at the supreme moment of his agony cannot be told in words. He was still comparatively young, he was surrounded by the loving care of a devoted family, but he had convinced himself by a course of reasoning, illogical perhaps, yet certainly plausible, that he must separate himself from all he held dear in the world, even life itself. To form the slightest idea of his feelings, one must have seen his face with its expression of enforced resignation and its tear-moistened eyes raised to heaven. The minute hand moved on. The pistols were loaded; he stretched forth his hand, took one up, and murmured his daughter’s name. Then he laid it down seized his pen, and wrote a few words. It seemed to him as if he had not taken a sufficient farewell of his beloved daughter. Then he turned again to the clock, counting time now not by minutes, but by seconds. He took up the deadly weapon again, his lips parted and his eyes fixed on the clock, and then shuddered at the click of the trigger as he cocked the pistol. At this moment of mortal anguish the cold sweat came forth upon his brow, a pang stronger than death clutched at his heart-strings. He heard the door of the staircase creak on its hinges — the clock gave its warning to strike eleven — the door of his study opened; Morrel did not turn round — he expected these words of Cocles, “The agent of Thomson & French.”

He placed the muzzle of the pistol between his teeth. Suddenly he heard a cry — it was his daughter’s voice. He turned and saw Julie. The pistol fell from his hands. “My father!” cried the young girl, out of breath, and half dead with joy — ”saved, you are saved!” And she threw herself into his arms, holding in her extended hand a red, netted silk purse.

“Saved, my child!” said Morrel; “what do you mean?”

“Yes, saved — saved! See, see!” said the young girl.

Morrel took the purse, and started as he did so, for a vague remembrance reminded him that it once belonged to himself. At one end was the receipted bill for the 287,000 francs, and at the other was a diamond as large as a hazel-nut, with these words on a small slip of parchment: — Julie’s Dowry.

Morrel passed his hand over his brow; it seemed to him a dream. At this moment the clock struck eleven. He felt as if each stroke of the hammer fell upon his heart. “Explain, my child,” he said, “Explain, my child,” he said, “explain — where did you find this purse?”

“In a house in the Allees de Meillan, No. 15, on the corner of a mantelpiece in a small room on the fifth floor.”

“But,” cried Morrel, “this purse is not yours!” Julie handed to her father the letter she had received in the morning.

“And did you go alone?” asked Morrel, after he had read it.

“Emmanuel accompanied me, father. He was to have waited for me at the corner of the Rue de Musee, but, strange to say, he was not there when I returned.”

“Monsieur Morrel!” exclaimed a voice on the stairs. — ”Monsieur Morrel!”

“It is his voice!” said Julie. At this moment Emmanuel entered, his countenance full of animation and joy. “The Pharaon!” he cried; “the Pharaon!”

“What — what — the Pharaon! Are you mad, Emmanuel? You know the vessel is lost.”

“The Pharaon, sir — they signal the Pharaon! The Pharaon is entering the harbor!” Morrel fell back in his chair, his strength was failing him; his understanding weakened by such events, refused to comprehend such incredible, unheard-of, fabulous facts. But his son came in. “Father,” cried

Maximilian, “how could you say the Pharaon was lost? The lookout has signalled her, and they say she is now coming into port.”

“My dear friends,” said Morrel, “if this be so, it must be a miracle of heaven! Impossible, impossible!”

But what was real and not less incredible was the purse he held in his hand, the acceptance receipted — the splendid diamond.

“Ah, sir,” exclaimed Cocles, “what can it mean? — the Pharaon?”

“Come, dear ones,” said Morrel, rising from his seat, “let us go and see, and heaven have pity upon us if it be false intelligence!” They all went out, and on the stairs met Madame Morrel, who had been afraid to go up into the study. In a moment they were at the Cannebiere. There was a crowd on the pier. All the crowd gave way before Morrel. “The Pharaon, the Pharaon!” said every voice.

And, wonderful to see, in front of the tower of Saint-Jean, was a ship bearing on her stern these words, printed in white letters, “The Pharaon, Morrel & Son, of Marseilles.” She was the exact duplicate of the other Pharaon, and loaded, as that had been, with cochineal and indigo. She cast anchor, clued up sails, and on the deck was Captain Gaumard giving orders, and good old Penelon making signals to M. Morrel. To doubt any longer was impossible; there was the evidence of the senses, and ten thousand persons who came to corroborate the testimony. As Morrel and his son embraced on the pier-head, in the presence and amid the applause of the whole city witnessing this event, a man, with his face half-covered by a black beard, and who, concealed behind the sentry-box, watched the scene with delight, uttered these words in a low tone: “Be happy, noble heart, be blessed for all the good thou hast done and wilt do hereafter, and let my gratitude remain in obscurity like your good deeds.”

And with a smile expressive of supreme content, he left his hiding-place, and without being observed, descended one of the flights of steps provided for debarkation, and hailing three times, shouted “Jacopo, Jacopo, Jacopo!” Then a launch came to shore, took him on board, and conveyed him to a yacht splendidly fitted up, on whose deck he sprung with the activity of a sailor; thence he once again looked towards Morrel, who, weeping with joy, was shaking hands most cordially with all the crowd around him, and thanking with a look the unknown benefactor whom he seemed to be seeking in the skies. “And now,” said the unknown, “farewell kindness, humanity, and gratitude! Farewell to all the feelings that expand the heart! I have been heaven’s substitute to recompense the good — now the god of vengeance yields to me his power to punish the wicked!” At these words he gave a signal, and, as if only awaiting this signal, the yacht instantly put out to sea.

Chapter 31

Italy: Sinbad the Sailor.

Towards the beginning of the year 1838, two young men belonging to the first society of Paris, the Vicomte Albert de Morcerf and the Baron Franz d’Epinay, were at Florence. They had agreed to see the Carnival at Rome that year, and that Franz, who for the last three or four years had inhabited Italy, should act as cicerone to Albert. As it is no inconsiderable affair to spend the Carnival at Rome, especially when you have no great desire to sleep on the Piazza del Popolo, or the Campo Vaccino, they wrote to Signor Pastrini, the proprietor of the Hotel de Londres, Piazza di Spagna, to reserve comfortable apartments for them. Signor Pastrini replied that he had only two rooms and a parlor on the third floor, which he offered at the low charge of a louis per diem. They accepted his offer; but wishing to make the best use of the time that was left, Albert started for Naples. As for Franz, he remained at Florence, and after having passed a few days in exploring the paradise of the Cascine, and spending two or three evenings at the houses of the Florentine nobility, he took a fancy into his head (having already visited Corsica, the cradle of Bonaparte) to visit Elba, the waiting-place of Napoleon.

One evening he cast off the painter of a sailboat from the iron ring that secured it to the dock at Leghorn, wrapped himself in his coat and lay down, and said to the crew, — ”To the Island of Elba!” The boat shot out of the harbor like a bird and the next morning Franz disembarked at Porto-Ferrajo. He traversed the island, after having followed the traces which the footsteps of the giant have left, and re-embarked for Marciana. Two hours after he again landed at Pianosa, where he was assured that red partridges abounded. The sport was bad; Franz only succeeded in killing a few partridges, and, like every unsuccessful sportsman, he returned to the boat very much out of temper. “Ah, if your excellency chose,” said the captain, “you might have capital sport.”

“Where?”

"Do you see that island?" continued the captain, pointing to a conical pile rising from the indigo sea.

"Well, what is this island?"

"The Island of Monte Cristo."

"But I have no permission to shoot over this island."

"Your excellency does not require a permit, for the island is uninhabited."

"Ah, indeed!" said the young man. "A desert island in the midst of the Mediterranean must be a curiosity."

"It is very natural; this island is a mass of rocks, and does not contain an acre of land capable of cultivation."

"To whom does this island belong?"

"To Tuscany."

"What game shall I find there!"

"Thousands of wild goats."

"Who live upon the stones, I suppose," said Franz with an incredulous smile.

"No, but by browsing the shrubs and trees that grow out of the crevices of the rocks."

"Where can I sleep?"

"On shore in the grottos, or on board in your cloak; besides, if your excellency pleases, we can leave as soon as you like — we can sail as well by night as by day, and if the wind drops we can use our oars."

As Franz had sufficient time, and his apartments at Rome were not yet available, he accepted the proposition. Upon his answer in the affirmative, the sailors exchanged a few words together in a low tone. "Well," asked he, "what now? Is there any difficulty in the way?"

"No." replied the captain, "but we must warn your excellency that the island is an infected port."

"What do you mean?"

"Monte Cristo although uninhabited, yet serves occasionally as a refuge for the smugglers and pirates who come from Corsica, Sardinia, and Africa, and if it becomes known that we have been there, we shall have to perform quarantine for six days on our return to Leghorn."

"The deuce! That puts a different face on the matter. Six days! Why, that's as long as the Almighty took to make the world! Too long a wait — too long."

"But who will say your excellency has been to Monte Cristo?"

"Oh, I shall not," cried Franz.

"Nor I, nor I," chorused the sailors.

"Then steer for Monte Cristo."

The captain gave his orders, the helm was put up, and the boat was soon sailing in the direction of the island. Franz waited until all was in order, and when the sail was filled, and the four sailors had taken their places — three forward, and one at the helm — he resumed the conversation. "Gaetano," said he to the captain, "you tell me Monte Cristo serves as a refuge for pirates, who are, it seems to me, a very different kind of game from the goats."

"Yes, your excellency, and it is true."

"I knew there were smugglers, but I thought that since the capture of Algiers, and the destruction of the regency, pirates existed only in the romances of Cooper and Captain Marryat."

"Your excellency is mistaken; there are pirates, like the bandits who were believed to have been exterminated by Pope Leo XII., and who yet, every day, rob travellers at the gates of Rome. Has not your excellency heard that the French charge d'affaires was robbed six months ago within five hundred paces of Velletri?"

"Oh, yes, I heard that."

"Well, then, if, like us, your excellency lived at Leghorn, you would hear, from time to time, that a little merchant vessel, or an English yacht that was expected at Bastia, at Porto-Ferrajo, or at Civita Vecchia, has not arrived; no one knows what has become of it, but, doubtless, it has struck on a rock and foundered. Now this rock it has met has been a long and narrow boat, manned by six or eight men, who have surprised and plundered it, some dark and stormy night, near some desert and gloomy island, as bandits plunder a carriage in the recesses of a forest."

"But," asked Franz, who lay wrapped in his cloak at the bottom of the boat, "why do not those who have been plundered complain to the French, Sardinian, or Tuscan governments?"

"Why?" said Gaetano with a smile.

"Yes, why?"

"Because, in the first place, they transfer from the vessel to their own boat whatever they think worth taking, then they bind the crew hand and foot, they attach to every one's neck a four and twenty pound ball, a large hole is chopped in the vessel's bottom, and then they leave her. At the end of ten minutes the vessel begins to roll heavily and settle down. First one gun'l goes under, then the other. Then they lift and sink again, and both go under at once. All at once there's a noise like a cannon — that's the air blowing up the deck. Soon the water rushes out of the scupper-holes like a whale spouting, the vessel gives a last groan, spins round and round, and disappears, forming a vast whirlpool in the ocean, and then all is over, so that in five minutes nothing but the eye of God can see the vessel where she lies at the bottom of the sea. Do you understand now," said the captain, "why no complaints are made to the government, and why the vessel never reaches port?"

It is probable that if Gaetano had related this previous to proposing the expedition, Franz would have hesitated, but now that they had started, he thought it would be cowardly to draw back. He was one of those men who do not rashly court danger, but if danger presents itself, combat it with the most unalterable coolness. Calm and resolute, he treated any peril as he would an adversary in a duel, — calculated its probable method of approach; retreated, if at all, as a point of strategy and not from cowardice; was quick to see an opening for attack, and won victory at a single thrust. "Bah!" said he, "I have travelled through Sicily and Calabria — I have sailed two months in the Archipelago, and yet I never saw even the shadow of a bandit or a pirate."

"I did not tell your excellency this to deter you from your project," replied Gaetano, "but you questioned me, and I have answered; that's all."

"Yes, and your conversation is most interesting; and as I wish to enjoy it as long as possible, steer for Monte Cristo."

The wind blew strongly, the boat made six or seven knots an hour, and they were rapidly reaching the end of their voyage. As they drew near the island seemed to lift from the sea, and the air was so clear that they could already distinguish the rocks heaped on one another, like cannon balls in an arsenal, with green bushes and trees growing in the crevices. As for the sailors, although they appeared perfectly tranquil yet it was evident that they were on the alert, and that they carefully watched the glassy surface over which they were sailing, and on which a few fishing-boats, with their white sails, were alone visible. They were within fifteen miles of Monte Cristo when the sun began to set behind Corsica, whose mountains appeared against the sky, showing their rugged peaks in bold relief; this mass of rock, like the giant Adamastor, rose dead ahead, a formidable barrier, and intercepting the light that gilded its massive peaks so that the voyagers were in shadow. Little by little the shadow rose higher and seemed to drive before it the last rays of the expiring day; at last the reflection rested on the summit of the mountain, where it paused an instant, like the fiery crest of a volcano, then gloom gradually covered the summit as it had covered the base, and the island now only appeared to be a gray mountain that grew continually darker; half an hour after, the night was quite dark.

Fortunately, the mariners were used to these latitudes, and knew every rock in the Tuscan Archipelago; for in the midst of this obscurity Franz was not without uneasiness — Corsica had long since disappeared, and Monte Cristo itself was invisible; but the sailors seemed, like the lynx, to see in the dark, and the pilot who steered did not evince the slightest hesitation. An hour had passed since the sun had set, when Franz fancied he saw, at a quarter of a mile to the left, a dark mass, but he could not precisely make out what it was, and fearing to excite the mirth of the sailors by mistaking a floating cloud for land, he remained silent; suddenly a great light appeared on the strand; land might resemble a cloud, but the fire was not a meteor. "What is this light?" asked he.

"Hush!" said the captain; "it is a fire."

"But you told me the island was uninhabited?"

"I said there were no fixed habitations on it, but I said also that it served sometimes as a harbor for smugglers."

"And for pirates?"

"And for pirates," returned Gaetano, repeating Franz's words. "It is for that reason I have given orders to pass the island, for, as you see, the fire is behind us."

"But this fire?" continued Franz. "It seems to me rather reassuring than otherwise; men who did not wish to be seen would not light a fire."

"Oh, that goes for nothing," said Gaetano. "If you can guess the position of the island in the darkness, you will see that the fire cannot be seen from the side or from Pianosa, but only from the sea."

"You think, then, this fire indicates the presence of unpleasant neighbors?"

"That is what we must find out," returned Gaetano, fixing his eyes on this terrestrial star.

"How can you find out?"

“You shall see.” Gaetano consulted with his companions, and after five minutes’ discussion a manoeuvre was executed which caused the vessel to tack about, they returned the way they had come, and in a few minutes the fire disappeared, hidden by an elevation of the land. The pilot again changed the course of the boat, which rapidly approached the island, and was soon within fifty paces of it. Gaetano lowered the sail, and the boat came to rest. All this was done in silence, and from the moment that their course was changed not a word was spoken.

Gaetano, who had proposed the expedition, had taken all the responsibility on himself; the four sailors fixed their eyes on him, while they got out their oars and held themselves in readiness to row away, which, thanks to the darkness, would not be difficult. As for Franz, he examined his arms with the utmost coolness; he had two double-barrelled guns and a rifle; he loaded them, looked at the priming, and waited quietly. During this time the captain had thrown off his vest and shirt, and secured his trousers round his waist; his feet were naked, so he had no shoes and stockings to take off; after these preparations he placed his finger on his lips, and lowering himself noiselessly into the sea, swam towards the shore with such precaution that it was impossible to hear the slightest sound; he could only be traced by the phosphorescent line in his wake. This track soon disappeared; it was evident that he had touched the shore. Every one on board remained motionless for half an hour, when the same luminous track was again observed, and the swimmer was soon on board. “Well?” exclaimed Franz and the sailors in unison.

“They are Spanish smugglers,” said he; “they have with them two Corsican bandits.”

“And what are these Corsican bandits doing here with Spanish smugglers?”

“Alas,” returned the captain with an accent of the most profound pity, “we ought always to help one another. Very often the bandits are hard pressed by gendarmes or carbineers; well, they see a vessel, and good fellows like us on board, they come and demand hospitality of us; you can’t refuse help to a poor hunted devil; we receive them, and for greater security we stand out to sea. This costs us nothing, and saves the life, or at least the liberty, of a fellow-creature, who on the first occasion returns the service by pointing out some safe spot where we can land our goods without interruption.”

“Ah!” said Franz, “then you are a smuggler occasionally, Gaetano?”

“Your excellency, we must live somehow,” returned the other, smiling impenetrably.

“Then you know the men who are now on Monte Cristo?”

“Oh, yes, we sailors are like freemasons, and recognize each other by signs.”

“And do you think we have nothing to fear if we land?”

“Nothing at all; smugglers are not thieves.”

“But these two Corsican bandits?” said Franz, calculating the chances of peril.

“It is not their fault that they are bandits, but that of the authorities.”

“How so?”

“Because they are pursued for having made a stiff, as if it was not in a Corsican’s nature to revenge himself.”

“What do you mean by having made a stiff? — having assassinated a man?” said Franz, continuing his investigation.

“I mean that they have killed an enemy, which is a very different thing,” returned the captain.

“Well,” said the young man, “let us demand hospitality of these smugglers and bandits. Do you think they will grant it?”

“Without doubt.”

“How many are they?”

“Four, and the two bandits make six.”

“Just our number, so that if they prove troublesome, we shall be able to hold them in check; so, for the last time, steer to Monte Cristo.”

“Yes, but your excellency will permit us to take all due precautions.”

“By all means, be as wise as Nestor and as prudent as Ulysses; I do more than permit, I exhort you.”

“Silence, then!” said Gaetano.

Every one obeyed. For a man who, like Franz, viewed his position in its true light, it was a grave one. He was alone in the darkness with sailors whom he did not know, and who had no reason to be devoted to him; who knew that he had several thousand francs in his belt, and who had often examined his weapons, — which were very beautiful, — if not with envy, at least with curiosity. On the other hand, he was about to land, without any other escort than these men, on an island which had, indeed, a very religious name, but which did not seem to Franz likely to afford him much hospitality, thanks to the smugglers and bandits. The history of the scuttled vessels, which had appeared improbable during the day, seemed very probable at night; placed as he was between two possible sources of danger, he kept his eye on the crew, and his gun in his hand. The sailors had again hoisted sail, and the vessel was once more cleaving the waves. Through the darkness Franz, whose eyes were now more accustomed to it, could see the looming shore along which the boat was sailing, and then, as they rounded a rocky point, he saw the fire more brilliant than ever, and about it five or six persons seated. The blaze illumined the sea for a hundred paces around. Gaetano skirted the light, carefully keeping the boat in the shadow; then, when they were opposite the fire, he steered to the centre of the circle, singing a fishing song, of which his companions sung the chorus. At the first words of the song the men seated round the fire arose and approached the landing-place, their eyes fixed on the boat, evidently seeking to know who the new-comers were and what were their intentions. They soon appeared satisfied and returned (with the exception of one, who remained at the shore) to their fire, at which the carcass of a goat was roasting. When the boat was within twenty paces of the shore, the man on the beach, who carried a carbine, presented arms after the manner of a sentinel, and cried, “Who comes there?” in Sardinian. Franz coolly cocked both barrels. Gaetano then exchanged a few words with this man which the traveller did not understand, but which evidently concerned him. “Will your excellency give your name, or remain incognito?” asked the captain.

“My name must rest unknown, — merely say I am a Frenchman travelling for pleasure.” As soon as Gaetano had transmitted this answer, the sentinel gave an order to one of the men seated round the fire, who rose and disappeared among the rocks. Not a word was spoken, every one seemed occupied, Franz with his disembarkment, the sailors with their sails, the smugglers with their goat; but in the midst of all this carelessness it was evident that they mutually observed each other. The man who had disappeared returned suddenly on the opposite side to that by which he had left; he made a sign with his head to the sentinel, who, turning to the boat, said, “S’accommodi.” The Italian s’accommodi is untranslatable; it means at once, “Come, enter, you are welcome; make yourself at home; you are the master.” It is like that Turkish phrase of Moliere’s that so astonished the bourgeois gentleman by the number of things implied in its utterance. The sailors did not wait for a second invitation; four strokes of the oar brought them to land; Gaetano sprang to shore, exchanged a few words with the sentinel, then his comrades disembarked, and lastly came Franz. One of his guns was swung over his shoulder, Gaetano had the other, and a sailor held his rifle; his dress, half artist, half dandy, did not excite any suspicion, and, consequently, no disquietude. The boat was moored to the shore, and they advanced a few paces to find a comfortable bivouac; but, doubtless, the spot they chose did not suit the smuggler who filled the post of sentinel, for he cried out, “Not that way, if you please.”

Gaetano faltered an excuse, and advanced to the opposite side, while two sailors kindled torches at the fire to light them on their way. They advanced about thirty paces, and then stopped at a small esplanade surrounded with rocks, in which seats had been cut, not unlike sentry-boxes. Around in the crevices of the rocks grew a few dwarf oaks and thick bushes of myrtles. Franz lowered a torch, and saw by the mass of cinders that had accumulated that he was not the first to discover this retreat, which was, doubtless, one of the halting-places of the wandering visitors of Monte Cristo. As for his suspicions, once on terra firma, once that he had seen the indifferent, if not friendly, appearance of his hosts, his anxiety had quite disappeared, or rather, at sight of the goat, had turned to appetite. He mentioned this to Gaetano, who replied that nothing could be more easy than to prepare a supper when they had in their boat, bread, wine, half a dozen partridges, and a good fire to roast them by. “Besides,” added he, “if the smell of their roast meat tempts you, I will go and offer them two of our birds for a slice.”

“You are a born diplomat,” returned Franz; “go and try.”

Meanwhile the sailors had collected dried sticks and branches with which they made a fire. Franz waited impatiently, inhaling the aroma of the roasted meat, when the captain returned with a mysterious air.

“Well,” said Franz, “anything new? — do they refuse?”

“On the contrary,” returned Gaetano, “the chief, who was told you were a young Frenchman, invites you to sup with him.”

“Well,” observed Franz, “this chief is very polite, and I see no objection — the more so as I bring my share of the supper.”

“Oh, it is not that; he has plenty, and to spare, for supper; but he makes one condition, and rather a peculiar one, before he will receive you at his house.”

“His house? Has he built one here, then?”

“No; but he has a very comfortable one all the same, so they say.”

“You know this chief, then?”

“I have heard talk of him.”

“Favorably or otherwise?”

“Both.”

“The deuce! — and what is this condition?”

“That you are blindfolded, and do not take off the bandage until he himself bids you.” Franz looked at Gaetano, to see, if possible, what he thought of this proposal. “Ah,” replied he, guessing Franz’s thought, “I know this is a serious matter.”

“What should you do in my place?”

“I, who have nothing to lose, — I should go.”

“You would accept?”

“Yes, were it only out of curiosity.”

“There is something very peculiar about this chief, then?”

“Listen,” said Gaetano, lowering his voice, “I do not know if what they say is true” — he stopped to see if any one was near.

“What do they say?”

“That this chief inhabits a cavern to which the Pitti Palace is nothing.”

“What nonsense!” said Franz, reseating himself.

“It is no nonsense; it is quite true. Cama, the pilot of the Saint Ferdinand, went in once, and he came back amazed, vowing that such treasures were only to be heard of in fairy tales.”

“Do you know,” observed Franz, “that with such stories you make me think of Ali Baba’s enchanted cavern?”

“I tell you what I have been told.”

“Then you advise me to accept?”

“Oh, I don’t say that; your excellency will do as you please; I should be sorry to advise you in the matter.” Franz pondered the matter for a few moments, concluded that a man so rich could not have any intention of plundering him of what little he had, and seeing only the prospect of a good supper, accepted. Gaetano departed with the reply. Franz was prudent, and wished to learn all he possibly could concerning his host. He turned towards the sailor, who, during this dialogue, had sat gravely plucking the partridges with the air of a man proud of his office, and asked him how these men had landed, as no vessel of any kind was visible.

“Never mind that,” returned the sailor, “I know their vessel.”

“Is it a very beautiful vessel?”

“I would not wish for a better to sail round the world.”

“Of what burden is she?”

“About a hundred tons; but she is built to stand any weather. She is what the English call a yacht.”

“Where was she built?”

“I know not; but my own opinion is she is a Genoese.”

“And how did a leader of smugglers,” continued Franz, “venture to build a vessel designed for such a purpose at Genoa?”

“I did not say that the owner was a smuggler,” replied the sailor.

“No; but Gaetano did, I thought.”

“Gaetano had only seen the vessel from a distance, he had not then spoken to any one.”

“And if this person be not a smuggler, who is he?”

“A wealthy signor, who travels for his pleasure.”

“Come,” thought Franz, “he is still more mysterious, since the two accounts do not agree.”

“What is his name?”

“If you ask him he says Sinbad the Sailor; but I doubt if it be his real name.”

“Sinbad the Sailor?”

“Yes.”

“And where does he reside?”

“On the sea.”

“What country does he come from?”

“I do not know.”

“Have you ever seen him?”

“Sometimes.”

“What sort of a man is he?”

“Your excellency will judge for yourself.”

“Where will he receive me?”

“No doubt in the subterranean palace Gaetano told you of.”

“Have you never had the curiosity, when you have landed and found this island deserted, to seek for this enchanted palace?”

“Oh, yes, more than once, but always in vain; we examined the grotto all over, but we never could find the slightest trace of any opening; they say that the door is not opened by a key, but a magic word.”

“Decidedly,” muttered Franz, “this is an Arabian Nights’ adventure.”

“His excellency waits for you,” said a voice, which he recognized as that of the sentinel. He was accompanied by two of the yacht’s crew. Franz drew his handkerchief from his pocket, and presented it to the man who had spoken to him. Without uttering a word, they bandaged his eyes with a care that showed their apprehensions of his committing some indiscretion. Afterwards he was made to promise that he would not make the least attempt to raise the bandage. He promised. Then his two guides took his arms, and he went on, guided by them, and preceded by the sentinel. After going about thirty paces, he smelt the appetizing odor of the kid that was roasting, and knew thus that he was passing the bivouac; they then led him on about fifty paces farther, evidently advancing towards that part of the shore where they would not allow Gaetano to go — a refusal he could now comprehend. Presently, by a change in the atmosphere, he knew that they were entering a cave; after going on for a few seconds more he heard a crackling, and it seemed to him as though the atmosphere again changed, and became balmy and perfumed. At length his feet touched on a thick and soft carpet, and his guides let go their hold of him. There was a moment’s silence, and then a voice, in excellent French, although, with a foreign accent, said, “Welcome, sir. I beg you will remove your bandage.” It may be supposed, then, Franz did not wait for a repetition of this permission, but took off the handkerchief, and found himself in the presence of a man from thirty-eight to forty years of age, dressed in a Tunisian costume — that is to say, a red cap with a long blue silk tassel, a vest of black cloth embroidered with gold, pantaloons of deep red, large and full gaiters of the same color, embroidered with gold like the vest, and yellow slippers; he had a splendid cashmere round his waist, and a small sharp and crooked cangiar was passed through his girdle. Although of a paleness that was almost livid, this man had a remarkably handsome face; his eyes were penetrating and sparkling; his nose, quite straight, and projecting direct from the brow, was of the pure Greek type, while his teeth, as white as pearls, were set off to admiration by the black mustache that encircled them.

His pallor was so peculiar, that it seemed to pertain to one who had been long entombed, and who was incapable of resuming the healthy glow and hue of life. He was not particularly tall, but extremely well made, and, like the men of the south, had small hands and feet. But what astonished Franz, who had treated Gaetano’s description as a fable, was the splendor of the apartment in which he found himself. The entire chamber was lined with crimson brocade, worked with flowers of gold. In a recess was a kind of divan, surmounted with a stand of Arabian swords in silver scabbards, and the handles resplendent with gems; from the ceiling hung a lamp of Venetian glass, of beautiful shape and color, while the feet rested on a Turkey carpet, in which they sunk to the instep; tapestry hung before the door by which Franz had entered, and also in front of another door, leading into a second apartment which seemed to be brilliantly illuminated. The host gave Franz time to recover from his surprise, and, moreover, returned look for look, not even taking his eyes off him. “Sir,” he said, after a pause, “a thousand excuses for the precaution taken in your introduction hither; but as, during the greater portion of the year, this island is deserted, if the secret of this abode were discovered. I should doubtless, find on my return my temporary retirement in a state of great disorder, which would be exceedingly annoying, not for the loss it occasioned me, but because I should not have the certainty I now possess of separating myself from all the rest of mankind at pleasure. Let me now endeavor to make you forget this temporary unpleasantness, and offer you what no doubt you did not expect to find here — that is to say, a tolerable supper and pretty comfortable beds.”

“Ma foi, my dear sir,” replied Franz, “make no apologies. I have always observed that they bandage people’s eyes who penetrate enchanted palaces, for instance, those of Raoul in the ‘Huguenots,’ and really I have nothing to complain of, for what I see makes me think of the wonders of the ‘Arabian Nights.’“

“Alas, I may say with Lucullus, if I could have anticipated the honor of your visit, I would have prepared for it. But such as is my hermitage, it is at your disposal; such as is my supper, it is yours to share, if you will. Ali, is the supper ready?” At this moment the tapestry moved aside, and a Nubian, black as ebony, and dressed in a plain white tunic, made a sign to his master that all was prepared in the dining-room. “Now,” said the unknown to Franz, “I do not know if you are of my opinion, but I think nothing is more annoying than to remain two or three hours together without knowing by name or appellation how to address one another. Pray observe, that I too much respect the laws of hospitality to ask your name or title. I only request you to give me one by which I may have the pleasure of addressing you. As for myself, that I may put you at your ease, I tell you that I am generally called ‘Sinbad the Sailor.’“

“And I,” replied Franz, “will tell you, as I only require his wonderful lamp to make me precisely like Aladdin, that I see no reason why at this moment I should not be called Aladdin. That will keep us from going away from the East whither I am tempted to think I have been conveyed by some good genius.”

“Well, then, Signor Aladdin,” replied the singular amphitryon, “you heard our repast announced, will you now take the trouble to enter the dining-room, your humble servant going first to show the way?” At these words, moving aside the tapestry, Sinbad preceded his guest. Franz now looked upon another scene of enchantment; the table was splendidly covered, and once convinced of this important point he cast his eyes around him. The dining-room was scarcely less striking than the room he had just left; it was entirely of marble, with antique bas-reliefs of priceless value; and at the four corners of this apartment, which was oblong, were four magnificent statues, having baskets in their hands. These baskets contained four pyramids of most splendid fruit; there were Sicily pine-apples, pomegranates from Malaga, oranges from the Balearic Isles, peaches from France, and dates from Tunis. The supper consisted of a roast pheasant garnished with Corsican blackbirds; a boar’s ham with jelly, a quarter of a kid with tartar sauce, a glorious turbot, and a gigantic lobster. Between these large dishes were smaller ones containing various dainties. The dishes were of silver, and the plates of Japanese china.

Franz rubbed his eyes in order to assure himself that this was not a dream. Ali alone was present to wait at table, and acquitted himself so admirably, that the guest complimented his host thereupon. “Yes,” replied he, while he did the honors of the supper with much ease and grace — ”yes, he is a poor devil who is much devoted to me, and does all he can to prove it. He remembers that I saved his life, and as he has a regard for his head, he feels some gratitude towards me for having kept it on his shoulders.” Ali approached his master, took his hand, and kissed it.

“Would it be impertinent, Signor Sinbad,” said Franz, “to ask you the particulars of this kindness?”

“Oh, they are simple enough,” replied the host. “It seems the fellow had been caught wandering nearer to the harem of the Bey of Tunis than etiquette permits to one of his color, and he was condemned by the bey to have his tongue cut out, and his hand and head cut off; the tongue the first day, the hand the second, and the head the third. I always had a desire to have a mute in my service, so learning the day his tongue was cut out, I went to the bey, and proposed to give him for Ali a splendid double-barreled gun which I knew he was very desirous of having. He hesitated a moment, he was so very desirous to complete the poor devil's punishment. But when I added to the gun an English cutlass with which I had shivered his highness's yataghan to pieces, the bey yielded, and agreed to forgive the hand and head, but on condition that the poor fellow never again set foot in Tunis. This was a useless clause in the bargain, for whenever the coward sees the first glimpse of the shores of Africa, he runs down below, and can only be induced to appear again when we are out of sight of that quarter of the globe."

Franz remained a moment silent and pensive, hardly knowing what to think of the half-kindness, half-cruelty, with which his host related the brief narrative. "And like the celebrated sailor whose name you have assumed," he said, by way of changing the conversation, "you pass your life in travelling?"

"Yes. I made a vow at a time when I little thought I should ever be able to accomplish it," said the unknown with a singular smile; "and I made some others also which I hope I may fulfil in due season." Although Sinbad pronounced these words with much calmness, his eyes gave forth gleams of extraordinary ferocity.

"You have suffered a great deal, sir?" said Franz inquiringly.

Sinbad started and looked fixedly at him, as he replied, "What makes you suppose so?"

"Everything," answered Franz, — "your voice, your look, your pallid complexion, and even the life you lead."

"I? — I live the happiest life possible, the real life of a pasha. I am king of all creation. I am pleased with one place, and stay there; I get tired of it, and leave it; I am free as a bird and have wings like one; my attendants obey my slightest wish. Sometimes I amuse myself by delivering some bandit or criminal from the bonds of the law. Then I have my mode of dispensing justice, silent and sure, without respite or appeal, which condemns or pardons, and which no one sees. Ah, if you had tasted my life, you would not desire any other, and would never return to the world unless you had some great project to accomplish there."

"Revenge, for instance!" observed Franz.

The unknown fixed on the young man one of those looks which penetrate into the depth of the heart and thoughts. “And why revenge?” he asked.

“Because,” replied Franz, “you seem to me like a man who, persecuted by society, has a fearful account to settle with it.”

“Ah,” responded Sinbad, laughing with his singular laugh which displayed his white and sharp teeth. “You have not guessed rightly. Such as you see me I am, a sort of philosopher, and one day perhaps I shall go to Paris to rival Monsieur Appert, and the little man in the blue cloak.”

“And will that be the first time you ever took that journey?”

“Yes; it will. I must seem to you by no means curious, but I assure you that it is not my fault I have delayed it so long — it will happen one day or the other.”

“And do you propose to make this journey very shortly?”

“I do not know; it depends on circumstances which depend on certain arrangements.”

“I should like to be there at the time you come, and I will endeavor to repay you, as far as lies in my power, for your liberal hospitality displayed to me at Monte Cristo.”

“I should avail myself of your offer with pleasure,” replied the host, “but, unfortunately, if I go there, it will be, in all probability, incognito.”

The supper appeared to have been supplied solely for Franz, for the unknown scarcely touched one or two dishes of the splendid banquet to which his guest did ample justice. Then Ali brought on the dessert, or rather took the baskets from the hands of the statues and placed them on the table. Between the two baskets he placed a small silver cup with a silver cover. The care with which Ali placed this cup on the table roused Franz’s curiosity. He raised the cover and saw a kind of greenish paste, something like preserved angelica, but which was perfectly unknown to him. He replaced the lid, as ignorant of what the cup contained as he was before he had looked at it, and then casting his eyes towards his host he saw him smile at his disappointment. “You cannot guess,” said he, “what there is in that small vase, can you?”

“No, I really cannot.”

“Well, then, that green preserve is nothing less than the ambrosia which Hebe served at the table of Jupiter.”

“But,” replied Franz, “this ambrosia, no doubt, in passing through mortal hands has lost its heavenly appellation and assumed a human name; in vulgar phrase, what may you term this composition, for which, to tell the truth, I do not feel any particular desire?”

“Ah, thus it is that our material origin is revealed,” cried Sinbad; “we frequently pass so near to happiness without seeing, without regarding it, or if we do see and regard it, yet without recognizing it. Are you a man for the substantials, and is gold your god? taste this, and the mines of Peru, Guzerat, and Golconda are opened to you. Are you a man of imagination — a poet? taste this, and the boundaries of possibility disappear; the fields of infinite space open to you, you advance free in heart, free in mind, into the boundless realms of unfettered revery. Are you ambitious, and do you seek after the greatnesses of the earth? taste this, and in an hour you will be a king, not a king of a petty kingdom hidden in some corner of Europe like France, Spain, or England, but king of the world, king of the universe, king of creation; without bowing at the feet of Satan, you will be king and master of all the kingdoms of the earth. Is it not tempting what I offer you, and is it not an easy thing, since it is only to do thus? look!” At these words he uncovered the small cup which contained the substance so lauded, took a teaspoonful of the magic sweetmeat, raised it to his lips, and swallowed it slowly with his eyes half shut and his head bent backwards. Franz did not disturb him whilst he absorbed his favorite sweetmeat, but when he had finished, he inquired, — ”What, then, is this precious stuff?”

“Did you ever hear,” he replied, “of the Old Man of the Mountain, who attempted to assassinate Philip Augustus?”

“Of course I have.”

“Well, you know he reigned over a rich valley which was overhung by the mountain whence he derived his picturesque name. In this valley were magnificent gardens planted by Hassen-ben-Sabah, and in these gardens isolated pavilions. Into these pavilions he admitted the elect, and there, says Marco Polo, gave them to eat a certain herb, which transported them to Paradise, in the midst of ever-blooming shrubs, ever-ripe fruit, and ever-lovely virgins. What these happy persons took for reality was but a dream; but it was a dream so soft, so voluptuous, so enthralling, that they sold themselves body and soul to him who gave it to them, and obedient to his orders as to those of a deity, struck down the designated victim, died in torture without a murmur, believing that the death they underwent was but a quick transition to that life of delights of which the holy herb, now before you, had given them a slight foretaste.”

“Then,” cried Franz, “it is hashish! I know that — by name at least.”

“That is it precisely, Signor Aladdin; it is hashish — the purest and most unadulterated hashish of Alexandria, — the hashish of Abou-Gor, the celebrated maker, the only man, the man to whom there should be built a palace, inscribed with these words, ‘A grateful world to the dealer in happiness.’“

“Do you know,” said Franz, “I have a very great inclination to judge for myself of the truth or exaggeration of your eulogies.”

“Judge for yourself, Signor Aladdin — judge, but do not confine yourself to one trial. Like everything else, we must habituate the senses to a fresh impression, gentle or violent, sad or joyous. There is a struggle in nature against this divine substance, — in nature which is not made for joy and clings to pain. Nature subdued must yield in the combat, the dream must succeed to reality, and then the dream reigns supreme, then the dream becomes life, and life becomes the dream. But what changes occur! It is only by comparing the pains of actual being with the joys of the assumed existence, that you would desire to live no longer, but to dream thus forever. When you return to this mundane sphere from your visionary world, you would seem to leave a Neapolitan spring for a Lapland winter — to quit paradise for earth — heaven for hell! Taste the hashish, guest of mine — taste the hashish.”

Franz’s only reply was to take a teaspoonful of the marvellous preparation, about as much in quantity as his host had eaten, and lift it to his mouth. “Diable!” he said, after having swallowed the divine preserve. “I do not know if the result will be as agreeable as you describe, but the thing does not appear to me as palatable as you say.”

“Because your palate his not yet been attuned to the sublimity of the substances it flavors. Tell me, the first time you tasted oysters, tea, porter, truffles, and sundry other dainties which you now adore, did you like them? Could you comprehend how the Romans stuffed their pheasants with assafoetida, and the Chinese eat swallows’ nests? Eh? no! Well, it is the same with hashish; only eat for a week, and nothing in the world will seem to you to equal the delicacy of its flavor, which now appears to you flat and distasteful. Let us now go into the adjoining chamber, which is your apartment, and Ali will bring us coffee and pipes.” They both arose, and while he who called himself Sinbad — and whom we have occasionally named so, that we might, like his guest, have some title by which to distinguish him — gave some orders to the servant, Franz entered still another apartment. It was simply yet richly furnished. It was round, and a large divan completely encircled it. Divan, walls, ceiling, floor, were all covered with magnificent skins as soft and downy as the richest carpets; there were heavy-maned lion-skins from Atlas, striped tiger-skins from Bengal; panther-skins from the Cape, spotted beautifully, like those that appeared to Dante; bear-skins from Siberia, fox-skins from Norway, and so on; and all these skins were strewn in profusion one on the other, so that it seemed like walking over the most mossy turf, or reclining on the most luxurious bed. Both laid themselves down on the divan; chibouques with jasmine tubes and amber mouthpieces were within reach, and all prepared so that there was no need to smoke the same pipe twice. Each of them took one, which Ali lighted and then retired to prepare the coffee. There was a moment's silence, during which Sinbad gave himself up to thoughts that seemed to occupy him incessantly, even in the midst of his conversation; and Franz abandoned himself to that mute revery, into which we always sink when smoking excellent tobacco, which seems to remove with its fume all the troubles of the mind, and to give the smoker in exchange all the visions of the soul. Ali brought in the coffee. "How do you take it?" inquired the unknown; "in the French or Turkish style, strong or weak, sugar or none, cool or boiling? As you please; it is ready in all ways."

"I will take it in the Turkish style," replied Franz.

"And you are right," said his host; "it shows you have a tendency for an Oriental life. Ah, those Orientals; they are the only men who know how to live. As for me," he added, with one of those singular smiles which did not escape the young man, "when I have completed my affairs in Paris, I shall go and die in the East; and should you wish to see me again, you must seek me at Cairo, Bagdad, or Ispahan."

"Ma foi," said Franz, "it would be the easiest thing in the world; for I feel eagle's wings springing out at my shoulders, and with those wings I could make a tour of the world in four and twenty hours."

"Ah, yes, the hashish is beginning its work. Well, unfurl your wings, and fly into superhuman regions; fear nothing, there is a watch over you; and if your wings, like those of Icarus, melt before the sun, we are here to ease your fall." He then said something in Arabic to Ali, who made a sign of obedience and withdrew, but not to any distance. As to Franz a strange transformation had taken place in him. All the bodily fatigue of the day, all the preoccupation of mind which the events of the evening had brought on, disappeared as they do at the first approach of sleep, when we are still sufficiently conscious to be aware of the coming of slumber. His body seemed to acquire an airy lightness, his perception brightened in a remarkable manner, his senses seemed to redouble their power, the horizon continued to expand; but it was not the gloomy horizon of vague alarms, and which he had seen before he slept, but a blue, transparent, unbounded horizon, with all the blue of the ocean, all the spangles of the sun, all the perfumes of the summer breeze; then, in the midst of the songs of his sailors, — songs so clear and sonorous, that they would have made a divine harmony had their notes been taken down, — he saw the Island of Monte Cristo, no longer as a threatening rock in the midst of the waves, but as an oasis in the desert; then, as his boat drew nearer, the songs became louder, for an enchanting and mysterious harmony rose to heaven, as if some Loreley had decreed to attract a soul thither, or Amphion, the enchanter, intended there to build a city.

At length the boat touched the shore, but without effort, without shock, as lips touch lips; and he entered the grotto amidst continued strains of most delicious melody. He descended, or rather seemed to descend, several steps, inhaling the fresh and balmy air, like that which may be supposed to reign around the grotto of Circe, formed from such perfumes as set the mind a dreaming, and such fires as burn the very senses; and he saw again all he had seen before his sleep, from Sinbad, his singular host, to Ali, the mute attendant; then all seemed to fade away and become confused before his eyes, like the last shadows of the magic lantern before it is extinguished, and he was again in the chamber of statues, lighted only by one of those pale and antique lamps which watch in the dead of the night over the sleep of pleasure. They were the same statues, rich in form, in attraction, and poesy, with eyes of fascination, smiles of love, and bright and flowing hair. They were Phryne, Cleopatra, Messalina, those three celebrated courtesans. Then among them glided like a pure ray, like a Christian angel in the midst of Olympus, one of those chaste figures, those calm shadows, those soft visions, which seemed to veil its virgin brow before these marble wantons. Then the three statues advanced towards him with looks of love, and approached the couch on which he was reposing, their feet hidden in their long white tunics, their throats bare, hair flowing like waves, and assuming attitudes which the gods could not resist, but which saints withstood, and looks inflexible and ardent like those with which the serpent charms the bird; and then he gave way before looks that held him in a torturing grasp and delighted his senses as with a voluptuous kiss. It seemed to Franz that he closed his eyes, and in a last look about him saw the vision of modesty completely veiled; and then followed a dream of passion like that promised by the Prophet to the elect. Lips of stone turned to flame, breasts of ice became like heated lava, so that to Franz, yielding for the first time to the sway of the drug, love was a sorrow and voluptuousness a torture, as burning mouths were pressed to his thirsty lips, and he was held in cool serpent-like embraces. The more he strove against this unhallowed passion the more his senses yielded to its thrall, and at length, weary of a struggle that taxed his very soul, he gave way and sank back breathless and exhausted beneath the kisses of these marble goddesses, and the enchantment of his marvellous dream.

Chapter 32

The Waking.

When Franz returned to himself, he seemed still to be in a dream. He thought himself in a sepulchre, into which a ray of sunlight in pity scarcely penetrated. He stretched forth his hand, and touched stone; he rose to his seat, and found himself lying on his bournous in a bed of dry heather, very soft and odoriferous. The vision had fled; and as if the statues had been but shadows from the tomb, they had vanished at his waking. He advanced several paces towards the point whence the light came, and to all the excitement of his dream succeeded the calmness of reality. He found that he was in a grotto, went towards the opening, and through a kind of fanlight saw a blue sea and an azure sky. The air and water were shining in the beams of the morning sun; on the shore the sailors were sitting, chatting and laughing; and at ten yards from them the boat was at anchor, undulating gracefully on the water. There for some time he enjoyed the fresh breeze which played on his brow, and listened to the dash of the waves on the beach, that left against the rocks a lace of foam as white as silver. He was for some time without reflection or thought for the divine charm which is in the things of nature, specially after a fantastic dream; then gradually this view of the outer world, so calm, so pure, so grand, reminded him of the illusiveness of his vision, and once more awakened memory. He recalled his arrival on the island, his presentation to a smuggler chief, a subterranean palace full of splendor, an excellent supper, and a spoonful of hashish. It seemed, however, even in the very face of open day, that at least a year had elapsed since all these things had passed, so deep was the impression made in his mind by the dream, and so strong a hold had it taken of his imagination. Thus every now and then he saw in fancy amid the sailors, seated on a rock, or undulating in the vessel, one of the shadows which had shared his dream with looks and kisses. Otherwise, his head was perfectly clear, and his body refreshed; he was free from the slightest headache; on the contrary, he felt a certain degree of lightness, a faculty for absorbing the pure air, and enjoying the bright sunshine more vividly than ever.

He went gayly up to the sailors, who rose as soon as they perceived him; and the patron, accosting him, said, “The Signor Sinbad has left his compliments for your excellency, and desires us to express the regret he feels at not being able to take his leave in person; but he trusts you will excuse him, as very important business calls him to Malaga.”

“So, then, Gaetano,” said Franz, “this is, then, all reality; there exists a man who has received me in this island, entertained me right royally, and his departed while I was asleep?”

“He exists as certainly as that you may see his small yacht with all her sails spread; and if you will use your glass, you will, in all probability, recognize your host in the midst of his crew.” So saying, Gaetano pointed in a direction in which a small vessel was making sail towards the southern point of Corsica. Franz adjusted his telescope, and directed it towards the yacht. Gaetano was not mistaken. At the stern the mysterious stranger was standing up looking towards the shore, and holding a spy-glass in his hand. He was attired as he had been on the previous evening, and waved his pocket-handkerchief to his guest in token of adieu. Franz returned the salute by shaking his handkerchief as an exchange of signals. After a second, a slight cloud of smoke was seen at the stern of the vessel, which rose gracefully as it expanded in the air, and then Franz heard a slight report. “There, do you hear?” observed Gaetano; “he is bidding you adieu.” The young man took his carbine and fired it in the air, but without any idea that the noise could be heard at the distance which separated the yacht from the shore.

“What are your excellency’s orders?” inquired Gaetano.

“In the first place, light me a torch.”

“Ah, yes, I understand,” replied the patron, “to find the entrance to the enchanted apartment. With much pleasure, your excellency, if it would amuse you; and I will get you the torch you ask for. But I too have had the idea you have, and two or three times the same fancy has come over me; but I have always given it up. Giovanni, light a torch,” he added, “and give it to his excellency.”

Giovanni obeyed. Franz took the lamp, and entered the subterranean grotto, followed by Gaetano. He recognized the place where he had awaked by the bed of heather that was there; but it was in vain that he carried his torch all round the exterior surface of the grotto. He saw nothing, unless that, by traces of smoke, others had before him attempted the same thing, and, like him, in vain. Yet he did not leave a foot of this granite wall, as impenetrable as futurity, without strict scrutiny; he did not see a fissure without introducing the blade of his hunting sword into it, or a projecting point on which he did not lean and press in the hopes it would give way. All was vain; and he lost two hours in his attempts, which were at last utterly useless. At the end of this time he gave up his search, and Gaetano smiled.

When Franz appeared again on the shore, the yacht only seemed like a small white speck on the horizon. He looked again through his glass, but even then he could not distinguish anything. Gaetano reminded him that he had come for the purpose of shooting goats, which he had utterly forgotten. He took his fowling-piece, and began to hunt over the island with the air of a man who is fulfilling a duty, rather than enjoying a pleasure; and at the end of a quarter of an hour he had killed a goat and two kids. These animals, though wild and agile as chamois, were too much like domestic goats, and Franz could not consider them as game. Moreover, other ideas, much more enthralling, occupied his mind. Since, the evening before, he had really been the hero of one of the tales of the "Thousand and One Nights," and he was irresistibly attracted towards the grotto. Then, in spite of the failure of his first search, he began a second, after having told Gaetano to roast one of the two kids. The second visit was a long one, and when he returned the kid was roasted and the repast ready. Franz was sitting on the spot where he was on the previous evening when his mysterious host had invited him to supper; and he saw the little yacht, now like a sea-gull on the wave, continuing her flight towards Corsica. "Why," he remarked to Gaetano, "you told me that Signor Sinbad was going to Malaga, while it seems he is in the direction of Porto-Vecchio."

"Don't you remember," said the patron, "I told you that among the crew there were two Corsican brigands?"

"True; and he is going to land them," added Franz.

"Precisely so," replied Gaetano. "Ah, he is one who fears neither God nor Satan, they say, and would at any time run fifty leagues out of his course to do a poor devil a service."

"But such services as these might involve him with the authorities of the country in which he practices this kind of philanthropy," said Franz.

"And what cares he for that," replied Gaetano with a laugh, "or any authorities? He smiles at them. Let them try to pursue him! Why, in the first place, his yacht is not a ship, but a bird, and he would beat any frigate three knots in every nine; and if he were to throw himself on the coast, why, is he not certain of finding friends everywhere?”

It was perfectly clear that the Signor Sinbad, Franz’s host, had the honor of being on excellent terms with the smugglers and bandits along the whole coast of the Mediterranean, and so enjoyed exceptional privileges. As to Franz, he had no longer any inducement to remain at Monte Cristo. He had lost all hope of detecting the secret of the grotto; he consequently despatched his breakfast, and, his boat being ready, he hastened on board, and they were soon under way. At the moment the boat began her course they lost sight of the yacht, as it disappeared in the gulf of Porto-Vecchio. With it was effaced the last trace of the preceding night; and then supper, Sinbad, hashish, statues, — all became a dream for Franz. The boat sailed on all day and all night, and next morning, when the sun rose, they had lost sight of Monte Cristo. When Franz had once again set foot on shore, he forgot, for the moment at least, the events which had just passed, while he finished his affairs of pleasure at Florence, and then thought of nothing but how he should rejoin his companion, who was awaiting him at Rome.

He set out, and on the Saturday evening reached the Eternal City by the mail-coach. An apartment, as we have said, had been retained beforehand, and thus he had but to go to Signor Pastrini’s hotel. But this was not so easy a matter, for the streets were thronged with people, and Rome was already a prey to that low and feverish murmur which precedes all great events; and at Rome there are four great events in every year, — the Carnival, Holy Week, Corpus Christi, and the Feast of St. Peter. All the rest of the year the city is in that state of dull apathy, between life and death, which renders it similar to a kind of station between this world and the next — a sublime spot, a resting-place full of poetry and character, and at which Franz had already halted five or six times, and at each time found it more marvellous and striking. At last he made his way through the mob, which was continually increasing and getting more and more turbulent, and reached the hotel. On his first inquiry he was told, with the impertinence peculiar to hired hackney-coachmen and inn-keepers with their houses full, that there was no room for him at the Hotel de Londres. Then he sent his card to Signor Pastrini, and asked for Albert de Morcerf. This plan succeeded; and Signor Pastrini himself ran to him, excusing himself for having made his excellency wait, scolding the waiters, taking the candlestick from the porter, who was ready to pounce on the traveller and was about to lead him to Albert, when Morcerf himself appeared.

The apartment consisted of two small rooms and a parlor. The two rooms looked onto the street — a fact which Signor Pastrini commented upon as an inappreciable advantage. The rest of the floor was hired by a very rich gentleman who was supposed to be a Sicilian or Maltese; but the host was unable to decide to which of the two nations the traveller belonged. “Very good, signor Pastrini,” said Franz; “but we must have some supper instantly, and a carriage for tomorrow and the following days.”

“As to supper,” replied the landlord, “you shall be served immediately; but as for the carriage” —

“What as to the carriage?” exclaimed Albert. “Come, come, Signor Pastrini, no joking; we must have a carriage.”

“Sir,” replied the host, “we will do all in our power to procure you one — this is all I can say.”

“And when shall we know?” inquired Franz.

“To-morrow morning,” answered the inn-keeper.

“Oh, the deuce! then we shall pay the more, that’s all, I see plainly enough. At Drake’s or Aaron’s one pays twenty-five lire for common days, and thirty or thirty-five lire a day more for Sundays and feast days; add five lire a day more for extras, that will make forty, and there’s an end of it.”

“I am afraid if we offer them double that we shall not procure a carriage.”

“Then they must put horses to mine. It is a little worse for the journey, but that’s no matter.”

“There are no horses.” Albert looked at Franz like a man who hears a reply he does not understand.

“Do you understand that, my dear Franz — no horses?” he said, “but can’t we have post-horses?”

“They have been all hired this fortnight, and there are none left but those absolutely requisite for posting.”

“What are we to say to this?” asked Franz.

“I say, that when a thing completely surpasses my comprehension, I am accustomed not to dwell on that thing, but to pass to another. Is supper ready, Signor Pastrini?”

“Yes, your excellency.”

“Well, then, let us sup.”

“But the carriage and horses?” said Franz.

“Be easy, my dear boy; they will come in due season; it is only a question of how much shall be charged for them.” Morcerf then, with that delighted philosophy which believes that nothing is impossible to a full purse or well-lined pocketbook, supped, went to bed, slept soundly, and dreamed he was racing all over Rome at Carnival time in a coach with six horses.

Chapter 33

Roman Bandits.

The next morning Franz woke first, and instantly rang the bell. The sound had not yet died away when Signor Pastrini himself entered.

“Well, excellency,” said the landlord triumphantly, and without waiting for Franz to question him, “I feared yesterday, when I would not promise you anything, that you were too late — there is not a single carriage to be had — that is, for the last three days of the carnival.”

“Yes,” returned Franz, “for the very three days it is most needed.”

“What is the matter?” said Albert, entering; “no carriage to be had?”

“Just so,” returned Franz, “you have guessed it.”

“Well, your Eternal City is a nice sort of place.”

“That is to say, excellency,” replied Pastrini, who was desirous of keeping up the dignity of the capital of the Christian world in the eyes of his guest, “that there are no carriages to be had from Sunday to Tuesday evening, but from now till Sunday you can have fifty if you please.”

“Ah, that is something,” said Albert; “to-day is Thursday, and who knows what may arrive between this and Sunday?”

“Ten or twelve thousand travellers will arrive,” replied Franz, “which will make it still more difficult.”

“My friend,” said Morcerf, “let us enjoy the present without gloomy forebodings for the future.”

“At least we can have a window?”

“Where?”

“In the Corso.”

“Ah, a window!” exclaimed Signor Pastrini, — ”utterly impossible; there was only one left on the fifth floor of the Doria Palace, and that has been let to a Russian prince for twenty sequins a day.”

The two young men looked at each other with an air of stupefaction.

“Well,” said Franz to Albert, “do you know what is the best thing we can do? It is to pass the Carnival at Venice; there we are sure of obtaining gondolas if we cannot have carriages.”

“Ah, the devil, no,” cried Albert; “I came to Rome to see the Carnival, and I will, though I see it on stilts.”

“Bravo! an excellent idea. We will disguise ourselves as monster pulchinellos or shepherds of the Landes, and we shall have complete success.”

“Do your excellencies still wish for a carriage from now to Sunday morning?”

“Parbleu!” said Albert, “do you think we are going to run about on foot in the streets of Rome, like lawyer’s clerks?”

“I hasten to comply with your excellencies’ wishes; only, I tell you beforehand, the carriage will cost you six piastres a day.”

“And, as I am not a millionaire, like the gentleman in the next apartments,” said Franz, “I warn you, that as I have been four times before at Rome, I know the prices of all the carriages; we will give you twelve piastres for to-day, tomorrow, and the day after, and then you will make a good profit.”

“But, excellency” — said Pastrini, still striving to gain his point.

“Now go,” returned Franz, “or I shall go myself and bargain with your affettatore, who is mine also; he is an old friend of mine, who has plundered me pretty well already, and, in the hope of making more out of me, he will take a less price than the one I offer you; you will lose the preference, and that will be your fault.”

“Do not give yourselves the trouble, excellency,” returned Signor Pastrini, with the smile peculiar to the Italian speculator when he confesses defeat; “I will do all I can, and I hope you will be satisfied.”

“And now we understand each other.”

“When do you wish the carriage to be here?”

“In an hour.”

“In an hour it will be at the door.”

An hour after the vehicle was at the door; it was a hack conveyance which was elevated to the rank of a private carriage in honor of the occasion, but, in spite of its humble exterior, the young men would have thought themselves happy to have secured it for the last three days of the Carnival. “Excellency,” cried the cicerone, seeing Franz approach the window, “shall I bring the carriage nearer to the palace?”

Accustomed as Franz was to the Italian phraseology, his first impulse was to look round him, but these words were addressed to him. Franz was the "excellency," the vehicle was the "carriage," and the Hotel de Londres was the "palace." The genius for laudation characteristic of the race was in that phrase.

Franz and Albert descended, the carriage approached the palace; their excellencies stretched their legs along the seats; the cicerone sprang into the seat behind. "Where do your excellencies wish to go?" asked he.

"To Saint Peter's first, and then to the Colosseum," returned Albert. But Albert did not know that it takes a day to see Saint Peter's, and a month to study it. The day was passed at Saint Peter's alone. Suddenly the daylight began to fade away; Franz took out his watch — it was half-past four. They returned to the hotel; at the door Franz ordered the coachman to be ready at eight. He wished to show Albert the Colosseum by moonlight, as he had shown him Saint Peter's by daylight. When we show a friend a city one has already visited, we feel the same pride as when we point out a woman whose lover we have been. He was to leave the city by the Porta del Popolo, skirt the outer wall, and re-enter by the Porta San Giovanni; thus they would behold the Colosseum without finding their impressions dulled by first looking on the Capitol, the Forum, the Arch of Septimus Severus, the Temple of Antoninus and Faustina, and the Via Sacra. They sat down to dinner. Signor Pastrini had promised them a banquet; he gave them a tolerable repast. At the end of the dinner he entered in person. Franz thought that he came to hear his dinner praised, and began accordingly, but at the first words he was interrupted. "Excellency," said Pastrini, "I am delighted to have your approbation, but it was not for that I came."

"Did you come to tell us you have procured a carriage?" asked Albert, lighting his cigar.

"No; and your excellencies will do well not to think of that any longer; at Rome things can or cannot be done; when you are told anything cannot be done, there is an end of it."

"It is much more convenient at Paris, — when anything cannot be done, you pay double, and it is done directly."

"That is what all the French say," returned Signor Pastrini, somewhat piqued; "for that reason, I do not understand why they travel."

"But," said Albert, emitting a volume of smoke and balancing his chair on its hind legs, "only madmen, or blockheads like us, ever do travel. Men in their senses do not quit their hotel in the Rue du Helder, their walk on the Boulevard de Gand, and the Cafe de Paris." It is of course understood that

Albert resided in the aforesaid street, appeared every day on the fashionable walk, and dined frequently at the only restaurant where you can really dine, that is, if you are on good terms with its frequenters. Signor Pastrini remained silent a short time; it was evident that he was musing over this answer, which did not seem very clear. “But,” said Franz, in his turn interrupting his host’s meditations, “you had some motive for coming here, may I beg to know what it was?”

“Ah, yes; you have ordered your carriage at eight o’clock precisely?”

“I have.”

“You intend visiting Il Colosseo.”

“You mean the Colosseum?”

“It is the same thing. You have told your coachman to leave the city by the Porta del Popolo, to drive round the walls, and re-enter by the Porta San Giovanni?”

“These are my words exactly.”

“Well, this route is impossible.”

“Impossible!”

“Very dangerous, to say the least.”

“Dangerous! — and why?”

“On account of the famous Luigi Vampa.”

“Pray, who may this famous Luigi Vampa be?” inquired Albert; “he may be very famous at Rome, but I can assure you he is quite unknown at Paris.”

“What! do you not know him?”

“I have not that honor.”

“You have never heard his name?”

“Never.”

“Well, then, he is a bandit, compared to whom the Decesaris and the Gasparones were mere children.”

“Now then, Albert,” cried Franz, “here is a bandit for you at last.”

“I forewarn you, Signor Pastrini, that I shall not believe one word of what you are going to tell us; having told you this, begin.”

“Once upon a time” —

“Well, go on.” Signor Pastrini turned toward Franz, who seemed to him the more reasonable of the two; we must do him justice, — he had had a great many Frenchmen in his house, but had never been able to comprehend them. “Excellency,” said he gravely, addressing Franz, “if you look upon me as a liar, it is useless for me to say anything; it was for your interest!” —

"Albert does not say you are a liar, Signor Pastrini," said Franz, "but that he will not believe what you are going to tell us, — but I will believe all you say; so proceed."

"But if your excellency doubt my veracity" —

"Signor Pastrini," returned Franz, "you are more susceptible than Cassandra, who was a prophetess, and yet no one believed her; while you, at least, are sure of the credence of half your audience. Come, sit down, and tell us all about this Signor Vampa."

"I had told your excellency he is the most famous bandit we have had since the days of Mastrilla."

"Well, what has this bandit to do with the order I have given the coachman to leave the city by the Porta del Popolo, and to re-enter by the Porta San Giovanni?"

"This," replied Signor Pastrini, "that you will go out by one, but I very much doubt your returning by the other."

"Why?" asked Franz.

"Because, after nightfall, you are not safe fifty yards from the gates."

"On your honor is that true?" cried Albert.

"Count," returned Signor Pastrini, hurt at Albert's repeated doubts of the truth of his assertions, "I do not say this to you, but to your companion, who knows Rome, and knows, too, that these things are not to be laughed at."

"My dear fellow," said Albert, turning to Franz, "here is an admirable adventure; we will fill our carriage with pistols, blunderbusses, and double-barrelled guns. Luigi Vampa comes to take us, and we take him — we bring him back to Rome, and present him to his holiness the Pope, who asks how he can repay so great a service; then we merely ask for a carriage and a pair of horses, and we see the Carnival in the carriage, and doubtless the Roman people will crown us at the Capitol, and proclaim us, like Curtius and the veiled Horatius, the preservers of their country." Whilst Albert proposed this scheme, Signor Pastrini's face assumed an expression impossible to describe.

"And pray," asked Franz, "where are these pistols, blunderbusses, and other deadly weapons with which you intend filling the carriage?"

"Not out of my armory, for at Terracina I was plundered even of my hunting-knife."

"I shared the same fate at Aquapendente."

“Do you know, Signor Pastrini,” said Albert, lighting a second cigar at the first, “that this practice is very convenient for bandits, and that it seems to be due to an arrangement of their own.” Doubtless Signor Pastrini found this pleasantry compromising, for he only answered half the question, and then he spoke to Franz, as the only one likely to listen with attention. “Your excellency knows that it is not customary to defend yourself when attacked by bandits.”

“What!” cried Albert, whose courage revolted at the idea of being plundered tamely, “not make any resistance!”

“No, for it would be useless. What could you do against a dozen bandits who spring out of some pit, ruin, or aqueduct, and level their pieces at you?”

“Eh, parbleu! — they should kill me.”

The inn-keeper turned to Franz with an air that seemed to say, “Your friend is decidedly mad.”

“My dear Albert,” returned Franz, “your answer is sublime, and worthy the ‘Let him die,’ of Corneille, only, when Horace made that answer, the safety of Rome was concerned; but, as for us, it is only to gratify a whim, and it would be ridiculous to risk our lives for so foolish a motive.” Albert poured himself out a glass of lacryma Christi, which he sipped at intervals, muttering some unintelligible words.

“Well, Signor Pastrini,” said Franz, “now that my companion is quieted, and you have seen how peaceful my intentions are, tell me who is this Luigi Vampa. Is he a shepherd or a nobleman? — young or old? — tall or short? Describe him, in order that, if we meet him by chance, like Bugaboo John or Lara, we may recognize him.”

“You could not apply to any one better able to inform you on all these points, for I knew him when he was a child, and one day that I fell into his hands, going from Ferentino to Alatri, he, fortunately for me, recollected me, and set me free, not only without ransom, but made me a present of a very splendid watch, and related his history to me.”

“Let us see the watch,” said Albert.

Signor Pastrini drew from his fob a magnificent Breguet, bearing the name of its maker, of Parisian manufacture, and a count’s coronet.

“Here it is,” said he.

“Peste,” returned Albert, “I compliment you on it; I have its fellow” — he took his watch from his waistcoat pocket — ”and it cost me 3,000 francs.”

“Let us hear the history,” said Franz, motioning Signor Pastrini to seat himself.

“Your excellencies permit it?” asked the host.

“Pardieu!” cried Albert, “you are not a preacher, to remain standing!”

The host sat down, after having made each of them a respectful bow, which meant that he was ready to tell them all they wished to know concerning Luigi Vampa. “You tell me,” said Franz, at the moment Signor Pastrini was about to open his mouth, “that you knew Luigi Vampa when he was a child — he is still a young man, then?”

“A young man? he is only two and twenty; — he will gain himself a reputation.”

“What do you think of that, Albert? — at two and twenty to be thus famous?”

“Yes, and at his age, Alexander, Caesar, and Napoleon, who have all made some noise in the world, were quite behind him.”

“So,” continued Franz, “the hero of this history is only two and twenty?”

“Scarcely so much.”

“Is he tall or short?”

“Of the middle height — about the same stature as his excellency,” returned the host, pointing to Albert.

“Thanks for the comparison,” said Albert, with a bow.

“Go on, Signor Pastrini,” continued Franz, smiling at his friend’s susceptibility. “To what class of society does he belong?”

“He was a shepherd-boy attached to the farm of the Count of San-Felice, situated between Palestrina and the lake of Gabri; he was born at Pampinara, and entered the count’s service when he was five years old; his father was also a shepherd, who owned a small flock, and lived by the wool and the milk, which he sold at Rome. When quite a child, the little Vampa displayed a most extraordinary precocity. One day, when he was seven years old, he came to the curate of Palestrina, and asked to be taught to read; it was somewhat difficult, for he could not quit his flock; but the good curate went every day to say mass at a little hamlet too poor to pay a priest and which, having no other name, was called Borgo; he told Luigi that he might meet him on his return, and that then he would give him a lesson, warning him that it would be short, and that he must profit as much as possible by it. The child accepted joyfully. Every day Luigi led his flock to graze on the road that leads from Palestrina to Borgo; every day, at nine o’clock in the morning, the priest and the boy sat down on a bank by the wayside, and the little shepherd took his lesson out of the priest’s breviary. At the end of three months he had learned to read. This was not enough — he must now learn to write. The priest had a writing teacher at Rome make three alphabets — one large, one middling, and one small; and pointed out to him that by the help of a sharp instrument he could trace the letters on a slate, and thus learn to write. The same evening, when the flock was safe at the farm, the little Luigi hastened to the smith at Palestrina, took a large nail, heated and sharpened it, and formed a sort of stylus. The next morning he gathered an armful of pieces of slate and began. At the end of three months he had learned to write. The curate, astonished at his quickness and intelligence, made him a present of pens, paper, and a penknife. This demanded new effort, but nothing compared to the first; at the end of a week he wrote as well with this pen as with the stylus. The curate related the incident to the Count of San-Felice, who sent for the little shepherd, made him read and write before him, ordered his attendant to let him eat with the domestics, and to give him two piastres a month. With this, Luigi purchased books and pencils. He applied his imitative powers to everything, and, like Giotto, when young, he drew on his slate sheep, houses, and trees. Then, with his knife, he began to carve all sorts of objects in wood; it was thus that Pinelli, the famous sculptor, had commenced.

“A girl of six or seven — that is, a little younger than Vampa — tended sheep on a farm near Palestrina; she was an orphan, born at Valmontone and was named Teresa. The two children met, sat down near each other, let their flocks mingle together, played, laughed, and conversed together; in the evening they separated the Count of San-Felice’s flock from those of Baron Cervetri, and the children returned to their respective farms, promising to meet the next morning. The next day they kept their word, and thus they grew up together. Vampa was twelve, and Teresa eleven. And yet their natural disposition revealed itself. Beside his taste for the fine arts, which Luigi had carried as far as he could in his solitude, he was given to alternating fits of sadness and enthusiasm, was often angry and capricious, and always sarcastic. None of the lads of Pampinara, Palestrina, or Valmontone had been able to gain any influence over him or even to become his companion. His disposition (always inclined to exact concessions rather than to make them) kept him aloof from all friendships.

Teresa alone ruled by a look, a word, a gesture, this impetuous character, which yielded beneath the hand of a woman, and which beneath the hand of a man might have broken, but could never have been bended. Teresa was lively and gay, but coquettish to excess. The two piastres that Luigi received every month from the Count of San-Felice's steward, and the price of all the little carvings in wood he sold at Rome, were expended in earrings, necklaces, and gold hairpins. So that, thanks to her friend's generosity, Teresa was the most beautiful and the best-attired peasant near Rome. The two children grew up together, passing all their time with each other, and giving themselves up to the wild ideas of their different characters. Thus, in all their dreams, their wishes, and their conversations, Vampa saw himself the captain of a vessel, general of an army, or governor of a province. Teresa saw herself rich, superbly attired, and attended by a train of liveried domestics. Then, when they had thus passed the day in building castles in the air, they separated their flocks, and descended from the elevation of their dreams to the reality of their humble position.

"One day the young shepherd told the count's steward that he had seen a wolf come out of the Sabine mountains, and prowl around his flock. The steward gave him a gun; this was what Vampa longed for. This gun had an excellent barrel, made at Breschia, and carrying a ball with the precision of an English rifle; but one day the count broke the stock, and had then cast the gun aside. This, however, was nothing to a sculptor like Vampa; he examined the broken stock, calculated what change it would require to adapt the gun to his shoulder, and made a fresh stock, so beautifully carved that it would have fetched fifteen or twenty piastres, had he chosen to sell it. But nothing could be farther from his thoughts. For a long time a gun had been the young man's greatest ambition. In every country where independence has taken the place of liberty, the first desire of a manly heart is to possess a weapon, which at once renders him capable of defence or attack, and, by rendering its owner terrible, often makes him feared. From this moment Vampa devoted all his leisure time to perfecting himself in the use of his precious weapon; he purchased powder and ball, and everything served him for a mark — the trunk of some old and moss-grown olivetree, that grew on the Sabine mountains; the fox, as he quitted his earth on some marauding excursion; the eagle that soared above their heads: and thus he soon became so expert, that Teresa overcame the terror she at first felt at the report, and amused herself by watching him direct the ball wherever he pleased, with as much accuracy as if he placed it by hand.

“One evening a wolf emerged from a pine-wood hear which they were usually stationed, but the wolf had scarcely advanced ten yards ere he was dead. Proud of this exploit, Vampa took the dead animal on his shoulders, and carried him to the farm. These exploits had gained Luigi considerable reputation. The man of superior abilities always finds admirers, go where he will. He was spoken of as the most adroit, the strongest, and the most courageous contadino for ten leagues around; and although Teresa was universally allowed to be the most beautiful girl of the Sabines, no one had ever spoken to her of love, because it was known that she was beloved by Vampa. And yet the two young people had never declared their affection; they had grown together like two trees whose roots are mingled, whose branches intertwined, and whose intermingled perfume rises to the heavens. Only their wish to see each other had become a necessity, and they would have preferred death to a day’s separation. Teresa was sixteen, and Vampa seventeen. About this time, a band of brigands that had established itself in the Lepini mountains began to be much spoken of. The brigands have never been really extirpated from the neighborhood of Rome. Sometimes a chief is wanted, but when a chief presents himself he rarely has to wait long for a band of followers.

“The celebrated Cucumetto, pursued in the Abruzzo, driven out of the kingdom of Naples, where he had carried on a regular war, had crossed the Garigliano, like Manfred, and had taken refuge on the banks of the Amasine between Sonnino and Juperno. He strove to collect a band of followers, and followed the footsteps of Decesaris and Gasperone, whom he hoped to surpass. Many young men of Palestrina, Frascati, and Pampinara had disappeared. Their disappearance at first caused much disquietude; but it was soon known that they had joined Cucumetto. After some time Cucumetto became the object of universal attention; the most extraordinary traits of ferocious daring and brutality were related of him. One day he carried off a young girl, the daughter of a surveyor of Frosinone. The bandit’s laws are positive; a young girl belongs first to him who carries her off, then the rest draw lots for her, and she is abandoned to their brutality until death relieves her sufferings. When their parents are sufficiently rich to pay a ransom, a messenger is sent to negotiate; the prisoner is hostage for the security of the messenger; should the ransom be refused, the prisoner is irrevocably lost. The young girl’s lover was in Cucumetto’s troop; his name was Carlini. When she recognized her lover, the poor girl extended her arms to him, and believed herself safe; but Carlini felt his heart sink, for he but too well knew the fate that awaited her. However, as he was a favorite with Cucumetto, as he had for three years faithfully served him, and as he had saved his life by shooting a dragoon who was about to cut him down, he hoped the chief would have pity on him. He took Cucumetto one side, while the young girl, seated at the foot of a huge pine that stood in the centre of the forest, made a veil of her picturesque head-dress to hide her face from the lascivious gaze of the bandits. There he told the chief all — his affection for the prisoner, their promises of mutual fidelity, and how every night, since he had been near, they had met in some neighboring ruins.

“It so happened that night that Cucumetto had sent Carlini to a village, so that he had been unable to go to the place of meeting. Cucumetto had been there, however, by accident, as he said, and had carried the maiden off. Carlini besought his chief to make an exception in Rita’s favor, as her father was rich, and could pay a large ransom. Cucumetto seemed to yield to his friend’s entreaties, and bade him find a shepherd to send to Rita’s father at Frosinone. Carlini flew joyfully to Rita, telling her she was saved, and bidding her write to her father, to inform him what had occurred, and that her ransom was fixed at three hundred piastres. Twelve hours’ delay was all that was granted — that is, until nine the next morning. The instant the letter was written, Carlini seized it, and hastened to the plain to find a messenger. He found a young shepherd watching his flock. The natural messengers of the bandits are the shepherds who live between the city and the mountains, between civilized and savage life. The boy undertook the commission, promising to be in Frosinone in less than an hour. Carlini returned, anxious to see his mistress, and announce the joyful intelligence. He found the troop in the glade, supping off the provisions exacted as contributions from the peasants; but his eye vainly sought Rita and Cucumetto among them. He inquired where they were, and was answered by a burst of laughter. A cold perspiration burst from every pore, and his hair stood on end. He repeated his question. One of the bandits rose, and offered him a glass filled with Orvietto, saying, ‘To the health of the brave Cucumetto and the fair Rita.’ At this moment Carlini heard a woman’s cry; he divined the truth, seized the glass, broke it across the face of him who presented it, and rushed towards the spot whence the cry came. After a hundred yards he turned the corner of the thicket; he found Rita senseless in the arms of Cucumetto. At the sight of Carlini, Cucumetto rose, a pistol in each hand. The two brigands looked at each other for a moment — the one with a smile of lasciviousness on his lips, the other with the pallor of death on his brow. A terrible battle between the two men seemed imminent; but by degrees Carlini's features relaxed, his hand, which had grasped one of the pistols in his belt, fell to his side. Rita lay between them. The moon lighted the group.

"'Well,' said Cucumetto, 'have you executed your commission?'

"'Yes, captain,' returned Carlini. 'At nine o'clock to-morrow Rita's father will be here with the money.' — 'It is well; in the meantime, we will have a merry night; this young girl is charming, and does credit to your taste. Now, as I am not egotistical, we will return to our comrades and draw lots for her.' — 'You have determined, then, to abandon her to the common law?' said Carlini.

"'Why should an exception be made in her favor?'

"'I thought that my entreaties' —

"'What right have you, any more than the rest, to ask for an exception?' — 'It is true.' — 'But never mind,' continued Cucumetto, laughing, 'sooner or later your turn will come.' Carlini's teeth clinched convulsively.

"'Now, then,' said Cucumetto, advancing towards the other bandits, 'are you coming?' — 'I follow you.'

"Cucumetto departed, without losing sight of Carlini, for, doubtless, he feared lest he should strike him unawares; but nothing betrayed a hostile design on Carlini's part. He was standing, his arms folded, near Rita, who was still insensible. Cucumetto fancied for a moment the young man was about to take her in his arms and fly; but this mattered little to him now Rita had been his; and as for the money, three hundred piastres distributed among the band was so small a sum that he cared little about it. He continued to follow the path to the glade; but, to his great surprise, Carlini arrived almost as soon as himself. 'Let us draw lots! let us draw lots!' cried all the brigands, when they saw the chief.

"Their demand was fair, and the chief inclined his head in sign of acquiescence. The eyes of all shone fiercely as they made their demand, and the red light of the fire made them look like demons. The names of all, including Carlini, were placed in a hat, and the youngest of the band drew forth a ticket; the ticket bore the name of Diovolaccio. He was the man who had proposed to Carlini the health of their chief, and to whom Carlini replied by breaking the glass across his face. A large wound, extending from the temple to the mouth, was bleeding profusely. Diovalaccio, seeing himself thus favored by fortune, burst into a loud laugh. ‘Captain,’ said he, ‘just now Carlini would not drink your health when I proposed it to him; propose mine to him, and let us see if he will be more condescending to you than to me.’ Every one expected an explosion on Carlini’s part; but to their great surprise, he took a glass in one hand and a flask in the other, and filling it, — ’Your health, Diavolaccio,’ said he calmly, and he drank it off, without his hand trembling in the least. Then sitting down by the fire, ‘My supper,’ said he; ‘my expedition has given me an appetite.’ — ’Well done, Carlini!’ cried the brigands; ‘that is acting like a good fellow;’ and they all formed a circle round the fire, while Diavolaccio disappeared. Carlini ate and drank as if nothing had happened. The bandits looked on with astonishment at this singular conduct until they heard footsteps. They turned round, and saw Diavolaccio bearing the young girl in his arms. Her head hung back, and her long hair swept the ground. As they entered the circle, the bandits could perceive, by the firelight, the unearthly pallor of the young girl and of Diavolaccio. This apparition was so strange and so solemn, that every one rose, with the exception of Carlini, who remained seated, and ate and drank calmly. Diavolaccio advanced amidst the most profound silence, and laid Rita at the captain’s feet. Then every one could understand the cause of the unearthly pallor in the young girl and the bandit. A knife was plunged up to the hilt in Rita’s left breast. Every one looked at Carlini; the sheath at his belt was empty. ‘Ah, ah,’ said the chief, ‘I now understand why Carlini stayed behind.’ All savage natures appreciate a desperate deed. No other of the bandits would, perhaps, have done the same; but they all understood what Carlini had done. ‘Now, then,’ cried Carlini, rising in his turn, and approaching the corpse, his hand on the butt of one of his pistols, ‘does any one dispute the possession of this woman with me?’ — ’No,’ returned the chief, ‘she is thine.’ Carlini raised her in his arms, and carried her out of the circle of firelight. Cucumetto placed his sentinels for the night, and the bandits wrapped themselves in their cloaks, and lay down before the fire. At midnight the sentinel gave the alarm, and in an instant all were on the alert. It was Rita’s father, who brought his daughter’s ransom in person. ‘Here,’ said he, to Cucumetto, ‘here are three hundred piastres; give me back my child. But the chief, without taking the money, made a sign to him to follow. The old man obeyed. They both advanced beneath the trees, through whose branches streamed the moonlight. Cucumetto stopped at last, and pointed to two persons grouped at the foot of a tree.

"'There,' said he, 'demand thy child of Carlini; he will tell thee what has become of her;' and he returned to his companions. The old man remained motionless; he felt that some great and unforeseen misfortune hung over his head. At length he advanced toward the group, the meaning of which he could not comprehend. As he approached, Carlini raised his head, and the forms of two persons became visible to the old man's eyes. A woman lay on the ground, her head resting on the knees of a man, who was seated by her; as he raised his head, the woman's face became visible. The old man recognized his child, and Carlini recognized the old man. 'I expected thee,' said the bandit to Rita's father. — 'Wretch!' returned the old man, 'what hast thou done?' and he gazed with terror on Rita, pale and bloody, a knife buried in her bosom. A ray of moonlight poured through the trees, and lighted up the face of the dead. — 'Cucumetto had violated thy daughter,' said the bandit; 'I loved her, therefore I slew her; for she would have served as the sport of the whole band.' The old man spoke not, and grew pale as death. 'Now,' continued Carlini, 'if I have done wrongly, avenge her;' and withdrawing the knife from the wound in Rita's bosom, he held it out to the old man with one hand, while with the other he tore open his vest. — 'Thou hast done well!' returned the old man in a hoarse voice; 'embrace me, my son.' Carlini threw himself, sobbing like a child, into the arms of his mistress's father. These were the first tears the man of blood had ever wept. 'Now,' said the old man, 'aid me to bury my child.' Carlini fetched two pickaxes; and the father and the lover began to dig at the foot of a huge oak, beneath which the young girl was to repose. When the grave was formed, the father kissed her first, and then the lover; afterwards, one taking the head, the other the feet, they placed her in the grave. Then they knelt on each side of the grave, and said the prayers of the dead. Then, when they had finished, they cast the earth over the corpse, until the grave was filled. Then, extending his hand, the old man said; 'I thank you, my son; and now leave me alone.' — 'Yet' — replied Carlini. — 'Leave me, I command you.' Carlini obeyed, rejoined his comrades, folded himself in his cloak, and soon appeared to sleep as soundly as the rest. It had been resolved the night before to change their encampment. An hour before daybreak, Cucumetto aroused his men, and gave the word to march. But Carlini would not quit the forest, without knowing what had become of Rita's father. He went toward the place where he had left him. He found the old man suspended from one of the branches of the oak which shaded his daughter's grave. He then took an oath of bitter vengeance over the dead body of the one and the tomb of the other. But he was unable to complete this oath, for two days afterwards, in an encounter with the Roman carbineers, Carlini was killed. There was some surprise, however, that, as he was with his face to the enemy, he should have received a ball between his shoulders. That astonishment ceased when one of the brigands remarked to his comrades that Cucumetto was stationed ten paces in Carlini's rear when he fell. On the morning of the departure from the forest of Frosinone he had followed Carlini in the darkness, and heard this oath of vengeance, and, like a wise man, anticipated it. They told ten other stories of this bandit chief, each more singular than the other. Thus, from Fondi to Perusia, every one trembles at the name of Cucumetto.

"These narratives were frequently the theme of conversation between Luigi and Teresa. The young girl trembled very much at hearing the stories; but Vampa reassured her with a smile, tapping the butt of his good fowling-piece, which threw its ball so well; and if that did not restore her courage, he pointed to a crow, perched on some dead branch, took aim, touched the trigger, and the bird fell dead at the foot of the tree. Time passed on, and the two young people had agreed to be married when Vampa should be twenty and Teresa nineteen years of age. They were both orphans, and had only their employers' leave to ask, which had been already sought and obtained. One day when they were talking over their plans for the future, they heard two or three reports of firearms, and then suddenly a man came out of the wood, near which the two young persons used to graze their flocks, and hurried towards them. When he came within hearing, he exclaimed. 'I am pursued; can you conceal me?' They knew full well that this fugitive must be a bandit; but there is an innate sympathy between the Roman brigand and the Roman peasant and the latter is always ready to aid the former. Vampa, without saying a word, hastened to the stone that closed up the entrance to their grotto, drew it away, made a sign to the fugitive to take refuge there, in a retreat unknown to every one, closed the stone upon him, and then went and resumed his seat by Teresa. Instantly afterwards four carbineers, on horseback, appeared on the edge of the wood; three of them appeared to be looking for the fugitive, while the fourth dragged a brigand prisoner by the neck. The three carbineers looked about carefully on every side, saw the young peasants, and galloping up, began to question them. They had seen no one. ‘That is very annoying,’ said the brigadier; for the man we are looking for is the chief.’ — ’Cucumetto?’ cried Luigi and Teresa at the same moment.

“‘Yes,’ replied the brigadier; ‘and as his head is valued at a thousand Roman crowns, there would have been five hundred for you, if you had helped us to catch him.’ The two young persons exchanged looks. The brigadier had a moment’s hope. Five hundred Roman crowns are three thousand lire, and three thousand lire are a fortune for two poor orphans who are going to be married.

“‘Yes, it is very annoying,’ said Vampa; ‘but we have not seen him.’

“Then the carbineers scoured the country in different directions, but in vain; then, after a time, they disappeared. Vampa then removed the stone, and Cucumetto came out. Through the crevices in the granite he had seen the two young peasants talking with the carbineers, and guessed the subject of their parley. He had read in the countenances of Luigi and Teresa their steadfast resolution not to surrender him, and he drew from his pocket a purse full of gold, which he offered to them. But Vampa raised his head proudly; as to Teresa, her eyes sparkled when she thought of all the fine gowns and gay jewellery she could buy with this purse of gold.

“Cucumetto was a cunning fiend, and had assumed the form of a brigand instead of a serpent, and this look from Teresa showed to him that she was a worthy daughter of Eve, and he returned to the forest, pausing several times on his way, under the pretext of saluting his protectors. Several days elapsed, and they neither saw nor heard of Cucumetto. The time of the Carnival was at hand. The Count of San-Felice announced a grand masked ball, to which all that were distinguished in Rome were invited. Teresa had a great desire to see this ball. Luigi asked permission of his protector, the steward, that she and he might be present amongst the servants of the house. This was granted. The ball was given by the Count for the particular pleasure of his daughter Carmela, whom he adored. Carmela was precisely the age and figure of Teresa, and Teresa was as handsome as Carmela. On the evening of the ball Teresa was attired in her best, her most brilliant ornaments in her hair, and gayest glass beads, — she was in the costume of the women of Frascati. Luigi wore the very picturesque garb of the Roman peasant at holiday time. They both mingled, as they had leave to do, with the servants and peasants.

“The festa was magnificent; not only was the villa brilliantly illuminated, but thousands of colored lanterns were suspended from the trees in the garden; and very soon the palace overflowed to the terraces, and the terraces to the garden-walks. At each cross-path was an orchestra, and tables spread with refreshments; the guests stopped, formed quadrilles, and danced in any part of the grounds they pleased. Carmela was attired like a woman of Sonnino. Her cap was embroidered with pearls, the pins in her hair were of gold and diamonds, her girdle was of Turkey silk, with large embroidered flowers, her bodice and skirt were of cashmere, her apron of Indian muslin, and the buttons of her corset were of jewels. Two of her companions were dressed, the one as a woman of Nettuno, and the other as a woman of La Riccia. Four young men of the richest and noblest families of Rome accompanied them with that Italian freedom which has not its parallel in any other country in the world. They were attired as peasants of Albano, Velletri, Civita-Castellana, and Sora. We need hardly add that these peasant costumes, like those of the young women, were brilliant with gold and jewels.

“Carmela wished to form a quadrille, but there was one lady wanting. Carmela looked all around her, but not one of the guests had a costume similar to her own, or those of her companions. The Count of San-Felice pointed out Teresa, who was hanging on Luigi’s arm in a group of peasants. ‘Will you allow me, father?’ said Carmela. — ’Certainly,’ replied the count, ‘are we not in Carnival time?’ — Carmela turned towards the young man who was talking with her, and saying a few words to him, pointed with her finger to Teresa. The young man looked, bowed in obedience, and then went to Teresa, and invited her to dance in a quadrille directed by the count’s daughter. Teresa felt a flush pass over her face; she looked at Luigi, who could not refuse his assent. Luigi slowly relinquished Teresa’s arm, which he had held beneath his own, and Teresa, accompanied by her elegant cavalier, took her appointed place with much agitation in the aristocratic quadrille. Certainly, in the eyes of an artist, the exact and strict costume of Teresa had a very different character from that of Carmela and her companions; and Teresa was frivolous and coquettish, and thus the embroidery and muslins, the cashmere waist-girdles, all dazzled her, and the reflection of sapphires and diamonds almost turned her giddy brain.

"Luigi felt a sensation hitherto unknown arising in his mind. It was like an acute pain which gnawed at his heart, and then thrilled through his whole body. He followed with his eye each movement of Teresa and her cavalier; when their hands touched, he felt as though he should swoon; every pulse beat with violence, and it seemed as though a bell were ringing in his ears. When they spoke, although Teresa listened timidly and with downcast eyes to the conversation of her cavalier, as Luigi could read in the ardent looks of the good-looking young man that his language was that of praise, it seemed as if the whole world was turning round with him, and all the voices of hell were whispering in his ears ideas of murder and assassination. Then fearing that his paroxysm might get the better of him, he clutched with one hand the branch of a tree against which he was leaning, and with the other convulsively grasped the dagger with a carved handle which was in his belt, and which, unwittingly, he drew from the scabbard from time to time. Luigi was jealous! He felt that, influenced by her ambitions and coquettish disposition, Teresa might escape him.

"The young peasant girl, at first timid and scared, soon recovered herself. We have said that Teresa was handsome, but this is not all; Teresa was endowed with all those wild graces which are so much more potent than our affected and studied elegancies. She had almost all the honors of the quadrille, and if she were envious of the Count of San-Felice's daughter, we will not undertake to say that Carmela was not jealous of her. And with overpowering compliments her handsome cavalier led her back to the place whence he had taken her, and where Luigi awaited her. Twice or thrice during the dance the young girl had glanced at Luigi, and each time she saw that he was pale and that his features were agitated, once even the blade of his knife, half drawn from its sheath, had dazzled her eyes with its sinister glare. Thus, it was almost tremblingly that she resumed her lover's arm. The quadrille had been most perfect, and it was evident there was a great demand for a repetition, Carmela alone objecting to it, but the Count of San-Felice besought his daughter so earnestly, that she acceded. One of the cavaliers then hastened to invite Teresa, without whom it was impossible for the quadrille to be formed, but the young girl had disappeared. The truth was, that Luigi had not felt the strength to support another such trial, and, half by persuasion and half by force, he had removed Teresa toward another part of the garden. Teresa had yielded in spite of herself, but when she looked at the agitated countenance of the young man, she understood by his silence and trembling voice that something strange was passing within him. She herself was not exempt from internal emotion, and without having done anything wrong, yet fully comprehended that Luigi was right in reproaching her. Why, she did not know, but yet she did not the less feel that these reproaches were merited. However, to Teresa's great astonishment, Luigi remained mute, and not a word escaped his lips the rest of the evening. When the chill of the night had driven away the guests from the gardens, and the gates of the villa were closed on them for the festa in-doors, he took Teresa quite away, and as he left her at her home, he said, —

"'Teresa, what were you thinking of as you danced opposite the young Countess of San-Felice?' — 'I thought,' replied the young girl, with all the frankness of her nature, 'that I would give half my life for a costume such as she wore.'

"'And what said your cavalier to you?' — 'He said it only depended on myself to have it, and I had only one word to say.'

"'He was right,' said Luigi. 'Do you desire it as ardently as you say?' — 'Yes.' — 'Well, then, you shall have it!'

"The young girl, much astonished, raised her head to look at him, but his face was so gloomy and terrible that her words froze to her lips. As Luigi spoke thus, he left her. Teresa followed him with her eyes into the darkness as long as she could, and when he had quite disappeared, she went into the house with a sigh.

"That night a memorable event occurred, due, no doubt, to the imprudence of some servant who had neglected to extinguish the lights. The Villa of San-Felice took fire in the rooms adjoining the very apartment of the lovely Carmela. Awakened in the night by the light of the flames, she sprang out of bed, wrapped herself in a dressing-gown, and attempted to escape by the door, but the corridor by which she hoped to fly was already a prey to the flames. She then returned to her room, calling for help as loudly as she could, when suddenly her window, which was twenty feet from the ground, was opened, a young peasant jumped into the chamber, seized her in his arms, and with superhuman skill and strength conveyed her to the turf of the grass-plot, where she fainted. When she recovered, her father was by her side. All the servants surrounded her, offering her assistance. An entire wing of the villa was burnt down; but what of that, as long as Carmela was safe and uninjured? Her preserver was everywhere sought for, but he did not appear; he was inquired after, but no one had seen him. Carmela was greatly troubled that she had not recognized him. As the count was immensely rich, excepting the danger Carmela had run, — and the marvellous manner in which she had escaped, made that appear to him rather a favor of providence than a real misfortune, — the loss occasioned by the conflagration was to him but a trifle.

“The next day, at the usual hour, the two young peasants were on the borders of the forest. Luigi arrived first. He came toward Teresa in high spirits, and seemed to have completely forgotten the events of the previous evening. The young girl was very pensive, but seeing Luigi so cheerful, she on her part assumed a smiling air, which was natural to her when she was not excited or in a passion. Luigi took her arm beneath his own, and led her to the door of the grotto. Then he paused. The young girl, perceiving that there was something extraordinary, looked at him steadfastly. ‘Teresa,’ said Luigi, ‘yesterday evening you told me you would give all the world to have a costume similar to that of the count’s daughter.’ — ’Yes,’ replied Teresa with astonishment; ‘but I was mad to utter such a wish.’ — ’And I replied, “Very well, you shall have it.”‘ — ’Yes,’ replied the young girl, whose astonishment increased at every word uttered by Luigi, ‘but of course your reply was only to please me.’

“‘I have promised no more than I have given you, Teresa,’ said Luigi proudly. ‘Go into the grotto and dress yourself.’ At these words he drew away the stone, and showed Teresa the grotto, lighted up by two wax lights, which burnt on each side of a splendid mirror; on a rustic table, made by Luigi, were spread out the pearl necklace and the diamond pins, and on a chair at the side was laid the rest of the costume.

“Teresa uttered a cry of joy, and, without inquiring whence this attire came, or even thanking Luigi, darted into the grotto, transformed into a dressing-room. Luigi pushed the stone behind her, for on the crest of a small adjacent hill which cut off the view toward Palestrina, he saw a traveller on horseback, stopping a moment, as if uncertain of his road, and thus presenting against the blue sky that perfect outline which is peculiar to distant objects in southern climes. When he saw Luigi, he put his horse into a gallop and advanced toward him. Luigi was not mistaken. The traveller, who was going from Palestrina to Tivoli, had mistaken his way; the young man directed him; but as at a distance of a quarter of a mile the road again divided into three ways, and on reaching these the traveller might again stray from his route, he begged Luigi to be his guide. Luigi threw his cloak on the ground, placed his carbine on his shoulder, and freed from his heavy covering, preceded the traveller with the rapid step of a mountaineer, which a horse can scarcely keep up with. In ten minutes Luigi and the traveller reached the cross-roads. On arriving there, with an air as majestic as that of an emperor, he stretched his hand towards that one of the roads which the traveller was to follow. — ”That is your road, excellency, and now you cannot again mistake.” — ’And here is your recompense,’ said the traveller, offering the young herdsman some small pieces of money.

“‘Thank you,’ said Luigi, drawing back his hand; ‘I render a service, I do not sell it.’ — ’Well,’ replied the traveller, who seemed used to this difference between the servility of a man of the cities and the pride of the mountaineer, ‘if you refuse wages, you will, perhaps, accept a gift.’ — ’Ah, yes, that is another thing.’ — ’Then,’ said the traveller, ‘take these two Venetian sequins and give them to your bride, to make herself a pair of earrings.’

“‘And then do you take this poniard,’ said the young herdsman; ‘you will not find one better carved between Albano and Civita-Castellana.’

“‘I accept it,’ answered the traveller, ‘but then the obligation will be on my side, for this poniard is worth more than two sequins.’ — ’For a dealer perhaps; but for me, who engraved it myself, it is hardly worth a piastre.’

“‘What is your name?’ inquired the traveller. — ’Luigi Vampa,’ replied the shepherd, with the same air as he would have replied, Alexander, King of Macedon. — ’And yours?’ — ’I,’ said the traveller, ‘am called Sinbad the Sailor.’“ Franz d’Epinay started with surprise.

“Sinbad the Sailor.” he said.

“Yes,” replied the narrator; “that was the name which the traveller gave to Vampa as his own.”

“Well, and what may you have to say against this name?” inquired Albert; “it is a very pretty name, and the adventures of the gentleman of that name amused me very much in my youth, I must confess.” — Franz said no more. The name of Sinbad the Sailor, as may well be supposed, awakened in him a world of recollections, as had the name of the Count of Monte Cristo on the previous evening.

“Proceed!” said he to the host.

“Vampa put the two sequins haughtily into his pocket, and slowly returned by the way he had gone. As he came within two or three hundred paces of the grotto, he thought he heard a cry. He listened to know whence this sound could proceed. A moment afterwards he thought he heard his own name pronounced distinctly. The cry proceeded from the grotto. He bounded like a chamois, cocking his carbine as he went, and in a moment reached the summit of a hill opposite to that on which he had perceived the traveller. Three cries for help came more distinctly to his ear. He cast his eyes around him and saw a man carrying off Teresa, as Nessus, the centaur, carried Dejanira. This man, who was hastening towards the wood, was already three-quarters of the way on the road from the grotto to the forest. Vampa measured the distance; the man was at least two hundred paces in advance of him, and there was not a chance of overtaking him. The young shepherd stopped, as if his feet had been rooted to the ground; then he put the butt of his carbine to his shoulder, took aim at the ravisher, followed him for a second in his track, and then fired. The ravisher stopped suddenly, his knees bent under him, and he fell with Teresa in his arms. The young girl rose instantly, but the man lay on the earth struggling in the agonies of death. Vampa then rushed towards Teresa; for at ten paces from the dying man her legs had failed her, and she had dropped on her knees, so that the young man feared that the ball that had brought down his enemy, had also wounded his betrothed. Fortunately, she was unscathed, and it was fright alone that had overcome Teresa. When Luigi had assured himself that she was safe and unharmed, he turned towards the wounded man. He had just expired, with clinched hands, his mouth in a spasm of agony, and his hair on end in the sweat of death. His eyes remained open and menacing. Vampa approached the corpse, and recognized Cucumetto. From the day on which the bandit had been saved by the two young peasants, he had been enamoured of Teresa, and had sworn she should be his. From that time he had watched them, and profiting by the moment when her lover had left her alone, had carried her off, and believed he at length had her in his power, when the ball, directed by the unerring skill of the young herdsman, had pierced his heart. Vampa gazed on him for a moment without betraying the slightest emotion; while, on the contrary, Teresa, shuddering in every limb, dared not approach the slain ruffian but by degrees, and threw a hesitating glance at the dead body over the shoulder of her lover. Suddenly Vampa turned toward his mistress: — ’Ah,’ said he — ’good, good! You are dressed; it is now my turn to dress myself.’

“Teresa was clothed from head to foot in the garb of the Count of San-Felice’s daughter. Vampa took Cucumetto’s body in his arms and conveyed it to the grotto, while in her turn Teresa remained outside. If a second traveller had passed, he would have seen a strange thing, — a shepherdess watching her flock, clad in a cashmere grown, with ear-rings and necklace of pearls, diamond pins, and buttons of sapphires, emeralds, and rubies. He would, no doubt, have believed that he had returned to the times of Florian, and would have declared, on reaching Paris, that he had met an Alpine shepherdess seated at the foot of the Sabine Hill. At the end of a quarter of an hour Vampa quitted the grotto; his costume was no less elegant than that of Teresa. He wore a vest of garnet-colored velvet, with buttons of cut gold; a silk waistcoat covered with embroidery; a Roman scarf tied round his neck; a cartridge-box worked with gold, and red and green silk; sky-blue velvet breeches, fastened above the knee with diamond buckles; garters of deerskin, worked with a thousand arabesques, and a hat whereon hung ribbons of all colors; two watches hung from his girdle, and a splendid poniard was in his belt. Teresa uttered a cry of admiration. Vampa in this attire resembled a painting by Leopold Robert, or Schnetz. He had assumed the entire costume of Cucumetto. The young man saw the effect produced on his betrothed, and a smile of pride passed over his lips. — ’Now,’ he said to Teresa, ‘are you ready to share my fortune, whatever it may be?’ — ’Oh, yes!’ exclaimed the young girl enthusiastically. — ’And follow me wherever I go?’ — ’To the world’s end.’ — ’Then take my arm, and let us on; we have no time to lose.’ — The young girl did so without questioning her lover as to where he was conducting her, for he appeared to her at this moment as handsome, proud, and powerful as a god. They went towards the forest, and soon entered it. We need scarcely say that all the paths of the mountain were known to Vampa; he therefore went forward without a moment’s hesitation, although there was no beaten track, but he knew his path by looking at the trees and bushes, and thus they kept on advancing for nearly an hour and a half. At the end of this time they had reached the thickest of the forest. A torrent, whose bed was dry, led into a deep gorge. Vampa took this wild road, which, enclosed between two ridges, and shadowed by the tufted umbrage of the pines, seemed, but for the difficulties of its descent, that path to Avernus of which Virgil speaks. Teresa had become alarmed at the wild and deserted look of the plain around her, and pressed closely against her guide, not uttering a syllable; but as she saw him advance with even step and composed countenance, she endeavored to repress her emotion. Suddenly, about ten paces from them, a man advanced from behind a tree and aimed at Vampa. — ’Not another step,’ he said, ‘or you are a dead man.’ — ’What, then,’ said Vampa, raising his hand with a gesture of disdain, while Teresa, no longer able to restrain her alarm, clung closely to him, ‘do wolves rend each other?’ — ’Who are you?’ inquired the sentinel. — ’I am Luigi Vampa, shepherd of the San-Felice farm.’ — ’What do you want?’ — ’I would speak with your companions who are in the glade at Rocca Bianca.’ — ’Follow me, then,’ said the sentinel; ‘or, as you know your way, go first.’ — Vampa smiled disdainfully at this precaution on the part of the bandit, went before Teresa, and continued to advance with the same firm and easy step as before. At the end of ten minutes the bandit made them a sign to stop. The two young persons obeyed. Then the bandit thrice imitated the cry of a crow; a croak answered this signal. — ’Good!’ said the sentry, ‘you may now go on.’ — Luigi and Teresa again set forward; as they went on Teresa clung tremblingly to her lover at the sight of weapons and the glistening of carbines through the trees. The retreat of Rocca Bianca was at the top of a small mountain, which no doubt in former days had been a volcano — an extinct volcano before the days when Remus and Romulus had deserted Alba to come and found the city of Rome. Teresa and Luigi reached the summit, and all at once found themselves in the presence of twenty bandits. ‘Here is a young man who seeks and wishes to speak to you,’ said the sentinel. — ’What has he to say?’ inquired the young man who was in command in the chief’s absence. — ’I wish to say that I am tired of a shepherd’s life,’ was Vampa’s reply. — ’Ah, I understand,’ said the lieutenant; ‘and you seek admittance into our ranks?’ — ’Welcome!’ cried several bandits from Ferrusino, Pampinara, and Anagni, who had recognized Luigi Vampa. — ’Yes, but I came to ask something more than to be your companion.’ — ’And what may that be?’ inquired the bandits with astonishment. — ’I come to ask to be your captain,’ said the young man. The bandits shouted with laughter. ‘And what have you done to aspire to this honor?’ demanded the lieutenant. — ’I have killed your chief, Cucumetto, whose dress I now wear; and I set fire to the villa San-Felice to procure a wedding-dress for my betrothed.’ An hour afterwards Luigi Vampa was chosen captain, vice Cucumetto deceased.”

“Well, my dear Albert,” said Franz, turning towards his friend; “what think you of citizen Luigi Vampa?”

“I say he is a myth,” replied Albert, “and never had an existence.”

“And what may a myth be?” inquired Pastrini.

“The explanation would be too long, my dear landlord,” replied Franz.

“And you say that Signor Vampa exercises his profession at this moment in the environs of Rome?”

“And with a boldness of which no bandit before him ever gave an example.”

“Then the police have vainly tried to lay hands on him?”

“Why, you see, he has a good understanding with the shepherds in the plains, the fishermen of the Tiber, and the smugglers of the coast. They seek for him in the mountains, and he is on the waters; they follow him on the waters, and he is on the open sea; then they pursue him, and he has suddenly taken refuge in the islands, at Giglio, Guanouti, or Monte Cristo; and when they hunt for him there, he reappears suddenly at Albano, Tivoli, or La Riccia.”

“And how does he behave towards travellers?”

“Alas! his plan is very simple. It depends on the distance he may be from the city, whether he gives eight hours, twelve hours, or a day wherein to pay their ransom; and when that time has elapsed he allows another hour’s grace. At the sixtieth minute of this hour, if the money is not forthcoming, he blows out the prisoner’s brains with a pistol-shot, or plants his dagger in his heart, and that settles the account.”

“Well, Albert,” inquired Franz of his companion, “are you still disposed to go to the Colosseum by the outer wall?”

“Quite so,” said Albert, “if the way be picturesque.” The clock struck nine as the door opened, and a coachman appeared. “Excellencies,” said he, “the coach is ready.”

“Well, then,” said Franz, “let us to the Colosseum.”

“By the Porta del Popolo or by the streets, your excellencies?”

“By the streets, morbleu, by the streets!” cried Franz.

“Ah, my dear fellow,” said Albert, rising, and lighting his third cigar, “really, I thought you had more courage.” So saying, the two young men went down the staircase, and got into the carriage.

Chapter 34

The Colosseum.

Franz had so managed his route, that during the ride to the Colosseum they passed not a single ancient ruin, so that no preliminary impression interfered to mitigate the colossal proportions of the gigantic building they came to admire. The road selected was a continuation of the Via Sistina; then by cutting off the right angle of the street in which stands Santa Maria Maggiore and proceeding by the Via Urbana and San Pietro in Vincoli, the travellers would find themselves directly opposite the Colosseum. This itinerary possessed another great advantage, — that of leaving Franz at full liberty to indulge his deep reverie upon the subject of Signor Pastrini's story, in which his mysterious host of Monte Cristo was so strangely mixed up. Seated with folded arms in a corner of the carriage, he continued to ponder over the singular history he had so lately listened to, and to ask himself an interminable number of questions touching its various circumstances without, however, arriving at a satisfactory reply to any of them. One fact more than the rest brought his friend "Sinbad the Sailor" back to his recollection, and that was the mysterious sort of intimacy that seemed to exist between the brigands and the sailors; and Pastrini's account of Vampa's having found refuge on board the vessels of smugglers and fishermen, reminded Franz of the two Corsican bandits he had found supping so amicably with the crew of the little yacht, which had even deviated from its course and touched at Porto-Vecchio for the sole purpose of landing them. The very name assumed by his host of Monte Cristo and again repeated by the landlord of the Hotel de Londres, abundantly proved to him that his island friend was playing his philanthropic part on the shores of Piombino, Civita-Vecchio, Ostia, and Gaeta, as on those of Corsica, Tuscany, and Spain; and further, Franz bethought him of having heard his singular entertainer speak both of Tunis and Palermo, proving thereby how largely his circle of acquaintances extended.

But however the mind of the young man might be absorbed in these reflections, they were at once dispersed at the sight of the dark frowning ruins of the stupendous Colosseum, through the various openings of which the pale moonlight played and flickered like the unearthly gleam from the eyes of the wandering dead. The carriage stopped near the Meta Sudans; the door was opened, and the young men, eagerly alighting, found themselves opposite a cicerone, who appeared to have sprung up from the ground, so unexpected was his appearance.

The usual guide from the hotel having followed them, they had paid two conductors, nor is it possible, at Rome, to avoid this abundant supply of guides; besides the ordinary cicerone, who seizes upon you directly you set foot in your hotel, and never quits you while you remain in the city, there is also a special cicerone belonging to each monument — nay, almost to each part of a monument. It may, therefore, be easily imagined there is no scarcity of guides at the Colosseum, that wonder of all ages, which Martial thus eulogizes: “Let Memphis cease to boast the barbarous miracles of her pyramids, and the wonders of Babylon be talked of no more among us; all must bow to the superiority of the gigantic labor of the Caesars, and the many voices of Fame spread far and wide the surpassing merits of this incomparable monument.”

As for Albert and Franz, they essayed not to escape from their ciceronian tyrants; and, indeed, it would have been so much the more difficult to break their bondage, as the guides alone are permitted to visit these monuments with torches in their hands. Thus, then, the young men made no attempt at resistance, but blindly and confidingly surrendered themselves into the care and custody of their conductors. Albert had already made seven or eight similar excursions to the Colosseum, while his less favored companion trod for the first time in his life the classic ground forming the monument of Flavius Vespasian; and, to his credit be it spoken, his mind, even amid the glib loquacity of the guides, was duly and deeply touched with awe and enthusiastic admiration of all he saw; and certainly no adequate notion of these stupendous ruins can be formed save by such as have visited them, and more especially by moonlight, at which time the vast proportions of the building appear twice as large when viewed by the mysterious beams of a southern moonlit sky, whose rays are sufficiently clear and vivid to light the horizon with a glow equal to the soft twilight of an eastern clime. Scarcely, therefore, had the reflective Franz walked a hundred steps beneath the interior porticoes of the ruin, than, abandoning Albert to the guides (who would by no means yield their prescriptive right of carrying their victims through the routine regularly laid down, and as regularly followed by them, but dragged the unconscious visitor to the various objects with a pertinacity that admitted of no appeal, beginning, as a matter of course, with the Lions' Den, and finishing with Caesar's "Podium,"), to escape a jargon and mechanical survey of the wonders by which he was surrounded, Franz ascended a half-dilapidated staircase, and, leaving them to follow their monotonous round, seated himself at the foot of a column, and immediately opposite a large aperture, which permitted him to enjoy a full and undisturbed view of the gigantic dimensions of the majestic ruin.

Franz had remained for nearly a quarter of an hour perfectly hidden by the shadow of the vast column at whose base he had found a resting-place, and from whence his eyes followed the motions of Albert and his guides, who, holding torches in their hands, had emerged from a vomitarium at the opposite extremity of the Colosseum, and then again disappeared down the steps conducting to the seats reserved for the Vestal virgins, resembling, as they glided along, some restless shades following the flickering glare of so many ignes-fatui. All at once his ear caught a sound resembling that of a stone rolling down the staircase opposite the one by which he had himself ascended. There was nothing remarkable in the circumstance of a fragment of granite giving way and falling heavily below; but it seemed to him that the substance that fell gave way beneath the pressure of a foot, and also that some one, who endeavored as much as possible to prevent his footsteps from being heard, was approaching the spot where he sat. Conjecture soon became certainty, for the figure of a man was distinctly visible to Franz, gradually emerging from the staircase opposite, upon which the moon was at that moment pouring a full tide of silvery brightness.

The stranger thus presenting himself was probably a person who, like Franz, preferred the enjoyment of solitude and his own thoughts to the frivolous gabble of the guides. And his appearance had nothing extraordinary in it; but the hesitation with which he proceeded, stopping and listening with anxious attention at every step he took, convinced Franz that he expected the arrival of some person. By a sort of instinctive impulse, Franz withdrew as much as possible behind his pillar. About ten feet from the spot where he and the stranger were, the roof had given way, leaving a large round opening, through which might be seen the blue vault of heaven, thickly studded with stars. Around this opening, which had, possibly, for ages permitted a free entrance to the brilliant moonbeams that now illumined the vast pile, grew a quantity of creeping plants, whose delicate green branches stood out in bold relief against the clear azure of the firmament, while large masses of thick, strong fibrous shoots forced their way through the chasm, and hung floating to and fro, like so many waving strings. The person whose mysterious arrival had attracted the attention of Franz stood in a kind of half-light, that rendered it impossible to distinguish his features, although his dress was easily made out. He wore a large brown mantle, one fold of which, thrown over his left shoulder, served likewise to mask the lower part of his countenance, while the upper part was completely hidden by his broad-brimmed hat. The lower part of his dress was more distinctly visible by the bright rays of the moon, which, entering through the broken ceiling, shed their refulgent beams on feet cased in elegantly made boots of polished leather, over which descended fashionably cut trousers of black cloth.

From the imperfect means Franz had of judging, he could only come to one conclusion, — that the person whom he was thus watching certainly belonged to no inferior station of life. Some few minutes had elapsed, and the stranger began to show manifest signs of impatience, when a slight noise was heard outside the aperture in the roof, and almost immediately a dark shadow seemed to obstruct the flood of light that had entered it, and the figure of a man was clearly seen gazing with eager scrutiny on the immense space beneath him; then, as his eye caught sight of him in the mantle, he grasped a floating mass of thickly matted boughs, and glided down by their help to within three or four feet of the ground, and then leaped lightly on his feet. The man who had performed this daring act with so much indifference wore the Transtevere costume. “I beg your excellency’s pardon for keeping you waiting,” said the man, in the Roman dialect, “but I don’t think I’m many minutes after my time, ten o’clock has just struck on the Lateran.”

“Say not a word about being late,” replied the stranger in purest Tuscan; “‘tis I who am too soon. But even if you had caused me to wait a little while, I should have felt quite sure that the delay was not occasioned by any fault of yours.”

“Your excellency is perfectly right in so thinking,” said the man; “I came here direct from the Castle of St. Angelo, and I had an immense deal of trouble before I could get a chance to speak to Beppo.”

“And who is Beppo?”

"Oh, Beppo is employed in the prison, and I give him so much a year to let me know what is going on within his holiness's castle."

"Indeed! You are a provident person, I see."

"Why, you see, no one knows what may happen. Perhaps some of these days I may be entrapped, like poor Peppino and may be very glad to have some little nibbling mouse to gnaw the meshes of my net, and so help me out of prison."

"Briefly, what did you glean?"

"That two executions of considerable interest will take place the day after to-morrow at two o'clock, as is customary at Rome at the commencement of all great festivals. One of the culprits will be mazzolato; [*] he is an atrocious villain, who murdered the priest who brought him up, and deserves not the smallest pity. The other sufferer is sentenced to be decapitato; [**] and he, your excellency, is poor Peppino."

* Knocked on the head.

** Beheaded.

"The fact is, that you have inspired not only the pontifical government, but also the neighboring states, with such extreme fear, that they are glad of all opportunity of making an example."

"But Peppino did not even belong to my band: he was merely a poor shepherd, whose only crime consisted in furnishing us with provisions."

"Which makes him your accomplice to all intents and purposes. But mark the distinction with which he is treated; instead of being knocked on the head as you would be if once they caught hold of you, he is simply sentenced to be guillotined, by which means, too, the amusements of the day are diversified, and there is a spectacle to please every spectator."

"Without reckoning the wholly unexpected one I am preparing to surprise them with."

"My good friend," said the man in the cloak, "excuse me for saying that you seem to me precisely in the mood to commit some wild or extravagant act."

"Perhaps I am; but one thing I have resolved on, and that is, to stop at nothing to restore a poor devil to liberty, who has got into this scrape solely from having served me. I should hate and despise myself as a coward did I desert the brave fellow in his present extremity."

"And what do you mean to do?"

“To surround the scaffold with twenty of my best men, who, at a signal from me, will rush forward directly Peppino is brought for execution, and, by the assistance of their stilettos, drive back the guard, and carry off the prisoner.”

“That seems to me as hazardous as uncertain, and convinces me that my scheme is far better than yours.”

“And what is your excellency’s project?”

“Just this. I will so advantageously bestow 2,000 piastres, that the person receiving them shall obtain a respite till next year for Peppino; and during that year, another skilfully placed 1,000 piastres will afford him the means of escaping from his prison.”

“And do you feel sure of succeeding?”

“Pardieu!” exclaimed the man in the cloak, suddenly expressing himself in French.

“What did your excellency say?” inquired the other.

“I said, my good fellow, that I would do more single-handed by the means of gold than you and all your troop could effect with stilettos, pistols, carbines, and blunderbusses included. Leave me, then, to act, and have no fears for the result.”

“At least, there can be no harm in myself and party being in readiness, in case your excellency should fail.”

“None whatever. Take what precautions you please, if it is any satisfaction to you to do so; but rely upon my obtaining the reprieve I seek.”

“Remember, the execution is fixed for the day after tomorrow, and that you have but one day to work in.”

“And what of that? Is not a day divided into twenty-four hours, each hour into sixty minutes, and every minute sub-divided into sixty seconds? Now in 86,400 seconds very many things can be done.”

“And how shall I know whether your excellency has succeeded or not.”

“Oh, that is very easily arranged. I have engaged the three lower windows at the Cafe Rospoli; should I have obtained the requisite pardon for Peppino, the two outside windows will be hung with yellow damasks, and the centre with white, having a large cross in red marked on it.”

“And whom will you employ to carry the reprieve to the officer directing the execution?”

“Send one of your men, disguised as a penitent friar, and I will give it to him. His dress will procure him the means of approaching the scaffold itself, and he will deliver the official order to the officer, who, in his turn, will hand it to the executioner; in the meantime, it will be as well to acquaint Peppino with what we have determined on, if it be only to prevent his dying of fear or losing his senses, because in either case a very useless expense will have been incurred."

"Your excellency," said the man, "you are fully persuaded of my entire devotion to you, are you not?"

"Nay, I flatter myself that there can be no doubt of it," replied the cavalier in the cloak.

"Well, then, only fulfil your promise of rescuing Peppino, and henceforward you shall receive not only devotion, but the most absolute obedience from myself and those under me that one human being can render to another."

"Have a care how far you pledge yourself, my good friend, for I may remind you of your promise at some, perhaps, not very distant period, when I, in my turn, may require your aid and influence."

"Let that day come sooner or later, your excellency will find me what I have found you in this my heavy trouble; and if from the other end of the world you but write me word to do such or such a thing, you may regard it as done, for done it shall be, on the word and faith of" —

"Hush!" interrupted the stranger; "I hear a noise."

"'Tis some travellers, who are visiting the Colosseum by torchlight."

"'Twere better we should not be seen together; those guides are nothing but spies, and might possibly recognize you; and, however I may be honored by your friendship, my worthy friend, if once the extent of our intimacy were known, I am sadly afraid both my reputation and credit would suffer thereby."

"Well, then, if you obtain the reprieve?"

"The middle window at the Cafe Rospoli will be hung with white damask, bearing a red cross."

"And if you fail?"

"Then all three windows will have yellow draperies."

"And then?"

"And then, my good fellow, use your daggers in any way you please, and I further promise you to be there as a spectator of your prowess."

"We understand each other perfectly, then. Adieu, your excellency; depend upon me as firmly as I do upon you."

Saying these words, the Transteverin disappeared down the staircase, while his companion, muffling his features more closely than before in the folds of his mantle, passed almost close to Franz, and descended to the arena by an outward flight of steps. The next minute Franz heard himself called by Albert, who made the lofty building re-echo with the sound of his friend's name. Franz, however, did not obey the summons till he had satisfied himself that the two men whose conversation he had overheard were at a sufficient distance to prevent his encountering them in his descent. In ten minutes after the strangers had departed, Franz was on the road to the Piazza de Spagni, listening with studied indifference to the learned dissertation delivered by Albert, after the manner of Pliny and Calpurnius, touching the iron-pointed nets used to prevent the ferocious beasts from springing on the spectators. Franz let him proceed without interruption, and, in fact, did not hear what was said; he longed to be alone, and free to ponder over all that had occurred. One of the two men, whose mysterious meeting in the Colosseum he had so unintentionally witnessed, was an entire stranger to him, but not so the other; and though Franz had been unable to distinguish his features, from his being either wrapped in his mantle or obscured by the shadow, the tones of his voice had made too powerful an impression on him the first time he had heard them for him ever again to forget them, hear them when or where he might. It was more especially when this man was speaking in a manner half jesting, half bitter, that Franz's ear recalled most vividly the deep sonorous, yet well-pitched voice that had addressed him in the grotto of Monte Cristo, and which he heard for the second time amid the darkness and ruined grandeur of the Colosseum. And the more he thought, the more entire was his conviction, that the person who wore the mantle was no other than his former host and entertainer, "Sinbad the Sailor."

Under any other circumstances, Franz would have found it impossible to resist his extreme curiosity to know more of so singular a personage, and with that intent have sought to renew their short acquaintance; but in the present instance, the confidential nature of the conversation he had overheard made him, with propriety, judge that his appearance at such a time would be anything but agreeable. As we have seen, therefore, he permitted his former host to retire without attempting a recognition, but fully promising himself a rich indemnity for his present forbearance should chance afford him another opportunity. In vain did Franz endeavor to forget the many perplexing thoughts which assailed him; in vain did he court the refreshment of sleep. Slumber refused to visit his eyelids and the night was passed in feverish contemplation of the chain of circumstances tending to prove the identity of the mysterious visitant to the Colosseum with the inhabitant of the grotto of Monte Cristo; and the more he thought, the firmer grew his opinion on the subject. Worn out at length, he fell asleep at daybreak, and did not awake till late. Like a genuine Frenchman, Albert had employed his time in arranging for the evening's diversion; he had sent to engage a box at the Teatro Argentino; and Franz, having a number of letters to write, relinquished the carriage to Albert for the whole of the day. At five o'clock Albert returned, delighted with his day's work; he had been occupied in leaving his letters of introduction, and had received in return more invitations to balls and routs than it would be possible for him to accept; besides this, he had seen (as he called it) all the remarkable sights at Rome. Yes, in a single day he had accomplished what his more serious-minded companion would have taken weeks to effect. Neither had he neglected to ascertain the name of the piece to be played that night at the Teatro Argentino, and also what performers appeared in it.

The opera of "Parisina" was announced for representation, and the principal actors were Coselli, Moriani, and La Specchia. The young men, therefore, had reason to consider themselves fortunate in having the opportunity of hearing one of the best works by the composer of "Lucia di Lammermoor," supported by three of the most renowned vocalists of Italy. Albert had never been able to endure the Italian theatres, with their orchestras from which it is impossible to see, and the absence of balconies, or open boxes; all these defects pressed hard on a man who had had his stall at the Bouffes, and had shared a lower box at the Opera. Still, in spite of this, Albert displayed his most dazzling and effective costumes each time he visited the theatres; but, alas, his elegant toilet was wholly thrown away, and one of the most worthy representatives of Parisian fashion had to carry with him the mortifying reflection that he had nearly overrun Italy without meeting with a single adventure.

Sometimes Albert would affect to make a joke of his want of success; but internally he was deeply wounded, and his self-love immensely piqued, to think that Albert de Morcerf, the most admired and most sought after of any young person of his day, should thus be passed over, and merely have his labor for his pains. And the thing was so much the more annoying, as, according to the characteristic modesty of a Frenchman, Albert had quitted Paris with the full conviction that he had only to show himself in Italy to carry all before him, and that upon his return he should astonish the Parisian world with the recital of his numerous love-affairs. Alas, poor Albert! none of those interesting adventures fell in his way; the lovely Genoese, Florentines, and Neapolitans were all faithful, if not to their husbands, at least to their lovers, and thought not of changing even for the splendid appearance of Albert de Morcerf; and all he gained was the painful conviction that the ladies of Italy have this advantage over those of France, that they are faithful even in their infidelity. Yet he could not restrain a hope that in Italy, as elsewhere, there might be an exception to the general rule. Albert, besides being an elegant, well-looking young man, was also possessed of considerable talent and ability; moreover, he was a viscount — a recently created one, certainly, but in the present day it is not necessary to go as far back as Noah in tracing a descent, and a genealogical tree is equally estimated, whether dated from 1399 or merely 1815; but to crown all these advantages, Albert de Morcerf commanded an income of 50,000 livres, a more than sufficient sum to render him a personage of considerable importance in Paris. It was therefore no small mortification to him to have visited most of the principal cities in Italy without having excited the most trifling observation. Albert, however, hoped to indemnify himself for all these slights and indifferences during the Carnival, knowing full well that among the different states and kingdoms in which this festivity is celebrated, Rome is the spot where even the wisest and gravest throw off the usual rigidity of their lives, and deign to mingle in the follies of this time of liberty and relaxation.

The Carnival was to commence on the morrow; therefore Albert had not an instant to lose in setting forth the programme of his hopes, expectations, and claims to notice. With this design he had engaged a box in the most conspicuous part of the theatre, and exerted himself to set off his personal attractions by the aid of the most rich and elaborate toilet. The box taken by Albert was in the first circle; although each of the three tiers of boxes is deemed equally aristocratic, and is, for this reason, generally styled the “nobility’s boxes,” and although the box engaged for the two friends was sufficiently capacious to contain at least a dozen persons, it had cost less than would be paid at some of the French theatres for one admitting merely four occupants. Another motive had influenced Albert’s selection of his seat, — who knew but that, thus advantageously placed, he might not in truth attract the notice of some fair Roman, and an introduction might ensue that would procure him the offer of a seat in a carriage, or a place in a princely balcony, from which he might behold the gayeties of the Carnival? These united considerations made Albert more lively and anxious to please than he had hitherto been. Totally disregarding the business of the stage, he leaned from his box and began attentively scrutinizing the beauty of each pretty woman, aided by a powerful opera-glass; but, alas, this attempt to attract notice wholly failed; not even curiosity had been excited, and it was but too apparent that the lovely creatures, into whose good graces he was desirous of stealing, were all so much engrossed with themselves, their lovers, or their own thoughts, that they had not so much as noticed him or the manipulation of his glass.

The truth was, that the anticipated pleasures of the Carnival, with the "holy week" that was to succeed it, so filled every fair breast, as to prevent the least attention being bestowed even on the business of the stage. The actors made their entries and exits unobserved or unthought of; at certain conventional moments, the spectators would suddenly cease their conversation, or rouse themselves from their musings, to listen to some brilliant effort of Moriani's, a well-executed recitative by Coselli, or to join in loud applause at the wonderful powers of La Specchia; but that momentary excitement over, they quickly relapsed into their former state of preoccupation or interesting conversation. Towards the close of the first act, the door of a box which had been hitherto vacant was opened; a lady entered to whom Franz had been introduced in Paris, where indeed, he had imagined she still was. The quick eye of Albert caught the involuntary start with which his friend beheld the new arrival, and, turning to him, he said hastily, "Do you know the woman who has just entered that box?"

"Yes; what do you think of her?"

"Oh, she is perfectly lovely — what a complexion! And such magnificent hair! Is she French?"

"No; a Venetian."

"And her name is — "

"Countess G — — ."

"Ah, I know her by name!" exclaimed Albert; "she is said to possess as much wit and cleverness as beauty. I was to have been presented to her when I met her at Madame Villefort's ball."

“Shall I assist you in repairing your negligence?” asked Franz.

“My dear fellow, are you really on such good terms with her as to venture to take me to her box?”

“Why, I have only had the honor of being in her society and conversing with her three or four times in my life; but you know that even such an acquaintance as that might warrant my doing what you ask.” At that instant, the countess perceived Franz, and graciously waved her hand to him, to which he replied by a respectful inclination of the head. “Upon my word,” said Albert, “you seem to be on excellent terms with the beautiful countess.”

“You are mistaken in thinking so,” returned Franz calmly; “but you merely fall into the same error which leads so many of our countrymen to commit the most egregious blunders, — I mean that of judging the habits and customs of Italy and Spain by our Parisian notions; believe me, nothing is more fallacious than to form any estimate of the degree of intimacy you may suppose existing among persons by the familiar terms they seem upon; there is a similarity of feeling at this instant between ourselves and the countess — nothing more.”

“Is there, indeed, my good fellow? Pray tell me, is it sympathy of heart?”

“No; of taste,” continued Franz gravely.

“And in what manner has this congeniality of mind been evinced?”

“By the countess’s visiting the Colosseum, as we did last night, by moonlight, and nearly alone.”

“You were with her, then?”

“I was.”

“And what did you say to her?”

“Oh, we talked of the illustrious dead of whom that magnificent ruin is a glorious monument!”

“Upon my word,” cried Albert, “you must have been a very entertaining companion alone, or all but alone, with a beautiful woman in such a place of sentiment as the Colosseum, and yet to find nothing better a talk about than the dead! All I can say is, if ever I should get such a chance, the living should be my theme.”

“And you will probably find your theme ill-chosen.”

“But,” said Albert, breaking in upon his discourse, “never mind the past; let us only remember the present. Are you not going to keep your promise of introducing me to the fair subject of our remarks?”

"Certainly, directly the curtain falls on the stage."

"What a confounded time this first act takes. I believe, on my soul, that they never mean to finish it."

"Oh, yes, they will; only listen to that charming finale. How exquisitely Coselli sings his part."

"But what an awkward, inelegant fellow he is."

"Well, then, what do you say to La Specchia? Did you ever see anything more perfect than her acting?"

"Why, you know, my dear fellow, when one has been accustomed to Malibran and Sontag, such singers as these don't make the same impression on you they perhaps do on others."

"At least, you must admire Moriani's style and execution."

"I never fancied men of his dark, ponderous appearance singing with a voice like a woman's."

"My good friend," said Franz, turning to him, while Albert continued to point his glass at every box in the theatre, "you seem determined not to approve; you are really too difficult to please." The curtain at length fell on the performances, to the infinite satisfaction of the Viscount of Morcerf, who seized his hat, rapidly passed his fingers through his hair, arranged his cravat and wristbands, and signified to Franz that he was waiting for him to lead the way. Franz, who had mutely interrogated the countess, and received from her a gracious smile in token that he would be welcome, sought not to retard the gratification of Albert's eager impatience, but began at once the tour of the house, closely followed by Albert, who availed himself of the few minutes required to reach the opposite side of the theatre to settle the height and smoothness of his collar, and to arrange the lappets of his coat. This important task was just completed as they arrived at the countess's box. At the knock, the door was immediately opened, and the young man who was seated beside the countess, in obedience to the Italian custom, instantly rose and surrendered his place to the strangers, who, in turn, would be expected to retire upon the arrival of other visitors.

Franz presented Albert as one of the most distinguished young men of the day, both as regarded his position in society and extraordinary talents; nor did he say more than the truth, for in Paris and the circle in which the viscount moved, he was looked upon and cited as a model of perfection. Franz added that his companion, deeply grieved at having been prevented the honor of being presented to the countess during her sojourn in Paris, was most anxious to make up for it, and had requested him (Franz) to remedy the past misfortune by conducting him to her box, and concluded by asking pardon for his presumption in having taken it upon himself to do so. The countess, in reply, bowed gracefully to Albert, and extended her hand with cordial kindness to Franz; then, inviting Albert to take the vacant seat beside her, she recommended Franz to take the next best, if he wished to view the ballet, and pointed to the one behind her own chair. Albert was soon deeply engrossed in discoursing upon Paris and Parisian matters, speaking to the countess of the various persons they both knew there. Franz perceived how completely he was in his element; and, unwilling to interfere with the pleasure he so evidently felt, took up Albert's glass, and began in his turn to survey the audience. Sitting alone, in the front of a box immediately opposite, but situated on the third row, was a woman of exquisite beauty, dressed in a Greek costume, which evidently, from the ease and grace with which she wore it, was her national attire. Behind her, but in deep shadow, was the outline of a masculine figure; but the features of this latter personage it was not possible to distinguish. Franz could not forbear breaking in upon the apparently interesting conversation passing between the countess and Albert, to inquire of the former if she knew who was the fair Albanian opposite, since beauty such as hers was well worthy of being observed by either sex. "All I can tell about her," replied the countess, "is, that she has been at Rome since the beginning of the season; for I saw her where she now sits the very first night of the season, and since then she has never missed a performance. Sometimes she is accompanied by the person who is now with her, and at others she is merely attended by a black servant."

"And what do you think of her personal appearance?"

"Oh, I consider her perfectly lovely — she is just my idea of what Medora must have been."

Franz and the countess exchanged a smile, and then the latter resumed her conversation with Albert, while Franz returned to his previous survey of the house and company. The curtain rose on the ballet, which was one of those excellent specimens of the Italian school, admirably arranged and put on the stage by Henri, who has established for himself a great reputation throughout Italy for his taste and skill in the choreographic art — one of those masterly productions of grace, method, and elegance in which the whole corps de ballet, from the principal dancers to the humblest supernumerary, are all engaged on the stage at the same time; and a hundred and fifty persons may be seen exhibiting the same attitude, or elevating the same arm or leg with a simultaneous movement, that would lead you to suppose that but one mind, one act of volition, influenced the moving mass — the ballet was called “Poliska.” However much the ballet might have claimed his attention, Franz was too deeply occupied with the beautiful Greek to take any note of it; while she seemed to experience an almost childlike delight in watching it, her eager, animated looks contrasting strongly with the utter indifference of her companion, who, during the whole time the piece lasted, never even moved, not even when the furious, crashing din produced by the trumpets, cymbals, and Chinese bells sounded their loudest from the orchestra. Of this he took no heed, but was, as far as appearances might be trusted, enjoying soft repose and bright celestial dreams. The ballet at length came to a close, and the curtain fell amid the loud, unanimous plaudits of an enthusiastic and delighted audience.

Owing to the very judicious plan of dividing the two acts of the opera with a ballet, the pauses between the performances are very short, the singers in the opera having time to repose themselves and change their costume, when necessary, while the dancers are executing their pirouettes and exhibiting their graceful steps. The overture to the second act began; and, at the first sound of the leader’s bow across his violin, Franz observed the sleeper slowly arise and approach the Greek girl, who turned around to say a few words to him, and then, leaning forward again on the railing of her box, she became as absorbed as before in what was going on. The countenance of the person who had addressed her remained so completely in the shade, that, though Franz tried his utmost, he could not distinguish a single feature. The curtain rose, and the attention of Franz was attracted by the actors; and his eyes turned from the box containing the Greek girl and her strange companion to watch the business of the stage.

Most of my readers are aware that the second act of “Parisina” opens with the celebrated and effective duet in which Parisina, while sleeping, betrays to Azzo the secret of her love for Ugo. The injured husband goes through all the emotions of jealousy, until conviction seizes on his mind, and then, in a frenzy of rage and indignation, he awakens his guilty wife to tell her that he knows her guilt and to threaten her with his vengeance. This duet is one of the most beautiful, expressive and terrible conceptions that has ever emanated from the fruitful pen of Donizetti. Franz now listened to it for the third time; yet its notes, so tenderly expressive and fearfully grand as the wretched husband and wife give vent to their different griefs and passions, thrilled through the soul of Franz with an effect equal to his first emotions upon hearing it. Excited beyond his usual calm demeanor, Franz rose with the audience, and was about to join the loud, enthusiastic applause that followed; but suddenly his purpose was arrested, his hands fell by his sides, and the half-uttered "bravos" expired on his lips. The occupant of the box in which the Greek girl sat appeared to share the universal admiration that prevailed; for he left his seat to stand up in front, so that, his countenance being fully revealed, Franz had no difficulty in recognizing him as the mysterious inhabitant of Monte Cristo, and the very same person he had encountered the preceding evening in the ruins of the Colosseum, and whose voice and figure had seemed so familiar to him. All doubt of his identity was now at an end; his singular host evidently resided at Rome. The surprise and agitation occasioned by this full confirmation of Franz's former suspicion had no doubt imparted a corresponding expression to his features; for the countess, after gazing with a puzzled look at his face, burst into a fit of laughter, and begged to know what had happened. "Countess," returned Franz, totally unheeding her raillery, "I asked you a short time since if you knew any particulars respecting the Albanian lady opposite; I must now beseech you to inform me who and what is her husband?"

"Nay," answered the countess, "I know no more of him than yourself."

"Perhaps you never before noticed him?"

"What a question — so truly French! Do you not know that we Italians have eyes only for the man we love?"

"True," replied Franz.

"All I can say is," continued the countess, taking up the lorgnette, and directing it toward the box in question, "that the gentleman, whose history I am unable to furnish, seems to me as though he had just been dug up; he looks more like a corpse permitted by some friendly grave-digger to quit his tomb for a while, and revisit this earth of ours, than anything human. How ghastly pale he is!"

"Oh, he is always as colorless as you now see him," said Franz.

"Then you know him?" almost screamed the countess. "Oh, pray do, for heaven's sake, tell us all about — is he a vampire, or a resuscitated corpse, or what?"

"I fancy I have seen him before; and I even think he recognizes me."

“And I can well understand,” said the countess, shrugging up her beautiful shoulders, as though an involuntary shudder passed through her veins, “that those who have once seen that man will never be likely to forget him.” The sensation experienced by Franz was evidently not peculiar to himself; another, and wholly uninterested person, felt the same unaccountable awe and misgiving. “Well.” inquired Franz, after the countess had a second time directed her lorgnette at the box, “what do you think of our opposite neighbor?”

“Why, that he is no other than Lord Ruthven himself in a living form.” This fresh allusion to Byron [*] drew a smile to Franz’s countenance; although he could but allow that if anything was likely to induce belief in the existence of vampires, it would be the presence of such a man as the mysterious personage before him.

“I must positively find out who and what he is,” said Franz, rising from his seat.

“No, no,” cried the countess; “you must not leave me. I depend upon you to escort me home. Oh, indeed, I cannot permit you to go.”

> * Scott, of course: “The son of an ill-fated sire, and the
> father of a yet more unfortunate family, bore in his looks
> that cast of inauspicious melancholy by which the
> physiognomists of that time pretended to distinguish those
> who were predestined to a violent and unhappy death.” — The
> Abbot, ch. xxii.

“Is it possible,” whispered Franz, “that you entertain any fear?”

“I’ll tell you,” answered the countess. “Byron had the most perfect belief in the existence of vampires, and even assured me that he had seen them. The description he gave me perfectly corresponds with the features and character of the man before us. Oh, he is the exact personification of what I have been led to expect! The coal-black hair, large bright, glittering eyes, in which a wild, unearthly fire seems burning, — the same ghastly paleness. Then observe, too, that the woman with him is altogether unlike all others of her sex. She is a foreigner — a stranger. Nobody knows who she is, or where she comes from. No doubt she belongs to the same horrible race he does, and is, like himself, a dealer in magical arts. I entreat of you not to go near him — at least to-night; and if to-morrow your curiosity still continues as great, pursue your researches if you will; but to-night you neither can nor shall. For that purpose I mean to keep you all to myself.” Franz protested he could not defer his pursuit till the following day, for many reasons. “Listen to me,” said the countess, “and do not be so very headstrong. I am going home. I have a party at my house to-night, and therefore cannot possibly remain till the end of the opera. Now, I cannot for one instant believe you so devoid of gallantry as to refuse a lady your escort when she even condescends to ask you for it.”

There was nothing else left for Franz to do but to take up his hat, open the door of the box, and offer the countess his arm. It was quite evident, by her manner, that her uneasiness was not feigned; and Franz himself could not resist a feeling of superstitious dread — so much the stronger in him, as it arose from a variety of corroborative recollections, while the terror of the countess sprang from an instinctive belief, originally created in her mind by the wild tales she had listened to till she believed them truths. Franz could even feel her arm tremble as he assisted her into the carriage. Upon arriving at her hotel, Franz perceived that she had deceived him when she spoke of expecting company; on the contrary, her own return before the appointed hour seemed greatly to astonish the servants. “Excuse my little subterfuge,” said the countess, in reply to her companion’s half-reproachful observation on the subject; “but that horrid man had made me feel quite uncomfortable, and I longed to be alone, that I might compose my startled mind.” Franz essayed to smile. “Nay,” said she, “do not smile; it ill accords with the expression of your countenance, and I am sure it does not spring from your heart. However, promise me one thing.”

“What is it?”

“Promise me, I say.”

“I will do anything you desire, except relinquish my determination of finding out who this man is. I have more reasons than you can imagine for desiring to know who he is, from whence he came, and whither he is going.”

“Where he comes from I am ignorant; but I can readily tell you where he is going to, and that is down below, without the least doubt.”

“Let us only speak of the promise you wished me to make,” said Franz.

“Well, then, you must give me your word to return immediately to your hotel, and make no attempt to follow this man to-night. There are certain affinities between the persons we quit and those we meet afterwards. For heaven’s sake, do not serve as a conductor between that man and me. Pursue your chase after him to-morrow as eagerly as you please; but never bring him near me, if you would not see me die of terror. And now, good-night; go to your rooms, and try to sleep away all recollections of this evening. For my own part, I am quite sure I shall not be able to close my eyes.” So saying, the countess quitted Franz, leaving him unable to decide whether she were merely amusing herself at his expense, or whether her fears and agitations were genuine.

Upon his return to the hotel, Franz found Albert in his dressing-gown and slippers, listlessly extended on a sofa, smoking a cigar. “My dear fellow.” cried he, springing up, “is it really you? Why, I did not expect to see you before to-morrow.”

“My dear Albert,” replied Franz, “I am glad of this opportunity to tell you, once and forever, that you entertain a most erroneous notion concerning Italian women. I should have thought the continual failures you have met with in all your own love affairs might have taught you better by this time.”

“Upon my soul, these women would puzzle the very Devil to read them aright. Why, here — they give you their hand — they press yours in return — they keep up a whispering conversation — permit you to accompany them home. Why, if a Parisian were to indulge in a quarter of these marks of flattering attention, her reputation would be gone forever.”

“And the very reason why the women of this fine country put so little restraint on their words and actions, is because they live so much in public, and have really nothing to conceal. Besides, you must have perceived that the countess was really alarmed.”

“At what? At the sight of that respectable gentleman sitting opposite to us in the same box with the lovely Greek girl? Now, for my part, I met them in the lobby after the conclusion of the piece; and hang me, if I can guess where you took your notions of the other world from. I can assure you that this hobgoblin of yours is a deuced fine-looking fellow — admirably dressed. Indeed, I feel quite sure, from the cut of his clothes, they are made by a first-rate Paris tailor — probably Blin or Humann. He was rather too pale, certainly; but then, you know, paleness is always looked upon as a strong proof of aristocratic descent and distinguished breeding.” Franz smiled; for he well remembered that Albert particularly prided himself on the entire absence of color in his own complexion.

“Well, that tends to confirm my own ideas,” said Franz, “that the countess’s suspicions were destitute alike of sense and reason. Did he speak in your hearing? and did you catch any of his words?”

“I did; but they were uttered in the Romaic dialect. I knew that from the mixture of Greek words. I don’t know whether I ever told you that when I was at college I was rather — rather strong in Greek.”

“He spoke the Romaic language, did he?”

“I think so.”

“That settles it,” murmured Franz. “‘Tis he, past all doubt.”

“What do you say?”

“Nothing, nothing. But tell me, what were you thinking about when I came in?”

“Oh, I was arranging a little surprise for you.”

“Indeed. Of what nature?”

“Why, you know it is quite impossible to procure a carriage.”

“Certainly; and I also know that we have done all that human means afforded to endeavor to get one.”

“Now, then, in this difficulty a bright idea has flashed across my brain.” Franz looked at Albert as though he had not much confidence in the suggestions of his imagination. “I tell you what, Sir Franz,” cried Albert, “you deserve to be called out for such a misgiving and incredulous glance as that you were pleased to bestow on me just now.”

“And I promise to give you the satisfaction of a gentleman if your scheme turns out as ingenious as you assert.”

“Well, then, hearken to me.”

“I listen.”

“You agree, do you not, that obtaining a carriage is out of the question?”

“I do.”

“Neither can we procure horses?”

“True; we have offered any sum, but have failed.”

“Well, now, what do you say to a cart? I dare say such a thing might be had.”

“Very possibly.”

“And a pair of oxen?”

“As easily found as the cart.”

“Then you see, my good fellow, with a cart and a couple of oxen our business can be managed. The cart must be tastefully ornamented; and if you and I dress ourselves as Neapolitan reapers, we may get up a striking tableau, after the manner of that splendid picture by Leopold Robert. It would add greatly to the effect if the countess would join us in the costume of a peasant from Puzzoli or Sorrento. Our group would then be quite complete, more especially as the countess is quite beautiful enough to represent a madonna.”

“Well,” said Franz, “this time, Albert, I am bound to give you credit for having hit upon a most capital idea.”

“And quite a national one, too,” replied Albert with gratified pride. “A mere masque borrowed from our own festivities. Ha, ha, ye Romans! you thought to make us, unhappy strangers, trot at the heels of your processions, like so many lazzaroni, because no carriages or horses are to be had in your beggarly city. But you don’t know us; when we can’t have one thing we invent another.”

“And have you communicated your triumphant idea to anybody?”

“Only to our host. Upon my return home I sent for him, and I then explained to him what I wished to procure. He assured me that nothing would be easier than to furnish all I desired. One thing I was sorry for; when I bade him have the horns of the oxen gilded, he told me there would not be time, as it would require three days to do that; so you see we must do without this little superfluity.”

“And where is he now?”

“Who?”

“Our host.”

“Gone out in search of our equipage, by to-morrow it might be too late.”

“Then he will be able to give us an answer to-night.”

“Oh, I expect him every minute.” At this instant the door opened, and the head of Signor Pastrini appeared. “Permesso?” inquired he.

“Certainly — certainly,” cried Franz. “Come in, mine host.”

“Now, then,” asked Albert eagerly, “have you found the desired cart and oxen?”

“Better than that!” replied Signor Pastrini, with the air of a man perfectly well satisfied with himself.

“Take care, my worthy host,” said Albert, “better is a sure enemy to well.”

“Let your excellencies only leave the matter to me,” returned Signor Pastrini in a tone indicative of unbounded self-confidence.

“But what have you done?” asked Franz. “Speak out, there’s a worthy fellow.”

“Your excellencies are aware,” responded the landlord, swelling with importance, “that the Count of Monte Cristo is living on the same floor with yourselves!”

“I should think we did know it,” exclaimed Albert, “since it is owing to that circumstance that we are packed into these small rooms, like two poor students in the back streets of Paris.”

“When, then, the Count of Monte Cristo, hearing of the dilemma in which you are placed, has sent to offer you seats in his carriage and two places at his windows in the Palazzo Rospoli.” The friends looked at each other with unutterable surprise.

“But do you think,” asked Albert, “that we ought to accept such offers from a perfect stranger?”

“What sort of person is this Count of Monte Cristo?” asked Franz of his host. “A very great nobleman, but whether Maltese or Sicilian I cannot exactly say; but this I know, that he is noble as a Borghese and rich as a gold-mine.”

“It seems to me,” said Franz, speaking in an undertone to Albert, “that if this person merited the high panegyrics of our landlord, he would have conveyed his invitation through another channel, and not permitted it to be brought to us in this unceremonious way. He would have written — or” —

At this instant some one knocked at the door. “Come in,” said Franz. A servant, wearing a livery of considerable style and richness, appeared at the threshold, and, placing two cards in the landlord’s hands, who forthwith presented them to the two young men, he said, “Please to deliver these, from the Count of Monte Cristo to Viscomte Albert de Morcerf and M. Franz d’Epinay. The Count of Monte Cristo,” continued the servant, “begs these gentlemen’s permission to wait upon them as their neighbor, and he will be honored by an intimation of what time they will please to receive him.”

“Faith, Franz,” whispered Albert, “there is not much to find fault with here.”

“Tell the count,” replied Franz, “that we will do ourselves the pleasure of calling on him.” The servant bowed and retired.

“That is what I call an elegant mode of attack,” said Albert, “You were quite correct in what you said, Signor Pastrini. The Count of Monte Cristo is unquestionably a man of first-rate breeding and knowledge of the world.”

“Then you accept his offer?” said the host.

"Of course we do," replied Albert. "Still, I must own I am sorry to be obliged to give up the cart and the group of reapers — it would have produced such an effect! And were it not for the windows at the Palazzo Rospoli, by way of recompense for the loss of our beautiful scheme, I don't know but what I should have held on by my original plan. What say you, Franz?"

"Oh, I agree with you; the windows in the Palazzo Rospoli alone decided me." The truth was, that the mention of two places in the Palazzo Rospoli had recalled to Franz the conversation he had overheard the preceding evening in the ruins of the Colosseum between the mysterious unknown and the Transteverin, in which the stranger in the cloak had undertaken to obtain the freedom of a condemned criminal; and if this muffled-up individual proved (as Franz felt sure he would) the same as the person he had just seen in the Teatro Argentino, then he should be able to establish his identity, and also to prosecute his researches respecting him with perfect facility and freedom. Franz passed the night in confused dreams respecting the two meetings he had already had with his mysterious tormentor, and in waking speculations as to what the morrow would produce. The next day must clear up every doubt; and unless his near neighbor and would-be friend, the Count of Monte Cristo, possessed the ring of Gyges, and by its power was able to render himself invisible, it was very certain he could not escape this time. Eight o'clock found Franz up and dressed, while Albert, who had not the same motives for early rising, was still soundly asleep. The first act of Franz was to summon his landlord, who presented himself with his accustomed obsequiousness.

"Pray, Signor Pastrini," asked Franz, "is not some execution appointed to take place to-day?"

"Yes, your excellency; but if your reason for inquiry is that you may procure a window to view it from, you are much too late."

"Oh, no," answered Franz, "I had no such intention; and even if I had felt a wish to witness the spectacle, I might have done so from Monte Pincio — could I not?"

"Ah!" exclaimed mine host, "I did not think it likely your excellency would have chosen to mingle with such a rabble as are always collected on that hill, which, indeed, they consider as exclusively belonging to themselves."

“Very possibly I may not go,” answered Franz; “but in case I feel disposed, give me some particulars of to-day’s executions.”

“What particulars would your excellency like to hear?”

“Why, the number of persons condemned to suffer, their names, and description of the death they are to die.”

“That happens just lucky, your excellency! Only a few minutes ago they brought me the tavolettas.”

“What are they?”

“Sort of wooden tablets hung up at the corners of streets the evening before an execution, on which is pasted up a paper containing the names of the condemned persons, their crimes, and mode of punishment. The reason for so publicly announcing all this is, that all good and faithful Catholics may offer up their prayers for the unfortunate culprits, and, above all, beseech of heaven to grant them a sincere repentance.”

“And these tablets are brought to you that you may add your prayers to those of the faithful, are they?” asked Franz somewhat incredulously.

“Oh, dear, no, your excellency! I have not time for anybody’s affairs but my own and those of my honorable guests; but I make an agreement with the man who pastes up the papers, and he brings them to me as he would the playbills, that in case any person staying at my hotel should like to witness an execution, he may obtain every requisite information concerning the time and place etc.”

“Upon my word, that is a most delicate attention on your part, Signor Pastrini,” cried Franz.

“Why, your excellency,” returned the landlord, chuckling and rubbing his hands with infinite complacency, “I think I may take upon myself to say I neglect nothing to deserve the support and patronage of the noble visitors to this poor hotel.”

“I see that plainly enough, my most excellent host, and you may rely upon me to proclaim so striking a proof of your attention to your guests wherever I go. Meanwhile, oblige me by a sight of one of these tavolettas.”

“Nothing can be easier than to comply with your excellency’s wish,” said the landlord, opening the door of the chamber; “I have caused one to be placed on the landing, close by your apartment.” Then, taking the tablet from the wall, he handed it to Franz, who read as follows: —

“‘The public is informed that on Wednesday, February 23d, being the first day of the Carnival, executions will take place in the Piazza del

Popolo, by order of the Tribunal of the Rota, of two persons, named Andrea Rondola, and Peppino, otherwise called Rocca Priori; the former found guilty of the murder of a venerable and exemplary priest, named Don Cesare Torlini, canon of the church of St. John Lateran; and the latter convicted of being an accomplice of the atrocious and sanguinary bandit, Luigi Vampa, and his band. The first-named malefactor will be subjected to the mazzuola, the second culprit beheaded. The prayers of all good Christians are entreated for these unfortunate men, that it may please God to awaken them to a sense of their guilt, and to grant them a hearty and sincere repentance for their crimes.'"

This was precisely what Franz had heard the evening before in the ruins of the Colosseum. No part of the programme differed, — the names of the condemned persons, their crimes, and mode of punishment, all agreed with his previous information. In all probability, therefore, the Transteverin was no other than the bandit Luigi Vampa himself, and the man shrouded in the mantle the same he had known as "Sinbad the Sailor," but who, no doubt, was still pursuing his philanthropic expedition in Rome, as he had already done at Porto-Vecchio and Tunis. Time was getting on, however, and Franz deemed it advisable to awaken Albert; but at the moment he prepared to proceed to his chamber, his friend entered the room in perfect costume for the day. The anticipated delights of the Carnival had so run in his head as to make him leave his pillow long before his usual hour. "Now, my excellent Signor Pastrini," said Franz, addressing his landlord, "since we are both ready, do you think we may proceed at once to visit the Count of Monte Cristo?"

"Most assuredly," replied he. "The Count of Monte Cristo is always an early riser; and I can answer for his having been up these two hours."

"Then you really consider we shall not be intruding if we pay our respects to him directly?"

"Oh, I am quite sure. I will take all the blame on myself if you find I have led you into an error."

"Well, then, if it be so, are you ready, Albert?"

"Perfectly."

"Let us go and return our best thanks for his courtesy."

"Yes, let us do so." The landlord preceded the friends across the landing, which was all that separated them from the apartments of the count, rang at the bell, and, upon the door being opened by a servant, said, “I signori Francesi.”

The domestic bowed respectfully, and invited them to enter. They passed through two rooms, furnished in a luxurious manner they had not expected to see under the roof of Signor Pastrini, and were shown into an elegantly fitted-up drawing-room. The richest Turkey carpets covered the floor, and the softest and most inviting couches, easy-chairs, and sofas, offered their high-piled and yielding cushions to such as desired repose or refreshment. Splendid paintings by the first masters were ranged against the walls, intermingled with magnificent trophies of war, while heavy curtains of costly tapestry were suspended before the different doors of the room. “If your excellencies will please to be seated,” said the man, “I will let the count know that you are here.”

And with these words he disappeared behind one of the tapestried portieres. As the door opened, the sound of a guzla reached the ears of the young men, but was almost immediately lost, for the rapid closing of the door merely allowed one rich swell of harmony to enter. Franz and Albert looked inquiringly at each other, then at the gorgeous furnishings of the apartment. Everything seemed more magnificent at a second view than it had done at their first rapid survey.

“Well,” said Franz to his friend, “what think you of all this?”

“Why, upon my soul, my dear fellow, it strikes me that our elegant and attentive neighbor must either be some successful stock-jobber who has speculated in the fall of the Spanish funds, or some prince travelling incog.”

“Hush, hush!” replied Franz; “we shall ascertain who and what he is — he comes!” As Franz spoke, he heard the sound of a door turning on its hinges, and almost immediately afterwards the tapestry was drawn aside, and the owner of all these riches stood before the two young men. Albert instantly rose to meet him, but Franz remained, in a manner, spellbound on his chair; for in the person of him who had just entered he recognized not only the mysterious visitant to the Colosseum, and the occupant of the box at the Teatro Argentino, but also his extraordinary host of Monte Cristo.

Chapter 35

La Mazzolata.

"Gentlemen," said the Count of Monte Cristo as he entered, "I pray you excuse me for suffering my visit to be anticipated; but I feared to disturb you by presenting myself earlier at your apartments; besides, you sent me word that you would come to me, and I have held myself at your disposal."

"Franz and I have to thank you a thousand times, count," returned Albert; "you extricated us from a great dilemma, and we were on the point of inventing a very fantastic vehicle when your friendly invitation reached us."

"Indeed," returned the count, motioning the two young men to sit down. "It was the fault of that blockhead Pastrini, that I did not sooner assist you in your distress. He did not mention a syllable of your embarrassment to me, when he knows that, alone and isolated as I am, I seek every opportunity of making the acquaintance of my neighbors. As soon as I learned I could in any way assist you, I most eagerly seized the opportunity of offering my services." The two young men bowed. Franz had, as yet, found nothing to say; he had come to no determination, and as nothing in the count's manner manifested the wish that he should recognize him, he did not know whether to make any allusion to the past, or wait until he had more proof; besides, although sure it was he who had been in the box the previous evening, he could not be equally positive that this was the man he had seen at the Colosseum. He resolved, therefore, to let things take their course without making any direct overture to the count. Moreover, he had this advantage, he was master of the count's secret, while the count had no hold on Franz, who had nothing to conceal. However, he resolved to lead the conversation to a subject which might possibly clear up his doubts.

"Count," said he, "you have offered us places in your carriage, and at your windows in the Rospoli Palace. Can you tell us where we can obtain a sight of the Piazza del Popolo?"

"Ah," said the count negligently, looking attentively at Morcerf, "is there not something like an execution upon the Piazza del Popolo?"

“Yes,” returned Franz, finding that the count was coming to the point he wished.

“Stay, I think I told my steward yesterday to attend to this; perhaps I can render you this slight service also.” He extended his hand, and rang the bell thrice. “Did you ever occupy yourself,” said he to Franz, “with the employment of time and the means of simplifying the summoning your servants? I have. When I ring once, it is for my valet; twice, for my majordomo; thrice, for my steward, — thus I do not waste a minute or a word. Here he is.” A man of about forty-five or fifty entered, exactly resembling the smuggler who had introduced Franz into the cavern; but he did not appear to recognize him. It was evident he had his orders. “Monsieur Bertuccio,” said the count, “you have procured me windows looking on the Piazza del Popolo, as I ordered you yesterday.”

“Yes, excellency,” returned the steward; “but it was very late.”

“Did I not tell you I wished for one?” replied the count, frowning.

“And your excellency has one, which was let to Prince Lobanieff; but I was obliged to pay a hundred” —

“That will do — that will do, Monsieur Bertuccio; spare these gentlemen all such domestic arrangements. You have the window, that is sufficient. Give orders to the coachman; and be in readiness on the stairs to conduct us to it.” The steward bowed, and was about to quit the room. “Ah,” continued the count, “be good enough to ask Pastrini if he has received the tavoletta, and if he can send us an account of the execution.”

“There is no need to do that,” said Franz, taking out his tablets; “for I saw the account, and copied it down.”

“Very well, you can retire, M. Bertuccio; but let us know when breakfast is ready. These gentlemen,” added he, turning to the two friends, “will, I trust, do me the honor to breakfast with me?”

“But, my dear count,” said Albert, “we shall abuse your kindness.”

“Not at all; on the contrary, you will give me great pleasure. You will, one or other of you, perhaps both, return it to me at Paris. M. Bertuccio, lay covers for three.” He then took Franz’s tablets out of his hand. “‘We announce,’ he read, in the same tone with which he would have read a newspaper, ‘that to-day, the 23d of February, will be executed Andrea Rondolo, guilty of murder on the person of the respected and venerated Don Cesare Torlini, canon of the church of St. John Lateran, and Peppino, called Rocca Priori, convicted of complicity with the detestable bandit Luigi

Vampa, and the men of his band.' Hum! 'The first will be mazzolato, the second decapitato.' Yes," continued the count, "it was at first arranged in this way; but I think since yesterday some change has taken place in the order of the ceremony."

"Really?" said Franz.

"Yes, I passed the evening at the Cardinal Rospigliosi's, and there mention was made of something like a pardon for one of the two men."

"For Andrea Rondolo?" asked Franz.

"No," replied the count, carelessly; "for the other (he glanced at the tablets as if to recall the name), for Peppino, called Rocca Priori. You are thus deprived of seeing a man guillotined; but the mazzuola still remains, which is a very curious punishment when seen for the first time, and even the second, while the other, as you must know, is very simple. The mandaia [*] never fails, never trembles, never strikes thirty times ineffectually, like the soldier who beheaded the Count of Chalais, and to whose tender mercy Richelieu had doubtless recommended the sufferer. Ah," added the count, in a contemptuous tone, "do not tell me of European punishments, they are in the infancy, or rather the old age, of cruelty."

* Guillotine.

"Really, count," replied Franz, "one would think that you had studied the different tortures of all the nations of the world."

"There are, at least, few that I have not seen," said the count coldly.

"And you took pleasure in beholding these dreadful spectacles?"

"My first sentiment was horror, the second indifference, the third curiosity."

"Curiosity — that is a terrible word."

"Why so? In life, our greatest preoccupation is death; is it not then, curious to study the different ways by which the soul and body can part; and how, according to their different characters, temperaments, and even the different customs of their countries, different persons bear the transition from life to death, from existence to annihilation? As for myself, I can assure you of one thing, — the more men you see die, the easier it becomes to die yourself; and in my opinion, death may be a torture, but it is not an expiation."

"I do not quite understand you," replied Franz; "pray explain your meaning, for you excite my curiosity to the highest pitch."

"Listen," said the count, and deep hatred mounted to his face, as the blood would to the face of any other. "If a man had by unheard-of and excruciating tortures destroyed your father, your mother, your betrothed, — a being who, when torn from you, left a desolation, a wound that never closes, in your breast, — do you think the reparation that society gives you is sufficient when it interposes the knife of the guillotine between the base of the occiput and the trapezal muscles of the murderer, and allows him who has caused us years of moral sufferings to escape with a few moments of physical pain?"

"Yes, I know," said Franz, "that human justice is insufficient to console us; she can give blood in return for blood, that is all; but you must demand from her only what it is in her power to grant."

"I will put another case to you," continued the count; "that where society, attacked by the death of a person, avenges death by death. But are there not a thousand tortures by which a man may be made to suffer without society taking the least cognizance of them, or offering him even the insufficient means of vengeance, of which we have just spoken? Are there not crimes for which the impalement of the Turks, the augers of the Persians, the stake and the brand of the Iroquois Indians, are inadequate tortures, and which are unpunished by society? Answer me, do not these crimes exist?"

"Yes," answered Franz; "and it is to punish them that duelling is tolerated."

"Ah, duelling," cried the count; "a pleasant manner, upon my soul, of arriving at your end when that end is vengeance! A man has carried off your mistress, a man has seduced your wife, a man has dishonored your daughter; he has rendered the whole life of one who had the right to expect from heaven that portion of happiness God his promised to every one of his creatures, an existence of misery and infamy; and you think you are avenged because you send a ball through the head, or pass a sword through the breast, of that man who has planted madness in your brain, and despair in your heart. And remember, moreover, that it is often he who comes off victorious from the strife, absolved of all crime in the eyes of the world. No, no," continued the count, "had I to avenge myself, it is not thus I would take revenge."

"Then you disapprove of duelling? You would not fight a duel?" asked Albert in his turn, astonished at this strange theory.

“Oh, yes,” replied the count; “understand me, I would fight a duel for a trifle, for an insult, for a blow; and the more so that, thanks to my skill in all bodily exercises, and the indifference to danger I have gradually acquired, I should be almost certain to kill my man. Oh, I would fight for such a cause; but in return for a slow, profound, eternal torture, I would give back the same, were it possible; an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, as the Orientalists say, — our masters in everything, — those favored creatures who have formed for themselves a life of dreams and a paradise of realities.”

“But,” said Franz to the count, “with this theory, which renders you at once judge and executioner of your own cause, it would be difficult to adopt a course that would forever prevent your falling under the power of the law. Hatred is blind, rage carries you away; and he who pours out vengeance runs the risk of tasting a bitter draught.”

“Yes, if he be poor and inexperienced, not if he be rich and skilful; besides, the worst that could happen to him would be the punishment of which we have already spoken, and which the philanthropic French Revolution has substituted for being torn to pieces by horses or broken on the wheel. What matters this punishment, as long as he is avenged? On my word, I almost regret that in all probability this miserable Peppino will not be beheaded, as you might have had an opportunity then of seeing how short a time the punishment lasts, and whether it is worth even mentioning; but, really this is a most singular conversation for the Carnival, gentlemen; how did it arise? Ah, I recollect, you asked for a place at my window; you shall have it; but let us first sit down to table, for here comes the servant to inform us that breakfast is ready.” As he spoke, a servant opened one of the four doors of the apartment, saying — ”Al suo commodo!” The two young men arose and entered the breakfast-room.

During the meal, which was excellent, and admirably served, Franz looked repeatedly at Albert, in order to observe the impressions which he doubted not had been made on him by the words of their entertainer; but whether with his usual carelessness he had paid but little attention to him, whether the explanation of the Count of Monte Cristo with regard to duelling had satisfied him, or whether the events which Franz knew of had had their effect on him alone, he remarked that his companion did not pay the least regard to them, but on the contrary ate like a man who for the last four or five months had been condemned to partake of Italian cookery —

that is, the worst in the world. As for the count, he just touched the dishes; he seemed to fulfil the duties of a host by sitting down with his guests, and awaited their departure to be served with some strange or more delicate food. This brought back to Franz, in spite of himself, the recollection of the terror with which the count had inspired the Countess G — — , and her firm conviction that the man in the opposite box was a vampire. At the end of the breakfast Franz took out his watch. “Well,” said the count, “what are you doing?”

“You must excuse us, count,” returned Franz, “but we have still much to do.”

“What may that be?”

“We have no masks, and it is absolutely necessary to procure them.”

“Do not concern yourself about that; we have, I think, a private room in the Piazza del Popolo; I will have whatever costumes you choose brought to us, and you can dress there.”

“After the execution?” cried Franz.

“Before or after, whichever you please.”

“Opposite the scaffold?”

“The scaffold forms part of the fete.”

“Count, I have reflected on the matter,” said Franz, “I thank you for your courtesy, but I shall content myself with accepting a place in your carriage and at your window at the Rospoli Palace, and I leave you at liberty to dispose of my place at the Piazza del Popolo.”

“But I warn you, you will lose a very curious sight,” returned the count.

“You will describe it to me,” replied Franz, “and the recital from your lips will make as great an impression on me as if I had witnessed it. I have more than once intended witnessing an execution, but I have never been able to make up my mind; and you, Albert?”

“I,” replied the viscount, — ”I saw Castaing executed, but I think I was rather intoxicated that day, for I had quitted college the same morning, and we had passed the previous night at a tavern.”

“Besides, it is no reason because you have not seen an execution at Paris, that you should not see one anywhere else; when you travel, it is to see everything. Think what a figure you will make when you are asked, ‘How do they execute at Rome?’ and you reply, ‘I do not know’! And, besides, they say that the culprit is an infamous scoundrel, who killed with a log of wood a worthy canon who had brought him up like his own son. Diable, when a churchman is killed, it should be with a different weapon than a log, especially when he has behaved like a father. If you went to Spain, would you not see the bull-fight? Well, suppose it is a bull-fight you are going to see? Recollect the ancient Romans of the Circus, and the sports where they killed three hundred lions and a hundred men. Think of the eighty thousand applauding spectators, the sage matrons who took their daughters, and the charming Vestals who made with the thumb of their white hands the fatal sign that said, 'Come, despatch the dying.'"

"Shall you go, then, Albert?" asked Franz.

"Ma foi, yes; like you, I hesitated, but the count's eloquence decides me."

"Let us go, then," said Franz, "since you wish it; but on our way to the Piazza del Popolo, I wish to pass through the Corso. Is this possible, count?"

"On foot, yes, in a carriage, no."

"I will go on foot, then."

"Is it important that you should go that way?"

"Yes, there is something I wish to see."

"Well, we will go by the Corso. We will send the carriage to wait for us on the Piazza del Popolo, by the Strada del Babuino, for I shall be glad to pass, myself, through the Corso, to see if some orders I have given have been executed."

"Excellency," said a servant, opening the door, "a man in the dress of a penitent wishes to speak to you."

"Ah, yes" returned the count, "I know who he is, gentlemen; will you return to the salon? you will find good cigars on the centre table. I will be with you directly." The young men rose and returned into the salon, while the count, again apologizing, left by another door. Albert, who was a great smoker, and who had considered it no small sacrifice to be deprived of the cigars of the Cafe de Paris, approached the table, and uttered a cry of joy at perceiving some veritable puros.

"Well," asked Franz, "what think you of the Count of Monte Cristo?"

"What do I think?" said Albert, evidently surprised at such a question from his companion; "I think he is a delightful fellow, who does the honors of his table admirably; who has travelled much, read much, is, like Brutus, of the Stoic school, and moreover," added he, sending a volume of smoke up towards the ceiling, "that he has excellent cigars." Such was Albert's opinion of the count, and as Franz well knew that Albert professed never to form an opinion except upon long reflection, he made no attempt to change it. “But,” said he, “did you observe one very singular thing?”

“What?”

“How attentively he looked at you.”

“At me?”

“Yes.” — Albert reflected. “Ah,” replied he, sighing, “that is not very surprising; I have been more than a year absent from Paris, and my clothes are of a most antiquated cut; the count takes me for a provincial. The first opportunity you have, undeceive him, I beg, and tell him I am nothing of the kind.” Franz smiled; an instant after the count entered.

“I am now quite at your service, gentlemen,” said he. “The carriage is going one way to the Piazza del Popolo, and we will go another; and, if you please, by the Corso. Take some more of these cigars, M. de Morcerf.”

“With all my heart,” returned Albert; “Italian cigars are horrible. When you come to Paris, I will return all this.”

“I will not refuse; I intend going there soon, and since you allow me, I will pay you a visit. Come, we have not any time to lose, it is half-past twelve — let us set off.” All three descended; the coachman received his master’s orders, and drove down the Via del Babuino. While the three gentlemen walked along the Piazza de Spagni and the Via Frattina, which led directly between the Fiano and Rospoli palaces, Franz’s attention was directed towards the windows of that last palace, for he had not forgotten the signal agreed upon between the man in the mantle and the Transtevere peasant. “Which are your windows?” asked he of the count, with as much indifference as he could assume. “The three last,” returned he, with a negligence evidently unaffected, for he could not imagine with what intention the question was put. Franz glanced rapidly towards the three windows. The side windows were hung with yellow damask, and the centre one with white damask and a red cross. The man in the mantle had kept his promise to the Transteverin, and there could now be no doubt that he was the count. The three windows were still untenanted. Preparations were making on every side; chairs were placed, scaffolds were raised, and windows were hung with flags. The masks could not appear; the carriages could not move about; but the masks were visible behind the windows, the carriages, and the doors.

Franz, Albert, and the count continued to descend the Corso. As they approached the Piazza del Popolo, the crowd became more dense, and above the heads of the multitude two objects were visible: the obelisk, surmounted by a cross, which marks the centre of the square, and in front of the obelisk, at the point where the three streets, del Babuino, del Corso, and di Ripetta, meet, the two uprights of the scaffold, between which glittered the curved knife of the mandaia. At the corner of the street they met the count's steward, who was awaiting his master. The window, let at an exorbitant price, which the count had doubtless wished to conceal from his guests, was on the second floor of the great palace, situated between the Via del Babuino and the Monte Pincio. It consisted, as we have said, of a small dressing-room, opening into a bedroom, and, when the door of communication was shut, the inmates were quite alone. On chairs were laid elegant masquerade costumes of blue and white satin. "As you left the choice of your costumes to me," said the count to the two friends, "I have had these brought, as they will be the most worn this year; and they are most suitable, on account of the confetti (sweetmeats), as they do not show the flour."

Franz heard the words of the count but imperfectly, and he perhaps did not fully appreciate this new attention to their wishes; for he was wholly absorbed by the spectacle that the Piazza del Popolo presented, and by the terrible instrument that was in the centre. It was the first time Franz had ever seen a guillotine, — we say guillotine, because the Roman mandaia is formed on almost the same model as the French instrument. [*] The knife, which is shaped like a crescent, that cuts with the convex side, falls from a less height, and that is all the difference. Two men, seated on the movable plank on which the victim is laid, were eating their breakfasts, while waiting for the criminal. Their repast consisted apparently of bread and sausages. One of them lifted the plank, took out a flask of wine, drank some, and then passed it to his companion. These two men were the executioner's assistants. At this sight Franz felt the perspiration start forth upon his brow. The prisoners, transported the previous evening from the Carcere Nuovo to the little church of Santa Maria del Popolo, had passed the night, each accompanied by two priests, in a chapel closed by a grating, before which were two sentinels, who were relieved at intervals. A double line of carbineers, placed on each side of the door of the church, reached to the scaffold, and formed a circle around it, leaving a path about ten feet wide, and around the guillotine a space of nearly a hundred feet. All the rest of the square was paved with heads. Many women held their infants on their shoulders, and thus the children had the best view. The Monte Pincio seemed a vast amphitheatre filled with spectators; the balconies of the two churches at the corner of the Via del Babuino and the Via di Ripetta were crammed; the steps even seemed a parti-colored sea, that was impelled towards the portico; every niche in the wall held its living statue. What the count said was true — the most curious spectacle in life is that of death. And yet, instead of the silence and the solemnity demanded by the occasion, laughter and jests arose from the crowd. It was evident that the execution was, in the eyes of the people, only the commencement of the Carnival. Suddenly the tumult ceased, as if by magic, and the doors of the church opened. A brotherhood of penitents, clothed from head to foot in robes of gray sackcloth, with holes for the eyes, and holding in their hands lighted tapers, appeared first; the chief marched at the head. Behind the penitents came a man of vast stature and proportions. He was naked, with the exception of cloth drawers at the left side of which hung a large knife in a sheath, and he bore on his right shoulder a heavy iron sledge-hammer. This man was the executioner. He had, moreover, sandals bound on his feet by cords. Behind the executioner came, in the order in which they were to die, first Peppino and then Andrea. Each was accompanied by two priests. Neither had his eyes bandaged. Peppino walked with a firm step, doubtless aware of what awaited him. Andrea was supported by two priests. Each of them, from time to time, kissed the crucifix a confessor held out to them. At this sight alone Franz felt his legs tremble under him. He looked at Albert — he was as white as his shirt, and mechanically cast away his cigar, although he had not half smoked it. The count alone seemed unmoved — nay, more, a slight color seemed striving to rise in his pale cheeks. His nostrils dilated like those of a wild beast that scents its prey, and his lips, half opened, disclosed his white teeth, small and sharp like those of a jackal. And yet his features wore an expression of smiling tenderness, such as Franz had never before witnessed in them; his black eyes especially were full of kindness and pity. However, the two culprits advanced, and as they approached their faces became visible. Peppino was a handsome young man of four or five and twenty, bronzed by the sun; he carried his head erect, and seemed on the watch to see on which side his liberator would appear. Andrea was short and fat; his visage, marked with brutal cruelty, did not indicate age; he might be thirty. In prison he had suffered his beard to grow;

his head fell on his shoulder, his legs bent beneath him, and his movements were apparently automatic and unconscious.

> * Dr. Guillotin got the idea of his famous machine from
> witnessing an execution in Italy.

"I thought," said Franz to the count, "that you told me there would be but one execution."

"I told you true," replied he coldly.

"And yet here are two culprits."

"Yes; but only one of these two is about to die; the other has many years to live."

"If the pardon is to come, there is no time to lose."

"And see, here it is," said the count. At the moment when Peppino reached the foot of the mandaia, a priest arrived in some haste, forced his way through the soldiers, and, advancing to the chief of the brotherhood, gave him a folded paper. The piercing eye of Peppino had noticed all. The chief took the paper, unfolded it, and, raising his hand, "Heaven be praised, and his holiness also," said he in a loud voice; "here is a pardon for one of the prisoners!"

"A pardon!" cried the people with one voice — "a pardon!" At this cry Andrea raised his head. "Pardon for whom?" cried he.

Peppino remained breathless. "A pardon for Peppino, called Rocca Priori," said the principal friar. And he passed the paper to the officer commanding the carbineers, who read and returned it to him.

"For Peppino!" cried Andrea, who seemed roused from the torpor in which he had been plunged. "Why for him and not for me? We ought to die together. I was promised he should die with me. You have no right to put me to death alone. I will not die alone — I will not!" And he broke from the priests struggling and raving like a wild beast, and striving desperately to break the cords that bound his hands. The executioner made a sign, and his two assistants leaped from the scaffold and seized him. "What is going on?" asked Franz of the count; for, as all the talk was in the Roman dialect, he had not perfectly understood it. "Do you not see?" returned the count, "that this human creature who is about to die is furious that his fellow-sufferer does not perish with him? and, were he able, he would rather tear him to pieces with his teeth and nails than let him enjoy the life he himself is about to be deprived of. Oh, man, man — race of crocodiles," cried the count, extending his clinched hands towards the crowd, "how well do I recognize you there, and that at all times you are worthy of yourselves!” Meanwhile Andrea and the two executioners were struggling on the ground, and he kept exclaiming, “He ought to die! — he shall die! — I will not die alone!”

“Look, look,” cried the count, seizing the young men’s hands — ”look, for on my soul it is curious. Here is a man who had resigned himself to his fate, who was going to the scaffold to die — like a coward, it is true, but he was about to die without resistance. Do you know what gave him strength? — do you know what consoled him? It was, that another partook of his punishment — that another partook of his anguish — that another was to die before him. Lead two sheep to the butcher’s, two oxen to the slaughterhouse, and make one of them understand that his companion will not die; the sheep will bleat for pleasure, the ox will bellow with joy. But man — man, whom God created in his own image — man, upon whom God has laid his first, his sole commandment, to love his neighbor — man, to whom God has given a voice to express his thoughts — what is his first cry when he hears his fellow-man is saved? A blasphemy. Honor to man, this masterpiece of nature, this king of the creation!” And the count burst into a laugh; a terrible laugh, that showed he must have suffered horribly to be able thus to laugh. However, the struggle still continued, and it was dreadful to witness. The people all took part against Andrea, and twenty thousand voices cried, “Put him to death! put him to death!” Franz sprang back, but the count seized his arm, and held him before the window. “What are you doing?” said he. “Do you pity him? If you heard the cry of ‘Mad dog!’ you would take your gun — you would unhesitatingly shoot the poor beast, who, after all, was only guilty of having been bitten by another dog. And yet you pity a man who, without being bitten by one of his race, has yet murdered his benefactor; and who, now unable to kill any one, because his hands are bound, wishes to see his companion in captivity perish. No, no — look, look!”

The command was needless. Franz was fascinated by the horrible spectacle. The two assistants had borne Andrea to the scaffold, and there, in spite of his struggles, his bites, and his cries, had forced him to his knees. During this time the executioner had raised his mace, and signed to them to get out of the way; the criminal strove to rise, but, ere he had time, the mace fell on his left temple. A dull and heavy sound was heard, and the man dropped like an ox on his face, and then turned over on his back. The executioner let fall his mace, drew his knife, and with one stroke opened his throat, and mounting on his stomach, stamped violently on it with his feet. At every stroke a jet of blood sprang from the wound.

This time Franz could contain himself no longer, but sank, half fainting, into a seat. Albert, with his eyes closed, was standing grasping the window-curtains. The count was erect and triumphant, like the Avenging Angel!

Chapter 36

The Carnival at Rome.

When Franz recovered his senses, he saw Albert drinking a glass of water, of which, to judge from his pallor, he stood in great need; and the count, who was assuming his masquerade costume. He glanced mechanically towards the square — the scene was wholly changed; scaffold, executioners, victims, all had disappeared; only the people remained, full of noise and excitement. The bell of Monte Citorio, which only sounds on the pope's decease and the opening of the Carnival, was ringing a joyous peal. "Well," asked he of the count, "what has, then, happened?"

"Nothing," replied the count; "only, as you see, the Carnival has commenced. Make haste and dress yourself."

"In fact," said Franz, "this horrible scene has passed away like a dream."

"It is but a dream, a nightmare, that has disturbed you."

"Yes, that I have suffered; but the culprit?"

"That is a dream also; only he has remained asleep, while you have awakened; and who knows which of you is the most fortunate?"

"But Peppino — what has become of him?"

"Peppino is a lad of sense, who, unlike most men, who are happy in proportion as they are noticed, was delighted to see that the general attention was directed towards his companion. He profited by this distraction to slip away among the crowd, without even thanking the worthy priests who accompanied him. Decidedly man is an ungrateful and egotistical animal. But dress yourself; see, M. de Morcerf sets you the example." Albert was drawing on the satin pantaloon over his black trousers and varnished boots. "Well, Albert," said Franz, "do you feel much inclined to join the revels? Come, answer frankly."

"Ma foi, no," returned Albert. "But I am really glad to have seen such a sight; and I understand what the count said — that when you have once habituated yourself to a similar spectacle, it is the only one that causes you any emotion."

“Without reflecting that this is the only moment in which you can study character,” said the count; “on the steps of the scaffold death tears off the mask that has been worn through life, and the real visage is disclosed. It must be allowed that Andrea was not very handsome, the hideous scoundrel! Come, dress yourselves, gentlemen, dress yourselves.” Franz felt it would be ridiculous not to follow his two companions’ example. He assumed his costume, and fastened on the mask that scarcely equalled the pallor of his own face. Their toilet finished, they descended; the carriage awaited them at the door, filled with sweetmeats and bouquets. They fell into the line of carriages. It is difficult to form an idea of the perfect change that had taken place. Instead of the spectacle of gloomy and silent death, the Piazza del Popolo presented a spectacle of gay and noisy mirth and revelry. A crowd of masks flowed in from all sides, emerging from the doors, descending from the windows. From every street and every corner drove carriages filled with clowns, harlequins, dominoes, mummers, pantomimists, Transteverins, knights, and peasants, screaming, fighting, gesticulating, throwing eggs filled with flour, confetti, nosegays, attacking, with their sarcasms and their missiles, friends and foes, companions and strangers, indiscriminately, and no one took offence, or did anything but laugh. Franz and Albert were like men who, to drive away a violent sorrow, have recourse to wine, and who, as they drink and become intoxicated, feel a thick veil drawn between the past and the present. They saw, or rather continued to see, the image of what they had witnessed; but little by little the general vertigo seized them, and they felt themselves obliged to take part in the noise and confusion. A handful of confetti that came from a neighboring carriage, and which, while it covered Morcerf and his two companions with dust, pricked his neck and that portion of his face uncovered by his mask like a hundred pins, incited him to join in the general combat, in which all the masks around him were engaged. He rose in his turn, and seizing handfuls of confetti and sweetmeats, with which the carriage was filled, cast them with all the force and skill he was master of.

The strife had fairly begun, and the recollection of what they had seen half an hour before was gradually effaced from the young men’s minds, so much were they occupied by the gay and glittering procession they now beheld. As for the Count of Monte Cristo, he had never for an instant shown any appearance of having been moved. Imagine the large and splendid Corso, bordered from one end to the other with lofty palaces, with their balconies hung with carpets, and their windows with flags. At these balconies are three hundred thousand spectators — Romans, Italians, strangers from all parts of the world, the united aristocracy of birth, wealth, and genius. Lovely women, yielding to the influence of the scene, bend over their balconies, or lean from their windows, and shower down confetti, which are returned by bouquets; the air seems darkened with the falling confetti and flying flowers. In the streets the lively crowd is dressed in the most fantastic costumes — gigantic cabbages walk gravely about, buffaloes' heads bellow from men's shoulders, dogs walk on their hind legs; in the midst of all this a mask is lifted, and, as in Callot's Temptation of St. Anthony, a lovely face is exhibited, which we would fain follow, but from which we are separated by troops of fiends. This will give a faint idea of the Carnival at Rome. At the second turn, the count stopped the carriage, and requested permission to withdraw, leaving the vehicle at their disposal. Franz looked up — they were opposite the Rospoli Palace. At the centre window, the one hung with white damask with a red cross, was a blue domino, beneath which Franz's imagination easily pictured the beautiful Greek of the Argentina. "Gentlemen," said the count, springing out, "when you are tired of being actors, and wish to become spectators of this scene, you know you have places at my windows. In the meantime, dispose of my coachman, my carriage, and my servants." We have forgotten to mention, that the count's coachman was attired in a bear-skin, exactly resembling Odry's in "The Bear and the Pasha;" and the two footmen behind were dressed up as green monkeys, with spring masks, with which they made grimaces at every one who passed. Franz thanked the count for his attention. As for Albert, he was busily occupied throwing bouquets at a carriage full of Roman peasants that was passing near him. Unfortunately for him, the line of carriages moved on again, and while he descended the Piazza del Popolo, the other ascended towards the Palazzo di Venezia. "Ah, my dear fellow," said he to Franz; "you did not see?"

"What?"

"There, — that calash filled with Roman peasants."

"No."

"Well, I am convinced they are all charming women."

"How unfortunate that you were masked, Albert," said Franz; "here was an opportunity of making up for past disappointments."

“Oh,” replied he, half laughing, half serious; “I hope the Carnival will not pass without some amends in one shape or the other.”

But, in spite of Albert’s hope, the day passed unmarked by any incident, excepting two or three encounters with the carriage full of Roman peasants. At one of these encounters, accidentally or purposely, Albert’s mask fell off. He instantly rose and cast the remainder of the bouquets into the carriage. Doubtless one of the charming females Albert had detected beneath their coquettish disguise was touched by his gallantry; for, as the carriage of the two friends passed her, she threw a bunch of violets. Albert seized it, and as Franz had no reason to suppose it was meant for him, he suffered Albert to retain it. Albert placed it in his button-hole, and the carriage went triumphantly on.

“Well,” said Franz to him; “there is the beginning of an adventure.”

“Laugh if you please — I really think so. So I will not abandon this bouquet.”

“Pardieu,” returned Franz, laughing, “in token of your ingratitude.” The jest, however, soon appeared to become earnest; for when Albert and Franz again encountered the carriage with the contadini, the one who had thrown the violets to Albert, clapped her hands when she beheld them in his button-hole. “Bravo, bravo,” said Franz; “things go wonderfully. Shall I leave you? Perhaps you would prefer being alone?”

“No,” replied he; “I will not be caught like a fool at a first disclosure by a rendezvous under the clock, as they say at the opera-balls. If the fair peasant wishes to carry matters any further, we shall find her, or rather, she will find us to-morrow; then she will give me some sign or other, and I shall know what I have to do.”

“On my word,” said Franz, “you are wise as Nestor and prudent as Ulysses, and your fair Circe must be very skilful or very powerful if she succeed in changing you into a beast of any kind.” Albert was right; the fair unknown had resolved, doubtless, to carry the intrigue no farther; for although the young men made several more turns, they did not again see the calash, which had turned up one of the neighboring streets. Then they returned to the Rospoli Palace; but the count and the blue domino had also disappeared; the two windows, hung with yellow damask, were still occupied by the persons whom the count had invited. At this moment the same bell that had proclaimed the beginning of the mascherata sounded the retreat. The file on the Corso broke the line, and in a second all the carriages had disappeared. Franz and Albert were opposite the Via delle Maratte; the coachman, without saying a word, drove up it, passed along the Piazza di Spagni and the Rospoli Palace and stopped at the door of the hotel. Signor Pastrini came to the door to receive his guests. Franz hastened to inquire after the count, and to express regret that he had not returned in sufficient time; but Pastrini reassured him by saying that the Count of Monte Cristo had ordered a second carriage for himself, and that it had gone at four o'clock to fetch him from the Rospoli Palace. The count had, moreover, charged him to offer the two friends the key of his box at the Argentina. Franz questioned Albert as to his intentions; but Albert had great projects to put into execution before going to the theatre; and instead of making any answer, he inquired if Signor Pastrini could procure him a tailor. “A tailor,” said the host; “and for what?”

“To make us between now and to-morrow two Roman peasant costumes,” returned Albert. The host shook his head. “To make you two costumes between now and to-morrow? I ask your excellencies' pardon, but this is quite a French demand; for the next week you will not find a single tailor who would consent to sew six buttons on a waistcoat if you paid him a crown a piece for each button.”

“Then I must give up the idea?”

“No; we have them ready-made. Leave all to me; and to-morrow, when you awake, you shall find a collection of costumes with which you will be satisfied.”

“My dear Albert,” said Franz, “leave all to our host; he has already proved himself full of resources; let us dine quietly, and afterwards go and see ‘The Algerian Captive.’“

“Agreed,” returned Albert; “but remember, Signor Pastrini, that both my friend and myself attach the greatest importance to having to-morrow the costumes we have asked for.” The host again assured them they might rely on him, and that their wishes should be attended to; upon which Franz and Albert mounted to their apartments, and proceeded to disencumber themselves of their costumes. Albert, as he took off his dress, carefully preserved the bunch of violets; it was his token reserved for the morrow. The two friends sat down to table; but they could not refrain from remarking the difference between the Count of Monte Cristo's table and that of Signor Pastrini. Truth compelled Franz, in spite of the dislike he seemed to have taken to the count, to confess that the advantage was not on

Pastrini's side. During dessert, the servant inquired at what time they wished for the carriage. Albert and Franz looked at each other, fearing really to abuse the count's kindness. The servant understood them. "His excellency the Count of Monte Cristo had," he said, "given positive orders that the carriage was to remain at their lordships' orders all day, and they could therefore dispose of it without fear of indiscretion."

They resolved to profit by the count's courtesy, and ordered the horses to be harnessed, while they substituted evening dress for that which they had on, and which was somewhat the worse for the numerous combats they had sustained. This precaution taken, they went to the theatre, and installed themselves in the count's box. During the first act, the Countess G — — entered. Her first look was at the box where she had seen the count the previous evening, so that she perceived Franz and Albert in the place of the very person concerning whom she had expressed so strange an opinion to Franz. Her opera-glass was so fixedly directed towards them, that Franz saw it would be cruel not to satisfy her curiosity; and, availing himself of one of the privileges of the spectators of the Italian theatres, who use their boxes to hold receptions, the two friends went to pay their respects to the countess. Scarcely had they entered, when she motioned to Franz to assume the seat of honor. Albert, in his turn, sat behind.

"Well," said she, hardly giving Franz time to sit down, "it seems you have nothing better to do than to make the acquaintance of this new Lord Ruthven, and you are already the best friends in the world."

"Without being so far advanced as that, my dear countess," returned Franz, "I cannot deny that we have abused his good nature all day."

"All day?"

"Yes; this morning we breakfasted with him; we rode in his carriage all day, and now we have taken possession of his box."

"You know him, then?"

"Yes, and no."

"How so?"

"It is a long story."

"Tell it to me."

"It would frighten you too much."

"So much the more reason."

"At least wait until the story has a conclusion."

"Very well; I prefer complete histories; but tell me how you made his acquaintance? Did any one introduce you to him?"

"No; it was he who introduced himself to us."

"When?"

"Last night, after we left you."

"Through what medium?"

"The very prosaic one of our landlord."

"He is staying, then, at the Hotel de Londres with you?"

"Not only in the same hotel, but on the same floor."

"What is his name — for, of course, you know?"

"The Count of Monte Cristo."

"That is not a family name?"

"No, it is the name of the island he has purchased."

"And he is a count?"

"A Tuscan count."

"Well, we must put up with that," said the countess, who was herself from one of the oldest Venetian families. "What sort of a man is he?"

"Ask the Vicomte de Morcerf."

"You hear, M. de Morcerf, I am referred to you," said the countess.

"We should be very hard to please, madam," returned Albert, "did we not think him delightful. A friend of ten years' standing could not have done more for us, or with a more perfect courtesy."

"Come," observed the countess, smiling, "I see my vampire is only some millionaire, who has taken the appearance of Lara in order to avoid being confounded with M. de Rothschild; and you have seen her?"

"Her?"

"The beautiful Greek of yesterday."

"No; we heard, I think, the sound of her guzla, but she remained perfectly invisible."

"When you say invisible," interrupted Albert, "it is only to keep up the mystery; for whom do you take the blue domino at the window with the white curtains?"

"Where was this window with white hangings?" asked the countess.

"At the Rospoli Palace."

"The count had three windows at the Rospoli Palace?"

"Yes. Did you pass through the Corso?"

"Yes."

"Well, did you notice two windows hung with yellow damask, and one with white damask with a red cross? Those were the count's windows."

"Why, he must be a nabob. Do you know what those three windows were worth?"

"Two or three hundred Roman crowns?"

"Two or three thousand."

"The deuce."

"Does his island produce him such a revenue?"

"It does not bring him a baiocco."

"Then why did he purchase it?"

"For a whim."

"He is an original, then?"

"In reality," observed Albert, "he seemed to me somewhat eccentric; were he at Paris, and a frequenter of the theatres, I should say he was a poor devil literally mad. This morning he made two or three exits worthy of Didier or Anthony." At this moment a fresh visitor entered, and, according to custom, Franz gave up his seat to him. This circumstance had, moreover, the effect of changing the conversation; an hour afterwards the two friends returned to their hotel. Signor Pastrini had already set about procuring their disguises for the morrow; and he assured them that they would be perfectly satisfied. The next morning, at nine o'clock, he entered Franz's room, followed by a tailor, who had eight or ten Roman peasant costumes on his arm; they selected two exactly alike, and charged the tailor to sew on each of their hats about twenty yards of ribbon, and to procure them two of the long silk sashes of different colors with which the lower orders decorate themselves on fete-days. Albert was impatient to see how he looked in his new dress — a jacket and breeches of blue velvet, silk stockings with clocks, shoes with buckles, and a silk waistcoat. This picturesque attire set him off to great advantage; and when he had bound the scarf around his waist, and when his hat, placed coquettishly on one side, let fall on his shoulder a stream of ribbons, Franz was forced to confess that costume has much to do with the physical superiority we accord to certain nations. The Turks used to be so picturesque with their long and flowing robes, but are they not now hideous with their blue frocks buttoned up to the chin, and their red caps, which make them look like a bottle of wine with a red seal? Franz complimented Albert, who looked at himself in the glass with an unequivocal smile of satisfaction. They were thus engaged when the Count of Monte Cristo entered.

"Gentlemen," said he, "although a companion is agreeable, perfect freedom is sometimes still more agreeable. I come to say that to-day, and for the remainder of the Carnival, I leave the carriage entirely at your disposal. The host will tell you I have three or four more, so that you will not inconvenience me in any way. Make use of it, I pray you, for your pleasure or your business."

The young men wished to decline, but they could find no good reason for refusing an offer which was so agreeable to them. The Count of Monte Cristo remained a quarter of an hour with them, conversing on all subjects with the greatest ease. He was, as we have already said, perfectly well acquainted with the literature of all countries. A glance at the walls of his salon proved to Franz and Albert that he was a connoisseur of pictures. A few words he let fall showed them that he was no stranger to the sciences, and he seemed much occupied with chemistry. The two friends did not venture to return the count the breakfast he had given them; it would have been too absurd to offer him in exchange for his excellent table the very inferior one of Signor Pastrini. They told him so frankly, and he received their excuses with the air of a man who appreciated their delicacy. Albert was charmed with the count's manners, and he was only prevented from recognizing him for a perfect gentleman by reason of his varied knowledge. The permission to do what he liked with the carriage pleased him above all, for the fair peasants had appeared in a most elegant carriage the preceding evening, and Albert was not sorry to be upon an equal footing with them. At half-past one they descended, the coachman and footman had put on their livery over their disguises, which gave them a more ridiculous appearance than ever, and which gained them the applause of Franz and Albert. Albert had fastened the faded bunch of violets to his button-hole. At the first sound of the bell they hastened into the Corso by the Via Vittoria. At the second turn, a bunch of fresh violets, thrown from a carriage filled with harlequins, indicated to Albert that, like himself and his friend, the peasants had changed their costume, also; and whether it was the result of chance, or whether a similar feeling had possessed them both, while he had changed his costume they had assumed his.

Albert placed the fresh bouquet in his button-hole, but he kept the faded one in his hand; and when he again met the calash, he raised it to his lips, an action which seemed greatly to amuse not only the fair lady who had thrown it, but her joyous companions also. The day was as gay as the preceding one, perhaps even more animated and noisy; the count appeared for an instant at his window, but when they again passed he had disappeared. It is almost needless to say that the flirtation between Albert and the fair peasant continued all day. In the evening, on his return, Franz found a letter from the embassy, informing him that he would have the honor of being received by his holiness the next day. At each previous visit he had made to Rome, he had solicited and obtained the same favor; and incited as much by a religious feeling as by gratitude, he was unwilling to quit the capital of the Christian world without laying his respectful homage at the feet of one of St. Peter's successors who has set the rare example of all the virtues. He did not then think of the Carnival, for in spite of his condescension and touching kindness, one cannot incline one's self without awe before the venerable and noble old man called Gregory XVI. On his return from the Vatican, Franz carefully avoided the Corso; he brought away with him a treasure of pious thoughts, to which the mad gayety of the maskers would have been profanation. At ten minutes past five Albert entered overjoyed. The harlequin had reassumed her peasant's costume, and as she passed she raised her mask. She was charming. Franz congratulated Albert, who received his congratulations with the air of a man conscious that they are merited. He had recognized by certain unmistakable signs, that his fair incognita belonged to the aristocracy. He had made up his mind to write to her the next day. Franz remarked, while he gave these details, that Albert seemed to have something to ask of him, but that he was unwilling to ask it. He insisted upon it, declaring beforehand that he was willing to make any sacrifice the other wished. Albert let himself be pressed just as long as friendship required, and then avowed to Franz that he would do him a great favor by allowing him to occupy the carriage alone the next day. Albert attributed to Franz's absence the extreme kindness of the fair peasant in raising her mask. Franz was not sufficiently egotistical to stop Albert in the middle of an adventure that promised to prove so agreeable to his curiosity and so flattering to his vanity. He felt assured that the perfect indiscretion of his friend would duly inform him of all that happened; and as, during three years that he had travelled all over Italy, a similar piece of good fortune had never fallen to his share, Franz was by no means sorry to learn how to act on such an occasion. He therefore promised Albert that he would content himself the morrow with witnessing the Carnival from the windows of the Rospoli Palace.

The next morning he saw Albert pass and repass, holding an enormous bouquet, which he doubtless meant to make the bearer of his amorous epistle. This belief was changed into certainty when Franz saw the bouquet (conspicuous by a circle of white camellias) in the hand of a charming harlequin dressed in rose-colored satin. The evening was no longer joy, but delirium. Albert nothing doubted but that the fair unknown would reply in the same manner. Franz anticipated his wishes by saying that the noise fatigued him, and that he should pass the next day in writing and looking over his journal. Albert was not deceived, for the next evening Franz saw him enter triumphantly shaking a folded paper which he held by one corner. "Well," said he, "was I mistaken?"

"She has answered you!" cried Franz.

"Read." This word was pronounced in a manner impossible to describe. Franz took the letter, and read: —

Tuesday evening, at seven o'clock, descend from your carriage opposite the Via dei Pontefici, and follow the Roman peasant who snatches your torch from you. When you arrive at the first step of the church of San Giacomo, be sure to fasten a knot of rose-colored ribbons to the shoulder of your harlequin costume, in order that you may be recognized. Until then you will not see me.

Constancy and Discretion.

"Well," asked he, when Franz had finished, "what do you think of that?"

"I think that the adventure is assuming a very agreeable appearance."

"I think so, also," replied Albert; "and I very much fear you will go alone to the Duke of Bracciano's ball." Franz and Albert had received that morning an invitation from the celebrated Roman banker. "Take care, Albert," said Franz. "All the nobility of Rome will be present, and if your fair incognita belong to the higher class of society, she must go there."

"Whether she goes there or not, my opinion is still the same," returned Albert. "You have read the letter?"

"Yes."

"You know how imperfectly the women of the mezzo cito are educated in Italy?" (This is the name of the lower class.)

"Yes."

"Well, read the letter again. Look at the writing, and find if you can, any blemish in the language or orthography." (The writing was, in reality, charming, and the orthography irreproachable.) "You are born to good fortune," said Franz, as he returned the letter.

"Laugh as much as you will," replied Albert, "I am in love."

"You alarm me," cried Franz. "I see that I shall not only go alone to the Duke of Bracciano's, but also return to Florence alone."

"If my unknown be as amiable as she is beautiful," said Albert, "I shall fix myself at Rome for six weeks, at least. I adore Rome, and I have always had a great taste for archaeology."

"Come, two or three more such adventures, and I do not despair of seeing you a member of the Academy." Doubtless Albert was about to discuss seriously his right to the academic chair when they were informed that dinner was ready. Albert's love had not taken away his appetite. He hastened with Franz to seat himself, free to recommence the discussion after dinner. After dinner, the Count of Monte Cristo was announced. They had not seen him for two days. Signor Pastrini informed them that business had called him to Civita Vecchia. He had started the previous evening, and had only returned an hour since. He was charming. Whether he kept a watch over himself, or whether by accident he did not sound the acrimonious chords that in other circumstances had been touched, he was to-night like everybody else. The man was an enigma to Franz. The count must feel sure that Franz recognized him; and yet he had not let fall a single word indicating any previous acquaintance between them. On his side, however great Franz's desire was to allude to their former interview, the fear of being disagreeable to the man who had loaded him and his friend with kindness prevented him from mentioning it. The count had learned that the two friends had sent to secure a box at the Argentina Theatre, and were told they were all let. In consequence, he brought them the key of his own — at least such was the apparent motive of his visit. Franz and Albert made some difficulty, alleging their fear of depriving him of it; but the count replied that, as he was going to the Palli Theatre, the box at the Argentina Theatre would be lost if they did not profit by it. This assurance determined the two friends to accept it.

Franz had by degrees become accustomed to the count's pallor, which had so forcibly struck him at their first meeting. He could not refrain from admiring the severe beauty of his features, the only defect, or rather the principal quality of which was the pallor. Truly, a Byronic hero! Franz could not, we will not say see him, but even think of him without imagining his stern head upon Manfred’s shoulders, or beneath Lara’s helmet. His forehead was marked with the line that indicates the constant presence of bitter thoughts; he had the fiery eyes that seem to penetrate to the very soul, and the haughty and disdainful upper lip that gives to the words it utters a peculiar character that impresses them on the minds of those to whom they are addressed. The count was no longer young. He was at least forty; and yet it was easy to understand that he was formed to rule the young men with whom he associated at present. And, to complete his resemblance with the fantastic heroes of the English poet, the count seemed to have the power of fascination. Albert was constantly expatiating on their good fortune in meeting such a man. Franz was less enthusiastic; but the count exercised over him also the ascendency a strong mind always acquires over a mind less domineering. He thought several times of the project the count had of visiting Paris; and he had no doubt but that, with his eccentric character, his characteristic face, and his colossal fortune, he would produce a great effect there. And yet he did not wish to be at Paris when the count was there. The evening passed as evenings mostly pass at Italian theatres; that is, not in listening to the music, but in paying visits and conversing. The Countess G — — wished to revive the subject of the count, but Franz announced he had something far newer to tell her, and, in spite of Albert’s demonstrations of false modesty, he informed the countess of the great event which had preoccupied them for the last three days. As similar intrigues are not uncommon in Italy, if we may credit travellers, the comtess did not manifest the least incredulity, but congratulated Albert on his success. They promised, upon separating, to meet at the Duke of Bracciano’s ball, to which all Rome was invited. The heroine of the bouquet kept her word; she gave Albert no sign of her existence the morrow or the day after.

At length Tuesday came, the last and most tumultuous day of the Carnival. On Tuesday, the theatres open at ten o’clock in the morning, as Lent begins after eight at night. On Tuesday, all those who through want of money, time, or enthusiasm, have not been to see the Carnival before, mingle in the gayety, and contribute to the noise and excitement. From two o’clock till five Franz and Albert followed in the fete, exchanging handfuls of confetti with the other carriages and the pedestrians, who crowded amongst the horses’ feet and the carriage wheels without a single accident, a single dispute, or a single fight. The fetes are veritable pleasure days to the Italians. The author of this history, who has resided five or six years in Italy, does not recollect to have ever seen a ceremony interrupted by one of those events so common in other countries. Albert was triumphant in his harlequin costume. A knot of rose-colored ribbons fell from his shoulder almost to the ground. In order that there might be no confusion, Franz wore his peasant’s costume.

As the day advanced, the tumult became greater. There was not on the pavement, in the carriages, at the windows, a single tongue that was silent, a single arm that did not move. It was a human storm, made up of a thunder of cries, and a hail of sweetmeats, flowers, eggs, oranges, and nosegays. At three o’clock the sound of fireworks, let off on the Piazza del Popolo and the Piazza di Venezia (heard with difficulty amid the din and confusion) announced that the races were about to begin. The races, like the moccoli, are one of the episodes peculiar to the last days of the Carnival. At the sound of the fireworks the carriages instantly broke ranks, and retired by the adjacent streets. All these evolutions are executed with an inconceivable address and marvellous rapidity, without the police interfering in the matter. The pedestrians ranged themselves against the walls; then the trampling of horses and the clashing of steel were heard. A detachment of carbineers, fifteen abreast, galloped up the Corso in order to clear it for the barberi. When the detachment arrived at the Piazza di Venezia, a second volley of fireworks was discharged, to announce that the street was clear. Almost instantly, in the midst of a tremendous and general outcry, seven or eight horses, excited by the shouts of three hundred thousand spectators, passed by like lightning. Then the Castle of Saint Angelo fired three cannon to indicate that number three had won. Immediately, without any other signal, the carriages moved on, flowing on towards the Corso, down all the streets, like torrents pent up for a while, which again flow into the parent river; and the immense stream again continued its course between its two granite banks.

A new source of noise and movement was added to the crowd. The sellers of moccoletti entered on the scene. The moccoli, or moccoletti, are candles which vary in size from the pascal taper to the rushlight, and which give to each actor in the great final scene of the Carnival two very serious problems to grapple with, — first, how to keep his own moccoletto alight; and secondly, how to extinguish the moccoletti of others. The moccoletto is like life: man has found but one means of transmitting it, and that one comes from God. But he has discovered a thousand means of taking it away, and the devil has somewhat aided him. The moccoletto is kindled by approaching it to a light. But who can describe the thousand means of extinguishing the moccoletto? — the gigantic bellows, the monstrous extinguishers, the superhuman fans. Every one hastened to purchase moccoletti — Franz and Albert among the rest.

The night was rapidly approaching; and already, at the cry of "Moccoletti!" repeated by the shrill voices of a thousand vendors, two or three stars began to burn among the crowd. It was a signal. At the end of ten minutes fifty thousand lights glittered, descending from the Palazzo di Venezia to the Piazza del Popolo, and mounting from the Piazzo del Popolo to the Palazzo di Venezia. It seemed like the fete of jack-o'-lanterns. It is impossible to form any idea of it without having seen it. Suppose that all the stars had descended from the sky and mingled in a wild dance on the face of the earth; the whole accompanied by cries that were never heard in any other part of the world. The facchino follows the prince, the Transteverin the citizen, every one blowing, extinguishing, relighting. Had old AEolus appeared at this moment, he would have been proclaimed king of the moccoli, and Aquilo the heir-presumptive to the throne. This battle of folly and flame continued for two hours; the Corso was light as day; the features of the spectators on the third and fourth stories were visible. Every five minutes Albert took out his watch; at length it pointed to seven. The two friends were in the Via dei Pontefici. Albert sprang out, bearing his moccoletto in his hand. Two or three masks strove to knock his moccoletto out of his hand; but Albert, a first-rate pugilist, sent them rolling in the street, one after the other, and continued his course towards the church of San Giacomo. The steps were crowded with masks, who strove to snatch each other's torches. Franz followed Albert with his eyes, and saw him mount the first step. Instantly a mask, wearing the well-known costume of a peasant woman, snatched his moccoletto from him without his offering any resistance. Franz was too far off to hear what they said; but, without doubt, nothing hostile passed, for he saw Albert disappear arm-in-arm with the peasant girl. He watched them pass through the crowd for some time, but at length he lost sight of them in the Via Macello. Suddenly the bell that gives the signal for the end of the carnival sounded, and at the same instant all the moccoletti were extinguished as if by enchantment. It seemed as though one immense blast of the wind had extinguished every one. Franz found himself in utter darkness. No sound was audible save that of the carriages that were carrying the maskers home; nothing was visible save a few lights that burnt behind the windows. The Carnival was over.

Chapter 37

The Catacombs of Saint Sebastian.

In his whole life, perhaps, Franz had never before experienced so sudden an impression, so rapid a transition from gayety to sadness, as in this moment. It seemed as though Rome, under the magic breath of some demon of the night, had suddenly changed into a vast tomb. By a chance, which added yet more to the intensity of the darkness, the moon, which was on the wane, did not rise until eleven o'clock, and the streets which the young man traversed were plunged in the deepest obscurity. The distance was short, and at the end of ten minutes his carriage, or rather the count's, stopped before the Hotel de Londres. Dinner was waiting, but as Albert had told him that he should not return so soon, Franz sat down without him. Signor Pastrini, who had been accustomed to see them dine together, inquired into the cause of his absence, but Franz merely replied that Albert had received on the previous evening an invitation which he had accepted. The sudden extinction of the moccoletti, the darkness which had replaced the light, and the silence which had succeeded the turmoil, had left in Franz's mind a certain depression which was not free from uneasiness. He therefore dined very silently, in spite of the officious attention of his host, who presented himself two or three times to inquire if he wanted anything.

Franz resolved to wait for Albert as late as possible. He ordered the carriage, therefore, for eleven o'clock, desiring Signor Pastrini to inform him the moment that Albert returned to the hotel. At eleven o'clock Albert had not come back. Franz dressed himself, and went out, telling his host that he was going to pass the night at the Duke of Bracciano's. The house of the Duke of Bracciano is one of the most delightful in Rome, the duchess, one of the last heiresses of the Colonnas, does its honors with the most consummate grace, and thus their fetes have a European celebrity. Franz and Albert had brought to Rome letters of introduction to them, and their first question on his arrival was to inquire the whereabouts of his travelling companion. Franz replied that he had left him at the moment they were about to extinguish the moccoli, and that he had lost sight of him in the Via Macello. “Then he has not returned?” said the duke.

“I waited for him until this hour,” replied Franz.

“And do you know whither he went?”

“No, not precisely; however, I think it was something very like a rendezvous.”

“Diavolo!” said the duke, “this is a bad day, or rather a bad night, to be out late; is it not, countess!” These words were addressed to the Countess G — — , who had just arrived, and was leaning on the arm of Signor Torlonia, the duke’s brother.

“I think, on the contrary, that it is a charming night,” replied the countess, “and those who are here will complain of but one thing — its too rapid flight.”

“I am not speaking,” said the duke with a smile, “of the persons who are here; the men run no other danger than that of falling in love with you, and the women of falling ill of jealousy at seeing you so lovely; I meant persons who were out in the streets of Rome.”

“Ah,” asked the countess, “who is out in the streets of Rome at this hour, unless it be to go to a ball?”

“Our friend, Albert de Morcerf, countess, whom I left in pursuit of his unknown about seven o’clock this evening,” said Franz, “and whom I have not seen since.”

“And don’t you know where he is?”

“Not at all.”

“Is he armed?”

“He is in masquerade.”

“You should not have allowed him to go,” said the duke to Franz; “you, who know Rome better than he does.”

“You might as well have tried to stop number three of the barberi, who gained the prize in the race to-day,” replied Franz; “and then moreover, what could happen to him?”

“Who can tell? The night is gloomy, and the Tiber is very near the Via Macello.” Franz felt a shudder run through his veins at observing that the feeling of the duke and the countess was so much in unison with his own personal disquietude. “I informed them at the hotel that I had the honor of passing the night here, duke,” said Franz, “and desired them to come and inform me of his return.”

"Ah," replied the duke, "here I think, is one of my servants who is seeking you."

The duke was not mistaken; when he saw Franz, the servant came up to him. "Your excellency," he said, "the master of the Hotel de Londres has sent to let you know that a man is waiting for you with a letter from the Viscount of Morcerf."

"A letter from the viscount!" exclaimed Franz.

"Yes."

"And who is the man?"

"I do not know."

"Why did he not bring it to me here?"

"The messenger did not say."

"And where is the messenger?"

"He went away directly he saw me enter the ball-room to find you."

"Oh," said the countess to Franz, "go with all speed — poor young man! Perhaps some accident has happened to him."

"I will hasten," replied Franz.

"Shall we see you again to give us any information?" inquired the countess.

"Yes, if it is not any serious affair, otherwise I cannot answer as to what I may do myself."

"Be prudent, in any event," said the countess.

"Oh, pray be assured of that." Franz took his hat and went away in haste. He had sent away his carriage with orders for it to fetch him at two o'clock; fortunately the Palazzo Bracciano, which is on one side in the Corso, and on the other in the Square of the Holy Apostles, is hardly ten minutes' walk from the Hotel de Londres. As he came near the hotel, Franz saw a man in the middle of the street. He had no doubt that it was the messenger from Albert. The man was wrapped up in a large cloak. He went up to him, but, to his extreme astonishment, the stranger first addressed him. "What wants your excellency of me?" inquired the man, retreating a step or two, as if to keep on his guard.

"Are not you the person who brought me a letter," inquired Franz, "from the Viscount of Morcerf?"

"Your excellency lodges at Pastrini's hotel?"

"I do."

"Your excellency is the travelling companion of the viscount?"

“I am.”

“Your excellency’s name” —

“Is the Baron Franz d’Epinay.”

“Then it is to your excellency that this letter is addressed.”

“Is there any answer?” inquired Franz, taking the letter from him.

“Yes — your friend at least hopes so.”

“Come up-stairs with me, and I will give it to you.”

“I prefer waiting here,” said the messenger, with a smile.

“And why?”

“Your excellency will know when you have read the letter.”

“Shall I find you here, then?”

“Certainly.”

Franz entered the hotel. On the staircase he met Signor Pastrini. “Well?” said the landlord.

“Well — what?” responded Franz.

“You have seen the man who desired to speak with you from your friend?” he asked of Franz.

“Yes, I have seen him,” he replied, “and he has handed this letter to me. Light the candles in my apartment, if you please.” The inn-keeper gave orders to a servant to go before Franz with a light. The young man had found Signor Pastrini looking very much alarmed, and this had only made him the more anxious to read Albert’s letter; and so he went instantly towards the waxlight, and unfolded it. It was written and signed by Albert. Franz read it twice before he could comprehend what it contained. It was thus worded: —

My Dear Fellow, — The moment you have received this, have the kindness to take the letter of credit from my pocket-book, which you will find in the square drawer of the secretary; add your own to it, if it be not sufficient. Run to Torlonia, draw from him instantly four thousand piastres, and give them to the bearer. It is urgent that I should have this money without delay. I do not say more, relying on you as you may rely on me. Your friend,

Albert de Morcerf.

P.S. — I now believe in Italian banditti.

Below these lines were written, in a strange hand, the following in Italian: —

Se alle sei della mattina le quattro mile piastre non sono nelle mie mani, alla sette il conte Alberto avra cessato di vivere.

Luigi Vampa.

“If by six in the morning the four thousand piastres are not in my hands, by seven o’clock the Count Albert will have ceased to live.”

This second signature explained everything to Franz, who now understood the objection of the messenger to coming up into the apartment; the street was safer for him. Albert, then, had fallen into the hands of the famous bandit chief, in whose existence he had for so long a time refused to believe. There was no time to lose. He hastened to open the secretary, and found the pocket-book in the drawer, and in it the letter of credit. There were in all six thousand piastres, but of these six thousand Albert had already expended three thousand. As to Franz, he had no letter of credit, as he lived at Florence, and had only come to Rome to pass seven or eight days; he had brought but a hundred louis, and of these he had not more than fifty left. Thus seven or eight hundred piastres were wanting to them both to make up the sum that Albert required. True, he might in such a case rely on the kindness of Signor Torlonia. He was, therefore, about to return to the Palazzo Bracciano without loss of time, when suddenly a luminous idea crossed his mind. He remembered the Count of Monte Cristo. Franz was about to ring for Signor Pastrini, when that worthy presented himself. “My dear sir,” he said, hastily, “do you know if the count is within?”

“Yes, your excellency; he has this moment returned.”

“Is he in bed?”

“I should say no.”

“Then ring at his door, if you please, and request him to be so kind as to give me an audience.” Signor Pastrini did as he was desired, and returning five minutes after, he said, — ”The count awaits your excellency.” Franz went along the corridor, and a servant introduced him to the count. He was in a small room which Franz had not yet seen, and which was surrounded with divans. The count came towards him. “Well, what good wind blows you hither at this hour?” said he; “have you come to sup with me? It would be very kind of you.”

“No; I have come to speak to you of a very serious matter.”

“A serious matter,” said the count, looking at Franz with the earnestness usual to him; “and what may it be?”

“Are we alone?”

“Yes,” replied the count, going to the door, and returning. Franz gave him Albert’s letter. “Read that,” he said. The count read it.

“Well, well!” said he.

“Did you see the postscript?”

“I did, indeed.

“‘Se alle sei della mattina le quattro mile piastre non sono nelle mie mani, alla sette il conte Alberto avra cessato di vivere.

“‘Luigi Vampa.’“

“What think you of that?” inquired Franz.

“Have you the money he demands?”

“Yes, all but eight hundred piastres.” The count went to his secretary, opened it, and pulling out a drawer filled with gold, said to Franz, — ”I hope you will not offend me by applying to any one but myself.”

“You see, on the contrary, I come to you first and instantly,” replied Franz.

“And I thank you; have what you will;” and he made a sign to Franz to take what he pleased.

“Is it absolutely necessary, then, to send the money to Luigi Vampa?” asked the young man, looking fixedly in his turn at the count.

“Judge for yourself,” replied he. “The postscript is explicit.”

“I think that if you would take the trouble of reflecting, you could find a way of simplifying the negotiation,” said Franz.

“How so?” returned the count, with surprise.

“If we were to go together to Luigi Vampa, I am sure he would not refuse you Albert’s freedom.”

“What influence can I possibly have over a bandit?”

“Have you not just rendered him a service that can never be forgotten?”

“What is that?”

“Have you not saved Peppino’s life?”

“Well, well,” said the count, “who told you that?”

“No matter; I know it.” The count knit his brows, and remained silent an instant. “And if I went to seek Vampa, would you accompany me?”

“If my society would not be disagreeable.”

“Be it so. It is a lovely night, and a walk without Rome will do us both good.”

“Shall I take any arms?”

“For what purpose?”

“Any money?”

“It is useless. Where is the man who brought the letter?”

“In the street.”

“He awaits the answer?”

“Yes.”

“I must learn where we are going. I will summon him hither.”

“It is useless; he would not come up.”

“To your apartments, perhaps; but he will not make any difficulty at entering mine.” The count went to the window of the apartment that looked on to the street, and whistled in a peculiar manner. The man in the mantle quitted the wall, and advanced into the middle of the street. “Salite!” said the count, in the same tone in which he would have given an order to his servant. The messenger obeyed without the least hesitation, but rather with alacrity, and, mounting the steps at a bound, entered the hotel; five seconds afterwards he was at the door of the room. “Ah, it is you, Peppino,” said the count. But Peppino, instead of answering, threw himself on his knees, seized the count’s hand, and covered it with kisses. “Ah,” said the count, “you have, then, not forgotten that I saved your life; that is strange, for it is a week ago.”

“No, excellency; and never shall I forget it,” returned Peppino, with an accent of profound gratitude.

“Never? That is a long time; but it is something that you believe so. Rise and answer.” Peppino glanced anxiously at Franz. “Oh, you may speak before his excellency,” said he; “he is one of my friends. You allow me to give you this title?” continued the count in French, “it is necessary to excite this man’s confidence.”

“You can speak before me,” said Franz; “I am a friend of the count’s.”

“Good!” returned Peppino. “I am ready to answer any questions your excellency may address to me.”

“How did the Viscount Albert fall into Luigi’s hands?”

“Excellency, the Frenchman’s carriage passed several times the one in which was Teresa.”

“The chief’s mistress?”

“Yes. The Frenchman threw her a bouquet; Teresa returned it — all this with the consent of the chief, who was in the carriage.”

“What?” cried Franz, “was Luigi Vampa in the carriage with the Roman peasants?”

“It was he who drove, disguised as the coachman,” replied Peppino.

“Well?” said the count.

“Well, then, the Frenchman took off his mask; Teresa, with the chief’s consent, did the same. The Frenchman asked for a rendezvous; Teresa gave him one — only, instead of Teresa, it was Beppo who was on the steps of the church of San Giacomo.”

“What!” exclaimed Franz, “the peasant girl who snatched his mocoletto from him” —

“Was a lad of fifteen,” replied Peppino. “But it was no disgrace to your friend to have been deceived; Beppo has taken in plenty of others.”

“And Beppo led him outside the walls?” said the count.

“Exactly so; a carriage was waiting at the end of the Via Macello. Beppo got in, inviting the Frenchman to follow him, and he did not wait to be asked twice. He gallantly offered the right-hand seat to Beppo, and sat by him. Beppo told him he was going to take him to a villa a league from Rome; the Frenchman assured him he would follow him to the end of the world. The coachman went up the Via di Ripetta and the Porta San Paola; and when they were two hundred yards outside, as the Frenchman became somewhat too forward, Beppo put a brace of pistols to his head, the coachman pulled up and did the same. At the same time, four of the band, who were concealed on the banks of the Almo, surrounded the carriage. The Frenchman made some resistance, and nearly strangled Beppo; but he could not resist five armed men, and was forced to yield. They made him get out, walk along the banks of the river, and then brought him to Teresa and Luigi, who were waiting for him in the catacombs of St. Sebastian.”

“Well,” said the count, turning towards Franz, “it seems to me that this is a very likely story. What do you say to it?”

“Why, that I should think it very amusing,” replied Franz, “if it had happened to any one but poor Albert.”

“And, in truth, if you had not found me here,” said the count, “it might have proved a gallant adventure which would have cost your friend dear; but now, be assured, his alarm will be the only serious consequence.”

“And shall we go and find him?” inquired Franz.

“Oh, decidedly, sir. He is in a very picturesque place — do you know the catacombs of St. Sebastian?”

“I was never in them; but I have often resolved to visit them.”

“Well, here is an opportunity made to your hand, and it would be difficult to contrive a better. Have you a carriage?”

“No.”

“That is of no consequence; I always have one ready, day and night.”

“Always ready?”

“Yes. I am a very capricious being, and I should tell you that sometimes when I rise, or after my dinner, or in the middle of the night, I resolve on starting for some particular point, and away I go.” The count rang, and a footman appeared. “Order out the carriage,” he said, “and remove the pistols which are in the holsters. You need not awaken the coachman; Ali will drive.” In a very short time the noise of wheels was heard, and the carriage stopped at the door. The count took out his watch. “Half-past twelve,” he said. “We might start at five o’clock and be in time, but the delay may cause your friend to pass an uneasy night, and therefore we had better go with all speed to extricate him from the hands of the infidels. Are you still resolved to accompany me?”

“More determined than ever.”

“Well, then, come along.”

Franz and the count went downstairs, accompanied by Peppino. At the door they found the carriage. Ali was on the box, in whom Franz recognized the dumb slave of the grotto of Monte Cristo. Franz and the count got into the carriage. Peppino placed himself beside Ali, and they set off at a rapid pace. Ali had received his instructions, and went down the Corso, crossed the Campo Vaccino, went up the Strada San Gregorio, and reached the gates of St. Sebastian. Then the porter raised some difficulties, but the Count of Monte Cristo produced a permit from the governor of Rome, allowing him to leave or enter the city at any hour of the day or night; the portcullis was therefore raised, the porter had a louis for his trouble, and they went on their way. The road which the carriage now traversed was the ancient Appian Way, and bordered with tombs. From time to time, by the light of the moon, which began to rise, Franz imagined that he saw something like a sentinel appear at various points among the ruins, and suddenly retreat into the darkness on a signal from Peppino. A short time before they reached the Baths of Caracalla the carriage stopped, Peppino opened the door, and the count and Franz alighted.

“In ten minutes,” said the count to his companion, “we shall be there.”

He then took Peppino aside, gave him an order in a low voice, and Peppino went away, taking with him a torch, brought with them in the carriage. Five minutes elapsed, during which Franz saw the shepherd going along a narrow path that led over the irregular and broken surface of the Campagna; and finally he disappeared in the midst of the tall red herbage, which seemed like the bristling mane of an enormous lion. “Now,” said the count, “let us follow him.” Franz and the count in their turn then advanced along the same path, which, at the distance of a hundred paces, led them over a declivity to the bottom of a small valley. They then perceived two men conversing in the obscurity. “Ought we to go on?” asked Franz of the count; “or shall we wait awhile?”

“Let us go on; Peppino will have warned the sentry of our coming.” One of the two men was Peppino, and the other a bandit on the lookout. Franz and the count advanced, and the bandit saluted them. “Your excellency,” said Peppino, addressing the count, “if you will follow me, the opening of the catacombs is close at hand.”

“Go on, then,” replied the count. They came to an opening behind a clump of bushes and in the midst of a pile of rocks, by which a man could scarcely pass. Peppino glided first into this crevice; after they got along a few paces the passage widened. Peppino passed, lighted his torch, and turned to see if they came after him. The count first reached an open space and Franz followed him closely. The passageway sloped in a gentle descent, enlarging as they proceeded; still Franz and the count were compelled to advance in a stooping posture, and were scarcely able to proceed abreast of one another. They went on a hundred and fifty paces in this way, and then were stopped by, “Who comes there?” At the same time they saw the reflection of a torch on a carbine barrel.

“A friend!” responded Peppino; and, advancing alone towards the sentry, he said a few words to him in a low tone; and then he, like the first, saluted the nocturnal visitors, making a sign that they might proceed.

Behind the sentinel was a staircase with twenty steps. Franz and the count descended these, and found themselves in a mortuary chamber. Five corridors diverged like the rays of a star, and the walls, dug into niches, which were arranged one above the other in the shape of coffins, showed that they were at last in the catacombs. Down one of the corridors, whose extent it was impossible to determine, rays of light were visible. The count laid his hand on Franz’s shoulder. “Would you like to see a camp of bandits in repose?” he inquired.

“Exceedingly,” replied Franz.

“Come with me, then. Peppino, put out the torch.” Peppino obeyed, and Franz and the count were in utter darkness, except that fifty paces in advance of them a reddish glare, more evident since Peppino had put out his torch, was visible along the wall. They advanced silently, the count guiding Franz as if he had the singular faculty of seeing in the dark. Franz himself, however, saw his way more plainly in proportion as he went on towards the light, which served in some manner as a guide. Three arcades were before them, and the middle one was used as a door. These arcades opened on one side into the corridor where the count and Franz were, and on the other into a large square chamber, entirely surrounded by niches similar to those of which we have spoken. In the midst of this chamber were four stones, which had formerly served as an altar, as was evident from the cross which still surmounted them. A lamp, placed at the base of a pillar, lighted up with its pale and flickering flame the singular scene which presented itself to the eyes of the two visitors concealed in the shadow. A man was seated with his elbow leaning on the column, and was reading with his back turned to the arcades, through the openings of which the new-comers contemplated him. This was the chief of the band, Luigi Vampa. Around him, and in groups, according to their fancy, lying in their mantles, or with their backs against a sort of stone bench, which went all round the columbarium, were to be seen twenty brigands or more, each having his carbine within reach. At the other end, silent, scarcely visible, and like a shadow, was a sentinel, who was walking up and down before a grotto, which was only distinguishable because in that spot the darkness seemed more dense than elsewhere. When the count thought Franz had gazed sufficiently on this picturesque tableau, he raised his finger to his lips, to warn him to be silent, and, ascending the three steps which led to the corridor of the columbarium, entered the chamber by the middle arcade, and advanced towards Vampa, who was so intent on the book before him that he did not hear the noise of his footsteps.

“Who comes there?” cried the sentinel, who was less abstracted, and who saw by the lamp-light a shadow approaching his chief. At this challenge, Vampa rose quickly, drawing at the same moment a pistol from his girdle. In a moment all the bandits were on their feet, and twenty carbines were levelled at the count. “Well,” said he in a voice perfectly calm, and no muscle of his countenance disturbed, “well, my dear Vampa, it appears to me that you receive a friend with a great deal of ceremony.”

“Ground arms,” exclaimed the chief, with an imperative sign of the hand, while with the other he took off his hat respectfully; then, turning to the singular personage who had caused this scene, he said, “Your pardon, your excellency, but I was so far from expecting the honor of a visit, that I did not really recognize you.”

“It seems that your memory is equally short in everything, Vampa,” said the count, “and that not only do you forget people’s faces, but also the conditions you make with them.”

“What conditions have I forgotten, your excellency?” inquired the bandit, with the air of a man who, having committed an error, is anxious to repair it.

“Was it not agreed,” asked the count, “that not only my person, but also that of my friends, should be respected by you?”

“And how have I broken that treaty, your excellency?”

“You have this evening carried off and conveyed hither the Vicomte Albert de Morcerf. Well,” continued the count, in a tone that made Franz shudder, “this young gentleman is one of my friends — this young gentleman lodges in the same hotel as myself — this young gentleman has been up and down the Corso for eight hours in my private carriage, and yet, I repeat to you, you have carried him off, and conveyed him hither, and,” added the count, taking the letter from his pocket, “you have set a ransom on him, as if he were an utter stranger.”

“Why did you not tell me all this — you?” inquired the brigand chief, turning towards his men, who all retreated before his look. “Why have you caused me thus to fail in my word towards a gentleman like the count, who has all our lives in his hands? By heavens, if I thought one of you knew that the young gentleman was the friend of his excellency, I would blow his brains out with my own hand!”

“Well,” said the count, turning towards Franz, “I told you there was some mistake in this.”

“Are you not alone?” asked Vampa with uneasiness.

“I am with the person to whom this letter was addressed, and to whom I desired to prove that Luigi Vampa was a man of his word. Come, your excellency,” the count added, turning to Franz, “here is Luigi Vampa, who will himself express to you his deep regret at the mistake he has committed.” Franz approached, the chief advancing several steps to meet him. “Welcome among us, your excellency,” he said to him; “you heard what the count just said, and also my reply; let me add that I would not for the four thousand piastres at which I had fixed your friend’s ransom, that this had happened.”

“But,” said Franz, looking round him uneasily, “where is the Viscount? — I do not see him.”

“Nothing has happened to him, I hope,” said the count frowningly.

“The prisoner is there,” replied Vampa, pointing to the hollow space in front of which the bandit was on guard, “and I will go myself and tell him he is free.” The chief went towards the place he had pointed out as Albert’s prison, and Franz and the count followed him. “What is the prisoner doing?” inquired Vampa of the sentinel.

“Ma foi, captain,” replied the sentry, “I do not know; for the last hour I have not heard him stir.”

“Come in, your excellency,” said Vampa. The count and Franz ascended seven or eight steps after the chief, who drew back a bolt and opened a door. Then, by the gleam of a lamp, similar to that which lighted the columbarium, Albert was to be seen wrapped up in a cloak which one of the bandits had lent him, lying in a corner in profound slumber. “Come,” said the count, smiling with his own peculiar smile, “not so bad for a man who is to be shot at seven o’clock to-morrow morning.” Vampa looked at Albert with a kind of admiration; he was not insensible to such a proof of courage.

“You are right, your excellency,” he said; “this must be one of your friends.” Then going to Albert, he touched him on the shoulder, saying, “Will your excellency please to awaken?” Albert stretched out his arms, rubbed his eyelids, and opened his eyes. “Oh,” said he, “is it you, captain? You should have allowed me to sleep. I had such a delightful dream. I was dancing the galop at Torlonia’s with the Countess G — — .” Then he drew his watch from his pocket, that he might see how time sped.

“Half-past one only?” said he. “Why the devil do you rouse me at this hour?”

“To tell you that you are free, your excellency.”

“My dear fellow,” replied Albert, with perfect ease of mind, “remember, for the future, Napoleon’s maxim, ‘Never awaken me but for bad news;’ if you had let me sleep on, I should have finished my galop, and have been grateful to you all my life. So, then, they have paid my ransom?”

“No, your excellency.”

“Well, then, how am I free?”

“A person to whom I can refuse nothing has come to demand you.”

“Come hither?”

“Yes, hither.”

“Really? Then that person is a most amiable person.” Albert looked around and perceived Franz. “What,” said he, “is it you, my dear Franz, whose devotion and friendship are thus displayed?”

“No, not I,” replied Franz, “but our neighbor, the Count of Monte Cristo.”

“Oh, my dear count,” said Albert gayly, arranging his cravat and wristbands, “you are really most kind, and I hope you will consider me as under eternal obligations to you, in the first place for the carriage, and in the next for this visit,” and he put out his hand to the Count, who shuddered as he gave his own, but who nevertheless did give it. The bandit gazed on this scene with amazement; he was evidently accustomed to see his prisoners tremble before him, and yet here was one whose gay temperament was not for a moment altered; as for Franz, he was enchanted at the way in which Albert had sustained the national honor in the presence of the bandit. “My dear Albert,” he said, “if you will make haste, we shall yet have time to finish the night at Torlonia’s. You may conclude your interrupted galop, so that you will owe no ill-will to Signor Luigi, who has, indeed, throughout this whole affair acted like a gentleman.”

“You are decidedly right, and we may reach the Palazzo by two o’clock. Signor Luigi,” continued Albert, “is there any formality to fulfil before I take leave of your excellency?”

“None, sir,” replied the bandit, “you are as free as air.”

“Well, then, a happy and merry life to you. Come, gentlemen, come.”

And Albert, followed by Franz and the count, descended the staircase, crossed the square chamber, where stood all the bandits, hat in hand. “Peppino,” said the brigand chief, “give me the torch.”

“What are you going to do?” inquired the count.

“I will show you the way back myself,” said the captain; “that is the least honor that I can render to your excellency.” And taking the lighted torch from the hands of the herdsman, he preceded his guests, not as a servant who performs an act of civility, but like a king who precedes ambassadors. On reaching the door, he bowed. “And now, your excellency,” added he, "allow me to repeat my apologies, and I hope you will not entertain any resentment at what has occurred."

"No, my dear Vampa," replied the count; "besides, you compensate for your mistakes in so gentlemanly a way, that one almost feels obliged to you for having committed them."

"Gentlemen," added the chief, turning towards the young men, "perhaps the offer may not appear very tempting to you; but if you should ever feel inclined to pay me a second visit, wherever I may be, you shall be welcome." Franz and Albert bowed. The count went out first, then Albert. Franz paused for a moment. "Has your excellency anything to ask me?" said Vampa with a smile.

"Yes, I have," replied Franz; "I am curious to know what work you were perusing with so much attention as we entered."

"Caesar's 'Commentaries,'" said the bandit, "it is my favorite work."

"Well, are you coming?" asked Albert.

"Yes," replied Franz, "here I am," and he, in his turn, left the caves. They advanced to the plain. "Ah, your pardon," said Albert, turning round; "will you allow me, captain?" And he lighted his cigar at Vampa's torch. "Now, my dear count," he said, "let us on with all the speed we may. I am enormously anxious to finish my night at the Duke of Bracciano's." They found the carriage where they had left it. The count said a word in Arabic to Ali, and the horses went on at great speed. It was just two o'clock by Albert's watch when the two friends entered into the dancing-room. Their return was quite an event, but as they entered together, all uneasiness on Albert's account ceased instantly. "Madame," said the Viscount of Morcerf, advancing towards the countess, "yesterday you were so condescending as to promise me a galop; I am rather late in claiming this gracious promise, but here is my friend, whose character for veracity you well know, and he will assure you the delay arose from no fault of mine." And as at this moment the orchestra gave the signal for the waltz, Albert put his arm round the waist of the countess, and disappeared with her in the whirl of dancers. In the meanwhile Franz was considering the singular shudder that had passed over the Count of Monte Cristo at the moment when he had been, in some sort, forced to give his hand to Albert.

Chapter 38

The Compact.

The first words that Albert uttered to his friend, on the following morning, contained a request that Franz would accompany him on a visit to the count; true, the young man had warmly and energetically thanked the count on the previous evening; but services such as he had rendered could never be too often acknowledged. Franz, who seemed attracted by some invisible influence towards the count, in which terror was strangely mingled, felt an extreme reluctance to permit his friend to be exposed alone to the singular fascination that this mysterious personage seemed to exercise over him, and therefore made no objection to Albert's request, but at once accompanied him to the desired spot, and, after a short delay, the count joined them in the salon. "My dear count," said Albert, advancing to meet him, "permit me to repeat the poor thanks I offered last night, and to assure you that the remembrance of all I owe to you will never be effaced from my memory; believe me, as long as I live, I shall never cease to dwell with grateful recollection on the prompt and important service you rendered me; and also to remember that to you I am indebted even for my life."

"My very good friend and excellent neighbor," replied the count, with a smile, "you really exaggerate my trifling exertions. You owe me nothing but some trifle of 20,000. francs, which you have been saved out of your travelling expenses, so that there is not much of a score between us; — but you must really permit me to congratulate you on the ease and unconcern with which you resigned yourself to your fate, and the perfect indifference you manifested as to the turn events might take."

"Upon my word," said Albert, "I deserve no credit for what I could not help, namely, a determination to take everything as I found it, and to let those bandits see, that although men get into troublesome scrapes all over the world, there is no nation but the French that can smile even in the face of grim Death himself. All that, however, has nothing to do with my obligations to you, and I now come to ask you whether, in my own person, my family, or connections, I can in any way serve you? My father, the

Comte de Morcerf, although of Spanish origin, possesses considerable influence, both at the court of France and Madrid, and I unhesitatingly place the best services of myself, and all to whom my life is dear, at your disposal."

"Monsieur de Morcerf," replied the count, "your offer, far from surprising me, is precisely what I expected from you, and I accept it in the same spirit of hearty sincerity with which it is made; — nay, I will go still further, and say that I had previously made up my mind to ask a great favor at your hands."

"Oh, pray name it."

"I am wholly a stranger to Paris — it is a city I have never yet seen."

"Is it possible," exclaimed Albert, "that you have reached your present age without visiting the finest capital in the world? I can scarcely credit it."

"Nevertheless, it is quite true; still, I agree with you in thinking that my present ignorance of the first city in Europe is a reproach to me in every way, and calls for immediate correction; but, in all probability, I should have performed so important, so necessary a duty, as that of making myself acquainted with the wonders and beauties of your justly celebrated capital, had I known any person who would have introduced me into the fashionable world, but unfortunately I possessed no acquaintance there, and, of necessity, was compelled to abandon the idea."

"So distinguished an individual as yourself," cried Albert, "could scarcely have required an introduction."

"You are most kind; but as regards myself, I can find no merit I possess, save that, as a millionaire, I might have become a partner in the speculations of M. Aguado and M. Rothschild; but as my motive in travelling to your capital would not have been for the pleasure of dabbling in stocks, I stayed away till some favorable chance should present itself of carrying my wish into execution. Your offer, however, smooths all difficulties, and I have only to ask you, my dear M. de Morcerf" (these words were accompanied by a most peculiar smile), "whether you undertake, upon my arrival in France, to open to me the doors of that fashionable world of which I know no more than a Huron or a native of Cochin-China?"

"Oh, that I do, and with infinite pleasure," answered Albert; "and so much the more readily as a letter received this morning from my father summons me to Paris, in consequence of a treaty of marriage (my dear

Franz, do not smile, I beg of you) with a family of high standing, and connected with the very cream of Parisian society.”

“Connected by marriage, you mean,” said Franz, laughingly.

“Well, never mind how it is,” answered Albert, “it comes to the same thing in the end. Perhaps by the time you return to Paris, I shall be quite a sober, staid father of a family! A most edifying representative I shall make of all the domestic virtues — don’t you think so? But as regards your wish to visit our fine city, my dear count, I can only say that you may command me and mine to any extent you please.”

“Then it is settled,” said the count, “and I give you my solemn assurance that I only waited an opportunity like the present to realize plans that I have long meditated.” Franz did not doubt that these plans were the same concerning which the count had dropped a few words in the grotto of Monte Cristo, and while the Count was speaking the young man watched him closely, hoping to read something of his purpose in his face, but his countenance was inscrutable especially when, as in the present case, it was veiled in a sphinx-like smile. “But tell me now, count,” exclaimed Albert, delighted at the idea of having to chaperon so distinguished a person as Monte Cristo; “tell me truly whether you are in earnest, or if this project of visiting Paris is merely one of the chimerical and uncertain air castles of which we make so many in the course of our lives, but which, like a house built on the sand, is liable to be blown over by the first puff of wind?”

“I pledge you my honor,” returned the count, “that I mean to do as I have said; both inclination and positive necessity compel me to visit Paris.”

“When do you propose going thither?”

“Have you made up your mind when you shall be there yourself?”

“Certainly I have; in a fortnight or three weeks’ time, that is to say, as fast as I can get there!”

“Nay,” said the Count; “I will give you three months ere I join you; you see I make an ample allowance for all delays and difficulties.

“And in three months’ time,” said Albert, “you will be at my house?”

“Shall we make a positive appointment for a particular day and hour?” inquired the count; “only let me warn you that I am proverbial for my punctilious exactitude in keeping my engagements.”

“Day for day, hour for hour,” said Albert; “that will suit me to a dot.”

“So be it, then,” replied the count, and extending his hand towards a calendar, suspended near the chimney-piece, he said, “to-day is the 21st of

February;” and drawing out his watch, added, “it is exactly half-past ten o’clock. Now promise me to remember this, and expect me the 21st of May at the same hour in the forenoon.”

“Capital,” exclaimed Albert; “your breakfast shall be waiting.”

“Where do you live?”

“No. 27, Rue du Helder.”

“Have you bachelor’s apartments there? I hope my coming will not put you to any inconvenience.”

“I reside in my father’s house, but occupy a pavilion at the farther side of the court-yard, entirely separated from the main building.”

“Quite sufficient,” replied the count, as, taking out his tablets, he wrote down “No. 27, Rue du Helder, 21st May, half-past ten in the morning.”

“Now then,” said the count, returning his tablets to his pocket, “make yourself perfectly easy; the hand of your time-piece will not be more accurate in marking the time than myself.”

“Shall I see you again ere my departure?” asked Albert.

“That depends; when do you leave?”

“To-morrow evening, at five o’clock.”

“In that case I must say adieu to you, as I am compelled to go to Naples, and shall not return hither before Saturday evening or Sunday morning. And you, baron,” pursued the count, addressing Franz, “do you also depart to-morrow?”

“Yes.”

“For France?”

“No, for Venice; I shall remain in Italy for another year or two.”

“Then we shall not meet in Paris?”

“I fear I shall not have that honor.”

“Well, since we must part,” said the count, holding out a hand to each of the young men, “allow me to wish you both a safe and pleasant journey.” It was the first time the hand of Franz had come in contact with that of the mysterious individual before him, and unconsciously he shuddered at its touch, for it felt cold and icy as that of a corpse. “Let us understand each other,” said Albert; “it is agreed — is it not? — that you are to be at No. 27, in the Rue du Helder, on the 21st of May, at half-past ten in the morning, and your word of honor passed for your punctuality?”

“The 21st of May, at half-past ten in the morning, Rue du Helder, No. 27,” replied the Count. The young men then rose, and bowing to the count, quitted the room. “What is the matter?” asked Albert of Franz, when they had returned to their own apartments; “you seem more than commonly thoughtful.”

“I will confess to you, Albert,” replied Franz, “the count is a very singular person, and the appointment you have made to meet him in Paris fills me with a thousand apprehensions.”

“My dear fellow,” exclaimed Albert, “what can there possibly be in that to excite uneasiness? Why, you must have lost your senses.”

“Whether I am in my senses or not,” answered Franz, “that is the way I feel.”

“Listen to me, Franz,” said Albert; “I am glad that the occasion has presented itself for saying this to you, for I have noticed how cold you are in your bearing towards the count, while he, on the other hand, has always been courtesy itself to us. Have you anything particular against him?”

“Possibly.”

“Did you ever meet him previously to coming hither?”

“I have.”

“And where?”

“Will you promise me not to repeat a single word of what I am about to tell you?”

“I promise.”

“Upon your honor?”

“Upon my honor.”

“Then listen to me.” Franz then related to his friend the history of his excursion to the Island of Monte Cristo and of his finding a party of smugglers there, and the two Corsican bandits with them. He dwelt with considerable force and energy on the almost magical hospitality he had received from the count, and the magnificence of his entertainment in the grotto of the “Thousand and One Nights.” He recounted, with circumstantial exactitude, all the particulars of the supper, the hashish, the statues, the dream, and how, at his awakening, there remained no proof or trace of all these events, save the small yacht, seen in the distant horizon driving under full sail toward Porto-Vecchio. Then he detailed the conversation overheard by him at the Colosseum, between the count and Vampa, in which the count had promised to obtain the release of the bandit Peppino, — an engagement which, as our readers are aware, he most faithfully fulfilled. At last he arrived at the adventure of the preceding night, and the embarrassment in which he found himself placed by not having sufficient cash by six or seven hundred piastres to make up the sum required, and finally of his application to the count and the picturesque and satisfactory result that followed. Albert listened with the most profound attention. “Well,” said he, when Franz had concluded, “what do you find to object to in all you have related? The count is fond of travelling, and, being rich, possesses a vessel of his own. Go but to Portsmouth or Southampton, and you will find the harbors crowded with the yachts belonging to such of the English as can afford the expense, and have the same liking for this amusement. Now, by way of having a resting-place during his excursions, avoiding the wretched cookery — which has been trying its best to poison me during the last four months, while you have manfully resisted its effects for as many years, — and obtaining a bed on which it is possible to slumber, Monte Cristo has furnished for himself a temporary abode where you first found him; but, to prevent the possibility of the Tuscan government taking a fancy to his enchanted palace, and thereby depriving him of the advantages naturally expected from so large an outlay of capital, he has wisely enough purchased the island, and taken its name. Just ask yourself, my good fellow, whether there are not many persons of our acquaintance who assume the names of lands and properties they never in their lives were masters of?”

“But,” said Franz, “the Corsican bandits that were among the crew of his vessel?”

“Why, really the thing seems to me simple enough. Nobody knows better than yourself that the bandits of Corsica are not rogues or thieves, but purely and simply fugitives, driven by some sinister motive from their native town or village, and that their fellowship involves no disgrace or stigma; for my own part, I protest that, should I ever go to Corsica, my first visit, ere even I presented myself to the mayor or prefect, should be to the bandits of Colomba, if I could only manage to find them; for, on my conscience, they are a race of men I admire greatly.”

“Still,” persisted Franz, “I suppose you will allow that such men as Vampa and his band are regular villains, who have no other motive than plunder when they seize your person. How do you explain the influence the count evidently possessed over those ruffians?”

“My good friend, as in all probability I own my present safety to that influence, it would ill become me to search too closely into its source;

therefore, instead of condemning him for his intimacy with outlaws, you must give me leave to excuse any little irregularity there may be in such a connection; not altogether for preserving my life, for my own idea was that it never was in much danger, but certainly for saving me 4,000 piastres, which, being translated, means neither more nor less than 24,000 livres of our money — a sum at which, most assuredly, I should never have been estimated in France, proving most indisputably," added Albert with a laugh, "that no prophet is honored in his own country."

"Talking of countries," replied Franz, "of what country is the count, what is his native tongue, whence does he derive his immense fortune, and what were those events of his early life — a life as marvellous as unknown — that have tinctured his succeeding years with so dark and gloomy a misanthropy? Certainly these are questions that, in your place, I should like to have answered."

"My dear Franz," replied Albert, "when, upon receipt of my letter, you found the necessity of asking the count's assistance, you promptly went to him, saying, 'My friend Albert de Morcerf is in danger; help me to deliver him.' Was not that nearly what you said?"

"It was."

"Well, then, did he ask you, 'Who is M. Albert de Morcerf? how does he come by his name — his fortune? what are his means of existence? what is his birthplace! of what country is he a native?' Tell me, did he put all these questions to you?"

"I confess he asked me none."

"No; he merely came and freed me from the hands of Signor Vampa, where, I can assure you, in spite of all my outward appearance of ease and unconcern, I did not very particularly care to remain. Now, then, Franz, when, for services so promptly and unhesitatingly rendered, he but asks me in return to do for him what is done daily for any Russian prince or Italian nobleman who may pass through Paris — merely to introduce him into society — would you have me refuse? My good fellow, you must have lost your senses to think it possible I could act with such cold-blooded policy." And this time it must be confessed that, contrary to the usual state of affairs in discussions between the young men, the effective arguments were all on Albert's side.

"Well," said Franz with a sigh, "do as you please my dear viscount, for your arguments are beyond my powers of refutation. Still, in spite of all, you must admit that this Count of Monte Cristo is a most singular personage.”

“He is a philanthropist,” answered the other; “and no doubt his motive in visiting Paris is to compete for the Monthyon prize, given, as you are aware, to whoever shall be proved to have most materially advanced the interests of virtue and humanity. If my vote and interest can obtain it for him, I will readily give him the one and promise the other. And now, my dear Franz, let us talk of something else. Come, shall we take our luncheon, and then pay a last visit to St. Peter’s?” Franz silently assented; and the following afternoon, at half-past five o’clock, the young men parted. Albert de Morcerf to return to Paris, and Franz d’Epinay to pass a fortnight at Venice. But, ere he entered his travelling carriage, Albert, fearing that his expected guest might forget the engagement he had entered into, placed in the care of a waiter at the hotel a card to be delivered to the Count of Monte Cristo, on which, beneath the name of Vicomte Albert de Morcerf, he had written in pencil — ”27, Rue du Helder, on the 21st May, half-past ten A.M.”

Chapter 39

The Guests.

In the house in the Rue du Helder, where Albert had invited the Count of Monte Cristo, everything was being prepared on the morning of the 21st of May to do honor to the occasion. Albert de Morcerf inhabited a pavilion situated at the corner of a large court, and directly opposite another building, in which were the servants' apartments. Two windows only of the pavilion faced the street; three other windows looked into the court, and two at the back into the garden. Between the court and the garden, built in the heavy style of the imperial architecture, was the large and fashionable dwelling of the Count and Countess of Morcerf. A high wall surrounded the whole of the hotel, surmounted at intervals by vases filled with flowers, and broken in the centre by a large gate of gilded iron, which served as the carriage entrance. A small door, close to the lodge of the concierge, gave ingress and egress to the servants and masters when they were on foot.

It was easy to discover that the delicate care of a mother, unwilling to part from her son, and yet aware that a young man of the viscount's age required the full exercise of his liberty, had chosen this habitation for Albert. There were not lacking, however, evidences of what we may call the intelligent egoism of a youth who is charmed with the indolent, careless life of an only son, and who lives as it were in a gilded cage. By means of the two windows looking into the street, Albert could see all that passed; the sight of what is going on is necessary to young men, who always want to see the world traverse their horizon, even if that horizon is only a public thoroughfare. Then, should anything appear to merit a more minute examination, Albert de Morcerf could follow up his researches by means of a small gate, similar to that close to the concierge's door, and which merits a particular description. It was a little entrance that seemed never to have been opened since the house was built, so entirely was it covered with dust and dirt; but the well-oiled hinges and locks told quite another story. This door was a mockery to the concierge, from whose vigilance and jurisdiction it was free, and, like that famous portal in the "Arabian Nights," opening at the “Sesame” of Ali Baba, it was wont to swing backward at a cabalistic word or a concerted tap from without from the sweetest voices or whitest fingers in the world. At the end of a long corridor, with which the door communicated, and which formed the ante-chamber, was, on the right, Albert’s breakfast-room, looking into the court, and on the left the salon, looking into the garden. Shrubs and creeping plants covered the windows, and hid from the garden and court these two apartments, the only rooms into which, as they were on the ground-floor, the prying eyes of the curious could penetrate. On the floor above were similar rooms, with the addition of a third, formed out of the ante-chamber; these three rooms were a salon, a boudoir, and a bedroom. The salon down-stairs was only an Algerian divan, for the use of smokers. The boudoir up-stairs communicated with the bedchamber by an invisible door on the staircase; it was evident that every precaution had been taken. Above this floor was a large atelier, which had been increased in size by pulling down the partitions — a pandemonium, in which the artist and the dandy strove for preeminence. There were collected and piled up all Albert’s successive caprices, hunting-horns, bass-viols, flutes — a whole orchestra, for Albert had had not a taste but a fancy for music; easels, palettes, brushes, pencils — for music had been succeeded by painting; foils, boxing-gloves, broadswords, and single-sticks — for, following the example of the fashionable young men of the time, Albert de Morcerf cultivated, with far more perseverance than music and drawing, the three arts that complete a dandy’s education, i.e., fencing, boxing, and single-stick; and it was here that he received Grisier, Cook, and Charles Leboucher. The rest of the furniture of this privileged apartment consisted of old cabinets, filled with Chinese porcelain and Japanese vases, Lucca della Robbia faience, and Palissy platters; of old arm-chairs, in which perhaps had sat Henry IV. or Sully, Louis XIII. or Richelieu — for two of these arm-chairs, adorned with a carved shield, on which were engraved the fleur-de-lis of France on an azure field evidently came from the Louvre, or, at least, some royal residence. Over these dark and sombre chairs were thrown splendid stuffs, dyed beneath Persia’s sun, or woven by the fingers of the women of Calcutta or of Chandernagor. What these stuffs did there, it was impossible to say; they awaited, while gratifying the eyes, a destination unknown to their owner himself; in the meantime they filled the place with their golden and silky reflections. In the centre of the room was a Roller and Blanchet “baby grand” piano in rosewood, but holding the potentialities of an orchestra in its narrow and sonorous cavity, and groaning beneath the weight of the chefs-d’oeuvre of Beethoven, Weber, Mozart, Haydn, Gretry, and Porpora. On the walls, over the doors, on the ceiling, were swords, daggers, Malay creeses, maces, battle-axes; gilded, damasked, and inlaid suits of armor; dried plants, minerals, and stuffed birds, their flame-colored wings outspread in motionless flight, and their beaks forever open. This was Albert’s favorite lounging place.

However, the morning of the appointment, the young man had established himself in the small salon down-stairs. There, on a table, surrounded at some distance by a large and luxurious divan, every species of tobacco known, — from the yellow tobacco of Petersburg to the black of Sinai, and so on along the scale from Maryland and Porto-Rico, to Latakia, — was exposed in pots of crackled earthenware of which the Dutch are so fond; beside them, in boxes of fragrant wood, were ranged, according to their size and quality, pueros, regalias, havanas, and manillas; and, in an open cabinet, a collection of German pipes, of chibouques, with their amber mouth-pieces ornamented with coral, and of narghiles, with their long tubes of morocco, awaiting the caprice or the sympathy of the smokers. Albert had himself presided at the arrangement, or, rather, the symmetrical derangement, which, after coffee, the guests at a breakfast of modern days love to contemplate through the vapor that escapes from their mouths, and ascends in long and fanciful wreaths to the ceiling. At a quarter to ten, a valet entered; he composed, with a little groom named John, and who only spoke English, all Albert’s establishment, although the cook of the hotel was always at his service, and on great occasions the count’s chasseur also. This valet, whose name was Germain, and who enjoyed the entire confidence of his young master, held in one hand a number of papers, and in the other a packet of letters, which he gave to Albert. Albert glanced carelessly at the different missives, selected two written in a small and delicate hand, and enclosed in scented envelopes, opened them and perused their contents with some attention. “How did these letters come?” said he.

“One by the post, Madame Danglars’ footman left the other.”

“Let Madame Danglars know that I accept the place she offers me in her box. Wait; then, during the day, tell Rosa that when I leave the Opera I will sup with her as she wishes. Take her six bottles of different wine — Cyprus, sherry, and Malaga, and a barrel of Ostend oysters; get them at Borel’s, and be sure you say they are for me.”

“At what o’clock, sir, do you breakfast?”

“What time is it now?”

“A quarter to ten.”

“Very well, at half past ten. Debray will, perhaps, be obliged to go to the minister — and besides” (Albert looked at his tablets), “it is the hour I told the count, 21st May, at half past ten; and though I do not much rely upon his promise, I wish to be punctual. Is the countess up yet?”

“If you wish, I will inquire.”

“Yes, ask her for one of her liqueur cellarets, mine is incomplete; and tell her I shall have the honor of seeing her about three o’clock, and that I request permission to introduce some one to her.” The valet left the room. Albert threw himself on the divan, tore off the cover of two or three of the papers, looked at the theatre announcements, made a face seeing they gave an opera, and not a ballet; hunted vainly amongst the advertisements for a new tooth-powder of which he had heard, and threw down, one after the other, the three leading papers of Paris, muttering, “These papers become more and more stupid every day.” A moment after, a carriage stopped before the door, and the servant announced M. Lucien Debray. A tall young man, with light hair, clear gray eyes, and thin and compressed lips, dressed in a blue coat with beautifully carved gold buttons, a white neckcloth, and a tortoiseshell eye-glass suspended by a silken thread, and which, by an effort of the superciliary and zygomatic muscles, he fixed in his eye, entered, with a half-official air, without smiling or speaking. “Good-morning, Lucien, good-morning,” said Albert; “your punctuality really alarms me. What do I say? punctuality! You, whom I expected last, you arrive at five minutes to ten, when the time fixed was half-past! Has the ministry resigned?”

“No, my dear fellow,” returned the young man, seating himself on the divan; “reassure yourself; we are tottering always, but we never fall, and I begin to believe that we shall pass into a state of immobility, and then the affairs of the Peninsula will completely consolidate us.”

“Ah, true; you drive Don Carlos out of Spain.”

“No, no, my dear fellow, do not confound our plans. We take him to the other side of the French frontier, and offer him hospitality at Bourges.”

“At Bourges?”

“Yes, he has not much to complain of; Bourges is the capital of Charles VII. Do you not know that all Paris knew it yesterday, and the day before it had already transpired on the Bourse, and M. Danglars (I do not know by what means that man contrives to obtain intelligence as soon as we do) made a million!”

“And you another order, for I see you have a blue ribbon at your button-hole.”

“Yes; they sent me the order of Charles III.,” returned Debray, carelessly.

“Come, do not affect indifference, but confess you were pleased to have it.”

“Oh, it is very well as a finish to the toilet. It looks very neat on a black coat buttoned up.”

“And makes you resemble the Prince of Wales or the Duke of Reichstadt.”

“It is for that reason you see me so early.”

“Because you have the order of Charles III., and you wish to announce the good news to me?”

“No, because I passed the night writing letters, — five and twenty despatches. I returned home at daybreak, and strove to sleep; but my head ached and I got up to have a ride for an hour. At the Bois de Boulogne, ennui and hunger attacked me at once, — two enemies who rarely accompany each other, and who are yet leagued against me, a sort of Carlo-republican alliance. I then recollected you gave a breakfast this morning, and here I am. I am hungry, feed me; I am bored, amuse me.”

“It is my duty as your host,” returned Albert, ringing the bell, while Lucien turned over, with his gold-mounted cane, the papers that lay on the table. “Germain, a glass of sherry and a biscuit. In the meantime, my dear Lucien, here are cigars — contraband, of course — try them, and persuade the minister to sell us such instead of poisoning us with cabbage leaves.”

“Peste, I will do nothing of the kind; the moment they come from government you would find them execrable. Besides, that does not concern the home but the financial department. Address yourself to M. Humann, section of the indirect contributions, corridor A., No. 26.”

“On my word,” said Albert, “you astonish me by the extent of your knowledge. Take a cigar.”

“Really, my dear Albert,” replied Lucien, lighting a manilla at a rose-colored taper that burnt in a beautifully enamelled stand — ”how happy you are to have nothing to do. You do not know your own good fortune!”

“And what would you do, my dear diplomatist,” replied Morcerf, with a slight degree of irony in his voice, “if you did nothing? What? private secretary to a minister, plunged at once into European cabals and Parisian intrigues; having kings, and, better still, queens, to protect, parties to unite, elections to direct; making more use of your cabinet with your pen and your telegraph than Napoleon did of his battle-fields with his sword and his victories; possessing five and twenty thousand francs a year, besides your place; a horse, for which Chateau-Renaud offered you four hundred louis, and which you would not part with; a tailor who never disappoints you; with the opera, the jockey-club, and other diversions, can you not amuse yourself? Well, I will amuse you."

"How?"

"By introducing to you a new acquaintance."

"A man or a woman?"

"A man."

"I know so many men already."

"But you do not know this man."

"Where does he come from — the end of the world?"

"Farther still, perhaps."

"The deuce! I hope he does not bring our breakfast with him."

"Oh, no; our breakfast comes from my father's kitchen. Are you hungry?"

"Humiliating as such a confession is, I am. But I dined at M. de Villefort's, and lawyers always give you very bad dinners. You would think they felt some remorse; did you ever remark that?"

"Ah, depreciate other persons' dinners; you ministers give such splendid ones."

"Yes; but we do not invite people of fashion. If we were not forced to entertain a parcel of country boobies because they think and vote with us, we should never dream of dining at home, I assure you."

"Well, take another glass of sherry and another biscuit."

"Willingly. Your Spanish wine is excellent. You see we were quite right to pacify that country."

"Yes; but Don Carlos?"

"Well, Don Carlos will drink Bordeaux, and in ten years we will marry his son to the little queen."

"You will then obtain the Golden Fleece, if you are still in the ministry."

"I think, Albert, you have adopted the system of feeding me on smoke this morning."

“Well, you must allow it is the best thing for the stomach; but I hear Beauchamp in the next room; you can dispute together, and that will pass away the time.”

“About what?”

“About the papers.”

“My dear friend,” said Lucien with an air of sovereign contempt, “do I ever read the papers?”

“Then you will dispute the more.”

“M. Beauchamp,” announced the servant. “Come in, come in,” said Albert, rising and advancing to meet the young man. “Here is Debray, who detests you without reading you, so he says.”

“He is quite right,” returned Beauchamp; “for I criticise him without knowing what he does. Good-day, commander!”

“Ah, you know that already,” said the private secretary, smiling and shaking hands with him.

“Pardieu?”

“And what do they say of it in the world?”

“In which world? we have so many worlds in the year of grace 1838.”

“In the entire political world, of which you are one of the leaders.”

“They say that it is quite fair, and that sowing so much red, you ought to reap a little blue.”

“Come, come, that is not bad!” said Lucien. “Why do you not join our party, my dear Beauchamp? With your talents you would make your fortune in three or four years.”

“I only await one thing before following your advice; that is, a minister who will hold office for six months. My dear Albert, one word, for I must give poor Lucien a respite. Do we breakfast or dine? I must go to the Chamber, for our life is not an idle one.”

“You only breakfast; I await two persons, and the instant they arrive we shall sit down to table.”

Chapter 40

The Breakfast.

“And what sort of persons do you expect to breakfast?” said Beauchamp.

“A gentleman, and a diplomatist.”

“Then we shall have to wait two hours for the gentleman, and three for the diplomatist. I shall come back to dessert; keep me some strawberries, coffee, and cigars. I shall take a cutlet on my way to the Chamber.”

“Do not do anything of the sort; for were the gentleman a Montmorency, and the diplomatist a Metternich, we will breakfast at eleven; in the meantime, follow Debray’s example, and take a glass of sherry and a biscuit.”

“Be it so; I will stay; I must do something to distract my thoughts.”

“You are like Debray, and yet it seems to me that when the minister is out of spirits, the opposition ought to be joyous.”

“Ah, you do not know with what I am threatened. I shall hear this morning that M. Danglars make a speech at the Chamber of Deputies, and at his wife’s this evening I shall hear the tragedy of a peer of France. The devil take the constitutional government, and since we had our choice, as they say, at least, how could we choose that?”

“I understand; you must lay in a stock of hilarity.”

“Do not run down M. Danglars’ speeches,” said Debray; “he votes for you, for he belongs to the opposition.”

“Pardieu, that is exactly the worst of all. I am waiting until you send him to speak at the Luxembourg, to laugh at my ease.”

“My dear friend,” said Albert to Beauchamp, “it is plain that the affairs of Spain are settled, for you are most desperately out of humor this morning. Recollect that Parisian gossip has spoken of a marriage between myself and Mlle. Eugenie Danglars; I cannot in conscience, therefore, let you run down the speeches of a man who will one day say to me, ‘Vicomte, you know I give my daughter two millions.’“

“Ah, this marriage will never take place,” said Beauchamp. “The king has made him a baron, and can make him a peer, but he cannot make him a gentleman, and the Count of Morcerf is too aristocratic to consent, for the paltry sum of two million francs, to a mesalliance. The Viscount of Morcerf can only wed a marchioness.”

“But two million francs make a nice little sum,” replied Morcerf.

“It is the social capital of a theatre on the boulevard, or a railroad from the Jardin des Plantes to La Rapee.”

“Never mind what he says, Morcerf,” said Debray, “do you marry her. You marry a money-bag label, it is true; well, but what does that matter? It is better to have a blazon less and a figure more on it. You have seven martlets on your arms; give three to your wife, and you will still have four; that is one more than M. de Guise had, who so nearly became King of France, and whose cousin was Emperor of Germany.”

“On my word, I think you are right, Lucien,” said Albert absently.

“To be sure; besides, every millionaire is as noble as a bastard — that is, he can be.”

“Do not say that, Debray,” returned Beauchamp, laughing, “for here is Chateau-Renaud, who, to cure you of your mania for paradoxes, will pass the sword of Renaud de Montauban, his ancestor, through your body.”

“He will sully it then,” returned Lucien; “for I am low — very low.”

“Oh, heavens,” cried Beauchamp, “the minister quotes Beranger, what shall we come to next?”

“M. de Chateau-Renaud — M. Maximilian Morrel,” said the servant, announcing two fresh guests.

“Now, then, to breakfast,” said Beauchamp; “for, if I remember, you told me you only expected two persons, Albert.”

“Morrel,” muttered Albert — ”Morrel — who is he?” But before he had finished, M. de Chateau-Renaud, a handsome young man of thirty, gentleman all over, — that is, with the figure of a Guiche and the wit of a Mortemart, — took Albert’s hand. “My dear Albert,” said he, “let me introduce to you M. Maximilian Morrel, captain of Spahis, my friend; and what is more — however the man speaks for himself — my preserver. Salute my hero, viscount.” And he stepped on one side to give place to a young man of refined and dignified bearing, with large and open brow, piercing eyes, and black mustache, whom our readers have already seen at Marseilles, under circumstances sufficiently dramatic not to be forgotten. A rich uniform, half French, half Oriental, set off his graceful and stalwart figure, and his broad chest was decorated with the order of the Legion of Honor. The young officer bowed with easy and elegant politeness. “Monsieur,” said Albert with affectionate courtesy, “the count of Chateau-Renaud knew how much pleasure this introduction would give me; you are his friend, be ours also.”

“Well said,” interrupted Chateau-Renaud; “and pray that, if you should ever be in a similar predicament, he may do as much for you as he did for me.”

“What has he done?” asked Albert.

“Oh, nothing worth speaking of,” said Morrel; “M. de Chateau-Renaud exaggerates.”

“Not worth speaking of?” cried Chateau-Renaud; “life is not worth speaking of! — that is rather too philosophical, on my word, Morrel. It is very well for you, who risk your life every day, but for me, who only did so once” —

“We gather from all this, baron, that Captain Morrel saved your life.”

“Exactly so.”

“On what occasion?” asked Beauchamp.

“Beauchamp, my good fellow, you know I am starving,” said Debray: “do not set him off on some long story.”

“Well, I do not prevent your sitting down to table,” replied Beauchamp, “Chateau-Renaud can tell us while we eat our breakfast.”

“Gentlemen,” said Morcerf, “it is only a quarter past ten, and I expect some one else.”

“Ah, true, a diplomatist!” observed Debray.

“Diplomat or not, I don’t know; I only know that he charged himself on my account with a mission, which he terminated so entirely to my satisfaction, that had I been king, I should have instantly created him knight of all my orders, even had I been able to offer him the Golden Fleece and the Garter.”

“Well, since we are not to sit down to table,” said Debray, “take a glass of sherry, and tell us all about it.”

“You all know that I had the fancy of going to Africa.”

“It is a road your ancestors have traced for you,” said Albert gallantly.

“Yes? but I doubt that your object was like theirs — to rescue the Holy Sepulchre.”

"You are quite right, Beauchamp," observed the young aristocrat. "It was only to fight as an amateur. I cannot bear duelling since two seconds, whom I had chosen to arrange an affair, forced me to break the arm of one of my best friends, one whom you all know — poor Franz d'Epinay."

"Ah, true," said Debray, "you did fight some time ago; about what?"

"The devil take me, if I remember," returned Chateau-Renaud. "But I recollect perfectly one thing, that, being unwilling to let such talents as mine sleep, I wished to try upon the Arabs the new pistols that had been given to me. In consequence I embarked for Oran, and went from thence to Constantine, where I arrived just in time to witness the raising of the siege. I retreated with the rest, for eight and forty hours. I endured the rain during the day, and the cold during the night tolerably well, but the third morning my horse died of cold. Poor brute — accustomed to be covered up and to have a stove in the stable, the Arabian finds himself unable to bear ten degrees of cold in Arabia."

"That's why you want to purchase my English horse," said Debray, "you think he will bear the cold better."

"You are mistaken, for I have made a vow never to return to Africa."

"You were very much frightened, then?" asked Beauchamp.

"Well, yes, and I had good reason to be so," replied Chateau-Renaud. "I was retreating on foot, for my horse was dead. Six Arabs came up, full gallop, to cut off my head. I shot two with my double-barrelled gun, and two more with my pistols, but I was then disarmed, and two were still left; one seized me by the hair (that is why I now wear it so short, for no one knows what may happen), the other swung a yataghan, and I already felt the cold steel on my neck, when this gentleman whom you see here charged them, shot the one who held me by the hair, and cleft the skull of the other with his sabre. He had assigned himself the task of saving a man's life that day; chance caused that man to be myself. When I am rich I will order a statue of Chance from Klagmann or Marochetti."

"Yes," said Morrel, smiling, "it was the 5th of September, the anniversary of the day on which my father was miraculously preserved; therefore, as far as it lies in my power, I endeavor to celebrate it by some" —

"Heroic action," interrupted Chateau-Renaud. "I was chosen. But that is not all — after rescuing me from the sword, he rescued me from the cold, not by sharing his cloak with me, like St. Martin, but by giving me the whole; then from hunger by sharing with me — guess what?"

“A Strasbourg pie?” asked Beauchamp.

“No, his horse; of which we each of us ate a slice with a hearty appetite. It was very hard.”

“The horse?” said Morcerf, laughing.

“No, the sacrifice,” returned Chateau-Renaud; “ask Debray if he would sacrifice his English steed for a stranger?”

“Not for a stranger,” said Debray, “but for a friend I might, perhaps.”

“I divined that you would become mine, count,” replied Morrel; “besides, as I had the honor to tell you, heroism or not, sacrifice or not, that day I owed an offering to bad fortune in recompense for the favors good fortune had on other days granted to us.”

“The history to which M. Morrel alludes,” continued Chateau-Renaud, “is an admirable one, which he will tell you some day when you are better acquainted with him; to-day let us fill our stomachs, and not our memories. What time do you breakfast, Albert?”

“At half-past ten.”

“Precisely?” asked Debray, taking out his watch.

“Oh, you will give me five minutes’ grace,” replied Morcerf, “for I also expect a preserver.”

“Of whom?”

“Of myself,” cried Morcerf; “parbleu, do you think I cannot be saved as well as any one else, and that there are only Arabs who cut off heads? Our breakfast is a philanthropic one, and we shall have at table — at least, I hope so — two benefactors of humanity.”

“What shall we do?” said Debray; “we have only one Monthyon prize.”

“Well, it will be given to some one who has done nothing to deserve it,” said Beauchamp; “that is the way the Academy mostly escapes from the dilemma.”

“And where does he come from?” asked Debray. “You have already answered the question once, but so vaguely that I venture to put it a second time.”

“Really,” said Albert, “I do not know; when I invited him three months ago, he was then at Rome, but since that time who knows where he may have gone?”

“And you think him capable of being exact?” demanded Debray.

“I think him capable of everything.”

“Well, with the five minutes’ grace, we have only ten left.”

“I will profit by them to tell you something about my guest.”

“I beg pardon,” interrupted Beauchamp; “are there any materials for an article in what you are going to tell us?”

“Yes, and for a most curious one.”

“Go on, then, for I see I shall not get to the Chamber this morning, and I must make up for it.”

“I was at Rome during the last Carnival.”

“We know that,” said Beauchamp.

“Yes, but what you do not know is that I was carried off by bandits.”

“There are no bandits,” cried Debray.

“Yes there are, and most hideous, or rather most admirable ones, for I found them ugly enough to frighten me.”

“Come, my dear Albert,” said Debray, “confess that your cook is behindhand, that the oysters have not arrived from Ostend or Marennes, and that, like Madame de Maintenon, you are going to replace the dish by a story. Say so at once; we are sufficiently well-bred to excuse you, and to listen to your history, fabulous as it promises to be.”

“And I say to you, fabulous as it may seem, I tell it as a true one from beginning to end. The brigands had carried me off, and conducted me to a gloomy spot, called the Catacombs of Saint Sebastian.”

“I know it,” said Chateau-Renaud; “I narrowly escaped catching a fever there.”

“And I did more than that,” replied Morcerf, “for I caught one. I was informed that I was prisoner until I paid the sum of 4,000 Roman crowns — about 24,000 francs. Unfortunately, I had not above 1,500. I was at the end of my journey and of my credit. I wrote to Franz — and were he here he would confirm every word — I wrote then to Franz that if he did not come with the four thousand crowns before six, at ten minutes past I should have gone to join the blessed saints and glorious martyrs in whose company I had the honor of being; and Signor Luigi Vampa, such was the name of the chief of these bandits, would have scrupulously kept his word.”

“But Franz did come with the four thousand crowns,” said Chateau-Renaud. “A man whose name is Franz d’Epinay or Albert de Morcerf has not much difficulty in procuring them.”

“No, he arrived accompanied simply by the guest I am going to present to you.”

"Ah, this gentleman is a Hercules killing Cacus, a Perseus freeing Andromeda."

"No, he is a man about my own size."

"Armed to the teeth?"

"He had not even a knitting-needle."

"But he paid your ransom?"

"He said two words to the chief and I was free."

"And they apologized to him for having carried you off?" said Beauchamp.

"Just so."

"Why, he is a second Ariosto."

"No, his name is the Count of Monte Cristo."

"There is no Count of Monte Cristo" said Debray.

"I do not think so," added Chateau-Renaud, with the air of a man who knows the whole of the European nobility perfectly.

"Does any one know anything of a Count of Monte Cristo?"

"He comes possibly from the Holy Land, and one of his ancestors possessed Calvary, as the Mortemarts did the Dead Sea."

"I think I can assist your researches," said Maximilian. "Monte Cristo is a little island I have often heard spoken of by the old sailors my father employed — a grain of sand in the centre of the Mediterranean, an atom in the infinite."

"Precisely!" cried Albert. "Well, he of whom I speak is the lord and master of this grain of sand, of this atom; he has purchased the title of count somewhere in Tuscany."

"He is rich, then?"

"I believe so."

"But that ought to be visible."

"That is what deceives you, Debray."

"I do not understand you."

"Have you read the 'Arabian Nights'?"

"What a question!"

"Well, do you know if the persons you see there are rich or poor, if their sacks of wheat are not rubies or diamonds? They seem like poor fishermen, and suddenly they open some mysterious cavern filled with the wealth of the Indies."

"Which means?"

“Which means that my Count of Monte Cristo is one of those fishermen. He has even a name taken from the book, since he calls himself Sinbad the Sailor, and has a cave filled with gold.”

“And you have seen this cavern, Morcerf?” asked Beauchamp.

“No, but Franz has; for heaven’s sake, not a word of this before him. Franz went in with his eyes blindfolded, and was waited on by mutes and by women to whom Cleopatra was a painted strumpet. Only he is not quite sure about the women, for they did not come in until after he had taken hashish, so that what he took for women might have been simply a row of statues.”

The two young men looked at Morcerf as if to say, — ”Are you mad, or are you laughing at us?”

“And I also,” said Morrel thoughtfully, “have heard something like this from an old sailor named Penelon.”

“Ah,” cried Albert, “it is very lucky that M. Morrel comes to aid me; you are vexed, are you not, that he thus gives a clew to the labyrinth?”

“My dear Albert,” said Debray, “what you tell us is so extraordinary.”

“Ah, because your ambassadors and your consuls do not tell you of them — they have no time. They are too much taken up with interfering in the affairs of their countrymen who travel.”

“Now you get angry, and attack our poor agents. How will you have them protect you? The Chamber cuts down their salaries every day, so that now they have scarcely any. Will you be ambassador, Albert? I will send you to Constantinople.”

“No, lest on the first demonstration I make in favor of Mehemet Ali, the Sultan send me the bowstring, and make my secretaries strangle me.”

“You say very true,” responded Debray.

“Yes,” said Albert, “but this has nothing to do with the existence of the Count of Monte Cristo.”

“Pardieu, every one exists.”

“Doubtless, but not in the same way; every one has not black slaves, a princely retinue, an arsenal of weapons that would do credit to an Arabian fortress, horses that cost six thousand francs apiece, and Greek mistresses.”

“Have you seen the Greek mistress?”

“I have both seen and heard her. I saw her at the theatre, and heard her one morning when I breakfasted with the count.”

“He eats, then?”

“Yes; but so little, it can hardly be called eating.”

“He must be a vampire.”

“Laugh, if you will; the Countess G — — , who knew Lord Ruthven, declared that the count was a vampire.”

“Ah, capital,” said Beauchamp. “For a man not connected with newspapers, here is the pendant to the famous sea-serpent of the Constitutionnel.”

“Wild eyes, the iris of which contracts or dilates at pleasure,” said Debray; “facial angle strongly developed, magnificent forehead, livid complexion, black beard, sharp and white teeth, politeness unexceptionable.”

“Just so, Lucien,” returned Morcerf; “you have described him feature for feature. Yes, keen and cutting politeness. This man has often made me shudder; and one day that we were viewing an execution, I thought I should faint, more from hearing the cold and calm manner in which he spoke of every description of torture, than from the sight of the executioner and the culprit.”

“Did he not conduct you to the ruins of the Colosseum and suck your blood?” asked Beauchamp.

“Or, having delivered you, make you sign a flaming parchment, surrendering your soul to him as Esau did his birth-right?”

“Rail on, rail on at your ease, gentlemen,” said Morcerf, somewhat piqued. “When I look at you Parisians, idlers on the Boulevard de Gand or the Bois de Boulogne, and think of this man, it seems to me we are not of the same race.”

“I am highly flattered,” returned Beauchamp. “At the same time,” added Chateau-Renaud, “your Count of Monte Cristo is a very fine fellow, always excepting his little arrangements with the Italian banditti.”

“There are no Italian banditti,” said Debray.

“No vampire,” cried Beauchamp. “No Count of Monte Cristo” added Debray. “There is half-past ten striking, Albert.”

“Confess you have dreamed this, and let us sit down to breakfast,” continued Beauchamp. But the sound of the clock had not died away when Germain announced, “His excellency the Count of Monte Cristo.” The involuntary start every one gave proved how much Morcerf’s narrative had impressed them, and Albert himself could not wholly refrain from manifesting sudden emotion. He had not heard a carriage stop in the street, or steps in the ante-chamber; the door had itself opened noiselessly. The count appeared, dressed with the greatest simplicity, but the most fastidious dandy could have found nothing to cavil at in his toilet. Every article of dress — hat, coat, gloves, and boots — was from the first makers. He seemed scarcely five and thirty. But what struck everybody was his extreme resemblance to the portrait Debray had drawn. The count advanced, smiling, into the centre of the room, and approached Albert, who hastened towards him holding out his hand in a ceremonial manner. “Punctuality,” said Monte Cristo, “is the politeness of kings, according to one of your sovereigns, I think; but it is not the same with travellers. However, I hope you will excuse the two or three seconds I am behindhand; five hundred leagues are not to be accomplished without some trouble, and especially in France, where, it seems, it is forbidden to beat the postilions.”

“My dear count,” replied Albert, “I was announcing your visit to some of my friends, whom I had invited in consequence of the promise you did me the honor to make, and whom I now present to you. They are the Count of Chateau-Renaud, whose nobility goes back to the twelve peers, and whose ancestors had a place at the Round Table; M. Lucien Debray, private secretary to the minister of the interior; M. Beauchamp, an editor of a paper, and the terror of the French government, but of whom, in spite of his national celebrity, you perhaps have not heard in Italy, since his paper is prohibited there; and M. Maximilian Morrel, captain of Spahis.”

At this name the count, who had hitherto saluted every one with courtesy, but at the same time with coldness and formality, stepped a pace forward, and a slight tinge of red colored his pale cheeks. “You wear the uniform of the new French conquerors, monsieur,” said he; “it is a handsome uniform.” No one could have said what caused the count’s voice to vibrate so deeply, and what made his eye flash, which was in general so clear, lustrous, and limpid when he pleased. “You have never seen our Africans, count?” said Albert. “Never,” replied the count, who was by this time perfectly master of himself again.

“Well, beneath this uniform beats one of the bravest and noblest hearts in the whole army.”

“Oh, M. de Morcerf,” interrupted Morrel.

“Let me go on, captain. And we have just heard,” continued Albert, “of a new deed of his, and so heroic a one, that, although I have seen him to-day for the first time, I request you to allow me to introduce him as my friend.”

At these words it was still possible to observe in Monte Cristo the concentrated look, changing color, and slight trembling of the eyelid that show emotion. “Ah, you have a noble heart,” said the count; “so much the better.” This exclamation, which corresponded to the count’s own thought rather than to what Albert was saying, surprised everybody, and especially Morrel, who looked at Monte Cristo with wonder. But, at the same time, the intonation was so soft that, however strange the speech might seem, it was impossible to be offended at it. “Why should he doubt it?” said Beauchamp to Chateau-Renaud.

“In reality,” replied the latter, who, with his aristocratic glance and his knowledge of the world, had penetrated at once all that was penetrable in Monte Cristo, “Albert has not deceived us, for the count is a most singular being. What say you, Morrel!”

“Ma foi, he has an open look about him that pleases me, in spite of the singular remark he has made about me.”

“Gentlemen,” said Albert, “Germain informs me that breakfast is ready. My dear count, allow me to show you the way.” They passed silently into the breakfast-room, and every one took his place. “Gentlemen,” said the count, seating himself, “permit me to make a confession which must form my excuse for any improprieties I may commit. I am a stranger, and a stranger to such a degree, that this is the first time I have ever been at Paris. The French way of living is utterly unknown to me, and up to the present time I have followed the Eastern customs, which are entirely in contrast to the Parisian. I beg you, therefore, to excuse if you find anything in me too Turkish, too Italian, or too Arabian. Now, then, let us breakfast.”

“With what an air he says all this,” muttered Beauchamp; “decidedly he is a great man.”

“A great man in his own country,” added Debray.

“A great man in every country, M. Debray,” said Chateau-Renaud. The count was, it may be remembered, a most temperate guest. Albert remarked this, expressing his fears lest, at the outset, the Parisian mode of life should displease the traveller in the most essential point. “My dear count,” said he, “I fear one thing, and that is, that the fare of the Rue du Helder is not so much to your taste as that of the Piazza di Spagni. I ought to have consulted you on the point, and have had some dishes prepared expressly.”

“Did you know me better,” returned the count, smiling, “you would not give one thought of such a thing for a traveller like myself, who has successively lived on maccaroni at Naples, polenta at Milan, olla podrida at Valencia, pilau at Constantinople, karrick in India, and swallows' nests in China. I eat everywhere, and of everything, only I eat but little; and to-day, that you reproach me with my want of appetite, is my day of appetite, for I have not eaten since yesterday morning."

"What," cried all the guests, "you have not eaten for four and twenty hours?"

"No," replied the count; "I was forced to go out of my road to obtain some information near Nimes, so that I was somewhat late, and therefore I did not choose to stop."

"And you ate in your carriage?" asked Morcerf.

"No, I slept, as I generally do when I am weary without having the courage to amuse myself, or when I am hungry without feeling inclined to eat."

"But you can sleep when you please, monsieur?" said Morrel.

"Yes."

"You have a recipe for it?"

"An infallible one."

"That would be invaluable to us in Africa, who have not always any food to eat, and rarely anything to drink."

"Yes," said Monte Cristo; "but, unfortunately, a recipe excellent for a man like myself would be very dangerous applied to an army, which might not awake when it was needed."

"May we inquire what is this recipe?" asked Debray.

"Oh, yes," returned Monte Cristo; "I make no secret of it. It is a mixture of excellent opium, which I fetched myself from Canton in order to have it pure, and the best hashish which grows in the East — that is, between the Tigris and the Euphrates. These two ingredients are mixed in equal proportions, and formed into pills. Ten minutes after one is taken, the effect is produced. Ask Baron Franz d'Epinay; I think he tasted them one day."

"Yes," replied Morcerf, "he said something about it to me."

"But," said Beauchamp, who, as became a journalist, was very incredulous, "you always carry this drug about you?"

"Always."

"Would it be an indiscretion to ask to see those precious pills?" continued Beauchamp, hoping to take him at a disadvantage.

"No, monsieur," returned the count; and he drew from his pocket a marvellous casket, formed out of a single emerald and closed by a golden lid which unscrewed and gave passage to a small greenish colored pellet about the size of a pea. This ball had an acrid and penetrating odor. There were four or five more in the emerald, which would contain about a dozen. The casket passed around the table, but it was more to examine the admirable emerald than to see the pills that it passed from hand to hand. "And is it your cook who prepares these pills?" asked Beauchamp.

"Oh, no, monsieur," replied Monte Cristo; "I do not thus betray my enjoyments to the vulgar. I am a tolerable chemist, and prepare my pills myself."

"This is a magnificent emerald, and the largest I have ever seen," said Chateau-Renaud, "although my mother has some remarkable family jewels."

"I had three similar ones," returned Monte Cristo. "I gave one to the Sultan, who mounted it in his sabre; another to our holy father the Pope, who had it set in his tiara, opposite to one nearly as large, though not so fine, given by the Emperor Napoleon to his predecessor, Pius VII. I kept the third for myself, and I had it hollowed out, which reduced its value, but rendered it more commodious for the purpose I intended." Every one looked at Monte Cristo with astonishment; he spoke with so much simplicity that it was evident he spoke the truth, or that he was mad. However, the sight of the emerald made them naturally incline to the former belief. "And what did these two sovereigns give you in exchange for these magnificent presents?" asked Debray.

"The Sultan, the liberty of a woman," replied the Count; "the Pope, the life of a man; so that once in my life I have been as powerful as if heaven had brought me into the world on the steps of a throne."

"And it was Peppino you saved, was it not?" cried Morcerf; "it was for him that you obtained pardon?"

"Perhaps," returned the count, smiling.

"My dear count, you have no idea what pleasure it gives me to hear you speak thus," said Morcerf. "I had announced you beforehand to my friends as an enchanter of the 'Arabian Nights,' a wizard of the Middle Ages; but the Parisians are so subtle in paradoxes that they mistake for caprices of the imagination the most incontestable truths, when these truths do not form a part of their daily existence. For example, here is Debray who reads, and

Beauchamp who prints, every day, ‘A member of the Jockey Club has been stopped and robbed on the Boulevard;’ ‘four persons have been assassinated in the Rue St. Denis’ or ‘the Faubourg St. Germain;’ ‘ten, fifteen, or twenty thieves, have been arrested in a cafe on the Boulevard du Temple, or in the Thermes de Julien,’ — and yet these same men deny the existence of the bandits in the Maremma, the Campagna di Romana, or the Pontine Marshes. Tell them yourself that I was taken by bandits, and that without your generous intercession I should now have been sleeping in the Catacombs of St. Sebastian, instead of receiving them in my humble abode in the Rue du Helder.”

“Ah,” said Monte Cristo “you promised me never to mention that circumstance.”

“It was not I who made that promise,” cried Morcerf; “it must have been some one else whom you have rescued in the same manner, and whom you have forgotten. Pray speak of it, for I shall not only, I trust, relate the little I do know, but also a great deal I do not know.”

“It seems to me,” returned the count, smiling, “that you played a sufficiently important part to know as well as myself what happened.”

“Well, you promise me, if I tell all I know, to relate, in your turn, all that I do not know?”

“That is but fair,” replied Monte Cristo.

“Well,” said Morcerf, “for three days I believed myself the object of the attentions of a masque, whom I took for a descendant of Tullia or Poppoea, while I was simply the object of the attentions of a contadina, and I say contadina to avoid saying peasant girl. What I know is, that, like a fool, a greater fool than he of whom I spoke just now, I mistook for this peasant girl a young bandit of fifteen or sixteen, with a beardless chin and slim waist, and who, just as I was about to imprint a chaste salute on his lips, placed a pistol to my head, and, aided by seven or eight others, led, or rather dragged me, to the Catacombs of St. Sebastian, where I found a highly educated brigand chief perusing Caesar’s ‘Commentaries,’ and who deigned to leave off reading to inform me, that unless the next morning, before six o’clock, four thousand piastres were paid into his account at his banker’s, at a quarter past six I should have ceased to exist. The letter is still to be seen, for it is in Franz d’Epinay’s possession, signed by me, and with a postscript of M. Luigi Vampa. This is all I know, but I know not, count, how you contrived to inspire so much respect in the bandits of Rome who ordinarily have so little respect for anything. I assure you, Franz and I were lost in admiration.”

“Nothing more simple,” returned the count. “I had known the famous Vampa for more than ten years. When he was quite a child, and only a shepherd, I gave him a few gold pieces for showing me my way, and he, in order to repay me, gave me a poniard, the hilt of which he had carved with his own hand, and which you may have seen in my collection of arms. In after years, whether he had forgotten this interchange of presents, which ought to have cemented our friendship, or whether he did not recollect me, he sought to take me, but, on the contrary, it was I who captured him and a dozen of his band. I might have handed him over to Roman justice, which is somewhat expeditious, and which would have been particularly so with him; but I did nothing of the sort — I suffered him and his band to depart.”

“With the condition that they should sin no more,” said Beauchamp, laughing. “I see they kept their promise.”

“No, monsieur,” returned Monte Cristo “upon the simple condition that they should respect myself and my friends. Perhaps what I am about to say may seem strange to you, who are socialists, and vaunt humanity and your duty to your neighbor, but I never seek to protect a society which does not protect me, and which I will even say, generally occupies itself about me only to injure me; and thus by giving them a low place in my esteem, and preserving a neutrality towards them, it is society and my neighbor who are indebted to me.”

“Bravo,” cried Chateau-Renaud; “you are the first man I ever met sufficiently courageous to preach egotism. Bravo, count, bravo!”

“It is frank, at least,” said Morrel. “But I am sure that the count does not regret having once deviated from the principles he has so boldly avowed.”

“How have I deviated from those principles, monsieur?” asked Monte Cristo, who could not help looking at Morrel with so much intensity, that two or three times the young man had been unable to sustain that clear and piercing glance.

“Why, it seems to me,” replied Morrel, “that in delivering M. de Morcerf, whom you did not know, you did good to your neighbor and to society.”

“Of which he is the brightest ornament,” said Beauchamp, drinking off a glass of champagne.

“My dear count,” cried Morcerf, “you are at fault — you, one of the most formidable logicians I know — and you must see it clearly proved that instead of being an egotist, you are a philanthropist. Ah, you call yourself Oriental, a Levantine, Maltese, Indian, Chinese; your family name is Monte Cristo; Sinbad the Sailor is your baptismal appellation, and yet the first day you set foot in Paris you instinctively display the greatest virtue, or rather the chief defect, of us eccentric Parisians, — that is, you assume the vices you have not, and conceal the virtues you possess."

"My dear vicomte," returned Monte Cristo, "I do not see, in all I have done, anything that merits, either from you or these gentlemen, the pretended eulogies I have received. You were no stranger to me, for I knew you from the time I gave up two rooms to you, invited you to breakfast with me, lent you one of my carriages, witnessed the Carnival in your company, and saw with you from a window in the Piazza del Popolo the execution that affected you so much that you nearly fainted. I will appeal to any of these gentlemen, could I leave my guest in the hands of a hideous bandit, as you term him? Besides, you know, I had the idea that you could introduce me into some of the Paris salons when I came to France. You might some time ago have looked upon this resolution as a vague project, but to-day you see it was a reality, and you must submit to it under penalty of breaking your word."

"I will keep it," returned Morcerf; "but I fear that you will be much disappointed, accustomed as you are to picturesque events and fantastic horizons. Amongst us you will not meet with any of those episodes with which your adventurous existence has so familiarized you; our Chimborazo is Mortmartre, our Himalaya is Mount Valerien, our Great Desert is the plain of Grenelle, where they are now boring an artesian well to water the caravans. We have plenty of thieves, though not so many as is said; but these thieves stand in far more dread of a policeman than a lord. France is so prosaic, and Paris so civilized a city, that you will not find in its eighty-five departments — I say eighty-five, because I do not include Corsica — you will not find, then, in these eighty-five departments a single hill on which there is not a telegraph, or a grotto in which the commissary of police has not put up a gaslamp. There is but one service I can render you, and for that I place myself entirely at your orders, that is, to present, or make my friends present, you everywhere; besides, you have no need of any one to introduce you — with your name, and your fortune, and your talent" (Monte Cristo bowed with a somewhat ironical smile) "you can present yourself everywhere, and be well received. I can be useful in one way only

— if knowledge of Parisian habits, of the means of rendering yourself comfortable, or of the bazaars, can assist, you may depend upon me to find you a fitting dwelling here. I do not dare offer to share my apartments with you, as I shared yours at Rome — I, who do not profess egotism, but am yet egotist par excellence; for, except myself, these rooms would not hold a shadow more, unless that shadow were feminine."

"Ah," said the count, "that is a most conjugal reservation; I recollect that at Rome you said something of a projected marriage. May I congratulate you?"

"The affair is still in projection."

"And he who says in 'projection,' means already decided," said Debray.

"No," replied Morcerf, "my father is most anxious about it; and I hope, ere long, to introduce you, if not to my wife, at least to my betrothed — Mademoiselle Eugenie Danglars."

"Eugenie Danglars," said Monte Cristo; "tell me, is not her father Baron Danglars?"

"Yes," returned Morcerf, "a baron of a new creation."

"What matter," said Monte Cristo "if he has rendered the State services which merit this distinction?"

"Enormous ones," answered Beauchamp. "Although in reality a Liberal, he negotiated a loan of six millions for Charles X., in 1829, who made him a baron and chevalier of the Legion of Honor; so that he wears the ribbon, not, as you would think, in his waistcoat-pocket, but at his button-hole."

"Ah," interrupted Morcerf, laughing, "Beauchamp, Beauchamp, keep that for the Corsaire or the Charivari, but spare my future father-in-law before me." Then, turning to Monte Cristo, "You just now spoke his name as if you knew the baron?"

"I do not know him," returned Monte Cristo; "but I shall probably soon make his acquaintance, for I have a credit opened with him by the house of Richard & Blount, of London, Arstein & Eskeles of Vienna, and Thomson & French at Rome." As he pronounced the two last names, the count glanced at Maximilian Morrel. If the stranger expected to produce an effect on Morrel, he was not mistaken — Maximilian started as if he had been electrified. "Thomson & French," said he; "do you know this house, monsieur?"

"They are my bankers in the capital of the Christian world," returned the count quietly. "Can my influence with them be of any service to you?"

“Oh, count, you could assist me perhaps in researches which have been, up to the present, fruitless. This house, in past years, did ours a great service, and has, I know not for what reason, always denied having rendered us this service.”

“I shall be at your orders,” said Monte Cristo bowing.

“But,” continued Morcerf, “a propos of Danglars, — we have strangely wandered from the subject. We were speaking of a suitable habitation for the Count of Monte Cristo. Come, gentlemen, let us all propose some place. Where shall we lodge this new guest in our great capital?”

“Faubourg Saint-Germain,” said Chateau-Renaud. “The count will find there a charming hotel, with a court and garden.”

“Bah, Chateau-Renaud,” returned Debray, “you only know your dull and gloomy Faubourg Saint-Germain; do not pay any attention to him, count — live in the Chaussee d’Antin, that’s the real centre of Paris.”

“Boulevard de l’Opera,” said Beauchamp; “the second floor — a house with a balcony. The count will have his cushions of silver cloth brought there, and as he smokes his chibouque, see all Paris pass before him.”

“You have no idea, then, Morrel?” asked Chateau-Renaud; “you do not propose anything.”

“Oh, yes,” returned the young man, smiling; “on the contrary, I have one, but I expected the count would be tempted by one of the brilliant proposals made him, yet as he has not replied to any of them, I will venture to offer him a suite of apartments in a charming hotel, in the Pompadour style, that my sister has inhabited for a year, in the Rue Meslay.”

“You have a sister?” asked the count.

“Yes, monsieur, a most excellent sister.”

“Married?”

“Nearly nine years.”

“Happy?” asked the count again.

“As happy as it is permitted to a human creature to be,” replied Maximilian. “She married the man she loved, who remained faithful to us in our fallen fortunes — Emmanuel Herbaut.” Monte Cristo smiled imperceptibly. “I live there during my leave of absence,” continued Maximilian; “and I shall be, together with my brother-in-law Emmanuel, at the disposition of the Count, whenever he thinks fit to honor us.”

“One minute,” cried Albert, without giving Monte Cristo the time to reply. “Take care, you are going to immure a traveller, Sinbad the Sailor, a man who comes to see Paris; you are going to make a patriarch of him.”

“Oh, no,” said Morrel; “my sister is five and twenty, my brother-in-law is thirty, they are gay, young, and happy. Besides, the count will be in his own house, and only see them when he thinks fit to do so.”

“Thanks, monsieur,” said Monte Cristo; “I shall content myself with being presented to your sister and her husband, if you will do me the honor to introduce me; but I cannot accept the offer of any one of these gentlemen, since my habitation is already prepared.”

“What,” cried Morcerf; “you are, then, going to an hotel — that will be very dull for you.”

“Was I so badly lodged at Rome?” said Monte Cristo smiling.

“Parbleu, at Rome you spent fifty thousand piastres in furnishing your apartments, but I presume that you are not disposed to spend a similar sum every day.”

“It is not that which deterred me,” replied Monte Cristo; “but as I determined to have a house to myself, I sent on my valet de chambre, and he ought by this time to have bought the house and furnished it.”

“But you have, then, a valet de chambre who knows Paris?” said Beauchamp.

“It is the first time he has ever been in Paris. He is black, and cannot speak,” returned Monte Cristo.

“It is Ali!” cried Albert, in the midst of the general surprise.

“Yes, Ali himself, my Nubian mute, whom you saw, I think, at Rome.”

“Certainly,” said Morcerf; “I recollect him perfectly. But how could you charge a Nubian to purchase a house, and a mute to furnish it? — he will do everything wrong.”

“Undeceive yourself, monsieur,” replied Monte Cristo; “I am quite sure, that, on the contrary, he will choose everything as I wish. He knows my tastes, my caprices, my wants. He has been here a week, with the instinct of a hound, hunting by himself. He will arrange everything for me. He knew, that I should arrive to-day at ten o’clock; he was waiting for me at nine at the Barriere de Fontainebleau. He gave me this paper; it contains the number of my new abode; read it yourself,” and Monte Cristo passed a paper to Albert. “Ah, that is really original,” said Beauchamp.

“And very princely,” added Chateau-Renaud.

“What, do you not know your house?” asked Debray.

"No," said Monte Cristo; "I told you I did not wish to be behind my time; I dressed myself in the carriage, and descended at the viscount's door." The young men looked at each other; they did not know if it was a comedy Monte Cristo was playing, but every word he uttered had such an air of simplicity, that it was impossible to suppose what he said was false — besides, why should he tell a falsehood? "We must content ourselves, then," said Beauchamp, "with rendering the count all the little services in our power. I, in my quality of journalist, open all the theatres to him."

"Thanks, monsieur," returned Monte Cristo, "my steward has orders to take a box at each theatre."

"Is your steward also a Nubian?" asked Debray.

"No, he is a countryman of yours, if a Corsican is a countryman of any one's. But you know him, M. de Morcerf."

"Is it that excellent M. Bertuccio, who understands hiring windows so well?"

"Yes, you saw him the day I had the honor of receiving you; he has been a soldier, a smuggler — in fact, everything. I would not be quite sure that he has not been mixed up with the police for some trifle — a stab with a knife, for instance."

"And you have chosen this honest citizen for your steward," said Debray. "Of how much does he rob you every year?"

"On my word," replied the count, "not more than another. I am sure he answers my purpose, knows no impossibility, and so I keep him."

"Then," continued Chateau-Renaud, "since you have an establishment, a steward, and a hotel in the Champs Elysees, you only want a mistress." Albert smiled. He thought of the fair Greek he had seen in the count's box at the Argentina and Valle theatres. "I have something better than that," said Monte Cristo; "I have a slave. You procure your mistresses from the opera, the Vaudeville, or the Varietes; I purchased mine at Constantinople; it cost me more, but I have nothing to fear."

"But you forget," replied Debray, laughing, "that we are Franks by name and franks by nature, as King Charles said, and that the moment she puts her foot in France your slave becomes free."

"Who will tell her?"

"The first person who sees her."

"She only speaks Romaic."

"That is different."

“But at least we shall see her,” said Beauchamp, “or do you keep eunuchs as well as mutes?”

“Oh, no,” replied Monte Cristo; “I do not carry brutalism so far. Every one who surrounds me is free to quit me, and when they leave me will no longer have any need of me or any one else; it is for that reason, perhaps, that they do not quit me.” They had long since passed to dessert and cigars.

“My dear Albert,” said Debray, rising, “it is half-past two. Your guest is charming, but you leave the best company to go into the worst sometimes. I must return to the minister’s. I will tell him of the count, and we shall soon know who he is.”

“Take care,” returned Albert; “no one has been able to accomplish that.”

“Oh, we have three millions for our police; it is true they are almost always spent beforehand, but, no matter, we shall still have fifty thousand francs to spend for this purpose.”

“And when you know, will you tell me?”

“I promise you. Au revoir, Albert. Gentlemen, good morning.”

As he left the room, Debray called out loudly, “My carriage.”

“Bravo,” said Beauchamp to Albert; “I shall not go to the Chamber, but I have something better to offer my readers than a speech of M. Danglars.”

“For heaven’s sake, Beauchamp,” returned Morcerf, “do not deprive me of the merit of introducing him everywhere. Is he not peculiar?”

“He is more than that,” replied Chateau-Renaud; “he is one of the most extraordinary men I ever saw in my life. Are you coming, Morrel?”

“Directly I have given my card to the count, who has promised to pay us a visit at Rue Meslay, No. 14.”

“Be sure I shall not fail to do so,” returned the count, bowing. And Maximilian Morrel left the room with the Baron de Chateau-Renaud, leaving Monte Cristo alone with Morcerf.

Chapter 41

The Presentation.

When Albert found himself alone with Monte Cristo, “My dear count,” said he, “allow me to commence my services as cicerone by showing you a specimen of a bachelor’s apartment. You, who are accustomed to the palaces of Italy, can amuse yourself by calculating in how many square feet a young man who is not the worst lodged in Paris can live. As we pass from one room to another, I will open the windows to let you breathe.” Monte Cristo had already seen the breakfast-room and the salon on the ground-floor. Albert led him first to his atelier, which was, as we have said, his favorite apartment. Monte Cristo quickly appreciated all that Albert had collected here — old cabinets, Japanese porcelain, Oriental stuffs, Venetian glass, arms from all parts of the world — everything was familiar to him; and at the first glance he recognized their date, their country, and their origin. Morcerf had expected he should be the guide; on the contrary, it was he who, under the count’s guidance, followed a course of archaeology, mineralogy, and natural history. They descended to the first floor; Albert led his guest into the salon. The salon was filled with the works of modern artists; there were landscapes by Dupre, with their long reeds and tall trees, their lowing oxen and marvellous skies; Delacroix’s Arabian cavaliers, with their long white burnouses, their shining belts, their damasked arms, their horses, who tore each other with their teeth while their riders contended fiercely with their maces; aquarelles of Boulanger, representing Notre Dame de Paris with that vigor that makes the artist the rival of the poet; there were paintings by Diaz, who makes his flowers more beautiful than flowers, his suns more brilliant than the sun; designs by Decamp, as vividly colored as those of Salvator Rosa, but more poetic; pastels by Giraud and Muller, representing children like angels and women with the features of a virgin; sketches torn from the album of Dauzats’ “Travels in the East,” that had been made in a few seconds on the saddle of a camel, or beneath the dome of a mosque — in a word, all that modern art can give in exchange and as recompense for the art lost and gone with ages long since past.

Albert expected to have something new this time to show to the traveller, but, to his great surprise, the latter, without seeking for the signatures, many of which, indeed, were only initials, named instantly the author of every picture in such a manner that it was easy to see that each name was not only known to him, but that each style associated with it had been appreciated and studied by him. From the salon they passed into the bed-chamber; it was a model of taste and simple elegance. A single portrait, signed by Leopold Robert, shone in its carved and gilded frame. This portrait attracted the Count of Monte Cristo's attention, for he made three rapid steps in the chamber, and stopped suddenly before it. It was the portrait of a young woman of five or six and twenty, with a dark complexion, and light and lustrous eyes, veiled beneath long lashes. She wore the picturesque costume of the Catalan fisherwomen, a red and black bodice, and golden pins in her hair. She was looking at the sea, and her form was outlined on the blue ocean and sky. The light was so faint in the room that Albert did not perceive the pallor that spread itself over the count's visage, or the nervous heaving of his chest and shoulders. Silence prevailed for an instant, during which Monte Cristo gazed intently on the picture.

"You have there a most charming mistress, viscount," said the count in a perfectly calm tone; "and this costume — a ball costume, doubtless — becomes her admirably."

"Ah, monsieur," returned Albert, "I would never forgive you this mistake if you had seen another picture beside this. You do not know my mother; she it is whom you see here. She had her portrait painted thus six or eight years ago. This costume is a fancy one, it appears, and the resemblance is so great that I think I still see my mother the same as she was in 1830. The countess had this portrait painted during the count's absence. She doubtless intended giving him an agreeable surprise; but, strange to say, this portrait seemed to displease my father, and the value of the picture, which is, as you see, one of the best works of Leopold Robert, could not overcome his dislike to it. It is true, between ourselves, that M. de Morcerf is one of the most assiduous peers at the Luxembourg, a general renowned for theory, but a most mediocre amateur of art. It is different with my mother, who paints exceedingly well, and who, unwilling to part with so valuable a picture, gave it to me to put here, where it would be less likely to displease M. de Morcerf, whose portrait, by Gros, I will also show you. Excuse my talking of family matters, but as I shall have the honor of introducing you to the count, I tell you this to prevent you making any allusions to this picture. The picture seems to have a malign influence, for my mother rarely comes here without looking at it, and still more rarely does she look at it without weeping. This disagreement is the only one that has ever taken place between the count and countess, who are still as much united, although married more than twenty years, as on the first day of their wedding."

Monte Cristo glanced rapidly at Albert, as if to seek a hidden meaning in his words, but it was evident the young man uttered them in the simplicity of his heart. "Now," said Albert, "that you have seen all my treasures, allow me to offer them to you, unworthy as they are. Consider yourself as in your own house, and to put yourself still more at your ease, pray accompany me to the apartments of M. de Morcerf, he whom I wrote from Rome an account of the services you rendered me, and to whom I announced your promised visit, and I may say that both the count and countess anxiously desire to thank you in person. You are somewhat blase I know, and family scenes have not much effect on Sinbad the Sailor, who has seen so many others. However, accept what I propose to you as an initiation into Parisian life — a life of politeness, visiting, and introductions." Monte Cristo bowed without making any answer; he accepted the offer without enthusiasm and without regret, as one of those conventions of society which every gentleman looks upon as a duty. Albert summoned his servant, and ordered him to acquaint M. and Madame de Morcerf of the arrival of the Count of Monte Cristo. Albert followed him with the count. When they arrived at the ante-chamber, above the door was visible a shield, which, by its rich ornaments and its harmony with the rest of the furniture, indicated the importance the owner attached to this blazon. Monte Cristo stopped and examined it attentively.

"Azure seven merlets, or, placed bender," said he. "These are, doubtless, your family arms? Except the knowledge of blazons, that enables me to decipher them, I am very ignorant of heraldry — I, a count of a fresh creation, fabricated in Tuscany by the aid of a commandery of St. Stephen, and who would not have taken the trouble had I not been told that when you travel much it is necessary. Besides, you must have something on the panels of your carriage, to escape being searched by the custom-house officers. Excuse my putting such a question to you."

"It is not indiscreet," returned Morcerf, with the simplicity of conviction. "You have guessed rightly. These are our arms, that is, those of my father, but they are, as you see, joined to another shield, which has gules, a silver tower, which are my mother's. By her side I am Spanish, but the family of Morcerf is French, and, I have heard, one of the oldest of the south of France."

"Yes," replied Monte Cristo "these blazons prove that. Almost all the armed pilgrims that went to the Holy Land took for their arms either a cross, in honor of their mission, or birds of passage, in sign of the long voyage they were about to undertake, and which they hoped to accomplish on the wings of faith. One of your ancestors had joined the Crusades, and supposing it to be only that of St. Louis, that makes you mount to the thirteenth century, which is tolerably ancient."

"It is possible," said Morcerf; "my father has in his study a genealogical tree which will tell you all that, and on which I made commentaries that would have greatly edified Hozier and Jaucourt. At present I no longer think of it, and yet I must tell you that we are beginning to occupy ourselves greatly with these things under our popular government."

"Well, then, your government would do well to choose from the past something better than the things that I have noticed on your monuments, and which have no heraldic meaning whatever. As for you, viscount," continued Monte Cristo to Morcerf, "you are more fortunate than the government, for your arms are really beautiful, and speak to the imagination. Yes, you are at once from Provence and Spain; that explains, if the portrait you showed me be like, the dark hue I so much admired on the visage of the noble Catalan." It would have required the penetration of Oedipus or the Sphinx to have divined the irony the count concealed beneath these words, apparently uttered with the greatest politeness. Morcerf thanked him with a smile, and pushed open the door above which were his arms, and which, as we have said, opened into the salon. In the most conspicuous part of the salon was another portrait. It was that of a man, from five to eight and thirty, in the uniform of a general officer, wearing the double epaulet of heavy bullion, that indicates superior rank, the ribbon of the Legion of Honor around his neck, which showed he was a commander, and on the right breast, the star of a grand officer of the order of the Saviour, and on the left that of the grand cross of Charles III., which proved that the person represented by the picture had served in the wars of Greece and Spain, or, what was just the same thing as regarded decorations, had fulfilled some diplomatic mission in the two countries.

Monte Cristo was engaged in examining this portrait with no less care than he had bestowed upon the other, when another door opened, and he found himself opposite to the Count of Morcerf in person. He was a man of forty to forty-five years, but he seemed at least fifty, and his black mustache and eyebrows contrasted strangely with his almost white hair, which was cut short, in the military fashion. He was dressed in plain clothes, and wore at his button-hole the ribbons of the different orders to which he belonged. He entered with a tolerably dignified step, and some little haste. Monte Cristo saw him advance towards him without making a single step. It seemed as if his feet were rooted to the ground, and his eyes on the Count of Morcerf. "Father," said the young man, "I have the honor of presenting to you the Count of Monte Cristo, the generous friend whom I had the good fortune to meet in the critical situation of which I have told you."

"You are most welcome, monsieur," said the Count of Morcerf, saluting Monte Cristo with a smile, "and monsieur has rendered our house, in preserving its only heir, a service which insures him our eternal gratitude." As he said these words, the count of Morcerf pointed to a chair, while he seated himself in another opposite the window.

Monte Cristo, in taking the seat Morcerf offered him, placed himself in such a manner as to remain concealed in the shadow of the large velvet curtains, and read on the careworn and livid features of the count a whole history of secret griefs written in each wrinkle time had planted there. "The countess," said Morcerf, "was at her toilet when she was informed of the visit she was about to receive. She will, however, be in the salon in ten minutes."

"It is a great honor to me," returned Monte Cristo, "to be thus, on the first day of my arrival in Paris, brought in contact with a man whose merit equals his reputation, and to whom fortune has for once been equitable, but has she not still on the plains of Metidja, or in the mountains of Atlas, a marshal's staff to offer you?"

"Oh," replied Morcerf, reddening slightly, "I have left the service, monsieur. Made a peer at the Restoration, I served through the first campaign under the orders of Marshal Bourmont. I could, therefore, expect a higher rank, and who knows what might have happened had the elder branch remained on the throne? But the Revolution of July was, it seems, sufficiently glorious to allow itself to be ungrateful, and it was so for all services that did not date from the imperial period. I tendered my resignation, for when you have gained your epaulets on the battle-field, you do not know how to manoeuvre on the slippery grounds of the salons. I have hung up my sword, and cast myself into politics. I have devoted myself to industry; I study the useful arts. During the twenty years I served, I often wished to do so, but I had not the time.”

“These are the ideas that render your nation superior to any other,” returned Monte Cristo. “A gentleman of high birth, possessor of an ample fortune, you have consented to gain your promotion as an obscure soldier, step by step — this is uncommon; then become general, peer of France, commander of the Legion of Honor, you consent to again commence a second apprenticeship, without any other hope or any other desire than that of one day becoming useful to your fellow-creatures; this, indeed, is praiseworthy, — nay, more, it is sublime.” Albert looked on and listened with astonishment; he was not used to see Monte Cristo give vent to such bursts of enthusiasm. “Alas,” continued the stranger, doubtless to dispel the slight cloud that covered Morcerf’s brow, “we do not act thus in Italy; we grow according to our race and our species, and we pursue the same lines, and often the same uselessness, all our lives.”

“But, monsieur,” said the Count of Morcerf, “for a man of your merit, Italy is not a country, and France opens her arms to receive you; respond to her call. France will not, perhaps, be always ungrateful. She treats her children ill, but she always welcomes strangers.”

“Ah, father,” said Albert with a smile, “it is evident you do not know the Count of Monte Cristo; he despises all honors, and contents himself with those written on his passport.”

“That is the most just remark,” replied the stranger, “I ever heard made concerning myself.”

“You have been free to choose your career,” observed the Count of Morcerf, with a sigh; “and you have chosen the path strewed with flowers.”

“Precisely, monsieur,” replied Monte Cristo with one of those smiles that a painter could never represent or a physiologist analyze.

“If I did not fear to fatigue you,” said the general, evidently charmed with the count’s manners, “I would have taken you to the Chamber; there is a debate very curious to those who are strangers to our modern senators.”

“I shall be most grateful, monsieur, if you will, at some future time, renew your offer, but I have been flattered with the hope of being introduced to the countess, and I will therefore wait.”

“Ah, here is my mother,” cried the viscount. Monte Cristo, turned round hastily, and saw Madame de Morcerf at the entrance of the salon, at the door opposite to that by which her husband had entered, pale and motionless; when Monte Cristo turned round, she let fall her arm, which for some unknown reason had been resting on the gilded door-post. She had been there some moments, and had heard the last words of the visitor. The latter rose and bowed to the countess, who inclined herself without speaking. “Ah, good heavens, madame,” said the count, “are you ill, or is it the heat of the room that affects you?”

“Are you ill, mother?” cried the viscount, springing towards her.

She thanked them both with a smile. “No,” returned she, “but I feel some emotion on seeing, for the first time, the man without whose intervention we should have been in tears and desolation. Monsieur,” continued the countess, advancing with the majesty of a queen, “I owe to you the life of my son, and for this I bless you. Now, I thank you for the pleasure you give me in thus affording me the opportunity of thanking you as I have blessed you, from the bottom of my heart.” The count bowed again, but lower than before; He was even paler than Mercedes. “Madame,” said he, “the count and yourself recompense too generously a simple action. To save a man, to spare a father’s feelings, or a mother’s sensibility, is not to do a good action, but a simple deed of humanity.” At these words, uttered with the most exquisite sweetness and politeness, Madame de Morcerf replied. “It is very fortunate for my son, monsieur, that he found such a friend, and I thank God that things are thus.” And Mercedes raised her fine eyes to heaven with so fervent an expression of gratitude, that the count fancied he saw tears in them. M. de Morcerf approached her. “Madame,” said he. “I have already made my excuses to the count for quitting him, and I pray you to do so also. The sitting commences at two; it is now three, and I am to speak.”

“Go, then, and monsieur and I will strive our best to forget your absence,” replied the countess, with the same tone of deep feeling. “Monsieur,” continued she, turning to Monte Cristo, “will you do us the honor of passing the rest of the day with us?”

“Believe me, madame, I feel most grateful for your kindness, but I got out of my travelling carriage at your door this morning, and I am ignorant how I am installed in Paris, which I scarcely know; this is but a trifling inquietude, I know, but one that may be appreciated.”

“We shall have the pleasure another time,” said the countess; “you promise that?” Monte Cristo inclined himself without answering, but the gesture might pass for assent. “I will not detain you, monsieur,” continued the countess; “I would not have our gratitude become indiscreet or importunate.”

“My dear Count,” said Albert, “I will endeavor to return your politeness at Rome, and place my coupe at your disposal until your own be ready.”

“A thousand thanks for your kindness, viscount,” returned the Count of Monte Cristo “but I suppose that M. Bertuccio has suitably employed the four hours and a half I have given him, and that I shall find a carriage of some sort ready at the door.” Albert was used to the count’s manner of proceeding; he knew that, like Nero, he was in search of the impossible, and nothing astonished him, but wishing to judge with his own eyes how far the count’s orders had been executed, he accompanied him to the door of the house. Monte Cristo was not deceived. As soon as he appeared in the Count of Morcerf’s ante-chamber, a footman, the same who at Rome had brought the count’s card to the two young men, and announced his visit, sprang into the vestibule, and when he arrived at the door the illustrious traveller found his carriage awaiting him. It was a coupe of Koller’s building, and with horses and harness for which Drake had, to the knowledge of all the lions of Paris, refused on the previous day seven hundred guineas. “Monsieur,” said the count to Albert, “I do not ask you to accompany me to my house, as I can only show you a habitation fitted up in a hurry, and I have, as you know, a reputation to keep up as regards not being taken by surprise. Give me, therefore, one more day before I invite you; I shall then be certain not to fail in my hospitality.”

“If you ask me for a day, count, I know what to anticipate; it will not be a house I shall see, but a palace. You have decidedly some genius at your control.”

“Ma foi, spread that idea,” replied the Count of Monte Cristo, putting his foot on the velvet-lined steps of his splendid carriage, “and that will be worth something to me among the ladies.” As he spoke, he sprang into the vehicle, the door was closed, but not so rapidly that Monte Cristo failed to perceive the almost imperceptible movement which stirred the curtains of the apartment in which he had left Madame de Morcerf. When Albert returned to his mother, he found her in the boudoir reclining in a large velvet arm-chair, the whole room so obscure that only the shining spangle, fastened here and there to the drapery, and the angles of the gilded frames of the pictures, showed with some degree of brightness in the gloom. Albert could not see the face of the countess, as it was covered with a thin veil she had put on her head, and which fell over her features in misty folds, but it seemed to him as though her voice had altered. He could distinguish amid the perfumes of the roses and heliotropes in the flower-stands, the sharp and fragrant odor of volatile salts, and he noticed in one of the chased cups on the mantle-piece the countess's smelling-bottle, taken from its shagreen case, and exclaimed in a tone of uneasiness, as he entered, — ”My dear mother, have you been ill during my absence?”

“No, no, Albert, but you know these roses, tuberoses, and orange-flowers throw out at first, before one is used to them, such violent perfumes.”

“Then, my dear mother,” said Albert, putting his hand to the bell, “they must be taken into the ante-chamber. You are really ill, and just now were so pale as you came into the room” —

“Was I pale, Albert?”

“Yes; a pallor that suits you admirably, mother, but which did not the less alarm my father and myself.”

“Did your father speak of it?” inquired Mercedes eagerly.

“No, madame; but do you not remember that he spoke of the fact to you?”

“Yes, I do remember,” replied the countess. A servant entered, summoned by Albert's ring of the bell. “Take these flowers into the anteroom or dressing-room,” said the viscount; “they make the countess ill.” The footman obeyed his orders. A long pause ensued, which lasted until all the flowers were removed. “What is this name of Monte Cristo?” inquired the countess, when the servant had taken away the last vase of flowers, “is it a family name, or the name of the estate, or a simple title?”

“I believe, mother, it is merely a title. The count purchased an island in the Tuscan archipelago, and, as he told you to-day, has founded a commandery. You know the same thing was done for Saint Stephen of Florence, Saint George, Constantinian of Parma, and even for the Order of Malta. Except this, he has no pretension to nobility, and calls himself a chance count, although the general opinion at Rome is that the count is a man of very high distinction.”

“His manners are admirable,” said the countess, “at least, as far as I could judge in the few minutes he remained here.”

“They are perfect mother, so perfect, that they surpass by far all I have known in the leading aristocracy of the three proudest nobilities of Europe — the English, the Spanish, and the German.” The countess paused a moment; then, after a slight hesitation, she resumed, — ”You have seen, my dear Albert — I ask the question as a mother — you have seen M. de Monte Cristo in his house, you are quicksighted, have much knowledge of the world, more tact than is usual at your age, do you think the count is really what he appears to be?”

“What does he appear to be?”

“Why, you have just said, — a man of high distinction.”

“I told you, my dear mother, he was esteemed such.”

“But what is your own opinion, Albert?”

“I must tell you that I have not come to any decided opinion respecting him, but I think him a Maltese.”

“I do not ask you of his origin but what he is.”

“Ah, what he is; that is quite another thing. I have seen so many remarkable things in him, that if you would have me really say what I think, I shall reply that I really do look upon him as one of Byron’s heroes, whom misery has marked with a fatal brand; some Manfred, some Lara, some Werner, one of those wrecks, as it were, of some ancient family, who, disinherited of their patrimony, have achieved one by the force of their adventurous genius, which has placed them above the laws of society.”

“You say” —

“I say that Monte Cristo is an island in the midst of the Mediterranean, without inhabitants or garrison, the resort of smugglers of all nations, and pirates of every flag. Who knows whether or not these industrious worthies do not pay to their feudal lord some dues for his protection?”

“That is possible,” said the countess, reflecting.

“Never mind,” continued the young man, “smuggler or not, you must agree, mother dear, as you have seen him, that the Count of Monte Cristo is a remarkable man, who will have the greatest success in the salons of Paris. Why, this very morning, in my rooms, he made his entree amongst us by striking every man of us with amazement, not even excepting Chateau-Renaud.”

“And what do you suppose is the count’s age?” inquired Mercedes, evidently attaching great importance to this question.

“Thirty-five or thirty-six, mother.”

“So young, — it is impossible,” said Mercedes, replying at the same time to what Albert said as well as to her own private reflection.

“It is the truth, however. Three or four times he has said to me, and certainly without the slightest premeditation, ‘at such a period I was five years old, at another ten years old, at another twelve,’ and I, induced by curiosity, which kept me alive to these details, have compared the dates, and never found him inaccurate. The age of this singular man, who is of no age, is then, I am certain, thirty-five. Besides, mother, remark how vivid his eye, how raven-black his hair, and his brow, though so pale, is free from wrinkles, — he is not only vigorous, but also young.” The countess bent her head, as if beneath a heavy wave of bitter thoughts. “And has this man displayed a friendship for you, Albert?” she asked with a nervous shudder.

“I am inclined to think so.”

“And — do — you — like — him?”

“Why, he pleases me in spite of Franz d’Epinay, who tries to convince me that he is a being returned from the other world.” The countess shuddered. “Albert,” she said, in a voice which was altered by emotion, “I have always put you on your guard against new acquaintances. Now you are a man, and are able to give me advice; yet I repeat to you, Albert, be prudent.”

“Why, my dear mother, it is necessary, in order to make your advice turn to account, that I should know beforehand what I have to distrust. The count never plays, he only drinks pure water tinged with a little sherry, and is so rich that he cannot, without intending to laugh at me, try to borrow money. What, then, have I to fear from him?”

“You are right,” said the countess, “and my fears are weakness, especially when directed against a man who has saved your life. How did your father receive him, Albert? It is necessary that we should be more than complaisant to the count. M. de Morcerf is sometimes occupied, his business makes him reflective, and he might, without intending it” —

“Nothing could be in better taste than my father’s demeanor, madame,” said Albert; “nay, more, he seemed greatly flattered at two or three compliments which the count very skilfully and agreeably paid him with as much ease as if he had known him these thirty years. Each of these little tickling arrows must have pleased my father,” added Albert with a laugh. “And thus they parted the best possible friends, and M. de Morcerf even wished to take him to the Chamber to hear the speakers.” The countess made no reply. She fell into so deep a revery that her eyes gradually closed.

The young man, standing up before her, gazed upon her with that filial affection which is so tender and endearing with children whose mothers are still young and handsome. Then, after seeing her eyes closed, and hearing her breathe gently, he believed she had dropped asleep, and left the apartment on tiptoe, closing the door after him with the utmost precaution. “This devil of a fellow,” he muttered, shaking his head; “I said at the time he would create a sensation here, and I measure his effect by an infallible thermometer. My mother has noticed him, and he must therefore, perforce, be remarkable.” He went down to the stables, not without some slight annoyance, when he remembered that the Count of Monte Cristo had laid his hands on a “turnout” which sent his bays down to second place in the opinion of connoisseurs. “Most decidedly,” said he, “men are not equal, and I must beg my father to develop this theorem in the Chamber of Peers.”

Chapter 42

Monsieur Bertuccio.

Meanwhile the count had arrived at his house; it had taken him six minutes to perform the distance, but these six minutes were sufficient to induce twenty young men who knew the price of the equipage they had been unable to purchase themselves, to put their horses in a gallop in order to see the rich foreigner who could afford to give 20,000 francs apiece for his horses. The house Ali had chosen, and which was to serve as a town residence to Monte Cristo, was situated on the right hand as you ascend the Champs Elysees. A thick clump of trees and shrubs rose in the centre, and masked a portion of the front; around this shrubbery two alleys, like two arms, extended right and left, and formed a carriage-drive from the iron gates to a double portico, on every step of which stood a porcelain vase, filled with flowers. This house, isolated from the rest, had, besides the main entrance, another in the Rue Ponthieu. Even before the coachman had hailed the concierge, the massy gates rolled on their hinges — they had seen the Count coming, and at Paris, as everywhere else, he was served with the rapidity of lightning. The coachman entered and traversed the half-circle without slackening his speed, and the gates were closed ere the wheels had ceased to sound on the gravel. The carriage stopped at the left side of the portico, two men presented themselves at the carriage-window; the one was Ali, who, smiling with an expression of the most sincere joy, seemed amply repaid by a mere look from Monte Cristo. The other bowed respectfully, and offered his arm to assist the count in descending. “Thanks, M. Bertuccio,” said the count, springing lightly up the three steps of the portico; “and the notary?”

“He is in the small salon, excellency,” returned Bertuccio.

“And the cards I ordered to be engraved as soon as you knew the number of the house?”

“Your excellency, it is done already. I have been myself to the best engraver of the Palais Royal, who did the plate in my presence. The first card struck off was taken, according to your orders, to the Baron Danglars, Rue de la Chaussee d'Antin, No. 7; the others are on the mantle-piece of your excellency's bedroom."

"Good; what o'clock is it?"

"Four o'clock." Monte Cristo gave his hat, cane, and gloves to the same French footman who had called his carriage at the Count of Morcerf's, and then he passed into the small salon, preceded by Bertuccio, who showed him the way. "These are but indifferent marbles in this ante-chamber," said Monte Cristo. "I trust all this will soon be taken away." Bertuccio bowed. As the steward had said, the notary awaited him in the small salon. He was a simple-looking lawyer's clerk, elevated to the extraordinary dignity of a provincial scrivener. "You are the notary empowered to sell the country house that I wish to purchase, monsieur?" asked Monte Cristo.

"Yes, count," returned the notary.

"Is the deed of sale ready?"

"Yes, count."

"Have you brought it?"

"Here it is."

"Very well; and where is this house that I purchase?" asked the count carelessly, addressing himself half to Bertuccio, half to the notary. The steward made a gesture that signified, "I do not know." The notary looked at the count with astonishment. "What!" said he, "does not the count know where the house he purchases is situated?"

"No," returned the count.

"The count does not know?"

"How should I know? I have arrived from Cadiz this morning. I have never before been at Paris, and it is the first time I have ever even set my foot in France."

"Ah, that is different; the house you purchase is at Auteuil." At these words Bertuccio turned pale. "And where is Auteuil?" asked the count.

"Close by here, monsieur," replied the notary — "a little beyond Passy; a charming situation, in the heart of the Bois de Boulogne."

"So near as that?" said the Count; "but that is not in the country. What made you choose a house at the gates of Paris, M. Bertuccio?"

"I," cried the steward with a strange expression. "His excellency did not charge me to purchase this house. If his excellency will recollect — if he will think" —

“Ah, true,” observed Monte Cristo; “I recollect now. I read the advertisement in one of the papers, and was tempted by the false title, ‘a country house.’“

“It is not yet too late,” cried Bertuccio, eagerly; “and if your excellency will intrust me with the commission, I will find you a better at Enghien, at Fontenay-aux-Roses, or at Bellevue.”

“Oh, no,” returned Monte Cristo negligently; “since I have this, I will keep it.”

“And you are quite right,” said the notary, who feared to lose his fee. “It is a charming place, well supplied with spring-water and fine trees; a comfortable habitation, although abandoned for a long time, without reckoning the furniture, which, although old, is yet valuable, now that old things are so much sought after. I suppose the count has the tastes of the day?”

“To be sure,” returned Monte Cristo; “it is very convenient, then?”

“It is more — it is magnificent.”

“Peste, let us not lose such an opportunity,” returned Monte Cristo. “The deed, if you please, Mr. Notary.” And he signed it rapidly, after having first run his eye over that part of the deed in which were specified the situation of the house and the names of the proprietors. “Bertuccio,” said he, “give fifty-five thousand francs to monsieur.” The steward left the room with a faltering step, and returned with a bundle of bank-notes, which the notary counted like a man who never gives a receipt for money until after he is sure it is all there. “And now,” demanded the count, “are all the forms complied with?”

“All, sir.”

“Have you the keys?”

“They are in the hands of the concierge, who takes care of the house, but here is the order I have given him to install the count in his new possessions.”

“Very well;” and Monte Cristo made a sign with his hand to the notary, which said, “I have no further need of you; you may go.”

“But,” observed the honest notary, “the count is, I think, mistaken; it is only fifty thousand francs, everything included.”

“And your fee?”

“Is included in this sum.”

“But have you not come from Auteuil here?”

"Yes, certainly."

"Well, then, it is but fair that you should be paid for your loss of time and trouble," said the count; and he made a gesture of polite dismissal. The notary left the room backwards, and bowing down to the ground; it was the first time he had ever met a similar client. "See this gentleman out," said the count to Bertuccio. And the steward followed the notary out of the room. Scarcely was the count alone, when he drew from his pocket a book closed with a lock, and opened it with a key which he wore round his neck, and which never left him. After having sought for a few minutes, he stopped at a leaf which had several notes, and compared them with the deed of sale, which lay on the table. "'Auteuil, Rue de la Fontaine, No. 28;' it is indeed the same," said he; "and now, am I to rely upon an avowal extorted by religious or physical terror? However, in an hour I shall know all. Bertuccio!" cried he, striking a light hammer with a pliant handle on a small gong. "Bertuccio!" The steward appeared at the door. "Monsieur Bertuccio," said the count, "did you never tell me that you had travelled in France?"

"In some parts of France — yes, excellency."

"You know the environs of Paris, then?"

"No, excellency, no," returned the steward, with a sort of nervous trembling, which Monte Cristo, a connoisseur in all emotions, rightly attributed to great disquietude.

"It is unfortunate," returned he, "that you have never visited the environs, for I wish to see my new property this evening, and had you gone with me, you could have given me some useful information."

"To Auteuil!" cried Bertuccio, whose copper complexion became livid — "I go to Auteuil?"

"Well, what is there surprising in that? When I live at Auteuil, you must come there, as you belong to my service." Bertuccio hung down his head before the imperious look of his master, and remained motionless, without making any answer. "Why, what has happened to you? — are you going to make me ring a second time for the carriage?" asked Monte Cristo, in the same tone that Louis XIV. pronounced the famous, "I have been almost obliged to wait." Bertuccio made but one bound to the ante-chamber, and cried in a hoarse voice — "His excellency's horses!" Monte Cristo wrote two or three notes, and, as he sealed the last, the steward appeared. "Your excellency's carriage is at the door," said he.

“Well, take your hat and gloves,” returned Monte Cristo.

“Am I to accompany you, your excellency?” cried Bertuccio.

“Certainly, you must give the orders, for I intend residing at the house.” It was unexampled for a servant of the count’s to dare to dispute an order of his, so the steward, without saying a word, followed his master, who got into the carriage, and signed to him to follow, which he did, taking his place respectfully on the front seat.

Chapter 43

The House at Auteuil.

Monte Cristo noticed, as they descended the staircase, that Bertuccio signed himself in the Corsican manner; that is, had formed the sign of the cross in the air with his thumb, and as he seated himself in the carriage, muttered a short prayer. Any one but a man of exhaustless thirst for knowledge would have had pity on seeing the steward's extraordinary repugnance for the count's projected drive without the walls; but the Count was too curious to let Bertuccio off from this little journey. In twenty minutes they were at Auteuil; the steward's emotion had continued to augment as they entered the village. Bertuccio, crouched in the corner of the carriage, began to examine with a feverish anxiety every house they passed. "Tell them to stop at Rue de la Fontaine, No. 28," said the count, fixing his eyes on the steward, to whom he gave this order. Bertuccio's forehead was covered with perspiration; however, he obeyed, and, leaning out of the window, he cried to the coachman, — "Rue de la Fontaine, No. 28." No. 28 was situated at the extremity of the village; during the drive night had set in, and darkness gave the surroundings the artificial appearance of a scene on the stage. The carriage stopped, the footman sprang off the box, and opened the door. "Well," said the count, "you do not get out, M. Bertuccio — you are going to stay in the carriage, then? What are you thinking of this evening?" Bertuccio sprang out, and offered his shoulder to the count, who, this time, leaned upon it as he descended the three steps of the carriage. "Knock," said the count, "and announce me." Bertuccio knocked, the door opened, and the concierge appeared. "What is it?" asked he.

"It is your new master, my good fellow," said the footman. And he held out to the concierge the notary's order.

"The house is sold, then?" demanded the concierge; "and this gentleman is coming to live here?"

"Yes, my friend," returned the count; "and I will endeavor to give you no cause to regret your old master."

“Oh, monsieur,” said the concierge, “I shall not have much cause to regret him, for he came here but seldom; it is five years since he was here last, and he did well to sell the house, for it did not bring him in anything at all.”

“What was the name of your old master?” said Monte Cristo.

“The Marquis of Saint-Meran. Ah, I am sure he has not sold the house for what he gave for it.”

“The Marquis of Saint-Meran!” returned the count. “The name is not unknown to me; the Marquis of Saint-Meran!” and he appeared to meditate.

“An old gentleman,” continued the concierge, “a stanch follower of the Bourbons; he had an only daughter, who married M. de Villefort, who had been the king’s attorney at Nimes, and afterwards at Versailles.” Monte Cristo glanced at Bertuccio, who became whiter than the wall against which he leaned to prevent himself from falling. “And is not this daughter dead?” demanded Monte Cristo; “I fancy I have heard so.”

“Yes, monsieur, one and twenty years ago; and since then we have not seen the poor marquis three times.”

“Thanks, thanks,” said Monte Cristo, judging from the steward’s utter prostration that he could not stretch the cord further without danger of breaking it. “Give me a light.”

“Shall I accompany you, monsieur?”

“No, it is unnecessary; Bertuccio will show me a light.” And Monte Cristo accompanied these words by the gift of two gold pieces, which produced a torrent of thanks and blessings from the concierge. “Ah, monsieur,” said he, after having vainly searched on the mantle-piece and the shelves, “I have not got any candles.”

“Take one of the carriage-lamps, Bertuccio,” said the count, “and show me the apartments.” The steward obeyed in silence, but it was easy to see, from the manner in which the hand that held the light trembled, how much it cost him to obey. They went over a tolerably large ground-floor; a second floor consisted of a salon, a bathroom, and two bedrooms; near one of the bedrooms they came to a winding staircase that led down to the garden.

“Ah, here is a private staircase,” said the count; “that is convenient. Light me, M. Bertuccio, and go first; we will see where it leads to.”

“Monsieur,” replied Bertuccio, “it leads to the garden.”

“And, pray, how do you know that?”

“It ought to do so, at least.”

“Well, let us be sure of that.” Bertuccio sighed, and went on first; the stairs did, indeed, lead to the garden. At the outer door the steward paused. “Go on, Monsieur Bertuccio,” said the count. But he who was addressed stood there, stupefied, bewildered, stunned; his haggard eyes glanced around, as if in search of the traces of some terrible event, and with his clinched hands he seemed striving to shut out horrible recollections. “Well,” insisted the Count. “No, no,” cried Bertuccio, setting down the lantern at the angle of the interior wall. “No, monsieur, it is impossible; I can go no farther.”

“What does this mean?” demanded the irresistible voice of Monte Cristo.

“Why, you must see, your excellency,” cried the steward, “that this is not natural; that, having a house to purchase, you purchase it exactly at Auteuil, and that, purchasing it at Auteuil, this house should be No. 28, Rue de la Fontaine. Oh, why did I not tell you all? I am sure you would not have forced me to come. I hoped your house would have been some other one than this; as if there was not another house at Auteuil than that of the assassination!”

“What, what!” cried Monte Cristo, stopping suddenly, “what words do you utter? Devil of a man, Corsican that you are — always mysteries or superstitions. Come, take the lantern, and let us visit the garden; you are not afraid of ghosts with me, I hope?” Bertuccio raised the lantern, and obeyed. The door, as it opened, disclosed a gloomy sky, in which the moon strove vainly to struggle through a sea of clouds that covered her with billows of vapor which she illumined for an instant, only to sink into obscurity. The steward wished to turn to the left. “No, no, monsieur,” said Monte Cristo. “What is the use of following the alleys? Here is a beautiful lawn; let us go on straight forwards.”

Bertuccio wiped the perspiration from his brow, but obeyed; however, he continued to take the left hand. Monte Cristo, on the contrary, took the right hand; arrived near a clump of trees, he stopped. The steward could not restrain himself. “Move, monsieur — move away, I entreat you; you are exactly in the spot!”

“What spot?”

“Where he fell.”

“My dear Monsieur Bertuccio,” said Monte Cristo, laughing, “control yourself; we are not at Sartena or at Corte. This is not a Corsican arbor, but an English garden; badly kept, I own, but still you must not calumniate it for that.”

“Monsieur, I implore you do not stay there!”

“I think you are going mad, Bertuccio,” said the count coldly. “If that is the case, I warn you, I shall have you put in a lunatic asylum.”

“Alas, excellency,” returned Bertuccio, joining his hands, and shaking his head in a manner that would have excited the count’s laughter, had not thoughts of a superior interest occupied him, and rendered him attentive to the least revelation of this timorous conscience. “Alas, excellency, the evil has arrived!”

“M. Bertuccio,” said the count, “I am very glad to tell you, that while you gesticulate, you wring your hands and roll your eyes like a man possessed by a devil who will not leave him; and I have always observed, that the devil most obstinate to be expelled is a secret. I knew you were a Corsican. I knew you were gloomy, and always brooding over some old history of the vendetta; and I overlooked that in Italy, because in Italy those things are thought nothing of. But in France they are considered in very bad taste; there are gendarmes who occupy themselves with such affairs, judges who condemn, and scaffolds which avenge.” Bertuccio clasped his hands, and as, in all these evolutions, he did not let fall the lantern, the light showed his pale and altered countenance. Monte Cristo examined him with the same look that, at Rome, he had bent upon the execution of Andrea, and then, in a tone that made a shudder pass through the veins of the poor steward, — ”The Abbe Busoni, then told me an untruth,” said he, “when, after his journey in France, in 1829, he sent you to me, with a letter of recommendation, in which he enumerated all your valuable qualities. Well, I shall write to the abbe; I shall hold him responsible for his protege’s misconduct, and I shall soon know all about this assassination. Only I warn you, that when I reside in a country, I conform to all its code, and I have no wish to put myself within the compass of the French laws for your sake.”

“Oh, do not do that, excellency; I have always served you faithfully,” cried Bertuccio, in despair. “I have always been an honest man, and, as far as lay in my power, I have done good.”

“I do not deny it,” returned the count; “but why are you thus agitated. It is a bad sign; a quiet conscience does not occasion such paleness in the cheeks, and such fever in the hands of a man.”

"But, your excellency," replied Bertuccio hesitatingly, "did not the Abbe Busoni, who heard my confession in the prison at Nimes, tell you that I had a heavy burden upon my conscience?"

"Yes; but as he said you would make an excellent steward, I concluded you had stolen — that was all."

"Oh, your excellency," returned Bertuccio in deep contempt.

"Or, as you are a Corsican, that you had been unable to resist the desire of making a 'stiff,' as you call it."

"Yes, my good master," cried Bertuccio, casting himself at the count's feet, "it was simply vengeance — nothing else."

"I understand that, but I do not understand what it is that galvanizes you in this manner."

"But, monsieur, it is very natural," returned Bertuccio, "since it was in this house that my vengeance was accomplished."

"What! my house?"

"Oh, your excellency, it was not yours, then."

"Whose, then? The Marquis de Saint-Meran, I think, the concierge said. What had you to revenge on the Marquis de Saint-Meran?"

"Oh, it was not on him, monsieur; it was on another."

"This is strange," returned Monte Cristo, seeming to yield to his reflections, "that you should find yourself without any preparation in a house where the event happened that causes you so much remorse."

"Monsieur," said the steward, "it is fatality, I am sure. First, you purchase a house at Auteuil — this house is the one where I have committed an assassination; you descend to the garden by the same staircase by which he descended; you stop at the spot where he received the blow; and two paces farther is the grave in which he had just buried his child. This is not chance, for chance, in this case, is too much like providence."

"Well, amiable Corsican, let us suppose it is providence. I always suppose anything people please, and, besides, you must concede something to diseased minds. Come, collect yourself, and tell me all."

"I have related it but once, and that was to the Abbe Busoni. Such things," continued Bertuccio, shaking his head, "are only related under the seal of confession."

"Then," said the count, "I refer you to your confessor. Turn Chartreux or Trappist, and relate your secrets, but, as for me, I do not like any one who is alarmed by such phantasms, and I do not choose that my servants should be afraid to walk in the garden of an evening. I confess I am not very desirous of a visit from the commissary of police, for, in Italy, justice is only paid when silent — in France she is paid only when she speaks. Peste, I thought you somewhat Corsican, a great deal smuggler, and an excellent steward; but I see you have other strings to your bow. You are no longer in my service, Monsieur Bertuccio."

"Oh, your excellency, your excellency!" cried the steward, struck with terror at this threat, "if that is the only reason I cannot remain in your service, I will tell all, for if I quit you, it will only be to go to the scaffold."

"That is different," replied Monte Cristo; "but if you intend to tell an untruth, reflect it were better not to speak at all."

"No, monsieur, I swear to you, by my hopes of salvation, I will tell you all, for the Abbe Busoni himself only knew a part of my secret; but, I pray you, go away from that plane-tree. The moon is just bursting through the clouds, and there, standing where you do, and wrapped in that cloak that conceals your figure, you remind me of M. de Villefort."

"What!" cried Monte Cristo, "it was M. de Villefort?"

"Your excellency knows him?"

"The former royal attorney at Nimes?"

"Yes."

"Who married the Marquis of Saint-Meran's daughter?"

"Yes."

"Who enjoyed the reputation of being the most severe, the most upright, the most rigid magistrate on the bench?"

"Well, monsieur," said Bertuccio, "this man with this spotless reputation" —

"Well?"

"Was a villain."

"Bah," replied Monte Cristo, "impossible!"

"It is as I tell you."

"Ah, really," said Monte Cristo. "Have you proof of this?"

"I had it."

"And you have lost it; how stupid!"

"Yes; but by careful search it might be recovered."

"Really," returned the count, "relate it to me, for it begins to interest me." And the count, humming an air from "Lucia," went to sit down on a bench, while Bertuccio followed him, collecting his thoughts. Bertuccio remained standing before him.

Chapter 44

The Vendetta.

“At what point shall I begin my story, your excellency?” asked Bertuccio.

“Where you please,” returned Monte Cristo, “since I know nothing at all of it.”

“I thought the Abbe Busoni had told your excellency.”

“Some particulars, doubtless, but that is seven or eight years ago, and I have forgotten them.”

“Then I can speak without fear of tiring your excellency.”

“Go on, M. Bertuccio; you will supply the want of the evening papers.”

“The story begins in 1815.”

“Ah,” said Monte Cristo, “1815 is not yesterday.”

“No, monsieur, and yet I recollect all things as clearly as if they had happened but then. I had a brother, an elder brother, who was in the service of the emperor; he had become lieutenant in a regiment composed entirely of Corsicans. This brother was my only friend; we became orphans — I at five, he at eighteen. He brought me up as if I had been his son, and in 1814 he married. When the emperor returned from the Island of Elba, my brother instantly joined the army, was slightly wounded at Waterloo, and retired with the army beyond the Loire.”

“But that is the history of the Hundred Days, M. Bertuccio,” said the count; “unless I am mistaken, it has been already written.”

“Excuse me, excellency, but these details are necessary, and you promised to be patient.”

“Go on; I will keep my word.”

“One day we received a letter. I should tell you that we lived in the little village of Rogliano, at the extremity of Cape Corso. This letter was from my brother. He told us that the army was disbanded, and that he should return by Chateauroux, Clermont-Ferrand, Le Puy, and Nimes; and, if I had any money, he prayed me to leave it for him at Nimes, with an inn-keeper with whom I had dealings.”

“In the smuggling line?” said Monte Cristo.

"Eh, your excellency? Every one must live."

"Certainly; go on."

"I loved my brother tenderly, as I told your excellency, and I resolved not to send the money, but to take it to him myself. I possessed a thousand francs. I left five hundred with Assunta, my sister-in-law, and with the other five hundred I set off for Nimes. It was easy to do so, and as I had my boat and a lading to take in at sea, everything favored my project. But, after we had taken in our cargo, the wind became contrary, so that we were four or five days without being able to enter the Rhone. At last, however, we succeeded, and worked up to Arles. I left the boat between Bellegarde and Beaucaire, and took the road to Nimes."

"We are getting to the story now?"

"Yes, your excellency; excuse me, but, as you will see, I only tell you what is absolutely necessary. Just at this time the famous massacres took place in the south of France. Three brigands, called Trestaillon, Truphemy, and Graffan, publicly assassinated everybody whom they suspected of Bonapartism. You have doubtless heard of these massacres, your excellency?"

"Vaguely; I was far from France at that period. Go on."

"As I entered Nimes, I literally waded in blood; at every step you encountered dead bodies and bands of murderers, who killed, plundered, and burned. At the sight of this slaughter and devastation I became terrified, not for myself — for I, a simple Corsican fisherman, had nothing to fear; on the contrary, that time was most favorable for us smugglers — but for my brother, a soldier of the empire, returning from the army of the Loire, with his uniform and his epaulets, there was everything to apprehend. I hastened to the inn-keeper. My misgivings had been but too true. My brother had arrived the previous evening at Nimes, and, at the very door of the house where he was about to demand hospitality, he had been assassinated. I did all in my power to discover the murderers, but no one durst tell me their names, so much were they dreaded. I then thought of that French justice of which I had heard so much, and which feared nothing, and I went to the king's attorney."

"And this king's attorney was named Villefort?" asked Monte Cristo carelessly.

"Yes, your excellency; he came from Marseilles, where he had been deputy-procureur. His zeal had procured him advancement, and he was said to be one of the first who had informed the government of the departure from the Island of Elba."

"Then," said Monte Cristo "you went to him?"

"'Monsieur,' I said, 'my brother was assassinated yesterday in the streets of Nimes, I know not by whom, but it is your duty to find out. You are the representative of justice here, and it is for justice to avenge those she has been unable to protect.' — 'Who was your brother?' asked he. — 'A lieutenant in the Corsican battalion.' — 'A soldier of the usurper, then?' — 'A soldier of the French army.' — 'Well,' replied he, 'he has smitten with the sword, and he has perished by the sword.' — 'You are mistaken, monsieur,' I replied; 'he has perished by the poniard.' — 'What do you want me to do?' asked the magistrate. — 'I have already told you — avenge him.' — 'On whom?' — 'On his murderers.' — 'How should I know who they are?' — 'Order them to be sought for.' — 'Why, your brother has been involved in a quarrel, and killed in a duel. All these old soldiers commit excesses which were tolerated in the time of the emperor, but which are not suffered now, for the people here do not like soldiers of such disorderly conduct.' — 'Monsieur,' I replied, 'it is not for myself that I entreat your interference — I should grieve for him or avenge him, but my poor brother had a wife, and were anything to happen to me, the poor creature would perish from want, for my brother's pay alone kept her. Pray, try and obtain a small government pension for her.'

"'Every revolution has its catastrophes,' returned M. de Villefort; 'your brother has been the victim of this. It is a misfortune, and government owes nothing to his family. If we are to judge by all the vengeance that the followers of the usurper exercised on the partisans of the king, when, in their turn, they were in power, your brother would be to-day, in all probability, condemned to death. What has happened is quite natural, and in conformity with the law of reprisals.' — 'What,' cried I, 'do you, a magistrate, speak thus to me?' — 'All these Corsicans are mad, on my honor,' replied M. de Villefort; 'they fancy that their countryman is still emperor. You have mistaken the time, you should have told me this two months ago, it is too late now. Go now, at once, or I shall have you put out.'

"I looked at him an instant to see if there was anything to hope from further entreaty. But he was a man of stone. I approached him, and said in a low voice, 'Well, since you know the Corsicans so well, you know that they always keep their word. You think that it was a good deed to kill my brother, who was a Bonapartist, because you are a royalist. Well, I, who am a Bonapartist also, declare one thing to you, which is, that I will kill you. From this moment I declare the vendetta against you, so protect yourself as well as you can, for the next time we meet your last hour has come.' And before he had recovered from his surprise, I opened the door and left the room."

"Well, well," said Monte Cristo, "such an innocent looking person as you are to do those things, M. Bertuccio, and to a king's attorney at that! But did he know what was meant by the terrible word 'vendetta'?"

"He knew so well, that from that moment he shut himself in his house, and never went out unattended, seeking me high and low. Fortunately, I was so well concealed that he could not find me. Then he became alarmed, and dared not stay any longer at Nimes, so he solicited a change of residence, and, as he was in reality very influential, he was nominated to Versailles. But, as you know, a Corsican who has sworn to avenge himself cares not for distance, so his carriage, fast as it went, was never above half a day's journey before me, who followed him on foot. The most important thing was, not to kill him only — for I had an opportunity of doing so a hundred times — but to kill him without being discovered — at least, without being arrested. I no longer belonged to myself, for I had my sister-in-law to protect and provide for. For three months I watched M. de Villefort, for three months he took not a step out-of-doors without my following him. At length I discovered that he went mysteriously to Auteuil. I followed him thither, and I saw him enter the house where we now are, only, instead of entering by the great door that looks into the street, he came on horseback, or in his carriage, left the one or the other at the little inn, and entered by the gate you see there." Monte Cristo made a sign with his head to show that he could discern in the darkness the door to which Bertuccio alluded. "As I had nothing more to do at Versailles, I went to Auteuil, and gained all the information I could. If I wished to surprise him, it was evident this was the spot to lie in wait for him. The house belonged, as the concierge informed your excellency, to M. de Saint-Meran, Villefort's father-in-law. M. de Saint-Meran lived at Marseilles, so that this country house was useless to him, and it was reported to be let to a young widow, known only by the name of 'the baroness.'

"One evening, as I was looking over the wall, I saw a young and handsome woman who was walking alone in that garden, which was not overlooked by any windows, and I guessed that she was awaiting M. de Villefort. When she was sufficiently near for me to distinguish her features, I saw she was from eighteen to nineteen, tall and very fair. As she had a loose muslin dress on and as nothing concealed her figure, I saw she would ere long become a mother. A few moments after, the little door was opened and a man entered. The young woman hastened to meet him. They threw themselves into each other's arms, embraced tenderly, and returned together to the house. The man was M. de Villefort; I fully believed that when he went out in the night he would be forced to traverse the whole of the garden alone."

"And," asked the count, "did you ever know the name of this woman?"

"No, excellency," returned Bertuccio; "you will see that I had no time to learn it."

"Go on."

"That evening," continued Bertuccio, "I could have killed the procureur, but as I was not sufficiently acquainted with the neighborhood, I was fearful of not killing him on the spot, and that if his cries were overheard I might be taken; so I put it off until the next occasion, and in order that nothing should escape me, I took a chamber looking into the street bordered by the wall of the garden. Three days after, about seven o'clock in the evening, I saw a servant on horseback leave the house at full gallop, and take the road to Sevres. I concluded that he was going to Versailles, and I was not deceived. Three hours later, the man returned covered with dust, his errand was performed, and two minutes after, another man on foot, muffled in a mantle, opened the little door of the garden, which he closed after him. I descended rapidly; although I had not seen Villefort's face, I recognized him by the beating of my heart. I crossed the street, and stopped at a post placed at the angle of the wall, and by means of which I had once before looked into the garden. This time I did not content myself with looking, but I took my knife out of my pocket, felt that the point was sharp, and sprang over the wall. My first care was to run to the door; he had left the key in it, taking the simple precaution of turning it twice in the lock. Nothing, then, preventing my escape by this means, I examined the grounds. The garden was long and narrow; a stretch of smooth turf extended down the middle, and at the corners were clumps of trees with thick and massy foliage, that made a background for the shrubs and flowers. In order to go from the door to the house, or from the house to the door, M. de Villefort would be obliged to pass by one of these clumps of trees.

"It was the end of September; the wind blew violently. The faint glimpses of the pale moon, hidden momentarily by masses of dark clouds that were sweeping across the sky, whitened the gravel walks that led to the house, but were unable to pierce the obscurity of the thick shrubberies, in which a man could conceal himself without any fear of discovery. I hid myself in the one nearest to the path Villefort must take, and scarcely was I there when, amidst the gusts of wind, I fancied I heard groans; but you know, or rather you do not know, your excellency, that he who is about to commit an assassination fancies that he hears low cries perpetually ringing in his ears. Two hours passed thus, during which I imagined I heard moans repeatedly. Midnight struck. As the last stroke died away, I saw a faint light shine through the windows of the private staircase by which we have just descended. The door opened, and the man in the mantle reappeared. The terrible moment had come, but I had so long been prepared for it that my heart did not fail in the least. I drew my knife from my pocket again, opened it, and made ready to strike. The man in the mantle advanced towards me, but as he drew near I saw that he had a weapon in his hand. I was afraid, not of a struggle, but of a failure. When he was only a few paces from me, I saw that what I had taken for a weapon was only a spade. I was still unable to divine for what reason M. de Villefort had this spade in his hands, when he stopped close to the thicket where I was, glanced round, and began to dig a hole in the earth. I then perceived that he was hiding something under his mantle, which he laid on the grass in order to dig more freely. Then, I confess, curiosity mingled with hatred; I wished to see what Villefort was going to do there, and I remained motionless, holding my breath. Then an idea crossed my mind, which was confirmed when I saw the procureur lift from under his mantle a box, two feet long, and six or eight inches deep. I let him place the box in the hole he had made, then, while he stamped with his feet to remove all traces of his occupation, I rushed on him and plunged my knife into his breast, exclaiming, — 'I am Giovanni Bertuccio; thy death for my brother's; thy treasure for his widow; thou seest that my vengeance is more complete than I had hoped.' I know not if he heard these words; I think he did not, for he fell without a cry. I felt his blood gush over my face, but I was intoxicated, I was delirious, and the blood refreshed, instead of burning me. In a second I had disinterred the box; then, that it might not be known I had done so, I filled up the hole, threw the spade over the wall, and rushed through the door, which I double-locked, carrying off the key.”

“Ah,” said Monte Cristo “it seems to me this was nothing but murder and robbery.”

“No, your excellency,” returned Bertuccio; “it was a vendetta followed by restitution.”

“And was the sum a large one?”

“It was not money.”

“Ah, I recollect,” replied the count; “did you not say something of an infant?”

“Yes, excellency; I hastened to the river, sat down on the bank, and with my knife forced open the lock of the box. In a fine linen cloth was wrapped a new-born child. Its purple visage, and its violet-colored hands showed that it had perished from suffocation, but as it was not yet cold, I hesitated to throw it into the water that ran at my feet. After a moment I fancied that I felt a slight pulsation of the heart, and as I had been assistant at the hospital at Bastia, I did what a doctor would have done — I inflated the lungs by blowing air into them, and at the expiration of a quarter of an hour, it began to breathe, and cried feebly. In my turn I uttered a cry, but a cry of joy. ‘God has not cursed me then,’ I cried, ‘since he permits me to save the life of a human creature, in exchange for the life I have taken away.’“

“And what did you do with the child?” asked Monte Cristo. “It was an embarrassing load for a man seeking to escape.”

“I had not for a moment the idea of keeping it, but I knew that at Paris there was an asylum where they receive such creatures. As I passed the city gates I declared that I had found the child on the road, and I inquired where the asylum was; the box confirmed my statement, the linen proved that the infant belonged to wealthy parents, the blood with which I was covered might have proceeded from the child as well as from any one else. No objection was raised, but they pointed out the asylum, which was situated at the upper end of the Rue d’Enfer, and after having taken the precaution of cutting the linen in two pieces, so that one of the two letters which marked it was on the piece wrapped around the child, while the other remained in my possession, I rang the bell, and fled with all speed. A fortnight after I was at Rogliano, and I said to Assunta, — ’Console thyself, sister; Israel is dead, but he is avenged.’ She demanded what I meant, and when I had told her all, — ’Giovanni,’ said she, ‘you should have brought this child with you; we would have replaced the parents it has lost, have called it Benedetto, and then, in consequence of this good action, God would have blessed us.’ In reply I gave her the half of the linen I had kept in order to reclaim him if we became rich.”

“What letters were marked on the linen?” said Monte Cristo.

“An H and an N, surmounted by a baron’s coronet.”

“By heaven, M. Bertuccio, you make use of heraldic terms; where did you study heraldry?”

“In your service, excellency, where everything is learned.”

“Go on, I am curious to know two things.”

“What are they, your excellency?”

“What became of this little boy? for I think you told me it was a boy, M. Bertuccio.”

“No excellency, I do not recollect telling you that.”

“I thought you did; I must have been mistaken.”

“No, you were not, for it was in reality a little boy. But your excellency wished to know two things; what was the second?”

“The second was the crime of which you were accused when you asked for a confessor, and the Abbe Busoni came to visit you at your request in the prison at Nimes.”

“The story will be very long, excellency.”

“What matter? you know I take but little sleep, and I do not suppose you are very much inclined for it either.” Bertuccio bowed, and resumed his story.

“Partly to drown the recollections of the past that haunted me, partly to supply the wants of the poor widow, I eagerly returned to my trade of smuggler, which had become more easy since that relaxation of the laws which always follows a revolution. The southern districts were ill-watched in particular, in consequence of the disturbances that were perpetually breaking out in Avignon, Nimes, or Uzes. We profited by this respite on the part of the government to make friends everywhere. Since my brother’s assassination in the streets of Nimes, I had never entered the town; the result was that the inn-keeper with whom we were connected, seeing that we would no longer come to him, was forced to come to us, and had established a branch to his inn, on the road from Bellegarde to Beaucaire, at the sign of the Pont du Gard. We had thus, at Aigues-Mortes, Martigues, or

Bouc, a dozen places where we left our goods, and where, in case of necessity, we concealed ourselves from the gendarmes and custom-house officers. Smuggling is a profitable trade, when a certain degree of vigor and intelligence is employed; as for myself, brought up in the mountains, I had a double motive for fearing the gendarmes and custom-house officers, as my appearance before the judges would cause an inquiry, and an inquiry always looks back into the past. And in my past life they might find something far more grave than the selling of smuggled cigars, or barrels of brandy without a permit. So, preferring death to capture, I accomplished the most astonishing deeds, and which, more than once, showed me that the too great care we take of our bodies is the only obstacle to the success of those projects which require rapid decision, and vigorous and determined execution. In reality, when you have once devoted your life to your enterprises, you are no longer the equal of other men, or, rather, other men are no longer your equals, and whosoever has taken this resolution, feels his strength and resources doubled."

"Philosophy, M. Bertuccio," interrupted the Count; "you have done a little of everything in your life."

"Oh, excellency!"

"No, no; but philosophy at half-past ten at night is somewhat late; yet I have no other observation to make, for what you say is correct, which is more than can be said for all philosophy."

"My journeys became more and more extensive and more productive. Assunta took care of all, and our little fortune increased. One day as I was setting off on an expedition, 'Go,' said she; 'at your return I will give you a surprise.' I questioned her, but in vain; she would tell me nothing, and I departed. Our expedition lasted nearly six weeks; we had been to Lucca to take in oil, to Leghorn for English cottons, and we ran our cargo without opposition, and returned home full of joy. When I entered the house, the first thing I beheld in the middle of Assunta's chamber was a cradle that might be called sumptuous compared with the rest of the furniture, and in it a baby seven or eight months old. I uttered a cry of joy; the only moments of sadness I had known since the assassination of the procureur were caused by the recollection that I had abandoned this child. For the assassination itself I had never felt any remorse. Poor Assunta had guessed all. She had profited by my absence, and furnished with the half of the linen, and having written down the day and hour at which I had deposited the child at the asylum, had set off for Paris, and had reclaimed it. No objection was raised, and the infant was given up to her. Ah, I confess, your excellency, when I saw this poor creature sleeping peacefully in its cradle, I felt my eyes filled with tears. ‘Ah, Assunta,’ cried I, ‘you are an excellent woman, and heaven will bless you.’“

“This,” said Monte Cristo, “is less correct than your philosophy, — it is only faith.”

“Alas, your excellency is right,” replied Bertuccio, “and God made this infant the instrument of our punishment. Never did a perverse nature declare itself more prematurely, and yet it was not owing to any fault in his bringing up. He was a most lovely child, with large blue eyes, of that deep color that harmonizes so well with the blond complexion; only his hair, which was too light, gave his face a most singular expression, and added to the vivacity of his look, and the malice of his smile. Unfortunately, there is a proverb which says that ‘red is either altogether good or altogether bad.’ The proverb was but too correct as regarded Benedetto, and even in his infancy he manifested the worst disposition. It is true that the indulgence of his foster-mother encouraged him. This child, for whom my poor sister would go to the town, five or six leagues off, to purchase the earliest fruits and the most tempting sweetmeats, preferred to Palma grapes or Genoese preserves, the chestnuts stolen from a neighbor’s orchard, or the dried apples in his loft, when he could eat as well of the nuts and apples that grew in my garden. One day, when Benedetto was about five or six, our neighbor Vasilio, who, according to the custom of the country, never locked up his purse or his valuables — for, as your excellency knows, there are no thieves in Corsica — complained that he had lost a louis out of his purse; we thought he must have made a mistake in counting his money, but he persisted in the accuracy of his statement. One day, Benedetto, who had been gone from the house since morning, to our great anxiety, did not return until late in the evening, dragging a monkey after him, which he said he had found chained to the foot of a tree. For more than a month past, the mischievous child, who knew not what to wish for, had taken it into his head to have a monkey. A boatman, who had passed by Rogliano, and who had several of these animals, whose tricks had greatly diverted him, had, doubtless, suggested this idea to him. ‘Monkeys are not found in our woods chained to trees,’ said I; ‘confess how you obtained this animal.’ Benedetto maintained the truth of what he had said, and accompanied it with details that did more honor to his imagination than to his veracity. I became angry; he began to laugh, I threatened to strike him, and he made two steps backwards. ‘You cannot beat me,’ said he; ‘you have no right, for you are not my father.’

“We never knew who had revealed this fatal secret, which we had so carefully concealed from him; however, it was this answer, in which the child’s whole character revealed itself, that almost terrified me, and my arm fell without touching him. The boy triumphed, and this victory rendered him so audacious, that all the money of Assunta, whose affection for him seemed to increase as he became more unworthy of it, was spent in caprices she knew not how to contend against, and follies she had not the courage to prevent. When I was at Rogliano everything went on properly, but no sooner was my back turned than Benedetto became master, and everything went ill. When he was only eleven, he chose his companions from among the young men of eighteen or twenty, the worst characters in Bastia, or, indeed, in Corsica, and they had already, for some mischievous pranks, been several times threatened with a prosecution. I became alarmed, as any prosecution might be attended with serious consequences. I was compelled, at this period, to leave Corsica on an important expedition; I reflected for a long time, and with the hope of averting some impending misfortune, I resolved that Benedetto should accompany me. I hoped that the active and laborious life of a smuggler, with the severe discipline on board, would have a salutary effect on his character, which was now well-nigh, if not quite, corrupt. I spoke to Benedetto alone, and proposed to him to accompany me, endeavoring to tempt him by all the promises most likely to dazzle the imagination of a child of twelve. He heard me patiently, and when I had finished, burst out laughing.

“‘Are you mad, uncle?’ (he called me by this name when he was in good humor); ‘do you think I am going to change the life I lead for your mode of existence — my agreeable indolence for the hard and precarious toil you impose on yourself, exposed to the bitter frost at night, and the scorching heat by day, compelled to conceal yourself, and when you are perceived, receive a volley of bullets, all to earn a paltry sum? Why, I have as much money as I want; mother Assunta always furnishes me when I ask for it! You see that I should be a fool to accept your offer.’ The arguments, and his audacity, perfectly stupefied me. Benedetto rejoined his associates, and I saw him from a distance point me out to them as a fool.”

“Sweet child,” murmured Monte Cristo.

“Oh, had he been my own son,” replied Bertuccio, “or even my nephew, I would have brought him back to the right road, for the knowledge that you are doing your duty gives you strength, but the idea that I was striking a child whose father I had killed, made it impossible for me to punish him. I gave my sister, who constantly defended the unfortunate boy, good advice, and as she confessed that she had several times missed money to a considerable amount, I showed her a safe place in which to conceal our little treasure for the future. My mind was already made up. Benedetto could read, write, and cipher perfectly, for when the fit seized him, he learned more in a day than others in a week. My intention was to enter him as a clerk in some ship, and without letting him know anything of my plan, to convey him some morning on board; by this means his future treatment would depend upon his own conduct. I set off for France, after having fixed upon the plan. Our cargo was to be landed in the Gulf of Lyons, and this was a difficult thing to do because it was then the year 1829. The most perfect tranquillity was restored, and the vigilance of the custom-house officers was redoubled, and their strictness was increased at this time, in consequence of the fair at Beaucaire.

“Our expedition made a favorable beginning. We anchored our vessel — which had a double hold, where our goods were concealed — amidst a number of other vessels that bordered the banks of the Rhone from Beaucaire to Arles. On our arrival we began to discharge our cargo in the night, and to convey it into the town, by the help of the inn-keeper with whom we were connected. Whether success rendered us imprudent, or whether we were betrayed, I know not; but one evening, about five o’clock, our little cabin-boy came breathlessly, to inform us that he had seen a detachment of custom-house officers advancing in our direction. It was not their proximity that alarmed us, for detachments were constantly patrolling along the banks of the Rhone, but the care, according to the boy’s account, that they took to avoid being seen. In an instant we were on the alert, but it was too late; our vessel was surrounded, and amongst the custom-house officers I observed several gendarmes, and, as terrified at the sight of their uniforms as I was brave at the sight of any other, I sprang into the hold, opened a port, and dropped into the river, dived, and only rose at intervals to breathe, until I reached a ditch that had recently been made from the Rhone to the canal that runs from Beaucaire to Aigues-Mortes. I was now safe, for I could swim along the ditch without being seen, and I reached the canal in safety. I had designedly taken this direction. I have already told your excellency of an inn-keeper from Nimes who had set up a little tavern on the road from Bellegarde to Beaucaire."

"Yes," said Monte Cristo "I perfectly recollect him; I think he was your colleague."

"Precisely," answered Bertuccio; "but he had, seven or eight years before this period, sold his establishment to a tailor at Marseilles, who, having almost ruined himself in his old trade, wished to make his fortune in another. Of course, we made the same arrangements with the new landlord that we had with the old; and it was of this man that I intended to ask shelter."

"What was his name?" inquired the count, who seemed to become somewhat interested in Bertuccio's story.

"Gaspard Caderousse; he had married a woman from the village of Carconte, and whom we did not know by any other name than that of her village. She was suffering from malarial fever, and seemed dying by inches. As for her husband, he was a strapping fellow of forty, or five and forty, who had more than once, in time of danger, given ample proof of his presence of mind and courage."

"And you say," interrupted Monte Cristo "that this took place towards the year" —

"1829, your excellency."

"In what month?"

"June."

"The beginning or the end?"

"The evening of the 3d."

"Ah," said Monte Cristo "the evening of the 3d of June, 1829. Go on."

"It was from Caderousse that I intended demanding shelter, and, as we never entered by the door that opened onto the road, I resolved not to break through the rule, so climbing over the garden-hedge, I crept amongst the olive and wild fig trees, and fearing that Caderousse might have some guest, I entered a kind of shed in which I had often passed the night, and which was only separated from the inn by a partition, in which holes had been made in order to enable us to watch an opportunity of announcing our presence. My intention was, if Caderousse was alone, to acquaint him with my presence, finish the meal the custom-house officers had interrupted, and profit by the threatened storm to return to the Rhone, and ascertain the state of our vessel and its crew. I stepped into the shed, and it was fortunate I did so, for at that moment Caderousse entered with a stranger.

"I waited patiently, not to overhear what they said, but because I could do nothing else; besides, the same thing had occurred often before. The man who was with Caderousse was evidently a stranger to the South of France; he was one of those merchants who come to sell jewellery at the Beaucaire fair, and who during the month the fair lasts, and during which there is so great an influx of merchants and customers from all parts of Europe, often have dealings to the amount of 100,000 to 150,000 francs. Caderousse entered hastily. Then, seeing that the room was, as usual, empty, and only guarded by the dog, he called to his wife, 'Hello, Carconte,' said he, 'the worthy priest has not deceived us; the diamond is real.' An exclamation of joy was heard, and the staircase creaked beneath a feeble step. 'What do you say?' asked his wife, pale as death.

"'I say that the diamond is real, and that this gentleman, one of the first jewellers of Paris, will give us 50,000. francs for it. Only, in order to satisfy himself that it really belongs to us, he wishes you to relate to him, as I have done already, the miraculous manner in which the diamond came into our possession. In the meantime please to sit down, monsieur, and I will fetch you some refreshment.' The jeweller examined attentively the interior of the inn and the apparent poverty of the persons who were about to sell him a diamond that seemed to have come from the casket of a prince. 'Relate your story, madame,' said he, wishing, no doubt, to profit by the absence of the husband, so that the latter could not influence the wife's story, to see if the two recitals tallied.

"'Oh,' returned she, 'it was a gift of heaven. My husband was a great friend, in 1814 or 1815, of a sailor named Edmond Dantes. This poor fellow, whom Caderousse had forgotten, had not forgotten him, and at his death he bequeathed this diamond to him.' — 'But how did he obtain it?' asked the jeweller; 'had he it before he was imprisoned?' — 'No, monsieur; but it appears that in prison he made the acquaintance of a rich Englishman, and as in prison he fell sick, and Dantes took the same care of him as if he had been his brother, the Englishman, when he was set free, gave this stone to Dantes, who, less fortunate, died, and, in his turn, left it to us, and charged the excellent abbe, who was here this morning, to deliver it.' — 'The same story,' muttered the jeweller; 'and improbable as it seemed at first, it may be true. There’s only the price we are not agreed about.’ — ’How not agreed about?’ said Caderousse. ‘I thought we agreed for the price I asked.’ — ’That is,’ replied the jeweller, ‘I offered 40,000 francs.’ — ’Forty thousand,’ cried La Carconte; ‘we will not part with it for that sum. The abbe told us it was worth 50,000. without the setting.’

“‘What was the abbe’s name?’ asked the indefatigable questioner. — ’The Abbe Busoni,’ said La Carconte. — ’He was a foreigner?’ — ’An Italian, from the neighborhood of Mantua, I believe.’ — ’Let me see this diamond again,’ replied the jeweller; ‘the first time you are often mistaken as to the value of a stone.’ Caderousse took from his pocket a small case of black shagreen, opened, and gave it to the jeweller. At the sight of the diamond, which was as large as a hazel-nut, La Carconte’s eyes sparkled with cupidity.”

“And what did you think of this fine story, eavesdropper?” said Monte Cristo; “did you credit it?”

“Yes, your excellency. I did not look on Caderousse as a bad man, and I thought him incapable of committing a crime, or even a theft.”

“That did more honor to your heart than to your experience, M. Bertuccio. Had you known this Edmond Dantes, of whom they spoke?”

“No, your excellency, I had never heard of him before, and never but once afterwards, and that was from the Abbe Busoni himself, when I saw him in the prison at Nimes.”

“Go on.”

“The jeweller took the ring, and drawing from his pocket a pair of steel pliers and a small set of copper scales, he took the stone out of its setting, and weighed it carefully. ‘I will give you 45,000,’ said he, ‘but not a sou more; besides, as that is the exact value of the stone, I brought just that sum with me.’ — ’Oh, that’s no matter,’ replied Caderousse, ‘I will go back with you to fetch the other 5,000 francs.’ — ’No,’ returned the jeweller, giving back the diamond and the ring to Caderousse — ’no, it is worth no more, and I am sorry I offered so much, for the stone has a flaw in it, which I had not seen. However, I will not go back on my word, and I will give 45,000.’ — ’At least, replace the diamond in the ring,’ said La Carconte sharply. — ’Ah, true,’ replied the jeweller, and he reset the stone. — ’No matter,’ observed Caderousse, replacing the box in his pocket, ‘some one else will purchase it.’ — ’Yes,’ continued the jeweller; ‘but some one else will not be so easy as I am, or content himself with the same story. It is not natural that a man like you should possess such a diamond. He will inform against you. You will have to find the Abbe Busoni; and abbes who give diamonds worth two thousand louis are rare. The law would seize it, and put you in prison; if at the end of three or four months you are set at liberty, the ring will be lost, or a false stone, worth three francs, will be given you, instead of a diamond worth 50,000 or perhaps 55,000 francs; from which you must allow that one runs considerable risk in purchasing.' Caderousse and his wife looked eagerly at each other. — 'No,' said Caderousse, 'we are not rich enough to lose 5,000 francs.' — 'As you please, my dear sir,' said the jeweller; 'I had, however, as you see, brought you the money in bright coin.' And he drew from his pocket a handful of gold, and held it sparkling before the dazzled eyes of the innkeeper, and in the other hand he held a packet of bank-notes.

"There was evidently a severe struggle in the mind of Caderousse; it was plain that the small shagreen case, which he turned over and over in his hand, did not seem to him commensurate in value to the enormous sum which fascinated his gaze. He turned towards his wife. 'What do you think of this?' he asked in a low voice. — 'Let him have it — let him have it,' she said. 'If he returns to Beaucaire without the diamond, he will inform against us, and, as he says, who knows if we shall ever again see the Abbe Busoni? — in all probability we shall never see him.' — 'Well, then, so I will!' said Caderousse; 'so you may have the diamond for 45,000 francs. But my wife wants a gold chain, and I want a pair of silver buckles.' The jeweller drew from his pocket a long flat box, which contained several samples of the articles demanded. 'Here,' he said, 'I am very straightforward in my dealings — take your choice.' The woman selected a gold chain worth about five louis, and the husband a pair of buckles, worth perhaps fifteen francs. — 'I hope you will not complain now?' said the jeweller.

"'The abbe told me it was worth 50,000 francs,' muttered Caderousse. 'Come, come — give it to me! What a strange fellow you are,' said the jeweller, taking the diamond from his hand. 'I give you 45,000 francs — that is, 2,500 livres of income, — a fortune such as I wish I had myself, and you are not satisfied!' — 'And the five and forty thousand francs,' inquired Caderousse in a hoarse voice, 'where are they? Come — let us see them.' — 'Here they are,' replied the jeweller, and he counted out upon the table 15,000. francs in gold, and 30,000 francs in bank-notes.

"'Wait while I light the lamp,' said La Carconte; 'it is growing dark, and there may be some mistake.' In fact, night had come on during this conversation, and with night the storm which had been threatening for the last half-hour. The thunder growled in the distance; but it was apparently not heard by the jeweller, Caderousse, or La Carconte, absorbed as they were all three with the demon of gain. I myself felt; a strange kind of fascination at the sight of all this gold and all these bank-notes; it seemed to me that I was in a dream, and, as it always happens in a dream, I felt myself riveted to the spot. Caderousse counted and again counted the gold and the notes, then handed them to his wife, who counted and counted them again in her turn. During this time, the jeweller made the diamond play and sparkle in the lamplight, and the gem threw out jets of light which made him unmindful of those which — precursors of the storm — began to play in at the windows. 'Well,' inquired the jeweller, 'is the cash all right?'

"'Yes,' said Caderousse. 'Give me the pocket-book, La Carconte, and find a bag somewhere.'

"La Carconte went to a cupboard, and returned with an old leathern pocket-book and a bag. From the former she took some greasy letters, and put in their place the bank-notes, and from the bag took two or three crowns of six livres each, which, in all probability, formed the entire fortune of the miserable couple. 'There,' said Caderousse; 'and now, although you have wronged us of perhaps 10,000 francs, will you have your supper with us? I invite you with good-will.' — 'Thank you,' replied the jeweller, 'it must be getting late, and I must return to Beaucaire — my wife will be getting uneasy.' He drew out his watch, and exclaimed, 'Morbleu, nearly nine o'clock — why, I shall not get back to Beaucaire before midnight! Good-night, my friends. If the Abbe Busoni should by any accident return, think of me.' — 'In another week you will have left Beaucaire.' remarked Caderousse, 'for the fair ends in a few days.' — 'True, but that makes no difference. Write to me at Paris, to M. Joannes, in the Palais Royal, arcade Pierre, No. 45. I will make the journey on purpose to see him, if it is worth while.' At this moment there was a tremendous clap of thunder, accompanied by a flash of lightning so vivid, that it quite eclipsed the light of the lamp.

"'See here,' exclaimed Caderousse. 'You cannot think of going out in such weather as this.' — 'Oh, I am not afraid of thunder,' said the jeweller. — 'And then there are robbers,' said La Carconte. 'The road is never very safe during fair time.’ — ’Oh, as to the robbers,’ said Joannes, ‘here is something for them,’ and he drew from his pocket a pair of small pistols, loaded to the muzzle. ‘Here,’ said he, ‘are dogs who bark and bite at the same time, they are for the two first who shall have a longing for your diamond, Friend Caderousse.’

“Caderousse and his wife again interchanged a meaning look. It seemed as though they were both inspired at the same time with some horrible thought. ‘Well, then, a good journey to you,’ said Caderousse. — ’Thanks,’ replied the jeweller. He then took his cane, which he had placed against an old cupboard, and went out. At the moment when he opened the door, such a gust of wind came in that the lamp was nearly extinguished. ‘Oh,’ said he, ‘this is very nice weather, and two leagues to go in such a storm.’ — ’Remain,’ said Caderousse. ‘You can sleep here.’ — ’Yes; do stay,’ added La Carconte in a tremulous voice; ‘we will take every care of you.’ — ’No; I must sleep at Beaucaire. So, once more, good-night.’ Caderousse followed him slowly to the threshold. ‘I can see neither heaven nor earth,’ said the jeweller, who was outside the door. ‘Do I turn to the right, or to the left hand?’ — ’To the right,’ said Caderousse. ‘You cannot go wrong — the road is bordered by trees on both sides.’ — ’Good — all right,’ said a voice almost lost in the distance. ‘Close the door,’ said La Carconte; ‘I do not like open doors when it thunders.’ — ’Particularly when there is money in the house, eh?’ answered Caderousse, double-locking the door.

“He came into the room, went to the cupboard, took out the bag and pocket-book, and both began, for the third time, to count their gold and bank-notes. I never saw such an expression of cupidity as the flickering lamp revealed in those two countenances. The woman, especially, was hideous; her usual feverish tremulousness was intensified, her countenance had become livid, and her eyes resembled burning coals. ‘Why,’ she inquired in a hoarse voice, ‘did you invite him to sleep here to-night?’ — ’Why?’ said Caderousse with a shudder; ‘why, that he might not have the trouble of returning to Beaucaire.’ — ’Ah,’ responded the woman, with an expression impossible to describe; ‘I thought it was for something else.’ — ’Woman, woman — why do you have such ideas?’ cried Caderousse; ‘or, if you have them, why don’t you keep them to yourself?’ — ’Well,’ said La Carconte, after a moment’s pause, ‘you are not a man.’ — ’What do you mean?’ added Caderousse. — ’If you had been a man, you would not have let him go from here.’ — ’Woman!’ — ’Or else he should not have reached

Beaucaire.' — 'Woman!' — 'The road takes a turn — he is obliged to follow it — while alongside of the canal there is a shorter road.' — 'Woman! — you offend the good God. There — listen!' And at this moment there was a tremendous peal of thunder, while the livid lightning illumined the room, and the thunder, rolling away in the distance, seemed to withdraw unwillingly from the cursed abode. 'Mercy!' said Caderousse, crossing himself.

"At the same moment, and in the midst of the terrifying silence which usually follows a clap of thunder, they heard a knocking at the door. Caderousse and his wife started and looked aghast at each other. 'Who's there?' cried Caderousse, rising, and drawing up in a heap the gold and notes scattered over the table, and which he covered with his two hands. — 'It is I,' shouted a voice. — 'And who are you?' — 'Eh, pardieu, Joannes, the jeweller.' — 'Well, and you said I offended the good God,' said La Carconte with a horrid smile. 'Why, the good God sends him back again.' Caderousse sank pale and breathless into his chair. La Carconte, on the contrary, rose, and going with a firm step towards the door, opened it, saying, as she did so — 'Come in, dear M. Joannes.' — 'Ma foi,' said the jeweller, drenched with rain, 'I am not destined to return to Beaucaire to-night. The shortest follies are best, my dear Caderousse. You offered me hospitality, and I accept it, and have returned to sleep beneath your friendly roof.' Caderousse stammered out something, while he wiped away the sweat that started to his brow. La Carconte double-locked the door behind the jeweller."

Chapter 45

The Rain of Blood.

“As the jeweller returned to the apartment, he cast around him a scrutinizing glance — but there was nothing to excite suspicion, if it did not exist, or to confirm it, if it were already awakened. Caderousse’s hands still grasped the gold and bank-notes, and La Carconte called up her sweetest smiles while welcoming the reappearance of their guest. ‘Well, well,’ said the jeweller, ‘you seem, my good friends, to have had some fears respecting the accuracy of your money, by counting it over so carefully directly I was gone.’ — ’Oh, no,’ answered Caderousse, ‘that was not my reason, I can assure you; but the circumstances by which we have become possessed of this wealth are so unexpected, as to make us scarcely credit our good fortune, and it is only by placing the actual proof of our riches before our eyes that we can persuade ourselves that the whole affair is not a dream.’ The jeweller smiled. — ’Have you any other guests in your house?’ inquired he. — ’Nobody but ourselves,’ replied Caderousse; ‘the fact is, we do not lodge travellers — indeed, our tavern is so near the town, that nobody would think of stopping here.’ — ’Then I am afraid I shall very much inconvenience you.’ — ’Inconvenience us? Not at all, my dear sir,’ said La Carconte in her most gracious manner. ‘Not at all, I assure you.’ — ’But where will you manage to stow me?’ — ’In the chamber overhead.’ — ’Surely that is where you yourselves sleep?’ — ’Never mind that; we have a second bed in the adjoining room.’ Caderousse stared at his wife with much astonishment.

“The jeweller, meanwhile, was humming a song as he stood warming his back at the fire La Carconte had kindled to dry the wet garments of her guest; and this done, she next occupied herself in arranging his supper, by spreading a napkin at the end of the table, and placing on it the slender remains of their dinner, to which she added three or four fresh-laid eggs. Caderousse had once more parted with his treasure — the banknotes were replaced in the pocket-book, the gold put back into the bag, and the whole carefully locked in the cupboard. He then began pacing the room with a pensive and gloomy air, glancing from time to time at the jeweller, who stood reeking with the steam from his wet clothes, and merely changing his place on the warm hearth, to enable the whole of his garments to be dried.

"'There,' said La Carconte, as she placed a bottle of wine on the table, 'supper is ready whenever you are.' — 'And you?' asked Joannes. — 'I don't want any supper,' said Caderousse. — 'We dined so very late,' hastily interposed La Carconte. — 'Then it seems I am to eat alone,' remarked the jeweller. — 'Oh, we shall have the pleasure of waiting upon you,' answered La Carconte, with an eager attention she was not accustomed to manifest even to guests who paid for what they took.

"From time to time Caderousse darted on his wife keen, searching glances, but rapid as the lightning flash. The storm still continued. 'There, there,' said La Carconte; 'do you hear that? upon my word, you did well to come back.' — 'Nevertheless,' replied the jeweller, 'if by the time I have finished my supper the tempest has at all abated, I shall make another start.' — 'It's the mistral,' said Caderousse, 'and it will be sure to last till to-morrow morning.' He sighed heavily. — 'Well,' said the jeweller, as he placed himself at table, 'all I can say is, so much the worse for those who are abroad.' — 'Yes,' chimed in La Carconte, 'they will have a wretched night of it.'

"The jeweller began eating his supper, and the woman, who was ordinarily so querulous and indifferent to all who approached her, was suddenly transformed into the most smiling and attentive hostess. Had the unhappy man on whom she lavished her assiduities been previously acquainted with her, so sudden an alteration might well have excited suspicion in his mind, or at least have greatly astonished him. Caderousse, meanwhile, continued to pace the room in gloomy silence, sedulously avoiding the sight of his guest; but as soon as the stranger had completed his repast, the agitated inn-keeper went eagerly to the door and opened it. 'I believe the storm is over,' said he. But as if to contradict his statement, at that instant a violent clap of thunder seemed to shake the house to its very foundation, while a sudden gust of wind, mingled with rain, extinguished the lamp he held in his hand. Trembling and awe-struck, Caderousse hastily shut the door and returned to his guest, while La Carconte lighted a candle by the smouldering ashes that glimmered on the hearth. 'You must be tired,' said she to the jeweller; 'I have spread a pair of white sheets on your bed; go up when you are ready, and sleep well.'

“Joannes stayed for a while to see whether the storm seemed to abate in its fury, but a brief space of time sufficed to assure him that, instead of diminishing, the violence of the rain and thunder momentarily increased; resigning himself, therefore, to what seemed inevitable, he bade his host good-night, and mounted the stairs. He passed over my head and I heard the flooring creak beneath his footsteps. The quick, eager glance of La Carconte followed him as he ascended, while Caderousse, on the contrary, turned his back, and seemed most anxiously to avoid even glancing at him.

“All these circumstances did not strike me as painfully at the time as they have since done; in fact, all that had happened (with the exception of the story of the diamond, which certainly did wear an air of improbability), appeared natural enough, and called for neither apprehension nor mistrust; but, worn out as I was with fatigue, and fully purposing to proceed onwards directly the tempest abated, I determined to obtain a few hours’ sleep. Overhead I could accurately distinguish every movement of the jeweller, who, after making the best arrangements in his power for passing a comfortable night, threw himself on his bed, and I could hear it creak and groan beneath his weight. Insensibly my eyelids grew heavy, deep sleep stole over me, and having no suspicion of anything wrong, I sought not to shake it off. I looked into the kitchen once more and saw Caderousse sitting by the side of a long table upon one of the low wooden stools which in country places are frequently used instead of chairs; his back was turned towards me, so that I could not see the expression of his countenance — neither should I have been able to do so had he been placed differently, as his head was buried between his two hands. La Carconte continued to gaze on him for some time, then shrugging her shoulders, she took her seat immediately opposite to him. At this moment the expiring embers threw up a fresh flame from the kindling of a piece of wood that lay near, and a bright light flashed over the room. La Carconte still kept her eyes fixed on her husband, but as he made no sign of changing his position, she extended her hard, bony hand, and touched him on the forehead.

“Caderousse shuddered. The woman’s lips seemed to move, as though she were talking; but because she merely spoke in an undertone, or my senses were dulled by sleep, I did not catch a word she uttered. Confused sights and sounds seemed to float before me, and gradually I fell into a deep, heavy slumber. How long I had been in this unconscious state I know not, when I was suddenly aroused by the report of a pistol, followed by a fearful cry. Weak and tottering footsteps resounded across the chamber above me, and the next instant a dull, heavy weight seemed to fall powerless on the staircase. I had not yet fully recovered consciousness, when again I heard groans, mingled with half-stifled cries, as if from persons engaged in a deadly struggle. A cry more prolonged than the others and ending in a series of groans effectually roused me from my drowsy lethargy. Hastily raising myself on one arm, I looked around, but all was dark; and it seemed to me as if the rain must have penetrated through the flooring of the room above, for some kind of moisture appeared to fall, drop by drop, upon my forehead, and when I passed my hand across my brow, I felt that it was wet and clammy.

"To the fearful noises that had awakened me had succeeded the most perfect silence — unbroken, save by the footsteps of a man walking about in the chamber above. The staircase creaked, he descended into the room below, approached the fire and lit a candle. The man was Caderousse — he was pale and his shirt was all bloody. Having obtained the light, he hurried up-stairs again, and once more I heard his rapid and uneasy footsteps. A moment later he came down again, holding in his hand the small shagreen case, which he opened, to assure himself it contained the diamond, — seemed to hesitate as to which pocket he should put it in, then, as if dissatisfied with the security of either pocket, he deposited it in his red handkerchief, which he carefully rolled round his head. After this he took from his cupboard the bank-notes and gold he had put there, thrust the one into the pocket of his trousers, and the other into that of his waistcoat, hastily tied up a small bundle of linen, and rushing towards the door, disappeared in the darkness of the night.

"Then all became clear and manifest to me, and I reproached myself with what had happened, as though I myself had done the guilty deed. I fancied that I still heard faint moans, and imagining that the unfortunate jeweller might not be quite dead, I determined to go to his relief, by way of atoning in some slight degree, not for the crime I had committed, but for that which I had not endeavored to prevent. For this purpose I applied all the strength I possessed to force an entrance from the cramped spot in which I lay to the adjoining room. The poorly fastened boards which alone divided me from it yielded to my efforts, and I found myself in the house. Hastily snatching up the lighted candle, I hurried to the staircase; about midway a body was lying quite across the stairs. It was that of La Carconte. The pistol I had heard had doubtless been fired at her. The shot had frightfully lacerated her throat, leaving two gaping wounds from which, as well as the mouth, the blood was pouring in floods. She was stone dead. I strode past her, and ascended to the sleeping chamber, which presented an appearance of the wildest disorder. The furniture had been knocked over in the deadly struggle that had taken place there, and the sheets, to which the unfortunate jeweller had doubtless clung, were dragged across the room. The murdered man lay on the floor, his head leaning against the wall, and about him was a pool of blood which poured forth from three large wounds in his breast; there was a fourth gash, in which a long table knife was plunged up to the handle.

“I stumbled over some object; I stooped to examine — it was the second pistol, which had not gone off, probably from the powder being wet. I approached the jeweller, who was not quite dead, and at the sound of my footsteps and the creaking of the floor, he opened his eyes, fixed them on me with an anxious and inquiring gaze, moved his lips as though trying to speak, then, overcome by the effort, fell back and expired. This appalling sight almost bereft me of my senses, and finding that I could no longer be of service to any one in the house, my only desire was to fly. I rushed towards the staircase, clutching my hair, and uttering a groan of horror. Upon reaching the room below, I found five or six custom-house officers, and two or three gendarmes — all heavily armed. They threw themselves upon me. I made no resistance; I was no longer master of my senses. When I strove to speak, a few inarticulate sounds alone escaped my lips.

“As I noticed the significant manner in which the whole party pointed to my blood-stained garments, I involuntarily surveyed myself, and then I discovered that the thick warm drops that had so bedewed me as I lay beneath the staircase must have been the blood of La Carconte. I pointed to the spot where I had concealed myself. ‘What does he mean?’ asked a gendarme. One of the officers went to the place I directed. ‘He means,’ replied the man upon his return, ‘that he got in that way;’ and he showed the hole I had made when I broke through.

“Then I saw that they took me for the assassin. I recovered force and energy enough to free myself from the hands of those who held me, while I managed to stammer forth — ’I did not do it! Indeed, indeed I did not!’ A couple of gendarmes held the muzzles of their carbines against my breast. — ’Stir but a step,’ said they, ‘and you are a dead man.’ — ’Why should you threaten me with death,’ cried I, ‘when I have already declared my innocence?’ — ’Tush, tush,’ cried the men; ‘keep your innocent stories to tell to the judge at Nimes. Meanwhile, come along with us; and the best advice we can give you is to do so unresistingly.’ Alas, resistance was far from my thoughts. I was utterly overpowered by surprise and terror; and without a word I suffered myself to be handcuffed and tied to a horse’s tail, and thus they took me to Nimes.

“I had been tracked by a customs-officer, who had lost sight of me near the tavern; feeling certain that I intended to pass the night there, he had returned to summon his comrades, who just arrived in time to hear the report of the pistol, and to take me in the midst of such circumstantial proofs of my guilt as rendered all hopes of proving my innocence utterly futile. One only chance was left me, that of beseeching the magistrate before whom I was taken to cause every inquiry to be made for the Abbe Busoni, who had stopped at the inn of the Pont du Gard on that morning. If Caderousse had invented the story relative to the diamond, and there existed no such person as the Abbe Busoni, then, indeed, I was lost past redemption, or, at least, my life hung upon the feeble chance of Caderousse himself being apprehended and confessing the whole truth. Two months passed away in hopeless expectation on my part, while I must do the magistrate the justice to say that he used every means to obtain information of the person I declared could exculpate me if he would. Caderousse still evaded all pursuit, and I had resigned myself to what seemed my inevitable fate. My trial was to come on at the approaching assizes; when, on the 8th of September — that is to say, precisely three months and five days after the events which had perilled my life — the Abbe Busoni, whom I never ventured to believe I should see, presented himself at the prison doors, saying he understood one of the prisoners wished to speak to him; he added, that having learned at Marseilles the particulars of my imprisonment, he hastened to comply with my desire. You may easily imagine with what eagerness I welcomed him, and how minutely I related the whole of what I had seen and heard. I felt some degree of nervousness as I entered upon the history of the diamond, but, to my inexpressible astonishment, he confirmed it in every particular, and to my equal surprise, he seemed to place entire belief in all I said. And then it was that, won by his mild charity, seeing that he was acquainted with all the habits and customs of my own country, and considering also that pardon for the only crime of which I was really guilty might come with a double power from lips so benevolent and kind, I besought him to receive my confession, under the seal of which I recounted the Auteuil affair in all its details, as well as every other transaction of my life. That which I had done by the impulse of my best feelings produced the same effect as though it had been the result of calculation. My voluntary confession of the assassination at Auteuil proved to him that I had not committed that of which I stood accused. When he quitted me, he bade me be of good courage, and to rely upon his doing all in his power to convince my judges of my innocence.

"I had speedy proofs that the excellent abbe was engaged in my behalf, for the rigors of my imprisonment were alleviated by many trifling though acceptable indulgences, and I was told that my trial was to be postponed to the assizes following those now being held. In the interim it pleased providence to cause the apprehension of Caderousse, who was discovered in some distant country, and brought back to France, where he made a full confession, refusing to make the fact of his wife's having suggested and arranged the murder any excuse for his own guilt. The wretched man was sentenced to the galleys for life, and I was immediately set at liberty."

"And then it was, I presume," said Monte Cristo "that you came to me as the bearer of a letter from the Abbe Busoni?"

"It was, your excellency; the benevolent abbe took an evident interest in all that concerned me.

"'Your mode of life as a smuggler,' said he to me one day, 'will be the ruin of you; if you get out, don't take it up again.' — 'But how,' inquired I, 'am I to maintain myself and my poor sister?'

"'A person, whose confessor I am,' replied he, 'and who entertains a high regard for me, applied to me a short time since to procure him a confidential servant. Would you like such a post? If so, I will give you a letter of introduction to him.' — 'Oh, father,' I exclaimed, 'you are very good.'

"'But you must swear solemnly that I shall never have reason to repent my recommendation.' I extended my hand, and was about to pledge myself by any promise he would dictate, but he stopped me. 'It is unnecessary for you to bind yourself by any vow,' said he; 'I know and admire the Corsican nature too well to fear you. Here, take this,' continued he, after rapidly writing the few lines I brought to your excellency, and upon receipt of which you deigned to receive me into your service, and proudly I ask whether your excellency has ever had cause to repent having done so?"

“No,” replied the count; “I take pleasure in saying that you have served me faithfully, Bertuccio; but you might have shown more confidence in me.”

“I, your excellency?”

“Yes; you. How comes it, that having both a sister and an adopted son, you have never spoken to me of either?”

“Alas, I have still to recount the most distressing period of my life. Anxious as you may suppose I was to behold and comfort my dear sister, I lost no time in hastening to Corsica, but when I arrived at Rogliano I found a house of mourning, the consequences of a scene so horrible that the neighbors remember and speak of it to this day. Acting by my advice, my poor sister had refused to comply with the unreasonable demands of Benedetto, who was continually tormenting her for money, as long as he believed there was a sou left in her possession. One morning that he had demanded money, threatening her with the severest consequences if she did not supply him with what he desired, he disappeared and remained away all day, leaving the kind-hearted Assunta, who loved him as if he were her own child, to weep over his conduct and bewail his absence. Evening came, and still, with all the patient solicitude of a mother, she watched for his return.

“As the eleventh hour struck, he entered with a swaggering air, attended by two of the most dissolute and reckless of his boon companions. She stretched out her arms to him, but they seized hold of her, and one of the three — none other than the accursed Benedetto exclaimed, — ’Put her to torture and she’ll soon tell us where her money is.’

“It unfortunately happened that our neighbor, Vasilio, was at Bastia, leaving no person in his house but his wife; no human creature beside could hear or see anything that took place within our dwelling. Two held poor Assunta, who, unable to conceive that any harm was intended to her, smiled in the face of those who were soon to become her executioners. The third proceeded to barricade the doors and windows, then returned, and the three united in stifling the cries of terror incited by the sight of these preparations, and then dragged Assunta feet foremost towards the brazier, expecting to wring from her an avowal of where her supposed treasure was secreted. In the struggle her clothes caught fire, and they were obliged to let go their hold in order to preserve themselves from sharing the same fate. Covered with flames, Assunta rushed wildly to the door, but it was fastened; she flew to the windows, but they were also secured; then the neighbors heard frightful shrieks; it was Assunta calling for help. The cries died away in groans, and next morning, as soon as Vasilio's wife could muster up courage to venture abroad, she caused the door of our dwelling to be opened by the public authorities, when Assunta, although dreadfully burnt, was found still breathing; every drawer and closet in the house had been forced open, and the money stolen. Benedetto never again appeared at Rogliano, neither have I since that day either seen or heard anything concerning him.

"It was subsequently to these dreadful events that I waited on your excellency, to whom it would have been folly to have mentioned Benedetto, since all trace of him seemed entirely lost; or of my sister, since she was dead."

"And in what light did you view the occurrence?" inquired Monte Cristo.

"As a punishment for the crime I had committed," answered Bertuccio. "Oh, those Villeforts are an accursed race!"

"Truly they are," murmured the count in a lugubrious tone.

"And now," resumed Bertuccio, "your excellency may, perhaps, be able to comprehend that this place, which I revisit for the first time — this garden, the actual scene of my crime — must have given rise to reflections of no very agreeable nature, and produced that gloom and depression of spirits which excited the notice of your excellency, who was pleased to express a desire to know the cause. At this instant a shudder passes over me as I reflect that possibly I am now standing on the very grave in which lies M. de Villefort, by whose hand the ground was dug to receive the corpse of his child."

"Everything is possible," said Monte Cristo, rising from the bench on which he had been sitting; "even," he added in an inaudible voice, "even that the procureur be not dead. The Abbe Busoni did right to send you to me," he went on in his ordinary tone, "and you have done well in relating to me the whole of your history, as it will prevent my forming any erroneous opinions concerning you in future. As for that Benedetto, who so grossly belied his name, have you never made any effort to trace out whither he has gone, or what has become of him?"

"No; far from wishing to learn whither he has betaken himself, I should shun the possibility of meeting him as I would a wild beast. Thank God, I have never heard his name mentioned by any person, and I hope and believe he is dead."

“Do not think so, Bertuccio,” replied the count; “for the wicked are not so easily disposed of, for God seems to have them under his special watch-care to make of them instruments of his vengeance.”

“So be it,” responded Bertuccio, “all I ask of heaven is that I may never see him again. And now, your excellency,” he added, bowing his head, “you know everything — you are my judge on earth, as the Almighty is in heaven; have you for me no words of consolation?”

“My good friend, I can only repeat the words addressed to you by the Abbe Busoni. Villefort merited punishment for what he had done to you, and, perhaps, to others. Benedetto, if still living, will become the instrument of divine retribution in some way or other, and then be duly punished in his turn. As far as you yourself are concerned, I see but one point in which you are really guilty. Ask yourself, wherefore, after rescuing the infant from its living grave, you did not restore it to its mother? There was the crime, Bertuccio — that was where you became really culpable.”

“True, excellency, that was the crime, the real crime, for in that I acted like a coward. My first duty, directly I had succeeded in recalling the babe to life, was to restore it to its mother; but, in order to do so, I must have made close and careful inquiry, which would, in all probability, have led to my own apprehension; and I clung to life, partly on my sister’s account, and partly from that feeling of pride inborn in our hearts of desiring to come off untouched and victorious in the execution of our vengeance. Perhaps, too, the natural and instinctive love of life made me wish to avoid endangering my own. And then, again, I am not as brave and courageous as was my poor brother.” Bertuccio hid his face in his hands as he uttered these words, while Monte Cristo fixed on him a look of inscrutable meaning. After a brief silence, rendered still more solemn by the time and place, the count said, in a tone of melancholy wholly unlike his usual manner, “In order to bring this conversation to a fitting termination (the last we shall ever hold upon this subject), I will repeat to you some words I have heard from the lips of the Abbe Busoni. For all evils there are two remedies — time and silence. And now leave me, Monsieur Bertuccio, to walk alone here in the garden. The very circumstances which inflict on you, as a principal in the tragic scene enacted here, such painful emotions, are to me, on the contrary, a source of something like contentment, and serve but to enhance the value of this dwelling in my estimation. The chief beauty of trees consists in the deep shadow of their umbrageous boughs, while fancy pictures a moving multitude of shapes and forms flitting and passing beneath that shade. Here I have a garden laid out in such a way as to afford the fullest scope for the imagination, and furnished with thickly grown trees, beneath whose leafy screen a visionary like myself may conjure up phantoms at will. This to me, who expected but to find a blank enclosure surrounded by a straight wall, is, I assure you, a most agreeable surprise. I have no fear of ghosts, and I have never heard it said that so much harm had been done by the dead during six thousand years as is wrought by the living in a single day. Retire within, Bertuccio, and tranquillize your mind. Should your confessor be less indulgent to you in your dying moments than you found the Abbe Busoni, send for me, if I am still on earth, and I will soothe your ears with words that shall effectually calm and soothe your parting soul ere it goes forth to traverse the ocean called eternity.”

Bertuccio bowed respectfully, and turned away, sighing heavily. Monte Cristo, left alone, took three or four steps onwards, and murmured, “Here, beneath this plane-tree, must have been where the infant’s grave was dug. There is the little door opening into the garden. At this corner is the private staircase communicating with the sleeping apartment. There will be no necessity for me to make a note of these particulars, for there, before my eyes, beneath my feet, all around me, I have the plan sketched with all the living reality of truth.” After making the tour of the garden a second time, the count re-entered his carriage, while Bertuccio, who perceived the thoughtful expression of his master’s features, took his seat beside the driver without uttering a word. The carriage proceeded rapidly towards Paris.

That same evening, upon reaching his abode in the Champs Elysees, the Count of Monte Cristo went over the whole building with the air of one long acquainted with each nook or corner. Nor, although preceding the party, did he once mistake one door for another, or commit the smallest error when choosing any particular corridor or staircase to conduct him to a place or suite of rooms he desired to visit. Ali was his principal attendant during this nocturnal survey. Having given various orders to Bertuccio relative to the improvements and alterations he desired to make in the house, the Count, drawing out his watch, said to the attentive Nubian, “It is half-past eleven o’clock; Haidee will soon be here. Have the French attendants been summoned to await her coming?” Ali extended his hands towards the apartments destined for the fair Greek, which were so effectually concealed by means of a tapestried entrance, that it would have puzzled the most curious to have divined their existence. Ali, having pointed to the apartments, held up three fingers of his right hand, and then, placing it beneath his head, shut his eyes, and feigned to sleep. “I understand,” said Monte Cristo, well acquainted with Ali’s pantomime; “you mean to tell me that three female attendants await their new mistress in her sleeping-chamber.” Ali, with considerable animation, made a sign in the affirmative.

“Madame will be tired to-night,” continued Monte Cristo, “and will, no doubt, wish to rest. Desire the French attendants not to weary her with questions, but merely to pay their respectful duty and retire. You will also see that the Greek servants hold no communication with those of this country.” He bowed. Just at that moment voices were heard hailing the concierge. The gate opened, a carriage rolled down the avenue, and stopped at the steps. The count hastily descended, presented himself at the already opened carriage door, and held out his hand to a young woman, completely enveloped in a green silk mantle heavily embroidered with gold. She raised the hand extended towards her to her lips, and kissed it with a mixture of love and respect. Some few words passed between them in that sonorous language in which Homer makes his gods converse. The young woman spoke with an expression of deep tenderness, while the count replied with an air of gentle gravity. Preceded by Ali, who carried a rose-colored flambeau in his hand, the new-comer, who was no other than the lovely Greek who had been Monte Cristo’s companion in Italy, was conducted to her apartments, while the count retired to the pavilion reserved for himself. In another hour every light in the house was extinguished, and it might have been thought that all its inmates slept.

Chapter 46

Unlimited Credit.

About two o'clock the following day a calash, drawn by a pair of magnificent English horses, stopped at the door of Monte Cristo and a person, dressed in a blue coat, with buttons of a similar color, a white waistcoat, over which was displayed a massive gold chain, brown trousers, and a quantity of black hair descending so low over his eyebrows as to leave it doubtful whether it were not artificial so little did its jetty glossiness assimilate with the deep wrinkles stamped on his features — a person, in a word, who, although evidently past fifty, desired to be taken for not more than forty, bent forwards from the carriage door, on the panels of which were emblazoned the armorial bearings of a baron, and directed his groom to inquire at the porter's lodge whether the Count of Monte Cristo resided there, and if he were within. While waiting, the occupant of the carriage surveyed the house, the garden as far as he could distinguish it, and the livery of servants who passed to and fro, with an attention so close as to be somewhat impertinent. His glance was keen but showed cunning rather than intelligence; his lips were straight, and so thin that, as they closed, they were drawn in over the teeth; his cheek-bones were broad and projecting, a never-failing proof of audacity and craftiness; while the flatness of his forehead, and the enlargement of the back of his skull, which rose much higher than his large and coarsely shaped ears, combined to form a physiognomy anything but prepossessing, save in the eyes of such as considered that the owner of so splendid an equipage must needs be all that was admirable and enviable, more especially when they gazed on the enormous diamond that glittered in his shirt, and the red ribbon that depended from his button-hole.

The groom, in obedience to his orders, tapped at the window of the porter's lodge, saying, "Pray, does not the Count of Monte Cristo live here?"

"His excellency does reside here," replied the concierge; "but" — added he, glancing an inquiring look at Ali. Ali returned a sign in the negative.

“But what?” asked the groom.

“His excellency does not receive visitors to-day.”

“Then here is my master’s card, — the Baron Danglars. You will take it to the count, and say that, although in haste to attend the Chamber, my master came out of his way to have the honor of calling upon him.”

“I never speak to his excellency,” replied the concierge; “the valet de chambre will carry your message.” The groom returned to the carriage. “Well?” asked Danglars. The man, somewhat crest-fallen by the rebuke he had received, repeated what the concierge had said. “Bless me,” murmured Baron Danglars, “this must surely be a prince instead of a count by their styling him ‘excellency,’ and only venturing to address him by the medium of his valet de chambre. However, it does not signify; he has a letter of credit on me, so I must see him when he requires his money.”

Then, throwing himself back in his carriage, Danglars called out to his coachman, in a voice that might be heard across the road, “To the Chamber of Deputies.”

Apprised in time of the visit paid him, Monte Cristo had, from behind the blinds of his pavilion, as minutely observed the baron, by means of an excellent lorgnette, as Danglars himself had scrutinized the house, garden, and servants. “That fellow has a decidedly bad countenance,” said the count in a tone of disgust, as he shut up his glass into its ivory case. “How comes it that all do not retreat in aversion at sight of that flat, receding, serpent-like forehead, round, vulture-shaped head, and sharp-hooked nose, like the beak of a buzzard? Ali,” cried he, striking at the same time on the brazen gong. Ali appeared. “Summon Bertuccio,” said the count. Almost immediately Bertuccio entered the apartment. “Did your excellency desire to see me?” inquired he. “I did,” replied the count. “You no doubt observed the horses standing a few minutes since at the door?”

“Certainly, your excellency. I noticed them for their remarkable beauty.”

“Then how comes it,” said Monte Cristo with a frown, “that, when I desired you to purchase for me the finest pair of horses to be found in Paris, there is another pair, fully as fine as mine, not in my stables?” At the look of displeasure, added to the angry tone in which the count spoke, Ali turned pale and held down his head. “It is not your fault, my good Ali,” said the count in the Arabic language, and with a gentleness none would have thought him capable of showing, either in voice or face — ”it is not your fault. You do not understand the points of English horses.” The countenance of poor Ali recovered its serenity. “Permit me to assure your excellency,” said Bertuccio, “that the horses you speak of were not to be sold when I purchased yours.” Monte Cristo shrugged his shoulders. “It seems, sir steward,” said he, “that you have yet to learn that all things are to be sold to such as care to pay the price.”

“His excellency is not, perhaps, aware that M. Danglars gave 16,000 francs for his horses?”

“Very well. Then offer him double that sum; a banker never loses an opportunity of doubling his capital.”

“Is your excellency really in earnest?” inquired the steward. Monte Cristo regarded the person who durst presume to doubt his words with the look of one equally surprised and displeased. “I have to pay a visit this evening,” replied he. “I desire that these horses, with completely new harness, may be at the door with my carriage.” Bertuccio bowed, and was about to retire; but when he reached the door, he paused, and then said, “At what o’clock does your excellency wish the carriage and horses to be ready?”

“At five o’clock,” replied the count.

“I beg your excellency’s pardon,” interposed the steward in a deprecating manner, “for venturing to observe that it is already two o’clock.”

“I am perfectly aware of that fact,” answered Monte Cristo calmly. Then, turning towards Ali, he said, “Let all the horses in my stables be led before the windows of your young lady, that she may select those she prefers for her carriage. Request her also to oblige me by saying whether it is her pleasure to dine with me; if so, let dinner be served in her apartments. Now, leave me, and desire my valet de chambre to come hither.” Scarcely had Ali disappeared when the valet entered the chamber. “Monsieur Baptistin,” said the count, “you have been in my service one year, the time I generally give myself to judge of the merits or demerits of those about me. You suit me very well.” Baptistin bowed low. “It only remains for me to know whether I also suit you?”

“Oh, your excellency!” exclaimed Baptistin eagerly.

“Listen, if you please, till I have finished speaking,” replied Monte Cristo. “You receive 1,500 francs per annum for your services here — more than many a brave subaltern, who continually risks his life for his country, obtains. You live in a manner far superior to many clerks who work ten times harder than you do for their money. Then, though yourself a servant, you have other servants to wait upon you, take care of your clothes, and see that your linen is duly prepared for you. Again, you make a profit upon each article you purchase for my toilet, amounting in the course of a year to a sum equalling your wages."

"Nay, indeed, your excellency."

"I am not condemning you for this, Monsieur Baptistin; but let your profits end here. It would be long indeed ere you would find so lucrative a post as that you have now the good fortune to fill. I neither ill-use nor ill-treat my servants by word or action. An error I readily forgive, but wilful negligence or forgetfulness, never. My commands are ordinarily short, clear, and precise; and I would rather be obliged to repeat my words twice, or even three times, than they should be misunderstood. I am rich enough to know whatever I desire to know, and I can promise you I am not wanting in curiosity. If, then, I should learn that you had taken upon yourself to speak of me to any one favorably or unfavorably, to comment on my actions, or watch my conduct, that very instant you would quit my service. You may now retire. I never caution my servants a second time — remember that." Baptistin bowed, and was proceeding towards the door. "I forgot to mention to you," said the count, "that I lay yearly aside a certain sum for each servant in my establishment; those whom I am compelled to dismiss lose (as a matter of course) all participation in this money, while their portion goes to the fund accumulating for those domestics who remain with me, and among whom it will be divided at my death. You have been in my service a year, your fund has already begun to accumulate — let it continue to do so."

This address, delivered in the presence of Ali, who, not understanding one word of the language in which it was spoken, stood wholly unmoved, produced an effect on M. Baptistin only to be conceived by such as have occasion to study the character and disposition of French domestics. "I assure your excellency," said he, "that at least it shall be my study to merit your approbation in all things, and I will take M. Ali as my model."

"By no means," replied the count in the most frigid tones; "Ali has many faults mixed with most excellent qualities. He cannot possibly serve you as a pattern for your conduct, not being, as you are, a paid servant, but a mere slave — a dog, who, should he fail in his duty towards me, I should not discharge from my service, but kill." Baptistin opened his eyes with astonishment.

"You seem incredulous," said Monte Cristo, who repeated to Ali in the Arabic language what he had just been saying to Baptistin in French. The

Nubian smiled assentingly to his master's words, then, kneeling on one knee, respectfully kissed the hand of the count. This corroboration of the lesson he had just received put the finishing stroke to the wonder and stupefaction of M. Baptistin. The count then motioned the valet de chambre to retire, and to Ali to follow to his study, where they conversed long and earnestly together. As the hand of the clock pointed to five the count struck thrice upon his gong. When Ali was wanted one stroke was given, two summoned Baptistin, and three Bertuccio. The steward entered. "My horses," said Monte Cristo.

"They are at the door harnessed to the carriage as your excellency desired. Does your excellency wish me to accompany him?"

"No, the coachman, Ali, and Baptistin will go." The count descended to the door of his mansion, and beheld his carriage drawn by the very pair of horses he had so much admired in the morning as the property of Danglars. As he passed them he said — "They are extremely handsome certainly, and you have done well to purchase them, although you were somewhat remiss not to have procured them sooner."

"Indeed, your excellency, I had very considerable difficulty in obtaining them, and, as it is, they have cost an enormous price."

"Does the sum you gave for them make the animals less beautiful," inquired the count, shrugging his shoulders.

"Nay, if your excellency is satisfied, it is all that I could wish. Whither does your excellency desire to be driven?"

"To the residence of Baron Danglars, Rue de la Chaussee d'Antin." This conversation had passed as they stood upon the terrace, from which a flight of stone steps led to the carriage-drive. As Bertuccio, with a respectful bow, was moving away, the count called him back. "I have another commission for you, M. Bertuccio," said he; "I am desirous of having an estate by the seaside in Normandy — for instance, between Havre and Boulogne. You see I give you a wide range. It will be absolutely necessary that the place you may select have a small harbor, creek, or bay, into which my corvette can enter and remain at anchor. She draws only fifteen feet. She must be kept in constant readiness to sail immediately I think proper to give the signal. Make the requisite inquiries for a place of this description, and when you have met with an eligible spot, visit it, and if it possess the advantages desired, purchase it at once in your own name. The corvette must now, I think, be on her way to Fecamp, must she not?"

“Certainly, your excellency; I saw her put to sea the same evening we quitted Marseilles.”

“And the yacht.”

“Was ordered to remain at Martigues.”

“‘Tis well. I wish you to write from time to time to the captains in charge of the two vessels so as to keep them on the alert.”

“And the steamboat?”

“She is at Chalons?”

“Yes.”

“The same orders for her as for the two sailing vessels.”

“Very good.”

“When you have purchased the estate I desire, I want constant relays of horses at ten leagues apart along the northern and southern road.”

“Your excellency may depend upon me.” The Count made a gesture of satisfaction, descended the terrace steps, and sprang into his carriage, which was whirled along swiftly to the banker’s house. Danglars was engaged at that moment, presiding over a railroad committee. But the meeting was nearly concluded when the name of his visitor was announced. As the count’s title sounded on his ear he rose, and addressing his colleagues, who were members of one or the other Chamber, he said, — ”Gentlemen, pardon me for leaving you so abruptly; but a most ridiculous circumstance has occurred, which is this, — Thomson & French, the Roman bankers, have sent to me a certain person calling himself the Count of Monte Cristo, and have given him an unlimited credit with me. I confess this is the drollest thing I have ever met with in the course of my extensive foreign transactions, and you may readily suppose it has greatly roused my curiosity. I took the trouble this morning to call on the pretended count — if he were a real count he wouldn’t be so rich. But, would you believe it, ‘He was not receiving.’ So the master of Monte Cristo gives himself airs befitting a great millionaire or a capricious beauty. I made inquiries, and found that the house in the Champs Elysees is his own property, and certainly it was very decently kept up. But,” pursued Danglars with one of his sinister smiles, “an order for unlimited credit calls for something like caution on the part of the banker to whom that order is given. I am very anxious to see this man. I suspect a hoax is intended, but the instigators of it little knew whom they had to deal with. ‘They laugh best who laugh last!’“

Having delivered himself of this pompous address, uttered with a degree of energy that left the baron almost out of breath, he bowed to the assembled party and withdrew to his drawing-room, whose sumptuous furnishings of white and gold had caused a great sensation in the Chaussee d'Antin. It was to this apartment he had desired his guest to be shown, with the purpose of overwhelming him at the sight of so much luxury. He found the count standing before some copies of Albano and Fattore that had been passed off to the banker as originals; but which, mere copies as they were, seemed to feel their degradation in being brought into juxtaposition with the gaudy colors that covered the ceiling. The count turned round as he heard the entrance of Danglars into the room. With a slight inclination of the head, Danglars signed to the count to be seated, pointing significantly to a gilded arm-chair, covered with white satin embroidered with gold. The count sat down. "I have the honor, I presume, of addressing M. de Monte Cristo."

The count bowed. "And I of speaking to Baron Danglars, chevalier of the Legion of Honor, and member of the Chamber of Deputies?"

Monte Cristo repeated all the titles he had read on the baron's card.

Danglars felt the irony and compressed his lips. "You will, I trust, excuse me, monsieur, for not calling you by your title when I first addressed you," he said, "but you are aware that we are living under a popular form of government, and that I am myself a representative of the liberties of the people."

"So much so," replied Monte Cristo, "that while you call yourself baron you are not willing to call anybody else count."

"Upon my word, monsieur," said Danglars with affected carelessness, "I attach no sort of value to such empty distinctions; but the fact is, I was made baron, and also chevalier of the Legion of Honor, in return for services rendered, but" —

"But you have discarded your titles after the example set you by Messrs. de Montmorency and Lafayette? That was a noble example to follow, monsieur."

"Why," replied Danglars, "not entirely so; with the servants, — you understand."

"I see; to your domestics you are 'my lord,' the journalists style you 'monsieur,' while your constituents call you 'citizen.' These are distinctions very suitable under a constitutional government. I understand perfectly." Again Danglars bit his lips; he saw that he was no match for Monte Cristo in an argument of this sort, and he therefore hastened to turn to subjects more congenial.

"Permit me to inform you, Count," said he, bowing, "that I have received a letter of advice from Thomson & French, of Rome."

"I am glad to hear it, baron, — for I must claim the privilege of addressing you after the manner of your servants. I have acquired the bad habit of calling persons by their titles from living in a country where barons are still barons by right of birth. But as regards the letter of advice, I am charmed to find that it has reached you; that will spare me the troublesome and disagreeable task of coming to you for money myself. You have received a regular letter of advice?"

"Yes," said Danglars, "but I confess I didn't quite comprehend its meaning."

"Indeed?"

"And for that reason I did myself the honor of calling upon you, in order to beg for an explanation."

"Go on, monsieur. Here I am, ready to give you any explanation you desire."

"Why," said Danglers, "in the letter — I believe I have it about me" — here he felt in his breast-pocket — "yes, here it is. Well, this letter gives the Count of Monte Cristo unlimited credit on our house."

"Well, baron, what is there difficult to understand about that?"

"Merely the term unlimited — nothing else, certainly."

"Is not that word known in France? The people who wrote are Anglo-Germans, you know."

"Oh, as for the composition of the letter, there is nothing to be said; but as regards the competency of the document, I certainly have doubts."

"Is it possible?" asked the count, assuming all air and tone of the utmost simplicity and candor. "Is it possible that Thomson & French are not looked upon as safe and solvent bankers? Pray tell me what you think, baron, for I feel uneasy, I can assure you, having some considerable property in their hands."

"Thomson & French are perfectly solvent," replied Danglars, with an almost mocking smile: "but the word unlimited, in financial affairs, is so extremely vague."

"Is, in fact, unlimited," said Monte Cristo.

“Precisely what I was about to say,” cried Danglars. “Now what is vague is doubtful; and it was a wise man who said, ‘when in doubt, keep out.’“

“Meaning to say,” rejoined Monte Cristo, “that however Thomson & French may be inclined to commit acts of imprudence and folly, the Baron Danglars is not disposed to follow their example.”

“Not at all.”

“Plainly enough. Messrs. Thomson & French set no bounds to their engagements while those of M. Danglars have their limits; he is a wise man, according to his own showing.”

“Monsieur,” replied the banker, drawing himself up with a haughty air, “the extent of my resources has never yet been questioned.”

“It seems, then, reserved for me,” said Monte Cristo coldly, “to be the first to do so.”

“By what right, sir?”

“By right of the objections you have raised, and the explanations you have demanded, which certainly must have some motive.”

Once more Danglars bit his lips. It was the second time he had been worsted, and this time on his own ground. His forced politeness sat awkwardly upon him, and approached almost to impertinence. Monte Cristo on the contrary, preserved a graceful suavity of demeanor, aided by a certain degree of simplicity he could assume at pleasure, and thus possessed the advantage.

“Well, sir,” resumed Danglars, after a brief silence, “I will endeavor to make myself understood, by requesting you to inform me for what sum you propose to draw upon me?”

“Why, truly,” replied Monte Cristo, determined not to lose an inch of the ground he had gained, “my reason for desiring an ‘unlimited’ credit was precisely because I did not know how much money I might need.”

The banker thought the time had come for him to take the upper hand. So throwing himself back in his arm-chair, he said, with an arrogant and purse-proud air, — ”Let me beg of you not to hesitate in naming your wishes; you will then be convinced that the resources of the house of Danglars, however limited, are still equal to meeting the largest demands; and were you even to require a million” —

“I beg your pardon,” interposed Monte Cristo.

“I said a million,” replied Danglars, with the confidence of ignorance.

“But could I do with a million?” retorted the count. “My dear sir, if a trifle like that could suffice me, I should never have given myself the trouble of opening an account. A million? Excuse my smiling when you speak of a sum I am in the habit of carrying in my pocket-book or dressing-case.” And with these words Monte Cristo took from his pocket a small case containing his visiting-cards, and drew forth two orders on the treasury for 500,000 francs each, payable at sight to the bearer. A man like Danglars was wholly inaccessible to any gentler method of correction. The effect of the present revelation was stunning; he trembled and was on the verge of apoplexy. The pupils of his eyes, as he gazed at Monte Cristo dilated horribly.

“Come, come,” said Monte Cristo, “confess honestly that you have not perfect confidence in Thomson & French. I understand, and foreseeing that such might be the case, I took, in spite of my ignorance of affairs, certain precautions. See, here are two similar letters to that you have yourself received; one from the house of Arstein & Eskeles of Vienna, to Baron Rothschild, the other drawn by Baring of London, upon M. Laffitte. Now, sir, you have but to say the word, and I will spare you all uneasiness by presenting my letter of credit to one or other of these two firms.” The blow had struck home, and Danglars was entirely vanquished; with a trembling hand he took the two letters from the count, who held them carelessly between finger and thumb, and proceeded to scrutinize the signatures, with a minuteness that the count might have regarded as insulting, had it not suited his present purpose to mislead the banker. “Oh, sir,” said Danglars, after he had convinced himself of the authenticity of the documents he held, and rising as if to salute the power of gold personified in the man before him, — ”three letters of unlimited credit! I can be no longer mistrustful, but you must pardon me, my dear count, for confessing to some degree of astonishment.”

“Nay,” answered Monte Cristo, with the most gentlemanly air, “‘tis not for such trifling sums as these that your banking house is to be incommoded. Then, you can let me have some money, can you not?”

“Whatever you say, my dear count; I am at your orders.”

“Why,” replied Monte Cristo, “since we mutually understand each other — for such I presume is the case?” Danglars bowed assentingly. “You are quite sure that not a lurking doubt or suspicion lingers in your mind?”

“Oh, my dear count,” exclaimed Danglars, “I never for an instant entertained such a feeling towards you.”

“No, you merely wished to be convinced, nothing more; but now that we have come to so clear an understanding, and that all distrust and suspicion are laid at rest, we may as well fix a sum as the probable expenditure of the first year, suppose we say six millions to” —

“Six millions!” gasped Danglars — ”so be it.”

“Then, if I should require more,” continued Monte Cristo in a careless manner, “why, of course, I should draw upon you; but my present intention is not to remain in France more than a year, and during that period I scarcely think I shall exceed the sum I mentioned. However, we shall see. Be kind enough, then, to send me 500,000 francs to-morrow. I shall be at home till midday, or if not, I will leave a receipt with my steward.”

“The money you desire shall be at your house by ten o’clock to-morrow morning, my dear count,” replied Danglars. “How would you like to have it? in gold, silver, or notes?”

“Half in gold, and the other half in bank-notes, if you please,” said the count, rising from his seat.

“I must confess to you, count,” said Danglars, “that I have hitherto imagined myself acquainted with the degree of all the great fortunes of Europe, and still wealth such as yours has been wholly unknown to me. May I presume to ask whether you have long possessed it?”

“It has been in the family a very long while,” returned Monte Cristo, “a sort of treasure expressly forbidden to be touched for a certain period of years, during which the accumulated interest has doubled the capital. The period appointed by the testator for the disposal of these riches occurred only a short time ago, and they have only been employed by me within the last few years. Your ignorance on the subject, therefore, is easily accounted for. However, you will be better informed as to me and my possessions ere long.” And the count, while pronouncing these latter words, accompanied them with one of those ghastly smiles that used to strike terror into poor Franz d’Epinay.

“With your tastes, and means of gratifying them,” continued Danglars, “you will exhibit a splendor that must effectually put us poor miserable millionaires quite in the shade. If I mistake not you are an admirer of paintings, at least I judged so from the attention you appeared to be bestowing on mine when I entered the room. If you will permit me, I shall be happy to show you my picture gallery, composed entirely of works by the ancient masters — warranted as such. Not a modern picture among them. I cannot endure the modern school of painting."

"You are perfectly right in objecting to them, for this one great fault — that they have not yet had time to become old."

"Or will you allow me to show you several fine statues by Thorwaldsen, Bartoloni, and Canova? — all foreign artists, for, as you may perceive, I think but very indifferently of our French sculptors."

"You have a right to be unjust to them, monsieur; they are your compatriots."

"But all this may come later, when we shall be better known to each other. For the present, I will confine myself (if perfectly agreeable to you) to introducing you to the Baroness Danglars — excuse my impatience, my dear count, but a client like you is almost like a member of the family." Monte Cristo bowed, in sign that he accepted the proffered honor; Danglars rang and was answered by a servant in a showy livery. "Is the baroness at home?" inquired Danglars.

"Yes, my lord," answered the man.

"And alone?"

"No, my lord, madame has visitors."

"Have you any objection to meet any persons who may be with madame, or do you desire to preserve a strict incognito?"

"No, indeed," replied Monte Cristo with a smile, "I do not arrogate to myself the right of so doing."

"And who is with madame? — M. Debray?" inquired Danglars, with an air of indulgence and good-nature that made Monte Cristo smile, acquainted as he was with the secrets of the banker's domestic life.

"Yes, my lord," replied the servant, "M. Debray is with madame." Danglars nodded his head; then, turning to Monte Cristo, said, "M. Lucien Debray is an old friend of ours, and private secretary to the Minister of the Interior. As for my wife, I must tell you, she lowered herself by marrying me, for she belongs to one of the most ancient families in France. Her maiden name was De Servieres, and her first husband was Colonel the Marquis of Nargonne."

"I have not the honor of knowing Madame Danglars; but I have already met M. Lucien Debray."

"Ah, indeed?" said Danglars; "and where was that?"

"At the house of M. de Morcerf."

"Ah, ha, you are acquainted with the young viscount, are you?"

"We were together a good deal during the Carnival at Rome."

"True, true," cried Danglars. "Let me see; have I not heard talk of some strange adventure with bandits or thieves hid in ruins, and of his having had a miraculous escape? I forget how, but I know he used to amuse my wife and daughter by telling them about it after his return from Italy."

"Her ladyship is waiting to receive you, gentlemen," said the servant, who had gone to inquire the pleasure of his mistress. "With your permission," said Danglars, bowing, "I will precede you, to show you the way."

"By all means," replied Monte Cristo; "I follow you."

Chapter 47

The Dappled Grays.

The baron, followed by the count, traversed a long series of apartments, in which the prevailing characteristics were heavy magnificence and the gaudiness of ostentatious wealth, until he reached the boudoir of Madame Danglars — a small octagonal-shaped room, hung with pink satin, covered with white Indian muslin. The chairs were of ancient workmanship and materials; over the doors were painted sketches of shepherds and shepherdesses, after the style and manner of Boucher; and at each side pretty medallions in crayons, harmonizing well with the furnishings of this charming apartment, the only one throughout the great mansion in which any distinctive taste prevailed. The truth was, it had been entirely overlooked in the plan arranged and followed out by M. Danglars and his architect, who had been selected to aid the baron in the great work of improvement solely because he was the most fashionable and celebrated decorator of the day. The decorations of the boudoir had then been left entirely to Madame Danglars and Lucien Debray. M. Danglars, however, while possessing a great admiration for the antique, as it was understood during the time of the Directory, entertained the most sovereign contempt for the simple elegance of his wife's favorite sitting-room, where, by the way, he was never permitted to intrude, unless, indeed, he excused his own appearance by ushering in some more agreeable visitor than himself; and even then he had rather the air and manner of a person who was himself introduced, than that of being the presenter of another, his reception being cordial or frigid, in proportion as the person who accompanied him chanced to please or displease the baroness.

Madame Danglars (who, although past the first bloom of youth, was still strikingly handsome) was now seated at the piano, a most elaborate piece of cabinet and inlaid work, while Lucien Debray, standing before a small work-table, was turning over the pages of an album. Lucien had found time, preparatory to the count's arrival, to relate many particulars respecting him to Madame Danglars. It will be remembered that Monte Cristo had made a lively impression on the minds of all the party assembled at the breakfast given by Albert de Morcerf; and although Debray was not in the habit of yielding to such feelings, he had never been able to shake off the powerful influence excited in his mind by the impressive look and manner of the count, consequently the description given by Lucien to the baroness bore the highly-colored tinge of his own heated imagination. Already excited by the wonderful stories related of the count by De Morcerf, it is no wonder that Madame Danglars eagerly listened to, and fully credited, all the additional circumstances detailed by Debray. This posing at the piano and over the album was only a little ruse adopted by way of precaution. A most gracious welcome and unusual smile were bestowed on M. Danglars; the count, in return for his gentlemanly bow, received a formal though graceful courtesy, while Lucien exchanged with the count a sort of distant recognition, and with Danglars a free and easy nod.

"Baroness," said Danglars, "give me leave to present to you the Count of Monte Cristo, who has been most warmly recommended to me by my correspondents at Rome. I need but mention one fact to make all the ladies in Paris court his notice, and that is, that he has come to take up his abode in Paris for a year, during which brief period he proposes to spend six millions of money. That means balls, dinners, and lawn parties without end, in all of which I trust the count will remember us, as he may depend upon it we shall him, in our own humble entertainments." In spite of the gross flattery and coarseness of this address, Madame Danglars could not forbear gazing with considerable interest on a man capable of expending six millions in twelve months, and who had selected Paris for the scene of his princely extravagance. "And when did you arrive here?" inquired she.

"Yesterday morning, madame."

"Coming, as usual, I presume, from the extreme end of the globe? Pardon me — at least, such I have heard is your custom."

"Nay, madame. This time I have merely come from Cadiz."

"You have selected a most unfavorable moment for your first visit. Paris is a horrible place in summer. Balls, parties, and fetes are over; the Italian opera is in London; the French opera everywhere except in Paris. As for the Theatre Francais, you know, of course, that it is nowhere. The only amusements left us are the indifferent races at the Champ de Mars and Satory. Do you propose entering any horses at either of these races, count?"

“I shall do whatever they do at Paris, madame, if I have the good fortune to find some one who will initiate me into the prevalent ideas of amusement.”

“Are you fond of horses, count?”

“I have passed a considerable part of my life in the East, madame, and you are doubtless aware that the Orientals value only two things — the fine breeding of their horses and the beauty of their women.”

“Nay, count,” said the baroness, “it would have been somewhat more gallant to have placed the ladies first.”

“You see, madame, how rightly I spoke when I said I required a preceptor to guide me in all my sayings and doings here.” At this instant the favorite attendant of Madame Danglars entered the boudoir; approaching her mistress, she spoke some words in an undertone. Madame Danglars turned very pale, then exclaimed, — ”I cannot believe it; the thing is impossible.”

“I assure you, madame,” replied the woman, “it is as I have said.” Turning impatiently towards her husband, Madame Danglars demanded, “Is this true?”

“Is what true, madame?” inquired Danglars, visibly agitated.

“What my maid tells me.”

“But what does she tell you?”

“That when my coachman was about to harness the horses to my carriage, he discovered that they had been removed from the stables without his knowledge. I desire to know what is the meaning of this?”

“Be kind enough, madame, to listen to me,” said Danglars.

“Oh, yes; I will listen, monsieur, for I am most curious to hear what explanation you will give. These two gentlemen shall decide between us; but, first, I will state the case to them. Gentlemen,” continued the baroness, “among the ten horses in the stables of Baron Danglars, are two that belong exclusively to me — a pair of the handsomest and most spirited creatures to be found in Paris. But to you, at least, M. Debray, I need not give a further description, because to you my beautiful pair of dappled grays were well known. Well, I had promised Madame de Villefort the loan of my carriage to drive to-morrow to the Bois; but when my coachman goes to fetch the grays from the stables they are gone — positively gone. No doubt M. Danglars has sacrificed them to the selfish consideration of gaining some thousands of paltry francs. Oh, what a detestable crew they are, these mercenary speculators!”

"Madame," replied Danglars, "the horses were not sufficiently quiet for you; they were scarcely four years old, and they made me extremely uneasy on your account."

"Nonsense," retorted the baroness; "you could not have entertained any alarm on the subject, because you are perfectly well aware that I have had for a month in my service the very best coachman in Paris. But, perhaps, you have disposed of the coachman as well as the horses?"

"My dear love, pray do not say any more about them, and I promise you another pair exactly like them in appearance, only more quiet and steady." The baroness shrugged her shoulders with an air of ineffable contempt, while her husband, affecting not to observe this unconjugal gesture, turned towards Monte Cristo and said, — "Upon my word, count, I am quite sorry not to have met you sooner. You are setting up an establishment, of course?"

"Why, yes," replied the count.

"I should have liked to have made you the offer of these horses. I have almost given them away, as it is; but, as I before said, I was anxious to get rid of them upon any terms. They were only fit for a young man."

"I am much obliged by your kind intentions towards me," said Monte Cristo; "but this morning I purchased a very excellent pair of carriage-horses, and I do not think they were dear. There they are. Come, M. Debray, you are a connoisseur, I believe, let me have your opinion upon them." As Debray walked towards the window, Danglars approached his wife. "I could not tell you before others," said he in a low tone, "the reason of my parting with the horses; but a most enormous price was offered me this morning for them. Some madman or fool, bent upon ruining himself as fast as he can, actually sent his steward to me to purchase them at any cost; and the fact is, I have gained 16,000 francs by the sale of them. Come, don't look so angry, and you shall have 4,000 francs of the money to do what you like with, and Eugenie shall have 2,000. There, what do you think now of the affair? Wasn't I right to part with the horses?" Madame Danglars surveyed her husband with a look of withering contempt.

"Great heavens?" suddenly exclaimed Debray.

"What is it?" asked the baroness.

"I cannot be mistaken; there are your horses! The very animals we were speaking of, harnessed to the count's carriage!"

“My dappled grays?” demanded the baroness, springing to the window. “‘Tis indeed they!” said she. Danglars looked absolutely stupefied. “How very singular,” cried Monte Cristo with well-feigned astonishment.

“I cannot believe it,” murmured the banker. Madame Danglars whispered a few words in the ear of Debray, who approached Monte Cristo, saying, “The baroness wishes to know what you paid her husband for the horses.”

“I scarcely know,” replied the count; “it was a little surprise prepared for me by my steward, and cost me — well, somewhere about 30,000 francs.” Debray conveyed the count’s reply to the baroness. Poor Danglars looked so crest-fallen and discomfited that Monte Cristo assumed a pitying air towards him. “See,” said the count, “how very ungrateful women are. Your kind attention, in providing for the safety of the baroness by disposing of the horses, does not seem to have made the least impression on her. But so it is; a woman will often, from mere wilfulness, prefer that which is dangerous to that which is safe. Therefore, in my opinion, my dear baron, the best and easiest way is to leave them to their fancies, and allow them to act as they please, and then, if any mischief follows, why, at least, they have no one to blame but themselves.” Danglars made no reply; he was occupied in anticipations of the coming scene between himself and the baroness, whose frowning brow, like that of Olympic Jove, predicted a storm. Debray, who perceived the gathering clouds, and felt no desire to witness the explosion of Madame Danglars’ rage, suddenly recollected an appointment, which compelled him to take his leave; while Monte Cristo, unwilling by prolonging his stay to destroy the advantages he hoped to obtain, made a farewell bow and departed, leaving Danglars to endure the angry reproaches of his wife.

“Excellent,” murmured Monte Cristo to himself, as he came away. “All has gone according to my wishes. The domestic peace of this family is henceforth in my hands. Now, then, to play another master-stroke, by which I shall gain the heart of both husband and wife — delightful! Still,” added he, “amid all this, I have not yet been presented to Mademoiselle Eugenie Danglars, whose acquaintance I should have been glad to make. But,” he went on with his peculiar smile, “I am here in Paris, and have plenty of time before me — by and by will do for that.” With these reflections he entered his carriage and returned home. Two hours afterwards, Madame Danglars received a most flattering epistle from the count, in which he entreated her to receive back her favorite “dappled grays,” protesting that he could not endure the idea of making his entry into the Parisian world of fashion with the knowledge that his splendid equipage had been obtained at the price of a lovely woman's regrets. The horses were sent back wearing the same harness she had seen on them in the morning; only, by the count's orders, in the centre of each rosette that adorned either side of their heads, had been fastened a large diamond.

To Danglars Monte Cristo also wrote, requesting him to excuse the whimsical gift of a capricious millionaire, and to beg the baroness to pardon the Eastern fashion adopted in the return of the horses.

During the evening, Monte Cristo quitted Paris for Auteuil, accompanied by Ali. The following day, about three o'clock, a single blow struck on the gong summoned Ali to the presence of the count. "Ali," observed his master, as the Nubian entered the chamber, "you have frequently explained to me how more than commonly skilful you are in throwing the lasso, have you not?" Ali drew himself up proudly, and then returned a sign in the affirmative. "I thought I did not mistake. With your lasso you could stop an ox?" Again Ali repeated his affirmative gesture. "Or a tiger?" Ali bowed his head in token of assent. "A lion even?" Ali sprung forwards, imitating the action of one throwing the lasso, then of a strangled lion.

"I understand," said Monte Cristo; "you wish to tell me you have hunted the lion?" Ali smiled with triumphant pride as he signified that he had indeed both chased and captured many lions. "But do you believe you could arrest the progress of two horses rushing forwards with ungovernable fury?" The Nubian smiled. "It is well," said Monte Cristo. "Then listen to me. Ere long a carriage will dash past here, drawn by the pair of dappled gray horses you saw me with yesterday; now, at the risk of your own life, you must manage to stop those horses before my door."

Ali descended to the street, and marked a straight line on the pavement immediately at the entrance of the house, and then pointed out the line he had traced to the count, who was watching him. The count patted him gently on the shoulder, his usual mode of praising Ali, who, pleased and gratified with the commission assigned him, walked calmly towards a projecting stone forming the angle of the street and house, and, seating himself thereon, began to smoke his chibouque, while Monte Cristo re-entered his dwelling, perfectly assured of the success of his plan. Still, as five o'clock approached, and the carriage was momentarily expected by the count, the indication of more than common impatience and uneasiness might be observed in his manner. He stationed himself in a room commanding a view of the street, pacing the chamber with restless steps, stopping merely to listen from time to time for the sound of approaching wheels, then to cast an anxious glance on Ali; but the regularity with which the Nubian puffed forth the smoke of his chibouque proved that he at least was wholly absorbed in the enjoyment of his favorite occupation. Suddenly a distant sound of rapidly advancing wheels was heard, and almost immediately a carriage appeared, drawn by a pair of wild, ungovernable horses, while the terrified coachman strove in vain to restrain their furious speed.

In the vehicle was a young woman and a child of about seven or eight clasped in each other's arms. Terror seemed to have deprived them even of the power of uttering a cry. The carriage creaked and rattled as it flew over the rough stones, and the slightest obstacle under the wheels would have caused disaster; but it kept on in the middle of the road, and those who saw it pass uttered cries of terror.

Ali suddenly cast aside his chibouque, drew the lasso from his pocket, threw it so skilfully as to catch the forelegs of the near horse in its triple fold, and suffered himself to be dragged on for a few steps by the violence of the shock, then the animal fell over on the pole, which snapped, and therefore prevented the other horse from pursuing its way. Gladly availing himself of this opportunity, the coachman leaped from his box; but Ali had promptly seized the nostrils of the second horse, and held them in his iron grasp, till the beast, snorting with pain, sunk beside his companion. All this was achieved in much less time than is occupied in the recital. The brief space had, however, been sufficient for a man, followed by a number of servants, to rush from the house before which the accident had occurred, and, as the coachman opened the door of the carriage, to take from it a lady who was convulsively grasping the cushions with one hand, while with the other she pressed to her bosom the young boy, who had lost consciousness.

Monte Cristo carried them both to the salon, and deposited them on a sofa. "Compose yourself, madame," said he; "all danger is over." The woman looked up at these words, and, with a glance far more expressive than any entreaties could have been, pointed to her child, who still continued insensible. "I understand the nature of your alarms, madame," said the count, carefully examining the child, "but I assure you there is not the slightest occasion for uneasiness; your little charge has not received the least injury; his insensibility is merely the effects of terror, and will soon pass.”

“Are you quite sure you do not say so to tranquillize my fears? See how deadly pale he is! My child, my darling Edward; speak to your mother — open your dear eyes and look on me once again! Oh, sir, in pity send for a physician; my whole fortune shall not be thought too much for the recovery of my boy.”

With a calm smile and a gentle wave of the hand, Monte Cristo signed to the distracted mother to lay aside her apprehensions; then, opening a casket that stood near, he drew forth a phial of Bohemian glass incrusted with gold, containing a liquid of the color of blood, of which he let fall a single drop on the child’s lips. Scarcely had it reached them, ere the boy, though still pale as marble, opened his eyes, and eagerly gazed around him. At this, the delight of the mother was almost frantic. “Where am I?” exclaimed she; “and to whom am I indebted for so happy a termination to my late dreadful alarm?”

“Madame,” answered the count, “you are under the roof of one who esteems himself most fortunate in having been able to save you from a further continuance of your sufferings.”

“My wretched curiosity has brought all this about,” pursued the lady. “All Paris rung with the praises of Madame Danglars’ beautiful horses, and I had the folly to desire to know whether they really merited the high praise given to them.”

“Is it possible,” exclaimed the count with well-feigned astonishment, “that these horses belong to the baroness?”

“They do, indeed. May I inquire if you are acquainted with Madame Danglars?”

“I have that honor; and my happiness at your escape from the danger that threatened you is redoubled by the consciousness that I have been the unwilling and the unintentional cause of all the peril you have incurred. I yesterday purchased these horses of the baron; but as the baroness evidently regretted parting with them, I ventured to send them back to her, with a request that she would gratify me by accepting them from my hands.”

“You are, then, doubtless, the Count of Monte Cristo, of whom Hermine has talked to me so much?”

“You have rightly guessed, madame,” replied the count.

"And I am Madame Heloise de Villefort." The count bowed with the air of a person who hears a name for the first time. "How grateful will M. de Villefort be for all your goodness; how thankfully will he acknowledge that to you alone he owes the existence of his wife and child! Most certainly, but for the prompt assistance of your intrepid servant, this dear child and myself must both have perished."

"Indeed, I still shudder at the fearful danger you were placed in."

"I trust you will allow me to recompense worthily the devotion of your man."

"I beseech you, madame," replied Monte Cristo "not to spoil Ali, either by too great praise or rewards. I cannot allow him to acquire the habit of expecting to be recompensed for every trifling service he may render. Ali is my slave, and in saving your life he was but discharging his duty to me."

"Nay," interposed Madame de Villefort, on whom the authoritative style adopted by the count made a deep impression, "nay, but consider that to preserve my life he has risked his own."

"His life, madame, belongs not to him; it is mine, in return for my having myself saved him from death." Madame de Villefort made no further reply; her mind was utterly absorbed in the contemplation of the person who, from the first instant she saw him, had made so powerful an impression on her. During the evident preoccupation of Madame de Villefort, Monte Cristo scrutinized the features and appearance of the boy she kept folded in her arms, lavishing on him the most tender endearments. The child was small for his age, and unnaturally pale. A mass of straight black hair, defying all attempts to train or curl it, fell over his projecting forehead, and hung down to his shoulders, giving increased vivacity to eyes already sparkling with a youthful love of mischief and fondness for every forbidden enjoyment. His mouth was large, and the lips, which had not yet regained their color, were particularly thin; in fact, the deep and crafty look, giving a predominant expression to the child's face, belonged rather to a boy of twelve or fourteen than to one so young. His first movement was to free himself by a violent push from the encircling arms of his mother, and to rush forward to the casket from whence the count had taken the phial of elixir; then, without asking permission of any one, he proceeded, in all the wilfulness of a spoiled child unaccustomed to restrain either whims or caprices, to pull the corks out of all the bottles.

“Touch nothing, my little friend,” cried the count eagerly; “some of those liquids are not only dangerous to taste, but even to inhale.”

Madame de Villefort became very pale, and, seizing her son’s arm, drew him anxiously toward her; but, once satisfied of his safety, she also cast a brief but expressive glance on the casket, which was not lost upon the count. At this moment Ali entered. At sight of him Madame de Villefort uttered an expression of pleasure, and, holding the child still closer towards her, she said, “Edward, dearest, do you see that good man? He has shown very great courage and resolution, for he exposed his own life to stop the horses that were running away with us, and would certainly have dashed the carriage to pieces. Thank him, then, my child, in your very best manner; for, had he not come to our aid, neither you nor I would have been alive to speak our thanks.” The child stuck out his lips and turned away his head in a disdainful manner, saying, “He’s too ugly.”

The count smiled as if the child bade fair to realize his hopes, while Madame de Villefort reprimanded her son with a gentleness and moderation very far from conveying the least idea of a fault having been committed. “This lady,” said the Count, speaking to Ali in the Arabic language, “is desirous that her son should thank you for saving both their lives; but the boy refuses, saying you are too ugly.” Ali turned his intelligent countenance towards the boy, on whom he gazed without any apparent emotion; but the spasmodic working of the nostrils showed to the practiced eye of Monte Cristo that the Arab had been wounded to the heart.

“Will you permit me to inquire,” said Madame de Villefort, as she arose to take her leave, “whether you usually reside here?”

“No, I do not,” replied Monte Cristo; “it is a small place I have purchased quite lately. My place of abode is No. 30, Avenue des Champs Elysees; but I see you have quite recovered from your fright, and are, no doubt, desirous of returning home. Anticipating your wishes, I have desired the same horses you came with to be put to one of my carriages, and Ali, he whom you think so very ugly,” continued he, addressing the boy with a smiling air, “will have the honor of driving you home, while your coachman remains here to attend to the necessary repairs of your calash. As soon as that important business is concluded, I will have a pair of my own horses harnessed to convey it direct to Madame Danglars.”

“I dare not return with those dreadful horses,” said Madame de Villefort.

“You will see,” replied Monte Cristo, “that they will be as different as possible in the hands of Ali. With him they will be gentle and docile as lambs.” Ali had, indeed, given proof of this; for, approaching the animals, who had been got upon their legs with considerable difficulty, he rubbed their foreheads and nostrils with a sponge soaked in aromatic vinegar, and wiped off the sweat and foam that covered their mouths. Then, commencing a loud whistling noise, he rubbed them well all over their bodies for several minutes; then, undisturbed by the noisy crowd collected round the broken carriage, Ali quietly harnessed the pacified animals to the count’s chariot, took the reins in his hands, and mounted the box, when to the utter astonishment of those who had witnessed the ungovernable spirit and maddened speed of the same horses, he was actually compelled to apply his whip in no very gentle manner before he could induce them to start; and even then all that could be obtained from the celebrated “dappled grays,” now changed into a couple of dull, sluggish, stupid brutes, was a slow, pottering pace, kept up with so much difficulty that Madame de Villefort was more than two hours returning to her residence in the Faubourg St. Honore.

Scarcely had the first congratulations upon her marvellous escape been gone through when she wrote the following letter to Madame Danglars: —

Dear Hermine, — I have just had a wonderful escape from the most imminent danger, and I owe my safety to the very Count of Monte Cristo we were talking about yesterday, but whom I little expected to see to-day. I remember how unmercifully I laughed at what I considered your eulogistic and exaggerated praises of him; but I have now ample cause to admit that your enthusiastic description of this wonderful man fell far short of his merits. Your horses got as far as Ranelagh, when they darted forward like mad things, and galloped away at so fearful a rate, that there seemed no other prospect for myself and my poor Edward but that of being dashed to pieces against the first object that impeded their progress, when a strange-looking man, — an Arab, a negro, or a Nubian, at least a black of some nation or other — at a signal from the count, whose domestic he is, suddenly seized and stopped the infuriated animals, even at the risk of being trampled to death himself; and certainly he must have had a most wonderful escape. The count then hastened to us, and took us into his house, where he speedily recalled my poor Edward to life. He sent us home in his own carriage. Yours will be returned to you to-morrow. You will find your horses in bad condition, from the results of this accident; they seem thoroughly stupefied, as if sulky and vexed at having been conquered by man. The count, however, has commissioned me to assure you that two or three days' rest, with plenty of barley for their sole food during that time, will bring them back to as fine, that is as terrifying, a condition as they were in yesterday. Adieu! I cannot return you many thanks for the drive of yesterday; but, after all, I ought not to blame you for the misconduct of your horses, more especially as it procured me the pleasure of an introduction to the Count of Monte Cristo, — and certainly that illustrious personage, apart from the millions he is said to be so very anxious to dispose of, seemed to me one of those curiously interesting problems I, for one, delight in solving at any risk, even if it were to necessitate another drive to the Bois behind your horses. Edward endured the accident with miraculous courage — he did not utter a single cry, but fell lifeless into my arms; nor did a tear fall from his eyes after it was over. I doubt not you will consider these praises the result of blind maternal affection, but there is a soul of iron in that delicate, fragile body. Valentine sends many affectionate remembrances to your dear Eugenie. I embrace you with all my heart.

Heloise de Villefort.

P.S. — Do pray contrive some means for me to meet the Count of Monte Cristo at your house. I must and will see him again. I have just made M. de Villefort promise to call on him, and I hope the visit will be returned.

That night the adventure at Auteuil was talked of everywhere. Albert related it to his mother; Chateau-Renaud recounted it at the Jockey Club, and Debray detailed it at length in the salons of the minister; even Beauchamp accorded twenty lines in his journal to the relation of the count's courage and gallantry, thereby celebrating him as the greatest hero of the day in the eyes of all the feminine members of the aristocracy. Vast was the crowd of visitors and inquiring friends who left their names at the residence of Madame de Villefort, with the design of renewing their visit at the right moment, of hearing from her lips all the interesting circumstances of this most romantic adventure. As for M. de Villefort, he fulfilled the predictions of Heloise to the letter, — donned his dress suit, drew on a pair of white gloves, ordered the servants to attend the carriage dressed in their full livery, and drove that same night to No. 30 in the Avenue des Champs-Elysees.

Chapter 48

Ideology.

If the Count of Monte Cristo had been for a long time familiar with the ways of Parisian society, he would have appreciated better the significance of the step which M. de Villefort had taken. Standing well at court, whether the king regnant was of the older or younger branch, whether the government was doctrinaire liberal, or conservative; looked upon by all as a man of talent, since those who have never experienced a political check are generally so regarded; hated by many, but warmly supported by others, without being really liked by anybody, M. de Villefort held a high position in the magistracy, and maintained his eminence like a Harlay or a Mole. His drawing-room, under the regenerating influence of a young wife and a daughter by his first marriage, scarcely eighteen, was still one of the well-regulated Paris salons where the worship of traditional customs and the observance of rigid etiquette were carefully maintained. A freezing politeness, a strict fidelity to government principles, a profound contempt for theories and theorists, a deep-seated hatred of ideality, — these were the elements of private and public life displayed by M. de Villefort.

He was not only a magistrate, he was almost a diplomatist. His relations with the former court, of which he always spoke with dignity and respect, made him respected by the new one, and he knew so many things, that not only was he always carefully considered, but sometimes consulted. Perhaps this would not have been so had it been possible to get rid of M. de Villefort; but, like the feudal barons who rebelled against their sovereign, he dwelt in an impregnable fortress. This fortress was his post as king's attorney, all the advantages of which he exploited with marvellous skill, and which he would not have resigned but to be made deputy, and thus to replace neutrality by opposition. Ordinarily M. de Villefort made and returned very few visits. His wife visited for him, and this was the received thing in the world, where the weighty and multifarious occupations of the magistrate were accepted as an excuse for what was really only calculated pride, a manifestation of professed superiority — in fact, the application of the axiom, “Pretend to think well of yourself, and the world will think well of you,” an axiom a hundred times more useful in society nowadays than that of the Greeks, “Know thyself,” a knowledge for which, in our days, we have substituted the less difficult and more advantageous science of knowing others.

To his friends M. de Villefort was a powerful protector; to his enemies, he was a silent, but bitter opponent; for those who were neither the one nor the other, he was a statue of the law-made man. He had a haughty bearing, a look either steady and impenetrable or insolently piercing and inquisitorial. Four successive revolutions had built and cemented the pedestal upon which his fortune was based. M. de Villefort had the reputation of being the least curious and the least wearisome man in France. He gave a ball every year, at which he appeared for a quarter of an hour only, — that is to say, five and forty minutes less than the king is visible at his balls. He was never seen at the theatres, at concerts, or in any place of public resort. Occasionally, but seldom, he played at whist, and then care was taken to select partners worthy of him — sometimes they were ambassadors, sometimes archbishops, or sometimes a prince, or a president, or some dowager duchess. Such was the man whose carriage had just now stopped before the Count of Monte Cristo’s door. The valet de chambre announced M. de Villefort at the moment when the count, leaning over a large table, was tracing on a map the route from St. Petersburg to China.

The procureur entered with the same grave and measured step he would have employed in entering a court of justice. He was the same man, or rather the development of the same man, whom we have heretofore seen as assistant attorney at Marseilles. Nature, according to her way, had made no deviation in the path he had marked out for himself. From being slender he had now become meagre; once pale, he was now yellow; his deep-set eyes were hollow, and the gold spectacles shielding his eyes seemed to be an integral portion of his face. He dressed entirely in black, with the exception of his white tie, and his funeral appearance was only mitigated by the slight line of red ribbon which passed almost imperceptibly through his button-hole, and appeared like a streak of blood traced with a delicate brush. Although master of himself, Monte Cristo, scrutinized with irrepressible curiosity the magistrate whose salute he returned, and who, distrustful by habit, and especially incredulous as to social prodigies, was much more despised to look upon “the noble stranger,” as Monte Cristo was already called, as an adventurer in search of new fields, or an escaped criminal, rather than as a prince of the Holy See, or a sultan of the Thousand and One Nights.

"Sir," said Villefort, in the squeaky tone assumed by magistrates in their oratorical periods, and of which they cannot, or will not, divest themselves in society, "sir, the signal service which you yesterday rendered to my wife and son has made it a duty for me to offer you my thanks. I have come, therefore, to discharge this duty, and to express to you my overwhelming gratitude." And as he said this, the "eye severe" of the magistrate had lost nothing of its habitual arrogance. He spoke in a voice of the procureur-general, with the rigid inflexibility of neck and shoulders which caused his flatterers to say (as we have before observed) that he was the living statue of the law.

"Monsieur," replied the count, with a chilling air, "I am very happy to have been the means of preserving a son to his mother, for they say that the sentiment of maternity is the most holy of all; and the good fortune which occurred to me, monsieur, might have enabled you to dispense with a duty which, in its discharge, confers an undoubtedly great honor; for I am aware that M. de Villefort is not usually lavish of the favor which he now bestows on me, — a favor which, however estimable, is unequal to the satisfaction which I have in my own consciousness." Villefort, astonished at this reply, which he by no means expected, started like a soldier who feels the blow levelled at him over the armor he wears, and a curl of his disdainful lip indicated that from that moment he noted in the tablets of his brain that the Count of Monte Cristo was by no means a highly bred gentleman. He glanced around, in order to seize on something on which the conversation might turn, and seemed to fall easily on a topic. He saw the map which Monte Cristo had been examining when he entered, and said, "You seem geographically engaged, sir? It is a rich study for you, who, as I learn, have seen as many lands as are delineated on this map."

"Yes, sir," replied the count; "I have sought to make of the human race, taken in the mass, what you practice every day on individuals — a physiological study. I have believed it was much easier to descend from the whole to a part than to ascend from a part to the whole. It is an algebraic axiom, which makes us proceed from a known to an unknown quantity, and not from an unknown to a known; but sit down, sir, I beg of you."

Monte Cristo pointed to a chair, which the procureur was obliged to take the trouble to move forwards himself, while the count merely fell back into his own, on which he had been kneeling when M. Villefort entered. Thus the count was halfway turned towards his visitor, having his back towards the window, his elbow resting on the geographical chart which furnished the theme of conversation for the moment, — a conversation which assumed, as in the case of the interviews with Danglars and Morcerf, a turn analogous to the persons, if not to the situation. "Ah, you philosophize," replied Villefort, after a moment's silence, during which, like a wrestler who encounters a powerful opponent, he took breath; "well, sir, really, if, like you, I had nothing else to do, I should seek a more amusing occupation."

"Why, in truth, sir," was Monte Cristo's reply, "man is but an ugly caterpillar for him who studies him through a solar microscope; but you said, I think, that I had nothing else to do. Now, really, let me ask, sir, have you? — do you believe you have anything to do? or to speak in plain terms, do you really think that what you do deserves being called anything?"

Villefort's astonishment redoubled at this second thrust so forcibly made by his strange adversary. It was a long time since the magistrate had heard a paradox so strong, or rather, to say the truth more exactly, it was the first time he had ever heard of it. The procureur exerted himself to reply. "Sir," he responded, "you are a stranger, and I believe you say yourself that a portion of your life has been spent in Oriental countries, so you are not aware how human justice, so expeditious in barbarous countries, takes with us a prudent and well-studied course."

"Oh, yes — yes, I do, sir; it is the pede claudo of the ancients. I know all that, for it is with the justice of all countries especially that I have occupied myself — it is with the criminal procedure of all nations that I have compared natural justice, and I must say, sir, that it is the law of primitive nations, that is, the law of retaliation, that I have most frequently found to be according to the law of God."

"If this law were adopted, sir," said the procureur, "it would greatly simplify our legal codes, and in that case the magistrates would not (as you just observed) have much to do."

"It may, perhaps, come to this in time," observed Monte Cristo; "you know that human inventions march from the complex to the simple, and simplicity is always perfection."

"In the meanwhile," continued the magistrate, "our codes are in full force, with all their contradictory enactments derived from Gallic customs, Roman laws, and Frank usages; the knowledge of all which, you will agree, is not to be acquired without extended labor; it needs tedious study to acquire this knowledge, and, when acquired, a strong power of brain to retain it."

"I agree with you entirely, sir; but all that even you know with respect to the French code, I know, not only in reference to that code, but as regards the codes of all nations. The English, Turkish, Japanese, Hindu laws, are as familiar to me as the French laws, and thus I was right, when I said to you, that relatively (you know that everything is relative, sir) — that relatively to what I have done, you have very little to do; but that relatively to all I have learned, you have yet a great deal to learn."

"But with what motive have you learned all this?" inquired Villefort, in astonishment. Monte Cristo smiled. "Really, sir," he observed, "I see that in spite of the reputation which you have acquired as a superior man, you look at everything from the material and vulgar view of society, beginning with man, and ending with man — that is to say, in the most restricted, most narrow view which it is possible for human understanding to embrace."

"Pray, sir, explain yourself," said Villefort, more and more astonished, "I really do — not — understand you — perfectly."

"I say, sir, that with the eyes fixed on the social organization of nations, you see only the springs of the machine, and lose sight of the sublime workman who makes them act; I say that you do not recognize before you and around you any but those office-holders whose commissions have been signed by a minister or king; and that the men whom God has put above those office-holders, ministers, and kings, by giving them a mission to follow out, instead of a post to fill — I say that they escape your narrow, limited field of observation. It is thus that human weakness fails, from its debilitated and imperfect organs. Tobias took the angel who restored him to light for an ordinary young man. The nations took Attila, who was doomed to destroy them, for a conqueror similar to other conquerors, and it was necessary for both to reveal their missions, that they might be known and acknowledged; one was compelled to say, 'I am the angel of the Lord'; and the other, 'I am the hammer of God,' in order that the divine essence in both might be revealed."

“Then,” said Villefort, more and more amazed, and really supposing he was speaking to a mystic or a madman, “you consider yourself as one of those extraordinary beings whom you have mentioned?”

“And why not?” said Monte Cristo coldly.

“Your pardon, sir,” replied Villefort, quite astounded, “but you will excuse me if, when I presented myself to you, I was unaware that I should meet with a person whose knowledge and understanding so far surpass the usual knowledge and understanding of men. It is not usual with us corrupted wretches of civilization to find gentlemen like yourself, possessors, as you are, of immense fortune — at least, so it is said — and I beg you to observe that I do not inquire, I merely repeat; — it is not usual, I say, for such privileged and wealthy beings to waste their time in speculations on the state of society, in philosophical reveries, intended at best to console those whom fate has disinherited from the goods of this world.”

“Really, sir,” retorted the count, “have you attained the eminent situation in which you are, without having admitted, or even without having met with exceptions? and do you never use your eyes, which must have acquired so much finesse and certainty, to divine, at a glance, the kind of man by whom you are confronted? Should not a magistrate be not merely the best administrator of the law, but the most crafty expounder of the chicanery of his profession, a steel probe to search hearts, a touchstone to try the gold which in each soul is mingled with more or less of alloy?”

“Sir,” said Villefort, “upon my word, you overcome me. I really never heard a person speak as you do.”

“Because you remain eternally encircled in a round of general conditions, and have never dared to raise your wings into those upper spheres which God has peopled with invisible or exceptional beings.”

“And you allow then, sir, that spheres exist, and that these marked and invisible beings mingle amongst us?”

“Why should they not? Can you see the air you breathe, and yet without which you could not for a moment exist?”

“Then we do not see those beings to whom you allude?”

“Yes, we do; you see them whenever God pleases to allow them to assume a material form. You touch them, come in contact with them, speak to them, and they reply to you.”

"Ah," said Villefort, smiling, "I confess I should like to be warned when one of these beings is in contact with me."

"You have been served as you desire, monsieur, for you were warned just now, and I now again warn you."

"Then you yourself are one of these marked beings?"

"Yes, monsieur, I believe so; for until now, no man has found himself in a position similar to mine. The dominions of kings are limited either by mountains or rivers, or a change of manners, or an alteration of language. My kingdom is bounded only by the world, for I am not an Italian, or a Frenchman, or a Hindu, or an American, or a Spaniard — I am a cosmopolite. No country can say it saw my birth. God alone knows what country will see me die. I adopt all customs, speak all languages. You believe me to be a Frenchman, for I speak French with the same facility and purity as yourself. Well, Ali, my Nubian, believes me to be an Arab; Bertuccio, my steward, takes me for a Roman; Haidee, my slave, thinks me a Greek. You may, therefore, comprehend, that being of no country, asking no protection from any government, acknowledging no man as my brother, not one of the scruples that arrest the powerful, or the obstacles which paralyze the weak, paralyzes or arrests me. I have only two adversaries — I will not say two conquerors, for with perseverance I subdue even them, — they are time and distance. There is a third, and the most terrible — that is my condition as a mortal being. This alone can stop me in my onward career, before I have attained the goal at which I aim, for all the rest I have reduced to mathematical terms. What men call the chances of fate — namely, ruin, change, circumstances — I have fully anticipated, and if any of these should overtake me, yet it will not overwhelm me. Unless I die, I shall always be what I am, and therefore it is that I utter the things you have never heard, even from the mouths of kings — for kings have need, and other persons have fear of you. For who is there who does not say to himself, in a society as incongruously organized as ours, 'Perhaps some day I shall have to do with the king's attorney'?"

"But can you not say that, sir? The moment you become an inhabitant of France, you are naturally subjected to the French law."

"I know it sir," replied Monte Cristo; "but when I visit a country I begin to study, by all the means which are available, the men from whom I may have anything to hope or to fear, till I know them as well as, perhaps better than, they know themselves. It follows from this, that the king's attorney, be he who he may, with whom I should have to deal, would assuredly be more embarrassed than I should.”

“That is to say,” replied Villefort with hesitation, “that human nature being weak, every man, according to your creed, has committed faults.”

“Faults or crimes,” responded Monte Cristo with a negligent air.

“And that you alone, amongst the men whom you do not recognize as your brothers — for you have said so,” observed Villefort in a tone that faltered somewhat — ”you alone are perfect.”

“No, not perfect,” was the count’s reply; “only impenetrable, that’s all. But let us leave off this strain, sir, if the tone of it is displeasing to you; I am no more disturbed by your justice than are you by my second-sight.”

“No, no, — by no means,” said Villefort, who was afraid of seeming to abandon his ground. “No; by your brilliant and almost sublime conversation you have elevated me above the ordinary level; we no longer talk, we rise to dissertation. But you know how the theologians in their collegiate chairs, and philosophers in their controversies, occasionally say cruel truths; let us suppose for the moment that we are theologizing in a social way, or even philosophically, and I will say to you, rude as it may seem, ‘My brother, you sacrifice greatly to pride; you may be above others, but above you there is God.’“

“Above us all, sir,” was Monte Cristo’s response, in a tone and with an emphasis so deep that Villefort involuntarily shuddered. “I have my pride for men — serpents always ready to threaten every one who would pass without crushing them under foot. But I lay aside that pride before God, who has taken me from nothing to make me what I am.”

“Then, count, I admire you,” said Villefort, who, for the first time in this strange conversation, used the aristocratic form to the unknown personage, whom, until now, he had only called monsieur. “Yes, and I say to you, if you are really strong, really superior, really pious, or impenetrable, which you were right in saying amounts to the same thing — then be proud, sir, for that is the characteristic of predominance. Yet you have unquestionably some ambition.”

“I have, sir.”

“And what may it be?”

“I too, as happens to every man once in his life, have been taken by Satan into the highest mountain in the earth, and when there he showed me all the kingdoms of the world, and as he said before, so said he to me, ‘Child of earth, what wouldst thou have to make thee adore me?’ I reflected long, for a gnawing ambition had long preyed upon me, and then I replied, ‘Listen, — I have always heard of providence, and yet I have never seen him, or anything that resembles him, or which can make me believe that he exists. I wish to be providence myself, for I feel that the most beautiful, noblest, most sublime thing in the world, is to recompense and punish.’ Satan bowed his head, and groaned. ‘You mistake,’ he said, ‘providence does exist, only you have never seen him, because the child of God is as invisible as the parent. You have seen nothing that resembles him, because he works by secret springs, and moves by hidden ways. All I can do for you is to make you one of the agents of that providence.’ The bargain was concluded. I may sacrifice my soul, but what matters it?” added Monte Cristo. “If the thing were to do again, I would again do it.” Villefort looked at Monte Cristo with extreme amazement. “Count,” he inquired, “have you any relations?”

“No, sir, I am alone in the world.”

“So much the worse.”

“Why?” asked Monte Cristo.

“Because then you might witness a spectacle calculated to break down your pride. You say you fear nothing but death?”

“I did not say that I feared it; I only said that death alone could check the execution of my plans.”

“And old age?”

“My end will be achieved before I grow old.”

“And madness?”

“I have been nearly mad; and you know the axiom, — non bis in idem. It is an axiom of criminal law, and, consequently, you understand its full application.”

“Sir,” continued Villefort, “there is something to fear besides death, old age, and madness. For instance, there is apoplexy — that lightning-stroke which strikes but does not destroy you, and yet which brings everything to an end. You are still yourself as now, and yet you are yourself no longer; you who, like Ariel, verge on the angelic, are but an inert mass, which, like Caliban, verges on the brutal; and this is called in human tongues, as I tell you, neither more nor less than apoplexy. Come, if so you will, count, and continue this conversation at my house, any day you may be willing to see an adversary capable of understanding and anxious to refute you, and I will show you my father, M. Noirtier de Villefort, one of the most fiery Jacobins of the French Revolution; that is to say, he had the most remarkable audacity, seconded by a most powerful organization — a man who has not, perhaps, like yourself seen all the kingdoms of the earth, but who has helped to overturn one of the greatest; in fact, a man who believed himself, like you, one of the envoys, not of God, but of a supreme being; not of providence, but of fate. Well, sir, the rupture of a blood-vessel on the lobe of the brain has destroyed all this, not in a day, not in an hour, but in a second. M. Noirtier, who, on the previous night, was the old Jacobin, the old senator, the old Carbonaro, laughing at the guillotine, the cannon, and the dagger — M. Noirtier, playing with revolutions — M. Noirtier, for whom France was a vast chess-board, from which pawns, rooks, knights, and queens were to disappear, so that the king was checkmated — M. Noirtier, the redoubtable, was the next morning 'poor M. Noirtier,' the helpless old man, at the tender mercies of the weakest creature in the household, that is, his grandchild, Valentine; a dumb and frozen carcass, in fact, living painlessly on, that time may be given for his frame to decompose without his consciousness of its decay."

"Alas, sir," said Monte Cristo "this spectacle is neither strange to my eye nor my thought. I am something of a physician, and have, like my fellows, sought more than once for the soul in living and in dead matter; yet, like providence, it has remained invisible to my eyes, although present to my heart. A hundred writers since Socrates, Seneca, St. Augustine, and Gall, have made, in verse and prose, the comparison you have made, and yet I can well understand that a father's sufferings may effect great changes in the mind of a son. I will call on you, sir, since you bid me contemplate, for the advantage of my pride, this terrible spectacle, which must have been so great a source of sorrow to your family."

"It would have been so unquestionably, had not God given me so large a compensation. In contrast with the old man, who is dragging his way to the tomb, are two children just entering into life — Valentine, the daughter by my first wife — Mademoiselle Renee de Saint-Meran — and Edward, the boy whose life you have this day saved."

"And what is your deduction from this compensation, sir?" inquired Monte Cristo.

"My deduction is," replied Villefort, "that my father, led away by his passions, has committed some fault unknown to human justice, but marked by the justice of God. That God, desirous in his mercy to punish but one person, has visited this justice on him alone.” Monte Cristo with a smile on his lips, uttered in the depths of his soul a groan which would have made Villefort fly had he but heard it. “Adieu, sir,” said the magistrate, who had risen from his seat; “I leave you, bearing a remembrance of you — a remembrance of esteem, which I hope will not be disagreeable to you when you know me better; for I am not a man to bore my friends, as you will learn. Besides, you have made an eternal friend of Madame de Villefort.” The count bowed, and contented himself with seeing Villefort to the door of his cabinet, the procureur being escorted to his carriage by two footmen, who, on a signal from their master, followed him with every mark of attention. When he had gone, Monte Cristo breathed a profound sigh, and said, — ”Enough of this poison, let me now seek the antidote.” Then sounding his bell, he said to Ali, who entered, “I am going to madam’s chamber — have the carriage ready at one o’clock.”

Chapter 49

Haidee.

It will be recollected that the new, or rather old, acquaintances of the Count of Monte Cristo, residing in the Rue Meslay, were no other than Maximilian, Julie, and Emmanuel. The very anticipations of delight to be enjoyed in his forthcoming visits — the bright, pure gleam of heavenly happiness it diffused over the almost deadly warfare in which he had voluntarily engaged, illumined his whole countenance with a look of ineffable joy and calmness, as, immediately after Villefort's departure, his thoughts flew back to the cheering prospect before him, of tasting, at least, a brief respite from the fierce and stormy passions of his mind. Even Ali, who had hastened to obey the Count's summons, went forth from his master's presence in charmed amazement at the unusual animation and pleasure depicted on features ordinarily so stern and cold; while, as though dreading to put to flight the agreeable ideas hovering over his patron's meditations, whatever they were, the faithful Nubian walked on tiptoe towards the door, holding his breath, lest its faintest sound should dissipate his master's happy reverie.

It was noon, and Monte Cristo had set apart one hour to be passed in the apartments of Haidee, as though his oppressed spirit could not all at once admit the feeling of pure and unmixed joy, but required a gradual succession of calm and gentle emotions to prepare his mind to receive full and perfect happiness, in the same manner as ordinary natures demand to be inured by degrees to the reception of strong or violent sensations. The young Greek, as we have already said, occupied apartments wholly unconnected with those of the count. The rooms had been fitted up in strict accordance with Oriental ideas; the floors were covered with the richest carpets Turkey could produce; the walls hung with brocaded silk of the most magnificent designs and texture; while around each chamber luxurious divans were placed, with piles of soft and yielding cushions, that needed only to be arranged at the pleasure or convenience of such as sought repose. Haidee and three French maids, and one who was a Greek. The first three remained constantly in a small waiting-room, ready to obey the summons of a small golden bell, or to receive the orders of the Romaic slave, who knew just enough French to be able to transmit her mistress's wishes to the three other waiting-women; the latter had received most peremptory instructions from Monte Cristo to treat Haidee with all the deference they would observe to a queen.

The young girl herself generally passed her time in the chamber at the farther end of her apartments. This was a sort of boudoir, circular, and lighted only from the roof, which consisted of rose-colored glass. Haidee was reclining upon soft downy cushions, covered with blue satin spotted with silver; her head, supported by one of her exquisitely moulded arms, rested on the divan immediately behind her, while the other was employed in adjusting to her lips the coral tube of a rich narghile, through whose flexible pipe she drew the smoke fragrant by its passage through perfumed water. Her attitude, though perfectly natural for an Eastern woman would, in a European, have been deemed too full of coquettish straining after effect. Her dress, which was that of the women of Epirus, consisted of a pair of white satin trousers, embroidered with pink roses, displaying feet so exquisitely formed and so delicately fair, that they might well have been taken for Parian marble, had not the eye been undeceived by their movements as they constantly shifted in and out of a pair of little slippers with upturned toes, beautifully ornamented with gold and pearls. She wore a blue and white-striped vest, with long open sleeves, trimmed with silver loops and buttons of pearls, and a sort of bodice, which, closing only from the centre to the waist, exhibited the whole of the ivory throat and upper part of the bosom; it was fastened with three magnificent diamond clasps. The junction of the bodice and drawers was entirely concealed by one of the many-colored scarfs, whose brilliant hues and rich silken fringe have rendered them so precious in the eyes of Parisian belles. Tilted on one side of her head she had a small cap of gold-colored silk, embroidered with pearls; while on the other a purple rose mingled its glowing colors with the luxuriant masses of her hair, of which the blackness was so intense that it was tinged with blue. The extreme beauty of the countenance, that shone forth in loveliness that mocked the vain attempts of dress to augment it, was peculiarly and purely Grecian; there were the large, dark, melting eyes, the finely formed nose, the coral lips, and pearly teeth, that belonged to her race and country. And, to complete the whole, Haidee was in the very springtide and fulness of youthful charms — she had not yet numbered more than twenty summers.

Monte Cristo summoned the Greek attendant, and bade her inquire whether it would be agreeable to her mistress to receive his visit. Haidee's only reply was to direct her servant by a sign to withdraw the tapestried curtain that hung before the door of her boudoir, the framework of the opening thus made serving as a sort of border to the graceful tableau presented by the young girl's picturesque attitude and appearance. As Monte Cristo approached, she leaned upon the elbow of the arm that held the narghile, and extending to him her other hand, said, with a smile of captivating sweetness, in the sonorous language spoken by the women of Athens and Sparta, "Why demand permission ere you enter? Are you no longer my master, or have I ceased to be your slave?" Monte Cristo returned her smile. "Haidee," said he, "you well know."

"Why do you address me so coldly — so distantly?" asked the young Greek. "Have I by any means displeased you? Oh, if so, punish me as you will; but do not — do not speak to me in tones and manner so formal and constrained."

"Haidee," replied the count, "you know that you are now in France, and are free."

"Free to do what?" asked the young girl.

"Free to leave me."

"Leave you? Why should I leave you?"

"That is not for me to say; but we are now about to mix in society — to visit and be visited."

"I don't wish to see anybody but you."

"And should you see one whom you could prefer, I would not be so unjust" —

"I have never seen any one I preferred to you, and I have never loved any one but you and my father."

"My poor child," replied Monte Cristo, "that is merely because your father and myself are the only men who have ever talked to you."

"I don't want anybody else to talk to me. My father said I was his 'joy' — you style me your 'love,' — and both of you have called me 'my child.'"

"Do you remember your father, Haidee?" The young Greek smiled. "He is here, and here," said she, touching her eyes and her heart. "And where am I?" inquired Monte Cristo laughingly.

“You?” cried she, with tones of thrilling tenderness, “you are everywhere!” Monte Cristo took the delicate hand of the young girl in his, and was about to raise it to his lips, when the simple child of nature hastily withdrew it, and presented her cheek. “You now understand, Haidee,” said the count, “that from this moment you are absolutely free; that here you exercise unlimited sway, and are at liberty to lay aside or continue the costume of your country, as it may suit your inclination. Within this mansion you are absolute mistress of your actions, and may go abroad or remain in your apartments as may seem most agreeable to you. A carriage waits your orders, and Ali and Myrtho will accompany you whithersoever you desire to go. There is but one favor I would entreat of you.”

“Speak.”

“Guard carefully the secret of your birth. Make no allusion to the past; nor upon any occasion be induced to pronounce the names of your illustrious father or ill-fated mother.”

“I have already told you, my lord, that I shall see no one.”

“It is possible, Haidee, that so perfect a seclusion, though conformable with the habits and customs of the East, may not be practicable in Paris. Endeavor, then, to accustom yourself to our manner of living in these northern climes as you did to those of Rome, Florence, Milan, and Madrid; it may be useful to you one of these days, whether you remain here or return to the East.” The young girl raised her tearful eyes towards Monte Cristo as she said with touching earnestness, “Whether we return to the East, you mean to say, my lord, do you not?”

“My child,” returned Monte Cristo “you know full well that whenever we part, it will be no fault or wish of mine; the tree forsakes not the flower — the flower falls from the tree.”

“My lord,” replied Haidee, “I never will leave you, for I am sure I could not exist without you.”

“My poor girl, in ten years I shall be old, and you will be still young.”

“My father had a long white beard, but I loved him; he was sixty years old, but to me he was handsomer than all the fine youths I saw.”

“Then tell me, Haidee, do you believe you shall be able to accustom yourself to our present mode of life?”

“Shall I see you?”

“Every day.”

“Then what do you fear, my lord?”

“You might find it dull.”

“No, my lord. In the morning, I shall rejoice in the prospect of your coming, and in the evening dwell with delight on the happiness I have enjoyed in your presence; then too, when alone, I can call forth mighty pictures of the past, see vast horizons bounded only by the towering mountains of Pindus and Olympus. Oh, believe me, that when three great passions, such as sorrow, love, and gratitude fill the heart, ennui can find no place.”

“You are a worthy daughter of Epirus, Haidee, and your charming and poetical ideas prove well your descent from that race of goddesses who claim your country as their birthplace. Depend on my care to see that your youth is not blighted, or suffered to pass away in ungenial solitude; and of this be well assured, that if you love me as a father, I love you as a child.”

“You are wrong, my lord. The love I have for you is very different from the love I had for my father. My father died, but I did not die. If you were to die, I should die too.” The Count, with a smile of profound tenderness, extended his hand, and she carried it to her lips. Monte Cristo, thus attuned to the interview he proposed to hold with Morrel and his family, departed, murmuring as he went these lines of Pindar, “Youth is a flower of which love is the fruit; happy is he who, after having watched its silent growth, is permitted to gather and call it his own.” The carriage was prepared according to orders, and stepping lightly into it, the count drove off at his usual rapid pace.

Chapter 50

The Morrel Family.

In a very few minutes the count reached No. 7 in the Rue Meslay. The house was of white stone, and in a small court before it were two small beds full of beautiful flowers. In the concierge that opened the gate the count recognized Cocles; but as he had but one eye, and that eye had become somewhat dim in the course of nine years, Cocles did not recognize the count. The carriages that drove up to the door were compelled to turn, to avoid a fountain that played in a basin of rockwork, — an ornament that had excited the jealousy of the whole quarter, and had gained for the place the appellation of "The Little Versailles." It is needless to add that there were gold and silver fish in the basin. The house, with kitchens and cellars below, had above the ground-floor, two stories and attics. The whole of the property, consisting of an immense workshop, two pavilions at the bottom of the garden, and the garden itself, had been purchased by Emmanuel, who had seen at a glance that he could make of it a profitable speculation. He had reserved the house and half the garden, and building a wall between the garden and the workshops, had let them upon lease with the pavilions at the bottom of the garden. So that for a trifling sum he was as well lodged, and as perfectly shut out from observation, as the inhabitants of the finest mansion in the Faubourg St. Germain. The breakfast-room was finished in oak; the salon in mahogany, and the furnishings were of blue velvet; the bedroom was in citronwood and green damask. There was a study for Emmanuel, who never studied, and a music-room for Julie, who never played. The whole of the second story was set apart for Maximilian; it was precisely similar to his sister's apartments, except that for the breakfast-parlor he had a billiard-room, where he received his friends. He was superintending the grooming of his horse, and smoking his cigar at the entrance of the garden, when the count's carriage stopped at the gate.

Cocles opened the gate, and Baptistin, springing from the box, inquired whether Monsieur and Madame Herbault and Monsieur Maximilian Morrel would see his excellency the Count of Monte Cristo. "The Count of Monte

Cristo?” cried Morrel, throwing away his cigar and hastening to the carriage; “I should think we would see him. Ah, a thousand thanks, count, for not having forgotten your promise.” And the young officer shook the count’s hand so warmly, that Monte Cristo could not be mistaken as to the sincerity of his joy, and he saw that he had been expected with impatience, and was received with pleasure. “Come, come,” said Maximilian, “I will serve as your guide; such a man as you are ought not to be introduced by a servant. My sister is in the garden plucking the dead roses; my brother is reading his two papers, the Presse and the Debats, within six steps of her; for wherever you see Madame Herbault, you have only to look within a circle of four yards and you will find M. Emmanuel, and ‘reciprocally,’ as they say at the Polytechnic School.” At the sound of their steps a young woman of twenty to five and twenty, dressed in a silk morning gown, and busily engaged in plucking the dead leaves off a noisette rose-tree, raised her head. This was Julie, who had become, as the clerk of the house of Thomson & French had predicted, Madame Emmanuel Herbault. She uttered a cry of surprise at the sight of a stranger, and Maximilian began to laugh. “Don’t disturb yourself, Julie,” said he. “The count has only been two or three days in Paris, but he already knows what a fashionable woman of the Marais is, and if he does not, you will show him.”

“Ah, monsieur,” returned Julie, “it is treason in my brother to bring you thus, but he never has any regard for his poor sister. Penelon, Penelon!” An old man, who was digging busily at one of the beds, stuck his spade in the earth, and approached, cap in hand, striving to conceal a quid of tobacco he had just thrust into his cheek. A few locks of gray mingled with his hair, which was still thick and matted, while his bronzed features and determined glance well suited an old sailor who had braved the heat of the equator and the storms of the tropics. “I think you hailed me, Mademoiselle Julie?” said he. Penelon had still preserved the habit of calling his master’s daughter “Mademoiselle Julie,” and had never been able to change the name to Madame Herbault. “Penelon,” replied Julie, “go and inform M. Emmanuel of this gentleman’s visit, and Maximilian will conduct him to the salon.” Then, turning to Monte Cristo, — ”I hope you will permit me to leave you for a few minutes,” continued she; and without awaiting any reply, disappeared behind a clump of trees, and escaped to the house by a lateral alley.

“I am sorry to see,” observed Monte Cristo to Morrel, “that I cause no small disturbance in your house.”

“Look there,” said Maximilian, laughing; “there is her husband changing his jacket for a coat. I assure you, you are well known in the Rue Meslay.”

“Your family appears to be a very happy one,” said the count, as if speaking to himself.

“Oh, yes, I assure you, count, they want nothing that can render them happy; they are young and cheerful, they are tenderly attached to each other, and with twenty-five thousand francs a year they fancy themselves as rich as Rothschild.”

“Five and twenty thousand francs is not a large sum, however,” replied Monte Cristo, with a tone so sweet and gentle, that it went to Maximilian’s heart like the voice of a father; “but they will not be content with that. Your brother-in-law is a barrister? a doctor?”

“He was a merchant, monsieur, and had succeeded to the business of my poor father. M. Morrel, at his death, left 500,000 francs, which were divided between my sister and myself, for we were his only children. Her husband, who, when he married her, had no other patrimony than his noble probity, his first-rate ability, and his spotless reputation, wished to possess as much as his wife. He labored and toiled until he had amassed 250,000 francs; six years sufficed to achieve this object. Oh, I assure you, sir, it was a touching spectacle to see these young creatures, destined by their talents for higher stations, toiling together, and through their unwillingness to change any of the customs of their paternal house, taking six years to accomplish what less scrupulous people would have effected in two or three. Marseilles resounded with their well-earned praises. At last, one day, Emmanuel came to his wife, who had just finished making up the accounts. ‘Julie,’ said he to her, ‘Cocles has just given me the last rouleau of a hundred francs; that completes the 250,000 francs we had fixed as the limits of our gains. Can you content yourself with the small fortune which we shall possess for the future? Listen to me. Our house transacts business to the amount of a million a year, from which we derive an income of 40,000 francs. We can dispose of the business, if we please, in an hour, for I have received a letter from M. Delaunay, in which he offers to purchase the good-will of the house, to unite with his own, for 300,000 francs. Advise me what I had better do.’ — ’Emmanuel,’ returned my sister, ‘the house of Morrel can only be carried on by a Morrel. Is it not worth 300,000 francs to save our father’s name from the chances of evil fortune and failure?’ — ’I thought so,’ replied Emmanuel; ‘but I wished to have your advice.’ — ’This is my counsel: — Our accounts are made up and our bills paid; all we have to do is to stop the issue of any more, and close our office.’ This was done instantly. It was three o’clock; at a quarter past, a merchant presented himself to insure two ships; it was a clear profit of 15,000. francs. ‘Monsieur,’ said Emmanuel, ‘have the goodness to address yourself to M. Delaunay. We have quitted business.’ — ’How long?’ inquired the astonished merchant. ‘A quarter of an hour,’ was the reply. And this is the reason, monsieur,” continued Maximilian, “of my sister and brother-in-law having only 25,000 francs a year.”

Maximilian had scarcely finished his story, during which the count’s heart had swelled within him, when Emmanuel entered wearing a hat and coat. He saluted the count with the air of a man who is aware of the rank of his guest; then, after having led Monte Cristo around the little garden, he returned to the house. A large vase of Japan porcelain, filled with flowers that loaded the air with their perfume, stood in the salon. Julie, suitably dressed, and her hair arranged (she had accomplished this feat in less than ten minutes), received the count on his entrance. The songs of the birds were heard in an aviary hard by, and the branches of laburnums and rose acacias formed an exquisite framework to the blue velvet curtains. Everything in this charming retreat, from the warble of the birds to the smile of the mistress, breathed tranquillity and repose. The count had felt the influence of this happiness from the moment he entered the house, and he remained silent and pensive, forgetting that he was expected to renew the conversation, which had ceased after the first salutations had been exchanged. The silence became almost painful when, by a violent effort, tearing himself from his pleasing reverie — ”Madame,” said he at length, “I pray you to excuse my emotion, which must astonish you who are only accustomed to the happiness I meet here; but contentment is so new a sight to me, that I could never be weary of looking at yourself and your husband.”

“We are very happy, monsieur,” replied Julie; “but we have also known unhappiness, and few have ever undergone more bitter sufferings than ourselves.” The Count’s features displayed an expression of the most intense curiosity.

"Oh, all this is a family history, as Chateau-Renaud told you the other day," observed Maximilian. "This humble picture would have but little interest for you, accustomed as you are to behold the pleasures and the misfortunes of the wealthy and industrious; but such as we are, we have experienced bitter sorrows."

"And God has poured balm into your wounds, as he does into those of all who are in affliction?" said Monte Cristo inquiringly.

"Yes, count," returned Julie, "we may indeed say he has, for he has done for us what he grants only to his chosen; he sent us one of his angels." The count's cheeks became scarlet, and he coughed, in order to have an excuse for putting his handkerchief to his mouth. "Those born to wealth, and who have the means of gratifying every wish," said Emmanuel, "know not what is the real happiness of life, just as those who have been tossed on the stormy waters of the ocean on a few frail planks can alone realize the blessings of fair weather."

Monte Cristo rose, and without making any answer (for the tremulousness of his voice would have betrayed his emotion) walked up and down the apartment with a slow step.

"Our magnificence makes you smile, count," said Maximilian, who had followed him with his eyes. "No, no," returned Monte Cristo, pale as death, pressing one hand on his heart to still its throbbings, while with the other he pointed to a crystal cover, beneath which a silken purse lay on a black velvet cushion. "I was wondering what could be the significance of this purse, with the paper at one end and the large diamond at the other."

"Count," replied Maximilian, with an air of gravity, "those are our most precious family treasures."

"The stone seems very brilliant," answered the count.

"Oh, my brother does not allude to its value, although it has been estimated at 100,000 francs; he means, that the articles contained in this purse are the relics of the angel I spoke of just now."

"This I do not comprehend; and yet I may not ask for an explanation, madame," replied Monte Cristo bowing. "Pardon me, I had no intention of committing an indiscretion."

"Indiscretion, — oh, you make us happy by giving us an excuse for expatiating on this subject. If we wanted to conceal the noble action this purse commemorates, we should not expose it thus to view. Oh, would we could relate it everywhere, and to every one, so that the emotion of our unknown benefactor might reveal his presence."

"Ah, really," said Monte Cristo in a half-stifled voice.

"Monsieur," returned Maximilian, raising the glass cover, and respectfully kissing the silken purse, "this has touched the hand of a man who saved my father from suicide, us from ruin, and our name from shame and disgrace, — a man by whose matchless benevolence we poor children, doomed to want and wretchedness, can at present hear every one envying our happy lot. This letter" (as he spoke, Maximilian drew a letter from the purse and gave it to the count) — "this letter was written by him the day that my father had taken a desperate resolution, and this diamond was given by the generous unknown to my sister as her dowry." Monte Cristo opened the letter, and read it with an indescribable feeling of delight. It was the letter written (as our readers know) to Julie, and signed "Sinbad the Sailor." "Unknown you say, is the man who rendered you this service — unknown to you?"

"Yes; we have never had the happiness of pressing his hand," continued Maximilian. "We have supplicated heaven in vain to grant us this favor, but the whole affair has had a mysterious meaning that we cannot comprehend — we have been guided by an invisible hand, — a hand as powerful as that of an enchanter."

"Oh," cried Julie, "I have not lost all hope of some day kissing that hand, as I now kiss the purse which he has touched. Four years ago, Penelon was at Trieste — Penelon, count, is the old sailor you saw in the garden, and who, from quartermaster, has become gardener — Penelon, when he was at Trieste, saw on the quay an Englishman, who was on the point of embarking on board a yacht, and he recognized him as the person who called on my father the fifth of June, 1829, and who wrote me this letter on the fifth of September. He felt convinced of his identity, but he did not venture to address him."

"An Englishman," said Monte Cristo, who grew uneasy at the attention with which Julie looked at him. "An Englishman you say?"

"Yes," replied Maximilian, "an Englishman, who represented himself as the confidential clerk of the house of Thomson & French, at Rome. It was this that made me start when you said the other day, at M. de Morcerf's, that Messrs. Thomson & French were your bankers. That happened, as I told you, in 1829. For God's sake, tell me, did you know this Englishman?"

“But you tell me, also, that the house of Thomson & French have constantly denied having rendered you this service?”

“Yes.”

“Then is it not probable that this Englishman may be some one who, grateful for a kindness your father had shown him, and which he himself had forgotten, has taken this method of requiting the obligation?”

“Everything is possible in this affair, even a miracle.”

“What was his name?” asked Monte Cristo.

“He gave no other name,” answered Julie, looking earnestly at the count, “than that at the end of his letter — ’Sinbad the Sailor.’“

“Which is evidently not his real name, but a fictitious one.”

Then, noticing that Julie was struck with the sound of his voice, —

“Tell me,” continued he, “was he not about my height, perhaps a little taller, with his chin imprisoned, as it were, in a high cravat; his coat closely buttoned up, and constantly taking out his pencil?”

“Oh, do you then know him?” cried Julie, whose eyes sparkled with joy.

“No,” returned Monte Cristo “I only guessed. I knew a Lord Wilmore, who was constantly doing actions of this kind.”

“Without revealing himself?”

“He was an eccentric being, and did not believe in the existence of gratitude.”

“Oh, heaven,” exclaimed Julie, clasping her hands, “in what did he believe, then?”

“He did not credit it at the period which I knew him,” said Monte Cristo, touched to the heart by the accents of Julie’s voice; “but, perhaps, since then he has had proofs that gratitude does exist.”

“And do you know this gentleman, monsieur?” inquired Emmanuel.

“Oh, if you do know him,” cried Julie, “can you tell us where he is — where we can find him? Maximilian — Emmanuel — if we do but discover him, he must believe in the gratitude of the heart!” Monte Cristo felt tears start into his eyes, and he again walked hastily up and down the room.

“In the name of heaven,” said Maximilian, “if you know anything of him, tell us what it is.”

“Alas,” cried Monte Cristo, striving to repress his emotion, “if Lord Wilmore was your unknown benefactor, I fear you will never see him again. I parted from him two years ago at Palermo, and he was then on the point of setting out for the most remote regions; so that I fear he will never return.”

“Oh, monsieur, this is cruel of you,” said Julie, much affected; and the young lady’s eyes swam with tears.

“Madame,” replied Monte Cristo gravely, and gazing earnestly on the two liquid pearls that trickled down Julie’s cheeks, “had Lord Wilmore seen what I now see, he would become attached to life, for the tears you shed would reconcile him to mankind;” and he held out his hand to Julie, who gave him hers, carried away by the look and accent of the count. “But,” continued she, “Lord Wilmore had a family or friends, he must have known some one, can we not — ”

“Oh, it is useless to inquire,” returned the count; “perhaps, after all, he was not the man you seek for. He was my friend: he had no secrets from me, and if this had been so he would have confided in me.”

“And he told you nothing?”

“Not a word.”

“Nothing that would lead you to suppose?”

“Nothing.”

“And yet you spoke of him at once.”

“Ah, in such a case one supposes” —

“Sister, sister,” said Maximilian, coming to the count’s aid, “monsieur is quite right. Recollect what our excellent father so often told us, ‘It was no Englishman that thus saved us.’“ Monte Cristo started. “What did your father tell you, M. Morrel?” said he eagerly.

“My father thought that this action had been miraculously performed — he believed that a benefactor had arisen from the grave to save us. Oh, it was a touching superstition, monsieur, and although I did not myself believe it, I would not for the world have destroyed my father’s faith. How often did he muse over it and pronounce the name of a dear friend — a friend lost to him forever; and on his death-bed, when the near approach of eternity seemed to have illumined his mind with supernatural light, this thought, which had until then been but a doubt, became a conviction, and his last words were, ‘Maximilian, it was Edmond Dantes!’“ At these words the count’s paleness, which had for some time been increasing, became alarming; he could not speak; he looked at his watch like a man who has forgotten the hour, said a few hurried words to Madame Herbault, and pressing the hands of Emmanuel and Maximilian, — ”Madame,” said he, “I trust you will allow me to visit you occasionally; I value your friendship, and feel grateful to you for your welcome, for this is the first time for many years that I have thus yielded to my feelings;” and he hastily quitted the apartment.

“This Count of Monte Cristo is a strange man,” said Emmanuel.

“Yes,” answered Maximilian, “but I feel sure he has an excellent heart, and that he likes us.”

“His voice went to my heart,” observed Julie; “and two or three times I fancied that I had heard it before.”

Chapter 51

Pyramus and Thisbe.

About two-thirds of the way along the Faubourg Saint-Honore, and in the rear of one of the most imposing mansions in this rich neighborhood, where the various houses vie with each other for elegance of design and magnificence of construction, extended a large garden, where the wide-spreading chestnut-trees raised their heads high above the walls in a solid rampart, and with the coming of every spring scattered a shower of delicate pink and white blossoms into the large stone vases that stood upon the two square pilasters of a curiously wrought iron gate, that dated from the time of Louis XII. This noble entrance, however, in spite of its striking appearance and the graceful effect of the geraniums planted in the two vases, as they waved their variegated leaves in the wind and charmed the eye with their scarlet bloom, had fallen into utter disuse. The proprietors of the mansion had many years before thought it best to confine themselves to the possession of the house itself, with its thickly planted court-yard, opening into the Faubourg Saint-Honore, and to the garden shut in by this gate, which formerly communicated with a fine kitchen-garden of about an acre. For the demon of speculation drew a line, or in other words projected a street, at the farther side of the kitchen-garden. The street was laid out, a name was chosen and posted up on an iron plate, but before construction was begun, it occurred to the possessor of the property that a handsome sum might be obtained for the ground then devoted to fruits and vegetables, by building along the line of the proposed street, and so making it a branch of communication with the Faubourg Saint-Honore itself, one of the most important thoroughfares in the city of Paris.

In matters of speculation, however, though “man proposes,” “money disposes.” From some such difficulty the newly named street died almost in birth, and the purchaser of the kitchen-garden, having paid a high price for it, and being quite unable to find any one willing to take his bargain off his hands without a considerable loss, yet still clinging to the belief that at some future day he should obtain a sum for it that would repay him, not only for his past outlay, but also the interest upon the capital locked up in his new acquisition, contented himself with letting the ground temporarily to some market-gardeners, at a yearly rental of 500 francs. And so, as we have said, the iron gate leading into the kitchen-garden had been closed up and left to the rust, which bade fair before long to eat off its hinges, while to prevent the ignoble glances of the diggers and delvers of the ground from presuming to sully the aristocratic enclosure belonging to the mansion, the gate had been boarded up to a height of six feet. True, the planks were not so closely adjusted but that a hasty peep might be obtained through their interstices; but the strict decorum and rigid propriety of the inhabitants of the house left no grounds for apprehending that advantage would be taken of that circumstance.

Horticulture seemed, however, to have been abandoned in the deserted kitchen-garden; and where cabbages, carrots, radishes, pease, and melons had once flourished, a scanty crop of lucerne alone bore evidence of its being deemed worthy of cultivation. A small, low door gave egress from the walled space we have been describing into the projected street, the ground having been abandoned as unproductive by its various renters, and had now fallen so completely in general estimation as to return not even the one-half per cent it had originally paid. Towards the house the chestnut-trees we have before mentioned rose high above the wall, without in any way affecting the growth of other luxuriant shrubs and flowers that eagerly dressed forward to fill up the vacant spaces, as though asserting their right to enjoy the boon of light and air. At one corner, where the foliage became so thick as almost to shut out day, a large stone bench and sundry rustic seats indicated that this sheltered spot was either in general favor or particular use by some inhabitant of the house, which was faintly discernible through the dense mass of verdure that partially concealed it, though situated but a hundred paces off.

Whoever had selected this retired portion of the grounds as the boundary of a walk, or as a place for meditation, was abundantly justified in the choice by the absence of all glare, the cool, refreshing shade, the screen it afforded from the scorching rays of the sun, that found no entrance there even during the burning days of hottest summer, the incessant and melodious warbling of birds, and the entire removal from either the noise of the street or the bustle of the mansion. On the evening of one of the warmest days spring had yet bestowed on the inhabitants of Paris, might be seen negligently thrown upon the stone bench, a book, a parasol, and a work-basket, from which hung a partly embroidered cambric handkerchief, while at a little distance from these articles was a young woman, standing close to the iron gate, endeavoring to discern something on the other side by means of the openings in the planks, — the earnestness of her attitude and the fixed gaze with which she seemed to seek the object of her wishes, proving how much her feelings were interested in the matter. At that instant the little side-gate leading from the waste ground to the street was noiselessly opened, and a tall, powerful young man appeared. He was dressed in a common gray blouse and velvet cap, but his carefully arranged hair, beard and mustache, all of the richest and glossiest black, ill accorded with his plebeian attire. After casting a rapid glance around him, in order to assure himself that he was unobserved, he entered by the small gate, and, carefully closing and securing it after him, proceeded with a hurried step towards the barrier.

At the sight of him she expected, though probably not in such a costume, the young woman started in terror, and was about to make a hasty retreat. But the eye of love had already seen, even through the narrow chinks of the wooden palisades, the movement of the white robe, and observed the fluttering of the blue sash. Pressing his lips close to the planks, he exclaimed, “Don’t be alarmed, Valentine — it is I!” Again the timid girl found courage to return to the gate, saying, as she did so, “And why do you come so late to-day? It is almost dinner-time, and I had to use no little diplomacy to get rid of my watchful mother-in-law, my too-devoted maid, and my troublesome brother, who is always teasing me about coming to work at my embroidery, which I am in a fair way never to get done. So pray excuse yourself as well as you can for having made me wait, and, after that, tell me why I see you in a dress so singular that at first I did not recognize you.”

“Dearest Valentine,” said the young man, “the difference between our respective stations makes me fear to offend you by speaking of my love, but yet I cannot find myself in your presence without longing to pour forth my soul, and tell you how fondly I adore you. If it be but to carry away with me the recollection of such sweet moments, I could even thank you for chiding me, for it leaves me a gleam of hope, that if you did not expect me (and that indeed would be worse than vanity to suppose), at least I was in your thoughts. You asked me the cause of my being late, and why I come disguised. I will candidly explain the reason of both, and I trust to your goodness to pardon me. I have chosen a trade."

"A trade? Oh, Maximilian, how can you jest at a time when we have such deep cause for uneasiness?"

"Heaven keep me from jesting with that which is far dearer to me than life itself! But listen to me, Valentine, and I will tell you all about it. I became weary of ranging fields and scaling walls, and seriously alarmed at the idea suggested by you, that if caught hovering about here your father would very likely have me sent to prison as a thief. That would compromise the honor of the French army, to say nothing of the fact that the continual presence of a captain of Spahis in a place where no warlike projects could be supposed to account for it might well create surprise; so I have become a gardener, and, consequently, adopted the costume of my calling."

"What excessive nonsense you talk, Maximilian!"

"Nonsense? Pray do not call what I consider the wisest action of my life by such a name. Consider, by becoming a gardener I effectually screen our meetings from all suspicion or danger."

"I beseech of you, Maximilian, to cease trifling, and tell me what you really mean."

"Simply, that having ascertained that the piece of ground on which I stand was to let, I made application for it, was readily accepted by the proprietor, and am now master of this fine crop of lucerne. Think of that, Valentine! There is nothing now to prevent my building myself a little hut on my plantation, and residing not twenty yards from you. Only imagine what happiness that would afford me. I can scarcely contain myself at the bare idea. Such felicity seems above all price — as a thing impossible and unattainable. But would you believe that I purchase all this delight, joy, and happiness, for which I would cheerfully have surrendered ten years of my life, at the small cost of 500 francs per annum, paid quarterly? Henceforth we have nothing to fear. I am on my own ground, and have an undoubted right to place a ladder against the wall, and to look over when I please, without having any apprehensions of being taken off by the police as a suspicious character. I may also enjoy the precious privilege of assuring you of my fond, faithful, and unalterable affection, whenever you visit your favorite bower, unless, indeed, it offends your pride to listen to professions of love from the lips of a poor workingman, clad in a blouse and cap." A faint cry of mingled pleasure and surprise escaped from the lips of

Valentine, who almost instantly said, in a saddened tone, as though some envious cloud darkened the joy which illumined her heart, “Alas, no, Maximilian, this must not be, for many reasons. We should presume too much on our own strength, and, like others, perhaps, be led astray by our blind confidence in each other’s prudence.”

“How can you for an instant entertain so unworthy a thought, dear Valentine? Have I not, from the first blessed hour of our acquaintance, schooled all my words and actions to your sentiments and ideas? And you have, I am sure, the fullest confidence in my honor. When you spoke to me of experiencing a vague and indefinite sense of coming danger, I placed myself blindly and devotedly at your service, asking no other reward than the pleasure of being useful to you; and have I ever since, by word or look, given you cause of regret for having selected me from the numbers that would willingly have sacrificed their lives for you? You told me, my dear Valentine, that you were engaged to M. d’Epinay, and that your father was resolved upon completing the match, and that from his will there was no appeal, as M. de Villefort was never known to change a determination once formed. I kept in the background, as you wished, and waited, not for the decision of your heart or my own, but hoping that providence would graciously interpose in our behalf, and order events in our favor. But what cared I for delays or difficulties, Valentine, as long as you confessed that you loved me, and took pity on me? If you will only repeat that avowal now and then, I can endure anything.”

“Ah, Maximilian, that is the very thing that makes you so bold, and which renders me at once so happy and unhappy, that I frequently ask myself whether it is better for me to endure the harshness of my mother-in-law, and her blind preference for her own child, or to be, as I now am, insensible to any pleasure save such as I find in these meetings, so fraught with danger to both.”

“I will not admit that word,” returned the young man; “it is at once cruel and unjust. Is it possible to find a more submissive slave than myself? You have permitted me to converse with you from time to time, Valentine, but forbidden my ever following you in your walks or elsewhere — have I not obeyed? And since I found means to enter this enclosure to exchange a few words with you through this gate — to be close to you without really seeing you — have I ever asked so much as to touch the hem of your gown or tried to pass this barrier which is but a trifle to one of my youth and strength?

Never has a complaint or a murmur escaped me. I have been bound by my promises as rigidly as any knight of olden times. Come, come, dearest Valentine, confess that what I say is true, lest I be tempted to call you unjust.”

“It is true,” said Valentine, as she passed the end of her slender fingers through a small opening in the planks, and permitted Maximilian to press his lips to them, “and you are a true and faithful friend; but still you acted from motives of self-interest, my dear Maximilian, for you well knew that from the moment in which you had manifested an opposite spirit all would have been ended between us. You promised to bestow on me the friendly affection of a brother. For I have no friend but yourself upon earth, who am neglected and forgotten by my father, harassed and persecuted by my mother-in-law, and left to the sole companionship of a paralyzed and speechless old man, whose withered hand can no longer press mine, and who can speak to me with the eye alone, although there still lingers in his heart the warmest tenderness for his poor grandchild. Oh, how bitter a fate is mine, to serve either as a victim or an enemy to all who are stronger than myself, while my only friend and supporter is a living corpse! Indeed, indeed, Maximilian, I am very miserable, and if you love me it must be out of pity.”

“Valentine,” replied the young man, deeply affected, “I will not say you are all I love in the world, for I dearly prize my sister and brother-in-law; but my affection for them is calm and tranquil, in no manner resembling what I feel for you. When I think of you my heart beats fast, the blood burns in my veins, and I can hardly breathe; but I solemnly promise you to restrain all this ardor, this fervor and intensity of feeling, until you yourself shall require me to render them available in serving or assisting you. M. Franz is not expected to return home for a year to come, I am told; in that time many favorable and unforeseen chances may befriend us. Let us, then, hope for the best; hope is so sweet a comforter. Meanwhile, Valentine, while reproaching me with selfishness, think a little what you have been to me — the beautiful but cold resemblance of a marble Venus. What promise of future reward have you made me for all the submission and obedience I have evinced? — none whatever. What granted me? — scarcely more. You tell me of M. Franz d’Epinay, your betrothed lover, and you shrink from the idea of being his wife; but tell me, Valentine, is there no other sorrow in your heart? You see me devoted to you, body and soul, my life and each warm drop that circles round my heart are consecrated to your service; you know full well that my existence is bound up in yours — that were I to lose you I would not outlive the hour of such crushing misery; yet you speak with calmness of the prospect of your being the wife of another! Oh, Valentine, were I in your place, and did I feel conscious, as you do, of being worshipped, adored, with such a love as mine, a hundred times at least should I have passed my hand between these iron bars, and said, ‘Take this hand, dearest Maximilian, and believe that, living or dead, I am yours — yours only, and forever!’“ The poor girl made no reply, but her lover could plainly hear her sobs and tears. A rapid change took place in the young man’s feelings. “Dearest, dearest Valentine,” exclaimed he, “forgive me if I have offended you, and forget the words I spoke if they have unwittingly caused you pain.”

“No, Maximilian, I am not offended,” answered she, “but do you not see what a poor, helpless being I am, almost a stranger and an outcast in my father’s house, where even he is seldom seen; whose will has been thwarted, and spirits broken, from the age of ten years, beneath the iron rod so sternly held over me; oppressed, mortified, and persecuted, day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute, no person has cared for, even observed my sufferings, nor have I ever breathed one word on the subject save to yourself. Outwardly and in the eyes of the world, I am surrounded by kindness and affection; but the reverse is the case. The general remark is, ‘Oh, it cannot be expected that one of so stern a character as M. Villefort could lavish the tenderness some fathers do on their daughters. What though she has lost her own mother at a tender age, she has had the happiness to find a second mother in Madame de Villefort.’ The world, however, is mistaken; my father abandons me from utter indifference, while my mother-in-law detests me with a hatred so much the more terrible because it is veiled beneath a continual smile.”

“Hate you, sweet Valentine,” exclaimed the young man; “how is it possible for any one to do that?”

“Alas,” replied the weeping girl, “I am obliged to own that my mother-in-law’s aversion to me arises from a very natural source — her overweening love for her own child, my brother Edward.”

“But why should it?”

“I do not know; but, though unwilling to introduce money matters into our present conversation, I will just say this much — that her extreme dislike to me has its origin there; and I much fear she envies me the fortune I enjoy in right of my mother, and which will be more than doubled at the death of M. and Mme. de Saint-Meran, whose sole heiress I am. Madame de Villefort has nothing of her own, and hates me for being so richly endowed. Alas, how gladly would I exchange the half of this wealth for the happiness of at least sharing my father's love. God knows, I would prefer sacrificing the whole, so that it would obtain me a happy and affectionate home."

"Poor Valentine!"

"I seem to myself as though living a life of bondage, yet at the same time am so conscious of my own weakness that I fear to break the restraint in which I am held, lest I fall utterly helpless. Then, too, my father is not a person whose orders may be infringed with impunity; protected as he is by his high position and firmly established reputation for talent and unswerving integrity, no one could oppose him; he is all-powerful even with the king; he would crush you at a word. Dear Maximilian, believe me when I assure you that if I do not attempt to resist my father's commands it is more on your account than my own."

"But why, Valentine, do you persist in anticipating the worst, — why picture so gloomy a future?"

"Because I judge it from the past."

"Still, consider that although I may not be, strictly speaking, what is termed an illustrious match for you, I am, for many reasons, not altogether so much beneath your alliance. The days when such distinctions were so nicely weighed and considered no longer exist in France, and the first families of the monarchy have intermarried with those of the empire. The aristocracy of the lance has allied itself with the nobility of the cannon. Now I belong to this last-named class; and certainly my prospects of military preferment are most encouraging as well as certain. My fortune, though small, is free and unfettered, and the memory of my late father is respected in our country, Valentine, as that of the most upright and honorable merchant of the city; I say our country, because you were born not far from Marseilles."

"Don't speak of Marseilles, I beg of you, Maximilian; that one word brings back my mother to my recollection — my angel mother, who died too soon for myself and all who knew her; but who, after watching over her child during the brief period allotted to her in this world, now, I fondly hope, watches from her home in heaven. Oh, if my mother were still living, there would be nothing to fear, Maximilian, for I would tell her that I loved you, and she would protect us."

"I fear, Valentine," replied the lover, "that were she living I should never have had the happiness of knowing you; you would then have been too happy to have stooped from your grandeur to bestow a thought on me."

"Now it is you who are unjust, Maximilian," cried Valentine; "but there is one thing I wish to know."

"And what is that?" inquired the young man, perceiving that Valentine hesitated.

"Tell me truly, Maximilian, whether in former days, when our fathers dwelt at Marseilles, there was ever any misunderstanding between them?"

"Not that I am aware of," replied the young man, "unless, indeed, any ill-feeling might have arisen from their being of opposite parties — your father was, as you know, a zealous partisan of the Bourbons, while mine was wholly devoted to the emperor; there could not possibly be any other difference between them. But why do you ask?"

"I will tell you," replied the young girl, "for it is but right you should know. Well, on the day when your appointment as an officer of the Legion of honor was announced in the papers, we were all sitting with my grandfather, M. Noirtier; M. Danglars was there also — you recollect M. Danglars, do you not, Maximilian, the banker, whose horses ran away with my mother-in-law and little brother, and very nearly killed them? While the rest of the company were discussing the approaching marriage of Mademoiselle Danglars, I was reading the paper to my grandfather; but when I came to the paragraph about you, although I had done nothing else but read it over to myself all the morning (you know you had told me all about it the previous evening), I felt so happy, and yet so nervous, at the idea of speaking your name aloud, and before so many people, that I really think I should have passed it over, but for the fear that my doing so might create suspicions as to the cause of my silence; so I summoned up all my courage, and read it as firmly and as steadily as I could."

"Dear Valentine!"

"Well, would you believe it? directly my father caught the sound of your name he turned round quite hastily, and, like a poor silly thing, I was so persuaded that every one must be as much affected as myself by the utterance of your name, that I was not surprised to see my father start, and almost tremble; but I even thought (though that surely must have been a mistake) that M. Danglars trembled too.”

“‘Morrel, Morrel,’ cried my father, ‘stop a bit;’ then knitting his brows into a deep frown, he added, ‘surely this cannot be one of the Morrel family who lived at Marseilles, and gave us so much trouble from their violent Bonapartism — I mean about the year 1815.’ — ’Yes,’ replied M. Danglars, ‘I believe he is the son of the old shipowner.’“

“Indeed,” answered Maximilian; “and what did your father say then, Valentine?”

“Oh, such a dreadful thing, that I don’t dare to tell you.”

“Always tell me everything,” said Maximilian with a smile.

“‘Ah,’ continued my father, still frowning, ‘their idolized emperor treated these madmen as they deserved; he called them ‘food for powder,’ which was precisely all they were good for; and I am delighted to see that the present government have adopted this salutary principle with all its pristine vigor; if Algiers were good for nothing but to furnish the means of carrying so admirable an idea into practice, it would be an acquisition well worthy of struggling to obtain. Though it certainly does cost France somewhat dear to assert her rights in that uncivilized country.’“

“Brutal politics, I must confess.” said Maximilian; “but don’t attach any serious importance, dear, to what your father said. My father was not a bit behind yours in that sort of talk. ‘Why,’ said he, ‘does not the emperor, who has devised so many clever and efficient modes of improving the art of war, organize a regiment of lawyers, judges and legal practitioners, sending them in the hottest fire the enemy could maintain, and using them to save better men?’ You see, my dear, that for picturesque expression and generosity of spirit there is not much to choose between the language of either party. But what did M. Danglars say to this outburst on the part of the procureur?”

“Oh, he laughed, and in that singular manner so peculiar to himself — half-malicious, half-ferocious; he almost immediately got up and took his leave; then, for the first time, I observed the agitation of my grandfather, and I must tell you, Maximilian, that I am the only person capable of discerning emotion in his paralyzed frame. And I suspected that the conversation that had been carried on in his presence (for they always say and do what they like before the dear old man, without the smallest regard for his feelings) had made a strong impression on his mind; for, naturally enough, it must have pained him to hear the emperor he so devotedly loved and served spoken of in that depreciating manner."

"The name of M. Noirtier," interposed Maximilian, "is celebrated throughout Europe; he was a statesman of high standing, and you may or may not know, Valentine, that he took a leading part in every Bonapartist conspiracy set on foot during the restoration of the Bourbons."

"Oh, I have often heard whispers of things that seem to me most strange — the father a Bonapartist, the son a Royalist; what can have been the reason of so singular a difference in parties and politics? But to resume my story; I turned towards my grandfather, as though to question him as to the cause of his emotion; he looked expressively at the newspaper I had been reading. 'What is the matter, dear grandfather?' said I, 'are you pleased?' He gave me a sign in the affirmative. 'With what my father said just now?' He returned a sign in the negative. 'Perhaps you liked what M. Danglars said?' Another sign in the negative. 'Oh, then, you were glad to hear that M. Morrel (I didn't dare to say Maximilian) had been made an officer of the Legion of Honor?' He signified assent; only think of the poor old man's being so pleased to think that you, who were a perfect stranger to him, had been made an officer of the Legion of Honor! Perhaps it was a mere whim on his part, for he is falling, they say, into second childhood, but I love him for showing so much interest in you."

"How singular," murmured Maximilian; "your father hates me, while your grandfather, on the contrary — What strange feelings are aroused by politics."

"Hush," cried Valentine, suddenly; "some one is coming!" Maximilian leaped at one bound into his crop of lucerne, which he began to pull up in the most ruthless way, under the pretext of being occupied in weeding it.

"Mademoiselle, mademoiselle!" exclaimed a voice from behind the trees. "Madame is searching for you everywhere; there is a visitor in the drawing-room."

"A visitor?" inquired Valentine, much agitated; "who is it?"

"Some grand personage — a prince I believe they said — the Count of Monte Cristo."

"I will come directly," cried Valentine aloud. The name of Monte Cristo sent an electric shock through the young man on the other side of the iron gate, to whom Valentine's "I am coming" was the customary signal of farewell. "Now, then," said Maximilian, leaning on the handle of his spade, “I would give a good deal to know how it comes about that the Count of Monte Cristo is acquainted with M. de Villefort.”

Chapter 52

Toxicology.

It was really the Count of Monte Cristo who had just arrived at Madame de Villefort's for the purpose of returning the procureur's visit, and at his name, as may be easily imagined, the whole house was in confusion. Madame de Villefort, who was alone in her drawing-room when the count was announced, desired that her son might be brought thither instantly to renew his thanks to the count; and Edward, who heard this great personage talked of for two whole days, made all possible haste to come to him, not from obedience to his mother, or out of any feeling of gratitude to the count, but from sheer curiosity, and that some chance remark might give him the opportunity for making one of the impertinent speeches which made his mother say, — ”Oh, that naughty child! But I can't be severe with him, he is really so bright.”

After the usual civilities, the count inquired after M. de Villefort. “My husband dines with the chancellor,” replied the young lady; “he has just gone, and I am sure he'll be exceedingly sorry not to have had the pleasure of seeing you before he went.” Two visitors who were there when the count arrived, having gazed at him with all their eyes, retired after that reasonable delay which politeness admits and curiosity requires. “What is your sister Valentine doing?” inquired Madame de Villefort of Edward; “tell some one to bid her come here, that I may have the honor of introducing her to the count.”

“You have a daughter, then, madame?” inquired the count; “very young, I presume?”

“The daughter of M. de Villefort by his first marriage,” replied the young wife, “a fine well-grown girl.”

“But melancholy,” interrupted Master Edward, snatching the feathers out of the tail of a splendid parroquet that was screaming on its gilded perch, in order to make a plume for his hat. Madame de Villefort merely cried, — ”Be still, Edward!” She then added, — ”This young madcap is, however, very nearly right, and merely re-echoes what he has heard me say with pain a hundred times; for Mademoiselle de Villefort is, in spite of all we can do to rouse her, of a melancholy disposition and taciturn habit, which frequently injure the effect of her beauty. But what detains her? Go, Edward, and see."

"Because they are looking for her where she is not to be found."

"And where are they looking for her?"

"With grandpapa Noirtier."

"And do you think she is not there?"

"No, no, no, no, no, she is not there," replied Edward, singing his words.

"And where is she, then? If you know, why don't you tell?"

"She is under the big chestnut-tree," replied the spoiled brat, as he gave, in spite of his mother's commands, live flies to the parrot, which seemed keenly to relish such fare. Madame de Villefort stretched out her hand to ring, intending to direct her waiting-maid to the spot where she would find Valentine, when the young lady herself entered the apartment. She appeared much dejected; and any person who considered her attentively might have observed the traces of recent tears in her eyes.

Valentine, whom we have in the rapid march of our narrative presented to our readers without formally introducing her, was a tall and graceful girl of nineteen, with bright chestnut hair, deep blue eyes, and that reposeful air of quiet distinction which characterized her mother. Her white and slender fingers, her pearly neck, her cheeks tinted with varying hues reminded one of the lovely Englishwomen who have been so poetically compared in their manner to the gracefulness of a swan. She entered the apartment, and seeing near her stepmother the stranger of whom she had already heard so much, saluted him without any girlish awkwardness, or even lowering her eyes, and with an elegance that redoubled the count's attention. He rose to return the salutation. "Mademoiselle de Villefort, my daughter-in-law," said Madame de Villefort to Monte Cristo, leaning back on her sofa and motioning towards Valentine with her hand. "And M. de Monte Cristo, King of China, Emperor of Cochin-China," said the young imp, looking slyly towards his sister.

Madame de Villefort at this really did turn pale, and was very nearly angry with this household plague, who answered to the name of Edward; but the count, on the contrary, smiled, and appeared to look at the boy complacently, which caused the maternal heart to bound again with joy and enthusiasm.

“But, madame,” replied the count, continuing the conversation, and looking by turns at Madame de Villefort and Valentine, “have I not already had the honor of meeting yourself and mademoiselle before? I could not help thinking so just now; the idea came over my mind, and as mademoiselle entered the sight of her was an additional ray of light thrown on a confused remembrance; excuse the remark.”

“I do not think it likely, sir; Mademoiselle de Villefort is not very fond of society, and we very seldom go out,” said the young lady.

“Then it was not in society that I met with mademoiselle or yourself, madame, or this charming little merry boy. Besides, the Parisian world is entirely unknown to me, for, as I believe I told you, I have been in Paris but very few days. No, — but, perhaps, you will permit me to call to mind — stay!” The Count placed his hand on his brow as if to collect his thoughts. “No — it was somewhere — away from here — it was — I do not know — but it appears that this recollection is connected with a lovely sky and some religious fete; mademoiselle was holding flowers in her hand, the interesting boy was chasing a beautiful peacock in a garden, and you, madame, were under the trellis of some arbor. Pray come to my aid, madame; do not these circumstances appeal to your memory?”

“No, indeed,” replied Madame de Villefort; “and yet it appears to me, sir, that if I had met you anywhere, the recollection of you must have been imprinted on my memory.”

“Perhaps the count saw us in Italy,” said Valentine timidly.

“Yes, in Italy; it was in Italy most probably,” replied Monte Cristo; “you have travelled then in Italy, mademoiselle?”

“Yes; madame and I were there two years ago. The doctors, anxious for my lungs, had prescribed the air of Naples. We went by Bologna, Perugia, and Rome.”

“Ah, yes — true, mademoiselle,” exclaimed Monte Cristo as if this simple explanation was sufficient to revive the recollection he sought. “It was at Perugia on Corpus Christi Day, in the garden of the Hotel des Postes, when chance brought us together; you, Madame de Villefort, and her son; I now remember having had the honor of meeting you.”

“I perfectly well remember Perugia, sir, and the Hotel des Postes, and the festival of which you speak,” said Madame de Villefort, “but in vain do I tax my memory, of whose treachery I am ashamed, for I really do not recall to mind that I ever had the pleasure of seeing you before.”

"It is strange, but neither do I recollect meeting with you," observed Valentine, raising her beautiful eyes to the count.

"But I remember it perfectly," interposed the darling Edward.

"I will assist your memory, madame," continued the count; "the day had been burning hot; you were waiting for horses, which were delayed in consequence of the festival. Mademoiselle was walking in the shade of the garden, and your son disappeared in pursuit of the peacock."

"And I caught it, mamma, don't you remember?" interposed Edward, "and I pulled three such beautiful feathers out of his tail."

"You, madame, remained under the arbor; do you not remember, that while you were seated on a stone bench, and while, as I told you, Mademoiselle de Villefort and your young son were absent, you conversed for a considerable time with somebody?"

"Yes, in truth, yes," answered the young lady, turning very red, "I do remember conversing with a person wrapped in a long woollen mantle; he was a medical man, I think."

"Precisely so, madame; this man was myself; for a fortnight I had been at that hotel, during which period I had cured my valet de chambre of a fever, and my landlord of the jaundice, so that I really acquired a reputation as a skilful physician. We discoursed a long time, madame, on different subjects; of Perugino, of Raffaelle, of manners, customs, of the famous aquatofana, of which they had told you, I think you said, that certain individuals in Perugia had preserved the secret."

"Yes, true," replied Madame de Villefort, somewhat uneasily, "I remember now."

"I do not recollect now all the various subjects of which we discoursed, madame," continued the count with perfect calmness; "but I perfectly remember that, falling into the error which others had entertained respecting me, you consulted me as to the health of Mademoiselle de Villefort."

"Yes, really, sir, you were in fact a medical man," said Madame de Villefort, "since you had cured the sick."

"Moliere or Beaumarchais would reply to you, madame, that it was precisely because I was not, that I had cured my patients; for myself, I am content to say to you that I have studied chemistry and the natural sciences somewhat deeply, but still only as an amateur, you understand." — At this moment the clock struck six. "It is six o'clock," said Madame de Villefort, evidently agitated. "Valentine, will you not go and see if your grandpapa will have his dinner?” Valentine rose, and saluting the count, left the apartment without speaking.

“Oh, madame,” said the count, when Valentine had left the room, “was it on my account that you sent Mademoiselle de Villefort away?”

“By no means,” replied the young lady quickly; “but this is the hour when we usually give M. Noirtier the unwelcome meal that sustains his pitiful existence. You are aware, sir, of the deplorable condition of my husband’s father?”

“Yes, madame, M. de Villefort spoke of it to me — a paralysis, I think.”

“Alas, yes; the poor old gentleman is entirely helpless; the mind alone is still active in this human machine, and that is faint and flickering, like the light of a lamp about to expire. But excuse me, sir, for talking of our domestic misfortunes; I interrupted you at the moment when you were telling me that you were a skilful chemist.”

“No, madame, I did not say as much as that,” replied the count with a smile; “quite the contrary. I have studied chemistry because, having determined to live in eastern climates I have been desirous of following the example of King Mithridates.”

“Mithridates rex Ponticus,” said the young scamp, as he tore some beautiful portraits out of a splendid album, “the individual who took cream in his cup of poison every morning at breakfast.”

“Edward, you naughty boy,” exclaimed Madame de Villefort, snatching the mutilated book from the urchin’s grasp, “you are positively past bearing; you really disturb the conversation; go, leave us, and join your sister Valentine in dear grandpapa Noirtier’s room.”

“The album,” said Edward sulkily.

“What do you mean? — the album!”

“I want the album.”

“How dare you tear out the drawings?”

“Oh, it amuses me.”

“Go — go at once.”

“I won’t go unless you give me the album,” said the boy, seating himself doggedly in an arm-chair, according to his habit of never giving way.

“Take it, then, and pray disturb us no longer,” said Madame de Villefort, giving the album to Edward, who then went towards the door, led by his mother. The count followed her with his eyes.

"Let us see if she shuts the door after him," he muttered. Madame de Villefort closed the door carefully after the child, the count appearing not to notice her; then casting a scrutinizing glance around the chamber, the young wife returned to her chair, in which she seated herself. "Allow me to observe, madame," said the count, with that kind tone he could assume so well, "you are really very severe with that dear clever child."

"Oh, sometimes severity is quite necessary," replied Madame de Villefort, with all a mother's real firmness.

"It was his Cornelius Nepos that Master Edward was repeating when he referred to King Mithridates," continued the count, "and you interrupted him in a quotation which proves that his tutor has by no means neglected him, for your son is really advanced for his years."

"The fact is, count," answered the mother, agreeably flattered, "he has great aptitude, and learns all that is set before him. He has but one fault, he is somewhat wilful; but really, on referring for the moment to what he said, do you truly believe that Mithridates used these precautions, and that these precautions were efficacious?"

"I think so, madame, because I myself have made use of them, that I might not be poisoned at Naples, at Palermo, and at Smyrna — that is to say, on three several occasions when, but for these precautions, I must have lost my life."

"And your precautions were successful?"

"Completely so."

"Yes, I remember now your mentioning to me at Perugia something of this sort."

"Indeed?" said the count with an air of surprise, remarkably well counterfeited; "I really did not remember."

"I inquired of you if poisons acted equally, and with the same effect, on men of the North as on men of the South; and you answered me that the cold and sluggish habits of the North did not present the same aptitude as the rich and energetic temperaments of the natives of the South."

"And that is the case," observed Monte Cristo. "I have seen Russians devour, without being visibly inconvenienced, vegetable substances which would infallibly have killed a Neapolitan or an Arab."

"And you really believe the result would be still more sure with us than in the East, and in the midst of our fogs and rains a man would habituate himself more easily than in a warm latitude to this progressive absorption of poison?”

“Certainly; it being at the same time perfectly understood that he should have been duly fortified against the poison to which he had not been accustomed.”

“Yes, I understand that; and how would you habituate yourself, for instance, or rather, how did you habituate yourself to it?”

“Oh, very easily. Suppose you knew beforehand the poison that would be made use of against you; suppose the poison was, for instance, brucine” —

“Brucine is extracted from the false angostura [*] is it not?” inquired Madame de Villefort.

“Precisely, madame,” replied Monte Cristo; “but I perceive I have not much to teach you. Allow me to compliment you on your knowledge; such learning is very rare among ladies.”

* Brucoea ferruginea.

“Oh, I am aware of that,” said Madame de Villefort; “but I have a passion for the occult sciences, which speak to the imagination like poetry, and are reducible to figures, like an algebraic equation; but go on, I beg of you; what you say interests me to the greatest degree.”

“Well,” replied Monte Cristo “suppose, then, that this poison was brucine, and you were to take a milligramme the first day, two milligrammes the second day, and so on. Well, at the end of ten days you would have taken a centigramme, at the end of twenty days, increasing another milligramme, you would have taken three hundred centigrammes; that is to say, a dose which you would support without inconvenience, and which would be very dangerous for any other person who had not taken the same precautions as yourself. Well, then, at the end of a month, when drinking water from the same carafe, you would kill the person who drank with you, without your perceiving, otherwise than from slight inconvenience, that there was any poisonous substance mingled with this water.”

“Do you know any other counter-poisons?”

“I do not.”

“I have often read, and read again, the history of Mithridates,” said Madame de Villefort in a tone of reflection, “and had always considered it a fable.”

“No, madame, contrary to most history, it is true; but what you tell me, madame, what you inquire of me, is not the result of a chance query, for two years ago you asked me the same questions, and said then, that for a very long time this history of Mithridates had occupied your mind.”

“True, sir. The two favorite studies of my youth were botany and mineralogy, and subsequently, when I learned that the use of simples frequently explained the whole history of a people, and the entire life of individuals in the East, as flowers betoken and symbolize a love affair, I have regretted that I was not a man, that I might have been a Flamel, a Fontana, or a Cabanis.”

“And the more, madame,” said Monte Cristo, “as the Orientals do not confine themselves, as did Mithridates, to make a cuirass of his poisons, but they also made them a dagger. Science becomes, in their hands, not only a defensive weapon, but still more frequently an offensive one; the one serves against all their physical sufferings, the other against all their enemies. With opium, belladonna, brucaea, snake-wood, and the cherry-laurel, they put to sleep all who stand in their way. There is not one of those women, Egyptian, Turkish, or Greek, whom here you call ‘good women,’ who do not know how, by means of chemistry, to stupefy a doctor, and in psychology to amaze a confessor.”

“Really,” said Madame de Villefort, whose eyes sparkled with strange fire at this conversation.

“Oh, yes, indeed, madame,” continued Monte Cristo, “the secret dramas of the East begin with a love philtre and end with a death potion — begin with paradise and end with — hell. There are as many elixirs of every kind as there are caprices and peculiarities in the physical and moral nature of humanity; and I will say further — the art of these chemists is capable with the utmost precision to accommodate and proportion the remedy and the bane to yearnings for love or desires for vengeance.”

“But, sir,” remarked the young woman, “these Eastern societies, in the midst of which you have passed a portion of your existence, are as fantastic as the tales that come from their strange land. A man can easily be put out of the way there, then; it is, indeed, the Bagdad and Bassora of the ‘Thousand and One Nights.’ The sultans and viziers who rule over society there, and who constitute what in France we call the government, are really Haroun-al-Raschids and Giaffars, who not only pardon a poisoner, but even make him a prime minister, if his crime has been an ingenious one, and who, under such circumstances, have the whole story written in letters of gold, to divert their hours of idleness and ennui."

"By no means, madame; the fanciful exists no longer in the East. There, disguised under other names, and concealed under other costumes, are police agents, magistrates, attorneys-general, and bailiffs. They hang, behead, and impale their criminals in the most agreeable possible manner; but some of these, like clever rogues, have contrived to escape human justice, and succeed in their fraudulent enterprises by cunning stratagems. Amongst us a simpleton, possessed by the demon of hate or cupidity, who has an enemy to destroy, or some near relation to dispose of, goes straight to the grocer's or druggist's, gives a false name, which leads more easily to his detection than his real one, and under the pretext that the rats prevent him from sleeping, purchases five or six grammes of arsenic — if he is really a cunning fellow, he goes to five or six different druggists or grocers, and thereby becomes only five or six times more easily traced; — then, when he has acquired his specific, he administers duly to his enemy, or near kinsman, a dose of arsenic which would make a mammoth or mastodon burst, and which, without rhyme or reason, makes his victim utter groans which alarm the entire neighborhood. Then arrive a crowd of policemen and constables. They fetch a doctor, who opens the dead body, and collects from the entrails and stomach a quantity of arsenic in a spoon. Next day a hundred newspapers relate the fact, with the names of the victim and the murderer. The same evening the grocer or grocers, druggist or druggists, come and say, 'It was I who sold the arsenic to the gentleman;' and rather than not recognize the guilty purchaser, they will recognize twenty. Then the foolish criminal is taken, imprisoned, interrogated, confronted, confounded, condemned, and cut off by hemp or steel; or if she be a woman of any consideration, they lock her up for life. This is the way in which you Northerns understand chemistry, madame. Desrues was, however, I must confess, more skilful."

"What would you have, sir?" said the lady, laughing; "we do what we can. All the world has not the secret of the Medicis or the Borgias."

"Now," replied the count, shrugging his shoulders, "shall I tell you the cause of all these stupidities? It is because, at your theatres, by what at least I could judge by reading the pieces they play, they see persons swallow the contents of a phial, or suck the button of a ring, and fall dead instantly. Five minutes afterwards the curtain falls, and the spectators depart. They are ignorant of the consequences of the murder; they see neither the police commissary with his badge of office, nor the corporal with his four men; and so the poor fools believe that the whole thing is as easy as lying. But go a little way from France — go either to Aleppo or Cairo, or only to Naples or Rome, and you will see people passing by you in the streets — people erect, smiling, and fresh-colored, of whom Asmodeus, if you were holding on by the skirt of his mantle, would say, ‘That man was poisoned three weeks ago; he will be a dead man in a month.’“

“Then,” remarked Madame de Villefort, “they have again discovered the secret of the famous aquatofana that they said was lost at Perugia.”

“Ah, but madame, does mankind ever lose anything? The arts change about and make a tour of the world; things take a different name, and the vulgar do not follow them — that is all; but there is always the same result. Poisons act particularly on some organ or another — one on the stomach, another on the brain, another on the intestines. Well, the poison brings on a cough, the cough an inflammation of the lungs, or some other complaint catalogued in the book of science, which, however, by no means precludes it from being decidedly mortal; and if it were not, would be sure to become so, thanks to the remedies applied by foolish doctors, who are generally bad chemists, and which will act in favor of or against the malady, as you please; and then there is a human being killed according to all the rules of art and skill, and of whom justice learns nothing, as was said by a terrible chemist of my acquaintance, the worthy Abbe Adelmonte of Taormina, in Sicily, who has studied these national phenomena very profoundly.”

“It is quite frightful, but deeply interesting,” said the young lady, motionless with attention. “I thought, I must confess, that these tales, were inventions of the Middle Ages.”

“Yes, no doubt, but improved upon by ours. What is the use of time, rewards of merit, medals, crosses, Monthyon prizes, if they do not lead society towards more complete perfection? Yet man will never be perfect until he learns to create and destroy; he does know how to destroy, and that is half the battle.”

“So,” added Madame de Villefort, constantly returning to her object, “the poisons of the Borgias, the Medicis, the Renes, the Ruggieris, and later, probably, that of Baron de Trenck, whose story has been so misused by modern drama and romance” —

"Were objects of art, madame, and nothing more," replied the count. "Do you suppose that the real savant addresses himself stupidly to the mere individual? By no means. Science loves eccentricities, leaps and bounds, trials of strength, fancies, if I may be allowed so to term them. Thus, for instance, the excellent Abbe Adelmonte, of whom I spoke just now, made in this way some marvellous experiments."

"Really?"

"Yes; I will mention one to you. He had a remarkably fine garden, full of vegetables, flowers, and fruit. From amongst these vegetables he selected the most simple — a cabbage, for instance. For three days he watered this cabbage with a distillation of arsenic; on the third, the cabbage began to droop and turn yellow. At that moment he cut it. In the eyes of everybody it seemed fit for table, and preserved its wholesome appearance. It was only poisoned to the Abbe Adelmonte. He then took the cabbage to the room where he had rabbits — for the Abbe Adelmonte had a collection of rabbits, cats, and guinea-pigs, fully as fine as his collection of vegetables, flowers, and fruit. Well, the Abbe Adelmonte took a rabbit, and made it eat a leaf of the cabbage. The rabbit died. What magistrate would find, or even venture to insinuate, anything against this? What procureur has ever ventured to draw up an accusation against M. Magendie or M. Flourens, in consequence of the rabbits, cats, and guinea-pigs they have killed? — not one. So, then, the rabbit dies, and justice takes no notice. This rabbit dead, the Abbe Adelmonte has its entrails taken out by his cook and thrown on the dunghill; on this dunghill is a hen, who, pecking these intestines, is in her turn taken ill, and dies next day. At the moment when she is struggling in the convulsions of death, a vulture is flying by (there are a good many vultures in Adelmonte's country); this bird darts on the dead fowl, and carries it away to a rock, where it dines off its prey. Three days afterwards, this poor vulture, which has been very much indisposed since that dinner, suddenly feels very giddy while flying aloft in the clouds, and falls heavily into a fish-pond. The pike, eels, and carp eat greedily always, as everybody knows — well, they feast on the vulture. Now suppose that next day, one of these eels, or pike, or carp, poisoned at the fourth remove, is served up at your table. Well, then, your guest will be poisoned at the fifth remove, and die, at the end of eight or ten days, of pains in the intestines, sickness, or abscess of the pylorus. The doctors open the body and say with an air of profound learning, ‘The subject has died of a tumor on the liver, or of typhoid fever!’“

“But,” remarked Madame de Villefort, “all these circumstances which you link thus to one another may be broken by the least accident; the vulture may not see the fowl, or may fall a hundred yards from the fish-pond.”

“Ah, that is where the art comes in. To be a great chemist in the East, one must direct chance; and this is to be achieved.” — Madame de Villefort was in deep thought, yet listened attentively. “But,” she exclaimed, suddenly, “arsenic is indelible, indestructible; in whatsoever way it is absorbed, it will be found again in the body of the victim from the moment when it has been taken in sufficient quantity to cause death.”

“Precisely so,” cried Monte Cristo — ”precisely so; and this is what I said to my worthy Adelmonte. He reflected, smiled, and replied to me by a Sicilian proverb, which I believe is also a French proverb, ‘My son, the world was not made in a day — but in seven. Return on Sunday.’ On the Sunday following I did return to him. Instead of having watered his cabbage with arsenic, he had watered it this time with a solution of salts, having their basis in strychnine, strychnos colubrina, as the learned term it. Now, the cabbage had not the slightest appearance of disease in the world, and the rabbit had not the smallest distrust; yet, five minutes afterwards, the rabbit was dead. The fowl pecked at the rabbit, and the next day was a dead hen. This time we were the vultures; so we opened the bird, and this time all special symptoms had disappeared, there were only general symptoms. There was no peculiar indication in any organ — an excitement of the nervous system — that was it; a case of cerebral congestion — nothing more. The fowl had not been poisoned — she had died of apoplexy. Apoplexy is a rare disease among fowls, I believe, but very common among men.” Madame de Villefort appeared more and more thoughtful.

“It is very fortunate,” she observed, “that such substances could only be prepared by chemists; otherwise, all the world would be poisoning each other.”

“By chemists and persons who have a taste for chemistry,” said Monte Cristo carelessly.

“And then,” said Madame de Villefort, endeavoring by a struggle, and with effort, to get away from her thoughts, “however skilfully it is prepared, crime is always crime, and if it avoid human scrutiny, it does not escape the eye of God. The Orientals are stronger than we are in cases of conscience, and, very prudently, have no hell — that is the point.”

“Really, madame, this is a scruple which naturally must occur to a pure mind like yours, but which would easily yield before sound reasoning. The bad side of human thought will always be defined by the paradox of Jean Jacques Rousseau, — you remember, — the mandarin who is killed five hundred leagues off by raising the tip of the finger. Man’s whole life passes in doing these things, and his intellect is exhausted by reflecting on them. You will find very few persons who will go and brutally thrust a knife in the heart of a fellow-creature, or will administer to him, in order to remove him from the surface of the globe on which we move with life and animation, that quantity of arsenic of which we just now talked. Such a thing is really out of rule — eccentric or stupid. To attain such a point, the blood must be heated to thirty-six degrees, the pulse be, at least, at ninety, and the feelings excited beyond the ordinary limit. But suppose one pass, as is permissible in philology, from the word itself to its softened synonym, then, instead of committing an ignoble assassination you make an ‘elimination;’ you merely and simply remove from your path the individual who is in your way, and that without shock or violence, without the display of the sufferings which, in the case of becoming a punishment, make a martyr of the victim, and a butcher, in every sense of the word, of him who inflicts them. Then there will be no blood, no groans, no convulsions, and above all, no consciousness of that horrid and compromising moment of accomplishing the act, — then one escapes the clutch of the human law, which says, ‘Do not disturb society!’ This is the mode in which they manage these things, and succeed in Eastern climes, where there are grave and phlegmatic persons who care very little for the questions of time in conjunctures of importance.”

“Yet conscience remains,” remarked Madame de Villefort in an agitated voice, and with a stifled sigh.

“Yes,” answered Monte Cristo “happily, yes, conscience does remain; and if it did not, how wretched we should be! After every action requiring exertion, it is conscience that saves us, for it supplies us with a thousand good excuses, of which we alone are judges; and these reasons, howsoever excellent in producing sleep, would avail us but very little before a tribunal, when we were tried for our lives. Thus Richard III., for instance, was marvellously served by his conscience after the putting away of the two children of Edward IV.; in fact, he could say, ‘These two children of a cruel and persecuting king, who have inherited the vices of their father, which I alone could perceive in their juvenile propensities — these two children are impediments in my way of promoting the happiness of the English people, whose unhappiness they (the children) would infallibly have caused.’ Thus was Lady Macbeth served by her conscience, when she sought to give her son, and not her husband (whatever Shakespeare may say), a throne. Ah, maternal love is a great virtue, a powerful motive — so powerful that it excuses a multitude of things, even if, after Duncan’s death, Lady Macbeth had been at all pricked by her conscience.”

Madame de Villefort listened with avidity to these appalling maxims and horrible paradoxes, delivered by the count with that ironical simplicity which was peculiar to him. After a moment’s silence, the lady inquired, “Do you know, my dear count,” she said, “that you are a very terrible reasoner, and that you look at the world through a somewhat distempered medium? Have you really measured the world by scrutinies, or through alembics and crucibles? For you must indeed be a great chemist, and the elixir you administered to my son, which recalled him to life almost instantaneously” —

“Oh, do not place any reliance on that, madame; one drop of that elixir sufficed to recall life to a dying child, but three drops would have impelled the blood into his lungs in such a way as to have produced most violent palpitations; six would have suspended his respiration, and caused syncope more serious than that in which he was; ten would have destroyed him. You know, madame, how suddenly I snatched him from those phials which he so imprudently touched?”

“Is it then so terrible a poison?”

“Oh, no. In the first place, let us agree that the word poison does not exist, because in medicine use is made of the most violent poisons, which become, according as they are employed, most salutary remedies.”

“What, then, is it?”

“A skilful preparation of my friend’s the worthy Abbe Adelmonte, who taught me the use of it.”

“Oh,” observed Madame de Villefort, “it must be an admirable anti-spasmodic.”

“Perfect, madame, as you have seen,” replied the count; “and I frequently make use of it — with all possible prudence though, be it observed,” he added with a smile of intelligence.

"Most assuredly," responded Madame de Villefort in the same tone. "As for me, so nervous, and so subject to fainting fits, I should require a Doctor Adelmonte to invent for me some means of breathing freely and tranquillizing my mind, in the fear I have of dying some fine day of suffocation. In the meanwhile, as the thing is difficult to find in France, and your abbe is not probably disposed to make a journey to Paris on my account, I must continue to use Monsieur Planche's anti-spasmodics; and mint and Hoffman's drops are among my favorite remedies. Here are some lozenges which I have made up on purpose; they are compounded doubly strong." Monte Cristo opened the tortoise-shell box, which the lady presented to him, and inhaled the odor of the lozenges with the air of an amateur who thoroughly appreciated their composition. "They are indeed exquisite," he said; "but as they are necessarily submitted to the process of deglutition — a function which it is frequently impossible for a fainting person to accomplish — I prefer my own specific."

"Undoubtedly, and so should I prefer it, after the effects I have seen produced; but of course it is a secret, and I am not so indiscreet as to ask it of you."

"But I," said Monte Cristo, rising as he spoke — "I am gallant enough to offer it you."

"How kind you are."

"Only remember one thing — a small dose is a remedy, a large one is poison. One drop will restore life, as you have seen; five or six will inevitably kill, and in a way the more terrible inasmuch as, poured into a glass of wine, it would not in the slightest degree affect its flavor. But I say no more, madame; it is really as if I were prescribing for you." The clock struck half-past six, and a lady was announced, a friend of Madame de Villefort, who came to dine with her.

"If I had had the honor of seeing you for the third or fourth time, count, instead of only for the second," said Madame de Villefort; "if I had had the honor of being your friend, instead of only having the happiness of being under an obligation to you, I should insist on detaining you to dinner, and not allow myself to be daunted by a first refusal."

"A thousand thanks, madame," replied Monte Cristo "but I have an engagement which I cannot break. I have promised to escort to the

Academie a Greek princess of my acquaintance who has never seen your grand opera, and who relies on me to conduct her thither.”

“Adieu, then, sir, and do not forget the prescription.”

“Ah, in truth, madame, to do that I must forget the hour’s conversation I have had with you, which is indeed impossible.” Monte Cristo bowed, and left the house. Madame de Villefort remained immersed in thought. “He is a very strange man,” she said, “and in my opinion is himself the Adelmonte he talks about.” As to Monte Cristo the result had surpassed his utmost expectations. “Good,” said he, as he went away; “this is a fruitful soil, and I feel certain that the seed sown will not be cast on barren ground.” Next morning, faithful to his promise, he sent the prescription requested.

Chapter 53

Robert le Diable.

The pretext of an opera engagement was so much the more feasible, as there chanced to be on that very night a more than ordinary attraction at the Academie Royale. Levasseur, who had been suffering under severe illness, made his reappearance in the character of Bertrand, and, as usual, the announcement of the most admired production of the favorite composer of the day had attracted a brilliant and fashionable audience. Morcerf, like most other young men of rank and fortune, had his orchestra stall, with the certainty of always finding a seat in at least a dozen of the principal boxes occupied by persons of his acquaintance; he had, moreover, his right of entry into the omnibus box. Chateau-Renaud rented a stall beside his own, while Beauchamp, as a journalist, had unlimited range all over the theatre. It happened that on this particular night the minister’s box was placed at the disposal of Lucien Debray, who offered it to the Comte de Morcerf, who again, upon his mother’s rejection of it, sent it to Danglars, with an intimation that he should probably do himself the honor of joining the baroness and her daughter during the evening, in the event of their accepting the box in question. The ladies received the offer with too much pleasure to dream of a refusal. To no class of persons is the presentation of a gratuitous opera-box more acceptable than to the wealthy millionaire, who still hugs economy while boasting of carrying a king’s ransom in his waistcoat pocket.

Danglars had, however, protested against showing himself in a ministerial box, declaring that his political principles, and his parliamentary position as member of the opposition party would not permit him so to commit himself; the baroness had, therefore, despatched a note to Lucien Debray, bidding him call for them, it being wholly impossible for her to go alone with Eugenie to the opera. There is no gainsaying the fact that a very unfavorable construction would have been put upon the circumstance if the two women had gone without escort, while the addition of a third, in the person of her mother’s admitted lover, enabled Mademoiselle Danglars to defy malice and ill-nature. One must take the world as one finds it.

The curtain rose, as usual, to an almost empty house, it being one of the absurdities of Parisian fashion never to appear at the opera until after the beginning of the performance, so that the first act is generally played without the slightest attention being paid to it, that part of the audience already assembled being too much occupied in observing the fresh arrivals, while nothing is heard but the noise of opening and shutting doors, and the buzz of conversation. “Surely,” said Albert, as the door of a box on the first circle opened, “that must be the Countess G — — .”

“And who is the Countess G — — ?” inquired Chateau-Renaud.

“What a question! Now, do you know, baron, I have a great mind to pick a quarrel with you for asking it; as if all the world did not know who the Countess G — — was.”

“Ah, to be sure,” replied Chateau-Renaud; “the lovely Venetian, is it not?”

“Herself.” At this moment the countess perceived Albert, and returned his salutation with a smile. “You know her, it seems?” said Chateau-Renaud.

“Franz introduced me to her at Rome,” replied Albert.

“Well, then, will you do as much for me in Paris as Franz did for you in Rome?”

“With pleasure.”

There was a cry of “Shut up!” from the audience. This manifestation on the part of the spectators of their wish to be allowed to hear the music, produced not the slightest effect on the two young men, who continued their conversation. “The countess was present at the races in the Champ-de-Mars,” said Chateau-Renaud.

“To-day?”

“Yes.”

“Bless me, I quite forgot the races. Did you bet?”

“Oh, merely a paltry fifty louis.”

“And who was the winner?”

“Nautilus. I staked on him.”

“But there were three races, were there not?”

“Yes; there was the prize given by the Jockey Club — a gold cup, you know — and a very singular circumstance occurred about that race.”

“What was it?”

“Oh, shut up!” again interposed some of the audience.

“Why, it was won by a horse and rider utterly unknown on the course.”

“Is that possible?”

“True as day. The fact was, nobody had observed a horse entered by the name of Vampa, or that of a jockey styled Job, when, at the last moment, a splendid roan, mounted by a jockey about as big as your fist, presented themselves at the starting-post. They were obliged to stuff at least twenty pounds weight of shot in the small rider’s pockets, to make him weight; but with all that he outstripped Ariel and Barbare, against whom he ran, by at least three whole lengths.”

“And was it not found out at last to whom the horse and jockey belonged?”

“No.”

“You say that the horse was entered under the name of Vampa?”

“Exactly; that was the title.”

“Then,” answered Albert, “I am better informed than you are, and know who the owner of that horse was.”

“Shut up, there!” cried the pit in chorus. And this time the tone and manner in which the command was given, betokened such growing hostility that the two young men perceived, for the first time, that the mandate was addressed to them. Leisurely turning round, they calmly scrutinized the various countenances around them, as though demanding some one person who would take upon himself the responsibility of what they deemed excessive impertinence; but as no one responded to the challenge, the friends turned again to the front of the theatre, and affected to busy themselves with the stage. At this moment the door of the minister’s box opened, and Madame Danglars, accompanied by her daughter, entered, escorted by Lucien Debray, who assiduously conducted them to their seats.

“Ha, ha,” said Chateau-Renaud, “here comes some friends of yours, viscount! What are you looking at there? don’t you see they are trying to catch your eye?” Albert turned round, just in time to receive a gracious wave of the fan from the baroness; as for Mademoiselle Eugenie, she scarcely vouchsafed to waste the glances of her large black eyes even upon the business of the stage. “I tell you what, my dear fellow,” said Chateau-Renaud, “I cannot imagine what objection you can possibly have to Mademoiselle Danglars — that is, setting aside her want of ancestry and somewhat inferior rank, which by the way I don’t think you care very much about. Now, barring all that, I mean to say she is a deuced fine girl!”

“Handsome, certainly,” replied Albert, “but not to my taste, which I confess, inclines to something softer, gentler, and more feminine.”

“Ah, well,” exclaimed Chateau-Renaud, who because he had seen his thirtieth summer fancied himself duly warranted in assuming a sort of paternal air with his more youthful friend, “you young people are never satisfied; why, what would you have more? your parents have chosen you a bride built on the model of Diana, the huntress, and yet you are not content.”

“No, for that very resemblance affrights me; I should have liked something more in the manner of the Venus of Milo or Capua; but this chase-loving Diana continually surrounded by her nymphs gives me a sort of alarm lest she should some day bring on me the fate of Actaeon.”

And, indeed, it required but one glance at Mademoiselle Danglars to comprehend the justness of Morcerf’s remark — she was beautiful, but her beauty was of too marked and decided a character to please a fastidious taste; her hair was raven black, but its natural waves seemed somewhat rebellious; her eyes, of the same color as her hair, were surmounted by well-arched brows, whose great defect, however, consisted in an almost habitual frown, while her whole physiognomy wore that expression of firmness and decision so little in accordance with the gentler attributes of her sex — her nose was precisely what a sculptor would have chosen for a chiselled Juno. Her mouth, which might have been found fault with as too large, displayed teeth of pearly whiteness, rendered still more conspicuous by the brilliant carmine of her lips, contrasting vividly with her naturally pale complexion. But that which completed the almost masculine look Morcerf found so little to his taste, was a dark mole, of much larger dimensions than these freaks of nature generally are, placed just at the corner of her mouth; and the effect tended to increase the expression of self-dependence that characterized her countenance. The rest of Mademoiselle Eugenie’s person was in perfect keeping with the head just described; she, indeed, reminded one of Diana, as Chateau-Renaud observed, but her bearing was more haughty and resolute. As regarded her attainments, the only fault to be found with them was the same that a fastidious connoisseur might have found with her beauty, that they were somewhat too erudite and masculine for so young a person. She was a perfect linguist, a first-rate artist, wrote poetry, and composed music; to the study of the latter she professed to be entirely devoted, following it with an indefatigable perseverance, assisted by a schoolfellow, — a young woman without fortune whose talent promised to develop into remarkable powers as a singer. It was rumored that she was an object of almost paternal interest to one of the principal composers of the day, who excited her to spare no pains in the cultivation of her voice, which might hereafter prove a source of wealth and independence. But this counsel effectually decided Mademoiselle Danglars never to commit herself by being seen in public with one destined for a theatrical life; and acting upon this principle, the banker's daughter, though perfectly willing to allow Mademoiselle Louise d'Armilly (that was the name of the young virtuosa) to practice with her through the day, took especial care not to be seen in her company. Still, though not actually received at the Hotel Danglars in the light of an acknowledged friend, Louise was treated with far more kindness and consideration than is usually bestowed on a governess.

The curtain fell almost immediately after the entrance of Madame Danglars into her box, the band quitted the orchestra for the accustomed half-hour's interval allowed between the acts, and the audience were left at liberty to promenade the salon or lobbies, or to pay and receive visits in their respective boxes. Morcerf and Chateau-Renaud were amongst the first to avail themselves of this permission. For an instant the idea struck Madame Danglars that this eagerness on the part of the young viscount arose from his impatience to join her party, and she whispered her expectations to her daughter, that Albert was hurrying to pay his respects to them. Mademoiselle Eugenie, however, merely returned a dissenting movement of the head, while, with a cold smile, she directed the attention of her mother to an opposite box on the first circle, in which sat the Countess G — — , and where Morcerf had just made his appearance. "So we meet again, my travelling friend, do we?" cried the countess, extending her hand to him with all the warmth and cordiality of an old acquaintance; "it was really very good of you to recognize me so quickly, and still more so to bestow your first visit on me."

"Be assured," replied Albert, "that if I had been aware of your arrival in Paris, and had known your address, I should have paid my respects to you before this. Allow me to introduce my friend, Baron de Chateau-Renaud, one of the few true gentlemen now to be found in France, and from whom I have just learned that you were a spectator of the races in the Champ-de-Mars, yesterday.” Chateau-Renaud bowed to the countess.

“So you were at the races, baron?” inquired the countess eagerly.

“Yes, madame.”

“Well, then,” pursued Madame G — — with considerable animation, “you can probably tell me who won the Jockey Club stakes?”

“I am sorry to say I cannot,” replied the baron; “and I was just asking the same question of Albert.”

“Are you very anxious to know, countess?” asked Albert.

“To know what?”

“The name of the owner of the winning horse?”

“Excessively; only imagine — but do tell me, viscount, whether you really are acquainted with it or no?”

“I beg your pardon, madame, but you were about to relate some story, were you not? You said, ‘only imagine,’ — and then paused. Pray continue.”

“Well, then, listen. You must know I felt so interested in the splendid roan horse, with his elegant little rider, so tastefully dressed in a pink satin jacket and cap, that I could not help praying for their success with as much earnestness as though the half of my fortune were at stake; and when I saw them outstrip all the others, and come to the winning-post in such gallant style, I actually clapped my hands with joy. Imagine my surprise, when, upon returning home, the first object I met on the staircase was the identical jockey in the pink jacket! I concluded that, by some singular chance, the owner of the winning horse must live in the same hotel as myself; but, as I entered my apartments, I beheld the very gold cup awarded as a prize to the unknown horse and rider. Inside the cup was a small piece of paper, on which were written these words — ’From Lord Ruthven to Countess G — — .’“

“Precisely; I was sure of it,” said Morcerf.

“Sure of what?”

“That the owner of the horse was Lord Ruthven himself.”

“What Lord Ruthven do you mean?”

“Why, our Lord Ruthven — the Vampire of the Salle Argentino!”

“Is it possible?” exclaimed the countess; “is he here in Paris?”

“To be sure, — why not?”

“And you visit him? — meet him at your own house and elsewhere?”

“I assure you he is my most intimate friend, and M. de Chateau-Renaud has also the honor of his acquaintance.”

“But why are you so sure of his being the winner of the Jockey Club prize?”

“Was not the winning horse entered by the name of Vampa?”

“What of that?”

“Why, do you not recollect the name of the celebrated bandit by whom I was made prisoner?”

“Oh, yes.”

“And from whose hands the count extricated me in so wonderful a manner?”

“To be sure, I remember it all now.”

“He called himself Vampa. You see, it’s evident where the count got the name.”

“But what could have been his motive for sending the cup to me?”

“In the first place, because I had spoken much of you to him, as you may believe; and in the second, because he delighted to see a countrywoman take so lively an interest in his success.”

“I trust and hope you never repeated to the count all the foolish remarks we used to make about him?”

“I should not like to affirm upon oath that I have not. Besides, his presenting you the cup under the name of Lord Ruthven” —

“Oh, but that is dreadful! Why, the man must owe me a fearful grudge.”

“Does his action appear like that of an enemy?”

“No; certainly not.”

“Well, then” —

“And so he is in Paris?”

“Yes.”

“And what effect does he produce?”

“Why,” said Albert, “he was talked about for a week; then the coronation of the queen of England took place, followed by the theft of Mademoiselle Mars’s diamonds; and so people talked of something else.”

“My good fellow,” said Chateau-Renaud, “the count is your friend and you treat him accordingly. Do not believe what Albert is telling you, countess; so far from the sensation excited in the Parisian circles by the appearance of the Count of Monte Cristo having abated, I take upon myself to declare that it is as strong as ever. His first astounding act upon coming amongst us was to present a pair of horses, worth 32,000 francs, to Madame Danglars; his second, the almost miraculous preservation of Madame de Villefort's life; now it seems that he has carried off the prize awarded by the Jockey Club. I therefore maintain, in spite of Morcerf, that not only is the count the object of interest at this present moment, but also that he will continue to be so for a month longer if he pleases to exhibit an eccentricity of conduct which, after all, may be his ordinary mode of existence."

"Perhaps you are right," said Morcerf; "meanwhile, who is in the Russian ambassador's box?"

"Which box do you mean?" asked the countess.

"The one between the pillars on the first tier — it seems to have been fitted up entirely afresh."

"Did you observe any one during the first act?" asked Chateau-Renaud.

"Where?"

"In that box."

"No," replied the countess, "it was certainly empty during the first act;" then, resuming the subject of their previous conversation, she said, "And so you really believe it was your mysterious Count of Monte Cristo that gained the prize?"

"I am sure of it."

"And who afterwards sent the cup to me?"

"Undoubtedly."

"But I don't know him," said the countess; "I have a great mind to return it."

"Do no such thing, I beg of you; he would only send you another, formed of a magnificent sapphire, or hollowed out of a gigantic ruby. It is his way, and you must take him as you find him." At this moment the bell rang to announce the drawing up of the curtain for the second act. Albert rose to return to his place. "Shall I see you again?" asked the countess. "At the end of the next act, with your permission, I will come and inquire whether there is anything I can do for you in Paris?"

"Pray take notice," said the countess, "that my present residence is 22 Rue de Rivoli, and that I am at home to my friends every Saturday evening. So now, you are both forewarned." The young men bowed, and quitted the box. Upon reaching their stalls, they found the whole of the audience in the parterre standing up and directing their gaze towards the box formerly possessed by the Russian ambassador. A man of from thirty-five to forty years of age, dressed in deep black, had just entered, accompanied by a young woman dressed after the Eastern style. The lady was surpassingly beautiful, while the rich magnificence of her attire drew all eyes upon her. “Hullo,” said Albert; “it is Monte Cristo and his Greek!”

The strangers were, indeed, no other than the count and Haidee. In a few moments the young girl had attracted the attention of the whole house, and even the occupants of the boxes leaned forward to scrutinize her magnificent diamonds. The second act passed away during one continued buzz of voices — one deep whisper — intimating that some great and universally interesting event had occurred; all eyes, all thoughts, were occupied with the young and beautiful woman, whose gorgeous apparel and splendid jewels made a most extraordinary spectacle. Upon this occasion an unmistakable sign from Madame Danglars intimated her desire to see Albert in her box directly the curtain fell on the second act, and neither the politeness nor good taste of Morcerf would permit his neglecting an invitation so unequivocally given. At the close of the act he therefore went to the baroness. Having bowed to the two ladies, he extended his hand to Debray. By the baroness he was most graciously welcomed, while Eugenie received him with her accustomed coldness.

“My dear fellow,” said Debray, “you have come in the nick of time. There is madame overwhelming me with questions respecting the count; she insists upon it that I can tell her his birth, education, and parentage, where he came from, and whither he is going. Being no disciple of Cagliostro, I was wholly unable to do this; so, by way of getting out of the scrape, I said, ‘Ask Morcerf; he has got the whole history of his beloved Monte Cristo at his fingers’ ends;’ whereupon the baroness signified her desire to see you.”

“Is it not almost incredible,” said Madame Danglars, “that a person having at least half a million of secret-service money at his command, should possess so little information?”

“Let me assure you, madame,” said Lucien, “that had I really the sum you mention at my disposal, I would employ it more profitably than in troubling myself to obtain particulars respecting the Count of Monte Cristo, whose only merit in my eyes consists in his being twice as rich as a nabob. However, I have turned the business over to Morcerf, so pray settle it with him as may be most agreeable to you; for my own part, I care nothing about the count or his mysterious doings.”

"I am very sure no nabob would have sent me a pair of horses worth 32,000 francs, wearing on their heads four diamonds valued at 5,000 francs each."

"He seems to have a mania for diamonds," said Morcerf, smiling, "and I verily believe that, like Potemkin, he keeps his pockets filled, for the sake of strewing them along the road, as Tom Thumb did his flint stones."

"Perhaps he has discovered some mine," said Madame Danglars. "I suppose you know he has an order for unlimited credit on the baron's banking establishment?"

"I was not aware of it," replied Albert, "but I can readily believe it."

"And, further, that he stated to M. Danglars his intention of only staying a year in Paris, during which time he proposed to spend six millions.

"He must be the Shah of Persia, travelling incog."

"Have you noticed the remarkable beauty of the young woman, M. Lucien?" inquired Eugenie.

"I really never met with one woman so ready to do justice to the charms of another as yourself," responded Lucien, raising his lorgnette to his eye. "A most lovely creature, upon my soul!" was his verdict.

"Who is this young person, M. de Morcerf?" inquired Eugenie; "does anybody know?"

"Mademoiselle," said Albert, replying to this direct appeal, "I can give you very exact information on that subject, as well as on most points relative to the mysterious person of whom we are now conversing — the young woman is a Greek."

"So I should suppose by her dress; if you know no more than that, every one here is as well-informed as yourself."

"I am extremely sorry you find me so ignorant a cicerone," replied Morcerf, "but I am reluctantly obliged to confess, I have nothing further to communicate — yes, stay, I do know one thing more, namely, that she is a musician, for one day when I chanced to be breakfasting with the count, I heard the sound of a guzla — it is impossible that it could have been touched by any other finger than her own."

"Then your count entertains visitors, does he?" asked Madame Danglars.

"Indeed he does, and in a most lavish manner, I can assure you."

"I must try and persuade M. Danglars to invite him to a ball or dinner, or something of the sort, that he may be compelled to ask us in return."

“What,” said Debray, laughing; “do you really mean you would go to his house?”

“Why not? my husband could accompany me.”

“But do you know this mysterious count is a bachelor?”

“You have ample proof to the contrary, if you look opposite,” said the baroness, as she laughingly pointed to the beautiful Greek.

“No, no!” exclaimed Debray; “that girl is not his wife: he told us himself she was his slave. Do you not recollect, Morcerf, his telling us so at your breakfast?”

“Well, then,” said the baroness, “if slave she be, she has all the air and manner of a princess.”

“Of the ‘Arabian Nights’?”

“If you like; but tell me, my dear Lucien, what it is that constitutes a princess. Why, diamonds — and she is covered with them.”

“To me she seems overloaded,” observed Eugenie; “she would look far better if she wore fewer, and we should then be able to see her finely formed throat and wrists.”

“See how the artist peeps out!” exclaimed Madame Danglars. “My poor Eugenie, you must conceal your passion for the fine arts.”

“I admire all that is beautiful,” returned the young lady.

“What do you think of the count?” inquired Debray; “he is not much amiss, according to my ideas of good looks.”

“The count,” repeated Eugenie, as though it had not occurred to her to observe him sooner; “the count? — oh, he is so dreadfully pale.”

“I quite agree with you,” said Morcerf; “and the secret of that very pallor is what we want to find out. The Countess G — — insists upon it that he is a vampire.”

“Then the Countess G — — has returned to Paris, has she?” inquired the baroness.

“Is that she, mamma?” asked Eugenie; “almost opposite to us, with that profusion of beautiful light hair?”

“Yes,” said Madame Danglars, “that is she. Shall I tell you what you ought to do, Morcerf?”

“Command me, madame.”

“Well, then, you should go and bring your Count of Monte Cristo to us.”

“What for?” asked Eugenie.

“What for? Why, to converse with him, of course. Have you really no desire to meet him?”

“None whatever,” replied Eugenie.

“Strange child,” murmured the baroness.

“He will very probably come of his own accord,” said Morcerf. “There; do you see, madame, he recognizes you, and bows.” The baroness returned the salute in the most smiling and graceful manner.

“Well,” said Morcerf, “I may as well be magnanimous, and tear myself away to forward your wishes. Adieu; I will go and try if there are any means of speaking to him.”

“Go straight to his box; that will be the simplest plan.”

“But I have never been presented.”

“Presented to whom?”

“To the beautiful Greek.”

“You say she is only a slave?”

“While you assert that she is a queen, or at least a princess. No; I hope that when he sees me leave you, he will come out.”

“That is possible — go.”

“I am going,” said Albert, as he made his parting bow. Just as he was passing the count’s box, the door opened, and Monte Cristo came forth. After giving some directions to Ali, who stood in the lobby, the count took Albert’s arm. Carefully closing the box door, Ali placed himself before it, while a crowd of spectators assembled round the Nubian.

“Upon my word,” said Monte Cristo, “Paris is a strange city, and the Parisians a very singular people. See that cluster of persons collected around poor Ali, who is as much astonished as themselves; really one might suppose he was the only Nubian they had ever beheld. Now I can promise you, that a Frenchman might show himself in public, either in Tunis, Constantinople, Bagdad, or Cairo, without being treated in that way.”

“That shows that the Eastern nations have too much good sense to waste their time and attention on objects undeserving of either. However, as far as Ali is concerned, I can assure you, the interest he excites is merely from the circumstance of his being your attendant — you, who are at this moment the most celebrated and fashionable person in Paris.”

“Really? and what has procured me so fluttering a distinction?”

“What? why, yourself, to be sure! You give away horses worth a thousand louis; you save the lives of ladies of high rank and beauty; under the name of Major Brack you run thoroughbreds ridden by tiny urchins not larger than marmots; then, when you have carried off the golden trophy of victory, instead of setting any value on it, you give it to the first handsome woman you think of!”

“And who has filled your head with all this nonsense?”

“Why, in the first place, I heard it from Madame Danglars, who, by the by, is dying to see you in her box, or to have you seen there by others; secondly, I learned it from Beauchamp’s journal; and thirdly, from my own imagination. Why, if you sought concealment, did you call your horse Vampa?”

“That was an oversight, certainly,” replied the count; “but tell me, does the Count of Morcerf never visit the Opera? I have been looking for him, but without success.”

“He will be here to-night.”

“In what part of the house?”

“In the baroness’s box, I believe.”

“That charming young woman with her is her daughter?”

“Yes.”

“I congratulate you.” Morcerf smiled. “We will discuss that subject at length some future time,” said he. “But what do you think of the music?”

“What music?”

“Why, the music you have been listening to.”

“Oh, it is well enough as the production of a human composer, sung by featherless bipeds, to quote the late Diogenes.”

“From which it would seem, my dear count, that you can at pleasure enjoy the seraphic strains that proceed from the seven choirs of paradise?”

“You are right, in some degree; when I wish to listen to sounds more exquisitely attuned to melody than mortal ear ever yet listened to, I go to sleep.”

“Then sleep here, my dear count. The conditions are favorable; what else was opera invented for?”

“No, thank you. Your orchestra is too noisy. To sleep after the manner I speak of, absolute calm and silence are necessary, and then a certain preparation” —

“I know — the famous hashish!”

“Precisely. So, my dear viscount, whenever you wish to be regaled with music come and sup with me.”

“I have already enjoyed that treat when breakfasting with you,” said Morcerf.

“Do you mean at Rome?”

“I do.”

“Ah, then, I suppose you heard Haidee’s guzla; the poor exile frequently beguiles a weary hour in playing over to me the airs of her native land.” Morcerf did not pursue the subject, and Monte Cristo himself fell into a silent reverie. The bell rang at this moment for the rising of the curtain. “You will excuse my leaving you,” said the count, turning in the direction of his box.

“What? Are you going?”

“Pray, say everything that is kind to Countess G — — on the part of her friend the Vampire.”

“And what message shall I convey to the baroness!”

“That, with her permission, I shall do myself the honor of paying my respects in the course of the evening.”

The third act had begun; and during its progress the Count of Morcerf, according to his promise, made his appearance in the box of Madame Danglars. The Count of Morcerf was not a person to excite either interest or curiosity in a place of public amusement; his presence, therefore, was wholly unnoticed, save by the occupants of the box in which he had just seated himself. The quick eye of Monte Cristo however, marked his coming; and a slight though meaning smile passed over his lips. Haidee, whose soul seemed centred in the business of the stage, like all unsophisticated natures, delighted in whatever addressed itself to the eye or ear.

The third act passed off as usual. Mesdemoiselles Noblet, Julie, and Leroux executed the customary pirouettes; Robert duly challenged the Prince of Granada; and the royal father of the princess Isabella, taking his daughter by the hand, swept round the stage with majestic strides, the better to display the rich folds of his velvet robe and mantle. After which the curtain again fell, and the spectators poured forth from the theatre into the lobbies and salon. The count left his box, and a moment later was saluting the Baronne Danglars, who could not restrain a cry of mingled pleasure and surprise. “You are welcome, count!” she exclaimed, as he entered. “I have been most anxious to see you, that I might repeat orally the thanks writing can so ill express.”

“Surely so trifling a circumstance cannot deserve a place in your remembrance. Believe me, madame, I had entirely forgotten it.”

“But it is not so easy to forget, monsieur, that the very next day after your princely gift you saved the life of my dear friend, Madame de Villefort, which was endangered by the very animals your generosity restored to me.”

“This time, at least, I do not deserve your thanks. It was Ali, my Nubian slave, who rendered this service to Madame de Villefort.”

“Was it Ali,” asked the Count of Morcerf, “who rescued my son from the hands of bandits?”

“No, count,” replied Monte Cristo taking the hand held out to him by the general; “in this instance I may fairly and freely accept your thanks; but you have already tendered them, and fully discharged your debt — if indeed there existed one — and I feel almost mortified to find you still reverting to the subject. May I beg of you, baroness, to honor me with an introduction to your daughter?”

“Oh, you are no stranger — at least not by name,” replied Madame Danglars, “and the last two or three days we have really talked of nothing but you. Eugenie,” continued the baroness, turning towards her daughter, “this is the Count of Monte Cristo.” The Count bowed, while Mademoiselle Danglars bent her head slightly. “You have a charming young person with you to-night, count,” said Eugenie. “Is she your daughter?”

“No, mademoiselle,” said Monte Cristo, astonished at the coolness and freedom of the question. “She is a poor unfortunate Greek left under my care.”

“And what is her name?”

“Haidee,” replied Monte Cristo.

“A Greek?” murmured the Count of Morcerf.

“Yes, indeed, count,” said Madame Danglars; “and tell me, did you ever see at the court of Ali Tepelini, whom you so gloriously and valiantly served, a more exquisite beauty or richer costume?”

“Did I hear rightly, monsieur,” said Monte Cristo “that you served at Yanina?”

“I was inspector-general of the pasha’s troops,” replied Morcerf; “and it is no secret that I owe my fortune, such as it is, to the liberality of the illustrious Albanese chief.”

“But look!” exclaimed Madame Danglars.

“Where?” stammered Morcerf.

"There," said Monte Cristo placing his arms around the count, and leaning with him over the front of the box, just as Haidee, whose eyes were occupied in examining the theatre in search of her guardian, perceived his pale features close to Morcerf's face. It was as if the young girl beheld the head of Medusa. She bent forwards as though to assure herself of the reality of what she saw, then, uttering a faint cry, threw herself back in her seat. The sound was heard by the people about Ali, who instantly opened the box-door. "Why, count," exclaimed Eugenie, "what has happened to your ward? she seems to have been taken suddenly ill."

"Very probably," answered the count. "But do not be alarmed on her account. Haidee's nervous system is delicately organized, and she is peculiarly susceptible to the odors even of flowers — nay, there are some which cause her to faint if brought into her presence. However," continued Monte Cristo, drawing a small phial from his pocket, "I have an infallible remedy." So saying, he bowed to the baroness and her daughter, exchanged a parting shake of the hand with Debray and the count, and left Madame Danglars' box. Upon his return to Haidee he found her still very pale. As soon as she saw him she seized his hand; her own hands were moist and icy cold. "Who was it you were talking with over there?" she asked.

"With the Count of Morcerf," answered Monte Cristo. "He tells me he served your illustrious father, and that he owes his fortune to him."

"Wretch!" exclaimed Haidee, her eyes flashing with rage; "he sold my father to the Turks, and the fortune he boasts of was the price of his treachery! Did not you know that, my dear lord?"

"Something of this I heard in Epirus," said Monte Cristo; "but the particulars are still unknown to me. You shall relate them to me, my child. They are, no doubt, both curious and interesting."

"Yes, yes; but let us go. I feel as though it would kill me to remain long near that dreadful man." So saying, Haidee arose, and wrapping herself in her burnoose of white cashmire embroidered with pearls and coral, she hastily quitted the box at the moment when the curtain was rising upon the fourth act.

"Do you observe," said the Countess G — — to Albert, who had returned to her side, "that man does nothing like other people; he listens most devoutly to the third act of 'Robert le Diable,' and when the fourth begins, takes his departure."

Chapter 54

A Flurry in Stocks.

Some days after this meeting, Albert de Morcerf visited the Count of Monte Cristo at his house in the Champs Elysees, which had already assumed that palace-like appearance which the count’s princely fortune enabled him to give even to his most temporary residences. He came to renew the thanks of Madame Danglars which had been already conveyed to the count through the medium of a letter, signed “Baronne Danglars, nee Hermine de Servieux.” Albert was accompanied by Lucien Debray, who, joining in his friend’s conversation, added some passing compliments, the source of which the count’s talent for finesse easily enabled him to guess. He was convinced that Lucien’s visit was due to a double feeling of curiosity, the larger half of which sentiment emanated from the Rue de la Chaussee d’Antin. In short, Madame Danglars, not being able personally to examine in detail the domestic economy and household arrangements of a man who gave away horses worth 30,000 francs and who went to the opera with a Greek slave wearing diamonds to the amount of a million of money, had deputed those eyes, by which she was accustomed to see, to give her a faithful account of the mode of life of this incomprehensible person. But the count did not appear to suspect that there could be the slightest connection between Lucien’s visit and the curiosity of the baroness.

“You are in constant communication with the Baron Danglars?” the count inquired of Albert de Morcerf.

“Yes, count, you know what I told you?”

“All remains the same, then, in that quarter?”

“It is more than ever a settled thing,” said Lucien, — and, considering that this remark was all that he was at that time called upon to make, he adjusted the glass to his eye, and biting the top of his gold headed cane, began to make the tour of the apartment, examining the arms and the pictures.

“Ah,” said Monte Cristo “I did not expect that the affair would be so promptly concluded.”

"Oh, things take their course without our assistance. While we are forgetting them, they are falling into their appointed order; and when, again, our attention is directed to them, we are surprised at the progress they have made towards the proposed end. My father and M. Danglars served together in Spain, my father in the army and M. Danglars in the commissariat department. It was there that my father, ruined by the revolution, and M. Danglars, who never had possessed any patrimony, both laid the foundations of their different fortunes."

"Yes," said Monte Cristo "I think M. Danglars mentioned that in a visit which I paid him; and," continued he, casting a side-glance at Lucien, who was turning over the leaves of an album, "Mademoiselle Eugenie is pretty — I think I remember that to be her name."

"Very pretty, or rather, very beautiful," replied Albert, "but of that style of beauty which I do not appreciate; I am an ungrateful fellow."

"You speak as if you were already her husband."

"Ah," returned Albert, in his turn looking around to see what Lucien was doing.

"Really," said Monte Cristo, lowering his voice, "you do not appear to me to be very enthusiastic on the subject of this marriage."

"Mademoiselle Danglars is too rich for me," replied Morcerf, "and that frightens me."

"Bah," exclaimed Monte Cristo, "that's a fine reason to give. Are you not rich yourself?"

"My father's income is about 50,000 francs per annum; and he will give me, perhaps, ten or twelve thousand when I marry."

"That, perhaps, might not be considered a large sum, in Paris especially," said the count; "but everything does not depend on wealth, and it is a fine thing to have a good name, and to occupy a high station in society. Your name is celebrated, your position magnificent; and then the Comte de Morcerf is a soldier, and it is pleasing to see the integrity of a Bayard united to the poverty of a Duguesclin; disinterestedness is the brightest ray in which a noble sword can shine. As for me, I consider the union with Mademoiselle Danglars a most suitable one; she will enrich you, and you will ennoble her." Albert shook his head, and looked thoughtful. "There is still something else," said he.

"I confess," observed Monte Cristo, "that I have some difficulty in comprehending your objection to a young lady who is both rich and beautiful."

"Oh," said Morcerf, "this repugnance, if repugnance it may be called, is not all on my side."

"Whence can it arise, then? for you told me your father desired the marriage."

"It is my mother who dissents; she has a clear and penetrating judgment, and does not smile on the proposed union. I cannot account for it, but she seems to entertain some prejudice against the Danglars."

"Ah," said the count, in a somewhat forced tone, "that may be easily explained; the Comtesse de Morcerf, who is aristocracy and refinement itself, does not relish the idea of being allied by your marriage with one of ignoble birth; that is natural enough."

"I do not know if that is her reason," said Albert, "but one thing I do know, that if this marriage be consummated, it will render her quite miserable. There was to have been a meeting six weeks ago in order to talk over and settle the affair; but I had such a sudden attack of indisposition" —

"Real?" interrupted the count, smiling.

"Oh, real enough, from anxiety doubtless, — at any rate they postponed the matter for two months. There is no hurry, you know. I am not yet twenty-one, and Eugenie is only seventeen; but the two months expire next week. It must be done. My dear count, you cannot imagine how my mind is harassed. How happy you are in being exempt from all this!"

"Well, and why should not you be free, too? What prevents you from being so?"

"Oh, it will be too great a disappointment to my father if I do not marry Mademoiselle Danglars."

"Marry her then," said the count, with a significant shrug of the shoulders.

"Yes," replied Morcerf, "but that will plunge my mother into positive grief."

"Then do not marry her," said the count.

"Well, I shall see. I will try and think over what is the best thing to be done; you will give me your advice, will you not, and if possible extricate me from my unpleasant position? I think, rather than give pain to my dear mother, I would run the risk of offending the count." Monte Cristo turned away; he seemed moved by this last remark. "Ah," said he to Debray, who had thrown himself into an easy-chair at the farthest extremity of the salon, and who held a pencil in his right hand and an account book in his left, "what are you doing there? Are you making a sketch after Poussin?"

"Oh, no," was the tranquil response; "I am too fond of art to attempt anything of that sort. I am doing a little sum in arithmetic."

"In arithmetic?"

"Yes; I am calculating — by the way, Morcerf, that indirectly concerns you — I am calculating what the house of Danglars must have gained by the last rise in Haiti bonds; from 206 they have risen to 409 in three days, and the prudent banker had purchased at 206; therefore he must have made 300,000 livres."

"That is not his biggest scoop," said Morcerf; "did he not make a million in Spaniards this last year?"

"My dear fellow," said Lucien, "here is the Count of Monte Cristo, who will say to you, as the Italians do, —

"'Danaro e santita, Meta della meta.' [*]

* "Money and sanctity, Each in a moiety.

"When they tell me such things, I only shrug my shoulders and say nothing."

"But you were speaking of Haitians?" said Monte Cristo.

"Ah, Haitians, — that is quite another thing! Haitians are the ecarte of French stock-jobbing. We may like bouillotte, delight in whist, be enraptured with boston, and yet grow tired of them all; but we always come back to ecarte — it is not only a game, it is a hors-d'oeuvre! M. Danglars sold yesterday at 405, and pockets 300,000 francs. Had he but waited till to-day, the price would have fallen to 205, and instead of gaining 300,000 francs, he would have lost 20 or 25,000."

"And what has caused the sudden fall from 409 to 206?" asked Monte Cristo. "I am profoundly ignorant of all these stock-jobbing intrigues."

"Because," said Albert, laughing, "one piece of news follows another, and there is often great dissimilarity between them."

"Ah," said the count, "I see that M. Danglars is accustomed to play at gaining or losing 300,000 francs in a day; he must be enormously rich."

"It is not he who plays!" exclaimed Lucien; "it is Madame Danglars: she is indeed daring."

"But you who are a reasonable being, Lucien, and who knows how little dependence is to be placed on the news, since you are at the fountain-head, surely you ought to prevent it," said Morcerf, with a smile.

"How can I, if her husband fails in controlling her?" asked Lucien; "you know the character of the baroness — no one has any influence with her, and she does precisely what she pleases."

"Ah, if I were in your place" — said Albert.

"Well?"

"I would reform her; it would be rendering a service to her future son-in-law."

"How would you set about it?"

"Ah, that would be easy enough — I would give her a lesson."

"A lesson?"

"Yes. Your position as secretary to the minister renders your authority great on the subject of political news; you never open your mouth but the stockbrokers immediately stenograph your words. Cause her to lose a hundred thousand francs, and that would teach her prudence."

"I do not understand," stammered Lucien.

"It is very clear, notwithstanding," replied the young man, with an artlessness wholly free from affectation; "tell her some fine morning an unheard-of piece of intelligence — some telegraphic despatch, of which you alone are in possession; for instance, that Henri IV. was seen yesterday at Gabrielle's. That would boom the market; she will buy heavily, and she will certainly lose when Beauchamp announces the following day, in his gazette, 'The report circulated by some usually well-informed persons that the king was seen yesterday at Gabrielle's house, is totally without foundation. We can positively assert that his majesty did not quit the Pont-Neuf.'" Lucien half smiled. Monte Cristo, although apparently indifferent, had not lost one word of this conversation, and his penetrating eye had even read a hidden secret in the embarrassed manner of the secretary. This embarrassment had completely escaped Albert, but it caused Lucien to shorten his visit; he was evidently ill at ease. The count, in taking leave of him, said something in a low voice, to which he answered, "Willingly, count; I accept." The count returned to young Morcerf.

"Do you not think, on reflection," said he to him, "that you have done wrong in thus speaking of your mother-in-law in the presence of M. Debray?"

"My dear count," said Morcerf, "I beg of you not to apply that title so prematurely."

"Now, speaking without any exaggeration, is your mother really so very much averse to this marriage?"

"So much so that the baroness very rarely comes to the house, and my mother, has not, I think, visited Madame Danglars twice in her whole life."

"Then," said the count, "I am emboldened to speak openly to you. M. Danglars is my banker; M. de Villefort has overwhelmed me with politeness in return for a service which a casual piece of good fortune enabled me to render him. I predict from all this an avalanche of dinners and routs. Now, in order not to presume on this, and also to be beforehand with them, I have, if agreeable to you, thought of inviting M. and Madame Danglars, and M. and Madame de Villefort, to my country-house at Auteuil. If I were to invite you and the Count and Countess of Morcerf to this dinner, I should give it the appearance of being a matrimonial meeting, or at least Madame de Morcerf would look upon the affair in that light, especially if Baron Danglars did me the honor to bring his daughter. In that case your mother would hold me in aversion, and I do not at all wish that; on the contrary, I desire to stand high in her esteem."

"Indeed, count," said Morcerf, "I thank you sincerely for having used so much candor towards me, and I gratefully accept the exclusion which you propose. You say you desire my mother's good opinion; I assure you it is already yours to a very unusual extent."

"Do you think so?" said Monte Cristo, with interest.

"Oh, I am sure of it; we talked of you an hour after you left us the other day. But to return to what we were saying. If my mother could know of this attention on your part — and I will venture to tell her — I am sure that she will be most grateful to you; it is true that my father will be equally angry." The count laughed. "Well," said he to Morcerf, "but I think your father will not be the only angry one; M. and Madame Danglars will think me a very ill-mannered person. They know that I am intimate with you — that you are, in fact; one of the oldest of my Parisian acquaintances — and they will not find you at my house; they will certainly ask me why I did not invite you. Be sure to provide yourself with some previous engagement which shall have a semblance of probability, and communicate the fact to me by a line in writing. You know that with bankers nothing but a written document will be valid."

"I will do better than that," said Albert; "my mother is wishing to go to the sea-side — what day is fixed for your dinner?"

"Saturday."

"This is Tuesday — well, to-morrow evening we leave, and the day after we shall be at Treport. Really, count, you have a delightful way of setting people at their ease."

"Indeed, you give me more credit than I deserve; I only wish to do what will be agreeable to you, that is all."

"When shall you send your invitations?"

"This very day."

"Well, I will immediately call on M. Danglars, and tell him that my mother and myself must leave Paris to-morrow. I have not seen you, consequently I know nothing of your dinner."

"How foolish you are! Have you forgotten that M. Debray has just seen you at my house?"

"Ah, true."

"Fix it this way. I have seen you, and invited you without any ceremony, when you instantly answered that it would be impossible for you to accept, as you were going to Treport."

"Well, then, that is settled; but you will come and call on my mother before to-morrow?"

"Before to-morrow? — that will be a difficult matter to arrange, besides, I shall just be in the way of all the preparations for departure."

"Well, you can do better. You were only a charming man before, but, if you accede to my proposal, you will be adorable."

"What must I do to attain such sublimity?"

"You are to-day free as air — come and dine with me; we shall be a small party — only yourself, my mother, and I. You have scarcely seen my mother; you shall have an opportunity of observing her more closely. She is a remarkable woman, and I only regret that there does not exist another like her, about twenty years younger; in that case, I assure you, there would very soon be a Countess and Viscountess of Morcerf. As to my father, you will not see him; he is officially engaged, and dines with the chief referendary. We will talk over our travels; and you, who have seen the whole world, will relate your adventures — you shall tell us the history of the beautiful Greek who was with you the other night at the Opera, and whom you call your slave, and yet treat like a princess. We will talk Italian and Spanish. Come, accept my invitation, and my mother will thank you."

“A thousand thanks,” said the count, “your invitation is most gracious, and I regret exceedingly that it is not in my power to accept it. I am not so much at liberty as you suppose; on the contrary, I have a most important engagement.”

“Ah, take care, you were teaching me just now how, in case of an invitation to dinner, one might creditably make an excuse. I require the proof of a pre-engagement. I am not a banker, like M. Danglars, but I am quite as incredulous as he is.”

“I am going to give you a proof,” replied the count, and he rang the bell.

“Humph,” said Morcerf, “this is the second time you have refused to dine with my mother; it is evident that you wish to avoid her.” Monte Cristo started. “Oh, you do not mean that,” said he; “besides, here comes the confirmation of my assertion.” Baptistin entered, and remained standing at the door. “I had no previous knowledge of your visit, had I?”

“Indeed, you are such an extraordinary person, that I would not answer for it.”

“At all events, I could not guess that you would invite me to dinner.”

“Probably not.”

“Well, listen, Baptistin, what did I tell you this morning when I called you into my laboratory?”

“To close the door against visitors as soon as the clock struck five,” replied the valet.

“What then?”

“Ah, my dear count,” said Albert.

“No, no, I wish to do away with that mysterious reputation that you have given me, my dear viscount; it is tiresome to be always acting Manfred. I wish my life to be free and open. Go on, Baptistin.”

“Then to admit no one except Major Bartolomeo Cavalcanti and his son.”

“You hear — Major Bartolomeo Cavalcanti — a man who ranks amongst the most ancient nobility of Italy, whose name Dante has celebrated in the tenth canto of ‘The Inferno,’ you remember it, do you not? Then there is his son, Andrea, a charming young man, about your own age, viscount, bearing the same title as yourself, and who is making his entry into the Parisian world, aided by his father’s millions. The major will bring his son with him this evening, the contino, as we say in Italy; he confides him to my care. If he proves himself worthy of it, I will do what I can to advance his interests. You will assist me in the work, will you not?”

“Most undoubtedly. This Major Cavalcanti is an old friend of yours, then?”

“By no means. He is a perfect nobleman, very polite, modest, and agreeable, such as may be found constantly in Italy, descendants of very ancient families. I have met him several times at Florence, Bologna and Lucca, and he has now communicated to me the fact of his arrival in Paris. The acquaintances one makes in travelling have a sort of claim on one; they everywhere expect to receive the same attention which you once paid them by chance, as though the civilities of a passing hour were likely to awaken any lasting interest in favor of the man in whose society you may happen to be thrown in the course of your journey. This good Major Cavalcanti is come to take a second view of Paris, which he only saw in passing through in the time of the Empire, when he was on his way to Moscow. I shall give him a good dinner, he will confide his son to my care, I will promise to watch over him, I shall let him follow in whatever path his folly may lead him, and then I shall have done my part.”

“Certainly; I see you are a model Mentor,” said Albert “Good-by, we shall return on Sunday. By the way, I have received news of Franz.”

“Have you? Is he still amusing himself in Italy?”

“I believe so; however, he regrets your absence extremely. He says you were the sun of Rome, and that without you all appears dark and cloudy; I do not know if he does not even go so far as to say that it rains.”

“His opinion of me is altered for the better, then?”

“No, he still persists in looking upon you as the most incomprehensible and mysterious of beings.”

“He is a charming young man,” said Monte Cristo “and I felt a lively interest in him the very first evening of my introduction, when I met him in search of a supper, and prevailed upon him to accept a portion of mine. He is, I think, the son of General d’Epinay?”

“He is.”

“The same who was so shamefully assassinated in 1815?”

“By the Bonapartists.”

“Yes. Really I like him extremely; is there not also a matrimonial engagement contemplated for him?”

“Yes, he is to marry Mademoiselle de Villefort.”

“Indeed?”

“And you know I am to marry Mademoiselle Danglars,” said Albert, laughing.

“You smile.”

“Yes.”

“Why do you do so?”

“I smile because there appears to me to be about as much inclination for the consummation of the engagement in question as there is for my own. But really, my dear count, we are talking as much of women as they do of us; it is unpardonable.” Albert rose.

“Are you going?”

“Really, that is a good idea! — two hours have I been boring you to death with my company, and then you, with the greatest politeness, ask me if I am going. Indeed, count, you are the most polished man in the world. And your servants, too, how very well behaved they are; there is quite a style about them. Monsieur Baptistin especially; I could never get such a man as that. My servants seem to imitate those you sometimes see in a play, who, because they have only a word or two to say, aquit themselves in the most awkward manner possible. Therefore, if you part with M. Baptistin, give me the refusal of him.”

“By all means.”

“That is not all; give my compliments to your illustrious Luccanese, Cavalcante of the Cavalcanti; and if by any chance he should be wishing to establish his son, find him a wife very rich, very noble on her mother’s side at least, and a baroness in right of her father, I will help you in the search.”

“Ah, ha; you will do as much as that, will you?”

“Yes.”

“Well, really, nothing is certain in this world.”

“Oh, count, what a service you might render me! I should like you a hundred times better if, by your intervention, I could manage to remain a bachelor, even were it only for ten years.”

“Nothing is impossible,” gravely replied Monte Cristo; and taking leave of Albert, he returned into the house, and struck the gong three times. Bertuccio appeared. “Monsieur Bertuccio, you understand that I intend entertaining company on Saturday at Auteuil.” Bertuccio slightly started. “I shall require your services to see that all be properly arranged. It is a beautiful house, or at all events may be made so.”

“There must be a good deal done before it can deserve that title, your excellency, for the tapestried hangings are very old.”

“Let them all be taken away and changed, then, with the exception of the sleeping-chamber which is hung with red damask; you will leave that exactly as it is.” Bertuccio bowed. “You will not touch the garden either; as to the yard, you may do what you please with it; I should prefer that being altered beyond all recognition.”

“I will do everything in my power to carry out your wishes, your excellency. I should be glad, however, to receive your excellency’s commands concerning the dinner.”

“Really, my dear M. Bertuccio,” said the count, “since you have been in Paris, you have become quite nervous, and apparently out of your element; you no longer seem to understand me.”

“But surely your excellency will be so good as to inform me whom you are expecting to receive?”

“I do not yet know myself, neither is it necessary that you should do so. ‘Lucullus dines with Lucullus,’ that is quite sufficient.” Bertuccio bowed, and left the room.

Chapter 55

Major Cavalcanti.

Both the count and Baptistin had told the truth when they announced to Morcerf the proposed visit of the major, which had served Monte Cristo as a pretext for declining Albert’s invitation. Seven o’clock had just struck, and M. Bertuccio, according to the command which had been given him, had two hours before left for Auteuil, when a cab stopped at the door, and after depositing its occupant at the gate, immediately hurried away, as if ashamed of its employment. The visitor was about fifty-two years of age, dressed in one of the green surtouts, ornamented with black frogs, which have so long maintained their popularity all over Europe. He wore trousers of blue cloth, boots tolerably clean, but not of the brightest polish, and a little too thick in the soles, buckskin gloves, a hat somewhat resembling in shape those usually worn by the gendarmes, and a black cravat striped with white, which, if the proprietor had not worn it of his own free will, might have passed for a halter, so much did it resemble one. Such was the picturesque costume of the person who rang at the gate, and demanded if it was not at No. 30 in the Avenue des Champs-Elysees that the Count of Monte Cristo lived, and who, being answered by the porter in the affirmative, entered, closed the gate after him, and began to ascend the steps.

The small and angular head of this man, his white hair and thick gray mustaches, caused him to be easily recognized by Baptistin, who had received an exact description of the expected visitor, and who was awaiting him in the hall. Therefore, scarcely had the stranger time to pronounce his name before the count was apprised of his arrival. He was ushered into a simple and elegant drawing-room, and the count rose to meet him with a smiling air. “Ah, my dear sir, you are most welcome; I was expecting you.”

“Indeed,” said the Italian, “was your excellency then aware of my visit?”

“Yes; I had been told that I should see you to-day at seven o’clock.”

“Then you have received full information concerning my arrival?”

“Of course.”

“Ah, so much the better, I feared this little precaution might have been forgotten.”

“What precaution?”

“That of informing you beforehand of my coming.”

“Oh, no, it has not.”

“But you are sure you are not mistaken.”

“Very sure.”

“It really was I whom your excellency expected at seven o’clock this evening?”

“I will prove it to you beyond a doubt.”

“Oh, no, never mind that,” said the Italian; “it is not worth the trouble.”

“Yes, yes,” said Monte Cristo. His visitor appeared slightly uneasy. “Let me see,” said the count; “are you not the Marquis Bartolomeo Cavalcanti?”

“Bartolomeo Cavalcanti,” joyfully replied the Italian; “yes, I am really he.”

“Ex-major in the Austrian service?”

“Was I a major?” timidly asked the old soldier.

“Yes,” said Monte Cristo “you were a major; that is the title the French give to the post which you filled in Italy.”

“Very good,” said the major, “I do not demand more, you understand” —

“Your visit here to-day is not of your own suggestion, is it?” said Monte Cristo.

“No, certainly not.”

“You were sent by some other person?”

“Yes.”

“By the excellent Abbe Busoni?”

“Exactly so,” said the delighted major.

“And you have a letter?”

“Yes, there it is.”

“Give it me, then;” and Monte Cristo took the letter, which he opened and read. The major looked at the count with his large staring eyes, and then took a survey of the apartment, but his gaze almost immediately reverted to the proprietor of the room. “Yes, yes, I see. ‘Major Cavalcanti, a worthy patrician of Lucca, a descendant of the Cavalcanti of Florence,’“ continued Monte Cristo, reading aloud, “‘possessing an income of half a million.’“ Monte Cristo raised his eyes from the paper, and bowed. “Half a million,” said he, “magnificent!”

“Half a million, is it?” said the major.

“Yes, in so many words; and it must be so, for the abbe knows correctly the amount of all the largest fortunes in Europe.”

“Be it half a million, then; but on my word of honor, I had no idea that it was so much.”

“Because you are robbed by your steward. You must make some reformation in that quarter.”

“You have opened my eyes,” said the Italian gravely; “I will show the gentlemen the door.” Monte Cristo resumed the perusal of the letter: —

“‘And who only needs one thing more to make him happy.’“

“Yes, indeed but one!” said the major with a sigh.

“‘Which is to recover a lost and adored son.’“

“A lost and adored son!”

“‘Stolen away in his infancy, either by an enemy of his noble family or by the gypsies.’“

“At the age of five years!” said the major with a deep sigh, and raising his eye to heaven.

“Unhappy father,” said Monte Cristo. The count continued: —

“‘I have given him renewed life and hope, in the assurance that you have the power of restoring the son whom he has vainly sought for fifteen years.’“ The major looked at the count with an indescribable expression of anxiety. “I have the power of so doing,” said Monte Cristo. The major recovered his self-possession. “So, then,” said he, “the letter was true to the end?”

“Did you doubt it, my dear Monsieur Bartolomeo?”

“No, indeed; certainly not; a good man, a man holding religious office, as does the Abbe Busoni, could not condescend to deceive or play off a joke; but your excellency has not read all.”

“Ah, true,” said Monte Cristo “there is a postscript.”

“Yes, yes,” repeated the major, “yes — there — is — a — postscript.”

“‘In order to save Major Cavalcanti the trouble of drawing on his banker, I send him a draft for 2,000 francs to defray his travelling expenses, and credit on you for the further sum of 48,000 francs, which you still owe me.’“ The major awaited the conclusion of the postscript, apparently with great anxiety. “Very good,” said the count.

“He said ‘very good,’“ muttered the major, “then — sir” — replied he.

“Then what?” asked Monte Cristo.

“Then the postscript” —

“Well; what of the postscript?”

“Then the postscript is as favorably received by you as the rest of the letter?”

“Certainly; the Abbe Busoni and myself have a small account open between us. I do not remember if it is exactly 48,000. francs, which I am still owing him, but I dare say we shall not dispute the difference. You attached great importance, then, to this postscript, my dear Monsieur Cavalcanti?”

“I must explain to you,” said the major, “that, fully confiding in the signature of the Abbe Busoni, I had not provided myself with any other funds; so that if this resource had failed me, I should have found myself very unpleasantly situated in Paris.”

“Is it possible that a man of your standing should be embarrassed anywhere?” said Monte Cristo.

“Why, really I know no one,” said the major.

“But then you yourself are known to others?”

“Yes, I am known, so that” —

“Proceed, my dear Monsieur Cavalcanti.”

“So that you will remit to me these 48,000 francs?”

“Certainly, at your first request.” The major’s eyes dilated with pleasing astonishment. “But sit down,” said Monte Cristo; “really I do not know what I have been thinking of — I have positively kept you standing for the last quarter of an hour.”

“Don’t mention it.” The major drew an arm-chair towards him, and proceeded to seat himself.

“Now,” said the count, “what will you take — a glass of port, sherry, or Alicante?”

“Alicante, if you please; it is my favorite wine.”

“I have some that is very good. You will take a biscuit with it, will you not?”

“Yes, I will take a biscuit, as you are so obliging.”

Monte Cristo rang; Baptistin appeared. The count advanced to meet him. “Well?” said he in a low voice. “The young man is here,” said the valet de chambre in the same tone.

“Into what room did you take him?”

“Into the blue drawing-room, according to your excellency’s orders.”

“That’s right; now bring the Alicante and some biscuits.”

Baptistin left the room. “Really,” said the major, “I am quite ashamed of the trouble I am giving you.”

“Pray don’t mention such a thing,” said the count. Baptistin re-entered with glasses, wine, and biscuits. The count filled one glass, but in the other he only poured a few drops of the ruby-colored liquid. The bottle was covered with spiders’ webs, and all the other signs which indicate the age of wine more truly than do wrinkles on a man’s face. The major made a wise choice; he took the full glass and a biscuit. The count told Baptistin to leave the plate within reach of his guest, who began by sipping the Alicante with an expression of great satisfaction, and then delicately steeped his biscuit in the wine.

“So, sir, you lived at Lucca, did you? You were rich, noble, held in great esteem — had all that could render a man happy?”

“All,” said the major, hastily swallowing his biscuit, “positively all.”

“And yet there was one thing wanting in order to complete your happiness?”

“Only one thing,” said the Italian.

“And that one thing, your lost child.”

“Ah,” said the major, taking a second biscuit, “that consummation of my happiness was indeed wanting.” The worthy major raised his eyes to heaven and sighed.

“Let me hear, then,” said the count, “who this deeply regretted son was; for I always understood you were a bachelor.”

“That was the general opinion, sir,” said the major, “and I” —

“Yes,” replied the count, “and you confirmed the report. A youthful indiscretion, I suppose, which you were anxious to conceal from the world at large?” The major recovered himself, and resumed his usual calm manner, at the same time casting his eyes down, either to give himself time to compose his countenance, or to assist his imagination, all the while giving an under-look at the count, the protracted smile on whose lips still announced the same polite curiosity. “Yes,” said the major, “I did wish this fault to be hidden from every eye.”

“Not on your own account, surely,” replied Monte Cristo; “for a man is above that sort of thing?”

“Oh, no, certainly not on my own account,” said the major with a smile and a shake of the head.

“But for the sake of the mother?” said the count.

“Yes, for the mother’s sake — his poor mother!” cried the major, taking a third biscuit.

“Take some more wine, my dear Cavalcanti,” said the count, pouring out for him a second glass of Alicante; “your emotion has quite overcome you.”

“His poor mother,” murmured the major, trying to get the lachrymal gland in operation, so as to moisten the corner of his eye with a false tear.

“She belonged to one of the first families in Italy, I think, did she not?”

“She was of a noble family of Fiesole, count.”

“And her name was” —

“Do you desire to know her name?” —

“Oh,” said Monte Cristo “it would be quite superfluous for you to tell me, for I already know it.”

“The count knows everything,” said the Italian, bowing.

“Oliva Corsinari, was it not?”

“Oliva Corsinari.”

“A marchioness?”

“A marchioness.”

“And you married her at last, notwithstanding the opposition of her family?”

“Yes, that was the way it ended.”

“And you have doubtless brought all your papers with you?” said Monte Cristo.

“What papers?”

“The certificate of your marriage with Oliva Corsinari, and the register of your child’s birth.”

“The register of my child’s birth?”

“The register of the birth of Andrea Cavalcanti — of your son; is not his name Andrea?”

“I believe so,” said the major.

“What? You believe so?”

“I dare not positively assert it, as he has been lost for so long a time.”

“Well, then,” said Monte Cristo “you have all the documents with you?”

“Your excellency, I regret to say that, not knowing it was necessary to come provided with these papers, I neglected to bring them.”

“That is unfortunate,” returned Monte Cristo.

“Were they, then, so necessary?”

“They were indispensable.”

The major passed his hand across his brow. “Ah, per Bacco, indispensable, were they?”

“Certainly they were; supposing there were to be doubts raised as to the validity of your marriage or the legitimacy of your child?”

“True,” said the major, “there might be doubts raised.”

“In that case your son would be very unpleasantly situated.”

“It would be fatal to his interests.”

“It might cause him to fail in some desirable matrimonial alliance.”

“O peccato!”

“You must know that in France they are very particular on these points; it is not sufficient, as in Italy, to go to the priest and say, ‘We love each other, and want you to marry us.’ Marriage is a civil affair in France, and in order to marry in an orthodox manner you must have papers which undeniably establish your identity.”

“That is the misfortune! You see I have not these necessary papers.”

“Fortunately, I have them, though,” said Monte Cristo.

“You?”

“Yes.”

“You have them?”

“I have them.”

“Ah, indeed?” said the major, who, seeing the object of his journey frustrated by the absence of the papers, feared also that his forgetfulness might give rise to some difficulty concerning the 48,000 francs — ”ah, indeed, that is a fortunate circumstance; yes, that really is lucky, for it never occurred to me to bring them.”

“I do not at all wonder at it — one cannot think of everything; but, happily, the Abbe Busoni thought for you.”

“He is an excellent person.”

“He is extremely prudent and thoughtful.”

“He is an admirable man,” said the major; “and he sent them to you?”

“Here they are.”

The major clasped his hands in token of admiration. “You married Oliva Corsinari in the church of San Paolo del Monte-Cattini; here is the priest’s certificate.”

“Yes indeed, there it is truly,” said the Italian, looking on with astonishment.

"And here is Andrea Cavalcanti's baptismal register, given by the curate of Saravezza."

"All quite correct."

"Take these documents, then; they do not concern me. You will give them to your son, who will, of course, take great care of them."

"I should think so, indeed! If he were to lose them" —

"Well, and if he were to lose them?" said Monte Cristo.

"In that case," replied the major, "it would be necessary to write to the curate for duplicates, and it would be some time before they could be obtained."

"It would be a difficult matter to arrange," said Monte Cristo.

"Almost an impossibility," replied the major.

"I am very glad to see that you understand the value of these papers."

"I regard them as invaluable."

"Now," said Monte Cristo "as to the mother of the young man" —

"As to the mother of the young man" — repeated the Italian, with anxiety.

"As regards the Marchesa Corsinari" —

"Really," said the major, "difficulties seem to thicken upon us; will she be wanted in any way?"

"No, sir," replied Monte Cristo; "besides, has she not" —

"Yes, sir," said the major, "she has" —

"Paid the last debt of nature?"

"Alas, yes," returned the Italian.

"I knew that," said Monte Cristo; "she has been dead these ten years."

"And I am still mourning her loss," exclaimed the major, drawing from his pocket a checked handkerchief, and alternately wiping first the left and then the right eye.

"What would you have?" said Monte Cristo; "we are all mortal. Now, you understand, my dear Monsieur Cavalcanti, that it is useless for you to tell people in France that you have been separated from your son for fifteen years. Stories of gypsies, who steal children, are not at all in vogue in this part of the world, and would not be believed. You sent him for his education to a college in one of the provinces, and now you wish him to complete his education in the Parisian world. That is the reason which has induced you to leave Via Reggio, where you have lived since the death of your wife. That will be sufficient."

"You think so?"

"Certainly."

"Very well, then."

"If they should hear of the separation" —

"Ah, yes; what could I say?"

"That an unfaithful tutor, bought over by the enemies of your family" —

"By the Corsinari?"

"Precisely. Had stolen away this child, in order that your name might become extinct."

"That is reasonable, since he is an only son."

"Well, now that all is arranged, do not let these newly awakened remembrances be forgotten. You have, doubtless, already guessed that I was preparing a surprise for you?"

"An agreeable one?" asked the Italian.

"Ah, I see the eye of a father is no more to be deceived than his heart."

"Hum!" said the major.

"Some one has told you the secret; or, perhaps, you guessed that he was here."

"That who was here?"

"Your child — your son — your Andrea!"

"I did guess it," replied the major with the greatest possible coolness. "Then he is here?"

"He is," said Monte Cristo; "when the valet de chambre came in just now, he told me of his arrival."

"Ah, very well, very well," said the major, clutching the buttons of his coat at each exclamation.

"My dear sir," said Monte Cristo, "I understand your emotion; you must have time to recover yourself. I will, in the meantime, go and prepare the young man for this much-desired interview, for I presume that he is not less impatient for it than yourself."

"I should quite imagine that to be the case," said Cavalcanti.

"Well, in a quarter of an hour he shall be with you."

"You will bring him, then? You carry your goodness so far as even to present him to me yourself?"

"No; I do not wish to come between a father and son. Your interview will be private. But do not be uneasy; even if the powerful voice of nature should be silent, you cannot well mistake him; he will enter by this door. He is a fine young man, of fair complexion — a little too fair, perhaps — pleasing in manners; but you will see and judge for yourself.”

“By the way,” said the major, “you know I have only the 2,000 francs which the Abbe Busoni sent me; this sum I have expended upon travelling expenses, and” —

“And you want money; that is a matter of course, my dear M. Cavalcanti. Well, here are 8,000 francs on account.”

The major’s eyes sparkled brilliantly.

“It is 40,000 francs which I now owe you,” said Monte Cristo.

“Does your excellency wish for a receipt?” said the major, at the same time slipping the money into the inner pocket of his coat.

“For what?” said the count.

“I thought you might want it to show the Abbe Busoni.”

“Well, when you receive the remaining 40,000, you shall give me a receipt in full. Between honest men such excessive precaution is, I think, quite unnecessary.”

“Yes, so it is, between perfectly upright people.”

“One word more,” said Monte Cristo.

“Say on.”

“You will permit me to make one remark?”

“Certainly; pray do so.”

“Then I should advise you to leave off wearing that style of dress.”

“Indeed,” said the major, regarding himself with an air of complete satisfaction.

“Yes. It may be worn at Via Reggio; but that costume, however elegant in itself, has long been out of fashion in Paris.”

“That’s unfortunate.”

“Oh, if you really are attached to your old mode of dress; you can easily resume it when you leave Paris.”

“But what shall I wear?”

“What you find in your trunks.”

“In my trunks? I have but one portmanteau.”

“I dare say you have nothing else with you. What is the use of boring one’s self with so many things? Besides an old soldier always likes to march with as little baggage as possible.”

“That is just the case — precisely so.”

“But you are a man of foresight and prudence, therefore you sent your luggage on before you. It has arrived at the Hotel des Princes, Rue de Richelieu. It is there you are to take up your quarters.”

“Then, in these trunks” —

“I presume you have given orders to your valet de chambre to put in all you are likely to need, — your plain clothes and your uniform. On grand occasions you must wear your uniform; that will look very well. Do not forget your crosses. They still laugh at them in France, and yet always wear them, for all that.”

“Very well, very well,” said the major, who was in ecstasy at the attention paid him by the count.

“Now,” said Monte Cristo, “that you have fortified yourself against all painful excitement, prepare yourself, my dear M. Cavalcanti, to meet your lost Andrea.” Saying which Monte Cristo bowed, and disappeared behind the tapestry, leaving the major fascinated beyond expression with the delightful reception which he had received at the hands of the count.

Chapter 56

Andrea Cavalcanti.

The Count of Monte Cristo entered the adjoining room, which Baptistin had designated as the drawing-room, and found there a young man, of graceful demeanor and elegant appearance, who had arrived in a cab about half an hour previously. Baptistin had not found any difficulty in recognizing the person who presented himself at the door for admittance. He was certainly the tall young man with light hair, red beard, black eyes, and brilliant complexion, whom his master had so particularly described to him. When the count entered the room the young man was carelessly stretched on a sofa, tapping his boot with the gold-headed cane which he held in his hand. On perceiving the count he rose quickly. “The Count of Monte Cristo, I believe?” said he.

“Yes, sir, and I think I have the honor of addressing Count Andrea Cavalcanti?”

“Count Andrea Cavalcanti,” repeated the young man, accompanying his words with a bow.

“You are charged with a letter of introduction addressed to me, are you not?” said the count.

“I did not mention that, because the signature seemed to me so strange.”

“The letter signed ‘Sinbad the Sailor,’ is it not?”

“Exactly so. Now, as I have never known any Sinbad, with the exception of the one celebrated in the ‘Thousand and One Nights’“ —

“Well, it is one of his descendants, and a great friend of mine; he is a very rich Englishman, eccentric almost to insanity, and his real name is Lord Wilmore.”

“Ah, indeed? Then that explains everything that is extraordinary,” said Andrea. “He is, then, the same Englishman whom I met — at — ah — yes, indeed. Well, monsieur, I am at your service.”

“If what you say be true,” replied the count, smiling, “perhaps you will be kind enough to give me some account of yourself and your family?”

"Certainly, I will do so," said the young man, with a quickness which gave proof of his ready invention. "I am (as you have said) the Count Andrea Cavalcanti, son of Major Bartolomeo Cavalcanti, a descendant of the Cavalcanti whose names are inscribed in the golden book at Florence. Our family, although still rich (for my father's income amounts to half a million), has experienced many misfortunes, and I myself was, at the age of five years, taken away by the treachery of my tutor, so that for fifteen years I have not seen the author of my existence. Since I have arrived at years of discretion and become my own master, I have been constantly seeking him, but all in vain. At length I received this letter from your friend, which states that my father is in Paris, and authorizes me to address myself to you for information respecting him."

"Really, all you have related to me is exceedingly interesting," said Monte Cristo, observing the young man with a gloomy satisfaction; "and you have done well to conform in everything to the wishes of my friend Sinbad; for your father is indeed here, and is seeking you."

The count from the moment of first entering the drawing-room, had not once lost sight of the expression of the young man's countenance; he had admired the assurance of his look and the firmness of his voice; but at these words, so natural in themselves, "Your father is indeed here, and is seeking you," young Andrea started, and exclaimed, "My father? Is my father here?"

"Most undoubtedly," replied Monte Cristo; "your father, Major Bartolomeo Cavalcanti." The expression of terror which, for the moment, had overspread the features of the young man, had now disappeared. "Ah, yes, that is the name, certainly. Major Bartolomeo Cavalcanti. And you really mean to say; monsieur, that my dear father is here?"

"Yes, sir; and I can even add that I have only just left his company. The history which he related to me of his lost son touched me to the quick; indeed, his griefs, hopes, and fears on that subject might furnish material for a most touching and pathetic poem. At length, he one day received a letter, stating that the abductors of his son now offered to restore him, or at least to give notice where he might be found, on condition of receiving a large sum of money, by way of ransom. Your father did not hesitate an instant, and the sum was sent to the frontier of Piedmont, with a passport signed for Italy. You were in the south of France, I think?"

"Yes," replied Andrea, with an embarrassed air, "I was in the south of France."

"A carriage was to await you at Nice?"

"Precisely so; and it conveyed me from Nice to Genoa, from Genoa to Turin, from Turin to Chambery, from Chambery to Pont-de-Beauvoisin, and from Pont-de-Beauvoisin to Paris."

"Indeed? Then your father ought to have met with you on the road, for it is exactly the same route which he himself took, and that is how we have been able to trace your journey to this place."

"But," said Andrea, "if my father had met me, I doubt if he would have recognized me; I must be somewhat altered since he last saw me."

"Oh, the voice of nature," said Monte Cristo.

"True," interrupted the young man, "I had not looked upon it in that light."

"Now," replied Monte Cristo "there is only one source of uneasiness left in your father's mind, which is this — he is anxious to know how you have been employed during your long absence from him, how you have been treated by your persecutors, and if they have conducted themselves towards you with all the deference due to your rank. Finally, he is anxious to see if you have been fortunate enough to escape the bad moral influence to which you have been exposed, and which is infinitely more to be dreaded than any physical suffering; he wishes to discover if the fine abilities with which nature had endowed you have been weakened by want of culture; and, in short, whether you consider yourself capable of resuming and retaining in the world the high position to which your rank entitles you."

"Sir!" exclaimed the young man, quite astounded, "I hope no false report" —

"As for myself, I first heard you spoken of by my friend Wilmore, the philanthropist. I believe he found you in some unpleasant position, but do not know of what nature, for I did not ask, not being inquisitive. Your misfortunes engaged his sympathies, so you see you must have been interesting. He told me that he was anxious to restore you to the position which you had lost, and that he would seek your father until he found him. He did seek, and has found him, apparently, since he is here now; and, finally, my friend apprised me of your coming, and gave me a few other instructions relative to your future fortune. I am quite aware that my friend Wilmore is peculiar, but he is sincere, and as rich as a gold-mine, consequently, he may indulge his eccentricities without any fear of their ruining him, and I have promised to adhere to his instructions. Now, sir, pray do not be offended at the question I am about to put to you, as it comes in the way of my duty as your patron. I would wish to know if the misfortunes which have happened to you — misfortunes entirely beyond your control, and which in no degree diminish my regard for you — I would wish to know if they have not, in some measure, contributed to render you a stranger to the world in which your fortune and your name entitle you to make a conspicuous figure?”

“Sir,” returned the young man, with a reassurance of manner, “make your mind easy on this score. Those who took me from my father, and who always intended, sooner or later, to sell me again to my original proprietor, as they have now done, calculated that, in order to make the most of their bargain, it would be politic to leave me in possession of all my personal and hereditary worth, and even to increase the value, if possible. I have, therefore, received a very good education, and have been treated by these kidnappers very much as the slaves were treated in Asia Minor, whose masters made them grammarians, doctors, and philosophers, in order that they might fetch a higher price in the Roman market.” Monte Cristo smiled with satisfaction; it appeared as if he had not expected so much from M. Andrea Cavalcanti. “Besides,” continued the young man, “if there did appear some defect in education, or offence against the established forms of etiquette, I suppose it would be excused, in consideration of the misfortunes which accompanied my birth, and followed me through my youth.”

“Well,” said Monte Cristo in an indifferent tone, “you will do as you please, count, for you are the master of your own actions, and are the person most concerned in the matter, but if I were you, I would not divulge a word of these adventures. Your history is quite a romance, and the world, which delights in romances in yellow covers, strangely mistrusts those which are bound in living parchment, even though they be gilded like yourself. This is the kind of difficulty which I wished to represent to you, my dear count. You would hardly have recited your touching history before it would go forth to the world, and be deemed unlikely and unnatural. You would be no longer a lost child found, but you would be looked upon as an upstart, who had sprung up like a mushroom in the night. You might excite a little curiosity, but it is not every one who likes to be made the centre of observation and the subject of unpleasant remark.”

"I agree with you, monsieur," said the young man, turning pale, and, in spite of himself, trembling beneath the scrutinizing look of his companion, "such consequences would be extremely unpleasant."

"Nevertheless, you must not exaggerate the evil," said Monte Cristo, "for by endeavoring to avoid one fault you will fall into another. You must resolve upon one simple and single line of conduct, and for a man of your intelligence, this plan is as easy as it is necessary; you must form honorable friendships, and by that means counteract the prejudice which may attach to the obscurity of your former life." Andrea visibly changed countenance. "I would offer myself as your surety and friendly adviser," said Monte Cristo, "did I not possess a moral distrust of my best friends, and a sort of inclination to lead others to doubt them too; therefore, in departing from this rule, I should (as the actors say) be playing a part quite out of my line, and should, therefore, run the risk of being hissed, which would be an act of folly."

"However, your excellency," said Andrea, "in consideration of Lord Wilmore, by whom I was recommended to you — "

"Yes, certainly," interrupted Monte Cristo; "but Lord Wilmore did not omit to inform me, my dear M. Andrea, that the season of your youth was rather a stormy one. Ah," said the count, watching Andrea's countenance, "I do not demand any confession from you; it is precisely to avoid that necessity that your father was sent for from Lucca. You shall soon see him. He is a little stiff and pompous in his manner, and he is disfigured by his uniform; but when it becomes known that he has been for eighteen years in the Austrian service, all that will be pardoned. We are not generally very severe with the Austrians. In short, you will find your father a very presentable person, I assure you."

"Ah, sir, you have given me confidence; it is so long since we were separated, that I have not the least remembrance of him, and, besides, you know that in the eyes of the world a large fortune covers all defects."

"He is a millionaire — his income is 500,000 francs."

"Then," said the young man, with anxiety, "I shall be sure to be placed in an agreeable position."

"One of the most agreeable possible, my dear sir; he will allow you an income of 50,000 livres per annum during the whole time of your stay in Paris."

"Then in that case I shall always choose to remain there."

“You cannot control circumstances, my dear sir; ‘man proposes, and God disposes.’“ Andrea sighed. “But,” said he, “so long as I do remain in Paris, and nothing forces me to quit it, do you mean to tell me that I may rely on receiving the sum you just now mentioned to me?”

“You may.”

“Shall I receive it from my father?” asked Andrea, with some uneasiness.

“Yes, you will receive it from your father personally, but Lord Wilmore will be the security for the money. He has, at the request of your father, opened an account of 6,000. francs a month at M. Danglars’, which is one of the safest banks in Paris.”

“And does my father mean to remain long in Paris?” asked Andrea.

“Only a few days,” replied Monte Cristo. “His service does not allow him to absent himself more than two or three weeks together.”

“Ah, my dear father!” exclaimed Andrea, evidently charmed with the idea of his speedy departure.

“Therefore,” said Monte Cristo feigning to mistake his meaning —”therefore I will not, for another instant, retard the pleasure of your meeting. Are you prepared to embrace your worthy father?”

“I hope you do not doubt it.”

“Go, then, into the drawing-room, my young friend, where you will find your father awaiting you.” Andrea made a low bow to the count, and entered the adjoining room. Monte Cristo watched him till he disappeared, and then touched a spring in a panel made to look like a picture, which, in sliding partly from the frame, discovered to view a small opening, so cleverly contrived that it revealed all that was passing in the drawing-room now occupied by Cavalcanti and Andrea. The young man closed the door behind him, and advanced towards the major, who had risen when he heard steps approaching him. “Ah, my dear father!” said Andrea in a loud voice, in order that the count might hear him in the next room, “is it really you?”

“How do you do, my dear son?” said the major gravely.

“After so many years of painful separation,” said Andrea, in the same tone of voice, and glancing towards the door, “what a happiness it is to meet again!”

“Indeed it is, after so long a separation.”

“Will you not embrace me, sir?” said Andrea.

“If you wish it, my son,” said the major; and the two men embraced each other after the fashion of actors on the stage; that is to say, each rested his head on the other’s shoulder.

“Then we are once more reunited?” said Andrea.

“Once more,” replied the major.

“Never more to be separated?”

“Why, as to that — I think, my dear son, you must be by this time so accustomed to France as to look upon it almost as a second country.”

“The fact is,” said the young man, “that I should be exceedingly grieved to leave it.”

“As for me, you must know I cannot possibly live out of Lucca; therefore I shall return to Italy as soon as I can.”

“But before you leave France, my dear father, I hope you will put me in possession of the documents which will be necessary to prove my descent.”

“Certainly; I am come expressly on that account; it has cost me much trouble to find you, but I had resolved on giving them into your hands, and if I had to recommence my search, it would occupy all the few remaining years of my life.”

“Where are these papers, then?”

“Here they are.”

Andrea seized the certificate of his father’s marriage and his own baptismal register, and after having opened them with all the eagerness which might be expected under the circumstances, he read them with a facility which proved that he was accustomed to similar documents, and with an expression which plainly denoted an unusual interest in the contents. When he had perused the documents, an indefinable expression of pleasure lighted up his countenance, and looking at the major with a most peculiar smile, he said, in very excellent Tuscan, — ”Then there is no longer any such thing, in Italy as being condemned to the galleys?” The major drew himself up to his full height.

“Why? — what do you mean by that question?”

“I mean that if there were, it would be impossible to draw up with impunity two such deeds as these. In France, my dear sir, half such a piece of effrontery as that would cause you to be quickly despatched to Toulon for five years, for change of air.”

“Will you be good enough to explain your meaning?” said the major, endeavoring as much as possible to assume an air of the greatest majesty.

“My dear M. Cavalcanti,” said Andrea, taking the major by the arm in a confidential manner, “how much are you paid for being my father?” The major was about to speak, when Andrea continued, in a low voice.

"Nonsense, I am going to set you an example of confidence, they give me 50,000 francs a year to be your son; consequently, you can understand that it is not at all likely I shall ever deny my parent." The major looked anxiously around him. "Make yourself easy, we are quite alone," said Andrea; "besides, we are conversing in Italian."

"Well, then," replied the major, "they paid me 50,000 francs down."

"Monsieur Cavalcanti," said Andrea, "do you believe in fairy tales?"

"I used not to do so, but I really feel now almost obliged to have faith in them."

"You have, then, been induced to alter your opinion; you have had some proofs of their truth?" The major drew from his pocket a handful of gold. "Most palpable proofs," said he, "as you may perceive."

"You think, then, that I may rely on the count's promises?"

"Certainly I do."

"You are sure he will keep his word with me?"

"To the letter, but at the same time, remember, we must continue to play our respective parts. I, as a tender father" —

"And I as a dutiful son, as they choose that I shall be descended from you."

"Whom do you mean by they?"

"Ma foi, I can hardly tell, but I was alluding to those who wrote the letter; you received one, did you not?"

"Yes."

"From whom?"

"From a certain Abbe Busoni."

"Have you any knowledge of him?"

"No, I have never seen him."

"What did he say in the letter?"

"You will promise not to betray me?"

"Rest assured of that; you well know that our interests are the same."

"Then read for yourself;" and the major gave a letter into the young man's hand. Andrea read in a low voice —

"You are poor; a miserable old age awaits you. Would you like to become rich, or at least independent? Set out immediately for Paris, and demand of the Count of Monte Cristo, Avenue des Champs Elysees, No. 30, the son whom you had by the Marchesa Corsinari, and who was taken from you at five years of age. This son is named Andrea Cavalcanti. In order that you may not doubt the kind intention of the writer of this letter, you will find enclosed an order for 2,400 francs, payable in Florence, at Signor Gozzi's; also a letter of introduction to the Count of Monte Cristo, on whom I give you a draft of 48,000 francs. Remember to go to the count on the 26th May at seven o'clock in the evening.

(Signed)

"Abbe Busoni."

"It is the same."

"What do you mean?" said the major.

"I was going to say that I received a letter almost to the same effect."

"You?"

"Yes."

"From the Abbe Busoni?"

"No."

"From whom, then?"

"From an Englishman, called Lord Wilmore, who takes the name of Sinbad the Sailor."

"And of whom you have no more knowledge than I of the Abbe Busoni?"

"You are mistaken; there I am ahead of you."

"You have seen him, then?"

"Yes, once."

"Where?"

"Ah, that is just what I cannot tell you; if I did, I should make you as wise as myself, which it is not my intention to do."

"And what did the letter contain?"

"Read it."

"'You are poor, and your future prospects are dark and gloomy. Do you wish for a name? should you like to be rich, and your own master?'"

"Ma foi," said the young man; "was it possible there could be two answers to such a question?"

"Take the post-chaise which you will find waiting at the Porte de Genes, as you enter Nice; pass through Turin, Chambery, and Pont-de-Beauvoisin. Go to the Count of Monte Cristo, Avenue des Champs Elysees, on the 26th of May, at seven o'clock in the evening, and demand of him your father. You are the son of the Marchese Cavalcanti and the Marchesa Oliva Corsinari. The marquis will give you some papers which will certify this fact, and authorize you to appear under that name in the Parisian world. As to your rank, an annual income of 50,000 livres will enable you to support it admirably. I enclose a draft for 5,000 livres, payable on M. Ferrea, banker at Nice, and also a letter of introduction to the Count of Monte Cristo, whom I have directed to supply all your wants.

"Sinbad the Sailor."

"Humph," said the major; "very good. You have seen the count, you say?"

"I have only just left him."

"And has he conformed to all that the letter specified?"

"He has."

"Do you understand it?"

"Not in the least."

"There is a dupe somewhere."

"At all events, it is neither you nor I."

"Certainly not."

"Well, then" —

"Why, it does not much concern us, do you think it does?"

"No; I agree with you there. We must play the game to the end, and consent to be blindfolded."

"Ah, you shall see; I promise you I will sustain my part to admiration."

"I never once doubted your doing so." Monte Cristo chose this moment for re-entering the drawing-room. On hearing the sound of his footsteps, the two men threw themselves in each other's arms, and while they were in the midst of this embrace, the count entered. "Well, marquis," said Monte Cristo, "you appear to be in no way disappointed in the son whom your good fortune has restored to you."

"Ah, your excellency, I am overwhelmed with delight."

"And what are your feelings?" said Monte Cristo, turning to the young man.

"As for me, my heart is overflowing with happiness."

"Happy father, happy son!" said the count.

"There is only one thing which grieves me," observed the major, "and that is the necessity for my leaving Paris so soon."

"Ah, my dear M. Cavalcanti, I trust you will not leave before I have had the honor of presenting you to some of my friends."

"I am at your service, sir," replied the major.

"Now, sir," said Monte Cristo, addressing Andrea, "make your confession."

"To whom?"

"Tell M. Cavalcanti something of the state of your finances."

"Ma foi, monsieur, you have touched upon a tender chord."

"Do you hear what he says, major?"

"Certainly I do."

"But do you understand?"

"I do."

"Your son says he requires money."

"Well, what would you have me do?" said the major.

"You should furnish him with some of course," replied Monte Cristo.

"I?"

"Yes, you," said the count, at the same time advancing towards Andrea, and slipping a packet of bank-notes into the young man's hand.

"What is this?"

"It is from your father."

"From my father?"

"Yes; did you not tell him just now that you wanted money? Well, then, he deputes me to give you this."

"Am I to consider this as part of my income on account?"

"No, it is for the first expenses of your settling in Paris."

"Ah, how good my dear father is!"

"Silence," said Monte Cristo; "he does not wish you to know that it comes from him."

"I fully appreciate his delicacy," said Andrea, cramming the notes hastily into his pocket.

"And now, gentlemen, I wish you good-morning," said Monte Cristo.

"And when shall we have the honor of seeing you again, your excellency?" asked Cavalcanti.

"Ah," said Andrea, "when may we hope for that pleasure?"

"On Saturday, if you will — Yes. — Let me see — Saturday — I am to dine at my country house, at Auteuil, on that day, Rue de la Fontaine, No. 28. Several persons are invited, and among others, M. Danglars, your banker. I will introduce you to him, for it will be necessary he should know you, as he is to pay your money."

"Full dress?" said the major, half aloud.

“Oh, yes, certainly,” said the count; “uniform, cross, knee-breeches.”

“And how shall I be dressed?” demanded Andrea.

“Oh, very simply; black trousers, patent leather boots, white waistcoat, either a black or blue coat, and a long cravat. Go to Blin or Veronique for your clothes. Baptistin will tell you where, if you do not know their address. The less pretension there is in your attire, the better will be the effect, as you are a rich man. If you mean to buy any horses, get them of Devedeux, and if you purchase a phaeton, go to Baptiste for it.”

“At what hour shall we come?” asked the young man.

“About half-past six.”

“We will be with you at that time,” said the major. The two Cavalcanti bowed to the count, and left the house. Monte Cristo went to the window, and saw them crossing the street, arm in arm. “There go two miscreants;” said he, “it is a pity they are not really related!” — then, after an instant of gloomy reflection, “Come, I will go to see the Morrels,” said he; “I think that disgust is even more sickening than hatred.”

Chapter 57

In the Lucerne Patch.

Our readers must now allow us to transport them again to the enclosure surrounding M. de Villefort’s house, and, behind the gate, half screened from view by the large chestnut-trees, which on all sides spread their luxuriant branches, we shall find some people of our acquaintance. This time Maximilian was the first to arrive. He was intently watching for a shadow to appear among the trees, and awaiting with anxiety the sound of a light step on the gravel walk. At length, the long-desired sound was heard, and instead of one figure, as he had expected, he perceived that two were approaching him. The delay had been occasioned by a visit from Madame Danglars and Eugenie, which had been prolonged beyond the time at which Valentine was expected. That she might not appear to fail in her promise to Maximilian, she proposed to Mademoiselle Danglars that they should take a walk in the garden, being anxious to show that the delay, which was doubtless a cause of vexation to him, was not occasioned by any neglect on her part. The young man, with the intuitive perception of a lover, quickly understood the circumstances in which she was involuntarily placed, and he was comforted. Besides, although she avoided coming within speaking distance, Valentine arranged so that Maximilian could see her pass and repass, and each time she went by, she managed, unperceived by her companion, to cast an expressive look at the young man, which seemed to say, “Have patience! You see it is not my fault.” And Maximilian was patient, and employed himself in mentally contrasting the two girls, — one fair, with soft languishing eyes, a figure gracefully bending like a weeping willow; the other a brunette, with a fierce and haughty expression, and as straight as a poplar. It is unnecessary to state that, in the eyes of the young man, Valentine did not suffer by the contrast. In about half an hour the girls went away, and Maximilian understood that Mademoiselle Danglars’ visit had at last come to an end. In a few minutes Valentine re-entered the garden alone. For fear that any one should be observing her return, she walked slowly; and instead of immediately directing her steps towards the gate, she seated herself on a bench, and, carefully casting her eyes around, to convince herself that she was not watched, she presently arose, and proceeded quickly to join Maximilian.

"Good-evening, Valentine," said a well-known voice.

"Good-evening, Maximilian; I know I have kept you waiting, but you saw the cause of my delay."

"Yes, I recognized Mademoiselle Danglars. I was not aware that you were so intimate with her."

"Who told you we were intimate, Maximilian?"

"No one, but you appeared to be so. From the manner in which you walked and talked together, one would have thought you were two school-girls telling your secrets to each other."

"We were having a confidential conversation," returned Valentine; "she was owning to me her repugnance to the marriage with M. de Morcerf; and I, on the other hand, was confessing to her how wretched it made me to think of marrying M. d'Epinay."

"Dear Valentine!"

"That will account to you for the unreserved manner which you observed between me and Eugenie, as in speaking of the man whom I could not love, my thoughts involuntarily reverted to him on whom my affections were fixed."

"Ah, how good you are to say so, Valentine! You possess a quality which can never belong to Mademoiselle Danglars. It is that indefinable charm which is to a woman what perfume is to the flower and flavor to the fruit, for the beauty of either is not the only quality we seek."

"It is your love which makes you look upon everything in that light."

"No, Valentine, I assure you such is not the case. I was observing you both when you were walking in the garden, and, on my honor, without at all wishing to depreciate the beauty of Mademoiselle Danglars, I cannot understand how any man can really love her."

"The fact is, Maximilian, that I was there, and my presence had the effect of rendering you unjust in your comparison."

"No; but tell me — it is a question of simple curiosity, and which was suggested by certain ideas passing in my mind relative to Mademoiselle Danglars" —

"I dare say it is something disparaging which you are going to say. It only proves how little indulgence we may expect from your sex," interrupted

Valentine.

“You cannot, at least, deny that you are very harsh judges of each other.”

“If we are so, it is because we generally judge under the influence of excitement. But return to your question.”

“Does Mademoiselle Danglars object to this marriage with M. de Morcerf on account of loving another?”

“I told you I was not on terms of strict intimacy with Eugenie.”

“Yes, but girls tell each other secrets without being particularly intimate; own, now, that you did question her on the subject. Ah, I see you are smiling.”

“If you are already aware of the conversation that passed, the wooden partition which interposed between us and you has proved but a slight security.”

“Come, what did she say?”

“She told me that she loved no one,” said Valentine; “that she disliked the idea of being married; that she would infinitely prefer leading an independent and unfettered life; and that she almost wished her father might lose his fortune, that she might become an artist, like her friend, Mademoiselle Louise d’Armilly.”

“Ah, you see” —

“Well, what does that prove?” asked Valentine.

“Nothing,” replied Maximilian.

“Then why did you smile?”

“Why, you know very well that you are reflecting on yourself, Valentine.”

“Do you want me to go away?”

“Ah, no, no. But do not let us lose time; you are the subject on which I wish to speak.”

“True, we must be quick, for we have scarcely ten minutes more to pass together.”

“Ma foi,” said Maximilian, in consternation.

“Yes, you are right; I am but a poor friend to you. What a life I cause you to lead, poor Maximilian, you who are formed for happiness! I bitterly reproach myself, I assure you.”

“Well, what does it signify, Valentine, so long as I am satisfied, and feel that even this long and painful suspense is amply repaid by five minutes of your society, or two words from your lips? And I have also a deep conviction that heaven would not have created two hearts, harmonizing as ours do, and almost miraculously brought us together, to separate us at last."

"Those are kind and cheering words. You must hope for us both, Maximilian; that will make me at least partly happy."

"But why must you leave me so soon?"

"I do not know particulars. I can only tell you that Madame de Villefort sent to request my presence, as she had a communication to make on which a part of my fortune depended. Let them take my fortune, I am already too rich; and, perhaps, when they have taken it, they will leave me in peace and quietness. You would love me as much if I were poor, would you not, Maximilian?"

"Oh, I shall always love you. What should I care for either riches or poverty, if my Valentine was near me, and I felt certain that no one could deprive me of her? But do you not fear that this communication may relate to your marriage?"

"I do not think that is the case."

"However it may be, Valentine, you must not be alarmed. I assure you that, as long as I live, I shall never love any one else!"

"You think to reassure me when you say that, Maximilian."

"Pardon me, you are right. I am a brute. But I was going to tell you that I met M. de Morcerf the other day."

"Well?"

"Monsieur Franz is his friend, you know."

"What then?"

"Monsieur de Morcerf has received a letter from Franz, announcing his immediate return." Valentine turned pale, and leaned her hand against the gate. "Ah heavens, if it were that! But no, the communication would not come through Madame de Villefort."

"Why not?"

"Because — I scarcely know why — but it has appeared as if Madame de Villefort secretly objected to the marriage, although she did not choose openly to oppose it."

"Is it so? Then I feel as if I could adore Madame de Villefort."

"Do not be in such a hurry to do that," said Valentine, with a sad smile.

"If she objects to your marrying M. d'Epinay, she would be all the more likely to listen to any other proposition."

“No, Maximilian, it is not suitors to which Madame de Villefort objects, it is marriage itself.”

“Marriage? If she dislikes that so much, why did she ever marry herself?”

“You do not understand me, Maximilian. About a year ago, I talked of retiring to a convent. Madame de Villefort, in spite of all the remarks which she considered it her duty to make, secretly approved of the proposition, my father consented to it at her instigation, and it was only on account of my poor grandfather that I finally abandoned the project. You can form no idea of the expression of that old man’s eye when he looks at me, the only person in the world whom he loves, and, I had almost said, by whom he is beloved in return. When he learned my resolution, I shall never forget the reproachful look which he cast on me, and the tears of utter despair which chased each other down his lifeless cheeks. Ah, Maximilian, I experienced, at that moment, such remorse for my intention, that, throwing myself at his feet, I exclaimed, — ’Forgive me, pray forgive me, my dear grandfather; they may do what they will with me, I will never leave you.’ When I had ceased speaking, he thankfully raised his eyes to heaven, but without uttering a word. Ah, Maximilian, I may have much to suffer, but I feel as if my grandfather’s look at that moment would more than compensate for all.”

“Dear Valentine, you are a perfect angel, and I am sure I do not know what I — sabring right and left among the Bedouins — can have done to merit your being revealed to me, unless, indeed, heaven took into consideration the fact that the victims of my sword were infidels. But tell me what interest Madame de Villefort can have in your remaining unmarried?”

“Did I not tell you just now that I was rich, Maximilian — too rich? I possess nearly 50,000 livres in right of my mother; my grandfather and my grandmother, the Marquis and Marquise de Saint-Meran, will leave me as much, and M. Noirtier evidently intends making me his heir. My brother Edward, who inherits nothing from his mother, will, therefore, be poor in comparison with me. Now, if I had taken the veil, all this fortune would have descended to my father, and, in reversion, to his son.”

“Ah, how strange it seems that such a young and beautiful woman should be so avaricious.”

“It is not for herself that she is so, but for her son, and what you regard as a vice becomes almost a virtue when looked at in the light of maternal love.”

“But could you not compromise matters, and give up a portion of your fortune to her son?”

“How could I make such a proposition, especially to a woman who always professes to be so entirely disinterested?”

“Valentine, I have always regarded our love in the light of something sacred; consequently, I have covered it with the veil of respect, and hid it in the innermost recesses of my soul. No human being, not even my sister, is aware of its existence. Valentine, will you permit me to make a confidant of a friend and reveal to him the love I bear you?”

Valentine started. “A friend, Maximilian; and who is this friend? I tremble to give my permission.”

“Listen, Valentine. Have you never experienced for any one that sudden and irresistible sympathy which made you feel as if the object of it had been your old and familiar friend, though, in reality, it was the first time you had ever met? Nay, further, have you never endeavored to recall the time, place, and circumstances of your former intercourse, and failing in this attempt, have almost believed that your spirits must have held converse with each other in some state of being anterior to the present, and that you are only now occupied in a reminiscence of the past?”

“Yes.”

“Well, that is precisely the feeling which I experienced when I first saw that extraordinary man.”

“Extraordinary, did you say?”

“Yes.”

“You have known him for some time, then?”

“Scarcely longer than eight or ten days.”

“And do you call a man your friend whom you have only known for eight or ten days? Ah, Maximilian, I had hoped you set a higher value on the title of friend.”

“Your logic is most powerful, Valentine, but say what you will, I can never renounce the sentiment which has instinctively taken possession of my mind. I feel as if it were ordained that this man should be associated with all the good which the future may have in store for me, and sometimes it really seems as if his eye was able to see what was to come, and his hand endowed with the power of directing events according to his own will.”

“He must be a prophet, then,” said Valentine, smiling.

“Indeed,” said Maximilian, “I have often been almost tempted to attribute to him the gift of prophecy; at all events, he has a wonderful power of foretelling any future good.”

“Ah,” said Valentine in a mournful tone, “do let me see this man, Maximilian; he may tell me whether I shall ever be loved sufficiently to make amends for all I have suffered.”

“My poor girl, you know him already.”

“I know him?”

“Yes; it was he who saved the life of your step-mother and her son.”

“The Count of Monte Cristo?”

“The same.”

“Ah,” cried Valentine, “he is too much the friend of Madame de Villefort ever to be mine.”

“The friend of Madame de Villefort! It cannot be; surely, Valentine, you are mistaken?”

“No, indeed, I am not; for I assure you, his power over our household is almost unlimited. Courted by my step-mother, who regards him as the epitome of human wisdom; admired by my father, who says he has never before heard such sublime ideas so eloquently expressed; idolized by Edward, who, notwithstanding his fear of the count’s large black eyes, runs to meet him the moment he arrives, and opens his hand, in which he is sure to find some delightful present, — M. de Monte Cristo appears to exert a mysterious and almost uncontrollable influence over all the members of our family.”

“If such be the case, my dear Valentine, you must yourself have felt, or at all events will soon feel, the effects of his presence. He meets Albert de Morcerf in Italy — it is to rescue him from the hands of the banditti; he introduces himself to Madame Danglars — it is that he may give her a royal present; your step-mother and her son pass before his door — it is that his Nubian may save them from destruction. This man evidently possesses the power of influencing events, both as regards men and things. I never saw more simple tastes united to greater magnificence. His smile is so sweet when he addresses me, that I forget it ever can be bitter to others. Ah, Valentine, tell me, if he ever looked on you with one of those sweet smiles? if so, depend on it, you will be happy.”

“Me?” said the young girl, “he never even glances at me; on the contrary, if I accidentally cross his path, he appears rather to avoid me. Ah, he is not generous, neither does he possess that supernatural penetration which you attribute to him, for if he did, he would have perceived that I was unhappy; and if he had been generous, seeing me sad and solitary, he would have used his influence to my advantage, and since, as you say, he resembles the sun, he would have warmed my heart with one of his life-giving rays. You say he loves you, Maximilian; how do you know that he does? All would pay deference to an officer like you, with a fierce mustache and a long sabre, but they think they may crush a poor weeping girl with impunity."

"Ah, Valentine, I assure you you are mistaken."

"If it were otherwise — if he treated me diplomatically — that is to say, like a man who wishes, by some means or other, to obtain a footing in the house, so that he may ultimately gain the power of dictating to its occupants — he would, if it had been but once, have honored me with the smile which you extol so loudly; but no, he saw that I was unhappy, he understood that I could be of no use to him, and therefore paid no attention to me whatever. Who knows but that, in order to please Madame de Villefort and my father, he may not persecute me by every means in his power? It is not just that he should despise me so, without any reason. Ah, forgive me," said Valentine, perceiving the effect which her words were producing on Maximilian: "I have done wrong, for I have given utterance to thoughts concerning that man which I did not even know existed in my heart. I do not deny the influence of which you speak, or that I have not myself experienced it, but with me it has been productive of evil rather than good."

"Well, Valentine," said Morrel with a sigh, "we will not discuss the matter further. I will not make a confidant of him."

"Alas," said Valentine, "I see that I have given you pain. I can only say how sincerely I ask pardon for having griefed you. But, indeed, I am not prejudiced beyond the power of conviction. Tell me what this Count of Monte Cristo has done for you."

"I own that your question embarrasses me, Valentine, for I cannot say that the count has rendered me any ostensible service. Still, as I have already told you I have an instinctive affection for him, the source of which I cannot explain to you. Has the sun done anything for me? No; he warms me with his rays, and it is by his light that I see you — nothing more. Has such and such a perfume done anything for me? No; its odor charms one of my senses — that is all I can say when I am asked why I praise it. My friendship for him is as strange and unaccountable as his for me. A secret voice seems to whisper to me that there must be something more than chance in this unexpected reciprocity of friendship. In his most simple actions, as well as in his most secret thoughts, I find a relation to my own. You will perhaps smile at me when I tell you that, ever since I have known this man, I have involuntarily entertained the idea that all the good fortune which has befallen me originated from him. However, I have managed to live thirty years without this protection, you will say; but I will endeavor a little to illustrate my meaning. He invited me to dine with him on Saturday, which was a very natural thing for him to do. Well, what have I learned since? That your mother and M. de Villefort are both coming to this dinner. I shall meet them there, and who knows what future advantages may result from the interview? This may appear to you to be no unusual combination of circumstances; nevertheless, I perceive some hidden plot in the arrangement — something, in fact, more than is apparent on a casual view of the subject. I believe that this singular man, who appears to fathom the motives of every one, has purposely arranged for me to meet M. and Madame de Villefort, and sometimes, I confess, I have gone so far as to try to read in his eyes whether he was in possession of the secret of our love."

"My good friend," said Valentine, "I should take you for a visionary, and should tremble for your reason, if I were always to hear you talk in a strain similar to this. Is it possible that you can see anything more than the merest chance in this meeting? Pray reflect a little. My father, who never goes out, has several times been on the point of refusing this invitation; Madame de Villefort, on the contrary, is burning with the desire of seeing this extraordinary nabob in his own house, therefore, she has with great difficulty prevailed on my father to accompany her. No, no; it is as I have said, Maximilian, — there is no one in the world of whom I can ask help but yourself and my grandfather, who is little better than a corpse."

"I see that you are right, logically speaking," said Maximilian; "but the gentle voice which usually has such power over me fails to convince me to-day."

"I feel the same as regards yourself." said Valentine; "and I own that, if you have no stronger proof to give me" —

"I have another," replied Maximilian; "but I fear you will deem it even more absurd than the first."

"So much the worse," said Valentine, smiling.

"It is, nevertheless, conclusive to my mind. My ten years of service have also confirmed my ideas on the subject of sudden inspirations, for I have several times owed my life to a mysterious impulse which directed me to move at once either to the right or to the left, in order to escape the ball which killed the comrade fighting by my side, while it left me unharmed."

"Dear Maximilian, why not attribute your escape to my constant prayers for your safety? When you are away, I no longer pray for myself, but for you."

"Yes, since you have known me," said Morrel, smiling; "but that cannot apply to the time previous to our acquaintance, Valentine."

"You are very provoking, and will not give me credit for anything; but let me hear this second proof, which you yourself own to be absurd."

"Well, look through this opening, and you will see the beautiful new horse which I rode here."

"Ah, what a beautiful creature!" cried Valentine; "why did you not bring him close to the gate, so that I could talk to him and pat him?"

"He is, as you see, a very valuable animal," said Maximilian. "You know that my means are limited, and that I am what would be designated a man of moderate pretensions. Well, I went to a horse dealer's, where I saw this magnificent horse, which I have named Medeah. I asked the price; they told me it was 4,500 francs. I was, therefore, obliged to give it up, as you may imagine, but I own I went away with rather a heavy heart, for the horse had looked at me affectionately, had rubbed his head against me and, when I mounted him, had pranced in the most delightful way imaginable, so that I was altogether fascinated with him. The same evening some friends of mine visited me, — M. de Chateau-Renaud, M. Debray, and five or six other choice spirits, whom you do not know, even by name. They proposed a game of bouillotte. I never play, for I am not rich enough to afford to lose, or sufficiently poor to desire to gain. But I was at my own house, you understand, so there was nothing to be done but to send for the cards, which I did.

"Just as they were sitting down to table, M. de Monte Cristo arrived. He took his seat amongst them; they played, and I won. I am almost ashamed to say that my gains amounted to 5,000 francs. We separated at midnight. I could not defer my pleasure, so I took a cabriolet and drove to the horse dealer's. Feverish and excited, I rang at the door. The person who opened it must have taken me for a madman, for I rushed at once to the stable.

Medeah was standing at the rack, eating his hay. I immediately put on the saddle and bridle, to which operation he lent himself with the best grace possible; then, putting the 4,500 francs into the hands of the astonished dealer, I proceeded to fulfil my intention of passing the night in riding in the Champs Elysees. As I rode by the count's house I perceived a light in one of the windows, and fancied I saw the shadow of his figure moving behind the curtain. Now, Valentine, I firmly believe that he knew of my wish to possess this horse, and that he lost expressly to give me the means of procuring him."

"My dear Maximilian, you are really too fanciful; you will not love even me long. A man who accustoms himself to live in such a world of poetry and imagination must find far too little excitement in a common, every-day sort of attachment such as ours. But they are calling me. Do you hear?"

"Ah, Valentine," said Maximilian, "give me but one finger through this opening in the grating, one finger, the littlest finger of all, that I may have the happiness of kissing it."

"Maximilian, we said we would be to each other as two voices, two shadows."

"As you will, Valentine."

"Shall you be happy if I do what you wish?"

"Oh, yes!" Valentine mounted on a bench, and passed not only her finger but her whole hand through the opening. Maximilian uttered a cry of delight, and, springing forwards, seized the hand extended towards him, and imprinted on it a fervent and impassioned kiss. The little hand was then immediately withdrawn, and the young man saw Valentine hurrying towards the house, as though she were almost terrified at her own sensations.

Chapter 58

M. Noirtier de Villefort.

We will now relate what was passing in the house of the king’s attorney after the departure of Madame Danglars and her daughter, and during the time of the conversation between Maximilian and Valentine, which we have just detailed. M. de Villefort entered his father’s room, followed by Madame de Villefort. Both of the visitors, after saluting the old man and speaking to Barrois, a faithful servant, who had been twenty-five years in his service, took their places on either side of the paralytic.

M. Noirtier was sitting in an arm-chair, which moved upon casters, in which he was wheeled into the room in the morning, and in the same way drawn out again at night. He was placed before a large glass, which reflected the whole apartment, and so, without any attempt to move, which would have been impossible, he could see all who entered the room and everything which was going on around him. M. Noirtier, although almost as immovable as a corpse, looked at the new-comers with a quick and intelligent expression, perceiving at once, by their ceremonious courtesy, that they were come on business of an unexpected and official character. Sight and hearing were the only senses remaining, and they, like two solitary sparks, remained to animate the miserable body which seemed fit for nothing but the grave; it was only, however, by means of one of these senses that he could reveal the thoughts and feelings that still occupied his mind, and the look by which he gave expression to his inner life was like the distant gleam of a candle which a traveller sees by night across some desert place, and knows that a living being dwells beyond the silence and obscurity. Noirtier’s hair was long and white, and flowed over his shoulders; while in his eyes, shaded by thick black lashes, was concentrated, as it often happens with an organ which is used to the exclusion of the others, all the activity, address, force, and intelligence which were formerly diffused over his whole body; and so although the movement of the arm, the sound of the voice, and the agility of the body, were wanting, the speaking eye sufficed for all. He commanded with it; it was the medium through which his thanks were conveyed. In short, his whole appearance produced on the mind the impression of a corpse with living eyes, and nothing could be more startling than to observe the expression of anger or joy suddenly lighting up these organs, while the rest of the rigid and marble-like features were utterly deprived of the power of participation. Three persons only could understand this language of the poor paralytic; these were Villefort, Valentine, and the old servant of whom we have already spoken. But as Villefort saw his father but seldom, and then only when absolutely obliged, and as he never took any pains to please or gratify him when he was there, all the old man's happiness was centred in his granddaughter. Valentine, by means of her love, her patience, and her devotion, had learned to read in Noirtier's look all the varied feelings which were passing in his mind. To this dumb language, which was so unintelligible to others, she answered by throwing her whole soul into the expression of her countenance, and in this manner were the conversations sustained between the blooming girl and the helpless invalid, whose body could scarcely be called a living one, but who, nevertheless, possessed a fund of knowledge and penetration, united with a will as powerful as ever although clogged by a body rendered utterly incapable of obeying its impulses. Valentine had solved the problem, and was able easily to understand his thoughts, and to convey her own in return, and, through her untiring and devoted assiduity, it was seldom that, in the ordinary transactions of every-day life, she failed to anticipate the wishes of the living, thinking mind, or the wants of the almost inanimate body. As to the servant, he had, as we have said, been with his master for five and twenty years, therefore he knew all his habits, and it was seldom that Noirtier found it necessary to ask for anything, so prompt was he in administering to all the necessities of the invalid. Villefort did not need the help of either Valentine or the domestic in order to carry on with his father the strange conversation which he was about to begin. As we have said, he perfectly understood the old man's vocabulary, and if he did not use it more often, it was only indifference and ennui which prevented him from so doing. He therefore allowed Valentine to go into the garden, sent away Barrois, and after having seated himself at his father's right hand, while Madame de Villefort placed herself on the left, he addressed him thus: —

"I trust you will not be displeased, sir, that Valentine has not come with us, or that I dismissed Barrois, for our conference will be one which could not with propriety be carried on in the presence of either. Madame de Villefort and I have a communication to make to you."

Noirtier's face remained perfectly passive during this long preamble, while, on the contrary, Villefort's eye was endeavoring to penetrate into the inmost recesses of the old man's heart.

"This communication," continued the procureur, in that cold and decisive tone which seemed at once to preclude all discussion, "will, we are sure, meet with your approbation." The eye of the invalid still retained that vacancy of expression which prevented his son from obtaining any knowledge of the feelings which were passing in his mind; he listened, nothing more. "Sir," resumed Villefort, "we are thinking of marrying Valentine." Had the old man's face been moulded in wax it could not have shown less emotion at this news than was now to be traced there. "The marriage will take place in less than three months," said Villefort. Noirtier's eye still retained its inanimate expression.

Madame de Villefort now took her part in the conversation and added, — ”We thought this news would possess an interest for you, sir, who have always entertained a great affection for Valentine; it therefore only now remains for us to tell you the name of the young man for whom she is destined. It is one of the most desirable connections which could possibly be formed; he possesses fortune, a high rank in society, and every personal qualification likely to render Valentine supremely happy, — his name, moreover, cannot be wholly unknown to you. It is M. Franz de Quesnel, Baron d'Epinay."

While his wife was speaking, Villefort had narrowly watched the old man's countenance. When Madame de Villefort pronounced the name of Franz, the pupil of M. Noirtier's eye began to dilate, and his eyelids trembled with the same movement that may be perceived on the lips of an individual about to speak, and he darted a lightning glance at Madame de Villefort and his son. The procureur, who knew the political hatred which had formerly existed between M. Noirtier and the elder d'Epinay, well understood the agitation and anger which the announcement had produced; but, feigning not to perceive either, he immediately resumed the narrative begun by his wife. "Sir," said he, "you are aware that Valentine is about to enter her nineteenth year, which renders it important that she should lose no time in forming a suitable alliance. Nevertheless, you have not been forgotten in our plans, and we have fully ascertained beforehand that

Valentine’s future husband will consent, not to live in this house, for that might not be pleasant for the young people, but that you should live with them; so that you and Valentine, who are so attached to each other, would not be separated, and you would be able to pursue exactly the same course of life which you have hitherto done, and thus, instead of losing, you will be a gainer by the change, as it will secure to you two children instead of one, to watch over and comfort you.”

Noirtier’s look was furious; it was very evident that something desperate was passing in the old man’s mind, for a cry of anger and grief rose in his throat, and not being able to find vent in utterance, appeared almost to choke him, for his face and lips turned quite purple with the struggle. Villefort quietly opened a window, saying, “It is very warm, and the heat affects M. Noirtier.” He then returned to his place, but did not sit down. “This marriage,” added Madame de Villefort, “is quite agreeable to the wishes of M. d’Epinay and his family; besides, he had no relations nearer than an uncle and aunt, his mother having died at his birth, and his father having been assassinated in 1815, that is to say, when he was but two years old; it naturally followed that the child was permitted to choose his own pursuits, and he has, therefore, seldom acknowledged any other authority but that of his own will.”

“That assassination was a mysterious affair,” said Villefort, “and the perpetrators have hitherto escaped detection, although suspicion has fallen on the head of more than one person.” Noirtier made such an effort that his lips expanded into a smile.

“Now,” continued Villefort, “those to whom the guilt really belongs, by whom the crime was committed, on whose heads the justice of man may probably descend here, and the certain judgment of God hereafter, would rejoice in the opportunity thus afforded of bestowing such a peace-offering as Valentine on the son of him whose life they so ruthlessly destroyed.” Noirtier had succeeded in mastering his emotion more than could have been deemed possible with such an enfeebled and shattered frame. “Yes, I understand,” was the reply contained in his look; and this look expressed a feeling of strong indignation, mixed with profound contempt. Villefort fully understood his father’s meaning, and answered by a slight shrug of his shoulders. He then motioned to his wife to take leave. “Now sir,” said Madame de Villefort, “I must bid you farewell. Would you like me to send Edward to you for a short time?”

It had been agreed that the old man should express his approbation by closing his eyes, his refusal by winking them several times, and if he had some desire or feeling to express, he raised them to heaven. If he wanted Valentine, he closed his right eye only, and if Barrois, the left. At Madame de Villefort’s proposition he instantly winked his eyes. Provoked by a complete refusal, she bit her lip and said, “Then shall I send Valentine to you?” The old man closed his eyes eagerly, thereby intimating that such was his wish. M. and Madame de Villefort bowed and left the room, giving orders that Valentine should be summoned to her grandfather’s presence, and feeling sure that she would have much to do to restore calmness to the perturbed spirit of the invalid. Valentine, with a color still heightened by emotion, entered the room just after her parents had quitted it. One look was sufficient to tell her that her grandfather was suffering, and that there was much on his mind which he was wishing to communicate to her. “Dear grandpapa,” cried she, “what has happened? They have vexed you, and you are angry?” The paralytic closed his eyes in token of assent. “Who has displeased you? Is it my father?”

“No.”

“Madame de Villefort?”

“No.”

“Me?” The former sign was repeated. “Are you displeased with me?” cried Valentine in astonishment. M. Noirtier again closed his eyes. “And what have I done, dear grandpapa, that you should be angry with me?” cried Valentine.

There was no answer, and she continued. “I have not seen you all day. Has any one been speaking to you against me?”

“Yes,” said the old man’s look, with eagerness.

“Let me think a moment. I do assure you, grandpapa — Ah — M. and Madame de Villefort have just left this room, have they not?”

“Yes.”

“And it was they who told you something which made you angry? What was it then? May I go and ask them, that I may have the opportunity of making my peace with you?”

“No, no,” said Noirtier’s look.

“Ah, you frighten me. What can they have said?” and she again tried to think what it could be.

"Ah, I know," said she, lowering her voice and going close to the old man. "They have been speaking of my marriage, — have they not?"

"Yes," replied the angry look.

"I understand; you are displeased at the silence I have preserved on the subject. The reason of it was, that they had insisted on my keeping the matter a secret, and begged me not to tell you anything of it. They did not even acquaint me with their intentions, and I only discovered them by chance, that is why I have been so reserved with you, dear grandpapa. Pray forgive me." But there was no look calculated to reassure her; all it seemed to say was, "It is not only your reserve which afflicts me."

"What is it, then?" asked the young girl. "Perhaps you think I shall abandon you, dear grandpapa, and that I shall forget you when I am married?"

"No."

"They told you, then, that M. d'Epinay consented to our all living together?"

"Yes."

"Then why are you still vexed and grieved?" The old man's eyes beamed with an expression of gentle affection. "Yes, I understand," said Valentine; "it is because you love me." The old man assented. "And you are afraid I shall be unhappy?"

"Yes."

"You do not like M. Franz?" The eyes repeated several times, "No, no, no."

"Then you are vexed with the engagement?"

"Yes."

"Well, listen," said Valentine, throwing herself on her knees, and putting her arm round her grandfather's neck, "I am vexed, too, for I do not love M. Franz d'Epinay." An expression of intense joy illumined the old man's eyes. "When I wished to retire into a convent, you remember how angry you were with me?" A tear trembled in the eye of the invalid. "Well," continued Valentine, "the reason of my proposing it was that I might escape this hateful marriage, which drives me to despair." Noirtier's breathing came thick and short. "Then the idea of this marriage really grieves you too? Ah, if you could but help me — if we could both together defeat their plan! But you are unable to oppose them, — you, whose mind is so quick, and whose will is so firm are nevertheless, as weak and unequal to the contest as I am myself. Alas, you, who would have been such a powerful protector to me in the days of your health and strength, can now only sympathize in my joys and sorrows, without being able to take any active part in them. However, this is much, and calls for gratitude and heaven has not taken away all my blessings when it leaves me your sympathy and kindness."

At these words there appeared in Noirtier's eye an expression of such deep meaning that the young girl thought she could read these words there: "You are mistaken; I can still do much for you."

"Do you think you can help me, dear grandpapa?" said Valentine.

"Yes." Noirtier raised his eyes, it was the sign agreed on between him and Valentine when he wanted anything.

"What is it you want, dear grandpapa?" said Valentine, and she endeavored to recall to mind all the things which he would be likely to need; and as the ideas presented themselves to her mind, she repeated them aloud, then, — finding that all her efforts elicited nothing but a constant "No," — she said, "Come, since this plan does not answer, I will have recourse to another." She then recited all the letters of the alphabet from A down to N. When she arrived at that letter the paralytic made her understand that she had spoken the initial letter of the thing he wanted. "Ah," said Valentine, "the thing you desire begins with the letter N; it is with N that we have to do, then. Well, let me see, what can you want that begins with N? Na — Ne — Ni — No" —

"Yes, yes, yes," said the old man's eye.

"Ah, it is No, then?"

"Yes." Valentine fetched a dictionary, which she placed on a desk before Noirtier; she opened it, and, seeing that the odd man's eye was thoroughly fixed on its pages, she ran her finger quickly up and down the columns. During the six years which had passed since Noirtier first fell into this sad state, Valentine's powers of invention had been too often put to the test not to render her expert in devising expedients for gaining a knowledge of his wishes, and the constant practice had so perfected her in the art that she guessed the old man's meaning as quickly as if he himself had been able to seek for what he wanted. At the word "Notary," Noirtier made a sign to her to stop. "Notary," said she, "do you want a notary, dear grandpapa?" The old man again signified that it was a notary he desired.

"You would wish a notary to be sent for then?" said Valentine.

"Yes."

"Shall my father be informed of your wish?"

"Yes."

"Do you wish the notary to be sent for immediately?"

"Yes."

"Then they shall go for him directly, dear grandpapa. Is that all you want?"

"Yes." Valentine rang the bell, and ordered the servant to tell Monsieur or Madame de Villefort that they were requested to come to M. Noirtier's room. "Are you satisfied now?" inquired Valentine.

"Yes."

"I am sure you are; it is not very difficult to discover that," — and the young girl smiled on her grandfather, as if he had been a child. M. de Villefort entered, followed by Barrois. "What do you want me for, sir?" demanded he of the paralytic.

"Sir," said Valentine, "my grandfather wishes for a notary." At this strange and unexpected demand M. de Villefort and his father exchanged looks. "Yes," motioned the latter, with a firmness which seemed to declare that with the help of Valentine and his old servant, who both knew what his wishes were, he was quite prepared to maintain the contest. "Do you wish for a notary?" asked Villefort.

"Yes."

"What to do?"

Noirtier made no answer. "What do you want with a notary?" again repeated Villefort. The invalid's eye remained fixed, by which expression he intended to intimate that his resolution was unalterable. "Is it to do us some ill turn? Do you think it is worth while?" said Villefort.

"Still," said Barrois, with the freedom and fidelity of an old servant, "if M. Noirtier asks for a notary, I suppose he really wishes for a notary; therefore I shall go at once and fetch one." Barrois acknowledged no master but Noirtier, and never allowed his desires in any way to be contradicted.

"Yes, I do want a notary," motioned the old man, shutting his eyes with a look of defiance, which seemed to say, "and I should like to see the person who dares to refuse my request."

"You shall have a notary, as you absolutely wish for one, sir," said Villefort; "but I shall explain to him your state of health, and make excuses for you, for the scene cannot fail of being a most ridiculous one."

“Never mind that,” said Barrois; “I shall go and fetch a notary, nevertheless,” — and the old servant departed triumphantly on his mission.

Chapter 59

The Will.

As soon as Barrois had left the room, Noirtier looked at Valentine with a malicious expression that said many things. The young girl perfectly understood the look, and so did Villefort, for his countenance became clouded, and he knitted his eyebrows angrily. He took a seat, and quietly awaited the arrival of the notary. Noirtier saw him seat himself with an appearance of perfect indifference, at the same time giving a side look at Valentine, which made her understand that she also was to remain in the room. Three-quarters of an hour after, Barrois returned, bringing the notary with him. “Sir,” said Villefort, after the first salutations were over, “you were sent for by M. Noirtier, whom you see here. All his limbs have become completely paralysed, he has lost his voice also, and we ourselves find much trouble in endeavoring to catch some fragments of his meaning.” Noirtier cast an appealing look on Valentine, which look was at once so earnest and imperative, that she answered immediately. “Sir,” said she, “I perfectly understand my grandfather’s meaning at all times.”

“That is quite true,” said Barrois; “and that is what I told the gentleman as we walked along.”

“Permit me,” said the notary, turning first to Villefort and then to Valentine — ”permit me to state that the case in question is just one of those in which a public officer like myself cannot proceed to act without thereby incurring a dangerous responsibility. The first thing necessary to render an act valid is, that the notary should be thoroughly convinced that he has faithfully interpreted the will and wishes of the person dictating the act. Now I cannot be sure of the approbation or disapprobation of a client who cannot speak, and as the object of his desire or his repugnance cannot be clearly proved to me, on account of his want of speech, my services here would be quite useless, and cannot be legally exercised.” The notary then prepared to retire. An imperceptible smile of triumph was expressed on the lips of the procureur. Noirtier looked at Valentine with an expression so full of grief, that she arrested the departure of the notary. “Sir,” said she, “the language which I speak with my grandfather may be easily learnt, and I can teach you in a few minutes, to understand it almost as well as I can myself. Will you tell me what you require, in order to set your conscience quite at ease on the subject?”

“In order to render an act valid, I must be certain of the approbation or disapprobation of my client. Illness of body would not affect the validity of the deed, but sanity of mind is absolutely requisite.”

“Well, sir, by the help of two signs, with which I will acquaint you presently, you may ascertain with perfect certainty that my grandfather is still in the full possession of all his mental faculties. M. Noirtier, being deprived of voice and motion, is accustomed to convey his meaning by closing his eyes when he wishes to signify ‘yes,’ and to wink when he means ‘no.’ You now know quite enough to enable you to converse with M. Noirtier; — try.” Noirtier gave Valentine such a look of tenderness and gratitude that it was comprehended even by the notary himself. “You have heard and understood what your granddaughter has been saying, sir, have you?” asked the notary. Noirtier closed his eyes. “And you approve of what she said — that is to say, you declare that the signs which she mentioned are really those by means of which you are accustomed to convey your thoughts?”

“Yes.”

“It was you who sent for me?”

“Yes.”

“To make your will?”

“Yes.”

“And you do not wish me to go away without fulfilling your original intentions?” The old man winked violently. “Well, sir,” said the young girl, “do you understand now, and is your conscience perfectly at rest on the subject?” But before the notary could answer, Villefort had drawn him aside. “Sir,” said he, “do you suppose for a moment that a man can sustain a physical shock, such as M. Noirtier has received, without any detriment to his mental faculties?”

“It is not exactly that, sir,” said the notary, “which makes me uneasy, but the difficulty will be in wording his thoughts and intentions, so as to be able to get his answers.”

“You must see that to be an utter impossibility,” said Villefort. Valentine and the old man heard this conversation, and Noirtier fixed his eye so earnestly on Valentine that she felt bound to answer to the look.

"Sir," said she, "that need not make you uneasy, however difficult it may at first sight appear to be. I can discover and explain to you my grandfather's thoughts, so as to put an end to all your doubts and fears on the subject. I have now been six years with M. Noirtier, and let him tell you if ever once, during that time, he has entertained a thought which he was unable to make me understand."

"No," signed the old man.

"Let us try what we can do, then," said the notary. "You accept this young lady as your interpreter, M. Noirtier?"

"Yes."

"Well, sir, what do you require of me, and what document is it that you wish to be drawn up?" Valentine named all the letters of the alphabet until she came to W. At this letter the eloquent eye of Noirtier gave her notice that she was to stop. "It is very evident that it is the letter W which M. Noirtier wants," said the notary. "Wait," said Valentine; and, turning to her grandfather, she repeated, "Wa — We — Wi" — The old man stopped her at the last syllable. Valentine then took the dictionary, and the notary watched her while she turned over the pages. She passed her finger slowly down the columns, and when she came to the word "Will," M. Noirtier's eye bade her stop. "Will," said the notary; "it is very evident that M. Noirtier is desirous of making his will."

"Yes, yes, yes," motioned the invalid.

"Really, sir, you must allow that this is most extraordinary," said the astonished notary, turning to M. de Villefort. "Yes," said the procureur, "and I think the will promises to be yet more extraordinary, for I cannot see how it is to be drawn up without the intervention of Valentine, and she may, perhaps, be considered as too much interested in its contents to allow of her being a suitable interpreter of the obscure and ill-defined wishes of her grandfather."

"No, no, no," replied the eye of the paralytic.

"What?" said Villefort, "do you mean to say that Valentine is not interested in your will?"

"No."

"Sir," said the notary, whose interest had been greatly excited, and who had resolved on publishing far and wide the account of this extraordinary and picturesque scene, "what appeared so impossible to me an hour ago, has now become quite easy and practicable, and this may be a perfectly valid will, provided it be read in the presence of seven witnesses, approved by the testator, and sealed by the notary in the presence of the witnesses. As to the time, it will not require very much more than the generality of wills. There are certain forms necessary to be gone through, and which are always the same. As to the details, the greater part will be furnished afterwards by the state in which we find the affairs of the testator, and by yourself, who, having had the management of them, can doubtless give full information on the subject. But besides all this, in order that the instrument may not be contested, I am anxious to give it the greatest possible authenticity, therefore, one of my colleagues will help me, and, contrary to custom, will assist in the dictation of the testament. Are you satisfied, sir?" continued the notary, addressing the old man.

"Yes," looked the invalid, his eye beaming with delight at the ready interpretation of his meaning.

"What is he going to do?" thought Villefort, whose position demanded much reserve, but who was longing to know what his father's intentions were. He left the room to give orders for another notary to be sent, but Barrois, who had heard all that passed, had guessed his master's wishes, and had already gone to fetch one. The procureur then told his wife to come up. In the course of a quarter of an hour every one had assembled in the chamber of the paralytic; the second notary had also arrived. A few words sufficed for a mutual understanding between the two officers of the law. They read to Noirtier the formal copy of a will, in order to give him an idea of the terms in which such documents are generally couched; then, in order to test the capacity of the testator, the first notary said, turning towards him, — "When an individual makes his will, it is generally in favor or in prejudice of some person."

"Yes."

"Have you an exact idea of the amount of your fortune?"

"Yes."

"I will name to you several sums which will increase by gradation; you will stop me when I reach the one representing the amount of your own possessions?"

"Yes." There was a kind of solemnity in this interrogation. Never had the struggle between mind and matter been more apparent than now, and if it was not a sublime, it was, at least, a curious spectacle. They had formed a circle round the invalid; the second notary was sitting at a table, prepared for writing, and his colleague was standing before the testator in the act of interrogating him on the subject to which we have alluded. “Your fortune exceeds 300,000. francs, does it not?” asked he. Noirtier made a sign that it did. “Do you possess 400,000 francs?” inquired the notary. Noirtier’s eye remained immovable. “Five hundred thousand?” The same expression continued. “Six hundred thousand — 700,000 — 800,000 — 900,000?” Noirtier stopped him at the last-named sum. “You are then in possession of 900,000. francs?” asked the notary. “Yes.”

“In landed property?”

“No.”

“In stock?”

“Yes.”

“The stock is in your own hands?” The look which M. Noirtier cast on Barrois showed that there was something wanting which he knew where to find. The old servant left the room, and presently returned, bringing with him a small casket. “Do you permit us to open this casket?” asked the notary. Noirtier gave his assent. They opened it, and found 900,000. francs in bank scrip. The first notary handed over each note, as he examined it, to his colleague.

The total amount was found to be as M. Noirtier had stated. “It is all as he has said; it is very evident that the mind still retains its full force and vigor.” Then, turning towards the paralytic, he said, “You possess, then, 900,000. francs of capital, which, according to the manner in which you have invested it, ought to bring in an income of about 40,000 livres?”

“Yes.”

“To whom do you desire to leave this fortune?”

“Oh,” said Madame de Villefort, “there is not much doubt on that subject. M. Noirtier tenderly loves his granddaughter, Mademoiselle de Villefort; it is she who has nursed and tended him for six years, and has, by her devoted attention, fully secured the affection, I had almost said the gratitude, of her grandfather, and it is but just that she should reap the fruit of her devotion.” The eye of Noirtier clearly showed by its expression that he was not deceived by the false assent given by Madame de Villefort’s words and manner to the motives which she supposed him to entertain. “Is it, then, to Mademoiselle Valentine de Villefort that you leave these 900,000 francs?” demanded the notary, thinking he had only to insert this clause, but waiting first for the assent of Noirtier, which it was necessary should be given before all the witnesses of this singular scene. Valentine, when her name was made the subject of discussion, had stepped back, to escape unpleasant observation; her eyes were cast down, and she was crying. The old man looked at her for an instant with an expression of the deepest tenderness, then, turning towards the notary, he significantly winked his eye in token of dissent.

“What,” said the notary, “do you not intend making Mademoiselle Valentine de Villefort your residuary legatee?”

“No.”

“You are not making any mistake, are you?” said the notary; “you really mean to declare that such is not your intention?”

“No,” repeated Noirtier; “No.” Valentine raised her head, struck dumb with astonishment. It was not so much the conviction that she was disinherited that caused her grief, but her total inability to account for the feelings which had provoked her grandfather to such an act. But Noirtier looked at her with so much affectionate tenderness that she exclaimed, “Oh, grandpapa, I see now that it is only your fortune of which you deprive me; you still leave me the love which I have always enjoyed.”

“Ah, yes, most assuredly,” said the eyes of the paralytic, for he closed them with an expression which Valentine could not mistake. “Thank you, thank you,” murmured she. The old man’s declaration that Valentine was not the destined inheritor of his fortune had excited the hopes of Madame de Villefort; she gradually approached the invalid, and said: “Then, doubtless, dear M. Noirtier, you intend leaving your fortune to your grandson, Edward de Villefort?” The winking of the eyes which answered this speech was most decided and terrible, and expressed a feeling almost amounting to hatred.

“No?” said the notary; “then, perhaps, it is to your son, M. de Villefort?”

“No.” The two notaries looked at each other in mute astonishment and inquiry as to what were the real intentions of the testator. Villefort and his wife both grew red, one from shame, the other from anger.

“What have we all done, then, dear grandpapa?” said Valentine; “you no longer seem to love any of us?” The old man’s eyes passed rapidly from Villefort and his wife, and rested on Valentine with a look of unutterable fondness. “Well,” said she; “if you love me, grandpapa, try and bring that love to bear upon your actions at this present moment. You know me well enough to be quite sure that I have never thought of your fortune; besides, they say I am already rich in right of my mother — too rich, even. Explain yourself, then.” Noirtier fixed his intelligent eyes on Valentine’s hand. “My hand?” said she.

“Yes.”

“Her hand!” exclaimed every one.

“Oh, gentlemen, you see it is all useless, and that my father’s mind is really impaired,” said Villefort.

“Ah,” cried Valentine suddenly, “I understand. It is my marriage you mean, is it not, dear grandpapa?”

“Yes, yes, yes,” signed the paralytic, casting on Valentine a look of joyful gratitude for having guessed his meaning.

“You are angry with us all on account of this marriage, are you not?”

“Yes?”

“Really, this is too absurd,” said Villefort.

“Excuse me, sir,” replied the notary; “on the contrary, the meaning of M. Noirtier is quite evident to me, and I can quite easily connect the train of ideas passing in his mind.”

“You do not wish me to marry M. Franz d’Epinay?” observed Valentine.

“I do not wish it,” said the eye of her grandfather. “And you disinherit your granddaughter,” continued the notary, “because she has contracted an engagement contrary to your wishes?”

“Yes.”

“So that, but for this marriage, she would have been your heir?”

“Yes.” There was a profound silence. The two notaries were holding a consultation as to the best means of proceeding with the affair. Valentine was looking at her grandfather with a smile of intense gratitude, and Villefort was biting his lips with vexation, while Madame de Villefort could not succeed in repressing an inward feeling of joy, which, in spite of herself, appeared in her whole countenance. “But,” said Villefort, who was the first to break the silence, “I consider that I am the best judge of the propriety of the marriage in question. I am the only person possessing the right to dispose of my daughter’s hand. It is my wish that she should marry M. Franz d’Epinay — and she shall marry him.” Valentine sank weeping into a chair.

“Sir,” said the notary, “how do you intend disposing of your fortune in case Mademoiselle de Villefort still determines on marrying M. Franz?”

The old man gave no answer. “You will, of course, dispose of it in some way or other?”

“Yes.”

“In favor of some member of your family?”

“No.”

“Do you intend devoting it to charitable purposes, then?” pursued the notary.

“Yes.”

“But,” said the notary, “you are aware that the law does not allow a son to be entirely deprived of his patrimony?”

“Yes.”

“You only intend, then, to dispose of that part of your fortune which the law allows you to subtract from the inheritance of your son?” Noirtier made no answer. “Do you still wish to dispose of all?”

“Yes.”

“But they will contest the will after your death?”

“No.”

“My father knows me,” replied Villefort; “he is quite sure that his wishes will be held sacred by me; besides, he understands that in my position I cannot plead against the poor.” The eye of Noirtier beamed with triumph. “What do you decide on, sir?” asked the notary of Villefort.

“Nothing, sir; it is a resolution which my father has taken and I know he never alters his mind. I am quite resigned. These 900,000 francs will go out of the family in order to enrich some hospital; but it is ridiculous thus to yield to the caprices of an old man, and I shall, therefore, act according to my conscience.” Having said this, Villefort quitted the room with his wife, leaving his father at liberty to do as he pleased. The same day the will was made, the witnesses were brought, it was approved by the old man, sealed in the presence of all and given in charge to M. Deschamps, the family notary.

Chapter 60

The Telegraph.

M. and Madame de Villefort found on their return that the Count of Monte Cristo, who had come to visit them in their absence, had been ushered into the drawing-room, and was still awaiting them there. Madame de Villefort, who had not yet sufficiently recovered from her late emotion to allow of her entertaining visitors so immediately, retired to her bedroom, while the procureur, who could better depend upon himself, proceeded at once to the salon. Although M. de Villefort flattered himself that, to all outward view, he had completely masked the feelings which were passing in his mind, he did not know that the cloud was still lowering on his brow, so much so that the count, whose smile was radiant, immediately noticed his sombre and thoughtful air. “Ma foi,” said Monte Cristo, after the first compliments were over, “what is the matter with you, M. de Villefort? Have I arrived at the moment when you were drawing up an indictment for a capital crime?” Villefort tried to smile. “No, count,” he replied, “I am the only victim in this case. It is I who lose my cause, and it is ill-luck, obstinacy, and folly which have caused it to be decided against me.”

“To what do you refer?” said Monte Cristo with well-feigned interest. “Have you really met with some great misfortune?”

“Oh, no, monsieur,” said Villefort with a bitter smile; “it is only a loss of money which I have sustained — nothing worth mentioning, I assure you.”

“True,” said Monte Cristo, “the loss of a sum of money becomes almost immaterial with a fortune such as you possess, and to one of your philosophic spirit.”

“It is not so much the loss of the money that vexes me,” said Villefort, “though, after all, 900,000 francs are worth regretting; but I am the more annoyed with this fate, chance, or whatever you please to call the power which has destroyed my hopes and my fortune, and may blast the prospects of my child also, as it is all occasioned by an old man relapsed into second childhood.”

“What do you say?” said the count; “900,000 francs? It is indeed a sum which might be regretted even by a philosopher. And who is the cause of all this annoyance?”

“My father, as I told you.”

“M. Noirtier? But I thought you told me he had become entirely paralyzed, and that all his faculties were completely destroyed?”

“Yes, his bodily faculties, for he can neither move nor speak, nevertheless he thinks, acts, and wills in the manner I have described. I left him about five minutes ago, and he is now occupied in dictating his will to two notaries.”

“But to do this he must have spoken?”

“He has done better than that — he has made himself understood.”

“How was such a thing possible?”

“By the help of his eyes, which are still full of life, and, as you perceive, possess the power of inflicting mortal injury.”

“My dear,” said Madame de Villefort, who had just entered the room, “perhaps you exaggerate the evil.”

“Good-morning, madame,” said the count, bowing. Madame de Villefort acknowledged the salutation with one of her most gracious smiles. “What is this that M. de Villefort has been telling me?” demanded Monte Cristo “and what incomprehensible misfortune” —

“Incomprehensible is not the word,” interrupted the procureur, shrugging his shoulders. “It is an old man’s caprice.”

“And is there no means of making him revoke his decision?”

“Yes,” said Madame de Villefort; “and it is still entirely in the power of my husband to cause the will, which is now in prejudice of Valentine, to be altered in her favor.” The count, who perceived that M. and Madame de Villefort were beginning to speak in parables, appeared to pay no attention to the conversation, and feigned to be busily engaged in watching Edward, who was mischievously pouring some ink into the bird’s water-glass. “My dear,” said Villefort, in answer to his wife, “you know I have never been accustomed to play the patriarch in my family, nor have I ever considered that the fate of a universe was to be decided by my nod. Nevertheless, it is necessary that my will should be respected in my family, and that the folly of an old man and the caprice of a child should not be allowed to overturn a project which I have entertained for so many years. The Baron d’Epinay was my friend, as you know, and an alliance with his son is the most suitable thing that could possibly be arranged."

"Do you think," said Madame de Villefort, "that Valentine is in league with him? She has always been opposed to this marriage, and I should not be at all surprised if what we have just seen and heard is nothing but the execution of a plan concerted between them."

"Madame," said Villefort, "believe me, a fortune of 900,000. francs is not so easily renounced."

"She could, nevertheless, make up her mind to renounce the world, sir, since it is only about a year ago that she herself proposed entering a convent."

"Never mind," replied Villefort; "I say that this marriage shall be consummated."

"Notwithstanding your father's wishes to the contrary?" said Madame de Villefort, selecting a new point of attack. "That is a serious thing." Monte Cristo, who pretended not to be listening, heard however, every word that was said. "Madame," replied Villefort "I can truly say that I have always entertained a high respect for my father, because, to the natural feeling of relationship was added the consciousness of his moral superiority. The name of father is sacred in two senses; he should be reverenced as the author of our being and as a master whom we ought to obey. But, under the present circumstances, I am justified in doubting the wisdom of an old man who, because he hated the father, vents his anger on the son. It would be ridiculous in me to regulate my conduct by such caprices. I shall still continue to preserve the same respect toward M. Noirtier; I will suffer, without complaint, the pecuniary deprivation to which he has subjected me; but I shall remain firm in my determination, and the world shall see which party has reason on his side. Consequently I shall marry my daughter to the Baron Franz d'Epinay, because I consider it would be a proper and eligible match for her to make, and, in short, because I choose to bestow my daughter's hand on whomever I please."

"What?" said the count, the approbation of whose eye Villefort had frequently solicited during this speech. "What? Do you say that M. Noirtier disinherits Mademoiselle de Villefort because she is going to marry M. le Baron Franz d'Epinay?"

"Yes, sir, that is the reason," said Villefort, shrugging his shoulders.

"The apparent reason, at least," said Madame de Villefort.

“The real reason, madame, I can assure you; I know my father.”

“But I want to know in what way M. d’Epinay can have displeased your father more than any other person?”

“I believe I know M. Franz d’Epinay,” said the count; “is he not the son of General de Quesnel, who was created Baron d’Epinay by Charles X.?”

“The same,” said Villefort.

“Well, but he is a charming young man, according to my ideas.”

“He is, which makes me believe that it is only an excuse of M. Noirtier to prevent his granddaughter marrying; old men are always so selfish in their affection,” said Madame de Villefort.

“But,” said Monte Cristo “do you not know any cause for this hatred?”

“Ah, ma foi, who is to know?”

“Perhaps it is some political difference?”

“My father and the Baron d’Epinay lived in the stormy times of which I only saw the ending,” said Villefort.

“Was not your father a Bonapartist?” asked Monte Cristo; “I think I remember that you told me something of that kind.”

“My father has been a Jacobin more than anything else,” said Villefort, carried by his emotion beyond the bounds of prudence; “and the senator’s robe, which Napoleon cast on his shoulders, only served to disguise the old man without in any degree changing him. When my father conspired, it was not for the emperor, it was against the Bourbons; for M. Noirtier possessed this peculiarity, he never projected any Utopian schemes which could never be realized, but strove for possibilities, and he applied to the realization of these possibilities the terrible theories of The Mountain, — theories that never shrank from any means that were deemed necessary to bring about the desired result.”

“Well,” said Monte Cristo, “it is just as I thought; it was politics which brought Noirtier and M. d’Epinay into personal contact. Although General d’Epinay served under Napoleon, did he not still retain royalist sentiments? And was he not the person who was assassinated one evening on leaving a Bonapartist meeting to which he had been invited on the supposition that he favored the cause of the emperor?” Villefort looked at the count almost with terror. “Am I mistaken, then?” said Monte Cristo.

“No, sir, the facts were precisely what you have stated,” said Madame de Villefort; “and it was to prevent the renewal of old feuds that M. de

Villefort formed the idea of uniting in the bonds of affection the two children of these inveterate enemies.”

“It was a sublime and charitable thought,” said Monte Cristo, “and the whole world should applaud it. It would be noble to see Mademoiselle Noirtier de Villefort assuming the title of Madame Franz d’Epinay.” Villefort shuddered and looked at Monte Cristo as if he wished to read in his countenance the real feelings which had dictated the words he had just uttered. But the count completely baffled the procureur, and prevented him from discovering anything beneath the never-varying smile he was so constantly in the habit of assuming. “Although,” said Villefort, “it will be a serious thing for Valentine to lose her grandfather’s fortune, I do not think that M. d’Epinay will be frightened at this pecuniary loss. He will, perhaps, hold me in greater esteem than the money itself, seeing that I sacrifice everything in order to keep my word with him. Besides, he knows that Valentine is rich in right of her mother, and that she will, in all probability, inherit the fortune of M. and Madame de Saint-Meran, her mother’s parents, who both love her tenderly.”

“And who are fully as well worth loving and tending as M. Noirtier,” said Madame de Villefort; “besides, they are to come to Paris in about a month, and Valentine, after the affront she has received, need not consider it necessary to continue to bury herself alive by being shut up with M. Noirtier.” The count listened with satisfaction to this tale of wounded self-love and defeated ambition. “But it seems to me,” said Monte Cristo, “and I must begin by asking your pardon for what I am about to say, that if M. Noirtier disinherits Mademoiselle de Villefort because she is going to marry a man whose father he detested, he cannot have the same cause of complaint against this dear Edward.”

“True,” said Madame de Villefort, with an intonation of voice which it is impossible to describe; “is it not unjust — shamefully unjust? Poor Edward is as much M. Noirtier’s grandchild as Valentine, and yet, if she had not been going to marry M. Franz, M. Noirtier would have left her all his money; and supposing Valentine to be disinherited by her grandfather, she will still be three times richer than he.” The count listened and said no more. “Count,” said Villefort, “we will not entertain you any longer with our family misfortunes. It is true that my patrimony will go to endow charitable institutions, and my father will have deprived me of my lawful inheritance without any reason for doing so, but I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that I have acted like a man of sense and feeling. M. d’Epinay, to whom I had promised the interest of this sum, shall receive it, even if I endure the most cruel privations.”

“However,” said Madame de Villefort, returning to the one idea which incessantly occupied her mind, “perhaps it would be better to explain this unlucky affair to M. d’Epinay, in order to give him the opportunity of himself renouncing his claim to the hand of Mademoiselle de Villefort.”

“Ah, that would be a great pity,” said Villefort.

“A great pity,” said Monte Cristo.

“Undoubtedly,” said Villefort, moderating the tones of his voice, “a marriage once concerted and then broken off, throws a sort of discredit on a young lady; then again, the old reports, which I was so anxious to put an end to, will instantly gain ground. No, it will all go well; M. d’Epinay, if he is an honorable man, will consider himself more than ever pledged to Mademoiselle de Villefort, unless he were actuated by a decided feeling of avarice, but that is impossible.”

“I agree with M. de Villefort,” said Monte Cristo, fixing his eyes on Madame de Villefort; “and if I were sufficiently intimate with him to allow of giving my advice, I would persuade him, since I have been told M. d’Epinay is coming back, to settle this affair at once beyond all possibility of revocation. I will answer for the success of a project which will reflect so much honor on M. de Villefort.” The procureur arose, delighted with the proposition, but his wife slightly changed color. “Well, that is all that I wanted, and I will be guided by a counsellor such as you are,” said he, extending his hand to Monte Cristo. “Therefore let every one here look upon what has passed to-day as if it had not happened, and as though we had never thought of such a thing as a change in our original plans.”

“Sir,” said the count, “the world, unjust as it is, will be pleased with your resolution; your friends will be proud of you, and M. d’Epinay, even if he took Mademoiselle de Villefort without any dowry, which he will not do, would be delighted with the idea of entering a family which could make such sacrifices in order to keep a promise and fulfil a duty.” At the conclusion of these words, the count rose to depart. “Are you going to leave us, count?” said Madame de Villefort.

“I am sorry to say I must do so, madame, I only came to remind you of your promise for Saturday.”

“Did you fear that we should forget it?”

“You are very good, madame, but M. de Villefort has so many important and urgent occupations.”

“My husband has given me his word, sir,” said Madame de Villefort; “you have just seen him resolve to keep it when he has everything to lose, and surely there is more reason for his doing so where he has everything to gain.”

“And,” said Villefort, “is it at your house in the Champs-Elysees that you receive your visitors?”

“No,” said Monte Cristo, “which is precisely the reason which renders your kindness more meritorious, — it is in the country.”

“In the country?”

“Yes.”

“Where is it, then? Near Paris, is it not?”

“Very near, only half a league from the Barriers, — it is at Auteuil.”

“At Auteuil?” said Villefort; “true, Madame de Villefort told me you lived at Auteuil, since it was to your house that she was taken. And in what part of Auteuil do you reside?”

“Rue de la Fontaine.”

“Rue de la Fontaine!” exclaimed Villefort in an agitated tone; “at what number?”

“No. 28.”

“Then,” cried Villefort, “was it you who bought M. de Saint-Meran’s house!”

“Did it belong to M. de Saint-Meran?” demanded Monte Cristo.

“Yes,” replied Madame de Villefort; “and, would you believe it, count” —

“Believe what?”

“You think this house pretty, do you not?”

“I think it charming.”

“Well, my husband would never live in it.”

“Indeed?” returned Monte Cristo, “that is a prejudice on your part, M. de Villefort, for which I am quite at a loss to account.”

“I do not like Auteuil, sir,” said the procureur, making an evident effort to appear calm.

“But I hope you will not carry your antipathy so far as to deprive me of the pleasure of your company, sir,” said Monte Cristo.

"No, count, — I hope — I assure you I shall do my best," stammered Villefort.

"Oh," said Monte Cristo, "I allow of no excuse. On Saturday, at six o'clock. I shall be expecting you, and if you fail to come, I shall think — for how do I know to the contrary? — that this house, which his remained uninhabited for twenty years, must have some gloomy tradition or dreadful legend connected with it."

"I will come, count, — I will be sure to come," said Villefort eagerly.

"Thank you," said Monte Cristo; "now you must permit me to take my leave of you."

"You said before that you were obliged to leave us, monsieur," said Madame de Villefort, "and you were about to tell us why when your attention was called to some other subject."

"Indeed madame," said Monte Cristo: "I scarcely know if I dare tell you where I am going."

"Nonsense; say on."

"Well, then, it is to see a thing on which I have sometimes mused for hours together."

"What is it?"

"A telegraph. So now I have told my secret."

"A telegraph?" repeated Madame de Villefort.

"Yes, a telegraph. I had often seen one placed at the end of a road on a hillock, and in the light of the sun its black arms, bending in every direction, always reminded me of the claws of an immense beetle, and I assure you it was never without emotion that I gazed on it, for I could not help thinking how wonderful it was that these various signs should be made to cleave the air with such precision as to convey to the distance of three hundred leagues the ideas and wishes of a man sitting at a table at one end of the line to another man similarly placed at the opposite extremity, and all this effected by a simple act of volition on the part of the sender of the message. I began to think of genii, sylphs, gnomes, in short, of all the ministers of the occult sciences, until I laughed aloud at the freaks of my own imagination. Now, it never occurred to me to wish for a nearer inspection of these large insects, with their long black claws, for I always feared to find under their stone wings some little human genius fagged to death with cabals, factions, and government intrigues. But one fine day I learned that the mover of this telegraph was only a poor wretch, hired for twelve hundred francs a year, and employed all day, not in studying the heavens like an astronomer, or in gazing on the water like an angler, or even in enjoying the privilege of observing the country around him, but all his monotonous life was passed in watching his white-bellied, black-clawed fellow insect, four or five leagues distant from him. At length I felt a desire to study this living chrysalis more closely, and to endeavor to understand the secret part played by these insect-actors when they occupy themselves simply with pulling different pieces of string."

"And are you going there?"

"I am."

"What telegraph do you intend visiting? that of the home department, or of the observatory?"

"Oh, no; I should find there people who would force me to understand things of which I would prefer to remain ignorant, and who would try to explain to me, in spite of myself, a mystery which even they do not understand. Ma foi, I should wish to keep my illusions concerning insects unimpaired; it is quite enough to have those dissipated which I had formed of my fellow-creatures. I shall, therefore, not visit either of these telegraphs, but one in the open country where I shall find a good-natured simpleton, who knows no more than the machine he is employed to work."

"You are a singular man," said Villefort.

"What line would you advise me to study?"

"The one that is most in use just at this time."

"The Spanish one, you mean, I suppose?"

"Yes; should you like a letter to the minister that they might explain to you" —

"No," said Monte Cristo; "since, as I told you before, I do not wish to comprehend it. The moment I understand it there will no longer exist a telegraph for me; it will be nothing more than a sign from M. Duchatel, or from M. Montalivet, transmitted to the prefect of Bayonne, mystified by two Greek words, tele, graphein. It is the insect with black claws, and the awful word which I wish to retain in my imagination in all its purity and all its importance."

"Go then; for in the course of two hours it will be dark, and you will not be able to see anything."

"Ma foi, you frighten me. Which is the nearest way? Bayonne?"

"Yes; the road to Bayonne."

“And afterwards the road to Chatillon?”

“Yes.”

“By the tower of Montlhery, you mean?”

“Yes.”

“Thank you. Good-by. On Saturday I will tell you my impressions concerning the telegraph.” At the door the count was met by the two notaries, who had just completed the act which was to disinherit Valentine, and who were leaving under the conviction of having done a thing which could not fail of redounding considerably to their credit.

Chapter 61

How a Gardener May Get Rid of the Dormice that Eat His Peaches.

Not on the same night, as he had intended, but the next morning, the Count of Monte Cristo went out by the Barrier d’Enfer, taking the road to Orleans. Leaving the village of Linas, without stopping at the telegraph, which flourished its great bony arms as he passed, the count reached the tower of Montlhery, situated, as every one knows, upon the highest point of the plain of that name. At the foot of the hill the count dismounted and began to ascend by a little winding path, about eighteen inches wide; when he reached the summit he found himself stopped by a hedge, upon which green fruit had succeeded to red and white flowers.

Monte Cristo looked for the entrance to the enclosure, and was not long in finding a little wooden gate, working on willow hinges, and fastened with a nail and string. The count soon mastered the mechanism, the gate opened, and he then found himself in a little garden, about twenty feet long by twelve wide, bounded on one side by part of the hedge, which contained the ingenious contrivance we have called a gate, and on the other by the old tower, covered with ivy and studded with wall-flowers. No one would have thought in looking at this old, weather-beaten, floral-decked tower (which might be likened to an elderly dame dressed up to receive her grandchildren at a birthday feast) that it would have been capable of telling strange things, if, — in addition to the menacing ears which the proverb says all walls are provided with, — it had also a voice. The garden was crossed by a path of red gravel, edged by a border of thick box, of many years’ growth, and of a tone and color that would have delighted the heart of Delacroix, our modern Rubens. This path was formed in the shape of the figure of 8, thus, in its windings, making a walk of sixty feet in a garden of only twenty.

Never had Flora, the fresh and smiling goddess of gardeners, been honored with a purer or more scrupulous worship than that which was paid to her in this little enclosure. In fact, of the twenty rose-trees which formed the parterre, not one bore the mark of the slug, nor were there evidences anywhere of the clustering aphis which is so destructive to plants growing in a damp soil. And yet it was not because the damp had been excluded from the garden; the earth, black as soot, the thick foliage of the trees betrayed its presence; besides, had natural humidity been wanting, it could have been immediately supplied by artificial means, thanks to a tank of water, sunk in one of the corners of the garden, and upon which were stationed a frog and a toad, who, from antipathy, no doubt, always remained on the two opposite sides of the basin. There was not a blade of grass to be seen in the paths, or a weed in the flower-beds; no fine lady ever trained and watered her geraniums, her cacti, and her rhododendrons, with more pains than this hitherto unseen gardener bestowed upon his little enclosure. Monte Cristo stopped after having closed the gate and fastened the string to the nail, and cast a look around.

"The man at the telegraph," said he, "must either engage a gardener or devote himself passionately to agriculture." Suddenly he struck against something crouching behind a wheelbarrow filled with leaves; the something rose, uttering an exclamation of astonishment, and Monte Cristo found himself facing a man about fifty years old, who was plucking strawberries, which he was placing upon grape leaves. He had twelve leaves and about as many strawberries, which, on rising suddenly, he let fall from his hand. "You are gathering your crop, sir?" said Monte Cristo, smiling.

"Excuse me, sir," replied the man, raising his hand to his cap; "I am not up there, I know, but I have only just come down."

"Do not let me interfere with you in anything, my friend," said the count; "gather your strawberries, if, indeed, there are any left."

"I have ten left," said the man, "for here are eleven, and I had twenty-one, five more than last year. But I am not surprised; the spring has been warm this year, and strawberries require heat, sir. This is the reason that, instead of the sixteen I had last year, I have this year, you see, eleven, already plucked — twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen. Ah, I miss three, they were here last night, sir — I am sure they were here — I counted them. It must be the Mere Simon's son who has stolen them; I saw him strolling about here this morning. Ah, the young rascal — stealing in a garden — he does not know where that may lead him to."

"Certainly, it is wrong," said Monte Cristo, "but you should take into consideration the youth and greediness of the delinquent."

“Of course,” said the gardener, “but that does not make it the less unpleasant. But, sir, once more I beg pardon; perhaps you are an officer that I am detaining here.” And he glanced timidly at the count’s blue coat.

“Calm yourself, my friend,” said the count, with the smile which he made at will either terrible or benevolent, and which now expressed only the kindliest feeling; “I am not an inspector, but a traveller, brought here by a curiosity he half repents of, since he causes you to lose your time.”

“Ah, my time is not valuable,” replied the man with a melancholy smile. “Still it belongs to government, and I ought not to waste it; but, having received the signal that I might rest for an hour” (here he glanced at the sun-dial, for there was everything in the enclosure of Montlhery, even a sun-dial), “and having ten minutes before me, and my strawberries being ripe, when a day longer — by-the-by, sir, do you think dormice eat them?”

“Indeed, I should think not,” replied Monte Cristo; “dormice are bad neighbors for us who do not eat them preserved, as the Romans did.”

“What? Did the Romans eat them?” said the gardener — ”ate dormice?”

“I have read so in Petronius,” said the count.

“Really? They can’t be nice, though they do say ‘as fat as a dormouse.’ It is not a wonder they are fat, sleeping all day, and only waking to eat all night. Listen. Last year I had four apricots — they stole one, I had one nectarine, only one — well, sir, they ate half of it on the wall; a splendid nectarine — I never ate a better.”

“You ate it?”

“That is to say, the half that was left — you understand; it was exquisite, sir. Ah, those gentlemen never choose the worst morsels; like Mere Simon’s son, who has not chosen the worst strawberries. But this year,” continued the horticulturist, “I’ll take care it shall not happen, even if I should be forced to sit by the whole night to watch when the strawberries are ripe.” Monte Cristo had seen enough. Every man has a devouring passion in his heart, as every fruit has its worm; that of the telegraph man was horticulture. He began gathering the grape-leaves which screened the sun from the grapes, and won the heart of the gardener. “Did you come here, sir, to see the telegraph?” he said.

“Yes, if it isn’t contrary to the rules.”

“Oh, no,” said the gardener; “not in the least, since there is no danger that anyone can possibly understand what we are saying.”

"I have been told," said the count, "that you do not always yourselves understand the signals you repeat."

"That is true, sir, and that is what I like best," said the man, smiling.

"Why do you like that best?"

"Because then I have no responsibility. I am a machine then, and nothing else, and so long as I work, nothing more is required of me."

"Is it possible," said Monte Cristo to himself, "that I can have met with a man that has no ambition? That would spoil my plans."

"Sir," said the gardener, glancing at the sun-dial, "the ten minutes are almost up; I must return to my post. Will you go up with me?"

"I follow you." Monte Cristo entered the tower, which was divided into three stories. The tower contained implements, such as spades, rakes, watering-pots, hung against the wall; this was all the furniture. The second was the man's conventional abode, or rather sleeping-place; it contained a few poor articles of household furniture — a bed, a table, two chairs, a stone pitcher — and some dry herbs, hung up to the ceiling, which the count recognized as sweet pease, and of which the good man was preserving the seeds; he had labelled them with as much care as if he had been master botanist in the Jardin des Plantes.

"Does it require much study to learn the art of telegraphing?" asked Monte Cristo.

"The study does not take long; it was acting as a supernumerary that was so tedious."

"And what is the pay?"

"A thousand francs, sir."

"It is nothing."

"No; but then we are lodged, as you perceive."

Monte Cristo looked at the room. They passed to the third story; it was the telegraph room. Monte Cristo looked in turn at the two iron handles by which the machine was worked. "It is very interesting," he said, "but it must be very tedious for a lifetime."

"Yes. At first my neck was cramped with looking at it, but at the end of a year I became used to it; and then we have our hours of recreation, and our holidays."

"Holidays?"

"Yes."

"When?"

“When we have a fog.”

“Ah, to be sure.”

“Those are indeed holidays to me; I go into the garden, I plant, I prune, I trim, I kill the insects all day long.”

“How long have you been here?”

“Ten years, and five as a supernumerary make fifteen.”

“You are — ”

“Fifty-five years old.”

“How long must you have served to claim the pension?”

“Oh, sir, twenty-five years.”

“And how much is the pension?”

“A hundred crowns.”

“Poor humanity!” murmured Monte Cristo.

“What did you say, sir?” asked the man.

“I was saying it was very interesting.”

“What was?”

“All you were showing me. And you really understand none of these signals?”

“None at all.”

“And have you never tried to understand them?”

“Never. Why should I?”

“But still there are some signals only addressed to you.”

“Certainly.”

“And do you understand them?”

“They are always the same.”

“And they mean — ”

“Nothing new; You have an hour; or To-morrow.”

“This is simple enough,” said the count; “but look, is not your correspondent putting itself in motion?”

“Ah, yes; thank you, sir.”

“And what is it saying — anything you understand?”

“Yes; it asks if I am ready.”

“And you reply?”

“By the same sign, which, at the same time, tells my right-hand correspondent that I am ready, while it gives notice to my left-hand correspondent to prepare in his turn.”

“It is very ingenious,” said the count.

“You will see,” said the man proudly; “in five minutes he will speak.”

“I have, then, five minutes,” said Monte Cristo to himself; “it is more time than I require. My dear sir, will you allow me to ask you a question?”

“What is it, sir?”

“You are fond of gardening?”

“Passionately.”

“And you would be pleased to have, instead of this terrace of twenty feet, an enclosure of two acres?”

“Sir, I should make a terrestrial paradise of it.”

“You live badly on your thousand francs?”

“Badly enough; but yet I do live.”

“Yes; but you have a wretchedly small garden.”

“True, the garden is not large.”

“And, then, such as it is, it is filled with dormice, who eat everything.”

“Ah, they are my scourges.”

“Tell me, should you have the misfortune to turn your head while your right-hand correspondent was telegraphing” —

“I should not see him.”

“Then what would happen?”

“I could not repeat the signals.”

“And then?”

“Not having repeated them, through negligence, I should be fined.”

“How much?”

“A hundred francs.”

“The tenth of your income — that would be fine work.”

“Ah,” said the man.

“Has it ever happened to you?” said Monte Cristo.

“Once, sir, when I was grafting a rose-tree.”

“Well, suppose you were to alter a signal, and substitute another?”

“Ah, that is another case; I should be turned off, and lose my pension.”

“Three hundred francs?”

“A hundred crowns, yes, sir; so you see that I am not likely to do any of these things.”

“Not even for fifteen years’ wages? Come, it is worth thinking about?”

“For fifteen thousand francs?”

“Yes.”

“Sir, you alarm me.”

"Nonsense."

"Sir, you are tempting me?"

"Just so; fifteen thousand francs, do you understand?"

"Sir, let me see my right-hand correspondent."

"On the contrary, do not look at him, but at this."

"What is it?"

"What? Do you not know these bits of paper?"

"Bank-notes!"

"Exactly; there are fifteen of them."

"And whose are they?"

"Yours, if you like."

"Mine?" exclaimed the man, half-suffocated.

"Yes; yours — your own property."

"Sir, my right-hand correspondent is signalling."

"Let him signal."

"Sir, you have distracted me; I shall be fined."

"That will cost you a hundred francs; you see it is your interest to take my bank-notes."

"Sir, my right-hand correspondent redoubles his signals; he is impatient."

"Never mind — take these;" and the count placed the packet in the man's hands. "Now this is not all," he said; "you cannot live upon your fifteen thousand francs."

"I shall still have my place."

"No, you will lose it, for you are going to alter your correspondent's message."

"Oh, sir, what are you proposing?"

"A jest."

"Sir, unless you force me" —

"I think I can effectually force you;" and Monte Cristo drew another packet from his pocket. "Here are ten thousand more francs," he said, "with the fifteen thousand already in your pocket, they will make twenty-five thousand. With five thousand you can buy a pretty little house with two acres of land; the remaining twenty thousand will bring you in a thousand francs a year."

"A garden with two acres of land!"

"And a thousand francs a year."

"Oh, heavens!"

"Come, take them," and Monte Cristo forced the bank-notes into his hand.

"What am I to do?"

"Nothing very difficult."

"But what is it?"

"To repeat these signs." Monte Cristo took a paper from his pocket, upon which were drawn three signs, with numbers to indicate the order in which they were to be worked.

"There, you see it will not take long."

"Yes; but" —

"Do this, and you will have nectarines and all the rest." The shot told; red with fever, while the large drops fell from his brow, the man executed, one after the other, the three signs given by the count, in spite of the frightful contortions of the right-hand correspondent, who, not understanding the change, began to think the gardener had gone mad. As to the left-hand one, he conscientiously repeated the same signals, which were finally transmitted to the Minister of the Interior. "Now you are rich," said Monte Cristo.

"Yes," replied the man, "but at what a price!"

"Listen, friend," said Monte Cristo. "I do not wish to cause you any remorse; believe me, then, when I swear to you that you have wronged no man, but on the contrary have benefited mankind." The man looked at the bank-notes, felt them, counted them, turned pale, then red, then rushed into his room to drink a glass of water, but he had no time to reach the water-jug, and fainted in the midst of his dried herbs. Five minutes after the new telegram reached the minister, Debray had the horses put to his carriage, and drove to Danglars' house.

"Has your husband any Spanish bonds?" he asked of the baroness.

"I think so, indeed! He has six millions' worth."

"He must sell them at whatever price."

"Why?"

"Because Don Carlos has fled from Bourges, and has returned to Spain."

"How do you know?" Debray shrugged his shoulders. "The idea of asking how I hear the news," he said. The baroness did not wait for a repetition; she ran to her husband, who immediately hastened to his agent, and ordered him to sell at any price. When it was seen that Danglars sold, the Spanish funds fell directly. Danglars lost five hundred thousand francs;

but he rid himself of all his Spanish shares. The same evening the following was read in Le Messager:

“[By telegraph.] The king, Don Carlos, has escaped the vigilance of his guardians at Bourges, and has returned to Spain by the Catalonian frontier. Barcelona has risen in his favor.”

All that evening nothing was spoken of but the foresight of Danglars, who had sold his shares, and of the luck of the stock-jobber, who only lost five hundred thousand francs by such a blow. Those who had kept their shares, or bought those of Danglars, looked upon themselves as ruined, and passed a very bad night. Next morning Le Moniteur contained the following:

“It was without any foundation that Le Messager yesterday announced the flight of Don Carlos and the revolt of Barcelona. The king (Don Carlos) has not left Bourges, and the peninsula is in the enjoyment of profound peace. A telegraphic signal, improperly interpreted, owing to the fog, was the cause of this error.”

The funds rose one per cent higher than before they had fallen. This, reckoning his loss, and what he had missed gaining, made the difference of a million to Danglars. “Good,” said Monte Cristo to Morrel, who was at his house when the news arrived of the strange reverse of fortune of which Danglars had been the victim, “I have just made a discovery for twenty-five thousand francs, for which I would have paid a hundred thousand.”

“What have you discovered?” asked Morrel.

“I have just discovered how a gardener may get rid of the dormice that eat his peaches.”

Chapter 62

Ghosts.

At first sight, the exterior of the house at Auteuil gave no indications of splendor, nothing one would expect from the destined residence of the magnificent Count of Monte Cristo; but this simplicity was according to the will of its master, who positively ordered nothing to be altered outside. The splendor was within. Indeed, almost before the door opened, the scene changed. M. Bertuccio had outdone himself in the taste displayed in furnishing, and in the rapidity with which it was executed. It is told that the Duc d’Antin removed in a single night a whole avenue of trees that annoyed Louis XIV.; in three days M. Bertuccio planted an entirely bare court with poplars, large spreading sycamores to shade the different parts of the house, and in the foreground, instead of the usual paving-stones, half hidden by the grass, there extended a lawn but that morning laid down, and upon which the water was yet glistening. For the rest, the orders had been issued by the count; he himself had given a plan to Bertuccio, marking the spot where each tree was to be planted, and the shape and extent of the lawn which was to take the place of the paving-stones. Thus the house had become unrecognizable, and Bertuccio himself declared that he scarcely knew it, encircled as it was by a framework of trees. The overseer would not have objected, while he was about it, to have made some improvements in the garden, but the count had positively forbidden it to be touched. Bertuccio made amends, however, by loading the ante-chambers, staircases, and mantle-pieces with flowers.

What, above all, manifested the shrewdness of the steward, and the profound science of the master, the one in carrying out the ideas of the other, was that this house which appeared only the night before so sad and gloomy, impregnated with that sickly smell one can almost fancy to be the smell of time, had in a single day acquired the aspect of life, was scented with its master’s favorite perfumes, and had the very light regulated according to his wish. When the count arrived, he had under his touch his books and arms, his eyes rested upon his favorite pictures; his dogs, whose caresses he loved, welcomed him in the ante-chamber; the birds, whose songs delighted him, cheered him with their music; and the house, awakened from its long sleep, like the sleeping beauty in the wood, lived, sang, and bloomed like the houses we have long cherished, and in which, when we are forced to leave them, we leave a part of our souls. The servants passed gayly along the fine court-yard; some, belonging to the kitchens, gliding down the stairs, restored but the previous day, as if they had always inhabited the house; others filling the coach-houses, where the equipages, encased and numbered, appeared to have been installed for the last fifty years; and in the stables the horses replied with neighs to the grooms, who spoke to them with much more respect than many servants pay their masters.

The library was divided into two parts on either side of the wall, and contained upwards of two thousand volumes; one division was entirely devoted to novels, and even the volume which had been published but the day before was to be seen in its place in all the dignity of its red and gold binding. On the other side of the house, to match with the library, was the conservatory, ornamented with rare flowers, that bloomed in china jars; and in the midst of the greenhouse, marvellous alike to sight and smell, was a billiard-table which looked as if it had been abandoned during the past hour by players who had left the balls on the cloth. One chamber alone had been respected by the magnificent Bertuccio. Before this room, to which you could ascend by the grand, and go out by the back staircase, the servants passed with curiosity, and Bertuccio with terror. At five o'clock precisely, the count arrived before the house at Auteuil, followed by Ali. Bertuccio was awaiting this arrival with impatience, mingled with uneasiness; he hoped for some compliments, while, at the same time, he feared to have frowns. Monte Cristo descended into the courtyard, walked all over the house, without giving any sign of approbation or pleasure, until he entered his bedroom, situated on the opposite side to the closed room; then he approached a little piece of furniture, made of rosewood, which he had noticed at a previous visit. "That can only be to hold gloves," he said.

"Will your excellency deign to open it?" said the delighted Bertuccio, "and you will find gloves in it." Elsewhere the count found everything he required — smelling-bottles, cigars, knick-knacks.

"Good," he said; and M. Bertuccio left enraptured, so great, so powerful, and real was the influence exercised by this man over all who surrounded him. At precisely six o’clock the clatter of horses’ hoofs was heard at the entrance door; it was our captain of Spahis, who had arrived on Medeah. “I am sure I am the first,” cried Morrel; “I did it on purpose to have you a minute to myself, before every one came. Julie and Emmanuel have a thousand things to tell you. Ah, really this is magnificent! But tell me, count, will your people take care of my horse?”

“Do not alarm yourself, my dear Maximilian — they understand.”

“I mean, because he wants petting. If you had seen at what a pace he came — like the wind!”

“I should think so, — a horse that cost 5,000 francs!” said Monte Cristo, in the tone which a father would use towards a son.

“Do you regret them?” asked Morrel, with his open laugh.

“I? Certainly not,” replied the count. “No; I should only regret if the horse had not proved good.”

“It is so good, that I have distanced M. de Chateau-Renaud, one of the best riders in France, and M. Debray, who both mount the minister’s Arabians; and close on their heels are the horses of Madame Danglars, who always go at six leagues an hour.”

“Then they follow you?” asked Monte Cristo.

“See, they are here.” And at the same minute a carriage with smoking horses, accompanied by two mounted gentlemen, arrived at the gate, which opened before them. The carriage drove round, and stopped at the steps, followed by the horsemen. The instant Debray had touched the ground, he was at the carriage-door. He offered his hand to the baroness, who, descending, took it with a peculiarity of manner imperceptible to every one but Monte Cristo. But nothing escaped the count’s notice, and he observed a little note, passed with the facility that indicates frequent practice, from the hand of Madame Danglars to that of the minister’s secretary. After his wife the banker descended, as pale as though he had issued from his tomb instead of his carriage. Madame Danglars threw a rapid and inquiring glance which could only be interpreted by Monte Cristo, around the court-yard, over the peristyle, and across the front of the house, then, repressing a slight emotion, which must have been seen on her countenance if she had not kept her color, she ascended the steps, saying to Morrel, “Sir, if you were a friend of mine, I should ask you if you would sell your horse.”

Morrel smiled with an expression very like a grimace, and then turned round to Monte Cristo, as if to ask him to extricate him from his embarrassment. The count understood him. “Ah, madame,” he said, “why did you not make that request of me?”

“With you, sir,” replied the baroness, “one can wish for nothing, one is so sure to obtain it. If it were so with M. Morrel” —

“Unfortunately,” replied the count, “I am witness that M. Morrel cannot give up his horse, his honor being engaged in keeping it.”

“How so?”

“He laid a wager he would tame Medeah in the space of six months. You understand now that if he were to get rid of the animal before the time named, he would not only lose his bet, but people would say he was afraid; and a brave captain of Spahis cannot risk this, even to gratify a pretty woman, which is, in my opinion, one of the most sacred obligations in the world.”

“You see my position, madame,” said Morrel, bestowing a grateful smile on Monte Cristo.

“It seems to me,” said Danglars, in his coarse tone, ill-concealed by a forced smile, “that you have already got horses enough.” Madame Danglars seldom allowed remarks of this kind to pass unnoticed, but, to the surprise of the young people, she pretended not to hear it, and said nothing. Monte Cristo smiled at her unusual humility, and showed her two immense porcelain jars, over which wound marine plants, of a size and delicacy that nature alone could produce. The baroness was astonished. “Why,” said she, “you could plant one of the chestnut-trees in the Tuileries inside! How can such enormous jars have been manufactured?”

“Ah, madame,” replied Monte Cristo, “you must not ask of us, the manufacturers of fine porcelain, such a question. It is the work of another age, constructed by the genii of earth and water.”

“How so? — at what period can that have been?”

“I do not know; I have only heard that an emperor of China had an oven built expressly, and that in this oven twelve jars like this were successively baked. Two broke, from the heat of the fire; the other ten were sunk three hundred fathoms deep into the sea. The sea, knowing what was required of her, threw over them her weeds, encircled them with coral, and encrusted them with shells; the whole was cemented by two hundred years beneath these almost impervious depths, for a revolution carried away the emperor who wished to make the trial, and only left the documents proving the manufacture of the jars and their descent into the sea. At the end of two hundred years the documents were found, and they thought of bringing up the jars. Divers descended in machines, made expressly on the discovery, into the bay where they were thrown; but of ten three only remained, the rest having been broken by the waves. I am fond of these jars, upon which, perhaps, misshapen, frightful monsters have fixed their cold, dull eyes, and in which myriads of small fish have slept, seeking a refuge from the pursuit of their enemies.” Meanwhile, Danglars, who had cared little for curiosities, was mechanically tearing off the blossoms of a splendid orange-tree, one after another. When he had finished with the orange-tree, he began at the cactus; but this, not being so easily plucked as the orange-tree, pricked him dreadfully. He shuddered, and rubbed his eyes as though awaking from a dream.

“Sir,” said Monte Cristo to him, “I do not recommend my pictures to you, who possess such splendid paintings; but, nevertheless, here are two by Hobbema, a Paul Potter, a Mieris, two by Gerard Douw, a Raphael, a Vandyke, a Zurbaran, and two or three by Murillo, worth looking at.”

“Stay,” said Debray; “I recognize this Hobbema.”

“Ah, indeed!”

“Yes; it was proposed for the Museum.”

“Which, I believe, does not contain one?” said Monte Cristo.

“No; and yet they refused to buy it.”

“Why?” said Chateau-Renaud.

“You pretend not to know, — because government was not rich enough.”

“Ah, pardon me,” said Chateau-Renaud; “I have heard of these things every day during the last eight years, and I cannot understand them yet.”

“You will, by and by,” said Debray.

“I think not,” replied Chateau-Renaud.

“Major Bartolomeo Cavalcanti and Count Andrea Cavalcanti,” announced Baptistin. A black satin stock, fresh from the maker’s hands, gray moustaches, a bold eye, a major’s uniform, ornamented with three medals and five crosses — in fact, the thorough bearing of an old soldier — such was the appearance of Major Bartolomeo Cavalcanti, that tender father with whom we are already acquainted. Close to him, dressed in entirely new clothes, advanced smilingly Count Andrea Cavalcanti, the dutiful son, whom we also know. The three young people were talking together. On the entrance of the new-comers, their eyes glanced from father to son, and then, naturally enough, rested on the latter, whom they began criticising. “Cavalcanti!” said Debray. “A fine name,” said Morrel.

“Yes,” said Chateau-Renaud, “these Italians are well named and badly dressed.”

“You are fastidious, Chateau-Renaud,” replied Debray; “those clothes are well cut and quite new.”

“That is just what I find fault with. That gentleman appears to be well dressed for the first time in his life.”

“Who are those gentlemen?” asked Danglars of Monte Cristo.

“You heard — Cavalcanti.”

“That tells me their name, and nothing else.”

“Ah, true. You do not know the Italian nobility; the Cavalcanti are all descended from princes.”

“Have they any fortune?”

“An enormous one.”

“What do they do?”

“Try to spend it all. They have some business with you, I think, from what they told me the day before yesterday. I, indeed, invited them here to-day on your account. I will introduce you to them.”

“But they appear to speak French with a very pure accent,” said Danglars.

“The son has been educated in a college in the south; I believe near Marseilles. You will find him quite enthusiastic.”

“Upon what subject?” asked Madame Danglars.

“The French ladies, madame. He has made up his mind to take a wife from Paris.”

“A fine idea that of his,” said Danglars, shrugging his shoulders. Madame Danglars looked at her husband with an expression which, at any other time, would have indicated a storm, but for the second time she controlled herself. “The baron appears thoughtful to-day,” said Monte Cristo to her; “are they going to put him in the ministry?”

“Not yet, I think. More likely he has been speculating on the Bourse, and has lost money.”

“M. and Madame de Villefort,” cried Baptistin. They entered. M. de Villefort, notwithstanding his self-control, was visibly affected, and when Monte Cristo touched his hand, he felt it tremble. “Certainly, women alone know how to dissimulate,” said Monte Cristo to himself, glancing at

Madame Danglars, who was smiling on the procureur, and embracing his wife. After a short time, the count saw Bertuccio, who, until then, had been occupied on the other side of the house, glide into an adjoining room. He went to him. “What do you want, M. Bertuccio?” said he.

“Your excellency has not stated the number of guests.”

“Ah, true.”

“How many covers?”

“Count for yourself.”

“Is every one here, your excellency?”

“Yes.”

Bertuccio glanced through the door, which was ajar. The count watched him. “Good heavens!” he exclaimed.

“What is the matter?” said the count.

“That woman — that woman!”

“Which?”

“The one with a white dress and so many diamonds — the fair one.”

“Madame Danglars?”

“I do not know her name; but it is she, sir, it is she!”

“Whom do you mean?”

“The woman of the garden! — she that was enciente — she who was walking while she waited for” — Bertuccio stood at the open door, with his eyes starting and his hair on end.

“Waiting for whom?” Bertuccio, without answering, pointed to Villefort with something of the gesture Macbeth uses to point out Banquo. “Oh, oh,” he at length muttered, “do you see?”

“What? Who?”

“Him!”

“Him! — M. de Villefort, the king’s attorney? Certainly I see him.”

“Then I did not kill him?”

“Really, I think you are going mad, good Bertuccio,” said the count.

“Then he is not dead?”

“No; you see plainly he is not dead. Instead of striking between the sixth and seventh left ribs, as your countrymen do, you must have struck higher or lower, and life is very tenacious in these lawyers, or rather there is no truth in anything you have told me — it was a fright of the imagination, a dream of your fancy. You went to sleep full of thoughts of vengeance; they weighed heavily upon your stomach; you had the nightmare — that’s all.

Come, calm yourself, and reckon them up — M. and Madame de Villefort, two; M. and Madame Danglars, four; M. de Chateau-Renaud, M. Debray, M. Morrel, seven; Major Bartolomeo Cavalcanti, eight.”

“Eight!” repeated Bertuccio.

“Stop! You are in a shocking hurry to be off — you forget one of my guests. Lean a little to the left. Stay! look at M. Andrea Cavalcanti, the young man in a black coat, looking at Murillo’s Madonna; now he is turning.” This time Bertuccio would have uttered an exclamation, had not a look from Monte Cristo silenced him. “Benedetto?” he muttered; “fatality!”

“Half-past six o’clock has just struck, M. Bertuccio,” said the count severely; “I ordered dinner at that hour, and I do not like to wait;” and he returned to his guests, while Bertuccio, leaning against the wall, succeeded in reaching the dining-room. Five minutes afterwards the doors of the drawing-room were thrown open, and Bertuccio appearing said, with a violent effort, “The dinner waits.”

The Count of Monte Cristo offered his arm to Madame de Villefort. “M. de Villefort,” he said, “will you conduct the Baroness Danglars?”

Villefort complied, and they passed on to the dining-room.

Chapter 63

The Dinner.

It was evident that one sentiment affected all the guests on entering the dining-room. Each one asked what strange influence had brought them to this house, and yet astonished, even uneasy though they were, they still felt that they would not like to be absent. The recent events, the solitary and eccentric position of the count, his enormous, nay, almost incredible fortune, should have made men cautious, and have altogether prevented ladies visiting a house where there was no one of their own sex to receive them; and yet curiosity had been enough to lead them to overleap the bounds of prudence and decorum. And all present, even including Cavalcanti and his son, notwithstanding the stiffness of the one and the carelessness of the other, were thoughtful, on finding themselves assembled at the house of this incomprehensible man. Madame Danglars had started when Villefort, on the count's invitation, offered his arm; and Villefort felt that his glance was uneasy beneath his gold spectacles, when he felt the arm of the baroness press upon his own. None of this had escaped the count, and even by this mere contact of individuals the scene had already acquired considerable interest for an observer. M. de Villefort had on the right hand Madame Danglars, on his left Morrel. The count was seated between Madame de Villefort and Danglars; the other seats were filled by Debray, who was placed between the two Cavalcanti, and by Chateau-Renaud, seated between Madame de Villefort and Morrel.

The repast was magnificent; Monte Cristo had endeavored completely to overturn the Parisian ideas, and to feed the curiosity as much as the appetite of his guests. It was an Oriental feast that he offered to them, but of such a kind as the Arabian fairies might be supposed to prepare. Every delicious fruit that the four quarters of the globe could provide was heaped in vases from China and jars from Japan. Rare birds, retaining their most brilliant plumage, enormous fish, spread upon massive silver dishes, together with every wine produced in the Archipelago, Asia Minor, or the Cape, sparkling in bottles, whose grotesque shape seemed to give an additional flavor to the draught, — all these, like one of the displays with which Apicius of old gratified his guests, passed in review before the eyes of the astonished Parisians, who understood that it was possible to expend a thousand louis upon a dinner for ten persons, but only on the condition of eating pearls, like Cleopatra, or drinking refined gold, like Lorenzo de' Medici.

Monte Cristo noticed the general astonishment, and began laughing and joking about it. "Gentlemen," he said, "you will admit that, when arrived at a certain degree of fortune, the superfluities of life are all that can be desired; and the ladies will allow that, after having risen to a certain eminence of position, the ideal alone can be more exalted. Now, to follow out this reasoning, what is the marvellous? — that which we do not understand. What is it that we really desire? — that which we cannot obtain. Now, to see things which I cannot understand, to procure impossibilities, these are the study of my life. I gratify my wishes by two means — my will and my money. I take as much interest in the pursuit of some whim as you do, M. Danglars, in promoting a new railway line; you, M. de Villefort, in condemning a culprit to death; you, M. Debray, in pacifying a kingdom; you, M. de Chateau-Renaud, in pleasing a woman; and you, Morrel, in breaking a horse that no one can ride. For example, you see these two fish; one brought from fifty leagues beyond St. Petersburg, the other five leagues from Naples. Is it not amusing to see them both on the same table?"

"What are the two fish?" asked Danglars.

"M. Chateau-Renaud, who has lived in Russia, will tell you the name of one, and Major Cavalcanti, who is an Italian, will tell you the name of the other."

"This one is, I think, a sterlet," said Chateau-Renaud.

"And that one, if I mistake not, a lamprey."

"Just so. Now, M. Danglars, ask these gentlemen where they are caught."

"Sterlets," said Chateau-Renaud, "are only found in the Volga."

"And," said Cavalcanti, "I know that Lake Fusaro alone supplies lampreys of that size."

"Exactly; one comes from the Volga, and the other from Lake Fusaro."

"Impossible!" cried all the guests simultaneously.

"Well, this is just what amuses me," said Monte Cristo. "I am like Nero — cupitor impossibilium; and that is what is amusing you at this moment.

This fish, which seems so exquisite to you, is very likely no better than perch or salmon; but it seemed impossible to procure it, and here it is."

"But how could you have these fish brought to France?"

"Oh, nothing more easy. Each fish was brought over in a cask — one filled with river herbs and weeds, the other with rushes and lake plants; they were placed in a wagon built on purpose, and thus the sterlet lived twelve days, the lamprey eight, and both were alive when my cook seized them, killing one with milk and the other with wine. You do not believe me, M. Danglars!"

"I cannot help doubting," answered Danglars with his stupid smile.

"Baptistin," said the count, "have the other fish brought in — the sterlet and the lamprey which came in the other casks, and which are yet alive." Danglars opened his bewildered eyes; the company clapped their hands. Four servants carried in two casks covered with aquatic plants, and in each of which was breathing a fish similar to those on the table.

"But why have two of each sort?" asked Danglars.

"Merely because one might have died," carelessly answered Monte Cristo.

"You are certainly an extraordinary man," said Danglars; "and philosophers may well say it is a fine thing to be rich."

"And to have ideas," added Madame Danglars.

"Oh, do not give me credit for this, madame; it was done by the Romans, who much esteemed them, and Pliny relates that they sent slaves from Ostia to Rome, who carried on their heads fish which he calls the mulus, and which, from the description, must probably be the goldfish. It was also considered a luxury to have them alive, it being an amusing sight to see them die, for, when dying, they change color three or four times, and like the rainbow when it disappears, pass through all the prismatic shades, after which they were sent to the kitchen. Their agony formed part of their merit — if they were not seen alive, they were despised when dead."

"Yes," said Debray, "but then Ostia is only a few leagues from Rome."

"True," said Monte Cristo; "but what would be the use of living eighteen hundred years after Lucullus, if we can do no better than he could?" The two Cavalcanti opened their enormous eyes, but had the good sense not to say anything. "All this is very extraordinary," said Chateau-Renaud; "still, what I admire the most, I confess, is the marvellous promptitude with which your orders are executed. Is it not true that you only bought this house five or six days ago?”

“Certainly not longer.”

“Well, I am sure it is quite transformed since last week. If I remember rightly, it had another entrance, and the court-yard was paved and empty; while to-day we have a splendid lawn, bordered by trees which appear to be a hundred years old.”

“Why not? I am fond of grass and shade,” said Monte Cristo.

“Yes,” said Madame de Villefort, “the door was towards the road before, and on the day of my miraculous escape you brought me into the house from the road, I remember.”

“Yes, madame,” said Monte Cristo; “but I preferred having an entrance which would allow me to see the Bois de Boulogne over my gate.”

“In four days,” said Morrel; “it is extraordinary!”

“Indeed,” said Chateau-Renaud, “it seems quite miraculous to make a new house out of an old one; for it was very old, and dull too. I recollect coming for my mother to look at it when M. de Saint-Meran advertised it for sale two or three years ago.”

“M. de Saint-Meran?” said Madame de Villefort; “then this house belonged to M. de Saint-Meran before you bought it?”

“It appears so,” replied Monte Cristo.

“Is it possible that you do not know of whom you purchased it?”

“Quite so; my steward transacts all this business for me.”

“It is certainly ten years since the house had been occupied,” said Chateau-Renaud, “and it was quite melancholy to look at it, with the blinds closed, the doors locked, and the weeds in the court. Really, if the house had not belonged to the father-in-law of the procureur, one might have thought it some accursed place where a horrible crime had been committed.” Villefort, who had hitherto not tasted the three or four glasses of rare wine which were placed before him, here took one, and drank it off. Monte Cristo allowed a short time to elapse, and then said, “It is singular, baron, but the same idea came across me the first time I came here; it looked so gloomy I should never have bought it if my steward had not taken the matter into his own hands. Perhaps the fellow had been bribed by the notary.”

“It is probable,” stammered out Villefort, trying to smile; “but I can assure you that I had nothing to do with any such proceeding. This house is part of Valentine’s marriage-portion, and M. de Saint-Meran wished to sell it; for if it had remained another year or two uninhabited it would have fallen to ruin.” It was Morrel’s turn to become pale.

“There was, above all, one room,” continued Monte Cristo, “very plain in appearance, hung with red damask, which, I know not why, appeared to me quite dramatic.”

“Why so?” said Danglars; “why dramatic?”

“Can we account for instinct?” said Monte Cristo. “Are there not some places where we seem to breathe sadness? — why, we cannot tell. It is a chain of recollections — an idea which carries you back to other times, to other places — which, very likely, have no connection with the present time and place. And there is something in this room which reminds me forcibly of the chamber of the Marquise de Ganges [*] or Desdemona. Stay, since we have finished dinner, I will show it to you, and then we will take coffee in the garden. After dinner, the play.” Monte Cristo looked inquiringly at his guests. Madame de Villefort rose, Monte Cristo did the same, and the rest followed their example. Villefort and Madame Danglars remained for a moment, as if rooted to their seats; they questioned each other with vague and stupid glances. “Did you hear?” said Madame Danglars.

> * Elisabeth de Rossan, Marquise de Ganges, was one of the
> famous women of the court of Louis XIV. where she was known
> as “La Belle Provencale.” She was the widow of the Marquise
> de Castellane when she married de Ganges, and having the
> misfortune to excite the enmity of her new brothers-in-law,
> was forced by them to take poison; and they finished her off
> with pistol and dagger. — Ed.

“We must go,” replied Villefort, offering his arm. The others, attracted by curiosity, were already scattered in different parts of the house; for they thought the visit would not be limited to the one room, and that, at the same time, they would obtain a view of the rest of the building, of which Monte Cristo had created a palace. Each one went out by the open doors. Monte Cristo waited for the two who remained; then, when they had passed, he brought up the rear, and on his face was a smile, which, if they could have understood it, would have alarmed them much more than a visit to the room they were about to enter. They began by walking through the apartments, many of which were fitted up in the Eastern style, with cushions and divans instead of beds, and pipes instead of furniture. The drawing-rooms were decorated with the rarest pictures by the old masters, the boudoirs hung with draperies from China, of fanciful colors, fantastic design, and wonderful texture. At length they arrived at the famous room. There was nothing particular about it, excepting that, although daylight had disappeared, it was not lighted, and everything in it was old-fashioned, while the rest of the rooms had been redecorated. These two causes were enough to give it a gloomy aspect. “Oh.” cried Madame de Villefort, “it is really frightful.” Madame Danglars tried to utter a few words, but was not heard. Many observations were made, the import of which was a unanimous opinion that there was something sinister about the room. “Is it not so?” asked Monte Cristo. “Look at that large clumsy bed, hung with such gloomy, blood-colored drapery! And those two crayon portraits, that have faded from the dampness; do they not seem to say, with their pale lips and staring eyes, ‘We have seen’?” Villefort became livid; Madame Danglars fell into a long seat placed near the chimney. “Oh,” said Madame de Villefort, smiling, “are you courageous enough to sit down upon the very seat perhaps upon which the crime was committed?” Madame Danglars rose suddenly.

“And then,” said Monte Cristo, “this is not all.”

“What is there more?” said Debray, who had not failed to notice the agitation of Madame Danglars.

“Ah, what else is there?” said Danglars; “for, at present, I cannot say that I have seen anything extraordinary. What do you say, M. Cavalcanti?”

“Ah,” said he, “we have at Pisa, Ugolino’s tower; at Ferrara, Tasso’s prison; at Rimini, the room of Francesca and Paolo.”

“Yes, but you have not this little staircase,” said Monte Cristo, opening a door concealed by the drapery. “Look at it, and tell me what you think of it.”

“What a wicked-looking, crooked staircase,” said Chateau-Renaud with a smile.

“I do not know whether the wine of Chios produces melancholy, but certainly everything appears to me black in this house,” said Debray.

Ever since Valentine’s dowry had been mentioned, Morrel had been silent and sad. “Can you imagine,” said Monte Cristo, “some Othello or Abbe de Ganges, one stormy, dark night, descending these stairs step by step, carrying a load, which he wishes to hide from the sight of man, if not from God?” Madame Danglars half fainted on the arm of Villefort, who was obliged to support himself against the wall. “Ah, madame,” cried Debray, “what is the matter with you? how pale you look!”

“It is very evident what is the matter with her,” said Madame de Villefort; “M. de Monte Cristo is relating horrible stories to us, doubtless intending to frighten us to death.”

“Yes,” said Villefort, “really, count, you frighten the ladies.”

“What is the matter?” asked Debray, in a whisper, of Madame Danglars.

“Nothing,” she replied with a violent effort. “I want air, that is all.”

“Will you come into the garden?” said Debray, advancing towards the back staircase.

“No, no,” she answered, “I would rather remain here.”

“Are you really frightened, madame?” said Monte Cristo.

“Oh, no, sir,” said Madame Danglars; “but you suppose scenes in a manner which gives them the appearance of reality.”

“Ah, yes,” said Monte Cristo smiling; “it is all a matter of imagination. Why should we not imagine this the apartment of an honest mother? And this bed with red hangings, a bed visited by the goddess Lucina? And that mysterious staircase, the passage through which, not to disturb their sleep, the doctor and nurse pass, or even the father carrying the sleeping child?” Here Madame Danglars, instead of being calmed by the soft picture, uttered a groan and fainted. “Madame Danglars is ill,” said Villefort; “it would be better to take her to her carriage.”

“Oh, mon Dieu,” said Monte Cristo, “and I have forgotten my smelling-bottle!”

“I have mine,” said Madame de Villefort; and she passed over to Monte Cristo a bottle full of the same kind of red liquid whose good properties the count had tested on Edward.

“Ah,” said Monte Cristo, taking it from her hand.

“Yes,” she said, “at your advice I have made the trial.”

“And have you succeeded?”

“I think so.”

Madame Danglars was carried into the adjoining room; Monte Cristo dropped a very small portion of the red liquid upon her lips; she returned to consciousness. “Ah,” she cried, “what a frightful dream!”

Villefort pressed her hand to let her know it was not a dream. They looked for M. Danglars, but, as he was not especially interested in poetical ideas, he had gone into the garden, and was talking with Major Cavalcanti on the projected railway from Leghorn to Florence. Monte Cristo seemed in despair. He took the arm of Madame Danglars, and conducted her into the garden, where they found Danglars taking coffee between the Cavalcanti. "Really, madame," he said, "did I alarm you much?"

"Oh, no, sir," she answered; "but you know, things impress us differently, according to the mood of our minds." Villefort forced a laugh. "And then, you know," he said, "an idea, a supposition, is sufficient."

"Well," said Monte Cristo, "you may believe me if you like, but it is my opinion that a crime has been committed in this house."

"Take care," said Madame de Villefort, "the king's attorney is here."

"Ah," replied Monte Cristo, "since that is the case, I will take advantage of his presence to make my declaration."

"Your declaration?" said Villefort.

"Yes, before witnesses."

"Oh, this is very interesting," said Debray; "if there really has been a crime, we will investigate it."

"There has been a crime," said Monte Cristo. "Come this way, gentlemen; come, M. Villefort, for a declaration to be available, should be made before the competent authorities." He then took Villefort's arm, and, at the same time, holding that of Madame Danglars under his own, he dragged the procureur to the plantain-tree, where the shade was thickest. All the other guests followed. "Stay," said Monte Cristo, "here, in this very spot" (and he stamped upon the ground), "I had the earth dug up and fresh mould put in, to refresh these old trees; well, my man, digging, found a box, or rather, the iron-work of a box, in the midst of which was the skeleton of a newly born infant." Monte Cristo felt the arm of Madame Danglars stiffen, while that of Villefort trembled. "A newly born infant," repeated Debray; "this affair becomes serious!"

"Well," said Chateau-Renaud, "I was not wrong just now then, when I said that houses had souls and faces like men, and that their exteriors carried the impress of their characters. This house was gloomy because it was remorseful: it was remorseful because it concealed a crime."

"Who said it was a crime?" asked Villefort, with a last effort.

"How? is it not a crime to bury a living child in a garden?" cried Monte Cristo. "And pray what do you call such an action?"

"But who said it was buried alive?"

“Why bury it there if it were dead? This garden has never been a cemetery.”

“What is done to infanticides in this country?” asked Major Cavalcanti innocently.

“Oh, their heads are soon cut off,” said Danglars.

“Ah, indeed?” said Cavalcanti.

“I think so; am I not right, M. de Villefort?” asked Monte Cristo.

“Yes, count,” replied Villefort, in a voice now scarcely human.

Monte Cristo, seeing that the two persons for whom he had prepared this scene could scarcely endure it, and not wishing to carry it too far, said, “Come, gentlemen, — some coffee, we seem to have forgotten it,” and he conducted the guests back to the table on the lawn.

“Indeed, count,” said Madame Danglars, “I am ashamed to own it, but all your frightful stories have so upset me, that I must beg you to let me sit down;” and she fell into a chair. Monte Cristo bowed, and went to Madame de Villefort. “I think Madame Danglars again requires your bottle,” he said. But before Madame de Villefort could reach her friend the procureur had found time to whisper to Madame Danglars, “I must speak to you.”

“When?”

“To-morrow.”

“Where?”

“In my office, or in the court, if you like, — that is the surest place.”

“I will be there.” — At this moment Madame de Villefort approached. “Thanks, my dear friend,” said Madame Danglars, trying to smile; “it is over now, and I am much better.”

Chapter 64

The Beggar.

The evening passed on; Madame de Villefort expressed a desire to return to Paris, which Madame Danglars had not dared to do, notwithstanding the uneasiness she experienced. On his wife's request, M. de Villefort was the first to give the signal of departure. He offered a seat in his landau to Madame Danglars, that she might be under the care of his wife. As for M. Danglars, absorbed in an interesting conversation with M. Cavalcanti, he paid no attention to anything that was passing. While Monte Cristo had begged the smelling-bottle of Madame de Villefort, he had noticed the approach of Villefort to Madame Danglars, and he soon guessed all that had passed between them, though the words had been uttered in so low a voice as hardly to be heard by Madame Danglars. Without opposing their arrangements, he allowed Morrel, Chateau-Renaud, and Debray to leave on horseback, and the ladies in M. de Villefort's carriage. Danglars, more and more delighted with Major Cavalcanti, had offered him a seat in his carriage. Andrea Cavalcanti found his tilbury waiting at the door; the groom, in every respect a caricature of the English fashion, was standing on tiptoe to hold a large iron-gray horse.

Andrea had spoken very little during dinner; he was an intelligent lad, and he feared to utter some absurdity before so many grand people, amongst whom, with dilating eyes, he saw the king's attorney. Then he had been seized upon by Danglars, who, with a rapid glance at the stiff-necked old major and his modest son, and taking into consideration the hospitality of the count, made up his mind that he was in the society of some nabob come to Paris to finish the worldly education of his heir. He contemplated with unspeakable delight the large diamond which shone on the major's little finger; for the major, like a prudent man, in case of any accident happening to his bank-notes, had immediately converted them into an available asset. Then, after dinner, on the pretext of business, he questioned the father and son upon their mode of living; and the father and son, previously informed that it was through Danglars the one was to receive his

48,000 francs and the other 50,000 livres annually, were so full of affability that they would have shaken hands even with the banker’s servants, so much did their gratitude need an object to expend itself upon. One thing above all the rest heightened the respect, nay almost the veneration, of Danglars for Cavalcanti. The latter, faithful to the principle of Horace, nil admirari, had contented himself with showing his knowledge by declaring in what lake the best lampreys were caught. Then he had eaten some without saying a word more; Danglars, therefore, concluded that such luxuries were common at the table of the illustrious descendant of the Cavalcanti, who most likely in Lucca fed upon trout brought from Switzerland, and lobsters sent from England, by the same means used by the count to bring the lampreys from Lake Fusaro, and the sterlet from the Volga. Thus it was with much politeness of manner that he heard Cavalcanti pronounce these words, “To-morrow, sir, I shall have the honor of waiting upon you on business.”

“And I, sir,” said Danglars, “shall be most happy to receive you.” Upon which he offered to take Cavalcanti in his carriage to the Hotel des Princes, if it would not be depriving him of the company of his son. To this Cavalcanti replied by saying that for some time past his son had lived independently of him, that he had his own horses and carriages, and that not having come together, it would not be difficult for them to leave separately. The major seated himself, therefore, by the side of Danglars, who was more and more charmed with the ideas of order and economy which ruled this man, and yet who, being able to allow his son 60,000 francs a year, might be supposed to possess a fortune of 500,000 or 600,000 livres.

As for Andrea, he began, by way of showing off, to scold his groom, who, instead of bringing the tilbury to the steps of the house, had taken it to the outer door, thus giving him the trouble of walking thirty steps to reach it. The groom heard him with humility, took the bit of the impatient animal with his left hand, and with the right held out the reins to Andrea, who, taking them from him, rested his polished boot lightly on the step. At that moment a hand touched his shoulder. The young man turned round, thinking that Danglars or Monte Cristo had forgotten something they wished to tell him, and had returned just as they were starting. But instead of either of these, he saw nothing but a strange face, sunburnt, and encircled by a beard, with eyes brilliant as carbuncles, and a smile upon the mouth which displayed a perfect set of white teeth, pointed and sharp as the wolf’s or jackal’s. A red handkerchief encircled his gray head; torn and filthy garments covered his large bony limbs, which seemed as though, like those of a skeleton, they would rattle as he walked; and the hand with which he leaned upon the young man’s shoulder, and which was the first thing Andrea saw, seemed of gigantic size. Did the young man recognize that face by the light of the lantern in his tilbury, or was he merely struck with the horrible appearance of his interrogator? We cannot say; but only relate the fact that he shuddered and stepped back suddenly. “What do you want of me?” he asked.

“Pardon me, my friend, if I disturb you,” said the man with the red handkerchief, “but I want to speak to you.”

“You have no right to beg at night,” said the groom, endeavoring to rid his master of the troublesome intruder.

“I am not begging, my fine fellow,” said the unknown to the servant, with so ironical an expression of the eye, and so frightful a smile, that he withdrew; “I only wish to say two or three words to your master, who gave me a commission to execute about a fortnight ago.”

“Come,” said Andrea, with sufficient nerve for his servant not to perceive his agitation, “what do you want? Speak quickly, friend.”

The man said, in a low voice: “I wish — I wish you to spare me the walk back to Paris. I am very tired, and as I have not eaten so good a dinner as you, I can scarcely stand.” The young man shuddered at this strange familiarity. “Tell me,” he said — ”tell me what you want?”

“Well, then, I want you to take me up in your fine carriage, and carry me back.” Andrea turned pale, but said nothing.

“Yes,” said the man, thrusting his hands into his pockets, and looking impudently at the youth; “I have taken the whim into my head; do you understand, Master Benedetto?”

At this name, no doubt, the young man reflected a little, for he went towards his groom, saying, “This man is right; I did indeed charge him with a commission, the result of which he must tell me; walk to the barrier, there take a cab, that you may not be too late.” The surprised groom retired. “Let me at least reach a shady spot,” said Andrea.

“Oh, as for that, I’ll take you to a splendid place,” said the man with the handkerchief; and taking the horse’s bit he led the tilbury where it was certainly impossible for any one to witness the honor that Andrea conferred upon him.

"Don't think I want the glory of riding in your fine carriage," said he; "oh, no, it's only because I am tired, and also because I have a little business to talk over with you."

"Come, step in," said the young man. It was a pity this scene had not occurred in daylight, for it was curious to see this rascal throwing himself heavily down on the cushion beside the young and elegant driver of the tilbury. Andrea drove past the last house in the village without saying a word to his companion, who smiled complacently, as though well-pleased to find himself travelling in so comfortable a vehicle. Once out of Auteuil, Andrea looked around, in order to assure himself that he could neither be seen nor heard, and then, stopping the horse and crossing his arms before the man, he asked, — "Now, tell me why you come to disturb my tranquillity?"

"Let me ask you why you deceived me?"

"How have I deceived you?"

"'How,' do you ask? When we parted at the Pont du Var, you told me you were going to travel through Piedmont and Tuscany; but instead of that, you come to Paris."

"How does that annoy you?"

"It does not; on the contrary, I think it will answer my purpose."

"So," said Andrea, "you are speculating upon me?"

"What fine words he uses!"

"I warn you, Master Caderousse, that you are mistaken."

"Well, well, don't be angry, my boy; you know well enough what it is to be unfortunate; and misfortunes make us jealous. I thought you were earning a living in Tuscany or Piedmont by acting as facchino or cicerone, and I pitied you sincerely, as I would a child of my own. You know I always did call you my child."

"Come, come, what then?"

"Patience — patience!"

"I am patient, but go on."

"All at once I see you pass through the barrier with a groom, a tilbury, and fine new clothes. You must have discovered a mine, or else become a stockbroker."

"So that, as you confess, you are jealous?"

"No, I am pleased — so pleased that I wished to congratulate you; but as I am not quite properly dressed, I chose my opportunity, that I might not compromise you.”

“Yes, and a fine opportunity you have chosen!” exclaimed Andrea; “you speak to me before my servant.”

“How can I help that, my boy? I speak to you when I can catch you. You have a quick horse, a light tilbury, you are naturally as slippery as an eel; if I had missed you to-night, I might not have had another chance.”

“You see, I do not conceal myself.”

“You are lucky; I wish I could say as much, for I do conceal myself; and then I was afraid you would not recognize me, but you did,” added Caderousse with his unpleasant smile. “It was very polite of you.”

“Come,” said Andrea, “what do you want?”

“You do not speak affectionately to me, Benedetto, my old friend, that is not right — take care, or I may become troublesome.” This menace smothered the young man’s passion. He urged the horse again into a trot. “You should not speak so to an old friend like me, Caderousse, as you said just now; you are a native of Marseilles, I am” —

“Do you know then now what you are?”

“No, but I was brought up in Corsica; you are old and obstinate, I am young and wilful. Between people like us threats are out of place, everything should be amicably arranged. Is it my fault if fortune, which has frowned on you, has been kind to me?”

“Fortune has been kind to you, then? Your tilbury, your groom, your clothes, are not then hired? Good, so much the better,” said Caderousse, his eyes sparkling with avarice.

“Oh, you knew that well enough before speaking to me,” said Andrea, becoming more and more excited. “If I had been wearing a handkerchief like yours on my head, rags on my back, and worn-out shoes on my feet, you would not have known me.”

“You wrong me, my boy; now I have found you, nothing prevents my being as well-dressed as any one, knowing, as I do, the goodness of your heart. If you have two coats you will give me one of them. I used to divide my soup and beans with you when you were hungry.”

“True,” said Andrea.

“What an appetite you used to have! Is it as good now?”

“Oh, yes,” replied Andrea, laughing.

“How did you come to be dining with that prince whose house you have just left?”

“He is not a prince; simply a count.”

“A count, and a rich one too, eh?”

“Yes; but you had better not have anything to say to him, for he is not a very good-tempered gentleman.”

“Oh, be easy! I have no design upon your count, and you shall have him all to yourself. But,” said Caderousse, again smiling with the disagreeable expression he had before assumed, “you must pay for it — you understand?”

“Well, what do you want?”

“I think that with a hundred francs a month” —

“Well?”

“I could live” —

“Upon a hundred francs!”

“Come — you understand me; but that with” —

“With?”

“With a hundred and fifty francs I should be quite happy.”

“Here are two hundred,” said Andrea; and he placed ten gold louis in the hand of Caderousse.

“Good!” said Caderousse.

“Apply to the steward on the first day of every month, and you will receive the same sum.”

“There now, again you degrade me.”

“How so?”

“By making me apply to the servants, when I want to transact business with you alone.”

“Well, be it so, then. Take it from me then, and so long at least as I receive my income, you shall be paid yours.”

“Come, come; I always said you were a fine fellow, and it is a blessing when good fortune happens to such as you. But tell me all about it?”

“Why do you wish to know?” asked Cavalcanti.

“What? do you again defy me?”

“No; the fact is, I have found my father.”

“What? a real father?”

“Yes, so long as he pays me” —

“You’ll honor and believe him — that’s right. What is his name?”

“Major Cavalcanti.”

“Is he pleased with you?”

"So far I have appeared to answer his purpose."

"And who found this father for you?"

"The Count of Monte Cristo."

"The man whose house you have just left?"

"Yes."

"I wish you would try and find me a situation with him as grandfather, since he holds the money-chest!"

"Well, I will mention you to him. Meanwhile, what are you going to do?"

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"It is very kind of you to trouble yourself about me."

"Since you interest yourself in my affairs, I think it is now my turn to ask you some questions."

"Ah, true. Well; I shall rent a room in some respectable house, wear a decent coat, shave every day, and go and read the papers in a cafe. Then, in the evening, I shall go to the theatre; I shall look like some retired baker. That is what I want."

"Come, if you will only put this scheme into execution, and be steady, nothing could be better."

"Do you think so, M. Bossuet? And you — what will you become? A peer of France?"

"Ah," said Andrea, "who knows?"

"Major Cavalcanti is already one, perhaps; but then, hereditary rank is abolished."

"No politics, Caderousse. And now that you have all you want, and that we understand each other, jump down from the tilbury and disappear."

"Not at all, my good friend."

"How? Not at all?"

"Why, just think for a moment; with this red handkerchief on my head, with scarcely any shoes, no papers, and ten gold napoleons in my pocket, without reckoning what was there before — making in all about two hundred francs, — why, I should certainly be arrested at the barriers. Then, to justify myself, I should say that you gave me the money; this would cause inquiries, it would be found that I left Toulon without giving due notice, and I should then be escorted back to the shores of the Mediterranean. Then I should become simply No. 106, and good-by to my dream of resembling the retired baker! No, no, my boy; I prefer remaining honorably in the capital.” Andrea scowled. Certainly, as he had himself owned, the reputed son of Major Cavalcanti was a wilful fellow. He drew up for a minute, threw a rapid glance around him, and then his hand fell instantly into his pocket, where it began playing with a pistol. But, meanwhile, Caderousse, who had never taken his eyes off his companion, passed his hand behind his back, and opened a long Spanish knife, which he always carried with him, to be ready in case of need. The two friends, as we see, were worthy of and understood one another. Andrea’s hand left his pocket inoffensively, and was carried up to the red mustache, which it played with for some time. “Good Caderousse,” he said, “how happy you will be.”

“I will do my best,” said the inn-keeper of the Pont du Gard, shutting up his knife.

“Well, then, we will go into Paris. But how will you pass through the barrier without exciting suspicion? It seems to me that you are in more danger riding than on foot.”

“Wait,” said Caderousse, “we shall see.” He then took the great-coat with the large collar, which the groom had left behind in the tilbury, and put it on his back; then he took off Cavalcanti’s hat, which he placed upon his own head, and finally he assumed the careless attitude of a servant whose master drives himself.

“But, tell me,” said Andrea, “am I to remain bareheaded?”

“Pooh,” said Caderousse; “it is so windy that your hat can easily appear to have blown off.”

“Come, come; enough of this,” said Cavalcanti.

“What are you waiting for?” said Caderousse. “I hope I am not the cause.”

“Hush,” said Andrea. They passed the barrier without accident. At the first cross street Andrea stopped his horse, and Caderousse leaped out.

“Well!” said Andrea, — ”my servant’s coat and my hat?”

“Ah,” said Caderousse, “you would not like me to risk taking cold?”

“But what am I to do?”

“You? Oh, you are young while I am beginning to get old. Au revoir, Benedetto;” and running into a court, he disappeared. “Alas,” said Andrea, sighing, “one cannot be completely happy in this world!”

Chapter 65

A Conjugal Scene.

At the Place Louis XV. the three young people separated — that is to say, Morrel went to the Boulevards, Chateau-Renaud to the Pont de la Revolution, and Debray to the Quai. Most probably Morrel and Chateau-Renaud returned to their “domestic hearths,” as they say in the gallery of the Chamber in well-turned speeches, and in the theatre of the Rue Richelieu in well-written pieces; but it was not the case with Debray. When he reached the wicket of the Louvre, he turned to the left, galloped across the Carrousel, passed through the Rue Saint-Roch, and, issuing from the Rue de la Michodiere, he arrived at M. Danglars’ door just at the same time that Villefort’s landau, after having deposited him and his wife at the Faubourg St. Honore, stopped to leave the baroness at her own house. Debray, with the air of a man familiar with the house, entered first into the court, threw his bridle into the hands of a footman, and returned to the door to receive Madame Danglars, to whom he offered his arm, to conduct her to her apartments. The gate once closed, and Debray and the baroness alone in the court, he asked, — ”What was the matter with you, Hermine? and why were you so affected at that story, or rather fable, which the count related?”

“Because I have been in such shocking spirits all the evening, my friend,” said the baroness.

“No, Hermine,” replied Debray; “you cannot make me believe that; on the contrary, you were in excellent spirits when you arrived at the count’s. M. Danglars was disagreeable, certainly, but I know how much you care for his ill-humor. Some one has vexed you; I will allow no one to annoy you.”

“You are deceived, Lucien, I assure you,” replied Madame Danglars; “and what I have told you is really the case, added to the ill-humor you remarked, but which I did not think it worth while to allude to.” It was evident that Madame Danglars was suffering from that nervous irritability which women frequently cannot account for even to themselves; or that, as Debray had guessed, she had experienced some secret agitation that she would not acknowledge to any one. Being a man who knew that the former of these symptoms was one of the inherent penalties of womanhood, he did not then press his inquiries, but waited for a more appropriate opportunity when he should again interrogate her, or receive an avowal proprio motu. At the door of her apartment the baroness met Mademoiselle Cornelie, her confidential maid. “What is my daughter doing?” asked Madame Danglars.

“She practiced all the evening, and then went to bed,” replied Mademoiselle Cornelie.

“Yet I think I hear her piano.”

“It is Mademoiselle Louise d’Armilly, who is playing while Mademoiselle Danglars is in bed.”

“Well,” said Madame Danglars, “come and undress me.” They entered the bedroom. Debray stretched himself upon a large couch, and Madame Danglars passed into her dressing-room with Mademoiselle Cornelie. “My dear M. Lucien,” said Madame Danglars through the door, “you are always complaining that Eugenie will not address a word to you.”

“Madame,” said Lucien, playing with a little dog, who, recognizing him as a friend of the house, expected to be caressed, “I am not the only one who makes similar complaints, I think I heard Morcerf say that he could not extract a word from his betrothed.”

“True,” said Madame Danglars; “yet I think this will all pass off, and that you will one day see her enter your study.”

“My study?”

“At least that of the minister.”

“Why so!”

“To ask for an engagement at the Opera. Really, I never saw such an infatuation for music; it is quite ridiculous for a young lady of fashion.” Debray smiled. “Well,” said he, “let her come, with your consent and that of the baron, and we will try and give her an engagement, though we are very poor to pay such talent as hers.”

“Go, Cornelie,” said Madame Danglars, “I do not require you any longer.”

Cornelie obeyed, and the next minute Madame Danglars left her room in a charming loose dress, and came and sat down close to Debray. Then she began thoughtfully to caress the little spaniel. Lucien looked at her for a moment in silence. “Come, Hermine,” he said, after a short time, “answer candidly, — something vexes you — is it not so?”

“Nothing,” answered the baroness.

And yet, as she could scarcely breathe, she rose and went towards a looking-glass. “I am frightful to-night,” she said. Debray rose, smiling, and was about to contradict the baroness upon this latter point, when the door opened suddenly. M. Danglars appeared; Debray reseated himself. At the noise of the door Madame Danglars turned round, and looked upon her husband with an astonishment she took no trouble to conceal. “Good-evening, madame,” said the banker; “good-evening, M. Debray.”

Probably the baroness thought this unexpected visit signified a desire to make up for the sharp words he had uttered during the day. Assuming a dignified air, she turned round to Debray, without answering her husband. “Read me something, M. Debray,” she said. Debray, who was slightly disturbed at this visit, recovered himself when he saw the calmness of the baroness, and took up a book marked by a mother-of-pearl knife inlaid with gold. “Excuse me,” said the banker, “but you will tire yourself, baroness, by such late hours, and M. Debray lives some distance from here.”

Debray was petrified, not only to hear Danglars speak so calmly and politely, but because it was apparent that beneath outward politeness there really lurked a determined spirit of opposition to anything his wife might wish to do. The baroness was also surprised, and showed her astonishment by a look which would doubtless have had some effect upon her husband if he had not been intently occupied with the paper, where he was looking to see the closing stock quotations. The result was, that the proud look entirely failed of its purpose.

“M. Lucien,” said the baroness, “I assure you I have no desire to sleep, and that I have a thousand things to tell you this evening, which you must listen to, even though you slept while hearing me.”

“I am at your service, madame,” replied Lucien coldly.

“My dear M. Debray,” said the banker, “do not kill yourself to-night listening to the follies of Madame Danglars, for you can hear them as well to-morrow; but I claim to-night and will devote it, if you will allow me, to talk over some serious matters with my wife.” This time the blow was so well aimed, and hit so directly, that Lucien and the baroness were staggered, and they interrogated each other with their eyes, as if to seek help against this aggression, but the irresistible will of the master of the house prevailed, and the husband was victorious.

“Do not think I wish to turn you out, my dear Debray,” continued Danglars; “oh, no, not at all. An unexpected occurrence forces me to ask my wife to have a little conversation with me; it is so rarely I make such a request, I am sure you cannot grudge it to me.” Debray muttered something, bowed and went out, knocking himself against the edge of the door, like Nathan in “Athalie.”

“It is extraordinary,” he said, when the door was closed behind him, “how easily these husbands, whom we ridicule, gain an advantage over us.”

Lucien having left, Danglars took his place on the sofa, closed the open book, and placing himself in a dreadfully dictatorial attitude, he began playing with the dog; but the animal, not liking him as well as Debray, and attempting to bite him, Danglars seized him by the skin of his neck and threw him upon a couch on the other side of the room. The animal uttered a cry during the transit, but, arrived at its destination, it crouched behind the cushions, and stupefied at such unusual treatment remained silent and motionless. “Do you know, sir,” asked the baroness, “that you are improving? Generally you are only rude, but to-night you are brutal.”

“It is because I am in a worse humor than usual,” replied Danglars. Hermine looked at the banker with supreme disdain. These glances frequently exasperated the pride of Danglars, but this evening he took no notice of them.

“And what have I to do with your ill-humor?” said the baroness, irritated at the impassibility of her husband; “do these things concern me? Keep your ill-humor at home in your money boxes, or, since you have clerks whom you pay, vent it upon them.”

“Not so,” replied Danglars; “your advice is wrong, so I shall not follow it. My money boxes are my Pactolus, as, I think, M. Demoustier says, and I will not retard its course, or disturb its calm. My clerks are honest men, who earn my fortune, whom I pay much below their deserts, if I may value them according to what they bring in; therefore I shall not get into a passion with them; those with whom I will be in a passion are those who eat my dinners, mount my horses, and exhaust my fortune.”

“And pray who are the persons who exhaust your fortune? Explain yourself more clearly, I beg, sir.”

“Oh, make yourself easy! — I am not speaking riddles, and you will soon know what I mean. The people who exhaust my fortune are those who draw out 700,000 francs in the course of an hour.”

“I do not understand you, sir,” said the baroness, trying to disguise the agitation of her voice and the flush of her face. “You understand me perfectly, on the contrary," said Danglars: "but, if you will persist, I will tell you that I have just lost 700,000 francs upon the Spanish loan."

"And pray," asked the baroness, "am I responsible for this loss?"

"Why not?"

"Is it my fault you have lost 700,000 francs?"

"Certainly it is not mine."

"Once for all, sir," replied the baroness sharply, "I tell you I will not hear cash named; it is a style of language I never heard in the house of my parents or in that of my first husband."

"Oh, I can well believe that, for neither of them was worth a penny."

"The better reason for my not being conversant with the slang of the bank, which is here dinning in my ears from morning to night; that noise of jingling crowns, which are constantly being counted and re-counted, is odious to me. I only know one thing I dislike more, which is the sound of your voice."

"Really?" said Danglars. "Well, this surprises me, for I thought you took the liveliest interest in all my affairs!"

"I? What could put such an idea into your head?"

"Yourself."

"Ah? — what next?"

"Most assuredly."

"I should like to know upon what occasion?"

"Oh, mon Dieu, that is very easily done. Last February you were the first who told me of the Haitian funds. You had dreamed that a ship had entered the harbor at Havre, that this ship brought news that a payment we had looked upon as lost was going to be made. I know how clear-sighted your dreams are; I therefore purchased immediately as many shares as I could of the Haitian debt, and I gained 400,000 francs by it, of which 100,000 have been honestly paid to you. You spent it as you pleased; that was your business. In March there was a question about a grant to a railway. Three companies presented themselves, each offering equal securities. You told me that your instinct, — and although you pretend to know nothing about speculations, I think on the contrary, that your comprehension is very clear upon certain affairs, — well, you told me that your instinct led you to believe the grant would be given to the company called the Southern. I bought two thirds of the shares of that company; as you had foreseen, the shares trebled in value, and I picked up a million, from which 250,000 francs were paid to you for pin-money. How have you spent this 250,000 francs? — it is no business of mine.”

“When are you coming to the point?” cried the baroness, shivering with anger and impatience.

“Patience, madame, I am coming to it.”

“That’s fortunate.”

“In April you went to dine at the minister’s. You heard a private conversation respecting Spanish affairs — on the expulsion of Don Carlos. I bought some Spanish shares. The expulsion took place and I pocketed 600,000 francs the day Charles V. repassed the Bidassoa. Of these 600,000 francs you took 50,000 crowns. They were yours, you disposed of them according to your fancy, and I asked no questions; but it is not the less true that you have this year received 500,000 livres.”

“Well, sir, and what then?”

“Ah, yes, it was just after this that you spoiled everything.”

“Really, your manner of speaking” —

“It expresses my meaning, and that is all I want. Well, three days after that you talked politics with M. Debray, and you fancied from his words that Don Carlos had returned to Spain. Well, I sold my shares, the news got out, and I no longer sold — I gave them away, next day I find the news was false, and by this false report I have lost 700,000. francs.”

“Well?”

“Well, since I gave you a fourth of my gains, I think you owe me a fourth of my losses; the fourth of 700,000 francs is 175,000 francs.”

“What you say is absurd, and I cannot see why M. Debray’s name is mixed up in this affair.”

“Because if you do not possess the 175,000 francs I reclaim, you must have lent them to your friends, and M. Debray is one of your friends.”

“For shame!” exclaimed the baroness.

“Oh, let us have no gestures, no screams, no modern drama, or you will oblige me to tell you that I see Debray leave here, pocketing the whole of the 500,000 livres you have handed over to him this year, while he smiles to himself, saying that he has found what the most skilful players have never discovered — that is, a roulette where he wins without playing, and is no loser when he loses.” The baroness became enraged. “Wretch!” she cried, “will you dare to tell me you did not know what you now reproach me with?”

"I do not say that I did know it, and I do not say that I did not know it. I merely tell you to look into my conduct during the last four years that we have ceased to be husband and wife, and see whether it has not always been consistent. Some time after our rupture, you wished to study music, under the celebrated baritone who made such a successful appearance at the Theatre Italien; at the same time I felt inclined to learn dancing of the danseuse who acquired such a reputation in London. This cost me, on your account and mine, 100,000 francs. I said nothing, for we must have peace in the house; and 100,000 francs for a lady and gentleman to be properly instructed in music and dancing are not too much. Well, you soon become tired of singing, and you take a fancy to study diplomacy with the minister's secretary. You understand, it signifies nothing to me so long as you pay for your lessons out of your own cashbox. But to-day I find you are drawing on mine, and that your apprenticeship may cost me 700,000 francs per month. Stop there, madame, for this cannot last. Either the diplomatist must give his lessons gratis, and I will tolerate him, or he must never set his foot again in my house; — do you understand, madame?"

"Oh, this is too much," cried Hermine, choking, "you are worse than despicable."

"But," continued Danglars, "I find you did not even pause there" —

"Insults!"

"You are right; let us leave these facts alone, and reason coolly. I have never interfered in your affairs excepting for your good; treat me in the same way. You say you have nothing to do with my cash-box. Be it so. Do as you like with your own, but do not fill or empty mine. Besides, how do I know that this was not a political trick, that the minister enraged at seeing me in the opposition, and jealous of the popular sympathy I excite, has not concerted with M. Debray to ruin me?"

"A probable thing!"

"Why not? Who ever heard of such an occurrence as this? — a false telegraphic despatch — it is almost impossible for wrong signals to be made as they were in the last two telegrams. It was done on purpose for me — I am sure of it."

"Sir," said the baroness humbly, "are you not aware that the man employed there was dismissed, that they talked of going to law with him, that orders were issued to arrest him and that this order would have been put into execution if he had not escaped by flight, which proves that he was either mad or guilty? It was a mistake.”

“Yes, which made fools laugh, which caused the minister to have a sleepless night, which has caused the minister’s secretaries to blacken several sheets of paper, but which has cost me 700,000 francs.”

“But, sir,” said Hermine suddenly, “if all this is, as you say, caused by M. Debray, why, instead of going direct to him, do you come and tell me of it? Why, to accuse the man, do you address the woman?”

“Do I know M. Debray? — do I wish to know him? — do I wish to know that he gives advice? — do I wish to follow it? — do I speculate? No; you do all this, not I.”

“Still it seems to me, that as you profit by it — ”

Danglars shrugged his shoulders. “Foolish creature,” he exclaimed. “Women fancy they have talent because they have managed two or three intrigues without being the talk of Paris! But know that if you had even hidden your irregularities from your husband, who has but the commencement of the art — for generally husbands will not see — you would then have been but a faint imitation of most of your friends among the women of the world. But it has not been so with me, — I see, and always have seen, during the last sixteen years. You may, perhaps, have hidden a thought; but not a step, not an action, not a fault, has escaped me, while you flattered yourself upon your address, and firmly believed you had deceived me. What has been the result? — that, thanks to my pretended ignorance, there is none of your friends, from M. de Villefort to M. Debray, who has not trembled before me. There is not one who has not treated me as the master of the house, — the only title I desire with respect to you; there is not one, in fact, who would have dared to speak of me as I have spoken of them this day. I will allow you to make me hateful, but I will prevent your rendering me ridiculous, and, above all, I forbid you to ruin me.”

The baroness had been tolerably composed until the name of Villefort had been pronounced; but then she became pale, and, rising, as if touched by a spring, she stretched out her hands as though conjuring an apparition; she then took two or three steps towards her husband, as though to tear the secret from him, of which he was ignorant, or which he withheld from some odious calculation, — odious, as all his calculations were. “M. de Villefort! — What do you mean?”

"I mean that M. de Nargonne, your first husband, being neither a philosopher nor a banker, or perhaps being both, and seeing there was nothing to be got out of a king's attorney, died of grief or anger at finding, after an absence of nine months, that you had been enceinte six. I am brutal, — I not only allow it, but boast of it; it is one of the reasons of my success in commercial business. Why did he kill himself instead of you? Because he had no cash to save. My life belongs to my cash. M. Debray has made me lose 700,000 francs; let him bear his share of the loss, and we will go on as before; if not, let him become bankrupt for the 250,000 livres, and do as all bankrupts do — disappear. He is a charming fellow, I allow, when his news is correct; but when it is not, there are fifty others in the world who would do better than he."

Madame Danglars was rooted to the spot; she made a violent effort to reply to this last attack, but she fell upon a chair thinking of Villefort, of the dinner scene, of the strange series of misfortunes which had taken place in her house during the last few days, and changed the usual calm of her establishment to a scene of scandalous debate. Danglars did not even look at her, though she did her best to faint. He shut the bedroom door after him, without adding another word, and returned to his apartments; and when Madame Danglars recovered from her half-fainting condition, she could almost believe that she had had a disagreeable dream.

Chapter 66

Matrimonial Projects.

The day following this scene, at the hour the banker usually chose to pay a visit to Madame Danglars on his way to his office, his coupe did not appear. At this time, that is, about half-past twelve, Madame Danglars ordered her carriage, and went out. Danglars, hidden behind a curtain, watched the departure he had been waiting for. He gave orders that he should be informed as soon as Madame Danglars appeared; but at two o’clock she had not returned. He then called for his horses, drove to the Chamber, and inscribed his name to speak against the budget. From twelve to two o’clock Danglars had remained in his study, unsealing his dispatches, and becoming more and more sad every minute, heaping figure upon figure, and receiving, among other visits, one from Major Cavalcanti, who, as stiff and exact as ever, presented himself precisely at the hour named the night before, to terminate his business with the banker. On leaving the Chamber, Danglars, who had shown violent marks of agitation during the sitting, and been more bitter than ever against the ministry, re-entered his carriage, and told the coachman to drive to the Avenue des Champs-Elysees, No. 30.

Monte Cristo was at home; only he was engaged with some one and begged Danglars to wait for a moment in the drawing-room. While the banker was waiting in the anteroom, the door opened, and a man dressed as an abbe and doubtless more familiar with the house than he was, came in and instead of waiting, merely bowed, passed on to the farther apartments, and disappeared. A minute after the door by which the priest had entered reopened, and Monte Cristo appeared. “Pardon me,” said he, “my dear baron, but one of my friends, the Abbe Busoni, whom you perhaps saw pass by, has just arrived in Paris; not having seen him for a long time, I could not make up my mind to leave him sooner, so I hope this will be sufficient reason for my having made you wait.”

“Nay,” said Danglars, “it is my fault; I have chosen my visit at a wrong time, and will retire.”

“Not at all; on the contrary, be seated; but what is the matter with you? You look careworn; really, you alarm me. Melancholy in a capitalist, like the appearance of a comet, presages some misfortune to the world.”

“I have been in ill-luck for several days,” said Danglars, “and I have heard nothing but bad news.”

“Ah, indeed?” said Monte Cristo. “Have you had another fall at the Bourse?”

“No; I am safe for a few days at least. I am only annoyed about a bankrupt of Trieste.”

“Really? Does it happen to be Jacopo Manfredi?”

“Exactly so. Imagine a man who has transacted business with me for I don’t know how long, to the amount of 800,000 or 900,000 francs during the year. Never a mistake or delay — a fellow who paid like a prince. Well, I was a million in advance with him, and now my fine Jacopo Manfredi suspends payment!”

“Really?”

“It is an unheard-of fatality. I draw upon him for 600,000. francs, my bills are returned unpaid, and, more than that, I hold bills of exchange signed by him to the value of 400,000. francs, payable at his correspondent’s in Paris at the end of this month. To-day is the 30th. I present them; but my correspondent has disappeared. This, with my Spanish affairs, made a pretty end to the month.”

“Then you really lost by that affair in Spain?”

“Yes; only 700,000 francs out of my cash-box — nothing more!”

“Why, how could you make such a mistake — such an old stager?”

“Oh, it is all my wife’s fault. She dreamed Don Carlos had returned to Spain; she believes in dreams. It is magnetism, she says, and when she dreams a thing it is sure to happen, she assures me. On this conviction I allow her to speculate, she having her bank and her stockbroker; she speculated and lost. It is true she speculates with her own money, not mine; nevertheless, you can understand that when 700,000. francs leave the wife’s pocket, the husband always finds it out. But do you mean to say you have not heard of this? Why, the thing has made a tremendous noise.”

“Yes, I heard it spoken of, but I did not know the details, and then no one can be more ignorant than I am of the affairs in the Bourse.”

“Then you do not speculate?”

"I? — How could I speculate when I already have so much trouble in regulating my income? I should be obliged, besides my steward, to keep a clerk and a boy. But touching these Spanish affairs, I think that the baroness did not dream the whole of the Don Carlos matter. The papers said something about it, did they not?"

"Then you believe the papers?"

"I? — not the least in the world; only I fancied that the honest Messager was an exception to the rule, and that it only announced telegraphic despatches."

"Well, that's what puzzles me," replied Danglars; "the news of the return of Don Carlos was brought by telegraph."

"So that," said Monte Cristo, "you have lost nearly 1,700,000 francs this month."

"Not nearly, indeed; that is exactly my loss."

"Diable," said Monte Cristo compassionately, "it is a hard blow for a third-rate fortune."

"Third-rate," said Danglars, rather humble, "what do you mean by that?"

"Certainly," continued Monte Cristo, "I make three assortments in fortune — first-rate, second-rate, and third-rate fortunes. I call those first-rate which are composed of treasures one possesses under one's hand, such as mines, lands, and funded property, in such states as France, Austria, and England, provided these treasures and property form a total of about a hundred millions; I call those second-rate fortunes, that are gained by manufacturing enterprises, joint-stock companies, viceroyalties, and principalities, not drawing more than 1,500,000 francs, the whole forming a capital of about fifty millions; finally, I call those third-rate fortunes, which are composed of a fluctuating capital, dependent upon the will of others, or upon chances which a bankruptcy involves or a false telegram shakes, such as banks, speculations of the day — in fact, all operations under the influence of greater or less mischances, the whole bringing in a real or fictitious capital of about fifteen millions. I think this is about your position, is it not?"

"Confound it, yes!" replied Danglars.

"The result, then, of six more such months as this would be to reduce the third-rate house to despair."

"Oh," said Danglars, becoming very pale, how you are running on!"

“Let us imagine seven such months,” continued Monte Cristo, in the same tone. “Tell me, have you ever thought that seven times 1,700,000 francs make nearly twelve millions? No, you have not; — well, you are right, for if you indulged in such reflections, you would never risk your principal, which is to the speculator what the skin is to civilized man. We have our clothes, some more splendid than others, — this is our credit; but when a man dies he has only his skin; in the same way, on retiring from business, you have nothing but your real principal of about five or six millions, at the most; for third-rate fortunes are never more than a fourth of what they appear to be, like the locomotive on a railway, the size of which is magnified by the smoke and steam surrounding it. Well, out of the five or six millions which form your real capital, you have just lost nearly two millions, which must, of course, in the same degree diminish your credit and fictitious fortune; to follow out my simile, your skin has been opened by bleeding, and this if repeated three or four times will cause death — so pay attention to it, my dear Monsieur Danglars. Do you want money? Do you wish me to lend you some?”

“What a bad calculator you are!” exclaimed Danglars, calling to his assistance all his philosophy and dissimulation. “I have made money at the same time by speculations which have succeeded. I have made up the loss of blood by nutrition. I lost a battle in Spain, I have been defeated in Trieste, but my naval army in India will have taken some galleons, and my Mexican pioneers will have discovered some mine.”

“Very good, very good! But the wound remains and will reopen at the first loss.”

“No, for I am only embarked in certainties,” replied Danglars, with the air of a mountebank sounding his own praises; “to involve me, three governments must crumble to dust.”

“Well, such things have been.”

“That there should be a famine!”

“Recollect the seven fat and the seven lean kine.”

“Or, that the sea should become dry, as in the days of Pharaoh, and even then my vessels would become caravans.”

“So much the better. I congratulate you, my dear M. Danglars,” said Monte Cristo; “I see I was deceived, and that you belong to the class of second-rate fortunes.”

"I think I may aspire to that honor," said Danglars with a smile, which reminded Monte Cristo of the sickly moons which bad artists are so fond of daubing into their pictures of ruins. "But, while we are speaking of business," Danglars added, pleased to find an opportunity of changing the subject, "tell me what I am to do for M. Cavalcanti."

"Give him money, if he is recommended to you, and the recommendation seems good."

"Excellent; he presented himself this morning with a bond of 40,000 francs, payable at sight, on you, signed by Busoni, and returned by you to me, with your indorsement — of course, I immediately counted him over the forty bank-notes."

Monte Cristo nodded his head in token of assent. "But that is not all," continued Danglars; "he has opened an account with my house for his son."

"May I ask how much he allows the young man?"

"Five thousand francs per month."

"Sixty thousand francs per year. I thought I was right in believing that Cavalcanti to be a stingy fellow. How can a young man live upon 5,000 francs a month?"

"But you understand that if the young man should want a few thousands more" —

"Do not advance it; the father will never repay it. You do not know these ultramontane millionaires; they are regular misers. And by whom were they recommended to you?"

"Oh, by the house of Fenzi, one of the best in Florence."

"I do not mean to say you will lose, but, nevertheless, mind you hold to the terms of the agreement."

"Would you not trust the Cavalcanti?"

"I? oh, I would advance six millions on his signature. I was only speaking in reference to the second-rate fortunes we were mentioning just now."

"And with all this, how unassuming he is! I should never have taken him for anything more than a mere major."

"And you would have flattered him, for certainly, as you say, he has no manner. The first time I saw him he appeared to me like an old lieutenant who had grown mouldy under his epaulets. But all the Italians are the same; they are like old Jews when they are not glittering in Oriental splendor."

"The young man is better," said Danglars.

"Yes; a little nervous, perhaps, but, upon the whole, he appeared tolerable. I was uneasy about him."

"Why?"

"Because you met him at my house, just after his introduction into the world, as they told me. He has been travelling with a very severe tutor, and had never been to Paris before."

"Ah, I believe noblemen marry amongst themselves, do they not?" asked Danglars carelessly; "they like to unite their fortunes."

"It is usual, certainly; but Cavalcanti is an original who does nothing like other people. I cannot help thinking that he has brought his son to France to choose a wife."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"And you have heard his fortune mentioned?"

"Nothing else was talked of; only some said he was worth millions, and others that he did not possess a farthing."

"And what is your opinion?"

"I ought not to influence you, because it is only my own personal impression."

"Well, and it is that" —

"My opinion is, that all these old podestas, these ancient condottieri, — for the Cavalcanti have commanded armies and governed provinces, — my opinion, I say, is, that they have buried their millions in corners, the secret of which they have transmitted only to their eldest sons, who have done the same from generation to generation; and the proof of this is seen in their yellow and dry appearance, like the florins of the republic, which, from being constantly gazed upon, have become reflected in them."

"Certainly," said Danglars, "and this is further supported by the fact of their not possessing an inch of land."

"Very little, at least; I know of none which Cavalcanti possesses, excepting his palace in Lucca."

"Ah, he has a palace?" said Danglars, laughing; "come, that is something."

"Yes; and more than that, he lets it to the Minister of Finance while he lives in a simple house. Oh, as I told you before, I think the old fellow is very close."

"Come, you do not flatter him."

“I scarcely know him; I think I have seen him three times in my life; all I know relating to him is through Busoni and himself. He was telling me this morning that, tired of letting his property lie dormant in Italy, which is a dead nation, he wished to find a method, either in France or England, of multiplying his millions, but remember, that though I place great confidence in Busoni, I am not responsible for this.”

“Never mind; accept my thanks for the client you have sent me. It is a fine name to inscribe on my ledgers, and my cashier was quite proud of it when I explained to him who the Cavalcanti were. By the way, this is merely a simple question, when this sort of people marry their sons, do they give them any fortune?”

“Oh, that depends upon circumstances. I know an Italian prince, rich as a gold mine, one of the noblest families in Tuscany, who, when his sons married according to his wish, gave them millions; and when they married against his consent, merely allowed them thirty crowns a month. Should Andrea marry according to his father’s views, he will, perhaps, give him one, two, or three millions. For example, supposing it were the daughter of a banker, he might take an interest in the house of the father-in-law of his son; then again, if he disliked his choice, the major takes the key, double-locks his coffer, and Master Andrea would be obliged to live like the sons of a Parisian family, by shuffling cards or rattling the dice.”

“Ah, that boy will find out some Bavarian or Peruvian princess; he will want a crown and an immense fortune.”

“No; these grand lords on the other side of the Alps frequently marry into plain families; like Jupiter, they like to cross the race. But do you wish to marry Andrea, my dear M. Danglars, that you are asking so many questions?”

“Ma foi,” said Danglars, “it would not be a bad speculation, I fancy, and you know I am a speculator.”

“You are not thinking of Mademoiselle Danglars, I hope; you would not like poor Andrea to have his throat cut by Albert?”

“Albert,” repeated Danglars, shrugging his shoulders; “ah, well; he would care very little about it, I think.”

“But he is betrothed to your daughter, I believe?”

“Well, M. de Morcerf and I have talked about this marriage, but Madame de Morcerf and Albert” —

“You do not mean to say that it would not be a good match?”

"Indeed, I imagine that Mademoiselle Danglars is as good as M. de Morcerf."

"Mademoiselle Danglars' fortune will be great, no doubt, especially if the telegraph should not make any more mistakes."

"Oh, I do not mean her fortune only; but tell me" —

"What?"

"Why did you not invite M. and Madame de Morcerf to your dinner?"

"I did so, but he excused himself on account of Madame de Morcerf being obliged to go to Dieppe for the benefit of sea air."

"Yes, yes," said Danglars, laughing, "it would do her a great deal of good."

"Why so?"

"Because it is the air she always breathed in her youth." Monte Cristo took no notice of this ill-natured remark.

"But still, if Albert be not so rich as Mademoiselle Danglars," said the count, "you must allow that he has a fine name?"

"So he has; but I like mine as well."

"Certainly; your name is popular, and does honor to the title they have adorned it with; but you are too intelligent not to know that according to a prejudice, too firmly rooted to be exterminated, a nobility which dates back five centuries is worth more than one that can only reckon twenty years."

"And for this very reason," said Danglars with a smile, which he tried to make sardonic, "I prefer M. Andrea Cavalcanti to M. Albert de Morcerf."

"Still, I should not think the Morcerfs would yield to the Cavalcanti?"

"The Morcerfs! — Stay, my dear count," said Danglars; "you are a man of the world, are you not?"

"I think so."

"And you understand heraldry?"

"A little."

"Well, look at my coat-of-arms, it is worth more than Morcerf's."

"Why so?"

"Because, though I am not a baron by birth, my real name is, at least, Danglars."

"Well, what then?"

"While his name is not Morcerf."

"How? — not Morcerf?"

"Not the least in the world."

“Go on.”

“I have been made a baron, so that I actually am one; he made himself a count, so that he is not one at all.”

“Impossible!”

“Listen my dear count; M. de Morcerf has been my friend, or rather my acquaintance, during the last thirty years. You know I have made the most of my arms, though I never forgot my origin.”

“A proof of great humility or great pride,” said Monte Cristo.

“Well, when I was a clerk, Morcerf was a mere fisherman.”

“And then he was called” —

“Fernand.”

“Only Fernand?”

“Fernand Mondego.”

“You are sure?”

“Pardieu, I have bought enough fish of him to know his name.”

“Then, why did you think of giving your daughter to him?”

“Because Fernand and Danglars, being both parvenus, both having become noble, both rich, are about equal in worth, excepting that there have been certain things mentioned of him that were never said of me.”

“What?”

“Oh, nothing!”

“Ah, yes; what you tell me recalls to mind something about the name of Fernand Mondego. I have heard that name in Greece.”

“In conjunction with the affairs of Ali Pasha?”

“Exactly so.”

“This is the mystery,” said Danglars. “I acknowledge I would have given anything to find it out.”

“It would be very easy if you much wished it?”

“How so?”

“Probably you have some correspondent in Greece?”

“I should think so.”

“At Yanina?”

“Everywhere.”

“Well, write to your correspondent in Yanina, and ask him what part was played by a Frenchman named Fernand Mondego in the catastrophe of Ali Tepelini.”

“You are right,” exclaimed Danglars, rising quickly, “I will write to-day.”

“Do so.”

“I will.”

“And if you should hear of anything very scandalous” —

“I will communicate it to you.”

“You will oblige me.” Danglars rushed out of the room, and made but one leap into his coupe.

Chapter 67

At the Office of the King’s Attorney.

Let us leave the banker driving his horses at their fullest speed, and follow Madame Danglars in her morning excursion. We have said that at half-past twelve o’clock Madame Danglars had ordered her horses, and had left home in the carriage. She directed her course towards the Faubourg Saint Germain, went down the Rue Mazarine, and stopped at the Passage du Pont-Neuf. She descended, and went through the passage. She was very plainly dressed, as would be the case with a woman of taste walking in the morning. At the Rue Guenegaud she called a cab, and directed the driver to go to the Rue de Harlay. As soon as she was seated in the vehicle, she drew from her pocket a very thick black veil, which she tied on to her straw bonnet. She then replaced the bonnet, and saw with pleasure, in a little pocket-mirror, that her white complexion and brilliant eyes were alone visible. The cab crossed the Pont-Neuf and entered the Rue de Harlay by the Place Dauphine; the driver was paid as the door opened, and stepping lightly up the stairs Madame Danglars soon reached the Salle des Pas-Perdus.

There was a great deal going on that morning, and many business-like persons at the Palais; business-like persons pay very little attention to women, and Madame Danglars crossed the hall without exciting any more attention than any other woman calling upon her lawyer. There was a great press of people in M. de Villefort’s ante-chamber, but Madame Danglars had no occasion even to pronounce her name. The instant she appeared the door-keeper rose, came to her, and asked her whether she was not the person with whom the procureur had made an appointment; and on her affirmative answer being given, he conducted her by a private passage to M. de Villefort’s office. The magistrate was seated in an arm-chair, writing, with his back towards the door; he did not move as he heard it open, and the door-keeper pronounce the words, “Walk in, madame,” and then reclose it; but no sooner had the man’s footsteps ceased, than he started up, drew the bolts, closed the curtains, and examined every corner of the room. Then, when he had assured himself that he could neither be seen nor heard, and was consequently relieved of doubts, he said, — ”Thanks, madame, — thanks for your punctuality;” and he offered a chair to Madame Danglars, which she accepted, for her heart beat so violently that she felt nearly suffocated.

“It is a long time, madame,” said the procureur, describing a half-circle with his chair, so as to place himself exactly opposite to Madame Danglars, — ”it is a long time since I had the pleasure of speaking alone with you, and I regret that we have only now met to enter upon a painful conversation.”

“Nevertheless, sir, you see I have answered your first appeal, although certainly the conversation must be much more painful for me than for you.” Villefort smiled bitterly.

“It is true, then,” he said, rather uttering his thoughts aloud than addressing his companion, — ”it is true, then, that all our actions leave their traces — some sad, others bright — on our paths; it is true that every step in our lives is like the course of an insect on the sands; — it leaves its track! Alas, to many the path is traced by tears.”

“Sir,” said Madame Danglars, “you can feel for my emotion, can you not? Spare me, then, I beseech you. When I look at this room, — whence so many guilty creatures have departed, trembling and ashamed, when I look at that chair before which I now sit trembling and ashamed, — oh, it requires all my reason to convince me that I am not a very guilty woman and you a menacing judge.” Villefort dropped his head and sighed. “And I,” he said, “I feel that my place is not in the judge’s seat, but on the prisoner’s stool.”

“You?” said Madame Danglars.

“Yes, I.”

“I think, sir, you exaggerate your situation,” said Madame Danglars, whose beautiful eyes sparkled for a moment. “The paths of which you were just speaking have been traced by all young men of ardent imaginations. Besides the pleasure, there is always remorse from the indulgence of our passions, and, after all, what have you men to fear from all this? the world excuses, and notoriety ennobles you.”

“Madame,” replied Villefort, “you know that I am no hypocrite, or, at least, that I never deceive without a reason. If my brow be severe, it is because many misfortunes have clouded it; if my heart be petrified, it is that it might sustain the blows it has received. I was not so in my youth, I was not so on the night of the betrothal, when we were all seated around a table in the Rue du Cours at Marseilles. But since then everything has changed in and about me; I am accustomed to brave difficulties, and, in the conflict to crush those who, by their own free will, or by chance, voluntarily or involuntarily, interfere with me in my career. It is generally the case that what we most ardently desire is as ardently withheld from us by those who wish to obtain it, or from whom we attempt to snatch it. Thus, the greater number of a man's errors come before him disguised under the specious form of necessity; then, after error has been committed in a moment of excitement, of delirium, or of fear, we see that we might have avoided and escaped it. The means we might have used, which we in our blindness could not see, then seem simple and easy, and we say, 'Why did I not do this, instead of that?' Women, on the contrary, are rarely tormented with remorse; for the decision does not come from you, — your misfortunes are generally imposed upon you, and your faults the results of others' crimes."

"In any case, sir, you will allow," replied Madame Danglars, "that, even if the fault were alone mine, I last night received a severe punishment for it."

"Poor thing," said Villefort, pressing her hand, "it was too severe for your strength, for you were twice overwhelmed, and yet" —

"Well?"

"Well, I must tell you. Collect all your courage, for you have not yet heard all."

"Ah," exclaimed Madame Danglars, alarmed, "what is there more to hear?"

"You only look back to the past, and it is, indeed, bad enough. Well, picture to yourself a future more gloomy still — certainly frightful, perhaps sanguinary." The baroness knew how calm Villefort naturally was, and his present excitement frightened her so much that she opened her mouth to scream, but the sound died in her throat. "How has this terrible past been recalled?" cried Villefort; "how is it that it has escaped from the depths of the tomb and the recesses of our hearts, where it was buried, to visit us now, like a phantom, whitening our cheeks and flushing our brows with shame?"

"Alas," said Hermine, "doubtless it is chance."

"Chance?" replied Villefort; "No, no, madame, there is no such thing as chance."

"Oh, yes; has not a fatal chance revealed all this? Was it not by chance the Count of Monte Cristo bought that house? Was it not by chance he caused the earth to be dug up? Is it not by chance that the unfortunate child was disinterred under the trees? — that poor innocent offspring of mine, which I never even kissed, but for whom I wept many, many tears. Ah, my heart clung to the count when he mentioned the dear spoil found beneath the flowers."

"Well, no, madame, — this is the terrible news I have to tell you," said Villefort in a hollow voice — "no, nothing was found beneath the flowers; there was no child disinterred — no. You must not weep, no, you must not groan, you must tremble!"

"What can you mean?" asked Madame Danglars, shuddering.

"I mean that M. de Monte Cristo, digging underneath these trees, found neither skeleton nor chest, because neither of them was there!"

"Neither of them there?" repeated Madame Danglars, her staring, wide-open eyes expressing her alarm.

"Neither of them there!" she again said, as though striving to impress herself with the meaning of the words which escaped her.

"No," said Villefort, burying his face in his hands, "no, a hundred times no!"

"Then you did not bury the poor child there, sir? Why did you deceive me? Where did you place it? tell me — where?"

"There! But listen to me — listen — and you will pity me who has for twenty years alone borne the heavy burden of grief I am about to reveal, without casting the least portion upon you."

"Oh, you frighten me! But speak; I will listen."

"You recollect that sad night, when you were half-expiring on that bed in the red damask room, while I, scarcely less agitated than you, awaited your delivery. The child was born, was given to me — motionless, breathless, voiceless; we thought it dead." Madame Danglars moved rapidly, as though she would spring from her chair, but Villefort stopped, and clasped his hands as if to implore her attention. "We thought it dead," he repeated; "I placed it in the chest, which was to take the place of a coffin; I descended to the garden, I dug a hole, and then flung it down in haste. Scarcely had I covered it with earth, when the arm of the Corsican was stretched towards me; I saw a shadow rise, and, at the same time, a flash of light. I felt pain; I wished to cry out, but an icy shiver ran through my veins and stifled my voice; I fell lifeless, and fancied myself killed. Never shall I forget your sublime courage, when, having returned to consciousness, I dragged myself to the foot of the stairs, and you, almost dying yourself, came to meet me. We were obliged to keep silent upon the dreadful catastrophe. You had the fortitude to regain the house, assisted by your nurse. A duel was the pretext for my wound. Though we scarcely expected it, our secret remained in our own keeping alone. I was taken to Versailles; for three months I struggled with death; at last, as I seemed to cling to life, I was ordered to the South. Four men carried me from Paris to Chalons, walking six leagues a day; Madame de Villefort followed the litter in her carriage. At Chalons I was put upon the Saone, thence I passed on to the Rhone, whence I descended, merely with the current, to Arles; at Arles I was again placed on my litter, and continued my journey to Marseilles. My recovery lasted six months. I never heard you mentioned, and I did not dare inquire for you. When I returned to Paris, I learned that you, the widow of M. de Nargonne, had married M. Danglars.

"What was the subject of my thoughts from the time consciousness returned to me? Always the same — always the child's corpse, coming every night in my dreams, rising from the earth, and hovering over the grave with menacing look and gesture. I inquired immediately on my return to Paris; the house had not been inhabited since we left it, but it had just been let for nine years. I found the tenant. I pretended that I disliked the idea that a house belonging to my wife's father and mother should pass into the hands of strangers. I offered to pay them for cancelling the lease; they demanded 6,000 francs. I would have given 10,000 — I would have given 20,000. I had the money with me; I made the tenant sign the deed of resilition, and when I had obtained what I so much wanted, I galloped to Auteuil.

"No one had entered the house since I had left it. It was five o'clock in the afternoon; I ascended into the red room, and waited for night. There all the thoughts which had disturbed me during my year of constant agony came back with double force. The Corsican, who had declared the vendetta against me, who had followed me from Nimes to Paris, who had hid himself in the garden, who had struck me, had seen me dig the grave, had seen me inter the child, — he might become acquainted with your person, — nay, he might even then have known it. Would he not one day make you pay for keeping this terrible secret? Would it not be a sweet revenge for him when he found that I had not died from the blow of his dagger? It was therefore necessary, before everything else, and at all risks, that I should cause all traces of the past to disappear — that I should destroy every material vestige; too much reality would always remain in my recollection. It was for this I had annulled the lease — it was for this I had come — it was for this I was waiting. Night arrived; I allowed it to become quite dark. I was without a light in that room; when the wind shook all the doors, behind which I continually expected to see some spy concealed, I trembled. I seemed everywhere to hear your moans behind me in the bed, and I dared not turn around. My heart beat so violently that I feared my wound would open. At length, one by one, all the noises in the neighborhood ceased. I understood that I had nothing to fear, that I should neither be seen nor heard, so I decided upon descending to the garden.

"Listen, Hermine; I consider myself as brave as most men, but when I drew from my breast the little key of the staircase, which I had found in my coat — that little key we both used to cherish so much, which you wished to have fastened to a golden ring — when I opened the door, and saw the pale moon shedding a long stream of white light on the spiral staircase like a spectre, I leaned against the wall, and nearly shrieked. I seemed to be going mad. At last I mastered my agitation. I descended the staircase step by step; the only thing I could not conquer was a strange trembling in my knees. I grasped the railings; if I had relaxed my hold for a moment, I should have fallen. I reached the lower door. Outside this door a spade was placed against the wall; I took it, and advanced towards the thicket. I had provided myself with a dark lantern. In the middle of the lawn I stopped to light it, then I continued my path.

"It was the end of November, all the verdure of the garden had disappeared, the trees were nothing more than skeletons with their long bony arms, and the dead leaves sounded on the gravel under my feet. My terror overcame me to such a degree as I approached the thicket, that I took a pistol from my pocket and armed myself. I fancied continually that I saw the figure of the Corsican between the branches. I examined the thicket with my dark lantern; it was empty. I looked carefully around; I was indeed alone, — no noise disturbed the silence but the owl, whose piercing cry seemed to be calling up the phantoms of the night. I tied my lantern to a forked branch I had noticed a year before at the precise spot where I stopped to dig the hole.

“The grass had grown very thickly there during the summer, and when autumn arrived no one had been there to mow it. Still one place where the grass was thin attracted my attention; it evidently was there I had turned up the ground. I went to work. The hour, then, for which I had been waiting during the last year had at length arrived. How I worked, how I hoped, how I struck every piece of turf, thinking to find some resistance to my spade! But no, I found nothing, though I had made a hole twice as large as the first. I thought I had been deceived — had mistaken the spot. I turned around, I looked at the trees, I tried to recall the details which had struck me at the time. A cold, sharp wind whistled through the leafless branches, and yet the drops fell from my forehead. I recollected that I was stabbed just as I was trampling the ground to fill up the hole; while doing so I had leaned against a laburnum; behind me was an artificial rockery, intended to serve as a resting-place for persons walking in the garden; in falling, my hand, relaxing its hold of the laburnum, felt the coldness of the stone. On my right I saw the tree, behind me the rock. I stood in the same attitude, and threw myself down. I rose, and again began digging and enlarging the hole; still I found nothing, nothing — the chest was no longer there!”

“The chest no longer there?” murmured Madame Danglars, choking with fear.

“Think not I contented myself with this one effort,” continued Villefort. “No; I searched the whole thicket. I thought the assassin, having discovered the chest, and supposing it to be a treasure, had intended carrying it off, but, perceiving his error, had dug another hole, and deposited it there; but I could find nothing. Then the idea struck me that he had not taken these precautions, and had simply thrown it in a corner. In the last case I must wait for daylight to renew my search. I remained in the room and waited.”

“Oh, heavens!”

When daylight dawned I went down again. My first visit was to the thicket. I hoped to find some traces which had escaped me in the darkness. I had turned up the earth over a surface of more than twenty feet square, and a depth of two feet. A laborer would not have done in a day what occupied me an hour. But I could find nothing — absolutely nothing. Then I renewed the search. Supposing it had been thrown aside, it would probably be on the path which led to the little gate; but this examination was as useless as the first, and with a bursting heart I returned to the thicket, which now contained no hope for me.”

“Oh,” cried Madame Danglars, “it was enough to drive you mad!”

“I hoped for a moment that it might,” said Villefort; “but that happiness was denied me. However, recovering my strength and my ideas, ‘Why,’ said I, ‘should that man have carried away the corpse?’“

“But you said,” replied Madame Danglars, “he would require it as a proof.”

“Ah, no, madame, that could not be. Dead bodies are not kept a year; they are shown to a magistrate, and the evidence is taken. Now, nothing of the kind has happened.”

“What then?” asked Hermine, trembling violently.

“Something more terrible, more fatal, more alarming for us — the child was, perhaps, alive, and the assassin may have saved it!”

Madame Danglars uttered a piercing cry, and, seizing Villefort’s hands, exclaimed, “My child was alive?” said she; “you buried my child alive? You were not certain my child was dead, and you buried it? Ah” —

Madame Danglars had risen, and stood before the procureur, whose hands she wrung in her feeble grasp. “I know not; I merely suppose so, as I might suppose anything else,” replied Villefort with a look so fixed, it indicated that his powerful mind was on the verge of despair and madness. “Ah, my child, my poor child!” cried the baroness, falling on her chair, and stifling her sobs in her handkerchief. Villefort, becoming somewhat reassured, perceived that to avert the maternal storm gathering over his head, he must inspire Madame Danglars with the terror he felt. “You understand, then, that if it were so,” said he, rising in his turn, and approaching the baroness, to speak to her in a lower tone, “we are lost. This child lives, and some one knows it lives — some one is in possession of our secret; and since Monte Cristo speaks before us of a child disinterred, when that child could not be found, it is he who is in possession of our secret.”

“Just God, avenging God!” murmured Madame Danglars.

Villefort’s only answer was a stifled groan.

“But the child — the child, sir?” repeated the agitated mother.

“How I have searched for him,” replied Villefort, wringing his hands; “how I have called him in my long sleepless nights; how I have longed for royal wealth to purchase a million of secrets from a million of men, and to find mine among them! At last, one day, when for the hundredth time I took up my spade, I asked myself again and again what the Corsican could have done with the child. A child encumbers a fugitive; perhaps, on perceiving it was still alive, he had thrown it into the river."

"Impossible!" cried Madame Danglars: "a man may murder another out of revenge, but he would not deliberately drown a child."

"Perhaps," continued Villefort, "he had put it in the foundling hospital."

"Oh, yes, yes," cried the baroness; "my child is there!"

"I ran to the hospital, and learned that the same night — the night of the 20th of September — a child had been brought there, wrapped in part of a fine linen napkin, purposely torn in half. This portion of the napkin was marked with half a baron's crown, and the letter H."

"Truly, truly," said Madame Danglars, "all my linen is marked thus; Monsieur de Nargonne was a baronet, and my name is Hermine. Thank God, my child was not then dead!"

"No, it was not dead."

"And you can tell me so without fearing to make me die of joy? Where is the child?" Villefort shrugged his shoulders. "Do I know?" said he; "and do you believe that if I knew I would relate to you all its trials and all its adventures as would a dramatist or a novel writer? Alas, no, I know not. A woman, about six months after, came to claim it with the other half of the napkin. This woman gave all the requisite particulars, and it was intrusted to her."

"But you should have inquired for the woman; you should have traced her."

"And what do you think I did? I feigned a criminal process, and employed all the most acute bloodhounds and skilful agents in search of her. They traced her to Chalons, and there they lost her."

"They lost her?"

"Yes, forever." Madame Danglars had listened to this recital with a sigh, a tear, or a shriek for every detail. "And this is all?" said she; "and you stopped there?"

"Oh, no," said Villefort; "I never ceased to search and to inquire. However, the last two or three years I had allowed myself some respite. But now I will begin with more perseverance and fury than ever, since fear urges me, not my conscience."

"But," replied Madame Danglars, "the Count of Monte Cristo can know nothing, or he would not seek our society as he does."

"Oh, the wickedness of man is very great," said Villefort, "since it surpasses the goodness of God. Did you observe that man's eyes while he was speaking to us?"

"No."

"But have you ever watched him carefully?"

"Doubtless he is capricious, but that is all; one thing alone struck me, — of all the exquisite things he placed before us, he touched nothing. I might have suspected he was poisoning us."

"And you see you would have been deceived."

"Yes, doubtless."

"But believe me, that man has other projects. For that reason I wished to see you, to speak to you, to warn you against every one, but especially against him. Tell me," cried Villefort, fixing his eyes more steadfastly on her than he had ever done before, "did you ever reveal to any one our connection?"

"Never, to any one."

"You understand me," replied Villefort, affectionately; "when I say any one, — pardon my urgency, — to any one living I mean?"

"Yes, yes, I understand very well," ejaculated the baroness; "never, I swear to you."

"Were you ever in the habit of writing in the evening what had transpired in the morning? Do you keep a journal?"

"No, my life has been passed in frivolity; I wish to forget it myself."

"Do you talk in your sleep?"

"I sleep soundly, like a child; do you not remember?" The color mounted to the baroness's face, and Villefort turned awfully pale.

"It is true," said he, in so low a tone that he could hardly be heard.

"Well?" said the baroness.

"Well, I understand what I now have to do," replied Villefort. "In less than one week from this time I will ascertain who this M. de Monte Cristo is, whence he comes, where he goes, and why he speaks in our presence of children that have been disinterred in a garden." Villefort pronounced these words with an accent which would have made the count shudder had he heard him. Then he pressed the hand the baroness reluctantly gave him, and led her respectfully back to the door. Madame Danglars returned in another cab to the passage, on the other side of which she found her carriage, and her coachman sleeping peacefully on his box while waiting for her.

Chapter 68

A Summer Ball.

The same day during the interview between Madame Danglars and the procureur, a travelling-carriage entered the Rue du Helder, passed through the gateway of No. 27, and stopped in the yard. In a moment the door was opened, and Madame de Morcerf alighted, leaning on her son’s arm. Albert soon left her, ordered his horses, and having arranged his toilet, drove to the Champs Elysees, to the house of Monte Cristo. The count received him with his habitual smile. It was a strange thing that no one ever appeared to advance a step in that man’s favor. Those who would, as it were, force a passage to his heart, found an impassable barrier. Morcerf, who ran towards him with open arms, was chilled as he drew near, in spite of the friendly smile, and simply held out his hand. Monte Cristo shook it coldly, according to his invariable practice. “Here I am, dear count.”

“Welcome home again.”

“I arrived an hour since.”

“From Dieppe?”

“No, from Treport.”

“Indeed?”

“And I have come at once to see you.”

“That is extremely kind of you,” said Monte Cristo with a tone of perfect indifference.

“And what is the news?”

“You should not ask a stranger, a foreigner, for news.”

“I know it, but in asking for news, I mean, have you done anything for me?”

“Had you commissioned me?” said Monte Cristo, feigning uneasiness.

“Come, come,” said Albert, “do not assume so much indifference. It is said, sympathy travels rapidly, and when at Treport, I felt the electric shock; you have either been working for me or thinking of me.”

“Possibly,” said Monte Cristo, “I have indeed thought of you, but the magnetic wire I was guiding acted, indeed, without my knowledge.”

"Indeed? Pray tell me how it happened?"

"Willingly. M. Danglars dined with me."

"I know it; to avoid meeting him, my mother and I left town."

"But he met here M. Andrea Cavalcanti."

"Your Italian prince?"

"Not so fast; M. Andrea only calls himself count."

"Calls himself, do you say?"

"Yes, calls himself."

"Is he not a count?"

"What can I know of him? He calls himself so. I, of course, give him the same title, and every one else does likewise."

"What a strange man you are! What next? You say M. Danglars dined here?"

"Yes, with Count Cavalcanti, the marquis his father, Madame Danglars, M. and Madame de Villefort, — charming people, — M. Debray, Maximilian Morrel, and M. de Chateau-Renaud."

"Did they speak of me?"

"Not a word."

"So much the worse."

"Why so? I thought you wished them to forget you?"

"If they did not speak of me, I am sure they thought about me, and I am in despair."

"How will that affect you, since Mademoiselle Danglars was not among the number here who thought of you? Truly, she might have thought of you at home."

"I have no fear of that; or, if she did, it was only in the same way in which I think of her."

"Touching sympathy! So you hate each other?" said the count.

"Listen," said Morcerf — "if Mademoiselle Danglars were disposed to take pity on my supposed martyrdom on her account, and would dispense with all matrimonial formalities between our two families, I am ready to agree to the arrangement. In a word, Mademoiselle Danglars would make a charming mistress — but a wife — diable!"

"And this," said Monte Cristo, "is your opinion of your intended spouse?"

"Yes; it is rather unkind, I acknowledge, but it is true. But as this dream cannot be realized, since Mademoiselle Danglars must become my lawful wife, live perpetually with me, sing to me, compose verses and music within ten paces of me, and that for my whole life, it frightens me. One may forsake a mistress, but a wife, — good heavens! There she must always be; and to marry Mademoiselle Danglars would be awful.”

“You are difficult to please, viscount.”

“Yes, for I often wish for what is impossible.”

“What is that?”

“To find such a wife as my father found.” Monte Cristo turned pale, and looked at Albert, while playing with some magnificent pistols.

“Your father was fortunate, then?” said he.

“You know my opinion of my mother, count; look at her, — still beautiful, witty, more charming than ever. For any other son to have stayed with his mother for four days at Treport, it would have been a condescension or a martyrdom, while I return, more contented, more peaceful — shall I say more poetic! — than if I had taken Queen Mab or Titania as my companion.”

“That is an overwhelming demonstration, and you would make every one vow to live a single life.”

“Such are my reasons for not liking to marry Mademoiselle Danglars. Have you ever noticed how much a thing is heightened in value when we obtain possession of it? The diamond which glittered in the window at Marle’s or Fossin’s shines with more splendor when it is our own; but if we are compelled to acknowledge the superiority of another, and still must retain the one that is inferior, do you not know what we have to endure?”

“Worldling,” murmured the count.

“Thus I shall rejoice when Mademoiselle Eugenie perceives I am but a pitiful atom, with scarcely as many hundred thousand francs as she has millions.” Monte Cristo smiled. “One plan occurred to me,” continued Albert; “Franz likes all that is eccentric; I tried to make him fall in love with Mademoiselle Danglars; but in spite of four letters, written in the most alluring style, he invariably answered: ‘My eccentricity may be great, but it will not make me break my promise.’“

“That is what I call devoted friendship, to recommend to another one whom you would not marry yourself.” Albert smiled. — ”Apropos,” continued he, “Franz is coming soon, but it will not interest you; you dislike him, I think?”

“I?” said Monte Cristo; “my dear Viscount, how have you discovered that I did not like M. Franz! I like every one.”

“And you include me in the expression every one — many thanks!”

“Let us not mistake,” said Monte Cristo; “I love every one as God commands us to love our neighbor, as Christians; but I thoroughly hate but a few. Let us return to M. Franz d’Epinay. Did you say he was coming?”

“Yes; summoned by M. de Villefort, who is apparently as anxious to get Mademoiselle Valentine married as M. Danglars is to see Mademoiselle Eugenie settled. It must be a very irksome office to be the father of a grown-up daughter; it seems to make one feverish, and to raise one’s pulse to ninety beats a minute until the deed is done.”

“But M. d’Epinay, unlike you, bears his misfortune patiently.”

“Still more, he talks seriously about the matter, puts on a white tie, and speaks of his family. He entertains a very high opinion of M. and Madame de Villefort.”

“Which they deserve, do they not?”

“I believe they do. M. de Villefort has always passed for a severe but a just man.”

“There is, then, one,” said Monte Cristo, “whom you do not condemn like poor Danglars?”

“Because I am not compelled to marry his daughter perhaps,” replied Albert, laughing.

“Indeed, my dear sir,” said Monte Cristo, “you are revoltingly foppish.”

“I foppish? how do you mean?”

“Yes; pray take a cigar, and cease to defend yourself, and to struggle to escape marrying Mademoiselle Danglars. Let things take their course; perhaps you may not have to retract.”

“Bah,” said Albert, staring.

“Doubtless, my dear viscount, you will not be taken by force; and seriously, do you wish to break off your engagement?”

“I would give a hundred thousand francs to be able to do so.”

“Then make yourself quite easy. M. Danglars would give double that sum to attain the same end.”

“Am I, indeed, so happy?” said Albert, who still could not prevent an almost imperceptible cloud passing across his brow. “But, my dear count, has M. Danglars any reason?”

“Ah, there is your proud and selfish nature. You would expose the self-love of another with a hatchet, but you shrink if your own is attacked with a needle.”

“But yet M. Danglars appeared” —

“Delighted with you, was he not? Well, he is a man of bad taste, and is still more enchanted with another. I know not whom; look and judge for yourself.”

“Thank you, I understand. But my mother — no, not my mother; I mistake — my father intends giving a ball.”

“A ball at this season?”

“Summer balls are fashionable.”

“If they were not, the countess has only to wish it, and they would become so.”

“You are right; You know they are select affairs; those who remain in Paris in July must be true Parisians. Will you take charge of our invitation to Messieurs Cavalcanti?”

“When will it take place?”

“On Saturday.”

“M. Cavalcanti’s father will be gone.”

“But the son will be here; will you invite young M. Cavalcanti?”

“I do not know him, viscount.”

“You do not know him?”

“No, I never saw him until a few days since, and am not responsible for him.”

“But you receive him at your house?”

“That is another thing: he was recommended to me by a good abbe, who may be deceived. Give him a direct invitation, but do not ask me to present him. If he were afterwards to marry Mademoiselle Danglars, you would accuse me of intrigue, and would be challenging me, — besides, I may not be there myself.”

“Where?”

“At your ball.”

“Why should you not be there?”

“Because you have not yet invited me.”

“But I come expressly for that purpose.”

“You are very kind, but I may be prevented.”

“If I tell you one thing, you will be so amiable as to set aside all impediments.”

“Tell me what it is.”

“My mother begs you to come.”

“The Comtesse de Morcerf?” said Monte Cristo, starting.

“Ah, count,” said Albert, “I assure you Madame de Morcerf speaks freely to me, and if you have not felt those sympathetic fibres of which I spoke just now thrill within you, you must be entirely devoid of them, for during the last four days we have spoken of no one else.”

“You have talked of me?”

“Yes, that is the penalty of being a living puzzle!”

“Then I am also a puzzle to your mother? I should have thought her too reasonable to be led by imagination.”

“A problem, my dear count, for every one — for my mother as well as others; much studied, but not solved, you still remain an enigma, do not fear. My mother is only astonished that you remain so long unsolved. I believe, while the Countess G — — takes you for Lord Ruthven, my mother imagines you to be Cagliostro or the Count Saint-Germain. The first opportunity you have, confirm her in her opinion; it will be easy for you, as you have the philosophy of the one and the wit of the other.”

“I thank you for the warning,” said the count; “I shall endeavor to be prepared for all suppositions.”

“You will, then, come on Saturday?”

“Yes, since Madame de Morcerf invites me.”

“You are very kind.”

“Will M. Danglars be there?”

“He has already been invited by my father. We shall try to persuade the great d’Aguesseau, [*] M. de Villefort, to come, but have not much hope of seeing him.”

“‘Never despair of anything,’ says the proverb.”

* Magistrate and orator of great eloquence — chancellor of
France under Louis XV.

“Do you dance, count?”

“I dance?”

“Yes, you; it would not be astonishing.”

“That is very well before one is over forty. No, I do not dance, but I like to see others do so. Does Madame de Morcerf dance?”

“Never; you can talk to her, she so delights in your conversation.”

“Indeed?”

“Yes, truly; and I assure you. You are the only man of whom I have heard her speak with interest.” Albert rose and took his hat; the count conducted him to the door. “I have one thing to reproach myself with,” said he, stopping Albert on the steps. “What is it?”

“I have spoken to you indiscreetly about Danglars.”

“On the contrary, speak to me always in the same strain about him.”

“I am glad to be reassured on that point. Apropos, when do you aspect M. d’Epinay?”

“Five or six days hence at the latest.”

“And when is he to be married?”

“Immediately on the arrival of M. and Madame de Saint-Meran.”

“Bring him to see me. Although you say I do not like him, I assure you I shall be happy to see him.”

“I will obey your orders, my lord.”

“Good-by.”

“Until Saturday, when I may expect you, may I not?”

“Yes, I promised you.” The Count watched Albert, waving his hand to him. When he had mounted his phaeton, Monte Cristo turned, and seeing Bertuccio, “What news?” said he. “She went to the Palais,” replied the steward.

“Did she stay long there?”

“An hour and a half.”

“Did she return home?”

“Directly.”

“Well, my dear Bertuccio,” said the count, “I now advise you to go in quest of the little estate I spoke to you of in Normandy.” Bertuccio bowed, and as his wishes were in perfect harmony with the order he had received, he started the same evening.

Chapter 69

The Inquiry.

M. de Villefort kept the promise he had made to Madame Danglars, to endeavor to find out how the Count of Monte Cristo had discovered the history of the house at Auteuil. He wrote the same day for the required information to M. de Boville, who, from having been an inspector of prisons, was promoted to a high office in the police; and the latter begged for two days time to ascertain exactly who would be most likely to give him full particulars. At the end of the second day M. de Villefort received the following note: —

“The person called the Count of Monte Cristo is an intimate acquaintance of Lord Wilmore, a rich foreigner, who is sometimes seen in Paris and who is there at this moment; he is also known to the Abbe Busoni, a Sicilian priest, of high repute in the East, where he has done much good.”

M. de Villefort replied by ordering the strictest inquiries to be made respecting these two persons; his orders were executed, and the following evening he received these details: —

“The abbe, who was in Paris only for a month, inhabited a small two-storied house behind Saint-Sulpice; there were two rooms on each floor and he was the only tenant. The two lower rooms consisted of a dining-room, with a table, chairs, and side-board of walnut, — and a wainscoted parlor, without ornaments, carpet, or timepiece. It was evident that the abbe limited himself to objects of strict necessity. He preferred to use the sitting-room upstairs, which was more library than parlor, and was furnished with theological books and parchments, in which he delighted to bury himself for months at a time, according to his valet de chambre. His valet looked at the visitors through a sort of wicket; and if their faces were unknown to him or displeased him, he replied that the abbe was not in Paris, an answer which satisfied most persons, because the abbe was known to be a great traveller. Besides, whether at home or not, whether in Paris or Cairo, the abbe always left something to give away, which the valet distributed through this wicket in his master’s name. The other room near the library was a bedroom. A bed without curtains, four arm-chairs, and a couch, covered with yellow Utrecht velvet, composed, with a prie-Dieu, all its furniture. Lord Wilmore resided in Rue Fontaine-Saint-George. He was one of those English tourists who consume a large fortune in travelling. He hired the apartment in which he lived furnished, passed only a few hours in the day there, and rarely slept there. One of his peculiarities was never to speak a word of French, which he however wrote with great facility."

The day after this important information had been given to the king's attorney, a man alighted from a carriage at the corner of the Rue Ferou, and rapping at an olive-green door, asked if the Abbe Busoni were within. "No, he went out early this morning," replied the valet.

"I might not always be content with that answer," replied the visitor, "for I come from one to whom everyone must be at home. But have the kindness to give the Abbe Busoni" —

"I told you he was not at home," repeated the valet. "Then on his return give him that card and this sealed paper. Will he be at home at eight o'clock this evening?"

"Doubtless, unless he is at work, which is the same as if he were out."

"I will come again at that time," replied the visitor, who then retired.

At the appointed hour the same man returned in the same carriage, which, instead of stopping this time at the end of the Rue Ferou, drove up to the green door. He knocked, and it opened immediately to admit him. From the signs of respect the valet paid him, he saw that his note had produced a good effect. "Is the abbe at home?" asked he.

"Yes; he is at work in his library, but he expects you, sir," replied the valet. The stranger ascended a rough staircase, and before a table, illumined by a lamp whose light was concentrated by a large shade while the rest of the apartment was in partial darkness, he perceived the abbe in a monk's dress, with a cowl on his head such as was used by learned men of the Middle Ages. "Have I the honor of addressing the Abbe Busoni?" asked the visitor.

"Yes, sir," replied the abbe; "and you are the person whom M. de Boville, formerly an inspector of prisons, sends to me from the prefect of police?"

"Exactly, sir."

"One of the agents appointed to secure the safety of Paris?"

"Yes, sir" replied the stranger with a slight hesitation, and blushing.

The abbe replaced the large spectacles, which covered not only his eyes but his temples, and sitting down motioned to his visitor to do the same. “I am at your service, sir,” said the abbe, with a marked Italian accent.

“The mission with which I am charged, sir,” replied the visitor, speaking with hesitation, “is a confidential one on the part of him who fulfils it, and him by whom he is employed.” The abbe bowed. “Your probity,” replied the stranger, “is so well known to the prefect that he wishes as a magistrate to ascertain from you some particulars connected with the public safety, to ascertain which I am deputed to see you. It is hoped that no ties of friendship or humane consideration will induce you to conceal the truth.”

“Provided, sir, the particulars you wish for do not interfere with my scruples or my conscience. I am a priest, sir, and the secrets of confession, for instance, must remain between me and God, and not between me and human justice.”

“Do not alarm yourself, monsieur, we will duly respect your conscience.”

At this moment the abbe pressed down his side of the shade and so raised it on the other, throwing a bright light on the stranger’s face, while his own remained obscured. “Excuse me, abbe,” said the envoy of the prefect of the police, “but the light tries my eyes very much.” The abbe lowered the shade. “Now, sir, I am listening — go on.”

“I will come at once to the point. Do you know the Count of Monte Cristo?”

“You mean Monsieur Zaccone, I presume?”

“Zaccone? — is not his name Monte Cristo?”

“Monte Cristo is the name of an estate, or, rather, of a rock, and not a family name.”

“Well, be it so — let us not dispute about words; and since M. de Monte Cristo and M. Zaccone are the same” —

“Absolutely the same.”

“Let us speak of M. Zaccone.”

“Agreed.”

“I asked you if you knew him?”

“Extremely well.”

“Who is he?”

“The son of a rich shipbuilder in Malta.”

“I know that is the report; but, as you are aware, the police does not content itself with vague reports.”

“However,” replied the abbe, with an affable smile, “when that report is in accordance with the truth, everybody must believe it, the police as well as all the rest.”

“Are you sure of what you assert?”

“What do you mean by that question?”

“Understand, sir, I do not in the least suspect your veracity; I ask if you are certain of it?”

“I knew his father, M. Zaccone.”

“Ah, indeed?”

“And when a child I often played with the son in the timber-yards.”

“But whence does he derive the title of count?”

“You are aware that may be bought.”

“In Italy?”

“Everywhere.”

“And his immense riches, whence does he procure them?”

“They may not be so very great.”

“How much do you suppose he possesses?”

“From one hundred and fifty to two hundred thousand livres per annum.”

“That is reasonable,” said the visitor; “I have heard he had three or four millions.”

“Two hundred thousand per annum would make four millions of capital.”

“But I was told he had four millions per annum.”

“That is not probable.”

“Do you know this Island of Monte Cristo?”

“Certainly, every one who has come from Palermo, Naples, or Rome to France by sea must know it, since he has passed close to it and must have seen it.”

“I am told it is a delightful place?”

“It is a rock.”

“And why has the count bought a rock?”

“For the sake of being a count. In Italy one must have territorial possessions to be a count.”

“You have, doubtless, heard the adventures of M. Zaccone’s youth?”

“The father’s?”

“No, the son’s.”

“I know nothing certain; at that period of his life, I lost sight of my young comrade.”

“Was he in the wars?”

“I think he entered the service.”

“In what branch?”

“In the navy.”

“Are you not his confessor?”

“No, sir; I believe he is a Lutheran.”

“A Lutheran?”

“I say, I believe such is the case, I do not affirm it; besides, liberty of conscience is established in France.”

“Doubtless, and we are not now inquiring into his creed, but his actions; in the name of the prefect of police, I ask you what you know of him.

“He passes for a very charitable man. Our holy father, the pope, has made him a knight of Jesus Christ for the services he rendered to the Christians in the East; he has five or six rings as testimonials from Eastern monarchs of his services.”

“Does he wear them?”

“No, but he is proud of them; he is better pleased with rewards given to the benefactors of man than to his destroyers.”

“He is a Quaker then?”

“Exactly, he is a Quaker, with the exception of the peculiar dress.”

“Has he any friends?”

“Yes, every one who knows him is his friend.”

“But has he any enemies?”

“One only.”

“What is his name?”

“Lord Wilmore.”

“Where is he?”

“He is in Paris just now.”

“Can he give me any particulars?”

“Important ones; he was in India with Zaccone.”

“Do you know his abode?”

“It’s somewhere in the Chaussee d’Antin; but I know neither the street nor the number.”

“Are you at variance with the Englishman?”

“I love Zaccone, and he hates him; we are consequently not friends.”

“Do you think the Count of Monte Cristo had ever been in France before he made this visit to Paris?”

"To that question I can answer positively; no, sir, he had not, because he applied to me six months ago for the particulars he required, and as I did not know when I might again come to Paris, I recommended M. Cavalcanti to him."

"Andrea?"

"No, Bartolomeo, his father."

"Now, sir, I have but one question more to ask, and I charge you, in the name of honor, of humanity, and of religion, to answer me candidly."

"What is it, sir?"

"Do you know with what design M. de Monte Cristo purchased a house at Auteuil?"

"Certainly, for he told me."

"What is it, sir?"

"To make a lunatic asylum of it, similar to that founded by the Count of Pisani at Palermo. Do you know about that institution?"

"I have heard of it."

"It is a magnificent charity." Having said this, the abbe bowed to imply he wished to pursue his studies. The visitor either understood the abbe's meaning, or had no more questions to ask; he arose, and the abbe accompanied him to the door. "You are a great almsgiver," said the visitor, "and although you are said to be rich, I will venture to offer you something for your poor people; will you accept my offering?"

"I thank you, sir; I am only jealous in one thing, and that is that the relief I give should be entirely from my own resources."

"However" —

"My resolution, sir, is unchangeable, but you have only to search for yourself and you will find, alas, but too many objects upon whom to exercise your benevolence." The abbe once more bowed as he opened the door, the stranger bowed and took his leave, and the carriage conveyed him straight to the house of M. de Villefort. An hour afterwards the carriage was again ordered, and this time it went to the Rue Fontaine-Saint-George, and stopped at No. 5, where Lord Wilmore lived. The stranger had written to Lord Wilmore, requesting an interview, which the latter had fixed for ten o'clock. As the envoy of the prefect of police arrived ten minutes before ten, he was told that Lord Wilmore, who was precision and punctuality personified, was not yet come in, but that he would be sure to return as the clock struck.

The visitor was introduced into the drawing-room, which was like all other furnished drawing-rooms. A mantle-piece, with two modern Sevres vases, a timepiece representing Cupid with his bent bow, a mirror with an engraving on each side — one representing Homer carrying his guide, the other, Belisarius begging — a grayish paper; red and black tapestry — such was the appearance of Lord Wilmore's drawing-room. It was illuminated by lamps with ground-glass shades which gave only a feeble light, as if out of consideration for the envoy's weak sight. After ten minutes' expectation the clock struck ten; at the fifth stroke the door opened and Lord Wilmore appeared. He was rather above the middle height, with thin reddish whiskers, light complexion and light hair, turning rather gray. He was dressed with all the English peculiarity, namely, in a blue coat, with gilt buttons and high collar, in the fashion of 1811, a white kerseymere waistcoat, and nankeen pantaloons, three inches too short, but which were prevented by straps from slipping up to the knee. His first remark on entering was, — "You know, sir, I do not speak French?"

"I know you do not like to converse in our language," replied the envoy. "But you may use it," replied Lord Wilmore; "I understand it."

"And I," replied the visitor, changing his idiom, "know enough of English to keep up the conversation. Do not put yourself to the slightest inconvenience."

"Aw?" said Lord Wilmore, with that tone which is only known to natives of Great Britain.

The envoy presented his letter of introduction, which the latter read with English coolness, and having finished, — "I understand," said he, "perfectly."

Then began the questions, which were similar to those which had been addressed to the Abbe Busoni. But as Lord Wilmore, in the character of the count's enemy, was less restrained in his answers, they were more numerous; he described the youth of Monte Cristo, who he said, at ten years of age, entered the service of one of the petty sovereigns of India who make war on the English. It was there Wilmore had first met him and fought against him; and in that war Zaccone had been taken prisoner, sent to England, and consigned to the hulks, whence he had escaped by swimming. Then began his travels, his duels, his caprices; then the insurrection in Greece broke out, and he had served in the Grecian ranks. While in that service he had discovered a silver mine in the mountains of Thessaly, but he had been careful to conceal it from every one. After the battle of Navarino, when the Greek government was consolidated, he asked of King Otho a mining grant for that district, which was given him. Hence that immense fortune, which, in Lord Wilmore's opinion, possibly amounted to one or two millions per annum, — a precarious fortune, which might be momentarily lost by the failure of the mine.

"But," asked the visitor, "do you know why he came to France?"

"He is speculating in railways," said Lord Wilmore, "and as he is an expert chemist and physicist, he has invented a new system of telegraphy, which he is seeking to bring to perfection."

"How much does he spend yearly?" asked the prefect.

"Not more than five or six hundred thousand francs," said Lord Wilmore; "he is a miser." Hatred evidently inspired the Englishman, who, knowing no other reproach to bring on the count, accused him of avarice. "Do you know his house at Auteuil?"

"Certainly."

"What do you know respecting it?"

"Do you wish to know why he bought it?"

"Yes."

"The count is a speculator, who will certainly ruin himself in experiments. He supposes there is in the neighborhood of the house he has bought a mineral spring equal to those at Bagneres, Luchon, and Cauterets. He is going to turn his house into a Badhaus, as the Germans term it. He has already dug up all the garden two or three times to find the famous spring, and, being unsuccessful, he will soon purchase all the contiguous houses. Now, as I dislike him, and hope his railway, his electric telegraph, or his search for baths, will ruin him, I am watching for his discomfiture, which must soon take place."

"What was the cause of your quarrel?"

"When he was in England he seduced the wife of one of my friends."

"Why do you not seek revenge?"

"I have already fought three duels with him," said the Englishman, "the first with the pistol, the second with the sword, and the third with the sabre."

"And what was the result of those duels?"

"The first time, he broke my arm; the second, he wounded me in the breast; and the third time, made this large wound." The Englishman turned down his shirt-collar, and showed a scar, whose redness proved it to be a recent one. “So that, you see, there is a deadly feud between us.”

“But,” said the envoy, “you do not go about it in the right way to kill him, if I understand you correctly.”

“Aw?” said the Englishman, “I practice shooting every day, and every other day Grisier comes to my house.”

This was all the visitor wished to ascertain, or, rather, all the Englishman appeared to know. The agent arose, and having bowed to Lord Wilmore, who returned his salutation with the stiff politeness of the English, he retired. Lord Wilmore, having heard the door close after him, returned to his bedroom, where with one hand he pulled off his light hair, his red whiskers, his false jaw, and his wound, to resume the black hair, dark complexion, and pearly teeth of the Count of Monte Cristo. It was M. de Villefort, and not the prefect, who returned to the house of M. de Villefort. The procureur felt more at ease, although he had learned nothing really satisfactory, and, for the first time since the dinner-party at Auteuil, he slept soundly.

Chapter 70

The Ball.

It was in the warmest days of July, when in due course of time the Saturday arrived upon which the ball was to take place at M. de Morcerf's. It was ten o'clock at night; the branches of the great trees in the garden of the count's house stood out boldly against the azure canopy of heaven, which was studded with golden stars, but where the last fleeting clouds of a vanishing storm yet lingered. From the apartments on the ground-floor might be heard the sound of music, with the whirl of the waltz and galop, while brilliant streams of light shone through the openings of the Venetian blinds. At this moment the garden was only occupied by about ten servants, who had just received orders from their mistress to prepare the supper, the serenity of the weather continuing to increase. Until now, it had been undecided whether the supper should take place in the dining-room, or under a long tent erected on the lawn, but the beautiful blue sky, studded with stars, had settled the question in favor of the lawn. The gardens were illuminated with colored lanterns, according to the Italian custom, and, as is usual in countries where the luxuries of the table — the rarest of all luxuries in their complete form — are well understood, the supper-table was loaded with wax-lights and flowers.

At the time the Countess of Morcerf returned to the rooms, after giving her orders, many guests were arriving, more attracted by the charming hospitality of the countess than by the distinguished position of the count; for, owing to the good taste of Mercedes, one was sure of finding some devices at her entertainment worthy of describing, or even copying in case of need. Madame Danglars, in whom the events we have related had caused deep anxiety, had hesitated about going to Madame de Morcerf's, when during the morning her carriage happened to meet that of Villefort. The latter made a sign, and when the carriages had drawn close together, said, — "You are going to Madame de Morcerf's, are you not?"

"No," replied Madame Danglars, "I am too ill."

"You are wrong," replied Villefort, significantly; "it is important that you should be seen there."

"Do you think so?" asked the baroness.

"I do."

"In that case I will go." And the two carriages passed on towards their different destinations. Madame Danglars therefore came, not only beautiful in person, but radiant with splendor; she entered by one door at the time when Mercedes appeared at the door. The countess took Albert to meet Madame Danglars. He approached, paid her some well merited compliments on her toilet, and offered his arm to conduct her to a seat. Albert looked around him. "You are looking for my daughter?" said the baroness, smiling.

"I confess it," replied Albert. "Could you have been so cruel as not to bring her?"

"Calm yourself. She has met Mademoiselle de Villefort, and has taken her arm; see, they are following us, both in white dresses, one with a bouquet of camellias, the other with one of myosotis. But tell me" —

"Well, what do you wish to know?"

"Will not the Count of Monte Cristo be here to-night?"

"Seventeen!" replied Albert.

"What do you mean?"

"I only mean that the count seems the rage," replied the viscount, smiling, "and that you are the seventeenth person that has asked me the same question. The count is in fashion; I congratulate him upon it."

"And have you replied to every one as you have to me?"

"Ah, to be sure, I have not answered you; be satisfied, we shall have this 'lion;' we are among the privileged ones."

"Were you at the opera yesterday?"

"No."

"He was there."

"Ah, indeed? And did the eccentric person commit any new originality?"

"Can he be seen without doing so? Elssler was dancing in the 'Diable Boiteux;' the Greek princess was in ecstasies. After the cachucha he placed a magnificent ring on the stem of a bouquet, and threw it to the charming danseuse, who, in the third act, to do honor to the gift, reappeared with it on her finger. And the Greek princess, — will she be here?"

“No, you will be deprived of that pleasure; her position in the count’s establishment is not sufficiently understood.”

“Wait; leave me here, and go and speak to Madame de Villefort, who is trying to attract your attention.”

Albert bowed to Madame Danglars, and advanced towards Madame de Villefort, whose lips opened as he approached. “I wager anything,” said Albert, interrupting her, “that I know what you were about to say.”

“Well, what is it?”

“If I guess rightly, will you confess it?”

“Yes.”

“On your honor?”

“On my honor.”

“You were going to ask me if the Count of Monte Cristo had arrived, or was expected.”

“Not at all. It is not of him that I am now thinking. I was going to ask you if you had received any news of Monsieur Franz.”

“Yes, — yesterday.”

“What did he tell you?”

“That he was leaving at the same time as his letter.”

“Well, now then, the count?”

“The count will come, of that you may be satisfied.”

“You know that he has another name besides Monte Cristo?”

“No, I did not know it.”

“Monte Cristo is the name of an island, and he has a family name.”

“I never heard it.”

“Well, then, I am better informed than you; his name is Zaccone.”

“It is possible.”

“He is a Maltese.”

“That is also possible.

“The son of a shipowner.”

“Really, you should relate all this aloud, you would have the greatest success.”

“He served in India, discovered a mine in Thessaly, and comes to Paris to establish a mineral water-cure at Auteuil.”

“Well, I’m sure,” said Morcerf, “this is indeed news! Am I allowed to repeat it?”

“Yes, but cautiously, tell one thing at a time, and do not say I told you.”

"Why so?"

"Because it is a secret just discovered."

"By whom?"

"The police."

"Then the news originated" —

"At the prefect's last night. Paris, you can understand, is astonished at the sight of such unusual splendor, and the police have made inquiries."

"Well, well! Nothing more is wanting than to arrest the count as a vagabond, on the pretext of his being too rich."

"Indeed, that doubtless would have happened if his credentials had not been so favorable."

"Poor count! And is he aware of the danger he has been in?"

"I think not."

"Then it will be but charitable to inform him. When he arrives, I will not fail to do so."

Just then, a handsome young man, with bright eyes, black hair, and glossy mustache, respectfully bowed to Madame de Villefort. Albert extended his hand. "Madame," said Albert, "allow me to present to you M. Maximilian Morrel, captain of Spahis, one of our best, and, above all, of our bravest officers."

"I have already had the pleasure of meeting this gentleman at Auteuil, at the house of the Count of Monte Cristo," replied Madame de Villefort, turning away with marked coldness of manner. This answer, and especially the tone in which it was uttered, chilled the heart of poor Morrel. But a recompense was in store for him; turning around, he saw near the door a beautiful fair face, whose large blue eyes were, without any marked expression, fixed upon him, while the bouquet of myosotis was gently raised to her lips.

The salutation was so well understood that Morrel, with the same expression in his eyes, placed his handkerchief to his mouth; and these two living statues, whose hearts beat so violently under their marble aspect, separated from each other by the whole length of the room, forgot themselves for a moment, or rather forgot the world in their mutual contemplation. They might have remained much longer lost in one another, without any one noticing their abstraction. The Count of Monte Cristo had just entered.

We have already said that there was something in the count which attracted universal attention wherever he appeared. It was not the coat, unexceptional in its cut, though simple and unornamented; it was not the plain white waistcoat; it was not the trousers, that displayed the foot so perfectly formed — it was none of these things that attracted the attention, — it was his pale complexion, his waving black hair, his calm and serene expression, his dark and melancholy eye, his mouth, chiselled with such marvellous delicacy, which so easily expressed such high disdain, — these were what fixed the attention of all upon him. Many men might have been handsomer, but certainly there could be none whose appearance was more significant, if the expression may be used. Everything about the count seemed to have its meaning, for the constant habit of thought which he had acquired had given an ease and vigor to the expression of his face, and even to the most trifling gesture, scarcely to be understood. Yet the Parisian world is so strange, that even all this might not have won attention had there not been connected with it a mysterious story gilded by an immense fortune.

Meanwhile he advanced through the assemblage of guests under a battery of curious glances towards Madame de Morcerf, who, standing before a mantle-piece ornamented with flowers, had seen his entrance in a looking-glass placed opposite the door, and was prepared to receive him. She turned towards him with a serene smile just at the moment he was bowing to her. No doubt she fancied the count would speak to her, while on his side the count thought she was about to address him; but both remained silent, and after a mere bow, Monte Cristo directed his steps to Albert, who received him cordially. “Have you seen my mother?” asked Albert.

“I have just had the pleasure,” replied the count; “but I have not seen your father.”

“See, he is down there, talking politics with that little group of great geniuses.”

“Indeed?” said Monte Cristo; “and so those gentlemen down there are men of great talent. I should not have guessed it. And for what kind of talent are they celebrated? You know there are different sorts.”

“That tall, harsh-looking man is very learned, he discovered, in the neighborhood of Rome, a kind of lizard with a vertebra more than lizards usually have, and he immediately laid his discovery before the Institute. The thing was discussed for a long time, but finally decided in his favor. I can assure you the vertebra made a great noise in the learned world, and the gentleman, who was only a knight of the Legion of Honor, was made an officer.”

“Come,” said Monte Cristo, “this cross seems to me to be wisely awarded. I suppose, had he found another additional vertebra, they would have made him a commander.”

“Very likely,” said Albert.

“And who can that person be who has taken it into his head to wrap himself up in a blue coat embroidered with green?”

“Oh, that coat is not his own idea; it is the Republic’s, which deputed David [*] to devise a uniform for the Academicians.”

* Louis David, a famous French painter.

“Indeed?” said Monte Cristo; “so this gentleman is an Academician?”

“Within the last week he has been made one of the learned assembly.”

“And what is his especial talent?”

“His talent? I believe he thrusts pins through the heads of rabbits, he makes fowls eat madder, and punches the spinal marrow out of dogs with whalebone.”

“And he is made a member of the Academy of Sciences for this?”

“No; of the French Academy.”

“But what has the French Academy to do with all this?”

“I was going to tell you. It seems” —

“That his experiments have very considerably advanced the cause of science, doubtless?”

“No; that his style of writing is very good.”

“This must be very flattering to the feelings of the rabbits into whose heads he has thrust pins, to the fowls whose bones he has dyed red, and to the dogs whose spinal marrow he has punched out?”

Albert laughed.

“And the other one?” demanded the count.

“That one?”

“Yes, the third.”

“The one in the dark blue coat?”

“Yes.”

“He is a colleague of the count, and one of the most active opponents to the idea of providing the Chamber of Peers with a uniform. He was very successful upon that question. He stood badly with the Liberal papers, but his noble opposition to the wishes of the court is now getting him into favor with the journalists. They talk of making him an ambassador.”

“And what are his claims to the peerage?”

“He has composed two or three comic operas, written four or five articles in the Siecle, and voted five or six years on the ministerial side.”

“Bravo, Viscount,” said Monte Cristo, smiling; “you are a delightful cicerone. And now you will do me a favor, will you not?”

“What is it?”

“Do not introduce me to any of these gentlemen; and should they wish it, you will warn me.” Just then the count felt his arm pressed. He turned round; it was Danglars.

“Ah, is it you, baron?” said he.

“Why do you call me baron?” said Danglars; “you know that I care nothing for my title. I am not like you, viscount; you like your title, do you not?”

“Certainly,” replied Albert, “seeing that without my title I should be nothing; while you, sacrificing the baron, would still remain the millionaire.”

“Which seems to me the finest title under the royalty of July,” replied Danglars.

“Unfortunately,” said Monte Cristo, “one’s title to a millionaire does not last for life, like that of baron, peer of France, or Academician; for example, the millionaires Franck & Poulmann, of Frankfort, who have just become bankrupts.”

“Indeed?” said Danglars, becoming pale.

“Yes; I received the news this evening by a courier. I had about a million in their hands, but, warned in time, I withdrew it a month ago.”

“Ah, mon Dieu,” exclaimed Danglars, “they have drawn on me for 200,000 francs!”

“Well, you can throw out the draft; their signature is worth five per cent.”

“Yes, but it is too late,” said Danglars, “I have honored their bills.”

“Then,” said Monte Cristo, “here are 200,000 francs gone after” —

“Hush, do not mention these things,” said Danglars; then, approaching Monte Cristo, he added, “especially before young M. Cavalcanti;” after which he smiled, and turned towards the young man in question. Albert had left the count to speak to his mother, Danglars to converse with young Cavalcanti; Monte Cristo was for an instant alone. Meanwhile the heat became excessive. The footmen were hastening through the rooms with waiters loaded with ices. Monte Cristo wiped the perspiration from his forehead, but drew back when the waiter was presented to him; he took no refreshment. Madame de Morcerf did not lose sight of Monte Cristo; she saw that he took nothing, and even noticed his gesture of refusal.

"Albert," she asked, "did you notice that?"

"What, mother?"

"That the count has never been willing to partake of food under the roof of M. de Morcerf."

"Yes; but then he breakfasted with me — indeed, he made his first appearance in the world on that occasion."

"But your house is not M. de Morcerf's," murmured Mercedes; "and since he has been here I have watched him."

"Well?"

"Well, he has taken nothing yet."

"The count is very temperate." Mercedes smiled sadly. "Approach him," said she, "and when the next waiter passes, insist upon his taking something."

"But why, mother?"

"Just to please me, Albert," said Mercedes. Albert kissed his mother's hand, and drew near the count. Another salver passed, loaded like the preceding ones; she saw Albert attempt to persuade the count, but he obstinately refused. Albert rejoined his mother; she was very pale.

"Well," said she, "you see he refuses?"

"Yes; but why need this annoy you?"

"You know, Albert, women are singular creatures. I should like to have seen the count take something in my house, if only an ice. Perhaps he cannot reconcile himself to the French style of living, and might prefer something else."

"Oh, no; I have seen him eat of everything in Italy; no doubt he does not feel inclined this evening."

"And besides," said the countess, "accustomed as he is to burning climates, possibly he does not feel the heat as we do."

"I do not think that, for he has complained of feeling almost suffocated, and asked why the Venetian blinds were not opened as well as the windows."

“In a word,” said Mercedes, “it was a way of assuring me that his abstinence was intended.” And she left the room. A minute afterwards the blinds were thrown open, and through the jessamine and clematis that overhung the window one could see the garden ornamented with lanterns, and the supper laid under the tent. Dancers, players, talkers, all uttered an exclamation of joy — every one inhaled with delight the breeze that floated in. At the same time Mercedes reappeared, paler than before, but with that imperturbable expression of countenance which she sometimes wore. She went straight to the group of which her husband formed the centre. “Do not detain those gentlemen here, count,” she said; “they would prefer, I should think, to breathe in the garden rather than suffocate here, since they are not playing.”

“Ah,” said a gallant old general, who, in 1809, had sung “Partant pour la Syrie,” — ”we will not go alone to the garden.”

“Then,” said Mercedes, “I will lead the way.” Turning towards Monte Cristo, she added, “count, will you oblige me with your arm?” The count almost staggered at these simple words; then he fixed his eyes on Mercedes. It was only a momentary glance, but it seemed to the countess to have lasted for a century, so much was expressed in that one look. He offered his arm to the countess; she took it, or rather just touched it with her little hand, and they together descended the steps, lined with rhododendrons and camellias. Behind them, by another outlet, a group of about twenty persons rushed into the garden with loud exclamations of delight.

Chapter 71

Bread and Salt.

Madame de Morcerf entered an archway of trees with her companion. It led through a grove of lindens to a conservatory.

“It was too warm in the room, was it not, count?” she asked.

“Yes, madame; and it was an excellent idea of yours to open the doors and the blinds.” As he ceased speaking, the count felt the hand of Mercedes tremble. “But you,” he said, “with that light dress, and without anything to cover you but that gauze scarf, perhaps you feel cold?”

“Do you know where I am leading you?” said the countess, without replying to the question.

“No, madame,” replied Monte Cristo; “but you see I make no resistance.”

“We are going to the greenhouse that you see at the other end of the grove.”

The count looked at Mercedes as if to interrogate her, but she continued to walk on in silence, and he refrained from speaking. They reached the building, ornamented with magnificent fruits, which ripen at the beginning of July in the artificial temperature which takes the place of the sun, so frequently absent in our climate. The countess left the arm of Monte Cristo, and gathered a bunch of Muscatel grapes. “See, count,” she said, with a smile so sad in its expression that one could almost detect the tears on her eyelids — ”see, our French grapes are not to be compared, I know, with yours of Sicily and Cyprus, but you will make allowance for our northern sun.” The count bowed, but stepped back. “Do you refuse?” said Mercedes, in a tremulous voice. “Pray excuse me, madame,” replied Monte Cristo, “but I never eat Muscatel grapes.”

Mercedes let them fall, and sighed. A magnificent peach was hanging against an adjoining wall, ripened by the same artificial heat. Mercedes drew near, and plucked the fruit. “Take this peach, then,” she said. The count again refused. “What, again?” she exclaimed, in so plaintive an accent that it seemed to stifle a sob; “really, you pain me.”

A long silence followed; the peach, like the grapes, fell to the ground. “Count,” added Mercedes with a supplicating glance, “there is a beautiful Arabian custom, which makes eternal friends of those who have together eaten bread and salt under the same roof.”

“I know it, madame,” replied the count; “but we are in France, and not in Arabia, and in France eternal friendships are as rare as the custom of dividing bread and salt with one another.”

“But,” said the countess, breathlessly, with her eyes fixed on Monte Cristo, whose arm she convulsively pressed with both hands, “we are friends, are we not?”

The count became pale as death, the blood rushed to his heart, and then again rising, dyed his cheeks with crimson; his eyes swam like those of a man suddenly dazzled. “Certainly, we are friends,” he replied; “why should we not be?” The answer was so little like the one Mercedes desired, that she turned away to give vent to a sigh, which sounded more like a groan. “Thank you,” she said. And they walked on again. They went the whole length of the garden without uttering a word. “Sir,” suddenly exclaimed the countess, after their walk had continued ten minutes in silence, “is it true that you have seen so much, travelled so far, and suffered so deeply?”

“I have suffered deeply, madame,” answered Monte Cristo.

“But now you are happy?”

“Doubtless,” replied the count, “since no one hears me complain.”

“And your present happiness, has it softened your heart?”

“My present happiness equals my past misery,” said the count.

“Are you not married?” asked the countess. “I, married?” exclaimed Monte Cristo, shuddering; “who could have told you so?”

“No one told me you were, but you have frequently been seen at the opera with a young and lovely woman.”

“She is a slave whom I bought at Constantinople, madame, the daughter of a prince. I have adopted her as my daughter, having no one else to love in the world.”

“You live alone, then?”

“I do.”

“You have no sister — no son — no father?”

“I have no one.”

“How can you exist thus without any one to attach you to life?”

"It is not my fault, madame. At Malta, I loved a young girl, was on the point of marrying her, when war came and carried me away. I thought she loved me well enough to wait for me, and even to remain faithful to my memory. When I returned she was married. This is the history of most men who have passed twenty years of age. Perhaps my heart was weaker than the hearts of most men, and I suffered more than they would have done in my place; that is all." The countess stopped for a moment, as if gasping for breath. "Yes," she said, "and you have still preserved this love in your heart — one can only love once — and did you ever see her again?"

"Never."

"Never?"

"I never returned to the country where she lived."

"To Malta?"

"Yes; Malta."

"She is, then, now at Malta?"

"I think so."

"And have you forgiven her for all she has made you suffer?"

"Her, — yes."

"But only her; do you then still hate those who separated you?"

"I hate them? Not at all; why should I?" The countess placed herself before Monte Cristo, still holding in her hand a portion of the perfumed grapes. "Take some," she said. "Madame, I never eat Muscatel grapes," replied Monte Cristo, as if the subject had not been mentioned before. The countess dashed the grapes into the nearest thicket, with a gesture of despair. "Inflexible man!" she murmured. Monte Cristo remained as unmoved as if the reproach had not been addressed to him. Albert at this moment ran in. "Oh, mother," he exclaimed, "such a misfortune has happened!"

"What? What has happened?" asked the countess, as though awakening from a sleep to the realities of life; "did you say a misfortune? Indeed, I should expect misfortunes."

"M. de Villefort is here."

"Well?"

"He comes to fetch his wife and daughter."

"Why so?"

"Because Madame de Saint-Meran is just arrived in Paris, bringing the news of M. de Saint-Meran's death, which took place on the first stage after he left Marseilles. Madame de Villefort, who was in very good spirits, would neither believe nor think of the misfortune, but Mademoiselle Valentine, at the first words, guessed the whole truth, notwithstanding all the precautions of her father; the blow struck her like a thunderbolt, and she fell senseless."

"And how was M. de Saint-Meran related to Mademoiselle de Villefort?" said the count.

"He was her grandfather on the mother's side. He was coming here to hasten her marriage with Franz."

"Ah, indeed?"

"So Franz must wait. Why was not M. de Saint-Meran also grandfather to Mademoiselle Danglars?"

"Albert, Albert," said Madame de Morcerf, in a tone of mild reproof, "what are you saying? Ah, count, he esteems you so highly, tell him that he has spoken amiss." And she took two or three steps forward. Monte Cristo watched her with an air so thoughtful, and so full of affectionate admiration, that she turned back and grasped his hand; at the same time she seized that of her son, and joined them together.

"We are friends; are we not?" she asked.

"Oh, madame, I do not presume to call myself your friend, but at all times I am your most respectful servant." The countess left with an indescribable pang in her heart, and before she had taken ten steps the count saw her raise her handkerchief to her eyes. "Do not my mother and you agree?" asked Albert, astonished.

"On the contrary," replied the count, "did you not hear her declare that we were friends?" They re-entered the drawing-room, which Valentine and Madame de Villefort had just quitted. It is perhaps needless to add that Morrel departed almost at the same time.

Chapter 72

Madame de Saint-Meran.

A gloomy scene had indeed just passed at the house of M. de Villefort. After the ladies had departed for the ball, whither all the entreaties of Madame de Villefort had failed in persuading him to accompany them, the procureur had shut himself up in his study, according to his custom, with a heap of papers calculated to alarm any one else, but which generally scarcely satisfied his inordinate desires. But this time the papers were a mere matter of form. Villefort had secluded himself, not to study, but to reflect; and with the door locked and orders given that he should not be disturbed excepting for important business, he sat down in his arm-chair and began to ponder over the events, the remembrance of which had during the last eight days filled his mind with so many gloomy thoughts and bitter recollections. Then, instead of plunging into the mass of documents piled before him, he opened the drawer of his desk, touched a spring, and drew out a parcel of cherished memoranda, amongst which he had carefully arranged, in characters only known to himself, the names of all those who, either in his political career, in money matters, at the bar, or in his mysterious love affairs, had become his enemies.

Their number was formidable, now that he had begun to fear, and yet these names, powerful though they were, had often caused him to smile with the same kind of satisfaction experienced by a traveller who from the summit of a mountain beholds at his feet the craggy eminences, the almost impassable paths, and the fearful chasms, through which he has so perilously climbed. When he had run over all these names in his memory, again read and studied them, commenting meanwhile upon his lists, he shook his head.

“No,” he murmured, “none of my enemies would have waited so patiently and laboriously for so long a space of time, that they might now come and crush me with this secret. Sometimes, as Hamlet says —

> ‘Foul deeds will rise,
> Tho’ all the earth o’erwhelm them to men’s eyes;’

but, like a phosphoric light, they rise but to mislead. The story has been told by the Corsican to some priest, who in his turn has repeated it. M. de Monte Cristo may have heard it, and to enlighten himself — but why should he wish to enlighten himself upon the subject?" asked Villefort, after a moment's reflection, "what interest can this M. de Monte Cristo or M. Zaccone, — son of a shipowner of Malta, discoverer of a mine in Thessaly, now visiting Paris for the first time, — what interest, I say, can he take in discovering a gloomy, mysterious, and useless fact like this? However, among all the incoherent details given to me by the Abbe Busoni and by Lord Wilmore, by that friend and that enemy, one thing appears certain and clear in my opinion — that in no period, in no case, in no circumstance, could there have been any contact between him and me."

But Villefort uttered words which even he himself did not believe. He dreaded not so much the revelation, for he could reply to or deny its truth; — he cared little for that mene, tekel, upharsin, which appeared suddenly in letters of blood upon the wall; — but what he was really anxious for was to discover whose hand had traced them. While he was endeavoring to calm his fears, — and instead of dwelling upon the political future that had so often been the subject of his ambitious dreams, was imagining a future limited to the enjoyments of home, in fear of awakening the enemy that had so long slept, — the noise of a carriage sounded in the yard, then he heard the steps of an aged person ascending the stairs, followed by tears and lamentations, such as servants always give vent to when they wish to appear interested in their master's grief. He drew back the bolt of his door, and almost directly an old lady entered, unannounced, carrying her shawl on her arm, and her bonnet in her hand. The white hair was thrown back from her yellow forehead, and her eyes, already sunken by the furrows of age, now almost disappeared beneath the eyelids swollen with grief. "Oh, sir," she said; "oh, sir, what a misfortune! I shall die of it; oh, yes, I shall certainly die of it!"

And then, falling upon the chair nearest the door, she burst into a paroxysm of sobs. The servants, standing in the doorway, not daring to approach nearer, were looking at Noirtier's old servant, who had heard the noise from his master's room, and run there also, remaining behind the others. Villefort rose, and ran towards his mother-in-law, for it was she.

"Why, what can have happened?" he exclaimed, "what has thus disturbed you? Is M. de Saint-Meran with you?"

"M. de Saint-Meran is dead," answered the old marchioness, without preface and without expression; she appeared to be stupefied. Villefort drew back, and clasping his hands together, exclaimed — "Dead! — so suddenly?"

"A week ago," continued Madame de Saint-Meran, "we went out together in the carriage after dinner. M. de Saint-Meran had been unwell for some days; still, the idea of seeing our dear Valentine again inspired him with courage, and notwithstanding his illness he would leave. At six leagues from Marseilles, after having eaten some of the lozenges he is accustomed to take, he fell into such a deep sleep, that it appeared to me unnatural; still I hesitated to wake him, although I fancied that his face was flushed, and that the veins of his temples throbbed more violently than usual. However, as it became dark, and I could no longer see, I fell asleep; I was soon aroused by a piercing shriek, as from a person suffering in his dreams, and he suddenly threw his head back violently. I called the valet, I stopped the postilion, I spoke to M. de Saint-Meran, I applied my smelling-salts; but all was over, and I arrived at Aix by the side of a corpse." Villefort stood with his mouth half open, quite stupefied.

"Of course you sent for a doctor?"

"Immediately; but, as I have told you, it was too late."

"Yes; but then he could tell of what complaint the poor marquis had died."

"Oh, yes, sir, he told me; it appears to have been an apoplectic stroke."

"And what did you do then?"

"M. de Saint-Meran had always expressed a desire, in case his death happened during his absence from Paris, that his body might be brought to the family vault. I had him put into a leaden coffin, and I am preceding him by a few days."

"Oh, my poor mother," said Villefort, "to have such duties to perform at your age after such a blow!"

"God has supported me through all; and then, my dear marquis, he would certainly have done everything for me that I performed for him. It is true that since I left him, I seem to have lost my senses. I cannot cry; at my age they say that we have no more tears, — still I think that when one is in trouble one should have the power of weeping. Where is Valentine, sir? It is on her account I am here; I wish to see Valentine." Villefort thought it would be terrible to reply that Valentine was at a ball; so he only said that she had gone out with her step-mother, and that she should be fetched. “This instant, sir — this instant, I beseech you!” said the old lady. Villefort placed the arm of Madame de Saint-Meran within his own, and conducted her to his apartment. “Rest yourself, mother,” he said.

The marchioness raised her head at this word, and beholding the man who so forcibly reminded her of her deeply-regretted child, who still lived for her in Valentine, she felt touched at the name of mother, and bursting into tears, she fell on her knees before an arm-chair, where she buried her venerable head. Villefort left her to the care of the women, while old Barrois ran, half-scared, to his master; for nothing frightens old people so much as when death relaxes its vigilance over them for a moment in order to strike some other old person. Then, while Madame de Saint-Meran remained on her knees, praying fervently, Villefort sent for a cab, and went himself to fetch his wife and daughter from Madame de Morcerf’s. He was so pale when he appeared at the door of the ball-room, that Valentine ran to him, saying —

“Oh, father, some misfortune has happened!”

“Your grandmamma has just arrived, Valentine,” said M. de Villefort.

“And grandpapa?” inquired the young girl, trembling with apprehension. M. de Villefort only replied by offering his arm to his daughter. It was just in time, for Valentine’s head swam, and she staggered; Madame de Villefort instantly hastened to her assistance, and aided her husband in dragging her to the carriage, saying — ”What a singular event! Who could have thought it? Ah, yes, it is indeed strange!” And the wretched family departed, leaving a cloud of sadness hanging over the rest of the evening. At the foot of the stairs, Valentine found Barrois awaiting her.

“M. Noirtier wishes to see you to-night, he said, in an undertone.

“Tell him I will come when I leave my dear grandmamma,” she replied, feeling, with true delicacy, that the person to whom she could be of the most service just then was Madame de Saint-Meran. Valentine found her grandmother in bed; silent caresses, heartwrung sobs, broken sighs, burning tears, were all that passed in this sad interview, while Madame de Villefort, leaning on her husband’s arm, maintained all outward forms of respect, at least towards the poor widow. She soon whispered to her husband, “I think it would be better for me to retire, with your permission, for the sight of me appears still to afflict your mother-in-law.” Madame de Saint-Meran heard her. “Yes, yes,” she said softly to Valentine, “let her leave; but do you stay.”

Madame de Villefort left, and Valentine remained alone beside the bed, for the procureur, overcome with astonishment at the unexpected death, had followed his wife. Meanwhile, Barrois had returned for the first time to old Noirtier, who having heard the noise in the house, had, as we have said, sent his old servant to inquire the cause; on his return, his quick intelligent eye interrogated the messenger. “Alas, sir,” exclaimed Barrois, “a great misfortune has happened. Madame de Saint-Meran has arrived, and her husband is dead!”

M. de Saint-Meran and Noirtier had never been on strict terms of friendship; still, the death of one old man always considerably affects another. Noirtier let his head fall upon his chest, apparently overwhelmed and thoughtful; then he closed one eye, in token of inquiry. “Mademoiselle Valentine?” Noirtier nodded his head. “She is at the ball, as you know, since she came to say good-by to you in full dress.” Noirtier again closed his left eye. “Do you wish to see her?” Noirtier again made an affirmative sign. “Well, they have gone to fetch her, no doubt, from Madame de Morcerf’s; I will await her return, and beg her to come up here. Is that what you wish for?”

“Yes,” replied the invalid.

Barrois, therefore, as we have seen, watched for Valentine, and informed her of her grandfather’s wish. Consequently, Valentine came up to Noirtier, on leaving Madame de Saint-Meran, who in the midst of her grief had at last yielded to fatigue and fallen into a feverish sleep. Within reach of her hand they placed a small table upon which stood a bottle of orangeade, her usual beverage, and a glass. Then, as we have said, the young girl left the bedside to see M. Noirtier. Valentine kissed the old man, who looked at her with such tenderness that her eyes again filled with tears, whose sources he thought must be exhausted. The old gentleman continued to dwell upon her with the same expression. “Yes, yes,” said Valentine, “you mean that I have yet a kind grandfather left, do you not.” The old man intimated that such was his meaning. “Ah, yes, happily I have,” replied Valentine. “Without that, what would become of me?”

It was one o’clock in the morning. Barrois, who wished to go to bed himself, observed that after such sad events every one stood in need of rest. Noirtier would not say that the only rest he needed was to see his child, but wished her good-night, for grief and fatigue had made her appear quite ill. The next morning she found her grandmother in bed; the fever had not abated, on the contrary her eyes glistened and she appeared to be suffering from violent nervous irritability. “Oh, dear grandmamma, are you worse?” exclaimed Valentine, perceiving all these signs of agitation.

“No, my child, no,” said Madame de Saint-Meran; “but I was impatiently waiting for your arrival, that I might send for your father.”

“My father?” inquired Valentine, uneasily.

“Yes, I wish to speak to him.” Valentine durst not oppose her grandmother’s wish, the cause of which she did not know, and an instant afterwards Villefort entered. “Sir,” said Madame de Saint-Meran, without using any circumlocution, and as if fearing she had no time to lose, “you wrote to me concerning the marriage of this child?”

“Yes, madame,” replied Villefort, “it is not only projected but arranged.”

“Your intended son-in-law is named M. Franz d’Epinay?”

“Yes, madame.”

“Is he not the son of General d’Epinay who was on our side, and who was assassinated some days before the usurper returned from the Island of Elba?”

“The same.”

“Does he not dislike the idea of marrying the granddaughter of a Jacobin?”

“Our civil dissensions are now happily extinguished, mother,” said Villefort; “M. d’Epinay was quite a child when his father died, he knows very little of M. Noirtier, and will meet him, if not with pleasure, at least with indifference.”

“Is it a suitable match?”

“In every respect.”

“And the young man?”

“Is regarded with universal esteem.”

“You approve of him?”

“He is one of the most well-bred young men I know.” During the whole of this conversation Valentine had remained silent. “Well, sir,” said Madame de Saint-Meran, after a few minutes’ reflection, “I must hasten the marriage, for I have but a short time to live.”

“You, madame?” “You, dear mamma?” exclaimed M. de Villefort and Valentine at the same time.

“I know what I am saying,” continued the marchioness; “I must hurry you, so that, as she has no mother, she may at least have a grandmother to bless her marriage. I am all that is left to her belonging to my poor Renee, whom you have so soon forgotten, sir."

"Ah, madame," said Villefort, "you forget that I was obliged to give a mother to my child."

"A stepmother is never a mother, sir. But this is not to the purpose, — our business concerns Valentine, let us leave the dead in peace."

All this was said with such exceeding rapidity, that there was something in the conversation that seemed like the beginning of delirium.

"It shall be as you wish, madame," said Villefort; "more especially since your wishes coincide with mine, and as soon as M. d'Epinay arrives in Paris" —

"My dear grandmother," interrupted Valentine, "consider decorum — the recent death. You would not have me marry under such sad auspices?"

"My child," exclaimed the old lady sharply, "let us hear none of the conventional objections that deter weak minds from preparing for the future. I also was married at the death-bed of my mother, and certainly I have not been less happy on that account."

"Still that idea of death, madame," said Villefort.

"Still? — Always! I tell you I am going to die — do you understand? Well, before dying, I wish to see my son-in-law. I wish to tell him to make my child happy; I wish to read in his eyes whether he intends to obey me; — in fact, I will know him — I will!" continued the old lady, with a fearful expression, "that I may rise from the depths of my grave to find him, if he should not fulfil his duty!"

"Madame," said Villefort, "you must lay aside these exalted ideas, which almost assume the appearance of madness. The dead, once buried in their graves, rise no more."

"And I tell you, sir, that you are mistaken. This night I have had a fearful sleep. It seemed as though my soul were already hovering over my body, my eyes, which I tried to open, closed against my will, and what will appear impossible above all to you, sir, I saw, with my eyes shut, in the spot where you are now standing, issuing from that corner where there is a door leading into Madame Villefort's dressing-room — I saw, I tell you, silently enter, a white figure." Valentine screamed. "It was the fever that disturbed you, madame," said Villefort.

"Doubt, if you please, but I am sure of what I say. I saw a white figure, and as if to prevent my discrediting the testimony of only one of my senses, I heard my glass removed — the same which is there now on the table.”

“Oh, dear mother, it was a dream.”

“So little was it a dream, that I stretched my hand towards the bell; but when I did so, the shade disappeared; my maid then entered with a light.”

“But she saw no one?”

“Phantoms are visible to those only who ought to see them. It was the soul of my husband! — Well, if my husband’s soul can come to me, why should not my soul reappear to guard my granddaughter? the tie is even more direct, it seems to me.”

“Oh, madame,” said Villefort, deeply affected, in spite of himself, “do not yield to those gloomy thoughts; you will long live with us, happy, loved, and honored, and we will make you forget” —

“Never, never, never,” said the marchioness. “When does M. d’Epinay return?”

“We expect him every moment.”

“It is well. As soon as he arrives inform me. We must be expeditious. And then I also wish to see a notary, that I may be assured that all our property returns to Valentine.”

“Ah, grandmamma,” murmured Valentine, pressing her lips on the burning brow, “do you wish to kill me? Oh, how feverish you are; we must not send for a notary, but for a doctor.”

“A doctor?” said she, shrugging her shoulders, “I am not ill; I am thirsty — that is all.”

“What are you drinking, dear grandmamma?”

“The same as usual, my dear, my glass is there on the table — give it to me, Valentine.” Valentine poured the orangeade into a glass and gave it to her grandmother with a certain degree of dread, for it was the same glass she fancied that had been touched by the spectre. The marchioness drained the glass at a single draught, and then turned on her pillow, repeating, — ”The notary, the notary!”

M. de Villefort left the room, and Valentine seated herself at the bedside of her grandmother. The poor child appeared herself to require the doctor she had recommended to her aged relative. A bright spot burned in either cheek, her respiration was short and difficult, and her pulse beat with feverish excitement. She was thinking of the despair of Maximilian, when he should be informed that Madame de Saint-Meran, instead of being an ally, was unconsciously acting as his enemy. More than once she thought of revealing all to her grandmother, and she would not have hesitated a moment, if Maximilian Morrel had been named Albert de Morcerf or Raoul de Chateau-Renaud; but Morrel was of plebeian extraction, and Valentine knew how the haughty Marquise de Saint-Meran despised all who were not noble. Her secret had each time been repressed when she was about to reveal it, by the sad conviction that it would be useless to do so; for, were it once discovered by her father and mother, all would be lost. Two hours passed thus; Madame de Saint-Meran was in a feverish sleep, and the notary had arrived. Though his coming was announced in a very low tone, Madame de Saint-Meran arose from her pillow. “The notary!” she exclaimed, “let him come in.”

The notary, who was at the door, immediately entered. “Go, Valentine,” said Madame de Saint-Meran, “and leave me with this gentleman.”

“But, grandmamma” —

“Leave me — go!” The young girl kissed her grandmother, and left with her handkerchief to her eyes; at the door she found the valet de chambre, who told her that the doctor was waiting in the dining-room. Valentine instantly ran down. The doctor was a friend of the family, and at the same time one of the cleverest men of the day, and very fond of Valentine, whose birth he had witnessed. He had himself a daughter about her age, but whose life was one continued source of anxiety and fear to him from her mother having been consumptive.

“Oh,” said Valentine, “we have been waiting for you with such impatience, dear M. d’Avrigny. But, first of all, how are Madeleine and Antoinette?” Madeleine was the daughter of M. d’Avrigny, and Antoinette his niece. M. d’Avrigny smiled sadly. “Antoinette is very well,” he said, “and Madeleine tolerably so. But you sent for me, my dear child. It is not your father or Madame de Villefort who is ill. As for you, although we doctors cannot divest our patients of nerves, I fancy you have no further need of me than to recommend you not to allow your imagination to take too wide a field.” Valentine colored. M. d’Avrigny carried the science of divination almost to a miraculous extent, for he was one of the physicians who always work upon the body through the mind. “No,” she replied, “it is for my poor grandmother. You know the calamity that has happened to us, do you not?”

“I know nothing.” said M. d’Avrigny.

“Alas,” said Valentine, restraining her tears, “my grandfather is dead.”

"M. de Saint-Meran?"

"Yes."

"Suddenly?"

"From an apoplectic stroke."

"An apoplectic stroke?" repeated the doctor.

"Yes, and my poor grandmother fancies that her husband, whom she never left, has called her, and that she must go and join him. Oh, M. d'Avrigny, I beseech you, do something for her!"

"Where is she?"

"In her room with the notary."

"And M. Noirtier?"

"Just as he was, his mind perfectly clear, but the same incapability of moving or speaking."

"And the same love for you — eh, my dear child?"

"Yes," said Valentine, "he was very fond of me."

"Who does not love you?" Valentine smiled sadly. "What are your grandmother's symptoms?"

"An extreme nervous excitement and a strangely agitated sleep; she fancied this morning in her sleep that her soul was hovering above her body, which she at the same time watched. It must have been delirium; she fancies, too, that she saw a phantom enter her chamber and even heard the noise it made on touching her glass."

"It is singular," said the doctor; "I was not aware that Madame de Saint-Meran was subject to such hallucinations."

"It is the first time I ever saw her in this condition," said Valentine; "and this morning she frightened me so that I thought her mad; and my father, who you know is a strong-minded man, himself appeared deeply impressed."

"We will go and see," said the doctor; "what you tell me seems very strange." The notary here descended, and Valentine was informed that her grandmother was alone. "Go upstairs," she said to the doctor.

"And you?"

"Oh, I dare not — she forbade my sending for you; and, as you say, I am myself agitated, feverish and out of sorts. I will go and take a turn in the garden to recover myself." The doctor pressed Valentine's hand, and while he visited her grandmother, she descended the steps. We need not say which portion of the garden was her favorite walk. After remaining for a short time in the parterre surrounding the house, and gathering a rose to place in her waist or hair, she turned into the dark avenue which led to the bench; then from the bench she went to the gate. As usual, Valentine strolled for a short time among her flowers, but without gathering them. The mourning in her heart forbade her assuming this simple ornament, though she had not yet had time to put on the outward semblance of woe. She then turned towards the avenue. As she advanced she fancied she heard a voice speaking her name. She stopped astonished, then the voice reached her ear more distinctly, and she recognized it to be that of Maximilian.

Chapter 73

The Promise.

It was, indeed, Maximilian Morrel, who had passed a wretched existence since the previous day. With the instinct peculiar to lovers he had anticipated after the return of Madame de Saint-Meran and the death of the marquis, that something would occur at M. de Villefort's in connection with his attachment for Valentine. His presentiments were realized, as we shall see, and his uneasy forebodings had goaded him pale and trembling to the gate under the chestnut-trees. Valentine was ignorant of the cause of this sorrow and anxiety, and as it was not his accustomed hour for visiting her, she had gone to the spot simply by accident or perhaps through sympathy. Morrel called her, and she ran to the gate. “You here at this hour?” said she. “Yes, my poor girl,” replied Morrel; “I come to bring and to hear bad tidings.”

“This is, indeed, a house of mourning,” said Valentine; “speak, Maximilian, although the cup of sorrow seems already full.”

“Dear Valentine,” said Morrel, endeavoring to conceal his own emotion, “listen, I entreat you; what I am about to say is very serious. When are you to be married?”

“I will tell you all,” said Valentine; “from you I have nothing to conceal. This morning the subject was introduced, and my dear grandmother, on whom I depended as my only support, not only declared herself favorable to it, but is so anxious for it, that they only await the arrival of M. d'Epinay, and the following day the contract will be signed.” A deep sigh escaped the young man, who gazed long and mournfully at her he loved. “Alas,” replied he, “it is dreadful thus to hear my condemnation from your own lips. The sentence is passed, and, in a few hours, will be executed; it must be so, and I will not endeavor to prevent it. But, since you say nothing remains but for M. d'Epinay to arrive that the contract may be signed, and the following day you will be his, to-morrow you will be engaged to M. d'Epinay, for he came this morning to Paris.” Valentine uttered a cry.

"I was at the house of Monte Cristo an hour since," said Morrel; "we were speaking, he of the sorrow your family had experienced, and I of your grief, when a carriage rolled into the court-yard. Never, till then, had I placed any confidence in presentiments, but now I cannot help believing them, Valentine. At the sound of that carriage I shuddered; soon I heard steps on the staircase, which terrified me as much as the footsteps of the commander did Don Juan. The door at last opened; Albert de Morcerf entered first, and I began to hope my fears were vain, when, after him, another young man advanced, and the count exclaimed — 'Ah, here is the Baron Franz d'Epinay!' I summoned all my strength and courage to my support. Perhaps I turned pale and trembled, but certainly I smiled; and five minutes after I left, without having heard one word that had passed."

"Poor Maximilian!" murmured Valentine.

"Valentine, the time has arrived when you must answer me. And remember my life depends on your answer. What do you intend doing?" Valentine held down her head; she was overwhelmed.

"Listen," said Morrel; "it is not the first time you have contemplated our present position, which is a serious and urgent one; I do not think it is a moment to give way to useless sorrow; leave that for those who like to suffer at their leisure and indulge their grief in secret. There are such in the world, and God will doubtless reward them in heaven for their resignation on earth, but those who mean to contend must not lose one precious moment, but must return immediately the blow which fortune strikes. Do you intend to struggle against our ill-fortune? Tell me, Valentine for it is that I came to know."

Valentine trembled, and looked at him with amazement. The idea of resisting her father, her grandmother, and all the family, had never occurred to her. "What do you say, Maximilian?" asked Valentine. "What do you mean by a struggle? Oh, it would be a sacrilege. What? I resist my father's order, and my dying grandmother's wish? Impossible!" Morrel started. "You are too noble not to understand me, and you understand me so well that you already yield, dear Maximilian. No, no; I shall need all my strength to struggle with myself and support my grief in secret, as you say. But to grieve my father — to disturb my grandmother's last moments — never!"

"You are right," said Morrel, calmly.

"In what a tone you speak!" cried Valentine.

"I speak as one who admires you, mademoiselle."

“Mademoiselle,” cried Valentine; “mademoiselle! Oh, selfish man, — he sees me in despair, and pretends he cannot understand me!”

“You mistake — I understand you perfectly. You will not oppose M. Villefort, you will not displease the marchioness, and to-morrow you will sign the contract which will bind you to your husband.”

“But, mon Dieu, tell me, how can I do otherwise?”

“Do not appeal to me, mademoiselle; I shall be a bad judge in such a case; my selfishness will blind me,” replied Morrel, whose low voice and clinched hands announced his growing desperation.

“What would you have proposed, Maximilian, had you found me willing to accede?”

“It is not for me to say.”

“You are wrong; you must advise me what to do.”

“Do you seriously ask my advice, Valentine?”

“Certainly, dear Maximilian, for if it is good, I will follow it; you know my devotion to you.”

“Valentine,” said Morrel pushing aside a loose plank, “give me your hand in token of forgiveness of my anger; my senses are confused, and during the last hour the most extravagant thoughts have passed through my brain. Oh, if you refuse my advice” —

“What do you advise?” said Valentine, raising her eyes to heaven and sighing. “I am free,” replied Maximilian, “and rich enough to support you. I swear to make you my lawful wife before my lips even shall have approached your forehead.”

“You make me tremble!” said the young girl.

“Follow me,” said Morrel; “I will take you to my sister, who is worthy also to be yours. We will embark for Algiers, for England, for America, or, if you prefer it, retire to the country and only return to Paris when our friends have reconciled your family.” Valentine shook her head. “I feared it, Maximilian,” said she; “it is the counsel of a madman, and I should be more mad than you, did I not stop you at once with the word ‘Impossible, impossible!’“

“You will then submit to what fate decrees for you without even attempting to contend with it?” said Morrel sorrowfully. “Yes, — if I die!”

“Well, Valentine,” resumed Maximilian, “I can only say again that you are right. Truly, it is I who am mad, and you prove to me that passion blinds the most well-meaning. I appreciate your calm reasoning. It is then understood that to-morrow you will be irrevocably promised to M. Franz d’Epinay, not only by that theatrical formality invented to heighten the effect of a comedy called the signature of the contract, but your own will?”

“Again you drive me to despair, Maximilian,” said Valentine, “again you plunge the dagger into the wound! What would you do, tell me, if your sister listened to such a proposition?”

“Mademoiselle,” replied Morrel with a bitter smile, “I am selfish — you have already said so — and as a selfish man I think not of what others would do in my situation, but of what I intend doing myself. I think only that I have known you not a whole year. From the day I first saw you, all my hopes of happiness have been in securing your affection. One day you acknowledged that you loved me, and since that day my hope of future happiness has rested on obtaining you, for to gain you would be life to me. Now, I think no more; I say only that fortune has turned against me — I had thought to gain heaven, and now I have lost it. It is an every-day occurrence for a gambler to lose not only what he possesses but also what he has not.” Morrel pronounced these words with perfect calmness; Valentine looked at him a moment with her large, scrutinizing eyes, endeavoring not to let Morrel discover the grief which struggled in her heart. “But, in a word, what are you going to do?” asked she.

“I am going to have the honor of taking my leave of you, mademoiselle, solemnly assuring you that I wish your life may be so calm, so happy, and so fully occupied, that there may be no place for me even in your memory.”

“Oh!” murmured Valentine.

“Adieu, Valentine, adieu!” said Morrel, bowing.

“Where are you going?” cried the young girl, extending her hand through the opening, and seizing Maximilian by his coat, for she understood from her own agitated feelings that her lover’s calmness could not be real; “where are you going?”

“I am going, that I may not bring fresh trouble into your family: and to set an example which every honest and devoted man, situated as I am, may follow.”

“Before you leave me, tell me what you are going to do, Maximilian.” The young man smiled sorrowfully. “Speak, speak!” said Valentine; “I entreat you.”

“Has your resolution changed, Valentine?”

“It cannot change, unhappy man; you know it must not!” cried the young girl. “Then adieu, Valentine!” Valentine shook the gate with a strength of which she could not have been supposed to be possessed, as Morrel was going away, and passing both her hands through the opening, she clasped and wrung them. “I must know what you mean to do!” said she. “Where are you going?”

“Oh, fear not,” said Maximilian, stopping at a short distance, “I do not intend to render another man responsible for the rigorous fate reserved for me. Another might threaten to seek M. Franz, to provoke him, and to fight with him; all that would be folly. What has M. Franz to do with it? He saw me this morning for the first time, and has already forgotten he has seen me. He did not even know I existed when it was arranged by your two families that you should be united. I have no enmity against M. Franz, and promise you the punishment shall not fall on him.”

“On whom, then! — on me?”

“On you? Valentine! Oh, heaven forbid! Woman is sacred; the woman one loves is holy.”

“On yourself, then, unhappy man; on yourself?”

“I am the only guilty person, am I not?” said Maximilian.

“Maximilian!” said Valentine, “Maximilian, come back, I entreat you!” He drew near with his sweet smile, and but for his paleness one might have thought him in his usual happy mood. “Listen, my dear, my adored Valentine,” said he in his melodious and grave tone; “those who, like us, have never had a thought for which we need blush before the world, such may read each other’s hearts. I never was romantic, and am no melancholy hero. I imitate neither Manfred nor Anthony; but without words, protestations, or vows, my life has entwined itself with yours; you leave me, and you are right in doing so, — I repeat it, you are right; but in losing you, I lose my life.

“The moment you leave me, Valentine, I am alone in the world. My sister is happily married; her husband is only my brother-in-law, that is, a man whom the ties of social life alone attach to me; no one then longer needs my useless life. This is what I shall do; I will wait until the very moment you are married, for I will not lose the shadow of one of those unexpected chances which are sometimes reserved for us, since M. Franz may, after all, die before that time, a thunderbolt may fall even on the altar as you approach it, — nothing appears impossible to one condemned to die, and miracles appear quite reasonable when his escape from death is concerned. I will, then, wait until the last moment, and when my misery is certain, irremediable, hopeless, I will write a confidential letter to my brother-in-law, another to the prefect of police, to acquaint them with my intention, and at the corner of some wood, on the brink of some abyss, on the bank of some river, I will put an end to my existence, as certainly as I am the son of the most honest man who ever lived in France."

Valentine trembled convulsively; she loosened her hold of the gate, her arms fell by her side, and two large tears rolled down her cheeks. The young man stood before her, sorrowful and resolute. "Oh, for pity's sake," said she, "you will live, will you not?"

"No, on my honor," said Maximilian; "but that will not affect you. You have done your duty, and your conscience will be at rest." Valentine fell on her knees, and pressed her almost bursting heart. "Maximilian," said she, "Maximilian, my friend, my brother on earth, my true husband in heaven, I entreat you, do as I do, live in suffering; perhaps we may one day be united."

"Adieu, Valentine," repeated Morrel.

"My God," said Valentine, raising both her hands to heaven with a sublime expression, "I have done my utmost to remain a submissive daughter; I have begged, entreated, implored; he has regarded neither my prayers, my entreaties, nor my tears. It is done," cried she, willing away her tears, and resuming her firmness, "I am resolved not to die of remorse, but rather of shame. Live, Maximilian, and I will be yours. Say when shall it be? Speak, command, I will obey." Morrel, who had already gone some few steps away, again returned, and pale with joy extended both hands towards Valentine through the opening. "Valentine," said he, "dear Valentine, you must not speak thus — rather let me die. Why should I obtain you by violence, if our love is mutual? Is it from mere humanity you bid me live? I would then rather die."

"Truly," murmured Valentine, "who on this earth cares for me, if he does not? Who has consoled me in my sorrow but he? On whom do my hopes rest? On whom does my bleeding heart repose? On him, on him, always on him! Yes, you are right, Maximilian, I will follow you. I will leave the paternal home, I will give up all. Oh, ungrateful girl that I am," cried Valentine, sobbing, "I will give up all, even my dear old grandfather, whom I had nearly forgotten."

"No," said Maximilian, "you shall not leave him. M. Noirtier has evinced, you say, a kind feeling towards me. Well, before you leave, tell him all; his consent would be your justification in God's sight. As soon as we are married, he shall come and live with us, instead of one child, he shall have two. You have told me how you talk to him and how he answers you; I shall very soon learn that language by signs, Valentine, and I promise you solemnly, that instead of despair, it is happiness that awaits us."

"Oh, see, Maximilian, see the power you have over me, you almost make me believe you; and yet, what you tell me is madness, for my father will curse me — he is inflexible — he will never pardon me. Now listen to me, Maximilian; if by artifice, by entreaty, by accident — in short, if by any means I can delay this marriage, will you wait?"

"Yes, I promise you, as faithfully as you have promised me that this horrible marriage shall not take place, and that if you are dragged before a magistrate or a priest, you will refuse."

"I promise you by all that is most sacred to me in the world, namely, by my mother."

"We will wait, then," said Morrel.

"Yes, we will wait," replied Valentine, who revived at these words; "there are so many things which may save unhappy beings such as we are."

"I rely on you, Valentine," said Morrel; "all you do will be well done; only if they disregard your prayers, if your father and Madame de Saint-Meran insist that M. d'Epinay should be called to-morrow to sign the contract" —

"Then you have my promise, Maximilian."

"Instead of signing" —

"I will go to you, and we will fly; but from this moment until then, let us not tempt providence, let us not see each other. It is a miracle, it is a providence that we have not been discovered. If we were surprised, if it were known that we met thus, we should have no further resource."

"You are right, Valentine; but how shall I ascertain?"

"From the notary, M. Deschamps."

"I know him."

"And for myself — I will write to you, depend on me. I dread this marriage, Maximilian, as much as you."

"Thank you, my adored Valentine, thank you; that is enough. When once I know the hour, I will hasten to this spot, you can easily get over this fence with my assistance, a carriage will await us at the gate, in which you will accompany me to my sister's; there living, retired or mingling in society, as you wish, we shall be enabled to use our power to resist oppression, and not suffer ourselves to be put to death like sheep, which only defend themselves by sighs."

"Yes," said Valentine, "I will now acknowledge you are right, Maximilian; and now are you satisfied with your betrothal?" said the young girl sorrowfully.

"My adored Valentine, words cannot express one half of my satisfaction." Valentine had approached, or rather, had placed her lips so near the fence, that they nearly touched those of Morrel, which were pressed against the other side of the cold and inexorable barrier. "Adieu, then, till we meet again," said Valentine, tearing herself away. "I shall hear from you?"

"Yes."

"Thanks, thanks, dear love, adieu!" The sound of a kiss was heard, and Valentine fled through the avenue. Morrel listened to catch the last sound of her dress brushing the branches, and of her footstep on the gravel, then raised his eyes with an ineffable smile of thankfulness to heaven for being permitted to be thus loved, and then also disappeared. The young man returned home and waited all the evening and all the next day without getting any message. It was only on the following day, at about ten o'clock in the morning, as he was starting to call on M. Deschamps, the notary, that he received from the postman a small billet, which he knew to be from Valentine, although he had not before seen her writing. It was to this effect:—

Tears, entreaties, prayers, have availed me nothing. Yesterday, for two hours, I was at the church of Saint-Phillippe du Roule, and for two hours I prayed most fervently. Heaven is as inflexible as man, and the signature of the contract is fixed for this evening at nine o'clock. I have but one promise and but one heart to give; that promise is pledged to you, that heart is also yours. This evening, then, at a quarter to nine at the gate.

Your betrothed,

Valentine de Villefort.

P.S. — My poor grandmother gets worse and worse; yesterday her fever amounted to delirium; to-day her delirium is almost madness. You will be very kind to me, will you not, Morrel, to make me forget my sorrow in leaving her thus? I think it is kept a secret from grandpapa Noirtier, that the contract is to be signed this evening.

Morrel went also to the notary, who confirmed the news that the contract was to be signed that evening. Then he went to call on Monte Cristo and heard still more. Franz had been to announce the ceremony, and Madame de Villefort had also written to beg the count to excuse her not inviting him; the death of M. de Saint-Meran and the dangerous illness of his widow would cast a gloom over the meeting which she would regret should be shared by the count whom she wished every happiness. The day before Franz had been presented to Madame de Saint-Meran, who had left her bed to receive him, but had been obliged to return to it immediately after. It is easy to suppose that Morrel's agitation would not escape the count's penetrating eye. Monte Cristo was more affectionate than ever, — indeed, his manner was so kind that several times Morrel was on the point of telling him all. But he recalled the promise he had made to Valentine, and kept his secret.

The young man read Valentine's letter twenty times in the course of the day. It was her first, and on what an occasion! Each time he read it he renewed his vow to make her happy. How great is the power of a woman who has made so courageous a resolution! What devotion does she deserve from him for whom she has sacrificed everything! How ought she really to be supremely loved! She becomes at once a queen and a wife, and it is impossible to thank and love her sufficiently. Morrel longed intensely for the moment when he should hear Valentine say, "Here I am, Maximilian; come and help me." He had arranged everything for her escape; two ladders were hidden in the clover-field; a cabriolet was ordered for Maximilian alone, without a servant, without lights; at the turning of the first street they would light the lamps, as it would be foolish to attract the notice of the police by too many precautions. Occasionally he shuddered; he thought of the moment when, from the top of that wall, he should protect the descent of his dear Valentine, pressing in his arms for the first time her of whom he had yet only kissed the delicate hand.

When the afternoon arrived and he felt that the hour was drawing near, he wished for solitude, his agitation was extreme; a simple question from a friend would have irritated him. He shut himself in his room, and tried to read, but his eye glanced over the page without understanding a word, and he threw away the book, and for the second time sat down to sketch his plan, the ladders and the fence. At length the hour drew near. Never did a man deeply in love allow the clocks to go on peacefully. Morrel tormented his so effectually that they struck eight at half-past six. He then said, “It is time to start; the signature was indeed fixed to take place at nine o’clock, but perhaps Valentine will not wait for that.” Consequently, Morrel, having left the Rue Meslay at half-past eight by his timepiece, entered the clover-field while the clock of Saint-Phillippe du Roule was striking eight. The horse and cabriolet were concealed behind a small ruin, where Morrel had often waited.

The night gradually drew on, and the foliage in the garden assumed a deeper hue. Then Morrel came out from his hiding-place with a beating heart, and looked through the small opening in the gate; there was yet no one to be seen. The clock struck half-past eight, and still another half-hour was passed in waiting, while Morrel walked to and fro, and gazed more and more frequently through the opening. The garden became darker still, but in the darkness he looked in vain for the white dress, and in the silence he vainly listened for the sound of footsteps. The house, which was discernible through the trees, remained in darkness, and gave no indication that so important an event as the signature of a marriage-contract was going on. Morrel looked at his watch, which wanted a quarter to ten; but soon the same clock he had already heard strike two or three times rectified the error by striking half-past nine.

This was already half an hour past the time Valentine had fixed. It was a terrible moment for the young man. The slightest rustling of the foliage, the least whistling of the wind, attracted his attention, and drew the perspiration to his brow; then he tremblingly fixed his ladder, and, not to lose a moment, placed his foot on the first step. Amidst all these alternations of hope and fear, the clock struck ten. “It is impossible,” said Maximilian, “that the signing of a contract should occupy so long a time without unexpected interruptions. I have weighed all the chances, calculated the time required for all the forms; something must have happened.” And then he walked rapidly to and fro, and pressed his burning forehead against the fence. Had Valentine fainted? or had she been discovered and stopped in her flight? These were the only obstacles which appeared possible to the young man.

The idea that her strength had failed her in attempting to escape, and that she had fainted in one of the paths, was the one that most impressed itself upon his mind. “In that case,” said he, “I should lose her, and by my own fault.” He dwelt on this idea for a moment, then it appeared reality. He even thought he could perceive something on the ground at a distance; he ventured to call, and it seemed to him that the wind wafted back an almost inarticulate sigh. At last the half-hour struck. It was impossible to wait longer, his temples throbbed violently, his eyes were growing dim; he passed one leg over the wall, and in a moment leaped down on the other side. He was on Villefort’s premises — had arrived there by scaling the wall. What might be the consequences? However, he had not ventured thus far to draw back. He followed a short distance close under the wall, then crossed a path, hid entered a clump of trees. In a moment he had passed through them, and could see the house distinctly. Then Morrel saw that he had been right in believing that the house was not illuminated. Instead of lights at every window, as is customary on days of ceremony, he saw only a gray mass, which was veiled also by a cloud, which at that moment obscured the moon’s feeble light. A light moved rapidly from time to time past three windows of the second floor. These three windows were in Madame de Saint-Meran’s room. Another remained motionless behind some red curtains which were in Madame de Villefort’s bedroom. Morrel guessed all this. So many times, in order to follow Valentine in thought at every hour in the day, had he made her describe the whole house, that without having seen it he knew it all.

This darkness and silence alarmed Morrel still more than Valentine’s absence had done. Almost mad with grief, and determined to venture everything in order to see Valentine once more, and be certain of the misfortune he feared, Morrel gained the edge of the clump of trees, and was going to pass as quickly as possible through the flower-garden, when the sound of a voice, still at some distance, but which was borne upon the wind, reached him.

At this sound, as he was already partially exposed to view, he stepped back and concealed himself completely, remaining perfectly motionless. He had formed his resolution. If it was Valentine alone, he would speak as she passed; if she was accompanied, and he could not speak, still he should see her, and know that she was safe; if they were strangers, he would listen to their conversation, and might understand something of this hitherto incomprehensible mystery. The moon had just then escaped from behind the cloud which had concealed it, and Morrel saw Villefort come out upon the steps, followed by a gentleman in black. They descended, and advanced towards the clump of trees, and Morrel soon recognized the other gentleman as Doctor d'Avrigny.

The young man, seeing them approach, drew back mechanically, until he found himself stopped by a sycamore-tree in the centre of the clump; there he was compelled to remain. Soon the two gentlemen stopped also.

"Ah, my dear doctor," said the procureur, "heaven declares itself against my house! What a dreadful death — what a blow! Seek not to console me; alas, nothing can alleviate so great a sorrow — the wound is too deep and too fresh! Dead, dead!" The cold sweat sprang to the young man's brow, and his teeth chattered. Who could be dead in that house, which Villefort himself had called accursed? "My dear M. de Villefort," replied the doctor, with a tone which redoubled the terror of the young man, "I have not led you here to console you; on the contrary" —

"What can you mean?" asked the procureur, alarmed.

"I mean that behind the misfortune which has just happened to you, there is another, perhaps, still greater."

"Can it be possible?" murmured Villefort, clasping his hands. "What are you going to tell me?"

"Are we quite alone, my friend?"

"Yes, quite; but why all these precautions?"

"Because I have a terrible secret to communicate to you," said the doctor. "Let us sit down."

Villefort fell, rather than seated himself. The doctor stood before him, with one hand placed on his shoulder. Morrel, horrified, supported his head with one hand, and with the other pressed his heart, lest its beatings should be heard. "Dead, dead!" repeated he within himself; and he felt as if he were also dying.

"Speak, doctor — I am listening," said Villefort; "strike — I am prepared for everything!"

"Madame de Saint-Meran was, doubtless, advancing in years, but she enjoyed excellent health." Morrel began again to breathe freely, which he had not done during the last ten minutes.

"Grief has consumed her," said Villefort — "yes, grief, doctor! After living forty years with the marquis" —

"It is not grief, my dear Villefort," said the doctor; "grief may kill, although it rarely does, and never in a day, never in an hour, never in ten minutes.” Villefort answered nothing, he simply raised his head, which had been cast down before, and looked at the doctor with amazement.

“Were you present during the last struggle?” asked M. d’Avrigny.

“I was,” replied the procureur; “you begged me not to leave.”

“Did you notice the symptoms of the disease to which Madame de Saint-Meran has fallen a victim?”

“I did. Madame de Saint-Meran had three successive attacks, at intervals of some minutes, each one more serious than the former. When you arrived, Madame de Saint-Meran had already been panting for breath some minutes; she then had a fit, which I took to be simply a nervous attack, and it was only when I saw her raise herself in the bed, and her limbs and neck appear stiffened, that I became really alarmed. Then I understood from your countenance there was more to fear than I had thought. This crisis past, I endeavored to catch your eye, but could not. You held her hand — you were feeling her pulse — and the second fit came on before you had turned towards me. This was more terrible than the first; the same nervous movements were repeated, and the mouth contracted and turned purple.”

“And at the third she expired.”

“At the end of the first attack I discovered symptoms of tetanus; you confirmed my opinion.”

“Yes, before others,” replied the doctor; “but now we are alone” —

“What are you going to say? Oh, spare me!”

“That the symptoms of tetanus and poisoning by vegetable substances are the same.” M. de Villefort started from his seat, then in a moment fell down again, silent and motionless. Morrel knew not if he were dreaming or awake. “Listen,” said the doctor; “I know the full importance of the statement I have just made, and the disposition of the man to whom I have made it.”

“Do you speak to me as a magistrate or as a friend?” asked Villefort.

“As a friend, and only as a friend, at this moment. The similarity in the symptoms of tetanus and poisoning by vegetable substances is so great, that were I obliged to affirm by oath what I have now stated, I should hesitate; I therefore repeat to you, I speak not to a magistrate, but to a friend. And to that friend I say. ‘During the three-quarters of an hour that the struggle continued, I watched the convulsions and the death of Madame de Saint-Meran, and am thoroughly convinced that not only did her death proceed from poison, but I could also specify the poison.’“

“Can it be possible?”

“The symptoms are marked, do you see? — sleep broken by nervous spasms, excitation of the brain, torpor of the nerve centres. Madame de Saint-Meran succumbed to a powerful dose of brucine or of strychnine, which by some mistake, perhaps, has been given to her.” Villefort seized the doctor’s hand. “Oh, it is impossible,” said he, “I must be dreaming! It is frightful to hear such things from such a man as you! Tell me, I entreat you, my dear doctor, that you may be deceived.”

“Doubtless I may, but” —

“But?”

“But I do not think so.”

“Have pity on me doctor! So many dreadful things have happened to me lately that I am on the verge of madness.”

“Has any one besides me seen Madame de Saint-Meran?”

“No.”

“Has anything been sent for from a chemist’s that I have not examined?”

“Nothing.”

“Had Madame de Saint-Meran any enemies?”

“Not to my knowledge.”

“Would her death affect any one’s interest?”

“It could not indeed, my daughter is her only heiress — Valentine alone. Oh, if such a thought could present itself, I would stab myself to punish my heart for having for one instant harbored it.”

“Indeed, my dear friend,” said M. d’Avrigny, “I would not accuse any one; I speak only of an accident, you understand, — of a mistake, — but whether accident or mistake, the fact is there; it is on my conscience and compels me to speak aloud to you. Make inquiry.”

“Of whom? — how? — of what?”

“May not Barrois, the old servant, have made a mistake, and have given Madame de Saint-Meran a dose prepared for his master?”

“For my father?”

“Yes.”

“But how could a dose prepared for M. Noirtier poison Madame de Saint-Meran?”

“Nothing is more simple. You know poisons become remedies in certain diseases, of which paralysis is one. For instance, having tried every other remedy to restore movement and speech to M. Noirtier, I resolved to try one last means, and for three months I have been giving him brucine; so that in the last dose I ordered for him there were six grains. This quantity, which is perfectly safe to administer to the paralyzed frame of M. Noirtier, which has become gradually accustomed to it, would be sufficient to kill another person."

"My dear doctor, there is no communication between M. Noirtier's apartment and that of Madame de Saint-Meran, and Barrois never entered my mother-in-law's room. In short, doctor although I know you to be the most conscientious man in the world, and although I place the utmost reliance in you, I want, notwithstanding my conviction, to believe this axiom, errare humanum est."

"Is there one of my brethren in whom you have equal confidence with myself?"

"Why do you ask me that? — what do you wish?"

"Send for him; I will tell him what I have seen, and we will consult together, and examine the body."

"And you will find traces of poison?"

"No, I did not say of poison, but we can prove what was the state of the body; we shall discover the cause of her sudden death, and we shall say, 'Dear Villefort, if this thing has been caused by negligence, watch over your servants; if from hatred, watch your enemies.'"

"What do you propose to me, d'Avrigny?" said Villefort in despair; "so soon as another is admitted into our secret, an inquest will become necessary; and an inquest in my house — impossible! Still," continued the procureur, looking at the doctor with uneasiness, "if you wish it — if you demand it, why then it shall be done. But, doctor, you see me already so grieved — how can I introduce into my house so much scandal, after so much sorrow? My wife and my daughter would die of it! And I, doctor — you know a man does not arrive at the post I occupy — one has not been king's attorney twenty-five years without having amassed a tolerable number of enemies; mine are numerous. Let this affair be talked of, it will be a triumph for them, which will make them rejoice, and cover me with shame. Pardon me, doctor, these worldly ideas; were you a priest I should not dare tell you that, but you are a man, and you know mankind. Doctor, pray recall your words; you have said nothing, have you?"

"My dear M. de Villefort," replied the doctor, "my first duty is to humanity. I would have saved Madame de Saint-Meran, if science could have done it; but she is dead and my duty regards the living. Let us bury this terrible secret in the deepest recesses of our hearts; I am willing, if any one should suspect this, that my silence on the subject should be imputed to my ignorance. Meanwhile, sir, watch always — watch carefully, for perhaps the evil may not stop here. And when you have found the culprit, if you find him, I will say to you, ‘You are a magistrate, do as you will!’“

“I thank you, doctor,” said Villefort with indescribable joy; “I never had a better friend than you.” And, as if he feared Doctor d’Avrigny would recall his promise, he hurried him towards the house.

When they were gone, Morrel ventured out from under the trees, and the moon shone upon his face, which was so pale it might have been taken for that of a ghost. “I am manifestly protected in a most wonderful, but most terrible manner,” said he; “but Valentine, poor girl, how will she bear so much sorrow?”

As he thought thus, he looked alternately at the window with red curtains and the three windows with white curtains. The light had almost disappeared from the former; doubtless Madame de Villefort had just put out her lamp, and the nightlamp alone reflected its dull light on the window. At the extremity of the building, on the contrary, he saw one of the three windows open. A wax-light placed on the mantle-piece threw some of its pale rays without, and a shadow was seen for one moment on the balcony. Morrel shuddered; he thought he heard a sob.

It cannot be wondered at that his mind, generally so courageous, but now disturbed by the two strongest human passions, love and fear, was weakened even to the indulgence of superstitious thoughts. Although it was impossible that Valentine should see him, hidden as he was, he thought he heard the shadow at the window call him; his disturbed mind told him so. This double error became an irresistible reality, and by one of the incomprehensible transports of youth, he bounded from his hiding-place, and with two strides, at the risk of being seen, at the risk of alarming Valentine, at the risk of being discovered by some exclamation which might escape the young girl, he crossed the flower-garden, which by the light of the moon resembled a large white lake, and having passed the rows of orange-trees which extended in front of the house, he reached the step, ran quickly up and pushed the door, which opened without offering any resistance. Valentine had not seen him. Her eyes, raised towards heaven, were watching a silvery cloud gliding over the azure, its form that of a shadow mounting towards heaven. Her poetic and excited mind pictured it as the soul of her grandmother.

Meanwhile, Morrel had traversed the anteroom and found the staircase, which, being carpeted, prevented his approach being heard, and he had regained that degree of confidence that the presence of M. de Villefort even would not have alarmed him. He was quite prepared for any such encounter. He would at once approach Valentine’s father and acknowledge all, begging Villefort to pardon and sanction the love which united two fond and loving hearts. Morrel was mad. Happily he did not meet any one. Now, especially, did he find the description Valentine had given of the interior of the house useful to him; he arrived safely at the top of the staircase, and while he was feeling his way, a sob indicated the direction he was to take. He turned back, a door partly open enabled him to see his road, and to hear the voice of one in sorrow. He pushed the door open and entered. At the other end of the room, under a white sheet which covered it, lay the corpse, still more alarming to Morrel since the account he had so unexpectedly overheard. By its side, on her knees, and with her head buried in the cushion of an easy-chair, was Valentine, trembling and sobbing, her hands extended above her head, clasped and stiff. She had turned from the window, which remained open, and was praying in accents that would have affected the most unfeeling; her words were rapid, incoherent, unintelligible, for the burning weight of grief almost stopped her utterance. The moon shining through the open blinds made the lamp appear to burn paler, and cast a sepulchral hue over the whole scene. Morrel could not resist this; he was not exemplary for piety, he was not easily impressed, but Valentine suffering, weeping, wringing her hands before him, was more than he could bear in silence. He sighed, and whispered a name, and the head bathed in tears and pressed on the velvet cushion of the chair — a head like that of a Magdalen by Correggio — was raised and turned towards him. Valentine perceived him without betraying the least surprise. A heart overwhelmed with one great grief is insensible to minor emotions. Morrel held out his hand to her. Valentine, as her only apology for not having met him, pointed to the corpse under the sheet, and began to sob again. Neither dared for some time to speak in that room. They hesitated to break the silence which death seemed to impose; at length Valentine ventured.

“My friend,” said she, “how came you here? Alas, I would say you are welcome, had not death opened the way for you into this house.”

“Valentine,” said Morrel with a trembling voice, “I had waited since half-past eight, and did not see you come; I became uneasy, leaped the wall, found my way through the garden, when voices conversing about the fatal event” —

“What voices?” asked Valentine. Morrel shuddered as he thought of the conversation of the doctor and M. de Villefort, and he thought he could see through the sheet the extended hands, the stiff neck, and the purple lips.

“Your servants,” said he, “who were repeating the whole of the sorrowful story; from them I learned it all.”

“But it was risking the failure of our plan to come up here, love.”

“Forgive me,” replied Morrel; “I will go away.”

“No,” said Valentine, “you might meet some one; stay.”

“But if any one should come here” —

The young girl shook her head. “No one will come,” said she; “do not fear, there is our safeguard,” pointing to the bed.

“But what has become of M. d’Epinay?” replied Morrel.

“M. Franz arrived to sign the contract just as my dear grandmother was dying.”

“Alas,” said Morrel with a feeling of selfish joy; for he thought this death would cause the wedding to be postponed indefinitely. “But what redoubles my sorrow,” continued the young girl, as if this feeling was to receive its immediate punishment, “is that the poor old lady, on her death-bed, requested that the marriage might take place as soon as possible; she also, thinking to protect me, was acting against me.”

“Hark!” said Morrel. They both listened; steps were distinctly heard in the corridor and on the stairs.

“It is my father, who has just left his study.”

“To accompany the doctor to the door,” added Morrel.

“How do you know it is the doctor?” asked Valentine, astonished.

“I imagined it must be,” said Morrel. Valentine looked at the young man; they heard the street door close, then M. de Villefort locked the garden door, and returned up-stairs. He stopped a moment in the anteroom, as if hesitating whether to turn to his own apartment or into Madame de Saint-Meran’s; Morrel concealed himself behind a door; Valentine remained motionless, grief seeming to deprive her of all fear. M. de Villefort passed on to his own room. “Now,” said Valentine, “you can neither go out by the front door nor by the garden.” Morrel looked at her with astonishment.

“There is but one way left you that is safe,” said she; “it is through my grandfather’s room.” She rose, “Come,” she added. — ”Where?” asked Maximilian.

“To my grandfather’s room.”

“I in M. Noirtier’s apartment?”

“Yes.”

“Can you mean it, Valentine?”

“I have long wished it; he is my only remaining friend and we both need his help, — come.”

“Be careful, Valentine,” said Morrel, hesitating to comply with the young girl’s wishes; “I now see my error — I acted like a madman in coming in here. Are you sure you are more reasonable?”

“Yes,” said Valentine; “and I have but one scruple, — that of leaving my dear grandmother’s remains, which I had undertaken to watch.”

“Valentine,” said Morrel, “death is in itself sacred.”

“Yes,” said Valentine; “besides, it will not be for long.” She then crossed the corridor, and led the way down a narrow staircase to M. Noirtier’s room; Morrel followed her on tiptoe; at the door they found the old servant. “Barrois,” said Valentine, “shut the door, and let no one come in.” She passed first. Noirtier, seated in his chair, and listening to every sound, was watching the door; he saw Valentine, and his eye brightened. There was something grave and solemn in the approach of the young girl which struck the old man, and immediately his bright eye began to interrogate. “Dear grandfather.” said she hurriedly, “you know poor grandmamma died an hour since, and now I have no friend in the world but you.” His expressive eyes evinced the greatest tenderness. “To you alone, then, may I confide my sorrows and my hopes?” The paralytic motioned “Yes.” Valentine took Maximilian’s hand. “Look attentively, then, at this gentleman.” The old man fixed his scrutinizing gaze with slight astonishment on Morrel. “It is M. Maximilian Morrel,” said she; “the son of that good merchant of Marseilles, whom you doubtless recollect.”

“Yes,” said the old man. “He brings an irreproachable name, which Maximilian is likely to render glorious, since at thirty years of age he is a captain, an officer of the Legion of Honor.” The old man signified that he recollected him. “Well, grandpapa,” said Valentine, kneeling before him, and pointing to Maximilian, “I love him, and will be only his; were I compelled to marry another, I would destroy myself.”

The eyes of the paralytic expressed a multitude of tumultuous thoughts. “You like M. Maximilian Morrel, do you not, grandpapa?” asked Valentine.

“Yes.”

“And you will protect us, who are your children, against the will of my father?” — Noirtier cast an intelligent glance at Morrel, as if to say, “perhaps I may.” Maximilian understood him.

“Mademoiselle,” said he, “you have a sacred duty to fulfil in your deceased grandmother’s room, will you allow me the honor of a few minutes’ conversation with M. Noirtier?”

“That is it,” said the old man’s eye. Then he looked anxiously at Valentine.

“Do you fear he will not understand?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, we have so often spoken of you, that he knows exactly how I talk to you.” Then turning to Maximilian, with an adorable smile; although shaded by sorrow, — ”He knows everything I know,” said she.

Valentine arose, placed a chair for Morrel, requested Barrois not to admit any one, and having tenderly embraced her grandfather, and sorrowfully taken leave of Morrel, she went away. To prove to Noirtier that he was in Valentine’s confidence and knew all their secrets, Morrel took the dictionary, a pen, and some paper, and placed them all on a table where there was a light.

“But first,” said Morrel, “allow me, sir, to tell you who I am, how much I love Mademoiselle Valentine, and what are my designs respecting her.” Noirtier made a sign that he would listen.

It was an imposing sight to witness this old man, apparently a mere useless burden, becoming the sole protector, support, and adviser of the lovers who were both young, beautiful, and strong. His remarkably noble and austere expression struck Morrel, who began his story with trembling. He related the manner in which he had become acquainted with Valentine, and how he had loved her, and that Valentine, in her solitude and her misfortune, had accepted the offer of his devotion. He told him his birth, his position, his fortune, and more than once, when he consulted the look of the paralytic, that look answered, “That is good, proceed.”

“And now,” said Morrel, when he had finished the first part of his recital, “now I have told you of my love and my hopes, may I inform you of my intentions?”

"Yes," signified the old man.

"This was our resolution; a cabriolet was in waiting at the gate, in which I intended to carry off Valentine to my sister's house, to marry her, and to wait respectfully M. de Villefort's pardon."

"No," said Noirtier.

"We must not do so?"

"No."

"You do not sanction our project?"

"No."

"There is another way," said Morrel. The old man's interrogative eye said, "What?"

"I will go," continued Maximilian, "I will seek M. Franz d'Epinay — I am happy to be able to mention this in Mademoiselle de Villefort's absence — and will conduct myself toward him so as to compel him to challenge me." Noirtier's look continued to interrogate. "You wish to know what I will do?"

"Yes."

"I will find him, as I told you. I will tell him the ties which bind me to Mademoiselle Valentine; if he be a sensible man, he will prove it by renouncing of his own accord the hand of his betrothed, and will secure my friendship, and love until death; if he refuse, either through interest or ridiculous pride, after I have proved to him that he would be forcing my wife from me, that Valentine loves me, and will have no other, I will fight with him, give him every advantage, and I shall kill him, or he will kill me; if I am victorious, he will not marry Valentine, and if I die, I am very sure Valentine will not marry him." Noirtier watched, with indescribable pleasure, this noble and sincere countenance, on which every sentiment his tongue uttered was depicted, adding by the expression of his fine features all that coloring adds to a sound and faithful drawing. Still, when Morrel had finished, he shut his eyes several times, which was his manner of saying "No."

"No?" said Morrel; "you disapprove of this second project, as you did of the first?"

"I do," signified the old man.

"But what then must be done?" asked Morrel. "Madame de Saint-Meran's last request was, that the marriage might not be delayed; must I let things take their course?” Noirtier did not move. “I understand,” said Morrel; “I am to wait.”

“Yes.”

“But delay may ruin our plan, sir,” replied the young man. “Alone, Valentine has no power; she will be compelled to submit. I am here almost miraculously, and can scarcely hope for so good an opportunity to occur again. Believe me, there are only the two plans I have proposed to you; forgive my vanity, and tell me which you prefer. Do you authorize Mademoiselle Valentine to intrust herself to my honor?”

“No.”

“Do you prefer I should seek M. d’Epinay?”

“No.”

“Whence then will come the help we need — from chance?” resumed Morrel.

“No.”

“From you?”

“Yes.”

“You thoroughly understand me, sir? Pardon my eagerness, for my life depends on your answer. Will our help come from you?”

“Yes.”

“You are sure of it?”

“Yes.” There was so much firmness in the look which gave this answer, no one could, at any rate, doubt his will, if they did his power. “Oh, thank you a thousand times! But how, unless a miracle should restore your speech, your gesture, your movement, how can you, chained to that arm-chair, dumb and motionless, oppose this marriage?” A smile lit up the old man’s face, a strange smile of the eyes in a paralyzed face. “Then I must wait?” asked the young man.

“Yes.”

“But the contract?” The same smile returned. “Will you assure me it shall not be signed?”

“Yes,” said Noirtier.

“The contract shall not be signed!” cried Morrel. “Oh, pardon me, sir; I can scarcely realize so great a happiness. Will they not sign it?”

“No,” said the paralytic. Notwithstanding that assurance, Morrel still hesitated. This promise of an impotent old man was so strange that, instead of being the result of the power of his will, it might emanate from enfeebled organs. Is it not natural that the madman, ignorant of his folly, should attempt things beyond his power? The weak man talks of burdens he can raise, the timid of giants he can confront, the poor of treasures he spends, the most humble peasant, in the height of his pride, calls himself Jupiter. Whether Noirtier understood the young man's indecision, or whether he had not full confidence in his docility, he looked uneasily at him. "What do you wish, sir?" asked Morrel; "that I should renew my promise of remaining tranquil?" Noirtier's eye remained fixed and firm, as if to imply that a promise did not suffice; then it passed from his face to his hands.

"Shall I swear to you, sir?" asked Maximilian.

"Yes," said the paralytic with the same solemnity. Morrel understood that the old man attached great importance to an oath. He extended his hand.

"I swear to you, on my honor," said he, "to await your decision respecting the course I am to pursue with M. d'Epinay."

"That is right," said the old man.

"Now," said Morrel, "do you wish me to retire?"

"Yes."

"Without seeing Mademoiselle Valentine?"

"Yes."

Morrel made a sign that he was ready to obey. "But," said he, "first allow me to embrace you as your daughter did just now." Noirtier's expression could not be understood. The young man pressed his lips on the same spot, on the old man's forehead, where Valentine's had been. Then he bowed a second time and retired. He found outside the door the old servant, to whom Valentine had given directions. Morrel was conducted along a dark passage, which led to a little door opening on the garden, soon found the spot where he had entered, with the assistance of the shrubs gained the top of the wall, and by his ladder was in an instant in the clover-field where his cabriolet was still waiting for him. He got in it, and thoroughly wearied by so many emotions, arrived about midnight in the Rue Meslay, threw himself on his bed and slept soundly.

Chapter 74

The Villefort Family Vault.

Two days after, a considerable crowd was assembled, towards ten o'clock in the morning, around the door of M. de Villefort's house, and a long file of mourning-coaches and private carriages extended along the Faubourg Saint-Honore and the Rue de la Pepiniere. Among them was one of a very singular form, which appeared to have come from a distance. It was a kind of covered wagon, painted black, and was one of the first to arrive. Inquiry was made, and it was ascertained that, by a strange coincidence, this carriage contained the corpse of the Marquis de Saint-Meran, and that those who had come thinking to attend one funeral would follow two. Their number was great. The Marquis de Saint-Meran, one of the most zealous and faithful dignitaries of Louis XVIII. and King Charles X., had preserved a great number of friends, and these, added to the personages whom the usages of society gave Villefort a claim on, formed a considerable body.

Due information was given to the authorities, and permission obtained that the two funerals should take place at the same time. A second hearse, decked with the same funereal pomp, was brought to M. de Villefort's door, and the coffin removed into it from the post-wagon. The two bodies were to be interred in the cemetery of Pere-la-Chaise, where M. de Villefort had long since had a tomb prepared for the reception of his family. The remains of poor Renee were already deposited there, and now, after ten years of separation, her father and mother were to be reunited with her. The Parisians, always curious, always affected by funereal display, looked on with religious silence while the splendid procession accompanied to their last abode two of the number of the old aristocracy — the greatest protectors of commerce and sincere devotees to their principles. In one of the mourning-coaches Beauchamp, Debray, and Chateau-Renaud were talking of the very sudden death of the marchioness. "I saw Madame de Saint-Meran only last year at Marseilles, when I was coming back from Algiers," said Chateau-Renaud; "she looked like a woman destined to live to be a hundred years old, from her apparent sound health and great activity of mind and body. How old was she?"

"Franz assured me," replied Albert, "that she was sixty-six years old. But she has not died of old age, but of grief; it appears that since the death of the marquis, which affected her very deeply, she has not completely recovered her reason."

"But of what disease, then, did she die?" asked Debray.

"It is said to have been a congestion of the brain, or apoplexy, which is the same thing, is it not?"

"Nearly."

"It is difficult to believe that it was apoplexy," said Beauchamp. "Madame de Saint-Meran, whom I once saw, was short, of slender form, and of a much more nervous than sanguine temperament; grief could hardly produce apoplexy in such a constitution as that of Madame de Saint-Meran."

"At any rate," said Albert, "whatever disease or doctor may have killed her, M. de Villefort, or rather, Mademoiselle Valentine, — or, still rather, our friend Franz, inherits a magnificent fortune, amounting, I believe, to 80,000 livres per annum."

"And this fortune will be doubled at the death of the old Jacobin, Noirtier."

"That is a tenacious old grandfather," said Beauchamp. "Tenacem propositi virum. I think he must have made an agreement with death to outlive all his heirs, and he appears likely to succeed. He resembles the old Conventionalist of '93, who said to Napoleon, in 1814, 'You bend because your empire is a young stem, weakened by rapid growth. Take the Republic for a tutor; let us return with renewed strength to the battle-field, and I promise you 500,000 soldiers, another Marengo, and a second Austerlitz. Ideas do not become extinct, sire; they slumber sometimes, but only revive the stronger before they sleep entirely.' Ideas and men appeared the same to him. One thing only puzzles me, namely, how Franz d'Epinay will like a grandfather who cannot be separated from his wife. But where is Franz?"

"In the first carriage, with M. de Villefort, who considers him already as one of the family."

Such was the conversation in almost all the carriages; these two sudden deaths, so quickly following each other, astonished every one, but no one suspected the terrible secret which M. d'Avrigny had communicated, in his nocturnal walk to M. de Villefort. They arrived in about an hour at the cemetery; the weather was mild, but dull, and in harmony with the funeral ceremony. Among the groups which flocked towards the family vault, Chateau-Renaud recognized Morrel, who had come alone in a cabriolet, and walked silently along the path bordered with yew-trees. “You here?” said Chateau-Renaud, passing his arms through the young captain’s; “are you a friend of Villefort’s? How is it that I have never met you at his house?”

“I am no acquaintance of M. de Villefort’s.” answered Morrel, “but I was of Madame de Saint-Meran.” Albert came up to them at this moment with Franz.

“The time and place are but ill-suited for an introduction.” said Albert; “but we are not superstitious. M. Morrel, allow me to present to you M. Franz d’Epinay, a delightful travelling companion, with whom I made the tour of Italy. My dear Franz, M. Maximilian Morrel, an excellent friend I have acquired in your absence, and whose name you will hear me mention every time I make any allusion to affection, wit, or amiability.” Morrel hesitated for a moment; he feared it would be hypocritical to accost in a friendly manner the man whom he was tacitly opposing, but his oath and the gravity of the circumstances recurred to his memory; he struggled to conceal his emotion and bowed to Franz. “Mademoiselle de Villefort is in deep sorrow, is she not?” said Debray to Franz.

“Extremely,” replied he; “she looked so pale this morning, I scarcely knew her.” These apparently simple words pierced Morrel to the heart. This man had seen Valentine, and spoken to her! The young and high-spirited officer required all his strength of mind to resist breaking his oath. He took the arm of Chateau-Renaud, and turned towards the vault, where the attendants had already placed the two coffins. “This is a magnificent habitation,” said Beauchamp, looking towards the mausoleum; “a summer and winter palace. You will, in turn, enter it, my dear d’Epinay, for you will soon be numbered as one of the family. I, as a philosopher, should like a little country-house, a cottage down there under the trees, without so many free-stones over my poor body. In dying, I will say to those around me what Voltaire wrote to Piron: ‘Eo rus, and all will be over.’ But come, Franz, take courage, your wife is an heiress.”

“Indeed, Beauchamp, you are unbearable. Politics has made you laugh at everything, and political men have made you disbelieve everything. But when you have the honor of associating with ordinary men, and the pleasure of leaving politics for a moment, try to find your affectionate heart, which you leave with your stick when you go to the Chamber."

"But tell me," said Beauchamp, "what is life? Is it not a hall in Death's anteroom?"

"I am prejudiced against Beauchamp," said Albert, drawing Franz away, and leaving the former to finish his philosophical dissertation with Debray. The Villefort vault formed a square of white stones, about twenty feet high; an interior partition separated the two families, and each apartment had its entrance door. Here were not, as in other tombs, ignoble drawers, one above another, where thrift bestows its dead and labels them like specimens in a museum; all that was visible within the bronze gates was a gloomy-looking room, separated by a wall from the vault itself. The two doors before mentioned were in the middle of this wall, and enclosed the Villefort and Saint-Meran coffins. There grief might freely expend itself without being disturbed by the trifling loungers who came from a picnic party to visit Pere-la-Chaise, or by lovers who make it their rendezvous.

The two coffins were placed on trestles previously prepared for their reception in the right-hand crypt belonging to the Saint-Meran family. Villefort, Franz, and a few near relatives alone entered the sanctuary.

As the religious ceremonies had all been performed at the door, and there was no address given, the party all separated; Chateau-Renaud, Albert, and Morrel, went one way, and Debray and Beauchamp the other. Franz remained with M. de Villefort; at the gate of the cemetery, Morrel made an excuse to wait; he saw Franz and M. de Villefort get into the same mourning coach, and thought this meeting forboded evil. He then returned to Paris, and although in the same carriage with Chateau-Renaud and Albert, he did not hear one word of their conversation. As Franz was about to take leave of M. de Villefort, "When shall I see you again?" said the latter.

"At what time you please, sir," replied Franz.

"As soon as possible."

"I am at your command, sir; shall we return together?"

"If not unpleasant to you."

"On the contrary, I shall feel much pleasure." Thus, the future father and son-in-law stepped into the same carriage, and Morrel, seeing them pass, became uneasy. Villefort and Franz returned to the Faubourg Saint-Honore. The procureur, without going to see either his wife or his daughter, went at once to his study, and, offering the young man a chair, — ”M. d’Epinay,” said he, “allow me to remind you at this moment, — which is perhaps not so ill-chosen as at first sight may appear, for obedience to the wishes of the departed is the first offering which should be made at their tomb, — allow me then to remind you of the wish expressed by Madame de Saint-Meran on her death-bed, that Valentine’s wedding might not be deferred. You know the affairs of the deceased are in perfect order, and her will bequeaths to Valentine the entire property of the Saint-Meran family; the notary showed me the documents yesterday, which will enable us to draw up the contract immediately. You may call on the notary, M. Deschamps, Place Beauveau, Faubourg Saint-Honore, and you have my authority to inspect those deeds.”

“Sir,” replied M. d’Epinay, “it is not, perhaps, the moment for Mademoiselle Valentine, who is in deep distress, to think of a husband; indeed, I fear” —

“Valentine will have no greater pleasure than that of fulfilling her grandmother’s last injunctions; there will be no obstacle from that quarter, I assure you.”

“In that case,” replied Franz, “as I shall raise none, you may make arrangements when you please; I have pledged my word, and shall feel pleasure and happiness in adhering to it.”

“Then,” said Villefort, “nothing further is required. The contract was to have been signed three days since; we shall find it all ready, and can sign it to-day.”

“But the mourning?” said Franz, hesitating.

“Don’t be uneasy on that score,” replied Villefort; “no ceremony will be neglected in my house. Mademoiselle de Villefort may retire during the prescribed three months to her estate of Saint-Meran; I say hers, for she inherits it to-day. There, after a few days, if you like, the civil marriage shall be celebrated without pomp or ceremony. Madame de Saint-Meran wished her daughter should be married there. When that is over, you, sir, can return to Paris, while your wife passes the time of her mourning with her mother-in-law.”

“As you please, sir,” said Franz.

“Then,” replied M. de Villefort, “have the kindness to wait half an hour; Valentine shall come down into the drawing-room. I will send for M. Deschamps; we will read and sign the contract before we separate, and this evening Madame de Villefort shall accompany Valentine to her estate, where we will rejoin them in a week.”

“Sir,” said Franz, “I have one request to make.”

“What is it?”

“I wish Albert de Morcerf and Raoul de Chateau-Renaud to be present at this signature; you know they are my witnesses.”

“Half an hour will suffice to apprise them; will you go for them yourself, or shall you send?”

“I prefer going, sir.”

“I shall expect you, then, in half an hour, baron, and Valentine will be ready.” Franz bowed and left the room. Scarcely had the door closed, when M. de Villefort sent to tell Valentine to be ready in the drawing-room in half an hour, as he expected the notary and M. d’Epinay and his witnesses. The news caused a great sensation throughout the house; Madame de Villefort would not believe it, and Valentine was thunderstruck. She looked around for help, and would have gone down to her grandfather’s room, but on the stairs she met M. de Villefort, who took her arm and led her into the drawing-room. In the anteroom, Valentine met Barrois, and looked despairingly at the old servant. A moment later, Madame de Villefort entered the drawing-room with her little Edward. It was evident that she had shared the grief of the family, for she was pale and looked fatigued. She sat down, took Edward on her knees, and from time to time pressed this child, on whom her affections appeared centred, almost convulsively to her bosom. Two carriages were soon heard to enter the court yard. One was the notary’s; the other, that of Franz and his friends. In a moment the whole party was assembled. Valentine was so pale one might trace the blue veins from her temples, round her eyes and down her cheeks. Franz was deeply affected. Chateau-Renaud and Albert looked at each other with amazement; the ceremony which was just concluded had not appeared more sorrowful than did that which was about to begin. Madame de Villefort had placed herself in the shadow behind a velvet curtain, and as she constantly bent over her child, it was difficult to read the expression of her face. M. de Villefort was, as usual, unmoved.

The notary, after having according to the customary method arranged the papers on the table, taken his place in an armchair, and raised his spectacles, turned towards Franz:

"Are you M. Franz de Quesnel, baron d'Epinay?" asked he, although he knew it perfectly.

"Yes, sir," replied Franz. The notary bowed. "I have, then, to inform you, sir, at the request of M. de Villefort, that your projected marriage with Mademoiselle de Villefort has changed the feeling of M. Noirtier towards his grandchild, and that he disinherits her entirely of the fortune he would have left her. Let me hasten to add," continued he, "that the testator, having only the right to alienate a part of his fortune, and having alienated it all, the will will not bear scrutiny, and is declared null and void."

"Yes." said Villefort; "but I warn M. d'Epinay, that during my life-time my father's will shall never be questioned, my position forbidding any doubt to be entertained."

"Sir," said Franz, "I regret much that such a question has been raised in the presence of Mademoiselle Valentine; I have never inquired the amount of her fortune, which, however limited it may be, exceeds mine. My family has sought consideration in this alliance with M. de Villefort; all I seek is happiness." Valentine imperceptibly thanked him, while two silent tears rolled down her cheeks. "Besides, sir," said Villefort, addressing himself to his future son-in-law, "excepting the loss of a portion of your hopes, this unexpected will need not personally wound you; M. Noirtier's weakness of mind sufficiently explains it. It is not because Mademoiselle Valentine is going to marry you that he is angry, but because she will marry, a union with any other would have caused him the same sorrow. Old age is selfish, sir, and Mademoiselle de Villefort has been a faithful companion to M. Noirtier, which she cannot be when she becomes the Baroness d'Epinay. My father's melancholy state prevents our speaking to him on any subjects, which the weakness of his mind would incapacitate him from understanding, and I am perfectly convinced that at the present time, although, he knows that his granddaughter is going to be married, M. Noirtier has even forgotten the name of his intended grandson." M. de Villefort had scarcely said this, when the door opened, and Barrois appeared.

"Gentlemen," said he, in a tone strangely firm for a servant speaking to his masters under such solemn circumstances, — "gentlemen, M. Noirtier de Villefort wishes to speak immediately to M. Franz de Quesnel, baron d'Epinay;" he, as well as the notary, that there might be no mistake in the person, gave all his titles to the bride-groom elect.

Villefort started, Madame de Villefort let her son slip from her knees, Valentine rose, pale and dumb as a statue. Albert and Chateau-Renaud exchanged a second look, more full of amazement than the first. The notary looked at Villefort. “It is impossible,” said the procureur. “M. d’Epinay cannot leave the drawing-room at present.”

“It is at this moment,” replied Barrois with the same firmness, “that M. Noirtier, my master, wishes to speak on important subjects to M. Franz d’Epinay.”

“Grandpapa Noirtier can speak now, then,” said Edward, with his habitual quickness. However, his remark did not make Madame de Villefort even smile, so much was every mind engaged, and so solemn was the situation. Astonishment was at its height. Something like a smile was perceptible on Madame de Villefort’s countenance. Valentine instinctively raised her eyes, as if to thank heaven.

“Pray go, Valentine,” said; M. de Villefort, “and see what this new fancy of your grandfather’s is.” Valentine rose quickly, and was hastening joyfully towards the door, when M. de Villefort altered his intention.

“Stop,” said he; “I will go with you.”

“Excuse me, sir,” said Franz, “since M. Noirtier sent for me, I am ready to attend to his wish; besides, I shall be happy to pay my respects to him, not having yet had the honor of doing so.”

“Pray, sir,” said Villefort with marked uneasiness, “do not disturb yourself.”

“Forgive me, sir,” said Franz in a resolute tone. “I would not lose this opportunity of proving to M. Noirtier how wrong it would be of him to encourage feelings of dislike to me, which I am determined to conquer, whatever they may be, by my devotion.” And without listening to Villefort he arose, and followed Valentine, who was running down-stairs with the joy of a shipwrecked mariner who finds a rock to cling to. M. de Villefort followed them. Chateau-Renaud and Morcerf exchanged a third look of still increasing wonder.

Chapter 75

A Signed Statement.

Noirtier was prepared to receive them, dressed in black, and installed in his arm-chair. When the three persons he expected had entered, he looked at the door, which his valet immediately closed.

“Listen,” whispered Villefort to Valentine, who could not conceal her joy; “if M. Noirtier wishes to communicate anything which would delay your marriage, I forbid you to understand him.” Valentine blushed, but did not answer. Villefort, approaching Noirtier — ”Here is M. Franz d’Epinay,” said he; “you requested to see him. We have all wished for this interview, and I trust it will convince you how ill-formed are your objections to Valentine’s marriage.”

Noirtier answered only by a look which made Villefort’s blood run cold. He motioned to Valentine to approach. In a moment, thanks to her habit of conversing with her grandfather, she understood that he asked for a key. Then his eye was fixed on the drawer of a small chest between the windows. She opened the drawer, and found a key; and, understanding that was what he wanted, again watched his eyes, which turned toward an old secretary which had been neglected for many years and was supposed to contain nothing but useless documents. “Shall I open the secretary?” asked Valentine.

“Yes,” said the old man.

“And the drawers?”

“Yes.”

“Those at the side?”

“No.”

“The middle one?”

“Yes.” Valentine opened it and drew out a bundle of papers. “Is that what you wish for?” asked she.

“No.”

She took successively all the other papers out till the drawer was empty. “But there are no more,” said she. Noirtier’s eye was fixed on the dictionary. “Yes, I understand, grandfather,” said the young girl.

He pointed to each letter of the alphabet. At the letter S the old man stopped her. She opened, and found the word “secret.”

“Ah, is there a secret spring?” said Valentine.

“Yes,” said Noirtier.

“And who knows it?” Noirtier looked at the door where the servant had gone out. “Barrois?” said she.

“Yes.”

“Shall I call him?”

“Yes.”

Valentine went to the door, and called Barrois. Villefort’s impatience during this scene made the perspiration roll from his forehead, and Franz was stupefied. The old servant came. “Barrois,” said Valentine, “my grandfather has told me to open that drawer in the secretary, but there is a secret spring in it, which you know — will you open it?”

Barrois looked at the old man. “Obey,” said Noirtier’s intelligent eye. Barrois touched a spring, the false bottom came out, and they saw a bundle of papers tied with a black string.

“Is that what you wish for?” said Barrois.

“Yes.”

“Shall I give these papers to M. de Villefort?”

“No.”

“To Mademoiselle Valentine?”

“No.”

“To M. Franz d’Epinay?”

“Yes.”

Franz, astonished, advanced a step. “To me, sir?” said he.

“Yes.” Franz took them from Barrois and casting a glance at the cover, read: —

“‘To be given, after my death, to General Durand, who shall bequeath the packet to his son, with an injunction to preserve it as containing an important document.’

“Well, sir,” asked Franz, “what do you wish me to do with this paper?”

“To preserve it, sealed up as it is, doubtless,” said the procureur.

“No,” replied Noirtier eagerly.

“Do you wish him to read it?” said Valentine.

“Yes,” replied the old man. “You understand, baron, my grandfather wishes you to read this paper,” said Valentine.

“Then let us sit down,” said Villefort impatiently, “for it will take some time.”

“Sit down,” said the old man. Villefort took a chair, but Valentine remained standing by her father’s side, and Franz before him, holding the mysterious paper in his hand. “Read,” said the old man. Franz untied it, and in the midst of the most profound silence read:

“‘Extract from the Report of a meeting of the Bonapartist Club in the Rue Saint-Jacques, held February 5th, 1815.’“

Franz stopped. “February 5th, 1815!” said he; “it is the day my father was murdered.” Valentine and Villefort were dumb; the eye of the old man alone seemed to say clearly, “Go on.”

“But it was on leaving this club,” said he, “my father disappeared.” Noirtier’s eye continued to say, “Read.” He resumed: —

“‘The undersigned Louis Jacques Beaurepaire, lieutenant-colonel of artillery, Etienne Duchampy, general of brigade, and Claude Lecharpal, keeper of woods and forests, Declare, that on the 4th of February, a letter arrived from the Island of Elba, recommending to the kindness and the confidence of the Bonapartist Club, General Flavien de Quesnel, who having served the emperor from 1804. to 1814 was supposed to be devoted to the interests of the Napoleon dynasty, notwithstanding the title of baron which Louis XVIII. had just granted to him with his estate of Epinay.

“‘A note was in consequence addressed to General de Quesnel, begging him to be present at the meeting next day, the 5th. The note indicated neither the street nor the number of the house where the meeting was to be held; it bore no signature, but it announced to the general that some one would call for him if he would be ready at nine o’clock. The meetings were always held from that time till midnight. At nine o’clock the president of the club presented himself; the general was ready, the president informed him that one of the conditions of his introduction was that he should be eternally ignorant of the place of meeting, and that he would allow his eyes to be bandaged, swearing that he would not endeavor to take off the bandage. General de Quesnel accepted the condition, and promised on his honor not to seek to discover the road they took. The general’s carriage was ready, but the president told him it was impossible for him to use it, since it was useless to blindfold the master if the coachman knew through what streets he went. “What must be done then?” asked the general. — ”I have my carriage here,” said the president.

“‘“Have you, then, so much confidence in your servant that you can intrust him with a secret you will not allow me to know?”

“‘“Our coachman is a member of the club,” said the president; “we shall be driven by a State-Councillor.”

“‘“Then we run another risk,” said the general, laughing, “that of being upset.” We insert this joke to prove that the general was not in the least compelled to attend the meeting, but that he came willingly. When they were seated in the carriage the president reminded the general of his promise to allow his eyes to be bandaged, to which he made no opposition. On the road the president thought he saw the general make an attempt to remove the handkerchief, and reminded him of his oath. “Sure enough,” said the general. The carriage stopped at an alley leading out of the Rue Saint-Jacques. The general alighted, leaning on the arm of the president, of whose dignity he was not aware, considering him simply as a member of the club; they went through the alley, mounted a flight of stairs, and entered the assembly-room.

“‘The deliberations had already begun. The members, apprised of the sort of presentation which was to be made that evening, were all in attendance. When in the middle of the room the general was invited to remove his bandage, he did so immediately, and was surprised to see so many well-known faces in a society of whose existence he had till then been ignorant. They questioned him as to his sentiments, but he contented himself with answering, that the letters from the Island of Elba ought to have informed them’“ —

Franz interrupted himself by saying, “My father was a royalist; they need not have asked his sentiments, which were well known.”

“And hence,” said Villefort, “arose my affection for your father, my dear M. Franz. Opinions held in common are a ready bond of union.”

“Read again,” said the old man. Franz continued: —

“‘The president then sought to make him speak more explicitly, but M. de Quesnel replied that he wished first to know what they wanted with him. He was then informed of the contents of the letter from the Island of Elba, in which he was recommended to the club as a man who would be likely to advance the interests of their party. One paragraph spoke of the return of Bonaparte and promised another letter and further details, on the arrival of the Pharaon belonging to the shipbuilder Morrel, of Marseilles, whose captain was entirely devoted to the emperor. During all this time, the general, on whom they thought to have relied as on a brother, manifested evidently signs of discontent and repugnance. When the reading was finished, he remained silent, with knitted brows.

"'"Well," asked the president, "what do you say to this letter, general?"

"'"I say that it is too soon after declaring myself for Louis XVIII. to break my vow in behalf of the ex-emperor." This answer was too clear to permit of any mistake as to his sentiments. "General," said the president, "we acknowledge no King Louis XVIII., or an ex-emperor, but his majesty the emperor and king, driven from France, which is his kingdom, by violence and treason."

"'"Excuse me, gentlemen," said the general; "you may not acknowledge Louis XVIII., but I do, as he has made me a baron and a field-marshal, and I shall never forget that for these two titles I am indebted to his happy return to France."

"'"Sir," said the president, rising with gravity, "be careful what you say; your words clearly show us that they are deceived concerning you in the Island of Elba, and have deceived us! The communication has been made to you in consequence of the confidence placed in you, and which does you honor. Now we discover our error; a title and promotion attach you to the government we wish to overturn. We will not constrain you to help us; we enroll no one against his conscience, but we will compel you to act generously, even if you are not disposed to do so."

"'"You would call acting generously, knowing your conspiracy and not informing against you, that is what I should call becoming your accomplice. You see I am more candid than you."'"

"Ah, my father!" said Franz, interrupting himself. "I understand now why they murdered him." Valentine could not help casting one glance towards the young man, whose filial enthusiasm it was delightful to behold. Villefort walked to and fro behind them. Noirtier watched the expression of each one, and preserved his dignified and commanding attitude. Franz returned to the manuscript, and continued: —

"'"Sir," said the president, "you have been invited to join this assembly — you were not forced here; it was proposed to you to come blindfolded — you accepted. When you complied with this twofold request you well knew we did not wish to secure the throne of Louis XVIII., or we should not take so much care to avoid the vigilance of the police. It would be conceding too much to allow you to put on a mask to aid you in the discovery of our secret, and then to remove it that you may ruin those who have confided in you. No, no, you must first say if you declare yourself for the king of a day who now reigns, or for his majesty the emperor.”

“‘“I am a royalist,” replied the general; “I have taken the oath of allegiance to Louis XVIII., and I will adhere to it.” These words were followed by a general murmur, and it was evident that several of the members were discussing the propriety of making the general repent of his rashness.

“‘The president again arose, and having imposed silence, said, — ”Sir, you are too serious and too sensible a man not to understand the consequences of our present situation, and your candor has already dictated to us the conditions which remain for us to offer you.” The general, putting his hand on his sword, exclaimed, — ”If you talk of honor, do not begin by disavowing its laws, and impose nothing by violence.”

“‘“And you, sir,” continued the president, with a calmness still more terrible than the general’s anger, “I advise you not to touch your sword.” The general looked around him with slight uneasiness; however he did not yield, but calling up all his fortitude, said, — ”I will not swear.”

“‘“Then you must die,” replied the president calmly. M. d’Epinay became very pale; he looked round him a second time, several members of the club were whispering, and getting their arms from under their cloaks. “General,” said the president, “do not alarm yourself; you are among men of honor who will use every means to convince you before resorting to the last extremity, but as you have said, you are among conspirators, you are in possession of our secret, and you must restore it to us.” A significant silence followed these words, and as the general did not reply, — ”Close the doors,” said the president to the door-keeper.

“‘The same deadly silence succeeded these words. Then the general advanced, and making a violent effort to control his feelings, — ”I have a son,” said he, “and I ought to think of him, finding myself among assassins.”

“‘“General,” said the chief of the assembly, “one man may insult fifty — it is the privilege of weakness. But he does wrong to use his privilege. Follow my advice, swear, and do not insult.” The general, again daunted by the superiority of the chief, hesitated a moment; then advancing to the president’s desk, — ”What is the form, said he.

“‘“It is this: — ’I swear by my honor not to reveal to any one what I have seen and heard on the 5th of February, 1815, between nine and ten o’clock in the evening; and I plead guilty of death should I ever violate this oath.’“ The general appeared to be affected by a nervous tremor, which prevented his answering for some moments; then, overcoming his manifest repugnance, he pronounced the required oath, but in so low a tone as to be scarcely audible to the majority of the members, who insisted on his repeating it clearly and distinctly, which he did.

“‘“Now am I at liberty to retire?” said the general. The president rose, appointed three members to accompany him, and got into the carriage with the general after bandaging his eyes. One of those three members was the coachman who had driven them there. The other members silently dispersed. “Where do you wish to be taken?” asked the president. — ”Anywhere out of your presence,” replied M. d’Epinay. “Beware, sir,” replied the president, “you are no longer in the assembly, and have only to do with individuals; do not insult them unless you wish to be held responsible.” But instead of listening, M. d’Epinay went on, — ”You are still as brave in your carriage as in your assembly because you are still four against one.” The president stopped the coach. They were at that part of the Quai des Ormes where the steps lead down to the river. “Why do you stop here?” asked d’Epinay.

“‘“Because, sir,” said the president, “you have insulted a man, and that man will not go one step farther without demanding honorable reparation.”

“‘“Another method of assassination?” said the general, shrugging his shoulders.

“‘“Make no noise, sir, unless you wish me to consider you as one of the men of whom you spoke just now as cowards, who take their weakness for a shield. You are alone, one alone shall answer you; you have a sword by your side, I have one in my cane; you have no witness, one of these gentlemen will serve you. Now, if you please, remove your bandage.” The general tore the handkerchief from his eyes. “At last,” said he, “I shall know with whom I have to do.” They opened the door and the four men alighted.’“

Franz again interrupted himself, and wiped the cold drops from his brow; there was something awful in hearing the son read aloud in trembling pallor these details of his father’s death, which had hitherto been a mystery. Valentine clasped her hands as if in prayer. Noirtier looked at Villefort with an almost sublime expression of contempt and pride. Franz continued: —

“‘It was, as we said, the fifth of February. For three days the mercury had been five or six degrees below freezing and the steps were covered with ice. The general was stout and tall, the president offered him the side of the railing to assist him in getting down. The two witnesses followed. It was a dark night. The ground from the steps to the river was covered with snow and hoarfrost, the water of the river looked black and deep. One of the seconds went for a lantern in a coal-barge near, and by its light they examined the weapons. The president’s sword, which was simply, as he had said, one he carried in his cane, was five inches shorter than the general’s, and had no guard. The general proposed to cast lots for the swords, but the president said it was he who had given the provocation, and when he had given it he had supposed each would use his own arms. The witnesses endeavored to insist, but the president bade them be silent. The lantern was placed on the ground, the two adversaries took their stations, and the duel began. The light made the two swords appear like flashes of lightning; as for the men, they were scarcely perceptible, the darkness was so great.

“‘General d’Epinay passed for one of the best swordsmen in the army, but he was pressed so closely in the onset that he missed his aim and fell. The witnesses thought he was dead, but his adversary, who knew he had not struck him, offered him the assistance of his hand to rise. The circumstance irritated instead of calming the general, and he rushed on his adversary. But his opponent did not allow his guard to be broken. He received him on his sword and three times the general drew back on finding himself too closely engaged, and then returned to the charge. At the third he fell again. They thought he slipped, as at first, and the witnesses, seeing he did not move, approached and endeavored to raise him, but the one who passed his arm around the body found it was moistened with blood. The general, who had almost fainted, revived. “Ah,” said he, “they have sent some fencing-master to fight with me.” The president, without answering, approached the witness who held the lantern, and raising his sleeve, showed him two wounds he had received in his arm; then opening his coat, and unbuttoning his waistcoat, displayed his side, pierced with a third wound. Still he had not even uttered a sigh. General d’Epinay died five minutes after.’“

Franz read these last words in a voice so choked that they were hardly audible, and then stopped, passing his hand over his eyes as if to dispel a cloud; but after a moment's silence, he continued: —

"'The president went up the steps, after pushing his sword into his cane; a track of blood on the snow marked his course. He had scarcely arrived at the top when he heard a heavy splash in the water — it was the general's body, which the witnesses had just thrown into the river after ascertaining that he was dead. The general fell, then, in a loyal duel, and not in ambush as it might have been reported. In proof of this we have signed this paper to establish the truth of the facts, lest the moment should arrive when either of the actors in this terrible scene should be accused of premeditated murder or of infringement of the laws of honor.

"'Signed, Beaurepaire, Deschamps, and Lecharpal.'"

When Franz had finished reading this account, so dreadful for a son; when Valentine, pale with emotion, had wiped away a tear; when Villefort, trembling, and crouched in a corner, had endeavored to lessen the storm by supplicating glances at the implacable old man, — "Sir," said d'Epinay to Noirtier, "since you are well acquainted with all these details, which are attested by honorable signatures, — since you appear to take some interest in me, although you have only manifested it hitherto by causing me sorrow, refuse me not one final satisfaction — tell me the name of the president of the club, that I may at least know who killed my father." Villefort mechanically felt for the handle of the door; Valentine, who understood sooner than anyone her grandfather's answer, and who had often seen two scars upon his right arm, drew back a few steps. "Mademoiselle," said Franz, turning towards Valentine, "unite your efforts with mine to find out the name of the man who made me an orphan at two years of age." Valentine remained dumb and motionless.

"Hold, sir," said Villefort, "do not prolong this dreadful scene. The names have been purposely concealed; my father himself does not know who this president was, and if he knows, he cannot tell you; proper names are not in the dictionary."

"Oh, misery," cried Franz: "the only hope which sustained me and enabled me to read to the end was that of knowing, at least, the name of him who killed my father! Sir, sir," cried he, turning to Noirtier, "do what you can — make me understand in some way!"

"Yes," replied Noirtier.

“Oh, mademoiselle, — mademoiselle!” cried Franz, “your grandfather says he can indicate the person. Help me, — lend me your assistance!” Noirtier looked at the dictionary. Franz took it with a nervous trembling, and repeated the letters of the alphabet successively, until he came to M. At that letter the old man signified “Yes.”

“M,” repeated Franz. The young man’s finger, glided over the words, but at each one Noirtier answered by a negative sign. Valentine hid her head between her hands. At length, Franz arrived at the word MYSELF.

“Yes!”

“You?” cried Franz, whose hair stood on end; “you, M. Noirtier — you killed my father?”

“Yes!” replied Noirtier, fixing a majestic look on the young man. Franz fell powerless on a chair; Villefort opened the door and escaped, for the idea had entered his mind to stifle the little remaining life in the heart of this terrible old man.

Chapter 76

Progress of Cavalcanti the Younger.

Meanwhile M. Cavalcanti the elder had returned to his service, not in the army of his majesty the Emperor of Austria, but at the gaming-table of the baths of Lucca, of which he was one of the most assiduous courtiers. He had spent every farthing that had been allowed for his journey as a reward for the majestic and solemn manner in which he had maintained his assumed character of father. M. Andrea at his departure inherited all the papers which proved that he had indeed the honor of being the son of the Marquis Bartolomeo and the Marchioness Oliva Corsinari. He was now fairly launched in that Parisian society which gives such ready access to foreigners, and treats them, not as they really are, but as they wish to be considered. Besides, what is required of a young man in Paris? To speak its language tolerably, to make a good appearance, to be a good gamester, and to pay in cash. They are certainly less particular with a foreigner than with a Frenchman. Andrea had, then, in a fortnight, attained a very fair position. He was called count, he was said to possess 50,000 livres per annum; and his father's immense riches, buried in the quarries of Saravezza, were a constant theme. A learned man, before whom the last circumstance was mentioned as a fact, declared he had seen the quarries in question, which gave great weight to assertions hitherto somewhat doubtful, but which now assumed the garb of reality.

Such was the state of society in Paris at the period we bring before our readers, when Monte Cristo went one evening to pay M. Danglars a visit. M. Danglars was out, but the count was asked to go and see the baroness, and he accepted the invitation. It was never without a nervous shudder, since the dinner at Auteuil, and the events which followed it, that Madame Danglars heard Monte Cristo's name announced. If he did not come, the painful sensation became most intense; if, on the contrary, he appeared, his noble countenance, his brilliant eyes, his amiability, his polite attention even towards Madame Danglars, soon dispelled every impression of fear. It appeared impossible to the baroness that a man of such delightfully pleasing manners should entertain evil designs against her; besides, the most corrupt minds only suspect evil when it would answer some interested end — useless injury is repugnant to every mind. When Monte Cristo entered the boudoir, — to which we have already once introduced our readers, and where the baroness was examining some drawings, which her daughter passed to her after having looked at them with M. Cavalcanti, — his presence soon produced its usual effect, and it was with smiles that the baroness received the count, although she had been a little disconcerted at the announcement of his name. The latter took in the whole scene at a glance.

The baroness was partially reclining on a sofa, Eugenie sat near her, and Cavalcanti was standing. Cavalcanti, dressed in black, like one of Goethe's heroes, with varnished shoes and white silk open-worked stockings, passed a white and tolerably nice-looking hand through his light hair, and so displayed a sparkling diamond, that in spite of Monte Cristo's advice the vain young man had been unable to resist putting on his little finger. This movement was accompanied by killing glances at Mademoiselle Danglars, and by sighs launched in the same direction. Mademoiselle Danglars was still the same — cold, beautiful, and satirical. Not one of these glances, nor one sigh, was lost on her; they might have been said to fall on the shield of Minerva, which some philosophers assert protected sometimes the breast of Sappho. Eugenie bowed coldly to the count, and availed herself of the first moment when the conversation became earnest to escape to her study, whence very soon two cheerful and noisy voices being heard in connection with occasional notes of the piano assured Monte Cristo that Mademoiselle Danglars preferred to his society and to that of M. Cavalcanti the company of Mademoiselle Louise d'Armilly, her singing teacher.

It was then, especially while conversing with Madame Danglars, and apparently absorbed by the charm of the conversation, that the count noticed M. Andrea Cavalcanti's solicitude, his manner of listening to the music at the door he dared not pass, and of manifesting his admiration. The banker soon returned. His first look was certainly directed towards Monte Cristo, but the second was for Andrea. As for his wife, he bowed to her, as some husbands do to their wives, but in a way that bachelors will never comprehend, until a very extensive code is published on conjugal life.

"Have not the ladies invited you to join them at the piano?" said Danglars to Andrea. "Alas, no, sir," replied Andrea with a sigh, still more remarkable than the former ones. Danglars immediately advanced towards the door and opened it.

The two young ladies were seen seated on the same chair, at the piano, accompanying themselves, each with one hand, a fancy to which they had accustomed themselves, and performed admirably. Mademoiselle d’Armilly, whom they then perceived through the open doorway, formed with Eugenie one of the tableaux vivants of which the Germans are so fond. She was somewhat beautiful, and exquisitely formed — a little fairy-like figure, with large curls falling on her neck, which was rather too long, as Perugino sometimes makes his Virgins, and her eyes dull from fatigue. She was said to have a weak chest, and like Antonia in the “Cremona Violin,” she would die one day while singing. Monte Cristo cast one rapid and curious glance round this sanctum; it was the first time he had ever seen Mademoiselle d’Armilly, of whom he had heard much. “Well,” said the banker to his daughter, “are we then all to be excluded?” He then led the young man into the study, and either by chance or manoeuvre the door was partially closed after Andrea, so that from the place where they sat neither the Count nor the baroness could see anything; but as the banker had accompanied Andrea, Madame Danglars appeared to take no notice of it.

The count soon heard Andrea’s voice, singing a Corsican song, accompanied by the piano. While the count smiled at hearing this song, which made him lose sight of Andrea in the recollection of Benedetto, Madame Danglars was boasting to Monte Cristo of her husband’s strength of mind, who that very morning had lost three or four hundred thousand francs by a failure at Milan. The praise was well deserved, for had not the count heard it from the baroness, or by one of those means by which he knew everything, the baron’s countenance would not have led him to suspect it. “Hem,” thought Monte Cristo, “he begins to conceal his losses; a month since he boasted of them.” Then aloud, — ”Oh, madame, M. Danglars is so skilful, he will soon regain at the Bourse what he loses elsewhere.”

“I see that you participate in a prevalent error,” said Madame Danglars. “What is it?” said Monte Cristo.

“That M. Danglars speculates, whereas he never does.”

“Truly, madame, I recollect M. Debray told me — apropos, what is become of him? I have seen nothing of him the last three or four days.”

"Nor I," said Madame Danglars; "but you began a sentence, sir, and did not finish."

"Which?"

"M. Debray had told you" —

"Ah, yes; he told me it was you who sacrificed to the demon of speculation."

"I was once very fond of it, but I do not indulge now."

"Then you are wrong, madame. Fortune is precarious; and if I were a woman and fate had made me a banker's wife, whatever might be my confidence in my husband's good fortune, still in speculation you know there is great risk. Well, I would secure for myself a fortune independent of him, even if I acquired it by placing my interests in hands unknown to him." Madame Danglars blushed, in spite of all her efforts. "Stay," said Monte Cristo, as though he had not observed her confusion, "I have heard of a lucky hit that was made yesterday on the Neapolitan bonds."

"I have none — nor have I ever possessed any; but really we have talked long enough of money, count, we are like two stockbrokers; have you heard how fate is persecuting the poor Villeforts?"

"What has happened?" said the count, simulating total ignorance.

"You know the Marquis of Saint-Meran died a few days after he had set out on his journey to Paris, and the marchioness a few days after her arrival?"

"Yes," said Monte Cristo, "I have heard that; but, as Claudius said to Hamlet, 'it is a law of nature; their fathers died before them, and they mourned their loss; they will die before their children, who will, in their turn, grieve for them.'"

"But that is not all."

"Not all!"

"No; they were going to marry their daughter" —

"To M. Franz d'Epinay. Is it broken off?"

"Yesterday morning, it appears, Franz declined the honor."

"Indeed? And is the reason known?"

"No."

"How extraordinary! And how does M. de Villefort bear it?"

"As usual. Like a philosopher." Danglars returned at this moment alone. "Well," said the baroness, "do you leave M. Cavalcanti with your daughter?"

"And Mademoiselle d'Armilly," said the banker; "do you consider her no one?" Then, turning to Monte Cristo, he said, "Prince Cavalcanti is a charming young man, is he not? But is he really a prince?"

"I will not answer for it," said Monte Cristo. "His father was introduced to me as a marquis, so he ought to be a count; but I do not think he has much claim to that title."

"Why?" said the banker. "If he is a prince, he is wrong not to maintain his rank; I do not like any one to deny his origin."

"Oh, you are a thorough democrat," said Monte Cristo, smiling.

"But do you see to what you are exposing yourself?" said the baroness. "If, perchance, M. de Morcerf came, he would find M. Cavalcanti in that room, where he, the betrothed of Eugenie, has never been admitted."

"You may well say, perchance," replied the banker; "for he comes so seldom, it would seem only chance that brings him."

"But should he come and find that young man with your daughter, he might be displeased."

"He? You are mistaken. M. Albert would not do us the honor to be jealous; he does not like Eugenie sufficiently. Besides, I care not for his displeasure."

"Still, situated as we are" —

"Yes, do you know how we are situated? At his mother's ball he danced once with Eugenie, and M. Cavalcanti three times, and he took no notice of it." The valet announced the Vicomte Albert de Morcerf. The baroness rose hastily, and was going into the study, when Danglars stopped her. "Let her alone," said he. She looked at him in amazement. Monte Cristo appeared to be unconscious of what passed. Albert entered, looking very handsome and in high spirits. He bowed politely to the baroness, familiarly to Danglars, and affectionately to Monte Cristo. Then turning to the baroness: "May I ask how Mademoiselle Danglars is?" said he.

"She is quite well," replied Danglars quickly; "she is at the piano with M. Cavalcanti." Albert retained his calm and indifferent manner; he might feel perhaps annoyed, but he knew Monte Cristo's eye was on him. "M. Cavalcanti has a fine tenor voice," said he, "and Mademoiselle Eugenie a splendid soprano, and then she plays the piano like Thalberg. The concert must be a delightful one."

"They suit each other remarkably well," said Danglars. Albert appeared not to notice this remark, which was, however, so rude that Madame

Danglars blushed.

“I, too,” said the young man, “am a musician — at least, my masters used to tell me so; but it is strange that my voice never would suit any other, and a soprano less than any.” Danglars smiled, and seemed to say, “It is of no consequence.” Then, hoping doubtless to effect his purpose, he said, — ”The prince and my daughter were universally admired yesterday. You were not of the party, M. de Morcerf?”

“What prince?” asked Albert. “Prince Cavalcanti,” said Danglars, who persisted in giving the young man that title.

“Pardon me,” said Albert, “I was not aware that he was a prince. And Prince Cavalcanti sang with Mademoiselle Eugenie yesterday? It must have been charming, indeed. I regret not having heard them. But I was unable to accept your invitation, having promised to accompany my mother to a German concert given by the Baroness of Chateau-Renaud.” This was followed by rather an awkward silence. “May I also be allowed,” said Morcerf, “to pay my respects to Mademoiselle Danglars?” “Wait a moment,” said the banker, stopping the young man; “do you hear that delightful cavatina? Ta, ta, ta, ti, ta, ti, ta, ta; it is charming, let them finish — one moment. Bravo, bravi, brava!” The banker was enthusiastic in his applause.

“Indeed,” said Albert, “it is exquisite; it is impossible to understand the music of his country better than Prince Cavalcanti does. You said prince, did you not? But he can easily become one, if he is not already; it is no uncommon thing in Italy. But to return to the charming musicians — you should give us a treat, Danglars, without telling them there is a stranger. Ask them to sing one more song; it is so delightful to hear music in the distance, when the musicians are unrestrained by observation.”

Danglars was quite annoyed by the young man’s indifference. He took Monte Cristo aside. “What do you think of our lover?” said he.

“He appears cool. But, then your word is given.”

“Yes, doubtless I have promised to give my daughter to a man who loves her, but not to one who does not. See him there, cold as marble and proud like his father. If he were rich, if he had Cavalcanti’s fortune, that might be pardoned. Ma foi, I haven’t consulted my daughter; but if she has good taste” —

“Oh,” said Monte Cristo, “my fondness may blind me, but I assure you I consider Morcerf a charming young man who will render your daughter happy and will sooner or later attain a certain amount of distinction, and his father’s position is good.”

“Hem,” said Danglars.

“Why do you doubt?”

“The past — that obscurity on the past.”

“But that does not affect the son.”

“Very true.”

“Now, I beg of you, don’t go off your head. It’s a month now that you have been thinking of this marriage, and you must see that it throws some responsibility on me, for it was at my house you met this young Cavalcanti, whom I do not really know at all.”

“But I do.”

“Have you made inquiry?”

“Is there any need of that! Does not his appearance speak for him? And he is very rich.”

“I am not so sure of that.”

“And yet you said he had money.”

“Fifty thousand livres — a mere trifle.”

“He is well educated.”

“Hem,” said Monte Cristo in his turn.

“He is a musician.”

“So are all Italians.”

“Come, count, you do not do that young man justice.”

“Well, I acknowledge it annoys me, knowing your connection with the Morcerf family, to see him throw himself in the way.” Danglars burst out laughing. “What a Puritan you are!” said he; “that happens every day.”

“But you cannot break it off in this way; the Morcerfs are depending on this union.”

“Indeed.”

“Positively.”

“Then let them explain themselves; you should give the father a hint, you are so intimate with the family.”

“I? — where the devil did you find out that?”

“At their ball; it was apparent enough. Why, did not the countess, the proud Mercedes, the disdainful Catalane, who will scarcely open her lips to her oldest acquaintances, take your arm, lead you into the garden, into the private walks, and remain there for half an hour?”

"Ah, baron, baron," said Albert, "you are not listening — what barbarism in a megalomaniac like you!"

"Oh, don't worry about me, Sir Mocker," said Danglars; then turning to the count he said, "but will you undertake to speak to the father?"

"Willingly, if you wish it."

"But let it be done explicitly and positively. If he demands my daughter let him fix the day — declare his conditions; in short, let us either understand each other, or quarrel. You understand — no more delay."

"Yes, sir, I will give my attention to the subject."

"I do not say that I await with pleasure his decision, but I do await it. A banker must, you know, be a slave to his promise." And Danglars sighed as M. Cavalcanti had done half an hour before. "Bravi, bravo, brava!" cried Morcerf, parodying the banker, as the selection came to an end. Danglars began to look suspiciously at Morcerf, when some one came and whispered a few words to him. "I shall soon return," said the banker to Monte Cristo; "wait for me. I shall, perhaps, have something to say to you." And he went out.

The baroness took advantage of her husband's absence to push open the door of her daughter's study, and M. Andrea, who was sitting before the piano with Mademoiselle Eugenie, started up like a jack-in-the-box. Albert bowed with a smile to Mademoiselle Danglars, who did not appear in the least disturbed, and returned his bow with her usual coolness. Cavalcanti was evidently embarrassed; he bowed to Morcerf, who replied with the most impertinent look possible. Then Albert launched out in praise of Mademoiselle Danglars' voice, and on his regret, after what he had just heard, that he had been unable to be present the previous evening. Cavalcanti, being left alone, turned to Monte Cristo.

"Come," said Madame Danglars, "leave music and compliments, and let us go and take tea."

"Come, Louise," said Mademoiselle Danglars to her friend. They passed into the next drawing-room, where tea was prepared. Just as they were beginning, in the English fashion, to leave the spoons in their cups, the door again opened and Danglars entered, visibly agitated. Monte Cristo observed it particularly, and by a look asked the banker for an explanation. "I have just received my courier from Greece," said Danglars.

"Ah, yes," said the count; "that was the reason of your running away from us."

"Yes."

"How is King Otho getting on?" asked Albert in the most sprightly tone. Danglars cast another suspicious look towards him without answering, and Monte Cristo turned away to conceal the expression of pity which passed over his features, but which was gone in a moment. "We shall go together, shall we not?" said Albert to the count.

"If you like," replied the latter. Albert could not understand the banker's look, and turning to Monte Cristo, who understood it perfectly, — "Did you see," said he, "how he looked at me?"

"Yes," said the count; "but did you think there was anything particular in his look?"

"Indeed, I did; and what does he mean by his news from Greece?"

"How can I tell you?"

"Because I imagine you have correspondents in that country." Monte Cristo smiled significantly.

"Stop," said Albert, "here he comes. I shall compliment Mademoiselle Danglars on her cameo, while the father talks to you."

"If you compliment her at all, let it be on her voice, at least," said Monte Cristo.

"No, every one would do that."

"My dear viscount, you are dreadfully impertinent." Albert advanced towards Eugenie, smiling. Meanwhile, Danglars, stooping to Monte Cristo's ear, "Your advice was excellent," said he; "there is a whole history connected with the names Fernand and Yanina."

"Indeed?" said Monte Cristo.

"Yes, I will tell you all; but take away the young man; I cannot endure his presence."

"He is going with me. Shall I send the father to you?"

"Immediately."

"Very well." The count made a sign to Albert and they bowed to the ladies, and took their leave, Albert perfectly indifferent to Mademoiselle Danglars' contempt, Monte Cristo reiterating his advice to Madame Danglars on the prudence a banker's wife should exercise in providing for the future. M. Cavalcanti remained master of the field.

Chapter 77

Haidee.

Scarcely had the count’s horses cleared the angle of the boulevard, than Albert, turning towards the count, burst into a loud fit of laughter — much too loud in fact not to give the idea of its being rather forced and unnatural. “Well,” said he, “I will ask you the same question which Charles IX. put to Catherine de Medicis, after the massacre of Saint Bartholomew, ‘How have I played my little part?’“

“To what do you allude?” asked Monte Cristo.

“To the installation of my rival at M. Danglars’.”

“What rival?”

“Ma foi, what rival? Why, your protege, M. Andrea Cavalcanti!”

“Ah, no joking, viscount, if you please; I do not patronize M. Andrea — at least, not as concerns M. Danglars.”

“And you would be to blame for not assisting him, if the young man really needed your help in that quarter, but, happily for me, he can dispense with it.”

“What, do you think he is paying his addresses?”

“I am certain of it; his languishing looks and modulated tones when addressing Mademoiselle Danglars fully proclaim his intentions. He aspires to the hand of the proud Eugenie.”

“What does that signify, so long as they favor your suit?”

“But it is not the case, my dear count: on the contrary. I am repulsed on all sides.”

“What!”

“It is so indeed; Mademoiselle Eugenie scarcely answers me, and Mademoiselle d’Armilly, her confidant, does not speak to me at all.”

“But the father has the greatest regard possible for you,” said Monte Cristo.

“He? Oh, no, he has plunged a thousand daggers into my heart, tragedy-weapons, I own, which instead of wounding sheathe their points in their own handles, but daggers which he nevertheless believed to be real and deadly.”

“Jealousy indicates affection.”

“True; but I am not jealous.”

“He is.”

“Of whom? — of Debray?”

“No, of you.”

“Of me? I will engage to say that before a week is past the door will be closed against me.”

“You are mistaken, my dear viscount.”

“Prove it to me.”

“Do you wish me to do so?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I am charged with the commission of endeavoring to induce the Comte de Morcerf to make some definite arrangement with the baron.”

“By whom are you charged?”

“By the baron himself.”

“Oh,” said Albert with all the cajolery of which he was capable. “You surely will not do that, my dear count?”

“Certainly I shall, Albert, as I have promised to do it.”

“Well,” said Albert, with a sigh, “it seems you are determined to marry me.”

“I am determined to try and be on good terms with everybody, at all events,” said Monte Cristo. “But apropos of Debray, how is it that I have not seen him lately at the baron’s house?”

“There has been a misunderstanding.”

“What, with the baroness?”

“No, with the baron.”

“Has he perceived anything?”

“Ah, that is a good joke!”

“Do you think he suspects?” said Monte Cristo with charming artlessness.

“Where have you come from, my dear count?” said Albert.

“From Congo, if you will.”

“It must be farther off than even that.”

“But what do I know of your Parisian husbands?”

“Oh, my dear count, husbands are pretty much the same everywhere; an individual husband of any country is a pretty fair specimen of the whole race.”

“But then, what can have led to the quarrel between Danglars and Debray? They seemed to understand each other so well,” said Monte Cristo with renewed energy.

“Ah, now you are trying to penetrate into the mysteries of Isis, in which I am not initiated. When M. Andrea Cavalcanti has become one of the family, you can ask him that question.” The carriage stopped. “Here we are,” said Monte Cristo; “it is only half-past ten o’clock, come in.”

“Certainly I will.”

“My carriage shall take you back.”

“No, thank you; I gave orders for my coupe to follow me.”

“There it is, then,” said Monte Cristo, as he stepped out of the carriage. They both went into the house; the drawing-room was lighted up — they went in there. “You will make tea for us, Baptistin,” said the count. Baptistin left the room without waiting to answer, and in two seconds reappeared, bringing on a waiter all that his master had ordered, ready prepared, and appearing to have sprung from the ground, like the repasts which we read of in fairy tales. “Really, my dear count,” said Morcerf, “what I admire in you is, not so much your riches, for perhaps there are people even wealthier than yourself, nor is it only your wit, for Beaumarchais might have possessed as much, — but it is your manner of being served, without any questions, in a moment, in a second; it is as if they guessed what you wanted by your manner of ringing, and made a point of keeping everything you can possibly desire in constant readiness.”

“What you say is perhaps true; they know my habits. For instance, you shall see; how do you wish to occupy yourself during tea-time?”

“Ma foi, I should like to smoke.”

Monte Cristo took the gong and struck it once. In about the space of a second a private door opened, and Ali appeared, bringing two chibouques filled with excellent latakia. “It is quite wonderful,” said Albert.

“Oh no, it is as simple as possible,” replied Monte Cristo. “Ali knows I generally smoke while I am taking my tea or coffee; he has heard that I ordered tea, and he also knows that I brought you home with me; when I summoned him he naturally guessed the reason of my doing so, and as he comes from a country where hospitality is especially manifested through the medium of smoking, he naturally concludes that we shall smoke in company, and therefore brings two chibouques instead of one — and now the mystery is solved."

"Certainly you give a most commonplace air to your explanation, but it is not the less true that you — Ah, but what do I hear?" and Morcerf inclined his head towards the door, through which sounds seemed to issue resembling those of a guitar.

"Ma foi, my dear viscount, you are fated to hear music this evening; you have only escaped from Mademoiselle Danglars' piano, to be attacked by Haidee's guzla."

"Haidee — what an adorable name! Are there, then, really women who bear the name of Haidee anywhere but in Byron's poems?"

"Certainly there are. Haidee is a very uncommon name in France, but is common enough in Albania and Epirus; it is as if you said, for example, Chastity, Modesty, Innocence, — it is a kind of baptismal name, as you Parisians call it."

"Oh, that is charming," said Albert, "how I should like to hear my countrywomen called Mademoiselle Goodness, Mademoiselle Silence, Mademoiselle Christian Charity! Only think, then, if Mademoiselle Danglars, instead of being called Claire-Marie-Eugenie, had been named Mademoiselle Chastity-Modesty-Innocence Danglars; what a fine effect that would have produced on the announcement of her marriage!"

"Hush," said the count, "do not joke in so loud a tone; Haidee may hear you, perhaps."

"And you think she would be angry?"

"No, certainly not," said the count with a haughty expression.

"She is very amiable, then, is she not?" said Albert.

"It is not to be called amiability, it is her duty; a slave does not dictate to a master."

"Come; you are joking yourself now. Are there any more slaves to be had who bear this beautiful name?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Really, count, you do nothing, and have nothing like other people. The slave of the Count of Monte Cristo! Why, it is a rank of itself in France, and from the way in which you lavish money, it is a place that must be worth a hundred thousand francs a year."

"A hundred thousand francs! The poor girl originally possessed much more than that; she was born to treasures in comparison with which those recorded in the 'Thousand and One Nights' would seem but poverty."

"She must be a princess then."

"You are right; and she is one of the greatest in her country too."

"I thought so. But how did it happen that such a great princess became a slave?"

"How was it that Dionysius the Tyrant became a schoolmaster? The fortune of war, my dear viscount, — the caprice of fortune; that is the way in which these things are to be accounted for."

"And is her name a secret?"

"As regards the generality of mankind it is; but not for you, my dear viscount, who are one of my most intimate friends, and on whose silence I feel I may rely, if I consider it necessary to enjoin it — may I not do so?"

"Certainly; on my word of honor."

"You know the history of the Pasha of Yanina, do you not?"

"Of Ali Tepelini? [*] Oh, yes; it was in his service that my father made his fortune."

"True, I had forgotten that."

> * Ali Pasha, "The Lion," was born at Tepelini, an Albanian village at the foot of the Klissoura Mountains, in 1741. By diplomacy and success in arms he became almost supreme ruler of Albania, Epirus, and adjacent territory. Having aroused the enmity of the Sultan, he was proscribed and put to death by treachery in 1822, at the age of eighty. — Ed.

"Well, what is Haidee to Ali Tepelini?"

"Merely his daughter."

"What? the daughter of Ali Pasha?"

"Of Ali Pasha and the beautiful Vasiliki."

"And your slave?"

"Ma foi, yes."

"But how did she become so?"

"Why, simply from the circumstance of my having bought her one day, as I was passing through the market at Constantinople."

"Wonderful! Really, my dear count, you seem to throw a sort of magic influence over all in which you are concerned; when I listen to you, existence no longer seems reality, but a waking dream. Now, I am perhaps going to make an imprudent and thoughtless request, but" —

"Say on."

"But, since you go out with Haidee, and sometimes even take her to the opera" —

"Well?"

"I think I may venture to ask you this favor."

"You may venture to ask me anything."

"Well then, my dear count, present me to your princess."

"I will do so; but on two conditions."

"I accept them at once."

"The first is, that you will never tell any one that I have granted the interview."

"Very well," said Albert, extending his hand; "I swear I will not."

"The second is, that you will not tell her that your father ever served hers."

"I give you my oath that I will not."

"Enough, viscount; you will remember those two vows, will you not? But I know you to be a man of honor." The count again struck the gong. Ali reappeared. "Tell Haidee," said he, "that I will take coffee with her, and give her to understand that I desire permission to present one of my friends to her." Ali bowed and left the room. "Now, understand me," said the count, "no direct questions, my dear Morcerf; if you wish to know anything, tell me, and I will ask her."

"Agreed." Ali reappeared for the third time, and drew back the tapestried hanging which concealed the door, to signify to his master and Albert that they were at liberty to pass on. "Let us go in," said Monte Cristo.

Albert passed his hand through his hair, and curled his mustache, then, having satisfied himself as to his personal appearance, followed the count into the room, the latter having previously resumed his hat and gloves. Ali was stationed as a kind of advanced guard, and the door was kept by the three French attendants, commanded by Myrtho. Haidee was awaiting her visitors in the first room of her apartments, which was the drawing-room. Her large eyes were dilated with surprise and expectation, for it was the first time that any man, except Monte Cristo, had been accorded an entrance into her presence. She was sitting on a sofa placed in an angle of the room, with her legs crossed under her in the Eastern fashion, and seemed to have made for herself, as it were, a kind of nest in the rich Indian silks which enveloped her. Near her was the instrument on which she had just been playing; it was elegantly fashioned, and worthy of its mistress. On perceiving Monte Cristo, she arose and welcomed him with a smile peculiar to herself, expressive at once of the most implicit obedience and also of the deepest love. Monte Cristo advanced towards her and extended his hand, which she as usual raised to her lips.

Albert had proceeded no farther than the door, where he remained rooted to the spot, being completely fascinated by the sight of such surpassing beauty, beheld as it was for the first time, and of which an inhabitant of more northern climes could form no adequate idea.

“Whom do you bring?” asked the young girl in Romaic, of Monte Cristo; “is it a friend, a brother, a simple acquaintance, or an enemy.”

“A friend,” said Monte Cristo in the same language.

“What is his name?”

“Count Albert; it is the same man whom I rescued from the hands of the banditti at Rome.”

“In what language would you like me to converse with him?”

Monte Cristo turned to Albert. “Do you know modern Greek,” asked he.

“Alas, no,” said Albert; “nor even ancient Greek, my dear count; never had Homer or Plato a more unworthy scholar than myself.”

“Then,” said Haidee, proving by her remark that she had quite understood Monte Cristo’s question and Albert’s answer, “then I will speak either in French or Italian, if my lord so wills it.”

Monte Cristo reflected one instant. “You will speak in Italian,” said he. Then, turning towards Albert, — ”It is a pity you do not understand either ancient or modern Greek, both of which Haidee speaks so fluently; the poor child will be obliged to talk to you in Italian, which will give you but a very false idea of her powers of conversation.” The count made a sign to Haidee to address his visitor. “Sir,” she said to Morcerf, “you are most welcome as the friend of my lord and master.” This was said in excellent Tuscan, and with that soft Roman accent which makes the language of Dante as sonorous as that of Homer. Then, turning to Ali, she directed him to bring coffee and pipes, and when he had left the room to execute the orders of his young mistress she beckoned Albert to approach nearer to her. Monte Cristo and Morcerf drew their seats towards a small table, on which were arranged music, drawings, and vases of flowers. Ali then entered bringing coffee and chibouques; as to M. Baptistin, this portion of the building was interdicted to him. Albert refused the pipe which the Nubian offered him. “Oh, take it — take it,” said the count; “Haidee is almost as civilized as a Parisian; the smell of an Havana is disagreeable to her, but the tobacco of the East is a most delicious perfume, you know.”

Ali left the room. The cups of coffee were all prepared, with the addition of sugar, which had been brought for Albert. Monte Cristo and Haidee took the beverage in the original Arabian manner, that is to say, without sugar. Haidee took the porcelain cup in her little slender fingers and conveyed it to her mouth with all the innocent artlessness of a child when eating or drinking something which it likes. At this moment two women entered, bringing salvers filled with ices and sherbet, which they placed on two small tables appropriated to that purpose. “My dear host, and you, signora,” said Albert, in Italian, “excuse my apparent stupidity. I am quite bewildered, and it is natural that it should be so. Here I am in the heart of Paris; but a moment ago I heard the rumbling of the omnibuses and the tinkling of the bells of the lemonade-sellers, and now I feel as if I were suddenly transported to the East; not such as I have seen it, but such as my dreams have painted it. Oh, signora, if I could but speak Greek, your conversation, added to the fairy-scene which surrounds me, would furnish an evening of such delight as it would be impossible for me ever to forget.”

“I speak sufficient Italian to enable me to converse with you, sir,” said Haidee quietly; “and if you like what is Eastern, I will do my best to secure the gratification of your tastes while you are here.”

“On what subject shall I converse with her?” said Albert, in a low tone to Monte Cristo.

“Just what you please; you may speak of her country and of her youthful reminiscences, or if you like it better you can talk of Rome, Naples, or Florence.”

“Oh,” said Albert, “it is of no use to be in the company of a Greek if one converses just in the same style as with a Parisian; let me speak to her of the East.”

“Do so then, for of all themes which you could choose that will be the most agreeable to her taste.” Albert turned towards Haidee. “At what age did you leave Greece, signora?” asked he.

“I left it when I was but five years old,” replied Haidee.

“And have you any recollection of your country?”

“When I shut my eyes and think, I seem to see it all again. The mind can see as well as the body. The body forgets sometimes — but the mind never forgets.”

“And how far back into the past do your recollections extend?”

“I could scarcely walk when my mother, who was called Vasiliki, which means royal,” said the young girl, tossing her head proudly, “took me by the hand, and after putting in our purse all the money we possessed, we went out, both covered with veils, to solicit alms for the prisoners, saying, ‘He who giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord.’ Then when our purse was full we returned to the palace, and without saying a word to my father, we sent it to the convent, where it was divided amongst the prisoners.”

“And how old were you at that time?”

“I was three years old,” said Haidee.

“Then you remember everything that went on about you from the time when you were three years old?” said Albert.

“Everything.”

“Count,” said Albert, in a low tone to Monte Cristo, “do allow the signora to tell me something of her history. You prohibited my mentioning my father’s name to her, but perhaps she will allude to him of her own accord in the course of the recital, and you have no idea how delighted I should be to hear our name pronounced by such beautiful lips.” Monte Cristo turned to Haidee, and with an expression of countenance which commanded her to pay the most implicit attention to his words, he said in Greek, — ”Tell us the fate of your father; but neither the name of the traitor nor the treason.” Haidee sighed deeply, and a shade of sadness clouded her beautiful brow.

“What are you saying to her?” said Morcerf in an undertone.

“I again reminded her that you were a friend, and that she need not conceal anything from you.”

“Then,” said Albert, “this pious pilgrimage in behalf of the prisoners was your first remembrance; what is the next?”

“Oh, then I remember as if it were but yesterday sitting under the shade of some sycamore-trees, on the borders of a lake, in the waters of which the trembling foliage was reflected as in a mirror. Under the oldest and thickest of these trees, reclining on cushions, sat my father; my mother was at his feet, and I, childlike, amused myself by playing with his long white beard which descended to his girdle, or with the diamond-hilt of the scimitar attached to his girdle. Then from time to time there came to him an Albanian who said something to which I paid no attention, but which he always answered in the same tone of voice, either ‘Kill,’ or ‘Pardon.’“

“It is very strange,” said Albert, “to hear such words proceed from the mouth of any one but an actress on the stage, and one needs constantly to be saying to one’s self, ‘This is no fiction, it is all reality,’ in order to believe it. And how does France appear in your eyes, accustomed as they have been to gaze on such enchanted scenes?”

“I think it is a fine country,” said Haidee, “but I see France as it really is, because I look on it with the eyes of a woman; whereas my own country, which I can only judge of from the impression produced on my childish mind, always seems enveloped in a vague atmosphere, which is luminous or otherwise, according as my remembrances of it are sad or joyous.”

“So young,” said Albert, forgetting at the moment the Count’s command that he should ask no questions of the slave herself, “is it possible that you can have known what suffering is except by name?”

Haidee turned her eyes towards Monte Cristo, who, making at the same time some imperceptible sign, murmured, — ”Go on.”

“Nothing is ever so firmly impressed on the mind as the memory of our early childhood, and with the exception of the two scenes I have just described to you, all my earliest reminiscences are fraught with deepest sadness.”

“Speak, speak, signora,” said Albert, “I am listening with the most intense delight and interest to all you say.”

Haidee answered his remark with a melancholy smile. “You wish me, then, to relate the history of my past sorrows?” said she.

“I beg you to do so,” replied Albert.

“Well, I was but four years old when one night I was suddenly awakened by my mother. We were in the palace of Yanina; she snatched me from the cushions on which I was sleeping, and on opening my eyes I saw hers filled with tears. She took me away without speaking. When I saw her weeping I began to cry too. ‘Hush, child!’ said she. At other times in spite of maternal endearments or threats, I had with a child’s caprice been accustomed to indulge my feelings of sorrow or anger by crying as much as I felt inclined; but on this occasion there was an intonation of such extreme terror in my mother’s voice when she enjoined me to silence, that I ceased crying as soon as her command was given. She bore me rapidly away.

“I saw then that we were descending a large staircase; around us were all my mother’s servants carrying trunks, bags, ornaments, jewels, purses of gold, with which they were hurrying away in the greatest distraction.

“Behind the women came a guard of twenty men armed with long guns and pistols, and dressed in the costume which the Greeks have assumed since they have again become a nation. You may imagine there was something startling and ominous,” said Haidee, shaking her head and turning pale at the mere remembrance of the scene, “in this long file of slaves and women only half-aroused from sleep, or at least so they appeared to me, who was myself scarcely awake. Here and there on the walls of the staircase, were reflected gigantic shadows, which trembled in the flickering light of the pine-torches till they seemed to reach to the vaulted roof above.

“‘Quick!’ said a voice at the end of the gallery. This voice made every one bow before it, resembling in its effect the wind passing over a field of wheat, by its superior strength forcing every ear to yield obeisance. As for me, it made me tremble. This voice was that of my father. He came last, clothed in his splendid robes and holding in his hand the carbine which your emperor presented him. He was leaning on the shoulder of his favorite Selim, and he drove us all before him, as a shepherd would his straggling flock. My father,” said Haidee, raising her head, “was that illustrious man known in Europe under the name of Ali Tepelini, pasha of Yanina, and before whom Turkey trembled.”

Albert, without knowing why, started on hearing these words pronounced with such a haughty and dignified accent; it appeared to him as if there was something supernaturally gloomy and terrible in the expression which gleamed from the brilliant eyes of Haidee at this moment; she appeared like a Pythoness evoking a spectre, as she recalled to his mind the remembrance of the fearful death of this man, to the news of which all Europe had listened with horror. “Soon,” said Haidee, “we halted on our march, and found ourselves on the borders of a lake. My mother pressed me to her throbbing heart, and at the distance of a few paces I saw my father, who was glancing anxiously around. Four marble steps led down to the water’s edge, and below them was a boat floating on the tide.

“From where we stood I could see in the middle of the lake a large blank mass; it was the kiosk to which we were going. This kiosk appeared to me to be at a considerable distance, perhaps on account of the darkness of the night, which prevented any object from being more than partially discerned.

We stepped into the boat. I remember well that the oars made no noise whatever in striking the water, and when I leaned over to ascertain the cause I saw that they were muffled with the sashes of our Palikares. [*] Besides the rowers, the boat contained only the women, my father, mother, Selim, and myself. The Palikares had remained on the shore of the lake, ready to cover our retreat; they were kneeling on the lowest of the marble steps, and in that manner intended making a rampart of the three others, in case of pursuit. Our bark flew before the wind. 'Why does the boat go so fast?' asked I of my mother.

[*] Greek militiamen in the war for independence. — Ed.

"'Silence, child! Hush, we are flying!' I did not understand. Why should my father fly? — he, the all-powerful — he, before whom others were accustomed to fly — he, who had taken for his device, 'They hate me; then they fear me!' It was, indeed, a flight which my father was trying to effect. I have been told since that the garrison of the castle of Yanina, fatigued with long service" —

Here Haidee cast a significant glance at Monte Cristo, whose eyes had been riveted on her countenance during the whole course of her narrative. The young girl then continued, speaking slowly, like a person who is either inventing or suppressing some feature of the history which he is relating. "You were saying, signora," said Albert, who was paying the most implicit attention to the recital, "that the garrison of Yanina, fatigued with long service" —

"Had treated with the Serasker [*] Koorshid, who had been sent by the sultan to gain possession of the person of my father; it was then that Ali Tepelini — after having sent to the sultan a French officer in whom he reposed great confidence — resolved to retire to the asylum which he had long before prepared for himself, and which he called kataphygion, or the refuge."

"And this officer," asked Albert, "do you remember his name, signora?" Monte Cristo exchanged a rapid glance with the young girl, which was quite unperceived by Albert. "No," said she, "I do not remember it just at this moment; but if it should occur to me presently, I will tell you." Albert was on the point of pronouncing his father's name, when Monte Cristo gently held up his finger in token of reproach; the young man recollected his promise, and was silent.

[*] A Turkish pasha in command of the troops of a province. —

Ed.

"It was towards this kiosk that we were rowing. A ground-floor, ornamented with arabesques, bathing its terraces in the water, and another floor, looking on the lake, was all which was visible to the eye. But beneath the ground-floor, stretching out into the island, was a large subterranean cavern, to which my mother, myself, and the women were conducted. In this place were together 60,000. pouches and 200 barrels; the pouches contained 25,000,000 of money in gold, and the barrels were filled with 30,000. pounds of gunpowder.

"Near the barrels stood Selim, my father's favorite, whom I mentioned to you just now. He stood watch day and night with a lance provided with a lighted slowmatch in his hand, and he had orders to blow up everything — kiosk, guards, women, gold, and Ali Tepelini himself — at the first signal given by my father. I remember well that the slaves, convinced of the precarious tenure on which they held their lives, passed whole days and nights in praying, crying, and groaning. As for me, I can never forget the pale complexion and black eyes of the young soldier, and whenever the angel of death summons me to another world, I am quite sure I shall recognize Selim. I cannot tell you how long we remained in this state; at that period I did not even know what time meant. Sometimes, but very rarely, my father summoned me and my mother to the terrace of the palace; these were hours of recreation for me, as I never saw anything in the dismal cavern but the gloomy countenances of the slaves and Selim's fiery lance. My father was endeavoring to pierce with his eager looks the remotest verge of the horizon, examining attentively every black speck which appeared on the lake, while my mother, reclining by his side, rested her head on his shoulder, and I played at his feet, admiring everything I saw with that unsophisticated innocence of childhood which throws a charm round objects insignificant in themselves, but which in its eyes are invested with the greatest importance. The heights of Pindus towered above us; the castle of Yanina rose white and angular from the blue waters of the lake, and the immense masses of black vegetation which, viewed in the distance, gave the idea of lichens clinging to the rocks, were in reality gigantic fir-trees and myrtles.

"One morning my father sent for us; my mother had been crying all the night, and was very wretched; we found the pasha calm, but paler than usual. 'Take courage, Vasiliki,' said he; 'to-day arrives the firman of the master, and my fate will be decided. If my pardon be complete, we shall return triumphant to Yanina; if the news be inauspicious, we must fly this night.' — 'But supposing our enemy should not allow us to do so?' said my mother. 'Oh, make yourself easy on that head,' said Ali, smiling; 'Selim and his flaming lance will settle that matter. They would be glad to see me dead, but they would not like themselves to die with me.'

"My mother only answered by sighs to consolations which she knew did not come from my father's heart. She prepared the iced water which he was in the habit of constantly drinking, — for since his sojourn at the kiosk he had been parched by the most violent fever, — after which she anointed his white beard with perfumed oil, and lighted his chibouque, which he sometimes smoked for hours together, quietly watching the wreaths of vapor that ascended in spiral clouds and gradually melted away in the surrounding atmosphere. Presently he made such a sudden movement that I was paralyzed with fear. Then, without taking his eyes from the object which had first attracted his attention, he asked for his telescope. My mother gave it him, and as she did so, looked whiter than the marble against which she leaned. I saw my father's hand tremble. 'A boat! — two! — three!' murmured my, father; — 'four!' He then arose, seizing his arms and priming his pistols. 'Vasiliki,' said he to my mother, trembling perceptibly, 'the instant approaches which will decide everything. In the space of half an hour we shall know the emperor's answer. Go into the cavern with Haidee.' — 'I will not quit you,' said Vasiliki; 'if you die, my lord, I will die with you.' — 'Go to Selim!' cried my father. 'Adieu, my lord,' murmured my mother, determining quietly to await the approach of death. 'Take away Vasiliki!' said my father to his Palikares.

"As for me, I had been forgotten in the general confusion; I ran toward Ali Tepelini; he saw me hold out my arms to him, and he stooped down and pressed my forehead with his lips. Oh, how distinctly I remember that kiss! — it was the last he ever gave me, and I feel as if it were still warm on my forehead. On descending, we saw through the lattice-work several boats which were gradually becoming more distinct to our view. At first they appeared like black specks, and now they looked like birds skimming the surface of the waves. During this time, in the kiosk at my father's feet, were seated twenty Palikares, concealed from view by an angle of the wall and watching with eager eyes the arrival of the boats. They were armed with their long guns inlaid with mother-of-pearl and silver, and cartridges in great numbers were lying scattered on the floor. My father looked at his watch, and paced up and down with a countenance expressive of the greatest anguish. This was the scene which presented itself to my view as I quitted my father after that last kiss. My mother and I traversed the gloomy passage leading to the cavern. Selim was still at his post, and smiled sadly on us as we entered. We fetched our cushions from the other end of the cavern, and sat down by Selim. In great dangers the devoted ones cling to each other; and, young as I was, I quite understood that some imminent danger was hanging over our heads."

Albert had often heard — not from his father, for he never spoke on the subject, but from strangers — the description of the last moments of the vizier of Yanina; he had read different accounts of his death, but the story seemed to acquire fresh meaning from the voice and expression of the young girl, and her sympathetic accent and the melancholy expression of her countenance at once charmed and horrified him. As to Haidee, these terrible reminiscences seemed to have overpowered her for a moment, for she ceased speaking, her head leaning on her hand like a beautiful flower bowing beneath the violence of the storm; and her eyes gazing on vacancy indicated that she was mentally contemplating the green summit of the Pindus and the blue waters of the lake of Yanina, which, like a magic mirror, seemed to reflect the sombre picture which she sketched. Monte Cristo looked at her with an indescribable expression of interest and pity.

"Go on," said the count in the Romaic language.

Haidee looked up abruptly, as if the sonorous tones of Monte Cristo's voice had awakened her from a dream; and she resumed her narrative. "It was about four o'clock in the afternoon, and although the day was brilliant out-of-doors, we were enveloped in the gloomy darkness of the cavern. One single, solitary light was burning there, and it appeared like a star set in a heaven of blackness; it was Selim's flaming lance. My mother was a Christian, and she prayed. Selim repeated from time to time the sacred words: 'God is great!' However, my mother had still some hope. As she was coming down, she thought she recognized the French officer who had been sent to Constantinople, and in whom my father placed so much confidence; for he knew that all the soldiers of the French emperor were naturally noble and generous. She advanced some steps towards the staircase, and listened. 'They are approaching,' said she; 'perhaps they bring us peace and liberty!' — 'What do you fear, Vasiliki?' said Selim, in a voice at once so gentle and yet so proud. ‘If they do not bring us peace, we will give them war; if they do not bring life, we will give them death.’ And he renewed the flame of his lance with a gesture which made one think of Dionysus of Crete. [*] But I, being only a little child, was terrified by this undaunted courage, which appeared to me both ferocious and senseless, and I recoiled with horror from the idea of the frightful death amidst fire and flames which probably awaited us.

> * The god of fruitfulness in Grecian mythology. In Crete he
> was supposed to be slain in winter with the decay of
> vegetation and to revive in the spring. Haidee’s learned
> reference is to the behavior of an actor in the Dionysian
> festivals. — Ed.

“My mother experienced the same sensations, for I felt her tremble. ‘Mamma, mamma,’ said I, ‘are we really to be killed?’ And at the sound of my voice the slaves redoubled their cries and prayers and lamentations. ‘My child,’ said Vasiliki, ‘may God preserve you from ever wishing for that death which to-day you so much dread!’ Then, whispering to Selim, she asked what were her master’s orders. ‘If he send me his poniard, it will signify that the emperor’s intentions are not favorable, and I am to set fire to the powder; if, on the contrary, he send me his ring, it will be a sign that the emperor pardons him, and I am to extinguish the match and leave the magazine untouched.’ — ’My friend,’ said my mother, ‘when your master’s orders arrive, if it is the poniard which he sends, instead of despatching us by that horrible death which we both so much dread, you will mercifully kill us with this same poniard, will you not?’ — ’Yes, Vasiliki,’ replied Selim tranquilly.

“Suddenly we heard loud cries; and, listening, discerned that they were cries of joy. The name of the French officer who had been sent to Constantinople resounded on all sides amongst our Palikares; it was evident that he brought the answer of the emperor, and that it was favorable.”

“And do you not remember the Frenchman’s name?” said Morcerf, quite ready to aid the memory of the narrator. Monte Cristo made a sign to him to be silent.

“I do not recollect it,” said Haidee.

“The noise increased; steps were heard approaching nearer and nearer: they were descending the steps leading to the cavern. Selim made ready his lance. Soon a figure appeared in the gray twilight at the entrance of the cave, formed by the reflection of the few rays of daylight which had found their way into this gloomy retreat. ‘Who are you?’ cried Selim. ‘But whoever you may be, I charge you not to advance another step.’ — ’Long live the emperor!’ said the figure. ‘He grants a full pardon to the Vizier Ali, and not only gives him his life, but restores to him his fortune and his possessions.’ My mother uttered a cry of joy, and clasped me to her bosom. ‘Stop,’ said Selim, seeing that she was about to go out; ‘you see I have not yet received the ring,’ — ’True,’ said my mother. And she fell on her knees, at the same time holding me up towards heaven, as if she desired, while praying to God in my behalf, to raise me actually to his presence.”

And for the second time Haidee stopped, overcome by such violent emotion that the perspiration stood upon her pale brow, and her stifled voice seemed hardly able to find utterance, so parched and dry were her throat and lips. Monte Cristo poured a little iced water into a glass, and presented it to her, saying with a mildness in which was also a shade of command, — ”Courage.”

Haidee dried her eyes, and continued: “By this time our eyes, habituated to the darkness, had recognized the messenger of the pasha, — it was a friend. Selim had also recognized him, but the brave young man only acknowledged one duty, which was to obey. ‘In whose name do you come?’ said he to him. ‘I come in the name of our master, Ali Tepelini.’ — ’If you come from Ali himself,’ said Selim, ‘you know what you were charged to remit to me?’ — ’Yes,’ said the messenger, ‘and I bring you his ring.’ At these words he raised his hand above his head, to show the token; but it was too far off, and there was not light enough to enable Selim, where he was standing, to distinguish and recognize the object presented to his view. ‘I do not see what you have in your hand,’ said Selim. ‘Approach then,’ said the messenger, ‘or I will come nearer to you, if you prefer it.’ — ’I will agree to neither one nor the other,’ replied the young soldier; ‘place the object which I desire to see in the ray of light which shines there, and retire while I examine it.’ — ’Be it so,’ said the envoy; and he retired, after having first deposited the token agreed on in the place pointed out to him by Selim.

“Oh, how our hearts palpitated; for it did, indeed, seem to be a ring which was placed there. But was it my father’s ring? that was the question. Selim, still holding in his hand the lighted match, walked towards the opening in the cavern, and, aided by the faint light which streamed in through the mouth of the cave, picked up the token.

"'It is well,' said he, kissing it; 'it is my master's ring!' And throwing the match on the ground, he trampled on it and extinguished it. The messenger uttered a cry of joy and clapped his hands. At this signal four soldiers of the Serasker Koorshid suddenly appeared, and Selim fell, pierced by five blows. Each man had stabbed him separately, and, intoxicated by their crime, though still pale with fear, they sought all over the cavern to discover if there was any fear of fire, after which they amused themselves by rolling on the bags of gold. At this moment my mother seized me in her arms, and hurrying noiselessly along numerous turnings and windings known only to ourselves, she arrived at a private staircase of the kiosk, where was a scene of frightful tumult and confusion. The lower rooms were entirely filled with Koorshid's troops; that is to say, with our enemies. Just as my mother was on the point of pushing open a small door, we heard the voice of the pasha sounding in a loud and threatening tone. My mother applied her eye to the crack between the boards; I luckily found a small opening which afforded me a view of the apartment and what was passing within. 'What do you want?' said my father to some people who were holding a paper inscribed with characters of gold. 'What we want,' replied one, 'is to communicate to you the will of his highness. Do you see this firman?' — 'I do,' said my father. 'Well, read it; he demands your head.'

"My father answered with a loud laugh, which was more frightful than even threats would have been, and he had not ceased when two reports of a pistol were heard; he had fired them himself, and had killed two men. The Palikares, who were prostrated at my father's feet, now sprang up and fired, and the room was filled with fire and smoke. At the same instant the firing began on the other side, and the balls penetrated the boards all round us. Oh, how noble did the grand vizier my father look at that moment, in the midst of the flying bullets, his scimitar in his hand, and his face blackened with the powder of his enemies! and how he terrified them, even then, and made them fly before him! 'Selim, Selim!' cried he, 'guardian of the fire, do your duty!' — 'Selim is dead,' replied a voice which seemed to come from the depths of the earth, 'and you are lost, Ali!' At the same moment an explosion was heard, and the flooring of the room in which my father was sitting was suddenly torn up and shivered to atoms — the troops were firing from underneath. Three or four Palikares fell with their bodies literally ploughed with wounds.

"My father howled aloud, plunged his fingers into the holes which the balls had made, and tore up one of the planks entire. But immediately through this opening twenty more shots were fired, and the flame, rushing up like fire from the crater of a volcano, soon reached the tapestry, which it quickly devoured. In the midst of all this frightful tumult and these terrific cries, two reports, fearfully distinct, followed by two shrieks more heartrending than all, froze me with terror. These two shots had mortally wounded my father, and it was he who had given utterance to these frightful cries. However, he remained standing, clinging to a window. My mother tried to force the door, that she might go and die with him, but it was fastened on the inside. All around him were lying the Palikares, writhing in convulsive agonies, while two or three who were only slightly wounded were trying to escape by springing from the windows. At this crisis the whole flooring suddenly gave way, my father fell on one knee, and at the same moment twenty hands were thrust forth, armed with sabres, pistols, and poniards — twenty blows were instantaneously directed against one man, and my father disappeared in a whirlwind of fire and smoke kindled by these demons, and which seemed like hell itself opening beneath his feet. I felt myself fall to the ground, my mother had fainted."

Haidee's arms fell by her side, and she uttered a deep groan, at the same time looking towards the count as if to ask if he were satisfied with her obedience to his commands. Monte Cristo arose and approached her, took her hand, and said to her in Romaic, "Calm yourself, my dear child, and take courage in remembering that there is a God who will punish traitors."

"It is a frightful story, count," said Albert, terrified at the paleness of Haidee's countenance, "and I reproach myself now for having been so cruel and thoughtless in my request."

"Oh, it is nothing," said Monte Cristo. Then, patting the young girl on the head, he continued, "Haidee is very courageous, and she sometimes even finds consolation in the recital of her misfortunes."

"Because, my lord," said Haidee eagerly, "my miseries recall to me the remembrance of your goodness."

Albert looked at her with curiosity, for she had not yet related what he most desired to know, — how she had become the slave of the count. Haidee saw at a glance the same expression pervading the countenances of her two auditors; she exclaimed, 'When my mother recovered her senses we were before the serasker. 'Kill,' said she, 'but spare the honor of the widow of Ali.’ — ’It is not to me to whom you must address yourself,’ said Koorshid.

“‘To whom, then?’ — ’To your new master.’

“‘Who and where is he?’ — ’He is here.’

“And Koorshid pointed out one who had more than any contributed to the death of my father,” said Haidee, in a tone of chastened anger. “Then,” said Albert, “you became the property of this man?”

“No,” replied Haidee, “he did not dare to keep us, so we were sold to some slave-merchants who were going to Constantinople. We traversed Greece, and arrived half dead at the imperial gates. They were surrounded by a crowd of people, who opened a way for us to pass, when suddenly my mother, having looked closely at an object which was attracting their attention, uttered a piercing cry and fell to the ground, pointing as she did so to a head which was placed over the gates, and beneath which were inscribed these words:

“‘This is the head of Ali Tepelini Pasha of Yanina.’ I cried bitterly, and tried to raise my mother from the earth, but she was dead! I was taken to the slave-market, and was purchased by a rich Armenian. He caused me to be instructed, gave me masters, and when I was thirteen years of age he sold me to the Sultan Mahmood.”

“Of whom I bought her,” said Monte Cristo, “as I told you, Albert, with the emerald which formed a match to the one I had made into a box for the purpose of holding my hashish pills.”

“Oh, you are good, you are great, my lord!” said Haidee, kissing the count’s hand, “and I am very fortunate in belonging to such a master!” Albert remained quite bewildered with all that he had seen and heard. “Come, finish your cup of coffee,” said Monte Cristo; “the history is ended.”

Chapter 78

We hear From Yanina.

If Valentine could have seen the trembling step and agitated countenance of Franz when he quitted the chamber of M. Noirtier, even she would have been constrained to pity him. Villefort had only just given utterance to a few incoherent sentences, and then retired to his study, where he received about two hours afterwards the following letter: —

“After all the disclosures which were made this morning, M. Noirtier de Villefort must see the utter impossibility of any alliance being formed between his family and that of M. Franz d’Epinay. M. d’Epinay must say that he is shocked and astonished that M. de Villefort, who appeared to be aware of all the circumstances detailed this morning, should not have anticipated him in this announcement.”

No one who had seen the magistrate at this moment, so thoroughly unnerved by the recent inauspicious combination of circumstances, would have supposed for an instant that he had anticipated the annoyance; although it certainly never had occurred to him that his father would carry candor, or rather rudeness, so far as to relate such a history. And in justice to Villefort, it must be understood that M. Noirtier, who never cared for the opinion of his son on any subject, had always omitted to explain the affair to Villefort, so that he had all his life entertained the belief that General de Quesnel, or the Baron d’Epinay, as he was alternately styled, according as the speaker wished to identify him by his own family name, or by the title which had been conferred on him, fell the victim of assassination, and not that he was killed fairly in a duel. This harsh letter, coming as it did from a man generally so polite and respectful, struck a mortal blow at the pride of Villefort. Hardly had he read the letter, when his wife entered. The sudden departure of Franz, after being summoned by M. Noirtier, had so much astonished every one, that the position of Madame de Villefort, left alone with the notary and the witnesses, became every moment more embarrassing. Determined to bear it no longer, she arose and left the room;

saying she would go and make some inquiries into the cause of his sudden disappearance.

M. de Villefort’s communications on the subject were very limited and concise; he told her, in fact, that an explanation had taken place between M. Noirtier, M. d’Epinay, and himself, and that the marriage of Valentine and Franz would consequently be broken off. This was an awkward and unpleasant thing to have to report to those who were awaiting her return in the chamber of her father-in-law. She therefore contented herself with saying that M. Noirtier having at the commencement of the discussion been attacked by a sort of apoplectic fit, the affair would necessarily be deferred for some days longer. This news, false as it was following so singularly in the train of the two similar misfortunes which had so recently occurred, evidently astonished the auditors, and they retired without a word. During this time Valentine, at once terrified and happy, after having embraced and thanked the feeble old man for thus breaking with a single blow the chain which she had been accustomed to consider as irrefragable, asked leave to retire to her own room, in order to recover her composure. Noirtier looked the permission which she solicited. But instead of going to her own room, Valentine, having once gained her liberty, entered the gallery, and, opening a small door at the end of it, found herself at once in the garden.

In the midst of all the strange events which had crowded one on the other, an indefinable sentiment of dread had taken possession of Valentine’s mind. She expected every moment that she should see Morrel appear, pale and trembling, to forbid the signing of the contract, like the Laird of Ravenswood in “The Bride of Lammermoor.” It was high time for her to make her appearance at the gate, for Maximilian had long awaited her coming. He had half guessed what was going on when he saw Franz quit the cemetery with M. de Villefort. He followed M. d’Epinay, saw him enter, afterwards go out, and then re-enter with Albert and Chateau-Renaud. He had no longer any doubts as to the nature of the conference; he therefore quickly went to the gate in the clover-patch, prepared to hear the result of the proceedings, and very certain that Valentine would hasten to him the first moment she should be set at liberty. He was not mistaken; peering through the crevices of the wooden partition, he soon discovered the young girl, who cast aside all her usual precautions and walked at once to the barrier. The first glance which Maximilian directed towards her entirely reassured him, and the first words she spoke made his heart bound with delight.

"We are saved!" said Valentine. "Saved?" repeated Morrel, not being able to conceive such intense happiness; "by whom?"

"By my grandfather. Oh, Morrel, pray love him for all his goodness to us!" Morrel swore to love him with all his soul; and at that moment he could safely promise to do so, for he felt as though it were not enough to love him merely as a friend or even as a father. "But tell me, Valentine, how has it all been effected? What strange means has he used to compass this blessed end?"

Valentine was on the point of relating all that had passed, but she suddenly remembered that in doing so she must reveal a terrible secret which concerned others as well as her grandfather, and she said, "At some future time I will tell you all about it."

"But when will that be?"

"When I am your wife."

The conversation had now turned upon a topic so pleasing to Morrel, that he was ready to accede to anything that Valentine thought fit to propose, and he likewise felt that a piece of intelligence such as he just heard ought to be more than sufficient to content him for one day. However, he would not leave without the promise of seeing Valentine again the next night. Valentine promised all that Morrel required of her, and certainly it was less difficult now for her to believe that she should marry Maximilian than it was an hour ago to assure herself that she should not marry Franz.

During the time occupied by the interview we have just detailed, Madame de Villefort had gone to visit M. Noirtier. The old man looked at her with that stern and forbidding expression with which he was accustomed to receive her.

"Sir," said she, "it is superfluous for me to tell you that Valentine's marriage is broken off, since it was here that the affair was concluded." Noirtier's countenance remained immovable. "But one thing I can tell you, of which I do not think you are aware; that is, that I have always been opposed to this marriage, and that the contract was entered into entirely without my consent or approbation." Noirtier regarded his daughter-in-law with the look of a man desiring an explanation. "Now that this marriage, which I know you so much disliked, is done away with, I come to you on an errand which neither M. de Villefort nor Valentine could consistently undertake.” Noirtier’s eyes demanded the nature of her mission. “I come to entreat you, sir,” continued Madame de Villefort, “as the only one who has the right of doing so, inasmuch as I am the only one who will receive no personal benefit from the transaction, — I come to entreat you to restore, not your love, for that she has always possessed, but to restore your fortune to your granddaughter.”

There was a doubtful expression in Noirtier’s eyes; he was evidently trying to discover the motive of this proceeding, and he could not succeed in doing so. “May I hope, sir,” said Madame de Villefort, “that your intentions accord with my request?” Noirtier made a sign that they did. “In that case, sir,” rejoined Madame de Villefort, “I will leave you overwhelmed with gratitude and happiness at your prompt acquiescence to my wishes.” She then bowed to M. Noirtier and retired.

The next day M. Noirtier sent for the notary; the first will was torn up and a second made, in which he left the whole of his fortune to Valentine, on condition that she should never be separated from him. It was then generally reported that Mademoiselle de Villefort, the heiress of the marquis and marchioness of Saint-Meran, had regained the good graces of her grandfather, and that she would ultimately be in possession of an income of 300,000 livres.

While all the proceedings relative to the dissolution of the marriage-contract were being carried on at the house of M. de Villefort, Monte Cristo had paid his visit to the Count of Morcerf, who, in order to lose no time in responding to M. Danglars’ wishes, and at the same time to pay all due deference to his position in society, donned his uniform of lieutenant-general, which he ornamented with all his crosses, and thus attired, ordered his finest horses and drove to the Rue de la Chausse d’Antin.

Danglars was balancing his monthly accounts, and it was perhaps not the most favorable moment for finding him in his best humor. At the first sight of his old friend, Danglars assumed his majestic air, and settled himself in his easy-chair. Morcerf, usually so stiff and formal, accosted the banker in an affable and smiling manner, and, feeling sure that the overture he was about to make would be well received, he did not consider it necessary to adopt any manoeuvres in order to gain his end, but went at once straight to the point.

“Well, baron,” said he, “here I am at last; some time has elapsed since our plans were formed, and they are not yet executed.” Morcerf paused at these words, quietly waiting till the cloud should have dispersed which had gathered on the brow of Danglars, and which he attributed to his silence; but, on the contrary, to his great surprise, it grew darker and darker. “To what do you allude, monsieur?” said Danglars; as if he were trying in vain to guess at the possible meaning of the general’s words.

“Ah,” said Morcerf, “I see you are a stickler for forms, my dear sir, and you would remind me that the ceremonial rites should not be omitted. Ma foi, I beg your pardon, but as I have but one son, and it is the first time I have ever thought of marrying him, I am still serving my apprenticeship, you know; come, I will reform.” And Morcerf with a forced smile arose, and, making a low bow to M. Danglars, said: “Baron, I have the honor of asking of you the hand of Mademoiselle Eugenie Danglars for my son, the Vicomte Albert de Morcerf.”

But Danglars, instead of receiving this address in the favorable manner which Morcerf had expected, knit his brow, and without inviting the count, who was still standing, to take a seat, he said: “Monsieur, it will be necessary to reflect before I give you an answer.”

“To reflect?” said Morcerf, more and more astonished; “have you not had enough time for reflection during the eight years which have elapsed since this marriage was first discussed between us?”

“Count,” said the banker, “things are constantly occurring in the world to induce us to lay aside our most established opinions, or at all events to cause us to remodel them according to the change of circumstances, which may have placed affairs in a totally different light to that in which we at first viewed them.”

“I do not understand you, baron,” said Morcerf.

“What I mean to say is this, sir, — that during the last fortnight unforeseen circumstances have occurred” —

“Excuse me,” said Morcerf, “but is it a play we are acting?”

“A play?”

“Yes, for it is like one; pray let us come more to the point, and endeavor thoroughly to understand each other.”

“That is quite my desire.”

“You have seen M. de Monte Cristo have you not?”

“I see him very often,” said Danglars, drawing himself up; “he is a particular friend of mine.”

“Well, in one of your late conversations with him, you said that I appeared to be forgetful and irresolute concerning this marriage, did you not?”

“I did say so.”

“Well, here I am, proving at once that I am really neither the one nor the other, by entreating you to keep your promise on that score.”

Danglars did not answer. “Have you so soon changed your mind,” added Morcerf, “or have you only provoked my request that you may have the pleasure of seeing me humbled?” Danglars, seeing that if he continued the conversation in the same tone in which he had begun it, the whole thing might turn out to his own disadvantage, turned to Morcerf, and said: “Count, you must doubtless be surprised at my reserve, and I assure you it costs me much to act in such a manner towards you; but, believe me when I say that imperative necessity has imposed the painful task upon me.”

“These are all so many empty words, my dear sir,” said Morcerf: “they might satisfy a new acquaintance, but the Comte de Morcerf does not rank in that list; and when a man like him comes to another, recalls to him his plighted word, and this man fails to redeem the pledge, he has at least a right to exact from him a good reason for so doing.” Danglars was a coward, but did not wish to appear so; he was piqued at the tone which Morcerf had just assumed. “I am not without a good reason for my conduct,” replied the banker.

“What do you mean to say?”

“I mean to say that I have a good reason, but that it is difficult to explain.”

“You must be aware, at all events, that it is impossible for me to understand motives before they are explained to me; but one thing at least is clear, which is, that you decline allying yourself with my family.”

“No, sir,” said Danglars; “I merely suspend my decision, that is all.”

“And do you really flatter yourself that I shall yield to all your caprices, and quietly and humbly await the time of again being received into your good graces?”

“Then, count, if you will not wait, we must look upon these projects as if they had never been entertained.” The count bit his lips till the blood almost started, to prevent the ebullition of anger which his proud and irritable temper scarcely allowed him to restrain; understanding, however, that in the present state of things the laugh would decidedly be against him, he turned from the door, towards which he had been directing his steps, and again confronted the banker. A cloud settled on his brow, evincing decided anxiety and uneasiness, instead of the expression of offended pride which had lately reigned there. “My dear Danglars,” said Morcerf, “we have been acquainted for many years, and consequently we ought to make some allowance for each other’s failings. You owe me an explanation, and really it is but fair that I should know what circumstance has occurred to deprive my son of your favor.”

“It is from no personal ill-feeling towards the viscount, that is all I can say, sir,” replied Danglars, who resumed his insolent manner as soon as he perceived that Morcerf was a little softened and calmed down. “And towards whom do you bear this personal ill-feeling, then?” said Morcerf, turning pale with anger. The expression of the count’s face had not remained unperceived by the banker; he fixed on him a look of greater assurance than before, and said: “You may, perhaps, be better satisfied that I should not go farther into particulars.”

A tremor of suppressed rage shook the whole frame of the count, and making a violent effort over himself, he said: “I have a right to insist on your giving me an explanation. Is it Madame de Morcerf who has displeased you? Is it my fortune which you find insufficient? Is it because my opinions differ from yours?”

“Nothing of the kind, sir,” replied Danglars: “if such had been the case, I only should have been to blame, inasmuch as I was aware of all these things when I made the engagement. No, do not seek any longer to discover the reason. I really am quite ashamed to have been the cause of your undergoing such severe self-examination; let us drop the subject, and adopt the middle course of delay, which implies neither a rupture nor an engagement. Ma foi, there is no hurry. My daughter is only seventeen years old, and your son twenty-one. While we wait, time will be progressing, events will succeed each other; things which in the evening look dark and obscure, appear but too clearly in the light of morning, and sometimes the utterance of one word, or the lapse of a single day, will reveal the most cruel calumnies.”

“Calumnies, did you say, sir?” cried Morcerf, turning livid with rage. “Does any one dare to slander me?”

“Monsieur, I told you that I considered it best to avoid all explanation.”

“Then, sir, I am patiently to submit to your refusal?”

“Yes, sir, although I assure you the refusal is as painful for me to give as it is for you to receive, for I had reckoned on the honor of your alliance, and the breaking off of a marriage contract always injures the lady more than the gentleman.”

“Enough, sir,” said Morcerf, “we will speak no more on the subject.” And clutching his gloves in anger, he left the apartment. Danglars observed that during the whole conversation Morcerf had never once dared to ask if it was on his own account that Danglars recalled his word. That evening he had a long conference with several friends; and M. Cavalcanti, who had remained in the drawing-room with the ladies, was the last to leave the banker’s house.

The next morning, as soon as he awoke, Danglars asked for the newspapers; they were brought to him; he laid aside three or four, and at last fixed on the Impartial, the paper of which Beauchamp was the chief editor. He hastily tore off the cover, opened the journal with nervous precipitation, passed contemptuously over the Paris jottings, and arriving at the miscellaneous intelligence, stopped with a malicious smile, at a paragraph headed “We hear from Yanina.” “Very good,” observed Danglars, after having read the paragraph; “here is a little article on Colonel Fernand, which, if I am not mistaken, would render the explanation which the Comte de Morcerf required of me perfectly unnecessary.”

At the same moment, that is, at nine o’clock in the morning, Albert de Morcerf, dressed in a black coat buttoned up to his chin, might have been seen walking with a quick and agitated step in the direction of Monte Cristo’s house in the Champs Elysees. When he presented himself at the gate the porter informed him that the Count had gone out about half an hour previously. “Did he take Baptistin with him?”

“No, my lord.”

“Call him, then; I wish to speak to him.” The concierge went to seek the valet de chambre, and returned with him in an instant.

“My good friend,” said Albert, “I beg pardon for my intrusion, but I was anxious to know from your own mouth if your master was really out or not.”

“He is really out, sir,” replied Baptistin.

“Out, even to me?”

“I know how happy my master always is to receive the vicomte,” said Baptistin; “and I should therefore never think of including him in any general order.”

“You are right; and now I wish to see him on an affair of great importance. Do you think it will be long before he comes in?”

“No, I think not, for he ordered his breakfast at ten o’clock.”

“Well, I will go and take a turn in the Champs Elysees, and at ten o’clock I will return here; meanwhile, if the count should come in, will you beg him not to go out again without seeing me?”

“You may depend on my doing so, sir,” said Baptistin.

Albert left the cab in which he had come at the count’s door, intending to take a turn on foot. As he was passing the Allee des Veuves, he thought he saw the count’s horses standing at Gosset’s shooting-gallery; he approached, and soon recognized the coachman. “Is the count shooting in the gallery?” said Morcerf.

“Yes, sir,” replied the coachman. While he was speaking, Albert had heard the report of two or three pistol-shots. He entered, and on his way met the waiter. “Excuse me, my lord,” said the lad; “but will you have the kindness to wait a moment?”

“What for, Philip?” asked Albert, who, being a constant visitor there, did not understand this opposition to his entrance.

“Because the person who is now in the gallery prefers being alone, and never practices in the presence of any one.”

“Not even before you, Philip? Then who loads his pistol?”

“His servant.”

“A Nubian?”

“A negro.”

“It is he, then.”

“Do you know this gentleman?”

“Yes, and I am come to look for him; he is a friend of mine.”

“Oh, that is quite another thing, then. I will go immediately and inform him of your arrival.” And Philip, urged by his own curiosity, entered the gallery; a second afterwards, Monte Cristo appeared on the threshold. “I ask your pardon, my dear count,” said Albert, “for following you here, and I must first tell you that it was not the fault of your servants that I did so; I alone am to blame for the indiscretion. I went to your house, and they told me you were out, but that they expected you home at ten o’clock to breakfast. I was walking about in order to pass away the time till ten o’clock, when I caught sight of your carriage and horses.”

“What you have just said induces me to hope that you intend breakfasting with me.”

“No, thank you, I am thinking of other things besides breakfast just now; perhaps we may take that meal at a later hour and in worse company.”

“What on earth are you talking of?”

“I am to fight to-day.”

“For what?”

“I am going to fight” —

“Yes, I understand that, but what is the quarrel? People fight for all sorts of reasons, you know.”

“I fight in the cause of honor.”

“Ah, that is something serious.”

“So serious, that I come to beg you to render me a service.”

“What is it?”

“To be my second.”

“That is a serious matter, and we will not discuss it here; let us speak of nothing till we get home. Ali, bring me some water.” The count turned up his sleeves, and passed into the little vestibule where the gentlemen were accustomed to wash their hands after shooting. “Come in, my lord,” said Philip in a low tone, “and I will show you something droll.” Morcerf entered, and in place of the usual target, he saw some playing-cards fixed against the wall. At a distance Albert thought it was a complete suit, for he counted from the ace to the ten. “Ah, ha,” said Albert, “I see you were preparing for a game of cards.”

“No,” said the count, “I was making a suit.”

“How?” said Albert.

“Those are really aces and twos which you see, but my shots have turned them into threes, fives, sevens, eights, nines, and tens.” Albert approached. In fact, the bullets had actually pierced the cards in the exact places which the painted signs would otherwise have occupied, the lines and distances being as regularly kept as if they had been ruled with pencil. “Diable,” said Morcerf.

“What would you have, my dear viscount?” said Monte Cristo, wiping his hands on the towel which Ali had brought him; “I must occupy my leisure moments in some way or other. But come, I am waiting for you.” Both men entered Monte Cristo’s carriage, which in the course of a few minutes deposited them safely at No. 30. Monte Cristo took Albert into his study, and pointing to a seat, placed another for himself. “Now let us talk the matter over quietly,” said the count.

“You see I am perfectly composed,” said Albert.

“With whom are you going to fight?”

“With Beauchamp.”

“One of your friends!”

“Of course; it is always with friends that one fights.”

“I suppose you have some cause of quarrel?”

“I have.”

“What has he done to you?”

“There appeared in his journal last night — but wait, and read for yourself.” And Albert handed over the paper to the count, who read as follows: —

“A correspondent at Yanina informs us of a fact of which until now we had remained in ignorance. The castle which formed the protection of the town was given up to the Turks by a French officer named Fernand, in whom the grand vizier, Ali Tepelini, had reposed the greatest confidence.”

“Well,” said Monte Cristo, “what do you see in that to annoy you?”

“What do I see in it?”

“Yes; what does it signify to you if the castle of Yanina was given up by a French officer?”

“It signifies to my father, the Count of Morcerf, whose Christian name is Fernand!”

“Did your father serve under Ali Pasha?”

“Yes; that is to say, he fought for the independence of the Greeks, and hence arises the calumny.”

“Oh, my dear viscount, do talk reason!”

“I do not desire to do otherwise.”

“Now, just tell me who the devil should know in France that the officer Fernand and the Count of Morcerf are one and the same person? and who cares now about Yanina, which was taken as long ago as the year 1822 or 1823?”

“That just shows the meanness of this slander. They have allowed all this time to elapse, and then all of a sudden rake up events which have been forgotten to furnish materials for scandal, in order to tarnish the lustre of our high position. I inherit my father’s name, and I do not choose that the shadow of disgrace should darken it. I am going to Beauchamp, in whose journal this paragraph appears, and I shall insist on his retracting the assertion before two witnesses.”

“Beauchamp will never retract.”

“Then he must fight.”

“No he will not, for he will tell you, what is very true, that perhaps there were fifty officers in the Greek army bearing the same name.”

“We will fight, nevertheless. I will efface that blot on my father’s character. My father, who was such a brave soldier, whose career was so brilliant” —

“Oh, well, he will add, ‘We are warranted in believing that this Fernand is not the illustrious Count of Morcerf, who also bears the same Christian name.’“

“I am determined not to be content with anything short of an entire retractation.”

“And you intend to make him do it in the presence of two witnesses, do you?”

“Yes.”

“You do wrong.”

“Which means, I suppose, that you refuse the service which I asked of you?”

“You know my theory regarding duels; I told you my opinion on that subject, if you remember, when we were at Rome.”

“Nevertheless, my dear count, I found you this morning engaged in an occupation but little consistent with the notions you profess to entertain.”

“Because, my dear fellow, you understand one must never be eccentric. If one’s lot is cast among fools, it is necessary to study folly. I shall perhaps find myself one day called out by some harebrained scamp, who has no more real cause of quarrel with me than you have with Beauchamp; he may take me to task for some foolish trifle or other, he will bring his witnesses, or will insult me in some public place, and I am expected to kill him for all that.”

“You admit that you would fight, then? Well, if so, why do you object to my doing so?”

“I do not say that you ought not to fight, I only say that a duel is a serious thing, and ought not to be undertaken without due reflection.”

“Did he reflect before he insulted my father?”

“If he spoke hastily, and owns that he did so, you ought to be satisfied.”

"Ah, my dear count, you are far too indulgent."

"And you are far too exacting. Supposing, for instance, and do not be angry at what I am going to say" —

"Well."

"Supposing the assertion to be really true?"

"A son ought not to submit to such a stain on his father's honor."

"Ma foi, we live in times when there is much to which we must submit."

"That is precisely the fault of the age."

"And do you undertake to reform it?"

"Yes, as far as I am personally concerned."

"Well, you are indeed exacting, my dear fellow!"

"Yes, I own it."

"Are you quite impervious to good advice?"

"Not when it comes from a friend."

"And do you account me that title?"

"Certainly I do."

"Well, then, before going to Beauchamp with your witnesses, seek further information on the subject."

"From whom?"

"From Haidee."

"Why, what can be the use of mixing a woman up in the affair? — what can she do in it?"

"She can declare to you, for example, that your father had no hand whatever in the defeat and death of the vizier; or if by chance he had, indeed, the misfortune to" —

"I have told you, my dear count, that I would not for one moment admit of such a proposition."

"You reject this means of information, then?"

"I do — most decidedly."

"Then let me offer one more word of advice."

"Do so, then, but let it be the last."

"You do not wish to hear it, perhaps?"

"On the contrary, I request it."

"Do not take any witnesses with you when you go to Beauchamp — visit him alone."

"That would be contrary to all custom."

"Your case is not an ordinary one."

“And what is your reason for advising me to go alone?”

“Because then the affair will rest between you and Beauchamp.”

“Explain yourself.”

“I will do so. If Beauchamp be disposed to retract, you ought at least to give him the opportunity of doing it of his own free will, — the satisfaction to you will be the same. If, on the contrary, he refuses to do so, it will then be quite time enough to admit two strangers into your secret.”

“They will not be strangers, they will be friends.”

“Ah, but the friends of to-day are the enemies of to-morrow; Beauchamp, for instance.”

“So you recommend” —

“I recommend you to be prudent.”

“Then you advise me to go alone to Beauchamp?”

“I do, and I will tell you why. When you wish to obtain some concession from a man’s self-love, you must avoid even the appearance of wishing to wound it.”

“I believe you are right.”

“I am glad of it.”

“Then I will go alone.”

“Go; but you would do better still by not going at all.”

“That is impossible.”

“Do so, then; it will be a wiser plan than the first which you proposed.”

“But if, in spite of all my precautions, I am at last obliged to fight, will you not be my second?”

“My dear viscount,” said Monte Cristo gravely, “you must have seen before to-day that at all times and in all places I have been at your disposal, but the service which you have just demanded of me is one which it is out of my power to render you.”

“Why?”

“Perhaps you may know at some future period, and in the mean time I request you to excuse my declining to put you in possession of my reasons.”

“Well, I will have Franz and Chateau-Renaud; they will be the very men for it.”

“Do so, then.”

“But if I do fight, you will surely not object to giving me a lesson or two in shooting and fencing?”

“That, too, is impossible.”

“What a singular being you are! — you will not interfere in anything.”

“You are right — that is the principle on which I wish to act.”

“We will say no more about it, then. Good-by, count.” Morcerf took his hat, and left the room. He found his carriage at the door, and doing his utmost to restrain his anger he went at once to find Beauchamp, who was in his office. It was a gloomy, dusty-looking apartment, such as journalists’ offices have always been from time immemorial. The servant announced M. Albert de Morcerf. Beauchamp repeated the name to himself, as though he could scarcely believe that he had heard aright, and then gave orders for him to be admitted. Albert entered. Beauchamp uttered an exclamation of surprise on seeing his friend leap over and trample under foot all the newspapers which were strewed about the room. “This way, this way, my dear Albert!” said he, holding out his hand to the young man. “Are you out of your senses, or do you come peaceably to take breakfast with me? Try and find a seat — there is one by that geranium, which is the only thing in the room to remind me that there are other leaves in the world besides leaves of paper.”

“Beauchamp,” said Albert, “it is of your journal that I come to speak.”

“Indeed? What do you wish to say about it?”

“I desire that a statement contained in it should be rectified.”

“To what do you refer? But pray sit down.”

“Thank you,” said Albert, with a cold and formal bow.

“Will you now have the kindness to explain the nature of the statement which has displeased you?”

“An announcement has been made which implicates the honor of a member of my family.”

“What is it?” said Beauchamp, much surprised; “surely you must be mistaken.”

“The story sent you from Yanina.”

“Yanina?”

“Yes; really you appear to be totally ignorant of the cause which brings me here.”

“Such is really the case, I assure you, upon my honor! Baptiste, give me yesterday’s paper,” cried Beauchamp.

“Here, I have brought mine with me,” replied Albert.

Beauchamp took the paper, and read the article to which Albert pointed in an undertone. “You see it is a serious annoyance,” said Morcerf, when Beauchamp had finished the perusal of the paragraph. “Is the officer referred to a relation of yours, then?” demanded the journalist.

“Yes,” said Albert, blushing.

“Well, what do you wish me to do for you?” said Beauchamp mildly.

“My dear Beauchamp, I wish you to contradict this statement.” Beauchamp looked at Albert with a benevolent expression.

“Come,” said he, “this matter will want a good deal of talking over; a retractation is always a serious thing, you know. Sit down, and I will read it again.” Albert resumed his seat, and Beauchamp read, with more attention than at first, the lines denounced by his friend. “Well,” said Albert in a determined tone, “you see that your paper his insulted a member of my family, and I insist on a retractation being made.”

“You insist?”

“Yes, I insist.”

“Permit me to remind you that you are not in the Chamber, my dear Viscount.”

“Nor do I wish to be there,” replied the young man, rising. “I repeat that I am determined to have the announcement of yesterday contradicted. You have known me long enough,” continued Albert, biting his lips convulsively, for he saw that Beauchamp’s anger was beginning to rise, — ”you have been my friend, and therefore sufficiently intimate with me to be aware that I am likely to maintain my resolution on this point.”

“If I have been your friend, Morcerf, your present manner of speaking would almost lead me to forget that I ever bore that title. But wait a moment, do not let us get angry, or at least not yet. You are irritated and vexed — tell me how this Fernand is related to you?”

“He is merely my father,” said Albert — ”M. Fernand Mondego, Count of Morcerf, an old soldier who has fought in twenty battles and whose honorable scars they would denounce as badges of disgrace.”

“Is it your father?” said Beauchamp; “that is quite another thing. Then I can well understand your indignation, my dear Albert. I will look at it again;” and he read the paragraph for the third time, laying a stress on each word as he proceeded. “But the paper nowhere identifies this Fernand with your father.”

"No; but the connection will be seen by others, and therefore I will have the article contradicted." At the words "I will," Beauchamp steadily raised his eyes to Albert's countenance, and then as gradually lowering them, he remained thoughtful for a few moments. "You will retract this assertion, will you not, Beauchamp?" said Albert with increased though stifled anger.

"Yes," replied Beauchamp.

"Immediately?" said Albert.

"When I am convinced that the statement is false."

"What?"

"The thing is worth looking into, and I will take pains to investigate the matter thoroughly."

"But what is there to investigate, sir?" said Albert, enraged beyond measure at Beauchamp's last remark. "If you do not believe that it is my father, say so immediately; and if, on the contrary, you believe it to be him, state your reasons for doing so." Beauchamp looked at Albert with the smile which was so peculiar to him, and which in its numerous modifications served to express every varied emotion of his mind. "Sir," replied he, "if you came to me with the idea of demanding satisfaction, you should have gone at once to the point, and not have entertained me with the idle conversation to which I have been patiently listening for the last half hour. Am I to put this construction on your visit?"

"Yes, if you will not consent to retract that infamous calumny."

"Wait a moment — no threats, if you please, M. Fernand Mondego, Vicomte de Morcerf; I never allow them from my enemies, and therefore shall not put up with them from my friends. You insist on my contradicting the article relating to General Fernand, an article with which, I assure you on my word of honor, I had nothing whatever to do?"

"Yes, I insist on it," said Albert, whose mind was beginning to get bewildered with the excitement of his feelings.

"And if I refuse to retract, you wish to fight, do you?" said Beauchamp in a calm tone.

"Yes," replied Albert, raising his voice.

"Well," said Beauchamp, "here is my answer, my dear sir. The article was not inserted by me — I was not even aware of it; but you have, by the step you have taken, called my attention to the paragraph in question, and it will remain until it shall be either contradicted or confirmed by some one who has a right to do so."

“Sir,” said Albert, rising, “I will do myself the honor of sending my seconds to you, and you will be kind enough to arrange with them the place of meeting and the weapons.”

“Certainly, my dear sir.”

“And this evening, if you please, or to-morrow at the latest, we will meet.”

“No, no, I will be on the ground at the proper time; but in my opinion (and I have a right to dictate the preliminaries, as it is I who have received the provocation) — in my opinion the time ought not to be yet. I know you to be well skilled in the management of the sword, while I am only moderately so; I know, too, that you are a good marksman — there we are about equal. I know that a duel between us two would be a serious affair, because you are brave, and I am brave also. I do not therefore wish either to kill you, or to be killed myself without a cause. Now, I am going to put a question to you, and one very much to the purpose too. Do you insist on this retractation so far as to kill me if I do not make it, although I have repeated more than once, and affirmed on my honor, that I was ignorant of the thing with which you charge me, and although I still declare that it is impossible for any one but you to recognize the Count of Morcerf under the name of Fernand?”

“I maintain my original resolution.”

“Very well, my dear sir; then I consent to cut throats with you. But I require three weeks’ preparation; at the end of that time I shall come and say to you, ‘The assertion is false, and I retract it,’ or ‘The assertion is true,’ when I shall immediately draw the sword from its sheath, or the pistols from the case, whichever you please.”

“Three weeks!” cried Albert; “they will pass as slowly as three centuries when I am all the time suffering dishonor.”

“Had you continued to remain on amicable terms with me, I should have said, ‘Patience, my friend;’ but you have constituted yourself my enemy, therefore I say, ‘What does that signify to me, sir?’“

“Well, let it be three weeks then,” said Morcerf; “but remember, at the expiration of that time no delay or subterfuge will justify you in” —

“M. Albert de Morcerf,” said Beauchamp, rising in his turn, “I cannot throw you out of window for three weeks — that is to say, for twenty-four days to come — nor have you any right to split my skull open till that time has elapsed. To-day is the 29th of August; the 21st of September will, therefore, be the conclusion of the term agreed on, and till that time arrives — and it is the advice of a gentleman which I am about to give you — till then we will refrain from growling and barking like two dogs chained within sight of each other.” When he had concluded his speech, Beauchamp bowed coldly to Albert, turned his back upon him, and went to the press-room.

Albert vented his anger on a pile of newspapers, which he sent flying all over the office by switching them violently with his stick; after which ebullition he departed — not, however, without walking several times to the door of the press-room, as if he had half a mind to enter. While Albert was lashing the front of his carriage in the same manner that he had the newspapers which were the innocent agents of his discomfiture, as he was crossing the barrier he perceived Morrel, who was walking with a quick step and a bright eye. He was passing the Chinese Baths, and appeared to have come from the direction of the Porte Saint-Martin, and to be going towards the Madeleine. “Ah,” said Morcerf, “there goes a happy man!” And it so happened Albert was not mistaken in his opinion.

Chapter 79

The Lemonade.

Morrel was, in fact, very happy. M. Noirtier had just sent for him, and he was in such haste to know the reason of his doing so that he had not stopped to take a cab, placing infinitely more dependence on his own two legs than on the four legs of a cab-horse. He had therefore set off at a furious rate from the Rue Meslay, and was hastening with rapid strides in the direction of the Faubourg Saint-Honore. Morrel advanced with a firm, manly tread, and poor Barrois followed him as he best might. Morrel was only thirty-one, Barrois was sixty years of age; Morrel was deeply in love, and Barrois was dying with heat and exertion. These two men, thus opposed in age and interests, resembled two parts of a triangle, presenting the extremes of separation, yet nevertheless possessing their point of union. This point of union was Noirtier, and it was he who had just sent for Morrel, with the request that the latter would lose no time in coming to him — a command which Morrel obeyed to the letter, to the great discomfiture of Barrois. On arriving at the house, Morrel was not even out of breath, for love lends wings to our desires; but Barrois, who had long forgotten what it was to love, was sorely fatigued by the expedition he had been constrained to use.

The old servant introduced Morrel by a private entrance, closed the door of the study, and soon the rustling of a dress announced the arrival of Valentine. She looked marvellously beautiful in her deep mourning dress, and Morrel experienced such intense delight in gazing upon her that he felt as if he could almost have dispensed with the conversation of her grandfather. But the easy-chair of the old man was heard rolling along the floor, and he soon made his appearance in the room. Noirtier acknowledged by a look of extreme kindness and benevolence the thanks which Morrel lavished on him for his timely intervention on behalf of Valentine and himself — an intervention which had saved them from despair. Morrel then cast on the invalid an interrogative look as to the new favor which he designed to bestow on him. Valentine was sitting at a little distance from them, timidly awaiting the moment when she should be obliged to speak.

Noirtier fixed his eyes on her. “Am I to say what you told me?” asked Valentine. Noirtier made a sign that she was to do so.

“Monsieur Morrel,” said Valentine to the young man, who was regarding her with the most intense interest, “my grandfather, M. Noirtier, had a thousand things to say, which he told me three days ago; and now, he has sent for you, that I may repeat them to you. I will repeat them, then; and since he has chosen me as his interpreter, I will be faithful to the trust, and will not alter a word of his intentions.”

“Oh, I am listening with the greatest impatience,” replied the young man; “speak, I beg of you.” Valentine cast down her eyes; this was a good omen for Morrel, for he knew that nothing but happiness could have the power of thus overcoming Valentine. “My grandfather intends leaving this house,” said she, “and Barrois is looking out suitable apartments for him in another.”

“But you, Mademoiselle de Villefort, — you, who are necessary to M. Noirtier’s happiness” —

“I?” interrupted Valentine; “I shall not leave my grandfather, — that is an understood thing between us. My apartment will be close to his. Now, M. de Villefort must either give his consent to this plan or his refusal; in the first case, I shall leave directly, and in the second, I shall wait till I am of age, which will be in about ten months. Then I shall be free, I shall have an independent fortune, and” —

“And what?” demanded Morrel.

“And with my grandfather’s consent I shall fulfil the promise which I have made you.” Valentine pronounced these last few words in such a low tone, that nothing but Morrel’s intense interest in what she was saying could have enabled him to hear them. “Have I not explained your wishes, grandpapa?” said Valentine, addressing Noirtier. “Yes,” looked the old man. — ”Once under my grandfather’s roof, M. Morrel can visit me in the presence of my good and worthy protector, if we still feel that the union we contemplated will be likely to insure our future comfort and happiness; in that case I shall expect M. Morrel to come and claim me at my own hands. But, alas, I have heard it said that hearts inflamed by obstacles to their desire grew cold in time of security; I trust we shall never find it so in our experience!”

“Oh,” cried Morrel, almost tempted to throw himself on his knees before Noirtier and Valentine, and to adore them as two superior beings, “what have I ever done in my life to merit such unbounded happiness?”

“Until that time,” continued the young girl in a calm and self-possessed tone of voice, “we will conform to circumstances, and be guided by the wishes of our friends, so long as those wishes do not tend finally to separate us; in a word, and I repeat it, because it expresses all I wish to convey, — we will wait.”

“And I swear to make all the sacrifices which this word imposes, sir,” said Morrel, “not only with resignation, but with cheerfulness.”

“Therefore,” continued Valentine, looking playfully at Maximilian, “no more inconsiderate actions — no more rash projects; for you surely would not wish to compromise one who from this day regards herself as destined, honorably and happily, to bear your name?”

Morrel looked obedience to her commands. Noirtier regarded the lovers with a look of ineffable tenderness, while Barrois, who had remained in the room in the character of a man privileged to know everything that passed, smiled on the youthful couple as he wiped the perspiration from his bald forehead. “How hot you look, my good Barrois,” said Valentine.

“Ah, I have been running very fast, mademoiselle, but I must do M. Morrel the justice to say that he ran still faster.” Noirtier directed their attention to a waiter, on which was placed a decanter containing lemonade and a glass. The decanter was nearly full, with the exception of a little, which had been already drunk by M. Noirtier.

“Come, Barrois,” said the young girl, “take some of this lemonade; I see you are coveting a good draught of it.”

“The fact is, mademoiselle,” said Barrois, “I am dying with thirst, and since you are so kind as to offer it me, I cannot say I should at all object to drinking your health in a glass of it.”

“Take some, then, and come back immediately.” Barrois took away the waiter, and hardly was he outside the door, which in his haste he forgot to shut, than they saw him throw back his head and empty to the very dregs the glass which Valentine had filled. Valentine and Morrel were exchanging their adieux in the presence of Noirtier when a ring was heard at the door-bell. It was the signal of a visit. Valentine looked at her watch.

“It is past noon,” said she, “and to-day is Saturday; I dare say it is the doctor, grandpapa.” Noirtier looked his conviction that she was right in her supposition. “He will come in here, and M. Morrel had better go, — do you not think so, grandpapa?”

"Yes," signed the old man.

"Barrois," cried Valentine, "Barrois!"

"I am coming, mademoiselle," replied he. "Barrois will open the door for you," said Valentine, addressing Morrel. "And now remember one thing, Monsieur Officer, that my grandfather commands you not to take any rash or ill-advised step which would be likely to compromise our happiness."

"I promised him to wait," replied Morrel; "and I will wait."

At this moment Barrois entered. "Who rang?" asked Valentine.

"Doctor d'Avrigny," said Barrois, staggering as if he would fall.

"What is the matter, Barrois?" said Valentine. The old man did not answer, but looked at his master with wild staring eyes, while with his cramped hand he grasped a piece of furniture to enable him to stand upright. "He is going to fall!" cried Morrel. The rigors which had attacked Barrois gradually increased, the features of the face became quite altered, and the convulsive movement of the muscles appeared to indicate the approach of a most serious nervous disorder. Noirtier, seeing Barrois in this pitiable condition, showed by his looks all the various emotions of sorrow and sympathy which can animate the heart of man. Barrois made some steps towards his master.

"Ah, sir," said he, "tell me what is the matter with me. I am suffering — I cannot see. A thousand fiery darts are piercing my brain. Ah, don't touch me, pray don't." By this time his haggard eyes had the appearance of being ready to start from their sockets; his head fell back, and the lower extremities of the body began to stiffen. Valentine uttered a cry of horror; Morrel took her in his arms, as if to defend her from some unknown danger. "M. d'Avrigny, M. d'Avrigny," cried she, in a stifled voice. "Help, help!" Barrois turned round and with a great effort stumbled a few steps, then fell at the feet of Noirtier, and resting his hand on the knee of the invalid, exclaimed, "My master, my good master!" At this moment M. de Villefort, attracted by the noise, appeared on the threshold. Morrel relaxed his hold of Valentine, and retreating to a distant corner of the room remained half hidden behind a curtain. Pale as if he had been gazing on a serpent, he fixed his terrified eye on the agonized sufferer.

Noirtier, burning with impatience and terror, was in despair at his utter inability to help his old domestic, whom he regarded more in the light of a friend than a servant. One might by the fearful swelling of the veins of his forehead and the contraction of the muscles round the eye, trace the terrible conflict which was going on between the living energetic mind and the inanimate and helpless body. Barrois, his features convulsed, his eyes suffused with blood, and his head thrown back, was lying at full length, beating the floor with his hands, while his legs had become so stiff, that they looked as if they would break rather than bend. A slight appearance of foam was visible around the mouth, and he breathed painfully, and with extreme difficulty.

Villefort seemed stupefied with astonishment, and remained gazing intently on the scene before him without uttering a word. He had not seen Morrel. After a moment of dumb contemplation, during which his face became pale and his hair seemed to stand on end, he sprang towards the door, crying out, “Doctor, doctor! come instantly, pray come!”

“Madame, madame!” cried Valentine, calling her step-mother, and running up-stairs to meet her; “come quick, quick! — and bring your bottle of smelling-salts with you.”

“What is the matter?” said Madame de Villefort in a harsh and constrained tone.

“Oh, come, come!”

“But where is the doctor?” exclaimed Villefort; “where is he?” Madame de Villefort now deliberately descended the staircase. In one hand she held her handkerchief, with which she appeared to be wiping her face, and in the other a bottle of English smelling-salts. Her first look on entering the room was at Noirtier, whose face, independent of the emotion which such a scene could not fail of producing, proclaimed him to be in possession of his usual health; her second glance was at the dying man. She turned pale, and her eye passed quickly from the servant and rested on the master.

“In the name of heaven, madame,” said Villefort, “where is the doctor? He was with you just now. You see this is a fit of apoplexy, and he might be saved if he could but be bled!”

“Has he eaten anything lately?” asked Madame de Villefort, eluding her husband’s question. “Madame,” replied Valentine, “he has not even breakfasted. He has been running very fast on an errand with which my grandfather charged him, and when he returned, took nothing but a glass of lemonade.”

“Ah,” said Madame de Villefort, “why did he not take wine? Lemonade was a very bad thing for him.”

“Grandpapa’s bottle of lemonade was standing just by his side; poor Barrois was very thirsty, and was thankful to drink anything he could find.” Madame de Villefort started. Noirtier looked at her with a glance of the most profound scrutiny. “He has such a short neck,” said she. “Madame,” said Villefort, “I ask where is M. d’Avrigny? In God’s name answer me!”

“He is with Edward, who is not quite well,” replied Madame de Villefort, no longer being able to avoid answering.

Villefort rushed up-stairs to fetch him. “Take this,” said Madame de Villefort, giving her smelling-bottle to Valentine. “They will, no doubt, bleed him; therefore I will retire, for I cannot endure the sight of blood;” and she followed her husband up-stairs. Morrel now emerged from his hiding-place, where he had remained quite unperceived, so great had been the general confusion. “Go away as quick as you can, Maximilian,” said Valentine, “and stay till I send for you. Go.”

Morrel looked towards Noirtier for permission to retire. The old man, who had preserved all his usual coolness, made a sign to him to do so. The young man pressed Valentine’s hand to his lips, and then left the house by a back staircase. At the same moment that he quitted the room, Villefort and the doctor entered by an opposite door. Barrois was now showing signs of returning consciousness. The crisis seemed past, a low moaning was heard, and he raised himself on one knee. D’Avrigny and Villefort laid him on a couch. “What do you prescribe, doctor?” demanded Villefort. “Give me some water and ether. You have some in the house, have you not?”

“Yes.”

“Send for some oil of turpentine and tartar emetic.”

Villefort immediately despatched a messenger. “And now let every one retire.”

“Must I go too?” asked Valentine timidly.

“Yes, mademoiselle, you especially,” replied the doctor abruptly.

Valentine looked at M. d’Avrigny with astonishment, kissed her grandfather on the forehead, and left the room. The doctor closed the door after her with a gloomy air. “Look, look, doctor,” said Villefort, “he is quite coming round again; I really do not think, after all, it is anything of consequence.” M. d’Avrigny answered by a melancholy smile. “How do you feel, Barrois?” asked he. “A little better, sir.”

“Will you drink some of this ether and water?”

“I will try; but don’t touch me.”

"Why not?"

"Because I feel that if you were only to touch me with the tip of your finger the fit would return."

"Drink."

Barrois took the glass, and, raising it to his purple lips, took about half of the liquid offered him. "Where do you suffer?" asked the doctor.

"Everywhere. I feel cramps over my whole body."

"Do you find any dazzling sensation before the eyes?"

"Yes."

"Any noise in the ears?"

"Frightful."

"When did you first feel that?"

"Just now."

"Suddenly?"

"Yes, like a clap of thunder."

"Did you feel nothing of it yesterday or the day before?"

"Nothing."

"No drowsiness?"

"None."

"What have you eaten to-day?"

"I have eaten nothing; I only drank a glass of my master's lemonade — that's all;" and Barrois turned towards Noirtier, who, immovably fixed in his arm-chair, was contemplating this terrible scene without allowing a word or a movement to escape him.

"Where is this lemonade?" asked the doctor eagerly.

"Down-stairs in the decanter."

"Whereabouts downstairs?"

"In the kitchen."

"Shall I go and fetch it, doctor?" inquired Villefort.

"No, stay here and try to make Barrois drink the rest of this glass of ether and water. I will go myself and fetch the lemonade." D'Avrigny bounded towards the door, flew down the back staircase, and almost knocked down Madame de Villefort, in his haste, who was herself going down to the kitchen. She cried out, but d'Avrigny paid no attention to her; possessed with but one idea, he cleared the last four steps with a bound, and rushed into the kitchen, where he saw the decanter about three parts empty still standing on the waiter, where it had been left. He darted upon it as an eagle would seize upon its prey. Panting with loss of breath, he returned to the room he had just left. Madame de Villefort was slowly ascending the steps which led to her room. “Is this the decanter you spoke of?” asked d’Avrigny.

“Yes, doctor.”

“Is this the same lemonade of which you partook?”

“I believe so.”

“What did it taste like?”

“It had a bitter taste.”

The doctor poured some drops of the lemonade into the palm of his hand, put his lips to it, and after having rinsed his mouth as a man does when he is tasting wine, he spat the liquor into the fireplace.

“It is no doubt the same,” said he. “Did you drink some too, M. Noirtier?”

“Yes.”

“And did you also discover a bitter taste?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, doctor,” cried Barrois, “the fit is coming on again. Oh, do something for me.” The doctor flew to his patient. “That emetic, Villefort — see if it is coming.” Villefort sprang into the passage, exclaiming, “The emetic! the emetic! — is it come yet?” No one answered. The most profound terror reigned throughout the house. “If I had anything by means of which I could inflate the lungs,” said d’Avrigny, looking around him, “perhaps I might prevent suffocation. But there is nothing which would do — nothing!” “Oh, sir,” cried Barrois, “are you going to let me die without help? Oh, I am dying! Oh, save me!”

“A pen, a pen!” said the doctor. There was one lying on the table; he endeavored to introduce it into the mouth of the patient, who, in the midst of his convulsions, was making vain attempts to vomit; but the jaws were so clinched that the pen could not pass them. This second attack was much more violent than the first, and he had slipped from the couch to the ground, where he was writhing in agony. The doctor left him in this paroxysm, knowing that he could do nothing to alleviate it, and, going up to Noirtier, said abruptly, “How do you find yourself? — well?”

“Yes.”

“Have you any weight on the chest; or does your stomach feel light and comfortable — eh?”

"Yes."

"Then you feel pretty much as you generally do after you have had the dose which I am accustomed to give you every Sunday?"

"Yes."

"Did Barrois make your lemonade?"

"Yes."

"Was it you who asked him to drink some of it?"

"No."

"Was it M. de Villefort?"

"No."

"Madame?"

"No."

"It was your granddaughter, then, was it not?"

"Yes." A groan from Barrois, accompanied by a yawn which seemed to crack the very jawbones, attracted the attention of M. d'Avrigny; he left M. Noirtier, and returned to the sick man. "Barrois," said the doctor, "can you speak?" Barrois muttered a few unintelligible words. "Try and make an effort to do so, my good man." said d'Avrigny. Barrois reopened his bloodshot eyes. "Who made the lemonade?"

"I did."

"Did you bring it to your master directly it was made?"

"No."

"You left it somewhere, then, in the meantime?"

"Yes; I left it in the pantry, because I was called away."

"Who brought it into this room, then?"

"Mademoiselle Valentine." D'Avrigny struck his forehead with his hand. "Gracious heaven," exclaimed he. "Doctor, doctor!" cried Barrois, who felt another fit coming.

"Will they never bring that emetic?" asked the doctor.

"Here is a glass with one already prepared," said Villefort, entering the room.

"Who prepared it?"

"The chemist who came here with me."

"Drink it," said the doctor to Barrois. "Impossible, doctor; it is too late; my throat is closing up. I am choking! Oh, my heart! Ah, my head! — Oh, what agony! — Shall I suffer like this long?"

"No, no, friend," replied the doctor, "you will soon cease to suffer."

"Ah, I understand you," said the unhappy man. "My God, have mercy upon me!" and, uttering a fearful cry, Barrois fell back as if he had been struck by lightning. D'Avrigny put his hand to his heart, and placed a glass before his lips.

"Well?" said Villefort. "Go to the kitchen and get me some syrup of violets." Villefort went immediately. "Do not be alarmed, M. Noirtier," said d'Avrigny; "I am going to take my patient into the next room to bleed him; this sort of attack is very frightful to witness."

And taking Barrois under the arms, he dragged him into an adjoining room; but almost immediately he returned to fetch the lemonade. Noirtier closed his right eye. "You want Valentine, do you not? I will tell them to send her to you." Villefort returned, and d'Avrigny met him in the passage. "Well, how is he now?" asked he. "Come in here," said d'Avrigny, and he took him into the chamber where the sick man lay. "Is he still in a fit?" said the procureur.

"He is dead."

Villefort drew back a few steps, and, clasping his hands, exclaimed, with real amazement and sympathy, "Dead? — and so soon too!"

"Yes, it is very soon," said the doctor, looking at the corpse before him; "but that ought not to astonish you; Monsieur and Madame de Saint-Meran died as soon. People die very suddenly in your house, M. de Villefort."

"What?" cried the magistrate, with an accent of horror and consternation, "are you still harping on that terrible idea?"

"Still, sir; and I shall always do so," replied d'Avrigny, "for it has never for one instant ceased to retain possession of my mind; and that you may be quite sure I am not mistaken this time, listen well to what I am going to say, M. de Villefort." The magistrate trembled convulsively. "There is a poison which destroys life almost without leaving any perceptible traces. I know it well; I have studied it in all its forms and in the effects which it produces. I recognized the presence of this poison in the case of poor Barrois as well as in that of Madame de Saint-Meran. There is a way of detecting its presence. It restores the blue color of litmus-paper reddened by an acid, and it turns syrup of violets green. We have no litmus-paper, but, see, here they come with the syrup of violets."

The doctor was right; steps were heard in the passage. M. d'Avrigny opened the door, and took from the hands of the chambermaid a cup which contained two or three spoonfuls of the syrup, he then carefully closed the door. “Look,” said he to the procureur, whose heart beat so loudly that it might almost be heard, “here is in this cup some syrup of violets, and this decanter contains the remainder of the lemonade of which M. Noirtier and Barrois partook. If the lemonade be pure and inoffensive, the syrup will retain its color; if, on the contrary, the lemonade be drugged with poison, the syrup will become green. Look closely!”

The doctor then slowly poured some drops of the lemonade from the decanter into the cup, and in an instant a light cloudy sediment began to form at the bottom of the cup; this sediment first took a blue shade, then from the color of sapphire it passed to that of opal, and from opal to emerald. Arrived at this last hue, it changed no more. The result of the experiment left no doubt whatever on the mind.

“The unfortunate Barrois has been poisoned,” said d’Avrigny, “and I will maintain this assertion before God and man.” Villefort said nothing, but he clasped his hands, opened his haggard eyes, and, overcome with his emotion, sank into a chair.

Chapter 80

The Accusation.

M. D'Avrigny soon restored the magistrate to consciousness, who had looked like a second corpse in that chamber of death. "Oh, death is in my house!" cried Villefort.

"Say, rather, crime!" replied the doctor.

"M. d'Avrigny," cried Villefort, "I cannot tell you all I feel at this moment, — terror, grief, madness."

"Yes," said M. d'Avrigny, with an imposing calmness, "but I think it is now time to act. I think it is time to stop this torrent of mortality. I can no longer bear to be in possession of these secrets without the hope of seeing the victims and society generally revenged." Villefort cast a gloomy look around him. "In my house," murmured he, "in my house!"

"Come, magistrate," said M. d'Avrigny, "show yourself a man; as an interpreter of the law, do honor to your profession by sacrificing your selfish interests to it."

"You make me shudder, doctor. Do you talk of a sacrifice?"

"I do."

"Do you then suspect any one?"

"I suspect no one; death raps at your door — it enters — it goes, not blindfolded, but circumspectly, from room to room. Well, I follow its course, I track its passage; I adopt the wisdom of the ancients, and feel my way, for my friendship for your family and my respect for you are as a twofold bandage over my eyes; well" —

"Oh, speak, speak, doctor; I shall have courage."

"Well, sir, you have in your establishment, or in your family, perhaps, one of the frightful monstrosities of which each century produces only one. Locusta and Agrippina, living at the same time, were an exception, and proved the determination of providence to effect the entire ruin of the Roman empire, sullied by so many crimes. Brunehilde and Fredegonde were the results of the painful struggle of civilization in its infancy, when man was learning to control mind, were it even by an emissary from the realms of darkness. All these women had been, or were, beautiful. The same flower of innocence had flourished, or was still flourishing, on their brow, that is seen on the brow of the culprit in your house.” Villefort shrieked, clasped his hands, and looked at the doctor with a supplicating air. But the latter went on without pity: —

“‘Seek whom the crime will profit,’ says an axiom of jurisprudence.”

“Doctor,” cried Villefort, “alas, doctor, how often has man’s justice been deceived by those fatal words. I know not why, but I feel that this crime” —

“You acknowledge, then, the existence of the crime?”

“Yes, I see too plainly that it does exist. But it seems that it is intended to affect me personally. I fear an attack myself, after all these disasters.”

“Oh, man,” murmured d’Avrigny, “the most selfish of all animals, the most personal of all creatures, who believes the earth turns, the sun shines, and death strikes for him alone, — an ant cursing God from the top of a blade of grass! And have those who have lost their lives lost nothing? — M. de Saint-Meran, Madame de Saint-Meran, M. Noirtier” —

“How? M. Noirtier?”

“Yes; think you it was the poor servant’s life was coveted? No, no; like Shakespeare’s ‘Polonius,’ he died for another. It was Noirtier the lemonade was intended for — it is Noirtier, logically speaking, who drank it. The other drank it only by accident, and, although Barrois is dead, it was Noirtier whose death was wished for.”

“But why did it not kill my father?”

“I told you one evening in the garden after Madame de Saint-Meran’s death — because his system is accustomed to that very poison, and the dose was trifling to him, which would be fatal to another; because no one knows, not even the assassin, that, for the last twelve months, I have given M. Noirtier brucine for his paralytic affection, while the assassin is not ignorant, for he has proved that brucine is a violent poison.”

“Oh, have pity — have pity!” murmured Villefort, wringing his hands.

“Follow the culprit’s steps; he first kills M. de Saint-Meran” —

“O doctor!”

“I would swear to it; what I heard of his symptoms agrees too well with what I have seen in the other cases.” Villefort ceased to contend; he only groaned. “He first kills M. de Saint-Meran,” repeated the doctor, “then Madame de Saint-Meran, — a double fortune to inherit.” Villefort wiped the perspiration from his forehead. “Listen attentively.”

“Alas,” stammered Villefort, “I do not lose a single word.”

“M. Noirtier,” resumed M. d’Avrigny in the same pitiless tone, — ”M. Noirtier had once made a will against you — against your family — in favor of the poor, in fact; M. Noirtier is spared, because nothing is expected from him. But he has no sooner destroyed his first will and made a second, than, for fear he should make a third, he is struck down. The will was made the day before yesterday, I believe; you see there has been no time lost.”

“Oh, mercy, M. d’Avrigny!”

“No mercy, sir! The physician has a sacred mission on earth; and to fulfil it he begins at the source of life, and goes down to the mysterious darkness of the tomb. When crime has been committed, and God, doubtless in anger, turns away his face, it is for the physician to bring the culprit to justice.”

“Have mercy on my child, sir,” murmured Villefort.

“You see it is yourself who have first named her — you, her father.”

“Have pity on Valentine! Listen — it is impossible! I would as willingly accuse myself! Valentine, whose heart is pure as a diamond or a lily.”

“No pity, procureur; the crime is fragrant. Mademoiselle herself packed all the medicines which were sent to M. de Saint-Meran; and M. de Saint-Meran is dead. Mademoiselle de Villefort prepared all the cooling draughts which Madame de Saint-Meran took, and Madame de Saint-Meran is dead. Mademoiselle de Villefort took from the hands of Barrois, who was sent out, the lemonade which M. Noirtier had every morning, and he has escaped by a miracle. Mademoiselle de Villefort is the culprit — she is the poisoner! To you, as the king’s attorney, I denounce Mademoiselle de Villefort, do your duty.”

“Doctor, I resist no longer — I can no longer defend myself — I believe you; but, for pity’s sake, spare my life, my honor!”

“M. de Villefort,” replied the doctor, with increased vehemence, “there are occasions when I dispense with all foolish human circumspection. If your daughter had committed only one crime, and I saw her meditating another, I would say ‘Warn her, punish her, let her pass the remainder of her life in a convent, weeping and praying.’ If she had committed two crimes, I would say, ‘Here, M. de Villefort, is a poison that the prisoner is not acquainted with, — one that has no known antidote, quick as thought, rapid as lightning, mortal as the thunderbolt; give her that poison, recommending her soul to God, and save your honor and your life, for it is yours she aims at; and I can picture her approaching your pillow with her hypocritical smiles and her sweet exhortations. Woe to you, M. de Villefort, if you do not strike first!' This is what I would say had she only killed two persons but she has seen three deaths, — has contemplated three murdered persons, — has knelt by three corpses! To the scaffold with the poisoner — to the scaffold! Do you talk of your honor? Do what I tell you, and immortality awaits you!"

Villefort fell on his knees. "Listen," said he; "I have not the strength of mind you have, or rather that which you would not have, if instead of my daughter Valentine your daughter Madeleine were concerned." The doctor turned pale. "Doctor, every son of woman is born to suffer and to die; I am content to suffer and to await death."

"Beware," said M. d'Avrigny, "it may come slowly; you will see it approach after having struck your father, your wife, perhaps your son."

Villefort, suffocating, pressed the doctor's arm. "Listen," cried he; "pity me — help me! No, my daughter is not guilty. If you drag us both before a tribunal I will still say, 'No, my daughter is not guilty; — there is no crime in my house. I will not acknowledge a crime in my house; for when crime enters a dwelling, it is like death — it does not come alone.' Listen. What does it signify to you if I am murdered? Are you my friend? Are you a man? Have you a heart? No, you are a physician! Well, I tell you I will not drag my daughter before a tribunal, and give her up to the executioner! The bare idea would kill me — would drive me like a madman to dig my heart out with my finger-nails! And if you were mistaken, doctor — if it were not my daughter — if I should come one day, pale as a spectre, and say to you, 'Assassin, you have killed my child!' — hold — if that should happen, although I am a Christian, M. d'Avrigny, I should kill myself."

"Well," said the doctor, after a moment's silence, "I will wait." Villefort looked at him as if he had doubted his words. "Only," continued M. d'Avrigny, with a slow and solemn tone, "if any one falls ill in your house, if you feel yourself attacked, do not send for me, for I will come no more. I will consent to share this dreadful secret with you, but I will not allow shame and remorse to grow and increase in my conscience, as crime and misery will in your house."

"Then you abandon me, doctor?"

"Yes, for I can follow you no farther, and I only stop at the foot of the scaffold. Some further discovery will be made, which will bring this dreadful tragedy to a close. Adieu."

"I entreat you, doctor!"

"All the horrors that disturb my thoughts make your house odious and fatal. Adieu, sir."

"One word — one single word more, doctor! You go, leaving me in all the horror of my situation, after increasing it by what you have revealed to me. But what will be reported of the sudden death of the poor old servant?"

"True," said M. d'Avrigny; "we will return." The doctor went out first, followed by M. de Villefort. The terrified servants were on the stairs and in the passage where the doctor would pass. "Sir," said d'Avrigny to Villefort, so loud that all might hear, "poor Barrois has led too sedentary a life of late; accustomed formerly to ride on horseback, or in the carriage, to the four corners of Europe, the monotonous walk around that arm-chair has killed him — his blood has thickened. He was stout, had a short, thick neck; he was attacked with apoplexy, and I was called in too late. By the way," added he in a low tone, "take care to throw away that cup of syrup of violets in the ashes."

The doctor, without shaking hands with Villefort, without adding a word to what he had said, went out, amid the tears and lamentations of the whole household. The same evening all Villefort's servants, who had assembled in the kitchen, and had a long consultation, came to tell Madame de Villefort that they wished to leave. No entreaty, no proposition of increased wages, could induce them to remain; to every argument they replied, "We must go, for death is in this house." They all left, in spite of prayers and entreaties, testifying their regret at leaving so good a master and mistress, and especially Mademoiselle Valentine, so good, so kind, and so gentle. Villefort looked at Valentine as they said this. She was in tears, and, strange as it was, in spite of the emotions he felt at the sight of these tears, he looked also at Madame de Villefort, and it appeared to him as if a slight gloomy smile had passed over her thin lips, like a meteor seen passing inauspiciously between two clouds in a stormy sky.

Chapter 81

The Room of the Retired Baker.

The evening of the day on which the Count of Morcerf had left Danglars' house with feelings of shame and anger at the rejection of the projected alliance, M. Andrea Cavalcanti, with curled hair, mustaches in perfect order, and white gloves which fitted admirably, had entered the courtyard of the banker's house in La Chaussee d'Antin. He had not been more than ten minutes in the drawing-room before he drew Danglars aside into the recess of a bow-window, and, after an ingenious preamble, related to him all his anxieties and cares since his noble father's departure. He acknowledged the extreme kindness which had been shown him by the banker's family, in which he had been received as a son, and where, besides, his warmest affections had found an object on which to centre in Mademoiselle Danglars. Danglars listened with the most profound attention; he had expected this declaration for the last two or three days, and when at last it came his eyes glistened as much as they had lowered on listening to Morcerf. He would not, however, yield immediately to the young man's request, but made a few conscientious objections. "Are you not rather young, M. Andrea, to think of marrying?"

"I think not, sir," replied M. Cavalcanti; "in Italy the nobility generally marry young. Life is so uncertain, that we ought to secure happiness while it is within our reach."

"Well, sir," said Danglars, "in case your proposals, which do me honor, are accepted by my wife and daughter, by whom shall the preliminary arrangements be settled? So important a negotiation should, I think, be conducted by the respective fathers of the young people."

"Sir, my father is a man of great foresight and prudence. Thinking that I might wish to settle in France, he left me at his departure, together with the papers establishing my identity, a letter promising, if he approved of my choice, 150,000 livres per annum from the day I was married. So far as I can judge, I suppose this to be a quarter of my father's revenue."

“I,” said Danglars, “have always intended giving my daughter 500,000 francs as her dowry; she is, besides, my sole heiress.”

“All would then be easily arranged if the baroness and her daughter are willing. We should command an annuity of 175,000 livres. Supposing, also, I should persuade the marquis to give me my capital, which is not likely, but still is possible, we would place these two or three millions in your hands, whose talent might make it realize ten per cent.”

“I never give more than four per cent, and generally only three and a half; but to my son-in-law I would give five, and we would share the profit.”

“Very good, father-in-law,” said Cavalcanti, yielding to his low-born nature, which would escape sometimes through the aristocratic gloss with which he sought to conceal it. Correcting himself immediately, he said, “Excuse me, sir; hope alone makes me almost mad, — what will not reality do?”

“But,” said Danglars, — who, on his part, did not perceive how soon the conversation, which was at first disinterested, was turning to a business transaction, — ”there is, doubtless, a part of your fortune your father could not refuse you?”

“Which?” asked the young man.

“That you inherit from your mother.”

“Truly, from my mother, Leonora Corsinari.”

“How much may it amount to?”

“Indeed, sir,” said Andrea, “I assure you I have never given the subject a thought, but I suppose it must have been at least two millions.” Danglars felt as much overcome with joy as the miser who finds a lost treasure, or as the shipwrecked mariner who feels himself on solid ground instead of in the abyss which he expected would swallow him up.

“Well, sir,” said Andrea, bowing to the banker respectfully, “may I hope?”

“You may not only hope,” said Danglars, “but consider it a settled thing, if no obstacle arises on your part.”

“I am, indeed, rejoiced,” said Andrea.

“But,” said Danglars thoughtfully, “how is it that your patron, M. de Monte Cristo, did not make his proposal for you?” Andrea blushed imperceptibly. “I have just left the count, sir,” said he; “he is, doubtless, a delightful man but inconceivably peculiar in his ideas. He esteems me highly. He even told me he had not the slightest doubt that my father would give me the capital instead of the interest of my property. He has promised to use his influence to obtain it for me; but he also declared that he never had taken on himself the responsibility of making proposals for another, and he never would. I must, however, do him the justice to add that he assured me if ever he had regretted the repugnance he felt to such a step it was on this occasion, because he thought the projected union would be a happy and suitable one. Besides, if he will do nothing officially, he will answer any questions you propose to him. And now," continued he, with one of his most charming smiles, "having finished talking to the father-in-law, I must address myself to the banker."

"And what may you have to say to him?" said Danglars, laughing in his turn.

"That the day after to-morrow I shall have to draw upon you for about four thousand francs; but the count, expecting my bachelor's revenue could not suffice for the coming month's outlay, has offered me a draft for twenty thousand francs. It bears his signature, as you see, which is all-sufficient."

"Bring me a million such as that," said Danglars, "I shall be well pleased," putting the draft in his pocket. "Fix your own hour for to-morrow, and my cashier shall call on you with a check for eighty thousand francs."

"At ten o'clock then, if you please; I should like it early, as I am going into the country to-morrow."

"Very well, at ten o'clock; you are still at the Hotel des Princes?"

"Yes."

The following morning, with the banker's usual punctuality, the eighty thousand francs were placed in the young man's hands as he was on the point of starting, after having left two hundred francs for Caderousse. He went out chiefly to avoid this dangerous enemy, and returned as late as possible in the evening. But scarcely had he stepped out of his carriage when the porter met him with a parcel in his hand. "Sir," said he, "that man has been here."

"What man?" said Andrea carelessly, apparently forgetting him whom he but too well recollected.

"Him to whom your excellency pays that little annuity."

"Oh," said Andrea, "my father's old servant. Well, you gave him the two hundred francs I had left for him?"

"Yes, your excellency." Andrea had expressed a wish to be thus addressed. "But," continued the porter, "he would not take them." Andrea turned pale, but as it was dark his pallor was not perceptible. “What? he would not take them?” said he with slight emotion.

“No, he wished to speak to your excellency; I told him you were gone out, and after some dispute he believed me and gave me this letter, which he had brought with him already sealed.”

“Give it me,” said Andrea, and he read by the light of his carriage-lamp, — ”You know where I live; I expect you tomorrow morning at nine o’clock.”

Andrea examined it carefully, to ascertain if the letter had been opened, or if any indiscreet eyes had seen its contents; but it was so carefully folded, that no one could have read it, and the seal was perfect. “Very well,” said he. “Poor man, he is a worthy creature.” He left the porter to ponder on these words, not knowing which most to admire, the master or the servant. “Take out the horses quickly, and come up to me,” said Andrea to his groom. In two seconds the young man had reached his room and burnt Caderousse’s letter. The servant entered just as he had finished. “You are about my height, Pierre,” said he.

“I have that honor, your excellency.”

“You had a new livery yesterday?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I have an engagement with a pretty little girl for this evening, and do not wish to be known; lend me your livery till to-morrow. I may sleep, perhaps, at an inn.” Pierre obeyed. Five minutes after, Andrea left the hotel, completely disguised, took a cabriolet, and ordered the driver to take him to the Cheval Rouge, at Picpus. The next morning he left that inn as he had left the Hotel des Princes, without being noticed, walked down the Faubourg St. Antoine, along the boulevard to Rue Menilmontant, and stopping at the door of the third house on the left looked for some one of whom to make inquiry in the porter’s absence. “For whom are you looking, my fine fellow?” asked the fruiteress on the opposite side.

“Monsieur Pailletin, if you please, my good woman,” replied Andrea.

“A retired baker?” asked the fruiteress.

“Exactly.”

“He lives at the end of the yard, on the left, on the third story.” Andrea went as she directed him, and on the third floor he found a hare’s paw, which, by the hasty ringing of the bell, it was evident he pulled with considerable ill-temper. A moment after Caderousse’s face appeared at the grating in the door. “Ah, you are punctual,” said he, as he drew back the door.

“Confound you and your punctuality!” said Andrea, throwing himself into a chair in a manner which implied that he would rather have flung it at the head of his host.

“Come, come, my little fellow, don’t be angry. See, I have thought about you — look at the good breakfast we are going to have; nothing but what you are fond of.” Andrea, indeed, inhaled the scent of something cooking which was not unwelcome to him, hungry as he was; it was that mixture of fat and garlic peculiar to provincial kitchens of an inferior order, added to that of dried fish, and above all, the pungent smell of musk and cloves. These odors escaped from two deep dishes which were covered and placed on a stove, and from a copper pan placed in an old iron pot. In an adjoining room Andrea saw also a tolerably clean table prepared for two, two bottles of wine sealed, the one with green, the other with yellow, a supply of brandy in a decanter, and a measure of fruit in a cabbage-leaf, cleverly arranged on an earthenware plate.

“What do you think of it, my little fellow?” said Caderousse. “Ay, that smells good! You know I used to be a famous cook; do you recollect how you used to lick your fingers? You were among the first who tasted any of my dishes, and I think you relished them tolerably.” While speaking, Caderousse went on peeling a fresh supply of onions.

“But,” said Andrea, ill-temperedly, “by my faith, if it was only to breakfast with you, that you disturbed me, I wish the devil had taken you!”

“My boy,” said Caderousse sententiously, “one can talk while eating. And then, you ungrateful being, you are not pleased to see an old friend? I am weeping with joy.” He was truly crying, but it would have been difficult to say whether joy or the onions produced the greatest effect on the lachrymal glands of the old inn-keeper of the Pont-du-Gard. “Hold your tongue, hypocrite,” said Andrea; “you love me!”

“Yes, I do, or may the devil take me. I know it is a weakness,” said Caderousse, “but it overpowers me.”

“And yet it has not prevented your sending for me to play me some trick.”

“Come,” said Caderousse, wiping his large knife on his apron, “if I did not like you, do you think I should endure the wretched life you lead me? Think for a moment. You have your servant’s clothes on — you therefore keep a servant; I have none, and am obliged to prepare my own meals. You abuse my cookery because you dine at the table d'hote of the Hotel des Princes, or the Cafe de Paris. Well, I too could keep a servant; I too could have a tilbury; I too could dine where I like; but why do I not? Because I would not annoy my little Benedetto. Come, just acknowledge that I could, eh?" This address was accompanied by a look which was by no means difficult to understand. "Well," said Andrea, "admitting your love, why do you want me to breakfast with you?"

"That I may have the pleasure of seeing you, my little fellow."

"What is the use of seeing me after we have made all our arrangements?"

"Eh, dear friend," said Caderousse, "are wills ever made without codicils? But you first came to breakfast, did you not? Well, sit down, and let us begin with these pilchards, and this fresh butter; which I have put on some vine-leaves to please you, wicked one. Ah, yes; you look at my room, my four straw chairs, my images, three francs each. But what do you expect? This is not the Hotel des Princes."

"Come, you are growing discontented, you are no longer happy; you, who only wish to live like a retired baker." Caderousse sighed. "Well, what have you to say? you have seen your dream realized."

"I can still say it is a dream; a retired baker, my poor Benedetto, is rich — he has an annuity."

"Well, you have an annuity."

"I have?"

"Yes, since I bring you your two hundred francs." Caderousse shrugged his shoulders. "It is humiliating," said he, "thus to receive money given grudgingly, — an uncertain supply which may soon fail. You see I am obliged to economize, in case your prosperity should cease. Well, my friend, fortune is inconstant, as the chaplain of the regiment said. I know your prosperity is great, you rascal; you are to marry the daughter of Danglars."

"What? of Danglars?"

"Yes, to be sure; must I say Baron Danglars? I might as well say Count Benedetto. He was an old friend of mine and if he had not so bad a memory he ought to invite me to your wedding, seeing he came to mine. Yes, yes, to mine; gad, he was not so proud then, — he was an under-clerk to the good M. Morrel. I have dined many times with him and the Count of Morcerf, so you see I have some high connections and were I to cultivate them a little, we might meet in the same drawing-rooms.”

“Come, your jealousy represents everything to you in the wrong light.”

“That is all very fine, Benedetto mio, but I know what I am saying. Perhaps I may one day put on my best coat, and presenting myself at the great gate, introduce myself. Meanwhile let us sit down and eat.” Caderousse set the example and attacked the breakfast with good appetite, praising each dish he set before his visitor. The latter seemed to have resigned himself; he drew the corks, and partook largely of the fish with the garlic and fat. “Ah, mate,” said Caderousse, “you are getting on better terms with your old landlord!”

“Faith, yes,” replied Andrea, whose hunger prevailed over every other feeling.

“So you like it, you rogue?”

“So much that I wonder how a man who can cook thus can complain of hard living.”

“Do you see,” said Caderousse, “all my happiness is marred by one thought?”

“What is that?”

“That I am dependent on another, I who have always gained my own livelihood honestly.”

“Do not let that disturb you, I have enough for two.”

“No, truly; you may believe me if you will; at the end of every month I am tormented by remorse.”

“Good Caderousse!”

“So much so, that yesterday I would not take the two hundred francs.”

“Yes, you wished to speak to me; but was it indeed remorse, tell me?”

“True remorse; and, besides, an idea had struck me.” Andrea shuddered; he always did so at Caderousse’s ideas. “It is miserable — do you see? — always to wait till the end of the month.” — ”Oh,” said Andrea philosophically, determined to watch his companion narrowly, “does not life pass in waiting? Do I, for instance, fare better? Well, I wait patiently, do I not?”

“Yes; because instead of expecting two hundred wretched francs, you expect five or six thousand, perhaps ten, perhaps even twelve, for you take care not to let any one know the utmost. Down there, you always had little presents and Christmas-boxes which you tried to hide from your poor friend Caderousse. Fortunately he is a cunning fellow, that friend Caderousse."

"There you are beginning again to ramble, to talk again and again of the past! But what is the use of teasing me with going all over that again?"

"Ah, you are only one and twenty, and can forget the past; I am fifty, and am obliged to recollect it. But let us return to business."

"Yes."

"I was going to say, if I were in your place" —

"Well."

"I would realize" —

"How would you realize?"

"I would ask for six months' in advance, under pretence of being able to purchase a farm, then with my six months I would decamp."

"Well, well," said Andrea, "that isn't a bad idea."

"My dear friend," said Caderousse, "eat of my bread, and take my advice; you will be none the worse off, physically or morally."

"But," said Andrea, "why do you not act on the advice you gave me? Why do you not realize a six months', a year's advance even, and retire to Brussels? Instead of living the retired baker, you might live as a bankrupt, using his privileges; that would be very good."

"But how the devil would you have me retire on twelve hundred francs?"

"Ah, Caderousse," said Andrea, "how covetous you are! Two months ago you were dying with hunger."

"The appetite grows by what it feeds on," said Caderousse, grinning and showing his teeth, like a monkey laughing or a tiger growling. "And," added he, biting off with his large white teeth an enormous mouthful of bread, "I have formed a plan." Caderousse's plans alarmed Andrea still more than his ideas; ideas were but the germ, the plan was reality. "Let me see your plan; I dare say it is a pretty one."

"Why not? Who formed the plan by which we left the establishment of M — — ! eh? was it not I? and it was no bad one I believe, since here we are!"

"I do not say," replied Andrea, "that you never make a good one; but let us see your plan."

"Well," pursued Caderousse, "can you without expending one sou, put me in the way of getting fifteen thousand francs? No, fifteen thousand are not enough, — I cannot again become an honest man with less than thirty thousand francs."

"No," replied Andrea, dryly, "no, I cannot."

"I do not think you understand me," replied Caderousse, calmly; "I said without your laying out a sou."

"Do you want me to commit a robbery, to spoil all my good fortune — and yours with mine — and both of us to be dragged down there again?"

"It would make very little difference to me," said Caderousse, "if I were retaken, I am a poor creature to live alone, and sometimes pine for my old comrades; not like you, heartless creature, who would be glad never to see them again." Andrea did more than tremble this time, he turned pale.

"Come, Caderousse, no nonsense!" said he.

"Don't alarm yourself, my little Benedetto, but just point out to me some means of gaining those thirty thousand francs without your assistance, and I will contrive it."

"Well, I'll see — I'll try to contrive some way," said Andrea.

"Meanwhile you will raise my monthly allowance to five hundred francs, my little fellow? I have a fancy, and mean to get a housekeeper."

"Well, you shall have your five hundred francs," said Andrea; "but it is very hard for me, my poor Caderousse — you take advantage" —

"Bah," said Caderousse, "when you have access to countless stores." One would have said Andrea anticipated his companion's words, so did his eye flash like lightning, but it was but for a moment. "True," he replied, "and my protector is very kind."

"That dear protector," said Caderousse; "and how much does he give you monthly?"

"Five thousand francs."

"As many thousands as you give me hundreds! Truly, it is only bastards who are thus fortunate. Five thousand francs per month! What the devil can you do with all that?"

"Oh, it is no trouble to spend that; and I am like you, I want capital."

"Capital? — yes — I understand — every one would like capital."

"Well, and I shall get it."

"Who will give it to you — your prince?"

"Yes, my prince. But unfortunately I must wait."

"You must wait for what?" asked Caderousse.

"For his death."

"The death of your prince?"

"Yes."

"How so?"

"Because he has made his will in my favor."

"Indeed?"

"On my honor."

"For how much?"

"For five hundred thousand."

"Only that? It's little enough."

"But so it is."

"No it cannot be!"

"Are you my friend, Caderousse?"

"Yes, in life or death."

"Well, I will tell you a secret."

"What is it?"

"But remember" —

"Ah, pardieu, mute as a carp."

"Well, I think" — Andrea stopped and looked around.

"You think? Do not fear; pardieu, we are alone."

"I think I have discovered my father."

"Your true father?"

"Yes."

"Not old Cavalcanti?"

"No, for he has gone again; the true one, as you say."

"And that father is" —

"Well, Caderousse, it is Monte Cristo."

"Bah!"

"Yes, you understand, that explains all. He cannot acknowledge me openly, it appears, but he does it through M. Cavalcanti, and gives him fifty thousand francs for it."

"Fifty thousand francs for being your father? I would have done it for half that, for twenty thousand, for fifteen thousand; why did you not think of me, ungrateful man?"

"Did I know anything about it, when it was all done when I was down there?"

"Ah, truly? And you say that by his will" —

"He leaves me five hundred thousand livres."

"Are you sure of it?"

"He showed it me; but that is not all — there is a codicil, as I said just now."

"Probably."

"And in that codicil he acknowledges me."

"Oh, the good father, the brave father, the very honest father!" said Caderousse, twirling a plate in the air between his two hands.

"Now say if I conceal anything from you?"

"No, and your confidence makes you honorable in my opinion; and your princely father, is he rich, very rich?"

"Yes, he is that; he does not himself know the amount of his fortune."

"Is it possible?"

"It is evident enough to me, who am always at his house. The other day a banker's clerk brought him fifty thousand francs in a portfolio about the size of your plate; yesterday his banker brought him a hundred thousand francs in gold." Caderousse was filled with wonder; the young man's words sounded to him like metal, and he thought he could hear the rushing of cascades of louis. "And you go into that house?" cried he briskly.

"When I like."

Caderousse was thoughtful for a moment. It was easy to perceive he was revolving some unfortunate idea in his mind. Then suddenly, — "How I should like to see all that," cried he; "how beautiful it must be!"

"It is, in fact, magnificent," said Andrea.

"And does he not live in the Champs-Elysees?"

"Yes, No. 30."

"Ah," said Caderousse, "No. 30."

"Yes, a fine house standing alone, between a court-yard and a garden, — you must know it."

"Possibly; but it is not the exterior I care for, it is the interior. What beautiful furniture there must be in it!"

"Have you ever seen the Tuileries?"

"No."

"Well, it surpasses that."

"It must be worth one's while to stoop, Andrea, when that good M. Monte Cristo lets fall his purse."

"It is not worth while to wait for that," said Andrea; "money is as plentiful in that house as fruit in an orchard."

"But you should take me there one day with you."

"How can I? On what plea?"

"You are right; but you have made my mouth water. I must absolutely see it; I shall find a way."

"No nonsense, Caderousse!"

"I will offer myself as floor-polisher."

"The rooms are all carpeted."

"Well, then, I must be contented to imagine it."

"That is the best plan, believe me."

"Try, at least, to give me an idea of what it is."

"How can I?"

"Nothing is easier. Is it large?"

"Middling."

"How is it arranged?"

"Faith, I should require pen, ink, and paper to make a plan."

"They are all here," said Caderousse, briskly. He fetched from an old secretary a sheet of white paper and pen and ink. "Here," said Caderousse, "draw me all that on the paper, my boy." Andrea took the pen with an imperceptible smile and began. "The house, as I said, is between the court and the garden; in this way, do you see?" Andrea drew the garden, the court and the house.

"High walls?"

"Not more than eight or ten feet."

"That is not prudent," said Caderousse.

"In the court are orange-trees in pots, turf, and clumps of flowers."

"And no steel-traps?"

"No."

"The stables?"

"Are on either side of the gate, which you see there." And Andrea continued his plan.

"Let us see the ground floor," said Caderousse.

"On the ground-floor, dining-room, two drawing-rooms, billiard-room, staircase in the hall, and a little back staircase."

"Windows?"

"Magnificent windows, so beautiful, so large, that I believe a man of your size should pass through each frame."

"Why the devil have they any stairs with such windows?"

"Luxury has everything."

"But shutters?"

"Yes, but they are never used. That Count of Monte Cristo is an original, who loves to look at the sky even at night."

"And where do the servants sleep?"

"Oh, they have a house to themselves. Picture to yourself a pretty coach-house at the right-hand side where the ladders are kept. Well, over that coach-house are the servants' rooms, with bells corresponding with the different apartments."

"Ah, diable — bells did you say?"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing! I only say they cost a load of money to hang, and what is the use of them, I should like to know?"

"There used to be a dog let loose in the yard at night, but it has been taken to the house at Auteuil, to that you went to, you know."

"Yes."

"I was saying to him only yesterday, 'You are imprudent, Monsieur Count; for when you go to Auteuil and take your servants the house is left unprotected.' 'Well,' said he, 'what next?' 'Well, next, some day you will be robbed.'"

"What did he answer?"

"He quietly said, 'What do I care if I am?'"

"Andrea, he has some secretary with a spring."

"How do you know?"

"Yes, which catches the thief in a trap and plays a tune. I was told there were such at the last exhibition."

"He has simply a mahogany secretary, in which the key is always kept."

"And he is not robbed?"

"No; his servants are all devoted to him."

"There ought to be some money in that secretary?"

"There may be. No one knows what there is."

"And where is it?"

"On the first floor."

"Sketch me the plan of that floor, as you have done of the ground floor, my boy."

"That is very simple." Andrea took the pen. "On the first story, do you see, there is the anteroom and the drawing-room; to the right of the drawing-room, a library and a study; to the left, a bedroom and a dressing-room. The famous secretary is in the dressing-room."

"Is there a window in the dressing-room?"

"Two, — one here and one there." Andrea sketched two windows in the room, which formed an angle on the plan, and appeared as a small square added to the rectangle of the bedroom. Caderousse became thoughtful. "Does he often go to Auteuil?" added he.

"Two or three times a week. To-morrow, for instance, he is going to spend the day and night there."

"Are you sure of it?"

"He has invited me to dine there."

"There's a life for you," said Caderousse; "a town house and a country house."

"That is what it is to be rich."

"And shall you dine there?"

"Probably."

"When you dine there, do you sleep there?"

"If I like; I am at home there." Caderousse looked at the young man, as if to get at the truth from the bottom of his heart. But Andrea drew a cigar-case from his pocket, took a Havana, quietly lit it, and began smoking. "When do you want your twelve hundred francs?" said he to Caderousse.

"Now, if you have them." Andrea took five and twenty louis from his pocket.

"Yellow boys?" said Caderousse; "no, I thank you."

"Oh, you despise them."

"On the contrary, I esteem them, but will not have them."

"You can change them, idiot; gold is worth five sous."

"Exactly; and he who changes them will follow friend Caderousse, lay hands on him, and demand what farmers pay him their rent in gold. No nonsense, my good fellow; silver simply, round coins with the head of some monarch or other on them. Anybody may possess a five-franc piece."

"But do you suppose I carry five hundred francs about with me? I should want a porter."

"Well, leave them with your porter; he is to be trusted. I will call for them."

"To-day?"

"No, to-morrow; I shall not have time to day."

"Well, to-morrow I will leave them when I go to Auteuil."

"May I depend on it?"

"Certainly."

"Because I shall secure my housekeeper on the strength of it."

"Now see here, will that be all? Eh? And will you not torment me any more?"

"Never." Caderousse had become so gloomy that Andrea feared he should be obliged to notice the change. He redoubled his gayety and carelessness. "How sprightly you are," said Caderousse; "One would say you were already in possession of your property."

"No, unfortunately; but when I do obtain it" —

"Well?"

"I shall remember old friends, I can tell you that."

"Yes, since you have such a good memory."

"What do you want? It looks as if you were trying to fleece me?"

"I? What an idea! I, who am going to give you another piece of good advice."

"What is it?"

"To leave behind you the diamond you have on your finger. We shall both get into trouble. You will ruin both yourself and me by your folly."

"How so?" said Andrea.

"How? You put on a livery, you disguise yourself as a servant, and yet keep a diamond on your finger worth four or five thousand francs."

"You guess well."

"I know something of diamonds; I have had some."

"You do well to boast of it," said Andrea, who, without becoming angry, as Caderousse feared, at this new extortion, quietly resigned the ring. Caderousse looked so closely at it that Andrea well knew that he was examining to see if all the edges were perfect.

"It is a false diamond," said Caderousse.

"You are joking now," replied Andrea.

"Do not be angry, we can try it." Caderousse went to the window, touched the glass with it, and found it would cut.

"Confiteor," said Caderousse, putting the diamond on his little finger; "I was mistaken; but those thieves of jewellers imitate so well that it is no longer worth while to rob a jeweller's shop — it is another branch of industry paralyzed."

“Have you finished?” said Andrea, — ”do you want anything more? — will you have my waistcoat or my hat? Make free, now you have begun.”

“No; you are, after all, a good companion; I will not detain you, and will try to cure myself of my ambition.”

“But take care the same thing does not happen to you in selling the diamond you feared with the gold.”

“I shall not sell it — do not fear.”

“Not at least till the day after to-morrow,” thought the young man.

“Happy rogue,” said Caderousse; “you are going to find your servants, your horses, your carriage, and your betrothed!”

“Yes,” said Andrea.

“Well, I hope you will make a handsome wedding-present the day you marry Mademoiselle Danglars.”

“I have already told you it is a fancy you have taken in your head.”

“What fortune has she?”

“But I tell you” —

“A million?” Andrea shrugged his shoulders.

“Let it be a million,” said Caderousse; “you can never have so much as I wish you.”

“Thank you,” said the young man.

“Oh, I wish it you with all my heart!” added Caderousse with his hoarse laugh. “Stop, let me show you the way.”

“It is not worth while.”

“Yes, it is.”

“Why?”

“Because there is a little secret, a precaution I thought it desirable to take, one of Huret & Fitchet’s locks, revised and improved by Gaspard Caderousse; I will manufacture you a similar one when you are a capitalist.”

“Thank you,” said Andrea; “I will let you know a week beforehand.” They parted. Caderousse remained on the landing until he had not only seen Andrea go down the three stories, but also cross the court. Then he returned hastily, shut his door carefully, and began to study, like a clever architect, the plan Andrea had left him.

“Dear Benedetto,” said he, “I think he will not be sorry to inherit his fortune, and he who hastens the day when he can touch his five hundred thousand will not be his worst friend.”

Chapter 82

The Burglary.

The day following that on which the conversation we have related took place, the Count of Monte Cristo set out for Auteuil, accompanied by Ali and several attendants, and also taking with him some horses whose qualities he was desirous of ascertaining. He was induced to undertake this journey, of which the day before he had not even thought and which had not occurred to Andrea either, by the arrival of Bertuccio from Normandy with intelligence respecting the house and sloop. The house was ready, and the sloop which had arrived a week before lay at anchor in a small creek with her crew of six men, who had observed all the requisite formalities and were ready again to put to sea.

The count praised Bertuccio's zeal, and ordered him to prepare for a speedy departure, as his stay in France would not be prolonged more than a month. "Now," said he, "I may require to go in one night from Paris to Treport; let eight fresh horses be in readiness on the road, which will enable me to go fifty leagues in ten hours."

"Your highness had already expressed that wish," said Bertuccio, "and the horses are ready. I have bought them, and stationed them myself at the most desirable posts, that is, in villages, where no one generally stops."

"That's well," said Monte Cristo; "I remain here a day or two — arrange accordingly." As Bertuccio was leaving the room to give the requisite orders, Baptistin opened the door: he held a letter on a silver waiter.

"What are you doing here?" asked the count, seeing him covered with dust; "I did not send for you, I think?"

Baptistin, without answering, approached the count, and presented the letter. "Important and urgent," said he. The count opened the letter, and read: —

"M. de Monte Cristo is apprised that this night a man will enter his house in the Champs-Elysees with the intention of carrying off some papers supposed to be in the secretary in the dressing-room. The count's well-known courage will render unnecessary the aid of the police, whose interference might seriously affect him who sends this advice. The count, by any opening from the bedroom, or by concealing himself in the dressing-room, would be able to defend his property himself. Many attendants or apparent precautions would prevent the villain from the attempt, and M. de Monte Cristo would lose the opportunity of discovering an enemy whom chance has revealed to him who now sends this warning to the count, — a warning he might not be able to send another time, if this first attempt should fail and another be made."

The count's first idea was that this was an artifice — a gross deception, to draw his attention from a minor danger in order to expose him to a greater. He was on the point of sending the letter to the commissary of police, notwithstanding the advice of his anonymous friend, or perhaps because of that advice, when suddenly the idea occurred to him that it might be some personal enemy, whom he alone should recognize and over whom, if such were the case, he alone would gain any advantage, as Fiesco [*] had done over the Moor who would have killed him. We know the Count's vigorous and daring mind, denying anything to be impossible, with that energy which marks the great man. From his past life, from his resolution to shrink from nothing, the count had acquired an inconceivable relish for the contests in which he had engaged, sometimes against nature, that is to say, against God, and sometimes against the world, that is, against the devil.

* The Genoese conspirator.

"They do not want my papers," said Monte Cristo, "they want to kill me; they are no robbers, but assassins. I will not allow the prefect of police to interfere with my private affairs. I am rich enough, forsooth, to distribute his authority on this occasion." The count recalled Baptistin, who had left the room after delivering the letter. "Return to Paris," said he; "assemble the servants who remain there. I want all my household at Auteuil."

"But will no one remain in the house, my lord?" asked Baptistin.

"Yes, the porter."

"My lord will remember that the lodge is at a distance from the house."

"Well?"

"The house might be stripped without his hearing the least noise."

"By whom?"

"By thieves."

"You are a fool, M. Baptistin. Thieves might strip the house — it would annoy me less than to be disobeyed." Baptistin bowed.

"You understand me?" said the count. "Bring your comrades here, one and all; but let everything remain as usual, only close the shutters of the ground floor."

"And those of the second floor?"

"You know they are never closed. Go!"

The count signified his intention of dining alone, and that no one but Ali should attend him. Having dined with his usual tranquillity and moderation, the count, making a signal to Ali to follow him, went out by the side-gate and on reaching the Bois de Boulogne turned, apparently without design towards Paris and at twilight; found himself opposite his house in the Champs-Elysees. All was dark; one solitary, feeble light was burning in the porter's lodge, about forty paces distant from the house, as Baptistin had said. Monte Cristo leaned against a tree, and with that scrutinizing glance which was so rarely deceived, looked up and down the avenue, examined the passers-by, and carefully looked down the neighboring streets, to see that no one was concealed. Ten minutes passed thus, and he was convinced that no one was watching him. He hastened to the side-door with Ali, entered hurriedly, and by the servants' staircase, of which he had the key, gained his bedroom without opening or disarranging a single curtain, without even the porter having the slightest suspicion that the house, which he supposed empty, contained its chief occupant.

Arrived in his bedroom, the count motioned to Ali to stop; then he passed into the dressing-room, which he examined. Everything appeared as usual — the precious secretary in its place, and the key in the secretary. He double locked it, took the key, returned to the bedroom door, removed the double staple of the bolt, and went in. Meanwhile Ali had procured the arms the count required — namely, a short carbine and a pair of double-barrelled pistols, with which as sure an aim might be taken as with a single-barrelled one. Thus armed, the count held the lives of five men in his hands. It was about half-past nine. The count and Ali ate in haste a crust of bread and drank a glass of Spanish wine; then Monte Cristo slipped aside one of the movable panels, which enabled him to see into the adjoining room. He had within his reach his pistols and carbine, and Ali, standing near him, held one of the small Arabian hatchets, whose form has not varied since the Crusades. Through one of the windows of the bedroom, on a line with that in the dressing-room, the count could see into the street.

Two hours passed thus. It was intensely dark; still Ali, thanks to his wild nature, and the count, thanks doubtless to his long confinement, could distinguish in the darkness the slightest movement of the trees. The little light in the lodge had long been extinct. It might be expected that the attack, if indeed an attack was projected, would be made from the staircase of the ground floor, and not from a window; in Monte Cristo’s opinion, the villains sought his life, not his money. It would be his bedroom they would attack, and they must reach it by the back staircase, or by the window in the dressing-room. The clock of the Invalides struck a quarter to twelve; the west wind bore on its moistened gusts the doleful vibration of the three strokes.

As the last stroke died away, the count thought he heard a slight noise in the dressing-room; this first sound, or rather this first grinding, was followed by a second, then a third; at the fourth, the count knew what to expect. A firm and well-practised hand was engaged in cutting the four sides of a pane of glass with a diamond. The count felt his heart beat more rapidly. Inured as men may be to danger, forewarned as they may be of peril, they understand, by the fluttering of the heart and the shuddering of the frame, the enormous difference between a dream and a reality, between the project and the execution. However, Monte Cristo only made a sign to apprise Ali, who, understanding that danger was approaching from the other side, drew nearer to his master. Monte Cristo was eager to ascertain the strength and number of his enemies.

The window whence the noise proceeded was opposite the opening by which the count could see into the dressing-room. He fixed his eyes on that window — he distinguished a shadow in the darkness; then one of the panes became quite opaque, as if a sheet of paper were stuck on the outside, then the square cracked without falling. Through the opening an arm was passed to find the fastening, then a second; the window turned on its hinges, and a man entered. He was alone.

“That’s a daring rascal,” whispered the count.

At that moment Ali touched him slightly on the shoulder. He turned; Ali pointed to the window of the room in which they were, facing the street. “I see!” said he, “there are two of them; one does the work while the other stands guard.” He made a sign to Ali not to lose sight of the man in the street, and turned to the one in the dressing-room.

The glass-cutter had entered, and was feeling his way, his arms stretched out before him. At last he appeared to have made himself familiar with his surroundings. There were two doors; he bolted them both.

When he drew near to the bedroom door, Monte Cristo expected that he was coming in, and raised one of his pistols; but he simply heard the sound of the bolts sliding in their copper rings. It was only a precaution. The nocturnal visitor, ignorant of the fact that the count had removed the staples, might now think himself at home, and pursue his purpose with full security. Alone and free to act as he wished, the man then drew from his pocket something which the count could not discern, placed it on a stand, then went straight to the secretary, felt the lock, and contrary to his expectation found that the key was missing. But the glass-cutter was a prudent man who had provided for all emergencies. The count soon heard the rattling of a bunch of skeleton keys, such as the locksmith brings when called to force a lock, and which thieves call nightingales, doubtless from the music of their nightly song when they grind against the bolt. “Ah, ha,” whispered Monte Cristo with a smile of disappointment, “he is only a thief.”

But the man in the dark could not find the right key. He reached the instrument he had placed on the stand, touched a spring, and immediately a pale light, just bright enough to render objects distinct, was reflected on his hands and countenance. “By heavens,” exclaimed Monte Cristo, starting back, “it is” —

Ali raised his hatchet. “Don’t stir,” whispered Monte Cristo, “and put down your hatchet; we shall require no arms.” Then he added some words in a low tone, for the exclamation which surprise had drawn from the count, faint as it had been, had startled the man who remained in the pose of the old knife-grinder. It was an order the count had just given, for immediately Ali went noiselessly, and returned, bearing a black dress and a three-cornered hat. Meanwhile Monte Cristo had rapidly taken off his great-coat, waistcoat, and shirt, and one might distinguish by the glimmering through the open panel that he wore a pliant tunic of steel mail, of which the last in France, where daggers are no longer dreaded, was worn by King Louis XVI., who feared the dagger at his breast, and whose head was cleft with a hatchet. The tunic soon disappeared under a long cassock, as did his hair under a priest’s wig; the three-cornered hat over this effectually transformed the count into an abbe.

The man, hearing nothing more, stood erect, and while Monte Cristo was completing his disguise had advanced straight to the secretary, whose lock was beginning to crack under his nightingale.

“Try again,” whispered the count, who depended on the secret spring, which was unknown to the picklock, clever as he might be — ”try again, you have a few minutes’ work there.” And he advanced to the window. The man whom he had seen seated on a fence had got down, and was still pacing the street; but, strange as it appeared, he cared not for those who might pass from the avenue of the Champs-Elysees or by the Faubourg St. Honore; his attention was engrossed with what was passing at the count’s, and his only aim appeared to be to discern every movement in the dressing-room.

Monte Cristo suddenly struck his finger on his forehead and a smile passed over his lips; then drawing near to Ali, he whispered, —

“Remain here, concealed in the dark, and whatever noise you hear, whatever passes, only come in or show yourself if I call you.” Ali bowed in token of strict obedience. Monte Cristo then drew a lighted taper from a closet, and when the thief was deeply engaged with his lock, silently opened the door, taking care that the light should shine directly on his face. The door opened so quietly that the thief heard no sound; but, to his astonishment, the room was suddenly illuminated. He turned.

“Ah, good-evening, my dear M. Caderousse,” said Monte Cristo; “what are you doing here, at such an hour?”

“The Abbe Busoni!” exclaimed Caderousse; and, not knowing how this strange apparition could have entered when he had bolted the doors, he let fall his bunch of keys, and remained motionless and stupefied. The count placed himself between Caderousse and the window, thus cutting off from the thief his only chance of retreat. “The Abbe Busoni!” repeated Caderousse, fixing his haggard gaze on the count.

“Yes, undoubtedly, the Abbe Busoni himself,” replied Monte Cristo. “And I am very glad you recognize me, dear M. Caderousse; it proves you have a good memory, for it must be about ten years since we last met.” This calmness of Busoni, combined with his irony and boldness, staggered Caderousse.

“The abbe, the abbe!” murmured he, clinching his fists, and his teeth chattering.

“So you would rob the Count of Monte Cristo?” continued the false abbe.

“Reverend sir,” murmured Caderousse, seeking to regain the window, which the count pitilessly blocked — ”reverend sir, I don’t know — believe me — I take my oath” —

“A pane of glass out,” continued the count, “a dark lantern, a bunch of false keys, a secretary half forced — it is tolerably evident” —

Caderousse was choking; he looked around for some corner to hide in, some way of escape.

“Come, come,” continued the count, “I see you are still the same, — an assassin.”

“Reverend sir, since you know everything, you know it was not I — it was La Carconte; that was proved at the trial, since I was only condemned to the galleys.”

“Is your time, then, expired, since I find you in a fair way to return there?”

“No, reverend sir; I have been liberated by some one.”

“That some one has done society a great kindness.”

“Ah,” said Caderousse, “I had promised” —

“And you are breaking your promise!” interrupted Monte Cristo.

“Alas, yes!” said Caderousse very uneasily.

“A bad relapse, that will lead you, if I mistake not, to the Place de Greve. So much the worse, so much the worse — diavolo, as they say in my country.”

“Reverend sir, I am impelled” —

“Every criminal says the same thing.”

“Poverty” —

“Pshaw!” said Busoni disdainfully; “poverty may make a man beg, steal a loaf of bread at a baker’s door, but not cause him to open a secretary in a house supposed to be inhabited. And when the jeweller Johannes had just paid you 40,000. francs for the diamond I had given you, and you killed him to get the diamond and the money both, was that also poverty?”

“Pardon, reverend sir,” said Caderousse; “you have saved my life once, save me again!”

“That is but poor encouragement.”

“Are you alone, reverend sir, or have you there soldiers ready to seize me?”

“I am alone,” said the abbe, “and I will again have pity on you, and will let you escape, at the risk of the fresh miseries my weakness may lead to, if you tell me the truth.”

“Ah, reverend sir,” cried Caderousse, clasping his hands, and drawing nearer to Monte Cristo, “I may indeed say you are my deliverer!”

“You mean to say you have been freed from confinement?”

“Yes, that is true, reverend sir.”

“Who was your liberator?”

“An Englishman.”

“What was his name?”

“Lord Wilmore.”

“I know him; I shall know if you lie.”

“Ah, reverend sir, I tell you the simple truth.”

“Was this Englishman protecting you?”

“No, not me, but a young Corsican, my companion.”

“What was this young Corsican’s name?”

“Benedetto.”

“Is that his Christian name?”

“He had no other; he was a foundling.”

“Then this young man escaped with you?”

“He did.”

“In what way?”

“We were working at St. Mandrier, near Toulon. Do you know St. Mandrier?”

“I do.”

“In the hour of rest, between noon and one o’clock” —

“Galley-slaves having a nap after dinner! We may well pity the poor fellows!” said the abbe.

“Nay,” said Caderousse, “one can’t always work — one is not a dog.”

“So much the better for the dogs,” said Monte Cristo.

“While the rest slept, then, we went away a short distance; we severed our fetters with a file the Englishman had given us, and swam away.”

“And what is become of this Benedetto?”

“I don’t know.”

“You ought to know.”

“No, in truth; we parted at Hyeres.” And, to give more weight to his protestation, Caderousse advanced another step towards the abbe, who remained motionless in his place, as calm as ever, and pursuing his interrogation. “You lie,” said the Abbe Busoni, with a tone of irresistible authority.

“Reverend sir!”

“You lie! This man is still your friend, and you, perhaps, make use of him as your accomplice.”

“Oh, reverend sir!”

“Since you left Toulon what have you lived on? Answer me!”

“On what I could get.”

“You lie,” repeated the abbe a third time, with a still more imperative tone. Caderousse, terrified, looked at the count. “You have lived on the money he has given you.”

“True,” said Caderousse; “Benedetto has become the son of a great lord.”

“How can he be the son of a great lord?”

“A natural son.”

“And what is that great lord’s name?”

“The Count of Monte Cristo, the very same in whose house we are.”

“Benedetto the count’s son?” replied Monte Cristo, astonished in his turn.

“Well, I should think so, since the count has found him a false father — since the count gives him four thousand francs a month, and leaves him 500,000 francs in his will.”

“Ah, yes,” said the factitious abbe, who began to understand; “and what name does the young man bear meanwhile?”

“Andrea Cavalcanti.”

“Is it, then, that young man whom my friend the Count of Monte Cristo has received into his house, and who is going to marry Mademoiselle Danglars?”

“Exactly.”

“And you suffer that, you wretch — you, who know his life and his crime?”

“Why should I stand in a comrade’s way?” said Caderousse.

“You are right; it is not you who should apprise M. Danglars, it is I.”

“Do not do so, reverend sir.”

“Why not?”

“Because you would bring us to ruin.”

“And you think that to save such villains as you I will become an abettor of their plot, an accomplice in their crimes?”

“Reverend sir,” said Caderousse, drawing still nearer.

“I will expose all.”

“To whom?”

“To M. Danglars.”

“By heaven!” cried Caderousse, drawing from his waistcoat an open knife, and striking the count in the breast, “you shall disclose nothing, reverend sir!” To Caderousse’s great astonishment, the knife, instead of piercing the count’s breast, flew back blunted. At the same moment the count seized with his left hand the assassin’s wrist, and wrung it with such strength that the knife fell from his stiffened fingers, and Caderousse uttered a cry of pain. But the count, disregarding his cry, continued to wring the bandit’s wrist, until, his arm being dislocated, he fell first on his knees, then flat on the floor. The count then placed his foot on his head, saying, “I know not what restrains me from crushing thy skull, rascal.”

“Ah, mercy — mercy!” cried Caderousse. The count withdrew his foot. “Rise!” said he. Caderousse rose.

“What a wrist you have, reverend sir!” said Caderousse, stroking his arm, all bruised by the fleshy pincers which had held it; “what a wrist!”

“Silence! God gives me strength to overcome a wild beast like you; in the name of that God I act, — remember that, wretch, — and to spare thee at this moment is still serving him.”

“Oh!” said Caderousse, groaning with pain.

“Take this pen and paper, and write what I dictate.”

“I don’t know how to write, reverend sir.”

“You lie! Take this pen, and write!” Caderousse, awed by the superior power of the abbe, sat down and wrote: —

Sir, — The man whom you are receiving at your house, and to whom you intend to marry your daughter, is a felon who escaped with me from confinement at Toulon. He was No. 59, and I No. 58. He was called Benedetto, but he is ignorant of his real name, having never known his parents.

“Sign it!” continued the count.

“But would you ruin me?”

“If I sought your ruin, fool, I should drag you to the first guard-house; besides, when that note is delivered, in all probability you will have no more to fear. Sign it, then!”

Caderousse signed it. “The address, ‘To monsieur the Baron Danglars, banker, Rue de la Chaussee d’Antin.’“ Caderousse wrote the address. The abbe took the note. “Now,” said he, “that suffices — begone!”

“Which way?”

“The way you came.”

“You wish me to get out at that window?”

“You got in very well.”

“Oh, you have some design against me, reverend sir.”

“Idiot! what design can I have?”

“Why, then, not let me out by the door?”

“What would be the advantage of waking the porter?” —

“Ah, reverend sir, tell me, do you wish me dead?”

“I wish what God wills.”

“But swear that you will not strike me as I go down.”

“Cowardly fool!”

“What do you intend doing with me?”

“I ask you what can I do? I have tried to make you a happy man, and you have turned out a murderer.”

“Oh, monsieur,” said Caderousse, “make one more attempt — try me once more!”

“I will,” said the count. “Listen — you know if I may be relied on.”

“Yes,” said Caderousse.

“If you arrive safely at home” —

“What have I to fear, except from you?”

“If you reach your home safely, leave Paris, leave France, and wherever you may be, so long as you conduct yourself well, I will send you a small annuity; for, if you return home safely, then” —

“Then?” asked Caderousse, shuddering.

“Then I shall believe God has forgiven you, and I will forgive you too.”

“As true as I am a Christian,” stammered Caderousse, “you will make me die of fright!”

“Now begone,” said the count, pointing to the window.

Caderousse, scarcely yet relying on this promise, put his legs out of the window and stood on the ladder. “Now go down,” said the abbe, folding his arms. Understanding he had nothing more to fear from him, Caderousse began to go down. Then the count brought the taper to the window, that it might be seen in the Champs-Elysees that a man was getting out of the window while another held a light.

“What are you doing, reverend sir? Suppose a watchman should pass?” And he blew out the light. He then descended, but it was only when he felt his foot touch the ground that he was satisfied of his safety.

Monte Cristo returned to his bedroom, and, glancing rapidly from the garden to the street, he saw first Caderousse, who after walking to the end of the garden, fixed his ladder against the wall at a different part from where he came in. The count then looking over into the street, saw the man who appeared to be waiting run in the same direction, and place himself against the angle of the wall where Caderousse would come over. Caderousse climbed the ladder slowly, and looked over the coping to see if the street was quiet. No one could be seen or heard. The clock of the Invalides struck one. Then Caderousse sat astride the coping, and drawing up his ladder passed it over the wall; then he began to descend, or rather to slide down by the two stanchions, which he did with an ease which proved how accustomed he was to the exercise. But, once started, he could not stop. In vain did he see a man start from the shadow when he was halfway down — in vain did he see an arm raised as he touched the ground. Before he could defend himself that arm struck him so violently in the back that he let go the ladder, crying, “Help!” A second blow struck him almost immediately in the side, and he fell, calling, “Help, murder!” Then, as he rolled on the ground, his adversary seized him by the hair, and struck him a third blow in the chest. This time Caderousse endeavored to call again, but he could only utter a groan, and he shuddered as the blood flowed from his three wounds. The assassin, finding that he no longer cried out, lifted his head up by the hair; his eyes were closed, and the mouth was distorted. The murderer, supposing him dead, let fall his head and disappeared. Then Caderousse, feeling that he was leaving him, raised himself on his elbow, and with a dying voice cried with great effort, “Murder! I am dying! Help, reverend sir, — help!”

This mournful appeal pierced the darkness. The door of the back-staircase opened, then the side-gate of the garden, and Ali and his master were on the spot with lights.

Chapter 83

The Hand of God.

Caderousse continued to call piteously, “Help, reverend sir, help!”

“What is the matter?” asked Monte Cristo.

“Help,” cried Caderousse; “I am murdered!”

“We are here; — take courage.”

“Ah, it’s all over! You are come too late — you are come to see me die. What blows, what blood!” He fainted. Ali and his master conveyed the wounded man into a room. Monte Cristo motioned to Ali to undress him, and he then examined his dreadful wounds. “My God!” he exclaimed, “thy vengeance is sometimes delayed, but only that it may fall the more effectually.” Ali looked at his master for further instructions. “Bring here immediately the king’s attorney, M. de Villefort, who lives in the Faubourg St. Honore. As you pass the lodge, wake the porter, and send him for a surgeon.” Ali obeyed, leaving the abbe alone with Caderousse, who had not yet revived.

When the wretched man again opened his eyes, the count looked at him with a mournful expression of pity, and his lips moved as if in prayer. “A surgeon, reverend sir — a surgeon!” said Caderousse.

“I have sent for one,” replied the abbe.

“I know he cannot save my life, but he may strengthen me to give my evidence.”

“Against whom?”

“Against my murderer.”

“Did you recognize him?”

“Yes; it was Benedetto.”

“The young Corsican?”

“Himself.”

“Your comrade?”

“Yes. After giving me the plan of this house, doubtless hoping I should kill the count and he thus become his heir, or that the count would kill me and I should be out of his way, he waylaid me, and has murdered me.”

“I have also sent for the procureur.”

“He will not come in time; I feel my life fast ebbing.”

“Wait a moment,” said Monte Cristo. He left the room, and returned in five minutes with a phial. The dying man’s eyes were all the time riveted on the door, through which he hoped succor would arrive. “Hasten, reverend sir, hasten! I shall faint again!” Monte Cristo approached, and dropped on his purple lips three or four drops of the contents of the phial. Caderousse drew a deep breath. “Oh,” said he, “that is life to me; more, more!”

“Two drops more would kill you,” replied the abbe.

“Oh, send for some one to whom I can denounce the wretch!”

“Shall I write your deposition? You can sign it.”

“Yes, yes,” said Caderousse; and his eyes glistened at the thought of this posthumous revenge. Monte Cristo wrote: —

“I die, murdered by the Corsican Benedetto, my comrade in the galleys at Toulouse, No. 59.”

“Quick, quick!” said Caderousse, “or I shall be unable to sign it.”

Monte Cristo gave the pen to Caderousse, who collected all his strength, signed it, and fell back on his bed, saying: “You will relate all the rest, reverend sir; you will say he calls himself Andrea Cavalcanti. He lodges at the Hotel des Princes. Oh, I am dying!” He again fainted. The abbe made him smell the contents of the phial, and he again opened his eyes. His desire for revenge had not forsaken him.

“Ah, you will tell all I have said, will you not, reverend sir?”

“Yes, and much more.”

“What more will you say?”

“I will say he had doubtless given you the plan of this house, in the hope the count would kill you. I will say, likewise, he had apprised the count, by a note, of your intention, and, the count being absent, I read the note and sat up to await you.”

“And he will be guillotined, will be not?” said Caderousse. “Promise me that, and I will die with that hope.”

“I will say,” continued the count, “that he followed and watched you the whole time, and when he saw you leave the house, ran to the angle of the wall to conceal himself.”

“Did you see all that?”

“Remember my words: ‘If you return home safely, I shall believe God has forgiven you, and I will forgive you also.’“

"And you did not warn me!" cried Caderousse, raising himself on his elbows. "You knew I should be killed on leaving this house, and did not warn me!"

"No; for I saw God's justice placed in the hands of Benedetto, and should have thought it sacrilege to oppose the designs of providence."

"God's justice! Speak not of it, reverend sir. If God were just, you know how many would be punished who now escape."

"Patience," said the abbe, in a tone which made the dying man shudder; "have patience!" Caderousse looked at him with amazement. "Besides," said the abbe, "God is merciful to all, as he has been to you; he is first a father, then a judge."

"Do you then believe in God?" said Caderousse.

"Had I been so unhappy as not to believe in him until now," said Monte Cristo, "I must believe on seeing you." Caderousse raised his clinched hands towards heaven.

"Listen," said the abbe, extending his hand over the wounded man, as if to command him to believe; "this is what the God in whom, on your death-bed, you refuse to believe, has done for you — he gave you health, strength, regular employment, even friends — a life, in fact, which a man might enjoy with a calm conscience. Instead of improving these gifts, rarely granted so abundantly, this has been your course — you have given yourself up to sloth and drunkenness, and in a fit of intoxication have ruined your best friend."

"Help!" cried Caderousse; "I require a surgeon, not a priest; perhaps I am not mortally wounded — I may not die; perhaps they can yet save my life."

"Your wounds are so far mortal that, without the three drops I gave you, you would now be dead. Listen, then."

"Ah," murmured Caderousse, "what a strange priest you are; you drive the dying to despair, instead of consoling them."

"Listen," continued the abbe. "When you had betrayed your friend God began not to strike, but to warn you. Poverty overtook you. You had already passed half your life in coveting that which you might have honorably acquired; and already you contemplated crime under the excuse of want, when God worked a miracle in your behalf, sending you, by my hands, a fortune — brilliant, indeed, for you, who had never possessed any. But this unexpected, unhoped-for, unheard-of fortune sufficed you no longer when you once possessed it; you wished to double it, and how? — by a murder!

You succeeded, and then God snatched it from you, and brought you to justice."

"It was not I who wished to kill the Jew," said Caderousse; "it was La Carconte."

"Yes," said Monte Cristo, "and God, — I cannot say in justice, for his justice would have slain you, — but God, in his mercy, spared your life."

"Pardieu, to transport me for life, how merciful!"

"You thought it a mercy then, miserable wretch! The coward who feared death rejoiced at perpetual disgrace; for like all galley-slaves, you said, 'I may escape from prison, I cannot from the grave.' And you said truly; the way was opened for you unexpectedly. An Englishman visited Toulon, who had vowed to rescue two men from infamy, and his choice fell on you and your companion. You received a second fortune, money and tranquillity were restored to you, and you, who had been condemned to a felon's life, might live as other men. Then, wretched creature, then you tempted God a third time. 'I have not enough,' you said, when you had more than you before possessed, and you committed a third crime, without reason, without excuse. God is wearied; he has punished you." Caderousse was fast sinking. "Give me drink," said he: "I thirst — I burn!" Monte Cristo gave him a glass of water. "And yet that villain, Benedetto, will escape!"

"No one, I tell you, will escape; Benedetto will be punished."

"Then, you, too, will be punished, for you did not do your duty as a priest — you should have prevented Benedetto from killing me."

"I?" said the count, with a smile which petrified the dying man, "when you had just broken your knife against the coat of mail which protected my breast! Yet perhaps if I had found you humble and penitent, I might have prevented Benedetto from killing you; but I found you proud and blood-thirsty, and I left you in the hands of God."

"I do not believe there is a God," howled Caderousse; "you do not believe it; you lie — you lie!"

"Silence," said the abbe; "you will force the last drop of blood from your veins. What! you do not believe in God when he is striking you dead? you will not believe in him, who requires but a prayer, a word, a tear, and he will forgive? God, who might have directed the assassin's dagger so as to end your career in a moment, has given you this quarter of an hour for repentance. Reflect, then, wretched man, and repent."

“No,” said Caderousse, “no; I will not repent. There is no God; there is no providence — all comes by chance.” —

“There is a providence; there is a God,” said Monte Cristo, “of whom you are a striking proof, as you lie in utter despair, denying him, while I stand before you, rich, happy, safe and entreating that God in whom you endeavor not to believe, while in your heart you still believe in him.”

“But who are you, then?” asked Caderousse, fixing his dying eyes on the count. “Look well at me!” said Monte Cristo, putting the light near his face. “Well, the abbe — the Abbe Busoni.” Monte Cristo took off the wig which disfigured him, and let fall his black hair, which added so much to the beauty of his pallid features. “Oh?” said Caderousse, thunderstruck, “but for that black hair, I should say you were the Englishman, Lord Wilmore.”

“I am neither the Abbe Busoni nor Lord Wilmore,” said Monte Cristo; “think again, — do you not recollect me?” Those was a magic effect in the count’s words, which once more revived the exhausted powers of the miserable man. “Yes, indeed,” said he; “I think I have seen you and known you formerly.”

“Yes, Caderousse, you have seen me; you knew me once.”

“Who, then, are you? and why, if you knew me, do you let me die?”

“Because nothing can save you; your wounds are mortal. Had it been possible to save you, I should have considered it another proof of God’s mercy, and I would again have endeavored to restore you, I swear by my father’s tomb.”

“By your father’s tomb!” said Caderousse, supported by a supernatural power, and half-raising himself to see more distinctly the man who had just taken the oath which all men hold sacred; “who, then, are you?” The count had watched the approach of death. He knew this was the last struggle. He approached the dying man, and, leaning over him with a calm and melancholy look, he whispered, “I am — I am” — And his almost closed lips uttered a name so low that the count himself appeared afraid to hear it. Caderousse, who had raised himself on his knees, and stretched out his arm, tried to draw back, then clasping his hands, and raising them with a desperate effort, “O my God, my God!” said he, “pardon me for having denied thee; thou dost exist, thou art indeed man’s father in heaven, and his judge on earth. My God, my Lord, I have long despised thee! Pardon me, my God; receive me, O my Lord!” Caderousse sighed deeply, and fell back with a groan. The blood no longer flowed from his wounds. He was dead.

“One!” said the count mysteriously, his eyes fixed on the corpse, disfigured by so awful a death. Ten minutes afterwards the surgeon and the procureur arrived, the one accompanied by the porter, the other by Ali, and were received by the Abbe Busoni, who was praying by the side of the corpse.

Chapter 84

Beauchamp.

The daring attempt to rob the count was the topic of conversation throughout Paris for the next fortnight. The dying man had signed a deposition declaring Benedetto to be the assassin. The police had orders to make the strictest search for the murderer. Caderousse’s knife, dark lantern, bunch of keys, and clothing, excepting the waistcoat, which could not be found, were deposited at the registry; the corpse was conveyed to the morgue. The count told every one that this adventure had happened during his absence at Auteuil, and that he only knew what was related by the Abbe Busoni, who that evening, by mere chance, had requested to pass the night in his house, to examine some valuable books in his library. Bertuccio alone turned pale whenever Benedetto’s name was mentioned in his presence, but there was no reason why any one should notice his doing so. Villefort, being called on to prove the crime, was preparing his brief with the same ardor that he was accustomed to exercise when required to speak in criminal cases.

But three weeks had already passed, and the most diligent search had been unsuccessful; the attempted robbery and the murder of the robber by his comrade were almost forgotten in anticipation of the approaching marriage of Mademoiselle Danglars to the Count Andrea Cavalcanti. It was expected that this wedding would shortly take place, as the young man was received at the banker’s as the betrothed. Letters had been despatched to M. Cavalcanti, as the count’s father, who highly approved of the union, regretted his inability to leave Parma at that time, and promised a wedding gift of a hundred and fifty thousand livres. It was agreed that the three millions should be intrusted to Danglars to invest; some persons had warned the young man of the circumstances of his future father-in-law, who had of late sustained repeated losses; but with sublime disinterestedness and confidence the young man refused to listen, or to express a single doubt to the baron. The baron adored Count Andrea Cavalcanti: not so Mademoiselle Eugenie Danglars. With an instinctive hatred of matrimony, she suffered Andrea’s attentions in order to get rid of Morcerf; but when Andrea urged his suit, she betrayed an entire dislike to him. The baron might possibly have perceived it, but, attributing it to a caprice, feigned ignorance.

The delay demanded by Beauchamp had nearly expired. Morcerf appreciated the advice of Monte Cristo to let things die away of their own accord. No one had taken up the remark about the general, and no one had recognized in the officer who betrayed the castle of Yanina the noble count in the House of Peers. Albert, however felt no less insulted; the few lines which had irritated him were certainly intended as an insult. Besides, the manner in which Beauchamp had closed the conference left a bitter recollection in his heart. He cherished the thought of the duel, hoping to conceal its true cause even from his seconds. Beauchamp had not been seen since the day he visited Albert, and those of whom the latter inquired always told him he was out on a journey which would detain him some days. Where he was no one knew.

One morning Albert was awakened by his valet de chambre, who announced Beauchamp. Albert rubbed his eyes, ordered his servant to introduce him into the small smoking-room on the ground-floor, dressed himself quickly, and went down. He found Beauchamp pacing the room; on perceiving him Beauchamp stopped. “Your arrival here, without waiting my visit at your house to-day, looks well, sir,” said Albert. “Tell me, may I shake hands with you, saying, ‘Beauchamp, acknowledge you have injured me, and retain my friendship,’ or must I simply propose to you a choice of arms?”

“Albert,” said Beauchamp, with a look of sorrow which stupefied the young man, “let us first sit down and talk.”

“Rather, sir, before we sit down, I must demand your answer.”

“Albert,” said the journalist, “these are questions which it is difficult to answer.”

“I will facilitate it by repeating the question, ‘Will you, or will you not, retract?’“

“Morcerf, it is not enough to answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to questions which concern the honor, the social interest, and the life of such a man as Lieutenant-general the Count of Morcerf, peer of France.”

“What must then be done?”

“What I have done, Albert. I reasoned thus — money, time, and fatigue are nothing compared with the reputation and interests of a whole family; probabilities will not suffice, only facts will justify a deadly combat with a friend. If I strike with the sword, or discharge the contents of a pistol at man with whom, for three years, I have been on terms of intimacy, I must, at least, know why I do so; I must meet him with a heart at ease, and that quiet conscience which a man needs when his own arm must save his life.”

“Well,” said Morcerf, impatiently, “what does all this mean?”

“It means that I have just returned from Yanina.”

“From Yanina?”

“Yes.”

“Impossible!”

“Here is my passport; examine the visa — Geneva, Milan, Venice, Trieste, Delvino, Yanina. Will you believe the government of a republic, a kingdom, and an empire?” Albert cast his eyes on the passport, then raised them in astonishment to Beauchamp. “You have been to Yanina?” said he.

“Albert, had you been a stranger, a foreigner, a simple lord, like that Englishman who came to demand satisfaction three or four months since, and whom I killed to get rid of, I should not have taken this trouble; but I thought this mark of consideration due to you. I took a week to go, another to return, four days of quarantine, and forty-eight hours to stay there; that makes three weeks. I returned last night, and here I am.”

“What circumlocution! How long you are before you tell me what I most wish to know?”

“Because, in truth, Albert” —

“You hesitate?”

“Yes, — I fear.”

“You fear to acknowledge that your correspondent his deceived you? Oh, no self-love, Beauchamp. Acknowledge it, Beauchamp; your courage cannot be doubted.”

“Not so,” murmured the journalist; “on the contrary” —

Albert turned frightfully pale; he endeavored to speak, but the words died on his lips. “My friend,” said Beauchamp, in the most affectionate tone, “I should gladly make an apology; but, alas,” —

“But what?”

“The paragraph was correct, my friend.”

“What? That French officer” —

“Yes.”

“Fernand?”

“Yes.”

“The traitor who surrendered the castle of the man in whose service he was” —

“Pardon me, my friend, that man was your father!” Albert advanced furiously towards Beauchamp, but the latter restrained him more by a mild look than by his extended hand.

“My friend,” said he, “here is a proof of it.”

Albert opened the paper, it was an attestation of four notable inhabitants of Yanina, proving that Colonel Fernand Mondego, in the service of Ali Tepelini, had surrendered the castle for two million crowns. The signatures were perfectly legal. Albert tottered and fell overpowered in a chair. It could no longer be doubted; the family name was fully given. After a moment’s mournful silence, his heart overflowed, and he gave way to a flood of tears. Beauchamp, who had watched with sincere pity the young man’s paroxysm of grief, approached him. “Now, Albert,” said he, “you understand me — do you not? I wished to see all, and to judge of everything for myself, hoping the explanation would be in your father’s favor, and that I might do him justice. But, on the contrary, the particulars which are given prove that Fernand Mondego, raised by Ali Pasha to the rank of governor-general, is no other than Count Fernand of Morcerf; then, recollecting the honor you had done me, in admitting me to your friendship, I hastened to you.”

Albert, still extended on the chair, covered his face with both hands, as if to prevent the light from reaching him. “I hastened to you,” continued Beauchamp, “to tell you, Albert, that in this changing age, the faults of a father cannot revert upon his children. Few have passed through this revolutionary period, in the midst of which we were born, without some stain of infamy or blood to soil the uniform of the soldier, or the gown of the magistrate. Now I have these proofs, Albert, and I am in your confidence, no human power can force me to a duel which your own conscience would reproach you with as criminal, but I come to offer you what you can no longer demand of me. Do you wish these proofs, these attestations, which I alone possess, to be destroyed? Do you wish this frightful secret to remain with us? Confided to me, it shall never escape my lips; say, Albert, my friend, do you wish it?”

Albert threw himself on Beauchamp’s neck. “Ah, noble fellow!” cried he.

“Take these,” said Beauchamp, presenting the papers to Albert.

Albert seized them with a convulsive hand, tore them in pieces, and trembling lest the least vestige should escape and one day appear to confront him, he approached the wax-light, always kept burning for cigars, and burned every fragment. “Dear, excellent friend,” murmured Albert, still burning the papers.

“Let all be forgotten as a sorrowful dream,” said Beauchamp; “let it vanish as the last sparks from the blackened paper, and disappear as the smoke from those silent ashes.”

“Yes, yes,” said Albert, “and may there remain only the eternal friendship which I promised to my deliverer, which shall be transmitted to our children’s children, and shall always remind me that I owe my life and the honor of my name to you, — for had this been known, oh, Beauchamp, I should have destroyed myself; or, — no, my poor mother! I could not have killed her by the same blow, — I should have fled from my country.”

“Dear Albert,” said Beauchamp. But this sudden and factitious joy soon forsook the young man, and was succeeded by a still greater grief.

“Well,” said Beauchamp, “what still oppresses you, my friend?”

“I am broken-hearted,” said Albert. “Listen, Beauchamp! I cannot thus, in a moment relinquish the respect, the confidence, and pride with which a father’s untarnished name inspires a son. Oh, Beauchamp, Beauchamp, how shall I now approach mine? Shall I draw back my forehead from his embrace, or withhold my hand from his? I am the most wretched of men. Ah, my mother, my poor mother!” said Albert, gazing through his tears at his mother’s portrait; “if you know this, how much must you suffer!”

“Come,” said Beauchamp, taking both his hands, “take courage, my friend.”

“But how came that first note to be inserted in your journal? Some unknown enemy — an invisible foe — has done this.”

“The more must you fortify yourself, Albert. Let no trace of emotion be visible on your countenance, bear your grief as the cloud bears within it ruin and death — a fatal secret, known only when the storm bursts. Go, my friend, reserve your strength for the moment when the crash shall come.”

“You think, then, all is not over yet?” said Albert, horror-stricken.

“I think nothing, my friend; but all things are possible. By the way” —

“What?” said Albert, seeing that Beauchamp hesitated.

"Are you going to marry Mademoiselle Danglars?"

"Why do you ask me now?"

"Because the rupture or fulfilment of this engagement is connected with the person of whom we were speaking."

"How?" said Albert, whose brow reddened; "you think M. Danglars" —

"I ask you only how your engagement stands? Pray put no construction on my words I do not mean they should convey, and give them no undue weight."

"No." said Albert, "the engagement is broken off."

"Well," said Beauchamp. Then, seeing the young man was about to relapse into melancholy, "Let us go out, Albert," said he; "a ride in the wood in the phaeton, or on horseback, will refresh you; we will then return to breakfast, and you shall attend to your affairs, and I to mine."

"Willingly," said Albert; "but let us walk. I think a little exertion would do me good." The two friends walked out on the fortress. When arrived at the Madeleine, — "Since we are out," said Beauchamp, "let us call on M. de Monte Cristo; he is admirably adapted to revive one's spirits, because he never interrogates, and in my opinion those who ask no questions are the best comforters."

"Gladly," said Albert; "I love him — let us call."

Chapter 85

The Journey.

Monte Cristo uttered a joyful exclamation on seeing the young men together. “Ah, ha!” said he, “I hope all is over, explained and settled.”

“Yes,” said Beauchamp; “the absurd reports have died away, and should they be renewed, I would be the first to oppose them; so let us speak no more of it.”

“Albert will tell you,” replied the count “that I gave him the same advice. Look,” added he. “I am finishing the most execrable morning’s work.”

“What is it?” said Albert; “arranging your papers, apparently.”

“My papers, thank God, no, — my papers are all in capital order, because I have none; but M. Cavalcanti’s.”

“M. Cavalcanti’s?” asked Beauchamp.

“Yes; do you not know that this is a young man whom the count is introducing?” said Morcerf.

“Let us not misunderstand each other,” replied Monte Cristo; “I introduce no one, and certainly not M. Cavalcanti.”

“And who,” said Albert with a forced smile, “is to marry Mademoiselle Danglars instead of me, which grieves me cruelly.”

“What? Cavalcanti is going to marry Mademoiselle Danglars?” asked Beauchamp.

“Certainly; do you come from the end of the world?” said Monte Cristo; “you, a journalist, the husband of renown? It is the talk of all Paris.”

“And you, count, have made this match?” asked Beauchamp.

“I? Silence, purveyor of gossip, do not spread that report. I make a match? No, you do not know me; I have done all in my power to oppose it.”

“Ah, I understand,” said Beauchamp, “on our friend Albert’s account.”

“On my account?” said the young man; “oh, no, indeed, the count will do me the justice to assert that I have, on the contrary, always entreated him to break off my engagement, and happily it is ended. The count pretends I have not him to thank; — so be it — I will erect an altar Deo ignoto.”

"Listen," said Monte Cristo; "I have had little to do with it, for I am at variance both with the father-in-law and the young man; there is only Mademoiselle Eugenie, who appears but little charmed with the thoughts of matrimony, and who, seeing how little I was disposed to persuade her to renounce her dear liberty, retains any affection for me."

"And do you say this wedding is at hand?"

"Oh, yes, in spite of all I could say. I do not know the young man; he is said to be of good family and rich, but I never trust to vague assertions. I have warned M. Danglars of it till I am tired, but he is fascinated with his Luccanese. I have even informed him of a circumstance I consider very serious; the young man was either charmed by his nurse, stolen by gypsies, or lost by his tutor, I scarcely know which. But I do know his father lost sight of him for more than ten years; what he did during these ten years, God only knows. Well, all that was useless. They have commissioned me to write to the major to demand papers, and here they are. I send them, but like Pilate — washing my hands."

"And what does Mademoiselle d'Armilly say to you for robbing her of her pupil?"

"Oh, well, I don't know; but I understand that she is going to Italy. Madame Danglars asked me for letters of recommendation for the impresari; I gave her a few lines for the director of the Valle Theatre, who is under some obligation to me. But what is the matter, Albert? you look dull; are you, after all, unconsciously in love with Mademoiselle Eugenie?"

"I am not aware of it," said Albert, smiling sorrowfully. Beauchamp turned to look at some paintings. "But," continued Monte Cristo, "you are not in your usual spirits?"

"I have a dreadful headache," said Albert.

"Well, my dear viscount," said Monte Cristo, "I have an infallible remedy to propose to you."

"What is that?" asked the young man.

"A change."

"Indeed?" said Albert.

"Yes; and as I am just now excessively annoyed, I shall go from home. Shall we go together?"

"You annoyed, count?" said Beauchamp; "and by what?"

"Ah, you think very lightly of it; I should like to see you with a brief preparing in your house."

"What brief?"

"The one M. de Villefort is preparing against my amiable assassin — some brigand escaped from the gallows apparently."

"True," said Beauchamp; "I saw it in the paper. Who is this Caderousse?"

"Some provincial, it appears. M. de Villefort heard of him at Marseilles, and M. Danglars recollects having seen him. Consequently, the procureur is very active in the affair, and the prefect of police very much interested; and, thanks to that interest, for which I am very grateful, they send me all the robbers of Paris and the neighborhood, under pretence of their being Caderousse's murderers, so that in three months, if this continues, every robber and assassin in France will have the plan of my house at his fingers' end. I am resolved to desert them and go to some remote corner of the earth, and shall be happy if you will accompany me, viscount."

"Willingly."

"Then it is settled?"

"Yes, but where?"

"I have told you, where the air is pure, where every sound soothes, where one is sure to be humbled, however proud may be his nature. I love that humiliation, I, who am master of the universe, as was Augustus."

"But where are you really going?"

"To sea, viscount; you know I am a sailor. I was rocked when an infant in the arms of old ocean, and on the bosom of the beautiful Amphitrite; I have sported with the green mantle of the one and the azure robe of the other; I love the sea as a mistress, and pine if I do not often see her."

"Let us go, count."

"To sea?"

"Yes."

"You accept my proposal?"

"I do."

"Well, Viscount, there will be in my court-yard this evening a good travelling britzka, with four post-horses, in which one may rest as in a bed. M. Beauchamp, it holds four very well, will you accompany us?"

"Thank you, I have just returned from sea."

"What? you have been to sea?"

"Yes; I have just made a little excursion to the Borromean Islands." [*]

* Lake Maggiore.

"What of that? come with us," said Albert.

“No, dear Morcerf; you know I only refuse when the thing is impossible. Besides, it is important,” added he in a low tone, “that I should remain in Paris just now to watch the paper.”

“Ah, you are a good and an excellent friend,” said Albert; “yes, you are right; watch, watch, Beauchamp, and try to discover the enemy who made this disclosure.” Albert and Beauchamp parted, the last pressure of their hands expressing what their tongues could not before a stranger.

“Beauchamp is a worthy fellow,” said Monte Cristo, when the journalist was gone; “is he not, Albert?”

“Yes, and a sincere friend; I love him devotedly. But now we are alone, — although it is immaterial to me, — where are we going?”

“Into Normandy, if you like.”

“Delightful; shall we be quite retired? have no society, no neighbors?”

“Our companions will be riding-horses, dogs to hunt with, and a fishing-boat.”

“Exactly what I wish for; I will apprise my mother of my intention, and return to you.”

“But shall you be allowed to go into Normandy?”

“I may go where I please.”

“Yes, I am aware you may go alone, since I once met you in Italy — but to accompany the mysterious Monte Cristo?”

“You forget, count, that I have often told you of the deep interest my mother takes in you.”

“‘Woman is fickle.’ said Francis I.; ‘woman is like a wave of the sea,’ said Shakespeare; both the great king and the great poet ought to have known woman’s nature well.”

“Woman’s, yes; my mother is not woman, but a woman.”

“As I am only a humble foreigner, you must pardon me if I do not understand all the subtle refinements of your language.”

“What I mean to say is, that my mother is not quick to give her confidence, but when she does she never changes.”

“Ah, yes, indeed,” said Monte Cristo with a sigh; “and do you think she is in the least interested in me?”

“I repeat it, you must really be a very strange and superior man, for my mother is so absorbed by the interest you have excited, that when I am with her she speaks of no one else.”

“And does she try to make you dislike me?”

"On the contrary, she often says, 'Morcerf, I believe the count has a noble nature; try to gain his esteem.'"

"Indeed?" said Monte Cristo, sighing.

"You see, then," said Albert, "that instead of opposing, she will encourage me."

"Adieu, then, until five o'clock; be punctual, and we shall arrive at twelve or one."

"At Treport?"

"Yes; or in the neighborhood."

"But can we travel forty-eight leagues in eight hours?"

"Easily," said Monte Cristo.

"You are certainly a prodigy; you will soon not only surpass the railway, which would not be very difficult in France, but even the telegraph."

"But, viscount, since we cannot perform the journey in less than seven or eight hours, do not keep me waiting."

"Do not fear, I have little to prepare." Monte Cristo smiled as he nodded to Albert, then remained a moment absorbed in deep meditation. But passing his hand across his forehead as if to dispel his revery, he rang the bell twice and Bertuccio entered. "Bertuccio," said he, "I intend going this evening to Normandy, instead of to-morrow or the next day. You will have sufficient time before five o'clock; despatch a messenger to apprise the grooms at the first station. M. de Morcerf will accompany me." Bertuccio obeyed and despatched a courier to Pontoise to say the travelling-carriage would arrive at six o'clock. From Pontoise another express was sent to the next stage, and in six hours all the horses stationed on the road were ready. Before his departure, the count went to Haidee's apartments, told her his intention, and resigned everything to her care. Albert was punctual. The journey soon became interesting from its rapidity, of which Morcerf had formed no previous idea. "Truly," said Monte Cristo, "with your posthorses going at the rate of two leagues an hour, and that absurd law that one traveller shall not pass another without permission, so that an invalid or ill-tempered traveller may detain those who are well and active, it is impossible to move; I escape this annoyance by travelling with my own postilion and horses; do I not, Ali?"

The count put his head out of the window and whistled, and the horses appeared to fly. The carriage rolled with a thundering noise over the pavement, and every one turned to notice the dazzling meteor. Ali, smiling, repeated the sound, grasped the reins with a firm hand, and spurred his horses, whose beautiful manes floated in the breeze. This child of the desert was in his element, and with his black face and sparkling eyes appeared, in the cloud of dust he raised, like the genius of the simoom and the god of the hurricane. “I never knew till now the delight of speed,” said Morcerf, and the last cloud disappeared from his brow; “but where the devil do you get such horses? Are they made to order?”

“Precisely,” said the count; “six years since I bought a horse in Hungary remarkable for its swiftness. The thirty-two that we shall use to-night are its progeny; they are all entirely black, with the exception of a star upon the forehead.”

“That is perfectly admirable; but what do you do, count, with all these horses?”

“You see, I travel with them.”

“But you are not always travelling.”

“When I no longer require them, Bertuccio will sell them, and he expects to realize thirty or forty thousand francs by the sale.”

“But no monarch in Europe will be wealthy enough to purchase them.”

“Then he will sell them to some Eastern vizier, who will empty his coffers to purchase them, and refill them by applying the bastinado to his subjects.”

“Count, may I suggest one idea to you?”

“Certainly.”

“It is that, next to you, Bertuccio must be the richest gentleman in Europe.”

“You are mistaken, viscount; I believe he has not a franc in his possession.”

“Then he must be a wonder. My dear count, if you tell me many more marvellous things, I warn you I shall not believe them.”

“I countenance nothing that is marvellous, M. Albert. Tell me, why does a steward rob his master?”

“Because, I suppose, it is his nature to do so, for the love of robbing.”

“You are mistaken; it is because he has a wife and family, and ambitious desires for himself and them. Also because he is not sure of always retaining his situation, and wishes to provide for the future. Now, M. Bertuccio is alone in the world; he uses my property without accounting for the use he makes of it; he is sure never to leave my service.”

“Why?”

“Because I should never get a better.”

“Probabilities are deceptive.”

“But I deal in certainties; he is the best servant over whom one has the power of life and death.”

“Do you possess that right over Bertuccio?”

“Yes.”

There are words which close a conversation with an iron door; such was the count’s “yes.” The whole journey was performed with equal rapidity; the thirty-two horses, dispersed over seven stages, brought them to their destination in eight hours. At midnight they arrived at the gate of a beautiful park. The porter was in attendance; he had been apprised by the groom of the last stage of the count’s approach. At half past two in the morning Morcerf was conducted to his apartments, where a bath and supper were prepared. The servant who had travelled at the back of the carriage waited on him; Baptistin, who rode in front, attended the count. Albert bathed, took his supper, and went to bed. All night he was lulled by the melancholy noise of the surf. On rising, he went to his window, which opened on a terrace, having the sea in front, and at the back a pretty park bounded by a small forest. In a creek lay a little sloop, with a narrow keel and high masts, bearing on its flag the Monte Cristo arms which were a mountain on a sea azure, with a cross gules on the shield. Around the schooner lay a number of small fishing-boats belonging to the fishermen of the neighboring village, like humble subjects awaiting orders from their queen. There, as in every spot where Monte Cristo stopped, if but for two days, luxury abounded and life went on with the utmost ease.

Albert found in his anteroom two guns, with all the accoutrements for hunting; a lofty room on the ground-floor containing all the ingenious instruments the English — eminent in piscatory pursuits, since they are patient and sluggish — have invented for fishing. The day passed in pursuing those exercises in which Monte Cristo excelled. They killed a dozen pheasants in the park, as many trout in the stream, dined in a summer-house overlooking the ocean, and took tea in the library.

Towards the evening of the third day. Albert, completely exhausted with the exercise which invigorated Monte Cristo, was sleeping in an arm-chair near the window, while the count was designing with his architect the plan of a conservatory in his house, when the sound of a horse at full speed on the high road made Albert look up. He was disagreeably surprised to see his own valet de chambre, whom he had not brought, that he might not inconvenience Monte Cristo.

"Florentin here!" cried he, starting up; "is my mother ill?" And he hastened to the door. Monte Cristo watched and saw him approach the valet, who drew a small sealed parcel from his pocket, containing a newspaper and a letter. "From whom is this?" said he eagerly. "From M. Beauchamp," replied Florentin.

"Did he send you?"

"Yes, sir; he sent for me to his house, gave me money for my journey, procured a horse, and made me promise not to stop till I had reached you, I have come in fifteen hours."

Albert opened the letter with fear, uttered a shriek on reading the first line, and seized the paper. His sight was dimmed, his legs sank under him, and he would have fallen had not Florentin supported him.

"Poor young man," said Monte Cristo in a low voice; "it is then true that the sin of the father shall fall on the children to the third and fourth generation." Meanwhile Albert had revived, and, continuing to read, he threw back his head, saying, "Florentin, is your horse fit to return immediately?"

"It is a poor lame post-horse."

"In what state was the house when you left?"

"All was quiet, but on returning from M. Beauchamp's, I found madame in tears: she had sent for me to know when you would return. I told her my orders from M. Beauchamp; she first extended her arms to prevent me, but after a moment's reflection, 'Yes, go, Florentin,' said she, 'and may he come quickly.'"

"Yes, my mother," said Albert, "I will return, and woe to the infamous wretch! But first of all I must get there."

He went back to the room where he had left Monte Cristo. Five minutes had sufficed to make a complete transformation in his appearance. His voice had become rough and hoarse; his face was furrowed with wrinkles; his eyes burned under the blue-veined lids, and he tottered like a drunken man. "Count," said he, "I thank you for your hospitality, which I would gladly have enjoyed longer; but I must return to Paris."

"What has happened?"

“A great misfortune, more important to me than life. Don’t question me, I beg of you, but lend me a horse.”

“My stables are at your command, viscount; but you will kill yourself by riding on horseback. Take a post-chaise or a carriage.”

“No, it would delay me, and I need the fatigue you warn me of; it will do me good.” Albert reeled as if he had been shot, and fell on a chair near the door. Monte Cristo did not see this second manifestation of physical exhaustion; he was at the window, calling, “Ali, a horse for M. de Morcerf — quick! he is in a hurry!” These words restored Albert; he darted from the room, followed by the count. “Thank you!” cried he, throwing himself on his horse. “Return as soon as you can, Florentin. Must I use any password to procure a horse?”

“Only dismount; another will be immediately saddled.” Albert hesitated a moment. “You may think my departure strange and foolish,” said the young man; “you do not know how a paragraph in a newspaper may exasperate one. Read that,” said he, “when I am gone, that you may not be witness of my anger.”

While the count picked up the paper he put spurs to his horse, which leaped in astonishment at such an unusual stimulus, and shot away with the rapidity of an arrow. The count watched him with a feeling of compassion, and when he had completely disappeared, read as follows: —

“The French officer in the service of Ali Pasha of Yanina alluded to three weeks since in the Impartial, who not only surrendered the castle of Yanina, but sold his benefactor to the Turks, styled himself truly at that time Fernand, as our esteemed contemporary states; but he has since added to his Christian name a title of nobility and a family name. He now calls himself the Count of Morcerf, and ranks among the peers.”

Thus the terrible secret, which Beauchamp had so generously destroyed, appeared again like an armed phantom; and another paper, deriving its information from some malicious source, had published two days after Albert’s departure for Normandy the few lines which had rendered the unfortunate young man almost crazy.

Chapter 86

The Trial.

At eight o’clock in the morning Albert had arrived at Beauchamp’s door. The valet de chambre had received orders to usher him in at once. Beauchamp was in his bath. “Here I am,” said Albert.

“Well, my poor friend,” replied Beauchamp, “I expected you.”

“I need not say I think you are too faithful and too kind to have spoken of that painful circumstance. Your having sent for me is another proof of your affection. So, without losing time, tell me, have you the slightest idea whence this terrible blow proceeds?”

“I think I have some clew.”

“But first tell me all the particulars of this shameful plot.” Beauchamp proceeded to relate to the young man, who was overwhelmed with shame and grief, the following facts. Two days previously, the article had appeared in another paper besides the Impartial, and, what was more serious, one that was well known as a government paper. Beauchamp was breakfasting when he read the paragraph. He sent immediately for a cabriolet, and hastened to the publisher’s office. Although professing diametrically opposite principles from those of the editor of the other paper, Beauchamp — as it sometimes, we may say often, happens — was his intimate friend. The editor was reading, with apparent delight, a leading article in the same paper on beet-sugar, probably a composition of his own.

“Ah, pardieu,” said Beauchamp, “with the paper in your hand, my friend, I need not tell you the cause of my visit.”

“Are you interested in the sugar question?” asked the editor of the ministerial paper.

“No,” replied Beauchamp, “I have not considered the question; a totally different subject interests me.”

“What is it?”

“The article relative to Morcerf.”

“Indeed? Is it not a curious affair?”

"So curious, that I think you are running a great risk of a prosecution for defamation of character."

"Not at all; we have received with the information all the requisite proofs, and we are quite sure M. de Morcerf will not raise his voice against us; besides, it is rendering a service to one's country to denounce these wretched criminals who are unworthy of the honor bestowed on them." Beauchamp was thunderstruck. "Who, then, has so correctly informed you?" asked he; "for my paper, which gave the first information on the subject, has been obliged to stop for want of proof; and yet we are more interested than you in exposing M. de Morcerf, as he is a peer of France, and we are of the opposition."

"Oh, that is very simple; we have not sought to scandalize. This news was brought to us. A man arrived yesterday from Yanina, bringing a formidable array of documents; and when we hesitated to publish the accusatory article, he told us it should be inserted in some other paper."

Beauchamp understood that nothing remained but to submit, and left the office to despatch a courier to Morcerf. But he had been unable to send to Albert the following particulars, as the events had transpired after the messenger's departure; namely, that the same day a great agitation was manifest in the House of Peers among the usually calm members of that dignified assembly. Every one had arrived almost before the usual hour, and was conversing on the melancholy event which was to attract the attention of the public towards one of their most illustrious colleagues. Some were perusing the article, others making comments and recalling circumstances which substantiated the charges still more. The Count of Morcerf was no favorite with his colleagues. Like all upstarts, he had had recourse to a great deal of haughtiness to maintain his position. The true nobility laughed at him, the talented repelled him, and the honorable instinctively despised him. He was, in fact, in the unhappy position of the victim marked for sacrifice; the finger of God once pointed at him, every one was prepared to raise the hue and cry.

The Count of Morcerf alone was ignorant of the news. He did not take in the paper containing the defamatory article, and had passed the morning in writing letters and in trying a horse. He arrived at his usual hour, with a proud look and insolent demeanor; he alighted, passed through the corridors, and entered the house without observing the hesitation of the door-keepers or the coolness of his colleagues. Business had already been going on for half an hour when he entered. Every one held the accusing paper, but, as usual, no one liked to take upon himself the responsibility of the attack. At length an honorable peer, Morcerf's acknowledged enemy, ascended the tribune with that solemnity which announced that the expected moment had arrived. There was an impressive silence; Morcerf alone knew not why such profound attention was given to an orator who was not always listened to with so much complacency. The count did not notice the introduction, in which the speaker announced that his communication would be of that vital importance that it demanded the undivided attention of the House; but at the mention of Yanina and Colonel Fernand, he turned so frightfully pale that every member shuddered and fixed his eyes upon him. Moral wounds have this peculiarity, — they may be hidden, but they never close; always painful, always ready to bleed when touched, they remain fresh and open in the heart.

The article having been read during the painful hush that followed, a universal shudder pervaded the assembly, and immediately the closest attention was given to the orator as he resumed his remarks. He stated his scruples and the difficulties of the case; it was the honor of M. de Morcerf, and that of the whole House, he proposed to defend, by provoking a debate on personal questions, which are always such painful themes of discussion. He concluded by calling for an investigation, which might dispose of the calumnious report before it had time to spread, and restore M. de Morcerf to the position he had long held in public opinion. Morcerf was so completely overwhelmed by this great and unexpected calamity that he could scarcely stammer a few words as he looked around on the assembly. This timidity, which might proceed from the astonishment of innocence as well as the shame of guilt, conciliated some in his favor; for men who are truly generous are always ready to compassionate when the misfortune of their enemy surpasses the limits of their hatred.

The president put it to the vote, and it was decided that the investigation should take place. The count was asked what time he required to prepare his defence. Morcerf's courage had revived when he found himself alive after this horrible blow. "My lords," answered he, "it is not by time I could repel the attack made on me by enemies unknown to me, and, doubtless, hidden in obscurity; it is immediately, and by a thunderbolt, that I must repel the flash of lightning which, for a moment, startled me. Oh, that I could, instead of taking up this defence, shed my last drop of blood to prove to my noble colleagues that I am their equal in worth.” These words made a favorable impression on behalf of the accused. “I demand, then, that the examination shall take place as soon as possible, and I will furnish the house with all necessary information.”

“What day do you fix?” asked the president.

“To-day I am at your service,” replied the count. The president rang the bell. “Does the House approve that the examination should take place to-day?”

“Yes,” was the unanimous answer.

A committee of twelve members was chosen to examine the proofs brought forward by Morcerf. The investigation would begin at eight o’clock that evening in the committee-room, and if postponement were necessary, the proceedings would be resumed each evening at the same hour. Morcerf asked leave to retire; he had to collect the documents he had long been preparing against this storm, which his sagacity had foreseen.

Albert listened, trembling now with hope, then with anger, and then again with shame, for from Beauchamp’s confidence he knew his father was guilty, and he asked himself how, since he was guilty, he could prove his innocence. Beauchamp hesitated to continue his narrative. “What next?” asked Albert.

“What next? My friend, you impose a painful task on me. Must you know all?”

“Absolutely; and rather from your lips than another’s.”

“Muster up all your courage, then, for never have you required it more.” Albert passed his hand over his forehead, as if to try his strength, as a man who is preparing to defend his life proves his shield and bends his sword. He thought himself strong enough, for he mistook fever for energy. “Go on,” said he.

“The evening arrived; all Paris was in expectation. Many said your father had only to show himself to crush the charge against him; many others said he would not appear; while some asserted that they had seen him start for Brussels; and others went to the police-office to inquire if he had taken out a passport. I used all my influence with one of the committee, a young peer of my acquaintance, to get admission to one of the galleries. He called for me at seven o’clock, and, before any one had arrived, asked one of the door-keepers to place me in a box. I was concealed by a column, and might witness the whole of the terrible scene which was about to take place. At eight o’clock all were in their places, and M. de Morcerf entered at the last stroke. He held some papers in his hand; his countenance was calm, and his step firm, and he was dressed with great care in his military uniform, which was buttoned completely up to the chin. His presence produced a good effect. The committee was made up of Liberals, several of whom came forward to shake hands with him.”

Albert felt his heart bursting at these particulars, but gratitude mingled with his sorrow: he would gladly have embraced those who had given his father this proof of esteem at a moment when his honor was so powerfully attacked. “At this moment one of the door-keepers brought in a letter for the president. ‘You are at liberty to speak, M. de Morcerf,’ said the president, as he unsealed the letter; and the count began his defence, I assure you, Albert, in a most eloquent and skilful manner. He produced documents proving that the Vizier of Yanina had up to the last moment honored him with his entire confidence, since he had interested him with a negotiation of life and death with the emperor. He produced the ring, his mark of authority, with which Ali Pasha generally sealed his letters, and which the latter had given him, that he might, on his return at any hour of the day or night, gain access to the presence, even in the harem. Unfortunately, the negotiation failed, and when he returned to defend his benefactor, he was dead. ‘But,’ said the count, ‘so great was Ali Pasha’s confidence, that on his death-bed he resigned his favorite mistress and her daughter to my care.’“ Albert started on hearing these words; the history of Haidee recurred to him, and he remembered what she had said of that message and the ring, and the manner in which she had been sold and made a slave. “And what effect did this discourse produce?” anxiously inquired Albert. “I acknowledge it affected me, and, indeed, all the committee also,” said Beauchamp.

“Meanwhile, the president carelessly opened the letter which had been brought to him; but the first lines aroused his attention; he read them again and again, and fixing his eyes on M. de Morcerf, ‘Count,’ said he, ‘you have said that the Vizier of Yanina confided his wife and daughter to your care?’ — ’Yes, sir,’ replied Morcerf; ‘but in that, like all the rest, misfortune pursued me. On my return, Vasiliki and her daughter Haidee had disappeared.’ — ’Did you know them?’ — ’My intimacy with the pasha and his unlimited confidence had gained me an introduction to them, and I had seen them above twenty times.’

"'Have you any idea what became of them?' — 'Yes, sir; I heard they had fallen victims to their sorrow, and, perhaps, to their poverty. I was not rich; my life was in constant danger; I could not seek them, to my great regret.' The president frowned imperceptibly. 'Gentlemen,' said he, 'you have heard the Comte de Morcerf's defence. Can you, sir, produce any witnesses to the truth of what you have asserted?' — 'Alas, no, monsieur,' replied the count; 'all those who surrounded the vizier, or who knew me at his court, are either dead or gone away, I know not where. I believe that I alone, of all my countrymen, survived that dreadful war. I have only the letters of Ali Tepelini, which I have placed before you; the ring, a token of his good-will, which is here; and, lastly, the most convincing proof I can offer, after an anonymous attack, and that is the absence of any witness against my veracity and the purity of my military life.' A murmur of approbation ran through the assembly; and at this moment, Albert, had nothing more transpired, your father's cause had been gained. It only remained to put it to the vote, when the president resumed: 'Gentlemen and you, monsieur, — you will not be displeased, I presume, to listen to one who calls himself a very important witness, and who has just presented himself. He is, doubtless, come to prove the perfect innocence of our colleague. Here is a letter I have just received on the subject; shall it be read, or shall it be passed over? and shall we take no notice of this incident?' M. de Morcerf turned pale, and clinched his hands on the papers he held. The committee decided to hear the letter; the count was thoughtful and silent. The president read: —

"'Mr. President, — I can furnish the committee of inquiry into the conduct of the Lieutenant-General the Count of Morcerf in Epirus and in Macedonia with important particulars.'

"The president paused, and the count turned pale. The president looked at his auditors. 'Proceed,' was heard on all sides. The president resumed: —

"'I was on the spot at the death of Ali Pasha. I was present during his last moments. I know what is become of Vasiliki and Haidee. I am at the command of the committee, and even claim the honor of being heard. I shall be in the lobby when this note is delivered to you.'

"'And who is this witness, or rather this enemy?' asked the count, in a tone in which there was a visible alteration. 'We shall know, sir,' replied the president. 'Is the committee willing to hear this witness?' — 'Yes, yes,' they all said at once. The door-keeper was called. ‘Is there any one in the lobby?’ said the president.

"‘Yes, sir.’ — ’Who is it?’ — ’A woman, accompanied by a servant.’ Every one looked at his neighbor. ‘Bring her in,’ said the president. Five minutes after the door-keeper again appeared; all eyes were fixed on the door, and I,” said Beauchamp, “shared the general expectation and anxiety. Behind the door-keeper walked a woman enveloped in a large veil, which completely concealed her. It was evident, from her figure and the perfumes she had about her, that she was young and fastidious in her tastes, but that was all. The president requested her to throw aside her veil, and it was then seen that she was dressed in the Grecian costume, and was remarkably beautiful.”

“Ah,” said Albert, “it was she.”

“Who?”

“Haidee.”

“Who told you that?”

“Alas, I guess it. But go on, Beauchamp. You see I am calm and strong. And yet we must be drawing near the disclosure.”

“M. de Morcerf,” continued Beauchamp, “looked at this woman with surprise and terror. Her lips were about to pass his sentence of life or death. To the committee the adventure was so extraordinary and curious, that the interest they had felt for the count’s safety became now quite a secondary matter. The president himself advanced to place a seat for the young lady; but she declined availing herself of it. As for the count, he had fallen on his chair; it was evident that his legs refused to support him.

"‘Madame,’ said the president, ‘you have engaged to furnish the committee with some important particulars respecting the affair at Yanina, and you have stated that you were an eyewitness of the event.’ — ’I was, indeed,’ said the stranger, with a tone of sweet melancholy, and with the sonorous voice peculiar to the East.

"‘But allow me to say that you must have been very young then.’ — ’I was four years old; but as those events deeply concerned me, not a single detail has escaped my memory.’ — ’In what manner could these events concern you? and who are you, that they should have made so deep an impression on you?’ — ’On them depended my father’s life,’ replied she. ‘I am Haidee, the daughter of Ali Tepelini, pasha of Yanina, and of Vasiliki, his beloved wife.’

“The blush of mingled pride and modesty which suddenly suffused the cheeks of the young woman, the brilliancy of her eye, and her highly important communication, produced an indescribable effect on the assembly. As for the count, he could not have been more overwhelmed if a thunderbolt had fallen at his feet and opened an immense gulf before him. ‘Madame,’ replied the president, bowing with profound respect, ‘allow me to ask one question; it shall be the last: Can you prove the authenticity of what you have now stated?’ — ’I can, sir,’ said Haidee, drawing from under her veil a satin satchel highly perfumed; ‘for here is the register of my birth, signed by my father and his principal officers, and that of my baptism, my father having consented to my being brought up in my mother’s faith, — this latter has been sealed by the grand primate of Macedonia and Epirus; and lastly (and perhaps the most important), the record of the sale of my person and that of my mother to the Armenian merchant El-Kobbir, by the French officer, who, in his infamous bargain with the Porte, had reserved as his part of the booty the wife and daughter of his benefactor, whom he sold for the sum of four hundred thousand francs.’ A greenish pallor spread over the count’s cheeks, and his eyes became bloodshot at these terrible imputations, which were listened to by the assembly with ominous silence.

“Haidee, still calm, but with a calmness more dreadful than the anger of another would have been, handed to the president the record of her sale, written in Arabic. It had been supposed some of the papers might be in the Arabian, Romaic, or Turkish language, and the interpreter of the House was in attendance. One of the noble peers, who was familiar with the Arabic language, having studied it during the famous Egyptian campaign, followed with his eye as the translator read aloud: —

“‘I, El-Kobbir, a slave-merchant, and purveyor of the harem of his highness, acknowledge having received for transmission to the sublime emperor, from the French lord, the Count of Monte Cristo, an emerald valued at eight hundred thousand francs; as the ransom of a young Christian slave of eleven years of age, named Haidee, the acknowledged daughter of the late lord Ali Tepelini, pasha of Yanina, and of Vasiliki, his favorite; she having been sold to me seven years previously, with her mother, who had died on arriving at Constantinople, by a French colonel in the service of the Vizier Ali Tepelini, named Fernand Mondego. The above-mentioned purchase was made on his highness’s account, whose mandate I had, for the sum of four hundred thousand francs.

"'Given at Constantinople, by authority of his highness, in the year 1247 of the Hegira.

"'Signed El-Kobbir.'

"'That this record should have all due authority, it shall bear the imperial seal, which the vendor is bound to have affixed to it.'

"Near the merchant's signature there was, indeed, the seal of the sublime emperor. A dreadful silence followed the reading of this document; the count could only stare, and his gaze, fixed as if unconsciously on Haidee, seemed one of fire and blood. 'Madame,' said the president, 'may reference be made to the Count of Monte Cristo, who is now, I believe, in Paris?' — 'Sir,' replied Haidee, 'the Count of Monte Cristo, my foster-father, has been in Normandy the last three days.'

"'Who, then, has counselled you to take this step, one for which the court is deeply indebted to you, and which is perfectly natural, considering your birth and your misfortunes?' — 'Sir,' replied Haidee, 'I have been led to take this step from a feeling of respect and grief. Although a Christian, may God forgive me, I have always sought to revenge my illustrious father. Since I set my foot in France, and knew the traitor lived in Paris, I have watched carefully. I live retired in the house of my noble protector, but I do it from choice. I love retirement and silence, because I can live with my thoughts and recollections of past days. But the Count of Monte Cristo surrounds me with every paternal care, and I am ignorant of nothing which passes in the world. I learn all in the silence of my apartments, — for instance, I see all the newspapers, every periodical, as well as every new piece of music; and by thus watching the course of the life of others, I learned what had transpired this morning in the House of Peers, and what was to take place this evening; then I wrote.'

"'Then,' remarked the president, 'the Count of Monte Cristo knows nothing of your present proceedings?' — 'He is quite unaware of them, and I have but one fear, which is that he should disapprove of what I have done. But it is a glorious day for me,' continued the young girl, raising her ardent gaze to heaven, 'that on which I find at last an opportunity of avenging my father!'

"The count had not uttered one word the whole of this time. His colleagues looked at him, and doubtless pitied his prospects, blighted under the perfumed breath of a woman. His misery was depicted in sinister lines on his countenance. 'M. de Morcerf,' said the president, 'do you recognize this lady as the daughter of Ali Tepelini, pasha of Yanina?' — 'No,' said Morcerf, attempting to rise, 'it is a base plot, contrived by my enemies.' Haidee, whose eyes had been fixed on the door, as if expecting some one, turned hastily, and, seeing the count standing, shrieked, 'You do not know me?' said she. 'Well, I fortunately recognize you! You are Fernand Mondego, the French officer who led the troops of my noble father! It is you who surrendered the castle of Yanina! It is you who, sent by him to Constantinople, to treat with the emperor for the life or death of your benefactor, brought back a false mandate granting full pardon! It is you who, with that mandate, obtained the pasha's ring, which gave you authority over Selim, the fire-keeper! It is you who stabbed Selim. It is you who sold us, my mother and me, to the merchant, El-Kobbir! Assassin, assassin, assassin, you have still on your brow your master's blood! Look, gentlemen, all!'

"These words had been pronounced with such enthusiasm and evident truth, that every eye was fixed on the count's forehead, and he himself passed his hand across it, as if he felt Ali's blood still lingering there. 'You positively recognize M. de Morcerf as the officer, Fernand Mondego?' — 'Indeed I do!' cried Haidee. 'Oh, my mother, it was you who said, "You were free, you had a beloved father, you were destined to be almost a queen. Look well at that man; it is he who raised your father's head on the point of a spear; it is he who sold us; it is he who forsook us! Look well at his right hand, on which he has a large wound; if you forgot his features, you would know him by that hand, into which fell, one by one, the gold pieces of the merchant El-Kobbir!" I know him! Ah, let him say now if he does not recognize me!' Each word fell like a dagger on Morcerf, and deprived him of a portion of his energy; as she uttered the last, he hid his mutilated hand hastily in his bosom, and fell back on his seat, overwhelmed by wretchedness and despair. This scene completely changed the opinion of the assembly respecting the accused count.

"'Count of Morcerf,' said the president, 'do not allow yourself to be cast down; answer. The justice of the court is supreme and impartial as that of God; it will not suffer you to be trampled on by your enemies without giving you an opportunity of defending yourself. Shall further inquiries be made? Shall two members of the House be sent to Yanina? Speak!' Morcerf did not reply. Then all the members looked at each other with terror. They knew the count's energetic and violent temper; it must be, indeed, a dreadful blow which would deprive him of courage to defend himself. They expected that his stupefied silence would be followed by a fiery outburst. ‘Well,’ asked the president, ‘what is your decision?’

“‘I have no reply to make,’ said the count in a low tone.

“‘Has the daughter of Ali Tepelini spoken the truth?’ said the president. ‘Is she, then, the terrible witness to whose charge you dare not plead “Not guilty”? Have you really committed the crimes of which you are accused?’ The count looked around him with an expression which might have softened tigers, but which could not disarm his judges. Then he raised his eyes towards the ceiling, but withdrew then, immediately, as if he feared the roof would open and reveal to his distressed view that second tribunal called heaven, and that other judge named God. Then, with a hasty movement, he tore open his coat, which seemed to stifle him, and flew from the room like a madman; his footstep was heard one moment in the corridor, then the rattling of his carriage-wheels as he was driven rapidly away. ‘Gentlemen,’ said the president, when silence was restored, ‘is the Count of Morcerf convicted of felony, treason, and conduct unbecoming a member of this House?’ — ’Yes,’ replied all the members of the committee of inquiry with a unanimous voice.

“Haidee had remained until the close of the meeting. She heard the count’s sentence pronounced without betraying an expression of joy or pity; then drawing her veil over her face she bowed majestically to the councillors, and left with that dignified step which Virgil attributes to his goddesses.”

Chapter 87

The Challenge.

“Then,” continued Beauchamp, “I took advantage of the silence and the darkness to leave the house without being seen. The usher who had introduced me was waiting for me at the door, and he conducted me through the corridors to a private entrance opening into the Rue de Vaugirard. I left with mingled feelings of sorrow and delight. Excuse me, Albert, — sorrow on your account, and delight with that noble girl, thus pursuing paternal vengeance. Yes, Albert, from whatever source the blow may have proceeded — it may be from an enemy, but that enemy is only the agent of providence.” Albert held his head between his hands; he raised his face, red with shame and bathed in tears, and seizing Beauchamp’s arm, “My friend,” said he, “my life is ended. I cannot calmly say with you, ‘Providence has struck the blow;’ but I must discover who pursues me with this hatred, and when I have found him I shall kill him, or he will kill me. I rely on your friendship to assist me, Beauchamp, if contempt has not banished it from your heart.”

“Contempt, my friend? How does this misfortune affect you? No, happily that unjust prejudice is forgotten which made the son responsible for the father’s actions. Review your life, Albert; although it is only just beginning, did a lovely summer’s day ever dawn with greater purity than has marked the commencement of your career? No, Albert, take my advice. You are young and rich — leave Paris — all is soon forgotten in this great Babylon of excitement and changing tastes. You will return after three or four years with a Russian princess for a bride, and no one will think more of what occurred yesterday than if it had happened sixteen years ago.”

“Thank you, my dear Beauchamp, thank you for the excellent feeling which prompts your advice; but it cannot be. I have told you my wish, or rather my determination. You understand that, interested as I am in this affair, I cannot see it in the same light as you do. What appears to you to emanate from a celestial source, seems to me to proceed from one far less pure. Providence appears to me to have no share in this affair; and happily so, for instead of the invisible, impalpable agent of celestial rewards and punishments, I shall find one both palpable and visible, on whom I shall revenge myself, I assure you, for all I have suffered during the last month. Now, I repeat, Beauchamp, I wish to return to human and material existence, and if you are still the friend you profess to be, help me to discover the hand that struck the blow.”

“Be it so,” said Beauchamp; “if you must have me descend to earth, I submit; and if you will seek your enemy, I will assist you, and I will engage to find him, my honor being almost as deeply interested as yours.”

“Well, then, you understand, Beauchamp, that we begin our search immediately. Each moment’s delay is an eternity for me. The calumniator is not yet punished, and he may hope that he will not be; but, on my honor, if he thinks so, he deceives himself.”

“Well, listen, Morcerf.”

“Ah, Beauchamp, I see you know something already; you will restore me to life.”

“I do not say there is any truth in what I am going to tell you, but it is, at least, a ray of light in a dark night; by following it we may, perhaps, discover something more certain.”

“Tell me; satisfy my impatience.”

“Well, I will tell you what I did not like to mention on my return from Yanina.”

“Say on.”

“I went, of course, to the chief banker of the town to make inquiries. At the first word, before I had even mentioned your father’s name” —

“‘Ah,’ said he. ‘I guess what brings you here.’

“‘How, and why?’

“‘Because a fortnight since I was questioned on the same subject.’

“‘By whom?’ — ’By a Paris banker, my correspondent.’

“‘Whose name is’ —

“‘Danglars.’“

“He!” cried Albert; “yes, it is indeed he who has so long pursued my father with jealous hatred. He, the man who would be popular, cannot forgive the Count of Morcerf for being created a peer; and this marriage broken off without a reason being assigned — yes, it is all from the same cause.”

“Make inquiries, Albert, but do not be angry without reason; make inquiries, and if it be true” —

“Oh, yes, if it be true,” cried the young man, “he shall pay me all I have suffered.”

“Beware, Morcerf, he is already an old man.”

“I will respect his age as he has respected the honor of my family; if my father had offended him, why did he not attack him personally? Oh, no, he was afraid to encounter him face to face.”

“I do not condemn you, Albert; I only restrain you. Act prudently.”

“Oh, do not fear; besides, you will accompany me. Beauchamp, solemn transactions should be sanctioned by a witness. Before this day closes, if M. Danglars is guilty, he shall cease to live, or I shall die. Pardieu, Beauchamp, mine shall be a splendid funeral!”

“When such resolutions are made, Albert, they should be promptly executed. Do you wish to go to M. Danglars? Let us go immediately.” They sent for a cabriolet. On entering the banker’s mansion, they perceived the phaeton and servant of M. Andrea Cavalcanti. “Ah, parbleu, that’s good,” said Albert, with a gloomy tone. “If M. Danglars will not fight with me, I will kill his son-in-law; Cavalcanti will certainly fight.” The servant announced the young man; but the banker, recollecting what had transpired the day before, did not wish him admitted. It was, however, too late; Albert had followed the footman, and, hearing the order given, forced the door open, and followed by Beauchamp found himself in the banker’s study. “Sir,” cried the latter, “am I no longer at liberty to receive whom I choose in my house? You appear to forget yourself sadly.”

“No, sir,” said Albert, coldly; “there are circumstances in which one cannot, except through cowardice, — I offer you that refuge, — refuse to admit certain persons at least.”

“What is your errand, then, with me, sir?”

“I mean,” said Albert, drawing near, and without apparently noticing Cavalcanti, who stood with his back towards the fireplace — ”I mean to propose a meeting in some retired corner where no one will interrupt us for ten minutes; that will be sufficient — where two men having met, one of them will remain on the ground.” Danglars turned pale; Cavalcanti moved a step forward, and Albert turned towards him. “And you, too,” said he, “come, if you like, monsieur; you have a claim, being almost one of the family, and I will give as many rendezvous of that kind as I can find persons willing to accept them.” Cavalcanti looked at Danglars with a stupefied air, and the latter, making an effort, arose and stepped between the two young men. Albert’s attack on Andrea had placed him on a different footing, and he hoped this visit had another cause than that he had at first supposed.

“Indeed, sir,” said he to Albert, “if you are come to quarrel with this gentleman because I have preferred him to you, I shall resign the case to the king’s attorney.”

“You mistake, sir,” said Morcerf with a gloomy smile; “I am not referring in the least to matrimony, and I only addressed myself to M. Cavalcanti because he appeared disposed to interfere between us. In one respect you are right, for I am ready to quarrel with every one to-day; but you have the first claim, M. Danglars.”

“Sir,” replied Danglars, pale with anger and fear, “I warn you, when I have the misfortune to meet with a mad dog, I kill it; and far from thinking myself guilty of a crime, I believe I do society a kindness. Now, if you are mad and try to bite me, I will kill you without pity. Is it my fault that your father has dishonored himself?”

“Yes, miserable wretch!” cried Morcerf, “it is your fault.” Danglars retreated a few steps. “My fault?” said he; “you must be mad! What do I know of the Grecian affair? Have I travelled in that country? Did I advise your father to sell the castle of Yanina — to betray” —

“Silence!” said Albert, with a thundering voice. “No; it is not you who have directly made this exposure and brought this sorrow on us, but you hypocritically provoked it.”

“I?”

“Yes; you! How came it known?”

“I suppose you read it in the paper in the account from Yanina?”

“Who wrote to Yanina?”

“To Yanina?”

“Yes. Who wrote for particulars concerning my father?”

“I imagine any one may write to Yanina.”

“But one person only wrote!”

“One only?”

“Yes; and that was you!”

“I, doubtless, wrote. It appears to me that when about to marry your daughter to a young man, it is right to make some inquiries respecting his family; it is not only a right, but a duty.”

“You wrote, sir, knowing what answer you would receive.”

“I, indeed? I assure you,” cried Danglars, with a confidence and security proceeding less from fear than from the interest he really felt for the young man, “I solemnly declare to you, that I should never have thought of writing to Yanina, did I know anything of Ali Pasha’s misfortunes.”

“Who, then, urged you to write? Tell me.”

“Pardieu, it was the most simple thing in the world. I was speaking of your father’s past history. I said the origin of his fortune remained obscure. The person to whom I addressed my scruples asked me where your father had acquired his property? I answered, ‘In Greece.’ — ’Then,’ said he, ‘write to Yanina.’“

“And who thus advised you?”

“No other than your friend, Monte Cristo.”

“The Count of Monte Cristo told you to write to Yanina?”

“Yes; and I wrote, and will show you my correspondence, if you like.” Albert and Beauchamp looked at each other. “Sir,” said Beauchamp, who had not yet spoken, “you appear to accuse the count, who is absent from Paris at this moment, and cannot justify himself.”

“I accuse no one, sir,” said Danglars; “I relate, and I will repeat before the count what I have said to you.”

“Does the count know what answer you received?”

“Yes; I showed it to him.”

“Did he know my father’s Christian name was Fernand, and his family name Mondego?”

“Yes, I had told him that long since, and I did only what any other would have done in my circumstances, and perhaps less. When, the day after the arrival of this answer, your father came by the advice of Monte Cristo to ask my daughter’s hand for you, I decidedly refused him, but without any explanation or exposure. In short, why should I have any more to do with the affair? How did the honor or disgrace of M. de Morcerf affect me? It neither increased nor decreased my income.”

Albert felt the blood mounting to his brow; there was no doubt upon the subject. Danglars defended himself with the baseness, but at the same time with the assurance, of a man who speaks the truth, at least in part, if not wholly — not for conscience’ sake, but through fear. Besides, what was Morcerf seeking? It was not whether Danglars or Monte Cristo was more or less guilty; it was a man who would answer for the offence, whether trifling or serious; it was a man who would fight, and it was evident Danglars would not fight. And, in addition to this, everything forgotten or unperceived before presented itself now to his recollection. Monte Cristo knew everything, as he had bought the daughter of Ali Pasha; and, knowing everything, he had advised Danglars to write to Yanina. The answer known, he had yielded to Albert's wish to be introduced to Haidee, and allowed the conversation to turn on the death of Ali, and had not opposed Haidee's recital (but having, doubtless, warned the young girl, in the few Romaic words he spoke to her, not to implicate Morcerf's father). Besides, had he not begged of Morcerf not to mention his father's name before Haidee? Lastly, he had taken Albert to Normandy when he knew the final blow was near. There could be no doubt that all had been calculated and previously arranged; Monte Cristo then was in league with his father's enemies. Albert took Beauchamp aside, and communicated these ideas to him.

"You are right," said the latter; "M. Danglars has only been a secondary agent in this sad affair, and it is of M. de Monte Cristo that you must demand an explanation." Albert turned. "Sir," said he to Danglars, "understand that I do not take a final leave of you; I must ascertain if your insinuations are just, and am going now to inquire of the Count of Monte Cristo." He bowed to the banker, and went out with Beauchamp, without appearing to notice Cavalcanti. Danglars accompanied him to the door, where he again assured Albert that no motive of personal hatred had influenced him against the Count of Morcerf.

Chapter 88

The Insult.

At the banker’s door Beauchamp stopped Morcerf. “Listen,” said he; “just now I told you it was of M. de Monte Cristo you must demand an explanation.”

“Yes; and we are going to his house.”

“Reflect, Morcerf, one moment before you go.”

“On what shall I reflect?”

“On the importance of the step you are taking.”

“Is it more serious than going to M. Danglars?”

“Yes; M. Danglars is a money-lover, and those who love money, you know, think too much of what they risk to be easily induced to fight a duel. The other is, on the contrary, to all appearance a true nobleman; but do you not fear to find him a bully?”

“I only fear one thing; namely, to find a man who will not fight.”

“Do not be alarmed,” said Beauchamp; “he will meet you. My only fear is that he will be too strong for you.”

“My friend,” said Morcerf, with a sweet smile, “that is what I wish. The happiest thing that could occur to me, would be to die in my father’s stead; that would save us all.”

“Your mother would die of grief.”

“My poor mother!” said Albert, passing his hand across his eyes, “I know she would; but better so than die of shame.”

“Are you quite decided, Albert?”

“Yes; let us go.”

“But do you think we shall find the count at home?”

“He intended returning some hours after me, and doubtless he is now at home.” They ordered the driver to take them to No. 30 Champs-Elysees. Beauchamp wished to go in alone, but Albert observed that as this was an unusual circumstance he might be allowed to deviate from the usual etiquette in affairs of honor. The cause which the young man espoused was one so sacred that Beauchamp had only to comply with all his wishes; he yielded and contented himself with following Morcerf. Albert sprang from the porter's lodge to the steps. He was received by Baptistin. The count had, indeed, just arrived, but he was in his bath, and had forbidden that any one should be admitted. "But after his bath?" asked Morcerf.

"My master will go to dinner."

"And after dinner?"

"He will sleep an hour."

"Then?"

"He is going to the opera."

"Are you sure of it?" asked Albert.

"Quite, sir; my master has ordered his horses at eight o'clock precisely."

"Very good," replied Albert; "that is all I wished to know." Then, turning towards Beauchamp, "If you have anything to attend to, Beauchamp, do it directly; if you have any appointment for this evening, defer it till tomorrow. I depend on you to accompany me to the opera; and if you can, bring Chateau-Renaud with you."

Beauchamp availed himself of Albert's permission, and left him, promising to call for him at a quarter before eight. On his return home, Albert expressed his wish to Franz Debray, and Morrel, to see them at the opera that evening. Then he went to see his mother, who since the events of the day before had refused to see any one, and had kept her room. He found her in bed, overwhelmed with grief at this public humiliation. The sight of Albert produced the effect which might naturally be expected on Mercedes; she pressed her son's hand and sobbed aloud, but her tears relieved her. Albert stood one moment speechless by the side of his mother's bed. It was evident from his pale face and knit brows that his resolution to revenge himself was growing weaker. "My dear mother," said he, "do you know if M. de Morcerf has any enemy?" Mercedes started; she noticed that the young man did not say "my father." "My son," she said, "persons in the count's situation have many secret enemies. Those who are known are not the most dangerous."

"I know it, and appeal to your penetration. You are of so superior a mind, nothing escapes you."

"Why do you say so?"

"Because, for instance, you noticed on the evening of the ball we gave, that M. de Monte Cristo would eat nothing in our house." Mercedes raised herself on her feverish arm. “M. de Monte Cristo!” she exclaimed; “and how is he connected with the question you asked me?”

“You know, mother, M. de Monte Cristo is almost an Oriental, and it is customary with the Orientals to secure full liberty for revenge by not eating or drinking in the houses of their enemies.”

“Do you say M. de Monte Cristo is our enemy?” replied Mercedes, becoming paler than the sheet which covered her. “Who told you so? Why, you are mad, Albert! M. de Monte Cristo has only shown us kindness. M. de Monte Cristo saved your life; you yourself presented him to us. Oh, I entreat you, my son, if you had entertained such an idea, dispel it; and my counsel to you — nay, my prayer — is to retain his friendship.”

“Mother,” replied the young man, “you have especial reasons for telling me to conciliate that man.”

“I?” said Mercedes, blushing as rapidly as she had turned pale, and again becoming paler than ever.

“Yes, doubtless; and is it not that he may never do us any harm?” Mercedes shuddered, and, fixing on her son a scrutinizing gaze, “You speak strangely,” said she to Albert, “and you appear to have some singular prejudices. What has the count done? Three days since you were with him in Normandy; only three days since we looked on him as our best friend.”

An ironical smile passed over Albert’s lips. Mercedes saw it and with the double instinct of woman and mother guessed all; but as she was prudent and strong-minded she concealed both her sorrows and her fears. Albert was silent; an instant after, the countess resumed: “You came to inquire after my health; I will candidly acknowledge that I am not well. You should install yourself here, and cheer my solitude. I do not wish to be left alone.”

“Mother,” said the young man, “you know how gladly I would obey your wish, but an urgent and important affair obliges me to leave you for the whole evening.”

“Well,” replied Mercedes, sighing, “go, Albert; I will not make you a slave to your filial piety.” Albert pretended he did not hear, bowed to his mother, and quitted her. Scarcely had he shut her door, when Mercedes called a confidential servant, and ordered him to follow Albert wherever he should go that evening, and to come and tell her immediately what he observed. Then she rang for her lady’s maid, and, weak as she was, she dressed, in order to be ready for whatever might happen. The footman’s mission was an easy one. Albert went to his room, and dressed with unusual care. At ten minutes to eight Beauchamp arrived; he had seen Chateau-Renaud, who had promised to be in the orchestra before the curtain was raised. Both got into Albert's coupe; and, as the young man had no reason to conceal where he was going, he called aloud, "To the opera." In his impatience he arrived before the beginning of the performance.

Chateau-Renaud was at his post; apprised by Beauchamp of the circumstances, he required no explanation from Albert. The conduct of the son in seeking to avenge his father was so natural that Chateau-Renaud did not seek to dissuade him, and was content with renewing his assurances of devotion. Debray was not yet come, but Albert knew that he seldom lost a scene at the opera. Albert wandered about the theatre until the curtain was drawn up. He hoped to meet with M. de Monte Cristo either in the lobby or on the stairs. The bell summoned him to his seat, and he entered the orchestra with Chateau-Renaud and Beauchamp. But his eyes scarcely quitted the box between the columns, which remained obstinately closed during the whole of the first act. At last, as Albert was looking at his watch for about the hundredth time, at the beginning of the second act the door opened, and Monte Cristo entered, dressed in black, and, leaning over the front of the box, looked around the pit. Morrel followed him, and looked also for his sister and brother in-law; he soon discovered them in another box, and kissed his hand to them.

The count, in his survey of the pit, encountered a pale face and threatening eyes, which evidently sought to gain his attention. He recognized Albert, but thought it better not to notice him, as he looked so angry and discomposed. Without communicating his thoughts to his companion, he sat down, drew out his opera-glass, and looked another way. Although apparently not noticing Albert, he did not, however, lose sight of him, and when the curtain fell at the end of the second act, he saw him leave the orchestra with his two friends. Then his head was seen passing at the back of the boxes, and the count knew that the approaching storm was intended to fall on him. He was at the moment conversing cheerfully with Morrel, but he was well prepared for what might happen. The door opened, and Monte Cristo, turning round, saw Albert, pale and trembling, followed by Beauchamp and Chateau-Renaud.

"Well," cried he, with that benevolent politeness which distinguished his salutation from the common civilities of the world, "my cavalier has attained his object. Good-evening, M. de Morcerf." The countenance of this man, who possessed such extraordinary control over his feelings, expressed the most perfect cordiality. Morrel only then recollected the letter he had received from the viscount, in which, without assigning any reason, he begged him to go to the opera, but he understood that something terrible was brooding.

"We are not come here, sir, to exchange hypocritical expressions of politeness, or false professions of friendship," said Albert, "but to demand an explanation." The young man's trembling voice was scarcely audible. "An explanation at the opera?" said the count, with that calm tone and penetrating eye which characterize the man who knows his cause is good. "Little acquainted as I am with the habits of Parisians, I should not have thought this the place for such a demand."

"Still, if people will shut themselves up," said Albert, "and cannot be seen because they are bathing, dining, or asleep, we must avail ourselves of the opportunity whenever they are to be seen."

"I am not difficult of access, sir; for yesterday, if my memory does not deceive me, you were at my house."

"Yesterday I was at your house, sir," said the young man; "because then I knew not who you were." In pronouncing these words Albert had raised his voice so as to be heard by those in the adjoining boxes and in the lobby. Thus the attention of many was attracted by this altercation. "Where are you come from, sir? You do not appear to be in the possession of your senses."

"Provided I understand your perfidy, sir, and succeed in making you understand that I will be revenged, I shall be reasonable enough," said Albert furiously.

"I do not understand you, sir," replied Monte Cristo; "and if I did, your tone is too high. I am at home here, and I alone have a right to raise my voice above another's. Leave the box, sir!" Monte Cristo pointed towards the door with the most commanding dignity. "Ah, I shall know how to make you leave your home!" replied Albert, clasping in his convulsed grasp the glove, which Monte Cristo did not lose sight of.

"Well, well," said Monte Cristo quietly, "I see you wish to quarrel with me; but I would give you one piece of advice, which you will do well to keep in mind. It is in poor taste to make a display of a challenge. Display is not becoming to every one, M. de Morcerf."

At this name a murmur of astonishment passed around the group of spectators of this scene. They had talked of no one but Morcerf the whole day. Albert understood the allusion in a moment, and was about to throw his glove at the count, when Morrel seized his hand, while Beauchamp and Chateau-Renaud, fearing the scene would surpass the limits of a challenge, held him back. But Monte Cristo, without rising, and leaning forward in his chair, merely stretched out his arm and, taking the damp, crushed glove from the clinched hand of the young man, “Sir,” said he in a solemn tone, “I consider your glove thrown, and will return it to you wrapped around a bullet. Now leave me or I will summon my servants to throw you out at the door.”

Wild, almost unconscious, and with eyes inflamed, Albert stepped back, and Morrel closed the door. Monte Cristo took up his glass again as if nothing had happened; his face was like marble, and his heart was like bronze. Morrel whispered, “What have you done to him?”

“I? Nothing — at least personally,” said Monte Cristo.

“But there must be some cause for this strange scene.”

“The Count of Morcerf’s adventure exasperates the young man.”

“Have you anything to do with it?”

“It was through Haidee that the Chamber was informed of his father’s treason.”

“Indeed?” said Morrel. “I had been told, but would not credit it, that the Grecian slave I have seen with you here in this very box was the daughter of Ali Pasha.”

“It is true, nevertheless.”

“Then,” said Morrel, “I understand it all, and this scene was premeditated.”

“How so?”

“Yes. Albert wrote to request me to come to the opera, doubtless that I might be a witness to the insult he meant to offer you.”

“Probably,” said Monte Cristo with his imperturbable tranquillity.

“But what shall you do with him?”

“With whom?”

“With Albert.”

“What shall I do with Albert? As certainly, Maximilian, as I now press your hand, I shall kill him before ten o’clock to-morrow morning.” Morrel, in his turn, took Monte Cristo’s hand in both of his, and he shuddered to feel how cold and steady it was.

“Ah, Count,” said he, “his father loves him so much!”

“Do not speak to me of that,” said Monte Cristo, with the first movement of anger he had betrayed; “I will make him suffer.” Morrel, amazed, let fall Monte Cristo’s hand. “Count, count!” said he.

“Dear Maximilian,” interrupted the count, “listen how adorably Duprez is singing that line, —

‘O Mathilde! idole de mon ame!’

“I was the first to discover Duprez at Naples, and the first to applaud him. Bravo, bravo!” Morrel saw it was useless to say more, and refrained. The curtain, which had risen at the close of the scene with Albert, again fell, and a rap was heard at the door.

“Come in,” said Monte Cristo with a voice that betrayed not the least emotion; and immediately Beauchamp appeared. “Good-evening, M. Beauchamp,” said Monte Cristo, as if this was the first time he had seen the journalist that evening; “be seated.”

Beauchamp bowed, and, sitting down, “Sir,” said he, “I just now accompanied M. de Morcerf, as you saw.”

“And that means,” replied Monte Cristo, laughing, “that you had, probably, just dined together. I am happy to see, M. Beauchamp, that you are more sober than he was.”

“Sir,” said M. Beauchamp, “Albert was wrong, I acknowledge, to betray so much anger, and I come, on my own account, to apologize for him. And having done so, entirely on my own account, be it understood, I would add that I believe you too gentlemanly to refuse giving him some explanation concerning your connection with Yanina. Then I will add two words about the young Greek girl.” Monte Cristo motioned him to be silent. “Come,” said he, laughing, “there are all my hopes about to be destroyed.”

“How so?” asked Beauchamp.

“Doubtless you wish to make me appear a very eccentric character. I am, in your opinion, a Lara, a Manfred, a Lord Ruthven; then, just as I am arriving at the climax, you defeat your own end, and seek to make an ordinary man of me. You bring me down to your own level, and demand explanations! Indeed, M. Beauchamp, it is quite laughable.”

“Yet,” replied Beauchamp haughtily, “there are occasions when probity commands” —

“M. Beauchamp,” interposed this strange man, “the Count of Monte Cristo bows to none but the Count of Monte Cristo himself. Say no more, I entreat you. I do what I please, M. Beauchamp, and it is always well done.”

"Sir," replied the young man, "honest men are not to be paid with such coin. I require honorable guaranties."

"I am, sir, a living guaranty," replied Monte Cristo, motionless, but with a threatening look; "we have both blood in our veins which we wish to shed — that is our mutual guaranty. Tell the viscount so, and that to-morrow, before ten o'clock, I shall see what color his is."

"Then I have only to make arrangements for the duel," said Beauchamp.

"It is quite immaterial to me," said Monte Cristo, "and it was very unnecessary to disturb me at the opera for such a trifle. In France people fight with the sword or pistol, in the colonies with the carbine, in Arabia with the dagger. Tell your client that, although I am the insulted party, in order to carry out my eccentricity, I leave him the choice of arms, and will accept without discussion, without dispute, anything, even combat by drawing lots, which is always stupid, but with me different from other people, as I am sure to gain."

"Sure to gain!" repeated Beauchamp, looking with amazement at the count.

"Certainly," said Monte Cristo, slightly shrugging his shoulders; "otherwise I would not fight with M. de Morcerf. I shall kill him — I cannot help it. Only by a single line this evening at my house let me know the arms and the hour; I do not like to be kept waiting."

"Pistols, then, at eight o'clock, in the Bois de Vincennes," said Beauchamp, quite disconcerted, not knowing if he was dealing with an arrogant braggadocio or a supernatural being.

"Very well, sir," said Monte Cristo. "Now all that is settled, do let me see the performance, and tell your friend Albert not to come any more this evening; he will hurt himself with all his ill-chosen barbarisms: let him go home and go to sleep." Beauchamp left the box, perfectly amazed. "Now," said Monte Cristo, turning towards Morrel, "I may depend upon you, may I not?"

"Certainly," said Morrel, "I am at your service, count; still" —

"What?"

"It is desirable I should know the real cause."

"That is to say, you would rather not?"

"No."

"The young man himself is acting blindfolded, and knows not the true cause, which is known only to God and to me; but I give you my word, Morrel, that God, who does know it, will be on our side.”

“Enough,” said Morrel; “who is your second witness?”

“I know no one in Paris, Morrel, on whom I could confer that honor besides you and your brother Emmanuel. Do you think Emmanuel would oblige me?”

“I will answer for him, count.”

“Well? that is all I require. To-morrow morning, at seven o’clock, you will be with me, will you not?”

“We will.”

“Hush, the curtain is rising. Listen! I never lose a note of this opera if I can avoid it; the music of William Tell is so sweet.”

Chapter 89

A Nocturnal Interview.

Monte Cristo waited, according to his usual custom, until Duprez had sung his famous “Suivez-moi;” then he rose and went out. Morrel took leave of him at the door, renewing his promise to be with him the next morning at seven o’clock, and to bring Emmanuel. Then he stepped into his coupe, calm and smiling, and was at home in five minutes. No one who knew the count could mistake his expression when, on entering, he said, “Ali, bring me my pistols with the ivory cross.”

Ali brought the box to his master, who examined the weapons with a solicitude very natural to a man who is about to intrust his life to a little powder and shot. These were pistols of an especial pattern, which Monte Cristo had had made for target practice in his own room. A cap was sufficient to drive out the bullet, and from the adjoining room no one would have suspected that the count was, as sportsmen would say, keeping his hand in. He was just taking one up and looking for the point to aim at on a little iron plate which served him as a target, when his study door opened, and Baptistin entered. Before he had spoken a word, the count saw in the next room a veiled woman, who had followed closely after Baptistin, and now, seeing the count with a pistol in his hand and swords on the table, rushed in. Baptistin looked at his master, who made a sign to him, and he went out, closing the door after him. “Who are you, madame?” said the count to the veiled woman.

The stranger cast one look around her, to be certain that they were quite alone; then bending as if she would have knelt, and joining her hands, she said with an accent of despair, “Edmond, you will not kill my son?” The count retreated a step, uttered a slight exclamation, and let fall the pistol he held. “What name did you pronounce then, Madame de Morcerf?” said he. “Yours!” cried she, throwing back her veil, — ”yours, which I alone, perhaps, have not forgotten. Edmond, it is not Madame de Morcerf who is come to you, it is Mercedes.”

“Mercedes is dead, madame,” said Monte Cristo; “I know no one now of that name.”

“Mercedes lives, sir, and she remembers, for she alone recognized you when she saw you, and even before she saw you, by your voice, Edmond, — by the simple sound of your voice; and from that moment she has followed your steps, watched you, feared you, and she needs not to inquire what hand has dealt the blow which now strikes M. de Morcerf.”

“Fernand, do you mean?” replied Monte Cristo, with bitter irony; “since we are recalling names, let us remember them all.” Monte Cristo had pronounced the name of Fernand with such an expression of hatred that Mercedes felt a thrill of horror run through every vein. “You see, Edmond, I am not mistaken, and have cause to say, ‘Spare my son!’“

“And who told you, madame, that I have any hostile intentions against your son?”

“No one, in truth; but a mother has twofold sight. I guessed all; I followed him this evening to the opera, and, concealed in a parquet box, have seen all.”

“If you have seen all, madame, you know that the son of Fernand has publicly insulted me,” said Monte Cristo with awful calmness.

“Oh, for pity’s sake!”

“You have seen that he would have thrown his glove in my face if Morrel, one of my friends, had not stopped him.”

“Listen to me, my son has also guessed who you are, — he attributes his father’s misfortunes to you.”

“Madame, you are mistaken, they are not misfortunes, — it is a punishment. It is not I who strike M. de Morcerf; it is providence which punishes him.”

“And why do you represent providence?” cried Mercedes. “Why do you remember when it forgets? What are Yanina and its vizier to you, Edmond? What injury his Fernand Mondego done you in betraying Ali Tepelini?”

“Ah, madame,” replied Monte Cristo, “all this is an affair between the French captain and the daughter of Vasiliki. It does not concern me, you are right; and if I have sworn to revenge myself, it is not on the French captain, or the Count of Morcerf, but on the fisherman Fernand, the husband of Mercedes the Catalane.”

“Ah, sir!” cried the countess, “how terrible a vengeance for a fault which fatality made me commit! — for I am the only culprit, Edmond, and if you owe revenge to any one, it is to me, who had not fortitude to bear your absence and my solitude.”

“But,” exclaimed Monte Cristo, “why was I absent? And why were you alone?”

“Because you had been arrested, Edmond, and were a prisoner.”

“And why was I arrested? Why was I a prisoner?”

“I do not know,” said Mercedes. “You do not, madame; at least, I hope not. But I will tell you. I was arrested and became a prisoner because, under the arbor of La Reserve, the day before I was to marry you, a man named Danglars wrote this letter, which the fisherman Fernand himself posted.” Monte Cristo went to a secretary, opened a drawer by a spring, from which he took a paper which had lost its original color, and the ink of which had become of a rusty hue — this he placed in the hands of Mercedes. It was Danglars’ letter to the king’s attorney, which the Count of Monte Cristo, disguised as a clerk from the house of Thomson & French, had taken from the file against Edmond Dantes, on the day he had paid the two hundred thousand francs to M. de Boville. Mercedes read with terror the following lines: —

“The king’s attorney is informed by a friend to the throne and religion that one Edmond Dantes, second in command on board the Pharaon, this day arrived from Smyrna, after having touched at Naples and Porto-Ferrajo, is the bearer of a letter from Murat to the usurper, and of another letter from the usurper to the Bonapartist club in Paris. Ample corroboration of this statement may be obtained by arresting the above-mentioned Edmond Dantes, who either carries the letter for Paris about with him, or has it at his father’s abode. Should it not be found in possession of either father or son, then it will assuredly be discovered in the cabin belonging to the said Dantes on board the Pharaon.”

“How dreadful!” said Mercedes, passing her hand across her brow, moist with perspiration; “and that letter” —

“I bought it for two hundred thousand francs, madame,” said Monte Cristo; “but that is a trifle, since it enables me to justify myself to you.”

“And the result of that letter” —

“You well know, madame, was my arrest; but you do not know how long that arrest lasted. You do not know that I remained for fourteen years within a quarter of a league of you, in a dungeon in the Chateau d’If. You do not know that every day of those fourteen years I renewed the vow of vengeance which I had made the first day; and yet I was not aware that you had married Fernand, my calumniator, and that my father had died of hunger!”

“Can it be?” cried Mercedes, shuddering.

“That is what I heard on leaving my prison fourteen years after I had entered it; and that is why, on account of the living Mercedes and my deceased father, I have sworn to revenge myself on Fernand, and — I have revenged myself.”

“And you are sure the unhappy Fernand did that?”

“I am satisfied, madame, that he did what I have told you; besides, that is not much more odious than that a Frenchman by adoption should pass over to the English; that a Spaniard by birth should have fought against the Spaniards; that a stipendiary of Ali should have betrayed and murdered Ali. Compared with such things, what is the letter you have just read? — a lover’s deception, which the woman who has married that man ought certainly to forgive; but not so the lover who was to have married her. Well, the French did not avenge themselves on the traitor, the Spaniards did not shoot the traitor, Ali in his tomb left the traitor unpunished; but I, betrayed, sacrificed, buried, have risen from my tomb, by the grace of God, to punish that man. He sends me for that purpose, and here I am.” The poor woman’s head and arms fell; her legs bent under her, and she fell on her knees. “Forgive, Edmond, forgive for my sake, who love you still!”

The dignity of the wife checked the fervor of the lover and the mother. Her forehead almost touched the carpet, when the count sprang forward and raised her. Then seated on a chair, she looked at the manly countenance of Monte Cristo, on which grief and hatred still impressed a threatening expression. “Not crush that accursed race?” murmured he; “abandon my purpose at the moment of its accomplishment? Impossible, madame, impossible!”

“Edmond,” said the poor mother, who tried every means, “when I call you Edmond, why do you not call me Mercedes?”

“Mercedes!” repeated Monte Cristo; “Mercedes! Well yes, you are right; that name has still its charms, and this is the first time for a long period that I have pronounced it so distinctly. Oh, Mercedes, I have uttered your name with the sigh of melancholy, with the groan of sorrow, with the last effort of despair; I have uttered it when frozen with cold, crouched on the straw in my dungeon; I have uttered it, consumed with heat, rolling on the stone floor of my prison. Mercedes, I must revenge myself, for I suffered fourteen years, — fourteen years I wept, I cursed; now I tell you, Mercedes, I must revenge myself."

The count, fearing to yield to the entreaties of her he had so ardently loved, called his sufferings to the assistance of his hatred. "Revenge yourself, then, Edmond," cried the poor mother; "but let your vengeance fall on the culprits, — on him, on me, but not on my son!"

"It is written in the good book," said Monte Cristo, "that the sins of the fathers shall fall upon their children to the third and fourth generation. Since God himself dictated those words to his prophet, why should I seek to make myself better than God?"

"Edmond," continued Mercedes, with her arms extended towards the count, "since I first knew you, I have adored your name, have respected your memory. Edmond, my friend, do not compel me to tarnish that noble and pure image reflected incessantly on the mirror of my heart. Edmond, if you knew all the prayers I have addressed to God for you while I thought you were living and since I have thought you must be dead! Yes, dead, alas! I imagined your dead body buried at the foot of some gloomy tower, or cast to the bottom of a pit by hateful jailers, and I wept! What could I do for you, Edmond, besides pray and weep? Listen; for ten years I dreamed each night the same dream. I had been told that you had endeavored to escape; that you had taken the place of another prisoner; that you had slipped into the winding sheet of a dead body; that you had been thrown alive from the top of the Chateau d'If, and that the cry you uttered as you dashed upon the rocks first revealed to your jailers that they were your murderers. Well, Edmond, I swear to you, by the head of that son for whom I entreat your pity, — Edmond, for ten years I saw every night every detail of that frightful tragedy, and for ten years I heard every night the cry which awoke me, shuddering and cold. And I, too, Edmond — oh! believe me — guilty as I was — oh, yes, I, too, have suffered much!"

"Have you known what it is to have your father starve to death in your absence?" cried Monte Cristo, thrusting his hands into his hair; "have you seen the woman you loved giving her hand to your rival, while you were perishing at the bottom of a dungeon?"

"No," interrupted Mercedes, "but I have seen him whom I loved on the point of murdering my son." Mercedes uttered these words with such deep anguish, with an accent of such intense despair, that Monte Cristo could not restrain a sob. The lion was daunted; the avenger was conquered. “What do you ask of me?” said he, — ”your son’s life? Well, he shall live!” Mercedes uttered a cry which made the tears start from Monte Cristo’s eyes; but these tears disappeared almost instantaneously, for, doubtless, God had sent some angel to collect them — far more precious were they in his eyes than the richest pearls of Guzerat and Ophir.

“Oh,” said she, seizing the count’s hand and raising it to her lips; “oh, thank you, thank you, Edmond! Now you are exactly what I dreamt you were, — the man I always loved. Oh, now I may say so!”

“So much the better,” replied Monte Cristo; “as that poor Edmond will not have long to be loved by you. Death is about to return to the tomb, the phantom to retire in darkness.”

“What do you say, Edmond?”

“I say, since you command me, Mercedes, I must die.”

“Die? and why so? Who talks of dying? Whence have you these ideas of death?”

“You do not suppose that, publicly outraged in the face of a whole theatre, in the presence of your friends and those of your son — challenged by a boy who will glory in my forgiveness as if it were a victory — you do not suppose that I can for one moment wish to live. What I most loved after you, Mercedes, was myself, my dignity, and that strength which rendered me superior to other men; that strength was my life. With one word you have crushed it, and I die.”

“But the duel will not take place, Edmond, since you forgive?”

“It will take place,” said Monte Cristo, in a most solemn tone; “but instead of your son’s blood to stain the ground, mine will flow.” Mercedes shrieked, and sprang towards Monte Cristo, but, suddenly stopping, “Edmond,” said she, “there is a God above us, since you live and since I have seen you again; I trust to him from my heart. While waiting his assistance I trust to your word; you have said that my son should live, have you not?”

“Yes, madame, he shall live,” said Monte Cristo, surprised that without more emotion Mercedes had accepted the heroic sacrifice he made for her. Mercedes extended her hand to the count.

“Edmond,” said she, and her eyes were wet with tears while looking at him to whom she spoke, “how noble it is of you, how great the action you have just performed, how sublime to have taken pity on a poor woman who appealed to you with every chance against her, Alas, I am grown old with grief more than with years, and cannot now remind my Edmond by a smile, or by a look, of that Mercedes whom he once spent so many hours in contemplating. Ah, believe me, Edmond, as I told you, I too have suffered much; I repeat, it is melancholy to pass one's life without having one joy to recall, without preserving a single hope; but that proves that all is not yet over. No, it is not finished; I feel it by what remains in my heart. Oh, I repeat it, Edmond; what you have just done is beautiful — it is grand; it is sublime."

"Do you say so now, Mercedes? — then what would you say if you knew the extent of the sacrifice I make to you? Suppose that the Supreme Being, after having created the world and fertilized chaos, had paused in the work to spare an angel the tears that might one day flow for mortal sins from her immortal eyes; suppose that when everything was in readiness and the moment had come for God to look upon his work and see that it was good — suppose he had snuffed out the sun and tossed the world back into eternal night — then — even then, Mercedes, you could not imagine what I lose in sacrificing my life at this moment." Mercedes looked at the count in a way which expressed at the same time her astonishment, her admiration, and her gratitude. Monte Cristo pressed his forehead on his burning hands, as if his brain could no longer bear alone the weight of its thoughts. "Edmond," said Mercedes, "I have but one word more to say to you." The count smiled bitterly. "Edmond," continued she, "you will see that if my face is pale, if my eyes are dull, if my beauty is gone; if Mercedes, in short, no longer resembles her former self in her features, you will see that her heart is still the same. Adieu, then, Edmond; I have nothing more to ask of heaven — I have seen you again, and have found you as noble and as great as formerly you were. Adieu, Edmond, adieu, and thank you."

But the count did not answer. Mercedes opened the door of the study and had disappeared before he had recovered from the painful and profound revery into which his thwarted vengeance had plunged him. The clock of the Invalides struck one when the carriage which conveyed Madame de Morcerf away rolled on the pavement of the Champs-Elysees, and made Monte Cristo raise his head. "What a fool I was," said he, "not to tear my heart out on the day when I resolved to avenge myself!"

Chapter 90

The Meeting.

After Mercedes had left Monte Cristo, he fell into profound gloom. Around him and within him the flight of thought seemed to have stopped; his energetic mind slumbered, as the body does after extreme fatigue. “What?” said he to himself, while the lamp and the wax lights were nearly burnt out, and the servants were waiting impatiently in the anteroom; “what? this edifice which I have been so long preparing, which I have reared with so much care and toil, is to be crushed by a single touch, a word, a breath! Yes, this self, of whom I thought so much, of whom I was so proud, who had appeared so worthless in the dungeons of the Chateau d’If, and whom I had succeeded in making so great, will be but a lump of clay to-morrow. Alas, it is not the death of the body I regret; for is not the destruction of the vital principle, the repose to which everything is tending, to which every unhappy being aspires, — is not this the repose of matter after which I so long sighed, and which I was seeking to attain by the painful process of starvation when Faria appeared in my dungeon? What is death for me? One step farther into rest, — two, perhaps, into silence.

“No, it is not existence, then, that I regret, but the ruin of projects so slowly carried out, so laboriously framed. Providence is now opposed to them, when I most thought it would be propitious. It is not God’s will that they should be accomplished. This burden, almost as heavy as a world, which I had raised, and I had thought to bear to the end, was too great for my strength, and I was compelled to lay it down in the middle of my career. Oh, shall I then, again become a fatalist, whom fourteen years of despair and ten of hope had rendered a believer in providence? And all this — all this, because my heart, which I thought dead, was only sleeping; because it has awakened and has begun to beat again, because I have yielded to the pain of the emotion excited in my breast by a woman’s voice. Yet,” continued the count, becoming each moment more absorbed in the anticipation of the dreadful sacrifice for the morrow, which Mercedes had accepted, “yet, it is impossible that so noble-minded a woman should thus through selfishness consent to my death when I am in the prime of life and strength; it is impossible that she can carry to such a point maternal love, or rather delirium. There are virtues which become crimes by exaggeration. No, she must have conceived some pathetic scene; she will come and throw herself between us; and what would be sublime here will there appear ridiculous.” The blush of pride mounted to the count’s forehead as this thought passed through his mind. “Ridiculous?” repeated he; “and the ridicule will fall on me. I ridiculous? No, I would rather die.”

By thus exaggerating to his own mind the anticipated ill-fortune of the next day, to which he had condemned himself by promising Mercedes to spare her son, the count at last exclaimed, “Folly, folly, folly! — to carry generosity so far as to put myself up as a mark for that young man to aim at. He will never believe that my death was suicide; and yet it is important for the honor of my memory, — and this surely is not vanity, but a justifiable pride, — it is important the world should know that I have consented, by my free will, to stop my arm, already raised to strike, and that with the arm which has been so powerful against others I have struck myself. It must be; it shall be.”

Seizing a pen, he drew a paper from a secret drawer in his desk, and wrote at the bottom of the document (which was no other than his will, made since his arrival in Paris) a sort of codicil, clearly explaining the nature of his death. “I do this, O my God,” said he, with his eyes raised to heaven, “as much for thy honor as for mine. I have during ten years considered myself the agent of thy vengeance, and other wretches, like Morcerf, Danglars, Villefort, even Morcerf himself, must not imagine that chance has freed them from their enemy. Let them know, on the contrary, that their punishment, which had been decreed by providence, is only delayed by my present determination, and although they escape it in this world, it awaits them in another, and that they are only exchanging time for eternity.”

While he was thus agitated by gloomy uncertainties, — wretched waking dreams of grief, — the first rays of morning pierced his windows, and shone upon the pale blue paper on which he had just inscribed his justification of providence. It was just five o’clock in the morning when a slight noise like a stifled sigh reached his ear. He turned his head, looked around him, and saw no one; but the sound was repeated distinctly enough to convince him of its reality.

He arose, and quietly opening the door of the drawing-room, saw Haidee, who had fallen on a chair, with her arms hanging down and her beautiful head thrown back. She had been standing at the door, to prevent his going out without seeing her, until sleep, which the young cannot resist, had overpowered her frame, wearied as she was with watching. The noise of the door did not awaken her, and Monte Cristo gazed at her with affectionate regret. “She remembered that she had a son,” said he; “and I forgot I had a daughter.” Then, shaking his head sorrowfully, “Poor Haidee,” said he; “she wished to see me, to speak to me; she has feared or guessed something. Oh, I cannot go without taking leave of her; I cannot die without confiding her to some one.” He quietly regained his seat, and wrote under the other lines: —

“I bequeath to Maximilian Morrel, captain of Spahis, — and son of my former patron, Pierre Morrel, shipowner at Marseilles, — the sum of twenty millions, a part of which may be offered to his sister Julia and brother-in-law Emmanuel, if he does not fear this increase of fortune may mar their happiness. These twenty millions are concealed in my grotto at Monte Cristo, of which Bertuccio knows the secret. If his heart is free, and he will marry Haidee, the daughter of Ali Pasha of Yanina, whom I have brought up with the love of a father, and who has shown the love and tenderness of a daughter for me, he will thus accomplish my last wish. This will has already constituted Haidee heiress of the rest of my fortune, consisting of lands, funds in England, Austria, and Holland, furniture in my different palaces and houses, and which without the twenty millions and the legacies to my servants, may still amount to sixty millions.”

He was finishing the last line when a cry behind him made him start, and the pen fell from his hand. “Haidee,” said he, “did you read it?”

“Oh, my lord,” said she, “why are you writing thus at such an hour? Why are you bequeathing all your fortune to me? Are you going to leave me?”

“I am going on a journey, dear child,” said Monte Cristo, with an expression of infinite tenderness and melancholy; “and if any misfortune should happen to me.”

The count stopped. “Well?” asked the young girl, with an authoritative tone the count had never observed before, and which startled him. “Well, if any misfortune happen to me,” replied Monte Cristo, “I wish my daughter to be happy.” Haidee smiled sorrowfully, and shook her head. “Do you think of dying, my lord?” said she.

“The wise man, my child, has said, ‘It is good to think of death.’“

“Well, if you die,” said she, “bequeath your fortune to others, for if you die I shall require nothing;” and, taking the paper, she tore it in four pieces, and threw it into the middle of the room. Then, the effort having exhausted her strength, she fell not asleep this time, but fainting on the floor. The count leaned over her and raised her in his arms; and seeing that sweet pale face, those lovely eyes closed, that beautiful form motionless and to all appearance lifeless, the idea occurred to him for the first time, that perhaps she loved him otherwise than as a daughter loves a father.

“Alas,” murmured he, with intense suffering, “I might, then, have been happy yet.” Then he carried Haidee to her room, resigned her to the care of her attendants, and returning to his study, which he shut quickly this time, he again copied the destroyed will. As he was finishing, the sound of a cabriolet entering the yard was heard. Monte Cristo approached the window, and saw Maximilian and Emmanuel alight. “Good,” said he; “it was time,” — and he sealed his will with three seals. A moment afterwards he heard a noise in the drawing-room, and went to open the door himself. Morrel was there; he had come twenty minutes before the time appointed. “I am perhaps come too soon, count,” said he, “but I frankly acknowledge that I have not closed my eyes all night, nor has any one in my house. I need to see you strong in your courageous assurance, to recover myself.” Monte Cristo could not resist this proof of affection; he not only extended his hand to the young man, but flew to him with open arms. “Morrel,” said he, “it is a happy day for me, to feel that I am beloved by such a man as you. Good-morning, Emmanuel; you will come with me then, Maximilian?”

“Did you doubt it?” said the young captain.

“But if I were wrong” —

“I watched you during the whole scene of that challenge yesterday; I have been thinking of your firmness all night, and I said to myself that justice must be on your side, or man’s countenance is no longer to be relied on.”

“But, Morrel, Albert is your friend?”

“Simply an acquaintance, sir.”

“You met on the same day you first saw me?”

“Yes, that is true; but I should not have recollected it if you had not reminded me.”

“Thank you, Morrel.” Then ringing the bell once, “Look.” said he to Ali, who came immediately, “take that to my solicitor. It is my will, Morrel. When I am dead, you will go and examine it.”

“What?” said Morrel, “you dead?”

“Yes; must I not be prepared for everything, dear friend? But what did you do yesterday after you left me?”

“I went to Tortoni’s, where, as I expected, I found Beauchamp and Chateau-Renaud. I own I was seeking them.”

“Why, when all was arranged?”

“Listen, count; the affair is serious and unavoidable.”

“Did you doubt it!”

“No; the offence was public, and every one is already talking of it.”

“Well?”

“Well, I hoped to get an exchange of arms, — to substitute the sword for the pistol; the pistol is blind.”

“Have you succeeded?” asked Monte Cristo quickly, with an imperceptible gleam of hope.

“No; for your skill with the sword is so well known.”

“Ah? — who has betrayed me?”

“The skilful swordsman whom you have conquered.”

“And you failed?”

“They positively refused.”

“Morrel,” said the count, “have you ever seen me fire a pistol?”

“Never.”

“Well, we have time; look.” Monte Cristo took the pistols he held in his hand when Mercedes entered, and fixing an ace of clubs against the iron plate, with four shots he successively shot off the four sides of the club. At each shot Morrel turned pale. He examined the bullets with which Monte Cristo performed this dexterous feat, and saw that they were no larger than buckshot. “It is astonishing,” said he. “Look, Emmanuel.” Then turning towards Monte Cristo, “Count,” said he, “in the name of all that is dear to you, I entreat you not to kill Albert! — the unhappy youth has a mother.”

“You are right,” said Monte Cristo; “and I have none.” These words were uttered in a tone which made Morrel shudder. “You are the offended party, count.”

“Doubtless; what does that imply?”

“That you will fire first.”

“I fire first?”

“Oh, I obtained, or rather claimed that; we had conceded enough for them to yield us that.”

“And at what distance?”

“Twenty paces.” A smile of terrible import passed over the count’s lips. “Morrel,” said he, “do not forget what you have just seen.”

“The only chance for Albert’s safety, then, will arise from your emotion.”

“I suffer from emotion?” said Monte Cristo.

“Or from your generosity, my friend; to so good a marksman as you are, I may say what would appear absurd to another.”

“What is that?”

“Break his arm — wound him — but do not kill him.”

“I will tell you, Morrel,” said the count, “that I do not need entreating to spare the life of M. de Morcerf; he shall be so well spared, that he will return quietly with his two friends, while I” —

“And you?”

“That will be another thing; I shall be brought home.”

“No, no,” cried Maximilian, quite unable to restrain his feelings.

“As I told you, my dear Morrel, M. de Morcerf will kill me.” Morrel looked at him in utter amazement. “But what has happened, then, since last evening, count?”

“The same thing that happened to Brutus the night before the battle of Philippi; I have seen a ghost.”

“And that ghost” —

“Told me, Morrel, that I had lived long enough.” Maximilian and Emmanuel looked at each other. Monte Cristo drew out his watch. “Let us go,” said he; “it is five minutes past seven, and the appointment was for eight o’clock.” A carriage was in readiness at the door. Monte Cristo stepped into it with his two friends. He had stopped a moment in the passage to listen at a door, and Maximilian and Emmanuel, who had considerately passed forward a few steps, thought they heard him answer by a sigh to a sob from within. As the clock struck eight they drove up to the place of meeting. “We are first,” said Morrel, looking out of the window. “Excuse me, sir,” said Baptistin, who had followed his master with indescribable terror, “but I think I see a carriage down there under the trees.”

Monte Cristo sprang lightly from the carriage, and offered his hand to assist Emmanuel and Maximilian. The latter retained the count’s hand between his. “I like,” said he, “to feel a hand like this, when its owner relies on the goodness of his cause.”

“It seems to me,” said Emmanuel, “that I see two young men down there, who are evidently, waiting.” Monte Cristo drew Morrel a step or two behind his brother-in-law. “Maximilian,” said he, “are your affections disengaged?” Morrel looked at Monte Cristo with astonishment. “I do not seek your confidence, my dear friend. I only ask you a simple question; answer it; — that is all I require.”

“I love a young girl, count.”

“Do you love her much?”

“More than my life.”

“Another hope defeated!” said the count. Then, with a sigh, “Poor Haidee!” murmured he.

“To tell the truth, count, if I knew less of you, I should think that you were less brave than you are.”

“Because I sigh when thinking of some one I am leaving? Come, Morrel, it is not like a soldier to be so bad a judge of courage. Do I regret life? What is it to me, who have passed twenty years between life and death? Moreover, do not alarm yourself, Morrel; this weakness, if it is such, is betrayed to you alone. I know the world is a drawing-room, from which we must retire politely and honestly; that is, with a bow, and our debts of honor paid.”

“That is to the purpose. Have you brought your arms?”

“I? — what for? I hope these gentlemen have theirs.”

“I will inquire,” said Morrel.

“Do; but make no treaty — you understand me?”

“You need not fear.” Morrel advanced towards Beauchamp and Chateau-Renaud, who, seeing his intention, came to meet him. The three young men bowed to each other courteously, if not affably.

“Excuse me, gentlemen,” said Morrel, “but I do not see M. de Morcerf.”

“He sent us word this morning,” replied Chateau-Renaud, “that he would meet us on the ground.”

“Ah,” said Morrel. Beauchamp pulled out his watch. “It is only five minutes past eight,” said he to Morrel; “there is not much time lost yet.”

“Oh, I made no allusion of that kind,” replied Morrel.

"There is a carriage coming," said Chateau-Renaud. It advanced rapidly along one of the avenues leading towards the open space where they were assembled. "You are doubtless provided with pistols, gentlemen? M. de Monte Cristo yields his right of using his."

"We had anticipated this kindness on the part of the count," said Beauchamp, "and I have brought some weapons which I bought eight or ten days since, thinking to want them on a similar occasion. They are quite new, and have not yet been used. Will you examine them."

"Oh, M. Beauchamp, if you assure me that M. de Morcerf does not know these pistols, you may readily believe that your word will be quite sufficient."

"Gentlemen," said Chateau-Renaud, "it is not Morcerf coming in that carriage; — faith, it is Franz and Debray!" The two young men he announced were indeed approaching. "What chance brings you here, gentlemen?" said Chateau-Renaud, shaking hands with each of them. "Because," said Debray, "Albert sent this morning to request us to come." Beauchamp and Chateau-Renaud exchanged looks of astonishment. "I think I understand his reason," said Morrel.

"What is it?"

"Yesterday afternoon I received a letter from M. de Morcerf, begging me to attend the opera."

"And I," said Debray.

"And I also," said Franz.

"And we, too," added Beauchamp and Chateau-Renaud.

"Having wished you all to witness the challenge, he now wishes you to be present at the combat."

"Exactly so," said the young men; "you have probably guessed right."

"But, after all these arrangements, he does not come himself," said Chateau-Renaud. "Albert is ten minutes after time."

"There he comes," said Beauchamp, "on horseback, at full gallop, followed by a servant."

"How imprudent," said Chateau-Renaud, "to come on horseback to fight a duel with pistols, after all the instructions I had given him."

"And besides," said Beauchamp, "with a collar above his cravat, an open coat and white waistcoat! Why has he not painted a spot upon his heart? — it would have been more simple." Meanwhile Albert had arrived within ten paces of the group formed by the five young men. He jumped from his horse, threw the bridle on his servant's arms, and joined them. He was pale, and his eyes were red and swollen; it was evident that he had not slept. A shade of melancholy gravity overspread his countenance, which was not natural to him. "I thank you, gentlemen," said he, "for having complied with my request; I feel extremely grateful for this mark of friendship." Morrel had stepped back as Morcerf approached, and remained at a short distance. "And to you also, M. Morrel, my thanks are due. Come, there cannot be too many."

"Sir," said Maximilian, "you are not perhaps aware that I am M. de Monte Cristo's friend?"

"I was not sure, but I thought it might be so. So much the better; the more honorable men there are here the better I shall be satisfied."

"M. Morrel," said Chateau-Renaud, "will you apprise the Count of Monte Cristo that M. de Morcerf is arrived, and we are at his disposal?" Morrel was preparing to fulfil his commission. Beauchamp had meanwhile drawn the box of pistols from the carriage. "Stop, gentlemen," said Albert; "I have two words to say to the Count of Monte Cristo."

"In private?" asked Morrel.

"No, sir; before all who are here."

Albert's witnesses looked at each other. Franz and Debray exchanged some words in a whisper, and Morrel, rejoiced at this unexpected incident, went to fetch the count, who was walking in a retired path with Emmanuel. "What does he want with me?" said Monte Cristo.

"I do not know, but he wishes to speak to you."

"Ah?" said Monte Cristo, "I trust he is not going to tempt me by some fresh insult!"

"I do not think that such is his intention," said Morrel.

The count advanced, accompanied by Maximilian and Emmanuel. His calm and serene look formed a singular contrast to Albert's grief-stricken face, who approached also, followed by the other four young men. When at three paces distant from each other, Albert and the count stopped.

"Approach, gentlemen," said Albert; "I wish you not to lose one word of what I am about to have the honor of saying to the Count of Monte Cristo, for it must be repeated by you to all who will listen to it, strange as it may appear to you."

"Proceed, sir," said the count.

“Sir,” said Albert, at first with a tremulous voice, but which gradually became firmer, “I reproached you with exposing the conduct of M. de Morcerf in Epirus, for guilty as I knew he was, I thought you had no right to punish him; but I have since learned that you had that right. It is not Fernand Mondego’s treachery towards Ali Pasha which induces me so readily to excuse you, but the treachery of the fisherman Fernand towards you, and the almost unheard-of miseries which were its consequences; and I say, and proclaim it publicly, that you were justified in revenging yourself on my father, and I, his son, thank you for not using greater severity.”

Had a thunderbolt fallen in the midst of the spectators of this unexpected scene, it would not have surprised them more than did Albert’s declaration. As for Monte Cristo, his eyes slowly rose towards heaven with an expression of infinite gratitude. He could not understand how Albert’s fiery nature, of which he had seen so much among the Roman bandits, had suddenly stooped to this humiliation. He recognized the influence of Mercedes, and saw why her noble heart had not opposed the sacrifice she knew beforehand would be useless. “Now, sir,” said Albert, “if you think my apology sufficient, pray give me your hand. Next to the merit of infallibility which you appear to possess, I rank that of candidly acknowledging a fault. But this confession concerns me only. I acted well as a man, but you have acted better than man. An angel alone could have saved one of us from death — that angel came from heaven, if not to make us friends (which, alas, fatality renders impossible), at least to make us esteem each other.”

Monte Cristo, with moistened eye, heaving breast, and lips half open, extended to Albert a hand which the latter pressed with a sentiment resembling respectful fear. “Gentlemen,” said he, “M. de Monte Cristo receives my apology. I had acted hastily towards him. Hasty actions are generally bad ones. Now my fault is repaired. I hope the world will not call me cowardly for acting as my conscience dictated. But if any one should entertain a false opinion of me,” added he, drawing himself up as if he would challenge both friends and enemies, “I shall endeavor to correct his mistake.”

“What happened during the night?” asked Beauchamp of Chateau-Renaud; “we appear to make a very sorry figure here.”

“In truth, what Albert has just done is either very despicable or very noble,” replied the baron.

“What can it mean?” said Debray to Franz. “The Count of Monte Cristo acts dishonorably to M. de Morcerf, and is justified by his son! Had I ten Yaninas in my family, I should only consider myself the more bound to fight ten times.” As for Monte Cristo, his head was bent down, his arms were powerless. Bowing under the weight of twenty-four years’ reminiscences, he thought not of Albert, of Beauchamp, of Chateau-Renaud, or of any of that group; but he thought of that courageous woman who had come to plead for her son’s life, to whom he had offered his, and who had now saved it by the revelation of a dreadful family secret, capable of destroying forever in that young man’s heart every feeling of filial piety.

“Providence still,” murmured he; “now only am I fully convinced of being the emissary of God!”

Chapter 91

Mother and Son.

The Count of Monte Cristo bowed to the five young men with a melancholy and dignified smile, and got into his carriage with Maximilian and Emmanuel. Albert, Beauchamp, and Chateau-Renaud remained alone. Albert looked at his two friends, not timidly, but in a way that appeared to ask their opinion of what he had just done.

"Indeed, my dear friend," said Beauchamp first, who had either the most feeling or the least dissimulation, "allow me to congratulate you; this is a very unhoped-for conclusion of a very disagreeable affair."

Albert remained silent and wrapped in thought. Chateau-Renaud contented himself with tapping his boot with his flexible cane. "Are we not going?" said he, after this embarrassing silence. "When you please," replied Beauchamp; "allow me only to compliment M. de Morcerf, who has given proof to-day of rare chivalric generosity."

"Oh, yes," said Chateau-Renaud.

"It is magnificent," continued Beauchamp, "to be able to exercise so much self-control!"

"Assuredly; as for me, I should have been incapable of it," said Chateau-Renaud, with most significant coolness.

"Gentlemen," interrupted Albert, "I think you did not understand that something very serious had passed between M. de Monte Cristo and myself."

"Possibly, possibly," said Beauchamp immediately; "but every simpleton would not be able to understand your heroism, and sooner or later you will find yourself compelled to explain it to them more energetically than would be convenient to your bodily health and the duration of your life. May I give you a friendly counsel? Set out for Naples, the Hague, or St. Petersburg — calm countries, where the point of honor is better understood than among our hot-headed Parisians. Seek quietude and oblivion, so that you may return peaceably to France after a few years. Am I not right, M. de Chateau-Renaud?"

"That is quite my opinion," said the gentleman; "nothing induces serious duels so much as a duel forsworn."

"Thank you, gentlemen," replied Albert, with a smile of indifference; "I shall follow your advice — not because you give it, but because I had before intended to quit France. I thank you equally for the service you have rendered me in being my seconds. It is deeply engraved on my heart, and, after what you have just said, I remember that only." Chateau-Renaud and Beauchamp looked at each other; the impression was the same on both of them, and the tone in which Morcerf had just expressed his thanks was so determined that the position would have become embarrassing for all if the conversation had continued.

"Good-by, Albert," said Beauchamp suddenly, carelessly extending his hand to the young man. The latter did not appear to arouse from his lethargy; in fact, he did not notice the offered hand. "Good-by," said Chateau-Renaud in his turn, keeping his little cane in his left hand, and saluting with his right. Albert's lips scarcely whispered "Good-by," but his look was more explicit; it expressed a whole poem of restrained anger, proud disdain, and generous indignation. He preserved his melancholy and motionless position for some time after his two friends had regained their carriage; then suddenly unfastening his horse from the little tree to which his servant had tied it, he mounted and galloped off in the direction of Paris.

In a quarter of an hour he was entering the house in the Rue du Helder. As he alighted, he thought he saw his father's pale face behind the curtain of the count's bedroom. Albert turned away his head with a sigh, and went to his own apartments. He cast one lingering look on all the luxuries which had rendered life so easy and so happy since his infancy; he looked at the pictures, whose faces seemed to smile, and the landscapes, which appeared painted in brighter colors. Then he took away his mother's portrait, with its oaken frame, leaving the gilt frame from which he took it black and empty. Then he arranged all his beautiful Turkish arms, his fine English guns, his Japanese china, his cups mounted in silver, his artistic bronzes by Feucheres and Barye; examined the cupboards, and placed the key in each; threw into a drawer of his secretary, which he left open, all the pocket-money he had about him, and with it the thousand fancy jewels from his vases and his jewel-boxes; then he made an exact inventory of everything, and placed it in the most conspicuous part of the table, after putting aside the books and papers which had collected there.

At the beginning of this work, his servant, notwithstanding orders to the contrary, came to his room. “What do you want?” asked he, with a more sorrowful than angry tone. “Pardon me, sir,” replied the valet; “you had forbidden me to disturb you, but the Count of Morcerf has called me.”

“Well!” said Albert.

“I did not like to go to him without first seeing you.”

“Why?”

“Because the count is doubtless aware that I accompanied you to the meeting this morning.”

“It is probable,” said Albert.

“And since he has sent for me, it is doubtless to question me on what happened there. What must I answer?”

“The truth.”

“Then I shall say the duel did not take place?”

“You will say I apologized to the Count of Monte Cristo. Go.”

The valet bowed and retired, and Albert returned to his inventory. As he was finishing this work, the sound of horses prancing in the yard, and the wheels of a carriage shaking his window, attracted his attention. He approached the window, and saw his father get into it, and drive away. The door was scarcely closed when Albert bent his steps to his mother’s room; and, no one being there to announce him, he advanced to her bed-chamber, and distressed by what he saw and guessed, stopped for one moment at the door. As if the same idea had animated these two beings, Mercedes was doing the same in her apartments that he had just done in his. Everything was in order, — laces, dresses, jewels, linen, money, all were arranged in the drawers, and the countess was carefully collecting the keys. Albert saw all these preparations and understood them, and exclaiming, “My mother!” he threw his arms around her neck.

The artist who could have depicted the expression of these two countenances would certainly have made of them a beautiful picture. All these proofs of an energetic resolution, which Albert did not fear on his own account, alarmed him for his mother. “What are you doing?” asked he.

“What were you doing?” replied she.

“Oh, my mother!” exclaimed Albert, so overcome he could scarcely speak; “it is not the same with you and me — you cannot have made the same resolution I have, for I have come to warn you that I bid adieu to your house, and — and to you.”

“I also,” replied Mercedes, “am going, and I acknowledge I had depended on your accompanying me; have I deceived myself?”

“Mother,” said Albert with firmness. “I cannot make you share the fate I have planned for myself. I must live henceforth without rank and fortune, and to begin this hard apprenticeship I must borrow from a friend the loaf I shall eat until I have earned one. So, my dear mother, I am going at once to ask Franz to lend me the small sum I shall require to supply my present wants.”

“You, my poor child, suffer poverty and hunger? Oh, do not say so; it will break my resolutions.”

“But not mine, mother,” replied Albert. “I am young and strong; I believe I am courageous, and since yesterday I have learned the power of will. Alas, my dear mother, some have suffered so much, and yet live, and have raised a new fortune on the ruin of all the promises of happiness which heaven had made them — on the fragments of all the hope which God had given them! I have seen that, mother; I know that from the gulf in which their enemies have plunged them they have risen with so much vigor and glory that in their turn they have ruled their former conquerors, and have punished them. No, mother; from this moment I have done with the past, and accept nothing from it — not even a name, because you can understand that your son cannot bear the name of a man who ought to blush for it before another.”

“Albert, my child,” said Mercedes, “if I had a stronger heart, that is the counsel I would have given you; your conscience has spoken when my voice became too weak; listen to its dictates. You had friends, Albert; break off their acquaintance. But do not despair; you have life before you, my dear Albert, for you are yet scarcely twenty-two years old; and as a pure heart like yours wants a spotless name, take my father’s — it was Herrera. I am sure, my dear Albert, whatever may be your career, you will soon render that name illustrious. Then, my son, return to the world still more brilliant because of your former sorrows; and if I am wrong, still let me cherish these hopes, for I have no future to look forward to. For me the grave opens when I pass the threshold of this house.”

“I will fulfil all your wishes, my dear mother,” said the young man. “Yes, I share your hopes; the anger of heaven will not pursue us, since you are pure and I am innocent. But, since our resolution is formed, let us act promptly. M. de Morcerf went out about half an hour ago; the opportunity is favorable to avoid an explanation."

"I am ready, my son," said Mercedes. Albert ran to fetch a carriage. He recollected that there was a small furnished house to let in the Rue de Saints Peres, where his mother would find a humble but decent lodging, and thither he intended conducting the countess. As the carriage stopped at the door, and Albert was alighting, a man approached and gave him a letter. Albert recognized the bearer. "From the count," said Bertuccio. Albert took the letter, opened, and read it, then looked round for Bertuccio, but he was gone. He returned to Mercedes with tears in his eyes and heaving breast, and without uttering a word he gave her the letter. Mercedes read: —

Albert, — While showing you that I have discovered your plans, I hope also to convince you of my delicacy. You are free, you leave the count's house, and you take your mother to your home; but reflect, Albert, you owe her more than your poor noble heart can pay her. Keep the struggle for yourself, bear all the suffering, but spare her the trial of poverty which must accompany your first efforts; for she deserves not even the shadow of the misfortune which has this day fallen on her, and providence is not willing that the innocent should suffer for the guilty. I know you are going to leave the Rue du Helder without taking anything with you. Do not seek to know how I discovered it; I know it — that is sufficient.

Now, listen, Albert. Twenty-four years ago I returned, proud and joyful, to my country. I had a betrothed, Albert, a lovely girl whom I adored, and I was bringing to my betrothed a hundred and fifty louis, painfully amassed by ceaseless toil. This money was for her; I destined it for her, and, knowing the treachery of the sea I buried our treasure in the little garden of the house my father lived in at Marseilles, on the Allees de Meillan. Your mother, Albert, knows that poor house well. A short time since I passed through Marseilles, and went to see the old place, which revived so many painful recollections; and in the evening I took a spade and dug in the corner of the garden where I had concealed my treasure. The iron box was there — no one had touched it — under a beautiful fig-tree my father had planted the day I was born, which overshadowed the spot. Well, Albert, this money, which was formerly designed to promote the comfort and tranquillity of the woman I adored, may now, through strange and painful circumstances, be devoted to the same purpose. Oh, feel for me, who could offer millions to that poor woman, but who return her only the piece of black bread forgotten under my poor roof since the day I was torn from her I loved. You are a generous man, Albert, but perhaps you may be blinded by pride or resentment; if you refuse me, if you ask another for what I have a right to offer you, I will say it is ungenerous of you to refuse the life of your mother at the hands of a man whose father was allowed by your father to die in all the horrors of poverty and despair.

Albert stood pale and motionless to hear what his mother would decide after she had finished reading this letter. Mercedes turned her eyes with an ineffable look towards heaven. “I accept it,” said she; “he has a right to pay the dowry, which I shall take with me to some convent!” Putting the letter in her bosom, she took her son’s arm, and with a firmer step than she even herself expected she went down-stairs.

Chapter 92

The Suicide.

Meanwhile Monte Cristo had also returned to town with Emmanuel and Maximilian. Their return was cheerful. Emmanuel did not conceal his joy at the peaceful termination of the affair, and was loud in his expressions of delight. Morrel, in a corner of the carriage, allowed his brother-in-law's gayety to expend itself in words, while he felt equal inward joy, which, however, betrayed itself only in his countenance. At the Barriere du Trone they met Bertuccio, who was waiting there, motionless as a sentinel at his post. Monte Cristo put his head out of the window, exchanged a few words with him in a low tone, and the steward disappeared. "Count," said Emmanuel, when they were at the end of the Place Royale, "put me down at my door, that my wife may not have a single moment of needless anxiety on my account or yours."

"If it were not ridiculous to make a display of our triumph, I would invite the count to our house; besides that, he doubtless has some trembling heart to comfort. So we will take leave of our friend, and let him hasten home."

"Stop a moment," said Monte Cristo; "do not let me lose both my companions. Return, Emmanuel, to your charming wife, and present my best compliments to her; and do you, Morrel, accompany me to the Champs Elysees."

"Willingly," said Maximilian; "particularly as I have business in that quarter."

"Shall we wait breakfast for you?" asked Emmanuel.

"No," replied the young man. The door was closed, and the carriage proceeded. "See what good fortune I brought you!" said Morrel, when he was alone with the count. "Have you not thought so?"

"Yes," said Monte Cristo; "for that reason I wished to keep you near me."

"It is miraculous!" continued Morrel, answering his own thoughts.

"What?" said Monte Cristo.

"What has just happened."

"Yes," said the Count, "you are right — it is miraculous."

“For Albert is brave,” resumed Morrel.

“Very brave,” said Monte Cristo; “I have seen him sleep with a sword suspended over his head.”

“And I know he has fought two duels,” said Morrel. “How can you reconcile that with his conduct this morning?”

“All owing to your influence,” replied Monte Cristo, smiling.

“It is well for Albert he is not in the army,” said Morrel.

“Why?”

“An apology on the ground!” said the young captain, shaking his head.

“Come,” said the count mildly, “do not entertain the prejudices of ordinary men, Morrel! Acknowledge, that if Albert is brave, he cannot be a coward; he must then have had some reason for acting as he did this morning, and confess that his conduct is more heroic than otherwise.”

“Doubtless, doubtless,” said Morrel; “but I shall say, like the Spaniard, ‘He has not been so brave to-day as he was yesterday.’“

“You will breakfast with me, will you not, Morrel?” said the count, to turn the conversation.

“No; I must leave you at ten o’clock.”

“Your engagement was for breakfast, then?” said the count.

Morrel smiled, and shook his head. “Still you must breakfast somewhere.”

“But if I am not hungry?” said the young man.

“Oh,” said the count, “I only know two things which destroy the appetite, — grief — and as I am happy to see you very cheerful, it is not that — and love. Now after what you told me this morning of your heart, I may believe” —

“Well, count,” replied Morrel gayly, “I will not dispute it.”

“But you will not make me your confidant, Maximilian?” said the count, in a tone which showed how gladly he would have been admitted to the secret.

“I showed you this morning that I had a heart, did I not, count?” Monte Cristo only answered by extending his hand to the young man. “Well,” continued the latter, “since that heart is no longer with you in the Bois de Vincennes, it is elsewhere, and I must go and find it.”

“Go,” said the count deliberately; “go, dear friend, but promise me if you meet with any obstacle to remember that I have some power in this world, that I am happy to use that power in the behalf of those I love, and that I love you, Morrel."

"I will remember it," said the young man, "as selfish children recollect their parents when they want their aid. When I need your assistance, and the moment arrives, I will come to you, count."

"Well, I rely upon your promise. Good-by, then."

"Good-by, till we meet again." They had arrived in the Champs Elysees. Monte Cristo opened the carriage-door, Morrel sprang out on the pavement, Bertuccio was waiting on the steps. Morrel disappeared down the Avenue de Marigny, and Monte Cristo hastened to join Bertuccio.

"Well?" asked he.

"She is going to leave her house," said the steward.

"And her son?"

"Florentin, his valet, thinks he is going to do the same."

"Come this way." Monte Cristo took Bertuccio into his study, wrote the letter we have seen, and gave it to the steward. "Go," said he quickly. "But first, let Haidee be informed that I have returned."

"Here I am," said the young girl, who at the sound of the carriage had run down-stairs and whose face was radiant with joy at seeing the count return safely. Bertuccio left. Every transport of a daughter finding a father, all the delight of a mistress seeing an adored lover, were felt by Haidee during the first moments of this meeting, which she had so eagerly expected. Doubtless, although less evident, Monte Cristo's joy was not less intense. Joy to hearts which have suffered long is like the dew on the ground after a long drought; both the heart and the ground absorb that beneficent moisture falling on them, and nothing is outwardly apparent.

Monte Cristo was beginning to think, what he had not for a long time dared to believe, that there were two Mercedes in the world, and he might yet be happy. His eye, elate with happiness, was reading eagerly the tearful gaze of Haidee, when suddenly the door opened. The count knit his brow. "M. de Morcerf!" said Baptistin, as if that name sufficed for his excuse. In fact, the count's face brightened.

"Which," asked he, "the viscount or the count?"

"The count."

"Oh," exclaimed Haidee, "is it not yet over?"

"I know not if it is finished, my beloved child," said Monte Cristo, taking the young girl's hands; "but I do know you have nothing more to fear."

“But it is the wretched” —

“That man cannot injure me, Haidee,” said Monte Cristo; “it was his son alone that there was cause to fear.”

“And what I have suffered,” said the young girl, “you shall never know, my lord.” Monte Cristo smiled. “By my father’s tomb,” said he, extending his hand over the head of the young girl, “I swear to you, Haidee, that if any misfortune happens, it will not be to me.”

“I believe you, my lord, as implicitly as if God had spoken to me,” said the young girl, presenting her forehead to him. Monte Cristo pressed on that pure beautiful forehead a kiss which made two hearts throb at once, the one violently, the other heavily. “Oh,” murmured the count, “shall I then be permitted to love again? Ask M. de Morcerf into the drawing-room,” said he to Baptistin, while he led the beautiful Greek girl to a private staircase.

We must explain this visit, which although expected by Monte Cristo, is unexpected to our readers. While Mercedes, as we have said, was making a similar inventory of her property to Albert’s, while she was arranging her jewels, shutting her drawers, collecting her keys, to leave everything in perfect order, she did not perceive a pale and sinister face at a glass door which threw light into the passage, from which everything could be both seen and heard. He who was thus looking, without being heard or seen, probably heard and saw all that passed in Madame de Morcerf’s apartments. From that glass door the pale-faced man went to the count’s bedroom and raised with a constricted hand the curtain of a window overlooking the court-yard. He remained there ten minutes, motionless and dumb, listening to the beating of his own heart. For him those ten minutes were very long. It was then Albert, returning from his meeting with the count, perceived his father watching for his arrival behind a curtain, and turned aside. The count’s eye expanded; he knew Albert had insulted the count dreadfully, and that in every country in the world such an insult would lead to a deadly duel. Albert returned safely — then the count was revenged.

An indescribable ray of joy illumined that wretched countenance like the last ray of the sun before it disappears behind the clouds which bear the aspect, not of a downy couch, but of a tomb. But as we have said, he waited in vain for his son to come to his apartment with the account of his triumph. He easily understood why his son did not come to see him before he went to avenge his father’s honor; but when that was done, why did not his son come and throw himself into his arms?

It was then, when the count could not see Albert, that he sent for his servant, who he knew was authorized not to conceal anything from him. Ten minutes afterwards, General Morcerf was seen on the steps in a black coat with a military collar, black pantaloons, and black gloves. He had apparently given previous orders, for as he reached the bottom step his carriage came from the coach-house ready for him. The valet threw into the carriage his military cloak, in which two swords were wrapped, and, shutting the door, he took his seat by the side of the coachman. The coachman stooped down for his orders.

“To the Champs Elysees,” said the general; “the Count of Monte Cristo’s. Hurry!” The horses bounded beneath the whip; and in five minutes they stopped before the count’s door. M. de Morcerf opened the door himself, and as the carriage rolled away he passed up the walk, rang, and entered the open door with his servant.

A moment afterwards, Baptistin announced the Count of Morcerf to Monte Cristo, and the latter, leading Haidee aside, ordered that Morcerf be asked into the drawing-room. The general was pacing the room the third time when, in turning, he perceived Monte Cristo at the door. “Ah, it is M. de Morcerf,” said Monte Cristo quietly; “I thought I had not heard aright.”

“Yes, it is I,” said the count, whom a frightful contraction of the lips prevented from articulating freely.

“May I know the cause which procures me the pleasure of seeing M. de Morcerf so early?”

“Had you not a meeting with my son this morning?” asked the general.

“I had,” replied the count.

“And I know my son had good reasons to wish to fight with you, and to endeavor to kill you.”

“Yes, sir, he had very good ones; but you see that in spite of them he has not killed me, and did not even fight.”

“Yet he considered you the cause of his father’s dishonor, the cause of the fearful ruin which has fallen on my house.”

“It is true, sir,” said Monte Cristo with his dreadful calmness; “a secondary cause, but not the principal.”

“Doubtless you made, then, some apology or explanation?”

“I explained nothing, and it is he who apologized to me.”

"But to what do you attribute this conduct?"

"To the conviction, probably, that there was one more guilty than I."

"And who was that?"

"His father."

"That may be," said the count, turning pale; "but you know the guilty do not like to find themselves convicted."

"I know it, and I expected this result."

"You expected my son would be a coward?" cried the count.

"M. Albert de Morcerf is no coward!" said Monte Cristo.

"A man who holds a sword in his hand, and sees a mortal enemy within reach of that sword, and does not fight, is a coward! Why is he not here that I may tell him so?"

"Sir." replied Monte Cristo coldly, "I did not expect that you had come here to relate to me your little family affairs. Go and tell M. Albert that, and he may know what to answer you."

"Oh, no, no," said the general, smiling faintly, "I did not come for that purpose; you are right. I came to tell you that I also look upon you as my enemy. I came to tell you that I hate you instinctively; that it seems as if I had always known you, and always hated you; and, in short, since the young people of the present day will not fight, it remains for us to do so. Do you think so, sir?"

"Certainly. And when I told you I had foreseen the result, it is the honor of your visit I alluded to."

"So much the better. Are you prepared?"

"Yes, sir."

"You know that we shall fight till one of us is dead," said the general, whose teeth were clinched with rage. "Until one of us dies," repeated Monte Cristo, moving his head slightly up and down.

"Let us start, then; we need no witnesses."

"Very true," said Monte Cristo; "it is unnecessary, we know each other so well!"

"On the contrary," said the count, "we know so little of each other."

"Indeed?" said Monte Cristo, with the same indomitable coolness; "let us see. Are you not the soldier Fernand who deserted on the eve of the battle of Waterloo? Are you not the Lieutenant Fernand who served as guide and spy to the French army in Spain? Are you not the Captain Fernand who betrayed, sold, and murdered his benefactor, Ali? And have not all these

Fernands, united, made Lieutenant-General, the Count of Morcerf, peer of France?”

“Oh,” cried the general, as if branded with a hot iron, “wretch, — to reproach me with my shame when about, perhaps, to kill me! No, I did not say I was a stranger to you. I know well, demon, that you have penetrated into the darkness of the past, and that you have read, by the light of what torch I know not, every page of my life; but perhaps I may be more honorable in my shame than you under your pompous coverings. No — no, I am aware you know me; but I know you only as an adventurer sewn up in gold and jewellery. You call yourself in Paris the Count of Monte Cristo; in Italy, Sinbad the Sailor; in Malta, I forget what. But it is your real name I want to know, in the midst of your hundred names, that I may pronounce it when we meet to fight, at the moment when I plunge my sword through your heart.”

The Count of Monte Cristo turned dreadfully pale; his eye seemed to burn with a devouring fire. He leaped towards a dressing-room near his bedroom, and in less than a moment, tearing off his cravat, his coat and waistcoat, he put on a sailor’s jacket and hat, from beneath which rolled his long black hair. He returned thus, formidable and implacable, advancing with his arms crossed on his breast, towards the general, who could not understand why he had disappeared, but who on seeing him again, and feeling his teeth chatter and his legs sink under him, drew back, and only stopped when he found a table to support his clinched hand. “Fernand,” cried he, “of my hundred names I need only tell you one, to overwhelm you! But you guess it now, do you not? — or, rather, you remember it? For, notwithstanding all my sorrows and my tortures, I show you to-day a face which the happiness of revenge makes young again — a face you must often have seen in your dreams since your marriage with Mercedes, my betrothed!”

The general, with his head thrown back, hands extended, gaze fixed, looked silently at this dreadful apparition; then seeking the wall to support him, he glided along close to it until he reached the door, through which he went out backwards, uttering this single mournful, lamentable, distressing cry, — ”Edmond Dantes!” Then, with sighs which were unlike any human sound, he dragged himself to the door, reeled across the court-yard, and falling into the arms of his valet, he said in a voice scarcely intelligible, — ”Home, home.” The fresh air and the shame he felt at having exposed himself before his servants, partly recalled his senses, but the ride was short, and as he drew near his house all his wretchedness revived. He stopped at a short distance from the house and alighted.

The door was wide open, a hackney-coach was standing in the middle of the yard — a strange sight before so noble a mansion; the count looked at it with terror, but without daring to inquire its meaning, he rushed towards his apartment. Two persons were coming down the stairs; he had only time to creep into an alcove to avoid them. It was Mercedes leaning on her son's arm and leaving the house. They passed close by the unhappy being, who, concealed behind the damask curtain, almost felt Mercedes dress brush past him, and his son's warm breath, pronouncing these words, — "Courage, mother! Come, this is no longer our home!" The words died away, the steps were lost in the distance. The general drew himself up, clinging to the curtain; he uttered the most dreadful sob which ever escaped from the bosom of a father abandoned at the same time by his wife and son. He soon heard the clatter of the iron step of the hackney-coach, then the coachman's voice, and then the rolling of the heavy vehicle shook the windows. He darted to his bedroom to see once more all he had loved in the world; but the hackney-coach drove on and the head of neither Mercedes nor her son appeared at the window to take a last look at the house or the deserted father and husband. And at the very moment when the wheels of that coach crossed the gateway a report was heard, and a thick smoke escaped through one of the panes of the window, which was broken by the explosion.

Chapter 93

Valentine.

We may easily conceive where Morrel's appointment was. On leaving Monte Cristo he walked slowly towards Villefort's; we say slowly, for Morrel had more than half an hour to spare to go five hundred steps, but he had hastened to take leave of Monte Cristo because he wished to be alone with his thoughts. He knew his time well — the hour when Valentine was giving Noirtier his breakfast, and was sure not to be disturbed in the performance of this pious duty. Noirtier and Valentine had given him leave to go twice a week, and he was now availing himself of that permission. He had arrived; Valentine was expecting him. Uneasy and almost crazed, she seized his hand and led him to her grandfather. This uneasiness, amounting almost to frenzy, arose from the report Morcerf's adventure had made in the world, for the affair at the opera was generally known. No one at Villefort's doubted that a duel would ensue from it. Valentine, with her woman's instinct, guessed that Morrel would be Monte Cristo's second, and from the young man's well-known courage and his great affection for the count, she feared that he would not content himself with the passive part assigned to him. We may easily understand how eagerly the particulars were asked for, given, and received; and Morrel could read an indescribable joy in the eyes of his beloved, when she knew that the termination of this affair was as happy as it was unexpected.

"Now," said Valentine, motioning to Morrel to sit down near her grandfather, while she took her seat on his footstool, — "now let us talk about our own affairs. You know, Maximilian, grandpapa once thought of leaving this house, and taking an apartment away from M. de Villefort's."

"Yes," said Maximilian, "I recollect the project, of which I highly approved."

"Well," said Valentine, "you may approve again, for grandpapa is again thinking of it."

"Bravo," said Maximilian.

“And do you know,” said Valentine, “what reason grandpapa gives for leaving this house.” Noirtier looked at Valentine to impose silence, but she did not notice him; her looks, her eyes, her smile, were all for Morrel.

“Oh, whatever may be M. Noirtier’s reason,” answered Morrel, “I can readily believe it to be a good one.”

“An excellent one,” said Valentine. “He pretends the air of the Faubourg St. Honore is not good for me.”

“Indeed?” said Morrel; “in that M. Noirtier may be right; you have not seemed to be well for the last fortnight.”

“Not very,” said Valentine. “And grandpapa has become my physician, and I have the greatest confidence in him, because he knows everything.”

“Do you then really suffer?” asked Morrel quickly.

“Oh, it must not be called suffering; I feel a general uneasiness, that is all. I have lost my appetite, and my stomach feels as if it were struggling to get accustomed to something.” Noirtier did not lose a word of what Valentine said. “And what treatment do you adopt for this singular complaint?”

“A very simple one,” said Valentine. “I swallow every morning a spoonful of the mixture prepared for my grandfather. When I say one spoonful, I began by one — now I take four. Grandpapa says it is a panacea.” Valentine smiled, but it was evident that she suffered.

Maximilian, in his devotedness, gazed silently at her. She was very beautiful, but her usual pallor had increased; her eyes were more brilliant than ever, and her hands, which were generally white like mother-of-pearl, now more resembled wax, to which time was adding a yellowish hue. From Valentine the young man looked towards Noirtier. The latter watched with strange and deep interest the young girl, absorbed by her affection, and he also, like Morrel, followed those traces of inward suffering which was so little perceptible to a common observer that they escaped the notice of every one but the grandfather and the lover.

“But,” said Morrel, “I thought this mixture, of which you now take four spoonfuls, was prepared for M. Noirtier?”

“I know it is very bitter,” said Valentine; “so bitter, that all I drink afterwards appears to have the same taste.” Noirtier looked inquiringly at his granddaughter. “Yes, grandpapa,” said Valentine; “it is so. Just now, before I came down to you, I drank a glass of sugared water; I left half, because it seemed so bitter.” Noirtier turned pale, and made a sign that he wished to speak. Valentine rose to fetch the dictionary. Noirtier watched her with evident anguish. In fact, the blood was rushing to the young girl’s head already, her cheeks were becoming red. “Oh,” cried she, without losing any of her cheerfulness, “this is singular! I can’t see! Did the sun shine in my eyes?” And she leaned against the window.

“The sun is not shining,” said Morrel, more alarmed by Noirtier’s expression than by Valentine’s indisposition. He ran towards her. The young girl smiled. “Cheer up,” said she to Noirtier. “Do not be alarmed, Maximilian; it is nothing, and has already passed away. But listen! Do I not hear a carriage in the court-yard?” She opened Noirtier’s door, ran to a window in the passage, and returned hastily. “Yes,” said she, “it is Madame Danglars and her daughter, who have come to call on us. Good-by; — I must run away, for they would send here for me, or, rather, farewell till I see you again. Stay with grandpapa, Maximilian; I promise you not to persuade them to stay.”

Morrel watched her as she left the room; he heard her ascend the little staircase which led both to Madame de Villefort’s apartments and to hers. As soon as she was gone, Noirtier made a sign to Morrel to take the dictionary. Morrel obeyed; guided by Valentine, he had learned how to understand the old man quickly. Accustomed, however, as he was to the work, he had to repeat most of the letters of the alphabet and to find every word in the dictionary, so that it was ten minutes before the thought of the old man was translated by these words, “Fetch the glass of water and the decanter from Valentine’s room.”

Morrel rang immediately for the servant who had taken Barrois’s situation, and in Noirtier’s name gave that order. The servant soon returned. The decanter and the glass were completely empty. Noirtier made a sign that he wished to speak. “Why are the glass and decanter empty?” asked he; “Valentine said she only drank half the glassful.” The translation of this new question occupied another five minutes. “I do not know,” said the servant, “but the housemaid is in Mademoiselle Valentine’s room: perhaps she has emptied them.”

“Ask her,” said Morrel, translating Noirtier’s thought this time by his look. The servant went out, but returned almost immediately. “Mademoiselle Valentine passed through the room to go to Madame de Villefort’s,” said he; “and in passing, as she was thirsty, she drank what remained in the glass; as for the decanter, Master Edward had emptied that to make a pond for his ducks.” Noirtier raised his eyes to heaven, as a gambler does who stakes his all on one stroke. From that moment the old man’s eyes were fixed on the door, and did not quit it.

It was indeed Madame Danglars and her daughter whom Valentine had seen; they had been ushered into Madame de Villefort’s room, who had said she would receive them there. That is why Valentine passed through her room, which was on a level with Valentine’s, and only separated from it by Edward’s. The two ladies entered the drawing-room with that sort of official stiffness which preludes a formal communication. Among worldly people manner is contagious. Madame de Villefort received them with equal solemnity. Valentine entered at this moment, and the formalities were resumed. “My dear friend,” said the baroness, while the two young people were shaking hands, “I and Eugenie are come to be the first to announce to you the approaching marriage of my daughter with Prince Cavalcanti.” Danglars kept up the title of prince. The popular banker found that it answered better than count. “Allow me to present you my sincere congratulations,” replied Madame de Villefort. “Prince Cavalcanti appears to be a young man of rare qualities.”

“Listen,” said the baroness, smiling; “speaking to you as a friend I can say that the prince does not yet appear all he will be. He has about him a little of that foreign manner by which French persons recognize, at first sight, the Italian or German nobleman. Besides, he gives evidence of great kindness of disposition, much keenness of wit, and as to suitability, M. Danglars assures me that his fortune is majestic — that is his word.”

“And then,” said Eugenie, while turning over the leaves of Madame de Villefort’s album, “add that you have taken a great fancy to the young man.”

“And,” said Madame de Villefort, “I need not ask you if you share that fancy.”

“I?” replied Eugenie with her usual candor. “Oh, not the least in the world, madame! My wish was not to confine myself to domestic cares, or the caprices of any man, but to be an artist, and consequently free in heart, in person, and in thought.” Eugenie pronounced these words with so firm a tone that the color mounted to Valentine’s cheeks. The timid girl could not understand that vigorous nature which appeared to have none of the timidities of woman.

“At any rate,” said she, “since I am to be married whether I will or not, I ought to be thankful to providence for having released me from my engagement with M. Albert de Morcerf, or I should this day have been the wife of a dishonored man.”

“It is true,” said the baroness, with that strange simplicity sometimes met with among fashionable ladies, and of which plebeian intercourse can never entirely deprive them, — ”it is very true that had not the Morcerfs hesitated, my daughter would have married Monsieur Albert. The general depended much on it; he even came to force M. Danglars. We have had a narrow escape.”

“But,” said Valentine, timidly, “does all the father’s shame revert upon the son? Monsieur Albert appears to me quite innocent of the treason charged against the general.”

“Excuse me,” said the implacable young girl, “Monsieur Albert claims and well deserves his share. It appears that after having challenged M. de Monte Cristo at the Opera yesterday, he apologized on the ground to-day.”

“Impossible,” said Madame de Villefort.

“Ah, my dear friend,” said Madame Danglars, with the same simplicity we before noticed, “it is a fact. I heard it from M. Debray, who was present at the explanation.” Valentine also knew the truth, but she did not answer. A single word had reminded her that Morrel was expecting her in M. Noirtier’s room. Deeply engaged with a sort of inward contemplation, Valentine had ceased for a moment to join in the conversation. She would, indeed, have found it impossible to repeat what had been said the last few minutes, when suddenly Madame Danglars’ hand, pressed on her arm, aroused her from her lethargy.

“What is it?” said she, starting at Madame Danglars’ touch as she would have done from an electric shock. “It is, my dear Valentine,” said the baroness, “that you are, doubtless, suffering.”

“I?” said the young girl, passing her hand across her burning forehead.

“Yes, look at yourself in that glass; you have turned pale and then red successively, three or four times in one minute.”

“Indeed,” cried Eugenie, “you are very pale!”

“Oh, do not be alarmed; I have been so for many days.” Artless as she was, the young girl knew that this was an opportunity to leave, and besides, Madame de Villefort came to her assistance. “Retire, Valentine,” said she; “you are really suffering, and these ladies will excuse you; drink a glass of pure water, it will restore you.” Valentine kissed Eugenie, bowed to Madame Danglars, who had already risen to take her leave, and went out.

“That poor child,” said Madame de Villefort when Valentine was gone, “she makes me very uneasy, and I should not be astonished if she had some serious illness.”

Meanwhile, Valentine, in a sort of excitement which she could not quite understand, had crossed Edward’s room without noticing some trick of the child, and through her own had reached the little staircase. She was within three steps of the bottom; she already heard Morrel’s voice, when suddenly a cloud passed over her eyes, her stiffened foot missed the step, her hands had no power to hold the baluster, and falling against the wall she lost her balance wholly and toppled to the floor. Morrel bounded to the door, opened it, and found Valentine stretched out at the bottom of the stairs. Quick as a flash, he raised her in his arms and placed her in a chair. Valentine opened her eyes.

“Oh, what a clumsy thing I am,” said she with feverish volubility; “I don’t know my way. I forgot there were three more steps before the landing.”

“You have hurt yourself, perhaps,” said Morrel. “What can I do for you, Valentine?” Valentine looked around her; she saw the deepest terror depicted in Noirtier’s eyes. “Don’t worry, dear grandpapa,” said she, endeavoring to smile; “it is nothing — it is nothing; I was giddy, that is all.”

“Another attack of giddiness,” said Morrel, clasping his hands. “Oh, attend to it, Valentine, I entreat you.”

“But no,” said Valentine, — ”no, I tell you it is all past, and it was nothing. Now, let me tell you some news; Eugenie is to be married in a week, and in three days there is to be a grand feast, a betrothal festival. We are all invited, my father, Madame de Villefort, and I — at least, I understood it so.”

“When will it be our turn to think of these things? Oh, Valentine, you who have so much influence over your grandpapa, try to make him answer — Soon.”

“And do you,” said Valentine, “depend on me to stimulate the tardiness and arouse the memory of grandpapa?”

“Yes,” cried Morrel, “make haste. So long as you are not mine, Valentine, I shall always think I may lose you.”

“Oh,” replied Valentine with a convulsive movement, “oh, indeed, Maximilian, you are too timid for an officer, for a soldier who, they say, never knows fear. Ah, ha, ha!” she burst into a forced and melancholy laugh, her arms stiffened and twisted, her head fell back on her chair, and she remained motionless. The cry of terror which was stopped on Noirtier’s lips, seemed to start from his eyes. Morrel understood it; he knew he must call assistance. The young man rang the bell violently; the housemaid who had been in Mademoiselle Valentine’s room, and the servant who had replaced Barrois, ran in at the same moment. Valentine was so pale, so cold, so inanimate that without listening to what was said to them they were seized with the fear which pervaded that house, and they flew into the passage crying for help. Madame Danglars and Eugenie were going out at that moment; they heard the cause of the disturbance. “I told you so!” exclaimed Madame de Villefort. “Poor child!”

Chapter 94

Maximilian’s Avowal.

At the same moment M. de Villefort’s voice was heard calling from his study, “What is the matter?” Morrel looked at Noirtier who had recovered his self-command, and with a glance indicated the closet where once before under somewhat similar circumstances, he had taken refuge. He had only time to get his hat and throw himself breathless into the closet when the procureur’s footstep was heard in the passage. Villefort sprang into the room, ran to Valentine, and took her in his arms. “A physician, a physician, — M. d’Avrigny!” cried Villefort; “or rather I will go for him myself.” He flew from the apartment, and Morrel at the same moment darted out at the other door. He had been struck to the heart by a frightful recollection — the conversation he had heard between the doctor and Villefort the night of Madame de Saint-Meran’s death, recurred to him; these symptoms, to a less alarming extent, were the same which had preceded the death of Barrois. At the same time Monte Cristo’s voice seemed to resound in his ear with the words he had heard only two hours before, “Whatever you want, Morrel, come to me; I have great power.” More rapidly than thought, he darted down the Rue Matignon, and thence to the Avenue des Champs Elysees.

Meanwhile M. de Villefort arrived in a hired cabriolet at M. d’Avrigny’s door. He rang so violently that the porter was alarmed. Villefort ran upstairs without saying a word. The porter knew him, and let him pass, only calling to him, “In his study, Monsieur Procureur — in his study!” Villefort pushed, or rather forced, the door open. “Ah,” said the doctor, “is it you?”

“Yes,” said Villefort, closing the door after him, “it is I, who am come in my turn to ask you if we are quite alone. Doctor, my house is accursed!”

“What?” said the latter with apparent coolness, but with deep emotion, “have you another invalid?”

“Yes, doctor,” cried Villefort, clutching his hair, “yes!”

D’Avrigny’s look implied, “I told you it would be so.” Then he slowly uttered these words, “Who is now dying in your house? What new victim is going to accuse you of weakness before God?” A mournful sob burst from

Villefort's heart; he approached the doctor, and seizing his arm, — ”Valentine,” said he, “it is Valentine's turn!”

“Your daughter?” cried d'Avrigny with grief and surprise.

“You see you were deceived,” murmured the magistrate; “come and see her, and on her bed of agony entreat her pardon for having suspected her.”

“Each time you have applied to me,” said the doctor, “it has been too late; still I will go. But let us make haste, sir; with the enemies you have to do with there is no time to be lost.”

“Oh, this time, doctor, you shall not have to reproach me with weakness. This time I will know the assassin, and will pursue him.”

“Let us try first to save the victim before we think of revenging her,” said d'Avrigny. “Come.” The same cabriolet which had brought Villefort took them back at full speed, and at this moment Morrel rapped at Monte Cristo's door. The count was in his study and was reading with an angry look something which Bertuccio had brought in haste. Hearing the name of Morrel, who had left him only two hours before, the count raised his head, arose, and sprang to meet him. “What is the matter, Maximilian?” asked he; “you are pale, and the perspiration rolls from your forehead.” Morrel fell into a chair. “Yes,” said he, “I came quickly; I wanted to speak to you.”

“Are all your family well?” asked the count, with an affectionate benevolence, whose sincerity no one could for a moment doubt.

“Thank you, count — thank you,” said the young man, evidently embarrassed how to begin the conversation; “yes, every one in my family is well.”

“So much the better; yet you have something to tell me?” replied the count with increased anxiety.

“Yes,” said Morrel, “it is true; I have but now left a house where death has just entered, to run to you.”

“Are you then come from M. de Morcerf's?” asked Monte Cristo.

“No,” said Morrel; “is some one dead in his house?”

“The general has just blown his brains out,” replied Monte Cristo with great coolness.

“Oh, what a dreadful event!” cried Maximilian.

“Not for the countess, or for Albert,” said Monte Cristo; “a dead father or husband is better than a dishonored one, — blood washes out shame.”

“Poor countess,” said Maximilian, “I pity her very much; she is so noble a woman!”

“Pity Albert also, Maximilian; for believe me he is the worthy son of the countess. But let us return to yourself. You have hastened to me — can I have the happiness of being useful to you?”

“Yes, I need your help: that is I thought like a madman that you could lend me your assistance in a case where God alone can succor me.”

“Tell me what it is,” replied Monte Cristo.

“Oh,” said Morrel, “I know not, indeed, if I may reveal this secret to mortal ears, but fatality impels me, necessity constrains me, count” — Morrel hesitated. “Do you think I love you?” said Monte Cristo, taking the young man’s hand affectionately in his.

“Oh, you encourage me, and something tells me there,” placing his hand on his heart, “that I ought to have no secret from you.”

“You are right, Morrel; God is speaking to your heart, and your heart speaks to you. Tell me what it says.”

“Count, will you allow me to send Baptistin to inquire after some one you know?”

“I am at your service, and still more my servants.”

“Oh, I cannot live if she is not better.”

“Shall I ring for Baptistin?”

“No, I will go and speak to him myself.” Morrel went out, called Baptistin, and whispered a few words to him. The valet ran directly. “Well, have you sent?” asked Monte Cristo, seeing Morrel return.

“Yes, and now I shall be more calm.”

“You know I am waiting,” said Monte Cristo, smiling.

“Yes, and I will tell you. One evening I was in a garden; a clump of trees concealed me; no one suspected I was there. Two persons passed near me — allow me to conceal their names for the present; they were speaking in an undertone, and yet I was so interested in what they said that I did not lose a single word.”

“This is a gloomy introduction, if I may judge from your pallor and shuddering, Morrel.”

“Oh, yes, very gloomy, my friend. Some one had just died in the house to which that garden belonged. One of the persons whose conversation I overheard was the master of the house; the other, the physician. The former was confiding to the latter his grief and fear, for it was the second time within a month that death had suddenly and unexpectedly entered that house which was apparently destined to destruction by some exterminating angel, as an object of God's anger."

"Ah, indeed?" said Monte Cristo, looking earnestly at the young man, and by an imperceptible movement turning his chair, so that he remained in the shade while the light fell full on Maximilian's face. "Yes," continued Morrel, "death had entered that house twice within one month."

"And what did the doctor answer?" asked Monte Cristo.

"He replied — he replied, that the death was not a natural one, and must be attributed" —

"To what?"

"To poison."

"Indeed?" said Monte Cristo with a slight cough which in moments of extreme emotion helped him to disguise a blush, or his pallor, or the intense interest with which he listened; "indeed, Maximilian, did you hear that?"

"Yes, my dear count, I heard it; and the doctor added that if another death occurred in a similar way he must appeal to justice." Monte Cristo listened, or appeared to do so, with the greatest calmness. "Well," said Maximilian, "death came a third time, and neither the master of the house nor the doctor said a word. Death is now, perhaps, striking a fourth blow. Count, what am I bound to do, being in possession of this secret?"

"My dear friend," said Monte Cristo, "you appear to be relating an adventure which we all know by heart. I know the house where you heard it, or one very similar to it; a house with a garden, a master, a physician, and where there have been three unexpected and sudden deaths. Well, I have not intercepted your confidence, and yet I know all that as well as you, and I have no conscientious scruples. No, it does not concern me. You say an exterminating angel appears to have devoted that house to God's anger — well, who says your supposition is not reality? Do not notice things which those whose interest it is to see them pass over. If it is God's justice, instead of his anger, which is walking through that house, Maximilian, turn away your face and let his justice accomplish its purpose." Morrel shuddered. There was something mournful, solemn, and terrible in the count's manner. "Besides," continued he, in so changed a tone that no one would have supposed it was the same person speaking — "besides, who says that it will begin again?"

"It has returned, count," exclaimed Morrel; "that is why I hastened to you."

“Well, what do you wish me to do? Do you wish me, for instance, to give information to the procureur?” Monte Cristo uttered the last words with so much meaning that Morrel, starting up, cried out, “You know of whom I speak, count, do you not?”

“Perfectly well, my good friend; and I will prove it to you by putting the dots to the ‘i,’ or rather by naming the persons. You were walking one evening in M. de Villefort’s garden; from what you relate, I suppose it to have been the evening of Madame de Saint-Meran’s death. You heard M. de Villefort talking to M. d’Avrigny about the death of M. de Saint-Meran, and that no less surprising, of the countess. M. d’Avrigny said he believed they both proceeded from poison; and you, honest man, have ever since been asking your heart and sounding your conscience to know if you ought to expose or conceal this secret. Why do you torment them? ‘Conscience, what hast thou to do with me?’ as Sterne said. My dear fellow, let them sleep on, if they are asleep; let them grow pale in their drowsiness, if they are disposed to do so, and pray do you remain in peace, who have no remorse to disturb you.” Deep grief was depicted on Morrel’s features; he seized Monte Cristo’s hand. “But it is beginning again, I say!”

“Well,” said the Count, astonished at his perseverance, which he could not understand, and looking still more earnestly at Maximilian, “let it begin again, — it is like the house of the Atreidae; [*] God has condemned them, and they must submit to their punishment. They will all disappear, like the fabrics children build with cards, and which fall, one by one, under the breath of their builder, even if there are two hundred of them. Three months since it was M. de Saint-Meran; Madame de Saint-Meran two months since; the other day it was Barrois; to-day, the old Noirtier, or young Valentine.”

> * In the old Greek legend the Atreidae, or children of
> Atreus, were doomed to punishment because of the abominable
> crime of their father. The Agamemnon of Aeschylus is based
> on this legend.

“You knew it?” cried Morrel, in such a paroxysm of terror that Monte Cristo started, — he whom the falling heavens would have found unmoved; “you knew it, and said nothing?”

“And what is it to me?” replied Monte Cristo, shrugging his shoulders; “do I know those people? and must I lose the one to save the other? Faith, no, for between the culprit and the victim I have no choice.”

“But I,” cried Morrel, groaning with sorrow, “I love her!”

“You love? — whom?” cried Monte Cristo, starting to his feet, and seizing the two hands which Morrel was raising towards heaven.

“I love most fondly — I love madly — I love as a man who would give his life-blood to spare her a tear — I love Valentine de Villefort, who is being murdered at this moment! Do you understand me? I love her; and I ask God and you how I can save her?” Monte Cristo uttered a cry which those only can conceive who have heard the roar of a wounded lion. “Unhappy man,” cried he, wringing his hands in his turn; “you love Valentine, — that daughter of an accursed race!” Never had Morrel witnessed such an expression — never had so terrible an eye flashed before his face — never had the genius of terror he had so often seen, either on the battle-field or in the murderous nights of Algeria, shaken around him more dreadful fire. He drew back terrified.

As for Monte Cristo, after this ebullition he closed his eyes as if dazzled by internal light. In a moment he restrained himself so powerfully that the tempestuous heaving of his breast subsided, as turbulent and foaming waves yield to the sun’s genial influence when the cloud has passed. This silence, self-control, and struggle lasted about twenty seconds, then the count raised his pallid face. “See,” said he, “my dear friend, how God punishes the most thoughtless and unfeeling men for their indifference, by presenting dreadful scenes to their view. I, who was looking on, an eager and curious spectator, — I, who was watching the working of this mournful tragedy, — I, who like a wicked angel was laughing at the evil men committed protected by secrecy (a secret is easily kept by the rich and powerful), I am in my turn bitten by the serpent whose tortuous course I was watching, and bitten to the heart!”

Morrel groaned. “Come, come,” continued the count, “complaints are unavailing, be a man, be strong, be full of hope, for I am here and will watch over you.” Morrel shook his head sorrowfully. “I tell you to hope. Do you understand me?” cried Monte Cristo. “Remember that I never uttered a falsehood and am never deceived. It is twelve o’clock, Maximilian; thank heaven that you came at noon rather than in the evening, or to-morrow morning. Listen, Morrel — it is noon; if Valentine is not now dead, she will not die.”

“How so?” cried Morrel, “when I left her dying?” Monte Cristo pressed his hands to his forehead. What was passing in that brain, so loaded with dreadful secrets? What does the angel of light or the angel of darkness say to that mind, at once implacable and generous? God only knows.

Monte Cristo raised his head once more, and this time he was calm as a child awaking from its sleep. “Maximilian,” said he, “return home. I command you not to stir — attempt nothing, not to let your countenance betray a thought, and I will send you tidings. Go.”

“Oh, count, you overwhelm me with that coolness. Have you, then, power against death? Are you superhuman? Are you an angel?” And the young man, who had never shrunk from danger, shrank before Monte Cristo with indescribable terror. But Monte Cristo looked at him with so melancholy and sweet a smile, that Maximilian felt the tears filling his eyes. “I can do much for you, my friend,” replied the count. “Go; I must be alone.” Morrel, subdued by the extraordinary ascendancy Monte Cristo exercised over everything around him, did not endeavor to resist it. He pressed the count’s hand and left. He stopped one moment at the door for Baptistin, whom he saw in the Rue Matignon, and who was running.

Meanwhile, Villefort and d’Avrigny had made all possible haste, Valentine had not revived from her fainting fit on their arrival, and the doctor examined the invalid with all the care the circumstances demanded, and with an interest which the knowledge of the secret intensified twofold. Villefort, closely watching his countenance and his lips, awaited the result of the examination. Noirtier, paler than even the young girl, more eager than Villefort for the decision, was watching also intently and affectionately. At last d’Avrigny slowly uttered these words: — ”she is still alive!”

“Still?” cried Villefort; “oh, doctor, what a dreadful word is that.”

“Yes,” said the physician, “I repeat it; she is still alive, and I am astonished at it.”

“But is she safe?” asked the father.

“Yes, since she lives.” At that moment d’Avrigny’s glance met Noirtier’s eye. It glistened with such extraordinary joy, so rich and full of thought, that the physician was struck. He placed the young girl again on the chair, — her lips were scarcely discernible, they were so pale and white, as well as her whole face, — and remained motionless, looking at Noirtier, who appeared to anticipate and commend all he did. “Sir,” said d’Avrigny to Villefort, “call Mademoiselle Valentine’s maid, if you please.” Villefort went himself to find her; and d’Avrigny approached Noirtier. “Have you something to tell me?” asked he. The old man winked his eyes expressively, which we may remember was his only way of expressing his approval.

“Privately?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I will remain with you.” At this moment Villefort returned, followed by the lady’s maid; and after her came Madame de Villefort.

“What is the matter, then, with this dear child? she has just left me, and she complained of being indisposed, but I did not think seriously of it.” The young woman with tears in her eyes and every mark of affection of a true mother, approached Valentine and took her hand. D’Avrigny continued to look at Noirtier; he saw the eyes of the old man dilate and become round, his cheeks turn pale and tremble; the perspiration stood in drops upon his forehead. “Ah,” said he, involuntarily following Noirtier’s eyes, which were fixed on Madame de Villefort, who repeated, — ”This poor child would be better in bed. Come, Fanny, we will put her to bed.” M. d’Avrigny, who saw that would be a means of his remaining alone with Noirtier, expressed his opinion that it was the best thing that could be done; but he forbade that anything should be given to her except what he ordered.

They carried Valentine away; she had revived, but could scarcely move or speak, so shaken was her frame by the attack. She had, however, just power to give one parting look to her grandfather, who in losing her seemed to be resigning his very soul. D’Avrigny followed the invalid, wrote a prescription, ordered Villefort to take a cabriolet, go in person to a chemist’s to get the prescribed medicine, bring it himself, and wait for him in his daughter’s room. Then, having renewed his injunction not to give Valentine anything, he went down again to Noirtier, shut the doors carefully, and after convincing himself that no one was listening, — ”Do you,” said he, “know anything of this young lady’s illness?”

“Yes,” said the old man.

“We have no time to lose; I will question, and do you answer me.” Noirtier made a sign that he was ready to answer. “Did you anticipate the accident which has happened to your granddaughter?”

“Yes.” D’Avrigny reflected a moment; then approaching Noirtier, — ”Pardon what I am going to say,” added he, “but no indication should be neglected in this terrible situation. Did you see poor Barrois die?” Noirtier raised his eyes to heaven. “Do you know of what he died!” asked d’Avrigny, placing his hand on Noirtier’s shoulder.

"Yes," replied the old man.

"Do you think he died a natural death?" A sort of smile was discernible on the motionless lips of Noirtier.

"Then you have thought that Barrois was poisoned?"

"Yes."

"Do you think the poison he fell a victim to was intended for him?"

"No."

"Do you think the same hand which unintentionally struck Barrois has now attacked Valentine?"

"Yes."

"Then will she die too?" asked d'Avrigny, fixing his penetrating gaze on Noirtier. He watched the effect of this question on the old man. "No," replied he with an air of triumph which would have puzzled the most clever diviner. "Then you hope?" said d'Avrigny, with surprise.

"Yes."

"What do you hope?" The old man made him understand with his eyes that he could not answer. "Ah, yes, it is true," murmured d'Avrigny. Then, turning to Noirtier, — "Do you hope the assassin will be tried?"

"No."

"Then you hope the poison will take no effect on Valentine?"

"Yes."

"It is no news to you," added d'Avrigny, "to tell you that an attempt has been made to poison her?" The old man made a sign that he entertained no doubt upon the subject. "Then how do you hope Valentine will escape?" Noirtier kept his eyes steadfastly fixed on the same spot. D'Avrigny followed the direction and saw that they were fixed on a bottle containing the mixture which he took every morning. "Ah, indeed?" said d'Avrigny, struck with a sudden thought, "has it occurred to you" — Noirtier did not let him finish. "Yes," said he. "To prepare her system to resist poison?"

"Yes."

"By accustoming her by degrees" —

"Yes, yes, yes," said Noirtier, delighted to be understood.

"Of course. I had told you that there was brucine in the mixture I give you."

"Yes."

"And by accustoming her to that poison, you have endeavored to neutralize the effect of a similar poison?" Noirtier's joy continued. "And you have succeeded,” exclaimed d’Avrigny. “Without that precaution Valentine would have died before assistance could have been procured. The dose has been excessive, but she has only been shaken by it; and this time, at any rate, Valentine will not die.” A superhuman joy expanded the old man’s eyes, which were raised towards heaven with an expression of infinite gratitude. At this moment Villefort returned. “Here, doctor,” said he, “is what you sent me for.”

“Was this prepared in your presence?”

“Yes,” replied the procureur.

“Have you not let it go out of your hands?”

“No.” D’Avrigny took the bottle, poured some drops of the mixture it contained in the hollow of his hand, and swallowed them. “Well,” said he, “let us go to Valentine; I will give instructions to every one, and you, M. de Villefort, will yourself see that no one deviates from them.”

At the moment when d’Avrigny was returning to Valentine’s room, accompanied by Villefort, an Italian priest, of serious demeanor and calm and firm tone, hired for his use the house adjoining the hotel of M. de Villefort. No one knew how the three former tenants of that house left it. About two hours afterwards its foundation was reported to be unsafe; but the report did not prevent the new occupant establishing himself there with his modest furniture the same day at five o’clock. The lease was drawn up for three, six, or nine years by the new tenant, who, according to the rule of the proprietor, paid six months in advance. This new tenant, who, as we have said, was an Italian, was called Il Signor Giacomo Busoni. Workmen were immediately called in, and that same night the passengers at the end of the faubourg saw with surprise that carpenters and masons were occupied in repairing the lower part of the tottering house.

Chapter 95

Father and Daughter.

We saw in a preceding chapter how Madame Danglars went formally to announce to Madame de Villefort the approaching marriage of Eugenie Danglars and M. Andrea Cavalcanti. This announcement, which implied or appeared to imply, the approval of all the persons concerned in this momentous affair, had been preceded by a scene to which our readers must be admitted. We beg them to take one step backward, and to transport themselves, the morning of that day of great catastrophes, into the showy, gilded salon we have before shown them, and which was the pride of its owner, Baron Danglars. In this room, at about ten o'clock in the morning, the banker himself had been walking to and fro for some minutes thoughtfully and in evident uneasiness, watching both doors, and listening to every sound. When his patience was exhausted, he called his valet. "Etienne," said he, "see why Mademoiselle Eugenie has asked me to meet her in the drawing-room, and why she makes me wait so long."

Having given this vent to his ill-humor, the baron became more calm; Mademoiselle Danglars had that morning requested an interview with her father, and had fixed on the gilded drawing-room as the spot. The singularity of this step, and above all its formality, had not a little surprised the banker, who had immediately obeyed his daughter by repairing first to the drawing-room. Etienne soon returned from his errand. "Mademoiselle's lady's maid says, sir, that mademoiselle is finishing her toilette, and will be here shortly."

Danglars nodded, to signify that he was satisfied. To the world and to his servants Danglars assumed the character of the good-natured man and the indulgent father. This was one of his parts in the popular comedy he was performing, — a make-up he had adopted and which suited him about as well as the masks worn on the classic stage by paternal actors, who seen from one side, were the image of geniality, and from the other showed lips drawn down in chronic ill-temper. Let us hasten to say that in private the genial side descended to the level of the other, so that generally the indulgent man disappeared to give place to the brutal husband and domineering father. “Why the devil does that foolish girl, who pretends to wish to speak to me, not come into my study? and why on earth does she want to speak to me at all?”

He was turning this thought over in his brain for the twentieth time, when the door opened and Eugenie appeared, attired in a figured black satin dress, her hair dressed and gloves on, as if she were going to the Italian Opera. “Well, Eugenie, what is it you want with me? and why in this solemn drawing-room when the study is so comfortable?”

“I quite understand why you ask, sir,” said Eugenie, making a sign that her father might be seated, “and in fact your two questions suggest fully the theme of our conversation. I will answer them both, and contrary to the usual method, the last first, because it is the least difficult. I have chosen the drawing-room, sir, as our place of meeting, in order to avoid the disagreeable impressions and influences of a banker’s study. Those gilded cashbooks, drawers locked like gates of fortresses, heaps of bank-bills, come from I know not where, and the quantities of letters from England, Holland, Spain, India, China, and Peru, have generally a strange influence on a father’s mind, and make him forget that there is in the world an interest greater and more sacred than the good opinion of his correspondents. I have, therefore, chosen this drawing-room, where you see, smiling and happy in their magnificent frames, your portrait, mine, my mother’s, and all sorts of rural landscapes and touching pastorals. I rely much on external impressions; perhaps, with regard to you, they are immaterial, but I should be no artist if I had not some fancies.”

“Very well,” replied M. Danglars, who had listened to all this preamble with imperturbable coolness, but without understanding a word, since like every man burdened with thoughts of the past, he was occupied with seeking the thread of his own ideas in those of the speaker.

“There is, then, the second point cleared up, or nearly so,” said Eugenie, without the least confusion, and with that masculine pointedness which distinguished her gesture and her language; “and you appear satisfied with the explanation. Now, let us return to the first. You ask me why I have requested this interview; I will tell you in two words, sir; I will not marry count Andrea Cavalcanti.”

Danglars leaped from his chair and raised his eyes and arms towards heaven.

“Yes, indeed, sir,” continued Eugenie, still quite calm; “you are astonished, I see; for since this little affair began, I have not manifested the slightest opposition, and yet I am always sure, when the opportunity arrives, to oppose a determined and absolute will to people who have not consulted me, and things which displease me. However, this time, my tranquillity, or passiveness as philosophers say, proceeded from another source; it proceeded from a wish, like a submissive and devoted daughter” (a slight smile was observable on the purple lips of the young girl), “to practice obedience.”

“Well?” asked Danglars.

“Well, sir,” replied Eugenie, “I have tried to the very last and now that the moment has come, I feel in spite of all my efforts that it is impossible.”

“But,” said Danglars, whose weak mind was at first quite overwhelmed with the weight of this pitiless logic, marking evident premeditation and force of will, “what is your reason for this refusal, Eugenie? what reason do you assign?”

“My reason?” replied the young girl. “Well, it is not that the man is more ugly, more foolish, or more disagreeable than any other; no, M. Andrea Cavalcanti may appear to those who look at men’s faces and figures as a very good specimen of his kind. It is not, either, that my heart is less touched by him than any other; that would be a schoolgirl’s reason, which I consider quite beneath me. I actually love no one, sir; you know it, do you not? I do not then see why, without real necessity, I should encumber my life with a perpetual companion. Has not some sage said, ‘Nothing too much’? and another, ‘I carry all my effects with me’? I have been taught these two aphorisms in Latin and in Greek; one is, I believe, from Phaedrus, and the other from Bias. Well, my dear father, in the shipwreck of life — for life is an eternal shipwreck of our hopes — I cast into the sea my useless encumbrance, that is all, and I remain with my own will, disposed to live perfectly alone, and consequently perfectly free.”

“Unhappy girl, unhappy girl!” murmured Danglars, turning pale, for he knew from long experience the solidity of the obstacle he had so suddenly encountered.

“Unhappy girl,” replied Eugenie, “unhappy girl, do you say, sir? No, indeed; the exclamation appears quite theatrical and affected. Happy, on the contrary, for what am I in want of! The world calls me beautiful. It is something to be well received. I like a favorable reception; it expands the countenance, and those around me do not then appear so ugly. I possess a share of wit, and a certain relative sensibility, which enables me to draw from life in general, for the support of mine, all I meet with that is good, like the monkey who cracks the nut to get at its contents. I am rich, for you have one of the first fortunes in France. I am your only daughter, and you are not so exacting as the fathers of the Porte Saint-Martin and Gaiete, who disinherit their daughters for not giving them grandchildren. Besides, the provident law has deprived you of the power to disinherit me, at least entirely, as it has also of the power to compel me to marry Monsieur This or Monsieur That. And so — being, beautiful, witty, somewhat talented, as the comic operas say, and rich — and that is happiness, sir — why do you call me unhappy?"

Danglars, seeing his daughter smiling, and proud even to insolence, could not entirely repress his brutal feelings, but they betrayed themselves only by an exclamation. Under the fixed and inquiring gaze levelled at him from under those beautiful black eyebrows, he prudently turned away, and calmed himself immediately, daunted by the power of a resolute mind. "Truly, my daughter," replied he with a smile, "you are all you boast of being, excepting one thing; I will not too hastily tell you which, but would rather leave you to guess it." Eugenie looked at Danglars, much surprised that one flower of her crown of pride, with which she had so superbly decked herself, should be disputed. "My daughter," continued the banker, "you have perfectly explained to me the sentiments which influence a girl like you, who is determined she will not marry; now it remains for me to tell you the motives of a father like me, who has decided that his daughter shall marry." Eugenie bowed, not as a submissive daughter, but as an adversary prepared for a discussion.

"My daughter," continued Danglars, "when a father asks his daughter to choose a husband, he has always some reason for wishing her to marry. Some are affected with the mania of which you spoke just now, that of living again in their grandchildren. This is not my weakness, I tell you at once; family joys have no charm for me. I may acknowledge this to a daughter whom I know to be philosophical enough to understand my indifference, and not to impute it to me as a crime."

"This is not to the purpose," said Eugenie; "let us speak candidly, sir; I admire candor."

"Oh," said Danglars, "I can, when circumstances render it desirable, adopt your system, although it may not be my general practice. I will therefore proceed. I have proposed to you to marry, not for your sake, for indeed I did not think of you in the least at the moment (you admire candor, and will now be satisfied, I hope); but because it suited me to marry you as soon as possible, on account of certain commercial speculations I am desirous of entering into." Eugenie became uneasy.

"It is just as I tell you, I assure you, and you must not be angry with me, for you have sought this disclosure. I do not willingly enter into arithmetical explanations with an artist like you, who fears to enter my study lest she should imbibe disagreeable or anti-poetic impressions and sensations. But in that same banker's study, where you very willingly presented yourself yesterday to ask for the thousand francs I give you monthly for pocket-money, you must know, my dear young lady, that many things may be learned, useful even to a girl who will not marry. There one may learn, for instance, what, out of regard to your nervous susceptibility, I will inform you of in the drawing-room, namely, that the credit of a banker is his physical and moral life; that credit sustains him as breath animates the body; and M. de Monte Cristo once gave me a lecture on that subject, which I have never forgotten. There we may learn that as credit sinks, the body becomes a corpse, and this is what must happen very soon to the banker who is proud to own so good a logician as you for his daughter." But Eugenie, instead of stooping, drew herself up under the blow. "Ruined?" said she.

"Exactly, my daughter; that is precisely what I mean," said Danglars, almost digging his nails into his breast, while he preserved on his harsh features the smile of the heartless though clever man; "ruined — yes, that is it."

"Ah!" said Eugenie.

"Yes, ruined! Now it is revealed, this secret so full of horror, as the tragic poet says. Now, my daughter, learn from my lips how you may alleviate this misfortune, so far as it will affect you."

"Oh," cried Eugenie, "you are a bad physiognomist, if you imagine I deplore on my own account the catastrophe of which you warn me. I ruined? and what will that signify to me? Have I not my talent left? Can I not, like Pasta, Malibran, Grisi, acquire for myself what you would never have given me, whatever might have been your fortune, a hundred or a hundred and fifty thousand livres per annum, for which I shall be indebted to no one but myself; and which, instead of being given as you gave me those poor twelve thousand francs, with sour looks and reproaches for my prodigality, will be accompanied with acclamations, with bravos, and with flowers? And if I do not possess that talent, which your smiles prove to me you doubt, should I not still have that ardent love of independence, which will be a substitute for wealth, and which in my mind supersedes even the instinct of self-preservation? No, I grieve not on my own account, I shall always find a resource; my books, my pencils, my piano, all the things which cost but little, and which I shall be able to procure, will remain my own.

"Do you think that I sorrow for Madame Danglars? Undeceive yourself again; either I am greatly mistaken, or she has provided against the catastrophe which threatens you, and, which will pass over without affecting her. She has taken care for herself, — at least I hope so, — for her attention has not been diverted from her projects by watching over me. She has fostered my independence by professedly indulging my love for liberty. Oh, no, sir; from my childhood I have seen too much, and understood too much, of what has passed around me, for misfortune to have an undue power over me. From my earliest recollections, I have been beloved by no one — so much the worse; that has naturally led me to love no one — so much the better — now you have my profession of faith."

"Then," said Danglars, pale with anger, which was not at all due to offended paternal love, — "then, mademoiselle, you persist in your determination to accelerate my ruin?"

"Your ruin? I accelerate your ruin? What do you mean? I do not understand you."

"So much the better, I have a ray of hope left; listen."

"I am all attention," said Eugenie, looking so earnestly at her father that it was an effort for the latter to endure her unrelenting gaze.

"M. Cavalcanti," continued Danglars, "is about to marry you, and will place in my hands his fortune, amounting to three million livres."

"That is admirable!" said Eugenie with sovereign contempt, smoothing her gloves out one upon the other.

"You think I shall deprive you of those three millions," said Danglars; "but do not fear it. They are destined to produce at least ten. I and a brother banker have obtained a grant of a railway, the only industrial enterprise which in these days promises to make good the fabulous prospects that Law once held out to the eternally deluded Parisians, in the fantastic Mississippi scheme. As I look at it, a millionth part of a railway is worth fully as much as an acre of waste land on the banks of the Ohio. We make in our case a deposit, on a mortgage, which is an advance, as you see, since we gain at least ten, fifteen, twenty, or a hundred livres' worth of iron in exchange for our money. Well, within a week I am to deposit four millions for my share; the four millions, I promise you, will produce ten or twelve."

"But during my visit to you the day before yesterday, sir, which you appear to recollect so well," replied Eugenie, "I saw you arranging a deposit — is not that the term? — of five millions and a half; you even pointed it out to me in two drafts on the treasury, and you were astonished that so valuable a paper did not dazzle my eyes like lightning."

"Yes, but those five millions and a half are not mine, and are only a proof of the great confidence placed in me; my title of popular banker has gained me the confidence of charitable institutions, and the five millions and a half belong to them; at any other time I should not have hesitated to make use of them, but the great losses I have recently sustained are well known, and, as I told you, my credit is rather shaken. That deposit may be at any moment withdrawn, and if I had employed it for another purpose, I should bring on me a disgraceful bankruptcy. I do not despise bankruptcies, believe me, but they must be those which enrich, not those which ruin. Now, if you marry M. Cavalcanti, and I get the three millions, or even if it is thought I am going to get them, my credit will be restored, and my fortune, which for the last month or two has been swallowed up in gulfs which have been opened in my path by an inconceivable fatality, will revive. Do you understand me?"

"Perfectly; you pledge me for three millions, do you not?"

"The greater the amount, the more flattering it is to you; it gives you an idea of your value."

"Thank you. One word more, sir; do you promise me to make what use you can of the report of the fortune M. Cavalcanti will bring without touching the money? This is no act of selfishness, but of delicacy. I am willing to help rebuild your fortune, but I will not be an accomplice in the ruin of others."

"But since I tell you," cried Danglars, "that with these three million" —

"Do you expect to recover your position, sir, without touching those three million?"

"I hope so, if the marriage should take place and confirm my credit."

"Shall you be able to pay M. Cavalcanti the five hundred thousand francs you promise for my dowry?"

"He shall receive them on returning from the mayor's." [*]

* The performance of the civil marriage.

"Very well!"

"What next? what more do you want?"

"I wish to know if, in demanding my signature, you leave me entirely free in my person?"

"Absolutely."

"Then, as I said before, sir, — very well; I am ready to marry M. Cavalcanti."

"But what are you up to?"

"Ah, that is my affair. What advantage should I have over you, if knowing your secret I were to tell you mine?" Danglars bit his lips. "Then," said he, "you are ready to pay the official visits, which are absolutely indispensable?"

"Yes," replied Eugenie.

"And to sign the contract in three days?"

"Yes."

"Then, in my turn, I also say, very well!" Danglars pressed his daughter's hand in his. But, extraordinary to relate, the father did not say, "Thank you, my child," nor did the daughter smile at her father. "Is the conference ended?" asked Eugenie, rising. Danglars motioned that he had nothing more to say. Five minutes afterwards the piano resounded to the touch of Mademoiselle d'Armilly's fingers, and Mademoiselle Danglars was singing Brabantio's malediction on Desdemona. At the end of the piece Etienne entered, and announced to Eugenie that the horses were in the carriage, and that the baroness was waiting for her to pay her visits. We have seen them at Villefort's; they proceeded then on their course.

Chapter 96

The Contract.

Three days after the scene we have just described, namely towards five o'clock in the afternoon of the day fixed for the signature of the contract between Mademoiselle Eugenie Danglars and Andrea Cavalcanti, — whom the banker persisted in calling prince, — a fresh breeze was stirring the leaves in the little garden in front of the Count of Monte Cristo's house, and the count was preparing to go out. While his horses were impatiently pawing the ground, — held in by the coachman, who had been seated a quarter of an hour on his box, — the elegant phaeton with which we are familiar rapidly turned the angle of the entrance-gate, and cast out on the doorsteps M. Andrea Cavalcanti, as decked up and gay as if he were going to marry a princess. He inquired after the count with his usual familiarity, and ascending lightly to the second story met him at the top of the stairs. The count stopped on seeing the young man. As for Andrea, he was launched, and when he was once launched nothing stopped him. "Ah, good morning, my dear count," said he. "Ah, M. Andrea," said the latter, with his half-jesting tone; "how do you do."

"Charmingly, as you see. I am come to talk to you about a thousand things; but, first tell me, were you going out or just returned?"

"I was going out, sir."

"Then, in order not to hinder you, I will get up with you if you please in your carriage, and Tom shall follow with my phaeton in tow."

"No," said the count, with an imperceptible smile of contempt, for he had no wish to be seen in the young man's society, — "no; I prefer listening to you here, my dear M. Andrea; we can chat better in-doors, and there is no coachman to overhear our conversation." The count returned to a small drawing-room on the first floor, sat down, and crossing his legs motioned to the young man to take a seat also. Andrea assumed his gayest manner. "You know, my dear count," said he, "the ceremony is to take place this evening. At nine o'clock the contract is to be signed at my father-in-law's."

"Ah, indeed?" said Monte Cristo.

“What; is it news to you? Has not M. Danglars informed you of the ceremony?”

“Oh, yes,” said the count; “I received a letter from him yesterday, but I do not think the hour was mentioned.”

“Possibly my father-in-law trusted to its general notoriety.”

“Well,” said Monte Cristo, “you are fortunate, M. Cavalcanti; it is a most suitable alliance you are contracting, and Mademoiselle Danglars is a handsome girl.”

“Yes, indeed she is,” replied Cavalcanti, in a very modest tone.

“Above all, she is very rich, — at least, I believe so,” said Monte Cristo.

“Very rich, do you think?” replied the young man.

“Doubtless; it is said M. Danglars conceals at least half of his fortune.”

“And he acknowledges fifteen or twenty millions,” said Andrea with a look sparkling with joy.

“Without reckoning,” added Monte Cristo, “that he is on the eve of entering into a sort of speculation already in vogue in the United States and in England, but quite novel in France.”

“Yes, yes, I know what you mean, — the railway, of which he has obtained the grant, is it not?”

“Precisely; it is generally believed he will gain ten millions by that affair.”

“Ten millions! Do you think so? It is magnificent!” said Cavalcanti, who was quite confounded at the metallic sound of these golden words. “Without reckoning,” replied Monte Cristo, “that all his fortune will come to you, and justly too, since Mademoiselle Danglars is an only daughter. Besides, your own fortune, as your father assured me, is almost equal to that of your betrothed. But enough of money matters. Do you know, M. Andrea, I think you have managed this affair rather skilfully?”

“Not badly, by any means,” said the young man; “I was born for a diplomatist.”

“Well, you must become a diplomatist; diplomacy, you know, is something that is not to be acquired; it is instinctive. Have you lost your heart?”

“Indeed, I fear it,” replied Andrea, in the tone in which he had heard Dorante or Valere reply to Alceste [*] at the Theatre Francais.

“Is your love returned?”

[*] In Moliere’s comedy, Le Misanthrope.

“I suppose so,” said Andrea with a triumphant smile, “since I am accepted. But I must not forget one grand point.”

“Which?”

“That I have been singularly assisted.”

“Nonsense.”

“I have, indeed.”

“By circumstances?”

“No; by you.”

“By me? Not at all, prince,” said Monte Cristo laying a marked stress on the title, “what have I done for you? Are not your name, your social position, and your merit sufficient?”

“No,” said Andrea, — ”no; it is useless for you to say so, count. I maintain that the position of a man like you has done more than my name, my social position, and my merit.”

“You are completely mistaken, sir,” said Monte Cristo coldly, who felt the perfidious manoeuvre of the young man, and understood the bearing of his words; “you only acquired my protection after the influence and fortune of your father had been ascertained; for, after all, who procured for me, who had never seen either you or your illustrious father, the pleasure of your acquaintance? — two of my good friends, Lord Wilmore and the Abbe Busoni. What encouraged me not to become your surety, but to patronize you? — your father’s name, so well known in Italy and so highly honored. Personally, I do not know you.” This calm tone and perfect ease made Andrea feel that he was, for the moment, restrained by a more muscular hand than his own, and that the restraint could not be easily broken through.

“Oh, then my father has really a very large fortune, count?”

“It appears so, sir,” replied Monte Cristo.

“Do you know if the marriage settlement he promised me has come?”

“I have been advised of it.”

“But the three millions?”

“The three millions are probably on the road.”

“Then I shall really have them?”

“Oh, well,” said the count, “I do not think you have yet known the want of money.” Andrea was so surprised that he pondered the matter for a moment. Then, arousing from his revery, — ”Now, sir, I have one request to make to you, which you will understand, even if it should be disagreeable to you.”

“Proceed,” said Monte Cristo.

“I have formed an acquaintance, thanks to my good fortune, with many noted persons, and have, at least for the moment, a crowd of friends. But marrying, as I am about to do, before all Paris, I ought to be supported by an illustrious name, and in the absence of the paternal hand some powerful one ought to lead me to the altar; now, my father is not coming to Paris, is he? He is old, covered with wounds, and suffers dreadfully, he says, in travelling.”

“Indeed?”

“Well, I am come to ask a favor of you.”

“Of me?”

“Yes, of you.”

“And pray what may it be?”

“Well, to take his part.”

“Ah, my dear sir! What? — after the varied relations I have had the happiness to sustain towards you, can it be that you know me so little as to ask such a thing? Ask me to lend you half a million and, although such a loan is somewhat rare, on my honor, you would annoy me less! Know, then, what I thought I had already told you, that in participation in this world’s affairs, more especially in their moral aspects, the Count of Monte Cristo has never ceased to entertain the scruples and even the superstitions of the East. I, who have a seraglio at Cairo, one at Smyrna, and one at Constantinople, preside at a wedding? — never!”

“Then you refuse me?”

“Decidedly; and were you my son or my brother I would refuse you in the same way.”

“But what must be done?” said Andrea, disappointed.

“You said just now that you had a hundred friends.”

“Very true, but you introduced me at M. Danglars’.”

“Not at all! Let us recall the exact facts. You met him at a dinner party at my house, and you introduced yourself at his house; that is a totally different affair.”

“Yes, but, by my marriage, you have forwarded that.”

“I? — not in the least, I beg you to believe. Recollect what I told you when you asked me to propose you. ‘Oh, I never make matches, my dear prince, it is my settled principle.’“ Andrea bit his lips.

“But, at least, you will be there?”

“Will all Paris be there?”

“Oh, certainly.”

“Well, like all Paris, I shall be there too,” said the count.

“And will you sign the contract?”

“I see no objection to that; my scruples do not go thus far.”

“Well, since you will grant me no more, I must be content with what you give me. But one word more, count.”

“What is it?”

“Advice.”

“Be careful; advice is worse than a service.”

“Oh, you can give me this without compromising yourself.”

“Tell me what it is.”

“Is my wife’s fortune five hundred thousand livres?”

“That is the sum M. Danglars himself announced.”

“Must I receive it, or leave it in the hands of the notary?”

“This is the way such affairs are generally arranged when it is wished to do them stylishly: Your two solicitors appoint a meeting, when the contract is signed, for the next or the following day; then they exchange the two portions, for which they each give a receipt; then, when the marriage is celebrated, they place the amount at your disposal as the chief member of the alliance.”

“Because,” said Andrea, with a certain ill-concealed uneasiness, “I thought I heard my father-in-law say that he intended embarking our property in that famous railway affair of which you spoke just now.”

“Well,” replied Monte Cristo, “it will be the way, everybody says, of trebling your fortune in twelve months. Baron Danglars is a good father, and knows how to calculate.”

“In that case,” said Andrea, “everything is all right, excepting your refusal, which quite grieves me.”

“You must attribute it only to natural scruples under similar circumstances.”

“Well,” said Andrea, “let it be as you wish. This evening, then, at nine o’clock.”

“Adieu till then.” Notwithstanding a slight resistance on the part of Monte Cristo, whose lips turned pale, but who preserved his ceremonious smile, Andrea seized the count’s hand, pressed it, jumped into his phaeton, and disappeared.

The four or five remaining hours before nine o'clock arrived, Andrea employed in riding, paying visits, — designed to induce those of whom he had spoken to appear at the banker's in their gayest equipages, — dazzling them by promises of shares in schemes which have since turned every brain, and in which Danglars was just taking the initiative. In fact, at half-past eight in the evening the grand salon, the gallery adjoining, and the three other drawing-rooms on the same floor, were filled with a perfumed crowd, who sympathized but little in the event, but who all participated in that love of being present wherever there is anything fresh to be seen. An Academician would say that the entertainments of the fashionable world are collections of flowers which attract inconstant butterflies, famished bees, and buzzing drones.

No one could deny that the rooms were splendidly illuminated; the light streamed forth on the gilt mouldings and the silk hangings; and all the bad taste of decorations, which had only their richness to boast of, shone in its splendor. Mademoiselle Eugenie was dressed with elegant simplicity in a figured white silk dress, and a white rose half concealed in her jet black hair was her only ornament, unaccompanied by a single jewel. Her eyes, however, betrayed that perfect confidence which contradicted the girlish simplicity of this modest attire. Madame Danglars was chatting at a short distance with Debray, Beauchamp, and Chateau-Renaud.

Debray was admitted to the house for this grand ceremony, but on the same plane with every one else, and without any particular privilege. M. Danglars, surrounded by deputies and men connected with the revenue, was explaining a new theory of taxation which he intended to adopt when the course of events had compelled the government to call him into the ministry. Andrea, on whose arm hung one of the most consummate dandies of the opera, was explaining to him rather cleverly, since he was obliged to be bold to appear at ease, his future projects, and the new luxuries he meant to introduce to Parisian fashions with his hundred and seventy-five thousand livres per annum.

The crowd moved to and fro in the rooms like an ebb and flow of turquoises, rubies, emeralds, opals, and diamonds. As usual, the oldest women were the most decorated, and the ugliest the most conspicuous. If there was a beautiful lily, or a sweet rose, you had to search for it, concealed in some corner behind a mother with a turban, or an aunt with a bird of paradise.

At each moment, in the midst of the crowd, the buzzing, and the laughter, the door-keeper’s voice was heard announcing some name well known in the financial department, respected in the army, or illustrious in the literary world, and which was acknowledged by a slight movement in the different groups. But for one whose privilege it was to agitate that ocean of human waves, how many were received with a look of indifference or a sneer of disdain! At the moment when the hand of the massive time-piece, representing Endymion asleep, pointed to nine on its golden face, and the hammer, the faithful type of mechanical thought, struck nine times, the name of the Count of Monte Cristo resounded in its turn, and as if by an electric shock all the assembly turned towards the door.

The count was dressed in black and with his habitual simplicity; his white waistcoat displayed his expansive noble chest and his black stock was singularly noticeable because of its contrast with the deadly paleness of his face. His only jewellery was a chain, so fine that the slender gold thread was scarcely perceptible on his white waistcoat. A circle was immediately formed around the door. The count perceived at one glance Madame Danglars at one end of the drawing-room, M. Danglars at the other, and Eugenie in front of him. He first advanced towards the baroness, who was chatting with Madame de Villefort, who had come alone, Valentine being still an invalid; and without turning aside, so clear was the road left for him, he passed from the baroness to Eugenie, whom he complimented in such rapid and measured terms, that the proud artist was quite struck. Near her was Mademoiselle Louise d’Armilly, who thanked the count for the letters of introduction he had so kindly given her for Italy, which she intended immediately to make use of. On leaving these ladies he found himself with Danglars, who had advanced to meet him.

Having accomplished these three social duties, Monte Cristo stopped, looking around him with that expression peculiar to a certain class, which seems to say, “I have done my duty, now let others do theirs.” Andrea, who was in an adjoining room, had shared in the sensation caused by the arrival of Monte Cristo, and now came forward to pay his respects to the count. He found him completely surrounded; all were eager to speak to him, as is always the case with those whose words are few and weighty. The solicitors arrived at this moment and arranged their scrawled papers on the velvet cloth embroidered with gold which covered the table prepared for the signature; it was a gilt table supported on lions’ claws. One of the notaries sat down, the other remained standing. They were about to proceed to the reading of the contract, which half Paris assembled was to sign. All took their places, or rather the ladies formed a circle, while the gentlemen (more indifferent to the restraints of what Boileau calls the “energetic style”) commented on the feverish agitation of Andrea, on M. Danglars’ riveted attention, Eugenie’s composure, and the light and sprightly manner in which the baroness treated this important affair.

The contract was read during a profound silence. But as soon as it was finished, the buzz was redoubled through all the drawing-rooms; the brilliant sums, the rolling millions which were to be at the command of the two young people, and which crowned the display of the wedding presents and the young lady’s diamonds, which had been made in a room entirely appropriated for that purpose, had exercised to the full their delusions over the envious assembly. Mademoiselle Danglars’ charms were heightened in the opinion of the young men, and for the moment seemed to outvie the sun in splendor. As for the ladies, it is needless to say that while they coveted the millions, they thought they did not need them for themselves, as they were beautiful enough without them. Andrea, surrounded by his friends, complimented, flattered, beginning to believe in the reality of his dream, was almost bewildered. The notary solemnly took the pen, flourished it above his head, and said, “Gentlemen, we are about to sign the contract.”

The baron was to sign first, then the representative of M. Cavalcanti, senior, then the baroness, afterwards the “future couple,” as they are styled in the abominable phraseology of legal documents. The baron took the pen and signed, then the representative. The baroness approached, leaning on Madame de Villefort’s arm. “My dear,” said she, as she took the pen, “is it not vexatious? An unexpected incident, in the affair of murder and theft at the Count of Monte Cristo’s, in which he nearly fell a victim, deprives us of the pleasure of seeing M. de Villefort.”

“Indeed?” said M. Danglars, in the same tone in which he would have said, “Oh, well, what do I care?”

“As a matter of fact,” said Monte Cristo, approaching, “I am much afraid that I am the involuntary cause of his absence.”

“What, you, count?” said Madame Danglars, signing; “if you are, take care, for I shall never forgive you.” Andrea pricked up his ears.

“But it is not my fault, as I shall endeavor to prove.” Every one listened eagerly; Monte Cristo who so rarely opened his lips, was about to speak.

"You remember," said the count, during the most profound silence, "that the unhappy wretch who came to rob me died at my house; the supposition is that he was stabbed by his accomplice, on attempting to leave it."

"Yes," said Danglars.

"In order that his wounds might be examined he was undressed, and his clothes were thrown into a corner, where the police picked them up, with the exception of the waistcoat, which they overlooked." Andrea turned pale, and drew towards the door; he saw a cloud rising in the horizon, which appeared to forebode a coming storm.

"Well, this waistcoat was discovered to-day, covered with blood, and with a hole over the heart." The ladies screamed, and two or three prepared to faint. "It was brought to me. No one could guess what the dirty rag could be; I alone suspected that it was the waistcoat of the murdered man. My valet, in examining this mournful relic, felt a paper in the pocket and drew it out; it was a letter addressed to you, baron."

"To me?" cried Danglars.

"Yes, indeed, to you; I succeeded in deciphering your name under the blood with which the letter was stained," replied Monte Cristo, amid the general outburst of amazement.

"But," asked Madame Danglars, looking at her husband with uneasiness, "how could that prevent M. de Villefort" —

"In this simple way, madame," replied Monte Cristo; "the waistcoat and the letter were both what is termed circumstantial evidence; I therefore sent them to the king's attorney. You understand, my dear baron, that legal methods are the safest in criminal cases; it was, perhaps, some plot against you." Andrea looked steadily at Monte Cristo and disappeared in the second drawing-room.

"Possibly," said Danglars; "was not this murdered man an old galley-slave?"

"Yes," replied the count; "a felon named Caderousse." Danglars turned slightly pale; Andrea reached the anteroom beyond the little drawing-room.

"But go on signing," said Monte Cristo; "I perceive that my story has caused a general emotion, and I beg to apologize to you, baroness, and to Mademoiselle Danglars." The baroness, who had signed, returned the pen to the notary. "Prince Cavalcanti," said the latter; "Prince Cavalcanti, where are you?"

“Andrea, Andrea,” repeated several young people, who were already on sufficiently intimate terms with him to call him by his Christian name.

“Call the prince; inform him that it is his turn to sign,” cried Danglars to one of the floorkeepers.

But at the same instant the crowd of guests rushed in alarm into the principal salon as if some frightful monster had entered the apartments, quaerens quem devoret. There was, indeed, reason to retreat, to be alarmed, and to scream. An officer was placing two soldiers at the door of each drawing-room, and was advancing towards Danglars, preceded by a commissary of police, girded with his scarf. Madame Danglars uttered a scream and fainted. Danglars, who thought himself threatened (certain consciences are never calm), — Danglars even before his guests showed a countenance of abject terror.

“What is the matter, sir?” asked Monte Cristo, advancing to meet the commissioner.

“Which of you gentlemen,” asked the magistrate, without replying to the count, “answers to the name of Andrea Cavalcanti?” A cry of astonishment was heard from all parts of the room. They searched; they questioned. “But who then is Andrea Cavalcanti?” asked Danglars in amazement.

“A galley-slave, escaped from confinement at Toulon.”

“And what crime has he committed?”

“He is accused,” said the commissary with his inflexible voice, “of having assassinated the man named Caderousse, his former companion in prison, at the moment he was making his escape from the house of the Count of Monte Cristo.” Monte Cristo cast a rapid glance around him. Andrea was gone.

Chapter 97

The Departure for Belgium.

A few minutes after the scene of confusion produced in the salons of M. Danglars by the unexpected appearance of the brigade of soldiers, and by the disclosure which had followed, the mansion was deserted with as much rapidity as if a case of plague or of cholera morbus had broken out among the guests. In a few minutes, through all the doors, down all the staircases, by every exit, every one hastened to retire, or rather to fly; for it was a situation where the ordinary condolences, — which even the best friends are so eager to offer in great catastrophes, — were seen to be utterly futile. There remained in the banker’s house only Danglars, closeted in his study, and making his statement to the officer of gendarmes; Madame Danglars, terrified, in the boudoir with which we are acquainted; and Eugenie, who with haughty air and disdainful lip had retired to her room with her inseparable companion, Mademoiselle Louise d’Armilly. As for the numerous servants (more numerous that evening than usual, for their number was augmented by cooks and butlers from the Cafe de Paris), venting on their employers their anger at what they termed the insult to which they had been subjected, they collected in groups in the hall, in the kitchens, or in their rooms, thinking very little of their duty, which was thus naturally interrupted. Of all this household, only two persons deserve our notice; these are Mademoiselle Eugenie Danglars and Mademoiselle Louise d’Armilly.

The betrothed had retired, as we said, with haughty air, disdainful lip, and the demeanor of an outraged queen, followed by her companion, who was paler and more disturbed than herself. On reaching her room Eugenie locked her door, while Louise fell on a chair. “Ah, what a dreadful thing,” said the young musician; “who would have suspected it? M. Andrea Cavalcanti a murderer — a galley-slave escaped — a convict!” An ironical smile curled the lip of Eugenie. “In truth I was fated,” said she. “I escaped the Morcerf only to fall into the Cavalcanti.”

“Oh, do not confound the two, Eugenie.”

“Hold your tongue! The men are all infamous, and I am happy to be able now to do more than detest them — I despise them.”

“What shall we do?” asked Louise.

“What shall we do?”

“Yes.”

“Why, the same we had intended doing three days since — set off.”

“What? — although you are not now going to be married, you intend still” —

“Listen, Louise. I hate this life of the fashionable world, always ordered, measured, ruled, like our music-paper. What I have always wished for, desired, and coveted, is the life of an artist, free and independent, relying only on my own resources, and accountable only to myself. Remain here? What for? — that they may try, a month hence, to marry me again; and to whom? — M. Debray, perhaps, as it was once proposed. No, Louise, no! This evening’s adventure will serve for my excuse. I did not seek one, I did not ask for one. God sends me this, and I hail it joyfully!”

“How strong and courageous you are!” said the fair, frail girl to her brunette companion.

“Did you not yet know me? Come, Louise, let us talk of our affairs. The post-chaise” —

“Was happily bought three days since.”

“Have you had it sent where we are to go for it?”

“Yes.”

“Our passport?”

“Here it is.”

And Eugenie, with her usual precision, opened a printed paper, and read, —

“M. Leon d’Armilly, twenty years of age; profession, artist; hair black, eyes black; travelling with his sister.”

“Capital! How did you get this passport?”

“When I went to ask M. de Monte Cristo for letters to the directors of the theatres at Rome and Naples, I expressed my fears of travelling as a woman; he perfectly understood them, and undertook to procure for me a man’s passport, and two days after I received this, to which I have added with my own hand, ‘travelling with his sister.’“

“Well,” said Eugenie cheerfully, “we have then only to pack up our trunks; we shall start the evening of the signing of the contract, instead of the evening of the wedding — that is all.”

“But consider the matter seriously, Eugenie!”

“Oh, I am done with considering! I am tired of hearing only of market reports, of the end of the month, of the rise and fall of Spanish funds, of Haitian bonds. Instead of that, Louise — do you understand? — air, liberty, melody of birds, plains of Lombardy, Venetian canals, Roman palaces, the Bay of Naples. How much have we, Louise?” The young girl to whom this question was addressed drew from an inlaid secretary a small portfolio with a lock, in which she counted twenty-three bank-notes.

“Twenty-three thousand francs,” said she.

“And as much, at least, in pearls, diamonds, and jewels,” said Eugenie. “We are rich. With forty-five thousand francs we can live like princesses for two years, and comfortably for four; but before six months — you with your music, and I with my voice — we shall double our capital. Come, you shall take charge of the money, I of the jewel-box; so that if one of us had the misfortune to lose her treasure, the other would still have hers left. Now, the portmanteau — let us make haste — the portmanteau!”

“Stop!” said Louise, going to listen at Madame Danglars’ door.

“What do you fear?”

“That we may be discovered.”

“The door is locked.”

“They may tell us to open it.”

“They may if they like, but we will not.”

“You are a perfect Amazon, Eugenie!” And the two young girls began to heap into a trunk all the things they thought they should require. “There now,” said Eugenie, “while I change my costume do you lock the portmanteau.” Louise pressed with all the strength of her little hands on the top of the portmanteau. “But I cannot,” said she; “I am not strong enough; do you shut it.”

“Ah, you do well to ask,” said Eugenie, laughing; “I forgot that I was Hercules, and you only the pale Omphale!” And the young girl, kneeling on the top, pressed the two parts of the portmanteau together, and Mademoiselle d’Armilly passed the bolt of the padlock through. When this was done, Eugenie opened a drawer, of which she kept the key, and took from it a wadded violet silk travelling cloak. “Here,” said she, “you see I have thought of everything; with this cloak you will not be cold.”

“But you?”

“Oh, I am never cold, you know! Besides, with these men’s clothes” —

“Will you dress here?”

“Certainly.”

“Shall you have time?”

“Do not be uneasy, you little coward! All our servants are busy, discussing the grand affair. Besides, what is there astonishing, when you think of the grief I ought to be in, that I shut myself up? — tell me!”

“No, truly — you comfort me.”

“Come and help me.”

From the same drawer she took a man’s complete costume, from the boots to the coat, and a provision of linen, where there was nothing superfluous, but every requisite. Then, with a promptitude which indicated that this was not the first time she had amused herself by adopting the garb of the opposite sex, Eugenie drew on the boots and pantaloons, tied her cravat, buttoned her waistcoat up to the throat, and put on a coat which admirably fitted her beautiful figure. “Oh, that is very good — indeed, it is very good!” said Louise, looking at her with admiration; “but that beautiful black hair, those magnificent braids, which made all the ladies sigh with envy, — will they go under a man’s hat like the one I see down there?”

“You shall see,” said Eugenie. And with her left hand seizing the thick mass, which her long fingers could scarcely grasp, she took in her right hand a pair of long scissors, and soon the steel met through the rich and splendid hair, which fell in a cluster at her feet as she leaned back to keep it from her coat. Then she grasped the front hair, which she also cut off, without expressing the least regret; on the contrary, her eyes sparkled with greater pleasure than usual under her ebony eyebrows. “Oh, the magnificent hair!” said Louise, with regret.

“And am I not a hundred times better thus?” cried Eugenie, smoothing the scattered curls of her hair, which had now quite a masculine appearance; “and do you not think me handsomer so?”

“Oh, you are beautiful — always beautiful!” cried Louise. “Now, where are you going?”

“To Brussels, if you like; it is the nearest frontier. We can go to Brussels, Liege, Aix-la-Chapelle; then up the Rhine to Strasburg. We will cross Switzerland, and go down into Italy by the Saint-Gothard. Will that do?”

“Yes.”

“What are you looking at?”

“I am looking at you; indeed you are adorable like that! One would say you were carrying me off.”

“And they would be right, pardieu!”

“Oh, I think you swore, Eugenie.” And the two young girls, whom every one might have thought plunged in grief, the one on her own account, the other from interest in her friend, burst out laughing, as they cleared away every visible trace of the disorder which had naturally accompanied the preparations for their escape. Then, having blown out the lights, the two fugitives, looking and listening eagerly, with outstretched necks, opened the door of a dressing-room which led by a side staircase down to the yard, — Eugenie going first, and holding with one arm the portmanteau, which by the opposite handle Mademoiselle d’Armilly scarcely raised with both hands. The yard was empty; the clock was striking twelve. The porter was not yet gone to bed. Eugenie approached softly, and saw the old man sleeping soundly in an arm-chair in his lodge. She returned to Louise, took up the portmanteau, which she had placed for a moment on the ground, and they reached the archway under the shadow of the wall.

Eugenie concealed Louise in an angle of the gateway, so that if the porter chanced to awake he might see but one person. Then placing herself in the full light of the lamp which lit the yard, — ”Gate!” cried she, with her finest contralto voice, and rapping at the window.

The porter got up as Eugenie expected, and even advanced some steps to recognize the person who was going out, but seeing a young man striking his boot impatiently with his riding-whip, he opened it immediately. Louise slid through the half-open gate like a snake, and bounded lightly forward. Eugenie, apparently calm, although in all probability her heart beat somewhat faster than usual, went out in her turn. A porter was passing and they gave him the portmanteau; then the two young girls, having told him to take it to No. 36, Rue de la Victoire, walked behind this man, whose presence comforted Louise. As for Eugenie, she was as strong as a Judith or a Delilah. They arrived at the appointed spot. Eugenie ordered the porter to put down the portmanteau, gave him some pieces of money, and having rapped at the shutter sent him away. The shutter where Eugenie had rapped was that of a little laundress, who had been previously warned, and was not yet gone to bed. She opened the door.

“Mademoiselle,” said Eugenie, “let the porter get the post-chaise from the coach-house, and fetch some post-horses from the hotel. Here are five francs for his trouble.”

“Indeed,” said Louise, “I admire you, and I could almost say respect you.” The laundress looked on in astonishment, but as she had been promised twenty louis, she made no remark.

In a quarter of an hour the porter returned with a post-boy and horses, which were harnessed, and put in the post-chaise in a minute, while the porter fastened the portmanteau on with the assistance of a cord and strap. “Here is the passport,” said the postilion, “which way are we going, young gentleman?”

“To Fontainebleau,” replied Eugenie with an almost masculine voice.

“What do you say?” said Louise.

“I am giving them the slip,” said Eugenie; “this woman to whom we have given twenty louis may betray us for forty; we will soon alter our direction.” And the young girl jumped into the britzska, which was admirably arranged for sleeping in, without scarcely touching the step. “You are always right,” said the music teacher, seating herself by the side of her friend.

A quarter of an hour afterwards the postilion, having been put in the right road, passed with a crack of his whip through the gateway of the Barriere Saint-Martin. “Ah,” said Louise, breathing freely, “here we are out of Paris.”

“Yes, my dear, the abduction is an accomplished fact,” replied Eugenie. “Yes, and without violence,” said Louise.

“I shall bring that forward as an extenuating circumstance,” replied Eugenie. These words were lost in the noise which the carriage made in rolling over the pavement of La Villette. M. Danglars no longer had a daughter.

Chapter 98

The Bell and Bottle Tavern.

And now let us leave Mademoiselle Danglars and her friend pursuing their way to Brussels, and return to poor Andrea Cavalcanti, so inopportunely interrupted in his rise to fortune. Notwithstanding his youth, Master Andrea was a very skilful and intelligent boy. We have seen that on the first rumor which reached the salon he had gradually approached the door, and crossing two or three rooms at last disappeared. But we have forgotten to mention one circumstance, which nevertheless ought not to be omitted; in one of the rooms he crossed, the trousseau of the bride-elect was on exhibition. There were caskets of diamonds, cashmere shawls, Valenciennes lace, English veilings, and in fact all the tempting things, the bare mention of which makes the hearts of young girls bound with joy, and which is called the “corbeille.” [*] Now, in passing through this room, Andrea proved himself not only to be clever and intelligent, but also provident, for he helped himself to the most valuable of the ornaments before him.

> * Literally, “the basket,” because wedding gifts were
> originally brought in such a receptacle.

Furnished with this plunder, Andrea leaped with a lighter heart from the window, intending to slip through the hands of the gendarmes. Tall and well proportioned as an ancient gladiator, and muscular as a Spartan, he walked for a quarter of an hour without knowing where to direct his steps, actuated by the sole idea of getting away from the spot where if he lingered he knew that he would surely be taken. Having passed through the Rue Mont Blanc, guided by the instinct which leads thieves always to take the safest path, he found himself at the end of the Rue Lafayette. There he stopped, breathless and panting. He was quite alone; on one side was the vast wilderness of the Saint-Lazare, on the other, Paris enshrouded in darkness. “Am I to be captured?” he cried; “no, not if I can use more activity than my enemies. My safety is now a mere question of speed.” At this moment he saw a cab at the top of the Faubourg Poissonniere. The dull driver, smoking his pipe, was plodding along toward the limits of the Faubourg Saint-Denis, where no doubt he ordinarily had his station. “Ho, friend!” said Benedetto.

“What do you want, sir?” asked the driver.

“Is your horse tired?”

“Tired? oh, yes, tired enough — he has done nothing the whole of this blessed day! Four wretched fares, and twenty sous over, making in all seven francs, are all that I have earned, and I ought to take ten to the owner.”

“Will you add these twenty francs to the seven you have?”

“With pleasure, sir; twenty francs are not to be despised. Tell me what I am to do for this.”

“A very easy thing, if your horse isn’t tired.”

“I tell you he’ll go like the wind, — only tell me which way to drive.”

“Towards the Louvres.”

“Ah, I know the way — you get good sweetened rum over there.”

“Exactly so; I merely wish to overtake one of my friends, with whom I am going to hunt to-morrow at Chapelle-en-Serval. He should have waited for me here with a cabriolet till half-past eleven; it is twelve, and, tired of waiting, he must have gone on.”

“It is likely.”

“Well, will you try and overtake him?”

“Nothing I should like better.”

“If you do not overtake him before we reach Bourget you shall have twenty francs; if not before Louvres, thirty.”

“And if we do overtake him?”

“Forty,” said Andrea, after a moment’s hesitation, at the end of which he remembered that he might safely promise. “That’s all right,” said the man; “hop in, and we’re off! Who-o-o-p, la!”

Andrea got into the cab, which passed rapidly through the Faubourg Saint-Denis, along the Faubourg Saint-Martin, crossed the barrier, and threaded its way through the interminable Villette. They never overtook the chimerical friend, yet Andrea frequently inquired of people on foot whom he passed and at the inns which were not yet closed, for a green cabriolet and bay horse; and as there are a great many cabriolets to be seen on the road to the Low Countries, and as nine-tenths of them are green, the inquiries increased at every step. Every one had just seen it pass; it was only five hundred, two hundred, one hundred steps in advance; at length they reached it, but it was not the friend. Once the cab was also passed by a calash rapidly whirled along by two post-horses. “Ah,” said Cavalcanti to himself, “if I only had that britzska, those two good post-horses, and above all the passport that carries them on!” And he sighed deeply. The calash contained Mademoiselle Danglars and Mademoiselle d’Armilly. “Hurry, hurry!” said Andrea, “we must overtake him soon.” And the poor horse resumed the desperate gallop it had kept up since leaving the barrier, and arrived steaming at Louvres.

“Certainly,” said Andrea, “I shall not overtake my friend, but I shall kill your horse, therefore I had better stop. Here are thirty francs; I will sleep at the Red Horse, and will secure a place in the first coach. Good-night, friend.” And Andrea, after placing six pieces of five francs each in the man’s hand, leaped lightly on to the pathway. The cabman joyfully pocketed the sum, and turned back on his road to Paris. Andrea pretended to go towards the Red Horse inn, but after leaning an instant against the door, and hearing the last sound of the cab, which was disappearing from view, he went on his road, and with a lusty stride soon traversed the space of two leagues. Then he rested; he must be near Chapelle-en-Serval, where he pretended to be going. It was not fatigue that stayed Andrea here; it was that he might form some resolution, adopt some plan. It would be impossible to make use of a diligence, equally so to engage post-horses; to travel either way a passport was necessary. It was still more impossible to remain in the department of the Oise, one of the most open and strictly guarded in France; this was quite out of the question, especially to a man like Andrea, perfectly conversant with criminal matters.

He sat down by the side of the moat, buried his face in his hands and reflected. Ten minutes after he raised his head; his resolution was made. He threw some dust over the topcoat, which he had found time to unhook from the ante-chamber and button over his ball costume, and going to Chapelle-en-Serval he knocked loudly at the door of the only inn in the place. The host opened. “My friend,” said Andrea, “I was coming from Montefontaine to Senlis, when my horse, which is a troublesome creature, stumbled and threw me. I must reach Compiegne to-night, or I shall cause deep anxiety to my family. Could you let me hire a horse of you?”

An inn-keeper has always a horse to let, whether it be good or bad. The host called the stable-boy, and ordered him to saddle “Whitey,” then he awoke his son, a child of seven years, whom he ordered to ride before the gentleman and bring back the horse. Andrea gave the inn-keeper twenty francs, and in taking them from his pocket dropped a visiting card. This belonged to one of his friends at the Cafe de Paris, so that the innkeeper, picking it up after Andrea had left, was convinced that he had let his horse to the Count of Mauleon, 25 Rue Saint-Dominique, that being the name and address on the card. “Whitey” was not a fast animal, but he kept up an easy, steady pace; in three hours and a half Andrea had traversed the nine leagues which separated him from Compiegne, and four o’clock struck as he reached the place where the coaches stop. There is an excellent tavern at Compiegne, well remembered by those who have ever been there. Andrea, who had often stayed there in his rides about Paris, recollected the Bell and Bottle inn; he turned around, saw the sign by the light of a reflected lamp, and having dismissed the child, giving him all the small coin he had about him, he began knocking at the door, very reasonably concluding that having now three or four hours before him he had best fortify himself against the fatigues of the morrow by a sound sleep and a good supper. A waiter opened the door.

“My friend,” said Andrea, “I have been dining at Saint-Jean-au-Bois, and expected to catch the coach which passes by at midnight, but like a fool I have lost my way, and have been walking for the last four hours in the forest. Show me into one of those pretty little rooms which overlook the court, and bring me a cold fowl and a bottle of Bordeaux.” The waiter had no suspicions; Andrea spoke with perfect composure, he had a cigar in his mouth, and his hands in the pocket of his top coat; his clothes were fashionably made, his chin smooth, his boots irreproachable; he looked merely as if he had stayed out very late, that was all. While the waiter was preparing his room, the hostess arose; Andrea assumed his most charming smile, and asked if he could have No. 3, which he had occupied on his last stay at Compiegne. Unfortunately, No. 3 was engaged by a young man who was travelling with his sister. Andrea appeared in despair, but consoled himself when the hostess assured him that No. 7, prepared for him, was situated precisely the same as No. 3, and while warming his feet and chatting about the last races at Chantilly, he waited until they announced his room to be ready.

Andrea had not spoken without cause of the pretty rooms looking out upon the court of the Bell Tavern, which with its triple galleries like those of a theatre, with the jessamine and clematis twining round the light columns, forms one of the prettiest entrances to an inn that you can imagine. The fowl was tender, the wine old, the fire clear and sparkling, and Andrea was surprised to find himself eating with as good an appetite as though nothing had happened. Then he went to bed and almost immediately fell into that deep sleep which is sure to visit men of twenty years of age, even when they are torn with remorse. Now, here we are obliged to own that Andrea ought to have felt remorse, but that he did not. This was the plan which had appealed to him to afford the best chance of his security. Before daybreak he would awake, leave the inn after rigorously paying his bill, and reaching the forest, he would, under pretence of making studies in painting, test the hospitality of some peasants, procure himself the dress of a woodcutter and a hatchet, casting off the lion's skin to assume that of the woodman; then, with his hands covered with dirt, his hair darkened by means of a leaden comb, his complexion embrowned with a preparation for which one of his old comrades had given him the recipe, he intended, by following the wooded districts, to reach the nearest frontier, walking by night and sleeping in the day in the forests and quarries, and only entering inhabited regions to buy a loaf from time to time.

Once past the frontier, Andrea proposed making money of his diamonds; and by uniting the proceeds to ten bank-notes he always carried about with him in case of accident, he would then find himself possessor of about 50,000 livres, which he philosophically considered as no very deplorable condition after all. Moreover, he reckoned much on the interest of the Danglars to hush up the rumor of their own misadventures. These were the reasons which, added to the fatigue, caused Andrea to sleep so soundly. In order that he might awaken early he did not close the shutters, but contented himself with bolting the door and placing on the table an unclasped and long-pointed knife, whose temper he well knew, and which was never absent from him. About seven in the morning Andrea was awakened by a ray of sunlight, which played, warm and brilliant, upon his face. In all well-organized brains, the predominating idea — and there always is one — is sure to be the last thought before sleeping, and the first upon waking in the morning. Andrea had scarcely opened his eyes when his predominating idea presented itself, and whispered in his ear that he had slept too long. He jumped out of bed and ran to the window. A gendarme was crossing the court. A gendarme is one of the most striking objects in the world, even to a man void of uneasiness; but for one who has a timid conscience, and with good cause too, the yellow, blue, and white uniform is really very alarming.

“Why is that gendarme there?” asked Andrea of himself. Then, all at once, he replied, with that logic which the reader has, doubtless, remarked in him, “There is nothing astonishing in seeing a gendarme at an inn; instead of being astonished, let me dress myself.” And the youth dressed himself with a facility his valet de chambre had failed to rob him of during the two months of fashionable life he had led in Paris. “Now then,” said Andrea, while dressing himself, “I’ll wait till he leaves, and then I’ll slip away.” And, saying this, Andrea, who had now put on his boots and cravat, stole gently to the window, and a second time lifted up the muslin curtain. Not only was the first gendarme still there, but the young man now perceived a second yellow, blue, and white uniform at the foot of the staircase, the only one by which he could descend, while a third, on horseback, holding a musket in his fist, was posted as a sentinel at the great street door which alone afforded the means of egress.

The appearance of the third gendarme settled the matter, for a crowd of curious loungers was extended before him, effectually blocking the entrance to the hotel. “They’re after me!” was Andrea’s first thought. “The devil!” A pallor overspread the young man’s forehead, and he looked around him with anxiety. His room, like all those on the same floor, had but one outlet to the gallery in the sight of everybody. “I am lost!” was his second thought; and, indeed, for a man in Andrea’s situation, an arrest meant the assizes, trial, and death, — death without mercy or delay. For a moment he convulsively pressed his head within his hands, and during that brief period he became nearly mad with terror; but soon a ray of hope glimmered in the multitude of thoughts which bewildered his mind, and a faint smile played upon his white lips and pallid cheeks. He looked around and saw the objects of his search upon the chimney-piece; they were a pen, ink, and paper. With forced composure he dipped the pen in the ink, and wrote the following lines upon a sheet of paper: —

“I have no money to pay my bill, but I am not a dishonest man; I leave behind me as a pledge this pin, worth ten times the amount. I shall be excused for leaving at daybreak, for I was ashamed.”

He then drew the pin from his cravat and placed it on the paper. This done, instead of leaving the door fastened, he drew back the bolts and even placed the door ajar, as though he had left the room, forgetting to close it, and slipping into the chimney like a man accustomed to that kind of gymnastic exercise, having effaced the marks of his feet upon the floor, he commenced climbing the only opening which afforded him the means of escape. At this precise time, the first gendarme Andrea had noticed walked up-stairs, preceded by the commissary of police, and supported by the second gendarme who guarded the staircase and was himself re-enforced by the one stationed at the door.

Andrea was indebted for this visit to the following circumstances. At daybreak, the telegraphs were set at work in all directions, and almost immediately the authorities in every district had exerted their utmost endeavors to arrest the murderer of Caderousse. Compiegne, that royal residence and fortified town, is well furnished with authorities, gendarmes, and commissaries of police; they therefore began operations as soon as the telegraphic despatch arrived, and the Bell and Bottle being the best-known hotel in the town, they had naturally directed their first inquiries there.

Now, besides the reports of the sentinels guarding the Hotel de Ville, which is next door to the Bell and Bottle, it had been stated by others that a number of travellers had arrived during the night. The sentinel who was relieved at six o'clock in the morning, remembered perfectly that just as he was taking his post a few minutes past four a young man arrived on horseback, with a little boy before him. The young man, having dismissed the boy and horse, knocked at the door of the hotel, which was opened, and again closed after his entrance. This late arrival had attracted much suspicion, and the young man being no other than Andrea, the commissary and gendarme, who was a brigadier, directed their steps towards his room.

They found the door ajar. "Oh, ho," said the brigadier, who thoroughly understood the trick; "a bad sign to find the door open! I would rather find it triply bolted." And, indeed, the little note and pin upon the table confirmed, or rather corroborated, the sad truth. Andrea had fled. We say corroborated, because the brigadier was too experienced to be convinced by a single proof. He glanced around, looked in the bed, shook the curtains, opened the closets, and finally stopped at the chimney. Andrea had taken the precaution to leave no traces of his feet in the ashes, but still it was an outlet, and in this light was not to be passed over without serious investigation.

The brigadier sent for some sticks and straw, and having filled the chimney with them, set a light to it. The fire crackled, and the smoke ascended like the dull vapor from a volcano; but still no prisoner fell down, as they expected. The fact was, that Andrea, at war with society ever since his youth, was quite as deep as a gendarme, even though he were advanced to the rank of brigadier, and quite prepared for the fire, he had climbed out on the roof and was crouching down against the chimney-pots. At one time he thought he was saved, for he heard the brigadier exclaim in a loud voice, to the two gendarmes, “He is not here!” But venturing to peep, he perceived that the latter, instead of retiring, as might have been reasonably expected upon this announcement, were watching with increased attention.

It was now his turn to look about him; the Hotel de Ville, a massive sixteenth century building, was on his right; any one could descend from the openings in the tower, and examine every corner of the roof below, and Andrea expected momentarily to see the head of a gendarme appear at one of these openings. If once discovered, he knew he would be lost, for the roof afforded no chance of escape; he therefore resolved to descend, not through the same chimney by which he had come up, but by a similar one conducting to another room. He looked around for a chimney from which no smoke issued, and having reached it, he disappeared through the orifice without being seen by any one. At the same minute, one of the little windows of the Hotel de Ville was thrown open, and the head of a gendarme appeared. For an instant it remained motionless as one of the stone decorations of the building, then after a long sigh of disappointment the head disappeared. The brigadier, calm and dignified as the law he represented, passed through the crowd, without answering the thousand questions addressed to him, and re-entered the hotel.

“Well?” asked the two gendarmes.

“Well, my boys,” said the brigadier, “the brigand must really have escaped early this morning; but we will send to the Villers-Coterets and Noyon roads, and search the forest, when we shall catch him, no doubt.” The honorable functionary had scarcely expressed himself thus, in that intonation which is peculiar to brigadiers of the gendarmerie, when a loud scream, accompanied by the violent ringing of a bell, resounded through the court of the hotel. “Ah, what is that?” cried the brigadier.

“Some traveller seems impatient,” said the host. “What number was it that rang?”

“Number 3.”

“Run, waiter!” At this moment the screams and ringing were redoubled. “Ah,” said the brigadier, stopping the servant, “the person who is ringing appears to want something more than a waiter; we will attend upon him with a gendarme. Who occupies Number 3?”

“The little fellow who arrived last night in a post-chaise with his sister, and who asked for an apartment with two beds.” The bell here rang for the third time, with another shriek of anguish.

“Follow me, Mr. Commissary!” said the brigadier; “tread in my steps.”

“Wait an instant,” said the host; “Number 3 has two staircases, — inside and outside.”

“Good,” said the brigadier. “I will take charge of the inside one. Are the carbines loaded?”

“Yes, brigadier.”

“Well, you guard the exterior, and if he attempts to fly, fire upon him; he must be a great criminal, from what the telegraph says.”

The brigadier, followed by the commissary, disappeared by the inside staircase, accompanied by the noise which his assertions respecting Andrea had excited in the crowd. This is what had happened. Andrea had very cleverly managed to descend two-thirds of the chimney, but then his foot slipped, and notwithstanding his endeavors, he came into the room with more speed and noise than he intended. It would have signified little had the room been empty, but unfortunately it was occupied. Two ladies, sleeping in one bed, were awakened by the noise, and fixing their eyes upon the spot whence the sound proceeded, they saw a man. One of these ladies, the fair one, uttered those terrible shrieks which resounded through the house, while the other, rushing to the bell-rope, rang with all her strength. Andrea, as we can see, was surrounded by misfortune.

“For pity’s sake,” he cried, pale and bewildered, without seeing whom he was addressing, — ”for pity’s sake do not call assistance! Save me! — I will not harm you.”

“Andrea, the murderer!” cried one of the ladies.

“Eugenie! Mademoiselle Danglars!” exclaimed Andrea, stupefied.

“Help, help!” cried Mademoiselle d’Armilly, taking the bell from her companion’s hand, and ringing it yet more violently. “Save me, I am pursued!” said Andrea, clasping his hands. “For pity, for mercy’s sake do not deliver me up!”

“It is too late, they are coming,” said Eugenie.

“Well, conceal me somewhere; you can say you were needlessly alarmed; you can turn their suspicions and save my life!”

The two ladies, pressing closely to one another, and drawing the bedclothes tightly around them, remained silent to this supplicating voice, repugnance and fear taking possession of their minds.

“Well, be it so,” at length said Eugenie; “return by the same road you came, and we will say nothing about you, unhappy wretch.”

“Here he is, here he is!” cried a voice from the landing; “here he is! I see him!” The brigadier had put his eye to the keyhole, and had discovered Andrea in a posture of entreaty. A violent blow from the butt end of the musket burst open the lock, two more forced out the bolts, and the broken door fell in. Andrea ran to the other door, leading to the gallery, ready to rush out; but he was stopped short, and he stood with his body a little thrown back, pale, and with the useless knife in his clinched hand.

“Fly, then!” cried Mademoiselle d’Armilly, whose pity returned as her fears diminished; “fly!”

“Or kill yourself!” said Eugenie (in a tone which a Vestal in the amphitheatre would have used, when urging the victorious gladiator to finish his vanquished adversary). Andrea shuddered, and looked on the young girl with an expression which proved how little he understood such ferocious honor. “Kill myself?” he cried, throwing down his knife; “why should I do so?”

“Why, you said,” answered Mademoiselle Danglars, “that you would be condemned to die like the worst criminals.”

“Bah,” said Cavalcanti, crossing his arms, “one has friends.”

The brigadier advanced to him, sword in hand. “Come, come,” said Andrea, “sheathe your sword, my fine fellow; there is no occasion to make such a fuss, since I give myself up;” and he held out his hands to be manacled. The girls looked with horror upon this shameful metamorphosis, the man of the world shaking off his covering and appearing as a galley-slave. Andrea turned towards them, and with an impertinent smile asked, —”Have you any message for your father, Mademoiselle Danglars, for in all probability I shall return to Paris?”

Eugenie covered her face with her hands. “Oh, ho!” said Andrea, “you need not be ashamed, even though you did post after me. Was I not nearly your husband?”

And with this raillery Andrea went out, leaving the two girls a prey to their own feelings of shame, and to the comments of the crowd. An hour after they stepped into their calash, both dressed in feminine attire. The gate of the hotel had been closed to screen them from sight, but they were forced, when the door was open, to pass through a throng of curious glances and whispering voices. Eugenie closed her eyes; but though she could not see, she could hear, and the sneers of the crowd reached her in the carriage. “Oh, why is not the world a wilderness?” she exclaimed, throwing herself into the arms of Mademoiselle d’Armilly, her eyes sparkling with the same kind of rage which made Nero wish that the Roman world had but one neck, that he might sever it at a single blow. The next day they stopped at the Hotel de Flandre, at Brussels. The same evening Andrea was incarcerated in the Conciergerie.

Chapter 99

The Law.

We have seen how quietly Mademoiselle Danglars and Mademoiselle d’Armilly accomplished their transformation and flight; the fact being that every one was too much occupied in his or her own affairs to think of theirs. We will leave the banker contemplating the enormous magnitude of his debt before the phantom of bankruptcy, and follow the baroness, who after being momentarily crushed under the weight of the blow which had struck her, had gone to seek her usual adviser, Lucien Debray. The baroness had looked forward to this marriage as a means of ridding her of a guardianship which, over a girl of Eugenie’s character, could not fail to be rather a troublesome undertaking; for in the tacit relations which maintain the bond of family union, the mother, to maintain her ascendancy over her daughter, must never fail to be a model of wisdom and a type of perfection.

Now, Madame Danglars feared Eugenie’s sagacity and the influence of Mademoiselle d’Armilly; she had frequently observed the contemptuous expression with which her daughter looked upon Debray, — an expression which seemed to imply that she understood all her mother’s amorous and pecuniary relationships with the intimate secretary; moreover, she saw that Eugenie detested Debray, — not only because he was a source of dissension and scandal under the paternal roof, but because she had at once classed him in that catalogue of bipeds whom Plato endeavors to withdraw from the appellation of men, and whom Diogenes designated as animals upon two legs without feathers.

Unfortunately, in this world of ours, each person views things through a certain medium, and so is prevented from seeing in the same light as others, and Madame Danglars, therefore, very much regretted that the marriage of Eugenie had not taken place, not only because the match was good, and likely to insure the happiness of her child, but because it would also set her at liberty. She ran therefore to Debray, who, after having like the rest of Paris witnessed the contract scene and the scandal attending it, had retired in haste to his club, where he was chatting with some friends upon the events which served as a subject of conversation for three-fourths of that city known as the capital of the world.

At the precise time when Madame Danglars, dressed in black and concealed in a long veil, was ascending the stairs leading to Debray’s apartments, — notwithstanding the assurances of the concierge that the young man was not at home, — Debray was occupied in repelling the insinuations of a friend, who tried to persuade him that after the terrible scene which had just taken place he ought, as a friend of the family, to marry Mademoiselle Danglars and her two millions. Debray did not defend himself very warmly, for the idea had sometimes crossed his mind; still, when he recollected the independent, proud spirit of Eugenie, he positively rejected it as utterly impossible, though the same thought again continually recurred and found a resting-place in his heart. Tea, play, and the conversation, which had become interesting during the discussion of such serious affairs, lasted till one o’clock in the morning.

Meanwhile Madame Danglars, veiled and uneasy, awaited the return of Debray in the little green room, seated between two baskets of flowers, which she had that morning sent, and which, it must be confessed, Debray had himself arranged and watered with so much care that his absence was half excused in the eyes of the poor woman.

At twenty minutes of twelve, Madame Danglars, tired of waiting, returned home. Women of a certain grade are like prosperous grisettes in one respect, they seldom return home after twelve o’clock. The baroness returned to the hotel with as much caution as Eugenie used in leaving it; she ran lightly up-stairs, and with an aching heart entered her apartment, contiguous, as we know, to that of Eugenie. She was fearful of exciting any remark, and believed firmly in her daughter’s innocence and fidelity to the paternal roof. She listened at Eugenie’s door, and hearing no sound tried to enter, but the bolts were in place. Madame Danglars then concluded that the young girl had been overcome with the terrible excitement of the evening, and had gone to bed and to sleep. She called the maid and questioned her.

“Mademoiselle Eugenie,” said the maid, “retired to her apartment with Mademoiselle d’Armilly; they then took tea together, after which they desired me to leave, saying that they needed me no longer.” Since then the maid had been below, and like every one else she thought the young ladies were in their own room; Madame Danglars, therefore, went to bed without a shadow of suspicion, and began to muse over the recent events. In proportion as her memory became clearer, the occurrences of the evening were revealed in their true light; what she had taken for confusion was a tumult; what she had regarded as something distressing, was in reality a disgrace. And then the baroness remembered that she had felt no pity for poor Mercedes, who had been afflicted with as severe a blow through her husband and son.

“Eugenie,” she said to herself, “is lost, and so are we. The affair, as it will be reported, will cover us with shame; for in a society such as ours satire inflicts a painful and incurable wound. How fortunate that Eugenie is possessed of that strange character which has so often made me tremble!” And her glance was turned towards heaven, where a mysterious providence disposes all things, and out of a fault, nay, even a vice, sometimes produces a blessing. And then her thoughts, cleaving through space like a bird in the air, rested on Cavalcanti. This Andrea was a wretch, a robber, an assassin, and yet his manners showed the effects of a sort of education, if not a complete one; he had been presented to the world with the appearance of an immense fortune, supported by an honorable name. How could she extricate herself from this labyrinth? To whom would she apply to help her out of this painful situation? Debray, to whom she had run, with the first instinct of a woman towards the man she loves, and who yet betrays her, — Debray could but give her advice, she must apply to some one more powerful than he.

The baroness then thought of M. de Villefort. It was M. de Villefort who had remorselessly brought misfortune into her family, as though they had been strangers. But, no; on reflection, the procureur was not a merciless man; and it was not the magistrate, slave to his duties, but the friend, the loyal friend, who roughly but firmly cut into the very core of the corruption; it was not the executioner, but the surgeon, who wished to withdraw the honor of Danglars from ignominious association with the disgraced young man they had presented to the world as their son-in-law. And since Villefort, the friend of Danglars, had acted in this way, no one could suppose that he had been previously acquainted with, or had lent himself to, any of Andrea’s intrigues. Villefort’s conduct, therefore, upon reflection, appeared to the baroness as if shaped for their mutual advantage. But the inflexibility of the procureur should stop there; she would see him the next day, and if she could not make him fail in his duties as a magistrate, she would, at least, obtain all the indulgence he could allow. She would invoke the past, recall old recollections; she would supplicate him by the remembrance of guilty, yet happy days. M. de Villefort would stifle the affair; he had only to turn his eyes on one side, and allow Andrea to fly, and follow up the crime under that shadow of guilt called contempt of court. And after this reasoning she slept easily.

At nine o'clock next morning she arose, and without ringing for her maid or giving the least sign of her activity, she dressed herself in the same simple style as on the previous night; then running down-stairs, she left the hotel, walked to the Rue de Provence, called a cab, and drove to M. de Villefort's house. For the last month this wretched house had presented the gloomy appearance of a lazaretto infected with the plague. Some of the apartments were closed within and without; the shutters were only opened to admit a minute's air, showing the scared face of a footman, and immediately afterwards the window would be closed, like a gravestone falling on a sepulchre, and the neighbors would say to each other in a low voice, "Will there be another funeral to-day at the procureur's house?" Madame Danglars involuntarily shuddered at the desolate aspect of the mansion; descending from the cab, she approached the door with trembling knees, and rang the bell. Three times did the bell ring with a dull, heavy sound, seeming to participate, in the general sadness, before the concierge appeared and peeped through the door, which he opened just wide enough to allow his words to be heard. He saw a lady, a fashionable, elegantly dressed lady, and yet the door remained almost closed.

"Do you intend opening the door?" said the baroness.

"First, madame, who are you?"

"Who am I? You know me well enough."

"We no longer know any one, madame."

"You must be mad, my friend," said the baroness.

"Where do you come from?"

"Oh, this is too much!"

"Madame, these are my orders; excuse me. Your name?"

"The baroness Danglars; you have seen me twenty times."

"Possibly, madame. And now, what do you want?"

"Oh, how extraordinary! I shall complain to M. de Villefort of the impertinence of his servants."

"Madame, this is precaution, not impertinence; no one enters here without an order from M. d'Avrigny, or without speaking to the procureur."

“Well, I have business with the procureur.”

“Is it pressing business?”

“You can imagine so, since I have not even brought my carriage out yet. But enough of this — here is my card, take it to your master.”

“Madame will await my return?”

“Yes; go.” The concierge closed the door, leaving Madame Danglars in the street. She had not long to wait; directly afterwards the door was opened wide enough to admit her, and when she had passed through, it was again shut. Without losing sight of her for an instant, the concierge took a whistle from his pocket as soon as they entered the court, and blew it. The valet de chambre appeared on the door-steps. “You will excuse this poor fellow, madame,” he said, as he preceded the baroness, “but his orders are precise, and M. de Villefort begged me to tell you that he could not act otherwise.”

In the court showing his merchandise, was a tradesman who had been admitted with the same precautions. The baroness ascended the steps; she felt herself strongly infected with the sadness which seemed to magnify her own, and still guided by the valet de chambre, who never lost sight of her for an instant, she was introduced to the magistrate’s study. Preoccupied as Madame Danglars had been with the object of her visit, the treatment she had received from these underlings appeared to her so insulting, that she began by complaining of it. But Villefort, raising his head, bowed down by grief, looked up at her with so sad a smile that her complaints died upon her lips. “Forgive my servants,” he said, “for a terror I cannot blame them for; from being suspected they have become suspicious.”

Madame Danglars had often heard of the terror to which the magistrate alluded, but without the evidence of her own eyesight she could never have believed that the sentiment had been carried so far. “You too, then, are unhappy?” she said. “Yes, madame,” replied the magistrate.

“Then you pity me!”

“Sincerely, madame.”

“And you understand what brings me here?”

“You wish to speak to me about the circumstance which has just happened?”

“Yes, sir, — a fearful misfortune.”

“You mean a mischance.”

“A mischance?” repeated the baroness.

“Alas, madame,” said the procureur with his imperturbable calmness of manner, “I consider those alone misfortunes which are irreparable.”

“And do you suppose this will be forgotten?”

“Everything will be forgotten, madame,” said Villefort. “Your daughter will be married to-morrow, if not to-day — in a week, if not to-morrow; and I do not think you can regret the intended husband of your daughter.”

Madame Danglars gazed on Villefort, stupefied to find him so almost insultingly calm. “Am I come to a friend?” she asked in a tone full of mournful dignity. “You know that you are, madame,” said Villefort, whose pale cheeks became slightly flushed as he gave her the assurance. And truly this assurance carried him back to different events from those now occupying the baroness and him. “Well, then, be more affectionate, my dear Villefort,” said the baroness. “Speak to me not as a magistrate, but as a friend; and when I am in bitter anguish of spirit, do not tell me that I ought to be gay.” Villefort bowed. “When I hear misfortunes named, madame,” he said, “I have within the last few months contracted the bad habit of thinking of my own, and then I cannot help drawing up an egotistical parallel in my mind. That is the reason that by the side of my misfortunes yours appear to me mere mischances; that is why my dreadful position makes yours appear enviable. But this annoys you; let us change the subject. You were saying, madame” —

“I came to ask you, my friend,” said the baroness, “what will be done with this impostor?”

“Impostor,” repeated Villefort; “certainly, madame, you appear to extenuate some cases, and exaggerate others. Impostor, indeed! — M. Andrea Cavalcanti, or rather M. Benedetto, is nothing more nor less than an assassin!”

“Sir, I do not deny the justice of your correction, but the more severely you arm yourself against that unfortunate man, the more deeply will you strike our family. Come, forget him for a moment, and instead of pursuing him let him go.”

“You are too late, madame; the orders are issued.”

“Well, should he be arrested — do they think they will arrest him?”

“I hope so.”

“If they should arrest him (I know that sometimes prisoners afford means of escape), will you leave him in prison?” — The procureur shook his head. “At least keep him there till my daughter be married.”

“Impossible, madame; justice has its formalities.”

“What, even for me?” said the baroness, half jesting, half in earnest. “For all, even for myself among the rest,” replied Villefort.

“Ah,” exclaimed the baroness, without expressing the ideas which the exclamation betrayed. Villefort looked at her with that piercing glance which reads the secrets of the heart. “Yes, I know what you mean,” he said; “you refer to the terrible rumors spread abroad in the world, that the deaths which have kept me in mourning for the last three months, and from which Valentine has only escaped by a miracle, have not happened by natural means.”

“I was not thinking of that,” replied Madame Danglars quickly. “Yes, you were thinking of it, and with justice. You could not help thinking of it, and saying to yourself, ‘you, who pursue crime so vindictively, answer now, why are there unpunished crimes in your dwelling?’“ The baroness became pale. “You were saying this, were you not?”

“Well, I own it.”

“I will answer you.”

Villefort drew his armchair nearer to Madame Danglars; then resting both hands upon his desk he said in a voice more hollow than usual: “There are crimes which remain unpunished because the criminals are unknown, and we might strike the innocent instead of the guilty; but when the culprits are discovered” (Villefort here extended his hand toward a large crucifix placed opposite to his desk) — ”when they are discovered, I swear to you, by all I hold most sacred, that whoever they may be they shall die. Now, after the oath I have just taken, and which I will keep, madame, dare you ask for mercy for that wretch!”

“But, sir, are you sure he is as guilty as they say?”

“Listen; this is his description: ‘Benedetto, condemned, at the age of sixteen, for five years to the galleys for forgery.’ He promised well, as you see — first a runaway, then an assassin.”

“And who is this wretch?”

“Who can tell? — a vagabond, a Corsican.”

“Has no one owned him?”

“No one; his parents are unknown.”

“But who was the man who brought him from Lucca?”

“Another rascal like himself, perhaps his accomplice.” The baroness clasped her hands. “Villefort,” she exclaimed in her softest and most captivating manner.

"For heaven's sake, madame," said Villefort, with a firmness of expression not altogether free from harshness — "for heaven's sake, do not ask pardon of me for a guilty wretch! What am I? — the law. Has the law any eyes to witness your grief? Has the law ears to be melted by your sweet voice? Has the law a memory for all those soft recollections you endeavor to recall? No, madame; the law has commanded, and when it commands it strikes. You will tell me that I am a living being, and not a code — a man, and not a volume. Look at me, madame — look around me. Have mankind treated me as a brother? Have they loved me? Have they spared me? Has any one shown the mercy towards me that you now ask at my hands? No, madame, they struck me, always struck me!

"Woman, siren that you are, do you persist in fixing on me that fascinating eye, which reminds me that I ought to blush? Well, be it so; let me blush for the faults you know, and perhaps — perhaps for even more than those! But having sinned myself, — it may be more deeply than others, — I never rest till I have torn the disguises from my fellow-creatures, and found out their weaknesses. I have always found them; and more, — I repeat it with joy, with triumph, — I have always found some proof of human perversity or error. Every criminal I condemn seems to me living evidence that I am not a hideous exception to the rest. Alas, alas, alas; all the world is wicked; let us therefore strike at wickedness!"

Villefort pronounced these last words with a feverish rage, which gave a ferocious eloquence to his words.

"But"' said Madame Danglars, resolving to make a last effort, "this young man, though a murderer, is an orphan, abandoned by everybody."

"So much the worse, or rather, so much the better; it has been so ordained that he may have none to weep his fate."

"But this is trampling on the weak, sir."

"The weakness of a murderer!"

"His dishonor reflects upon us."

"Is not death in my house?"

"Oh, sir," exclaimed the baroness, "you are without pity for others, well, then, I tell you they will have no mercy on you!"

"Be it so!" said Villefort, raising his arms to heaven.

"At least, delay the trial till the next assizes; we shall then have six months before us."

“No, madame,” said Villefort; “instructions have been given. There are yet five days left; five days are more than I require. Do you not think that I also long for forgetfulness? While working night and day, I sometimes lose all recollection of the past, and then I experience the same sort of happiness I can imagine the dead feel; still, it is better than suffering.”

“But, sir, he has fled; let him escape — inaction is a pardonable offence.”

“I tell you it is too late; early this morning the telegraph was employed, and at this very minute” —

“Sir,” said the valet de chambre, entering the room, “a dragoon has brought this despatch from the minister of the interior.” Villefort seized the letter, and hastily broke the seal. Madame Danglars trembled with fear; Villefort started with joy. “Arrested!” he exclaimed; “he was taken at Compiegne, and all is over.” Madame Danglars rose from her seat, pale and cold. “Adieu, sir,” she said. “Adieu, madame,” replied the king’s attorney, as in an almost joyful manner he conducted her to the door. Then, turning to his desk, he said, striking the letter with the back of his right hand, “Come, I had a forgery, three robberies, and two cases of arson, I only wanted a murder, and here it is. It will be a splendid session!”

Chapter 100

The Apparition.

As the procureur had told Madame Danglars, Valentine was not yet recovered. Bowed down with fatigue, she was indeed confined to her bed; and it was in her own room, and from the lips of Madame de Villefort, that she heard all the strange events we have related, — we mean the flight of Eugenie and the arrest of Andrea Cavalcanti, or rather Benedetto, together with the accusation of murder pronounced against him. But Valentine was so weak that this recital scarcely produced the same effect it would have done had she been in her usual state of health. Indeed, her brain was only the seat of vague ideas, and confused forms, mingled with strange fancies, alone presented themselves before her eyes.

During the daytime Valentine's perceptions remained tolerably clear, owing to the constant presence of M. Noirtier, who caused himself to be carried to his granddaughter's room, and watched her with his paternal tenderness; Villefort also, on his return from the law courts, frequently passed an hour or two with his father and child. At six o'clock Villefort retired to his study, at eight M. d'Avrigny himself arrived, bringing the night draught prepared for the young girl, and then M. Noirtier was carried away. A nurse of the doctor's choice succeeded them, and never left till about ten or eleven o'clock, when Valentine was asleep. As she went downstairs she gave the keys of Valentine's room to M. de Villefort, so that no one could reach the sick-room excepting through that of Madame de Villefort and little Edward.

Every morning Morrel called on Noirtier to receive news of Valentine, and, extraordinary as it seemed, each day found him less uneasy. Certainly, though Valentine still labored under dreadful nervous excitement, she was better; and moreover, Monte Cristo had told him when, half distracted, he had rushed to the count's house, that if she were not dead in two hours she would be saved. Now four days had elapsed, and Valentine still lived.

The nervous excitement of which we speak pursued Valentine even in her sleep, or rather in that state of somnolence which succeeded her waking hours; it was then, in the silence of night, in the dim light shed from the alabaster lamp on the chimney-piece, that she saw the shadows pass and repass which hover over the bed of sickness, and fan the fever with their trembling wings. First she fancied she saw her stepmother threatening her, then Morrel stretched his arms towards her; sometimes mere strangers, like the Count of Monte Cristo came to visit her; even the very furniture, in these moments of delirium, seemed to move, and this state lasted till about three o'clock in the morning, when a deep, heavy slumber overcame the young girl, from which she did not awake till daylight. On the evening of the day on which Valentine had learned of the flight of Eugenie and the arrest of Benedetto, — Villefort having retired as well as Noirtier and d'Avrigny, — her thoughts wandered in a confused maze, alternately reviewing her own situation and the events she had just heard.

Eleven o'clock had struck. The nurse, having placed the beverage prepared by the doctor within reach of the patient, and locked the door, was listening with terror to the comments of the servants in the kitchen, and storing her memory with all the horrible stories which had for some months past amused the occupants of the ante-chambers in the house of the king's attorney. Meanwhile an unexpected scene was passing in the room which had been so carefully locked. Ten minutes had elapsed since the nurse had left; Valentine, who for the last hour had been suffering from the fever which returned nightly, incapable of controlling her ideas, was forced to yield to the excitement which exhausted itself in producing and reproducing a succession and recurrence of the same fancies and images. The night-lamp threw out countless rays, each resolving itself into some strange form to her disordered imagination, when suddenly by its flickering light Valentine thought she saw the door of her library, which was in the recess by the chimney-piece, open slowly, though she in vain listened for the sound of the hinges on which it turned.

At any other time Valentine would have seized the silken bell-pull and summoned assistance, but nothing astonished her in her present situation. Her reason told her that all the visions she beheld were but the children of her imagination, and the conviction was strengthened by the fact that in the morning no traces remained of the nocturnal phantoms, who disappeared with the coming of daylight. From behind the door a human figure appeared, but the girl was too familiar with such apparitions to be alarmed, and therefore only stared, hoping to recognize Morrel. The figure advanced towards the bed and appeared to listen with profound attention. At this moment a ray of light glanced across the face of the midnight visitor.

"It is not he," she murmured, and waited, in the assurance that this was but a dream, for the man to disappear or assume some other form. Still, she felt her pulse, and finding it throb violently she remembered that the best method of dispelling such illusions was to drink, for a draught of the beverage prepared by the doctor to allay her fever seemed to cause a reaction of the brain, and for a short time she suffered less. Valentine therefore reached her hand towards the glass, but as soon as her trembling arm left the bed the apparition advanced more quickly towards her, and approached the young girl so closely that she fancied she heard his breath, and felt the pressure of his hand.

This time the illusion, or rather the reality, surpassed anything Valentine had before experienced; she began to believe herself really alive and awake, and the belief that her reason was this time not deceived made her shudder. The pressure she felt was evidently intended to arrest her arm, and she slowly withdrew it. Then the figure, from whom she could not detach her eyes, and who appeared more protecting than menacing, took the glass, and walking towards the night-light held it up, as if to test its transparency. This did not seem sufficient; the man, or rather the ghost — for he trod so softly that no sound was heard — then poured out about a spoonful into the glass, and drank it. Valentine witnessed this scene with a sentiment of stupefaction. Every minute she had expected that it would vanish and give place to another vision; but the man, instead of dissolving like a shadow, again approached her, and said in an agitated voice, "Now you may drink."

Valentine shuddered. It was the first time one of these visions had ever addressed her in a living voice, and she was about to utter an exclamation. The man placed his finger on her lips. "The Count of Monte Cristo!" she murmured.

It was easy to see that no doubt now remained in the young girl's mind as to the reality of the scene; her eyes started with terror, her hands trembled, and she rapidly drew the bedclothes closer to her. Still, the presence of Monte Cristo at such an hour, his mysterious, fanciful, and extraordinary entrance into her room through the wall, might well seem impossibilities to her shattered reason. "Do not call any one — do not be alarmed," said the Count; "do not let a shade of suspicion or uneasiness remain in your breast; the man standing before you, Valentine (for this time it is no ghost), is nothing more than the tenderest father and the most respectful friend you could dream of."

Valentine could not reply; the voice which indicated the real presence of a being in the room, alarmed her so much that she feared to utter a syllable; still the expression of her eyes seemed to inquire, "If your intentions are pure, why are you here?" The count's marvellous sagacity understood all that was passing in the young girl's mind.

"Listen to me," he said, "or, rather, look upon me; look at my face, paler even than usual, and my eyes, red with weariness — for four days I have not closed them, for I have been constantly watching you, to protect and preserve you for Maximilian." The blood mounted rapidly to the cheeks of Valentine, for the name just announced by the count dispelled all the fear with which his presence had inspired her. "Maximilian!" she exclaimed, and so sweet did the sound appear to her, that she repeated it — "Maximilian! — has he then owned all to you?"

"Everything. He told me your life was his, and I have promised him that you shall live."

"You have promised him that I shall live?"

"Yes."

"But, sir, you spoke of vigilance and protection. Are you a doctor?"

"Yes; the best you could have at the present time, believe me."

"But you say you have watched?" said Valentine uneasily; "where have you been? — I have not seen you." The count extended his hand towards the library. "I was hidden behind that door," he said, "which leads into the next house, which I have rented." Valentine turned her eyes away, and, with an indignant expression of pride and modest fear, exclaimed: "Sir, I think you have been guilty of an unparalleled intrusion, and that what you call protection is more like an insult."

"Valentine," he answered, "during my long watch over you, all I have observed has been what people visited you, what nourishment was prepared, and what beverage was served; then, when the latter appeared dangerous to me, I entered, as I have now done, and substituted, in the place of the poison, a healthful draught; which, instead of producing the death intended, caused life to circulate in your veins."

"Poison — death!" exclaimed Valentine, half believing herself under the influence of some feverish hallucination; "what are you saying, sir?"

"Hush, my child," said Monte Cristo, again placing his finger upon her lips, "I did say poison and death. But drink some of this;" and the count took a bottle from his pocket, containing a red liquid, of which he poured a few drops into the glass. "Drink this, and then take nothing more to-night." Valentine stretched out her hand, but scarcely had she touched the glass when she drew back in fear. Monte Cristo took the glass, drank half its contents, and then presented it to Valentine, who smiled and swallowed the rest. "Oh, yes," she exclaimed, "I recognize the flavor of my nocturnal beverage which refreshed me so much, and seemed to ease my aching brain. Thank you, sir, thank you!"

"This is how you have lived during the last four nights, Valentine," said the count. "But, oh, how I passed that time! Oh, the wretched hours I have endured — the torture to which I have submitted when I saw the deadly poison poured into your glass, and how I trembled lest you should drink it before I could find time to throw it away!"

"Sir," said Valentine, at the height of her terror, "you say you endured tortures when you saw the deadly poison poured into my glass; but if you saw this, you must also have seen the person who poured it?"

"Yes." Valentine raised herself in bed, and drew over her chest, which appeared whiter than snow, the embroidered cambric, still moist with the cold dews of delirium, to which were now added those of terror. "You saw the person?" repeated the young girl. "Yes," repeated the count.

"What you tell me is horrible, sir. You wish to make me believe something too dreadful. What? — attempt to murder me in my father's house, in my room, on my bed of sickness? Oh, leave me, sir; you are tempting me — you make me doubt the goodness of providence — it is impossible, it cannot be!"

"Are you the first that this hand has stricken? Have you not seen M. de Saint-Meran, Madame de Saint-Meran, Barrois, all fall? Would not M. Noirtier also have fallen a victim, had not the treatment he has been pursuing for the last three years neutralized the effects of the poison?"

"Oh, heaven," said Valentine; "is this the reason why grandpapa has made me share all his beverages during the last month?"

"And have they all tasted of a slightly bitter flavor, like that of dried orange-peel?"

"Oh, yes, yes!"

“Then that explains all,” said Monte Cristo. “Your grandfather knows, then, that a poisoner lives here; perhaps he even suspects the person. He has been fortifying you, his beloved child, against the fatal effects of the poison, which has failed because your system was already impregnated with it. But even this would have availed little against a more deadly medium of death employed four days ago, which is generally but too fatal.”

“But who, then, is this assassin, this murderer?”

“Let me also ask you a question. Have you never seen any one enter your room at night?”

“Oh, yes; I have frequently seen shadows pass close to me, approach, and disappear; but I took them for visions raised by my feverish imagination, and indeed when you entered I thought I was under the influence of delirium.”

“Then you do not know who it is that attempts your life?”

“No,” said Valentine; “who could desire my death?”

“You shall know it now, then,” said Monte Cristo, listening.

“How do you mean?” said Valentine, looking anxiously around.

“Because you are not feverish or delirious to-night, but thoroughly awake; midnight is striking, which is the hour murderers choose.”

“Oh, heavens,” exclaimed Valentine, wiping off the drops which ran down her forehead. Midnight struck slowly and sadly; every hour seemed to strike with leaden weight upon the heart of the poor girl. “Valentine,” said the count, “summon up all your courage; still the beatings of your heart; do not let a sound escape you, and feign to be asleep; then you will see.” Valentine seized the count’s hand. “I think I hear a noise,” she said; “leave me.”

“Good-by, for the present,” replied the count, walking upon tiptoe towards the library door, and smiling with an expression so sad and paternal that the young girl’s heart was filled with gratitude. Before closing the door he turned around once more, and said, “Not a movement — not a word; let them think you asleep, or perhaps you may be killed before I have the power of helping you.” And with this fearful injunction the count disappeared through the door, which noiselessly closed after him.

Chapter 101

Locusta.

Valentine was alone; two other clocks, slower than that of Saint-Philippe du Roule, struck the hour of midnight from different directions, and excepting the rumbling of a few carriages all was silent. Then Valentine's attention was engrossed by the clock in her room, which marked the seconds. She began counting them, remarking that they were much slower than the beatings of her heart; and still she doubted, — the inoffensive Valentine could not imagine that any one should desire her death. Why should they? To what end? What had she done to excite the malice of an enemy? There was no fear of her falling asleep. One terrible idea pressed upon her mind, — that some one existed in the world who had attempted to assassinate her, and who was about to endeavor to do so again. Supposing this person, wearied at the inefficacy of the poison, should, as Monte Cristo intimated, have recourse to steel! — What if the count should have no time to run to her rescue! — What if her last moments were approaching, and she should never again see Morrel! When this terrible chain of ideas presented itself, Valentine was nearly persuaded to ring the bell, and call for help. But through the door she fancied she saw the luminous eye of the count — that eye which lived in her memory, and the recollection overwhelmed her with so much shame that she asked herself whether any amount of gratitude could ever repay his adventurous and devoted friendship.

Twenty minutes, twenty tedious minutes, passed thus, then ten more, and at last the clock struck the half-hour. Just then the sound of finger-nails slightly grating against the door of the library informed Valentine that the count was still watching, and recommended her to do the same; at the same time, on the opposite side, that is towards Edward's room, Valentine fancied that she heard the creaking of the floor; she listened attentively, holding her breath till she was nearly suffocated; the lock turned, and the door slowly opened. Valentine had raised herself upon her elbow, and had scarcely time to throw herself down on the bed and shade her eyes with her arm; then, trembling, agitated, and her heart beating with indescribable terror, she awaited the event.

Some one approached the bed and drew back the curtains. Valentine summoned every effort, and breathed with that regular respiration which announces tranquil sleep. “Valentine!” said a low voice. Still silent: Valentine had promised not to awake. Then everything was still, excepting that Valentine heard the almost noiseless sound of some liquid being poured into the glass she had just emptied. Then she ventured to open her eyelids, and glance over her extended arm. She saw a woman in a white dressing-gown pouring a liquor from a phial into her glass. During this short time Valentine must have held her breath, or moved in some slight degree, for the woman, disturbed, stopped and leaned over the bed, in order the better to ascertain whether Valentine slept — it was Madame de Villefort.

On recognizing her step-mother, Valentine could not repress a shudder, which caused a vibration in the bed. Madame de Villefort instantly stepped back close to the wall, and there, shaded by the bed-curtains, she silently and attentively watched the slightest movement of Valentine. The latter recollected the terrible caution of Monte Cristo; she fancied that the hand not holding the phial clasped a long sharp knife. Then collecting all her remaining strength, she forced herself to close her eyes; but this simple operation upon the most delicate organs of our frame, generally so easy to accomplish, became almost impossible at this moment, so much did curiosity struggle to retain the eyelid open and learn the truth. Madame de Villefort, however, reassured by the silence, which was alone disturbed by the regular breathing of Valentine, again extended her hand, and half hidden by the curtains succeeded in emptying the contents of the phial into the glass. Then she retired so gently that Valentine did not know she had left the room. She only witnessed the withdrawal of the arm — the fair round arm of a woman but twenty-five years old, and who yet spread death around her.

It is impossible to describe the sensations experienced by Valentine during the minute and a half Madame de Villefort remained in the room. The grating against the library-door aroused the young girl from the stupor in which she was plunged, and which almost amounted to insensibility. She raised her head with an effort. The noiseless door again turned on its hinges, and the Count of Monte Cristo reappeared. “Well,” said he, “do you still doubt?”

“Oh,” murmured the young girl.

"Have you seen?"

"Alas!"

"Did you recognize?" Valentine groaned. "Oh, yes;" she said, "I saw, but I cannot believe!"

"Would you rather die, then, and cause Maximilian's death?"

"Oh," repeated the young girl, almost bewildered, "can I not leave the house? — can I not escape?"

"Valentine, the hand which now threatens you will pursue you everywhere; your servants will be seduced with gold, and death will be offered to you disguised in every shape. You will find it in the water you drink from the spring, in the fruit you pluck from the tree."

"But did you not say that my kind grandfather's precaution had neutralized the poison?"

"Yes, but not against a strong dose; the poison will be changed, and the quantity increased." He took the glass and raised it to his lips. "It is already done," he said; "brucine is no longer employed, but a simple narcotic! I can recognize the flavor of the alcohol in which it has been dissolved. If you had taken what Madame de Villefort has poured into your glass, Valentine — Valentine — you would have been doomed!"

"But," exclaimed the young girl, "why am I thus pursued?"

"Why? — are you so kind — so good — so unsuspicious of ill, that you cannot understand, Valentine?"

"No, I have never injured her."

"But you are rich, Valentine; you have 200,000 livres a year, and you prevent her son from enjoying these 200,000. livres."

"How so? The fortune is not her gift, but is inherited from my relations."

"Certainly; and that is why M. and Madame de Saint-Meran have died; that is why M. Noirtier was sentenced the day he made you his heir; that is why you, in your turn, are to die — it is because your father would inherit your property, and your brother, his only son, succeed to his."

"Edward? Poor child! Are all these crimes committed on his account?"

"Ah, then you at length understand?"

"Heaven grant that this may not be visited upon him!"

"Valentine, you are an angel!"

"But why is my grandfather allowed to live?"

"It was considered, that you dead, the fortune would naturally revert to your brother, unless he were disinherited; and besides, the crime appearing useless, it would be folly to commit it.”

“And is it possible that this frightful combination of crimes has been invented by a woman?”

“Do you recollect in the arbor of the Hotel des Postes, at Perugia, seeing a man in a brown cloak, whom your stepmother was questioning upon aqua tofana? Well, ever since then, the infernal project has been ripening in her brain.”

“Ah, then, indeed, sir,” said the sweet girl, bathed in tears, “I see that I am condemned to die!”

“No, Valentine, for I have foreseen all their plots; no, your enemy is conquered since we know her, and you will live, Valentine — live to be happy yourself, and to confer happiness upon a noble heart; but to insure this you must rely on me.”

“Command me, sir — what am I to do?”

“You must blindly take what I give you.”

“Alas, were it only for my own sake, I should prefer to die!”

“You must not confide in any one — not even in your father.”

“My father is not engaged in this fearful plot, is he, sir?” asked Valentine, clasping her hands.

“No; and yet your father, a man accustomed to judicial accusations, ought to have known that all these deaths have not happened naturally; it is he who should have watched over you — he should have occupied my place — he should have emptied that glass — he should have risen against the assassin. Spectre against spectre!” he murmured in a low voice, as he concluded his sentence.

“Sir,” said Valentine, “I will do all I can to live, for there are two beings whose existence depends upon mine — my grandfather and Maximilian.”

“I will watch over them as I have over you.”

“Well, sir, do as you will with me;” and then she added, in a low voice, “oh, heavens, what will befall me?”

“Whatever may happen, Valentine, do not be alarmed; though you suffer; though you lose sight, hearing, consciousness, fear nothing; though you should awake and be ignorant where you are, still do not fear; even though you should find yourself in a sepulchral vault or coffin. Reassure yourself, then, and say to yourself: ‘At this moment, a friend, a father, who lives for my happiness and that of Maximilian, watches over me!’“

“Alas, alas, what a fearful extremity!”

“Valentine, would you rather denounce your stepmother?”

“I would rather die a hundred times — oh, yes, die!”

“No, you will not die; but will you promise me, whatever happens, that you will not complain, but hope?”

“I will think of Maximilian!”

“You are my own darling child, Valentine! I alone can save you, and I will.” Valentine in the extremity of her terror joined her hands, — for she felt that the moment had arrived to ask for courage, — and began to pray, and while uttering little more than incoherent words, she forgot that her white shoulders had no other covering than her long hair, and that the pulsations of her heart could be seen through the lace of her nightdress. Monte Cristo gently laid his hand on the young girl’s arm, drew the velvet coverlet close to her throat, and said with a paternal smile, — ”My child, believe in my devotion to you as you believe in the goodness of providence and the love of Maximilian.”

Then he drew from his waistcoat-pocket the little emerald box, raised the golden lid, and took from it a pastille about the size of a pea, which he placed in her hand. She took it, and looked attentively on the count; there was an expression on the face of her intrepid protector which commanded her veneration. She evidently interrogated him by her look. “Yes,” said he. Valentine carried the pastille to her mouth, and swallowed it. “And now, my dear child, adieu for the present. I will try and gain a little sleep, for you are saved.”

“Go,” said Valentine, “whatever happens, I promise you not to fear.”

Monte Cristo for some time kept his eyes fixed on the young girl, who gradually fell asleep, yielding to the effects of the narcotic the count had given her. Then he took the glass, emptied three parts of the contents in the fireplace, that it might be supposed Valentine had taken it, and replaced it on the table; then he disappeared, after throwing a farewell glance on Valentine, who slept with the confidence and innocence of an angel.

Chapter 102

Valentine.

The night-light continued to burn on the chimney-piece, exhausting the last drops of oil which floated on the surface of the water. The globe of the lamp appeared of a reddish hue, and the flame, brightening before it expired, threw out the last flickerings which in an inanimate object have been so often compared with the convulsions of a human creature in its final agonies. A dull and dismal light was shed over the bedclothes and curtains surrounding the young girl. All noise in the streets had ceased, and the silence was frightful. It was then that the door of Edward’s room opened, and a head we have before noticed appeared in the glass opposite; it was Madame de Villefort, who came to witness the effects of the drink she had prepared. She stopped in the doorway, listened for a moment to the flickering of the lamp, the only sound in that deserted room, and then advanced to the table to see if Valentine’s glass were empty. It was still about a quarter full, as we before stated. Madame de Villefort emptied the contents into the ashes, which she disturbed that they might the more readily absorb the liquid; then she carefully rinsed the glass, and wiping it with her handkerchief replaced it on the table.

If any one could have looked into the room just then he would have noticed the hesitation with which Madame de Villefort approached the bed and looked fixedly on Valentine. The dim light, the profound silence, and the gloomy thoughts inspired by the hour, and still more by her own conscience, all combined to produce a sensation of fear; the poisoner was terrified at the contemplation of her own work. At length she rallied, drew aside the curtain, and leaning over the pillow gazed intently on Valentine. The young girl no longer breathed, no breath issued through the half-closed teeth; the white lips no longer quivered — the eyes were suffused with a bluish vapor, and the long black lashes rested on a cheek white as wax. Madame de Villefort gazed upon the face so expressive even in its stillness; then she ventured to raise the coverlet and press her hand upon the young girl’s heart. It was cold and motionless. She only felt the pulsation in her own fingers, and withdrew her hand with a shudder. One arm was hanging out of the bed; from shoulder to elbow it was moulded after the arms of Germain Pillon's "Graces," [*] but the fore-arm seemed to be slightly distorted by convulsion, and the hand, so delicately formed, was resting with stiff outstretched fingers on the framework of the bed. The nails, too, were turning blue.

* Germain Pillon was a famous French sculptor (1535-1598).
His best known work is "The Three Graces," now in the
Louvre.

Madame de Villefort had no longer any doubt; all was over — she had consummated the last terrible work she had to accomplish. There was no more to do in the room, so the poisoner retired stealthily, as though fearing to hear the sound of her own footsteps; but as she withdrew she still held aside the curtain, absorbed in the irresistible attraction always exerted by the picture of death, so long as it is merely mysterious and does not excite disgust. Just then the lamp again flickered; the noise startled Madame de Villefort, who shuddered and dropped the curtain. Immediately afterwards the light expired, and the room was plunged in frightful obscurity, while the clock at that minute struck half-past four. Overpowered with agitation, the poisoner succeeded in groping her way to the door, and reached her room in an agony of fear.

The darkness lasted two hours longer; then by degrees a cold light crept through the Venetian blinds, until at length it revealed the objects in the room. About this time the nurse's cough was heard on the stairs and the woman entered the room with a cup in her hand. To the tender eye of a father or a lover, the first glance would have sufficed to reveal Valentine's condition; but to this hireling, Valentine only appeared to sleep. "Good," she exclaimed, approaching the table, "she has taken part of her draught; the glass is three-quarters empty."

Then she went to the fireplace and lit the fire, and although she had just left her bed, she could not resist the temptation offered by Valentine's sleep, so she threw herself into an arm-chair to snatch a little more rest. The clock striking eight awoke her. Astonished at the prolonged slumber of the patient, and frightened to see that the arm was still hanging out of the bed, she advanced towards Valentine, and for the first time noticed the white lips. She tried to replace the arm, but it moved with a frightful rigidity which could not deceive a sick-nurse. She screamed aloud; then running to the door exclaimed, — ”Help, help!”

“What is the matter?” asked M. d’Avrigny, at the foot of the stairs, it being the hour he usually visited her.

“What is it?” asked Villefort, rushing from his room. “Doctor, do you hear them call for help?”

“Yes, yes; let us hasten up; it was in Valentine’s room.” But before the doctor and the father could reach the room, the servants who were on the same floor had entered, and seeing Valentine pale and motionless on her bed, they lifted up their hands towards heaven and stood transfixed, as though struck by lightening. “Call Madame de Villefort! — Wake Madame de Villefort!” cried the procureur from the door of his chamber, which apparently he scarcely dared to leave. But instead of obeying him, the servants stood watching M. d’Avrigny, who ran to Valentine, and raised her in his arms. “What? — this one, too?” he exclaimed. “Oh, where will be the end?” Villefort rushed into the room. “What are you saying, doctor?” he exclaimed, raising his hands to heaven.

“I say that Valentine is dead!” replied d’Avrigny, in a voice terrible in its solemn calm.

M. de Villefort staggered and buried his head in the bed. On the exclamation of the doctor and the cry of the father, the servants all fled with muttered imprecations; they were heard running down the stairs and through the long passages, then there was a rush in the court, afterwards all was still; they had, one and all, deserted the accursed house. Just then, Madame de Villefort, in the act of slipping on her dressing-gown, threw aside the drapery and for a moment stood motionless, as though interrogating the occupants of the room, while she endeavored to call up some rebellious tears. On a sudden she stepped, or rather bounded, with outstretched arms, towards the table. She saw d’Avrigny curiously examining the glass, which she felt certain of having emptied during the night. It was now a third full, just as it was when she threw the contents into the ashes. The spectre of Valentine rising before the poisoner would have alarmed her less. It was, indeed, the same color as the draught she had poured into the glass, and which Valentine had drunk}; it was indeed the poison, which could not deceive M. d’Avrigny, which he now examined so closely; it was doubtless a miracle from heaven, that, notwithstanding her precautions, there should be some trace, some proof remaining to reveal the crime. While Madame de Villefort remained rooted to the spot like a statue of terror, and Villefort, with his head hidden in the bedclothes, saw nothing around him, d'Avrigny approached the window, that he might the better examine the contents of the glass, and dipping the tip of his finger in, tasted it. "Ah," he exclaimed, "it is no longer brucine that is used; let me see what it is!"

Then he ran to one of the cupboards in Valentine's room, which had been transformed into a medicine closet, and taking from its silver case a small bottle of nitric acid, dropped a little of it into the liquor, which immediately changed to a blood-red color. "Ah," exclaimed d'Avrigny, in a voice in which the horror of a judge unveiling the truth was mingled with the delight of a student making a discovery. Madame de Villefort was overpowered, her eyes first flashed and then swam, she staggered towards the door and disappeared. Directly afterwards the distant sound of a heavy weight falling on the ground was heard, but no one paid any attention to it; the nurse was engaged in watching the chemical analysis, and Villefort was still absorbed in grief. M. d'Avrigny alone had followed Madame de Villefort with his eyes, and watched her hurried retreat. He lifted up the drapery over the entrance to Edward's room, and his eye reaching as far as Madame de Villefort's apartment, he beheld her extended lifeless on the floor. "Go to the assistance of Madame de Villefort," he said to the nurse. "Madame de Villefort is ill."

"But Mademoiselle de Villefort" — stammered the nurse.

"Mademoiselle de Villefort no longer requires help," said d'Avrigny, "since she is dead."

"Dead, — dead!" groaned forth Villefort, in a paroxysm of grief, which was the more terrible from the novelty of the sensation in the iron heart of that man.

"Dead!" repeated a third voice. "Who said Valentine was dead?"

The two men turned round, and saw Morrel standing at the door, pale and terror-stricken. This is what had happened. At the usual time, Morrel had presented himself at the little door leading to Noirtier's room. Contrary to custom, the door was open, and having no occasion to ring he entered. He waited for a moment in the hall and called for a servant to conduct him to M. Noirtier; but no one answered, the servants having, as we know, deserted the house. Morrel had no particular reason for uneasiness; Monte Cristo had promised him that Valentine should live, and so far he had always fulfilled his word. Every night the count had given him news, which was the next morning confirmed by Noirtier. Still this extraordinary silence appeared strange to him, and he called a second and third time; still no answer. Then he determined to go up. Noirtier’s room was opened, like all the rest. The first thing he saw was the old man sitting in his arm-chair in his usual place, but his eyes expressed alarm, which was confirmed by the pallor which overspread his features.

“How are you, sir?” asked Morrel, with a sickness of heart.

“Well,” answered the old man, by closing his eyes; but his appearance manifested increasing uneasiness.

“You are thoughtful, sir,” continued Morrel; “you want something; shall I call one of the servants?”

“Yes,” replied Noirtier.

Morrel pulled the bell, but though he nearly broke the cord no one answered. He turned towards Noirtier; the pallor and anguish expressed on his countenance momentarily increased.

“Oh,” exclaimed Morrel, “why do they not come? Is any one ill in the house?” The eyes of Noirtier seemed as though they would start from their sockets. “What is the matter? You alarm me. Valentine? Valentine?”

“Yes, yes,” signed Noirtier. Maximilian tried to speak, but he could articulate nothing; he staggered, and supported himself against the wainscot. Then he pointed to the door.

“Yes, yes, yes!” continued the old man. Maximilian rushed up the little staircase, while Noirtier’s eyes seemed to say, — ”Quicker, quicker!”

In a minute the young man darted through several rooms, till at length he reached Valentine’s. There was no occasion to push the door, it was wide open. A sob was the only sound he heard. He saw as though in a mist, a black figure kneeling and buried in a confused mass of white drapery. A terrible fear transfixed him. It was then he heard a voice exclaim “Valentine is dead!” and another voice which, like an echo repeated, — ”Dead, — dead!”

Chapter 103

Maximilian.

Villefort rose, half ashamed of being surprised in such a paroxysm of grief. The terrible office he had held for twenty-five years had succeeded in making him more or less than man. His glance, at first wandering, fixed itself upon Morrel. “Who are you, sir,” he asked, “that forget that this is not the manner to enter a house stricken with death? Go, sir, go!” But Morrel remained motionless; he could not detach his eyes from that disordered bed, and the pale corpse of the young girl who was lying on it. “Go! — do you hear?” said Villefort, while d’Avrigny advanced to lead Morrel out. Maximilian stared for a moment at the corpse, gazed all around the room, then upon the two men; he opened his mouth to speak, but finding it impossible to give utterance to the innumerable ideas that occupied his brain, he went out, thrusting his hands through his hair in such a manner that Villefort and d’Avrigny, for a moment diverted from the engrossing topic, exchanged glances, which seemed to say, — ”He is mad!”

But in less than five minutes the staircase groaned beneath an extraordinary weight. Morrel was seen carrying, with superhuman strength, the arm-chair containing Noirtier up-stairs. When he reached the landing he placed the arm-chair on the floor and rapidly rolled it into Valentine’s room. This could only have been accomplished by means of unnatural strength supplied by powerful excitement. But the most fearful spectacle was Noirtier being pushed towards the bed, his face expressing all his meaning, and his eyes supplying the want of every other faculty. That pale face and flaming glance appeared to Villefort like a frightful apparition. Each time he had been brought into contact with his father, something terrible had happened. “See what they have done!” cried Morrel, with one hand leaning on the back of the chair, and the other extended towards Valentine. “See, my father, see!”

Villefort drew back and looked with astonishment on the young man, who, almost a stranger to him, called Noirtier his father. At this moment the whole soul of the old man seemed centred in his eyes which became bloodshot; the veins of the throat swelled; his cheeks and temples became purple, as though he was struck with epilepsy; nothing was wanting to complete this but the utterance of a cry. And the cry issued from his pores, if we may thus speak — a cry frightful in its silence. D'Avrigny rushed towards the old man and made him inhale a powerful restorative.

"Sir," cried Morrel, seizing the moist hand of the paralytic, "they ask me who I am, and what right I have to be here. Oh, you know it, tell them, tell them!" And the young man's voice was choked by sobs. As for the old man, his chest heaved with his panting respiration. One could have thought that he was undergoing the agonies preceding death. At length, happier than the young man, who sobbed without weeping, tears glistened in the eyes of Noirtier. "Tell them," said Morrel in a hoarse voice, "tell them that I am her betrothed. Tell them she was my beloved, my noble girl, my only blessing in the world. Tell them — oh, tell them, that corpse belongs to me!"

The young man overwhelmed by the weight of his anguish, fell heavily on his knees before the bed, which his fingers grasped with convulsive energy. D'Avrigny, unable to bear the sight of this touching emotion, turned away; and Villefort, without seeking any further explanation, and attracted towards him by the irresistible magnetism which draws us towards those who have loved the people for whom we mourn, extended his hand towards the young man. But Morrel saw nothing; he had grasped the hand of Valentine, and unable to weep vented his agony in groans as he bit the sheets. For some time nothing was heard in that chamber but sobs, exclamations, and prayers. At length Villefort, the most composed of all, spoke: "Sir," said he to Maximilian, "you say you loved Valentine, that you were betrothed to her. I knew nothing of this engagement, of this love, yet I, her father, forgive you, for I see that your grief is real and deep; and besides my own sorrow is too great for anger to find a place in my heart. But you see that the angel whom you hoped for has left this earth — she has nothing more to do with the adoration of men. Take a last farewell, sir, of her sad remains; take the hand you expected to possess once more within your own, and then separate yourself from her forever. Valentine now requires only the ministrations of the priest."

"You are mistaken, sir," exclaimed Morrel, raising himself on one knee, his heart pierced by a more acute pang than any he had yet felt — "you are mistaken; Valentine, dying as she has, not only requires a priest, but an avenger. You, M. de Villefort, send for the priest; I will be the avenger."

“What do you mean, sir?” asked Villefort, trembling at the new idea inspired by the delirium of Morrel.

“I tell you, sir, that two persons exist in you; the father has mourned sufficiently, now let the procureur fulfil his office.”

The eyes of Noirtier glistened, and d’Avrigny approached.

“Gentlemen,” said Morrel, reading all that passed through the minds of the witnesses to the scene, “I know what I am saying, and you know as well as I do what I am about to say — Valentine has been assassinated!” Villefort hung his head, d’Avrigny approached nearer, and Noirtier said “Yes” with his eyes. “Now, sir,” continued Morrel, “in these days no one can disappear by violent means without some inquiries being made as to the cause of her disappearance, even were she not a young, beautiful, and adorable creature like Valentine. Mr. Procureur,” said Morrel with increasing vehemence, “no mercy is allowed; I denounce the crime; it is your place to seek the assassin.” The young man’s implacable eyes interrogated Villefort, who, on his side, glanced from Noirtier to d’Avrigny. But instead of finding sympathy in the eyes of the doctor and his father, he only saw an expression as inflexible as that of Maximilian. “Yes,” indicated the old man.

“Assuredly,” said d’Avrigny.

“Sir,” said Villefort, striving to struggle against this triple force and his own emotion, — ”sir, you are deceived; no one commits crimes here. I am stricken by fate. It is horrible, indeed, but no one assassinates.”

The eyes of Noirtier lighted up with rage, and d’Avrigny prepared to speak. Morrel, however, extended his arm, and commanded silence. “And I say that murders are committed here,” said Morrel, whose voice, though lower in tone, lost none of its terrible distinctness: “I tell you that this is the fourth victim within the last four months. I tell you, Valentine’s life was attempted by poison four days ago, though she escaped, owing to the precautions of M. Noirtier. I tell you that the dose has been double, the poison changed, and that this time it has succeeded. I tell you that you know these things as well as I do, since this gentleman has forewarned you, both as a doctor and as a friend.”

“Oh, you rave, sir,” exclaimed Villefort, in vain endeavoring to escape the net in which he was taken.

“I rave?” said Morrel; “well, then, I appeal to M. d’Avrigny himself. Ask him, sir, if he recollects the words he uttered in the garden of this house on the night of Madame de Saint-Meran's death. You thought yourselves alone, and talked about that tragical death, and the fatality you mentioned then is the same which has caused the murder of Valentine." Villefort and d'Avrigny exchanged looks. "Yes, yes," continued Morrel; "recall the scene, for the words you thought were only given to silence and solitude fell into my ears. Certainly, after witnessing the culpable indolence manifested by M. de Villefort towards his own relations, I ought to have denounced him to the authorities; then I should not have been an accomplice to thy death, as I now am, sweet, beloved Valentine; but the accomplice shall become the avenger. This fourth murder is apparent to all, and if thy father abandon thee, Valentine, it is I, and I swear it, that shall pursue the assassin." And this time, as though nature had at least taken compassion on the vigorous frame, nearly bursting with its own strength, the words of Morrel were stifled in his throat; his breast heaved; the tears, so long rebellious, gushed from his eyes; and he threw himself weeping on his knees by the side of the bed.

Then d'Avrigny spoke. "And I, too," he exclaimed in a low voice, "I unite with M. Morrel in demanding justice for crime; my blood boils at the idea of having encouraged a murderer by my cowardly concession."

"Oh, merciful heavens!" murmured Villefort. Morrel raised his head, and reading the eyes of the old man, which gleamed with unnatural lustre, —"Stay," he said, "M. Noirtier wishes to speak."

"Yes," indicated Noirtier, with an expression the more terrible, from all his faculties being centred in his glance.

"Do you know the assassin?" asked Morrel.

"Yes," replied Noirtier.

"And will you direct us?" exclaimed the young man. "Listen, M. d'Avrigny, listen!" Noirtier looked upon Morrel with one of those melancholy smiles which had so often made Valentine happy, and thus fixed his attention. Then, having riveted the eyes of his interlocutor on his own, he glanced towards the door.

"Do you wish me to leave?" said Morrel, sadly.

"Yes," replied Noirtier.

"Alas, alas, sir, have pity on me!"

The old man's eyes remained fixed on the door.

"May I, at least, return?" asked Morrel.

"Yes."

“Must I leave alone?”

“No.”

“Whom am I to take with me? The procureur?”

“No.”

“The doctor?”

“Yes.”

“You wish to remain alone with M. de Villefort?”

“Yes.”

“But can he understand you?”

“Yes.”

“Oh,” said Villefort, inexpressibly delighted to think that the inquiries were to be made by him alone, — ”oh, be satisfied, I can understand my father.” D’Avrigny took the young man’s arm, and led him out of the room. A more than deathlike silence then reigned in the house. At the end of a quarter of an hour a faltering footstep was heard, and Villefort appeared at the door of the apartment where d’Avrigny and Morrel had been staying, one absorbed in meditation, the other in grief. “You can come,” he said, and led them back to Noirtier. Morrel looked attentively on Villefort. His face was livid, large drops rolled down his face, and in his fingers he held the fragments of a quill pen which he had torn to atoms.

“Gentlemen,” he said in a hoarse voice, “give me your word of honor that this horrible secret shall forever remain buried amongst ourselves!” The two men drew back.

“I entreat you.” — continued Villefort.

“But,” said Morrel, “the culprit — the murderer — the assassin.”

“Do not alarm yourself, sir; justice will be done,” said Villefort. “My father has revealed the culprit’s name; my father thirsts for revenge as much as you do, yet even he conjures you as I do to keep this secret. Do you not, father?”

“Yes,” resolutely replied Noirtier. Morrel suffered an exclamation of horror and surprise to escape him. “Oh, sir,” said Villefort, arresting Maximilian by the arm, “if my father, the inflexible man, makes this request, it is because he knows, be assured, that Valentine will be terribly revenged. Is it not so, father?” The old man made a sign in the affirmative. Villefort continued: “He knows me, and I have pledged my word to him. Rest assured, gentlemen, that within three days, in a less time than justice would demand, the revenge I shall have taken for the murder of my child will be such as to make the boldest heart tremble;” and as he spoke these words he ground his teeth, and grasped the old man’s senseless hand.

“Will this promise be fulfilled, M. Noirtier?” asked Morrel, while d’Avrigny looked inquiringly.

“Yes,” replied Noirtier with an expression of sinister joy.

“Swear, then,” said Villefort, joining the hands of Morrel and d’Avrigny, “swear that you will spare the honor of my house, and leave me to avenge my child.” D’Avrigny turned round and uttered a very feeble “Yes,” but Morrel, disengaging his hand, rushed to the bed, and after having pressed the cold lips of Valentine with his own, hurriedly left, uttering a long, deep groan of despair and anguish. We have before stated that all the servants had fled. M. de Villefort was therefore obliged to request M. d’Avrigny to superintend all the arrangements consequent upon a death in a large city, more especially a death under such suspicious circumstances.

It was something terrible to witness the silent agony, the mute despair of Noirtier, whose tears silently rolled down his cheeks. Villefort retired to his study, and d’Avrigny left to summon the doctor of the mayoralty, whose office it is to examine bodies after decease, and who is expressly named “the doctor of the dead.” M. Noirtier could not be persuaded to quit his grandchild. At the end of a quarter of an hour M. d’Avrigny returned with his associate; they found the outer gate closed, and not a servant remaining in the house; Villefort himself was obliged to open to them. But he stopped on the landing; he had not the courage to again visit the death chamber. The two doctors, therefore, entered the room alone. Noirtier was near the bed, pale, motionless, and silent as the corpse. The district doctor approached with the indifference of a man accustomed to spend half his time amongst the dead; he then lifted the sheet which was placed over the face, and just unclosed the lips.

“Alas,” said d’Avrigny, “she is indeed dead, poor child!”

“Yes,” answered the doctor laconically, dropping the sheet he had raised. Noirtier uttered a kind of hoarse, rattling sound; the old man’s eyes sparkled, and the good doctor understood that he wished to behold his child. He therefore approached the bed, and while his companion was dipping the fingers with which he had touched the lips of the corpse in chloride of lime, he uncovered the calm and pale face, which looked like that of a sleeping angel. A tear, which appeared in the old man’s eye, expressed his thanks to the doctor. The doctor of the dead then laid his permit on the corner of the table, and having fulfilled his duty, was conducted out by d’Avrigny. Villefort met them at the door of his study; having in a few words thanked the district doctor, he turned to d’Avrigny, and said, — ”And now the priest.”

“Is there any particular priest you wish to pray with Valentine?” asked d’Avrigny.

“No.” said Villefort; “fetch the nearest.”

“The nearest,” said the district doctor, “is a good Italian abbe, who lives next door to you. Shall I call on him as I pass?”

“D’Avrigny,” said Villefort, “be so kind, I beseech you, as to accompany this gentleman. Here is the key of the door, so that you can go in and out as you please; you will bring the priest with you, and will oblige me by introducing him into my child’s room.”

“Do you wish to see him?”

“I only wish to be alone. You will excuse me, will you not? A priest can understand a father’s grief.” And M. de Villefort, giving the key to d’Avrigny, again bade farewell to the strange doctor, and retired to his study, where he began to work. For some temperaments work is a remedy for all afflictions. As the doctors entered the street, they saw a man in a cassock standing on the threshold of the next door. “This is the abbe of whom I spoke,” said the doctor to d’Avrigny. D’Avrigny accosted the priest. “Sir,” he said, “are you disposed to confer a great obligation on an unhappy father who has just lost his daughter? I mean M. de Villefort, the king’s attorney.”

“Ah,” said the priest, in a marked Italian accent; “yes, I have heard that death is in that house.”

“Then I need not tell you what kind of service he requires of you.”

“I was about to offer myself, sir,” said the priest; “it is our mission to forestall our duties.”

“It is a young girl.”

“I know it, sir; the servants who fled from the house informed me. I also know that her name is Valentine, and I have already prayed for her.”

“Thank you, sir,” said d’Avrigny; “since you have commenced your sacred office, deign to continue it. Come and watch by the dead, and all the wretched family will be grateful to you.”

“I am going, sir; and I do not hesitate to say that no prayers will be more fervent than mine.” D’Avrigny took the priest’s hand, and without meeting

Villefort, who was engaged in his study, they reached Valentine’s room, which on the following night was to be occupied by the undertakers. On entering the room, Noirtier’s eyes met those of the abbe, and no doubt he read some particular expression in them, for he remained in the room. D’Avrigny recommended the attention of the priest to the living as well as to the dead, and the abbe promised to devote his prayers to Valentine and his attentions to Noirtier. In order, doubtless, that he might not be disturbed while fulfilling his sacred mission, the priest rose as soon as d’Avrigny departed, and not only bolted the door through which the doctor had just left, but also that leading to Madame de Villefort’s room.

Chapter 104

Danglars Signature.

The next morning dawned dull and cloudy. During the night the undertakers had executed their melancholy office, and wrapped the corpse in the winding-sheet, which, whatever may be said about the equality of death, is at least a last proof of the luxury so pleasing in life. This winding-sheet was nothing more than a beautiful piece of cambric, which the young girl had bought a fortnight before. During the evening two men, engaged for the purpose, had carried Noirtier from Valentine's room into his own, and contrary to all expectation there was no difficulty in withdrawing him from his child. The Abbe Busoni had watched till daylight, and then left without calling any one. D'Avrigny returned about eight o'clock in the morning; he met Villefort on his way to Noirtier's room, and accompanied him to see how the old man had slept. They found him in the large arm-chair, which served him for a bed, enjoying a calm, nay, almost a smiling sleep. They both stood in amazement at the door.

"See," said d'Avrigny to Villefort, "nature knows how to alleviate the deepest sorrow. No one can say that M. Noirtier did not love his child, and yet he sleeps."

"Yes, you are right," replied Villefort, surprised; "he sleeps, indeed! And this is the more strange, since the least contradiction keeps him awake all night."

"Grief has stunned him," replied d'Avrigny; and they both returned thoughtfully to the procureur's study.

"See, I have not slept," said Villefort, showing his undisturbed bed; "grief does not stun me. I have not been in bed for two nights; but then look at my desk; see what I have written during these two days and nights. I have filled those papers, and have made out the accusation against the assassin Benedetto. Oh, work, work, — my passion, my joy, my delight, — it is for thee to alleviate my sorrows!" and he convulsively grasped the hand of d'Avrigny.

"Do you require my services now?" asked d'Avrigny.

“No,” said Villefort; “only return again at eleven o’clock; at twelve the — the — oh, heavens, my poor, poor child!” and the procureur again becoming a man, lifted up his eyes and groaned.

“Shall you be present in the reception room?”

“No; I have a cousin who has undertaken this sad office. I shall work, doctor — when I work I forget everything.” And, indeed, no sooner had the doctor left the room, than he was again absorbed in study. On the doorsteps d’Avrigny met the cousin whom Villefort had mentioned, a personage as insignificant in our story as in the world he occupied — one of those beings designed from their birth to make themselves useful to others. He was punctual, dressed in black, with crape around his hat, and presented himself at his cousin’s with a face made up for the occasion, and which he could alter as might be required. At twelve o’clock the mourning-coaches rolled into the paved court, and the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honore was filled with a crowd of idlers, equally pleased to witness the festivities or the mourning of the rich, and who rush with the same avidity to a funeral procession as to the marriage of a duchess.

Gradually the reception-room filled, and some of our old friends made their appearance — we mean Debray, Chateau-Renaud, and Beauchamp, accompanied by all the leading men of the day at the bar, in literature, or the army, for M. de Villefort moved in the first Parisian circles, less owing to his social position than to his personal merit. The cousin standing at the door ushered in the guests, and it was rather a relief to the indifferent to see a person as unmoved as themselves, and who did not exact a mournful face or force tears, as would have been the case with a father, a brother, or a lover. Those who were acquainted soon formed into little groups. One of them was made of Debray, Chateau-Renaud, and Beauchamp.

“Poor girl,” said Debray, like the rest, paying an involuntary tribute to the sad event, — ”poor girl, so young, so rich, so beautiful! Could you have imagined this scene, Chateau-Renaud, when we saw her, at the most three weeks ago, about to sign that contract?”

“Indeed, no,” said Chateau-Renaud — ”Did you know her?”

“I spoke to her once or twice at Madame de Morcerf’s, among the rest; she appeared to me charming, though rather melancholy. Where is her stepmother? Do you know?”

“She is spending the day with the wife of the worthy gentleman who is receiving us.”

“Who is he?”

“Whom do you mean?”

“The gentleman who receives us? Is he a deputy?”

“Oh, no. I am condemned to witness those gentlemen every day,” said Beauchamp; “but he is perfectly unknown to me.”

“Have you mentioned this death in your paper?”

“It has been mentioned, but the article is not mine; indeed, I doubt if it will please M. Villefort, for it says that if four successive deaths had happened anywhere else than in the house of the king’s attorney, he would have interested himself somewhat more about it.”

“Still,” said Chateau-Renaud, “Dr. d’Avrigny, who attends my mother, declares he is in despair about it. But whom are you seeking, Debray?”

“I am seeking the Count of Monte Cristo” said the young man.

“I met him on the boulevard, on my way here,” said Beauchamp. “I think he is about to leave Paris; he was going to his banker.”

“His banker? Danglars is his banker, is he not?” asked Chateau-Renaud of Debray.

“I believe so,” replied the secretary with slight uneasiness. “But Monte Cristo is not the only one I miss here; I do not see Morrel.”

“Morrel? Do they know him?” asked Chateau-Renaud. “I think he has only been introduced to Madame de Villefort.”

“Still, he ought to have been here,” said Debray; “I wonder what will be talked about to-night; this funeral is the news of the day. But hush, here comes our minister of justice; he will feel obliged to make some little speech to the cousin,” and the three young men drew near to listen. Beauchamp told the truth when he said that on his way to the funeral he had met Monte Cristo, who was directing his steps towards the Rue de la Chausse d’Antin, to M. Danglars’.

The banker saw the carriage of the count enter the court yard, and advanced to meet him with a sad, though affable smile. “Well,” said he, extending his hand to Monte Cristo, “I suppose you have come to sympathize with me, for indeed misfortune has taken possession of my house. When I perceived you, I was just asking myself whether I had not wished harm towards those poor Morcerfs, which would have justified the proverb of ‘He who wishes misfortunes to happen to others experiences them himself.’ Well, on my word of honor, I answered, ‘No!’ I wished no ill to Morcerf; he was a little proud, perhaps, for a man who like myself has risen from nothing; but we all have our faults. Do you know, count, that persons of our time of life — not that you belong to the class, you are still a young man, — but as I was saying, persons of our time of life have been very unfortunate this year. For example, look at the puritanical procureur, who has just lost his daughter, and in fact nearly all his family, in so singular a manner; Morcerf dishonored and dead; and then myself covered with ridicule through the villany of Benedetto; besides" —

"Besides what?" asked the Count.

"Alas, do you not know?"

"What new calamity?"

"My daughter" —

"Mademoiselle Danglars?"

"Eugenie has left us!"

"Good heavens, what are you telling me?"

"The truth, my dear count. Oh, how happy you must be in not having either wife or children!"

"Do you think so?"

"Indeed I do."

"And so Mademoiselle Danglars" —

"She could not endure the insult offered to us by that wretch, so she asked permission to travel."

"And is she gone?"

"The other night she left."

"With Madame Danglars?"

"No, with a relation. But still, we have quite lost our dear Eugenie; for I doubt whether her pride will ever allow her to return to France."

"Still, baron," said Monte Cristo, "family griefs, or indeed any other affliction which would crush a man whose child was his only treasure, are endurable to a millionaire. Philosophers may well say, and practical men will always support the opinion, that money mitigates many trials; and if you admit the efficacy of this sovereign balm, you ought to be very easily consoled — you, the king of finance, the focus of immeasurable power."

Danglars looked at him askance, as though to ascertain whether he spoke seriously. "Yes," he answered, "if a fortune brings consolation, I ought to be consoled; I am rich."

"So rich, dear sir, that your fortune resembles the pyramids; if you wished to demolish them you could not, and if it were possible, you would not dare!” Danglars smiled at the good-natured pleasantry of the count. “That reminds me,” he said, “that when you entered I was on the point of signing five little bonds; I have already signed two: will you allow me to do the same to the others?”

“Pray do so.”

There was a moment’s silence, during which the noise of the banker’s pen was alone heard, while Monte Cristo examined the gilt mouldings on the ceiling. “Are they Spanish, Haitian, or Neapolitan bonds?” said Monte Cristo. “No,” said Danglars, smiling, “they are bonds on the bank of France, payable to bearer. Stay, count,” he added, “you, who may be called the emperor, if I claim the title of king of finance, have you many pieces of paper of this size, each worth a million?” The count took into his hands the papers, which Danglars had so proudly presented to him, and read: —

“To the Governor of the Bank. Please pay to my order, from the fund deposited by me, the sum of a million, and charge the same to my account.

“Baron Danglars.”

“One, two, three, four, five,” said Monte Cristo; “five millions — why what a Croesus you are!”

“This is how I transact business,” said Danglars.

“It is really wonderful,” said the count; “above all, if, as I suppose, it is payable at sight.”

“It is, indeed, said Danglars.

“It is a fine thing to have such credit; really, it is only in France these things are done. Five millions on five little scraps of paper! — it must be seen to be believed.”

“You do not doubt it?”

“No!”

“You say so with an accent — stay, you shall be convinced; take my clerk to the bank, and you will see him leave it with an order on the Treasury for the same sum.”

“No,” said Monte Cristo folding the five notes, “most decidedly not; the thing is so curious, I will make the experiment myself. I am credited on you for six millions. I have drawn nine hundred thousand francs, you therefore still owe me five millions and a hundred thousand francs. I will take the five scraps of paper that I now hold as bonds, with your signature alone, and here is a receipt in full for the six millions between us. I had prepared it beforehand, for I am much in want of money to-day.” And Monte Cristo placed the bonds in his pocket with one hand, while with the other he held out the receipt to Danglars. If a thunderbolt had fallen at the banker's feet, he could not have experienced greater terror.

"What," he stammered, "do you mean to keep that money? Excuse me, excuse me, but I owe this money to the charity fund, — a deposit which I promised to pay this morning."

"Oh, well, then," said Monte Cristo, "I am not particular about these five notes, pay me in a different form; I wished, from curiosity, to take these, that I might be able to say that without any advice or preparation the house of Danglars had paid me five millions without a minute's delay; it would have been remarkable. But here are your bonds; pay me differently;" and he held the bonds towards Danglars, who seized them like a vulture extending its claws to withhold the food that is being wrested from its grasp. Suddenly he rallied, made a violent effort to restrain himself, and then a smile gradually widened the features of his disturbed countenance.

"Certainly," he said, "your receipt is money."

"Oh dear, yes; and if you were at Rome, the house of Thomson & French would make no more difficulty about paying the money on my receipt than you have just done."

"Pardon me, count, pardon me."

"Then I may keep this money?"

"Yes," said Danglars, while the perspiration started from the roots of his hair. "Yes, keep it — keep it."

Monte Cristo replaced the notes in his pocket with that indescribable expression which seemed to say, "Come, reflect; if you repent there is still time."

"No," said Danglars, "no, decidedly no; keep my signatures. But you know none are so formal as bankers in transacting business; I intended this money for the charity fund, and I seemed to be robbing them if I did not pay them with these precise bonds. How absurd — as if one crown were not as good as another. Excuse me;" and he began to laugh loudly, but nervously.

"Certainly, I excuse you," said Monte Cristo graciously, "and pocket them." And he placed the bonds in his pocket-book.

"But," said Danglars, "there is still a sum of one hundred thousand francs?"

"Oh, a mere nothing," said Monte Cristo. "The balance would come to about that sum; but keep it, and we shall be quits."

“Count,” said Danglars, “are you speaking seriously?”

“I never joke with bankers,” said Monte Cristo in a freezing manner, which repelled impertinence; and he turned to the door, just as the valet de chambre announced, — ”M. de Boville, receiver-general of the charities.”

“Ma foi,” said Monte Cristo; “I think I arrived just in time to obtain your signatures, or they would have been disputed with me.”

Danglars again became pale, and hastened to conduct the count out. Monte Cristo exchanged a ceremonious bow with M. de Boville, who was standing in the waiting-room, and who was introduced into Danglars’ room as soon as the count had left. The count’s sad face was illumined by a faint smile, as he noticed the portfolio which the receiver-general held in his hand. At the door he found his carriage, and was immediately driven to the bank. Meanwhile Danglars, repressing all emotion, advanced to meet the receiver-general. We need not say that a smile of condescension was stamped upon his lips. “Good-morning, creditor,” said he; “for I wager anything it is the creditor who visits me.”

“You are right, baron,” answered M. de Boville; “the charities present themselves to you through me: the widows and orphans depute me to receive alms to the amount of five millions from you.”

“And yet they say orphans are to be pitied,” said Danglars, wishing to prolong the jest. “Poor things!”

“Here I am in their name,” said M. de Boville; “but did you receive my letter yesterday?”

“Yes.”

“I have brought my receipt.”

“My dear M. de Boville, your widows and orphans must oblige me by waiting twenty-four hours, since M. de Monte Cristo whom you just saw leaving here — you did see him, I think?”

“Yes; well?”

“Well, M. de Monte Cristo has just carried off their five millions.”

“How so?”

“The count has an unlimited credit upon me; a credit opened by Thomson & French, of Rome; he came to demand five millions at once, which I paid him with checks on the bank. My funds are deposited there, and you can understand that if I draw out ten millions on the same day it will appear rather strange to the governor. Two days will be a different thing,” said Danglars, smiling.

“Come,” said Boville, with a tone of entire incredulity, “five millions to that gentleman who just left, and who bowed to me as though he knew me?”

“Perhaps he knows you, though you do not know him; M. de Monte Cristo knows everybody.”

“Five millions!”

“Here is his receipt. Believe your own eyes.” M. de Boville took the paper Danglars presented him, and read: —

“Received of Baron Danglars the sum of five million one hundred thousand francs, to be repaid on demand by the house of Thomson & French of Rome.”

“It is really true,” said M. de Boville.

“Do you know the house of Thomson & French?”

“Yes, I once had business to transact with it to the amount of 200,000 francs; but since then I have not heard it mentioned.”

“It is one of the best houses in Europe,” said Danglars, carelessly throwing down the receipt on his desk.

“And he had five millions in your hands alone! Why, this Count of Monte Cristo must be a nabob?”

“Indeed I do not know what he is; he has three unlimited credits — one on me, one on Rothschild, one on Lafitte; and, you see,” he added carelessly, “he has given me the preference, by leaving a balance of 100,000 francs.” M. de Boville manifested signs of extraordinary admiration. “I must visit him,” he said, “and obtain some pious grant from him.”

“Oh, you may make sure of him; his charities alone amount to 20,000 francs a month.”

“It is magnificent! I will set before him the example of Madame de Morcerf and her son.”

“What example?”

“They gave all their fortune to the hospitals.”

“What fortune?”

“Their own — M. de Morcerf’s, who is deceased.”

“For what reason?”

“Because they would not spend money so guiltily acquired.”

“And what are they to live upon?”

“The mother retires into the country, and the son enters the army.”

“Well, I must confess, these are scruples.”

"I registered their deed of gift yesterday."

"And how much did they possess?"

"Oh, not much — from twelve to thirteen hundred thousand francs. But to return to our millions."

"Certainly," said Danglars, in the most natural tone in the world. "Are you then pressed for this money?"

"Yes; for the examination of our cash takes place to-morrow."

"To-morrow? Why did you not tell me so before? Why, it is as good as a century! At what hour does the examination take place?"

"At two o'clock."

"Send at twelve," said Danglars, smiling. M. de Boville said nothing, but nodded his head, and took up the portfolio. "Now I think of it, you can do better," said Danglars.

"How do you mean?"

"The receipt of M. de Monte Cristo is as good as money; take it to Rothschild's or Lafitte's, and they will take it off your hands at once."

"What, though payable at Rome?"

"Certainly; it will only cost you a discount of 5,000 or 6,000 francs." The receiver started back. "Ma foi," he said, "I prefer waiting till to-morrow. What a proposition!"

"I thought, perhaps," said Danglars with supreme impertinence, "that you had a deficiency to make up?"

"Indeed," said the receiver.

"And if that were the case it would be worth while to make some sacrifice."

"Thank you, no, sir."

"Then it will be to-morrow."

"Yes; but without fail."

"Ah, you are laughing at me; send to-morrow at twelve, and the bank shall be notified."

"I will come myself."

"Better still, since it will afford me the pleasure of seeing you." They shook hands. "By the way," said M. de Boville, "are you not going to the funeral of poor Mademoiselle de Villefort, which I met on my road here?"

"No," said the banker; "I have appeared rather ridiculous since that affair of Benedetto, so I remain in the background."

"Bah, you are wrong. How were you to blame in that affair?"

“Listen — when one bears an irreproachable name, as I do, one is rather sensitive.”

“Everybody pities you, sir; and, above all, Mademoiselle Danglars!”

“Poor Eugenie!” said Danglars; “do you know she is going to embrace a religious life?”

“No.”

“Alas, it is unhappily but too true. The day after the event, she decided on leaving Paris with a nun of her acquaintance; they are gone to seek a very strict convent in Italy or Spain.”

“Oh, it is terrible!” and M. de Boville retired with this exclamation, after expressing acute sympathy with the father. But he had scarcely left before Danglars, with an energy of action those can alone understand who have seen Robert Macaire represented by Frederic, [*] exclaimed, — ”Fool!” Then enclosing Monte Cristo’s receipt in a little pocket-book, he added: — ”Yes, come at twelve o’clock; I shall then be far away.” Then he double-locked his door, emptied all his drawers, collected about fifty thousand francs in bank-notes, burned several papers, left others exposed to view, and then commenced writing a letter which he addressed:

“To Madame la Baronne Danglars.”

> * Frederic Lemaitre — French actor (1800-1876). Robert
> Macaire is the hero of two favorite melodramas — ”Chien de
> Montargis” and “Chien d’Aubry” — and the name is applied to
> bold criminals as a term of derision.

“I will place it on her table myself to-night,” he murmured. Then taking a passport from his drawer he said, — ”Good, it is available for two months longer.”

Chapter 105

The Cemetery of Pere-la-Chaise.

M. de Boville had indeed met the funeral procession which was taking Valentine to her last home on earth. The weather was dull and stormy, a cold wind shook the few remaining yellow leaves from the boughs of the trees, and scattered them among the crowd which filled the boulevards. M. de Villefort, a true Parisian, considered the cemetery of Pere-la-Chaise alone worthy of receiving the mortal remains of a Parisian family; there alone the corpses belonging to him would be surrounded by worthy associates. He had therefore purchased a vault, which was quickly occupied by members of his family. On the front of the monument was inscribed: "The families of Saint-Meran and Villefort," for such had been the last wish expressed by poor Renee, Valentine's mother. The pompous procession therefore wended its way towards Pere-la-Chaise from the Faubourg Saint-Honore. Having crossed Paris, it passed through the Faubourg du Temple, then leaving the exterior boulevards, it reached the cemetery. More than fifty private carriages followed the twenty mourning-coaches, and behind them more than five hundred persons joined in the procession on foot.

These last consisted of all the young people whom Valentine's death had struck like a thunderbolt, and who, notwithstanding the raw chilliness of the season, could not refrain from paying a last tribute to the memory of the beautiful, chaste, and adorable girl, thus cut off in the flower of her youth. As they left Paris, an equipage with four horses, at full speed, was seen to draw up suddenly; it contained Monte Cristo. The count left the carriage and mingled in the crowd who followed on foot. Chateau-Renaud perceived him and immediately alighting from his coupe, joined him.

The count looked attentively through every opening in the crowd; he was evidently watching for some one, but his search ended in disappointment. "Where is Morrel?" he asked; "do either of these gentlemen know where he is?"

"We have already asked that question," said Chateau-Renaud, "for none of us has seen him." The count was silent, but continued to gaze around him. At length they arrived at the cemetery. The piercing eye of Monte Cristo glanced through clusters of bushes and trees, and was soon relieved from all anxiety, for seeing a shadow glide between the yew-trees, Monte Cristo recognized him whom he sought. One funeral is generally very much like another in this magnificent metropolis. Black figures are seen scattered over the long white avenues; the silence of earth and heaven is alone broken by the noise made by the crackling branches of hedges planted around the monuments; then follows the melancholy chant of the priests, mingled now and then with a sob of anguish, escaping from some woman concealed behind a mass of flowers.

The shadow Monte Cristo had noticed passed rapidly behind the tomb of Abelard and Heloise, placed itself close to the heads of the horses belonging to the hearse, and following the undertaker's men, arrived with them at the spot appointed for the burial. Each person's attention was occupied. Monte Cristo saw nothing but the shadow, which no one else observed. Twice the count left the ranks to see whether the object of his interest had any concealed weapon beneath his clothes. When the procession stopped, this shadow was recognized as Morrel, who, with his coat buttoned up to his throat, his face livid, and convulsively crushing his hat between his fingers, leaned against a tree, situated on an elevation commanding the mausoleum, so that none of the funeral details could escape his observation. Everything was conducted in the usual manner. A few men, the least impressed of all by the scene, pronounced a discourse, some deploring this premature death, others expatiating on the grief of the father, and one very ingenious person quoting the fact that Valentine had solicited pardon of her father for criminals on whom the arm of justice was ready to fall — until at length they exhausted their stores of metaphor and mournful speeches.

Monte Cristo heard and saw nothing, or rather he only saw Morrel, whose calmness had a frightful effect on those who knew what was passing in his heart. "See," said Beauchamp, pointing out Morrel to Debray. "What is he doing up there?" And they called Chateau-Renaud's attention to him.

"How pale he is!" said Chateau-Renaud, shuddering.

"He is cold," said Debray.

"Not at all," said Chateau-Renaud, slowly; "I think he is violently agitated. He is very susceptible."

"Bah," said Debray; "he scarcely knew Mademoiselle de Villefort; you said so yourself."

“True. Still I remember he danced three times with her at Madame de Morcerf’s. Do you recollect that ball, count, where you produced such an effect?”

“No, I do not,” replied Monte Cristo, without even knowing of what or to whom he was speaking, so much was he occupied in watching Morrel, who was holding his breath with emotion. “The discourse is over; farewell, gentlemen,” said the count. And he disappeared without anyone seeing whither he went. The funeral being over, the guests returned to Paris. Chateau-Renaud looked for a moment for Morrel; but while they were watching the departure of the count, Morrel had quitted his post, and Chateau-Renaud, failing in his search, joined Debray and Beauchamp.

Monte Cristo concealed himself behind a large tomb and awaited the arrival of Morrel, who by degrees approached the tomb now abandoned by spectators and workmen. Morrel threw a glance around, but before it reached the spot occupied by Monte Cristo the latter had advanced yet nearer, still unperceived. The young man knelt down. The count, with outstretched neck and glaring eyes, stood in an attitude ready to pounce upon Morrel upon the first occasion. Morrel bent his head till it touched the stone, then clutching the grating with both hands, he murmured, — ”Oh, Valentine!” The count’s heart was pierced by the utterance of these two words; he stepped forward, and touching the young man’s shoulder, said, — ”I was looking for you, my friend.” Monte Cristo expected a burst of passion, but he was deceived, for Morrel turning round, said calmly, —

“You see I was praying.” The scrutinizing glance of the count searched the young man from head to foot. He then seemed more easy.

“Shall I drive you back to Paris?” he asked.

“No, thank you.”

“Do you wish anything?”

“Leave me to pray.” The count withdrew without opposition, but it was only to place himself in a situation where he could watch every movement of Morrel, who at length arose, brushed the dust from his knees, and turned towards Paris, without once looking back. He walked slowly down the Rue de la Roquette. The count, dismissing his carriage, followed him about a hundred paces behind. Maximilian crossed the canal and entered the Rue Meslay by the boulevards. Five minutes after the door had been closed on Morrel’s entrance, it was again opened for the count. Julie was at the entrance of the garden, where she was attentively watching Penelon, who, entering with zeal into his profession of gardener, was very busy grafting some Bengal roses. "Ah, count," she exclaimed, with the delight manifested by every member of the family whenever he visited the Rue Meslay.

"Maximilian has just returned, has he not, madame?" asked the count.

"Yes, I think I saw him pass; but pray, call Emmanuel."

"Excuse me, madame, but I must go up to Maximilian's room this instant," replied Monte Cristo, "I have something of the greatest importance to tell him."

"Go, then," she said with a charming smile, which accompanied him until he had disappeared. Monte Cristo soon ran up the staircase conducting from the ground-floor to Maximilian's room; when he reached the landing he listened attentively, but all was still. Like many old houses occupied by a single family, the room door was panelled with glass; but it was locked, Maximilian was shut in, and it was impossible to see what was passing in the room, because a red curtain was drawn before the glass. The count's anxiety was manifested by a bright color which seldom appeared on the face of that imperturbable man.

"What shall I do!" he uttered, and reflected for a moment; "shall I ring? No, the sound of a bell, announcing a visitor, will but accelerate the resolution of one in Maximilian's situation, and then the bell would be followed by a louder noise." Monte Cristo trembled from head to foot and as if his determination had been taken with the rapidity of lightning, he struck one of the panes of glass with his elbow; the glass was shivered to atoms, then withdrawing the curtain he saw Morrel, who had been writing at his desk, bound from his seat at the noise of the broken window.

"I beg a thousand pardons," said the count, "there is nothing the matter, but I slipped down and broke one of your panes of glass with my elbow. Since it is opened, I will take advantage of it to enter your room; do not disturb yourself — do not disturb yourself!" And passing his hand through the broken glass, the count opened the door. Morrel, evidently discomposed, came to meet Monte Cristo less with the intention of receiving him than to exclude his entry. "Ma foi," said Monte Cristo, rubbing his elbow, "it's all your servant's fault; your stairs are so polished, it is like walking on glass."

"Are you hurt, sir?" coldly asked Morrel.

"I believe not. But what are you about there? You were writing."

"I?"

"Your fingers are stained with ink."

"Ah, true, I was writing. I do sometimes, soldier though I am."

Monte Cristo advanced into the room; Maximilian was obliged to let him pass, but he followed him. "You were writing?" said Monte Cristo with a searching look.

"I have already had the honor of telling you I was," said Morrel.

The count looked around him. "Your pistols are beside your desk," said Monte Cristo, pointing with his finger to the pistols on the table.

"I am on the point of starting on a journey," replied Morrel disdainfully.

"My friend," exclaimed Monte Cristo in a tone of exquisite sweetness.

"Sir?"

"My friend, my dear Maximilian, do not make a hasty resolution, I entreat you."

"I make a hasty resolution?" said Morrel, shrugging his shoulders; "is there anything extraordinary in a journey?"

"Maximilian," said the count, "let us both lay aside the mask we have assumed. You no more deceive me with that false calmness than I impose upon you with my frivolous solicitude. You can understand, can you not, that to have acted as I have done, to have broken that glass, to have intruded on the solitude of a friend — you can understand that, to have done all this, I must have been actuated by real uneasiness, or rather by a terrible conviction. Morrel, you are going to destroy yourself!"

"Indeed, count," said Morrel, shuddering; "what has put this into your head?"

"I tell you that you are about to destroy yourself," continued the count, "and here is proof of what I say;" and, approaching the desk, he removed the sheet of paper which Morrel had placed over the letter he had begun, and took the latter in his hands.

Morrel rushed forward to tear it from him, but Monte Cristo perceiving his intention, seized his wrist with his iron grasp. "You wish to destroy yourself," said the count; "you have written it."

"Well," said Morrel, changing his expression of calmness for one of violence — "well, and if I do intend to turn this pistol against myself, who shall prevent me — who will dare prevent me? All my hopes are blighted, my heart is broken, my life a burden, everything around me is sad and mournful; earth has become distasteful to me, and human voices distract me. It is a mercy to let me die, for if I live I shall lose my reason and become mad. When, sir, I tell you all this with tears of heartfelt anguish, can you reply that I am wrong, can you prevent my putting an end to my miserable existence? Tell me, sir, could you have the courage to do so?”

“Yes, Morrel,” said Monte Cristo, with a calmness which contrasted strangely with the young man’s excitement; “yes, I would do so.”

“You?” exclaimed Morrel, with increasing anger and reproach — ”you, who have deceived me with false hopes, who have cheered and soothed me with vain promises, when I might, if not have saved her, at least have seen her die in my arms! You, who pretend to understand everything, even the hidden sources of knowledge, — and who enact the part of a guardian angel upon earth, and could not even find an antidote to a poison administered to a young girl! Ah, sir, indeed you would inspire me with pity, were you not hateful in my eyes.”

“Morrel” —

“Yes; you tell me to lay aside the mask, and I will do so, be satisfied! When you spoke to me at the cemetery, I answered you — my heart was softened; when you arrived here, I allowed you to enter. But since you abuse my confidence, since you have devised a new torture after I thought I had exhausted them all, then, Count of Monte Cristo my pretended benefactor — then, Count of Monte Cristo, the universal guardian, be satisfied, you shall witness the death of your friend;” and Morrel, with a maniacal laugh, again rushed towards the pistols.

“And I again repeat, you shall not commit suicide.”

“Prevent me, then!” replied Morrel, with another struggle, which, like the first, failed in releasing him from the count’s iron grasp.

“I will prevent you.”

“And who are you, then, that arrogate to yourself this tyrannical right over free and rational beings?”

“Who am I?” repeated Monte Cristo. “Listen; I am the only man in the world having the right to say to you, ‘Morrel, your father’s son shall not die to-day;’“ and Monte Cristo, with an expression of majesty and sublimity, advanced with arms folded toward the young man, who, involuntarily overcome by the commanding manner of this man, recoiled a step.

“Why do you mention my father?” stammered he; “why do you mingle a recollection of him with the affairs of today?”

“Because I am he who saved your father’s life when he wished to destroy himself, as you do to-day — because I am the man who sent the purse to your young sister, and the Pharaon to old Morrel — because I am the Edmond Dantes who nursed you, a child, on my knees.” Morrel made another step back, staggering, breathless, crushed; then all his strength give way, and he fell prostrate at the feet of Monte Cristo. Then his admirable nature underwent a complete and sudden revulsion; he arose, rushed out of the room and to the stairs, exclaiming energetically, “Julie, Julie — Emmanuel, Emmanuel!”

Monte Cristo endeavored also to leave, but Maximilian would have died rather than relax his hold of the handle of the door, which he closed upon the count. Julie, Emmanuel, and some of the servants, ran up in alarm on hearing the cries of Maximilian. Morrel seized their hands, and opening the door exclaimed in a voice choked with sobs, “On your knees — on your knees — he is our benefactor — the saviour of our father! He is” —

He would have added “Edmond Dantes,” but the count seized his arm and prevented him. Julie threw herself into the arms of the count; Emmanuel embraced him as a guardian angel; Morrel again fell on his knees, and struck the ground with his forehead. Then the iron-hearted man felt his heart swell in his breast; a flame seemed to rush from his throat to his eyes, he bent his head and wept. For a while nothing was heard in the room but a succession of sobs, while the incense from their grateful hearts mounted to heaven. Julie had scarcely recovered from her deep emotion when she rushed out of the room, descended to the next floor, ran into the drawing-room with childlike joy and raised the crystal globe which covered the purse given by the unknown of the Allees de Meillan. Meanwhile, Emmanuel in a broken voice said to the count, “Oh, count, how could you, hearing us so often speak of our unknown benefactor, seeing us pay such homage of gratitude and adoration to his memory, — how could you continue so long without discovering yourself to us? Oh, it was cruel to us, and — dare I say it? — to you also.”

“Listen, my friends,” said the count — ”I may call you so since we have really been friends for the last eleven years — the discovery of this secret has been occasioned by a great event which you must never know. I wished to bury it during my whole life in my own bosom, but your brother Maximilian wrested it from me by a violence he repents of now, I am sure.” Then turning around, and seeing that Morrel, still on his knees, had thrown himself into an arm-chair, he added in a low voice, pressing Emmanuel’s hand significantly, “Watch over him.”

“Why so?” asked the young man, surprised.

“I cannot explain myself; but watch over him.” Emmanuel looked around the room and caught sight of the pistols; his eyes rested on the weapons, and he pointed to them. Monte Cristo bent his head. Emmanuel went towards the pistols. “Leave them,” said Monte Cristo. Then walking towards Morrel, he took his hand; the tumultuous agitation of the young man was succeeded by a profound stupor. Julie returned, holding the silken purse in her hands, while tears of joy rolled down her cheeks, like dewdrops on the rose.

“Here is the relic,” she said; “do not think it will be less dear to us now we are acquainted with our benefactor!”

“My child,” said Monte Cristo, coloring, “allow me to take back that purse? Since you now know my face, I wish to be remembered alone through the affection I hope you will grant me.

“Oh,” said Julie, pressing the purse to her heart, “no, no, I beseech you do not take it, for some unhappy day you will leave us, will you not?”

“You have guessed rightly, madame,” replied Monte Cristo, smiling; “in a week I shall have left this country, where so many persons who merit the vengeance of heaven lived happily, while my father perished of hunger and grief.” While announcing his departure, the count fixed his eyes on Morrel, and remarked that the words, “I shall have left this country,” had failed to rouse him from his lethargy. He then saw that he must make another struggle against the grief of his friend, and taking the hands of Emmanuel and Julie, which he pressed within his own, he said with the mild authority of a father, “My kind friends, leave me alone with Maximilian.” Julie saw the means offered of carrying off her precious relic, which Monte Cristo had forgotten. She drew her husband to the door. “Let us leave them,” she said. The count was alone with Morrel, who remained motionless as a statue.

“Come,” said Monte-Cristo, touching his shoulder with his finger, “are you a man again, Maximilian?”

“Yes; for I begin to suffer again.”

The count frowned, apparently in gloomy hesitation.

“Maximilian, Maximilian,” he said, “the ideas you yield to are unworthy of a Christian.”

“Oh, do not fear, my friend,” said Morrel, raising his head, and smiling with a sweet expression on the count; “I shall no longer attempt my life.”

“Then we are to have no more pistols — no more despair?”

“No; I have found a better remedy for my grief than either a bullet or a knife.”

“Poor fellow, what is it?”

“My grief will kill me of itself.”

“My friend,” said Monte Cristo, with an expression of melancholy equal to his own, “listen to me. One day, in a moment of despair like yours, since it led to a similar resolution, I also wished to kill myself; one day your father, equally desperate, wished to kill himself too. If any one had said to your father, at the moment he raised the pistol to his head — if any one had told me, when in my prison I pushed back the food I had not tasted for three days — if anyone had said to either of us then, ‘Live — the day will come when you will be happy, and will bless life!’ — no matter whose voice had spoken, we should have heard him with the smile of doubt, or the anguish of incredulity, — and yet how many times has your father blessed life while embracing you — how often have I myself” —

“Ah,” exclaimed Morrel, interrupting the count, “you had only lost your liberty, my father had only lost his fortune, but I have lost Valentine.”

“Look at me,” said Monte Cristo, with that expression which sometimes made him so eloquent and persuasive — ”look at me. There are no tears in my eyes, nor is there fever in my veins, yet I see you suffer — you, Maximilian, whom I love as my own son. Well, does not this tell you that in grief, as in life, there is always something to look forward to beyond? Now, if I entreat, if I order you to live, Morrel, it is in the conviction that one day you will thank me for having preserved your life.”

“Oh, heavens,” said the young man, “oh, heavens — what are you saying, count? Take care. But perhaps you have never loved!”

“Child!” replied the count.

“I mean, as I love. You see, I have been a soldier ever since I attained manhood. I reached the age of twenty-nine without loving, for none of the feelings I before then experienced merit the appellation of love. Well, at twenty-nine I saw Valentine; for two years I have loved her, for two years I have seen written in her heart, as in a book, all the virtues of a daughter and wife. Count, to possess Valentine would have been a happiness too infinite, too ecstatic, too complete, too divine for this world, since it has been denied me; but without Valentine the earth is desolate.”

“I have told you to hope,” said the count.

“Then have a care, I repeat, for you seek to persuade me, and if you succeed I should lose my reason, for I should hope that I could again behold Valentine.” The count smiled. “My friend, my father,” said Morrel with excitement, “have a care, I again repeat, for the power you wield over me alarms me. Weigh your words before you speak, for my eyes have already become brighter, and my heart beats strongly; be cautious, or you will make me believe in supernatural agencies. I must obey you, though you bade me call forth the dead or walk upon the water.”

“Hope, my friend,” repeated the count.

“Ah,” said Morrel, falling from the height of excitement to the abyss of despair — ”ah, you are playing with me, like those good, or rather selfish mothers who soothe their children with honeyed words, because their screams annoy them. No, my friend, I was wrong to caution you; do not fear, I will bury my grief so deep in my heart, I will disguise it so, that you shall not even care to sympathize with me. Adieu, my friend, adieu!”

“On the contrary,” said the count, “after this time you must live with me — you must not leave me, and in a week we shall have left France behind us.”

“And you still bid me hope?”

“I tell you to hope, because I have a method of curing you.”

“Count, you render me sadder than before, if it be possible. You think the result of this blow has been to produce an ordinary grief, and you would cure it by an ordinary remedy — change of scene.” And Morrel dropped his head with disdainful incredulity. “What can I say more?” asked Monte Cristo. “I have confidence in the remedy I propose, and only ask you to permit me to assure you of its efficacy.”

“Count, you prolong my agony.”

“Then,” said the count, “your feeble spirit will not even grant me the trial I request? Come — do you know of what the Count of Monte Cristo is capable? do you know that he holds terrestrial beings under his control? nay, that he can almost work a miracle? Well, wait for the miracle I hope to accomplish, or” —

“Or?” repeated Morrel.

“Or, take care, Morrel, lest I call you ungrateful.”

“Have pity on me, count!”

“I feel so much pity towards you, Maximilian, that — listen to me attentively — if I do not cure you in a month, to the day, to the very hour, mark my words, Morrel, I will place loaded pistols before you, and a cup of the deadliest Italian poison — a poison more sure and prompt than that which has killed Valentine."

"Will you promise me?"

"Yes; for I am a man, and have suffered like yourself, and also contemplated suicide; indeed, often since misfortune has left me I have longed for the delights of an eternal sleep."

"But you are sure you will promise me this?" said Morrel, intoxicated. "I not only promise, but swear it!" said Monte Cristo extending his hand.

"In a month, then, on your honor, if I am not consoled, you will let me take my life into my own hands, and whatever may happen you will not call me ungrateful?"

"In a month, to the day, the very hour and the date are sacred, Maximilian. I do not know whether you remember that this is the 5th of September; it is ten years to-day since I saved your father's life, who wished to die." Morrel seized the count's hand and kissed it; the count allowed him to pay the homage he felt due to him. "In a month you will find on the table, at which we shall be then sitting, good pistols and a delicious draught; but, on the other hand, you must promise me not to attempt your life before that time."

"Oh, I also swear it!" Monte Cristo drew the young man towards him, and pressed him for some time to his heart. "And now," he said, "after to-day, you will come and live with me; you can occupy Haidee's apartment, and my daughter will at least be replaced by my son."

"Haidee?" said Morrel, "what has become of her?"

"She departed last night."

"To leave you?"

"To wait for me. Hold yourself ready then to join me at the Champs Elysees, and lead me out of this house without any one seeing my departure." Maximilian hung his head, and obeyed with childlike reverence.

Chapter 106

Dividing the Proceeds.

The apartment on the second floor of the house in the Rue Saint-Germain-des-Pres, where Albert de Morcerf had selected a home for his mother, was let to a very mysterious person. This was a man whose face the concierge himself had never seen, for in the winter his chin was buried in one of the large red handkerchiefs worn by gentlemen’s coachmen on a cold night, and in the summer he made a point of always blowing his nose just as he approached the door. Contrary to custom, this gentleman had not been watched, for as the report ran that he was a person of high rank, and one who would allow no impertinent interference, his incognito was strictly respected.

His visits were tolerably regular, though occasionally he appeared a little before or after his time, but generally, both in summer and winter, he took possession of his apartment about four o’clock, though he never spent the night there. At half-past three in the winter the fire was lighted by the discreet servant, who had the superintendence of the little apartment, and in the summer ices were placed on the table at the same hour. At four o’clock, as we have already stated, the mysterious personage arrived. Twenty minutes afterwards a carriage stopped at the house, a lady alighted in a black or dark blue dress, and always thickly veiled; she passed like a shadow through the lodge, and ran up-stairs without a sound escaping under the touch of her light foot. No one ever asked her where she was going. Her face, therefore, like that of the gentleman, was perfectly unknown to the two concierges, who were perhaps unequalled throughout the capital for discretion. We need not say she stopped at the second floor. Then she tapped in a peculiar manner at a door, which after being opened to admit her was again fastened, and curiosity penetrated no farther. They used the same precautions in leaving as in entering the house. The lady always left first, and as soon as she had stepped into her carriage, it drove away, sometimes towards the right hand, sometimes to the left; then about twenty minutes afterwards the gentleman would also leave, buried in his cravat or concealed by his handkerchief.

The day after Monte Cristo had called upon Danglars, the mysterious lodger entered at ten o’clock in the morning instead of four in the afternoon. Almost directly afterwards, without the usual interval of time, a cab arrived, and the veiled lady ran hastily up-stairs. The door opened, but before it could be closed, the lady exclaimed: “Oh, Lucien — oh, my friend!” The concierge therefore heard for the first time that the lodger’s name was Lucien; still, as he was the very perfection of a door-keeper, he made up his mind not to tell his wife. “Well, what is the matter, my dear?” asked the gentleman whose name the lady’s agitation revealed; “tell me what is the matter.”

“Oh, Lucien, can I confide in you?”

“Of course, you know you can do so. But what can be the matter? Your note of this morning has completely bewildered me. This precipitation — this unusual appointment. Come, ease me of my anxiety, or else frighten me at once.”

“Lucien, a great event has happened!” said the lady, glancing inquiringly at Lucien, — ”M. Danglars left last night!”

“Left? — M. Danglars left? Where has he gone?”

“I do not know.”

“What do you mean? Has he gone intending not to return?”

“Undoubtedly; — at ten o’clock at night his horses took him to the barrier of Charenton; there a post-chaise was waiting for him — he entered it with his valet de chambre, saying that he was going to Fontainebleau.”

“Then what did you mean” —

“Stay — he left a letter for me.”

“A letter?”

“Yes; read it.” And the baroness took from her pocket a letter which she gave to Debray. Debray paused a moment before reading, as if trying to guess its contents, or perhaps while making up his mind how to act, whatever it might contain. No doubt his ideas were arranged in a few minutes, for he began reading the letter which caused so much uneasiness in the heart of the baroness, and which ran as follows: —

“Madame and most faithful wife.”

Debray mechanically stopped and looked at the baroness, whose face became covered with blushes. “Read,” she said.

Debray continued: —

“When you receive this, you will no longer have a husband. Oh, you need not be alarmed, you will only have lost him as you have lost your daughter; I mean that I shall be travelling on one of the thirty or forty roads leading out of France. I owe you some explanations for my conduct, and as you are a woman that can perfectly understand me, I will give them. Listen, then. I received this morning five millions which I paid away; almost directly afterwards another demand for the same sum was presented to me; I put this creditor off till to-morrow and I intend leaving to-day, to escape that to-morrow, which would be rather too unpleasant for me to endure. You understand this, do you not, my most precious wife? I say you understand this, because you are as conversant with my affairs as I am; indeed, I think you understand them better, since I am ignorant of what has become of a considerable portion of my fortune, once very tolerable, while I am sure, madame, that you know perfectly well. For women have infallible instincts; they can even explain the marvellous by an algebraic calculation they have invented; but I, who only understand my own figures, know nothing more than that one day these figures deceived me. Have you admired the rapidity of my fall? Have you been slightly dazzled at the sudden fusion of my ingots? I confess I have seen nothing but the fire; let us hope you have found some gold among the ashes. With this consoling idea, I leave you, madame, and most prudent wife, without any conscientious reproach for abandoning you; you have friends left, and the ashes I have already mentioned, and above all the liberty I hasten to restore to you. And here, madame, I must add another word of explanation. So long as I hoped you were working for the good of our house and for the fortune of our daughter, I philosophically closed my eyes; but as you have transformed that house into a vast ruin I will not be the foundation of another man’s fortune. You were rich when I married you, but little respected. Excuse me for speaking so very candidly, but as this is intended only for ourselves, I do not see why I should weigh my words. I have augmented our fortune, and it has continued to increase during the last fifteen years, till extraordinary and unexpected catastrophes have suddenly overturned it, — without any fault of mine, I can honestly declare. You, madame, have only sought to increase your own, and I am convinced that you have succeeded. I leave you, therefore, as I took you, — rich, but little respected. Adieu! I also intend from this time to work on my own account. Accept my acknowledgments for the example you have set me, and which I intend following.

"Your very devoted husband,

"Baron Danglars."

The baroness had watched Debray while he read this long and painful letter, and saw him, notwithstanding his self-control, change color once or twice. When he had ended the perusal, he folded the letter and resumed his pensive attitude. "Well?" asked Madame Danglars, with an anxiety easy to be understood.

"Well, madame?" unhesitatingly repeated Debray.

"With what ideas does that letter inspire you?"

"Oh, it is simple enough, madame; it inspires me with the idea that M. Danglars has left suspiciously."

"Certainly; but is this all you have to say to me?"

"I do not understand you," said Debray with freezing coldness.

"He is gone! Gone, never to return!"

"Oh, madame, do not think that!"

"I tell you he will never return. I know his character; he is inflexible in any resolutions formed for his own interests. If he could have made any use of me, he would have taken me with him; he leaves me in Paris, as our separation will conduce to his benefit; — therefore he has gone, and I am free forever," added Madame Danglars, in the same supplicating tone. Debray, instead of answering, allowed her to remain in an attitude of nervous inquiry. "Well?" she said at length, "do you not answer me?"

"I have but one question to ask you, — what do you intend to do?"

"I was going to ask you," replied the baroness with a beating heart.

"Ah, then, you wish to ask advice of me?"

"Yes; I do wish to ask your advice," said Madame Danglars with anxious expectation.

"Then if you wish to take my advice," said the young man coldly, "I would recommend you to travel."

"To travel!" she murmured.

"Certainly; as M. Danglars says, you are rich, and perfectly free. In my opinion, a withdrawal from Paris is absolutely necessary after the double catastrophe of Mademoiselle Danglars' broken contract and M. Danglars' disappearance. The world will think you abandoned and poor, for the wife of a bankrupt would never be forgiven, were she to keep up an appearance of opulence. You have only to remain in Paris for about a fortnight, telling the world you are abandoned, and relating the details of this desertion to your best friends, who will soon spread the report. Then you can quit your house, leaving your jewels and giving up your jointure, and every one's mouth will be filled with praises of your disinterestedness. They will know you are deserted, and think you also poor, for I alone know your real financial position, and am quite ready to give up my accounts as an honest partner." The dread with which the pale and motionless baroness listened to this, was equalled by the calm indifference with which Debray had spoken. "Deserted?" she repeated; "ah, yes, I am, indeed, deserted! You are right, sir, and no one can doubt my position." These were the only words that this proud and violently enamoured woman could utter in response to Debray.

"But then you are rich, — very rich, indeed," continued Debray, taking out some papers from his pocket-book, which he spread upon the table. Madame Danglars did not see them; she was engaged in stilling the beatings of her heart, and restraining the tears which were ready to gush forth. At length a sense of dignity prevailed, and if she did not entirely master her agitation, she at least succeeded in preventing the fall of a single tear. "Madame," said Debray, "it is nearly six months since we have been associated. You furnished a principal of 100,000 francs. Our partnership began in the month of April. In May we commenced operations, and in the course of the month gained 450,000 francs. In June the profit amounted to 900,000. In July we added 1,700,000 francs, — it was, you know, the month of the Spanish bonds. In August we lost 300,000 francs at the beginning of the month, but on the 13th we made up for it, and we now find that our accounts, reckoning from the first day of partnership up to yesterday, when I closed them, showed a capital of 2,400,000 francs, that is, 1,200,000 for each of us. Now, madame," said Debray, delivering up his accounts in the methodical manner of a stockbroker, "there are still 80,000 francs, the interest of this money, in my hands."

"But," said the baroness, "I thought you never put the money out to interest."

"Excuse me, madame," said Debray coldly, "I had your permission to do so, and I have made use of it. There are, then, 40,000 francs for your share, besides the 100,000 you furnished me to begin with, making in all 1,340,000 francs for your portion. Now, madame, I took the precaution of drawing out your money the day before yesterday; it is not long ago, you see, and I was in continual expectation of being called on to deliver up my accounts. There is your money, — half in bank-notes, the other half in checks payable to bearer. I say there, for as I did not consider my house safe enough, or lawyers sufficiently discreet, and as landed property carries evidence with it, and moreover since you have no right to possess anything independent of your husband, I have kept this sum, now your whole fortune, in a chest concealed under that closet, and for greater security I myself concealed it there.

“Now, madame,” continued Debray, first opening the closet, then the chest; — ”now, madame, here are 800 notes of 1,000. francs each, resembling, as you see, a large book bound in iron; to this I add a certificate in the funds of 25,000. francs; then, for the odd cash, making I think about 110,000. francs, here is a check upon my banker, who, not being M. Danglars, will pay you the amount, you may rest assured.” Madame Danglars mechanically took the check, the bond, and the heap of bank-notes. This enormous fortune made no great appearance on the table. Madame Danglars, with tearless eyes, but with her breast heaving with concealed emotion, placed the bank-notes in her bag, put the certificate and check into her pocket-book, and then, standing pale and mute, awaited one kind word of consolation. But she waited in vain.

“Now, madame,” said Debray, “you have a splendid fortune, an income of about 60,000 livres a year, which is enormous for a woman who cannot keep an establishment here for a year, at least. You will be able to indulge all your fancies; besides, should you find your income insufficient, you can, for the sake of the past, madame, make use of mine; and I am ready to offer you all I possess, on loan.”

“Thank you, sir — thank you,” replied the baroness; “you forget that what you have just paid me is much more than a poor woman requires, who intends for some time, at least, to retire from the world.”

Debray was, for a moment, surprised, but immediately recovering himself, he bowed with an air which seemed to say, “As you please, madame.”

Madame Danglars had until then, perhaps, hoped for something; but when she saw the careless bow of Debray, and the glance by which it was accompanied, together with his significant silence, she raised her head, and without passion or violence or even hesitation, ran down-stairs, disdaining to address a last farewell to one who could thus part from her. “Bah,” said

Debray, when she had left, “these are fine projects! She will remain at home, read novels, and speculate at cards, since she can no longer do so on the Bourse.” Then taking up his account book, he cancelled with the greatest care all the entries of the amounts he had just paid away. “I have 1,060,000 francs remaining,” he said. “What a pity Mademoiselle de Villefort is dead! She suited me in every respect, and I would have married her.” And he calmly waited until the twenty minutes had elapsed after Madame Danglars’ departure before he left the house. During this time he occupied himself in making figures, with his watch by his side.

Asmodeus — that diabolical personage, who would have been created by every fertile imagination if Le Sage had not acquired the priority in his great masterpiece — would have enjoyed a singular spectacle, if he had lifted up the roof of the little house in the Rue Saint-Germain-des-Pres, while Debray was casting up his figures. Above the room in which Debray had been dividing two millions and a half with Madame Danglars was another, inhabited by persons who have played too prominent a part in the incidents we have related for their appearance not to create some interest. Mercedes and Albert were in that room. Mercedes was much changed within the last few days; not that even in her days of fortune she had ever dressed with the magnificent display which makes us no longer able to recognize a woman when she appears in a plain and simple attire; nor indeed, had she fallen into that state of depression where it is impossible to conceal the garb of misery; no, the change in Mercedes was that her eye no longer sparkled, her lips no longer smiled, and there was now a hesitation in uttering the words which formerly sprang so fluently from her ready wit.

It was not poverty which had broken her spirit; it was not a want of courage which rendered her poverty burdensome. Mercedes, although deposed from the exalted position she had occupied, lost in the sphere she had now chosen, like a person passing from a room splendidly lighted into utter darkness, appeared like a queen, fallen from her palace to a hovel, and who, reduced to strict necessity, could neither become reconciled to the earthen vessels she was herself forced to place upon the table, nor to the humble pallet which had become her bed. The beautiful Catalane and noble countess had lost both her proud glance and charming smile, because she saw nothing but misery around her; the walls were hung with one of the gray papers which economical landlords choose as not likely to show the dirt; the floor was uncarpeted; the furniture attracted the attention to the poor attempt at luxury; indeed, everything offended eyes accustomed to refinement and elegance.

Madame de Morcerf had lived there since leaving her house; the continual silence of the spot oppressed her; still, seeing that Albert continually watched her countenance to judge the state of her feelings, she constrained herself to assume a monotonous smile of the lips alone, which, contrasted with the sweet and beaming expression that usually shone from her eyes, seemed like “moonlight on a statue,” — yielding light without warmth. Albert, too, was ill at ease; the remains of luxury prevented him from sinking into his actual position. If he wished to go out without gloves, his hands appeared too white; if he wished to walk through the town, his boots seemed too highly polished. Yet these two noble and intelligent creatures, united by the indissoluble ties of maternal and filial love, had succeeded in tacitly understanding one another, and economizing their stores, and Albert had been able to tell his mother without extorting a change of countenance, — ”Mother, we have no more money.”

Mercedes had never known misery; she had often, in her youth, spoken of poverty, but between want and necessity, those synonymous words, there is a wide difference. Amongst the Catalans, Mercedes wished for a thousand things, but still she never really wanted any. So long as the nets were good, they caught fish; and so long as they sold their fish, they were able to buy twine for new nets. And then, shut out from friendship, having but one affection, which could not be mixed up with her ordinary pursuits, she thought of herself — of no one but herself. Upon the little she earned she lived as well as she could; now there were two to be supported, and nothing to live upon.

Winter approached. Mercedes had no fire in that cold and naked room — she, who was accustomed to stoves which heated the house from the hall to the boudoir; she had not even one little flower — she whose apartment had been a conservatory of costly exotics. But she had her son. Hitherto the excitement of fulfilling a duty had sustained them. Excitement, like enthusiasm, sometimes renders us unconscious to the things of earth. But the excitement had calmed down, and they felt themselves obliged to descend from dreams to reality; after having exhausted the ideal, they found they must talk of the actual.

“Mother,” exclaimed Albert, just as Madame Danglars was descending the stairs, “let us reckon our riches, if you please; I want capital to build my plans upon.”

“Capital — nothing!” replied Mercedes with a mournful smile.

“No, mother, — capital 3,000 francs. And I have an idea of our leading a delightful life upon this 3,000 francs.”

“Child!” sighed Mercedes.

“Alas, dear mother,” said the young man, “I have unhappily spent too much of your money not to know the value of it. These 3,000 francs are enormous, and I intend building upon this foundation a miraculous certainty for the future.”

“You say this, my dear boy; but do you think we ought to accept these 3,000 francs?” said Mercedes, coloring.

“I think so,” answered Albert in a firm tone. “We will accept them the more readily, since we have them not here; you know they are buried in the garden of the little house in the Allees de Meillan, at Marseilles. With 200 francs we can reach Marseilles.”

“With 200 francs? — are you sure, Albert?”

“Oh, as for that, I have made inquiries respecting the diligences and steamboats, and my calculations are made. You will take your place in the coupe to Chalons. You see, mother, I treat you handsomely for thirty-five francs.” Albert then took a pen, and wrote: —

	Frs.
Coupe, thirty-five francs	35.
From Chalons to Lyons you will go on by the steamboat	6.
From Lyons to Avignon (still by steamboat)	16.
From Avignon to Marseilles, seven francs	7.
Expenses on the road, about fifty francs	50.
Total	114 frs.

“Let us put down 120,” added Albert, smiling. “You see I am generous, am I not, mother?”

“But you, my poor child?”

“I? do you not see that I reserve eighty francs for myself? A young man does not require luxuries; besides, I know what travelling is.”

“With a post-chaise and valet de chambre?”

“Any way, mother.”

“Well, be it so. But these 200 francs?”

“Here they are, and 200 more besides. See, I have sold my watch for 100 francs, and the guard and seals for 300. How fortunate that the ornaments were worth more than the watch. Still the same story of superfluities! Now I think we are rich, since instead of the 114 francs we require for the journey we find ourselves in possession of 250."

"But we owe something in this house?"

"Thirty francs; but I pay that out of my 150 francs, — that is understood, — and as I require only eighty francs for my journey, you see I am overwhelmed with luxury. But that is not all. What do you say to this, mother?"

And Albert took out of a little pocket-book with golden clasps, a remnant of his old fancies, or perhaps a tender souvenir from one of the mysterious and veiled ladies who used to knock at his little door, — Albert took out of this pocket-book a note of 1,000 francs.

"What is this?" asked Mercedes.

"A thousand francs."

"But whence have you obtained them?"

"Listen to me, mother, and do not yield too much to agitation." And Albert, rising, kissed his mother on both cheeks, then stood looking at her. "You cannot imagine, mother, how beautiful I think you!" said the young man, impressed with a profound feeling of filial love. "You are, indeed, the most beautiful and most noble woman I ever saw!"

"Dear child!" said Mercedes, endeavoring in vain to restrain a tear which glistened in the corner of her eye. "Indeed, you only wanted misfortune to change my love for you to admiration. I am not unhappy while I possess my son!"

"Ah, just so," said Albert; "here begins the trial. Do you know the decision we have come to, mother?"

"Have we come to any?"

"Yes; it is decided that you are to live at Marseilles, and that I am to leave for Africa, where I will earn for myself the right to use the name I now bear, instead of the one I have thrown aside." Mercedes sighed. "Well, mother, I yesterday engaged myself as substitute in the Spahis," [*] added the young man, lowering his eyes with a certain feeling of shame, for even he was unconscious of the sublimity of his self- abasement. "I thought my body was my own, and that I might sell it. I yesterday took the place of another. I sold myself for more than I thought I was worth," he added, attempting to smile; "I fetched 2,000 francs."

* The Spahis are French cavalry reserved for service in

Africa.

"Then these 1,000 francs" — said Mercedes, shuddering —

"Are the half of the sum, mother; the other will be paid in a year."

Mercedes raised her eyes to heaven with an expression it would be impossible to describe, and tears, which had hitherto been restrained, now yielded to her emotion, and ran down her cheeks.

"The price of his blood!" she murmured.

"Yes, if I am killed," said Albert, laughing. "But I assure you, mother, I have a strong intention of defending my person, and I never felt half so strong an inclination to live as I do now."

"Merciful heavens!"

"Besides, mother, why should you make up your mind that I am to be killed? Has Lamoriciere, that Ney of the South, been killed? Has Changarnier been killed? Has Bedeau been killed? Has Morrel, whom we know, been killed? Think of your joy, mother, when you see me return with an embroidered uniform! I declare, I expect to look magnificent in it, and chose that regiment only from vanity." Mercedes sighed while endeavoring to smile; the devoted mother felt that she ought not to allow the whole weight of the sacrifice to fall upon her son. "Well, now you understand, mother!" continued Albert; "here are more than 4,000 francs settled on you; upon these you can live at least two years."

"Do you think so?" said Mercedes. These words were uttered in so mournful a tone that their real meaning did not escape Albert; he felt his heart beat, and taking his mother's hand within his own he said, tenderly, —

"Yes, you will live!"

"I shall live! — then you will not leave me, Albert?"

"Mother, I must go," said Albert in a firm, calm voice; "you love me too well to wish me to remain useless and idle with you; besides, I have signed."

"You will obey your own wish and the will of heaven!"

"Not my own wish, mother, but reason — necessity. Are we not two despairing creatures? What is life to you? — Nothing. What is life to me? — Very little without you, mother; for believe me, but for you I should have ceased to live on the day I doubted my father and renounced his name. Well, I will live, if you promise me still to hope; and if you grant me the care of your future prospects, you will redouble my strength. Then I will go to the governor of Algeria; he has a royal heart, and is essentially a soldier;

I will tell him my gloomy story. I will beg him to turn his eyes now and then towards me, and if he keep his word and interest himself for me, in six months I shall be an officer, or dead. If I am an officer, your fortune is certain, for I shall have money enough for both, and, moreover, a name we shall both be proud of, since it will be our own. If I am killed — well then mother, you can also die, and there will be an end of our misfortunes.”

“It is well,” replied Mercedes, with her eloquent glance; “you are right, my love; let us prove to those who are watching our actions that we are worthy of compassion.”

“But let us not yield to gloomy apprehensions,” said the young man; “I assure you we are, or rather we shall be, very happy. You are a woman at once full of spirit and resignation; I have become simple in my tastes, and am without passion, I hope. Once in service, I shall be rich — once in M. Dantes’ house, you will be at rest. Let us strive, I beseech you, — let us strive to be cheerful.”

“Yes, let us strive, for you ought to live, and to be happy, Albert.”

“And so our division is made, mother,” said the young man, affecting ease of mind. “We can now part; come, I shall engage your passage.”

“And you, my dear boy?”

“I shall stay here for a few days longer; we must accustom ourselves to parting. I want recommendations and some information relative to Africa. I will join you again at Marseilles.”

“Well, be it so — let us part,” said Mercedes, folding around her shoulders the only shawl she had taken away, and which accidentally happened to be a valuable black cashmere. Albert gathered up his papers hastily, rang the bell to pay the thirty francs he owed to the landlord, and offering his arm to his mother, they descended the stairs. Some one was walking down before them, and this person, hearing the rustling of a silk dress, turned around. “Debray!” muttered Albert.

“You, Morcerf?” replied the secretary, resting on the stairs. Curiosity had vanquished the desire of preserving his incognito, and he was recognized. It was, indeed, strange in this unknown spot to find the young man whose misfortunes had made so much noise in Paris.

“Morcerf!” repeated Debray. Then noticing in the dim light the still youthful and veiled figure of Madame de Morcerf: — ”Pardon me,” he added with a smile, “I leave you, Albert.” Albert understood his thoughts.

"Mother," he said, turning towards Mercedes, "this is M. Debray, secretary of the minister for the interior, once a friend of mine."

"How once?" stammered Debray; "what do you mean?"

"I say so, M. Debray, because I have no friends now, and I ought not to have any. I thank you for having recognized me, sir." Debray stepped forward, and cordially pressed the hand of his interlocutor. "Believe me, dear Albert," he said, with all the emotion he was capable of feeling, —"believe me, I feel deeply for your misfortunes, and if in any way I can serve you, I am yours."

"Thank you, sir," said Albert, smiling. "In the midst of our misfortunes, we are still rich enough not to require assistance from any one. We are leaving Paris, and when our journey is paid, we shall have 5,000 francs left." The blood mounted to the temples of Debray, who held a million in his pocket-book, and unimaginative as he was he could not help reflecting that the same house had contained two women, one of whom, justly dishonored, had left it poor with 1,500,000. francs under her cloak, while the other, unjustly stricken, but sublime in her misfortune, was yet rich with a few deniers. This parallel disturbed his usual politeness, the philosophy he witnessed appalled him, he muttered a few words of general civility and ran down-stairs.

That day the minister's clerks and the subordinates had a great deal to put up with from his ill-humor. But that same night, he found himself the possessor of a fine house, situated on the Boulevard de la Madeleine, and an income of 50,000 livres. The next day, just as Debray was signing the deed, that is about five o'clock in the afternoon, Madame de Morcerf, after having affectionately embraced her son, entered the coupe of the diligence, which closed upon her. A man was hidden in Lafitte's banking-house, behind one of the little arched windows which are placed above each desk; he saw Mercedes enter the diligence, and he also saw Albert withdraw. Then he passed his hand across his forehead, which was clouded with doubt. "Alas," he exclaimed, "how can I restore the happiness I have taken away from these poor innocent creatures? God help me!"

Chapter 107

The Lions’ Den.

One division of La Force, in which the most dangerous and desperate prisoners are confined, is called the court of Saint-Bernard. The prisoners, in their expressive language, have named it the “Lions’ Den,” probably because the captives possess teeth which frequently gnaw the bars, and sometimes the keepers also. It is a prison within a prison; the walls are double the thickness of the rest. The gratings are every day carefully examined by jailers, whose herculean proportions and cold pitiless expression prove them to have been chosen to reign over their subjects for their superior activity and intelligence. The court-yard of this quarter is enclosed by enormous walls, over which the sun glances obliquely, when it deigns to penetrate into this gulf of moral and physical deformity. On this paved yard are to be seen, — pacing to and fro from morning till night, pale, careworn, and haggard, like so many shadows, — the men whom justice holds beneath the steel she is sharpening. There, crouched against the side of the wall which attracts and retains the most heat, they may be seen sometimes talking to one another, but more frequently alone, watching the door, which sometimes opens to call forth one from the gloomy assemblage, or to throw in another outcast from society.

The court of Saint-Bernard has its own particular apartment for the reception of guests; it is a long rectangle, divided by two upright gratings placed at a distance of three feet from one another to prevent a visitor from shaking hands with or passing anything to the prisoners. It is a wretched, damp, nay, even horrible spot, more especially when we consider the agonizing conferences which have taken place between those iron bars. And yet, frightful though this spot may be, it is looked upon as a kind of paradise by the men whose days are numbered; it is so rare for them to leave the Lions’ Den for any other place than the barrier Saint-Jacques or the galleys!

In the court which we have attempted to describe, and from which a damp vapor was rising, a young man with his hands in his pockets, who had excited much curiosity among the inhabitants of the “Den,” might be seen walking. The cut of his clothes would have made him pass for an elegant man, if those clothes had not been torn to shreds; still they did not show signs of wear, and the fine cloth, beneath the careful hands of the prisoner, soon recovered its gloss in the parts which were still perfect, for the wearer tried his best to make it assume the appearance of a new coat. He bestowed the same attention upon the cambric front of a shirt, which had considerably changed in color since his entrance into the prison, and he polished his varnished boots with the corner of a handkerchief embroidered with initials surmounted by a coronet. Some of the inmates of the "Lions' Den" were watching the operations of the prisoner's toilet with considerable interest. "See, the prince is pluming himself," said one of the thieves. "He's a fine looking fellow," said another; "if he had only a comb and hair-grease, he'd take the shine off the gentlemen in white kids."

"His coat looks almost new, and his boots shine like a nigger's face. It's pleasant to have such well-dressed comrades; but didn't those gendarmes behave shameful? — must 'a been jealous, to tear such clothes!"

"He looks like a big-bug," said another; "dresses in fine style. And, then, to be here so young! Oh, what larks!" Meanwhile the object of this hideous admiration approached the wicket, against which one of the keepers was leaning. "Come, sir," he said, "lend me twenty francs; you will soon be paid; you run no risks with me. Remember, I have relations who possess more millions than you have deniers. Come, I beseech you, lend me twenty francs, so that I may buy a dressing-gown; it is intolerable always to be in a coat and boots! And what a coat, sir, for a prince of the Cavalcanti!" The keeper turned his back, and shrugged his shoulders; he did not even laugh at what would have caused any one else to do so; he had heard so many utter the same things, — indeed, he heard nothing else.

"Come," said Andrea, "you are a man void of compassion; I'll have you turned out." This made the keeper turn around, and he burst into a loud laugh. The prisoners then approached and formed a circle. "I tell you that with that wretched sum," continued Andrea, "I could obtain a coat, and a room in which to receive the illustrious visitor I am daily expecting."

"Of course — of course," said the prisoners; — "any one can see he's a gentleman!"

"Well, then, lend him the twenty francs," said the keeper, leaning on the other shoulder; "surely you will not refuse a comrade!"

"I am no comrade of these people," said the young man, proudly, "you have no right to insult me thus."

The thieves looked at one another with low murmurs, and a storm gathered over the head of the aristocratic prisoner, raised less by his own words than by the manner of the keeper. The latter, sure of quelling the tempest when the waves became too violent, allowed them to rise to a certain pitch that he might be revenged on the importunate Andrea, and besides it would afford him some recreation during the long day. The thieves had already approached Andrea, some screaming, "La savate — La savate!" [*] a cruel operation, which consists in cuffing a comrade who may have fallen into disgrace, not with an old shoe, but with an iron-heeled one. Others proposed the "anguille," another kind of recreation, in which a handkerchief is filled with sand, pebbles, and two-sous pieces, when they have them, which the wretches beat like a flail over the head and shoulders of the unhappy sufferer. "Let us horsewhip the fine gentleman!" said others.

* Savate: an old shoe.

But Andrea, turning towards them, winked his eyes, rolled his tongue around his cheeks, and smacked his lips in a manner equivalent to a hundred words among the bandits when forced to be silent. It was a Masonic sign Caderousse had taught him. He was immediately recognized as one of them; the handkerchief was thrown down, and the iron-heeled shoe replaced on the foot of the wretch to whom it belonged. Some voices were heard to say that the gentleman was right; that he intended to be civil, in his way, and that they would set the example of liberty of conscience, — and the mob retired. The keeper was so stupefied at this scene that he took Andrea by the hands and began examining his person, attributing the sudden submission of the inmates of the Lions' Den to something more substantial than mere fascination. Andrea made no resistance, although he protested against it. Suddenly a voice was heard at the wicket. "Benedetto!" exclaimed an inspector. The keeper relaxed his hold. "I am called," said Andrea. "To the visitors' room!" said the same voice.

"You see some one pays me a visit. Ah, my dear sir, you will see whether a Cavalcanti is to be treated like a common person!" And Andrea, gliding through the court like a black shadow, rushed out through the wicket, leaving his comrades, and even the keeper, lost in wonder. Certainly a call to the visitors' room had scarcely astonished Andrea less than themselves, for the wily youth, instead of making use of his privilege of waiting to be claimed on his entry into La Force, had maintained a rigid silence. “Everything,” he said, “proves me to be under the protection of some powerful person, — this sudden fortune, the facility with which I have overcome all obstacles, an unexpected family and an illustrious name awarded to me, gold showered down upon me, and the most splendid alliances about to be entered into. An unhappy lapse of fortune and the absence of my protector have cast me down, certainly, but not forever. The hand which has retreated for a while will be again stretched forth to save me at the very moment when I shall think myself sinking into the abyss. Why should I risk an imprudent step? It might alienate my protector. He has two means of extricating me from this dilemma, — the one by a mysterious escape, managed through bribery; the other by buying off my judges with gold. I will say and do nothing until I am convinced that he has quite abandoned me, and then” —

Andrea had formed a plan which was tolerably clever. The unfortunate youth was intrepid in the attack, and rude in the defence. He had borne with the public prison, and with privations of all sorts; still, by degrees nature, or rather custom, had prevailed, and he suffered from being naked, dirty, and hungry. It was at this moment of discomfort that the inspector’s voice called him to the visiting-room. Andrea felt his heart leap with joy. It was too soon for a visit from the examining magistrate, and too late for one from the director of the prison, or the doctor; it must, then, be the visitor he hoped for. Behind the grating of the room into which Andrea had been led, he saw, while his eyes dilated with surprise, the dark and intelligent face of M. Bertuccio, who was also gazing with sad astonishment upon the iron bars, the bolted doors, and the shadow which moved behind the other grating.

“Ah,” said Andrea, deeply affected.

“Good morning, Benedetto,” said Bertuccio, with his deep, hollow voice.

“You — you?” said the young man, looking fearfully around him.

“Do you not recognize me, unhappy child?”

“Silence, — be silent!” said Andrea, who knew the delicate sense of hearing possessed by the walls; “for heaven’s sake, do not speak so loud!”

“You wish to speak with me alone, do you not?” said Bertuccio.

“Oh, yes.”

“That is well.” And Bertuccio, feeling in his pocket, signed to a keeper whom he saw through the window of the wicket.

“Read?” he said.

“What is that?” asked Andrea.

“An order to conduct you to a room, and to leave you there to talk to me.”

“Oh,” cried Andrea, leaping with joy. Then he mentally added, — ”Still my unknown protector! I am not forgotten. They wish for secrecy, since we are to converse in a private room. I understand, Bertuccio has been sent by my protector.”

The keeper spoke for a moment with an official, then opened the iron gates and conducted Andrea to a room on the first floor. The room was whitewashed, as is the custom in prisons, but it looked quite brilliant to a prisoner, though a stove, a bed, a chair, and a table formed the whole of its sumptuous furniture. Bertuccio sat down upon the chair, Andrea threw himself upon the bed; the keeper retired.

“Now,” said the steward, “what have you to tell me?”

“And you?” said Andrea.

“You speak first.”

“Oh, no. You must have much to tell me, since you have come to seek me.”

“Well, be it so. You have continued your course of villany; you have robbed — you have assassinated.”

“Well, I should say! If you had me taken to a private room only to tell me this, you might have saved yourself the trouble. I know all these things. But there are some with which, on the contrary, I am not acquainted. Let us talk of those, if you please. Who sent you?”

“Come, come, you are going on quickly, M. Benedetto!”

“Yes, and to the point. Let us dispense with useless words. Who sends you?”

“No one.”

“How did you know I was in prison?”

“I recognized you, some time since, as the insolent dandy who so gracefully mounted his horse in the Champs Elysees.”

“Oh, the Champs Elysees? Ah, yes; we burn, as they say at the game of pincette. The Champs Elysees? Come, let us talk a little about my father.”

“Who, then, am I?”

“You, sir? — you are my adopted father. But it was not you, I presume, who placed at my disposal 100,000 francs, which I spent in four or five months; it was not you who manufactured an Italian gentleman for my father; it was not you who introduced me into the world, and had me invited to a certain dinner at Auteuil, which I fancy I am eating at this moment, in company with the most distinguished people in Paris — amongst the rest with a certain procureur, whose acquaintance I did very wrong not to cultivate, for he would have been very useful to me just now; — it was not you, in fact, who bailed me for one or two millions, when the fatal discovery of my little secret took place. Come, speak, my worthy Corsican, speak!”

“What do you wish me to say?”

“I will help you. You were speaking of the Champs Elysees just now, worthy foster-father.”

“Well?”

“Well, in the Champs Elysees there resides a very rich gentleman.”

“At whose house you robbed and murdered, did you not?”

“I believe I did.”

“The Count of Monte Cristo?”

“‘Tis you who have named him, as M. Racine says. Well, am I to rush into his arms, and strain him to my heart, crying, ‘My father, my father!’ like Monsieur Pixerecourt.” [*]

“Do not let us jest,” gravely replied Bertuccio, “and dare not to utter that name again as you have pronounced it.”

* Guilbert de Pixerecourt, French dramatist
(1775-1844).

“Bah,” said Andrea, a little overcome, by the solemnity of Bertuccio’s manner, “why not?”

“Because the person who bears it is too highly favored by heaven to be the father of such a wretch as you.”

“Oh, these are fine words.”

“And there will be fine doings, if you do not take care.”

“Menaces — I do not fear them. I will say” —

“Do you think you are engaged with a pygmy like yourself?” said Bertuccio, in so calm a tone, and with so steadfast a look, that Andrea was moved to the very soul. “Do you think you have to do with galley-slaves, or novices in the world? Benedetto, you are fallen into terrible hands; they are ready to open for you — make use of them. Do not play with the thunderbolt they have laid aside for a moment, but which they can take up again instantly, if you attempt to intercept their movements.”

“My father — I will know who my father is,” said the obstinate youth; “I will perish if I must, but I will know it. What does scandal signify to me? What possessions, what reputation, what ‘pull,’ as Beauchamp says, — have I? You great people always lose something by scandal, notwithstanding your millions. Come, who is my father?”

“I came to tell you.”

“Ah,” cried Benedetto, his eyes sparkling with joy. Just then the door opened, and the jailer, addressing himself to Bertuccio, said, — ”Excuse me, sir, but the examining magistrate is waiting for the prisoner.”

“And so closes our interview,” said Andrea to the worthy steward; “I wish the troublesome fellow were at the devil!”

“I will return to-morrow,” said Bertuccio.

“Good! Gendarmes, I am at your service. Ah, sir, do leave a few crowns for me at the gate that I may have some things I am in need of!”

“It shall be done,” replied Bertuccio. Andrea extended his hand; Bertuccio kept his own in his pocket, and merely jingled a few pieces of money. “That’s what I mean,” said Andrea, endeavoring to smile, quite overcome by the strange tranquillity of Bertuccio. “Can I be deceived?” he murmured, as he stepped into the oblong and grated vehicle which they call “the salad basket.” “Never mind, we shall see! To-morrow, then!” he added, turning towards Bertuccio.

“To-morrow!” replied the steward.

Chapter 108

The Judge.

We remember that the Abbe Busoni remained alone with Noirtier in the chamber of death, and that the old man and the priest were the sole guardians of the young girl’s body. Perhaps it was the Christian exhortations of the abbe, perhaps his kind charity, perhaps his persuasive words, which had restored the courage of Noirtier, for ever since he had conversed with the priest his violent despair had yielded to a calm resignation which surprised all who knew his excessive affection for Valentine. M. de Villefort had not seen his father since the morning of the death. The whole establishment had been changed; another valet was engaged for himself, a new servant for Noirtier, two women had entered Madame de Villefort’s service, — in fact, everywhere, to the concierge and coachmen, new faces were presented to the different masters of the house, thus widening the division which had always existed between the members of the same family.

The assizes, also, were about to begin, and Villefort, shut up in his room, exerted himself with feverish anxiety in drawing up the case against the murderer of Caderousse. This affair, like all those in which the Count of Monte Cristo had interfered, caused a great sensation in Paris. The proofs were certainly not convincing, since they rested upon a few words written by an escaped galley-slave on his death-bed, and who might have been actuated by hatred or revenge in accusing his companion. But the mind of the procureur was made up; he felt assured that Benedetto was guilty, and he hoped by his skill in conducting this aggravated case to flatter his self-love, which was about the only vulnerable point left in his frozen heart.

The case was therefore prepared owing to the incessant labor of Villefort, who wished it to be the first on the list in the coming assizes. He had been obliged to seclude himself more than ever, to evade the enormous number of applications presented to him for the purpose of obtaining tickets of admission to the court on the day of trial. And then so short a time had elapsed since the death of poor Valentine, and the gloom which overshadowed the house was so recent, that no one wondered to see the father so absorbed in his professional duties, which were the only means he had of dissipating his grief.

Once only had Villefort seen his father; it was the day after that upon which Bertuccio had paid his second visit to Benedetto, when the latter was to learn his father's name. The magistrate, harassed and fatigued, had descended to the garden of his house, and in a gloomy mood, similar to that in which Tarquin lopped off the tallest poppies, he began knocking off with his cane the long and dying branches of the rose-trees, which, placed along the avenue, seemed like the spectres of the brilliant flowers which had bloomed in the past season. More than once he had reached that part of the garden where the famous boarded gate stood overlooking the deserted enclosure, always returning by the same path, to begin his walk again, at the same pace and with the same gesture, when he accidentally turned his eyes towards the house, whence he heard the noisy play of his son, who had returned from school to spend the Sunday and Monday with his mother. While doing so, he observed M. Noirtier at one of the open windows, where the old man had been placed that he might enjoy the last rays of the sun which yet yielded some heat, and was now shining upon the dying flowers and red leaves of the creeper which twined around the balcony.

The eye of the old man was riveted upon a spot which Villefort could scarcely distinguish. His glance was so full of hate, of ferocity, and savage impatience, that Villefort turned out of the path he had been pursuing, to see upon what person this dark look was directed. Then he saw beneath a thick clump of linden-trees, which were nearly divested of foliage, Madame de Villefort sitting with a book in her hand, the perusal of which she frequently interrupted to smile upon her son, or to throw back his elastic ball, which he obstinately threw from the drawing-room into the garden. Villefort became pale; he understood the old man's meaning. Noirtier continued to look at the same object, but suddenly his glance was transferred from the wife to the husband, and Villefort himself had to submit to the searching investigation of eyes, which, while changing their direction and even their language, had lost none of their menacing expression. Madame de Villefort, unconscious of the passions that exhausted their fire over her head, at that moment held her son's ball, and was making signs to him to reclaim it with a kiss. Edward begged for a long while, the maternal kiss probably not offering sufficient recompense for the trouble he must take to obtain it; however at length he decided, leaped out of the window into a cluster of heliotropes and daisies, and ran to his mother, his forehead streaming with perspiration. Madame de Villefort wiped his forehead, pressed her lips upon it, and sent him back with the ball in one hand and some bonbons in the other.

Villefort, drawn by an irresistible attraction, like that of the bird to the serpent, walked towards the house. As he approached it, Noirtier's gaze followed him, and his eyes appeared of such a fiery brightness that Villefort felt them pierce to the depths of his heart. In that earnest look might be read a deep reproach, as well as a terrible menace. Then Noirtier raised his eyes to heaven, as though to remind his son of a forgotten oath. "It is well, sir," replied Villefort from below, — "it is well; have patience but one day longer; what I have said I will do." Noirtier seemed to be calmed by these words, and turned his eyes with indifference to the other side. Villefort violently unbuttoned his great-coat, which seemed to strangle him, and passing his livid hand across his forehead, entered his study.

The night was cold and still; the family had all retired to rest but Villefort, who alone remained up, and worked till five o'clock in the morning, reviewing the last interrogatories made the night before by the examining magistrates, compiling the depositions of the witnesses, and putting the finishing stroke to the deed of accusation, which was one of the most energetic and best conceived of any he had yet delivered.

The next day, Monday, was the first sitting of the assizes. The morning dawned dull and gloomy, and Villefort saw the dim gray light shine upon the lines he had traced in red ink. The magistrate had slept for a short time while the lamp sent forth its final struggles; its flickerings awoke him, and he found his fingers as damp and purple as though they had been dipped in blood. He opened the window; a bright yellow streak crossed the sky, and seemed to divide in half the poplars, which stood out in black relief on the horizon. In the clover-fields beyond the chestnut-trees, a lark was mounting up to heaven, while pouring out her clear morning song. The damps of the dew bathed the head of Villefort, and refreshed his memory. "To-day," he said with an effort, — "to-day the man who holds the blade of justice must strike wherever there is guilt." Involuntarily his eyes wandered towards the window of Noirtier's room, where he had seen him the preceding night. The curtain was drawn, and yet the image of his father was so vivid to his mind that he addressed the closed window as though it had been open, and as if through the opening he had beheld the menacing old man. “Yes,” he murmured, — ”yes, be satisfied.”

His head dropped upon his chest, and in this position he paced his study; then he threw himself, dressed as he was, upon a sofa, less to sleep than to rest his limbs, cramped with cold and study. By degrees every one awoke. Villefort, from his study, heard the successive noises which accompany the life of a house, — the opening and shutting of doors, the ringing of Madame de Villefort’s bell, to summon the waiting-maid, mingled with the first shouts of the child, who rose full of the enjoyment of his age. Villefort also rang; his new valet brought him the papers, and with them a cup of chocolate.

“What are you bringing me?” said he.

“A cup of chocolate.”

“I did not ask for it. Who has paid me this attention?”

“My mistress, sir. She said you would have to speak a great deal in the murder case, and that you should take something to keep up your strength;” and the valet placed the cup on the table nearest to the sofa, which was, like all the rest, covered with papers. The valet then left the room. Villefort looked for an instant with a gloomy expression, then, suddenly, taking it up with a nervous motion, he swallowed its contents at one draught. It might have been thought that he hoped the beverage would be mortal, and that he sought for death to deliver him from a duty which he would rather die than fulfil. He then rose, and paced his room with a smile it would have been terrible to witness. The chocolate was inoffensive, for M. de Villefort felt no effects. The breakfast-hour arrived, but M. de Villefort was not at table. The valet re-entered.

“Madame de Villefort wishes to remind you, sir,” he said, “that eleven o’clock has just struck, and that the trial commences at twelve.”

“Well,” said Villefort, “what then?”

“Madame de Villefort is dressed; she is quite ready, and wishes to know if she is to accompany you, sir?”

“Where to?”

“To the Palais.”

“What to do?”

“My mistress wishes much to be present at the trial.”

“Ah,” said Villefort, with a startling accent; “does she wish that?” — The man drew back and said, “If you wish to go alone, sir, I will go and tell my mistress.” Villefort remained silent for a moment, and dented his pale cheeks with his nails. “Tell your mistress,” he at length answered, “that I wish to speak to her, and I beg she will wait for me in her own room.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then come to dress and shave me.”

“Directly, sir.” The valet re-appeared almost instantly, and, having shaved his master, assisted him to dress entirely in black. When he had finished, he said, —

“My mistress said she should expect you, sir, as soon as you had finished dressing.”

“I am going to her.” And Villefort, with his papers under his arm and hat in hand, directed his steps toward the apartment of his wife. At the door he paused for a moment to wipe his damp, pale brow. He then entered the room. Madame de Villefort was sitting on an ottoman and impatiently turning over the leaves of some newspapers and pamphlets which young Edward, by way of amusing himself, was tearing to pieces before his mother could finish reading them. She was dressed to go out, her bonnet was placed beside her on a chair, and her gloves were on her hands.

“Ah, here you are, monsieur,” she said in her naturally calm voice; “but how pale you are! Have you been working all night? Why did you not come down to breakfast? Well, will you take me, or shall I take Edward?” Madame de Villefort had multiplied her questions in order to gain one answer, but to all her inquiries M. de Villefort remained mute and cold as a statue. “Edward,” said Villefort, fixing an imperious glance on the child, “go and play in the drawing-room, my dear; I wish to speak to your mamma.” Madame de Villefort shuddered at the sight of that cold countenance, that resolute tone, and the awfully strange preliminaries. Edward raised his head, looked at his mother, and then, finding that she did not confirm the order, began cutting off the heads of his leaden soldiers.

“Edward,” cried M. de Villefort, so harshly that the child started up from the floor, “do you hear me? — Go!” The child, unaccustomed to such treatment, arose, pale and trembling; it would be difficult to say whether his emotion were caused by fear or passion. His father went up to him, took him in his arms, and kissed his forehead. “Go,” he said: “go, my child.” Edward ran out. M. de Villefort went to the door, which he closed behind the child, and bolted. “Dear me!” said the young woman, endeavoring to read her husband’s inmost thoughts, while a smile passed over her countenance which froze the impassibility of Villefort; “what is the matter?”

“Madame, where do you keep the poison you generally use?” said the magistrate, without any introduction, placing himself between his wife and the door.

Madame de Villefort must have experienced something of the sensation of a bird which, looking up, sees the murderous trap closing over its head. A hoarse, broken tone, which was neither a cry nor a sigh, escaped from her, while she became deadly pale. “Monsieur,” she said, “I — I do not understand you.” And, in her first paroxysm of terror, she had raised herself from the sofa, in the next, stronger very likely than the other, she fell down again on the cushions. “I asked you,” continued Villefort, in a perfectly calm tone, “where you conceal the poison by the aid of which you have killed my father-in-law, M. de Saint-Meran, my mother-in-law, Madame de Saint-Meran, Barrois, and my daughter Valentine.”

“Ah, sir,” exclaimed Madame de Villefort, clasping her hands, “what do you say?”

“It is not for you to interrogate, but to answer.”

“Is it to the judge or to the husband?” stammered Madame de Villefort. “To the judge — to the judge, madame!” It was terrible to behold the frightful pallor of that woman, the anguish of her look, the trembling of her whole frame. “Ah, sir,” she muttered, “ah, sir,” and this was all.

“You do not answer, madame!” exclaimed the terrible interrogator. Then he added, with a smile yet more terrible than his anger, “It is true, then; you do not deny it!” She moved forward. “And you cannot deny it!” added Villefort, extending his hand toward her, as though to seize her in the name of justice. “You have accomplished these different crimes with impudent address, but which could only deceive those whose affections for you blinded them. Since the death of Madame de Saint-Meran, I have known that a poisoner lived in my house. M. d’Avrigny warned me of it. After the death of Barrois my suspicions were directed towards an angel, — those suspicions which, even when there is no crime, are always alive in my heart; but after the death of Valentine, there has been no doubt in my mind, madame, and not only in mine, but in those of others; thus your crime, known by two persons, suspected by many, will soon become public, and, as I told you just now, you no longer speak to the husband, but to the judge.”

The young woman hid her face in her hands. “Oh, sir,” she stammered, “I beseech you, do not believe appearances.”

“Are you, then, a coward?” cried Villefort, in a contemptuous voice. “But I have always observed that poisoners were cowards. Can you be a coward, — you who have had the courage to witness the death of two old men and a young girl murdered by you?”

“Sir! sir!”

“Can you be a coward?” continued Villefort, with increasing excitement, “you, who could count, one by one, the minutes of four death agonies? You, who have arranged your infernal plans, and removed the beverages with a talent and precision almost miraculous? Have you, then, who have calculated everything with such nicety, have you forgotten to calculate one thing — I mean where the revelation of your crimes will lead you to? Oh, it is impossible — you must have saved some surer, more subtle and deadly poison than any other, that you might escape the punishment that you deserve. You have done this — I hope so, at least.” Madame de Villefort stretched out her hands, and fell on her knees.

“I understand,” he said, “you confess; but a confession made to the judges, a confession made at the last moment, extorted when the crime cannot be denied, diminishes not the punishment inflicted on the guilty!”

“The punishment?” exclaimed Madame de Villefort, “the punishment, monsieur? Twice you have pronounced that word!”

“Certainly. Did you hope to escape it because you were four times guilty? Did you think the punishment would be withheld because you are the wife of him who pronounces it? — No, madame, no; the scaffold awaits the poisoner, whoever she may be, unless, as I just said, the poisoner has taken the precaution of keeping for herself a few drops of her deadliest potion.” Madame de Villefort uttered a wild cry, and a hideous and uncontrollable terror spread over her distorted features. “Oh, do not fear the scaffold, madame,” said the magistrate; “I will not dishonor you, since that would be dishonor to myself; no, if you have heard me distinctly, you will understand that you are not to die on the scaffold.”

“No, I do not understand; what do you mean?” stammered the unhappy woman, completely overwhelmed. “I mean that the wife of the first magistrate in the capital shall not, by her infamy, soil an unblemished name; that she shall not, with one blow, dishonor her husband and her child.”

“No, no — oh, no!”

“Well, madame, it will be a laudable action on your part, and I will thank you for it!”

“You will thank me — for what?”

“For what you have just said.”

“What did I say? Oh, my brain whirls; I no longer understand anything. Oh, my God, my God!” And she rose, with her hair dishevelled, and her lips foaming.

“Have you answered the question I put to you on entering the room? — where do you keep the poison you generally use, madame?” Madame de Villefort raised her arms to heaven, and convulsively struck one hand against the other. “No, no,” she vociferated, “no, you cannot wish that!”

“What I do not wish, madame, is that you should perish on the scaffold. Do you understand?” asked Villefort.

“Oh, mercy, mercy, monsieur!”

“What I require is, that justice be done. I am on the earth to punish, madame,” he added, with a flaming glance; “any other woman, were it the queen herself, I would send to the executioner; but to you I shall be merciful. To you I will say, ‘Have you not, madame, put aside some of the surest, deadliest, most speedy poison?’“

“Oh, pardon me, sir; let me live!”

“She is cowardly,” said Villefort.

“Reflect that I am your wife!”

“You are a poisoner.”

“In the name of heaven!”

“No!”

“In the name of the love you once bore me!”

“No, no!”

“In the name of our child! Ah, for the sake of our child, let me live!”

“No, no, no, I tell you; one day, if I allow you to live, you will perhaps kill him, as you have the others!”

“I? — I kill my boy?” cried the distracted mother, rushing toward Villefort; “I kill my son? Ha, ha, ha!” and a frightful, demoniac laugh finished the sentence, which was lost in a hoarse rattle. Madame de Villefort fell at her husband’s feet. He approached her. “Think of it, madame,” he said; “if, on my return, justice his not been satisfied, I will denounce you with my own mouth, and arrest you with my own hands!” She listened, panting, overwhelmed, crushed; her eye alone lived, and glared horribly. “Do you understand me?” he said. “I am going down there to pronounce the sentence of death against a murderer. If I find you alive on my return, you shall sleep to-night in the conciergerie.” Madame de Villefort sighed; her nerves gave way, and she sunk on the carpet. The king’s attorney seemed to experience a sensation of pity; he looked upon her less severely, and, bowing to her, said slowly, “Farewell, madame, farewell!” That farewell struck Madame de Villefort like the executioner’s knife. She fainted. The procureur went out, after having double-locked the door.

Chapter 109

The Assizes.

The Benedetto affair, as it was called at the Palais, and by people in general, had produced a tremendous sensation. Frequenting the Cafe de Paris, the Boulevard de Gand, and the Bois de Boulogne, during his brief career of splendor, the false Cavalcanti had formed a host of acquaintances. The papers had related his various adventures, both as the man of fashion and the galley-slave; and as every one who had been personally acquainted with Prince Andrea Cavalcanti experienced a lively curiosity in his fate, they all determined to spare no trouble in endeavoring to witness the trial of M. Benedetto for the murder of his comrade in chains. In the eyes of many, Benedetto appeared, if not a victim to, at least an instance of, the fallibility of the law. M. Cavalcanti, his father, had been seen in Paris, and it was expected that he would re-appear to claim the illustrious outcast. Many, also, who were not aware of the circumstances attending his withdrawal from Paris, were struck with the worthy appearance, the gentlemanly bearing, and the knowledge of the world displayed by the old patrician, who certainly played the nobleman very well, so long as he said nothing, and made no arithmetical calculations. As for the accused himself, many remembered him as being so amiable, so handsome, and so liberal, that they chose to think him the victim of some conspiracy, since in this world large fortunes frequently excite the malevolence and jealousy of some unknown enemy. Every one, therefore, ran to the court; some to witness the sight, others to comment upon it. From seven o’clock in the morning a crowd was stationed at the iron gates, and an hour before the trial commenced the hall was full of the privileged. Before the entrance of the magistrates, and indeed frequently afterwards, a court of justice, on days when some especial trial is to take place, resembles a drawing-room where many persons recognize each other and converse if they can do so without losing their seats; or, if they are separated by too great a number of lawyers, communicate by signs.

It was one of the magnificent autumn days which make amends for a short summer; the clouds which M. de Villefort had perceived at sunrise had all disappeared as if by magic, and one of the softest and most brilliant days of September shone forth in all its splendor.

Beauchamp, one of the kings of the press, and therefore claiming the right of a throne everywhere, was eying everybody through his monocle. He perceived Chateau-Renaud and Debray, who had just gained the good graces of a sergeant-at-arms, and who had persuaded the latter to let them stand before, instead of behind him, as they ought to have done. The worthy sergeant had recognized the minister's secretary and the millionnaire, and, by way of paying extra attention to his noble neighbors, promised to keep their places while they paid a visit to Beauchamp.

"Well," said Beauchamp, "we shall see our friend!"

"Yes, indeed!" replied Debray. "That worthy prince. Deuce take those Italian princes!"

"A man, too, who could boast of Dante for a genealogist, and could reckon back to the 'Divine Comedy.'"

"A nobility of the rope!" said Chateau-Renaud phlegmatically.

"He will be condemned, will he not?" asked Debray of Beauchamp.

"My dear fellow, I think we should ask you that question; you know such news much better than we do. Did you see the president at the minister's last night?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"Something which will surprise you."

"Oh, make haste and tell me, then; it is a long time since that has happened."

"Well, he told me that Benedetto, who is considered a serpent of subtlety and a giant of cunning, is really but a very commonplace, silly rascal, and altogether unworthy of the experiments that will be made on his phrenological organs after his death."

"Bah," said Beauchamp, "he played the prince very well."

"Yes, for you who detest those unhappy princes, Beauchamp, and are always delighted to find fault with them; but not for me, who discover a gentleman by instinct, and who scent out an aristocratic family like a very bloodhound of heraldry."

"Then you never believed in the principality?"

“Yes. — in the principality, but not in the prince.”

“Not so bad,” said Beauchamp; “still, I assure you, he passed very well with many people; I saw him at the ministers’ houses.”

“Ah, yes,” said Chateau-Renaud. “The idea of thinking ministers understand anything about princes!”

“There is something in what you have just said,” said Beauchamp, laughing.

“But,” said Debray to Beauchamp, “if I spoke to the president, you must have been with the procureur.”

“It was an impossibility; for the last week M. de Villefort has secluded himself. It is natural enough; this strange chain of domestic afflictions, followed by the no less strange death of his daughter” —

“Strange? What do you mean, Beauchamp?”

“Oh, yes; do you pretend that all this has been unobserved at the minister’s?” said Beauchamp, placing his eye-glass in his eye, where he tried to make it remain.

“My dear sir,” said Chateau-Renaud, “allow me to tell you that you do not understand that manoeuvre with the eye-glass half so well as Debray. Give him a lesson, Debray.”

“Stay,” said Beauchamp, “surely I am not deceived.”

“What is it?”

“It is she!”

“Whom do you mean?”

“They said she had left.”

“Mademoiselle Eugenie?” said Chateau-Renaud; “has she returned?”

“No, but her mother.”

“Madame Danglars? Nonsense! Impossible!” said Chateau-Renaud; “only ten days after the flight of her daughter, and three days from the bankruptcy of her husband?”

Debray colored slightly, and followed with his eyes the direction of Beauchamp’s glance. “Come,” he said, “it is only a veiled lady, some foreign princess, perhaps the mother of Cavalcanti. But you were just speaking on a very interesting topic, Beauchamp.”

“I?”

“Yes; you were telling us about the extraordinary death of Valentine.”

“Ah, yes, so I was. But how is it that Madame de Villefort is not here?”

"Poor, dear woman," said Debray, "she is no doubt occupied in distilling balm for the hospitals, or in making cosmetics for herself or friends. Do you know she spends two or three thousand crowns a year in this amusement? But I wonder she is not here. I should have been pleased to see her, for I like her very much."

"And I hate her," said Chateau-Renaud.

"Why?"

"I do not know. Why do we love? Why do we hate? I detest her, from antipathy."

"Or, rather, by instinct."

"Perhaps so. But to return to what you were saying, Beauchamp."

"Well, do you know why they die so multitudinously at M. de Villefort's?"

"'Multitudinously' is good," said Chateau-Renaud.

"My good fellow, you'll find the word in Saint-Simon."

"But the thing itself is at M. de Villefort's; but let's get back to the subject."

"Talking of that," said Debray, "Madame was making inquiries about that house, which for the last three months has been hung with black."

"Who is Madame?" asked Chateau-Renaud.

"The minister's wife, pardieu!"

"Oh, your pardon! I never visit ministers; I leave that to the princes."

"Really, You were only before sparkling, but now you are brilliant; take compassion on us, or, like Jupiter, you will wither us up."

"I will not speak again," said Chateau-Renaud; "pray have compassion upon me, and do not take up every word I say."

"Come, let us endeavor to get to the end of our story, Beauchamp; I told you that yesterday Madame made inquiries of me upon the subject; enlighten me, and I will then communicate my information to her."

"Well, gentlemen, the reason people die so multitudinously (I like the word) at M. de Villefort's is that there is an assassin in the house!" The two young men shuddered, for the same idea had more than once occurred to them. "And who is the assassin;" they asked together.

"Young Edward!" A burst of laughter from the auditors did not in the least disconcert the speaker, who continued, — "Yes, gentlemen; Edward, the infant phenomenon, who is quite an adept in the art of killing."

"You are jesting."

"Not at all. I yesterday engaged a servant, who had just left M. de Villefort — I intend sending him away to-morrow, for he eats so enormously, to make up for the fast imposed upon him by his terror in that house. Well, now listen."

"We are listening."

"It appears the dear child has obtained possession of a bottle containing some drug, which he every now and then uses against those who have displeased him. First, M. and Madame de Saint-Meran incurred his displeasure, so he poured out three drops of his elixir — three drops were sufficient; then followed Barrois, the old servant of M. Noirtier, who sometimes rebuffed this little wretch — he therefore received the same quantity of the elixir; the same happened to Valentine, of whom he was jealous; he gave her the same dose as the others, and all was over for her as well as the rest."

"Why, what nonsense are you telling us?" said Chateau-Renaud.

"Yes, it is an extraordinary story," said Beauchamp; "is it not?"

"It is absurd," said Debray.

"Ah," said Beauchamp, "you doubt me? Well, you can ask my servant, or rather him who will no longer be my servant to-morrow, it was the talk of the house."

"And this elixir, where is it? what is it?"

"The child conceals it."

"But where did he find it?"

"In his mother's laboratory."

"Does his mother then, keep poisons in her laboratory?"

"How can I tell? You are questioning me like a king's attorney. I only repeat what I have been told, and like my informant I can do no more. The poor devil would eat nothing, from fear."

"It is incredible!"

"No, my dear fellow, it is not at all incredible. You saw the child pass through the Rue Richelieu last year, who amused himself with killing his brothers and sisters by sticking pins in their ears while they slept. The generation who follow us are very precocious."

"Come, Beauchamp," said Chateau-Renaud, "I will bet anything you do not believe a word of all you have been telling us."

"I do not see the Count of Monte Cristo here."

“He is worn out,” said Debray; “besides, he could not well appear in public, since he has been the dupe of the Cavalcanti, who, it appears, presented themselves to him with false letters of credit, and cheated him out of 100,000. francs upon the hypothesis of this principality.”

“By the way, M. de Chateau-Renaud,” asked Beauchamp, “how is Morrel?”

“Ma foi, I have called three times without once seeing him. Still, his sister did not seem uneasy, and told me that though she had not seen him for two or three days, she was sure he was well.”

“Ah, now I think of it, the Count of Monte Cristo cannot appear in the hall,” said Beauchamp.

“Why not?”

“Because he is an actor in the drama.”

“Has he assassinated any one, then?”

“No, on the contrary, they wished to assassinate him. You know that it was in leaving his house that M. de Caderousse was murdered by his friend Benedetto. You know that the famous waistcoat was found in his house, containing the letter which stopped the signature of the marriage-contract. Do you see the waistcoat? There it is, all blood-stained, on the desk, as a testimony of the crime.”

“Ah, very good.”

“Hush, gentlemen, here is the court; let us go back to our places.” A noise was heard in the hall; the sergeant called his two patrons with an energetic “hem!” and the door-keeper appearing, called out with that shrill voice peculiar to his order, ever since the days of Beaumarchais, “The court, gentlemen!”

Chapter 110

The Indictment.

The judges took their places in the midst of the most profound silence; the jury took their seats; M. de Villefort, the object of unusual attention, and we had almost said of general admiration, sat in the arm-chair and cast a tranquil glance around him. Every one looked with astonishment on that grave and severe face, whose calm expression personal griefs had been unable to disturb, and the aspect of a man who was a stranger to all human emotions excited something very like terror.

“Gendarmes,” said the president, “lead in the accused.”

At these words the public attention became more intense, and all eyes were turned towards the door through which Benedetto was to enter. The door soon opened and the accused appeared. The same impression was experienced by all present, and no one was deceived by the expression of his countenance. His features bore no sign of that deep emotion which stops the beating of the heart and blanches the cheek. His hands, gracefully placed, one upon his hat, the other in the opening of his white waistcoat, were not at all tremulous; his eye was calm and even brilliant. Scarcely had he entered the hall when he glanced at the whole body of magistrates and assistants; his eye rested longer on the president, and still more so on the king’s attorney. By the side of Andrea was stationed the lawyer who was to conduct his defence, and who had been appointed by the court, for Andrea disdained to pay any attention to those details, to which he appeared to attach no importance. The lawyer was a young man with light hair whose face expressed a hundred times more emotion than that which characterized the prisoner.

The president called for the indictment, revised as we know, by the clever and implacable pen of Villefort. During the reading of this, which was long, the public attention was continually drawn towards Andrea, who bore the inspection with Spartan unconcern. Villefort had never been so concise and eloquent. The crime was depicted in the most vivid colors; the former life of the prisoner, his transformation, a review of his life from the earliest period, were set forth with all the talent that a knowledge of human life could furnish to a mind like that of the procureur. Benedetto was thus forever condemned in public opinion before the sentence of the law could be pronounced. Andrea paid no attention to the successive charges which were brought against him. M. de Villefort, who examined him attentively, and who no doubt practiced upon him all the psychological studies he was accustomed to use, in vain endeavored to make him lower his eyes, notwithstanding the depth and profundity of his gaze. At length the reading of the indictment was ended.

"Accused," said the president, "your name and surname?" Andrea arose. "Excuse me, Mr. President," he said, in a clear voice, "but I see you are going to adopt a course of questions through which I cannot follow you. I have an idea, which I will explain by and by, of making an exception to the usual form of accusation. Allow me, then, if you please, to answer in different order, or I will not do so at all." The astonished president looked at the jury, who in turn looked at Villefort. The whole assembly manifested great surprise, but Andrea appeared quite unmoved. "Your age?" said the president; "will you answer that question?"

"I will answer that question, as well as the rest, Mr. President, but in its turn."

"Your age?" repeated the president.

"I am twenty-one years old, or rather I shall be in a few days, as I was born the night of the 27th of September, 1817." M. de Villefort, who was busy taking down some notes, raised his head at the mention of this date. "Where were you born?" continued the president.

"At Auteuil, near Paris." M. de Villefort a second time raised his head, looked at Benedetto as if he had been gazing at the head of Medusa, and became livid. As for Benedetto, he gracefully wiped his lips with a fine cambric pocket-handkerchief. "Your profession?"

"First I was a forger," answered Andrea, as calmly as possible; "then I became a thief, and lately have become an assassin." A murmur, or rather storm, of indignation burst from all parts of the assembly. The judges themselves appeared to be stupefied, and the jury manifested tokens of disgust for cynicism so unexpected in a man of fashion. M. de Villefort pressed his hand upon his brow, which, at first pale, had become red and burning; then he suddenly arose and looked around as though he had lost his senses — he wanted air.

"Are you looking for anything, Mr. Procureur?" asked Benedetto, with his most ingratiating smile. M. de Villefort answered nothing, but sat, or rather threw himself down again upon his chair. "And now, prisoner, will you consent to tell your name?" said the president. "The brutal affectation with which you have enumerated and classified your crimes calls for a severe reprimand on the part of the court, both in the name of morality, and for the respect due to humanity. You appear to consider this a point of honor, and it may be for this reason, that you have delayed acknowledging your name. You wished it to be preceded by all these titles."

"It is quite wonderful, Mr. President, how entirely you have read my thoughts," said Benedetto, in his softest voice and most polite manner. "This is, indeed, the reason why I begged you to alter the order of the questions." The public astonishment had reached its height. There was no longer any deceit or bravado in the manner of the accused. The audience felt that a startling revelation was to follow this ominous prelude.

"Well," said the president; "your name?"

"I cannot tell you my name, since I do not know it; but I know my father's, and can tell it to you."

A painful giddiness overwhelmed Villefort; great drops of acrid sweat fell from his face upon the papers which he held in his convulsed hand.

"Repeat your father's name," said the president. Not a whisper, not a breath, was heard in that vast assembly; every one waited anxiously.

"My father is king's attorney," replied Andrea calmly.

"King's attorney?" said the president, stupefied, and without noticing the agitation which spread over the face of M. de Villefort; "king's attorney?"

"Yes; and if you wish to know his name, I will tell it, — he is named Villefort." The explosion, which had been so long restrained from a feeling of respect to the court of justice, now burst forth like thunder from the breasts of all present; the court itself did not seek to restrain the feelings of the audience. The exclamations, the insults addressed to Benedetto, who remained perfectly unconcerned, the energetic gestures, the movement of the gendarmes, the sneers of the scum of the crowd always sure to rise to the surface in case of any disturbance — all this lasted five minutes, before the door-keepers and magistrates were able to restore silence. In the midst of this tumult the voice of the president was heard to exclaim, — "Are you playing with justice, accused, and do you dare set your fellow-citizens an example of disorder which even in these times has never been equalled?"

Several persons hurried up to M. de Villefort, who sat half bowed over in his chair, offering him consolation, encouragement, and protestations of zeal and sympathy. Order was re-established in the hall, except that a few people still moved about and whispered to one another. A lady, it was said, had just fainted; they had supplied her with a smelling-bottle, and she had recovered. During the scene of tumult, Andrea had turned his smiling face towards the assembly; then, leaning with one hand on the oaken rail of the dock, in the most graceful attitude possible, he said: “Gentlemen, I assure you I had no idea of insulting the court, or of making a useless disturbance in the presence of this honorable assembly. They ask my age; I tell it. They ask where I was born; I answer. They ask my name, I cannot give it, since my parents abandoned me. But though I cannot give my own name, not possessing one, I can tell them my father’s. Now I repeat, my father is named M. de Villefort, and I am ready to prove it.”

There was an energy, a conviction, and a sincerity in the manner of the young man, which silenced the tumult. All eyes were turned for a moment towards the procureur, who sat as motionless as though a thunderbolt had changed him into a corpse. “Gentlemen,” said Andrea, commanding silence by his voice and manner; “I owe you the proofs and explanations of what I have said.”

“But,” said the irritated president, “you called yourself Benedetto, declared yourself an orphan, and claimed Corsica as your country.”

“I said anything I pleased, in order that the solemn declaration I have just made should not be withheld, which otherwise would certainly have been the case. I now repeat that I was born at Auteuil on the night of the 27th of September, 1817, and that I am the son of the procureur, M. de Villefort. Do you wish for any further details? I will give them. I was born in No. 28, Rue de la Fontaine, in a room hung with red damask; my father took me in his arms, telling my mother I was dead, wrapped me in a napkin marked with an H and an N, and carried me into a garden, where he buried me alive.”

A shudder ran through the assembly when they saw that the confidence of the prisoner increased in proportion to the terror of M. de Villefort. “But how have you become acquainted with all these details?” asked the president.

“I will tell you, Mr. President. A man who had sworn vengeance against my father, and had long watched his opportunity to kill him, had introduced himself that night into the garden in which my father buried me. He was concealed in a thicket; he saw my father bury something in the ground, and stabbed him; then thinking the deposit might contain some treasure he turned up the ground, and found me still living. The man carried me to the foundling asylum, where I was registered under the number 37. Three months afterwards, a woman travelled from Rogliano to Paris to fetch me, and having claimed me as her son, carried me away. Thus, you see, though born in Paris, I was brought up in Corsica."

There was a moment's silence, during which one could have fancied the hall empty, so profound was the stillness. "Proceed," said the president.

"Certainly, I might have lived happily amongst those good people, who adored me, but my perverse disposition prevailed over the virtues which my adopted mother endeavored to instil into my heart. I increased in wickedness till I committed crime. One day when I cursed Providence for making me so wicked, and ordaining me to such a fate, my adopted father said to me, 'Do not blaspheme, unhappy child, the crime is that of your father, not yours, — of your father, who consigned you to hell if you died, and to misery if a miracle preserved you alive.' After that I ceased to blaspheme, but I cursed my father. That is why I have uttered the words for which you blame me; that is why I have filled this whole assembly with horror. If I have committed an additional crime, punish me, but if you will allow that ever since the day of my birth my fate has been sad, bitter, and lamentable, then pity me."

"But your mother?" asked the president.

"My mother thought me dead; she is not guilty. I did not even wish to know her name, nor do I know it." Just then a piercing cry, ending in a sob, burst from the centre of the crowd, who encircled the lady who had before fainted, and who now fell into a violent fit of hysterics. She was carried out of the hall, the thick veil which concealed her face dropped off, and Madame Danglars was recognized. Notwithstanding his shattered nerves, the ringing sensation in his ears, and the madness which turned his brain, Villefort rose as he perceived her. "The proofs, the proofs!" said the president; "remember this tissue of horrors must be supported by the clearest proofs."

"The proofs?" said Benedetto, laughing; "do you want proofs?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, look at M. de Villefort, and then ask me for proofs."

Every one turned towards the procureur, who, unable to bear the universal gaze now riveted on him alone, advanced staggering into the midst of the tribunal, with his hair dishevelled and his face indented with the mark of his nails. The whole assembly uttered a long murmur of astonishment. “Father,” said Benedetto, “I am asked for proofs, do you wish me to give them?”

“No, no, it is useless,” stammered M. de Villefort in a hoarse voice; “no, it is useless!”

“How useless?” cried the president, “what do you mean?”

“I mean that I feel it impossible to struggle against this deadly weight which crushes me. Gentlemen, I know I am in the hands of an avenging God! We need no proofs; everything relating to this young man is true.” A dull, gloomy silence, like that which precedes some awful phenomenon of nature, pervaded the assembly, who shuddered in dismay. “What, M. de Villefort,” cried the president, “do you yield to an hallucination? What, are you no longer in possession of your senses? This strange, unexpected, terrible accusation has disordered your reason. Come, recover.”

The procureur dropped his head; his teeth chattered like those of a man under a violent attack of fever, and yet he was deadly pale.

“I am in possession of all my senses, sir,” he said; “my body alone suffers, as you may suppose. I acknowledge myself guilty of all the young man has brought against me, and from this hour hold myself under the authority of the procureur who will succeed me.”

And as he spoke these words with a hoarse, choking voice, he staggered towards the door, which was mechanically opened by a door-keeper. The whole assembly were dumb with astonishment at the revelation and confession which had produced a catastrophe so different from that which had been expected during the last fortnight by the Parisian world.

“Well,” said Beauchamp, “let them now say that drama is unnatural!”

“Ma foi!” said Chateau-Renaud, “I would rather end my career like M. de Morcerf; a pistol-shot seems quite delightful compared with this catastrophe.”

“And moreover, it kills,” said Beauchamp.

“And to think that I had an idea of marrying his daughter,” said Debray. “She did well to die, poor girl!”

“The sitting is adjourned, gentlemen,” said the president; “fresh inquiries will be made, and the case will be tried next session by another magistrate.”

As for Andrea, who was calm and more interesting than ever, he left the hall, escorted by gendarmes, who involuntarily paid him some attention. “Well, what do you think of this, my fine fellow?” asked Debray of the sergeant-at-arms, slipping a louis into his hand. “There will be extenuating circumstances,” he replied.

Chapter 111

Expiation.

Notwithstanding the density of the crowd, M. de Villefort saw it open before him. There is something so awe-inspiring in great afflictions that even in the worst times the first emotion of a crowd has generally been to sympathize with the sufferer in a great catastrophe. Many people have been assassinated in a tumult, but even criminals have rarely been insulted during trial. Thus Villefort passed through the mass of spectators and officers of the Palais, and withdrew. Though he had acknowledged his guilt, he was protected by his grief. There are some situations which men understand by instinct, but which reason is powerless to explain; in such cases the greatest poet is he who gives utterance to the most natural and vehement outburst of sorrow. Those who hear the bitter cry are as much impressed as if they listened to an entire poem, and when the sufferer is sincere they are right in regarding his outburst as sublime.

It would be difficult to describe the state of stupor in which Villefort left the Palais. Every pulse beat with feverish excitement, every nerve was strained, every vein swollen, and every part of his body seemed to suffer distinctly from the rest, thus multiplying his agony a thousand-fold. He made his way along the corridors through force of habit; he threw aside his magisterial robe, not out of deference to etiquette, but because it was an unbearable burden, a veritable garb of Nessus, insatiate in torture. Having staggered as far as the Rue Dauphine, he perceived his carriage, awoke his sleeping coachman by opening the door himself, threw himself on the cushions, and pointed towards the Faubourg Saint-Honore; the carriage drove on. The weight of his fallen fortunes seemed suddenly to crush him; he could not foresee the consequences; he could not contemplate the future with the indifference of the hardened criminal who merely faces a contingency already familiar. God was still in his heart. “God,” he murmured, not knowing what he said, — ”God — God!” Behind the event that had overwhelmed him he saw the hand of God. The carriage rolled rapidly onward. Villefort, while turning restlessly on the cushions, felt something press against him. He put out his hand to remove the object; it was a fan which Madame de Villefort had left in the carriage; this fan awakened a recollection which darted through his mind like lightning. He thought of his wife.

“Oh!” he exclaimed, as though a redhot iron were piercing his heart. During the last hour his own crime had alone been presented to his mind; now another object, not less terrible, suddenly presented itself. His wife! He had just acted the inexorable judge with her, he had condemned her to death, and she, crushed by remorse, struck with terror, covered with the shame inspired by the eloquence of his irreproachable virtue, — she, a poor, weak woman, without help or the power of defending herself against his absolute and supreme will, — she might at that very moment, perhaps, be preparing to die! An hour had elapsed since her condemnation; at that moment, doubtless, she was recalling all her crimes to her memory; she was asking pardon for her sins; perhaps she was even writing a letter imploring forgiveness from her virtuous husband — a forgiveness she was purchasing with her death! Villefort again groaned with anguish and despair. “Ah,” he exclaimed, “that woman became criminal only from associating with me! I carried the infection of crime with me, and she has caught it as she would the typhus fever, the cholera, the plague! And yet I have punished her — I have dared to tell her — I have — ’Repent and die!’ But no, she must not die; she shall live, and with me. We will flee from Paris and go as far as the earth reaches. I told her of the scaffold; oh, heavens, I forgot that it awaits me also! How could I pronounce that word? Yes, we will fly; I will confess all to her, — I will tell her daily that I also have committed a crime! — Oh, what an alliance — the tiger and the serpent; worthy wife of such as I am! She must live that my infamy may diminish hers.” And Villefort dashed open the window in front of the carriage.

“Faster, faster!” he cried, in a tone which electrified the coachman. The horses, impelled by fear, flew towards the house.

“Yes, yes,” repeated Villefort, as he approached his home — ”yes, that woman must live; she must repent, and educate my son, the sole survivor, with the exception of the indestructible old man, of the wreck of my house. She loves him; it was for his sake she has committed these crimes. We ought never to despair of softening the heart of a mother who loves her child. She will repent, and no one will know that she has been guilty. The events which have taken place in my house, though they now occupy the public mind, will be forgotten in time, or if, indeed, a few enemies should persist in remembering them, why then I will add them to my list of crimes. What will it signify if one, two, or three more are added? My wife and child shall escape from this gulf, carrying treasures with them; she will live and may yet be happy, since her child, in whom all her love is centred, will be with her. I shall have performed a good action, and my heart will be lighter.” And the procureur breathed more freely than he had done for some time.

The carriage stopped at the door of the house. Villefort leaped out of the carriage, and saw that his servants were surprised at his early return; he could read no other expression on their features. Neither of them spoke to him; they merely stood aside to let him pass by, as usual, nothing more. As he passed by M. Noirtier’s room, he perceived two figures through the half-open door; but he experienced no curiosity to know who was visiting his father: anxiety carried him on further.

“Come,” he said, as he ascended the stairs leading to his wife’s room, “nothing is changed here.” He then closed the door of the landing. “No one must disturb us,” he said; “I must speak freely to her, accuse myself, and say” — he approached the door, touched the crystal handle, which yielded to his hand. “Not locked,” he cried; “that is well.” And he entered the little room in which Edward slept; for though the child went to school during the day, his mother could not allow him to be separated from her at night. With a single glance Villefort’s eye ran through the room. “Not here,” he said; “doubtless she is in her bedroom.” He rushed towards the door, found it bolted, and stopped, shuddering. “Heloise!” he cried. He fancied he heard the sound of a piece of furniture being removed. “Heloise!” he repeated.

“Who is there?” answered the voice of her he sought. He thought that voice more feeble than usual.

“Open the door!” cried Villefort. “Open; it is I.” But notwithstanding this request, notwithstanding the tone of anguish in which it was uttered, the door remained closed. Villefort burst it open with a violent blow. At the entrance of the room which led to her boudoir, Madame de Villefort was standing erect, pale, her features contracted, and her eyes glaring horribly. “Heloise, Heloise!” he said, “what is the matter? Speak!” The young woman extended her stiff white hands towards him. “It is done, monsieur,” she said with a rattling noise which seemed to tear her throat. “What more do you want?” and she fell full length on the floor. Villefort ran to her and seized her hand, which convulsively clasped a crystal bottle with a golden stopper. Madame de Villefort was dead. Villefort, maddened with horror, stepped back to the threshhold of the door, fixing his eyes on the corpse: “My son!” he exclaimed suddenly, “where is my son? — Edward, Edward!” and he rushed out of the room, still crying, “Edward, Edward!” The name was pronounced in such a tone of anguish that the servants ran up.

“Where is my son?” asked Villefort; “let him be removed from the house, that he may not see” —

“Master Edward is not down-stairs, sir,” replied the valet.

“Then he must be playing in the garden; go and see.”

“No, sir; Madame de Villefort sent for him half an hour ago; he went into her room, and has not been down-stairs since.” A cold perspiration burst out on Villefort’s brow; his legs trembled, and his thoughts flew about madly in his brain like the wheels of a disordered watch. “In Madame de Villefort’s room?” he murmured and slowly returned, with one hand wiping his forehead, and with the other supporting himself against the wall. To enter the room he must again see the body of his unfortunate wife. To call Edward he must reawaken the echo of that room which now appeared like a sepulchre; to speak seemed like violating the silence of the tomb. His tongue was paralyzed in his mouth.

“Edward!” he stammered — ”Edward!” The child did not answer. Where, then, could he be, if he had entered his mother’s room and not since returned? He stepped forward. The corpse of Madame de Villefort was stretched across the doorway leading to the room in which Edward must be; those glaring eyes seemed to watch over the threshold, and the lips bore the stamp of a terrible and mysterious irony. Through the open door was visible a portion of the boudoir, containing an upright piano and a blue satin couch. Villefort stepped forward two or three paces, and beheld his child lying — no doubt asleep — on the sofa. The unhappy man uttered an exclamation of joy; a ray of light seemed to penetrate the abyss of despair and darkness. He had only to step over the corpse, enter the boudoir, take the child in his arms, and flee far, far away.

Villefort was no longer the civilized man; he was a tiger hurt unto death, gnashing his teeth in his wound. He no longer feared realities, but phantoms. He leaped over the corpse as if it had been a burning brazier. He took the child in his arms, embraced him, shook him, called him, but the child made no response. He pressed his burning lips to the cheeks, but they were icy cold and pale; he felt the stiffened limbs; he pressed his hand upon the heart, but it no longer beat, — the child was dead. A folded paper fell from Edward's breast. Villefort, thunderstruck, fell upon his knees; the child dropped from his arms, and rolled on the floor by the side of its mother. He picked up the paper, and, recognizing his wife's writing, ran his eyes rapidly over its contents; it ran as follows: —

"You know that I was a good mother, since it was for my son's sake I became criminal. A good mother cannot depart without her son."

Villefort could not believe his eyes, — he could not believe his reason; he dragged himself towards the child's body, and examined it as a lioness contemplates its dead cub. Then a piercing cry escaped from his breast, and he cried, "Still the hand of God." The presence of the two victims alarmed him; he could not bear solitude shared only by two corpses. Until then he had been sustained by rage, by his strength of mind, by despair, by the supreme agony which led the Titans to scale the heavens, and Ajax to defy the gods. He now arose, his head bowed beneath the weight of grief, and, shaking his damp, dishevelled hair, he who had never felt compassion for any one determined to seek his father, that he might have some one to whom he could relate his misfortunes, — some one by whose side he might weep. He descended the little staircase with which we are acquainted, and entered Noirtier's room. The old man appeared to be listening attentively and as affectionately as his infirmities would allow to the Abbe Busoni, who looked cold and calm, as usual. Villefort, perceiving the abbe, passed his hand across his brow. He recollected the call he had made upon him after the dinner at Auteuil, and then the visit the abbe had himself paid to his house on the day of Valentine's death. "You here, sir!" he exclaimed; "do you, then, never appear but to act as an escort to death?"

Busoni turned around, and, perceiving the excitement depicted on the magistrate's face, the savage lustre of his eyes, he understood that the revelation had been made at the assizes; but beyond this he was ignorant. "I came to pray over the body of your daughter."

"And now why are you here?"

"I come to tell you that you have sufficiently repaid your debt, and that from this moment I will pray to God to forgive you, as I do."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Villefort, stepping back fearfully, "surely that is not the voice of the Abbe Busoni!"

“No!” The abbe threw off his wig, shook his head, and his hair, no longer confined, fell in black masses around his manly face.

“It is the face of the Count of Monte Cristo!” exclaimed the procureur, with a haggard expression.

“You are not exactly right, M. Procureur; you must go farther back.”

“That voice, that voice! — where did I first hear it?”

“You heard it for the first time at Marseilles, twenty-three years ago, the day of your marriage with Mademoiselle de Saint-Meran. Refer to your papers.”

“You are not Busoni? — you are not Monte Cristo? Oh, heavens — you are, then, some secret, implacable, and mortal enemy! I must have wronged you in some way at Marseilles. Oh, woe to me!”

“Yes; you are now on the right path,” said the count, crossing his arms over his broad chest; “search — search!”

“But what have I done to you?” exclaimed Villefort, whose mind was balancing between reason and insanity, in that cloud which is neither a dream nor reality; “what have I done to you? Tell me, then! Speak!”

“You condemned me to a horrible, tedious death; you killed my father; you deprived me of liberty, of love, and happiness.”

“Who are you, then? Who are you?”

“I am the spectre of a wretch you buried in the dungeons of the Chateau d’If. God gave that spectre the form of the Count of Monte Cristo when he at length issued from his tomb, enriched him with gold and diamonds, and led him to you!”

“Ah, I recognize you — I recognize you!” exclaimed the king’s attorney; “you are” —

“I am Edmond Dantes!”

“You are Edmond Dantes,” cried Villefort, seizing the count by the wrist; “then come here!” And up the stairs he dragged Monte Cristo; who, ignorant of what had happened, followed him in astonishment, foreseeing some new catastrophe. “There, Edmond Dantes!” he said, pointing to the bodies of his wife and child, “see, are you well avenged?” Monte Cristo became pale at this horrible sight; he felt that he had passed beyond the bounds of vengeance, and that he could no longer say, “God is for and with me.” With an expression of indescribable anguish he threw himself upon the body of the child, reopened its eyes, felt its pulse, and then rushed with him into Valentine’s room, of which he double-locked the door. “My child,” cried Villefort, “he carries away the body of my child! Oh, curses, woe, death to you!” and he tried to follow Monte Cristo; but as though in a dream he was transfixed to the spot, — his eyes glared as though they were starting through the sockets; he griped the flesh on his chest until his nails were stained with blood; the veins of his temples swelled and boiled as though they would burst their narrow boundary, and deluge his brain with living fire. This lasted several minutes, until the frightful overturn of reason was accomplished; then uttering a loud cry followed by a burst of laughter, he rushed down the stairs.

A quarter of an hour afterwards the door of Valentine’s room opened, and Monte Cristo reappeared. Pale, with a dull eye and heavy heart, all the noble features of that face, usually so calm and serene, were overcast by grief. In his arms he held the child, whom no skill had been able to recall to life. Bending on one knee, he placed it reverently by the side of its mother, with its head upon her breast. Then, rising, he went out, and meeting a servant on the stairs, he asked, “Where is M. de Villefort?”

The servant, instead of answering, pointed to the garden. Monte Cristo ran down the steps, and advancing towards the spot designated beheld Villefort, encircled by his servants, with a spade in his hand, and digging the earth with fury. “It is not here!” he cried. “It is not here!” And then he moved farther on, and began again to dig.

Monte Cristo approached him, and said in a low voice, with an expression almost humble, “Sir, you have indeed lost a son; but” —

Villefort interrupted him; he had neither listened nor heard. “Oh, I will find it,” he cried; “you may pretend he is not here, but I will find him, though I dig forever!” Monte Cristo drew back in horror. “Oh,” he said, “he is mad!” And as though he feared that the walls of the accursed house would crumble around him, he rushed into the street, for the first time doubting whether he had the right to do as he had done. “Oh, enough of this, — enough of this,” he cried; “let me save the last.” On entering his house, he met Morrel, who wandered about like a ghost awaiting the heavenly mandate for return to the tomb. “Prepare yourself, Maximilian,” he said with a smile; “we leave Paris to-morrow.”

“Have you nothing more to do there?” asked Morrel.

“No,” replied Monte Cristo; “God grant I may not have done too much already.”

The next day they indeed left, accompanied only by Baptistin. Haidee had taken away Ali, and Bertuccio remained with Noirtier.

Chapter 112

The Departure.

The recent event formed the theme of conversation throughout all Paris. Emmanuel and his wife conversed with natural astonishment in their little apartment in the Rue Meslay upon the three successive, sudden, and most unexpected catastrophes of Morcerf, Danglars, and Villefort. Maximilian, who was paying them a visit, listened to their conversation, or rather was present at it, plunged in his accustomed state of apathy. “Indeed,” said Julie, “might we not almost fancy, Emmanuel, that those people, so rich, so happy but yesterday, had forgotten in their prosperity that an evil genius — like the wicked fairies in Perrault’s stories who present themselves unbidden at a wedding or baptism — hovered over them, and appeared all at once to revenge himself for their fatal neglect?”

“What a dire misfortune!” said Emmanuel, thinking of Morcerf and Danglars.

“What dreadful sufferings!” said Julie, remembering Valentine, but whom, with a delicacy natural to women, she did not name before her brother.

“If the Supreme Being has directed the fatal blow,” said Emmanuel, “it must be that he in his great goodness has perceived nothing in the past lives of these people to merit mitigation of their awful punishment.”

“Do you not form a very rash judgment, Emmanuel?” said Julie. “When my father, with a pistol in his hand, was once on the point of committing suicide, had any one then said, ‘This man deserves his misery,’ would not that person have been deceived?”

“Yes; but your father was not allowed to fall. A being was commissioned to arrest the fatal hand of death about to descend on him.”

Emmanuel had scarcely uttered these words when the sound of the bell was heard, the well-known signal given by the porter that a visitor had arrived. Nearly at the same instant the door was opened and the Count of Monte Cristo appeared on the threshold. The young people uttered a cry of joy, while Maximilian raised his head, but let it fall again immediately.

"Maximilian," said the count, without appearing to notice the different impressions which his presence produced on the little circle, "I come to seek you."

"To seek me?" repeated Morrel, as if awakening from a dream.

"Yes," said Monte Cristo; "has it not been agreed that I should take you with me, and did I not tell you yesterday to prepare for departure?"

"I am ready," said Maximilian; "I came expressly to wish them farewell."

"Whither are you going, count?" asked Julie.

"In the first instance to Marseilles, madame."

"To Marseilles!" exclaimed the young couple.

"Yes, and I take your brother with me."

"Oh, count." said Julie, "will you restore him to us cured of his melancholy?" — Morrel turned away to conceal the confusion of his countenance.

"You perceive, then, that he is not happy?" said the count. "Yes," replied the young woman; "and fear much that he finds our home but a dull one."

"I will undertake to divert him," replied the count.

"I am ready to accompany you, sir," said Maximilian. "Adieu, my kind friends! Emmanuel — Julie — farewell!"

"How farewell?" exclaimed Julie; "do you leave us thus, so suddenly, without any preparations for your journey, without even a passport?"

"Needless delays but increase the grief of parting," said Monte Cristo, "and Maximilian has doubtless provided himself with everything requisite; at least, I advised him to do so."

"I have a passport, and my clothes are ready packed," said Morrel in his tranquil but mournful manner.

"Good," said Monte Cristo, smiling; "in these prompt arrangements we recognize the order of a well-disciplined soldier."

"And you leave us," said Julie, "at a moment's warning? you do not give us a day — no, not even an hour before your departure?"

"My carriage is at the door, madame, and I must be in Rome in five days."

"But does Maximilian go to Rome?" exclaimed Emmanuel.

"I am going wherever it may please the count to take me," said Morrel, with a smile full of grief; "I am under his orders for the next month."

"Oh, heavens, how strangely he expresses himself, count!" said Julie.

“Maximilian goes with me,” said the count, in his kindest and most persuasive manner; “therefore do not make yourself uneasy on your brother’s account.”

“Once more farewell, my dear sister; Emmanuel, adieu!” Morrel repeated.

“His carelessness and indifference touch me to the heart,” said Julie. “Oh, Maximilian, Maximilian, you are certainly concealing something from us.”

“Pshaw!” said Monte Cristo, “you will see him return to you gay, smiling, and joyful.”

Maximilian cast a look of disdain, almost of anger, on the count.

“We must leave you,” said Monte Cristo.

“Before you quit us, count,” said Julie, “will you permit us to express to you all that the other day” —

“Madame,” interrupted the count, taking her two hands in his, “all that you could say in words would never express what I read in your eyes; the thoughts of your heart are fully understood by mine. Like benefactors in romances, I should have left you without seeing you again, but that would have been a virtue beyond my strength, because I am a weak and vain man, fond of the tender, kind, and thankful glances of my fellow-creatures. On the eve of departure I carry my egotism so far as to say, ‘Do not forget me, my kind friends, for probably you will never see me again.’“

“Never see you again?” exclaimed Emmanuel, while two large tears rolled down Julie’s cheeks, “never behold you again? It is not a man, then, but some angel that leaves us, and this angel is on the point of returning to heaven after having appeared on earth to do good.”

“Say not so,” quickly returned Monte Cristo — ”say not so, my friends; angels never err, celestial beings remain where they wish to be. Fate is not more powerful than they; it is they who, on the contrary, overcome fate. No, Emmanuel, I am but a man, and your admiration is as unmerited as your words are sacrilegious.” And pressing his lips on the hand of Julie, who rushed into his arms, he extended his other hand to Emmanuel; then tearing himself from this abode of peace and happiness, he made a sign to Maximilian, who followed him passively, with the indifference which had been perceptible in him ever since the death of Valentine had so stunned him. “Restore my brother to peace and happiness,” whispered Julie to Monte Cristo. And the count pressed her hand in reply, as he had done eleven years before on the staircase leading to Morrel’s study.

“You still confide, then, in Sinbad the Sailor?” asked he, smiling.

“Oh, yes,” was the ready answer.

“Well, then, sleep in peace, and put your trust in heaven.” As we have before said, the postchaise was waiting; four powerful horses were already pawing the ground with impatience, while Ali, apparently just arrived from a long walk, was standing at the foot of the steps, his face bathed in perspiration. “Well,” asked the count in Arabic, “have you been to see the old man?” Ali made a sign in the affirmative.

“And have you placed the letter before him, as I ordered you to do?”

The slave respectfully signalized that he had. “And what did he say, or rather do?” Ali placed himself in the light, so that his master might see him distinctly, and then imitating in his intelligent manner the countenance of the old man, he closed his eyes, as Noirtier was in the custom of doing when saying “Yes.”

“Good; he accepts,” said Monte Cristo. “Now let us go.”

These words had scarcely escaped him, when the carriage was on its way, and the feet of the horses struck a shower of sparks from the pavement. Maximilian settled himself in his corner without uttering a word. Half an hour had passed when the carriage stopped suddenly; the count had just pulled the silken check-string, which was fastened to Ali’s finger. The Nubian immediately descended and opened the carriage door. It was a lovely starlight night — they had just reached the top of the hill Villejuif, from whence Paris appears like a sombre sea tossing its millions of phosphoric waves into light — waves indeed more noisy, more passionate, more changeable, more furious, more greedy, than those of the tempestuous ocean, — waves which never rest as those of the sea sometimes do, — waves ever dashing, ever foaming, ever ingulfing what falls within their grasp. The count stood alone, and at a sign from his hand, the carriage went on for a short distance. With folded arms, he gazed for some time upon the great city. When he had fixed his piercing look on this modern Babylon, which equally engages the contemplation of the religious enthusiast, the materialist, and the scoffer, — ”Great city,” murmured he, inclining his head, and joining his hands as if in prayer, “less than six months have elapsed since first I entered thy gates. I believe that the Spirit of God led my steps to thee and that he also enables me to quit thee in triumph; the secret cause of my presence within thy walls I have confided alone to him who only has had the power to read my heart. God only knows that I retire from thee without pride or hatred, but not without many regrets; he only knows that the power confided to me has never been made subservient to my personal good or to any useless cause. Oh, great city, it is in thy palpitating bosom that I have found that which I sought; like a patient miner, I have dug deep into thy very entrails to root out evil thence. Now my work is accomplished, my mission is terminated, now thou canst neither afford me pain nor pleasure. Adieu, Paris, adieu!”

His look wandered over the vast plain like that of some genius of the night; he passed his hand over his brow, got into the carriage, the door was closed on him, and the vehicle quickly disappeared down the other side of the hill in a whirlwind of noise and dust.

Ten leagues were passed and not a single word was uttered.

Morrel was dreaming, and Monte Cristo was looking at the dreamer.

“Morrel,” said the count to him at length, “do you repent having followed me?”

“No, count; but to leave Paris” —

“If I thought happiness might await you in Paris, Morrel, I would have left you there.”

“Valentine reposes within the walls of Paris, and to leave Paris is like losing her a second time.”

“Maximilian,” said the count, “the friends that we have lost do not repose in the bosom of the earth, but are buried deep in our hearts, and it has been thus ordained that we may always be accompanied by them. I have two friends, who in this way never depart from me; the one who gave me being, and the other who conferred knowledge and intelligence on me. Their spirits live in me. I consult them when doubtful, and if I ever do any good, it is due to their beneficent counsels. Listen to the voice of your heart, Morrel, and ask it whether you ought to preserve this melancholy exterior towards me.”

“My friend,” said Maximilian, “the voice of my heart is very sorrowful, and promises me nothing but misfortune.”

“It is the way of weakened minds to see everything through a black cloud. The soul forms its own horizons; your soul is darkened, and consequently the sky of the future appears stormy and unpromising.”

“That may possibly be true,” said Maximilian, and he again subsided into his thoughtful mood.

The journey was performed with that marvellous rapidity which the unlimited power of the count ever commanded. Towns fled from them like shadows on their path, and trees shaken by the first winds of autumn seemed like giants madly rushing on to meet them, and retreating as rapidly when once reached. The following morning they arrived at Chalons, where the count's steamboat waited for them. Without the loss of an instant, the carriage was placed on board and the two travellers embarked without delay. The boat was built for speed; her two paddle-wheels were like two wings with which she skimmed the water like a bird. Morrel was not insensible to that sensation of delight which is generally experienced in passing rapidly through the air, and the wind which occasionally raised the hair from his forehead seemed on the point of dispelling momentarily the clouds collected there.

As the distance increased between the travellers and Paris, almost superhuman serenity appeared to surround the count; he might have been taken for an exile about to revisit his native land. Ere long Marseilles presented herself to view, — Marseilles, white, fervid, full of life and energy, — Marseilles, the younger sister of Tyre and Carthage, the successor to them in the empire of the Mediterranean, — Marseilles, old, yet always young. Powerful memories were stirred within them by the sight of the round tower, Fort Saint-Nicolas, the City Hall designed by Puget, [*] the port with its brick quays, where they had both played in childhood, and it was with one accord that they stopped on the Cannebiere. A vessel was setting sail for Algiers, on board of which the bustle usually attending departure prevailed. The passengers and their relations crowded on the deck, friends taking a tender but sorrowful leave of each other, some weeping, others noisy in their grief, the whole forming a spectacle that might be exciting even to those who witnessed similar sights daily, but which had no power to disturb the current of thought that had taken possession of the mind of Maximilian from the moment he had set foot on the broad pavement of the quay.

* Pierre Puget, the sculptor-architect, was born at
Marseilles in 1622.

“Here,” said he, leaning heavily on the arm of Monte Cristo, — ”here is the spot where my father stopped, when the Pharaon entered the port; it was here that the good old man, whom you saved from death and dishonor, threw himself into my arms. I yet feel his warm tears on my face, and his were not the only tears shed, for many who witnessed our meeting wept also.” Monte Cristo gently smiled and said, — ”I was there;” at the same time pointing to the corner of a street. As he spoke, and in the very direction he indicated, a groan, expressive of bitter grief, was heard, and a woman was seen waving her hand to a passenger on board the vessel about to sail. Monte Cristo looked at her with an emotion that must have been remarked by Morrel had not his eyes been fixed on the vessel.

“Oh, heavens!” exclaimed Morrel, “I do not deceive myself — that young man who is waving his hat, that youth in the uniform of a lieutenant, is Albert de Morcerf!”

“Yes,” said Monte Cristo, “I recognized him.”

“How so? — you were looking the other way.” the Count smiled, as he was in the habit of doing when he did not want to make any reply, and he again turned towards the veiled woman, who soon disappeared at the corner of the street. Turning to his friend, — ”Dear Maximilian,” said the count, “have you nothing to do in this land?”

“I have to weep over the grave of my father,” replied Morrel in a broken voice.

“Well, then, go, — wait for me there, and I will soon join you.”

“You leave me, then?”

“Yes; I also have a pious visit to pay.”

Morrel allowed his hand to fall into that which the count extended to him; then with an inexpressibly sorrowful inclination of the head he quitted the count and bent his steps to the east of the city. Monte Cristo remained on the same spot until Maximilian was out of sight; he then walked slowly towards the Allees de Meillan to seek out a small house with which our readers were made familiar at the beginning of this story. It yet stood, under the shade of the fine avenue of lime-trees, which forms one of the most frequent walks of the idlers of Marseilles, covered by an immense vine, which spreads its aged and blackened branches over the stone front, burnt yellow by the ardent sun of the south. Two stone steps worn away by the friction of many feet led to the door, which was made of three planks; the door had never been painted or varnished, so great cracks yawned in it during the dry season to close again when the rains came on. The house, with all its crumbling antiquity and apparent misery, was yet cheerful and picturesque, and was the same that old Dantes formerly inhabited — the only difference being that the old man occupied merely the garret, while the whole house was now placed at the command of Mercedes by the count.

The woman whom the count had seen leave the ship with so much regret entered this house; she had scarcely closed the door after her when Monte Cristo appeared at the corner of a street, so that he found and lost her again almost at the same instant. The worn out steps were old acquaintances of his; he knew better than any one else how to open that weather-beaten door with the large headed nail which served to raise the latch within. He entered without knocking, or giving any other intimation of his presence, as if he had been a friend or the master of the place. At the end of a passage paved with bricks, was a little garden, bathed in sunshine, and rich in warmth and light. In this garden Mercedes had found, at the place indicated by the count, the sum of money which he, through a sense of delicacy, had described as having been placed there twenty-four years previously. The trees of the garden were easily seen from the steps of the street-door. Monte Cristo, on stepping into the house, heard a sigh that was almost a deep sob; he looked in the direction whence it came, and there under an arbor of Virginia jessamine, [*] with its thick foliage and beautiful long purple flowers, he saw Mercedes seated, with her head bowed, and weeping bitterly. She had raised her veil, and with her face hidden by her hands was giving free scope to the sighs and tears which had been so long restrained by the presence of her son. Monte Cristo advanced a few steps, which were heard on the gravel. Mercedes raised her head, and uttered a cry of terror on beholding a man before her.

> * The Carolina — not Virginia — jessamine, gelsemium sempervirens (properly speaking not a jessamine at all) has yellow blossoms. The reference is no doubt to the Wistaria frutescens. — Ed.

“Madame,” said the count, “it is no longer in my power to restore you to happiness, but I offer you consolation; will you deign to accept it as coming from a friend?”

“I am, indeed, most wretched,” replied Mercedes. “Alone in the world, I had but my son, and he has left me!”

“He possesses a noble heart, madame,” replied the count, “and he has acted rightly. He feels that every man owes a tribute to his country; some contribute their talents, others their industry; these devote their blood, those their nightly labors, to the same cause. Had he remained with you, his life must have become a hateful burden, nor would he have participated in your griefs. He will increase in strength and honor by struggling with adversity, which he will convert into prosperity. Leave him to build up the future for you, and I venture to say you will confide it to safe hands."

"Oh," replied the wretched woman, mournfully shaking her head, "the prosperity of which you speak, and which, from the bottom of my heart, I pray God in his mercy to grant him, I can never enjoy. The bitter cup of adversity has been drained by me to the very dregs, and I feel that the grave is not far distant. You have acted kindly, count, in bringing me back to the place where I have enjoyed so much bliss. I ought to meet death on the same spot where happiness was once all my own."

"Alas," said Monte Cristo, "your words sear and embitter my heart, the more so as you have every reason to hate me. I have been the cause of all your misfortunes; but why do you pity, instead of blaming me? You render me still more unhappy" —

"Hate you, blame you — you, Edmond! Hate, reproach, the man that has spared my son's life! For was it not your fatal and sanguinary intention to destroy that son of whom M. de Morcerf was so proud? Oh, look at me closely, and discover if you can even the semblance of a reproach in me." The count looked up and fixed his eyes on Mercedes, who arose partly from her seat and extended both her hands towards him. "Oh, look at me," continued she, with a feeling of profound melancholy, "my eyes no longer dazzle by their brilliancy, for the time has long fled since I used to smile on Edmond Dantes, who anxiously looked out for me from the window of yonder garret, then inhabited by his old father. Years of grief have created an abyss between those days and the present. I neither reproach you nor hate you, my friend. Oh, no, Edmond, it is myself that I blame, myself that I hate! Oh, miserable creature that I am!" cried she, clasping her hands, and raising her eyes to heaven. "I once possessed piety, innocence, and love, the three ingredients of the happiness of angels, and now what am I?" Monte Cristo approached her, and silently took her hand. "No," said she, withdrawing it gently — "no, my friend, touch me not. You have spared me, yet of all those who have fallen under your vengeance I was the most guilty. They were influenced by hatred, by avarice, and by self-love; but I was base, and for want of courage acted against my judgment. Nay, do not press my hand, Edmond; you are thinking, I am sure, of some kind speech to console me, but do not utter it to me, reserve it for others more worthy of your kindness. See” (and she exposed her face completely to view) — ”see, misfortune has silvered my hair, my eyes have shed so many tears that they are encircled by a rim of purple, and my brow is wrinkled. You, Edmond, on the contrary, — you are still young, handsome, dignified; it is because you have had faith; because you have had strength, because you have had trust in God, and God has sustained you. But as for me, I have been a coward; I have denied God and he has abandoned me.”

Mercedes burst into tears; her woman’s heart was breaking under its load of memories. Monte Cristo took her hand and imprinted a kiss on it; but she herself felt that it was a kiss of no greater warmth than he would have bestowed on the hand of some marble statue of a saint. “It often happens,” continued she, “that a first fault destroys the prospects of a whole life. I believed you dead; why did I survive you? What good has it done me to mourn for you eternally in the secret recesses of my heart? — only to make a woman of thirty-nine look like a woman of fifty. Why, having recognized you, and I the only one to do so — why was I able to save my son alone? Ought I not also to have rescued the man that I had accepted for a husband, guilty though he were? Yet I let him die! What do I say? Oh, merciful heavens, was I not accessory to his death by my supine insensibility, by my contempt for him, not remembering, or not willing to remember, that it was for my sake he had become a traitor and a perjurer? In what am I benefited by accompanying my son so far, since I now abandon him, and allow him to depart alone to the baneful climate of Africa? Oh, I have been base, cowardly, I tell you; I have abjured my affections, and like all renegades I am of evil omen to those who surround me!”

“No, Mercedes,” said Monte Cristo, “no; you judge yourself with too much severity. You are a noble-minded woman, and it was your grief that disarmed me. Still I was but an agent, led on by an invisible and offended Deity, who chose not to withhold the fatal blow that I was destined to hurl. I take that God to witness, at whose feet I have prostrated myself daily for the last ten years, that I would have sacrificed my life to you, and with my life the projects that were indissolubly linked with it. But — and I say it with some pride, Mercedes — God needed me, and I lived. Examine the past and the present, and endeavor to dive into futurity, and then say whether I am not a divine instrument. The most dreadful misfortunes, the most frightful sufferings, the abandonment of all those who loved me, the persecution of those who did not know me, formed the trials of my youth; when suddenly, from captivity, solitude, misery, I was restored to light and liberty, and became the possessor of a fortune so brilliant, so unbounded, so unheard-of, that I must have been blind not to be conscious that God had endowed me with it to work out his own great designs. From that time I looked upon this fortune as something confided to me for an especial purpose. Not a thought was given to a life which you once, Mercedes, had the power to render blissful; not one hour of peaceful calm was mine; but I felt myself driven on like an exterminating angel. Like adventurous captains about to embark on some enterprise full of danger, I laid in my provisions, I loaded my weapons, I collected every means of attack and defence; I inured my body to the most violent exercises, my soul to the bitterest trials; I taught my arm to slay, my eyes to behold excruciating sufferings, and my mouth to smile at the most horrid spectacles. Good-natured, confiding, and forgiving as I had been, I became revengeful, cunning, and wicked, or rather, immovable as fate. Then I launched out into the path that was opened to me. I overcame every obstacle, and reached the goal; but woe to those who stood in my pathway!"

"Enough," said Mercedes; "enough, Edmond! Believe me, that she who alone recognized you has been the only one to comprehend you; and had she crossed your path, and you had crushed her like glass, still, Edmond, still she must have admired you! Like the gulf between me and the past, there is an abyss between you, Edmond, and the rest of mankind; and I tell you freely that the comparison I draw between you and other men will ever be one of my greatest tortures. No, there is nothing in the world to resemble you in worth and goodness! But we must say farewell, Edmond, and let us part."

"Before I leave you, Mercedes, have you no request to make?" said the count.

"I desire but one thing in this world, Edmond, — the happiness of my son."

"Pray to the Almighty to spare his life, and I will take upon myself to promote his happiness."

"Thank you, Edmond."

"But have you no request to make for yourself, Mercedes?"

"For myself I want nothing. I live, as it were, between two graves. One is that of Edmond Dantes, lost to me long, long since. He had my love! That word ill becomes my faded lip now, but it is a memory dear to my heart, and one that I would not lose for all that the world contains. The other grave is that of the man who met his death from the hand of Edmond Dantes. I approve of the deed, but I must pray for the dead."

"Your son shall be happy, Mercedes," repeated the count.

"Then I shall enjoy as much happiness as this world can possibly confer."

"But what are your intentions?"

"To say that I shall live here, like the Mercedes of other times, gaining my bread by labor, would not be true, nor would you believe me. I have no longer the strength to do anything but to spend my days in prayer. However, I shall have no occasion to work, for the little sum of money buried by you, and which I found in the place you mentioned, will be sufficient to maintain me. Rumor will probably be busy respecting me, my occupations, my manner of living — that will signify but little."

"Mercedes," said the count, "I do not say it to blame you, but you made an unnecessary sacrifice in relinquishing the whole of the fortune amassed by M. de Morcerf; half of it at least by right belonged to you, in virtue of your vigilance and economy."

"I perceive what you are intending to propose to me; but I cannot accept it, Edmond — my son would not permit it."

"Nothing shall be done without the full approbation of Albert de Morcerf. I will make myself acquainted with his intentions and will submit to them. But if he be willing to accept my offers, will you oppose them?"

"You well know, Edmond, that I am no longer a reasoning creature; I have no will, unless it be the will never to decide. I have been so overwhelmed by the many storms that have broken over my head, that I am become passive in the hands of the Almighty, like a sparrow in the talons of an eagle. I live, because it is not ordained for me to die. If succor be sent to me, I will accept it."

"Ah, madame," said Monte Cristo, "you should not talk thus! It is not so we should evince our resignation to the will of heaven; on the contrary, we are all free agents."

"Alas!" exclaimed Mercedes, "if it were so, if I possessed free-will, but without the power to render that will efficacious, it would drive me to despair." Monte Cristo dropped his head and shrank from the vehemence of her grief. "Will you not even say you will see me again?" he asked.

"On the contrary, we shall meet again," said Mercedes, pointing to heaven with solemnity. "I tell you so to prove to you that I still hope." And after pressing her own trembling hand upon that of the count, Mercedes rushed up the stairs and disappeared. Monte Cristo slowly left the house and turned towards the quay. But Mercedes did not witness his departure, although she was seated at the little window of the room which had been occupied by old Dantes. Her eyes were straining to see the ship which was carrying her son over the vast sea; but still her voice involuntarily murmured softly, “Edmond, Edmond, Edmond!”

Chapter 113

The Past.

The count departed with a sad heart from the house in which he had left Mercedes, probably never to behold her again. Since the death of little Edward a great change had taken place in Monte Cristo. Having reached the summit of his vengeance by a long and tortuous path, he saw an abyss of doubt yawning before him. More than this, the conversation which had just taken place between Mercedes and himself had awakened so many recollections in his heart that he felt it necessary to combat with them. A man of the count's temperament could not long indulge in that melancholy which can exist in common minds, but which destroys superior ones. He thought he must have made an error in his calculations if he now found cause to blame himself.

"I cannot have deceived myself," he said; "I must look upon the past in a false light. What!" he continued, "can I have been following a false path? — can the end which I proposed be a mistaken end? — can one hour have sufficed to prove to an architect that the work upon which he founded all his hopes was an impossible, if not a sacrilegious, undertaking? I cannot reconcile myself to this idea — it would madden me. The reason why I am now dissatisfied is that I have not a clear appreciation of the past. The past, like the country through which we walk, becomes indistinct as we advance. My position is like that of a person wounded in a dream; he feels the wound, though he cannot recollect when he received it. Come, then, thou regenerate man, thou extravagant prodigal, thou awakened sleeper, thou all-powerful visionary, thou invincible millionaire, — once again review thy past life of starvation and wretchedness, revisit the scenes where fate and misfortune conducted, and where despair received thee. Too many diamonds, too much gold and splendor, are now reflected by the mirror in which Monte Cristo seeks to behold Dantes. Hide thy diamonds, bury thy gold, shroud thy splendor, exchange riches for poverty, liberty for a prison, a living body for a corpse!" As he thus reasoned, Monte Cristo walked down the Rue de la Caisserie. It was the same through which, twenty-four years ago, he had been conducted by a silent and nocturnal guard; the houses, to-day so smiling and animated, were on that night dark, mute, and closed. “And yet they were the same,” murmured Monte Cristo, “only now it is broad daylight instead of night; it is the sun which brightens the place, and makes it appear so cheerful.”

He proceeded towards the quay by the Rue Saint-Laurent, and advanced to the Consigne; it was the point where he had embarked. A pleasure-boat with striped awning was going by. Monte Cristo called the owner, who immediately rowed up to him with the eagerness of a boatman hoping for a good fare. The weather was magnificent, and the excursion a treat.

The sun, red and flaming, was sinking into the embrace of the welcoming ocean. The sea, smooth as crystal, was now and then disturbed by the leaping of fish, which were pursued by some unseen enemy and sought for safety in another element; while on the extreme verge of the horizon might be seen the fishermen’s boats, white and graceful as the sea-gull, or the merchant vessels bound for Corsica or Spain.

But notwithstanding the serene sky, the gracefully formed boats, and the golden light in which the whole scene was bathed, the Count of Monte Cristo, wrapped in his cloak, could think only of this terrible voyage, the details of which were one by one recalled to his memory. The solitary light burning at the Catalans; that first sight of the Chateau d’If, which told him whither they were leading him; the struggle with the gendarmes when he wished to throw himself overboard; his despair when he found himself vanquished, and the sensation when the muzzle of the carbine touched his forehead — all these were brought before him in vivid and frightful reality. Like the streams which the heat of the summer has dried up, and which after the autumnal storms gradually begin oozing drop by drop, so did the count feel his heart gradually fill with the bitterness which formerly nearly overwhelmed Edmond Dantes. Clear sky, swift-flitting boats, and brilliant sunshine disappeared; the heavens were hung with black, and the gigantic structure of the Chateau d’If seemed like the phantom of a mortal enemy. As they reached the shore, the count instinctively shrunk to the extreme end of the boat, and the owner was obliged to call out, in his sweetest tone of voice, “Sir, we are at the landing.”

Monte Cristo remembered that on that very spot, on the same rock, he had been violently dragged by the guards, who forced him to ascend the slope at the points of their bayonets. The journey had seemed very long to

Dantes, but Monte Cristo found it equally short. Each stroke of the oar seemed to awaken a new throng of ideas, which sprang up with the flying spray of the sea.

There had been no prisoners confined in the Chateau d’If since the revolution of July; it was only inhabited by a guard, kept there for the prevention of smuggling. A concierge waited at the door to exhibit to visitors this monument of curiosity, once a scene of terror. The count inquired whether any of the ancient jailers were still there; but they had all been pensioned, or had passed on to some other employment. The concierge who attended him had only been there since 1830. He visited his own dungeon. He again beheld the dull light vainly endeavoring to penetrate the narrow opening. His eyes rested upon the spot where had stood his bed, since then removed, and behind the bed the new stones indicated where the breach made by the Abbe Faria had been. Monte Cristo felt his limbs tremble; he seated himself upon a log of wood.

“Are there any stories connected with this prison besides the one relating to the poisoning of Mirabeau?” asked the count; “are there any traditions respecting these dismal abodes, — in which it is difficult to believe men can ever have imprisoned their fellow-creatures?”

“Yes, sir; indeed, the jailer Antoine told me one connected with this very dungeon.”

Monte Cristo shuddered; Antoine had been his jailer. He had almost forgotten his name and face, but at the mention of the name he recalled his person as he used to see it, the face encircled by a beard, wearing the brown jacket, the bunch of keys, the jingling of which he still seemed to hear. The count turned around, and fancied he saw him in the corridor, rendered still darker by the torch carried by the concierge. “Would you like to hear the story, sir?”

“Yes; relate it,” said Monte Cristo, pressing his hand to his heart to still its violent beatings; he felt afraid of hearing his own history.

“This dungeon,” said the concierge, “was, it appears, some time ago occupied by a very dangerous prisoner, the more so since he was full of industry. Another person was confined in the Chateau at the same time, but he was not wicked, he was only a poor mad priest.”

“Ah, indeed? — mad!” repeated Monte Cristo; “and what was his mania?”

“He offered millions to any one who would set him at liberty.”

Monte Cristo raised his eyes, but he could not see the heavens; there was a stone veil between him and the firmament. He thought that there had been no less thick a veil before the eyes of those to whom Faria offered the treasures. “Could the prisoners see each other?” he asked.

“Oh, no, sir, it was expressly forbidden; but they eluded the vigilance of the guards, and made a passage from one dungeon to the other.”

“And which of them made this passage?”

“Oh, it must have been the young man, certainly, for he was strong and industrious, while the abbe was aged and weak; besides, his mind was too vacillating to allow him to carry out an idea.”

“Blind fools!” murmured the count.

“However, be that as it may, the young man made a tunnel, how or by what means no one knows; but he made it, and there is the evidence yet remaining of his work. Do you see it?” and the man held the torch to the wall.

“Ah, yes; I see,” said the count, in a voice hoarse from emotion.

“The result was that the two men communicated with one another; how long they did so, nobody knows. One day the old man fell ill and died. Now guess what the young one did?”

“Tell me.”

“He carried off the corpse, which he placed in his own bed with its face to the wall; then he entered the empty dungeon, closed the entrance, and slipped into the sack which had contained the dead body. Did you ever hear of such an idea?” Monte Cristo closed his eyes, and seemed again to experience all the sensations he had felt when the coarse canvas, yet moist with the cold dews of death, had touched his face. The jailer continued: “Now this was his project. He fancied that they buried the dead at the Chateau d’If, and imagining they would not expend much labor on the grave of a prisoner, he calculated on raising the earth with his shoulders, but unfortunately their arrangements at the Chateau frustrated his projects. They never buried the dead; they merely attached a heavy cannon-ball to the feet, and then threw them into the sea. This is what was done. The young man was thrown from the top of the rock; the corpse was found on the bed next day, and the whole truth was guessed, for the men who performed the office then mentioned what they had not dared to speak of before, that at the moment the corpse was thrown into the deep, they heard a shriek, which was almost immediately stifled by the water in which it disappeared.” The count breathed with difficulty; the cold drops ran down his forehead, and his heart was full of anguish.

“No,” he muttered, “the doubt I felt was but the commencement of forgetfulness; but here the wound reopens, and the heart again thirsts for vengeance. And the prisoner,” he continued aloud, “was he ever heard of afterwards?”

“Oh, no; of course not. You can understand that one of two things must have happened; he must either have fallen flat, in which case the blow, from a height of ninety feet, must have killed him instantly, or he must have fallen upright, and then the weight would have dragged him to the bottom, where he remained — poor fellow!”

“Then you pity him?” said the count.

“Ma foi, yes; though he was in his own element.”

“What do you mean?”

“The report was that he had been a naval officer, who had been confined for plotting with the Bonapartists.”

“Great is truth,” muttered the count, “fire cannot burn, nor water drown it! Thus the poor sailor lives in the recollection of those who narrate his history; his terrible story is recited in the chimney-corner, and a shudder is felt at the description of his transit through the air to be swallowed by the deep.” Then, the count added aloud, “Was his name ever known?”

“Oh, yes; but only as No. 34.”

“Oh, Villefort, Villefort,” murmured the count, “this scene must often have haunted thy sleepless hours!”

“Do you wish to see anything more, sir?” said the concierge.

“Yes, especially if you will show me the poor abbe’s room.”

“Ah — No. 27.”

“Yes; No. 27.” repeated the count, who seemed to hear the voice of the abbe answering him in those very words through the wall when asked his name.

“Come, sir.”

“Wait,” said Monte Cristo, “I wish to take one final glance around this room.”

“This is fortunate,” said the guide; “I have forgotten the other key.”

“Go and fetch it.”

“I will leave you the torch, sir.”

“No, take it away; I can see in the dark.”

"Why, you are like No. 34. They said he was so accustomed to darkness that he could see a pin in the darkest corner of his dungeon."

"He spent fourteen years to arrive at that," muttered the count.

The guide carried away the torch. The count had spoken correctly. Scarcely had a few seconds elapsed, ere he saw everything as distinctly as by daylight. Then he looked around him, and really recognized his dungeon.

"Yes," he said, "there is the stone upon which I used to sit; there is the impression made by my shoulders on the wall; there is the mark of my blood made when one day I dashed my head against the wall. Oh, those figures, how well I remember them! I made them one day to calculate the age of my father, that I might know whether I should find him still living, and that of Mercedes, to know if I should find her still free. After finishing that calculation, I had a minute's hope. I did not reckon upon hunger and infidelity!" and a bitter laugh escaped the count. He saw in fancy the burial of his father, and the marriage of Mercedes. On the other side of the dungeon he perceived an inscription, the white letters of which were still visible on the green wall. "'O God,'" he read, "'preserve my memory!' Oh, yes," he cried, "that was my only prayer at last; I no longer begged for liberty, but memory; I dreaded to become mad and forgetful. O God, thou hast preserved my memory; I thank thee, I thank thee!" At this moment the light of the torch was reflected on the wall; the guide was coming; Monte Cristo went to meet him.

"Follow me, sir;" and without ascending the stairs the guide conducted him by a subterraneous passage to another entrance. There, again, Monte Cristo was assailed by a multitude of thoughts. The first thing that met his eye was the meridian, drawn by the abbe on the wall, by which he calculated the time; then he saw the remains of the bed on which the poor prisoner had died. The sight of this, instead of exciting the anguish experienced by the count in the dungeon, filled his heart with a soft and grateful sentiment, and tears fell from his eyes.

"This is where the mad abbe was kept, sir, and that is where the young man entered;" and the guide pointed to the opening, which had remained unclosed. "From the appearance of the stone," he continued, "a learned gentleman discovered that the prisoners might have communicated together for ten years. Poor things! Those must have been ten weary years."

Dantes took some louis from his pocket, and gave them to the man who had twice unconsciously pitied him. The guide took them, thinking them merely a few pieces of little value; but the light of the torch revealed their true worth. “Sir,” he said, “you have made a mistake; you have given me gold.”

“I know it.” The concierge looked upon the count with surprise. “Sir,” he cried, scarcely able to believe his good fortune — ”sir, I cannot understand your generosity!”

“Oh, it is very simple, my good fellow; I have been a sailor, and your story touched me more than it would others.”

“Then, sir, since you are so liberal, I ought to offer you something.”

“What have you to offer to me, my friend? Shells? Straw-work? Thank you!”

“No, sir, neither of those; something connected with this story.”

“Really? What is it?”

“Listen,” said the guide; “I said to myself, ‘Something is always left in a cell inhabited by one prisoner for fifteen years,’ so I began to sound the wall.”

“Ah,” cried Monte Cristo, remembering the abbe’s two hiding-places.

“After some search, I found that the floor gave a hollow sound near the head of the bed, and at the hearth.”

“Yes,” said the count, “yes.”

“I raised the stones, and found” —

“A rope-ladder and some tools?”

“How do you know that?” asked the guide in astonishment.

“I do not know — I only guess it, because that sort of thing is generally found in prisoners’ cells.”

“Yes, sir, a rope-ladder and tools.”

“And have you them yet?”

“No, sir; I sold them to visitors, who considered them great curiosities; but I have still something left.”

“What is it?” asked the count, impatiently.

“A sort of book, written upon strips of cloth.”

“Go and fetch it, my good fellow; and if it be what I hope, you will do well.”

“I will run for it, sir;” and the guide went out. Then the count knelt down by the side of the bed, which death had converted into an altar. “Oh, second father,” he exclaimed, “thou who hast given me liberty, knowledge, riches; thou who, like beings of a superior order to ourselves, couldst understand the science of good and evil; if in the depths of the tomb there still remain something within us which can respond to the voice of those who are left on earth; if after death the soul ever revisit the places where we have lived and suffered, — then, noble heart, sublime soul, then I conjure thee by the paternal love thou didst bear me, by the filial obedience I vowed to thee, grant me some sign, some revelation! Remove from me the remains of doubt, which, if it change not to conviction, must become remorse!” The count bowed his head, and clasped his hands together.

“Here, sir,” said a voice behind him.

Monte Cristo shuddered, and arose. The concierge held out the strips of cloth upon which the Abbe Faria had spread the riches of his mind. The manuscript was the great work by the Abbe Faria upon the kingdoms of Italy. The count seized it hastily, his eyes immediately fell upon the epigraph, and he read, “‘Thou shalt tear out the dragons’ teeth, and shall trample the lions under foot, saith the Lord.’“

“Ah,” he exclaimed, “here is my answer. Thanks, father, thanks.” And feeling in his pocket, he took thence a small pocket-book, which contained ten bank-notes, each of 1,000. francs.

“Here,” he said, “take this pocket-book.”

“Do you give it to me?”

“Yes; but only on condition that you will not open it till I am gone;” and placing in his breast the treasure he had just found, which was more valuable to him than the richest jewel, he rushed out of the corridor, and reaching his boat, cried, “To Marseilles!” Then, as he departed, he fixed his eyes upon the gloomy prison. “Woe,” he cried, “to those who confined me in that wretched prison; and woe to those who forgot that I was there!” As he repassed the Catalans, the count turned around and burying his head in his cloak murmured the name of a woman. The victory was complete; twice he had overcome his doubts. The name he pronounced, in a voice of tenderness, amounting almost to love, was that of Haidee.

On landing, the count turned towards the cemetery, where he felt sure of finding Morrel. He, too, ten years ago, had piously sought out a tomb, and sought it vainly. He, who returned to France with millions, had been unable to find the grave of his father, who had perished from hunger. Morrel had indeed placed a cross over the spot, but it had fallen down and the grave-digger had burnt it, as he did all the old wood in the churchyard. The worthy merchant had been more fortunate. Dying in the arms of his children, he had been by them laid by the side of his wife, who had preceded him in eternity by two years. Two large slabs of marble, on which were inscribed their names, were placed on either side of a little enclosure, railed in, and shaded by four cypress-trees. Morrel was leaning against one of these, mechanically fixing his eyes on the graves. His grief was so profound that he was nearly unconscious. “Maximilian,” said the count, “you should not look on the graves, but there;” and he pointed upwards.

“The dead are everywhere,” said Morrel; “did you not yourself tell me so as we left Paris?”

“Maximilian,” said the count, “you asked me during the journey to allow you to remain some days at Marseilles. Do you still wish to do so?”

“I have no wishes, count; only I fancy I could pass the time less painfully here than anywhere else.”

“So much the better, for I must leave you; but I carry your word with me, do I not?”

“Ah, count, I shall forget it.”

“No, you will not forget it, because you are a man of honor, Morrel, because you have taken an oath, and are about to do so again.”

“Oh, count, have pity upon me. I am so unhappy.”

“I have known a man much more unfortunate than you, Morrel.”

“Impossible!”

“Alas,” said Monte Cristo, “it is the infirmity of our nature always to believe ourselves much more unhappy than those who groan by our sides!”

“What can be more wretched than the man who has lost all he loved and desired in the world?”

“Listen, Morrel, and pay attention to what I am about to tell you. I knew a man who like you had fixed all his hopes of happiness upon a woman. He was young, he had an old father whom he loved, a betrothed bride whom he adored. He was about to marry her, when one of the caprices of fate, — which would almost make us doubt the goodness of providence, if that providence did not afterwards reveal itself by proving that all is but a means of conducting to an end, — one of those caprices deprived him of his mistress, of the future of which he had dreamed (for in his blindness he forgot he could only read the present), and cast him into a dungeon.”

“Ah,” said Morrel, “one quits a dungeon in a week, a month, or a year.”

“He remained there fourteen years, Morrel,” said the count, placing his hand on the young man’s shoulder. Maximilian shuddered.

“Fourteen years!” he muttered — ”Fourteen years!” repeated the count. “During that time he had many moments of despair. He also, Morrel, like you, considered himself the unhappiest of men.”

“Well?” asked Morrel.

“Well, at the height of his despair God assisted him through human means. At first, perhaps, he did not recognize the infinite mercy of the Lord, but at last he took patience and waited. One day he miraculously left the prison, transformed, rich, powerful. His first cry was for his father; but that father was dead.”

“My father, too, is dead,” said Morrel.

“Yes; but your father died in your arms, happy, respected, rich, and full of years; his father died poor, despairing, almost doubtful of providence; and when his son sought his grave ten years afterwards, his tomb had disappeared, and no one could say, ‘There sleeps the father you so well loved.’“

“Oh!” exclaimed Morrel.

“He was, then, a more unhappy son than you, Morrel, for he could not even find his father’s grave.”

“But then he had the woman he loved still remaining?”

“You are deceived, Morrel, that woman” —

“She was dead?”

“Worse than that, she was faithless, and had married one of the persecutors of her betrothed. You see, then, Morrel, that he was a more unhappy lover than you.”

“And has he found consolation?”

“He has at least found peace.”

“And does he ever expect to be happy?”

“He hopes so, Maximilian.” The young man’s head fell on his breast.

“You have my promise,” he said, after a minute’s pause, extending his hand to Monte Cristo. “Only remember” —

“On the 5th of October, Morrel, I shall expect you at the Island of Monte Cristo. On the 4th a yacht will wait for you in the port of Bastia, it will be called the Eurus. You will give your name to the captain, who will bring you to me. It is understood — is it not?”

“But, count, do you remember that the 5th of October” —

“Child,” replied the count, “not to know the value of a man’s word! I have told you twenty times that if you wish to die on that day, I will assist you. Morrel, farewell!”

“Do you leave me?”

“Yes; I have business in Italy. I leave you alone with your misfortunes, and with hope, Maximilian.”

“When do you leave?”

“Immediately; the steamer waits, and in an hour I shall be far from you. Will you accompany me to the harbor, Maximilian?”

“I am entirely yours, count.” Morrel accompanied the count to the harbor. The white steam was ascending like a plume of feathers from the black chimney. The steamer soon disappeared, and in an hour afterwards, as the count had said, was scarcely distinguishable in the horizon amidst the fogs of the night.

Chapter 114

Peppino.

At the same time that the steamer disappeared behind Cape Morgion, a man travelling post on the road from Florence to Rome had just passed the little town of Aquapendente. He was travelling fast enough to cover a great deal of ground without exciting suspicion. This man was dressed in a greatcoat, or rather a surtout, a little worse for the journey, but which exhibited the ribbon of the Legion of Honor still fresh and brilliant, a decoration which also ornamented the under coat. He might be recognized, not only by these signs, but also from the accent with which he spoke to the postilion, as a Frenchman. Another proof that he was a native of the universal country was apparent in the fact of his knowing no other Italian words than the terms used in music, and which like the "goddam" of Figaro, served all possible linguistic requirements. "Allegro!" he called out to the postilions at every ascent. "Moderato!" he cried as they descended. And heaven knows there are hills enough between Rome and Florence by the way of Aquapendente! These two words greatly amused the men to whom they were addressed. On reaching La Storta, the point from whence Rome is first visible, the traveller evinced none of the enthusiastic curiosity which usually leads strangers to stand up and endeavor to catch sight of the dome of St. Peter's, which may be seen long before any other object is distinguishable. No, he merely drew a pocketbook from his pocket, and took from it a paper folded in four, and after having examined it in a manner almost reverential, he said — "Good! I have it still!"

The carriage entered by the Porto del Popolo, turned to the left, and stopped at the Hotel d'Espagne. Old Pastrini, our former acquaintance, received the traveller at the door, hat in hand. The traveller alighted, ordered a good dinner, and inquired the address of the house of Thomson & French, which was immediately given to him, as it was one of the most celebrated in Rome. It was situated in the Via dei Banchi, near St. Peter's. In Rome, as everywhere else, the arrival of a post-chaise is an event. Ten young descendants of Marius and the Gracchi, barefooted and out at elbows, with one hand resting on the hip and the other gracefully curved above the head, stared at the traveller, the post-chaise, and the horses; to these were added about fifty little vagabonds from the Papal States, who earned a pittance by diving into the Tiber at high water from the bridge of St. Angelo. Now, as these street Arabs of Rome, more fortunate than those of Paris, understand every language, more especially the French, they heard the traveller order an apartment, a dinner, and finally inquire the way to the house of Thomson & French. The result was that when the new-comer left the hotel with the cicerone, a man detached himself from the rest of the idlers, and without having been seen by the traveller, and appearing to excite no attention from the guide, followed the stranger with as much skill as a Parisian police agent would have used.

The Frenchman had been so impatient to reach the house of Thomson & French that he would not wait for the horses to be harnessed, but left word for the carriage to overtake him on the road, or to wait for him at the bankers' door. He reached it before the carriage arrived. The Frenchman entered, leaving in the anteroom his guide, who immediately entered into conversation with two or three of the industrious idlers who are always to be found in Rome at the doors of banking-houses, churches, museums, or theatres. With the Frenchman, the man who had followed him entered too; the Frenchman knocked at the inner door, and entered the first room; his shadow did the same.

"Messrs. Thomson & French?" inquired the stranger.

An attendant arose at a sign from a confidential clerk at the first desk. "Whom shall I announce?" said the attendant.

"Baron Danglars."

"Follow me," said the man. A door opened, through which the attendant and the baron disappeared. The man who had followed Danglars sat down on a bench. The clerk continued to write for the next five minutes; the man preserved profound silence, and remained perfectly motionless. Then the pen of the clerk ceased to move over the paper; he raised his head, and appearing to be perfectly sure of privacy, — "Ah, ha," he said, "here you are, Peppino!"

"Yes," was the laconic reply. "You have found out that there is something worth having about this large gentleman?"

"There is no great merit due to me, for we were informed of it."

"You know his business here, then."

"Pardieu, he has come to draw, but I don't know how much!"

"You will know presently, my friend."

"Very well, only do not give me false information as you did the other day."

"What do you mean? — of whom do you speak? Was it the Englishman who carried off 3,000 crowns from here the other day?"

"No; he really had 3,000 crowns, and we found them. I mean the Russian prince, who you said had 30,000 livres, and we only found 22,000."

"You must have searched badly."

"Luigi Vampa himself searched."

"Indeed? But you must let me make my observations, or the Frenchman will transact his business without my knowing the sum." Peppino nodded, and taking a rosary from his pocket began to mutter a few prayers while the clerk disappeared through the same door by which Danglars and the attendant had gone out. At the expiration of ten minutes the clerk returned with a beaming countenance. "Well?" asked Peppino of his friend.

"Joy, joy — the sum is large!"

"Five or six millions, is it not?"

"Yes, you know the amount."

"On the receipt of the Count of Monte Cristo?"

"Why, how came you to be so well acquainted with all this?"

"I told you we were informed beforehand."

"Then why do you apply to me?"

"That I may be sure I have the right man."

"Yes, it is indeed he. Five millions — a pretty sum, eh, Peppino?"

"Hush — here is our man!" The clerk seized his pen, and Peppino his beads; one was writing and the other praying when the door opened. Danglars looked radiant with joy; the banker accompanied him to the door. Peppino followed Danglars.

According to the arrangements, the carriage was waiting at the door. The guide held the door open. Guides are useful people, who will turn their hands to anything. Danglars leaped into the carriage like a young man of twenty. The cicerone reclosed the door, and sprang up by the side of the coachman. Peppino mounted the seat behind.

"Will your excellency visit St. Peter's?" asked the cicerone.

"I did not come to Rome to see," said Danglars aloud; then he added softly, with an avaricious smile, "I came to touch!" and he rapped his pocket-book, in which he had just placed a letter.

“Then your excellency is going” —

“To the hotel.”

“Casa Pastrini!” said the cicerone to the coachman, and the carriage drove rapidly on. Ten minutes afterwards the baron entered his apartment, and Peppino stationed himself on the bench outside the door of the hotel, after having whispered something in the ear of one of the descendants of Marius and the Gracchi whom we noticed at the beginning of the chapter, who immediately ran down the road leading to the Capitol at his fullest speed. Danglars was tired and sleepy; he therefore went to bed, placing his pocketbook under his pillow. Peppino had a little spare time, so he had a game of mora with the facchini, lost three crowns, and then to console himself drank a bottle of Orvieto.

The next morning Danglars awoke late, though he went to bed so early; he had not slept well for five or six nights, even if he had slept at all. He breakfasted heartily, and caring little, as he said, for the beauties of the Eternal City, ordered post-horses at noon. But Danglars had not reckoned upon the formalities of the police and the idleness of the posting-master. The horses only arrived at two o’clock, and the cicerone did not bring the passport till three. All these preparations had collected a number of idlers round the door of Signor Pastrini’s; the descendants of Marius and the Gracchi were also not wanting. The baron walked triumphantly through the crowd, who for the sake of gain styled him “your excellency.” As Danglars had hitherto contented himself with being called a baron, he felt rather flattered at the title of excellency, and distributed a dozen silver coins among the beggars, who were ready, for twelve more, to call him “your highness.”

“Which road?” asked the postilion in Italian. “The Ancona road,” replied the baron. Signor Pastrini interpreted the question and answer, and the horses galloped off. Danglars intended travelling to Venice, where he would receive one part of his fortune, and then proceeding to Vienna, where he would find the rest, he meant to take up his residence in the latter town, which he had been told was a city of pleasure.

He had scarcely advanced three leagues out of Rome when daylight began to disappear. Danglars had not intended starting so late, or he would have remained; he put his head out and asked the postilion how long it would be before they reached the next town. “Non capisco” (do not understand), was the reply. Danglars bent his head, which he meant to imply, “Very well.” The carriage again moved on. “I will stop at the first posting-house,” said Danglars to himself.

He still felt the same self-satisfaction which he had experienced the previous evening, and which had procured him so good a night’s rest. He was luxuriously stretched in a good English calash, with double springs; he was drawn by four good horses, at full gallop; he knew the relay to be at a distance of seven leagues. What subject of meditation could present itself to the banker, so fortunately become bankrupt?

Danglars thought for ten minutes about his wife in Paris; another ten minutes about his daughter travelling with Mademoiselle d’Armilly; the same period was given to his creditors, and the manner in which he intended spending their money; and then, having no subject left for contemplation, he shut his eyes, and fell asleep. Now and then a jolt more violent than the rest caused him to open his eyes; then he felt that he was still being carried with great rapidity over the same country, thickly strewn with broken aqueducts, which looked like granite giants petrified while running a race. But the night was cold, dull, and rainy, and it was much more pleasant for a traveller to remain in the warm carriage than to put his head out of the window to make inquiries of a postilion whose only answer was “Non capisco.”

Danglars therefore continued to sleep, saying to himself that he would be sure to awake at the posting-house. The carriage stopped. Danglars fancied that they had reached the long-desired point; he opened his eyes and looked through the window, expecting to find himself in the midst of some town, or at least village; but he saw nothing except what seemed like a ruin, where three or four men went and came like shadows. Danglars waited a moment, expecting the postilion to come and demand payment with the termination of his stage. He intended taking advantage of the opportunity to make fresh inquiries of the new conductor; but the horses were unharnessed, and others put in their places, without any one claiming money from the traveller. Danglars, astonished, opened the door; but a strong hand pushed him back, and the carriage rolled on. The baron was completely roused. “Eh?” he said to the postilion, “eh, mio caro?”

This was another little piece of Italian the baron had learned from hearing his daughter sing Italian duets with Cavalcanti. But mio caro did not reply. Danglars then opened the window.

“Come, my friend,” he said, thrusting his hand through the opening, “where are we going?”

“Dentro la testa!” answered a solemn and imperious voice, accompanied by a menacing gesture. Danglars thought dentro la testa meant, “Put in your head!” He was making rapid progress in Italian. He obeyed, not without some uneasiness, which, momentarily increasing, caused his mind, instead of being as unoccupied as it was when he began his journey, to fill with ideas which were very likely to keep a traveller awake, more especially one in such a situation as Danglars. His eyes acquired that quality which in the first moment of strong emotion enables them to see distinctly, and which afterwards fails from being too much taxed. Before we are alarmed, we see correctly; when we are alarmed, we see double; and when we have been alarmed, we see nothing but trouble. Danglars observed a man in a cloak galloping at the right hand of the carriage.

“Some gendarme!” he exclaimed. “Can I have been intercepted by French telegrams to the pontifical authorities?” He resolved to end his anxiety. “Where are you taking me?” he asked. “Dentro la testa,” replied the same voice, with the same menacing accent.

Danglars turned to the left; another man on horseback was galloping on that side. “Decidedly,” said Danglars, with the perspiration on his forehead, “I must be under arrest.” And he threw himself back in the calash, not this time to sleep, but to think. Directly afterwards the moon rose. He then saw the great aqueducts, those stone phantoms which he had before remarked, only then they were on the right hand, now they were on the left. He understood that they had described a circle, and were bringing him back to Rome. “Oh, unfortunate!” he cried, “they must have obtained my arrest.” The carriage continued to roll on with frightful speed. An hour of terror elapsed, for every spot they passed showed that they were on the road back. At length he saw a dark mass, against which it seemed as if the carriage was about to dash; but the vehicle turned to one side, leaving the barrier behind and Danglars saw that it was one of the ramparts encircling Rome.

“Mon dieu!” cried Danglars, “we are not returning to Rome; then it is not justice which is pursuing me! Gracious heavens; another idea presents itself — what if they should be” —

His hair stood on end. He remembered those interesting stories, so little believed in Paris, respecting Roman bandits; he remembered the adventures that Albert de Morcerf had related when it was intended that he should marry Mademoiselle Eugenie. “They are robbers, perhaps,” he muttered. Just then the carriage rolled on something harder than gravel road. Danglars hazarded a look on both sides of the road, and perceived monuments of a singular form, and his mind now recalled all the details Morcerf had related, and comparing them with his own situation, he felt sure that he must be on the Appian Way. On the left, in a sort of valley, he perceived a circular excavation. It was Caracalla’s circus. On a word from the man who rode at the side of the carriage, it stopped. At the same time the door was opened. “Scendi!” exclaimed a commanding voice. Danglars instantly descended; although he did not yet speak Italian, he understood it very well. More dead than alive, he looked around him. Four men surrounded him, besides the postilion.

“Di qua,” said one of the men, descending a little path leading out of the Appian Way. Danglars followed his guide without opposition, and had no occasion to turn around to see whether the three others were following him. Still it appeared as though they were stationed at equal distances from one another, like sentinels. After walking for about ten minutes, during which Danglars did not exchange a single word with his guide, he found himself between a hillock and a clump of high weeds; three men, standing silent, formed a triangle, of which he was the centre. He wished to speak, but his tongue refused to move. “Avanti!” said the same sharp and imperative voice.

This time Danglars had double reason to understand, for if the word and gesture had not explained the speaker’s meaning, it was clearly expressed by the man walking behind him, who pushed him so rudely that he struck against the guide. This guide was our friend Peppino, who dashed into the thicket of high weeds, through a path which none but lizards or polecats could have imagined to be an open road. Peppino stopped before a pit overhung by thick hedges; the pit, half open, afforded a passage to the young man, who disappeared like the evil spirits in the fairy tales. The voice and gesture of the man who followed Danglars ordered him to do the same. There was no longer any doubt, the bankrupt was in the hands of Roman banditti. Danglars acquitted himself like a man placed between two dangerous positions, and who is rendered brave by fear. Notwithstanding his large stomach, certainly not intended to penetrate the fissures of the Campagna, he slid down like Peppino, and closing his eyes fell upon his feet. As he touched the ground, he opened his eyes. The path was wide, but dark. Peppino, who cared little for being recognized now that he was in his own territories, struck a light and lit a torch. Two other men descended after Danglars forming the rearguard, and pushing Danglars whenever he happened to stop, they came by a gentle declivity to the intersection of two corridors. The walls were hollowed out in sepulchres, one above the other, and which seemed in contrast with the white stones to open their large dark eyes, like those which we see on the faces of the dead. A sentinel struck the rings of his carbine against his left hand. “Who comes there?” he cried.

“A friend, a friend!” said Peppino; “but where is the captain?”

“There,” said the sentinel, pointing over his shoulder to a spacious crypt, hollowed out of the rock, the lights from which shone into the passage through the large arched openings. “Fine spoil, captain, fine spoil!” said Peppino in Italian, and taking Danglars by the collar of his coat he dragged him to an opening resembling a door, through which they entered the apartment which the captain appeared to have made his dwelling-place.

“Is this the man?” asked the captain, who was attentively reading Plutarch’s “Life of Alexander.”

“Himself, captain — himself.”

“Very well, show him to me.” At this rather impertinent order, Peppino raised his torch to the face of Danglars, who hastily withdrew that he might not have his eyelashes burnt. His agitated features presented the appearance of pale and hideous terror. “The man is tired,” said the captain, “conduct him to his bed.”

“Oh,” murmured Danglars, “that bed is probably one of the coffins hollowed in the wall, and the sleep I shall enjoy will be death from one of the poniards I see glistening in the darkness.”

From their beds of dried leaves or wolf-skins at the back of the chamber now arose the companions of the man who had been found by Albert de Morcerf reading “Caesar’s Commentaries,” and by Danglars studying the “Life of Alexander.” The banker uttered a groan and followed his guide; he neither supplicated nor exclaimed. He no longer possessed strength, will, power, or feeling; he followed where they led him. At length he found himself at the foot of a staircase, and he mechanically lifted his foot five or six times. Then a low door was opened before him, and bending his head to avoid striking his forehead he entered a small room cut out of the rock. The cell was clean, though empty, and dry, though situated at an immeasurable distance under the earth. A bed of dried grass covered with goat-skins was placed in one corner. Danglars brightened up on beholding it, fancying that it gave some promise of safety. “Oh, God be praised,” he said; “it is a real bed!”

“Ecco!” said the guide, and pushing Danglars into the cell, he closed the door upon him. A bolt grated and Danglars was a prisoner. If there had been no bolt, it would have been impossible for him to pass through the midst of the garrison who held the catacombs of St. Sebastian, encamped round a master whom our readers must have recognized as the famous Luigi Vampa. Danglars, too, had recognized the bandit, whose existence he would not believe when Albert de Morcerf mentioned him in Paris; and not only did he recognize him, but the cell in which Albert had been confined, and which was probably kept for the accommodation of strangers. These recollections were dwelt upon with some pleasure by Danglars, and restored him to some degree of tranquillity. Since the bandits had not despatched him at once, he felt that they would not kill him at all. They had arrested him for the purpose of robbery, and as he had only a few louis about him, he doubted not he would be ransomed. He remembered that Morcerf had been taxed at 4,000 crowns, and as he considered himself of much greater importance than Morcerf he fixed his own price at 8,000 crowns. Eight thousand crowns amounted to 48,000 livres; he would then have about 5,050,000 francs left. With this sum he could manage to keep out of difficulties. Therefore, tolerably secure in being able to extricate himself from his position, provided he were not rated at the unreasonable sum of 5,050,000 francs, he stretched himself on his bed, and after turning over two or three times, fell asleep with the tranquillity of the hero whose life Luigi Vampa was studying.

Chapter 115

Luigi Vampa’s Bill of Fare.

We awake from every sleep except the one dreaded by Danglars. He awoke. To a Parisian accustomed to silken curtains, walls hung with velvet drapery, and the soft perfume of burning wood, the white smoke of which diffuses itself in graceful curves around the room, the appearance of the whitewashed cell which greeted his eyes on awakening seemed like the continuation of some disagreeable dream. But in such a situation a single moment suffices to change the strongest doubt into certainty. “Yes, yes,” he murmured, “I am in the hands of the brigands of whom Albert de Morcerf spoke.” His first idea was to breathe, that he might know whether he was wounded. He borrowed this from “Don Quixote,” the only book he had ever read, but which he still slightly remembered.

“No,” he cried, “they have not wounded, but perhaps they have robbed me!” and he thrust his hands into his pockets. They were untouched; the hundred louis he had reserved for his journey from Rome to Venice were in his trousers pocket, and in that of his great-coat he found the little note-case containing his letter of credit for 5,050,000 francs. “Singular bandits!” he exclaimed; “they have left me my purse and pocket-book. As I was saying last night, they intend me to be ransomed. Hallo, here is my watch! Let me see what time it is.” Danglars’ watch, one of Breguet’s repeaters, which he had carefully wound up on the previous night, struck half past five. Without this, Danglars would have been quite ignorant of the time, for daylight did not reach his cell. Should he demand an explanation from the bandits, or should he wait patiently for them to propose it? The last alternative seemed the most prudent, so he waited until twelve o’clock. During all this time a sentinel, who had been relieved at eight o’clock, had been watching his door. Danglars suddenly felt a strong inclination to see the person who kept watch over him. He had noticed that a few rays, not of daylight, but from a lamp, penetrated through the ill-joined planks of the door; he approached just as the brigand was refreshing himself with a mouthful of brandy, which, owing to the leathern bottle containing it, sent forth an odor which was extremely unpleasant to Danglars. “Faugh!” he exclaimed, retreating to the farther corner of his cell.

At twelve this man was replaced by another functionary, and Danglars, wishing to catch sight of his new guardian, approached the door again. He was an athletic, gigantic bandit, with large eyes, thick lips, and a flat nose; his red hair fell in dishevelled masses like snakes around his shoulders. “Ah, ha,” cried Danglars, “this fellow is more like an ogre than anything else; however, I am rather too old and tough to be very good eating!” We see that Danglars was collected enough to jest; at the same time, as though to disprove the ogreish propensities, the man took some black bread, cheese, and onions from his wallet, which he began devouring voraciously. “May I be hanged,” said Danglars, glancing at the bandit’s dinner through the crevices of the door, — ”may I be hanged if I can understand how people can eat such filth!” and he withdrew to seat himself upon his goat-skin, which reminded him of the smell of the brandy.

But the mysteries of nature are incomprehensible, and there are certain invitations contained in even the coarsest food which appeal very irresistibly to a fasting stomach. Danglars felt his own not to be very well supplied just then, and gradually the man appeared less ugly, the bread less black, and the cheese more fresh, while those dreadful vulgar onions recalled to his mind certain sauces and side-dishes, which his cook prepared in a very superior manner whenever he said, “Monsieur Deniseau, let me have a nice little fricassee to-day.” He got up and knocked on the door; the bandit raised his head. Danglars knew that he was heard, so he redoubled his blows. “Che cosa?” asked the bandit. “Come, come,” said Danglars, tapping his fingers against the door, “I think it is quite time to think of giving me something to eat!” But whether he did not understand him, or whether he had received no orders respecting the nourishment of Danglars, the giant, without answering, went on with his dinner. Danglars’ feelings were hurt, and not wishing to put himself under obligations to the brute, the banker threw himself down again on his goat-skin and did not breathe another word.

Four hours passed by and the giant was replaced by another bandit. Danglars, who really began to experience sundry gnawings at the stomach, arose softly, again applied his eye to the crack of the door, and recognized the intelligent countenance of his guide. It was, indeed, Peppino who was preparing to mount guard as comfortably as possible by seating himself opposite to the door, and placing between his legs an earthen pan, containing chick-pease stewed with bacon. Near the pan he also placed a pretty little basket of Villetri grapes and a flask of Orvieto. Peppino was decidedly an epicure. Danglars watched these preparations and his mouth watered. “Come,” he said to himself, “let me try if he will be more tractable than the other;” and he tapped gently at the door. “On y va,” (coming) exclaimed Peppino, who from frequenting the house of Signor Pastrini understood French perfectly in all its idioms.

Danglars immediately recognized him as the man who had called out in such a furious manner, “Put in your head!” But this was not the time for recrimination, so he assumed his most agreeable manner and said with a gracious smile, — ”Excuse me, sir, but are they not going to give me any dinner?”

“Does your excellency happen to be hungry?”

“Happen to be hungry, — that’s pretty good, when I haven’t eaten for twenty-four hours!” muttered Danglars. Then he added aloud, “Yes, sir, I am hungry — very hungry.”

“What would your excellency like?” and Peppino placed his pan on the ground, so that the steam rose directly under the nostrils of Danglars. “Give your orders.”

“Have you kitchens here?”

“Kitchens? — of course — complete ones.”

“And cooks?”

“Excellent!”

“Well, a fowl, fish, game, — it signifies little, so that I eat.”

“As your excellency pleases. You mentioned a fowl, I think?”

“Yes, a fowl.” Peppino, turning around, shouted, “A fowl for his excellency!” His voice yet echoed in the archway when a handsome, graceful, and half-naked young man appeared, bearing a fowl in a silver dish on his head, without the assistance of his hands. “I could almost believe myself at the Cafe de Paris,” murmured Danglars.

“Here, your excellency,” said Peppino, taking the fowl from the young bandit and placing it on the worm-eaten table, which with the stool and the goat-skin bed formed the entire furniture of the cell. Danglars asked for a knife and fork. “Here, excellency,” said Peppino, offering him a little blunt knife and a boxwood fork. Danglars took the knife in one hand and the fork in the other, and was about to cut up the fowl. “Pardon me, excellency,” said Peppino, placing his hand on the banker's shoulder; "people pay here before they eat. They might not be satisfied, and" —

"Ah, ha," thought Danglars, "this is not so much like Paris, except that I shall probably be skinned! Never mind, I'll fix that all right. I have always heard how cheap poultry is in Italy; I should think a fowl is worth about twelve sous at Rome. — There," he said, throwing a louis down. Peppino picked up the louis, and Danglars again prepared to carve the fowl. "Stay a moment, your excellency," said Peppino, rising; "you still owe me something."

"I said they would skin me," thought Danglars; but resolving to resist the extortion, he said, "Come, how much do I owe you for this fowl?"

"Your excellency has given me a louis on account."

"A louis on account for a fowl?"

"Certainly; and your excellency now owes me 4,999 louis." Danglars opened his enormous eyes on hearing this gigantic joke. "Come, come, this is very droll — very amusing — I allow; but, as I am very hungry, pray allow me to eat. Stay, here is another louis for you."

"Then that will make only 4,998 louis more," said Peppino with the same indifference. "I shall get them all in time."

"Oh, as for that," said Danglars, angry at this prolongation of the jest, — "as for that you won't get them at all. Go to the devil! You do not know with whom you have to deal!" Peppino made a sign, and the youth hastily removed the fowl. Danglars threw himself upon his goat-skin, and Peppino, reclosing the door, again began eating his pease and bacon. Though Danglars could not see Peppino, the noise of his teeth allowed no doubt as to his occupation. He was certainly eating, and noisily too, like an ill-bred man. "Brute!" said Danglars. Peppino pretended not to hear him, and without even turning his head continued to eat slowly. Danglars' stomach felt so empty, that it seemed as if it would be impossible ever to fill it again; still he had patience for another half-hour, which appeared to him like a century. He again arose and went to the door. "Come, sir, do not keep me starving here any longer, but tell me what they want."

"Nay, your excellency, it is you who should tell us what you want. Give your orders, and we will execute them."

"Then open the door directly." Peppino obeyed. "Now look here, I want something to eat! To eat — do you hear?"

"Are you hungry?"

“Come, you understand me.”

“What would your excellency like to eat?”

“A piece of dry bread, since the fowls are beyond all price in this accursed place.”

“Bread? Very well. Hallo, there, some bread!” he called. The youth brought a small loaf. “How much?” asked Danglars.

“Four thousand nine hundred and ninety-eight louis,” said Peppino; “You have paid two louis in advance.”

“What? One hundred thousand francs for a loaf?”

“One hundred thousand francs,” repeated Peppino.

“But you only asked 100,000 francs for a fowl!”

“We have a fixed price for all our provisions. It signifies nothing whether you eat much or little — whether you have ten dishes or one — it is always the same price.”

“What, still keeping up this silly jest? My dear fellow, it is perfectly ridiculous — stupid! You had better tell me at once that you intend starving me to death.”

“Oh, dear, no, your excellency, unless you intend to commit suicide. Pay and eat.”

“And what am I to pay with, brute?” said Danglars, enraged. “Do you suppose I carry 100,000 francs in my pocket?”

“Your excellency has 5,050,000 francs in your pocket; that will be fifty fowls at 100,000 francs apiece, and half a fowl for the 50,000.”

Danglars shuddered. The bandage fell from his eyes, and he understood the joke, which he did not think quite so stupid as he had done just before. “Come,” he said, “if I pay you the 100,000 francs, will you be satisfied, and allow me to eat at my ease?”

“Certainly,” said Peppino.

“But how can I pay them?”

“Oh, nothing easier; you have an account open with Messrs. Thomson & French, Via dei Banchi, Rome; give me a draft for 4,998 louis on these gentlemen, and our banker shall take it.” Danglars thought it as well to comply with a good grace, so he took the pen, ink, and paper Peppino offered him, wrote the draft, and signed it. “Here,” he said, “here is a draft at sight.”

“And here is your fowl.” Danglars sighed while he carved the fowl; it appeared very thin for the price it had cost. As for Peppino, he examined the paper attentively, put it into his pocket, and continued eating his pease.

Chapter 116

The Pardon.

The next day Danglars was again hungry; certainly the air of that dungeon was very provocative of appetite. The prisoner expected that he would be at no expense that day, for like an economical man he had concealed half of his fowl and a piece of the bread in the corner of his cell. But he had no sooner eaten than he felt thirsty; he had forgotten that. He struggled against his thirst till his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth; then, no longer able to resist, he called out. The sentinel opened the door; it was a new face. He thought it would be better to transact business with his old acquaintance, so he sent for Peppino. “Here I am, your excellency,” said Peppino, with an eagerness which Danglars thought favorable to him. “What do you want?”

“Something to drink.”

“Your excellency knows that wine is beyond all price near Rome.”

“Then give me water,” cried Danglars, endeavoring to parry the blow.

“Oh, water is even more scarce than wine, your excellency, — there has been such a drought.”

“Come,” thought Danglars, “it is the same old story.” And while he smiled as he attempted to regard the affair as a joke, he felt his temples get moist with perspiration.

“Come, my friend,” said Danglars, seeing that he made no impression on Peppino, “you will not refuse me a glass of wine?”

“I have already told you that we do not sell at retail.”

“Well, then, let me have a bottle of the least expensive.”

“They are all the same price.”

“And what is that?”

“Twenty-five thousand francs a bottle.”

“Tell me,” cried Danglars, in a tone whose bitterness Harpagon [*] alone has been capable of revealing — ”tell me that you wish to despoil me of all; it will be sooner over than devouring me piecemeal.”

* The miser in Moliere’s comedy of “L’Avare.” — Ed.

“It is possible such may be the master’s intention.”

"The master? — who is he?"

"The person to whom you were conducted yesterday."

"Where is he?"

"Here."

"Let me see him."

"Certainly." And the next moment Luigi Vampa appeared before Danglars.

"You sent for me?" he said to the prisoner.

"Are you, sir, the chief of the people who brought me here?"

"Yes, your excellency. What then?"

"How much do you require for my ransom?"

"Merely the 5,000,000 you have about you." Danglars felt a dreadful spasm dart through his heart. "But this is all I have left in the world," he said, "out of an immense fortune. If you deprive me of that, take away my life also."

"We are forbidden to shed your blood."

"And by whom are you forbidden?"

"By him we obey."

"You do, then, obey some one?"

"Yes, a chief."

"I thought you said you were the chief?"

"So I am of these men; but there is another over me."

"And did your superior order you to treat me in this way?"

"Yes."

"But my purse will be exhausted."

"Probably."

"Come," said Danglars, "will you take a million?"

"No."

"Two millions? — three? — four? Come, four? I will give them to you on condition that you let me go."

"Why do you offer me 4,000,000 for what is worth 5,000,000? This is a kind of usury, banker, that I do not understand."

"Take all, then — take all, I tell you, and kill me!"

"Come, come, calm yourself. You will excite your blood, and that would produce an appetite it would require a million a day to satisfy. Be more economical."

“But when I have no more money left to pay you?” asked the infuriated Danglars.

“Then you must suffer hunger.”

“Suffer hunger?” said Danglars, becoming pale.

“Most likely,” replied Vampa coolly.

“But you say you do not wish to kill me?”

“No.”

“And yet you will let me perish with hunger?”

“Ah, that is a different thing.”

“Well, then, wretches,” cried Danglars, “I will defy your infamous calculations — I would rather die at once! You may torture, torment, kill me, but you shall not have my signature again!”

“As your excellency pleases,” said Vampa, as he left the cell. Danglars, raving, threw himself on the goat-skin. Who could these men be? Who was the invisible chief? What could be his intentions towards him? And why, when every one else was allowed to be ransomed, might he not also be? Oh, yes; certainly a speedy, violent death would be a fine means of deceiving these remorseless enemies, who appeared to pursue him with such incomprehensible vengeance. But to die? For the first time in his life, Danglars contemplated death with a mixture of dread and desire; the time had come when the implacable spectre, which exists in the mind of every human creature, arrested his attention and called out with every pulsation of his heart, “Thou shalt die!”

Danglars resembled a timid animal excited in the chase; first it flies, then despairs, and at last, by the very force of desperation, sometimes succeeds in eluding its pursuers. Danglars meditated an escape; but the walls were solid rock, a man was sitting reading at the only outlet to the cell, and behind that man shapes armed with guns continually passed. His resolution not to sign lasted two days, after which he offered a million for some food. They sent him a magnificent supper, and took his million.

From this time the prisoner resolved to suffer no longer, but to have everything he wanted. At the end of twelve days, after having made a splendid dinner, he reckoned his accounts, and found that he had only 50,000 francs left. Then a strange reaction took place; he who had just abandoned 5,000,000 endeavored to save the 50,000 francs he had left, and sooner than give them up he resolved to enter again upon a life of privation — he was deluded by the hopefulness that is a premonition of madness. He who for so long a time had forgotten God, began to think that miracles were possible — that the accursed cavern might be discovered by the officers of the Papal States, who would release him; that then he would have 50,000 remaining, which would be sufficient to save him from starvation; and finally he prayed that this sum might be preserved to him, and as he prayed he wept. Three days passed thus, during which his prayers were frequent, if not heartfelt. Sometimes he was delirious, and fancied he saw an old man stretched on a pallet; he, also, was dying of hunger.

On the fourth, he was no longer a man, but a living corpse. He had picked up every crumb that had been left from his former meals, and was beginning to eat the matting which covered the floor of his cell. Then he entreated Peppino, as he would a guardian angel, to give him food; he offered him 1,000 francs for a mouthful of bread. But Peppino did not answer. On the fifth day he dragged himself to the door of the cell.

“Are you not a Christian?” he said, falling on his knees. “Do you wish to assassinate a man who, in the eyes of heaven, is a brother? Oh, my former friends, my former friends!” he murmured, and fell with his face to the ground. Then rising in despair, he exclaimed, “The chief, the chief!”

“Here I am,” said Vampa, instantly appearing; “what do you want?”

“Take my last gold,” muttered Danglars, holding out his pocket-book, “and let me live here; I ask no more for liberty — I only ask to live!”

“Then you suffer a great deal?”

“Oh, yes, yes, cruelly!”

“Still, there have been men who suffered more than you.”

“I do not think so.”

“Yes; those who have died of hunger.”

Danglars thought of the old man whom, in his hours of delirium, he had seen groaning on his bed. He struck his forehead on the ground and groaned. “Yes,” he said, “there have been some who have suffered more than I have, but then they must have been martyrs at least.”

“Do you repent?” asked a deep, solemn voice, which caused Danglars’ hair to stand on end. His feeble eyes endeavored to distinguish objects, and behind the bandit he saw a man enveloped in a cloak, half lost in the shadow of a stone column.

“Of what must I repent?” stammered Danglars.

“Of the evil you have done,” said the voice.

"Oh, yes; oh, yes, I do indeed repent." And he struck his breast with his emaciated fist.

"Then I forgive you," said the man, dropping his cloak, and advancing to the light.

"The Count of Monte Cristo!" said Danglars, more pale from terror than he had been just before from hunger and misery.

"You are mistaken — I am not the Count of Monte Cristo."

"Then who are you?"

"I am he whom you sold and dishonored — I am he whose betrothed you prostituted — I am he upon whom you trampled that you might raise yourself to fortune — I am he whose father you condemned to die of hunger — I am he whom you also condemned to starvation, and who yet forgives you, because he hopes to be forgiven — I am Edmond Dantes!" Danglars uttered a cry, and fell prostrate. "Rise," said the count, "your life is safe; the same good fortune has not happened to your accomplices — one is mad, the other dead. Keep the 50,000 francs you have left — I give them to you. The 5,000,000 you stole from the hospitals has been restored to them by an unknown hand. And now eat and drink; I will entertain you to-night. Vampa, when this man is satisfied, let him be free." Danglars remained prostrate while the count withdrew; when he raised his head he saw disappearing down the passage nothing but a shadow, before which the bandits bowed. According to the count's directions, Danglars was waited on by Vampa, who brought him the best wine and fruits of Italy; then, having conducted him to the road, and pointed to the post-chaise, left him leaning against a tree. He remained there all night, not knowing where he was. When daylight dawned he saw that he was near a stream; he was thirsty, and dragged himself towards it. As he stooped down to drink, he saw that his hair had become entirely white.

Chapter 117

The Fifth of October.

It was about six o’clock in the evening; an opal-colored light, through which an autumnal sun shed its golden rays, descended on the blue ocean. The heat of the day had gradually decreased, and a light breeze arose, seeming like the respiration of nature on awakening from the burning siesta of the south. A delicious zephyr played along the coasts of the Mediterranean, and wafted from shore to shore the sweet perfume of plants, mingled with the fresh smell of the sea.

A light yacht, chaste and elegant in its form, was gliding amidst the first dews of night over the immense lake, extending from Gibraltar to the Dardanelles, and from Tunis to Venice. The vessel resembled a swan with its wings opened towards the wind, gliding on the water. It advanced swiftly and gracefully, leaving behind it a glittering stretch of foam. By degrees the sun disappeared behind the western horizon; but as though to prove the truth of the fanciful ideas in heathen mythology, its indiscreet rays reappeared on the summit of every wave, as if the god of fire had just sunk upon the bosom of Amphitrite, who in vain endeavored to hide her lover beneath her azure mantle. The yacht moved rapidly on, though there did not appear to be sufficient wind to ruffle the curls on the head of a young girl. Standing on the prow was a tall man, of a dark complexion, who saw with dilating eyes that they were approaching a dark mass of land in the shape of a cone, which rose from the midst of the waves like the hat of a Catalan. “Is that Monte Cristo?” asked the traveller, to whose orders the yacht was for the time submitted, in a melancholy voice.

“Yes, your excellency,” said the captain, “we have reached it.”

“We have reached it!” repeated the traveller in an accent of indescribable sadness. Then he added, in a low tone, “Yes; that is the haven.” And then he again plunged into a train of thought, the character of which was better revealed by a sad smile, than it would have been by tears. A few minutes afterwards a flash of light, which was extinguished instantly, was seen on the land, and the sound of firearms reached the yacht.

“Your excellency,” said the captain, “that was the land signal, will you answer yourself?”

“What signal?” The captain pointed towards the island, up the side of which ascended a volume of smoke, increasing as it rose. “Ah, yes,” he said, as if awaking from a dream. “Give it to me.”

The captain gave him a loaded carbine; the traveller slowly raised it, and fired in the air. Ten minutes afterwards, the sails were furled, and they cast anchor about a hundred fathoms from the little harbor. The gig was already lowered, and in it were four oarsmen and a coxswain. The traveller descended, and instead of sitting down at the stern of the boat, which had been decorated with a blue carpet for his accommodation, stood up with his arms crossed. The rowers waited, their oars half lifted out of the water, like birds drying their wings.

“Give way,” said the traveller. The eight oars fell into the sea simultaneously without splashing a drop of water, and the boat, yielding to the impulsion, glided forward. In an instant they found themselves in a little harbor, formed in a natural creek; the boat grounded on the fine sand.

“Will your excellency be so good as to mount the shoulders of two of our men, they will carry you ashore?” The young man answered this invitation with a gesture of indifference, and stepped out of the boat; the sea immediately rose to his waist. “Ah, your excellency,” murmured the pilot, “you should not have done so; our master will scold us for it.” The young man continued to advance, following the sailors, who chose a firm footing. Thirty strides brought them to dry land; the young man stamped on the ground to shake off the wet, and looked around for some one to show him his road, for it was quite dark. Just as he turned, a hand rested on his shoulder, and a voice which made him shudder exclaimed, — ”Good-evening, Maximilian; you are punctual, thank you!”

“Ah, is it you, count?” said the young man, in an almost joyful accent, pressing Monte Cristo’s hand with both his own.

“Yes; you see I am as exact as you are. But you are dripping, my dear fellow; you must change your clothes, as Calypso said to Telemachus. Come, I have a habitation prepared for you in which you will soon forget fatigue and cold.” Monte Cristo perceived that the young man had turned around; indeed, Morrel saw with surprise that the men who had brought him had left without being paid, or uttering a word. Already the sound of their oars might be heard as they returned to the yacht.

"Oh, yes," said the count, "you are looking for the sailors."

"Yes, I paid them nothing, and yet they are gone."

"Never mind that, Maximilian," said Monte Cristo, smiling. "I have made an agreement with the navy, that the access to my island shall be free of all charge. I have made a bargain." Morrel looked at the count with surprise. "Count," he said, "you are not the same here as in Paris."

"How so?"

"Here you laugh." The count's brow became clouded. "You are right to recall me to myself, Maximilian," he said; "I was delighted to see you again, and forgot for the moment that all happiness is fleeting."

"Oh, no, no, count," cried Maximilian, seizing the count's hands, "pray laugh; be happy, and prove to me, by your indifference, that life is endurable to sufferers. Oh, how charitable, kind, and good you are; you affect this gayety to inspire me with courage."

"You are wrong, Morrel; I was really happy."

"Then you forget me, so much the better."

"How so?"

"Yes; for as the gladiator said to the emperor, when he entered the arena, 'He who is about to die salutes you.'"

"Then you are not consoled?" asked the count, surprised.

"Oh," exclaimed Morrel, with a glance full of bitter reproach, "do you think it possible that I could be?"

"Listen," said the count. "Do you understand the meaning of my words? You cannot take me for a commonplace man, a mere rattle, emitting a vague and senseless noise. When I ask you if you are consoled, I speak to you as a man for whom the human heart has no secrets. Well, Morrel, let us both examine the depths of your heart. Do you still feel the same feverish impatience of grief which made you start like a wounded lion? Have you still that devouring thirst which can only be appeased in the grave? Are you still actuated by the regret which drags the living to the pursuit of death; or are you only suffering from the prostration of fatigue and the weariness of hope deferred? Has the loss of memory rendered it impossible for you to weep? Oh, my dear friend, if this be the case, — if you can no longer weep, if your frozen heart be dead, if you put all your trust in God, then, Maximilian, you are consoled — do not complain."

"Count," said Morrel, in a firm and at the same time soft voice, "listen to me, as to a man whose thoughts are raised to heaven, though he remains on earth; I come to die in the arms of a friend. Certainly, there are people whom I love. I love my sister Julie, — I love her husband Emmanuel; but I require a strong mind to smile on my last moments. My sister would be bathed in tears and fainting; I could not bear to see her suffer. Emmanuel would tear the weapon from my hand, and alarm the house with his cries. You, count, who are more than mortal, will, I am sure, lead me to death by a pleasant path, will you not?"

"My friend," said the count, "I have still one doubt, — are you weak enough to pride yourself upon your sufferings?"

"No, indeed, — I am calm," said Morrel, giving his hand to the count; "my pulse does not beat slower or faster than usual. No, I feel that I have reached the goal, and I will go no farther. You told me to wait and hope; do you know what you did, unfortunate adviser? I waited a month, or rather I suffered for a month! I did hope (man is a poor wretched creature), I did hope. What I cannot tell, — something wonderful, an absurdity, a miracle, — of what nature he alone can tell who has mingled with our reason that folly we call hope. Yes, I did wait — yes, I did hope, count, and during this quarter of an hour we have been talking together, you have unconsciously wounded, tortured my heart, for every word you have uttered proved that there was no hope for me. Oh, count, I shall sleep calmly, deliciously in the arms of death." Morrel uttered these words with an energy which made the count shudder. "My friend," continued Morrel, "you named the fifth of October as the end of the period of waiting, — to-day is the fifth of October," he took out his watch, "it is now nine o'clock, — I have yet three hours to live."

"Be it so," said the count, "come." Morrel mechanically followed the count, and they had entered the grotto before he perceived it. He felt a carpet under his feet, a door opened, perfumes surrounded him, and a brilliant light dazzled his eyes. Morrel hesitated to advance; he dreaded the enervating effect of all that he saw. Monte Cristo drew him in gently. "Why should we not spend the last three hours remaining to us of life, like those ancient Romans, who when condemned by Nero, their emperor and heir, sat down at a table covered with flowers, and gently glided into death, amid the perfume of heliotropes and roses?" Morrel smiled. "As you please," he said; "death is always death, — that is forgetfulness, repose, exclusion from life, and therefore from grief." He sat down, and Monte Cristo placed himself opposite to him. They were in the marvellous dining-room before described, where the statues had baskets on their heads always filled with fruits and flowers. Morrel had looked carelessly around, and had probably noticed nothing.

“Let us talk like men,” he said, looking at the count.

“Go on!”

“Count,” said Morrel, “you are the epitome of all human knowledge, and you seem like a being descended from a wiser and more advanced world than ours.”

“There is something true in what you say,” said the count, with that smile which made him so handsome; “I have descended from a planet called grief.”

“I believe all you tell me without questioning its meaning; for instance, you told me to live, and I did live; you told me to hope, and I almost did so. I am almost inclined to ask you, as though you had experienced death, ‘is it painful to die?’“

Monte Cristo looked upon Morrel with indescribable tenderness. “Yes,” he said, “yes, doubtless it is painful, if you violently break the outer covering which obstinately begs for life. If you plunge a dagger into your flesh, if you insinuate a bullet into your brain, which the least shock disorders, — then certainly, you will suffer pain, and you will repent quitting a life for a repose you have bought at so dear a price.”

“Yes; I know that there is a secret of luxury and pain in death, as well as in life; the only thing is to understand it.”

“You have spoken truly, Maximilian; according to the care we bestow upon it, death is either a friend who rocks us gently as a nurse, or an enemy who violently drags the soul from the body. Some day, when the world is much older, and when mankind will be masters of all the destructive powers in nature, to serve for the general good of humanity; when mankind, as you were just saying, have discovered the secrets of death, then that death will become as sweet and voluptuous as a slumber in the arms of your beloved.”

“And if you wished to die, you would choose this death, count?”

“Yes.”

Morrel extended his hand. “Now I understand,” he said, “why you had me brought here to this desolate spot, in the midst of the ocean, to this subterranean palace; it was because you loved me, was it not, count? It was because you loved me well enough to give me one of those sweet means of death of which we were speaking; a death without agony, a death which allows me to fade away while pronouncing Valentine’s name and pressing your hand.”

“Yes, you have guessed rightly, Morrel,” said the count, “that is what I intended.”

“Thanks; the idea that tomorrow I shall no longer suffer, is sweet to my heart.”

“Do you then regret nothing?”

“No,” replied Morrel.

“Not even me?” asked the count with deep emotion. Morrel’s clear eye was for the moment clouded, then it shone with unusual lustre, and a large tear rolled down his cheek.

“What,” said the count, “do you still regret anything in the world, and yet die?”

“Oh, I entreat you,” exclaimed Morrel in a low voice, “do not speak another word, count; do not prolong my punishment.” The count fancied that he was yielding, and this belief revived the horrible doubt that had overwhelmed him at the Chateau d’If. “I am endeavoring,” he thought, “to make this man happy; I look upon this restitution as a weight thrown into the scale to balance the evil I have wrought. Now, supposing I am deceived, supposing this man has not been unhappy enough to merit happiness. Alas, what would become of me who can only atone for evil by doing good?” Then he said aloud: “Listen, Morrel, I see your grief is great, but still you do not like to risk your soul.” Morrel smiled sadly. “Count,” he said, “I swear to you my soul is no longer my own.”

“Maximilian, you know I have no relation in the world. I have accustomed myself to regard you as my son: well, then, to save my son, I will sacrifice my life, nay, even my fortune.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, that you wish to quit life because you do not understand all the enjoyments which are the fruits of a large fortune. Morrel, I possess nearly a hundred millions and I give them to you; with such a fortune you can attain every wish. Are you ambitious? Every career is open to you. Overturn the world, change its character, yield to mad ideas, be even criminal — but live.”

“Count, I have your word,” said Morrel coldly; then taking out his watch, he added, “It is half-past eleven.”

“Morrel, can you intend it in my house, under my very eyes?”

“Then let me go,” said Maximilian, “or I shall think you did not love me for my own sake, but for yours;” and he arose.

“It is well,” said Monte Cristo whose countenance brightened at these words; “you wish — you are inflexible. Yes, as you said, you are indeed wretched and a miracle alone can cure you. Sit down, Morrel, and wait.”

Morrel obeyed; the count arose, and unlocking a closet with a key suspended from his gold chain, took from it a little silver casket, beautifully carved and chased, the corners of which represented four bending figures, similar to the Caryatides, the forms of women, symbols of the angels aspiring to heaven. He placed the casket on the table; then opening it took out a little golden box, the top of which flew open when touched by a secret spring. This box contained an unctuous substance partly solid, of which it was impossible to discover the color, owing to the reflection of the polished gold, sapphires, rubies, emeralds, which ornamented the box. It was a mixed mass of blue, red, and gold. The count took out a small quantity of this with a gilt spoon, and offered it to Morrel, fixing a long steadfast glance upon him. It was then observable that the substance was greenish.

“This is what you asked for,” he said, “and what I promised to give you.”

“I thank you from the depths of my heart,” said the young man, taking the spoon from the hands of Monte Cristo. The count took another spoon, and again dipped it into the golden box. “What are you going to do, my friend?” asked Morrel, arresting his hand.

“Well, the fact is, Morrel, I was thinking that I too am weary of life, and since an opportunity presents itself” —

“Stay!” said the young man. “You who love, and are beloved; you, who have faith and hope, — oh, do not follow my example. In your case it would be a crime. Adieu, my noble and generous friend, adieu; I will go and tell Valentine what you have done for me.” And slowly, though without any hesitation, only waiting to press the count’s hand fervently, he swallowed the mysterious substance offered by Monte Cristo. Then they were both silent. Ali, mute and attentive, brought the pipes and coffee, and disappeared. By degrees, the light of the lamps gradually faded in the hands of the marble statues which held them, and the perfumes appeared less powerful to Morrel. Seated opposite to him, Monte Cristo watched him in the shadow, and Morrel saw nothing but the bright eyes of the count. An overpowering sadness took possession of the young man, his hands relaxed their hold, the objects in the room gradually lost their form and color, and his disturbed vision seemed to perceive doors and curtains open in the walls.

"Friend," he cried, "I feel that I am dying; thanks!" He made a last effort to extend his hand, but it fell powerless beside him. Then it appeared to him that Monte Cristo smiled, not with the strange and fearful expression which had sometimes revealed to him the secrets of his heart, but with the benevolent kindness of a father for a child. At the same time the count appeared to increase in stature, his form, nearly double its usual height, stood out in relief against the red tapestry, his black hair was thrown back, and he stood in the attitude of an avenging angel. Morrel, overpowered, turned around in the arm-chair; a delicious torpor permeated every vein. A change of ideas presented themselves to his brain, like a new design on the kaleidoscope. Enervated, prostrate, and breathless, he became unconscious of outward objects; he seemed to be entering that vague delirium preceding death. He wished once again to press the count's hand, but his own was immovable. He wished to articulate a last farewell, but his tongue lay motionless and heavy in his throat, like a stone at the mouth of a sepulchre. Involuntarily his languid eyes closed, and still through his eyelashes a well-known form seemed to move amid the obscurity with which he thought himself enveloped.

The count had just opened a door. Immediately a brilliant light from the next room, or rather from the palace adjoining, shone upon the room in which he was gently gliding into his last sleep. Then he saw a woman of marvellous beauty appear on the threshold of the door separating the two rooms. Pale, and sweetly smiling, she looked like an angel of mercy conjuring the angel of vengeance. "Is it heaven that opens before me?" thought the dying man; "that angel resembles the one I have lost." Monte Cristo pointed out Morrel to the young woman, who advanced towards him with clasped hands and a smile upon her lips.

"Valentine, Valentine!" he mentally ejaculated; but his lips uttered no sound, and as though all his strength were centred in that internal emotion, he sighed and closed his eyes. Valentine rushed towards him; his lips again moved.

"He is calling you," said the count; "he to whom you have confided your destiny — he from whom death would have separated you, calls you to him. Happily, I vanquished death. Henceforth, Valentine, you will never again be separated on earth, since he has rushed into death to find you. Without me, you would both have died. May God accept my atonement in the preservation of these two existences!”

Valentine seized the count’s hand, and in her irresistible impulse of joy carried it to her lips.

“Oh, thank me again!” said the count; “tell me till you are weary, that I have restored you to happiness; you do not know how much I require this assurance.”

“Oh, yes, yes, I thank you with all my heart,” said Valentine; “and if you doubt the sincerity of my gratitude, oh, then, ask Haidee! ask my beloved sister Haidee, who ever since our departure from France, has caused me to wait patiently for this happy day, while talking to me of you.”

“You then love Haidee?” asked Monte Cristo with an emotion he in vain endeavored to dissimulate.

“Oh, yes, with all my soul.”

“Well, then, listen, Valentine,” said the count; “I have a favor to ask of you.”

“Of me? Oh, am I happy enough for that?”

“Yes; you have called Haidee your sister, — let her become so indeed, Valentine; render her all the gratitude you fancy that you owe to me; protect her, for” (the count’s voice was thick with emotion) “henceforth she will be alone in the world.”

“Alone in the world!” repeated a voice behind the count, “and why?”

Monte Cristo turned around; Haidee was standing pale, motionless, looking at the count with an expression of fearful amazement.

“Because to-morrow, Haidee, you will be free; you will then assume your proper position in society, for I will not allow my destiny to overshadow yours. Daughter of a prince, I restore to you the riches and name of your father.”

Haidee became pale, and lifting her transparent hands to heaven, exclaimed in a voice stifled with tears, “Then you leave me, my lord?”

“Haidee, Haidee, you are young and beautiful; forget even my name, and be happy.”

“It is well,” said Haidee; “your order shall be executed, my lord; I will forget even your name, and be happy.” And she stepped back to retire.

“Oh, heavens,” exclaimed Valentine, who was supporting the head of Morrel on her shoulder, “do you not see how pale she is? Do you not see how she suffers?”

Haidee answered with a heartrending expression, “Why should he understand this, my sister? He is my master, and I am his slave; he has the right to notice nothing.”

The count shuddered at the tones of a voice which penetrated the inmost recesses of his heart; his eyes met those of the young girl and he could not bear their brilliancy. “Oh, heavens,” exclaimed Monte Cristo, “can my suspicions be correct? Haidee, would it please you not to leave me?”

“I am young,” gently replied Haidee; “I love the life you have made so sweet to me, and I should be sorry to die.”

“You mean, then, that if I leave you, Haidee” —

“I should die; yes, my lord.”

“Do you then love me?”

“Oh, Valentine, he asks if I love him. Valentine, tell him if you love Maximilian.” The count felt his heart dilate and throb; he opened his arms, and Haidee, uttering a cry, sprang into them. “Oh, yes,” she cried, “I do love you! I love you as one loves a father, brother, husband! I love you as my life, for you are the best, the noblest of created beings!”

“Let it be, then, as you wish, sweet angel; God has sustained me in my struggle with my enemies, and has given me this reward; he will not let me end my triumph in suffering; I wished to punish myself, but he has pardoned me. Love me then, Haidee! Who knows? perhaps your love will make me forget all that I do not wish to remember.”

“What do you mean, my lord?”

“I mean that one word from you has enlightened me more than twenty years of slow experience; I have but you in the world, Haidee; through you I again take hold on life, through you I shall suffer, through you rejoice.”

“Do you hear him, Valentine?” exclaimed Haidee; “he says that through me he will suffer — through me, who would yield my life for his.” The count withdrew for a moment. “Have I discovered the truth?” he said; “but whether it be for recompense or punishment, I accept my fate. Come, Haidee, come!” and throwing his arm around the young girl’s waist, he pressed the hand of Valentine, and disappeared.

An hour had nearly passed, during which Valentine, breathless and motionless, watched steadfastly over Morrel. At length she felt his heart beat, a faint breath played upon his lips, a slight shudder, announcing the return of life, passed through the young man’s frame. At length his eyes opened, but they were at first fixed and expressionless; then sight returned, and with it feeling and grief. “Oh,” he cried, in an accent of despair, “the count has deceived me; I am yet living;” and extending his hand towards the table, he seized a knife.

“Dearest,” exclaimed Valentine, with her adorable smile, “awake, and look at me!” Morrel uttered a loud exclamation, and frantic, doubtful, dazzled, as though by a celestial vision, he fell upon his knees.

The next morning at daybreak, Valentine and Morrel were walking arm-in-arm on the sea-shore, Valentine relating how Monte Cristo had appeared in her room, explained everything, revealed the crime, and, finally, how he had saved her life by enabling her to simulate death. They had found the door of the grotto opened, and gone forth; on the azure dome of heaven still glittered a few remaining stars. Morrel soon perceived a man standing among the rocks, apparently awaiting a sign from them to advance, and pointed him out to Valentine. “Ah, it is Jacopo,” she said, “the captain of the yacht;” and she beckoned him towards them.

“Do you wish to speak to us?” asked Morrel.

“I have a letter to give you from the count.”

“From the count!” murmured the two young people.

“Yes; read it.” Morrel opened the letter, and read: —

“My Dear Maximilian, —

“There is a felucca for you at anchor. Jacopo will carry you to Leghorn, where Monsieur Noirtier awaits his granddaughter, whom he wishes to bless before you lead her to the altar. All that is in this grotto, my friend, my house in the Champs Elysees, and my chateau at Treport, are the marriage gifts bestowed by Edmond Dantes upon the son of his old master, Morrel. Mademoiselle de Villefort will share them with you; for I entreat her to give to the poor the immense fortune reverting to her from her father, now a madman, and her brother who died last September with his mother. Tell the angel who will watch over your future destiny, Morrel, to pray sometimes for a man, who like Satan thought himself for an instant equal to God, but who now acknowledges with Christian humility that God alone possesses supreme power and infinite wisdom. Perhaps those prayers may soften the remorse he feels in his heart. As for you, Morrel, this is the secret of my conduct towards you. There is neither happiness nor misery in the world; there is only the comparison of one state with another, nothing more. He who has felt the deepest grief is best able to experience supreme happiness.

We must have felt what it is to die, Morrel, that we may appreciate the enjoyments of living.

“Live, then, and be happy, beloved children of my heart, and never forget that until the day when God shall deign to reveal the future to man, all human wisdom is summed up in these two words, — ’*Wait and hope*.’ — Your friend,

“Edmond Dantes, Count of Monte Cristo.”

During the perusal of this letter, which informed Valentine for the first time of the madness of her father and the death of her brother, she became pale, a heavy sigh escaped from her bosom, and tears, not the less painful because they were silent, ran down her cheeks; her happiness cost her very dear. Morrel looked around uneasily. “But,” he said, “the count’s generosity is too overwhelming; Valentine will be satisfied with my humble fortune. Where is the count, friend? Lead me to him.” Jacopo pointed towards the horizon. “What do you mean?” asked Valentine. “Where is the count? — where is Haidee?”

“Look!” said Jacopo.

The eyes of both were fixed upon the spot indicated by the sailor, and on the blue line separating the sky from the Mediterranean Sea, they perceived a large white sail. “Gone,” said Morrel; “gone! — adieu, my friend — adieu, my father!”

“Gone,” murmured Valentine; “adieu, my sweet Haidee — adieu, my sister!”

“Who can say whether we shall ever see them again?” said Morrel with tearful eyes.

“Darling,” replied Valentine, “has not the count just told us that all human wisdom is summed up in two words? — ’*Wait and hope*.’“

THE END

THE REGENT’S DAUGHTER

Anonymous translation, 1845

This novel is the sequel to Dumas’ *The Conspirators* and was first published in 1845.
Set in 1719, the novel concerns Philippe d ‘ Orléans, the Regent of France, who struggles with his two daughters and son, whilst seeking to take care of another daughter — illegitimate and hidden.

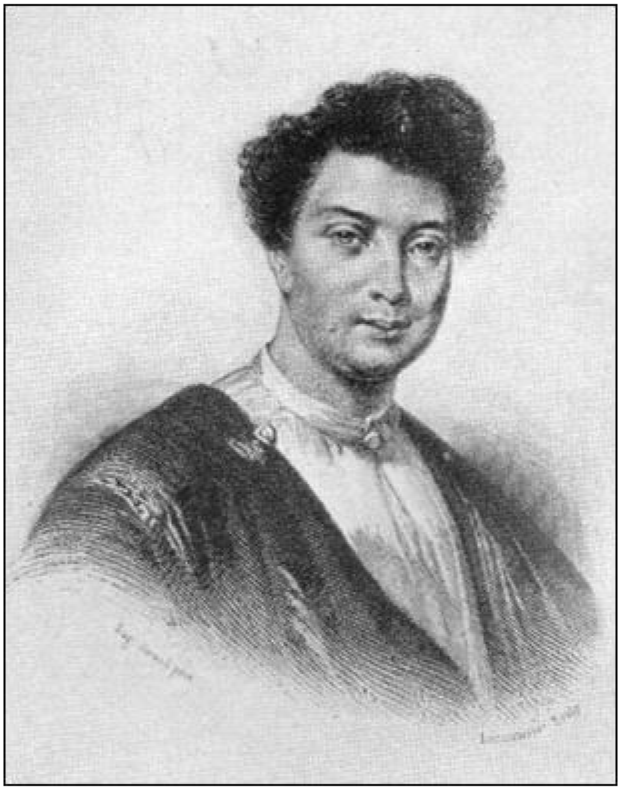

An engraving of Dumas, close to the time of this novel’s publication

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CHAPTER I.

AN ABBESS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

On the 8th February, 1719, a carriage, bearing the fleur-de-lis of France, with the motto of Orleans, preceded by two outriders and a page, entered the porch of the Abbey of Chelles, precisely as the clock struck ten, and, the door having been quickly opened, its two occupants stepped out.

The first was a man of from forty-five to forty-six years of age, short, and rather stout, with a high color, easy in his movements, and displaying in every gesture a certain air of high breeding and command.

The second, who followed slowly, was short, and remarkably thin. His face, though not precisely ugly, was very disagreeable, although bearing the evidences of a keen intellect. He seemed to feel the cold, and followed his companion, wrapped up in an ample cloak.

The first of these two made his way up the staircase with the air of a man well acquainted with the locality. Passing through a large antechamber containing several nuns, who bowed to the ground as he passed, he ran rather than walked to a reception-room, which, it must be confessed, bore but little trace of that austerity which is ordinarily ascribed to the interior of a cloister.

The other, who followed leisurely, was saluted almost as humbly by the nuns.

“And now,” said the first, “wait here and warm yourself, while I go to her, and in ten minutes I will make an end of all these abuses you mention: if she deny, and I want proof, I will call you.”

“Ten minutes, monseigneur,” replied the man in the cloak; “in two hours your highness will not have even broached the subject of your visit. Oh! the Abbess de Chelles is a clever woman!”

So saying, he stretched himself out in an easy chair, which he had drawn near the fire, and rested his thin legs on the fender.

“Yes, yes,” replied he who had been addressed as “your highness;” “I know, and if I could forget it, you take care to remind me of it often enough. Why did you bring me here to-day through all this wind and snow?”

“Because you would not come yesterday, monseigneur.”

“Yesterday, it was impossible; I had an appointment with Lord Stair at five o’clock.”

“In a house in the Rue des Bons Enfants. My lord does not live any longer, then, at the English embassy?”

“Abbe, I had forbidden you to follow me.”

“Monseigneur, it is my duty to disobey you.”

“Well, then, disobey; but let me tell stories at my pleasure, without your having the impertinence to show me that you know it, just for the sake of proving the efficiency of your police.”

“Monseigneur may rest easy in future — I will believe anything!”

“I will not promise as much in return, abbe, for here I think you have made a mistake.”

“Monseigneur, I know what I said, and I repeat it.”

“But look! no noise, no light, perfect quiet, your account is incorrect; it is evident that we are late.”

“Yesterday, monseigneur, where you stand, there was an orchestra of fifty musicians; there, where that young sister kneels so devoutly, was a buffet: what was upon it I cannot tell, but I know it was there, and in the gallery on the left, where a modest supper of lentils and cream cheese is now preparing for the holy sisters, were two hundred people, drinking, dancing, and making — ”

“Well, making what?”

“Making love, monseigneur.”

“Diable! are you sure of this?”

“Rather more sure than if I had seen it, and that is why you do well in coming to-day, and would have done better in coming yesterday. This sort of life does not become an abbess, monseigneur.”

“No, it is only fit for an abbe. Ha!”

“I am a politician, monseigneur.”

“Well, my daughter is a political abbess, that is all.”

“Oh, let it be so, if it suits you, monseigneur; I am not so particular in point of morals, you know. To-morrow there will be another song or two out, but what does that matter?” — — ”Well, well, wait for me, and I will go and scold.”

“Take my word for it, monseigneur, if you wish to scold properly you had better do it here, before me; if you fail in memory or arguments, sign to me, and I will come to the rescue."

"Yes, yes, you are right," said the person who had undertaken to redress wrongs, and in whom we hope the reader has recognized Philippe d'Orleans. "Yes, this scandal must be quieted a little, at any rate: the abbess must not receive more than twice a week. There must be none of these dances and assemblies, and the cloisters must be re-established. Mademoiselle d'Orleans passed from gayety to a religious life; she left the Palais Royal for Chelles in spite of all I could do to prevent her; now, for five days in the week she must be the abbess, and that will leave her two to play the great lady."

"Ah, monseigneur, you are beginning to see the thing in its true light."

"Is not this what you wish?"

"It is what is necessary. It seems to me that an abbess who has thirty valets, fifteen footmen, ten cooks, eight grooms, and a mute — who fences, plays the horn, and the violincello — who is a surgeon and a hairdresser — who shoots and makes fireworks — cannot be very dull."

"Has not my daughter been told of my arrival," said the duke to an old nun who crossed the room with a bunch of keys in her hand; "I wish to know whether I shall go to her, or whether she is coming to me."

"Madame is coming, monseigneur," replied the sister, respectfully.

"It is well," murmured the regent, somewhat impatiently.

"Monseigneur, remember the parable of Jesus driving out the money-changers from the temple; you know it, or ought to know it, for I taught it you when I was your preceptor. Now, drive out these musicians, these Pharisees, these comedians and anatomists; three only of each profession will make a nice escort for our return."

"Do not fear, I am in a preaching vein."

"Then," replied Dubois, rising, "that is most fortunate, for here she is."

At this moment a door, leading to the interior of the convent, was opened, and the person so impatiently expected appeared.

Let us explain who was this worthy person who had succeeded, by repeated follies, in rousing the anger of Philippe d'Orleans, the most indulgent man and father in France.

Mademoiselle de Chartres, Louise-Adelaide-d'Orleans, was the second and prettiest of the regent's daughters. She had a beautiful complexion, fine eyes, a good figure, and well-shaped hands. Her teeth were splendid, and her grandmother, the princess palatine, compared them to a string of pearls in a coral casket. She danced well, sang better, and played at sight. She had learned of Cauchereau, one of the first artists at the opera, with whom she had made much more progress than is common with ladies, and especially with princesses. It is true that she was most assiduous; the secret of that assiduity will be shortly revealed.

All her tastes were masculine. She appeared to have changed sex with her brother Louis. She loved dogs and horses; amused herself with pistols and foils, but cared little for any feminine occupations.

Her chief predilection, however, was for music; she seldom missed a night at the opera when her master Cauchereau performed; and once, when he surpassed himself in an air, she exclaimed, “Bravo, bravo, my dear Cauchereau!” in a voice audible to the whole house.

The Duchesse d’Orleans judged that the exclamation was somewhat indiscreet for a princess of the blood, and decided that Mademoiselle Chartres knew enough of music. Cauchereau was well paid, and desired not to return to the Palais Royal. The duchess also begged her daughter to spend a fortnight at the convent of Chelles, the abbess of which, a sister of Marechal de Villars, was a friend of hers.

It was doubtless during this retreat that mademoiselle — who did everything by fits and starts — resolved to renounce the world. Toward the end of the holy week of 1718, she asked and obtained her father’s permission to spend Easter at Chelles; but at the end of that time, instead of returning to the palais, she expressed a wish to remain as a nun.

The duke tried to oppose this, but Mademoiselle de Chartres was obstinate, and on the 23d of April she took the vows. Then the duke treated with Mademoiselle de Villars for the abbey, and, on the promise of twelve thousand francs, Mademoiselle de Chartres was named abbess in her stead, and she had occupied the post about a year.

This, then, was the abbess of Chelles, who appeared before her father, not surrounded by an elegant and profane court, but followed by six nuns dressed in black and holding torches. There was no sign of frivolity or of pleasure; nothing but the most somber apparel and the most severe aspect. The regent, however, suspected that he had been kept waiting while all this was preparing.

“I do not like hypocrisy,” said he, sharply, “and can forgive vices which are not hidden under the garb of virtues. All these lights, madame, are doubtless the remains of yesterday’s illumination. Are all your flowers so faded, and all your guests so fatigued, that you cannot show me a single bouquet nor a single dancer?”

“Monsieur,” said the abbess in a grave tone, “this is not the place for fetes and amusements.” — — ”Yes,” answered the regent, “I see, that if you feasted yesterday, you fast to-day.”

“Did you come here, monsieur, to catechise? At least what you see should reply to any accusations against me.”

“I came to tell you, madame,” replied the regent, annoyed at being supposed to have been duped, “that the life you lead displeases me; your conduct yesterday was unbecoming an abbess; your austerities to-day are unbecoming a princess of the blood; decide, once for all, between the nun and the court lady. People begin to speak ill of you, and I have enemies enough of my own, without your saddling me with others from the depth of your convent.”

“Alas, monsieur, in giving entertainments, balls, and concerts, which have been quoted as the best in Paris, I have neither pleased those enemies, nor you, nor myself. Yesterday was my last interview with the world; this morning I have taken leave of it forever; and to-day, while still ignorant of your visit, I had adopted a determination from which I will never depart.”

“And what is it?” asked the regent, suspecting that this was only a new specimen of his daughter’s ordinary follies.

“Come to this window and look out,” said the abbess.

The regent, in compliance with the invitation, approached the window, and saw a large fire blazing in the middle of the courtyard. Dubois — who was as curious as if he had really been an abbe — slipped up beside him.

Several people were rapidly passing and repassing before the fire, and throwing various singular-shaped objects into the flames.

”But what is that?” asked the regent of Dubois, who seemed as much surprised as himself.

“That which is burning now?” asked the abbe. — — ”Yes,” replied the regent.

“Ma foi, monseigneur, it looks to me very much like a violincello.”

“It is mine,” said the abbess, “an excellent violincello by Valeri.”

“And you are burning it!” exclaimed the duke.

“All instruments are sources of perdition,” said the abbess, in a tone which betrayed the most profound remorse.

“Eh, but here is a harpsichord,” interrupted the duke.

“My harpsichord, monsieur; it was so perfect that it enticed me toward earthly things; I condemned it this morning.”

“And what are those chests of papers with which they are feeding the fire?” asked Dubois, whom the spectacle seemed to interest immensely.

“My music, which I am having burned.”

“Your music?” demanded the regent.

“Yes, and even yours,” answered the abbess; “look carefully and you will see your opera of ‘Panthée’ follow in its turn. You will understand that my resolution once taken, its execution was necessarily general.”

“Well, madame, this time you are really mad! To light the fire with music, and then feed it with bass-viols and harpsichords is really a little too luxurious.”

“I am doing penance, monsieur.”

“Hum, say rather that you are refitting your house, and that this is an excuse for buying new furniture, since you are doubtless tired of the old.”

“No, monseigneur, it is no such thing.”

“Well, then, what is it? Tell me frankly.”

“In truth, I am weary of amusing myself, and, indeed, I intend to act differently.”

“And what are you going to do?”

“I am going with my nuns to visit my tomb.”

“Diable, monseigneur!” exclaimed the abbe, “her wits are gone at last.”

“It will be truly edifying, will it not, monsieur?” continued the abbess, gravely.

“Indeed,” answered the regent, “if you really do this, I doubt not but people will laugh at it twice as much as they did at your suppers.”

“Will you accompany me, messieurs?” continued the abbess; “I am going to spend a few minutes in my coffin; it is a fancy I have had a long time.”

“You will have plenty of time for that,” said the regent; “moreover, you have not even invented this amusement; for Charles the Fifth, who became a monk as you became a nun, without exactly knowing why, thought of it before you.”

“Then you will not go with me, monsieur?” said the abbess.

“I,” answered the duke, who had not the least sympathy with somber ideas, “I go to see tombs! I go to hear the De Profundis! No, pardieu! and the only thing which consoles me for not being able to escape them some day, is, that I shall neither see the one nor the other.”

“Ah, monsieur,” answered the abbess, in a scandalized tone, “you do not, then, believe in the immortality of the soul?”

“I believe that you are raving mad. Confound this abbe, who promises me a feast, and brings me to a funeral.”

“By my faith, monseigneur,” said Dubois, “I think I prefer the extravagance of yesterday; it was more attractive.”

The abbess bowed, and made a few steps toward the door. The duke and Dubois remained staring at each other, uncertain whether to laugh or cry.

“One word more,” said the duke; “are you decided this time, or is it not some fever which you have caught from your confessor? If it be real, I have nothing to say; but if it be a fever, I desire that they cure you of it. I have Morceau and Chirac, whom I pay for attending on me and mine.”

“Monseigneur,” answered the abbess, “you forget that I know sufficient of medicine to undertake my own cure, if I were ill: I can, therefore, assure you that I am not. I am a Jansenist; that is all.”

“Ah,” cried the duke, “this is more of Father le Doux’s work, that execrable Benedictine! At least I know a treatment which will cure him.”

”What is that?” asked the abbess.

“The Bastille.”

And he went out in a rage, followed by Dubois, who was laughing heartily.

“You see,” said the regent, after a long silence, and when they were nearing Paris, “I preached with a good grace; it seems it was I who needed the sermon.”

“Well, you are a happy father, that is all; I compliment you on your younger daughter, Mademoiselle de Chartres. Unluckily your elder daughter, the Duchesse de Berry — ”

“Oh, do not talk of her; she is my ulcer, particularly when I am in a bad temper.”

“Well?”

“I have a great mind to make use of it by finishing with her at one blow.”

“She is at the Luxembourg?”

“I believe so.”

“Let us go to the Luxembourg, monseigneur.”

“You go with me?”

“I shall not leave you to-night.”

“Well, drive to the Luxembourg.”

CHAPTER II.

DECIDEDLY THE FAMILY BEGINS TO SETTLE DOWN.

Whatever the regent might say, the Duchesse de Berry was his favorite daughter. At seven years of age she had been seized with a disease which all the doctors declared to be fatal, and when they had abandoned her, her father, who had studied medicine, took her in hand himself, and succeeded in saving her.

From that time the regent's affection for his daughter became almost a weakness. He allowed the haughty and self-willed child the most perfect liberty; her education was neglected, but this did not prevent Louis XIV. from choosing her as a wife for his grandson the Duc de Berry.

It is well known how death at once struck a triple blow at the royal posterity, and within a few years carried off the dauphin, the Duc and Duchesse de Bourgoyne and the Duc de Berry.

Left a widow at twenty years of age, loving her father almost as tenderly as he loved her, and having to choose between the society of Versailles and that of the Palais Royal, the Duchesse de Berry, young, beautiful, and fond of pleasure, had quickly decided. She took part in all the fetes, the pleasures and follies of her father.

The Duc d'Orleans, in his increasing fondness for his daughter — who already had six hundred thousand francs a year — allowed her four hundred thousand francs more from his private fortune. He gave up the Luxembourg to her, gave her a bodyguard, and at length, to the scandal of those who advocated the old forms of etiquette, he merely shrugged his shoulders when the Duchesse de Berry passed through Paris preceded by cymbals and trumpets, and only laughed when she received the Venetian ambassador on a throne, raised on three steps, which nearly embroiled France with the republic of Venice.

About this time the Duchesse de Berry took a fancy to fall in love with the Chevalier de Riom.

The Chevalier de Riom was a nephew or grand-nephew of the Duc de Lauzun, who came to Paris in 1715 to seek his fortune, and found it at the

Luxembourg. Introduced to the princess by Madame de Mouchy, he soon established the same influence over her as his uncle, the Duc de Lauzun, had exercised over La Grande Mademoiselle fifty years before, and was soon established as her lover, supplanting Lahaie, who was sent on an embassy to Denmark.

The duchess had the singular moderation of never having had more than two lovers; Lahaie, whom she had never avowed, and Riom, whom she proclaimed aloud.

This was not the true cause of the malice with which the princess was pursued; it arose rather from the previous offenses of her passage through Paris, the reception of the ambassadors, her bodyguard, and her assumptions. The duke himself was indignant at Riom's influence over his daughter. Riom had been brought up by the Duc de Lauzun, who in the morning had crushed the hand of the Princesse de Monaco with the heel of the boot which, in the evening, he made the daughter of Gaston d'Orleans pull off, and who had given his nephew the following instruction, which Riom had fully carried out.

"The daughters of France," said he, "must be treated with a high hand;" and Riom, trusting to his uncle's experience, had so well schooled the Duchesse de Berry that she scarcely dared to give a fete without his permission.

The duke took as strong a dislike to Riom as his careless character allowed him to take to any one, and, under pretext of serving the duchess, had given him a regiment, then the government of Cognac, then the order to retire to his government, which almost made his favors look like disfavors and disgrace.

The duchess was not deceived; she went to her father, begged, prayed, and scolded, but in vain; and she went away threatening the duke with her anger, and declaring that Riom should not go.

The duke's only reply was to repeat his orders for Riom's departure the next day, and Riom had respectfully promised to obey.

The same day, which was the one preceding that on which our story opens, Riom had ostensibly set out, and Dubois himself had told the duke that he had left for Cognac at nine o'clock.

Meanwhile the duke had not again seen his daughter; thus, when he spoke of going to finish with her, it was rather a pardon than a quarrel that he went to seek. Dubois had not been duped by this pretended resolution;

but Riom was gone, and that was all he wanted; he hoped to slip in some new personage who should efface all memory of Riom, who was to be sent to join the Maréchal de Berwick in Spain.

The carriage stopped before the Luxembourg, which was lighted as usual.

The duke ascended the steps with his usual celerity, Dubois remained in a corner of the carriage. Presently the duke appeared at the door with a disappointed air.

“Ah, monseigneur,” said Dubois, “are you refused admittance?”

“No, the duchesse is not here.”

“Where, then — at the Carmelites?”

“No, at Meudon.”

“At Meudon, in February, and in such weather; what can she be doing there?”

“It is easy to know.”

“How?”

“Let us go to Meudon.”

“To Meudon!” said the regent, jumping into the carriage; “I allow you five-and-twenty minutes to get there.”

“I would humbly beg to remind monseigneur,” said the coachman, “that the horses have already gone ten leagues.”

“Kill them, but be at Meudon in five-and-twenty minutes.”

There was no reply to be made to such an order; the coachman whipped his horses, and the noble animals set out at as brisk a pace as if they had just left the stable.

Throughout the drive Dubois was silent, and the regent thoughtful; there was nothing on the route to arrest the attention of either, and they arrived at Meudon full of contradictory reflections.

This time both alighted; Dubois, thinking the interview might be long, was anxious to find a more comfortable waiting-place than a carriage.

At the door they found a Swiss in full livery — he stopped them — the duke made himself known.

“Pardon,” said the Swiss, “I did not know that monseigneur was expected.”

“Expected or not, I am here; send word to the princess.”

“Monseigneur is to be at the ceremony?” asked the Swiss, who seemed embarrassed.

"Yes, of course," put in Dubois, stopping the duke, who was about to ask what ceremony; "and I also."

"Then shall I lead monseigneur at once to the chapel?"

"To the chapel?" asked the duke.

"Yes; for the ceremony is already commenced."

"Ah, Dubois," said the duke, "is she also going to take the veil?"

"Monseigneur," said Dubois, "I should rather say she is going to be married."

"Pardieu!" exclaimed the regent, "that would crown all;" and he darted toward the staircase, followed by Dubois.

"Does not monseigneur wish me to guide him?" asked the Swiss.

"It is needless," cried the regent; "I know the way."

Indeed — with an agility surprising in so corpulent a man — the regent darted through the rooms and corridors, and arrived at the door of the chapel, which appeared to be closed, but yielded to the first touch. Dubois was right.

Riom, who had returned secretly, was on his knees with the princess, before the private chaplain of the Luxembourg, while M. de Pons, Riom's relative, and the Marquis de la Rochefoucauld, captain of the princess's guard, held the canopy over their heads; Messrs. de Mouchy and de Lauzun stood, one by the duchess and the other by Riom.

"Certainly fortune is against us, monseigneur," said Dubois; "we are five minutes too late."

"Mordieu!" cried the duke, exasperated, "we will see."

"Chut," said Dubois; "I cannot permit sacrilege. If it were any use, I do not say; but this would be mere folly."

"Are they married, then?" asked the duke, drawing back.

"So much married, monseigneur, that the devil himself cannot unmarry them, without the assistance of the pope."

"I will write to Rome!"

"Take care, monseigneur; do not waste your influence; you will want it all, so get me made a cardinal."

"But," exclaimed the regent, "such a marriage is intolerable."

"Mésalliances are in fashion," said Dubois; "there is nothing else talked of — Louis XIV. made a mésalliance in marrying Madame de Maintenon, to whom you pay a pension as his widow — La Grande Mademoiselle made a mésalliance in marrying the Duc de Lauzun — you did so in marrying Mademoiselle de Blois, so much so, indeed, that when you announced the marriage to your mother, the princess palatine, she replied by a blow. Did not I do the same when I married the daughter of a village schoolmaster? After such good examples, why should not your daughter do so in her turn?”

“Silence, demon,” said the regent.

“Besides,” continued Dubois, “the Duchesse de Berry’s passion began to be talked about, and this will quiet the talk; for it will be known all through Paris to-morrow. Decidedly, monseigneur, your family begins to settle down.”

The Duc d’Orleans uttered an oath, to which Dubois replied by a laugh, which Mephistopheles might have envied.

“Silence!” cried a Swiss, who did not know who it was that was making a noise, and did not wish the pious exhortation of the chaplain to be lost.

“Silence, monseigneur,” repeated Dubois; “you are disturbing the ceremony.”

“If we are not silent,” replied the duke, “the next thing they will do will be to turn us out.”

“Silence!” repeated the Swiss, striking the flagstone with his halberd, while the Duchesse de Berry sent M. de Mouchy to learn who was causing the disturbance.

M. de Mouchy obeyed the orders of the duchess, and perceiving two persons who appeared to be concealing themselves in the shade, he approached them.

“Who is making this noise?” said he; “and who gave you permission to enter this chapel?”

“One who has a great mind to send you all out by the window,” replied the regent, “but who will content himself at present with begging you to order M. de Riom to set out at once for Cognac, and to intimate to the Duchesse de Berry that she had better absent herself from the Palais Royal.”

The regent went out, signing to Dubois to follow; and, leaving M. de Mouchy bewildered at his appearance, returned to the Palais Royal.

That evening the regent wrote a letter, and ringing for a valet:

“Take care that this letter is dispatched by an express courier to-morrow morning, and is delivered only to the person to whom it is addressed.”

That person was Madame Ursule, Superior of the Ursuline Convent at Clisson.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT PASSED THREE NIGHTS LATER AT EIGHT HUNDRED LEAGUES FROM THE PALAIS ROYAL.

Three nights after that on which we have seen the regent, first at Chelles and then at Meudon, a scene passed in the environs of Nantes which cannot be omitted in this history; we will therefore exercise our privilege of transporting the reader to that place.

On the road to Clisson, two or three miles from Nantes — near the convent known as the residence of Abelard — was a large dark house, surrounded by thick stunted trees; hedges everywhere surrounded the inclosure outside the walls, hedges impervious to the sight, and only interrupted by a wicket gate.

This gate led into a garden, at the end of which was a wall, having a small, massive, and closed door. From a distance this grave and dismal residence appeared like a prison; it was, however, a convent, full of young Augustines, subject to a rule lenient as compared with provincial customs, but rigid as compared with those of Paris.

The house was inaccessible on three sides, but the fourth, which did not face the road, abutted on a large sheet of water; and ten feet above its surface were the windows of the refectory.

This little lake was carefully guarded, and was surrounded by high wooden palisades. A single iron gate opened into it, and at the same time gave a passage to the waters of a small rivulet which fed the lake, and the water had egress at the opposite end.

In the summer, a small boat belonging to the garden was seen on the water, and was used for fishing.

Sometimes, also, in summer, on dark nights, the river-gate was mysteriously opened, and a man, wrapped in a large brown cloak, silently dropped into the little boat, which appeared to detach itself from its fastenings, then glided quietly along, and stopped under one of the barred windows of the refectory.

Soon a sound was heard, imitating the croaking of a frog or the cry of the owl so common there, and then a young girl would appear at the window, and pass her head through the opening between the bars, which were, however, too high for the man to reach. A low and tender conversation was then carried on, and at length, after a different hour and a different signal had been agreed upon for their next interview, they separated, the boat disappeared, the gate shut gently, and the young girl closed the window with a sigh.

But now it was the month of February, and in the terrible winter of 1719. The trees were powdered with hoar frost, and it was at this time impossible to glide quietly along in the little boat, for the lake was covered with ice. And yet, in this biting cold, in this dark, starless night, a cavalier ventured alone into the open country, and along a cross-road which led to Clisson. He threw the reins on the neck of his horse, which proceeded at a slow and careful pace.

Soon, however, in spite of his instinctive precaution, the poor animal, which had no light to guide him, struck against a stone and nearly fell. The rider soon perceived that his horse was lamed, and on seeing a trail of blood upon the snow, discovered that it was wounded.

The young man appeared seriously annoyed at the accident, and while deliberating what course to take, he heard a sound of horses' feet on the same road; and, feeling sure that if they were pursuing him he could not escape them, he remounted his horse, drew aside behind some fallen trees, put his sword under his arm, drew out a pistol, and waited.

The cavalcade soon appeared; they were four in number, and rode silently along, passing the group of trees which hid the cavalier, when suddenly they stopped. One who appeared the chief alighted, took out a dark lantern, and examined the road.

As they could not see far, they returned some steps, and, by the light of their lantern, perceived the cavalier.

The sound of cocking pistols was now heard.

"Hola!" said the cavalier with the wounded horse, taking the initiative; "who are you, and what do you want?"

"It is he," murmured two or three voices.

The man with the lantern advanced toward the cavalier.

"Advance one step further and you are a dead man," said the cavalier. "Declare your name at once, that I may know with whom I have to deal."

"Shoot no one, Gaston de Chanlay," replied the man with the lantern, calmly; "and put up your pistols."

"Ah! it is the Marquis de Pontcalec."

"Yes; it is I."

"And what do you come here for, may I ask?"

"To demand some explanation of your conduct. Approach and reply, if you please."

"The invitation is singular, marquis. If you wish for an answer, could you not ask it in other terms?"

"Approach, Gaston," said another voice; "we really wish to speak with you."

"A la bonne heure," said Chanlay, "I recognize you there, Montlouis; but I confess I am not accustomed to M. de Pontcalec's manner of proceeding."

"My manners are those of a frank and open Breton, monsieur," replied the marquis, "of one who has nothing to hide from his friends, and is willing to be questioned as freely as he questions others."

"I join Montlouis," said another voice, "in begging Gaston to explain amicably. Surely it is not our interest to quarrel among ourselves."

"Thanks, Du Couëdic," said De Chanlay, "I am of the same opinion; so here I am" — and sheathing his sword at these words, the young man issued from his retreat and approached the group.

"M. de Talhouet," said Pontcalec, in the tone of a man who has a right to issue commands, "watch that no one approaches."

M. de Talhouet obeyed, and rode round in a circle, keeping both eyes and ears open.

"And now," said the marquis, "let us put out our lantern, since we have found our man!"

"Messieurs," said De Chanlay, "all this seems to me somewhat strange. It appears that you were following me — that you were seeking for me, now you have found me, and may put out your lantern. What does it mean? If it is a joke, I confess I think both time and place ill-chosen."

"No, monsieur," replied Pontcalec, in his hard, dry voice, "it is not a joke; it is an interrogatory."

"An interrogatory?" said De Chanlay, frowning.

"An explanation, rather," said Montlouis.

"Interrogatory or explanation, it matters not," said Pontcalec, "the thing is too serious to argue about words. M. de Chanlay, I repeat, reply to our questions.”

“You speak roughly, Marquis de Pontcalec,” replied the chevalier.

“If I command, it is because I have the right to do so. Am I, or am I not, your chief?”

“Certainly you are; but that is no reason for forgetting the consideration which one gentleman owes to another.”

“Monsieur de Chanlay, all these objections seem to me like shuffling. You have sworn to obey — do so now.”

“I swore to obey,” replied the chevalier, “but not as a servant.”

“You swore to obey as a slave. Obey, then, or submit to the consequences of your disobedience!”

“Monsieur le Marquis — !”

“My dear Gaston,” cried Montlouis, “speak, I beg, as soon as possible: by a word you can remove all suspicion.”

“Suspicion!” cried Gaston, pale with anger, “am *I* suspected, then?”

“Certainly you are,” said Pontcalec, with his ordinary roughness. “Do you think if we did not suspect you we should amuse ourselves by following you on such a night as this?”

“Oh, that is quite another matter!” said Gaston, coldly; “tell me your suspicions — I listen.”

“Chevalier, remember the facts; we four were conspiring together, and we did not seek your aid; you offered it, saying, that besides being willing to aid in the public good, you had a private revenge to serve in this. Am I not right?”

“You are.”

“We received you — welcomed you as a friend, as a brother; we told you all our hopes, all our plans; nay, more — you were elected, by chance, the one to strike the glorious blow. Each one of us offered to take your part, but you refused. Is it not so?”

“You have spoken the strictest truth, marquis.”

“This very morning we drew the lots; this evening you should be on the road to Paris. Instead of that, where do we find you? on the road to Clisson, where are lodged the mortal enemies of Breton independence, where lives your sworn foe — the Marechal de Montesquieu.”

“Ah! monsieur,” said Gaston, scornfully.

“Reply by open words, and not by sneers: reply, M. de Chanlay, and quickly.”

“Reply, Gaston,” said Du Couëdic and Montlouis, imploringly.

“And to what am I to reply?”

“You are to account for your frequent absence during the last two months — for the mystery which surrounds you — for refusing, as you do, once or twice weekly, to join our nightly meetings. We confess, Gaston, all this has made us uneasy; by a word you can reassure us.”

“You see, monsieur, that you are proved guilty by hiding, instead of pursuing your course.”

“I did not pursue my course, because my horse was wounded; you may see the stains of blood upon the road.”

“But why did you hide?”

“Because I wished to know first who was pursuing me. Have I not the fear of being arrested, as well as yourselves?”

“And where are you going?”

“If you had followed my steps as you have done hitherto, you would have found that my path did not lead to Clisson.”

“Nor to Paris.”

“I beg,” said De Chanlay, “that you will trust me, and respect my secret — a secret in which not only my own honor, but that of another, is concerned. You do not know, perhaps — it may be exaggerated — how extreme is my delicacy on this point.”

“Then it is a love-secret,” said Montlouis. — — ”Yes, and the secret of a first love,” replied Gaston.

“All evasions,” cried Pontcalec.

“Marquis!” said Gaston, haughtily.

“This is not saying enough, my friend,” replied Du Couëdic. “How can we believe that you are going to a rendezvous in such weather, and that this rendezvous is not at Clisson — where, except the Augustine Convent, there is not a single house for two miles around.”

“M. de Chanlay,” said the Marquis de Pontcalec, in an agitated voice, “you swore to obey me as your chief, and to devote soul and body to our holy cause. Monsieur, our undertaking is serious — our property, our liberties, our lives and our honor are at stake; — will you reply clearly and freely to the questions which I put to you in the name of all, so as to remove all doubts? If not, Gaston de Chanlay — by virtue of that right which you gave me, of your own free will, over your life — if not, I declare, on my honor, I will blow your brains out with my own hand!”

A solemn silence followed these words; not one voice was raised to defend Gaston; he looked at each one in turn, and each one turned away from him.

“Marquis,” said the chevalier at length, in a tone of deep feeling, “not only do you insult me by suspicions, but you grieve me by saying that I can only remove those suspicions by declaring my secret. Stay,” added he, drawing a pocketbook from his coat, and hastily penciling a few words on a leaf which he tore out; “stay, here is the secret you wish to know; I hold it in one hand, and in the other I hold a loaded pistol. Will you make me reparation for the insult you have offered me? or, in my turn, I give you my word as a gentleman that I will blow my brains out. When I am dead, open my hand and read this paper; you will then see if I deserved your suspicions.”

And Gaston held the pistol to his head with the calm resolution which showed that he would keep his word.

“Gaston! Gaston!” cried Montlouis, while Du Couëdic held his arm; “stop, in Heaven’s name! Marquis, he would do as he said; pardon him, and he will tell us all. Is it not so, Gaston? You will not have a secret from your brothers, who beg you, in the names of their wives and children, to tell it them.”

“Certainly,” said the marquis, “I not only pardon but love him; he knows it well. Let him but prove his innocence, and I will make him every reparation, but, before that, nothing: he is young, and alone in the world. He has not, like us, wives and children, whose happiness and whose fortune he is risking; he stakes only his own life, and he holds that as cheaply as is usual at twenty years of age; but with his life he risks ours; and yet, let him say but one word showing a justification, and I will be the first to open my arms to him.”

“Well, marquis,” said Gaston, after a few moments’ silence, “follow me, and you shall be satisfied.”

“And we?” asked Montlouis and Du Couëdic.

“Come, also, you are all gentlemen; I risk no more in confiding my secret to all than to one.”

The marquis called Talhouet, who had kept good watch, and now rejoined the group, and followed without asking what had passed.

All five went on but slowly, for Gaston’s horse was lame; the chevalier guided them toward the convent, then to the little rivulet, and at ten paces from the iron gate he stopped.

“It is here,” said he.

“Here?”

“At the convent?”

“Yes, my friends; there is here, at this moment, a young girl whom I have loved since I saw her a year ago in the procession at the Fete Dieu at Nantes; she observed me also — I followed her, and sent her a letter.”

“But how do you see her?” asked the marquis.

“A hundred louis won the gardener over to my interest; he has given me a key to this gate; in the summer I come in a boat to the convent wall; ten feet above the water is a window, where she awaits me. If it were lighter, you could see it from this spot — and, in spite of the darkness, I see it now.”

“Yes, I understand how you manage in summer, but you cannot use the boat now.”

“True; but, instead, there is a coating of ice, on which I shall go this evening; perhaps it will break and engulf me; so much the better, for then, I hope, your suspicions would die with me.”

“You have taken a load from my breast,” said Montlouis.

“Ah! my poor Gaston, how happy you make me; for, remember, Du Couëdic and I answered for you.”

“Chevalier,” said the marquis, “pardon and embrace us.”

“Willingly, marquis; but you have destroyed a portion of my happiness.”

“How so?”

“I wished my love to have been known to no one. I have so much need of strength and courage! Am I not to leave her to-night forever?”

“Who knows, chevalier? You look gloomily at the future.”

“I know what I am saying, Montlouis.”

“If you succeed — and with your courage and sang-froid you ought to succeed — France is free: then she will owe her liberty to you, and you will be master of your own fate.”

“Ah! marquis, if I succeed, it will be for you; my own fate is fixed.”

“Courage, chevalier; meanwhile, let us see how you manage these love affairs.”

“Still mistrust, marquis?”

“Still; my dear Gaston, I mistrust myself: and, naturally enough; after being named your chief, all the responsibility rests on me, and I must watch over you all.”

“At least, marquis, I am as anxious to reach the foot of that wall as you can be to see me, so I shall not keep you waiting long.”

Gaston tied his horse to a tree; by means of a plank thrown across, he passed the stream, opened the gate, and then, following the palisades so as to get away from the stream, he stepped upon the ice, which cracked under his feet.

“In Heaven’s name,” cried Montlouis, “be prudent.”

“Look, marquis,” said Gaston.

“I believe you; I believe you, Gaston.”

“You give me fresh courage,” replied the chevalier.

“And now, Gaston, one word more. When shall you leave?”

“To-morrow at this time, marquis, I shall probably be thirty leagues on the way to Paris.”

“Come back and let us embrace, and say adieu.” — — ”With pleasure.”

Gaston retraced his steps, and was embraced cordially by each of the chevaliers, who did not turn away till they saw that he had arrived safely at the end of his perilous journey.

CHAPTER IV.

SHOWING HOW CHANCE ARRANGES SOME MATTERS BETTER THAN PROVIDENCE.

In spite of the cracking of the ice, Gaston pursued his way boldly, and perceived, with a beating heart, that the winter rains had raised the waters of the little lake, so that he might possibly be able to reach the window.

He was not mistaken; on giving the signal, the window was opened, then a head appeared nearly at the level of his own, and a hand touched his; it was the first time. Gaston seized it, and covered it with kisses.

"Gaston, you have come, in spite of the cold, and on the ice; I told you in my letter not to do so."

"With your letter on my heart, Helene, I think I can run no danger; but what have you to tell me? You have been crying!"

"Alas, since this morning I have done little else."

"Since this morning," said Gaston, with a sad smile, "that is strange; if I were not a man, I too should have cried since this morning."

"What do you say, Gaston?"

"Nothing, nothing; tell me, what are your griefs, Helene?"

"Alas! you know I am not my own mistress. I am a poor orphan, brought up here, having no other world than the convent. I have never seen any one to whom I can give the names of father or mother — my mother I believe to be dead, and my father is absent; I depend upon an invisible power, revealed only to our superior. This morning the good mother sent for me, and announced, with tears in her eyes, that I was to leave."

"To leave the convent, Helene?"

"Yes; my family reclaims me, Gaston."

"Your family? Alas! what new misfortune awaits us?"

"Yes, it is a misfortune, Gaston. Our good mother at first congratulated me, as if it were a pleasure; but I was happy here, and wished to remain till I became your wife. I am otherwise disposed of, but how?"

"And this order to remove you?"

“Admits of neither dispute nor delay. Alas! it seems that I belong to a powerful family, and that I am the daughter of some great nobleman. When the good mother told me I must leave, I burst into tears, and fell on my knees, and said I would not leave her; then, suspecting that I had some hidden motive, she pressed me, questioned me, and — forgive me, Gaston — I wanted to confide in some one; I felt the want of pity and consolation, and I told her all — that we loved each other — all except the manner in which we meet. I was afraid if I told her that, that she would prevent my seeing you this last time to say adieu.”

“But did you not tell, Helene, what were my plans; that, bound to an association myself for six months, perhaps for a year, at the end of that time, the very day I should be free, my name, my fortune, my very life, was yours?”

“I told her, Gaston; and this is what makes me think I am the daughter of some powerful nobleman, for then Mother Ursula replied: ‘You must forget the chevalier, my child, for who knows that your new family would consent to your marrying him?’“

”But do not I belong to one of the oldest families in Brittany? and, though I am not rich, my fortune is independent. Did you say this, Helene?”

“Yes; I said to her, ‘Gaston chose me, an orphan, without name and without fortune. I may be separated from him, but it would be cruel ingratitude to forget him, and I shall never do so.’“

“Helene, you are an angel. And you cannot then imagine who are your parents, or to what you are destined?”

“No; it seems that it is a secret on which all my future happiness depends; only, Gaston, I fear they are high in station, for it almost appeared as if our superior spoke to me with deference.”

“To you, Helene?”

“Yes.”

“So much the better,” said Gaston, sighing.

“Do you rejoice at our separation, Gaston?”

“No, Helene; but I rejoice that you should find a family when you are about to lose a friend.”

“Lose a friend, Gaston! I have none but you; whom then should I lose?”

“At least, I must leave you for some time, Helene.”

“What do you mean?”

"I mean that Fate has endeavored to make our lots similar, and that you are not the only one who does not know what the morrow may bring forth."

"Gaston! Gaston! what does this strange language mean?"

"That I also am subject to a fatality which I must obey — that I also am governed by an irresistible and superior power."

"You! oh heavens!"

"To a power which may condemn me to leave you in a week — in a fortnight — in a month; and not only to leave you, but to leave France."

"Ah, Gaston! what do you tell me?"

"What in my love, or rather in my egotism, I have dreaded to tell you before. I shut my eyes to this hour, and yet I knew that it must come; this morning they were opened. I must leave you, Helene."

"But why? What have you undertaken? what will become of you?"

"Alas! Helene, we each have our secret," said the chevalier, sorrowfully; "I pray that yours may be less terrible than mine."

"Gaston!"

"Were you not the first to say that we must part, Helene? Had not you first the courage to renounce me? Well; blessings on you for that courage — for I, Helene, had it not."

And at these last words the young man again pressed his lips to her hand, and Helene could see that tears stood in his eyes.

"Oh, mon Dieu!" murmured she, "how have we deserved this misery?"

At this exclamation Gaston raised his head. "Come," said he, as if to himself, "courage! It is useless to struggle against these necessities; let us obey without a murmur, and perhaps our resignation may disarm our fate. Can I see you again?"

"I fear not — I leave to-morrow."

"And on what road?"

"To Paris."

"Good heavens!" cried Gaston; "and I also."

"You, also, Gaston?"

"Yes, Helene; we were mistaken, we need not part."

"Oh, Gaston; is it true?"

"Helene, we had no right to accuse Providence; not only can we see each other on the journey, but at Paris we will not be separated. How do you travel?"

"In the convent carriage, with post horses and by short stages."

"Who goes with you?"

"A nun, who will return to the convent when she has delivered me over to those who await me."

"All is for the best, Helene. I shall go on horseback, as a stranger, unknown to you; each evening I may speak to you, or, if I cannot do so, I shall at least see you — it will be but a half separation."

And the two lovers, with the buoyant hopes of youth, after meeting with tears and sadness, parted with smiles and joyous confidence in the future. Gaston recrossed the frozen lake, and found, instead of his own wounded horse, that of Montlouis, and, thanks to this kindness, reached Nantes safely in less than three quarters of an hour.

CHAPTER V.

THE JOURNEY.

That very night Gaston made his will, and deposited it with a notary at Nantes.

He left everything to Helene de Chaverny; begged her, if he died, not to renounce the world, but to accept the career opening to her youth and beauty; but, as he was the last of his family, he begged her, in memeory of him, to call her first son Gaston.

He next went to see each of his friends, and once more told them that he believed the enterprise would be successful. Pontcalec gave him half a piece of gold and a letter, which he was to present to a certain Captain la Jonquiere, their correspondent at Paris, who would put Gaston in communication with the important persons he went to seek. He then put all the ready money he had into a valise, and, accompanied only by an old servant named Owen, in whom he had great confidence, he set out from Nantes.

It was midday, a bright sun shone on the stream, and sparkled on the icicles which hung from the leafless trees, as Gaston made his way along the deserted road, looking in vain for anything resembling the convent carriage.

The servant appeared much more anxious to quicken their pace than Gaston himself did, for to him the journey was fraught with annoyances, and he was so anxious to arrive at that Paris of which he had heard such wonderful tales, that, had it been possible, he would willingly have added wings to their horses’ feet.

Gaston, however, traveled slowly as far as Oudan, but the convent carriage proceeded more slowly still. At Oudan he halted; he chose the Char Couronne, a house which had some windows overlooking the road, and which, moreover, was the best inn in the village.

While his dinner was preparing, Gaston, in spite of the cold, remained in the balcony; but in vain he looked for the carriage he so much wished to see.

Then he thought that perhaps Helene had preceded him, and was already in the inn. He went at once to a window at the back, overlooking the courtyard, to inspect the carriages standing there.

His attention was arrested by seeing, not the carriage, but his servant, Owen, speaking earnestly to a man dressed in gray and wrapped in a sort of military cloak, who, after a short conversation, mounted his horse and rode off with the air of a man to whom speed is of the utmost importance, as Gaston heard his steps along the road to Paris.

At this moment the servant raised his eyes, and began busily brushing the snow from his boots and clothes.

Gaston signed to him to approach.

"Who were you talking with, Owen?"

"To a man, M. Gaston."

"Who is that man?"

"A traveler — a soldier, who was asking his way."

"His way; to what place?"

"To Rennes."

"But you could not tell him, for you do not know this place."

"I asked the landlord, monsieur."

"Why could not he ask himself?"

"Because he had had a quarrel with him about the price of his dinner, and did not wish to speak to him again."

"Hum," said Gaston.

Nothing was more natural than this, yet Gaston became thoughtful; but he quickly threw off his suspicions, accusing himself of becoming timid at a time when he most needed courage; his brow remained clouded, however, for the carriage did not appear.

He thought at one moment that Helene might have chosen another road in order to part from him without noise or quarrel, but he soon concluded that it was only some accident which delayed her; he sat down again to table, though he had finished his dinner, and when Owen appeared to clear away, "Some wine," said he. Owen had already removed a half empty bottle.

"Some wine?" repeated the servant in astonishment, for Gaston usually drank but little.

"Yes, some wine; is there anything surprising in that?"

"No, monsieur," replied Owen.

And he transmitted the order for a second bottle of wine to the waiter. Gaston poured out a glass, drank it, then a second.

Owen stared.

Then, thinking it both his duty and his interest to prevent his master's finishing the bottle —

"Monsieur," said he, "I have heard that if you are riding, it is bad to drink when it is very cold. You forgot that we have a long way to go, and that it will be getting still colder, and, if we wait much longer, we shall get no post-horses. It is nearly three o'clock, now, and at half-past four it will be dark."

This behavior surprised Gaston.

"You are in a very great hurry, Owen," said he; "have you a rendezvous with the man who was asking his way of you?"

"Monsieur knows that to be impossible," replied Owen, "since he is going to Rennes, and we to Paris."

However, under the scrutinizing gaze of his master, Owen turned red, when suddenly, at the sound of wheels, Gaston ran to the window. It was the dark carriage.

At this sight Gaston darted from the room.

It was then Owen's turn to run to the window to see what it was that had so much interested his master. He saw a green and black carriage stop, from which the driver alighted and opened the door; then he saw a young lady in a cloak go into the hotel, followed by an Augustine sister; the two ladies, announcing that they should only remain to dine, asked for a room.

But to reach this room they had to cross a public salon, in which Gaston stood near the fire-place; a rapid but meaning glance was exchanged between him and Helene, and, to Gaston's great satisfaction, he recognized in the driver of the carriage the convent gardener. He let him pass, however, unnoticed, but as he crossed the yard to go to the stable, he followed him.

He accosted the gardener, who told him that he was to take the two ladies to Rambouillet, where Helene would remain, and then he was to take back Sister Therese to Clisson.

Gaston, raising his eyes suddenly, saw Owen watching him, and this curiosity displeased him.

"What are you doing there?" asked he.

"Waiting for orders," said Owen.

"Do you know that fellow?" asked Gaston of the gardener.

“M. Owen, your servant? Of course I do; we are from the same place.”

“So much the worse,” murmured Gaston.

“Oh, Owen is an honest fellow.”

“Never mind,” said Gaston; “not a word of Helene, I beg.”

The gardener promised; and, indeed, it was his own interest to keep the secret, for, had it been discovered that he had given Gaston the key, he would have lost his place.

After a hasty meal, the carriage was again ordered, and at the door Gaston met the ladies, and handed them in. Chanlay was not quite unknown to the sister, so she thanked him graciously as he handed her in.

“Monsieur,” said Owen, behind the chevalier, “our horses are ready.”

“One more glass,” said Gaston, “and I shall start.”

To Owen’s great surprise, Gaston returned to the room and ordered a third bottle — for Owen had removed the second, of which Gaston had only drank his two glasses.

Gaston remained about a quarter of an hour, and then, having no further motive for waiting, he set out.

When they had ridden a short distance, they saw the carriage imbedded in a deep rut, where, in spite of the efforts of the horses and the gardener, it remained stationary. Gaston could not leave him in such a dilemma, and the gardener, recognizing Owen, called to him for aid. The two riders dismounted, opened the carriage door, took out the ladies, and succeeded in freeing the carriage, so that they were able to proceed.

An acquaintanceship was thus established, and the poor nun, who was very timid, inquired of Gaston if the road were safe. Gaston reassured her, and said that he and his servant would escort them, and his offer was at once accepted with thanks.

Meanwhile Helene had played her part admirably, showing that a young girl, however simple and naïve, has the instinct of dissimulation, which only requires opportunity to develop itself.

Gaston rode along close to the door, for the road was narrow, and Sister Therese asked him many questions. She learned that he was called the Chevalier de Livry, and was the brother of one of the young ladies who had been in the convent school, but who was now married to Montlouis.

They stopped, as previously arranged, at Ancenis.

The gardener confirmed what Gaston had said of his relationship to Mademoiselle de Livry, so that Sister Therese had no suspicion, and was very friendly with him.

She was, in fact, delighted, on starting the next morning, to find him already mounted, and to receive his accustomed politeness in handing them into the carriage. As he did so, he slipped a note into Helene's hand, and by a glance she told him he should receive a reply.

Gaston rode by the side of the carriage, for the road was bad, and assistance was frequently required, either to free a wheel, to assist the ladies to alight for the purpose of walking up a steep ascent, or some of the many accidents of a journey. "My dear Helene," said Sister Therese, several times, "what would have become of us without the aid of this gentleman?"

Before arriving at Angers, Gaston inquired at what hotel they were going to stay, and, finding that it was the same at which he intended to put up, he sent Owen on before to engage apartments.

When they arrived, he received a note, which Helene had written during dinner. She spoke of her love and happiness as though they were secure and everlasting.

But Gaston looked on the future in its true light. Bound by an oath to undertake a terrible mission, he foresaw sad misfortunes after their present short-lived joy. He remembered that he was about to lose happiness, just as he had tasted it for the first time, and rebelled against his fate. He did not remember that he had sought that conspiracy which now bound him, and which forced him to pursue a path leading to exile or the scaffold, while he had in sight another path which would lead him direct to happiness.

It is true that when Gaston joined the conspiracy he did not know Helene, and thought himself alone in the world. At twenty years of age he had believed that the world had no pleasure for him; then he had met Helene, and the world became full of pleasure and hope: but it was too late; he had already entered on a career from which he could not draw back.

Meanwhile, in the preoccupation of his mind, Gaston had quite forgotten his suspicions of Owen, and had not noticed that he had spoken to two cavaliers similar to the one whom he had seen the first evening; but Owen lost nothing of what passed between Gaston and Helene.

As they approached the end of their journey, Gaston became sad; and when the landlord at Chartres replied to the question of Sister Therese, "To-morrow you may, if you choose, reach Rambouillet," it was as though he had said, "To-morrow you separate forever."

Helene, who loved as women love, with the strength, or rather the weakness, to sacrifice everything to that love, could not understand Gaston's passive submission to the decrees of Providence, and she would have preferred to have seen him make some effort to combat them.

But Helene was in this unjust to Gaston; the same ideas tormented him. He knew that at a word from him Helene would follow him to the end of the world — he had plenty of gold — it would be easy for Helene one evening, instead of going to rest, to go with him into a post-chaise, and in two days they would be beyond the frontier, free and happy, not for a day or a month, but forever.

But one word, one little word, opposed itself to all this. That word was honor. He had given his oath, and he would be disgraced if he did not keep it.

The last evening Helene expected that Gaston would speak, but in vain, and she retired to rest with the conviction that Gaston did not love her as she loved him.

That night Gaston never slept, and he rose pale and despairing. They breakfasted at a little village. The nun thought that in the evening she would begin her homeward journey toward her beloved convent. Helene thought that it was now too late to act, even if Gaston should speak. Gaston thought that he was about to lose forever the woman whom he loved.

About three o'clock in the afternoon they all alighted to walk up a steep hill, from the summit of which they could see before them a steeple and a number of houses. It was Rambouillet; they did not know it, but they felt that it was.

Gaston was the first to break the silence. "There," said he, "our paths separate. Helene, I implore you preserve the recollection of me, and, whatever happens, do not condemn or curse me."

"Gaston, you only speak of the most terrible things. I need courage, and you take it from me. Have you nothing joyful to tell me? I know the present is dark, but is the future also as dreadful? Are there not many years, and therefore many hopes, to look forward to? We are young — we love one another; are there no means of struggling against the fate which threatens us? Oh, Gaston! I feel in myself a great strength, and if you but say — but no, I am mad; it is I who suffer, and yet I who console."

"I understand you, Helene — you want a promise, do you not? Well, judge if I am wretched; I dare not promise. You tell me to hope, and I can but despair. If I had ten years, five years, one year, at my own disposal, I would offer them to you, Helene, and think myself blessed, but from the moment I leave you, we lose each other. From to-morrow morning I belong no more to myself.”

“Oh!” cried Helene, “unhappy that I am, did you then deceive me when you said you loved me; are you pledged to another?”

“At least, my poor Helene,” said Gaston, “on this point I can reassure you. I have no other love.”

“Then we may yet be happy, Gaston, if my new family will recognize you as my husband.”

“Helene, do you not see that every word you utter stabs me to the heart?”

“But at least tell me what it is.”

“Fate, which I cannot escape; ties which I dare not break.”

“I know of none such,” cried the young girl. “I am promised a family, riches, station, and a name; and yet, Gaston, say but one word and I leave them all for you. Why, then, will you not do as much for me?”

Gaston answered not; and at this moment Sister Therese rejoined them, and they again got into the carriage. When they neared the town, the nun called Gaston, told him that, perhaps, some one might come to meet Helene, and that a stranger should not be seen with them. Gaston bowed silently and sadly, and turned to leave them.

Helene was no ordinary woman; she saw Gaston’s distress. “Is it adieu, or au revoir?” cried she, boldly.

“Au revoir,” said Gaston, and he rode off quickly.

CHAPTER VI.

A ROOM IN THE HOTEL AT RAMBOUILLET.

Gaston went away without saying how they were to meet again; but Helene thought that he would certainty manage that, and she contented herself with watching him as long as she could. Ten minutes later the carriage stopped at the Tigre-Royal. A woman, who was waiting, came out hastily, and respectfully assisted the ladies to alight, and then guided them through the passages of the hotel, preceded by a valet carrying lights.

A door opened, Madame Desroches drew back to allow Helene and Sister Therese to pass, and they soon found themselves on a soft and easy sofa, in front of a bright fire.

The room was large and well furnished, but the taste was severe, for the style called Rococo was not yet introduced. There were four doors; the first was that by which they had entered — the second led to the dining-room, which was already lighted and warmed — the third led into a richly-appointed bedroom — the fourth did not open.

Helene admired the magnificence of all around her — the quiet and respectful manner of the servants; while Sister Therese rejoiced, when she saw the smoking supper, that it was not a fast day.

Presently Madame Desroches returned, and approaching the sister, handed her a letter. She opened it, and read as follows:

“Sister Therese may pass the night at Rambouillet, or leave again at once, according to her own wish. She will receive two hundred louis offered to the convent by Helene, and will give up her charge to the care of Madame Desroches, who is honored by the confidence of Helene’s parents.”

At the bottom of the letter, instead of a signature, was a cipher, which the sister compared with that on a letter which she had brought from Clisson. The identity being proved —

“My child,” said she, “I leave you after supper.”

“So soon!” said Helene, to whom Therese was now the only link to her past life.

“Yes, my child. It is at my option to sleep here, but I prefer to return at once; for I wish to be again at home, where the only thing wanting to my happiness will be your presence.”

Helene threw herself on Therese’s neck, weeping. She recalled her youth, passed so happily among affectionate companions, and she again saw the towers and steeples of her former residence.

They sat down to table, and Sister Therese hastily partook of some refreshment, then embraced Helene, who wished to accompany her to the carriage; but Madame Desroches begged her not to do so, as the hotel was full of strangers.

Helene then asked permission to see the poor gardener, who had been their escort, once more. This man had become a friend to her, and she quitted him and Therese sadly.

Madame Desroches, seeing that Helene felt vainly in her pocket, said, “Does mademoiselle want anything?”

“Yes,” said Helene; “I should wish to give a souvenir to this good man.”

Madame Desroches gave Helene twenty-five louis, and she, without counting them, slipped them into the gardener’s hand, who overwhelmed her with tears and thanks.

At length they were forced to part, and Helene, hearing the sound of their carriage driving away, threw herself on a sofa, weeping.

Madame Desroches reminded her that she had eaten nothing. Helene insisted that she should sup with her. After her meal she showed Helene her bedroom, saying, “Will mademoiselle ring when she requires her femme-de-chambre; for this evening mademoiselle will receive a visit.”

“A visit!” cried Helene.

“Yes, mademoiselle; from a relation.”

“And is it the one who watches over me?”

“From your birth, mademoiselle.”

“Oh, mon Dieu!” cried Helene; “and he is coming?”

“He is most anxious to know you.”

“Oh,” murmured Helene; “I feel as if I should faint.”

Madame Desroches ran to her, and supported her.

“Do you feel so much terror,” asked she, “at seeing one who loves you?”

“It is not terror, it is agitation,” said Helene. “I did not know that it would be to-night; and this important news quite overcomes me.”

“But I have not told you all: this person is necessarily surrounded by mystery.”

“Why so?”

“I am forbidden to reply to that question, mademoiselle.”

“What necessity can there be for such precautions with a poor orphan like me?”

“They are necessary, believe me.”

“But in what do they consist?”

“Firstly, you may not see the face of this person; so that you may not recognize him if you meet him in the world.”

“Then he will come masked?”

“No, mademoiselle: but the lights will be extinguished.”

“Then we shall be in darkness?”

“Yes.”

“But you will remain with me, Madame Desroches.”

“No, mademoiselle; that is expressly forbidden.”

“By whom?”

“By the person who is coming.”

“But do you, then, owe such absolute obedience to this person?”

“More than that, mademoiselle, I owe him the deepest respect.”

“Is he, then, of such high station?”

“He is of the very highest in France.”

“And he is my relation?”

“The nearest.”

“For Heaven’s sake, Madame Desroches, do not leave me in uncertainty on this point.”

“I have already told you, mademoiselle, that there are some questions to which I am expressly forbidden to reply,” and she was about to retire.

“Why do you leave me?” asked Helene.

“I leave you to your toilet.”

“But, madame — ”

Madame Desroches made a low, ceremonious curtsey, and went out of the room, closing the door behind her.

CHAPTER VII.

A SERVANT IN THE ROYAL LIVERY. — MONSEIGNEUR LE DUC D'ORLEANS.

While the things which we have related were passing in the parlor of the hotel Tigre-Royal, in another apartment of the same hotel, seated near a large fire, was a man shaking the snow from his boots, and untying the strings of a large portfolio. This man was dressed in the hunting livery of the house of Orleans; the coat red and silver, large boots, and a three-cornered hat, trimmed with silver. He had a quick eye, a long pointed nose, a round and open forehead, which was contradicted by thin and compressed lips.

This man murmured to himself some phrases which he interrupted by oaths and exclamations, which seemed less the result of words than thoughts.

"Come, come," said he, "M. de Montaran did not deceive me, and our Bretons are hard at the work; but for what earthly reason can he have come by such short stages? He left at noon on the 11th, and only arrived on the evening of the 21st. This probably hides some new mystery, which will be explained by the fellow recommended by Montaran, and with whom my people were in communication on the journey. Hola!"

And he rang a silver bell. A man, dressed in gray, like those we have seen on the route, appeared.

"Ah! it is you, Tapin?"

"Yes, monseigneur; the affair being important, I thought it better to come myself."

"Have you questioned the men you placed on the road?"

"Yes, monseigneur; but they know nothing but the places at which our conspirators stopped; in fact, that is all they were told to learn."

"I will try to learn from the servant. What sort of man is he?"

"Oh, a mischievous simpleton, half Norman, half Breton; a bad fellow."

"What is he about now?"

"Serving his master's supper."

"Whom, I hope, they have placed as I desired?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"In a room without curtains?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"And you have made a hole in the shutter?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Well, then, send me the servant, and remain within call."

The man in the red coat consulted his watch.

"Half-past eight," said he; "at this hour Monseigneur the Regent returns to St. Germains and asks for Dubois; as Dubois is not there, he rubs his hands and prepares for some folly. Rub your hands, Philippe d'Orleans, and amuse yourself at your pleasure, for the danger is not at Paris, but here. We shall see if you will laugh at my secret police this time. Ah! here is our man."

At this moment Tapin introduced Owen.

"Here is the person you wished to see," said he.

Owen remained standing, trembling, near the door, while Dubois wrapped himself in a large cloak, which left only the upper part of his face visible to him on whom he fixed his cat-like eyes.

"Approach, my friend," said Dubois.

In spite of the cordiality of this invitation, it was given in so harsh a voice that Owen would have preferred being at a greater distance from this man, who looked at him so strangely.

"Well, fellow," said Dubois, seeing that he did not stir, "did you not hear me?"

"Yes, monseigneur," said Owen.

"Then why do you not obey?"

"I did not know you spoke to me."

And Owen then stepped forward.

"You have received fifty louis to speak the truth to me," continued Dubois.

"Pardon, monseigneur," said Owen, who began to recover his composure; "I have not received them; they were promised to me, but — "

Dubois took a handful of gold from his pocket, counted fifty louis, and placed them in a pile on the table.

Owen looked at the pile with an expression of which one would have supposed his dull countenance incapable.

"Good," thought Dubois; "he is avaricious."

In reality, the fifty louis had always appeared very doubtful to Owen. He had betrayed his master with scarcely a hope of obtaining his reward; and now the promised gold was before his eyes.

"May I take them?" asked Owen, spreading his hand toward them.

"Wait a moment," said Dubois, who amused himself by exciting that cupidity which any but a peasant would have concealed; "we will make a bargain."

"What is it?" asked Owen.

"Here are the fifty louis."

"I see them," said Owen, passing his tongue over his lips, like a thirsty dog.

"At every answer you make to a question of mine, I either add ten louis if it is important, or take them away if it is unimportant and stupid."

Owen started; he did not like the terms.

"Now," said Dubois, "let us talk. What place have you come from?"

"Direct from Nantes."

"With whom?"

"With the Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay."

These being preliminary questions, the pile remained undisturbed.

"Listen!" said Dubois.

"I am all attention."

"Did your master travel under his own name?"

"He set out in his own name, but changed it on the journey."

"What name did he take?"

"M. de Livry."

Dubois added ten louis, but as they would not stand on the others, he commenced a second pile.

Owen uttered a joyful cry.

"Oh," said Dubois, "do not exult yet. We are not near the end. Is there a M. de Livry at Nantes?"

"No, monseigneur; but there is a Demoiselle de Livry."

"Who is she?"

"The wife of M. de Montlouis, an intimate friend of my master."

"Good," said Dubois, adding ten louis; "and what was your master doing at Nantes?"

"What most young men do; he hunted, danced, and so on."

Dubois took away ten louis. Owen shuddered.

"Stop," said he, "he did something else."

"Ah! what was that?"

"I do not know," replied Owen.

Dubois held the ten louis in his hand.

"And since his departure, what has he done?"

"He passed through Oudon, Ancenis, Le Mans, Nogent, and Chartres."

Dubois stretched out his hand, and took up another ten louis.

Owen uttered a dolorous cry.

"And did he make no acquaintance on the route?"

"Yes; with a young lady from the Augustine convent at Clisson, who was traveling with a sister of the convent, named Therese."

"And what was the young lady called?"

"Mademoiselle Helene de Chaverny."

"Helene! A promising name. Doubtless, she is your master's mistress?"

"I do not know," said Owen; "he would not have told me."

"He is a shrewd fellow," said Dubois, taking ten louis from the fifty.

Owen trembled: four such answers, and he would have betrayed his master for nothing.

"And these ladies are going to Paris with him?"

"No, monseigneur; they stop at Rambouillet."

"Ah," said Dubois.

The tone of this exclamation gave Owen some hope.

"Come," said Dubois, "all this is not very important, but one must encourage beginners."

And he added ten louis to the pile.

"Sister Therese," continued Owen, "is already gone home."

"So that the young lady remains alone?"

"No," answered Owen.

"How so?"

"A lady from Paris awaited her."

"From Paris?"

"Yes."

"Do you know her name?"

"I heard Sister Therese call her Madame Desroches."

"Madame Desroches!" cried Dubois, and he began another pile with ten louis.

"Yes," replied Owen, delighted.

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I am; she is a tall, thin, yellow-looking woman."

Dubois added ten louis. Owen thought that if he had made an interval between each adjective he might have had twenty louis.

"Thin, tall, yellow," repeated Dubois; "just so."

"From forty to forty-five," added Owen.

"Exactly," said Dubois, adding ten louis.

"In a silk dress, with large flowers on it."

"Very good," said Dubois.

Owen saw that his questioner knew enough about the lady, and waited.

"And you say that your master made acquaintance with the young lady en route?"

"Yes, monsieur, but I think it was a farce."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that they knew each other before; and I am sure of one thing, that my master waited for her three hours at Oudon."

"Bravo," said Dubois, adding ten louis; "we shall make something of you."

"You do not wish to know anything more, then?" asked Owen, extending his hand toward the two piles of gold.

"Stop," said Dubois; "is the young lady pretty?"

"Beautiful as an angel," answered Owen.

"And, no doubt, they made an appointment to meet in Paris?"

"No, monsieur, I think they said adieu forever."

"Another farce."

"I do not think so, monsieur; my master was so sad when they separated."

"And they are not to meet again?"

"Yes, once more, I think, and all will be over."

"Well, take your money; and remember that if you mention one word of this, in ten minutes you will be a dead man."

Owen snatched the money, which disappeared in his pocket instantly.

"And now," said he, "may I go?"

"No, idiot; from this moment you belong to me, for I have bought you, and you will be more useful to me at Paris than elsewhere."

"In that case I will remain, monsieur, I promise."

"There is no need to promise."

At this moment the door opened, and Tapin appeared, looking very much agitated.

“What has happened now?” asked Dubois.

“Something very important, monseigneur; but send away this man.”

“Return to your master,” said Dubois, “and if he writes to any one whatever, remember that I am most anxious to see his writing.”

Owen went out, delighted to be set free.

“Well, Tapin,” said Dubois, “what is it?”

“Monseigneur, after the hunt at St. Germains, his royal highness, instead of returning to Paris, sent away every one, and gave orders to proceed to Rambouillet.”

“The regent coming to Rambouillet!”

“He will be here in half an hour, and would have been here now, if hunger had not luckily obliged him to enter the chateau and procure some refreshment.”

“And what is he coming to Rambouillet for?”

“I do not know, monseigneur, unless it be for the young girl who has just arrived with a nun, and who is now in the pavilion of the hotel.”

“You are right, Tapin; it is doubtless for her; and Madame Desroches, too. Did you know that Madame Desroches was here?”

“No, monseigneur, I did not.”

“And are you sure that your information is correct, my dear Tapin?”

“Oh, monseigneur, it was from L’Eveille, whom I placed near his royal highness, and what he says is gospel truth.”

“You are right,” said Dubois, who seemed to know the qualities of this man, “if it be L’Eveille, there is no doubt.”

“The poor fellow has lamed his horse, which fell near Rambouillet.”

“Thirty louis for the horse; he may gain what he can of it.”

Tapin took the thirty louis.

“You know the situation of the pavilion, do you not?”

“Perfectly.”

“Where is it?”

“One side looks on the second courtyard; the other on a deserted lane.”

“Place men in the courtyard and in the lane, disguised as stablemen, or how you please; let no one enter the pavilion but monseigneur and myself; the life of his royal highness is at stake.”

“Rest easy, monseigneur.”

“Do you know our Breton?”

“I saw him dismount.”

“Do your men know him?”

“They all saw him on the road.”

“Well, I recommend him to you.”

“Shall we arrest him?”

“Certainly not; he must be allowed to go where he pleases, and act as he pleases, and he must have every opportunity to do so. If he were arrested now, he would tell nothing, and our plans would be disconcerted; no, no, these plans must hatch.”

“Hatch what, monseigneur?” said Tapin, who appeared to be on confidential terms with Dubois.

“My archbishop’s miter, M. Lecocq,” said Dubois, “and now to your work; I go to mine.”

Both left the room and descended the staircase, but separated at the door; Lecocq went along the Rue de Paris; and Dubois, slipping along by the wall, went to peep through the hole in the shutter.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE UTILITY OF A SEAL.

Gaston had just supped; for at his age, whether a man be in despair or in love, nature asserts her rights. He was leaning on the table thoughtfully. The lamp threw a light over his face, and enabled Dubois to gratify his curiosity.

He looked at him with an attention almost alarming: his quick eye darted — his lip curled with a smile, which gave one the idea of a demon smiling at the sight of one of those victims who seem to have vowed their own perdition.

While looking, he murmured, “Young, handsome, black eyes, proud lips — he is a Breton, he is not corrupted, like the conspirators of Cellamare, by the soft glances of the ladies at court; — then the other spoke of carrying off, dethroning, but this one — *diable*, this one; and yet,” continued he, after a pause, “I look in vain for traces of cunning on that open brow. I see no Machiavelism in the corners of that mouth, so full of loyalty and honor; yet no doubt all is arranged to surprise the regent on his visit to this Clisson demoiselle. Who will say again that Bretons have dull brains?

“No,” said Dubois, after another pause, “it cannot be so. It is impossible that this young man with his calm sad face should be ready in a quarter of an hour to kill a man, and that man the first prince of the blood. No, I cannot believe in such sang-froid; and yet the regent has kept this amourette secret even from me; he goes out to hunt at St. Germains, announces aloud that he shall sleep at the Palais Royal, then all at once gives counter orders, and drives to Rambouillet. At Rambouillet, the young girl waits, and is received by Madame Desroches; who can she be watching for, if not for the regent? and this young girl is the mistress of the chevalier — but is she? — Ah! we must learn. We must find out how far we can depend on Owen,” and Dubois left his observatory and waited on the staircase — he was quite hidden in the shade, and he could see Gaston’s door in the light.

The door presently opened, and Owen appeared.

He held a letter in his hands, and after hesitating a minute, he appeared to have taken his determination, and mounted the staircase.

"Good," said Dubois, "he has tasted the forbidden fruit, and he is mine."

Then, stopping Owen: "Give me the letter which you were bringing me, and wait here."

"How did you know I had a letter?" asked Owen, bewildered.

Dubois shrugged his shoulders, took the letter, and disappeared.

In his room he examined the seal; the chevalier, who had no wax, had used that on the bottle, and had sealed it with the stone of a ring.

Dubois held the letter above the candle, and the wax melted. He opened the letter and read:

"Dear Helene — Your courage has doubled mine; manage so that I can enter the house, and you shall know my plans."

"Oh!" said Dubois, "it seems she does not know them yet. Things are not as far advanced as I supposed."

He resealed the letter with one of the numerous rings which he wore, and which resembled that of the chevalier, and calling Owen —

"Here," said he, "is your master's letter; deliver it faithfully, bring me the answer, and you shall have ten louis."

"Ah!" thought Owen, "has this man a mine of gold?" And he went off.

Ten minutes after he returned with the reply.

It was on scented and ornamented paper, sealed with the letter H.

Dubois opened a box, took out a kind of paste in which he was about to take the impression of the seal, when he observed that from the manner in which it was folded, he could read it without opening. It was as follows:

"The person who sent for me at Bretagne is coming to meet me here instead of waiting at Paris, so impatient is he, I am told, to see me. I think he will leave again to-night. Come to-morrow morning before nine. I will tell you all that has passed, and then we can arrange how to act."

"This," said Dubois, still taking Helene for the chevalier's accomplice, "makes it clearer. If this is the way they bring up young ladies at Clisson, I congratulate them and monseigneur, who, from her age, concludes her to be simple and ingenuous. Here," said he to Owen, "here is the letter, and your ten louis."

Owen took them.

At this moment ten o'clock struck, and the rolling of a carriage was heard. Dubois went to the window, and saw it stop at the hotel door.

In the carriage was a gentleman whom Dubois at once recognized as Lafare, captain of his royal highness's guards. "Well," said he, "he is more prudent than I thought; but where is he? Ah!”

This exclamation was uttered at the sight of a man dressed in the same red livery which he himself concealed under his cloak, and who followed the carriage mounted on a superb Spanish jenet, which, however, he could not have ridden long, for while the carriage horses were covered with foam, this one was quite fresh.

Lafare at once demanded a room and supper; meanwhile the man dismounted, threw the reins to a page, and went toward the pavilion.

“Well,” said Dubois, “all this is as clear as a mountain stream; but how is it that the face of the chevalier does not appear? is he too much occupied with his chicken to have heard the carriage? Let us see. As to you, monseigneur,” continued Dubois, “be assured; I will not disturb your tete-à-tete. Enjoy at your pleasure this commencement of ingenuity, which promises such happy results. Ah! monseigneur, it is certain that you are short-sighted.”

Dubois went down, and again took up his post at his observatory. As he approached it, Gaston rose, after putting his note in his pocket-book.

“Ah,” said Dubois, “I must have that pocket-book. I would pay high for it. He is going out, he buckles on his sword, he looks for his cloak; where is he going? Let us see: to wait for his royal highness’s exit? No, no, that is not the face of a man who is going to kill another; I could sooner believe he was about to spend the evening under the windows of his sweetheart.

“Ah, if he had that idea it would be a means — ”

It would be difficult to render the expression which passed over the face of Dubois at this moment.

“Yes, but if I were to get a sword-thrust in the enterprise, how monseigneur would laugh; bah! there is no danger: our men are at their post, and besides, nothing venture, nothing gain.”

Encouraged by this reflection, Dubois made the circuit of the hotel, in order to appear at one end of the little lane as Gaston appeared at the other.

As he had expected, at the end of the lane he found Tapin, who had placed L’Eveille in the courtyard; in two words he explained his project. Tapin pointed out to Dubois one man leaning on the step of an outer door, a second was playing a kind of Jew’s harp, and seemed an itinerant musician, and there was another, too well hidden to be seen.

Dubois, thus sure of support, returned into the lane.

He soon perceived a figure at the other end, and at once recognized the chevalier, who was too thoughtful even to notice that he was passing any one.

Dubois wanted a quarrel, and he saw that he must take the initiative. He turned and stopped before the chevalier, who was trying to discover which were the windows of the room in which Helene was.

“My friend,” said he roughly, “what are you doing at this hour before this house?”

Gaston was obliged to bring back his thoughts to the materialism of life.

“Did you speak to me, monsieur?” said he.

“Yes,” replied Dubois, “I asked what you were doing here.”

“Pass on,” said the chevalier; “I do not interfere with you; do not interfere with me.”

“That might be,” said Dubois, “if your presence did not annoy me.”

“This lane, narrow as it is, is wide enough for both, monsieur; walk on one side, and I will walk on the other.”

“I wish to walk alone,” said Dubois, “therefore, I beg you will choose some other window; there are plenty at Rambouillet to choose from.”

“And why should I not look at these windows if I choose?” asked Chanlay.

“Because they are those of my wife,” replied Dubois. — — ”Of your wife!”

“Yes; of my wife, who has just arrived from Paris, and of whom I am jealous, I warn you.”

”Diable,” murmured Gaston; “he must be the husband of the person to whom Helene has been given in charge;” and in order to conciliate a person who might be useful to him —

“Monsieur,” said he politely, “in that case I am willing to leave a place where I was walking without any object in view.”

“Oh,” thought Dubois, “here is a polite conspirator; I must have a quarrel.”

Gaston was going away.

“You are deceiving me, monsieur,” said Dubois.

The chevalier turned as though he had been bitten by a serpent; however, prudent for the sake of Helene, and for the mission he had undertaken, he restrained himself.

“Is it,” said he, “because I was polite that you disbelieve my word?”

"You spoke politely because you were afraid; but it is none the less true that I saw you looking at that window."

"Afraid — I afraid!" cried Chanlay, facing him; "did you say that I was afraid?"

"I did," replied Dubois.

"Do you, then, seek a quarrel?"

"It appears so. I see you come from Quimper — Corentin."

"Paques-Dieu!" said Gaston, drawing his sword, "draw!"

"And you, off with your coat," said Dubois, throwing off his cloak, and preparing to do the same with his coat.

"Why so?" asked the chevalier.

"Because I do not know you, monsieur, and because those who walk at night frequently have their coat prudently lined with a shirt of mail."

At these words the chevalier's cloak and coat were thrown aside; but, at the moment when Gaston was about to rush on his adversary, the four men appeared and seized him.

"A duel, monsieur," cried they, "in spite of the king's prohibition!" and they dragged him toward the door.

"An assassination," murmured Gaston, not daring to cry out, for fear of compromising Helene; "cowards!"

"We are betrayed, monsieur," said Dubois, rolling up Gaston's cloak and coat, and putting them under his arm; "we shall meet again to-morrow, no doubt."

And he ran toward the hotel, while they shut up Gaston in the lower room.

Dubois ran up the staircase and into his room, where he opened the precious pocket-book. He found in one pocket a broken coin and a man's name. This coin was evidently a sign of recognition, and the name was probably that of the man to whom Gaston was addressed, and who was called Captain la Jonquiere. The paper was oddly folded.

"La Jonquiere," said Dubois; "we have our eyes on *him* already."

He looked over the rest of the pocket-book — there was nothing.

"It is little," said Dubois, "but it is enough."

He folded a paper like the other, took the name, and rang the bell.

Some one knocked; the door was fastened inside. "I forgot," said Dubois, opening it, and giving entrance to Monsieur Tapin.

"What have you done with him?"

“He is in the lower room, and watched.”

“Take back his cloak and coat to the place where he threw them; make your excuses, and set him free. Take care that everything is in his pockets, so that he may suspect nothing. Bring me my coat and cloak.”

Monsieur Tapin bowed low, and went to obey his orders.

CHAPTER IX.

THE VISIT.

All this passed, as we have said, in the lane under Helene's windows. She had heard the noise; and, as among the voices she thought she distinguished that of the chevalier, she ran anxiously to the window, when, at the same moment, Madame Desroches appeared.

She came to beg Helene to go into the drawing-room, as the visitor had arrived.

Helene started, and nearly fell; her voice failed her, and she followed, silent and trembling.

The room into which Madame Desroches led her was without any light, except what was thrown on the carpet by the last remains of a fire. Madame Desroches threw some water over the flame, and left the room entirely dark.

Begging Helene to have no fear, Madame Desroches withdrew. The instant after, Helene heard a voice behind the fourth door, which had not yet opened.

She started at the sound, and involuntarily made a few steps toward the door.

"Is she ready?" said the voice.

"Yes, monseigneur," was the reply.

"Monseigneur!" murmured Helene; "who is coming, then?"

"Is she alone?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Is she aware of my arrival?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"We shall not be interrupted?"

"Monseigneur may rely upon me."

"And no light?"

"None whatever."

The steps approached, then stopped.

"Speak frankly, Madame Desroches," said the voice. "Is she as pretty as they said?"

“More beautiful than your highness can imagine.”

“Your highness! who can he be?” thought Helene, much agitated.

At this moment the door creaked on its hinges and a heavy step approached.

“Mademoiselle,” said the voice, “I beg you to receive and hear me.”

“I am here,” said Helene, faintly.

“Are you frightened?”

“I confess it, mon — Shall I say ‘monsieur’ or ‘monseigneur’?”

“Say ‘my friend.’“

At this moment her hand touched that of the unknown.

“Madame Desroches, are you there?” asked Helene, drawing back.

“Madame Desroches,” said the voice, “tell mademoiselle that she is as safe as in a temple before God.”

“Ah! monseigneur, I am at your feet, pardon me.”

“Rise, my child, and seat yourself there. Madame Desroches, close all the doors; and now,” continued he, “give me your hand, I beg.”

Helene’s hand again met that of the stranger, and this time it was not withdrawn.

“He seems to tremble also,” murmured she.

“Tell me are you afraid, dear child?”

“No,” replied Helene; “but when your hand clasps mine, a strange thrill passes through me.”

“Speak to me, Helene,” said the unknown, with an expression of tenderness. “I know already that you are beautiful, but this is the first time I have heard your voice. Speak — I am listening.”

“But have you seen me, then?” asked Helene.

“Do you remember that two years ago the abbess had your portrait taken?”

“Yes, I remember — an artist came expressly from Paris.”

“It was I who sent him.”

“And was the portrait for you?”

“It is here,” said the unknown, taking from his pocket a miniature, which Helene could feel, though she could not see it.

“But what interest could you have in the portrait of a poor orphan?”

“Helene, I am your father’s friend.”

“My father! Is he alive?”

“Yes.”

“Shall I ever see him?”

“Perhaps.”

“Oh!” said Helene, pressing the stranger’s hand, “I bless you for bringing me this news.”

“Dear child!” said he.

“But if he be alive,” said Helene, “why has he not sought out his child?”

“He had news of you every month; and though at a distance, watched over you.”

“And yet,” said Helene, reproachfully, “he has not seen me for sixteen years.”

“Believe me, none but the most important reasons would have induced him to deprive himself of this pleasure.”

“I believe you, monsieur; it is not for me to accuse my father.”

“No; it is for you to pardon him if he accuses himself.”

“To pardon him!” cried Helene.

“Yes; and this pardon, which he cannot ask for himself, I ask in his name.”

”Monsieur,” said Helene, “I do not understand you.’“

“Listen, then, and give me back your hand.”

“Here it is.”

“Your father was an officer in the king’s service; at the battle of Nerwinden, where he charged at the head of the king’s household troops, one of his followers, called M. de Chaverny, fell near him, pierced by a ball. Your father wished to assist him, but the wound was mortal, and the wounded man, who knew that it was so, said, ‘Think not of me, but of my child.’ Your father pressed his hand as a promise, and the man fell back and died, as though he only waited this assurance to close his eyes. You are listening, are you not, Helene?”

“Oh! need you ask such a question?” said the young girl.

“At the end of the campaign, your father’s first care was for the little orphan. She was a charming child, of from ten to twelve years, who promised to be as beautiful as you are. The death of M. de Chaverny, her father, left her without support or fortune; your father placed her at the convent of the Faubourg Saint Antoine, and announced that at a proper age he should give her a dowry.”

“I thank God,” cried Helene, “for having made me the child of a man who so nobly kept his promise.”

“Wait, Helene,” said the unknown, “for now comes the time when your father will not receive your praises.”

Helene was silent.

The unknown continued: “Your father, indeed, watched over the orphan till her eighteenth year. She was an adorable young girl, and his visits to the convent became longer and more frequent than they should have been: your father began to love his protegée. At first he was frightened at his own love, for he remembered his promise to her dying father. He begged the superior to look for a suitable husband for Mademoiselle de Chaverny, and was told that her nephew, a young Breton, having seen her, loved her, and wished to obtain her hand.”

“Well, monsieur?” asked Helene, hearing that the unknown hesitated to proceed.

“Well; your father’s surprise was great, Helene, when he learned from the superior that Mademoiselle de Chaverny had replied that she did not wish to marry, and that her greatest desire was to remain in the convent where she had been brought up, and that the happiest day of her life would be that on which she should pronounce her vows.”

“She loved some one,” said Helene.

“Yes, my child, you are right — alas! we cannot avoid our fate — Mademoiselle de Chaverny loved your father. For a long time she kept her secret, but one day, when your father begged her to renounce her strange wish to take the veil, the poor child confessed all. Strong against his love when he did not believe it returned, he succumbed when he found he had but to desire and to obtain. They were both so young — your father scarcely twenty-five, she not eighteen — they forgot the world, and only remembered that they could be happy.”

“But since they loved,” said Helene, “why did they not marry?”

“Union was impossible, on account of the distance which separated them. Do you not know that your father is of high station?”

“Alas! yes,” said Helene, “I know it.”

“During a year,” continued he, “their happiness surpassed their hopes; but at the end of that time you came into the world, and then — ”

“Well?” asked the young girl, timidly.

“Your birth cost your mother’s life.”

Helene sobbed.

“Yes,” continued the unknown, in a voice full of emotion, “yes, Helene, weep for your mother; she was a noble woman, of whom, through his griefs, his pleasures, even his follies — your father retains a tender recollection; he transferred to you all his love for her.”

“And yet,” said Helene, “he consented to remove me from him, and has never again seen me.”

”Helene, on this point pardon your father, for it was not his fault. You were born in 1703, at the most austere period of Louis XIV.’s reign; your father was already out of favor with the king, or rather with Madame de Maintenon; and for your sake, as much or more than for his, he sent you into Bretagne, confiding you to Mother Ursula, superior of the convent where you were brought up. At length, Louis XIV. being dead, and everything having changed through all France, it is decided to bring you nearer to him. During the journey, however, you must have seen that his care was over you, and when he knew that you were at Rambouillet, he could not wait till to-morrow — he is come to you here, Helene.”

“Oh, mon Dieu!” cried Helene, “is this true?”

“And in seeing, or rather in listening to you, he thinks he hears your mother — the same accent in the voice. Helene, Helene, that you may be happier than she was is his heartfelt prayer!”

“Oh, heavens!” cried Helene, “this emotion, your trembling hand. Monsieur, you said my father is come to meet me.”

“Yes.”

“Here at Rambouillet?”

“Yes.”

“You say he is happy to see me again?”

“Oh yes, very happy!”

“But this happiness was not enough, is it not so? He wished to speak to me, to tell me himself the story of my life — that I may thank him for his love — that I may fall at his feet, that I may ask his blessing. Oh!” cried Helene, kneeling, “oh, I am at your feet; bless me, father!”

“Helene, my child, my daughter!” cried the unknown, “not at my feet, but in my arms!”

“My father, my father!” was Helene’s only reply.

“And yet,” continued he, “I came with a different intention, prepared to deny all, to remain a stranger to you; but having you so near me, pressing your hand, hearing your voice, I had not the strength; but do not make me repent my weakness, and let secrecy — ”

“I swear by my mother’s grave,” cried Helene.

“That is all I desire,” cried the unknown. “Now listen, for I must leave you.”

“What, already!”

“It must be so.”

“Speak, then, my father. I am ready to obey you.”

“To-morrow you leave for Paris; there is a house there destined for you. Madame Desroches will take you there, and at the very first moment that I can do so, I will come there to see you.”

“Soon, I hope, for do not forget that I am alone in the world.”

“As soon as possible;” and pressing his lips to Helene’s forehead, the unknown imprinted on it one of those kisses as sweet to the heart of a father as a kiss of love to the heart of a lover.

Ten minutes later Madame Desroches entered with a light. Helene was on her knees praying; without rising, she signed to Madame Desroches to place the light on the chimney-piece, which that lady did, and then retired.

Helene, after praying for some time, rose, and looked around her as though for some evidence that the whole was not a dream; her own emotion, however, assured her that it was really a great event in her life which had taken place. Then the thought of Gaston rose to her mind; this father whom she had so dreaded to see — this father, who himself had loved so ardently and suffered so deeply, would not do violence to her love; besides, Gaston was a scion of an ancient house, and beyond all this, she loved him, so that she would die if she were separated from him, and her father would not wish her death.

The obstacles on Gaston’s side could be but the right, and would doubtless be easily overcome, and Helene fell asleep to dream of a happy and smiling future.

Gaston, on his part, set at liberty with many apologies from those who pretended to have mistaken him for another person, went back to fetch his coat and cloak, which he was overjoyed to find where he had left them; he anxiously opened his pocket-book — it was as he had left it, and for greater safety he now burned the address of La Jonquiere. He gave his orders for the next day to Owen and retired.

Meanwhile, two carriages rolled away from the door of the Tigre-Royal; in the first were two gentlemen in traveling costume, preceded and followed by outriders.

In the second was a single traveler, wrapped in a large cloak; this carriage followed close behind the other as far as the Barriere de l’Etoile, where they separated, and while the first stopped at the Palais Royal, the other drew up at the Rue de Valois.

CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH DUBOIS PROVES THAT HIS POLICE WAS BETTER ORGANIZED AT AN EXPENSE OF 300,000 FRANCS THAN THE GENERAL POLICE FOR THREE MILLIONS.

Whatever might have been the fatigues of the preceding night, the Duc d’Orleans still gave his mornings to business. He generally began to work with Dubois before he was dressed; then came a short and select levée, followed again by audiences, which kept him till eleven or twelve o’clock; then the chiefs of the councils (La Valliere and Le Blanc) came to give an account of their espionage, then Torcy, to bring any important letters which he had abstracted. At half-past two the regent had his chocolate, which he always took while laughing and chatting. This lasted half an hour, then came the audience hour for ladies, after that he went to the Duchesse d’Orleans, then to the young king, whom he visited every day, and to whom he always displayed the greatest reverence and respect.

Once a week he received foreign ministers, and on Sundays heard mass in his private chapel.

At six, on council days, at five on others, all business was over; then the regent would go to the opera, or to Madame de Berry, with whom, however, he had quarreled now, on account of her marriage with Riom. Then came those famous suppers.

They were composed of from ten to fifteen persons, and the regent’s presence among them sometimes added to their license and freedom, but never restrained it. At these suppers, kings, ministers, chancellors, ladies of the court, were all passed in review, discussed, abused; everything might be said, everything told, everything done; provided only that it were wittily said, told, or done. When all the guests had arrived, the doors were closed and barred, so that it was impossible to reach the regent until the following morning, however urgent might be the necessity.

Dubois was seldom of the number, his bad health forbade it; and this was the time chosen to pick him to pieces, at which the regent would laugh as heartily as any one. Dubois knew that he often furnished the amusement of these suppers, but he also knew that by the morning the regent invariably forgot what had been said the night before, and so he cared little about it.

Dubois, however, watched while the regent supped or slept, and seemed indefatigable; he appeared to have the gift of ubiquity.

When he returned from Rambouillet, he called Maitre Tapin, who had returned on horseback, and talked with him for an hour, after which he slept for four or five, then, rising, he presented himself at the door of his royal highness; the regent was still asleep.

Dubois approached the bed and contemplated him with a smile which at once resembled that of an ape and a demon.

At length he decided to wake him.

"Hola, monseigneur, wake up!" he cried.

The duke opened his eyes, and seeing Dubois, he turned his face to the wall, saying —

"Ah! is that you, abbe; go to the devil!"

"Monseigneur, I have just been there, but he was too busy to receive me, and sent me to you."

"Leave me alone; I am tired."

"I dare say, the night was stormy."

"What do you mean?" asked the duke, turning half round.

"I mean that the way you spent the night does not suit a man who makes appointments for seven in the morning."

"Did I appoint you for seven in the morning?"

"Yes, yesterday morning, before you went to St. Germains."

"It is true," said the regent.

"Monseigneur did not know that the night would be so fatiguing."

"Fatiguing! I left table at seven."

"And afterward?"

"Well! what afterward?"

"Are you satisfied, monseigneur, and was the young person worth the journey?"

"What journey?"

"The journey you took after you left the table at seven."

"One would think, to hear you, that from St. Germains here, was a long distance."

"No, monseigneur is right; it is but a few steps, but there is a method of prolonging the distance."

“What is that?”

“Going round by Rambouillet.”

“You are dreaming, abbe.”

“Possibly, monseigneur. I will tell you my dream; it will at least prove to your highness that even in my dreams I do not forget you.”

“Some new nonsense.”

“Not at all. I dreamed that monseigneur started the stag at Le Treillage, and that the animal, after some battling, worthy of a stag of high birth, was taken at Chambourcy.”

“So far, your dream resembles the truth; continue, abbe.”

“After which, monseigneur returned to St. Germains, sat down to table at half-past five, and ordered that the carriage without arms should be prepared and harnessed, with four horses, at half-past seven.”

“Not bad, abbe, not bad; go on.”

“At half-past seven, monseigneur dismissed every one except Lafare, with whom he entered the carriage. Am I right?”

“Go on; go on.”

“The carriage went toward Rambouillet, and arrived there at a quarter to ten, but at the entrance of the town it stopped, Lafare went on in the carriage to the Tigre-Royal, monseigneur following as an outrider.”

“Here your dream becomes confused, abbe.”

“No, no, not at all.”

“Continue, then.”

“Well, while Lafare pretended to eat a bad supper, which was served by waiters who called him Excellency, monseigneur gave his horse to a page and went to a little pavilion.”

“Demon, where were you hidden?”

“I, monseigneur, have not left the Palais Royal, where I slept like a dormouse, and the proof is, that I am telling you my dream.”

“And what was there in the pavilion?”

“First, at the door, a horrible duenna, tall, thin, dry, and yellow.”

“Dubois, I will recommend you to Desroches, and the first time she sees you, she will tear your eyes out.”

“Then inside, mon Dieu! inside.”

“You could not see that, even in a dream, abbe.”

“Monseigneur, you may take away the 300,000 francs which you allow me for my secret police, if — by their aid — I did not see into the interior.”

“Well, what did you see?”

“Ma foi, monseigneur, a charming little Bretonne, sixteen or seventeen years old, beautiful, coming direct from the Augustine convent at Clisson, accompanied to Rambouillet by one of the sisters, whose troublesome presence was soon dispensed with, was it not?”

“Dubois, I have often thought you were the devil, who has taken the form of an abbe to ruin me.”

“To save you, monseigneur, to save you.”

“To save me; I do not believe it.”

“Well,” said Dubois, “are you pleased with her?”

“Enchanted, Dubois; she is charming.”

“Well, you have brought her from so far, that if she were not, you would be quite cheated.”

The regent frowned, but, reflecting that probably Dubois did not know the rest, the frown changed to a smile.

”Dubois,” said he, “certainly, you are a great man.”

“Ah, monseigneur, no one but you doubts it, and yet you disgrace me —”

“Disgrace you!”

“Yes, you hide your loves from me.”

“Come, do not be vexed, Dubois.”

“There is reason, however, you must confess, monseigneur.”

“Why?”

“Why did you not tell me you wanted a Bretonne. Could not I have sent for one?”

“Yes.”

“Yes, of course I could.”

“As good?”

“Yes, and better. You think you have found a treasure, perhaps?”

“Hola, hola!”

“Well, when you know what she is, and to what you expose yourself.”

“Do not jest, abbe, I beg.”

“Ah! monseigneur, you distress me.”

“What do you mean?”

“That you are taken by a glance, a single night fascinates you, and there is no one to compare to the new comer. Is she then very pretty?”

“Charming.”

"And discreet: virtue itself, I suppose."

"You are right."

"Well, I tell you, monseigneur, you are lost."

"I?"

"Yes; your Bretonne is a jade."

"Silence, abbe."

"Why silence?"

"I forbid you to say another word."

"Monseigneur, you, too, have had a dream — let me explain it."

"Monsieur Joseph, I will send you to the Bastille."

"As you please, monseigneur, but still you must know that this girl — "

"Is my daughter, abbe."

Dubois drew back stupefied.

"Your daughter; and who is her mother?"

"An honest woman, who had the honor of dying without knowing you."

"And the child?"

"The child has been concealed, that she might not be sullied by the looks of such creatures as you."

Dubois bowed, and retired, respectfully.

The regent looked triumphant.

"Ah!" said Dubois, who had not quite closed the door, "I thought this plot would bring me my archbishop's miter — if I am careful, it will bring me my cardinal's hat."

CHAPTER XI.

RAMBOUILLET AGAIN.

At the appointed hour Gaston presented himself at Helene’s domicile, but Madame Desroches made some difficulty about admitting him; Helene, however, said firmly that she was quite at liberty to judge for herself what was right, and that she was quite determined to see M. de Livry, who had come to take leave of her. It will be remembered that this was the name which Gaston had assumed during the journey, and which he intended to retain, except when with those connected with his mission to Paris.

Madame Desroches went to her room somewhat out of humor, and even attempted to overhear the conversation, but Helene bolted the outer door.

“Ah, Gaston,” said she, “I have been expecting you. I did not sleep last night.”

“Nor I, Helene; but I must admire all this splendor.”

Helene smiled.

“And your head-dress — how beautiful you are, like this.”

“You do not appear much pleased.”

Gaston made no reply, but continued his investigations.

“These rich hangings, these costly pictures, all prove that your protectors are opulent, Helene.”

“I believe so,” said Helene, smiling, “yet I am told that these hangings, and this gilding, which you admire, are old and unfashionable, and must be replaced by new.”

“Ah, Helene, you will become a great lady,” said Gaston, sighing; “already I am kept waiting for an audience.”

“My dear Gaston, did you not wait for hours in your little boat on the lake?”

”You were then in the convent. I waited the abbess’s pleasure.”

“That title is sacred, is it not?”

“Yes.”

“It gives security, imposes respect and obedience.”

“Doubtless.”

“Well, judge of my delight. Here I find the same protection, the same love, only more powerful, more lasting.”

“What!” exclaimed Gaston, surprised.

“I find — ”

“Speak, in Heaven’s name.”

“Gaston, I have found a father.”

“A father — ah, my dear Helene, I share your joy; what happiness! a father to watch over my Helene, my wife!”

“To watch from afar.”

“Is he separated from you?”

“Alas, it seems the world separates us.”

“Is it a secret?”

“A secret even to me, or you may be sure you should know all. I have no secrets from you, Gaston.”

“A misfortune of birth — a prescription in your family — some temporary obstacle?” — — ”I do not know.”

“Decidedly, it is a secret; but,” said he, smiling, “I permit you to be discreet with me, if your father ordered it. However, may I ask some more questions?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Are you pleased? Is your father one you can be proud of?”

“I think so, his heart seems noble and good. His voice is sweet and melodious.”

“His voice! but is he like you?”

“I do not know. I have not seen him.”

“Not seen him?”

“No, it was dark.”

“Your father did not wish to see his daughter; and you so beautiful; oh, what indifference!”

“No, Gaston, he is not indifferent; he knows me well; he has my portrait — that portrait which made you so jealous last spring.”

“But I do not understand this.”

“It was dark, I tell you.”

“In that case one might light these girandoles,” said Gaston.

“That is well, when one wishes to be seen; but when one has reasons for concealment — ”

"What!" interrupted Gaston; "what reason can a father have for hiding from his own daughter?"

"Excellent reasons, I believe, and you should understand them better than I can."

"Oh, Helene!" said Gaston, "with what terrible ideas you fill my mind."

"You alarm me, Gaston!"

"Tell me — what did your father speak of!"

"Of his deep love for me."

Gaston started.

"He swore to me that in future I should be happy; that there should be no more uncertainty as to my fate, for that he would despise all those considerations which had induced him as yet to disown me as a daughter."

"Words, words; but what proof did he give you? Pardon me these questions, Helene. I dread misfortune. I wish that for a time your angel's innocence could give place to the sharpness and infernal sagacity of a fiend; you would then understand me. I should not need to subject you to this interrogatory, which now is so necessary."

"I do not understand your question, Gaston. I do not know how to reply to you."

"Did he show you much affection?"

"Yes."

"But in the darkness, when he wished to speak to you?"

"He took my hand, and his trembled the most."

Gaston clenched his hands with rage.

"He embraced you paternally, did he not?"

"He gave me a single kiss on the forehead, which I received on my knees."

"Helene!" he cried, "my fears were not groundless; you are betrayed — you are the victim of a snare. Helene, this man who conceals himself, who fears the light, who calls you his child, is not your father."

"Gaston, you distress me."

"Helene, angels might envy your innocence; but on earth all is abused, even angels are insulted, profaned, by men. This man, whom I will know, whom I will seize and force to have confidence in your love and honor, shall tell me — if he be not the vilest of beings — whether I am to call him father, or kill him as a wretch!"

"Gaston, your brain is wandering; what can lead you to suspect such treachery? And, since you arouse my suspicions, since you hold a light over those ignoble labyrinths of the human heart which I refused to contemplate, I will speak to you with the same freedom. Was I not in this man's power? Is not this house his? Are not the people by whom I am surrounded devoted to his orders? Gaston, if you love me, you will ask my pardon for what you have thought and said of my father."

Gaston was in despair.

"Do not destroy one of the purest and holiest joys I have ever tasted. Do not poison the happiness of a life which I have often wept to think was solitary and abandoned, without other affection than that of which Heaven forbids us to be lavish. Let my filial ties compensate for the remorse which I sometimes feel for loving you almost to idolatry."

"Helene, forgive me," cried Gaston. "Yes, you are right; I sully your pure joys by my contact, and it may be the noble affection of your father, but in Heaven's name, Helene, give some heed to the fears of my experience and my love. Criminal passions often speculate on innocent credulity. The argument you use is weak. To show at once a guilty love would be unlike a skillful corrupter; but to win you by a novel luxury pleasing to your age, to accustom you gradually to new impressions, to win you at last by persuasion, is a sweeter victory than that of violence. Helene, listen to my prudence of five-and-twenty years — I say my prudence, for it is my love that speaks, that love which you should see so humble, so devoted, so ready to accept a father whom I knew to be really your parent."

Helene made no answer.

"I implore you," continued Gaston, "not to take any determination now, but to watch everything around you. Suspect the perfumes which are given you, the wine which you are offered — everything, Helene. Watch over yourself, you are my happiness, my honor, my life."

"My friend, I will obey you; this will not keep me from loving my father."

"Adore him, Helene, if I am wrong."

"You are a noble friend, Gaston. We are agreed then?"

"At the slightest suspicion write to me."

"Write! You leave me then?"

"I must go to Paris on business. I shall be at the hotel Muids d'Amour, Rue des Bourdonnais. Write down this address, and do not show it to any one.”

“Why so many precautions?”

Gaston hesitated.

“Because, if your devoted protector were known, his plans for aiding you might be frustrated in case of bad intentions.”

“You are somewhat mysterious, Gaston. I have a father who conceals himself, and a lover — this word I can hardly speak — who is going to do the same.”

“But my intentions, you know,” said Gaston, attempting to force a laugh.

“Ah, Madame Desroches is coming back. She thinks our interview too long. I am as much under tutelage as at the convent.”

Gaston imprinted a kiss on the hand Helene held out to him. As Madame Desroches approached, Helene made a formal curtsey, which Gaston returned by an equally formal bow.

Gaston left for Paris. Owen awaited him with impatience, and this time could not reproach his master with being slow, for in three hours they were in Paris.

CHAPTER XII.

CAPTAIN LA JONQUIERE.

There was, as the reader has learned, in the Rue des Bourdonnais, a hotel where one could lodge, eat, and drink.

In his nocturnal interview with Dubois, Tapin had received the famous name of La Jonquiere, and had transmitted it to L’Eveille, who had passed it to all the chiefs of police, who had begun to search for the suspected officer in all the equivocal houses in Paris. The conspiracy of Cellamare, which we have related in a history of the Chevalier d’Harmental, had taught them that everywhere conspirators were to be found.

It was, however, by luck or by cleverness, Maitre Tapin himself who, in the Rue des Bourdonnais and in the hotel Muids d’Amour, found La Jonquiere, who was then a nightmare to Dubois.

The landlord took Tapin to be an old attorney’s clerk, and replied to his questions politely, that “the Captain la Jonquiere was in the hotel, but was asleep.”

Tapin asked no more. La Jonquiere was asleep, therefore he was in bed, for it was only six in the morning; if he were in bed, then he must be stopping at the inn.

Tapin went back to the Palais Royal, and found Dubois, who had just left the regent. A number of false La Jonquieres had already been discovered by his emissaries. One was a smuggler, called Captain la Jonciere, whom L’Eveille had found and arrested. A second was La Jonquille, sergeant in the French guards, and many others.

“Well,” said Dubois, when Tapin had made his report, “you have found the real Captain la Jonquiere, then?”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“Is he called La Jonquiere?”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“L-a, la; J-o-n, jon; q-u-i-e-r-e, quiere?” continued he, spelling the word.

“La Jonquiere,” repeated Tapin.

“A captain.”

"Yes, monseigneur."

"What is he doing?"

"Waiting and drinking."

"That must be he," said Dubois; "and does he pay?"

He evidently attached great importance to the question.

"Very well, monsieur."

"A la bonne heure, Tapin. You have some sense."

"Monseigneur," said Tapin, modestly, "you flatter me; it is quite clear, if he had not paid he could not have been a dangerous man."

Dubois gave him ten louis as a reward, gave him some further orders, and set out at once to go to the Rue des Bourdonnais.

Let us say a word regarding the interior of the hotel. It was partly hotel, partly public house; the dwelling rooms were on the first-floor, and the tavern rooms on the ground-floor.

The principal of these, the common room, had four oak tables, and a quantity of red and white curtains; some benches along the walls, some glasses on a sideboard, some handsomely framed pictures, all blackened and rendered nauseous by smoke, completed the tout ensemble of this room, in which sat a fat man, with a red face, thirty-five or forty years old, and a little pale girl of twelve or fourteen.

This was the landlord and his only daughter and heiress.

A servant was cooking a ragout in the kitchen.

As the clock struck one, a French guard entered, and stopping at the threshold, murmured, "Rue des Bourdonnais, Muids d'Amour, in the common room, to sit at the table on the left, and wait."

Then, in accordance with this, the worthy defender of his country, whistling a tune and twirling his mustache, seated himself at the place indicated.

Scarcely had he had time to seat himself and strike his fist on the table, which, in the language of all taverns, means "Some wine," than a second guard, dressed exactly like the first, appeared at the door, murmured some words, and, after a little hesitation, seated himself by the other.

The two soldiers looked at each other, and both exclaimed:

"Ah!" which in all languages means surprise.

"It is you, Grippart," said one.

"It is you, L'Eulevant," said the other.

"What are you doing in this tavern?"

"And you?"

"I do not know."

"Nor I."

"You come here, then?"

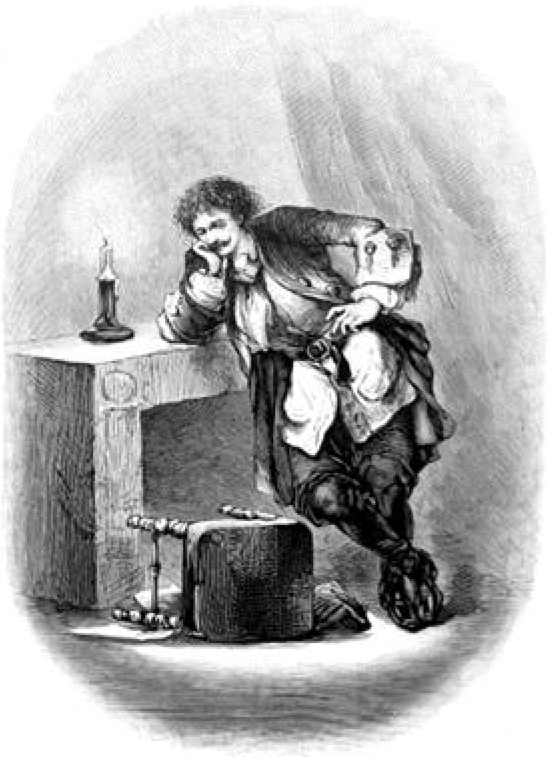

"Under orders."

"That is my case."

"And you are waiting?"

"For a man who is coming."

"With a watchword?"

"And on this watchword?"

"I am to obey as though it were Tapin himself."

"Just so; and, in the mean time, I have a pistole for drink."

"I have a pistole also, but I was not told to drink."

"And it being doubtful?"

"In doubt, as the sage says, I do not abstain."

"In that case, let us drink."

And he raised his hand to call the landlord, but it was not necessary, for he was standing near, expecting orders.

"Some wine," cried the two guards.

"Orleans," added one; "I like that."

The landlord brought an inclosed bottle.

The two drinkers filled their glasses, emptied them, and then placed them on the table, each with a different grimace, but both intended to express the same opinion.

When the host was gone, one said to the other:

“You know more of this than you have told me?”

“I know it concerns a certain captain,” answered the other.

“Yes; just so. But I suppose we shall have aid to arrest him?”

“Doubtless; two to one is not enough.”

“You forget the man with the watchword.”

“Ah! I think I hear something.”

“Yes; some one coming downstairs.”

“Chut!”

“Silence!”

And the soldiers, much more occupied by their commission than if they had really been soldiers, kept an eye turned toward the staircase while they drunk.

They were not deceived; the step on the staircase approached, and they saw, first, some legs, then a body, then a head descending. The legs were covered with fine silk stockings and white cashmere breeches, the body with a tight blue coat, and the head with a three-cornered hat, jauntily placed over one ear; his epaulets left no doubt that he held the rank of captain.

This man, who was, in fact, Captain la Jonquiere, was about five feet five, rather fat, and had a sagacious air; one would almost have supposed that he suspected spies in the two soldiers, for he turned his back to them at once, and entered into conversation with his host in a somewhat assumed tone and manner.

“In truth,” said he, “I should have dined here, and this delicious perfume of stewed kidneys would have tempted me, but some bons vivants are expecting me at the ‘Galoubet de Paphos.’ Perhaps a young man may come here this morning, but I could not wait any longer. Should he ask for a hundred pistoles, say that I shall be back in an hour, if he will wait.”

“Very well, captain,” said the host.

“Some wine,” said the guard.

“Ah,” said the captain, throwing an apparently careless glance at the drinkers, “here are some soldiers who have but little respect for an epaulet.”

Then, turning to the host —

“Serve these gentlemen; you see they are in a hurry.”

“Ah,” said one, rising, “as soon as monsieur will permit.”

“Certainly I permit it,” said La Jonquiere; and he stepped toward the door.

“But, captain,” said the host, stopping him, “you have not told me the name of the gentleman you expect.”

La Jonquiere hesitated. After a moment:

“Monsieur Gaston de Chanlay,” he replied.

“Gaston de Chanlay,” repeated the host. “I hope I shall remember the name. Gaston — Gascon. Ah, I shall remember Gascon. Chanlay; ah, I shall think of Chandelle.”

“That is it,” repeated La Jonquiere, gravely; “Gascon de Chandelle.”

And he went out, but not without looking round the corners of the street and the angles of the houses.

He had not taken a hundred steps in the Rue St. Honoré before Dubois presented himself at the door. He had passed La Jonquiere, but, never having seen him, could not recognize him.

He presented himself boldly, dressed as a shopkeeper.

CHAPTER XIII.

MONSIEUR MOUTONNET, DRAPER AT ST. GERMAIN-EN-LAYE.

Dubois at once accosted the host.

“Monsieur,” said he, timidly, “does Captain la Jonquiere lodge here? I wish to speak to him.”

“You wish to speak to him?” said the host, examining the new-comer from head to foot.

“If possible,” said Dubois.

“Are you sure that is the person you want?” asked the host, who did not think this was the man La Jonquiere expected.

“I think so,” said Dubois modestly.

“A short, fat man?”

“Yes.”

“Drinks his brandy neat?”

“That is the man.”

“Always ready with his cane if he is not attended to directly!”

“Ah, that is Captain la Jonquiere!”

“You know him, then?”

“Not in the least,” said Dubois.

“True, for you must have met him at the door.”

“Diable! Is he out?” said Dubois, with a start of ill-humor badly repressed. “Thank you,” and he called up an amiable smile.

“He has not been gone five minutes.”

“But he is coming back?”

“In an hour.”

“May I wait for him, monsieur?”

“Certainly, if you take something.”

“Give me some brandy-cherries,” said Dubois. “I never drink wine except with meals.”

The two guards exchanged a contemptuous smile.

The host hastened to bring the cherries.

“Ah!” said Dubois; “only five! At St. Germain-en-Laye they give six.”

“Possibly, monsieur; for at St. Germain-en-Laye they have no excise to pay.”

“Yes, I forgot that,” and he began to eat a cherry, which he could not, however, accomplish without a grimace.

“Where does the captain lodge?” asked Dubois.

“There is the door of his room; he preferred the ground-floor.”

“Yes,” murmured Dubois; “the windows look into the public road.”

“And there is a door opening into the Rue des Deux-Boules.”

“Oh, how convenient! And does not the noise annoy him?”

“There is another room above: sometimes he sleeps in one, sometimes in the other.”

“Like Denis the tyrant,” said Dubois, who could not refrain from Latin or historical quotations.

“What?” said mine host.

Dubois bit his lip. At this moment one of the soldiers called for wine, and the host darted off to wait upon him.

Dubois turned to the two guards.

“Thank you,” said he.

“What is it, bourgeois?” asked they.

“France and the regent,” replied Dubois.

“The watchword!” cried both, rising.

“Enter this room,” said Dubois, showing La Jonquiere’s room. “Open the door into the Rue des Deux-Boules, and hide behind a curtain, under a table, in a closet, wherever you can. If, when I come in, I can see so much as an ear, you will have no pay for six months.”

The two men emptied their glasses, and entered the room, while Dubois, who saw they had forgotten to pay, put a piece of twelve sous on the table, then, opening the window, and calling to the driver of a hackney carriage standing before the door — ”L’Eveille,” said he, “bring the carriage to the little door in the Rue des Deux-Boules, and tell Tapin to come up when I knock on the windows with my fingers; he has his orders; be off.”

The host reappeared.

“Hola!” cried, “where are my men?”

“A sergeant came and called them away.”

”But they have not paid.”

“Yes, they left a twelve-sou piece on the table.”

“Diable! twelve sous; and my wine is eight sous the bottle.”

“Ah!” said Dubois, “no doubt they thought that as they were soldiers you would make a reduction.”

“At any rate,” said the host, consoling himself, “it is not all lost; and in our trade one must expect this kind of thing.”

“You have nothing of the sort to fear with Captain la Jonquiere?”

“Oh, no, he is the best of lodgers; he pays without a word, and ready money. True, he never likes anything.”

“Oh, that may be his manner,” said Dubois.

“Exactly.”

“What you tell me of his prompt payment pleases me.”

“Have you come to ask for money? He said he expected some one to whom he owed a hundred pistoles.”

“No; on the contrary, I owe him fifty louis.”

“Fifty louis! peste!” said the host, “what a pretty sum! Perhaps I was mistaken, and he said receive, not pay. Are you the Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay?”

“Does he expect the Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay?” said Dubois, with a joy he could not conceal.

“He told me so,” said the host. “Is that you?”

“No; I am not noble. I am called Moutonnet.”

“Nobility is nothing,” said the host. “One may be called Moutonnet and be an honest man.”

“Yes; Moutonnet, draper at St. Germain-en-Laye.”

“And you have fifty louis for the captain?”

“Yes. In turning over some old accounts of my father’s, I find he owed fifty louis to Captain la Jonquiere’s father; and I have had no peace till, instead of the father, who is dead, I had found the son.”

“Do you know there are not many debtors like you?”

“The Moutonnets are all the same, from father to son. When we are owed anything we are pitiless. Listen. There is an honest fellow who owed Moutonnet & Son one hundred and sixty francs; my grandfather put him in prison, and there he has been for the three generations, and he has just died there. I calculated that, during the thirty years he was there, he cost us twelve thousand francs; but we maintained the principle. But I beg your pardon for keeping you with all this nonsense; and here is a new customer for you.”

“Ah!” said the host, “it is Captain la Jonquiere himself. Captain,” continued he, “some one is waiting for you.”

The captain entered suspiciously — he had seen some strange, and, he thought, sinister faces about.

Dubois saluted him politely.

La Jonquiere asked the host if the friend he had expected had arrived.

“No one but monsieur. However, you lose nothing by the exchange, since one was to fetch away money, and the other brings it.”

La Jonquiere, surprised, turned to Dubois, who repeated the same story he had told to the host, and with such success that La Jonquiere, calling for wine, asked Dubois to follow him into his room.

Dubois approached the window, and quietly tapped on it with his fingers.

“But shall I not be in the way in your room?” asked Dubois.

“Not at all, not at all — the view is pleasant — as we drink we can look out and see the passers-by: and there are some pretty women in the Rue des Bourdonnais.”

They entered the room. Dubois made a sign to Tapin, who appeared in the first room, followed by two men, then shut the door behind him.

Tapin’s two followers went to the window of the common room, and drew the curtains, while Tapin placed himself behind the door of Jonquiere’s room, so as to be hidden by it when it opened. The host now returned from La Jonquiere’s room, to write down the receipt for the money which La Jonquiere had just paid him for the wine, when Tapin threw a handkerchief over his mouth, and carried him off like a feather to a second carriage standing at the door. One of the men seized the little girl who was cooking eggs, the other carried off the servant, and soon they were all on the way to St. Lazare, drawn by two such good horses that it was evidently not a real hired car.

Tapin remained behind, and taking from a closet a calico apron and waistcoat, signed to a loiterer who was looking in at the window, and who quickly transformed himself into a publican.

At this moment a violent noise was heard in the captain’s room, as of a table thrown down with bottles and glasses; then oaths, then the clinking of a sword, then silence.

Presently a carriage was heard rolling away up the Rue de Deux-Boules. Tapin looked joyous.

“Bravo,” said he, “that is done.”

“It was time, masters,” said the pretended publican, “for here is a customer.”

CHAPTER XIV.

TRUST TO SIGNS OF GRATITUDE.

Tapin at first thought that it was the Chevalier de Chanlay, but it was only a woman who wanted a pint of wine.

"What has happened to poor M. Bourguignon?" asked she. "He has just been taken away in a coach."

"Alas!" said Tapin, "we were far from expecting it. He was standing there talking, and was suddenly seized with apoplexy."

"Gracious heavens!"

"We are all mortal," said Tapin, throwing up his eyes.

"But why did they take the little girl?"

"To attend to her father — it is her duty."

"But the servant?"

"To cook for them."

"Ah, I could not understand it all, so I came to buy a pint of wine, though I did not want it, that I might find out."

"Well, now you know."

"Yes, but who are you?"

"I am Champagne, Bourguignon's cousin. I arrived by chance this morning; I brought him news of his family, and the sudden joy overcame him; ask Grabigeon," continued Tapin, showing his assistant, who was finishing an omelet commenced by the landlord's daughter.

"Oh, yes, everything passed exactly as M. Champagne says," replied Grabigeon, wiping away a tear with the handle of his spoon.

"Poor M. Bourguignon! then you think that we should pray for him?"

"There is never any harm in praying," said Tapin, sententiously.

"Ah, stop a minute, give me good measure."

Bourguignon would have groaned in spirit, could he have seen the wine that Tapin gave for her two sous.

"Well," said she, "I will go and tell the neighbors, who are very anxious, and I promise you my custom, M. Champagne; indeed, if M. Bourguignon were not your cousin, I would tell you what I think."

"Oh, tell me, never mind that."

"I perceive that he cheated me shamefully. What you have given me for two sous, he would hardly have given me for four; but if there is no justice here there is in heaven, and it is very providential that you are to continue his business."

"I believe so," said Tapin, in a half voice, "particularly for his customers."

And he dismissed the woman just as the door opened, and a young man entered, dressed in a blue cloak.

"Is this the hotel Le Muids d'Amour?" asked he.

"Yes, monsieur."

"Does Captain la Jonquiere lodge here?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Is he within?"

"Yes, he has just returned."

"Tell him, if you please, that the Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay is here."

Tapin offered the chevalier a chair, and went into La Jonquiere's room.

Gaston shook the snow from his boots and cloak, and proceeded leisurely to examine the picture on the wall, never supposing that he had close to him three or four swords, which, at a sign from the polite host, would leave their sheaths to be plunged into his breast.

Tapin returned, saying, "Captain la Jonquiere waits for M. de Chanlay."

Gaston proceeded to the room where sat a man whom the host pointed out as Captain la Jouquiere, and — without being much of a physiognomist — he perceived at once that he was no bully.

Little, dry, gray-eyed, uneasy in his uniform, such appeared the formidable captain whom Gaston had been recommended to treat with so much consideration.

"This man is ugly, and looks like a sexton," thought Gaston; then, as the stranger advanced toward him —

"Have I the honor of speaking to Captain la Jonquiere?" asked Gaston.

"Himself," said Dubois; "and are you M. le Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay?" — — "I am, monsieur."

"Have you the sign of recognition?" asked the false La Jonquiere.

"Here is the half of the gold piece."

"And here the other," said Dubois.

They tried the two, which fitted exactly.

"And now," continued Gaston, "the papers;" and he drew from his pocket the strangely folded paper, on which was written the name of La Jonquiere.

Dubois took from his pocket a similar paper, bearing Gaston's name: they were precisely alike.

"Now," said Gaston, "the pocket-book."

They found that their new pocket-books were precisely similar, and both, though new, contained an almanac for the year 1700, nineteen years previous.

"And now, monsieur," said Gaston.

"Now we will talk of business: is not that your meaning, chevalier?"

"Exactly; are we safe?"

"As though in a desert."

They seated themselves by a table, on which were a bottle of sherry and two glasses.

Dubois filled one, and was about to fill the other, when Gaston stopped him.

"Peste!" thought Dubois, "he is slender and sober, bad signs; Cæsar mistrusted thin people who did not drink, and Brutus and Cassius were such."

"Captain," said Gaston, after a short silence, "when we undertake, as now, an affair in which we risk our heads, I think we should know each other, so that the past may vouch for the future. Montlouis, Talhouet, De Couëdic, and Pontcalec have told you my name and condition. I was brought up by a brother, who had reasons for personal hatred to the regent. This hatred I have imbibed; therefore, three years ago, when the league was formed among the nobility in Bretagne, I entered the conspiracy; now I have been chosen to come to Paris to receive the instructions of Baron de Valef, who has arrived from Spain, to transmit them to the Duc d'Olivares, his Catholic Majesty's agent in Paris, and to assure myself of his assent."

"And what is Captain la Jonquiere to do in all this?" asked Dubois, as though he were doubting the chevalier's identity.

"To present me to the Duc d'Olivares. I arrived two hours ago; since then I have seen M. de Valef, and now I come to you. Now you know my history."

Dubois listened, and, when Gaston had finished — "As to me, chevalier," said he, throwing himself back indolently in his chair, "I must own my history is somewhat longer and more adventurous; however, if you wish to hear it, I obey."

"I think it necessary, in our position, to know each other," said Gaston.

"Well," said Dubois, "as you know, I am called Captain la Jonquiere; my father was, like myself, a soldier of fortune; this is a trade at which one gains in general a good deal of glory and very little money; my glorious father died, leaving me, for sole inheritance, his rapier and his uniform; I girded on the rapier, which was rather too long, and I wore the uniform, which was rather too large. From that time," said Dubois, calling the chevalier's attention to the looseness of his coat, "from that time I contracted the habit of always having plenty of room to move easily."

Gaston nodded, as though to express his approbation of this habit.

"Thanks to my good looks I was received in the Royal Italian, which was then recruiting in France. I held a distinguished post; when — the day before the battle of Malplaquet — I had a slight quarrel with my sergeant about an order which he gave me with the end of his cane raised instead of lowered, as it should have been."

"Pardon me," said Gaston, "but I cannot see what difference that could make to the order he was giving."

"It made this difference, that in lowering his cane it struck against my hat, which fell to the ground; the result was a duel, in which I passed my saber through his body. Now, as I certainly should have been shot if I had waited to be arrested, I made off, and woke the next morning — devil take me if I know how it happened — in Marlborough's army."

"That is to say, you deserted," said Gaston, smiling.

"I had Coriolanus and the great Condé for examples," said Dubois, "and this appeared to me to be sufficient to excuse me in the eyes of posterity. I assisted then, I must tell you, as we are to hide nothing from one another, at the battle of Malplaquet; but instead of being on one side of the brook, I was on the other, and instead of having the village behind me, I faced it. I think this was a lucky exchange for your humble servant; the Royal Italian left eight hundred men on the field of battle, my company was cut to pieces, and my own comrade and bedfellow killed by a cannon-ball. The glory with which my late regiment covered itself so much delighted Marlborough, that he made me an ensign on the field of battle. With such a protector I ought to have done well, but his wife, Lady Marlborough, whom Heaven confound, having been awkward enough to spill a bowl of water over Queen Anne's dress, this great event changed the face of things in Europe. In the overthrow which resulted, I found myself without any other protector than my own merit, and the enemies I had gained thereby."

"And what did you do then?" asked Gaston, somewhat interested in the adventurous life of the pretended captain.

"What could I do? I was forced to enter the service of his Catholic majesty, who, to his honor be it said, graciously acceded to my demand for a commission. In three years I was a captain; but, out of our pay of thirty reals a day, they kept back twenty, telling us what an honor it was for us to lend money to the king of Spain. As the security did not appear good in my eyes, I asked leave of my colonel to quit the service and return to my beautiful country, accompanied by a recommendation, in order that the Malplaquet affair might not be too much brought on the tapis. The colonel referred me to the Prince do Cellamare, who, recognizing in me a natural disposition to obey, without discussion, any orders given in a proper manner and accompanied by a certain music, employed me actively in the famous conspiracy which bears his name, when, all at once, the whole affair blew up, as you know, by the double denunciation of La Fillon and a wretched writer called Buvat; but his highness, wisely thinking that what is deferred is not lost, recommended me to his successor, to whom, I hope, my services may be useful, and whom I thank most heartily for procuring me the acquaintance of so accomplished a cavalier as yourself. Count on me then, chevalier, as your most humble and obedient servant."

"I ask nothing of you, captain," replied Gaston, "but to present me to the duke, the only person to whom my instructions permit me to speak openly, and to whom I am to deliver the Baron de Valef's dispatches. I beg, therefore, that you will present me to his excellency."

"This very day, chevalier," said Dubois, who seemed to have decided on his course of action; "in an hour if you like, in ten minutes if necessary."

"As soon as possible."

"Listen," said Dubois; "I was a little too quick when I said you should see his excellency in an hour — in Paris one is never sure; perhaps he does not know of your coming, and I may not find him at home."

”I understand."

"Perhaps even I may be prevented from coming back to fetch you."

"How so?"

"Peste, chevalier; it is easy to see that this is your first visit to Paris."

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that in Paris there are three distinct bodies of police, who all unite to torment those honest people who only desire to substitute what is not for what is. First, the regent’s police, which is not much to be feared; secondly, that of Messire Voyer d’Argenson — this has its days, when he is in a bad humor, or has been ill received at the convent of the Madeleine du Tresnel; thirdly, there is Dubois’s police; ah! that is a different thing. Dubois is a — ”

“A wretch,” cried Gaston; “I am well aware of that.”

Dubois smiled his sinister smile.

“Well, to escape these three police?” said Gaston.

“One must be prudent, chevalier.”

“Instruct me, captain; for you seem to know more about it than I, who am a provincial.”

“First, we must not lodge in the same hotel.”

“Diable!” said Gaston, who remembered the address given to Helene; “I had a great wish to remain here.”

“I will be the one to turn out then, chevalier. Take one of my rooms, this one, or the one above.”

“I prefer this.”

“You are right; on the ground-floor, a window looking into one street, a secret door to the other. You have a quick eye; we shall make something of you.”

“Let us return to our business.”

“Right; where was I?”

“You said you might not be able to come back and fetch me.”

“Yes, but in that case take care not to follow any one without sufficient signs.”

“By what signs shall I recognize any one as coming from you?”

“First, he must have a letter from me.”

“I do not know your writing.”

“True; I will give you a specimen.”

And Dubois wrote the following lines:

“Monsieur le Chevaliér — Follow without fear the man who brings this note, he is deputed by me to lead you to the house where the Duc d’Olivares and Captain la Jonquiere await you.”

"Stay," said he, giving him the note, "if any one comes in my name, he will give you a similar letter."

"Is that enough?"

"One cannot be too careful; besides the letter, he will show you the half-coin, and at the door of the house to which he leads you, ask for the third sign."

"Which will be."

"The paper."

"It is well," said Gaston, "with these precautions — the devil is in it if we are mistaken. Now, what am I to do?"

"Wait; you will not go out to-day."

"No."

"Well, remain quiet in this hotel, where you will want for nothing. I will recommend you to the host."

"Thanks."

"My dear M. Champagne," said Dubois to Tapin, opening the door, "the Chevalier de Chanlay takes my room; attend to him as you would to me."

Then, closing it —

"That fellow is worth his weight in gold, Tapin," said he in a low voice, "do not lose sight of him for a moment; you will answer for him with your head."

CHAPTER XV.

HIS EXCELLENCY THE DUC D’ORLEANS.

Dubois, on leaving the chevalier, contemplated the chance which had again placed in his hands the future of the regent and of France. In crossing the hall he recognized L’Eveille, and signed to him to follow. It was L’Eveille who had undertaken to get the real La Jonquiere out of the way. Dubois became thoughtful: the easiest part of the affair was done; it now remained to persuade the regent to put himself in a kind of affair which he held in the utmost horror — the maneuvering of intrigue.

Dubois began by asking where the regent was, and how occupied? The prince was in his studio, finishing an etching commenced by Hubert, the chemist, who, at an adjoining table, was occupied in embalming an ibis, by the Egyptian method, which he professed to have recovered.

A secretary was reading some letters to the regent.

All at once, to the regent’s astonishment — for this was his sanctum — the door opened, and an usher announced Captain la Jonquiere.

The regent turned.

“La Jonquiere?” said he; “who is this?”

Hubert looked surprised that a stranger should be thus unceremoniously intruded on their privacy.

At this moment a long-pointed head appeared at the open door.

The regent did not, at first, recognize Dubois in his disguise: but shortly, the pointed nose, which had not its match in the kingdom, betrayed him.

A merry look took the place of the astonishment which the regent’s features had at first displayed.

“Ah, it is you, abbe!” said his highness, laughing, “and what is the meaning of this disguise?”

“It means that I have changed my skin, and from a fox have turned into a lion; and now Monsieur the Chemist and Monsieur the Secretary, do me the favor to take your bird and letters elsewhere.”

“Why so?” asked the regent.

“Because I have important business to speak of with you.”

“Go to the devil with your important business; it is too late: come to-morrow.”

“Monseigneur,” said Dubois, “do not force me to remain till to-morrow in this villainous disguise.”

“Do what you please, but I have decided that the rest of this day shall be given to pleasure.”

“Well, I come to propose a disguise to you also.”

“A disguise! what do you mean, Dubois?” asked the regent, who thought it was probably one of his ordinary masquerades.

“Ah, it makes your mouth water, Monsieur Alain.”

“Speak; what do you want to do?”

“First send away your chemist and secretary.”

“You still wish it?” — — ”Decidedly.”

“Very well, then.”

The regent signed to them to leave: they did so.

“And now,” said he, “what is it?”

“I want to present to you, monseigneur, a young man, a very delightful fellow, just arrived from Bretagne, and strongly recommended to me.”

“His name?”

“The Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay.”

“De Chanlay!” said the regent, “the name is not unknown to me.”

“Indeed.”

“Yes, I think I have heard it formerly; but I do not remember where or how. What does your protégé come to Paris for?”

“Monseigneur, I shall leave him to tell you that himself.”

“Tell it to me.”

“Yes; that is to say, to the Duc d’Olivares, whom you are about to personate. Ah, my protégé is a discreet conspirator, and I have had some trouble to get at the truth of things. He was addressed to Paris, to a certain La Jonquiere, who was to present him to the Duc d’Olivares. Do you understand now?”

“Not at all.”

“Well, I have been Captain la Jonquiere, but I cannot be both La Jonquiere and his excellency.”

“So, you reserve that part — ”

“For you, monseigneur.”

“Thank you. So you think that, under a false name, I will get at the secrets — ”

“Of your enemies, monseigneur,” interrupted Dubois. “Pardieu! what a dreadful crime, and how it would distress you, to change name and dress; you have never before learned secrets by such means. But remember, monseigneur, our many disguises, and after being called M. Alain and Maitre Jean, you may well, I think, without anything derogatory to your dignity, be called Le Duc d’Olivares.”

”I ask no better than a disguise for amusement, but — ”

“But a disguise,” continued Dubois, “to preserve the peace of France, to prevent traitors from overthrowing the kingdom, to prevent assassins from murdering you — this, I suppose, is unworthy of you. I understand; ah, if it were only in pursuit of some little ironmongress in the Pont Neuf, or the pretty widow of the Rue Saint Augustine, it might be worth your while.”

“If I do what you wish,” said the regent, “what will be the result?”

“Probably, that you will own that I am no visionary, and that you will allow others to watch over you, since you will not watch over yourself.”

“But, once for all, if the thing turns out not worth the trouble, shall I be freed from your worrying?”

“I promise you, on my honor.”

“Abbe, if you have no objection, I should prefer another oath.”

“Oh, monseigneur, you are too hard; but you consent?”

“Again this folly.”

“You shall see if it be folly.”

“I believe you make plots to frighten me.”

“Then they are well made; you shall see.”

“Are you certain?”

“Absolutely.”

“If I am not frightened, look to yourself.”

“Monseigneur exacts too much.”

“You are not sure, Dubois.”

“I swear to you, monsieur, that you will be moved, and will be glad to speak with his excellency’s tongue.”

And Dubois went out before the regent had time to withdraw his consent.

Five minutes after, a courier entered the antechamber, and gave a letter to a page, who brought it to the regent.

“Madame Desroches,” said he, looking at the writing, and, breaking the seal, read as follows:

“Monseigneur — The young lady you left in my charge does not appear to be in safety here.”

“Bah,” exclaimed the regent, and then read on —

“The residence in the town, which your highness feared for her, would be a hundred times better than isolation; and I do not feel strong enough to defend her as I would wish, and as I ought.”

“Ouais,” said the regent, “it seems something is the matter.”

“A young man, who had written to Mademoiselle Helene shortly before your arrival yesterday, presented himself this morning at the pavilion; I wished to refuse him admittance, but mademoiselle so peremptorily ordered me to admit him, and to retire, that in her look and tone I recognized the blood which commands.”

“Yes, yes,” said the regent, “she is, indeed, my daughter; but who can this young man be? Some coxcomb she must have seen in the convent parlor.” Then he read on:

“I believe, monseigneur, that this young man and mademoiselle have met before. I did not think it wrong to listen, for your highness’s service, and in spite of the double door I once heard him say, ‘To see you as formerly.’ Will your royal highness secure me against this danger, and send me a written order which I can use to shelter myself from the anger of mademoiselle.”

“Diable!” exclaimed the regent, “it cannot be a love affair already; brought up in the only convent in France where men never pass the parlor. No, it is some foolish fear of Madame Desroches; but let us see what else she writes.”

“P. S. — I have just been to the hotel Tigre-Royal for information. The young man arrived yesterday evening at seven o’clock, just three-quarters of an hour before mademoiselle; he came by the Bretagne road, that is, the road she also came. He travels under the name of M. de Livry.”

”Oh!” said the regent, “this looks like a concerted plan. Pardieu! Dubois would laugh if he knew this; how he would talk! It is to be hoped he knows nothing of it, in spite of his police. Hola! page.”

The page who had brought the letter entered.

“Where is the messenger from Rambouillet?”

“He is waiting for an answer.”

“Give him this, and tell him to start at once.”

As to Dubois, while preparing the interview between Gaston and the false duke, he made the following calculation.

“I hold the regent both by himself and his daughter. This intrigue of his is either serious or not; if it be not, I distress her in exaggerating it. If it be serious, I have the merit of having discovered it; but I must not strike both blows at once. First, I must save the duke, then his daughter, and there will be two rewards. — Is that the best? — Yes — the duke first — if a young girl falls, no one suffers, if a man falls, a kingdom is lost, let us begin with the duke.” And Dubois dispatched a courier to M. de Montaran at Nantes.

M. de Montaran was, as we have said, the ancient governor of Bretagne.

As to Gaston, his plan was fixed. Ashamed of being associated with a man like Jonquiere, he congratulated himself that he was now to communicate with the chief of the enterprise, and resolved, if he also appeared base and venial, to return and take counsel with his friends at Nantes. As to Helene, he doubted not; he knew her courage and her love, and that she would die rather than have to blush before her dearest friend. He saw with joy that the happiness of finding a father did not lead her to forget the past, but still he had his fears as to this mysterious paternity; even a king would own such a daughter, were there not some disgraceful obstacle.

Gaston dressed himself carefully; there is a coquetry in danger as well as in pleasure, and he embellished his youth with every advantage of costume.

The regent, by Dubois’s advice, dressed in black velvet and half hid his face in an immense cravat of Mechlin lace.

The interview was to take place in a house belonging to the regent, in the Faubourg Saint Germain: he arrived there at five o’clock, as night was falling.

CHAPTER XVI.

MONSEIGNEUR, WE ARE BRETONS.

Gaston remained in the room on the ground-floor, and dressed himself carefully, as we have said, while Tapin continued his apprenticeship. By the evening he knew how to measure a pint as well as his predecessor, and even better; for he thought that in the compensation which would be given to Bourguignon, waste would be considered, and that therefore the less waste the better; so the morning's customer on her return got badly served, and went off disgusted.

When his toilet was finished, Gaston began to inspect La Jonquiere's library, and found it composed of three sets of books: theatrical books, obscene books, and arithmetical books.

While he was thus engaged a man entered, introduced by Tapin, who went out directly, and left him alone with Gaston. The man announced that Captain La Jonquiere, not being able to return, had sent him in his stead. Gaston demanding proof, the man showed a letter in the same terms and the same writing as the specimen Gaston had received, and then the half coin, after which Gaston made no difficulty as to following him, and both got into a carefully closed carriage. They crossed the Pont-Neuf, and, in the Rue du Bac, stopped at the courtyard of a pavilion; then the man drew from his pocket the paper bearing the chevalier's name as the third signal of recognition.

Gaston and his companion alighted, ascended the four steps of the doorway, and entered a large circular corridor surrounding the pavilion. Gaston looked round and saw that his guide had disappeared, and that he was alone.

His heart beat quickly. He was about to face, not the tool, but the master and originator of the whole plot, the representative of a king; he was to play a kingdom against a kingdom.

A bell sounded within.

Gaston almost trembled. He looked in a glass and saw that he was pale; a thousand new ideas assailed him; the door opened, and La Jonquiere appeared.

"Come, chevalier," said he, "we are expected."

Gaston advanced with a firm step.

They found a man seated in an armchair, his back turned to the door. A single light, placed on a table and covered with a shade, lighted only the lower part of his body; his head and shoulders were in shadow.

Gaston thought the face noble, and understood at once that this was a man of worth, and no La Jonquiere. The mouth was benevolent and the eyes large, bold, and firm, like those of a king or a bird of prey; deep thought was written on his brow, prudence and some degree of firmness in the lower part of the face; all this, however, in the half-darkness, and in spite of the Mechlin cravat.

"At least this is an eagle," thought he, "the other was but a raven."

Gaston bowed silently, and the unknown, rising, went and leaned against the chimney.

"Monsieur is the person of whom I spoke to your excellency," said La Jonquiere, "M. le Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay."

The unknown bowed silently.

"Mordieu!" whispered Dubois in his ear, "if you do not speak he will not say anything."

"This gentleman comes from Bretagne, I believe," said the duke, coldly.

"Yes, monsieur; but will your excellency pardon me. Captain la Jonquiere has told my name, but I have not been told yours. Excuse my rudeness, monseigneur; it is not I who speak, it is my province, which sends me."

"You are right, monsieur," said La Jonquiere, quickly, taking from a portfolio on the table a paper, at the bottom of which was a large signature with the seal of the king of Spain.

"Here is the name," said he.

"Duc d'Olivares," read Gaston.

Then turning to him, he bowed respectfully.

"And now, monsieur," said the duke, "you will not, I presume, hesitate to speak."

"I thought I had first to listen," said Gaston, still on the defensive.

"True: but, remember, it is a dialogue; each one speaks in turn."

"Monseigneur, you do me too much honor, and I will set the example of confidence."

"I listen, monsieur."

“Monseigneur, the states of Bretagne — ”

“The malcontents of Bretagne,” interrupted the regent smiling, in spite of a sign from Dubois.

“The malcontents are so numerous,” replied Gaston, “that they may be considered the representatives of the province: however, I will employ the word your excellency points out; the malcontents of Bretagne have sent me to you, monseigneur, to learn the intentions of Spain in this affair.”

“First let us learn those of Bretagne.”

“Monseigneur, Spain may count on us; we pledge our word, and Breton loyalty is proverbial.”

“But what do you promise?”

“To second the efforts of the French nobility.”

“But are you not French?”

“Monseigneur, we are Bretons. Bretagne, reunited to France by a treaty, may look on herself as separated from the moment when France no longer respects the rights of that treaty.”

“Yes, I know; the old story of Anne de Bretagne’s contract. It is a long time since that contract was signed, monsieur.”

The false La Jonquiere pushed the regent violently.

“What matter,” said Gaston, “if each one of us has it by heart?”

CHAPTER XVII.

MONSIEUR ANDRE.

“You said that the Breton nobility were ready to second the French nobility: now, what do the French nobility want?”

“They desire, in case of his majesty’s death, to place the king of Spain on the throne of France, as sole heir of Louis XIV.”

“Very good, very good,” said La Jonquiere, taking snuff with an air of extreme satisfaction.

“But,” said the regent, “the king is not dead, although you speak almost as if he were.”

“The Grand Dauphin, the Duc and Duchesse de Bourgogne and their children, disappeared in a deplorable manner.” The regent turned pale with anger; Dubois coughed.

“Then they reckon on the king’s death?”

“Generally, monseigneur.”

“Then that explains how the king of Spain hopes, in spite of the renunciation of his rights, to mount the throne of France. But, among the people attached to the regency, he may meet with some opposition.”

The false Spaniard involuntarily lingered on these words.

“Monseigneur,” replied the chevalier, “this case also has been foreseen.”

“Ah!” said Dubois, “this has been foreseen. Did not I tell you, monseigneur, that the Bretons were valuable to us. Continue, monsieur, continue.”

In spite of this invitation, Gaston was silent.

“Well, monsieur,” said the pretended duke, “I am listening.”

“This secret is not mine, monseigneur.”

“Then,” said the duke, “I have not the confidence of your chiefs?”

“On the contrary, you alone have it.”

“I understand, monsieur; but the captain is my friend, and I answer for him as for myself.”

“My instructions are, monseigneur, to speak to you alone.”

“But, I tell you, I answer for the captain.”

"In that case," said Gaston, bowing, "I have said all I have to say."

"You hear, captain," said the regent; "have the kindness to leave us alone."

"Yes, monseigneur; I have but two words to say to you."

Gaston drew back.

"Monseigneur," whispered Dubois, "press him hard — get out the whole affair — you will never have such another chance. What do you think of our Breton?"

"A noble fellow; eyes full of intelligence and a fine head."

"So much the better for cutting it off."

"What do you say?"

"Nothing, monseigneur; I am exactly of your opinion. M. de Chanlay, your humble servant; some might be angry that you would not speak before them, but I am not proud, and, provided all things turn out as I expect, I do not care for the means."

Chanlay bowed.

"Monsieur," said the regent, when Dubois had closed the door, "we are alone, and I am listening. Speak — you understand my impatience."

"Yes, monseigneur. You are doubtless surprised that you have not yet received from Spain a certain dispatch which you were to send to Cardinal Olocroni?"

"True, monsieur," said the regent, dissembling with difficulty.

"I will explain the delay. The messenger who should have brought this dispatch fell ill, and has not left Madrid. The Baron de Valef, my friend, who was in Spain, offered himself; and, after three or four day's hesitation, at length — as he was a man already tried in Cellamare's conspiracy — they trusted him."

"In fact," said the regent, "the Baron de Valef narrowly escaped Dubois's emissaries; it needed some courage to renew such a work. I know that when the regent saw Madame de Maine and Cellamare arrested; Richelieu, Polignac, Malezieux, and Mademoiselle de Launay in the Bastille; and that wretched Lagrange-Chancel at the Sainte Marguerite, he thought all was finished."

"You see he was mistaken, monseigneur."

"But do not these Breton conspirators fear that in thus rising they may sacrifice the heads of the Paris conspirators whom the regent has in his power?"

“They hope to save them, or die with them.”

“How save them?”

“Let us return to the dispatch, if you please, monseigneur; here it is.”

The regent took the paper, but seeing the address to his excellency the Duc d’Olivares, laid it on the table unopened. Strange inconsistency! This man opened two hundred letters a day by his spies; it is true that then he dealt with a Thorey or a Dubois, and not with a Chevalier de Chanlay.

“Well, monseigneur,” said Gaston.

“You know, doubtless, what this dispatch contains, monsieur?”

“Not word for word, perhaps; but I know what was arranged.”

“Well, tell me. I shall be glad to know how far you are admitted into the secrets of the Spanish cabinet.”

“When the regent is got rid of,” said Gaston, without noticing the slight start which his interlocutor gave at these words, “the Duc de Maine will be provisionally recognized in his place. The Duc de Maine will at once break the treaty of the quadruple alliance signed by that wretch Dubois.”

“I wish La Jonquiere had been here to hear you speak thus; it would have pleased him. Go on, monsieur.”

“The pretender will start with a fleet for the English shore; Prussia, Sweden, and Russia will then be engaged with Holland; the empire will profit by this war to retake Naples and Sicily, to which it lays claim through the house of Suabia; the Grand Duchy of Tuscany will be assured to the second son of the king of Spain, the Catholic low countries will be re-united to France, Sardinia given to the Duke of Savoy, Commachio to the pope. France will be the soul of the great league of the south against the north, and, if Louis XV. dies, Philip V. will be crowned king of half the world.”

“Yes, I know all that,” said the regent, “and this is Cellamare’s conspiracy renewed. But you used a phrase I did not understand.”

“Which, monseigneur?”

“You said, when the regent is got rid of. How is he to be got rid of?”

“The old plan was, as you know, to carry him off to the prison of Saragossa, or the fortress of Toledo.”

“Yes; and the plan failed through the duke’s watchfulness.”

“It was impracticable — a thousand obstacles opposed it. How was it possible to take such a prisoner across France?”

“It was difficult,” said the duke; “I never understood the adoption of such a plan. I am glad to find it modified.”

“Monseigneur, it would be possible to seduce guards, to escape from a prison or a fortress, to return to France, retake a lost power, and punish those who had executed this abduction. Philip V. and Alberoni have nothing to fear; his excellency the Duc d’Olivares regains the frontier in safety; and, while half the conspirators escape, the other half pay for all.” — — ”However — ”

“Monseigneur, we have the example of the last conspiracy before our eyes, and you yourself named those who are in the Bastille.”

“What you say is most logical,” replied the duke.

“While, on the contrary, in getting rid of the regent — ” continued the chevalier.

“Yes; you prevent his return. It is possible to return from a prison, but not from a tomb — that is what you would say?”

“Yes, monseigneur,” replied Gaston, with a somewhat tremulous voice.

“Now I understand your mission. You come to Paris to make away with the regent?”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“Explain yourself.”

“We were five Breton gentlemen, forming a small party or league in the midst of the general association, and it was agreed that the majority should decide on our plans.”

“I understand, and the majority decided that the regent should be assassinated.”

“Yes, monseigneur, four were for assassination, and one against it.”

”And that one?”

“If I lose your excellency’s confidence I must own that I was that one.”

“But, then, why are you to accomplish a design you disapprove?”

“Chance was to decide the one who should strike the blow.”

“And the lot?”

“Fell on me, monseigneur.”

“Why did you not refuse?”

“The ballot was without names, no one knew my vote. I should have been taken for a coward.”

“And you came to Paris?”

“For the task imposed on me.”

“Reckoning on me?”

“As on an enemy of the regent, for aid in accomplishing an enterprise which not only concerns the interests of Spain, but which will save our friends from the Bastille.”

“Do they run as much danger as you believe?”

“Death hovers over them; the regent has proofs, and has said of M. de Richelieu that if he had four heads he has wherewith to condemn them all.”

“He said that in a moment of passion.”

“What, monseigneur, you defend the duke — you tremble when a man devotes himself to save, not only his accomplices, but two kingdoms — you hesitate to accept that devotion.”

“If you fail!”

“Everything has its good and evil side; if the happiness of being the savior of a country is lost, the honor of being a martyr to its cause is gained.”

“But remember, in facilitating your access to the regent, I become your accomplice.”

“Does that frighten you, monseigneur?”

“Certainly, for you being arrested — ”

“Well — I being arrested?”

“They may force from you, by means of tortures, the names of those — ”

Gaston’s reply was a smile of supreme disdain.

“You are a foreigner and a Spaniard, monseigneur,” said he, “and do not know what a French gentleman is, therefore I pardon you.”

“Then I may reckon on your silence?”

“Pontcalec, Du Couëdic, Talhouet, and Montlouis, doubted me for an instant, and have since apologized to me for doing so.”

“Well, monsieur, I will think seriously of what you have said, but in your place — ”

“In my place?”

“I would renounce this enterprise.”

“I wish I had never entered into it, monseigneur, I own, for since I did so a great change has taken place in my life, but I am in it, and must accomplish it.”

“Even if I refuse to second you?”

“The Breton committee have provided for that emergency.”

“And decided — ”

“To do without you.”

"Then your resolution — "

"Is irrevocable."

"I have said all I had to say," replied the regent, "since you are determined to pursue your undertaking."

"Monseigneur," said Gaston, "you seem to wish to retire."

"Have you anything more to say to me?"

"Not to-day; to-morrow, or the day after."

"You have the captain as go-between — when he gives me notice I will receive you with pleasure."

"Monseigneur," said Gaston firmly, and with a noble air, "let me speak freely. We should have no go-between; you and I — so evidently separated by rank and station — are equal before the scaffold which threatens us. I have even a superiority over you, since I run the greater danger; however, you are now, monseigneur, a conspirator, like the Chevalier de Chanlay, with this difference: that you have the right — being the chief — to see his head fall before yours — let me, then, treat as an equal with your excellency, and see you when it is necessary."

The regent thought for a moment.

"Very well," said he, "this house is not my residence; you understand I do not receive many at my house: since the war, my position is precarious and delicate in France; Cellamare is in prison at Blois; I am only a sort of consul — good as a hostage — I cannot use too many precautions."

The regent lied with a painful effort.

"Write, then, poste restante to M. Andre, you must name the time at which you wish to see me, and I will be there."

"Through the post?" asked Gaston.

"Yes, it is only a delay of three hours; at each post a man will watch for your letter, and bring it to me when it arrives; three hours after you can come here."

"Your excellency forgets," said Gaston, laughing, "that I do not know where I am, in what street, at what number; I came by night. Stay, let us do better than that; you asked for time to reflect, take till to-morrow morning, and at eleven o'clock send for me. We must arrange a plan beforehand, that it may not fail, like those plans where a carriage or a shower of rain disconcerts everything."

"That is a good idea," said the regent; "to-morrow, then, at eleven o'clock, you shall be fetched, and we will then have no secrets from each other.”

Gaston bowed and retired. In the antechamber he found the guide who brought him, but he noticed that in leaving they crossed a garden which they had not passed through on entering, and went out by a different door. At this door the carriage waited, and it quickly arrived at the Rue des Bourdonnais.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FAUBOURG SAINT ANTOINE.

No more illusion for the chevalier. In a day or two he might be called to his work.

The Spanish envoy had deeply impressed Gaston — there was about him an air of greatness which surprised him.

A strange circumstance passed across his mind; there was, between his forehead and eyes and those of Helene, one of those vague and distant likenesses which seem almost like the incoherence of a dream. Gaston, without knowing why, associated these two faces in his memory, and could not separate them. As he was about to lie down, worn out with fatigue, a horse's feet sounded in the street, the hotel door opened, and Gaston heard an animated conversation; but soon the door was closed, the noise ceased, and he slept as a man sleeps at five-and-twenty, even if he be a conspirator.

However, Gaston was not mistaken; a horse had arrived, and a conversation had taken place. A peasant from Rambouillet brought in haste a note from a young and pretty woman to the Chevalier de Chanlay, Hotel Muids d'Amour.

We can imagine who the young and pretty woman was.

Tapin took the letter, looked at it, then, taking off his apron, left the charge of the hotel to one of his servants, and went off to Dubois.

"Oh," exclaimed the latter, "let us see; a letter!"

He unsealed it skillfully by aid of steam, and, on reading it, seemed pleased.

"Good! excellent! Let them alone to go their own way; we hold the reins, and can stop them when we like." Then, turning to Tapin, he gave him the letter, which he had resealed. "Here," said he, "deliver the letter."

"When?" asked Tapin.

"At once."

Tapin stepped toward the door.

"No, stop," said Dubois; "to-morrow morning will be soon enough."

"Now," said Tapin, "may I make an observation?"

“Speak.”

“As monseigneur’s agent, I gain three crowns a day.”

“Well, is not that enough, you scoundrel?”

“It was enough as agent. I do not complain, but it is not enough as wine-merchant. Oh, the horrid trade!”

“Drink and amuse yourself.”

“Since I have sold wine I hate it.”

“Because you see how it is made; but drink champagne, muscat, anything: Bourguignon pays. Apropos, he has had a real attack; so your lie was only an affair of chronology.”

“Indeed.”

“Yes, fear has caused it; you want to inherit his goods?”

”No, no; the trade is not amusing.”

“Well, I will add three crowns a day to your pay while you are there, and I will give the shop to your eldest daughter. Bring me such letters often, and you shall be welcome.”

Tapin returned to the hotel, but waited for the morning to deliver the letter.

At six o’clock, hearing Gaston moving, he entered, and gave him the note.

This was what it contained:

“My Friend — I think of your advice, and that perhaps you were right at last, I fear. A carriage has just arrived — Madame Desroches orders departure — I tried to resist — they shut me up in my room; fortunately, a peasant passed by to water his horse; I have given him two louis, and he promised to take you this note. I hear the last preparations — in two hours we leave for Paris.

“On my arrival, I will send you my address, if I have to jump out of the window and bring it.

“Be assured, the woman who loves you will remain worthy of herself and you.”

“Ah, Helene!” cried Gaston; “I was not deceived. Eight o’clock, but she must have arrived. Why was not this letter brought to me at once?”

“You were asleep, monsieur. I waited your awaking.”

There was no reply to be made. Gaston thought he would go and watch at the barrier, as Helene might not have arrived. He dressed quickly, and set out, after saying to Tapin:

“If Captain La Jonquiere comes here, say I shall be back at nine.”

* * *

While Gaston waits uselessly for Helene, let us look back.

We saw the regent receive Madame Desroches’ letter and send a reply. Indeed, it was necessary to remove Helene from the attempts of this M. de Livry.

But who could he be? Dubois alone could tell. So when Dubois appeared —

“Dubois,” said the regent, “who is M. de Livry, of Nantes?”

“Livry — Livry,” said he. “Stay!”

“Yes, Livry.”

“Who knows such a name? Send for M. d’Hozier.”

“Idiot!”

“But, monseigneur, I do not study genealogies. I am an unworthy plebeian.”

“A truce to this folly.”

“Diable! it seems monseigneur is in earnest about these Livrys. Are you going to give the order to one of them? because, in that case, I will try and find a noble origin.”

“Go to the devil, and send me Nocé.”

Dubois smiled, and went out.

Nocé quickly appeared. He was a man about forty, distinguished-looking, tall, handsome, cold and witty, one of the regent’s most faithful and favorite friends.

“Monseigneur sent for me.”

“Ah, Nocé, good-day.”

“Can I serve your royal highness in anything?”

“Yes; lend me your house in the Faubourg St. Antoine, but empty, and carefully arranged. I will put my own people in it.”

“Is it to be for — ?”

“For a prude, Nocé.”

“The houses in the faubourg have a bad name, monseigneur.”

“The person for whom I require it does not know that; remember, absolute silence, Nocé, and give me the keys.”

“A quarter of an hour, monseigneur, and you shall have them.”

“Adieu, Nocé, your hand; no spying, no curiosity, I beg.”

"Monseigneur, I am going to hunt, and shall only return at your pleasure."

"Thanks; adieu till to-morrow."

The regent sat down and wrote to Madame Desroches, sending a carriage with an order to bring Helene, after reading her the letter without showing it to her.

The letter was as follows:

"My Daughter — On reflection, I wish to have you near me. Therefore follow Madame Desroches without loss of time. On your arrival at Paris, you shall hear from me. Your affectionate father."

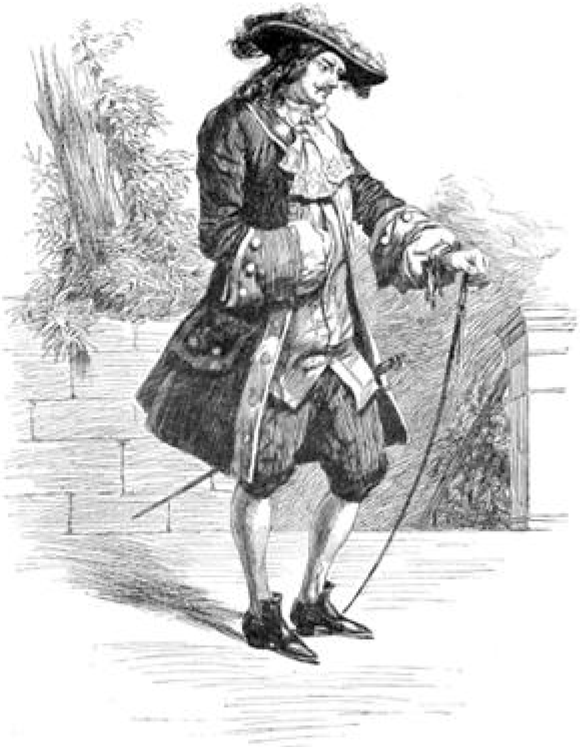

Helene resisted, prayed, wept, but was forced to obey. She profited by a moment of solitude to write to Gaston, as we have seen. Then she left this dwelling which had become dear to her, for there she had found her father and received her lover.

As to Gaston, he waited vainly at the barrier, till, giving up all hope, he returned to the hotel. As he crossed the garden of the Tuileries, eight o'clock struck.

At that moment Dubois entered the regent's bedchamber with a portfolio under his arm, and a triumphant smile on his face.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ARTIST AND THE POLITICIAN.

“Ah! it is you, Dubois,” exclaimed the regent, as his minister entered.

“Yes, monseigneur,” said Dubois, taking out some papers. “Well, what do you say to our Bretons now?”

“What papers are those?” asked the regent, who, in spite of the preceding day’s conversation, or perhaps because of it, felt a secret sympathy with De Chanlay.

“Oh, nothing at all, first a little report of what passed yesterday evening between M. de Chanlay and his excellency the Duc d’Olivares.”

“You listened, then?” said the regent.

“Pardieu, monseigneur, what did you expect that I should do?”

“And you heard?”

“All. What do you think of his Catholic majesty’s pretensions?”

“I think that perhaps they use his name without his consent.”

“And Cardinal Alberoni? Tudieu! monseigneur, how nicely they manage Europe: the pretender in England; Prussia, Sweden, and Russia tearing Holland to pieces; the empire recovering Sicily and Naples; the grand duchy of Tuscany for Philip the Fifth’s son; Sardinia for the king of Savoy; Commanchio for the pope; France for Spain; really, this plan is somewhat grand, to emanate from the brain of a bell-ringer.”

“All smoke! these prospects,” said the duke; “mere dreams.”

“And the Breton league, is that all smoke?”

“I am forced to own that that really exists.”

“And the dagger of our conspirator; is that a dream?”

“No; it even appeared to me likely to be vigorously handled.”

“Peste! monseigneur, you complained in the other plot that you found none but rose-water conspirators. Well, this time I hope you are better pleased. These fellows strike hard.”

“Do you know,” said the regent, thoughtfully, “that the Chevalier de Chanlay is of an energetic and vigorous nature.”

“Ah, the next thing will be, you will conceive a great admiration for this fellow. I know, monseigneur, that you are capable of it.”

“How is it that a prince always finds such natures among his enemies, and not among friends?”

“Because, monseigneur, hatred is a passion, and devotion often only a weakness; but if you will descend from the height of philosophy and deign to a simple act, namely, to give me two signatures — ”

“What signatures?” asked the regent.

“First, there is a captain to be made a major.”

“Captain la Jonquiere?”

“Oh, no; as to him, we’ll hang him when we have done with him; but meanwhile, we must treat him with care.”

“Who, then, is this captain?”

“A brave officer whom monseigneur eight days, or rather eight nights ago, met in a house in the Rue St. Honoré.”

“What do you mean?”

“Ah, I see I must aid your memory a little, monseigneur, since you have such a bad one.”

“Speak, one can never get at the truth with you.”

“In two words, eight nights ago you went out disguised as a musketeer through the little door in the Rue Richelieu, accompanied by Nocé and Simiane.”

“It is true; what passed in the Rue St. Honore?”

“Do you wish to know, monseigneur?”

”I do.”

“I can refuse you nothing.”

“Speak, then.”

“You supped at the house — that house, monseigneur.”

“Still with Nocé and Simiane?”

“No, monseigneur, tete-à-tete. Nocé and Simiane supped too, but separately. You supped, then, and were at table, when a brave officer, who probably mistook the door, knocked so obstinately at yours, that you became impatient, and handled the unfortunate who disturbed you somewhat roughly, but he, who, it seems, was not of an enduring nature, took out his sword, whereupon you, monseigneur, who never look twice before committing a folly, drew your rapier and tried your skill with the officer.”

“And the result?” asked the regent.

“Was, that you got a scratch on the shoulder, in return for which you bestowed on your adversary a sword-thrust in the breast.”

“But it was not dangerous?” asked the regent, anxiously.

“No; fortunately the blade glided along the ribs.”

“So much the better.”

“But that is not all.”

“How?”

“It appears that you owed the officer a special grudge.”

“I had never seen him.”

“Princes strike from a distance.”

“What do you mean?”

“This officer had been a captain for eight years, when, on your highness’s coming into power, he was dismissed.”

“Then I suppose he deserved it.”

“Ah, monseigneur, you would make us out as infallible as the pope!”

“He must have committed some cowardly act.”

“He is one of the bravest officers in the service.”

“Some infamous act then?”

“He is the most honest fellow breathing.”

“Then this is an injustice to be repaired.”

“Exactly; and that is why I prepared this major’s brevet.”

“Give it to me, Dubois, you have some good in you sometimes.”

A diabolical smile passed over Dubois’s face as he drew from his portfolio a second paper.

The regent watched him uneasily.

“What is that paper?” asked he.

“Monseigneur, you have repaired an act of injustice, now do an act of justice.”

“The order to arrest the Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay, and place him in the Bastille,” cried the regent. “Ah! I see now why you bribed me with a good action; but stay, this requires reflection.”

“Do you think I propose to you an abuse of power, monseigneur?” asked Dubois, laughing.

“No, but yet — ”

“Monseigneur,” continued Dubois, “when we have in our hands the government of a kingdom, the thing most necessary is, to govern.”

“But it seems to me that I am the master.”

“To reward, yes; but on condition of punishing — the balance of justice is destroyed, monseigneur, if an eternal and blind mercy weighs down one of the scales. To act as you always wish, and often do, is not good, but weak. What is the reward of virtue, if you do not punish vice?”

“Then,” said the regent, the more impatiently that he felt he was defending a bad though generous cause, “if you wished me to be severe, you should not have brought about an interview between me and this young man; you should not have given me the opportunity of appreciating his worth, but have allowed me to suppose him a common conspirator.”

“Yes; and now, because he presented himself to your highness under a romantic guise, your artistic imagination runs away with you. Diable! monseigneur, there is a time for everything; so chemistry with Hubert, engraving with Audran, music with Lafare, make love with the whole world — but politics with me.”

“Mon Dieu!” said the regent, “is it worth while to defend a life, watched, tortured, calumniated as mine is?”

”But it is not your life you are defending, monseigneur; consider, among all these calumnies which pursue you, and against which Heaven knows you should be steeled by this time; your most bitter enemies have never accused you of cowardice — as to your life, at Steinkirk, at Nerwinden, and at Lerida, you proved at what rate you valued it. Pardieu! if you were merely a private gentleman, a minister, or a prince of the blood, and you were assassinated, a man’s heart would cease to beat, and that would be all; but wrongly or rightly, you coveted a place among the powerful ones of the world; for that end you broke the will of Louis the Fourteenth, you drove the bastards from the throne whereon they had already placed their feet, you made yourself regent of France — that is to say, the keystone of the arch of the world. If you die, it is not a man who falls, it is the pillar which supports the European edifice which gives way; thus our four last years of watchfulness and struggles would be lost, and everything around would be shaken. Look at England; the Chevalier de Saint George will renew the mad enterprises of the pretender; look at Holland — -Russia, Sweden, and Prussia would hunt her to the death; look at Austria — her two-headed eagle seizes Venice and Milan, as an indemnification for the loss of Spain; cast your eyes on France — no longer France, but Philip the Fifth’s vassal; look, finally, at Louis the Fifteenth, the last descendant of the greatest monarch that ever gave light to the world, and the child whom by watchfulness and care we have saved from the fate of his father, his mother, and his uncles, to place him safe and sound on the throne of his ancestors; this child falls back again into the hands of those whom an adulterous law boldly calls to succeed him; thus, on all sides, murder, desolation, ruin, civil and foreign wars. And why? because it pleases Monsieur Philippe d'Orleans to think himself still major of the king's troops, or commandant of the army in Spain, and to forget that he ceased to be so from the moment he became regent of France."

"You *will* have it, then," said the duke.

"Stay, monseigneur," said Dubois, "it shall not be said that in an affair of this importance you gave way to my importunity. I have said what I had to say, now I leave you — do as you please. I leave you the paper; I am going to give some orders, and in a quarter of an hour I will return to fetch it."

And Dubois saluted the regent and went out.

Left alone, the regent became thoughtful — this whole affair, so somber and so tenacious of life, this remains of the former conspiracy, filled the duke's mind with gloomy thoughts; he had braved death in battle, had laughed at abductions meditated by the Spaniards and by Louis the Fourteenth's bastards; but this time a secret horror oppressed him; he felt an involuntary admiration for the young man whose poniard was raised against him; sometimes he hated him, at others he excused — he almost loved him. Dubois, cowering down over this conspiracy like an infernal ape over some dying prey, and piercing with his ravenous claws to its very heart, seemed to him to possess a sublime intelligence and power; he felt that he, ordinarily so courageous, should have defended his life feebly in this instance, and his eyes involuntarily sought the paper.

"Yes," murmured he, "Dubois is right, my life is no longer my own; yesterday, my mother also told me the same thing. Who knows what might happen if I were to fall? The same as happened at the death of my ancestor Henry the Fourth, perchance. After having reconquered his kingdom step by step, he was about — thanks to ten years of peace, economy, and prosperity — to add Alsace, Lorraine, and perhaps Flanders, to France, while the Duke of Savoy, his son-in-law, descending the Alps, should cut out for himself a kingdom in the Milanais, and with the leavings of that kingdom enrich the kingdom of Venice and strengthen the dukes of Modena, Florence, and Mantua; everything was ready for the immense result, prepared during the whole life of a king who was at once a legislator and a soldier; then the 13th of May arrived; a carriage with the royal livery passed the Rue de la Feronniere, and the clock of Les Innocents struck three. In a moment all was destroyed; past prosperity, hopes of the future; it needed a whole century, a minister called Richelieu and a king called Louis the Fourteenth, to cicatrize the wound made in France by Ravaillac's knife. Yes, Dubois was right," cried the duke, "and I must abandon this young man to human justice; besides, it is not I who condemn him; the judges are there to decide; and," added he, with animation, "have I not still the power to pardon."

And quieted by the thought of this royal prerogative, which he exercised in the name of Louis XV., he signed the paper, and left the room to finish dressing.

Ten minutes after the door opened softly, Dubois carefully looked in, saw that the room was empty, approached the table near which the prince had been seated, looked rapidly at the order, smiled on seeing the signature, and folding it in four, placed it in his pocket, and left the room with an air of great satisfaction.

CHAPTER XX.

BLOOD REVEALS ITSELF.

When Gaston returned from the Barriere de la Conference, and left his room, he found La Jonquiere installed by the fireplace, and discussing a bottle of wine which he had just uncorked.

“Well, chevalier,” said he, as Gaston entered, “how do you like my room? it is convenient, is it not? Sit down and taste this wine; it rivals the best Rosseau. Do you drink Rosseau? No, they do not drink wine in Bretagne; they drink cider or beer, I believe. I never could get anything worth drinking there, except brandy.”

Gaston did not reply, for he was so occupied that he had not even heard what La Jonquiere said. He threw himself in an easy chair, with his hand in his pocket, holding Helene’s first letter.

“Where is she?” he asked himself; “this immense, unbounded Paris may keep her from me forever. Oh! the difficulty is too great for a man without power or experience!”

“Apropos,” said La Jonquiere, who had followed the young man’s ideas easily, “there is a letter for you.”

“From Bretagne?” asked the chevalier, trembling.

“No; from Paris. A beautiful writing — evidently a woman’s.”

“Where is it?” cried Gaston.

“Ask our host. When I came in he held it in his hands.”

“Give it to me,” cried Gaston, rushing into the common room.

“What does monsieur want?” asked Tapin, with his usual politeness.

“My letter.”

“What letter?”

“The letter you received for me.”

“Pardon, monsieur; I forgot it.”

And he gave Gaston the letter.

“Poor imbecile!” said the false La Jonquiere, “and these idiots think of conspiring. It is like D’Harmental; they think they can attend to love and politics at the same time. Triple fools; if they were to go at once to La

Fillon's for the former, the latter would not be so likely to bring them to the Place de Greve."

Gaston returned joyously, reading and re-reading Helene's letter. "Rue de Faubourg St. Antoine; a white house behind trees — poplars, I think. I could not see the number, but it is the thirty-first or thirty-second house on the left side, after passing a chateau with towers, resembling a prison."

"Oh," cried Gaston, "I can find that; it is the Bastille."

Dubois overheard these words.

"Parbleu; I will take care you shall find it, if I lead you there myself."

Gaston looked at his watch, and finding that it wanted two hours of the time appointed for his rendezvous in the Rue du Bac, took up his hat and was going out.

"What! are you going away?" asked Dubois.

"I am obliged to do so."

"And our appointment for eleven o'clock?"

"It is not yet nine."

"You do not want me?"

"No, thank you."

"If you are preparing an abduction, for instance, I am an adept, and might assist you."

"Thank you," said Gaston, reddening involuntarily, "but I am not."

Dubois whistled an air, to show that he took the answer for what it was worth.

"Shall I find you here on my return?" asked Gaston.

"I do not know; perhaps I also have to reassure some pretty creature who is interested in me; but, at any rate, at the appointed hour you will find your yesterday's guide with the same carriage and the same coachman."

Gaston took a hasty leave. At the corner of the cemetery of the Innocents he took a carriage, and was driven to the Rue St. Antoine. At the twentieth house he alighted, ordering the driver to follow him; then he proceeded to examine the left side of the street. He soon found himself facing a high wall, over which he saw the tops of some tall poplars; this house, he felt sure, was the one where Helene was.

But here his difficulties were but commencing. There was no opening in the wall, neither bell nor knocker at the door; those who came with couriers galloping before them to strike with their silver-headed canes could dispense with a knocker. Gaston was afraid to strike with a stone, for fear of being denied admittance, he therefore ordered the coachman to stop, and going up a narrow lane by one side of the house, he imitated the cry of the screech-owl — a signal preconcerted.

Helene started. She recognized the cry, and it seemed to her as though she were again in the Augustine convent at Clissons, with the chevalier’s boat under her windows. She ran to the window; Gaston was there.

Helene and he exchanged a glance; then, re-entering the room, she rang a bell, which Madame Desroches had given her, so violently that two servants and Madame Desroches herself all entered at once.

“Go and open the door,” said Helene, imperiously. “There is some one at the door whom I expect.”

“Stop,” said Madame Desroches to the valet, who was going to obey; “I will go myself.”

“Useless, madame. I know who it is, and I have already told you that it is a person whom I expect.”

“But mademoiselle ought not to receive this person,” replied the duenna, trying to stand her ground.

“I am no longer at the convent, madame, and I am not yet in prison,” replied Helene; “and I shall receive whom I please.”

“But, at least, I may know who this is?”

“I see no objection. It is the same person whom I received at Rambouillet.”

“M. de Livry?”

“Yes.”

“I have positive orders not to allow this young man to see you.”

“And *I* order you to admit him instantly.”

“Mademoiselle, you disobey your father,” said Madame Desroches, half angrily, half respectfully.

“My father does not see through your eyes, madame.”

“Yet, who is master of your fate?”

“I alone,” cried Helene, unwilling to allow any domination.

“Mademoiselle, I swear to you that your father — ”

“Will approve, if he be my father.”

These words, given with all the pride of an empress, cowed Madame Desroches, and she had recourse to silence.

“Well,” said Helene, “I ordered that the door should be opened; does no one obey when I command?”

No one stirred; they waited for the orders of Madame Desroches.

Helene smiled scornfully, and made such an imperious gesture that Madame Desroches moved from the door, and made way for her; Helene then, slowly and with dignity, descended the staircase herself, followed by Madame Desroches, who was petrified to find such a will in a young girl just out of a convent.

”She is a queen,” said the waiting-maid to Madame Desroches; “I know I should have gone to open the door, if she had not done so herself.”

“Alas!” said the duenna, “they are all alike in that family.”

“Do you know the family, then?” asked the servant, astonished.

Madame Desroches saw that she had said too much.

“Yes,” said she; “I formerly knew the marquis, her father.”

Meanwhile Helene had descended the staircase, crossed the court, and opened the door; on the step stood Gaston.

“Come, my friend,” said Helene.

Gaston followed her, the door closed behind them, and they entered a room on the ground-floor.

“You called me, and I am here, Helene,” said the young man; “what do you fear, what dangers threaten you?”

“Look around you,” said Helene, “and judge.”

The room in which they were was a charming boudoir, adjoining the dining-room, with which it communicated not only by folding doors, but also by an opening almost concealed by rare and peculiar flowers. The boudoir was hung with blue satin; over the doors were pictures by Claude Audran, representing the history of Venus in four tableaux, while the panels formed other episodes of the same history, all most graceful in outline and voluptuous in expression. This was the house which Nocé, in the innocence of his heart, had designated as fit for a prude.

“Gaston,” said Helene, “I wonder whether I should really mistrust this man, who calls himself my father. My fears are more aroused here than at Rambouillet.”

After examining the boudoir, Gaston and Helene passed into the dining-room, and then into the garden, which was ornamented with marble statues of the same subjects as the pictures. As they returned, they passed Madame Desroches, who had not lost sight of them, and who, raising her hands in a despairing manner, exclaimed:

“Oh, mon Dieu! what would monseigneur think of this?”

These words kindled the smoldering fire in Gaston’s breast.

“Monseigneur!” cried he; “you heard, Helene — monseigneur! We are then, as I feared, in the house of one of those great men who purchase pleasure at the expense of honor. Helene, do not allow yourself to be deceived. At Rambouillet I foresaw danger; here I see it.”

“Mon Dieu,” said Helene, “but if, by aid of his valets, this man should retain me here by force.”

“Do not fear, Helene; am not I here?”

“Oh!” said Helene, “and must I renounce the sweet idea of finding a father, a preceptor, a friend.”

“And at what a moment, when you are about to be left alone in the world,” said Gaston, unconsciously betraying a part of his secret.

“What were you saying, Gaston? What is the meaning of these words?”

“Nothing — nothing,” replied the young man; “some meaningless words which escaped me, and to which you must not attach any consequence.”

“Gaston, you are hiding some dreadful secret from me, since you speak of abandoning me at the moment I lose a father.”

“Helene, I will never abandon you except with life.”

“Ah,” cried the young girl, “your life is in danger, and it is thus that you fear to abandon me. Gaston, you betray yourself; you are no longer the Gaston of former days. You met me to-day with a constrained joy; losing me yesterday did not cause you intense sorrow: there are more important prospects in your mind than in your heart. There is something in you — pride, or ambition, more powerful than your love. You turn pale, Gaston; your silence breaks my heart.”

“Nothing — nothing, Helene, I assure you. Is it surprising that I am troubled to find you here, alone and defenseless, and not know how to protect you; for doubtless this is a man of power. In Bretagne I should have had friends and two hundred peasants to defend me; here I have no one.”

”Is that all, Gaston?”

“That is, it seems to me, more than enough.”

“No, Gaston, for we will leave this house instantly.”

Gaston turned pale; Helene lowered her eyes, and placing her hand in that of her lover —

“Before these people who watch us,” said she; “before the eyes of this woman, we will go away together.”

Gaston's eyes lighted up with joy; but somber thoughts quickly clouded them again. Helene watched this changing expression.

"Am I not your wife, Gaston?" said she; "is not my honor yours? Let us go."

"But where to place you?" said Gaston.

"Gaston," replied Helene, "I know nothing, I can do nothing; I am ignorant of Paris — of the world; I only know myself and you; well, you have opened my eyes; I distrust all except your fidelity and love."

Gaston was in despair. Six months previous, and he would have paid with his life the generous devotion of the courageous girl.

"Helene, reflect," said Gaston; "if we were mistaken, and this man be really your father!"

"Gaston, do you forget that you first taught me to distrust him?"

"Oh, yes, Helene, let us go," cried Gaston.

"Where are we to go?" asked Helene; "but you need not reply — if you know, it is sufficient."

"Helene," said Gaston, "I will not insult you by swearing to respect your honor; the offer which you have made to-day I have long hesitated to make — rich, happy, sure for the present of fortune and happiness, I would have placed all at your feet, trusting to God for the future; but at this moment I must tell you, that you were not mistaken; from day to day, from this day to the next, there is a chance of a terrible event. I must tell you now, Helene, what I can offer you. If I succeed, a high and powerful position; but if I fail, flight, exile, it may be poverty. Do you love me enough, Helene, or rather do you love your honor enough, to brave all this and follow me?"

"I am ready, Gaston; tell me to follow you, and I do so."

"Well, Helene, your confidence shall not be displaced, believe me; I will take you to a person who will protect you, if necessary, and who, in my absence, will replace the father you thought to find, but whom you have, on the contrary, lost a second time."

"Who is this person, Gaston? This is not distrust," added Helene, with a charming smile, "but curiosity."

"Some one who can refuse me nothing, Helene, whose days are dependent on mine, and who will think I demand small payment when I exact your peace and security."

"Still mysterious, Gaston: really, you frighten me."

“This secret is the last, Helene; from this moment my whole life will be open to you.”

“I thank you, Gaston.”

“And now I am at your orders, Helene.”

“Let us go then.”

Helene took the chevalier’s arm, and crossed the drawing-room, where sat Madame Desroches, pale with anger, and scrawling a letter, whose destination we can guess.

“Mon Dieu! mademoiselle, where are you going? what are you doing?”

“I am going away from a house where my honor is threatened.”

“What!” cried the old lady, springing to her feet, “you are going away with your lover.”

“You are mistaken, madame,” replied Helene, in an accent of dignity, “it is with my husband.”

Madame Desroches, terrified, let her hands fall by her side, powerless.

“You shall not go, mademoiselle, even if I am forced to use violence.”

“Try, madame,” said Helene, in the queenly tone which seemed natural to her.

“Hola, Picard, Coutourier, Blanchet.”

The servants appeared.

“The first who stops me I kill,” said Gaston quietly, as he drew his sword.

“What a will,” cried Madame Desroches; “ah, Mesdemoiselles de Chartres and de Valois, I recognize you there.”

The two young people heard this exclamation, but did not understand it.

“We are going, madame,” said Helene; “do not forget to repeat, word by word, what I told you.”

And, hanging on Gaston’s arm, flushed with pleasure and pride, brave as an ancient Amazon, the young girl ordered that the door should be opened for her; the Swiss did not dare to resist. Gaston took Helene by the hand, summoned the carriage in which he had come, and seeing that he was to be followed, he stepped toward the assailants, and said in a loud voice:

“Two steps further, and I tell this history aloud, and place myself and mademoiselle under the safeguard of the public honor.”

Madame Desroches believed that Gaston knew the mystery, and would declare it: she therefore thought best to retire quickly, followed by the servants.

The intelligent driver started at a gallop.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHAT PASSED IN THE RUE DU BAC WHILE WAITING FOR GASTON.

“What, monseigneur, you here!” cried Dubois, entering the room of the house in the Rue du Bac, and finding the regent seated in the same place as on the previous day.

“Yes; is there anything wonderful in that? Have I not an appointment at noon with the chevalier?”

“But I thought the order you signed would have put an end to these conferences.”

“You were mistaken, Dubois; I wish to have another interview with this young man. I shall make one more effort to induce him to renounce his plans.”

“And if he should do so?”

“Then all will be at an end — there will be no conspiracy — there will have been no conspirators. I cannot punish intentions.”

“With any other I should not allow this; but with him I say, as you please.”

“You think he will remain firm?”

“Oh! I am quite easy. But when he has decidedly refused, when you are quite convinced that he persists in his intention of assassinating you, then you will give him over to me, will you not?”

“Yes, but not here.”

“Why not here?”‘

“Better to arrest him at his hotel.”

“There, at the Muids d’Amour, with Tapin and D’Argenson’s people — impossible, monsieur. Bourguignon’s affair is still in everybody’s mouth in that quarter. I am not sure that they even quite believe in the attack of apoplexy, since Tapin now gives strict measure. It will be much better to arrest him as he leaves here, monseigneur; the house is quiet; four men could easily do it, and they are already here. I will move them, as you insist on seeing him; and, instead of arresting him as he enters, it must be done as he leaves. At the door a carriage shall be ready to take him to the Bastille; so that even the coachman who brings him here shall not know what has become of him. No one but Monsieur de Launay shall know; and I will answer for his discretion.”

“Do as you please.”

“That is my usual custom.”

“Rascal that you are!”

“But I think monseigneur reaps the benefit of the rascality.”

“Oh, I know you are always right.”

“But the others?”

“What others?”

“The Bretons, Pontcalec, Du Couëdic, Talhouet, and Montlouis?”

“Oh, the unfortunates; you know their names.”

“And how do you think I have passed my time at the hotel Muids d’Amour?”

“They will know of their accomplice’s arrest.”

“How?”

“Having no letter from Paris, they will fear that something is wrong.”

”Bah! Is not Captain la Jonquiere there to reassure them?”

“True; but they must know the writing?”

“Not bad, monseigneur, you are improving; but you take useless precautions, as Racine says. At this moment, probably, they are arrested.”

“And who dispatched the order?”

“I. Pardieu! I am not your minister for nothing. Besides, you signed it.”

“I! Are you mad?”

“Assuredly, these men are not less guilty than the chevalier; and in authorizing me to arrest one, you authorized me to arrest all.”

“And when did the bearer of this order leave?”

Dubois took out his watch.

“Just three hours ago. Thus, it was a poetical license when I said they were all arrested; they will not be till to-morrow morning.”

“Bretagne will be aroused, Dubois.”

“Bah! I have taken measures.”

“The Breton tribunals will not condemn their compatriots.”

“That case is foreseen.”

“And, if they should be condemned, none will be found to execute them. It will be a second edition of the affair at Chalais. Remember, it was at

Nantes that *that* took place, Dubois. I tell you, Bretons are unaccommodating.”

“This is a point to settle with the commissioners, of whom this is a list. I will send three or four executioners from Paris — men accustomed to noble deeds — who have preserved the traditions of the Cardinal de Richelieu.”

“Good God!” cried the regent; “bloodshed under my reign — I do not like it. As to Count Horn, he was a thief, and Duchaffour a wretch; but I am tender, Dubois.”

“No, monseigneur, you are not tender; you are uncertain and weak; I told you so when you were my scholar — I tell you so again, now that you are my master. When you were christened, your godmothers, the fairies, gave you every gift of nature — strength, beauty, courage, and mind: only one — whom they did not invite because she was old, and they probably foresaw your aversion to old women — arrived the last, and gave you weakness — that spoiled all.”

“And who told you this pretty tale? Perrault or St. Simon?”

“The princess palatine, your mother.”

The regent laughed.

“And whom shall we choose for the commission?” asked he.

“Oh, monseigneur, people of mind and resolution, be sure; not provincials; not very sensitive to family scenes; men old in the dust of tribunals, whom the Breton men will not frighten with their fierce eyes, nor the Breton women seduce with their beautiful languid ones.”

The regent made no reply.

“After all,” continued Dubois, “these people may not be as guilty as we suppose. What they have plotted let us recapitulate. Bah! mere trifles. To bring back the Spaniards into France, what is that? To call Philip the Fifth king, the renouncer of his country; to break all the laws of the State — these good Bretons.”

“Dubois, I know the national law as well as you.”

“Then, monseigneur, if you speak truly, you have only to approve the nomination of the commissioners I have chosen.”

“How many are there?”

“Twelve.”

“Their names?”

Dubois gave in the list.

"Ah, you were right — a happy choice; but who is to preside over this amiable assembly?"

"Guess, monseigneur."

"Take care; you must have an honest man at the head of these ravagers."

"I have one."

"Who is it?"

"An ambassador."

"Cellamare, perhaps."

"Ma foi! I think if you would let him come out of Blois he would not refuse you even the heads of his accomplices."

"Let him stop at Blois. Who is to preside?"

"Chateau-Neuf."

"The ambassador from Holland, from the great king. Dubois, I do not generally compliment you, but this time you have done wonders."

"You understand, monseigneur: he knows that these people wish to make a republic; and he, who is brought up to know none but sultans, and who has a horror of Holland through the horror of Louis XIV. for republics, has accepted with a good grace. We shall have Argram for prosecutor. Cayet shall be our secretary. We go to work quickly and well, monseigneur, for time presses."

"But shall we at least have quiet afterward?"

"I believe so. We may sleep all day and all night; that is to say, when we have finished the war in Spain."

"Oh!" cried the regent, "why did I strive for the regency? I should laugh to see M. de Maine freeing himself with his Jesuits and his Spaniards! Madame de Maintenon and her politics, with Villeroy and Villars, would drive away the spleen; and Hubert says it is good to laugh once a day."

"Apropos of Madame de Maintenon," replied Dubois; "you know, monseigneur, that she is very ill, and that she cannot live a fortnight."

"Bah!"

"Since the imprisonment of Madame de Maine and the exile of her husband, she says that decidedly Louis XIV. is dead, and that she goes weeping to rejoin him."

"Which does not trouble you, eh?"

"Oh! I confess that I hate her cordially; it was she who made the king open his eyes so wide when I asked for the red hat at your marriage; and, corbleu! it was not an easy thing to arrange, monseigneur, as you know. If you had not been there to redress my wrongs, she would have spoiled my career. If I could but have crammed her M. de Maine into this Bretagne affair; but it was impossible — the poor man is half dead with fear, so that he says to every one he meets, ‘Do you know there has been a conspiracy against the government of the king and against the person of the regent? it is a disgrace to France. Ah! if all men were only like me!’“

“No one would conspire — that is certain,” said the regent.

“He has disowned his wife,” added Dubois, laughing.

“And she has disowned her husband,” said the regent, laughing also.

“I should not advise you to imprison them together — they would fight.”

“Therefore I have placed one at Doulens, and the other at Dijon.”

“From whence they bite by post.”

“Let us put all that aside, Dubois.”

“Ah, monseigneur! you have, I see, sworn the loss of the blood of Louis XIV.; you are a true executioner.”

This audacious joke proved how sure Dubois felt of his ascendency over the prince.

The regent signed the order naming the tribunal, and Dubois went out to prepare for Gaston’s arrest.

Gaston, on his return to the Muids d’Amour, found the same carriage and the same guide awaiting him that had before conducted him to the Rue du Bac. Gaston, who did not wish Helene to alight, asked if he could continue his route in the hired carriage in which he had just arrived; the man replied that he saw no objection, and mounted on the box by the driver, to whom he told the address.

During the drive, Gaston, instead of displaying the courage which Helene had expected, was sad, and yet gave no explanation of his sadness. As they entered the Rue du Bac, Helene, in despair at finding so little force of character in him on whom she leaned for protection, said: “Gaston, you frighten me.”

“Helene, you shall see before long if I am acting for your good or not.”

The carriage stopped.

“Helene, there is one in this house who will stand in the place of a father to you. Let me go first, and I announce you.”

“Ah!” cried Helene, trembling, she knew not why; “and you are going to leave me here alone?”

“You have nothing to fear, Helene; besides, in a few minutes I will return and fetch you.”

The young girl held out her hand, which Gaston pressed to his lips; the door opened; the carriage drove into the courtyard, where Gaston felt that Helene ran no danger; the man who had come to the hotel to fetch him opened the carriage door; Gaston again pressed Helene’s hand, alighted, ascended the steps, and entered the corridor, when his guide left him as before.

Gaston, knowing that Helene waited his return, at once tapped at the door of the room.

“Enter,” said the voice of the false Spaniard.

Gaston knew the voice, entered, and with a calm face approached the Duc d’Olivares.

“You are punctual, monsieur,” said the latter; “we named noon, and it is now striking.”

“I am pressed for time, monseigneur; my undertaking weighs on me; I fear to feel remorse. That astonishes and alarms you, does it not, monseigneur? But reassure yourself; the remorse of a man such as I am troubles no one but himself.”

“In truth, monsieur,” cried the regent, with a feeling of joy he could not quite conceal, “I think you are drawing back.”

“Not so, monseigneur; since fate chose me to strike the prince, I have gone steadily forward, and shall do so till my mission is accomplished.”

“Monsieur, I thought I detected some hesitation in your words; and words are of weight in certain mouths, and under certain circumstances.”

“Monsieur, in Bretagne we speak as we feel, but we also do as we promise.”

“Then you are resolved?”

“More than ever.”

“Because, you see,” replied the regent, “there is still time — the evil is not yet done.”

“The evil, you call it, monseigneur,” said Gaston; “what shall I call it then?”

“It is thus that I meant it,” replied the regent; “the evil is for you, since you feel remorse.”

“It is not generous, monseigneur, to dwell on a confidence which I should not have made to any person of less merit than yourself.”

“And it is because I appreciate your worth, monsieur, that I tell you there is yet time to draw back; that I ask if you have reflected — if you repent having mixed yourself with all these — ” the duke hesitated — ”these audacious enterprises. Fear nothing from me — I will protect you, even if you desert us; I have seen you but once, but I think I judge of you as you deserve — men of worth are so rare that the regrets will be for us.”

“Such kindness overwhelms me, monseigneur,” said Gaston, who, in spite of his courage, felt some indecision. “My prince, I do not hesitate; but my reflections are those of a duelist, who goes to the ground determined to kill his enemy, yet deploring the necessity which forces him to rob a man of life. But here the interest is so great, so superior to the weaknesses of our nature, that I will be true to my friendship if not my sympathies, and will conduct myself so that you shall esteem in me even the momentary weakness which for a second held back my arm.”

“Well,” said the regent, “how shall you proceed?”

“I shall wait till I meet him face to face, and then I shall not use an arquebuse, as Paltrot did, nor a pistol, as Vitry did. I shall say, ‘Monseigneur, you are the curse of France — I sacrifice you to her salvation;’ and I shall stab him with my poniard.”

“As Ravaillac did,” said the duke, with a serenity which made Gaston shudder; “it is well.”

Gaston did not reply.

“This plan appears to me the most secure, and I approve of it; but I must ask you one other question: suppose you should be taken and interrogated?”

“Your excellency knows what men do in such cases — they die, but do not answer; and since you have quoted Ravaillac, I think, if my memory serves me, that was what he did — and yet Ravaillac was not a gentleman.”

Gaston’s pride did not displease the regent, who had a young heart and a chivalric mind; besides, accustomed to worn-out and time-serving courtiers, Gaston’s vigorous and simple nature was a novelty to him; and we know how the regent loved a novelty.

“I may then reckon,” said he, “that you are immovable?”

Gaston looked surprised that the duke should repeat this question.

“Yes,” said the regent; “I see you are decided.”

“Absolutely, and wait your last instructions.”

“How? *my* instructions?”

“Certainly; I have placed myself body and soul at your disposal.”

The duke rose.

"Well," said he, "you must go out by that door, and cross the garden which surrounds the house. In a carriage which awaits you at the bottom you will find my secretary, who will give you a pass for an audience with the regent; besides that, you will have the warranty of my word."

"That is all I have to ask on that point, monseigneur."

"Have you anything else to say?"

"Yes; before I take leave of you, whom I may never see again in this world, I have a boon to ask."

"Speak, monsieur, I listen."

"Monsieur," said Gaston, "do not wonder if I hesitate a moment, for this is no personal favor and no ordinary service — Gaston de Chanlay needs but a dagger, and here it is; but in sacrificing his body he would not lose his soul; mine, monseigneur, belongs first to God and then to a young girl whom I love to idolatry — sad love, is it not, which has bloomed so near a tomb? To abandon this pure and tender girl would be to tempt God in a most rash manner, for I see that sometimes he tries us cruelly, and lets even his angels suffer. I love, then, an adorable woman, whom my affection has supported and protected against infamous schemes; when I am dead or banished, what will become of her? *Our* heads fall, monseigneur; they are those of simple gentlemen; but you are a powerful adversary, and supported by a powerful king; *you* can conquer evil fortune. I wish to place in your hands the treasure of my soul. You will bestow on her all the protection which, as an accomplice, as an associate, you owe to me."

"Monsieur, I promise you," replied the regent, deeply moved.

"That is not all, monseigneur; misfortune may overtake me, and find me not able to bestow my person upon her; I would yet leave her my name. If I die she has no fortune, for she is an orphan. On leaving Nantes I made a will wherein I left her everything I possessed. Monseigneur, if I die, let her be a widow — is it possible?"

"Who opposes it?"

"No one; but I may be arrested to-morrow, this evening, on putting my foot outside this house."

The regent started at this strange presentiment.

"Suppose I am taken to the Bastille; could you obtain for me permission to marry her before my execution?"

"I am sure of it."

“You will use every means to obtain this favor for me? Swear it to me, monseigneur, that I may bless your name, and that, even under torture, nothing may escape but a thanksgiving when I think of you.”

“On my honor, monsieur, I promise you that this young girl shall be sacred to me; she shall inherit in my heart all the affection which I involuntarily feel for you.”

“Monseigneur, one word more.”

“Speak, monsieur; I listen with the deepest sympathy.”

“This young girl knows nothing of my project; she does not know what has brought me to Paris, nor the catastrophe which threatens us, for I have not had the courage to tell her. You will tell it to her, monseigneur — prepare her for the event. I shall never see her again, but to become her husband. If I were to see her again at the moment of striking the blow which separates me from her, my hand might tremble, and this must not be.”

“On my word of honor, monsieur,” said the regent, softened beyond all expression, “I repeat, not only shall this young girl be sacred to me, but I will do all you wish for her — she shall reap the fruits of the respect and affection with which you have inspired me.”

“Now,” said Gaston, “I am strong.”

“And where is this young girl?”

“Below, in the carriage which brought me. Let me retire, monseigneur, and only tell me where she will be placed.”

“Here, monsieur; this house, which is not inhabited, and which is very suitable for a young girl, shall be hers.”

“Monseigneur, your hand.”

The regent held out his hand, but hearing a little dry cough, he understood that Dubois was becoming impatient, and he indicated to Gaston that the audience was over.

“Once more, monseigneur, watch over this young girl; she is beautiful, amiable and proud — one of those noble natures which we meet but seldom. Adieu, monseigneur, I go to find your secretary.”

“And must I tell her that you are about to take a man’s life?” asked the regent, making one more effort to restrain Gaston.

“Yes, monseigneur,” said the chevalier; “but you will add that I do it to save France.”

"Go then, monsieur," said the duke, opening a door which led into the garden, "and follow the directions I have given you."

"Wish me good fortune, monseigneur."

"The madman," thought the regent; "does he wish me to pray for success to his dagger's thrust? Ma foi, no!"

Gaston went out, the gravel, half-covered with snow, creaked under his feet — the regent watched him for some time from the window of the corridor — then, when he had lost sight of him —

"Well," said he, "each one must go his own way. Poor fellow!"

And he returned to the room, where he found Dubois, who had entered by another door, and was waiting for him.

Dubois's face wore an expression of malicious satisfaction which did not escape the regent, who watched him some time in silence, as if trying to discover what was passing through the brain of this second Mephistopheles.

Dubois was the first to speak.

"Well, monseigneur, you are rid of him at last, I hope."

"Yes," replied the duke; "but in a manner which greatly displeases me — I do not like playing a part in your comedies, as you know."

"Possibly; but you might, perhaps, do wisely in giving me a part in yours."

"How so?"

"They would be more successful, and the denouements would be better."

"I do not understand — explain yourself, and quickly, for I have some one waiting whom I must receive."

"Oh! certainly, monseigneur, receive them, and we will continue our conversation later — the denouement of this comedy has already taken place, and cannot be changed."

And with these words, Dubois bowed with the mock respect which he generally assumed whenever, in the eternal game they played against each other, he held the best cards.

Nothing made the regent so uneasy as this simulated respect; he held him back —

"What is there now?" asked he; "what have you discovered?"

"That you are a skillful dissimulator, peste!"

"That astonishes you?"

"No, it troubles me; a few steps further, and you will do wonders in this art — you will have no further need of me; you will have to send me away to educate your son, whom, it must be confessed, requires a master like myself.”

“Speak quickly.”

“Certainly, monseigneur; it is not now, however, a question of your son, but of your daughter.”

“Of which daughter?”

“Ah! true; there are so many. First, the Abbess of Chelles, then Madame de Berry, then Mademoiselle de Valois; then the others, too young for the world, and therefore for me, to speak of; then, lastly, the charming Bretagne flower, the wild blossom which was to be kept away from Dubois’s poisoning breath, for fear it should wither under it.”

“Do you dare to say I was wrong?”

“Not so, monseigneur: you have done wonders; not wishing to have anything to do with the infamous Dubois, for which I commend you, you — the archbishop of Cambray being dead — have taken in his place the good, the worthy, the pure Nocé, and have borrowed his house.”

“Ah!” said the regent, “you know that?”

“And what a house! Pure as its master — yes, monseigneur, you are full of prudence and wisdom. Let us conceal the corruptions of the world from this innocent child, let us remove from her everything that can destroy her primitive naïveté; this is why we choose this dwelling for her — a moral sanctuary, where the priestesses of virtue, and doubtless always under pretext of their ingenuousness, take the most ingenuous but least permitted of positions.”

“Nocé told me that all was proper.”

“Do you know the house, monseigneur?”

“Do I look at such things?”

“Ah! no; your sight is not good, I remember.”

“Dubois!”

“For furniture your daughter will have strange couches, magic sofas; and as to books, ah! that is the climax. Nocé’s books are good for the instruction and formation of youth; they would do well to go with the breviary of Bussy-Rabutin, of which I presented you a copy on your twelfth birthday.”

“Yes; serpent that you are.”

“In short, the most austere prudery prevails over the dwelling. I had chosen it for the education of the son; but monseigneur, who looks at things differently, chose it for the daughter.”

“Ah, ca! Dubois,” said the regent, “you weary me.”

“I am just at the end, monseigneur. No doubt your daughter was well pleased with the residence; for, like all of your blood, she is very intelligent.”

The regent shuddered, and guessed that some disagreeable news was hidden under the long preamble and mocking smile of Dubois.

“However, monseigneur, see what the spirit of contradiction will do; she was not content with the dwelling you chose for her, and she is moving.”

“What do you mean?”

“I am wrong — she *has* moved.”

“My daughter gone!” cried the regent.

“Exactly,” said Dubois.

“How?”

“Through the door. Oh, she is not one of those young ladies who go through the windows, or by night — oh, she is of your blood, monseigneur; if I had ever doubted it, I should be convinced now.”

“And Madame Desroches?”

“She is at the Palais Royal, I have just left her; she came to announce it to your highness.”

“Could she not prevent it?”

“Mademoiselle commanded.”

“She should have made the servants close the doors: they did not know that she was my daughter, and had no reason to obey her.”

“Madame Desroches was afraid of mademoiselle’s anger, but the servants were afraid of the sword.”

“Of the sword! are you drunk, Dubois?”

“Oh, I am very likely to get drunk on chicory water! No, monseigneur; if I am drunk, it is with admiration of your highness’s perspicacity when you try to conduct an affair all alone.”

“But what sword do you mean?”

“The sword which Mademoiselle Helene disposes of, and which belongs to a charming young man — ”

“Dubois!”

“Who loves her!”

“Dubois! you will drive me mad.”

“And who followed her from Nantes to Rambouillet with infinite gallantry.”

“Monsieur de Livry?”

“Ah! you know his name; then I am telling you nothing new, monseigneur.”

“Dubois, I am overwhelmed.”

“Not without sufficient cause, monseigneur; but see what is the result of your managing your own affairs, while you have at the same time to look after those of France.”

“But where is she?”

“Ah! where indeed — how should I know?”

“Dubois, *you* have told me of her flight — I look to you to discover her retreat. Dubois, my dear Dubois, for God’s sake find my daughter!”

“Ah! monseigneur, you are exactly like the father in Moliere, and I am like Scapin — ’My good Scapin, my dear Scapin, find me my daughter.’ Monseigneur, I am sorry for it, but Geroute could say no more; however, we will look for your daughter, and rescue her from the ravisher.”

“Well, find her, Dubois, and ask for what you please when you have done so.”

“Ah, that is something like speaking.”

The regent had thrown himself back in an armchair, and leaned his head upon his hands. Dubois left him to his grief, congratulating himself that this affection would double his empire over the duke. All at once, while Dubois was watching him with a malicious smile, some one tapped at the door.

“Who is there?” asked Dubois.

“Monseigneur,” said an usher’s voice at the door, “there is in the carriage which brought the chevalier a young woman who wishes to know if he is coming down soon.”

Dubois made a bound toward the door, but he was too late; the regent, to whom the usher’s words had recalled the solemn promise he had made to Gaston, rose at once.

“Where are you going, monseigneur?” asked Dubois.

“To receive this young girl.”

“That is my affair, not yours — you forget that you abandoned this conspiracy to me.”

“I gave up the chevalier to you, but I promised him to be a father to this girl whom he loves. I have pledged my word, and I will keep it; since through me she loses her lover, I must at least console her.”

“I undertake it,” said Dubois, trying to hide his paleness and agitation under one of his own peculiar smiles.

“Hold your tongue and remain here,” said the regent.

“Let me at least speak to her, monseigneur.”

“I will speak to her myself — this is no affair of yours; I have taken it upon myself, have given my word as a gentleman. Silence, and remain here.”

Dubois ground his teeth; but when the regent spoke in this tone, he knew he must obey: he leaned against the chimney-piece and waited.

Soon the rustling of a silk dress was heard.

“Yes, madame,” said the usher, “this way.”

“Here she is,” said the duke, “remember one thing, Dubois: this young girl is in no way responsible for her lover’s fault; consequently, understand me, she must be treated with the greatest respect;” then, turning to the door, “Enter,” said he; the door was hastily opened, the young girl made a step toward the regent, who started back thunderstruck.

“My daughter!” murmured he, endeavoring to regain his self-command, while Helene, after looking round for Gaston, stopped and curtseyed.

Dubois’s face would not be easy to depict.

“Pardon me, monseigneur,” said Helene, “perhaps I am mistaken. I am seeking a friend who left me below, who was to come back to me; but, as he delayed so long, I came to seek for him. I was brought here, but perhaps the usher made a mistake.”

“No, mademoiselle,” said the duke, “M. de Chanlay has just left me, and I expected you.”

As the regent spoke, the young girl became abstracted, and seemed as though taxing her memory; then, in answer to her own thoughts, she cried —

“Mon Dieu! how strange.”

“What is the matter?” asked the regent.

“Yes: that it is.”

“Explain!” said the duke, “I do not understand you.”

”Ah! monsieur,” said Helene, trembling, “it is strange how your voice resembles that of another person.”

“Of your acquaintance?” asked the regent.

“Of a person in whose presence I have been but once, but whose accents live in my heart.”

“And who was this person?” asked the regent, while Dubois shrugged his shoulders at this half recognition.

“He called himself my father,” replied Helene.

“I congratulate myself upon this chance, mademoiselle,” said the regent, “for this similarity in my voice to that of a person who is dear to you may give greater weight to my words. You know that Monsieur de Chanlay has chosen me for your protector?”

“He told me he would bring me to some one who would protect me from the danger — ”

“What danger?” asked the regent.

Helene looked round her, and her glance rested uneasily on Dubois, and there was no mistaking her expression. Dubois’s face inspired her with as much distrust as the regent’s did with confidence.

“Monseigneur,” said Dubois (who did not fail to notice this expression), in an undertone to the regent, “I think I am de trop here, and had better retire; you do not want me, do you?”

“No; but I shall presently; do not go away.” — — ”I will be at your orders.”

This conversation was too low for Helene to hear; besides, she had stepped back, and continued watching the doors, in the hope of seeing Gaston return.

It was a consolation to Dubois to know she would be disappointed.

When Dubois was gone, they breathed more freely.

“Seat yourself, mademoiselle,” said the duke; “I have much to tell you.”

“Monsieur, one thing before all. Is the Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay in any danger?”

“We will speak of him directly, but first of yourself; he brought you to me as a protector. Now, tell me against whom I am to protect you?”

“All that has happened to me for some days is so strange, that I do not know whom to fear or whom to trust. If Gaston were there — ”

“Yes, I understand; if he authorized you to tell me, you would keep nothing back. But if I can prove to you that I know nearly all concerning you?”

“You, monsieur!”

“Yes, I; are you not called Helene de Chaverny? Were you not brought up in the Augustine convent between Nantes and Clisson? Did you not one day receive an order to leave the convent from a mysterious protector who watches over you? Did you not travel with one of the sisters, to whom you gave a hundred louis for her trouble? At Rambouillet, did not a person called Madame Desroches await you? Did she not announce to you a visit from your father? The same evening, did not some one arrive who loved you, and who thought you loved him?”

“Yes, yes, monsieur, it is all true,” said Helene, astonished that a stranger should thus know the details of her history.

“Then the next day,” continued the regent, “did not Monsieur de Chanlay, who followed you under the name of De Livry, pay you a visit, which was vainly opposed by Madame Desroches?”

“You are right, monsieur, and I see that Gaston has told you all.”

“Then came the order to leave for Paris. You would have opposed it, but were forced to obey. You were taken to a house in the Faubourg St. Antoine; but there your captivity became insupportable.”

“You are mistaken, monsieur; it was not the captivity, but the prison.”

“I do not understand you.”

“Did not Gaston tell you of his fears, which I laughed at at first, but shared afterward?”

“No, tell me what did you fear?”

“But if *he* did not tell you, how shall *I*?”

“Is there anything one cannot tell to a friend?”

“Did he not tell you that this man whom I at first believed to be my father — ?”

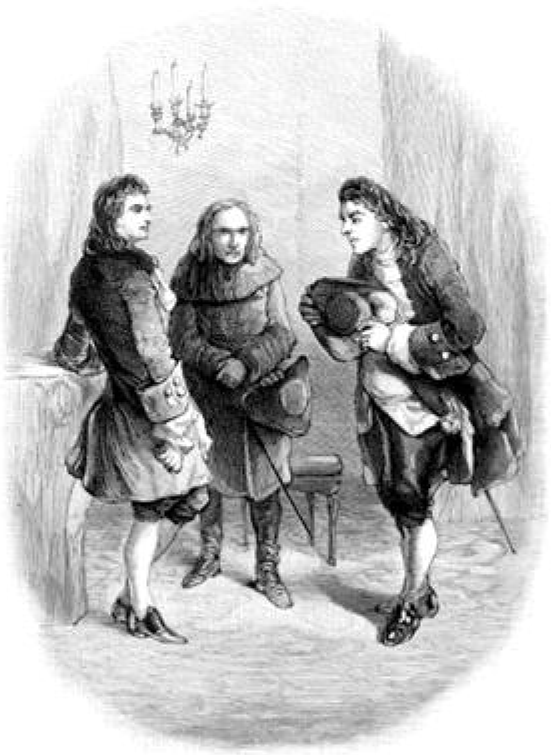

“Believed!”

“Yes; I swear it, monsieur. Hearing his voice, feeling my hand pressed by his, I had at first no doubt, and it almost needed evidence to bring fear instead of the filial love with which he at first inspired me.”

“I do not understand you, mademoiselle; how could you fear a man who — to judge by what you tell me — had so much affection for you?”

“You do not understand, monsieur; as you say, under a frivolous pretext, I was removed from Rambouillet to Paris, shut in a house in the Faubourg Saint Antoine, which spoke more clearly to my eyes than Gaston’s fears had done. Then I thought myself lost — and that this feigned tenderness of a father concealed the wiles of a seducer. I had no friend but Gaston — I wrote to him — he came.”

“Then,” said the regent, filled with joy, “when you left that house it was to escape those wiles, not to follow your lover?”

“Oh, monsieur, if I had believed in that father whom I had seen but once, and then surrounded by mysteries, I swear to you that nothing would have led me from the path of duty.”

“Oh, dear child!” cried the duke, with an accent which made Helene start.

“Then Gaston spoke to me of a person who could refuse him nothing — who would watch over me and be a father to me. He brought me here, saying he would return to me. I waited in vain for more than an hour, and at length, fearing some accident had happened to him, I asked for you." The regent's brow became clouded.

"Thus," said he, "it was Gaston's influence that turned you from your duty — his fears aroused yours?"

"Yes; he suspected the mystery which encircled me, and feared that it concealed some fatal project."

"But he must have given you some proof to persuade you."

"What proof was needed in that abominable house? Would a father have placed his daughter in such a habitation?"

"Yes, yes," murmured the regent, "he was wrong; but confess that without the chevalier's suggestions, you, in the innocence of your soul, would have had no suspicion."

"No," said Helene, "but happily Gaston watched over me."

"Do you then believe that all Gaston said to you was true?" asked the regent.

"We easily side with those we love, monsieur."

"And you love the chevalier?"

"Yes; for the last two years, monsieur."

"But how could he see you in the convent?"

"By night, with the aid of a boat."

"And did he see you often?"

"Every week."

"Then you love him?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"But how could you dispose of your heart, knowing that you were not your own mistress?"

"For sixteen years I had heard nothing of my family; how could I suppose that all at once it would reveal itself, or rather, that an odious maneuver should take me from my quiet retreat to my ruin?"

"Then you still think that that man lied, when he called himself your father?"

"I scarcely know what to think, and my mind becomes bewildered in contemplating this strange reality, which seems so like a dream."

"But you should not consult your mind here, Helene," said the regent; "you should consult your heart. When you were with this man, did not your heart speak to you?"

“Oh!” said Helene, “while he was there I was convinced, for I have never felt emotion such as I felt then.”

“Yes,” replied the regent, bitterly; “but when he was gone, this emotion disappeared, driven away by stronger influence. It is very simple, this man was only your father; Gaston was your lover.”

“Monsieur,” said Helene, drawing back, “you speak strangely.”

“Pardon me,” replied the regent, in a sweet voice; “I see that I allowed myself to be carried away by my interest. But what surprises me more than all, mademoiselle,” continued he, “is that, being beloved as you are by Gaston, you could not induce him to abandon his projects.”

“His projects, monsieur! what do you mean?”

“What! you do not know the object of his visit to Paris?”

“I do not, monsieur. When I told him, with tears in my eyes, that I was forced to leave Clisson, he said he must also leave Nantes. When I told him that I was coming to Paris, he answered, with a cry of joy, that he was about to set out for the same place.”

“Then,” cried the regent, his heart freed from an enormous load, “you are not his accomplice?”

“His accomplice!” cried Helene, alarmed; “ah, mon Dieu! what does this mean?”

“Nothing,” said the regent, “nothing.”

“Oh, yes, monsieur; you have used a word which explains all. I wondered what made so great a change in Gaston. Why, for the last year, whenever I spoke of our future, his brow became dark. Why, with so sad a smile, he said to me, ‘Helene, no one is sure of the morrow.’ Why he fell into such reveries, as though some misfortune threatened him. That misfortune you have shown me, monsieur. Gaston saw none but malcontents there — Montlouis, Pontcalec. Ah! Gaston is conspiring — that is why he came to Paris.”

“Then you knew nothing of this conspiracy?”

“Alas, monsieur! I am but a woman, and, doubtless, Gaston did not think me worthy to share such a secret.”

“So much the better,” cried the regent; “and now, my child, listen to the voice of a friend, of a man who might be your father. Let the chevalier go on the path he has chosen, since you have still the power to go no further.”

“Who? I, monsieur!” cried Helene; “I abandon him at a moment when you yourself tell me that a danger threatens him that I had not known! Oh, no, no, monsieur! We two are alone in the world, we have but each other: Gaston has no parents, I have none either; or if I have, they have been separated from me for sixteen years, and are accustomed to my absence. We may, then, lose ourselves together without costing any one a tear — oh, I deceived you, monsieur, and whatever crime he has committed, or may commit, I am his accomplice."

"Ah!" murmured the regent, in a choking voice, "my last hope fails me; she loves him."

Helene turned, with astonishment, toward the stranger who took so lively an interest in her sorrow. The regent composed himself.

"But," continued he, "did you not almost renounce him? Did you not tell him, the day you separated, that you could not dispose of your heart and person?"

"Yes, I told him so," replied the young girl, with exaltation, "because at that time I believed him happy, because I did not know that his liberty, perhaps his life, were compromised; then, my heart would have suffered, but my conscience would have remained tranquil; it was a grief to bear, not a remorse to combat; but since I know him threatened — unhappy — I feel that his life is mine."

"But you exaggerate your love for him," replied the regent, determined to ascertain his daughter's feelings. "This love would yield to absence."

"It would yield to nothing, monsieur; in the isolation in which my parents left me, this love has become my only hope, my happiness, my life. Ah! monsieur, if you have any influence with him — and you must have, since he confides to you the secrets which he keeps from me — in Heaven's name, induce him to renounce these projects, of which you speak; tell him what I dare not tell him myself, that I love him beyond all expression; tell him that his fate shall be mine; that if he be exiled, I exile myself; if he be imprisoned, I will be so too; and that if he dies, I die. Tell him *that*, monsieur; and add — add that you saw, by my tears and by my despair, that I spoke the truth."

"Unhappy child!" murmured the regent.

Indeed, Helene's situation was a pitiable one. By the paleness of her cheeks, it was evident that she suffered cruelly; while she spoke, her tears flowed ceaselessly, and it was easy to see that every word came from her heart, and that what she had said she would do.

“Well,” said the regent, “I promise you that I will do all I can to save the chevalier.”

Helene was about to throw herself at the duke’s feet, so humbled was this proud spirit by the thought of Gaston’s danger; but the regent received her in his arms. Helene trembled through her whole frame — there was something in the contact with this man which filled her with hope and joy. She remained leaning on his arm, and made no effort to raise herself.

“Mademoiselle,” said the regent, watching her with an expression which would certainty have betrayed him if Helene had raised her eyes to his face, “Mademoiselle, the most pressing affair first — I have told you that Gaston is in danger, but not in immediate danger; let us then first think of yourself, whose position is both false and precarious. You are intrusted to my care, and I must, before all else, acquit myself worthily of this charge. Do you trust me, mademoiselle?”

“Oh, yes; Gaston brought me to you.”

“Always Gaston,” sighed the regent, in an undertone; then to Helene he said:

“You will reside in this house, which is unknown, and here you will be free. Your society will consist of excellent books, and my presence will not be wanting, if it be agreeable to you.”

Helene made a movement as if to speak.

“Besides,” continued the duke, “it will give you an opportunity to speak of the chevalier.”

Helene blushed, and the regent continued:

“The church of the neighboring convent will be open to you, and should you have the slightest fear, such as you have already experienced, the convent itself might shelter you — the superior is a friend of mine.”

“Ah, monsieur,” said Helene, “you quite reassure me; I accept the house you offer me — and your great kindness to Gaston and myself will ever render your presence agreeable to me.”

The regent bowed.

“Then, mademoiselle,” said he, “consider yourself at home here; I think there is a sleeping-room adjoining this room — the arrangement of the ground-floor is commodious, and this evening I will send you two nuns from the convent, whom, doubtless, you would prefer to servants, to wait on you.”

“Ah, yes, monsieur.”

“Then,” continued the regent, with hesitation, “then you have almost renounced your — father?”

“Ah, monsieur, do you not understand that it is for fear he should not be my father.”

“However,” replied the regent, “nothing proves it; that house alone is certainly an argument against him but he might not have known it.”

“Oh,” said Helene, “that is almost impossible.”

“However, if he took any further steps, if he should discover your retreat and claim you, or at least ask to see you?”

“Monsieur, we would inform Gaston, and learn his opinion.”

“It is well,” said the regent, with a smile; and he held out his hand to Helene, and then moved toward the door.

“Monsieur,” said Helene, in a scarcely audible voice.

“Do you wish for anything?” asked the duke, returning.

“Can I see him?”

The words seemed to die away on her lips as she pronounced them.

“Yes,” said the duke, “but is it not better for your sake to do so as little as possible?” Helene lowered her eyes.

“Besides,” said the duke, “he has gone on a journey, and may not be back for some days.”

“And shall I see him on his return?”

“I swear it to you.”

Ten minutes after, two nuns and a lay sister entered and installed themselves in the house.

When the regent quitted his daughter, he asked for Dubois, but he was told that, after waiting half an hour, Dubois had returned to the Palais Royal.

The duke, on entering the abbe’s room, found him at work with his secretaries; a portfolio full of papers was on the table.

“I beg a thousand pardons,” said Dubois, on seeing the duke, “but as you delayed, and your conference was likely to be prolonged greatly, I took the liberty of transgressing your orders, and returning here.”

“You did rightly; but I want to speak to you.”

“To me?”

“Yes, to you.”

“To me alone?”

“Alone.”

"In that case, will monseigneur go into my cabinet, or into your own room?"

"Let us go into your cabinet."

The abbe made a respectful bow and opened the door — the regent passed in first, and Dubois followed when he had replaced the portfolio under his arm. These papers had probably been got together in expectation of this visit.

When they were in the cabinet, the duke looked round him.

"The place is safe?" asked he.

"Pardieu, each door is double, and the walls are two feet thick."

The regent sat down and fell into a deep reverie.

"I am waiting, monseigneur," said Dubois, in a few minutes.

"Abbe," said the regent, in a quick decided tone, as of a man determined to be answered, "is the chevalier in the Bastille?"

"Monseigneur," replied Dubois, "he must have been there about half an hour."

"Then write to M. de Launay. I desire that he be set free at once."

Dubois did not seem surprised; he made no reply, but he placed the portfolio on the table, opened it, took out some papers, and began to look over them quietly.

"Did you hear me?" asked the regent, after a moment's silence.

"I did, monseigneur."

"Obey, then."

"Write yourself, monseigneur," said Dubois.

"And why?"

"Because nothing shall induce this hand to sign your highness's ruin," said Dubois.

"More words," said the regent, impatiently.

"Not words, but facts, monseigneur. Is M. de Chanlay a conspirator, or is he not?"

"Yes, certainly! but my daughter loves him."

"A fine reason for setting him at liberty."

"It may not be a reason to you, abbe, but to me it is, and a most sacred one. He shall leave the Bastille at once."

"Go and fetch him, then; I do not prevent you."

"And did you know this secret?"

"Which?"

"That M. de Livry and the chevalier were the same?"

"Yes, I knew it. What, then?"

"You wished to deceive me."

"I wished to save you from the sentimentality in which you are lost at this moment. The regent of France — already too much occupied by whims and pleasures — must make things worse by adding passion to the list. And what a passion! Paternal love, dangerous love — an ordinary love may be satisfied, and then dies away — but a father's tenderness is insatiable, and above all, intolerable. It will cause your highness to commit faults which I shall prevent, for the simple reason that I am happy enough not to be a father; a thing on which I congratulate myself daily, when I see the misfortunes and stupidity of those who are."

"And what matters a head more or less?" cried the regent. "This De Chanlay will not kill me, when he knows it was I who liberated him."

"No; neither will he die from a few days in the Bastille; and there he must stay."

"And I tell you he shall leave it to-day."

"He must, for his own honor," said Dubois, as though the regent had not spoken; "for if he were to leave the Bastille to-day, as you wish, he would appear to his accomplices, who are now in the prison at Nantes, and whom I suppose you do not wish to liberate also, as a traitor and spy who has been pardoned for the information he has given."

The regent reflected.

"You are all alike," pursued Dubois, "you kings and reigning princes; a reason stupid enough, like all reasons of honor, such as I have just given, closes your mouth; but you will never understand true and important reasons of state. What does it matter to me or to France that Mademoiselle Helene de Chaverny, natural daughter of the regent, should weep for her lover, Monsieur Gaston de Chanlay? Ten thousand wives, ten thousand mothers, ten thousand daughters, may weep in one year for their sons, their husbands, their fathers, killed in your highness's service by the Spaniard who threaten you, who takes your gentleness for weakness, and who becomes emboldened by impunity. We know the plot; let us do it justice. M. de Chanlay — chief or agent of this plot, coming to Paris to assassinate you — do not deny it, no doubt he told you so himself — is the lover of your daughter; so much the worse — it is a misfortune which falls upon you, but may have fallen upon you before, and will again. I knew it all. I knew that he was beloved; I knew that he was called De Chanlay, and not De Livry; yes, I dissimulated, but it was to punish him exemplarily with his accomplices, because, it must be understood that the regent's head is not one of those targets which any one may aim at through excitement or ennui, and go away unpunished if they fail."

"Dubois, Dubois, I shall never sacrifice my daughter's life to save my own, and I should kill her in executing the chevalier; therefore no prison, no dungeon; let us spare the shadow of torture to him whom we cannot treat with entire justice; let us pardon completely; no half pardon, any more than half justice."

"Ah, yes; pardon, pardon; there it is at last; are you not tired of that word, monseigneur; are you not weary of harping eternally on one string?"

"This time, at least, it is a different thing, for it is not generosity. I call Heaven to witness that I should like to punish this man, who is more beloved as a lover than I as a father; and who takes from me my last and only daughter; but, in spite of myself, I stop, I can go no farther; Chanlay shall be set free."

"Chanlay shall be set free; yes, monseigneur; mon Dieu! who opposes it? Only it must be later, some days hence. What harm shall we do him? Diable! he will not die of a week in the Bastille; you shall have your son-in-law; be at peace; but do act so that our poor little government shall not be too much ridiculed. Remember that at this moment the affairs of the others are being looked into, and somewhat roughly too. Well, these others have also mistresses, wives, mothers. Do you busy yourself with them? No, you are not so mad. Think, then, of the ridicule if it were known that your daughter loved the man who was to stab you; the bastards would laugh for a month; it is enough to revive La Maintenon, who is dying, and make her live a year longer. Have patience, monseigneur; let the chevalier eat chicken and drink wine with De Launay. Pardieu! Richelieu does very well there; he is loved by another of your daughters, which did not prevent you from putting him in the Bastille."

"But," said the regent, "when he is in the Bastille, what will you do with him?"

"Oh, he only serves this little apprenticeship to make him your son-in-law. But, seriously, monseigneur, do you think of raising him to that honor?"

“Oh, mon Dieu! at this moment I think of nothing, Dubois, but that I do not want to make my poor Helene unhappy; and yet I really think that giving him to her as a husband is somewhat derogatory, though the De Chanlays are a good family.”

“Do you know them, monseigneur? Parbleu! it only wanted that.”

”I heard the name long ago, but I cannot remember on what occasion; we shall see; but, meanwhile, whatever you may say, one thing I have decided — he must not appear as a traitor; and remember, I will not have him maltreated.”

“In that case he is well off with M. de Launay. But you do not know the Bastille, monseigneur. If you had ever tried it, you would not want a country house. Under the late king it was a prison — oh, yes, I grant that, but under the gentle reign of Philippe d’Orleans, it is a house of pleasure. Besides, at this moment, there is an excellent company there. There are fetes, balls, vocal concerts; they drink champagne to the health of the Duc de Maine and the king of Spain. It is you who pay, but they wish aloud that you may die, and your race become extinct. Pardieu! Monsieur de Chanlay will find some acquaintances there, and be as comfortable as a fish in the water. Ah, pity him, monseigneur, for he is much to be pitied, poor fellow!”

“Yes, yes,” cried the duke, delighted; “and after the revelations in Bretagne we shall see.”

Dubois laughed.

“The revelations in Bretagne. Ah, pardieu! monseigneur, I shall be anxious to know what you will learn that the chevalier did not tell you. Do you not know enough yet, monseigneur? Peste! if it were me, I should know too much.”

“But it is not you, abbe.”

“Alas, unfortunately not, monseigneur, for if I were the Duc d’Orleans and regent, I would make myself cardinal. But do not let us speak of that, it will come in time, I hope; besides, I have found a way of managing the affair which troubles you.”

“I distrust you, abbe. I warn you.”

“Stay, monseigneur; you only love the chevalier because your daughter does?”

“Well?”

“But if the chevalier repaid her fidelity by ingratitude. Mon Dieu! the young woman is proud, monseigneur; she herself would give him up. That would be well played, I think."

"The chevalier cease to love Helene! impossible; she is an angel."

"Many angels have gone through that, monseigneur; besides, the Bastille does and undoes many things, and one soon becomes corrupted there, especially in the society he will find there."

"Well, we shall see, but not a step without my consent."

"Fear nothing, monseigneur. Will you now examine the papers from Nantes?"

"Yes, but first send me Madame Desroches."

"Certainly."

Dubois rang and gave the regent's orders.

Ten minutes after Madame Desroches entered timidly; but instead of the storm she had expected, she received a smile and a hundred louis.

"I do not understand it," thought she; "after all, the young girl cannot be his daughter."

CHAPTER XXII.

IN BRETAGNE.

Our readers must now permit us to look backward, for we have (in following the principal persons of our history) neglected some others in Bretagne, who deserve some notice; besides, if we do not represent them as taking an active part in this tale, history is ready with her inflexible voice to contradict us; we must, therefore, for the present, submit to the exigencies of history.

Bretagne had, from the first, taken an active part in the movement of the legitimated bastards; this province, which had given pledges of fidelity to monarchical principles, and pushed them to exaggeration, if not to madness, since it preferred the adulterous offspring of a king to the interests of a kingdom, and since its love became a crime by calling in aid of the pretensions of those whom it recognized as its princes, enemies against whom Louis XIV. for sixty years, and France for two centuries had waged a war of extermination.

We have seen the list of the principal names which constituted this revolt; the regent had wittily said that it contained the head and tail; but he was mistaken — it was the head and body. The head was the council of the legitimated princes, the king of Spain, and his imbecile agent, the prince of Cellamare; the body was formed by those brave and clever men who were now in the Bastille; but the tail was now agitating in Bretagne among a people unaccustomed to the ways of a court, and it was a tail armed with stings like those of a scorpion, and which was the most to be feared.

The Bretagne chiefs, then, renewed the Chevalier de Rohan, under Louis XIV.; we say the Chevalier de Rohan, because to every conspiracy must be given the name of a chief.

Along with the prince, who was a conceited and commonplace man, and even before him, were two men, stronger than he; one in thought and the other in execution. These two men were Letreaumont, a Norman gentleman, and Affinius Vanden-Enden, a Dutch philosopher; Letreaumont wanted money, he was the arm; Affinius wanted a republic, he was the soul. This republic, moreover, he wanted inclosed in Louis XIV.'s kingdom, still further to annoy the great king — who hated republicans even at a distance — who had persecuted and destroyed the Pensioner of Holland, John de Witt, more cruel in this than the Prince of Orange, who, in declaring himself De Witt's enemy, revenged personal injuries, while Louis XIV. had received nothing but friendship and devotion from this great man.

Now Affinius wanted a republic in Normandy, and got the Chevalier de Rohan named Protector; the Bretons wished to revenge themselves for certain injuries their province had received under the regency, and they decreed it a republic, with the power of choosing a protector, even were he a Spaniard; but Monsieur de Maine had a good chance.

This is what passed in Bretagne.

The Bretons lent an ear to the first overtures of the Spaniards; they had no more cause for discontent than other provinces, but to them it seemed a capital opportunity for war, and they had no other aim. Richelieu had ruled them severely; they thought to emancipate themselves under Dubois, and they began by objecting to the administrators sent by the regent; a revolution always commences by a riot.

Montesquieu was appointed viceroy to hold assemblies, to hear the people's complaints, and to collect their money. The people complained plentifully, but would not pay, because they did not like the steward; this appeared a bad reason to Montesquieu, who was a man of the old régime.

"You cannot offer these complaints to his majesty," said he, "without appearing to rebel: pay first, and complain afterward; the king will listen to your sorrows, but not to your antipathies to a man honored by his choice."

Monsieur de Montaran, of whom the Bretons complained, gave no offense; but, in being intendant of the province, any other would have been as much disliked, and they persisted in their refusal to pay.

"Monsieur le Marechal," said their deputies, "your language might suit a general treating with a conquered place, but cannot be accepted by free and privileged men. We are neither enemies nor soldiers — we are citizens and masters at home. In compensation of a service which we ask, namely — that Monsieur de Montaran, whom we dislike, should be removed, we will pay the tax demanded; but if the court takes to itself the highest prize, we will keep our money, and bear as we best can the treasurer who displeases us."

Monsieur de Montesquieu, with a contemptuous smile, turned on his heel — the deputies did the same, and both retired with their original dignity.

But the marshal was willing to wait; he behaved himself as an able diplomatist, and thought that private reunions would set all right; but the Breton nobles were proud — indignant at their treatment, they appeared no more at the marshal's reception; and he, from contempt, changed to angry and foolish resolves. This was what the Spaniards had expected. Montesquieu, corresponding with the authorities at Nantes, Quimper, Vannes, and Rennes, wrote that he had to deal with rebels and mutineers, but that ten thousand of his soldiers should teach the Bretons politeness.

The states were held again; from the nobility to the people in Bretagne is but a step; a spark lights the whole; the citizens declared to M. de Montesquieu that if he had ten thousand men, Bretagne had a hundred thousand, who would teach his soldiers, with stones, forks and muskets, that they had better mind their own business, and that only.

The marshal assured himself of the truth of this assertion, and was quiet, leaving things as they were for a while; the nobility then made a formal and moderate complaint; but Dubois and the council of the regency treated it as a hostile manifesto, and used it as an instrument.

Montaran, Montesquieu, Pontcalec and Talhouet were the men really fighting among themselves. Pontcalec, a man of mind and power, joined the malcontents and encouraged the growth of the struggle.

There was no drawing back; the court, however, only saw the revolt, and did not suspect the Spanish affair. The Bretons, who were secretly undermining the regency, cried aloud, “No impost, no Montaran,” to draw away suspicion from their anti-patriotic plots — but the event turned out against them. The regent — a skillful politician — guessed the plot without perceiving it; he thought that this local veil hid some other phantom, and he tore off the veil. He withdrew Montaran, and then the conspirators were unmasked; all the others were content and quiet, they alone remained in arms.

Then Pontcalec and his friends formed the plot we are acquainted with, and used violent means to attain their ends.

Spain was watching; Alberoni, beaten by Dubois in the affair of Cellamare, waited his revenge, and all the treasures prepared for the plot of Paris were now sent to Bretagne; but it was late — he did not believe it, and his agents deceived him; he thought it was possible to recommence the war, but then France made war on Spain. He thought it possible to kill the regent; but he, and not Chanlay, should do what no one would then recommend to the most cruel enemy of France. Alberoni reckoned on the arrival of a Spanish vessel full of arms and money, and this ship did not arrive; he waited for news of Chanlay; it was La Jonquiere who wrote — and what a La Jonquiere!

One evening Pontcalec and his friends had met in a little room near the old castle; their countenances were sad and irresolute — Du Couëdic announced that he had received a note recommending them to take flight.

"I have a similar one to show you," said Montlouis; "it was slid under my glass at table, and my wife, who expected nothing, was frightened."

"I neither expect nor fear anything," said Talhouet; "the province is calm, the news from Paris is good; every day the regent liberates some one of those imprisoned for the Spanish affair."

"And I, gentlemen," said Pontcalec, "must tell you of a strange communication I have received to-day. Show me your note, Du Couëdic, and you yours, Montlouis; perhaps it is the same writing, and is a snare for us."

"I do not think so, for if they wish us to leave this, it is to escape some danger; we have nothing to fear for our reputation, for that is not at stake. The affairs of Bretagne are known to the world: your brother, Talhouet, and your cousin have fled to Spain: Solduc, Rohan, Sanbilly the counselor, have all disappeared, yet their flight was supposed to be natural, and from some simple cause of discontent. I confess, if the advice be repeated, I shall fly."

"We have nothing to fear, my friends," said Pontcalec, "our affairs were never more prosperous. See, the court has no suspicion, or we should have been molested already. La Jonquiere wrote yesterday; he announces that De Chanlay is starting for La Muette, where the regent lives as a private gentleman, without guards, without fear." — — "Yet you are uneasy," said Du Couëdic.

"I confess it, but not for the reason you suppose."

"What is it, then?"

"A personal matter."

"Of your own!"

"Yes, and I could not confide it to more devoted friends, or any who know me better. If ever I were molested — if ever I had the alternative of remaining or of flying to escape a danger, I should remain; do you know why?”

“No, speak.”

“I am afraid.”

“You, Pontcalec? — afraid! What do you mean by these words, after those you have just uttered?”

“Mon Dieu! yes, my friend; the ocean is our safeguard; we could find safety on board one of those vessels which cruise on the Loire from Paimbœuf to Saint Nazaire; but what is safety to you is certain death to me.”

“I do not understand you,” said Talhouet.

“You alarm me,” said Montlouis.

“Listen, then, my friends,” said Pontcalec.

And he began, in the midst of the most scrupulous attention, the following recital, for they knew that if Pontcalec were afraid there must be a good cause.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SORCERESS OF SAVERNAY.

“I was ten years old, and I lived at Pontcalec, in the midst of woods, when one day my uncle Crysogon, my father, and I, resolved to have a rabbit hunt in a warren at five or six miles distance, found, seated on the heath, a woman reading. So few of our peasants could read that we were surprised. We stopped and looked at her — I see her now, as though it were yesterday, though it is nearly twenty years ago. She wore the dark costume of our Breton women, with the usual white head-dress, and she was seated on a large tuft of broom in blossom, which she had been cutting.

“My father was mounted on a beautiful bay horse, with a gold-colored mane, my uncle on a gray horse, young and ardent, and I rode one of those little white ponies, which to strength and activity unite the docility of a sheep.

“The woman looked up from her book at the group before her, and seeing me firm in my stirrups near my father, who seemed proud of me, she rose all at once, and approaching me, said —

“‘What a pity!’

“‘What do you mean?’ asked my father.

“‘It means that I do not like that white pony,’ replied the woman.

“‘And why not?’

“‘Because he will bring misfortune to your child, Sirè de Pontcalec.’

“We Bretons are superstitious, you know; so that even my father, who, you know, Montlouis, was an enlightened as well as a brave man, stopped, in spite of my uncle Crysogon, who urged us to proceed, and trembling at the idea of danger to me, he added —

“‘Yet the pony is gentle, my good woman, and Clement rides well for his age. I have often ridden the little animal in the park, and its paces are perfect.’

“‘I do not know anything of that, Marquis de Guer,’ replied the woman, ‘but the little white horse will injure your son Clement, I tell you.’

“‘And how can you know this?’

"'I see it,' replied she, in a strange voice.

"'When?' asked my father.

"'To-day.'

"My father turned pale, and I was afraid; but my uncle Crysogon, who had been in the Dutch wars, and had become somewhat hardened by combating the Huguenots, laughed till he nearly fell from his horse.

"'Parbleu!' said he, 'this good woman certainly is in league with the rabbits at Savernay. What do you say to it, Clement: would you like to go home and lose the sport?'

"'Uncle,' I replied, 'I would rather go on with you.'

"'You look pale and odd — are you afraid?'

"'I am not afraid,' said I.

"I lied, for I felt a certain shudder pass through me, which was very like fear.

"My father has since owned to me, that if it had not been for my uncle's words, which caused a certain false shame in him, he would have sent me home or given my horse to one of the servants; but what an example for a boy of my age, who declared himself to have no fear, and what a subject for ridicule to my uncle.

"I continued, then, to ride my pony; we reached the warren, and the chase commenced.

"While it lasted, the pleasures made us forget the prediction; but the chase over, and having started on our road home —

"'Well, Clement,' said my uncle, 'still on your pony; you are a brave boy.'

"My father and I both laughed; we were then crossing a plain as flat and even as this room — no obstacles in the way, nothing that could frighten a horse, yet at that moment my pony gave a bound which shook me from my seat, then he reared violently, and threw me off; my uncle laughed, but my father became as pale as death. I did not move, and my father leaped from his horse and came to me, and found that my leg was broken.

"To describe my father's grief and the cries of the grooms would be impossible; but my uncle's despair was indescribable — kneeling by my side, removing my clothes with a trembling hand, covering me with tears and caresses, his every word was a fervent prayer. My father was obliged to console him, but to all his consolations and caresses he answered not.

"They sent for the first surgeon at Nantes, who pronounced me in great danger. My uncle begged my mother's pardon all day long; and we remarked that, during my illness, he had quite changed his mode of life; instead of drinking and hunting with the officers — instead of going on fishing expeditions, of which he was so fond — he never left my pillow.

"The fever lasted six weeks, and the illness nearly four months; but I was saved, and retained no trace of the accident. When I went out for the first time, my uncle gave me his arm; but when the walk was over, he took leave of us with tears in his eyes.

"'Where are you going, Crysogon?' asked my father in astonishment.

"'I made a vow,' replied the good man, 'that if our child recovered, I would turn Carthusian, and I go to fulfill it.'

"This was a new grief. My father and my mother shed tears; I hung on my uncle's neck, and begged him not to leave us; but the viscount was a man who never broke a promise or a resolution. Our tears and prayers were vain.

"'My brother,' said he, 'I did not know that God sometimes deigns to reveal Himself to man in acts of mystery. I doubted, and deserve to be punished; besides, I do not wish to lose my salvation in the pleasures of this life.'

"At these words the viscount embraced me again, mounted his horse, and disappeared. He went to the Carthusian monastery at Morlaix. Two years afterward, fasts, macerations, and grief had made of this bon vivant, this joyous companion, this devoted friend, a premature skeleton. At the end of three years he died, leaving me all his wealth."

"Diable! what a frightful tale," said Du Couëdic; "but the old woman forgot to tell you that breaking your leg would double your fortune."

"Listen," said Pontcalec, more gravely than ever.

"Ah! it is not finished," said Talhouet.

"We are only at the commencement."

"Continue, we are listening."

"You have all heard of the strange death of the Baron de Caradec, have you not?"

"Our old college friend at Nantes," said Montlouis, "who was found murdered ten years ago in the forest of Chateaubriant?"

"Yes. Now listen; but remember that this is a secret which till this moment has been only known to me, and which even now must go no further than ourselves.”

The three Bretons, who were deeply interested, gave the required promises.

“Well,” said Pontcalec, “this college friendship of which Montlouis speaks had undergone some change between Caradec and myself, on account of a rivalry. We loved the same woman, and I was loved by her.

“One day I determined to hunt the stag in the forest of Chateaubriant; my dogs and huntsmen had been sent out the day before, and I was on my way to the rendezvous, when, on the road before me, I saw an enormous fagot walking along. This did not surprise me, for our peasants carry such enormous fagots, that they quite disappear under their load; but this fagot appeared from behind to move alone. Soon it stopped; an old woman, turning round, showed her face to me. As I approached, I could not take my eyes off her, for I recognized the sorceress of Savernay, who had predicted the misfortune caused by my white pony.

“My first impulse, I confess, was to take another road, and avoid the prophetess of evil; but she had already seen me, and she seemed to wait for me with a smile full of malice. I was ten years older than when her first threat had frightened me. I was ashamed to go back.

“‘Good-day, Viscount de Pontcalec,’ said she; ‘how is the Marquis de Guer?’

“‘Well, good woman; and I shall be quite easy about him, if you will assure me that nothing will happen to him during my absence.’

“‘Ah! ah!’ said she laughing; ‘you have not forgotten the plains of Savernay. You have a good memory, viscount; but yet, if I gave you some advice, you would not follow it any more than the first time. Man is blind.’

“‘And what is your advice?’

“‘Not to go hunting to-day.’

“‘Why not?’

“‘And to return at once to Pontcalec.’

“‘I cannot; I have a rendezvous with some friends at Chateaubriant.’

“‘So much the worse, viscount, for blood will be spilled.’

“‘Mine?’

“‘Yours, and another’s.’

“‘Bah! are you mad?’

“‘So said your uncle Crysogon. How is he?’

“‘Do you not know that he died seven years ago at Morlaix?’

"'Poor fellow!' said the woman, 'like you, he would not believe: at length he beheld, but it was too late.'

"I shuddered involuntarily; but a false shame whispered that it would be cowardly to give way, and that doubtless the fulfillment of the pretended witch's former prediction had been but a chance.

"'Ah! I see that a former experience has not made you wiser, my fine fellow,' said she. 'Well, go to Chateaubriant then, since you must have it so, but at least send back that handsome hunting-knife.'

"'And with what will monsieur cut the stag's foot?' asked the servant who followed me.

"'With your knife,' said the old woman.

"'That stag is a royal animal,' replied the servant, 'and deserves a hunting-knife.'

"'Besides,' said I, 'you said my blood would flow. What means that? — I shall be attacked, and if so, I shall want it to defend myself.'

"'I do not know what it means,' replied the old woman; 'but I do know, that in your place, my brave gentleman, I would listen to a poor old woman, and that I would not go to Chateaubriant; or, if I did go, it would be without my hunting-knife.'

"'Do not listen to the old witch, monsieur,' said the servant, who was doubtless afraid to take the fatal weapon.

"If I had been alone, I should have returned; but before my servant I did not like to do so.

"'Thank you, my good, woman,' said I, 'but really I do not see what reason there is for not going to Chateaubriant. As to my knife, I shall keep it; if I be attacked, I must have a weapon to defend myself.'

"'Go, then, and defend yourself,' said the old woman, shaking her head; 'we cannot escape our destiny.'

"I heard no more. I urged my horse to a gallop; but, turning a corner, I saw that the old woman had resumed her route, and I lost sight of her.

"An hour after I was in the forest of Chateaubriant; and I met you, Montlouis and Talhouet, for you were both of the party."

"It is true," said Talhouet, "and I began to understand."

"And I," said Montlouis.

"But I know nothing of it," said Du Couëdic; "so pray continue, Pontcalec."

"Our dogs started the deer, and we set off in pursuit; but we were not the only hunters in the forest — at a distance we heard the sound of another pack, which gradually approached; soon the two crossed, and some of my dogs by mistake went after the wrong deer. I ran after them to stop them, which separated me from you. You followed the rest of our pack; but some one had forestalled me. I heard the howls of my dogs under the lash of a whip; I redoubled my pace, and found the Baron de Caradec striking them. I told you there were causes of dislike between us, which only needed an opportunity to burst out. I asked him why he struck my dogs. His reply was haughtier than my question. We were alone — we were both twenty years of age — we were rivals — each was armed. We drew our knives — threw ourselves one upon the other, and Caradec fell from his horse, pierced through the body. To tell you what I felt when I saw him, bleeding and writhing in agony, would be impossible; I spurred my horse, and darted through the forest like a madman.

"I heard the voices of the hunters, and I arrived, one of the first, but I remember — do you remember it, Montlouis? — that you asked me why I was so pale."

"I do," said Montlouis.

"Then I remembered the advice of the sorceress, and reproached myself bitterly for neglecting it. This solitary and fatal duel seemed to me like an assassination. Nantes and its environs became insupportable to me, for every day I heard of the murder of Caradec. It is true that no one suspected me, but the secret voice of my conscience spoke so loud that twenty times I was on the point of denouncing myself.

"Then I left Nantes and went to Paris, but not until I had searched for the sorceress; not knowing either her name or her residence, I could not find her."

"It is strange," said Talhouet; "and have you ever seen her since?"

"Wait," said Pontcalec, "and listen, for now comes the terrible part. This winter — or rather last autumn — I say winter, because there was snow falling, though it was only in November — I was returning from Guer, and had ordered a halt at Pontcalec-des-Aulnes, after a day during which I had been shooting snipes in the marshes with two of my tenants. We arrived, benumbed with cold, at the rendezvous, and found a good fire and supper awaiting us.

“As I entered, and received the salutations and compliments of my people, I perceived in the chimney-corner an old woman wrapped in a large gray-and-black cloak, who appeared to be asleep.

“‘Who is that?’ I asked of the farmer, and trembling involuntarily.

“‘An old beggar, whom I do not know, and she looks like a witch,’ said he; ‘but she was perishing with cold, hunger and fatigue. She came begging; I told her to come in, and gave her a piece of bread, which she eat while she warmed herself, and now she has gone to sleep.’

“The figure moved slightly in its corner.

“‘What has happened to you, Monsieur le Marquis,’ asked the farmer’s wife, ‘that you are so wet, and that your clothes are splashed with mud up to the shoulder?’

“‘You nearly had to dine without me, my good Martine,’ I replied, ‘although this repast and this fire were prepared for me.’ — — ”‘Truly!’ cried the good woman, alarmed.

“‘Ah! monsieur had a narrow escape!’ said the farmer.

“‘How so, my good lord?’

“‘You know your marshes are full of bogs; I ventured without sounding the ground, and all at once I felt that I was sinking in; so that, had it not been for my gun, which I held across, enabling your husband to come and pull me out, I should have been smothered, which is not only a cruel but a stupid death.’

”‘Oh, monsieur,’ said the wife, ‘pray do not expose yourself in this way!’

“‘Let him alone,’ said the sepulchral voice of the figure crouched in the chimney-corner; ‘he will not die thus; I foretell that.’

“And, lowering the hood of her gray cloak, she showed me the face of that woman who had twice crossed my path with sad prediction.

“I remained motionless and petrified.

“‘You recognize me?’ she asked, without moving.

“I made a sign of assent, but had not really the courage to reply. All gathered in a circle round us.

“‘No, no,’ continued she; ‘be easy, Marquis de Guer; you will not die thus.’

“‘How do you know?’ I stammered out, with a conviction, however, that she did know.

“‘I cannot tell you, for I do not know myself; but you know well that I do not make mistakes.’

"'And how shall I die?' asked I, making an effort over myself to ask this question and to listen to her reply.

"'You will die by the sea. Beware of the water, Marquis de Guer!' she replied.

"'How?' asked I. 'What do you mean?'

"'I have spoken, and cannot explain further, marquis; but again I say, *Beware of the water!'*

"All the peasants looked frightened; some muttered prayers, others crossed themselves; the old woman returned to her corner, buried herself again in her cloak, and did not speak another syllable.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ARREST.

"The details of this affair may some day escape my memory, but the impression it made will never be effaced. I had not the shadow of a doubt; and this prediction took the aspect of a reality, as far as I was concerned. Yes," continued Pontcalec, "even though you should laugh, like my Uncle Crysogon, you would never change my opinion, or take away from me the conviction that the prediction will be realized; therefore, I tell you, were it true that we are pursued by Dubois's exempts — were there a boat ready to take us to Belle Isle to escape them, so convinced am I that the sea will be fatal to me, and that no other death has any power over me, that I would give myself up to my pursuers, and say, 'Do your worst; I shall not die by your hands.'"

The three Bretons had listened in silence to this strange declaration, which gathered solemnity from the circumstances in which they stood.

"Then," said Du Couëdic, after a pause, "we understand your courage, my friend; believing yourself destined to one sort of death, you are indifferent to all other danger; but take care, if the anecdote were known, it would rob you of all merit; not in our eyes, for we know what you really are; but others would say that you entered this conspiracy because you can neither be beheaded, shot, nor killed by the dagger, but that it would have been very different if conspirators were drowned."

"And perhaps they would speak the truth," said Pontcalec, smiling.

"But, my dear marquis," said Montlouis, "we, who have not the same grounds for security, should, I think, pay some attention to the advice of our unknown friend, and leave Nantes, or even France, as soon as possible."

"But this may be wrong," said Pontcalec; "and I do not believe our projects are known at Nantes or elsewhere."

"And probably nothing will be known till Gaston has done his work," said Talhouet, "and then we shall have nothing to fear but enthusiasm, and that does not kill. As to you, Pontcalec, never approach a seaport, never go to sea, and you will live to the age of Methuselah!"

The conversation might have continued in this jocular strain; but at this moment several gentlemen, with whom they had appointed a meeting, came in by different secret ways, and in different costumes.

It was not that they had much to fear from the provincial police — that of Nantes, though Nantes was a large town, was not sufficiently well organized to alarm conspirators, who had in the locality the influence of name and social position — but the police of Paris — the regent’s police, or that of Dubois — sent down spies, who were easily detected by their ignorance of the place, and the difference of their dress and speech.

Though this Breton association was numerous, we shall only occupy ourselves with its four chiefs, who were beyond all the others in name, fortune, courage, and intelligence.

They discussed a new edict of Montesquieu’s, and the necessity of arming themselves in case of violence on the marshal’s part: thus it was nothing less than the beginning of a civil war, for which the pretexts were the impiety of the regent’s court and Dubois’s sacrileges; pretexts which would arouse the anathemas of an essentially religious province, against a reign so little worthy to succeed that of Louis XIV.

Pontcalec explained their plan, not suspecting that at that moment Dubois’s police had sent a detachment to each of their dwellings, and that an exempt was even then on the spot with orders to arrest them. Thus all who had taken part in the meeting, saw, from afar, the bayonets of soldiers at their houses: and thus, being forewarned, they might probably escape by a speedy flight; they might easily find retreats among their numerous friends: many of them might gain the coast, and escape to Holland, Spain, or England.

Pontcalec, Du Couëdic, Montlouis, and Talhouet, as usual, went out together; but, on arriving at the end of the street where Montlouis’s house was situated, they perceived lights crossing the windows of the apartments, and a sentinel barring the door with his musket.

“Oh,” said Montlouis, stopping his companions, “what is going on at my house?”

“Indeed, there is something,” said Talhouet; “and just now I fancied I saw a sentinel at the Hotel de Rouen.”

“Why did you not say so?” asked Du Couëdic, “it was surely worth mentioning.”

“Oh, I was afraid of appearing an alarmist, and I thought it might be only a patrol.”

“But this man belongs to the regiment of Picardy,” said Montlouis, stepping back.

“It is strange,” said Pontcalec; “let me go up the lane which leads to my house — if that also be guarded, there will be no further doubt.”

Keeping together, in case of an attack, they went on silently till they saw a detachment of twenty men grouped round Pontcalec’s house.

“This passes a joke,” said Du Couëdic, “and unless our houses have all caught fire at once, I do not understand these uniforms around them; as to me, I shall leave mine, most certainly.”

“And I,” said Talhouet, “shall be off to Saint-Nazaire, and from thence to Le Croisic; take my advice and come with me. I know a brig about to start for Newfoundland, and the captain is a servant of mine; if the air on shore becomes too bad, we will embark, set sail, and vogue la galères; come, Pontcalec, forget your old witch and come with us.”

“No, no,” said Pontcalec, “I will not rush on my fate; reflect, my friends; we are the chiefs, and we should set a strange example by flying before we even know if a real danger exists. There is no proof against us. La Jonquiere is incorruptible; Gaston is intrepid; our letters from him say that all will soon be over; perhaps, at this very moment, France may be delivered and the regent dead. What would be thought of us if, at such a time, we had taken flight? the example of our desertion would ruin everything here. Consider it well; I do not command you as a chief, but I counsel you as a friend; you are not obliged to obey, for I free you from your oath, but in your place I would not go. We have given an example of devotion; the worst that can happen to us is to give that of martyrdom; but this will not, I hope, be the case. If we are arrested, the Breton parliament will judge us. Of what is it composed? — of our friends and accomplices. We are safer in a prison of which they hold the key, than on a vessel at the mercy of the winds; besides, before the parliament has assembled, all Bretagne will be in arms; tried, we are absolved; absolved, we are triumphant!”

“He is right,” said Talhouet; “my uncle, my brothers, all my family are compromised with me. I shall save myself with them, or die with him.”

“My dear Talhouet,” said Montlouis, “all this is very fine; but I have a worse opinion of this affair than you have. If we are in the hands of any one, it is Dubois, who is not a gentleman, and hates those who are. I do not like these people who belong to no class — who are neither nobles, soldiers, nor priests. I like better a true gentleman, a soldier, or a monk: at least they are all supported by the authority of their profession. However, I appeal, as we generally do, to the majority; but I confess, that if it be for flight, I shall fly most willingly."

"And I," said Du Couëdic; "Montesquieu may be better informed than we suppose; and if it be Dubois who holds us in his clutches, we shall have some difficulty in freeing ourselves."

"And I repeat, we must remain," said Pontcalec; "the duty of a general is to remain at the head of his soldiers; the duty of the chief of a conspiracy is to die at the head of the plot."

"My dear friend," said Montlouis, "your sorceress blinds you; to gain credence for her prediction, you are ready to drown yourself intentionally. I am less enthusiastic about this pythoness, I confess; and as I do not know what kind of death is in store for me, I am somewhat uneasy."

"You are mistaken, Montlouis," said Pontcalec, "it is duty above all which influences me, and besides, if I do not die for this, you will not, for I am your chief, and certainly before the judges I should reclaim the title which I have abjured to-day. If I do not die by Dubois, neither will you. We soldiers, and afraid to pay an official visit to parliament, for that is it, after all, and nothing else; benches covered with black robes — smiles of intelligence between the accused and the judge: it is a battle with the regent; let us accept it, and when parliament shall absolve us, we shall have done as well as if we had put to flight all the troops in Bretagne."

"Montlouis proposed to refer it to a majority," said Du Couëdic, "let us do so."

"I did not speak from fear," said Montlouis; "but I do not see the use of walking into the lion's mouth if we can muzzle him."

"That was unnecessary, Montlouis," said Pontcalec; "we all know you, and we accept your proposition. Let those who are for flight hold up their hands."

Montlouis and Du Couëdic raised their hands.

"We are two and two," said Montlouis; "we must, then, trust to inspiration."

"You forget," said Pontcalec, "that, as president, I have two votes."

"It is true."

"Let those, then, who are for remaining here hold up their hands."

Pontcalec and Talhouet raised their hands; thus the majority was fixed.

This deliberation in the open street might have seemed absurd, had it not involved in its results the question of life or death to four of the noblest gentlemen in Bretagne.

"Well," said Montlouis, "it appears, Du Couëdic, that we were wrong: and now, marquis, we obey your orders."

"See what I do," said Pontcalec, "and then do as you like."

And he walked straight up to his house, followed by his three friends.

Arriving at the door, he tapped a soldier on the shoulder.

"My friend," said he, "call your officer, I beg."

The soldier passed the order to the sergeant, who called the captain.

"What do you want?" asked the latter. — — "I want to come into my house."

"Who are you?"

"I am the Marquis de Pontcalec."

"Silence!" said the officer, in a low voice, "and fly instantly — I am here to arrest you." Then aloud, "You cannot pass," said he, pushing back the marquis, and closing in his soldiers before him.

Pontcalec took the officer's hand, pressed it, and said:

"You are a brave fellow, but I must go in. I thank you, and may God reward you!"

The officer, surprised, opened his ranks, and Pontcalec, followed by his friends, crossed the court. On seeing him, his family uttered cries of terror.

"What is it?" asked the marquis, calmly; "and what is going on here?"

"I arrest you, Monsieur le Marquis," said an exempt of the provost of Paris.

"Pardieu! what a fine exploit!" said Montlouis; "and you seem a clever fellow — you, a provost's exempt, and absolutely those whom you are sent to arrest are obliged to come and take you by the collar."

The exempt saluted this gentleman, who joked so pleasantly at such a time, and asked his name.

"I am Monsieur de Montlouis. Look, my dear fellow, if you have not got an order against me, too — if you have, execute it."

"Monsieur," said the exempt, bowing lower as he became more astonished, "it is not I, but my comrade, Duchevon, who is charged to arrest you; shall I tell him?" — — "Where is he?"

"At your house, waiting for you."

“I should be sorry to keep you waiting long,” said Montlouis, “and I will go to him. Thanks, my friend.”

The exempt was bewildered.

Montlouis pressed Pontcalec’s hand and those of the others; then, whispering a few words to them, he set out for his house, and was arrested.

Talhouet and Du Couëdic did the same; so that by eleven at night the work was over.

The news of the arrest ran through the town, but every one said, “The parliament will absolve them.”

The next day, however, their opinions changed, for there arrived from Nantes the commission, perfectly constituted, and wanting, as we have said, neither president, procureur du roi, secretary, nor even executioners. We use the plural, for there were three.

The bravest men are sometimes stupefied by great misfortune. This fell on the province with the power and rapidity of a thunderstroke; it made no cry, no movement; Bretagne expired.

The commission installed itself at once, and expected that, in consideration of its powers, people would bow before it rather than give offense; but the terror was so great, that each one thought of themselves alone, and merely deplored the fate of the others.

This, then, was the state of affairs in Bretagne three or four days after the arrest of Pontcalec and his three friends. Let us leave them awhile at Nantes, in Dubois’s toils, and see what was passing in Paris.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BASTILLE.

And now, with the reader’s permission, we will enter the Bastille — that formidable building at which even the passing traveler trembled, and which, to the whole neighborhood, was an annoyance and cause of alarm; for often at night the cries of the unfortunate prisoners who were under torture might be heard piercing the thick walls, so much so, that the Duchesse de Lesdequieres once wrote to the governor, that, if he did not prevent his patients from making such a noise, she should complain to the king.

At this time, however, under the reign of Philippe d’Orleans, there were no cries to be heard; the society was select, and too well bred to disturb the repose of a lady.

In a room in the Du Coin tower, on the first floor, was a prisoner alone; the room was large, and resembled an immense tomb lighted by two windows, furnished with an unusual allowance of bars and irons. A painted couch, two rough wooden chairs, and a black table, were the whole furniture; the walls were covered with strange inscriptions, which the prisoner consulted from time to time when he was overcome by ennui.

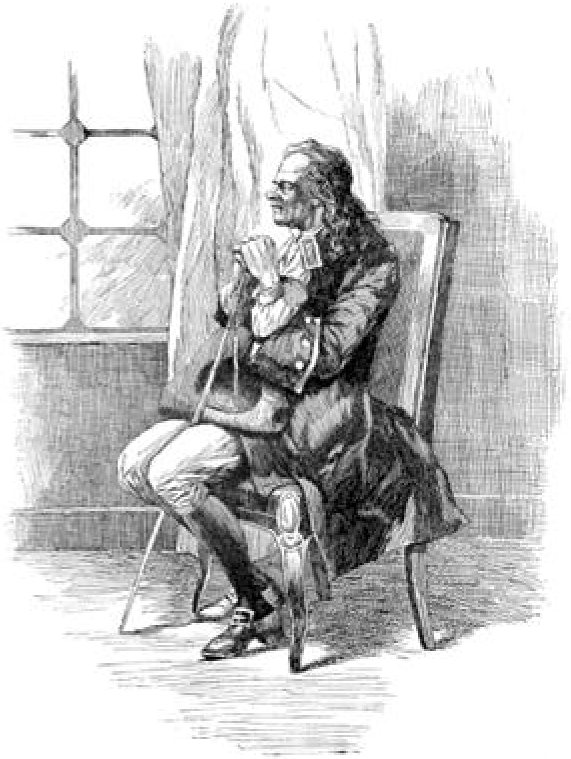

He had, however, been but one day in the Bastille, and yet already he paced his vast chamber, examining the iron-barred doors, looking through the grated windows, listening, sighing, waiting. This day, which was Sunday, a pale sun silvered the clouds, and the prisoner watched, with a feeling of inexpressible melancholy, the walkers on the Boulevards. It was easy to see that every passer-by looked at the Bastille with a feeling of terror, and of self-gratulation at not being within its walls. A noise of bolts and creaking hinges drew the prisoner from this sad occupation, and he saw the man enter before whom he had been taken the day before. This man, about thirty years of age, with an agreeable appearance and polite bearing, was the governor, M. de Launay, father of that De Launay who died at his post in ‘89.

The prisoner, who recognized him, did not know how rare such visits were.

“Monsieur de Chanlay,” said the governor, bowing, “I come to know if you have passed a good night, and are satisfied with the fare of the house and the conduct of the employés” — thus M. de Launay, in his politeness, called the turnkeys and jailers.

“Yes, monsieur; and these attentions paid to a prisoner have surprised me, I own.”

"The bed is hard and old, but yet it is one of the best; luxury being forbidden by our rules. Your room, monsieur, is the best in the Bastille; it has been occupied by the Duc d'Angoulême, by the Marquis de Bassompierre, and by the Marshals de Luxembourg and Biron; it is here that I lodge the princes when his majesty does me the honor to send them to me."

"It is an excellent lodging," said Gaston, smiling, "though ill furnished; can I have some books, some paper, and pens?"

"Books, monsieur, are strictly forbidden; but if you very much wish to read, as many things are allowed to a prisoner who is ennuyé, come and see me, then you can put in your pocket one of those volumes which my wife or I leave about; you will hide it from all eyes; on a second visit you will take the second volume, and to this abstraction we will close our eyes."

"And paper, pens, ink?" said Gaston, "I wish most particularly to write."

"No one writes here, monsieur; or, at least, only to the king, the regent, the minister, or to me; but they draw, and I can let you have drawing-paper and pencils."

"Monsieur, how can I thank you sufficiently for your kindness?"

"By granting me the request I came to make, for my visit is an interested one. I came to ask if you would do me the honor to dine with me to-day?"

"With you, monsieur! truly, you surprise me; however, I cannot tell you how sensible I am of your courtesy, and should retain for it an everlasting gratitude if I had any prospect but death before my eyes."

"Death! monsieur, you are gloomy; you should not think of these things — forget them and accept — "

"I do, monsieur."

"A la bonne heure," said the governor, bowing to Gaston, "I will take back your answer;" and he went out, leaving the prisoner plunged in a new train of ideas.

The politeness which at first charmed the chevalier, on reflection began to arouse some suspicion. Might it not be intended to inspire him with confidence, and lead him on to betray himself and his companions; he remembered the tragic chronicle of the Bastille, the snares laid for prisoners, and that famous dungeon chamber so much spoken of, which none who had entered ever left alive. Gaston felt himself alone and abandoned. He also felt that the crime he had meditated deserved death; did not all these flattering and strange advances conceal some snare? In fact, the

Bastille had done its ordinary work; the prison acted on the prisoner, who became cold, suspicious, and uneasy.

“They take me for a provincial,” he thought, “and they hope that — prudent in my interrogatories — I shall be imprudent in my conduct; they do not, they cannot, know my accomplices; and they hope that in giving me the means of communicating with them, of writing to them, or of inadvertently speaking of them, they will get something out of me. Dubois and D’Argenson are at the bottom of this.”

Then Gaston thought of his friends who were waiting for him without news from him, who would not know what had become of him, or, worse still, on some false news, might act and ruin themselves.

Then came the thought of his poor Helene, isolated, as he himself was, whom he had not even presented to the Duc d’Olivares, her sole protector for the future, and who might himself be arrested or have taken flight. Then, what would become of Helene, without support, and pursued by that unknown person, who had sought her even in the heart of Bretagne?

In a paroxysm of despair at this thought, Gaston threw himself on his bed, cursing the doors and bars which imprisoned him, and striking the stones with his hands.

At this moment there was a noise at the door. Gaston rose hastily, and met D’Argenson with a law officer, and behind them an imposing escort of soldiers. He understood that he was to be interrogated.

D’Argenson, with his great wig, large black eyes, and dark shaggy eyebrows, made little impression on the chevalier; he knew that in joining the conspiracy he sacrificed his happiness, and that in entering the Bastille he had sacrificed his life. In this mood, it was difficult to frighten him. D’Argenson asked a hundred questions which Gaston refused to answer, replying only by complaints of being unjustly arrested, and demanding proof. M. d’Argenson became angry, and Gaston laughed in his face; then D’Argenson spoke of the Breton conspiracy; Gaston assumed astonishment, and listened to the list of his accomplices with the greatest sangfroid. When the magistrate had finished, he thanked him for giving him intelligence of events which were quite new to him. D’Argenson again lost patience, and gave his ordinary angry cough. Then he passed from interrogatory to accusation.

“You wanted to kill the regent,” said he, all at once, to the chevalier.

“How do you know that?” asked Gaston, calmly.

“Never mind how, since I know it.”

“Then I will answer you as Agamemnon did Achilles. Why ask, since you know it?”

“Monsieur, I am not jesting,” said D’Argenson.

“Nor I,” said Gaston; “I only quote Racine.”

“Take care, monsieur, you may find this system of defense do you no good.”

“Do you think it would be better to confess what you ask me?”

“It is useless to deny a fact which I am aware of.”

“Then permit me to repeat my question: what is the use of asking me about a project of which apparently you are so much better informed than I am?”

“I want the details.”

“Ask your police, which reads even people’s most secret thoughts.”

“Hum, hum,” said D’Argenson, in a tone which, in spite of Gaston’s courage, made some impression on him, “what would you say if I asked news of your friend La Jonquiere?”

“I should say,” replied Gaston, turning pale, “that I hope the same mistake has not been made about him as about me.”

“Ah!” said D’Argenson, “that name touches you, I think — you know M. la Jonquiere?”

“I know him as a friend, recommended to me to show me Paris.”

“Yes — Paris and its environs; the Palais Royal, the Rue du Bac, or La Muette: he was to show you all these, was he not?”

“They know all,” thought Gaston.

“Well, monsieur,” said D’Argenson, “can you find another verse from Racine which will serve as an answer to my question?”

“Perhaps I might, if I knew what you meant; certainly I wished to see the Palais Royal, for it is a curious place, and I have heard it much spoken of. As to the Rue du Bac, I know little of it; then there only remains La Muette, of which I know nothing.”

”I do not say that you have been there; I say that La Jonquiere was to take you there — do you dare to deny it.”

“Ma foi, monsieur, I neither deny nor avow; I refer you to him; he will answer you if he think fit.”

“It is useless, monsieur; he has been asked, and has replied.”

Gaston felt a shudder pass through him. He might be betrayed, but he would divulge nothing. He kept silence.

D'Argenson waited a moment, then, seeing that Gaston remained silent —

"Would you like to meet La Jonquiere?" asked he.

"You can do with me as you please, monsieur," said Gaston; "I am in your hands."

But at the same time he resolved, if he were to face La Jonquiere, he would crush him beneath his contempt.

"It is well. As you say, I am the master, and I choose just now to apply the ordinary and extraordinary question: Do you know what they are, monsieur?" said D'Argenson, leaning on each syllable.

A cold sweat bathed Gaston's temples, not that he feared to die, but torture was worse than death. A victim of the torture was always disfigured or crippled, and the best of these alternatives was a cruel one for a young man of five and twenty.

D'Argenson saw, as in a mirror, what was passing in Gaston's mind.

"Hola!" said the interrogator.

Two men entered.

"Here is a gentleman who seems to have no dislike to the question ordinary or extraordinary. Take him to the room."

"It is the dark hour, the hour I expected," murmured Gaston. "Oh, my God! give me courage."

Doubtless his prayer was heard, for, making a sign that he was ready, he followed the guards with a firm step.

D'Argenson came behind him.

They descended the stone staircase and passed the first dungeon in the tower. There they crossed two courts. As they crossed the second court, some prisoners, looking through their windows and seeing a gentleman well dressed, called out:

"Hola! monsieur, you are set free then?"

A woman's voice added:

"Monsieur, if you are asked about us when you are free from here, say that we said nothing."

A young man's voice said:

"You are happy, monsieur — you will see her you love."

"You are mistaken, monsieur," said the chevalier. "I am about to suffer the question."

A terrible silence succeeded. Then the sad procession went over the drawbridge, Gaston was placed in a closed and locked chair and taken to the arsenal, which was separated from the Bastille by a narrow passage.

D'Argenson had taken the lead, and awaited the prisoner, who found himself in a low room covered with damp. On the wall hung chains, collars, and other strange instruments; chafing dishes stood on the ground, and crosses of Saint Andre were in the corner.

"You see this," said D'Argenson, showing the chevalier two rings fastened into flagstones at six feet apart, and separated by a wooden bench about three feet high; "in these rings are placed the head and feet of the patient; then this tressel is placed under him, so that his stomach is two feet higher than his mouth; then we pour pots of water holding two pints each into his mouth. The number is fixed at eight for the ordinary, ten for the extraordinary question. If the patient refuses to swallow, we pinch his nose so that he cannot breathe; then he opens his mouth, then he swallows. This question," continued he, emphasizing every detail, "is very disagreeable, and yet I do not think I should prefer the boot. Both kill sometimes; the boot disfigures the patient, and it is true that the water destroys his health for the future; but it is rare, for the prisoner always speaks at the ordinary question if he be guilty, and generally at the extraordinary, if he be not."

Gaston, pale and silent, listened and watched.

"Do you prefer the wedges, chevalier? Here, bring the wedges."

A man brought six wedges and showed them, still stained with blood and flattened at the edges by the blows which had been struck upon them.

"Do you know the way in which these are used? The knees and ankles of the patient are pressed between two wooden slabs as tightly as possible, then one of these men forces a wedge between the knees, which is followed by a larger one. There are eight for the ordinary torture, and two larger for the extraordinary. These wedges, I warn you, chevalier, break bones like glass, and wound the flesh insupportably."

"Enough, enough," said Gaston, "unless you wish to double the torture by describing it; but, if it be only to guide my choice, I leave it to you, as you must know them better than I, and I shall be grateful if you will choose the one which will kill me most quickly."

D’Argenson could not conceal the admiration with which Gaston’s strength of will inspired him.

“Come,” said he, “speak, and you shall not be tortured.”

“I have nothing to say, monsieur, so I cannot.”

“Do not play the Spartan, I advise you. One may cry, but between the cries one always speaks under torture.”

“Try,” said Gaston.

Gaston’s resolute air, in spite of the struggle of nature — a struggle which was evidenced by his paleness, and by a slight nervous tremor which shook him — gave D’Argenson the measure of his courage. He was accustomed to this kind of thing, and was rarely mistaken. He saw that he should get nothing out of him, yet he persisted.

“Come, monsieur,” said he, “it is still time. Do not force us to do you any violence.”

“Monsieur,” said Gaston, “I swear before God who hears me, that if you put me to the torture, instead of speaking, I will hold my breath, and stifle myself, if the thing be possible. Judge, then, if I am likely to yield to threats, where I am determined not to yield to pain.”

D’Argenson signed to the tormentors, who approached Gaston; but, as they did so, he seemed to gain new strength. With a calm smile, he helped them to remove his coat and to unfasten his cuffs.

“It is to be the water, then?” asked the man.

“The water first,” said D’Argenson.

They passed the cords through the rings, brought the tressels, filled the vases — Gaston did not flinch.

D’Argenson reflected.

After about ten minutes’ thought, which seemed an age to the chevalier —

“Let him go,” said D’Argenson, with a grunt of discontent, “and take him back to the Bastille.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

HOW LIFE PASSED IN THE BASTILLE WHILE WAITING FOR DEATH.

Gaston was inclined to thank the lieutenant of police, but he refrained. It might appear as though he had been afraid. He took his hat and coat, and returned to the Bastille as he had come.

“They did not like to put a man of high birth to the torture,” thought he; “they will try me and condemn me to death.”

But death seemed easy when divested of the preliminary agonies which the lieutenant of police had so minutely described.

On re-entering his room, Gaston saw, almost with joy, all that had seemed so horrible to him an hour before. The prison seemed gay, the view charming, the saddest inscriptions on the walls were madrigals compared to the menacing appearance of the room he had just quitted.

The major of the Bastille came to fetch him about an hour afterward, accompanied by a turnkey.

“I understand,” thought Gaston; “the governor’s invitation is a pretext, in such a case, to take from the prisoner the anguish of expectation. I shall, doubtless, cross some dungeon, into which I shall fall and die. God’s will be done.” And, with a firm step, he followed the major, expecting every moment to be precipitated into some secret dungeon, and murmuring Helene’s name, that he might die with it on his lips.

But, no accident following this poetical and loving invocation, the prisoner quietly arrived at the governor’s door.

M. de Launay came to meet him.

“Will you give me your word of honor, chevalier,” said he, “not to attempt to escape while you are in my house? It is understood, of course,” he added, smiling, “that this parole is withdrawn as soon as you are taken back to your own room, and it is only a precaution to insure me a continuance of your society.”

“I give you my word so far,” said Gaston.

“‘Tis well, monsieur, enter; you are expected.”

And he led Gaston to a well-furnished room, where a numerous company was already assembled.

“I have the honor to present to you M. le Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay,” said the governor. Then naming, in turn, each of the persons assembled —

“M. le Duc de Richelieu.”

“M. le Comte de Laval.”

“M. le Chevalier Dumesnil.”

“M. de Malezieux.”

“Ah,” said Gaston, smiling, “all the Cellamare conspiracy.”

“Except M. and Madame de Maine, and the Prince of Cellamare,” said the Abbe Brigaud, bowing.

“Ah, monsieur,” said Gaston, in a reproachful tone, “you forget the brave D’Harmental and the learned Mademoiselle de Launay.”

“D’Harmental is kept in bed by his wounds,” said Brigaud.

“As to Mademoiselle de Launay,” said the Chevalier Dumesnil, reddening with pleasure, “here she comes; she does us the honor of dining with us.”

“Present me, monsieur,” said Gaston; “among prisoners we must not make ceremonies; I reckon, therefore, on you.”‘

And Dumesnil, taking Gaston by the hand, presented him to Mademoiselle de Launay.

Gaston could not repress a certain expression of astonishment at all he saw.

“Ah, chevalier,” said the governor, “I see that, like three-quarters of the inhabitants of Paris, you thought I devoured my prisoners.”

“No, monsieur,” said Gaston, “but I certainly thought for a moment that I should not have had the honor of dining with you to-day.” — — ”How so?”

“Is it the habit to give your prisoners an appetite for their dinners by the walk I have had to-day?”

“Ah, yes,” cried Mademoiselle de Launay, “was it not you who were being led to the torture just now?”

“Myself, mademoiselle; and be assured that only such a hindrance would have kept me from so charming a society.”

“Ah, these things are not in my jurisdiction,” said the governor; “thank Heaven, I am a soldier, and not a judge. Do not confound arms and the toga, as Cicero says. My business is to keep you here, and to make your stay as agreeable as possible, so that I may have the pleasure of seeing you again. M. d'Argenson's business is to have you tortured, hanged, beheaded, put on the wheel, quartered, if possible; each to his task. Mademoiselle de Launay," added he, "dinner is ready, will you take my arm? Your pardon, Chevalier Dumesnil; you think me a tyrant, I am sure, but as host I am privileged. Gentlemen, seat yourselves."

"What a horrible thing a prison is," said Richelieu, delicately turning up his cuffs, "slavery, irons, bolts, chains."

"Shall I pass you this potage à l'écrevisses?" said the governor.

"Yes, monsieur," said the duke, "your cook does it beautifully, and I am really annoyed that mine did not conspire with me; he might have profited by his stay in the Bastille."

"There is champagne," said De Launay, "I have it direct from Ai."

"You must give me the address," said Richelieu, "for if the regent leaves me my head, I shall drink no other wine than this. I have got accustomed to it during my sojourns here, and I am a creature of habit."

"Indeed," said the governor, "you may all take example by Richelieu; he is most faithful to me; and, in fact, unless we are overcrowded, I always keep his room ready for him."

"That tyrant of a regent may force us all to keep a room here," said Brigaud.

"Monsieur de Launay," said Laval, in an angry tone, "permit me to ask if it was by your orders that I was awoke at two o'clock this morning, and the meaning of this persecution?"

"It is not my fault, monsieur; you must blame these gentlemen and ladies, who will not keep quiet, in spite of all I tell them."

"We!" cried all the guests.

"Certainly," replied the governor, "you all break through rules; I am always having reports of communications, correspondences, notes, etc."

Richelieu laughed, Dumesnil and Mademoiselle de Launay blushed.

"But we will speak of that at dessert. You do not drink, M. de Chanlay?"

"No, I am listening."

"Say that you are dreaming; you cannot deceive me thus."

"And of what?" asked Malezieux.

"Ah, it is easy to see that you are getting old, my poetical friend; of what should M. de Chanlay dream but of his love."

"Is it not better, M. de Chanlay," cried Richelieu, "to have your head separated from your body, than your body from your soul?"

"Apropos," interrupted Laval, "is there any news from the court; how is the king?"

"No politics, gentlemen, if you please," said the governor. "Let us discuss poetry, arts, war, and even the Bastille, if you like, but let us avoid politics."

"Ah, yes," said Richelieu, "let us talk of the Bastille. What have you done with Pompadour?"

"I am sorry to say he forced me to place him in the dungeon."

"What had he done?" asked Gaston.

"He had beaten his jailer."

"How long has it been forbidden for a gentleman to beat his servant?" asked Richelieu.

"The jailers are servants of the king, M. le Duc," said De Launay, smiling.

"Say rather of the regent."

"A subtle distinction."

"A just one."

"Shall I pass you the Chambertin, M. de Laval?"

"If you will drink with me to the health of the king."

"Certainly — if afterward you will drink with me to the health of the regent."

"Monsieur," said Laval, "I am no longer thirsty."

"I believe it — you have just drunk some wine from his highness's cellar."

"From the regent's?"

"He sent it me yesterday, knowing that I was to have the pleasure of your company."

"In that case," said Brigaud, throwing the contents of his glass upon the floor, "no more poison."

"Oh!" said Malezieux, "I did not know you were such a fanatic for the good cause."

"You were wrong to spill it, abbe," said Richelieu, "I know that wine, and you will hardly find such out of the Palais Royal — if it were against your principles to drink it, you should have passed it to your neighbor, or put it back in the bottle. 'Vinum in amphoram,' said my schoolmaster."

"M. le Duc," said Brigaud, "you do not know Latin as well as Spanish."

"I know French still less, and I want to learn it."

"Oh! that would be long and tedious; better get admitted into the Academy, it would be far easier."

"And do you speak Spanish?" asked Richelieu of De Chanlay.

"Report says, monsieur, that I am here for the abuse of that tongue."

"Monsieur," said the governor, "if you return to politics I must leave the table."

"Then," said Richelieu, "tell Mademoiselle de Launay to talk mathematics; that will not frighten any one."

Mademoiselle de Launay started; she had been carrying on a conversation with Dumesnil, which had been greatly exciting the jealousy of Maison-Rouge, who was in love with her.

When dinner was over, the governor conducted each guest back to his own room, and when it came to Gaston's turn he asked M. de Launay if he could have some razors, instruments which appeared necessary in a place where such elegant company was assembled.

"Monsieur le Chevalier," said the governor, "I am distressed to refuse you a thing of which I see the necessity; but it is against the rules for any one to shave themselves unless they have special permission from the lieutenant of police — no doubt you will obtain the permission if you apply for it."

"But are those gentlemen whom I met here privileged, for they were well dressed and shaved?"

"No, they all had to ask permission; the Duc de Richelieu remained for a month with a beard like a patriarch."

"I find it difficult to reconcile such severity in detail with the liberty I have just seen."

"Monsieur, I also have my privileges, which do not extend to giving you books, razors, or pens, but which allow me to invite to my table such prisoners as I choose to favor — always supposing that it is a favor. True, it is stipulated that I shall give an account of anything which is spoken against the government, but by preventing my guests from touching on politics, I avoid the necessity of betraying them."

"Is it not feared, monsieur," said Gaston, "that this intimacy between you and your prisoners should lead to indulgences on your part, which might be contrary to the intentions of the government?"

“I know my duty, monsieur, and keep within its strict limits; I receive my orders from the court, and my guests — who know that I have nothing to do with them — bear me no ill will for them. I hope you will do the same.”

“The precaution was not unnecessary,” said Gaston, “for doubtless I shall not long be left in the enjoyment of the pleasure I have had to-day.”

“You have doubtless some protector at court?”

“None,” said Gaston.

“Then you must trust to chance, monsieur.”

“I have never found it propitious.”

“The more reason that it should weary of persecuting you.”

“I am a Breton, and Bretons trust only in God.”

“Take that as my meaning when I said chance.”

Gaston retired, charmed with the manners and attentions of M. de Launay.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HOW THE NIGHT PASSED IN THE BASTILLE WHILE WAITING FOR THE DAY.

Gaston had already, on the preceding night, asked for a light, and been told that it was against the rules — this night he did not renew the request, but went quietly to bed; his morning's visit to the torture-room had given him a lesson in philosophy.

Thus, rather from youthful carelessness than from force of will or courage, he slept quietly and soundly.

He did not know how long he had slept when he was awoke by the sound of a small bell, which seemed to be in his room, although he could see neither bell nor ringer; it is true that the room was very dark, even by day, and doubly so at that hour. The bell, however, continued to sound distinctly, but with caution, as though it were afraid of being heard. Gaston thought the sound seemed to come from the chimney.

He rose, and approaching it gently, became convinced that he was right.

Presently he heard blows struck — under the floor on which he stepped — at regular intervals, with some blunt instrument.

It was evident that these were signals among the prisoners.

Gaston went to the window to raise the curtain of green serge which intercepted the rays of the moon, and in doing so he perceived an object hanging at the end of a string and swinging before the bars.

"Good," said he; "it appears that I shall have occupation, but each one in turn; regularity above all things; let us see what the bell wants, that was the first."

Gaston returned to the chimney, extended his hand, and soon felt a string, at the end of which a bell was hanging, he pulled, but it resisted.

"Good," said a voice, which came down the chimney, "you are there?"

"Yes," said Gaston; "what do you want?"

"Parbleu, I want to talk."

"Very well," said the chevalier, "let us talk."

“Are you not M. de Chanlay, with whom I had the pleasure of dining to-day?”

“Exactly so, monsieur.”

“In that case I am at your service.”

“And I at yours.”

“Then have the goodness to tell me the state of the Bretagne affairs.”

“You see they are in the Bastille.”

“Good,” said a voice, whose joyous tone Gaston could hear with ease.

“Pardon me,” said Gaston, “but what interest have you in these affairs?”

“Why, when affairs are bad in Bretagne, they treat us well, and when they prosper we are treated badly; thus the other day, apropos of some affair, I do not know what, which they pretended was connected with ours, we were all put in the dungeon.”

“Ah, diable!” said Gaston to himself, “if you do not know, I do.” Then he added, aloud, “Well then, monsieur, be content, they are very bad, and that is perhaps the reason why we had the pleasure of dining together to-day.”

“Eh, monsieur, are you compromised?”

“I fear so.”

“Receive my excuses.”

“I beg you, on the contrary, to accept mine, but I have a neighbor below who is becoming impatient, and who is striking hard enough to break the boards of my floor; permit me to reply to him.”

“Do so, monsieur; if my topographical calculations are correct, it must be the Marquis de Pompadour.”

“It will be difficult to ascertain.”

“Not so difficult as you suppose.”

“How so?”

“Does he not strike in a peculiar manner?”

“Yes; has it a meaning?”

“Certainly; it is our method of talking without direct communication.”

“Have the kindness to give me the key to the vocabulary.”

“It is not difficult; every letter has a rank in the alphabet.”

“Decidedly.”

“There are twenty-four letters.”

“I have never counted them, but no doubt you are right.”

“Well, one blow for a, two for b, three for c, and so on.”

“I understand, but this method of communication must be somewhat lengthy, and I see a string at my window which is getting impatient — I will strike a blow or two to show my neighbor that I have heard him, and then attend to the string.”

“Go, monsieur, I beg, for if I am not mistaken that string is of importance to me; but first strike three blows on the floor — in Bastille language that means patience; the prisoner will then wait for a new signal.”

Gaston struck three blows with the leg of his chair, and the noise ceased.

He then went to the window.

It was not easy to reach the bars, but he at length succeeded in doing so and raising the string, which was gently pulled by some hand as a sign of acknowledgment.

Gaston drew the packet — which would scarcely pass the bars — toward him; it contained a pot of sweetmeats and a book. He saw that there was something written on the paper which covered the pot, but it was too dark to read it.

The string vibrated gently, to show that an answer was expected, and Gaston, remembering his neighbor’s lesson, took a broom, which he saw in the corner, and struck three blows on the ceiling.

This, it will be remembered, meant patience.

The prisoner withdrew the string, freed from its burden.

Gaston returned to the chimney.

“Eh! monsieur,” said he.

“All right, what is it?”

“I have just received, by means of a string, a pot of sweets and a book.”

”Is not there something written on one of them?”

“About the book I do not know, but there is on the pot; unfortunately it is too dark to read.”

“Wait,” said the voice, “I will send a light.”

“I thought lights were forbidden.”

“Yes, but I have procured one.”

“Well, then send it, for I am as impatient as you to know what is written to me.” And Gaston, feeling cold, began to dress himself.

All at once he saw a light in his chimney; the bell came down again transformed into a lantern.

This transformation was effected in the most simple manner, the bell turned upside down, so as to form a vessel, into which some oil had been poured, and in the oil burned a little wick.

Gaston found this so ingenious that for a moment he forgot both the pot and the book. “Monsieur,” said he to his neighbor, “may I, without indiscretion, ask you how you procured the different objects with which you fabricated this lamp?”

“Nothing more simple, monsieur; I asked for a bell, which was given me, then I saved some oil from my breakfasts and dinners, till I had a bottle full; I made wicks by unraveling one of my handkerchiefs; I picked up a pebble when I was walking in the yard; I made some tinder with burned linen; I stole some matches when I dined at the governor’s: then I struck a light with a knife, which I possess; and with the aid of which I made the hole through which we correspond.”

“Receive my compliments, monsieur, you are a man of great invention.”

“Thank you, monsieur; will you now see what book has been sent you, and what is written on the paper of the pot of sweetmeats.”

“Monsieur, the book is a Virgil.”

“That is it — she promised it to me,” cried the voice, in an accent of happiness which surprised the chevalier, who could not understand that a Virgil should be so impatiently expected.

“Now,” said the prisoner with the bell, “pass on, I beg, to the pot of sweetmeats.”

“Willingly,” said Gaston, and he read:

“Monsieur le Chevalier — I hear from the lieutenant of the prison that you occupy the room on the first floor, which has a window immediately below mine. Prisoners should aid and help each other; eat the sweetmeats, and pass the Virgil up to the Chevalier Dumesnil, whose chimney looks into the court.”

“That is what is expected,” said the prisoner with the bell; “I was told at dinner to-day that I should receive this message.”

“Then you are the Chevalier Dumesnil?”

“Yes, monsieur, and your humble servant.”

“I am yours,” replied Gaston, “I have to thank you for a pot of sweetmeats, and I shall not forget my obligation.”

“In that case, monsieur,” replied the prisoner, “have the kindness to detach the bell, and fasten on the Virgil instead.”

“But if you have not the light, you cannot read.”

“Oh, I will make another lantern.”

Gaston, who trusted to his neighbor's ingenuity, after the proofs he had had of it, made no further difficulties; he took the bell, which he placed in the neck of an empty bottle, and fastened on the Virgil, conscientiously replacing a letter which fell from between the leaves.

"Thank you, monsieur," said Dumesnil; "and now, if you will reply to your neighbor below?"

"You give me liberty?"

"Yes, monsieur; though presently I shall make an appeal to your good nature."

"At your orders, monsieur; you say, then, that for the letters — — ?"

"One blow for A.; twenty-four for Z."

"Thank you."

The chevalier struck a blow with the handle of the broom, to give notice to his neighbor that he was ready to enter into conversation with him; it was instantly answered by another blow.

At the end of half an hour the prisoners had succeeded in saying this —

"Good-evening, monsieur; what is your name?"

"Thank you, monsieur; I am the Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay."

"And I, the Marquis de Pompadour."

At this moment Gaston, looking toward the windows, saw the string shaking convulsively.

He struck three blows, to ask for patience, and returned to the chimney.

"Monsieur," said he to Dumesnil, "I beg you to remember that the string at the window seems prodigiously ennuyé."

"Beg her to have patience; I will attend to her presently."

Gaston renewed the signal for patience on the ceiling, and then returned to the chimney, and the Virgil soon returned.

"Monsieur," said Dumesnil, "have the goodness to fasten the Virgil to the string; that is what she wants."

Gaston had the curiosity to see if Dumesnil had replied to Mademoiselle de Launay. He opened the Virgil; there was no letter, but some words were underlined in pencil, and Gaston read: "Meos amores," and "Carceris oblivia longa." He understood this method of correspondence, which consisted in underlining words which, placed together, made sense.

"Ah," said Gaston, fastening the book to the string, "it seems that I have become the postman."

Then he sighed deeply, remembering that he had no means of corresponding with Helene, and that she was entirely ignorant what had become of him. This gave him sympathy for the attachment of Mademoiselle de Launay and the Chevalier Dumesnil. He returned to the chimney.

“Monsieur,” said he, “your letter is dispatched.”

“A thousand thanks, chevalier. Now a word more, and I will leave you to sleep in peace.”

“Oh, say whatever you wish, monsieur.”

“Have you spoken with the prisoner below?”

“Yes.”

“Who is he?”

“The Marquis de Pompadour.”

“I thought so. What did he say?”

“‘Good-evening,’ and asked who I was; he had no time to ask more; the method of communication is not as expeditious as it is ingenious.”

“You must make a hole, and then you can talk as we do.”

“What with?”

“I will lend you my knife.”

“Thank you.”

“It will serve to amuse you, at least.”

“Give it me.”

“Here it is.”

And the knife fell at Gaston’s feet.

“Now, shall I send back the bell?”

“Yes; for my jailers might miss it to-morrow morning, and you do not want light for your conversation with Pompadour.”

“No; certainly not.”

And the bell was drawn up.

“Now,” said the chevalier, “you must have something to drink with your sweets, and I will send you a bottle of champagne.”

“Thank you,” said Gaston, “do not deprive yourself of it; I do not care much for it.”

“Then when you have made the hole, you shall pass it to Pompadour, who is of a very different opinion. Stay, here it is.”

“Thank you, chevalier.”

“Good-night.”

“Good-night.”

And the string ascended.

Gaston looked for the string at the window, and saw that it had disappeared.

“Ah,” sighed he, “the Bastille would be a palace for me, if my poor Helene were in Mademoiselle de Launay’s place.”

Then he resumed a conversation with Pompadour, which lasted till three in the morning, and in which he told him that he was going to pierce a hole, that they might have more direct communication.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A COMPANION IN THE BASTILLE.

Thus occupied, Gaston was more uneasy than ennuyé; besides, he found another source of amusement. Mademoiselle de Launay, who obtained whatever she liked from the lieutenant, Maison-Rouge, provided her request were only accompanied by a sweet smile, obtained paper and pens; she had sent some to Dumesnil, who had shared them with Gaston, with whom he still communicated, and with Richelieu, with whom also he managed to correspond. Then Gaston formed the idea of making some verses to Helene.

On his part, the Chevalier Dumesnil made some for Mademoiselle de Launay, who made them in return for him, so that the Bastille was a true Parnassus. There was only Richelieu who dishonored the society by writing prose.

Time passed, as it will pass, even in the Bastille.

Gaston was asked if he would like to attend mass, and as he was deeply religious, he had assented most gladly. The next day they came to fetch him.

The mass was celebrated in a little church, having, instead of chapels, separate closets, with bulls-eye windows into the choir, so that they could only see the officiating priest at the moment of elevation, and he could not see the prisoners at all.

Gaston saw M. de Laval and the Duc de Richelieu, who had apparently come to mass for the purpose of talking, for they knelt side by side, and kept up an incessant whispering. Monsieur de Laval appeared to have some important news to communicate, and kept looking at Gaston as though he were interested in it. As neither spoke to him, however, except in the way of mere salutation, he asked no questions.

When the mass was over, the prisoners were taken back. As they crossed a dark corridor, Gaston passed a man who seemed to be an employé of the house. This man sought Gaston’s hand, and slipped a paper into it, which he put quietly into his waistcoat pocket.

When he was alone in his own room he eagerly took it out. It was written on sugar paper, with the point of a sharpened coal, and contained this line — ”Feign illness from ennui.”

It seemed to Gaston that the writing was not unknown to him, but it was so roughly traced that it was difficult to recognize. He waited for the evening impatiently, that he might consult with the Chevalier Dumesnil.

At night Gaston told him what had passed, asking him, as he had a longer acquaintance with the Bastille, what he thought of the advice of his unknown correspondent.

“Ma foi, though I do not understand the advice, I should follow it, for it cannot hurt you; the worse that can happen is, that they may give you less to eat.”

“But,” said Gaston, “suppose they discover the illness to be feigned.”

“Oh! as to that,” replied Dumesnil, “the doctor is entirely ignorant, and will give you whatever you may ask for; perhaps they will let you walk in the garden, and that would be a great amusement.”

Gaston consulted Mademoiselle de Launay, whose advice, by logic or sympathy, was the same as that of the chevalier; but she added,

“If they diet you, let me know, and I will send you chicken, sweets, and Bordeaux.”

Pompadour did not reply; the hole was not yet pierced.

Gaston then played the sick man, did not eat what they sent him, relying on his neighbor’s liberality. At the end of the second day M. de Launay appeared — he had been told that Gaston was eating nothing, and he found the prisoner in bed.

“Monsieur,” he said, “I fear you are suffering, and have come to see you.”

“You are too good, monsieur,” said Gaston; “it is true that I am suffering.”

“What is the matter?”

“Ma foi, monsieur, I do not know that there is any amour propre here; I am ennuyé in this place.”

“What, in four or five days?”

“From the first hour.”

“What kind of ennui do you feel?”

“Are there several?”

“Certainly — one pines for his family.”

"I have none."

"For his mistress."

Gaston sighed.

"For one's country."

"Yes," said Gaston, "it is that," seeing that he must say something.

The governor appeared to reflect.

"Monsieur," said he, "since I have been governor of the Bastille, my only agreeable moments have been those in which I have been of service to the gentlemen confided to my care by the king. I am ready to do anything for you if you will promise to be reasonable."

"I promise you, monsieur."

"I can put you in communication with one of your compatriots, or at least with a man who seems to know Bretagne perfectly."

"Is he a prisoner?"

"Like yourself."

A vague sentiment passed through Gaston's mind that it must be this man who had slipped the note into his hand. "I should be very grateful if you would do this," said he.

"Well, to-morrow you shall see him; but as I am recommended to be strict with him, you can only remain with him an hour, and as he may not quit his chamber, you must go to him."

"As you please, monsieur," said Gaston.

"Then it is decided; at five o'clock expect me or the major; but it is on one condition."

"What is it?"

"That in consideration of this distraction you will eat a little to-day."

"I will try."

Gaston eat a little chicken and drank a little wine to keep his promise.

In the evening he told Dumesnil what had passed.

"Ma foi," said he, "you are lucky; the Count de Laval had the same idea, and all he got was to be put into a room in the tower Du Tresor, where he said he was dreadfully dull, and had no amusement but speaking to the prison apothecary."

"Diable!" said Gaston, "why did you not tell me that before?"

"I had forgotten it."

This tardy recollection troubled Gaston somewhat; placed as he was between Pompadour, Dumesnil, and Mademoiselle de Launay, his position was tolerable; if he were to be removed, he would be really attacked by the malady he had feigned.

At the appointed time the major of the Bastille came, and led Gaston across several courts, and they stopped at the tower Du Tresor. Every tower had its separate name.

In the room number one was a prisoner asleep on a folding bed, with his back turned to the light; the remains of his dinner were by him on a worn-out wooden table, and his costume, torn in many places, indicated a man of low station.

“Ouais,” said Gaston, “did they think that I was so fond of Bretagne, that any fellows who happened to have been born at Nismes or at Penmarch may be raised to the rank of my Pylades? No, this fellow is too ragged, and seems to eat too much; but as one must not be too capricious in prison, let us make use of the hour — I will recount my adventure to Mademoiselle de Launay, and she will put it into verse for the Chevalier Dumesnil.”

Gaston was now alone with the prisoner, who yawned and turned in his bed.

“Ugh! how cold it is in this cursed Bastille,” said he, rubbing his nose.

“That voice, that gesture — it is he!” said Gaston, and he approached the bed.

“What,” cried the prisoner, sitting up in bed, and looking at Gaston, “you here, M. de Chanlay?”

“Captain la Jonquiere,” cried Gaston.

“Myself — that is to say, I am the person you name; but my name is changed.”

“To what?” — — ”First Tresor.”

“What?”

“First Tresor. It is a custom in the Bastille for the prisoner to take the name of his room — that saves the turnkey the trouble of remembering names; however, if the Bastille be full, and two or three prisoners in the same room, they take two numbers; for example: I am first Tresor, if you were put here you would be first Tresor number two; another would be first Tresor number three — the jailers have a kind of Latin literature for this.”

”Yes, I understand,” said Gaston, watching La Jonquiere intently; “then you are a prisoner?”

“Parbleu, you see for yourself; I presume we are neither of us here for pleasure.”

"Then we are discovered."

"I am afraid so."

"Thanks to you."

"How to me?" cried La Jonquiere, feigning surprise. "No jokes, I beg."

"You have made revelations, traitor!"

"I! come, come, young man, you are mad; you ought not to be in the Bastille, but in the Petites Maisons."

"Do not deny it, M. d'Argenson told me!"

"D'Argenson; pardieu, the authority is good; and do you know what he told me?"

"No."

"That you had denounced me."

"Monsieur!"

"Well; what then? Are we to cut each other's throats because the police has followed out its trade and lied?"

"But how could he discover?"

"I ask the same of you. But one thing is certain; if I had told anything, I should not be here. You have not seen much of me, but you ought to know that I should not be fool enough to give information gratis; revelations are bought and sold, monsieur, and I know that Dubois pays high for them."

"Perhaps you are right," said Gaston; "but at least let us bless the chance which brings us together."

"Certainly."

"You do not appear enchanted, nevertheless."

"I am only moderately so, I confess."

"Captain!"

"Ah, monsieur, how bad-tempered you are."

"I?"

"Yes; you are always getting angry. I like my solitude; that does not speak."

"Monsieur!"

"Again. Now listen. Do you believe, as you say, that chance has brought us together?"

"What should it be?"

"Some combination of our jailers — of D'Argenson's, or perhaps Dubois's."

"Did you not write to me?"

“I?”

“Telling me to feign illness from ennui.”

“And how should I have written? — on what? — by whom?”

Gaston reflected; and this time it was La Jonquiere who watched him.

“Then,” said the captain presently, “I think, on the contrary, that it is to you we owe the pleasure of meeting in the Bastille.”

“To me, monsieur?”

“Yes, chevalier; you are too confiding. I give you that information in case you leave here; but more particularly in case you remain here.”

“Thank you.”

“Have you noticed if you were followed?”

“No.”

“A conspirator should never look before, but always behind him.”

Gaston confessed that he had not taken this precaution.

“And the duke,” asked La Jonquiere, “is he arrested?”

“I know not; I was going to ask you.”

“Peste! that is disagreeable. You took a young woman to him?”

“You know that.”

“Ah! my dear fellow, everything becomes known. Did not she give the information? Ah! woman, woman!”

“This was a brave girl, monsieur; I would answer for her discretion, courage, and devotion.”

“Yes, I understand. We love her — so she is honey and gold. What an idea of a conspiracy you must have to take a woman to the chief of the plot!”

“But I told her nothing; and she could know no secrets of mine but such as she may have surprised.”

“She has a keen eye.”

“And if she knew my projects, I am convinced she would never have spoken.”

“Oh, monsieur, without counting her natural disposition to that exercise, can we not always make a woman speak? Some one might have said, without any preparation ‘Your love for M. de Chanlay will lose your head’ — I will wager that she will speak.”

“There is no danger — she loves me too much.”

“That is the very reason, pardieu! that she would chatter like a magpie, and that we are both caged up. However, let us drop this. What do you do here?”

“Amuse myself.”

“Amuse yourself — how?”

“With making verses, eating sweets, and making holes in the floor.”

“Holes in the king’s boards?” said La Jonquiere. “Oh, oh! that is good to know. Does not M. de Launay scold?”

“He does not know it; besides, I am not singular — everybody makes a hole in something; one his floor, the other his chimney, the next his wall. Do you not make holes in something?”

La Jonquiere looked to see if Gaston were not laughing at him.

“But now, monsieur,” said La Jonquiere, “let us speak seriously. Are you condemned to death?”

“I?”

“Yes, you.”

“You say that coolly.”

“It is a habit in the Bastille. There are twenty here condemned to death, and not a bit the worse for it.”

“I have been interrogated.”

“Ah! you see.”

“But I do not believe I am condemned.”

“That will come.”

“My dear captain, do you know that, although you do not look so, you are marvelously merry?”

“You think so?”

“Yes.”

“Does it astonish you?”

“I did not know you were so brave.”

“Then you would regret life?”

“I confess it; I only want one thing to make me happy, and that is to live.”

“And you became a conspirator with a chance of happiness before you? I do not understand you; I thought people conspired from despair, as they marry when they have no other resource.”

“When I joined the conspiracy I did not love.”

“And afterward?”

“I would not draw back.”

“Bravo! that is what I call character. Have you been tortured?”

“No; but I had a narrow escape.”

“Then you will be.”

“Why so?”

“Because I have been; and it would be unfair to treat us differently. Look at the state of my clothes.”

“Which did they give you?” asked Gaston, shuddering at the recollection of what had passed between D’Argenson and himself.

“The water. They made me drink a barrel and a half; my stomach was like a bladder; I did not think I could have held so much.”

“And did you suffer much?” asked Gaston, with interest.

“Yes; but my temperament is robust — the next day I thought no more of it. It is true that since then I have drunk a great deal of wine. If you have to choose, select the water — it cleans. All the mixtures doctors give us are only a means of making us swallow water. Fangon says the best doctor he ever heard of was Doctor Sangrado; he only existed in Le Sage’s brain, or he would have done miracles.”

“You know Fangon?” asked Gaston, surprised.

“By reputation; besides, I have read his works. But do you intend to persist in saying nothing?”

“Doubtless.”

“You are right. I should tell you, if you regret life so much as you say, to whisper a few words to M. d’Argenson, but he is a talker who would reveal your confession.”

“I will not speak, be assured; these are points on which I do not need strengthening.”

“I believe it; pardieu! you seem to me like Sardanapalus in your tower. Here I have only M. de Laval, who takes medicine three times a day — it is an amusement he has invented. Well, tastes differ; and perhaps he wants to get accustomed to the water.”

“But did you not say I should certainly be condemned?”

”Do you wish to know the whole truth?”

“Yes.”

“Well, D’Argenson told me that you were.”

Gaston turned pale, in spite of his courage. La Jonquiere remarked it.

“However,” said he, “I believe you might save yourself by certain revelations.”

“Why, do you think I should do what you refused?”

“Our characters and our positions are different — I am no longer young — I am not in love — I do not leave a mistress in tears.” Gaston sighed.

“You see there is a great difference between us; when did you ever hear me sigh like that?”

“Ah! if I die, his excellency will take care of Helene.”

“And if he be arrested?”

“You are right.”

“Then — ”

“God will protect her.”

“Decidedly you are young,” said La Jonquiere.

“Explain.”

“Suppose his excellency be not arrested?”

“Well.”

“What age is he?”

“Forty-five or six, I suppose.”

“And if he fell in love with Helene; is not that her name?”

“The duke fall in love with her! he to whose protection I confided her! it would be infamous!”

“The world is full of infamy; that is how it gets on.”

“Oh, I will not dwell on such a thought.”

“I do not tell you to dwell on it; I only suggested it for you to make what use you liked of.”

“Hush,” said Gaston, “some one is coming.”

“Have you asked for anything?”

“No.”

“Then the time allowed for your visit is out,” and La Jonquiere threw himself quickly on his bed.

The bolts creaked, the door opened, and the governor appeared.

“Well, monsieur,” said he to Gaston; “does your companion suit you?”

“Yes, particularly as I know Captain la Jonquiere.”

“That makes my task more delicate; but, however, I made you an offer, and I will not draw back. I will permit one visit daily, at any hour you please: shall it be morning or evening?”

Gaston looked at La Jonquiere.

“Say five in the evening,” said La Jonquiere, quickly.

“In the evening at five o’clock, if you please.”

“The same as to-day, then?”

“Yes.”

“It shall be as you desire, monsieur.”

Gaston and La Jonquiere exchanged a glance, and the chevalier was taken back to his chamber.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SENTENCE.

It was half-past six, and quite dark; the chevalier's first act on being left in his room was to run to the chimney.

"Chevalier," said he.

Dumesnil replied.

"I have paid my visit."

"Well?"

"I have found an acquaintance, if not a friend."

"A new prisoner."

"Of the same date as myself."

"His name?"

"Captain la Jonquiere."

"What?"

"Do you know him?"

"Yes!"

"Then do me a favor: what is he?"

"Oh, an enemy of the regent's."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite; he was in our conspiracy, and only withdrew because we preferred abduction to assassination."

"Then he was — ?"

"For assassination."

"That is it," murmured Gaston; "he is a man to be trusted."

"If it be the same I mean, he lives in the Rue Bourdonnais, at the Muids d'Amour."

"The same."

"Then he is a safe man."

"That is well," said Gaston, "for he holds the lives of four brave gentlemen in his hands."

"Of whom you are one."

"No, I put myself aside, for it seems all is over with me."

"How all is over?"

"Yes, I am condemned."

"To what?"

"To death."

There was a moment's silence.

"Impossible!" cried the Chevalier Dumesnil, at length.

"Why impossible?"

"Because, if I be not mistaken, your affair is attached to ours."

"It follows on it."

"Well?"

"Well."

"Our affairs prospering, yours cannot go wrong."

"And who says you are prospering?"

"Listen, for with you I will have no secrets."

"I am listening."

"Mademoiselle de Launay wrote me this yesterday. She was walking with Maison-Rouge, who, as you know, loves her, and at whom we both laugh, but who is useful to us. On pretext of illness, she asked, as you did, for a doctor; he told her that the prison doctor was at her orders. I must tell you that we have known this doctor intimately; his name is Herment.

"However, she did not hope to get much out of him, for he is a timid man; but when he entered the garden, where she was walking, and gave her a consultation in the open air, he said to her, 'Hope!' In the mouth of any one else this would have been nothing — in his it was a vast deal; since *we* are told to hope, *you* have nothing to fear, as our affairs are intimately connected."

"However," said Gaston, "La Jonquiere seemed sure of what he said."

At this moment Pompadour knocked.

Gaston went to the hole, which, with the aid of his knife, he soon made practicable.

"Ask the Chevalier Dumesnil if he does not know anything more from Mademoiselle de Launay."

"About what?"

"One of us; I overheard some words between the governor and the major at my door — they were, 'condemned to death.'" Gaston shuddered.

"Be easy, marquis; I believe they spoke of me."

“Diable! that would not make me easy at all; firstly, because we have quickly become friends, and I should be grieved if anything were to happen to you; and, secondly, because what happened to you might well happen to us, our affairs being so similar.”

“And you believe that Mademoiselle de Launay could remove your doubts.”

“Yes, her windows look on the arsenal.”

“Well.”

“She would have seen if there were anything new going on there to-day.”

“Ah! she is striking now!”

At that moment Mademoiselle de Launay struck two blows, which meant attention.

Gaston replied by one, which meant that he was listening.

Then he went to the window.

A minute after the string appeared with a letter.

Gaston took the letter, and went to the hole to Pompadour.

“Well?” said the marquis.

“A letter,” replied Gaston.

“What does she say?”

“I cannot see, but I will send it to Dumesnil, who will read it.”

“Make haste.”

“Pardon,” said Gaston, “I am as anxious as you;” and he ran to the chimney.

“The string,” he cried.

“You have a letter.”

“Yes; have you a light?”

“Yes.”

“Lower the string.”

Gaston tied on the letter, which was drawn up.

“It is for you and not for me,” said Dumesnil.

“Never mind, read it, and tell me what it is; I have no light, and it would lose time to send me one.”

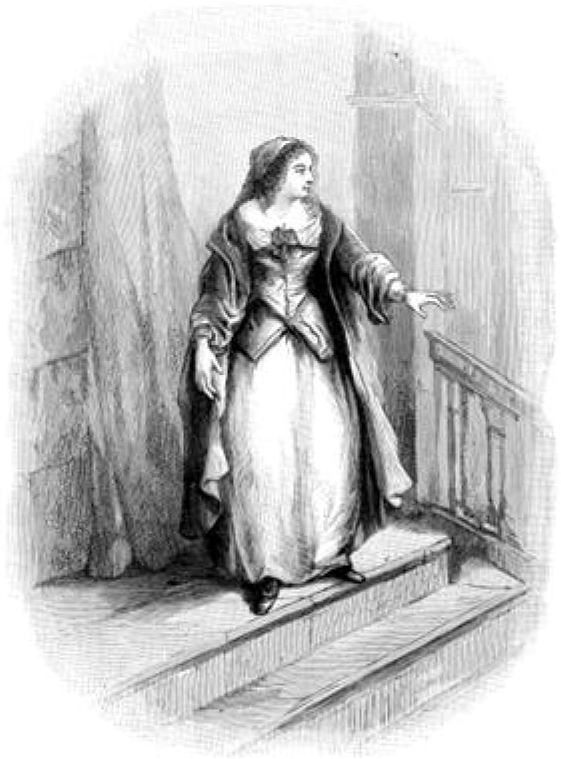

“You permit me?”

“Certainly.”

A moment’s silence.

“Well,” said Gaston.

“Diable!”

“Bad news, is it not?”

“Judge for yourself.”

And Dumesnil read:

“My dear Neighbor — Some judge extraordinary has arrived at the arsenal this evening. I recognized D’Argenson’s livery. We shall know more soon, when I see the doctor. A thousand remembrances to Dumesnil.”

“That is what La Jonquiere told me; it is I that am condemned.”

“Bah, chevalier,” said Dumesnil; “you are too easily alarmed.”

“Not at all. I know well what to think, and then — hark!”

“What!”

“Silence; some one is coming.” And Gaston went away from the chimney.

The door opened, and the major and lieutenant, with four soldiers, came for Gaston, who followed them.

“I am lost,” murmured he. “Poor Helene.”

And he raised his head with the intrepidity of a brave man, who, knowing death was near, went boldly to meet it.

“Monsieur,” said D’Argenson, “your crime has been examined by the tribunal of which I am the president. In the preceding sittings you were permitted to defend yourself; if you were not granted advocates, it was not with the intention of inquiring your defense, but, on the contrary, because it was useless to give you the extreme indulgence of a tribunal charged to be severe.”

“I do not understand you.”

“Then I will be more explicit. Discussion would have made one thing evident, even in the eyes of your defenders — that you are a conspirator and an assassin. How could you suppose that with these points established indulgence would be shown you. But here you are before us, every facility will be given for your justification. If you ask a delay, you shall have it. If you wish researches, they shall be made. If you speak, you have the reply, and it will not be refused you.”

“I understand, and thank the tribunal for this kindness,” replied Gaston. “The excuse it gives me for the absence of a defender seems sufficient. I have not to defend myself.”

“Then you do not wish for witnesses, delays, or documents?”

“I wish my sentence — that is all.”

“Do not be obstinate, chevalier; make some confessions.”

“I have none to make, for in all my interrogatories you have not made one precise accusation.”

“And you wish — ?”

“Certainly — I should like to know of what I am accused.”

“I will tell you. You came to Paris, appointed by the republican committee of Nantes, to assassinate the regent. You were referred to one La Jonquiere, your accomplice, now condemned with you.”

Gaston felt that he turned pale at these true accusations. “This might be true, monsieur,” said he, “but you could not know it. A man who wishes to commit such a deed does not confess it till it be accomplished.”

“No; but his accomplices confess for him.”

“That is to say, that La Jonquiere denounces me.”

“I do not refer to La Jonquiere, but the others.”

“The others!” cried Gaston; “are there, then, others arrested beside La Jonquiere and myself?”

"Yes. Messieurs de Pontcalec, de Talhouet, du Couëdic, and de Montlouis."

"I do not understand," said Gaston, with a vague feeling of terror — not for himself, but for his friends.

"What! do you not understand that Messieurs de Pontcalec, de Talhouet, du Couëdic, and de Montlouis are now being tried at Nantes?"

"Arrested!" cried Gaston, "impossible!"

"Yes," said D'Argenson, "you thought that the province would revolt rather than allow its defenders — as you rebels call yourselves — to be arrested. Well, the province has said nothing. The province has gone on singing, laughing, and dancing, and is already asking where they will be beheaded, in order to hire windows."

"I do not believe you, monsieur," said Gaston, coldly.

"Give me that portfolio," said D'Argenson to a man standing behind him. "Here, monsieur," continued he, "are the writs of arrest. Do you doubt their authenticity?"

"That does not say that they have accused me."

"They told all we wanted to know, and your culpability is the result."

"In that case, if they have told all you want to know, you have no need of my confession."

"Is that your final answer?"

"Yes."

"Officer, read the sentence."

The officer read —

"As the result of the investigation commenced on the 19th of February, that M. Gaston de Chanlay came from Nantes to Paris with the intention of committing the crime of murder on the person of his Royal Highness Monseigneur the Regent of France, which was to have been followed by a revolt against the authority of the king, the extraordinary commission instituted to inquire into this crime has adjudged the Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay worthy of the punishment for high treason, the person of the regent being as inviolable as that of the king. In consequence — We ordain that the Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay be degraded from all his titles and dignities; that he and his posterity be declared ignoble in perpetuity; that his goods be confiscated, his woods cut down to the height of six feet from the ground, and he himself beheaded on the Greve, or wheresoever it shall please the provost to appoint, saving his majesty's pardon."

Gaston was pale, but still as marble.

“And when am I to be executed?” asked he.

“As soon as it may please his majesty.”

Gaston felt a cloud pass before his eyes, and his ideas became confused; but this soon vanished, and the serenity of his bearing returned, the blood rushed back to his cheeks, and a contemptuous smile settled on his lips.

“It is well, monsieur,” said he; “at whatever moment his majesty’s order may arrive, it will find me prepared; but I wish to know whether I may not see some persons who are very dear to me before I die, and I wish to ask a favor of the king.”

D’Argenson’s eyes glistened with malignant joy. “Monsieur,” said he, “I told you that you would be treated with indulgence. You might therefore have spoken sooner, and perhaps his highness’s kindness might not have waited for a prayer.”

“You mistake me, monsieur,” said Gaston, with dignity; “neither his majesty’s honor nor mine will suffer from the favor which I shall ask.”

“What would you ask?” said D’Argenson; “speak, and I will tell you at once if there be a chance of your request being granted.”

“I ask, first, that my titles and dignities — which are not very great — should not be canceled, as I have no posterity. I am alone in the world; my name only survives me; but as that name is only noble, and not illustrious, it would not survive long.”

“This is quite a royal favor, monsieur. His majesty alone can and will reply. Is that all you wish to ask?”

“No; I have another request to make, but I do not know to whom I should apply.”

“First to me, monsieur, in my character of lieutenant of police. I shall see if I can grant it, or if I must refer it to his majesty.”

“Well, then, monsieur, I desire to see Mademoiselle Helene de Chaverny, ward of his excellency the Duc d’Olivares, and also the duke himself.”

D’Argenson, at this request, made a singular gesture, which Gaston interpreted as one of hesitation.

“Monsieur,” said Gaston, “I would see them in any place, and for as short a time as may be thought advisable.”

“You shall see them,” said D’Argenson.

“Ah! monsieur,” said Gaston, stepping forward as though to take his hand, “you lay me under the greatest obligation.”

“On one condition, however, monsieur.”

“What is it? there is no condition compatible with my honor that I will not accept in exchange for so great a favor.”

“You must tell no one of your condemnation, and this on your word as a gentleman.”

“I accede to that all the more willingly,” said Gaston, “as one of the persons named would certainly die if she knew of it.”

“Then all is well; have you anything further to say?”

“Nothing, monsieur, except to beg that you will record my denials.”

“They are already firmly attached — officer, hand the papers to Monsieur de Chanlay, that he may read and sign them.”

Gaston sat down by a table, and, while D’Argenson and the judges chatted around him, he carefully perused the papers and the report of his own answers to the interrogatory — then, finding all correct, he signed.

“Monsieur,” said he, “here are the documents. Shall I have the pleasure of seeing you again?”

“I do not think so,” said D’Argenson, with that brutality which was the terror of those who were subjected to him.

“Then to our meeting in another world, monsieur.”

The major led Gaston to his own room.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FAMILY FEUD.

When Gaston returned to his room, he was obliged to answer the questions of Dumesnil and Pompadour, who were waiting to hear news from him; but, in compliance with his promise made to D'Argenson, he did not mention his sentence, but simply announced a severer interrogatory than before — but as he wished to write some letters, he asked Dumesnil for a light. Dumesnil sent him a candle — things were progressing, it may be remarked; Maison-Rouge could refuse nothing to Mademoiselle de Launay, and she shared all with Dumesnil, who, in his turn, again shared with his neighbors, Gaston and Richelieu.

Gaston doubted whether, in spite of D'Argenson's promise, he would be allowed to see Helene, but he knew that at least he should see a priest before he died; there could be no doubt that the priest would forward two letters for him.

As he began to write, Mademoiselle de Launay made a signal that she had something to send him; it was a letter. Gaston read:

"Our friend — for you are our friend, and now we have no secrets from you — tell Dumesnil of the famous hope I conceived after the word that Herment said to me."

Gaston's heart beat. Might not he also find in this letter some ground for hope? Had they not said that his fate could not be separated from the others? It is true that those who had said so did not know of his conspiracy. He read on:

"An hour ago the doctor came, accompanied by Maison-Rouge; from the latter's manner I drew the most favorable augury; however, when I asked to speak in private, or, at least, to whisper to the doctor, he made some difficulties, which I removed with a smile. 'At least,' said he, 'no one must know that I am out of hearing. I should lose my place if it were known how weak I am.' This tone of love and interest combined seemed to me so grotesque that I laughingly promised him what he asked; you see how I keep my promise. He went to a distance, and Herment approached. Then commenced a dialogue, wherein the gestures meant one thing while the voice declared another. ‘You have good friends,’ said Herment; ‘friends in good places, who are greatly interested for you.’ I naturally thought of Madame de Maine. ‘Ah, monsieur,’ I cried, ‘have you anything for me?’ ‘Hush,’ said Herment. Judge how my heart beat.”

Gaston felt his own beating vigorously.

“‘And what have you to give me?’ ‘Oh, nothing myself: but you will have the object agreed upon.’ ‘But what is the object? Speak!’ ‘The beds in the Bastille are known to be bad, and particularly badly covered, and I am commissioned to offer you — ’ ‘What?’ ‘A coverlet.’ I burst out laughing; the devotion of my friends was shown in preventing my catching cold. ‘My dear Monsieur Herment,’ said I, ‘in my present position it would be better if my friends were to occupy themselves less about my feet and more about my head.’ ‘It is a female friend,’ said he. ‘Who is it?’ ‘Mademoiselle de Charolais,’ said Herment, lowering his voice, so that I could scarcely hear him. Then he withdrew. I, my dear chevalier, am now waiting for Mademoiselle de Charolais’s coverlet. Tell this to Dumesnil; it will make him laugh.”

Gaston sighed. The gayety of those around him weighed heavily on his heart. It was a new torture which they had invented, in forbidding him to confide his fate to any one; it seemed to him that he should have found consolation in the tears of his two neighbors. He had not the courage to read the letter to Dumesnil, so he passed it on to him, and a moment after heard shouts of laughter.

At this moment Gaston was saying adieu to Helene.

After passing a part of the night in writing, he slept; at five-and-twenty one must sleep, even if it be just before death.

In the morning Gaston’s breakfast was brought at the usual hour, but he remarked that it was more *recherché* than usual; he smiled at this attention, and as he was finishing, the governor entered.

Gaston with a rapid glance interrogated his expression, which was calm and courteous as ever. Was he also ignorant of the sentence, or was he wearing a mask?

“Monsieur,” said he, “will you take the trouble to descend to the council-chamber?”

Gaston rose. He seemed to hear a buzzing in his ears, for to a man condemned to death every injunction which he does not understand is a torture.

“May I know the reason, monsieur?” asked Gaston, in so calm a tone that it was impossible to detect his real emotion.

“To receive a visit,” replied the governor. “Yesterday, after the interrogatory, did you not ask the lieutenant of police to be allowed to see some one?”

Gaston started.

“And is it that person?” asked he.

“Yes, monsieur.”

Gaston had asked for two persons; the governor only announced one; which one was it? He had not the courage to ask, and silently followed the governor.

De Launay led Gaston to the council-chamber; on entering, he cast an eager glance around, but the room was empty.

“Remain here, monsieur; the person whom you expect is coming,” said the governor, who bowed and went out.

Gaston ran to the window, which was barred, and looked out — there was a sentinel before it.

The door opened, and Gaston, turning round, faced the Duc d’Olivares.

“Ah, monsieur,” cried he, “how good of you to come at the request of a poor prisoner.”

“It was a duty,” replied the duke, “besides, I had to thank you.”

“Me!” said Gaston, astonished; “what have I done to merit your excellency’s thanks?”

“You have been interrogated, taken to the torture-chamber, given to understand that you might save yourself by naming your accomplices, and yet you kept silence.”

“I made an engagement and kept it: that does not deserve any thanks, monseigneur.”

“And now, monsieur, tell me if I can serve you in anything.”

“First, tell me about yourself; have you been molested, monseigneur?”

“Not at all: and if all the Bretons are as discreet as you, I doubt not that my name will never be mentioned in these unfortunate debates.”

“Oh, I will answer for them as for myself, monseigneur; but can you answer for La Jonquiere?”

“La Jonquiere!” repeated the duke.

”Yes. Do you not know that he is arrested?”

“Yes; I heard something of it.”

“Well, I ask you, monseigneur, what you think of him?”

“I can tell you nothing, except that he has *my* confidence.”

“If so, he must be worthy of it, monseigneur. That is all I wished to know.”

“Then come to the request you had to make.”

“Have you seen the young girl I brought to your house?”

“Mademoiselle Helene de Chaverny? Yes.”

“Well, monsieur, I had not time to tell you then, but I tell you now, that I have loved her for a year. The dream of that year has been to consecrate my life to her happiness. I say the dream, monseigneur; for, on awaking, I saw that all hope of happiness was denied me; and yet, to give this young girl a name, a position, a fortune, at the moment of my arrest, she was about to become my wife.”

“Without the knowledge of her parents or the consent of her family?” cried the duke.

“She had neither, monseigneur; and was probably about to be sold to some nobleman when she left the person who had been set to watch her.”

“But who informed you that Mademoiselle Helene de Chaverny was to be the victim of a shameful bargain?”

“What she herself told me of a pretended father, who concealed himself; of diamonds which had been offered to her. Then, do you know where I found her, monseigneur? In one of those houses destined to the pleasures of our roués. She! an angel of innocence and purity. In short, monseigneur, this young girl fled with me, in spite of the cries of her duenna, in broad daylight, and in the face of the servants who surrounded her. She stayed two hours alone with me; and, though she is as pure as on the day when she received her mother’s first kiss, she is not the less compromised. I wish this projected marriage to take place.”

“In your situation, monsieur?”

“A still greater reason.”

“But perhaps you may deceive yourself as to the punishment reserved for you!”

“It is probably the same which, under similar circumstances, was inflicted on the Count de Chalais, the Marquis de Cinq-Mars, and the Chevalier Louis de Rohan.”

“Then you are prepared even for death, monsieur?”

“I prepared for it from the day I joined the conspiracy: the conspirator’s only excuse is, that, while robbing others of their lives, he risks his own.”

“And what will this young girl gain by the marriage?”

“Monseigneur, though not rich, I have some fortune; she is poor; I have a name, and she has none. I would leave her my name and fortune; and with that intention I have already petitioned the king that my goods may not be confiscated, nor my name declared infamous. Were it known for what reason I ask this, it would doubtless be granted; if I die without making her my wife, she will be supposed to be my mistress, and will be dishonored, lost, and there will be no future for her. If, on the contrary, by your protection, or that of your friends (and that protection I earnestly implore), we are united, no one can reproach her — the blood which flows for a political offense does not disgrace a family — no shame will fall on my widow; and if she cannot be happy, she will at least be independent and respected. This is the favor which I have to ask, monseigneur; is it in your power to obtain it for me?”

The duke went to the door and struck three blows: Maison-Rouge appeared.

“Ask M. de Launay, from me,” said the duke, “whether the young girl who is at the door in my carriage may come in? Her visit, as he knows, is authorized. You will have the kindness to conduct her here.”

“What! monseigneur; Helene is here — at the door?”

“Were you not promised that she should come?”

“Yes; but seeing you alone, I lost all hope.”

”I wished to see you first, thinking that you might have many things to say which you would not wish her to hear; for I know all.”

“You know all! What do you mean?”

“I know that you were taken to the arsenal yesterday!”

“Monseigneur!”

“I know that you found D’Argenson there, and that he read your sentence.”

“Mon Dieu!”

“I know that you are condemned to death, and that you were bound not to speak of it to any one.”

“Oh, monseigneur, silence! One word of this would kill Helene.”

“Be easy, monsieur; but let us see; is there no way of avoiding this execution?”

"Days would be necessary to prepare and execute a plan of escape, and I scarcely have hours."

"I do not speak of escape; I ask if you have no excuse to give for your crime?"

"My crime!" cried Gaston, astonished to hear his accomplice use such a word.

"Yes," replied the duke: "you know that men stigmatize murder with this name under all circumstances; but posterity often judges differently, and sometimes calls it a grand deed."

"I have no excuse to give, monseigneur, except that I believe the death of the regent to be necessary to the salvation of France."

"Yes," replied the duke, smiling; "but you will see that that is scarcely the excuse to offer to Philippe d'Orleans. I wanted something personal. Political enemy of the regent's as I am, I know that he is not considered a bad man. Men say that he is merciful, and that there have been no executions during his reign."

"You forget Count Horn."

"He was an assassin."

"And what am I?"

"There is this difference: Count Horn murdered in order to rob."

"I neither can nor will ask anything of the regent," said Gaston.

"Not you, personally, I know; but your friends. If they had a plausible pretense to offer, perhaps the prince himself might pardon you."

"I have none, monseigneur."

"It is impossible, monsieur — permit me to say so. A resolution such as you have taken must proceed from a sentiment of some kind — either of hatred or vengeance. And stay; I remember you told La Jonquiere, who repeated it to me, that there was a family feud: tell me the cause."

"It is useless, monseigneur, to tire you with that; it would not interest you."

"Never mind, tell it me."

"Well, the regent killed my brother."

"The regent killed your brother! how so? it is — impossible, Monsieur de Gaston," said the Duc d'Olivares.

"Yes, killed; if from the effect we go to the cause."

"Explain yourself; how could the regent do this?"

"My brother, who, being fifteen years of age when my father died, three months before my birth, stood to me in the place of that father, and of mother, who died when I was still in the cradle — my brother loved a young girl who was brought up in a convent by the orders of the prince."

"Do you know in what convent?"

"No: I only know that it was at Paris."

The duke murmured some words which Gaston could not hear.

"My brother, a relation of the abbess, had seen this young girl and asked her hand in marriage. The prince's consent to this union had been asked, and he made a pretense of granting it, when this young girl, seduced by her so-called protector, suddenly disappeared. For three months my brother hoped to find her, but all his searches were vain; he found no trace of her, and in despair he sought death in the battle of Ramillies."

"And what was the name of this girl!"

"No one ever knew, monseigneur; to speak her name was to dishonor it."

"It was doubtless she," murmured the duke, "it was Helene's mother; and your brother was called — ?" added he aloud.

"Olivier de Chanlay, monseigneur."

"Olivier de Chanlay!" repeated the duke, in a low voice. "I knew the name of De Chanlay was not strange to me." Then, aloud, "Continue, monsieur; I listen to you."

"You do not know what a family hatred is in a province like ours. I had lavished upon my brother all the love which would have fallen to the share of my father and mother, and now I suddenly found myself alone in the world. I grew up in isolation of heart, and in the hope of revenge; I grew up among people who were constantly repeating, 'It was the Duc d'Orleans who killed your brother.' Then the duke became regent, the Breton league was therefore organized. I was one of the first to join it. You know the rest. You see that there is nothing in all this which has any interest for your excellency."

"You mistake, monsieur; unfortunately, the regent has to reproach himself with many such faults."

"You see, therefore," said Gaston, "that my destiny must be accomplished, and that I can ask nothing of this man."

"You are right, monsieur; whatever is done must be done without you."

At this moment the door opened and Maison-Rouge appeared.

"Well, monsieur?" asked the duke.

“The governor has an order from the lieutenant of police to admit Mademoiselle Helene de Chaverny; shall I bring her here?”

“Monseigneur,” said Gaston, looking at the duke with an air of entreaty.

“Yes, monsieur,” said he, “I understand — grief and love do not need witnesses — I will come back to fetch Mademoiselle Helene.”

“The permission is for half an hour,” said Maison-Rouge.

“Then at the end of that time I will return,” said the duke, and bowing to Gaston, he went out.

An instant after the door opened again, and Helene appeared, trembling, and questioning Maison-Rouge, but he retired without replying.

Helene looked round and saw Gaston, and for a few minutes all their sorrows were forgotten in a close and passionate embrace. “And now — ” cried Helene, her face bathed in tears.

“Well! and now?” asked Gaston.

“Alas! to see you here — in prison,” murmured Helene, with an air of terror, “here, where I dare not speak freely, where we may be watched — overheard.”

“Do not complain, Helene, for this is an exception in our favor; a prisoner is never allowed to press one who is dear to him to his heart; the visitor generally stands against that wall, the prisoner against this, a soldier is placed between, and the conversation must be fixed beforehand.”

“To whom do we owe this favor?”

“Doubtless to the regent; for yesterday, when I asked permission of Monsieur d’Argenson, he said that it was beyond his power to grant, and that he must refer it to the regent.”

“But now that I see you again, Gaston, tell me all that has passed in this age of tears and suffering. Ah! tell me; but my presentiments did not deceive me; you were conspiring — do not deny it — I know it.”

“Yes; Helene, you know that we Bretons are constant both in our loves and our hatreds. A league was organized in Bretagne, in which all our nobles took part — could I act differently from my brothers? I ask you, Helene, could I, or ought I to have done so? Would you not have despised me, if, when you had seen all Bretagne under arms, I alone had been inactive — a whip in my hand while others held the sword?”

“Oh! yes; you are right; but why did you not remain in Bretagne with the others?”

“The others are arrested also, Helene.”

“Then you have been denounced — betrayed.”

“Probably — but sit down, Helene; now that we are alone, let me look at you, and tell you that you are beautiful, that I love you. How have you been in my absence — has the duke — ”

“Oh! if you only knew how good he is to me; every evening he comes to see me, and his care and attention — ”

“And,” said Gaston, who thought of the suggestion of the false La Jonquiere, “nothing suspicious in those attentions?”

”What do you mean, Gaston?”

“That the duke is still young, and that, as I told you just now, you are beautiful.”

“Oh, Heaven! no! Gaston; this time there is not a shadow of doubt; and when he was there near me — as near as you are now — there were moments when it seemed as if I had found my father.”

“Poor child!”

“Yes, by a strange chance, for which I cannot account, there is a resemblance between the duke’s voice and that of the man who came to see me at Rambouillet — it struck me at once.”

“You think so?” said Gaston, in an abstracted tone.

“What are you thinking of, Gaston?” asked Helene; “you seem scarcely to hear what I am saying to you.”

“Helene, every word you speak goes to the inmost depth of my heart.”

“You are uneasy, I understand. To conspire is to stake your life; but be easy, Gaston — I have told the duke that if you die I shall die too.”

Gaston started.

“You are an angel,” said he.

“Oh, my God!” cried poor Helene, “how horrible to know that the man I love runs a danger — all the more terrible for being uncertain; to feel that I am powerless to aid him, and that I can only shed tears when I would give my life to save him.”

Gaston’s face lit up with a flush of joy; it was the first time that he had ever heard such words from the lips of his beloved; and under the influence of an idea which had been occupying him for some minutes —

“Yes, dearest,” said he, taking her hand, “you can do much for me.”

“What can I do?”

“You can become my wife.”

Helene started.

"I your wife, Gaston?" cried she.

"Yes, Helene; this plan, formed in our liberty, may be executed in captivity. Helene, my wife before God and man, in this world and the next, for time and for eternity. You can do this for me, Helene, and am I not right in saying that you can do much?"

"Gaston," said she, looking at him fixedly, "you are hiding something from me."

It was Gaston's turn to start now.

"I!" said he, "what should I conceal from you?"

"You told me you saw M. d'Argenson yesterday?"

"Well, what then?"

"Well, Gaston," said Helene, turning pale, "you are condemned."

Gaston took a sudden resolution.

"Yes," said he, "I am condemned to exile; and, egotist as I am, I would bind you to me by indissoluble ties before I leave France."

"Is that the truth, Gaston?"

"Yes; have you the courage to be my wife, Helene? to be exiled with me?"

"Can you ask it, Gaston?" said she, her eyes lighted with enthusiasm, "exile — I thank thee, my God — I, who would have accepted an eternal prison with you, and have thought myself blessed — I may accompany, follow you? Oh, this condemnation is, indeed, a joy after what we feared! Gaston, Gaston, at length we shall be happy."

"Yes, Helene," said Gaston, with an effort.

"Picture my happiness," cried Helene; "to me France is the country where you are; your love is the only country I desire. I know I shall have to teach you to forget Bretagne, your friends, and your dreams of the future; but I will love you, so that it will be easy for you to forget them."

Gaston could do nothing but cover her hands with kisses.

"Is the place of your exile fixed?" said she; "tell me, when do you go? shall we go together?"

"My Helene," replied Gaston, "it is impossible; we must be separated for a time. I shall be taken to the frontier of France — I do not as yet know, which — and set free. Once out of the kingdom, you shall rejoin me."

"Oh, better than that, Gaston — better than that. By means of the duke I will discover the place of your exile, and instead of joining you there, I will be there to meet you. As you step from the carriage which brings you, you shall find me waiting to soften the pain of your adieux to France; and then, death alone is irretrievable; later, the king may pardon you; later still, and the action punished to-day may be looked upon as a deed to be rewarded. Then we will return; then nothing need keep us from Bretagne, the cradle of our love, the paradise of our memories. Oh!" continued she, in an accent of mingled love and impatience, "tell me, Gaston, that you share my hopes, that you are content, that you are happy."

"Yes, Helene, I now am happy, indeed; for now — and only now — I know by what an angel I am beloved. Yes, dearest, one hour of such love as yours, and then death would be better than a whole life with the love of any other."

"Well!" exclaimed Helene, her whole mind and soul earnestly fixed on the new future which was opening before her, "what will they do? Will they let me see you again before your departure? When and how shall we meet next? Shall you receive my letters? Can you reply to them? What hour to-morrow may I come?"

"They have almost promised me that our marriage shall take place this evening or to-morrow morning."

"What! here in a prison," said Helene, shuddering involuntarily.

"Wherever it may be, Helene, it will bind us together for the rest of our lives."

"But suppose they do not keep their promise to you; suppose they make you set out before I have seen you?"

"Alas!" said Gaston, with a bursting heart, "that is possible, Helene, and it is that I dread."

"Oh, mon Dieu! do you think your departure is so near?"

"You know, Helene, that prisoners are not their own masters; they may be removed at any moment."

"Oh, let them come — let them come; the sooner you are free, the sooner we shall be reunited. It is not necessary that I should be your wife, in order to follow and join you. Do I not know my Gaston's honor, and from this day I look upon him as my husband before God. Oh, go proudly, Gaston, for while these thick and gloomy walls surround you I tremble for your life. Go, and in a week we shall be reunited; reunited, with no separation to threaten us, no one to act as a spy on us — reunited forever."

The door opened.

"Great Heaven, already!" said Helene.

“Madame,” said the lieutenant, “the time has elapsed.”

“Helene,” said Gaston, seizing the young girl’s hand, with a nervous trembling which he could not master.

“What is it?” cried she, watching him with terror. “Good Heaven! you are as pale as marble.”

“It is nothing,” said he, forcing himself to be calm; “indeed, it is nothing,” and he kissed her hand.

“Till to-morrow, Gaston.”

“To-morrow — yes.”

The duke appeared at the door; Gaston ran to him.

“Monseigneur,” said he, “do all in your power to obtain permission for her to become my wife; but if that be impossible, swear to me that she shall be your daughter.”

The duke pressed Gaston’s hand; he was so affected that he could not speak.

Helene approached. Gaston was silent, fearing she might overhear.

He held out his hand to Helene, who presented her forehead to him, while silent tears rolled down her cheeks; Gaston closed his eyes, that the sight of her tears might not call up his own.

At length they must part. They exchanged one last lingering glance, and the duke pressed Gaston’s hand.

How strange was this sympathy between two men, one of whom had come so far for the sole purpose of killing the other.

The door closed, and Gaston sank down on a seat, utterly broken and exhausted.

In ten minutes the governor entered; he came to conduct Gaston back to his own room.

Gaston followed him silently, and when asked if there was anything he wanted, he mournfully shook his head.

At night Mademoiselle de Launay signaled that she had something to communicate.

Gaston opened the window, and received a letter inclosing another.

The first was for himself.

He read:

“Dear Neighbor — The coverlid was not so contemptible as I supposed; it contained a paper on which was written the word already spoken by

Herment — ’Hope!’ It also inclosed this letter for M. de Richelieu; send it to Dumesnil, who will pass it to the duke.

“Your servant,

“De Launay.”

“Alas!” thought Gaston, “they will miss me when I am gone,” and he called Dumesnil, to whom he passed the letter.

CHAPTER XXXI.

STATE AFFAIRS AND FAMILY AFFAIRS.

On leaving the Bastille, the duke took Helene home, promising to come and see her as usual in the evening; a promise which Helene would have estimated all the more highly if she had known that his highness had a bal masque at Monceaux.

On re-entering the Palais Royal the duke asked for Dubois, and was told he was in his study, working. The duke entered without allowing himself to be announced. Dubois was so busy that he did not hear the duke, who advanced and looked over his shoulder, to see what was occupying him so intently.

He was writing down names, with notes by the side of each.

“What are you doing there, abbe?” asked the regent.

“Ah! monseigneur, it is you; pardon; I did not hear you.”

“I asked what you were doing?”

“Signing the burial tickets for our Breton friends.”

“But their fate is not yet decided, and the sentence of the commission — ”

“I know it,” said Dubois.

“Is it given, then?”

“No, but I dictated it before they went.”

“Do you know that your conduct is odious?”

“Truly, monseigneur, you are insupportable. Manage your family affairs, and leave state affairs to me.”

“Family affairs!”

“Ah! as to those, I hope you are satisfied with me, or you would indeed be difficult to please. You recommend to me M. de Chanlay, and on your recommendation I make it a rose-water Bastille to him; sumptuous repasts, a charming governor. I let him pierce holes in your floors, and spoil your walls, all which will cost us a great deal to repair. Since his entrance, it is quite a fete. Dumesnil talks all day through his chimney, Mademoiselle de Launay fishes with a line through her window, Pompadour drinks champagne. There is nothing to be said to all this: these are your family affairs; but in Bretagne you have nothing to see, and I forbid you to look, monseigneur, unless you have a few more unknown daughters there, which is possible.”

“Dubois! scoundrel!”

“Ah! you think when you have said ‘Dubois,’ and added ‘scoundrel’ to my name, you have done everything. Well, scoundrel as much as you please; meanwhile, but for the scoundrel you would have been assassinated.”

“Well, what then?”

“What then! Hear the statesman! Well, then, I should be hanged, perhaps, which is a consideration; then Madame de Maintenon would be regent of France! What a joke! What then, indeed! To think that a philosophic prince should utter such naïvetés! Oh, Marcus Aurelius! was it not he who said, ‘Populos esse demum felices si reges philosophi forent, aut philosophi reges?’ Here is a sample.”

Dubois still wrote on.

“Dubois! you do not know this young man.”

“What young man?”

“The chevalier.”

”Really! you shall present him to me when he is your son-in-law.”

“That will be to-morrow, Dubois.”

The abbe looked round in astonishment, and looking at the regent, with his little eyes as wide open as possible —

“Ah, monseigneur, are you mad?” he said.

“No, but he is an honorable man, and you know that they are rare.”

“Honorable man! Ah, you have a strange idea of honor.”

“Yes; I believe that we differ in our ideas of it.”

“What has this honorable man done! Has he poisoned the dagger with which he meant to assassinate you? for then he would be more than an honorable man, he would be a saint. We have already St. Jacques Clement, St. Ravaillac; St. Gaston is wanting in the calendar. Quick, quick, monseigneur! you who will not ask the pope to give a cardinal’s hat to your minister, ask him to canonize your assassin; and for the first time in your life you would be logical.”

“Dubois, I tell you there are few capable of doing what this young man has done.”

"Peste! that is lucky; if there were ten in France I should certainly resign."

"I do not speak of what he wished to do, but of what he has done."

"Well, what has he done? I should like to be edified."

"First, he kept his oath to D'Argenson."

"I doubt it not, he is faithful to his word; and but for me would have kept his word also with Pontcalec, Talhouet, etc."

"Yes, but one was more difficult than the other. He had sworn not to mention his sentence to any one, and he did not speak of it to his mistress."

"Nor to you?"

"He spoke of it to me, because I told him that I knew it. He forbade me to ask anything of the regent, desiring, he said, but one favor."

"And that one?"

"To marry Helene, in order to leave her a fortune and a name."

"Good; he wants to leave your daughter a fortune and a name; he is polite, at least."

"Do you forget that this is a secret from him?"

"Who knows?"

"Dubois, I do not know in what your hands were steeped the day you were born, but I know that you sully everything you touch."

"Except conspirators, monseigneur, for it seems to me that there, on the contrary, I purify. Look at those of Cellamare, how all that affair was cleared out; Dubois here, Dubois there, I hope the apothecary has properly purged France from Spain. Well, it shall be the same with Olivares as with Cellamare. There is now only Bretagne congested; a good dose, and all will be right."

"Dubois, you would joke with the Gospel."

"Pardieu! I began by that."

The regent rose.

"Come, monseigneur, I was wrong; I forgot you were fasting; let us hear the end of this story."

"The end is that I promised to ask this favor from the regent, and that the regent will grant it."

"The regent will commit a folly."

"No, he will only repair a fault."

"Ah, now you find you have a reparation to make to M. de Chanlay."

"Not to him, but to his brother."

“Still better. What have you done to his brother?”

“I took from him the woman he loved.”

“Who?” — — ”Helene’s mother.”

“Well, that time you were wrong; for if you had let her alone we should not have had all this tiresome affair on our hands.”

“But we have it, and must now get out of it as well as possible.”

“Just what I am working at: and when is the marriage to take place?”

“To-morrow.”

“In the chapel of the Palais Royal? You shall dress in the costume of a knight of the order; you shall extend both hands over your son-in-law’s head — one more than he meant to have held over you — it will be very affecting.”

”No, abbe, it shall not be thus; they shall be married in the Bastille, and I shall be in the chapel where they cannot see me.”

“Well, monseigneur, I should like to be with you. I should like to see the ceremony; I believe these kind of things are very touching.”

“No, you would be in the way, and your ugly face would betray my incognito.”

“Your handsome face is still more easy to recognize, monseigneur,” said Dubois, bowing; “there are portraits of Henry the Fourth and Louis the Fourteenth in the Bastille.”

“You flatter me.”

“Are you going away, monseigneur?”

“Yes, I have an appointment with De Launay.”

“The governor of the Bastille?”

“Yes.”

“Go, monseigneur, go.”

“Shall I see you to-night at Morceaux?”

“Perhaps.”

“Have you a disguise?”

“I have La Jonquière’s dress.”

“Oh! that is only fit for the Rue du Bac.”

“Monseigneur forgets the Bastille, where it has had some success.”

“Well, adieu, abbe.”

“Adieu, monseigneur.”

When Dubois was left alone he appeared to take some sudden resolution. He rang the bell, and a servant entered.

"M. de Launay is coming to the regent, watch him, and bring him here afterward."

The servant retired without a reply, and Dubois resumed his work.

Half an hour afterward the door opened, and the servant announced De Launay. Dubois gave him a note.

"Read that," said he; "I give you written instructions, that there may be no pretext for neglecting them."

"Ah, monseigneur," said De Launay, "you would ruin me.".

"How so?"

"To-morrow when it becomes known."

"Who will tell it? will you?"

"No, but monseigneur — "

"Will be enchanted; I answer for him."

"A governor of the Bastille!"

"Do you care to retain the title?"

"Certainly."

"Then do as I tell you."

"'Tis hard, however, to close one's eyes and ears."

"My dear De Launay, go and pay a visit to Dumesnil's chimney and Pompadour's ceiling."

"Is it possible? You tell me of things I was not at all aware of."

"A proof that I know better than you what goes on in the Bastille; and if I were to speak of some things you do know, you would be still more surprised."

"What could you tell me?"

"That a week ago one of the officers of the Bastille, and an important one too, received fifty thousand francs to let two women pass with — "

"Monsieur, they were — "

"I know who they were, what they went for, and what they did. They were Mademoiselle de Valois and Mademoiselle de Charolais; they went to see the Duc de Richelieu, and they eat bon-bons till midnight in the Tour du Coin, where they intend to pay another visit to-morrow, as they have already announced to M. de Richelieu."

De Launay turned pale.

"Well," continued Dubois, "do you think if I told these kind of things to the regent, who is, as you know, greedy of scandal, that a certain M. de

Launay would be long governor of the Bastille? But I shall not say a word, for we must help each other."

"I am at your orders, monsieur."

"Then I shall find everything ready?"

"I promise you; but not a word to monseigneur."

"That is right, M. de Launay. Adieu!"

"Good," said Dubois, when he was gone; "and now, monseigneur, when you want to marry your daughter to-morrow there shall be only one thing missing — your son-in-law."

* * *

As Gaston passed on the letter to Dumesnil he heard steps in the corridor, and, hastily signing to the chevalier not to speak, he put out the light and began to undress. The governor entered. As it was not his custom to visit his prisoners at this hour, Gaston saw him with alarm, and he noticed that as M. de Launay placed his lamp on the table his hand trembled. The turnkeys withdrew, but the prisoner saw two soldiers at the door.

"Chevalier," said the governor, "you told me to treat you as a man — learn that you were condemned yesterday."

"And you have come to tell me," said Gaston, who always gained courage in the face of danger, "that the hour of my execution is arrived."

"No, monsieur, but it approaches."

"When will it be?"

"May I tell you the truth, chevalier?"

"I shall be most grateful to you."

"To-morrow, at break of day."

"Where?"

"In the yard of the Bastille."

"Thank you; I had hoped, however, that before I died I might have been the husband of the young girl who was here yesterday."

"Did M. d'Argenson promise you this?"

"No, but he promised to ask the king."

"The king may have refused."

"Does he never grant such favors?"

"'Tis rare, monsieur, but not without a precedent."

"I am a Christian," said Gaston; "I hope I shall be allowed a confessor."

"He is here."

"May I see him?"

"Directly; at present he is with your accomplice!"

"My accomplice! who?"

"La Jonquiere, who will be executed with you."

"And I had suspected him!" said Gaston.

"Chevalier, you are young to die," said the governor.

"Death does not count years: God bids it strike and it obeys."

"But if one can avert the blow, it is almost a crime not to do so."

"What do you mean? I do not understand."

"I told you that M. d'Argenson gave hopes."

"Enough, monsieur, I have nothing to confess."

At this moment the major knocked at the door and exchanged some words with the governor.

"Monsieur," said the latter, "Captain la Jonquiere wishes to see you once more."

"And you refuse it?" said Gaston, with a slight ironical smile.

"On the contrary, I grant it, in the hope that he will be more reasonable than you, and that he wishes to consult you as to making confessions."

"If that be his intention, tell him I refuse to come."

"I know nothing of it, monsieur; perhaps he only wishes once again to see his companion in misfortune."

"In that case, monsieur, I consent."

"Follow me, then."

They found the captain lying on the bed with his clothes in rags.

"I thought the almoner of the Bastille was with you?" said M. de Launay.

"He was, but I sent him away."

"Why so?"

"Because I do not like Jesuits; do you think, morbleu, that I cannot die properly without a priest?"

"To die properly, monsieur, is not to die bravely, but as a Christian."

"If I had wanted a sermon, I would have kept the priest, but I wanted M. de Chanlay."

"He is here, monsieur; I refuse nothing to those who have nothing to hope."

"Ah! chevalier, are you there?" said La Jonquiere, turning round; "you are welcome."

"Explain," said Gaston; "I see with sorrow that you refuse the consolations of religion."

"You also! if you say another word, I declare I will turn Huguenot."

"Pardon, captain, but I thought it my duty to advise you to do what I shall do myself."

"I bear you no ill-will, chevalier; if I were a minister, I would proclaim religious liberty. Now, M. de Launay," continued he, "you understand that as the chevalier and I are about to undertake a long tete-à-tete journey, we have some things to talk over together first."

"I will retire. Chevalier, you have an hour to remain here."

"Thank you, monsieur," said Gaston.

"Well?" said the captain, when they were alone.

"Well," said Gaston, "you were right."

"Yes; but I am exactly like the man who went round Jerusalem crying out 'Woe!' for seven days, and the eighth day a stone thrown from the walls struck him and killed him."

"Yes, I know that we are to die together."

"Which annoys you a little; does it not?"

"Very much, for I had reason to cling to life."

"Every one has."

"But I above all."

"Then I only know one way."

"Make revelations! never."

"No, but fly with me."

"How! fly with you?"

"Yes, I escape."

"But do you know that our execution is fixed for to-morrow?"

"Therefore I decamp to-night."

"Escape, do you say?"

"Certainly."

"How? where?"

"Open the window."

"Well."

"Shake the middle bar."

"Great God!"

"Does it resist?"

"No, it yields!"

"Very good, it has given me trouble enough, Heaven knows."

"It seems like a dream."

"Do you remember asking me if I did not make holes in anything, like all the others?"

"Yes, but you replied — "

"That I would tell you another time; was the answer a good one?"

"Excellent; but how to descend?"

"Help me."

"In what?"

"To search my paillasse."

"A ladder of cord!"

"Exactly."

"But how did you get it?"

"I received it with a file in a lark pie the day of my arrival."

"Certainly, you are decidedly a great man."

"I know it; besides that, I am a good man — for I might escape alone."

"And you have thought of me."

"I asked for you, saying that I wished to say adieu to you. I knew I should entice them to do some act of stupidity."

"Let us make haste, captain."

"On the contrary, let us act slowly and prudently; we have an hour before us."

"And the sentinels?"

"Bah! it is dark."

"But the moat, which is full of water?"

"It is frozen."

"But the wall?"

"When we are there, will be time enough to think about that."

"Must we fasten the ladder?"

"I want to try if it be solid; I have an affection for my spine, such as it is, and do not want to break my neck to save it from another fate."

"You are the first captain of the day, La Jonquiere."

"Bah! I have made plenty of others," said La Jonquiere, tying the last knot in the ladder.

"Is it finished?" asked Gaston.

"Yes."

"Shall I pass first?"

"As you like."

"I like it so."

“Go, then.”

“Is it high?”

“Fifteen to eighteen feet.”

“A trifle.”

“Yes, for you who are young, but it is a different affair for me; be prudent, I beg.”

“Do not be afraid.”

Gaston went first, slowly and prudently, followed by La Jonquiere, who laughed in his sleeve, and grumbled every time he hurt his fingers, or when the wind shook the cords.

“A nice affair for the successor of Richelieu and Mazarin,” he growled to himself. “It is true I am not yet a cardinal; that saves me.”

Gaston touched the water, or rather ice, of the fosse; a moment after, La Jonquiere was by his side.

“Now follow me,” said the latter. On the other side of the moat a ladder awaited them.

“You have accomplices then?”

“Parbleu! do you think the lark paté came by itself?”

“Who says one cannot escape from the Bastille?” said Gaston joyously.

“My young friend,” said Dubois, stopping on the third step, “take my advice; don’t get in there again without me; you might not be as fortunate the second time as the first.”

They continued to mount the wall, on the platform of which a sentinel walked, but instead of opposing them, he held his hand to La Jonquiere to assist him, and in three minutes they were on the platform, had drawn up the ladder, and placed it on the other side of the wall.

The descent was as safely managed, and they found themselves on another frozen moat.

“Now,” said the captain, “we must take away the ladder, that we may not compromise the poor devil who helped us.”

“We are then free?”

“Nearly so,” said La Jonquiere.

Gaston, strengthened by this news, took up the ladder on his shoulder.

“Peste, chevalier! the late Hercules was nothing to you, I think.”

“Bah!” said Gaston, “at this moment I could carry the Bastille itself.”

They went on in silence to a lane in the Faubourg St. Antoine; the streets were deserted.

“Now, my dear chevalier,” said La Jonquiere, “do me the favor to follow me to the corner of the Faubourg.”

“I would follow you to — ”

“Not so far, if you please; for safety’s sake we will each go our own way.”

“What carriage is that?”

“Mine.”

“How! yours?” — — ”Yes.”

“Peste! my dear captain: four horses! you travel like a prince!”

“Three horses; one is for you.”

“How! you consent?”

“Pardieu! that is not all.”

“What?”

“You have no money?”

“It was taken away.”

“Here are fifty louis.”

“But, captain — ”

“Come, it is Spanish money; take it.”

Gaston took the purse, while a postilion unharnessed a horse and led it to him.

“Now,” said Dubois, “where are you going?”

“To Bretagne, to rejoin my companions.”

“You are mad, my dear fellow; they are all condemned and may be executed in two or three days.”

“You are right,” said Gaston.

“Go to Flanders,” said La Jonquiere, “it is a pleasant country; in fifteen or eighteen hours you can reach the frontier.”

“Yes,” said Gaston gloomily; “thank you, I know where I shall go.”

“Well, good luck to you,” said Dubois, getting into his carriage.

“The same to you,” said Gaston.

They grasped each other’s hands, and then each went his own way.

CHAPTER XXXII.

SHOWING THAT WE MUST NOT ALWAYS JUDGE OTHERS BY OURSELVES, ABOVE ALL IF WE ARE CALLED DUBOIS.

The regent, as usual, passed the evening with Helene. He had not missed for four or five days, and the hours he passed with her were his happy hours, but this time he found her very much shaken by her visit to her lover in the Bastille.

“Come,” said the regent, “take courage, Helene; to-morrow you shall be his wife.”

“To-morrow is distant,” replied she.

“Helene, believe in my word, which has never failed you. I tell you that to-morrow shall dawn happily for you and for him.”

Helene sighed deeply.

A servant entered and spoke to the regent.

”What is it?” asked Helene, who was alarmed at the slightest thing.

“Nothing, my child,” said the duke; “it is only my secretary, who wishes to see me on some pressing business.”

“Shall I leave you?”

“Yes; do me that favor for an instant.”

Helene withdrew into her room.

At the same time the door opened and Dubois entered, out of breath.

“Where do you come from in such a state?”

“Parbleu! from the Bastille.”

“And our prisoner?”

“Well.”

“Is everything arranged for the marriage.”

“Yes, everything but the hour, which you did not name.”

“Let us say eight in the morning.”

“At eight in the morning,” said Dubois, calculating.

“Yes, what are you calculating?”

“I am thinking where he will be.”

“Who?”

“The prisoner.”

“What! the prisoner!”

“Yes; at eight o’clock he will be forty leagues from Paris!”

“From Paris!”

“Yes; if he continues to go at the pace at which I saw him set out.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, monseigneur, that there will be one thing only wanting at the marriage; the husband.”

“Gaston?”

“Has escaped from the Bastille half-an-hour ago.”

“You lie, abbe; people do not escape from the Bastille.”

“I beg your pardon, monseigneur; people escape from any place when they are condemned to death.”

“He escaped, knowing that to-morrow he was to wed her whom he loved?”

“Listen, monseigneur, life is a charming thing, and we all cling to it; then your son-in-law has a charming head which he wishes to keep on his shoulders — what more natural?”

“And where is he?”

“Perhaps I may be able to tell you to-morrow evening; at present, all I know is that he is at some distance, and that I will answer for it he will not return.”

The regent became deeply thoughtful.

“Really, monseigneur, your naïveté causes me perpetual astonishment; you must be strangely ignorant of the human heart if you suppose that a man condemned to death would remain in prison when he had a chance of escape.”

“Oh! Monsieur de Chanlay!” cried the regent.

“Eh, mon Dieu! this chevalier has acted as the commonest workman would have done, and quite right too.”

“Dubois! and my daughter?”

“Well, your daughter, monseigneur?”

“It will kill her,” said the regent.

“Oh no, monseigneur, not at all; when she finds out what he is, she will be consoled, and you can marry her to some small German or Italian prince — to the Duke of Modena, for instance, whom Mademoiselle de Valois will not have.”

"Dubois! and I meant to pardon him."

"He has done it for himself, monseigneur, thinking it safer, and ma foi! I should have done the same."

"Oh you; you are not noble, you had not taken an oath."

"You mistake, monseigneur; I had taken an oath, to prevent your highness from committing a folly, and I have succeeded."

"Well, well, let us speak of it no more, not a word of this before Helene — I will undertake to tell her."

"And I, to get back your son-in-law."

"No, no, he has escaped, let him profit by it."

As the regent spoke these words a noise was heard in the neighboring room, and a servant entering, hurriedly announced —

"Monsieur Gaston de Chanlay."

Dubois turned pale as death, and his face assumed an expression of threatening anger. The regent rose in a transport of joy, which brought a bright color into his face — there was as much pleasure in this face, rendered sublime by confidence, as there was compressed fury in Dubois's sharp and malignant countenance.

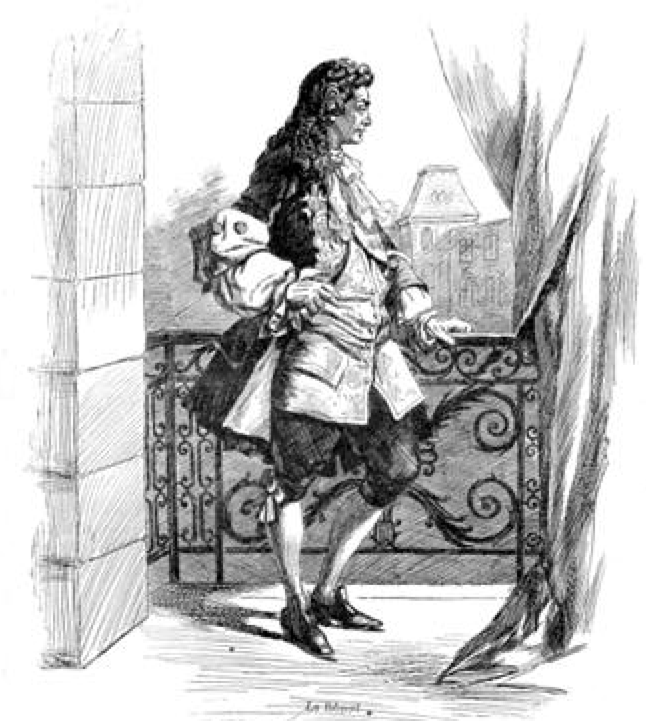

"Let him enter," said the regent.

"At least, give me time to go," said Dubois.

"Ah! yes, he would recognize you."

Dubois retired with a growling noise, like a hyena disturbed in its feast, or in its lair; he entered the next room. There he sat down by a table on which was every material for writing, and this seemed to suggest some new and terrible idea, for his face suddenly lighted up.

He rang.

"Send for the portfolio which is in my carriage," said he to the servant who appeared.

This order being executed at once, Dubois seized some papers, wrote on them some words with an expression of sinister joy, then, having ordered his carriage, drove to the Palais Royal.

Meanwhile the chevalier was led to the regent, and walked straight up to him.

"How! you here, monsieur!" said the duke, trying to look surprised.

"Yes, monseigneur, a miracle has been worked in my favor by La Jonquiere; he had prepared all for flight, he asked for me under pretense of consulting me as to confessions; then, when we were alone, he told me all and we escaped together and in safety."

"And instead of flying, monsieur, gaining the frontier, and placing yourself in safety, you are here at the peril of your life."

"Monseigneur," said Gaston, blushing, "I must confess that for a moment liberty seemed to me the most precious and the sweetest thing the world could afford. The first breath of air I drew seemed to intoxicate me, but I soon reflected."

"On one thing, monsieur?"

"On two, monseigneur."

"You thought of Helene, whom you were abandoning."

"And of my companions, whom I left under the ax."

"And then you decided?"

"That I was bound to their cause till our projects were accomplished."

"Our projects!"

"Yes, are they not yours as well as mine?"

"Listen, monsieur," said the regent; "I believe that man must keep within the limits of his strength. There are things which God seems to forbid him to execute; there are warnings which tell him to renounce certain projects. I believe that it is sacrilege to despise these warnings, to remain deaf to this voice; our projects have miscarried, monsieur, let us think no more of them.”

“On the contrary, monseigneur,” said Gaston, sadly shaking his head, “let us think of them more than ever.”

“But you are furious, monsieur,” said the regent, “to persist in an undertaking which has now become so difficult that it is almost madness.”

“I think, monseigneur, of our friends arrested, tried, condemned; M. d’Argenson told me so; of our friends who are destined to the scaffold, and who can be saved only by the death of the regent; of our friends who would say, if I were to leave France, that I purchased my safety by their ruin, and that the gates of the Bastille were opened by my revelations.”

“Then, monsieur, to this point of honor you sacrifice everything, even Helene?”

“Monseigneur, if they be still alive I must save them.”

“But if they be dead?”

“Then it is another thing,” replied Gaston; “then I must revenge them.”

“Really, monsieur,” said the duke, “this seems to me a somewhat exaggerated idea of heroism. It seems to me that you have, in your own person, already paid your share. Believe me, take the word of a man who is a good judge in affairs of honor; you are absolved in the eyes of the whole world, my dear Brutus.”

“I am not in my own, monseigneur.”

“Then you persist?”

“More than ever; the regent must die, and,” added he in a hollow voice, “die he shall.”

“But do you not first wish to see Mademoiselle de Chaverny?” asked the regent.

“Yes, monseigneur, but first I must have your promise to aid me in my project. Remember, monseigneur; there is not an instant to lose; my companions are condemned, as I was. Tell me at once, before I see Helene, that you will not abandon me. Let me make a new engagement with you — I am a man; I love, and therefore I am weak. I shall have to struggle against her tears and against my own weakness; monseigneur, I will only see Helene under the condition that you will enable me to see the regent.”

“And if I refuse that condition?”

“Then, monseigneur, I will not see Helene; I am dead to her; it is useless to renew hope in her which she must lose again, it is enough that she must weep for me once.”

“And you would still persist?”

“Yes, but with less chance.”

“Then what would you do?”

“Wait for the regent wherever he goes, and strike him whenever I can find him.”

“Think once more,” said the duke.

“By the honor of my name,” replied Gaston, “I once more implore your aid, or I declare that I will find means to dispense with it.”

“Well, monsieur, go and see Helene, and you shall have my answer on your return.”

“Where?”

“In that room.”

“And the answer shall be according to my desire?”

“Yes.”

Gaston went into Helene’s room; she was kneeling before a crucifix, praying that her lover might be restored to her. At the noise which Gaston made in opening the door she turned round.

Believing that God had worked a miracle, and uttering a cry, she held out her arms toward the chevalier, but without the strength to raise herself.

“Oh, mon Dieu! is it himself? is it his shade?”

“It is myself, Helene,” said the young man, darting toward her, and grasping her hands.

“But how? a prisoner this morning — free, this evening?”

“I escaped, Helene.”

“And then you thought of me, you ran to me, you would not fly without me. Oh! I recognize my Gaston there. Well — I am ready, take me where you will — I am yours — I am — ”

“Helene,” said Gaston, “you are not the bride of an ordinary man; if I had been only like all other men you would not have loved me.”

“Oh, no!”

“Well, Helene, to superior souls superior duties are allotted, and consequently greater trials; before I can be yours I have to accomplish the mission on which I came to Paris; we have both a fatal destiny to fulfill. Our life or death hangs on a single event which must be accomplished to-night.”

“What do you mean?” cried the young girl.

"Listen, Helene," replied Gaston, "if in four hours, that is to say, by daybreak, you have no news of me, do not expect me, believe that all that has passed between us is but a dream — and, if you can obtain permission to do so, come again and see me in the Bastille."

Helene trembled, Gaston took her back to her prie-Dieu, where she knelt.

Then, kissing her on the forehead as a brother might have done — "Pray on, Helene;" said he, "for in praying for me you pray also for Bretagne and for France." Then he rushed out of the room.

"Alas! alas!" murmured Helene, "save *him*, my God! and what care I for the rest of the world."

Gaston was met by a servant who gave him a note, telling him the duke was gone.

The note was as follows:

"There is a bal masque to-night at Monceaux; the regent will be there. He generally retires toward one o'clock in the morning into a favorite conservatory, which is situated at the end of the gilded gallery. No one enters there ordinarily but himself, because this habit of his is known and respected. The regent will be dressed in a black velvet domino, on the left arm of which is embroidered a golden bee. He hides this sign in a fold when he wishes to remain incognito. The card I inclose is an ambassador's ticket. With this you will be admitted, not only to the ball, but to this conservatory, where you will appear to seek a private interview. Use it for your encounter with the regent. My carriage is below, in which you will find my own domino. The coachman is at your orders."

On reading this note, which, as it were, brought him face to face with the man he meant to assassinate, a cold perspiration passed over Gaston's forehead, and he was obliged for a moment to lean against a chair for support; but suddenly, as if taking a violent resolution, he darted down the staircase, jumped into the carriage, and cried —

"To Monceaux!"

Scarcely had he quitted the room, when a secret door in the woodwork opened, and the duke entered. He went to Helene's door, who uttered a cry of delight at seeing him.

"Well," said the regent sadly, "are you content, Helene?"

"Oh! it is you, monseigneur?"

"You see, my child, that my predictions are fulfilled — believe me when I say, 'Hope.'"

"Ah! monseigneur, are you then an angel come down to earth to stand to me in the place of the father whom I have lost?"

"Alas," said the regent, smiling. "I am not an angel, my dear Helene; but such as I am, I will indeed be to you a father, and a tender one."

Saying this, the regent took Helene's hand, and was about to kiss it respectfully, but she raised her head and presented her forehead to him.

"I see that you love him truly," said he.

"Monseigneur, I bless you."

"May your blessing bring me happiness," said the regent, then, going down to his carriage —

"To the Palais Royal," said he, "but remember you have only a quarter of an hour to drive to Monceaux."

The horses flew along the road.

As the carriage entered under the peristyle, a courier on horseback was setting out.

Dubois, having seen him start, closed the window and went back to his apartments.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MONCEAUX.

Meanwhile Gaston went toward Monceaux.

He had found the duke's domino and mask in the carriage. The mask was of black velvet — the domino of violet satin. He put them both on, and suddenly remembered that he was without arms.

He thought, however, he should easily procure some weapon at Monceaux. As he approached, he found it was not a weapon that he needed, but courage. There passed in his mind a terrible contest. Pride and humanity struggled against each other, and, from time to time, he represented to himself his friends in prison, condemned to a cruel and infamous death.

As the carriage entered the courtyard of Monceaux, he murmured, "Already!"

However, the carriage stopped, the door was opened, he must alight. The prince's private carriage and coachman had been recognized, and all the servants overwhelmed him with attentions.

Gaston did not remark it — a kind of mist passed before his eyes — he presented his card.

It was the custom then for both men and women to be masked: but it was more frequently the women than the men who went to these reunions unmasked. At this period women spoke not only freely, but well, and the mask hid neither folly nor inferiority of rank, for the women of that day were all witty, and if they were handsome, they were soon titled: witness, the Duchesse de Chateauroux and the Comtesse Dubarry.

Gaston knew no one, but he felt instinctively that he was among the most select society of the day. Among the men were Novilles, Brancas, Broglie, St. Simon, and Biron. The women might be more mixed, but certainly not less spirituelles, nor less elegant.

No one knew how to organize a fete like the regent. The luxury of good taste, the profusion of flowers, the lights, the princes and ambassadors, the charming and beautiful women who surrounded him, all had their effect on

Gaston, who now recognized in the regent, not only a king, but a king at once powerful, gay, amiable, beloved, and above all, popular and national.

Gaston's heart beat when, seeking among these heads the one for which his blows were destined, he saw a black domino.

Without the mask which hid his face and concealed from all eyes its changing expression, he would not have taken four steps through the rooms without some one pointing him out as an assassin.

Gaston could not conceal from himself that there was something cowardly in coming to a prince, his host, to change those brilliant lights into funeral torches, to stain those dazzling tapestries with blood, to arouse the cry of terror amid the joyous tumult of a fete — and at this thought his courage failed him, and he stepped toward the door.

"I will kill him outside," said he, "but not here."

Then he remembered the duke's directions, his card would open to him the isolated conservatory, and he murmured —

"He foresaw that I should be a coward."

He approached a sort of gallery containing buffets where the guests came for refreshment. He went also, not that he was hungry or thirsty, but because he was unarmed. He chose a long, sharp and pointed knife, and put it under his domino, where he was sure no one could see it.

"The likeness to Ravaillac will be complete," said he.

At this moment, as Gaston turned, he heard a well-known voice say —

"You hesitate?"

Gaston opened his domino and showed the duke the knife which it concealed.

"I see the knife glisten, but I also see the hand tremble."

"Yes, monseigneur, it is true," said Gaston; "I hesitated, I trembled, I felt inclined to fly — but thank God you are here."

"And your ferocious courage?" said the duke in a mocking voice.

"It is not that I have lost it."

"What has become of it then?"

"Monseigneur, I am under his roof."

"Yes; but in the conservatory you are not."

"Could you not show him to me first, that I might accustom myself to his presence, that I may be inspired by the hatred I bear him, for I do not know how to find him in this crowd?"

"Just now he was near you."

Gaston shuddered.

"Near me?" said he.

"As near as I am," replied the duke, gravely.

"I will go to the conservatory, monseigneur."

"Go then."

"Yet a moment, monseigneur, that I may recover myself."

"Very well, you know the conservatory is beyond that gallery; stay, the doors are closed."

"Did you not say that with this card the servants would open them to me?"

"Yes; but it would be better to open them yourself — a servant might wait for your exit. If you are thus agitated before you strike the blow, what will it be afterward? Then the regent probably will not fall without defending himself — without a cry; they will all run to him, you will be arrested, and adieu your hope of the future. Think of Helene, who waits for you."

It is impossible to describe what was passing in Gaston's heart during this speech. The duke, however, watched its effect upon his countenance.

"Well," said Gaston, "what shall I do? advise me."

"When you are at the door of the conservatory, the one which opens on to the gallery turning to the left — do you know?"

"Yes."

"Under the lock you will find a carved button — push it, and the door will open, unless it be fastened within. But the regent, who has no suspicion, will not take this precaution. I have been there twenty times for a private audience. If he be not there, wait for him. You will know him, if there, by the black domino and the golden bee."

"Yes, yes; I know," said Gaston; not knowing, however, what he said.

"I do not reckon much on you this evening," replied the duke.

"Ah! monseigneur, the moment approaches which will change my past life into a doubtful future, perhaps of shame, at least of remorse."

"Remorse!" replied the duke. "When we perform an action which we believe to be just, and commanded by conscience, we do not feel remorse. Do you doubt the sanctity of your cause?"

"No, monseigneur, but it is easy for you to speak thus. You have the idea — I, the execution. You are the head, but I am the arm. Believe me, monseigneur," continued he in a hollow voice, and choking with emotion, “it is a terrible thing to kill a man who is before you defenseless — smiling on his murderer. I thought myself courageous and strong; but it must be thus with every conspirator who undertakes what I have done. In a moment of excitement, of pride, of enthusiasm, or of hatred, we take a fatal vow; then there is a vast extent of time between us and our victim; but the oath taken, the fever is calmed, the enthusiasm cools, the hatred diminishes. Every day brings us nearer the end to which we are tending, and then we shudder when we feel what a crime we have undertaken. And yet inexorable time flows on; and at every hour which strikes, we see our victim take another step, until at length the interval between us disappears, and we stand face to face. Believe me, monseigneur, the bravest tremble — for murder is always murder. Then we see that we are not the ministers of our consciences, but the slaves of our oaths. We set out with head erect, saying ‘I am the chosen one:’ we arrive with head bowed down, saying, ‘I am accursed.’“

“There is yet time, monsieur.”

“No, no; you well know, monseigneur, that fate urges me onward. I shall accomplish my task, terrible though it be. My heart will shudder, but my hand will still be firm. Yes, I tell you, were it not for my friends, whose lives hang on the blow I am about to strike, were there no Helene, whom I should cover with mourning, if not with blood, oh, I would prefer the scaffold, even the scaffold, with all its shame, for that does not punish, it absolves.”

“Come,” said the duke, “I see that though you tremble, you will act.”

“Do not doubt it, monseigneur; pray for me, for in half an hour all will be over.”

The duke gave an involuntary start; however, approving Gaston’s determination, he once more mixed with the crowd.

Gaston found an open window with a balcony. He stepped out for a moment to cool the fever in his veins, but it was in vain; the flame which consumed him was not to be extinguished thus.

He heard one o’clock strike.

“Now,” he murmured, “the time is come, and I cannot draw back. My God, to thee I recommend my soul — Helene, adieu!”

Then, slowly but firmly, he went to the door, and pressing the button, it opened noiselessly before him.

A mist came before his eyes. He seemed in a new world. The music sounded like a distant and charming melody. Around him breathed the sweetly perfumed flowers, and alabaster lamps half hidden in luxuriant foliage shed a delicious twilight over the scene, while through the interlacing leaves of tropical plants could just be seen the leafless gloomy trees beyond, and the snow covering the earth as with a winding sheet. Even the temperature was changed, and a sudden shiver passed through his veins. The contrast of all this verdure, these magnificent and blossoming orange trees — these magnolias, splendid with the waxy blooms, with the gilded salons he had left, bewildered him. It seemed difficult to connect the thought of murder with this fair-smiling and enchanted scene. The soft gravel yielded to his tread, and plashing fountains murmured forth a plaintive and monotonous harmony.

Gaston was almost afraid to look for a human form. At length he glanced round.

Nothing! he went on.

At length, beneath a broad-leaved palm, surrounded by blooming rhododendrons, he saw the black phantom seated on a bank of moss, his back turned toward the side from whence he was approaching.

The blood rushed to Gaston’s cheeks, his hand trembled, and he vainly sought for some support.

The domino did not move.

Gaston involuntarily drew back. All at once he forced his rebellious limbs to move on, and his trembling fingers to grasp the knife they had almost abandoned, and he stepped toward the regent, stifling a sob which was about to escape him.

At this moment the figure moved, and Gaston saw the golden bee, which seemed like a burning gem before his eyes.

The domino turned toward Gaston, and as he did so, the young man’s arm grew rigid, the foam rose to his lips, his teeth chattered, for a vague suspicion entered his breast.

Suddenly he uttered a piercing cry. The domino had risen, and was unmasked — his face was that of the Duc d’Olivares.

Gaston, thunderstruck, remained livid and mute. The regent and the duke were one and the same. The regent retained his calm majestic attitude; looked at the hand which held the knife, and the knife fell. Then, looking at his intended murderer with a smile at once sweet and sad, Gaston fell down before him like a tree cut by the ax.

Not a word had been spoken; nothing was heard but Gaston's broken sobs, and the water of the fountains plashing monotonously as it fell.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE PARDON.

"Rise, monsieur," said the regent.

"No, monseigneur," cried Gaston, bowing his forehead to the ground, "oh, no, it is at your feet that I should die."

"Die! Gaston! you see that you are pardoned."

"Oh, monseigneur, punish me, in Heaven's name; for you must indeed despise me if you pardon me."

"But have you not guessed?" asked the regent.

"What?"

"The reason why I pardon you."

Gaston cast a retrospective glance upon the past, his sad and solitary youth, his brother's despairing death, his love for Helene, those days that seemed so long away from her, those nights that passed so quickly beneath the convent window, his journey to Paris, the duke's kindness to the young girl, and last, this unexpected clemency; but in all this he beheld nothing, he divined nothing.

"Thank Helene," said the duke, who saw that Gaston vainly sought the cause of what had happened; "thank Helene, for it is she who saves your life."

"Helene! monseigneur."

"I cannot punish my daughter's affianced husband."

"Helene, your daughter! oh, monseigneur, and I would have killed you!"

"Yes, remember what you said just now. We set out the chosen one, we return the murderer. And sometimes you see more than a murderer — a parricide — for I am almost your father," said the duke, holding out his hand to Gaston.

"Monseigneur, have mercy on me."

"You have a noble heart, Gaston."

"And you, monseigneur, are a noble prince. Henceforth, I am yours body and soul. Every drop of my blood for one tear of Helene's, for one wish of your highness's."

“Thanks, Gaston,” said the duke, smiling, “I will repay your devotion by your happiness.”

“I, happy, through your highness! Ah! monseigneur, God revenges himself in permitting you to return me so much good for the evil I intended you.”

The regent smiled at this effusion of simple joy, when the door opened and gave entrance to a green domino.

”Captain la Jonquiere!” cried Gaston.

“Dubois!” murmured the duke, frowning.

“Monseigneur,” said Gaston, hiding his face in his hands, pale with affright; “monseigneur, I am lost. It is no longer I who must be saved. I forgot my honor, I forgot my friends.”

“Your friends, monsieur?” said the duke, coldly. “I thought you no longer made common cause with such men.”

“Monseigneur, you said I had a noble heart; believe me when I say that Pontcalec, Montlouis, Du Couëdic, and Talhouet have hearts as noble as my own.”

“Noble!” repeated the duke, contemptuously.

“Yes, monseigneur, I repeat what I said.”

“And do you know what they would have done, my poor child? you, who were their blind tool, the arm that they placed at the end of their thoughts. These noble hearts would have delivered their country to the stranger, they would have erased the name of France from the list of sovereign nations. Nobles, they were bound to set an example of courage and loyalty — they have given that of perfidy and cowardice; well, you do not reply — you lower your eyes; if it be your poniard you seek, it is at your feet; take it up, there is yet time.”

“Monsieur,” said Gaston, clasping his hands, “I renounce my ideas of assassination, I detest them, and I ask your pardon for having entertained them; but if you will not save my friends, I beg of you at least to let me perish with them. If I live when they die, my honor dies with them; think of it, monseigneur, the honor of the name your daughter is to bear.”

The regent bent his head as he replied:

“It is impossible, monsieur; they have betrayed France; and they must die.”

“Then I die with them!” said Gaston, “for I also have betrayed France, and, moreover, would have murdered your highness.”

The regent looked at Dubois; the glance they exchanged did not escape Gaston. He understood that he had dealt with a false La Jonquiere as well as a false Duc d'Olivares.

"No," said Dubois, addressing Gaston, "you shall not die for that, monsieur; but you must understand that there are crimes which the regent has neither the power nor the right to pardon."

"But he pardoned me!" exclaimed Gaston. — — "You are Helene's husband," said the duke.

"You mistake, monseigneur; I am not; and I shall never be; and as such a sacrifice involves the death of him who makes it, I shall die, monseigneur."

"Bah!" said Dubois, "no one dies of love nowadays; it was very well in the time of M. d'Urfe and Mademoiselle de Scuderi."

"Perhaps you are right, monsieur; but in all times men die by the dagger;" and Gaston stopped and picked up the knife with an expression which was not to be mistaken. Dubois did not move.

The regent made a step.

"Throw down that weapon, monsieur," said he, with hauteur.

Gaston placed the point against his breast.

"Throw it down, I say," repeated the regent.

"The life of my friends, monseigneur," said Gaston.

The regent turned again to Dubois, who smiled a sardonic smile.

"'Tis well," said the regent, "they shall live."

"Ah! monsieur," said Gaston, seizing the duke's hand, and trying to raise it to his lips, "you are the image of God on earth."

"Monseigneur, you commit an irreparable fault," said Dubois.

"What!" cried Gaston, astonished, "you are then — "

"The Abbe Dubois, at your service," said the false La Jonquiere, bowing.

"Oh! monseigneur, listen only to your own heart — I implore."

"Monseigneur, sign nothing," said Dubois.

"Sign! monseigneur, sign!" repeated Gaston, "you promised they should live; and I know your promise is sacred."

"Dubois, I shall sign," said the duke.

"Has your highness decided?"

"I have given my word."

"Very well; as you please."

"At once, monseigneur, at once; I know not why, but I am alarmed in spite of myself; monseigneur, their pardon, I implore you."

"Eh! monsieur," said Dubois, "since his highness has promised, what signify five minutes more or less?"

The regent looked uneasily at Dubois.

"Yes, you are right," said he, "this very moment; your portfolio, abbe, and quick, the young man is impatient."

Dubois bowed assent, called a servant, got his portfolio, and presented to the regent a sheet of paper, who wrote an order on it and signed it.

"Now a courier."

"Oh, no! monseigneur, it is useless."

"Why so?"

"A courier would never go quickly enough. I will go myself, if your highness will permit me; every moment I gain will save those unhappy men an age of torture."

Dubois frowned.

"Yes! yes! you are right," said the regent, "go yourself;" and he added in a low voice, "and do not let the order leave your hands."

"But, monseigneur," said Dubois, "you are more impatient than the young man himself; you forget that if he goes thus there is some one in Paris who will think he is dead."

These words struck Gaston, and recalled to him Helene, whom he had left, expecting him from one moment to another, in the fear of some great event, and who would never forgive him should he leave Paris without seeing her. In an instant his resolution was taken; he kissed the duke's hand, took the order, and was going, when the regent said —

"Not a word to Helene of what I told you; the only recompense I ask of you is to leave me the pleasure of telling her she is my child."

"Your highness shall be obeyed," said Gaston, moved to tears, and again bowing, he hastily went out.

"This way," said Dubois; "really, you look as if you had assassinated some one, and you will be arrested; cross this grove, at the end is a path which will lead you to the street."

"Oh, thank you; you understand that delay — "

"Might be fatal. That is why," added he to himself, "I have shown you the longest way — go."

When Gaston had disappeared, Dubois returned to the regent.

"What is the matter, monseigneur?" asked he; "you seem uneasy."

"I am."

“And why?”

“You made no resistance to my performing a good action — this frightened me.” Dubois smiled.

“Dubois,” said the duke, “you are plotting something.”

“No, monseigneur, it is all arranged.”

“What have you done?”

“Monseigneur, I know you.”

“Well.”

“I knew what would happen. That you would never be satisfied till you had signed the pardon of all these fellows.”

“Go on.”

“Well, I also have sent a courier.”

“You!”

“Yes, I; have I not the right to send couriers?”

“Yes; but, in Heaven’s name, tell me what order your courier carried.”

“An order for their execution.”

“And he is gone?”

Dubois took out his watch.

“Two hours ago,” said he.

“Wretch!”

“Ah, monseigneur! always big words. Every man to his trade, save M. de Chanlay, if you like; he is your son-in-law; as for me, I save you.”

“Yes; but I know De Chanlay. He will arrive before the courier.”

“No, monseigneur.”

“Two hours are nothing to a man like him; he will soon have made them up.”

“Were my courier only two hours in advance,” said Dubois, “De Chanlay might overtake him, but he will be three.”

”How so?”

“Because the worthy young man is in love; and if I reckon an hour for taking leave of your daughter, I am sure it is not too much.”

“Serpent! I understand the meaning of what you said just now.”

“He was in an excess of enthusiasm — he might have forgotten his love. You know my principle, monseigneur: distrust first impulses, they are always good.”

“It is an infamous principle.”

“Monseigneur, either one is a diplomatist or one is not.”

“Well,” said the regent, stepping toward the door, “I shall go and warn him.”

“Monseigneur,” said Dubois, stopping the duke with an accent of extreme resolution, and taking a paper out of his portfolio, already prepared, “if you do so, have the kindness in that case to accept my resignation at once. Joke, if you will, but, as Horace said, ‘est modus in rebus.’ He was a great as well as a courteous man. Come, come, monseigneur, a truce to politics for this evening — go back to the ball, and to-morrow evening all will be settled — France will be rid of four of her worst enemies, and you will retain a son-in-law whom I greatly prefer to M. de Riom, I assure you.”

And with these words they returned to the ballroom, Dubois joyous and triumphant, the duke sad and thoughtful, but convinced that his minister was right.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE LAST INTERVIEW.

Gaston left the conservatory, his heart bounding with joy. The enormous weight which had oppressed him since the commencement of the conspiracy, and which Helene's love had scarcely been able to alleviate, now seemed to disappear as at the touch of an angel.

To dreams of vengeance, dreams both terrible and bloody, succeeded visions of love and glory. Helene was not only a charming and a loving woman, she was also a princess of the blood royal — one of those divinities whose tenderness men would purchase with their hearts' blood, if they did not, being after all weak as mortals, give this inestimable tenderness away.

And Gaston felt revive within his breast the slumbering instinct of ambition. What a brilliant fortune was his — one to be envied by such men as Richelieu and Lauzun. No Louis XIV., imposing, as on Lauzun, exile or the abandonment of his mistress — no irritated father combating the pretensions of a simple gentleman — but, on the contrary, a powerful friend, greedy of love, longing to prove his affection for his pure and noble daughter. A holy emulation between the daughter and the son-in-law to make themselves more worthy of so just a prince, so mild a conqueror.

In a quarter of an hour Gaston had gained the Rue du Bac.

The door opened before him — a cry was heard — Helene, at the window watching for his return, had recognized the carriage, and ran joyously to meet him.

"Saved!" cried Gaston, seeing her; "saved! my friends, I — you — all — saved!"

"Oh, God!" cried Helene, turning pale, "you have killed him, then?"

"No, no; thank God! Oh! Helene, what a heart, what a man is this regent! Oh, love him well, Helene; you will love him, will you not?"

"Explain yourself, Gaston."

"Come, and let us speak of ourselves; I have but a few moments to give you, Helene; but the duke will tell you all."

"One thing before all," said Helene, "what is your fate?"

"The brightest in the world, Helene — your husband, rich and honored. Helene, I am wild with joy."

"And you remain with me at last?"

"No, I leave you, Helene."

"Oh, heavens!"

"But to return."

"Another separation!"

"Three days at the most — three days only. I go to bring blessings on your name, on mine, on that of our protector, our friend."

"Where are you going?"

"To Nantes!"

"To Nantes!"

"Yes. This order is the pardon of Pontcalec, Montlouis, and Talhouet and Du Couëdic. They are condemned to death, and they will owe me their lives. Oh, do not keep me here, Helene; think of what you suffered just now, when you were watching for me."

"And, consequently, what I am to suffer again."

"No, my Helene; for this time there is no fear, no obstacle: this time you are sure of my return."

"Gaston, shall I never see you, but at rare intervals and for a few minutes? Ah! Gaston, I have so much need of happiness."

"You shall be happy, Helene, be assured."

"My heart sinks."

"Ah! when you know all!"

"But tell me at once."

"Helene, the only thing wanting to my happiness is the permission to fall at your feet and tell you all — but I have promised — nay more, I have sworn."

"Always some secret!"

"This, at least, is a joyful one."

"Oh, Gaston, Gaston, I tremble."

"Look at me, Helene; can you fear when you see the joy that sparkles in my eyes?"

"Why do you not take me with you, Gaston?"

"Helene!"

"I beg of you to let us go together."

"Impossible."

“Why?”

“Because, first, I must be at Nantes in twenty hours.”

“I will follow you, even should I die with fatigue.”

“Then, because you are no longer your own mistress; you have here a protector, to whom you owe respect and obedience.”

“The duke?”

“Yes; the duke. Oh, when you know what he has done for me — for us.”

“Let us leave a letter for him, and he will forgive us.”

“No, no; he will say we are ungrateful; and he would be right. No, Helene; while I go to Bretagne, swift as a saving angel, you shall remain here and hasten the preparations for our marriage. And when I return I shall at once demand my wife; at your feet I shall bless you for the happiness and the honor you bestow on me.”

“You leave me, Gaston?” cried Helene, in a voice of distress.

“Oh, not thus, Helene, not thus; I cannot leave you so. Oh, no — be joyous, Helene; smile on me; say to me — in giving me your hand — that hand so pure and faithful — ’Go, Gaston — go — for it is your duty.’“

“Yes, my friend,” said Helene, “perhaps I ought to speak thus, but I have not the strength. Oh! Gaston, forgive me.”

“Oh, Helene, when I am so joyful.”

“Gaston, it is beyond my power; remember that you take with you the half of my life.”

Gaston heard the clock strike three and started.

“Adieu, Helene,” said he.

“Adieu,” murmured she.

Once more he pressed her hand and raised it to his lips, then dashed down the staircase toward the door.

But he heard Helene’s sobs.

Rapidly he remounted the staircase and ran to her. She was standing at the door of the room he had just left. Gaston clasped her in his arms, and she hung weeping upon his neck.

“Oh, mon Dieu!” cried she, “you leave me again, Gaston; listen to what I say, we shall never meet more.”

“My poor Helene,” cried the young man, “you are mad.”

“Despair has made me so.”

And her tears ran down her cheeks.

All at once she seemed to make a violent effort, and pressing her lips on those of her lover, she clasped him tightly to her breast, then quickly repulsing him —

“Now go, Gaston,” said she, “now I can die.”

Gaston replied by passionate caresses. The clock struck the half hour.

“Another half hour to make up.”

“Adieu, adieu, Gaston; you are right, you should already be away.”

“Adieu for a time.”

“Adieu, Gaston.”

And Helene returned to the pavilion. Gaston procured a horse, saddled, mounted, and left Paris by the same gate by which he had entered some days previously.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

NANTES.

The commission named by Dubois was to be permanent. Invested with unlimited powers, which in certain cases means that the decision is settled beforehand, they besieged the earth, supported by strong detachments of troops.

Since the arrest of the four gentlemen, Nantes, terrified at first, had risen in their favor. The whole of Bretagne awaited a revolt, but in the meanwhile was quiet.

However, the trial was approaching. On the eve of the public audience, Pontcalec held a serious conversation with his friends.

“Let us consider,” said he, “whether in word or deed we have committed any imprudence.”

“No,” said the other three.

“Has any one of you imparted our projects to his wife, his brother, a friend? Have you, Montlouis?”

“No, on my honor.”

“You, Talhouet?”

“No.”

“You, Couëdic?”

“No.”

“Then they have neither proof nor accusation against us. No one has surprised us, no one wishes us harm.”

“But,” said Montlouis, “meanwhile we shall be tried.”

“On what grounds?”

“Oh, secret information,” said Talhouet, smiling.

“Very secret,” said Du Couëdic, “since they do not breathe a word.”

“Ah, one fine night they will force us to escape, that they may not be obliged to liberate us some fine day.”

“I do not believe it,” said Montlouis, who had always been the most desponding, perhaps because he had the most at stake, having a young wife and two children who adored him. “I do not believe it. I have seen Dubois in England. I have talked with him; his face is like a ferret's, licking his lips when thirsty. Dubois is thirsty, and we are taken. Dubois's thirst will be slaked by our blood."

"But," said Du Couëdic, "there is the parliament of Bretagne."

"Yes, to look on, while we lose our heads."

There was only one of the four who smiled; that was Pontcalec.

"My friends," said he, "take courage. If Dubois be thirsty, so much the worse for Dubois. He will go mad, that is all; but this time I answer for it he shall not taste our blood."

And, indeed, from the beginning the task of the commission seemed difficult. No confessions, no proofs, no witnesses. Bretagne laughed in the commissioners' faces, and when she did not laugh, she threatened. The president dispatched a courier to Paris to explain the state of things, and get further instructions.

"Judge by their projects," said Dubois; "they may have done little, because they were prevented, but they intended much, and the intention in matters of rebellion is equivalent to the act."

Armed with this terrible weapon, the commission soon overthrew the hopes of the province. There was a terrible audience, in which the accused commenced with raillery and ended with accusation. On re-entering the prison, Pontcalec congratulated them on the truths they had told the judge.

"Nevertheless," said Montlouis, "it is a bad affair. Bretagne does not revolt."

"She waits our condemnation," said Talhouet.

"Then she will revolt somewhat late," said Montlouis.

"But our condemnation may not take place," said Pontcalec. "Say, frankly, we are guilty, but without proofs who will dare to sentence us? The commission?"

"No, not the commission, but Dubois."

"I have a great mind to do one thing," said Du Couëdic.

"What?"

"At the first audience to cry, 'Bretagne to the rescue!' Each time we have seen faces of friends; we should be delivered or killed, but at least it would be decided. I should prefer death to this suspense."

"But why run the risk of being wounded by some satellite of justice?"

"Because such a wound might be healed; not so the wound the executioner would make."

“Oh!” said Pontcalec, “you will have no more to do with the executioner than I shall.”

“Always the prediction,” said Montlouis. “You know that I have no faith in it.”

“You are wrong.”

“This is sure, my friends,” said Pontcalec. “We shall be exiled, we shall be forced to embark, and I shall be lost on the way. This is my fate. But yours may be different. Ask to go by a different vessel from me; or there is another chance. I may fall from the deck, or slip on the steps; at least, I shall die by the water. You know that is certain. I might be condemned to death, taken to the very scaffold, but if the scaffold were on dry ground I should be as easy as I am now.”

His tone of confidence gave them courage. They even laughed at the rapidity with which the deliberations were carried on. They did not know that Dubois sent courier after courier from Paris to hasten them.

At length the commission declared themselves sufficiently enlightened, and retired to deliberate in secret session.

Never was there a more stormy discussion. History has penetrated the secrets of these deliberations, in which some of the least bold or least ambitious counselors revolted against the idea of condemning these gentlemen on presumptions which were supported solely by the intelligence transmitted to them by Dubois; but the majority were devoted to Dubois, and the committee came to abuse and quarrels, and almost to blows.

At the end of a sitting of eleven hours’ duration, the majority declared their decision.

The commissioners associated sixteen others of the contumacious gentlemen with the four chiefs, and declared:

“That the accused, found guilty of criminal projects, of treason, and of felonious intentions, should be beheaded: those present, in person, those absent, in effigy. That the walls and fortifications of their castles should be demolished, their patents of nobility annuled, and their forests cut down to the height of nine feet.”

An hour after the delivery of this sentence, an order was given to the usher to announce it to the prisoners.

The sentence had been given after the stormy sitting of which we have spoken, and in which the accused had experienced such lively marks of sympathy from the public. And so, having beaten the judges on all the counts of the indictment, never had they been so full of hope.

They were seated at supper in their common room, calling to mind all the details of the sitting, when suddenly the door opened, and in the shade appeared the pale and stern form of the usher.

The solemn apparition changed, on the instant, into anxious palpitations their pleasant conversation.

The usher advanced slowly, while the jailer remained at the door, and the barrels of muskets were seen shining in the gloom of the corridor.

“What is your will, sir?” asked Pontcalec, “and what signifies this deadly paraphernalia?”

”Gentlemen,” said the usher, “I bear the sentence of the tribunal. On your knees and listen.”

“How?” said Montlouis, “it is only sentences of death that must be heard kneeling.”

“On your knees, gentlemen,” replied the usher.

“Let the guilty and the base kneel,” said Du Couëdic; “we are gentlemen, and innocent. We will hear our sentences standing.”

“As you will, gentlemen; but uncover yourselves, for I speak in the king’s name.”

Talhouet, who alone had his hat on, removed it. The four gentlemen stood erect and bare-headed, leaning on each other, with pale faces and a smile upon their lips.

The usher read the sentence through, uninterrupted by a murmur, or by a single gesture of surprise.

When he had finished —

“Why was I told,” asked Pontcalec, “to declare the designs of Spain against France, and that I should be liberated? Spain was an enemy’s country. I declared what I believed I knew of her projects; and, lo! I am condemned. Why is this? Is the commission, then, composed of cowards who spread snares for the accused?”

The usher made no answer.

“But,” added Montlouis, “the regent spared all Paris, implicated in the conspiracy of Cellamare; not a drop of blood was shed. Yet those who wished to carry off the regent, perhaps to kill him, were at least as guilty as men against whom no serious accusations even could be made. Are we then chosen to pay for the indulgence shown to the capital?”

The usher made no reply.

"You forget one thing, Montlouis," said Du Couëdic, "the old family hatred against Bretagne; and the regent, to make people believe that he belongs to the family, wishes to prove that he hates us. It is not we, personally, who are struck at; it is a province, which for three hundred years has claimed in vain its privileges and its rights, and which they wish to find guilty in order to have done with it forever."

The usher preserved a religious silence.

"Enough," said Talhouet, "we are condemned. 'Tis well. Now, have we, or have we not, the right of appeal?"

"No, gentlemen," said the usher.

"Then you can retire," said Couëdic.

The usher bowed and withdrew, followed by his escort, and the prison door, heavy and clanging, closed once more upon the four gentlemen.

"Well!" said Montlouis, when they were again alone.

"Well, we are condemned," said Pontcalec. "I never said there would be no sentence; I only said it would not be carried into execution."

"I am of Pontcalec's opinion," said Talhouet. "What they have done is but to terrify the province and test its patience."

"Besides," said Du Couëdic, "they will not execute us without the regent's ratification of the sentence. Now, without an extraordinary courier, it will take two days to reach Paris, one to examine into the affair, and two to return, altogether five days. We have, then, five days before us; and what may not happen in five days? The province will rise on hearing of our doom — "

Montlouis shook his head.

"Besides, there is Gaston," said Pontcalec, "whom you always forget."

"I am much afraid that Gaston has been arrested," said Montlouis. "I know Gaston, and were he at liberty, we should have heard of him ere now."

"Prophet of evil," said Talhouet, "at least you will not deny that we have some days before us."

"Who knows?" said Montlouis.

"And the waters?" said Pontcalec; "the waters? You always forget that I can only perish by the waters."

"Well, then, let us be seated again," said Du Couëdic, "and a last glass to our healths."

"There is no more wine," said Montlouis; "'tis an evil omen."

"Bah! there is more in the cellar," said Pontcalec.

And he called the jailer.

The man, on entering, found the four friends at table; he looked at them in astonishment.

"Well, what is there new, Master Christopher?" said Pontcalec.

Christopher came from Guer, and had a particular respect for Pontcalec, whose uncle Crysogon had been his seigneur.

"Nothing but what you know," he replied.

"Then go and fetch some wine."

"They wish to deaden their feelings," said the jailer to himself; "poor gentlemen."

Montlouis alone heard Christopher's remark, and he smiled sadly.

An instant afterward they heard steps rapidly approaching their room.

The door opened, and Christopher reappeared without any bottle in his hand.

"Well," said Pontcalec, "where is the wine?"

"Good news," cried Christopher, without answering Pontcalec's inquiry, "good news, gentlemen."

"What?" said Montlouis, starting. "Is the regent — dead?"

"And Bretagne in revolt?" asked Du Couëdic.

"No. I could not call that good news."

"Well, what is it then?" said Pontcalec.

"Monsieur de Chateauneuf has just ordered back to their barracks the hundred and fifty men who were under arms in the market-place, which had terrified everybody."

"Ah," said Montlouis, "I begin to believe it will not take place this evening."

At this moment the clock struck six.

"Well," said Pontcalec, "good news is no reason for our remaining thirsty; go and fetch our wine."

Christopher went out, and returned in ten minutes with a bottle.

The friends who were still at table filled their glasses.

"To Gaston's health," said Pontcalec, exchanging a meaning glance with his friends, to whom alone this toast was comprehensible.

And they emptied their glasses, all except Montlouis, who stopped as he was lifting his to his lips.

“Well, what is it?” said Pontcalec.

“The drum,” said Montlouis, stretching out his hand in the direction where he heard the sound.

“Well,” said Talhouet, “did you not hear what Christopher said? it is the troops returning.”

“On the contrary, it is the troops going out; that is not a retreat, but the générale.”

“The générale!” said Talhouet, “what on earth can that mean?”

“No good,” said Montlouis, shaking his head.

“Christopher!” said Pontcalec, turning to the jailer.

“Yes, gentlemen, I will find out what it is,” said he, “and be back in an instant.”

He rushed out of the room, but not without carefully shutting the door behind him.

The four friends remained in anxious silence. After a lapse of ten minutes the door opened, and the jailer reappeared, pale with terror.

“A courier has just entered the castle court,” said he; “he comes from Paris, he has delivered his dispatches, and immediately the guards were doubled, and the drums beat in all the barracks.”

“Oh, oh,” said Montlouis, “that concerns us.”

“Some one is ascending the stairs,” said the jailer, more pale and trembling than those to whom he spoke. In fact, they heard the butt ends of the muskets clanging on the stones of the corridor, and at the same time several voices were heard speaking hastily.

The door opened, and the usher reappeared.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “how long do you desire to set your worldly affairs in order, and to undergo your sentence?”

A profound terror froze even the hearers.

“I desire,” said Montlouis, “time for the sentence to reach Paris and return, approved by the regent.”

“I,” said Talhouet, “only desire the time necessary for the commission to repent of its iniquity.”

“As for me,” said Du Couëdic, “I wish for time for the minister at Paris to commute the sentence into eight days’ imprisonment, which we deserve for having acted somewhat thoughtlessly.”

“And you,” said the usher gravely, to Pontcalec, who was silent, “what do you ask?”

“I,” said Pontcalec calmly, “I demand nothing.”

“Then, gentlemen,” said the usher, “this is the answer of the commission: you have two hours at your disposal to arrange your spiritual and temporal affairs; it is now half-past six, in two hours and a half you must be on the Place du Bouffay, where the execution will take place.”

There was a profound silence; the bravest felt fear seizing the very roots of their hair.

The usher retired without any one having made any answer; only the condemned looked at each other, and pressed each other’s hands.

They had two hours.

Two hours, in the ordinary course of life, seem sometimes an age, at others two hours are but a moment.

The priests arrived, after them the soldiers, then the executioners.

The situation was appalling. Pontcalec, alone, did not belie himself. Not that the others wanted courage, but they wanted hope; still Pontcalec reassured them by the calmness with which he addressed, not only the priests, but the executioners themselves.

They made the preparations for that terrible process called the toilet of the condemned. The four sufferers must proceed to the scaffold dressed in black cloaks, in order that in the eyes of the people, from whom they always feared some tumult, they might be confounded with the priests who exhorted them.

Then the question of tying their hands was discussed — an important question.

Pontcalec answered with his smile of sublime confidence.

“Oh, leave us at least our hands free; we will go without disturbance.”

“That has nothing to do with us,” replied the executioner who was attending to Pontcalec; “unless by special order, the rules are the same for all sufferers.”

“And who gives these orders?” said Pontcalec, laughing, “the king?”

“No, marquis,” answered the executioner, astonished by such unexampled presence of mind, “not the king, but our chief.”

“And where is your chief?”

“That is he, talking with the jailer Christopher.”

“Call him then,” said Pontcalec.

“Ho, Monsieur Waters!” cried the executioner, “please to come this way; there is one of these gentlemen asking for you.”

A thunderbolt falling in the midst of them would not have produced a more terrible effect upon the four gentlemen than did this name.

“What did you say?” cried Pontcalec, shaking with affright; “what did you say? What name did you pronounce?”

“Waters, our chief.”

Pontcalec, pale and overcome, sank upon a chair, casting an unutterable glance upon his affrighted companions. No one around them understood this sudden despair, which so rapidly succeeded to so high a confidence.

“Well?” asked Montlouis, addressing Pontcalec in a tone of tender reproach.

“Yes, gentlemen, you were right,” said Pontcalec; “but I also was right to believe in this prediction, for it will be accomplished, as the others were. Only this time I yield, and confess that we are lost.”

And by a spontaneous movement the four gentlemen threw themselves into each other’s arms with fervent prayers to Heaven.

“What do you order?” asked the executioner.

”It is useless to tie their hands if they will give their words of honor; they are soldiers and gentlemen.”

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE TRAGEDY OF NANTES.

Meanwhile Gaston posted along the road to Nantes, leaving behind him all postilions, whose place, then as now, was to hold the horses instead of urging them on.

He had already passed Sevres and Versailles, and on arriving at Rambouillet just at daybreak, he saw the innkeeper and some postilions gathered round a horse which had just been bled. The horse was lying stretched on its side, in the middle of the street, breathing with difficulty.

Gaston at first paid no attention to all this; but as he was mounting himself, he heard one of the by-standers say:

“If he goes on at that pace he will kill more than one between this and Nantes.”

Gaston was on the point of starting, but struck by a sudden and terrible idea, he stopped and signed to the innkeeper to come to him.

The innkeeper approached.

“Who has passed by here?” asked Gaston, “going at such a pace as to have put that poor animal in such a state?”

“A courier of the minister’s,” answered the innkeeper.

“A courier of the minister’s!” exclaimed Gaston, “and coming from Paris?”

“From Paris.”

“How long has he passed, more or less?”

“About two hours.”

Gaston uttered a low cry which was like a groan. He knew Dubois — Dubois, who had tricked him under the disguise of La Jonquiere. The good will of the minister recurred to his mind and frightened him. Why this courier dispatched post haste just two hours before himself?

“Oh! I was too happy,” thought the young man, “and Helene was right when she told me she had a presentiment of some great misfortune. Oh, I will overtake this courier, and learn the message that he bears, or perish in the attempt.”

And he shot off like an arrow.

But with all these doubts and interrogations he had lost ten minutes more, so that on arriving at the first post station he was still two hours behind. This time the courier's horse had held out, and it was Gaston's which was ready to drop. The inn-keeper tried to make some remarks, but Gaston dropped two or three louis and set off again at a gallop.

At the next posting-house he had gained a few minutes, and that was all. The courier who was before him had not slackened his pace. Gaston increased his own; but this frightful rapidity redoubled the young man's fever and mistrust.

"Oh!" said he, "I *will* arrive at the same time that he does, if I am unable to precede him." And he doubled his speed, and spurred on his horse, which, at every station, stopped dripping with blood and sweat, or tumbled down exhausted. At every station he learned that the courier had passed almost as swiftly as himself, but he always gained some few minutes, and that sustained his strength.

Those whom he passed upon the way, leaving them far behind, pitied, in spite of themselves, the beautiful young man, pale faced and haggard, who flew on thus, and took neither rest, nor food, dripping with sweat, despite the bitter cold, and whose parched lips could only frame the words: "A horse! a horse! quick, there, a horse!"

And, in fact, exhausted, with no strength but that supplied him by his heart, and maddened more and more by the rapidity of his course and the feeling of danger, Gaston felt his head turn, his temples throb, and the perspiration of his limbs was tinged with blood.

Choked by the thirst and dryness of his throat, at Ancenis he drank a glass of water: it was the first moment he had lost during sixteen hours, and yet the accursed courier was still an hour and a half in advance. In eighty leagues Gaston had only gained some forty or fifty minutes.

The night was drawing in rapidly, and Gaston, ever expecting to see some object appear on the horizon, tried to pierce the obscurity with his bloodshot glances; on he went, as in a dream, thinking he heard the ringing of bells, the roar of cannon, and the roll of drums. His brain was full of mournful strains and inauspicious sounds; he lived no longer as a man, but his fever kept him up, he flew as it were in the air.

On, and still on. About eight o'clock at night he perceived Nantes at length upon the horizon, like a dark mass from out the midst of which some scattered lights were shining starlike in the gloom.

He tried to breathe, and thinking his cravat was choking him, he tore it off and threw it on the road.

Thus, mounted on his black horse, wrapped in his black cloak, and long ago bareheaded (his hat had fallen off), Gaston was like some fiendish cavalier bound to the witches' Sabbath.

On reaching the gates of Nantes his horse stumbled, but Gaston did not lose his stirrups, pulled him up sharply, and driving the spurs into his sides, he made him recover himself.

The night was dark, no one appeared upon the ramparts, the very sentinels were hidden in the gloom, it seemed like a deserted city.

But as he passed the gate a sentinel said something which Gaston did not even hear.

He held on his way.

At the Rue du Chateau his horse stumbled and fell, this time to rise no more.

What mattered it to Gaston now? — he had arrived. On he went on foot — his limbs were strained and deadened, yet he felt no fatigue, he held the paper crumpled in his hand.

One thing, however, astonished him, and that was meeting no one in so populous a quarter.

As he advanced, however, he heard a sullen murmur coming from the Place de Bouffay, as he passed before a long street which led into that *Place*.

There was a sea of heads, lit up by flaring lights; but Gaston passed on — his business was at the castle — and the sight disappeared.

At last he saw the castle — he saw the door gaping wide before him. The sentinel on guard upon the drawbridge tried to stop him; but Gaston, his order in his hand, pushed him roughly aside and entered the inner door.

Men were talking, and one of them wiping his tears off as he talked.

Gaston understood it all.

"A reprieve!" he cried, "a re — "

The word died upon his lips; but the men had done better than hear, they had seen his despairing gesture.

"Go, go!" they cried, showing him the way, "go! and, perhaps you may yet arrive in time."

And they themselves dispersed in all directions. Gaston pursued his way; he traversed a corridor, then some empty rooms, then the great chamber, and then another corridor.

Far off, through the bars, by the torchlight, he perceived the great crowd of which he had caught a glimpse before.

He had passed right through the castle, and issued on a terrace; thence he perceived the esplanade, a scaffold, men, and all around the crowd.

Gaston tried to cry, but no one heard him, he waved his handkerchief, but no one saw him; another man mounts on the scaffold, and Gaston uttered a cry and threw himself down below.

He had leaped from the top of the rampart to the bottom. A sentinel tried to stop him, but he threw him down, and descended a sort of staircase which led down to the square, and at the bottom was a sort of barricade of wagons. Gaston bent down and glided between the wheels.

Beyond the barricade were all St. Simon’s grenadiers — a living hedge; Gaston, with a desperate effort, broke through the line, and found himself inside the ring.

The soldiers, seeing a man, pale and breathless, with a paper in his hand, allowed him to pass.

All of a sudden he stopped, as if struck by lightning. Talhouet! — he saw him! — Talhouet kneeling on the scaffold!

“Stop! stop!” cried Gaston, with all the energy of despair.

But even as he spoke the sword of the executioner flashed like lightning — a dull and heavy blow followed — and a terrible shudder ran through all the crowd.

The young man’s shriek was lost in the general cry arising from twenty thousand palpitating breasts at once.

He had arrived a moment too late — Talhouet was dead: and, as he lifted his eyes, he saw in the hand of the headsman the bleeding head of his friend — and then, in the nobility of his heart, he felt that, one being dead, they all should die. That not one of them would accept a pardon which arrived a head too late. He looked around him; Du Couëdic mounted in his turn, clothed with his black mantle, bareheaded and bare-necked.

Gaston remembered that he also had a black mantle, and that his head and neck were bare, and he laughed convulsively.

He saw what remained for him to do, as one sees some wild landscape by the lightning’s livid gleam — ’tis awful, but grand.

Du Couëdic bends down; but, as he bends, he cries — ”See how they recompense the services of faithful soldiers! — see how you keep your promises, oh ye cowards of Bretagne!”

Two assistants force him on his knees; the sword of the executioner whirls round and gleams again, and Du Couëdic lies beside Talhouet.

The executioner takes up the head; shows it to the people; and then places it at one corner of the scaffold, opposite that of Talhouet.

“Who next?” asks Waters.

“It matters little,” answers a voice, “provided that Monsieur de Pontcalec be the last, according to his sentence.”

“I, then,” said Montlouis, “I.” And he springs upon the scaffold. But there he stops, his hair bristling; at a window before him he has seen his wife and his children.

“Montlouis! Montlouis!” cries his wife, with the despairing accent of a breaking heart, “Montlouis! look at us!”

At the same moment all eyes were turned toward that window. Soldiers, citizens, priests, and executioners look the same way. Gaston profits by the deathlike silence which reigns around him — springs to the scaffold, and grasps the staircase — and mounts the first steps.

“My wife! my children!” cries Montlouis, wringing his hands in despair; “oh! go, have pity upon me!”

“Montlouis!” cries his wife, holding up afar the youngest of his sons, “Montlouis, bless your children, and one day, perhaps, one of them will avenge you.”

“Adieu! my children, my blessing on you!” cries Montlouis, stretching his hands toward the window.

These mournful adieux pierce the night, and reverberate like a terrible echo in the hearts of the spectators.

“Enough,” says Waters, “enough.” Then turning to his assistants:

“Be quick!” says he, “or the people will not allow us to finish.”

“Be easy,” says Montlouis; “if the people should rescue me, I would not survive them.”

And he pointed with his finger to the heads of his companions.

“Ah, I had estimated them rightly, then,” cried Gaston, who heard these words, “Montlouis, martyr, pray for me.”

Montlouis turned round, he seemed to have heard a well-known voice; but at the very moment the executioner seized him, and almost instantly a loud cry told Gaston that Montlouis was like the others, and that *his* turn was come.

He leaped up; in a moment he was on the top of the ladder, and he in his turn looked down from the abominable platform upon all that crowd. At three corners of the scaffold were the heads of Talhouet, Du Couëdic, and Montlouis.

But there arose then a strange emotion in the people. The execution of Montlouis, attended by the circumstances we have narrated, had upset the crowd. All the square, heaving and uttering murmurs and imprecations, seemed to Gaston some vast sea with life in every wave. At this moment the idea flashed across him that he might be recognized, and that his name uttered by a single mouth might prevent his carrying out his intention. He fell on his knees, and laid his head himself upon the block.

“Adieu!” he murmured, “adieu, my friends, my tender, dear Helene; thy nuptial kiss has cost me my life, indeed, but not mine honor. Alas! those fifteen minutes wasted in thine arms will have struck down five heads. Adieu! Helene, adieu!”

The sword of the executioner gleamed.

“ — And you, my friends, pardon me,” added the young man.

The steel fell; the head rolled one way, and the body fell the other.

Then Waters raised the head and showed it to the people.

But then a mighty murmur rose from the crowd; no one had recognized Pontcalec.

The executioner mistook the meaning of this murmur; he placed Gaston’s head at the empty corner, and with his foot pushing the body into the tumbril where those of his three companions awaited it, he leaned upon his sword, and cried aloud:

“Justice is done.”

“And I, then,” cried a voice of thunder, “am I to be forgotten?”

And Pontcalec, in his turn, leaped upon the scaffold.

“You!” cried Waters, recoiling as if he had seen a ghost. “You! who are you?”

“I,” said Pontcalec; “come, I am ready.”

“But,” said the executioner trembling, and looking one after the other at the four corners of the scaffold — ”but there are four heads already.”

“I am the Baron de Pontcalec, do you hear; I am to die the last — and here I am.”

“Count,” said Waters, as pale as the baron, pointing with his sword to the four corners.

“Four heads!” exclaimed Pontcalec; “impossible.” At this moment he recognized in one of the heads the pale and noble face of Gaston, which seemed to smile upon him even in death.

And he in his turn started back in terror.

“Oh, kill me then quickly!” he cried, groaning with impatience; “would you make me die a thousand times?”

During this interval, one of the commissioners had mounted the ladder, called by the chief executioner. He cast a glance upon Pontcalec.

“It is indeed the Baron de Pontcalec,” said the commissioner; “perform your office.”

“But,” cried the executioner, “there are four heads there already.”

“Well, then, his will make five; better too many than too few.”

And the commissioner descended the steps, signing to the drums to beat.

Waters reeled upon the boards of his scaffold. The tumult increased. The horror was more than the crowd could bear. A long murmur ran along the square; the lights were put out; the soldiers, driven back, cried “To arms!” there was a moment of noise and confusion, and several voices exclaimed:

“Death to the commissioners! death to the executioners!” Then the guns of the fort, loaded with grape, were pointed toward the people.

“What shall I do?” asked Waters.

“Strike,” answered the same voice which had always spoken.

Pontcalec threw himself on his knees; the assistants placed his head upon the block. Then the priests fled in horror, the soldiers trembled in the gloom, and Waters, as he struck, turned away his head lest he should see his victim. Ten minutes afterward the square was empty — the windows closed and dark. The artillery and the fusiliers, encamped around the demolished scaffold, looked in silence on the spots of blood that incarnadined the pavement.

The priests to whom the bodies were delivered recognized that there were indeed, as Waters had said, five bodies instead of four. One of the corpses still held a crumpled paper in his hand.

This paper was the pardon of the other four. Then only was all explained — and the devotion of Gaston, which he had confided to no one, was divined.

The priests wished to perform a mass, but the president, Chateauneuf, fearing some disturbance at Nantes, ordered it to be performed without pomp or ceremony.

The bodies were buried on the Wednesday before Easter. The people were not permitted to enter the chapel where the mutilated bodies reposed, the greater part of which, report says, the quick lime refused to destroy.

And this finished the tragedy of Nantes.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE END.

A fortnight after the events we have just related, a queer carriage, the same which we saw arrive at Paris at the commencement of this history, went out at the same barrier by which it had entered, and proceeded along the road from Paris to Nantes. A young woman, pale and almost dying, was seated in it by the side of an Augustine nun, who uttered a sigh and wiped away a tear every time she looked at her companion.

A man on horseback was watching for the carriage a little beyond Rambouillet. He was wrapped in a large cloak which left nothing visible but his eyes.

Near him was another man also enveloped in a cloak.

When the carriage passed, he heaved a deep sigh, and two silent tears fell from his eyes.

“Adieu!” he murmured, “adieu all my joy, adieu my happiness; adieu Helene, my child, adieu!”

“Monseigneur,” said the man beside him, “you must pay for being a great prince; and he who would govern others must first conquer himself. Be strong to the end, monseigneur, and posterity will say that you were great.”

“Oh, I shall never forgive you,” said the regent, with a sigh so deep it sounded like a groan; “for you have killed my happiness.”

“Ah! yes — work for kings,” said the companion of this sorrowful man, shrugging his shoulders. “‘Noli fidere principibus terræ nec filiis eorum.’“

The two men remained there till the carriage had disappeared, and then returned to Paris.

Eight days afterward the carriage entered the porch of the Augustines at Clisson. On its arrival, all the convent pressed round the suffering traveler — poor floweret! broken by the rough winds of the world.

“Come, my child; come and live with us again,” said the superior.

“Not live, my mother,” said the young girl, “but die.”

“Think only of the Lord, my child,” said the good abbess.

“Yes, my mother! Our Lord, who died for the sins of men.”

Helene returned to her little cell, from which she had been absent scarcely a month. Everything was still in its place, and exactly as she had left it. She went to the window — the lake was sleeping tranquil and sad, but the ice which had covered it had disappeared beneath the rain, and with it the snow, where, before departing, the young girl had seen the impression of Gaston’s footsteps.

Spring came, and everything but Helene began to live once more. The trees around the little lake grew green, the large leaves of the water-lilies floated once more upon the surface, the reeds raised up their heads, and all the families of warbling birds came back to people them again.

Even the barred gate opened to let the sturdy gardener in.

Helene survived the summer, but in September she faded with the waning of the year, and died.

The very morning of her death, the superior received a letter from Paris by a courier. She carried it to the dying girl. It contained only these words:

“My mother — obtain from your daughter her pardon for the regent.”

Helene, implored by the superior, grew paler than ever at that name, but she answered:

“Yes, my mother, I forgive him. But it is because I go to rejoin him whom he killed.”

At four o’clock in the afternoon she breathed her last.

She asked to be buried at the spot where Gaston used to untie the boat with which he came to visit her; and her last wishes were complied with.

And there she sleeps beneath the sod, pure as the flowers that blossom over her grave: and like them, broken by the cruel gusts that sweep the delicate blossoms so mercilessly down, and wither them with a breath.

THE END

MARGUERITE DE VALOIS

Anonymous translation, 1846

First published in 1845, this novel is set in Paris in August 1572, during the reign of Charles IX and the French Wars of Religion. The novel's protagonist is Marguerite de Valois, daughter of the deceased Henry II and the infamous scheming Catholic power player Catherine de' Medici.

Although Margot herself is excluded from the throne by the Salic Law, her marriage to a Protestant prince offers a chance for domestic reconciliation during the late 16th century reign of the neurotic, hypochondriac King Charles IX, a time when Catholics are vying for political control of France with the French Protestants, the Huguenots. Catherine decides to make an overture of goodwill by offering up Margot in marriage to prominent Huguenot and King of Navarre, Henri de Bourbon, although she also schemes to bring about the notorious St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572, when thousands of Protestants are slaughtered. The marriage goes ahead but Margot, who does not love Henri, begins a passionate affair with the soldier La Môle, also a Protestant from a well-to-do family. Murders by poisoning follow, as court intrigues multiply and Queen Catherine's villainous plotting to place her son, the future Henry III on the throne threatens the lives of La Môle, Margot and Henri.

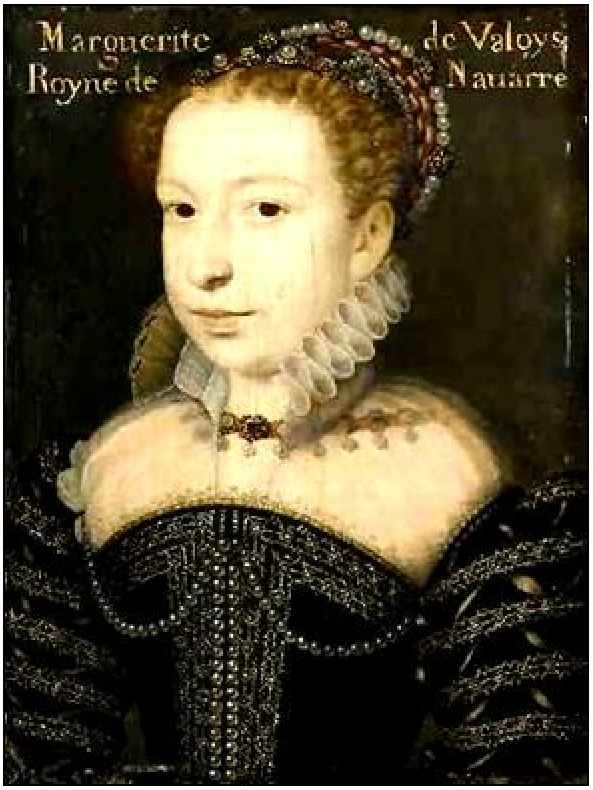
Marguerite de Valoys
Royne de Nauarre

Marguerite de Valois

Queen Margot played by Jeanne Moreau

Queen Margot played by Isabelle Adjani

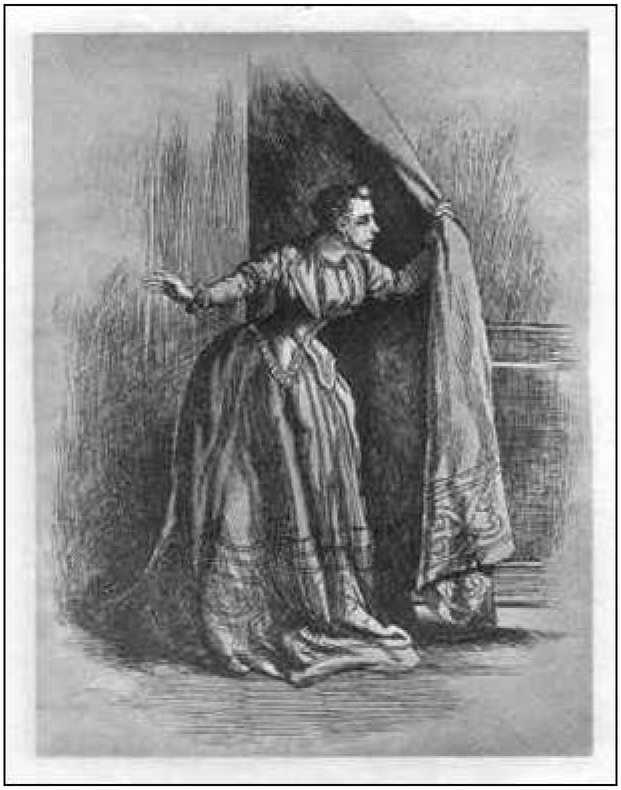

An original illustration

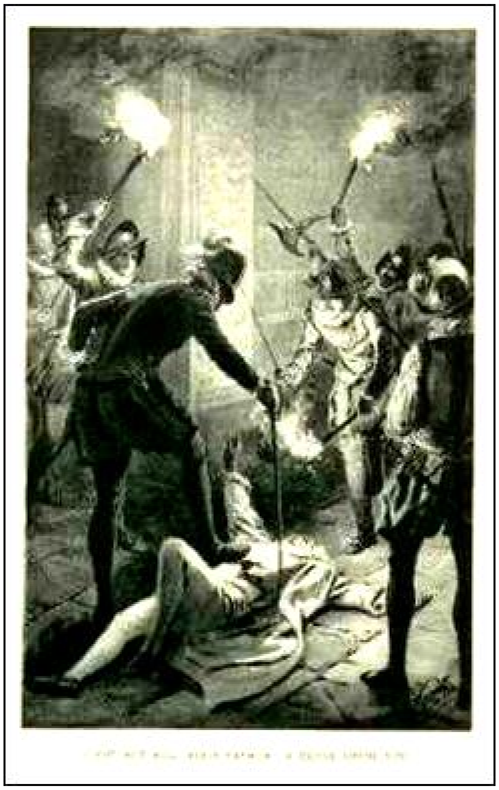

An original illustration from an English edition

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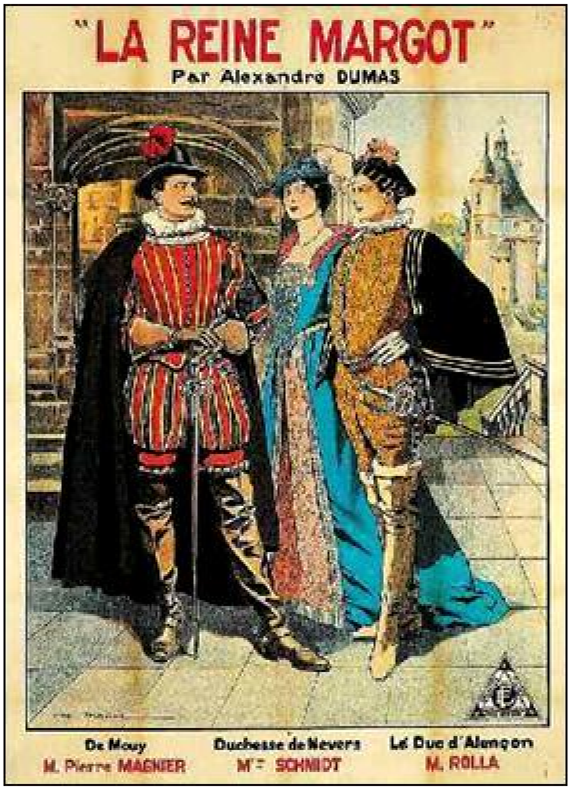
"LA REINE MARGOT"
Par Alexandre DUMAS
De Mouy
M. Pierre MAGNIER
Duchesse de Nevers
Mme SCHMIDT
Le Duc d'Alençon
M. ROLLA

The 1910 film version

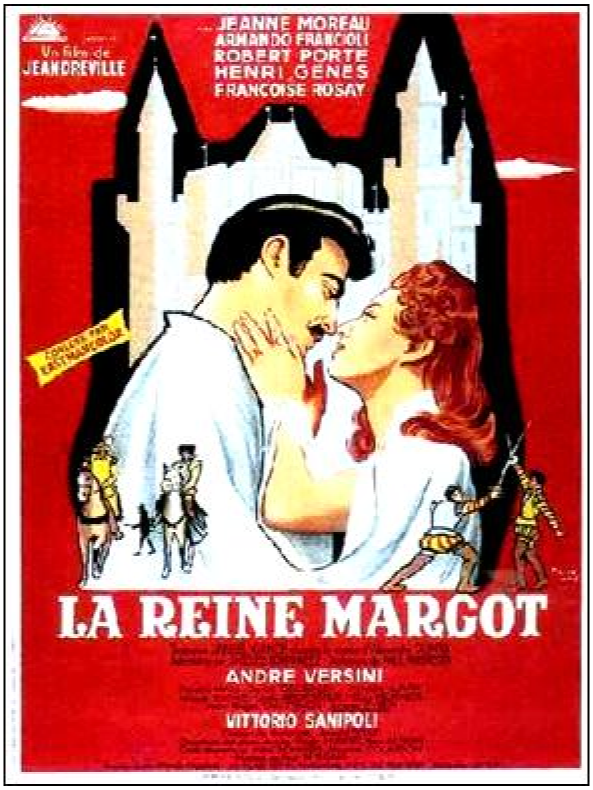
Un film de
JEANDREVILLE
JEANNE MOREAU
ARMANDO FRANCIOLI
ROBERT PORTE
HENRI GENES
FRANCOISE ROSAY
COULEUR PAR EASTMANCOLOR
LA REINE MARGOT
ANDRE VERSINI
VITTORIO SANIPOLI

The 1954 film adaptation

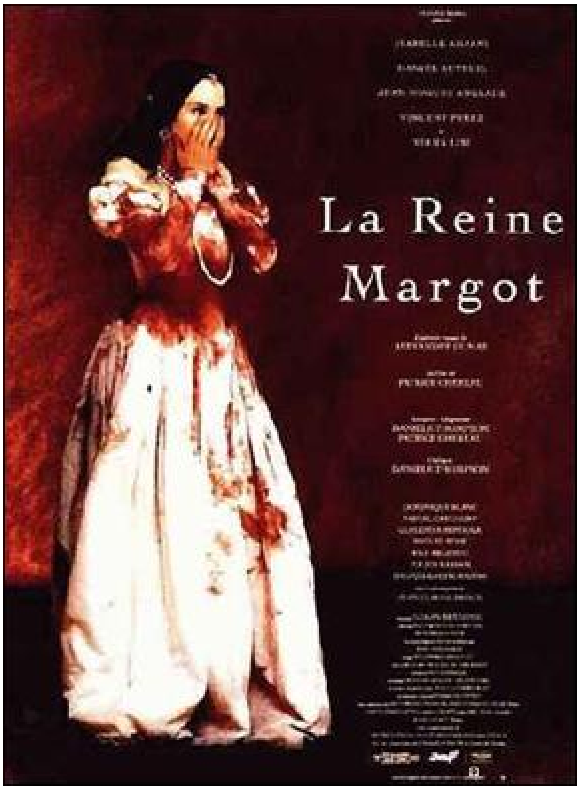
La Reine
Margot

The 1994 film adaptation

CHAPTER I.

MONSIEUR DE GUISE’S LATIN.

On Monday, the 18th of August, 1572, there was a splendid festival at the Louvre.

The ordinarily gloomy windows of the ancient royal residence were brilliantly lighted, and the squares and streets adjacent, usually so solitary after Saint Germain l’Auxerrois had struck the hour of nine, were crowded with people, although it was past midnight.

The vast, threatening, eager, turbulent throng resembled, in the darkness, a black and tumbling sea, each billow of which makes a roaring breaker; this sea, flowing through the Rue des Fossés Saint Germain and the Rue de l’Astruce and covering the quay, surged against the base of the walls of the Louvre, and, in its refluent tide, against the Hôtel de Bourbon, which faced it on the other side.

In spite of the royal festival, and perhaps even because of the royal festival, there was something threatening in the appearance of the people, for no doubt was felt that this imposing ceremony which called them there as spectators, was only the prelude to another in which they would participate a week later as invited guests and amuse themselves with all their hearts.

The court was celebrating the marriage of Madame Marguerite de Valois, daughter of Henry II. and sister of King Charles IX., with Henry de Bourbon, King of Navarre. In truth, that very morning, on a stage erected at the entrance to Notre-Dame, the Cardinal de Bourbon had united the young couple with the usual ceremonial observed at the marriages of the royal daughters of France.

This marriage had astonished every one, and occasioned much surmise to certain persons who saw clearer than others. They found it difficult to understand the union of two parties who hated each other so thoroughly as did, at this moment, the Protestant party and the Catholic party; and they wondered how the young Prince de Condé could forgive the Duc d’Anjou, the King’s brother, for the death of his father, assassinated at Jarnac by

Montesquiou. They asked how the young Duc de Guise could pardon Admiral de Coligny for the death of his father, assassinated at Orléans by Poltrot de Méré.

Moreover, Jeanne de Navarre, the weak Antoine de Bourbon’s courageous wife, who had conducted her son Henry to the royal marriage awaiting him, had died scarcely two months before, and singular reports had been spread abroad as to her sudden death. It was everywhere whispered, and in some places said aloud, that she had discovered some terrible secret; and that Catharine de Médicis, fearing its disclosure, had poisoned her with perfumed gloves, which had been made by a man named Réné, a Florentine deeply skilled in such matters. This report was the more widely spread and believed when, after this great queen’s death, at her son’s request, two celebrated physicians, one of whom was the famous Ambroise Paré, were instructed to open and examine the body, but not the skull. As Jeanne de Navarre had been poisoned by a perfume, only the brain could show any trace of the crime (the one part excluded from dissection). We say crime, for no one doubted that a crime had been committed.

This was not all. King Charles in particular had, with a persistency almost approaching obstinacy, urged this marriage, which not only reëstablished peace in his kingdom, but also attracted to Paris the principal Huguenots of France. As the two betrothed belonged one to the Catholic religion and the other to the reformed religion, they had been obliged to obtain a dispensation from Gregory XIII., who then filled the papal chair. The dispensation was slow in coming, and the delay had caused the late Queen of Navarre great uneasiness. She one day expressed to Charles IX. her fears lest the dispensation should not arrive; to which the King replied:

“Have no anxiety, my dear aunt. I honor you more than I do the Pope, and I love my sister more than I fear him. I am not a Huguenot, neither am I a blockhead; and if the Pope makes a fool of himself, I will myself take Margot by the hand, and have her married to your son in some Protestant meeting-house!”

This speech was soon spread from the Louvre through the city, and, while it greatly rejoiced the Huguenots, had given the Catholics something to think about; they asked one another, in a whisper, if the King was really betraying them or was only playing a comedy which some fine morning or evening might have an unexpected ending.

Charles IX.’s conduct toward Admiral de Coligny, who for five or six years had been so bitterly opposed to the King, appeared particularly inexplicable; after having put on his head a price of a hundred and fifty thousand golden crowns, the King now swore by him, called him his father, and declared openly that he should in future confide the conduct of the war to him alone. To such a pitch was this carried that Catharine de Médicis herself, who until then had controlled the young prince’s actions, will, and even desires, seemed to be growing really uneasy, and not without reason; for, in a moment of confidence, Charles IX. had said to the admiral, in reference to the war in Flanders,

“My father, there is one other thing against which we must be on our guard — that is, that the queen, my mother, who likes to poke her nose everywhere, as you well know, shall learn nothing of this undertaking; we must keep it so quiet that she will not have a suspicion of it, or being such a mischief-maker as I know she is, she would spoil all.”

Now, wise and experienced as he was, Coligny had not been able to keep such an absolute secret; and, though he had come to Paris with great suspicions, and albeit at his departure from Chatillon a peasant woman had thrown herself at his feet, crying, “Ah! sir, our good master, do not go to Paris, for if you do, you will die — you and all who are with you!” — these suspicions were gradually lulled in his heart, and so it was with Téligny, his son-in-law, to whom the King was especially kind and attentive, calling him his brother, as he called the admiral his father, and addressing him with the familiar “thou,” as he did his best friends.

The Huguenots, excepting some few morose and suspicious spirits, were therefore completely reassured. The death of the Queen of Navarre passed as having been caused by pleurisy, and the spacious apartments of the Louvre were filled with all those gallant Protestants to whom the marriage of their young chief, Henry, promised an unexpected return of good fortune. Admiral Coligny, La Rochefoucault, the young Prince de Condé, Téligny, — in short, all the leaders of the party, — were triumphant when they saw so powerful at the Louvre and so welcome in Paris those whom, three months before, King Charles and Queen Catharine would have hanged on gibbets higher than those of assassins.

The Maréchal de Montmorency was the only one who was missing among all his brothers, for no promise could move him, no specious appearances deceive him, and he remained secluded in his château de l’Isle

Adam, offering as his excuse for not appearing the grief which he still felt for his father, the Constable Anne de Montmorency, who had been killed at the battle of Saint Denis by a pistol-shot fired by Robert Stuart. But as this had taken place more than three years before, and as sensitiveness was a virtue little practised at that time, this unduly protracted mourning was interpreted just as people cared to interpret it.

However, everything seemed to show that the Maréchal de Montmorency was mistaken. The King, the Queen, the Duc d’Anjou, and the Duc d’Alençon did the honors of the royal festival with all courtesy and kindness.

The Duc d’Anjou received from the Huguenots themselves well-deserved compliments on the two battles of Jarnac and Montcontour, which he had gained before he was eighteen years of age, more precocious in that than either Cæsar or Alexander, to whom they compared him, of course placing the conquerors of Pharsalia and the Issus as inferior to the living prince. The Duc d’Alençon looked on, with his bland, false smile, while Queen Catharine, radiant with joy and overflowing with honeyed phrases, congratulated Prince Henry de Condé on his recent marriage with Marie de Clèves; even the Messieurs de Guise themselves smiled on the formidable enemies of their house, and the Duc de Mayenne discoursed with M. de Tavannes and the admiral on the impending war, which was now more than ever threatened against Philippe II.

In the midst of these groups a young man of about nineteen years of age was walking to and fro, his head a little on one side, his ear open to all that was said. He had a keen eye, black hair cut very close, thick eyebrows, a nose hooked like an eagle’s, a sneering smile, and a growing mustache and beard. This young man, who by his reckless daring had first attracted attention at the battle of Arnay-le-Duc and was the recipient of numberless compliments, was the dearly beloved pupil of Coligny and the hero of the day. Three months before — that is to say, when his mother was still living — he was called the Prince de Béarn, now he was called the King of Navarre, afterwards he was known as Henry IV.

From time to time a swift and gloomy cloud passed over his brow; unquestionably it was at the thought that scarce had two months elapsed since his mother’s death, and he, less than any one, doubted that she had been poisoned. But the cloud was transitory, and disappeared like a fleeting shadow, for they who spoke to him, they who congratulated him, they who elbowed him, were the very ones who had assassinated the brave Jeanne d’Albret.

Some paces distant from the King of Navarre, almost as pensive, almost as gloomy as the king pretended to be joyous and open-hearted, was the young Duc de Guise, conversing with Téligny. More fortunate than the Béarnais, at two-and-twenty he had almost attained the reputation of his father, François, the great Duc de Guise. He was an elegant gentleman, very tall, with a noble and haughty look, and gifted with that natural majesty which caused it to be said that in comparison with him other princes seemed to belong to the people. Young as he was, the Catholics looked up to him as the chief of their party, as the Huguenots saw theirs in Henry of Navarre, whose portrait we have just drawn. At first he had borne the title of Prince de Joinville, and at the siege of Orléans had fought his first battle under his father, who died in his arms, denouncing Admiral Coligny as his assassin. The young duke then, like Hannibal, took a solemn oath to avenge his father’s death on the admiral and his family, and to pursue the foes to his religion without truce or respite, promising God to be his destroying angel on earth until the last heretic should be exterminated. So with deep astonishment the people saw this prince, usually so faithful to his word, offering his hand to those whom he had sworn to hold as his eternal enemies, and talking familiarly with the son-in-law of the man whose death he had promised to his dying father.

But as we have said, this was an evening of astonishments.

Indeed, an observer privileged to be present at this festival, endowed with the knowledge of the future which is fortunately hidden from men, and with that power of reading men’s hearts which unfortunately belongs only to God, would have certainly enjoyed the strangest spectacle to be found in all the annals of the melancholy human comedy.

But this observer who was absent from the inner courts of the Louvre was to be found in the streets gazing with flashing eyes and breaking out into loud threats; this observer was the people, who, with its marvellous instinct made keener by hatred, watched from afar the shadows of its implacable enemies and translated the impressions they made with as great clearness as an inquisitive person can do before the windows of a hermetically sealed ball-room. The music intoxicates and governs the dancers, but the inquisitive person sees only the movement and laughs at the puppet jumping about without reason, because the inquisitive person hears no music.

The music that intoxicated the Huguenots was the voice of their pride.

The gleams which caught the eyes of the Parisians that midnight were the lightning flashes of their hatred illuminating the future.

And meantime everything was still festive within, and a murmur softer and more flattering than ever was at this moment pervading the Louvre, for the youthful bride, having laid aside her toilet of ceremony, her long mantle and flowing veil, had just returned to the ball-room, accompanied by the lovely Duchesse de Nevers, her most intimate friend, and led by her brother, Charles IX., who presented her to the principal guests.

The bride was the daughter of Henry II., was the pearl of the crown of France, was Marguerite de Valois, whom in his familiar tenderness for her King Charles IX. always called “*ma sœur Margot*,” “my sister Margot.”

Assuredly never was any welcome, however flattering, more richly deserved than that which the new Queen of Navarre was at this moment receiving. Marguerite at this period was scarcely twenty, and she was already the object of all the poets’ eulogies, some of whom compared her to Aurora, others to Cytherea; she was, in truth, a beauty without rival in that court in which Catharine de Médicis had assembled the loveliest women she could find, to make of them her sirens.

Marguerite had black hair and a brilliant complexion; a voluptuous eye, veiled by long lashes; delicate coral lips; a slender neck; a graceful, opulent figure, and concealed in a satin slipper a tiny foot. The French, who possessed her, were proud to see such a lovely flower flourishing in their soil, and foreigners who passed through France returned home dazzled with her beauty if they had but seen her, and amazed at her knowledge if they had discoursed with her; for Marguerite was not only the loveliest, she was also the most erudite woman of her time, and every one was quoting the remark of an Italian scholar who had been presented to her, and who, after having conversed with her for an hour in Italian, Spanish, Latin, and Greek, had gone away saying:

“To see the court without seeing Marguerite de Valois is to see neither France nor the court.”

Thus addresses to King Charles IX. and the Queen of Navarre were not wanting. It is well known that the Huguenots were great hands at addresses. Many allusions to the past, many hints as to the future, were adroitly slipped into these harangues; but to all such allusions and speeches the King replied, with his pale lips and artificial smiles:

“In giving my sister Margot to Henry of Navarre, I give my sister to all the Protestants of the kingdom.”

This phrase assured some and made others smile, for it had really a double sense: the one paternal, with which Charles IX. would not load his mind; the other insulting to the bride, to her husband, and also to him who said it, for it recalled some scandalous rumors with which the chroniclers of the court had already found means to smirch the nuptial robe of Marguerite de Valois.

However, M. de Guise was conversing, as we have said, with Téligny; but he did not pay to the conversation such sustained attention but that he turned away somewhat, from time to time, to cast a glance at the group of ladies, in the centre of whom glittered the Queen of Navarre. When the princess’s eye thus met that of the young duke, a cloud seemed to overspread that lovely brow, around which stars of diamonds formed a tremulous halo, and some agitating thought might be divined in her restless and impatient manner.

The Princess Claude, Marguerite’s eldest sister, who had been for some years married to the Duc de Lorraine, had observed this uneasiness, and was going up to her to inquire the cause, when all stood aside at the approach of the queen mother, who came forward, leaning on the arm of the young Prince de Condé, and the princess was thus suddenly separated from her sister. There was a general movement, by which the Duc de Guise profited to approach Madame de Nevers, his sister-in-law, and Marguerite.

Madame de Lorraine, who had not lost sight of her sister, then remarked, instead of the cloud which she had before observed on her forehead, a burning blush come into her cheeks. The duke approached still nearer, and when he was within two steps of Marguerite, she appeared rather to feel than see his presence, and turned round, making a violent effort over herself in order to give her features an appearance of calmness and indifference. The duke, then respectfully bowing, murmured in a low tone,

“*Ipse attuli.*”

That meant: “I have brought it, or brought it myself.”

Marguerite returned the young duke’s bow, and as she straightened herself, replied, in the same tone,

“*Noctu pro more.*”

That meant: “To-night, as usual.”

These soft words, absorbed by the enormous collar which the princess wore, as in the bell of a speaking-trumpet, were heard only by the person to whom they were addressed; but brief as had been the conference, it doubtless composed all the young couple had to say, for after this exchange of two words for three, they separated, Marguerite more thoughtful and the duke with his brow less clouded than when they met. This little scene took place without the person most interested appearing to remark it, for the King of Navarre had eyes but for one lady, and she had around her a suite almost as numerous as that which followed Marguerite de Valois. This was the beautiful Madame de Sauve.

Charlotte de Beaune Semblançay, granddaughter of the unfortunate Semblançay, and wife of Simon de Fizes, Baron de Sauve, was one of the ladies-in-waiting to Catharine de Médicis, and one of the most redoubtable auxiliaries of this queen, who poured forth to her enemies love-philtres when she dared not pour out Florentine poison. Delicately fair, and by turns sparkling with vivacity or languishing in melancholy, always ready for love and intrigue, the two great occupations which for fifty years employed the court of the three succeeding kings, — a woman in every acceptation of the word and in all the charm of the idea, from the blue eye languishing or flashing with fire to the small rebellious feet arched in their velvet slippers, Madame de Sauve had already for some months taken complete possession of every faculty of the King of Navarre, then beginning his career as a lover as well as a politician; thus it was that Marguerite de Valois, a magnificent and royal beauty, had not even excited admiration in her husband’s heart; and what was more strange, and astonished all the world, even from a soul so full of darkness and mystery, Catharine de Médicis, while she prosecuted her project of union between her daughter and the King of Navarre, had not ceased to favor almost openly his amour with Madame de Sauve. But despite this powerful aid, and despite the easy manners of the age, the lovely Charlotte had hitherto resisted; and this resistance, unheard of, incredible, unprecedented, even more than the beauty and wit of her who resisted, had excited in the heart of the Béarnais a passion which, unable to satisfy itself, had destroyed in the young king’s heart all timidity, pride, and even that carelessness, half philosophic, half indolent, which formed the basis of his character.

Madame de Sauve had been only a few minutes in the ballroom; from spite or grief she had at first resolved on not being present at her rival's triumph, and under the pretext of an indisposition had allowed her husband, who had been for five years secretary of state, to go alone to the Louvre; but when Catharine de Médicis saw the baron without his wife, she asked the cause that kept her dear Charlotte away, and when she found that the indisposition was but slight, she wrote a few words to her, which the lady hastened to obey. Henry, sad as he had at first been at her absence, had yet breathed more freely when he saw M. de Sauve enter alone; but just as he was about to pay some court to the charming creature whom he was condemned, if not to love, at least to treat as his wife, he unexpectedly saw Madame de Sauve arise from the farther end of the gallery. He remained stationary on the spot, his eyes fastened on the Circe who enthralled him as if by magic chains, and instead of proceeding towards his wife, by a movement of hesitation which betrayed more astonishment than alarm he advanced to meet Madame de Sauve.

The courtiers, seeing the King of Navarre, whose inflammable heart they knew, approach the beautiful Charlotte, had not the courage to prevent their meeting, but drew aside complaisantly; so that at the very moment when Marguerite de Valois and Monsieur de Guise exchanged the few words in Latin which we have noted above, Henry, having approached Madame de Sauve, began, in very intelligible French, although with somewhat of a Gascon accent, a conversation by no means so mysterious.

"Ah, *ma mie*!" he said, "you have, then, come at the very moment when they assured me that you were ill, and I had lost all hope of seeing you."

"Would your majesty perhaps wish me to believe that it had cost you something to lose this hope?" replied Madame de Sauve.

"By Heaven! I believe it!" replied the Béarnais; "know you not that you are my sun by day and my star by night? By my faith, I was in deepest darkness till you appeared and suddenly illumined all."

"Then, monseigneur, I serve you a very ill turn."

"What do you mean, *ma mie*?" inquired Henry.

"I mean that he who is master of the handsomest woman in France should only have one desire — that the light should disappear and give way to darkness, for happiness awaits you in the darkness."

"You know, cruel one, that my happiness is in the hands of one woman only, and that she laughs at poor Henry."

“Oh!” replied the baroness, “I believed, on the contrary, that it was this person who was the sport and jest of the King of Navarre.” Henry was alarmed at this hostile attitude, and yet he bethought him that it betrayed jealous spite, and that jealous spite is only the mask of love.

“Indeed, dear Charlotte, you reproach me very unjustly, and I do not comprehend how so lovely a mouth can be so cruel. Do you suppose for a moment that it is I who give myself in marriage? No, *ventre saint gris*, it is not I!”

“It is I, perhaps,” said the baroness, sharply, — if ever the voice of the woman who loves us and reproaches us for not loving her can seem sharp.

“With your lovely eyes have you not seen farther, baroness? No, no; Henry of Navarre is not marrying Marguerite de Valois.”

“And who, pray, is?”

“Why, by Heaven! it is the reformed religion marrying the pope — that’s all.”

“No, no, I cannot be deceived by your jests. Monseigneur loves Madame Marguerite. And can I blame you? Heaven forbid! She is beautiful enough to be adored.”

Henry reflected for a moment, and, as he reflected, a meaning smile curled the corner of his lips.

“Baroness,” said he, “you seem to be seeking a quarrel with me, but you have no right to do so. What have you done to prevent me from marrying Madame Marguerite? Nothing. On the contrary, you have always driven me to despair.”

“And well for me that I have, monseigneur,” replied Madame de Sauve.

“How so?”

“Why, of course, because you are marrying another woman!”

“I marry her because you love me not.”

“If I had loved you, sire, I must have died in an hour.”

“In an hour? What do you mean? And of what death would you have died?”

“Of jealousy! — for in an hour the Queen of Navarre will send away her women, and your majesty your gentlemen.”

“Is that really the thought that is uppermost in your mind, *ma mie*?”

“I did not say so. I only say, that if I loved you it would be uppermost in my mind most tormentingly.”

“Very well,” said Henry, at the height of joy on hearing this confession, the first which she had made to him, “suppose the King of Navarre should not send away his gentlemen this evening?”

“Sire,” replied Madame de Sauve, looking at the king with astonishment for once unfeigned, “you say things impossible and incredible.”

“What must I do to make you believe them?”

“Give me a proof — and that proof you cannot give me.”

“Yes, baroness, yes! By Saint Henry, I will give it you!” exclaimed the king, gazing at the young woman with eyes hot with love.

“Oh, your majesty!” exclaimed the lovely Charlotte in an undertone and with downcast eyes, “I do not understand — No! no, it is impossible for you to turn your back on the happiness awaiting you.”

“There are four Henrys in this room, my adorable!” replied the king, “Henry de France, Henry de Condé, Henry de Guise, but there is only one Henry of Navarre.”

“Well?”

“Well; if this Henry of Navarre is with you all night” —

“All night!”

“Yes; will that be a certain proof to you that he is not with any other?”

“Ah! if you do that, sire,” cried Madame Sauve.

“On the honor of a gentleman I will do it!”

Madame de Sauve raised her great eyes dewy with voluptuous promises and looked at the king, whose heart was filled with an intoxicating joy.

“And then,” said Henry, “what will you say?”

“I will say,” replied Charlotte, “that your majesty really loves me.”

“*Ventre saint gris*! then you shall say it, baroness, for it is true.”

“But how can you manage it?” murmured Madame de Sauve.

“Oh! by Heaven! baroness, have you not about you some waiting-woman, some girl whom you can trust?”

“Yes, Dariole is so devoted to me that she would let herself be cut in pieces for me; she is a real treasure.”

“By Heaven! then say to her that I will make her fortune when I am King of France, as the astrologers prophesy.”

Charlotte smiled, for even at this period the Gascon reputation of the Béarnais was already established with respect to his promises.

“Well, then, what do you want Dariole to do?”

“Little for her, a great deal for me. Your apartment is over mine?”

“Yes.”

“Let her wait behind the door. I will knock gently three times; she will open the door, and you will have the proof that I have promised you.”

Madame de Sauve kept silence for several seconds, and then, as if she had looked around her to observe if she were overheard, she fastened her gaze for a moment on the group clustering around the queen mother; brief as the moment was, it was sufficient for Catharine and her lady-in-waiting to exchange a look.

“Oh, if I were inclined,” said Madame de Sauve, with a siren’s accent that would have melted the wax in Ulysses’ ears, “if I were inclined to make your majesty tell a falsehood” —

“*Ma mie*, try” —

“Ah, *ma foi*! I confess I am tempted to do so.”

“Give in! Women are never so strong as after they are defeated.”

“Sire, I hold you to your promise for Dariole when you shall be King of France.”

Henry uttered an exclamation of joy.

At the precise moment when this cry escaped the lips of the Béarnais, the Queen of Navarre was replying to the Duc de Guise:

“*Noctu pro more* — to-night as usual.”

Then Henry turned away from Madame de Sauve as happy as the Duc de Guise had been when he left Marguerite de Valois.

An hour after the double scene we have just related, King Charles and the queen mother retired to their apartments. Almost immediately the rooms began to empty; the galleries exhibited the bases of their marble columns. The admiral and the Prince de Condé were escorted home by four hundred Huguenot gentlemen through the middle of the crowd, which hooted as they passed. Then Henry de Guise, with the Lorraine gentlemen and the Catholics, left in their turn, greeted by cries of joy and plaudits of the people.

But Marguerite de Valois, Henry de Navarre, and Madame de Sauve lived in the Louvre.

CHAPTER II.

THE QUEEN OF NAVARRE’S BEDCHAMBER.

The Duc de Guise escorted his sister-in-law, the Duchess de Nevers, to her hôtel in the Rue du Chaume, facing the Rue de Brac, and after he had put her into the hands of her women, he went to his own apartment to change his dress, put on a night cloak, and armed himself with one of those short, keen poniards which are called “*foi de gentilhomme*,” and were worn without swords; but as he took it off the table on which it lay, he perceived a small billet between the blade and the scabbard.

He opened it, and read as follows:

“*I hope M. de Guise will not return to the Louvre to-night; or if he does, that he will at least take the precaution to arm himself with a good coat of mail and a proved sword.*”

“Aha!” said the duke, addressing his valet, “this is a singular warning, Maître Robin. Now be kind enough to tell me who has been here during my absence.”

“Only one person, monseigneur.”

“Who?”

“Monsieur du Gast.”

“Aha! In fact, methinks I recognize the handwriting. And you are sure that Du Gast came? You saw him?”

“More than that, monseigneur; I spoke with him.”

“Very good; then I will follow his advice — my steel jacket and my sword.”

The valet, accustomed to these changes of costume, brought both. The duke put on his jacket, which was made of rings of steel so fine that it was scarcely thicker than velvet; he then drew on over his coat of mail his small clothes and a doublet of gray and silver, his favorite colors, put on a pair of long boots which reached to the middle of his thighs, covered his head with a velvet toque unadorned with feathers or precious stones, threw over his shoulders a dark-colored cloak, hung a dagger by his side, handed his sword to a page, the only attendant he allowed to accompany him, and took the way to the Louvre.

As he went down the steps of the hôtel, the watchman of Saint Germain l’Auxerrois had just announced one o’clock in the morning.

Though the night was far gone and the streets at this time were very far from safe, no accident befell the adventurous prince on the way, and safe and sound he approached the colossal mass of the ancient Louvre, all the lights of which had been extinguished one after the other, so that it rose portentous in its silence and darkness.

In front of the royal château was a deep fosse, looking into which were the chambers of most of the princes who inhabited the palace. Marguerite’s apartment was on the first floor. But this first floor, easily accessible but for the fosse, was, in consequence of the depth to which that was cut, thirty feet from the bottom of the wall, and consequently out of the reach of robbers or lovers; nevertheless the Duc de Guise approached it without hesitation.

At the same moment was heard the noise of a window which opened on the ground floor. This window was grated, but a hand appeared, lifted out one of the bars which had been loosened, and dropped from it a silken lace.

“Is that you, Gillonne?” said the duke, in a low voice.

“Yes, monseigneur,” replied a woman’s voice, in a still lower tone.

“And Marguerite?”

“Is waiting for you.”

“’T is well.”

Hereupon the duke made a signal to his page, who, opening his cloak, took out a small rope ladder. The prince fastened one end to the silk lace, and Gillonne, drawing it up, tied it securely. Then the prince, after having buckled his sword to his belt, ascended without accident. When he had entered, the bar was replaced and the window closed, while the page, having seen his master quietly enter the Louvre, to the windows of which he had accompanied him twenty times in the same way, laid himself down in his cloak on the grass of the fosse, beneath the shadow of the wall.

The night was extremely dark, and large drops of warm rain were falling from the heavy clouds charged with electric fluid.

The Duc de Guise followed his guide, who was no other than the daughter of Jacques de Matignon, maréchal of France. She was the especial confidante of Marguerite, who kept no secret from her; and it was said that among the number of mysteries entrusted to her incorruptible fidelity, there were some so terrible as to compel her to keep the rest.

There was no light left either in the low rooms or in the corridors, only from time to time a livid glare illuminated the dark apartments with a vivid flash, which as instantly disappeared.

The duke, still guided by his conductress, who held his hand, reached a staircase built in the thick wall, and opening by a secret and invisible door into the antechamber of Marguerite's apartment.

In this antechamber, which like all the other lower rooms was perfectly dark, Gillonne stopped.

"Have you brought what the queen requested?" she inquired, in a low voice.

"Yes," replied the Duc de Guise; "but I will give it only to her majesty in person."

"Come, then, and do not lose an instant!" said a voice from the darkness, which made the duke start, for he recognized it as Marguerite's.

At the same moment a curtain of violet velvet covered with golden fleurs-de-lis was raised, and the duke made out the form of the queen, who in her impatience had come to meet him.

"I am here, madame," he then said; and he passed the curtain, which fell behind him. So Marguerite de Valois herself now became the prince's guide, leading him into the room which, however, he knew already, while Gillonne, standing at the door, had raised her finger to her lips and reassured her royal mistress.

As if she understood the duke's jealous apprehensions, Marguerite led him to the bedchamber, and there paused.

"Well," she said, "are you satisfied, duke?"

"Satisfied, madame?" was the reply, "and with what?"

"Of the proof I give you," retorted Marguerite, with a slight tone of vexation in her voice, "that I belong to a man who, on the very night of his marriage, makes me of such small importance that he does not even come to thank me for the honor I have done him, not in selecting, but in accepting him for my husband."

"Oh! madame," said the duke, sorrowfully, "be assured he will come if you desire it."

"And do you say that, Henry?" cried Marguerite; "you, who better than any know the contrary of what you say? If I had that desire, should I have asked you to come to the Louvre?”

“You have asked me to come to the Louvre, Marguerite, because you are anxious to destroy every vestige of our past, and because that past lives not only in my memory, but in this silver casket which I bring to you.”

“Henry, shall I say one thing to you?” replied Marguerite, gazing earnestly at the duke; “it is that you are more like a schoolboy than a prince. I deny that I have loved you! I desire to quench a flame which will die, perhaps, but the reflection of which will never die! For the loves of persons of my rank illumine and frequently devour the whole epoch contemporary with them. No, no, duke; you may keep the letters of your Marguerite, and the casket she has given you. She asks but one of these letters, and that only because it is as dangerous for you as for herself.”

“It is all yours,” said the duke. “Take the one that you wish to destroy.”

Marguerite searched anxiously in the open casket, and with a tremulous hand took, one after the other, a dozen letters, only the addresses of which she examined, as if by merely glancing at these she could recall to her memory what the letters themselves contained; but after a close scrutiny she looked at the duke, pale and agitated.

“Sir,” she said, “what I seek is not here. Can you have lost it, by any accident? for if it should fall into the hands of” —

“What letter do you seek, madame?”

“That in which I told you to marry without delay.”

“As an excuse for your infidelity?”

Marguerite shrugged her shoulders.

“No; but to save your life. The one in which I told you that the king, seeing our love and my exertions to break off your proposed marriage with the Infanta of Portugal, had sent for his brother, the Bastard of Angoulême, and said to him, pointing to two swords, ‘*With this slay Henry de Guise this night, or with the other I will slay thee in the morning.*’ Where is that letter?”

“Here,” said the duke, drawing it from his breast.

Marguerite almost snatched it from his hands, opened it anxiously, assured herself that it was really the one she desired, uttered an exclamation of joy, and applying the lighted candle to it, the flames instantly consumed the paper; then, as if Marguerite feared that her imprudent words might be read in the very ashes, she trampled them under foot.

During all this the Duc de Guise had watched his mistress attentively.

“Well, Marguerite,” he said, when she had finished, “are you satisfied now?”

“Yes, for now that you have wedded the Princesse de Porcian, my brother will forgive me your love; while he would never have pardoned me for revealing a secret such as that which in my weakness for you I had not the strength to conceal from you.”

“True,” replied De Guise, “then you loved me.”

“And I love you still, Henry, as much — more than ever!”

“You” —

“I do; for never more than at this moment did I need a sincere and devoted friend. Queen, I have no throne; wife, I have no husband!”

The young prince shook his head sorrowfully.

“I tell you, I repeat to you, Henri, that my husband not only does not love me, but hates — despises me; indeed, it seems to me that your presence in the chamber in which he ought to be is proof of this hatred, this contempt.”

“It is not yet late, Madame, and the King of Navarre requires time to dismiss his gentlemen; if he has not already come, he will come soon.”

“And I tell you,” cried Marguerite, with increasing vexation, — ”I tell you that he will not come!”

“Madame!” exclaimed Gillonne, suddenly entering, “the King of Navarre is just leaving his apartments!”

“Oh, I knew he would come!” exclaimed the Duc de Guise.

“Henri,” said Marguerite, in a quick tone, and seizing the duke’s hand, — ”Henri, you shall see if I am a woman of my word, and if I may be relied on. Henri, enter that closet.”

“Madame, allow me to go while there is yet time, for reflect that the first mark of love you bestow on him, I shall quit the cabinet, and then woe to him!”

“Are you mad? Go in — go in, I say, and I will be responsible for all;” and she pushed the duke into the closet.

It was time. The door was scarcely closed behind the prince when the King of Navarre, escorted by two pages, who carried eight torches of yellow wax in two candelabra, appeared, smiling, on the threshold of the chamber. Marguerite concealed her trouble, and made a low bow.

“You are not yet in bed, Madame,” observed the Béarnais, with his frank and joyous look. “Were you by chance waiting for me?”

“No, Monsieur,” replied Marguerite; “for yesterday you repeated to me that our marriage was a political alliance, and that you would never thwart my wishes.”

“Assuredly; but that is no reason why we should not confer a little together. Gillonne, close the door, and leave us.”

Marguerite, who was sitting, then rose and extended her hand, as if to desire the pages to remain.

“Must I call your women?” inquired the king. “I will do so if such be your desire, although I confess that for what I have to say to you I should prefer our being alone;” and the King of Navarre advanced towards the closet.

“No!” exclaimed Marguerite, hastily going before him, — ”no! there is no occasion for that; I am ready to hear you.”

The Béarnais had learned what he desired to know; he threw a rapid and penetrating glance towards the cabinet, as if in spite of the thick curtain which hung before it, he would dive into its obscurity, and then, turning his looks to his lovely wife, pale with terror, he said with the utmost composure, “In that case, Madame, let us confer for a few moments.”

“As your Majesty pleases,” said the young wife, falling into, rather than sitting upon the seat which her husband pointed out to her.

The Béarnais placed himself beside her. “Madame,” he continued, “whatever many persons may have said, I think our marriage is a good marriage. I stand well with you; you stand well with me.”

“But — ” said Marguerite, alarmed.

“Consequently, we ought,” observed the King of Navarre, without seeming to notice Marguerite’s hesitation, “to act towards each other like good allies, since we have to-day sworn alliance in the presence of God. Don’t you think so?”

“Unquestionably, Monsieur.”

“I know, Madame, how great your penetration is; I know how the ground at court is intersected with dangerous abysses. Now, I am young, and although I never injured any one, I have a great many enemies. In which camp, Madame, ought I to range her who bears my name, and who has vowed her affection to me at the foot of the altar?”

“Monsieur, could you think — ”

“I think nothing, Madame; I hope, and I am anxious to know that my hope is well founded. It is quite certain that our marriage is merely a pretext or a snare.”

Marguerite started, for perhaps the same thought had occurred to her own mind.

“Now, then, which of the two?” continued Henri de Navarre. “The king hates me; the Duc d’Anjou hates me; the Duc d’Alençon hates me; Catherine de Médicis hated my mother too much not to hate me.”

“Oh, Monsieur, what are you saying?”

“The truth, madame,” replied the king; “and in order that it may not be supposed that I am deceived as to Monsieur de Mouy’s assassination and the poisoning of my mother, I wish that some one were here who could hear me.”

“Oh, sire,” replied Marguerite, with an air as calm and smiling as she could assume, “you know very well that there is no person here but you and myself.”

“It is for that very reason that I thus give vent to my thoughts; this it is that emboldens me to declare that I am not deceived by the caresses showered on me by the House of France or the House of Lorraine.”

“Sire, sire!” exclaimed Marguerite.

“Well, what is it, *ma mie*?” inquired Henry, smiling in his turn.

“Why, sire, such remarks are very dangerous.”

“Not when we are alone,” observed the king. “I was saying” —

Marguerite was evidently distressed; she desired to stop every word the king uttered, but he continued, with his apparent good nature:

“I was telling you that I was threatened on all sides: threatened by the King, threatened by the Duc d’Alençon, threatened by the Duc d’Anjou, threatened by the queen mother, threatened by the Duc de Guise, by the Duc de Mayenne, by the Cardinal de Lorraine — threatened, in fact, by every one. One feels that instinctively, as you know, madame. Well, against all these threats, which must soon become attacks, I can defend myself by your aid, for you are beloved by all the persons who detest me.”

“I?” said Marguerite.

“Yes, you,” replied Henry, with the utmost ease of manner; “yes, you are beloved by King Charles, you are beloved” (he laid strong emphasis on the word) “by the Duc d’Alençon, you are beloved by Queen Catharine, and you are beloved by the Duc de Guise.”

“Sire!” murmured Marguerite.

“Yes; and what is there astonishing in the fact that every one loves you? All I have mentioned are your brothers or relatives. To love one’s brothers and relatives is to live according to God’s heart.”

“But what, then,” asked Marguerite, greatly overcome, “what do you mean?”

“What I have just said, that if you will be — I do not mean my love — but my ally, I can brave everything; while, on the other hand, if you become my enemy, I am lost.”

“Oh, your enemy! — never, sir!” exclaimed Marguerite.

“And my love — never either?”

“Perhaps” —

“And my ally?”

“Most decidedly.”

And Marguerite turned round and offered her hand to the king.

Henry took it, kissed it gallantly, and retaining it in his own, more from a desire of investigation than from any sentiment of tenderness, said:

“Very well, I believe you, madame, and accept the alliance. They married us without our knowing each other — without our loving each other; they married us without consulting us — us whom they united. We therefore owe nothing to each other as man and wife; you see that I even go beyond your wishes and confirm this evening what I said to you yesterday; but we ally ourselves freely and without any compulsion. We ally ourselves, as two loyal hearts who owe each other mutual protection should ally themselves; ’t is as such you understand it?”

“Yes, sir,” said Marguerite, endeavoring to withdraw her hand.

“Well, then,” continued the Béarnais, with his eyes fastened on the door of the cabinet, “as the first proof of a frank alliance is the most perfect confidence, I will now relate to you, madame, in all its details, the plan I have formed in order that we may victoriously meet and overcome all these enmities.”

“Sire” — said Marguerite, in spite of herself turning her eyes toward the closet, whilst the Béarnais, seeing his trick succeed, laughed in his sleeve.

“This is what I mean to do,” he continued, without appearing to remark his young wife’s nervousness, “I intend” —

“Sire,” said Marguerite, rising hastily, and seizing the king’s arm, “allow me a little breath; my emotion — the heat — overpowers me.”

And, in truth, Marguerite was as pale and trembling as if she was about to fall on the carpet.

Henry went straight to a window some distance off, and opened it. This window looked out on the river.

Marguerite followed him.

“Silence, sire, — silence, for your own sake!” she murmured.

“What, madame,” said the Béarnais, with his peculiar smile, “did you not tell me we were alone?”

“Yes, sire; but did you not hear me say that by the aid of a tube introduced into the ceiling or the wall everything could be heard?”

“Well, madame, well,” said the Béarnais, earnestly and in a low voice, “it is true you do not love me, but you are, at least, honorable.”

“What do you mean, sire?”

“I mean that if you were capable of betraying me, you would have allowed me to go on, as I was betraying myself. You stopped me — I now know that some one is concealed here — that you are an unfaithful wife, but a faithful ally; and just now, I confess, I have more need of fidelity in politics than in love.”

“Sire!” replied Marguerite, confused.

“Good, good; we will talk of this hereafter,” said Henry, “when we know each other better.”

Then, raising his voice — ”Well,” he continued, “do you breathe more freely now, madame?”

“Yes, sire, — yes!”

“Well, then,” said the Béarnais, “I will no longer intrude on you. I owed you my respects, and some advances toward better acquaintance; deign, then, to accept them, as they are offered, with all my heart. Good-night, and happy slumbers!”

Marguerite raised her eyes, shining with gratitude, and offered her husband her hand.

“It is agreed,” she said.

“Political alliance, frank and loyal?” asked Henry.

“Frank and loyal,” was the reply.

And the Béarnais went toward the door, followed by Marguerite’s look as if she were fascinated. Then, when the curtain had fallen between them and the bedchamber:

“Thanks, Marguerite,” he said, in a quick low tone, “thanks! You are a true daughter of France. I leave you quite tranquil: lacking your love, your friendship will not fail me. I rely on you, as you, on your side, may rely on me. Adieu, madame.”

And Henry kissed his wife’s hand, and pressed it gently. Then with a quick step he returned to his own apartment, saying to himself, in a low voice, in the corridor:

“Who the devil is with her? Is it the King, or the Duc d’Anjou, or the Duc d’Alençon, or the Duc de Guise? is it a brother or a lover? is it both? I’ faith, I am almost sorry now I asked the baroness for this rendezvous; but, as my word is pledged, and Dariole is waiting for me — no matter. Yet, *ventre saint gris*! this Margot, as my brother-in-law, King Charles, calls her, is an adorable creature.”

And with a step which betrayed a slight hesitation, Henry of Navarre ascended the staircase which led to Madame de Sauve’s apartments.

Marguerite had followed him with her eyes until he disappeared. Then she returned to her chamber, and found the duke at the door of the cabinet. The sight of him almost touched her with remorse.

The duke was grave, and his knitted brow bespoke bitter reflection.

“Marguerite is neutral to-day,” he said; “in a week Marguerite will be hostile.”

“Ah! you have been listening?” said Marguerite.

“What else could I do in the cabinet?”

“And did you find that I behaved otherwise than the Queen of Navarre should behave?”

“No; but differently from the way in which the mistress of the Duc de Guise should behave.”

“Sir,” replied the queen, “I may not love my husband, but no one has the right to require me to betray him. Tell me honestly: would you reveal the secrets of the Princesse de Porcian, your wife?”

“Come, come, madame,” answered the duke, shaking his head, “this is very well; I see that you do not love me as in those days when you disclosed to me the plot of the King against me and my party.”

“The King was strong and you were weak; Henry is weak and you are strong. You see I always play a consistent part.”

“Only you pass from one camp to another.”

“That was a right I acquired, sir, in saving your life.”

"Good, madame; and as when lovers separate, they return all the gifts that have passed between them, I will save your life, in my turn, if ever the need arises, and we shall be quits."

And the duke bowed and left the room, nor did Marguerite attempt to retain him.

In the antechamber he found Gillonne, who guided him to the window on the ground floor, and in the fosse he found his page, with whom he returned to the Hôtel de Guise.

Marguerite, in a dreamy mood, went to the opened window.

"What a marriage night!" she murmured to herself; "the husband flees from me — the lover forsakes me!"

At that moment, coming from the Tour de Bois, and going up toward the Moulin de la Monnaie, on the other side of the fosse passed a student, his hand on his hip, and singing:

"SONG.

"Tell me why, O maiden fair,
When I burn to bite thy hair,
  And to kiss thy rosy lips,
And to touch thy lovely breast,
Like a nun thou feign'st thee blest
  In the cloister's sad eclipse?
"Who will win the precious prize

Of thy brow, thy mouth, thine eyes —
  Of thy bosom sweet — what lover?
Wilt thou all thy charms devote
To grim Pluton when the boat
  Charon rows shall take thee over?

"After thou hast sailed across,
Loveliest, then wilt find but loss —
  All thy beauty will decay.
When I die and meet thee there
In the shades I'll never swear
  Thou wert once my mistress gay!

"Therefore, darling, while we live,

Change thy mind and tokens give —
  Kisses from thy honey mouth!
Else when thou art like to die
Thou ’lt repent thy cruelty,
  Filling all my life with drouth!”

Marguerite listened with a melancholy smile; then when the student’s voice was lost in the distance, she shut the window, and called Gillonne to help her to prepare for bed.

CHAPTER III.

THE POET-KING.

The next day and those that followed were devoted to festivals, balls, and tournaments.

The same amalgamation continued to take place between the two parties. The caresses and compliments lavished were enough to turn the heads of the most bigoted Huguenots. Père Cotton was to be seen dining and carousing with the Baron de Courtaumer; the Duc de Guise went boating on the Seine with the Prince de Condé. King Charles seemed to have laid aside his usual melancholy, and could not get enough of the society of his new brother-in-law, Henry. Moreover, the queen mother was so gay, and so occupied with embroidery, ornaments, and plumes, that she could not sleep.

The Huguenots, to some degree contaminated by this new Capua, began to assume silken pourpoints, wear devices, and parade before certain balconies, as if they were Catholics.

On every side there was such a reaction in favor of the Protestants that it seemed as if the whole court was about to become Protestant; even the admiral, in spite of his experience, was deceived, and was so carried away that one evening he forgot for two whole hours to chew on his toothpick, which he always used from two o’clock, at which time he finished his dinner, until eight o’clock at night, when he sat down to supper.

The evening on which the admiral thus unaccountably deviated from his usual habit, King Charles IX. had invited Henry of Navarre and the Duc de Guise to sup with him. After the repast he took them into his chamber, and was busily explaining to them the ingenious mechanism of a wolf-trap he had invented, when, interrupting himself, —

“Isn’t the admiral coming to-night?” he asked. “Who has seen him to-day and can tell me anything about him?”

“I have,” said the King of Navarre; “and if your Majesty is anxious about his health, I can reassure you, for I saw him this morning at six, and this evening at seven o’clock.”

“Aha!” replied the King, whose eyes were instantly fixed with a searching expression on his brother-in-law; “for a new-married man, Harry, you are very early.”

“Yes, sire,” answered the King of Navarre, “I wished to inquire of the admiral, who knows everything, whether some gentlemen I am expecting are on their way hither.”

“More gentlemen! why, you had eight hundred on the day of your wedding, and fresh ones join you every day. You are surely not going to invade us?” said Charles IX., smiling.

The Duc de Guise frowned.

“Sire,” returned the Béarnais, “a war with Flanders is spoken of, and I am collecting round me all those gentlemen of my country and its neighborhood whom I think can be useful to your Majesty.”

The duke, calling to mind the pretended project Henry had mentioned to Marguerite the day of their marriage, listened still more attentively.

“Well, well,” replied the King, with his sinister smile, “the more the better; let them all come, Henry. But who are these gentlemen? — brave ones, I trust.”

“I know not, sire, if my gentlemen will ever equal those of your Majesty, or the Duc d’Anjou’s, or the Duc de Guise’s, but I know that they will do their best.”

“Do you expect many?”

“Ten or a dozen more.”

“What are their names?”

“Sire, their names escape me, and with the exception of one, whom Téligny recommended to me as a most accomplished gentleman, and whose name is De la Mole, I cannot tell.”

“De la Mole!” exclaimed the King, who was deeply skilled in the science of genealogy; “is he not a Lerac de la Mole, a Provençal?”

“Exactly so, sire; you see I recruit even in Provence.”

“And I,” added the Duc de Guise, with a sarcastic smile, “go even further than his majesty the King of Navarre, for I seek even in Piedmont all the trusty Catholics I can find.”

“Catholic or Huguenot,” interrupted the King, “it little matters to me, so they are brave.”

The King’s face while he uttered these words, which thus united Catholics and Huguenots in his thoughts, bore such an expression of indifference that the duke himself was surprised.

“Your Majesty is occupied with the Flemings,” said the admiral, to whom Charles had some days previously accorded the favor of entering without being announced, and who had overheard the King’s last words.

“Ah! here is my father the admiral!” cried Charles, opening his arms. “We were speaking of war, of gentlemen, of brave men — and *he* comes. It is like the lodestone which attracts the iron. My brother-in-law of Navarre and my cousin of Guise are expecting reinforcements for your army. That was what we were talking about.”

“And these reinforcements are on their way,” said the admiral.

“Have you had news of them?” asked the Béarnais.

“Yes, my son, and particularly of M. de la Mole; he was at Orléans yesterday, and will be in Paris to-morrow or the day after.”

“The devil! You must be a sorcerer, admiral,” said the Duc de Guise, “to know what is taking place at thirty or forty leagues’ distance. I should like to know for a certainty what happened or is happening before Orléans.”

Coligny remained unmoved at this savage onslaught, which evidently alluded to the death of François de Guise, the duke’s father, killed before Orléans by Poltrot de Méré, and not without a suspicion that the admiral had advised the crime.

“Sir,” replied he, coldly and with dignity, “I am a sorcerer whenever I wish to know anything positively that concerns my own affairs or the King’s. My courier arrived an hour ago from Orléans, having travelled, thanks to the post, thirty-two leagues in a day. As M. de la Mole has only his own horse, he rides but ten leagues a day, and will not arrive in Paris before the 24th. Here is all my magic.”

“Bravo, my father, a clever answer!” cried Charles IX.; “teach these young men that wisdom as well as age has whitened your hair and beard; so now we will send them to talk of their tournaments and their love-affairs and you and I will stay and talk of our wars. Good councillors make good kings, my father. Leave us, gentlemen. I wish to talk with the admiral.”

The two young men took their departure; the King of Navarre first, then the Duc de Guise; but outside the door they separated, after a formal salute.

Coligny followed them with his eyes, not without anxiety, for he never saw those two personified hatreds meet without a dread that some new lightning flash would leap forth. Charles IX. saw what was passing in his mind, and, going to him, laid his hand on his arm:

"Have no fear, my father; I am here to preserve peace and obedience. I am really a king, now that my mother is no longer queen, and she is no longer queen now that Coligny is my father."

"Oh, sire!" said the admiral, "Queen Catharine" —

"Is a marplot. Peace is impossible with her. These Italian Catholics are furious, and will hear of nothing but extermination; now, for my part, I not only wish to pacify, but I wish to put power into the hands of those that profess the reformed religion. The others are too dissolute, and scandalize me by their love affairs and their quarrels. Shall I speak frankly to you?" continued Charles, redoubling in energy. "I mistrust every one about me except my new friends. I suspect Tavannes's ambition. Vieilleville cares only for good wine, and would betray his king for a cask of Malvoisie; Montmorency thinks only of the chase, and spends all his time among his dogs and falcons; the Comte de Retz is a Spaniard; the De Guises are Lorraines. I think there are no true Frenchmen in France, except myself, my brother-in-law of Navarre, and you; but I am chained to the throne, and cannot command armies; it is as much as I can do to hunt at my ease at Saint Germain or Rambouillet. My brother-in-law of Navarre is too young and too inexperienced; besides, he seems to me exactly like his father Antoine, ruined by women. There is but you, my father, who can be called, at the same time, as brave as Cæsar and as wise as Plato; so that I scarcely know what to do — keep you near me, as my adviser, or send you to the army, as its general. If you act as my counsellor, who will command? If you command, who will be my counsellor?"

"Sire," said Coligny, "we must conquer first, and then take counsel after the victory."

"That is your advice — so be it; Monday you shall leave for Flanders, and I for Amboise."

"Your Majesty leaves Paris, then?"

"Yes; I am weary of this confusion, and of these fêtes. I am not a man of action; I am a dreamer. I was not born to be a king; I was born to be a poet. You shall form a council which shall govern while you are at war, and provided my mother is not in it, all will go well. I have already sent word to Ronsard to join me; and yonder, we two together, far from all tumult, far from the world, far from evil men, under our mighty trees on the banks of the river, with the murmur of brooks in our ears, will talk about divine things, the only compensation which there is in the world for the affairs of men. Wait! Hear these lines in which I invite him to join me; I wrote them this morning.”

Coligny smiled. Charles IX. rubbed his hand over his brow, yellow and shining like ivory, and repeated in a kind of sing-song the following couplets:

“Ronsard, I am full sure that if you see me not,
Your great King’s voice by you will shortly be forgot.
But as a slight reminder — know I still persevere
In making skill of poesy my sole endeavor.
And that is why I send to you this warm appeal,
To fill your mind with new, enthusiastic zeal.

“No longer then amuse yourself with home distractions;
Past is the time for gardening and its attractions.
Come, follow with your King, who loves you most of all,
For that the sweet strong verses from your lips do fall.
And if Ardoise shall not behold you shortly present,
A mighty quarrel will break out and prove unpleasant!”

“Bravo! sire, bravo!” cried Coligny, “I am better versed in matters of war than in matters of poetry, but it seems to me that those lines are equal to the best, even written by Ronsard, or Dorat, or even Michel de l’Hôpital, Chancellor of France.”

“Ah! my father!” exclaimed Charles IX.; “would what you said were true! For the title of poet, you see, is what I am ambitious, above all things, to gain; and as I said a few days ago to my master in poetry:

“‘The art of making verse, if one were criticised,
Should ever be above the art of reigning prized.
The crowns that you and I upon our brows are wearing,
I as the King receive, as poet you are sharing.
Your lofty soul, enkindled by celestial beams,
Flames of itself, while mine with borrowed glory gleams.
If ‘mid the gods I ask which has the better showing,
Ronsard is their delight: I, but their image glowing.
Your lyre, which ravishes with sounds so sweet and bold,

Subdues men’s minds, while I their bodies only hold!
It makes you master, lifts you into lofty regions,
Where even the haughty tyrant ne’er dared claim allegiance.’”

“Sire,” said Coligny, “I was well aware that your Majesty conversed with the Muses, but I did not know that you were their chief counsellor.”

“After you, my father, after you. And in order that I may not be disturbed in my relations with them, I wish to put you at the head of everything. So listen: I must now go and reply to a new madrigal my dear and illustrious poet has sent me. I cannot, therefore, give you the documents necessary to make you acquainted with the question now debating between Philip II. and myself. There is, besides, a plan of the campaign drawn up by my ministers. I will find it all for you, and give it to you to-morrow.”

“At what time, sire?”

“At ten o’clock; and if by chance I am busy making verses, or in my cabinet writing, well — you will come in just the same, and take all the papers which you will find on the table in this red portfolio. The color is remarkable, and you cannot mistake it. I am now going to write to Ronsard.”

“Adieu, sire!”

“Adieu, my father!”

“Your hand?”

“What, my hand? In my arms, in my heart, there is your place! Come, my old soldier, come!”

And Charles IX., drawing Coligny toward him as he bowed, pressed his lips to his white hair.

The admiral left the room, wiping away a tear.

Charles IX. followed him with his eyes as long as he could see, and listened as long as he could catch a sound; then, when he could no longer hear or see anything, he bent his head over toward his shoulder, as his custom was, and slowly entered his armory.

This armory was the king’s favorite apartment; there he took his fencing-lessons with Pompée, and his poetry lessons with Ronsard. He had gathered there a great collection of the most costly weapons he had been able to find. The walls were hung with axes, shields, spears, halberds, pistols, and muskets, and that day a famous armorer had brought him a magnificent arquebuse, on the barrel of which were inlaid in silver these four lines, composed by the royal poet himself:

“*Pour maintenir la foy,*
Je suis belle et fidèle.
Aux ennemis du Roi,
Je suis belle et cruelle.”

Charles, as we have said, entered this room, and after having shut the door by which he had entered, he raised the tapestry that masked a passage leading into a little chamber, where a woman kneeling before a *priedieu* was saying her prayers.

As this movement was executed noiselessly, and the footsteps of the king, deadened by the thick carpet, made no more noise than a phantom’s, the kneeling woman heard no sound, and continued to pray. Charles stood for a moment pensively looking at her.

She was a woman of thirty-four or thirty-five years of age, whose vigorous beauty was set off by the costume of the peasants of Caux. She wore the high cap so much the fashion at the court of France during the time of Isabel of Bavaria, and her red bodice was embroidered with gold, like those of the *contadine* of Nettuno and Sora. The apartment which she had for nearly twenty years occupied was close to the King’s bed-chamber and presented a singular mixture of elegance and rusticity. In equal measure the palace had encroached upon the cottage, and the cottage upon the palace, so that the room combined the simplicity of the peasant woman and the luxury of the court lady.

The *priedieu* on which she knelt was of oak, marvellously carved, covered with velvet and with gold fringes, while the Bible from which she was reading (for she was of the reformed religion) was very old and torn, like those found in the poorest cottages; now everything in the room was typified by the *priedieu* and the Bible.

“Eh, Madelon!” said the King.

The kneeling woman lifted her head smilingly at the well-known voice, and rising from her knees, —

“Ah! it is you, my son,” said she.

“Yes, nurse; come here.”

Charles IX. let fall the curtain, and sat down on the arm of an easy-chair. The nurse appeared.

“What do you want with me, Charlot?”

“Come near, and answer in a low tone.”

The nurse approached him with a familiarity such as might come from that maternal affection felt by a woman for her nursling, but attributed by the pamphlets of the time to a source infinitely less pure.

“Here I am,” said she; “speak!”

“Is the man I sent for come?”

“He has been here half an hour.”

Charles rose, approached the window, looked to assure himself there were no eavesdroppers, went to the door and looked out there also, shook the dust from his trophies of arms, patted a large greyhound which followed him wherever he went, stopping when he stopped and moving when he moved, — then returning to his nurse:

“Very well, nurse, let him come in,” said he.

The worthy woman disappeared by the same passage by which she had entered, while the king went and leaned against a table on which were scattered arms of every kind.

Scarcely had he done so when the portière was again lifted, and the person whom he expected entered.

He was a man of about forty, his eyes gray and false, his nose curved like the beak of a screech-owl, his cheek-bones prominent. His face tried to look respectful, but all that he could do was to wear a hypocritical smile on his lips blanched with fear.

Charles gently put his hand behind him, and grasped the butt of a pistol of a new construction, that was discharged, not by a match, as formerly, but by a flint brought in contact with a wheel of steel. He fixed his dull eyes steadily on the newcomer; meantime he whistled, with perfect precision and with remarkable sweetness, one of his favorite hunting-airs.

After a pause of some minutes, during which the expression of the stranger’s face grew more and more discomposed,

“You are the person,” said the King, “called François de Louvièrs Maurevel?”

“Yes, sire.”

“Captain of petardeers?”

“Yes, sire.”

“I wanted to see you.”

Maurevel made a low bow.

"You know," continued Charles, laying a stress on each word, "that I love all my subjects equally?"

"I know," stammered Maurevel, "that your Majesty is the father of your people."

"And that the Huguenots and Catholics are equally my children?"

Maurevel remained silent, but his agitation was manifest to the King's piercing eyes, although the person whom he was addressing was almost concealed in the darkness.

"Does this displease you," said the King, "you who have waged such a bitter war on the Huguenots?"

Maurevel fell on his knees.

"Sire," stammered he, "believe that" —

"I believe," continued Charles, looking more and more keenly at Maurevel, while his eyes, which at first had seemed like glass, now became almost fiery, "I believe that you had a great desire at Moncontour to kill the admiral, who has just left me; I believe you missed your aim, and that then you entered the army of my brother, the Duc d'Anjou; I believe that then you went for a second time over to the prince's and there took service in the company of M. de Mouy de Saint Phale" —

"Oh, sire!"

"A brave gentleman from Picardy" —

"Sire, sire!" cried Maurevel, "do not overwhelm me."

"He was a brave officer," continued Charles, whose features assumed an aspect of almost ferocious cruelty, "who received you as if you had been his son; fed you, lodged you, and clothed you."

Maurevel uttered a despairing sigh.

"You called him your father, I believe," continued the King, pitilessly, "and a tender friendship existed between you and the young De Mouy, his son."

Maurevel, still on his knees, bowed low, more and more crushed under the indignation of the King, who stood immovable, like a statue whose lips only are endowed with vitality.

"By the way," continued the King, "M. de Guise was to give you ten thousand crowns if you killed the admiral — was he not?"

The assassin in consternation struck his forehead against the floor.

"As regards your worthy father, the Sieur de Mouy, you were one day acting as his escort in a reconnaissance toward Chevreux. He dropped his whip and dismounted to pick it up. You were alone with him; you took a pistol from your holster, and while he was bending over, you shot him in the back; then seeing he was dead — for you killed him on the spot — you escaped on the horse he had given you. This is your history, I believe?”

And as Maurevel remained mute under this accusation, every circumstance of which was true, Charles IX. began to whistle again, with the same precision and melody, the same hunting-air.

“Now, then, murderer!” said he after a little, “do you know I have a great mind to have you hanged?”

“Oh, your Majesty!” cried Maurevel.

“Young De Mouy entreated me to do so only yesterday, and I scarcely knew what answer to make him, for his demand was perfectly just.”

Maurevel clasped his hands.

“All the more just, because I am, as you say, the father of my people; and because, as I answered you, now that I am reconciled to the Huguenots, they are as much my children as the Catholics.”

“Sire,” said Maurevel, in despair, “my life is in your hands; do with it what you will.”

“You are quite right, and I would not give a groat for it.”

“But, sire,” asked the assassin, “is there no means of redeeming my crime?”

“None that I know of; only if I were in your place — but thank God I am not” —

“Well, sire, if you were in my place?” murmured Maurevel, his eyes fixed on the King’s lips.

“I think I could extricate myself,” said the King.

Maurevel raised himself on one knee and one hand, fixing his eyes upon Charles to make certain that he was not jesting.

“I am very fond of young De Mouy,” said the King; “but I am equally fond of my cousin De Guise; and if my cousin asked me to spare a man that the other wanted me to hang, I confess I should be embarrassed; but for policy as well as religion’s sake I should comply with my cousin De Guise’s request, for De Mouy, brave captain though he be, is but a petty personage compared with a prince of Lorraine.”

During these words, Maurevel slowly rose, like a man whose life is saved.

"In your critical situation it would be a very important thing to gain my cousin De Guise's favor. So I am going to tell you what he said to me last night."

Maurevel drew nearer.

"'Imagine, sire,' said he to me, 'that every morning, at ten o'clock, my deadliest enemy passes down the Rue Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, on his return from the Louvre. I see him from a barred window in the room of my old preceptor, the Canon Pierre Piles, and I pray the devil to open the earth and swallow him in its abysses.' Now, Maître Maurevel," continued the King, "perhaps if you were the devil, or if for an instant you should take his place, that would perhaps please my cousin De Guise."

Maurevel's infernal smile came back to his lips, though they were still bloodless with terror, and he stammered out these words:

"But, sire, I cannot make the earth open."

"Yet you made it open wide enough for the worthy De Mouy, if I remember correctly. After this you will tell me how with a pistol — have you not that pistol still?"

"Forgive me, sire, I am a still better marksman with an arquebuse than a pistol," replied Maurevel, now quite reassured.

"Pistol or arquebuse makes no difference," said the King; "I am sure my cousin De Guise will not cavil over the choice of methods."

"But," said Maurevel, "I must have a weapon I can rely on, as, perhaps, I shall have to fire from a long distance."

"I have ten arquebuses in this room," replied Charles IX., "with which I can hit a crown-piece at a hundred and fifty paces — will you try one?"

"Most willingly, sire!" cried Maurevel, with the greatest joy, going in the direction of one which was standing in a corner of the room. It was the one which that day had been brought to the King.

"No, not that one," said the King, "not that one; I reserve that for myself. Some day I am going to have a grand hunt and then I hope to use it. Take any other you like."

Maurevel took one down from a trophy.

"And who is this enemy, sire?" asked the assassin.

"How should I know," replied Charles, withering the wretch with his contemptuous look.

"I must ask M. de Guise, then," faltered Maurevel.

The King shrugged his shoulders.

"Do not ask," said he; "for M. de Guise will not answer. Do people generally answer such questions? Those that do not wish to be hanged must guess them."

"But how shall I know him?"

"I tell you he passes the Canon's house every morning at ten o'clock."

"But many pass that house. Would your Majesty deign to give me any certain sign?"

"Oh, that is easy enough; to-morrow, for example, he will carry a red morocco portfolio under his arm."

"That is sufficient, sire."

"You still have the fast horse M. de Mouy gave you?"

"Sire, I have one of the fleetest of horses."

"Oh, I am not in the least anxious about you; only it is as well to let you know the monastery has a back door."

"Thanks, sire; pray Heaven for me!"

"Oh, a thousand devils! pray to Satan rather; for only by his aid can you escape a halter."

"Adieu, sire."

"Adieu! By the way, M. de Maurevel, remember that if you are heard of before ten to-morrow, or are *not* heard of afterward, there is a dungeon at the Louvre."

And Charles IX. calmly began to whistle, with more than usual precision, his favorite air.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EVENING OF THE 24TH OF AUGUST, 1572.

Our readers have not forgotten that in the previous chapter we mentioned a gentleman named De la Mole whom Henry of Navarre was anxiously expecting.

This young gentleman, as the admiral had announced, entered Paris by the gate of Saint Marcel the evening of the 24th of August, 1572; and bestowing a contemptuous glance on the numerous hostelries that displayed their picturesque signs on either side of him, he spurred his steaming horse on into the heart of the city, and after having crossed the Place Maubert, Le Petit Pont, the Pont Notre-Dame, and skirted the quays, he stopped at the end of the Rue de Bresec, which we have since corrupted into the Rue de l’Arbre Sec, and for the greater convenience of our readers we will call by its modern name.

The name pleased him, no doubt, for he entered the street, and finding on his left a large sheet-iron plate swinging, creaking on its hinges, with an accompaniment of little bells, he stopped and read these words, “*La Belle Étoile*,” written on a scroll beneath the sign, which was a most attractive one for a famished traveller, as it represented a fowl roasting in the midst of a black sky, while a man in a red cloak held out his hands and his purse toward this new-fangled constellation.

“Here,” said the gentleman to himself, “is an inn that promises well, and the landlord must be a most ingenious fellow. I have always heard that the Rue de l’Arbre Sec was near the Louvre; and, provided that the interior answers to the exterior, I shall be admirably lodged.”

While the newcomer was thus indulging in this monologue another horseman who had entered the street at the other end, that is to say, by the Rue Saint-Honoré, stopped also to admire the sign of *La Belle Étoile*.

The gentleman whom we already know, at least by name, rode a white steed of Spanish lineage and wore a black doublet ornamented with jet; his cloak was of dark violet velvet; his boots were of black leather, and he had a sword and poniard with hilts of chased steel.

Now if we pass from his costume to his features we shall conclude that he was twenty-four or twenty-five years of age. His complexion was dark; his eyes were blue; he had a delicate mustache and brilliant teeth which seemed to light up his whole face when his exquisitely modelled lips parted in a sweet and melancholy smile.

The contrast between him and the second traveller was very striking. Beneath his cocked hat escaped a profusion of frizzled hair, red rather than brown; beneath this mop of hair sparkled a pair of gray eyes which at the slightest opposition grew so fierce that they seemed black; a fair complexion, thin lips, a tawny mustache, and admirable teeth completed the description of his face. Taken all in all, with his white skin, lofty stature, and broad shoulders, he was indeed a *beau cavalier* in the ordinary acceptation of the term, and during the last hour which he had employed in staring up at all the windows, under the pretext of looking for signs, he had attracted the general attention of women, while the men, though they may have felt inclined to laugh at his scanty cloak, his tight-fitting small-clothes, and his old-fashioned boots, checked their rising mirth with a most cordial *Dieu vous garde*, after they had more attentively studied his face, which every moment assumed a dozen different expressions, but never that good-natured one characteristic of a bewildered provincial.

He it was who first addressed the other gentleman who, as I have said, was gazing at the hostelry of *La Belle Étoile*.

“By Heaven! monsieur,” said he, with that horrible mountain accent which would instantly distinguish a native of Piedmont among a hundred strangers, “we are close to the Louvre, are we not? At all events, I think your choice is the same as mine, and I am highly flattered by it.”

“Monsieur,” replied the other, with a Provençal accent which rivalled that of his companion, “I believe this inn is near the Louvre. However, I am still deliberating whether or not I shall have the honor of sharing your opinion. I am in a quandary.”

“You have not yet decided, sir? Nevertheless, the house is attractive. But perhaps, after all, I have been won over to it by your presence. Yet you will grant that is a pretty painting?”

“Very! and it is for that very reason I mistrust it. Paris, I am told, is full of sharpers, and you may be just as well tricked by a sign as by anything else.”

“By Heaven!” replied the Piedmontese, “I don’t care a fig for their tricks; and if the host does not serve me a chicken as well roasted as the one on his sign, I will put him on the spit, nor will I let him off till I have done him to a turn. Come, let us go in."

"You have decided me," said the Provençal, laughing; "precede me, I beg."

"Oh, sir, on my soul I could not think of it, for I am only your most obedient servant, the Comte Annibal de Coconnas."

"And I, monsieur, but the Comte Joseph Hyacinthe Boniface de Lerac de la Mole, equally at your service."

"Since that is the case, let us go in together, arm in arm."

The result of this conciliatory proposition was that the two young men got off their horses, threw the bridles to the ostler, linked arms, adjusted their swords, and approached the door of the inn, where the landlord was standing. But contrary to the custom of men of his profession, the worthy proprietor seemed not to notice them, so busy was he talking with a tall, sallow man, wrapped in a drab-colored cloak like an owl buried in his feathers.

The two gentlemen were so near the landlord and his friend in the drab-colored cloak that Coconnas, indignant that he and his companion should be treated with such lack of consideration, touched the landlord's sleeve.

He appeared suddenly to perceive them, and dismissed his friend with an "*Au revoir!* come soon and let me know the hour appointed."

"Well, *monsieur le drole*," said Coconnas, "do not you see we have business with you?"

"I beg pardon, gentlemen," said the host; "I did not see you."

"Eh, by Heaven! then you ought to have seen us; and now that you do see us, say, 'Monsieur le Comte,' and not merely 'Monsieur,' if you please."

La Mole stood by, leaving Coconnas, who seemed to have undertaken the affair, to speak; but by the scowling on his face it was evident that he was ready to come to his assistance when the moment of action should present itself.

"Well, what is your pleasure, Monsieur le Comte?" asked the landlord, in a quiet tone.

"Ah, that's better; is it not?" said Coconnas, turning to La Mole, who nodded affirmatively. "Monsieur le Comte and myself, attracted by the sign of your establishment, wish to sup and sleep here to-night."

"Gentlemen," said the host, "I am very sorry, but I have only one chamber, and I am afraid that would not suit you."

“So much the better,” said La Mole; “we will go and lodge somewhere else.”

“By no means,” said Coconnas, “I shall stay here; my horse is tired. I will have the room, since you will not.”

“Ah! that is quite different,” replied the host, with the same cool tone of impertinence. “If there is only one of you I cannot lodge you at all, then.”

“By Heaven!” cried Coconnas, “here’s a witty animal! Just now you could not lodge us because we were two, and now you have not room for one. You will not lodge us at all, then?”

“Since you take this high tone, gentlemen, I will answer you frankly.”

“Answer, then; only answer quickly.”

“Well, then, I should prefer not to have the honor of lodging you at all.”

“For what reason?” asked Coconnas, growing white with rage.

“Because you have no servants, and for one master’s room full, I should have two servants’ rooms empty; so that, if I let you have the master’s room, I run the risk of not letting the others.”

“Monsieur de la Mole,” said Coconnas, “do you not think we ought to massacre this fellow?”

“Decidedly,” said La Mole, preparing himself, together with Coconnas, to lay his whip over the landlord’s back.

But the landlord contented himself with retreating a step or two, despite this two-fold demonstration, which was not particularly reassuring, considering that the two gentlemen appeared so full of determination.

“It is easy to see,” said he, in a tone of raillery, “that these gentlemen are just from the provinces. At Paris it is no longer the fashion to massacre innkeepers who refuse to let them rooms — only great men are massacred nowadays and not the common people; and if you make any disturbance, I will call my neighbors, and you shall be beaten yourselves, and that would be an indignity for two such gentlemen.”

“Why! he is laughing at us,” cried Coconnas, in a rage.

“Grégoire, my arquebuse,” said the host, with the same voice with which he would have said, “Give these gentleman a chair.”

“*Trippe del papa!*” cried Coconnas, drawing his sword; “warm up, Monsieur de la Mole.”

“No, no; for while we warm up, our supper will get cold.”

“What, you think” — cried Coconnas.

“That Monsieur de la Belle Étoile is right; only he does not know how to treat his guests, especially when they are gentlemen, for instead of brutally saying, ‘Gentlemen, I do not want you,’ it would have been better if he had said, ‘Enter, gentlemen’ — at the same time reserving to himself the right to charge in his bill, master’s room, so much; servants’ room, so much.”

With these words, La Mole gently pushed by the landlord, who was just on the point of taking his arquebuse, and entered with Coconnas.

“Well,” said Coconnas, “I am sorry to sheathe my sword before I have ascertained that it is as sharp as that rascal’s larding-needle.”

“Patience, my dear friend, patience,” said La Mole. “All the inns in Paris are full of gentlemen come to attend the King of Navarre’s marriage or attracted by the approaching war with Flanders; we should not find another lodging; besides, perhaps it is the custom at Paris to receive strangers in this manner.”

“By Heaven! how patient you are, Monsieur de la Mole!” muttered Coconnas, curling his red mustache with rage and hurling the lightning of his eyes on the landlord. “But let the scoundrel take care; for if his cooking be bad, if his bed be hard, his wine less than three years in bottle, and his waiter be not as pliant as a reed” —

“There! there! my dear gentleman!” said the landlord, whetting his knife on a strap, “you may make yourself easy; you are in the land of Cocagne.”

Then in a low tone he added:

“These are some Huguenots; traitors have grown so insolent since the marriage of their Béarnais with Mademoiselle Margot!”

Then, with a smile that would have made his guests shudder had they seen it:

“How strange it would be if I were just to have two Huguenots come to my house, when” —

“Now, then,” interrupted Coconnas, pointedly, “are we going to have any supper?”

“Yes, as soon as you please, monsieur,” returned the landlord, softened, no doubt, by the last reflection.

“Well, then, the sooner the better,” said Coconnas; and turning to La Mole:

“Pray, Monsieur le Comte, while they are putting our room in order, tell me, do you think Paris seems a gay city?”

“Faith! no,” said La Mole. “All the faces I have seen looked scared or forbidding; perhaps the Parisians also are afraid of the storm; see how very black the sky is, and the air feels heavy.”

“Tell me, count, are you not bound for the Louvre?”

“Yes! and you also, Monsieur de Coconnas.”

“Well, let us go together.”

“It is rather late to go out, is it not?” said La Mole.

“Early or late, I must go; my orders are peremptory — ’Come instantly to Paris, and report to the Duc de Guise without delay.’“

At the Duc de Guise’s name the landlord drew nearer.

“I think the rascal is listening to us,” said Coconnas, who, as a true son of Piedmont, was very truculent, and could not forgive the proprietor of *La Belle Étoile* his rude reception of them.

“I am listening, gentlemen,” replied he, taking off his cap; “but it is to serve you. I heard the great duke’s name mentioned, and I came immediately. What can I do for you, gentlemen?”

“Aha! that name is magical, since it renders you so polite. Tell me, maître, — what’s your name?”

“Maître la Hurière,” replied the host, bowing.

“Well, Maître la Hurière, do you think my arm is lighter than the Duc de Guise’s, who makes you so civil?”

“No, Monsieur le Comte, but it is not so long,” replied La Hurière; “besides,” he added, “I must tell you that the great Henry is the idol of us Parisians.”

“Which Henry?” asked La Mole.

“It seems to me there is only one,” replied the landlord.

“You are mistaken; there is another, whom I desire you do not speak ill of, and that is Henry of Navarre; and then there is Henry de Condé, who has his share of merit.”

“I do not know them,” said the landlord.

“But I do; and as I am on my way to the King of Navarre, I desire you not to speak slightingly of him before me.”

The landlord replied by merely touching his cap, and continued to lavish his assiduities on Coconnas:

“So monsieur is going to see the great Duc de Guise? Monsieur is a very fortunate gentleman; he has come, no doubt, for” —

“What?” asked Coconnas.

“For the festivity,” replied the host, with a singular smile.

“You should say for the festivities,” replied Coconnas; “for Paris, I hear, runs riot with festivals; at least there is nothing talked about but balls, festivals, and orgies. Does not every one find plenty of amusement?”

“A moderate amount, but they will have more soon, I hope.”

“But the marriage of his majesty the King of Navarre has brought a great many people to Paris, has it not?” said La Mole.

“A great many Huguenots — yes,” replied La Hurière, but suddenly changing his tone:

“Pardon me, gentlemen,” said he, “perhaps you are of that religion?”

“I,” cried Coconnas, “I am as good a Catholic as the pope himself.”

La Hurière looked at La Mole, but La Mole did not or would not comprehend him.

“If you do not know the King of Navarre, Maître La Hurière,” said La Mole, “perhaps you know the admiral. I have heard he has some influence at court, and as I have letters for him, perhaps you will tell me where he lives, if his name does not take the skin off your lips.”

“He *did* live in the Rue de Béthizy down here at the right,” replied the landlord, with an inward satisfaction he could not conceal.

“He *did* live?” exclaimed La Mole. “Has he changed his residence?”

“Yes — from this world, perhaps.”

“What do you mean?” cried both the gentlemen together, “the admiral removed from this world?”

“What, Monsieur de Coconnas,” pursued the landlord, with a shrewd smile, “are you a friend of the Duc de Guise, and do not know *that*?”

“Know what?”

“That the day before yesterday, as the admiral was passing along the place Saint Germain l’Auxerrois before the house of the Canon Pierre Piles, he was fired at” —

“And killed?” said La Mole.

“No; he had his arm broken and two fingers taken off; but it is hoped the balls were poisoned.”

“How, wretch!” cried La Mole; “hoped?”

“Believed, I mean,” said the landlord, winking at Coconnas; “do not take a word too seriously, it was a slip of the tongue.”

And Maître La Hurière, turning his back on La Mole, poked out his tongue at Coconnas in the most insulting way, accompanying this action with a meaning wink.

“Really!” said Coconnas, joyfully.

“Really!” said La Mole, with sorrowful stupefaction.

“It is just as I have the honor of telling you, gentlemen,” said the landlord.

“In that case,” said La Mole, “I must go instantly to the Louvre. Shall I find the King of Navarre there?”

“Most likely, since he lives there.”

“And I,” said Coconnas, “must also go to the Louvre. Shall I find the Duc de Guise there?”

“Most likely; for only a moment ago I saw him pass with two hundred gentlemen.”

“Come, then, Monsieur de Coconnas,” said La Mole.

“I will follow you, sir,” replied Coconnas.

“But your supper, gentlemen!” cried La Hurière.

“Ah,” said La Mole, “I shall most likely sup with the King of Navarre.”

“And I,” said Coconnas, “with the Duc de Guise.”

“And I,” said the landlord, after having watched the two gentlemen on their way to the Louvre, “I will go and burnish my sallet, put a match to my arquebuse, and sharpen my partisan, for no one knows what may happen.”

CHAPTER V.

OF THE LOUVRE IN PARTICULAR, AND OF VIRTUE IN GENERAL.

The two young men, directed by the first person they met, went down the Rue d’Averon, the Rue Saint Germain l’Auxerrois, and soon found themselves before the Louvre, the towers of which were beginning to be lost in the early shades of the gloaming.

“What is the matter with you?” asked Coconnas of La Mole, who, as they came in sight of the old château, stopped and gazed, not without awe, on the drawbridges, the narrow windows, and the pointed belfries, which suddenly rose before his vision.

“I scarcely know,” said La Mole; “my heart beats strangely. I am not timid, but somehow this old palace seems so gloomy and terrible.”

“Well, as for me, I don’t know any reason for it,” replied Coconnas, “but I feel in excellent spirits. My dress is somewhat disordered,” he went on to say, glancing at his travelling costume, “but never mind, it looks as if I had been riding. Besides, my instructions commanded promptness and I shall be welcome because I shall have obeyed punctually.”

The two young men continued their way, each under the influence of the feelings he had expressed.

There was a strong guard at the Louvre and the sentinels were doubled. Our two cavaliers were somewhat embarrassed, therefore, but Coconnas, who had noticed that the Duc de Guise’s name acted like a talisman on the Parisians, approached a sentinel, and making use of the all-powerful name, asked if by means of it he might not be allowed to enter.

The name seemed to produce its ordinary effect upon the soldier; nevertheless he asked Coconnas if he had the countersign.

Coconnas was forced to confess he had not.

“Stand back, then,” said the soldier.

At this moment a person who was talking with the officer of the guard and who had overheard Coconnas ask leave to enter, broke off his conversation and came to him.

“Vat do you vant with Monsieur dee Gouise?” asked he.

“I wish to see him,” said Coconnas, smiling.

“Imbossible! the duke is mit the King.”

“But I have a letter for him.”

“Ah, you haf a ledder for him?”

“Yes, and I have come a long distance.”

“Ah! you haf gome a long tistance?”

“I have come from Piedmont.”

“Vell, vell! dat iss anodder ting. And vat iss your name?”

“The Comte Annibal de Coconnas.”

“Goot! goot! kif me the ledder, Monsieur Annibal, kif it to me!”

“On my word,” said La Mole to himself, “a very civil man. I hope I may find one like him to conduct me to the King of Navarre.”

“But kif me the ledder,” said the German gentleman, holding out his hand toward Coconnas, who hesitated.

“By Heaven!” replied the Piedmontese, distrustful like a half-Italian, “I scarcely know whether I ought, as I have not the honor of knowing you.”

“I am Pesme; I’m addached to Monsir le Douque de Gouise.”

“Pesme,” murmured Coconnas; “I am not acquainted with that name.”

“It is Monsieur de Besme, my dear sir,” said the sentinel. “His pronunciation misled you, that is all; you may safely give him your letter, I’ll answer for it.”

“Ah! Monsieur de Besme!” cried Coconnas; “of course I know you! with the greatest pleasure. Here is the letter. Pardon my hesitation; but fidelity requires one to be careful.”

“Goot, goot! dere iss no need of any egscuse,” said Besme.

“Perhaps, sir,” said La Mole, “you will be so kind as to the same for my letter that you have done for my friend?”

“And vat iss your name, monsir?”

“The Comte Lerac de la Mole.”

“Gount Lerag dee la Mole?”

“Yes.”

“I don’t know de name.”

“It is not strange that I have not the honor of being known to you, sir, for like the Comte de Coconnas I am only just arrived in Paris.”

“Where do you gome from?”

“From Provence.”

“Vit a ledder?”

“Yes.”

“For Monsir dee Gouise?”

“No; for his majesty the King of Navarre.”

“I do not pelong to de King of Navarre,” said De Besme coldly, “and derefore I gannot dake your ledder.”

And turning on his heel, he entered the Louvre, bidding Coconnas follow him.

La Mole was left alone.

At this moment a troop of cavaliers, about a hundred in number, came out from the Louvre by a gate alongside that of which Besme and Coconnas had entered.

“Aha!” said the sentinel to his comrade, “there are De Mouy and his Huguenots! See how joyous they all are! The King has probably promised them to put to death the assassin of the admiral; and as it was he who murdered De Mouy’s father, the son will kill two birds with one stone.”

“Excuse me, my good fellow,” interrupted La Mole, “did you not say that officer is M. de Mouy?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And that those with him are” —

“Are heretics — I said so.”

“Thank you,” said La Mole, affecting not to notice the scornful word *parpaillots*, employed by the sentinel. “That was all I wished to know;” and advancing to the chief of the cavaliers:

“Sir,” said he, “I am told you are M. de Mouy.”

“Yes, sir,” returned the officer, courteously.

“Your name, well known among those of our faith, emboldens me to address you, sir, to ask a special favor.”

“What may that be, sir, — but first whom have I the honor of addressing?”

“The Comte Lerac de la Mole.”

The young men bowed to each other.

“What can I do for you, sir?” asked De Mouy.

“Sir, I am just arrived from Aix, and bring a letter from M. d’Auriac, Governor of Provence. This letter is directed to the King of Navarre and contains important and pressing news. How can I give it to him? How can I enter the Louvre?”

“Nothing is easier than to enter the Louvre, sir,” replied De Mouy; “but I fear the King of Navarre will be too busy to see you at this hour. However, if you please, I will take you to his apartments, and then you must manage for yourself.”

“A thousand thanks!”

“Come, then,” said De Mouy.

De Mouy dismounted, threw the reins to his lackey, stepped toward the wicket, passed the sentinel, conducted La Mole into the château, and, opening the door leading to the king’s apartments:

“Enter, and inquire for yourself, sir,” said he.

And saluting La Mole, he retired.

La Mole, left alone, looked round.

The ante-room was vacant. One of the inner doors was open. He advanced a few paces and found himself in a passage.

He knocked and spoke, but no one answered. The profoundest silence reigned in this part of the Louvre.

“What was told me about the stern etiquette of this place?” said he to himself. “One may come and go in this palace as if it were a public place.”

Then he called again, but without obtaining any better result than before.

“Well, let us walk straight on,” thought he, “I must meet some one,” and he proceeded down the corridor, which grew darker and darker.

Suddenly the door opposite that by which he had entered opened, and two pages appeared, lighting a lady of noble bearing and exquisite beauty.

The glare of the torches fell full on La Mole, who stood motionless.

The lady stopped also.

“What do you want, sir?” said she, in a voice which fell upon his ears like exquisite music.

“Oh, madame,” said La Mole, casting down his eyes, “pardon me; I have just parted from M. de Mouy, who was so good as to conduct me here, and I wish to see the King of Navarre.”

“His majesty is not here, sir; he is with his brother-in-law. But, in his absence, could you not say to the queen” —

“Oh, yes, madame,” returned La Mole, “if I could obtain audience of her.”

“You have it already, sir.”

“What?” cried La Mole.

“I am the Queen of Navarre.”

La Mole made such a hasty movement of surprise and alarm that it caused the queen to smile.

"Speak, sir," said Marguerite, "but speak quickly, for the queen mother is waiting for me."

"Oh, madame, if the queen mother is waiting for you," said La Mole, "suffer me to leave you, for just now it would be impossible for me to speak to you. I am incapable of collecting my ideas. The sight of you has dazzled me. I no longer think, I can only admire."

Marguerite advanced graciously toward the handsome young man, who, without knowing it, was acting like a finished courtier.

"Recover yourself, sir," said she; "I will wait and they will wait for me."

"Pardon me, madame," said La Mole, "if I did not salute your majesty at first with all the respect which you have a right to expect from one of your humblest servants, but" —

"You took me for one of my ladies?" said Marguerite.

"No, madame; but for the shade of the beautiful Diane de Poitiers, who is said to haunt the Louvre."

"Come, sir," said Marguerite, "I see you will make your fortune at court; you said you had a letter for the king, it was not needed, but no matter! Where is it? I will give it to him — only make haste, I beg of you."

In a twinkling La Mole threw open his doublet, and drew from his breast a letter enveloped in silk.

Marguerite took the letter, and glanced at the writing.

"Are you not Monsieur de la Mole?" asked she.

"Yes, madame. Oh, *mon Dieu*! Can I hope my name is known to your majesty?"

"I have heard the king, my husband, and the Duc d'Alençon, my brother, speak of you. I know they expect you."

And in her corsage, glittering with embroidery and diamonds, she slipped the letter which had just come from the young man's doublet and was still warm from the vital heat of his body. La Mole eagerly watched Marguerite's every movement.

"Now, sir," said she, "descend to the gallery below, and wait until some one comes to you from the King of Navarre or the Duc d'Alençon. One of my pages will show you the way."

And Marguerite, as she said these words, went on her way. La Mole drew himself up close to the wall. But the passage was so narrow and the Queen of Navarre’s farthingale was so voluminous that her silken gown brushed against the young man’s clothes, while a penetrating perfume hovered where she passed.

La Mole trembled all over and, feeling that he was in danger of falling, he tried to find a support against the wall.

Marguerite disappeared like a vision.

“Are you coming, sir?” asked the page who was to conduct La Mole to the lower gallery.

“Oh, yes — yes!” cried La Mole, joyfully; for as the page led him the same way by which Marguerite had gone, he hoped that by making haste he might see her again.

And in truth, as he reached the top of the staircase, he perceived her below; and whether she heard his step or looked round by chance, Marguerite raised her head, and La Mole saw her a second time.

“Oh,” said he, as he followed the page, “she is not a mortal — she is a goddess, and as Vergilius Maro says: ‘*Et vera incessu patuit dea.*’“

“Well?” asked the page.

“Here I am,” replied La Mole, “excuse me, here I am.”

The page, preceding La Mole, descended a story lower, opened one door, then another, and stopping,

“You are to wait here,” said he.

La Mole entered the gallery, the door of which closed after him.

The gallery was vacant except for one gentleman, who was sauntering up and down, and seemed also waiting for some one.

The evening was by this time beginning to scatter monstrous shadows from the depths of the vaulted ceiling, and though the two gentlemen were not twenty paces apart, it was impossible for either to recognize the other’s face.

La Mole drew nearer.

“By Heaven!” muttered he as soon as he was within a few feet of the other, “here is Monsieur le Comte de Coconnas again!”

At the sound of footsteps Coconnas had already turned, and was staring at La Mole with no less astonishment than the other showed.

“By Heaven!” cried he. “The devil take me but here is Monsieur de la Mole! What am I doing? Swearing in the King’s palace? Well, never mind; it seems the King swears in a different way from mine, and even in churches. Here we are at last, then, in the Louvre!”

"Yes; I suppose Monsieur de Besme introduced you?"

"Oh, he is a charming German. Who brought you in?"

"M. de Mouy — I told you the Huguenots had some interest at court. Have you seen Monsieur de Guise?"

"No, not yet. Have you obtained your audience with the King of Navarre?"

"No, but I soon shall. I was brought here and told to wait."

"Ah, you will see there is some great supper under way and we shall be placed side by side. What a strange chance! For two hours fortune has joined us! But what is the matter? You seem ill at ease."

"I?" exclaimed La Mole, shivering, for in truth he was still dazzled by the vision which had been vouchsafed him. "Oh, no, but the place in which we are brings into my mind a throng of reflections."

"Philosophical ones, I suppose. Just the same as it is with me. When you came in I was just going over in my mind all my tutor's recommendations. Monsieur le Comte, are you acquainted with Plutarch?"

"Certainly I am!" exclaimed La Mole, smiling, "he is one of my favorite authors."

"Very well," Coconnas went on gravely, "this great man does not seem to me so far wrong when he compares the gifts of nature to brilliant but ephemeral flowers, while he regards virtue as a balsamic plant of imperishable perfume and sovereign efficacy for the healing of wounds."

"Do you know Greek, Monsieur de Coconnas?" said La Mole, gazing keenly at his companion.

"No, I do not; but my tutor did, and he strongly advised me when I should be at court to talk about virtue. 'That looks well,' he said. So I assure you I am well fortified with it. By the way, are you hungry?"

"No."

"And yet you seemed anxious to taste the broiled fowl of *La Belle Étoile*. As for me, I am dying of starvation!"

"Well, Monsieur de Coconnas, here is a fine chance for you to make use of your arguments on virtue and to put your admiration for Plutarch to the proof, for that great writer says somewhere: 'It is good to accustom the soul to pain and the stomach to hunger' — '*Prepon esti tên men psvchên odunê, ton de gastéra semó askeïn.*'"

"Ah, indeed! So you know Greek?" exclaimed Coconnas in surprise.

"Faith, yes," replied La Mole, "my tutor taught me."

“By Heaven! count, your fortune is made if that is so; you will compose poetry with Charles IX. and you will talk Greek with Queen Marguerite!”

“Not to reckon that I can still talk Gascon with the King of Navarre!” added La Mole, laughing.

At this moment the door communicating with the King’s apartment opened, a step was heard, and a shade was seen approaching in the darkness. This shade materialized into a body. This body belonged to Monsieur de Besme.

He scrutinized both gentlemen, so as to pick out the one he wanted, and then motioned Coconnas to follow him.

Coconnas waved his hand to La Mole.

De Besme conducted Coconnas to the end of the gallery, opened a door, and stood at the head of a staircase.

He looked cautiously round, then up and down.

“Monsir de Gogonnas,” said he, “vere are you staying?”

“At *La Belle Étoile*, Rue de l’Arbre Sec.”

“Goot, goot! dat is glose by. Go pack to your hodel gwick and to-nide” —

He looked around him again.

“Well, to-night?”

“Vell, gome here mit a vite gross in your hat. De bassvord is ‘Gouise.’ Hush! nod a vord.”

“What time am I to come?”

“Ven you hear de dogsin.”

“What’s the dogsin?” asked Coconnas.

“Ja! de dogsin — pum! pum!”

“Oh! the tocsin!”

“Ja, vot elus tid I zay?”

“Good — I shall be here,” said Coconnas.

And, saluting De Besme, he took his departure, asking himself:

“What the devil does he mean and why should the tocsin be rung? No matter! I persist in my opinion: Monsieur de Besme is a charming Tedesco — Why not wait for the Comte de la Mole? Ah faith, no! he will probably be invited to supper with the King of Navarre.”

And Coconnas set forth for the Rue de l’Arbre Sec, where the sign of *La Belle Étoile* like a lodestone attracted him.

Meantime a gallery door which led to the King of Navarre’s apartment opened, and a page approached Monsieur de la Mole.

“You are the Comte de la Mole?” said he.

“That is my name.”

“Where do you lodge?”

“At *La Belle Étoile*, Rue de l’Arbre Sec.”

“Good, that is close to the Louvre. Listen — his majesty the King of Navarre has desired me to inform you that he cannot at present receive you; perhaps he may send for you to-night; but if to-morrow morning you have received no word, come to the Louvre.”

“But supposing the sentinel refuse me admission.”

“True: the countersign is ‘Navarre;’ that word will open all doors to you.”

“Thanks.”

“Wait, my dear sir, I am ordered to escort you to the wicket gate for fear you should get lost in the Louvre.”

“By the way, how about Coconnas?” said La Mole to himself as soon as he was fairly in the street. “Oh, he will remain to supper with the Duc de Guise.”

But as soon as he entered Maître la Hurière’s the first thing La Mole saw was Coconnas seated before a gigantic omelet.

“Oho!” cried Coconnas, laughing heartily, “I see you have no more dined with the King of Navarre than I have supped with the Duc de Guise.”

“Faith, no.”

“Are you hungry now?”

“I believe I am.”

“In spite of Plutarch?”

“Count,” said La Mole, laughing, “Plutarch says in another place: ‘Let him that hath, share with him that hath not.’ Are you willing for the love of Plutarch to share your omelet with me? Then while we eat we will converse on virtue!”

“Oh, faith, not on that subject,” cried Coconnas. “It is all right when one is at the Louvre and there is danger of eavesdroppers and one’s stomach is empty. Sit down and have something to eat with me.”

“There, now I see that fate has decidedly made us inseparable. Are you going to sleep here?”

“I have not the least idea.”

“Nor I either.”

“At any rate, I know where I shall spend the night.”

“Where?”

“Wherever you do: that is settled.”

And both burst out laughing and then set to work to do honor to Maître la Hurière’s omelet.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DEBT PAID.

Now if the reader is curious to know why Monsieur de la Mole was not received by the King of Navarre, why Monsieur de Coconnas was not permitted to see Monsieur de Guise, and lastly, why instead of eating pheasants, partridges, and venison at the Louvre, both supped at the hotel of the *Belle Étoile* on an omelet, he must kindly accompany us to the old palace of kings, and follow the queen, Marguerite of Navarre, whom La Mole had lost from sight at the entrance of the grand gallery.

While Marguerite was descending the staircase, the duke, Henry de Guise, whom she had not seen since the night of her marriage, was in the King's closet. To this staircase which Marguerite was descending there was an outlet. To the closet in which Monsieur de Guise was there was a door, and this door and this outlet both led to a corridor, which corridor led to the apartments of the queen mother, Catharine de Médicis.

Catharine de Médicis was alone, seated near a table, with her elbow leaning on a prayer-book half open, and her head leaning on a hand still remarkably beautiful, — by reason of the cosmetics with which she was supplied by the Florentine Réné, who united the double duty of perfumer and poisoner to the queen mother.

The widow of Henry II. was clothed in mourning, which she had not thrown off since her husband's death. At this period she was about fifty-two or fifty-three years of age, and owing to her stoutness and fair complexion she preserved much of her early beauty.

Her rooms, like her dress, paraded her widowhood. Everything in them bore the impress of bereavement: hangings, walls, and furniture were all in mourning. Only above a kind of dais covering a throne, where at that moment lay sleeping the little greyhound presented to the queen mother by her son-in-law, Henry of Navarre, and bearing the mythological name of Phœbe, was a painted rainbow surrounded by that Greek motto which King François I. had given her: "*Phôs pherei ê de kai a'íthzên;*" which may be translated:

“*He brings light and serenity.*”

Suddenly, and at a moment when the queen mother appeared deeply plunged in some thought which brought a half-hesitating smile to her carmen-painted lips, a man opened the door, raised the tapestry, and showed his pale face, saying:

“Everything is going badly.”

Catharine raised her head and recognized the Duc de Guise.

“Why do you say ‘Everything is going badly’?” she replied. “What do you mean, Henry?”

“I mean that the King is more than ever taken with the accursed Huguenots; and if we await his leave to execute the great enterprise, we shall wait a very long time, and perhaps forever.”

“Tell me what has happened,” said Catharine, still preserving the tranquillity of countenance habitual to her, yet to which, when occasion served, she could give such different expressions.

“Why, just now, for the twentieth time, I asked his Majesty whether he would still permit all those bravadoes which the gentlemen of the reformed religion indulge in, since their admiral was wounded.”

“And what did my son reply?” asked Catharine.

“He replied, ‘Monsieur le Duc, you must necessarily be suspected by the people as the author of the attempted assassination of my second father, the admiral; defend yourself from the imputation as best you may. As to me, I will defend myself properly, if I am insulted;’ and then he turned away to feed his dogs.”

“And you made no attempt to retain him?”

“Certainly I did; but he replied to me, in that tone which you so well know, and looking at me with the gaze peculiar to him, ‘Monsieur le Duc, my dogs are hungry; and they are not men, whom I can keep waiting.’ Whereupon I came straight to you.”

“And you have done right,” said the queen mother.

“But what is now to be done?”

“Try a last effort.”

“And who will try it?”

“I will! Is the King alone?”

“No; M. de Tavannes is with him.”

“Await me here; or, rather, follow me at a distance.”

Catharine instantly rose and went to the chamber, where on Turkey carpets and velvet cushions were the King's favorite greyhounds. On perches ranged along the wall were two or three valuable falcons and a small shrike, with which Charles IX. amused himself in bringing down the little birds in the garden of the Louvre, and that of the Tuileries, which they had just begun building.

On her way the queen mother put on a pale and anguished expression, while down her cheeks rolled a last or rather a first tear.

She noiselessly approached Charles IX. as he was giving his dogs fragments of cakes cut into equal portions.

"My son," said the queen, with a trembling in her voice so cleverly affected that the King started.

"What is it, madame?" said Charles, turning round suddenly.

"My son," replied Catharine, "I would ask your leave to retire to one of your châteaux, no matter which, so that it be as distant as possible from Paris."

"And wherefore, madame?" inquired Charles IX., fixing on his mother that glassy eye which, on certain occasions, became so penetrating.

"Because every day I receive new insults from persons of the new faith; because to-day I hear that you have been threatened by the Protestants even in your own Louvre, and I do not desire to be present at such spectacles."

"But then, madame," replied Charles IX., with an expression full of conviction, "an attempt has been made to kill their admiral. An infamous murderer has already assassinated the brave M. de Mouy. *Mort de ma vie*, mother, there must be justice in a kingdom!"

"Oh, be easy on that head, my son," said Catharine; "they will not fail justice; for if you should refuse it, they will still have it in their own way: on M. de Guise to-day, on me to-morrow, and yourself later."

"Oh, madame!" said Charles, allowing a first accent of doubt to show in his voice, "do you think so?"

"Oh, my son," replied Catharine, giving way entirely to the violence of her thoughts, "do you not see that it is no longer a question of François de Guise's death or the admiral's, of the Protestant religion or the Catholic religion, but simply of the substitution of Antoine de Bourbon's son for the son of Henry the Second?"

"Come, come, mother, you are falling again into your usual exaggeration," said the King.

“What, then, have you in mind, my son?”

“To wait, mother, — to wait. All human wisdom is in this single word. The greatest, the strongest, the most skilful is he who knows how to wait.”

“You may wait, then; I will not.”

Catharine made a courtesy, and stepping towards the door, was about to return to her apartment.

Charles IX. stopped her.

“Well, then, really, what is best to be done, mother?” he asked, “for above all I am just, and I would have every one satisfied with me.”

Catharine turned toward him.

“Come, count,” she said to Tavannes, who was caressing the King’s shrike, “tell the King your opinion as to what should be done.”

“Will your Majesty permit me?” inquired the count.

“Speak, Tavannes! — speak.”

“What does your Majesty do when, in the chase, the wounded boar turns on you?”

“By Heaven! monsieur, I wait for him, with firm foot,” replied Charles, “and stab him in the throat with my boar-spear.”

“Simply that he may not hurt you,” remarked Catharine.

“And to amuse myself,” said the King, with a sigh which indicated courage easily aroused even to ferocity; “but I should not amuse myself killing my subjects; for, after all, the Huguenots are my subjects, as well as the Catholics.”

“Then, sire,” said Catharine, “your subjects, the Huguenots, will do like the wild boar who escapes the spear thrust into his throat: they will bring down the throne.”

“Nonsense! Do you really think so, madame?” said Charles IX., with an air which denoted that he did not place great faith in his mother’s predictions.

“But have you not seen M. de Mouy and his party to-day?”

“Yes; I have seen them, for I have just left them. But what does he ask for that is not just? He has requested that his father’s murderer and the admiral’s assassin be put to death. Did we not punish M. de Montgommery for the death of my father and your husband, although that death was a simple accident?”

“Very well, sire,” said Catharine, piqued, “let us say no more. Your majesty is under the protection of that God who gives you strength, wisdom, and confidence. But I, a poor woman whom God abandons, no doubt on account of my sins, fear and yield.”

And having said this, Catharine again courteseyed and left the room, making a sign to the Duc de Guise, who had at that moment entered, to remain in her place, and try a last effort.

Charles IX. followed his mother with his eye, but this time did not recall her. He then began to caress his dogs, whistling a hunting-air.

He suddenly paused.

“My mother,” said he, “is a royal spirit, and has scruples! Really, now, it is a cool proposal, to kill off some dozens of Huguenots because they come to demand justice! Is it not their right?”

“Some dozens!” murmured the Duc de Guise.

“Ah! are you here, sir?” said the King, pretending to see him for the first time. “Yes, some dozens. A tolerable waste of life! Ah! if any one came to me and said; ‘Sire, you shall be rid of all your enemies at once, and to-morrow there shall not remain one to reproach you with the death of the others,’ why, then, I do not say” —

“Well, sire?”

“Tavannes,” said the King, “you will tire Margot; put her back on her perch. It is no reason, because she bears the name of my sister, the Queen of Navarre, that every one should caress her.”

Tavannes put the hawk on her perch, and amused himself by curling and uncurling a greyhound’s ears.

“But, sire, if any one should say to your Majesty: ‘Sire, your Majesty shall be delivered from all your enemies to-morrow’?”

“And by the intercession of what saint would this miracle be wrought?”

“Sire, to-day is the 24th of August, and therefore it would be by the interposition of Saint Bartholomew.”

“A worthy saint,” replied the King, “who allowed himself to be skinned alive!”

“So much the better; the more he suffered, the more he ought to have felt a desire for vengeance on his executioners.”

“And will you, my cousin,” said the King, “will you, with your pretty little gold-hilted sword, slay ten thousand Huguenots between now and to-morrow? Ha! ha! ha! *mort de ma vie!* you are very amusing, Monsieur de Guise!”

And the King burst into a loud laugh, but a laugh so forced that the room echoed with its sinister sound.

“Sire, one word — and one only,” continued the duke, shuddering in spite of himself at the sound of that laugh, which had nothing human in it, — ”one signal, and all is ready. I have the Swiss and eleven hundred gentlemen; I have the light horse and the citizens; your Majesty has your guards, your friends, the Catholic nobility. We are twenty to one.”

“Well, then, cousin, since you are so strong, why the devil do you come to fill my ears with all this? Act without me — act” —

And the King turned again to his dogs.

Then the portière was raised, and Catharine reappeared.

“All goes well,” she said to the duke; “urge him, and he will yield.”

And the portière fell on Catharine, without Charles IX. seeing, or at least appearing to see her.

“But yet,” continued De Guise, “I must know if, in acting as I desire, I shall act agreeably to your Majesty’s views.”

“Really, cousin Henry, you put the knife to my throat! But I shall live. By Heaven! am I not the king?”

“No, not yet, sire; but, if you will, you shall be so to-morrow.”

“Ah — what!” continued Charles, “you would kill the King of Navarre, the Prince de Condé — in my Louvre — ah!”

Then he added, in a voice scarcely audible, — ”Without the walls, I do not say” —

“Sire,” cried the duke, “they are going out this evening to join in a revel with your brother, the Duc d’Alençon.”

“Tavannes,” said the King, with well-affected impatience, “do not you see that you are teasing the dog? Here, Actéon, — come!”

And Charles IX. went out without waiting to hear more, and Tavannes and the Duc de Guise were left almost as uncertain as before.

Meantime another scene was passing in Catharine’s apartment. After she had given the Duc de Guise her counsel to remain firm, she returned to her rooms, where she found assembled the persons who were usually present when she went to bed.

Her face was now as full of joy as it had been downcast when she set out. With her most agreeable manner she dismissed her women one by one and her courtiers, and there remained only Madame Marguerite, who, seated on a coffer near the open window, was looking at the sky, absorbed in thought.

Two or three times, when she thus found herself alone with her daughter, the queen mother opened her mouth to speak, but each time a gloomy thought withheld the words ready to escape her lips.

Suddenly the portière was raised, and Henry of Navarre appeared.

The little greyhound, which was asleep on the throne, leaped up and bounded towards him.

“You here, my son!” said Catharine, starting. “Do you sup in the Louvre to-night?”

“No, madame,” replied Henry, “we are going into the city to-night, with Messieurs d’Alençon and De Condé. I almost expected to find them here paying their court to you.”

Catharine smiled.

“Go, gentlemen, go — men are so fortunate in being able to go about as they please! Are they not, my daughter?”

“Yes,” replied Marguerite, “liberty is so glorious, so sweet a thing.”

“Does that imply that I restrict yours, madame?” inquired Henry, bowing to his wife.

“No, sire; I do not complain for myself, but for women in general.”

“Are you going to see the admiral, my son?” asked Catharine.

“Yes, possibly.”

“Go, that will set a good example, and to-morrow you will give me news of him.”

“Then, madame, I will go, since you approve of this step.”

“Oh,” said Catharine, “my approval is nothing — But who goes there? Send him away, send him away.”

Henry started to go to the door to carry out Catharine’s order; but at the same instant the portière was raised and Madame de Sauve showed her blond head.

“Madame,” said she, “it is Réné, the perfumer, whom your majesty sent for.”

Catharine cast a glance as quick as lightning at Henry of Navarre.

The young prince turned slightly red and then fearfully pale. Indeed, the name of his mother’s assassin had been spoken; he felt that his face betrayed his emotion, and he went and leaned against the bar of the window.

The little greyhound growled.

At the same moment two persons entered — the one announced, and the other having no need to be so.

The first was Réné, the perfumer, who approached Catharine with all the servile obsequiousness of Florentine servants. He held in his hand a box, which he opened, and all the compartments were seen filled with powders and flasks.

The second was Madame de Lorraine, Marguerite's eldest sister. She entered by a small secret door, which led from the King's closet, and, all pale and trembling, and hoping not to be observed by Catharine, who was examining, with Madame de Sauve, the contents of the box brought by René, seated herself beside Marguerite, near whom the King of Navarre was standing, with his hand on his brow, like one who tries to rouse himself from some sudden shock.

At this instant Catharine turned round.

"Daughter," she said to Marguerite, "you may retire to your room. My son, you may go and amuse yourself in the city."

Marguerite rose, and Henry turned half round.

Madame de Lorraine seized Marguerite's hand.

"Sister," she whispered, with great quickness, "in the name of the Duc de Guise, who now saves you, as you saved him, do not go from here — do not go to your apartments."

"Eh! what say you, Claude?" inquired Catharine, turning round.

"Nothing, mother."

"You were whispering to Marguerite."

"Simply to wish her good-night, and convey a greeting to her from the Duchesse de Nevers."

"And where is that fair duchess?"

"At her brother-in-law's, M. de Guise's."

Catharine looked suspiciously at the women and frowning:

"Come here, Claude," said the queen mother.

Claude obeyed, and the queen seized her hand.

"What did you say to her, indiscreet girl that you are?" she murmured, squeezing her daughter's wrist until she nearly shrieked with pain.

"Madame," said Henry to his wife, having lost nothing of the movements of the queen, Claude, or Marguerite, — "madame, will you allow me the honor of kissing your hand?"

Marguerite extended her trembling hand.

“What did she say to you?” whispered Henry, as he stooped to imprint a kiss on her hand.

“Not to go out. In the name of Heaven, do not you go out either!”

This was like a flash; but by its light, swift as it was, Henry at once detected a complete plot.

“This is not all,” added Marguerite; “here is a letter, which a country gentleman brought.”

“Monsieur de la Mole?”

“Yes.”

“Thank you,” he said, taking the letter and putting it under his doublet; and, passing in front of his bewildered wife, he placed his hand on the shoulder of the Florentine.

“Well, Maître Réné!” he said, “and how go commercial affairs?”

“Pretty well, monseigneur, — pretty well,” replied the poisoner, with his perfidious smile.

“I should think so,” said Henry, “with men who, like you, supply all the crowned heads at home and abroad.”

“Except the King of Navarre,” replied the Florentine, impudently.

“*Ventre saint gris*, Maître Réné,” replied the king, “you are right; and yet my poor mother, who also bought of you, recommended you to me with her dying breath. Come to me to-morrow, Maître Réné, or day after to-morrow, and bring your best perfumes.”

“That would not be a bad notion,” said Catharine, smiling; “for it is said” —

“That I need some perfumery,” interrupted Henry, laughing; “who told you that, mother? Was it Margot?”

“No, my son,” replied Catharine, “it was Madame de Sauve.”

At this moment the Duchesse de Lorraine, who in spite of all her efforts could no longer contain herself, burst into loud sobs.

Henry did not even turn toward her.

“Sister, what is the matter?” cried Marguerite, darting toward Claude.

“Nothing,” said Catharine, passing between the two young women, “nothing; she has those nervous attacks, for which Mazille prescribes aromatic preparations.”

And again, and with still more force than before, she pressed her eldest daughter’s arm; then, turning toward the youngest:

"There, Margot," she said, "did you not hear me request you to retire to your room? If that is not sufficient, I command you."

"Excuse me, madame," replied Marguerite, trembling and pale; "I wish your majesty good-night."

"I hope your wishes may be heard. Good-night — good-night!"

Marguerite withdrew, staggering, and in vain seeking to meet her husband's eyes, but he did not even turn toward her.

There was a moment's silence, during which Catharine remained with her eyes fastened on the Duchess of Lorraine, who, without speaking, looked at her mother with clasped hands.

Henry's back was still turned, but he was watching the scene in a mirror, while seeming to curl his mustache with a pomade which Réné had just given to him.

"And you, Henry," said Catharine, "are you still intending to go out?"

"Yes, that's true," exclaimed the king. "Faith, I was forgetting that the Duc d'Alençon and the Prince de Condé are waiting for me! These are admirable perfumes; they quite overpower one, and destroy one's memory. Good evening, madame."

"Good evening! To-morrow you will perhaps bring me tidings of the admiral."

"Without fail — Well, Phœbe, what is it?"

"Phœbe!" said the queen mother, impatiently.

"Call her, madame," said the Béarnais, "for she will not allow me to go out."

The queen mother rose, took the little greyhound by the collar, and held her while Henry left the apartment, with his features as calm and smiling as if he did not feel in his heart that his life was in imminent peril.

Behind him the little dog, set free by Catharine de Médicis, rushed to try and overtake him, but the door was closed, and Phœbe could only put her long nose under the tapestry and give a long and mournful howl.

"Now, Charlotte," said Catharine to Madame de Sauve, "go and find Messieurs de Guise and Tavannes, who are in my oratory, and return with them; then remain with the Duchess of Lorraine, who has the vapors."

CHAPTER VII.

THE NIGHT OF THE 24TH OF AUGUST, 1572.

When La Mole and Coconnas had finished their supper — and it was meagre enough, for the fowls of *La Belle Étoile* had their pin feathers singed only on the sign — Coconnas whirled his chair around on one leg, stretched out his feet, leaned one elbow on the table, and drinking a last glass of wine, said:

"Do you mean to go to bed instantly, Monsieur de la Mole?"

"*Ma foi!* I am very much inclined, for it is possible that I may be called up in the night."

"And I, too," said Coconnas; "but it appears to me that, under the circumstances, instead of going to bed and making those wait who are to come to us, we should do better to call for cards and play a game. They would then find us quite ready."

"I would willingly accept your proposal, sir, but I have very little money for play. I have scarce a hundred gold crowns in my valise, for my whole treasure. I rely on that with which to make my fortune!"

"A hundred gold crowns!" cried Coconnas, "and you complain? By Heaven! I have but six!"

"Why," replied La Mole, "I saw you draw from your pocket a purse which appeared not only full, but I should say bloated."

"Ah," said Coconnas, "that is to defray an old debt which I am compelled to pay to an old friend of my father, whom I suspect to be, like yourself, somewhat of a Huguenot. Yes, there are here a hundred rose nobles," he added, slapping his pocket, "but these hundred rose nobles belong to Maître Mercandon. My personal patrimony, as I tell you, is limited to six crowns."

"How, then, can you play?"

"Why, it is because of that I wished to play. Besides, an idea occurs to me."

"What is it?"

"We both came to Paris on the same errand."

"Yes."

"Each of us has a powerful protector."

"Yes."

"You rely on yours, as I rely on mine."

"Yes."

"Well, then, it occurred to me that we should play first for our money, and afterwards for the first favor which came to us, either from the court or from our mistress" —

"Really, a very ingenious idea," said La Mole, with a smile, "but I confess I am not such a gamester as to risk my whole life on a card or a turn of the dice; for the first favor which may come either to you or to me will, in all probability, involve our whole life."

"Well, let us drop out of account the first favor from the court and play for our mistress's first favor."

"I see only one objection to that," said La Mole.

"What objection?"

"I have no mistress!"

"Nor I either. But I expect to have one soon. Thank God! we are not cut out to want one long!"

"Undoubtedly, as you say, you will have your wish, Monsieur de Coconnas, but as I have not the same confidence in my love-star, I feel that it would be robbery, I to pit my fortune against yours. But, if you will, let us play until your six crowns be lost or doubled, and if lost, and you desire to continue the game, you are a gentleman, and your word is as good as gold."

"Well and good!" cried Coconnas, "that's the talk! You are right, sir, a gentleman's word is as good as gold, especially when he has credit at court. Thus, believe me, I did not risk too much when I proposed to play for the first favor we might receive."

"Doubtless, and you might lose it, but I could not gain it; for, as I am with the King of Navarre, I could not receive anything from the Duc de Guise."

"Ah, the heretic!" muttered the landlord as he was at work polishing up his old helmet, "I got on the right scent, did I?" And he stopped his work long enough to cross himself piously.

"Well, then," continued Coconnas, shuffling the cards which the waiter had just brought him, "you are of the" —

"Of the what?"

"Of the new religion."

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"Well, say that I am," said La Mole, with a smile, "have you anything against us?"

"Oh! thank God, no! It is all the same to me. I hate Huguenotry with all my heart, but I do not hate the Huguenots; besides, they are in fashion just now."

"Yes," replied La Mole, smiling; "to wit, the shooting at the admiral with an arquebuse; but supposing we have a game of arquebusades."

"Anything you please," said Coconnas, "provided I get to playing, it is all the same to me."

"Well, let us play, then," said La Mole, picking up his cards and arranging them in his hand.

"Yes, play ahead and with all confidence, for even if I were to lose a hundred crowns of gold against yours I shall have the wherewithal to pay you to-morrow morning."

"Then your fortune will come while you are asleep."

"No; I am going to find it."

"Where? Tell me and I'll go with you."

"At the Louvre."

"Are you going back there to-night?"

"Yes; to-night I have a private audience with the great Duc de Guise."

As soon as Coconnas began to speak about going to seek his fortune at the Louvre, La Hurière stopped polishing his sallet and went and stood behind La Mole's chair, so that Coconnas alone could see him, and made signs to him, which the Piedmontese, absorbed in his game and the conversation, did not notice.

"Well, it is miraculous," remarked La Mole; "and you were right when you said that we were born under the same star. I have also an appointment at the Louvre to-night, but not with the Duc de Guise; mine is with the King of Navarre."

"Have you a pass-word?"

"Yes."

"A rallying sign?"

"No."

"Well, I have one, and my pass-word is" —

As the Piedmontese was saying these words, La Hurière made such an expressive gesture that the indiscreet gentleman, who happened at that instant to raise his head, paused petrified more by the action than by the turn of the cards which had just caused him to lose three crowns.

La Mole looked around, but saw only his landlord standing behind him with folded arms and wearing on his head the sallet which he had seen him polishing the moment before.

“What is the matter, pray?” inquired La Mole of Coconnas.

Coconnas looked at the landlord and at his companion without answering, for he could make nothing out of Maître La Hurière’s redoubled gestures.

La Hurière saw that he must go to his aid:

“It is only that I am very fond of cards myself,” said he, speaking rapidly, “and I came closer to see the trick which made you gain, and the gentleman saw me with my war helmet on, and as I am only a poor bourgeois, it surprised him.”

“You make a fine figure, indeed you do!” cried La Mole, with a burst of laughter.

“Oh, sir,” replied La Hurière with admirably pretended good nature and a shrug of the shoulders expressive of his inferiority, “we poor fellows are not very valiant and our appearance is not elegant. It is all right for you fine gentlemen to wear glittering helmets and carry keen rapiers, and provided we mount guard strictly” —

“Aha!” said La Mole, taking his turn at shuffling the cards. “So you mount guard, do you?”

“*Eh, mon Dieu, oui, Monsieur le Comte!* I am sergeant in a company of citizen militia.”

After having said this while La Mole was engaged in dealing the cards, La Hurière withdrew, putting his finger on his lips as a sign of discretion for Coconnas, who was more amazed than ever.

This signal for caution was doubtless the reason that he lost almost as rapidly the second time as the first.

“Well,” observed La Mole, “this makes exactly your six crowns. Will you have your revenge on your future fortune?”

“Willingly,” replied Coconnas.

“But before you begin, did you not say you had an appointment with the Duc de Guise?”

Coconnas looked toward the kitchen, and saw the great eyes of La Hurière, who was repeating his warning.

"Yes," he replied, "but it is not yet time. But now let us talk a little about yourself, Monsieur de la Mole."

"We should do better, I think, by talking of the game, my dear Monsieur de Coconnas; for unless I am very much mistaken, I am in a fair way of gaining six more crowns."

"By Heaven! that is true! I always heard that the Huguenots had good luck at cards. Devil take me if I haven't a good mind to turn Huguenot!"

La Hurière's eyes sparkled like two coals; but Coconnas, absorbed in his game, did not notice them. "Do so, count, do so," said La Mole, "and though the way in which the change came about is odd, you will be well received among us."

Coconnas scratched his ear.

"If I were sure that your good luck came from that," he said, "I would; for I really do not stickle so overwhelmingly for the mass, and as the King does not think so much of it either" —

"Then it is such a beautiful religion," said La Mole; "so simple, so pure" —

"And, moreover, it is in fashion," said Coconnas; "and, moreover, it brings good luck at cards; for the devil take me if you do not hold all the aces, and yet I have watched you closely, and you play very fairly; you do not cheat; it must be the religion" —

"You owe me six crowns more," said La Mole, quietly.

"Ah, how you tempt me!" said Coconnas; "and if I am not satisfied with Monsieur de Guise to-night" —

"Well?"

"Well, to-morrow I will ask you to present me to the King of Navarre and, be assured, if once I become a Huguenot, I will out-Huguenot Luther, Calvin, Melanchthon, and all the reformers on earth!"

"Hush!" said La Mole, "you will get into a quarrel with our host."

"Ah, that is true," said Coconnas, looking toward the kitchen; "but — no, he is not listening; he is too much occupied at this moment."

"What is he doing, pray?" inquired La Mole, who could not see him from where he was.

"He is talking with — devil take me! it is he!"

"Who?"

“Why, that night-bird with whom he was discoursing when we arrived. The man in the yellow doublet and drab-colored cloak. By Heaven! how earnestly he talks. Say, Maître La Hurière, are you engaged in politics?”

But this time Maître La Hurière’s answer was a gesture so energetic and imperious that in spite of his love for the picture card Coconnas got up and went to him.

“What is the matter with you?” asked La Mole.

“You wish wine, sir?” said La Hurière, seizing Coconnas’ hand eagerly. “You shall have it. Grégoire, wine for these gentlemen!”

Then he whispered in his ear:

“Silence, if you value your life, silence! And get rid of your companion.”

La Hurière was so pale, the sallow man so lugubrious, that Coconnas felt a shiver run over him, and turning to La Mole said:

“My dear sir, I must beg you to excuse me. I have lost fifty crowns in the turn of a hand. I am in bad luck to-night, and I fear I may get into difficulties.”

“Well, sir, as you please,” replied La Mole; “besides, I shall not be sorry to lie down for a time. Maître la Hurière!”

“Monsieur le Comte?”

“If any one comes for me from the King of Navarre, wake me; I shall be dressed, and consequently ready.”

“So shall I,” said Coconnas; “and that I may not keep his highness waiting, I will prepare the sign. Maître la Hurière, some white paper and scissors!”

“Grégoire!” cried La Hurière, “white paper to write a letter on and scissors to cut the envelope with.”

“Ah!” said the Piedmontese to himself. “Something extraordinary is going on here!”

“Good-night, Monsieur de Coconnas,” said La Mole; “and you, landlord, be so good as to light me to my room. Good luck, my friend!” and La Mole disappeared up the winding staircase, followed by La Hurière.

Then the mysterious man, taking Coconnas by the arm, said to him, speaking very rapidly:

“Sir, you have very nearly betrayed a secret on which depends the fate of a kingdom. God saw fit to have you close your mouth in time. One word more, and I should have brought you down with my arquebuse. Now we are alone, fortunately; listen!”

“But who are you that you address me with this tone of authority?”

“Did you ever hear talk of the Sire de Maurevel?”

“The assassin of the admiral?”

“And of Captain de Mouy.”

“Yes.”

“Well, I am the Sire de Maurevel.”

“Oho!” said Coconnas.

“Now listen to me!”

“By Heaven! I assure you I will listen!”

“Hush!” said Maurevel, putting his finger on his mouth.

Coconnas listened.

At that moment he heard the landlord close the door of a chamber, then the door of a corridor, and bolt it. Then he rushed down the stairs to join the two speakers.

He offered a chair to Coconnas, a chair to Maurevel, and took one for himself.

“All is safe now, Monsieur de Maurevel,” said he; “you may speak.”

It was striking eleven o’clock at Saint Germain l’Auxerrois. Maurevel counted each of the hammer-strokes as they sounded clear and melancholy through the night, and when the last echo had died away in space he turned to Coconnas, who was greatly mystified at seeing the precautions taken by the two men. “Sir,” he asked, “are you a good Catholic?”

“Why, I think I am,” replied Coconnas.

“Sir,” continued Maurevel, “are you devoted to the King?”

“Heart and soul! I even feel that you insult me, sir, in asking such a question.”

“We will not quarrel over that; only you are going to follow us.”

“Whither?”

“That is of little consequence — put yourself in our hands; your fortune, and perhaps your life, is at stake.”

“I tell you, sir, that at midnight I have an appointment at the Louvre.”

“That is where we are going.”

“Monsieur de Guise is expecting me there.”

“And us also.”

“But I have a private pass-word,” continued Coconnas, somewhat mortified at sharing with the Sire de Maurevel and Maître La Hurière the honor of his audience.

"So have we."

"But I have a sign of recognition."

Maurevel smiled.

Then he drew from beneath his doublet a handful of crosses in white stuff, gave one to La Hurière, one to Coconnas, and took another for himself. La Hurière fastened his to his helmet. Maurevel attached his to the side of his hat.

"Ah," said Coconnas, amazed, "the appointment and the rallying password were for every one?"

"Yes, sir, — that is to say, for all good Catholics."

"Then there is a festival at the Louvre — some royal banquet, is there not?" said Coconnas; "and it is desired to exclude those hounds of Huguenots, — good, capital, excellent! They have been showing off too long."

"Yes, there is to be a festival at the Louvre — a royal banquet; and the Huguenots are invited; and moreover, they will be the heroes of the festival, and will pay for the banquet, and if you will be one of us, we will begin by going to invite their principal champion — their Gideon, as they call him."

"The admiral!" cried Coconnas.

"Yes, the old Gaspard, whom I missed, like a fool, though I aimed at him with the King's arquebuse."

"And this, my gentleman, is why I was polishing my sallet, sharpening my sword, and putting an edge on my knives," said La Hurière, in a harsh voice consonant with war.

At these words Coconnas shuddered and turned very pale, for he began to understand.

"What, really," he exclaimed, "this festival — this banquet is a — you are going" —

"You have been a long time guessing, sir," said Maurevel, "and it is easy to see that you are not so weary of these insolent heretics as we are."

"And you take on yourself," he said, "to go to the admiral's and to" —

Maurevel smiled, and drawing Coconnas to the window he said:

"Look there! — do you see, in the small square at the end of the street, behind the church, a troop drawn up noiselessly in the shadow?"

"Yes."

"The men forming that troop have, like Maître la Hurière, and myself, and yourself, a cross in their hats."

“Well?”

“Well, these men are a company of Swiss, from the smaller cantons, commanded by Toquenot, — you know the men from the smaller cantons are the King’s cronies.”

“Oho!” said Coconnas.

“Now look at that troop of horse passing along the Quay — do you recognize their leader?”

“How can I recognize him?” asked Coconnas, with a shudder; “I reached Paris only this evening.”

“Well, then, he is the one with whom you have a rendezvous at the Louvre at midnight. See, he is going to wait for you!”

“The Duc de Guise?”

“Himself! His escorts are Marcel, the ex-provost of the tradesmen, and Jean Choron, the present provost. These two are going to summon their companies, and here, down this street comes the captain of the quarter. See what he will do!”

“He knocks at each door; but what is there on the doors at which he knocks?”

“A white cross, young man, such as that which we have in our hats. In days gone by they let God bear the burden of distinguishing his own; now we have grown more civilized and we save him the bother.”

“But at each house at which he knocks the door opens and from each house armed citizens come out.”

“He will knock here in turn, and we shall in turn go out.”

“What,” said Coconnas, “every one called out to go and kill one old Huguenot? By Heaven! it is shameful! It is an affair of cut-throats, and not of soldiers.”

“Young man,” replied Maurevel, “if the old are objectionable to you, you may choose young ones — you will find plenty for all tastes. If you despise daggers, use your sword, for the Huguenots are not the men to allow their throats to be cut without defending themselves, and you know that Huguenots, young or old, are tough.”

“But are they all going to be killed, then?” cried Coconnas.

“All!”

“By the King’s order?”

“By order of the King and Monsieur de Guise.”

“And when?”

“When you hear the bell of Saint Germain l’Auxerrois.”

“Oh! so that was why that amiable German attached to the Duc de Guise — what is his name?”

“Monsieur de Besme.”

“That is it. That is why Monsieur de Besme told me to hasten at the first sound of the tocsin.”

“So then you have seen Monsieur de Besme?”

“I have seen him and spoken to him.”

“Where?”

“At the Louvre. He admitted me, gave me the pass-word, gave me” —

“Look there!”

“By Heaven! — there he is himself.”

“Would you speak with him?”

“Why, really, I should not object.”

Maurevel carefully opened the window; Besme was passing at the moment with twenty soldiers.

“*Guise and Lorraine!*” said Maurevel.

Besme turned round, and perceiving that he himself was addressed, came under the window.

“Oh, is it you, Monsir de Maurefel?”

“Yes, ’tis I; what are you looking for?”

“I am looking for de hostelry of de *Belle Étoile*, to find a Monsir Gogonnas.”

“Here I am, Monsieur de Besme,” said the young man.

“Goot, goot; are you ready?”

“Yes — to do what?”

“Vatefer Monsieur de Maurefel may dell you, for he is a goot Gatolic.”

“Do you hear?” inquired Maurevel.

“Yes,” replied Coconnas, “but, Monsieur de Besme, where are you going?”

“I?” asked Monsieur de Besme, with a laugh.

“Yes, you.”

“I am going to fire off a leedle wort at the admiral.”

“Fire off two, if need be,” said Maurevel, “and this time, if he gets up at the first, do not let him get up at the second.”

“Haf no vear, Monsir de Maurefel, haf no vear, und meanvile get dis yoong mahn on de right drack.”

“Don’t worry about me: the Coconnas are regular bloodhounds, and I am a chip off the old block.”

“Atieu.”

“Go on!”

“Unt you?”

“Begin the hunt; we shall be at the death.”

De Besme went on, and Maurevel closed the window.

“Did you hear, young man?” said Maurevel; “if you have any private enemy, even if he is not altogether a Huguenot, you can put him on your list, and he will pass with the others.”

Coconnas, more bewildered than ever with what he saw and heard, looked first at his landlord, who was assuming formidable attitudes, and then at Maurevel, who quietly drew a paper from his pocket.

“Here’s my list,” said he; “three hundred. Let each good Catholic do this night one-tenth part of the business I shall do, and to-morrow there will not remain one single heretic in the kingdom.”

“Hush!” said La Hurière.

“What is it?” inquired Coconnas and Maurevel together.

They heard the first pulsation from the bell in Saint Germain l’Auxerrois.

“The signal!” exclaimed Maurevel. “The time is set forward! I was told it was appointed at midnight — so much the better. When it concerns the interest of God and the King, it is better for clocks to be fast than slow!”

In reality they heard the church bell mournfully tolling.

Then a shot was fired, and almost instantly the light of several torches blazed up like flashes of lightning in the Rue de l’Arbre Sec.

Coconnas passed his hand over his brow, which was damp with perspiration.

“It has begun!” cried Maurevel. “Now to work — away!”

“One moment, one moment!” said the landlord. “Before we begin, let us protect the camp, as we say in the army. I do not wish to have my wife and children’s throats cut while I am out. There is a Huguenot here.”

“Monsieur de la Mole!” said Coconnas, starting.

“Yes, the heretic has thrown himself into the wolf’s throat.”

“What!” said Coconnas, “would you attack your guest?”

“I gave an extra edge to my rapier for his special benefit.”

“Oho!” said the Piedmontese, frowning.

“I never yet killed anything but my rabbits, ducks, and chickens,” replied the worthy inn-keeper, “and I do not know very well how to go to work to kill a man; well, I will practise on him, and if I am clumsy, no one will be there to laugh at me.”

“By Heaven! it is hard,” said Coconnas. “Monsieur de la Mole is my companion; Monsieur de la Mole has supped with me; Monsieur de la Mole has played with me” —

“Yes; but Monsieur de la Mole is a heretic,” said Maurevel. “Monsieur de la Mole is doomed; and if we do not kill him, others will.”

“Not to say,” added the host, “that he has won fifty crowns from you.”

“True,” said Coconnas; “but fairly, I am sure.”

“Fairly or not, you must pay them, while, if I kill him, you are quits.”

“Come, come!” cried Maurevel; “make haste, gentlemen, an arquebuse-shot, a rapier-thrust, a blow with a mallet, a stroke with any weapon you please; but get done with it if you wish to reach the admiral’s in time to help Monsieur de Guise as we promised.”

Coconnas sighed.

“I’ll make haste!” cried La Hurière, “wait for me.”

“By Heaven!” cried Coconnas, “he will put the poor fellow to great pain, and, perhaps, rob him. I must be present to finish him, if requisite, and to prevent any one from touching his money.”

And impelled by this happy thought, Coconnas followed La Hurière upstairs, and soon overtook him, for according as the landlord went up, doubtless as the effect of reflection, he slackened his pace.

As he reached the door, Coconnas still following, many gunshots were discharged in the street. Instantly La Mole was heard to leap out of bed and the flooring creaked under his feet.

“*Diable!*” muttered La Hurière, somewhat disconcerted; “that has awakened him, I think.”

“It looks like it,” observed Coconnas.

“And he will defend himself.”

“He is capable of it. Suppose, now, Maître la Hurière, he were to kill you; that would be droll!”

“Hum, hum!” responded the landlord, but knowing himself to be armed with a good arquebuse, he took courage and dashed the door in with a vigorous kick.

La Mole, without his hat, but dressed, was entrenched behind his bed, his sword between his teeth, and his pistols in his hands.

"Oho!" said Coconnas, his nostrils expanding as if he had been a wild beast smelling blood, "this grows interesting, Maître la Hurière. Forward!"

"Ah, you would assassinate me, it seems!" cried La Mole, with glaring eyes; "and it is you, wretch!"

Maître la Hurière's reply to this was to take aim at the young man with his arquebuse; but La Mole was on his guard, and as he fired, fell on his knees, and the ball flew over his head.

"Help!" cried La Mole; "help, Monsieur de Coconnas!"

"Help, Monsieur de Maurevel! — help!" cried La Hurière.

"*Ma foi!* Monsieur de la Mole," replied Coconnas, "all I can do in this affair is not to join the attack against you. It seems all the Huguenots are to be put to death to-night, in the King's name. Get out of it as well as you can."

"Ah, traitors! assassins! — is it so? Well, then, take this!" and La Mole, aiming in his turn, fired one of his pistols. La Hurière, who had kept his eye on him, dodged to one side; but Coconnas, not anticipating such a reply, stayed where he was, and the bullet grazed his shoulder.

"By Heaven!" he exclaimed, grinding his teeth; "I have it. Well, then, let it be we two, since you will have it so!"

And drawing his rapier, he rushed on La Mole.

Had he been alone La Mole would, doubtless, have awaited his attack; but Coconnas had La Hurière to aid him, who was reloading his gun, and Maurevel, who, responding to the innkeeper's invitation, was rushing upstairs four steps at a time.

La Mole, therefore, dashed into a small closet, which he bolted inside.

"Ah, coward!" cried Coconnas, furious, and striking at the door with the pommel of his sword; "wait! wait! and I will make as many holes in your body as you have gained crowns of me to-night. I came up to prevent you from suffering! Oh, I came up to prevent you from being robbed and you pay me back by putting a bullet into my shoulder! Wait for me, coward, wait!"

While this was going on, Maître la Hurière came up and with one blow with the butt-end of his arquebuse smashed in the door.

Coconnas darted into the closet, but only bare walls met him. The closet was empty and the window was open.

“He must have jumped out,” said the landlord, “and as we are on the fourth story, he is surely dead.”

“Or he has escaped by the roof of the next house,” said Coconnas, putting his leg on the window-sill and preparing to follow him over this narrow and slippery route; but Maurevel and La Hurière seized him and drew him back into the room.

“Are you mad?” they both exclaimed at once; “you will kill yourself!”

“Bah!” said Coconnas, “I am a mountaineer, and used to climbing glaciers; besides, when a man has once offended me, I would go up to heaven or descend to hell with him, by whatever route he pleases. Let me do as I wish.”

“Well,” said Maurevel, “he is either dead or a long way off by this time. Come with us; and if he escape you, you will find a thousand others to take his place.”

“You are right,” cried Coconnas. “Death to the Huguenots! I want revenge, and the sooner the better.”

And the three rushed down the staircase, like an avalanche.

“To the admiral’s!” shouted Maurevel.

“To the admiral’s!” echoed La Hurière.

“To the admiral’s, then, if it must be so!” cried Coconnas in his turn.

And all three, leaving the *Belle Étoile* in charge of Grégoire and the other waiters, hastened toward the admiral’s hôtel in the Rue de Béthizy; a bright light and the report of fire-arms guided them in that direction.

“Ah, who comes here?” cried Coconnas. “A man without his doublet or scarf!”

“It is some one escaping,” said Maurevel.

“Fire! fire!” said Coconnas; “you who have arquebuses.”

“Faith, not I,” replied Maurevel. “I keep my powder for better game.”

“You, then, La Hurière!”

“Wait, wait!” said the innkeeper, taking aim.

“Oh, yes, wait,” cried Coconnas, “and meantime he will escape.”

And he rushed after the unhappy wretch, whom he soon overtook, as he was wounded; but at the moment when, in order that he might not strike him behind, he exclaimed, “Turn, will you! turn!” the report of an arquebuse was heard, a bullet whistled by Coconnas’s ears, and the fugitive rolled over, like a hare in its swiftest flight struck by the shot of the sportsman.

A cry of triumph was heard behind Coconnas. The Piedmontese turned round and saw La Hurière brandishing his weapon.

“Ah,” he exclaimed, “I have handselled this time at any rate.”

“And only just missed making a hole quite through me.”

“Be on your guard! — be on your guard!” cried La Hurière.

Coconnas sprung back. The wounded man had risen on his knee, and, eager for revenge, was just on the point of stabbing him with his poniard, when the landlord’s warning put the Piedmontese on his guard.

“Ah, viper!” shouted Coconnas; and rushing at the wounded man, he thrust his sword through him three times up to the hilt.

“And now,” cried he, leaving the Huguenot in the agonies of death, “to the admiral’s! — to the admiral’s!”

“Aha! my gentlemen,” said Maurevel, “it seems to work.”

“Faith! yes,” replied Coconnas. “I do not know if it is the smell of gunpowder makes me drunk, or the sight of blood excites me, but by Heaven! I am thirsty for slaughter. It is like a battue of men. I have as yet only had battues of bears and wolves, and on my honor, a battue of men seems more amusing.”

And the three went on their way.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MASSACRE.

The hôtel occupied by the admiral, as we have said, was situated in the Rue de Béthizy. It was a great mansion at the rear of a court and had two wings giving on the street. A wall furnished with a large gate and two small grilled doors stretched from wing to wing.

When our three Guisards reached the end of the Rue de Béthizy, which is a continuation of the Rue des Fossés Saint Germain l’Auxerrois, they saw the hôtel surrounded by Swiss, by soldiers, and by armed citizens; every one had in his right hand either a sword or a pike or an arquebuse, and some held in their left hands torches, shedding over the scene a fitful and melancholy glare which, according as the throng moved, shifted along the street, climbed the walls; or spread over that living sea where every weapon cast its answering flash.

All around the hôtel and in the Rues Tirechappe, Étienne, and Bertin Poirée the terrible work was proceeding. Long shouts were heard, there was an incessant rattle of musketry, and from time to time some wretch, half naked, pale, and drenched in blood, leaped like a hunted stag into the circle of lugubrious light where a host of fiends seemed to be at work.

In an instant Coconnas, Maurevel, and La Hurière, accredited by their white crosses, and received with cries of welcome, were in the thickest of this struggling, panting mob. Doubtless they would not have been able to advance had not some of the throng recognized Maurevel and made way for him. Coconnas and La Hurière followed him closely and the three therefore contrived to get into the court-yard.

In the centre of this court-yard, the three doors of which had been burst open, a man, around whom the assassins formed a respectful circle, stood leaning on his drawn rapier, and eagerly looking up at a balcony about fifteen feet above him, and extending in front of the principal window of the hôtel.

This man stamped impatiently on the ground, and from time to time questioned those that were nearest to him.

“Nothing yet!” murmured he. “No one! — he must have been warned and has escaped. What do you think, Du Gast?”

“Impossible, monseigneur.”

“Why? Did you not tell me that just before we arrived a man, bare-headed, a drawn sword in his hand, came running, as if pursued, knocked at the door, and was admitted?”

“Yes, monseigneur; but M. de Besme came up immediately, the gates were shattered, and the hôtel was surrounded.”

“The man went in sure enough, but he has not gone out.”

“Why,” said Coconnas to La Hurière, “if my eyes do not deceive me, I see Monsieur de Guise.”

“You do see him, sir. Yes; the great Henry de Guise is come in person to watch for the admiral and serve him as he served the duke’s father. Every one has his day, and it is our turn now.”

“Holà, Besme, holà!” cried the duke, in his powerful voice, “have you not finished yet?”

And he struck his sword so forcibly against the stones that sparks flew out.

At this instant shouts were heard in the hôtel — then several shots — then a great shuffling of feet and a clashing of swords, and then all was again silent.

The duke was about to rush into the house.

“Monseigneur, monseigneur!” said Du Gast, detaining him, “your dignity commands you to wait here.”

“You are right, Du Gast. I must stay here; but I am dying with impatience and anxiety. If he were to escape me!”

Suddenly the noise of feet came nearer — the windows of the first floor were lighted up with what seemed the reflection of a conflagration.

The window, to which the duke’s eyes had been so many times lifted, opened, or, rather, was shattered to pieces, and a man, his pale face and white neck stained with blood, appeared on the balcony.

“Ah! at last, Besme!” cried the duke; “speak! speak!”

“Louk! louk!” replied the German coldly, and stooping down he lifted up something which seemed like a heavy body.

“But where are the others?” asked the duke, impatiently, “where are the others?”

“De udders are vinishing de udders!”

"And what have you done?"

"Vait! You shall peholt! Shtant pack a liddle."

The duke fell back a step.

At that instant the object Besme was dragging toward him with such effort became visible.

It was the body of an old man.

He lifted it above the balcony, held it suspended an instant, and then flung it down at his master's feet.

The heavy thud, the billows of blood spurting from the body and spattering the pavement all around, filled even the duke himself with horror; but this feeling lasted only an instant, and curiosity caused every one to crowd forward, so that the glare of the torches flickered on the victim's body.

They could see a white beard, a venerable face, and limbs contracted by death.

"The admiral!" cried twenty voices, as instantaneously hushed.

"Yes, the admiral, here he is!" said the duke, approaching the corpse, and contemplating it with silent ecstasy.

"The admiral! the admiral!" repeated the witnesses of this terrible scene, crowding together and timidly approaching the old man, majestic even in death.

"Ah, at last, Gaspard!" said the Duke de Guise, triumphantly. "Murderer of my father! thus do I avenge him!"

And the duke dared to plant his foot on the breast of the Protestant hero.

But instantly the dying warrior opened his eyes, his bleeding and mutilated hand was clinched for the last time, and the admiral, though without stirring, said to the duke in a sepulchral voice:

"Henry de Guise, some day the assassin's foot shall be felt on your breast. I did not kill your father. A curse upon you."

The duke, pale, and trembling in spite of himself, felt a cold shudder come over him. He passed his hand across his brow, as if to dispel the fearful vision; when he dared again to glance at the admiral his eyes were closed, his hand unclinched, and a stream of black blood was flowing from the mouth which had just pronounced such terrible words.

The duke raised his sword with a gesture of desperate resolution.

"Vell, monsir, are you gondent?"

"Yes, my worthy friend, yes, for you have revenged" —

“The Dugue François, haf I not?”

“Our religion,” replied Henry, in a solemn voice. “And now,” he went on, addressing the Swiss, the soldiers, and citizens who filled the court and street, “to work, my friends, to work!”

“Good evening, M. de Besme,” said Coconnas with a sort of admiration, approaching the German, who still stood on the balcony, calmly wiping his sword.

“So you settled him, did you?” cried La Hurière; “how did you manage it?”

“Oh, zimbly, zimbly; he haf heerd de gommotion, he haf oben de door unt I joost brick my rabier troo his potty. But I tink dey am gilling Téligny now. I hear his gries!”

At that instant, in fact, several shrieks, apparently uttered by a woman in distress, were heard; the windows of the long gallery which formed a wing of the hotel were lighted up with a red glare; two men were seen fleeing, pursued by a long line of assassins. An arquebuse-shot killed one; the other, finding an open window directly in his way, without stopping to look at the distance from the ground, sprang boldly into the courtyard below, heeding not the enemies who awaited him there.

“Kill! kill!” cried the assassins, seeing their prey about to escape them.

The fugitive picked up his sword, which as he stumbled had fallen from his hand, dashed headlong through the soldiers, upset three or four, ran one through the body, and amid the pistol-shots and curses of the soldiers, rendered furious because they had missed him, darted like lightning in front of Coconnas, who was waiting for him at the gate with his poniard in his hand.

“Touched!” cried the Piedmontese, piercing his arm with his keen, delicate blade.

“Coward!” replied the fugitive, striking his enemy in the face with the flat of his weapon, for want of room to thrust at him with its point.

“A thousand devils!” cried Coconnas; “it’s Monsieur de la Mole!”

“Monsieur de la Mole!” reëchoed La Hurière and Maurevel.

“He is the one who warned the admiral!” cried several soldiers.

“Kill him — kill him!” was shouted on all sides.

Coconnas, La Hurière, and a dozen soldiers rushed in pursuit of La Mole, who, covered with blood, and having attained that state of exaltation which is the last resource of human strength, dashed through the streets, with no other guide than instinct. Behind him, the footsteps and shouts of his enemies spurred him on and seemed to give him wings. Occasionally a bullet would whistle by his ears and suddenly add new swiftness to his flight just as it was beginning to slacken. He no longer breathed; it was not breath, but a dull rattle, a hoarse panting, that came from his chest. Perspiration and blood wet his locks and ran together down his face.

His doublet soon became too oppressive for the beating of his heart and he tore it off. Soon his sword became too heavy for his hand and he flung it far away. Sometimes it seemed to him that the footsteps of his pursuers were farther off and that he was about to escape them; but in response to their shouts, other murderers who were along his path and nearer to him left off their bloody occupations and started in pursuit of him.

Suddenly he caught sight of the river flowing silently at his left; it seemed to him that he should feel, like a stag at bay, an ineffable pleasure in plunging into it, and only the supreme power of reason could restrain him.

On his right was the Louvre, dark and motionless, but full of strange and ominous sounds; soldiers on the drawbridge came and went, and helmets and cuirasses glittered in the moonlight. La Mole thought of the King of Navarre, as he had before thought of Coligny; they were his only protectors. He collected all his strength, and inwardly vowing to abjure his faith should he escape the massacre, by making a detour of a score or two of yards he misled the mob pursuing him, darted straight for the Louvre, leaped upon the drawbridge among the soldiers, received another poniard stab which grazed his side, and despite the cries of “Kill — kill!” which resounded on all sides, and the opposing weapons of the sentinels, darted like an arrow through the court, into the vestibule, mounted the staircase, then up two stories higher, recognized a door, and leaning against it, struck it violently with his hands and feet.

“Who is there?” asked a woman’s voice.

“Oh, my God!” murmured La Mole; “they are coming, I hear them; ’tis I — ’tis I!”

“Who are you?” said the voice.

La Mole recollected the pass-word.

“Navarre — Navarre!” cried he.

The door instantly opened. La Mole, without thanking, without even seeing Gillonne, dashed into the vestibule, then along a corridor, through two or three chambers, until at last he entered a room lighted by a lamp suspended from the ceiling.

Behind curtains of velvet with gold fleurs-de-lis, in a bed of carved oak, a lady, half naked, leaning on her arm, stared at him with eyes wide open with terror.

La Mole sprang toward her.

"Madame," cried he, "they are killing, they are butchering my brothers — they seek to kill me, to butcher me also! Ah! you are the queen — save me!"

And he threw himself at her feet, leaving on the carpet a large track of blood.

At the sight of a man pale, exhausted, and bleeding at her feet, the Queen of Navarre started up in terror, hid her face in her hands, and called for help.

"Madame," cried La Mole, endeavoring to rise, "in the name of Heaven do not call, for if you are heard I am lost! Assassins are in my track — they are rushing up the stairs behind me. I hear them — there they are! there they are!"

"Help!" cried the queen, beside herself, "help!"

"Ah!" said La Mole, despairingly, "you have killed me. To die by so sweet a voice, so fair a hand! I did not think it possible."

At the same time the door flew open, and a troop of men, their faces covered with blood and blackened with powder, their swords drawn, and their pikes and arquebuses levelled, rushed into the apartment.

Coconnas was at their head — his red hair bristling, his pale blue eyes extraordinarily dilated, his cheek cut open by La Mole's sword, which had ploughed its bloody furrow there. Thus disfigured, the Piedmontese was terrible to behold.

"By Heaven!" he cried, "there he is! there he is! Ah! this time we have him at last!"

La Mole looked round him for a weapon, but in vain; he glanced at the queen, and saw the deepest pity depicted in her face; then he felt that she alone could save him; he threw his arms round her.

Coconnas advanced, and with the point of his long rapier again wounded his enemy's shoulder, and the crimson drops of warm blood stained the white and perfumed sheets of Marguerite's couch.

Marguerite saw the blood flow; she felt the shudder that ran through La Mole's frame; she threw herself with him into the recess between the bed and the wall. It was time, for La Mole, whose strength was exhausted, was incapable of flight or resistance; he leaned his pallid head on Marguerite's shoulder, and his hand convulsively seized and tore the thin embroidered cambric which enveloped Marguerite's body in a billow of gauze.

"Oh, madame," murmured he, in a dying voice, "save me."

He could say no more. A mist like the darkness of death came over his eyes, his head sunk back, his arms fell at his side, his legs gave way, and he sank on the floor, bathed in his blood, and dragging the queen with him.

At this moment Coconnas, excited by the shouts, intoxicated by the sight of blood, and exasperated by the long chase, advanced toward the recess; in another instant his sword would have pierced La Mole's heart, and perhaps Marguerite's also.

At the sight of the bare steel, and even more moved at such brutal insolence, the daughter of kings drew herself up to her full stature and uttered such a shriek of terror, indignation, and rage that the Piedmontese stood petrified by an unknown feeling; and yet undoubtedly had this scene been prolonged and no other actor taken part in it, his feeling would have vanished like a morning snow under an April sun. But suddenly a secret door in the wall opened, and a pale young man of sixteen or seventeen, dressed in black and with his hair in disorder, rushed in.

"Wait, sister!" he cried; "here I am, here I am!"

"François! François!" cried Marguerite; "help! help!"

"The Duc d'Alençon!" murmured La Hurière, grounding his arquebuse.

"By Heaven! a son of France!" growled Coconnas, drawing back.

The duke glanced round him. He saw Marguerite, dishevelled, more lovely than ever, leaning against the wall, surrounded by men, fury in their eyes, sweat on their foreheads, and foam in their mouths.

"Wretches!" cried he.

"Save me, brother!" shrieked Marguerite. "They are going to kill me!"

A flame flashed across the duke's pallid face.

He was unarmed, but sustained, no doubt, by the consciousness of his rank, he advanced with clinched fists toward Coconnas and his companions, who retreated, terrified at the lightning darting from his eyes.

"Ha! and will you murder a son of France, too?" cried the duke. Then, as they recoiled, — "Ho, there! captain of the guard! Hang every one of these ruffians!"

More alarmed at the sight of this weaponless young man than he would have been at the aspect of a regiment of reiters or lansquenets, Coconnas had already reached the door. La Hurière was leaping downstairs like a deer, and the soldiers were jostling and pushing one another in the vestibule in their endeavors to escape, finding the door far too small for their great desire to be outside it. Meantime Marguerite had instinctively thrown the damask coverlid of her bed over La Mole, and withdrawn from him.

When the last murderer had departed the Duc d'Alençon came back:

"Sister," he cried, seeing Marguerite all dabbled with blood, "are you wounded?" And he sprang toward his sister with a solicitude which would have done credit to his affection if he had not been charged with harboring too deep an affection for a brother to entertain for a sister.

"No," said she; "I think not, or, if so, very slightly."

"But this blood," said the duke, running his trembling hands all over Marguerite's body. "Where does it come from?"

"I know not," replied she; "one of those wretches laid his hand on me, and perhaps he was wounded."

"What!" cried the duke, "he dared to touch my sister? Oh, if you had only pointed him out to me, if you had told me which one it was, if I knew where to find him" —

"Hush!" said Marguerite.

"And why?" asked François.

"Because if you were seen at this time of night in my room" —

"Can't a brother visit his sister, Marguerite?"

The queen gave the duke a look so keen and yet so threatening that the young man drew back.

"Yes, yes, Marguerite," said he, "you are right, I will go to my room; but you cannot remain alone this dreadful night. Shall I call Gillonne?"

"No, no! leave me, François — leave me. Go by the way you came!"

The young prince obeyed; and hardly had he disappeared when Marguerite, hearing a sigh from behind her bed, hurriedly bolted the door of the secret passage, and then hastening to the other entrance closed it in the same way, just as a troop of archers and soldiers like a hurricane dashed by in hot chase of some other Huguenot residents in the Louvre.

After glancing round to assure herself that she was really alone, she again went to the "ruelle" of her bed, lifted the damask covering which had concealed La Mole from the Duc d'Alençon, and drawing the apparently lifeless body, by great exertion, into the middle of the room, and finding that the victim still breathed, sat down, placed his head on her knees, and sprinkled his face with water.

Then as the water cleared away the mask of blood, dust, and gunpowder which had covered his face, Marguerite recognized the handsome cavalier who, full of life and hope, had three or four hours before come to ask her to look out for his interests with her protection and that of the King of Navarre; and had gone away, dazzled by her beauty, leaving her also impressed by his.

Marguerite uttered a cry of terror, for now what she felt for the wounded man was more than mere pity — it was interest. He was no longer a mere stranger: he was almost an acquaintance. By her care La Mole's fine features soon reappeared, free from stain, but pale and distorted by pain. A shudder ran through her whole frame as she tremblingly placed her hand on his heart. It was still beating. Then she took a smelling-bottle from the table, and applied it to his nostrils.

La Mole opened his eyes.

"Oh! *mon Dieu!*" murmured he; "where am I?"

"Saved!" said Marguerite. "Reassure yourself — you are saved."

La Mole turned his eyes on the queen, gazed earnestly for a moment, and murmured,

"Oh, how beautiful you are!"

Then as if the vision were too much for him, he closed his lids and drew a sigh.

Marguerite started. He had become still paler than before, if that were possible, and for an instant that sigh was his last.

"Oh, my God! my God!" she ejaculated, "have pity on him!"

At this moment a violent knocking was heard at the door. Marguerite half raised herself, still supporting La Mole.

"Who is there?" she cried.

"Madame, it is I — it is I," replied a woman's voice, "the Duchesse de Nevers."

"Henriette!" cried Marguerite. "There is no danger; it is a friend of mine! Do you hear, sir?"

La Mole with some effort got up on one knee.

"Try to support yourself while I go and open the door," said the queen.

La Mole rested his hand on the floor and succeeded in holding himself upright.

Marguerite took one step toward the door, but suddenly stopped, shivering with terror.

“Ah, you are not alone!” she said, hearing the clash of arms outside.

“No, I have twelve guards which my brother-in-law, Monsieur de Guise, assigned me.”

“Monsieur de Guise!” murmured La Mole. “The assassin — the assassin!”

“Silence!” said Marguerite. “Not a word!”

And she looked round to see where she could conceal the wounded man.

“A sword! a dagger!” muttered La Mole.

“To defend yourself — useless! Did you not hear? There are twelve of them, and you are alone.”

“Not to defend myself, but that I may not fall alive into their hands.”

“No, no!” said Marguerite. “No, I will save you. Ah! this cabinet! Come! come.”

La Mole made an effort, and, supported by Marguerite, dragged himself to the cabinet. Marguerite locked the door upon him, and hid the key in her alms-purse.

“Not a cry, not a groan, not a sigh,” whispered she, through the panelling, “and you are saved.”

Then hastily throwing a night-robe over her shoulders, she opened the door for her friend, who tenderly embraced her.

“Ah!” cried Madame Nevers, “then nothing has happened to you, madame!”

“No, nothing at all,” replied Marguerite, wrapping the mantle still more closely round her to conceal the spots of blood on her peignoir.

“’Tis well. However, as Monsieur de Guise has given me twelve of his guards to escort me to his hôtel, and as I do not need such a large company, I am going to leave six with your majesty. Six of the duke’s guards are worth a regiment of the King’s to-night.”

Marguerite dared not refuse; she placed the soldiers in the corridor, and embraced the duchess, who then returned to the Hôtel de Guise, where she resided in her husband’s absence.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MURDERERS.

Coconnas had not fled, he had retreated; La Hurière had not fled, he had flown. The one had disappeared like a tiger, the other like a wolf.

The consequence was that La Hurière had already reached the Place Saint Germain l’Auxerrois when Coconnas was only just leaving the Louvre.

La Hurière, finding himself alone with his arquebuse, while around him men were running, bullets were whistling, and bodies were falling from windows, — some whole, others dismembered, — began to be afraid and was prudently thinking of returning to his tavern, but as he turned into the Rue de l’Arbre Sec from the Rue d’Averon he fell in with a troop of Swiss and light cavalry: it was the one commanded by Maurevel.

“Well,” cried Maurevel, who had christened himself with the nickname of King’s Killer, “have you finished so soon? Are you going back to your tavern, worthy landlord? And what the devil have you done with our Piedmontese gentleman? No misfortune has happened to him? That would be a shame, for he started out well.”

“No, I think not,” replied La Hurière; “I hope he will rejoin us!”

“Where have you been?”

“At the Louvre, and I must say we were very rudely treated there.”

“By whom?”

“Monsieur le Duc d’Alençon. Isn’t he interested in this affair?”

“Monseigneur le Duc d’Alençon is not interested in anything which does not concern himself personally. Propose to treat his two older brothers as Huguenots and he would be in it — provided only that the work should be done without compromising him. But won’t you go with these worthy fellows, Maître La Hurière?”

“And where are they going?”

“Oh, *mon Dieu*! Rue Montorguen; there is a Huguenot minister there whom I know; he has a wife and six children. These heretics are enormous breeders; it will be interesting.”

“And where are you going?”

“Oh, I have a little private business.”

“Say, there! don’t go off without me,” said a voice which made Maurevel start, “you know all the good places and I want to have my share.”

“Ah! it is our Piedmontese,” said Maurevel.

“Yes, it is Monsieur de Coconnas,” said La Hurière; “I thought you were following me.”

“Hang it! you made off too swiftly for that; and besides I turned a little to one side so as to fling into the river a frightful child who was screaming, ‘Down with the Papists! Long live the admiral!’ Unfortunately, I believe the little rascal knew how to swim. These miserable heretics must be flung into the water like cats before their eyes are opened if they are to be drowned at all.”

“Ah! you say you are just from the Louvre; so your Huguenot took refuge there, did he?” asked Maurevel.

“*Mon Dieu!* yes.”

“I gave him a pistol-shot at the moment when he was picking up his sword in the admiral’s court-yard, but I somehow or other missed him.”

“Well, I did not miss him,” added Coconnas; “I gave him such a thrust in the back that my sword was wet five inches up the blade. Besides, I saw him fall into the arms of Madame Marguerite, a pretty woman, by Heaven! yet I confess I should not be sorry to hear he was really dead; the vagabond is infernally spiteful, and capable of bearing me a grudge all his life. But didn’t you say you were bound somewhere?”

“Why, do you mean to go with me?”

“I do not like standing still, by Heaven! I have killed only three or four as yet, and when I get cold my shoulder pains me. Forward! forward!”

“Captain,” said Maurevel to the commander of the troop, “give me three men, and go and despatch your parson with the rest.”

Three Swiss stepped forward and joined Maurevel. Nevertheless, the two companies proceeded side by side till they reached the top of the Rue Tirechappe; there the light horse and the Swiss took the Rue de la Tonnellerie, while Maurevel, Coconnas, La Hurière, and his three men were proceeding down the Rue Trousse Vache and entering the Rue Sainte Avoye. “Where the devil are you taking us?” asked Coconnas, who was beginning to be bored by this long march from which he could see no results.

“I am taking you on an expedition at once brilliant and useful. Next to the admiral, next to Téligny, next to the Huguenot princes, I could offer you nothing better. So have patience, our business calls us to the Rue du Chaume, and we shall be there in a second.”

“Tell me,” said Coconnas, “is not the Rue du Chaume near the Temple?”

“Yes, why?”

“Because an old creditor of our family lives there, one Lambert Mercandon, to whom my father wished me to hand over a hundred rose nobles I have in my pocket for that purpose.”

“Well,” replied Maurevel, “this is a good opportunity for paying it. This is the day for settling old accounts. Is your Mercandon a Huguenot?”

“Oho, I understand!” said Coconnas; “he must be” —

“Hush! here we are.”

“What is that large hôtel, with its entrance in the street?”

“The Hôtel de Guise.”

“Truly,” returned Coconnas, “I should not have failed to come here, as I am under the patronage of the great Henry. But, by Heaven! all is so very quiet in this quarter, we scarcely hear any firing, and we might fancy ourselves in the country. The devil fetch me but every one is asleep!”

And indeed the Hôtel de Guise seemed as quiet as in ordinary times. All the windows were closed, and a solitary light was burning behind the blind of the principal window over the entrance which had attracted Coconnas’s attention as soon as they entered the street.

Just beyond the Hôtel de Guise, in other words, at the corner of the Rue du Petit Chantier and the Rue des Quatre Fils, Maurevel halted.

“Here is the house of the man we want,” said he.

“Of the man you want — that is to say” — observed La Hurière.

“Since you are with me we want him.”

“What! that house which seems so sound asleep” —

“Exactly! La Hurière, now go and make practical use of the plausible face which heaven, by some blunder, gave you, and knock at that house. Hand your arquebuse to M. de Coconnas, who has been ogling it this last half hour. If you are admitted, you must ask to speak to Seigneur de Mouy.”

“Aha!” exclaimed Coconnas, “now I understand — you also have a creditor in the quarter of the Temple, it would seem.”

“Exactly so!” responded Maurevel. “You will go up to him pretending to be a Huguenot, and inform De Mouy of all that has taken place; he is brave, and will come down.”

“And once down?” asked La Hurière.

“Once down, I will beg of him to cross swords with me.”

“On my soul, ’tis a fine gentleman’s,” said Coconnas, “and I propose to do exactly the same thing with Lambert Mercandon; and if he is too old to respond, I will try it with one of his sons or nephews.”

La Hurière, without making any reply, went and knocked at the door, and the sounds echoing in the silence of the night caused the doors of the Hôtel de Guise to open, and several heads to make their appearance from out them; it was evident that the hôtel was quiet after the manner of citadels, that is to say, because it was filled with soldiers.

The heads were almost instantly withdrawn, as doubtless an inkling of the matter in hand was divined.

“Does your Monsieur de Mouy live here?” inquired Coconnas, pointing to the house at which La Hurière was still knocking.

“No, but his mistress does.”

“By Heaven! how gallant you are, to give him an occasion to draw sword in the presence of his lady-love! We shall be the judges of the field. However, I should like very well to fight myself — my shoulder burns.”

“And your face,” added Maurevel, “is considerably damaged.”

Coconnas uttered a kind of growl.

“By Heaven!” he said, “I hope he is dead; if I thought not, I would return to the Louvre and finish him.”

La Hurière still kept knocking.

Soon the window on the first floor opened, and a man appeared in the balcony, in a nightcap and drawers, and unarmed.

“Who’s there?” cried he.

Maurevel made a sign to the Swiss, who retreated into a corner, whilst Coconnas stood close against the wall.

“Ah! Monsieur de Mouy!” said the innkeeper, in his blandest tones, “is that you?”

“Yes; what then?”

“It is he!” said Maurevel, with a thrill of joy.

“Why, sir,” continued La Hurière, “do you not know what is going on? They are murdering the admiral, and massacring all of our religion. Hasten to their assistance; come!”

“Ah!” exclaimed De Mouy, “I feared something was plotted for this night. I ought not to have deserted my worthy comrades. I will come, my friend, — wait for me.”

And without closing the window, through which a frightened woman could be heard uttering lamentations and tender entreaties, Monsieur de Mouy got his doublet, his mantle, and his weapons.

“He is coming down! He is coming down!” muttered Maurevel, pale with joy. “Attention, the rest of you!” he whispered to the Swiss.

Then taking the arquebuse from Coconnas he blew on the tinder to make sure that it was still alight.

“Here, La Hurière,” he added, addressing the innkeeper, who had rejoined the main body of the company, “here, take your arquebuse!”

“By Heaven!” exclaimed Coconnas, “the moon is coming out of the clouds to witness this beautiful fight. I would give a great deal if Lambert Mercandon were here, to serve as Monsieur de Mouy’s second.”

“Wait, wait!” said Maurevel; “Monsieur de Mouy alone is equal to a dozen men, and it is likely that we six shall have enough to do to despatch him. Forward, my men!” continued Maurevel, making a sign to the Swiss to stand by the door, in order to strike De Mouy as he came forth.

“Oho!” said Coconnas, as he watched these arrangements; “it appears that this will not come off quite as I expected.”

Already the noise made by De Mouy in withdrawing the bar was heard. The Swiss had left their hiding-place to arrange themselves near the door, Maurevel and La Hurière were going forward on tiptoe, and Coconnas with a dying gleam of gentlemanly feeling was standing where he was, when the young woman who had been for the moment utterly forgotten suddenly appeared on the balcony and uttered a terrible shriek at the sight of the Swiss, Maurevel, and La Hurière.

De Mouy, who had already half opened the door, paused.

“Come back! come back!” cried the young woman. “I see swords glitter, and the match of an arquebuse — there is treachery!”

“Oho!” said the young man; “let us see, then, what all this means.”

And he closed the door, replaced the bar, and went upstairs again.

Maurevel’s order of battle was changed as soon as he saw that De Mouy was not going to come out. The Swiss went and posted themselves at the other corner of the street, and La Hurière, with his arquebuse in his hand, waited till the enemy reappeared at the window.

He did not wait long. De Mouy came forward holding before him two pistols of such respectable length that La Hurière, who was already aiming, suddenly reflected that the Huguenot's bullets had no farther to fly in reaching the street from the balcony than his had in reaching the balcony.

"Assuredly," said he to himself, "I may kill this gentleman, but likewise this gentleman may kill me in the same way."

Now as Maître La Hurière, an innkeeper by profession, was only accidentally a soldier, this reflection determined him to retreat and seek shelter in the corner of the Rue de Braque, far enough away to cause him some difficulty in finding with a certain certainty, especially at night, the line which a bullet from his arquebuse would take in reaching De Mouy.

De Mouy cast a glance around him, and advanced cautiously like a man preparing to fight a duel; but seeing nothing, he exclaimed:

"Why, it appears, my worthy informant, that you have forgotten your arquebuse at my door! Here I am. What do you want with me?"

"Aha!" said Coconnas to himself; "he is certainly a brave fellow!"

"Well," continued De Mouy, "friends or enemies, whichever you are, do you not see I am waiting?"

La Hurière kept silence, Maurevel made no reply, and the three Swiss remained in covert.

Coconnas waited an instant; then, seeing that no one took part in the conversation begun by La Hurière and continued by De Mouy, he left his station, and advancing into the middle of the street, took off his hat and said:

"Sir, we are not here for an assassination, as you seem to suppose, but for a duel. I am here with one of your enemies, who was desirous of meeting you to end gallantly an old controversy. Eh, by Heaven! come forward, Monsieur de Maurevel, instead of turning your back. The gentleman accepts."

"Maurevel!" cried De Mouy; "Maurevel, the assassin of my father! Maurevel, the king's assassin! Ah, by Heaven! Yes, I accept."

And taking aim at Maurevel, who was about to knock at the Hôtel de Guise to request a reinforcement, he sent a bullet through his hat.

At the noise of the report and Maurevel's shouts, the guard which had escorted the Duchesse de Nevers came out, accompanied by three or four gentlemen, followed by their pages, and approached the house of young De Mouy's mistress.

A second pistol-shot, fired into the midst of the troop, killed the soldier next to Maurevel; after which De Mouy, finding himself weaponless, or at least with useless weapons, for his pistols had been fired and his adversaries were beyond the reach of his sword, took shelter behind the balcony gallery.

Meantime here and there windows began to be thrown open in the neighborhood, and according to the pacific or bellicose dispositions of their inhabitants, were barricaded or bristled with muskets and arquebuses.

"Help! my worthy Mercandon," shouted De Mouy, beckoning to an elderly man who, from a window which had just been thrown open in front of the Hôtel de Guise, was trying to make out the cause of the confusion.

"Is it you who call, Sire de Mouy?" cried the old man: "are they attacking you?"

"Me — you — all the Protestants; and wait — there is the proof!"

That moment De Mouy had seen La Hurière aim his arquebuse at him; it was fired; but the young man had time to stoop, and the ball broke a window above his head.

"Mercandon!" exclaimed Coconnas, who, in his delight at sight of this fray, had forgotten his creditor, but was reminded of him by De Mouy's apostrophe; "Mercandon, Rue du Chaume — that is it! Ah, he lives there! Good! Each of us will settle accounts with our man."

And, while the people from the Hôtel de Guise were breaking in the doors of De Mouy's house, and Maurevel, with a torch in his hand, was trying to set it on fire — while now that the doors were once broken, there was a fearful struggle with a single antagonist who at each rapier-thrust brought down his foe — Coconnas tried, by the help of a paving-stone, to break in Mercandon's door, and the latter, unmoved by this solitary effort, was doing his best with his arquebuse out of his window.

And now all this dark and deserted quarter was lighted up, as if by open day, — peopled like the interior of an ant-hive; for from the Hôtel de Montmorency six or eight Huguenot gentlemen, with their servants and friends, had just made a furious charge, and, supported by the firing from the windows, were beginning to repulse Maurevel's and the De Guises' force, who at length were driven back to the place whence they had come.

Coconnas, who had not yet succeeded in smashing Mercandon's door, though he was working at it with all his might, was caught in this sudden retreat. Placing his back to the wall, and grasping his sword firmly, he began not only to defend himself, but to attack his assailants, with cries so terrible that they were heard above all the uproar. He struck right and left, hitting friends and enemies, until a wide space was cleared around him. As his rapier made a hole in some breast, and the warm blood spurted over his hands and face, he, with dilated eye, expanded nostrils, and clinched teeth, regained the ground lost, and again approached the beleaguered house.

De Mouy, after a terrible combat in the staircase and hall, had finally come out of the burning house like a true hero. In the midst of all the struggle he had not ceased to cry, “Here, Maurevel! — Maurevel, where are you?” insulting him by the most opprobrious epithets.

He at length appeared in the street, supporting on one arm his mistress, half naked and nearly fainting, and holding a poniard between his teeth. His sword, flaming by the sweeping action he gave it, traced circles of white or red, according as the moon glittered on the blade or a flambeau glared on its blood-stained brightness.

Maurevel had fled. La Hurière, driven back by De Mouy as far as Coconnas, who did not recognize him, and received him at sword’s point, was begging for mercy on both sides. At this moment Mercandon perceived him, and knew him, by his white scarf, to be one of the murderers. He fired. La Hurière shrieked, threw up his arms, dropped his arquebuse, and, after having vainly attempted to reach the wall, in order to support himself, fell with his face flat on the earth.

De Mouy took advantage of this circumstance, turned down the Rue de Paradis, and disappeared.

Such had been the resistance of the Huguenots that the De Guise party, quite repulsed, had retired into their hôtel, fearing to be besieged and taken in their own habitation.

Coconnas who, intoxicated with blood and tumult, had reached that degree of excitement when, with the men of the south more especially, courage changes into madness, had not seen or heard anything, and noticed only that there was not such a roar in his ears, and that his hands and face were a little dryer than they had been. Dropping the point of his sword, he saw near him a man lying face downward in a red stream, and around him burning houses.

It was a very short truce, for just as he was approaching this man, whom he recognized as La Hurière, the door of the house he had in vain tried to burst in, opened, and old Mercandon, followed by his son and two nephews, rushed upon him.

“Here he is! here he is!” cried they all, with one voice.

Coconnas was in the middle of the street, and fearing to be surrounded by these four men who assailed him at once, sprang backward with the agility of one of the chamois which he had so often hunted in his native mountains, and in an instant found himself with his back against the wall of the Hôtel de Guise. Once at ease as to not being surprised from behind he put himself in a posture of defence, and said, jestingly:

“Aha, father Mercandon, don’t you know me?”

“Wretch!” cried the old Huguenot, “I know you well; you are engaged against me — me, your father’s friend and companion.”

“And his creditor, are you not?”

“Yes; his creditor, as you say.”

“Well, then,” said Coconnas, “I have come to settle our accounts.”

“Seize him, bind him!” said Mercandon to the young men who accompanied him, and who at his bidding rushed toward the Piedmontese.

“One moment! one moment!” said Coconnas, laughing, “to seize a man you must have a writ, and you have forgotten to secure one from the provost.”

And with these words he crossed his sword with the young man nearest to him and at the first blow cut his wrist.

The wounded man retreated with a howl.

“That will do for one!” said Coconnas.

At the same moment the window under which Coconnas had sought shelter opened noisily. He sprang to one side, fearing an attack from behind; but instead of an enemy he saw a woman; instead of the enemy’s weapon he was prepared to encounter, a nosegay fell at his feet.

“Ah!” he said, “a woman!”

He saluted the lady with his sword, and stooped to pick up the bouquet.

“Be on your guard, brave Catholic! — be on your guard!” cried the lady.

Coconnas rose, but not before the second nephew’s dagger had pierced his cloak, and wounded his other shoulder.

The lady uttered a piercing shriek.

Coconnas thanked her, assured her by a gesture, and then made a pass, which the nephew parried; but at the second thrust, his foot slipped in the blood, and Coconnas, springing at him like a tiger-cat, drove his sword through his breast.

"Good! good! brave cavalier!" exclaimed the lady of the Hôtel de Guise, "good! I will send you succor."

"Do not give yourself any trouble about that, madame," was Coconnas's reply; "rather look on to the end, if it interests you, and see how the Comte Annibal de Coconnas settles the Huguenots."

At this moment old Mercandon's son aimed a pistol at close range to Coconnas, and fired. The count fell on his knee. The lady at the window shrieked again; but Coconnas rose instantly; he had knelt only to avoid the bullet, which struck the wall about two feet beneath where the lady was standing.

Almost at the same moment a cry of rage issued from the window of Mercandon's house, and an old woman, who recognized Coconnas as a Catholic, from his white scarf and cross, hurled a flower-pot at him, which struck him above the knee.

"Capital!" said Coconnas; "one throws flowers at me and at the other, flower-pots; if this goes on, they'll be tearing houses down!"

"Thanks, mother, thanks!" said the young man.

"Go on, wife, go on," said old Mercandon; "but take care of yourself."

"Wait, Monsieur de Coconnas, wait!" said the young woman of the Hôtel de Guise, "I will have them shoot at the windows!"

"Ah! So it is a hell of women, is it?" said Coconnas. "Some of them for me and the others against me! By Heaven! let us put an end to this!"

The scene in fact was much changed and was evidently approaching its climax. Coconnas, who was wounded to be sure, but who had all the vigor of his four and twenty years, was used to arms, and angered rather than weakened by the three or four scratches he had received, now faced only Mercandon and his son: Mercandon, an aged man between sixty and seventy; his son, a youth of sixteen or eighteen, pale, fair-haired and slender, had flung down his pistol which had been discharged and was therefore useless, and was feebly brandishing a sword half as long as the Piedmontese's. The father, armed only with an unloaded arquebuse and a poniard, was calling for assistance. An old woman — the young man's mother — in the opposite window held in her hand a piece of marble which she was preparing to hurl.

Coconnas, excited on the one hand by threats, and on the other by encouragements, proud of his two-fold victory, intoxicated with powder and blood, lighted by the reflection of a burning house, elated by the idea that he was fighting under the eyes of a woman whose beauty was as superior as he was sure her rank was high, — Coconnas, like the last of the Horatii, felt his strength redouble, and seeing the young man falter, rushed on him and crossed his small weapon with his terrible and bloody rapier. Two strokes sufficed to drive it out of its owner's hands. Then Mercandon tried to drive Coconnas back, so that the projectiles thrown from the window might be sure to strike him, but Coconnas, to paralyze the double attack of the old man, who tried to stab him with his dagger, and the mother of the young man, who was endeavoring to break his skull with a stone she was ready to throw, seized his adversary by the body, presenting him to all the blows, like a shield, and well-nigh strangling him in his Herculean grasp.

"Help! help!" cried the young man; "he is crushing my chest — help! help!"

And his voice grew faint in a low and choking groan.

Then Mercandon ceased to attack, and began to entreat.

"Mercy, mercy! Monsieur de Coconnas, have mercy! — he is my only child!"

"He is my son, my son!" cried the mother; "the hope of our old age! Do not kill him, sir, — do not kill him!"

"Really," cried Coconnas, bursting into laughter, "not kill him! What, pray, did he mean to do to me, with his sword and pistol?"

"Sir," said Mercandon, clasping his hands, "I have at home your father's note of hand, I will give it back to you — I have ten thousand crowns of gold, I will give them to you — I have our family jewels, they shall be yours; but do not kill him — do not kill him!"

"And I have my love," said the lady in the Hôtel de Guise, in a low tone, "and I promise it you."

Coconnas reflected a moment, and said suddenly:

"Are you a Huguenot?"

"Yes, I am," murmured the youth.

"Then you must die!" replied Coconnas, frowning and putting to his adversary's breast his keen and glittering dagger.

"Die!" cried the old man; "my poor child die!"

And the mother's shriek resounded so pitifully and loud that for a moment it shook the Piedmontese's firm resolution.

"Oh, Madame la Duchesse!" cried the father, turning toward the lady at the Hôtel de Guise, "intercede for us, and every morning and evening you shall be remembered in our prayers."

"Then let him be a convert," said the lady.

"I am a Protestant," said the boy.

"Then die!" exclaimed Coconnas, lifting his dagger; "die! since you will not accept the life which those lovely lips offer to you."

Mercandon and his wife saw the blade of that deadly weapon gleam like lightning above the head of their son.

"My son Olivier," shrieked his mother, "abjure, abjure!"

"Abjure, my dear boy!" cried Mercandon, going on his knees to Coconnas; "do not leave us alone on the earth!"

"Abjure all together," said Coconnas; "for one *Credo*, three souls and one life."

"I am willing," said the youth.

"We are willing!" cried Mercandon and his wife.

"On your knees, then," said Coconnas, "and let your son repeat after me, word for word, the prayer I shall say."

The father obeyed first.

"I am ready," said the son, also kneeling.

Coconnas then began to repeat in Latin the words of the *Credo*. But whether from chance or calculation, young Olivier knelt close to where his sword had fallen. Scarcely did he see this weapon within his reach than, not ceasing to repeat the words which Coconnas dictated, he stretched out his hand to take it up. Coconnas watched the movement, although he pretended not to see it; but at the moment when the young man touched the handle of the sword with his fingers he rushed on him, knocked him over, exclaiming, "Ah, traitor!" and plunged his dagger into his throat.

The youth uttered one cry, raised himself convulsively on his knee, and fell dead.

"Ah, ruffian!" shrieked Mercandon, "you slay us to rob us of the hundred rose nobles you owe us."

"Faith! no," said Coconnas, "and the proof," — and as he said these words he flung at the old man's feet the purse which his father had given him before his departure to pay his creditor, — "and the proof," he went on to say, "is this money which I give you!"

"And here's your death!" cried the old woman from the window.

"Take care, M. de Coconnas, take care!" called out the lady at the Hôtel de Guise.

But before Coconnas could turn his head to comply with this advice, or get out of the way of the threat, a heavy mass came hissing through the air, fell on the Piedmontese's hat, broke his sword, and prostrated him on the pavement; he was overcome, crushed, so that he did not hear the double cry of joy and distress which came from the right and left.

Mercandon instantly rushed, dagger in hand, on Coconnas, now bereft of his senses; but at this moment the door of the Hôtel de Guise opened, and the old man, seeing swords and partisans gleaming, fled, while the lady he had called "Madame la Duchesse," her beauty terrible in the light of the flames, dazzling with diamonds and other gems, leaned half out of the window, in order to direct the newcomers, pointing her arm toward Coconnas.

"There! there! in front of me — a gentleman in a red doublet. There! — that is he — yes, that is he."

CHAPTER X.

DEATH, MASS, OR THE BASTILLE.

Marguerite, as we have said, had shut the door and returned to her chamber. But as she entered, panting, she saw Gillonne, who, terror-struck, was leaning against the door of the closet, staring at the traces of blood on the bed, the furniture, and the carpet.

“Ah! madame!” she cried when she saw the queen. “Oh! madame! tell me, is he dead?”

“Silence!” said Marguerite in that tone of voice which gives some indication of the importance of the command.

Gillonne was silent.

Marguerite then took from her purse a tiny gilded key, opened the closet door, and showed the young man to the servant. La Mole had succeeded in getting to his feet and making his way to the window. A small poniard, such as women at that time were in the habit of carrying, was at hand, and when he heard the door opening he had seized it.

“Fear nothing, sir,” said Marguerite; “for, on my soul, you are in safety!”

La Mole sank on his knees.

“Oh, madame,” he cried, “you are more than a queen — you are a goddess!”

“Do not agitate yourself, sir,” said Marguerite, “your blood is still flowing. Oh, look, Gillonne, how pale he is — let us see where you are wounded.”

“Madame,” said La Mole, trying to fix on certain parts of his body the pain which pervaded his whole frame, “I think I have a dagger-thrust in my shoulder, another in my chest, — the other wounds are not worth bothering about.”

“We will see,” said Marguerite. “Gillonne, bring me my balsam casket.”

Gillonne obeyed, and returned holding in one hand a casket, and in the other a silver-gilt ewer and some fine Holland linen.

“Help me to lift him, Gillonne,” said Queen Marguerite; “for in attempting to get up the poor gentleman has lost all his strength.”

"But, madame," said La Mole, "I am wholly confused. Indeed, I cannot allow" —

"But, sir, you will let us do for you, I think," said Marguerite. "When we may save you, it would be a crime to let you die."

"Oh!" cried La Mole, "I would rather die than see you, the queen, stain your hands with blood as unworthy as mine. Oh, never, never!"

And he drew back respectfully.

"Your blood, sir," replied Gillonne, with a smile, "has already stained her majesty's bed and chamber."

Marguerite folded her mantle over her cambric peignoir, all bespattered with small red spots. This movement, so expressive of feminine modesty, caused La Mole to remember that he had held in his arms and pressed to his heart this beautiful, beloved queen, and at the recollection a fugitive glow of color came into his pallid cheeks.

"Madame," stammered La Mole, "can you not leave me to the care of the surgeon?"

"Of a Catholic surgeon, perhaps," said the queen, with an expression which La Mole understood and which made him shudder. "Do you not know," continued the queen in a voice and with a smile of incomparable sweetness, "that we daughters of France are trained to know the qualities of herbs and to make balsams? for our duty as women and as queens has always been to soften pain. Therefore we are equal to the best surgeons in the world; so our flatterers say! Has not my reputation in this regard come to your ears? Come, Gillonne, let us to work!"

La Mole again endeavored to resist; he repeated that he would rather die than occasion the queen labor which, though begun in pity, might end in disgust; but this exertion completely exhausted his strength, and falling back, he fainted a second time.

Marguerite, then seizing the poniard which he had dropped, quickly cut the lace of his doublet; while Gillonne, with another blade, ripped open the sleeves.

Next Gillonne, with a cloth dipped in fresh water, stanched the blood which escaped from his shoulder and breast, and Marguerite, with a silver needle with a round point, probed the wounds with all the delicacy and skill that Maître Ambroise Paré could have displayed in such a case.

"A dangerous but not mortal wound, *acerrimum humeri vulnus, non autem lethale*," murmured the lovely and learned lady-surgeon; "hand me the salve, Gillonne, and get the lint ready.”

Meantime Gillonne, to whom the queen had just given this new order, had already dried and perfumed the young man’s chest and arms, which were like an antique model, as well as his shoulders, which fell gracefully back; his neck shaded by thick, curling locks, and which seemed rather to belong to a statue of Parian marble than the mangled frame of a dying man.

“Poor young man!” whispered Gillonne, looking not so much at her work as at the object of it.

“Is he not handsome?” said Marguerite, with royal frankness.

“Yes, madame; but it seems to me that instead of leaving him lying there on the floor, we should lift him on this couch against which he is leaning.”

“Yes,” said Marguerite, “you are right.”

And the two women, bending over, uniting their strength, raised La Mole, and laid him on a kind of great sofa in front of the window, which they opened in order to give them fresh air.

This movement aroused La Mole, who drew a long sigh, and opening his eyes, began to experience that indescribable sensation of well-being which comes to a wounded man when on his return to consciousness he finds coolness instead of burning heat, and the perfumes of balsams instead of the nauseating odor of blood.

He muttered some disconnected words, to which Marguerite replied with a smile, placing her finger on her lips.

At this moment several raps on the door were heard.

“Some one knocks at the secret passage,” said Marguerite.

“Who can be coming, madame?” asked Gillonne, in a panic.

“I will go and see who it is,” said Marguerite; “remain here, and do not leave him for a single instant.”

Marguerite went into the chamber, and closing the closet door, opened that of the passage which led to the King’s and queen mother’s apartments.

“Madame de Sauve!” she exclaimed, suddenly drawing back with an expression which resembled hatred, if not terror, so true it is that a woman never forgives another for taking from her even a man whom she does not love, — ”Madame de Sauve!”

“Yes, your majesty!” she replied, clasping her hands.

“You here, madame?” exclaimed Marguerite, more and more surprised, while at the same time her voice grew more and more imperative.

Charlotte fell on her knees.

“Madame,” she said, “pardon me! I know how guilty I am toward you; but if you knew — the fault is not wholly mine; an express command of the queen mother” —

“Rise!” said Marguerite, “and as I do not suppose you have come with the intention of justifying yourself to me, tell me why you have come at all.”

“I have come, madame,” said Charlotte, still on her knees, and with a look of wild alarm, “I came to ask you if he were not here?”

“Here! who? — of whom are you speaking, madame? for I really do not understand.”

“Of the king!”

“Of the king? What, do you follow him to my apartments? You know very well that he never comes here.”

“Ah, madame!” continued the Baronne de Sauve, without replying to these attacks, or even seeming to comprehend them, “ah, would to Heaven he were here!”

“And why so?”

“Eh, *mon Dieu*! madame, because they are murdering the Huguenots, and the King of Navarre is the chief of the Huguenots.”

“Oh!” cried Marguerite, seizing Madame de Sauve by the hand, and compelling her to rise; “ah! I had forgotten; besides, I did not think a king could run the same dangers as other men.”

“More, madame, — a thousand times more!” cried Charlotte.

“In fact, Madame de Lorraine had warned me; I had begged him not to leave the Louvre. Has he done so?”

“No, no, madame, he is in the Louvre; but if he is not here” —

“He is not here!”

“Oh!” cried Madame de Sauve, with an outburst of agony, “then he is a dead man, for the queen mother has sworn his destruction!”

“His destruction! ah,” said Marguerite, “you terrify me — impossible!”

“Madame,” replied Madame de Sauve, with that energy which passion alone can give, “I tell you that no one knows where the King of Navarre is.”

“And where is the queen mother?”

“The queen mother sent me to find Monsieur de Guise and Monsieur de Tavannes, who were in her oratory, and then dismissed me. Then — pardon me, madame — I went to my room and waited as usual.”

“For my husband, I suppose.”

“He did not come, madame. Then I sought for him everywhere and asked every one for him. One soldier told me he thought he had seen him in the midst of the guards who accompanied him, with his sword drawn in his hand, some time before the massacre began, and the massacre has begun an hour ago.”

“Thanks, madame,” said Marguerite; “and although perhaps the sentiment which impels you is an additional offence toward me, — yet, again, I thank you!”

“Oh, forgive me, madame!” she said, “and I will return to my apartments stronger for your pardon, for I dare not follow you, even at a distance.”

Marguerite extended her hand to her.

“I will go to Queen Catharine,” she said. “Return to your room. The King of Navarre is under my protection; I have promised him my alliance and I will be faithful to my promise.”

“But suppose you cannot obtain access to the queen mother, madame?”

“Then I will go to my brother Charles, and I will speak to him.”

“Go, madame, go,” said Charlotte, leaving Marguerite room to pass, “and may God guide your majesty!”

Marguerite darted down the corridor, but when she reached the end of it she turned to make sure that Madame de Sauve was not lingering behind. Madame de Sauve was following her.

The Queen of Navarre saw her go upstairs to her own apartment, and then she herself went toward the queen’s chamber.

All was changed here. Instead of the crowd of eager courtiers, who usually opened their ranks before the queen and respectfully saluted her, Marguerite met only guards with red partisans and garments stained with blood, or gentlemen in torn cloaks, — their faces blackened with powder, bearing orders and despatches, — some going in, others going out, and all this movement back and forth made a great and terrible confusion in the galleries.

Marguerite, however, went boldly on until she reached the queen mother’s antechamber. But this room was guarded by a double file of soldiers, who allowed only those who had a certain countersign to enter. Marguerite in vain tried to pass this living barrier; several times she saw the door open and shut, and each time she saw Catharine, her youth restored by action, as alert as if she were only twenty years of age, writing, receiving letters, opening them, addressing a word to one, a smile to another; and those on whom she smiled most graciously were those who were the most covered with dust and blood.

Amid this vast tumult which reigned in the Louvre and filled it with frightful clamors, could be heard the rattling of musketry more and more insistently repeated.

“I shall never get to her,” said Marguerite to herself after she had made three ineffectual attempts to pass the halberdiers. “Rather than waste my time here, I must go and find my brother.”

At this moment M. de Guise passed; he had just informed the queen of the murder of the admiral, and was returning to the butchery.

“Oh, Henry!” cried Marguerite, “where is the King of Navarre?”

The duke looked at her with a smile of astonishment, bowed, and without any reply passed out with his guards.

Marguerite ran to a captain who was on the point of leaving the Louvre and was engaged in having his men’s arquebuses loaded.

“The King of Navarre!” she exclaimed; “sir, where is the King of Navarre?”

“I do not know, madame,” replied the captain, “I do not belong to his majesty’s guards.”

“Ah, my dear Réné,” said the queen, recognizing Catharine’s perfumer, “is that you? — you have just left my mother. Do you know what has become of my husband?”

“His majesty the King of Navarre is no friend of mine, madame, you ought to remember that. It is even said,” he added, with a contraction of his features more like a grimace than a smile, “it is even said that he ventures to accuse me of having been the accomplice, with Madame Catharine, in poisoning his mother.”

“No, no!” cried Marguerite, “my good Réné, do not believe that!”

“Oh, it is of little consequence, madame!” said the perfumer; “neither the King of Navarre nor his party is any longer to be feared!”

And he turned his back on Marguerite.

“Ah, Monsieur de Tavannes!” cried Marguerite, “one word, I beseech you!”

Tavannes, who was going by, stopped.

“Where is Henry of Navarre?”

“Faith,” he replied, in a loud voice, “I believe he is somewhere in the city with the Messieurs d’Alençon and de Condé.”

And then he added, in a tone so low that the queen alone could hear:

“Your majesty, if you would see him, — to be in whose place I would give my life, — go to the king’s armory.”

“Thanks, Tavannes, thanks!” said Marguerite, who, of all that Tavannes had said, had heard only the chief direction; “thank you, I will go there.”

And she went on her way, murmuring:

“Oh, after all I promised him — after the way in which he behaved to me when that ingrate, Henry de Guise, was concealed in the closet — I cannot let him perish!”

And she knocked at the door of the King’s apartments; but they were encompassed within by two companies of guards.

“No one is admitted to the King,” said the officer, coming forward.

“But I” — said Marguerite.

“The order is general.”

“I, the Queen of Navarre! — I, his sister!”

“My orders admit of no exception, madame; I pray you to pardon me.”

And the officer closed the door.

“Oh, he is lost!” exclaimed Marguerite, alarmed at the sight of all those sinister faces, which even if they did not breathe vengeance, expressed sternness of purpose. “Yes, yes! I comprehend all. I have been used as a bait. I am the snare which has entrapped the Huguenots; but I will enter, if I am killed in the attempt!”

And Marguerite ran like a mad creature through the corridors and galleries, when suddenly, as she passed by a small door, she heard a sweet song, almost melancholy, so monotonous it was. It was a Calvinistic psalm, sung by a trembling voice in the next room.

“My brother the king’s nurse — the good Madelon — she is there!” exclaimed Marguerite. “God of the Christians, aid me now!”

And, full of hope, Marguerite knocked at the little door.

Soon after the counsel which Marguerite had conveyed to him, after his conversation with Réné, and after leaving the queen mother’s chamber, in spite of the efforts of the poor little Phœbe, — who like a good genius tried to detain him, — Henry of Navarre had met several Catholic gentlemen, who, under a pretext of doing him honor, had escorted him to his apartments, where a score of Huguenots awaited him, who had rallied round the young prince, and, having once rallied, would not leave him — so strongly, for some hours, had the presentiment of that fatal night weighed on the Louvre. They had remained there, without any one attempting to disturb them. At last, at the first stroke of the bell of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois, which resounded through all hearts like a funeral knell, Tavannes entered, and, in the midst of a death-like silence, announced that King Charles IX. desired to speak to Henry.

It was useless to attempt resistance, and no one thought of it. They heard the ceilings, galleries, and corridors creaking beneath the feet of the assembled soldiers, who were in the court-yards, as well as in the apartments, to the number of two thousand. Henry, after having taken leave of his friends, whom he was never again to see, followed Tavannes, who led him to a small gallery next the King's apartments, where he left him alone, unarmed, and a prey to mistrust.

The King of Navarre counted here alone, minute by minute, two mortal hours; listening, with increasing alarm, to the sound of the tocsin and the discharge of fire-arms; seeing through a small window, by the light of the flames and flambeaux, the refugees and their assassins pass; understanding nothing of these shrieks of murder, these cries of distress, — not even suspecting, in spite of his knowledge of Charles IX., the queen mother, and the Duc de Guise, the horrible drama at this moment enacting.

Henry had not physical courage, but he had better than that — he had moral fortitude. Though he feared danger, yet he smiled at it and faced it; but it was danger in the field of battle — danger in the open air — danger in the eyes of all, and attended by the noisy harmony of trumpets and the loud and vibrating beat of drums; but now he was weaponless, alone, locked in, shut up in a semi-darkness where he could scarcely see the enemy that might glide toward him, and the weapon that might be raised to strike him.

These two hours were, perhaps, the most agonizing of his life.

In the hottest of the tumult, and as Henry was beginning to understand that, in all probability, this was some organized massacre, a captain came to him, and conducted the prince along a corridor to the King's rooms. As they approached, the door opened and closed behind them as if by magic. The captain then led Henry to the King, who was in his armory.

When they entered, the King was seated in a great arm-chair, his two hands placed on the two arms of the seat, and his head falling on his chest. At the noise made by their entrance Charles looked up, and Henry observed the perspiration dropping from his brow like large beads.

“Good evening, Harry,” said the young King, roughly. “La Chastre, leave us.”

The captain obeyed.

A gloomy silence ensued. Henry looked around him with uneasiness, and saw that he was alone with the King.

Charles IX. suddenly arose.

“*Par la mordieu!*” said he, passing his hands through his light brown hair, and wiping his brow at the same time, “you are glad to be with me, are you not, Harry?”

“Certainly, sire,” replied the King of Navarre, “I am always happy to be with your Majesty.”

“Happier than if you were down there, eh?” continued Charles, following his own thoughts rather than replying to Henry’s compliment.

“I do not understand, sire,” replied Henry.

“Look out, then, and you will soon understand.”

And with a quick movement Charles stepped or rather sprang to the window, and drawing with him his brother-in-law, who became more and more terror-stricken, he pointed to him the horrible outlines of the assassins, who, on the deck of a boat, were cutting the throats or drowning the victims brought them at every moment.

“In the name of Heaven,” cried Henry; “what is going on to-night?”

“To-night, sir,” replied Charles IX., “they are ridding me of all the Huguenots. Look yonder, over the Hôtel de Bourbon, at the smoke and flames: they are the smoke and flames of the admiral’s house, which is on fire. Do you see that body, which these good Catholics are drawing on a torn mattress? It is the corpse of the admiral’s son-in-law — the carcass of your friend, Téligny.”

“What means this?” cried the King of Navarre, seeking vainly by his side for the hilt of his dagger, and trembling equally with shame and anger; for he felt that he was at the same time laughed at and threatened.

“It means,” cried Charles IX., becoming suddenly furious, and turning frightfully pale, “it means that I will no longer have any Huguenots about me. Do you hear me, Henry? — Am I King? Am I master?”

“But, your Majesty” —

“My Majesty kills and massacres at this moment all that is not Catholic; it is my pleasure. Are you a Catholic?” exclaimed Charles, whose anger was rising higher and higher, like an awful tide.

"Sire," replied Henry, "do you remember your own words, 'What matters the religion of those who serve me well'?"

"Ha! ha! ha!" cried Charles, bursting into a ferocious laugh; "you ask me if I remember my words, Henry! '*Verba volant,*' as my sister Margot says; and had not all those" — and he pointed to the city with his finger — "served me well, also? Were they not brave in battle, wise in council, deeply devoted? They were all useful subjects — but they were Huguenots, and I want none but Catholics."

Henry remained silent.

"Do you understand me now, Harry?" asked Charles.

"I understand, sire."

"Well?"

"Well, sire, I do not see why the King of Navarre should not do what so many gentlemen and poor folk have done. For if they all die, poor unfortunates, it is because the same terms have been proposed to them which your Majesty proposes to me, and they have refused, as I refuse."

Charles seized the young prince's arm, and fixed on him a look the vacancy of which suddenly changed into a fierce and savage scowl.

"What!" he said, "do you believe that I have taken the trouble to offer the mass to those whose throats we are cutting yonder?"

"Sire," said Henry, disengaging his arm, "will you not die in the religion of your fathers?"

"Yes, *par la mordieu*! and you?"

"Well, sire, I will do the same!" replied Henry.

Charles uttered a roar of rage and, with trembling hand, seized his arquebuse, which lay on the table.

Henry, who stood leaning against the tapestry, with the perspiration on his brow, and nevertheless, owing to his presence of mind, calm to all appearance, followed every movement of the terrible king with the greedy stupefaction of a bird fascinated by a serpent.

Charles cocked his arquebuse, and stamping with blind rage cried, as he dazzled Henry's eyes with the polished barrel of the deadly gun:

"Will you accept the mass?"

Henry remained mute.

Charles IX. shook the vaults of the Louvre with the most terrible oath that ever issued from the lips of man, and grew even more livid than before.

“Death, mass, or the Bastille!” he cried, taking aim at the King of Navarre.

“Oh, sire!” exclaimed Henry, “will you kill me — me, your brother?”

Henry thus, by his incomparable cleverness, which was one of the strongest faculties of his organization, evaded the answer which Charles IX. expected, for undoubtedly had his reply been in the negative Henry had been a dead man.

As immediately after the climax of rage, reaction begins, Charles IX. did not repeat the question he had addressed to the Prince of Navarre; and after a moment’s hesitation, during which he uttered a hoarse kind of growl, he went back to the open window, and aimed at a man who was running along the quay in front.

“I must kill some one!” cried Charles IX., ghastly as a corpse, his eyes suffused with blood; and firing as he spoke, he struck the man who was running.

Henry uttered a groan.

Then, animated by a frightful ardor, Charles loaded and fired his arquebuse without cessation, uttering cries of joy every time his aim was successful.

“It is all over with me!” said the King of Navarre to himself; “when he sees no one else to kill, he will kill me!”

“Well,” said a voice behind the princes, suddenly, “is it done?”

It was Catharine de Médicis, who had entered unobserved just as the King was firing his last shot.

“No, thousand thunders of hell!” said the King, throwing his arquebuse across the room. “No, the obstinate blockhead — he will not consent!”

Catharine made no reply. She turned her eyes slowly where Henry stood as motionless as one of the figures of the tapestry against which he was leaning. She then gave a glance at the King, which seemed to say:

“Then why he is alive?”

“He is alive, he is alive!” murmured Charles IX., who perfectly understood the glance, and replied to it without hesitation, — ”he is alive — because he is my relative.”

Catharine smiled.

Henry saw the smile, and realized that his struggle was to be with Catharine.

“Madame,” he said to her, “the whole thing comes from you, I see very well, and my brother-in-law Charles is not to blame. You laid the plan for drawing me into a snare. You made your daughter the bait which was to destroy us all. You separated me from my wife that she might not see me killed before her eyes” —

“Yes, but that shall not be!” cried another voice, breathless and impassioned, which Henry instantly recognized and which made Charles start with surprise and Catharine with rage.

“Marguerite!” exclaimed Henry.

“Margot!” said Charles IX.

“My daughter!” muttered Catharine.

“Sire,” said Marguerite to Henry, “your last words were an accusation against me, and you were both right and wrong, — right, for I am the means by which they attempted to destroy you; wrong, for I did not know that you were going to your destruction. I, sire, owe my own life to chance — to my mother’s forgetfulness, perhaps; but as soon as I learned your danger I remembered my duty, and a wife’s duty is to share her husband’s fortunes. If you are exiled, sire, I will follow you into exile; if you are put into prison I will be your fellow-captive; if they kill you, I will also die.”

And she offered her husband her hand, which he eagerly seized, if not with love, at least with gratitude.

“Oh, my poor Margot!” said Charles, “you had much better bid him become a Catholic!”

“Sire,” replied Marguerite, with that lofty dignity which was so natural to her, “for your own sake do not ask any prince of your house to commit a cowardly act.”

Catharine darted a significant glance at Charles.

“Brother,” cried Marguerite, who equally well with Charles IX. understood Catharine’s ominous pantomime, “my brother, remember! you made him my husband!”

Charles IX., at bay between Catharine’s commanding eyes and Marguerite’s supplicating look, as if between the two opposing principles of good and evil, stood for an instant undecided; at last Ormazd won the day.

“In truth,” said he, whispering in Catharine’s ear, “Margot is right, and Harry is my brother-in-law.”

“Yes,” replied Catharine in a similar whisper in her son’s ear, “yes — but supposing he were not?”

CHAPTER XI.

THE HAWTHORN OF THE CEMETERY OF THE INNOCENTS.

As soon as Marguerite reached her own apartments she tried in vain to divine the words which Catharine de Médicis had whispered to Charles IX., and which had cut short the terrible council of life and death which was taking place.

She spent a part of the morning in attending to La Mole, and the rest in trying to guess the enigma, which her mind could not discover.

The King of Navarre remained a prisoner in the Louvre, the persecution of the Huguenots went on hotter than ever. The terrible night was followed by a day of massacre still more horrible. No longer the bells rang the tocsin, but *Te Deums*, and the echoes of these joyous notes, resounding amid fire and slaughter, were perhaps even more lugubrious in sunlight than had been the last night's knell sounding in darkness. This was not all. A strange thing had happened: a hawthorn-tree, which had blossomed in the spring, and which, as usual, had lost its odorous flowers in the month of June, had blossomed again during the night, and the Catholics, who saw a miracle in this event, spread the report of the miracle far and wide, thus making God their accomplice; and with cross and banners they marched in a procession to the Cemetery of the Innocents, where this hawthorn-tree was blooming.

This method of acquiescence which Heaven seemed to show in the massacres redoubled the ardor of the assassins, and while every street, every square, every alley-way of the city continued to present a scene of desolation, the Louvre had become the common tomb for all Protestants who had been shut up there when the signal was given. The King of Navarre, the Prince de Condé, and La Mole were the only survivors.

Assured as to La Mole, whose wounds, as she had declared the evening before, were severe but not dangerous, Marguerite's mind was now occupied with one single idea: that was to save her husband's life, which was still threatened. No doubt the first sentiment which actuated the wife was one of generous pity for a man for whom, as the Béarnais himself had said, she had sworn, if not love, at least alliance; but there was, beside, another sentiment not so pure, which had penetrated the queen’s heart.

Marguerite was ambitious, and had foreseen almost the certainty of royalty in her marriage with Henry de Bourbon. Navarre, though beset on one side by the kings of France and on the other by the kings of Spain, who strip by strip had absorbed half of its territory, might become a real kingdom with the French Huguenots for subjects, if only Henry de Bourbon should fulfil the hopes which the courage shown by him on the infrequent occasions vouchsafed him of drawing his sword had aroused.

Marguerite, with her keen, lofty intellect, foresaw and reckoned on all this. So if she lost Henry she lost not only a husband, but a throne.

As she was absorbed in these reflections she heard some one knocking at the door of the secret corridor. She started, for only three persons came by that door, — the King, the queen mother, and the Duc d’Alençon. She opened the closet door, made a gesture of silence to Gillonne and La Mole, and then went to let her visitor in.

It was the Duc d’Alençon.

The young prince had not been seen since the night before. For a moment, Marguerite had conceived the idea of asking his intercession for the King of Navarre, but a terrible idea restrained her. The marriage had taken place against his wishes. François detested Henry, and had evinced his neutrality toward the Béarnais only because he was convinced that Henry and his wife had remained strangers to each other. A mark of interest shown by Marguerite in her husband might thrust one of the three threatening poniards into his heart instead of turning it aside. Marguerite, therefore, on perceiving the young prince, shuddered more than she had shuddered at seeing the King or even the queen mother. Nevertheless no one could have told by his appearance that anything unusual was taking place either in the city or at the Louvre. He was dressed with his usual elegance. His clothes and linen breathed of those perfumes which Charles IX. despised, but of which the Duc d’Anjou and he made continual use.

A practised eye like Marguerite’s, however, could detect the fact that in spite of his rather unusual pallor and in spite of a slight trembling in his hands — delicate hands, as carefully treated as a lady’s — he felt a deep sense of joy in the bottom of his heart. His entrance was in no wise different from usual. He went to his sister to kiss her, but Marguerite, instead of offering him her cheek, as she would have done had it been King Charles or the Duc d’Anjou, made a courtesy and allowed him to kiss her forehead.

The Duc d’Alençon sighed and touched his bloodless lips to her brow.

Then taking a seat he began to tell his sister the sanguinary news of the night, the admiral’s lingering and terrible death, Téligny’s instantaneous death caused by a bullet. He took his time and emphasized all the bloody details of that night, with that love of blood characteristic of himself and his two brothers; Marguerite allowed him to tell his story.

“You did not come to tell me this only, brother?” she then asked.

The Duc d’Alençon smiled.

“You have something else to say to me?”

“No,” replied the duke; “I am waiting.”

“Waiting! for what?”

“Have you not told me, dearest Marguerite,” said the duke, drawing his armchair close up to his sister’s, “that your marriage with the King of Navarre was contracted against your wishes?”

“Yes, no doubt. I did not know the Prince of Béarn when he was proposed to me as a husband.”

“And after you came to know him, did you not tell me that you felt no love for him?”

“I told you so; it is true.”

“Was it not your opinion that this marriage would make you unhappy?”

“My dear François,” said Marguerite, “when a marriage is not the height of happiness it is almost always the depth of wretchedness.”

“Well, then, my dear Marguerite, as I said to you, — I am waiting.”

“But what are you waiting for?”

“For you to display your joy!”

“What have I to be joyful for?”

“The unexpected chance which offers itself for you to resume your liberty.”

“My liberty?” replied Marguerite, who was determined to compel the prince to express his whole thought.

“Yes; your liberty! You will now be separated from the King of Navarre.”

“Separated!” said Marguerite, fastening her eyes on the young prince.

The Duc d’Alençon tried to endure his sister’s look, but his eyes soon avoided hers with embarrassment.

"Separated!" repeated Marguerite; "let us talk this over, brother, for I should like to understand all you mean, and how you propose to separate us."

"Why," murmured the duke, "Henry is a Huguenot."

"No doubt; but he made no secret of his religion, and that was known when we were married."

"Yes; but since your marriage, sister," asked the duke, involuntarily allowing a ray of joy to shine upon his face, "what has Henry been doing?"

"Why, you know better than any one, François, for he has spent his days almost constantly in your society, either hunting or playing mall or tennis."

"Yes, his days, no doubt," replied the duke; "his days — but his nights?"

Marguerite was silent; it was now her turn to cast down her eyes.

"His nights," persisted the Duc d'Alençon, "his nights?"

"Well?" inquired Marguerite, feeling that it was requisite that she should say something in reply.

"Well, he has been spending them with Madame de Sauve!"

"How do you know that?" exclaimed Marguerite.

"I know it because I have an interest in knowing it," replied the young prince, growing pale and picking the embroidery of his sleeves.

Marguerite began to understand what Catharine had whispered to Charles, but pretended to remain in ignorance.

"Why do you tell me this, brother?" she replied, with a well-affected air of melancholy; "was it to remind me that no one here loves me or takes my part, neither those whom nature gave me as protectors nor the man whom the Church gave me as my husband?"

"You are unjust," said the Duc d'Alençon, drawing his armchair still nearer to his sister, "I love you and protect you!"

"Brother," said Marguerite, looking at him sharply, "have you anything to say to me from the queen mother?"

"I! you mistake, sister. I swear to you — what can make you think that?"

"What can make me think that? — why, because you are breaking off the intimacy that binds you to my husband, because you are abandoning the cause of the King of Navarre."

"The cause of the King of Navarre!" replied the Duc d'Alençon, wholly at his wits' end.

"Yes, certainly. Now look here, François; let us speak frankly. You have come to an agreement a score of times; you cannot raise yourself or even hold your own except by mutual help. This alliance" —

"Has now become impossible, sister," interrupted the Duc d'Alençon.

"And why so?"

"Because the King has designs on your husband! Pardon me, when I said *your husband*, I erred; I meant Henry of Navarre. Our mother has seen through the whole thing. I entered into an alliance with the Huguenots because I believed the Huguenots were in favor; but now they are killing the Huguenots, and in another week there will not remain fifty in the whole kingdom. I gave my hand to the King of Navarre because he was — your husband; but now he is not your husband. What can you say to that — you who are not only the loveliest woman in France, but have the clearest head in the kingdom?"

"Why, I have this to say," replied Marguerite, "I know our brother Charles; I saw him yesterday in one of those fits of frenzy, every one of which shortens his life ten years. I have to say that unfortunately these attacks are very frequent, and that thus, in all probability, our brother Charles has not very long to live; and, finally, I have to say that the King of Poland has just died, and the question of electing a prince of the house of France in his stead is much discussed; and when circumstances are thus, it is not the moment to abandon allies who, in the moment of struggle, might support us with the strength of a nation and the power of a kingdom."

"And you!" exclaimed the duke, "do you not act much more treasonably to me in preferring a foreigner to your own brother?"

"Explain yourself, François! In what have I acted treasonably to you?"

"You yesterday begged the life of the King of Navarre from King Charles."

"Well?" said Marguerite, with pretended innocence.

The duke rose hastily, paced round the chamber twice or thrice with a bewildered air, then came back and took Marguerite's hand.

It was cold and unresponsive.

"Good-by, sister!" he said at last. "You will not understand me; do not, therefore, complain of whatever misfortunes may happen to you."

Marguerite grew pale, but remained motionless in her place. She saw the Duc d'Alençon go away, without making any attempt to detain him; but he had scarcely more than disappeared down the corridor when he returned.

"Listen, Marguerite," he said, "I had forgotten to tell you one thing; that is, that by this time to-morrow the King of Navarre will be dead."

Marguerite uttered a cry, for the idea that she was the instrument of assassination caused in her a terror she could not subdue.

“And you will not prevent his death?” she said; “you will not save your best and most faithful ally?”

“Since yesterday the King of Navarre is no longer my ally.”

“Who is, pray?”

“Monsieur de Guise. By destroying the Huguenots, Monsieur de Guise has become the king of the Catholics.”

“And does a son of Henry II. recognize a duke of Lorraine as his king?”

“You are in a bad frame of mind, Marguerite, and you do not understand anything.”

“I confess that I try in vain to read your thoughts.”

“Sister, you are of as good a house as the Princesse de Porcian; De Guise is no more immortal than the King of Navarre. Now, then, Marguerite, suppose three things, three possibilities: first, suppose monsieur is chosen King of Poland; the second, that you loved me as I love you; well, I am King of France, and you are — queen of the Catholics.”

Marguerite hid her face in her hands, overwhelmed at the depth of the views of this youth, whom no one at court thought possessed of even common understanding.

“But,” she asked after a moment’s silence, “I hope you are not jealous of Monsieur le Duc de Guise as you were of the King of Navarre!”

“What is done is done,” said the Duc d’Alençon, in a muffled voice, “and if I had to be jealous of the Duc de Guise, well, then, I was!”

“There is only one thing that can prevent this capital plan from succeeding, brother.”

“And what is that?”

“That I no longer love the Duc de Guise.”

“And whom, pray, do you love?”

“No one.”

The Duc d’Alençon looked at Marguerite with the astonishment of a man who takes his turn in failing to understand, and left the room, pressing his icy hand on his forehead, which ached to bursting.

Marguerite remained alone and thoughtful; the situation was beginning to take a clear and definite shape before her eyes; the King had permitted Saint Bartholomew’s, Queen Catharine and the Duc de Guise had put it into execution. The Duc de Guise and the Duc d’Alençon were about to join partnership so as to get the greatest possible advantage. The death of the King of Navarre would be a natural result of this great catastrophe. With the King of Navarre out of the way, his kingdom would be seized upon, Marguerite would be left a throneless, impotent widow with no other prospect before her than a nunnery, where she would not even have the sad consolation of weeping for a consort who had never been her husband.

She was still in the same position when Queen Catharine sent to ask if she would not like to go with her and the whole court on a pious visitation to the hawthorn of the Cemetery of the Innocents. Marguerite's first impulse was to refuse to take part in this cavalcade. But the thought that this excursion might possibly give her a chance to learn something new about the King of Navarre's fate decided her to go. So she sent word that if they would have a palfrey ready for her she would willingly go with their majesties.

Five minutes later a page came to ask if she was ready to go down, for the procession was preparing to start.

Marguerite warned Gillonne by a gesture to look after the wounded man and so went downstairs.

The King, the queen mother, Tavannes, and the principal Catholics were already mounted. Marguerite cast a rapid glance over the group, which was composed of about a score of persons; the King of Navarre was not of the party.

Madame de Sauve was there. Marguerite exchanged a glance with her, and was convinced that her husband's mistress had something to tell her.

They rode down the Rue de l'Astruce and entered into the Rue Saint Honoré. As the populace caught sight of the King, Queen Catharine, and the principal Catholics they flocked together and followed the procession like a rising tide, and shouts rent the air.

"*Vive le Roi!*"

"*Vive la Messe.*"

"Death to the Huguenots!"

These acclamations were accompanied by the waving of ensanguined swords and smoking arquebuses, which showed the part each had taken in the awful work just accomplished.

When they reached the top of the Rue des Prouvelles they met some men who were dragging a headless carcass. It was the admiral's. The men were going to hang it by the feet at Montfaucon.

They entered the Cemetery des Saints Innocents by the gate facing the Rue des Chaps, now known as the Rue des Déchargeurs; the clergy, notified in advance of the visit of the King and the queen mother, were waiting for their majesties to make them speeches.

Madame de Sauve took advantage of a moment when Catharine was listening to one of the discourses to approach the Queen of Navarre, and beg leave to kiss her hand. Marguerite extended her arm toward her, and Madame de Sauve, as she kissed the queen’s hand, slipped a tiny roll of paper up her sleeve.

Madame de Sauve drew back quickly and with clever dissimulation; yet Catharine perceived it, and turned round just as the maid of honor was kissing Marguerite’s hand.

The two women saw her glance, which penetrated them like a flash of lightning, but both remained unmoved; only Madame de Sauve left Marguerite and resumed her place near Catharine.

When Catharine had finished replying to the address which had just been made to her she smiled and beckoned the Queen of Navarre to go to her.

“Eh, my daughter,” said the queen mother, in her Italian patois, “so you are on intimate terms with Madame de Sauve, are you?”

Marguerite smiled in turn, and gave to her lovely countenance the bitterest expression she could, and replied:

“Yes, mother; the serpent came to bite my hand!”

“Aha!” replied Catharine, with a smile; “you are jealous, I think!”

“You are mistaken, madame,” replied Marguerite; “I am no more jealous of the King of Navarre than the King of Navarre is in love with me, but I know how to distinguish my friends from my enemies. I like those that like me, and detest those that hate me. Otherwise, madame, should I be your daughter?”

Catharine smiled so as to make Marguerite understand that if she had had any suspicion it had vanished.

Moreover, at that instant the arrival of other pilgrims attracted the attention of the august throng.

The Duc de Guise came with a troop of gentlemen all warm still from recent carnage. They escorted a richly decorated litter, which stopped in front of the King.

“The Duchesse de Nevers!” cried Charles IX., “Ah! let that lovely robust Catholic come and receive our compliments. Why, they tell me, cousin, that from your own window you have been hunting Huguenots, and that you killed one with a stone.”

The Duchesse de Nevers blushed exceedingly red.

“Sire,” she said in a low tone, and kneeling before the King, “on the contrary, it was a wounded Catholic whom I had the good fortune to rescue.”

“Good — good, my cousin! there are two ways of serving me: one is by exterminating my enemies, the other is by rescuing my friends. One does what one can, and I am certain that if you could have done more you would!”

While this was going on, the populace, seeing the harmony existing between the house of Lorraine and Charles IX., shouted exultantly:

“*Vive le Roi!*”

“*Vive le Duc de Guise!*”

“*Vive la Messe!*”

“Do you return to the Louvre with us, Henriette?” inquired the queen mother of the lovely duchess.

Marguerite touched her friend on the elbow, and she, understanding the sign, replied:

“No, madame, unless your majesty desire it; for I have business in the city with her majesty the Queen of Navarre.”

“And what are you going to do together?” inquired Catharine.

“To see some very rare and curious Greek books found at an old Protestant pastor’s, and which have been taken to the Tower of Saint Jacques la Boucherie,” replied Marguerite.

“You would do much better to see the last Huguenots flung into the Seine from the top of the Pont des Meuniers,” said Charles IX.; “that is the place for all good Frenchmen.”

“We will go, if it be your Majesty’s desire,” replied the Duchesse de Nevers.

Catharine cast a look of distrust on the two young women. Marguerite, on the watch, remarked it, and turning round uneasily, looked about her.

This assumed or real anxiety did not escape Catharine.

“What are you looking for?”

“I am seeking — I do not see” — she replied.

“Whom are you seeking? Who is it you fail to see?”

“La Sauve,” said Marguerite; “can she have returned to the Louvre?”

"Did I not say you were jealous?" said Catharine, in her daughter's ear. "Oh, *bestia*! Come, come, Henriette," she added, shrugging her shoulders, "begone, and take the Queen of Navarre with you."

Marguerite pretended to be still looking about her; then, turning to her friend, she said in a whisper:

"Take me away quickly; I have something of the greatest importance to say to you."

The duchess courtesied to the King and queen mother, and then, bowing low before the Queen of Navarre:

"Will your majesty deign to come into my litter?"

"Willingly, only you will have to take me back to the Louvre."

"My litter, like my servants and myself, are at your majesty's orders."

Queen Marguerite entered the litter, while Catharine and her gentlemen returned to the Louvre just as they had come. But during the route it was observed that the queen mother kept talking to the King, pointing several times to Madame de Sauve, and at each time the King laughed — as Charles IX. laughed; that is, with a laugh more sinister than a threat.

As soon as Marguerite felt the litter in motion, and had no longer to fear Catharine's searching eyes, she quickly drew from her sleeve Madame de Sauve's note and read as follows:

"*I have received orders to send to-night to the King of Navarre two keys; one is that of the room in which he is shut up, and the other is the key of my chamber; when once he has reached my apartment, I am enjoined to keep him there until six o'clock in the morning.*

"*Let your majesty reflect — let your majesty decide. Let your majesty esteem my life as nothing.*"

"There is now no doubt," murmured Marguerite, "and the poor woman is the tool of which they wish to make use to destroy us all. But we will see if the Queen Margot, as my brother Charles calls me, is so easily to be made a nun of."

"Tell me, whom is the letter from?" asked the Duchesse de Nevers.

"Ah, duchess, I have so many things to say to you!" replied Marguerite, tearing the note into a thousand bits.

CHAPTER XII.

MUTUAL CONFIDENCES.

“And, first, where are we going?” asked Marguerite; “not to the Pont des Meuniers, I suppose, — I have seen enough slaughter since yesterday, my poor Henriette.”

“I have taken the liberty to conduct your majesty” —

“First and foremost, my majesty requests you to forget my majesty — you were taking me” —

“To the Hôtel de Guise, unless you decide otherwise.”

“No, no, let us go there, Henriette; the Duc de Guise is not there, your husband is not there.”

“Oh, no,” cried the duchess, her bright emerald eyes sparkling with joy; “no, neither my husband, nor my brother-in-law, nor any one else. I am free — free as air, free as a bird, — free, my queen! Do you understand the happiness there is in that word? I go, I come, I command. Ah, poor queen, you are not free — and so you sigh.”

“You go, you come, you command. Is that all? Is that all the use of liberty? You are happy with only freedom as an excuse!”

“Your majesty promised to tell me a secret.”

“Again ‘your majesty’! I shall be angry soon, Henriette. Have you forgotten our agreement?”

“No; your respectful servant in public — in private, your madcap confidante, is it not so, madame? Is it not so, Marguerite?”

“Yes, yes,” said the queen, smiling.

“No family rivalry, no treachery in love; everything fair, open, and aboveboard! An offensive and defensive alliance, for the sole purpose of finding and, if we can, catching on the fly, that ephemeral thing called happiness.”

“Just so, duchess. Let us again seal the compact with a kiss.”

And the two beautiful women, the one so pale, so full of melancholy, the other so roseate, so fair, so animated, joined their lips as they had united their thoughts.

“Tell me, what is there new?” asked the duchess, giving Marguerite an eager, inquisitive look.

“Isn’t everything new since day before yesterday?”

“Oh, I am speaking of love, not of politics. When we are as old as dame Catharine we will take part in politics; but we are only twenty, my pretty queen, and so let us talk about something else. Let me see! can it be that you are really married?”

“To whom?” asked Marguerite, laughing.

“Ah! you reassure me, truly!”

“Well, Henriette, that which reassures you, alarms me. Duchess, I must be married.”

“When?”

“To-morrow.”

“Oh, poor little friend! and is it necessary?”

“Absolutely.”

“*Mordi*! as an acquaintance of mine says, this is very sad.”

“And so you know some one who says *mordi*?” asked Marguerite, with a smile.

“Yes.”

“And who is this some one?”

“You keep asking me questions when I am talking to you. Finish and I will begin.”

“In two words, it is this: The King of Navarre is in love, and not with me; I am not in love, but I do not want him, yet we must both of us change, or seem to change, between now and to-morrow.”

“Well, then, you change, and be very sure he will do the same.”

“That is quite impossible, for I am less than ever inclined to change.”

“Only with respect to your husband, I hope.”

“Henriette, I have a scruple.”

“A scruple! about what?”

“A religious one. Do you make any difference between Huguenots and Catholics?”

“In politics?”

“Yes.”

“Of course.”

“And in love?”

“My dear girl, we women are such heathens that we admit every kind of sect, and recognize many gods.”

“In one, eh?”

“Yes,” replied the duchess, her eyes sparkling; “he who is called *Eros*, *Cupido*, *Amor*. He who has a quiver on his back, wings on his shoulders, and a fillet over his eyes. *Mordi, vive la dévotion!*”

“You have a peculiar method of praying; you throw stones on the heads of Huguenots.”

“Let us do our duty and let people talk. Ah, Marguerite! how the finest ideas, the noblest actions, are spoilt in passing through the mouths of the vulgar!”

“The vulgar! — why, it was my brother Charles who congratulated you on your exploits, wasn’t it?”

“Your brother Charles is a mighty hunter blowing the horn all day, and that makes him very thin. I reject his compliments; besides, I gave him his answer — didn’t you hear what I said?”

“No; you spoke so low.”

“So much the better. I shall have more news to tell you. Now, then, finish your story, Marguerite.”

“I was going to say — to say” —

“Well?”

“I was going to say,” continued the queen, laughing, “if the stone my brother spoke of be a fact, I should resist.”

“Ah!” cried Henriette, “so you have chosen a Huguenot, have you? Well, to reassure your conscience, I promise you that I will choose one myself on the first opportunity.”

“Ah, so you have chosen a Catholic, have you?”

“*Mordi*!” replied the duchess.

“I see, I see.”

“And what is this Huguenot of yours?”

“I did not choose him. The young man is nothing and probably never will be anything to me.”

“But what sort is he? You can tell me that; you know how curious I am about these matters.”

“A poor young fellow, beautiful as Benvenuto Cellini’s Nisus, — and he came and took refuge in my room.”

“Oho! — of course without any suggestion on your part?”

“Poor fellow! Do not laugh so, Henriette; at this very moment he is between life and death.”

“He is ill, is he?”

“He is grievously wounded.”

“A wounded Huguenot is very disagreeable, especially in these times; and what have you done with this wounded Huguenot, who is not and never will be anything to you?”

“He is in my closet; I am concealing him and I want to save him.”

“He is handsome! he is young! he is wounded. You hide him in your closet; you want to save him. This Huguenot of yours will be very ungrateful if he is not too grateful.”

“I am afraid he is already — much more so than I could wish.”

“And this poor young man interests you?”

“From motives of humanity — that’s all.”

“Ah, humanity! my poor queen, that is the very virtue that is the ruin of all of us women.”

“Yes; and you understand: as the King, the Duc d’Alençon, my mother, even my husband, may at any moment enter my room” —

“You want me to hide your little Huguenot as long as he is ill, on condition I send him back to you when he is cured?”

“Scoffer!” said Marguerite, “no! I do not lay my plans so far in advance; but if you could conceal the poor fellow, — if you could preserve the life I have saved, — I confess I should be most grateful. You are free at the Hôtel de Guise; you have neither brother-in-law nor husband to spy on you or constrain you; besides, behind your room there is a closet like mine into which no one is entitled to enter; so lend me your closet for my Huguenot, and when he is cured open the cage and let the bird fly away.”

“There is only one difficulty, my dear queen: the cage is already occupied.”

“What, have *you* also saved somebody?”

“That is exactly what I answered your brother with.”

“Ah, I understand! that’s why you spoke so low that I could not hear you.”

“Listen, Marguerite: it is an admirable story — is no less poetical and romantic than yours. After I had left you six of my guards, I returned with the rest to the Hôtel de Guise, and I was watching them pillage and burn a house separated from my brother’s palace only by the Rue des Quatre Fils, when I heard the voices of men swearing and of women crying. I went out on the balcony and the first thing I saw was a sword flashing so brilliantly that it seemed to light up the whole scene. I was filled with admiration for this fiery sword. I am fond of fine things, you know! Then naturally enough I tried to distinguish the arm wielding it and then the body to which the arm belonged. Amid sword-thrusts and shouts I at last made out the man and I saw — a hero, an Ajax Telamon. I heard a voice — the voice of a Stentor. My enthusiasm awoke — I stood there panting, trembling at every blow aimed at him, at every thrust he parried! That was a quarter hour of emotion such as I had never before experienced, my queen; and never believed was possible to experience. So there I was panting, holding my breath, trembling, and voiceless, when all of a sudden my hero disappeared."

"How?"

"Struck down by a stone an old woman threw at him. Then, like Cyrus, I found my voice, and screamed, 'Help! help!' my guards went out, lifted him up, and bore him to the room which you want for your *protégé*."

"Alas, my dear Henriette, I can better understand this story because it is so nearly my own."

"With this difference, queen, that as I am serving my King and my religion, I have no reason to send Monsieur Annibal de Coconnas away."

"His name is Annibal de Coconnas!" said Marguerite, laughing.

"A terrible name, is it not? Well, he who bears it is worthy of it. What a champion he is, by Heaven! and how he made the blood flow! Put on your mask, my queen, for we are now at the palace."

"Why put on my mask?"

"Because I wish to show you my hero."

"Is he handsome?"

"He seemed magnificent to me during the conflict. To be sure, it was at night and he was lighted up by the flames. This morning by daylight I confess he seemed to me to have lost a little."

"So then my *protégé* is rejected at the Hôtel de Guise. I am sorry for it, for that is the last place where they would look for a Huguenot."

"Oh, no, your Huguenot shall come; I will have him brought this evening: one shall sleep in the right-hand corner of the closet and the other in the left."

"But when they recognize each other as Protestant and Catholic they will fight."

“Oh, there is no danger. Monsieur de Coconnas has had a cut down the face that prevents him from seeing very well; your Huguenot is wounded in the chest so that he can’t move; and, besides, you have only to tell him to be silent on the subject of religion, and all will go well.”

“So be it.”

“It’s a bargain; and now let us go in.”

“Thanks,” said Marguerite, pressing her friend’s hand.

“Here, madame,” said the duchess, “you are again ‘your majesty;’ suffer me, then, to do the honors of the Hôtel de Guise fittingly for the Queen of Navarre.”

And the duchess, alighting from the litter, almost knelt on the ground in helping Marguerite to step down; then pointing to the palace door guarded by two sentinels, arquebuse in hand, she followed the queen at a respectful distance, and this humble attitude she maintained as long as she was in sight.

As soon as she reached her room, the duchess closed the door, and, calling to her waiting-woman, a thorough Sicilian, said to her in Italian,

“Mica, how is Monsieur le Comte?”

“Better and better,” replied she.

“What is he doing?”

“At this moment, madame, he is taking some refreshment.”

“It is always a good sign,” said Marguerite, “when the appetite returns.”

“Ah, that is true. I forgot you were a pupil of Ambroise Paré. Leave us, Mica.”

“Why do you send her away?”

“That she may be on the watch.”

Mica left the room.

“Now,” said the duchess, “will you go in to see him, or shall I send for him here?”

“Neither the one nor the other. I wish to see him without his seeing me.”

“What matters it? You have your mask.”

“He may recognize me by my hair, my hands, a jewel.”

“How cautious she is since she has been married, my pretty queen!”

Marguerite smiled.

“Well,” continued the duchess, “I see only one way.”

“What is that?”

“To look through the keyhole.”

“Very well! take me to the door.”

The duchess took Marguerite by the hand and led her to a door covered with tapestry; then bending one knee, she applied her eye to the keyhole.

“’Tis all right; he is sitting at table, with his face turned toward us; come!”

The queen took her friend’s place, and looked through the keyhole; Coconnas, as the duchess had said, was sitting at a well-served table, and, despite his wounds, was doing ample justice to the good things before him.

“Ah, great heavens!” cried Marguerite, starting back.

“What is the matter?” asked the duchess in amazement.

“Impossible! — no! — yes! — on my soul, ’tis the very man!”

“Who?”

“Hush,” said Marguerite, getting to her feet and seizing the duchess’s hand; “’tis the man who pursued my Huguenot into my room, and stabbed him in my arms! Oh, Henriette, how fortunate he did not see me!”

“Well, then, you have seen him fighting; was he not handsome?”

“I do not know,” said Marguerite, “for I was looking at the man he was pursuing.”

“What is his name?”

“You will not mention it before the count?”

“No, I give you my promise!”

“Lerac de la Mole.”

“And what do you think of him now?”

“Of Monsieur de la Mole?”

“No, of Monsieur de Coconnas?”

“Faith!” said Marguerite, “I confess I think” —

She stopped.

“Come, come,” said the duchess, “I see you are angry with him for having wounded your Huguenot.”

“Why, so far,” said Marguerite, laughing, “my Huguenot owes him nothing; the slash he gave him under his eye” —

“They are quits, then, and we can reconcile them. Send me your wounded man.”

“Not now — by and by.”

“When?”

“When you have found yours another room.”

“Which?”

Marguerite looked meaningly at her friend, who, after a moment’s silence, laughed.

“So be it,” said the duchess; “alliance firmer than ever.”

“Friendship ever sincere!”

“And the word, in case we need each other?”

“The triple name of your triple god, ‘*Eros, Cupido, Amor.*’“

And the two princesses separated after one more kiss, and pressing each other’s hand for the twentieth time.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW THERE ARE KEYS WHICH OPEN DOORS THEY ARE NOT MEANT FOR.

The Queen of Navarre on her return to the Louvre found Gillonne in great excitement. Madame de Sauve had been there in her absence. She had brought a key sent her by the queen mother. It was the key of the room in which Henry was confined. It was evident that the queen mother for some purpose of her own wished the Béarnais to spend that night in Madame de Sauve's apartment.

Marguerite took the key and turned it over and over; she made Gillonne repeat Madame de Sauve's every word, weighed them, letter by letter, in her mind, and at length thought she detected Catharine's plan.

She took pen and ink, and wrote:

"*Instead of going to Madame de Sauve to-night, come to the Queen of Navarre.*"

"*Marguerite.*"

She rolled up the paper, put it in the hollow of the key, and ordered Gillonne to slip the key under the king's door as soon as it was dark.

This first duty having been attended to, Marguerite thought of the wounded man, closed all the doors, entered the closet, and, to her great surprise, found La Mole dressed in all his clothes, torn and blood-stained as they were.

On seeing her he strove to rise, but, still dizzy, could not stand, and fell back upon the sofa which had served for his bed.

"What is the matter, sir?" asked Marguerite; "and why do you thus disobey your physician's orders? I recommended you rest, and instead of following my advice you do just the contrary."

"Oh, madame," said Gillonne, "it is not my fault; I have entreated Monsieur le Comte not to commit this folly, but he declares that nothing shall keep him any longer at the Louvre."

"Leave the Louvre!" said Marguerite, gazing with astonishment at the young man, who cast down his eyes. "Why, it is impossible — you cannot walk; you are pale and weak; your knees tremble. Only a few hours ago the wound in your shoulder was still bleeding."

"Madame," said the young man, "as earnestly as I thanked your majesty for having given me shelter, as earnestly do I pray you now to suffer me to depart."

"I scarcely know what to call such a resolution," said Marguerite; "it is worse than ingratitude."

"Oh," cried La Mole, clasping his hands, "think me not ungrateful; my gratitude will cease only with my life."

"It will not last long, then," said Marguerite, moved at these words, the sincerity of which it was impossible to doubt; "for your wounds will open, and you will die from loss of blood, or you will be recognized for a Huguenot and killed ere you have gone fifty yards in the street."

"Nevertheless I must leave the Louvre," murmured La Mole.

"Must," returned Marguerite, fixing her serene, inscrutable eyes upon him; then turning rather pale she added, "ah, yes; forgive me, sir, I understand; doubtless there is some one outside the Louvre who is anxiously waiting for you. You are right, Monsieur de la Mole; it is natural, and I understand it. Why didn't you say so at first? or rather, why didn't I think of it myself? It is duty in the exercise of hospitality to protect one's guest's affections as well as to cure his wounds, and to care for the spirit just as one cares for the body."

"Alas, madame," said La Mole, "you are laboring under a strange mistake. I am well nigh alone in the world, and altogether so in Paris, where no one knows me. My assassin is the first man I have spoken to in this city; your majesty the first woman who has spoken to me."

"Then," said Marguerite, "why would you go?"

"Because," replied La Mole, "last night you got no rest, and to-night" —

Marguerite blushed.

"Gillonne," said she, "it is already evening and time to deliver that key."

Gillonne smiled, and left the room.

"But," continued Marguerite, "if you are alone in Paris, without friends, what will you do?"

"Madame, I soon shall have friends enough, for while I was pursued I thought of my mother, who was a Catholic; methought I saw her with a cross in her hand gliding before me toward the Louvre, and I vowed that if God should save my life I would embrace my mother's religion. Madame, God did more than save my life, he sent me one of his angels to make me love life.”

“But you cannot walk; before you have gone a hundred steps you will faint away.”

“Madame, I have made the experiment in the closet, I walk slowly and painfully, it is true; but let me get as far as the Place du Louvre; once outside, let befall what will.”

Marguerite leaned her head on her hand and sank into deep thought.

“And the King of Navarre,” said she, significantly, “you no longer speak of him? In changing your religion, have you also changed your desire to enter his service?”

“Madame,” replied La Mole, growing pale, “you have just hit upon the actual reason of my departure. I know that the King of Navarre is exposed to the greatest danger, and that all your majesty’s influence as a daughter of France will barely suffice to save his life.”

“What do you mean, sir,” exclaimed Marguerite, “and what danger do you refer to?”

“Madame,” replied La Mole, with some hesitation, “one can hear everything from the closet where I am.”

“’Tis true,” said Marguerite to herself; “Monsieur de Guise told me so before.”

“Well,” added she, aloud, “what did you hear?”

“In the first place, the conversation between your majesty and your brother.”

“With François?” said Marguerite, changing color.

“Yes, madame, with the Duc d’Alençon; and then after you went out I heard what Gillonne and Madame de Sauve said.”

“And these two conversations” —

“Yes, madame; married scarcely a week, you love your husband; your husband will come, in his turn, in the same way that the Duc d’Alençon and Madame de Sauve came. He will confide his secrets to you. Well, then, I must not overhear them; I should be indiscreet — I cannot — I must not — I will not be!”

By the tone in which La Mole uttered these last words, by the anxiety expressed in his voice, by the embarrassment shown in his eyes, Marguerite was enlightened as by a sudden revelation.

"Aha!" said she, "so you have heard everything that has been said in this room?"

"Yes, madame."

These words were uttered in a sigh.

"And you wish to depart to-night, this evening, to avoid hearing any more?"

"This moment, if it please your majesty to allow me to go."

"Poor fellow!" said Marguerite, with a strange accent of tender pity.

Astonished by such a gentle reply when he was expecting a rather forcible outburst, La Mole timidly raised his head; his eyes met Marguerite's and were riveted as by a magnetic power on their clear and limpid depths.

"So then you feel you cannot keep a secret, Monsieur de la Mole?" said Marguerite in a soft voice as she stood leaning on the back of her chair, half hidden in the shadow of a thick tapestry and enjoying the felicity of easily reading his frank and open soul while remaining impenetrable herself.

"Madame," said La Mole, "I have a miserable disposition: I distrust myself, and the happiness of another gives me pain."

"Whose happiness?" asked Marguerite, smiling. "Ah, yes — the King of Navarre's! Poor Henry!"

"You see," cried La Mole, passionately, "he is happy."

"Happy?"

"Yes, for your majesty is sorry for him."

Marguerite crumpled up the silk of her purse and smoothed out the golden fringe.

"So then you decline to see the King of Navarre?" said she; "you have made up your mind; you are decided?"

"I fear I should be troublesome to his majesty just at the present time."

"But the Duc d'Alençon, my brother?"

"Oh, no, madame!" cried La Mole, "the Duc d'Alençon even still less than the King of Navarre."

"Why so?" asked Marguerite, so stirred that her voice trembled as she spoke.

"Because, although I am already too bad a Huguenot to be a faithful servant of the King of Navarre, I am not a sufficiently good Catholic to be friends with the Duc d'Alençon and Monsieur de Guise."

This time Marguerite cast down her eyes, for she felt the very depths of her heart stirred by what he said, and yet she could not have told whether his reply was meant to give her joy or pain.

At this moment Gillonne came back. Marguerite asked her a question with a glance; Gillonne's answer, also conveyed by her eyes, was in the affirmative. She had succeeded in getting the key to the King of Navarre.

Marguerite turned her eyes toward La Mole, who stood before her, his head drooping on his breast, pale, like one suffering alike in mind and in body.

"Monsieur de la Mole is proud," said she, "and I hesitate to make him a proposition he will doubtless reject."

La Mole rose, took one step toward Marguerite, and was about to bow low before her to signify that he was at her service; but an intense, keen, burning pang forced the tears from his eyes, and conscious that he was in danger of falling, he clutched a piece of tapestry and clung to it.

"Don't you see, sir," cried Marguerite, springing to him and supporting him in her arms, "don't you see that you still need me?"

A scarcely perceptible movement passed over La Mole's lips.

"Oh, yes!" he whispered, "like the air I breathe, like the light I see!"

At this moment three knocks were heard at Marguerite's door.

"Do you hear, madame?" cried Gillonne, alarmed.

"Already!" exclaimed Marguerite.

"Shall I open?"

"Wait! perhaps it is the King of Navarre."

"Oh, madame!" cried La Mole, recalled to himself by these words, which the queen had spoken in such a low tone that she hoped Gillonne only had heard them, "on my knees I entreat you, let me depart. Yes, dead or alive! madame, have pity on me! Oh! you do not answer. I will tell you all, and then you will drive me away, I hope."

"Be silent," said Marguerite, who found an indescribable charm in the young man's reproaches; "be silent."

"Madame," replied La Mole, who did not find that anger he expected in the voice of the queen, "madame, I tell you again, everything is audible in this closet. Oh, do not make me perish by tortures more cruel than the executioner could inflict" —

"Silence! silence!" said Marguerite.

“Oh, madame, you are merciless! you will not hear me, you will not understand me. Know, then, that I love you” —

“Silence! I tell you,” interrupted Marguerite, placing on his mouth her warm, perfumed hand, which he seized between both of his and pressed eagerly to his lips.

“But” — he whispered.

“Be silent, child — who is this rebel that refuses to obey his queen?”

Then darting out of the closet, she shut the door and stood leaning against the wall pressing her trembling hand to her heart, as if to control it.

“Open, Gillonne.”

Gillonne left the room, and an instant after, the fine, intellectual, but rather anxious countenance of the King of Navarre appeared behind the tapestry.

“You have sent for me, madame?”

“Yes, sire. Your majesty received my letter?”

“And not without some surprise, I confess,” said Henry, looking round with distrust, which, however, almost instantly vanished from his mind.

“And not without some apprehension,” added Marguerite.

“I confess it, madame! But still, surrounded as I am by deadly enemies, by friends still more dangerous, perhaps, than my open foes, I recollected that one evening I had seen a noble generosity shining in your eyes — ’twas the night of our marriage; that one other evening I had seen the star of courage beaming in them — ’twas yesterday, the day fixed for my death.”

“Well, sire?” said Marguerite, smiling, while Henry seemed striving to read her heart.

“Well, madame,” returned the king, “thinking of these things, I said to myself, as I read your letter bidding me come: ‘Without friends, for he is a disarmed prisoner, the King of Navarre has but one means of dying nobly, of dying a death that will be recorded in history. It is to die betrayed by his wife; and I am come’“ —

“Sire,” replied Marguerite, “you will change your tone when you learn that all this is the work of a woman who loves you — and whom you love.”

Henry started back at these words, and his keen gray eyes under their black lashes were fixed on the queen with curiosity.

“Oh, reassure yourself, sire,” said the queen, smiling; “I am not that person.”

“But, madame,” said Henry, “you sent me this key, and this is your writing.”

“It is my writing, I confess; the letter came from me, but the key is a different matter. Let it satisfy you to know that it has passed through the hands of four women before it reached you.”

“Of four women?” exclaimed Henry in astonishment.

“Yes,” said Marguerite; “Queen Catharine’s, Madame de Sauve’s, Gillonne’s, and mine.”

Henry pondered over this enigma.

“Now let us talk reasonably, sire,” said Marguerite, “and above all let us speak frankly. Common report has it that your majesty has consented to abjure. Is it true?”

“That report is mistaken; I have not yet consented.”

“But your mind is made up?”

“That is to say, I am deliberating. When one is twenty and almost a king, *ventre saint gris*! there are many things well worth a mass.”

“And among other things life, for instance!”

Henry could not repress a fleeting smile.

“You do not tell me your whole thought,” said Marguerite.

“I have reservations for my allies, madame; and you know we are but allies as yet; if indeed you were both my ally — and” —

“And your wife, sire?”

“Faith! yes, and my wife” —

“What then?”

“Why, then, it might be different, and I perhaps might resolve to remain King of the Huguenots, as they call me. But as it is, I must be content to live.”

Marguerite looked at Henry in such a peculiar manner that it would have awakened suspicion in a less acute mind than his.

“And are you quite sure of succeeding even in that?” she asked.

“Why, almost; but you know, in this world nothing is certain.”

“It is true,” replied Marguerite, “your majesty shows such moderation and professes such disinterestedness, that after having renounced your crown, after having renounced your religion, you will probably renounce your alliance with a daughter of France; at least this is hoped for.”

These words bore a significance which sent a thrill through Henry’s whole frame; but instantaneously repressing the emotion, he said:

“Deign to recollect, madame, that at this moment I am not my own master; I shall therefore do what the King of France orders me. If I were consulted the least in the world on this question, affecting as it does my throne, my honor, and my life, rather than build my future on this forced marriage of ours, I should prefer to enter a monastery or turn gamekeeper.”

This calm resignation, this renunciation of the world, alarmed Marguerite. She thought perhaps this rupture of the marriage had been agreed upon by Charles IX., Catharine, and the King of Navarre. Why should she not be taken as a dupe or a victim? Because she was sister of the one and daughter of the other? Experience had taught her that this relationship gave her no ground on which to build her security.

So ambition was gnawing at this young woman’s, or rather this young queen’s heart, and she was too far above vulgar frailties to be drawn into any selfish meanness; in the case of every woman, however mediocre she may be, when she loves her love has none of these petty trials, for true love is also an ambition.

“Your majesty,” said Marguerite, with a sort of mocking disdain, “has no confidence in the star that shines over the head of every king!”

“Ah,” said Henry, “I vainly look for mine now, I cannot see it; ’tis hidden by the storm which now threatens me!”

“And suppose a woman’s breath were to dispel this tempest, and make the star reappear, brilliant as ever?”

“’Twere difficult.”

“Do you deny the existence of this woman?”

“No, I deny her power.”

“You mean her will?”

“I said her power, and I repeat, her power. A woman is powerful only when love and interest are combined within her in equal degrees; if either sentiment predominates, she is, like Achilles, vulnerable; now as to this woman, if I mistake not, I cannot rely on her love.”

Marguerite made no reply.

“Listen,” said Henry; “at the last stroke of the bell of Saint Germain l’Auxerrois you must have thought of regaining your liberty, sacrificed for the purpose of destroying my followers. My concern was to save my life: that was the most essential thing. We lose Navarre, indeed; but what is that compared with your being enabled to speak aloud in your room, which you dared not do when you had some one listening to you in yonder closet?”

Deeply absorbed as she was in her thoughts, Marguerite could not refrain from smiling. The king rose and prepared to seek his own apartment, for it was some time after eleven, and every one at the Louvre was, or seemed to be, asleep.

Henry took three steps toward the door, then suddenly stopped as if for the first time recollecting the motive of his visit to the queen.

“By the way, madame,” said he, “had you not something to communicate to me? or did you desire to give me an opportunity of thanking you for the reprieve which your brave presence in the King’s armory brought me? In truth it was just in time, madame; I cannot deny it, you appeared like a goddess of antiquity, in the nick of time to save my life.”

“Unfortunate man!” cried Marguerite, in a muffled voice, and seizing her husband’s arm, “do you not see that nothing is saved, neither your liberty, your crown, nor your life? Infatuated madman! Poor madman! Did you, then, see nothing in my letter but a rendezvous? Did you believe that Marguerite, indignant at your coldness, desired reparation?”

“I confess, madame,” said Henry in astonishment, “I confess” —

Marguerite shrugged her shoulders with an expression impossible to describe.

At this instant a strange sound was heard, like a sharp insistent scratching at the secret door.

Marguerite led the king toward the little door.

“Listen,” said she.

“The queen mother is leaving her room,” said a trembling voice outside, which Henry instantly recognized as Madame de Sauve’s.

“Where is she going?” asked Marguerite.

“She is coming to your majesty.”

And then the rustling of a silk gown, growing fainter, showed that Madame de Sauve was hastening rapidly away.

“Oho!” exclaimed Henry.

“I was sure of this,” said Marguerite.

“And I,” replied Henry, “feared it, and this is the proof of it.”

And half opening his black velvet doublet, he showed the queen that he had beneath it a shirt of mail, and a long Milan poniard, which instantly glittered in his hand like a viper in the sun.

“As if you needed weapon and cuirass here!” cried Marguerite. “Quick, quick, sire! conceal that dagger; ’tis the queen mother, indeed, but the queen mother only."

"Yet" —

"Silence! — I hear her."

And putting her mouth close to Henry's ear, she whispered something which the young king heard with attention mingled with astonishment. Then he hid himself behind the curtains of the bed.

Meantime, with the quickness of a panther, Marguerite sprang to the closet, where La Mole was waiting in a fever of excitement, opened the door, found the young man, and pressing his hand in the darkness — ”Silence," said she, approaching her lips so near that he felt her warm and balmy breath; "silence!"

Then returning to her chamber, she tore off her head-dress, cut the laces of her dress with her poniard, and sprang into bed.

It was time — the key turned in the lock. Catharine had a key for every door in the Louvre.

"Who is there?" cried Marguerite, as Catharine placed on guard at the door the four gentlemen by whom she was attended.

And, as if frightened by this sudden intrusion into her chamber, Marguerite sprang out from behind the curtains of her bed in a white dressing-gown, and then recognizing Catharine, came to kiss her hand with such well-feigned surprise that the wily Florentine herself could not help being deceived by it.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SECOND MARRIAGE NIGHT.

The queen mother cast a marvellously rapid glance around her. The velvet slippers at the foot of the bed, Marguerite’s clothes scattered over the chairs, the way she rubbed her eyes as if to drive away her sleepiness, all convinced Catharine that she had awakened her daughter.

Then she smiled as a woman does when she has succeeded in her plans, and drawing up an easy chair, she said:

“Let us sit down, Marguerite, and talk.”

“Madame, I am listening.”

“It is time,” said Catharine, slowly shutting her eyes in the characteristic way of people who weigh each word or who deeply dissimulate, “it is time, my daughter, that you should know how ardently your brother and myself desire to see you happy.”

This exordium for one who knew Catharine was alarming.

“What can she be about to say?” thought Marguerite.

“To be sure,” continued La Florentine, “in giving you in marriage we fulfilled one of those acts of policy frequently required by important interests of those who govern; but I must confess, my poor child, that we had no expectation that the indifference manifested by the King of Navarre for one so young, so lovely, and so fascinating as yourself would be so obstinate.”

Marguerite arose, and folding her robe de chambre around her, courtesied with ceremonious respect to her mother.

“I have heard to-night only,” continued Catharine, “otherwise I should have paid you an earlier visit, that your husband is far from showing you those attentions you have a right to claim, not merely as a beautiful woman, but as a princess of France.”

Marguerite sighed, and Catharine, encouraged by this mute approval, proceeded.

“In fact, that the King of Navarre is openly cohabiting one of my maids of honor who is scandalously smitten with him, that he scorns the love of the woman graciously given to him, is an insult to which we poor powerful ones of the earth cannot apply a remedy, and yet the meanest gentleman in our kingdom would avenge it by calling out his son-in-law or having his son do so.”

Marguerite dropped her head.

“For some time, my daughter,” Catharine went on to say, “I have seen by your reddened eyes, by your bitter sallies against La Sauve, that in spite of your efforts your heart must show external signs of its bleeding wound.”

Marguerite trembled: a slight movement had shaken the curtains; but fortunately Catharine did not notice it.

“This wound,” said she with affectionate sweetness redoubled, “this wound, my daughter, a mother’s hand must cure. Those who with the intention of securing your happiness have brought about your marriage, and who in their anxiety about you notice that every night Henry of Navarre goes to the wrong rooms; those who cannot allow a kinglet like him to insult a woman of such beauty, of such high rank, and so worthy, by scorning your person and neglecting his chances of posterity; those who see that at the first favorable wind, this wild and insolent madcap will turn against our family and expel you from his house — I say have not they the right to secure your interests by entirely dividing them from his, so that your future may be better suited to yourself and your rank?”

“And yet, madame,” replied Marguerite, “in spite of these observations so replete with maternal love, and filling me with joy and pride, I am bold enough to affirm to your majesty that the King of Navarre is my husband.”

Catharine started with rage, and drawing closer to Marguerite she said:

“He, your husband? Is it sufficient to make you husband and wife that the Church has pronounced its blessing upon you? And is the marriage consecration only in the words of the priest? He, your husband? Ah, my daughter! if you were Madame de Sauve you might give me this reply. But wholly contrary of what we expected of him since you granted Henry of Navarre the honor of calling you his wife, he has given all your rights to another woman, and at this very instant even,” said Catharine, raising her voice, — ”this key opens the door of Madame de Sauve’s apartment — come with me and you will see” —

“Oh, not so loud, madame, not so loud, I beseech you!” said Marguerite, “for not only are you mistaken, but” —

“Well?”

“Well, you will awaken my husband!”

As she said these words Marguerite arose with a perfectly voluptuous grace, her white dress fluttering loosely around her, while the large open sleeves displayed her bare and faultlessly modelled arm and truly royal hand, and taking a rose-colored taper she held it near the bed, and drawing back the curtain, and smiling significantly at her mother, pointed to the haughty profile, the black locks, and the parted lips of the King of Navarre, who, as he lay upon the disordered bed, seemed buried in profound repose.

Pale, with haggard eyes, her body thrown back as if an abyss had opened at her feet, Catharine uttered not a cry, but a hoarse bellow.

“You see, madame,” said Marguerite, “you were misinformed.”

Catharine looked first at Marguerite, then at Henry. In her active mind she combined Marguerite’s smile with the picture of that pale and dewy brow, those eyes circled by dark-colored rings, and she bit her thin lips in silent fury.

Marguerite allowed her mother for a moment to contemplate this picture, which affected her like the head of Medusa. Then she dropped the curtain and stepping on her tip-toes she came back to Catharine and sat down:

“You were saying, madame?” —

The Florentine for several seconds tried to fathom the young woman’s naïveté; but as if her keen glance had become blunted on Marguerite’s calmness, she exclaimed, “Nothing,” and hastily left the room.

As soon as the sound of her departing footsteps had died away down the long corridor, the bed-curtains opened a second time, and Henry, with sparkling eyes, trembling hand, and panting breath, came out and knelt at Marguerite’s feet; he was dressed only in his short-clothes and his coat of mail, so that Marguerite, seeing him in such an odd rig, could not help laughing even while she was warmly shaking hands with him.

“Ah, madame! ah, Marguerite!” he cried, “how shall I ever repay you?”

And he covered her hand with kisses which gradually strayed higher up along her arm.

“Sire,” said she, gently retreating, “can you forget that a poor woman to whom you owe your life is mourning and suffering on your account? Madame de Sauve,” added she, in a lower tone, “has forgotten her jealousy in sending you to me; and to that sacrifice she may probably have to add her life, for you know better than any one how terrible is my mother’s anger!”

Henry shuddered; and, rising, started to leave the room.

“Upon second thoughts,” said Marguerite, with admirable coquetry, “I have thought it all over and I see no cause for alarm. The key was given to you without any directions, and it will be supposed that you granted me the preference for to-night.”

“And so I do, Marguerite! Consent but to forget” —

“Not so loud, sire, not so loud!” replied the queen, employing the same words she had a few minutes before used to her mother; “any one in the adjoining closet can hear you. And as I am not yet quite free, I will ask you to speak in a lower tone.”

“Oho!” said Henry, half smiling, half gloomily, “that’s true! I was forgetting that I am probably not the one destined to play the end of this interesting scene! This closet” —

“Let me beg of your majesty to enter there,” said Marguerite; “for I am desirous of having the honor of presenting to you a worthy gentleman, wounded during the massacre while making his way to the Louvre to apprise your majesty of the danger with which you were threatened.”

The queen went toward the door, and Henry followed her. She opened it, and the king was thunderstruck at beholding a man in this cabinet, fated to reveal such continued surprises.

But La Mole was still more surprised at thus unexpectedly finding himself in the presence of Henry of Navarre. The result was that the king cast an ironical glance on Marguerite, who bore it without flinching.

“Sire,” said she, “I am in dread lest this gentleman may be murdered even here, in my very chamber; he is devoted to your majesty’s service, and for that reason I commend him to your royal protection.”

“Sire,” continued the young man, “I am the Comte Lerac de la Mole, whom your majesty was expecting; I was recommended to you by that poor Monsieur de Téligny, who was killed by my side.”

“Aha!” replied Henry; “you are right, sir. The queen gave me his letter; but have you not also a letter from the governor of Languedoc?”

“Yes, sire, and I was recommended to deliver it to your majesty as soon as I arrived.”

“Why did you not do so?”

“Sire, I hastened to the Louvre last evening, but your majesty was too much occupied to give me audience.”

“True!” answered the king; “but I should think you might have sent the letter to me?”

"I had orders from Monsieur d'Auriac to give it to no one else but your majesty, since it contained, he said, information so important that he feared to entrust it to any ordinary messenger."

"The contents are, indeed, of a serious nature," said the king, when he had received and read the letter; "advising my instant withdrawal from the court of France, and retirement to Béarn. M. d'Auriac, although a Catholic, was always a stanch friend of mine; and it is possible that, acting as governor of a province, he got scent of what was in the wind here. *Ventre saint gris*! monsieur! why was not this letter given to me three days ago, instead of now?"

"Because, as I before assured your majesty, that using all the speed and diligence in my power, it was wholly impossible to arrive before yesterday."

"That is very unfortunate, very unfortunate," murmured the king; "we should then have been in security, either at Rochelle or in some broad plain surrounded by two or three thousand trusty horsemen."

"Sire, what is done is done," said Marguerite, in a low voice, "and instead of wasting your time complaining over the past you must do the best possible with the future."

"If you were in my place, madame," replied Henry, with his questioning look, "you would still have hope, would you?"

"Certainly I should; I should consider myself as playing a game of three points, of which I had lost only the first."

"Ah, madame," whispered Henry, "if I dared but hope that you would go partners with me in the game" —

"If I had intended to side with your adversaries," replied Marguerite, "I should scarcely have delayed so long."

"True!" replied Henry, "and I am ungrateful; and as you say, the past may still be repaired."

"Alas! sire," said La Mole, "I wish your majesty every kind of good fortune; but now the admiral is no more."

Over Henry's face passed that sly, peasant-like smile, which was not understood at court until after he became King of France.

"But, madame," said the king, attentively observing La Mole, "this gentleman cannot remain here without causing you considerable inconvenience, and being himself subject to very unpleasant surprises. What will you do with him?"

“Could we not remove him from the Louvre?” asked Marguerite, “for I entirely agree with you!”

“It will be difficult.”

“Then could not Monsieur de la Mole find accommodation in your majesty’s apartments?”

“Alas, madame! you speak as if I were still King of the Huguenots, and had subjects to command. You are aware that I am half converted to the Catholic faith and have no people at all.”

Any one but Marguerite would have promptly answered: “He is a Catholic.”

But the queen wished Henry himself to ask her to do the very thing she was desirous of effecting; while La Mole, perceiving his protectress’s caution and not knowing where to set foot on the slippery ground of such a dangerous court as that of France, remained perfectly silent.

“But what is this the governor says in his letter?” said Henry, again casting his eyes over the missive he held in his hand. “He states that your mother was a Catholic, and from that circumstance originates the interest he felt in you.”

“And what were you telling me, Monsieur le Comte,” said Marguerite, “respecting a vow you had formed to change your religion? I confess my recollection on the subject is somewhat confused. Have the goodness to assist me, M. de la Mole. Did not your conversation refer to something of the nature the king appears to desire?”

“Alas! madame, what I did say was so coldly received by your majesty that I did not dare” —

“Simply because it in no way concerned me,” answered Marguerite. “But explain yourself to the king — explain!”

“Well, what was the vow?” asked the king.

“Sire,” said La Mole, “when pursued by assassins, myself unarmed, and almost expiring from my two wounds, I fancied I beheld my mother’s spirit holding a cross in her hands and guiding me to the Louvre. Then I vowed that if my life were preserved I would adopt the religion of my mother, who had been permitted to leave her grave to direct me to a place of safety during that horrible night. Heaven conducted me here, sire. I find myself here under the protection of a princess of France and of the King of Navarre; my life was miraculously saved, therefore I must fulfil my vow. I am ready to become a Catholic.”

Henry frowned. Sceptic that he was, he could well understand a change of religion from motives of interest, but he distrusted abjuration through faith.

"The king does not want to take charge of my *protégé*," thought Marguerite.

La Mole still remained mute and awkward between the two opposing wills. He felt, without being able to define why, that he was in a ridiculous position. Marguerite's womanly tact came to his relief.

"Sire," said she, "we forget that the poor wounded gentleman has need of repose. I myself am half asleep. Ah, see!"

La Mole did indeed turn pale; but it was at Marguerite's last words, which he had interpreted according to his own ideas.

"Well, madame," answered Henry, "nothing can be simpler. Can we not leave Monsieur de la Mole to take his repose."

The young man fixed a supplicating look on Marguerite, and, in spite of the presence of the two majesties, sunk upon a chair, overcome with fatigue and pain.

Marguerite understood all the love in his look, all the despair in his weakness.

"Sire," said she, "your majesty is bound to confer on this young man, who imperilled his life for his king, since he received his wounds while coming hither to inform you of the admiral's death and Téligny's, — your majesty is bound, I repeat, to confer on him an honor for which he will be grateful all his life long."

"What is it, madame?" asked Henry. "Command me, I am ready."

"Monsieur de la Mole must sleep to-night at your majesty's feet, while you, sire, can sleep on this couch. With the permission of my august spouse," added Marguerite, smiling, "I will summon Gillonne and return to bed, for I assure you I am not the least wearied of us three."

Henry had shrewd sense and a quick perception of things; friends and enemies subsequently found fault with him for possessing too much of both. He fully admitted that she who thus banished him from the nuptial bed was well justified in so doing by the indifference he had himself manifested toward her; and then, too, she had just repaid this indifference by saving his life; he therefore allowed no self-love to dictate his answer.

"Madame," said he, "if Monsieur de la Mole were able to come to my quarters I would give him my own bed."

“Yes,” replied Marguerite, “but your quarters just at the present time would not be safe for either of you, and prudence dictates that your majesty should remain here until morning.”

Then without awaiting the king’s reply she summoned Gillonne, and bade her prepare the necessary cushions for the king, and to arrange a bed at the king’s feet for La Mole, who appeared so happy and contented with the honor that one would have sworn he no longer felt his wounds.

Then Marguerite, courtesing low to the king, passed into her chamber, the door of which was well furnished with bolts, and threw herself on the bed.

“One thing is certain,” said Marguerite to herself, “to-morrow Monsieur de la Mole must have a protector at the Louvre; and he who, to-night, sees and hears nothing, may change his mind to-morrow.”

Then she called Gillonne, who was waiting to receive her last orders.

Gillonne came to her.

“Gillonne,” said she in a whisper, “you must contrive to bring my brother the Duc d’Alençon here to-morrow morning before eight o’clock.”

It was just striking two at the Louvre.

La Mole for a few moments talked on political subjects with the king, who gradually grew drowsy and was soon snoring.

La Mole might have slept as well as the king, but Marguerite was not asleep; she kept turning from side to side in her bed, and the noise she made disturbed the young man’s ideas and sleep.

“He is very young,” murmured Marguerite in her wakeful mood, “he is very timid; perhaps — but we must see — perhaps it will be ridiculous. Yet he has handsome eyes — and a good figure, and he is very charming; but if he should not turn out to be brave! — He ran away! — He is renouncing his faith! It is too bad — the dream began well. However, let things take their course and entrust them to that madcap Henriette’s triple god.”

And toward daybreak Marguerite fell asleep, murmuring:

“*Eros, Cupido, Amor.*”

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT WOMAN WILLS, GOD WILLS.

Marguerite was not mistaken: the wrath distilled in the depths of Catharine’s heart at sight of this comedy, the intrigue of which she followed without being in any way able to change its denouement, required a victim. So instead of going directly to her own room the queen mother proceeded to that of her lady in waiting.

Madame de Sauve was in expectation of two visits — one she hoped to receive from Henry, and the other she feared was in store for her from the queen mother. As she lay in her bed only partially undressed, while Dariole kept watch in the antechamber, she heard a key turn in the lock, and then slowly approaching footsteps which would have seemed heavy if they had not been deadened by thick rugs. She did not recognize Henry’s light, eager step; she suspected that Dariole was prevented from coming to warn her, and so leaning on her elbow she waited with eye and ear alert. The portière was lifted and the trembling young woman saw Catharine de Médicis appear.

Catharine seemed calm; but Madame de Sauve, accustomed for two years to study her, well knew what dark designs, and possibly cruel vengeance, might be concealed beneath that apparent calm.

At sight of Catharine, Madame de Sauve was about to spring from her bed, but Catharine signed to her to stay where she was; and poor Charlotte was fixed to the spot, inwardly endeavoring to collect all the forces of her soul to endure the storm which was silently gathering.

“Did you convey the key to the King of Navarre?” inquired Catharine, without the tone of her voice betraying any change; and yet as she spoke her lips grew paler and paler.

“I did, madame,” answered Charlotte, in a voice which she vainly tried to make as firm and assured as Catherine’s was.

“And have you seen him?”

“Who?” asked Madame de Sauve.

“The King of Navarre.”

"No, madame; but I am expecting him, and when I heard the key turn in the lock, I firmly believed it was he."

At this answer, which indicated either perfect confidence or deep dissimulation on Madame de Sauve's part, Catharine could not repress a slight shiver. She clinched her short plump hand.

"And yet you knew perfectly well," said she with her evil smile, "you knew perfectly well, Carlotta, that the King of Navarre would not come to-night."

"I, madame? I knew that?" exclaimed Charlotte, with a tone of surprise perfectly well assumed.

"Yes, you knew it!"

"If he does not come, he must be dead!" replied the young woman, shuddering at the mere supposition.

What gave Charlotte the courage to lie so was the certainty that she would suffer from a terrible vengeance if her little treason should be discovered.

"But did you not write to the king, Carlotta mia?" inquired Catharine, with the same cruel and silent laugh.

"No, madame," answered Charlotte, with well-assumed naïveté, "I cannot recollect receiving your majesty's commands to do so."

A short silence followed, during which Catharine continued to gaze on Madame de Sauve as the serpent looks at the bird it wishes to fascinate.

"You think you are pretty," said Catharine, "you think you are clever, do you not?"

"No, madame," answered Charlotte; "I only know that sometimes your majesty has been graciously pleased to commend both my personal attractions and address."

"Well, then," said Catharine, growing eager and animated, "you were mistaken if you think so, and I lied when I told you so; you are a simpleton and hideous compared to my daughter Margot."

"Oh, madame," replied Charlotte, "that is a fact I will not even try to deny — least of all in your presence."

"So, then, the King of Navarre prefers my daughter to you; a circumstance, I presume, not to your wishes, and certainly not what we agreed should be the case."

"Alas, madame," cried Charlotte, bursting into a torrent of tears which now flowed from no feigned source, "if it be so, I can but say I am very unfortunate!”

“It is so,” said Catharine, darting the two-fold keenness of her eyes like a double poniard into Madame de Sauve’s heart.

“But who can make you believe that?” asked Charlotte.

“Go down to the Queen of Navarre’s *pazza*, and you will find your lover there!”

“Oh!” exclaimed Madame de Sauve.

Catharine shrugged her shoulders.

“Are you jealous, pray?” asked the queen mother.

“I?” exclaimed Madame de Sauve, recalling her fast-failing strength.

“Yes, you! I should like to see a Frenchwoman’s jealousy.”

“But,” said Madame de Sauve, “how should your majesty expect me to be jealous except out of vanity? I love the King of Navarre only as far as your majesty’s service requires it.”

Catharine gazed at her for a moment with dreamy eyes.

“What you tell me may on the whole be true,” she murmured.

“Your majesty reads my heart.”

“And your heart is wholly devoted to me?”

“Command me, madame, and you shall judge for yourself.”

“Well, then, Carlotta, since you are ready to sacrifice yourself in my service, you must still continue for my sake to be in love with the King of Navarre and, above all, to be very jealous, — jealous as an Italian woman.”

“But, madame,” asked Charlotte, “how does an Italian woman show her jealousy?”

“I will tell you,” replied Catharine, and after nodding her head two or three times she left the room as deliberately and noiselessly as she had come in.

Charlotte, confused by the keen look of those eyes dilated like a cat’s or a panther’s without thereby losing anything of their inscrutability, allowed her to go without uttering a single word, without even letting her breathing be heard, and she did not even take a respiration until she heard the door close behind her and Dariole came to say that the terrible apparition had departed.

“Dariole,” said she, “draw up an armchair close to my bed and spend the night in it. I beg you to do so, for I should not dare to stay alone.”

Dariole obeyed; but in spite of the company of her faithful attendant, who stayed near her, in spite of the light from the lamp which she commanded to be left burning for the sake of greater tranquillity, Madame de Sauve also did not fall asleep till daylight, so insistently rang in her ears the metallic accent of Catharine’s voice.

Though Marguerite had not fallen asleep till daybreak she awoke at the first blast of the trumpets, at the first barking of the dogs. She instantly arose and began to put on a costume so negligent that it could not fail to attract attention. Then she summoned her women, and had the gentlemen ordinarily in attendance on the King of Navarre shown into her antechamber, and finally opening the door which shut Henry and De la Mole into the same room, she gave the count an affectionate glance and addressing her husband she said:

“Come, sire, it is not sufficient to have made madame my mother believe in what is not; it still remains for you to convince your whole court that a perfect understanding exists between us. But make yourself quite easy,” added she, laughing, “and remember my words, rendered almost solemn by the circumstances. To-day will be the last time that I shall put your majesty to such a cruel test.”

The King of Navarre smiled and ordered his gentlemen to be admitted.

Just as they were bowing to him he pretended suddenly to recollect having left his mantle on the queen’s bed and begged their excuse for receiving them in such a way; then, taking his mantle from the hands of Marguerite, who stood blushing by his side, he clasped it on his shoulder. Next, turning to his gentlemen, he inquired what news there was in the city and at court.

Marguerite was engaged in watching out of the corner of her eye the imperceptible signs of astonishment betrayed by the gentlemen at detecting this newly revealed intimacy between the king and queen of Navarre, when an usher entered, followed by three or four gentlemen, and announced the Duc d’Alençon.

To bring him there Gillonne had only to tell him that the king had spent the night in the queen’s room.

François rushed in so precipitately that he almost upset those who preceded him. His first glance was for Henry; his next was for Marguerite.

Henry replied with a courteous bow; Marguerite composed her features so that they expressed the utmost serenity.

Then the duke cast a vague but scrutinizing look around the whole room: he saw the two pillows placed at the head of the bed, the derangement of its tapestried coverings, and the king’s hat thrown on a chair.

He turned pale, but quickly recovering himself, he said:

“Does my royal brother Henry join this morning with the King in his game of tennis?”

“Does his Majesty do me the honor to select me as his partner?” inquired Henry, “or is it only a little attention on your part, my brother-in-law?”

“His Majesty has not so said, certainly,” replied the duke, somewhat embarrassed; “but don’t you generally play with him?”

Henry smiled, for so many and such serious events had occurred since he last played with the King that he would not have been astonished to learn that the King had changed his habitual companions at the game.

“I shall go there,” said Henry, with a smile.

“Come,” cried the duke.

“Are you going away?” inquired Marguerite.

“Yes, sister!”

“Are you in great haste?”

“In great haste.”

“Might I venture to detain you for a few minutes?”

Such a request was so unusual coming from Marguerite that her brother looked at her while her color came and went.

“What can she be going to say to him?” thought Henry, no less surprised than the duke himself.

Marguerite, as if she had guessed her husband’s thought, turned toward him.

“Sire,” said she, with a charming smile, “you may go back to his majesty if it seem good to you, for the secret which I am going to reveal to my brother is already known to you, for the reason that the request which I made you yesterday in regard to this secret was as good as refused by your majesty. I should not wish, therefore,” continued Marguerite, “to weary your majesty a second time by expressing in your presence a wish which seemed to be disagreeable.”

“What do you mean?” asked François, looking at both of them with astonishment.

“Aha!” exclaimed Henry, flushing, with indignation, “I know what you mean, madame. In truth, I regret that I am not free. But if I cannot offer Monsieur de la Mole such hospitality as would be equivalent to an assurance, I cannot do less than to recommend to my brother D’Alençon the person *in whom you feel such a lively interest*. Perhaps,” he added, in order to give still more emphasis to the words italicized, “perhaps my brother will discover some way whereby you will be permitted to keep Monsieur de la Mole here near you — that would be better than anything else, would it not, madame?”

“Come, come!” said Marguerite to herself, “the two together will do what neither of them would do individually.”

And she opened the closet door and invited the wounded young man to come forth, saying to Henry as she did so:

“Your majesty must now explain to my brother why we are interested in Monsieur de la Mole.”

Henry, caught in the snare, briefly related to M. d’Alençon, half a Protestant for the sake of opposition, as he himself was partly a Catholic from prudence, the arrival of Monsieur de la Mole at Paris, and how the young man had been severely wounded while bringing to him a letter from M. d’Auriac.

When the duke turned round, La Mole had come out from the closet and was standing before him.

François, at the sight of him, so handsome, so pale, and consequently doubly captivating by reason of his good looks and his pallor, felt a new sense of distrust spring up in the depths of his soul. Marguerite held him both through jealousy and through pride.

“Brother,” said Marguerite, “I will engage that this young gentleman will be useful to whoever may employ him. Should you accept his services, he will obtain a powerful protector, and you, a devoted servitor. In such times as the present, brother,” continued she, “we cannot be too well surrounded by devoted friends; more especially,” added she, lowering her voice so as to be heard by no one but the duke, “when one is ambitious, and has the misfortune to be only third in the succession to the throne.”

Then she put her finger on her lip, to intimate to François that in spite of the initiation she still kept secret an important part of her idea.

“Perhaps,” she added, “you may differ from Henry, in considering it not befitting that this young gentleman should remain so immediately in the vicinity of my apartments.”

“Sister,” replied François, eagerly, “if it meet your wishes, Monsieur de la Mole shall, in half an hour, be installed in my quarters, where, I think, he can have no cause to fear any danger. Let him love me and I will love him.”

François was untruthful, for already in the very depths of his heart he detested La Mole.

“Well, well! So then I was not mistaken,” said Marguerite to herself, seeing the King of Navarre’s scowling face. “Ah, I see that to lead you two, one must lead the other.”

Then finishing her thought:

“There! ‘then you are doing well, Marguerite,’ Henriette would say.”

In fact, half an hour later La Mole, having been solemnly catechised by Marguerite, kissed the hem of her gown and with an agility remarkable in a wounded man was mounting the stairs that led to the Duc d’Alençon’s quarters.

Two or three days passed, during which the excellent understanding between Henry and his wife seemed to grow more and more firmly established.

Henry had obtained permission not to make a public renunciation of his religion; but he had formally recanted in the presence of the king’s confessor, and every morning he listened to the mass performed at the Louvre. At night he made a show of going to his wife’s rooms, entered by the principal door, talked a few minutes with her, and then took his departure by the small secret door, and went up to Madame de Sauve, who had duly informed him of the queen mother’s visit as well as the unquestionable danger which threatened him. Warned on both sides, Henry redoubled his watchfulness against the queen mother and felt all distrust of her because little by little her face began to unbend, and one morning Henry detected a friendly smile on her bloodless lips. That day he had the greatest difficulty to bring himself to eat anything else than eggs cooked by himself or to drink anything else than water which his own eyes had seen dipped up from the Seine.

The massacres were still going on, but nevertheless were diminishing in violence. There had been such a wholesale butchery of the Huguenots that their number was greatly reduced. The larger part were dead; many had fled; a few had remained in concealment. Occasionally a great outcry arose in one district or another; it meant that one of these was discovered. Then the execution was either private or public according as the victim was driven into a corner or could escape. In such circumstances it furnished great amusement for the neighborhood where the affair took place; for instead of growing calmer as their enemies were annihilated, the Catholics grew more and more ferocious; the fewer the remaining victims, the more bloodthirsty they seemed in their persecution of the rest.

Charles IX. had taken great pleasure in hunting the Huguenots, and when he could no longer continue the chase himself he took delight in the noise of others hunting them.

One day, returning from playing at mall, which with tennis and hunting were his favorite amusements, he went to his mother's apartments in high spirits, followed by his usual train of courtiers.

"Mother," he said, embracing the Florentine, who, observing his joy, was already trying to detect its cause; "mother, good news! *Mort de tous les diables!* Do you know that the admiral's illustrious carcass which it was said was lost has been found?"

"Aha!" said Catharine.

"Oh, heavens! yes. You thought as I did, mother, the dogs had eaten a wedding dinner off him, but it was not so. My people, my dear people, my good people, had a clever idea and have hung the admiral up at the gibbet of Montfaucon.

"*Du haut en bas Gaspard on a jété,*
Et puis de bas en haut on l'a monté."

"Well!" said Catharine.

"Well, good mother," replied Charles IX., "I have a strong desire to see him again, dear old man, now I know he is really dead. It is very fine weather and everything seems to be blooming to-day. The air is full of life and perfume, and I feel better than I ever did. If you like, mother, we will get on horseback and go to Montfaucon."

"Willingly, my son," said Catharine, "if I had not made an appointment which I cannot defer; and beside, to pay a visit to a man of such importance as the admiral, we should invite the whole court. It will be an occasion for observers to make curious observations. We shall see who comes and who stays away."

"Faith, you are right, mother, we will put it off till to-morrow; that will be better, so send out your invitations and I will send mine; or rather let us not invite any one. We will only say we are going, and then every one will be free. Good-by, mother! I am going to play on the horn."

"You will exhaust yourself, Charles, as Ambroise Paré is always telling you, and he is right. It is too severe an exercise for you."

"Bah! bah! bah!" said Charles; "I wish I were sure nothing else would be the cause of my death. I should then bury every one here, including Harry, who will one day succeed us all, as Nostradamus prophesies."

Catharine frowned.

"My son," she said, "mistrust especially all things that appear impossible, and meanwhile take care of yourself."

"Only two or three blasts to rejoice my dogs, poor things; they are wearied to death with doing nothing. I ought to have let them loose on the Huguenots; that would have done them good!"

And Charles IX. left his mother's room, went into his armory, took down a horn, and played on it with a vigor that would have done honor to Roland himself. It was difficult to understand how so weak a frame and such pale lips could blow a blast so powerful.

Catharine, in truth, was awaiting some one as she had told her son. A moment after he had left her, one of her women came and spoke to her in a low voice. The queen smiled, rose, and saluting the persons who formed her court, followed the messenger.

Réné the Florentine, the man to whom on the eve of Saint Bartholomew the King of Navarre had given such a diplomatic reception, had just entered her oratory.

"Ah, here you are, Réné," said Catharine, "I was impatiently waiting for you."

Réné bowed.

"Did you receive the note I wrote you yesterday?"

"I had that honor."

"Did you make another trial, as I asked you to do, of the horoscope cast by Ruggieri, and agreeing so well with the prophecy of Nostradamus, which says that all my three sons shall reign? For several days past, affairs have decidedly changed, Réné, and it has occurred to me that possibly fate has become less threatening."

"Madame," replied Réné, shaking his head, "your majesty knows well that affairs do not change fate; on the contrary, fate controls affairs."

"Still, you have tried the sacrifice again, have you not?"

"Yes, madame," replied Réné; "for it is my duty to obey you in all things."

"Well — and the result?"

"Still the same, madame."

"What, the black lamb uttered its three cries?"

"Just the same as before, madame."

"The sign of three cruel deaths in my family," murmured Catharine.

"Alas!" said Réné.

"What then?"

"Then, madame, there was in its entrails that strange displacement of the liver which we had already observed in the first two — it was wrong side up!"

"A change of dynasty! Still — still — still the same!" muttered Catharine; "yet we must fight against this, Réné," she added.

Réné shook his head.

"I have told your majesty," he said, "that fate rules."

"Is that your opinion?" asked Catharine.

"Yes, madame."

"Do you remember Jeanne d'Albret's horoscope?"

"Yes, madame."

"Repeat it to me, I have quite forgotten it."

"*Vives honorata*," said Réné, "*morieris reformidata, regina amplificabere*."

"That means, I believe," said Catharine, "*Thou shalt live honored* — and she lacked common necessaries, poor thing! *Thou shalt die feared* — and we laughed at her. *Thou shalt be greater than thou hast been as a queen* — and she is dead, and sleeps in a tomb on which we have not even engraved her name."

"Madame, your majesty does not translate the *vives honorata* rightly. The Queen of Navarre lived honored; for all her life she enjoyed the love of her children, the respect of her partisans; respect and love all the more sincere in that she was poor."

"Yes," said Catharine, "I grant you the *vives honorata*; but *morieris reformidata*: how will you explain that?"

"Nothing more easy: *Thou shalt die feared*."

"Well — did she die feared?"

"So much so that she would not have died had not your majesty feared her. Then — *As a queen thou shalt be greater*; or, *Thou shalt be greater than thou hast been as a queen*. This is equally true, madame; for in exchange for a terrestrial crown she has doubtless, as a queen and martyr, a celestial crown; and, besides, who knows what the future may reserve for her posterity?”

Catharine was excessively superstitious; she was even more alarmed at Réné’s coolness than at the steadfastness of the auguries, and as in her case any scrape was a chance for her boldly to master the situation, she said suddenly to him, without any other transition than the working of her own thoughts:

“Are any perfumes come from Italy?”

“Yes, madame.”

“Send me a boxful.”

“Of which?”

“Of the last, of those” —

Catharine stopped.

“Of those the Queen of Navarre was so fond of?” asked Réné.

“Exactly.”

“I need not prepare them, for your majesty is now as skilful at them as I am.”

“You think so?” said Catharine. “They certainly succeed.”

“Has your majesty anything more to say to me?” asked the perfumer.

“Nothing,” replied Catharine, thoughtfully; “at least I think not, only if there is any change in the sacrifices, let me know it in time. By the way, let us leave the lambs, and try the hens.”

“Alas, madame, I fear that in changing the victim we shall not change the presages.”

“Do as I tell you.”

The perfumer bowed and left the apartment.

Catharine mused for a short time, then rose and returning to her bedchamber, where her women awaited her, announced the pilgrimage to Montfaucon for the morrow.

The news of this pleasure party caused great excitement in the palace and great confusion in the city: the ladies prepared their most elegant toilets; the gentlemen, their finest arms and steeds; the tradesmen closed their shops, and the populace killed a few straggling Huguenots, in order to furnish company for the dead admiral.

There was a tremendous hubbub all the evening and during a good part of the night.

La Mole had spent a miserable day, and this miserable day had followed three or four others equally miserable. Monsieur d’Alençon, to please his sister, had installed him in his apartments, but had not seen him since. He felt himself like a poor deserted child, deprived of the tender care, the soothing attention of two women, the recollection of one of whom occupied him perpetually. He had heard of her through the surgeon Ambroise Paré, whom she had sent to him, but what he heard from a man of fifty who was ignorant or pretended to be ignorant of the interest felt by La Mole in everything appertaining to Marguerite was very fragmentary and insufficient. Gillonne, indeed, had come once, of her own accord, be it understood, to ask after him, and the visit was to him like a sunbeam darting into a dungeon, and La Mole had remained dazzled by it, and had expected a second visit, and yet two days passed and she had not appeared.

As soon, therefore, as the convalescent heard of this magnificent reunion of the whole court for the following day he sent to ask Monsieur d’Alençon the favor of accompanying it.

The duke did not even inquire whether La Mole was able to bear the fatigue, but merely answered:

“Capital! Let him have one of my horses.”

That was all La Mole wanted. Maître Ambroise Paré came as usual to dress his wounds, and La Mole explained to him the necessity he was under of mounting on horseback, and begged him to put on the bandages with double care.

The two wounds, both that on the breast and that on the shoulder, were closed; the one on the shoulder only pained him. Both were rose-red in color, which showed that they were in a fair way of healing. Maître Ambroise Paré covered them with gummed taffetas, a remedy greatly in vogue then, and promised La Mole that if he did not exert himself too much everything would go well.

La Mole was at the height of joy. Save for a certain weakness caused by loss of blood and a slight giddiness attributable to the same cause, he felt as well as could be. Besides, doubtless Marguerite would be in the party; he should see Marguerite again. And when he remembered what benefit he had received from the sight of Gillonne, he had no doubt that her mistress would have a still more efficacious influence upon him.

So La Mole spent a part of the money which he had received when he went away from his family in the purchase of the most beautiful white satin doublet and the finest embroidered mantle that could be furnished by a fashionable tailor. The same tailor procured for him a pair of those perfumed boots such as were worn at that period. The whole outfit was brought to him in the morning only a half hour later than the time at which La Mole had ordered it, so that he had not much fault to find.

He dressed himself quickly, looked in the glass, and found that he was suitably attired, arranged, and perfumed. Then by walking up and down the room several times, he assured himself that though it caused him some sharp pangs, still the happiness which he felt in his heart would render these physical inconveniences of no account. A cherry-colored mantle of his own design, and cut rather longer than they were worn then, proved to be very becoming to him.

While he was thus engaged in the Louvre, another scene, of a similar kind, was going on at the Hôtel de Guise. A tall gentleman, with red hair, was examining, before a glass, a reddish mark which went across his face very disagreeably; he combed and perfumed his mustache, and while he was perfuming it, he kept spreading over that unfortunate mark which, in spite of all the cosmetics then in use, persisted in reappearing, a three-fold layer of white and red; but as the application was insufficient an idea came to him: a hot sun, an August sun, was flashing its rays into the court-yard; he made his way down there, took his hat in his hand, and with his nose in the air and his eyes closed, he walked up and down for ten minutes, fully exposed to the devouring flame which fell from heaven like a torrent. At the end of these ten minutes, owing to the unexampled ardor of the sun, the gentleman’s face had acquired such a brilliant color that the red streak was now no more in harmony with the rest than it had been, but in comparison seemed yellow.

Nevertheless, the gentleman did not seem much dissatisfied with this rainbow effect which he did his best to bring into accord with the rest of his face by spreading a layer of vermilion over it, after which he put on a magnificent suit which a tailor had brought to his room without any commands from him. Thus attired, scented, and armed from head to foot, he again went down into the court-yard and began to pat a large black horse whose beauty would have been matchless but for a small cut, like his own, made by a reiter’s sabre in one of the last civil conflicts.

Yet, enchanted with the good steed as he was with himself, the gentleman, whom no doubt our readers have easily recognized, was on his back a quarter of an hour before any of the others and making the courtyard of the Hôtel de Guise resound with the whinnying of the charger accompanied by exclamations of *mordi*, pronounced in every variety of accent according as he compelled the horse to submit to this authority. At the end of a moment the horse completely subdued, recognized by his obedience and subjection his master's legitimate control, but the victory had not been obtained without noise, and this noise, which was perhaps the very thing our gentleman reckoned upon, this noise had attracted to the windows a lady whom our queller of horses saluted respectfully, and who smiled at him in the most agreeable manner.

Five minutes later Madame de Nevers summoned her steward.

"Sir," said she, "has Monsieur le Comte Annibal de Coconnas been furnished a suitable breakfast?"

"Yes, madame," replied the steward, "he ate this morning with a better appetite than usual."

"Very well, sir," said the duchess.

Then addressing her first gentleman in waiting:

"Monsieur d'Arguzon," she said, "let us set out for the Louvre, and keep an eye, I beg, on Monsieur le Comte Annibal de Coconnas, for he is wounded, and consequently still weak; and I would not for all the world any accident should happen to him. That would make the Huguenots laugh, for they owe him a spite since the blessed night of Saint Bartholomew."

And Madame de Nevers, mounting her horse, went joyfully towards the Louvre, which was the general rendezvous.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon as a file of cavaliers, overflowing with gold, jewels, and magnificent garments, appeared in the Rue Saint Denis, entering by the corner of the Cemetery of the Innocents and stretching itself out in the sunlight between the two rows of gloomy looking houses like an immense reptile with variegated rings.

CHAPTER XVI.

A DEAD ENEMY’S BODY ALWAYS SMELLS SWEET.

No brilliant company, however, could give any idea of this spectacle. The rich and elegant silk dresses, bequeathed as a magnificent fashion by François I. to his successors, had not yet been changed into those formal and sombre vestments which came into fashion under Henry III.; so that the costume of Charles IX., less rich, but perhaps more elegant than those of preceding reigns, displayed its perfect harmony. In our day no similar cortège could have any standard of comparison, for when we wish magnificence of display we are reduced to mere symmetry and uniform.

Pages, esquires, gentlemen of low degree, dogs and horses, following on the flanks and in the rear, formed of the royal cortège an absolute army. Behind this army came the populace, or rather the populace was everywhere.

It followed, trooped alongside, and rushed ahead; there were shouts of *Noel* and *Haro*, for there were distinguishable in the procession many Calvinists to hoot at, and the populace harbors resentment.

That morning Charles, in presence of Catharine and the Duc de Guise, had, as a perfectly natural thing spoken before Henry of Navarre of going to visit the gibbet of Montfaucon, or, rather, the admiral’s mutilated corpse which had been suspended from it. Henry’s first impulse had been to refuse to take part in this excursion. Catharine supposed he would. At the first words in which he expressed his repugnance she exchanged a glance and a smile with the Duc de Guise. Henry detected them both, understood what they meant, and suddenly recovering his presence of mind said:

“But why should I not go? I am a Catholic, and am bound to my new religion.”

Then addressing the King:

“Your Majesty may reckon on my company,” he said; “and I shall be always happy to accompany you wheresoever you may go.”

And he threw a sweeping glance around, to see whose brows might be frowning.

Perhaps of all that cortège, the person who was looked at with the greatest curiosity was that motherless son, that kingless king, that Huguenot turned Catholic. His long and marked countenance, his somewhat vulgar figure, his familiarity with his inferiors, which he carried to a degree almost derogatory to a king, — a familiarity acquired by the mountaineer habits of his youth, and which he preserved till his death, — marked him out to the spectators, some of whom cried:

"To mass, Harry, to mass!"

To which Henry replied:

"I attended it yesterday, to-day, and I shall attend it again to-morrow. *Ventre saint gris!* surely that is sufficient."

Marguerite was on horseback — so lovely, so fresh, so elegant that admiration made a regular concert around her, though it must be confessed that a few notes of it were addressed to her companion, the Duchesse de Nevers, who had just joined her on a white horse so proud of his burden that he kept tossing his head.

"Well, duchess!" said the Queen of Navarre, "what is there new?"

"Why, madame," replied the duchess, aloud, "I know of nothing."

Then in a lower tone:

"And what has become of the Huguenot?"

"I have found him a retreat almost safe," replied Marguerite. "And the wholesale assassin, what have you done with him?"

"He wished to take part in the festivity, and so we mounted him on Monsieur de Nevers' war-horse, a creature as big as an elephant. He is a fearful cavalier. I allowed him to be present at the ceremony to-day, as I felt that your Huguenot would be prudent enough to keep his chamber and that there was no fear of their meeting."

"Oh, faith!" replied Marguerite, smiling, "if he were here, and he is not here, I do not think a collision would take place. My Huguenot is remarkably handsome, but nothing more — a dove, and not a hawk; he coos, but does not bite. After all," she added, with a gesture impossible to describe, and shrugging her shoulders slightly, "after all, perhaps our King thought him a Huguenot while he is only a Brahmin, and his religion forbids him to shed blood."

"But where, pray, is the Duc d'Alençon?" inquired Henriette; "I do not see him."

“He will join us later; his eyes troubled him this morning and he was inclined not to come, but as it is known that because he holds a different opinion from Charles and his brother Henry he inclines toward the Huguenots, he became convinced that the King might put a bad interpretation on his absence and he changed his mind. There, hark! people are gazing and shouting yonder; it must be that he is coming by the Porte Montmartre.”

“You are right; ’tis he; I recognize him. How elegant he looks to-day,” said Henriette. “For some time he has taken particular pains with his appearance; he must be in love. See how nice it is to be a prince of the blood, he gallops over every one, they all draw on one side.”

“Yes,” said Marguerite, laughing, “he will ride over us. For Heaven’s sake draw your attendants to one side, duchess, for there is one of them who will be killed if he does not give way.”

“It is my hero!” cried the duchess; “look, only look!”

Coconnas had left his place to approach the Duchesse de Nevers, but just as his horse was crossing the kind of exterior boulevard which separates the street from the Faubourg Saint Denis, a cavalier of the Duc d’Alençon’s suite, trying in vain to rein in his excited horse, dashed full against Coconnas. Coconnas, shaken by the collision, reeled on his colossal mount, his hat nearly fell off; he put it on more firmly and turned round furiously.

“Heavens!” said Marguerite, in a low tone, to her friend, “Monsieur de la Mole!”

“That handsome, pale young man?” exclaimed the duchess, unable to repress her first impression.

“Yes, yes; the very one who nearly upset your Piedmontese.”

“Oh,” said the duchess, “something terrible will happen! they look at each other — recollect each other!”

Coconnas had indeed recognized La Mole, and in his surprise dropped his bridle, for he believed he had killed his old companion, or at least put him *hors de combat* for some time. La Mole had also recognized Coconnas, and he felt a fire mount up into his face. For some seconds, which sufficed for the expression of all the sentiments these two men harbored, they gazed at each other in a way which made the two women shudder.

After which, La Mole, having looked about him, and doubtless seeing that the place was ill chosen for an explanation, spurred his horse and rejoined the Duc d’Alençon. Coconnas remained stationary for a moment, twisting his mustache until the point almost entered his eye; then seeing La Mole dash off without a word, he did the same.

"Ah, ha!" said Marguerite, with pain and contempt, "so I was not mistaken — it is really too much;" and she bit her lips till the blood came.

"He is very handsome," added the Duchesse de Nevers, with commiseration.

Just at this moment the Duc d'Alençon reached his place behind the King and the queen mother, so that his suite, in following him, were obliged to pass before Marguerite and the Duchesse de Nevers. La Mole, as he rode before the two princesses, raised his hat, saluted the queen, and, bowing to his horse's neck, remained uncovered until her majesty should honor him with a look.

But Marguerite turned her head aside disdainfully.

La Mole, no doubt, comprehended the contemptuous expression of the queen's features, and from pale he became livid, and that he might not fall from his horse was compelled to hold on by the mane.

"Oh, oh!" said Henriette to the queen; "look, cruel that you are! — he is going to faint."

"Good," said the queen, with a cruel smile; "that is the only thing we need. Where are your salts?"

Madame de Nevers was mistaken. La Mole, with an effort, recovered himself, and sitting erect on his horse took his place in the Duc d'Alençon's suite.

Meantime they kept on their way and at length saw the lugubrious outline of the gibbet, erected and first used by Enguerrand de Marigny. Never before had it been so adorned.

The ushers and guards went forward and made a wide circle around the enclosure. As they drew near, the crows perched on the gibbet flew away with croakings of despair.

The gibbet erected at Montfaucon generally offered behind its posts a shelter for the dogs that gathered there attracted by frequent prey, and for philosophic bandits who came to ponder on the sad chances of fortune.

That day at Montfaucon there were apparently neither dogs nor bandits. The ushers and guards had scared away the dogs together with the crows, and the bandits had mingled with the throng so as to make some of the lucky hits which are the more cheerful vicissitudes of their profession.

The procession moved forward; the King and Catharine arrived first, then came the Duc d’Anjou, Duc d’Alençon, the King of Navarre, Monsieur de Guise, and their followers, then Madame Marguerite, the Duchesse de Nevers, and all the women who composed what was called the queen’s flying squadron; then the pages, squires, attendants, and people — in all ten thousand persons.

From the principal gibbet hung a misshapen mass, a black corpse stained with coagulated blood and mud, whitened by layers of dust. The carcass was headless, and it was hung by the legs, and the populace, ingenious as it always is, had replaced the head with a bunch of straw, to which was fastened a mask; and in the mouth of this mask some wag, knowing the admiral’s habit, had introduced a toothpick.

At once appalling and singular was the spectacle of all these elegant lords and handsome ladies like a procession painted by Goya, riding along in the midst of those blackened carcasses and gibbets, with their long lean arms.

The noisier the exultation of the spectators, the more strikingly it contrasted with the melancholy silence and cold insensibility of those corpses — objects of ridicule which made even the jesters shudder.

Many could scarcely endure this horrible spectacle, and by his pallor might be distinguished, in the centre of collected Huguenots, Henry, who, great as was his power of self-control and the degree of dissimulation conferred on him by Heaven, could no longer bear it.

He made as his excuse the strong stench which emanated from all those human remains, and going to Charles, who, with Catharine, had stopped in front of the admiral’s dead body, he said:

“Sire, does not your Majesty find that this poor carcass smells so strong that it is impossible to remain near it any longer?”

“Do you find it so, Harry?” inquired the King, his eyes sparkling with ferocious joy.

“Yes, sire.”

“Well, then, I am not of your opinion; a dead enemy’s corpse always smells sweet.”

“Faith, sire,” said Tavannes, “since your Majesty knew that we were going to make a little call on the admiral, you should have invited Pierre Ronsard, your teacher of poetry; he would have extemporized an epitaph for the old Gaspard.”

"There is no need of him for that," said Charles IX., after an instant's thought:

"Ci-gît, — mais c'est mal entendu,
Pour lui le mot est trop honnête, —
Ici l'amiral est pendu
Par les pieds, à faute de tête."

"Bravo! bravo!" cried the Catholic gentlemen in unison, while the collected Huguenots scowled and kept silent, and Henry, as he was talking with Marguerite and Madame de Nevers, pretended not to have heard.

"Come, come, sir!" said Catharine, who, in spite of the perfumes with which she was covered, began to be made ill by the odor. "Come, however agreeable company may be, it must be left at last; let us therefore say good-by to the admiral, and return to Paris."

She nodded ironically as when one takes leave of a friend, and, taking the head of the column, turned to the road, while the cortège defiled before Coligny's corpse.

The sun was sinking in the horizon.

The throng followed fast on their majesties so as to enjoy to the very end all the splendors of the procession and the details of the spectacle; the thieves followed the populace, so that in ten minutes after the King's departure there was no person about the admiral's mutilated carcass on which now blew the first breezes of the evening.

When we say no person, we err. A gentleman mounted on a black horse, and who, doubtless, could not contemplate at his ease the black mutilated trunk when it was honored by the presence of princes, had remained behind, and was examining, in all their details, the bolts, stone pillars, chains, and in fact the gibbet, which no doubt appeared to him (but lately arrived in Paris, and ignorant of the perfection to which things could be brought in the capital) the paragon of all that man could invent in the way of awful ugliness.

We need hardly inform our friends that this man was M. Annibal de Coconnas.

A woman's practised eye had vainly looked for him in the cavalcade and had searched among the ranks without being able to find him.

Monsieur de Coconnas, as we have said, was standing ecstatically contemplating Enguerrand de Marigny's work.

But this woman was not the only person who was trying to find Monsieur de Coconnas. Another gentleman, noticeable for his white satin doublet and gallant plume, after looking toward the front and on all sides, bethought him to look back, and saw Coconnas’s tall figure and the silhouette of his gigantic horse standing out strongly against the sky reddened by the last rays of the setting sun.

Then the gentleman in the white satin doublet turned out from the road taken by the majority of the company, struck into a narrow footpath, and describing a curve rode back toward the gibbet.

Almost at the same time the lady whom we have recognized as the Duchesse de Nevers, just as we recognized the tall gentleman on the black horse as Coconnas, rode alongside of Marguerite and said to her:

“We were both mistaken, Marguerite, for the Piedmontese has remained behind and Monsieur de la Mole has gone back to meet him.”

“By Heaven!” exclaimed Marguerite, laughing, “then something is going to happen. Faith, I confess I should not be sorry to revise my opinion about him.”

Marguerite then turned her horse and witnessed the manœuvre which we have described La Mole as performing.

The two princesses left the procession; the opportunity was most favorable: they were passing by a hedge-lined footpath which led up the hill, and in doing so passed within thirty yards of the gibbet. Madame de Nevers whispered a word in her captain’s ear, Marguerite beckoned to Gillonne, and the four turned into this cross path and went and hid behind the shrubbery nearest to the place where the scene which they evidently expected to witness was to take place. It was about thirty yards, as we have already said, from the spot where Coconnas in a state of ecstasy was gesticulating before the admiral.

Marguerite dismounted, Madame de Nevers and Gillonne did the same; the captain then got down and took the bridles of the four horses. Thick green furnished the three women a seat such as princesses often seek in vain. The glade before them was so open that they would not miss the slightest detail.

La Mole had accomplished his circuit. He rode up slowly and took his stand behind Coconnas; then stretching out his hand tapped him on the shoulder.

The Piedmontese turned round.

“Oh!” said he, “so it was not a dream! You are still alive!”

“Yes, sir,” replied La Mole; “yes, I am still alive. It is no fault of yours, but I am still alive.”

“By Heaven! I know you again well enough,” replied Coconnas, “in spite of your pale face. You were redder than that the last time we met!”

“And I,” said La Mole, “I also recognize you, in spite of that yellow line across your face. You were paler than that when I made that mark for you!”

Coconnas bit his lips, but, evidently resolved on continuing the conversation in a tone of irony, he said:

“It is curious, is it not, Monsieur de la Mole, particularly for a Huguenot, to be able to look at the admiral suspended from that iron hook? And yet they say there are people extravagant enough to accuse us of killing even small Huguenots, sucklings.”

“Count,” said La Mole, bowing, “I am no longer a Huguenot; I have the happiness of being a Catholic!”

“Bah!” exclaimed Coconnas, bursting into loud laughter; “so you are a convert, sir? Oh, that was clever of you!”

“Sir,” replied La Mole, with the same seriousness and the same politeness, “I made a vow to become a convert if I escaped the massacre.”

“Count,” said the Piedmontese, “that was a very prudent vow, and I beg to congratulate you. Perhaps you made still others?”

“Yes, I made a second,” answered La Mole, patting his horse with entire coolness.

“And what might that be?” inquired Coconnas.

“To hang you up there, by that small nail which seems to await you beneath Monsieur de Coligny.”

“What, as I am now?” asked Coconnas, “alive and merry?”

“No, sir; after I have passed my sword through your body!”

Coconnas became purple, and his eyes darted flames.

“Do you mean,” said he in a bantering tone, “to that nail?”

“Yes,” replied La Mole, “to that nail.”

“You are not tall enough to do it, my little sir!”

“Then I’ll get on your horse, my great man-slayer,” replied La Mole. “Ah, you believe, my dear Monsieur Annibal de Coconnas, that one may with impunity assassinate people under the loyal and honorable excuse of being a hundred to one, forsooth! But the day comes when a man finds his man; and I believe that day has come now. I should very well like to send a bullet through your ugly head; but, bah! I might miss you, for my hand is still trembling from the traitorous wounds you inflicted upon me.”

“My ugly head!” shouted Coconnas, leaping down from his steed. “Down — down from your horse, M. le Comte, and draw!”

And he drew his sword.

“I believe your Huguenot called Monsieur de Coconnas an ‘ugly head,’“ whispered the Duchesse de Nevers. “Do you think he is bad looking?”

“He is charming,” said Marguerite, laughing, “and I am compelled to acknowledge that fury renders Monsieur de La Mole unjust; but hush! let us watch!”

In fact, La Mole had dismounted from his horse with as much deliberation as Coconnas had shown of precipitation; he had taken off his cherry-colored cloak, laid it leisurely on the ground, drawn his sword, and put himself on guard.

“Aïe!” he exclaimed, as he stretched out his arm.

“Ouf!” muttered Coconnas, as he moved his, — for both, as it will be remembered, had been wounded in the shoulder and it hurt them when they made any violent movement.

A burst of laughter, ill repressed, came from the clump of bushes. The princesses could not quite contain themselves at the sight of their two champions rubbing their omoplates and making up faces.

This burst of merriment reached the ears of the two gentlemen, who were ignorant that they had witnesses; turning round, they beheld their ladies.

La Mole resumed his guard as firm as an automaton, and Coconnas crossed his blade with an emphatic “By Heaven!”

“Ah ça! now they will murder each other in real earnest, if we do not interfere. There has been enough of this. Holá, gentlemen! — holá!” cried Marguerite.

“Let them be! let them be!” said Henriette, who having seen Coconnas at work, hoped in her heart that he would have as easy a victory over La Mole as he had over Mercandon’s son and two nephews.

“Oh, they are really beautiful so!” exclaimed Marguerite. “Look — they seem to breathe fire!”

Indeed, the combat, begun with sarcasms and mutual insults, became silent as soon as the champions had crossed their swords. Each distrusted his own strength, and each, at every quick pass, was compelled to restrain an expression of pain occasioned by his own wounds. Nevertheless, with eyes fixed and burning, mouth half open, and teeth clenched, La Mole advanced with short and firm steps toward his adversary, who, seeing in him a most skilful swordsman, retreated step by step. They both thus reached the edge of the ditch on the other side of which were the spectators; then, as if his retreat had been only a simple stratagem to draw nearer to his lady, Coconnas took his stand, and as La Mole made his guard a little too wide, he made a thrust with the quickness of lightning and instantly La Mole's white satin doublet was stained with a spot of blood which kept growing larger.

"Courage!" cried the Duchesse de Nevers.

"Ah, poor La Mole!" exclaimed Marguerite, with a cry of distress.

La Mole heard this cry, darted at the queen one of those looks which penetrate the heart even deeper than a sword-point, and taking advantage of a false parade, thrust vigorously at his adversary.

This time the two women uttered two cries which seemed like one. The point of La Mole's rapier had appeared, all covered with blood, behind Coconnas's back.

Yet neither fell. Both remained erect, looking at each other with open mouth, and feeling that on the slightest movement they must lose their balance. At last the Piedmontese, more dangerously wounded than his adversary, and feeling his senses forsaking him with his blood, fell on La Mole, grasping him with one hand, while with the other he endeavored to unsheath his poniard.

La Mole roused all his strength, raised his hand, and let fall the pommel of his sword on Coconnas's forehead. Coconnas, stupefied by the blow, fell, but in his fall drew down his adversary with him, and both rolled into the ditch.

Then Marguerite and the Duchesse de Nevers, seeing that, dying as they were, they were still struggling to destroy each other, hastened to them, followed by the captain of the guards; but before they could reach them the combatants' hands unloosened, their eyes closed, and letting go their grasp of their weapons they stiffened in what seemed like their final agony. A wide stream of blood bubbled round them.

"Oh, brave, brave La Mole!" cried Marguerite, unable any longer to repress her admiration. "Ah! pardon me a thousand times for having a moment doubted your courage."

And her eyes filled with tears.

“Alas! alas!” murmured the duchess, “gallant Annibal. Did you ever see two such intrepid lions, madame?”

And she sobbed aloud.

“Heavens! what ugly thrusts,” said the captain, endeavoring to stanch the streams of blood. “Holá! you, there, come here as quickly as you can — here, I say” —

He addressed a man who, seated on a kind of tumbril or cart painted red, appeared in the evening mist singing this old song, which had doubtless been suggested to him by the miracle of the Cemetery of the Innocents:

“*Bel aubespin fleurissant*
Verdissant,
Le long de ce beau rivage,
Tu es vétu, jusqu’au bas
Des longs bras
D’une lambrusche sauvage.

“*Le chantre rossignolet,*
Nouvelet,
Courtisant sa bien-aimée
Pour ses amours alléger
Vient loger
Tous les ans sous ta ramée.

“*Or, vis, gentil aubespin*
Vis sans fin;
Vis, sans que jamais tonnerre,
Ou la cognée, ou les vents
Ou le temps
Te puissent ruer par.”. . .

“Holá! hé!” shouted the captain a second time, “come when you are called. Don’t you see that these gentlemen need help?”

The carter, whose repulsive exterior and coarse face formed a singular contrast with the sweet and sylvan song we have just quoted, stopped his horse, got out, and bending over the two bodies said:

“These be terrible wounds, sure enough, but I have made worse in my time.”

“Who are you, pray?” inquired Marguerite, experiencing, in spite of herself, a certain vague terror which she could not overcome.

“Madame,” replied the man, bowing down to the ground, “I am Maître Caboche, headsman to the provostry of Paris, and I have come to hang up at the gibbet some companions for Monsieur the Admiral.”

“Well! and I am the Queen of Navarre,” replied Marguerite; “cast your corpses down there, spread in your cart the housings of our horses, and bring these two gentlemen softly behind us to the Louvre.”

CHAPTER XVII.

MAÎTRE AMBROISE PARÉ’S CONFRÈRE.

The tumbril in which Coconnas and La Mole were laid started back toward Paris, following in the shadow the guiding group. It stopped at the Louvre, and the driver was amply rewarded. The wounded men were carried to the Duc d’Alençon’s quarters, and Maître Ambroise Paré was sent for.

When he arrived, neither of the two men had recovered consciousness.

La Mole was the least hurt of the two. The sword had struck him below the right armpit, but without touching any vital parts. Coconnas was run through the lungs, and the air that escaped from his wound made the flame of a candle waver.

Ambroise Paré would not answer for Coconnas.

Madame de Nevers was in despair. Relying on Coconnas’s strength, courage, and skill, she had prevented Marguerite from interfering with the duel. She would have had Coconnas taken to the Hôtel de Guise and gladly bestowed on him a second time the care which she had already lavished on his comfort, but her husband was likely to arrive from Rome at any moment and find fault with the introduction of a strange man in the domestic establishment.

To hide the cause of the wounds, Marguerite had had the two young men brought to her brother’s rooms, where one of them, to be sure, had already been installed, by saying that they were two gentlemen who had been thrown from their horses during the excursion, but the truth was divulged by the captain, who, having witnessed the duel, could not help expressing his admiration, and it was soon known at court that two new *raffinés* had burst into sudden fame. Attended by the same surgeon, who divided his attentions between them, the two wounded men passed through the different phases of convalescence arising from the greater or less severity of their wounds. La Mole, who was less severely wounded of the two, was the first to recover consciousness. A terrible fever had taken possession of Coconnas and his return to life was attended by all the symptoms of the most horrible delirium.

Though La Mole was confined in the same room with Coconnas, he had not, when he came to himself, seen his companion, or if he saw him, he betrayed no sign that he saw him. Coconnas, on the contrary, as soon as he opened his eyes, fastened them on La Mole with an expression which proved that the blood he had lost had not modified the passions of his fiery temperament.

Coconnas thought he was dreaming, and that in this dream he saw the enemy he imagined he had twice slain, only the dream was unduly prolonged. After having observed La Mole laid, like himself, on a couch, and his wounds dressed by the surgeon, he saw him rise up in bed, while he himself was still confined to his by his fever, his weakness, and his pain; he saw him get out of bed, then walk, first leaning on the surgeon’s arm, and then on a cane, and finally without assistance.

Coconnas, still delirious, viewed these different stages of his companion’s recovery with eyes sometimes dull, at others wandering, but always threatening.

All this presented to the Piedmontese’s fiery spirit a fearful mixture of the fantastic and the real. For him La Mole was dead, wholly dead, having been actually killed twice and not merely once, and yet he recognized this same La Mole’s ghost lying in a bed like his own; then, as we have said, he saw this ghost get up, walk round, and, horrible to relate, come toward his bed. This ghost, whom Coconnas would have wished to avoid, even had it been in the depths of hell, came straight to him and stopped beside his pillow, standing there and looking at him; there was in his features a look of gentleness and compassion which Coconnas took for the expression of hellish derision.

There arose in his mind, possibly more wounded than his body, an insatiable thirst of vengeance. He was wholly occupied with one idea, that of procuring some weapon, and with that weapon piercing the body or the ghost of La Mole which so cruelly persecuted him. His clothes, stained with blood, had been placed on a chair by his bed, but afterwards removed, it being thought imprudent to leave them in his sight; but his poniard still remained on the chair, for it was imagined it would be some time before he would want to use it.

Coconnas saw the poniard; three nights while La Mole was slumbering he strove to reach it; three nights his strength failed him, and he fainted. At length, on the fourth night, he clutched it convulsively, and groaning with the pain of the effort, hid the weapon beneath his pillow.

The next day he saw something he had never deemed possible. La Mole's ghost, which every day seemed to gain strength, while he, occupied with the terrible dream, kept losing his in the eternal weaving of the scheme which was to rid him of it, — La Mole's ghost, growing more and more energetic, walked thoughtfully up and down the room three or four times, then, after having put on his mantle, buckled on his sword, and put on a broad-brimmed felt hat, opened the door and went out.

Coconnas breathed again. He thought that he was freed from his phantom. For two or three hours his blood circulated more calmly and coolly in his veins than it had done since the duel. La Mole's absence for one day would have restored Coconnas to his senses; a week's absence would perhaps have cured him; unfortunately, La Mole returned at the end of two hours.

This reappearance of La Mole was like a poniard-stab for Coconnas; and although La Mole did not return alone, Coconnas did not give a single look at his companion.

And yet his companion was worth looking at.

He was a man of forty, short, thick-set, and vigorous, with black hair which came to his eyebrows, and a black beard, which, contrary to the fashion of the period, thickly covered the chin; but he seemed one who cared little for the fashion.

He wore a leather jerkin, all covered with brown spots; red hose and leggings, thick shoes coming above the ankle, a cap the same color as his stockings, and a girdle, from which hung a large knife in a leather sheaf, completed his attire.

This singular personage, whose presence in the Louvre seemed so anomalous, threw his brown mantle on a chair and unceremoniously approached Coconnas, whose eyes, as if fascinated, remained fixed upon La Mole, who remained at some distance. He looked at the sick man, and shaking his head, said to La Mole:

"You have waited till it was rather late, my dear gentleman."

"I could not get out sooner," said La Mole.

"Eh! Heavens! you should have sent for me."

“Whom had I to send?”

“True, I forgot where we are. I had told those ladies, but they would not listen to me. If my prescriptions had been followed instead of those of that ass, Ambroise Paré, you would by this time have been in a condition to go in pursuit of adventures together, or exchange another sword-thrust if such had been your good pleasure; but we shall see. Does your friend listen to reason?”

“Scarcely.”

“Hold out your tongue, my dear gentleman.”

Coconnas thrust out his tongue to La Mole, making such a hideous grimace that the practitioner shook his head a second time.

“Oho!” he muttered, “contraction of the muscles. There’s no time to be lost. This evening I will send you a potion ready prepared; you must make him take it three times: once at midnight, once at one o’clock, and once at two.”

“Very well.”

“But who will make him take it?”

“I will.”

“You?”

“Yes.”

“You give me your word?”

“On my honor.”

“And if any physician should attempt to abstract the slightest portion to analyze it and discover what its ingredients are” —

“I will spill it to the last drop.”

“This also on your honor?”

“I swear it!”

“Whom shall I send you this potion by?”

“Any one you please.”

“But my messenger” —

“Well?”

“How will he get to you?”

“That is easily managed. He will say that he comes from Monsieur Réné, the perfumer.”

“That Florentine who lives on the Pont Saint Michel?”

“Exactly. He is allowed to enter the Louvre at any hour, day or night.”

The man smiled.

“In fact,” said he, “the queen mother at least owes him that much. It is understood, then; he will come from Maître Réné, the perfumer. I may surely use his name for once: he has often enough practised my profession without having taken his degree either.”

“Then,” said La Mole, “I may rely on you.”

“You may.”

“And about the payment?”

“Oh, we will arrange about that with the gentleman himself when he is well again.”

“You may be quite easy on that score, for I am sure he will pay you generously.”

“I believe you. And yet,” he added with a strange smile, “as the people with whom I have to do are not wont to be grateful, I should not be surprised if when he is on his legs again he should forget or at least not think to give a single thought to me.”

“All right,” said La Mole, smiling also, “in that case I should have to jog his memory.”

“Very well, we’ll leave it so. In two hours you will receive the medicine.”

“Au revoir!”

“You said” —

“Au revoir.”

The man smiled.

“It is always my custom,” he added, “to say adieu! So adieu, Monsieur de la Mole. In two hours you will have the potion. You understand, it must be given at midnight — in three doses — at intervals of an hour.”

So saying he took his departure, and La Mole was left alone with Coconnas.

Coconnas had heard the whole conversation, but understood nothing of it; a senseless babble of words, a senseless jangling of phrases, was all that came to him. Of the whole interview he remembered nothing except the word “midnight.”

He continued to watch La Mole, who remained in the room, pacing thoughtfully up and down.

The unknown doctor kept his word, and at the appointed time sent the medicine, which La Mole placed on a small silver chafing-dish, and having taken this precaution, went to bed.

This action on the part of La Mole gave Coconnas a little quietude. He tried to shut his eyes, but his feverish slumbers were only a continuation of his waking delirium. The same phantom which haunted him by day came to disturb him by night; across his hot eyelids he still saw La Mole as threatening as ever, and a voice kept repeating in his ear: “Midnight, midnight, midnight!”

Suddenly the echoing note of a clock’s bell awoke in the night and struck twelve. Coconnas opened his blood-shot eyes; the fiery breath from his breast scorched his dry lips, an unquenchable thirst devoured his burning throat; the little night lamp was burning as usual, and its dim light made thousands of phantoms dance before his wandering eyes.

And then a horrible vision — he saw La Mole get out of bed, and after walking up and down the room two or three times, as the sparrow-hawk flits before the little bird it is trying to fascinate, come toward him with his fist clinched.

Coconnas seized his poniard and prepared to plunge it into his enemy.

La Mole kept coming nearer.

Coconnas muttered:

“Ah! here you are again! you are always here! Come on! You threaten me, do you! you smile! Come, come, come! ah, you still keep coming nearer, a step at a time! Come, come, and let me kill you.”

And suiting the action to the word, just as La Mole bent down to him, Coconnas flashed out the poniard from under the clothes; but the effort he made in rising exhausted him, the weapon dropped from his hand, and he fell back upon his pillow.

“There, there!” said La Mole, gently lifting his head; “drink this, my poor fellow, for you are burning up.”

It was really a cup La Mole presented to Coconnas, who in the wild excitement of his delirium took it to be a threatening fist.

But at the nectarous sensation of this beneficent draught, soothing his lips and cooling his throat, Coconnas’s reason, or rather his instinct, came back to him, a never before experienced feeling of comfort pervaded his frame; he turned an intelligent look at La Mole, who was supporting him in his arms, and smiling on him; and from those eyes, so lately glowing with fury, a tear rolled down his burning cheek, which drank it with avidity.

“*Mordi!*” whispered Coconnas, as he fell back on his bolster. “If I get over this, Monsieur de la Mole, you shall be my friend.”

"And you will get over it," said La Mole, "if you will drink the other two cups, and have no more ugly dreams."

An hour afterward La Mole, assuming the duties of a nurse, and scrupulously carrying out the unknown doctor's orders, rose again, poured a second dose into the cup, and carried it to Coconnas, who instead of waiting for him with his poniard, received him with open arms, eagerly swallowed the potion, and calmly fell asleep.

The third cup had a no less marvellous effect. The sick man's breathing became more regular, his stiff limbs relaxed, a gentle perspiration diffused itself over his burning skin, and when Ambroise Paré visited him the next morning, he smiled complacently, saying:

"I answer for Monsieur de Coconnas now; and this will not be one of the least difficult cures I have effected."

This scene, half-dramatic, half-burlesque, and yet not lacking in a certain poetic touch when Coconnas's fierce ways were taken into consideration, resulted in the friendship which the two gentlemen had begun at the Inn of the *Belle Étoile*, and which had been so violently interrupted by the Saint Bartholomew night's occurrences, from that time forth taking on a new vigor and soon surpassing that of Orestes and Pylades by five sword-thrusts and one pistol-wound exchanged between them.

At all events, wounds old and new, slight or serious, were at last in a fair way of cure. La Mole, faithful to his duties as nurse, would not forsake the sick-room until Coconnas was entirely well. As long as weakness kept the invalid on the bed, he lifted him, and when he began to improve he helped him to walk; in a word, he lavished on him all the attentions suggested by his gentle and affectionate disposition, and this care, together with the Piedmontese's natural vigor, brought about a more rapid convalescence than would have been expected.

However, one and the same thought tormented both the young men. Each had in his delirium apparently seen the woman he loved approach his couch, and yet, certainly since they had recovered their senses, neither Marguerite nor Madame de Nevers had entered the room. However, that was perfectly comprehensible; the one, wife of the King of Navarre, the other, the Duc de Guise's sister-in-law, could not have publicly shown two simple gentlemen such a mark of evident interest, could they? No! La Mole and Coconnas could not make any other reply to this question. But still the absence of the ladies, tantamount perhaps to utter forgetfulness, was not the less painful.

It is true the gentleman who had witnessed the duel had come several times, as if of his own accord, to inquire after them; it is true Gillonne had done the same; but La Mole had not ventured to speak to the one concerning the queen; Coconnas had not ventured to speak to the other of Madame de Nevers.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE GHOSTS.

For some time each of the young men kept his secret confined to his own heart. At last their reserve burst its barriers, and the thought which had so long occupied them escaped their lips, and both cemented their friendship by this final proof, without which there is no friendship, — namely, perfect confidence.

They were both madly in love — one with a princess and the other with a queen.

For these two poor suitors there was something frightful in the almost insuperable distance separating them from the objects of their desires.

And yet hope is a sentiment so deeply rooted in man's heart that in spite of the madness of their love they hoped!

They both, as they recovered from their illness, took great pains with their personal appearance. Every man, even the most indifferent to physical appearance, has, at certain times, mute interviews with his looking-glass, signs of intelligence, after which he generally leaves his confidant, quite satisfied with the interview. Now our two young men were not persons whose mirrors were compelled to give them harsh advice. La Mole, delicate, pale, and elegant, had the beauty of distinction; Coconnas, powerful, large-framed, and fresh-colored, had the beauty of strength. He had more, for his recent illness had been of advantage to him. He had become thinner, grown paler, and the famous scar which had formerly caused him so much anxiety from its prismatic relationship to the rainbow had disappeared, giving promise, probably like the post-diluvian phenomenon, of a long series of lovely days and calm nights.

Moreover, the most delicate attentions continued to be lavished on the two wounded men, and each of them on the day when he was well enough to rise found a *robe-de-chambre* on the easy-chair nearest his bed; on the day when he was able to dress himself, a complete suit of clothes; moreover, in the pocket of each doublet was a well-filled purse, which they each kept, intending, of course, to return, in the proper time and place, to the unknown protector who watched over them.

This unknown protector could not be the prince in whose quarters the two young men resided, for the prince had not only never once paid them a visit, but he had not even sent to make any inquiry after them.

A vague hope whispered to each heart that this unknown protector was the woman he loved.

So the two wounded men awaited with intense impatience the moment when they could go out. La Mole, stronger and sooner cured than Coconnas, might have done so long before, but a kind of tacit convention bound him to his friend. It was agreed between them that the first time they went out they should make three calls:

The first should be upon the unknown doctor whose suave medicine had brought such a remarkable improvement in the inflammation of Coconnas's lungs.

The second to the dwelling of the defunct Maître La Hurière, where each of them had left his portmanteau and horse.

The third to the Florentine Réné, who, uniting to his title of perfumer that of magician, not only sold cosmetics and poisons, but also concocted philters and delivered oracles.

At length, after two months passed in convalescence and confinement, the long-looked-for day arrived.

We used the word "confinement;" the use of it is accurate because several times in their impatience they had tried to hasten that day; but each time a sentinel posted at the door had stopped their passage and they had learned that they could not step out unless Maître Ambroise Paré gave them their *exeat*.

Now, one day that clever surgeon, having come to the conclusion that the two invalids were, if not completely cured, at least on the road to complete recovery, gave them this *exeat*, and about two o'clock in the afternoon on a fine day in autumn, such as Paris sometimes offers to her astonished population, who have already laid up a store of resignation for the winter, the two friends, arm in arm, set foot outside the Louvre.

La Mole, finding to his great satisfaction, on an armchair, the famous cherry-colored mantle which he had folded so carefully before the duel, undertook to be Coconnas's guide, and Coconnas allowed himself to be guided without resistance or reflection. He knew that his friend was taking him to the unknown doctor’s whose potion (not patented) had cured him in a single night, when all of Master Ambroise Paré’s drugs were slowly killing him. He had divided the money in his purse into two parts, and intended a hundred rose-nobles for the anonymous Esculapius to whom his recovery was due. Coconnas was not afraid of death, but Coconnas was not the less satisfied to be alive and well, and so, as we see, he was intending to recompense his deliverer generously.

La Mole proceeded along the Rue de l’Astruce, the wide Rue Saint Honoré, the Rue des Prouvelles, and soon found himself on the Place des Halles. Near the ancient fountain, at the place which is at the present time called the Carreau des Halles, was an octagon stone building, surmounted by a vast wooden lantern, which was again surmounted by a pointed roof, on the top of which was a weathercock. This wooden lantern had eight openings, traversed, as that heraldic piece which they call the *fascis* traverses the field of blazonry, by a kind of wooden wheel, which was divided in the middle, in order to admit in the holes cut in it for that purpose the head and hands of such sentenced person or persons as were exposed at one or more of these eight openings.

This singular arrangement, which had nothing like it in the surrounding buildings, was called the pillory.

An ill-constructed, irregular, crooked, one-eyed, limping house, the roof spotted with moss like a leper’s skin, had, like a toadstool, sprung up at the foot of this species of tower.

This house was the executioner’s.

A man was exposed, and was thrusting out his tongue at the passers-by; he was one of the robbers who had been following his profession near the gibbet of Montfaucon, and had by ill luck been arrested in the exercise of his functions.

Coconnas believed that his friend had brought him to see this singular spectacle, and he joined the crowd of sightseers who were replying to the patient’s grimaces by vociferations and gibes.

Coconnas was naturally cruel, and the sight very much amused him, only he would have preferred that instead of gibes and vociferations they had thrown stones at a convict so insolent as to thrust out his tongue at the noble lords that condescended to visit him.

So when the moving lantern was turned on its base, in order to show the culprit to another portion of the square, and the crowd followed, Coconnas would have accompanied them, had not La Mole checked him, saying, in a low tone:

“We did not come here for this.”

“Well, what did we come for, then?” asked Coconnas.

“You will see,” replied La Mole.

The two friends had got into the habit of addressing each other with the familiar “thee” and “thou” ever since the morning of that famous night when Coconnas had tried to thrust his poniard into La Mole’s vitals. And he led Coconnas directly to a small window in the house which abutted on the tower; a man was leaning on the window-sill.

“Aha! here you are, gentlemen,” said the man, raising his blood-red cap, and showing his thick black hair, which came down to his eyebrows. “You are welcome.”

“Who is this man?” inquired Coconnas, endeavoring to recollect, for it seemed to him he had seen that face during one of the crises of his fever.

“Your preserver, my dear friend,” replied La Mole; “he who brought to you at the Louvre that refreshing drink which did you so much good.”

“Oho!” said Coconnas; “in that case, my friend” —

And he held out his hand to him.

But the man, instead of returning the gesture, drew himself up and withdrew from the two friends just the distance occupied by the curve of his body.

“Sir!” he said to Coconnas, “thanks for the honor you wish to confer on me, but it is probable that if you knew me you would not do so.”

“Faith!” said Coconnas, “I declare that, even if you were the devil himself, I am very greatly obliged to you, for if it had not been for you I should be dead at this time.”

“I am not exactly the devil,” replied the man in the red cap; “but yet persons are frequently found who would rather see the devil than me.”

“Who are you, pray?” asked Coconnas.

“Sir,” replied the man, “I am Maître Caboche, the executioner of the provostry of Paris” —

“Ah” — said Coconnas, withdrawing his hand.

“You see!” said Maître Caboche.

“No, no; I will touch your hand, or may the devil fetch me! Hold it out” —

“Really?”

“Wide as you can.”

“Here it is.”

“Open it — wider — wider!”

And Coconnas took from his pocket the handful of gold he had prepared for his anonymous physician and placed it in the executioner’s hand.

“I would rather have had your hand entirely and solely,” said Maître Caboche, shaking his head, “for I do not lack money, but I am in need of hands to touch mine. Never mind. God bless you, my dear gentleman.”

“So then, my friend,” said Coconnas, looking at the executioner with curiosity, “it is you who put men to the rack, who break them on the wheel, quarter them, cut off heads, and break bones. Aha! I am very glad to have made your acquaintance.”

“Sir,” said Maître Caboche, “I do not do all myself; just as you noble gentlemen have your lackeys to do what you do not choose to do yourself, so have I my assistants, who do the coarser work and despatch clownish fellows. Only when, by chance, I have to do with folks of quality, like you and your companion, for instance, ah! then it is another thing, and I take a pride in doing everything myself, from first to last, — that is to say, from the first putting of the *question*, to the decapitation.”

In spite of himself, Coconnas felt a shudder pervade his veins, as if the brutal wedge was pressing his leg — as if the edge of the axe was against his neck.

La Mole, without being able to account for it, felt the same sensation.

But Coconnas overcame the emotion, of which he was ashamed, and desirous of taking leave of Maître Caboche with a jest on his lips, said to him:

“Well, master, I hold you to your word, and when it is my turn to mount Enguerrand de Marigny’s gallows or Monsieur de Nemours’s scaffold you alone shall lay hands on me.”

“I promise you.”

“Then, this time here is my hand, as a pledge that I accept your promise,” said Coconnas.

And he offered the executioner his hand, which the latter touched timidly with his own, although it was evident that he had a great desire to grasp it warmly.

At this light touch Coconnas turned rather pale; but the same smile lingered on his lips, while La Mole, ill at ease, and seeing the crowd turn as the lantern did and come toward them, touched his cloak.

Coconnas, who in reality had as great a desire as La Mole to put an end to this scene, which by the natural bent of his character he had delayed longer than he would have wished, nodded to the executioner and went his way.

"Faith!" said La Mole, when he and his companion had reached the Croix du Trahoir, "I must confess we breathe more freely here than in the Place des Halles."

"Decidedly," replied Coconnas; "but I am none the less glad at having made Maître Caboche's acquaintance. It is well to have friends everywhere."

"Even at the sign of the *Belle Étoile,*" said La Mole, laughing.

"Oh! as for poor Maître La Hurière," said Coconnas, "he is dead and dead again. I saw the arquebuse spitting flame, I heard the thump of the bullet, which sounded as if it had struck against the great bell of Notre-Dame, and I left him stretched out in the gutter with streams of blood flowing from his nose and mouth. Taking it for granted that he is a friend, he is a friend we shall have in the next world."

Thus chatting, the two young men entered the Rue de l'Arbre Sec and proceeded toward the sign of the *Belle Étoile*, which was still creaking in the same place, still presenting to the traveller its astronomic hearth and its appetizing inscription. Coconnas and La Mole expected to find the house in a desperate state, the widow in mourning, and the little ones wearing crêpe on their arms; but to their great astonishment they found the house in full swing of activity, Madame La Hurière mightily resplendent, and the children gayer than ever.

"Oh, the faithless creature!" cried La Mole; "she must have married again."

Then addressing the new Artémise:

"Madame," said he, "we are two gentlemen, acquaintances of poor Monsieur La Hurière. We left here two horses and two portmanteaus which we have come to claim."

"Gentlemen," replied the mistress of the house, after she had tried to bring them to her recollection, "as I have not the honor of knowing you, with your permission I will go and call my husband. Grégoire, ask your master to come."

Grégoire stepped from the first kitchen, which was the general pandemonium, into the second, which was the laboratory where Maître La

Hurière in his life-time had been in the habit of concocting the dishes which he felt deserved to be prepared by his clever hands.

“The devil take me,” muttered Coconnas, “if it does not make me feel badly to see this house so gay when it ought to be so melancholy. Poor La Hurière!”

“He tried to kill me,” said La Mole, “but I pardon him with all my heart.”

La Mole had hardly uttered these words when a man appeared holding in his hand a stew-pan, in the bottom of which he was browning some onions, stirring them with a wooden spoon.

La Mole and Coconnas gave vent to a cry of amazement.

As they did so the man lifted his head and, replying by a similar cry, dropped his stew-pan, retaining in his hand only his wooden spoon.

In nomine Patris,” said the man, waving his spoon as he would have done with a holy-water sprinkler, “*et Filii, et Spiritus sancti*” —

“Maître La Hurière!” exclaimed the two young men.

“Messieurs de Coconnas and de la Mole!” cried La Hurière.

“So you are not dead?” asked Coconnas.

“Why! can it be that you are alive?” asked the landlord.

“Nevertheless, I saw you fall,” said Coconnas, “I heard the crash of the bullet, which broke something in you, I don’t know what. I left you lying in the gutter, with blood streaming out of your nose, out of your mouth, and even out of your eyes.”

“All that is as true as the gospel, Monsieur de Coconnas. But the noise you heard was the bullet striking against my sallat, on which fortunately it flattened itself; but the blow was none the less severe, and the proof of it,” added La Hurière, lifting his cap and displaying a pate as bald as a man’s knee, “is that as you see I have not a spear of hair left.”

The two young men burst out laughing when they saw his grotesque appearance.

“Aha! you laugh, do you?” said La Hurière, somewhat reassured, “you do not come, then, with any evil intentions.”

“Now tell us, Maître La Hurière, are you entirely cured of your bellicose inclinations?”

“Faith, that I am, gentlemen; and now” —

“Well, and now” —

“Now I have vowed not to meddle with any other fire than that in my kitchen.”

“Bravo!” cried Coconnas, “see how prudent he is! Now,” added the Piedmontese, “we left in your stables two horses, and in your rooms two portmanteaus.”

“Oh, the devil!” replied the landlord, scratching his ear.

“Well?”

“Two horses, you say?”

“Yes, in your stable.”

“And two portmanteaus?”

“Yes, in the rooms we had.”

“The truth is, don’t you see — you thought I was dead, didn’t you?”

“Certainly we did.”

“You will agree that as you were mistaken, I also might be.”

“What? In believing that we also were dead? You were perfectly free.”

“Now that’s it. You see, as you died intestate,” continued Maître La Hurière.

“Go on” —

“I believed something, I was mistaken, I see it now” —

“Tell us, what was it you believed?”

“I believed that I might consider myself your heir.”

“Oho!” exclaimed the two young men.

“Nevertheless, I could not be more grateful to find that you are alive, gentlemen.”

“So you sold our horses, did you?” asked Coconnas.

“Alas!” cried La Hurière.

“And our portmanteaus?” insisted La Mole.

“Oh! your portmanteaus? Oh, no,” cried La Hurière, “only what was in them.”

“Now look here, La Mole,” persisted Coconnas, “it seems to me that this is a bold rascal; suppose we disembowel him!”

This threat seemed to have great effect on Maître La Hurière, who stammered out these words:

“Well, gentlemen, I rather think the affair can be arranged.”

“Listen!” said La Mole, “I am the one who has the greatest cause of complaint against you.”

“Certainly, Monsieur le Comte, for I recollect that in a moment of madness I had the audacity to threaten you.”

“Yes, with a bullet which flew only a couple of inches above my head.”

“Do you think so?”

“I am certain of it.”

“If you are certain of it, Monsieur de la Mole,” said La Hurière, picking up his stew-pan with an innocent air, “I am too thoroughly at your service to give you the lie.”

“Well,” said La Mole, “as far as I am concerned I make no demand upon you.”

“What, my dear gentleman” —

“Except” —

“Aïe! aïe!” groaned La Hurière.

“Except a dinner for myself and my friends every time I find myself in your neighborhood.”

“How is this?” exclaimed La Hurière in an ecstasy. “I am at your service, my dear gentleman; I am at your service.”

“So it is a bargain, is it?”

“With all my heart — and you, Monsieur de Coconnas,” continued the landlord, “do you agree to the bargain?”

“Yes; but, like my friend, I must add one small condition.”

“What is that?”

“That you restore to Monsieur de la Mole the fifty crowns which I owe him, and which I put into your keeping.”

“To me, sir? When was that?”

“A quarter of an hour before you sold my horse and my portmanteau.”

La Hurière showed that he understood.

“Ah! I remember,” said he; and he stepped toward a cupboard and took out from it, one after the other, fifty crowns, which he brought to La Mole.

“Very well, sir,” said that gentleman; “very well. Serve me an omelet. The fifty crowns are for Grégoire.”

“Oh!” cried La Hurière; “in truth, my dear gentlemen, you are genuine princes, and you may count on me for life and for death.”

“If that is so,” said Coconnas, “make us the omelet we want, and spare neither butter nor lard.”

Then looking at the clock,

“Faith, you are right, La Mole,” said he, “we still have three hours to wait, and we may as well be here as anywhere else. All the more because, if I am not mistaken, we are already half way to the Pont Saint Michel.”

And the two young men went and sat down at table in the very same room and at the very same place which they had occupied during that memorable evening of the twenty-sixth of August, 1572, when Coconnas had proposed to La Mole to play each against the other the first mistress which they should have!

Let us grant for the honor of the morality of our two young men that neither of them this evening had the least idea of making such a proposition to his companion.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ABODE OF MAÎTRE RÉNÉ, PERFUMER TO THE QUEEN MOTHER.

At the period of this history there existed in Paris, for passing from one part of the city to another, but five bridges, some of stone and the others of wood, and they all led to the Cité; there were le Pont des Meuniers, le Pont au Change, le Pont Notre-Dame, le Petit Pont, and le Pont Saint Michel.

In other places when there was need of crossing the river there were ferries.

These five bridges were loaded with houses like the Pont Vecchio at Florence at the present time. Of these five bridges, each of which has its history, we shall now speak more particularly of the Pont Saint Michel.

The Pont Saint Michel had been built of stone in 1373; in spite of its apparent solidity, a freshet in the Seine undermined a part of it on the thirty-first of January, 1408; in 1416 it had been rebuilt of wood; but during the night of December 16, 1547, it was again carried away; about 1550, in other words twenty-two years anterior to the epoch which we have reached, it was again built of wood, and though it needed repairs it was regarded as solid enough.

In the midst of the houses which bordered the line of the bridge, facing the small islet on which the Templers had been burnt, and where at the present time the platform of the Pont Neuf rests, stood a wooden panelled house over which a large roof impended like the lid of an immense eye. At the only window, which opened on the first story, over the window and door of the ground floor, hermetically sealed, shone a reddish light, which attracted the attention of the passers-by to the low, wide façade, painted blue, with rich gold mouldings. A kind of frieze separating the ground floor from the first floor represented groups of devils in the most grotesque postures imaginable; and a wide scroll painted blue like the façade ran between the frieze and the window, with this inscription: “Réné, Florentin, Perfumer de sa Majesté la Reine Mère.”

The door of this shop was, as we have said, well bolted; but it was defended from nocturnal attacks better than by bolts by its occupant’s reputation, so redoubtable that the passengers over the bridge usually described a curve which took them to the opposite row of houses, as if they feared the very smell of the perfumes that might exhale through the walls.

More than this, the right and left hand neighbors, doubtless fearing that they might be compromised by the proximity, had, since Maître Réné’s occupancy of the house, taken their departure one after the other so that the two houses next to Réné’s were left empty and closed. Yet, in spite of this solitude and desertedness, belated passers-by had frequently seen, glittering through the crevices of the shutters of these empty habitations, strange rays of light, and had felt certain they heard strange noises like groans, which proved that some beings frequented these abodes, although they did not know if they belonged to this world or the other.

The result was that the tenants of the two buildings contiguous to the two empty houses from time to time queried whether it would not be wise in them to do as their neighbors had done.

It was, doubtless, owing to the privilege which the dread of him, widely circulated, had procured for him, that Maître Réné had ventured to keep up a light after the prescribed hour. No round or guard, moreover, would have dared to molest him, a man doubly dear to her majesty as her fellow-countryman and perfumer.

As we suppose that the reader, panoplied by the philosophical wisdom of this century, no longer believes in magic or magicians, we will invite him to accompany us into this dwelling which, at that epoch of superstitious faith, shed around it such a profound terror.

The shop on the ground floor is dark and deserted after eight o’clock in the evening — the hour at which it closes, not to open again until next morning; there it is that the daily sale of perfumery, unguents, and cosmetics of all kinds, such as a skilful chemist makes, takes place. Two apprentices aid him in the retail business, but do not sleep in the house; they lodge in the Rue de la Colandre.

In the evening they take their departure an instant before the shop closes; in the morning they wait at the door until it opens.

This ground-floor shop is therefore dark and deserted, as we have said.

In this shop, which is large and deep, there are two doors, each leading to a staircase. One of these staircases is in the wall itself and is lateral, and the other is exterior and visible from the quay now called the Quai des Augustins, and from the riverbank, now called the Quai des Orfévres.

Both lead to the principal room on the first floor. This room is of the same size as the ground floor, except that it is divided into two compartments by tapestry suspended in the centre and parallel to the bridge. At the end of the first compartment opens the door leading to the exterior staircase. On the side face of the second opens the door of the secret staircase. This door is invisible, being concealed by a large carved cupboard fastened to it by iron cramps, and moving with it when pushed open. Catharine alone, besides Réné, knows the secret of this door, and by it she comes and departs; and with eye or ear placed against the cupboard, in which are several small holes, she sees and hears all that occurs in the chamber.

Two other doors, visible to all eyes, present themselves at the sides of the second compartment. One opens into a small chamber lighted from the roof, and having nothing in it but a large stove, some alembecs, retorts, and crucibles: it is the alchemist’s laboratory; the other opens into a cell more singular than the rest of the apartment, for it is not lighted at all — has neither carpet nor furniture, but only a kind of stone altar.

The floor slopes from the centre to the ends, and from the ends to the base of the wall is a kind of gutter ending in a funnel, through whose orifice may be seen the dark waters of the Seine. On nails driven into the walls are hung singular-shaped instruments, all keen or pointed with points as fine as a needle and edges as sharp as a razor; some shine like mirrors; others, on the contrary, are of a dull gray or murky blue.

In a corner are two black fowls struggling with each other and tied together by the claws. This is the soothsayer’s sanctuary.

Let us return to the middle chamber, that with two compartments.

Here the common herd of clients are introduced; here ibises from Egypt; mummies, with gilded bands; the crocodile, yawning from the ceiling; death’s-heads, with eyeless sockets and loose teeth; and old musty volumes, torn and rat-eaten, are presented to the visitor’s eye in pellmell confusion. Behind the curtain are phials, singularly shaped boxes, and weird-looking vases; all this is lighted up by two small silver lamps exactly alike, perhaps stolen from some altar of Santa Maria Novella or the Church Dei Lervi of Florence; these, supplied with perfumed oil, cast their yellow flames around the sombre vault from which each hangs by three blackened chains.

Réné, alone, his arms crossed, is pacing up and down the second compartment with long strides, and shaking his head. After a lengthened and painful musing he pauses before an hour-glass:

“Ah! ah!” says he, “I forget to turn it; and perhaps the sand has all run through a long time ago.”

Then, looking at the moon as it struggled through a heavy black cloud which seemed to hang over Notre-Dame, he said: “It is nine o’clock. If she comes, she will come, as usual, in an hour or an hour and a half; then there will be time for all.”

At this moment a noise was heard on the bridge. Réné applied his ear to the orifice of a long tube, the other end of which reached down the street, terminating in a heraldic viper-head.

“No,” he said, “it is neither *she* nor *they*; it is men’s footsteps, and they stop at my door — they are coming here.”

And three sharp knocks were heard at the door.

Réné hurried downstairs and put his ear against the door, without opening it.

The three sharp blows were repeated.

“Who’s there?” asked Maître Réné.

“Must we mention our names?” inquired a voice.

“It is indispensable,” replied Réné.

“Well, then, I am the Comte Annibal de Coconnas,” said the same voice.

“And I am the Comte Lerac de la Mole,” said another voice, which had not as yet been heard.

“Wait, wait, gentlemen, I am at your service.”

And at the same moment Réné drew the bolts and, lifting the bars, opened the door to the two young men locking it after him. Then, conducting them by the exterior staircase, he introduced them into the second compartment.

La Mole, as he entered, made the sign of the cross under his cloak. He was pale, and his hand trembled without his being able to repress this symptom of weakness.

Coconnas looked at everything, one after the other; and seeing the door of the cell, was about to open it.

“Allow me to observe, my dear young gentleman,” said Réné, in his deep voice, and placing his hand on Coconnas’s, “those that do me the honor of a visit have access only to this part of the room.”

"Oh, very well," replied Coconnas; "besides, I feel like sitting down." And he took a seat.

There was unbroken silence for a moment — Maître Réné was waiting for one or the other of the young men to open the conversation.

"Maître Réné," at length said Coconnas, "you are a skilful man, and I pray you tell me if I shall always remain a sufferer from my wound — that is, always experience this shortness of breath, which prevents me from riding on horseback, using my sword, and eating larded omelettes?"

Réné put his ear to Coconnas's chest and listened attentively to the play of the lungs.

"No, Monsieur le Comte," he replied, "you will get well."

"Really?"

"Yes, I assure you."

"Well, you fill me with delight."

There was silence once more.

"Is there nothing else you would desire to know, M. le Comte?"

"I wish to know," said Coconnas, "if I am really in love?"

"You are," replied Réné.

"How do you know?"

"Because you asked the question."

"By Heaven! you are right. But with whom?"

"With her who now, on every occasion, uses the oath you have just uttered."

"Ah!" said Coconnas, amazed; "Maître Réné, you are a clever man! Now, La Mole, it is your turn."

La Mole reddened, and seemed embarrassed.

"I, Monsieur Réné," he stammered, and speaking more firmly as he proceeded, "do not care to ask you if I am in love, for I know that I am, and I do not hide it from myself; but tell me, shall I be beloved in return? for, in truth, all that at first seemed propitious now turns against me."

"Perchance you have not done all you should do."

"What is there to do, sir, but to testify, by one's respect and devotion to the lady of one's thoughts, that she is really and profoundly beloved?"

"You know," replied Réné, "that these demonstrations are frequently very meaningless."

"Then must I despair?"

"By no means; we must have recourse to science. In human nature there are antipathies to be overcome — sympathies which may be forced. Iron is not the lodestone; but by rubbing it with a lodestone we make it, in its turn, attract iron."

"Yes, yes," muttered La Mole; "but I have an objection to all these sorceries."

"Ah, then, if you have any such objections, you should not come here," answered Réné.

"Come, come, this is child's play!" interposed Coconnas. "Maître Réné, can you show me the devil?"

"No, Monsieur le Comte."

"I'm sorry for that; for I had a word or two to say to him, and it might have encouraged La Mole."

"Well, then, let it be so," said La Mole, "let us go to the point at once. I have been told of figures modelled in wax to look like the beloved object. Is that one way?"

"An infallible one."

"And there is nothing in the experiment likely to affect the life or health of the person beloved?"

"Nothing."

"Let us try, then."

"Shall I make first trial?" said Coconnas.

"No," said La Mole, "since I have begun, I will go through to the end."

"Is your desire mighty, ardent, imperious to know what the obstacle is, Monsieur de la Mole?"

"Oh," exclaimed La Mole, "I am dying with anxiety."

At this moment some one rapped lightly at the street door — so lightly that no one but Maître Réné heard the noise, doubtless because he had been expecting it.

Without any hesitation he went to the speaking-tube and put his ear to the mouthpiece, at the same time asking La Mole several idle questions. Then he added, suddenly:

"Now put all your energy into your wish, and call the person whom you love."

La Mole knelt, as if about to address a divinity; and Réné, going into the other compartment, went out noiselessly by the exterior staircase, and an instant afterward light steps trod the floor of his shop.

When La Mole rose he beheld before him Maître Réné. The Florentine held in his hand a small wax figure, very indifferently modelled; it wore a crown and mantle.

"Do you desire to be always beloved by your royal mistress?" demanded the perfumer.

"Yes, even if it cost me my life — even if my soul should be the sacrifice!" replied La Mole.

"Very good," said the Florentine, taking with the ends of his fingers some drops of water from a ewer and sprinkling them over the figure, at the same time muttering certain Latin words.

La Mole shuddered, believing that some sacrilege was committed.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"I am christening this figure with the name of Marguerite."

"What for?"

"To establish a sympathy."

La Mole opened his mouth to prevent his going any further, but a mocking look from Coconnas stopped him.

Réné, who had noticed the impulse, waited. "Your absolute and undivided will is necessary," he said.

"Go on," said La Mole.

Réné wrote on a small strip of red paper some cabalistic characters, put it into the eye of a steel needle, and with the needle pierced the small wax model in the heart.

Strange to say, at the orifice of the wound appeared a small drop of blood; then he set fire to the paper.

The heat of the needle melted the wax around it and dried up the spot of blood.

"Thus," said Réné, "by the power of sympathy, your love shall pierce and burn the heart of the woman whom you love."

Coconnas, true to his repute as a bold thinker, laughed in his mustache, and in a low tone jested; but La Mole, desperately in love and full of superstition, felt a cold perspiration start from the roots of his hair.

"And now," continued Réné, "press your lips to the lips of the figure, and say: 'Marguerite, I love thee! Come, Marguerite!'"

La Mole obeyed.

At this moment the door of the second chamber was heard to open, and light steps approached. Coconnas, curious and incredulous, drew his poniard, and fearing that if he raised the tapestry Réné would repeat what he said about the door, he cut a hole in the thick curtain, and applying his eye to the hole, uttered a cry of astonishment, to which two women's voices responded.

"What is it?" exclaimed La Mole, nearly dropping the waxen figure, which Réné caught from his hands.

"Why," replied Coconnas, "the Duchesse de Nevers and Madame Marguerite are there!"

"There, now, you unbelievers!" replied Réné, with an austere smile; "do you still doubt the force of sympathy?"

La Mole was petrified on seeing the queen; Coconnas was amazed at beholding Madame de Nevers. One believed that Réné's sorceries had evoked the phantom Marguerite; the other, seeing the door half open, by which the lovely phantoms had entered, gave at once a worldly and substantial explanation to the mystery.

While La Mole was crossing himself and sighing enough to split a rock, Coconnas, who had taken time to indulge in philosophical questionings and to drive away the foul fiend with the aid of that holy water sprinkler called scepticism, having observed, through the hole in the curtain, the astonishment shown by Madame de Nevers and Marguerite's somewhat caustic smile, judged the moment to be decisive, and understanding that a man may say in behalf of a friend what he cannot say for himself, instead of going to Madame de Nevers, went straight to Marguerite, and bending his knee, after the fashion of the great Artaxerxes as represented in the farces of the day, cried, in a voice to which the whistling of his wound added a peculiar accent not without some power:

"Madame, this very moment, at the demand of my friend the Comte de la Mole, Maître Réné was evoking your spirit; and to my great astonishment, your spirit is accompanied with a body most dear to me, and which I recommend to my friend. Shade of her majesty the Queen of Navarre, will you desire the body of your companion to come to the other side of the curtain?"

Marguerite began to laugh, and made a sign to Henriette, who passed to the other side of the curtain.

"La Mole, my friend," continued Coconnas, "be as eloquent as Demosthenes, as Cicero, as the Chancellor de l'Hôpital! and be assured that my life will be imperilled if you do not persuade the body of Madame de

Nevers that I am her most devoted, most obedient, and most faithful servant."

"But" — stammered La Mole.

"Do as I say! And you, Maître Réné, watch that we are not interrupted."

Réné did as Coconnas asked.

"By Heaven, monsieur," said Marguerite, "you are a clever man. I am listening to you. What have you to say?"

"I have to say to you, madame, that the shadow of my friend — for he is a shadow, and he proves it by not uttering a single little word — I say, that this shadow begs me to use the faculty which material bodies possess of speaking so as to be understood, and to say to you: Lovely shadow, the gentleman thus disembodied has lost his whole body and all his breath by the cruelty of your eyes. If this were really you, I should ask Maître Réné to plunge me in some sulphurous pit rather than use such language to the daughter of King Henry II., to the sister of King Charles IX., to the wife of the King of Navarre. But shades are freed from all earthly pride and they are never angry when men love them. Therefore, pray your body, madame, to love the soul of this poor La Mole a little — a soul in trouble, if ever there was one; a soul first persecuted by friendship, which three times thrust into him several inches of cold steel; a soul burnt by the fire of your eyes — fire a thousand times more consuming than all the flames of hell. So have pity on this poor soul! Love a little what was the handsome La Mole; and if you no longer possess speech, ah! bestow a gesture, bestow a smile upon him. My friend's soul is a very intelligent soul, and will comprehend everything. Be kind to him, then; or, by Heaven! I will run my sword through Réné's body in order that, by virtue of the power which he possesses over spirits, he may force yours, which he has already so opportunely evoked, to do all a shade so amiably disposed as yours appears to be should do."

At this burst of eloquence delivered by Coconnas as he stood in front of the queen like Æneas descending into Hades, Marguerite could not refrain from a hearty burst of laughter, yet, preserving the silence which on such an occasion may be the supposed characteristic of a royal shade, she presented her hand to Coconnas. He took it daintily in his, and, calling to La Mole, said:

"Shade of my friend, come hither instantly!"

La Mole, amazed, overcome, silently obeyed.

“’T is well,” said Coconnas, taking him by the back of the head; “and now bring the shadow of your handsome brown countenance into contact with the white and vaporous hand before you.”

And Coconnas, suiting the action to the word, raised the delicate hand to La Mole’s lips, and kept them for a moment respectfully united, without the hand seeking to withdraw itself from the gentle pressure.

Marguerite had not ceased to smile, but Madame de Nevers did not smile at all; she was still trembling at the unexpected appearance of the two gentlemen. She was conscious that her awkwardness was increased by all the fever of a growing jealousy, for it seemed to her that Coconnas ought not thus to forget her affairs for those of others.

La Mole saw her eyebrows contracted, detected the flashing threat of her eyes, and in spite of the intoxicating fever to which his delight was insensibly urging him to succumb he realized the danger which his friend was running and perceived what he should try to do to rescue him.

So rising and leaving Marguerite’s hand in Coconnas’s, he grasped the Duchesse de Nevers’s, and bending his knee he said:

“O loveliest — O most adorable of women — I speak of living women, and not of shades!” and he turned a look and a smile to Marguerite; “allow a soul released from its mortal envelope to repair the absence of a body fully absorbed by material friendship. Monsieur de Coconnas, whom you see, is only a man — a man of bold and hardy frame, of flesh handsome to gaze upon perchance, but perishable, like all flesh. *Omnis caro fenum.* Although this gentleman keeps on from morning to night pouring into my ears the most touching litanies about you, though you have seen him distribute as heavy blows as were ever seen in wide France — this champion, so full of eloquence in presence of a spirit, dares not address a woman. That is why he has addressed the shade of the queen, charging me to speak to your lovely body, and to tell you that he lays at your feet his soul and heart; that he entreats from your divine eyes a look in pity, from your rosy fingers a beckoning sign, and from your musical and heavenly voice those words which men can never forget; if not, he has supplicated another thing, and that is, in case he should not soften you, you will run my sword — which is a real blade, for swords have no shadows except in the sunshine — run my sword right through his body for the second time, for he can live no longer if you do not authorize him to live exclusively for you.” All the verve and comical exaggeration which Coconnas had put into his speech found their counterpart in the tenderness, the intoxicating vigor, and the mock humility which La Mole introduced into his supplication.

Henriette's eyes turned from La Mole, to whom she had listened till he ended, and rested on Coconnas, to see if the expression of that gentleman's countenance harmonized with his friend's ardent address. It seemed that she was satisfied, for blushing, breathless, conquered, she said to Coconnas, with a smile which disclosed a double row of pearls enclosed in coral:

"Is this true?"

"By Heaven!" exclaimed Coconnas, fascinated by her look, "it is true, indeed. Oh, yes, madame, it is true — true on your life — true on my death!"

"Come with me, then," said Henriette, extending to him her hand, while her eyes proclaimed the feelings of her heart.

Coconnas flung his velvet cap into the air and with one stride was at the young woman's side, while La Mole, recalled to Marguerite by a gesture, executed at the same time an amorous *chassez* with his friend.

Réné appeared at the door in the background.

"Silence!" he exclaimed, in a voice which at once damped all the ardor of the lovers; "silence!"

And they heard in the solid wall the sound of a key in a lock, and of a door grating on its hinges.

"But," said Marguerite, haughtily, "I should think that no one has the right to enter whilst we are here!"

"Not even the queen mother?" whispered Réné in her ear.

Marguerite instantly rushed out by the exterior staircase, leading La Mole after her; Henriette and Coconnas almost arm-in-arm followed them, all four taking flight, as fly at the first noise the birds seen engaged in loving parley on the boughs of a flowering shrub.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BLACK HENS.

It was time the two couples disappeared! Catharine was putting the key in the lock of the second door just as Coconnas and Madame de Nevers stepped out of the house by the lower entrance, and Catharine as she entered could hear the steps of the fugitives on the stairs.

She cast a searching glance around, and then fixing her suspicious eyes on Réné, who stood motionless, bowing before her, said:

“Who was that?”

“Some lovers, who are satisfied with the assurance I gave them that they are really in love.”

“Never mind them,” said Catharine, shrugging her shoulders; “is there no one else here?”

“No one but your majesty and myself.”

“Have you done what I ordered you?”

“About the two black hens?”

“Yes!”

“They are ready, madame.”

“Ah,” muttered Catharine, “if you were a Jew!”

“Why a Jew, madame?”

“Because you could then read the precious treatises which the Hebrews have written about sacrifices. I have had one of them translated, and I found that the Hebrews did not look for omens in the heart or liver as the Romans did, but in the configuration of the brain, and in the shape of the letters traced there by the all-powerful hand of destiny.”

“Yes, madame; so I have heard from an old rabbi.”

“There are,” said Catharine, “characters thus marked that reveal all the future. Only the Chaldean seers recommend” —

“Recommend — what?” asked Réné, seeing the queen hesitate.

“That the experiment shall be tried on the human brain, as more developed and more nearly sympathizing with the wishes of the consulter.”

“Alas!” said Réné, “your majesty knows it is impossible.”

“Difficult, at least,” said Catharine; “if we had known this at Saint Bartholomew’s, what a rich harvest we might have had — The first convict — but I will think of it. Meantime, let us do what we can. Is the chamber of sacrifice prepared?”

“Yes, madame.”

“Let us go there.”

Réné lighted a taper made of strange substances, the odor of which, both insidious and penetrating as well as nauseating and stupefying, betokened the introduction of many elements; holding this taper up, he preceded Catharine into the cell.

Catharine selected from amongst the sacrificial instruments a knife of blue steel, while Réné took up one of the two fowls that were huddling in one corner, with anxious, golden eyes.

“How shall we proceed?”

“We will examine the liver of the one and the brain of the other. If these two experiments lead to the same result we must be convinced, especially if these results coincide with those we got before.”

“Which shall we begin with?”

“With the liver.”

“Very well,” said Réné, and he fastened the bird down to two rings attached to the little altar, so that the creature, turned on its back, could only struggle, without stirring from the spot.

Catharine opened its breast with a single stroke of her knife; the fowl uttered three cries, and, after some convulsions, expired.

“Always three cries!” said Catharine; “three signs of death.”

She then opened the body.

“And the liver inclining to the left, always to the left, — a triple death, followed by a downfall. ’T is terrible, Réné.”

“We must see, madame, whether the presages from the second will correspond with those of the first.”

Réné unfastened the body of the fowl from the altar and tossed it into a corner; then he went to the other, which, foreseeing what its fate would be by its companion’s, tried to escape by running round the cell, and finding itself pent up in a corner flew over Réné’s head, and in its flight extinguished the magic taper Catharine held.

“You see, Réné, thus shall our race be extinguished,” said the queen; “death shall breathe upon it, and destroy it from the face of the earth! Yet three sons! three sons!” she murmured, sorrowfully.

Réné took from her the extinguished taper, and went into the adjoining room to relight it.

On his return he saw the hen hiding its head in the tunnel.

“This time,” said Catharine, “I will prevent the cries, for I will cut off the head at once.”

And accordingly, as soon as the hen was bound, Catharine, as she had said, severed the head at a single blow; but in the last agony the beak opened three times, and then closed forever.

“Do you see,” said Catharine, terrified, “instead of three cries, three sighs? Always three! — they will all three die. All these spirits before they depart count and call three. Let us now see the prognostications in the head.”

She severed the bloodless comb from the head, carefully opened the skull, and laying bare the lobes of the brain endeavored to trace a letter formed in the bloody sinuosities made by the division of the central pulp.

“Always so!” cried she, clasping her hands; “and this time clearer than ever; see here!”

Réné approached.

“What is the letter?” asked Catharine.

“An H,” replied Réné.

“How many times repeated?”

Réné counted.

“Four,” said he.

“Ay, ay! I see it! that is to say, Henry IV. Oh,” she cried, flinging the knife from her, “I am accursed in my posterity!”

She was terrible, that woman, pale as a corpse, lighted by the dismal taper, and clasping her bloody hands.

“He will reign!” she exclaimed with a sigh of despair; “he will reign!”

“He will reign!” repeated Réné, plunged in meditation.

Nevertheless, the gloomy expression of Catharine’s face soon disappeared under the light of a thought which unfolded in the depths of her mind.

“Réné,” said she, stretching out her hand toward the perfumer without lifting her head from her breast, “Réné, is there not a terrible history of a doctor at Perugia, who killed at once, by the aid of a pomade, his daughter and his daughter’s lover?”

“Yes, madame.”

“And this lover was” —

“Was King Ladislas, madame.”

“Ah, yes!” murmured she; “have you any of the details of this story?”

“I have an old book which mentions it,” replied Réné.

“Well, let us go into the other room, and you can show it me.”

They left the cell, the door of which Réné closed after him.

“Has your majesty any other orders to give me concerning the sacrifices?”

“No, Réné, I am for the present sufficiently convinced. We will wait till we can secure the head of some criminal, and on the day of the execution you must arrange with the hangman.”

Réné bowed in token of obedience, then holding his candle up he let the light fall on the shelves where his books stood, climbed on a chair, took one down, and handed it to the queen.

Catharine opened it.

“What is this?” she asked; “‘On the Method of Raising and Training Tercels, Falcons, and Gerfalcons to be Courageous, Valiant, and always ready for Flight.’“

“Ah! pardon me, madame, I made a mistake. That is a treatise on venery written by a scientific man of Lucca for the famous Castruccio Castracani. It stood next the other and was bound exactly like it. I took down the wrong one. However, it is a very precious volume; there are only three copies extant — one belongs to the library at Venice, the other was bought by your grandfather Lorenzo and was offered by Pietro de Médicis to King Charles VIII., when he visited Florence, and the third you have in your hands.”

“I venerate it,” said Catharine, “because of its rarity, but as I do not need it, I return it to you.”

And she held out her right hand to Réné to receive the book which she wished, while with her left hand she returned to him the one which she had first taken.

This time Réné was not mistaken; it was the volume she wished. He stepped down, turned the leaves for a moment, and gave it to her open.

Catharine went and sat down at a table. Réné placed the magic taper near her and by the light of its bluish flame she read a few lines in an undertone:

“Good!” said she, shutting the book; “that is all I wanted to know.”

She rose from her seat, leaving the book on the table, but bearing away the idea which had germinated in her mind and would ripen there.

Réné waited respectfully, taper in hand, until the queen, who seemed about to retire, should give him fresh orders or ask fresh questions.

Catharine, with her head bent and her finger on her mouth, walked up and down several times without speaking.

Then suddenly stopping before Réné, and fixing on him her eyes, round and piercing like a hawk's:

"Confess you have made for her some love-philter," said she.

"For whom?" asked Réné, starting.

"La Sauve."

"I, madame?" said Réné; "never!"

"Never?"

"I swear it on my soul."

"There must be some magic in it, however, for he is desperately in love with her, though he is not famous for his constancy."

"Who, madame?"

"He, Henry, the accursed, — he who is to succeed my three sons, — he who shall one day be called Henry IV., and is yet the son of Jeanne d'Albret."

And Catharine accompanied these words with a sigh which made Réné shudder, for he thought of the famous gloves he had prepared by Catharine's order for the Queen of Navarre.

"So he still runs after her, does he?" said Réné.

"He does," replied the queen.

"I thought that the King of Navarre was quite in love with his wife now."

"A farce, Réné, a farce! I know not why, but every one is seeking to deceive me. My daughter Marguerite is leagued against me; perhaps she, too, is looking forward to the death of her brothers; perhaps she, too, hopes to be Queen of France."

"Perhaps so," re-echoed Réné, falling back into his own reverie and echoing Catharine's terrible suspicion.

"Ha! we shall see," said Catharine, going to the main door, for she doubtless judged it useless to descend the secret stair, now that she was sure that they were alone.

Réné preceded her, and in a few minutes they stood in the perfumer's shop.

“You promised me some new kind of cosmetic for my hands and lips, Réné; the winter is at hand and you know how sensitive my skin is to the cold.”

“I have already provided for this, madame; and I shall bring you some to-morrow.”

“You would not find me in before nine o’clock to-morrow evening; I shall be occupied with my devotions during the day.”

“I will be at the Louvre at nine o’clock, then, madame.”

“Madame de Sauve has beautiful hands and beautiful lips,” said Catharine in a careless tone. “What pomade does she use?”

“For her hands?”

“Yes, for her hands first.”

“Heliotrope.”

“What for her lips?”

“She is going to try a new opiate of my invention. I was going to bring your majesty a box of it at the same time.”

Catharine mused an instant.

“She is certainly a very beautiful creature,” said she, pursuing her secret thoughts; “and the passion of the Béarnais for her is not strange at all.”

“And she is so devoted to your majesty,” said Réné. “At least I should think so.”

Catharine smiled and shrugged her shoulders.

“When a woman loves, is she faithful to any one but her lover? You must have given her some philter, Réné.”

“I swear I have not, madame.”

“Well, well; we’ll say no more about it. Show me this new opiate you spoke of, that is to make her lips fresher and rosier than ever.”

Réné approached a shelf and showed Catharine six small boxes of the same shape, *i.e.*, round silver boxes ranged side by side.

“This is the only philter she ever asked me for,” observed Réné; “it is true, as your majesty says, I composed it expressly for her, for her lips are so tender that the sun and wind affect them equally.”

Catharine opened one of the boxes; it contained a most fascinating carmine paste.

“Give me some paste for my hands, Réné,” said she; “I will take it away with me.”

Réné took the taper, and went to seek, in a private compartment, what the queen asked for. As he turned, he fancied that he saw the queen quickly conceal a box under her mantle; he was, however, too familiar with these little thefts of the queen mother to have the rudeness to seem to perceive the movement; so wrapping the cosmetic she demanded in a paper bag, ornamented with fleurs-de-lis:

“Here it is, madame,” he said.

“Thanks, Réné,” returned the queen; then, after a moment’s silence: “Do not give Madame de Sauve that paste for a week or ten days; I wish to make the first trial of it myself.”

And she prepared to go.

“Your majesty, do you desire me to accompany you?” asked Réné.

“Only to the end of the bridge,” replied Catharine; “my gentlemen and my litter wait for me there.”

They left the house, and at the end of the Rue de la Barillerie four gentlemen on horseback and a plain litter were waiting.

On his return Réné’s first care was to count his boxes of opiates. One was wanting.

CHAPTER XXI.

MADAME DE SAUVE’S APARTMENT.

Catharine was not deceived in her suspicions. Henry had resumed his former habits and went every evening to Madame de Sauve’s. At first he accomplished this with the greatest secrecy; but gradually he grew negligent and ceased to take any precautions, so that Catharine had no trouble in finding out that while Marguerite was still nominally Queen of Navarre, Madame de Sauve was the real queen.

At the beginning of this story we said a word or two about Madame de Sauve’s apartment; but the door opened by Dariole to the King of Navarre closed hermetically behind him, so that these rooms, the scene of the Béarnais’s mysterious amours, are totally unknown to us. The quarters, like those furnished by princes for their dependents in the palaces occupied by them in order to have them within reach, were smaller and less convenient than what she could have found in the city itself. As the reader already knows, they were situated on the second floor of the palace, almost immediately above those occupied by Henry himself. The door opened into a corridor, the end of which was lighted by an arched window with small leaded panes, so that even in the loveliest days of the year only a dubious light filtered through. During the winter, after three o’clock in the afternoon, it was necessary to light a lamp, but as this contained no more oil than in summer, it went out by ten o’clock, and thus, as soon as the winter days arrived, gave the two lovers the greatest security.

A small antechamber, carpeted with yellow flowered damask; a reception-room with hangings of blue velvet; a sleeping-room, the bed adorned with twisted columns and rose-satin curtains, enshrining a *ruelle* ornamented with a looking-glass set in silver, and two paintings representing the loves of Venus and Adonis, — such was the residence, or as one would say nowadays the nest, of the lovely lady-in-waiting to Queen Catharine de Médicis.

If one had looked sharply one would have found, opposite a toilet-table provided with every accessory, a small door in a dark corner of this room opening into a sort of oratory where, raised on two steps, stood a *priedieu*. In this little chapel on the wall hung three or four paintings, to the highest degree spiritual, as if to serve as a corrective to the two mythological pictures which we mentioned. Among these paintings were hung on gilded nails weapons such as women carried.

That evening, which was the one following the scenes which we have described as taking place at Maître Réné's, Madame de Sauve, seated in her bedroom on a couch, was telling Henry about her fears and her love, and was giving him as a proof of her love the devotion which she had shown on the famous night following Saint Bartholomew's, the night which, it will be remembered, Henry spent in his wife's quarters.

Henry on his side was expressing his gratitude to her. Madame de Sauve was charming that evening in her simple batiste wrapper; and Henry was very grateful.

At the same time, as Henry was really in love, he was dreamy. Madame de Sauve, who had come actually to love instead of pretending to love as Catharine had commanded, kept gazing at Henry to see if his eyes were in accord with his words.

"Come, now, Henry," she was saying, "be honest; that night which you spent in the boudoir of her majesty the Queen of Navarre, with Monsieur de la Mole at your feet, didn't you feel sorry that that worthy gentleman was between you and the queen's bedroom?"

"Certainly I did, sweetheart," said Henry, "for the only way that I could reach this room where I am so comfortable, where at this instant I am so happy, was for me to pass through the queen's room."

Madame de Sauve smiled.

"And you have not been there since?"

"Only as I have told you."

"You will never go to her without informing me?"

"Never."

"Would you swear to it?"

"Certainly I would, if I were still a Huguenot, but" —

"But what?"

"But the Catholic religion, the dogmas of which I am now learning, teach me that one must never take an oath."

"Gascon!" exclaimed Madame de Sauve, shaking her head.

“But now it is my turn, Charlotte,” said Henry. “If I ask you some questions, will you answer?”

“Certainly I will,” replied the young woman, “I have nothing to hide from you.”

“Now look here, Charlotte,” said the king, “explain to me just for once how it came about that after the desperate resistance which you made to me before my marriage, you became less cruel to me who am an awkward Béarnais, an absurd provincial, a prince too poverty-stricken, indeed, to keep the jewels of his crown polished.”

“Henry,” said Charlotte, “you are asking the explanation of the enigma which the philosophers of all countries have been trying to determine for the past three thousand years! Henry, never ask a woman why she loves you; be satisfied with asking, ‘Do you love me?’“

“Do you love me, Charlotte?” asked Henry.

“I love you,” replied Madame de Sauve, with a fascinating smile, dropping her pretty hand into her lover’s.

Henry retained the hand.

“But,” he went on to say, following out his thought, “supposing I have guessed the word which the philosophers have been vainly trying to find for three thousand years — at least as far as you are concerned, Charlotte?”

Madame de Sauve blushed.

“You love me,” pursued Henry, “consequently I have nothing else to ask you and I consider myself the happiest man in the world. But you know happiness is always accompanied by some lack. Adam, in the midst of Eden, was not perfectly happy, and he bit into that miserable apple which imposed upon us all that love for novelty that makes every one spend his life in the search for something unknown. Tell me, my darling, in order to help me to find mine, didn’t Queen Catharine at first bid you love me?”

“Henry,” exclaimed Madame de Sauve, “speak lower when you speak of the queen mother!”

“Oh!” exclaimed Henry, with a spontaneity and boldness which deceived Madame de Sauve herself, “it was a good thing formerly to distrust her, kind mother that she is, but then we were not on good terms; but now that I am her daughter’s husband” —

“Madame Marguerite’s husband!” exclaimed Charlotte, flushing with jealousy.

“Speak low in your turn,” said Henry; “now that I am her daughter’s husband we are the best friends in the world. What was it they wanted? For me to become a Catholic, so it seems. Well, grace has touched me, and by the intercession of Saint Bartholomew I have become one. We live together like brethren in a happy family — like good Christians.”

“And Queen Marguerite?”

“Queen Marguerite?” repeated Henry; “oh, well, she is the link uniting us.”

“But, Henry, you said that the Queen of Navarre, as a reward for the devotion I showed her, had been generous to me. If what you say is true, if this generosity, for which I have cherished deep gratitude toward her, is genuine, she is a connecting link easy to break. So you cannot trust to this support, for you have not made your pretended intimacy impose on any one.”

“Still I do rest on it, and for three months it has been the bolster on which I have slept.”

“Then, Henry!” cried Madame de Sauve, “you have deceived me, and Madame Marguerite is really your wife.”

Henry smiled.

“There, Henry,” said Madame de Sauve, “you have given me one of those exasperating smiles which make me feel the cruel desire to scratch your eyes out, king though you are.”

“Then,” said Henry, “I seem to be imposing now by means of this pretended friendship, since there are moments when, king though I am, you desire to scratch out my eyes, because you believe that it exists!”

“Henry! Henry!” said Madame de Sauve, “I believe that God himself does not know what your thoughts are.”

“My sweetheart,” said Henry, “I think that Catharine first told you to love me, next, that your heart told you the same thing, and that when those two voices are speaking to you, you hear only your heart’s. Now here I am. I love you and love you with my whole heart, and that is the very reason why if ever I should have secrets I should not confide them to you, — for fear of compromising you, of course, — for the queen’s friendship is changeable, it is a mother-in-law’s.”

This was not what Charlotte expected; it seemed to her that the thickening veil between her and her lover every time she tried to sound the depths of his bottomless heart was assuming the consistency of a wall, and was separating them from each other. So she felt the tears springing to her eyes as he made this answer, and as it struck ten o'clock just at that moment:

"Sire," said Charlotte, "it is my bed-time; my duties call me very early tomorrow morning to the queen mother."

"So you drive me away to-night, do you, sweetheart?"

"Henry, I am sad. As I am sad, you would find me tedious and you would not like me any more. You see that it is better for you to withdraw."

"Very good," said Henry, "I will withdraw if you insist upon it, only, *ventre saint gris*! you must at least grant me the favor of staying for your toilet."

"But Queen Marguerite, sire! won't you keep her waiting if you remain?"

"Charlotte," replied Henry, gravely, "it was agreed between us that we should never mention the Queen of Navarre, but it seems to me that this evening we have talked about nothing but her."

Madame de Sauve sighed; then she went and sat down before her toilet-table. Henry took a chair, pulled it along toward the one that served as his mistress's seat, and setting one knee on it while he leaned on the back of the other, he said:

"Come, my good little Charlotte, let me see you make yourself beautiful, and beautiful for me whatever you said. Heavens! What things! What scent-bottles, what powders, what phials, what perfumery boxes!"

"It seems a good deal," said Charlotte, with a sigh, "and yet it is too little, since with it all I have not as yet found the means of reigning exclusively over your majesty's heart."

"There!" exclaimed Henry; "let us not fall back on politics! What is that little fine delicate brush? Should it not be for painting the eyebrows of my Olympian Jupiter?"

"Yes, sire," replied Madame de Sauve, "and you have guessed at the first shot!"

"And that pretty little ivory rake?"

"'Tis for parting the hair!"

"And that charming little silver box with a chased cover?"

"Oh, that is something Réné sent, sire; 'tis the famous opiate which he has been promising me so long — to make still sweeter the lips which your majesty has been good enough sometimes to find rather sweet."

And Henry, as if to test what the charming woman said, touched his lips to the ones which she was looking at so attentively in the mirror. Now that they were returning to the field of coquetry, the cloud began to lift from the baroness’s brow. She took up the box which had thus been explained, and was just going to show Henry how the vermilion salve was used, when a sharp rap at the antechamber door startled the two lovers.

“Some one is knocking, madame,” said Dariole, thrusting her head through the opening of the portière.

“Go and find out who it is, and come back,” said Madame de Sauve. Henry and Charlotte looked at each other anxiously, and Henry was beginning to think of retiring to the oratory, in which he had already more than once taken refuge, when Dariole reappeared.

“Madame,” said she, “it is Maître Réné, the perfumer.”

At this name Henry frowned, and involuntarily bit his lips.

“Do you want me to refuse him admission?” asked Charlotte.

“No!” said Henry; “Maître Réné never does anything without having previously thought about it. If he comes to you, it is because he has a reason for coming.”

“In that case, do you wish to hide?”

“I shall be careful not to,” said Henry, “for Maître Réné knows everything; therefore Maître Réné knows that I am here.”

“But has not your majesty some reason for thinking his presence painful to you?”

“I!” said Henry, making an effort, which in spite of his will-power he could not wholly dissimulate. “I! none at all! we are rather cool to each other, it is true; but since the night of Saint Bartholomew we have been reconciled.”

“Let him enter!” said Madame de Sauve to Dariole.

A moment later Réné appeared, and took in the whole room at a glance.

Madame de Sauve was still before her toilet-table.

Henry had resumed his place on the couch.

Charlotte was in the light, and Henry in the shadow.

“Madame,” said Réné, with respectful familiarity, “I have come to offer my apologies.”

“For what, Réné?” asked Madame de Sauve, with that condescension which pretty women always use towards the world of tradespeople who surround them, and whose duty it is to make them more beautiful.

“Because long ago I promised to work for these pretty lips, and because”—

“Because you did not keep your promise until to-day; is that it?” asked Charlotte.

“Until to-day?” repeated Réné.

“Yes; it was only to-day, in fact, this evening, that I received the box you sent me.”

“Ah! indeed!” said Réné, looking strangely at the small opiate box on Madame de Sauve’s table, which was precisely like those he had in his shop. “I thought so!” he murmured. “And you have used it?”

“No, not yet. I was just about to try it as you entered.” Réné’s face assumed a dreamy expression which did not escape Henry. Indeed, very few things escaped him.

“Well, Réné, what are you going to do now?” asked the king.

“I? Nothing, sire,” said the perfumer, “I am humbly waiting until your majesty speaks to me, before taking leave of Madame la Baronne.”

“Come, now!” said Henry, smiling. “Do you need my word to know that it is a pleasure to me to see you?”

Réné glanced around him, made a tour of the room as if to sound the doors and the curtains with his eye and ear, then he stopped and standing so that he could embrace at a glance both Madame de Sauve and Henry:

“I do not know it,” said he, thanks to that admirable instinct which like a sixth sense guided him during the first part of his life in the midst of impending dangers. Henry felt that at that moment something strangely resembling a struggle was passing through the mind of the perfumer, and turned towards him, still in the shadow, while the Florentine’s face was in the light.

“You here at this hour, Réné?” said he.

“Am I unfortunate enough to be in your majesty’s way?” asked the perfumer, stepping back.

“No, but I want to know one thing.”

“What, sire?”

“Did you think you would find me here?”

“I was sure of it.”

“You wanted me, then?”

“I am glad to have found you, at least.”

“Have you something to say to me?” persisted Henry.

“Perhaps, sire!” replied Réné.

Charlotte blushed, for she feared that the revelation which the perfumer seemed anxious to make might have something to do with her conduct towards Henry. Therefore she acted as though, having been wholly engrossed with her toilet, she had heard nothing, and interrupted the conversation.

“Ah! really, Réné,” said she, opening the opiate box, “you are a delightful man. This cake is a marvellous color, and since you are here I am going to honor you by experimenting with your new production.”

She took the box in one hand, and with the other touched the tip of her finger to the rose paste, which she was about to raise to her lips.

Réné gave a start.

The baroness smilingly lifted the opiate to her mouth.

Réné turned pale.

Still in the shadow, but with fixed and glowing eyes, Henry lost neither the action of the one nor the shudder of the other.

Charlotte’s hand had but a short distance to go before it would touch her lips when Réné seized her arm, just as Henry rose to do so.

Henry fell back noiselessly on the couch.

“One moment, madame,” said Réné, with a constrained smile, “you must not use this opiate without special directions.”

“Who will give me these directions?”

“I.”

“When?”

“As soon as I have finished saying what I have to say to his Majesty the King of Navarre.”

Charlotte opened her eyes wide, understanding nothing of the mysterious language about her, and sat with the opiate pot in one hand, gazing at the tip of her finger, red with the rouge.

Henry rose, and moved by a thought which, like all those of the young king, had two sides, one which seemed superficial, the other which was deep, he took Charlotte’s hand and red as it was, made as though to raise it to his lips.

“One moment,” said Réné, quickly, “one moment! Be kind enough, madame, to rinse your lovely hands with this soap from Naples which I neglected to send you at the same time as the rouge, and which I have the honor of bringing you now.”

Drawing from its silver wrapping a cake of green soap, he put it in a vermilion basin, poured some water over it, and, with one knee on the floor, offered it to Madame de Sauve.

“Why, really, Maître Réné, I no longer recognize you,” said Henry, “you are so gallant that you far outstrip every court fop.”

“Oh, what a delicious perfume!” cried Charlotte, rubbing her beautiful hands with the pearly foam made by the scented cake.

Réné performed his office of courtier to the end. He offered a napkin of fine Frisian linen to Madame de Sauve, who dried her hands on it.

“Now,” said the Florentine to Henry. “Let your mind be at rest, monseigneur.”

Charlotte gave her hand to Henry, who kissed it, and while she half turned on her chair to listen to what Réné was about to say, the King of Navarre returned to his couch, more convinced than ever that something unusual was passing through the mind of the perfumer.

“Well?” asked Charlotte. The Florentine apparently made an effort to collect all his strength, and then turned towards Henry.

CHAPTER XXII.

“SIRE, YOU SHALL BE KING.”

“Sire,” said Réné to Henry, “I have come to speak of something which has been on my mind for some time.”

“Perfumery?” said Henry, smiling.

“Well, yes, sire, — perfumery,” replied Réné, with a singular nod of acquiescence.

“Speak, I am listening to you. This is a subject which has always interested me deeply.”

Réné looked at Henry to try, in spite of his words, to read the impenetrable thought; but seeing that it was perfectly impossible, he continued:

“One of my friends, sire, has just arrived from Florence. This friend is greatly interested in astrology.”

“Yes,” interrupted Henry, “I know that it is a passion with Florentines.”

“In company with the foremost students of the world he has read the horoscopes of the chief gentlemen of Europe.”

“Ah! ah!” exclaimed Henry.

“And as the house of Bourbon is at the head of the highest, descended as it is from the Count of Clermont, the fifth son of Saint Louis, your majesty must know that your horoscope has not been overlooked.”

Henry listened still more attentively.

“Do you remember this horoscope?” said the King of Navarre, with a smile which he strove to render indifferent.

“Oh!” replied Réné, shaking his head, “your horoscope is not one to be forgotten.”

“Indeed!” said Henry, ironically.

“Yes, sire; according to this horoscope your majesty is to have a most brilliant destiny.”

The young prince gave a lightning glance which was almost at once lost under cover of indifference.

“Every Italian oracle is apt to flatter,” said Henry; “but he who flatters lies. Are there not those who have predicted that I would command armies? I!” He burst out laughing. But an observer less occupied with himself than Réné would have noticed and realized the effort of this laugh.

“Sire,” said Réné, coldly, “the horoscope tells better than that.”

“Does it foretell that at the head of one of these armies I shall win battles?”

“Better than that, sire.”

“Well,” said Henry; “you will see that I shall be conqueror!”

“Sire, you shall be king.”

“Well! *Ventre saint gris*!” exclaimed Henry, repressing a violent beating of his heart; “am I not that already?”

“Sire, my friend knows what he promises; not only will you be king, but you will reign.”

“In that case,” said Henry, in the same mocking tone, “your friend must have ten crowns of gold, must he not, Réné? for such a prophecy is very ambitious, especially in times like these. Well, Réné, as I am not rich, I will give your friend five now and five more when the prophecy is fulfilled.”

“Sire,” said Madame de Sauve, “do not forget that you are already pledged to Dariole, and do not overburden yourself with promises.”

“Madame,” said Henry, “I hope when this time comes that I shall be treated as a king, and that they will be satisfied if I keep half of my promises.”

“Sire,” said Réné, “I will continue.”

“Oh, that is not all, then?” said Henry. “Well, if I am emperor, I will give twice as much.”

“Sire, my friend has returned from Florence with the horoscope, which he renewed in Paris, and which always gives the same result; and he told me a secret.”

“A secret of interest to his majesty?” asked Charlotte, quickly.

“I think so,” said the Florentine.

“He is searching for words,” thought Henry, without in any way coming to Réné’s rescue. “Apparently the thing is difficult to tell.”

“Speak, then,” went on the Baroness de Sauve; “what is it about?”

“It is about all the rumors of poisoning,” said the Florentine, weighing each of his words separately, “it is about all the rumors of poisoning which for some time have been circulated around court.” A slight movement of the nostrils of the King of Navarre was the only indication of his increased attention at the sudden turn in the conversation.

“And your friend the Florentine,” said Henry, “knows something about this poisoning?”

“Yes, sire.”

“How can you tell me a secret which is not yours, Réné, especially when the secret is such an important one?” said Henry, in the most natural tone he could assume.

“This friend has some advice to ask of your majesty.”

“Of me?”

“What is there surprising in that, sire? Remember the old soldier of Actium who, having a law-suit on hand, asked advice of Augustus.”

“Augustus was a lawyer, Réné, and I am not.”

“Sire, when my friend confided this secret to me, your majesty still belonged to the Calvinist party, of which you were the chief head, and of which Monsieur de Condé was the second.”

“Well?” said Henry.

“This friend hoped that you would use your all-powerful influence over Monsieur de Condé and beg him not to be hostile to him.”

“Explain this to me, Réné, if you wish me to understand it,” said Henry, without betraying the least change in his face or voice.

“Sire, your majesty will understand at the first word. This friend knows all the particulars of the attempt to poison Monseigneur de Condé.”

“There has been an attempt to poison the Prince de Condé?” exclaimed Henry with a well-assumed astonishment. “Ah, indeed, and when was this?”

Réné looked fixedly at the king, and replied merely by these words:

“A week ago, your majesty.”

“Some enemy?” asked the king.

“Yes,” replied Réné, “an enemy whom your majesty knows and who knows your majesty.”

“As a matter of fact,” said Henry, “I think I have heard this mentioned, but I am ignorant of the details which your friend has to reveal. Tell them to me.”

“Well, a perfumed apple was offered to the Prince of Condé. Fortunately, however, when it was brought to him his physician was with him. He took it from the hands of the messenger and smelled it to test its odor and soundness. Two days later a gangrene swelling of the face, an extravasation of the blood, a running sore which ate away his face, were the price of his devotion or the result of his imprudence."

"Unfortunately," replied Henry, "being half Catholic already, I have lost all influence over Monsieur de Condé. Your friend was wrong, therefore, in addressing himself to me."

"It was not only in regard to the Prince de Condé that your majesty could be of use to my friend, but in regard to the Prince de Porcian also, the brother of the one who was poisoned."

"Ah!" exclaimed Charlotte, "do you know, Réné, that your stories partake of the gruesome? You plead at a poor time. It is late, your conversation is death-like. Really, your perfumes are worth more." Charlotte again extended her hand towards the opiate box.

"Madame," said Réné, "before testing that, as you are about to do, hear what cruel results wicked men can draw from it."

"Really, Réné," said the baroness, "you are funereal this evening."

Henry frowned, but he understood that Réné wished to reach a goal which he did not yet see, and he resolved to push towards this end the conversation which awakened in him such painful memories.

"And," he continued, "you knew the details of the poisoning of the Prince de Porcian?"

"Yes," said he. "It is known that every night he left a lamp burning near his bed; the oil was poisoned and he was asphyxiated."

Henry clinched his fingers, which were damp with perspiration.

"So," he murmured, "he whom you call your friend knows not only the details of the poisoning, but the author of it?"

"Yes, and it is for this reason that he wished to ask you if you would use over the Prince of Porcian the remains of that influence and have the murderer pardoned for the death of his brother."

"Unfortunately," replied Henry, "still being half Huguenot, I have no influence over Monsieur le Prince de Porcian; your friend therefore would have done wrong in speaking to me."

"But what do you think of the intentions of Monsieur le Prince de Condé and of Monsieur de Porcian?"

"How should I know their intentions, Réné? God, whom I may know, has not given me the privilege of reading their hearts."

“Your majesty must ask yourself,” said the Florentine calmly. “Is there not in the life of your majesty some event so gloomy that it can serve as a test of clemency, so painful that it is a touchstone for generosity?”

These words were uttered in a tone which made Charlotte herself tremble. It was an allusion so direct, so pointed, that the young woman turned aside to hide her blush, and to avoid meeting Henry’s eyes. Henry made a supreme effort over himself; his forehead, which during the words of the Florentine wore threatening lines, unbent, and he changed the dignified, filial grief which tightened his heart into vague meditation.

“In my life,” said he, “a gloomy circumstance — no, Réné, no; I remember in my youth only folly and carelessness mingled with more or less cruel necessity imposed on every one by the demands of nature and the proofs of God.”

Réné in turn became constrained as he glanced from Henry to Charlotte, as though to rouse the one and hold back the other; for Charlotte had returned to her toilet to hide the anxiety caused by their conversation, and had again extended her hand towards the opiate box.

“But, sire, if you were the brother of the Prince of Porcian or the son of the Prince of Condé, and if they had poisoned your brother or assassinated your father” — Charlotte uttered a slight cry and raised the opiate to her lips. Réné saw the gesture, but this time he stopped her neither by word nor gesture; he merely exclaimed:

“In Heaven’s name, sire, answer! Sire, if you were in their place what would you do?”

Henry recovered himself. With trembling hand he wiped his forehead, on which stood drops of cold perspiration, and rising to his full height, replied in the midst of the silence which until then had held Réné and Charlotte:

“If I were in their place, and if I were sure of being king, that is, sure of representing God on earth, I would act like God, I should pardon.”

“Madame,” cried Réné, snatching the opiate from the hands of Madame de Sauve, “madame, give me back this box; my messenger boy, I see, has made a mistake in it. To-morrow I will send you another.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

A NEW CONVERT.

The following day there was to be a hunt in the forest of Saint Germain.

Henry had ordered a small Béarnais horse to be made ready for him; that is, to be saddled and bridled at eight o’clock in the morning. He had intended giving this horse to Madame de Sauve, but he wanted to try it first. At a quarter before eight the horse was ready. On the stroke of eight Henry came down to the court-yard. The horse, proud and fiery in spite of its small size, pricked up its ears and pawed the ground. The weather was cold and a light frost covered the pavement. Henry started to cross the court-yard to the stables where the horse and the groom were waiting, when a Swiss soldier whom he passed standing sentinel at the gate presented arms and said:

“God keep his Majesty the King of Navarre.”

At this wish and especially at the tone in which it was uttered the Béarnais started.

He turned and stepped back.

“De Mouy!” he murmured.

“Yes, sire, De Mouy.”

“What are you doing here?”

“Looking for you.”

“Why are you looking for me?”

“I must speak to your majesty.”

“Unfortunately,” said the king, approaching him, “do you not know you risk your head?”

“I know it.”

“Well?”

“Well, I am here.”

Henry turned slightly pale, for he knew that he shared the danger run by this rash young man. He looked anxiously about him, and stepped back a second time, no less quickly than he had done at first. He had seen the Duc d’Alençon at a window.

At once changing his manner Henry took the musket from the hands of De Mouy, standing, as we have said, sentinel, and while apparently measuring it:

“De Mouy,” said he, “it is certainly not without some very strong motive that you have come to beard the lion in his den in this way?”

“No, sire, I have waited for you a week; only yesterday I heard that your majesty was to try a horse this morning, and I took my position at the gate of the Louvre.”

“But how in this uniform?”

“The captain of the company is a Protestant and is one of my friends.”

“Here is your musket; return to your duty of sentinel. We are watched. As I come back I will try to say a word to you, but if I do not speak, do not stop me. Adieu.”

De Mouy resumed his measured walk, and Henry advanced towards the house.

“What is that pretty little animal?” asked the Duc d’Alençon from his window.

“A horse I am going to try this morning,” replied Henry.

“But that is not a horse for a man.”

“Therefore it is intended for a beautiful woman.”

“Take care, Henry; you are going to be indiscreet, for we shall see this beautiful woman at the hunt; and if I do not know whose knight you are, I shall at least know whose equerry you are.”

“No, my lord, you will not know,” said Henry, with his feigned good-humor, “for this beautiful woman cannot go out this morning; she is indisposed.”

He sprang into the saddle.

“Ah, bah!” cried d’Alençon, laughing; “poor Madame de Sauve.”

“François! François! it is you who are indiscreet.”

“What is the matter with the beautiful Charlotte?” went on the Duc d’Alençon.

“Why,” replied Henry, spurring his horse to a gallop, and making him describe a graceful curve; “why, I have no idea, — a heaviness in the head, according to what Dariole tells me. A torpor of the whole body; in short, general debility.”

“And will this prevent you from joining us?” asked the duke.

“I? Why should it?” asked Henry. “You know that I dote on a hunt, and that nothing could make me miss one.”

“But you will miss this one, Henry,” said the duke, after he had turned and spoken for an instant with some one unnoticed by Henry, who addressed François from the rear of the room, “for his Majesty tells me that the hunt cannot take place.”

“Bah!” said Henry, in the most disappointed tone imaginable. “Why not?”

“Very important letters from Monsieur de Nevers, it seems. There is a council among the King, the queen mother, and my brother the Duc d’Anjou.”

“Ah! ah!” said Henry to himself, “could any news have come from Poland?”

Then aloud:

“In that case,” he continued, “it is useless for me to run any further risk on this frost. Good-by, brother!”

Pulling up his horse in front of De Mouy:

“My friend,” said he, “call one of your comrades to finish your sentinel duty for you. Help the groom ungirth my horse. Put the saddle over your head and carry it to the saddler’s; there is some embroidery to be done on it, which there was not time to finish for to-day. You will bring an answer to my apartments.”

De Mouy hastened to obey, for the Duc d’Alençon had disappeared from his window, and it was evident that he suspected something.

In fact, scarcely had De Mouy disappeared through the gate before the Duc d’Alençon came in sight. A real Swiss was in De Mouy’s place. D’Alençon looked carefully at the new sentinel; then turning to Henry:

“This is not the man you were talking with just now, is it, brother?”

“The other is a young man who belongs to my household and whom I had enter the Swiss guards. I have just given him a commission and he has gone to carry it out.”

“Ah!” said the duke, as if this reply sufficed. “And how is Marguerite?”

“I am going to ask her, brother.”

“Have you not seen her since yesterday?”

“No. I went to her about eleven o’clock last night, but Gillonne told me that she was tired and had gone to sleep.”

“You will not find her in her room. She has gone out.”

"Oh!" said Henry. "Very likely. She was to go to the *Convent de l'Annonciade*."

There was no way of carrying the conversation further, as Henry had seemingly made up his mind simply to answer. The two brothers-in-law therefore departed, the Duc d'Alençon to go for news, he said, the King of Navarre to return to his room.

Henry had been there scarcely five minutes when he heard a knock at the door.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Sire," replied a voice which Henry recognized as that of De Mouy, "it is the answer from the saddler."

Henry, visibly moved, bade the young man enter and closed the door behind him.

"Is it you, De Mouy?" said he; "I hoped that you would reflect."

"Sire," replied De Mouy, "I have reflected for three months; that is long enough. Now it is time to act." Henry made a gesture of impatience.

"Fear nothing, sire, we are alone, and I will make haste, for time is precious. Your majesty can tell in a word all that the events of the year have lost to the cause of religion. Let us be clear, brief, and frank."

"I am listening, my good De Mouy," replied Henry, seeing that it was impossible for him to elude the explanation.

"Is it true that your majesty has abjured the Protestant religion?"

"It is true," said Henry.

"Yes, but is it with your lips or at heart?"

"One is always grateful to God when he saves our life," replied Henry, turning the question as he had a habit of doing in such cases, "and God has evidently saved me from this cruel danger."

"Sire," resumed De Mouy, "let us admit one thing."

"What?"

"That your abjuring is not a matter of conviction, but of calculation. You have abjured so that the King would let you live, and not because God has saved your life."

"Whatever the cause of my conversion, De Mouy," replied Henry, "I am none the less a Catholic."

"Yes, but shall you always be one? The first chance you have for resuming your freedom of life and of conscience, will you not resume it? Well! this opportunity has presented itself. La Rochelle has revolted, Roussillon and Béarn are merely waiting for one word before acting. In Guyenne every one cries for war. Merely tell me if you were forced into taking this step, and I will answer for the future.”

“A gentleman of my birth is not forced, my dear De Mouy. That which I have done, I have done voluntarily.”

“But, sire,” said the young man, his heart oppressed with this resistance which he had not expected, “you do not remember that in acting thus you abandon and betray us.”

Henry was unmoved.

“Yes,” went on De Mouy, “yes, you betray us, sire, for several of us, at the risk of our lives, have come to save your honor and your liberty; we are prepared to offer you a throne, sire; do you realize this? not only liberty, but power; a throne of your own choice, for in two months you could choose between Navarre and France.”

“De Mouy,” said Henry, covering his eyes, which in spite of himself had emitted a flash at the above suggestion, “De Mouy, I am safe, I am a Catholic, I am the husband of Marguerite, I am the brother of King Charles, I am the son-in-law of my good mother Catharine. De Mouy, in assuming these various positions, I have calculated their opportunities and also their obligations.”

“But, sire,” said De Mouy, “what must one believe? I am told that your marriage is not contracted, that at heart you are free, that the hatred of Catharine” —

“Lies, lies,” interrupted the Béarnais hastily. “Yes, you have been shamefully deceived, my friend; this dear Marguerite is indeed my wife, Catharine is really my mother, and King Charles IX. is the lord and master of my life and of my heart.”

De Mouy shuddered, and an almost scornful smile passed over his lips.

“In that case, sire,” said he dropping his arms dejectedly, and trying to fathom that soul filled with shadows, “this is the answer I am to take back to my brothers, — I shall tell them that the King of Navarre extends his hand and opens his heart to those who have cut our throats; I shall tell them that he has become the flatterer of the queen mother and the friend of Maurevel.”

“My dear De Mouy,” said Henry, “the King is coming out of the council chamber, and I must go and find out from him the reasons for our having had to give up so important a thing as a hunt. Adieu; imitate me, my friend, give up politics, return to the King and attend mass.”

Henry led or rather pushed into the antechamber the young man, whose amazement was beginning to change into fury.

Scarcely was the door closed before, unable any longer to resist the longing to avenge himself on something in defence of some one, De Mouy twisted his hat between his hands, threw it upon the floor, and stamping on it as a bull would stamp on the cloak of the matador:

“By Heaven!” he cried, “he is a wretched prince, and I have half a mind to kill myself here in order to stain him forever with my blood.”

“Hush, Monsieur de Mouy!” said a voice through a half-open door; “hush! some one besides myself might hear you.”

De Mouy turned quickly and perceived the Duc d’Alençon enveloped in a cloak, advancing into the corridor with pale face, to make sure that he and De Mouy were entirely alone.

“Monsieur le Duc d’Alençon,” cried De Mouy, “I am lost!”

“On the contrary,” murmured the prince, “perhaps you have found what you are looking for, and the proof of this is that I do not want you to kill yourself here as you had an idea of doing just now. Believe me, your blood can in all probability be put to better use than to redden the threshold of the King of Navarre.”

At these words the duke threw back the door which he had been holding half open.

“This chamber belongs to two of my gentlemen,” said the duke. “No one will interrupt us here. We can, therefore, talk freely. Come in, monsieur.”

“I, here, monseigneur!” cried the conspirator in amazement. He entered the room, the door of which the Duc d’Alençon closed behind him no less quickly than the King of Navarre had done.

De Mouy entered, furious, exasperated, cursing. But by degrees the cold and steady glance of the young Duc François had the same effect on the Huguenot captain as does the enchanted lake which dissipates drunkenness.

“Monseigneur,” said he, “if I understand correctly, your highness wishes to speak to me.”

“Yes, Monsieur de Mouy,” replied François. “In spite of your disguise I thought I recognized you, and when you presented arms to my brother Henry, I recognized you perfectly. Well, De Mouy, so you are not pleased with the King of Navarre?”

“Monseigneur!”

“Come, come! tell me frankly, unless you distrust me; perhaps I am one of your friends.”

“You, monseigneur?”

“Yes, I; so speak.”

“I do not know what to say to your highness, monseigneur. The matter I had to discuss with the King of Navarre concerned interests which your highness would not comprehend. Moreover,” added De Mouy with a manner which he strove to render indifferent, “they were mere trifles.”

“Trifles?” said the duke.

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“Trifles, for which you felt you would risk your life by coming back to the Louvre, where you know your head is worth its weight in gold. We are not ignorant of the fact that you, as well as the King of Navarre and the Prince de Condé, are one of the leaders of the Huguenots.”

“If you think that, monseigneur, act towards me as the brother of King Charles and the son of Queen Catharine should act.”

“Why should you wish me to act in that way, when I have told you that I am a friend of yours? Tell me the truth.”

“Monseigneur,” said De Mouy, “I swear to you” —

“Do not swear, monseigneur; the reformed church forbids the taking of oaths, and especially of false oaths.”

De Mouy frowned.

“I tell you I know all,” continued the duke.

De Mouy was still silent.

“You doubt it?” said the prince with affected persistence. “Well, my dear De Mouy, we shall have to be convinced. Come, now, you shall judge if I am wrong. Did you or did you not propose to my brother-in-law Henry, in his room just now,” the duke pointed to the chamber of the Béarnais, “your aid and that of your followers to reinstate him in his kingdom of Navarre?”

De Mouy looked at the duke with a startled gaze.

“A proposition which he refused with terror.”

De Mouy was still amazed.

“Did you then invoke your old friendship, the remembrance of a common religion? Did you even hold out to the King of Navarre a very brilliant hope, a hope so brilliant that he was dazzled by it — the hope of winning the crown of France? Come, tell me; am I well informed? Is that what you came to propose to the Béarnais?"

"Monseigneur!" cried De Mouy, "this is so true, that I now wonder if I should not tell your royal highness that you have lied! to arouse in this chamber a combat without mercy, and thus to make sure of the extinction of this terrible secret by the death of both of us."

"Gently, my brave De Mouy, gently!" said the Duc d'Alençon without changing countenance, or without taking the slightest notice of this terrible threat.

"The secret will die better with us if we both live than if one of us were to die. Listen to me, and stop pulling at the handle of your sword. For the third time I say that you are with a friend. Now tell me, did not the King of Navarre refuse everything you offered him?"

"Yes, monseigneur, and I admit it, because my avowal can compromise only myself."

"On leaving his room did you not stamp on your hat, and cry out that he was a cowardly prince, and unworthy of being your leader?"

"That is true, monseigneur, I said that."

"Ah! you did? you admit it at last?"

"Yes."

"And this is still your opinion?"

"More than ever, monseigneur."

"Well, am I, Monsieur de Mouy, I, the third son of Henry II., I, a son of France, am I a good enough gentleman to command your soldiers? Come, now; do you think me loyal enough for you to trust my word?"

"You, monseigneur! you, the leader of the Huguenots!"

"Why not? This is an epoch of conversions, you know. Henry has turned Catholic; I can turn Protestant."

"Yes, no doubt, monseigneur; so I am waiting for you to explain to me" —

"Nothing is easier; and in two words I can tell you the policy of every one. My brother Charles kills the Huguenots in order to reign more freely. My brother of Anjou lets them be killed because he is to succeed my brother Charles, and because, as you know, my brother Charles is often ill. But with me it is entirely different. I shall never reign — at least in France — as long as I have two elder brothers. The hatred of my mother and of my two brothers more than the law of nature keeps me from the throne. I have no claim to any family affection, any glory, or any kingdom. Yet I have a heart as great as my elder brother's. Well, De Mouy, I want to look about and with my sword cut a kingdom out of this France they cover with blood. Now this is what I want, De Mouy, listen: I want to be King of Navarre, not by birth but by election. And note well that you have no objection to this system. I am not a usurper, since my brother refuses your offers, and buries himself in his torpor, and pretends aloud that this kingdom of Navarre is only a myth. With Henry of Béarn you have nothing. With me, you have a sword and a name, François d'Alençon, son of France, protector of all his companions or all his accomplices, as you are pleased to call them. Well, what do you say to this offer, Monsieur de Mouy?"

"I say that it dazzles me, monseigneur."

"De Mouy, De Mouy, we shall have many obstacles to overcome. Do not, therefore, from the first be so exacting and so obstinate towards the son of a king and the brother of a king who comes to you."

"Monseigneur, the matter would be already settled if my opinion were the only one to be considered, but we have a council, and brilliant as the offer may be, perhaps even on that very account the leaders of the party will not consent to the plan unconditionally."

"That is another thing, and your answer comes from an honest heart and a prudent mind. From the way I have just acted, De Mouy, you must have recognized my honesty. Treat me, therefore, on your part as a man who is esteemed, not as a man who is flattered. De Mouy, have I any chance?"

"On my word, monseigneur, since your highness wants me to give my opinion, your highness has every chance, since the King of Navarre has refused the offer I have just made him. But I tell you again, monseigneur, I shall have to confer with our leaders."

"Do so, monsieur," replied d'Alençon. "But when shall I have an answer?"

De Mouy looked at the prince in silence. Then apparently coming to a decision:

"Monseigneur," said he, "give me your hand. I must have the hand of a son of France touch mine to make sure that I shall not be betrayed."

The duke not only extended his hand towards De Mouy, but grasped De Mouy's and pressed it.

"Now, monseigneur, I am satisfied," said the young Huguenot. "If we were betrayed I should say that you had nothing to do with it; otherwise, monseigneur, however slightly you might be concerned in the treason, you would be dishonored."

"Why do you say that to me, De Mouy, before telling me that you will bring me the answer from your leaders?"

"Because, monseigneur, asking me when you would have your answer was the same as asking me where are the leaders, and because if I said to you, 'This evening,' you would know that the chiefs were hiding in Paris." As he uttered these words, with a gesture of mistrust, De Mouy fixed his piercing glance on the false vacillating eyes of the young man.

"Well, well," said the duke, "you still have doubts, Monsieur de Mouy. But I cannot expect entire confidence from you at first. You will understand me better later. We shall be bound by common interests which will rid you of all suspicion. You say this evening, then, Monsieur de Mouy?"

"Yes, monseigneur, for time presses. Until this evening. But where shall I see you, if you please?"

"At the Louvre, here in this room; does that suit you?"

"Is this occupied?" said De Mouy, glancing at the two beds opposite each other.

"By two of my gentlemen, yes."

"Monseigneur, it seems to me imprudent to return to the Louvre."

"Why so?"

"Because if you have recognized me, others also may have as good eyes as your highness, and may recognize me. However, I will return to the Louvre if you will grant me what I am about to ask of you."

"What is that?"

"A passport."

"A passport from me found on you would ruin me and would not save you. I can do nothing for you unless in the eyes of the world we are strangers to each other; the slightest relation between us, noticed by my mother or my brother, would cost me my life. You were therefore protected by my interest for myself from the moment I compromised myself with the others, as I am now compromising myself with you. Free in my sphere of action, strong if I am unknown, so long as I myself remain impenetrable, I will guarantee you everything. Do not forget this. Make a fresh appeal to your courage, therefore. Try on my word of honor what you tried without the word of honor of my brother. Come this evening to the Louvre."

"But how do you wish me to come? I can not venture in these rooms in my present uniform — it is for the vestibules and the courts. My own is still more dangerous, since everyone knows me here, and since it in no way disguises me."

"Therefore I will look — wait — I think that — yes, here it is."

The duke had looked around him, and his eyes stopped at La Mole's clothes, thrown temporarily on the bed; that is, on the magnificent cherry-colored cloak embroidered in gold, of which we have already spoken; on a cap ornamented with a white plume surrounded by a rope of gold and silver marguerites, and finally on a pearl-gray satin and gold doublet.

"Do you see this cloak, this plume, and this doublet?" said the duke; "they belong to Monsieur de la Mole, one of my gentlemen, a fop of the highest type. The cloak was the rage at court, and when he wore it, Monsieur de la Mole was recognized a hundred feet away. I will give you the address of the tailor who made it for him. By paying him double what it is worth, you will have one exactly like it by this evening. You will remember the name of Monsieur de la Mole, will you not?"

Scarcely had the Duc d'Alençon finished making the suggestion, when a step was heard approaching in the corridor, and a key was turned in the lock.

"Who is that?" cried the duke, rushing to the door and drawing the bolt.

"By Heaven!" replied a voice from outside; "I find that a strange question. Who are you yourself? This is pleasant! I return to my own room, and am asked who I am!"

"Is it you, Monsieur de la Mole?"

"Yes, it is I, without a doubt. But who are you?"

While La Mole was expressing his surprise at finding his room occupied, and while he was trying to discover its new occupant, the Duc d'Alençon turned quickly, one hand on the lock, the other on the key.

"Do you know Monsieur de la Mole?" he asked of De Mouy.

"No, monseigneur."

"Does he know you?"

"I think not."

"In that case it will be all right. Appear to be looking out of the window."

De Mouy obeyed in silence, for La Mole was beginning to grow impatient, and was knocking on the door with all his might.

The Duc d’Alençon threw a last glance towards De Mouy, and seeing that his back was turned, he opened the door.

“Monseigneur le Duc!” cried La Mole, stepping back in surprise. “Oh, pardon, pardon, monseigneur!”

“It is nothing, monsieur; I needed your room to receive a visitor.”

“Certainly, monseigneur, certainly. But allow me, I beg you, to take my cloak and hat from the bed, for I lost both to-night on the quay of the Grève, where I was attacked by robbers.”

“In fact, monsieur,” said the prince, smiling, himself handing to La Mole the articles asked for, “you are very poorly accommodated here. You have had an encounter with some very obstinate fellows, apparently!”

The duke handed to La Mole the cloak and the hat. The young man bowed and withdrew to the antechamber to change his clothes, paying no attention to what the duke was doing in his room; for it was an ordinary occurrence at the Louvre for the rooms of the gentlemen to be used as reception-rooms by the prince to whom the latter were attached.

De Mouy then approached the duke, and both listened for La Mole to finish and go out; but when the latter had changed his clothes, he himself saved them all further trouble by drawing near to the door.

“Pardon me, monseigneur,” said he, “but did your highness meet the Count de Coconnas on your way?”

“No, count, and yet he was at service this morning.”

“In that case they will assassinate me,” said La Mole to himself as he went away.

The duke heard the noise of his retreating steps; then opening the door and drawing De Mouy after him:

“Watch him going away,” said he, “and try to copy his inimitable walk.”

“I will do my best,” replied De Mouy. “Unfortunately I am not a lady’s man, but a soldier.”

“At all events I shall expect you in this corridor before midnight. If the chamber of my gentlemen is free, I will receive you there; if not, we will find another.”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“Until this evening then, before midnight.”

“Until this evening, before midnight.”

“Ah! by the way, De Mouy, swing your right arm a good deal as you walk. This is a peculiar trick of Monsieur de la Mole’s.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RUE TIZON AND THE RUE CLOCHE PERCÉE.

La Mole hurriedly left the Louvre, and set out to search Paris for poor Coconnas.

His first move was to repair to the Rue de l’Arbre Sec and to enter Maître La Hurière’s, for La Mole remembered that he had often repeated to the Piedmontese a certain Latin motto which was meant to prove that Love, Bacchus, and Ceres are gods absolutely necessary to us, and he hoped that Coconnas, to follow up the Roman aphorism, had gone to the *Belle Étoile* after a night which must have been as full for his friend as it had been for himself.

La Mole found nothing at La Hurière’s except the reminder of the assumed obligation. A breakfast which was offered with good grace was eagerly accepted by our gentleman, in spite of his anxiety. His stomach calmed in default of his mind, La Mole resumed his walk, ascending the bank of the Seine like a husband searching for his drowned wife. On reaching the quay of the Grève, he recognized the place where, as he had said to Monsieur d’Alençon, he had been stopped during his nocturnal tramp three or four hours before. This was no unusual thing in Paris, older by a hundred years than that in which Boileau was awakened at the sound of a ball piercing his window shutter. A bit of the plume from his hat remained on the battle-field. The sentiment of possession is innate in man. La Mole had ten plumes each more beautiful than the last, and yet he stopped to pick up that one, or, rather, the sole fragment of what remained of it, and was contemplating it with a pitiful air when he heard the sound of heavy steps approaching, and rough voices ordering him to stand aside. La Mole raised his head and perceived a litter preceded by two pages and accompanied by an outrider. La Mole thought he recognized the litter, and quickly stepped aside.

The young man was not mistaken.

“Monsieur de la Mole!” exclaimed a sweet voice from the litter, while a hand as white and as smooth as satin drew back the curtains.

"Yes, madame, in person," replied La Mole bowing.

"Monsieur de la Mole with a plume in his hand," continued the lady in the litter. "Are you in love, my dear monsieur, and are you recovering lost traces?"

"Yes, madame," replied La Mole, "I am in love, and very much so. But just now these are my own traces that I have found, although they are not those for which I am searching. But will your majesty permit me to inquire after your health?"

"It is excellent, monsieur; it seems to me that I have never been better. This probably comes from the fact of my having spent the night in retreat."

"Ah! in retreat!" said La Mole, looking at Marguerite strangely.

"Well, yes; what is there surprising in that?"

"May I, without indiscretion, ask you in what convent?"

"Certainly, monsieur, I make no mystery of it; in the convent of the *Annonciade*. But what are you doing here with this startled air?"

"Madame, I too passed the night in retreat, and in the vicinity of the same convent. This morning I am looking for my friend who has disappeared, and in seeking him I came upon this plume."

"Whom does it belong to? Really, you frighten me about him; the place is a bad one."

"Your majesty may be reassured; the plume belongs to me. I lost it here about half-past five, as I was escaping from the hands of four bandits who tried with all their might to murder me, or at least I think they did."

Marguerite repressed a quick gesture of terror.

"Oh! tell me about it!" said she.

"Nothing is easier, madame. It was, as I have had the honor to tell your majesty, about five o'clock in the morning."

"And you were already out at five o'clock in the morning?" interrupted Marguerite.

"Your majesty will excuse me," said La Mole, "I had not yet returned."

"Ah! Monsieur de la Mole! you returned at five o'clock in the morning!" said Marguerite with a smile which was fatal for every one, and which La Mole was unfortunate enough to find adorable; "you returned so late, you merited this punishment!"

"Therefore I do not complain, madame," said La Mole, bowing respectfully, "and I should have been cut to pieces had I not considered myself a hundred times more fortunate than I deserve to be. But I was returning late, or early, as your majesty pleases, from that fortunate house in which I had spent the night in retreat, when four cut-throats rushed from the Rue de la Mortellerie and pursued me with indescribably long knives. It is grotesque, is it not, madame? but it is true — I had to run away, for I had forgotten my sword.”

“Oh! I understand,” said Marguerite, with an admirably naïve manner, “and you have come back to find your sword?”

La Mole looked at Marguerite as though a suspicion flashed through his mind.

“Madame, I would return to some place and very willingly too, since my sword is an excellent blade, but I do not know where the house is.”

“What, monsieur?” exclaimed Marguerite. “You do not know where the house is in which you passed the night?”

“No, madame, and may Satan exterminate me if I have any idea!”

“Well this is strange! your story, then, is a romance?”

“A true romance, as you say, madame.”

“Tell it to me.”

“It is somewhat long.”

“Never mind, I have time.”

“And, above all, it is improbable.”

“Never mind, no one could be more credulous than I.”

“Does your majesty command me?”

“Why, yes; if necessary.”

“In that case I obey. Last evening, having left two adorable women with whom we had spent the evening on the Saint Michel bridge, we took supper at Maître La Hurière’s.”

“In the first place,” said Marguerite, perfectly naturally, “who is Maître La Hurière?”

“Maître La Hurière, madame,” said La Mole, again glancing at Marguerite with the suspicion he had already felt, “Maître La Hurière is the host of the inn of the *Belle Étoile* in the Rue de l’Arbre Sec.”

“Yes, I can see it from here. You were supping, then, at Maître La Hurière’s with your friend Coconnas, no doubt?”

“Yes, madame, with my friend Coconnas, when a man entered and handed us each a note.”

“Were they alike?” asked Marguerite.

“Exactly alike. They contained only a single line:

“‘*You are awaited in the Rue Saint Antoine, opposite the Rue Saint Jouy*.’“

“And had the note no signature?” asked Marguerite.

“No; only three words — three charming words which three times promised the same thing, that is to say, a three-fold happiness.”

“And what were these three words?”

“*Eros, Cupido, Amor*.”

“In short, three sweet words; and did they fulfil what they promised?”

“Oh! more, madame, a hundred times more!” cried La Mole with enthusiasm.

“Continue. I am curious to know who was waiting for you in the Rue Saint Antoine, opposite the Rue de Jouy.”

“Two duennas, each with a handkerchief in her hand. They said we must let them bandage our eyes. Your majesty may imagine that it was not a difficult thing to have done. We bravely extended our necks. My guide turned me to the left, my friend’s guide turned him to the right, and we were separated.”

“And then?” continued Marguerite, who seemed determined to carry out the investigation to the end.

“I do not know,” said La Mole, “where his guide led my friend. To hell, perhaps. As to myself, all I know is that mine led me to a place I consider paradise.”

“And whence, no doubt, your too great curiosity drove you?”

“Exactly, madame; you have the gift of divination. I waited, impatiently, for daylight, that I might see where I was, when at half-past four the same duenna returned, again bandaged my eyes, made me promise not to try to raise my bandage, led me outside, accompanied me for a hundred feet, made me again swear not to remove my bandage until I had counted fifty more. I counted fifty, and found myself in the Rue Saint Antoine, opposite the Rue de Jouy.”

“And then” —

“Then, madame, I returned so happy that I paid no attention to the four wretches, from whose clutches I had such difficulty in escaping. Now, madame,” continued La Mole, “in finding a piece of my plume here, my heart trembled with joy, and I picked it up, promising myself to keep it as a souvenir of this glad night. But in the midst of my happiness, one thing troubles me; that is, what may have become of my companion.”

"Has he not returned to the Louvre?"

"Alas! no, madame! I have searched everywhere, in the *Étoile d'Or*, on the tennis courts, and in many other respectable places; but no Annibal, and no Coconnas" —

As La Mole uttered these words he accompanied them with a gesture of hopelessness, extended his arms and opened his cloak, underneath which at various points his doublet was seen, the lining of which showed through the rents like so many elegant slashes.

"Why, you were riddled through and through!" exclaimed Marguerite.

"Riddled is the word!" said La Mole, who was not sorry to turn to his account the danger he had run. "See, madame, see!"

"Why did you not change your doublet at the Louvre, since you returned there?" asked the queen.

"Ah!" said La Mole, "because some one was in my room."

"Some one in your room?" said Marguerite, whose eyes expressed the greatest astonishment; "who was in your room?"

"His highness."

"Hush!" interrupted Marguerite.

The young man obeyed.

"*Qui ad lecticam meam stant?*" she asked La Mole.

"*Duo pueri et unus eques*."

"*Optime, barbari!*" said she. "*Dic, Moles, quem inveneris in biculo tuo?*"

"*Franciscum ducem*."

"*Agentem?*"

"*Nescio quid*."

"*Quocum?*"

"*Cum ignoto*."

"That is strange," said Marguerite. "So you were unable to find Coconnas?" she continued, without evidently thinking of what she was saying.

"So, madame, as I have had the honor of telling you, I am really dying of anxiety."

"Well," said Marguerite, sighing, "I do not wish to detain you longer in your search for him; I do not know why I think so, but he will find himself! Never mind, however, go, in spite of this."

The queen laid a finger on her lips. But as beautiful Marguerite had confided no secret, had made no avowal to La Mole, the young man understood that this charming gesture, meaning only to impose silence on him, must have another significance.

The procession resumed its march, and La Mole, intent on following out his investigation, continued to ascend the quay as far as the Rue Long Pont which led him to the Rue Saint Antoine.

Opposite the Rue Jouy he stopped. It was there that the previous evening the two duennas had bandaged his eyes and those of Coconnas. He had turned to the left, then he had counted twenty steps. He repeated this and found himself opposite a house, or rather a wall, behind which rose a house; in this wall was a door with a shed over it ornamented with large nails and loop-holes.

The house was in the Rue Cloche Percée, a small narrow street beginning in the Rue Saint Antoine and ending in the Rue Roi de Sicile.

"By Heaven!" cried La Mole, "it was here — I would swear to it — in extending my hand, as I came out, I felt the nails in the door, then I descended two steps. The man who ran by crying 'Help!' who was killed in the Rue Roi de Sicile, passed just as I reached the first. Let us see, now."

La Mole went to the door and knocked. The door opened and a mustached janitor appeared.

"*Was ist das?*" (Who is that?) asked the janitor.

"Ah! ah!" said La Mole, "we are Swiss, apparently." "My friend," he continued, assuming the most charming manner, "I want my sword which I left in this house in which I spent the night."

"*Ich verstehe nicht,*" (I do not understand,) replied the janitor.

"My sword," went on La Mole.

"*Ich verstehe nicht,*" repeated the janitor.

" — which I left — my sword which I left" —

"*Ich verstehe nicht.*"

" — in this house, in which I spent the night."

"*Gehe zum Teufel!*" (Go to the devil!) And he slammed the door in La Mole's face.

"By Heaven!" cried La Mole, "if I had this sword I have just asked for, I would gladly put it through that fellow's body. But I have not, and this must wait for another day."

Thereupon La Mole continued his way to the Rue Roi de Sicile, took about fifty steps to the right, then to the left again, and came to the Rue Tizon, a little street running parallel with the Rue Cloche Percée, and like it in every way. More than this, scarcely had he gone thirty steps before he came upon the door with the large nails, with its shed and loop-holes, the two steps and the wall. One would have said that the Rue Cloche Percée had returned to see him pass by.

La Mole then reflected that he might have mistaken his right for his left, and he knocked at this door, to make the same demand he had made at the other. But this time he knocked in vain. The door was not opened.

Two or three times La Mole made the same trip, which naturally led him to the idea that the house had two entrances, one on the Rue Cloche Percée, the other on the Rue Tizon.

But this conclusion, logical as it was, did not bring him back his sword, and did not tell him where his friend was. For an instant he conceived the idea of buying another sword and cutting to pieces the wretched janitor who so persistently refused to speak anything but German, but he thought this porter belonged to Marguerite, and that if Marguerite had chosen thus, it was because she had her reasons, and that it might be disagreeable for her to be deprived of him.

Now La Mole would not have done anything disagreeable to Marguerite for anything in the world.

Fearing to yield to this temptation he returned about two o’clock in the afternoon to the Louvre.

As his room was not occupied this time he could enter it. The matter was urgent enough as far as his doublet was concerned, which, as the queen had already remarked to him, was considerably torn.

He therefore at once approached his bed to substitute the beautiful pearl-gray doublet for the one he wore, when to his great surprise the first thing he perceived near the pearl-gray doublet was the famous sword which he had left in the Rue Cloche Percée.

La Mole took it and turned it over and over.

It was really his.

“Ah! ah!” said he, “is there some magic under all this?” Then with a sigh, “Ah! if poor Coconnas could be found like my sword!”

Two or three hours after La Mole had ceased his circular tramp around the small double house, the door on the Rue Tizon had opened. It was about five o’clock in the evening, consequently night had closed in.

A woman wrapped in a long cloak trimmed with fur, accompanied by an attendant, came out of the door which was held open by a duenna of forty, and hurrying rapidly along to the Rue Roi de Sicile, knocked at a small door of the Hôtel Argenson, which opened for her; she then left by the main entrance of the same hôtel which opened on to the Vieille Rue du Temple, went toward a small postern in the Hôtel de Guise, unlocked it with a key which she carried in her pocket, and disappeared.

Half an hour later a young man with bandaged eyes left by the same door of the small house, guided by a woman who led him to the corner of the Rue Geoffroy Lasnier and La Mortellerie. There she asked him to count fifty steps and then remove his bandage.

The young man carefully obeyed the order, and when he had counted fifty, removed the handkerchief from his eyes.

“By Heaven!” cried he, looking around. “I’ll be hanged if I know where I am! Six o’clock!” he cried, as the clock of Notre-Dame struck, “and poor La Mole, what can have become of him? Let us run to the Louvre, perhaps they may have news of him there.”

Coconnas hurriedly descended the Rue La Mortellerie, and reached the gates of the Louvre in less time than it would have taken an ordinary horse. As he went he jostled and knocked down the moving hedge of brave bourgeois who were walking peacefully about the shops of the Place de Baudoyer, and entered the palace.

There he questioned the Swiss and the sentinel. The former thought they had seen Monsieur de la Mole enter that morning, but had not seen him go out.

The sentinel had been there only an hour and a half and had seen nothing.

He ran to his room and hastily threw open the door; but he found only the torn doublet of La Mole on the bed, which increased his fears still more.

Then he thought of La Hurière and hastened to the worthy inn of the *Belle Étoile*. La Hurière had seen La Mole; La Mole had breakfasted there. Coconnas was thus wholly reassured, and as he was very hungry he ordered supper.

Coconnas was in the two moods necessary for a good supper — his mind was relieved and his stomach was empty; therefore he supped so well that the meal lasted till eight o’clock. Then strengthened by two bottles of light wine from Anjou, of which he was very fond and which he tossed off with a sensual enjoyment shown by winks of his eyes and repeated smacking of his lips, he set out again in his search for La Mole, accompanying it through the crowd by kicks and knocks of his feet in proportion to the increasing friendship inspired in him by the comfort which always follows a good meal.

That lasted one hour, during which time Coconnas searched every street in the vicinity of the Quay of the Grève, the Port au Charbon, the Rue Saint Antoine, and the Rues Tizon and Cloche Percée, to which he thought his friend might have returned. Finally he bethought himself that there was a place through which he had to pass, the gate of the Louvre, and he resolved to wait at this gate until his return.

He was not more than a hundred steps from the Louvre, and had just put on her feet a woman whose husband he had already overturned on the Place Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, when in the distance he perceived before him in the doubtful light of a great lantern near the drawbridge of the Louvre the cherry-colored velvet cloak and the white plume of his friend, who like a shadow was disappearing under the gate and returning the sentinel's greeting.

The famous cherry-colored cloak was so well known to every one that he could not be mistaken in it.

"Well! by Heaven!" cried Coconnas; "it is really he this time, and he is returning. Well! well! La Mole, my friend! Plague it! Yet I have a good voice. How does it happen that he does not hear me? Fortunately I have as good legs as I have voice, so I will join him."

In this hope Coconnas set out as fast as he could, and reached the Louvre in an instant, but, fast as he was, just as he stepped into the court the red cloak, which seemed in haste also, disappeared in the vestibule.

"Hi there! La Mole!" cried Coconnas, still hastening. "Wait for me. It is I, Coconnas. What in the devil are you hurrying so for? Are you running away?"

In fact the red cloak, as though it had wings, scaled the stairs rather than mounted them.

"Ah! you will not hear me!" cried Coconnas. "I am angry with you! Are you sorry? Well, the devil! I can run no further." It was from the foot of the staircase that Coconnas hurled this final apostrophe to the fugitive whom he gave up following with his feet, but whom he still followed with his eyes through the screw of the stairway, and who had reached Marguerite's chamber. Suddenly a woman came out of this room and took the arm of the man Coconnas was following.

"Oh! oh!" said Coconnas, "that looked very much like Queen Marguerite. He was expected. In that case it is different. I understand why he did not answer me."

Crouching down by the banister he looked through the opening of the stairway. Then after a few words in a low voice he saw the red cloak follow the queen to her apartments.

"Good! good!" said Coconnas, "that is it. I was not mistaken. There are moments when the presence of our best friend is necessary to us, and dear La Mole has one of those moments."

And Coconnas ascending the stairs softly sat down on a velvet bench which ornamented the landing place, and said to himself:

"Very well, instead of joining him I will wait — yes; but," he added, "I think as he is with the Queen of Navarre I may have to wait long — it is cold, by Heaven! Well! well! I can wait just as well in my room. He will have to come there sometime."

Scarcely had he finished speaking, and started to carry out his resolution, when a quick light step sounded above him, accompanied by a snatch of song so familiar that Coconnas at once turned his head in the direction of the step and the song. It was La Mole descending from the upper story, where his room was. When he perceived Coconnas, he began to descend the stairs four steps at a time, and this done he threw himself into his arms.

"Oh, Heavens! is it you?" said Coconnas. "How the devil did you get out?"

"By the Rue Cloche Percée, by Heavens!"

"No, I do not mean that house."

"What then?"

"The queen's apartment."

"The queen's apartment?"

"The Queen of Navarre."

"I have not been there."

"Come now!"

"My dear Annibal," said La Mole, "you are out of your head. I have come from my room where I have been waiting for you for two hours."

"You have come from your room?"

"Yes."

"Was it not you I followed from the Place du Louvre?"

"When?"

"Just now."

"No."

"It was not you who disappeared under the gate ten minutes ago?"

"No."

"It was not you who just ascended the stairs as if you were pursued by a legion of devils?"

"No."

"By Heaven!" cried Coconnas, "the wine of the *Belle Étoile* is not poor enough to have so completely turned my head. I tell you that I have just seen your cherry-colored cloak and your white plume under the gate of the Louvre, that I followed both to the foot of the stairway, and that your cloak, your plume, everything, to your swinging arm, was expected here by a lady whom I greatly suspect to be the Queen of Navarre, and who led you through that door, which, unless I am mistaken, is that of the beautiful Marguerite."

"By Heaven!" cried La Mole, growing pale, "could there be treason?"

"Very good!" said Coconnas, "swear as much as you please, but do not tell me I am mistaken."

La Mole hesitated an instant, pressing his head between his hands, deterred by respect and jealousy. His jealousy conquered him, however, and he hastened to the door, at which he knocked with all his might. This caused a somewhat unusual hubbub considering the dignity of the place in which it occurred.

"We shall be arrested," said Coconnas, "but no matter, it is very funny. Tell me, La Mole, are there ghosts in the Louvre?"

"I know nothing about it," said the young man as pale as the plume which shaded his brow; "but I have always wanted to see one, and as the opportunity presents itself I shall do my best to come face to face with this one."

"I shall not prevent you," said Coconnas, "only knock a little less fiercely if you do not wish to frighten it away."

La Mole, exasperated as he was, felt the justice of the remark, and began to knock more gently.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE CHERRY-COLORED CLOAK.

Coconnas was not mistaken. The lady who had stopped the cavalier of the cherry-colored cloak was indeed the Queen of Navarre. As to the cavalier, our reader has already guessed, I presume, that he was no other than brave De Mouy. Upon recognizing the Queen of Navarre the young Huguenot realized that there was some mistake; but he dared not speak, fearing a cry from Marguerite would betray him. He preferred to let himself be led to her apartments, and when once there to say to his beautiful guide:

“Silence for silence, madame.”

Marguerite had gently pressed the arm of him whom in the semi-darkness she had mistaken for La Mole, and leaning toward him whispered in Latin:

“*Sola sum; introito, carissime.*”

De Mouy without answering let her lead him along; but scarcely was the door closed behind him and he found himself in the antechamber, which was better lighted than the stairway, before Marguerite saw that he was not La Mole.

Thereupon the cry which the cautious Huguenot had feared escaped Marguerite; but fortunately there was no further danger from it.

“Monsieur de Mouy!” cried she, stepping back.

“In person, madame, and I beg your majesty to leave me free to continue my way without mentioning my presence in the Louvre to any one.”

“Oh! Monsieur de Mouy!” reiterated Marguerite, “I was mistaken, then!”

“Yes,” said De Mouy, “I understand. Your majesty mistook me for the King of Navarre. I am the same height, I wear the same white plume, and many, no doubt in order to flatter me, say I have the same gait.”

Marguerite looked closely at De Mouy.

“Do you understand Latin, Monsieur de Mouy?” she asked.

“I used to know it,” replied the young man, “but I have forgotten it.”

Marguerite smiled.

“Monsieur de Mouy,” said she, “you may rely on my discretion. But as I think I know the name of the one you are seeking in the Louvre, I will offer my services to guide you directly to him.”

“Excuse me, madame,” said De Mouy, “I think you are mistaken, and that you are completely ignorant of” —

“What!” exclaimed Marguerite, “are you not looking for the King of Navarre?”

“Alas, madame,” said De Mouy, “I regret to have to beg you especially to conceal my presence in the Louvre from your husband, his majesty the king.”

“Listen, Monsieur de Mouy,” said Marguerite in surprise, “I have considered you until now one of the strongest leaders of the Huguenot party, and one of the most faithful partisans of the king my husband. Am I mistaken?”

“No, madame, for this very morning I was all that you say.”

“And what has changed you since this morning?”

“Madame,” said De Mouy, bowing, “kindly excuse me from answering, and do me the favor to accept my homage.”

De Mouy, respectful but firm, started towards the door.

Marguerite stopped him.

“But, monsieur,” said she, “if I were to ask you for a word of explanation, my word is good, it seems to me?”

“Madame,” replied De Mouy, “I am obliged to keep silent, and this duty must be very imperative for me not to have answered your majesty.”

“But, monsieur” —

“Your majesty may ruin me, madame, but you cannot ask me to betray my new friends.”

“But the old ones, monsieur, have they too not some rights?”

“Those who have remained true, yes; those who not only have abandoned us, but themselves as well, no.”

Marguerite, thoughtful and anxious, would no doubt have answered by a new question, had not Gillonne suddenly entered the apartment.

“The King of Navarre!” she cried.

“How is he coming?”

“By the secret corridor.”

“Take monsieur out by the other.”

“Impossible, madame. Listen.”

“Some one is knocking?”

“Yes, at the door to which you wish me to take monsieur.”

“Who is knocking?”

“I do not know.”

“Go and see, and come back and tell me.”

“Madame,” said De Mouy, “might I venture to remark to your majesty that if the King of Navarre sees me at this hour and in this costume in the Louvre, I am lost?”

Marguerite seized De Mouy and pushed him towards the famous cabinet.

“Step in here, monsieur,” said she; “you will be as safe and as well protected as if you were in your own house; I give you my word of honor.”

De Mouy entered hastily. Scarcely was the door closed when Henry appeared.

This time Marguerite had no anxiety to hide — she was merely gloomy, and love was far from her thoughts.

As to Henry, he entered with that mistrust which in the most dangerous moments caused him to notice the smallest details; whatever the circumstances, Henry was an acute observer. Therefore he at once saw the cloud on Marguerite’s brow.

“You are busy, madame?” said he.

“I? Why, yes, sire, I was dreaming.”

“You do well, madame. Dreaming is becoming to you. I too was dreaming; but contrary to you who seek solitude, I have come on purpose to share my dreams, with you.” Marguerite gave the king a gesture of welcome, and indicating an armchair to him, seated herself on a chair of sculptured ebony, as delicate and as strong as steel. There was an instant’s silence; then Henry broke it.

“I remembered, madame,” said he, “that my dreams as to the future corresponded with yours in so far as although separated as husband and wife, nevertheless we both desire to unite our fortune.”

“That is true, sire.”

“I think I understood you to say also that in all the plans I might make toward our mutual rising, I would find in you not only a faithful but an active ally.”

“Yes, sire, and I ask only one thing, that in beginning the work as soon as possible, you will give me the opportunity to begin also.”

“I am glad to find you of this mind, madame, and I trust that you have not for one instant doubted that I would lose sight of the plan I resolved to carry out the very day when, thanks to your brave intervention, I was almost sure of being safe.”

“Monsieur, I think that your carelessness is nothing but a mask, and I have faith not only in the predictions by the astrologers, but in your good genius as well.”

“What should you say, madame, if someone were to upset our plans and threaten to reduce us to an ordinary position?”

“I should say that I was ready to fight with you, either openly or in secret, against this someone, whoever he might be.”

“Madame,” continued Henry, “it is possible for you, is it not, to gain immediate admission into the room of your brother, Monsieur d’Alençon? You are in his confidence and he is very friendly to you; might I venture to beg you to find out if he is at present holding a secret conference with someone?”

Marguerite gave a start.

“With whom, monsieur?” she asked.

“With De Mouy.”

“Why?” asked Marguerite, repressing her emotion.

“Because if such is the case, madame, farewell to all our projects, or to all mine, at least.”

“Sire, speak softly,” said Marguerite, making a sign with her eyes and lips, and pointing to the cabinet.

“Oh! oh!” said Henry, “still someone? Indeed, that cabinet is so often occupied that it makes your room uninhabitable.”

Marguerite smiled.

“Is it still Monsieur de la Mole?” asked Henry.

“No, sire, it is Monsieur de Mouy.”

“He?” cried Henry with surprise mingled with joy. “He is not with the Duc d’Alençon, then? Oh! have him come in, that I may talk to him.”

Marguerite stepped to the cabinet, opened it, and taking De Mouy by the hand led him without preamble to the King of Navarre.

“Ah! madame,” said the young Huguenot, in a tone of reproach more sad than bitter, “you have betrayed me in spite of your promise; that is wrong. What should you do if I were to avenge myself by saying” —

“You will not avenge yourself, De Mouy,” interrupted Henry, pressing the young man’s hand, “or at least you will listen to me first. Madame,” continued Henry, turning to the queen, “be kind enough, I beg you, to see that no one overhears us.”

Scarcely had Henry uttered these words when Gillonne entered, frightened, and whispered a few words to Marguerite, which caused the latter to spring from her seat. While she hastened to the antechamber with Gillonne, Henry, without troubling himself as to why she had left the room, examined the bed, the side of it, as well as the draperies, and sounded the wall with his fingers. As to Monsieur de Mouy, frightened at all these preparations, he first of all made sure that his sword was out of its sheath.

Leaving her sleeping-room, Marguerite hastened to the antechamber and came face to face with La Mole, who in spite of all the protests of Gillonne had forced his way into Marguerite’s room.

Coconnas was behind him, ready to urge him forward or sustain a retreat.

“Ah! it is you, Monsieur la Mole!” cried the queen; “but what is the matter, and why are you so pale and trembling?”

“Madame,” said Gillonne, “Monsieur de la Mole knocked at the door so that, in spite of your majesty’s orders, I was forced to open it.”

“What is the meaning of this?” said the queen, severely; “is this true, Monsieur de la Mole?”

“Madame, I wanted to warn your majesty that a stranger, a robber perhaps, had gained admittance to your rooms with my cloak and my hat.”

“You are mad, monsieur,” said Marguerite, “for I see your cloak on your shoulders, and, God forgive me, I think I see your hat on your head, even though you are speaking to a queen.”

“Oh! pardon me, madame, pardon me!” cried La Mole, quickly uncovering; “but God is my witness, it is not my respect which is lacking.”

“No, it is your trust, is it not?” said the queen.

“What can you expect?” cried La Mole, “when a man is in your majesty’s rooms; when he gains admittance by assuming my clothes, and perhaps my name, who knows” —

“A man!” cried Marguerite, softly pressing her poor lover’s arm; “a man! You are modest, Monsieur de la Mole. Look through the opening of the portière and you will see two men.”

Marguerite drew back the velvet portière embroidered in gold, and La Mole saw Henry talking with the man in the cherry-colored cloak. Coconnas, as though he himself were concerned, looked also, saw, and recognized De Mouy. Both men stood amazed.

“Now that you are reassured, or at least now that I hope you are,” said Marguerite, “take your stand outside my door, and for your life, my dear La Mole, let no one enter. If any one even approaches the stairs, warn me.” La Mole, weak and obedient as a child, withdrew, glancing at Coconnas, who looked at him. Both found themselves outside without having thoroughly recovered from their astonishment.

“De Mouy!” cried Coconnas.

“Henry!” murmured La Mole.

“De Mouy with your cherry-colored cloak, your white plume, and your swinging arm.”

“Ah!” went on La Mole, “the moment it is not a question of love, it is a question of plot.”

“By Heaven! here we are in the midst of politics,” said Coconnas grumbling. “Fortunately I do not see Madame de Nevers mixed up in it.”

Marguerite returned and sat down by the two speakers. She had been gone only a moment, but had made the most of her time. Gillonne, on guard in the secret passage, and the two gentlemen on duty at the main entrance, assured perfect safety for her.

“Madame,” said Henry, “do you think it would be possible for us to be overheard in any way?”

“Monsieur,” said Marguerite, “the walls of this room are wadded, and a double wainscoting deadens all sound.”

“I depend on you,” replied Henry smiling. Then turning to De Mouy:

“Now,” said the king, in a low tone, as if in spite of the assurance of Marguerite his fears were not wholly overcome, “what are you here for?”

“Here?” said De Mouy.

“Yes, here, in this room,” repeated Henry.

“He had nothing to do here,” said Marguerite; “I induced him to come.”

“You?”

“I guessed everything.”

“You see, De Mouy, we can discover what is going on.”

“This morning,” continued Marguerite, “Monsieur de Mouy was with Duc François in the apartment of two of his gentlemen.”

“You see, De Mouy,” repeated Henry, “we know everything.”

“That is true,” said De Mouy.

“I was sure,” said Henry, “that Monsieur d’Alençon had taken possession of you.”

"That is your fault, sire. Why did you so persistently refuse what I offered you?"

"You refused!" exclaimed Marguerite. "The refusal I feared, then, was real?"

"Madame," said Henry, shaking his head, "and you, my brave De Mouy, really, you make me laugh with your exclamations. What! a man enters my chamber, speaks to me of a throne, of a revolt, of a revolution, to me, Henry, a prince tolerated provided that I eat humble pie, a Huguenot spared on condition that I play the Catholic; and I am expected to accept, when these propositions are made in a room without padding or double wainscoting! *Ventre saint gris!* You are either children or fools!"

"But, sire, could not your majesty have left me some hope, if not by word, at least by a gesture or sign?"

"What did my brother-in-law say to you, De Mouy?" asked Henry.

"Oh, sire, that is not my secret."

"Well, my God!" continued Henry, with a certain impatience at having to deal with a man who so poorly understood his words. "I do not ask what you proposed to him, I ask you merely if he listened to you, if he heard you."

"He listened, sire, and he heard."

"He listened and he heard! You admit it yourself, De Mouy, tactless conspirator that you are! Had I said one word you would have been lost, for I did not know, I merely suspected that he was there, or if not he, someone else, the Duc d'Anjou, Charles IX., or the queen mother, for instance. You do not know the walls of the Louvre, De Mouy; it was for them that the proverb was made which says that walls have ears; and knowing these walls you expected me to speak! Well, well, De Mouy, you pay a small compliment to the common sense of the King of Navarre, and I am surprised that not esteeming him more highly you should have offered him a crown."

"But, sire," said De Mouy, "could you not even while refusing this crown have given me some sign? In that case I should not have considered everything hopeless and lost."

"Well! *Ventre saint gris!*" exclaimed Henry, "if one can hear cannot one see also? and is not one lost by a sign as much as by a word? See, De Mouy," continued the king, looking around him, "at the present moment, so near to you that my words do not reach beyond the circle of our three chairs, I still fear I may be overheard when I say: De Mouy, repeat your proposal to me.”

“But, sire,” cried De Mouy in despair, “I am now engaged with Monsieur d’Alençon.”

Marguerite angrily clasped and unclasped her beautiful hands.

“Then it is too late?” said she.

“On the contrary,” murmured Henry, “know that even in this, God’s hand is visible. Continue your arrangement, De Mouy, for in Duc François lies our safety. Do you suppose that the King of Navarre would guarantee your heads? On the contrary, wretched man, I should have you all killed to the last one, and on the least suspicion. But with a son of France it is different. Secure proofs, De Mouy, ask for guarantees; but, stupid that you are, you will be deeply involved, and one word will suffice for you.”

“Oh, sire, it was my despair at your having left us, believe me, which threw me into the arms of the duke; it was also the fear of being betrayed, for he kept our secret.”

“Keep his, now, De Mouy; it rests with you. What does he wish? To leave court? Furnish him with means to escape. Work for him, De Mouy, as if you were working for me, turn the shield so that he may parry every blow they aim at us. When it is time to flee, we will both flee. When it is time to fight and reign, I will reign alone.”

“Do not trust the duke,” said Marguerite, “he is gloomy and acute, without hatred as without love; ever ready to treat his friends like enemies and his enemies like friends.”

“And he is expecting you now, De Mouy?” said Henry.

“Yes, sire.”

“Where?”

“In the apartment belonging to his two gentlemen.”

“At what time?”

“Before midnight.”

“It is not yet eleven o’clock,” said Henry, “so you have lost no time; now you may go, De Mouy.”

“We have your word, monsieur?” said Marguerite.

“Come now, madame!” said Henry, with the confidence he knew so well how to use with certain people and on certain occasions, “with Monsieur de Mouy, such things are not even asked for.”

“You are right, sire,” replied the young man; “but I need your word, for I shall have to tell the leaders that I have it. You are not a Catholic, are you?”

Henry shrugged his shoulders.

“You do not renounce the kingdom of Navarre?”

“I renounce no kingdom, De Mouy, I merely reserve for myself the choice of the best; that is, the one which shall best suit me and you.”

“And if in the meantime your majesty should be arrested, you would promise to reveal nothing even should they torture your royal majesty?”

“De Mouy, I swear that, before God.”

“One further word, sire. How am I to see you in future?”

“After to-morrow you shall have a key to my room. You will come there, De Mouy, as often as it may be necessary and when you please. It is for the Duc d’Alençon to answer for your presence in the Louvre. In the meantime, use the small stairway. I will show you the way. The queen will have the cherry-colored cloak like yours come here — the one who was in the antechamber just now. No one must notice any difference between you, or know that there are two of you, De Mouy. Do you not agree with me? And you, madame?” Henry looked at Marguerite and uttered the last words with a smile.

“Yes,” said she, without moving a feature; “for this Monsieur de la Mole belongs to my brother, the duke.”

“Well, madame, try to win him over to our side,” said Henry, in perfect seriousness. “Spare neither gold nor promises; I will put all my treasures at his disposal.”

“In that case,” said Marguerite, with one of the smiles which belong only to the women of Boccaccio, “since this is your wish, I will do my best to second it.”

“Very good, madame; and you, De Mouy, return to the duke, and make sure of him.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

MARGARITA.

During the conversation which we have just related, La Mole and Coconnas mounted guard. La Mole somewhat chagrined, Coconnas somewhat anxious. La Mole had had time to reflect, and in this he had been greatly aided by Coconnas.

“What do you think of all this, my friend?” La Mole had asked of Coconnas.

“I think,” the Piedmontese had replied, “that there is some court intrigue connected with it.”

“And such being the case, are you disposed to play a part in it?”

“My dear fellow,” replied Coconnas, “listen well to what I am going to say to you and try and profit by it. In all these princely dealings, in all royal affairs, we can and should be nothing but shadows. Where the King of Navarre leaves a bit of his plume and the Duc d’Alençon a piece of his cloak, we leave our lives. The queen has a fancy for you, and you for her. Nothing is better. Lose your head in love, my dear fellow, but not in politics.”

That was wise council. Therefore it was heard by La Mole with the melancholy of a man who feels that, placed between reason and madness, it is madness he will follow.

“I have not a fancy for the queen, Annibal, I love her; and fortunately or unfortunately I love her with all my heart. This is madness, you will say. Well, I admit that I am mad. But you are wise, Coconnas, you ought not to suffer for my foolishness and my misfortune. Go back to our master and do not compromise yourself.”

Coconnas pondered an instant. Then raising his head:

“My dear fellow,” he replied, “all that you tell me is perfectly reasonable; you are in love — act, therefore, like a lover. I am ambitious, and being so, I think life is worth more to me than a woman’s kiss. When I risk my life, I make my own conditions. Try, so far as you are concerned, my poor Medor, to make yours.”

Whereupon Coconnas extended his hand to La Mole and withdrew, having exchanged a final glance and a final smile with his friend.

About ten minutes after he left his post, the door opened, and Marguerite, peering out cautiously, took La Mole by the hand and, without uttering a word, drew him from the corridor into the furthest corner of her room. She closed the door behind her with a care which indicated the importance of the conversation she was about to have.

Once in her room she stopped, seated herself on her ebony chair, and drawing La Mole to her, she clasped her hands over both of his.

"Now that we are alone," said she, "let us talk seriously, my very dear friend."

"Seriously, madame," said La Mole.

"Or lovingly. Does that please you better? But there can be serious things in love, and especially in the love of a queen."

"Then — let us talk of serious things; but on condition that your majesty will not be vexed at the lighter things I have to say to you."

"I shall be vexed only at one thing, La Mole, and that is if you address me as 'madame' or 'your majesty.' For you, my beloved, I am just Marguerite."

"Yes, Marguerite! Yes, Margarita! Yes, my pearl!" cried the young man, devouring the queen with his eyes.

"Yes, that is right," said Marguerite. "So you are jealous, my fine gentleman?"

"Oh! unreasonably."

"Still?"

"Madly, Marguerite."

"Jealous of whom? Come!"

"Of everyone."

"But really?"

"Of the king first."

"I should think after what you had seen and heard you might be easy on that point."

"Of this Monsieur de Mouy, whom I saw this morning for the first time, and whom this evening I find so far advanced in his intimacy with you."

"Monsieur de Mouy?"

"Yes."

"Who gave you such ideas about Monsieur de Mouy?"

"Listen! I recognized him from his figure, from the color of his hair, from a natural feeling of hatred. He is the one who was with Monsieur d'Alençon this morning."

"Well, what connection has that with me?"

"Monsieur d'Alençon is your brother. It is said that you are very fond of him. You may have confided to him a vague feeling of your heart, and, according to the custom at court, he has aided your wish by admitting Monsieur de Mouy to your apartment. Now, what I do not understand is how I was fortunate enough to find the king here at the same time. But in any case, madame, be frank with me. In default of other sentiment, a love like mine has the right to demand frankness in return. See, I prostrate myself at your feet. If what you have felt for me is but a passing fancy, I will give you back your trust, your promise, your love; I will give back to Monsieur d'Alençon his kind favors and my post of gentleman, and I will go and seek death at the siege of La Rochelle, if love does not kill me before I have gone as far as that."

Marguerite listened smilingly to these charming words, watching La Mole's graceful gestures, then leaning her beautiful dreamy head on her feverish hand:

"You love me?" she asked.

"Oh, madame! more than life, more than safety, more than all; but you, you — you do not love me."

"Poor fool!" she murmured.

"Ah, yes, madame," cried La Mole, still at her feet, "I have told you I was that."

"The chief thought of your life, then, is your love, dear La Mole!"

"It is the only thought, madame, the sole thought."

"Well, be it so; I will make of all the rest only an accessory to this love. You love me; do you wish to remain near me?"

"My one prayer is that God will never take me from you."

"Well, you shall not leave me. I need you, La Mole."

"You need me? Does the sun need the glow-worm?"

"If I will tell you that I love you, would you be wholly devoted to me?"

"Ah! am I not that already, madame, and more than wholly?"

"Yes, but, God forgive me, you still doubt!"

"Oh! I am wrong, I am ungrateful, or, rather, as I have told you and repeated to you, I am a fool. But why was Monsieur de Mouy with you this evening? why did I see him this morning with Monsieur le Duc d’Alençon? Why that cherry-colored cloak, that white plume, that affected imitation of my gait? Ah! madame, it is not you whom I suspect, but your brother.”

“Wretched man!” said Marguerite, “wretched man to suppose that Duc François would push complacency so far as to introduce a wooer to his sister’s room! Mad enough to be jealous, and yet not to have guessed! Do you know, La Mole, that the Duc d’Alençon would run you through with his own sword if he knew that you were here, this evening, at my feet, and that instead of sending you away I were saying to you: ‘Stay here where you are, La Mole; for I love you, my fine gentleman, do you hear? I love you!’ Ah, yes! he would certainly kill you.”

“Great God!” cried La Mole, starting back and looking at Marguerite in terror, “is it possible?”

“Everything is possible, my friend, in these times and at this court. Now, one word; it was not for me that Monsieur de Mouy, in your cloak, his face hidden under your hat, came to the Louvre. It was for Monsieur d’Alençon. But I, thinking it was you, brought him here. He knows our secret, La Mole, and must be carefully managed.”

“I should prefer to kill him,” said La Mole; “that is shorter and surer.”

“And I, my brave gentleman,” said the queen, “I prefer him to live, and for you to know everything, for not only is his life useful to us, but it is necessary. Listen and weigh your words well before you answer. Do you love me enough, La Mole, to be glad if I were really to become a queen; that is, queen of a real kingdom?”

“Alas, madame, I love you enough to wish what you wish, even should this desire ruin my whole life!”

“Well, do you want to aid me to realize this desire, which would make you still happier?”

“Oh! I should lose you, madame,” cried La Mole hiding his head in his hands.

“No, on the contrary. Instead of being the first of my servants, you would become the first of my subjects, that is all.”

“Oh! no interest — no ambition, madame — do not sully the feeling I have for you — the devotion, nothing but devotion!”

“Noble nature!” said Marguerite; “well, yes, I accept your devotion, and I shall find out how to reward it.”

She extended both her hands, and La Mole covered them with kisses.

“Well!” said she.

“Well, yes!” replied La Mole, “yes, Marguerite, I am beginning to comprehend this vague project already talked of by us Huguenots before the massacre of Saint Bartholomew, the scheme for the execution of which I, like many another worthier than myself, was sent to Paris. You covet this actual kingdom of Navarre which is to take the place of an imaginary kingdom. King Henry drives you to it; De Mouy conspires with you, does he not? But the Duc d’Alençon, what is he doing in it all? Where is there a throne for him? I do not see. Now, is the Duc d’Alençon sufficiently your — friend to aid you in all this without asking anything in exchange for the danger he runs?”

“The duke, my friend, is conspiring on his own account. Let us leave him to his illusions. His life answers for ours.”

“But I, who belong to him, can I betray him?”

“Betray him! In what are you betraying him? What has he confided to you? Is it not he who has betrayed you by giving your cloak and hat to De Mouy as a means of gaining him admittance to his apartments? You belong to him, you say! Were you not mine, my gentleman, before you were his? Has he given you a greater proof of friendship than the proof of love you have from me?”

La Mole arose, pale and completely overcome.

“Oh!” he murmured, “Coconnas was right, intrigue is enveloping me in its folds. It will suffocate me.”

“Well?” asked Marguerite.

“Well,” said La Mole, “this is my answer: it is said, and I heard it at the other end of France, where your illustrious name and your universal reputation for beauty touched my heart like a vague desire for the unknown, — it is said that sometimes you love, but that your love is always fatal to those you love, so that death, jealous, no doubt, almost always removes your lovers.”

“La Mole!”

“Do not interrupt me, oh, my well-loved Margarita, for they add that you preserve the hearts of these faithful friends in gold boxes, and that occasionally you bestow a melancholy thought, a pious glance on the sad remains. You sigh, my queen, your eyes droop; it is true. Well! make me the dearest and the happiest of your favorites. You have pierced the hearts of others, and you keep their hearts. You do more with me, you expose my head. Well, Marguerite, swear to me before the image of the God who has saved my life in this very place, swear to me, that if I die for you, as a sad presentiment tells me I shall do, swear to me that you will keep my head, which the hangman will separate from my body; and that you will sometimes press your lips to it. Swear, Marguerite, and the promise of such reward bestowed by my queen will make me silent, and, if necessary, a traitor and a coward; this is being wholly devoted, as your lover and your accomplice should be."

"Oh! what ghastly foolishness, dear heart!" said Marguerite. "Oh! fatal thought, sweet love."

"Swear" —

"Swear?"

"Yes, on this silver chest with its cross. Swear."

"Well!" said Marguerite, "if — and God forbid! — your gloomy presentiment is realized, my fine gentleman, on this cross I swear to you that you shall be near me, living or dead, so long as I live; and if I am unable to rescue you from the peril which comes to you through me, through me alone, I will at least give to your poor soul the consolation for which you ask, and which you will so well have deserved."

"One word more, Marguerite. I can die now. I shall not mind death; but I can live, too, for we may succeed. The King of Navarre, king, you may be queen, in which case he will take you away. This vow of separation between you will some day be broken, and will do away with ours. Now, Marguerite, my well-beloved Marguerite, with a word you have taken away my every fear of death; now with a word keep up my courage concerning life."

"Oh, fear nothing, I am yours, body and soul!" cried Marguerite, again raising her hand to the cross on the little chest. "If I leave, you follow, and if the king refuses to take you, then I shall not go."

"But you dare not resist!"

"My well-beloved Hyacinthe," said Marguerite, "you do not know Henry. At present he is thinking of only one thing, that is, of being king. For this he would sacrifice everything he owns, and, still more, what he does not own. Now, adieu!"

"Madame," said La Mole, smiling, "are you going to send me away?"

"It is late," said Marguerite.

“No doubt; but where would you have me go? Monsieur de Mouy is in my room with Monsieur le Duc d’Alençon.”

“Ah! yes,” said Marguerite, with a beautiful smile. “Besides, I have still some things to tell you about this conspiracy.”

From that night La Mole was no longer an ordinary favorite. He well might carry his head high, for which, living or dead, so sweet a future was in store.

And yet at times his weary brow was bent, his cheek grew pale, and deep thoughts ploughed their furrows on the forehead of the young man, once so light-hearted, now so happy!

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE HAND OF GOD.

On leaving Madame de Sauve Henry had said to her:

“Go to bed, Charlotte. Pretend that you are very ill, and on no account see any one all day to-morrow.”

Charlotte obeyed without questioning the reason for this suggestion from the king. She was beginning to be accustomed to his eccentricities, as we should call them to-day, or to his whims as they were then called. Moreover, she knew that deep in his heart Henry hid secrets which he told to no one, in his mind plans which he feared to reveal even in his dreams; so that she carried out all his wishes, knowing that his most peculiar ideas had an object.

Whereupon that evening she complained to Dariole of great heaviness in her head, accompanied by dizziness. These were the symptoms which Henry had suggested to her to feign.

The following day she pretended that she wanted to rise, but scarcely had she put her foot on the floor when she said she felt a general debility, and went back to bed.

This indisposition, which Henry had already announced to the Duc d’Alençon, was the first news brought to Catharine when she calmly asked why La Sauve was not present as usual at her levee.

“She is ill!” replied Madame de Lorraine, who was there.

“Ill!” repeated Catharine, without a muscle of her face betraying the interest she took in the answer. “Some idle fatigue, perhaps.”

“No, madame,” replied the princess. “She complains of a severe headache and of weakness which prevents her from walking.” Catharine did not answer. But, to hide her joy, she turned to the window, and perceiving Henry, who was crossing the court after his conversation with De Mouy, she rose the better to see him. Driven by that conscience which, although invisible, always throbs in the deepest recesses of hearts most hardened to crime:

“Does not my son Henry seem paler than usual this morning?” she asked her captain of the guards.

There was nothing in the question. Henry was greatly troubled mentally; but physically he was very strong.

By degrees those usually present at the queen’s levee withdrew. Three or four intimate ones remained longer than the others, but Catharine impatiently dismissed them, saying that she wished to be alone. When the last courtier had gone Catharine closed the door and going to a secret closet hidden in one of the panels of her room she slid back a door in a groove of wood and took out a book, the worn leaves of which showed frequent use. Placing the volume on a table, she opened it to a book-mark, then resting her elbow on the table and her head on one hand:

“That is it,” murmured she, reading, “‘headache, general weakness, pain in the eyes, swelling of the palate.’ As yet they have mentioned only the pains in the head and weakness. But the other symptoms will not be slow in forthcoming.”

She continued:

“‘Then the inflammation reaches the throat, extends to the stomach, surrounds the heart like a circle of fire, and causes the brain to burst like a thunderclap,’“ she read on to herself. Then in a low voice:

“For the fever, six hours; for the general inflammation, twelve hours; for the gangrene, twelve hours; for the suffering, six hours; in all thirty-six hours. Now, suppose that the absorption is slow, and that instead of thirty-six hours we have forty, even forty-eight, yes, forty-eight hours should suffice. But Henry, how is it that he is still up? Because he is a man, because he has a strong constitution, because perhaps he drank after he kissed her, and wiped his lips after drinking.”

Catharine awaited the dinner hour with impatience.

Henry dined every day at the king’s table. He came, he in turn complained of pain in his head; he ate nothing, and withdrew immediately after the meal, saying that having been awake a part of the previous night, he felt a pressing need of sleep.

Catharine listened as his uncertain steps died away. Then she had him followed. She was told that the King of Navarre had gone to Madame de Sauve’s apartments.

“Henry,” said she to herself, “will this evening complete the work of death which some unfortunate chance has left half finished.”

The King of Navarre had indeed gone to Madame de Sauve’s room, but it was to tell her to continue playing her rôle.

The whole of the following morning Henry did not leave his chamber; nor did he appear at dinner. Madame de Sauve, they said, was growing worse and worse, and the report of Henry’s illness, spread abroad by Catharine herself, sped like one of those presentiments which hover in the air, but which no one can explain.

Catharine was delighted. The previous morning she had sent Ambroise Paré to help one of her favorite servants, who was ill at Saint Germain, so it had to be one of her own men who was called in to see Madame de Sauve and Henry. This man would say only what she wished him to say. If, contrary to all expectation, some other doctor had been summoned, and if some whisper concerning poison had frightened the court, in which so many such reports had already been circulated, she counted greatly on the rumor to arouse the jealousy of Marguerite regarding the various loves of her husband. We remember she had spoken strongly of this jealousy which had been apparent on various occasions; among others, on the hawthorn walk, where, in the presence of several persons, she had said to her daughter:

“So you are very jealous, Marguerite?” Therefore, with unruffled features she waited for the door to open, when some pale, startled servant would enter, crying:

“Your majesty, the King of Navarre has been hurt, and Madame de Sauve is dead!” Four o’clock in the afternoon struck. Catharine finished her luncheon in the aviary, where she was crumbling some bread for her rare birds which she herself had raised. Although her face was calm and even gloomy, as usual, her heart throbbed violently at the slightest sound. Suddenly the door opened.

“Madame,” said the captain of the guards, “the King of Navarre is” —

“Ill?” hastily interrupted Catharine.

“No, madame, thank God! His majesty seems to be wonderfully well.”

“What is it, then?”

“The King of Navarre is here.”

“What does he want?”

“He is bringing your majesty a rare kind of monkey.”

Just then Henry entered holding in his hand a basket, in which was a little monkey he was petting.

He entered smiling and seemed wholly absorbed in the dear little animal he brought; but occupied as he appeared to be, he did not fail to give his usual first glance around. This was sufficient for him under trying circumstances. As to Catharine, she was very pale, of a pallor which deepened as she saw that the cheeks of the young man were flushed with the glow of health.

The queen mother was amazed at this turn of affairs. She accepted Henry's gift mechanically, appeared agitated, complimented him on looking so well, and added:

"I am all the more pleased to see you looking so, because I heard that you were ill, and because, if I remember rightly, you yourself complained of not feeling well, in my presence. But I understand now," she added, trying to smile, "it was an excuse so that you might be free."

"No, I have really been very ill, madame," said Henry, "but a specific used in our mountains, and which comes from my mother, has cured my indisposition."

"Ah! you will give me the recipe, will you not, Henry?" said Catharine, really smiling this time, but with an irony she could not disguise.

"Some counter-poison," she murmured. "We must look into this; but no, seeing Madame de Sauve ill, it will be suspected. Indeed, I believe that the hand of God is over this man."

Catharine waited impatiently for the night. Madame de Sauve did not appear. At play she inquired for her, but was told that she was suffering more and more.

All the evening she was restless, and everyone anxiously wondered what were the thoughts which could move this face usually so calm.

At length everyone retired. Catharine had herself undressed and put to bed by her ladies-in-waiting. Then when everyone had gone to sleep in the Louvre, she rose, slipped on a long black dressing-gown, took a lamp, chose from her keys the one which unlocked the door of Madame de Sauve's apartments, and ascended the stairs to see her maid-of-honor.

Had Henry foreseen this visit? Was he busy in his own rooms? Was he hiding somewhere? However this may have been, the young woman was alone. Catharine opened the door cautiously, crossed the antechamber, entered the reception-room, set her lamp on a table, for a night lamp was burning near the sick woman, and glided like a shadow into the sleeping-room. Dariole in a deep armchair was sleeping near the bed of her mistress.

This bed was entirely shut in by curtains.

The respiration of the young woman was so light that for an instant Catharine thought she was not breathing at all.

At length she heard a slight sigh, and with an evil joy she raised the curtain in order to see for herself the effect of the terrible poison. She trembled in advance at the sight of the livid pallor or the devouring purple of the mortal fever she hoped for. But instead of this, calm, with eyes hidden under their white lids, her mouth rosy and half open, her moist cheek pressed gently against one of her gracefully rounded arms, while the other arm, fresh and pearly, was thrown across the crimson damask which served as counterpane, the beautiful young woman lay sleeping with a smile still on her lips. No doubt some sweet dream brought the smile to her lips, and to her cheek the flush of health which nothing could disturb. Catharine could not refrain from uttering a cry of surprise which roused Dariole for a moment. The queen mother hastily stepped behind the curtains of the bed.

Dariole opened her eyes, but overcome with sleep, without even wondering in her drowsy mind why she had wakened, the young girl dropped her heavy lids and slept again.

Then Catharine came from behind the curtain, and glancing at the other objects in the room, saw on a table a bottle of Spanish wine, some fruit, pastry, and two glasses. Henry must have had supper with the baroness, who apparently was as well as himself. Walking on tiptoe, Catharine took up the small silver box that was partly empty. It was the same or very similar to the one she had sent to Charlotte. She removed from it a piece as large as a pearl on the point of a gold needle, returned to her room, and gave it to the little ape which Henry had brought her that evening. Attracted by the aromatic odor the animal devoured it eagerly, and turning around in his basket, went to sleep. Catharine waited a quarter of an hour.

“With half of what he has just eaten,” said she, “my dog Brutus died, swelling up instantly. Some one has played me a trick. Is it Réné? Impossible. Then it is Henry. O fatality! It is very evident that since he is to reign he cannot die. But perhaps the poison was not strong enough. We shall see by trying steel.”

And Catharine went to bed revolving in her mind a fresh idea which no doubt was perfected the following day; for she called her captain of the guards to her, gave him a letter, ordered him to take it to its address and to deliver it only into the hands of the one for whom it was intended. It was addressed to the Sire de Louvièrs de Maurevel, Captain of the King’s Petard Makers, Rue de la Cerisaie, near the Arsenal.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LETTER FROM ROME.

Several days elapsed after the events we have just described, when one morning a litter escorted by several gentlemen wearing the colors of Monsieur de Guise entered the Louvre, and word was brought to the Queen of Navarre that Madame la Duchesse de Nevers begged the honor of an audience. Marguerite was receiving a call from Madame de Sauve. It was the first time the beautiful baroness had been out since her pretended illness. She knew that the queen had expressed to her husband great anxiety on account of her indisposition, which for almost a week had been court gossip, and she had come to thank her.

Marguerite congratulated her on her convalescence and on her good fortune at having recovered so quickly from the strange malady, the seriousness of which as a daughter of France she could not fail to appreciate.

“I trust you will attend the hunt, already once postponed,” said Marguerite. “It is planned positively for to-morrow. For winter, the weather is very mild. The sun has softened the earth, and the hunters all say that the day will be fine.”

“But, madame,” said the baroness, “I do not know if I shall be strong enough.”

“Bah!” exclaimed Marguerite, “make an effort; moreover, since I am one of the hunters, I have told the King to reserve a small Béarnese horse which I was to ride, but which will carry you perfectly. Have you not already heard of it?”

“Yes, madame, but I did not know that it was meant for your majesty. Had I known that I should not have accepted it.”

“From a feeling of pride, baroness?”

“No, madame, from a feeling of humility, on the contrary.”

“Then you will come?”

“Your majesty overwhelms me with honor. I will come, since you command me.”

At that moment Madame la Duchesse de Nevers was announced. At this name Marguerite gave a cry of such delight that the baroness understood that the two women wanted to talk together. She rose to leave.

“Until to-morrow, then,” said Marguerite.

“Until to-morrow, madame.”

“By the way,” continued Marguerite holding the baroness by the hand, “you know that in public I hate you, for I am horribly jealous of you.”

“But in private?” asked Madame de Sauve.

“Oh! in private, not only do I forgive you, but more than that, I thank you.”

“Then your majesty will permit me” —

Marguerite held out her hand, the baroness kissed it respectfully, made a low courtesy and went out.

While Madame de Sauve ascended her stairway, bounding like a deer whose tether has been broken, Madame de Nevers was exchanging a few formal words with the queen, which gave time to the gentlemen who had accompanied her to retire.

“Gillonne,” cried Marguerite when the door was closed behind the last, “Gillonne, see that no one interrupts us.”

“Yes,” said the duchess, “for we have matters of grave importance to discuss.”

Taking a chair she seated herself without ceremony in the best place near the fire and in the sunlight, sure that no one would interrupt the pleasant intimacy between herself and the Queen of Navarre.

“Well,” said Marguerite, with a smile, “what about our famous slaughterer?”

“My dear queen,” said the duchess, “he is a mythological creature, upon my word. He is incomparable, so far as his mind is concerned, and never dries up. He makes witty remarks that would make a saint in her shrine die of laughing. In other respects he is the maddest heathen who ever walked in the skin of a Catholic! I dote on him! And you, what are you doing with your Apollo?”

“Alas!” said Marguerite with a sigh.

“Oh, how that ‘alas!’ frightens me, dear queen! Is the gentle La Mole too respectful or too sentimental? In that, I am forced to admit he would be exactly the opposite of his friend Coconnas.”

“Oh, no, he has his moments,” said Marguerite, “but this ‘alas!’ concerned only myself.”

“What does it mean, then?”

“It means, dear duchess, that I am terribly afraid I am actually in love.”

“Really?”

“On my honor!”

“Oh! so much the better! What a merry life we can lead!” cried Henriette. “To love a little is my dream; to love much, is yours. It is so sweet, dear and learned queen, to rest the mind by the heart, is it not? and to have the smile after the delirium. Ah, Marguerite, I have a feeling that we are going to have a glorious year!”

“Do you think so?” said the queen. “I, on the contrary, do not know how that may be; I see things through a veil. All these politics occupy me so much. By the way, do you know if your Annibal is as devoted to my brother as he seems to be? Find out for me. I must know.”

“He, devoted to anybody or anything! It is easy to see that you do not know him as I do. If he ever is devoted to anything it will be his ambition, and that is all. If your brother is a man to make great promises to him, well, he will be devoted to your brother; but let your brother, son of France that he is, be careful not to break the promises he makes him. If he does, my faith, look out for your brother!”

“Really?”

“It is just as I say. Truly, Marguerite, there are times when this tiger whom I have tamed frightens me. The other day I said to him, ‘Annibal, be careful, do not deceive me, for if you do!’ — I said it, however, with my emerald eyes which prompted Ronsard’s lines:

“‘*La Duchesse de Nevers,*
Aux yeux verts,
Qui, sous leur paupière blonde
Lancent sur nous plus d’éclairs
Que ne font vingt Jupiters
Dans les airs
Lorsque la tempête gronde.’”

“Well?”

“Well, I supposed he would answer me: ‘I deceive you! I! never! etc., etc.’ But do you know what he did answer?”

“No.”

"Well, judge of the man! 'And you,' he replied, 'if you deceive me, you take care too, for, princess that you are' — and as he said this he threatened me not only with his eyes, but with his slender pointed finger, with its nail cut like a steel lance, which he held before my nose. At that moment, my poor queen, I confess he looked so fierce that I trembled, and yet you know I am no coward."

"He threatened you, Henriette, he dared?"

"Well, I had threatened him! For that matter he was right. So you see he is devoted up to a certain point, or rather to a very uncertain point."

"In that case we shall see," said Marguerite thoughtfully; "I will speak to La Mole. Have you nothing else to tell me?"

"Yes; something most interesting for which I came. But, the idea, you have told me more interesting things still. I have received news."

"From Rome?"

"Yes, through a courier from my husband."

"Ah! the Poland affair?"

"It is progressing beautifully, and probably in a day or two you will be rid of your brother of Anjou."

"So the pope has ratified his election?"

"Yes, my dear."

"And you never told me!" cried Marguerite. "Well, quick, quick, the details."

"Oh, mercy, I have none except those I have given you. But wait, I will give you the letter from Monsieur de Nevers. Here it is. Oh, no, those are some verses from Annibal, atrocious ones too, my poor Marguerite. He can not write any other kind. But wait, here it is. No, it isn't, that is a note of my own which I brought for you to have La Mole give him. Ah! at last, here it is." And Madame de Nevers handed the letter to the queen.

Marguerite opened it hastily and read it; but it told nothing more than she had already learned from her friend.

"How did you receive this?" continued the queen.

"From a courier of my husband, who had orders to stop at the Hôtel de Guise before going to the Louvre, and to deliver this letter to me before delivering that of the King. I knew the importance my queen would attach to this news, and I had written to Monsieur de Nevers to act thus. He obeyed, you see; he is not like that monster of a Coconnas. Now there is no one in the whole of Paris, except the King, you, and I, who knows this news; except the man who followed our courier" —

"What man?"

"Oh! the horrid business! Imagine how tired, worn out, and dusty the wretched messenger was when he arrived! He rode seven days, day and night, without stopping an instant."

"But the man you spoke of just now?"

"Wait a minute. Constantly followed by a wild-looking fellow who had relays like himself and who rode as far as he did for the four hundred leagues, the poor courier constantly expected to be shot in his back. Both reached the Saint Marcel gate at the same time, both galloped down the Rue Mouffetard, both crossed the city. But at the end of the bridge of Notre-Dame our courier turned to the right, while the other took the road to the left by the Place du Châtelet, and sped along the quays by the side of the Louvre, like an arrow from a bow."

"Thanks, my good Henriette, thanks!" cried Marguerite. "You are right; that is very interesting news. By whom was the other courier sent? I must know. So leave me until this evening. Rue Tizon, is it not? and the hunt to-morrow. Do take a frisky horse, so that he will run away, and we can be by ourselves. I will tell you this evening what is necessary for you to try and find out from your Coconnas."

"You will not forget my letter?" said the duchess of Nevers smiling.

"No, no, do not worry; he shall have it, and at once."

Madame de Nevers left, and Marguerite immediately sent for Henry, who came to her quickly. She gave him the letter from the Duc de Nevers.

"Oh! oh!" he exclaimed.

Then Marguerite told him about the second courier.

"Yes," said Henry; "I saw him enter the Louvre."

"Perhaps he was for the queen mother."

"No, I am sure of that, for I ventured to take my stand in the corridor, and I saw no one pass."

"Then," said Marguerite, looking at her husband, "he must be" —

"For your brother D'Alençon, must he not?" said Henry.

"Yes; but how can we be sure?"

"Could not one of his two gentlemen be sent for?" said Henry, carelessly, "and through him" —

“You are right,” said Marguerite, put at her ease at her husband’s suggestion. “I will send for Monsieur de la Mole. Gillonne! Gillonne!”

The young girl appeared.

“I must speak at once with Monsieur de la Mole,” said the queen. “Try to find him and bring him here.”

Gillonne disappeared. Henry seated himself before a table on which was a German book containing engravings by Albert Durer, which he began to examine with such close attention that when La Mole entered he did not seem to hear him, and did not even raise his head.

On his side, the young man, seeing the king with Marguerite, stopped on the threshold, silent from surprise and pale from anxiety.

Marguerite went to him.

“Monsieur de la Mole,” said she, “can you tell me who is on guard to-day at Monsieur d’Alençon’s?”

“Coconnas, madame,” said La Mole.

“Try to find out for me from him if he admitted to his master’s room a man covered with mud, who apparently had a long or hasty ride.”

“Ah, madame, I fear he will not tell me; for several days he has been very taciturn.”

“Indeed! But by giving him this note, it seems to me that he will owe you something in exchange.”

“From the duchess! Oh, with this note I will try.”

“Add,” said Marguerite, lowering her voice, “that this note will serve him as a means of gaining entrance this evening to the house you know about.”

“And I, madame,” said La Mole, in a low tone, “what shall be mine?”

“Give your name. That will be enough.”

“Give me the note, madame,” said La Mole, with throbbing heart, “I will bring back the answer.”

He withdrew.

“We shall know to-morrow if the duke has been informed of the Poland affair,” said Marguerite calmly, turning to her husband.

“That Monsieur de la Mole is really a fine servant,” said the Béarnais, with his peculiar smile, “and, by Heaven! I will make his fortune!”

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DEPARTURE.

When on the following day a beautiful sun, red but rayless, as is apt to be the case on privileged days of winter, rose behind the hills of Paris, everything had already been awake for two hours in the court of the Louvre. A magnificent Barbary horse, nervous and spirited, with limbs like those of a stag, on which the veins crossed one another like network, pawed the ground, pricked up his ears and snorted, while waiting for Charles IX. He was less impatient, however, than his master who, detained by Catharine, had been stopped by her in the hall. She had said she wished to speak to him on a matter of importance. Both were in the corridor with the glass windows. Catharine was cold, pale, and quiet as usual. Charles IX. fretted, bit his nails, and whipped his two favorite dogs. The latter were covered with cuirasses of mail, so that the snout of the wild boar should not harm them, and that they might be able to encounter the terrible animal with impunity. A small scutcheon with the arms of France had been stitched on their breasts similar to those on the breasts of the pages, who, more than once, had envied the privileges of these happy favorites.

“Pay attention, Charles,” said Catharine, “no one but you and I knows as yet of the expected arrival of these Polonais. But, God forgive me, the King of Navarre acts as if he knew. In spite of his abjuration, which I always mistrust, he is in communication with the Huguenots. Have you noticed how often he has gone out the past few days? He has money, too, he who has never had any. He buys horses, arms, and on rainy days he practises fencing from morning until night.”

“Well, my God, mother!” exclaimed Charles IX., impatiently, “do you think he intends to kill me, or my brother D’Anjou? In that case he will need a few more lessons, for yesterday I counted eleven buttonholes with my foil on his doublet, which, however, had only six. And as to my brother D’Anjou, you know that he fences as well if not better than I do; at least so people say.”

"Listen, Charles," continued Catharine, "and do not treat lightly what your mother tells you. The ambassadors will arrive; well, you will see! As soon as they are in Paris, Henry will do all he can to gain their attention. He is insinuating, he is crafty; without mentioning his wife who seconds him, I know not why, and will chat with them, and talk Latin, Greek, Hungarian, and I know not what, to them! Oh, I tell you, Charles, — and you know that I am not mistaken, — I tell you that there is something on foot."

Just then the clock struck and Charles IX. stopped listening to his mother to count the strokes.

"Good heavens! seven o'clock!" he exclaimed, "one hour before we get off, that will make it eight; one hour to reach the meeting-place, and to start again — we shall not be able to begin hunting before nine o'clock. Really, mother, you make me lose a great deal of time! Down, Risquetout! great Heavens! down, I say, you brigand!"

And a vigorous blow of the bloody whip on the mastiff's back brought a howl of real pain from the poor beast, thoroughly astonished at receiving punishment in exchange for a caress.

"Charles!" said Catharine, "listen to me, in God's name, and do not leave to chance your fortune and that of France! The hunt, the hunt, the hunt, you cry; why, you will have time enough to hunt when your work of king is settled."

"Come now, mother!" exclaimed Charles, pale with impatience, "explain quickly, for you bother me to death. Really, there are days when I cannot comprehend you."

He stopped beating his whip against his boot.

Catharine thought that the time had come and that it should not be passed by.

"My son," said she, "we have proof that De Mouy has returned to Paris. Monsieur de Maurevel, whom you are well acquainted with, has seen him. This can be only for the King of Navarre. That is enough, I trust, for us to suspect him more than ever."

"Come, there you go again after my poor Henriot! You want me to have him killed; do you not?"

"Oh, no."

"Exiled? But why can you not see that if he were exiled he would be much more dangerous than he will ever be here, in the Louvre, under our eyes, where he can do nothing without our knowing it at once?"

“Therefore I do not wish him exiled.”

“What do you want, then? Tell me quickly!”

“I want him to be held in safe keeping while these Polonais are here; in the Bastille, for instance.”

“Ah! my faith, no!” cried Charles IX. “We are going to hunt the boar this morning and Henry is one of my best men. Without him the fun would be spoiled. By Heaven, mother! really, you do nothing but vex me.”

“Why, my dear son, I did not say this morning. The ambassadors do not arrive until to-morrow or the day after. Arrest him after your hunt, this evening — to-night” —

“That is a different matter. Well, we will talk about it later and see. After the hunt I will not refuse. Adieu! Come here, Risquetout! Is it your turn to sulk now?”

“Charles,” said Catharine, laying a detaining hand on his arm at the risk of a fresh explosion which might result from this new delay, “I think that the best thing to do is to sign the order for arrest at once, even though it is not to be carried out until this evening or to-night.”

“Sign, write an order, look up a seal for the parchment when they are waiting for me to go hunting, I, who never keep anyone waiting! The devil take the thought!”

“Why, no, I love you too dearly to delay you. I arranged everything beforehand; step in here and see!”

And Catharine, as agile as if she were only twenty years old, pushed open a door of her cabinet, and pointed to an ink-stand, pen, parchment, the seal, and a lighted candle.

The king took the parchment and read it through hastily.

“*Order, etc., etc., to arrest and conduct to the Bastille our brother Henry of Navarre.*”

“Good, that is done!” he exclaimed, signing hurriedly. “Adieu, mother.”

He hastened from the room, followed by his dogs, greatly pleased to have gotten rid of Catharine so easily.

Charles IX. had been waited for with impatience, and as his promptness in hunting matters was well known, every one wondered at the delay. So when he finally appeared, the hunters welcomed him by shouts of “Long live the King!” the outriders by a flourish of trumpets, the horses by neighing, the dogs by barking. All this noise and hubbub brought a flush to his pale cheeks, his heart swelled, and for a moment Charles was young and happy.

The King scarcely took the time to salute the brilliant company gathered in the court-yard. He nodded to the Duc d’Alençon, waved his hand to his sister Marguerite, passed Henry without apparently seeing him, and sprang upon the fiery Barbary horse, which started off at once. But after curvetting around three or four times, he realized what sort of a rider he had to deal with and quieted down. The trumpets again sounded, and the King left the Louvre followed by the Duc d’Alençon, the King of Navarre, Marguerite, Madame de Nevers, Madame de Sauve, Tavannes, and the principal courtiers.

It goes without saying that La Mole and Coconnas were of the number.

As to the Duc d’Anjou, he had been at the siege of La Rochelle for three months.

While waiting for the King, Henry had spoken to his wife, who in returning his greeting had whispered,

“The courier from Rome was admitted by Monsieur de Coconnas himself to the chamber of the Duc d’Alençon a quarter of an hour before the messenger from the Duc de Nevers saw the King.”

“Then he knows all,” said Henry.

“He must know all,” replied Marguerite; “but keep your eyes on him and see how, in spite of his usual dissimulation, his eyes shine.”

“*Ventre saint gris!*” murmured the Béarnais. “I should think they would; he hunts triple game to-day: France, Poland, and Navarre, without counting the wild boar.”

He bowed to his wife, returned to his place, and calling one of his servants whose ancestors had been in the service of his father for more than a century, and whom he employed as ordinary messenger in his love affairs:

“Orthon,” said he, “take this key to the cousin of Madame de Sauve, who you know lives with his mistress at the corner of the Rue des Quatre Fils. Say to him that his cousin desires to speak to him this evening; that he is to enter my room, and, in case I am not there, to wait for me. If I am late, he is to lie down on my bed.”

“Is there an answer, sire?”

“No, except to tell me if you find him. The key is for him alone, you understand?”

“Yes, sire.”

“Wait; do not start now, plague you! Before leaving Paris I will call you to tighten my saddle-girths; in that way you will naturally have to lag behind, and you can carry out your commission and join us at Bondy.”

The servant made a sign of obedience and rode away.

They set out by the Rue Saint Honoré, through the Rue Saint Denis, and the Faubourg. At the Rue Saint Laurent the saddle-girths of the King of Navarre became loose. Orthon rode up to him, and everything happened as had been agreed on between him and his master, who followed the royal procession along the Rue des Récollets, where his faithful servant sought the Rue du Temple.

When Henry overtook the King, Charles was engaged in such an interesting conversation with the Duc d’Alençon, on the subject of the weather, the age of the wild boar which was a recluse, and as to where he had made his lair, that he did not notice, or pretended he did not notice, that Henry had lagged behind a moment.

In the meantime Marguerite had watched each countenance from afar and thought she perceived a certain embarrassment in the eyes of her brother every time she looked at him. Madame de Nevers was abandoning herself to mad gayety, for Coconnas, supremely happy that day, was making numberless jokes near her to make the ladies laugh.

As to La Mole he had already twice found an opportunity to kiss Marguerite’s white scarf with gold fringe, without the act, which was carried out with the skill usual to lovers, having been seen by more than three or four.

About a quarter-past eight they reached Bondy. The first thought of Charles IX. was to find out if the wild boar had held out.

The boar was in his lair, and the outrider who had turned him aside answered for him. A breakfast was ready. The King drank a glass of Hungarian wine. Charles IX. invited the ladies to take seats at table, and in his impatience to pass away the time set out to visit the kennels and the roosts, giving orders not to unsaddle his horse, as he said he had never had a better or a stronger mount.

While the King was taking this stroll, the Duc de Guise arrived. He was armed for war rather than for hunting, and was accompanied by twenty or thirty gentlemen equipped in like manner. He asked at once for the King, joined him, and returned talking with him.

At exactly nine o’clock the King himself gave the signal to start, and each one mounted and set out to the meet. During the ride Henry found another opportunity to be near his wife.

“Well,” said he, “do you know anything new?”

“No,” replied Marguerite, “unless it is that my brother Charles looks at you strangely.”

“I have noticed it,” said Henry.

“Have you taken precautions?”

“I have on a coat of mail, and at my side a good Spanish hunting knife, as sharp as a razor, and as pointed as a needle. I could pierce pistols with it.”

“In that case,” said Marguerite, “God protect you!”

The outrider in charge of the hunt made a sign. They had reached the lair.

CHAPTER XXX.

MAUREVEL.

While all this careless, light-hearted youth, apparently so at least, was scattering like a gilded whirlwind along the road to Bondy, Catharine, still rolling up the precious parchment to which King Charles had just affixed his signature, admitted into her room a man to whom, a few days before, her captain of the guards had carried a letter, addressed to Rue de la Cerisaie, near the Arsenal.

A broad silk band like a badge of mourning hid one of the man’s eyes, showing only the other eye, two prominent cheek-bones, and the curve of a vulture’s nose, while a grayish beard covered the lower part of his face. He wore a long thick cloak, beneath which one might have imagined a whole arsenal. Besides this, although it was not the custom of those called to court, he wore at his side a long campaign sword, broad, and with a double blade. One of his hands was hidden beneath his cloak, and never left the handle of a long dagger.

“Ah! you here, monsieur?” said the queen seating herself; “you know that I promised you after Saint Bartholomew, when you rendered us such signal service, not to let you be idle. The opportunity has arisen, or rather I have made it. Thank me, therefore.”

“Madame, I humbly thank your majesty,” replied the man with the black bandage, in a reserved voice at once low and insolent.

“A fine opportunity; you will not find another such in your whole life. Make the most of it, therefore.”

“I am waiting, madame, only after the preamble, I fear” —

“That the commission may not be much? Are not those who wish to advance fond of such commissions? The one of which I speak would be envied by the Tavannes and even by the De Guises.”

“Ah! madame,” said the man, “believe me, I am at your majesty’s orders, whatever they may be.”

“In that case, read,” said Catharine.

She handed him the parchment. The man read it and grew pale.

“What!” he exclaimed, “an order to arrest the King of Navarre!”

“Well! what is there strange in that?”

“But a king, madame! Really, I think — I fear I am not of sufficiently high rank.”

“My confidence makes you the first gentleman of my court, Monsieur de Maurevel,” said Catharine.

“I thank your majesty,” said the assassin so moved that he seemed to hesitate.

“You will obey, then?”

“If your majesty orders it, is it not my duty?”

“Yes, I order it.”

“Then I will obey.”

“How shall you go to work?”

“Why, madame, I do not know, I should greatly like to be guided by your majesty.”

“You fear noise?”

“I admit it.”

“Take a dozen sure men, if necessary.”

“I understand, of course, that your majesty will permit me to do the best I can for myself, and I am grateful to you for this; but where shall I arrest the King of Navarre?”

“Where would it best please you to arrest him?”

“In some place in which I should be warranted in doing so, if possible, even by his Majesty.”

“Yes, I understand, in some royal palace; what do you say to the Louvre, for instance?”

“Oh, if your majesty would permit it, that would be a great favor.”

“You will arrest him, then, in the Louvre.”

“In what part?”

“In his own room.”

Maurevel bowed.

“When, madame?”

“This evening, or rather to-night.”

“Very well, madame. Now, will your majesty deign to inform me on one point?”

“On what point?”

“About the respect due to his position.”

“Respect! position!” said Catharine, “why, then, you do not know, monsieur, that the King of France owes respect to no one in his kingdom, whoever he may be, recognizing no position as equal to his own?”

Maurevel bowed a second time.

“I insist on this point, however, madame, if your majesty will allow me.”

“I will, monsieur.”

“If the king contests the authenticity of the order, which is not probable, but” —

“On the contrary, monsieur, he is sure to do so.”

“He will contest it?”

“Without a doubt.”

“And consequently he will refuse to obey it?”

“I fear so.”

“And he will resist?”

“Probably.”

“Ah! the devil!” said Maurevel; “and in that case” —

“In what case?” said Catharine, not moving her eyes from him.

“Why, in case he resists, what is to be done?”

“What do you do when you are given an order from the King, that is, when you represent the King, and when there is any resistance, Monsieur de Maurevel?”

“Why, madame,” said the sbirro, “when I am honored with such an order, and when this order refers to a simple gentleman, I kill him.”

“I told you, monsieur,” said Catharine, “and I scarcely think that sufficient time has elapsed for you to have forgotten it, that the King of France recognizes no position in his kingdom, and that after him the greatest are simple gentlemen.”

Maurevel grew pale, for he was beginning to comprehend.

“Oh! oh!” he cried, “kill the King of Navarre?”

“Why, who is speaking of killing him? Where is the order to kill him? The King wishes him taken to the Bastille, and the order contains nothing more. If he lets himself be arrested, very good; but as he will not let himself be arrested, as he will resist, as he will endeavor to kill you” —

Maurevel grew paler.

“You will defend yourself,” continued Catharine. “One cannot ask a brave man like you to let himself be killed without defending himself; and in defending yourself, what can you expect? You must let come what may. You understand me, do you not?”

“Yes, madame; and yet” —

“Come, do you want me to write *dead or alive* after the words *order to arrest*?”

“I confess, madame, that that would do away with my scruples.”

“Well, it must be done, of course, since you do not think the order can be carried out without it.”

And Catharine shrugged her shoulders, unrolled the parchment with one hand, and wrote with the other: “*dead or alive*.”

“Now,” said she, “do you consider the order all right?”

“Yes, madame,” replied Maurevel; “but I beg your majesty to leave the carrying out of the entire affair to me.”

“What have I said that will interfere with it?”

“Your majesty told me to take a dozen men.”

“Yes, to make sure” —

“Well, I ask permission to take only six.”

“Why so?”

“Because, madame, if anything happens to the prince, as it probably will, it would be easy to excuse six men for having been afraid of losing the prisoner, but no one would excuse a dozen guards for not having let half of their number be killed before laying hands on royalty.”

“Fine royalty, in truth, which has no kingdom.”

“Madame,” said Maurevel, “it is not the kingdom which makes the king: it is birth.”

“Very well,” said Catharine; “do as you please. Only I must warn you that I do not wish you to leave the Louvre.”

“But, madame, to get my men together?”

“Have you not a sort of sergeant whom you can charge with this duty?”

“I have my lackey, who not only is a faithful fellow, but who has even occasionally aided me in this sort of thing.”

“Send for him, and confer with him. You know the chamber hung with the King’s arms, do you not? Well, your breakfast shall be served there; and from there you shall give your orders. The place will aid you to collect your wits in case they are scattered. Then when my son returns from the hunt, you are to go into my oratory, and wait until the time comes.”

“But how are we to get into the room? Probably the king suspects something, and he will shut himself up in it.”

“I have a duplicate key to every door,” said Catharine, “and the bolts have been removed from Henry’s room. Adieu, Monsieur de Maurevel, for a while. I will have you taken to the King’s armory. Ah! by the way! remember that the order of a King must be carried out before anything else. No excuse is admissible; a defeat, even a failure, would compromise the honor of the King. It is a serious matter.”

And Catharine, without giving Maurevel time to answer, called Monsieur de Nancey, the captain of the guards, and ordered him to conduct Maurevel to the king’s armory.

“My God!” exclaimed Maurevel as he followed his guide, “I have risen to the hierarchy of assassination; from a simple gentleman to a captain, from a captain to an admiral, from an admiral to a king without a crown. Who knows if I shall not some day be a king with a crown!”

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE HUNT.

The outrider who had turned aside the boar and who had told the King that the animal had not left the place was not mistaken. Scarcely were the bloodhounds put on the trail before it plunged into the thickets, and from a cluster of thorn bushes drove out the boar which the outrider had recognized by its track. It was a recluse; that is, the strangest kind of animal.

It started straight ahead and crossed the road fifty feet from the King, followed only by the bloodhound which had driven it back. The first relay of dogs was at once let loose, twenty in number, which sprang after it.

Hunting was Charles' chief passion. Scarcely had the animal crossed the road before he started after it, followed by the Duc d'Alençon and Henry, to whom a sign had indicated that he must not leave Charles.

The rest of the hunters followed the King.

At the time of which we are writing, the royal forests were far from being what they are to-day, great parks intersected by carriage roads. Then traffic was almost wanting. Kings had not yet conceived the idea of being merchants, and of dividing their woods into fellings, copses, and forests. The trees, planted, not by learned foresters, but by the hand of God, who threw the grain to the will of the winds, were not arranged in quincunxes, but grew as they pleased, as they do to-day in any virginal forest of America. In short, a forest in those days was a den of the wild boar, the stag, the wolf, and robbers; and a dozen paths starting from one point starred that of Bondy, surrounded by a circular road as the circle of a wheel surrounds its fellies.

To carry the comparison further, the nave would not be a bad representation of the single point where the parties meet in the centre of the wood, where the wandering hunters rally to start out again towards the point where the lost animal again appears.

At the end of a quarter of an hour there happened what always happens in such cases. Insurmountable obstacles rose in the path of the hunters, the cries of the dogs were lost in the distance, and the King returned to the meeting-place cursing and swearing as was his habit.

"Well, D'Alençon! Well, Henriot!" said he, "there you are, by Heaven, as calm and unruffled as nuns following their abbess. That is not hunting. Why, D'Alençon, you look as though you had just stepped out of a bandbox, and you are so saturated with perfumery that if you were to pass between the boar and my dogs, you might put them off the scent. And you, Henry, where is your spear, your musket? Let us see!"

"Sire," said Henry, "of what use is a musket? I know that your Majesty likes to shoot the beast when the dogs have caught it. As to a spear, I am clumsy enough with this weapon, which is not much used among our mountains, where we hunt the bear with a simple dagger."

"By Heavens, Henry, when you return to your Pyrenees you will have to send me a whole cartload of bears. It must be a pretty hunt that is carried on at such close quarters with an animal which might strangle us. Listen, I think I hear the dogs. No, I am mistaken." The King took his horn and blew a blast; several horns answered him. Suddenly an outrider appeared who blew another blast.

"The boar! the boar!" cried the King.

He galloped off, followed by the rest of the hunters who had rallied round him.

The outrider was not mistaken. As the King advanced they began to hear the barking of the pack, which consisted of more than sixty dogs, for one after another they had let loose all the relays placed at the points the boar had already passed. The King saw the boar again, and taking advantage of a clump of high trees, he rushed after him, blowing his horn with all his might.

For some time the princes followed him. But the King had such a strong horse and was so carried away by his ardor, and he rode over such rough roads and through such thick underbrush, that at first the ladies, then the Duc de Guise and his gentlemen, and finally the two princes, were forced to abandon him. Tavannes held out for a time longer, but at length he too gave up.

Except Charles and a few outriders who, excited over a promised reward, would not leave the King, everyone had gathered about the open space in the centre of the wood. The two princes were together on a narrow path, the

Duc de Guise and his gentlemen had halted a hundred feet from them. Further on were the ladies.

“Does it not really seem,” said the Duc d’Alençon to Henry, indicating by a wink the Duc de Guise, “that that man with his escort sheathed in steel is the real king? Poor princes that we are, he does not even honor us by a glance.”

“Why should he treat us better than we treat our own relatives?” replied Henry. “Why, brother, are not you and I prisoners at the court of France, hostages from our party?”

Duc François started at these words, and looked at Henry as if to provoke further explanation; but Henry had said more than he usually did and was silent.

“What do you mean, Henry?” asked the Duc François, visibly annoyed that his brother-in-law by stopping had left him to open the conversation.

“I say, brother,” said Henry, “that all these men who are so well armed, whose duty seems to be not to lose sight of us, look exactly like guards preventing two people from running away.”

“Running away? why? how?” asked D’Alençon, admirably successful in his pretended surprise and innocence.

“You have a magnificent mount, François,” said Henry, following out his thoughts, while apparently changing the conversation. “I am sure he could make seven leagues in an hour, and twenty between now and noon. It is a fine day. And one feels like saying good-by. See the beautiful cross-road. Does it not tempt you, François? As to me, my spurs burn me.”

François did not reply. But he first turned red and then white. Then he bent his head, as if listening for sounds from the hunters.

“The news from Poland is having its effect,” said Henry, “and my dear brother-in-law has his plans. He would like me to escape, but I shall not do so by myself.”

Scarcely had this thought passed through his mind before several new converts, who had come to court during the past two or three months, galloped up and smiled pleasantly on the two princes. The Duc d’Alençon, provoked by Henry’s remarks, had but one word to say, one gesture to make, and it was evident that thirty or forty horsemen, who at that moment gathered around them as though to oppose the troop belonging to Monsieur de Guise, favored his flight; but he turned aside his head, and, raising his horn to his lips, he sounded the rally. But the newcomers, as if they thought that the hesitation on the part of the Duc d’Alençon was due to the presence of the followers of the De Guises, had by degrees glided among them and the two princes, and had drawn themselves up in echelons with a strategic skill which showed the usual military disposition. In fact, to reach the Duc d’Alençon and the King of Navarre it would have been necessary to pass through this company, while, as far as eye could reach, a perfectly free road stretched out before the brothers.

Suddenly from among the trees, ten feet from the King of Navarre, another gentleman appeared, as yet unperceived by the two princes. Henry was trying to think who he was, when the gentleman raised his hat and Henry recognized him as the Vicomte de Turenne, one of the leaders of the Protestant party, who was supposed to be in Poitou.

The vicomte even ventured to make a sign which clearly meant,

“Will you come?”

But having consulted the impassable face and dull eye of the Duc d’Alençon, Henry turned his head two or three times over his shoulder as if something was the matter with his neck or doublet.

This was a refusal. The vicomte understood it, put both spurs to his horse and disappeared in the thicket. At that moment the pack was heard approaching, then they saw the boar followed by the dogs cross the end of the path where they were all gathered; then Charles IX., like an infernal hunter, hatless, the horn at his mouth blowing enough to burst his lungs; three or four outriders followed. Tavannes had disappeared.

“The King!” cried the Duc d’Alençon, and he rode after him.

Reassured by the presence of his good friends, Henry signed to them not to leave, and advanced towards the ladies.

“Well!” said Marguerite, taking a few steps towards him.

“Well, madame,” said Henry, “we are hunting the wild boar.”

“Is that all?”

“Yes, the wind has changed since morning; but I believe you predicted this.”

“These changes of the wind are bad for hunting, are they not, monsieur?” asked Marguerite.

“Yes,” said Henry; “they sometimes upset all plans, which have to be made over again.” Just then the barking of the dogs began to be heard as they rapidly approached, and a sort of noisy dust warned the hunters to be on their guard. Each one raised his head and listened.

Almost immediately the boar appeared again, but instead of returning to the woods, he followed the road that led directly to the open space where were the ladies, the gentlemen paying court to them, and the hunters who had given up the chase.

Behind the animal came thirty or forty great dogs, panting; then, twenty feet behind them, King Charles without hat or cloak, his clothes torn by the thorns, his face and hands covered with blood.

One or two outriders were with him.

The King stopped blowing his horn only to urge on his dogs, and stopped urging on his dogs only to return to his horn. He saw no one. Had his horse stumbled, he might have cried out as did Richard III.: “My kingdom for a horse!” But the horse seemed as eager as his master. His feet did not touch the ground, and his nostrils breathed forth fire. Boar, dogs, and King passed like a dream.

“Halloo! halloo!” cried the King as he went by, raising the horn to his bloody lips.

A few feet behind him came the Duc d’Alençon and two outriders. But the horses of the others had given out or else they were lost.

Everyone started after the King, for it was evident that the boar would soon be taken.

In fact, at the end of about ten minutes the animal left the path it had been following, and sprang into the bushes; but reaching an open space, it ran to a rock and faced the dogs.

At the shouts from Charles, who had followed it, everyone drew near.

They arrived at an interesting point in the chase. The boar seemed determined to make a desperate defence. The dogs, excited by a run of more than three hours, rushed on it with a fury which increased the shouts and the oaths of the King.

All the hunters formed a circle, the King somewhat in advance, behind him the Duc d’Alençon armed with a musket, and Henry, who had nothing but his simple hunting knife.

The Duc d’Alençon unfastened his musket and lighted the match. Henry moved his knife in its sheath.

As to the Duc de Guise, disdainful of all the details of hunting, he stood somewhat apart from the others with his gentlemen. The women, gathered together in a group, formed a counterpart to that of the duke.

Everyone who was anything of a hunter stood with eyes fixed on the animal in anxious expectation.

To one side an outrider was endeavoring to restrain the King’s two mastiffs, which, encased in their coats of mail, were waiting to take the boar by the ears, howling and jumping about in such a manner that every instant one might think they would burst their chains.

The boar made a wonderful resistance. Attacked at once by forty or more dogs, which enveloped it like a roaring tide, which covered it by their motley carpet, which on all sides was striving to reach its skin, wrinkled with bristles, at each blow of its snout it hurled a dog ten feet in the air. The dogs fell back, torn to pieces, and, with entrails dragging, at once returned to the fray. Charles, with hair on end, bloodshot eyes, and inflated nostrils, leaned over the neck of his dripping horse shouting furious “halloos!”

In less than ten minutes twenty dogs were out of the fight.

“The mastiffs!” cried Charles; “the mastiffs!”

At this shout the outrider opened the carbine-swivels of the leashes, and the two bloodhounds rushed into the midst of the carnage, overturning everything, scattering everything, making a way with their coats of mail to the animal, which they seized by the ear.

The boar, knowing that it was caught, clinched its teeth both from rage and pain.

“Bravo, Duredent! Bravo, Risquetout!” cried Charles. “Courage, dogs! A spear! a spear!”

“Do you not want my musket?” said the Duc d’Alençon.

“No,” cried the King, “no; one cannot feel a bullet when he shoots; there is no fun in it; but one can feel a spear. A spear! a spear!”

They handed the King a hunting spear hardened by fire and armed with a steel point.

“Take care, brother!” cried Marguerite.

“Come! come!” cried the Duchesse de Nevers. “Do not miss, sire. Give the beast a good stab!”

“Be easy, duchess!” said Charles.

Couching his lance, he darted at the boar which, held by the two bloodhounds, could not escape the blow. But at sight of the shining lance it turned to one side, and the weapon, instead of sinking into its breast, glided over its shoulder and blunted itself against the rock to which the animal had run.

“A thousand devils!” cried the King. “I have missed him. A spear! a spear!”

And bending back, as horsemen do when they are going to take a fence, he hurled his useless lance from him.

An outrider advanced and offered him another.

But at that moment, as though it foresaw the fate which awaited it, and which it wished to resist, by a violent effort the boar snatched its torn ears from the teeth of the bloodhounds, and with eyes bloody, protruding, hideous, its breath burning like the heat from a furnace, with chattering teeth and lowered head it sprang at the King’s horse. Charles was too good a hunter not to have foreseen this. He turned his horse, which began to rear, but he had miscalculated the pressure, and the horse, too tightly reined in, or perhaps giving way to his fright, fell over backwards. The spectators gave a terrible cry: the horse had fallen, and the King’s leg was under him.

“Your hand, sire, give me your hand,” said Henry.

The King let go his horse’s bridle, seized the saddle with his left hand, and tried to draw out his hunting knife with his right; but the knife, pressed into his belt by the weight of his body, would not come from its sheath.

“The boar! the boar!” cried Charles; “it is on me, D’Alençon! on me!”

The horse, recovering himself as if he understood his master’s danger, stretched his muscles, and had already succeeded in getting up on its three legs, when, at the cry from his brother, Henry saw the Duc François grow frightfully pale and raise the musket to his shoulder, but, instead of striking the boar, which was but two feet from the King, the ball broke the knee of the horse, which fell down again, his nose touching the ground. At that instant the boar, with its snout, tore Charles’s boot.

“Oh!” murmured D’Alençon with ashy lips, “I suppose that the Duc d’Anjou is King of France, and that I am King of Poland.”

The boar was about to attack Charles’s leg, when suddenly the latter felt someone raise his arm; then he saw the flash of a sharp-pointed blade which was driven into the shoulder of the boar and disappeared up to its guard, while a hand gloved in steel turned aside the head already poked under his clothes.

As the horse had risen, Charles had succeeded in freeing his leg, and now raising himself heavily, he saw that he was dripping with blood, whereupon he became as pale as a corpse.

“Sire,” said Henry, who still knelt holding the boar pierced to the heart, “sire, it is nothing, I turned aside the teeth, and your Majesty is not hurt.”

Then he rose, let go the knife, and the boar fell back pouring forth more blood from its mouth than from its wound.

Charles, surrounded by a breathless crowd, assailed by cries of terror which would have dashed the greatest courage, was for a moment ready to fall on the dying animal. But he recovered himself and, turning toward the King of Navarre, he pressed his hand with a look in which shone the first spark of feeling that had been roused in his heart for twenty-four years.

“Thank you, Henriot!” said he.

“My poor brother!” cried D’Alençon, approaching Charles.

“Ah! it is you, D’Alençon, is it?” said the King. “Well, famous marksman that you are, what became of your ball?”

“It must have flattened itself against the boar,” said the duke.

“Well! my God!” exclaimed Henry, with admirably assumed surprise; “you see, François, your bullet has broken the leg of his Majesty’s horse. That is strange!”

“What!” said the King; “is that true?”

“It is possible,” said the duke terrified; “my hand shook so!”

“The fact is that for a clever marksman that was a strange thing to do, François!” said Charles frowning. “A second time, Henriot, I thank you!”

“Gentlemen,” continued the King, “let us return to Paris; I have had enough of this.”

Marguerite came up to congratulate Henry.

“Yes, indeed, Margot,” said Charles, “congratulate him, and sincerely too, for without him the King of France would be Henry III.”

“Alas, madame,” said the Béarnais, “Monsieur le Duc d’Anjou, who is already my enemy, will be angrier than ever at me. But what can you expect? One does what one can. Ask Monsieur d’Alençon.”

And bowing, he drew his knife from the wild boar’s body and dug it two or three times into the earth to wipe off the blood.

PART II.

CHAPTER XXXII.

FRATERNITY.

In saving the life of Charles, Henry had done more than save the life of a man, — he had prevented three kingdoms from changing sovereigns.

Had Charles IX. been killed, the Duc d'Anjou would have become King of France, and the Duc d'Alençon in all probability would have been King of Poland. As to Navarre, as Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou was the lover of Madame de Condé, its crown would probably have paid to the husband the complacency of his wife. Now in all this no good would have come to Henry. He would have changed masters, that would have been all. Instead of Charles IX. who tolerated him, he would have seen the Duc d'Anjou on the throne of France, and being of one heart and mind with his mother Catharine, the latter had sworn that he should die, and he would not have failed to keep his oath. All these thoughts entered his mind when the wild boar sprang at Charles IX., and we know that the result of his rapid thinking was that his own life was attached to that of Charles IX.

Charles IX. had been saved by an act of devotion, the motive of which the King could not fathom. But Marguerite had understood, and she had admired that strange courage of Henry which, like flashes of lightning, shone only in a storm.

Unfortunately it was not all to have escaped the kingdom of the Duc d'Anjou. Henry had to make himself king. He had to dispute Navarre with the Duc d'Alençon and with the Prince of Condé; above all he had to leave the court where one walked only between two precipices, and go away protected by a son of France.

As he returned from Bondy Henry pondered deeply on the situation. On arriving at the Louvre his plan was formed. Without removing his riding-boots, just as he was, covered with dust and blood, he betook himself to the apartments of the Duc d'Alençon, whom he found striding up and down in great agitation.

On perceiving him the prince gave a start of surprise.

“Yes,” said Henry, taking him by both hands; “yes, I understand, my good brother, you are angry because I was the first to call the King’s attention to the fact that your ball struck the leg of his horse instead of the boar, as you intended it should. But what can you expect? I could not prevent an exclamation of surprise. Besides, the King would have noticed it, would he not?”

“No doubt, no doubt,” murmured D’Alençon. “And yet I can think of it only as an evil intention on your part to denounce me as you did, and which, as you yourself saw, had no result except to make my brother Charles suspect me, and to make hard feeling between us.”

“We will return to this in a few moments. As to my good or evil intentions regarding you, I have come to you on purpose that you may judge them.”

“Very good!” said D’Alençon with his customary reserve. “Speak, Henry, I am listening.”

“When I have spoken, François, you will readily see what my intentions are, for the confidence I am going to place in you does away with all reserve and prudence. And when I have told you, you will be able to ruin me by a single word!”

“What is it?” said François, beginning to be anxious.

“And yet,” continued Henry, “I have hesitated a long time to speak to you of the thing which brings me here, especially after the way in which you turned a deaf ear to-day.”

“Really,” said François, growing pale, “I do not know what you mean, Henry.”

“Brother, your interests are too dear to me not to tell you that the Huguenots have made advances to me.”

“Advances!” said D’Alençon. “What advances?”

“One of them, Monsieur de Mouy of Saint Phal, the son of the brave De Mouy, assassinated by Maurevel, you know” —

“Yes.”

“Well, he came at the risk of his life to show me that I was in captivity.”

“Ah! indeed! and what did you say to him?”

“Brother, you know that I love Charles dearly. He has saved my life, and the queen mother has been like a real mother to me. So I refused all the offers he made me.”

“What were these offers?”

“The Huguenots want to reconstruct the throne of Navarre, and as in reality this throne belongs to me by inheritance, they offered it to me.”

“Yes; and Monsieur de Mouy, instead of the consent he expected to ask for, has received your relinquishment?”

“My formal relinquishment — even in writing. But since,” continued Henry.

“You have repented, brother?” interrupted D’Alençon.

“No, I merely thought I noticed that Monsieur de Mouy had become discontented with me, and was paying his visits elsewhere.”

“Where?” asked François quickly.

“I do not know. At the Prince of Condé’s perhaps.”

“Yes, that might be,” said the duke.

“Besides,” went on Henry, “I have positive knowledge as to the leader he has chosen.”

François grew pale.

“But,” continued Henry, “the Huguenots are divided among themselves, and De Mouy, brave and loyal as he is, represents only one-half of the party. Now this other half, which is not to be scorned, has not given up the hope of having Henry of Navarre on the throne, who having hesitated at first may have reflected since.”

“You think this?”

“Oh, every day I receive proofs of it. The troops which joined us at the hunt, did you notice of what men it was composed?”

“Yes, of converted gentlemen.”

“Did you recognize the leader of the troop who signed to me?”

“Yes, it was the Vicomte de Turenne.”

“Did you know what they wanted of me?”

“Yes, they proposed to you to escape.”

“Then,” said Henry to François, who was growing restless, “there is evidently a second party which wants something else besides what Monsieur de Mouy wants.”

“A second party?”

“Yes, and a very powerful one, I tell you, so that in order to succeed it is necessary to unite the two — Turenne and De Mouy. The conspiracy progresses, the troops are ready, the signal alone is waited for. Now in this supreme situation, which demands prompt solution on my part, I have come to two decisions between which I am wavering. I have come to submit these decisions to you as to a friend."

"Say rather as to a brother."

"Yes, as to a brother," went on Henry.

"Speak, then, I am listening."

"In the first place I ought to explain to you the condition of my mind, my dear François. No desire, no ambition, no ability. I am an honest country gentleman, poor, sensual, and timid. The career of conspirator offers me indignities poorly compensated for even by the certain prospect of a crown."

"Ah, brother," said François, "you do wrong. Sad indeed is the position of a prince whose fortune is limited by the boundary of the paternal estate or by a man in a career for honors! I do not believe, therefore, in what you tell me."

"And yet what I tell you is so true, brother, that if I thought I had a true friend, I would resign in his favor the power which this party wishes to give me; but," he added with a sigh, "I have none."

"Perhaps you have. You probably are mistaken."

"No, *ventre saint gris*!" said Henry, "except yourself, brother, I see no one who is attached to me; so that rather than let fail an attempt which might bring to light some unworthy man, I truly prefer to inform my brother the King of what is taking place. I will mention no names, I will designate neither country nor date, but I will foretell the catastrophe."

"Great God!" exclaimed D'Alençon unable to repress his terror, "what do you mean? What! you, you, the sole hope of the party since the death of the admiral; you, a converted Huguenot, a poor convert, or at least such you were thought to be, you would raise the knife against your brothers! Henry, Henry, by doing this, do you know that you would be delivering to a second Saint Bartholomew all the Calvinists in the kingdom? Do you know that Catharine is waiting for just such a chance to exterminate all who have survived?"

And the duke trembling, his face spotted with red and white blotches, pressed Henry's hand to beg him to give up this idea which would ruin him.

"What!" said Henry, with an expression of perfect good-humor, "do you think there would be so much trouble, François? With the King's word, however, it seems to me that I should avoid it."

"The word of King Charles IX., Henry! Did not the admiral have it? Did not Téligny have it? Did not you yourself have it? Oh, Henry, I tell you if you do this, you will ruin us all. Not only them, but all who have had direct or indirect relations with them."

Henry seemed to ponder an instant.

"If I were an important prince at court," said he, "I should act differently. In your place, for instance, in your place, François, a son of France, and probable heir to the crown" —

François shook his head ironically.

"In my place," said he, "what would you do?"

"In your place, brother," replied Henry, "I should place myself at the head of the movement and direct it. My name and my credit should answer to my conscience for the life of the rebellious, and I should derive some benefit first for myself, then for the King, perhaps, from an enterprise which otherwise might do the greatest injury to France."

D'Alençon listened to these words with a joy which caused every muscle of his face to expand.

"Do you think," said he, "that this method is practicable and that it would save us all the disasters you foresee?"

"I think so," said Henry. "The Huguenots love you. Your bearing is modest, your position both high and interesting, and the kindness you have always shown to those of the faith will incline them to serve you."

"But," said D'Alençon, "there is a division in the party. Will those who want you want me?"

"I will undertake to bring them together by two means."

"What means?"

"First, by the confidence the leaders have in me; then by the fear that your highness, knowing their names" —

"But who will tell me these names?"

"I, *ventre saint gris*!"

"You will do that?"

"Listen, François; as I told you, you are the only one I love at court," said Henry. "This, no doubt, is because you are persecuted like myself; and then my wife, too, loves you with an affection which is unequalled" —

François flushed with pleasure.

"Believe me, brother," continued Henry; "take this thing in hand, reign in Navarre; and provided you keep a place at your table for me, and a fine forest in which to hunt, I shall consider myself fortunate.”

“Reign in Navarre!” said the duke; “but if” —

“If the Duc d’Anjou is chosen King of Poland; is that it? I will finish your thought for you.”

François looked at Henry with something like terror.

“Well, listen, François,” continued Henry, “since nothing escapes you. This is how I reason: If the Duc d’Anjou is chosen King of Poland, and our brother Charles, God keep him! should happen to die, it is but two hundred leagues from Pau to Paris, while it is four hundred from Paris to Cracovie. So you would be here to receive the inheritance by the time the King of Poland learned it was vacant. Then, if you are satisfied with me, you could give me the kingdom of Navarre, which would thenceforth be merely one of the jewels in your crown. In that way I would accept it. The worst that could happen to you would be that you would remain king there and bring up a race of kings by living with me and my family, while here, what are you? a poor persecuted prince, a poor third son of a king, the slave of two elder brothers, and one whom a whim may send to the Bastille.”

“Yes, yes,” said François; “I know that very well, so well that I do not see why you should give up this plan you propose to me. Is there no throb there?”

And the Duc d’Alençon put his hand on his brother’s heart.

“There are,” said Henry, smiling, “burdens too heavy for some hands; therefore I shall not try to raise this one; fear of fatigue is greater than the desire of possession.”

“So, Henry, you really renounce it?”

“I said so to De Mouy and I repeat it to you.”

“But in such cases, my dear brother,” said D’Alençon, “one does not say, one proves.”

Henry breathed like a pugilist who feels his enemy’s back bending.

“I will prove it this evening,” said he. “At nine o’clock we shall have the names of the leaders and the plan of the undertaking. I have already sent my renunciation to De Mouy.”

François took Henry’s hand and pressed it effusively between his own.

At that moment Catharine entered the Duc d’Alençon’s rooms, unannounced, as was her habit.

“Together!” said she, smiling; “two good brothers, truly!”

“I trust so, madame,” said Henry, with great coolness, while the Duc d’Alençon turned white from distress.

Henry stepped back to leave Catharine free to speak with her son.

The queen mother drew a magnificent jewel from her bag.

“This clasp comes from Florence,” said she. “I will give it to you for the belt of your sword.”

Then in a low tone:

“If to-night you hear any noise in your good brother Henry’s room, do not stir.”

François pressed his mother’s hand, and said:

“Will you allow me to show Henry the beautiful gift you have just given me?”

“You may do more. Give it to him in your name and in mine, for I have ordered a second one just like it.”

“You hear, Henry,” said François, “my good mother brings me this jewel and doubles its value by allowing me to give it to you.”

Henry went into ecstasies over the beauty of the clasp, and was enthusiastic in his thanks. When his delight had grown calmer:

“My son,” said Catharine, “I feel somewhat indisposed and I am going to bed; your brother Charles is greatly wearied from his fall and is going to do the same. So we shall not have supper together this evening, but each will be served in his own room. Oh, Henry, I forgot to congratulate you on your bravery and quickness. You saved your king and your brother, and you shall be rewarded for it.”

“I am already rewarded, madame,” replied Henry, bowing.

“By the feeling that you have done your duty?” replied Catharine. “That is not enough, and Charles and I will do something to pay the debt we owe you.”

“Everything that comes to me from you and my good brother will be welcome, madame.”

Then he bowed and withdrew.

“Ah! brother François!” thought Henry as he left, “I am sure now of not leaving alone, and the conspiracy which had a body has found a head and a heart. Only let us look out for ourselves. Catharine gives me a present, Catharine promises me a reward. There is some deviltry beneath it all. I must confer this evening with Marguerite.”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE GRATITUDE OF KING CHARLES IX.

Maurevel had spent a part of the day in the King's armory; but when it was time for the hunters to return from the chase Catharine sent him into her oratory with the guards who had joined him.

Charles IX., informed by his nurse on his arrival that a man had spent part of the day in his room, was at first very angry that a stranger had been admitted into his apartments. But his nurse described the man, saying that he was the same one she herself had been ordered to admit one evening, and the King realized that it was Maurevel. Then remembering the order his mother had wrung from him that morning, he understood everything.

"Oh, ho!" murmured Charles, "the same day on which he has saved my life. The time is badly chosen."

He started to go to his mother, but one thought deterred him.

"By Heaven! If I mention this to her it will result in a never-ending discussion. Better for us to act by ourselves.

"Nurse," said he, "lock every door, and say to Queen Elizabeth that I am suffering somewhat from the fall I have had, and that I shall sleep alone to-night."

The nurse obeyed, and as it was not yet time for the execution of his plan, Charles sat himself down to compose poetry. It was this occupation which made the time pass most quickly for the King. Nine o'clock struck before he thought it was more than seven. He counted the strokes of the clock one by one, and at the last he rose.

"The devil!" said he, "it is just time." Taking his hat and cloak, he left his room by a secret door he had had made in the wall, the existence of which even Catharine herself was ignorant.

Charles went directly to Henry's apartments. On leaving the Duc d'Alençon, the latter had gone to his room to change his clothes and had left again at once.

"He probably has decided to take supper with Margot," said the King. "He was very pleasant with her to-day, at least so it seemed to me."

He went to the queen’s apartments. Marguerite had brought back with her the Duchesse de Nevers, Coconnas, and La Mole, and was having a supper of preserves and pastry with them.

Charles knocked at the hall door, which was opened by Gillonne. But at sight of the King she was so frightened that she scarcely had sufficient presence of mind to courtesy, and instead of running to inform her mistress of the august visit she was to have, she let Charles enter without other warning than the cry that had escaped her. The King crossed the antechamber, and guided by the bursts of laughter advanced towards the dining-room.

“Poor Henriot!” said he, “he is enjoying himself without a thought of evil.”

“It is I,” said he, raising the portière and showing a smiling face.

Marguerite gave a terrible cry. Smiling as he was, his face appeared to her like the face of Medusa. Seated opposite the door, she had recognized him at once. The two men turned their backs to the King.

“Your Majesty!” cried the queen, rising in terror.

The three other guests felt their heads begin to swim; Coconnas alone retained his self-possession. He rose also, but with such tactful clumsiness that in doing so he upset the table, and with it the glass, plate, and candles. Instantly there was complete darkness and the silence of death.

“Run,” said Coconnas to La Mole; “quick! quick!”

La Mole did not wait to be told twice. Springing to the side of the wall, he began groping with his hands for the sleeping-room, that he might hide in the cabinet that opened out of it and which he knew so well. But as he stepped across the threshold he ran against a man who had just entered by the secret corridor.

“What does all this mean?” asked Charles, in the darkness, in a tone which was beginning to betray a formidable accent of impatience. “Am I such a mar-joy that the sight of me causes all this confusion? Come, Henriot! Henriot! where are you? Answer me.”

“We are saved!” murmured Marguerite, seizing a hand which she took for that of La Mole. “The King thinks my husband is one of our guests.”

“And I shall let him think so, madame, you may be sure,” said Henry, answering the queen in the same tone.

“Great God!” cried Marguerite, hastily dropping the hand she held, which was that of the King of Navarre.

“Silence!” said Henry.

“In the name of a thousand devils! why are you whispering in this way?” cried Charles. “Henry, answer me; where are you?”

“Here, sire,” said the King of Navarre.

“The devil!” said Coconnas, who was holding the Duchesse de Nevers in a corner, “the plot thickens.”

“In that case we are doubly lost,” said Henriette.

Coconnas, brave to the point of rashness, had reflected that the candles would have to be lighted sooner or later, and thinking the sooner the better, he dropped the hand of Madame de Nevers, picked up a taper from the midst of the débris, and going to a brazier blew on a piece of coal, with which he at once made a light. The chamber was again illuminated. Charles IX. glanced around inquiringly.

Henry was by the side of his wife, the Duchesse de Nevers was alone in a corner, while Coconnas stood in the centre of the room, candle-stick in hand, lighting up the whole scene.

“Excuse me, brother,” said Marguerite, “we were not expecting you.”

“So, as you may have perceived, your Majesty filled us with strange terror,” said Henriette.

“For my part,” said Henry, who had surmised everything, “I think the fear was so real that in rising I overturned the table.”

Coconnas glanced at the King of Navarre as much as to say:

“Good! Here is a man who understands at once.”

“What a frightful hubbub!” repeated Charles IX. “Your supper is ruined, Henriot; come with me and you shall finish it elsewhere; I will carry you off this evening.”

“What, sire!” said Henry, “your Majesty will do me the honor?”

“Yes, my Majesty will do you the honor of taking you away from the Louvre. Lend him to me, Margot, I will bring him back to you to-morrow morning.”

“Ah, brother,” said Marguerite, “you do not need my permission for that; you are master.”

“Sire,” said Henry, “I will get another cloak from my room, and will return immediately.”

“You do not need it, Henriot; the cloak you have is all right.”

“But, sire,” began the Béarnais.

"In the name of a thousand devils, I tell you not to go to your rooms! Do you not hear what I say? Come along!"

"Yes, yes, go!" said Marguerite, suddenly pressing her husband's arm; for a singular look from Charles had convinced her that something unusual was going on.

"Here I am, sire," said Henry.

Charles looked at Coconnas, who was still carrying out his office of torch-bearer by lighting the other candles.

"Who is this gentleman?" asked the King of Henry, eyeing the Piedmontese from head to foot. "Is he Monsieur de la Mole?"

"Who has told him of La Mole?" asked Marguerite in a low tone.

"No, sire," replied Henry, "Monsieur de la Mole is not here, I regret to say. Otherwise I should have the honor of presenting him to your Majesty at the same time as Monsieur de Coconnas, his friend. They are perfectly inseparable, and both are in the suite of Monsieur d'Alençon."

"Ah! ah! our famous marksman!" said Charles. "Good!" Then frowning:

"Is not this Monsieur de la Mole a Huguenot?" he asked.

"He is converted, sire, and I will answer for him as for myself."

"When you answer for any one, Henriot, after what you did to-day, I have no further right to doubt him. But I should have liked to see this Monsieur de la Mole. However, I can meet him another time."

Giving a last glance about the room, Charles embraced Marguerite, took hold of the arm of the King of Navarre, and led him off.

At the gate of the Louvre Henry wanted to speak to some one.

"Come, come! pass out quickly, Henriot," said Charles. "When I tell you that the air of the Louvre is not good for you this evening, the devil! you must believe me!"

"*Ventre saint gris!*" murmured Henry; "and what will De Mouy do all alone in my room? I trust the air which is not good for me may be no worse for him!"

"Ah!" exclaimed the King, when Henry and he had crossed the drawbridge, "does it suit you, Henry, to have the gentlemen of Monsieur d'Alençon courting your wife?"

"How so, sire?"

"Truly, is not this Monsieur de Coconnas making eyes at Margot?"

"Who told you that?"

"Well," said the King, "I heard it."

“A mere joke, sire; Monsieur de Coconnas does make eyes at some one, but it is at Madame de Nevers.”

“Ah, bah.”

“I can answer to your Majesty for what I tell you.”

Charles burst into laughter.

“Well,” said he, “let the Duc de Guise come to me again with his gossip, and I will gently pull his mustache by telling him of the exploits of his sister-in-law. But after all,” said the King, thinking better of it, “I do not know whether it was Monsieur de Coconnas or Monsieur de la Mole he referred to.”

“Neither the one more than the other, sire, and I can answer to you for the feelings of my wife.”

“Good, Henriot, good!” said the King. “I like you better now than the way you were before. On my honor, you are such a good fellow that I shall end by being unable to get along without you.”

As he spoke the King gave a peculiar whistle, whereupon four gentlemen who were waiting for him at the end of the Rue de Beauvais joined him. The whole party set out towards the middle of the city.

Ten o’clock struck.

“Well!” said Marguerite, after the King and Henry had left, “shall we go back to table?”

“Mercy, no!” cried the duchess, “I have been too badly frightened. Long live the little house in the Rue Cloche Percée! No one can enter that without regularly besieging it, and our good men have the right to use their swords there. But what are you looking for under the furniture and in the closets, Monsieur de Coconnas?”

“I am trying to find my friend La Mole,” said the Piedmontese.

“Look in my room, monsieur,” said Marguerite, “there is a certain closet”—

“Very well,” said Coconnas, “I will go there.”

He entered the room.

“Well!” said a voice from the darkness; “where are we?”

“Oh! by Heaven! we have reached the dessert.”

“And the King of Navarre?”

“He has seen nothing. He is a perfect husband, and I wish my wife had one like him. But I fear she never will, even if she marries again.”

“And King Charles?”

“Ah! the King. That is another thing. He has taken off the husband.”

“Really?”

“It is as I tell you. Furthermore, he honored me by looking askance at me when he discovered that I belonged to Monsieur d’Alençon, and cross when he found out that I was your friend.”

“You think, then, that he has heard me spoken of?”

“I fear that he has heard nothing very good of you. But that is not the point. I believe these ladies have a pilgrimage to make to the Rue de Roi de Sicile, and that we are to take them there.”

“Why, that is impossible! You know that very well.”

“How impossible?”

“We are on duty at his royal highness’s.”

“By Heavens, that is so; I always forget that we are ranked, and that from the gentlemen we once were we have had the honor to pass into valets.”

Thereupon the two friends went and told the queen and the duchess the necessity of their being present at least when Monsieur le Duc retired.

“Very well,” said Madame de Nevers, “we will go by ourselves.”

“Might we know where you are going?” asked Coconnas.

“Oh! you are too curious!” said the duchess. “*Quære et invenies.*”

The young men bowed and went at once to Monsieur d’Alençon.

The duke seemed to be waiting for them in his cabinet.

“Ah! ah!” said he, “you are very late, gentlemen.”

“It is scarcely ten o’clock, monseigneur,” said Coconnas.

The duke drew out his watch.

“That is true,” said he. “And yet every one has gone to sleep in the Louvre.”

“Yes, monsieur, but we are here at your orders. Must we admit into the chamber of your highness the gentlemen who are with the King until he retires?”

“On the contrary, go into the small reception-room and dismiss every one.”

The young men obeyed, carried out the order, which surprised no one, because of the well-known character of the duke, and returned to him.

“Monseigneur,” said Coconnas, “your highness will probably either go to bed or work, will you not?”

“No, gentlemen; you may have leave of absence until to-morrow.”

“Well, well,” whispered Coconnas into La Mole’s ear, “the court is going to stay up all night, apparently. It will be devilishly pleasant. Let us have our share of it.”

And both young men descended the stairs four steps at a time, took their cloaks and their night swords, and hastily left the Louvre after the two ladies, whom they overtook at the corner of the Rue du Coq Saint Honoré.

Meanwhile the Duc d’Alençon, with open eyes and ears, locked himself in his room to await the unexpected events he had been promised.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MAN PROPOSES BUT GOD DISPOSES.

As the duke had said to the young men, the most profound silence reigned in the Louvre.

Marguerite and Madame de Nevers had departed for the Rue Tizon. Coconnas and La Mole had followed them. The King and Henry were knocking about the city. The Duc d’Alençon was in his room vaguely and anxiously waiting for the events which the queen mother had predicted. Catharine had gone to bed, and Madame de Sauve, seated by her, was reading some Italian stories which greatly amused the good queen. Catharine had not been in such good humor for a long time. Having done justice to a collation with her ladies in waiting, having consulted her physician and arranged the daily accounts of her household, she had ordered prayers for the success of a certain enterprise, which she said was of great importance to the happiness of her children. Under certain circumstances it was Catharine’s habit — a habit, for that matter, wholly Florentine — to have prayers and masses read the object of which was known only to God and herself.

Finally she had seen Réné, and had chosen several novelties from among her rich collection of perfumed bags.

“Let me know,” said Catharine, “if my daughter the Queen of Navarre is in her rooms; and if she is there, beg her to come to me.”

The page to whom this order was given withdrew, and an instant later he returned, accompanied by Gillonne.

“Well!” said the queen mother, “I asked for the mistress, not the servant.”

“Madame,” said Gillonne, “I thought I ought to come myself and tell your majesty that the Queen of Navarre has gone out with her friend the Duchesse de Nevers” —

“Gone out at this hour!” exclaimed Catharine, frowning; “where can she have gone?”

“To a lecture on chemistry,” replied Gillonne, “which is to be held in the Hôtel de Guise, in the pavilion occupied by Madame de Nevers.”

“When will she return?” asked the queen mother.

“The lecture will last until late into the night,” replied Gillonne, “so that probably her majesty will stay with her friend until to-morrow morning.”

“The Queen of Navarre is happy,” murmured Catharine; “she has friends and she is queen; she wears a crown, is called your majesty, yet has no subjects. She is happy indeed.”

After this remark, which made her listeners smile inwardly:

“Well,” murmured Catharine, “since she has gone out — for she has gone, you say?”

“Half an hour ago, madame.”

“Everything is for the best; you may go.”

Gillonne bowed and left.

“Go on with your reading, Charlotte,” said the queen.

Madame de Sauve continued. At the end of ten minutes Catharine interrupted the story.

“Ah, by the way,” said she, “have the guards dismissed from the corridor.”

This was the signal for which Maurevel was waiting. The order of the queen mother was carried out, and Madame de Sauve went on with her story. She had read for about a quarter of an hour without any interruption, when a prolonged and terrible scream reached the royal chamber and made the hair of those present stand on end.

The scream was followed by the sound of a pistol-shot.

“What is it?” said Catharine; “why do you stop reading, Carlotta?”

“Madame,” said the young woman, turning pale, “did you not hear?”

“What?” asked Catharine.

“That cry.”

“And that pistol-shot?” added the captain of the guards.

“A cry, a pistol-shot?” asked Catharine; “I heard nothing. Besides, is a shout or a pistol-shot such a very unusual thing at the Louvre? Read, read, Carlotta.”

“But listen, madame,” said the latter, while Monsieur de Nancey stood up, his hand on his sword, but not daring to leave without permission from the queen, “listen, I hear steps, curses.”

“Shall I go and find out about it, madame?” said De Nancey.

“Not at all, monsieur, stay where you are,” said Catharine, raising herself on one hand to give more emphasis to her order. “Who, then, would protect me in case of an alarm? It is only some drunken Swiss fighting."

The calmness of the queen, contrasted with the terror on the faces of all present, was so remarkable that, timid as she was, Madame de Sauve fixed a questioning glance on the queen.

"Why, madame, I should think they were killing some one."

"Whom do you think they are killing?"

"The King of Navarre, madame; the noise comes from the direction of his apartments."

"The fool!" murmured the queen, whose lips in spite of her self-control were beginning to move strangely, for she was muttering a prayer; "the fool sees her King of Navarre everywhere."

"My God! my God!" cried Madame de Sauve, falling back in her chair.

"It is over, it is over," said Catharine. "Captain," she continued, turning to Monsieur de Nancey, "I hope if there is any scandal in the palace you will have the guilty ones severely punished to-morrow. Go on with your reading, Carlotta." And Catharine sank back on her pillow with a calmness that greatly resembled weakness, for those present noticed great drops of perspiration rolling down her face.

Madame de Sauve obeyed this formal order, but her eyes and her voice were mere machines. Her thoughts wandered to other things which represented a terrible danger hanging over a loved head. Finally, after struggling on for several minutes, she became so oppressed between her feelings and etiquette that her words became unintelligible, the book fell from her hands, and she fainted.

Suddenly a louder noise was heard; a quick, heavy step fell on the corridor, two pistol-shots shook the windows; and Catharine, astonished at the interminable struggle, rose in terror, erect, pale, with dilating eyes. As the captain of the guard was about to hurry out, she stopped him, saying:

"Let every one remain here. I myself will go and see what is the matter."

This is what was taking place, or rather what had taken place. That morning De Mouy had received the key of Henry's room from the hands of Orthon. In this key, which was piped, he had noticed a roll of paper. He drew it out with a pin. It was the password of the Louvre for that night.

Besides, Orthon had verbally transmitted to him the words of Henry, asking De Mouy to come to the king at ten o'clock in the Louvre.

At half-past nine De Mouy put on a suit of armor, the strength of which he had already more than once had occasion to test; over this he buttoned a silk doublet, fastened on his sword, put his pistols in his belt, and over everything threw the red cloak of La Mole.

We have seen how, before going back to his rooms, Henry had thought best to pay a visit to Marguerite, and how he arrived by the secret stairway just in time to run against La Mole in Marguerite's sleeping-room, and to appear in the dining-room before the King. It was at that very moment when, thanks to the password sent by Henry, and above all to the famous red cloak, that De Mouy passed under the gate of the Louvre.

The young man went directly to the apartments of the King of Navarre, imitating as well as he could, as was his habit, the gait of La Mole. He found Orthon waiting for him in the antechamber.

"Sire de Mouy," said the mountaineer, "the king has gone out, but he told me to admit you, and to tell you to wait for him. If he should be late in returning, he wants you, you know, to lie down on his bed."

De Mouy entered without asking for further explanation, for what Orthon had just told him was only the repetition of what he had already heard that morning. In order to pass away the time he took a pen and ink and, approaching a fine map of France which hung on the wall, he set to work to count and determine the stopping-places between Paris and Pau. But this was only the work of a quarter of an hour, and then De Mouy did not know what to do.

He made two or three rounds of the room, rubbed his eyes, yawned, sat down, got up, and sat down again. Finally, taking advantage of Henry's invitation, and the familiarity which existed between princes and their gentlemen, he placed his pistols and the lamp on a table, stretched himself out on the great bed with the sombre hangings which furnished the rear of the room, laid his sword by his side, and, sure of not being surprised since a servant was in the adjoining room, he fell into a pleasant sleep, the noise of which soon made the vast canopy ring with its echoes. De Mouy snored like a regular old soldier, and in this he could have vied with the King of Navarre himself.

It was then that six men, their swords in their hands and their knives at their belts, glided silently into the corridor which communicated by a small door with the apartments of Catharine and by a large one with those of Henry.

One of the six men walked ahead of the others. Besides his bare sword and his dagger, which was as strong as a hunting-knife, he carried his faithful pistols fastened to his belt by silver hooks.

This man was Maurevel. Having reached Henry’s door, he stopped.

“Are you perfectly sure that the sentinels are not in the corridor?” he asked of the one who apparently commanded the little band.

“Not a single one is at his post,” replied the lieutenant.

“Very good,” said Maurevel. “Now there is nothing further except to find out one thing — that is, if the man we are looking for is in his room.”

“But,” said the lieutenant, arresting the hand which Maurevel had laid on the handle of the door, “but, captain, these apartments are those of the King of Navarre.”

“Who said they were not?” asked Maurevel.

The guards looked at one another in amazement, and the lieutenant stepped back.

“What!” exclaimed he, “arrest some one at this hour, in the Louvre, and in the apartments of the King of Navarre?”

“What should you say,” said Maurevel, “were I to tell you that the one you are about to arrest is the King of Navarre himself?”

“I should say, captain, that it is serious business and that without an order signed by King Charles IX.” —

“Read this,” said Maurevel.

And drawing from his doublet the order which Catharine had given him he handed it to the lieutenant.

“Very well,” replied the latter after he had read it. “I have nothing further to say.”

“And you are ready?”

“I am ready.”

“And you?” continued Maurevel, turning to the other five sbirros.

They all saluted respectfully.

“Listen to me, then, gentlemen,” said Maurevel; “this is my plan: two of you will remain at this door, two at the door of the sleeping-room, and two will go with me.”

“Afterwards?” said the lieutenant.

“Pay close attention to this: we are ordered to prevent the prisoner from calling out, shouting, or resisting. Any infraction of this order is to be punished by death.”

“Well, well, he has full permission,” said the lieutenant to the man chosen by him to follow Maurevel into the king’s room.

“Full,” said Maurevel.

“Poor devil of the King of Navarre!” said one of the men. “It was written above that he should not escape this.”

“And here too,” said Maurevel, taking Catharine’s order from the hands of the lieutenant and returning it to his breast.

Maurevel inserted the key Catharine had given him into the lock, and leaving two men at the outer door, as had been agreed on, he entered the antechamber with the four others.

“Ah! ah!” said Maurevel, hearing the noisy breathing of the sleeper, the sound of which reached even as far as that, “it seems that we shall find what we are looking for.”

Orthon, thinking it was his master returning, at once started up and found himself face to face with five armed men in the first chamber.

At sight of the sinister face of Maurevel, who was called the King’s Slayer, the faithful servant sprang back, and placing himself before the second door:

“Who are you?” said he, “and what do you want?”

“In the King’s name,” replied Maurevel, “where is your master?”

“My master?”

“Yes, the King of Navarre.”

“The King of Navarre is not in his room,” said Orthon, barring the door more than ever, “so you cannot enter.”

“Excuses, lies!” said Maurevel. “Come, stand back!”

The Béarnais people are stubborn; this one growled like one of his own mountain dogs, and far from being intimidated:

“You shall not enter,” said he; “the king is out.”

And he clung to the door.

Maurevel made a sign. The four men seized the stubborn servant, snatched him from the door-sill to which he was clinging, and as he started to open his mouth and cry out, Maurevel clapped a hand to his lips.

Orthon bit furiously at the assassin, who dropped his hand with a dull cry, and brought down the handle of his sword on the head of the servant. Orthon staggered and fell back, shouting, “Help! help! help!”

Then his voice died away. He had fainted.

The assassins stepped over his body, two stopped at the second door, and two entered the sleeping-room with Maurevel.

In the glow of the lamp burning on the night table they saw the bed.

The curtains were drawn.

"Oh! oh!" said the lieutenant, "he has stopped snoring, apparently."

"Be quick!" cried Maurevel.

At this, a sharp cry, resembling the roar of a lion rather than a human voice, came from behind the curtains, which were violently thrown back, and a man appeared sitting there armed with a cuirass, his head covered with a helmet which reached to his eyes. Two pistols were in his hand, and his sword lay across his knees.

No sooner did Maurevel perceive this figure and recognize De Mouy than he felt his hair rise on end; he became frightfully pale, foam sprang to his lips, and he stepped back as if he had come face to face with a ghost. Suddenly the armed figure rose and stepped forward as Maurevel drew back, so that from the position of threatener, the latter now became the one threatened, and *vice versa*.

"Ah, scoundrel!" cried De Mouy, in a dull voice, "so you have come to murder me as you murdered my father!"

The two guards who had entered the room with Maurevel alone heard these terrible words. As they were uttered a pistol was placed to Maurevel's forehead. The latter sank to his knees just as De Mouy put his hand on the trigger; the shot was fired and one of the guards who stood behind him and whom he had unmasked by this movement dropped to the floor, struck to the heart. At the same instant Maurevel fired back, but the ball glanced off De Mouy's cuirass.

Then, measuring the distance, De Mouy sprang forward and with the edge of his broadsword split open the head of the second guard, and turning towards Maurevel crossed swords with him.

The struggle was brief but terrible. At the fourth pass Maurevel felt the cold steel in his throat. He uttered a stifled cry and fell backwards, upsetting the lamp, which went out in the fall.

At once De Mouy, strong and agile as one of Homer's heroes, took advantage of the darkness and sprang, with head lowered, into the antechamber, knocked down one guard, pushed aside the other, and shot like an arrow between those at the outer door. He escaped two pistol-shots, the balls of which grazed the wall of the corridor, and from that moment was safe, for one loaded pistol still was left him, besides the sword which had dealt such terrible blows.

For an instant he hesitated, undecided whether to go to Monsieur d’Alençon’s, the door of whose room he thought had just opened, or to try and escape from the Louvre. He determined on the latter course, continued on his way, slow at first, jumped ten steps at a time, and reaching the gate uttered the two passwords and rushed on, shouting out:

“Go upstairs; there is murder going on by order of the King.”

Taking advantage of the amazement produced on the sentinel by his words and the sound of the pistol-shots, he ran on and disappeared in the Rue du Coq without having received a scratch.

It was at this moment that Catharine stopped the captain of the guards, saying:

“Stay here; I myself will go and see what is the matter.”

“But, madame,” replied the captain, “the danger your majesty runs compels me to follow you.”

“Stay here, monsieur,” said Catharine, in a still more imperious tone, “stay here. There is a more powerful protection around kings than the human sword.”

The captain remained where he was.

Taking a lamp, Catharine slipped her bare feet into a pair of velvet slippers, left her room, and reaching the corridor, still full of smoke, advanced as impassible and as cold as a shadow towards the apartments of the King of Navarre.

Silence reigned supreme.

Catharine reached the door, crossed the threshold, and first saw Orthon, who had fainted in the antechamber.

“Ah! ah!” said she, “here is the servant; further on we shall probably find the master.” She entered the second door.

Then her foot ran against a corpse; she lowered her lamp; it was the guard who had had his head split open. He was quite dead.

A few feet further on the lieutenant, who had been struck by a bullet, was drawing his last breath.

Finally, before the bed lay a man whose face was as pale as death and who was bleeding from a double wound in his throat. He was clinching his hands convulsively in his efforts to rise.

It was Maurevel.

Catharine shuddered. She saw the empty bed, she looked around the room seeking in vain for the body she hoped to find among the three corpses.

Maurevel recognized Catharine. His eyes were horribly dilated and he made a despairing gesture towards her.

“Well,” said she in a whisper, “where is he? what has happened? Unfortunate man! have you let him escape?”

Maurevel strove to speak, but an unintelligible sound came from his throat, a bloody foam covered his lips, and he shook his head in sign of inability and pain.

“Speak!” cried Catharine, “speak! if only one word!”

Maurevel pointed to his wound, again made several inarticulate gasps, which ended in a hoarse rattle, and fainted.

Catharine looked around her. She was surrounded by the bodies of dead and dying; blood flowed in every direction, and the silence of death hovered over everything.

Once again she spoke to Maurevel, but failed to rouse him; he was not only silent but motionless; a paper was in his doublet. It was the order of arrest signed by the King. Catharine seized it and hid it in her breast. Just then she heard a light step behind her, and turning, she saw the Duc d’Alençon at the door. In spite of himself he had been drawn thither by the noise, and the sight before him fascinated him.

“You here?” said she.

“Yes, madame. For God’s sake what has happened?”

“Go back to your room, François; you will know soon enough.”

D’Alençon was not as ignorant of the affair as Catharine supposed.

At the sound of the first steps in the corridor he had listened. Seeing some men enter the apartments of the King of Navarre, and by connecting this with some words Catharine had uttered, he had guessed what was about to take place, and was rejoiced at having so dangerous an enemy destroyed by a hand stronger than his own. Before long the noises of pistol-shots and the rapid steps of a man running had attracted his attention, and he had seen disappearing in the light space caused by the opening of the door leading to the stairway the red cloak too well known not to be recognized.

“De Mouy!” he cried, “De Mouy in the apartments of the King of Navarre! Why, that is impossible! Can it be Monsieur de la Mole?”

He grew alarmed. Remembering that the young man had been recommended to him by Marguerite herself, and wishing to make sure that it was he whom he had just seen, he ascended hurriedly to the chamber of the two young men. It was vacant. But in a corner he found the famous red cloak hanging against the wall. His suspicions were confirmed. It was not La Mole, but De Mouy. Pale and trembling lest the Huguenot should be discovered, and would betray the secrets of the conspiracy, he rushed to the gate of the Louvre. There he was told that the red cloak had escaped safe and sound, shouting out as he passed that some one was being murdered in the Louvre by order of the King.

“He is mistaken,” murmured D’Alençon; “it is by order of the queen mother.”

Returning to the scene of combat, he found Catharine wandering like a hyena among the dead.

At the order from his mother the young man returned to his rooms, affecting calmness and obedience, in spite of the tumultuous thoughts which were passing through his mind.

In despair at the failure of this new attempt, Catharine called the captain of the guards, had the bodies removed, gave orders that Maurevel, who was only wounded, be carried to his home, and told them not to waken the King.

“Oh!” she murmured, as she returned to her rooms, her head sunk on her bosom, “he has again escaped. The hand of God is over this man. He will reign! he will reign!”

Entering her room, she passed her hand across her brow, and assumed an ordinary smile.

“What was the matter, madame?” asked every one except Madame de Sauve, who was too frightened to ask any questions.

“Nothing,” replied Catharine; “a noise, that was all.”

“Oh!” cried Madame de Sauve, suddenly pointing to the floor, “your majesty says there is nothing the matter, and every one of your majesty’s steps leaves a trace of blood on the carpet!”

CHAPTER XXXV.

A NIGHT OF KINGS.

Charles IX. walked along with Henry leaning on his arm, followed by his four gentlemen and preceded by two torch-bearers.

“When I leave the Louvre,” said the poor King, “I feel a pleasure similar to that which comes to me when I enter a beautiful forest. I breathe, I live, I am free.”

Henry smiled.

“In that case,” said he, “your Majesty would be in your element among the mountains of the Béarn.”

“Yes, and I understand that you want to go back to them; but if you are very anxious to do so, Henriot,” added Charles, laughing, “my advice is to be careful, for my mother Catharine loves you so dearly that it is absolutely impossible for her to get along without you.”

“What does your Majesty plan to do this evening?” asked Henry, changing this dangerous conversation.

“I want to have you meet some one, Henriot, and you shall give me your opinion.”

“I am at your Majesty’s orders.”

“To the right! to the right! We will take the Rue des Barres.”

The two kings, followed by their escort, had passed the Rue de la Savonnerie, when in front of the Hôtel de Condé they saw two men, wrapped in large cloaks, coming out of a secret door which one of them noiselessly closed behind him.

“Oh! oh!” said the King to Henry, who as usual had seen everything, but had not spoken, “this deserves attention.”

“Why do you say that, sire?” asked the King of Navarre.

“It is not on your account, Henriot. You are sure of your wife,” added Charles with a smile; “but your cousin De Condé is not sure of his, or if so, he is making a mistake, the devil!”

“But how do you know, sire, that it is Madame de Condé whom these gentlemen have been visiting?”

"Instinct tells me. The fact that the men stood in the doorway without moving until they saw us; then the cut of the shorter one's cloak — by Heaven! that would be strange!"

"What?"

"Nothing. An idea I had, that is all; let us go on."

He walked up to the two men, who, seeing him, started to walk away.

"Hello, gentlemen!" cried the King; "stop!"

"Are you speaking to us?" asked a voice which made Charles and his companion tremble.

"Well, Henriot," said Charles, "do you recognize the voice now?"

"Sire," said Henry, "if your brother the Duc d'Anjou was not at La Rochelle, I would swear it was he speaking."

"Well," said Charles, "he is not at La Rochelle, that is all."

"But who is with him?"

"Do you not recognize his companion?"

"No, sire."

"Yet his figure is unmistakable. Wait, you shall see who he is — hello, there! I tell you," cried the King, "do you not hear, by Heaven?"

"Are you the watch, that you order us to stop?" said the taller of the two men, freeing his arm from the folds of his cloak.

"Pretend that we are the watch," said the King, "and stop when we tell you to do so."

Leaning over to Henry's ear, he added:

"Now you will see the volcano send forth its fire."

"There are eight of you," said the taller of the two men, this time showing not only his arm but his face, "but were you a hundred, pass on!"

"Ah! ah! the Duc de Guise!" said Henry.

"Ah! our cousin from Lorraine," said the King; "at last you will meet! How fortunate!"

"The King!" cried the duke.

At these words the other man covered himself with his cloak and stood motionless, having first uncovered out of respect.

"Sire," said the Duc de Guise, "I have just been paying a visit to my sister-in-law, Madame de Condé."

"Yes — and you brought one of your gentlemen with you? Which one?"

"Sire," replied the duke, "your Majesty does not know him."

"We will meet him, however," said the King.

Walking up to the other figure, he signed to one of the lackeys to bring a torch.

“Pardon me, brother!” said the Duc d’Anjou, opening his cloak and bowing with poorly disguised anger.

“Ah! ah! Henry, is it you? But no, it is not possible, I am mistaken — my brother of Anjou would not have gone to see any one else before first calling on me. He knows that for royal princes, returning to the capital, Paris has but one entrance, the gate of the Louvre.”

“Pardon me, sire,” said the Duc d’Anjou; “I beg your Majesty to excuse my thoughtlessness.”

“Ah, yes!” replied the King, mockingly; “and what were you doing, brother, at the Hôtel de Condé?”

“Why,” said the King of Navarre in his sly way, “what your Majesty intimated just now.”

And leaning over to the King he ended his sentence in a burst of laughter.

“What is it?” asked the Duc de Guise, haughtily; for like every one else at court, he had a way of treating the poor King of Navarre very rudely, “why should I not go and see my sister-in-law. Does not Monsieur le Duc d’Alençon visit his?”

Henry flushed slightly.

“What sister-in-law?” asked Charles. “I know none except Queen Elizabeth.”

“Pardon, sire! it was your sister I should have said — Madame Marguerite, whom we saw pass in her litter as we came by here half an hour ago. She was accompanied by two courtiers who rode on either side of her.”

“Indeed!” said Charles. “What do you say to that, Henry?”

“That the Queen of Navarre is perfectly free to go where she pleases, but I doubt if she has left the Louvre.”

“Well, I am sure she did,” said the Duc de Guise.

“And I too,” said the Duc d’Anjou, “from the fact that the litter stopped in the Rue Cloche Percée.”

“Your sister-in-law, not this one,” said Henry, pointing to the Hôtel de Condé, “but that one,” turning in the direction of the Hôtel de Guise, “must also be of the party, for we left them together, and, as you know, they are inseparable.”

“I do not know what your majesty means,” replied the Duc de Guise.

"On the contrary," said the king, "nothing is simpler. That is why a courtier was riding at either side of the litter."

"Well!" said the duke, "if there is any scandal concerning my sisters-in-law, let us beg the King to withhold justice."

"Well, by Heaven," said Henry, "let us leave Madame de Condé and Madame de Nevers; the King is not anxious about his sister — and I have confidence in my wife."

"No, no," said Charles, "I want to make sure of it; but let us attend to the matter ourselves. The litter stopped in the Rue Cloche Percée, you say, cousin?"

"Yes, sire."

"Do you know the house?"

"Yes, sire."

"Well, let us go to it. And if in order to find out who is in it, it is necessary to burn it down, we will burn it."

It was with this end in view, which was rather discouraging for the tranquillity of those concerned, that the four chief lords of the Christian world set out to the Rue Saint Antoine.

They reached the Rue Cloche Percée. Charles, who wished to work privately, dismissed the gentlemen of his suite, saying that they might have the rest of the night to themselves, but for them to be at the Bastille with two horses at six o'clock in the morning.

There were only three houses in the Rue Cloche Percée. The search was much less difficult as two of the buildings were perfectly willing to open their doors. One of the houses faced the Rue Saint Antoine and the other the Rue du Roi de Sicile.

As to the third house, that was a different matter. It was the one which was guarded by the German janitor, and this janitor was not easily managed. That night Paris seemed destined to offer memorable examples of conjugal fidelity. In vain did Monsieur de Guise threaten in his purest Saxon; in vain did Henry of Anjou offer a purse filled with gold; in vain Charles went so far as to say that he was lieutenant of the watch; the brave German paid attention neither to the statement, the offer, nor the threats. Seeing that they insisted, and in a way that was becoming importunate, he slipped the nose of a gun under the iron bars, a move which brought forth bursts of laughter from three of the four visitors. Henry of Navarre stood apart, as if the affair had no interest for him. But as the weapon could not be turned between the bars, it was scarcely dangerous for any except a blind man, who might stand directly in front of it.

Seeing that the porter was neither to be intimidated, bribed, nor persuaded, the Duc de Guise pretended to leave with his companions; but the retreat did not last long. At the corner of the Rue Saint Antoine the duke found what he sought. This was a rock similar in size to those which three thousand years before had been moved by Ajax, son of Telamon, and Diomed. The duke raised it to his shoulder and came back, signing to his companions to follow. Just then the janitor, who had seen those he took for malefactors depart, closed the door. But he had not time to draw the bolts before the Duc de Guise took advantage of the moment, and hurled his veritable living catapult against the door. The lock broke, carrying away a portion of the wall to which it had been fastened. The door sprang open, knocking down the German, who, in falling, gave a terrible cry. This cry awakened the garrison, which otherwise would have run great risk of being surprised.

At that moment La Mole and Marguerite were translating an idyl of Theocritus, and Coconnas, pretending that he too was a Greek, was drinking some strong wine from Syracuse with Henriette. The scientific and bacchanalian conversation was violently interrupted.

La Mole and Coconnas at once extinguished the candles, and opening the windows, sprang out on the balcony. Then perceiving four men in the darkness, they set to work to hurl at them everything they had at hand, in the meantime making a frightful noise with blows from the flat of their swords, which, however, struck nothing but the wall. Charles, the most infuriated of the besiegers, received a sharp blow on the shoulder, the Duc d’Anjou a bowl full of orange and lemon marmalade, and the Duc de Guise a leg of venison. Henry received nothing. He was downstairs questioning the porter, whom Monsieur de Guise had strapped to the door, and who continued to answer by his eternal “*Ich verstehe nicht.*” The women encouraged the besieged by handing them projectiles, which succeeded one another like hailstones.

“The devil!” exclaimed Charles IX., as a table struck his head, driving his hat over his eyes, “if they don’t open the door pretty soon I will have them all hanged.”

“My brother!” whispered Marguerite to La Mole.

“The King!” cried the latter to Henriette.

“The King! the King!” repeated Henriette to Coconnas, who was dragging a chest to the window, and who was trying to exterminate the Duc de Guise. Without knowing who the latter was he was having a private struggle with him.

“The King, I tell you,” repeated Henriette.

Coconnas let go of the chest and looked up in amazement.

“The King?” said he.

“Yes, the King.”

“Then let us hide.”

“Yes. La Mole and Marguerite have already fled. Come!”

“Where?”

“Come, I tell you.”

And seizing him by the hand, Henriette pushed Coconnas through the secret door which connected with the adjoining house, and all four, having locked this door behind them, escaped into the Rue Tizon.

“Oh! oh!” said Charles, “I think that the garrison has surrendered.”

They waited a few minutes. No sound reached the besiegers.

“They are preparing some ruse,” said the Duc de Guise.

“It is more likely that they have recognized my brother’s voice and have fled,” said the Duc d’Anjou.

“They would have to pass by here,” said Charles.

“Yes,” said the Duc d’Anjou, “unless the house has two exits.”

“Cousin,” said the King, “take up your stone again and hurl it against the other door as you did at this.”

The duke thought it unnecessary to resort to such means, and as he had noticed that the second door was not as solid as the first he broke it down by a simple kick.

“The torches! the torches!” cried the King.

The lackeys approached. The torches were out, but the men had everything necessary for relighting them. This was done. Charles IX. took one and handed the other to the Duc d’Anjou.

The Duc de Guise entered first, sword in hand.

Henry brought up the rear.

They reached the first floor.

In the dining-room the table was set or rather upset, for it was the supper which had furnished the projectiles. The candlesticks were overturned, the furniture topsy-turvy, and everything which was not silver plate lay in fragments.

They entered the reception-room, but found no more clue there than in the other room as to the identity of the revellers. Some Greek and Latin books and several musical instruments were all they saw.

The sleeping-room was more silent still. A night lamp burned in an alabaster globe suspended from the ceiling; but it was evident that the room had not been occupied.

“There is a second door,” said the King.

“Very likely,” said the Duc d’Anjou.

“But where is it?” asked the Duc de Guise.

They looked everywhere, but could not find it.

“Where is the janitor?” asked the King.

“I bound him to the gate,” said the Duc de Guise.

“Ask him, cousin.”

“He will not answer.”

“Bah! we will have a dry fire built around his legs,” said the King, laughing, “then he will speak.”

Henry glanced hurriedly out of the window.

“He is not there,” said he.

“Who untied him?” asked the Duc de Guise, quickly.

“The devil!” exclaimed the King, “and we know nothing as yet.”

“Well!” said Henry, “you see very clearly, sire, that there is nothing to prove that my wife and Monsieur de Guise’s sister-in-law have been in this house.”

“That is so,” said Charles. “The Scriptures tell us that there are three things which leave no trace — the bird in the air, the fish in the sea, and the woman — no, I am wrong, the man, in” —

“So,” interrupted Henry, “what we had better do is” —

“Yes,” said Charles, “what we had better do is for me to look after my bruise, for you, D’Anjou, to wipe off your orange marmalade, and for you, De Guise, to get rid of the grease.” Thereupon they left without even troubling to close the door. Reaching the Rue Saint Antoine:

“Where are you bound for, gentlemen?” asked the King of the Duc d’Anjou and the Duc de Guise.

“Sire, we are going to the house of Nantouillet, who is expecting my Lorraine cousin and myself to supper. Will your Majesty come with us?”

“No, thanks, we are going in a different direction. Will you take one of my torch-bearers?”

“Thank you, no, sire,” said the Duc d’Anjou, hastily.

“Good; he is afraid I will spy on him,” whispered Charles to the King of Navarre.

Then taking the latter by the arm:

“Come, Henriot,” said he, “I will take you to supper to-night.”

“Are we not going back to the Louvre?” asked Henry.

“No, I tell you, you stupid! Come with me, since I tell you to come. Come!”

And he dragged Henry down the Rue Geoffroy Lasnier.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE ANAGRAM.

The Rue Garnier sur l'Eau runs into the Rue Geoffroy Lasnier, and the Rue des Barres lies at right angles to the former.

On the right, a short distance down the Rue de la Mortellerie, stands a small house in the centre of a garden surrounded by a high wall, which has but one entrance. Charles drew a key from his pocket and inserted it into the lock. The gate was unbolted and immediately opened. Telling Henry and the lackey bearing the torch to enter, the King closed and locked the gate behind him.

Light came from one small window which Charles smilingly pointed out to Henry.

"Sire, I do not understand," said the latter.

"But you will, Henriot."

The King of Navarre looked at Charles in amazement. His voice and his face had assumed an expression of gentleness so different from usual that Henry scarcely recognized him.

"Henriot," said the King, "I told you that when I left the Louvre I came out of hell. When I enter here I am in paradise."

"Sire," said Henry, "I am happy that your Majesty has thought me worthy of taking this trip to Heaven with you."

"The road thither is a narrow one," said the King, turning to a small stairway, "but nothing can be compared to it."

"Who is the angel who guards the entrance to your Eden, sire?"

"You shall see," replied Charles IX.

Signing to Henry to follow him noiselessly, he opened first one door, then another, and finally paused on a threshold.

"Look!" said he.

Henry approached and gazed on one of the most beautiful pictures he had ever seen.

A young woman of eighteen or nineteen lay sleeping, her head resting on the foot of a little bed in which a child was asleep. The woman held its little feet close to her lips, while her long hair fell over her shoulders like a flood of gold. It was like one of Albane’s pictures of the Virgin and the Child Jesus.

“Oh, sire,” said the King of Navarre, “who is this lovely creature?”

“The angel of my paradise, Henriot, the only one who loves me.”

Henry smiled.

“Yes,” said Charles, “for she loved me before she knew I was King.”

“And since she has known it?”

“Well, since she has known it,” said Charles, with a smile which showed that royalty sometimes weighed heavily on him, “since she has known it she loves me still; so you may judge.”

The King approached the woman softly and pressed a kiss as light as that which a bee gives to a lily on her rosy cheek.

Yet, light as it was, she awakened at once.

“Charles!” she murmured, opening her eyes.

“You see,” said the King, “she calls me Charles. The queen says ‘sire’!”

“Oh!” cried the young woman, “you are not alone, my King.”

“No, my sweet Marie, I wanted to bring you another king, happier than myself because he has no crown; more unhappy than I because he has no Marie Touchet. God makes compensation for everything.”

“Sire, is it the King of Navarre?” asked Marie.

“Yes, my child; come here, Henriot.” The King of Navarre drew near; Charles took him by the hand.

“See this hand, Marie,” said he, “it is the hand of a good brother and a loyal friend. Were it not for this hand” —

“Well, sire?”

“Well, had it not been for this hand to-day, Marie, our child would have no father.”

Marie uttered a cry, fell on her knees, and seizing Henry’s hand covered it with kisses.

“Very good, Marie, very good,” said Charles.

“What have you done to thank him, sire?”

“I have done for him what he did for me.”

Henry looked at Charles in astonishment.

“Some day you will know what I mean, Henriot; meanwhile come here and see.” He approached the bed, on which the child still slept.

“Ah!” said he, “if this little fellow were in the Louvre instead of here in this little house in the Rue des Barres, many things would be changed for the present as well as for the future perhaps.”

“Sire,” said Marie, “if your Majesty is willing, I prefer him to stay here; he sleeps better.”

“Let us not disturb his slumber, then,” said the King; “it is so sweet to sleep when one does not dream!”

“Well, sire,” said Marie, pointing to a door opening out of the room.

“Yes, you are right, Marie,” said Charles IX., “let us have supper.”

“My well-beloved Charles,” said Marie, “you will ask the king your brother to excuse me, will you not?”

“Why?”

“For having dismissed our servants, sire,” continued Marie, turning to the King of Navarre; “you must know that Charles wants to be served by me alone.”

“*Ventre saint gris!*” said Henry, “I should think so!”

Both men entered the dining-room. The mother, anxious and careful, laid a warm blanket over the little Charles, who, thanks to the sound sleep of childhood, so envied by his father, had not wakened.

Marie rejoined them.

“There are only two covers!” said the King.

“Permit me,” said Marie, “to serve your majesties.”

“Now,” said Charles, “this is where you cause me trouble, Henriot.”

“How so, sire?”

“Did you not hear?”

“Forgive me, Charles, forgive me.”

“Yes, I will forgive you. But sit here, near me, between us.”

“I will obey,” said Marie.

She brought a plate, sat down between the two kings, and served them.

“Is it not good, Henriot,” said Charles, “to have one place in the world in which one can eat and drink without needing any one to taste the meats and wines beforehand?”

“Sire,” said Henry, smiling, and by the smile replying to the constant fear in his own mind, “believe me, I appreciate your happiness more than any one.”

“And tell her, Henriot, that in order for us to live happily, she must not mingle in politics. Above all, she must not become acquainted with my mother.”

“Queen Catharine loves your Majesty so passionately that she would be jealous of any other love,” replied Henry, finding by a subterfuge the means of avoiding the dangerous confidence of the King.

“Marie,” said the latter, “I have brought you one of the finest and the wittiest men I know. At court, you see, and this is saying a great deal, he puts every one in the shade. I alone have clearly understood, not his heart, perhaps, but his mind.”

“Sire,” said Henry, “I am sorry that in exaggerating the one as you do, you mistrust the other.”

“I exaggerate nothing, Henriot,” said the King; “besides, you will be known some day.”

Then turning to the young woman:

“He makes delightful anagrams. Ask him to make one of your name. I will answer that he will do it.”

“Oh, what could you expect to find in the name of a poor girl like me? What gentle thought could there be in the letters with which chance spelled Marie Touchet?”

“Oh! the anagram from this name, sire,” said Henry, “is so easy that there is no great merit in finding it.”

“Ah! ah! it is already found,” said Charles. “You see — Marie.”

Henry drew his tablets from the pocket of his doublet, tore out a paper, and below the name *Marie Touchet* wrote *Je charme tout*. Then he handed the paper to the young woman.

“Truly,” she cried, “it is impossible!”

“What has he found?” asked Charles.

“Sire, I dare not repeat it.”

“Sire,” said Henry, “in the name Marie Touchet there is, letter for letter, by changing the ‘i’ into a ‘j,’ as is often done, *Je charme tout*.” (I charm all.)

“Yes,” exclaimed Charles, “letter for letter. I want this to be your motto, Marie, do you hear? Never was one better deserved. Thanks, Henriot. Marie, I will give it to you written in diamonds.”

The supper over, two o’clock struck from Notre-Dame.

“Now,” said Charles, “in return for this compliment, Marie, you will give the king an armchair, in which he can sleep until daybreak; but let it be some distance from us, because he snores frightfully. Then if you waken before I do, you will rouse me, for at six o’clock we have to be at the Bastille. Good-night, Henriot. Make yourself as comfortable as possible. But,” he added, approaching the King of Navarre and laying his hand on his shoulder, “for your life, Henry, — do you hear? for your life, — do not leave here without me, especially to return to the Louvre.”

Henry had suspected too many things in what still remained unexplained to him to disobey such advice. Charles IX. entered his room, and Henry, the sturdy mountaineer, settled himself in an armchair, in which he soon justified the precaution taken by his brother-in-law in keeping at a distance.

At dawn he was awakened by Charles. As he had not undressed, it did not take him long to finish his toilet. The King was more happy and smiling than he ever was at the Louvre. The hours spent by him in that little house in the Rue des Barres were his hours of sunshine.

Both men went out through the sleeping-room. The young woman was still in bed. The child was asleep in its cradle. Both were smiling.

Charles looked at them for a moment with infinite tenderness.

Then turning to the King of Navarre:

“Henriot,” said he, “if you ever hear what I did for you last night, or if misfortune come to me, remember this child asleep in its cradle.”

Then kissing both mother and child on the forehead, without giving Henry time to question him:

“Good-by, my angels,” said he, and went out.

Henry followed, deep in thought. The horses were waiting for them at the Bastille, held by the gentlemen to whom Charles IX. had given the order.

Charles signed to Henry to mount, sprang into his own saddle, and riding through the garden of the Arbalite, followed the outside highways.

“Where are we going?” asked Henry.

“We are going to see if the Duc d’Anjou returned for Madame de Condé alone,” replied Charles, “and if there is as much ambition as love in his heart, which I greatly doubt.”

Henry did not understand the answer, but followed Charles in silence.

They reached the Marais, and as from the shadow of the palisades they could see all which at that time was called the Faubourg Saint Laurent, Charles pointed out to Henry through the grayish mist of the morning some men wrapped in great cloaks and wearing fur caps. They were on horseback, and rode ahead of a wagon which was heavily laden. As they drew near they became outlined more clearly, and one could see another man in a long brown cloak, his face hidden by a French hat, riding and talking with them.

“Ah! ah!” said Charles, smiling, “I thought so.”

“Well, sire,” said Henry, “if I am not mistaken, that rider in the brown cloak is the Duc d’Anjou.”

“Yes,” said Charles IX. “Turn out a little, Henriot, I do not want him to see us.”

“But,” asked Henry, “who are the men in gray cloaks with fur caps?”

“Those men,” said Charles, “are Polish ambassadors, and in that wagon is a crown. And now,” said he, urging his horse to a gallop, and turning into the road of the Porte du Temple, “come, Henriot, I have seen all that I wanted to see.”

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE RETURN TO THE LOUVRE.

When Catharine thought that everything was over in the King of Navarre's rooms, when the dead guards had been removed, when Maurevel had been carried to her apartments, and the carpet had been cleaned, she dismissed her women, for it was almost midnight, and strove to sleep. But the shock had been too violent, and the disappointment too keen.

That detested Henry, constantly escaping her snares, which were usually fatal, seemed protected by some invincible power which Catharine persisted in calling chance, although in her heart of hearts a voice told her that its true name was destiny. The thought that the report of the new attempt in spreading throughout the Louvre and beyond the Louvre would give a greater confidence than ever in the future to Henry and the Huguenots exasperated her, and at that moment had chance, against which she was so unfortunately struggling, delivered her enemy into her hands, surely with the little Florentine dagger she wore at her belt she could have thwarted that destiny so favorable to the King of Navarre.

The hours of the night, hours so long for one waiting and watching struck one after another without Catharine's being able to close her eyes. A whole world of new plans unrolled in her visionary mind during those nocturnal hours. Finally at daybreak she rose, dressed herself, and went to the apartments of Charles IX.

The guards, who were accustomed to see her go to the King at all hours of the day and night, let her pass. She crossed the antechamber, therefore, and reached the armory. But there she found the nurse of Charles, who was awake.

"My son?" said the queen.

"Madame, he gave orders that no one was to be admitted to his room before eight o'clock."

"This order was not for me, nurse."

"It was for every one, madame."

Catharine smiled.

"Yes, I know very well," said the nurse, "that no one has any right to oppose your majesty; I therefore beg you to listen to the prayer of a poor woman and to refrain from entering."

"Nurse, I must speak to my son."

"Madame, I will not open the door except on a formal order from your majesty."

"Open, nurse," said Catharine, "I order you to open!"

At this voice, more respected and much more feared in the Louvre than that of Charles himself, the nurse handed the key to Catharine, but the queen had no need of it. She drew from her pocket her own key of the room, and under its heavy pressure the door yielded.

The room was vacant, Charles's bed was untouched, and his greyhound Actéon, asleep on the bear-skin that covered the step of the bed, rose and came forward to lick the ivory hands of Catharine.

"Ah!" said the queen, frowning, "he is out! I will wait for him."

She seated herself, pensive and gloomy, at the window which overlooked the court of the Louvre, and from which the chief entrance was visible.

For two hours she sat there, as motionless and pale as a marble statue, when at length she perceived a troop of horsemen returning to the Louvre, at whose head she recognized Charles and Henry of Navarre.

Then she understood all. Instead of arguing with her in regard to the arrest of his brother-in-law, Charles had taken him away and so had saved him.

"Blind, blind, blind!" she murmured. Then she waited. An instant later footsteps were heard in the adjoining room, which was the armory.

"But, sire," Henry was saying, "now that we have returned to the Louvre, tell me why you took me away and what is the service you have rendered me."

"No, no, Henriot," replied Charles, laughing, "some day, perhaps, you will find out; but for the present it must remain a mystery. Know only that for the time being you have in all probability brought about a fierce quarrel between my mother and me."

As he uttered these words, Charles raised the curtain and found himself face to face with Catharine.

Behind him and above his shoulder rose the pale, anxious countenance of the Béarnais.

"Ah! you here, madame?" said Charles IX., frowning.

“Yes, my son,” said Catharine, “I want to speak to you.”

“To me?”

“To you alone.”

“Well, well,” said Charles, turning to his brother-in-law, “since there is no escape, the sooner the better.”

“I will leave you, sire,” said Henry.

“Yes, yes, leave us,” replied Charles; “and as you are a Catholic, Henriot, go and hear a mass for me while I stay for the sermon.”

Henry bowed and withdrew.

Charles IX. went directly to the point.

“Well, madame,” said he, trying to make a joke of the affair. “By Heaven! you are waiting to scold me, are you not? I wickedly upset your little plan. Well, the devil! I could not let the man who had just saved my life be arrested and taken to the Bastille. Nor did I want to quarrel with my mother. I am a good son. Moreover,” he added in a low tone, “the Lord punishes children who quarrel with their mothers. Witness my brother François II. Forgive me, therefore, frankly, and confess that the joke was a good one.”

“Sire,” said Catharine, “your Majesty is mistaken; it is not a joke.”

“Yes, yes! and you will end by looking at it in that way, or the devil take me!”

“Sire, by your blunder you have baffled a project which would have led to an important discovery.”

“Bah! a project. Are you embarrassed because of a baffled project, mother? You can make twenty others, and in those, — well, I promise I will second you.”

“Now that you will second me it is too late, for he is warned and will be on his guard.”

“Well,” said the King, “let us come to the point. What have you against Henriot?”

“The fact that he conspires.”

“Yes, I know that this is your constant accusation; but does not every one conspire more or less in this charming royal household called the Louvre?”

“But he conspires more than any one, and he is much more dangerous than one imagines.”

“A regular Lorenzino!” said Charles.

“Listen,” said Catharine, becoming gloomy at mention of this name, which reminded her of one of the bloodiest catastrophes in the history of

Florence. “Listen; there is a way of proving to me that I am wrong.”

“What way, mother?”

“Ask Henry who was in his room last night.”

“In his room last night?”

“Yes; and if he tells you” —

“Well?”

“Well, I shall be ready to admit that I have been mistaken.”

“But in case it was a woman, we cannot ask.”

“A woman?”

“Yes.”

“A woman who killed two of your guards and perhaps mortally wounded Monsieur de Maurevel!”

“Oh! oh!” said the King, “this is serious. Was there any bloodshed?”

“Three men were stretched on the floor.”

“And the one who reduced them to this state?”

“Escaped safe and sound.”

“By Gog and Magog!” exclaimed Charles, “he was a brave fellow, and you are right, mother, I must know him.”

“Well, I tell you in advance that you will not know him, at least not through Henry.”

“But through you, mother? The man did not escape without leaving some trace, without your noticing some part of his clothing.”

“Nothing was noticed except the very elegant red cloak which he wore.”

“Ah! ah! a red cloak!” cried Charles. “I know only one at court remarkable enough to attract attention.”

“Exactly,” said Catharine.

“Well?” demanded Charles.

“Well,” said Catharine, “wait for me in your rooms, my son, and I will go and see if my orders have been carried out.”

Catharine left, and Charles, alone, began walking up and down distractedly, whistling a hunting-song, one hand in his doublet, the other hanging down, which his dog licked every time he paused.

As to Henry he had left his brother-in-law greatly disturbed, and instead of going along the main corridor he had taken the small private stairway, to which we have already referred more than once, and which led to the second story. Scarcely had he ascended four steps before he perceived a figure at the first landing. He stopped, raising his hand to his dagger. But he soon saw it was a woman, who took hold of his hand and said in a charming voice which he well knew:

"Thank God, sire, you are safe and sound. I was so afraid for you, but no doubt God heard my prayer."

"What has happened?" said Henry.

"You will know when you reach your rooms. You need not worry over Orthon. I have seen to him."

The young woman descended the stairs hastily, making Henry believe that she had met him by chance.

"That is strange," said Henry to himself. "What is the matter? What has happened to Orthon?"

Unfortunately, the question was not heard by Madame de Sauve, for the latter had already disappeared.

Suddenly at the top of the stairs Henry perceived another figure, but this time it was that of a man.

"Hush!" said the man.

"Ah! is it you, François?"

"Do not call me by my name."

"What has happened?"

"Return to your rooms and you will see, then slip into the corridor, look carefully around to make sure that no one is spying on you, and come to my apartments. The door will be ajar."

He, too, disappeared down the stairs, like the phantoms in a theatre who glide through a trap door.

"*Ventre saint gris!*" murmured the Béarnais, "the puzzle continues; but since the answer is in my rooms, let us go thither and find it."

However, it was not without emotion that Henry went on his way. He had the sensitiveness and the superstition of youth. Everything was clearly reflected on his mind, the surface of which was as smooth as a mirror, and what he had just heard foretold trouble.

He reached the door of his rooms and listened. Not a sound. Besides, since Charlotte had said to return to his apartments, it was evident that there was nothing for him to fear by doing so. He glanced hurriedly around the first room — it was vacant. Nothing showed that anything had occurred.

"Orthon is not here," said he.

He passed on to the next room. There everything was explained.

In spite of the water which had been thrown on in bucketsful, great red spots covered the floor. A piece of furniture was broken, the bed curtains had been slashed by the sword, a Venetian mirror had been shattered by a bullet; and a bloody hand which had left its terrible imprint on the wall showed that this silent chamber had been the scene of a frightful struggle. Henry embraced all these details at a glance, and passing his hand across his forehead, now damp with perspiration, murmured:

"Ah, I know now the service the King has rendered me. They came here to assassinate me — and — ah! De Mouy! what have they done to De Mouy? The wretches! They may have killed him!"

And as anxious to learn the news as the Duc d'Alençon was to tell it, Henry threw a last mournful glance on the surrounding objects, hurried from the room, reached the corridor, made sure that it was vacant, and pushing open the half-closed door, which he carefully shut behind him, he hurried to the Duc d'Alençon's.

The duke was waiting for him in the first room. Laying his finger on his lips, he hastily took Henry's hand and drew him into a small round tower which was completely isolated, and which consequently was out of range of spies.

"Ah, brother," said he, "what a horrible night!"

"What happened?" asked Henry.

"They tried to arrest you."

"Me?"

"Yes, you."

"For what reason?"

"I do not know. Where were you?"

"The King took me into the city with him last night."

"Then he knew about it," said D'Alençon. "But since you were not in your rooms, who was?"

"Was some one there?" asked Henry as if he were ignorant of the fact.

"Yes, a man. When I had heard the noise, I ran to help you; but it was too late."

"Was the man arrested?" asked Henry, anxiously.

"No, he escaped, after he had wounded Maurevel dangerously and killed two guards."

"Ah! brave De Mouy!" cried Henry.

"It was De Mouy, then?" said D'Alençon, quickly.

Henry saw that he had made a mistake.

“I presume so,” said he, “for I had an appointment with him to discuss your escape, and to tell him that I had yielded all my rights to the throne of Navarre to you.”

“If that is known,” said D’Alençon, growing pale, “we are lost.”

“Yes, for Maurevel will speak.”

“Maurevel received a sword-thrust in his throat, and I found out from the surgeon who dressed the wound that it would be a week before he would utter a single word.”

“A week! That is more than enough for De Mouy to escape.”

“For that matter,” said D’Alençon, “it might have been some one besides Monsieur de Mouy.”

“You think so?” said Henry.

“Yes, the man disappeared very quickly, and nothing but his red cloak was seen.”

“And a red cloak,” said Henry, “is more apt to be worn by a courtier than by a soldier. I should never suspect De Mouy in a red cloak.”

“No, if any one were suspected,” said D’Alençon, “it would be more apt to be” —

He stopped.

“It would be more likely to be Monsieur de la Mole,” said Henry.

“Certainly, since I myself, who saw the man running away, thought so for an instant.”

“You thought so? Why, it must have been Monsieur de la Mole, then.”

“Does he know anything?” asked D’Alençon.

“Absolutely nothing; at least, nothing of importance.”

“Brother,” said the duke; “I really think now that it was he.”

“The devil!” said Henry; “if it was, that will trouble the queen greatly, for she is interested in him.”

“Interested, you say?” said D’Alençon in amazement.

“Yes. Do you not remember, François, that it was your sister who recommended him to you?”

“Yes,” said the duke, in a dull voice; “so I tried to be agreeable to him. The proof of this is that, fearing his red cloak might compromise him, I went up to his rooms and took the cloak away.”

“Oh! oh!” exclaimed Henry, “that was doubly prudent. And now I would not bet, but I would swear, that it was he.”

“Even in court?” asked François.

“Faith, yes,” replied Henry. “He probably came to bring me some message from Marguerite.”

“If I were sure of being upheld by your testimony,” said D’Alençon, “I would almost accuse him.”

“If you were to accuse him,” replied Henry, “you understand, brother, that I would not contradict you.”

“But the queen?” said D’Alençon.

“Ah, yes, the queen.”

“We must know what she would do.”

“I will undertake to find out.”

“Plague it, brother! she will do wrong to lie to us, for this affair will make a glorious reputation of bravery for the young man, and which, cannot have cost him dear either, for he probably bought it on credit. Furthermore, it is true that he is well able to pay back both interest and capital.”

“Well, what can you expect?” said Henry; “in this base world one has nothing for nothing!”

And bowing and smiling to D’Alençon, he cautiously thrust his head into the corridor, and making sure that no one had been listening, he hurried rapidly away, and disappeared down the private stairway which led to the apartments of Marguerite.

As far as she was concerned, the Queen of Navarre was no less anxious than her husband. The night’s expedition sent against her and the Duchesse de Nevers by the King, the Duc d’Anjou, the Duc de Guise, and Henry, whom she had recognized, troubled her greatly. In all probability there was nothing which could compromise her. The janitor unfastened from the gate by La Mole and Coconnas had promised to be silent. But four lords like those with whom two simple gentlemen, such as La Mole and Coconnas, had coped, would not have gone out of their way by chance, or without having had some reason for thus inconveniencing themselves. Marguerite had returned at daybreak, having passed the rest of the night with the Duchesse de Nevers. She had retired at once, but had been unable to sleep, and had started at the slightest sound.

In the midst of this anxiety she heard some one knocking at the secret door, and being informed that the visitor was Gillonne, she gave orders to have her admitted.

Henry waited at the outer door. Nothing in his appearance showed the wounded husband. His usual smile lay on his delicate lips, and not a muscle of his face betrayed the terrible anxiety through which he had just passed. He seemed to glance inquiringly at Marguerite to discover if she would allow him to talk with her alone. Marguerite understood her husband's look, and signed to Gillonne to withdraw.

"Madame," said Henry, "I know how deeply you are attached to your friends, and I fear I bring you bad news."

"What is it, monsieur?" asked Marguerite.

"One of your dearest servants is at present greatly compromised."

"Which one?"

"The dear Count de la Mole."

"Monsieur le Comte de la Mole compromised! And why?"

"Because of the affair of last night."

In spite of her self-control Marguerite could not keep from blushing.

But she made an effort over herself.

"What affair?" she asked.

"What," said Henry, "did you not hear all the noise which was made in the Louvre?"

"No, monsieur."

"I congratulate you, madame," said Henry, with charming simplicity. "This proves that you are a sound sleeper."

"But what happened?"

"It seems that our good mother gave an order to Monsieur de Maurevel and six of his men to arrest me."

"You, monsieur, you?"

"Yes, me."

"For what reason?"

"Ah, who can tell the reasons of a mind as subtle as that of your mother? I suspect the reasons, but I do not know them positively."

"And you were not in your rooms?"

"No; I happened not to be. You have guessed rightly, madame, I was not. Last evening the King asked me to go out with him. But, although I was not in my rooms, some one else was."

"Who?"

"It seems that it was the Count de la Mole."

"The Count de la Mole!" exclaimed Marguerite, astonished.

"By Heavens! what a lively little fellow this man from the provinces is!" continued Henry. "Do you know that he wounded Maurevel and killed two guards?"

"Wounded Monsieur de Maurevel and killed two guards! — impossible!"

"What! You doubt his courage, madame?"

"No, but I say that Monsieur de la Mole could not have been in your rooms."

"Why not?"

"Why, because — because" — said Marguerite, embarrassed, "because he was elsewhere."

"Ah! If he can prove an alibi," said Henry, "that is different; he will tell where he was, and the matter will be settled."

"Where was he?" said Marguerite, quickly.

"In all probability the day will not pass without his being arrested and questioned. But unfortunately as there are proofs" —

"Proofs! what proofs?"

"The man who made this desperate defence wore a red cloak."

"But Monsieur de la Mole is not the only one who has a red cloak — I know another man who has one."

"No doubt, and I too know one. But this is what will happen: if it was not Monsieur de la Mole who was in my rooms, it must have been the other man who wears a red cloak, like La Mole. Now, do you know who this other man is?"

"Heavens!"

"There lies the danger. You, as well as myself, madame, have seen it. Your emotion proves this. Let us now talk like two people who are discussing the most desirable thing in the world — a throne; a most precious gift — life. De Mouy arrested, we are ruined."

"Yes, I understand that."

"While Monsieur de la Mole compromises no one; at least you would not suppose him capable of inventing a story such as, for instance, that he was with some ladies — whom I know?"

"Monsieur," said Marguerite, "if you fear only that, you may be easy. He will not say it."

"What!" said Henry, "would he remain silent if death were to be the price of his silence?"

"He would remain silent, monsieur."

“You are sure of this?”

“I am sure.”

“Then everything is for the best,” said Henry, rising.

“You are going, monsieur?” asked Marguerite, quickly.

“Oh, my God, yes. This is all I had to say to you.”

“And you are going” —

“To try and get out of the trouble we have been put to by this devil of a man in the red cloak.”

“Oh, my God! my God! the poor young man!” cried Marguerite, pitifully, wringing her hands.

“Really,” said Henry, as he went out, “this dear Monsieur de la Mole is a faithful servant.”

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE GIRDLE OF THE QUEEN MOTHER.

Charles entered his room, smiling and joking. But after a conversation of ten minutes with his mother, one would have said that the latter had given him her pallor and anger in exchange for the light-heartedness of her son.

“Monsieur de la Mole,” said Charles, “Monsieur de la Mole! Henry and the Duc d’Alençon must be sent for. Henry, because this young man was a Huguenot; the Duc d’Alençon, because he is in his service.”

“Send for them if you wish, my son, but you will learn nothing. Henry and François, I fear, are much more closely bound together than one would suppose from appearances. To question them is to suspect them. I think it would be better to wait for the slow but sure proof of time. If you give the guilty ones time to breathe again, my son, if you let them think they have escaped your vigilance, they will become bold and triumphant, and will give you a better opportunity to punish them. Then we shall know everything.”

Charles walked up and down, undecided, gnawing his anger, as a horse gnaws his bit, and pressing his clinched hand to his heart, which was consumed by his one idea.

“No, no,” said he, at length; “I will not wait. You do not know what it is to wait, beset with suspicions as I am. Besides, every day these courtiers become more insolent. Even last night did not two of them dare to cope with us? If Monsieur de la Mole is innocent, very good; but I should not be sorry to know where Monsieur de la Mole was last night, while they were attacking my guards in the Louvre, and me in the Rue Cloche Percée. So let the Duc d’Alençon be sent for, and afterwards Henry. I will question them separately. You may remain, mother.”

Catharine sat down. For a determined spirit such as hers was, every incident turned by her powerful hand would lead her to her goal, although it might seem to be leading away from it. From every blow there would result noise and a spark. The noise would guide, the spark give light.

The Duc d’Alençon entered. His previous conversation with Henry had prepared him for this interview; therefore he was quite calm.

His replies were very exact. Warned by his mother to remain in his own rooms, he was completely ignorant of the events of the night. But as his apartments opened upon the same corridor as did those of the King of Navarre, he had at first thought he heard a sound like that of a door being broken in, then curses, then pistol-shots. Thereupon he had ventured to push his door partly open, and had seen a man in a red cloak running away.

Charles and his mother exchanged glances.

“In a red cloak?” said the King.

“In a red cloak,” replied D’Alençon.

“And did you have any suspicions regarding this red cloak?”

D’Alençon rallied all his strength that he might lie as naturally as possible.

“At first sight,” said he, “I must confess to your Majesty that I thought I recognized the red cloak of one of my gentlemen.”

“What is the name of this gentleman?”

“Monsieur de la Mole.”

“Why was not Monsieur de la Mole with you as his duty required him to be?”

“I had given him leave of absence,” said the duke.

“That is well; now you may go,” said Charles.

The Duc d’Alençon started towards the door by which he had entered.

“Not that way,” said Charles; “this way.”

And he indicated the door opening into his nurse’s room. Charles did not want François and Henry to meet.

He did not know that they had already seen each other for an instant, and that this instant had sufficed for the two brothers-in-law to agree on their plans.

At a sign from Charles, Henry entered.

He did not wait for Charles to question him, however.

“Sire,” said he, “your Majesty has done well to send for me, for I was just coming to demand justice of you.”

Charles frowned.

“Yes, justice,” said Henry. “I will begin by thanking your Majesty for having taken me with you last night; for, by doing this, I now know that you saved my life. But what had I done that an attempt should be made to assassinate me?"

"Not to assassinate," said Catharine, quickly, "but to arrest you."

"Well," said Henry, "even so. What crime have I committed to merit arrest? If I am guilty I am as much so this morning as I was last evening. Tell me my offence, sire."

Embarrassed as to what reply to make, Charles looked at his mother.

"My son," said Catharine, "you receive suspicious characters."

"Very good," said Henry, "and these suspicious characters compromise me; is that it, madame?"

"Yes, Henry."

"Give me their names! Give me their names! Who are they? Let me see them!"

"Really," said Charles, "Henriot has the right to demand an explanation."

"And I do demand it!" said Henry, realizing the superiority of his position and anxious to make the most of it. "I ask it from my good brother Charles, and from my good mother Catharine. Since my marriage with Marguerite have I not been a kind husband? ask Marguerite. A good Catholic? ask my confessor. A good relative? ask those who were at the hunt yesterday."

"Yes, that is true, Henriot," said the King; "but what can you do? They claim that you conspire."

"Against whom?"

"Against me."

"Sire, if I had been conspiring against you, I had merely to let events take their course, when your horse broke his knee and could not rise, or when the furious boar turned on your Majesty."

"Well, the devil! mother, do you know that he is right?"

"But who was in your rooms last night?"

"Madame," said Henry, "in times when so few dare to answer for themselves, I should never attempt to answer for others. I left my rooms at seven o'clock in the evening, at ten o'clock my brother Charles took me away, and I spent the night with him. I could not be with your Majesty and know what was going on in my rooms at the same time."

"But," said Catharine, "it is none the less true that one of your men killed two of his Majesty's guards and wounded Monsieur de Maurevel."

"One of my men?" said Henry. "What man, madame? Name him."

"Every one accuses Monsieur de la Mole."

“Monsieur de la Mole is not in my suite, madame; Monsieur de la Mole belongs to Monsieur d’Alençon, to whom he was recommended by your daughter.”

“But,” said Charles, “was it Monsieur de la Mole who was in your rooms, Henriot?”

“How can you expect me to know, sire? I can say neither yes nor no. Monsieur de la Mole is an exceptional servant, thoroughly devoted to the Queen of Navarre. He often brings me messages, either from Marguerite, to whom he is grateful for having recommended him to Monsieur le Duc d’Alençon, or from Monsieur le Duc himself. I cannot say that it was not Monsieur de la Mole” —

“It was he,” said Catharine. “His red cloak was recognized.”

“Has Monsieur de la Mole a red cloak, then?”

“Yes.”

“And the man who so cleverly disposed of two of my guards and Monsieur de Maurevel” —

“Had a red cloak?” asked Henry.

“Exactly,” said Charles.

“I have nothing to say,” said the Béarnais. “But in any case it seems to me that instead of summoning me here, since I was not in my rooms, it is Monsieur de la Mole, who, having been there, as you say, should be questioned. But,” said Henry, “I must observe one thing to your Majesty.”

“What is that?”

“This, that if I had seen an order signed by my King and had defended myself instead of obeying this order, I should be guilty and should deserve all sorts of punishment; but it was not I but some stranger whom this order in no way concerned. There was an attempt made to arrest him unjustly, he defended himself too well, perhaps, but he was in the right.”

“And yet” — murmured Catharine.

“Madame,” said Henry, “was the order to arrest me?”

“Yes,” said Catharine, “and his Majesty himself signed it.”

“Was it an order to arrest any one found in my place in case I was not there?”

“No,” said Catharine.

“Well!” said Henry, “unless you prove that I was conspiring and that the man who was in my rooms was conspiring with me, this man is innocent.”

Then turning to Charles IX.:

“Sire,” continued Henry, “I shall not leave the Louvre. At a simple word from your Majesty I shall even be ready to enter any state prison you may be pleased to suggest. But while waiting for the proof to the contrary I have the right to call myself and I do call myself the very faithful servant, subject, and brother of your Majesty.”

And with a dignity hitherto unknown in him, Henry bowed to Charles and withdrew.

“Bravo, Henriot!” said Charles, when the King of Navarre had left.

“Bravo! because he has defeated us?” said Catharine.

“Why should I not applaud? When we fence together and he touches me do I not say ‘bravo’? Mother, you are wrong to hate this boy as you do.”

“My son,” said Catharine, pressing the hand of Charles IX., “I do not hate him, I fear him.”

“Well, you are wrong, mother. Henriot is my friend, and as he said, had he been conspiring against me he had only to let the wild boar alone.”

“Yes,” said Catharine, “so that Monsieur le Duc d’Anjou, his personal enemy, might be King of France.”

“Mother, whatever Henriot’s motive in saving my life, the fact is that he saved it, and, the devil! I do not want any harm to come to him. As to Monsieur de la Mole, well, I will talk about him with my brother D’Alençon, to whom he belongs.”

This was Charles IX.’s way of dismissing his mother, who withdrew endeavoring to fix her suspicions. On account of his unimportance, Monsieur de la Mole did not answer to her needs.

Returning to her rooms, Catharine found Marguerite waiting for her.

“Ah! ah!” said she, “is it you, my daughter? I sent for you last evening.”

“I know it, madame, but I had gone out.”

“And this morning?”

“This morning, madame, I have come to tell your majesty that you are about to do a great wrong.”

“What is that?”

“You are going to have Monsieur le Comte de la Mole arrested.”

“You are mistaken, my daughter, I am going to have no one arrested. It is the King, not I, who gives orders for arrests.”

“Let us not quibble over the words, madame, when the circumstances are serious. Monsieur de la Mole is going to be arrested, is he not?”

“Very likely.”

"Accused of having been found in the chamber of the King of Navarre last night, and of having killed two guards and wounded Monsieur de Maurevel?"

"Such indeed is the crime they impute to him."

"They impute it to him wrongly, madame," said Marguerite; "Monsieur de la Mole is not guilty."

"Monsieur de la Mole not guilty!" said Catharine, giving a start of joy, and thinking that what Marguerite was about to tell her would throw light on the subject.

"No," went on Marguerite, "he is not guilty, he cannot be so, for he was not in the king's room."

"Where was he, then?"

"In my room, madame."

"In your room?"

"Yes, in my room."

At this avowal from a daughter of France, Catharine felt like hurling a withering glance at Marguerite, but she merely crossed her arms on her lap.

"And," said she after a moment's silence, "if Monsieur de la Mole is arrested and questioned" —

"He will say where he was and with whom he was, mother," replied Marguerite, although she felt sure of the contrary.

"Since this is so, you are right, my daughter; Monsieur de la Mole must not be arrested."

Marguerite shivered. It seemed to her that there was something strange and terrible in the way her mother uttered these words; but she had nothing to say, for what she had come to ask for had been granted her.

"But," said Catharine, "if it was not Monsieur de la Mole who was in the king's room, it was some one else!"

Marguerite was silent.

"Do you know who it was, my daughter?" said Catharine.

"No, mother," said Marguerite, in an unsteady voice.

"Come, do not be half confidential."

"I repeat, madame, that I do not know," replied Marguerite again, growing pale in spite of herself.

"Well, well," said Catharine, carelessly, "we shall find out. Go now, my daughter. You may rest assured that your mother will watch over your honor."

Marguerite went out.

"Ah!" murmured Catharine, "they are in league. Henry and Marguerite are working together. While the wife is silent, the husband is blind. Ah, you are very clever, my children, and you think yourselves very strong. But your strength is in your union and I will break you, one after the other. Besides, the day will come when Maurevel can speak or write, utter a name, or spell six letters, and then we shall know everything. Yes, but in the meantime the guilty shall be in safe-keeping. The best thing to do would be to separate them at once."

Thereupon Catharine set out for the apartments of her son, whom she found holding a conference with D'Alençon.

"Ah! ah!" exclaimed Charles IX., frowning, "is it you, mother?"

"Why did you not say '*again*'? The word was in your mind, Charles."

"What is in my mind belongs to me, madame," said the King, in the rough tone he sometimes used even when speaking to Catharine. "What do you want of me? Tell me quickly."

"Well, you were right, my son," said Catharine to Charles, "and you, D'Alençon, were wrong."

"In what respect, madame?" asked both princes.

"It was not Monsieur de la Mole who was in the apartments of the King of Navarre."

"Ah! ah!" cried François, growing pale.

"Who was it, then?" asked Charles.

"We do not know yet, but we shall know when Maurevel is able to speak. So let us drop the subject, which will soon be explained, and return to Monsieur de la Mole."

"Well, what do you want of Monsieur de la Mole, mother, since he was not in the rooms of the King of Navarre?"

"No," said Catharine, "he was not there, but he was with — the queen."

"With the queen!" cried Charles, bursting into a nervous laugh.

"With the queen," murmured D'Alençon, turning as pale as death.

"No, no," said Charles, "De Guise told me he had met Marguerite's litter."

"Yes," said Catharine, "she has a house in town."

"In the Rue Cloche Percée!" cried the King.

"Oh! oh! this is too much," said D'Alençon, driving his nails into his breast. "And to have had him recommended to me!"

"Ah! now that I think of it!" said the King, stopping suddenly, "it was he who defended himself against us last night, and who hurled the silver bowl at my head, the wretch!"

"Oh, yes!" repeated François, "the wretch!"

"You are right, my children," said Catharine, without appearing to understand the feelings which incited both of her sons to speak. "You are right, for a single indiscreet act of this gentleman might cause a horrible scandal, and ruin a daughter of France. One moment of madness would be enough for that."

"Or of vanity," said François.

"No doubt, no doubt," said Charles. "And yet we cannot bring the case into court unless Henriot consents to appear as plaintiff."

"My son," said Catharine, placing her hand on Charles's shoulder in such a way as to call the King's attention to what she was about to propose, "listen to what I say. A crime has been committed, and there may be scandal. But this sort of offence to royalty is not punished by judges and hangmen. If you were simple gentlemen, I should have nothing to say to you, for you are both brave, but you are princes, you cannot cross swords with mere country squires. Think how you can avenge yourselves as princes."

"The devil!" cried Charles, "you are right, mother, and I will consider it."

"I will help you, brother," cried François.

"And I," said Catharine, unfastening the black silk girdle which was wound three times about her waist, and the two tassels of which fell to her knees. "I will retire, but I leave you this to represent me."

And she threw the girdle at the feet of the two princes.

"Ah! ah!" said Charles, "I understand."

"This girdle" — said D'Alençon, picking it up.

"Is punishment and silence," said Catharine, victorious; "but," she added, "there would be no harm in mentioning this to Henry."

She withdrew.

"By Heaven!" said D'Alençon; "a good idea, and when Henry knows that his wife has betrayed him — So," he added, turning to the King, "you will adopt our mother's suggestion?"

"In every detail," said Charles, not doubting but that he would drive a thousand daggers into D'Alençon's heart. "This will annoy Marguerite, but it will delight Henriot."

Then, calling one of his guards, he ordered Henry summoned, but thinking better of it:

“No, no,” said he, “I will go for him myself. Do you, D’Alençon, inform D’Anjou and De Guise.”

Leaving his apartments, he ascended the private stairway to the second floor, which led to Henry’s chamber.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

PROJECTS OF REVENGE.

Henry took advantage of the respite afforded him by his well-sustained examination to go to Madame de Sauve's. He found Orthon completely recovered from his fainting-fit. But Orthon could tell him nothing, except that some men had broken into the king's rooms, that the leader had struck him with the handle of his sword, and that the blow had stunned him. No one had troubled about Orthon. Catharine had seen that he had fainted and had believed him to be dead.

As he had come to himself between the departure of the queen mother and the arrival of the captain of the guards charged with clearing up the room, he had taken refuge in Madame de Sauve's apartments.

Henry begged Charlotte to keep the young man until news came from De Mouy, who would not fail to write him from his hiding-place. Then he would send Orthon to carry his answer to De Mouy, and instead of one devoted man he could count on two. This decided on, he returned to his rooms and began further to consider matters, walking up and down the while. Suddenly the door opened and the King appeared.

"Your Majesty!" cried Henry, rising to meet him.

"In person. Really, Henriot, you are a good fellow, and I love you more and more."

"Sire," said Henry, "your Majesty overwhelms me."

"You have but one fault, Henriot."

"What is that? The one for which your Majesty has already reproached me several times?" said Henry. "My preferring to hunt animals rather than birds?"

"No, no, I am not referring to that, Henriot, I mean something else."

"If your Majesty will explain," said Henry, who saw from the smile on Charles's lips that the King was in a good humor, "I will try and correct it."

"It is this, that having such good eyes, you see no better than you do."

"Bah!" said Henry, "can I be short-sighted, then, sire, without knowing it?"

“Worse than that, Henry, worse than that, you are blind.”

“Ah, indeed,” said the Béarnais, “but is it not when I shut my eyes that this happens?”

“Well, yes!” said Charles, “you are perfectly capable of that. At all events, I am going to open your eyes.”

“God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. Your Majesty is the representative of God on earth. Therefore you can do here what God does in heaven. Proceed; I am all attention.”

“When De Guise said last night that your wife had just passed escorted by a gallant you would not believe it.”

“Sire,” said Henry, “how could I believe that the sister of your Majesty could commit an act of such imprudence?”

“When he told you that your wife had gone to the Rue Cloche Percée, you would not believe that either!”

“How was I to suppose, sire, that a daughter of France would thus publicly risk her reputation?”

“When we besieged the house in the Rue Cloche Percée, and when I had a silver bowl hurled at my shoulder, D’Anjou some orange marmalade on his head, and De Guise a haunch of venison in the face, you saw two women and two men, did you not?”

“I saw nothing, sire. Does not your Majesty remember that I was questioning the janitor?”

“Yes, but, by Heaven, I saw” —

“Ah, if your Majesty saw anything, that is a different thing.”

“I saw two men and two women. Well, I know now beyond a doubt that one of the women was Margot, and that one of the men was Monsieur de la Mole.”

“Well,” said Henry, “if Monsieur de la Mole was in the Rue Cloche Percée, he was not here.”

“No,” said Charles, “he was not here. But never mind who was here; we shall know this as soon as that imbecile of a Maurevel is able to speak or write. The point is that Margot is deceiving you.”

“Bah!” said Henry; “do not believe such nonsense.”

“When I tell you that you are more than near-sighted, that you are blind, the devil! will you believe me just once, stupid? I tell you that Margot is deceiving you, and that this evening we are going to strangle her lover.”

Henry gave a start of surprise, and looked at his brother-in-law in amazement.

“Confess, Henry, that at heart you are not sorry. Margot will cry out like a thousand Niobes; but, faith! so much the worse. I do not want you to be made a fool of. If Condé is deceived by the Duc d’Anjou, I will wink; Condé is my enemy. But you are my brother; more than this, you are my friend.”

“But, sire” —

“And I do not want you to be annoyed, and made a fool of. You have been a quintain long enough for all these popinjays who come from the provinces to gather our crumbs, and court our women. Let them come, or rather let them come again. By Heaven! you have been deceived, Henriot, — that might happen to any one, — but I swear, you shall have shining satisfaction, and to-morrow they shall say: In the name of a thousand devils! it seems that King Charles loves his brother Henriot, for last night he had Monsieur de la Mole’s tongue pulled out in a most amusing manner.”

“Is this really decided on, sire?” asked Henry.

“Decided on, determined on, arranged. The coxcomb will have no time to plead his cause. The expedition will consist of myself, D’Anjou, D’Alençon, and De Guise — a king, two sons of France, and a sovereign prince, without counting you.”

“How without counting me?”

“Why, you are to be one of us.”

“I!”

“Yes, you! you shall stab the fellow in a royal manner, while the rest of us strangle him.”

“Sire,” said Henry, “your kindness overpowers me; but how do you know” —

“Why, the devil! it seems that the fellow boasts of it. He goes sometimes to your wife’s apartments in the Louvre, sometimes to the Rue Cloche Percée. They compose verses together. I should like to see the stanzas that fop writes. Pastorales they are. They discuss Bion and Moschus, and read first Daphne and then Corydon. Ah! take a good dagger with you!”

“Sire,” said Henry, “upon reflection” —

“What?”

“Your Majesty will see that I cannot join such an expedition. It seems to me it would be inconvenient to be there in person. I am too much interested in the affair to take any calm part in it. Your Majesty will avenge the honor of your sister on a coxcomb who boasts of having calumniated my wife; nothing is simpler, and Marguerite, whom I hold to be innocent, sire, is in no way dishonored. But were I of the party, it would be a different thing. My co-operation would convert an act of justice into an act of revenge. It would no longer be an execution, but an assassination. My wife would no longer be calumniated, but guilty.”

“By Heaven, Henry, as I said just now to my mother, you speak words of wisdom. You have a devilishly quick mind.”

And Charles gazed complacently at his brother-in-law, who bowed in return for the compliment.

“Nevertheless,” added Charles, “you are willing to be rid of this coxcomb, are you not?”

“Everything your Majesty does is well done,” replied the King of Navarre.

“Well, well, let me do your work for you. You may be sure it shall not be the worse for it.”

“I leave it to you, sire,” said Henry.

“At what time does he usually go to your wife’s room?”

“About nine o’clock.”

“And he leaves?”

“Before I reach there, for I never see him.”

“About” —

“About eleven.”

“Very well. Come this evening at midnight. The deed will be done.”

Charles pressed Henry’s hand cordially, and renewing his vows of friendship, left the apartment, whistling his favorite hunting-song.

“*Ventre saint gris!*” said the Béarnais, watching Charles, “either I am greatly mistaken, or the queen mother is responsible for all this deviltry. Truly, she does nothing but invent plots to make trouble between my wife and myself. Such a pleasant household!”

And Henry began to laugh as he was in the habit of laughing when no one could see or hear him.

About seven o’clock that evening a handsome young man, who had just taken a bath, was finishing his toilet as he calmly moved about his room, humming a little air, before a mirror in one of the rooms of the Louvre. Near him another young man was sleeping, or rather lying on a bed.

The one was our friend La Mole who, unconsciously, had been the object of so much discussion all day; the other was his companion Coconnas.

The great storm had passed over him without his having heard the rumble of the thunder or seen the lightning. He had returned at three o'clock in the morning, had stayed in bed until three in the afternoon, half asleep, half awake, building castles on that uncertain sand called the future. Then he had risen, had spent an hour at a fashionable bath, had dined at Maître La Hurière's, and returning to the Louvre had set himself to finish his toilet before making his usual call on the queen.

"And you say you have dined?" asked Coconnas, yawning.

"Faith, yes, and I was hungry too."

"Why did you not take me with you, selfish man?"

"Faith, you were sleeping so soundly that I did not like to waken you. But you shall sup with me instead. Be sure not to forget to ask Maître La Hurière for some of that light wine from Anjou, which arrived a few days ago."

"Is it good?"

"I merely tell you to ask for it."

"Where are you going?"

"Where am I going?" said La Mole, surprised that his friend should ask him such a question; "I am going to pay my respects to the queen."

"Well," said Coconnas, "if I were going to dine in our little house in the Rue Cloche Percée, I should have what was left over from yesterday. There is a certain wine of Alicante which is most refreshing."

"It would be imprudent to go there, Annibal, my friend, after what occurred last night. Besides, did we not promise that we would not go back there alone? Hand me my cloak."

"That is so," said Coconnas, "I had forgotten. But where the devil is your cloak? Ah! here it is."

"No, you have given me the black one, and it is the red one I want. The queen likes me better in that."

"Ah, faith," said Coconnas, searching everywhere, "look for yourself, I cannot find it."

"What!" said La Mole, "you cannot find it? Why, where can it be?"

"You probably sold it."

“Why, I have six crowns left.”

“Well, take mine.”

“Ah, yes, — a yellow cloak with a green doublet! I should look like a popinjay!”

“Faith, you are over-particular, so wear what you please.”

Having tossed everything topsy-turvy in his search, La Mole was beginning to abuse the thieves who managed to enter even the Louvre, when a page from the Duc d’Alençon appeared bringing the precious cloak in question.

“Ah!” cried La Mole, “here it is at last!”

“Is this your cloak, monsieur?” said the page. “Yes; monseigneur sent for it to decide a wager he made regarding its color.”

“Oh!” said La Mole, “I asked for it only because I was going out, but if his highness desires to keep it longer” —

“No, Monsieur le Comte, he is through with it.”

The page left. La Mole fastened his cloak.

“Well,” he went on, “what have you decided to do?”

“I do not know.”

“Shall I find you here this evening?”

“How can I tell?”

“Do you not know what you are going to do for two hours?”

“I know well enough what I shall do, but I do not know what I may be ordered to do.”

“By the Duchesse de Nevers?”

“No, by the Duc d’Alençon.”

“As a matter of fact,” said La Mole, “I have noticed for some time that he has been friendly to you.”

“Yes,” said Coconnas.

“Then your fortune is made,” said La Mole, laughing.

“Poof!” said Coconnas. “He is only a younger brother!”

“Oh!” said La Mole, “he is so anxious to become the elder one that perhaps Heaven will work some miracle in his favor.”

“So you do not know where you will be this evening?”

“No.”

“Go to the devil, then, — I mean good-by!”

“That La Mole is a terrible fellow,” thought Coconnas, “always wanting me to tell him where I am going to be! as if I knew. Besides, I believe I am sleepy.” And he threw himself on the bed again.

La Mole betook himself to the apartments of the queen. In the corridor he met the Duc d’Alençon.

“Ah! you here, Monsieur la Mole?” said the prince.

“Yes, my lord,” replied La Mole, bowing respectfully.

“Are you going away from the Louvre?”

“No, your highness. I am on my way to pay my respects to her Majesty the Queen of Navarre.”

“About what time shall you leave, Monsieur de la Mole?”

“Has monseigneur any orders for me?”

“No, not at present, but I shall want to speak to you this evening.”

“About what time?”

“Between nine and ten.”

“I shall do myself the honor of waiting on your highness at that time.”

“Very good. I shall depend on you.”

La Mole bowed and went on.

“There are times,” said he, “when the duke is as pale as death. It is very strange.”

He knocked at the door of the queen’s apartments. Gillonne, who apparently was expecting him, led him to Marguerite.

The latter was occupied with some work which seemed to be wearying her greatly. A paper covered with notes and a volume of Isocrates lay before her. She signed to La Mole to let her finish a paragraph. Then, in a few moments, she threw down her pen and invited the young man to sit beside her. La Mole was radiant. Never had he been so handsome or so light-hearted.

“Greek!” said he, glancing at the book. “A speech of Isocrates! What are you doing with that? Ah! and Latin on this sheet of paper! *Ad Sarmatiæ legatos reginæ Margaritæ concio!* So you are going to harangue these barbarians in Latin?”

“I must,” said Marguerite, “since they do not speak French.”

“But how can you write the answer before you have the speech?”

“A greater coquette than I would make you believe that this was impromptu; but I cannot deceive you, my Hyacinthe: I was told the speech in advance, and I am answering it.”

“Are these ambassadors about to arrive?”

“Better still, they arrived this morning.”

“Does any one know it?”

“They came incognito. Their formal arrival is planned for to-morrow afternoon, I believe, and you will see,” said Marguerite, with a little satisfied air not wholly free from pedantry, “that what I have done this evening is quite Ciceronian. But let us drop these important matters and speak of what has happened to you.”

“To me?”

“Yes.”

“What has happened to me?”

“Ah! it is in vain you pretend to be brave, you look pale.”

“Then it is from having slept too much. I am humbly sorry for it.”

“Come, come, let us not play the braggart; I know everything.”

“Have the kindness to inform me, then, my pearl, for I know nothing.”

“Well, answer me frankly. What did the queen mother ask you?”

“Had she something to say to me?”

“What! Have you not seen her?”

“No.”

“Nor King Charles?”

“No.”

“Nor the King of Navarre?”

“No.”

“But you have seen the Duc d’Alençon?”

“Yes, I met him just now in the corridor.”

“What did he say to you?”

“That he had some orders to give me between nine and ten o’clock this evening.”

“Nothing else?”

“Nothing else.”

“That is strange.”

“But what is strange? Tell me.”

“That nothing has been said to you.”

“What has happened?”

“All day, unfortunately, you have been hanging over an abyss.”

“I?”

“Yes, you.”

“Why?”

“Well, listen. It seems that last night De Mouy was surprised in the apartments of the King of Navarre, who was to have been arrested. De Mouy killed three men, and escaped without anything about him having been recognized except the famous red cloak.”

“Well?”

“Well, this red cloak, which once deceived me, has thrown others besides myself off the track. You have been suspected and even accused of this triple murder. This morning they wanted to arrest, judge, and perhaps convict you. Who knows? For in order to save yourself you would not have told where you were, would you?”

“Tell where I was?” cried La Mole; “compromise you, my beautiful queen? Oh! you are right. I should have died singing, to spare your sweet eyes one tear.”

“Alas!” said Marguerite, “my sweet eyes would have been filled with many, many tears.”

“But what caused the great storm to subside?”

“Guess.”

“How can I tell?”

“There was only one way to prove that you were not in the king’s room.”

“And that was” —

“To tell where you were.”

“Well?”

“Well, I told.”

“Whom did you tell?”

“My mother.”

“And Queen Catharine” —

“Queen Catharine knows that I love you.”

“Oh, madame! after having done so much for me, you can demand anything from your servant. Ah, Marguerite, truly, what you did was noble and beautiful. My life is yours, Marguerite.”

“I hope so, for I have snatched it from those who wanted to take it from me. But now you are saved.”

“And by you!” cried the young man; “by my adored queen!”

At that instant a sharp noise made them start. La Mole sprang back, filled with a vague terror. Marguerite uttered a cry, and stood with her eyes riveted on the broken glass of one of the window-panes.

Through this window a stone the size of an egg had entered and lay on the floor.

La Mole saw the broken pane, and realized the cause of the noise.

“Who dared to do this?” he cried, springing to the window.

“One moment,” said Marguerite. “It seems to me that something is tied around the stone.”

“Yes,” said La Mole, “it looks like a piece of paper.”

Marguerite went to the strange projectile and removed the thin sheet which, folded like a narrow band, encircled the middle of the stone.

The paper was attached to a cord, which came through the broken window.

Marguerite unfolded the letter and read.

“Unfortunate man!” she cried, holding out the paper to La Mole, who stood as pale and motionless as a statue of Terror.

With a heart filled with gloomy forebodings he read these words:

“*They are waiting for Monsieur de la Mole, with long swords, in the corridor leading to the apartments of Monsieur d’Alençon. Perhaps he would prefer to escape by this window and join Monsieur de Mouy at Mantes*” —

“Well!” asked La Mole, after reading it, “are these swords longer than mine?”

“No, but there may be ten against one.”

“Who is the friend who has sent us this note?” asked La Mole.

Marguerite took it from the young man’s hand and looked at it attentively.

“The King of Navarre’s handwriting!” she cried. “If he warns us, the danger is great. Flee, La Mole, flee, I beg you.”

“How?” asked La Mole.

“By this window. Does not the note refer to it?”

“Command, my queen, and I will leap from the window to obey you, if I broke my head twenty times by the fall.”

“Wait, wait,” said Marguerite. “It seems to me that there is a weight attached to this cord.”

“Let us see,” said La Mole.

Both drew up the cord, and with indescribable joy saw a ladder of hair and silk at the end of it.

“Ah! you are saved,” cried Marguerite.

"It is a miracle of heaven!"

"No, it is a gift from the King of Navarre."

"But suppose it were a snare?" said La Mole. "If this ladder were to break under me? Madame, did you not acknowledge your love for me to-day?"

Marguerite, whose joy had dissipated her grief, became ashy pale.

"You are right," said she, "that is possible."

She started to the door.

"What are you going to do?" cried La Mole.

"To find out if they are really waiting for you in the corridor."

"Never! never! For their anger to fall on you?"

"What can they do to a daughter of France? As a woman and a royal princess I am doubly inviolable."

The queen uttered these words with so much dignity that La Mole understood she ran no risk, and that he must let her do as she wished.

Marguerite put La Mole under the protection of Gillonne, leaving to him to decide, according to circumstances, whether to run or await her return, and started down the corridor. A side hall led to the library as well as to several reception-rooms, and at the end led to the apartments of the King, the queen mother, and to the small private stairway by which one reached the apartments of the Duc d'Alençon and Henry. Although it was scarcely nine o'clock, all the lights were extinguished, and the corridor, except for the dim glimmer which came from the side hall, was quite dark. The Queen of Navarre advanced boldly. When she had gone about a third of the distance she heard whispering which sounded mysterious and startling from an evident effort made to suppress it. It ceased almost instantly, as if by order from some superior, and silence was restored. The light, dim as it was, seemed to grow less. Marguerite walked on directly into the face of the danger if danger there was. To all appearances she was calm, although her clinched hands indicated a violent nervous tension. As she approached, the intense silence increased, while a shadow like that of a hand obscured the wavering and uncertain light.

At the point where the transverse hall crossed the main corridor a man sprang in front of the queen, uncovered a red candlestick, and cried out:

"Here he is!"

Marguerite stood face to face with her brother Charles. Behind him, a silken cord in hand, was the Duc d'Alençon. At the rear, in the darkness, stood two figures side by side, reflecting no light other than that of the drawn swords which they held in their hands. Marguerite saw everything at a glance. Making a supreme effort, she said smilingly to Charles:

“You mean, here *she* is, sire!”

Charles recoiled. The others stood motionless.

“You, Margot!” said he. “Where are you going at this hour?”

“At this hour!” said Marguerite. “Is it so late?”

“I ask where you are going?”

“To find a book of Cicero’s speeches, which I think I left at our mother’s.”

“Without a light?”

“I supposed the corridor was lighted.”

“Do you come from your own apartments?”

“Yes.”

“What are you doing this evening?”

“Preparing my address for the Polish ambassadors. Is there not a council to-morrow? and does not each one have to submit his address to your Majesty?”

“Have you not some one helping you with this work?”

Marguerite summoned all her strength.

“Yes, brother,” said she, “Monsieur de la Mole. He is very learned.”

“So much so,” said the Duc d’Alençon, “that I asked him when he had finished with you, sister, to come and help me, for I am not as clever as you are.”

“And were you waiting for him?” asked Marguerite as naturally as possible.

“Yes,” said D’Alençon, impatiently.

“Then,” said Marguerite, “I will send him to you, brother, for we have finished my work.”

“But your book?” said Charles.

“I will have Gillonne get it.”

The two brothers exchanged a sign.

“Go,” said Charles, “and we will continue our round.”

“Your round!” said Marguerite; “whom are you looking for?”

“The little red man,” said Charles. “Do you not know that there is a little red man who is said to haunt the old Louvre? My brother D’Alençon claims to have seen him, and we are looking for him.”

“Good luck to you,” said Marguerite, and she turned round. Glancing behind her, she saw the four figures gather close to the wall as if in conference. In an instant she had reached her own door.

“Open, Gillonne,” said she, “open.”

Gillonne obeyed.

Marguerite sprang into the room and found La Mole waiting for her, calm and quiet, but with drawn sword.

“Flee,” said she, “flee. Do not lose a second. They are waiting for you in the corridor to kill you.”

“You command me to do this?” said La Mole.

“I command it. We must part in order to see each other again.”

While Marguerite had been away La Mole had made sure of the ladder at the window. He now stepped out, but before placing his foot on the first round he tenderly kissed the queen’s hand.

“If the ladder is a trap and I should perish, Marguerite, remember your promise.”

“It was not a promise, La Mole, but an oath. Fear nothing. Adieu!”

And La Mole, thus encouraged, let himself slip down the ladder. At the same instant there was a knock at the door.

Marguerite watched La Mole’s perilous descent and did not turn away from the window until she was sure he had reached the ground in safety.

“Madame,” said Gillonne, “madame!”

“Well?” asked Marguerite.

“The King is knocking at the door.”

“Open it.”

Gillonne did so.

The four princes, impatient at waiting, no doubt, stood on the threshold.

Charles entered.

Marguerite came forward, a smile on her lips.

The King cast a rapid glance around.

“Whom are you looking for, brother?” asked Marguerite.

“Why,” said Charles, “I am looking — I am looking — why, the devil! I am looking for Monsieur de la Mole.”

“Monsieur de la Mole!”

“Yes; where is he?”

Marguerite took her brother by the hand and led him to the window.

Just then two horsemen were seen galloping away, around the wooden tower. One of them unfastened his white satin scarf and waved it in the darkness, as a sign of adieu. The two men were La Mole and Orthon.

Marguerite pointed them out to Charles.

“Well!” said the King, “what does this mean?”

“It means,” replied Marguerite, “that Monsieur le Duc d’Alençon may put his cord back into his pocket, and that Messieurs d’Anjou and de Guise may sheathe their swords, for Monsieur de la Mole will not pass through the corridor again to-night.”

CHAPTER XL.

THE ATRIDES.

Since his return to Paris, Henry of Anjou had not seen his mother Catharine alone, and, as every one knows, he was her favorite son.

This visit was not merely for the sake of etiquette, nor the carrying out of a painful ceremony, but the accomplishment of a very sweet duty for this son who, if he did not love his mother, was at least sure of being tenderly loved by her.

Catharine loved this son best either because of his bravery, his beauty, — for besides the mother, there was the woman in Catharine, — or because, according to some scandalous chronicles, Henry of Anjou reminded the Florentine of a certain happy epoch of secret love.

Catharine alone knew of the return of the Duc d’Anjou to Paris. Charles IX. would have been ignorant of it had not chance led him to the Hôtel de Condé just as his brother was leaving it. Charles had not expected him until the following day, and Henry of Anjou had hoped to conceal from him the two motives which had hastened his arrival by a day, namely, his visit to the beautiful Marie of Clèves, princess of Condé, and his conference with the Polish ambassadors.

It was this last reason, of the object of which Charles was uncertain, which the Duc d’Anjou had to explain to his mother. And the reader, ignorant on this point as was Henry of Navarre, will profit by the explanation.

When the Duc d’Anjou, so long expected, entered his mother’s rooms, Catharine, usually so cold and formal, and who since the departure of her favorite son had embraced with effusion no one but Coligny, who was to be assassinated the following day, opened her arms to the child of her love, and pressed him to her heart with a burst of maternal affection most surprising in a heart already long grown cold.

Then pushing him from her she gazed at him and again drew him into her arms.

"Ah, madame," said he, "since Heaven grants me the privilege of embracing my mother in private, console me, for I am the most wretched man alive."

"Oh, my God! my beloved child," cried Catharine, "what has happened to you?"

"Nothing which you do not know, mother. I am in love. I am loved; but it is this very love which is the cause of my unhappiness."

"Tell me about it, my son," said Catharine.

"Well, mother, — these ambassadors, — this departure" —

"Yes," said Catharine, "the ambassadors have arrived; the departure is near at hand."

"It need not be near at hand, mother, but my brother hastens it. He detests me. I am in his way, and he wants to rid himself of me."

Catharine smiled.

"By giving you a throne, poor, unhappy crowned head!"

"Oh, no, mother," said Henry in agony, "I do not wish to go away. I, a son of France, brought up in the refinement of polite society, near the best of mothers, loved by one of the dearest women in the world, must I go among snows, to the ends of the earth, to die by inches among those rough people who are intoxicated from morning until night, and who gauge the capacity of their king by that of a cask, according to what he can hold? No, mother, I do not want to go; I should die!"

"Come, Henry," said Catharine, pressing her son's hands, "come, is that the real reason?"

Henry's eyes fell, as though even to his mother he did not dare to confess what was in his heart.

"Is there no other reason?" asked Catharine; "less romantic, but more rational, more political?"

"Mother, it is not my fault if this thought comes to me, and takes stronger hold of me, perhaps, than it should; but did not you yourself tell me that the horoscope of my brother Charles prophesied that he would die young?"

"Yes," said Catharine, "but a horoscope may lie, my son. Indeed, I myself hope that all horoscopes are not true."

"But his horoscope said this, did it not?"

"His horoscope spoke of a quarter of a century; but it did not say whether it referred to his life or his reign."

“Well, mother, bring it about so that I can stay. My brother is almost twenty-four. In one year the question will be settled.”

Catharine pondered deeply.

“Yes,” said she; “it would certainly be better if it could be so arranged.”

“Oh, imagine my despair, mother,” cried Henry, “if I were to exchange the crown of France for that of Poland! My being tormented there with the idea that I might be reigning in the Louvre in the midst of this elegant and lettered court, near the best mother in the world, whose advice would spare me half my work and fatigue, who, accustomed to bearing, with my father, a portion of the burden of the State, would like to bear it with me too! Ah, mother, I should have been a great king!”

“There! there! dear child,” said Catharine, to whom this outlook had always been a very sweet hope, “there! do not despair. Have you thought of any way of arranging the matter?”

“Oh, yes, certainly, and that is why I came back two or three days before I was expected, letting my brother Charles suppose that it was on account of Madame de Condé. Then I have been with De Lasco, the chief ambassador. I became acquainted with him, and did all I could in that first interview to make him hate me. I hope I have succeeded.”

“Ah, my dear child,” said Catharine, “that is wrong. You must place the interest of France above your petty dislikes.”

“Mother, in case any accident happened to my brother, would it be to the interest of France for the Duc d’Alençon or the King of Navarre to reign?”

“Oh! the King of Navarre, never, never!” murmured Catharine, letting anxiety cover her face with that veil of care which spread over it every time this question arose.

“Faith,” continued Henry, “my brother D’Alençon is not worth much more, and is no fonder of you.”

“Well,” said Catharine, “what did Lasco say?”

“Even Lasco hesitated when I urged him to seek an audience. Oh, if he could write to Poland and annul this election!”

“Folly, my son, madness! What a Diet has consecrated is sacred.”

“But, mother, could not these Poles be prevailed on to accept my brother in my stead?”

“It would be difficult, if not impossible,” said Catharine.

“Never mind, try, make the attempt, speak to the King, mother. Ascribe everything to my love for Madame de Condé; say that I am mad over her, that I am losing my mind. He saw me coming out of the prince’s hôtel with De Guise, who did everything for me a friend could do.”

“Yes, in order to help the League. You do not see this, but I do.”

“Yes, mother, yes; but meanwhile I am making use of him. Should we not be glad when a man serves us while serving himself?”

“And what did the King say when he met you?”

“He apparently believed what I told him, that love alone had brought me back to Paris.”

“But did he ask you what you did the rest of the night?”

“Yes, mother; but I had supper at Nantouillet’s, where I made a frightful riot, so that the report of it might get abroad and deceive the King as to where I was.”

“Then he is ignorant of your visit to Lasco?”

“Absolutely.”

“Good, so much the better. I will try to influence him in your favor, dear child. But you know no influence makes any impression on his coarse nature.”

“Oh, mother, mother, what happiness if I could stay! I would love you even more than I do now if that were possible!”

“If you stay you will be sent to war.”

“Oh, never mind! if only I do not have to leave France.”

“You will be killed.”

“Mother, one does not die from blows; one dies from grief, from meanness. But Charles will not let me remain; he hates me.”

“He is jealous of you, my beautiful conqueror, that is well known. Why are you so brave and so fortunate? Why, at scarcely twenty years of age, have you won battles like Alexander or Cæsar? But, in the meantime, do not let your wishes be known to any one; pretend to be resigned, pay your court to the King. To-day there is a private council to read and discuss the speeches which are to be made at the ceremony. Act like the King of Poland, and leave the rest to me. By the way, how about your expedition of last night?”

“It failed, mother. The gallant was warned and escaped by the window.”

“Well,” said Catharine, “some day I shall know who this evil genius is who upsets all my plans in this way. Meanwhile I suspect and — let him beware!”

“So, mother” — said the Duc d’Anjou.

"Let me manage this affair."

She kissed Henry tenderly on his eyes and pushed him from the room.

Before long the princes of her household arrived at the rooms of the queen. Charles was in a good humor, for the cleverness of his sister Margot had pleased rather than vexed him. Moreover, he had nothing against La Mole, and he had waited for him somewhat eagerly in the corridor merely because it was a kind of hunt.

D'Alençon, on the contrary, was greatly preoccupied. The repulsion he had always felt for La Mole had turned into hate the instant he knew that La Mole was loved by his sister.

Marguerite possessed both a dreamy mind and a quick eye. She had to remember as well as to watch.

The Polish deputies had sent a copy of the speeches which they were to make.

Marguerite, to whom no more mention had been made of the affair of the previous evening than as if it had never occurred, read the speeches, and, except Charles, every one discussed what he would answer. Charles let Marguerite reply as she pleased. As far as D'Alençon was concerned he was very particular as to the choice of terms; but as to the discourse of Henry of Anjou he seemed determined to attack it, and made numerous corrections.

This council, without being in any way decisive, had greatly embittered the feelings of those present.

Henry of Anjou, who had to rewrite nearly all his discourse, withdrew to begin the task.

Marguerite, who had not heard of the King of Navarre since the injury he had given to her window-pane, returned to her rooms, hoping to find him there.

D'Alençon, who had read hesitation in the eyes of his brother of Anjou, and who had surprised a meaning glance between him and his mother, retired to ponder on what he regarded as a fresh plot. Charles was about to go to his workshop to finish a boar-spear he was making for himself when Catharine stopped him.

The King, who suspected that he was to meet some opposition to his will, paused and looked at his mother closely.

"Well," he said, "what now?"

“A final word, sire, which we forgot, and yet it is of much importance: what day shall we decide on for the public reception?”

“Ah, that is true,” said the King, seating himself again. “Well, what day would suit you?”

“I thought,” replied Catharine, “from your Majesty’s silence and apparent forgetfulness, that there was some deep-laid plan.”

“No,” said Charles; “why so, mother?”

“Because,” added Catharine, very gently, “it seems to me, my son, that these Poles should not see us so eager after their crown.”

“On the contrary, mother,” said Charles, “it is they who are in haste. They have come from Varsovia by forced marches. Honor for honor, courtesy for courtesy.”

“Your Majesty may be right in one sense; I am not curious. So your idea is that the public reception should be held soon?”

“Faith, yes, mother; is this not your idea too?”

“You know that my ideas are only such as can further your glory. I will tell you, therefore, that by this haste I fear you will be accused of profiting very quickly by this opportunity to relieve the house of France of the burdens your brother imposes on it, but which he certainly returns in glory and devotion.”

“Mother,” said Charles, “on his departure from France I will endow my brother so richly that no one will ever dare to think what you fear may be said.”

“Well,” said Catharine, “I surrender, since you have such a ready reply to each of my objections. But to receive this warlike people, who judge of the power of the states by exterior signs, you must have a considerable array of troops, and I do not think there are enough yet assembled in the Isle de France.”

“Pardon me, mother. I have foreseen this event, and am prepared for it. I have recalled two battalions from Normandy and one from Guyenne; my company of archers arrived yesterday from Brittany; the light horse, scattered throughout Lorraine, will be in Paris in the course of the day; and while it is supposed that I have scarcely four regiments at my disposition, I have twenty thousand men ready to appear.”

“Ah, ah!” said Catharine, surprised. “In that case only one thing is lacking, but that can be procured.”

“What is that?”

"Money. I believe that you are not furnished with an over-supply."

"On the contrary, madame, on the contrary," said Charles IX., "I have fourteen hundred thousand crowns in the Bastille; my private estates have yielded me during the last few days eight hundred thousand crowns, which I have put in my cellar in the Louvre, and in case of need Nantouillet holds three hundred thousand crowns at my disposal."

Catharine shivered. Until then she had known Charles to be violent and passionate, but never provident.

"Well," said she, "your Majesty thinks of everything. That is fine; and provided the tailors, the embroiderers, and the jewellers make haste, your Majesty will be in a position to hold this audience within six weeks."

"Six weeks!" exclaimed Charles. "Mother, the tailors, the embroiderers, and the jewellers have been at work ever since we heard of my brother's nomination. As a matter of fact, everything could be ready to-day, but, at the latest, it will take only three or four days."

"Oh!" murmured Catharine; "you are in greater haste than I supposed, my son."

"Honor for honor, I told you."

"Well, is it this honor done to the house of France which flatters you?"

"Certainly."

"And is your chief desire to see a son of France on the throne of Poland?"

"Exactly."

"Then it is the event, the fact, and not the man, which is of interest to you, and whoever reigns there" —

"No, no, mother, by Heaven! Let us keep to the point! The Poles have made a good choice. They are a skilful and strong people! A military people, a nation of soldiers, they choose a captain for their ruler. That is logical, plague it! D'Anjou is just the man for them. The hero of Jarnac and Montcontour fits them like a glove. Whom would you have me send them? D'Alençon? a coward! He would give them a fine idea of the Valois! — D'Alençon! He would run at the first bullet that whistled by his ears, while Henry of Anjou is a fighter. Yes! his sword always in his hand, he is ever pushing forward, on foot or horseback! — forward! thrust! overpower! kill! Ah! my brother of Anjou is a man, a valiant soldier, who will lead them to battle from morning until night, from one year's end to the next. He is not a hard drinker, it is true; but he will kill in cold blood. That is all. This dear Henry will be in his element; there! quick! quick! to battle! Sound the trumpet and the drum! Long live the king! Long live the conqueror! Long live the general! He will be proclaimed *imperator* three times a year. That will be fine for the house of France, and for the honor of the Valois; he may be killed, but, by Heaven, it will be a glorious death!"

Catharine shuddered. Her eyes flashed fire.

"Say that you wish to send Henry of Anjou away from you," she cried, "say that you do not love your brother!"

"Ah! ah! ah!" cried Charles, bursting into a nervous laugh, "you have guessed, have you, that I want to send him away? You have guessed that I do not love him? And when did you reach this conclusion? Come! Love my brother! Why should I love him? Ah! ah! ah! Do you want to make me laugh?"

As he spoke, his pale cheeks grew flushed with a feverish glow.

"Does he love me? Do you love me? Has any one, except my dogs, and Marie Touchet, and my nurse, ever loved me? No! I do not love my brother, I love only myself. Do you hear? And I shall not prevent my brother from doing as I do."

"Sire," said Catharine, growing excited on her part, "since you have opened your heart to me I must open mine to you. You are acting like a weak king, like an ill-advised monarch; you are sending away your second brother, the natural support of the throne, who is in every way worthy to succeed you if any accident happened, in which case your crown would be left in jeopardy. As you said, D'Alençon is young, incapable, weak, more than weak, cowardly! And the Béarnais rises up in the background, you understand?"

"Well, the devil!" exclaimed Charles, "what does it matter to me what happens when I am dead? The Béarnais rises behind my brother, you say! By Heaven! so much the better! I said that I loved no one — I was mistaken, I love Henriot. Yes, I love this good Henriot. He has a frank manner, a warm handshake, while I see nothing but false looks around me, and touch, only icy hands. He is incapable of treason towards me, I swear. Besides, I owe him amends, poor boy! His mother was poisoned by some members of my family, I am told. Moreover, I am well. But if I were to be taken ill, I would call him, I should want him to stay with me, I would take nothing except from him, and when I died I would make him King of France and of Navarre. And by Heaven! instead of laughing at my death as my brothers would do, he would weep, or at least he would pretend to weep."

Had a thunderbolt fallen at Catharine's feet she would have been less startled than at these words. She stood speechless, gazing at Charles with haggard eyes. Then at the end of a few moments:

"Henry of Navarre!" she cried, "Henry of Navarre King of France to the detriment of my children! Ah! Holy Virgin! we shall see! So this is why you wish to send away my son?"

"Your son — and what am I, then? the son of a wolf, like Romulus?" cried Charles, trembling with anger, his eyes shining as though they were on fire. "Your son, you are right; the King of France is not your son, the King of France has no brothers, the King of France has no mother, the King of France has only subjects. The King of France has no need of feelings, he has wishes. He can get on without being loved, but he shall be obeyed."

"Sire, you have misunderstood my words. I called my son the one who was going to leave me. I love him better just now because just now he is the one I am most afraid I shall lose. Is it a crime for a mother to wish that her child should not leave her?"

"And I, I tell you that he shall leave you. I tell you that he shall leave France, that he shall go to Poland, and within two days, too, and if you add one word he shall go to-morrow. Moreover, if you do not smooth your brow, if you do not take that threatening look from your eyes, I will strangle him this evening, as yesterday you yourself would have strangled your daughter's lover. Only I shall not fail, as we failed in regard to La Mole."

At the first threat Catharine's head fell; but she raised it again almost immediately.

"Ah, poor child!" said she, "your brother would kill you. But do not fear, your mother will protect you."

"Ah, you defy me!" cried Charles. "Well! by the blood of Christ, he shall die, not this evening, not soon, but this very instant. Ah, a weapon! a dagger! a knife! Ah!"

Having looked around in vain for what he wanted, Charles perceived the little dagger his mother always wore at her belt, sprang toward it, snatched it from its shagreen case encrusted with silver, and rushed from the room to strike down Henry of Anjou wherever he might meet him. But on reaching the hall, his strength, excited beyond human endurance, suddenly left him. He put out his arm, dropped the sharp weapon, which stuck point downwards into the wood, uttered a piercing cry, sank down, and rolled over on the floor.

At the same instant a quantity of blood spurted forth from his mouth and nose.

“Jesus!” said he. “They kill me! Help! help!”

Catharine, who had followed, saw him fall. For one instant she stood motionless, watching him. Then recollecting herself, not because of any maternal affection, but because of the awkwardness of the situation, she called out:

“The King is ill! Help! help!”

At the cry a crowd of servants, officers, and courtiers gathered around the young King. But ahead of them all a woman rushed out, pushed aside the others, and raised Charles, who had grown as pale as death.

“They kill me, nurse, they kill me,” murmured the King, covered with perspiration and blood.

“They kill you, my Charles?” cried the good woman, glancing at the group of faces with a look which reached even Catharine. “Who kills you?”

Charles heaved a feeble sigh, and fainted.

“Ah!” said the physician, Ambroise Paré, who was summoned at once, “ah! the King is very ill!”

“Now, from necessity or compulsion,” said the implacable Catharine to herself, “he will have to grant a delay.”

Whereupon she left the King to join her second son, who was in the oratory, anxiously waiting to hear the result of an interview which was of such importance to him.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE HOROSCOPE.

On leaving the oratory, in which she had just informed Henry all that had occurred, Catharine found Réné in her chamber. It was the first time that the queen and the astrologer had seen each other since the visit the queen had made to his shop at the Pont Saint Michel. But the previous evening she had written him, and Réné had brought the answer to her note in person.

“Well,” said the queen, “have you seen him?”

“Yes.”

“How is he?”

“Somewhat better.”

“Can he speak?”

“No, the sword traversed his larynx.”

“I told you in that case to have him write.”

“I tried. He collected all his strength, but his hand could trace only two letters. They are almost illegible. Then he fainted. The jugular vein was cut and the blood he lost has taken away all his strength.”

“Have you seen the letters?”

“Here they are.”

Réné drew a paper from his pocket and handed it to Catharine, who hastily unfolded it.

“An *m* and an *o*,” said she. “Could it have been La Mole, and was all that acting of Marguerite done to throw me off the track?”

“Madame,” said Réné, “if I dared to express my opinion in a matter about which your majesty hesitates to give yours I should say that I believe Monsieur de la Mole is too much in love to be seriously interested in politics.”

“You think so?”

“Yes, and above all too much in love with the Queen of Navarre to serve the King very devotedly; for there is no real love without jealousy.”

“You think that he is very much in love, then?”

“I am sure of it.”

"Has he been to you?"

"Yes."

"Did he ask you for some potion or philter?"

"No, we kept to the wax figure."

"Pierced to the heart?"

"To the heart."

"And this figure still exists?"

"Yes."

"Have you it?"

"It is in my rooms."

"It would be strange," said Catharine, "if these cabalistic preparations really had the power attributed to them."

"Your majesty is a better judge of that than I."

"Is the Queen of Navarre in love with Monsieur de la Mole?"

"She loves him enough to ruin herself for him. Yesterday she saved him from death at the risk of her honor and her life. You see, madame, and yet you still doubt."

"Doubt what?"

"Science."

"Science also deceives me," said Catharine, looking steadily at Réné, who bore her gaze without flinching.

"About what?"

"Oh! you know what I mean; unless, of course, it was the scholar and not science."

"I do not know what you mean, madame," replied the Florentine.

"Réné, have your perfumes lost their odor?"

"No, madame, not when I use them; but it is possible that in passing through the hands of others" —

Catharine smiled and shook her head.

"Your opiate has done wonders, Réné," said she; "Madame de Sauve's lips are fresher and rosier than ever."

"It is not my opiate that is responsible for that, madame. The Baroness de Sauve, using the privilege of every pretty woman to be capricious, has said nothing more to me about this opiate, and after the suggestion from your majesty I thought it best to send her no more of it. So that all the boxes are still in my house just as you left them, with the exception of one which disappeared, I know not how or why."

"That is well, Réné," said Catharine; "perhaps later we may return to this. In the meantime, let us speak of the other matter."

"I am all attention, madame."

"What is necessary to gain an idea of the length of any one's life?"

"In the first place to know the day of his birth, his age, and under what condition he first saw light."

"And then?"

"To have some of his blood and a lock of his hair."

"If I bring you some of his blood and a lock of his hair, if I tell you the circumstance connected with his birth, the time, and his present age, will you tell me the probable date of his death?"

"Yes, to within a few days."

"Very well; I have a lock of his hair and will get some of his blood."

"Was he born during the day or night?"

"At twenty-three minutes past five in the afternoon."

"Be at my room at five o'clock to-morrow. The experiment must be made at the hour of his birth."

"Very well," said Catharine, "*we* will be there."

Réné bowed, and withdrew without apparently noticing the "*we* will be there," which, however, contrary to her usual habit, indicated that Catharine would not go alone.

The following morning at dawn Catharine went to her son's apartments. At midnight she had sent to inquire after him, and had been told that Maître Ambroise Paré was with him, ready to bleed him if the nervous troubles continued.

Still starting up from his sleep, and still pale from loss of blood, Charles dozed on the shoulder of his faithful nurse, who leaning against the bed had not moved for three hours for fear of waking her dear child.

A slight foam appeared from time to time on the lips of the sick man, and the nurse wiped it off with a fine embroidered linen handkerchief. On the bed lay another handkerchief covered with great spots of blood.

For an instant Catharine thought she would take possession of the handkerchief; but she feared that this blood mixed with the saliva would be weak, and would not be efficacious. She asked the nurse if the doctor had bled her son as he had said he would do. The nurse answered "Yes" and that the flow of blood had been so great that Charles had fainted twice. The queen mother, who, like all princesses in those days, had some knowledge of medicine, asked to see the blood. Nothing was easier to do, as the physician had ordered that the blood be kept in order that he might examine it. It was in a basin in an adjoining closet. Catharine went in to look at it, poured some into a small bottle which she had brought for this purpose; and then came back, hiding in her pocket her fingers, the tips of which otherwise would have betrayed her.

Just as she came back from the closet Charles opened his eyes and saw his mother. Then remembering as in a dream all his bitter thoughts:

"Ah! is it you, madame?" said he. "Well, say to your well loved son, to your Henry of Anjou, that it shall be to-morrow."

"My dear Charles," said Catharine, "it shall be just when you please. Be quiet now and go to sleep."

As if yielding to this advice Charles closed his eyes; and Catharine, who had spoken to him as one does to calm a sick person or a child, left the room. But when he heard the door close Charles suddenly sat up, and in a voice still weak from suffering, said:

"My chancellor! The seals! the court! — send for them all."

The nurse, with gentle insistence, laid the head of the King back on her shoulder, and in order to put him to sleep strove to rock him as she would have done a child.

"No, no, nurse, I cannot sleep any more. Call my attendants. I must work this morning."

When Charles spoke in that way he was obeyed; and even the nurse, in spite of the privileges allowed her by her foster-child, dared not disobey. She sent for those whom the King wanted, and the council was planned, not for the next day, which was out of the question, but for five days from then.

At the hour agreed on, that is, at five o'clock, the queen mother and the Duc d'Anjou repaired to the rooms of Réné, who, expecting their visit, had everything ready for the mysterious seance. In the room to the right, that is, in the chamber of sacrifices, a steel blade was heating over a glowing brazier. From its fanciful arabesques this blade was intended to represent the events of the destiny about which the oracle was to be consulted. On the altar lay the Book of Fate, and during the night, which had been very clear, Réné had studied the course and the position of the stars.

Henry of Anjou entered first. He wore a wig, a mask concealed his face, and a long cloak hid his figure. His mother followed. Had she not known beforehand that the man who had preceded her was her son she never would have recognized him. Catharine removed her mask; the Duc d’Anjou kept his on.

“Did you make any observations last night?” asked Catharine.

“Yes, madame,” said Réné; “and the answer of the stars has already told me the past. The one you wish to know about, like every one born under the sign of the Cancer, has a warm heart and great pride. He is powerful. He has lived nearly a quarter of a century. He has until now had glory and wealth. Is this so, madame?”

“Possibly,” said Catharine.

“Have you a lock of his hair, and some of his blood?”

“Yes.”

Catharine handed to the necromancer a lock of fair hair and a small bottle filled with blood.

Réné took the flask, shook it thoroughly, so that the fibrine and water would mix, and poured a large drop of it on the glowing steel. The living liquid boiled for an instant, and then spread out into fantastic figures.

“Oh, madame,” cried Réné, “I see him twisting in awful agony. Hear how he groans, how he calls for help! Do you see how everything around him becomes blood? Do you see how about his death-bed great combats are taking place? See, here are the lances; and look, there are the swords!”

“Will it be long before this happens?” asked Catharine, trembling from an indescribable emotion and laying her hand on that of Henry of Anjou, who in his eager curiosity was leaning over the brazier.

Réné approached the altar and repeated a cabalistic prayer, putting such energy and conviction into the act that the veins of his temples swelled, and caused the prophetic convulsions and nervous twinges from which the ancient priestesses suffered before their tripods, and even on their death-beds.

At length he rose and announced that everything was ready, took the flask, still three-quarters full, in one hand, and in the other the lock of hair. Then telling Catharine to open the book at random, and to read the first words she looked at, he poured the rest of the blood on the steel blade, and threw the hair into the brazier, pronouncing a cabalistic sentence composed of Hebrew words which he himself did not understand.

Instantly the Duc d’Anjou and Catharine saw a white figure appear on the sword like that of a corpse wrapped in his shroud. Another figure, which seemed that of a woman, was leaning over the first.

At the same time the hair caught fire and threw out a single flame, clear, swift, and barbed like a fiery tongue.

“One year,” cried Réné, “scarcely one year, and this man shall die. A woman alone shall weep for him. But no, there at the end of the sword is another woman, with a child in her arms.”

Catharine looked at her son, and, mother though she was, seemed to ask him who these two women were.

But Réné had scarcely finished speaking before the steel became white and everything gradually disappeared from its surface. Then Catharine opened the book and read the following lines in a voice which, in spite of her effort at control, she could not keep from shaking:

“*‘Ains a peri cil que l’on redoutoit,*
Plus tôt, trop tôt, si prudence n’etoit.’”

A deep silence reigned for some moments.

“For the one whom you know,” asked Catharine, “what are the signs for this month?”

“As favorable as ever, madame; unless Providence interferes with his destiny he will be fortunate. And yet” —

“And yet what?”

“One of the stars in his pleiad was covered with a black cloud while I made my observations.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Catharine, “a black cloud — there is some hope, then?”

“Of whom are you speaking, madame?” asked the Duc d’Anjou.

Catharine drew her son away from the light of the brazier and spoke to him in a low tone.

Meanwhile Réné knelt down, and in the glow of the flame poured into his hand the last drop of blood which had remained in the bottom of the flask.

“Strange contradiction,” said he, “which proves how little to be depended on is the evidence of simple science practised by ordinary men! To any one but myself, a physician, a scholar, even for Maître Ambroise Paré, this blood would seem so pure, so healthy, so full of life and animal spirits, that it would promise long years of life; and yet all this vigor will soon disappear, all this life will be extinct within a year!”

Catharine and Henry of Anjou had turned round and were listening.

The eyes of the prince glowed through his mask.

“Ah!” continued Réné, “the present alone is known to ordinary mortals; while to us the past and the future are known.”

“So,” continued Catharine, “you still think he will die within the year?”

“As surely as we are three living persons who some day will rest in our coffins.”

“Yet you said that the blood was pure and healthy, and that it indicated a long life.”

“Yes, if things followed their natural course. But might not an accident” —

“Ah, yes, do you hear?” said Catharine to Henry, “an accident” —

“Alas!” said the latter, “all the more reason for my staying.”

“Oh, think no more about that: it is not possible.”

Then turning to Réné:

“Thanks,” said the young man, disguising his voice, “thanks; take this purse.”

“Come, *count*,” said Catharine, intentionally giving her son this title to throw Réné off the track.

They left.

“Oh, mother, you see,” said Henry, “an accident — and if an accident should happen, I shall not be on hand; I shall be four hundred leagues from you” —

“Four hundred leagues are accomplished in eight days, my son.”

“Yes; but how do I know whether those Poles will let me come back? If I could only wait, mother!”

“Who knows?” said Catharine; “might not this accident of which Réné speaks be the one which since yesterday has laid the King on a bed of pain? Listen, return by yourself, my child. I shall go back by the private door of the monastery of the Augustines. My suite is waiting for me in this convent. Go, now, Henry, go, and keep from irritating your brother in case you see him.”

CHAPTER XLII.

CONFIDENCES.

The first thing the Duc d’Anjou heard on arriving at the Louvre was that the formal reception of the ambassadors was arranged for the fifth day from that. The tailors and the jewellers were waiting for the prince with magnificent clothes and superb jewels which the King had ordered for him.

While the duke tried them on with an anger which brought the tears to his eyes, Henry of Navarre was very gay in a magnificent collar of emeralds, a sword with a gold handle, and a precious ring which Charles had sent him that morning.

D’Alençon had just received a letter and had shut himself up in his own room to read it.

As to Coconnas, he was searching every corner of the Louvre for his friend.

In fact, as may easily be imagined, he had been somewhat surprised at not seeing La Mole return that night, and by morning had begun to feel some anxiety.

Consequently he had started out to find his friend. He began his search at the Hôtel de la Belle Étoile, went from there to the Rue Cloche Percée, from the Rue Cloche Percée to the Rue Tizon, from there to the Pont Saint Michel, and finally from the Pont Saint Michel to the Louvre. This search, so far as those who had been questioned were concerned, had been carried on in a way so original and exacting (which may easily be believed when one realizes the eccentric character of Coconnas) that it had caused some explanations between him and three courtiers. These explanations had ended, as was the fashion of the times, on the ground. In these encounters Coconnas had been as conscientious as he usually was in affairs of that kind, and had killed the first man and wounded the two others, saying:

“Poor La Mole, he knew Latin so well!”

The last victim, who was the Baron de Boissey, said as he fell:

“Oh, for the love of Heaven, Coconnas, do vary a little and at least say that he knew Greek!”

At last the report of the adventure in the corridor leaked out. Coconnas was heartbroken over it; for an instant he thought that all these kings and princes had killed his friend and thrown him into some dungeon.

He learned that D’Alençon had been of the party; and overlooking the majesty which surrounded a prince of the blood, he went to him and demanded an explanation as he would have done of a simple gentleman.

At first D’Alençon was inclined to thrust out of the door the impertinent fellow who came and asked for an account of his actions. But Coconnas spoke so curtly, his eyes flashed with such brightness, and the affair of the three duels in less than twenty-four hours had raised the Piedmontese so high, that D’Alençon reflected, and instead of yielding to his first inclination, he answered the gentleman with a charming smile:

“My dear Coconnas, it is true that the King was furious at receiving a silver bowl on his shoulder, that the Duc d’Anjou was vexed at being hit on the head by some orange marmalade, and the Duc de Guise humiliated at having the breath knocked out of him by a haunch of venison, and so they were all determined to kill Monsieur de la Mole. But a friend of your friend’s turned aside the blow. The party therefore failed in their attempt. I give you my word as prince.”

“Ah!” said Coconnas, breathing as hard as a pair of bellows. “By Heaven, monseigneur, this is good news, and I should like to know this friend to show him my gratitude.”

Monsieur d’Alençon made no reply, but smiled more pleasantly than he had yet done, implying to Coconnas that this friend was none other than the prince himself.

“Well, monseigneur!” said Coconnas, “since you have gone so far as to tell me the beginning of the story, crown your kindness by finishing it. They tried to kill him, but failed, you say. Well, what happened then? I am brave and can bear the news. Have they thrown him into some dungeon? So much the better. It will make him more careful in future. He never would listen to my advice; besides, we can get him out, by Heaven! Stone does not baffle every one.”

D’Alençon shook his head.

“The worst of all this, my brave Coconnas,” said he, “is that your friend disappeared after the affair, and no one knows where he went.”

“By Heaven!” cried the Piedmontese, again growing pale, “had he gone to hell I should at least have known where he is.”

“Listen,” said D’Alençon, who, although for different reasons, was as anxious as Coconnas to know La Mole’s whereabouts, “I will give you the advice of a friend.”

“Give it, my lord,” said Coconnas, eagerly.

“Go to Queen Marguerite. She must know what has become of the friend you mourn.”

“I will confess to your highness,” said Coconnas, “that I had thought of going to her, but I scarcely dared. Madame Marguerite has a way of making me feel somewhat uncomfortable at times, and besides this, I feared that I might find her in tears. But since your highness assures me that La Mole is not dead and that her majesty knows where he is I will take heart and go to her.”

“Do so, my friend,” said François. “And when you find out where La Mole is, let me know, for really I am as anxious as you are. But remember one thing, Coconnas” —

“What?”

“Do not say you have come at my suggestion, for if you do you will learn nothing.”

“Monseigneur,” said Coconnas, “since your highness recommends secrecy on this point, I shall be as silent as a tench or as the queen mother.”

“What a kind, good, generous prince he is!” murmured Coconnas as he set out to find the Queen of Navarre.

Marguerite was expecting Coconnas, for the report of his despair had reached her, and on hearing by what exploits his grief had showed itself she almost forgave him for his somewhat rude treatment of her friend Madame la Duchesse de Nevers, to whom he had not spoken for two or three days, owing to some misunderstanding between them. Therefore as soon as he was announced to the queen he was admitted.

Coconnas entered the room, unable to overcome the constraint which he had mentioned to D’Alençon, and which he had always felt in the presence of the queen. It was caused more by her superior intellect than by her rank. But Marguerite received him with a smile which at once put him at his ease.

“Ah, madame,” said he, “give me back my friend, I beg you, or at least tell me what has become of him, for without him I cannot live. Imagine Euryalus without Nisus, Damon without Pythias, or Orestes without Pylades, and pity my grief for the sake of one of the heroes I have just mentioned, whose heart, I swear, was no more tender than mine.”

Marguerite smiled, and having made Coconnas promise not to reveal the secret, she told him of La Mole’s escape from the window. As to his hiding-place, insistent as were the prayers of the Piedmontese, she preserved the strictest silence. This only half satisfied Coconnas, so he resorted to diplomatic speeches of the highest order.

The result was that Marguerite saw clearly that the Duc d’Alençon was partly the cause of the courtier’s great desire to know what had become of La Mole.

“Well,” said the queen, “if you must know something definite about your friend, ask King Henry of Navarre. He alone has the right to speak. As to me, all I can tell you is that the friend for whom you are searching is alive, and you may believe what I say.”

“I believe one thing still more, madame,” replied Coconnas; “that is, that your beautiful eyes have not wept.”

Thereupon, thinking that there was nothing to add to a remark which had the double advantage of expressing his thought as well as the high opinion he had of La Mole, Coconnas withdrew, pondering on a reconciliation with Madame de Nevers, not on her account, but in order that he might find out from her what he had been unable to learn from Marguerite.

Deep griefs are abnormal conditions in which the mind shakes off the yoke as soon as possible. The thought of leaving Marguerite had at first broken La Mole’s heart, and it was in order to save the reputation of the queen rather than to preserve his own life that he had consented to run away.

Therefore, the following evening he returned to Paris to see Marguerite from her balcony. As if instinct told her of the young man’s plan, the queen spent the whole evening at her window. The result was that the lovers met again with the indescribable delight which accompanies forbidden pleasures. More than this, the melancholy and romantic temperament of La Mole found a certain charm in the situation. But a man really in love is happy only for the time being, while he sees or is with the woman he loves. After he has left her he suffers. Anxious to see Marguerite again, La Mole set himself busily to work to bring about the event which would make it possible for him to be with her; namely, the flight of the King of Navarre.

Marguerite on her part willingly gave herself up to the happiness of being loved with so pure a devotion. Often she was angry with herself for what she regarded as a weakness. Her strong mind despised the poverty of ordinary love, insensible to the details which for tender souls make it the sweetest, the most delicate, and the most desirable of all pleasures. So she felt that the days, if not happily filled, were at least happily ended. When, at about nine o'clock every evening, she stepped out on her balcony in a white dressing-gown, she perceived in the darkness of the quay a horseman whose hand was raised first to his lips, then to his heart. Then a significant cough reminded the lover of a cherished voice. Sometimes a note was thrown by a little hand, and in the note was hidden some costly jewel, precious not on account of its value, but because it had belonged to her who threw it; and this would fall on the pavement a few feet from the young man. Then La Mole would swoop down on it like a kite, press it to his heart, answer in the same voice, while Marguerite stood at her balcony until the sound of the horse's hoofs had died away in the darkness. The steed, ridden at full speed when coming, on leaving seemed as if made of material as lifeless as that of the famous horse which lost Troy.

This was why the queen was not anxious as to the fate of La Mole. But fearing that he might be watched and followed she persistently refused all interviews except these clandestine ones, which began immediately after La Mole's flight and continued every evening until the time set for the formal reception of the ambassadors, a reception which by the express orders of Ambroise Paré, as we have seen, was postponed for several days.

The evening before this reception, at about nine o'clock, when every one in the Louvre was engaged in preparations for the following day, Marguerite opened her window and stepped out upon her balcony. As she did so, without waiting for her note, La Mole, in greater haste than usual, threw his note which with his usual skill fell at the feet of his royal mistress.

Marguerite realized that the missive contained something special, and retired from the balcony to read it. The note consisted of two separate sheets.

On the first page were these words:

"*Madame, I must speak to the King of Navarre. The matter is urgent. I will wait.*"

On the second page were these words:

"*My lady and my queen, arrange so that I may give you one of the kisses I now send you. I will wait.*"

Marguerite had scarcely finished the second part of the letter when she heard the voice of Henry of Navarre, who with his usual caution had knocked on the outer door, and was asking Gillonne if he might enter.

The queen at once separated the letter, put one of the sheets in her robe, the other in her pocket, hurriedly closed the window, and stepped to the door.

“Enter, sire,” said she.

Notwithstanding the fact that Marguerite had been careful to close the window quickly and gently, the sound had reached Henry, whose acute senses, in the midst of people he greatly mistrusted, had almost acquired the exquisite delicacy they attain in the savage. But the King of Navarre was not one of those tyrants who forbid their wives from taking the air and watching the stars.

Henry was as gracious and smiling as ever.

“Madame,” said he, “while every one is rehearsing the coming ceremonial, I thought I would come and have a little talk with you about my affairs, which you still regard as yours, do you not?”

“Certainly, monsieur,” replied Marguerite; “are not our interests one and the same?”

“Yes, madame, and that is why I wanted to ask what you thought about Monsieur le Duc d’Alençon’s avoiding me so for the last few days. The day before yesterday he even went to Saint Germain. Does it not mean either that he is planning to leave by himself, for he is watched very little, or that he is not going to leave at all? Give me your opinion, madame, if you please. I confess it will be a great relief to me to tell you mine.”

“Your majesty is right in being anxious at my brother’s silence. I have been thinking about it all day, and my idea is that as circumstances have changed he has changed with them.”

“You mean, do you not, that seeing King Charles ill and the Duc d’Anjou King of Poland he would not be averse to staying in Paris to keep watch over the crown of France?”

“Exactly.”

“Be it so. I ask nothing better than for him to remain,” said Henry; “only that will change our entire plan. To leave without him I shall need three times the guarantees I should have asked for had I gone with your brother, whose name and presence in the enterprise would have been my safeguard. But what surprises me is that I have not heard from Monsieur de Mouy. It is not like him to stay away so long. Have you had any news of him, madame?”

"I, sire!" exclaimed Marguerite, in astonishment; "why, how could you expect" —

"Why, by Heaven, my dear, nothing would be more natural. In order to please me, you were kind enough to save the life of young La Mole, — he must have reached Nantes, — and if one can get to a place he can easily get away from it."

"Ah! this explains an enigma, the answer to which I could not make out," said Marguerite. "I had left my window open, and found, on coming back to my room, a note on my floor."

"There now," said Henry.

"A note which at first I could not understand, and to which I attached no importance whatsoever," continued Marguerite. "Perhaps I was wrong, and that it comes from that quarter."

"That is possible," said Henry; "I might even say probable. Might I see this note?"

"Certainly, sire," replied Marguerite, handing to the king the missive she had put into her pocket. The king glanced at it.

"Is it not Monsieur de la Mole's handwriting?" said he.

"I do not know," replied Marguerite. "It looks to me like a counterfeit."

"No matter, let us read it." And he read:

"*Madame, I must speak to the King of Navarre. The matter is urgent. I will wait.*"

"So!" said Henry — "you see, he says he will wait."

"Certainly I see that," said Marguerite. "But what would you expect?"

"Why! *ventre saint gris!* I expect that he is waiting!"

"That he is waiting!" cried Marguerite, looking at her husband in astonishment. "How can you say such a thing, sire? A man whom the King tried to kill — a man who is watched, threatened — waiting, you say! Would that be possible? — are the doors made for those who have been" —

"Obliged to escape by the window — you were going to say?"

"Yes, you have finished my sentence."

"Well, but if they know the way by the window, let them take it, since it is perfectly impossible for them to enter by the door. It is very simple."

"Do you think so?" said Marguerite, flushing with pleasure at the thought of again being near La Mole.

"I am sure of it."

"But how could one reach the window?" asked the queen.

“Did you not keep the rope ladder I sent you? Where is your usual foresight?”

“Yes, sire, I kept it,” said Marguerite.

“In that case there will be no difficulty,” said Henry.

“What does your majesty wish?”

“Why, it is very simple,” said Henry. “Fasten it to your balcony and let it hang down. If it is De Mouy who is waiting and he wants to mount it, he will do so.”

Without losing his gravity Henry took the candle to aid Marguerite in her search for the ladder. They did not have to look long; it was in a wardrobe in the famous closet.

“There it is,” said Henry; “now, madame, if I am not asking too much, fasten it to the balcony, I beg you.”

“Why should I fasten it and not you, sire?” said Marguerite.

“Because the best conspirators are the most careful. Seeing a man might perhaps frighten away our friend, you see.” Marguerite smiled and tied the ladder.

“There,” said Henry, concealing himself in a corner of the room, “stand so he can see you; now drop the ladder; good! I am sure that De Mouy will climb up.”

In fact, about ten minutes later a man, mad with joy, stepped over the balcony, but seeing that the queen did not come to him, he hesitated a moment. Instead of Marguerite it was Henry who stepped forward.

“Ah!” said he, graciously, “it is not De Mouy, but Monsieur de la Mole. Good evening, Monsieur de la Mole. Come in, I beg you.”

La Mole paused a moment, overwhelmed. Had he still been on the ladder instead of on the balcony he might possibly have fallen backward.

“You wanted to speak to the King of Navarre on matters of importance,” said Marguerite. “I have told him so and here he is.”

Henry closed the window.

“I love you,” said Marguerite, hastily pressing the young man’s hand.

“Well, monsieur,” said Henry, placing a chair for La Mole, “what is it?”

“This, sire,” replied La Mole. “I have left Monsieur de Mouy at the city gates. He desires to know if Maurevel has spoken, and if his presence in your majesty’s room is known.”

“Not yet, but it will be before long; so we must make haste.”

“That is my opinion, sire, and if to-morrow evening Monsieur d’Alençon is ready to start, De Mouy will be at the Porte Saint Marcel with five hundred men. These will take you to Fontainebleau. Then you can easily reach Blois, Angoulême, and Bordeaux.”

“Madame,” said Henry, turning to his wife, “I can be ready by to-morrow; can you?”

La Mole’s eyes were anxiously fixed on those of Marguerite.

“You have my promise,” said the queen. “Wherever you go, I will follow. But you know Monsieur d’Alençon must leave at the same time. No half way with him; either he serves us or he betrays us. If he hesitates we do not stir.”

“Does he know anything of this plan, Monsieur de la Mole?” asked Henry.

“He should have received a letter from Monsieur de Mouy several days ago.”

“Why,” said Henry, “he said nothing to me about it!”

“Be careful, monsieur,” said Marguerite, “be careful.”

“I shall be on my guard, you may be sure. How can we get an answer to De Mouy?”

“Do not worry, sire. On the right, on the left, of your majesty, visible or invisible, he will be on hand to-morrow during the reception of the ambassadors. One word in the address of the queen will suffice for him to understand whether you consent or not, whether he must leave or wait for you. If the Duc d’Alençon refuses, he asks but a fortnight to reorganize everything in your name.”

“Really,” said Henry, “De Mouy is invaluable. Can you insert the necessary words in your address, madame?”

“Nothing will be easier,” replied Marguerite.

“Then I will see Monsieur d’Alençon to-morrow,” said Henry. “Let de Mouy be at his post ready to understand at a word.”

“He will be there, sire.”

“And, Monsieur de la Mole,” said Henry, “take my answer to him. You probably have a horse or a servant near by?”

“Orthon is waiting for me at the quay.”

“Go back to him, monsieur. Oh, no, not by the window, which is good only for an emergency. You might be seen, and as it would not be known that you had taken this risk for me, it might compromise the queen.”

“How shall I leave, sire?”

“Although you may not be able to enter the Louvre by yourself, you can at least leave it with me, for I have the password. You have your cloak, I have mine; we will put them on and can pass the gate without difficulty. Besides, I shall be glad to give some special orders to Orthon. Wait here while I go and see if there is any one in the corridor.”

With the most natural air possible Henry went out to investigate. La Mole was left alone with the queen.

“Ah! when shall I see you again?” said he.

“To-morrow evening, if we leave. Otherwise some evening soon in the Rue Cloche Percée.”

“Monsieur de la Mole,” said Henry, returning, “you can come; there is no one here.”

La Mole bowed respectfully to the queen.

“Give him your hand to kiss, madame,” said Henry; “Monsieur de la Mole is no ordinary servitor.”

Marguerite obeyed.

“By the way,” said Henry, “be sure and keep the rope ladder. It is a valuable instrument for conspirators; and when we least expect it we may need it. Come, Monsieur de la Mole.”

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE AMBASSADORS.

The following day the entire population of Paris rushed towards the Faubourg Saint Antoine, by which it had been decided that the Polish ambassadors were to enter. A line of Swiss restrained the crowd, and a regiment of horse protected the lords and the ladies of the court who rode ahead of the procession.

Soon, near the Abbey Saint Antoine, a troop of cavaliers appeared, dressed in red and yellow, with caps and furred mantles, and carrying long curved sabres like Turkish cimeters.

The officers rode at the side of the lines.

Behind this troop came a second, clothed with Oriental magnificence. They preceded the ambassadors, who, four in number, represented in a gorgeous manner the most mythological of the chivalrous kingdoms of the sixteenth century.

One of the ambassadors was the Bishop of Cracow. His costume was half ecclesiastical, half military, resplendent with gold and precious stones.

His white horse, with long mane and tail, walked with proud step and seemed to breathe out fire from his nostrils. No one would have supposed that for a month the noble animal had made fifteen leagues daily over roads which the weather had rendered almost impassable.

Beside the bishop rode the Palatine Lasco, a powerful noble, closely related to the royal family, as rich as a king and as proud.

Behind these two chief ambassadors, who were accompanied by two other palatines of high rank, came a number of Polish lords, whose horses in their harness of silk, studded with gold and precious stones, excited the applause of the people. The French horsemen, in spite of their rich apparel, were completely eclipsed by the newcomers, whom they scornfully called barbarians.

Up to the last moment Catharine had hoped the reception would be postponed on account of the King’s illness. But when the day came, and she saw Charles, as pale as a corpse, put on the gorgeous royal mantle, she realized that apparently at least she must yield to his iron will, and began to believe that after all the safest plan for Henry of Anjou was to accept the magnificent exile to which he was condemned. With the exception of the few words he had uttered when he opened his eyes as his mother came out of the closet, Charles had not spoken to Catharine since the scene which had brought about the illness to which he had succumbed. Every one in the Louvre knew that there had been a dreadful altercation between mother and son, but no one knew the cause of it, and the boldest trembled before that coldness and silence, as birds tremble before the calm which precedes a storm.

Everything had been prepared in the Louvre, not as though there were to be a reception, but as if some funeral ceremony were to occur. Every one had obeyed orders in a gloomy or passive manner. It was known that Catharine had almost trembled, and consequently every one else trembled.

The large reception-hall of the palace had been prepared, and as such ceremonies were usually public, the guards and the sentinels had received orders to admit with the ambassadors as many people as the apartments and the courts would hold. As for Paris, it presented the same aspect that every large city presents under similar circumstances; that is, confusion and curiosity. But had any one looked closely at the population that day, he would have noticed, among the groups of honest bourgeois with smiling faces, a considerable number of men in long cloaks, who exchanged glances and signs when at a distance, and when they met, a few rapid words in a low tone. These men seemed greatly occupied with the procession, followed it closely, and appeared to receive their orders from an old man, whose sharp black eyes, in spite of his white beard and grayish eyebrows, showed a vigorous activity. This old man, either by his own efforts or by those of his companions, was among the first to gain admission to the Louvre, and, thanks to the kindness of the Swiss guard, succeeded in finding a place behind the ambassadors, opposite Marguerite and Henry of Navarre.

Henry, informed by La Mole that De Mouy would be present in some disguise or other, looked round on all sides. At last his eyes encountered those of the old man and held them.

A sign from De Mouy had dispelled all doubt. He was so changed that Henry himself was doubtful whether this old man with the white beard could be the intrepid Huguenot chief who five or six days before had made so desperate a defence.

A word from Henry whispered into Marguerite’s ear called the attention of the queen to De Mouy. Then her beautiful eyes wandered around the great hall in search of La Mole; but in vain — La Mole was not there.

The speeches began. The first was to the King. Lasco, in the name of the Diet, asked him to consent that the crown of Poland be offered to a prince of the house of France.

Charles’s reply was short and to the point. He presented his brother, the Duc d’Anjou, whose courage he praised highly to the Polish ambassadors. He spoke in French, and an interpreter translated his reply at the end of each sentence. While the interpreter was speaking, the King was seen applying a handkerchief to his lips, and each time he removed it, it was covered with blood. When Charles’s reply was finished, Lasco turned to the Duc d’Anjou, bowed, and began a Latin address, in which he offered him the throne in the name of the Polish nation.

The duke replied in the same language, and in a voice he strove in vain to render firm, that he accepted with gratitude the honor which was offered to him. While he spoke, Charles remained standing, with lips compressed, and fixed on him eyes as calm and threatening as those of an eagle.

When the duke had finished, Lasco took the crown of the Jagellos from the red velvet cushion on which it rested, and while two Polish nobles placed the royal mantle on the duke, he laid the crown in Charles’s hands.

Charles signed to his brother, the Duc d’Anjou knelt down before him, and with his own hand the King placed the crown on his brother’s head. Then the two kings exchanged one of the most bitter kisses ever exchanged between two brothers.

At once a herald cried:

“Alexander Edward Henry of France, Duc d’Anjou, is crowned King of Poland. Long live the King of Poland!”

The entire assembly repeated the cry: “Long live the King of Poland!” Then Lasco turned to Marguerite. The discourse of the beautiful queen had been reserved for the last. Now, as it was a compliment accorded her in order to display her brilliant talents, as they were called, every one paid great attention to the reply, which was in Latin, and which, as we have said, Marguerite had composed herself. Lascos’s address was more of a eulogy than an address. He had yielded, Sarmatian that he was, to the admiration which the beautiful queen of Navarre inspired in every one. He had borrowed his language from Ovid; his style was that of Ronsard. He said that having left Varsovia in the middle of a very dark night, neither he nor his companions would have been able to find their way, had they not, like the Magi, been guided by two stars which became more and more brilliant as they drew nearer to France, and which now they recognized as the two beautiful eyes of the Queen of Navarre. Finally, passing from the Gospel to the Koran, from Syria to Arabia, from Nazareth to Mecca, he concluded by saying that he was quite prepared to do what the ardent votaries of the prophet did. When they were fortunate enough to see his tomb, they put out their eyes, feeling that after they had looked at such a sight, nothing in the world was worth being admired.

This address was loudly applauded by those who understood Latin because they were of the same opinion as the orator, and by those who did not understand it because they wished to appear as though they did.

Marguerite made a gracious courtesy to the gallant Sarmatian; then fixing her eyes on De Mouy, began her reply in these words:

"*Quod nunc hac in aulâ insperati adestis exultaremus, ego et conjux, nisi ideo immineret calamitas, scilicet non solum fratris sed etiam amici orbitas.*"

These words had a double meaning, and, while intended for De Mouy, were apparently addressed to Henry of Anjou. The latter, therefore, bowed in token of gratitude.

Charles did not remember having read this sentence in the address which had been submitted to him some days before; but he attached no importance to Marguerite's words, which he knew were merely conventional. Besides, he understood Latin very imperfectly.

Marguerite continued:

"*Adeo dolemur a te dividi ut tecum proficisci maluissemus. Sed idem fatum quo nunc sine ullâ morâ Lutetiâ cedere juberis, hac in urbe detinet. Proficiscere ergo, frater; proficiscere, amice; proficiscere sine nobis; proficiscentem sequuntur spes et desideria nostra.*"

It may easily be imagined that De Mouy listened with the closest attention to these words which, although addressed to the ambassadors, were intended for him alone. Two or three times Henry had glanced indifferently over his shoulder to intimate to the young Huguenot that D'Alençon had refused; but the act, which appeared involuntary, would have been insufficient for De Mouy, had not Marguerite’s words confirmed it.

While looking at Marguerite and listening with his whole soul, his piercing black eyes beneath their gray brows struck Catharine, who started as if she had had a shock of electricity, and who did not remove her eyes from him.

“What a strange face!” thought she, continuing to change her expression according as the ceremony required it. “Who is this man who watches Marguerite so attentively and whom Marguerite and Henry on their part look at so earnestly?”

The Queen of Navarre went on with her address, which from that point was a reply to the courtesies of the Polish ambassador. While Catharine was racking her brain to discover the name of this fine old man the master of ceremonies came up behind her and handed her a perfumed satin bag containing a folded paper. She opened the bag, drew out the paper, and read these words:

“*By the aid of a cordial which I have just administered to him Maurevel has somewhat recovered his strength, and has succeeded in writing the name of the man who was in the apartment of the King of Navarre. This man was Monsieur de Mouy.*”

“De Mouy!” thought the queen; “well, I felt it was he. But this old man — ah! *cospetto!* — this old man is” —

She leaned toward the captain of the guard.

“Look, Monsieur de Nancey,” said she, “but without attracting attention; look at Lasco who is speaking. Behind him — do you see the old man with the white beard, in the black velvet suit?”

“Yes, madame,” replied the captain.

“Well, do not lose sight of him.”

“The one to whom the King of Navarre made a sign just now?”

“Exactly. Station yourself at the door of the Louvre with ten men, and when he comes out invite him in the King’s name to dinner. If he accepts, take him into some room in which you must keep him a prisoner. If he resists, seize him, dead or alive.”

Fortunately Henry, who had been paying but little attention to Marguerite’s address, was looking at Catharine, and had not lost a single expression of her face. Seeing the eyes of the queen mother fixed so earnestly on De Mouy, he grew uneasy; when he saw her give an order to the captain of the guard he comprehended everything.

It was at this moment that he made the sign which had surprised Monsieur de Nancey, and which meant, “You are discovered, save yourself!”

De Mouy understood this gesture, which was a fitting climax to the portion of Marguerite’s address intended for him. He did not delay an instant, but mingled with the crowd and disappeared.

Henry, however, was not easy until Monsieur de Nancey had returned to Catharine, and he saw from the frown on the queen mother’s face that the captain had not been in time.

The audience was over. Marguerite exchanged a few unofficial words with Lasco.

The King staggered to his feet, bowed, and went out, leaning on the arm of Ambroise Paré, who had not left him since his illness.

Catharine, pale with anger, and Henry, silent from disappointment, followed.

As to the Duc d’Alençon, he had scarcely been noticed during the ceremony, and not once had Charles, whose eyes had not left the Duc d’Anjou, glanced at him.

The new King of Poland felt himself lost. Far from his mother, carried away by those barbarians of the north, he was like Antæus, the son of Terra, who lost his strength when lifted in the arms of Hercules. Once beyond the frontier the Duc d’Anjou felt that he was forever excluded from the throne of France.

Instead of following the King he retired to his mother’s apartments.

He found her no less gloomy and preoccupied than himself, for she was thinking of that fine mocking face she had not lost sight of during the ceremony, of the Béarnais for whom destiny had seemed to make way, sweeping aside kings, royal assassins, enemies, and obstacles.

Seeing her beloved son pale beneath his crown, and bent under his royal mantle, clasping his beautiful hands in silence, and holding them out to her piteously, Catharine rose and went to him.

“Oh, mother,” cried the King of Poland, “I am condemned to die in exile!”

“My son,” said Catharine, “have you so soon forgotten Réné’s prediction? Do not worry, you will not have to stay there long.”

“Mother, I entreat you,” said the Duc d’Anjou, “if there is the slightest hint, or the least suspicion, that the throne of France is to be vacant, send me word.”

“Do not worry, my son,” said Catharine. “Until the day for which both of us are waiting, there shall always be a horse saddled in my stable, and in my antechamber a courier ready to set out for Poland.”

CHAPTER XLIV.

ORESTES AND PYLADES.

Henry of Anjou having departed, peace and happiness seemed to have returned to the Louvre, among this family of the Atrides.

Charles, forgetting his melancholy, recovered his vigorous health, hunting with Henry, and on days when this was not possible discussing hunting affairs with him, and reproaching him for only one thing, his indifference to hawking, declaring that he would be faultless if he knew how to snare falcons, gerfalcons, and hawks as well as he knew how to hunt brocks and hounds.

Catharine had become a good mother again. Gentle to Charles and D’Alençon, affectionate to Henry and Marguerite, gracious to Madame de Nevers and Madame de Sauve; and under the pretext that it was in obedience to an order from her that he had been wounded, she carried her amiabilities so far as to visit Maurevel twice during his convalescence, in his house in the Rue de la Cerisaie.

Marguerite continued to carry on her love affair after the Spanish fashion.

Every evening she opened her window and by gestures and notes kept up her correspondence with La Mole, while in each of his letters the young man reminded his lovely queen of her promise of a few moments in the Rue Cloche Percée as a reward for his exile.

Only one person was lonely and unhappy in the now calm and peaceful Louvre.

This was our friend Count Annibal de Coconnas.

It was certainly something to know that La Mole was alive; it was much to be the favorite of Madame de Nevers, the most charming and the most whimsical of women. But all the pleasure of a meeting granted him by the beautiful duchess, all the consolation offered by Marguerite as to the fate of their common friend, did not compensate in the eyes of the Piedmontese for one hour spent with La Mole at their friend La Hurière’s before a bottle of light wine, or for one of those midnight rambles through that part of Paris in which an honest man ran the risk of receiving rents in his flesh, his purse, or his clothes.

To the shame of humanity it must be said that Madame de Nevers bore with impatience her rivalry with La Mole.

It was not that she hated the Provincial; on the contrary, carried away by the irresistible instinct which, in spite of herself, makes every woman a coquette with another woman's lover, especially when that woman is her friend, she had not spared La Mole the flashes of her emerald eyes, and Coconnas might have envied the frank handclasps and the amiable acts done by the duchess in favor of his friend during those days in which the star of the Piedmontese seemed growing dim in the sky of his beautiful mistress; but Coconnas, who would have strangled fifteen persons for a single glance from his lady, was so little jealous of La Mole that he had often after some indiscretions of the duchess whispered certain offers which had made the man from the Provinces blush.

At this stage of affairs it happened that Henriette, who by the absence of La Mole was deprived of all the enjoyment she had had from the company of Coconnas, that is, his never-ending flow of spirits and fun, came to Marguerite one day to beg her to do her this three-fold favor without which the heart and the mind of Coconnas seemed to be slipping away day by day.

Marguerite, always sympathetic and, besides, influenced by the prayers of La Mole and the wishes of her own heart, arranged a meeting with Henriette for the next day in the house with the double entrance, in order to discuss these matters thoroughly and uninterruptedly.

Coconnas received with rather bad grace the note from Henriette, asking him to be in the Rue Tizon at half-past nine.

Nevertheless he went to the place appointed, where he found Henriette, who was provoked at having arrived first.

"Fie, Monsieur!" she cried, "it is very bad to make — I will not say a princess — but a lady — wait in this way."

"Wait?" said Coconnas, "what an idea! I'll wager, on the contrary, that we are ahead of time."

"I was."

"Well! and I too; it cannot be more than ten o'clock at the latest."

"Well! my note said half-past nine."

"Therefore I left the Louvre at nine o'clock. I am in the service of Monsieur le Duc d'Alençon, be it said in passing, and for this reason I shall be obliged to leave you in an hour.”

“Which pleases you, no doubt?”

“No, indeed! considering the fact that Monsieur d’Alençon is an ill-tempered and capricious master; moreover, if I am to be found fault with, I prefer to have it done by pretty lips like yours rather than by such sullen ones as his.”

“Ah!” said the duchess, “that is a little better. You say, then, that you left the Louvre at nine o’clock.”

“Yes, and with every idea of coming directly here, when at the corner of the Rue de Grenelle I saw a man who looked like La Mole.”

“Good! La Mole again.”

“Always, with or without permission.”

“Brutal man!”

“Ah!” said Coconnas, “we are going to begin our complimentary speeches again.”

“Not at all; but finish your story.”

“I was not the one who wanted to tell it. It was you who asked me why I was late.”

“Yes; was it my place to arrive first?”

“Well, you are not looking for any one.”

“You are growing tiresome, my dear friend; but go on. At the corner of the Rue de Grenelle you saw a man who looked like La Mole — But what is that on your doublet — blood?”

“Yes, and here is more which was probably sprinkled over me as he fell.”

“You had a fight?”

“I should think so.”

“On account of your La Mole?”

“On whose account do you think I would fight? For a woman?”

“I thank you!”

“So I followed this man who had the impudence to look like my friend. I joined him in the Rue Coquillière, I overtook him, and stared into his face under the light from a shop. But it was not La Mole.”

“Good! that was well done.”

“Yes, but he did not think so. ‘Monsieur,’ said I to him, ‘you are an ass to take it upon yourself to resemble from afar my friend Monsieur de la Mole, who is an accomplished cavalier; while on nearer view one can easily perceive that you are nothing but a vagrant.’ Whereupon he drew his sword, and I mine. At the third pass he fell down, sprinkling me with his blood.”

“But you assisted him at least?”

“I was about to do so when a horseman rode by. Ah! this time, duchess, I was sure that it was La Mole. Unfortunately he was galloping. I ran after him as hard as I could, and those who collected around to see the fight ran behind me. Now as I might easily have been mistaken for a thief, followed as I was by all that rabble shouting at my heels, I was obliged to turn back to scatter them, which made me lose a little time. In the meanwhile the rider disappeared; I followed, inquired of every one, gave the color of the horse; but it was useless; no one had noticed him. At last, tired out from the chase, I came here.”

“Tired of the chase!” said the duchess. “How flattering you are!”

“Listen, dear friend,” said Coconnas, turning nonchalantly in his chair. “You are going to bother me again on account of poor La Mole. Now, you are wrong, for friendship, you see, — I wish I had his wit or knowledge, I would then find some comparison which would make you understand how I feel — friendship, you see, is a star, while love — love — wait! I have it! — love is only a candle. You will tell me there are several varieties” —

“Of love?”

“No! of candles, and that some are better than others. The rose, for instance, is the best; but rose as it is, the candle burns out, while the star shines forever. You will answer this by saying that when the candle is burned out, another is put in its place.”

“Monsieur de Coconnas, you are a goose.”

“Indeed!”

“Monsieur de Coconnas, you are impertinent.”

“Ah?”

“Monsieur de Coconnas, you are a scoundrel.”

“Madame, I warn you that you will make me trebly regret La Mole.”

“You no longer love me.”

“On the contrary, duchess, you do not know it, but I idolize you. But I can love and cherish and idolize you, and yet in my spare moments praise my friend.”

“So you call the time spent with me spare moments, do you?”

“What can you expect? Poor La Mole is constantly in my thoughts.”

“You prefer him to me; that is shameful! and I detest you, Annibal! Why not be frank, and tell me you prefer him to me? Annibal, I warn you of one thing: if you prefer anything in the world to me” —

“Henriette, the loveliest of duchesses! For your own peace of mind, believe me, do not ask such unwise questions. I love you more than any woman, and I love La Mole more than any man.”

“Well answered!” said a strange voice suddenly. A damask curtain was raised in front of a great panel, which, sliding back into the wall, opened a passage between the two rooms, and showed La Mole in the doorway, like one of Titian’s fine portraits in its gilded frame.

“La Mole!” exclaimed Coconnas, without paying any attention to Marguerite or taking the time to thank her for the surprise she had arranged for him; “La Mole, my friend, my dear La Mole!” and he rushed into the arms of his friend, upsetting the armchair in which he had been sitting and the table that stood in his way.

La Mole returned his embrace with effusion; then, turning to the Duchesse de Nevers:

“Pardon me, madame, if the mention of my name has sometimes disturbed your happiness.” “Certainly,” he added, glancing at Marguerite with a look of ineffable tenderness, “it has not been my fault that I have not seen you sooner.”

“You see, Henriette,” said Marguerite, “I have kept my word; here he is!”

“Is it, then, to the prayers of Madame la Duchesse that I owe this happiness?” asked La Mole.

“To her prayers alone,” replied Marguerite.

Then, turning to La Mole, she continued:

“La Mole, I will allow you not to believe one word of what I say.”

Meanwhile Coconnas pressed his friend to his heart over and over again, walked round him a dozen times, and even held a candelabrum to his face the better to see him; then suddenly turning, he knelt down before Marguerite and kissed the hem of her robe.

“Ah! that is pleasant!” said the Duchesse de Nevers. “I suppose now you will find me bearable.”

“By Heaven!” cried Coconnas, “I shall find you as adorable as ever; only now I can tell you so with a lighter heart, and were there any number of Poles, Sarmatians, and other hyperborean barbarians present I should make them all admit that you were the queen of beauties.”

“Gently, gently, Coconnas,” said La Mole, “Madame Marguerite is here!”

“Oh! I cannot help that,” cried Coconnas, with the half-comic air which belonged to him alone, “I still assert that Madame Henriette is the queen of beauties and Madame Marguerite is the beauty of queens.”

But whatever he might say or do, the Piedmontese, completely carried away by the joy of having found his dear La Mole, had neither eyes nor ears for any one but him.

“Come, my beautiful queen,” said Madame de Nevers, “come, let us leave these dear friends to chat awhile alone. They have a thousand things to say to each other which would be interrupted by our conversation. It is hard for us, but it is the only way, I am sure, to make Monsieur Annibal perfectly sane. Do this for me, my queen! since I am foolish enough to love this worthless fellow, as his friend La Mole calls him.”

Marguerite whispered a few words to La Mole, who, anxious as he had been to see his friend, would have been glad had the affection of Coconnas for him been less exacting. Meanwhile Coconnas was endeavoring to bring back a smile and a gentle word to Henriette’s lips, a result which was easily attained. Then the two women passed into the next room, where supper was awaiting them.

The young men were alone. The first questions Coconnas asked his friend were about that fatal evening which had almost cost him his life. As La Mole proceeded in his story the Piedmontese, who, however, was not easily moved, trembled in every limb.

“But why,” said he, “instead of running about the country as you have done, and causing me such uneasiness, did you not seek refuge with our master? The duke who had defended you would have hidden you. I should have been near you and my grief, although feigned, would nevertheless have disturbed every simpleton at court.”

“Our master!” said La Mole, in a low voice, “the Duc d’Alençon?”

“Yes. According to what he told me, I supposed it was to him you owed your life.”

“I owe my life to the King of Navarre,” replied La Mole.

“Oh!” exclaimed Coconnas, “are you sure?”

“Beyond a doubt.”

“Oh! what a good, kind king! But what part did the Duc d’Alençon play in it all?”

“He held the rope to strangle me.”

“By Heaven!” cried Coconnas, “are you sure of what you say, La Mole? What! this pale-faced, pitiful-looking cur strangle my friend! Ah! by Heaven, by to-morrow I will let him know what I think of him.”

“Are you mad?”

“That is true, he would begin again. But what does it matter? Things cannot go on like this.”

“Come, come, Coconnas, calm yourself and try and remember that it is half-past eleven o’clock and that you are on duty to-night.”

“What do I care about my duty to him! Bah! Let him wait! My attendance! I serve a man who has held a rope? You are joking! No! This is providential; it is said that I should find you to leave you no more. I shall stay here.”

“Why, man alive, think what you are saying. You are not drunk, I hope.”

“No, fortunately; if I were I would set fire to the Louvre.”

“Come, Annibal,” said La Mole, “be reasonable. Return to your duties. Service is a sacred thing.”

“Will you return with me?”

“Impossible.”

“Are they still thinking of killing you?”

“I think not. I am of too little importance for them to have any plot on hand about me. For an instant they wanted to kill me, but that was all. The princes were on a frolic that night.”

“What are you going to do, then?”

“Nothing; wander about or take a walk.”

“Well, I will walk, too, and wander with you. That will be charming. Then, if you are attacked, there will be two of us, and we will give them no end of trouble. Let him come, your duke! I will pin him to the wall like a butterfly!”

“But, at least, say that you are going to leave his service!”

“Yes, I am.”

“In that case, tell him so.”

“Well, that seems only right. I will do so. I will write to him.”

“Write to him! That would be discourteous, Coconnas, to a prince of the blood.”

“Yes, of the blood! of the blood of my friend. Take care,” cried Coconnas, rolling his large, tragic eyes, “lest I trifle with points of etiquette!”

“Probably,” said La Mole to himself, “in a few days he will need neither the prince nor any one else, for if he wants to come with us, we will take him.”

Thereupon Coconnas took the pen without further opposition from his friend and hastily composed the following specimen of eloquence:

“*Monseigneur: There can be no doubt but that your highness, versed as you are in the writings of all authors of antiquity, must know the touching story of Orestes and Pylades, who were two heroes celebrated for their misfortunes and their friendship. My friend La Mole is no less unfortunate than was Orestes, while I am no less tender than Pylades. At present he has affairs of importance which demand my aid. It is therefore impossible for me to leave him. So with the consent of your highness I will take a short vacation, determined as I am to attach myself to my friend’s fortune, whithersoever it may lead me. It is with the deepest grief that I tear myself away from the service of your highness, but for this I trust I may obtain your pardon. I venture to subscribe myself with respect, my lord,*

“*Your highness’s very humble and very obedient servant,*

“*Annibal, Comte de Coconnas,*

“*The inseparable friend of Monsieur de la Mole.*”

This masterpiece finished, Coconnas read it aloud to La Mole, who merely shrugged his shoulders.

“Well! what do you say to it?” asked Coconnas, who had not seen the shrug, or who had pretended not to see it.

“I say,” replied La Mole, “that Monsieur d’Alençon will laugh at us.”

“At us?”

“Both of us.”

“That will be better, it seems to me, than to strangle each of us separately.”

“Bah!” said La Mole, laughing, “the one will not necessarily prevent the other.”

“Well! so much the worse. Come what may, I will send the letter to-morrow morning. Where shall we sleep when we leave here?”

“At Maître la Hurière’s, in that little room in which you tried to stab me before we were Orestes and Pylades!”

“Very well, I will send my letter to the Louvre by our host.”

Just then the panel moved.

“Well!” asked both princesses at once, “where are Orestes and Pylades?”

“By Heaven! madame,” replied Coconnas, “Pylades and Orestes are dying of hunger and love.”

It was Maître la Hurière himself who, at nine o’clock the following morning, carried to the Louvre the respectful missive of Count Annibal de Coconnas.

CHAPTER XLV.

ORTHON.

After the refusal of the Duc d’Alençon, which left everything in peril, even his life, Henry became more intimate with the prince than ever, if that were possible. Catharine concluded from the intimacy that the two princes not only understood each other perfectly, but also that they were planning some mutual conspiracy. She questioned Marguerite on the subject, but Marguerite was worthy of her mother, and the Queen of Navarre, whose chief talent lay in avoiding explanations, parried her mother’s questions so cleverly that although replying to all she left Catharine more mystified than ever.

The Florentine, therefore, had nothing to guide her except the spirit of intrigue she had brought with her from Tuscany, the most interesting of the small states of that period, and the feeling of hatred she had imbibed from the court of France, which was more divided in its interests and opinions than any court at that time.

She realized that a part of the strength of the Béarnais came from his alliance with the Duc d’Alençon, and she determined to separate them.

From the moment she formed this resolution she beset her son with the patience and the wiles of an angler, who, when he has dropped his bait near the fish, unconsciously draws it in until his prey is caught.

François perceived this increase of affection on the part of his mother and made advances to her. As for Henry, he pretended to see nothing, but kept a closer watch on his ally than he had yet done.

Every one was waiting for some event.

During this state of things, one morning when the sun rose clear, giving out that gentle warmth and sweet odor which announce a beautiful day, a pale man, leaning on a cane, and walking with difficulty, came out of a small house situated behind the arsenal, and walked slowly along the Rue du Petit Muse.

At the Porte Saint Antoine he turned into the street which encircles the moat of the Bastille like a marsh, left the boulevard on his left and entered the Archery Garden, where the gatekeeper received him with every mark of respect.

There was no one in the garden, which, as its name implies, belonged to a particular society called the Taxopholites. Had there been any strollers there the pale man would have merited their sympathy, for his long mustache, his military step and bearing, though weakened by suffering, sufficiently indicated that he was an officer who had been recently wounded, and who was endeavoring to regain his strength by moderate exercise in the open air.

Yet, strange to say, when the cloak opened in which, in spite of the increasing heat, this apparently harmless man was wrapped, it displayed a pair of long pistols suspended from the silver clasps of his belt. This belt also sustained a dagger and a sword so enormously long that it seemed almost impossible to be handled, and which, completing this living arsenal, clattered against his shrunken and trembling legs.

As an additional precaution the lonely soldier glanced around at every step as though to question each turn of the path, each bush and ditch.

Having entered the garden without being molested, the man reached a sort of small arbor, facing the boulevard, from which it was separated by a thick hedge and a small ditch which formed a double inclosure. He threw himself upon a grassy bank within reach of a table on which the host of the establishment, who combined with his duties as gatekeeper the vocation of cook, at once placed a bottle of cordial.

The invalid had been there about ten minutes and had several times raised the china cup to his lips, taking little sips of its contents, when suddenly his countenance, in spite of its interesting pallor, assumed a startled expression. From the Croix Faubin, along a path which to-day is the Rue de Naples, he had perceived a cavalier, wrapped in a great cloak, stop near the moat.

Not more than five minutes had elapsed, during which the man of the pale face, whom the reader has perhaps already recognized as Maurevel, had scarcely had time to recover from the emotion caused by his unexpected presence, when the horseman was joined by a man in a close-fitting coat, like that of a page, who came by the road which is since known as the Rue des Fossés Saint Nicholas.

Hidden in his leafy arbor, Maurevel could easily see and hear everything, and when it is known that the cavalier was De Mouy and the young man in the tight-fitting cloak Orthon, one may imagine whether Maurevel’s eyes and ears were not on the alert.

Both men looked very carefully around. Maurevel held his breath.

“You may speak, monsieur,” said Orthon, who being the younger was the more confident; “no one can either see or hear us.”

“That is well,” said De Mouy, “you are to go to Madame de Sauve, and if you find her in her rooms give her this note. If she is not there, you will place it behind the mirror where the king is in the habit of putting his letters. Then you will wait in the Louvre. If you receive an answer, you will bring it you know where; if no reply is sent, you will meet me this evening with a petronel at the spot I showed you, and from which I have just come.”

“Very well,” said Orthon, “I understand.”

“I will now leave you. I have much to do to-day. You need make no haste — there is no use in it, for you do not need to reach the Louvre until he is there, and I think he is taking a lesson in hawking this morning. Now go, and show me what you can do. You have recovered, and you apparently are going to thank Madame de Sauve for her kindness to you during your illness. Now go, my boy.”

Maurevel listened, his eyes fixed, his hair on end, his forehead covered with perspiration. His first impulse had been to detach one of his pistols from his belt and aim at De Mouy; but a movement of the latter had opened his cloak and displayed a firm and solid cuirass. Therefore in all probability the ball would flatten itself against this cuirass or strike some part of the body wherein the wound would not be fatal. Besides, he reflected that De Mouy, strong and well armed, would have an advantage over him, wounded as he was. So with a sigh he drew back the weapon which he had pointed at the Huguenot.

“How unfortunate,” he murmured, “that I am unable to stretch him dead on the spot, without other witness than that young varlet who would have been such a good mark for my second ball!”

But Maurevel thought that the note given to Orthon and which he was to deliver to Madame de Sauve might perhaps be of more importance than the life of the Huguenot chief.

“Well!” said he, “you have escaped me again this morning; be it so. To-morrow I will have my turn at you if I have to follow you into that hell from which you have come to ruin me, unless I destroy you.”

De Mouy raised his cloak over his face, and set out rapidly in the direction of the Temple. Orthon took the road along the moat which led to the banks of the river.

Then Maurevel, rising with more energy and vigor than he had dared to hope for, regained the Rue de la Cerisaie, reached his home, ordered a horse to be saddled, and weak as he was and at the risk of opening his wounds again, set off at a gallop to the Rue Saint Antoine, reached the quays, and entered the Louvre.

Five minutes after he had passed under the gate Catharine knew all that had just taken place, and Maurevel had received the thousand golden crowns promised him for the arrest of the King of Navarre.

“Oh!” said Catharine, “either I am mistaken or this De Mouy is the black spot that was discovered by Réné in the horoscope of the accursed Béarnais.”

A quarter of an hour after Maurevel Orthon entered the Louvre, showed himself as De Mouy had directed, and went to the apartments of Madame de Sauve, after having spoken to several attendants of the palace.

Dariole was the only one in her mistress’s rooms. Catharine had asked the latter to write certain important letters, and she had been with the queen for the last five minutes.

“No matter,” said Orthon, “I will wait.”

Taking advantage of his intimacy in the house, the young man went into the sleeping-room of the baroness, and, having assured himself that he was alone, he laid the note behind the mirror. Just as he was removing his hand Catharine entered.

Orthon turned pale, for it seemed to him that the quick, searching glance of the queen mother was first directed to the mirror.

“What are you doing here, my little man?” asked Catharine; “looking for Madame de Sauve?”

“Yes, madame; it is a long time since I saw her, and if I delay any longer in thanking her I fear she will think me ungrateful.”

“You love this dear Charlotte very much, do you not?”

“With all my heart, madame!”

“And you are faithful, from what I hear.”

“Your majesty will understand that this is very natural when you know that Madame de Sauve took more care of me than I, being only an humble servant, deserved.”

“And upon what occasion did she bestow all this care on you?” asked Catharine, pretending to be ignorant of what had happened to the youth.

“When I was wounded, madame.”

“Ah, poor boy!” said Catharine, “you were wounded?”

“Yes, madame.”

“When was that?”

“The night they tried to arrest the King of Navarre. I was so terrified at sight of the soldiers that I called and shouted; and one of the men gave me a blow on the head which knocked me senseless.”

“Poor boy! And are you quite recovered now?”

“Yes, madame.”

“So that you are trying to get back into the service of the King of Navarre?”

“No, madame. When the King of Navarre learned that I had dared to resist your majesty’s order he dismissed me at once.”

“Indeed!” said Catharine, in a tone full of interest; “well, I will see to that affair. But if you are waiting for Madame de Sauve you will wait in vain, for she is occupied in my apartments.”

Whereupon, thinking that Orthon perhaps had not had time to hide his note behind the mirror, Catharine stepped into the adjoining room in order to give him the necessary opportunity.

But just as Orthon, anxious at the unexpected arrival of the queen mother, was wondering whether her coming did not forebode some plot against his master, he heard three gentle taps against the ceiling. This was the signal which he himself was in the habit of giving his master in case of danger when the latter was with Madame de Sauve and Orthon was keeping guard.

He started at the sound; a light broke upon his mind; he fancied that this time the warning had been given to him. Springing to the mirror, he removed the note he had just placed there.

Through an opening in the tapestry Catharine had followed every movement of the boy. She saw him dart to the mirror, but she did not know whether it was to hide the note or take it away.

“Well!” murmured the impatient Florentine; “why does he not leave now?”

And she returned to the room smiling.

“Still here, my boy?” said she; “why, what do you want? Did I not tell you that I would look after your fortune? When I say a thing you do not doubt it, do you?”

“Oh, madame, God forbid!” replied Orthon.

And approaching the queen, he bent his knee, kissed the hem of her robe, and at once withdrew.

As he went through the antechamber he saw the captain of the guards, who was waiting for Catharine. The sight of this man, instead of allaying his suspicions, augmented them.

On her part, no sooner had she seen the curtains fall behind Orthon than Catharine sprang to the mirror. But in vain she sought behind it with hands trembling with impatience. She found no note.

And yet she was sure that she had seen the boy approach the mirror. It was to remove the note, therefore, and not to leave it. Fate had given to her enemies a strength equal to her own.

A child had become a man the moment he fought with her.

She moved the mirror, looked behind it, tapped it; nothing was there!

“Oh! unhappy boy!” cried she, “I wished him no ill and now by removing the note he hastens his destiny. Ho, there, Monsieur de Nancey!”

The vibrating tones of the queen mother rang through the salon and penetrated into the anteroom, where, as we have said, Monsieur de Nancey was waiting.

The captain of the guards hastened to the queen.

“Here I am, madame,” said he, “what is your majesty’s will?”

“Have you been in the antechamber?”

“Yes, madame.”

“Did you see a young man, a child, pass through?”

“Just now.”

“He cannot have gone far, can he?”

“Scarcely to the stairway.”

“Call him back.”

“What is his name?”

“Orthon. If he refuses to come bring him back by force; but do not frighten him unless he resists. I must speak to him at once.”

The captain of the guards hurriedly withdrew.

As he had said, Orthon was scarcely half way down the stairs, for he was descending slowly, hoping to meet or see the King of Navarre or Madame de Sauve somewhere.

He heard his name and gave a start.

His first impulse was to run, but with forethought beyond his years he realized that by doing so all would be lost.

He stopped therefore.

“Who calls me?”

“I, Monsieur de Nancey,” replied the captain of the guards, hurrying down the stairs.

“But I am in haste,” said Orthon.

“By order of her majesty the queen mother,” said Monsieur de Nancey, as he came up to him.

The youth wiped the perspiration from his brow and turned back.

The captain followed.

Catharine’s first idea had been to stop the young man, have him searched, and take possession of the note which she knew he had. She had planned to accuse him of theft, and with this end in view she had removed from the toilet table a diamond clasp which she was going to say he had taken.

But on reflection she concluded that this would be dangerous, in that it would arouse the boy’s suspicions and he would inform his master, who would then begin to mistrust something, and so her enemy would gain an advantage over her.

She could, no doubt, have the young man taken to some dungeon, but the rumor of the arrest, however secretly it might be done, would spread through the Louvre, and the slightest inkling of it would put Henry on his guard. However, she must have the note, for a note from Monsieur de Mouy to the King of Navarre, a note sent with such precautions, surely meant conspiracy.

She put back the clasp from where she had taken it.

“No, no,” said she, “that would be the method of a guard; it is poor. But for a note — which perhaps after all is not worth the trouble,” she continued, frowning, and speaking so low that she herself could scarcely hear the sound of her words. “Well, it is not my fault, but his. Why did not the little scoundrel put the note where he should have put it? I must have this letter.”

Just then Orthon entered.

Catharine’s face wore such a terrible expression that the youth stopped on the threshold pale as death. He was still too young to be perfect master of himself.

“Madame,” said he, “you have done me the honor of calling me back. In what can I serve your majesty?”

Catharine’s face lighted up as if a ray of sunlight had touched it.

"I called you back, my child," said she, "because your face pleases me, and having promised to help you I am anxious to do so without delay. We queens are sometimes accused of being forgetful. But this is not on account of our hearts, but because our minds are filled with business. Now I remembered that kings hold men's fortunes in their hands, and so I called you back. Follow me, my child."

Monsieur de Nancey, who was taking the affair seriously, was greatly surprised at Catharine's affectionate manner.

"Can you ride, my child?" asked Catharine.

"Yes, madame."

"Then come into my room. I want to give you a message to carry to Saint Germain."

"I am at your majesty's command."

"Order a horse to be saddled, De Nancey."

Monsieur de Nancey disappeared.

"Come, boy," said Catharine, leading the way.

Orthon followed. The queen mother descended to the next floor, entered the corridor in which were the apartments of the king and the Duc d'Alençon, reached the winding staircase, again descended a flight of stairs, and opened a door leading to a circular gallery to which none but the king and herself possessed the key. Bidding Orthon pass in first, she entered after him and locked the door. This gallery formed a sort of rampart to a certain portion of the apartments of the king and the queen mother, and, like the corridor of the castle of Saint Angelo at Rome, or that of the Pitti Palace at Florence, was a safe place in case of danger. The door locked, Catharine was alone with the young man in the dark corridor. Each advanced a few steps, the queen leading the way, Orthon following.

Suddenly Catharine turned and Orthon again saw on her face the same sinister expression which he had seen on it a few minutes before. Her eyes were as round as those of a cat or a panther and seemed to dart forth fire in the darkness.

"Stop!" she cried.

Orthon felt a shiver run through him; a deathly cold like an icy cloak seemed to fall from the ceiling. The floor felt like the covering of a tomb. Catharine's glance was so sharp that it seemed to penetrate to the very soul of the page. He recoiled and leaned against the wall, trembling from head to foot.

“Where is the note you were charged to give to the King of Navarre?”

“The note?” stammered Orthon.

“Yes; which, if you did not find him, you were to place behind the mirror?”

“I, madame,” said Orthon, “I do not know what you mean.”

“The note which De Mouy gave you an hour ago, behind the Archery Garden.”

“I have no note,” said Orthon; “your majesty must be mistaken.”

“You lie,” said Catharine; “give me the note, and I will keep the promise I made you.”

“What promise, madame?”

“I will make your fortune.”

“I have no note, madame,” repeated the child.

Catharine ground her teeth; then assuming a smile:

“Give it to me,” said she, “and you shall have a thousand golden crowns.”

“I have no note, madame.”

“Two thousand crowns.”

“Impossible; since I have no note, how can I give it to you?”

“Ten thousand crowns, Orthon.”

Orthon, who saw the anger of the queen rising, felt that there was only one way of saving his master, and that was to swallow the note. He put his hand to his pocket, but Catharine guessed his intention and stopped him.

“There, my child,” said she, laughing, “you are certainly faithful. When kings wish to attach a follower to them there is no harm in their making sure of his trustworthiness. Here, take this purse as a first reward. Go and carry your note to your master, and tell him that from to-day you are in my service. You can get out without me by the door we entered. It opens from within.”

And giving the purse to the astonished youth Catharine walked on a few steps and placed her hand against the wall.

But the young man stood still, hesitating. He could not believe that the danger he had felt hovering over him was gone.

“Come, do not tremble so,” said Catharine. “Have I not told you that you were free to go, and that if you wish to come back your fortune is made?”

“Thank you, madame,” said Orthon. “Then you pardon me?”

"I do more, I reward you; you are a faithful bearer of notes, a gentle messenger of love. But you forget your master is waiting for you."

"Ah! that is true," said the young man, springing towards the door.

But scarcely had he advanced three steps before the floor gave way beneath his feet. He stumbled, extended both hands, gave a fearful cry, and disappeared in the dungeon of the Louvre, the spring of which Catharine had just touched.

"So," murmured the queen, "thanks to the fellow's obstinacy I shall have to descend a hundred and fifty steps."

The queen mother returned to her apartments, lighted a dark lantern, came back to the corridor, closed the spring, and opened the door of a spiral staircase which seemed to lead to the bowels of the earth. Urged on by the insatiable thirst of a curiosity which was but the minister of her hatred, she reached an iron door which turned on its hinges and admitted her to the depths of the dungeon. Bleeding, crushed, and mutilated by a fall of a hundred feet or more, but still breathing, lay poor Orthon.

Beyond the thick wall the waters of the Seine were heard roaring, brought to the foot of the stairs by a subterranean channel.

Catharine entered the damp and unwholesome place, which during her reign had witnessed many a fall similar to the one it had just seen, searched the body, seized the letter, made sure that it was the one she desired, then pushing aside the body with her foot she pressed a spring, the bottom of the dungeon sank, and the corpse, carried down by its own weight, disappeared in the direction of the river.

Closing the door again, Catharine ascended, shut herself in her closet, and read the note, which contained these words:

"*This evening at ten o'clock, Rue de l'Arbre Sec, Hôtel de la Belle Étoile. If you come send no reply; otherwise send back NO by the bearer.*

"*De Mouy De Saint Phale.*"

As Catharine read this note a smile came to her lips. She was thinking of the victory she was to gain, forgetting the price at which she had bought it. But after all what was Orthon? A faithful, devoted follower, a handsome young boy; that was all.

That, one may well imagine, would not for an instant have turned the scales on which the fate of empires had been weighed.

The note read, Catharine at once went to Madame de Sauve's and placed it behind the mirror.

As she came down she found the captain of the guards at the entrance of the corridor.

“Madame,” said Monsieur de Nancey, “according to your majesty’s orders the horse is ready.”

“My dear baron,” said Catharine, “we shall not need it. I have made the boy speak, and he is really too stupid to be charged with the errand I wanted to entrust to him. I thought he was a lackey, but he is nothing but a groom at best. I gave him some money and dismissed him by the private gate.”

“But,” said Monsieur de Nancey, “the errand?”

“The errand?” asked Catharine.

“The one on which he was to go to Saint Germain. Does your majesty wish me to undertake it, or shall I have one of my men attend to it?”

“No, no,” said Catharine, “this evening you and your men will have something else to do.”

Whereupon the queen mother returned to her room, hoping that evening to hold in her hands the fate of the accursed King of Navarre.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE INN OF LA BELLE ÉTOILE.

Two hours after the event we have described, no trace of which remained on Catharine’s face, Madame de Sauve, having finished her work for the queen, returned to her own rooms. Henry followed her, and learning from Dariole that Orthon had been there he went directly to the mirror and found the note.

It was, as we have said, couched in these terms:

“*This evening at ten o’clock, Rue de l’Arbre Sec, Hôtel de la Belle Étoile. If you come send no reply; otherwise send back NO by the bearer.*”

There was no address.

“Henry will not fail to keep the appointment,” said Catharine, “for even had he not wished to do so there is no longer a messenger to take back his answer.”

Catharine was not mistaken.

Henry inquired for Orthon. Dariole said that he had gone out with the queen mother; but as the note had been found in its place, and as the poor boy was known to be incapable of treason, Henry felt no anxiety.

He dined as usual at the table of the King, who joked him greatly on the mistakes he had made while hawking that morning.

Henry made excuses for himself, saying that he came from the mountains and not the plain, but he promised Charles to study the art. Catharine was charming, and on leaving the table begged Marguerite to pass the evening with her.

At eight o’clock Henry took two attendants, left by the Porte Saint Honoré, made a long circuit, returned by the Tour de Bois, and crossing the Seine at the ferry of Nesle, rode up the Rue Saint Jacques, where he dismissed his gentlemen, as if he were going to keep some love appointment. At the corner of the Rue des Mathurins he found a man on horseback, wrapped in a cloak. He approached him.

“Mantes!” said the man.

“Pau!” replied the king.

The man at once dismounted. Henry put on his splashed mantle, mounted the horse, which was covered with foam, returned by the Rue de la Harpe, crossed the Pont Saint Michel, passed down the Rue Barthélemy, again crossed the river at the Pont aux Meuniers, descended the quays, took the Rue de l'Arbre Sec, and knocked at the door of Maître la Hurière's.

La Mole was in a room writing a long love-letter — to whom may easily be imagined.

Coconnas was in the kitchen with La Hurière, watching half a dozen partridges roasting, and disputing with his friend the host as to when they should be removed from the spit. At this moment Henry knocked. Grégoire opened the door and led the horse to the stable, while the traveller entered, stamping on the floor as if to warm his benumbed feet.

“Maître La Hurière,” said La Mole, as he continued to write, “here is a gentleman asking for you.”

La Hurière advanced, looked at Henry from head to foot, and as his thick cloth mantle did not inspire the innkeeper with very great veneration:

“Who are you?” he asked.

“Well, by Heaven!” said Henry, pointing to La Mole, “monsieur has just told you; I am a gentleman from Gascony come to court.”

“What do you want?”

“A room and supper.”

“Humph!” said La Hurière, “have you a lackey?”

This was the question usually asked, as is well known.

“No,” replied Henry, “but I hope to have one when I make my fortune.”

“I do not let rooms to any one unless he has a lackey,” said La Hurière.

“Even if I offered to pay you double for your supper?”

“Oh! you are very generous, worthy sir!” said La Hurière, looking suspiciously at Henry.

“Not at all, but, hoping to pass the night in your hotel, which has been highly recommended by a nobleman from my county who has been here, I invited a friend to sup with me. Have you any good wine of Arbois?”

“I have some which is better than the King of Navarre drinks.”

“Good! I will pay well for it. Ah! here is my friend.”

Just then the door opened and a gentleman entered older by a few years than the first, and dragging a long rapier at his side.

“Ah!” said he, “you are prompt, my young friend. For a man who has just made two hundred leagues it is something to be so punctual.”

“Is this your guest?” asked La Hurière.

“Yes,” said the first, going up to the young man with the rapier and shaking him by the hand, “we will have our supper now.”

“Here or in your room?”

“Wherever you please.”

“Maître,” said La Mole to La Hurière, “rid us of these Huguenot fellows. Coconnas and I cannot say a word before them.”

“Carry the supper to room No. 2, on the third floor. Upstairs, gentlemen.”

The two travellers followed Grégoire, who preceded them with lights.

La Mole watched them until they had disappeared. Then turning round he saw Coconnas, whose head was thrust out of the kitchen door. Two great eyes and an open mouth gave to the latter’s face a remarkable expression of astonishment.

La Mole stepped up to him.

“By Heaven!” said Coconnas, “did you see?”

“What?”

“Those two gentlemen.”

“Well?”

“I would swear that it was” —

“Who?”

“Why — the King of Navarre and the man in the red cloak.”

“Swear if you will, but not too loud.”

“Did you recognize them too?”

“Certainly.”

“What are they here for?”

“Some love affair.”

“You think so?”

“I am sure of it.”

“La Mole, I prefer sword-thrusts to these love affairs. I would have sworn a moment ago, now I will bet.”

“What will you bet?”

“That there is some plot on hand.”

“You are mad.”

“I tell you” —

“I tell you that even if they are plotting it is their own affair.”

“That is true. However,” said Coconnas, “I no longer belong to Monsieur d’Alençon. So let them do as they see fit.”

As the partridges had apparently reached the state in which Coconnas liked them, the Piedmontese, who counted on making the most of his dinner of them, called Maître la Hurière to remove them from the spit.

Meantime Henry and De Mouy were installed in their chamber.

“Well, sire,” said De Mouy, when Grégoire had set the table, “have you seen Orthon?”

“No; but I found the note he left behind the mirror. The boy must have become frightened, I suppose, for Queen Catharine came in while he was there, so he went away without waiting for my answer.”

“For a moment I felt somewhat anxious about him, as Dariole told me that the queen mother had had a long talk with him.”

“Oh! there is no danger. The boy is clever, and although the queen mother knows his profession he will not let her find out much from him, I am sure.”

“But have you seen him, De Mouy?” asked Henry.

“No, but I expect to this evening. At midnight he is to come here for me with a good petronel. He will tell me what happened as we walk along.”

“And the man at the corner of the Rue des Mathurins?”

“What man?”

“The man who gave me his horse and cloak. Are you sure of him?”

“He is one of our most devoted followers. Besides, he neither knows your majesty nor why he himself was there.”

“Can we discuss our affairs without fear, then?”

“Certainly. Besides, La Mole is on the watch.”

“Well, sire, what says Monsieur d’Alençon?”

“Monsieur d’Alençon will not go, De Mouy. He said so positively. The election of D’Anjou to the throne of Poland and the king’s illness have changed his mind.”

“So he is the one who spoiled our plan?”

“Yes.”

“Has he betrayed us?”

“Not yet; but he will do so at the first opportunity.”

“Coward! traitor! Why did he not answer my letters?”

“In order to have proofs against you, and none against himself. Meantime, all is lost, is it not, De Mouy?”

“On the contrary, sire, all is won. You know that the whole party, except the faction of the Prince de Condé, was for you, and used the duke, with whom it seemed to have relations, only as a safeguard. Well, since the day of the ceremony I have arranged so that everything is for you. One hundred men were enough to escape with the Duc d’Alençon; I have raised fifteen hundred. In one week they will be ready and drawn up on the road to Pau. It will not be a flight but a retreat. Fifteen hundred men will suffice, sire, will they not? Shall you feel safe with such an army?”

Henry smiled and touched him on the shoulder.

“You know, De Mouy,” said he, “and you alone know it, that Henry of Navarre is not naturally such a coward as is supposed.”

“Yes, I know that, sire; and I trust before long that all France will know it too.”

“But where one plots one must succeed. The first condition of success is decision; and for decision to be rapid, frank, and to the point, one must be sure of success.”

“Well, sire, what days do you hunt?”

“Every week or ten days we either hunt or hawk.”

“When did you hunt last?”

“To-day.”

“Then a week or ten days from now you will hunt again?”

“No doubt; possibly before then.”

“Listen, sire; everything seems perfectly quiet. The Duc d’Anjou has left; no one thinks of him. The King is getting better every day. The persecution against us has almost ceased. Play the amiable with the queen mother and Monsieur d’Alençon; keep telling him that you cannot go without him, and try to make him believe you, which is more difficult.”

“Do not worry, he will believe me.”

“Do you think he has such confidence in you?”

“No, God forbid, but he believes everything the queen says.”

“And is the queen true to us?”

“Oh! I have proof of it. Besides, she is ambitious and is dying for this far-off crown of Navarre.”

“Well! three days before the hunt send me word where it will take place — whether it is to be at Bondy, at Saint Germain, or at Rambouillet. Monsieur de la Mole will ride ahead of you; follow him, and ride fast. Once out of the forest if the queen mother wants you she will have to run after you; and I trust that her Norman horses will not see even the hoofs of our Barbary steeds and our Spanish ponies.”

“Agreed, De Mouy.”

“Have you any money, sire?”

Henry made the same grimace he made all his life at this question.

“Not much,” said he; “but I think Margot has some.”

“Well! whether it is yours or hers, bring as much as you can.”

“And in the meantime what are you going to do?”

“Having paid some attention to your majesty’s affairs, as you see, will your majesty permit me to devote a little time to my own?”

“Certainly, De Mouy, certainly, but what are yours?”

“Yesterday Orthon told me (he is a very intelligent boy, whom I recommend to your majesty) that he met that scoundrel of a Maurevel near the arsenal, that thanks to Réné he has recovered, and that he was warming himself in the sun like the snake that he is.”

“Ah, yes, I understand,” said Henry.

“Very good, then. You will be king some day, sire, and if you have anything such as I have to avenge you can do so in a kingly way. I am a soldier and must avenge myself like a soldier. So while all our little affairs are being arranged, which will give that scoundrel five or six days in which to recover more fully, I too shall take a stroll around the arsenal, and I will pin him to the grass with four blows of my rapier, after which I shall leave Paris with a lighter heart.”

“Attend to your affairs, my friend, by all means,” said the Béarnais. “By the way, you are pleased with La Mole, are you not?”

“Yes; he is a charming fellow, devoted to you body and soul, sire, and on whom you can depend as you can on me — brave” —

“And above all, discreet. So he must follow us to Navarre, De Mouy; once there we will look about and see what we can do to recompense him.”

As Henry concluded these words with a sly smile, the door opened or rather was broken in, and the man they had just been praising appeared, pale and agitated.

“Quick, sire,” cried he; “quick, the house is surrounded.”

“Surrounded!” cried Henry, rising; “by whom?”

“By the King’s guards.”

“Oh!” said De Mouy, drawing his pistols from his belt, “we are to have a battle, apparently.”

“Well,” said La Mole, “you may well talk of pistols and battle, but what can you do against fifty men?”

“He is right,” said the king; “and if there were any means of escape” —

“There is one which has already been of use to me, and if your majesty will follow me” —

“And De Mouy?”

“And De Mouy too if he wishes, but you must be quick.”

Steps were heard on the stairs.

“It is too late,” said Henry.

“Ah! if any one would only engage them for five minutes,” cried La Mole, “I would save the king.”

“Save him, then, monsieur,” said De Mouy; “I will look after them. Go, sire, go.”

“But what shall you do?”

“Do not fear, sire, but go.”

And De Mouy began by hiding the king’s plate, napkin, and goblet, so that it might seem as though he had been alone at table.

“Come, sire, come,” cried La Mole, seizing the king by the arm and dragging him towards the stairway.

“De Mouy, my brave De Mouy!” exclaimed Henry, holding out his hand to the young man.

De Mouy kissed the hand, pushed Henry from the room, and closed and bolted the door after him.

“Yes, I understand,” said Henry, “he will be caught, while we escape; but who the devil can have betrayed us?”

“Come, sire, come. They are on the stairs.”

In fact, the light of the torches was beginning to be seen on the wall, while at the foot of the stairs sounds like the clanking of swords were heard.

“Quick, quick, sire!” cried La Mole.

And, guiding the king in the darkness, he ascended two flights, pushed open a door, which he locked behind him, and, opening the window of a closet:

“Sire,” said he, “is your majesty very much afraid of a walk across the roofs?”

“I?” said Henry, “come, now; am I not a chamois hunter?”

“Well, your majesty must follow me. I know the way and will guide you.”

“Go on,” said Henry, “I will follow.”

La Mole stepped out, went along the ledge, which formed a sort of gutter, at the end of which they came to a depression between two roofs. In this way they reached an open window leading to an empty garret.

“Sire,” said La Mole, “here we are at the opening.”

“Ah! so much the better,” said Henry, wiping the perspiration from his pale face.

“Now,” said La Mole, “it will be easier: this garret opens on to a stairway, the stairway leads to an alley, and the alley to the street. I travelled the same road, sire, on a much more terrible night than this.”

“Go on, go on,” said Henry.

La Mole sprang through the open window, reached the unlocked door, opened it, came to a winding stairway, and placing in the king’s hand the cord that served as a baluster:

“Come, sire,” said he.

Half way down the stairs Henry stopped. He was before a window which overlooked the courtyard of the *Belle Étoile*. On the opposite stairway soldiers were seen running, some carrying swords, others torches.

Suddenly in the midst of a group the King of Navarre perceived De Mouy. He had surrendered his sword and was quietly descending the stairs.

“Poor fellow,” said Henry, “so brave and devoted!”

“Faith, sire,” said La Mole, “your majesty is right. He certainly does seem calm; and see, he even laughs! It must be that he is planning some scheme, for you know he seldom laughs.”

“And the young man who was with you?”

“Monsieur de Coconnas?” asked La Mole.

“Yes; what has become of him?”

“Oh! sire, I am not anxious about him. On seeing the soldiers he said only one word to me: ‘Do we risk anything?’

“‘Our heads,’ I answered.

“‘Can you escape?’

“‘I hope so.’

“‘Well, I can too,’ he replied. And I promise you he will! Sire, when Coconnas is caught it will be because he wishes to be caught.”

“Then,” said Henry, “all is well. Let us try to get back to the Louvre.”

“That will be easy enough, sire,” said La Mole. “Let us wrap ourselves in our cloaks and start. The street is full of people running to see the commotion, and we shall be taken for spectators.”

The gate was open and Henry and La Mole encountered no obstacle beyond the crowds in the street.

They reached the Rue d’Avernon; but in passing by the Rue Poulies they saw De Mouy and his escort cross the Place Saint Germain l’Auxerrois, led by the captain of the guards, Monsieur de Nancey.

“Ah!” said Henry, “they are taking him to the Louvre, apparently. The devil! the gates will be closed. They will take the names of all those who enter, and if I am seen returning after him they will think I have been with him.”

“Well! but, sire,” said La Mole, “enter some other way than by the gate.”

“How the devil do you mean?”

“Well, sire, there is the Queen of Navarre’s window.”

“*Ventre saint gris*, Monsieur de la Mole,” said Henry, “you are right. I never thought of that! But how can I attract the attention of the queen?”

“Oh,” said La Mole, bowing with an air of respectful gratitude, “your majesty throws stones so well!”

CHAPTER XLVII.

DE MOUY DE SAINT PHALE.

This time Catharine had taken such precautions that she felt sure of her object.

Consequently, about ten o’clock she sent away Marguerite, thoroughly convinced, as was the case, that the Queen of Navarre was ignorant of the plot against her husband, and went to the King, begging him not to retire so early.

Mystified by the air of triumph which, in spite of her usual dissimulation, appeared on his mother’s face, Charles questioned Catharine, who merely answered:

“I can say only one thing to your Majesty: that this evening you will be freed from two of your bitterest enemies.”

Charles raised his eyebrows like a man who says to himself:

“That is well; we shall see;” and whistling to his great boar-hound, who came to him dragging his belly along the ground like a serpent to lay his fine and intelligent head on his master’s knee, he waited. At the end of a few minutes, during which Catharine sat with eyes and ears alert, a pistol-shot was heard in the courtyard of the Louvre.

“What is that noise?” asked Charles, frowning, while the hound sprang up and pricked his ears.

“Nothing except a signal,” said Catharine; “that is all.”

“And what is the meaning of the signal?”

“It means that from this moment, sire, your one real enemy can no longer injure you.”

“Have they killed a man?” asked Charles, looking at his mother with that look of command which signifies that assassination and mercy are two inherent attributes of royal power.

“No, sire, they have only arrested two.”

“Oh!” murmured Charles, “always hidden plots, always conspiracies around the King. And yet, the devil! mother, I am grown up, and big enough to look out for myself. I need neither leading-strings nor padded caps. Go to Poland with your son Henry if you wish to reign; I tell you you are wrong to play this kind of game here."

"My son," said Catharine, "this is the last time I shall meddle with your affairs. But the enterprise in which you have always thwarted me was begun long ago, and I have earnestly endeavored to prove to your Majesty that I am right."

At that moment several men stopped in the outer hall and the butt-ends of muskets were heard on the pavement. Almost at the same instant Monsieur de Nancey begged an audience of the King.

"Let him enter," said Charles, hastily.

Monsieur de Nancey appeared, saluted the King, and turning to Catharine said:

"Madame, your majesty's orders are executed; he is captured."

"What *he*?" cried Catharine, greatly troubled. "Have you arrested only one?"

"He was alone, madame."

"Did he defend himself?"

"No, he was supping quietly in a room, and gave up his sword the moment it was demanded."

"Who?" asked the King.

"You shall see," said Catharine. "Bring in the prisoner, Monsieur de Nancey."

Five minutes later De Mouy was there.

"De Mouy!" cried the King; "what is the matter now, monsieur?"

"Well, sire," said De Mouy, with perfect composure, "if your Majesty will allow me the liberty, I will ask the same of you."

"Instead of asking this question of the King," said Catharine, "have the kindness, Monsieur de Mouy, to tell my son who was the man found in the chamber of the King of Navarre a certain night, and who on that night resisted the orders of his Majesty like the rebel that he is, killed two guards, and wounded Monsieur de Maurevel?"

"Yes," said Charles, frowning, "do you know the name of that man, Monsieur de Mouy?"

"Yes, sire; does your Majesty wish to hear it?"

"That will please me, I admit."

"Well, sire, he is called De Mouy de Saint Phale."

"It was you?"

"It was I."

Catharine, astonished at this audacity, recoiled a step.

"How did you dare resist the orders of the King?" asked Charles.

"In the first place, sire, I did not know that there was an order from your Majesty; then I saw only one thing, or rather one man, Monsieur de Maurevel, the assassin of my father and of the admiral. I remembered that a year and a half ago, in the very room in which we now are, on the evening of the 24th of August, your Majesty promised me to avenge us on the murderer, and as since that time very grave events have occurred I thought that in spite of himself the King had changed his mind. Seeing Maurevel within reach, I believed Heaven had sent him to me. Your Majesty knows the rest. Sire, I sprang upon him as upon an assassin and fired at his men as I would have fired at bandits."

Charles made no reply. His friendship for Henry had for some time made him look at many things in a different light from which he had at first seen them, and more than once with terror.

In regard to Saint Bartholomew the queen mother had registered in her memory remarks which had fallen from her son's lips and which resembled remorse.

"But," observed Catharine, "what were you doing at that hour in the apartments of the King of Navarre?"

"Oh!" replied De Mouy, "it is a long story, but if his Majesty has the patience to listen" —

"Yes," said Charles; "speak, I wish to hear it."

"I will obey, sire," said De Mouy, bowing.

Catharine sat down, fixing an anxious look on the young chief.

"We are listening," said Charles. "Here, Actéon!"

The dog resumed the place he had occupied before the prisoner had been admitted.

"Sire," said De Mouy, "I came to his majesty the King of Navarre as the deputy of our brethren, your faithful subjects of the reformed religion."

Catharine signed to Charles IX.

"Be quiet, mother," said the latter. "I do not lose a word. Go on, Monsieur de Mouy, go on; why did you come?"

"To inform the King of Navarre," continued Monsieur de Mouy, "that his abjuration had lost for him the confidence of the Huguenot party; but that, nevertheless, in remembrance of his father, Antoine de Bourbon, and especially on account of his mother, the courageous Jeanne d'Albret, whose name is dear among us, the followers of the reformed religion owed him this mark of deference, to beg him to desist from his claims to the crown of Navarre."

"What did he say?" asked Catharine, unable in spite of her self-control to receive this unexpected blow calmly.

"Ah! ah!" said Charles, "and yet this crown of Navarre, which without my permission has been made to jump from head to head, seems to belong a little to me."

"The Huguenots, sire, recognize better than any one the principle of sovereignty to which your Majesty has just referred. Therefore they hope to induce your Majesty to place the crown on a head that is dear to you."

"To me!" said Charles; "on a head that is dear to me! The devil! what head do you mean, monsieur? I do not understand."

"On the head of Monsieur le Duc d'Alençon."

Catharine became as pale as death, and gave De Mouy a flashing glance.

"Did my brother D'Alençon know this?"

"Yes, sire."

"And did he accept the crown?"

"Subject to the consent of your Majesty, to whom he referred us."

"Ah!" said Charles, "it is a crown which would suit our brother D'Alençon wonderfully well. And I never thought of it! Thanks, De Mouy, thanks! When you have such ideas you will always be welcome at the Louvre."

"Sire, you would long since have been informed of this project had it not been for that unfortunate affair of Maurevel's, which made me afraid I had fallen into disgrace with your Majesty."

"Yes, but what did Henry say to this plan?" asked Catharine.

"The King of Navarre, madame, yielded to the desire of his brethren, and his renunciation was ready."

"In that case," said Catharine, "you must have the renunciation."

"It happens that I have it with me, madame, signed by him and dated."

"Dated previous to the affair in the Louvre?" said Catharine.

"Yes, the evening before, I think."

De Mouy drew from his pocket an abdication in favor of the Duc d'Alençon, written and signed in Henry's hand, and bearing the date indicated.

“Faith, yes,” said Charles, “and all is in due form.”

“What did Henry demand in return for this renunciation?”

“Nothing, madame; the friendship of King Charles, he told us, would amply repay him for the loss of a crown.”

Catharine bit her lips in anger and wrung her beautiful hands.

“All this is perfectly correct, De Mouy,” said the King.

“Then,” said the queen mother, “if everything was settled between you and the King of Navarre, what was the object of your interview with him this evening?”

“I, madame! with the King of Navarre?” said De Mouy. “Monsieur de Nancey, who arrested me, will bear witness that I was alone. Your majesty can ask him.”

“Monsieur de Nancey!” called the King.

The captain of the guards entered.

“Monsieur de Nancey,” said Catharine, quickly, “was Monsieur de Mouy entirely alone at the inn of the *Belle Étoile*?”

“In the room, yes, madame; in the hostelry, no.”

“Ah!” said Catharine, “who was his companion?”

“I do not know if he was the companion of Monsieur de Mouy, madame, but I know that a man escaped by a back door after having stretched two of my men on the floor.”

“And you recognized this gentleman, no doubt?”

“No, I did not, but my guards did.”

“Who was he?” asked Charles IX.

“Monsieur le Comte Annibal de Coconnas.”

“Annibal de Coconnas!” exclaimed the King, gloomy and thoughtful; “the one who made such a terrible slaughter of the Huguenots during the massacre of Saint Bartholomew?”

“Monsieur de Coconnas, a gentleman in the suite of Monsieur d’Alençon,” said Monsieur de Nancey.

“Very good,” said Charles IX. “You may go, Monsieur de Nancey, and another time, remember one thing.”

“What is it, sire?”

“That you are in my service, and that you are to obey no one but me.”

Monsieur de Nancey withdrew backwards, bowing respectfully.

De Mouy smiled ironically at Catharine.

There was an instant's silence. The queen twisted the tassels of her girdle; Charles caressed his dog.

"But what was your intention, monsieur?" continued Charles; "were you acting violently?"

"Against whom, sire?"

"Why, against Henry, or François, or myself."

"Sire, we have the renunciation of your brother-in-law, the consent of your brother; and, as I have had the honor of telling you, we were on the point of soliciting your Majesty's sanction when that unfortunate affair occurred at the Louvre."

"Well, mother," said Charles, "I see nothing wrong in all this. You were right, Monsieur de Mouy, in asking for a king. Yes, Navarre may and ought to be a separate kingdom. Moreover, it seems made expressly to give to my brother D'Alençon, who has always had so great a desire for a crown that when we wear ours he cannot keep his eyes off of it. The only thing which stood in the way of this coronation was Henriot's rights; but since Henriot voluntarily abdicates" —

"Voluntarily, sire."

"It seems that it is the will of God! Monsieur de Mouy, you are free to return to your brethren, whom I have chastised somewhat roughly, perhaps, but that is between God and myself. Tell them that since they desire to have my brother d'Alençon for King of Navarre the King of France accedes to their wishes. From this moment Navarre is a kingdom, and its sovereign is called François. I ask only eight days for my brother to leave Paris with the brilliancy and pomp befitting a king. Now go, Monsieur de Mouy, go! Monsieur de Nancey, allow Monsieur de Mouy to pass; he is free."

"Sire," said De Mouy, advancing a step, "will your Majesty permit me?"

"Yes," said the King, and he extended his hand to the young Huguenot.

De Mouy knelt and kissed the King's hand.

"By the way," said Charles, detaining him as he was about to rise, "did you not demand from me justice on that scoundrel of a Maurevel?"

"Yes, sire."

"I do not know where he is, as he is hiding; but if you meet him, take justice into your own hands. I authorize you to do this and gladly."

"Ah! sire," cried De Mouy, "your Majesty overwhelms me. Your Majesty may rely on me. I have no idea where he is, but I will find him, you may rest assured."

De Mouy respectfully saluted King Charles and Queen Catharine, and withdrew without hindrance from the guards who had brought him thither. He passed rapidly through the corridors, reached the gate, and once outside hurried to Place Saint Germain l’Auxerrois, to the inn of the *Belle Étoile*. Here he found his horse, thanks to which, three hours after the scene we have just described, the young man breathed in safety behind the walls of Mantes.

Catharine, consumed with rage, returned to her apartments, whence she passed into those of Marguerite.

She found Henry there in his dressing-gown, apparently ready for bed.

“Satan!” she murmured, “aid a poor queen for whom God will do nothing more!”

CHAPTER XLVIII.

TWO HEADS FOR ONE CROWN.

“Ask Monsieur d’Alençon to come to me,” said Charles as he dismissed his mother.

Monsieur de Nancey, in accordance with the remark of the King that henceforth he was to obey him alone, hastened to the duke’s apartments and delivered word for word the order he had just received.

The Duc d’Alençon gave a start. He had always feared Charles, and now more than ever since by conspiring he had reason to be afraid.

Nevertheless, he went to his brother in all haste.

Charles was standing up, whistling a hunting-song.

As he entered, the Duc d’Alençon caught from the glassy eye of the King one of those bitter looks of hatred which he knew so well.

“Your Majesty has sent for me,” said he. “Here I am; what does your Majesty desire?”

“I desire to tell you, my good brother, that as a reward for the great friendship you bear me I have decided to-day to do for you the thing you most want.”

“For me?”

“Yes, for you. Think what for some time you have been dreaming of, without daring to ask it of me, and I will give it to you.”

“Sire,” said François, “I swear to you that I desire nothing but the continued good health of the King.”

“In that case you will be glad to know, D’Alençon, that the indisposition I experienced at the time the Poles arrived has passed by. Thanks to Henriot, I escaped a furious wild boar, which would have ripped me open, and I am so well that I do not envy the most healthy man in my kingdom. Without being an unkind brother you can, therefore, ask for something besides the continuation of my health, which is excellent.”

“I want nothing, sire.”

“Yes, yes, François,” said Charles, impatiently, “you desire the crown of Navarre, since you have had an understanding with Henriot and De Mouy,

— with the first, that he would abdicate; with the second, that he would give it to you. Well! Henriot renounces it! De Mouy has told me of your wish, and this crown for which you are ambitious" —

"Well?" asked D'Alençon in a trembling voice.

"Well, the devil! it is yours."

D'Alençon turned frightfully pale; then suddenly the blood rushed from his heart, which almost burst, flowed to his face, and his cheeks became suffused with a burning flush. The favor the King granted him at that moment threw him into despair.

"But, sire," said he, trembling with emotion and trying in vain to recover his self-possession, "I never desired and certainly never asked for such a thing."

"That is possible," said the King, "for you are very discreet, brother; but it has been desired and asked for you."

"Sire, I swear to you that never" —

"Do not swear."

"But, sire, are you going to exile me, then?"

"Do you call this exile, François? Plague it, you are hard to please! What better do you hope for?"

D'Alençon bit his lips in despair.

"Faith!" continued Charles, affecting kindness, "I did not think you were so popular, François, especially with the Huguenots. But they have sought you, and I have to confess to myself that I was mistaken. Besides, I could ask nothing better than to have one of my family — my brother who loves me and who is incapable of betraying me — at the head of a party which for thirty years has made war against us. This will quell everything as if by enchantment, to say nothing of the fact that we shall all be kings in the family. There will be no one except poor Henriot who will be nothing but my friend. But he is not ambitious and he shall take this title which no one else claims."

"Oh, sire! you are mistaken. I claim this title, and who has a better right to it than I? Henry is only your brother by marriage. I am your brother by blood, and more than this, my love — Sire, I beg you, keep me near you."

"No, no, François," replied Charles; "that would be to your unhappiness."

"How so?"

"For many reasons."

“But, sire, shall you ever find as faithful a companion as I am? From my childhood I have never left your Majesty.”

“I know that very well; and sometimes I have wished you farther away.”

“What does your Majesty mean?”

“Nothing, nothing; I understand myself. Oh, what fine hunts you will have there, François! How I envy you! Do you know that in those devilish mountains they hunt the bear as here we do the wild boar? You will send us all such magnificent skins! They hunt there with a dagger, you know; they wait for the animal, excite him, irritate him; he advances towards the hunter, and when within four feet of him he rises on his hind legs. It is then that they plunge the steel into his heart as Henry did to the boar at our last hunt. It is dangerous sport, but you are brave, François, and the danger will be a real pleasure for you.”

“Ah! your Majesty increases my grief, for I shall hunt with you no more.”

“By Heaven! so much the better!” said the King. “It helps neither of us to hunt together.”

“What does your Majesty mean?”

“That hunting with me causes you such pleasure and rouses in you such emotion that you who are the personification of skill, you who with any musket can bring down a magpie a hundred feet away, the last time we hunted together failed at twenty paces to hit a wild boar; but with your weapon, a weapon, too, with which you are familiar, you broke the leg of my best horse. The devil, François, that makes one reflect, you know!”

“Oh! sire, pardon me, it was from emotion,” said D’Alençon, who had become livid.

“Yes,” replied Charles, “I can well imagine what the emotion was; and it is on account of this emotion that I realize all that it means when I say to you: ‘Believe me, François, when one has such emotions it is best for us to hunt at a distance from each other. Think about it, brother, not while you are with me, because I can see my presence troubles you, but when you are alone, and you will see that I have every reason to fear that in another hunt you might be seized with another emotion. There is nothing like emotion for causing the hand to rise, and you might kill the rider instead of the horse, the king instead of the beast. Plague it, a bullet aimed too high or too low changes an entire government. We have an example of this in our own family. When Montgommery killed our father, Henry II., by accident — emotion, perhaps — the blow placed our brother, François II., on the throne and sent our father Henry to Saint Denis. So little is necessary for Providence to effect much!"

The duke felt the perspiration running down his face at this attack, as formidable as it was unforeseen.

It would have been impossible for the King to show more clearly that he had surmised all. Veiling his anger under a jesting manner, Charles was perhaps more terrible than as if he had let himself pour forth the lava of hate which was consuming his heart; his vengeance seemed in proportion to his rancor. As the one grew sharper, the other increased, and for the first time D'Alençon felt remorse, or rather regret for having meditated a crime which had not succeeded. He had sustained the struggle as long as he could, but at this final blow he bent his head, and Charles saw dawning in his eyes that devouring fire which in beings of a tender nature ploughs the furrow from which spring tears.

But D'Alençon was one of those who weep only from anger. Charles fixed on him his vulture gaze, watching the feelings which succeeded one another across the face of the young man, and all those sensations appeared to him as accurately, thanks to the deep study he had made of his family as if the heart of the duke had been an open book.

He left him a moment, crushed, motionless, and mute; then in a voice stamped with the firmness of hatred:

"Brother," said he, "we have declared to you our resolution; it is immutable. You will go."

D'Alençon gave a start, but Charles did not appear to notice it, and continued:

"I wish Navarre to be proud of having for king a brother of the King of France. Gold, power, honor, all that belongs to your birth you shall have, as your brother Henry had, and like him," he added, smiling, "you will bless me from afar. But no matter, blessings know no distance."

"Sire" —

"Accept my decision, or rather, resign yourself. Once king, we shall find a wife for you worthy of a son of France, and she, perhaps, may bring you another throne."

"But," said the Duc d'Alençon, "your Majesty forgets your good friend Henry."

"Henry! but I told you that he did not want the throne of Navarre! I told you he had abdicated in favor of you! Henry is a jovial fellow, and not a pale-face like you. He likes to laugh and amuse himself at his ease, and not mope, as we who wear crowns are condemned to do.”

D’Alençon heaved a sigh.

“Your Majesty orders me then to occupy myself” —

“No, not at all. Do not disturb yourself at all; I will arrange everything; rely on me, as on a good brother. And now that everything is settled, go. However, not a word of our conversation to your friends. I will take measures to give publicity to the affair very soon. Go now, François.”

There was nothing further to be said, so the duke bowed and withdrew, rage in his heart.

He was very anxious to find Henry and talk with him about all that had just taken place; but he found only Catharine. As a matter of fact, Henry wished to avoid the interview, whereas the latter sought for it.

On seeing Catharine the duke swallowed his anger and strove to smile. Less fortunate than Henry of Anjou, it was not a mother he sought in Catharine, but merely an ally. He began therefore by dissimulation, for in order to make good alliances it is necessary for each party to be somewhat deceived.

He met Catharine with a face on which there remained only a slight trace of anxiety.

“Well, madame,” said he, “here is great news; have you heard it?”

“I know that there is a plan on hand to make a king of you, monsieur.”

“It is a great kindness on the part of my brother, madame.”

“Is it not?”

“And I am almost tempted to believe that I owe a part of my gratitude to you; for it was really you who advised Charles to make me the present of a throne; it is to you I owe it. However, I will confess that, at heart, it gives me pain thus to rob the King of Navarre.”

“You love Henriot very much, apparently.”

“Why, yes; we have been intimate for some time.”

“Do you think he loves you as much as you love him?”

“I hope so, madame.”

“Such a friendship is very edifying; do you know it? especially between princes. Court friendships mean very little, François.”

“Mother, you must remember we are not only friends, but almost brothers.”

Catharine smiled a strange smile.

"Ah," said she, "are there brothers among kings?"

"Oh! as to that, neither of us was a king, mother, when our intimacy began. Moreover, we never expected to be kings; that is why we loved each other."

"Yes, but things are changed."

"How changed?"

"Why, who can say now whether both of you will not be kings?"

From the nervous start of the duke and the flush which rose to his brow Catharine saw that the arrow aimed by her had hit the mark.

"He?" said he, "Henriot king? And of what kingdom, mother?"

"One of the most magnificent kingdoms in Christendom, my son."

"Oh! mother," said D'Alençon, growing pale, "what are you saying?"

"What a good mother ought to say to her son, and what you have thought of more than once, François."

"I?" said the duke; "I have thought of nothing, madame, I swear to you."

"I can well believe you, for your friend, your brother Henry, as you call him, is, under his apparent frankness, a very clever and wily person, who keeps his secrets better than you keep yours, François. For instance, did he ever tell you that De Mouy was his man of business?"

As she spoke, Catharine turned a glance upon François as though it were a dagger aimed at his very soul.

But the latter had but one virtue, or rather vice, — the art of dissimulation; and he bore her look unflinchingly.

"De Mouy!" said he in surprise, as if it were the first time he had heard the name mentioned in that connection.

"Yes, the Huguenot De Mouy de Saint Phale; the one who nearly killed Monsieur de Maurevel, and who, secretly and in various disguises, is running all over France and the capital, intriguing and raising an army to support your brother Henry against your family."

Catharine, ignorant that on this point her son François knew as much if not more than she, rose at these words and started majestically to leave the room, but François detained her.

"Mother," said he, "another word, if you please. Since you deign to initiate me into your politics, tell me how, with his feeble resources, and being so slightly known, Henry could succeed in carrying on a war serious enough to disturb my family?"

“Child,” said the queen, smiling, “he is supported by perhaps more than thirty thousand men; he has but to say the word and these thirty thousand men will appear as suddenly as if they sprang from the ground; and these thirty thousand men are Huguenots, remember, that is, the bravest soldiers in the world, and then he has a protector whom you neither could nor would conciliate.”

“Who is that?”

“He has the King, the King, who loves him and who urges him on; the King, who from jealousy of your brother of Poland, and from spite against you, is looking about for a successor. But, blind man that you are if you do not see it, he seeks somewhere else besides in his own family.”

“The King! — you think so, mother?”

“Have you not noticed how he loves Henriot, his Henriot?”

“Yes, mother, yes.”

“And how he is repaid, for this same Henriot, forgetting that his brother-in-law would have shot him at the massacre of Saint Bartholomew, grovels to the earth like a dog which licks the hand that has beaten him.”

“Yes, yes,” murmured François, “I have already noticed that Henry is very humble with my brother Charles.”

“Clever in trying to please him in everything.”

“So much so that because of being always rallied by the King as to his ignorance of hawking he has begun to study it; and yesterday, yes, it was only yesterday, he asked me if I had not some books on that sport.”

“Well,” said Catharine, whose eyes sparkled as if an idea had suddenly come to her, “what did you answer him?”

“That I would look in my library.”

“Good,” said Catharine, “he must have this book.”

“But I looked, madame, and found nothing.”

“I will find one — and you shall give it to him as though it came from you.”

“And what will come of this?”

“Have you confidence in me, D’Alençon?”

“Yes, mother.”

“Will you obey me blindly so far as Henry is concerned? For whatever you may have said you do not love him.”

D’Alençon smiled.

“And I detest him,” continued Catharine.

“Yes, I will obey you.”

“Well, the day after to-morrow come here for the book; I will give it to you, you shall take it to Henry, and” —

“And?”

“Leave the rest to Providence or to chance.”

François knew his mother well enough to realize that she was not in the habit of leaving to Providence or to chance the care of friendships or hatreds. But he said nothing, and bowing like a man who accepts the commission with which he is charged, he returned to his own apartments.

“What does she mean?” thought the young man as he mounted the stairs. “I cannot see. But what I do understand in all this is that she acts like our common enemy. Well, let her go ahead.”

Meantime Marguerite, through La Mole, had received a letter from De Mouy to the King of Navarre. As in politics the two illustrious allies had no secrets, she opened the letter and read it.

The letter must have interested her, for, taking advantage of the darkness which was beginning to overshadow the walls of the Louvre, Marguerite at once hurried along the secret corridor, ascended the winding stairway, and, having looked carefully about on all sides, glided on like a shadow and disappeared within the antechamber of the King of Navarre.

This room had been unguarded since the disappearance of Orthon.

This circumstance, of which we have not spoken since the reader learned of the tragic fate of poor Orthon, had greatly troubled Henry. He had spoken of it to Madame de Sauve and to his wife, but neither of them knew any more about it than he did. Madame de Sauve had given him some information from which it was perfectly clear to Henry’s mind that the poor boy had been a victim of some machination of the queen mother, and that this was why he himself had been interrupted with De Mouy in the inn of the *Belle Étoile*. Any other than Henry would have kept silence, fearing to speak, but Henry calculated everything. He realized that his silence would betray him. One does not as a rule lose one’s servitor and confidant thus, without making inquiries about him and looking for him. So Henry asked and searched even in the presence of the King and the queen mother, and of every one, from the sentinel who walked before the gate of the Louvre to the captain of the guards, keeping watch in the antechamber of the King; but all inquiry and search was in vain, and Henry seemed so affected by the circumstance and so attached to the poor absent servitor that he said he would not put another in his place until he was perfectly sure that Orthon had disappeared forever.

So the antechamber, as we have said, was empty when Marguerite reached it.

Light as were the steps of the queen, Henry heard them and turned round.

“You, madame!” he exclaimed.

“Yes,” said Marguerite. “Quick! Read this!” and she handed him the open letter.

It contained these lines:

“*Sire: The moment has come for putting our plan of flight into execution. The day after to-morrow there will be hunting along the Seine, from Saint Germain to Maisons, that is, all along the forest.*

“*Go to the hunt, although it is hawking; wear a good coat of mail under your suit; take your best sword and ride the best horse in your stable. About noon, when the chase is at its height, and the King is galloping after the falcon, escape alone if you come alone; with the Queen of Navarre if the queen will follow you.*

“*Fifty of our men will be hidden in the Pavilion of François I., of which we have the key; no one will know that they will be there, for they will have come at night, and the shutters will be closed.*

“*You will pass by the Alley of the Violettes, at the end of which I shall be watching; at the right of this alley in an open space will be Messieurs de la Mole and Coconnas, with two horses. These horses are intended to replace yours and that of her majesty the Queen of Navarre, if necessary.*

“*Adieu, sire; be ready, as we shall be.*”

“You will be,” said Marguerite, uttering after sixteen hundred years the same words that Cæsar spoke on the banks of the Rubicon.

“Be it so, madame,” replied Henry; “I will not fail you.”

“Now, sire, be a hero; it is not difficult. You have but to follow the path that is indicated, and make a beautiful throne for me,” said the daughter of Henry II.

An imperceptible smile rose to the thin lips of the Béarnais. He kissed Marguerite’s hand, and went out to explore the corridor, whistling the refrain of an old song:

“*Cil qui mieux battit la muraille*
N’entra pas dedans le chasteau.”

The precaution was wise, for just as he opened the door of his sleeping-room the Duc d'Alençon opened that of his antechamber. Henry motioned to Marguerite, and then, aloud, said:

"Ah! is it you, brother? Welcome."

At the sign from her husband the queen had understood everything, and stepped hurriedly into a dressing-closet, in front of the door of which hung a thick tapestry. The Duc d'Alençon entered with a timorous step and looked around him.

"Are we alone, brother?" asked he in a whisper.

"Entirely. But what is the matter? You seem disturbed."

"We are discovered, Henry."

"How? — discovered?"

"Yes, De Mouy has been arrested."

"I know it."

"Well, De Mouy has told the King all."

"What has he told him?"

"He has told him that I desire the throne of Navarre, and that I have conspired to obtain it."

"Ah, the stupid!" cried Henry, "so that now you are compromised, my poor brother! How is it, then, that you have not been arrested?"

"I do not know. The King joked with me by pretending to offer me the throne of Navarre. He hoped, no doubt, to draw some confession from me, but I said nothing."

"And you did well, *ventre saint gris*!" said the Béarnais. "Stand firm, for our lives depend on that."

"Yes," said François, "the position is unsafe, I know. That is why I came to ask your advice, brother; what do you think I ought to do — run or stay?"

"You must have seen the King, since he spoke to you?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well! you must have read his thoughts. So follow your inspiration."

"I prefer to remain," replied François.

Notwithstanding the fact that he was almost thorough master of himself, Henry could not prevent a movement of joy from escaping him, and slight as it was, François saw it.

"Remain, then," said Henry.

"But you?"

“Why!” replied Henry, “if you remain, I have no motive for leaving. I was going only to follow you from devotion, in order not to be separated from my brother.”

“So,” said D’Alençon, “there is an end to all our plans; you give up without a struggle at the first stroke of ill luck?”

“I do not look upon it as a stroke of ill luck to remain here,” said Henry. “Thanks to my careless disposition, I am contented everywhere.”

“Well, then,” said D’Alençon, “we need say no more about it, only in case you decide anything different let me know.”

“By Heaven! I shall not fail to do that, you may be sure,” replied Henry. “Was it not agreed that we were to have no secrets from each other?”

D’Alençon said no more, but withdrew, pondering, however; for at one time he thought he had seen the tapestry in front of the closet move.

Scarcely was the duke gone when the curtain was raised and Marguerite reappeared.

“What do you think of this visit?” asked Henry.

“That there is something new and important on hand.”

“What do you think it is?”

“I do not know yet; but I will find out.”

“In the meanwhile?”

“In the meanwhile do not fail to come to my room to-morrow evening.”

“Indeed I will not fail, madame!” said Henry, gallantly kissing the hand of his wife.

With the same caution she had used in coming Marguerite returned to her own apartments.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE TREATISE ON HUNTING.

Three days had elapsed since the events we have just related. Day was beginning to dawn, but every one was already up and awake at the Louvre as usual on hunting days, when the Duc d’Alençon entered the apartments of the queen mother in answer to the invitation he had received. Catharine was not in her bedroom; but she had left orders that if her son came he was to wait for her.

At the end of a few minutes she came out of a private closet, to which no one but herself had admission, and in which she carried on her experiments in chemistry. As Catharine entered the room there came either from the closet or from her clothes the penetrating odor of some acrid perfume, and through the open door D’Alençon perceived a thick vapor, as of some burnt aromatic substance, floating in the laboratory like a white cloud.

The duke could not repress a glance of curiosity.

“Yes,” said Catharine de Médicis, “I have been burning several old parchments which gave out such an offensive smell that I put some juniper into the brazier, hence this odor.”

D’Alençon bowed.

“Well,” said the queen, concealing under the wide sleeves of her dressing-gown her hands, which here and there were stained with reddish spots, “is there anything new since yesterday?”

“Nothing, mother.”

“Have you seen Henry?”

“Yes.”

“Does he still refuse to leave?”

“Absolutely.”

“The knave!”

“What do you say, madame?”

“I say that he will go.”

“You think so?”

“I am sure of it.”

“Then he will escape us?”

“Yes,” said Catharine.

“And shall you let him go?”

“Not only that, but I tell you he must go.”

“I do not understand, mother.”

“Listen well to what I am about to tell you, François. A very skilful physician, the one who let me take the book on hunting which you are to give him, has told me that the King of Navarre is on the point of being attacked with consumption, one of those incurable diseases for which science has no remedy. Now, you understand that if he has to die from such a cruel malady it would be better for him to die away from us than among us here at court.”

“In fact,” said the duke, “that would cause us too much pain.”

“Especially your brother Charles,” said Catharine; “whereas, if he dies after having betrayed him the King will regard his death as a punishment from Heaven.”

“You are right, mother,” said François in admiration, “he must leave. But are you sure that he will?”

“All his plans are made. The meeting-place is in the forest of Saint Germain. Fifty Huguenots are to escort him as far as Fontainebleau, where five hundred others will await him.”

“And,” said D’Alençon, with a slight hesitation and visible pallor, “will my sister Margot accompany him?”

“Yes,” replied Catharine, “that is agreed on. But at Henry’s death Margot is to return to court a widow and free.”

“And Henry will die, madame? Are you sure of this?”

“The physician who gave me the book assured me of it.”

“Where is this book, madame?”

Catharine went slowly towards the mysterious closet, opened the door, entered, and a moment later appeared with the book in her hand.

“Here it is,” said she.

D’Alençon looked at the volume with a certain feeling of terror.

“What is this book, madame?” he asked, shuddering.

“I have already told you, my son. It is a treatise on the art of raising and training falcons, gerfalcons, and hawks, written by a very learned scholar for Lord Castruccio Castracani, tyrant of Lucca.”

“What must I do with it?”

"Take it to your good friend Henriot, who you told me had asked you for a treatise on the art of hunting. As he is going hawking to-day with the King he will not fail to read some of it, in order to prove to Charles that he has followed his advice and taken a lesson or two. The main thing is to give it into Henry's own hands."

"Oh! I do not dare!" said D'Alençon, shuddering.

"Why not?" asked Catharine; "it is a book like any other except that it has been packed away for so long that the leaves stick together. Do not attempt to read it, François, for it can be read only by wetting the finger and turning over each leaf, and this takes time and trouble."

"So that only a man who is very anxious to be instructed in the sport of hawking would waste his time and go to this trouble?" asked D'Alençon.

"Exactly, my son; you understand."

"Oh!" said D'Alençon; "there is Henriot in the court-yard. Give me the book, madame. I will take advantage of his absence and go to his room with it. On his return he will find it."

"I should prefer you to give it to him yourself, François, that would be surer."

"I have already said that I do not dare, madame," replied the duke.

"Very well; but at least put it where he can see it."

"Open? Is there any reason why it should not be open?"

"None."

"Then give it to me."

D'Alençon tremblingly took the book, which Catharine with a firm hand held out to him.

"Take it," said the queen, "there is no danger — I touch it; besides, you have gloves on."

This precaution was not enough for D'Alençon, who wrapped the volume in his cloak.

"Make haste," said Catharine; "Henry may return at any moment."

"You are right, madame. I will go at once."

The duke went out, trembling with fright.

We have often introduced the reader into the apartments of the King of Navarre, and he has been present at the events which have taken place in them, events bright or gloomy, according to the smile or frown of the protecting genius of the future king of France.

But perhaps never had these walls, stained with the blood of murders, sprinkled with the wine of orgies, scented with the perfumes of love, — perhaps never had this corner of the Louvre seen a paler face than that of the Duc d’Alençon, as with book in hand he opened the door of the bedchamber of the King of Navarre. And no one, as the duke had expected, was in the room to question with curious or anxious glances what he was about to do. The first rays of the morning sun alone were lighting up the vacant chamber.

On the wall in readiness hung the sword which Monsieur de Mouy had advised Henry to take with him. Some links of a coat of mail were scattered on the floor. A well-filled purse and a small dagger lay on a table, and some light ashes in the fireplace, joined to the other evidence, clearly showed D’Alençon that the King of Navarre had put on the shirt of mail, collected some money from his treasurer, and burned all papers that might compromise him.

“My mother was not mistaken,” said D’Alençon “the knave would have betrayed me.”

Doubtless this conviction gave added strength to the young man. He sounded the corners of the room at a glance, raised the portieres, and realizing from the loud noise in the court-yard below and the dense silence in the apartments that no one was there to spy on him, he drew the book from under his cloak, hastily laid it on the table, near the purse, propping it up against a desk of sculptured oak; then drawing back, he reached out his arm, and, with a hesitation which betrayed his fears, with his gloved hand he opened the volume to an engraving of a hunt. This done, D’Alençon again stepped back, and drawing off his glove threw it into the still warm fire, which had just consumed the papers. The supple leather crackled over the coals, twisted and flattened itself out like the body of a great reptile, leaving nothing but a burned and blackened lump.

D’Alençon waited until the flame had consumed the glove, then rolling up the cloak which had been wrapped around the book, he put it under his arm, and hastily returned to his own apartments. As he entered with beating heart, he heard steps on the winding stairs, and not doubting but that it was Henry he quickly closed his door. Then he stepped to the window, but he could see only a part of the court-yard of the Louvre. Henry was not there, however, and he felt convinced that it was the King of Navarre who had just returned.

The duke sat down, opened a book, and tried to read. It was a history of France from Pharamond to Henry II., for which, a few days after his accession to the throne, Henry had given a license.

But the duke's thoughts were not on what he was reading; the fever of expectation burned in his veins. His temples throbbed clear to his brain, and as in a dream or some magnetic trance, it seemed to François that he could see through the walls. His eyes appeared to probe into Henry's chamber, in spite of the obstacles between.

In order to drive away the terrible object before his mind's eye the duke strove to fix his attention on something besides the terrible book opened on the oak desk; but in vain he looked at his weapons, his ornaments; in vain he gazed a hundred times at the same spot on the floor; every detail of the picture at which he had merely glanced remained graven on his memory. It consisted of a gentleman on horseback fulfilling the duties of a beater of hawking, throwing the bait, calling to the falcon, and galloping through the deep grass of a swamp. Strong as was the duke's will, his memory triumphed over it.

Then it was not only the book he saw, but the King of Navarre approaching it, looking at the picture, trying to turn the pages, finally wetting his thumb and forcing the leaves apart. At this sight, fictitious and imaginary as it was, D'Alençon staggered and was forced to lean one hand against a table, while with the other he covered his eyes, as if by so doing he did not see more clearly than before the vision he wished to escape. This vision was in his own thoughts.

Suddenly D'Alençon saw Henry cross the court; he stopped a few moments before the men who were loading two mules with the provisions for the chase — none other than the money and other things he wished to take with him; then, having given his orders, he crossed the court diagonally and advanced towards the door.

D'Alençon stood motionless. It was not Henry, then, who had mounted the secret staircase. All the agony he had undergone during the last quarter of an hour had been useless. What he thought was over or almost over was only beginning.

François opened the door of his chamber, then holding it so he listened. This time he could not be mistaken, it was Henry himself; he recognized his step and the peculiar jingle of his spurs.

Henry's door opened and closed.

D’Alençon returned to his room and sank into an armchair.

“Good!” said he, “this is what is now taking place: he has passed through the antechamber, the first room, the sleeping-room; then he glances to see if his sword, his purse, his dagger are there; at last he finds the book open on his table.

“‘What book is this?’ he asks himself. ‘Who has brought it?’

“Then he draws nearer, sees the picture of the horseman calling his falcon, wants to read, tries to turn the leaves.”

A cold perspiration started to the brow of François.

“Will he call? Is the effect of the poison sudden? No, no, for my mother said he would die of slow consumption.”

This thought somewhat reassured him.

Ten minutes passed thus, a century of agony, dragging by second after second, each supplying all that the imagination could invent in the way of maddening terror, a world of visions.

D’Alençon could stand it no longer. He rose and crossed the antechamber, which was beginning to fill with gentlemen.

“Good morning, gentlemen,” said he, “I am going to the King.”

And to distract his consuming anxiety, and perhaps to prepare an *alibi*, D’Alençon descended to his brother’s apartments. Why did he go there? He did not know. What had he to say? Nothing! It was not Charles he sought — it was Henry he fled.

He took the winding staircase and found the door of the King’s apartments half opened. The guards let the duke enter without opposition. On hunting days there was neither etiquette nor orders.

François traversed successively the antechamber, the salon, and the bedroom without meeting any one. He thought Charles must be in the armory and opened the door leading thither.

The King was seated before a table, in a deep carved armchair. He had his back to the door, and appeared to be absorbed in what he was doing.

The duke approached on tiptoe; Charles was reading.

“By Heaven!” cried he, suddenly, “this is a fine book. I had heard of it, but I did not know it could be had in France.”

D’Alençon listened and advanced a step.

“Cursed leaves!” said the King, wetting his thumb and applying it to the pages; “it looks as though they had been stuck together on purpose to conceal the wonders they contain from the eyes of man.”

D’Alençon bounded forward. The book over which Charles was bending was the one he had left in Henry’s room. A dull cry broke from him.

“Ah, is it you, François?” said Charles, “you are welcome; come and see the finest book on hunting which ever came from the pen of man.”

D’Alençon’s first impulse was to snatch the volume from the hands of his brother; but an infernal thought restrained him; a frightful smile passed over his pallid lips, and he rubbed his hand across his eyes like a man dazed. Then recovering himself by degrees, but without moving:

“Sire,” he asked, “how did this book come into your Majesty’s possession?”

“I went into Henriot’s room this morning to see if he was ready; he was not there, he was probably strolling about the kennels or the stables; at any rate, instead of him I found this treasure, which I brought here to read at my leisure.”

And the King again moistened his thumb, and again turned over an obstinate page.

“Sire,” stammered D’Alençon, whose hair stood on end, and whose whole body was seized with a terrible agony. “Sire, I came to tell you” —

“Let me finish this chapter, François,” said Charles, “and then you shall tell me anything you wish. I have read or rather devoured fifty pages.”

“He has tasted the poison twenty-five times,” murmured François; “my brother is a dead man!”

Then the thought came to him that there was a God in heaven who perhaps after all was not chance.

With trembling hand the duke wiped away the cold perspiration which stood in drops on his brow, and waited in silence, as his brother had bade him do, until the chapter was finished.

CHAPTER L.

HAWKING.

Charles still read. In his curiosity he seemed to devour the pages, and each page, as we have said, either because of the dampness to which it had been exposed for so long or from some other cause, adhered to the next.

With haggard eyes D’Alençon gazed at this terrible spectacle, the end of which he alone could see.

“Oh!” he murmured, “what will happen? I shall go away, into exile, and seek an imaginary throne, while at the first news of Charles’s illness Henry will return to some fortified town near the capital, and watch this prey sent us by chance, able at a single stride to reach Paris; so that before the King of Poland even hears the news of my brother’s death the dynasty will be changed. This cannot be!”

Such were the thoughts which dominated the first involuntary feeling of horror that had urged François to warn Charles. It was the never-failing fatality which seemed to preserve Henry and follow the Valois which the duke was again going to try to thwart. In an instant his whole plan with regard to Henry was altered. It was Charles and not Henry who had read the poisoned book. Henry was to have gone, and gone condemned to die. The moment fate had again saved him, Henry must remain; for Henry was less to be feared in the Bastille or as prisoner at Vincennes than as the King of Navarre at the head of thirty thousand men.

The Duc d’Alençon let Charles finish his chapter, and when the King had raised his head:

“Brother,” said the duke, “I have waited because your Majesty ordered me to do so, but I regret it, because I have something of the greatest importance to say to you.”

“Go to the devil!” said Charles, whose cheeks were slowly turning a dull red, either because he had been too much engrossed in his reading or because the poison had begun to act. “Go to the devil! If you have come to discuss that same subject again, you shall leave as did the King of Poland. I rid myself of him, and I will do the same to you without further talk about it."

"It is not about my leaving, brother, that I want to speak to you, but about some one else who is going away. Your Majesty has touched me in my most sensitive point, my love for you as a brother, my devotion to you as a subject; and I hope to prove to you that I am no traitor."

"Well," said Charles, as he leaned his elbow on the book, crossed his legs, and looked at D'Alençon like a man who is trying to be patient. "Some fresh report, some accusation?"

"No, sire, a certainty, a plot, which my foolish scruples alone prevented my revealing to you before."

"A plot?" said Charles, "well, let us hear about it."

"Sire," said François, "while your Majesty hawks near the river in the plain of Vesinet the King of Navarre will escape to the forest of Saint Germain, where a troop of friends will be waiting to flee with him."

"Ah, I knew it," said Charles, "another calumny against my poor Henry! When will you be through with him?"

"Your Majesty need not wait long at least to find out whether or not what I have just had the honor of telling you is a calumny."

"How so?"

"Because this evening our brother-in-law will be gone."

Charles rose.

"Listen," said he, "I will try for the last time to believe you; but I warn you, both you and your mother, that it will be the last time."

Then raising his voice:

"Summon the King of Navarre!" he cried.

A guard started to obey, but François stopped him with a gesture.

"This is a poor way, brother, to learn anything," said he. "Henry will deny, will give a signal, his accomplices will be warned and will disappear. Then my mother and myself will be accused not only of being visionary but of being calumniators."

"What do you want, then?"

"In the name of our brotherly love I ask your Majesty to listen to me, in the name of my devotion, which you will realize, I want you to do nothing hastily. Act so that the real culprit, who for two years has been betraying your Majesty in will as well as in deed, may at last be recognized as guilty by an infallible proof, and punished as he deserves."

Charles did not answer, but going to a window raised it. The blood was rushing to his head.

Then turning round quickly:

“Well!” said he, “what would you do? Speak, François.”

“Sire,” said D’Alençon, “I would surround the forest of Saint Germain with three detachments of light horse, who at a given hour, eleven o’clock, for instance, should start out and drive every one in the forest to the Pavilion of Francis I., which I would, as if by chance, have indicated as the meeting-place. Then I would spur on, as if following my falcon, to the meeting-place, where Henry should be captured with his companions.”

“The idea is good,” said the King; “summon the captain of the guards.”

D’Alençon drew from his doublet a silver whistle, suspended from a gold chain, and raised it to his lips.

De Nancey appeared.

Charles gave him some orders in a low tone.

Meanwhile Actéon, the great greyhound, had dragged a book from the table, and was tossing it about the room, making great bounds after it.

Charles turned round and uttered a terrible oath. The book was the precious treatise on hunting, of which there existed only three copies in the world.

The punishment was proportionate to the offence.

Charles seized a whip and gave the dog three whistling blows.

Actéon uttered a howl, and fled under a table covered with a large cloth which served him as a hiding-place.

Charles picked up the book and saw with joy that only one leaf was gone, and that was not a page of the text, but an engraving. He placed the volume carefully away on a shelf where Actéon could not reach it. D’Alençon looked anxiously at him. Now that the book had fulfilled its dread mission he would have liked to see it out of Charles’s hands.

Six o’clock struck. It was time for the King to descend to the court-yard, already filled with horses richly caparisoned, and elegantly dressed ladies and gentlemen. The hunters held on their wrists their hooded falcons; some outriders carried horns wound with scarfs, in case the King, as sometimes happened, grew weary of hawking, and wished to hunt a deer or a chamois.

Charles closed the door of his armory and descended. D’Alençon watched each movement closely, and saw him put the key in his pocket.

As he went down the stairs Charles stopped and raised his hand to his head.

The limbs of the Duc d’Alençon trembled no less than did those of the King.

“It seems to me,” said the duke, “that there is going to be a storm.”

“A storm in January!” said Charles; “you are mad. No, I am dizzy, my skin is dry, I am weak, that is all.”

Then in a low tone:

“They will kill me,” he murmured, “with their hatred and their plots.”

But on reaching the court the fresh morning air, the shouts of the hunters, the loud greetings of the hundred people gathered there, produced their usual effect on Charles.

He breathed freely and happily. His first thought was for Henry, who was beside Marguerite.

This excellent couple seemed to care so much for each other that they were unable to be apart.

On perceiving Charles, Henry spurred his horse, and in three bounds was beside him.

“Ah, ah!” said Charles, “you are mounted as if you were going to hunt the stag, Henriot; but you know we are going hawking to-day.”

Then without waiting for a reply:

“Forward, gentlemen, forward! we must be hunting by nine o’clock!” and Charles frowned and spoke in an almost threatening tone.

Catharine was watching everything from a window, behind which a curtain was drawn back, showing her pale face. She herself was dressed in black and was hidden from view.

At the order from Charles all this gilded, embroidered, perfumed crowd, with the King at its head, lengthened out to pass through the gate of the Louvre, and swept like an avalanche along the road to Saint Germain, amid the shouts of the people, who saluted the young King as he rode by, thoughtful and pensive, on his white horse.

“What did he say to you?” asked Marguerite of Henry.

“He congratulated me on the speed of my horse.”

“Was that all?”

“Yes.”

“Then he suspects something.”

“I fear so.”

“Let us be cautious.”

Henry’s face lighted up with one of his beautiful smiles, which meant especially to Marguerite, “Be easy, my love.” As to Catharine, scarcely had the cortège left the court of the Louvre before she dropped the curtain.

But she had not failed to see one thing, namely, Henry’s pallor, his nervousness, and his low-toned conversation with Marguerite.

Henry was pale because, not having physical courage, his blood, under all circumstances in which his life was at stake, instead of rushing to his head, as is usually the case, flowed to his heart. He was nervous because the manner in which he had been received by Charles, so different from usual, had made a deep impression on him. Finally, he had conferred with Marguerite because, as we know, the husband and wife had formed, so far as politics were concerned, an alliance offensive and defensive.

But Catharine had interpreted these facts differently.

“This time,” she murmured, with her Florentine smile, “I think I may rely on my dear Henriot.”

Then to satisfy herself, having waited a quarter of an hour to give the party time to leave Paris, she went out of her room, mounted the winding staircase, and with the help of her pass-key opened the door of the apartments of the King of Navarre. She searched, but in vain, for the book. In vain she looked on every table, shelf, and in every closet; nowhere could she find it.

“D’Alençon must have taken it away,” said she, “that was wise.”

And she descended to her own chamber, quite sure this time that her plan would succeed.

The King went on towards Saint Germain, which he reached after a rapid ride of an hour and a half. They did not ascend to the old castle, which rose dark and majestic in the midst of the houses scattered over the mountain. They crossed the wooden bridge, which at that time was opposite the tree to-day called the “Sully Oak.” Then they signed for the boats adorned with flags which followed the hunting-party to aid the King and his suite in crossing the river. This was done. Instantly all the joyous procession, animated by such varied interests, again began to move, led by the King, over the magnificent plain which stretched from the wooded summit of Saint Germain, and which suddenly assumed the appearance of a great carpet covered with people, dotted with a thousand colors, and of which the river foaming along its banks seemed a silver fringe.

Ahead of the King, still on his white horse and holding his favorite falcon, rode the beaters, in their long green close-fitting coats and high boots, calling now and then to the half dozen great dogs, and beating, with their whips, the reeds which grew along the river banks.

At that moment the sun, until then hidden behind a cloud, suddenly burst forth and lighted with one of its rays all that procession of gold, all the ornaments, all the glowing eyes, and turned everything into a torrent of flame. Then, as if it had waited for that moment so that the sun might shine on its defeat, a heron rose from the midst of the reeds with a prolonged and plaintiff cry.

“Haw! Haw!” cried Charles, unhooding his falcon and sending it after the fugitive.

“Haw! Haw!” cried every voice to encourage the bird.

The falcon, dazzled for an instant by the light, turned, described a circle, then suddenly perceiving the heron, dashed after it.

But the heron, like a prudent bird, had risen a hundred yards before the beaters, and while the King had been unhooding his falcon, and while the latter had been growing accustomed to the light, it had gained a considerable height, so that by the time its enemy saw it, it had risen more than five hundred feet, and finding in the higher zones the air necessary for its powerful wings, continued to mount rapidly.

“Haw! Haw! Iron Beak!” cried Charles, cheering his falcon. “Show us that you are a thoroughbred! Haw! Haw!”

As if it understood the words the noble bird rose like an arrow, described a diagonal line, then a vertical one, as the heron had done, and mounted higher as though it would soon disappear in the upper air.

“Ah! coward!” cried Charles, as if the fugitive could hear him, and, spurring his horse, he followed the flight of the birds as far as he could, his head thrown back so as not to lose sight of them for an instant. “Ah! double coward! You run! My Iron Beak is a thoroughbred; on! on! Haw, Iron Beak! Haw!”

The contest was growing exciting. The birds were beginning to approach each other, or rather the falcon was nearing the heron. The only question was which could rise the higher.

Fear had stronger wings than courage. The falcon passed under the heron, and the latter, profiting by its advantage, dealt a blow with its long beak.

The falcon, as though hit by a dagger, described three circles, apparently overcome, and for an instant it looked as if the bird would fall. But like a warrior, who when wounded rises more terrible than before, it uttered a sharp and threatening cry, and went after the heron. The latter, making the most of its advantage, had changed the direction of its flight and turned toward the forest, trying this time to gain in distance instead of in height, and so escape. But the falcon was indeed a thoroughbred, with the eye of a gerfalcon.

It repeated the same manœuvre, rose diagonally after the heron, which gave two or three cries of distress and strove to rise perpendicularly as at first.

At the end of a few seconds the two birds seemed again about to disappear. The heron looked no larger than a lark, and the falcon was a black speck which every moment grew smaller.

Neither Charles nor his suite any longer followed the flight of the birds. Each one stopped, his eyes fixed on the clouds.

“Bravo! Bravo! Iron-beak!” cried Charles, suddenly. “See, see, gentlemen, he is uppermost! Haw! haw!”

“Faith, I can see neither of them,” said Henry.

“Nor I,” said Marguerite.

“Well, but if you cannot see them, Henry, you can hear them,” said Charles, “at least the heron. Listen! listen! he asks quarter!”

Two or three plaintive cries were heard which a practised ear alone could detect.

“Listen!” cried Charles, “and you will see them come down more quickly than they went up.”

As the King spoke, the two birds reappeared. They were still only two black dots, but from the size of the dots the falcon seemed to be uppermost.

“See! see!” cried Charles, “Iron Beak has him!”

The heron, outwitted by the bird of prey, no longer strove to defend itself. It descended rapidly, constantly struck at by the falcon, and answered only by its cries. Suddenly it folded its wings and dropped like a stone; but its adversary did the same, and when the fugitive again strove to resume its flight a last blow of the beak finished it; it continued to fall, turning over and over, and as it touched the earth the falcon swooped down and uttered a cry of victory which drowned the cry of defeat of the vanquished.

“To the falcon! the falcon!” shouted Charles, spurring his horse to the place where the birds had fallen. But suddenly he reined in his steed, uttered a cry, dropped his bridle, and grasping his horse’s mane with one hand pressed the other to his stomach as though he would tear out his very vitals.

All the courtiers hastened to him.

“It is nothing, nothing,” said Charles, with inflamed face and haggard eye; “it seemed as if a red-hot iron were passing through me just now; but forward! it is nothing.”

And Charles galloped on.

D’Alençon turned pale.

“What now?” asked Henry of Marguerite.

“I do not know,” replied she; “but did you see? My brother was purple in the face.”

“He is not usually so,” said Henry.

The courtiers glanced at one another in surprise and followed the King.

They arrived at the scene of combat. The falcon had already begun to peck at the head of the heron.

Charles sprang from his horse to obtain a nearer view; but on alighting he was obliged to seize hold of the saddle. The ground seemed to spin under him. He felt very sleepy.

“Brother! Brother!” cried Marguerite; “what is the matter?”

“I feel,” said Charles, “as Portia must have felt when she swallowed her burning coals. I am burning up and my breath seems on fire.”

Charles exhaled his breath and seemed surprised not to see fire issue from his lips.

The falcon had been caught and hooded again, and every one had gathered around the King.

“Why, what does it mean? Great Heavens! It cannot be anything, or if it is it must be the sun which is affecting my head and blinding my eyes. So on, on, to the hunt, gentlemen! There is a whole flight of herons. Unhood the falcons, all of them, by Heaven! now for some sport!”

Instantly five or six falcons were unhooded and let loose. They rose in the direction of the prey, while the entire party, the King at their head, reached the bank of the river.

“Well! what do you say, madame?” asked Henry of Marguerite.

“That the moment is favorable, and that if the King does not look back we can easily reach the forest from here.”

Henry called the attendant who was carrying the heron, and while the noisy, gilded avalanche swept along the road which to-day is a terrace he remained behind as if to examine the dead bird.

CHAPTER LI.

THE PAVILION OF FRANÇOIS I.

Hawking was a beautiful sport as carried on by kings, when kings were almost demi-gods, and when the chase was not only a pastime but an art.

Nevertheless we must leave the royal spectacle to enter a part of the forest where the actors in the scene we have just described will soon join us.

The Allée des Violettes was a long, leafy arcade and mossy retreat in which, among lavender and heather, a startled hare now and then pricked up its ears, and a wandering stag raised its head heavy with horns, opened its nostrils, and listened. To the right of this alley was an open space far enough from the road to be invisible, but not so far but that the road could be seen from it.

In the middle of the clearing two men were lying on the grass. Under them were travellers' cloaks, at their sides long swords, and near each of them a musketoon (then called a petronel) with the muzzle turned from them. In the richness of their costume they resembled the joyous characters of the "Decameron;" on closer view, by the threatening aspect of their weapons, they seemed like those forest robbers whom a hundred years later Salvator Rosa painted from nature in his landscapes. One of them was leaning on his hand and on one knee, listening as attentively as the hare or deer we mentioned above.

"It seems to me," said this one, "that the hunt was very near us just now. I heard the cries of the hunters cheering the falcon."

"And now," said the other, who seemed to await events with much more philosophy than his companion, "now I hear nothing more; they must have gone away. I told you this was a poor place from which to see anything. We cannot be seen, it is true; but we cannot see, either."

"The devil! my dear Annibal," said the first speaker, "we had to put our horses somewhere, as well as the mules, which, by the way, are so heavily laden that I do not see how they can follow us. Now I know that these old beeches and oaks are perfectly suited to this difficult task. I should venture to say that far from blaming Monsieur de Mouy as you are doing, I recognize in every detail of the enterprise he is directing the common sense of a true conspirator."

"Good!" said the second gentleman, whom no doubt our reader has already recognized as Coconnas; "good! that is the word! I expected it! I relied on you for it! So we are conspiring?"

"We are not conspiring; we are serving the king and the queen."

"Who are conspiring and which amounts to the same for us."

"Coconnas, I have told you," said La Mole, "that I do not in the least force you to follow me in this affair. I have undertaken it only because of a particular sentiment, which you can neither feel nor share."

"Well, by Heaven! Who said that you were forcing me? In the first place, I know of no one who could compel Coconnas, to do what he did not wish to do; but do you suppose that I would let you go without following you, especially when I see that you are going to the devil?"

"Annibal! Annibal!" said La Mole, "I think that I see her white palfrey in the distance. Oh! it is strange how my heart throbs at the mere thought of her coming!"

"Yes, it is strange," said Coconnas, yawning; "my heart does not throb in the least."

"It is not she," said La Mole. "What can have happened? They were to be here at noon, I thought."

"It happens that it is not noon," said Coconnas, "that is all, and, apparently, we still have time to take a nap."

So saying, Coconnas stretched himself on his cloak like a man who is about to add practice to precept; but as his ear touched the ground he raised his finger and motioned La Mole to be silent.

"What is it?" asked the latter.

"Hush! this time I am sure I hear something."

"That is singular; I have listened, but I hear nothing."

"Nothing?"

"No."

"Well!" said Coconnas, rising and laying his hand on La Mole's arm, "look at that deer."

"Where?"

"Yonder."

Coconnas pointed to the animal.

"Well?"

“Well, you will see.”

La Mole watched the deer. With head bent forward as though about to browse it listened without stirring. Soon it turned its head, covered with magnificent branching horns, in the direction from which no doubt the sound came. Then suddenly, without apparent cause, it disappeared like a flash of lightning.

“Oh!” said La Mole, “I believe you are right, for the deer has fled.”

“Because of that,” said Coconnas, “it must have heard what you have not heard.”

In short, a faint, scarcely perceptible sound quivered vaguely through the passes; to less practised ears it would have seemed like the breeze; for the two men it was the far-off galloping of horses. In an instant La Mole was on his feet.

“Here they are!” said he; “quick.”

Coconnas rose, but more calmly. The energy of the Piedmontese seemed to have passed into the heart of La Mole, while on the other hand the indolence of the latter seemed to have taken possession of his friend. One acted with enthusiasm; the other with reluctance. Soon a regular and measured sound struck the ear of the two friends. The neighing of a horse made the coursers they had tied ten paces away prick up their ears, as through the alley there passed like a white shadow a woman who, turning towards them, made a strange sign and disappeared.

“The queen!” they exclaimed together.

“What can it mean?” asked Coconnas.

“She made a sign,” said La Mole, “which meant ‘presently.’“

“She made a sign,” said Coconnas, “which meant ‘flee!’“

“The signal meant ‘wait for me.’“

“The signal meant ‘save yourself.’“

“Well,” said La Mole, “let each act on his own conviction; you leave and I will remain.”

Coconnas shrugged his shoulders and lay down again.

At that moment in the opposite direction from that in which the queen was going, but in the same alley, there passed at full speed a troop of horsemen whom the two friends recognized as ardent, almost rabid Protestants. Their steeds bounded like the locusts of which Job said, ‘They came and went.’“

“The deuce! the affair is growing serious,” said Coconnas, rising. “Let us go to the pavilion of François I.”

“No,” said La Mole; “if we are discovered it will be towards the pavilion that the attention of the King will be at first directed, since that is the general meeting-place.”

“You may be right, this time,” grumbled Coconnas.

Scarcely had Coconnas uttered these words before a horseman passed among the trees like a flash of lightning, and leaping ditches, bushes, and all barriers reached the two gentlemen.

He held a pistol in each hand and with his knees alone guided his horse in its furious chase.

“Monsieur de Mouy!” exclaimed Coconnas, uneasy and now more on the alert than La Mole; “Monsieur de Mouy running away! Every one for himself, then!”

“Quick! quick!” cried the Huguenot; “away! all is lost! I have come around to tell you so. Away!”

As if he had not stopped to utter these words, he was gone almost before they were spoken, and before La Mole and Coconnas realized their meaning.

“And the queen?” cried La Mole.

But the young man’s voice was lost in the distance; De Mouy was too far away either to hear or to answer him.

Coconnas had speedily made up his mind. While La Mole stood motionless, gazing after De Mouy, who had disappeared among the trees, he ran to the horses, led them out, sprang on his own, and, throwing the bridle of the other to La Mole, prepared to gallop off.

“Come! come!” cried he; “I repeat what De Mouy said: Let us be off! De Mouy knows what he is doing. Come, La Mole, quick!”

“One moment,” said La Mole; “we came here for something.”

“Unless it is to be hanged,” replied Coconnas, “I advise you to lose no more time. I know you are going to parse some rhetoric, paraphrase the word ‘flee,’ speak of Horace, who hurled his buckler, and Epaminondas, who was brought back on his. But I tell you one thing, when Monsieur de Mouy de Saint Phale flees all the world may run too.”

“Monsieur de Mouy de Saint Phale,” said La Mole, “was not charged to carry off Queen Marguerite! Nor does Monsieur de Mouy de Saint Phale love Queen Marguerite!”

"By Heaven! he is right if this love would make him do such foolish things as you plan doing. May five hundred thousand devils from hell take away the love which may cost two brave gentlemen their heads! By Heaven! as King Charles says, we are conspiring, my dear fellow; and when plans fail one must run. Mount! mount, La Mole!"

"Mount yourself, my dear fellow, I will not prevent you. I even urge you to do so. Your life is more precious than mine. Defend it, therefore."

"You must say to me: 'Coconnas, let us be hanged together,' and not 'Coconnas, save yourself.'"

"Bah! my friend," replied La Mole, "the rope is made for clowns, not for gentlemen like ourselves."

"I am beginning to think," said Coconnas, "that the precaution I took is not bad."

"What precaution?"

"To have made friends with the hangman."

"You are sinister, my dear Coconnas."

"Well, what are we going to do?" cried the latter, impatiently.

"Set out and find the queen."

"Where?"

"I do not know — seek the king."

"Where?"

"I have not the least idea; but we must find him, and we two by ourselves can do what fifty others neither could nor would dare to do."

"You appeal to my pride, Hyacinthe; that is a bad sign."

"Well! come; to horse and away!"

"A good suggestion!"

La Mole turned to seize the pommel of his saddle, but just as he put his foot in the stirrup an imperious voice was heard:

"Halt there! surrender!"

At the same moment the figure of a man appeared behind an oak, then another, then thirty. They were the light-horse, who, dismounted, had glided on all fours in and out among the bushes, searching the forest.

"What did I tell you?" murmured Coconnas, in a low tone.

A dull groan was La Mole's only answer.

The light-horse were still thirty paces away from the two friends.

"Well!" continued the Piedmontese, in a loud tone, to the lieutenant of the dragoons. "What is it, gentlemen?"

The lieutenant ordered his men to aim.

Coconnas continued under breath:

“Mount, La Mole, there is still time. Spring into your saddle as I have seen you do hundreds of times, and let us be off.”

Then turning to the light-horse:

“The devil, gentlemen, do not fire; you would kill friends.”

Then to La Mole:

“Between the trees they cannot aim well; they will fire and miss us.”

“Impossible,” said La Mole, “we cannot take Marguerite’s horse with us or the two mules. They would compromise us, whereas by my replies I can avert all suspicion. Go, my friend, go!”

“Gentlemen,” said Coconnas, drawing his sword and raising it, “gentlemen, we surrender.”

The light-horse dropped their muskets.

“But first tell us why we must do so?”

“You must ask that of the King of Navarre.”

“What crime have we committed?”

“Monsieur d’Alençon will inform you.”

Coconnas and La Mole looked at each other. The name of their enemy at such a moment did not greatly reassure them.

Yet neither of them made any resistance. Coconnas was asked to dismount, a manœuvre which he executed without a word. Then both were placed in the centre of the light-horse and took the road to the pavilion.

“You always wanted to see the pavilion of François I.,” said Coconnas to La Mole, perceiving through the trees the walls of a beautiful Gothic structure; “now it seems you will.”

La Mole made no reply, but merely extended his hand to Coconnas.

By the side of this lovely pavilion, built in the time of Louis XII., and named after François I., because the latter always chose it as a meeting-place when he hunted, was a kind of hut built for prickers, partly hidden behind the muskets, halberds, and shining swords like an ant-hill under a whitening harvest.

The prisoners were conducted to this hut.

We will now relate what had happened and so throw some light on the situation, which looked very dark, especially for the two friends.

The Protestant gentlemen had assembled, as had been agreed on, in the pavilion of François I., of which, as we know, De Mouy had the key.

Masters of the forest, or at least so they had believed, they had placed sentinels here and there whom the light-horse, having exchanged their white scarfs for red ones (a precaution due to the ingenious zeal of Monsieur de Nancey), had surprised and carried away without a blow.

The light-horse had continued their search surrounding the pavilion; but De Mouy, who, as we know, was waiting for the king at the end of the Allée des Violettes, had perceived the red scarfs stealing along and had instantly suspected them. He sprang to one side so as not to be seen, and noticed that the vast circle was narrowing in such a way as to beat the forest and surround the meeting-place. At the same time, at the end of the principal alley, he had caught a glimpse of the white aigrettes and the shining arquebuses of the King's bodyguard.

Finally he saw the King himself, while in the opposite direction he perceived the King of Navarre.

Then with his hat he had made a sign of the cross, which was the signal agreed on to indicate that all was lost.

At this signal the king had turned back and disappeared. De Mouy at once dug the two wide rowels of his spurs into the sides of his horse and galloped away, shouting as he went the words of warning which we have mentioned, to La Mole and Coconnas.

Now the King, who had noticed the absence of Henry and Marguerite, arrived, escorted by Monsieur d'Alençon, just as the two men came out of the hut to which he had said that all those found, not only in the pavilion but in the forest, were to be conducted.

D'Alençon, full of confidence, galloped close by the King, whose sharp pains were augmenting his ill humor. Two or three times he had nearly fainted and once he had vomited blood.

"Come," said he on arriving, "let us make haste; I want to return to the Louvre. Bring out all these rascals from their hole. This is Saint Blaise's day; he was cousin to Saint Bartholomew."

At these words of the King the entire mass of pikes and muskets began to move, and one by one the Huguenots were forced out not only from the forest and the pavilion but from the hut.

But the King of Navarre, Marguerite, and De Mouy were not there.

"Well," said the King, "where is Henry? Where is Margot? You promised them to me, D'Alençon, and, by Heaven, they will have to be found!"

"Sire, we have not even seen the King and the Queen of Navarre."

“But here they are,” said Madame de Nevers.

At that moment, at the end of an alley leading to the river, Henry and Margot came in sight, both as calm as if nothing had happened; both with their falcons on their wrists, riding lovingly side by side, so that as they galloped along their horses, like themselves, seemed to be caressing each other.

It was then that D’Alençon, furious, commanded the forest to be searched, and that La Mole and Coconnas were found within their ivy bower. They, too, in brotherly proximity entered the circle formed by the guards; only, as they were not sovereigns, they could not assume so calm a manner as Henry and Marguerite. La Mole was too pale and Coconnas too red.

CHAPTER LII.

THE EXAMINATION.

The spectacle which struck the young men as they entered the circle, although seen but for a few moments, was one never to be forgotten.

As we have said, Charles IX. had watched the gentlemen as the guards led them one by one from the pricker’s hut.

Both he and D’Alençon anxiously followed every movement, waiting to see the King of Navarre come out. Both, however, were doomed to disappointment. But it was not enough to know that the king was not there, it was necessary to find out what had become of him.

Therefore when the young couple were seen approaching from the end of the alley, D’Alençon turned pale, while Charles felt his heart grow glad; he instinctively desired that everything his brother had forced him to do should fall back on the duke.

“He will outwit us again,” murmured François, growing still paler.

At that moment the King was seized with such violent pains that he dropped his bridle, pressed both hands to his sides, and shrieked like a madman.

Henry hastily approached him, but by the time he had traversed the few hundred feet which separated them, Charles had recovered.

“Whence do you come, monsieur?” said the King, with a sternness that frightened Marguerite.

“Why, from the hunt, brother,” replied she.

“The hunt was along the river bank, and not in the forest.”

“My falcon swooped down on a pheasant just as we stopped behind every one to look at the heron.”

“Where is the pheasant?”

“Here; a beautiful bird, is it not?”

And Henry, in perfect innocence, held up his bird of purple, blue, and gold plumage.

“Ah!” said Charles, “and this pheasant caught, why did you not rejoin me?”

“Because the bird had directed its flight towards the park, sire, and when we returned to the river bank we saw you half a mile ahead of us, riding towards the forest. We set out to gallop after you, therefore, for being in your Majesty’s hunting-party we did not wish to lose you.”

“And were all these gentlemen invited also?” said Charles.

“What gentlemen?” asked Henry, casting an inquiring look about.

“Why, your Huguenots, by Heaven!” said Charles; “at all events if they were invited it was not by me.”

“No, sire,” replied Henry, “but possibly Monsieur d’Alençon asked them.”

“Monsieur d’Alençon? How so?”

“I?” said the duke.

“Why, yes, brother,” said Henry; “did you not announce yesterday that you were King of Navarre? The Huguenots who demanded you for their king have come to thank you for having accepted the crown, and the King for having given it. Is it not so, gentlemen?”

“Yes! yes!” cried twenty voices. “Long live the Duc d’Alençon! Long live King Charles!”

“I am not king of the Huguenots,” said François, white with anger; then, glancing stealthily at Charles, “and I sincerely trust I never shall be!”

“No matter!” said Charles, “but you must know, Henry, that I consider all this very strange.”

“Sire,” said the King of Navarre, firmly, “God forgive me, but one would say that I were undergoing an examination.”

“And if I should tell you that you were, what would you answer?”

“That I am a king like yourself, sire,” replied Henry, proudly, “for it is not the crown but birth that makes royalty, and that I would gladly answer any questions from my brother and my friend, but never from my judge.”

“And yet,” murmured Charles, “I should really like to know for once in my life how to act.”

“Let Monsieur de Mouy be brought out,” said D’Alençon, “and then you will know. Monsieur de Mouy must be among the prisoners.”

“Is Monsieur de Mouy here?” asked the King.

Henry felt a moment’s anxiety and exchanged glances with Marguerite; but his uneasiness was of short duration.

No voice replied.

“Monsieur de Mouy is not among the prisoners,” said Monsieur de Nancey; “some of our men think they saw him, but no one is sure of it.”

D’Alençon uttered an oath.

“Well!” said Marguerite, pointing to La Mole and Coconnas, who had heard all that had passed, and on whose intelligence she felt she could depend, “there are two gentlemen in the service of Monsieur d’Alençon; question them; they will answer.”

The duke felt the blow.

“I had them arrested on purpose to prove that they do not belong to me,” said he.

The King looked at the two friends and started on seeing La Mole again.

“Ah! that Provençal here?” said he.

Coconnas bowed graciously.

“What were you doing when you were arrested?” asked the King.

“Sire, we were planning deeds of war and of love.”

“On horseback, armed to the teeth, ready for flight!”

“No, sire,” said Coconnas; “your Majesty is misinformed. We were lying under the shade of a beech tree — *sub tegmine fagi*.”

“Ah! so you were lying under the shade of a beech tree?”

“And we might easily have escaped had we thought that in any way we had roused your Majesty’s anger. Now, gentlemen, on your honor as soldiers,” continued Coconnas, turning to the light-horse, “do you not think that had we so wished we could have escaped?”

“The fact is,” said the lieutenant, “that these gentlemen did not even attempt to run.”

“Because their horses were too far away,” said the Duc d’Alençon.

“I humbly beg monseigneur’s pardon,” said Coconnas; “but I was on mine, and my friend the Comte Lerac de la Mole was holding his by the bridle.”

“Is this true, gentlemen?” said the King.

“Yes, sire,” replied the lieutenant; “on seeing us Monsieur de Coconnas even dismounted.”

Coconnas smiled in a way which signified, “You see, sire!”

“But the other horses, the mules, and the boxes with which they were laden?” asked François.

“Well,” said Coconnas, “are we stable boys? Send for the groom who had charge of them.”

“He is not here,” exclaimed the duke, furious.

“Then he must have become frightened and run away,” said Coconnas; “one cannot expect a clown to have the manners of a gentleman.”

“Always the same system,” said D’Alençon, gnashing his teeth. “Fortunately, sire, I told you that for some time these gentlemen have not been in my service.”

“I!” exclaimed Coconnas, “am I unfortunate enough no longer to belong to your highness?”

“By Heaven! monsieur, you ought to know that better than any one, since you yourself gave me your dismissal, in a letter so impertinent that, thank God, I kept it, and fortunately have it with me.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Coconnas, “I had hoped that your highness would forgive me for a letter written under the first impulse of anger. I had been told that your highness had tried to strangle my friend La Mole in one of the corridors of the Louvre.”

“What is he saying?” interrupted the King.

“At first I thought your highness was alone,” continued Coconnas, ingenuously, “but afterwards I learned that three others” —

“Silence!” exclaimed Charles; “we have heard enough. Henry,” said he to the King of Navarre, “your word not to try to escape.”

“I give it to your Majesty, sire.”

“Return to Paris with Monsieur de Nancey, and remain in your chamber under arrest. You, gentlemen,” continued he, addressing the two friends, “give up your swords.”

La Mole looked at Marguerite. She smiled. La Mole at once handed his sword to the nearest officer. Coconnas did the same.

“Has Monsieur de Mouy been found?” asked the King.

“No, sire,” said Monsieur de Nancey; “either he was not in the forest or he escaped.”

“So much the worse,” said the King; “but let us return. I am cold and dizzy.”

“Sire, it is from anger, probably,” said François.

“Possibly; but my eyes trouble me. Where are the prisoners? I cannot see them. Is it night already? Oh! mercy! I am burning up! Help! Help!”

The unfortunate King dropped the bridle of his horse, stretched out his arms, and fell backward. The courtiers, frightened at this second attack, caught him as he fell.

François, standing apart, wiped the perspiration from his brow, for he alone knew the cause of the trouble from which his brother was suffering.

On the other side the King of Navarre, already under the guard of Monsieur de Nancey, looked upon the scene with growing astonishment.

"Well! well!" murmured he, with that wonderful intuition which at times made him seem inspired, "was I perhaps fortunate in having been stopped in my flight?"

He glanced at Margot, whose great eyes, wide open with surprise, were looking first at him and then at the King.

This time Charles was unconscious. A litter was brought and he was laid on it. They covered him with a cloak, taken from the shoulders of one of the courtiers. The procession silently set out in the direction of Paris, whence that morning light-hearted conspirators and a happy King had started forth, and to which now a dying King was returning, surrounded by rebel prisoners.

Marguerite, who throughout all this had lost neither the control of her mind nor body, gave her husband a look of intelligence; then, passing so close to La Mole that the latter was able to catch the following two Greek words, she said:

"*Me deide*," which meant, "Fear nothing."

"What did she say?" asked Coconnas.

"She told me to fear nothing," replied La Mole.

"So much the worse," murmured the Piedmontese, "so much the worse; that means that it is not good for us to be here. Every time that word has been said to me in an encouraging tone I have either received a bullet or a sword-thrust in my body, or a flower pot on my head. 'Fear nothing,' whether in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, or French, has always meant for me: 'Take care!'"

"Forward, gentlemen!" said the lieutenant of the light-horse.

"Without being indiscreet, monsieur," said Coconnas, "may we know where we are going?"

"To Vincennes, I think," said the lieutenant.

"I would rather go elsewhere," said Coconnas; "but one does not always go just where one wishes."

On the way the King recovered consciousness and some strength.

At Nanterre he even wanted to ride, but this was not allowed.

"Summon Maître Ambroise Paré," said Charles, on reaching the Louvre.

He descended from his litter, ascended the stairs, leaning on the arm of Tavannes, and entered his apartment, giving orders that no one be allowed to follow him.

Every one had noticed that he seemed very grave. During the journey he had been in a deep study, not addressing a word to any one, concerned neither with conspiracy nor conspirators. It was evident that he was occupied with his illness; a malady so sudden, so strange, so severe, some of the symptoms of which had been noticed in his brother François II. a short time before his death.

So the order to admit no one whomsoever to his rooms, except Maître Paré, caused no surprise. It was well known that the prince was a misanthrope. Charles entered his sleeping-room, seated himself in a folding-chair, and leaned his head against the cushions. Then reflecting that Maître Ambroise Paré might not be at home, and that there might be some delay before he saw him, he decided to employ the intervening time.

He clapped his hands, thus summoning a guard.

“Say to the King of Navarre that I wish to speak with him,” said Charles.

The man bowed and withdrew.

Just then Charles’s head fell back, a great weight seemed to oppress him; his ideas grew confused; it was as if a sort of bloody vapor were floating before his eyes; his mouth was dry, although he had already swallowed a whole carafe of water.

While he was in this drowsy state the door opened and Henry appeared. Monsieur de Nancey had followed him, but stopped in the antechamber.

The King of Navarre waited until the door was closed. Then he advanced.

“Sire,” said he, “you sent for me; I am here.”

The King started at the voice and mechanically extended his hand.

“Sire,” said Henry, letting his arms hang at his side, “your Majesty forgets that I am no longer your brother but your prisoner.”

“Ah! that is true,” said Charles. “Thank you for having reminded me of it. Moreover, it seems to me that when we last spoke together you promised to answer frankly what I might ask you.”

“I am ready to keep my word, sire. Ask your questions.”

The King poured some cold water into his hand and applied it to his forehead.

“Tell me, Henry, how much truth is there in the accusation brought against you by the Duc d’Alençon?”

“Only a little. It was Monsieur d’Alençon who was to have fled, and I who was to have accompanied him.”

“And why should you have gone with him? Are you dissatisfied with me, Henry?”

“No, sire; on the contrary, I have only praise for your majesty; and God, who reads our hearts, knows how deeply I love my brother and my King.”

“It seems to me,” said Charles, “that it is not natural to flee from those we love and who love us.”

“I was not fleeing from those who love me; I was fleeing from those who hate me. Will your Majesty permit me to speak openly?”

“Speak, monsieur.”

“Those who hate me, sire, are Monsieur d’Alençon and the queen mother.”

“As for Monsieur d’Alençon I will not answer; but the queen mother overwhelms you with attentions.”

“That is just why I mistrust her, sire. And I do well to do so.”

“Mistrust her?”

“Her, or those about her. You know, sire, that the misfortune of kings is not always that they are too little but that they are too well served.”

“Explain yourself; you promised to tell me everything.”

“Your Majesty will see that I will do so.”

“Continue.”

“Your Majesty loves me, you have said.”

“I loved you before your treason, Henry.”

“Pretend that you still love me, sire.”

“Very well.”

“If you love me you must want me to live, do you not?”

“I should be wretched were any harm to befall you.”

“Well, sire, twice your Majesty has just escaped being wretched.”

“How so?”

“Twice Providence has saved my life. It is true that the second time Providence assumed the features of your Majesty?”

“What form did it assume the first time?”

“That of a man who would be greatly surprised to see himself mistaken for Providence; I mean Réné. You, sire, saved me from steel.”

Charles frowned, for he remembered the night when he had taken Henry to the Rue des Barres.

“And Réné?” said he.

“Réné saved me from poison.”

“The deuce, Henriot, you have luck,” said the King, trying to smile. But a quick spasm of pain changed the effort into a nervous contraction of the lips. “That is not his profession.”

“Two miracles saved me, sire. A miracle of repentance on the part of the Florentine, and a miracle of goodness on your part. Well! I will confess to your Majesty that I am afraid Heaven will grow weary of working miracles, and I tried to run away, because of the proverb: ‘Heaven helps those who help themselves.’“

“Why did you not tell me this sooner, Henriot?”

“Had I uttered these words yesterday I should have been a denunciator.”

“And to-day?”

“To-day is different — I am accused and I am defending myself.”

“Are you sure of the first attempt, Henriot?”

“As sure as I am of the second.”

“And they tried to poison you?”

“Yes.”

“With what?”

“With an opiate.”

“How could they poison you with an opiate?”

“Why, sire, ask Réné; poisoning is done with gloves” —

Charles frowned; then by degrees his brow cleared.

“Yes,” said he, as if speaking to himself. “It is the nature of wild creatures to flee from death. Why, then, should not knowledge do what instinct does?”

“Well, sire!” said Henry, “is your Majesty satisfied with my frankness, and do you believe that I have told you everything?”

“Yes, Henriot, and you are a good fellow. Do you think that those who hate you have grown weary, or will new attempts be made on your life?”

“Sire, every evening I am surprised to find myself still living.”

“It is because they know I love you, Henriot, that they wish to kill you. But do not worry. They shall be punished for their evil intentions. Meanwhile you are free.”

“Free to leave Paris, sire?” asked Henry.

“No; you well know that I cannot possibly do without you. In the name of a thousand devils! I must have some one here who loves me.”

“Then, sire, if your Majesty keep me with you, will you grant me a favor”—

“What is it?”

“Not to keep me as a friend, but as a prisoner. Yes; does not your Majesty see that it is your friendship for me that is my ruin?”

“Would you prefer my hatred?”

“Your apparent hatred, sire. It will save me. As soon as they think I am in disgrace they will be less anxious for my death.”

“Henriot,” said Charles, “I know neither what you desire, nor what object you seek; but if your wishes do not succeed, and if your object is not accomplished, I shall be greatly surprised.”

“I may, then, count on the severity of the King?”

“Yes.”

“In that case I shall be less uneasy. Now what are your Majesty’s commands?”

“Return to your apartments, Henriot, I am in pain. I will see my dogs and then go to bed.”

“Sire,” said Henry, “your Majesty ought to send for a physician. Your trouble is perhaps more serious than you imagine.”

“I have sent for Maître Ambroise Paré, Henriot.”

“Then I shall retire more satisfied.”

“Upon my soul,” said the King, “I believe that of all my family you are the only one who really loves me.”

“Is this indeed your opinion, sire?”

“On the word of a gentleman.”

“Then commend me to Monsieur de Nancey as a man your deep anger may not allow to live a month. By this means you will have me many years to love you.”

“Monsieur de Nancey!” cried Charles.

The captain of the guards entered.

“I commit into your hands the most guilty man of my kingdom. You will answer for him with your life.”

Henry assumed an air of consternation, and followed Monsieur de Nancey.

CHAPTER LIII.

ACTÉON.

Charles, left alone, wondered greatly at not having seen either of his favorites, his nurse Madeleine or his greyhound Actéon.

“Nurse must have gone to chant psalms with some Huguenot of her acquaintance,” said he to himself; “and Actéon is probably still angry with me for the whipping I gave him this morning.”

Charles took a candle and went into his nurse’s room. The good woman was not there. From her chamber a door opened into the armory, it may be remembered. The King started towards this door, but as he did so he was seized with one of those spasms he had already felt, and which seemed to attack him suddenly. He felt as if his entrails were being run through with a red-hot iron, and an unquenchable thirst consumed him. Seeing a cup of milk on the table, he swallowed it at a gulp, and felt somewhat relieved.

Taking the candle he had set down, he entered the armory.

To his great astonishment Actéon did not come to meet him. Had he been shut up? If so, he would have known that his master had returned from hunting, and would have barked.

Charles called and whistled, but no animal appeared. He advanced a few steps, and as the light from the candle fell upon a corner of the room, he perceived an inert something lying there on the floor.

“Why! hello, Actéon!” cried Charles. He whistled again, but the dog did not stir. Charles hastened forward and touched him; the poor beast was stiff and cold. From his throat, contracted by pain, several drops of gall had fallen, mixed with foamy and bloody saliva. The dog had found an old cap of his master’s in the armory, and had died with his head resting on this object, which represented a friend.

At the sight, which made him forget his own pain and restored all his energy, rage boiled in Charles’s veins. He would have cried out; but, restrained as they are in their greatness, kings are not free to yield to that first impulse which every man turns to the profit of his passion or to his defence. Charles reflected that there had been some treason, and was silent.

Then he knelt down before his dog and with experienced eye examined the body. The eyes were glassy, the tongue red and covered with pustules. It was a strange disease, and one which made Charles shudder. The King put on his gloves, which he had taken off and slipped into his belt, opened the livid lips of the dog to examine his teeth, and perceived in the interstices some white-looking fragments clinging to the sharp points of the molars. He took out these pieces, and saw that they were paper. Near where the paper had been the swelling was greater, the gums were swollen, and the skin looked as if it had been eaten by vitriol.

Charles gazed carefully around him. On the carpet lay two or three bits of the paper similar to that which he had already recognized in the dog’s mouth. One of the pieces, larger than the others, showed the marks of a woodcut. Charles’s hair stood on end, for he recognized a fragment of the picture which represented a gentleman hawking, and which Actéon had torn from the treatise on hunting.

“Ah!” said he, turning pale; “the book was poisoned!”

Then, suddenly remembering:

“A thousand devils!” he exclaimed, “I touched every page with my finger, and at every page I raised my finger to my lips. These fainting-spells, these attacks of pain and vomiting! I am a dead man!”

For an instant Charles remained motionless under the weight of this terrible thought. Then, rising with a dull groan, he hastened to the door of the armory.

“Maître Réné!” he cried, “I want Maître Réné, the Florentine; send some one as quickly as possible to the Pont Saint Michel and bring him to me! He must be here within ten minutes. Let some one mount a horse and lead another that he may come more quickly. If Maître Ambroise Paré arrives have him wait.”

A guard went instantly to carry out the King’s commands.

“Oh!” murmured Charles, “if I have to put everybody to the torture, I will know who gave this book to Henriot;” and with perspiration on his brow, clenched hands, and heaving breast, he stood with his eyes fixed on the body of his dead dog.

Ten minutes later the Florentine knocked timidly and not without some anxiety at the door of the King’s apartments. There are some consciences to which the sky is never clear.

“Enter!” said Charles.

The perfumer appeared. Charles went towards him with imperious air and compressed lip.

“Your Majesty sent for me,” said Réné, trembling.

“You are a skilful chemist, are you not?”

“Sire” —

“And you know all that the cleverest doctors know?”

“Your Majesty exaggerates.”

“No; my mother has told me so. Besides, I have confidence in you, and I prefer to consult you rather than any one else. See,” he continued, pointing to the dog, “look at what this animal has between his teeth, I beg you, and tell me of what he died.”

While Réné, candle in hand, bent over the floor as much to hide his emotion as to obey the King, Charles stood up, his eyes fixed on the man, waiting with an impatience easy to understand for the reply which was to be his sentence of death or his assurance of safety.

Réné drew a kind of scalpel from his pocket, opened it, and with the point detached from the mouth of the greyhound the particles of paper which adhered to the gums; then he looked long and attentively at the humor and the blood which oozed from each wound.

“Sire,” said he, trembling, “the symptoms are very bad.”

Charles felt an icy shudder run through his veins to his very heart.

“Yes,” said he, “the dog has been poisoned, has he not?”

“I fear so, sire.”

“With what sort of poison?”

“With mineral poison, I think.”

“Can you ascertain positively that he has been poisoned?”

“Yes, certainly, by opening and examining the stomach.”

“Open it. I wish there to be no doubt.”

“I must call some one to assist me.”

“I will help you,” said Charles.

“You, sire!”

“Yes. If he has been poisoned, what symptoms shall we find?”

“Red blotches and herborizations in the stomach.”

“Come, then,” said Charles, “begin.”

With a stroke of the scalpel Réné opened the hound’s body and with his two hands removed the stomach, while Charles, one knee on the floor, held the light with clenched and trembling hand.

"See, sire," said Réné; "here are evident marks. These are the red spots I spoke of; as to these bloody veins, which seem like the roots of a plant, they are what I meant by herborizations. I find here everything I looked for."

"So the dog was poisoned?"

"Yes, sire."

"With mineral poison?"

"In all probability."

"And what symptoms would a man have who had inadvertently swallowed some of the same poison?"

"Great pain in the head, internal burning as if he had swallowed hot coals, pains in the bowels, and vomiting."

"Would he be thirsty?" asked Charles.

"Intensely thirsty."

"That is it! that is it!" murmured the King.

"Sire, I seek in vain for the motive for all these questions."

"Of what use to seek it? You need not know it. Answer my questions, that is all."

"Yes, sire."

"What is the antidote to give a man who may have swallowed the same substance as my dog?"

Réné reflected an instant.

"There are several mineral poisons," said he; "and before answering I should like to know what you mean. Has your Majesty any idea of the way in which your dog was poisoned?"

"Yes," said Charles; "he chewed the leaf of a book."

"The leaf of a book?"

"Yes."

"Has your Majesty this book?"

"Here it is," said Charles, and, taking the volume from the shelf where he had placed it, he handed it to Réné.

The latter gave a start of surprise which did not escape the King.

"He ate a leaf of this book?" stammered Réné.

"Yes, this one," and Charles pointed to the torn page.

"Will you allow me to tear out another, sire?"

"Do so."

Réné tore out a leaf and held it over the candle. The paper caught fire, filling the room with a strong smell of garlic.

“He has been poisoned with a preparation of arsenic,” said he.

“You are sure?”

“As sure as if I had prepared it myself.”

“And the antidote?”

Réné shook his head.

“What!” said Charles in a hoarse voice, “you know no remedy?”

“The best and most efficacious is the white of eggs beaten in milk; but” —

“But what?”

“It must be administered at once; otherwise” —

“Otherwise?”

“Sire, it is a terrible poison,” said Réné, again.

“Yet it does not kill immediately,” said Charles.

“No, but it kills surely, no matter how long the time, though even this may sometimes be calculated.”

Charles leaned against the marble table.

“Now,” said he, putting his hand on Réné’s shoulder, “you know this book?”

“I, sire?” said Réné, turning pale.

“Yes, you; on seeing it you betrayed yourself.”

“Sire, I swear to you” —

“Réné,” said Charles, “listen to me. You poisoned the Queen of Navarre with gloves; you poisoned the Prince of Porcion with the smoke from a lamp; you tried to poison Monsieur de Condé with a scented apple. Réné, I will have your skin removed with red-hot pincers, bit by bit, if you do not tell me to whom this book belongs.”

The Florentine saw that he could not dally with the anger of Charles IX., and resolved to be bold.

“If I tell the truth, sire, who will guarantee that I shall not be more cruelly punished than if I keep silent?”

“I will.”

“Will you give me your royal word?”

“On my honor as a gentleman your life shall be spared,” said the King.

“The book belongs to me, then,” said Réné.

“To you!” cried Charles, starting back and looking at the poisoner with haggard eyes.

“Yes, to me.”

“How did it leave your possession?”

“Her majesty the queen mother took it from my house.”

“The queen mother!” exclaimed Charles.

“Yes.”

“With what object?”

“With the intention, I think, of having it sent to the King of Navarre, who had asked the Duc d’Alençon for a book of the kind in order to study the art of hawking.”

“Ah!” cried Charles, “that is it. I see it all. The book indeed was in Henriot’s room. There is a destiny about this and I submit to it.”

At that moment Charles was seized with a violent fit of coughing, followed by fresh pain in the bowels. He gave two or three stifled cries, and fell back in his chair.

“What is the matter, sire?” asked Réné in a frightened voice.

“Nothing,” said Charles, “except that I am thirsty. Give me something to drink.”

Réné filled a glass with water and with trembling hand gave it to Charles, who swallowed it at a draught.

“Now,” said he, taking a pen and dipping it into the ink, “write in this book.”

“What must I write?”

“What I am going to dictate to you:

“‘*This book on hawking was given by me to the queen mother, Catharine de Médicis.*’“

Réné took the pen and wrote.

“Now sign your name.”

The Florentine obeyed.

“You promised to save my life.”

“I will keep my promise.”

“But,” said Réné, “the queen mother?”

“Oh!” said Charles, “I have nothing to do with her; if you are attacked defend yourself.”

“Sire, may I leave France, where I feel that my life is in danger?”

“I will reply to that in a fortnight.”

“But, in the meantime” —

Charles frowned and placed his finger on his livid lips.

“You need not be afraid of me, sire.”

And happy to have escaped so easily the Florentine bowed and withdrew.

Behind him the nurse appeared at the door of her room.

“What is the matter, my Charlot?” said she.

“Nurse, I have been walking in the dew, and have taken cold.”

“You are very pale, Charlot.”

“It is because I am so weak. Give me your arm, nurse, as far as my bed.”

The nurse hastily came forward.

Charles leaned on her and reached his room.

“Now,” said Charles, “I will put myself to bed.”

“If Maître Ambroise Paré comes?”

“Tell him that I am better and that I do not need him.”

“But, meanwhile, what will you take?”

“Oh! a very simple medicine,” said Charles, “the whites of eggs beaten in milk. By the way, nurse,” he continued, “my poor Actéon is dead. To-morrow morning he must be buried in a corner of the garden of the Louvre. He was one of my best friends. I will have a tomb made for him — if I have time.”

CHAPTER LIV.

THE FOREST OF VINCENNES.

According to the order given by Charles IX., Henry was conducted that same evening to Vincennes. Such was the name given at that time to the famous castle of which to-day only a fragment remains, colossal enough, however, to give an idea of its past grandeur.

The trip was made in a litter, on either side of which walked four guards.

Monsieur de Nancey, bearing the order which was to open to Henry the door of the protecting abode, walked first.

At the postern of the prison they stopped. Monsieur de Nancey dismounted from his horse, opened the gate, which was closed with a padlock, and respectfully asked the king to follow.

Henry obeyed without uttering a word. Any dwelling seemed to him safer than the Louvre, and ten doors closed on him were at the same time ten doors shut between him and Catharine de Médicis.

The royal prisoner crossed the drawbridge between two soldiers, passed through the three doors on the ground floor and the three at the foot of the staircase; then, still preceded by Monsieur de Nancey, he ascended one flight. Arrived there, the captain of the guards, seeing that the king was about to mount another flight, said to him:

“My lord, you are to stop here.”

“Ah!” said Henry, pausing, “it seems that I am given the honors of the first floor.”

“Sire,” replied Monsieur de Nancey, “you are treated like a crowned head.”

“The devil! the devil!” said Henry to himself, “two or three floors more would in no way have humiliated me. I shall be too comfortable here; I suspect something.”

“Will your majesty follow me?” asked Monsieur de Nancey.

“*Ventre saint gris!*” said the King of Navarre, “you know very well, monsieur, that it is not a question of what I will or will not do, but of what my brother Charles orders. Did he command that I should follow you?”

"Yes, sire."

"Then I will do so, monsieur."

They reached a sort of corridor at the end of which they came to a good-sized room, with dark and gloomy looking walls. Henry gazed around him with a glance not wholly free from anxiety.

"Where are we?" he asked.

"In the chamber of torture, my lord."

"Ah!" replied the king, looking at it more closely.

There was something of everything in this chamber — pitchers and wooden horses for the torture by water; wedges and mallets for the torture of the boot; besides stone benches nearly all around the room for the wretches who awaited the torture. Above these benches, at the seats themselves, and at their feet, were iron rings fastened into the walls, without other symmetry than that of the torturing art. But their proximity to the seats sufficiently indicated that they were there in order to await the limbs of those who were to occupy them.

Henry walked on without a word, but not a single detail of all the hideous apparatus which, so to speak, had stamped the history of suffering on the walls escaped him.

The king was so taken up with the objects about him that he forgot to look where he was going, and came to a sudden standstill.

"Ah!" said he, "what is that?"

And he pointed to a kind of ditch dug in the damp pavement which formed the floor.

"That is the gutter, sire."

"Does it rain here, then?"

"Yes, sire, blood."

"Ah!" said Henry, "very good. Shall we not soon reach my apartment?"

"Yes, my lord, here it is," said a figure in the dark, which, as it drew nearer, became clearer and more distinguishable.

Henry thought he recognized the voice, and advanced towards the figure.

"So it is you, Beaulieu," said he. "What the devil are you doing here?"

"Sire, I have just received my appointment as governor of the fortress of Vincennes."

"Well, my dear friend, your initiation does you honor. A king for a prisoner is not bad."

"Pardon me, sire," said Beaulieu, "but I have already had two gentlemen."

"Who are they? But, pardon me, perhaps I am indiscreet. If so, assume that I have said nothing."

"My lord, I have not been ordered to keep it secret. They are Monsieur de la Mole and Monsieur de Coconnas."

"Ah! that is true. I saw them arrested. Poor gentlemen, and how do they bear this misfortune?"

"Differently. One is gay, the other sad; one sings, the other groans."

"Which one groans?"

"Monsieur de la Mole, sire."

"Faith," said Henry, "I can understand more easily the one who groans than the one who sings. After what I have seen the prison is not a very lively place. On what floor are they?"

"High up; on the fourth."

Henry heaved a sigh. It was there that he wished to be.

"Come, Monsieur de Beaulieu," said he, "be good enough to show me my room. I am in haste to see it, as I am greatly fatigued from the journey we have just made."

"This is it, my lord," said Beaulieu, pointing to an open door.

"Number two," said Henry; "why not number one?"

"Because that is reserved, my lord."

"Ah! it seems, then, that you expect a prisoner of higher rank than I."

"I did not say, my lord, that it was a prisoner."

"Who is it, then?"

"I beg my lord not to insist, for by refusing to answer I should fail in the obedience due him."

"Ah! that is another thing," said Henry.

And he became more pensive than before. Number one perplexed him, apparently. The governor was assiduous in his attentions. With a thousand apologies he installed Henry in his apartment, made every excuse for the comforts he might lack, stationed two soldiers at the door, and withdrew.

"Now," said the governor, addressing the turnkey, "let us go to the others."

The turnkey walked ahead. They took the same road by which they had come, passed through the chamber of torture, crossed the corridor, and reached the stairway. Then, still following his guide, Monsieur de Beaulieu ascended three flights. On reaching the fourth floor the turnkey opened successively three doors, each ornamented with two locks and three enormous bolts. He had scarcely touched the third door before they heard a joyous voice exclaiming:

"By Heaven! open; if only to give us some air. Your stove is so warm that I am stifled here."

And Coconnas, whom the reader has no doubt already recognized from his favorite exclamation, bounded from where he stood to the door.

"One instant, my gentleman," said the turnkey, "I have not come to let you out, but to let myself in, and the governor is with me."

"The governor!" said Coconnas, "what does he want?"

"To pay you a visit."

"He does me great honor," said Coconnas; "and he is welcome."

Monsieur de Beaulieu entered and at once dispelled the cordial smile of Coconnas by one of those icy looks which belong to governors of fortresses, to jailers, and to hangmen.

"Have you any money, monsieur?" he asked of the prisoner.

"I?" said Coconnas; "not a crown."

"Jewels?"

"I have a ring."

"Will you allow me to search you?"

"By Heaven!" cried Coconnas, reddening with anger, "you take much on yourself, being in prison, and having me there also."

"We must suffer everything for the service of the King."

"So," said the Piedmontese, "those good fellows who rob on the Pont Neuf are like you, then, in the service of the King. By Heavens! I was very unjust, monsieur, for until now I have taken them for thieves."

"Good evening, monsieur," said Beaulieu. "Jailer, lock the door."

The governor went away, taking with him the ring, which was a beautiful sapphire, given him by Madame de Nevers to remind him of the color of her eyes.

"Now for the other," he said as he went out.

They crossed an empty chamber, and the game of three doors, six locks, and nine bolts began anew.

The last door open, a sigh was the first sound that greeted the visitors.

The apartment was more gloomy looking than the one Monsieur de Beaulieu had just left. Four long narrow windows admitted a feeble light into this mournful abode. Before these, iron bars were crossed in such a way that the eye of the prisoner was arrested by a dark line and prevented from catching even a glimpse of the sky. From each corner of the room pointed arches met in the middle of the ceiling, where they spread out in Gothic fashion.

La Mole was seated in a corner, and, in spite of the entrance of the visitors, appeared to have heard nothing.

The governor paused on the threshold and looked for an instant at the prisoner, who sat motionless, his head in his hands.

“Good evening, Monsieur de la Mole,” said Beaulieu.

The young man slowly raised his head.

“Good evening, monsieur,” said he.

“Monsieur,” continued the governor, “I have come to search you.”

“That is useless,” said La Mole. “I will give you all I have.”

“What have you?”

“About three hundred crowns, these jewels, and rings.”

“Give them to me, monsieur,” said the governor.

“Here they are.”

La Mole turned out his pockets, took the rings from his finger, and the clasp from his hat.

“Have you nothing more?”

“Not that I know of.”

“And that silk cord around your neck, what may that be?” asked the governor.

“Monsieur, that is not a jewel, but a relic.”

“Give it to me.”

“What! you demand it?”

“I am ordered to leave you only your clothes, and a relic is not an article of clothing.”

La Mole made a gesture of anger, which, in the midst of the dignified and pained calm which distinguished him, seemed to impress the men accustomed to stormy emotions.

But he immediately recovered his self-possession.

“Very well, monsieur,” said he, “you shall see what you ask for.”

Then, turning as if to approach the light, he unfastened the pretended relic, which was none other than a medallion containing a portrait, which he drew out and raised to his lips. Having kissed it several times, he suddenly pretended to drop it as by accident, and placing the heel of his boot on it he crushed it into a thousand pieces.

"Monsieur!" said the governor.

And he stooped down to see if he could not save the unknown object which La Mole wished to hide from him; but the miniature was literally ground to powder.

"The King wished for this jewel," said La Mole, "but he had no right to the portrait it contained. Now, here is the medallion; you may take it."

"Monsieur," said Beaulieu, "I shall complain of you to the King."

And without taking leave of his prisoner by a single word he went out, so angry that without waiting to preside over the task, he left to the turnkey the care of closing the doors.

The jailer turned to leave, but seeing that Monsieur de Beaulieu had already started down the stairs:

"Faith! monsieur," said he, turning back, "I did well to ask you to give me the hundred crowns at once for which I am to allow you to speak to your companion; for had you not done so the governor would have taken them from you with the three hundred others, and my conscience would not have allowed me to do anything for you; but as I was paid in advance, I promised that you should see your friend. So come. An honest man keeps his word. Only, if it is possible, for your sake as much as for mine, do not talk politics."

La Mole left his apartment and found himself face to face with Coconnas, who was walking up and down the flags of the intermediate room.

The two friends rushed into each other's arms.

The jailer pretended to wipe the corner of his eye, and then withdrew to watch that the prisoners were not surprised, or rather that he himself was not caught.

"Ah! here you are!" said Coconnas. "Well, has that dreadful governor paid his visit to you?"

"Yes, as he did to you, I presume?"

"Did he remove everything?"

"And from you, too?"

"Ah! I had not much; only a ring from Henrietta, that was all."

"And money?"

"I gave all I had to the good jailer, so that he would arrange this interview for us."

"Ah!" said La Mole, "it seems that he had something from both of us."

"Did you pay him too?"

"I gave him a hundred crowns."

"So much the better."

"One can do everything with money, and I trust that we shall not lack for it."

"Do you know what has happened to us?"

"Perfectly; we have been betrayed."

"By that scoundrelly Duc d'Alençon. I should have been right to twist his neck."

"Do you think our position serious?"

"I fear so."

"Then there is likelihood of the torture?"

"I will not hide from you the fact that I have already thought of it."

"What should you do in that case?"

"And you?"

"I should be silent," replied La Mole, with a feverish flush.

"Silent?" cried Coconnas.

"Yes, if I had the strength."

"Well," said Coconnas, "if they insult me in any such way I promise you I will tell them a few things."

"What things?" asked La Mole, quickly.

"Oh, be easy — things which will prevent Monsieur d'Alençon from sleeping for some time."

La Mole was about to reply when the jailer, who no doubt had heard some noise, appeared, and pushing each prisoner into his respective cell, locked the doors again.

CHAPTER LV.

THE FIGURE OF WAX.

For a week Charles was confined to his bed by a slow fever, interrupted by violent attacks which resembled epileptic fits. During these attacks he uttered shrieks which the guards, watching in his chamber, heard with terror, and the echoes of which reached to the farthest corner of the old Louvre, aroused so often by many a dreadful sound. Then, when these attacks passed, Charles, completely exhausted, sank back with closed eyes into the arms of his nurse.

To say that, each in his way, without communicating the feeling to the other, for mother and son sought to avoid rather than to see each other, to say that Catharine de Médicis and the Duc d’Alençon revolved sinister thoughts in the depths of their hearts would be to say that in that nest of vipers moved a hideous swarm.

Henry was shut up in his chamber in the prison; and at his own request no one had been allowed to see him, not even Marguerite. In the eyes of every one his imprisonment was an open disgrace. Catharine and D’Alençon, thinking him lost, breathed once more, and Henry ate and drank more calmly, hoping that he was forgotten.

At court no one suspected the cause of the King’s illness. Maître Ambroise Paré and Mazille, his colleague, thought it was inflammation of the bowels, and had prescribed a regimen which aided the special drink given by Réné. Charles received this, his only nourishment, three times a day from the hands of his nurse.

La Mole and Coconnas were at Vincennes in closest confinement. Marguerite and Madame de Nevers had made a dozen attempts to reach them, or at least to send them a note, but without success. One morning Charles felt somewhat better, and wished the court to assemble. This was the usual custom in the morning, although for some time no levee had taken place. The doors were accordingly thrown open, and it was easy to see, from his pale cheeks, yellow forehead, and the feverish light in his deep-sunken eyes, which were surrounded by dark circles, what frightful ravages the unknown disease had made on the young monarch.

The royal chamber was soon filled with curious and interested courtiers. Catharine, D’Alençon, and Marguerite had been informed that the King was to hold an audience. Therefore all three entered, at short intervals, one by one; Catharine calm, D’Alençon smiling, Marguerite dejected. Catharine seated herself by the side of the bed without noticing the look that Charles gave her as he saw her approach.

Monsieur d’Alençon stood at the foot.

Marguerite leaned against a table, and seeing the pale brow, the worn features, and deep-sunken eyes of her brother, could not repress a sigh and a tear.

Charles, whom nothing escaped, saw the tear and heard the sigh, and with his head made a slight motion to Marguerite.

This sign, slight as it was, lighted the face of the poor Queen of Navarre, to whom Henry had not had time or perhaps had not wished to say anything.

She feared for her husband, she trembled for her lover. For herself she had no fear; she knew La Mole well, and felt she could rely on him.

“Well, my dear son,” said Catharine, “how do you feel?”

“Better, mother, better.”

“What do your physicians say?”

“My physicians? They are clever doctors, mother,” said Charles, bursting into a laugh. “I take great pleasure, I admit, in hearing them discuss my malady. Nurse, give me something to drink.”

The nurse brought Charles a cup of his usual beverage.

“What do they order you to take, my son?”

“Oh! madame, who knows anything about their preparations?” said the King, hastily swallowing the drink.

“What my brother needs,” said François, “is to rise and get out into the open air; hunting, of which he is so fond, would do him a great deal of good.”

“Yes,” said Charles, with a smile, the meaning of which it was impossible for the duke to understand, “and yet the last hunt did me great harm.”

Charles uttered these words in such a strange way that the conversation, in which the others present had not taken part, stopped. Then the King gave a slight nod of his head. The courtiers understood that the audience was over, and withdrew one after another.

D’Alençon started to approach his brother, but some secret feeling stopped him. He bowed and went out.

Marguerite seized the wasted hand her brother held out to her, pressed it, and kissed it. Then she, in turn, withdrew.

“Dear Margot!” murmured Charles.

Catharine alone remained, keeping her place at the side of the bed. Finding himself alone with her, Charles recoiled as if from a serpent.

Instructed by the words of Réné, perhaps still better by silence and meditation, Charles no longer had even the happiness of doubt.

He knew perfectly to whom and to what to attribute his approaching death.

So, when Catharine drew near to the bed and extended to him a hand as cold as his glance, the King shuddered in fear.

“You have remained, madame?” said he.

“Yes, my son,” replied Catharine, “I must speak to you on important matters.”

“Speak, madame,” said Charles, again recoiling.

“Sire!” said the queen, “you said just now that your physicians were great doctors!”

“And I say so again, madame.”

“Yet what have they done during your illness?”

“Nothing, it is true — but if you had heard what they said — really, madame, one might afford to be ill if only to listen to their learned discussions.”

“Well, my son, do you want me to tell you something?”

“What is it, mother?”

“I suspect that all these clever doctors know nothing whatever about your malady.”

“Indeed, madame!”

“They may, perhaps, see a result, but they are ignorant of the cause.”

“That is possible,” said Charles, not understanding what his mother was aiming at.

“So that they treat the symptoms and not the ill itself.”

“On my soul!” said Charles, astonished, “I believe you are right, mother.”

"Well, my son," said Catharine, "as it is good neither for my happiness nor the welfare of the kingdom for you to be ill so long, and as your mind might end by becoming affected, I assembled the most skilful doctors."

"In the science of medicine, madame?"

"No, in a more profound science: that which helps not only the body but the mind as well."

"Ah! a beautiful science, madame," said Charles, "and one which the doctors are right in not teaching to crowned heads! Have your researches had any result?" he continued.

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"That which I hoped for; I bring to your Majesty that which will cure not only your body but your mind."

Charles shuddered. He thought that finding that he was still living his mother had resolved to finish knowingly that which she had begun unconsciously.

"Where is this remedy?" said he, rising on his elbow and looking at his mother.

"In the disease itself," replied Catharine.

"Then where is that?"

"Listen to me, my son," said Catharine, "have you not sometimes heard it said that there are secret enemies who in their revenge assassinate their victim from a distance?"

"By steel or poison?" asked Charles, without once turning his eyes from the impassible face of his mother.

"No, by a surer and much more terrible means," said Catharine.

"Explain yourself."

"My son," asked the Florentine, "do you believe in charms and magic?"

Charles repressed a smile of scorn and incredulity.

"Fully," said he.

"Well," said Catharine, quickly, "from magic comes all your suffering. An enemy of your Majesty who would not have dared to attack you openly has conspired in secret. He has directed against your Majesty a conspiracy much more terrible in that he has no accomplices, and the mysterious threads of which cannot be traced."

"Faith, no!" said Charles, aghast at such cunning.

"Think well, my son," said Catharine, "and recall to mind certain plans for flight which would have assured impunity to the murderer."

"To the murderer!" cried Charles. "To the murderer, you say? Has there been an attempt to kill me, mother?"

Catharine's changing eye rolled hypocritically under its wrinkled lid.

"Yes, my son; you doubt it, perhaps, but I know it for a certainty."

"I never doubt what you tell me, mother," replied the King, bitterly. "How was the attempt made? I am anxious to know."

"By magic."

"Explain yourself, madame," said Charles, recalled by his loathing to his rôle of observer.

"If the conspirator I mean, and one whom at heart your Majesty already suspects, had succeeded in his plans, no one would have fathomed the cause of your Majesty's sufferings. Fortunately, however, sire, your brother watched over you."

"Which brother?"

"D'Alençon."

"Ah! yes, that is true; I always forget that I have a brother," murmured Charles, laughing bitterly; "so you say, madame" —

"That fortunately he revealed the conspiracy. But while he, inexperienced child that he is, sought only the traces of an ordinary plot, the proofs of a young man's escapade, I sought for proofs of a much more important deed; for I understand the reach of the guilty one's mind."

"Ah! mother, one would say you were speaking of the King of Navarre," said Charles, anxious to see how far this Florentine dissimulation would go.

Catharine hypocritically dropped her eyes.

"I have had him arrested and taken to Vincennes for his escapade," continued the King; "is he more guilty than I suspected, then?"

"Do you feel the fever that consumes you?" asked Catharine.

"Yes, certainly, madame," said Charles, frowning.

"Do you feel the fire that burns you internally?"

"Yes, madame," replied Charles, his brow darkening more and more.

"And the sharp pains in your head, which shoot from your eyes to your brain like so many arrows?"

"Yes, madame. I feel all that. You describe my trouble perfectly!"

"Well! the explanation is very simple," said the Florentine. "See."

And she drew from under her cloak an object which she gave to the King.

It was a figure of yellow wax, about six inches high, clothed in a robe covered with golden stars also of wax, like the figure; and over this a royal mantle of the same material.

“Well,” asked Charles, “what is this little statue?”

“See what it has on its head,” said Catharine.

“A crown,” replied Charles.

“And in the heart?”

“A needle.”

“Well, sire, do you recognize yourself?”

“Myself?”

“Yes, you, with your crown and mantle?”

“Who made this figure?” asked Charles, whom this farce was beginning to weary; “the King of Navarre, no doubt?”

“No, sire.”

“No? then I do not understand you.”

“I say *no*,” replied Catharine, “because you asked the question literally. I should have said *yes* had you put it differently.”

Charles made no answer. He was striving to penetrate all the thoughts of that shadowy mind, which constantly closed before him just as he thought himself ready to read it.

“Sire,” continued Catharine, “this statue was found by the Attorney-General Laguesle, in the apartment of the man who on the day you last went hawking led a horse for the King of Navarre.”

“Monsieur de la Mole?”

“Yes, and, if you please, look again at the needle in the heart, and see what letter is written on the label attached to it.”

“I see an ‘M,’“ said Charles.

“That means *mort*, death; it is the magic formula, sire. The maker thus wrote his vow on the very wound he gave. Had he wished to make a pretence at killing, as did the Duc de Bretagne for King Charles VI., he would have driven the needle into the head and put an ‘F’ instead of an ‘M.’“

“So,” said Charles IX., “according to your idea, the person who seeks to end my days is Monsieur de la Mole?”

“Yes, he is the dagger; but behind the dagger is the hand that directs it.”

“This then is the sole cause of my illness? the day the charm is destroyed the malady will cease? But how go to work?” asked Charles, “you must know, mother; but I, unlike you, who have spent your whole life studying them, know nothing about charms and spells."

"The death of the conspirator destroys the charm, that is all. The day the charm is destroyed your illness will cease," said Catharine.

"Indeed!" said Charles, with an air of surprise.

"Did you not know that?"

"Why! I am no sorcerer," said the King.

"Well, now," said Catharine, "your Majesty is convinced, are you not?"

"Certainly."

"Conviction has dispelled anxiety?"

"Completely."

"You do not say so out of complaisance?"

"No, mother! I say it from the bottom of my heart."

Catharine's face broke into smiles.

"Thank God!" she exclaimed, as if she believed in God.

"Yes, thank God!" repeated Charles, ironically; "I know now, as you do, to whom to attribute my present condition, and consequently whom to punish."

"And you will punish" —

"Monsieur de la Mole; did you not say that he was the guilty party?"

"I said that he was the instrument."

"Well," said Charles, "Monsieur de la Mole first; he is the most important. All these attacks on me might arouse dangerous suspicions. It is imperative that there be some light thrown on the matter and from this light the truth may be discovered."

"So Monsieur de la Mole" —

"Suits me admirably as the guilty one; therefore I accept him. We will begin with him; and if he has an accomplice, he shall speak."

"Yes," murmured Catharine, "and if he does not, we will make him. We have infallible means for that."

Then rising:

"Will you permit the trial to begin, sire?"

"I desire it, madame," replied Charles, "and the sooner the better."

Catharine pressed the hand of her son without comprehending the nervous grasp with which he returned it, and left the apartment without hearing the sardonic laugh of the King, or the terrible oath which followed the laugh.

Charles wondered if it were not dangerous to let this woman go thus, for in a few hours she would have done so much that there would be no way of stopping it.

As he watched the curtain fall after Catharine, he heard a light rustle behind him, and turning he perceived Marguerite, who raised the drapery before the corridor leading to his nurse's rooms.

Marguerite's pallor, her haggard eyes and oppressed breathing betrayed the most violent emotion.

"Oh, sire! sire!" she exclaimed, rushing to her brother's bedside; "you know that she lies."

"She? Who?" asked Charles.

"Listen, Charles, it is a terrible thing to accuse one's mother; but I suspected that she remained with you to persecute them again. But, on my life, on yours, on our souls, I tell you what she says is false!"

"To persecute them! Whom is she persecuting?"

Both had instinctively lowered their voices; it seemed as if they themselves feared even to hear them.

"Henry, in the first place; your Henriot, who loves you, who is more devoted to you than any one else."

"You think so, Margot?" said Charles.

"Oh! sire, I am sure of it."

"Well, so am I," said Charles.

"Then if you are sure of it, brother," said Marguerite, surprised, "why did you have him arrested and taken to Vincennes?"

"Because he asked me to do so."

"He asked you, sire?"

"Yes, Henriot has singular ideas. Perhaps he is wrong, perhaps right; at any rate, one of his ideas was that he would be safer in disgrace than in favor, away from me at Vincennes instead of near me in the Louvre."

"Ah! I see," said Marguerite, "and is he safe there?"

"As safe as a man can be whose head Beaulieu answers for with his own."

"Oh! thank you, brother! so much for Henry. But" —

"But what?"

"There is another, sire, in whom perhaps I am wrong to be interested, but" —

"Who is it?"

“Sire, spare me. I would scarcely dare name him to my brother, much less to my King.”

“Monsieur de la Mole, is it not?” said Charles.

“Alas!” said Marguerite, “you tried to kill him once, sire, and he escaped from your royal vengeance only by a miracle.”

“He was guilty of only one crime then, Marguerite; now he has committed two.”

“Sire, he is not guilty of the second.”

“But,” said Charles, “did you not hear what our good mother said, my poor Margot?”

“Oh, I have already told you, Charles,” said Marguerite, lowering her voice, “that what she said was false.”

“You do not know perhaps that a waxen figure has been found in Monsieur de la Mole’s rooms?”

“Yes, yes, brother, I know it.”

“That this figure is pierced to the heart by a needle, and that it bears a tag with an ‘M’ on it?”

“I know that, too.”

“And that over the shoulders of the figure is a royal mantle, and that on its head is a royal crown?”

“I know all that.”

“Well! what have you to say to it?”

“This: that the figure with a royal cloak and a crown on its head is that of a woman, and not that of a man.”

“Bah!” said Charles, “and the needle in its heart?”

“Was a charm to make himself beloved by this woman, and not a charm to kill a man.”

“But the letter ‘M’?”

“It does not mean *mort*, as the queen mother said.”

“What does it mean, then?” asked Charles.

“It means — it means the name of the woman whom Monsieur de la Mole loves.”

“And what is the name of this woman?”

“*Marguerite*, brother!” cried the Queen of Navarre, falling on her knees before the King’s bed, taking his hand between both of hers, and pressing her face to it, bathed in tears.

"Hush, sister!" said Charles, casting a sharp glance about him beneath his frowning brow. "For just as you overheard a moment ago, we may now be overheard again."

"What does it matter?" exclaimed Marguerite, raising her head, "if the whole world were present to hear me, I would declare before it that it is infamous to abuse the love of a gentleman by staining his reputation with a suspicion of murder."

"Margot, suppose I were to tell you that I know as well as you do who it is and who it is not?"

"Brother!"

"Suppose I were to tell you that Monsieur de la Mole is innocent?"

"You know this?"

"If I were to tell you that I know the real author of the crime?"

"The real author!" cried Marguerite; "has there been a crime committed, then?"

"Yes; intentionally or unintentionally there has been a crime committed."

"On you?"

"Yes."

"Impossible!"

"Impossible? Look at me, Margot."

The young woman looked at her brother and trembled, seeing him so pale.

"Margot, I have not three months to live!" said Charles.

"You, brother! you, Charles!" she cried.

"Margot, I am poisoned."

Marguerite screamed.

"Hush," said Charles. "It must be thought that I am dying by magic."

"Do you know who is guilty?"

"Yes."

"You said it was not La Mole?"

"No, it is not he."

"Nor Henry either, surely — great God! could it be" —

"Who?"

"My brother — D'Alençon?" murmured Marguerite.

"Perhaps."

"Or — or" — Marguerite lowered her voice as if frightened at what she was going to say, "or — our mother?"

Charles was silent.

Marguerite looked at him, and read all that she asked in his eyes. Then still on her knees she half fell over against a chair.

“Oh! my God! my God!” she whispered, “that is impossible.”

“Impossible?” said Charles, with a strident laugh, “it is a pity Réné is not here to tell you the story.”

“Réné?”

“Yes; he would tell you that a woman to whom he dares refuse nothing asked him for a book on hunting which was in his library; that a subtle poison was poured on every page of this book; that the poison intended for some one, I know not for whom, fell by a turn of chance, or by a punishment of Heaven, on another. But in the absence of Réné if you wish to see the book it is there in my closet, and written in the Florentine’s handwriting you will see that this volume, which still contains the death of many among its pages, was given by him to his fellow countrywoman.”

“Hush, Charles, hush!” said Marguerite.

“Now you see that it must be supposed that I die of magic.”

“But it is monstrous, monstrous! Pity! Pity! you know he is innocent.”

“Yes, I know it, but he must be thought guilty. Let your lover die; it is very little to do in order to save the honor of the house of France; I myself shall die that the secret may die with me.”

Marguerite bent her head, realizing that nothing could be obtained from the King towards saving La Mole, and withdrew weeping, having no hope except in her own resources.

Meantime Catharine, as Charles had divined, had lost not a minute, but had written to the Attorney-General Laguesle a letter, every word of which has been preserved by history and which throws a lurid light upon the drama:

“*Monsieur le Procureur: I have this evening been informed beyond a doubt that La Mole has committed sacrilege. Many evil things such as books and papers have been found in his apartments in Paris. I beg you to summon the chief president, and to inform him as early as possible of the affair of the waxen figure meant for the King, and which was pierced to the heart.*

“*Catharine.*”

CHAPTER LVI.

THE INVISIBLE BUCKLERS.

The day after that on which Catharine had written this letter the governor entered Coconnas's cell with an imposing retinue consisting of two halberdiers and four men in black gowns.

Coconnas was asked to descend to a room in which the Attorney Laguesle and two judges waited to question him according to Catharine's instructions.

During the week he had spent in prison Coconnas had reflected a great deal. Besides that, he and La Mole were together for a few minutes each day, through the kindness of their jailer, who, without saying anything to them, had arranged this surprise, which in all probability they did not owe to his philosophy alone, — besides, we say, La Mole and he had agreed on the course they were to pursue, which was to persist in absolute denial; and they were persuaded that with a little skill the affair would take a more favorable turn; the charges were no greater against them than against the others. Henry and Marguerite had made no attempt at flight; they could not therefore be compromised in an affair in which the chief ring-leaders were free. Coconnas did not know that Henry was in the prison, and the complaisance of the jailer told him that above his head hovered a certain protection which he called the *invisible bucklers*.

Up to then the examination had been confined to the intentions of the King of Navarre, his plans of flight, and the part the two friends had played in them. To all these questions Coconnas had constantly replied in a way more than vague and much more than adroit; he was ready still to reply in the same way, and had prepared in advance all his little repartees, when he suddenly found the object of the examination was altered. It turned upon one or more visits to Réné, one or more waxen figures made at the instigation of La Mole.

Prepared as he was, Coconnas believed that the accusation lost much of its intensity, since it was no longer a question of having betrayed a king but of having made a figure of a queen; and this figure not more than ten inches high at the most. He, therefore, replied brightly that neither he nor his friend had played with a doll for some time, and noticed with pleasure that several times his answers made the judges smile.

It had not yet been said in verse: “I have laughed, therefore am I disarmed,” but it had been said a great deal in prose. And Coconnas thought that he had partly disarmed his judges because they had smiled.

His examination over, he went back to his cell, singing so merrily that La Mole, for whom he was making all the noise, drew from it the happiest auguries.

La Mole was brought down, and like Coconnas saw with astonishment that the accusation had abandoned its first ground and had entered a new field. He was questioned as to his visits to Réné. He replied that he had gone to the Florentine only once. Then, if he had not ordered a waxen figure. He replied that Réné had showed him such a figure ready made. He was then asked if this figure did not represent a man. He replied that it represented a woman. Then, if the object of the charm was not to cause the death of the man. He replied that the purpose of the charm was to cause himself to be beloved by the woman.

These questions were put in a hundred different forms, but La Mole always replied in the same way. The judges looked at one another with a certain indecision, not knowing what to say or do before such simplicity, when a note brought to the Attorney-General solved the difficulty.

“*If the accused denies resort to the torture.*

“*C.*”

The attorney put the note into his pocket, smiled at La Mole, and politely dismissed him.

La Mole returned to his cell almost as reassured, if not as joyous, as Coconnas.

“I think everything is going well,” said he.

An hour later he heard footsteps and saw a note slipped under his door, without seeing the hand that did it. He took it up, thinking that in all probability it came from the jailer?

Seeing it, a hope almost as acute as a disappointment sprang into his heart; he hoped it was from Marguerite, from whom he had had no news since he had been a prisoner.

He took it up with trembling hand, and almost died of joy as he looked at the handwriting.

“*Courage!*” said the note. “*I am watching over you.*”

“Ah! if she is watching,” cried La Mole, covering with kisses the paper which had touched a hand so dear, “if she is watching, I am saved.”

In order for La Mole to comprehend the note and rely with Coconnas on what the Piedmontese called his *invisible bucklers* it is necessary for us to conduct the reader to that small house, to that chamber in which the reminders of so many scenes of intoxicating happiness, so many half-evaporated perfumes, so many tender recollections, since become agonizing, were breaking the heart of a woman half reclining on velvet cushions.

“To be a queen, to be strong, young, rich, beautiful, and suffer what I suffer!” cried this woman; “oh! it is impossible!”

Then in her agitation she rose, paced up and down, stopped suddenly, pressed her burning forehead against the ice-cold marble, rose pale, her face covered with tears, wrung her hands, and crying aloud fell back again hopeless into a chair.

Suddenly the tapestry which separated the apartment of the Rue Cloche Percée from that in the Rue Tizon was raised, and the Duchesse de Nevers entered.

“Ah!” exclaimed Marguerite, “is it you? With what impatience I have waited for you! Well! What news?”

“Bad news, my poor friend. Catharine herself is hurrying on the trial, and at present is at Vincennes.”

“And Réné?”

“Is arrested.”

“Before you were able to speak to him?”

“Yes.”

“And our prisoners?”

“I have news of them.”

“From the jailer?”

“Yes.”

“Well?”

“Well! They see each other every day. The day before yesterday they were searched. La Mole broke your picture to atoms rather than give it up.”

“Dear La Mole!”

“Annibal laughed in the face of the inquisitors.”

“Worthy Annibal! What then?”

“This morning they were questioned as to the flight of the king, his projects of rebellion in Navarre, and they said nothing.”

“Oh! I knew they would keep silence; but silence will kill them as much as if they spoke.”

“Yes, but we must save them.”

“Have you thought over our plan?”

“Since yesterday I have thought of nothing else.”

“Well?”

“I have just come to terms with Beaulieu. Ah! my dear queen, what a hard and greedy man! It will cost a man’s life, and three hundred thousand crowns.”

“You say he is hard and greedy — and yet he asks only the life of a man and three hundred thousand crowns. Why, that is nothing!”

“Nothing! Three hundred thousand crowns! Why, all your jewels and all mine would not be enough.”

“Oh! that is nothing. The King of Navarre will pay something, the Duc d’Alençon will pay part, and my brother Charles will pay part, or if not” —

“See! what nonsense you talk. I have the money.”

“You?”

“Yes, I.”

“How did you get it?”

“Ah! that is telling!”

“Is it a secret?”

“For every one except you.”

“Oh, my God!” said Marguerite, smiling through her tears, “did you steal it?”

“You shall judge.”

“Well, let me.”

“Do you remember that horrible Nantouillet?”

“The rich man, the usurer?”

“If you please.”

“Well?”

“Well! One day seeing a certain blonde lady, with greenish eyes, pass by, wearing three rubies, one over her forehead, the other two over her temples, an arrangement which was very becoming to her, this rich man, this usurer, cried out:

"'For three kisses in the place of those three rubies I will give you three diamonds worth one hundred thousand crowns apiece!'"

"Well, Henriette?"

"Well, my dear, the diamonds appeared and are sold."

"Oh, Henriette! Henriette!" cried Marguerite.

"Well!" exclaimed the duchess in a bold tone at once innocent and sublime, which sums up the age and the woman, "well, I love Annibal!"

"That is true," said Marguerite, smiling and blushing at the same time, "you love him a very great deal, too much, perhaps."

And yet she pressed her friend's hand.

"So," continued Henriette, "thanks to our three diamonds, the three hundred thousand crowns and the man are ready."

"The man? What man?"

"The man to be killed; you forget a man must be killed."

"Have you found the necessary man?"

"Yes."

"At the same price?" asked Marguerite, smiling.

"At the same price I could have found a thousand," replied Henriette, "no, no, for five hundred crowns."

"For five hundred crowns you have found a man who has consented to be killed?"

"What can you expect? It is necessary for us to live."

"My dear friend, I do not understand you. Come, explain. Enigmas require too much time to guess at such a moment as this."

"Well, listen; the jailer to whom the keeping of La Mole and Coconnas is entrusted is an old soldier who knows what a wound is. He would like to help save our friends, but he does not want to lose his place. A blow of a dagger skilfully aimed will end the affair. We will give him a reward and the kingdom, indemnification. In this way the brave man will receive money from both parties and will renew the fable of the pelican."

"But," said Marguerite, "a thrust of a dagger" —

"Do not worry; Annibal will give it."

"Well," said Marguerite, "he has given as many as three blows of his sword to La Mole, and La Mole is not dead; there is therefore every reason to hope."

"Wicked woman! You deserve to have me stop."

“Oh! no, no; on the contrary, tell me the rest, I beg you. How are we to save them; come!”

“Well, this is the plan. The chapel is the only place in the castle where women can enter who are not prisoners. We are to be hidden behind the altar. Under the altar cloth they will find two daggers. The door of the vestry-room will be opened beforehand. Coconnas will strike the jailer, who will fall and pretend to be dead; we appear; each of us throws a cloak over the shoulders of her friend; we run with them through the small doors of the vestry-room, and as we have the password we can leave without hindrance.”

“And once out?”

“Two horses will be waiting at the door; the men will spring on them, leave France, and reach Lorraine, whence now and then they will return incognito.”

“Oh! you restore me to life,” said Marguerite. “So we shall save them?”

“I am almost sure of it.”

“Soon?”

“In three or four days. Beaulieu is to let us know.”

“But if you were recognized in the vicinity of Vincennes that might upset our plan.”

“How could any one recognize me? I go there as a nun, with a hood, thanks to which not even the tip of my nose is visible.”

“We cannot take too many precautions.”

“I know that well enough, by Heaven! as poor Annibal would say.”

“Did you hear anything about the King of Navarre?”

“I was careful to ask.”

“Well?”

“Well, he has never been so happy, apparently; he laughs, sings, eats, drinks, and sleeps well, and asks only one thing, and that is to be well guarded.”

“He is right. And my mother?”

“I told you she is hurrying on the trial as fast as she can.”

“Yes, but does she suspect anything about us?”

“How could she? Every one who has a secret is anxious to keep it. Ah! I know that she told the judges in Paris to be in readiness.”

“Let us act quickly, Henriette. If our poor prisoners change their abode, everything will have to be done over again.”

“Do not worry. I am as anxious as you to see them free.”

“Oh, yes, I know that, and thank you, thank you a hundred times for all you have done.”

“Adieu, Marguerite. I am going into the country again.”

“Are you sure of Beaulieu?”

“I think so.”

“Of the jailer?”

“He has promised.”

“Of the horses?”

“They will be the best in the stables of the Duc de Nevers.”

“I adore you, Henriette.”

And Marguerite threw her arms about her friend’s neck, after which the two women separated, promising to see each other again the next day, and every day, at the same place and hour.

These were the two charming and devoted creatures whom Coconnas, with so much reason, called his *invisible bucklers*.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE JUDGES.

“Well, my brave friend,” said Coconnas to La Mole, when the two were together after the examination, at which, for the first time, the subject of the waxen image had been discussed, “it seems to me that everything is going on finely, and that it will not be long before the judges will dismiss us. And this diagnosis is entirely different from that of a dismissal by physicians. When the doctor gives up the patient it is because he cannot cure him, but when the judge gives up the accused it is because he has no further hope of having him beheaded.”

“Yes,” said La Mole; “and moreover, it seems to me, from the politeness and gentleness of the jailer and the looseness of the doors, that I recognize our kind friends; but I do not recognize Monsieur de Beaulieu, at least from what I had been told of him.”

“I recognize him,” said Coconnas; “only it will cost dearly. But one is a princess, the other a queen; both are rich, and they will never have so good an opportunity to use their money. Now let us go over our lesson. We are to be taken to the chapel, and left there in charge of our turnkey; we shall each find a dagger in the spot indicated. I am to make a hole in the body of our guide.”

“Yes, but a slight one in the arm; otherwise you will rob him of his five hundred crowns.”

“Ah, no; not in the arm, for in that case he would have to lose it, and it would be easy to see that it was given intentionally. No, it must be in his right side, gliding skilfully along his ribs; that would look natural, but in reality would be harmless.”

“Well, aim for that, and then” —

“Then you will barricade the front door with benches while our two princesses rush from behind the altar, where they are to be hidden, and Henriette opens the vestry door. Ah, faith, how I love Henriette to-day! She must have been faithless to me in some way for me to feel as I do.”

“And then,” said La Mole, with the trembling voice which falls from lips like music, “then we shall reach the forest. A kiss given to each of us will make us strong and happy. Can you not picture us, Annibal, bending over our swift horses, our hearts gently oppressed? Oh, what a good thing is fear! Fear in the open air when one has one’s naked sword at one’s side, when one cries ‘hurra’ to the courser pricked by the spur, and which at each shout speeds the faster.”

“Yes,” said Coconnas, “but fear within four walls — what do you say to that, La Mole? I can speak of it, for I have felt something of it. When Beaulieu, with his pale face, entered my cell for the first time, behind him in the darkness shone halberds, and I heard a sinister sound of iron striking against iron. I swear to you I immediately thought of the Duc d’Alençon, and I expected to see his ugly face between the two hateful heads of the halberdiers. I was mistaken, however, and this was my sole consolation. But that was not all; night came, and I dreamed.”

“So,” said La Mole, who had been following his happy train of thought without paying attention to his friend, “so they have foreseen everything, even the place in which we are to hide. We shall go to Lorraine, dear friend. In reality I should rather have had it Navarre, for there I should have been with her, but Navarre is too far; Nancey would be better; besides, once there, we should be only eighty leagues from Paris. Have you any feeling of regret, Annibal, at leaving this place?”

“Ah, no! the idea! Although I confess I am leaving everything that belongs to me.”

“Well, could we manage to take the worthy jailer with us instead of” —

“He would not go,” said Coconnas, “he would lose too much. Think of it! five hundred crowns from us, a reward from the government; promotion, perhaps; how happy will be that fellow’s life when I shall have killed him! But what is the matter?”

“Nothing! An idea came to me.”

“It is not a funny one, apparently, for you are frightfully pale.”

“I was wondering why they should take us to the chapel.”

“Why,” said Coconnas, “to receive the sacrament. This is the time for it, I think.”

“But,” said La Mole, “they take only those condemned to death or the torture to the chapel.”

“Oh!” said Coconnas, becoming somewhat pale in turn, “this deserves our attention. Let us question the good man whom I am to split open. Here, turnkey!”

“Did monsieur call?” asked the jailer, who had been keeping watch at the top of the stairs.

“Yes; come here.”

“Well?”

“It has been arranged that we are to escape from the chapel, has it not?”

“Hush!” said the turnkey, looking round him in terror.

“Do not worry; no one can hear us.”

“Yes, monsieur; it is from the chapel.”

“They are to take us to the chapel, then?”

“Yes; that is the custom.”

“The custom?”

“Yes; it is customary to allow every one condemned to death to pass the night in the chapel.”

Coconnas and La Mole shuddered and glanced at each other.

“You think we are condemned to death, then?”

“Certainly. You, too, must think so.”

“Why should we think so?” asked La Mole.

“Certainly; otherwise you would not have arranged everything for your escape.”

“Do you know, there is reason in what he says!” said Coconnas to La Mole.

“Yes; and what I know besides is that we are playing a close game, apparently.”

“But do you think I am risking nothing?” said the turnkey. “If in a moment of excitement monsieur should make a mistake” —

“Well! by Heaven! I wish I were in your place,” said Coconnas, slowly, “and had to deal with no hand but this; with no sword except the one which is to graze you.”

“Condemned to death!” murmured La Mole, “why, that is impossible!”

“Impossible!” said the turnkey, naïvely, “and why?”

“Hush!” said Coconnas, “I think some one is opening the lower door.”

“To your cells, gentlemen, to your cells!” cried the jailer, hurriedly.

“When do you think the trial will take place?” asked La Mole.

“To-morrow, or later. But be easy; those who must be informed shall be.”

“Then let us embrace each other and bid farewell to these walls.”

The two friends rushed into each other’s arms and then returned to their cells, La Mole sighing, Coconnas singing.

Nothing new happened until seven o’clock. Night fell dark and rainy over the prison of Vincennes, a perfect night for flight. The evening meal was brought to Coconnas, who ate with his usual appetite, thinking of the pleasure he would feel in being soaked in the rain, which was pattering against the walls, and already preparing himself to fall asleep to the dull, monotonous murmur of the wind, when suddenly it seemed to him that this wind, to which he occasionally listened with a feeling of melancholy never before experienced by him until he came to prison, whistled more strangely than usual under the doors, and that the stove roared with a louder noise than common. This had happened every time one of the cells above or opposite him was opened. It was by this noise that Annibal always knew the jailer was coming from La Mole’s cell.

But this time it was in vain that Coconnas remained with eye and ear alert.

The moments passed; no one came.

“This is strange,” said Coconnas, “La Mole’s door has been opened and not mine. Could La Mole have called? Can he be ill? What does it mean?”

With a prisoner everything is a cause for suspicion and anxiety, as everything is a cause for joy and hope.

Half an hour passed, then an hour, then an hour and a half.

Coconnas was beginning to grow sleepy from anger when the grating of the lock made him spring to his feet.

“Oh!” said he, “has the time come for us to leave and are they going to take us to the chapel without condemning us? By Heaven, what joy it would be to escape on such a night! It is as dark as an oven! I hope the horses are not blind.”

He was about to ask some jocular question of the turnkey when he saw the latter put his finger to his lips and roll his eyes significantly. Behind the jailer Coconnas heard sounds and perceived shadows.

Suddenly in the midst of the darkness he distinguished two helmets, on which the smoking candle threw a yellow light.

“Oh!” said he in a low voice, “what is this sinister procession? What is going to happen?”

The jailer replied by a sigh which greatly resembled a groan.

“By Heaven!” murmured Coconnas; “what a wretched existence! always on the ragged edge; never on firm land; either we paddle in a hundred feet of water or we hover above the clouds; never a happy medium. Well, where are we going?”

“Follow the halberdiers, monsieur,” repeated the same voice.

He had to obey. Coconnas left his room, and perceived the dark man whose voice had been so disagreeable. He was a clerk, small and hunchbacked, who no doubt had put on the gown in order to hide his bandy legs, as well as his back. He slowly descended the winding stairs. At the first landing the guards paused.

“That is a good deal to go down,” murmured Coconnas, “but not enough.”

The door opened. The prisoner had the eye of a lynx and the scent of a bloodhound. He scented the judges and saw in the shadow the silhouette of a man with bare arms; the latter sight made the perspiration mount to his brow. Nevertheless, he assumed his most smiling manner, and entered the room with his head tipped to one side, and his hand on his hip, after the most approved manner of the times.

A curtain was raised, and Coconnas perceived the judges and the clerks.

A few feet away La Mole was seated on a bench.

Coconnas was led to the front of the tribunal. Arrived there, he stopped, nodded and smiled to La Mole, and then waited.

“What is your name, monsieur?” inquired the president.

“Marcus Annibal de Coconnas,” replied the gentleman with perfect ease. “Count de Montpantier, Chenaux, and other places; but they are known, I presume.”

“Where were you born?”

“At Saint Colomban, near Suza.”

“How old are you?”

“Twenty-seven years and three months.”

“Good!” said the president.

“This pleases him, apparently,” said Coconnas.

“Now,” said the president after a moment’s silence which gave the clerk time to write down the answers of the accused; “what was your reason for leaving the service of Monsieur d’Alençon?”

“To rejoin my friend Monsieur de la Mole, who had already left the duke three days before.”

“What were you doing the day of the hunt, when you were arrested?”

“Why,” said Coconnas, “I was hunting.”

“The King was also present at that hunt, and was there seized with the first attack of the malady from which he is at present suffering.”

“I was not near the King, and I can say nothing about this. I was even ignorant of the fact that he had been ill.”

The judges looked at one another with a smile of incredulity.

“Ah! you were ignorant of his Majesty’s illness, were you?” said the president.

“Yes, monsieur, and I am sorry to hear of it. Although the King of France is not my king, I have a great deal of sympathy for him.”

“Indeed!”

“On my honor! It is different so far as his brother the Duc d’Alençon is concerned. The latter I confess” —

“We have nothing to do with the Duc d’Alençon, monsieur; this concerns his Majesty.”

“Well, I have already told you that I am his very humble servant,” said Coconnas, turning about in an adorably impudent fashion.

“If as you pretend, monsieur, you are really his servant, will you tell us what you know of a certain waxen figure?”

“Ah, good! we have come back to the figure, have we?”

“Yes, monsieur; does this displease you?”

“On the contrary, I prefer it; go ahead.”

“Why was this statue found in Monsieur de la Mole’s apartments?”

“At Monsieur de la Mole’s? At Réné’s, you mean?”

“You acknowledge that it exists, then, do you?”

“Why, if you will show it to me.”

“Here it is. Is this the one you know?”

“It is.”

“Clerk,” said the president, “write down that the accused recognizes the image as the one seen at Monsieur de la Mole’s.”

“No, no!” said Coconnas, “do not let us misunderstand each other — as the one seen at Réné’s.”

“At Réné’s; very good! On what day?”

“The only day La Mole and myself were at Réné’s.”

“You admit, then, that you were at Réné’s with Monsieur de la Mole?”

“Why, did I ever deny it?”

“Clerk, write down that the accused admits having gone to Réné’s to work conjurations.”

“Stop there, Monsieur le Président. Moderate your enthusiasm, I beg you. I did not say that at all.”

“You deny having been at Réné’s to work conjurations?”

“I deny it. The magic took place by accident. It was unpremeditated.”

“But it took place?”

“I cannot deny that something resembling a charm did take place.”

“Clerk, write down that the accused admits that he obtained at Réné’s a charm against the life of the King.”

“What! against the King’s life? That is an infamous lie! There was no charm obtained against the life of the King.”

“You see, gentlemen!” said La Mole.

“Silence!” said the president; then turning to the clerk: “Against the life of the King,” he continued. “Have you that?”

“Why, no, no!” cried Coconnas. “Besides, the figure is not that of a man, but of a woman.”

“What did I tell you, gentlemen?” said La Mole.

“Monsieur de la Mole,” said the president, “answer when you are questioned, but do not interrupt the examination of others.”

“So you say that it is a woman?”

“Certainly I say so.”

“In that case, why did it have a crown and a cloak?”

“By Heaven!” said Coconnas, “that is simple enough, because it was” —

La Mole rose and put his finger on his lips.

“That is so,” said Coconnas, “what was I going to say that could possibly concern these gentlemen?”

“You persist in stating that the figure is that of a woman?”

“Yes; certainly I persist.”

“And you refuse to say what woman?”

“A woman of my country,” said La Mole, “whom I loved and by whom I wished to be loved in return.”

“We are not asking you, Monsieur de la Mole,” said the president; “keep silent, therefore, or you shall be gagged.”

“Gagged!” exclaimed Coconnas; “what do you mean, monsieur of the black robe? My friend gagged? A gentleman! the idea!”

“Bring in Réné,” said the Attorney-General Laguesle.

“Yes; bring in Réné,” said Coconnas; “we shall see who is right here, we two or you three.”

Réné entered, pale, aged, and almost unrecognizable to the two friends, bowed under the weight of the crime he was about to commit much more than because of those he had already committed.

“Maître Réné,” said the judge, “do you recognize the two accused persons here present?”

“Yes, monsieur,” replied Réné, in a voice which betrayed his emotion.

“From having seen them where?”

“In several places; and especially at my house.”

“How many times did they go to your house?”

“Once only.”

As Réné spoke the face of Coconnas expanded; La Mole’s, on the contrary, looked as though he had a presentiment of evil.

“For what purpose were they at your house?”

Réné seemed to hesitate a moment.

“To order me to make a waxen figure,” said he.

“Pardon me, Maître Réné,” said Coconnas, “you are making a slight mistake.”

“Silence!” said the president; then turning to Réné, “was this figure to be that of a man or a woman?”

“A man,” replied Réné.

Coconnas sprang up as if he had received an electric shock.

“A man!” he exclaimed.

“A man,” repeated Réné, but in so low a tone that the president scarcely heard him.

“Why did this figure of a man have on a mantle and a crown?”

“Because it represented a king.”

“Infamous liar!” cried Coconnas, infuriated.

“Keep still, Coconnas, keep still,” interrupted La Mole, “let the man speak; every one has a right to sell his own soul.”

“But not the bodies of others, by Heaven!”

“And what was the meaning of the needle in the heart of the figure, with the letter ‘M’ on a small banner?”

“The needle was emblematical of the sword or the dagger; the letter ‘M’ stands for *mort*.”

Coconnas sprang forward as though to strangle Réné, but four guards restrained him.

“That will do,” said the Attorney Laguesle, “the court is sufficiently informed. Take the prisoners to the waiting-room.”

“But,” exclaimed Coconnas, “it is impossible to hear one’s self accused of such things without protesting.”

“Protest, monsieur, no one will hinder you. Guards, did you hear?”

The guards seized the two prisoners and led them out, La Mole by one door, Coconnas by another.

Then the attorney signed to the man whom Coconnas had perceived in the shadow, and said to him:

“Do not go away, my good fellow, you shall have work this evening.”

“Which shall I begin with, monsieur?” asked the man, respectfully holding his cap in his hand.

“With that one,” said the president, pointing to La Mole, who could still be seen disappearing in the distance between the two guards. Then approaching Réné, who stood trembling, expecting to be led back to the cell in which he had been confined:

“You have spoken well, monsieur,” said he to him, “you need not worry. Both the King and the queen shall know that it is to you they are indebted for the truth of this affair.”

But instead of giving him strength, this promise seemed to terrify Réné, whose only answer was a deep sigh.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE TORTURE OF THE BOOT.

It was only when he had been led away to his new cell and the door was locked on him that Coconnas, left alone, and no longer sustained by the discussion with the judges and his anger at Réné, fell into a train of mournful reflections.

“It seems to me,” thought he, “that matters are turning against us, and that it is about time to go to the chapel. I suspect we are to be condemned to death. It looks so. I especially fear being condemned to death by sentences pronounced behind closed doors, in a fortified castle, before faces as ugly as those about me. They really wish to cut off our heads. Well! well! I repeat what I said just now, it is time to go to chapel.”

These words, uttered in a low tone, were followed by a silence, which in turn was broken by a cry, shrill, piercing, lugubrious, unlike anything human. It seemed to penetrate the thick walls, and vibrate against the iron bars.

In spite of himself Coconnas shivered; and yet he was so brave that his courage was like that of wild beasts. He stood still, doubting that the cry was human, and taking it for the sound of the wind in the trees or for one of the many night noises which seem to rise or descend from the two unknown worlds between which floats our globe. Then he heard it again, shriller, more prolonged, more piercing than before, and this time not only did Coconnas distinguish the agony of the human tone in it, but he thought it sounded like La Mole’s.

As he realized this the Piedmontese forgot that he was confined behind two doors, three gates, and a wall twelve feet thick. He hurled his entire weight against the sides of the cell as though to push them out and rush to the aid of the victim, crying, “Are they killing some one here?” But he unexpectedly encountered the wall and the shock hurled him back against a stone bench on which he sank down.

Then there was silence.

“Oh, they have killed him!” he murmured; “it is abominable! And one is without arms, here, and cannot defend one’s self!”

He groped about.

“Ah! this iron chain!” he cried, “I will take it and woe to him who comes near me!”

Coconnas rose, seized the iron chain, and with a pull shook it so violently that it was clear that with two such efforts he would wrench it away.

But suddenly the door opened and the light from a couple of torches fell into the cell.

“Come, monsieur,” said the same voice which had sounded so disagreeable to him, and which this time, in making itself heard three floors below, did not seem to him to have acquired any new charm.

“Come, monsieur, the court is awaiting you.”

“Good,” said Coconnas, dropping his ring, “I am to hear my sentence, am I not?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Oh! I breathe again; let us go,” said he.

He followed the usher, who preceded him with measured tread, holding his black rod.

In spite of the satisfaction he had felt at first, as he walked along Coconnas glanced anxiously about him.

“Oh!” he murmured, “I do not perceive my good jailer. I confess I miss him.”

They entered the hall the judges had just left, in which a man was standing alone, whom Coconnas recognized as the Attorney-General. In the course of the examination the latter had spoken several times, always with an animosity easy to understand.

He was the one whom Catharine, both by letter and in person, had specially charged with the trial.

At the farther end of this room, the corners of which were lost in darkness behind a partly raised curtain, Coconnas saw such dreadful sights that he felt his limbs give away, and cried out: “Oh, my God!”

It was not without cause that the cry had been uttered. The sight was indeed terrible. The portion of the room hidden during the trial by the curtain, which was now drawn back, looked like the entrance to hell.

A wooden horse was there, to which were attached ropes, pulleys, and other accessories of torture. Further on glowed a brazier, which threw its lurid glare on the surrounding objects, and which added to the terror of the spectacle. Against one of the pillars which supported the ceiling stood a man motionless as a statue, holding a rope in his hand. He looked as though made of the stone of the column against which he leaned. To the walls above the stone benches, between iron links, chains were suspended and blades glittered.

"Oh!" murmured Coconnas, "the chamber of horrors is all ready, apparently waiting only for the patient! What can it mean?"

"On your knees, Marc Annibal Coconnas," said a voice which caused that gentleman to raise his head. "On your knees to hear the sentence just pronounced on you!"

This was an invitation against which the whole soul of Annibal instinctively rebelled.

But as he was about to refuse two men placed their hands on his shoulders so unexpectedly and so suddenly that his knees bent under him on the pavement. The voice continued.

"Sentence of the court sitting in the prison of Vincennes on Marc Annibal de Coconnas, accused and convicted of high treason, of an attempt to poison, of sacrilege and magic against the person of the King, of a conspiracy against the kingdom, and of having by his pernicious counsels driven a prince of the blood to rebellion."

At each charge Coconnas had shaken his head, keeping time like a fractious child. The judge continued:

"In consequence of which, the aforesaid Marc Annibal de Coconnas shall be taken from prison to the Place Saint Jean en Grève to be there beheaded; his property shall be confiscated; his woods cut down to the height of six feet; his castles destroyed, and a post planted there with a copper plate bearing an inscription of his crime and punishment."

"As for my head," said Coconnas, "I know you will cut that off, for it is in France, and in great jeopardy; but as for my woods and castles, I defy all the saws and axes of this most Christian kingdom to harm them."

"Silence!" said the judge; and he continued:

"Furthermore, the aforesaid Coconnas" —

"What!" interrupted Coconnas, "is something more to be done to me after my head is cut off? Oh! that seems to me very hard!"

"No, monsieur," said the judge, "*before*."

And he resumed:

"Furthermore, the aforesaid Coconnas before the execution of his sentence shall undergo the severest torture, consisting of ten wedges" —

Coconnas sprang up, flashing a burning glance at the judge.

"And for what?" he cried, finding no other words but these simple ones to express the thousand thoughts that surged through his mind.

In reality this was complete ruin to Coconnas' hopes. He would not be taken to the chapel until after the torture, from which many frequently died. The braver and stronger the victim, the more likely he was to die, for it was considered an act of cowardice to confess; and so long as the prisoner refused to confess the torture was continued, and not only continued, but increased.

The judge did not reply to Coconnas; the rest of the sentence answered for him. He continued:

"In order to compel the aforesaid Coconnas to confess in regard to his accomplices, and the details of the plan and conspiracy."

"By Heaven!" cried Coconnas; "this is what I call infamous; more than infamous — cowardly!"

Accustomed to the anger of his victims, which suffering always changed to tears, the impassible judge merely made a sign.

Coconnas was seized by the feet and the shoulders, overpowered, laid on his back, and bound to the rack before he was able even to see those who did the act.

"Wretches!" shouted he, in a paroxysm of fury, straining the bed and the cords so that the tormentors themselves drew back. "Wretches! torture me, twist me, break me to pieces, but you shall know nothing, I swear! Ah! you think, do you, that it is with pieces of wood and steel that a gentleman of my name is made to speak? Go ahead! I defy you!"

"Prepare to write, clerk," said the judge.

"Yes, prepare," shouted Coconnas; "and if you write everything I am going to tell you you infamous hangmen, you will be kept busy. Write! write!"

"Have you anything you wish to confess?" asked the judge in his calm voice.

"Nothing; not a word! Go to the devil!"

"You had better reflect, monsieur. Come, executioner, adjust the boot."

At these words the man, who until then had stood motionless, the ropes in his hand, stepped forward from the pillar and slowly approached Coconnas, who turned and made a grimace at him.

It was Maître Caboche, the executioner of the provostship of Paris.

A look of sad surprise showed itself on the face of Coconnas, who, instead of crying out and growing agitated, lay without moving, unable to take his eyes from the face of the forgotten friend who appeared at that moment.

Without moving a muscle of his face, without showing that he had ever seen Coconnas anywhere except on the rack, Caboche placed two planks between the limbs of the victim, two others outside of his limbs, and bound them securely together by means of the rope he held in his hand.

This was the arrangement called the “boot.”

For ordinary torture six wedges were inserted between the two planks, which, on being forced apart, crushed the flesh.

For severe torture ten wedges were inserted, and then the planks not only broke the flesh but the bones.

The preliminaries over, Maître Caboche slipped the end of the wedge between the two planks, then, mallet in hand, bent on one knee and looked at the judge.

“Do you wish to speak?” said the latter.

“No,” resolutely answered Coconnas, although he felt the perspiration rise to his brow and his hair begin to stand on end.

“Proceed, then,” said the judge. “Insert the first wedge.”

Caboche raised his arm, with its heavy mallet, and struck the wedge a tremendous blow, which gave forth a dull sound. The rack shook.

Coconnas did not utter a single word at the first wedge, which usually caused the most resolute to groan. Moreover, the only expression on his face was that of indescribable astonishment. He watched Caboche in amazement, who, with arm raised, half turned towards the judge, stood ready to repeat the blow.

“What was your idea in hiding in the forest?” asked the judge.

“To sit down in the shade,” replied Coconnas.

“Proceed,” said the judge.

Caboche gave a second blow which resounded like the first.

Coconnas did not move a muscle; he continued to watch the executioner with the same expression.

The judge frowned.

“He is a hard Christian,” he murmured; “has the wedge entered?”

Caboche bent down to look, and in doing so said to Coconnas:

“Cry out, you poor fellow!”

Then rising:

“Up to the head, monsieur,” said he.

“Second wedge,” said the judge, coldly.

The words of Caboche explained all to Coconnas. The worthy executioner had rendered his friend the greatest service in his power: he was sparing him not only pain, but more, the shame of confession, by driving in wedges of leather, the upper part of which was covered with wood, instead of oak wedges. In this way he was leaving him all his strength to face the scaffold.

“Ah! kind, kind Caboche,” murmured Coconnas, “fear nothing; I will cry out since you ask me to, and if you are not satisfied it will be because you are hard to please.”

Meanwhile Caboche had introduced between the planks the end of a wedge larger than the first.

“Strike,” cried the judge.

At this word Caboche struck as if with a single blow he would demolish the entire prison of Vincennes.

“Ah! ah! Stop! stop!” cried Coconnas; “a thousand devils! you are breaking my bones! Take care!”

“Ah!” said the judge, smiling, “the second seems to take effect; that surprises me.”

Coconnas panted like a pair of bellows.

“What were you doing in the forest?” asked the judge.

“By Heaven! I have already told you. I was enjoying the fresh air.”

“Proceed,” said the judge.

“Confess,” whispered Caboche.

“What?”

“Anything you wish, but something.”

And he dealt a second blow no less light than the former.

Coconnas thought he would strangle himself in his efforts to cry out.

“Oh! oh!” said he; “what is it you want to know, monsieur? By whose order I was in the forest?”

“Yes.”

“I was there by order of Monsieur d’Alençon.”

“Write,” said the judge.

"If I committed a crime in setting a trap for the King of Navarre," continued Coconnas, "I was only an instrument, monsieur, and I was obeying my master."

The clerk began to write.

"Oh! you denounced me, pale-face!" murmured the victim; "but just wait!"

And he related the visit of François to the King of Navarre, the interviews between De Mouy and Monsieur d'Alençon, the story of the red cloak, all as though he were just remembering them between the blows of the hammer.

At length he had given such precise, terrible, uncontestable evidence against D'Alençon, making it seem as though it was extorted from him only by the pain, — he grimaced, roared, and yelled so naturally, and in so many different tones of voice, — that the judge himself became terrified at having to record details so compromising to a son of France.

"Well!" said Caboche to himself, "here is a gentleman who does not need to say things twice, and who gives full measure of work to the clerk. Great God! what if, instead of leather, the wedges had been of wood!"

Coconnas was excused from the last wedge; but he had had nine others, which were enough to have crushed his limbs completely.

The judge reminded the victim of the mercy allowed him on account of his confession, and withdrew.

The prisoner was alone with Caboche.

"Well," asked the latter, "how are you?"

"Ah! my friend! my kind friend, my dear Caboche!" exclaimed Coconnas. "You may be sure I shall be grateful all my life for what you have done for me."

"The deuce! but you are right, monsieur, for if they knew what I have done it would be I who would have to take your place on the rack, and they would not treat me as I have treated you."

"But how did the idea come to you?"

"Well," said Caboche, wrapping the limbs of Coconnas in bloody bands of linen; "I knew you had been arrested, and that your trial was going on. I knew that Queen Catharine was anxious for your death. I guessed that they would put you to the torture and consequently took my precautions."

"At the risk of what might have happened?"

“Monsieur,” said Caboche, “you are the only gentleman who ever gave me his hand, and we all have memories and hearts, even though we are hangmen, and perhaps for that very reason. You will see to-morrow how well I will do my work.”

“To-morrow?” said Coconnas.

“Yes.”

“What work?”

Caboche looked at Coconnas in amazement.

“What work? Have you forgotten the sentence?”

“Ah! yes, of course! the sentence!” said Coconnas; “I had forgotten it.”

The fact is that Coconnas had not really forgotten it, but he had not been thinking of it.

What he was thinking of was the chapel, the knife hidden under the altar cloth, of Henriette and the queen, of the vestry door, and the two horses waiting on the edge of the forest; he was thinking of liberty, of the ride in the open air, of safety beyond the boundaries of France.

“Now,” said Caboche, “you must be taken skilfully from the rack to the litter. Do not forget that for every one, even the guards, your limbs are broken, and that at every jar you must give a cry.”

“Ah! ah!” cried Coconnas, as the two assistants advanced.

“Come! come! Courage,” said Caboche, “if you cry out already, what will you do in a little while?”

“My dear Caboche,” said Coconnas, “do not have me touched, I beg, by your estimable acolytes; perhaps their hands are not as light as yours.”

“Place the litter near the racks,” said Caboche.

The attendants obeyed. Maître Caboche raised Coconnas in his arms as if he were a child and laid him in the litter, but in spite of every care Coconnas uttered loud shrieks.

The jailer appeared with a lantern.

“To the chapel,” said he.

The bearers started after Coconnas had given Caboche a second grasp of the hand. The first had been of too much use to the Piedmontese for him not to repeat it.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE CHAPEL.

In profound silence the mournful procession crossed the two drawbridges of the fortress and the courtyard which leads to the chapel, through the windows of which a pale light colored the white faces of the red-robed priests.

Coconnas eagerly breathed the night air, although it was heavy with rain. He looked at the profound darkness and rejoiced that everything seemed propitious for the flight of himself and his companion. It required all his will-power, all his prudence, all his self-control to keep from springing from the litter when on entering the chapel he perceived near the choir, three feet from the altar, a figure wrapped in a great white cloak.

It was La Mole.

The two soldiers who accompanied the litter stopped outside of the door.

“Since they have done us the final favor of once more leaving us together,” said Coconnas in a drawling voice, “take me to my friend.”

The bearers had had no different order, and made no objection to assenting to Coconnas’s demand.

La Mole was gloomy and pale; his head rested against the marble wall; his black hair, bathed with profuse perspiration, gave to his face the dull pallor of ivory, and seemed still to stand on end.

At a sign from the turnkey the two attendants went to find the priest for whom Coconnas had asked.

This was the signal agreed on.

Coconnas followed them with anxious eyes; but he was not the only one whose glance was riveted on them.

Scarcely had they disappeared when two women rushed from behind the altar and hurried to the choir with cries of joy, rousing the air like a warm and restless breeze which precedes a storm.

Marguerite rushed towards La Mole, and caught him in her arms.

La Mole uttered a piercing shriek, like one of the cries Coconnas had heard in his dungeon and which had so terrified him.

“My God! What is the matter, La Mole?” cried Marguerite, springing back in fright.

La Mole uttered a deep moan and raised his hands to his eyes as though to hide Marguerite from his sight.

The queen was more terrified at the silence and this gesture than she had been at the shriek.

“Oh!” she exclaimed, “what is the matter? You are covered with blood.”

Coconnas, who had rushed to the altar for the dagger, and who was already holding Henriette in his arms, now came back.

“Rise,” said Marguerite, “rise, I beg you! You see the time has come.”

A hopelessly sad smile passed over the white lips of La Mole, who seemed almost unequal to the effort.

“Beloved queen!” said the young man, “you counted without Catharine, and consequently without a crime. I underwent the torture, my bones are broken, my whole body is nothing but a wound, and the effort I make now to press my lips to your forehead causes me pain worse than death.”

Pale and trembling, La Mole touched his lips to the queen’s brow.

“The rack!” cried Coconnas, “I, too, suffered it, but did not the executioner do for you what he did for me?”

Coconnas related everything.

“Ah!” said La Mole, “I see; you gave him your hand the day of our visit; I forgot that all men are brothers, and was proud. God has punished me for it!”

La Mole clasped his hands.

Coconnas and the women exchanged a glance of indescribable terror.

“Come,” said the jailer, who until then had stood at the door to keep watch, and had now returned, “do not waste time, dear Monsieur de Coconnas; give me my thrust of the dagger, and do it in a way worthy of a gentleman, for they are coming.”

Marguerite knelt down before La Mole, as if she were one of the marble figures on a tomb, near the image of the one buried in it.

“Come, my friend,” said Coconnas, “I am strong, I will carry you, I will put you on your horse, or even hold you in front of me, if you cannot sit in the saddle; but let us start. You hear what this good man says; it is a question of life and death.”

La Mole made a superhuman struggle, a final effort.

“Yes,” said he, “it is a question of life or death.”

And he strove to rise.

Annibal took him by the arm and raised him. During the process La Mole uttered dull moans, but when Coconnas let go of him to attend to the turnkey, and when he was supported only by the two women his legs gave way, and in spite of the effort of Marguerite, who was wildly sobbing, he fell back in a heap, and a piercing shriek which he could not restrain echoed pitifully throughout the vaults of the chapel, which vibrated long after.

"You see," said La Mole, painfully, "you see, my queen! Leave me; give me one last kiss and go. I did not confess, Marguerite, and our secret is hidden in our love and will die with me. Good-by, my queen, my queen."

Marguerite, herself almost lifeless, clasped the dear head in her arms, and pressed on it a kiss which was almost holy.

"You Annibal," said La Mole, "who have been spared these agonies, who are still young and able to live, flee, flee; give me the supreme consolation, my dear friend, of knowing you have escaped."

"Time flies," said the jailer; "make haste."

Henriette gently strove to lead Annibal to the door. Marguerite on her knees before La Mole, sobbing, and with dishevelled hair, looked like a Magdalene.

"Flee, Annibal," said La Mole, "flee; do not give our enemies the joyful spectacle of the death of two innocent men."

Coconnas quietly disengaged himself from Henriette, who was leading him to the door, and with a gesture so solemn that it seemed majestic said:

"Madame, first give the five hundred crowns we promised to this man."

"Here they are," said Henriette.

Then turning to La Mole, and shaking his head sadly:

"As for you, La Mole, you do me wrong to think for an instant that I could leave you. Have I not sworn to live and die with you? But you are suffering so, my poor friend, that I forgive you."

And seating himself resolutely beside his friend Coconnas leaned forward and kissed his forehead.

Then gently, as gently as a mother would do to her child, he drew the dear head towards him, until it rested on his breast.

Marguerite was numb. She had picked up the dagger which Coconnas had just let fall.

"Oh, my queen," said La Mole, extending his arms to her, and understanding her thought, "my beloved queen, do not forget that I die in order to destroy the slightest suspicion of our love!"

"But what can I do for you, then," cried Marguerite, in despair, "if I cannot die with you?"

"You can make death sweet to me," replied La Mole; "you can come to me with smiling lips."

Marguerite advanced and clasped her hands as if asking him to speak.

"Do you remember that evening, Marguerite, when in exchange for the life I then offered you, and which to-day I lay down for you, you made me a sacred promise."

Marguerite gave a start.

"Ah! you do remember," said La Mole, "for you shudder."

"Yes, yes, I remember, and on my soul, Hyacinthe, I will keep that promise."

Marguerite raised her hand towards the altar, as if calling God a second time to witness her oath.

La Mole's face lighted up as if the vaulted roof of the chapel had opened and a heavenly ray had fallen on him.

"They are coming!" said the jailer.

Marguerite uttered a cry, and rushed to La Mole, but the fear of increasing his agony made her pause trembling before him.

Henriette pressed her lips to Coconnas's brow, and said to him:

"My Annibal, I understand, and I am proud of you. I well know that your heroism makes you die, and for that heroism I love you. Before God I will always love you more than all else, and what Marguerite has sworn to do for La Mole, although I know not what it is, I swear I will do for you also."

And she held out her hand to Marguerite.

"Ah! thank you," said Coconnas; "that is the way to speak."

"Before you leave me, my queen," said La Mole, "one last favor. Give me some last souvenir, that I may kiss it as I mount the scaffold."

"Ah! yes, yes," cried Marguerite; "here!"

And she unfastened from her neck a small gold reliquary suspended from a chain of the same metal.

"Here," said she, "is a holy relic which I have worn from childhood. My mother put it around my neck when I was very little and she still loved me. It was given me by my uncle, Pope Clement and has never left me. Take it! take it!"

La Mole took it, and kissed it passionately.

“They are at the door,” said the jailer; “flee, ladies, flee!”

The two women rushed behind the altar and disappeared.

At the same moment the priest entered.

CHAPTER LX.

THE PLACE SAINT JEAN EN GRÈVE.

It was seven o’clock in the morning, and a noisy crowd was waiting in the squares, the streets, and on the quays. At six o’clock a tumbril, the same in which after their duel the two friends had been conveyed half dead to the Louvre, had started from Vincennes and slowly crossed the Rue Saint Antoine. Along its route the spectators, so huddled together that they crushed one another, seemed like statues with fixed eyes and open mouths.

This day there was to be a heartrending spectacle offered by the queen mother to the people of Paris.

On some straw in the tumbril, we have mentioned, which was making its way through the streets, were two young men, bareheaded, and entirely clothed in black, leaning against each other. Coconnas supported on his knees La Mole, whose head hung over the sides of the tumbril, and whose eyes wandered vaguely here and there.

The crowd, eager to see even the bottom of the vehicle, crowded forward, lifted itself up, stood on tiptoe, mounted posts, clung to the angles of the walls, and appeared satisfied only when it had succeeded in seeing every detail of the two bodies which were going from the torture to death.

It had been rumored that La Mole was dying without having confessed one of the charges imputed to him; while, on the contrary, Coconnas, it was asserted, could not endure the torture, and had revealed everything.

So there were cries on all sides:

“See the red-haired one! It was he who confessed! It was he who told everything! He is a coward, and is the cause of the other’s death! The other is a brave fellow, and confessed nothing.”

The two young men heard perfectly, the one the praises, the other the reproaches, which accompanied their funeral march; and while La Mole pressed the hands of his friend a sublime expression of scorn lighted up the face of the Piedmontese, who from the foul tumbril gazed upon the stupid mob as if he were looking down from a triumphal car.

Misfortune had done its heavenly work, and had ennobled the face of Coconnas, as death was about to render divine his soul.

“Are we nearly there?” asked La Mole. “I can stand no more, my friend. I feel as if I were going to faint.”

“Wait! wait! La Mole, we are passing by the Rue Tizon and the Rue Cloche Percée; look! look!”

“Oh! raise me, raise me, that I may once more gaze on that happy abode.”

Coconnas raised his hand and touched the shoulder of the executioner, who sat at the front of the tumbril driving.

“Maître,” said he, “do us the kindness to stop a moment opposite the Rue Tizon.”

Caboche nodded in assent, and drew rein at the place indicated.

Aided by Coconnas, La Mole raised himself with an effort, and with eyes blinded by tears gazed at the small house, silent and mute, deserted as a tomb. A groan burst from him, and in a low voice he murmured:

“Adieu, adieu, youth, love, life!”

And his head fell forward on his breast.

“Courage,” said Coconnas; “we may perhaps find all this above.”

“Do you think so?” murmured La Mole.

“I think so, because the priest said so; and above all, because I hope so. But do not faint, my friend, or these staring wretches will laugh at us.”

Caboche heard the last words and whipping his horse with one hand he extended the other, unseen by any one, to Coconnas. It contained a small sponge saturated with a powerful stimulant, and La Mole, after smelling it and rubbing his forehead with it, felt himself revived and reanimated.

“Ah!” said La Mole, “I am better,” and he kissed the reliquary, which he wore around his neck.

As they turned a corner of the quay and reached the small edifice built by Henry II. they saw the scaffold rising bare and bloody on its platform above the heads of the crowd.

“Dear friend,” said La Mole, “I wish I might be the first to die.”

Coconnas again touched the hangman’s shoulder.

“What is it, my gentleman?” said the latter, turning around.

“My good fellow,” said Coconnas, “you will do what you can for me, will you not? You said you would.”

“Yes, and I repeat it.”

“My friend has suffered more than I and consequently has less strength”—

“Well?”

“Well, he says that it would cause him too much pain to see me die first. Besides, if I were to die before him he would have no one to support him on the scaffold.”

“Very well,” said Caboche, wiping away a tear with the back of his hand; “be easy, it shall be as you wish.”

“And with one blow, eh?” said the Piedmontese in a low tone.

“With one blow.”

“That is well. If you have to make up for it, make up on me.”

The tumbril stopped. They had arrived. Coconnas put on his hat.

A murmur like that of the waves at sea reached the ears of La Mole. He strove to rise, but strength failed him. Caboche and Coconnas supported him under the arms.

The place was paved with heads; the steps of the Hôtel de Ville seemed an amphitheatre peopled with spectators. Each window was filled with animated faces, the eyes of which seemed on fire.

When they saw the handsome young man, no longer able to support himself on his bruised legs, make a last effort to reach the scaffold, a great shout rose like a cry of universal desolation. Men groaned and women uttered plaintive shrieks.

“He was one of the greatest courtiers!” said the men; “and he should not have to die at Saint Jean en Grève, but at the Pré aux Clercs.”

“How handsome he is! How pale!” said the women; “he is the one who would not confess.”

“Dearest friend,” said La Mole, “I cannot stand. Carry me!”

“Wait,” said Coconnas.

He signed to the executioner, who stepped aside; then, stooping, he lifted La Mole in his arms as if he were a child, and without faltering carried his burden up the steps of the scaffold, where he put him down, amid the frantic shouting and applause of the multitude. Coconnas raised his hat and bowed. Then he threw the hat on the scaffold beside him.

“Look round,” said La Mole, “do you not see them somewhere?”

Coconnas slowly glanced around the place, and, having reached a certain point, without removing his eyes from it he laid his hand on his friend’s shoulder.

"Look," said he, "look at the window of that small tower!"

With his other hand he pointed out to La Mole the little building which still stands at the corner of the Rue de la Vannerie and the Rue Mouton, — a reminder of past ages.

Somewhat back from the window two women dressed in black were leaning against each other.

"Ah!" said La Mole, "I feared only one thing, and that was to die without seeing her again. I have seen her; now I can go."

And with his eyes riveted on the small window he raised the reliquary to his lips and covered it with kisses.

Coconnas saluted the two women with as much grace as if he were in a drawing-room. In response to this they waved their handkerchiefs bathed in tears.

Caboche now touched Coconnas on the shoulder, and looked at him significantly.

"Yes, yes," said the Piedmontese. Then turning to La Mole:

"Embrace me," said he, "and die like a man. This will not be hard for you, my friend; you are so brave!"

"Ah!" said La Mole, "there will be no merit in my dying bravely, suffering as I do."

The priest approached and held the crucifix before La Mole, who smiled and pointed to the reliquary in his hand.

"Never mind," said the priest, "ask strength from Him who suffered what you are about to suffer."

La Mole kissed the feet of the Christ.

"Commend me to the prayers of the nuns of the Avens Sainte Vierge."

"Make haste, La Mole," said Coconnas, "you cause me such suffering that I feel myself growing weak."

"I am ready," said La Mole.

"Can you keep your head steady?" inquired Caboche, holding his sword behind La Mole, who was on his knees.

"I hope so," said the latter.

"Then all will go well."

"But," said La Mole, "you will not forget what I asked of you? This reliquary will open the doors to you."

"Be easy. Now try to keep your head straight."

La Mole raised his head and turned his eyes towards the little tower.

“Adieu, Marguerite,” said he; “bless” —

He never finished. With one blow of his sword, as swift as a stroke of lightning, Caboche severed the head, which rolled to the feet of Coconnas.

The body fell back gently as if going to rest.

A great cry rose from thousands of voices, and, among them, it seemed to Coconnas that he heard a shriek more piercing than all the rest.

“Thank you, my good friend,” said Coconnas, and a third time he extended his hand to the hangman.

“My son,” said the priest, “have you nothing to confess to God?”

“Faith no, father,” said the Piedmontese; “all that I had to say I said to you yesterday.”

Then turning to Caboche:

“Now, executioner, my last friend, one more favor!”

Before kneeling down he turned on the crowd a glance so calm and serene that a murmur of admiration rose, which soothed his ear and flattered his pride. Then, raising the head of his friend and pressing a kiss on the purple lips, he gave a last look toward the little tower, and kneeling down, still holding the well-loved head in his hand, he said:

“Now!”

Scarcely had he uttered the word before Caboche had cut off his head.

This done, the poor hangman began to tremble.

“It was time it was over,” said he. “Poor fellow!”

And with difficulty he drew from the clinched fingers of La Mole the reliquary of gold. Then he threw his cloak over the sad remains which the tumbril was to convey to his own abode.

The spectacle over, the crowd dispersed.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE HEADSMAN’S TOWER.

Night descended over the city, which still trembled at the remembrance of the execution, the details of which passed from mouth to mouth, saddening the happy supper hour in every home. In contrast to the city, which was silent and mournful, the Louvre was noisy, joyous, and illuminated. There was a grand fête at the palace, a fête ordered by Charles IX., a fête he had planned for that evening at the very time that he had ordered the execution for the morning.

The previous evening the Queen of Navarre had received word to be present, and, in the hope that La Mole and Coconnas would have escaped during the night, since every measure had been taken for their safety, she had promised her brother to comply with his wishes.

But when she had lost all hope, after the scene in the chapel, after, out of a last feeling of piety for that love, the greatest and the deepest she had ever known, she had been present at the execution, she resolved that neither prayers nor threats should force her to attend a joyous festival at the Louvre the same day on which she had witnessed so terrible a scene at the Grève.

That day King Charles had given another proof of the will power which no one perhaps carried as far as he. In bed for a fortnight, weak as a dying man, pale as a corpse, yet he rose about five o’clock and donned his most beautiful clothes, although during his toilet he fainted three times.

At eight o’clock he asked what had become of his sister, and inquired if any one had seen her and what she was doing. No one could tell him, for the queen had gone to her apartments about eleven o’clock and had absolutely refused admittance to every one.

But there was no refusal for Charles. Leaning on the arm of Monsieur de Nancey, he went to the queen’s rooms and entered unannounced by the secret corridor.

Although he had expected a melancholy sight, and had prepared himself for it in advance, that which he saw was even more distressing than he had anticipated.

Marguerite, half dead, was lying on a divan, her head buried in the cushions, neither weeping nor praying, but moaning like one in great agony; and this she had been doing ever since her return from the Grève. At the other end of the chamber Henriette de Nevers, that daring woman, lay stretched on the carpet unconscious. On coming back from the Grève her strength, like Marguerite's, had given out, and poor Gillonne was going from one to the other, not daring to offer a word of consolation.

In the crises which follow great catastrophes one hugs one's grief like a treasure, and any one who attempts to divert us, ever so slightly, is looked on as an enemy. Charles IX. closed the door, and leaving Nancey in the corridor entered, pale and trembling.

Neither of the women had seen him. Gillonne alone, who was trying to revive Henriette, rose on one knee, and looked in a startled way at the King.

The latter made a sign with his hand, whereupon the girl rose, courtesied, and withdrew.

Charles then approached Marguerite, looked at her a moment in silence, and in a tone of which his harsh voice was supposed to be incapable, said:

"Margot! my sister!"

The young woman started and sat up.

"Your Majesty!" said she.

"Come, sister, courage."

Marguerite raised her eyes to Heaven.

"Yes," said Charles, "but listen to me."

The Queen of Navarre made a sign of assent.

"You promised me to come to the ball," said Charles.

"I!" exclaimed Marguerite.

"Yes, and after your promise you are expected; so that if you do not come every one will wonder why."

"Excuse me, brother," said Marguerite, "you see that I am suffering greatly."

"Exert yourself."

For an instant Marguerite seemed to try to summon her courage, then suddenly she gave way and fell back among the cushions.

"No, no, I cannot go," said she.

Charles took her hand and seating himself on the divan said:

"You have just lost a friend, I know, Margot; but look at me. Have I not lost all my friends, even my mother? You can always weep when you wish to; but I, at the moment of my greatest sorrows, am always forced to smile. You suffer; but look at me! I am dying. Come, Margot, courage! I ask it of you, sister, in the name of our honor! We bear like a cross of agony the reputation of our house; let us bear it, sister, as the Saviour bore his cross to Calvary; and if on the way we stagger, as he did, let us like him rise brave and resigned."

"Oh, my God! my God!" cried Marguerite.

"Yes," said Charles, answering her thought; "the sacrifice is severe, sister, but each one has his own burden, some of honor, others of life. Do you suppose that with my twenty-five years, and the most beautiful throne in the world, I do not regret dying? Look at me! My eyes, my complexion, my lips are those of a dying man, it is true; but my smile, does not my smile imply that I still hope? and in a week, a month at the most, you will be weeping for me, sister, as you now weep for him who died to-day."

"Brother!" exclaimed Marguerite, throwing her arms about Charles's neck.

"So dress yourself, dear Marguerite," said the King, "hide your pallor and come to the ball. I have given orders for new jewels to be brought to you, and ornaments worthy of your beauty."

"Oh! what are diamonds and dresses to me now?" said Marguerite.

"Life is long, Marguerite," said Charles, smiling, "at least for you."

The pages withdrew; Gillonne alone remained.

"Prepare everything that is necessary for me, Gillonne," said Marguerite.

"Sister, remember one thing: sometimes it is by stifling or rather by dissimulating our suffering that we show most honor to the dead."

"Well, sire," said Marguerite, shuddering, "I will go to the ball."

A tear, which soon dried on his parched eyelid, moistened Charles's eye.

He leaned over his sister, kissed her forehead, paused an instant before Henriette, who had neither seen nor heard him, and murmured:

"Poor woman!"

Then he went out silently.

Soon after several pages entered, bringing boxes and jewel-caskets.

Marguerite made a sign for them to set everything down.

Gillonne looked at her mistress in astonishment.

"Yes," said Marguerite, in a tone the bitterness of which it is impossible to describe; yes, I will dress and go to the ball; I am expected. Make haste;

the day will then be complete. A fête on the Grève in the morning, a fête in the Louvre in the evening.”

“And the duchess?” said Gillonne.

“She is quite happy. She may remain here; she can weep; she can suffer at her ease. She is not the daughter of a king, the wife of a king, the sister of a king. She is not a queen. Help me to dress, Gillonne.”

The young girl obeyed. The jewels were magnificent, the dress gorgeous. Marguerite had never been so beautiful.

She looked at herself in a mirror.

“My brother is right,” said she; “a human being is indeed a miserable creature.”

At that moment Gillonne returned.

“Madame,” said she, “a man is asking for you.”

“For me?”

“Yes.”

“Who is he?”

“I do not know, but he is terrible to look at; the very sight of him makes me shudder.”

“Go and ask him his name,” said Marguerite, turning pale.

Gillonne withdrew, and returned in a few moments.

“He will not give his name, madame, but he begged me to give you this.”

Gillonne handed to Marguerite the reliquary she had given to La Mole the previous evening.

“Oh! bring him in, bring him in!” said the queen quickly, growing paler and more numb than before.

A heavy step shook the floor. The echo, indignant, no doubt, at having to repeat such a sound, moaned along the wainscoting. A man stood on the threshold.

“You are” — said the queen.

“He whom you met one day near Montfaucon, madame, and who in his tumbril brought back two wounded gentlemen to the Louvre.”

“Yes, yes, I know you. You are Maître Caboche.”

“Executioner of the provostship of Paris, madame.”

These were the only words Henriette had heard for an hour. She raised her pale face from her hands and looked at the man with her sapphire eyes, from which a double flame seemed to dart.

“And you come” — said Marguerite, trembling.

“To remind you of your promise to the younger of the two gentlemen, who charged me to give you this reliquary. You remember the promise, madame?”

“Yes, yes,” exclaimed the queen, “and never has a noble soul had more satisfaction than his shall have; but where is” —

“At my house with the body.”

“At your house? Why did you not bring it?”

“I might have been stopped at the gate of the Louvre, and compelled to raise my cloak. What would they have said if they had seen a head under it?”

“That is right; keep it. I will come for it to-morrow.”

“To-morrow, madame,” said Caboche, “may perhaps be too late.”

“How so?”

“Because the queen mother wanted the heads of the first victims executed by me to be kept for her magical experiments.”

“Oh! What profanation! The heads of our well-beloved! Henriette,” cried Marguerite, turning to her friend, who had risen as if a spring had placed her on her feet, “Henriette, my angel, do you hear what this man says?”

“Yes; what must we do?”

“Go with him.”

Then uttering a cry of pain by which great sufferers return to life:

“Ah! I was so happy,” said Henriette; “I was almost dead.”

Meanwhile Marguerite had thrown a velvet cloak over her bare shoulders.

“Come,” said she, “we will go and see them once more.”

Telling Gillonne to have all the doors closed, the queen gave orders for a litter to be brought to the private entrance, and taking Henriette by the arm, she descended by the secret corridor, signing to Caboche to follow.

At the lower door was the litter; at the gate Caboche’s attendant waited with a lantern. Marguerite’s porters were trusty men, deaf and dumb, more to be depended on than if they had been beasts of burden.

They walked for about ten minutes, preceded by Caboche and his servant, carrying the lantern. Then they stopped. The hangman opened the door, while his man went ahead.

Marguerite stepped from the litter and helped out the Duchesse de Nevers. In the deep grief which bound them together it was the nervous organism which was the stronger.

The headsman's tower rose before them like a dark, vague giant, giving out a lurid gleam from two narrow upper windows.

The attendant reappeared at the door.

"You can enter, ladies," said Caboche; "every one is asleep in the tower."

At the same moment the light from above was extinguished.

The two women, holding to each other, passed through the small gothic door, and reached a dark hall with damp and uneven pavement. At the end of a winding corridor they perceived a light and guided by the gruesome master of the place they set out towards it. The door closed behind them.

Caboche, a wax torch in hand, admitted them into a lower room filled with smoke. In the centre was a table containing the remains of a supper for three. These three were probably the hangman, his wife, and his chief assistant. In a conspicuous place on the wall a parchment was nailed, sealed with the seal of the King. It was the hangman's license. In a corner was a long-handled sword. This was the flaming sword of justice.

Here and there were various rough drawings representing martyrs undergoing the torture.

At the door Caboche made a low bow.

"Your majesty will excuse me," said he, "if I ventured to enter the Louvre and bring you here. But it was the last wish of the gentleman, so that I felt I" —

"You did well, Maître," said Marguerite, "and here is a reward for you."

Caboche looked sadly at the large purse which Marguerite laid on the table.

"Gold!" said he; "always gold! Alas! madame, if I only could buy back for gold the blood I was forced to spill to-day!"

"Maître," said Marguerite, looking around with a sad hesitation, "Maître, do we have to go to some other room? I do not see" —

"No, madame, they are here; but it is a sad sight, and one which I could have spared you by wrapping up in my cloak that for which you have come."

Marguerite and Henriette looked at each other.

"No," said the queen, who had read in her friend's eye the same thought as in her own; "no, show us the way and we will follow."

Caboche took the torch and opened an oaken door at the top of a short stairway, which led to an underground chamber. At that instant a current of air blew some sparks from the torch and brought to the princesses an ill-smelling odor of dampness and blood. Henriette, white as an alabaster statue, leaned on the arm of her less agitated friend; but at the first step she swayed.

“I can never do it,” said she.

“When one loves truly, Henriette,” replied the queen, “one loves beyond death.”

It was a sight both horrible and touching presented by the two women, glowing with youth, beauty, and jewels, as they bent their heads beneath the foul, chalky ceiling, the weaker leaning on the stronger, the stronger clinging to the arm of the hangman.

They reached the final step. On the floor of the cellar lay two human forms covered with a wide cloth of black serge.

Caboche raised a corner of it, and, lowering the torch:

“See, madame,” said he.

In their black clothes lay the two young men, side by side, in the strange symmetry of death. Their heads had been placed close to their bodies, from which they seemed to be separated only by a bright red circle about the neck. Death had not disunited their hands, for either from chance or the kind care of the hangman the right hand of La Mole rested in Coconnas’s left hand.

There was a look of love under the lids of La Mole, and a smile of scorn under those of Coconnas.

Marguerite knelt down by the side of her lover, and with hands that sparkled with gems gently raised the head she had so greatly loved.

The Duchesse de Nevers leaned against the wall, unable to remove her eyes from that pale face on which so often she had gazed for pleasure and for love.

“La Mole! Dear La Mole!” murmured Marguerite.

“Annibal! Annibal!” cried the duchess, “so beautiful! so proud! so brave! Never again will you answer me!”

And her eyes filled with tears.

This woman, so scornful, so intrepid, so insolent in happiness; this woman who carried scepticism as far as absolute doubt, passion to the point of cruelty; this woman had never thought of death.

Marguerite was the first to move.

She put into a bag, embroidered with pearls and perfumed with finest essences, the head of La Mole, more beautiful than ever as it rested against the velvet and the gold, and the beauty of which was to be preserved by a special preparation, used at that time in the embalming of royal personages.

Henriette then drew near and wrapped the head of Coconnas in a fold of her cloak.

And both women, bending beneath their grief more than beneath their burdens, ascended the stairs with a last look at the remains which they left to the mercy of the hangman in that sombre abode of ordinary criminals.

“Do not fear, madame,” said Caboche, who understood their look, “the gentlemen, I promise you, shall be buried in holy ground.”

“And you will have masses said for them with this,” said Henriette, taking from her neck a magnificent necklace of rubies, and handing it to the hangman.

They returned to the Louvre by the same road by which they had gone. At the gate the queen gave her name; at the foot of her private stairway she descended and, returning to her rooms, laid her sad burden in the closet adjoining her sleeping-room, destined from that moment to become an oratory. Then, leaving Henriette in her room, paler and more beautiful than ever, she entered the great ballroom, the same room in which, two years and a half ago, the first chapter of our history opened.

All eyes were turned on her, but she bore the general gaze with a proud and almost joyous air.

She had religiously carried out the last wish of her friend.

Seeing her, Charles pushed tremblingly through the gilded crowd around her.

“Sister,” said he, aloud, “I thank you.”

Then in a low tone:

“Take care!” said he, “you have a spot of blood on your arm.”

“Ah! what difference does that make, sire,” said Marguerite, “since I have a smile on my lips?”

CHAPTER LXII.

THE SWEAT OF BLOOD.

A few days after the terrible scene we have just described, that is, on the 30th of May, 1574, while the court was at Vincennes, suddenly a great commotion was heard in the chamber of the King. The latter had been taken ill in the midst of the ball he had given the day of the execution of the two young men, and had been ordered by his physicians into the pure air of the country.

It was eight o'clock in the morning. A small group of courtiers were talking excitedly in the antechamber, when suddenly a cry was heard, and Charles's nurse appeared at the door, her eyes filled with tears, calling frantically:

"Help! Help!"

"Is his Majesty worse?" asked the Captain de Nancey, whom, as we know, the King had relieved from all duty to Queen Catharine in order to attach him to himself.

"Oh! Blood! Blood!" cried the nurse. "The doctors! call the doctors!"

Mozille and Ambroise Paré in turn attended the august patient, and the latter, seeing the King fall asleep, had taken advantage of the fact to withdraw for a few moments. Meanwhile a great perspiration had broken out all over the King; and as Charles suffered from a relaxation of the capillary vessels, which caused a hæmorrhage of the skin, the bloody sweat had alarmed the nurse, unaccustomed to this strange phenomenon, who, being a Protestant, kept repeating that it was a judgment for the blood of the Huguenots shed in the massacre of Saint Bartholomew.

The courtiers went in all directions in search of the doctor, who could not be far away, and whom they could not fail to meet. The antechamber, therefore, became deserted, every one being anxious to show his zeal in bringing the much-needed physician.

Just then a door opened and Catharine appeared. She passed hurriedly through the antechamber and hastily entered the apartment of her son.

Charles was stretched on his bed, his eyes closed, his breast heaving; from his body oozed a crimson sweat. His hand hung over the bed, and from the end of each finger dropped a ruby liquid. It was a horrible sight.

At the sound of his mother’s steps, as if he knew she was there, Charles sat up.

“Pardon, madame,” said he, looking at her, “but I desire to die in peace.”

“To die, my son?” said Catharine. “This is only a passing attack of your wretched trouble. Would you have us despair in this way?”

“I tell you, madame, I feel that my soul is about to pass away. I tell you, madame, that death is near me, by Heaven! I feel what I feel, and I know what I am talking about!”

“Sire,” said the queen, “your imagination is your most serious trouble. Since the well-merited punishment of those two sorcerers, those assassins, La Mole and Coconnas, your physical suffering should have diminished. The mental trouble alone continues, and if I could talk with you for just ten minutes I could prove to you” —

“Nurse,” said Charles, “watch at the door that no one may enter. Queen Catharine de Médicis wishes to speak with her well-loved son Charles IX.”

The nurse withdrew.

“Well,” continued Charles, “this interview will have to take place some day or other, and better to-day than to-morrow. Besides, to-morrow may be too late. But a third person must be present.”

“Why?”

“Because I tell you I am dying,” repeated Charles with frightful seriousness; “because at any moment death may enter this chamber, as you have done, pale, silent, and unannounced. It is, therefore, time. Last night I settled my personal affairs; this morning I will arrange those of the kingdom.”

“What person do you desire to see?” asked Catharine.

“My brother, madame. Have him summoned.”

“Sire,” said the queen, “I see with pleasure that the prejudices dictated by hatred rather than pain are leaving your mind, as they soon will fade from your heart. Nurse!” cried Catharine, “nurse!”

The woman, who was keeping watch outside, opened the door.

“Nurse,” said Catharine, “by order of my son, when Monsieur de Nancey returns say to him to summon the Duc d’Alençon.”

Charles made a sign which detained the woman.

"I said my brother, madame," said Charles.

Catharine's eyes dilated like those of a tigress about to show her anger. But Charles raised his hand imperatively.

"I wish to speak to my brother Henry," said he. "Henry alone is my brother; not he who is king yonder, but he who is a prisoner here. Henry shall know my last wishes."

"And do you think," exclaimed the Florentine, with unusual boldness in the face of the dread will of her son, her hatred for the Béarnais being strong enough to make her forget her customary dissimulation, — "do you think that if, as you say, you are near the tomb, I will yield to any one, especially a stranger, my right to be present at your last hour; my right as queen and mother?"

"Madame," said Charles, "I am still King; and I still command. I tell you that I desire to speak to my brother Henry and yet you do not summon my captain of the guard. A thousand devils! I warn you, madame, I still have strength enough to go for him myself."

The King made a movement as if to rise from the bed, which brought to light his body, bloody like Christ's after the flogging.

"Sire," cried Catharine, holding him back, "you wrong us all. You forget the insults given to our family, you repudiate our blood. A son of France alone should kneel before the death-bed of a King of France. As to me, my place is marked out; it is here by the laws of nature as well as the laws of royalty. Therefore I shall remain."

"And by what right do you remain, madame?" demanded Charles IX.

"Because I am your mother."

"You are no more my mother, madame, than is the Duc d'Alençon my brother."

"You are mad, monsieur," said Catharine; "since when is she who gives birth to a child no longer his mother?"

"From the moment, madame, when the unnatural mother takes away that which she gives," replied Charles, wiping away a bloody sweat from his lips.

"What do you mean, Charles? I do not understand you," murmured Catharine, gazing at her son, her eyes dilated with astonishment.

"But you will, madame."

Charles searched under his pillow and drew out a small silver key.

“Take this, madame, and open my travelling-box. It contains certain papers which will speak for me.”

Charles pointed to a magnificent carved box, closed with a silver lock, like the key, which occupied the most conspicuous place in the room.

Catharine, dominated by the look and manner of Charles, obeyed, advanced slowly to the box, and opened it. But no sooner had she looked into it than she suddenly sprang back as if she had seen some sleeping reptile inside it.

“Well,” said Charles, who had not taken his eyes from his mother, “what is there in the box to startle you, madame?”

“Nothing,” said Catharine.

“Then put in your hand, madame, and take out a book that is there; there is one, is there not?” added Charles, with a pale smile, more terrible in him than a threat in another.

“Yes,” faltered Catharine.

“A book on hunting?”

“Yes.”

“Take it out and bring it to me.”

In spite of her assurance Catharine turned pale, and trembled in every limb, as she extended her hand towards the box.

“Fatality!” she murmured, raising the book.

“Very good,” said Charles, “now listen; this book on hunting — I loved the chase madly, above everything else — I read this book too eagerly, do you understand, madame?”

Catharine gave a dull moan.

“It was a weakness,” continued Charles; “burn it, madame. The weakness of kings and queens must not be known!”

Catharine stepped to the glowing hearth, and dropped the book into the flames.

Then, standing motionless and silent, she watched with haggard eye the bluish light which rose from the poisoned leaves.

As the book burned a strong odor of arsenic spread through the room. Soon the volume was entirely destroyed.

“And now, madame,” said Charles, with irresistible majesty, “call my brother.”

Catharine, overcome, crushed under a multiple emotion which her profound wisdom could not analyze, and which her almost superhuman strength could not combat, took a step forward as if to speak.

The mother grew remorseful; the queen was afraid; the poisoner felt a return of hatred.

The latter sentiment dominated.

“Curse him!” she cried, rushing from the room, “he triumphs, he gains his end; curse him! curse him!”

“You understand, my brother, my brother Henry,” cried Charles, calling after his mother; “my brother Henry, with whom I wish to speak instantly regarding the regency of the kingdom!”

Almost at the same instant Maître Ambroise Paré entered through the door opposite the one by which the queen had just left, and, pausing on the threshold, noticed the peculiar odor in the room.

“Who has been burning arsenic here?” said he.

“I,” replied Charles.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE DONJON OF THE PRISON OF VINCENNES.

Henry of Navarre was strolling dreamily along the terrace of the prison. He knew the court was at the château, not a hundred feet away, and through the walls it seemed as if his piercing eye could picture Charles as he lay dying.

The weather was perfect. A broad band of sunlight lay on the distant fields, bathing in liquid gold the tops of the forest trees, proud of the richness of their first foliage. The very stones of the prison itself, gray as they were, seemed impregnated with the gentle light of heaven, and some flowers, lured by the breath of the east wind, had pushed through the crevices of the wall, and were raising their disks of red and yellow velvet to the kisses of the warm air.

But Henry's eyes were fixed neither on the verdant plains nor on the gilded tree tops. His glance went beyond, and was fixed, full of ambition, on the capital of France, destined one day to become the capital of the world.

"Paris," murmured the King of Navarre, "there is Paris; that is, joy, triumph, glory, power, and happiness. Paris, in which is the Louvre, and the Louvre, in which is the throne; and only one thing separates me from this Paris, for which I so long, and that something the stones at my feet, which shut me in with my enemy!"

As he glanced from Paris to Vincennes, he perceived on his left, in a valley, partly hidden by flowering almond-trees, a man, whose cuirass sparkled in the sunlight at its owner's slightest movement.

This man rode a fiery steed and led another which seemed no less impatient.

The King of Navarre fixed his eyes on this cavalier and saw him draw his sword from his sheath, place his handkerchief on the point, and wave it like a signal.

At the same instant the signal was repeated from the opposite hill, then all around the château a belt of handkerchiefs seemed to flutter.

It was De Mouy and his Huguenots, who, knowing the King was dying, and fearing that some attempt might be made on Henry’s life, had gathered together, ready to defend or attack.

Henry, with his eyes still on the horseman he had seen first, bent over the balustrade, and shading his eyes with his hand to keep out the dazzling rays of the sun, recognized the young Huguenot.

“De Mouy!” he exclaimed, as though the latter could hear him.

And in his joy at seeing himself surrounded by friends, the king raised his hat and waved his scarf.

All the white banners were again set in motion with an energy which proved the joy of their owners.

“Alas! they are waiting for me,” said Henry, “and I cannot join them. Why did I not do so when I could? Now it is too late!”

He made a despairing gesture, to which De Mouy returned a sign which meant, “I will wait.”

Just then Henry heard steps on the stone stairs. He hastily withdrew. The Huguenots understood the cause of his sudden disappearance, and their swords were returned to their sheaths and their handkerchiefs disappeared.

Henry saw on the stairs a woman whose quick breathing showed that she had come in haste.

He recognized, not without the secret dread he always felt on seeing her, Catharine de Médicis.

Behind her were two guards who stopped at the head of the stairs.

“Oh!” thought Henry, “it must be something new and important that makes the queen mother come to seek me on the balcony of the prison of Vincennes.”

Catharine seated herself on a stone bench against the battlement to recover her breath.

Henry approached her, and with his most gracious smile:

“Are you seeking me, my good mother?”

“Yes, monsieur,” replied Catharine, “I wish to give you a final proof of my attachment. The King is dying and wishes to see you.”

“Me!” said Henry, with a start of joy.

“Yes. He has been told, I am sure, that not only do you covet the throne of Navarre but that of France as well.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Henry.

"It is not true, I know, but he believes it, and no doubt the object of the interview he wishes with you is to lay a snare for you."

"For me?"

"Yes. Before dying Charles wants to know what there is to hope or fear from you. And on your answer to his offer, mark you, will depend his final commands, that is, your life or death."

"But what will he offer me?"

"How do I know? Impossibilities, probably."

"But have you no idea?"

"No; but suppose for instance" —

Catharine paused.

"What."

"Suppose he credited you with these ambitious aims of yours he has heard about; suppose he should wish to hear these aims from your own lips; suppose he should tempt you as once they used to tempt the guilty in order to provoke a confession without torture; suppose," continued Catharine, looking fixedly at Henry, "he were to offer you a kingdom, the regency!"

A thrill of indescribable joy pervaded Henry's weary heart, but he guessed the snare and his strong and supple soul rebounded.

"Me?" said he; "the snare would be too palpable; offer me the regency when there is you yourself and my brother D'Alençon?"

Catharine compressed her lips to conceal her satisfaction.

"Then," said she, quickly, "you would refuse it?"

"The King is dead," thought Henry, "and she is laying a trap for me."

Aloud, he said:

"I must first hear what the King of France has to say; for from your own words, madame, all this is mere supposition."

"Doubtless," said Catharine; "but you can tell me your intentions."

"Why!" said Henry, innocently, "having no pretensions, I have no intentions."

"That is no answer," said Catharine, feeling that time was flying, and giving way to her anger; "you can give some answer."

"I cannot answer suppositions, madame; a positive resolution is so difficult and so grave a thing to assume that I must wait for facts."

"Listen, monsieur," said Catharine; "there is no time to lose, and we are wasting it in vain discussion, in toying with words. Let us play our rôle of king and queen. If you accept the regency you are a dead man."

“The King lives,” thought Henry.

Then aloud:

“Madame,” said he, firmly, “God holds the lives of men and of kings in his hands. He will inspire me. Let his Majesty be informed that I am ready to see him.”

“Reflect, monsieur.”

“During the two years in which I have been persecuted, during the month I have been a prisoner,” replied Henry, bravely, “I have had time to reflect, madame, and I have reflected. Have the goodness, therefore, to go to the King before me, and to tell him that I am following you. These two guards,” added Henry, pointing to the soldiers, “will see that I do not escape. Moreover, that is not my intention.”

There was such firmness in Henry’s tone that Catharine saw that all her attempts, under whatever disguise, would not succeed. Therefore she hastily descended.

As soon as she had disappeared Henry went to the parapet and made a sign to De Mouy, which meant: “Draw near and be ready in case of necessity.”

De Mouy, who had dismounted, sprang into the saddle, and still leading the second horse galloped to within musket-shot of the prison.

Henry thanked him by a gesture, and descended.

On the first landing he found the two soldiers who were waiting for him.

A double troop of Swiss and light-horse guarded the entrance to the court, and to enter or leave the château it was necessary to traverse a double line of halberds.

Catharine had stopped and was waiting for him.

She signed to the two soldiers to go on, and laying her hand on Henry’s arm, said:

“This court has two gates. At one, behind the apartments of the King, if you refuse the regency, a good horse and freedom await you. At the other, through which you have just passed, if you listen to the voice of ambition — What do you say?”

“I say that if the King makes me regent, madame, I, and not you, shall give orders to the soldiers. I say that if I leave the castle at night, all these pikes, halberds, and muskets shall be lowered before me.”

“Madman!” murmured Catharine, exasperated, “believe me, and do not play this terrible game of life and death with me.”

“Why not?” said Henry, looking closely at Catharine; “why not with you as well as with another, since up to this time I have won?”

“Go to the King’s apartments, monsieur, since you are unwilling to believe or listen to anything,” said Catharine, pointing to the stairway with one hand, and with the other toying with one of the two poisoned daggers she always wore in the black shagreen case, which has become historical.

“Pass before me, madame,” said Henry; “so long as I am not regent, the honor of precedence belongs to you.”

Catharine, thwarted in all her plans, did not attempt to struggle, but ascended the stairs ahead of the King of Navarre.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE REGENCY.

The King, beginning to grow impatient, had summoned Monsieur de Nancey to his room, and had just given him orders to go in search of Henry, when the latter appeared.

On seeing his brother-in-law at the door Charles uttered a cry of joy, but Henry stood motionless, as startled as if he had come face to face with a corpse.

The two physicians who were at the bedside and the priest who had been with Charles withdrew.

Charles was not loved, and yet many were weeping in the antechambers. At the death of kings, good or bad, there are always persons who lose something and who fear they will not find it again under the successor.

The mourning, the sobbing, the words of Catharine, the sinister and majestic surroundings of the last moments of a king, the sight of the King himself, suffering from a malady common enough afterwards, but which, at that time, was new to science, produced on Henry's mind, which was still youthful and consequently still susceptible, such a terrible impression that in spite of his determination not to cause Charles fresh anxiety as to his condition, he could not as we have said repress the feeling of terror which came to his face on perceiving the dying man dripping with blood.

Charles smiled sadly. Nothing of those around them escapes the dying.

"Come, Henriot," said he, extending his hand with a gentleness of voice Henry had never before noticed in him. "Come in; I have been very unhappy at not seeing you for so long. I have tormented you greatly during my life, my poor friend, and sometimes, believe me, I have reproached myself for it. Sometimes I have taken the hands of those who tormented you, it is true, but a king cannot control circumstances, and besides my mother Catharine, my brothers D'Anjou and D'Alençon, I had to consider during my lifetime something else which was troublesome and which ceases the moment I draw near to death — state policy."

“Sire,” murmured Henry, “I remember only the love I have always had for my brother, the respect I have always felt for my King.”

“Yes, yes, you are right,” said Charles, “and I am grateful to you for saying this, Henriot, for truly you have suffered a great deal under my reign without counting the fact that it was during my reign that your poor mother died. But you must have seen that I was often driven? Sometimes I have resisted, but oftener I have yielded from very fatigue. But, as you said, let us not talk of the past. Now it is the present which concerns me; it is the future which frightens me.”

And the poor King hid his livid face in his emaciated hands.

After a moment’s silence he shook his head as if to drive away all gloomy thoughts, thus causing a shower of blood to fall about him.

“We must save the state,” he continued in a low tone, leaning towards Henry. “We must prevent its falling into the hands of fanatics or women.”

As we have just said, Charles uttered these words in a low tone, yet Henry thought he heard behind the headboard something like a dull exclamation of anger. Perhaps some opening made in the wall at the instigation of Charles himself permitted Catharine to hear this final conversation.

“Of women?” said the King of Navarre to provoke an explanation.

“Yes, Henry,” said Charles, “my mother wishes the regency until my brother returns from Poland. But mind what I tell you, he will not come back.”

“Why not?” cried Henry, whose heart gave a joyful leap.

“No, he cannot return,” continued Charles, “because his subjects will not let him leave.”

“But,” said Henry, “do you not suppose, brother, that the queen mother has already written to him?”

“Yes, but Nancey stopped the courier at Château Thierry, and brought me the letter, in which she said I was to die. I wrote to Varsovia myself, my letter reached there, I am sure, and my brother will be watched. So, in all probability, Henry, the throne will be vacant.”

A second sound louder than the first was heard in the alcove.

“She is surely there,” thought Henry, “and is listening.”

Charles heard nothing.

“Now,” he continued, “I am dying without male heir.” Then he stopped. A sweet thought seemed to light up his face, and, laying his hand on the

King of Navarre’s shoulder:

“Alas!” said he, “do you remember, Henriot, the poor little boy I showed you one evening sleeping in his silken cradle, watched over by an angel? Alas! Henriot, they will kill him!”

“Oh, sire!” cried Henry, whose eyes filled with tears, “I swear to you that I will watch over him all the days and nights of my life. Command me, my King.”

“Thanks, Henriot, thanks!” said Charles, with a show of feeling unusual in him, but which the situation had roused, “I accept your promise. Do not make him a king, — fortunately he was not born for a throne, — but make him happy. I have left him an independent fortune. Let him inherit his mother’s nobility, that of the heart. Perhaps it would be better for him if he were to enter the church. He would inspire less fear. Oh! it seems to me that I should die, if not happy, at least calm, if I had the kisses of the child and the sweet face of its mother to console me.”

“Sire, could you not send for them?”

“Ah, poor wretches! They would never be allowed to leave the Louvre! Such is the condition of kings, Henriot. They can neither live nor die as they please. But since you promise I am more resigned.”

Henry reflected.

“Yes, no doubt, my King. I have promised, but can I keep my word?”

“What do you mean?”

“Shall I not be persecuted, and threatened like him, even more than him? For I am a man, and he is only a child.”

“You are mistaken,” said Charles; “after my death you shall be great and powerful. Here is what will make you so.”

And the King drew a parchment from under the pillow.

“See!” said he.

Henry glanced over the document sealed with the royal seal.

“The regency for me, sire!” said he, growing pale with joy.

“Yes, for you, until the return of the Duc d’Anjou, and as in all probability the duke will never return it is not the regency only but the throne that this gives you.”

“The throne!” murmured Henry.

“Yes,” said Charles, “you alone are worthy of it; you alone are capable of governing these debauched gallants, and these bold women who live by blood and tears. My brother D’Alençon is a traitor, and would deceive every one. Leave him in the prison in which I have placed him. My mother will try to kill you, therefore banish her. My brother D’Anjou in three or four months, perhaps in a year, will leave Varsovia and will come to dispute the throne with you. Answer him by a bull from the pope. I have already arranged that matter through my ambassador, the Duc de Nevers, and you will receive the document before long.”

“Oh, my King!”

“You have but one thing to fear, Henry, — civil war; but by remaining converted you will avoid this, for the Huguenots are strong only when you put yourself at their head, and Monsieur de Condé is nothing when opposed to you. France is a country of plains, Henry, and consequently a Catholic country. The King of France ought to be the king of the Catholics and not the king of the Huguenots, for the King of France ought to be the king of the majority. It is said I feel remorse for the massacre of Saint Bartholomew; doubts, yes; remorse, no. It is said I am bleeding the blood of those Huguenots from every pore. I know what is flowing from me. It is arsenic and not blood.”

“What do you mean, sire?”

“Nothing. If my death must be avenged, Henriot, it must be avenged by God alone. Let us speak now of the future. I leave you a faithful parliament and a trusty army. Lean on them and they will protect you against your only enemies — my mother and the Duc d’Alençon.”

Just then the sound of arms and military commands were heard in the vestibule.

“I am dead!” murmured Henry.

“You fear? You hesitate?” said Charles, anxiously.

“I! sire,” replied Henry; “no, I do not fear, nor do I hesitate. I accept.”

Charles pressed Henry’s hand. At that moment the nurse approached with a drink she had been preparing in the adjoining room, not knowing that the fate of France was being decided three feet from her.

“Call my mother, nurse, and have Monsieur d’Alençon also summoned.”

CHAPTER LXV.

THE KING IS DEAD! LONG LIVE THE KING!

A few moments later Catharine and the Duc d’Alençon, pale with fright and trembling with rage, entered Charles’s room. As Henry had conjectured, Catharine had overheard everything and in a few words had told all to François.

Henry was standing at the head of Charles’s bed.

The King spoke his wishes:

“Madame,” said he to his mother, “had I a son, you would be regent, or in default of you it would be the King of Poland; or in default of him it would be my brother François; but I have no son, and after me the throne belongs to my brother the Duc d’Anjou, who is absent. As some day he will claim this throne I do not wish him to find in his place a man who by almost equal rights might dispute it with him, and who consequently might expose the kingdom to civil war. This is why I do not appoint you regent, madame, for you would have to choose between your two sons, which would be painful for a mother. This is why I do not choose my brother François, for he might say to his elder brother, ‘You had a throne, why did you leave it?’ No, I have chosen as regent one who can take the crown on trust, and who will keep it in his hand and not on his head. Salute this regent, madame; salute him, brother; it is the King of Navarre!”

And with a gesture of supreme authority the King himself saluted Henry.

Catharine and D’Alençon made a gesture between a nervous shudder and a salute.

“Here, my Lord Regent,” said Charles to the King of Navarre, “here is the parchment which, until the return of the King of Poland, gives you the command of the armies, the keys of the treasury, and the royal power and authority.”

Catharine devoured Henry with her eyes; François swayed so that he could scarcely stand; but this weakness of the one and strength of the other, instead of encouraging Henry, showed him the danger which threatened him.

Nevertheless he made a violent effort and overcoming his fears took the parchment from the hands of the king, raised himself to his full height, and gave Catharine and François a look which meant:

“Take care! I am your master.”

“No,” said she, “never; never shall my race bow to a foreign one; never shall a Bourbon reign in France while a Valois remains!”

“Mother,” cried Charles IX., sitting up among the crimson sheets of his bed, more frightful looking than ever, “take care, I am still King. Not for long, I well know; but it does not take long to give an order; it does not take long to punish murderers and poisoners.”

“Well! give the order, if you dare, and I will give mine! Come, François, come!”

And the queen left the room rapidly, followed by the Duc d’Alençon.

“Nancey!” cried Charles; “Nancey! come here! I order you, Nancey, to arrest my mother, and my brother, arrest” —

A stream of blood choked his utterance, just as the captain of the guards opened the door, and, almost suffocated, the King fell back on his bed. Nancey had heard only his name; the orders which followed, and which had been uttered in a less audible tone, were lost in space.

“Guard the door,” said Henry, “and let no one enter.”

Nancey bowed and withdrew.

Henry looked at the almost lifeless body, which already would have seemed like that of a corpse had not a light breath stirred the fringe of foam on the lips.

Henry looked for several moments, then, speaking to himself:

“The final moment has come!” said he; “shall I reign? shall I live?”

Just then the tapestry of the alcove was raised, a pale face appeared behind it, and a voice vibrated through the silence of death which reigned throughout the royal chamber.

“Live!” said this voice.

“Réné!” cried Henry.

“Yes, sire.”

“Your prediction was false, then; I shall not be king?”

“You shall be, sire; but the time has not yet come.”

“How do you know? Speak, that I may know if I may believe you.”

“Listen.”

“Well?”

“Stoop down.”

Henry leaned over Charles. Réné did the same. They were separated by the width of the bed alone, and even this distance was lessened by their positions. Between them, silent and motionless, lay the dying King.

“Listen,” said Réné; “placed here by the queen mother to ruin you, I prefer to serve you, for I have faith in your horoscope. By serving you I shall profit both in body and soul.”

“Did the queen mother command you to say this also?” asked Henry, full of doubt and pain.

“No,” said Réné; “but I will tell you a secret.”

He leaned still further over.

Henry did likewise, so that their heads almost touched.

This interview between two men bending over the body of a dying king was so sombre that the hair of the superstitious Florentine rose on end, and Henry’s face became covered with perspiration.

“Listen,” continued Réné, “I will tell you a secret known only to me. I will reveal it to you if you will swear over this dying man to forgive me for the death of your mother.”

“I have already promised you this,” said Henry, with darkening brow.

“You promised, but you did not swear,” said Réné, drawing back.

“I swear it,” said Henry, raising his right hand over the head of the King.

“Well, sire,” said the Florentine, hastily, “the King of Poland will soon arrive!”

“No,” said Henry, “the messenger was stopped by King Charles.”

“King Charles intercepted only the one on the road to Château Thierry. But the queen mother wisely sent couriers by three different routes.”

“Oh! I am lost!” exclaimed Henry.

“A messenger arrived this morning from Varsovia. The king left after him without any one’s thinking of opposing him, for at Varsovia the illness of the King of France was not yet known. This courier only preceded Henry of Anjou by a few hours.”

“Oh! had I but eight days!” cried Henry.

“Yes, but you have not eight hours. Did you hear the noise of arms?”

“Yes.”

“They are making ready to kill you. They will seek you even here in the apartment of the King.”

“The King is not yet dead.”

Réné looked closely at Charles.

“He will be in ten minutes; you have ten minutes to live, therefore; perhaps less.”

“What shall I do?”

“Flee instantly, without delaying a minute, a second.”

“But how? If they are waiting in the antechamber they will kill me as I go out.”

“Listen! I will risk everything for you. Never forget this.”

“Fear not.”

“Follow me by the secret corridor. I will lead you to the postern. Then, to gain time, I will tell the queen mother that you are coming down; you will be seen to have discovered this secret passage, and to have profited by it to escape. Flee! Flee!”

“Nurse!” murmured Charles, “nurse!”

Henry took from the bed Charles’s sword, of no further use to the dying King, put the parchment which made him regent in his breast, kissed Charles’s brow for the last time, and turning away hurried through the door, which closed behind him.

“Nurse!” cried the King, in a stronger voice, “nurse!”

The woman ran to him.

“What is it, Charlot?” she asked.

“Nurse,” said the King, his eye dilated by the terrible fixity of death, “something must have happened while I slept. I see a great light. I see God, our Master, I see Jesus, and the Blessed Virgin Mary. They are praying and interceding for me. The all-powerful Lord pardons me — calls to me — My God! my God! In thy mercy, receive me! My God! forget that I have been King, for I come to you without sceptre or crown. My God! forget the crimes of the King, and remember only the suffering of the man. My God, I come!”

And Charles, who as he spoke had risen more and more as if to go to the One who was calling him, after uttering these words heaved a sigh and fell back still and cold in the arms of his nurse.

Meantime, while the soldiers, commanded by Catharine, were beginning to fill the main corridor in which they expected Henry to appear, the latter, guided by Réné, passed along the secret passage and reached the postern, sprang on the horse which was waiting for him, and galloped to the place where he knew he would find De Mouy.

Hearing the sound of the horse’s hoofs, the galloping of which fell on the hard pavement, some sentinels turned and cried:

“He flees! He flees!”

“Who?” cried the queen mother, stepping to a window.

“The King of Navarre!” cried the sentinels.

“Fire on him! Fire!” cried Catharine.

The sentinels levelled their muskets, but Henry was already too far away.

“He flees!” cried the queen mother; “then he is vanquished!”

“He flees!” murmured the Duc d’Alençon; “then I am king!”

At that instant, while François and his mother were still before the window, the drawbridge thundered under horses’ hoofs and preceded by a clanking of arms and great noise a young man galloped up, his hat in his hand, shouting as he entered the court: “France!” He was followed by four gentlemen, covered like himself with perspiration, dust, and foam.

“My son!” exclaimed Catharine, extending both arms out of the window.

“Mother!” replied the young man, springing from his steed.

“My brother D’Anjou!” cried François, stepping back in amazement.

“Am I too late?” asked Henry d’Anjou.

“No, just in time, and God must have guided you, for you could not have arrived at a better moment. Look and listen!”

Monsieur de Nancey, captain of the guards, had come out upon the balcony from the chamber of the King.

All eyes were turned towards him.

Breaking a wand in two, with arms extended, he took a piece in either hand and cried three times:

“King Charles IX. is dead! King Charles IX. is dead! King Charles IX. is dead!”

Then he dropped the pieces of the wand.

“Long live King Henry III.!” shouted Catharine, making the sign of the cross. “Long live King Henry III.!”

All took up the cry except Duc François.

“Ah, she has betrayed me!” murmured he, digging his nails into his breast.

“I have won,” cried Catharine, “and that hateful Béarnais will not reign!”

CHAPTER LXVI.

EPILOGUE.

One year had elapsed since the death of Charles IX. and the accession of his successor to the throne.

King Henry III., happily reigning by the grace of God and his mother Catharine, was attending a fine procession given in honor of Notre Dame de Cléry.

He had gone on foot with the queen, his wife, and all the court.

King Henry III. could well afford this little pastime, for no serious business occupied him for the moment. The King of Navarre was in Navarre, where he had so long desired to be, and where he was said to be very much taken up with a beautiful girl of the blood of the Montmorencies whom he called La Fosseuse. Marguerite was with him, sad and gloomy, finding in the beautiful mountains not distraction but a softening of the two greatest griefs of life, — absence and death.

Paris was very quiet and the queen mother, really regent since her dear son Henry had been King, resided sometimes at the Louvre, sometimes at the Hôtel de Soissons, which occupied the site to-day covered by the Halle au Blé, of which nothing remains beyond the beautiful column which is still standing.

One evening when she was deeply engaged in studying the stars with Réné, of whose little act of treason she was still ignorant, and who had been reinstated in her favor after the false testimony he had so opportunely given at the trial of Coconnas and La Mole, she was informed that a man waited for her in her oratory with something to tell her of the greatest importance.

Hastily descending, the queen found the Sire de Maurevel.

“*He* is here!” cried the ancient captain of the guards, not giving Catharine time to address him, according to royal etiquette.

“What *he*?” demanded Catharine.

“Who but the King of Navarre, madame!”

“Here!” said Catharine, “here! He — Henry — And what has he come for, the madman?”

“If appearances are to be believed, he comes to see Madame de Sauve. That is all. If probabilities are to be considered, he comes to conspire against the King.”

“How do you know he is here?”

“Yesterday I saw him enter a house, and an instant later Madame de Sauve joined him there.”

“Are you sure it was he?”

“I waited until he came out, that is, part of the night. At three o’clock the two lovers appeared. The king led Madame de Sauve as far as the gate of the Louvre, where, thanks to the porter, who no doubt is in her pay, she was admitted without opposition, and the king returned, humming a tune, and with a step as free as if he were among his own mountains.”

“Where did he go then?”

“To the Rue de l’Arbre Sec, Hôtel de la Belle Étoile, the same inn in which the two sorcerers used to lodge whom your majesty had executed a year ago.”

“Why did you not come and tell me this at once?”

“Because I was not yet sure of my man.”

“And now?”

“Now I am certain.”

“Did you see him?”

“Yes. I hid in a wine merchant’s opposite. I saw him enter the same building as on the previous night. Then as Madame de Sauve was late he imprudently put his face against the window pane on the first floor, and I had no further doubt. Besides, a few minutes later Madame de Sauve came and again joined him.”

“Do you think that like last night they will remain until three o’clock in the morning?”

“It is probable.”

“Where is the house?”

“Near the Croix des Petits Champs, close to Saint Honoré.”

“Very good,” said Catharine. “Does Monsieur de Sauve know your handwriting?”

“No.”

“Sit down, then, and write.”

Maurevel took a pen and obeyed.

“I am ready, madame,” said he.

Catharine dictated:

“*While the Baron de Sauve is on service at the Louvre the baroness is with one of her friends, in a house near the Croix des Petits Champs, close to Saint Honoré. The Baron de Sauve will know the house by a red cross on the wall.*”

“Well?” said Maurevel.

“Make a copy of the letter,” said Catharine.

Maurevel obeyed in silence.

“Now,” said the queen, “have one of these letters taken by a clever man to the Baron de Sauve, and drop the other in the corridors of the Louvre.”

“I do not understand,” said Maurevel.

Catharine shrugged her shoulders.

“You do not understand that a husband who receives such a note will be angry?”

“But the King of Navarre never used to be angry, madame.”

“It is not always with a king as with a simple courtier. Besides, if De Sauve is not angry you can be so for him.”

“I!”

“Yes. You can take four men or six, if necessary, put on a mask, break down the door, as if you had been sent by the baron, surprise the lovers in the midst of their tête à tête, and strike your blow in the name of the King. The next day the note dropped in the corridor of the Louvre, and picked up by some kind friend who already will have circulated the news, will prove that it was the husband who had avenged himself. Only by chance, the gallant happened to be King of Navarre; but who would have imagined that, when every one thought him at Pau.”

Maurevel looked at Catharine in admiration, bowed, and withdrew.

As Maurevel left the Hôtel de Soissons Madame de Sauve entered the small house near the Croix des Petits Champs.

Henry was waiting for her at the half-open door.

As soon as he saw her on the stairs, he said:

“You have not been followed, have you?”

“*Why, no,*” said Charlotte, “at least, not so far as I know.”

“I think I have been,” said Henry, “not only to-night but last evening as well.”

“Oh! my God!” said Charlotte, “you frighten me, sire! If this meeting between you and one of your old friends should bring any harm to you I should be inconsolable.”

“Do not worry, my love,” said the Béarnais, “we have three swordsmen watching in the darkness.”

“Three are very few, sire.”

“Three are enough when they are De Mouy, Saucourt, and Barthélemy.”

“Is De Mouy in Paris with you?”

“Certainly.”

“He dared to return to the capital? Has he, then, like you, some poor woman who is in love with him?”

“No, but he has an enemy whose death he has sworn to have. Nothing but hate, my dear, commits as many follies as love.”

“Thank you, sire.”

“Oh,” said Henry, “I do not refer to our present follies. I mean those of the past and the future. But do not let us discuss this; we have no time to lose.”

“You still plan to leave Paris?”

“To-night.”

“Are your affairs which brought you back to Paris finished?”

“I came back only to see you.”

“Gascon!”

“*Ventre saint gris!* My love, that is true; but let us put aside such thoughts. I have still two or three hours in which to be happy; then farewell forever.”

“Ah! sire,” said Madame de Sauve, “nothing is forever except my love.”

Henry had just said that he had no time for discussion; therefore he did not discuss this point. He believed, or sceptic that he was, he pretended to believe.

As the King of Navarre had said, De Mouy and his two companions were hidden near by.

It was arranged that Henry should leave the small house at midnight instead of at three o’clock; that, as on the previous night, they would escort Madame de Sauve back to the Louvre, and from there they would go to the Rue de la Cerisaie, where Maurevel lived.

It was only during that day that De Mouy had been sure of his enemy’s whereabouts. The men had been on guard about an hour when they perceived a man, followed at a few feet by five others, who drew near to the door of the small house and tried several keys successively. De Mouy, concealed within the shelter of a neighboring door, made one bound from his hiding-place, and seized the man by the arm.

“One moment,” said he; “you cannot enter there.”

The man sprang back, and in doing so his hat fell off.

“De Mouy de Saint Phale!” he cried.

“Maurevel!” thundered the Huguenot, raising his sword. “I sought you, and you have come to me. Thanks!”

But his anger did not make him forget Henry, and turning to the window he whistled in the manner of the Béarnais shepherds.

“That will be enough,” said he to Saucourt. “Now, then, murderer!”

And he sprang towards Maurevel.

The latter had had time to draw a pistol from his belt.

“Ah! now,” said the King’s Slayer, aiming at the young man, “I think you are a dead man!”

He fired. De Mouy jumped to one side and the ball passed by without touching him.

“It is my turn now!” cried the young man.

And he dealt Maurevel such a violent thrust with his sword that, although the blade had to encounter his buff belt, the sharp point pierced this obstacle and sank into the flesh.

The assassin gave a terrible cry of pain; whereupon the soldiers with him, thinking he was killed, fled in alarm down the Rue Saint Honoré.

Maurevel was not brave. Seeing himself abandoned by his followers, and having to face an adversary like De Mouy, he strove to escape, and ran after the guard, shouting, “help! help!”

De Mouy, Saucourt, and Barthélemy, carried away by their ardor, pursued him. As they entered the Rue de Grenelle, which they had taken as a short cut, a window opened and a man sprang out from the first floor, landing on the ground lately wet by the rain.

It was Henry.

De Mouy’s whistle had warned him of some danger and the pistol-shot had showed him that the danger was great, and had drawn him to the aid of his friends.

Energetic and vigorous, he dashed after them, sword in hand.

A cry guided him; it came from the Barrier des Sergents. It was Maurevel, who being hard pressed by De Mouy was calling a second time for help from his men who had run away.

Maurevel had to turn or be run through the back; he turned, therefore, and, meeting his enemy’s steel, gave him back so skilful a thrust that the scarf of the latter was cut through. But De Mouy at once lunged. The sword again sank into the flesh it had already broken, and a second jet of blood spurted from a second wound.

“At him!” cried Henry, coming up. “Quick, quick, De Mouy!”

De Mouy needed no encouragement.

Again he charged at Maurevel; but the latter had not waited.

Pressing his left hand over his wound, he again took to flight.

“Kill him! Quick! Kill him!” cried the king, “here are the soldiers, and the despair of cowards is of no moment to the brave.”

Maurevel, who was well nigh exhausted, whose every breath caused a bloody perspiration, fell down; but almost immediately he rose again, and turning on one knee presented the point of his sword to De Mouy.

“Friends! Friends!” cried Maurevel. “There are only two. Fire at them! Fire!”

Saucourt and Barthélemy had gone in pursuit of the other soldiers, down the Rue des Poulies, and the king and De Mouy were alone with the four men.

“Fire!” cried Maurevel again, while one of the soldiers levelled his gun.

“Yes, but first,” said De Mouy, “die, traitor, murderer, assassin!” and seizing Maurevel’s sword with one hand, with the other he plunged his own up to its hilt into the breast of his enemy, with such force that he nailed him to the earth.

“Take care! Take care!” cried Henry.

De Mouy sprang back, leaving his sword in Maurevel’s body, just as a soldier was in the act of firing at him.

Henry at once passed his sword through the body of the soldier, who gave a cry and fell by the side of Maurevel.

The two others took to flight.

“Come, De Mouy, come!” cried Henry, “let us not lose an instant; if we are recognized it will be all over with us.”

“Wait, sire. Do you suppose I want to leave my sword in the body of this wretch?” and De Mouy approached Maurevel, who lay apparently without sign of life.

But just as he took hold of his sword, which was run through Maurevel’s body, the latter raised himself, and with the gun the soldier had dropped fired directly at De Mouy’s breast.

The young man fell without a cry. He was killed outright.

Henry rushed at Maurevel, but the latter had fallen again, and the king’s sword pierced only a dead body.

It was necessary to flee. The noise had attracted a large number of persons; the night watch might arrive at any moment. Henry looked around to see if there was any face he knew, and gave a cry of delight on recognizing La Hurière.

As the scene had occurred at the foot of the Croix du Trahoir, that is, opposite the Rue de l’Arbre Sec, our old friend, whose naturally gloomy disposition had been still further saddened since the death of La Mole and Coconnas, his two favorite lodgers, had left his furnaces and his pans in the midst of his preparations for the King of Navarre’s supper, and had run to the fight.

“My dear La Hurière, I commend De Mouy to your care, although I greatly fear nothing can be done for him. Take him to your inn, and if he still live, spare nothing. Here is my purse. As to the other, leave him in the gutter, that he may die like a dog.”

“And yourself?” said La Hurière.

“I have a farewell to make. I must hasten, but in ten minutes I shall be with you. Have my horses ready.”

Henry immediately set out towards the Croix des Petits Champs; but as he turned from the Rue de Grenelle he stopped in terror.

A large crowd was before the door.

“What is the matter?” asked Henry. “What is going on in the house?”

“Oh!” answered the man addressed, “a terrible affair, monsieur. A beautiful young woman has just been stabbed by her husband, to whom a note had been given informing him that his wife was here with her lover.”

“And the husband?” cried Henry.

“Has escaped.”

“And the wife?”

“She is in the house.”

“Dead?”

“Not yet, but, thank God, there is scarcely any hope.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Henry, “I am accursed indeed!” and he rushed into the house.

The room was full of people standing around a bed on which lay poor Charlotte, who had been stabbed twice.

Her husband, who had hidden his jealousy for two years, had seized this opportunity to avenge himself on her.

“Charlotte! Charlotte!” cried Henry, pushing through the crowd and falling on his knees before the bed.

Charlotte opened her beautiful eyes, already veiled by death, and uttered a cry which caused the blood to flow afresh from her two wounds. Making an effort to rise, she said:

“Oh! I well knew I could not die without seeing you again!”

And as if she had waited only for that moment to return to Henry the soul he had so loved, she pressed her lips to the King’s forehead, again whispered for a last time, “I love you!” and fell back dead.

Henry could not remain longer without risking his own life. He drew his dagger, cut a lock of the beautiful blonde hair which he had so often loosened that he might admire its length, and went out sobbing, in the midst of the tears of all present, who did not doubt but that they were weeping for persons of high degree.

“Friend! mistress!” cried Henry in despair — ”all forsake me, all leave me, all fail me at once!”

“Yes, sire,” said a man in a low tone, who had left the group in front of the house, and who had followed Henry; “but you still have the throne!”

“Réné!” exclaimed Henry.

“Yes, sire, Réné, who is watching over you. That scoundrel Maurevel uttered your name as he died. It is known you are in Paris; the archers are hunting for you. Flee! Flee!”

“And you say that I shall be King, Réné? I, a fugitive?”

“Look, sire,” said the Florentine, pointing to a brilliant star, which appeared from behind the folds of a black cloud, “it is not I who say so, but the star!”

Henry heaved a sigh, and disappeared in the darkness.

THE END

THE CORSICAN BROTHERS

Translated by Henry Frith

This short novel was first published in 1844 by the *Société belge de librairie*, based in Brussels, under the title *The Corsican Family.* In the narrative, a stranger arrives in Corsica, famed as being the land of the Vendetta. He stays with the widowed Madame Savilia de Franchi, who has twin sons: the peace-loving Louis, studying law in Paris, and the savage but noble Lucien, who lives with her. Their guest learns that these two brothers, apparently so different, were in fact born conjoined; now, whenever Lucien feels pain, Louis experiences it too - no matter the distance between them.

Dumas, close to the time of publication

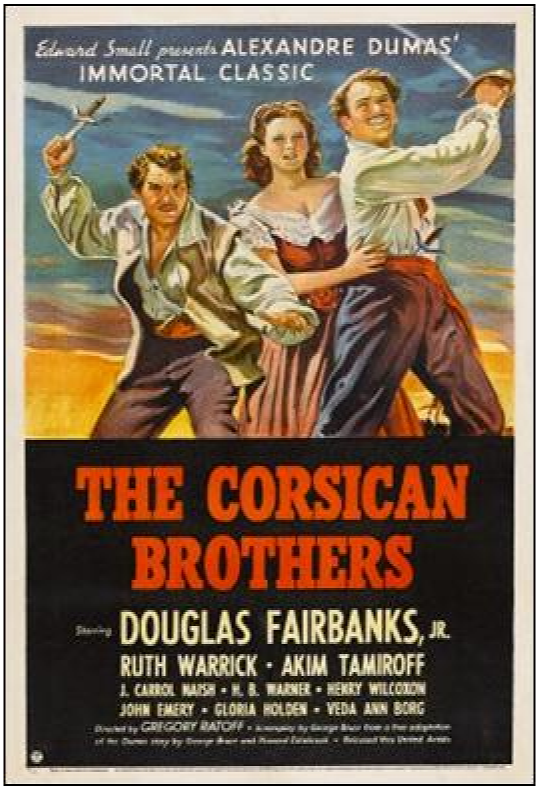
Edward Small presents ALEXANDRE DUMAS'
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THE CORSICAN BROTHERS
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RUTH WARRICK · AKIM TAMIROFF
J. CARROL NAISH · H. B. WARNER · HENRY WILCOXON
JOHN EMERY · GLORIA HOLDEN · VEDA ANN BORG
Directed by GREGORY RATOFF

The 1941 film adaptation

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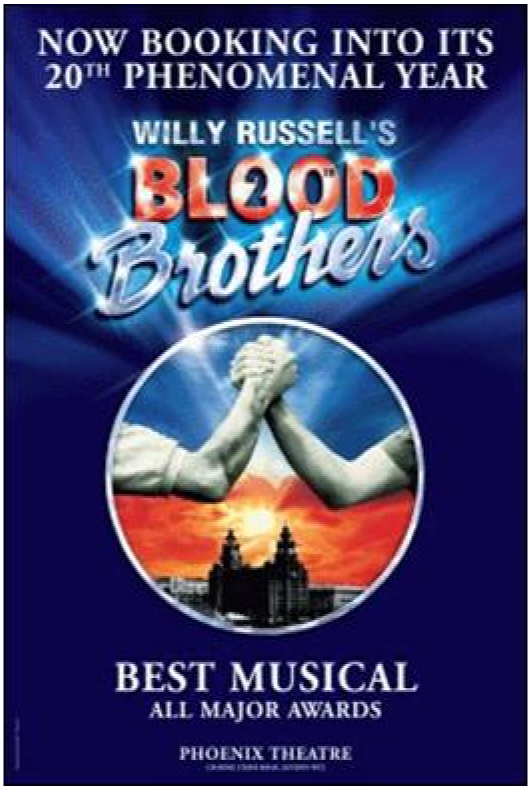
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THOMAS CHONG

The 1984 parody movie

TO
HENRY IRVING

THE LATEST REPRESENTATIVE OF THE TWIN BROTHERS

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED BY
THE TRANSLATOR

CHAPTER I.

IN the beginning of March, 1841, I was travelling in Corsica.

Nothing is more picturesque and more easy to accomplish than a journey in Corsica. You can embark at Toulon, in twenty hours you will be in Ajaccio, and then in twenty-four hours more you are at Bastia.

Once there you can hire or purchase a horse. If you wish to hire a horse you can do so for five francs a day; if you purchase one you can have a good animal for one hundred and fifty francs. And don’t sneer at the moderate price, for the horse hired or purchased will perform as great feats as the famous Gascon horse which leaped over the Pont Neuf, which neither Prospero nor Nautilus, the heroes of Chantilly and the Champ de Mars could do. He will traverse roads which Balmat himself could not cross without *crampons*, and will go over bridges upon which Auriol would need a balancing pole.

As for the traveller, all he has to do is to give the horse his head and let him go as he pleases; he does not mind the danger. *We* may add that with this horse, which can go anywhere, the traveller can accomplish his fifteen leagues a day without stopping to bait.

From time to time, while the tourist may be halting to examine some ancient castle, built by some old baron or legendary hero, or to sketch a tower built ages ago by the Genoese, the horse will be contented to graze by the road side, or to pluck the mosses from the rocks in the vicinity.

As to lodging for the night, it is still more simple in Corsica. The traveller having arrived at a village, passes down through the principal street, and making his own choice of the house wherein he will rest, he knocks at the door. An instant after, the master or mistress will appear upon the threshold, invite the traveller to dismount; offer him a share of the family supper and the whole of his own bed, and next morning, when seeing him safely resume his journey, will thank him for the preference he has accorded to his house.

As for remuneration, such a thing is never hinted at. The master would regard it as an insult if the subject were broached. If, however, the servant happen to be a young girl, one may fitly offer her a coloured handkerchief, with which she can make up a picturesque coiffure for a fête day. If the domestic be a male he will gladly accept a poignard, with which he can kill his enemy, should he meet him.

There is one thing more to remark, and that is, as sometimes happens, the servants of the house are relatives of the owner, and the former being in reduced circumstances, offer their services to the latter in consideration of board and lodging and a few piastres per month.

And it must not be supposed that the masters are not -well served by their cousins to the fifteenth and sixteenth degree, because the contrary is the case, and the custom is not thought anything of. Corsica is a French Department certainly, but Corsica is very far from being France.

As for robbers, one never hears of them, yet there are bandits in abundance; but these gentlemen must in no wise be confounded one with another.

So go without fear to Ajaccio, to Bastia, with a purse full of money hanging to your saddle-bow, and you may traverse the whole island without a shadow of danger, but do not go from Occana to Levaco, if you happen to have an enemy who has declared the Vendetta against you, for I would not answer for your safety during that short journey of six miles.

Well, then, I was in Corsica, as I have said, at the beginning of the month of March, and I was alone; Jadin having remained at Rome.

I had come across from Elba, had disembarked at Bastia, and there had purchased a horse at the above mentioned price.

I had visited Corte and Ajaccio, and just then I was traversing the province of Sartène.

On the particular day of which I am about to speak I was riding from Sartène to Sullacaro.

The day’s journey was short, perhaps a dozen leagues, in consequence of detours, and on account of my being obliged to climb the slopes of the mountain chain, which, like a backbone, runs through the island. I had a guide with me, for fear I should lose my way in the maquis.

It was about five o’clock in the afternoon when we arrived at the summit of the hill, which at the same time overlooks Olmeto and Sullacaro. There we stopped a moment to look about us.

“Where would your Excellency wish to stay the night?” asked the guide.

I looked down upon the village, the streets of which appeared almost deserted. Only a few women were visible, and they walked quickly along, and frequently looked cautiously around them.

As in virtue of the rules of Corsican hospitality, to which I have already referred, it was open to me to choose for my resting place any one of the hundred or hundred and twenty houses of which the village was composed, I therefore carried my eyes from house to house till they lighted upon one which promised comfortable quarters. It was a square mansion, built in a fortified sort of style and machicolated in front of the windows and above the door.

This was the first time I had seen these domestic fortifications; but I may mention that the province of Sartène is the classic ground of the Vendetta.

“Ah, good!” said my guide, as he followed the direction of my hand — ” that is the house of Madame Savilia de Franchi. Go on, go on, Signor, you have not made a bad choice, and I can see you do not want for experience in these matters.”

I should note here that in this 86th department of France Italian is universally spoken.

“But,” I said, “may it not be inconvenient if I demand hospitality from a lady, for if I understand you rightly, this house belongs to a lady.”

“No doubt,” he replied, with an air of astonishment; “but what inconvenience does your lordship think you will cause?”

“If the lady be young,” I replied, moved by a feeling of propriety — or, perhaps, let us say, of Parisian self-respect — ” a night passed under her roof might compromise her.”

“Compromise her!” repeated the guide, endeavouring to probe the meaning of the word I had rendered in Italian with all the emphasis which one would hazard a word in a strange tongue.

“Yes, of course,” I replied, beginning to feel impatient; “the lady is a widow, I suppose?”

“Yes, Excellency.”

“Well, then, will she receive a young man into her house?”

In 1841 I was thirty-six years old, or thereabouts, and was entitled to call myself young.

“Will she receive a young man!” exclaimed the guide; “why, what difference can it make whether yon are young or old?”

I saw that I should get no information out of him by this mode of interrogation, so I resumed —

“How old is Madame Savilia?”

“Forty, or nearly so.”

“Ah,” I said, replying more to my thoughts than to my guide, “all the better. She has children, no doubt?”

“Yes, two sons — fine young men both.”

“Shall I see them?”

“Yon will see one of them — he lives at home.”

“Where is the other, then?”

“He lives in Paris.”

“How old are these sons?”

“Twenty-one.”

“What, both?”

“Yes, they are twins.”

“What professions do they follow?”

“The one in Paris is studying law.”

“And the other?”

“The other is a Corsican.”

“Indeed!” was my reply to this characteristic answer, made in the most matter-of-fact tone. “Well, now, let us push on for the house of Madame Savilia de Franchi.”

We accordingly resumed our journey, and entered the village about ten minutes afterwards.

I now remarked what I had not noticed from the hill, namely, that every house was fortified similarly to Madame Savilia’s. Not so completely, perhaps, for that the poverty of the inhabitants could not attain to, but purely and simply with oaken planks, by which the windows were protected, loop-holes only being left for rifle barrels; some apertures were simply bricked up.

I asked my guide what he called these loop-holes, and he said they were known as *archères* — a reply which convinced me that they were used anterior to the invention of firearms.

As we advanced through the streets we were able the more fully to comprehend the profound character of the solitude and sadness of the place.

Many houses appeared to have sustained a siege, and the marks of the bullets dotted the walls.

From time to time as we proceeded we caught sight of a curious eye flashing upon us from an embrasure; but it was impossible to distinguish whether the spectator were a man or a woman.

We at length reached the house which I had indicated to my guide, and which was evidently the most considerable in the village.

As we approached it more nearly, one thing struck me, and that was, fortified to all outward appearance as it was, it was not so in reality, for there were neither oaken planks, bricks, nor loop-holes, but simple squares of glass, protected at night by wooden shutters.

It is true that the shutters showed holes which could only have been made by the. passage of a bullet; but they were of old date, and could not have been made within the previous ten years.

Scarcely had my guide knocked, when the door was opened, not hesitatingly, nor in a timid manner, but widely, and a valet, or rather I should say a man appeared.

It is the livery that makes the valet, and the individual who then opened the door to us wore a velvet waistcoat, trowsers of the same material, and leather gaiters. The breeches were fastened at the waist by a parti-coloured silk sash, from the folds of which protruded the handle of a Spanish knife.

“My friend,” I said, “is it indiscreet of me, who knows nobody in Sullacaro, to ask hospitality of your mistress?”

“Certainly not, your Excellency,” he replied; “the stranger does honour to the house before which he stops.”

“Maria,” he continued, turning to a servant, who was standing behind him, “will you inform Madame Savilia that a French traveller seeks hospitality?”

As he finished, speaking he came down the eight rough ladder-like steps which led to the entrance door, and took the bridle of my horse.

I dismounted.

“Your Excellency need have no further concern,” he said; “all your luggage will be taken to your room.”

I profited by this gracious invitation to idleness — one of the most agreeable which can be extended to a traveller.

CHAPTER II.

I SLOWLY ascended the steps and entered the house, and at a corner of the corridor I found myself face to face with a tall lady dressed in black.

I understood at once that this lady of thirty-eight or forty years of age, and still beautiful, was the mistress of the house.

"Madame," said I, bowing deeply, "I am afraid you will think me intrusive, but the custom of the country may be my excuse, and your servant's invitation my authority to enter."

"You are welcome to the mother," replied Madame de Franchi, "and you will almost immediately be welcomed by the son. From this moment, sir, the house belongs to you; use it as if it were your own."

"I come but to beg hospitality for one night, madame," I answered; "to-morrow morning, at daybreak, I will take my departure."

"You are free to do as you please, sir; but I hope that you will change your mind, and that we shall have the honour of your company for a longer period."

I bowed again, and Madame continued —

"Maria, show this gentleman to my son Louis' chamber; light the fire at once, and carry up some hot water. You will excuse me," she said, turning again to me as the servant departed, "but I always fancy that the first wants of a tired traveller are warm water and a fire. Will yon please to follow my maid, sir; and yon need have no hesitation in asking her for anything yon may require. We shall sup in an hour, and my son, who will be home by that time, will have the honour to wait upon you."

"I trust you will excuse my travelling dress, madame."

"Yes, sir," she replied smiling; "but on condition that you, on your part, will excuse the rusticity of your reception."

I bowed my thanks, and followed the servant upstairs.

The room was situated on the first floor, and looked out towards the rear of the house, upon a pretty and extensive garden, well planted with various trees, and watered by a charming little stream, which fell into the Tavaro.

At the further end the prospect was bounded by a hedge, so thick as to appear like a wall. As is the case in almost all Italian houses, the walls of the rooms were white-washed and frescoed.

I understood immediately that Madame de Franchi had given me this, her absent son’s chamber, because it was the most comfortable one in the house.

While Maria was lighting the fire and fetching the hot water, I took it into my head to make an inventory of the room, and try to arrive at an estimation of the character of its usual occupant by those means.

I immediately put this idea into execution, and beginning with the left hand, I took mental notes of the various objects by which I was surrounded.

The furniture all appeared to be modern, a circumstance which in that part of the island, where civilization had not then taken deep root, appeared to indicate no inconsiderable degree of luxury. It was composed of an iron bedstead and bedding, a sofa, four arm-chairs, six other occasional chairs, a wardrobe, half book case and half bureau, all of mahogany, from the first cabinet maker in Ajaccio.

The sofas and chairs were covered with chintz, and curtains of similar material fell before the windows, and hung round the bed.

I had got so far with my inventory when Maria left the room, and I was enabled to push my investigation a little closer.

I opened the book-case, and found within a collection of the works of our greatest poets. I noticed Corneille, Racine, Molière, La Fontaine, Ronsard, “Victor Hugo, and Lamartine.

Our moralists — Montaigne, Pascal, Labruyère.

Our historians — Mezeray, Chateaubriand, Augustin Thierry.

Our philosophers — Cuvier, Rendant, Elie de Beaumont.

Besides these there were several volumes of romances and other books, amongst which I recognized, with a certain pride, my own “Impression of Travel.”

The keys were in the drawer of the bureau. I opened one of them.

Here I found fragments of a history of Corsica, a work upon the best means of abolishing the Vendetta, some French verses, and some Italian sonnets, all in manuscript. This was more than I expected, and I had the presumption to conclude that I need not seek much, farther to form my opinion of the character of Monsieur Louis de Franchi.

He appeared to be a quiet, studious young man, a partizan of the French reformers, and then I understood why he had gone to Paris to become an advocate.

There was, without doubt, a great future for him in this course. I made all these reflections as I was dressing. My toilette, as I had hinted to Madame de Franchi, although not wanting in a certain picturesqueness, demanded that some allowance should be made for it.

It was composed of a vest of black velvet, open at seams of the sleeves, so as to keep me cooler during the heat of the day, and slashed *à l'Espagnole*, permitting a silken chemise to appear underneath. My legs were encased in velvet breeches to the knee, and thence protected by Spanish gaiters, embroidered in Spanish silk. A felt hat, warranted to take any shape, but particularly that of a sombrero, completed my costume.

I recommend this dress to all travellers as being the most convenient I am acquainted with, and I was in the act of dressing, when the same man who had introduced me appeared at the door.

He came to announce that his young master, Monsieur Lucien de Franchi, had that instant arrived, and who desired to pay his respects to me if I were ready to receive him.

I replied that I was at the disposal of Monsieur Lucien de Franchi if he would do me the honour to come up.

An instant afterwards I heard a rapid step approaching my room, and almost immediately afterwards I was face to face with my host.

CHAPTER III.

HE was, as my guide had told me, a young man of about twenty-one years of age, with black hair and eyes, his face browned by the sun, rather under than over the average height, but remarkably well-proportioned.

In his haste to welcome me he had come up, just as he was, in his riding-costume, which was composed of a redingote of green cloth, to which a cartridge-pouch gave a somewhat military air, grey pantaloons with leather let in on the inner side of the legs, boots and spurs. His head-dress was a cap similar to those worn by our Chasseurs d’Afrique.

From either side of his pouch there hung a gourd and a pistol, and he carried an English carbine in addition.

Notwithstanding the youthful appearance of my host, whose upper lip was as yet scarcely shaded by a moustache, he wore an air of independence and resolution, which struck me very forcibly.

Here was a man fitted for strife, and accustomed to live in the midst of danger, but without despising it, grave because he was solitary, calm because he was strong.

With a single glance he took me all in, my luggage, my arms, the dress I had just taken off, and that which I had just donned.

His glance was as rapid and as sure as that of a man whose very life may depend upon a hasty surrey of his surroundings.

“I trust you will excuse me if I disturb you,” he said; “but I come with good intentions. I wish to see if you require anything. I am always somewhat uneasy when any of you gentlemen from the continent pay us a visit, for we are still so uncivilized, we Corsicans, that it is really with fear and trembling that we exercise, particularly to Frenchmen, our own hospitality, which will, I fear, soon be the only thing that will remain to us.”

“You have no reason to fear,” I replied; “it would be difficult to say what more a traveller can require beyond what Madame de Franchi has supplied. Besides,” I continued, glancing round the apartment, “I must confess I do not perceive any of the want of civilization you speak of so frankly, and were it not for the charming prospect from those windows, I should fancy myself in an apartment in the Chaussée d’Antin.”

“Yes,” returned the young man, “it is rather a mania with my poor brother Louis; he is so fond of living *à la Française;* but I very much doubt whether, when he leaves Paris, the poor attempt at civilization here will appear to him sufficient on his return home as it formerly did.”

“Has your brother been long away from Corsica? “I inquired.

“For the last ten months.”

“You expect him back soon?”

“Oh, not for three or four years.”

“That is a very long separation for two brothers, who probably were never parted before.”

“Yes, and particularly if they love each other as we do.”

“No doubt he will come to see you before he finishes his studies.”

“Probably; he has promised us so much, at least.”

“In any case, nothing need prevent you from paying him a visit?”

“No, I never leave Corsica.”

There was in his tone, as he made this reply, that love of country which astonishes the rest of the universe. I smiled.

“It appears strange to you,” ho said, smiling in his turn, “when I tell you that I do not wish to leave a miserable country like ours; but you must know that I am as much a growth of the island as the oak or the laurel; the air I breathe must be impregnated with the odours of the sea and of the mountains. I must have torrents to cross, rocks to scale, forests to explore. I must have space; liberty is necessary to me, and if you were to take me to live in a town I believe I should die.”

“But how is it there is such a great difference between you and your brother in this respect?”

“And you would add with so great a physical resemblance, if you knew him.”

“Are you, then, so very much alike?”

“So much so, that when we were children our parents were obliged to sew a distinguishing mark upon our clothes.”

“And as you grew up? “I suggested.

“As we grew up our habits caused a very slight change in our appearance, that is all. Always in a study, poring over books and drawings, my brother grew somewhat pale, while I, being always in the open air, became bronzed, as you see.”

"I hope," I said, "that you will permit me to judge of this resemblance, and if you have any commission for Monsieur Louis, you will charge me with it."

"Yes, certainly, with great pleasure, if you will be so kind. Now, will you excuse me? I see you are more advanced in your toilet than I, and supper will be ready in a quarter of an hour."

"You surely need not trouble to change on my account."

"You must not reproach me with this, for you have yourself set me the example; but, in any case, I am now in a riding dress, and must change it for a mountaineer's costume, as, after supper, I have to make an excursion in which boots and spurs would only serve to hinder me."

"You are going out after supper, then?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied, "to a rendezvous."

I smiled.

"Ah, not in the sense you understand it — this is a matter of business."

"Do you think me so presumptuous as to believe I have a right to your conscience?"

"Why not? One should live so as to be able to proclaim what one has done. I never had a mistress, and I never shall have one. If my brother should marry, and have children, it is probable that I shall never take a wife. If, on the contrary, he does not marry, perhaps I shall, so as to prevent our race from becoming extinct. Did I not tell you," he added, laughing, "that I am a regular savage, and had come into the world a hundred years too late "But I continue to chatter here like a crow, and I shall not be ready by the time supper is on the table."

"But cannot we continue the conversation?" I said. "Your chamber, I believe, is opposite, and we can talk through the open doors."

"We can do better than that; you can come into my room while I dress. You are a judge of arms, I fancy. Well, then, you shall look at mine. There are some there which are valuable — from an historical point of view, I mean."

CHAPTER IV.

THE suggestion quite accorded with my inclination to compare the chambers of the brothers, and I did not hesitate to adopt it. I followed my host, who, opening the door, paused in front of me to show me the way.

This time I found myself in a regular arsenal. All the furniture was of the fifteenth or sixteenth century — the carved and canopied bedstead, supported by great posts, was draped with green damask *à fleur d'or;* the window curtains were of the same material. The walls were covered with Spanish leather, and in the open spaces were sustained trophies of Gothic and modern arms.

There was no mistaking the tastes of the occupant of this room: they were as warlike as those of his brother were peaceable.

"Look here," he said, passing into an inner room, "here you are in three centuries at once — see! I will dress while you amuse yourself, for I must make haste or supper will be announced."

"Which are the historic arms of which you spoke amongst all these swords, arquebuses, and poignards? "I asked.

"There are three. Let us take them in order. If you look by the head of my bed you will find a poignard with a very large hilt — the pommel forms a seal."

"Yes, I have it."

"That is the dagger of Sampietro."

"The famous Sampietro, the assassin of Vanina?"

"The assassin! No, the avenger."

"It is the same thing, I fancy."

"To the rest of the world, perhaps — not in Corsica."

"And is the dagger authentic?"

"Look for yourself. It carries the arms of Sampietro — only the fleur-de-lis of France is missing. You know that Sampietro was not authorized to wear the lily until after the siege of Perpignan."

"No, I was not aware of that fact. And how did you become possessed of this poignard?"

"Oh! it has been in our family for three hundred years. It was given to a Napoleon de Franchi by Sampietro himself."

“Do you remember on what occasion?”

“Yes. Sampietro and my ancestor fell into an ambuscade of Genoese, and defended themselves like lions. Sampietro’s helmet was knocked off, and a Genoese on horseback was about to kill Sampietro with his mace when my ancestor plunged his dagger into a joint in his enemy’s armour. The rider feeling himself wounded spurred his horse, carrying away in his flight the dagger so firmly embedded in his armour that he was unable to withdraw it, and as my ancestor very much regretted the loss of his favourite weapon Sampietro gave him his own. Napoleon took great care of it, for it is of Spanish workmanship, as you see, and will penetrate two five-franc pieces one on top of another.”

“May I make the attempt?”

“Certainly.”

Placing the coins upon the floor, I struck a sharp blow with the dagger. Lucien had not deceived me.

When I withdrew the poignard I found both pieces pierced through and through, fixed upon the point of the dagger.

“This is indeed the dagger of Sampietro,” I said. “But what astonishes me is that being possessed of such a weapon he should have employed the cord to kill his wife.”

“He did not possess it at that time,” replied Lucien; “he had given it to my ancestor.”

“Ah! true!”

“Sampietro was more than sixty years old when he hastened from Constantinople to Aix to teach that lesson to the world, viz., that women should not meddle in state affairs.”

I bowed in assent, and replaced the poignard.

“Now,” said I to Lucien, who all this time had been dressing, “let us pass on from Sampietro to some one else.”

“You see those two portraits close together?”

“Yes, Paoli and Napoleon.”

“Well, near the portrait of Paoli is a sword.”

“Precisely so.”

“That is his sword.”

“Paoli’s sword? And is it as authentic as the poignard of Sampietro?”

“Yes, at least as authentic; though he did not give it to one of my male ancestors, but to one of the ladies.”

“To one of your female ancestors?”

“Yes. Perhaps you have heard people speak of this woman, who in the war of independence presented herself at the Tower of Sullacaro, accompanied by a young man?”

“No, tell me the story.”

“Oh, it is a very short one.”

“So much the worse.”

“Well, you see, we have not much time to talk now.”

“I am all attention.”

‘‘Well, this woman and this young man presented themselves before the Tower of Sullacaro and requested to speak with Paoli; but as he was engaged writing, he declined to admit them; and then, as the woman insisted, the two sentinels repulsed her, when Paoli, who had heard the noise, opened the door and inquired the cause.”

“‘It is I,’ said the woman; ‘I wish to speak to you.’ “‘What have you to say to me? ‘“I have come to tell you that I have two sons. I heard yesterday that one had been killed for defending his country, and I have come twenty leagues to bring yon the other!!!’”

“You are relating an incident of Sparta,” I said. “Yes, it does appear very like it.”

“And who was this woman?”

“She was my ancestress.”

“Paoli took off his sword and gave it to her. “‘Take it,’ he said, ‘1 like time to make my excuses to woman.’”

“She was worthy of both — is it not so?”

“And now this sabre?”

“That is the one Buonaparte carried at the battle of the Pyramids.”

“No doubt it came into your family in the same manner as the poignard and the sword.”

“Entirely. After the battle Buonaparte gave the order to my grandfather, who was an officer in the Guides, to charge with fifty men a number of Mamelukes who were at bay around a wounded chieftain. My grandfather dispersed the Mamelukes and took the chief back a prisoner to the First Consul. But when he wished to sheath his sword he found the blade had been so bent in his encounter with the Mamelukes that it would not go into the scabbard. My grandfather therefore threw sabre and sheath away as useless, and, seeing this, Buonaparte gave him his own.”

“But,” I said, “in your place I would rather have had my grandfather’s sabre, all bent as it was, instead of that of the general’s, which was in good condition.”

“Look before you and you will find it. The First Consul had it recovered, and caused that large diamond to be inserted in the hilt. He then sent it to my family with the inscription which you can read on the blade.”

I advanced between the windows, where, hanging half-drawn from its scabbard, which it could not fully enter, I perceived the sabre bent and hacked, bearing the simple inscription —

“Battle of the Pyramids, 21st of July, 1798.”

At that moment the servant came to announce that supper was served.

“Very well, Griffo,” replied the young man; “tell my mother that we are coming down.”

As he spoke lie came forth from the inner room, dressed, as he said, like a mountaineer; that is to say, with a round velvet coat, trowsers, and gaiters; of his other costume he had only retained his pouch.

He found me occupied in examining two carbines hanging opposite each other, and both inscribed — “21st September, 1819: 11 A.M.”

“Are these carbines also historical?” I asked.

“Yes,” he answered. “For us, at least, they bear a historical significance. One was my father’s — ”

He hesitated.

“And the other,” I suggested.

“And the other,” he said, laughing, “is my mother’s. But let us go downstairs; my mother will be awaiting us.”

Then passing in front of me to show me the way he courteously signed to me to follow him.

CHAPTER V.

I MUST confess that as I descended to the supper-room I could not help thinking of Lucien’s last remark, “The other is my mother’s carbine; “and this circumstance compelled me to regard Madame de Franchi more closely than I had hitherto done.

When her son entered the *salle à manger,* he respectfully kissed her hand, and she received this homage with queenly dignity.

“I am afraid that we have kept you waiting, mother,” said Lucien; “I must ask your pardon.”

“In any case, that would be my fault, madame,” I said, bowing to her. “Monsieur Lucien has been telling me and pointing out many curious things, and by my reiterated questions I have delayed him.”

“Rest assured,” she said, “I have not been kept waiting; I have but this moment come downstairs. But,” she continued, addressing Lucien, “I was rather anxious to ask you what news there was of Louis.”

“Tour son has been ill, madame?” I asked.

“Lucien is afraid so,” she said.

“Have you received a letter from your brother? “I inquired.

“No,” he replied, “and that is the very thing that makes me uneasy.”

“But, then, how can you possibly tell that he is out of sorts?”

“Because during the last few days I have been suffering myself.”

“I hope you will excuse my continual questions; but, really, your answer does not make matters any clearer.”

“Well, you know that we are twins, don’t you?”

“Yes, my guide told me as much.”

“Were you also informed that when we came into the world we were joined together?”

“No; I was ignorant of that circumstance.”

“Well, then, it was a fact, and we were obliged to be cut asunder. So that, you see, however distant we may be, we have ever the same body, so that any impression, physical or moral, which one may receive is immediately reflected in the other. During the last few days I felt *triste,* morose, dull, and without any predisposing cause, so far as I am aware. I have experienced terrible pains in the region of the heart, and palpitations, so it is evident to me that my brother is suffering some great grief.”

I looked with astonishment at this young man, who affirmed such a strange thing without the slightest fear of contradiction, and his mother also appeared to entertain the same conviction as he did.

Madame de Franchi smiled sadly, and said, “The absent are in the hands of God, the great point is that you are certain that he is alive.”

“Yes,” replied Lucien, calmly, “for if he were dead I should have seen him.”

“And you would have told me, would you not, my son?”

“Oh, of course, mother, at once.”

“I am satisfied. Excuse me, monsieur,” she continued, turning to me, “I trust you will pardon my maternal anxiety. Not only are Louis and Lucien my sons, but they are the last of their race. Will you please take the chair at my right hand? Lucien, sit here.”

She indicated to the young man the vacant place at her left hand.

We seated ourselves at the extremity of a long table, at the opposite end of which were laid six other covers, destined for those who in Corsica are called the family; that is to say, the people who in large establishments occupy a position between the master and the servants.

The table was abundantly supplied with good cheer. But I confess that although at the moment blessed with a very good appetite, I contented myself with eating and drinking as it were mechanically, for my senses were not in any way attracted by the pleasures of the table. For, indeed, it appeared to me that I had entered into a strange world when I came into that house, and that I was now living in a dream.

Who could this woman be who was accustomed to carry a carbine like a soldier?

What sort of person could this brother be, who felt the same grief that his brother experienced at a distance of three hundred leagues?

What sort of mother could this be who made her son declare that if he saw the spirit of his dead brother he would tell her at once?

These were the questions that perplexed me, and it will be readily understood they gave me ample food for thought.

However, feeling that continual silence was not polite, I made an effort to collect my ideas. I looked up.

The mother and son at the same instant perceived that I wished to enter into conversation.

“So,” said Lucien to me, as if he were continuing his remarks, “so you made up your mind to come to Corsica?”

“Yes, as you see, I had for a long time had a desire to do so, and at last I have accomplished it.”

“*Ma foi!* you have done well not to delay your visit; for with the successive encroachments of French tastes and manners those who come to look for Corsica in a few years will not find it.”

“However,” I replied, “if the ancient national spirit retires before civilization and takes refuge in any corner of the island, it certainly will be in the province of Sartène, and in the valley of the Tavaro.”

“Do you think so, really?” said the young man, smiling.

“Yes, and it appears to me that here at the present moment there is a beautiful and noble tablet of ancient Corsican manners.”

“Yes, and nevertheless, even here, between my mother and myself, in the face of four hundred years of reminiscences of this old fortified mansion, the French spirit has come to seek out my brother — has carried him away to Paris, when he will return to us a lawyer. He will live in Ajaccio instead of dwelling in his ancestral home. He will plead — if he possess the talent — he may be nominated *procureur du roi* perhaps; then he will pursue the poor devils who have ‘taken a skin,’ as they say here. He will confound the assassin with the avenger — as you yourself have done already. He will demand, in the name of the law, the heads of those who had done what their fathers would have considered themselves dishonoured *not* to have done. He will substitute the judgment of men for the justice of God; and in the evening, when he shall have claimed a head for the scaffold, he will believe that he has performed his duty, and has brought his stone as a tribute to the temple of Civilization, as our préfect says. Oh! mon Dieu! mon Dieu!”

The young man raised his eyes to heaven, as Hannibal is reported to have done after the battle of Zama.

“But,” I replied, “you must confess that it is the will of God to equalize these things, since in making your brother a proselyte of the new order He has kept you here as a representative of the old manners and customs.”

“Yes; but what is there to prove that my brother will not follow the example of his uncle instead of following mine? And even I myself may be about to do something unworthy of a de Franchi.”

“You! “I exclaimed, with astonishment.

“Yes, I.”

“Do you wish me to tell you why you have come into this province of Sartène?”

“Yes, tell me.”

“You have come here to satisfy your curiosity as a man of the world, an artist, or a poet. I do not know what yon are, nor do I ask; you can tell us when you leave, if you wish, if not, you need not inform us; you are perfectly free to do as you like. Well, you have come in the hope of seeing some village Vendetta, of being introduced to some original bandit, such as Mr. Merimée has described in ‘Columba.’”

“Well, it appears to me that I have not made such a bad choice, for if my eyes do not deceive me, your house is the only one in the village that is not fortified.”

“That only proves I have degenerated, as I have said. My father, my grandfather, and my ancestors for many generations have always taken one side or the other in the disputes which in the last ten years have divided the village. And do you know what I have become in the midst of musket shots and stabs? Well, I am the arbitrator. You have come into the province of Sartène to see bandits; is not that the fact? So come with me this evening and I will show you one.”

“What! will you really allow me to go with you this evening?”

“Certainly, if it will amuse you. It entirely depends upon yourself.”

“I accept, then, with much pleasure.”

“Our guest is fatigued,” said Madame de Franchi, looking meaningly at her son, as if she felt ashamed Corsica had so far degenerated.

“No, mother, no, he had better come; and when in some Parisian *salon* people talk of the terrible Vendettas, of the implacable Corsican bandits who strike terror into the hearts of children in Bastia and Ajaccio, he will be able to tell them how things actually are.”

“But what is the great motive for this fend, which, as I understand, is now by your intercession to be for ever extinguished?”

“Oh,” replied Lucien, “in a quarrel it is not the motive that matters, it is the result. If a fly causes a man’s death the man is none the less dead because a fly caused it.”

I saw that he hesitated to tell me the cause of this terrible war, which for the last ten years had desolated the village of Sullacaro.

But, as may be imagined, the more he attempted to conceal it the more anxious I was to discover it.

“But,” said I, “this quarrel must have a motive; is that motive a secret?”

“Good gracious, no! The mischief arose between the Orlandi and the Colona.

“On what occasion?”

“Well, a fowl escaped from the farm yard of the Orlandi and flew into that of the Colona.”

“The Orlandi attempted to get back the hen, the Colona declared it belonged to them. The Orlandi then threatened to bring the Colona before the judge and make them declare on oath it was theirs. And then the old woman in whose house the hen had taken refuge wrung its neck, and threw the dead fowl into her neighbour’s face, saying —

“‘Well, then, if it belongs to you, eat it.’

“Then one of the Orlandi picked up the fowl by the feet, and attempted to beat the person who had thrown it in his sister’s face; but just as he was about to do so, one of the Colona appeared, who, unfortunately, carried a loaded gun, and he immediately sent a bullet through the Orlandi’s heart.”

“And how many lives have been sacrificed since?”

“Nine people have been killed altogether.”

“And all for a miserable hen not worth twelve sons?”

“Yes, but as I said just now, it is not the cause, but the effect that we have to look at.”

“Since there were nine people killed, then, there might easily be a dozen.”

“Yes, very likely there would be if they had not appointed me as arbitrator.”

‘‘At the intercession of one of the two families no doubt?”

“Oh! dear no, at my brother’s request, who heard of the matter at the Chancellor’s house. I asked him what on earth they had to do in Paris with, the affairs of an out-of-the-way little village in Corsica; but it seems the préfect mentioned it when he wrote to Paris, and said that if I were to say a word the whole thing would finish like a farce, by a marriage and a public recitation; so my brother took the hint, and replied he would answer for me. What could I do?” added the young man, throwing back his head proudly; “it shall never be said that a de Franchi passed his word for his brother, and that his brother did not fulfil the engagement.”

“And so you have arranged everything?”

“I am afraid so.”

“And we shall see the chief of one of these two parties this evening; no doubt?”

“Just so; last night I saw the other.”

“Are we going to see an Orlandi or a Colona?”

“An Orlandi.”

“Is it far from here?”

“In the ruins of the Castle of Vicentello d’lstria.”

“Ah! yes — they told me those ruins were close by.”

“Yes, they are about a league from here.”

“So in three-quarters of an hour we shall be there?”

“Yes, in about that time.”

“Lucien,” said Madame de Franchi, “remember you speak for yourself. For a mountaineer as you are it is scarcely three-quarters of an hour distance, but recollect that our guest may not be able to proceed so quickly.”

“That is true; we had better allow ourselves an hour and a half at least.”

“In that case you have no time to lose,” said Madame de Franchi, as she glanced at the clock.

“Mother,” said Lucien as he rose, “you will excuse our leaving you, will you not?”

She extended her hand to him, and the young man kissed it with the same respect as he had previously done.

Then turning to me, Lucien said —

“If you prefer to finish your supper quietly, and to smoke your cigar afterwards–”

“No, no! “I cried; “hang it, you have promised me a bandit, and I must have one.”

“Well, then, let us take our guns and be off.”

I bowed respectfully to Madame de Franchi, and we left the room, preceded by Griffo, who carried a light.

Our preparations did not occupy us very long.

I clasped a travelling belt round my waist, from which was suspended a sort of hunting-knife, and in the folds of which I carried powder and ball.

Lucien soon re-appeared with his cartridge case, and carrying a double-barrelled Manton, and a sort of peaked cap, woven for him by some Penelope of Sullacaro.

“Shall I go with your Excellency?” asked Griffo.

“No, it will be useless,” replied Lucien; “but you may as well loose Diamond, as we might put up a pheasant, and the moon is so clear we should be able to shoot as well as in daylight.”

An instant afterwards a great spaniel bounded out, and jumped joyously around its master.

We had not gone many paces from the house when Lucien turned round and said —

“By-the-by, Griffo, tell them if they hear any shots on the mountain that it is we who have fired them.”

“Very well, your Excellency.”

“If we did not take some such precautions,” said Lucien, “they would think that hostilities had recommenced, and we should soon hear our shots echoing in the streets of Sullacaro. A little farther on you will see a footpath to the right that will lead us directly up the mountain.”

CHAPTER VI.

ALTHOUGH it was only the beginning of the month of March the weather was beautiful, and we should have said that it was hot, had it not been for a refreshing breeze which carried with it a savour of the sea.

The moon was rising brilliantly behind Mount Cagna, and the cascades of light were falling upon the southern slope which separates Corsica into two parts, and in a measure forms two different nations, which are always at war, or at least, detest one another heartily.

As we mounted we could see the gorge in which the Tavaro was buried in profound darkness, impossible to penetrate, but we could view the calm Mediterranean, like a vast steel mirror extending into the horizon.

There are certain noises one hears only at night, for during the day they are overcome by other sounds, or it may be they awake only with the darkness, and these produced not upon Lucien, who was familiar with them, but upon me, who was a stranger to them, curious sensations of surprise, and awoke in me a powerful interest in all that I saw.

When we reached the place where the path united with another — one going up the mountain direct, and the other to the right, Lucien turned to me and said — “Are you anything of a mountaineer?”

“Yes, a little, as far as walking goes.”

“You are likely to get giddy, then.”

“I am afraid so. The precipice has an irresistible attraction for me.”

“Then we had better take this foot-path where there are no precipices, but merely rough walking.”

“I am quite equal to that.”

“Very well, then, we have three-quarters of an hour’s walk before us.”

“Let us take the path.”

Lucien then went first, and crossed through a little oak wood, into which I followed him.

Diamond trotted fifty or sixty paces away, beating right and left, and occasionally coming back to us, wagging his tail as much as to inform us that we might trust to him and continue our route in safety.

I saw that as some people like to possess a horse, equally for riding or driving, so Diamond had apparently been trained to hunt the biped or the quadruped, the bandit or the boar. I did not wish to appear altogether strange to Corsican manners, so I said as much to Lucien.

“You are mistaken,” he replied; “Diamond is very useful in hunting men or animals, but he never chases bandits. It is the triple red of the gendarmes, the voltigeur, and the volunteer that he hunts.”

“Then I suppose Diamond is a bandit’s dog?”

“He is. He belongs to an Orlandi, to whom I sometimes used to send him into the country with bread, powder, bullets, or whatever he required. He was shot by a Colona, and the next day the dog came to me, for being accustomed to come to the house, he looked upon me as a friend.”

“But,” I said, “I fancied I saw another dog at your house.”

“Yes, that is Brucso, he possesses the same qualities as Diamond, only he came to me from a Colona who was killed by an Orlandi, and so when I pay a visit to a Colona I take Brucso, but when I have business with an Orlandi I take Diamond. If I were to make a mistake and loose them both together they would kill each other. So,” continued Lucien, with a bitter smile, “men can make it up, and will receive the sacrament together; the dogs will never eat from the same platter.”

“Well,” I said, laughing; “here are two regular Corsican dogs, but it seems to me that Diamond, like all other modest creatures, has gone out of earshot while we are speaking of him. I am afraid he has missed us.”

“Oh, do not be alarmed,” said Lucien, “I know where he is.”

“May I inquire where?”

“He is at the Mucchio.”

I was about to hazard another question, even at the risk of tiring my companion, when a long howl was heard, so lamentable, so sad, and so prolonged, that I shivered and stopped.

“What can that be? “I said.

“Nothing, it is only Diamond crying.”

“What is he crying for?”

“His master. Do you not know that dogs do not forget those they have loved?”

“Ah, I understand,” I said, as another prolonged howl rose through the night.

“Yes,” I continued, “his master was shot, you say, and I suppose we are approaching the place where he was killed?”

“Just so, and Diamond has left us to go to Mucchio.”

“That is where the man’s tomb is?”

“Yes, that is to say, the monument which passers-by have raised to his memory, in the form of a cairn; so it follows that the tomb of the victim gradually grows larger, a symbol of the increasing vengeance of his relations.”

Another long howl from Diamond’s throat made me shudder again, though I was perfectly well aware of the cause of the noise.

At the next turn of the path we came upon the wayside tomb or cairn. A heap of stones formed a pyramid of four or five feet in height.

At the foot of this strange monument Diamond was lying with extended neck and open mouth. Lucien picked up a stone, and taking off his cap approached the mucchio.

I did the same, following his example closely.

When he had come close to the pyramid he broke a branch from a young oak and threw, first, the stone and then the branch upon the heap. He rapidly made the sign of the cross.

I imitated him exactly, and we resumed our route in silence, but Diamond remained behind.

About ten minutes afterwards we heard another dismal howling, and then almost immediately Diamond passed us, head and tail drooping, to a point about a hundred paces in front, when he suddenly resumed his hunting.

CHAPTER VII.

WE still kept advancing steadily, but, as Lucien had warned me, the path became rougher and more difficult.

I slung my gun over my shoulder, for I perceived that I should soon need both hands to assist me. As for my friend, he continued to press forward with the same easy gait, and did not appear to be at all inconvenienced by the difficult nature of the ground.

After some minutes’ climbing over rocks, aided by bushes and roots, we reached a species of platform surmounted by some ruined walls. These ruins were those of the Castle of Vicentello d’Istria, our destination.

In about five minutes we had climbed up to the last terrace, Lucien in advance, and as he extended his hand to assist me he said: —

“Well done, well done; you have not climbed badly for a Parisian.”

“Supposing that the Parisian you have assisted has already had some little experience in mountain scrambling?”

“Ah, true!” said Lucien, laughing. “Have you not a mountain near Paris called Montmartre?”

“Yes, but there are others beside Montmartre which I have ascended. For instance, the Rigi, the Faulhorn, the Gemmi, Vesuvius, Stromholi and Etna.”

“Indeed! Now I suppose you will despise me because I have never done more than surmount Monte Rotundo! Well, here we are! Four centuries ago my ancestors would have opened the portal to you and bade you welcome to the castle. Now their descendants can only show you the place where [the door used to be, and say to you, ‘Welcome to the ruins! ‘“

“I suppose the chateau has been in possession of your family since the death of Vicentello d’Istria? “I said, taking up the conversation at the point at which we had dropped it previously.

“No, but before his birth. It was the last dwelling-place of our famous ancestress Savilia, the widow of Lucien de Franchi.”

“Is there not some terrible history connected with this woman?”

“Yes; were it daylight I could now show you from this spot the ruins of the Castle of Valle. There lived the lord of Guidice, who was as much hated as she (Savilia) was beloved, as ugly as she was beautiful. He became enamoured of her, and as she did not quickly respond to his desires, he gave her to understand that if she did not accept him in a given time he would come and carry her off by force. Savilia made pretence of consenting, and invited Guidice to come to dinner at the castle. Guidice was overcome with joy at this, and forgetting that the invitation had only been extorted by menace, accepted it, and came attended only by a few body servants. The gate was closed behind them, and in a few minutes Guidice was a prisoner, and cast into a dungeon, yonder."

I passed on in the direction indicated, and found myself in a species of square court.

The moonlight streamed through the apertures time had made in the once solid walls, and threw dark and well-defined shadows upon the ground. All other portions of the ruins remained in the deep shade of the overhanging walls round about.

Lucien looked at his watch.

"Ah! we are twenty minutes too soon," he exclaimed. "Let us sit down; you are very likely tired."

We sat down; indeed, we extended ourselves at full length upon the grassy sward, in a position facing the great breach in the wall.

"But," said I to my companion, "it seems to me that you have not finished the story you began just now."

"No," replied Lucien. "Every morning and every evening Savilia came down to the dungeon in which Giudice was confined, and then separated from him only by a grating, she would undress herself, and expose herself naked to him, a captive.'

'"Giudice,' she would say, 'how do you expect that such an ugly man as you are can ever hope to possess all this?'

"This trial lasted for three months, and was repeated twice a day. But at the end of that period, thanks to a waiting woman whom he had bribed, Guidice was enabled to escape. He soon returned with all his men, who were much more numerous than those Savilia could assemble, and took the castle by assault, and having first possessed himself of Savilia, he subsequently exposed her naked in an iron cage at the cross roads in the Bocca di Cilaccia, offering, himself, the key to any passer by who might be tempted to enter. After three days of this public prostitution Savilia died."

"Well," I said, "it seems to me that your ancestors had a very pretty idea of revenging themselves, and that in finishing off their enemies with dagger or gunshot their descendants have in a manner degenerated!”

“Without mentioning that the day may come when we shall not kill them at all!” replied Lucien. “But it has not come to that yet. The two sons of Savilia,” he continued, “who were at Ajaccio with their uncle, were true Corsicans, and continued to make war against the sons of Guidice. This war lasted for four hundred years, and only finished, as you saw, by the dates upon the carbines of my parents, on the 21st September, 1819, at eleven o’clock A.M.”

“Oh, yes, I remember the inscription; but I had not time to inquire its meaning, as just then we were summoned to supper.”

“Well, this is the explanation: Of the family of Guidice there remained, in 1819, only two brothers. Of the de Franchi family there remained only my father, who had married his cousin. Three months after that the Guidice determined to exterminate us with one stroke. One of the brothers concealed himself on the road to Olmedo to await my father’s coming home to Sartène — while the other, taking advantage of his absence, determined to attack our house. This plan was carried out, but with a different result to what had been anticipated. My father, being warned of the plot, was on his guard; my mother, who had also got a hint of the affair, assembled the shepherds, &c., so that when the attack was made the intended victims were prepared for it — my father on the mountains, my mother in the mansion. The consequence was that the two Guidici fell, one shot by my father, the other by my mother. On seeing his foe fall, my father drew out his watch and saw it was eleven o’clock. When my mother shot her assailant she turned to the timepiece and noticed that it was also eleven o’clock. The whole thing had taken place exactly at the same moment. There were no more Guidici left, the family was extinct, and our victorious family is now left in peace; and considering we carried on a war for four hundred years, we didn’t want to meddle with it any more. My father had the dates engraved upon the carbines, and hung the pieces up on each side of the clock, as you saw. Seven months later my mother gave birth to twins, of whom one is your very humble servant, the Corsican Lucien; the other, the philanthropist, Louis, his brother.”

As he ceased speaking, I noticed a shadow of a man accompanied by a dog projected in the doorway.

The shadows were those of the bandit Orlandi and his friend Diamond.

At that moment the village clock of Sullacaro was heard striking nine with measured strokes.

Evidently the Orlandi was of Louis XV.’s opinion, that punctuality is the politeness of kings!

It would have been impossible to have been more exact than was that king of the mountain, with whom Lucien had appointed a meeting at nine o’clock.

“We both rose from our reclining posture when we saw the bandit approaching.

CHAPTER VIII.

“You are not alone, Monsieur Lucien,” said the bandit.

“Do not let that disturb you, Orlandi. This gentleman is a friend of mine, who has heard me speak of you, and wished to pay you a visit. I could not think of refusing him that pleasure.”

“Monsieur is welcome to the country,” said the bandit, bowing as he advanced towards us.

I returned his salute with the most punctilious politeness.

“You must have been waiting here some time,” continued Orlandi.

“Yes, about twenty minutes.”

“Quite so. I heard Diamond howling at Mucchio, and he has been with me quite a quarter of an hour since then; he is a good and faithful dog, is he not, Monsieur Lucien?”

“Yes, indeed he is, Orlandi,” replied Lucien, as he patted the animal.

“But,” said I, “since you knew that Monsieur Lucien was here, why did you not come sooner?”

“Because our appointment was for nine o’clock,” said the bandit, “and it is just as unpunctual to be a quarter of an hour too soon as to arrive a quarter of an hour too late.”

“That is meant for a hit at me, Orlandi,” said Lucien, laughing.

“No, sir; you no doubt have your reasons; besides you have a companion, and it is likely on his account you may have started earlier, for I know your punctual habits, Monsieur Lucien, and I know also that you have been good enough to put yourself to inconvenience on my account frequently.”

“Oh, do not say anything about that, Orlandi; this will probably be the last time.”

“Have we not some few words to exchange upon that subject, Monsieur Lucien,” said the bandit.

“Yes, if you will have the goodness to follow me.”

“I am at your orders.”

Lucien turned towards me, and said:

“Will you excuse me a moment?”

“Of course; “I replied.

The men then went away together, and ascending the breach through which Orlandi had appeared halted at the top of it, their figures standing out in strong relief in the moonlight.

Then I was able to take more particular note of this Orlandi. He was a tall man, who had fashioned his beard in exactly the same manner as young de Franchi, and was clothed like him; but his dress showed traces of more frequent contact with the bushes through which he was obliged to fly, and of the earth upon which he was obliged to lie, than did those of Lucien.

I could not hear what the men were talking about, and had I heard it I could not have understood it, as they spoke in the Corsican dialect.

But I was enabled to perceive by their gestures that the bandit was refuting with some heat a series of arguments which the young man was setting forth with an impartiality that did him honour.

At length the gestures of the Orlandi became less frequent and more energetic. His voice became subdued, and he at last bowed his head and held out his hand to the young man.

I concluded the conference was now over, and the men descended together towards me.

“My dear, sir,” said Lucien, “Orlandi wishes to shake you by the hand, and to thank you.”

“And for what?” I said.

“For being so good as to be one of his sponsors. I have answered for you!”

“If you have answered for me I will readily accept, without even asking what is in question.”

I extended my hand to the bandit, who did me the honour to touch it with the tips of his fingers.

“You will now be able to tell my brother that all has been arranged according to his wishes,” said Lucien, “and that you have signed the contract.”

“Is there, then, a marriage about to take place?”

“No, not yet; but perhaps there may be shortly.”

A disdainful smile passed over the bandit’s face as he replied, “We have made peace, Monsieur Lucien, because you wished it; but marriage is not included in the compact.”

“No,” replied Lucien, “it is only written in the future amongst the probabilities; but let us talk of something else. Did you not hear anything while I was talking with Orlandi?” he said, turning to me.

“Of what you were saying, do you mean?”

“No, but what yon might have thought was a pheasant close by?”

“Well, I fancied I did hear a bird crow, but I thought I must have been mistaken!”

“No, you were not mistaken, there is a cock perched in the great chestnut tree you saw about a hundred paces from here. I heard him just now as I was passing.”

“Well, then,” said Lucien, “we must eat him tomorrow.”

“He would have already been laid low,” said Orlandi, “if I had not thought that in the village they would believe I was shooting at something besides a pheasant.”

“I have provided against that,” said Lucien. “By-the-by,” he added, turning to me and throwing on his shoulder the gun he had already unslung, “the shot by courtesy belongs to you.”

“One moment,” I said. “I am not so sure of my aim as you, and I will be quite content to do my part in eating the bird. So do you fire.”

“I suppose you are not so used to shooting at night as we are,” replied Lucien, “and you would probably fire too low. But if you have nothing particular to do to-morrow you can come and take your revenge.”

CHAPTER IX.

WE left the rains on the side opposite to that on which we had entered, Lucien going first.

As soon as we had got into the brushwood a pheasant once more loudly announced his presence.

He was about eighty paces from us, roosting in the branches of the chestnut tree, the approach to which was prevented on all sides by the undergrowth.

“I do not quite see how you are going to get him,” I said to Lucien; “it does not appear a very easy shot.”

“No,” he replied; “but if I could just see him, I would fire from here.”

“You do not mean to say that your gun will kill a pheasant at eighty yards?”

“Not with shot,” he replied; “it will with a bullet.”

“Ah! that is a different thing altogether. I did not know you were loaded with ball. You were right to undertake the shot.” â “Would you like to see the pheasant?” asked Orlandi.

“Yes,” said Lucien, “I confess that I should.”

“Wait a moment, then;” and Orlandi began to imitate the clucking of the hen pheasant.

Then, without our being able to see the bird, we perceived a movement in the leaves of the chestnut-tree. The pheasant was evidently mounting branch by branch as he replied to the call of the hen imitated by Orlandi.

At length he arrived at the end of a branch, and was quite visible in the moonlight.

Orlandi ceased, and the pheasant remained motionless.

At the same moment Lucien levelled his gun, and, with a quick aim, fired.

The pheasant fell like a stone.

“Fetch it!” said Lucien to Diamond.

The dog rushed into the brushwood, and soon returned with the bird, pierced by the bullet, in his mouth.

“That is a good shot,” I said. “I congratulate you upon it, particularly with a fowling-piece.”

“Oh,” said Lucien, “I do not deserve your praise, for one barrel is rifled, and carries a ball like a carbine.”

“Never mind, such a shot with a carbine deserves honourable mention.”

“Bah!” said Orlandi; “why, with a carbine, Monsieur Lucien could hit a five-franc piece at three hundred paces.”

“And can you shoot with a pistol as well as with a gun?”

“Yes,” said Lucien, “very nearly. At twenty-five paces I can always divide six balls out of twelve on the blade of a knife.”

I took off my hat and saluted the speaker, saying, “Is your brother an equally good shot?”

“My brother?” he replied. “Poor Louis! he has never handled gun nor pistol in his life. My great fear is that he will get mixed up in some affair in Paris, and, brave as he undoubtedly is, he will be killed to sustain the honour of the country.”

Lucien, as he spoke, thrust the pheasant into the great pocket of his velveteen coat.

“Now,” he said, “my dear Orlandi, till to-morrow farewell.”

“Till to-morrow, Monsieur Lucien?”

“I count upon your punctuality. At ten o’clock your friends and relatives will be at the end of the street. On the opposite side Colona, with his friends, will be likewise present, and we shall be on the steps of the church.”

“That is agreed, Monsieur Lucien. Many thanks for your trouble; and to you, monsieur,” he added, turning to me, “lam obliged for the honour you have done me.”

After this exchange of compliments we separated, Orlandi disappearing in the brushwood, while we took our way back to the village.

As for Diamond, he was puzzled which to follow, and he stood looking right and left at the Orlandi and ourselves alternately. After hesitating for about five minutes, he did us the honour to accompany Lucien and me.

I must confess that while I had been scaling the ruined walls I had had my misgivings as to how I should descend, for the descent is usually more difficult, under such circumstances, than the ascent.

But I was glad to see that Lucien, apparently divining my thoughts, took another route home. This road, also, wag advantageous in another respect, for it was not so rough, and conversation was easier.

At length, finding the path quite smooth, I continued my questions to my companion, in accordance with my usual custom, and said — “Now peace is made, I suppose?”

“Yes, and as you see, it has not been concluded without some trouble. I have been obliged to represent all the advances as having been made by the Colona; for, you see, they have had five men killed, while the Orlandi have lost but four. The former consented to the arrangement yesterday, and the latter to-day. The upshot of it all is that the Colona have agreed to hand over a live hen to the Orlandi, a concession which will prove them in the wrong. This last consideration has settled the matter.”

“And to-morrow this touching reconciliation will be effected?”

“Yes, to-morrow, at ten o’clock. You are still unfortunate; you hoped to see a Vendetta?”

The young man smiled bitterly as he continued — “But this is a finer thing than a Vendetta! isn’t it? For four hundred years, in Corsica, they have been talking of nothing else. Now you will see a reconciliation. I assure you it is a much rarer sight than a Vendetta!”

I could not help laughing.

“There, you see, you are laughing at us,” he said. “And you are right, after all. We are really a very droll people.”

“No,” I replied, “I was laughing at another strange thing, and that is, to see that yon are annoyed with yourself because you have succeeded so well in bringing about a reconciliation.”

“Ah!” he replied. “If you had understood what we said you would have admired my eloquence. But come back in ten years’ time, and you will find us all speaking French.”

“You would make a first-rate pleader.”

“No, no — I am a referee — an arbitrator. What the deuce do you expect? Must not an arbitrator reconcile opposing factions? They might nominate me the arbiter between Heaven and Hell, that I might teach them to be reconciled, although, in my own heart, I should feel that I was a fool for my pains.”

I perceived that this conversation was only irritating to my new acquaintance, so I let it drop, and as he did not attempt to resume it, we proceeded in silence, and did not speak again until we had reached his house.

CHAPTER X.

Griffo was in attendance when we arrived, and before his master said a word the servant had taken the pheasant from Lucien’s pocket. The valet had heard and had understood the object of the shot.

Madame de Franchi had not yet retired to rest, although she had gone upstairs, and she had left a message with Griffo to request her son to go into her room before she went to bed.

The young man first inquiring whether I was in want of anything, and on my reply in the negative, begged to be excused, to wait upon his mother.

Of course I acknowledged the politeness, and leaving him, went up to my own room.

I entered it with a certain feeling of self congratulation. I was pleased that I had divined the character of Louis, as I had found out Lucien’s.

I undressed deliberately, and having taken down a volume of Victor Hugo’s works, I lay down and enjoyed myself thoroughly with *Les Orientales.*

For the hundredth time I came upon *Le Feu du ciel,* and re-read it once more. I was fully occupied thus, when I fancied I heard a step upon the staircase, which stopped at my door. I suspected that my host had paused outside, washing to bid me good-night, but scarcely liking to venture in for fear I should be asleep; so I cried out “Come in,” and put my book upon the table.

In fact, as I spoke the door opened, and Lucien appeared.

“I trust you will excuse me,” he said; “but it seems to me that I have been somewhat rude this evening, and I did not like to retire without making my excuses to you. So I have come to make the *amende honorable* — and as I daresay you have a number of questions to ask I am quite at your disposal.”

“A thousand thanks,” I replied; “but, thanks to your good nature, I am already well informed upon most topics concerning which I desired information, and there only remains one question, which I have made up my mind *not* to ask.”

“Why?”

li Because it would appear too impertinent. However, if you remain here I confess I cannot answer for myself. I give you fair warning!”

“Well, then, go on. Curiosity unsatisfied is an uncomfortable companion, and awakens all kinds of suppositions; and two, at least, out of every three guesses concerning a fact are sure to be quite wide of the mark, and more likely to prejudice the object than to arrive at the truth concerning it.”

“Well, you may rest easy. My worst suspicions concerning you lead me to regard you as a sorcerer!”

The young man laughed loudly.

“The devil! You have inoculated me with some of your curiosity: tell me why, I entreat you — speak out!”‘

“Well, then, yon have had the kindness to clear np many things which were before obscure to me; but one thing you did not touch upon. You have shown me your beautiful weapons, which I should like to examine again before my departure.”

“Granted. That’s one reason.”

“You have explained to me the inscriptions upon the carbines.”

“That’s another reason.”

“You have made it clear to me that, thanks to the phenomenon of your birth, you always experience — although far away from him, the same sensations that agitate your brother, and no doubt he feels equally your troubles.”

“That is a third reason for your belief in my sorcery!”

“Yes, but Madame de Franchi, when referring to the sadness you lately have experienced, and which leads yon to think that some misfortune threatens your brother, asked you if you were sure he were not dead, and you replied ‘No, for then I should have seen him.’”

“Yes, I remember I did say so.”

“Well, then, if such an explanation may be entrusted to a stranger, will you explain to me how this could happen?”

The young man’s face had assumed a very grave expression as I was sneaking, and I hesitated to pronounce the last words.

He was silent for a moment after I ceased to speak, and I said —

“I am afraid that I have been too indiscreet; pray forget that I spoke on the subject at all.”

“No,” he replied, quietly; “no, but you are a man of the world, and as such inclined to be somewhat incredulous. So, you see, I am rather afraid you will treat as a superstition an old family tradition which has been handed down for centuries.”

“Listen,” I said. “I can declare one thing, and that is that no one is more easily convinced than I am on all questions of legendary or traditionary lore — and I am always ready to give credence to things regarded as impossible!”

“So you believe in ghosts?”

“Do you wish to hear me tell how I saw one?”

“Yes, that will encourage me.”

“My father died in 1807, when I was three and a-half years old. When the doctor announced his speedy death I was sent away to the house of an old cousin in the country.

“She had made up a bed for me opposite her own, to which I was sent at the usual time, and, notwithstanding the trouble hanging over me, I feel fast asleep.

“I was suddenly awakened by three violent blows upon the door of the chamber; I got out of bed and walked across the floor to open it.

“‘Where are you going? ‘asked my cousin.

“She had herself been awakened by the noise, but could not overcome her terror, knowing very well that as the front door was fastened no one would be likely to come to the room in which we were sleeping.

“‘I am going to open the door to my father, who has come to bid me adieu,’ I replied.

“It was then she jumped out of bed and insisted upon my lying down again. I cried for a long time and very bitterly, saying,’ Papa is at the door, and I want to see papa again before he goes away for ever.’”

“And has the apparition ever returned since?” asked Lucien.

“No, although I have often called upon it; but, perhaps, Providence permitted to the innocence and purity of the child what it declines to accord to the sinfulness of the man.”

“Well, then,” said Lucien smiling, “in our family we are more fortunate than you.”

“Then you are enabled to see your deceased parents?”

“Yes, always when any great event is about to happen or has been accomplished.”

“And to what do you attribute this privilege?”

“I will tell you the tradition that has been handed down. You remember that I told you that Savilia died leaving two sons.”

“Yes, I recollect.”

"Well, these children grew up concentrating on each other the affection they would have bestowed on other relatives had any been alive. They swore nothing should separate them, not even death, and after some incantation or other they wrote with their blood on two pieces of parchment, which they exchanged, the reciprocal oath that whichever died first should appear to the other at the moment of his own death, and, subsequently, at every important epoch of his brother's life. Three months afterwards one of the two brothers was killed in an ambuscade at the moment when the survivor was sealing a letter addressed to him. Just as he was pressing the signet upon the burning wax he heard a sigh behind him, and, turning round, perceived his brother standing behind him, and touching his shoulder, although he felt no pressure from the hand.

Then, by a mechanical movement, he held out the letter that was destined for his brother, the spirit took the letter and disappeared. On the night before the survivor's death, the ghost appeared again.

"There is no doubt that the brothers not only made this engagement for themselves, but it applies also to their descendants, for spirits have appeared not only at the moment of the death of those who had passed away, but also on the eve of any great event in their lives."

"And have you never seen any apparition?"

"No; but like my father, who, during the night preceding his death, was warned by his father that he was about to die, so I presume my brother and I inherit the privilege of our ancestors, not having done anything to forfeit it."

"And is this privilege accorded to the males of the family only?"

"Yes."

"That is strange."

"It is as I say."

I looked at the young man as he was speaking to me. He was cool, calm, and grave, and I could not help repeating with Hamlet —

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

In Paris I should have thought that this young man was hoaxing me; but here in Corsica, in a little unknown village, one must look upon him either as a foolish person endeavouring to deceive one for his own purposes, or as a privileged being amongst other men.

"And now," he said, after a long silence, "are yon satisfied?"

“Yes, thank yon,” I answered. “I appreciate your confidence, and will promise to keep your secret.”

“Oh, goodness,” he said, laughing, “there is no secret in the matter — the first peasant yon meet would tell you all I have told you; I only hope that in Paris my brother has not boasted of this privilege, which would only cause men to laugh, and would frighten the ladies.”

So saying, he bade me good-night, and retired to his room.

Although fatigued, I was not able to sleep for some time, and when I did. at last sleep I was restless.

I appeared to see in a confused manner in my dreams all the people with whom I had come in contact that day. It was only when day broke that I fell into a sound sleep, and was awakened by the striking of a clock, close to my bed, apparently.

I rang the bell, without rising, for my lazy predecessor had provided a bell-rope close at hand, the only one probably in the village.

Griffo immediately appeared, carrying some warm water; I saw that this valet had been well drilled.

Lucien, he said, had twice inquired ‘whether I was awake, and had told him that if I did not ring before half-past nine he would call me.

It was now twenty-five minutes past nine, so it would not be long before he came.

He soon made his appearance, dressed very elegantly in French style, with a black frock coat and white trowsers.

He noticed that I looked at him with some surprise.

“I hope you are admiring my dress,” he said; “another proof that I am becoming civilized.”

“Yes, indeed,” I replied, “and I confess I am considerably astonished to find that yon possess such a tailor in Ajaccio. I shall look quite the country bumpkin beside you.”

“I assure you my dress is quite Parisian, my dear friend. You see my brother and I being exactly the same height, he for a joke sent me a regular outfit, which I only wear on grand occasions, to receive the prefect, for instance, or when the commandant makes his departmental inspection; or, better still, when I receive a guest like yourself, and when that pleasure is combined with such important business as we are about to accomplish to-day.”

There was in this young man’s manner of speaking a polished irony, and good-nature withal, which at once set people at their ease, and never passed the bounds of perfect politeness.

I simply bowed in reply, while he carefully inducted his hands into a pair of kid gloves of Paris manufacture.

As now attired, he looked a thorough Parisian.

All this time I was dressing rapidly.

A quarter to ten struck.

“Come along,” said Lucien, “if you wish to see the play. I think it is time we took our seats, unless, indeed, you would rather have breakfast first, which appears to me only reasonable.”

“Thank you, I seldom eat before eleven or twelve, so I am ready to face both operations.”

“Come along, then.”

I took up my hat and followed him upstairs.

CHAPTER XI.

PROM the top of the steps by which one reached the door of the chateau usually inhabited by Madame de Franchi and her son, one could look over the square.

This square, so silent the night before, was now full of people, but curiously enough there was not a man to be seen, the crowd was composed of women and children under twelve.

On the lowest step of the church door we could perceive a man girdled with a tri-coloured sash. This was the mayor.

Under the portico, another man clothed in black was seated at a table. This was the notary, and the written paper under his hand was the act of reconciliation.

I took my place beside the table! with the sponsors of the Orlandi. On the other side were the sponsors of the Colona faction. Lucien stood behind the notary so as to show that he acted for both..

In the choir of the church one could perceive the priests ready to solemnize the mass.; The clock struck ten.

At that moment a shiver pervaded the crowd and all eyes were turned towards the end of the street, if one could so call the unequal interval between the houses.

Immediately on the mountain side appeared the Orlandi, and in the direction of the river was the Colona, each followed by his partisans, but as had been arranged neither party carried arms.

The two chiefs presented a very vivid contrast.

Orlandi, as I said, was tall, brown, agile and thin.

Colona, on the other hand, was short, stontish, and vigorous; he had red hair and beard, both of which were short and curly.

Both men carried olive branches, the symbol of peace, which was the idea of the worthy mayor.

But besides this olive branch, the Colona held a white fowl by the feet; this bird was destined to replace that which had given rise to the quarrel, and the fowl was alive.

This last was a point that had long been discussed, and had very nearly upset the whole arrangement. The Colona looked upon it as a double humiliation to have to render back a living fowl for the one which his aunt had thrown dead in the face of the cousin of the Orlandi.

However, by force of reasoning, Lucien had persuaded the Colona. to provide the fowl, as he had managed to induce the Orlandi to accept it.

When the two rivals appeared, the bells, which until now had been silent, broke forth into a merry peal.

When they caught sight of each other both Orlandi and his brother made a similar movement of repulsion, but, nevertheless, they both continued their way.

Just opposite the church door they stopped, a few paces only dividing them.

If three days previously these men had caught sight of each other within a hundred paces, one of the two certainly would have remained on the field.

For about five minutes there was a profound silence, a silence which, notwithstanding the peaceful nature of the ceremony, was anything but pacific.

Then at length the mayor spoke.

“Well, Colona,” he said, “do you not know that you have to speak first?”

Colona made an effort and muttered some words in the Corsican patois.

I fancied I understood him to say that he regretted having been in Vendetta with his good neighbour Orlandi, and that he offered in reparation the white hen which he held in his hand.

Orlandi waited until his adversary had finished speaking, and replied in some words which I took to be a promise that he would forget everything but the solemn reconciliation that had that day taken place in the presence of Monsieur Lucien and the notary.

After that the rivals preserved a dogged silence.

“Now, gentlemen,” said the mayor, “you have only got to shake hands.”

By a simultaneous movement the rivals clasped their hands behind their backs.

The mayor descended from his elevated seat, and seizing the hand of Colona sought for the hand of the Orlandi, and having possessed himself of both he, with some effort, which he endeavoured to conceal with a smile, succeeded in joining the two hands.

The notary seized the moment, while the mayor held the two hands together, to stand up and read the deed declaring the feud to be at an end. The document was as follows: —

“In the presence of ns, Giuseppe Antonia Sarrola, Notary Royal of Sullacaro in the Province of Sartène.

“In the grand place of the village opposite the church, in the presence of the mayor, the sponsors, and all the population.

“Between Gaetano Orso Orlandi, called Orlandini.

“And Marco Vincenzio Colona, called Schioppone.

“It is solemnly ratified as follows: —

“From this day, 4th of March, 1841, the Vendetta declared between the families shall cease.

“From the same period they shall live together as good neighbours and friends, as their relatives did before the unhappy disunion which has so long alienated their families.

“In witness whereof they have signed these presents under the portico of the village church, with Monsieur Polo Arbori, mayor of the commune, Monsieur Lucien de Franchi, arbitrator, the sponsors of the two contracting parties, and ourselves the Notary.

“Sullacaro, 4th of March, 1841.”

I note with admiration that the mayor had very prudently omitted all mention of the hen which had put the Colona in such a bad position with the Orlandi.

So the face of the Colona got brighter in proportion as the figure of the Orlandi clouded; the latter looked at the hen which he was holding in his hand as if he had a great idea to throw it in the face of the Colona. But a glance from Lucien de Franchi checked this intention in the bud.

The mayor saw that he had no time to lose; he stepped back, holding the hands of the rivals, and without loosing them for a moment.

Then, in order to anticipate any discussion at the moment of signature, in view of each considering it a concession to sign before the other, he took the pen and wrote his own name first, and thus converting the shame into an honour, passed the pen to Orlandi, who took it, signed, and passed it to Lucien, who in his turn handed it to Colona, who made a cross.

At that moment the Te Deum was chanted as if for a victory.

We all signed afterwards, without distinction of rank or title, as the nobility of France a hundred years before had signed the protestation against Monsieur le Duc du Maine.

Then the heroes of the day entered the church, and knelt in the places appointed for them.

I saw that from this moment Lucien appeared perfectly at ease. All had been finished satisfactorily: the reconciliation had taken place not only before man but before Heaven.

The service terminated without any incident worth recording; and when it was over, Orlandi and Colona passed out with the same ceremony as before.

At the church door, at the instance of the mayor, they once again shook hands; and then each one, attended by his friends and relatives, made his way to his house, which for three years he had not entered.

Lucien and myself went back to Madame de Franchit house, where dinner awaited us.

It is not difficult to perceive by the attentions I received that Lucien had read my name over my shoulder when I was signing the paper, and the name was not altogether unknown to him.

In the morning I had announced to Lucien my intention to depart after dinner. I was urgently recalled to Paris by the rehearsals of “Un Mariage sons Louis XV.,” and notwithstanding the importunities of mother and son, I persisted in adhering to my first determination.

Lucien then asked permission to take advantage of my offer, and to take a letter to his brother; and Madame Franchi made me promise that I would hand this letter myself to her son.

There was really no trouble in the matter, for Louis de Franchi, like a true Parisian as he was, lived at No. 7, Rue du Helder.

I asked permission to see Lucien’s room once again, and he himself conducted me thither, explaining everything to me.

“You know,” he said, “if anything strikes you I hope you will take it, it is yours.”

I unhooked a small poignard hanging in an obscure corner, as if to show that it had no value attached to it; and as I had seen Lucien notice with some curiosity my hunting-belt and its appurtenances, I begged him to accept it, and he had the good taste to take it without being pressed.

At that moment Griffo appeared to tell me that the horse was saddled and the guide waiting.

I put aside the little present I had intended to give to Griffo, which consisted of a hunting-knife and two pistols attached to it, the barrels of which were hidden in the hilt.

I never saw anybody so delighted as he was at this present.

I descended, and found Madame de Franchi at the bottom of the staircase, where she was waiting to bid me good-bye, in the same place where she had bade me welcome. I kissed her hand, feeling great respect for such a simple-minded and yet so dignified a woman.

Lucien accompanied me to the door.

“On any other day,” he said, “I would saddle my horse, and ride with you beyond the mountain, but to-day I dare not quit Sullacaro for fear that one or other of the newly-made friends might commit some folly.”

“You are quite right,” I said; “and for my own part, I am very glad to have assisted at a ceremony so new to Corsica.”

“Yes,” he said, “you may well congratulate yourself, for you have to-day witnessed a thing which is enough to make our ancestors turn in their graves.”

“I understand — their word was sufficient; they did not need a notary to reconcile them, I suppose?”

“They were never reconciled at all.”

He then shook me by the hand.

“Have yon no message for your brother?” I said.

“Yes, certainly, if it will not incommode you to deliver it.”

“Well, then,” said he, “let us embrace. I can only deliver that which I am able to receive.”

So we embraced each other.

“We shall see you again some day?” I said.

“Yes, if you come to Corsica.”

“No, but won’t you come to Paris?”

“I shall never go there,” replied Lucien.

“In any case, you will find my card on the mantelpiece in your brother’s room — do not forget the address.”

“I will promise you that should any event call me to the Continent you shall have my first visit.”

“Very well, that is agreed.”

We shook hands once again and parted; but I noticed, so long as he could see me, he followed me with his eyes.

All was quiet in the village, although, of course, there was the usual agitation which follows the completion of a great public act; and as I went along the street I sought my friend Orlandi, who had never addressed a word to me, nor even thanked me; and so I passed the last house in the village, and entered the open country without having seen any one like him.

I thought he had entirely forgotten me, and under the circumstances I quite excused him, but before I got very far out of the village I perceived a man stride from the underwood, and place himself in the middle of the road. I recognized him at once as the man who in my great regard for appearances, and in my impatience, I had accused of ingratitude.

He was dressed in the same costume as he had appeared in the previous evening in the ruins of Vicentello.

When I was about twenty paces distant from him he took off his hat; while I spurred my horse so as not to keep Orlandi waiting.

“Monsieur,” he said, “I did not wish you to quit Sullacaro without accepting my thanks for the kindness you have shown to a poor peasant like myself, and as in the village I had not the heart, and could not command the language, to thank you, I waited for yon here.”

“I am obliged to you,” I said; “but it was not necessary to take any trouble about it, and all the honour has been mine.”

“And after all, monsieur,” continued the bandit, “the habit of four years is not easily overcome. The mountain air is strong at first, almost suffocating — but now when I go to sleep in a house I should be afraid the roof would fall upon me.”

“But surely,” I said, “you will now resume your former habits. I understand you have a house, a field, and a vineyard.”

“Yes, but my sister looks after the house; but the Lucquois are there to work in the field, and to raise the grapes. We Corsicans do not work.”

“What do you do, then?”

“We overlook the labourers. We walk about with a gun upon our shoulders.”

“Well, my dear Monsieur Orlandi,” I said, extending my hand, “I wish you good luck; but recollect that my honour as well as your own will be compromised if you fire at anything but game or wild animals. You must never on any account draw a trigger on the Colona family.”

“Ah! your Excellency,” he replied, with an expression of countenance which I never remarked except amongst the natives of Normandy, “that hen they gave us was a very thin one.”

And without another word he disappeared in the brushwood.

I continued my journey thinking that it was very likely that the meagre fowl would be the cause of another rupture between the Orlandi and the Colona.

That evening I slept at Albitucia, next day I reached Ajaccio.

Eight days afterwards I was in Paris.

CHAPTER XII.

THE day I arrived in Paris I called upon M. Louis de Franchi. He was not at home.

I left my card, with an intimation that I had just returned from Sullacaro, and that I was the bearer of a letter from M. Lucien, his brother. I inquired when he would be at home, as I had undertaken to deliver the letter with my own hand.

To conduct me to his master's study, where I wished to write a note, the valet led me through the dining-room and the *salon.*

I looked around me as I proceeded with a curiosity which will be understood, and I recognized the influence of the same taste which I had already perceived at Sullacaro; only the taste was here set off by true Parisian elegance. M. Louis de Franchi certainly appeared to have a very charming lodging for a bachelor.

Next morning, about eleven o'clock, my servant announced M. Louis de Franchi. I told the man to offer my visitor the papers and to say that I would wait on him as soon as I was dressed.

In five minutes I presented myself.

M. Louis de Franchi who was, no doubt from a sense of courtesy, reading a tale I had contributed to *La Presse,* raised his head as the door opened, and I entered.

I stood perfectly astounded at the resemblance between the two brothers. He rose.

"Monsieur," he said, "I could scarcely credit my good fortune when I read your note yesterday on my return home. I have pictured you twenty times so as to assure myself that it was in accord with your portraits, and at last I, this morning, determined to present myself at your house without considering the hour, and I fear I have been too early."

"I hope you will excuse me if I do not at once acknowledge your kindness in suitable terms, but may I inquire whether I have the honour to address M. Louis or M. Lucien de Franchi?"

"Are you serious? Yes, the resemblance is certainly wonderful, and when I was last at Sullacaro nearly every one mistook one of us for the other, yet if he has not abjured the Corsican dress, you have seen him in a costume, which would make a considerable difference in our appearance.”

“And justly so,” I replied; “but as chance would have it, he was, when I left, dressed exactly as you are now, except that he wore white trowsers, so that I was not able to separate your presence from his memory with the difference in dress of which you speak, but,” I continued, taking the letter from my pocket-book, “I can quite understand you are anxious to have news from home, so pray read this which I would have left at your house yesterday had I not promised Madame de Franchi to give it to yon myself.”

“They were all quite well when you left, I hope?”

“Yes, but somewhat anxious.”

“On my account?”

“Yes; but read that letter, I beg of you.”

“If you will excuse me.”

So Monsieur Franchi read the letter while I made some cigarettes. I watched him as his eyes travelled rapidly over the paper, and I heard him murmur, “Dear Lucien, Darling Mother yes yes–I understand.”

I had not yet recovered from the surprise the strange resemblance between the brothers had caused me, but now I noticed what Lucien had told me, that j Louis was paler, and spoke French better than he did.

“Well,” I said when he had finished reading the | letter, and had lighted the cigarette, “You see, as I told you, that they are anxious about you, and I am glad that their fears are unfounded.”

“Well, no,” he said gravely, “not altogether; I have not been ill, it is true, but I have been out of sorts, and my indisposition has been augmented by this feeling that my brother is suffering with me.”

“Monsieur Lucien has already told me as much, and had I been sceptical I should now have been quite sure that what he said was a fact. I should require no further proof than I now have. So you, yourself, are convinced, monsieur, that your brother’s health depends to a certain extent on your own.”

“Yes, perfectly so.”

“Then “I continued, “as your answer will doubly interest me, may I ask, not from mere curiosity, if this indisposition of which you speak is likely soon to pass away?”

“Oh, you know, monsieur, that the greatest griefs give way to time, and that my heart, even if seared, will heal. Meantime, however, pray accept my thanks once more, and permit me to call on yon occasionally to have a chat about Sullacaro.”

“With the greatest pleasure,” I replied; “but why not now continue our conversation, which is equally agreeable to both of us. My servant is about to announce breakfast. Will you do me the honour to join me, and we can talk at our ease?”

“I regret that it is impossible; I have an appointment with the Chancellor at twelve o’clock, and you will understand that such a young advocate as I am cannot afford to stay away.”

“Ah, it is probably only about that Orlandi and Colona affair, as you, no doubt, are aware, and I can re-assure you on that point, for I myself signed the contract as sponsor for this Orlandi.”

“Yes, my brother said as much.”

“But,” he added, looking at his watch, “it is nearly twelve o’clock; I must go and inform the Chancellor that my brother has redeemed my word.”

“Ah, yes, most religiously, I can answer for that.”

“Dear Lucien, I knew quite well, though our sentiments do not agree on this point, that he would do it for me.”

“Yes, and I assure you it cost him something to comply.”

“We will speak of all this later, for you can well understand how pleasant it is for me to re-visit with your assistance my mother, my brother, and our home surroundings, so if you will tell me when you are disengaged.”

“That will be somewhat difficult; for this next few days I shall be very busy, but will you tell me where I am likely to find you.”

“Listen,” he said, “to-morrow is Mi-Careme, is it not?”

“To-morrow?”

“Yes.”

“Well.”

“Are yon going to the Opera Ball?”

“Yes and No. Yes, if yon will meet me there. No, if I have no object in going.”

“I must go, I am obliged to be there.”

“Ah, yes,” I said laughing, “I understand, as you said just now, time heals up the greatest griefs, and your seared heart must be healed.”

“You are under a misapprehension, for I shall probably sustain new tortures by going.”

“Then do not go.”

“But what is one to do in this world? We cannot always do what we want; I am dragged thither by fate in spite of myself. I know I had better not go, and nevertheless I shall go.”

“Well, then, to-morrow, at the Opera.”

“Yes, agreed.”

“At what time.”

“Half-past twelve midnight, if that will suit you.”

“And whereabouts?”

“In the *foyer* — at one, I will be in front of the clock.”

“That is understood.”

We then shook hands and he left the house quickly.

It was on the stroke of twelve.

As for me, I occupied myself all the afternoon and all the next day in those employments as a man is obliged to undertake on his return from a lengthened tour.

At half-past twelve o’clock at night I was at the rendezvous.

Louis had been waiting some time — he had been following a mask which he thought he recognized, but the lady had been lost in the crowd, and he had not been able to rejoin her.

I wished to speak of Corsica, but Louis was too absent to follow out such a grave subject of conversation. His eyes were constantly fixed on the clock, and suddenly he rushed away from my side, exclaiming:

“Ah, there is my bouquet of violets.”

He pushed through the crowd to join a woman who, evidently with a purpose, was holding a large bouquet of violets in her hand.

There were bouquets of every species in the foyer, and I myself was soon accosted by a bouquet of camellias, which congratulated me upon my safe return to Paris.

To the camellias succeeded a bouquet of rose-pompons.

To these succeeded a bouquet of heliotrope.

In fact I was engaged with my fifteenth bouquet when I encountered D–.

“Ah, is it you, *mm cher?” he* cried. “Welcome back; you have returned just in time. I have a little supper party this evening — so-and-so and so-and-so — and we shall count upon you.”

“A thousand thanks, my dear fellow; but though I am strongly tempted to accept your invitation, I can’t. I am engaged to somebody.”

"Yes; but everyone else will bring somebody also," said D–. "It is quite understood that there are to be six water-bottles, whose destiny it is to refresh, bouquets."

"Ah, you are mistaken. I shall have no bouquet to put in a water-bottle; I am with a friend."

"Well, you know the proverb, 'Friends of bur friends.'"

"It is a young gentleman whom you do not know."

"Well, then, we will make his acquaintance."

"I will tell him of his good fortune."

"Yes, and if he decline, bring him by force."

"I will do what I can, I promise you. At what time?"

"Three o'clock; but as supper will remain on table till six you have ample margin."

"Very well."

A bouquet of myosotis, which perhaps had heard the latter portion of our conversation, then took D — 's arm and walked on with him.

Shortly afterwards I met Louis, who had by this time got rid of his violets.

As the lady who honoured me with her attention just then was a trifle dull, I despatched her to one of my friends, and took Louis' arm.

"Well," I said, "have you learnt what you wanted to know?"

"Oh, yes! You know that at a masked ball people talk of the very things they ought to leave you in ignorance of."

"My poor friend," I said, "pardon me for thus addressing you; but it appears to me that I know you since I have known your brother. Look here — you are unhappy, are not you? Now what is it?"

"Oh, my goodness! Nothing worth talking about."

I saw that he did not wish to speak on the subject, so I said no more.

We took two or three turns in silence. — I was quite indifferent, for I expected nobody, but he was anxiously examining every domino that passed.

At length I said, "Do you know what you might do to-night?"

He started like a man suddenly aroused.

"I! No. I beg your pardon; what did you say?"

"I was about to propose a distraction which it seems to me you need."

"What is it?"

"Come to supper with a friend of mine, with me."

"Oh, no — I am not in a festive humour."

"Bah! They will talk nothing but nonsense, and that will amuse you."

"Well — but I am not invited!"

"You mistake — for you are."

"It is very kind on your part — but 'pon my word I am not worthy of — "

Just then we crossed D–. He seemed very much engaged with his bouquet of myosotis. Nevertheless he saw me.

"Well," he said, "is it settled? Three o'clock."

"Less settled than ever," I replied — " I cannot join you."

"Go to the Devil, then!"

And with this pious ejaculation he continued his course.

"Who is that gentleman?" inquired Louis.

"That is D– , one of my friends; a very cheerful youth, though he is the manager of one of our most respectable papers."

"Monsieur D–!" exclaimed Louis. "Do you know *him?"*

"Certainly. I have known him for some years."

"And is he the person with whom you are invited to sup this evening?"

"Yes, the same."

"Then it was to his house you intended to take me?"

"Yes.", "Then that alters the case. I accept, and with very great pleasure."

"All right. That settles the question."

"Perhaps, after all, I ought not to go," muttered Louis, smiling sadly. "But you remember what I said yesterday about my destiny. Here is the proof. I should have done better not to have come here this evening."

At this moment we again encountered D–. "My dear fellow," I said, "I have changed my mind!"

"And you will' join us?"

"Yes."

"Bravo! But I ought to mention one thing."

"That is?"

"That whoever sups with us to-night, sups with us again to-morrow evening."

"By what law of society is that?"

"By the laws of the wager made with Chateau Renaud."

I felt Louis' arm quiver as it rested on mine — I turned round; but though his face was deadly pale, it was impassable.

"What is the wager?" I inquired.

“Oh, it would occupy too much time to repeat here, and, besides, some one interested might overhear, and it might thus be lost.”

“What wonderful discretion you possess! At three, then.”

“At three!”

Once more we separated, and as I glanced at the clock I saw it then was thirty-five minutes past two.

“Do you know this M. de Chateau Renaud?” asked Louis, who vainly attempted to command his voice, and to conceal his emotion.

“Only by sight. I have met him occasionally in society.”

“Then he is not a friend of yours?”

“Not even an acquaintance.”

“Ah, so much the better,” replied Louis.

“Why so?”

“For no particular reason.”

“But do you know him?”

“Indirectly.”

Notwithstanding this evasive answer, it was easy to perceive that between Louis and Chateau Renaud there existed one of those mysterious bonds which could only be forged by a woman. An instinctive feeling assured me that it would be best for all if he and I returned home quietly.

“Will you take my advice, Monsieur de Franchi,” I said.

“About what? tell me!”

“Do not go to supper at D–’s house.”

“Why not? Does he not expect us. Have yon not told him that you will bring a friend?”

“Yes, but that is not the point.”

“What is the point then.”

“I am sure yon had better not go, that is all!”

“But surely you have some reason to give for your change of opinion? just now you were insisting on my presence at D–’s against my will.”

“I did not then know that we should meet Chateau Renaud,”

But that is all the better. I believe he is a very pleasant companion, and I shall be glad to make his acquaintance.”

“Very well,” I replied — ” so be it. Shall we go now?”

We accordingly went downstairs for our paletots.

D– lived within a short distance of the opera house, the morning was very fine, and I hoped that the open air would enliven my companion. So I proposed that we should walk, and this he agreed to.

CHAPTER XIII.

WE found many of my friends assembled — habitués of the opera lobbies and of the greenroom, and, as I had expected, a few unmasked “bouquets “anxious for the time to come when the water-bottles would be used — supper time!

I introduced Louis to several friends, and it is needless to say that he was politely received and welcomed.

Ten minutes after our arrival D– entered, accompanied by his bouquet of myosotis, who unmasked herself with a freedom and precision which argued a long acquaintance with these sort of parties.

I introduced Louis to D–.

“Now,” said B , “if all the presentations have been made, I suggest that we present ourselves at table.”

“All the presentations are made, but all the guests have not arrived,” replied D–.

“Who is expected then?”

“Chateau Renaud is still wanting to complete the party.”

“Ah, just so. By-the-by, was there not some bet?”

“Yes. We laid a wager of a supper for twelve, that he would not bring a certain lady here to-night.”

“And who is the lady,” asked the bouquet of myosotis, “who is so very shy as to be made the subject of a bet?”

I looked at Louis de Franchi. He was outwardly composed, but pale as a corpse.

“Faith, I don’t know that there is any great harm in telling yon her name, especially as none of yon know her I think. She is Madame.”

Louis placed his hand upon D–’s arm.

“Monsieur,” he said; “will you grant me a favour? As a new acquaintance I venture to ask it!”

“What is it, monsieur?”

“Do not name the lady who is expected with M. de Chateau Renaud, you know she is a married woman!”

“Oh yes, but her husband is at Smyrna, in the East Indies, in Mexico, or some such place. When a husband lives so far away it is nearly the same as having no husband at all."

"Her husband will return in a few days. I know him. He is a gallant fellow. I would wish, if possible, to spare him the chagrin of learning on his return that his wife had made one at this supper-party."

"Excuse me, monsieur," said D–, "I was not aware that you are acquainted with the lady, and I did not think she was married. But since you know her and her husband–"

"I do know them."'

"Then we must exercise greater discretion. Ladies and gentlemen, whether Chateau Renaud comes or not — whether he wins or loses his bet, I must beg of you all to keep this adventure secret."

We all promised, not because our moral senses were offended, but because we were hungry and wished to begin our supper.

"Thank you, monsieur," said Louis to D–, holding out his hand to him. "I assure you, you are acting like a thorough gentleman in this matter."

We then passed into the supper-room, and each one took his allotted place. Two chairs were vacant, those reserved for Chateau Renaud and his expected companion.

The servant was about to remove them.

"No," said the master, "let them remain; Chateau Renaud has got until four o'clock to decide his wager. At four o'clock if he is not here he will have lost."

I could not keep my eyes from Louis de Franchi; I saw him watching the timepiece anxiously. It was then 3:40 A.M.

"Is that clock right?" asked Louis.

"That is not my concern," said D–, laughing.

"I set it by Chateau Renaud's watch, so that there may be no mistake."

"Well, gentlemen," said the bouquet of myosotis, "it seems we cannot talk of anything but Chateau Renaud and his unknown fair one. We are getting horribly slow,' I think."

"You are quite right, my dear," replied V –.

There are so many women of whom we can speak, and who are only waiting to be spoken to–"

"Let us drink their health," cried D–.

So we did, and then the champagne went round briskly; every guest had a bottle at his or her elbow.

I noticed that Louis scarcely tasted his wine; “Drink, man! “I whispered: “don’t you see that she will not come?”

“It still wants a quarter to four,” said he; “at four o’clock, even though I shall be late in commencing, I promise you I will overtake some of you.”

“Oh, very well! “I replied.

While we had been exchanging these few words in a low tone, the conversation had become general around the table. Occasionally D– and Louis glanced at the clock, which ticked regularly on without any care for the impatience of the two men who were so intent upon its movements.

At five minutes to four I looked at Louis.

“To your health,” I said.

He took his glass, smiled, and raised it to his lips. He had drunk about half its contents when a ring was heard at the front door.

I did not think it possible that Louis could become any paler than he was, but I saw my mistake then.

“‘Tis he,” he muttered.

“Yes, but perhaps he may have come alone,” I replied.

“We shall see in a moment.”

The sound of the bell had attracted everybody’s attention, and the most profound silence suddenly succeeded the buzz of conversation which had till then prevailed.

Then the sound of talking was heard in the anteroom.

D–rose and opened the door.

“I can recognize her voice,” said Louis, as he grasped my arm with a vice-like grip.

“We shall see! wait! be a man! “I answered. “It must be evident that if she has thus come to supper with a man, of her own will, to the house of a stranger, she is not worthy your sympathy.”

“I beg, madam, that you will enter,” said D–’s voice in the outer room. “We are all friends here I assure you.”

“Yes, come in, my dear Emily,” said M. de Chateau Renaud, “you need not take off your mask if you do not wish to do so.”

“The wretch,” muttered Louis.

At that moment a lady entered, dragged in rather than assisted by D–, who fancied he was doing the honours, and by Chateau Renaud.

“Three minutes to four,” said Chateau Renaud to D–, in a low voice.

“Quite right, ray dear fellow, you have won.”

“Not yet, monsieur,” said the young unknown addressing Chateau Renaud, and drawing herself up to her full height. “I can now understand your persistence. You laid a wager that I would sup here. Is that so?”

Chateau Renaud was silent. Then addressing D–, she continued.

“Since this man cannot answer, will you, monsieur, reply. Did not M. de Chateau Renaud wager that he would bring me here to supper to-night?”

“I will not hide from you, madame, that he flattered us with that hope,” replied D–.

“Well, then, M. de Chateau Renaud has lost, for I was quite unaware he was bringing me here. I believed we were to sup at the house of a friend of my own. So it appears to me that M. de Chateau Renaud has not won his wager.”

“But now you are here, my dear Emily, you may as well remain; won’t you? See, we have a good company and some pleasant young ladies too!”

“Now that I am here,” replied the unknown, “I will thank the gentleman who appears to be the master of the house for the courtesy with which he has treated me. But as, unfortunately, I cannot accept his polite invitation I will beg M. Louis de Franchi to see me home.”

Louis with a bound placed himself between the speaker and Chateau Renaud.

“I beg to observe, madam,” said the latter between his shut teeth, “that I brought you hither and consequently I am the proper person to conduct you home.”

“Gentlemen,” said the unknown, “you are five, I put myself into your honourable care. I trust you will defend me from the violence of M. de Chateau Renaud!”

Chateau Renaud made a movement. We all rose at once.

“Very good, madame,” he said. “You are at liberty. I know with whom I have to reckon.”

“If you refer to me, sir,” replied Louis de Franchi with an air of hauteur impossible to describe, “you will find me all day to-morrow at the Rue du Helder, No. 7.”

“Very well, monsieur. Perhaps I shall not have the pleasure to call upon you myself, but I hope that two friends of mine may be as cordially received in my place.”

“That was all that was necessary,” said Louis, shrugging his shoulders disdainfully. “A challenge before a lady! Come, madame,” he continued, offering his arm. “Believe me, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the honour you do me.”

And then they left the room, amidst the most profound silence.

“Well, gentlemen, so it seems I have lost,” said Chateau Renaud, when the door closed. “That’s all settled! To-morrow evening all of you sup with me at the Frères Provençaux.”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE next day, or rather the same day, at ten o’clock, I called upon M. Louis de Franchi.

As I was ascending the staircase, I met two young men coming down. One was evidently a civilian, the other wore the Legion of Honour, and though in *mufti* I could see he was an officer.

I had, no doubt, that these gentlemen had just been with M. de Franchi, and I watched them downstairs. Then I continued my way to Louis’ apartments and rang the bell.

The servant opened the door. His master was in his study.

When the man announced me, Louis, who was writing, looked up and exclaimed —

“Ah, welcome! I was just writing to you. I am very glad to see you. Joseph, I am not at home to any one.”

The servant went out and left us alone.

“Didn’t you meet two gentlemen upon the stairs?” asked Louis, as he placed a chair.

“Yes, one of them was decorated.”

“The same.”

“I fancied they had called upon you.”

“You are quite right.”

“Did they come on behalf of M. de Chateau Renaud?”

“They are his seconds.”

“Ah! so he has taken this matter seriously it seems.”

“He could scarcely do otherwise,” replied Louis.

“So they came to.”

“To request me to name two friends who would confer with them; I thought of you.”

“I am really honoured by your kindness. But I cannot go alone.”

“I have also written to ask an old friend, the Baron Giordano Martelli, to breakfast here. He will come at eleven. We will breakfast together, and at twelve, perhaps, you will be kind enough to go and see these gentlemen who have promised to remain at home until three o’clock. Here are their names and addresses.”

Louis handed me two cards as he spoke.

One card represented the Baron René de Chateau-grand, the other M. Adrien de Boissy.

The former lived in the Rue de la Paix, No. 12.

The latter, who I now saw, belonged to the army, was a lieutenant of Chasseurs d'Afrique, and lived in the Rue de Lille, No. 29.

I turned the cards over and over in my fingers.

"Well, what embarrasses you?" asked Louis.

"I should like to be told frankly if you look upon this as a serious matter. You know we must mould our conduct upon that."

"Indeed, I do consider it a very serious matter. You heard me place myself at M. de Chateau Renaud's disposal, he has sent to me. I must now go with the current."

"Yes, of course, but after all–"

"Go on," said Louis, smilingly.

"After all," I continued, "we must know what you are going to fight for. We cannot put two men up to cut and slash each other without having some ground for the encounter."

"Very well, let me tell you in as few words as possible, the head and front of the offending.

"When I first arrived in Paris I was introduced by a friend of mine, a captain in the navy, to his wife. She was young and beautiful. She made a deep impression upon me, and as I was really afraid I might end by falling in love with her, I very rarely went to my friend's house, although frequently pressed to do so.

‘‘My friend was rather piqued at my absence, and at last I frankly told him the truth, that his wife being so charming I was rather afraid to go to his house. He laughed, shook hands with me, and asked me, even pressed me, to dine with him that same evening.

"‘My dear Louis,’ said he, after dinner. ‘In a few weeks I shall sail for Mexico. I may be absent three months, perhaps six — or longer. We sailors sometimes know when we shall sail, but never when we may return. To you, I commend Emily during my absence. Emily, I beg of you to look upon M. Louis de Franchi as a brother.’

"The lady gave me her hand in token of agreement. I was stupefied! I did not know what to say, and I daresay I appeared very stupid to my future sister.

“Three weeks after this my friend sailed.

“During those three weeks he insisted that I should dine at least once a week with them *en famille.*

“Emily’s mother then came to live with her. I need scarcely say that her husband’s confidence was not abused, and though I loved her dearly I regarded her simply as a sister.

“Six months elapsed.

“Emily’s mother still remained with her, but when he went away, her husband had entreated her to receive as usual. There was nothing my poor friend had a greater horror of than to appear as a jealous husband. He adored Emily and had every confidence in her.

“So Emily continued to receive, and they were very friendly receptions. But her mother’s presence silenced all scandal Or cause for it, and no one could say a word against her reputation.

“At the end of three months or so M. de Chateau Renaud appeared.

“You believe in presentiments, I daresay. When I first saw that man I disliked him and would not speak to him. I hated him.

“But why I disliked him I cannot tell you. I did!

“Most likely because I saw that even at his first appearance Emily seemed inclined to like him, and he evidently admired her. Perhaps I am mistaken, but, as at the bottom of my heart I had never ceased to love Emily, I suspect I was jealous.

“So on the next occasion I did not lose sight of M. de Chateau Renaud. Perhaps he noticed my looks and it seemed to me that he was chatting in undertones to Emily and holding me up to ridicule.

“Had I yielded to my feelings I would have challenged him that evening, but I reflected that such conduct would be absurd, and restrained myself.

“Every Wednesday thenceforth was a greater trial than the last.

“M. de Cahteau Renaud is quite a man of the world, a dandy — a lion — I know how superior he is to me in many respects. But it seems to me that Emily values him more highly than he deserves.

“Soon I found out that I was not the only one who remarked her preference for M. de Chateau Renaud, and this preference increased to such an extent and became so obvious that one day Giordano, who like me was an habitué of the house, spoke to me about it.

“From that moment my resolution was taken. I determined to speak to Emily on the subject, convinced that she was only acting thoughtlessly and

I had but to call her attention to the matter to have it remedied.

“But to my great astonishment she took my remonstrances in joke, pretended that I was mad, and that those who agreed with me were as stupid as I was.

“However, I insisted.

“Emily only replied, that she would leave to my own decision as to whether a man in love was not necessarily a prejudiced judge.

“I remained perfectly stupefied; her husband must have told her everything.

“Now you will understand that under these circumstances, and being an unhappy and jealous lover, and only making myself objectionable to the lady, I ceased to visit at the house.

“But although I did not go to her parties I did not the less hear the gossip that was afloat, nor was I the less unhappy, for these reports were assuming a tangible shape.

“I resolved therefore to write to her, and beg her in the strongest language of which I was capable, for her own and her husband’s sake, to be careful. She never answered my letter.

“Some time afterwards I heard it publicly stated that Emily was actually the mistress of Chateau Renaud. What I suffered I cannot express.

“It was then my poor brother became conscious of my grief.

“Then, after about a fortnight, you came back to Paris. The very day you called upon me I received an anonymous letter from a lady unknown appointing a meeting at the Opera Ball.

“This woman said that she had certain information to convey to me respecting a lady friend of mine, whose Christian name only she would mention.

“The name was Emily.

“My correspondent said I should recognize her by her carrying a bouquet of violets.

“I told you at the time that I did not wish to go to the ball, but I repeat I was hurried thither by fate.

“I went as you know. I found my domino at the place at the hour indicated. She confirmed what I had already heard respecting Chateau Renaud and Emily, and if I wished proof, she would give it me, for Chateau Renaud had made a bet that he would take his new mistress to supper at M. D–’s house that, evening.

“Chance revealed to me that you knew M. D–, you suggested that I should accompany you. I accepted, you know the rest.”

“Now, what more could I do but await and accept the proposals that were made to me?”

“But,” I said, at length, as a sensation of fear crossed my mind, “lam afraid I heard your brother say that you had never handled a sword or a pistol.

“That is quite true!”

“Then you are absolutely at the mercy of your adversary!”

“I cannot help it. I am in the hands of Providence.”

CHAPTER XV.

As Louis was speaking, the servant announced the Baron Giordano Martelli.

He was a young Corsican from Sartène. He had served in the 11th Regiment, in which his gallantry had secured him promotion at the age of twenty-three.

“Well,” he said, after having bowed to me, “so things have come to a crisis, and no doubt you will soon have a visit from the seconds of Monsieur de Chateau Renaud.”

“They have been here already.”

“I suppose they have left their names and addresses?”

“Here are their cards.”

“Good.”

“Well, your servant has just told me that breakfast is waiting. Suppose we sit down, and after breakfast we can return their visit.”

We entered the *Salle à manger*, and put aside all business for the present.

During the meal Louis questioned me closely concerning my journey in Corsica, and I told him all the incidents with which the reader is acquainted. He made me repeat, over and over again, all that his mother and brother had said. He was quite touched, knowing the true Corsican instincts of Lucien, with the care he had to taken to reconcile the Orlandi and the Colona.

The clock struck twelve.

“I do not wish to hurry you, gentlemen,” said Louis, ‘‘hut I think you should return the visit of those gentlemen. It will not do to put ourselves in the wrong.”

“Oh, you may be quite easy on that point,” I said, “we have plenty of time before us.”

“*No* matter,” said the Baron Giordano, “Louis is right.”

“Now,” said I, “we must know whether you prefer to fight with sword or pistol?”

“Ah,” he replied, “it is all the same to me; I know as little about one as the other. Besides, Monsieur de Chateau Renaud will save me all trouble in choosing; he looks upon himself, no doubt, as the offended party, and as such will retain the choice of weapons.”

"However, the offence is doubtful, you only offered your arm, as you were asked to do."

"My opinion is," said Louis, "that all discussion should tend towards a peaceable arrangement of this matter. My tastes are not warlike, as you know. Far from being a duellist, this is the first affair of the kind I have had, and just for this very reason I wish to come well out of it."

"That is very easy to say, my friend, but you have to play for your life, and you leave to us and before your family the responsibility of the result."

"Ah, as to that you may make your mind quite easy, I know my mother and brother well enough; they would only ask whether I had conducted myself as a brave man, and if you replied in the affirmative they would be satisfied."

"But, hang it, we must know which arm you prefer."

"Well, if they propose pistols, accept them at once?"

"That is my advice, also," said the Baron.

"Very well, then, the pistol be it," I replied, "since that is the advice of both of you, but the pistol is a horrible weapon."

"Have I time to learn to fence between this and to-morrow?"

"No, unless, perhaps, you studied Grissier, and then you might learn enough to defend yourself."

Louis smiled.

"Believe me," said he, "that what will happen tomorrow is already written on high, and whatever we may do we cannot alter that."

We then shook hands with him and went downstairs.

Our first visit was naturally to the nearer of the two gentlemen who had called on behalf of our adversary.

We, therefore, visited Monsieur René de Chateau-grand, who lived, as we have said, at 12, Rue de la Paix.

Any other visitors were forbidden while we were calling, and we were at once introduced to his presence.

We found Monsieur de Chateaugrand a perfect man of the world — he would not for one moment give us the trouble of calling upon Monsieur de Boissy — he sent his own servant for him.

While we were waiting his appearance, we spoke of everything but the subject which had brought us thither, and in about ten minutes Monsieur de Boissy arrived.

The two gentlemen did not advance any pretensions to the choice of arms, the sword or pistol was equally familiar to M. de Chateau Renaud. They were quite willing to leave the selection to M. de Franchi, or to toss up. A louis was thrown into the air, face for sword, reverse for pistols. The coin came down reverse.

So it was decided. The combat was arranged to take place next morning at nine o’clock, in the wood of Vincennes, where the adversaries would be placed at twenty paces, and after the third signal given by clapping the hands they were to fire.

We returned to convey this decision to Louis de Franchi.

On my return home the same evening, I found the cards of MM. de Chateaugrand and de Boissy.

CHAPTER XVI.

AT eight o’clock that evening I called upon M. Louis de Franchi, to inquire whether he had anything to confide to me. But he begged me to wait till next morning, saying:

“The night will bring counsel with it.”

Next morning, therefore, instead of calling at eight, which would have given us plenty of time to go to the meeting, I called at half-past seven.

Louis was already writing in his study.

He looked up as I entered, and I noticed how very pale he was.

“Excuse me,” he said, “I am writing to my mother. You will find the morning papers there; if you can amuse yourself with them you will see a charming feuilleton by M. Mèry in the *Presse.”*

I took the paper thus indicated, and contrasted the livid pallor of the speaker with his calm and sweet voice.

I endeavoured to read, but I could not fix my attention, the letters brought no meaning with them.

In about five minutes Louis said, “There, I have finished.” And he rang for his valet.

“Joseph,” said he, “I am at home to no one, not even to the Baron Giordano. If he calls, ask him to wait in the *salon.* I wish to be alone with this gentlemen for ten minutes.”

The valet shut the door and disappeared.

“Now, my dear Alexander, listen. Giordano is a Corsican, and has Corsican ideas. I cannot, therefore, confide all I desire to him. I will ask him to keep the secret, that’s all. But as regards yourself, I wish you, if you will permit me, to request that you will promise to observe my instructions.”

“Certainly. Is not that the duty of a second?”

“A duty more real than you imagine, for you can save our family a second misfortune if you will.”

“A second misfortune!” I exclaimed.

“Wait. Read this letter.”

I took the letter addressed to Madame de Franchi, and read as follows, with growing astonishment: —

“MY DEAREST MOTHER, —

“If I did not know that you possessed Spartan fortitude allied with Christian submission, I would have used means to prepare you for the blow in store for you-for when you receive this letter you will have but one son!

“Lucien, my dear brother, love our mother for *both* in future.

“For some time I have been suffering from brain fever. I paid no attention to the premonitory symptoms — the doctor came too late. Darling mother, there is no hope for me now. I cannot be saved but by a miracle, and what right have I to suppose that Providence will work a miracle on my behalf?

“I am writing to you in a lucid interval. If I die, this letter will be posted immediately after my death; for in the selfishness of my love for yon I wish that you should know that I am dead without regretting anything in the world except your tenderness and my brother’s.

“Adieu, mother!

“Do not weep for me. It is the soul that lives, not the body, and when the latter perishes the former will still live and love you.

“Adieu, Lucien! Never leave our mother; and remember that she has you only to look to now.

“Your Son, “Your Brother,

“Louis DE FRANCHI.”

When I had finished the letter I turned to the writer and said —

“Well, and what does this mean?”

“Do you not understand?” he said.

“No r “I am going to be shot at ten minutes past nine.”

“You are going to be shot?”

“Yes.”

“You are mad! Why, what has put such an idea into your head?”

“I am not mad, my dear friend. I have been warned — that’s all.”

“Warned! By whom?”

“My brother has already told you, I think, that the male members of our family enjoy a singular privilege?”

“True,” I replied, shuddering, in spite of myself. “He spoke to me about apparitions.”

“Quite so. Well, then, my father appeared to me last night. That is “why yon find me so pallid. The sight of the dead pales the living!”

I gazed at him with astonishment, not unmixed with terror.

“Ton saw your father last night, yon say?”

“Yes.”

“And he spoke to yon?”

“He announced my death! “‘‘Oh, it was some terrible dream!”

“It was a terrible *reality.”*

“You were asleep, my friend.”

“I was wide awake. Do you not believe that a father can appear to his son?”

I hung my head, for at the bottom of my heart I *did* believe in the possibility.

“What passed between you? “I asked. “It is a very simple and very natural story. I was reading, expecting my father — for I knew if any danger threatened that he would appear to me — and at midnight the lamp burnt low, the door opened slowly, and my father appeared.”

“In what form? “I asked.

“Just as if he were alive — dressed in his usual manner — only he was very pale, and his eyes were without expression.”

“Good heavens! “I ejaculated. “He slowly approached my bed. I raised myself with my elbow, and said, ‘You are welcome, father.’”

“He came close, and regarded me fixedly, and it then appeared to me as if some sort of paternal solicitude was expressed in his face.”

“Go on,” I said; “this is terrible!”

“Then his lips moved, and, though I could hear no sound, I seemed to hear his words distinctly, though distant as an echo.”

“What did he say?”

“‘Think of God, my son!’

“‘I shall he killed in this duel, then? ‘I asked.

“I saw the tears roll down the pallid visage of the spectre.

“‘And at what hour?’

“He pointed towards the timepiece. I followed the direction of his finger. The clock showed ten minutes past nine.

“‘So be it, my father,’ I said; ‘God’s will be done. I leave my mother, but I rejoin you.’

“Then a faint smile passed over his face, he waved me a sign of farewell and glided away.

“The door opened as he advanced towards it, and when he had disappeared it shut of its own accord.”

This recital was so simply and so naturally told, that it was evident to me the event had occurred just as de Franchi had related it, or he was the victim of an illusion, which he had believed to be real in consequence of the preoccupation of his mind, and was therefore all the more terrible.

I wiped the perspiration from my forehead.

“Now,” continued Louis; “you know my brother, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“What do you think he will do when he learns that I have been killed in a duel?”

“He will leave Sullacaro at once to challenge the man who has killed you.”

“Just so,” and if lie is killed in his turn, my mother will be thrice a widow; widowed *(by* the loss of her husband, widowed by the loss of her two sons.”

“Ah! I understand. This is fearful!”

“Well, this must be avoided, and that is why I have written this letter. Believing that I have died from brain fever my brother will not seek to avenge me, and my mother will be the more easily consoled, knowing it was the will of God, and that I did not fall by the hand of man. At least–”

“At least what?” I repeated.

“Oh, nothing,” replied Louis. “I hope that will not come to pass.”

I saw that he was referring to some personal fear, and I did not insist farther.

At this moment the door opened, and the Baron de Giordano entered.

“My dear de Franchi,” he said, “I respect your privacy more than anything, but it is past eight, and the meeting is appointed for nine; we have quite a league and a half to drive, and we should start at once.”

“I am ready, my dear fellow,” said Louis. “I have told my friend here all I had to say to him.”

He put his finger on his lips as our eyes met.

“For you, my friend,” he continued, turning to the table and taking up a sealed letter, “there is this; if anything should happen to me read this letter, and I pray you to carry out my request contained in it.”

“To the very letter,” replied the Baron.

“You were to provide the arms,” said Louis.

“Yes,” I replied, “but just as I was coming away I found that one of the dogs did not bark properly, so we shall be obliged to get a case of pistols from Devisme.

Louis looked at me, smiled, and held out his hand. He knew quite well that I did not wish to see him killed with my pistols.

“Have you a carriage?” he asked; “if not I will send Joseph for one.”

“My coupé is here,” said the Baron, “and can carry three at a pinch; besides, my horses will take us more quickly than *& fiacre.”*

“Let us go,” said Louis.

We went downstairs. Joseph was waiting at the door.

“Shall I accompany you, sir?” he said.

“No, Joseph,” replied his master, “I shall not require your services to-day.”

Then, stepping back a pace and pressing a roll of gold into the man’s hand, he said, “Take this, and if at any time I have appeared brusque to you, pardon my ill-humour.”

“Oh, monsieur!” said Joseph, with tears in his eyes, “what is the meaning of this?”

“Chut!” said Louis, and he sprang into the carriage.

“He is a good servant,” he murmured, “and if either of you can ever be of use to him I shall be obliged.”

“Is he about to leave you?” said the Baron.

“No,” said Louis, smiling; “I am leaving him, that is all!”

We stopped at Devismes just long enough to secure a case of pistols, powder and bullets, and then resumed our way at a brisk trot.

CHAPTER XVII.

WE reached Vincennes at five minutes to nine.

Another carriage, that of Chateau Renaud, arrived at the same time.

We proceeded into the wood by different paths. Our carriages were to await us in the broad avenue. A few minutes later we met at the rendezvous.

“Gentlemen,” said Louis, “recollect that no arrangement is possible now.”

“Nevertheless ,” I said “Oh, my dear sir,” he replied, “after what I have told you, you should be the last person to think that any reconciliation is possible.”

I bowed before this absolute will, which for me was supreme.

We left Louis near the carriages, and advanced towards M. de Boissy and M. de Chateaugrand.

The Baron de Giordano carried the case of pistols.

The seconds exchanged salutes.

“Gentlemen,” said the Baron, “under these circumstances the shortest compliments are the best, for we may be interrupted any moment. We were requested to provide weapons — here they are. Examine them if you please. We have just procured them from the gunsmith, and we give you our word of honour that M. Louis de Franchi has not even seen them.”

“Such an assurance is unnecessary, gentlemen,” replied Chateaugrand, “we know with whom we have to deal,” and taking one pistol, “while M. de Boissy took the other, the seconds examined the bore.

“These are ordinary pistols, and have never been used,” said the Baron; “now the question is, how shall the principals fire.”

“My advice,” said M. de Boissy, “is that they should fire just as they are accustomed to do, together.”

“Very well,” said the Baron Giordano, “then all chances are equalized.”

“Will you advise M. de Franchi, then, and we will tell M. de Chateau Renaud, monsieur.”

“Now that is settled, will you have the goodness to load the pistols?”

Each one took a pistol, measured carefully the charges of powder, took two bullets at hazard, and rammed them home.

While the weapons were being loaded, I approached Louis, who received me with a smile.

“You won’t forget what I asked you?” he said, “and you will obtain from Giordano a promise that he will say nothing to my mother, or even to my brother. Will you take care, also, that this affair does not get into the papers, or, if it does, that no names are mentioned.”

“You are still of opinion, then, this duel will prove fatal to yon?” I said.

“I am more than ever convinced of it,” he replied, “but you will do me this justice at least, that I met death like a true Corsican.”

“My dear de Franchi, your calmness is so astounding that it gives me hopes that yon yourself are not convinced on this point.”

Louis took out his watch.

“I have but seven minutes to live,” he said; “here is my watch, keep it, I beg of you, in remembrance of me.” I took the watch, and shook my friend’s hand.

“In eight minutes I hope to restore it to you,” I said.

“Don’t speak of that,” he replied. “See, here are the others.”

“Gentlemen,” said the Viscount de Chateaugrand, “a little distance from here, on the right, is an open space where I had a little practice of my own last year; shall we proceed thither? we shall be less liable to interruption.”

“If you will lead the way,” said the Baron Giordano, “we will follow.”

The Viscount preceded us to the spot indicated. It was about thirty paces distant, at the bottom of a gentle slope surrounded on all sides by a screen of brushwood, and seemed fitted by nature as the theatre of such an event as was about to take place.

“M. Martelli,” said the Viscount, “will you measure the distance by me? “The Baron assented, and thus side by side he and M. de Chateaugrand measured twenty ordinary paces.

I was then left for a few seconds alone with M. de Franchi.

“*Apropos*,” he said, “you will find my will on the table where I was writing when you came in this morning.”

“Good,” I replied, “you may rest quite easy on that score.”

“When you are ready, gentlemen,” said the Viscount de Chateaugrand.

“I am here,” replied Louis. “Adieu, dear friend! thank you for all the trouble you have taken for me, without counting all you will have to do for me later on.” I pressed his hand. It was cold, but perfectly steady.

“Now,” I said, “forget the apparition of last night, and aim your best.”

“You remember de Freyschutz?”

“Yes.”

“Well, you know, then, that every bullet has its billet. Adieu!”

He met the Baron Giordano, who handed him the pistol; he took it, and, without looking at it, went and placed himself at the spot marked by the handkerchief.

M. de Chateau Renaud had already taken up his position.

There was a moment of mournful silence, during which the young men saluted their seconds, then their adversary’s seconds, and finally each other.

M. de Chateau Renaud appeared perfectly accustomed to these affairs, and was smiling like a man sure of success; perhaps, also, he was aware that Louis de Franchi never had fired a pistol in his life.

Louis was calm and collected, his fine head looked almost like a marble bust.

“Well, gentlemen,” said Chateau Renaud,” you see we are waiting.”

Louis gave me one last glance, and smiling, raised his eyes to heaven.

“Now, gentlemen, make ready,” said Chateaugrand. Then, striking his hands one against the other, he cried — “One! Two! Three!”.

The two shots made but one detonation.

An instant afterwards I saw Louis de Franchi turn round twice and then fall upon one knee.

M. de Chateau Renaud remained upright. The lappel of his coat had been shot through.

I rushed towards Louis de Franchi.

“You are wounded?” I said.

He attempted to reply, but in vain. A red froth appeared upon his lips.

At the same moment he let fall his pistol, and pressed his hand against his right side.

On looking closely, we perceived a tiny hole not large enough for the point of a little finger.

I begged the Baron to hasten to the barracks, and bring the surgeon of the regiment.

But de Franchi collected all his strength, and stopping Giordano, signed that all assistance would be useless. This exertion caused him to fall on both knees.

M. de Chateau Renaud kept at a distance, but his seconds now approached the wounded man.

Meanwhile, we had opened his coat and torn away his waistcoat and shirt.

The ball had entered the right side, below the sixth rib, and had come out a little above the left hip.

At each breath the wounded man drew, the blood welled out. It was evident he was mortally hurt.

“M. de Franchi,” said the Viscount de Chateau grand, “we regret extremely the issue of this sad affair. We trust you bear no malice against M. de Chateau Renaud.”

“Yes, yes,” murmured the wounded man, “I forgive him.”

Then turning towards me with an effort he said, “Remember your promise!”

“I swear to you I will do all yon wish.”

“And now,” he said, smiling, “look at the watch!”

He breathed a long sigh, and fell back. That sigh was his last.

I looked at the watch, it was exactly ten minutes past nine.

I turned to Louis de Franchi — he was dead.

We took back the body to the Bue de Helder, and while the Baron went to make the usual declaration to the Commissary of Police, I went upstairs with Joseph.

The poor lad was weeping bitterly.

As I entered, my eyes unconsciously turned towards the timepiece; it marked ten minutes past nine.

No doubt he had forgotten to wind it, and it had stopped at that hour.

The Baron Giordano returned almost immediately with the officers, who put the seals on the property.

The Baron wished to advise the relatives and friends of the affair, but I begged him, before he did so, to read the letter that Louis had handed to him before we set out that morning.

The letter contained his request that the cause of his death should be concealed from his brother, and that his funeral should be as quiet as possible.

The Baron Giordano charged himself with these details, and I sought MM. de Boissy and de Chateau-grand, to request their silence respecting the unhappy affair, and to induce Chateau Renaud to leave Paris for a time, without mentioning my reason for this last suggestion.

They promised me to do all they could to meet my views, and as I walked to Chateau Renaud’s house I posted the letter to Madame de Franchi, informing her that her son had died of brain fever.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONTRARY to custom, the duel was very little talked about; even the papers were silent on the subject.

A few intimate friends followed the body to Père la Chaise. Chateau Renaud refused to quit Paris, although pressed to do so.

At one time I thought of following Louis’ letter to Corsica with one from myself, but although my intentions were good, the misleading statements I should have to make were so repugnant to me that I did not do so. Besides, I was quite convinced that Louis himself had fully weighed before he had decided upon his course of action.

So at the risk of being thought indifferent, or even ungrateful, I kept silence, and I was sure that the Baron Giordano had done as much.

Five days after the duel, at about eleven o’clock in the evening, I was seated by my table in a rather melancholy frame of mind, when my servant entered and shutting the door quickly behind him said, in an agitated whisper, that M. de Franchi desired to speak with me.

I looked at him steadily; he was quite pale.

“Whom did you say, Victor?” I asked.

“Oh, monsieur, in truth I hardly know myself.”

“What M. de Franchi wishes to speak to me?”

“Monsieur’s friend. The gentleman who was here two or three times.”

“You are mad, my good man. Do you not know that I had the misfortune to lose my friend five days ago?”

“Yes, sir; and that is the reason I am so upset. He rang, I was in the ante-chamber, and opened the door, but recoiled at his appearance. However, he entered, and asked if you were at home. I replied that you were, and then he said, 4 Go and announce M. de Franchi, who wishes to speak with your master,’ and so I came.”

“You are stupid, Victor, the ante-chamber is not properly lighted. You were asleep, no doubt, and did not hear correctly. Go, and ask the gentleman his name.”

“It would be useless, sir. I swear to you I am not deceived. I heard him, and saw him, distinctly.”

“Then go and show him in.”

Victor turned tremblingly to the door, opened it, and then standing still in the room, said —

“Will monsieur be kind enough to come in?”

I immediately heard the footsteps of my visitor crossing the antechamber, and sure enough, at the door there appeared M. de Franchi.

I confess that I was terrified, and took a step backwards as he approached.

“I trust you will excuse my appearance so late,” said my visitor; “I only arrived ten minutes ago, and you will understand that I could not wait till tomorrow without seeing you.”

“Oh, my dear Lucien,” I exclaimed, advancing quickly, and embracing him. “Then it is really you.” And, in spite of myself, tears really came into my eyes.

“Yes,” he said, “it is I.”

I made a calculation of the time that had elapsed, and could scarcely imagine that he had received the letter — it could hardly have reached Ajaccio yet.

“Good Heavens! then you do not know what has happened?” I exclaimed.

“1 know all,” was his reply.

“Victor,” I said, turning towards my servant, who was still rather embarrassed, “leave us, and return in a quarter of an hour with some supper. You will have something to eat, and will sleep here of course.”

“With great pleasure,” he replied. “I have eaten nothing since we left Auxerre. Then, as to lodgings, as nobody knew me in the Rue de Helder, or rather,” he added, with a sad smile, “as everybody recognized me there, they declined to let me in, so I left the whole house in a state of alarm.”

“In fact, my dear Lucien, your resemblance to Louis is so very striking that even I myself was just now taken aback.”

“How,” exclaimed Victor, who had not yet ventured to leave us. “Is monsieur the brother.”

“Yes,” I replied, “go and get supper.” Victor went out, and we found ourselves alone. I took Lucien by the hand, and leading him to an easy chair seated myself near him.

“I suppose (I began) you were on your way to Paris when the fatal news met you?”

“No, I was at Sullacaro!”

“Impossible! Why your brother’s letter could not have reached you.”

“You forget the ballad of *Burger*, my dear Alexander — *the dead travel fast!”*

I shuddered! “I do not understand,” I said. “Have you forgotten what I told you about the apparitions familiar to our family?”

“Do you mean to say that you have *seen* your dead brother? “ — ” Yes.” — ” When?”

“On the night of the 16th inst.”

“And lie told yon everything? “All!”

“That he was dead?”

“He told me that he had been killed. The dead never lie!”

“And he said in what way?”

“In a duel.”

“By whom?”

“By M. de Chateau Renaud.”

“Oh no, Lucien, that cannot be,” I exclaimed, “you have obtained your information in some other way.”

“Do you think I am likely to joke at such a time?”

“I beg your pardon. But truly what you tell me is so strange, and everything that relates to you and your brother so out of ordinary nature, that–”

“That you hesitate to believe it. Well, I can understand the feeling. But wait. My brother was hit here,” he continued, as he opened his shirt and showed me the blue mark of the bullet on his flesh, “he was wounded above the sixth rib on the right side–do you believe that?”

“As a matter of fact,” I replied, “that is the very spot where he was hit.”

“And the bullet went out here,” continued Lucien, putting his finger just above his left hip.

“It is miraculous,” I exclaimed.

“And now,” he went on, “do you wish me to tell you the time he died?”

“Tell me!”

“At ten minutes past nine.”

“That will do, Lucien; “I said, “but I lose myself in questions. Give me a connected narrative of the events. I should prefer it.”

CHAPTER XIX.

LUCIEN settled himself comfortably in his arm-chair and looking at me fixedly, resumed: —

“It is very simple. The day my brother was killed I was riding very early, and went out to visit the shepherds, when soon after I had looked at my watch and replaced it in my pocket, I received a blow in the side, so violent that I fainted. When I recovered I found myself lying on the ground in the arms of the Orlandini, who was bathing my face with water. My horse was close by.

“‘Well,’ said Orlandini, ‘what has happened?’

“‘I know no more about it than you do. Did you not hear a gun fired? ‘“‘No.’

“‘It appears to me that I have received a ball in the side,’ and I put my hand upon the place where I felt pain.

“‘In the first place,’ replied he ‘there has been no shot fired, and besides, there is no mark of a bullet on your clothes.’

“‘Then,’ I replied, ‘it must be my brother who is killed.’

“‘Ah, indeed,’ he replied, ‘that is a different thing.’ I opened my coat and I found a mark, only at first it was quite red and not blue as I showed you just now.

“For an instant I was tempted to return to Sullacaro, feeling so upset both mentally and bodily, but I thought of my mother, who did not expect me before supper time, and I should be obliged to give her a reason for my return, and I had no reason to give.

“On the other hand, I did not wish to announce my brother’s death to her until I was absolutely certain of it. So I continued my way, and returned home about six o’clock in the evening.

“My poor mother received me as usual. She evidently had no suspicion that anything was wrong.

“Immediately after supper, I went upstairs, and as I passed through the corridor the wind blew my candle out.

“I was going downstairs to get a light when, passing my brother’s room, I noticed a gleam within.

“I thought that Griffo had been there and left a lamp burning.

"I pushed open the door; I saw a taper burning near my brother's bed, and on the bed my brother lay extended, naked and bleeding.

"I remained for an instant, I confess, motionless with terror, then I approached.

"I touched the body, he was already dead.

"He had received a ball through the body, which had struck in the same place where I had felt the blow, and some drops of blood were still falling from the wound.

"It was evident to me that my brother had been shot.

"I fell on my knees, and leaning my head against the bed, I prayed fervently.

"When I opened my eyes again the room was in total darkness, the taper had been extinguished, the vision had disappeared.

"I felt all over the bed, it was empty.

"Now I believe I am as brave as most people, but when I tottered out of that room I declare to yon my hair was standing on end and the perspiration pouring from my forehead.

"I went downstairs for another candle. My mother noticed me, and uttered a cry of surprise.

"'What is the matter with you,' she said, 'and why are you so pale?'

"'There is nothing the matter,' I implied, as I returned upstairs.

"This time the candle was not extinguished. I looked into my brother's room; it was empty.

"The taper had completely disappeared, nor was there any trace of the body on the bed, "On the ground was my first candle, which I now relighted.

"Notwithstanding this absence of proof, I had seen enough to be convinced that at ten minutes past nine that morning my brother had been killed. I went to bed in a very agitated frame of mind.

"As you may imagine, I did not sleep very well, but at length fatigue conquered my agitation and I got a little rest.

"Then all the circumstances came before me in the form of a dream. I saw the scene as it had passed. I saw the man who had killed him. I heard his name. He is called M. de Chateau Renaud."

"Alas! that is all too true," I replied; "but what have you come to Paris for?"

"I have come to kill the man who has killed my brother."

“To kill him?”

“Oh, you may rest assured, not in the Corsican fashion from behind a wall or through a hedge, but in the French manner, with white gloves on, a frilled shirt, and white cuffs.”

“And does Madame de Franchi know you have come to Paris with this intention?”

“She does.”

“And she has let you come?”

“She kissed me, and said, ‘Go.’ My mother is a true Corsican.”

“And so you came.”

“Here I am.”

“But your brother would not wish to be avenged were he alive.”

“Well, then,” replied Lucien, smiling bitterly, “he must have changed his mind since he died.”

At this moment the valet entered, carrying the supper tray.

Lucien eat like a man without a care in the world.

After supper I showed him to his room. He thanked me, shook me by the hand, and wished me good-night.

Next morning he came into my room as soon as the servant told him I was up.

“Will you accompany me to Vincennes?” he said. “If you are engaged I will go alone.”

“Alone! “I replied. “How will you be able to find the spot?”

“Oh, I shall easily recognize it. Do you not remember that I saw it in my dream?”

I was curious to know how far he was correct in this. “Very well,” I said, “I will go with you.”

“Get ready, then, while I write to Giordano. You will let Victor take the note for me, will you not?”

“He is at your disposal.”

“Thank you.”

Ten minutes afterwards the letter was despatched. I then sent for a cabriolet and we drove to Vincennes.

When we reached the cross-paths Lucien said, “We are not far off now, I think.”

“No; twenty paces further on we shall be at the spot where we entered the forest.”

“Here we are,” said the young man, as he stopped the carriage.

It was, indeed, the very spot!

Lucien entered the wood without the least hesitation, and as if he had known the place for years. He walked straight to the dell, and when there turned to the eastward, and then advancing he stopped at the place where his brother had fallen: stooping down he perceived the grass wore the red tinge of blood.

“This is the place,” he said.

Then he lightly kissed the spot where his brother had lain.

Rising with flashing eyes he paced the dell to the spot whence Chateau Renaud had fired.

“This is where he stood,” he said, stamping his foot, “and here he shall lie to-morrow.”

“How!” I exclaimed. “To-morrow!”

“Yes, unless he is a coward. For to-morrow he shall give me my revenge.”.

“But, my dear Lucien,” I said, “the custom in France is, as you are aware, that a duel cannot take place without a certain reason. Chateau Renaud called out your brother who had provoked him, but he has had nothing to do with you.”

“Ah, really! So Chateau Renaud had the right to quarrel with my brother because he offered his arm to a woman whom Chateau Renaud had scandalously deceived, and according to you he had the right to challenge my brother. M. de Chateau Renaud killed my brother, who had never handled a pistol: he shot him with the same sense of security that a man would shoot a hare; and yet you say I have no right to challenge Chateau Renaud. Nonsense!”

I bowed without speaking.

“Besides,” he continued, “you have nothing to do with it. You may be quite easy. I wrote to Giordano this morning, and when we return to Paris all will have been arranged. Do you think that M. de Chateau Renaud will refuse?”

“M. de Chateau Renaud has unfortunately a reputation for courage which may serve to remove any doubt you may entertain on that score.”

‘1 All the better,” said Lucien. “Let us go to breakfast.”

We returned to the road, and entering the cabriolet, I told the man to drive to the Rue Rivoli.

“No,” said Lucien, “you shall breakfast with me. Coachman, the *Café de Paris*; is not that the place where my brother usually dined?”

“I believe so,” I replied.

“Well, that is where I requested Giordano to meet us.”

“To the Café de Paris, then.”

In half an hour we were set down at the restaurant.

CHAPTER XX.

LUCIEN'S appearance created quite a sensation in consequence of his remarkable likeness to his brother.

The news of Louis' death had gone abroad — not, perhaps, in all its details, but it was known, and Lucien's appearance astonished many.

I requested a private room, saying that we were expecting the Baron Giordano, and we got a room at the end.

Lucien began to read the papers carelessly, as if he were oblivious of everything.

While we were seated at breakfast Giordano arrived.

The two young men had not met for four or five years, nevertheless, a firm clasp of the hand was the only demonstration they permitted themselves.

"Well, everything is settled," he said.

"Then M. de Chateau Renaud has accepted?"

"Yes, on condition, however, that after he has fought you he shall be left in peace."

"Oh, he may be quite easy; I am the last of the de Franchi. Have yon seen him, or his seconds?"

"I saw him; he will notify MM. de Boissy and de Chateaugrand. The weapons, the hour and the place will be the same."

"Capital, sit down and have some breakfast."

The Baron seated himself, and we spoke on indifferent topics.

After breakfast Lucien begged us to introduce him to the Commissioner of Police, who had sealed up his brother's property, and to the proprietors of the house."

at which, his brother had lived, for he wished to sleep that night, the last night that separated him from his vengeance, in Louis' room.

All these arrangements took up time, so it was not till five o'clock that Lucien entered his brother's apartment. Respecting his grief, we left him there alone.

We had arranged to meet him again next morning at eight o'clock, and he begged me to bring the same pistols, and to buy them if they were for sale.

I went to Devismes and purchased the weapons. Next morning, at eight o'clock I was with Lucien.

When I entered, he was seated writing at the same table, where his brother had sat writing. He smiled when he saw me, but he was very pale.

"Good morning," he said, "I am writing to my mother."

"I hope you will be able to write her a less doleful letter than poor Louis wrote eight days ago."

"I have told her that she may rest happy, for her son is avenged."

"How are you able to speak with such certainty?"

"Did not my brother announce to you his own approaching death? Well, then, I announce to you the death of M. de Chateau Renaud."

He rose as he spoke, and touching me on the temple, said —

"There, that's where I shall put my bullet."

"And yourself."

"I shall not be touched."

"But, at least, wait for the issue of the duel, before you send your letter."

"It would be perfectly useless."

He rang, the servant appeared.

"Joseph," said he, "take his letter to the post."

"But have you seen your dead brother?"

"Yes," he answered.

It is a very strange thing the occurrence of these two duels so close together, and in each of which one of the two combatants was doomed. While we were talking the Baron Giordano arrived. It was eight o'clock, so we started.

Lucien was very anxious to arrive first, so we were on the field ten minutes before the hour.

Our adversaries arrived at nine o'clock punctually. They came on horseback, followed by a groom also on horseback.

M. de Chateau Renaud had his hand in the breast of his coat. I at first thought he was carrying his arm in a sling.

The gentlemen dismounted twenty paces from ns, and gave their bridles to the groom.

Monsieur de Chateau Renaud remained apart, but looked steadfastly at Lucien, and I thought he became paler. He turned aside and amused himself knocking off the little flowers with his riding whip.

“Well, gentlemen, here we are!” said MM. de Chateaugrand and de Boissy, “but you know our conditions. This duel is to be the last, and no matter what the issue may be, M. de Chateau Renaud shall not have to answer to any one for the double result.”

“That is understood,” we replied. Then Lucien bowed assent.

“You have the weapons, gentlemen?” said the Viscount.

“Here are the same pistols.”

“And they are unknown to M. de Franchi?”

“Less known to him than to M. de Chateau Renaud who has already used them once. M. de Franchi has not even seen them.”

“That is sufficient, gentlemen. Come, Chateau Renaud!”

We immediately entered the wood, and each one felt, as he revisited the fatal spot, that a tragedy more terrible still was about to be enacted.

We soon arrived in the little dell.

M. de Chateau Renaud, thanks to his great self-command, appeared quite calm, but those who had seen both encounters could appreciate the difference. From time to time he glanced under his lids at Lucien, and his furtive looks denoted a disquietude approaching to fear.

Perhaps it was the great resemblance between the brothers that struck him, and he thought he saw in Lucien the avenging shade of Louis.

While they were loading the pistols I saw him draw his hand from the breast of his coat. The fingers were enveloped in a handkerchief as if to prevent their twitching.

Lucien waited calmly, like a man who was sure of his vengeance.

Without being told, Lucien walked to the place his brother had occupied, which compelled Chateau Renaud to take up his position as before.

Lucien received his weapon with a joyous smile.

When Chateau Renaud took his pistol he became deadly pale. Then he passed his hand between his cravat and his neck as if he were suffocating.

No one can conceive with what feelings of terror I regarded this young man, handsome, rich, and elegant, who but yesterday believed he had many years still before him, and who to-day, with the sweat on his brow and agony at his heart, felt he was condemned.

“Are you ready, gentlemen?” asked M. de Chateau grand.

“Yes,” replied Lucien.

M. de Chateau Renaud made a sign in the affirmative.

As for me I was obliged to turn away, not daring to look upon the scene.

I heard the two successive clappings of the hands, and at the third the simultaneous reports of the pistols. I turned round.

Chateau Renaud was lying on the ground, stark dead; he had not uttered a sound nor made a movement.

I approached the body, impelled by that invincible curiosity which compels one to see the end of a catastrophe.

The bullet had entered the dead man’s temple, at the very spot that Lucien had indicated to me previously.

I ran to him, he was calm and motionless, but seeing me coming towards him he let fall the pistol, and threw himself into my arms.

“Ah, my brother, my poor brother!” he cried as he burst into a passion of sobs.

These were the first tears that the young man had shed.

THE END

THE CHEVALIER OF MAISON-ROUGE

Translated by L. Lawford

This 1846 novel is set in Paris during the Reign of Terror and follows the adventures of a brave young man named Maurice Lindey, who unwittingly implicates himself in a Royalist plot to rescue Marie Antoinette from prison. Maurice is devoted to the Republican cause, but his infatuation with a beautiful young woman leads him into the service of the mysterious Knight of Maison-Rouge, the mastermind behind the plot.

Dumas based events in the novel on “the affair of the carnation”, which was an attempt by the Marquis de Rougeville to communicate with Marie Antoinette by hiding a secret message in the petals of a carnation. Dumas had originally titled the work *Le Chevalier de Rougeville*, but changed the title to *Le Chevalier de Maison-Rouge* after receiving a complaint from the son of the Marquis de Rougeville.

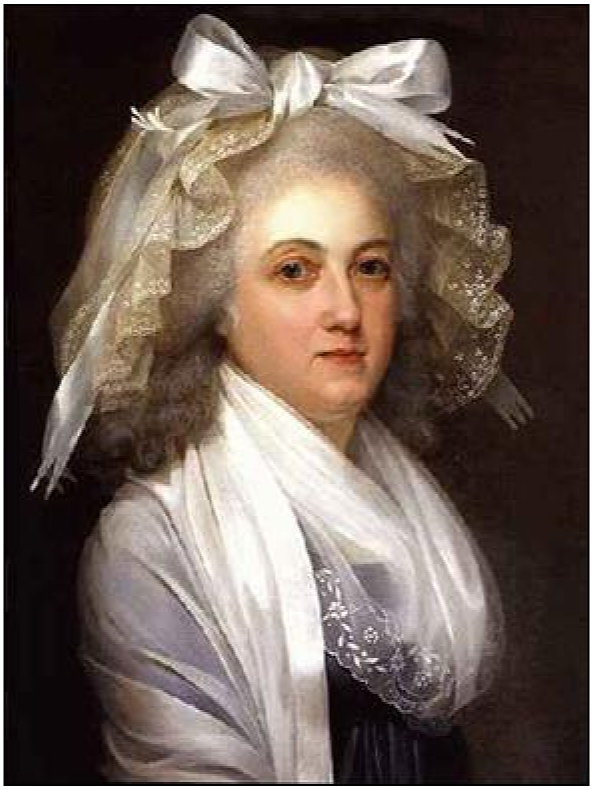

Marie-Antoinette

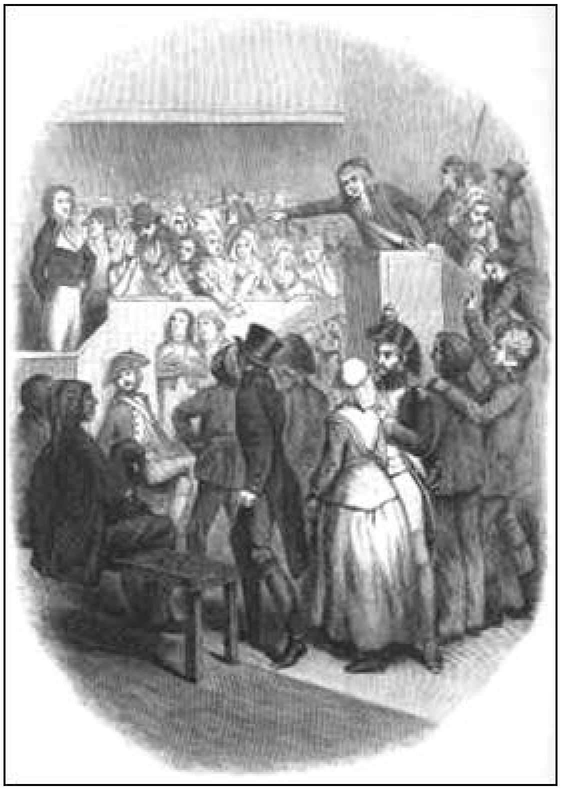

An original illustration

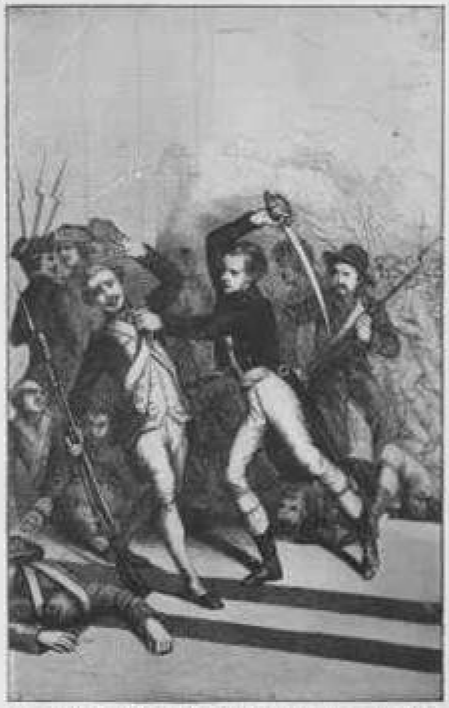

The avenging sword of Maurice had already cut through more than ten uniforms, when he received the signal to surrender.—Page 26.

The Chevalier de Maison Rouge.

An illustration from the first English edition

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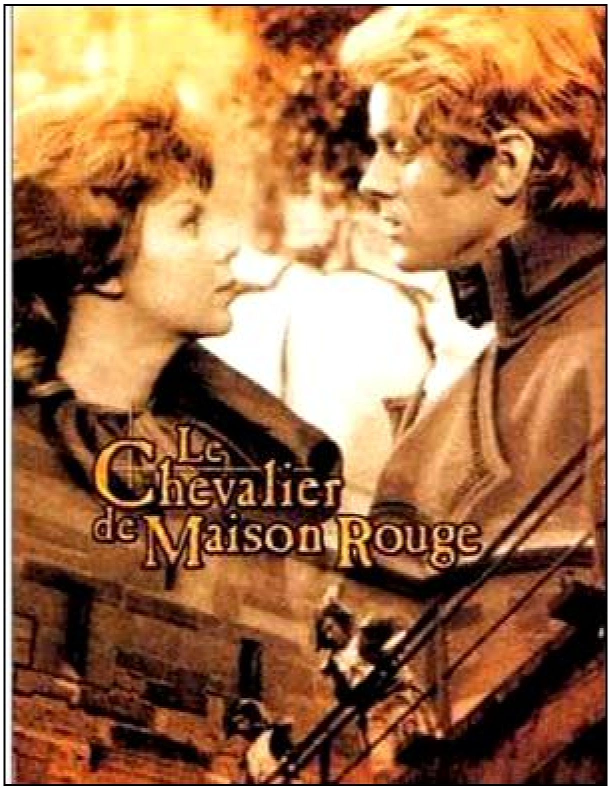
Le Chevalier de Maison Rouge

The 1963 television adaptation

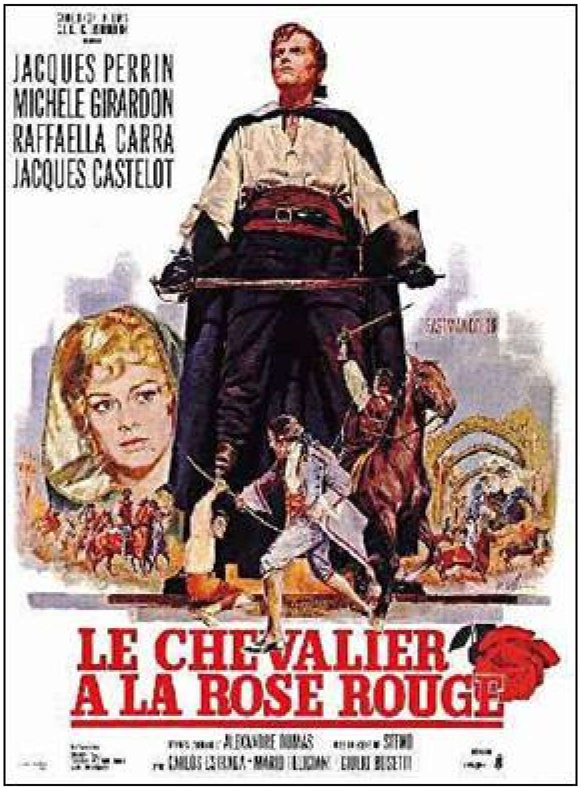
JACQUES PERRIN
MICHELE GIRARDON
RAFFAELLA CARRA
JACQUES CASTELOT
LE CHEVALIER A LA ROSE ROUGE
ALEXANDRE DUMAS
STENO

The 1965 film adaptation

CHAPTER I.

THE ENROLLED VOLUNTEERS.

IT WAS ON THE evening of the 10th of March, 1793, ten o’clock was striking from Notre Dame, and each stroke sounding, emitted a sad and monotonous vibration. Night had fallen on Paris, not boisterous and stormy, but cold, damp, and foggy. Paris itself at that time was not the Paris of our day; glittering at night with thousands of reflected lights, the Paris of busy promenades, of lively chat, with its riotous suburbs, the scene of audacious quarrels and daring crime, but a fearful, timid, busy city, whose few and scattered inhabitants, even in crossing from one street to another, ran concealing themselves in the darkness of the alleys, and ensconcing themselves behind their portes-cocheres, like wild beasts tracked by the hunters to their lair.

As we have previously said, it was the evening of the 10th of March, 1793. A few remarks upon the extreme situation, which had produced the changed aspect of the capital, before we commence stating the events, the recital of which forms the subject of this history. France, by the death of Louis XVI., had become at variance with all Europe.

To the three enemies she had first combated, that is to say, Prussia, the Empire, and Piedmont, were now joined England, Holland, and Spain. Sweden and Denmark alone preserved their old neutrality, occupied *as* they were besides in beholding Catharine II. devastating Poland.

The state of affairs was truly frightful. France, more respected as a physical power, but less esteemed as a moral one, since the massacres of September and the execution of the 21st of January, was literally blockaded, like a simple town, by entire Europe. England was on our coasts, Spain upon the Pyrenees, Piedmont and Austria on the Alps, Holland and Prussia to the north of the Pays-Bas, and with one accord from Upper Rhine to Escaut, two hundred and fifty thousand combatants marched against the Republic. Our generals were repulsed in every direction. Miacrinski had been obliged to abandon Aix-la-Chapelle, and draw back upon Liege; Steingel and Neully were driven back upon Limbourg; while Miranda, who besieged Maastricht, fell back upon Tougres. Valence and Dampierre, reduced to beat a retreat, did so with a loss of half their number. More than ten thousand deserters had already abandoned the army, and cleverly scattered themselves in the interior. At last the Convention, having no hope except in Dumouriez, despatched courier after courier, commanding him to quit the borders of Bribos (where he was preparing to embark for Holland), and return to take the command of the army of the Meuse.

Sensible at heart, like an animated body, France felt at Paris — that is to say, at its heart's core — each and every blow levelled at it by invasion, revolt, or treason, even from quarters the most distant. Each victory was a riot of joy; every defeat an insurrection of terror. It is therefore easy to comprehend what tumult was produced by the news of these successive losses, which we are now about to explain.

On the preceding evening, the 9th of March, they had had at the Convention a sitting more stormy than usual; all the officers had received orders to join their regiments at the same time, and Danton, that audacious proposer of improbable things (but which nevertheless were accomplished), Danton, mounting the tribune, cried out, "The soldiers fail, say you? Offer Paris an opportunity of saving France. Demand from her thirty thousand men, send them to Dumouriez, and not only is France saved, but Belgium is reassured and Holland is conquered." This proposition had been received with shouts of enthusiasm; registers had been opened in all the sections, inviting them to reunite in the evening. Places of public amusement were closed to avoid all distraction, and the black flag was hoisted at the Hotel de Ville, in token of distress. Before midnight five and thirty thousand names were inscribed on the registers. Only this evening, as it had before occurred in September, in every section, while inscribing their names, the enrolled volunteers had demanded that before their departure the traitors might be punished. The traitors were in fact the "contre-revolutionists" who secretly menaced the Revolution. But, as may be easily understood, the secret extended to all those who wished to give themselves to the extreme parties who at this period tore France. The traitors were the weaker party, as the Girondins were the weakest. The Montagnards decided that the Girondins must be the traitors. On the next day, which was the 10th of June, all the Montagnard deputies were present at the sitting. The Jacobins, armed, filled the tribunes, after having turned out the women; the Mayor presented himself with the Council of the Commune, confirming the report of the Commissioners of the Convention respecting the devotedness of the citizens, but repeating the wish, unanimously expressed the preceding evening, for a Tribunal Extraordinary appointed to judge the traitors. The report of the Committee was instantly demanded with loud vociferations. The Committee reunited immediately, and in five minutes afterwards, they were informed by Robert Lindet, that a Tribunal would be formed, composed of nine judges (independent of all forms, and acquiring proof by every means), divided into two permanent sections, and prosecuting, directly by order of the Convention, all those who were found guilty in any way of either tempting or misleading the people. This was a sweeping clause, and the Girondins, comprehending it would cause their arrest, rose *en masse*. Death, cried they, rather than submit to the establishment of this threatened imposition.

The Montagnards, in reply to this apostrophe, demanded the vote in a loud tone. “Yes, “replied Ferand, “let us vote to make known to the world men who are willing to assassinate innocence under the mask of the law.” They voted to this effect; and, against all expectation, the majority decided — 1st, they would have juries; secondly, that these juries should be of equal numbers in each department; thirdly, they should be nominated by the Convention. Ac the moment these three propositions received admission, loud cries were heard; but the Convention, accustomed to receive occasional visits from the populace, inquired their wishes, and were informed in reply, “It was merely a deputation of enrolled volunteers, who, having dined at the Halle-au-Ble, demanded to be permitted to display their military tactics before the Convention.”

The doors were opened immediately, and six hundred men, armed with swords, pistols, and pikes, apparently half-intoxicated, filed off amidst shouts of applause, and loudly demanded the death of the traitors. “Yes,” replied Collot d’Herbois, addressing them, “yes, my friends, we will save you — you and liberty, notwithstanding these intrigues.” These words were followed by an angry glance towards the Girondins, which plainly intimated they were not yet beyond reach of danger. In short, the sitting of the Convention terminated, the Montagnards scattered themselves amongst other clubs, running first to the Cordeliers and then to the Jacobins, proposing to place the traitors beyond the reach of the law, by cutting their throats the same night.

The wife of Louvet resided in Rue Saint Honore, near the Jacobins. She, hearing these vociferations, descended, entered the club, and heard this proposition; then quickly retraced her steps, and warned her husband of the impending danger. Louvet, hastily arming himself, ran from door to door to alarm his friends, but found them all absent; then fortunately ascertaining from one of the servants they had gone to Petion's house, he followed them there. He found them quietly deliberating over a decree, which ought to be presented on the morrow, and which by a chance majority they hoped to pass. He related what had occurred, communicated his fears, informed them of the plot devised against them by the Cordeliers and Jacobins, and concluded by urging them on their side to pursue some active and energetic measure.

Then Petion rose, calm and self-possessed as usual, walked to the window, opened it, and then extended his hand, which he drew in covered with moisture. "It rains," said he; "there will be nothing to-night."

Through this half-opened window the last vibration of the clock was heard striking ten.

Such were the occurrences of the 10th of March, and the evening preceding it — occurrences which, in this gloomy obscurity and menacing silence, rendered the abodes destined to shelter the living like sepulchres peopled by the dead. In fact, long patrols of the National Guard, preceded by men marching with fixed bayonets, troops of citizens, armed at hazard, pushing against each other, gendarmes closely examining each doorway, and strictly scrutinizing every narrow alley — these were the sole inhabitants who ventured to expose themselves in the streets. Every one instinctively understood something unusual and terrible was taking place. The cold and drizzling rain, which had tended so much to reassure Petion, had considerably augmented the ill-humour and trouble of these inspectors, whose every meeting resembled preparation for combat, and who, after recognising each other with looks of defiance, exchanged the word of command slowly and with a very bad grace. Indeed, it was said, seeing one and the other returning after their separation, that they mutually feared an attack from behind. On the same evening, when Paris was a prey to one of those panics (so often renewed that they ought, in some measure, to have become habitual), this evening the massacre of the lukewarm revolutionists was secretly debated, who, after having voted (with restriction for the most part) the death of the King, recoiled to-day before the death of the Queen, a prisoner in the Temple with her sister-in-law and her children. A woman, enveloped in a mantle of lilac printed cotton, with black spots, her head covered and almost buried in the hood, glided along the houses in La Rue Saint Honore, seeking concealment under a door porch, or in the angle of a wall, every time a patrol appeared, remaining motionless as a statue, and holding her breath till he had passed, and then again pursuing her anxious course with increased rapidity, till some danger of a similar nature again compelled her to seek refuge in silence and immobility.

She had already (thanks to the precautions she had taken) travelled over with impunity part of La Rue Saint Honore, when she suddenly encountered, not a body of patrol, but a small troop of our brave enrolled volunteers, who, having dined at La Halle-au-Ble, found their patriotism considerably increased by the numerous toasts they had drunk to their future victories. The poor woman uttered a cry, and made a futile attempt to escape by La Rue du Coq.

“Ah, ah! citoyenne,’’ cried the chief of the volunteers (for already, with the need of command natural to man, these worthy patriots had elected their chief), “Ah, where are you going?”

The fugitive made no reply, but continued her rapid movement.

“What sport,” said the chief; “it is a man disguised, an aristocrat, who thinks to save himself.”

The sound of two or three guns escaping from hands rather too unsteady to be depended upon, announced to the poor woman the fatal movement she had made.

“No, no,” cried she, stopping running, and retracing her steps; “no, citizen; you are mistaken. I am not a man.”

“Then advance at command,” said the chief, “and reply to my questions. Where are you hastening to, charming belle of the night?”

“But, citizen, I am not going anywhere. I am returning.”

“Oh! returning, are you?”

“Yes.”

“It is rather a late return for a respectable woman, citoyenne?”

“I am returning from visiting a sick relative.”

“Poor little kitten,” said the chief, making a motion with his hand (before which the horrified woman quickly recoiled). “Where is your passport?”

“My passport! What is that, citizen? What do you mean?”

“Have you not read the decree of the Commune?”

“No!”

“You have heard it proclaimed then?”

“Alas! no. What, then, said this decree, mon Dieu?”

“In the first place, we no longer say God; we only speak of the Supreme Being now.”

“Pardon me, I am in error. It is an old custom.”

“Bad habit — the habit of the aristocracy.”

“I will endeavour to correct myself, citizen; but you said —

“I said that the decree of the Commune prohibited, after six in the evening, any one to go out without a civic pass. Now, have you got that civic pass?”

“Alas! no.”

“You have forgotten it at your relations?”

“I was ignorant of the necessity of going out with one.”

“Then come with us to the first post; there you can explain all prettily to the Captain; and if he feels perfectly satisfied with your explanation, he will depute two men to conduct you in safety to your abode, else you will be detained for further information.”

From the cry of terror which escaped the poor prisoner, the chief of the enrolled Volunteers understood how much the unfortunate woman dreaded this interview.

“Oh, *oh!”* said he, “I am quite certain we hold distinguished game. Forward, forward — to the route, my little *ci-devant.”*

And the chief seizing the arm of the former, placed it within his own and dragged her, notwithstanding her cries and tears, towards the post de Palais Egalite.

They were already at the top of the barrier of Sergens, when suddenly a tall young man, closely wrapt in a mantle, turned the corner of La Rue des Petits-Champs at the very moment when the prisoner endeavoured, by renewing her supplications, to regain her liberty. But without listening, the chief dragged her brutally forward. The woman uttered a cry of terror, mingled with despair. The young man saw the struggle; he also heard the cry, then bounded from the opposite side of the street, and found himself facing the little troop.

“What is all this? What are you doing to this woman?” demanded he of the person who appeared to be the chief.

“Before you question me, you had better attend to your own business.”

“Who is this woman; and what do you want with her?” repeated the young man, in a still more imperative tone than at first.

“But who are you, that you interrogate us?”

The young man opened his cloak, when an epaulet was visible, glistening on his military costume.

“I am an officer,” said he, “as you can see.”

“Officer! In what?”

“In the Civic Guard.”

“Well, what of that?” replied one of the troop. “What do we know here of the officers of the Civic Guard?”

“What is that he says?” asked another man (in a drawling and ironical tone peculiar to a man of the people, or rather of the Parisian populace), beginning to be angry.

“He says,” replied the young man, “that if the epaulet cannot command respect for the officer, the sword shall command respect for the epaulet.”

At the same time making a retrograde movement, the unknown defender of the young woman had disengaged his arm from the folds of his mantle, and drawn from beneath it, sparkling by the glimmer of a lamp, a large infantry sabre. Then with a rapid movement which displayed his familiarity with similar scenes of violence, seized the chief of the Volunteers by the collar of his blouse, and placing the point of the sabre to his throat, “Now,” said he, “let us speak like friends.”

“But, citizen,” said the chief, endeavouring to free himself.

“I warn you, that at the slightest movement made, either by you or any of your men, I pass my sabre through your body.”

During this time two men belonging to the troop retained their hold of the woman.

“You have asked who I am,” continued the young man, “which you had no right to do, since you do not command a regular patrol. However, I will inform you. My name is Maurice Lindey; I commanded a body of artillerymen on the 10th of August, am now lieutenant in the National Guards, and secretary to the section of Brothers and Friends. Is that sufficient?”

“Well, Citizen Lieutenant,” replied the chief, still menaced with the blade, the point of which he felt pressing more and more, “this is quite another thing. If you are really what you say, that is a good patriot —

“There, I knew we should soon understand each other,” said the officer. “Now, in your turn, answer me; why did this woman call out, and what are you doing with her?”

“We are taking her to the guard-house.”

“And why are you taking her there?”

“Because she has no civic pass, and the last decree of the Commune ordered the arrest of any and every individual appearing in the streets of Paris without one after ten o’clock at night. Do you forget the country is in danger, and that the black flag floats over 1’Hotel de Ville?”

“The black flag floats over 1’Hotel de Ville, and the country is in danger, because two hundred thousand slaves march against France,” replied the officer, “and not because a woman runs through the streets of Paris after ten o’clock at night. But never mind, citizens. There is a decree of the Commune, it is true, and you only did your duty; and if you had answered me at once, our explanation might have been a much shorter, and probably a less stormy one. It is well to be a patriot, but equally so to be polite; and the first officer whom the citizens ought to respect, is he, it seems to me, whom they themselves appointed. In the meantime, release that woman, if you please. You are at liberty to depart.”

“Oh! citizen,” cried she, seizing the arm of Maurice (having listened to the whole of this debate with the most intense anxiety), “Oh! citizen, do not abandon me to the mercy of these rude and half-drunken men.”

“Well, then,” said Maurice, “take my arm, and I will conduct you with them as far as the Poste.”

“To the Poste!” exclaimed the terrified woman, “and why to the Poste, when I have injured no one?”

“You are taken to the Poste,” replied Maurice, “not because you have done any one wrong, or because you are considered capable of so doing, hut on account of the decree issued by the Commune, forbidding any one to go out without a pass; and you have none.”

“But monsieur, I was ignorant of it.”

“Citoyenne, you will find at the Poste brave and honourable men, who will fully appreciate your reasons, and from whom you have nothing to fear.”

“Monsieur,” said the young woman, pressing Maurice’s arm, “it is no longer insult that I fear, it is death; if they conduct me to the Poste, I am lost.”

CHAPTER II.

THE UNKNOWN.

THERE WAS IN this voice an accent of so much terror, mingled with superiority, that Maurice was startled. Like a stroke of electricity, this vibrating voice had touched his heart. He turned towards the enrolled volunteers, who were talking among themselves. Humiliated at having been held in check by a single individual, they were now consulting together with the visible intention of regaining their lost ground. They were eight against one; three were armed with guns, the remainder with pistols and pikes. Maurice wore only his sabre. The contest could not be an equal one. Even the woman comprehended this, as she held down her head, and uttered a deep sigh.

As to Maurice, with his brows knitted, his lip disdainfully curled, and his sabre drawn from its scabbard, he stood irresolute, fluctuating between the sentiments of a man and a citizen, the one urging him to protect this woman, the other counselling him to give her up. All at once, at the corner of La Rue des Bons-Enfans, he saw the reflection of several muskets, and heard also the measured tread of a patrol, who, perceiving a crowd, halted within a few paces of the group, and, through the corporal, demanded. “Who goes there?”

“A friend,” said Maurice. “A friend! Advance, Louis!”

He to whom this order was addressed, placed himself at the head of his eight men, and quickly approached. “Is it you, Maurice?” said the corporal. “Ah, libertine! what are you doing in the streets at this hour?”

“You see, I am going to the section of Brothers and Friends.”

“Yes; to visit that of sisters and friends. We know all about that.”

“Ah, listen, ma Belle, When the dusk midnight hour The church-bell shall toll, I will haste to thy bower, To thy side I will steal. Spite of bolts and of bars, And my love will reveal, ‘Neath the light of the stars.

“Is it not so?”

“No, mon ami; you are mistaken. I was on my way home when I discovered this citoyenne struggling in the hands of these citizen volunteers, and ran to inquire why they wished to detain her."

"It is just like you," said Louis. Then turning towards the volunteers, "Why did you stop this woman?" inquired the poetical corporal.

"I have already told the lieutenant," replied the chief of the little troop, "because she had no pass."

"Bah! bah!" said Louis, "a great crime, certainly."

"Are you then ignorant of the decree of the Commune?" demanded the chief of the volunteers. "Yes; but there is another clause which has annulled that — which — listen — "On Pindus and Parnassus, it is decreed by Love, That beauty's witching face, That youth and fairy grace, Without a pass, by day or night, may through the city rove."

"What do you say to this decree, citizen? it is clever, it seems to me."

"Yes; but it does not appear to me peremptory. In the first place it has not appeared in the *Moniteur;* then we are neither upon Pindus or Parnassus; it is not yet day; and, lastly, the citoyenne is perhaps neither graceful, young, nor fair."

"I wager the contrary," said Louis. "Prove that I am in the right, citoyenne, remove your hood, that all may judge if you come under the conditions of the decree."

"Monsieur," said the young woman, pressing closer to Maurice, "having saved me from your enemies, protect me now against your friends, I beseech you."

"You see," said the chief, "how she hides herself. In my opinion she is a spy of the aristocracy — some street-walker."

"Oh! monsieur," said the young woman, stepping before Maurice, and discovering a face radiant with youth and beauty, visible by the light of the lamp, "do I look like what they have termed me?"

Maurice was amazed. He had never even dreamed of beauty equal to that he had caught sight of for a moment, and only for a moment, since the Unknown had again unshrouded herself in the hood as quickly as she had previously removed it. "Louis," said Maurice, in a whisper, "claim the prisoner, that you may conduct her to your post; you have a right to do so, as chief of patrol."

"Very good," said the young corporal, "I understand with half a word."

Then, addressing himself to the Unknown, "Let us go, ma belle," continued he; "since you will not afford me the proof that you are within the conditions of the decree, you must follow us."

"Why follow you?" said the chief of the enrolled volunteers. "We shall conduct the citoyenne to the post of 1'Hotel de Ville, where we are on guard, and there she will be examined."

"Not so, not so," said the chief of the first troop, "she belongs to us, and we will keep her."

"Citizens, citizens," said Louis, "you will make me angry."

"Angry, or not angry, morbleu, it is equally the same to us. We are true soldiers of the Republic, and whilst you patrol the streets, we go to shed our blood on the frontier."

"Take care you do not shed it by the way, citizens, which is very likely to occur, if you are not rather more polite than you are at present."

"Politeness is a virtue appertaining to the aristocracy, and we belong to the lower orders," replied the chief.

"Do not speak of these things before madame," said Louis, "perhaps she is an Englishwoman. Do not be angry at the supposition, my beautiful bird of the night," added he, gallantly, turning towards the Unknown. "Doubtless you are conversant with the poets, and one of them tells us, 'That England is a swan's nest situated in the midst of a large pond."'

"Ah! you betray yourself," said the chief of the enrolled, "you avow yourself a creature of Pitt's, in the pay of England. A — "

"Silence," said Louis, "you do not understand poetry; therefore I must speak to you in prose. We are National Guards, affable and patient fellows enough, but still children of Paris; that is to say, if we are provoked we strike rather hard."

"Madame," said Maurice, "from what you have now witnessed you can easily imagine what will soon follow. In five minutes ten or twelve men will be cutting each other's throats for you. Is the cause your defenders have embraced worthy of the blood they are about to shed?"

"Monsieur," replied the Unknown, clasping her hands, "I can only assure you, that if you permit me to be arrested, the result to myself will be dreadful, but to others fatal; and that rather than you should abandon me, I would beseech you to pierce me through the heart with the weapon you hold in your hand, and cast my corpse into the Seine."

"Madame," replied Maurice, "I will take all the responsibility upon myself;" and letting drop the hand of the lovely *incognita* which he held in his own, —

“Citizens,” said he, addressing himself to the National Guard, “as an officer, as a patriot, and a Frenchman, I command you to protect this woman. And Louis, if any of these *canaille* say one word, put them to the bayonet.”

“Carry arms,” said Louis.

“Oh! mon Dieu! mon Dieu!” cried the Unknown, enveloping her head still closer in her hood, and supporting herself against a post, “Oh! mon Dieu! protect me.”

The volunteers directly placed themselves on the defensive, and one among them fired his pistol, when the ball passed through the hat of Maurice.

“Cross bayonets,” said Louis. “Plan, plan, plan, plan, plan, plan, plan.”

Then, in the darkness of night, a scene of struggling and confusion ensued, during which the sounds of one or two shots were heard, followed by cries, imprecations, and blasphemies, but no one appeared, because, as we have said, there was this evening a secret question of the massacre, and it was believed the massacre had commenced. Two or three windows only were opened for an instant, but were immediately closed. Less in number, and worse armed, the enrolled volunteers were in an instant defeated. Two were badly wounded and four others pinned against the wall, each with a bayonet through his breast.

“There,” said Louis, “I hope now you will remain as quiet as lambs. As for you. Citizen Maurice, I order you to conduct this woman to the post of 1’Hotel de Ville. You understand you are answerable for her.”

“Yes,” said Maurice. Then, in a low tone — ”And the password?” added he.

“The devil!” said Louis, rubbing his ear, “the password; it is — ”

“Do not fear I shall make a bad use of it.”

“Ma foi!” said Louis; “make what use you like of it, that is your concern.”

“Tell me, then,” said Maurice.

“I will tell you all in good time, but let us first dispose of these tipsy fellows. Then, before we part, I shall not be sorry to give you a few words of advice.”

“Very well. I will wait.”

Louis then returned to his national guards, who still kept the enrolled volunteers at bay.

“Now,” said he, “have you had sufficient?”

“Yes, dog of a Girondin,” replied the chief.

“You deceive yourself, my friend,” said Louis, coolly; “we are better sansculottes than yourselves, seeing that we belong to the club of Thermopyles, of whose patriotism no one, I hope, entertains a doubt. Let go these citizens,” continued Louis, “they resist no longer.”

“It is not the less true that this woman is an object of suspicion.”

“If she were a suspicious character she would have made her escape during this skirmish, and not, as you see she has done, waited till it had terminated.”

“Hum!” said one of the volunteers. “What the Citizen Thermopyle observes is quite true.”

“Besides, we shall know, since my friend goes to conduct her to the post, while we go to drink to the health of the nation.”

“Are we going to drink?” said the chief.

“Certainly, I am very thirsty, and I know a pretty little cabaret, at the corner of La Rue Thomas du Louvre.”

“Why did you not say so at once, citizen? We are sorry to have doubted your patriotism, and to prove it, let us, in the name of the nation and the law, embrace each other as friends.”

“Let us embrace,” said Louis.

And the enrolled volunteers and the national guards embraced with warm enthusiasm. At this moment they were more anxious to embrace than behead one another.

“Let us now go,” cried the two united troops, “to the corner of La Rue Thomas du Louvre.”

“And we,” said one of the wounded, in a plaintive voice, “do you intend to abandon us here?”

“Ah, well! yes,” said Louis, “abandon the heroes who have fallen bravely fighting for their country against the patriots — it is true by mistake, but still true for all that; we will send you some wheelbarrows. Meanwhile, you can sing the Marseillaise, it will divert you.”

Then, approaching Maurice, who was waiting for him, with this Unknown, at the corner of La Rue du Coq, while the national guards and enrolled volunteers went back again arm-in-arm towards La Place du Palais-Egalite:

“Maurice,” said he, “I promised you some counsel, and this is it. Be persuaded to accompany us, rather than compromise yourself by protecting this young woman, who, it is true, is very charming, and on that account not the less to be suspected; for charming women who run about the streets of Paris at midnight — ”

“Monsieur,” said the young woman, “judge me not from appearances, I implore you.”

“In the first place, you say monsieur, and that is a great fault. Do you understand, citoyenne, what I say?”

“Ah, well! Yes, yes, citizen; allow your friend to accomplish his kind action.”

“What is that?”

“By conducting me home., and protecting me on my road.”

“Maurice, Maurice,” said Louis, “consider well what you are doing; you will compromise yourself terribly.”

“I know it well,” said the young man, “but what would you have me do? If I leave the poor woman, she will be stopped at every step by the patrols.”

“Ah! yes, yes, monsieur, while with you — whilst with you, citizen, I meant to say — I shall be safe.”

“You hear?” said Louis, “safe. She then runs great danger?”

“My dear Louis,” said Maurice, “let us be just. She must either be a good compatriot or an aristocrat. If an aristocrat, we have erred in protecting her; if a good patriot, it is our duty to preserve her.”

“Pardon, pardon, cher ami; I am for Aristotle, but your logic is folly, what he says —

Iris my reason steals away, And yet she tells me to be wise; Oh! lady, I can only say, They turn away those glorious eyes.”

“Louis,” said Maurice, “a truce to Dorcit, to Parny, and to Gentil-Bernard, I pray you. Speak seriously, will you, or will you not, give me the password?”

“That is to say, Maurice, you place me in this situation — I must either sacrifice my duty to my friend, or my friend to my duty; but I fear, Maurice, my duty will fall the sacrifice.”

“Decide, then, for one or the other, mon ami, but, in the name of heaven, decide quickly.”

“You will not abuse it?”

“I promise you.”

“That is not sufficient; swear!”

“Upon what?”

“Swear upon the altar of your country.”

Louis pulled off his hat, presenting to Maurice the side with the cockade, and Maurice, finding the affair very simple, took, without smiling, the oath required upon this extemporary altar.

“Now,” said Louis, “this is the password — France and Lutece; perhaps you would say, France and Lucretia, but let that pass, it is Roman all the same.”

“Citoyenne,” said Maurice, “I am at your service. Thanks, Louis.”

“Bon voyage,” cried he, replacing on his head ‘the altar of the country,’ and, faithful to his Anacreontic taste, departed singing —

“Eleonora, Eleonora! Now I’ve taught you how to love, Tell your passionate adorer, Does the lesson weary prove?”

CHAPTER III.

LA RUE DES FOSSES SAINT VICTOR.

MAURICE, finding himself alone with the young woman, felt for the moment deeply embarrassed. The fear of being duped, attracted by her marvellous beauty, troubled his conscience as a pure and exalted Republican, and caused him to hesitate when about to offer her the support of his arm.

"Where are you going, citizen?" said he.

"Alas, monsieur, a long way from here," replied she.

"But how far?"

"By the side of the Jardin des Plantes."

"It is some distance, let us proceed on our way."

"Ah! mon Dieu! monsieur," said the Unknown; "I plainly perceive I am a constraint upon you; but indeed it is no ordinary danger that I incur. Believe me, I will not abuse your generosity."

"But, madame," said Maurice, who during his *tete-a-tete* had totally forgotten the language imposed by the Republican vocabulary, and returned to the language of a gentleman, "how is it, in all conscience, that at this hour you are found in the streets of Paris, where, with the exception of ourselves, you do not see a single individual?"

"Monsieur, I have told you; I had been paying a visit to the Faubourg du Roule. Leaving home at mid-day, and knowing nothing of what had taken place, I returned, of course, in equal ignorance, all my time having been spent in deep retirement."

"Yes," murmured Maurice, "in some retired house, the resort of the aristocrats. Confess, citoyenne, while publicly demanding my protection, you laugh in your sleeve at my egregious folly."

"Why should I act thus?"

"You are aware that the Republican acts as your guide. Well, this Republican betrays his cause, that is all."

"But, citizen," quickly rejoined the Unknown, "I, as well as you, love the Republic; you labour under a mistake concerning me."

“Then, citoyenne, if you are a good patriot, you can have no cause for concealment. Where do you come from?”

“Monsieur, excuse me.”

There was in this “monsieur” so much sweetness and modesty of expression, that Maurice believed it to be founded on some sentiment concealed.

“Surely,” said he, “this woman is returning from some rendezvous d’amour.”

At this moment, without knowing why, he felt deeply oppressed at this thought, and for a short time he remained silent.

When these two nocturnal promenaders had reached La Rue de la Verrerie, after having encountered three or four patrols, who, thanks to the password, allowed them free passage, an officer at length appeared, inclined to raise some difficulties. Maurice here found it necessary to give his name, and also his residence.

“That is all that is required from you,” said the officer; “but the citoyenne, who is she?”

“The sister of my wife.”

The officer permitted them to pass.

“You are then married, monsieur?” murmured the Unknown.

“No, madame, why do you think so?”

“Then,” said she, laughing, “you had better have said I was your wife.”

“Madame,” said Maurice, “the name of wife is rather too sacred to be slightly bestowed. I have not the honour of your acquaintance.”

The Unknown in her turn felt an oppression of the heart, and remained silent and confused. At this moment they crossed the bridge Marie. The young woman quickened her pace as they approached the end of their journey. They crossed the bridge De la Tourville.

“We are now, I believe, in your quarter,” said Maurice, planting his foot on the quay Saint Bernard.

“Yes, citizen,” replied the young woman, “but it is precisely here I most require your kind assistance.”

“Really, madame,” said Maurice, “you forbid me to be indiscreet, yet do all in your power to excite my curiosity. This is not generous. Grant me your confidence. I have merited it, I think. Are you not in honour bound to tell me to whom I speak?”

“You speak, monsieur,” said the Unknown, smiling, “to a woman whom you have saved from the greatest danger she could encounter, to one who owes you a debt of everlasting gratitude.”

“I do not require so much, madame; be less grateful, and pending the second, tell me your name.”

“Impossible!”

“You might have told it nevertheless to the first sectionary, if you had been taken to the post.”

“No, never!” said the Unknown.

“But, in that case, you would have gone to prison.”

“I had considered all that.”

“And prison at this moment — ”

“Leads to the scaffold; I know it all.”

“And you would have preferred the scaffold?”

“To treason — to discover my name was treason; it is treason to betray others.”

“I said truly, you compelled me to act a singular part for a Republican!”

“You act the part of a truly generous man. You encounter a poor woman subjected to insult; you do not condemn her because she might be ‘one of the people,’ but that she may be exempted from fresh annoyances, to save her from shipwreck, you reconduct her to the miserable quarter she inhabits.”

“As far as appearances go, you argue correctly, and I might have credited you, had I never either seen you or heard you speak: but your beauty and mode of expression stamp you as a woman of distinction, and it is just this distinction, in opposition with your costume and this miserable quarter, which proves to me that your absence from home at this unseasonable hour conceals some mystery. You are silent... we will speak no more. Are we far from your house, madame?”

At this moment they entered La Rue des Fosses St. Victor by La Rue de Seine.

“You see that small dark building,” said the Unknown to Maurice, extending her hand, and pointing towards a house situated beyond the walls of the Jardin des Plantes. “When we arrive there you must quit me.”

“Very well, madame, issue your orders, I am here only to obey.”

“You are angry.”

"I angry? — not the least in the world; besides, what does it matter to you?"

"It matters much, since I have yet a favour to ask of you."

"What is that?"

"A kind and frank adieu — the farewell of a friend."

"The farewell of a friend! Oh! madame, you do me too great an honour. A singular friend, not to know the name of his friend, who even conceals from him where she resides, no doubt from the fear of being too much troubled with his company."

The young woman hung down her head, but did not reply to this sarcasm.

"As to the rest, madame," continued Maurice, "if I have discovered a secret, I did so involuntarily, and without any effort on my part to do so."

"I have now reached my destination, monsieur," said the Unknown.

It was facing the old Rue St. Jacques, lined with tall dark-looking houses, intersected by obscure narrow alleys, leading to streets occupied by manufactories and tanyards, as within two steps ran the little river De Biure.

"Here!" said Maurice, "is it here that you live?"

"Yes."

"Impossible!"

"It is so, nevertheless. And now, adieu! my brave chevalier, my generous protector, adieu!"

"Adieu! madame," said Maurice, with slight irony of tone, "but first again assure me you run no further risk of any danger."

"None whatever."

"In that case I will leave you."

Maurice bowed coldly and retired a few paces. The Unknown remained for an instant stationary in the same place.

"I do not like to take my leave of you thus," said she. "Come, monsieur, your hand."

Maurice approached, and held out his hand, and then felt the young woman had slipped a ring on his finger.

"Oh! citizen, what have you done? Do you not perceive that you have lost one of your rings?"

"Monsieur, you wrong me much."

"The crime of ingratitude is wanting in me; is it not so, madame?"

"Come, I beseech you, monsieur — mon ami, do not leave me thus. What do you wish to know? What do you ask?"

“Payment — is it not so?” said the young man bitterly.

“No,” said the Unknown, with a bewitching expression, “but forgive me the secrecy I am obliged to preserve towards you.”

Maurice, seeing in the obscurity those beautiful eyes almost humid with tears, feeling the pressure of that soft hand reposing between his own, hearing the accents of that persuasive voice, which had almost descended to the depths of prayer, felt his anger all at once yield to admiration.

“What do I ask?” said he. “To see you again.”

“Impossible! utterly impossible.”

“If only for once — one hour, a minute, a second.”

“I tell you it is impossible.”

“Do you seriously tell me,” said Maurice, “that I shall never see you again?’’

“Never,” said the Unknown, in a desponding tone.

“Madame,” said Maurice, “you certainly jest with me.” Then, raising his noble head, he shook his hanging curls like a man wishing to escape from some power which, in spite of himself, still bound him. The Unknown regarded him with an undefinable expression. It was evident she had not altogether escaped the sentiment she had inspired.

“Listen,” said she, after a moment’s silence, interrupted only by a sigh, which Maurice had in vain endeavoured to suppress. “Swear to me, upon your honour, to shut your eyes the moment I desire you to do so, and to keep them closed while you can count sixty seconds. Mind, upon your honour.”

“If I swear, what will happen to me?”

“It will happen that I will prove my gratitude to you in a manner that I faithfully promise you I will never again to any other person. Do this for me more than for yourself. As to the rest, it will be difficult.”

“But, at least, am I not to know —

“No; trust to me. You see —

“In truth, madame, I know not whether you are angel or demon.”

“Will you swear it?”

“Yes; I swear to do as you desire me.”

“Whatever occurs, you will not open your eyes — whatever happens. You understand? even if you should feel yourself struck with a poniard.”

“You bewilder me. My word of honour required with so much urgency.”

“Swear, then, monsieur. It appears to me that you run no great risk in so doing.”

“Well, I swear,” said Maurice, “whatever may happen,” closing his eyes.

He hesitated.

“Let me see you only once more — only once more,” said he. “I entreat you.”

The young woman let fall the hood with a smile not quite free from coquetry, when, by the light of the moon, which at this moment shed its lustre between two clouds, he again beheld, for the second time, the raven hair hanging in masses of shining curls, the beautifully arched and pencilled eyebrows, overshadowing the almond-shaped eyes, so soft and languishing, an exquisitely formed nose, and lips fresh and brilliant as coral.

“Oh! you are beautiful, exquisitely beautiful,” said Maurice.

“Shut your eyes,” said the Unknown.

Maurice obeyed.

The young woman took both his hands within her own, and placed him in the desired position.

Suddenly he felt a warm perfume pervade his face, and lips slightly touch his mouth, leaving between his lips the disputed ring.

All passed rapid as thought. Maurice experienced a sensation almost amounting to pain. His feelings were inexplicable, even to himself.

He made a brusque movement, and extended his arms before him.

“Your oath,” said a voice, already in the distance.

Maurice clasped his hands over his eyes to strenuously resist the strong inclination he felt to perjure himself. He counted no more; he thought no more; but remained tottering, his nerves totally unstrung.

In about an instant he heard a noise like that of a door closing a few paces distant from him; then, again everything was silent. Then he removed his hand, and opened his eyes, looking round about him like a man just awakened from a deep sleep, and might, perhaps, have fancied all that had occurred a passing dream, had he not held between his lips the identical ring, proving this unheard of adventure an incontestable reality.

CHAPTER IV.

MANNERS OF THE TIMES.

WHEN Maurice came to himself, he looked around, but saw only the gloomy, dirty streets extending to his right and left. He essayed to find out exactly where he was, that he might recognise it again; but his mind was disturbed. The night was dark, and the moon, which, for a moment, had appeared to light up the lovely face of the fair Unknown, had again retired behind the clouds. The young man, after a moment of cruel incertitude, retraced his steps towards his own house, situated in Rue de Roule.

Arriving at La Rue Sainte-Avoie, Maurice was much surprised at the number of patrols who circulated in that quarter of the Temple.

“What is the matter now, sergeant?” inquired he of the chief of patrol, busily occupied in thoroughly searching La Rue des Fontaines.

“What is it?” said the sergeant. “It is this, *mon officier*. It was intended this night to carry off the woman Capet, and the whole nest beside.”

“How was that?”

“A band, forming a patrol, had, I do not know how, procured the password, and introduced themselves into the Temple in the costume of Chasseurs of the National Guard. Fortunately, he who represented the corporal, when speaking to the officer on guard, addressed him as ‘Monsieur.’ He sold himself — the aristocrat.”

“The devil!” said Maurice; “and have they not arrested the conspirators?”

“No. When the patrol reached the street, they were all dispersed.”

“And is there any hope of capturing any of these fellows?”

“There is only one among the number of sufficient importance to arrest — that is the chief, a very slight man; who had been introduced among the men on guard by one of the municipals of the service. We had made the villain run, but he had found a door behind, and fled through les Madelonnettes.”

Under any other circumstances, Maurice would have remained for the rest of the night with the patriots, who guarded the safety of the public, but since one short hour, love of country was no longer his sole engrossing thought. He continued his way, and the tidings he had just learned were soon obliterated from his memory by the recent events, in which he had himself taken so active a part. Besides, since these pretended attempts had become very frequent, the patriots themselves were aware, under certain circumstances, they made use of them in a political measure, therefore this news caused our young republican no great disquietude.

On returning home, Maurice found his “official” (at this epoque they had no longer servants), — Maurice, say we, found his official waiting, but who, while waiting, had fallen asleep, and while sleeping snored uneasily. He awoke him, and with all due regard for his fellow-man, made him pull off his boots, then dismissed him, that he might not interrupt his cogitations, and jumping into bed, it being very late, and he also having youth on his side, slept soundly, notwithstanding the preoccupation of his thoughts.

The next day he discovered a letter on his “table de nuit.” This letter was written in a clear, elegant hand, but unknown to him. He looked at the seal. The seal was engraved with the single word in English — ”Nothing.” He opened it. It merely contained these words, “Thank you. Everlasting gratitude in exchange for everlasting forgetfulness.” Maurice summoned his domestic (the true patriot never rang, the sound denoted servility, indeed, many officials only entered the service of their masters on this express condition).

The official of Maurice had received, nearly thirty years before, at the baptismal font, the name of Jean, but in ‘92 he was, by private authority, re-baptised (Jean savouring of Aristocracy and Deism), and now called himself “Scevola.”

“Scevola,” demanded Maurice, “do you know where this letter came from?”

“No, citizen.”

“Who brought it to you?”

“The concierge.”

“And who brought it to him?”‘

“A commissionaire, no doubt, since it had no post-mark.”

“Go down, and request the concierge to walk up.”

The concierge complied, because it was Maurice who made the request, and he was much beloved by all the officials with whom he was concerned in any way; but at the same time the concierge declared, that had it been any other tenant, he should have asked him to walk down.

The concierge was called Aristide.

Maurice interrogated him. It was a stranger who had brought the letter, about eight in the morning. The young man multiplied his questions, and varied them in every possible shape, but could elicit nothing further. Maurice requested his acceptance of six francs, also desiring, if this stranger again presented himself, that he would follow him, without appearing to do so, and inform him where he returned to.

We hasten to say, that, much to the satisfaction of Aristide, who felt himself rather insulted by this proposition, the man returned no more.

Maurice remained alone, crushing the letter with vexation; he drew the ring from his finger, and placed it with the crumpled letter upon the “table de nuit,” then turned towards the wall, with the foolish idea of sleeping afresh; but at the end of an hour Maurice returned to this fanfaronade, kissed the ring and re-read the letter. The ring was a splendid sapphire; the letter, as we have said, was a charming little billet, displaying its aristocracy in every line.

As Maurice re-read and examined it, the door opened. Maurice hastily replaced the ring on his finger, and concealed the note under his pillow. Was this the modesty of newly-awakened love? or was it the shame of a patriot, who would not wish it to be known that one in relation with the people was imprudent enough to write a billet, of which the perfume alone was sufficient to compromise both the hand that penned it and the hand that received it.

He who entered was a young man attired as a patriot, but a patriot of surpassing elegance. His blouse was composed of fine cloth, his breeches of cashmere, and his stockings of fine striped silk. As to his bonnet, it might have shamed, from the elegance of its form and splendid purple colour, even those of Paris itself. Added to all this, he carried in his belt a pair of pistols of the royal manufacture of Versailles, and a short sabre, equal to those of the pupils of Champ-de-Mars.

“Ah! thou sleepest, Brutus,” said the new comer, “and the country is in danger. Fi, done!”

“No, Louis,” said Maurice, laughing, “I do not sleep, I dream.”

“Yes. I understand.”

“Well, as for me, I cannot understand.”

“Bah!”

“Of whom do you speak? Who is this Encharis?”

“Why, the woman.”

“What woman?”

“The woman of La Rue Saint Honore — the woman of the patrol — the Unknown — the woman for whom you and I risked our heads last night.”

“Oh! yes,” said Maurice, who knew perfectly well what his friend would say, and only feigned ignorance, “the Unknown.”

“Well; who was she?”

“I know nothing.”

“Was she pretty?”

“Pshaw!” said Maurice, pouting his lips disdainfully.

“A poor woman forgotten in some love adventure.

“Yes; sweet creatures that we are, ‘Tis Love that ever tortures man.”

“Is this possible?” said Maurice, to whom such an idea was at this moment peculiarly repugnant, and who would have much preferred finding the Unknown to be even a conspirator rather than a light woman. “And where does she live?”

“I know nothing concerning her.”

“Come, now; you know nothing, that’s impossible.”

“Why so?”

“You escorted her back.”

“She escaped from me at the Bridge Marie.”

“Escaped from you!” said Louis, with a roar of laughter; “a woman escape from you!

“Say, can the trembling dove elude The vulture, — tyrant *of the* air; —

The fawn, on whom the tiger rude Springs from his solitary lair?”

“Louis,” said Maurice, “I wish you would accustom yourself to speak like other people. You annoy me horribly with your atrocious poetry.”

“To speak like other people, indeed! Now, it appears to me I speak better than most people. I speak as the Citizen Demonstur, both in prose and poetry. As for my poetry, *mon cher,* I know a certain Emilie who does not consider it so bad. But to return to yours.”

“My poetry?”

“No; your Emilie.”

“Have I an Emilie?”

“Ah, ah! your gazelle may turn tigress, and show her teeth in a manner that may not please you, although in love.”

“I in love,” said Maurice, shaking his head.

“Yes, you in love.”

“Louis,” said Maurice, arming himself with a pipe-key which lay upon the table, “I swear that if you will spout verses I will whistle.”

“Then let us talk politics; besides, that brought me here. Have you heard the news?”

“I know that Capet’s wife wished to escape.”

“Oh! that is nothing.”

“What more is there, then?”

“The famous Chevalier de Maison Rouge is in Paris!”

“Is it true?” said Maurice, raising himself to a sitting posture. “When did he come?”

“Yesterday evening.”

“But how?”

“Disguised as a chasseur of the National Guard. A woman who is thought to be an aristocrat, disguised as a woman of the people, took him these clothes to the barrier gate; an instant afterwards they are gone out arm-in-arm. It was not till after they had passed the sentinel suspicion was excited. He had seen the woman pass with a bundle and repass accompanied by a soldier, when it suddenly struck him something was wrong and he ran after them. They had disappeared in an hotel of La Rue Saint Honore, where the door was opened as if by magic. The hotel had a second point of egress, leading on to the Champs Elysees. *Bon soir* to the Chevalier de Maison Rouge and his companion; they had both vanished. They will demolish the hotel and guillotine the proprietor, but that will not deter the chevalier from renewing the attempt which has just failed; it is four months since the preceding one, and yesterday was the second.”

“Is he not arrested?” demanded Maurice.

“Ah! well. Yes, *man cher,* as well attempt to stop Proteus, arrest Proteus; you know the trouble Aristides had to accomplish it —

‘Pastor Aristasus, fugiens Peneia Tempe.”‘

“Take care,” said Maurice, carrying the key to his mouth.

“Take care of yourself, for this time you will not whistle at me, but at Virgil.”

“That is very true, and as long as you do not translate it I have nothing to say. Now to return to Maison Rouge.”

“We agree that he is a brave man.”

“The fact is, that to undertake such things he must possess immense courage.”

“Or intense adoration.”

“Do you believe, then, in the love of the chevalier for the Queen?”

“I do not believe it. I only mention what report says. Besides, she has turned the brains of so many others, that this would not be at all surprising. She has seduced Bernais, so they say.”

“Never mind; the chevalier must have had confederates in the Temple even.”

“Very possible:

“Love breaks through bars, And laughs at bolts.”

“Louis!”

“Ah! it is true.”

“Then you think like the rest?”

“Why not?”

“Because, according to your account, the Queen has had already two hundred lovers.”

“Two, three, four hundred. She is quite handsome enough for that. I do not say that she loves them; but, in short, they love her. All the world behold the sun, but the sun does not see all the world.”

“You say, then, that the Chevalier de Maison Rouge —

“I say they are on the track at this moment, and if he escapes this time the blood hounds of the Republic, he will be a cunning fox.”

“And what does the Commune in all this affair?”

“The Commune is about to issue a decree, by which every house (like an open register) must display on the front the name of every inhabitant, both male and female. This is realizing the dream of the ancients. Why should there not be a window in every breast, that all the world may see what passes there?”

“An excellent idea that,” said Maurice.

“To place windows in men’s breasts?”

“No; but to place a list of names on every door.”

Maurice felt this might be the means of assisting him to discover the Unknown, or at least afford him some clue whereby he might be able to trace her.

“Is it not so?” said Louis. “I have already betted this measure will secure us a batch of five hundred aristocrats. By the bye, we have received this morning, at our club, a deputation of enrolled volunteers; they arrived conducted by our adversaries of that night, whom I had not abandoned till dead drunk — they are here, I tell you, with garlands of flowers and immortal crowns."

"Indeed," replied Maurice, laughing; "and how many were there?"

"There were thirty, and were shaved, wearing bouquets in their button-holes."

"Citizens of the Club of Thermopyles," said the orator, "we wish the union of Frenchmen not to be interrupted by any misunderstanding; we therefore come to fraternize anew with such excellent patriots as yourselves."

"Well, what then?"

"Then we have fraternized, and in this reiteration, as Diasonis expresses himself, we raised an altar to the country with the table of the secretary and two carafes in which the nosegays were deposited. *As* you were the hero of the feat, you were three times summoned to appear, that you might be crowned; but as you did not reply, and it was necessary to crown something, they crowned the bust of Washington. This was the order of the ceremony."

As Louis concluded this statement, which at this epoch had nothing of burlesque, a noise was heard proceeding from the street; the drums, first heard in the distance, now approached nearer and nearer. They easily comprehended the cause of this noise, now too common to be misunderstood.

"What is all that?" said Maurice.

"The proclamation of the decree of the Commune," said Louis.

"I will run to the station," said Maurice, leaping from his bed, and calling his servant to assist him.

"I will return home and go to bed," said Louis. "I had not two hours' sleep last night, thanks to those outrageous volunteers. If they only fight a little, let me sleep; but if they fight much, come and fetch me."

"But why are you so smart to-day?" said Maurice, eyeing him all over as he rose to withdraw.

"Because in my road hither I am obliged to pass the 'Rue Bethisy,' and in La Rue Bethisy, on the third flat, is a window which always opens when I pass."

"Then you do not fear being taken for a fop?"

“I a fop! I am, on the contrary, known for a French sansculotte. But one must make some sacrifice to the softer sex. The worship of the country does not exclude that of love; indeed, one commands the other — ”

“Our republicans profess We but follow ancient lore; Beauty we prize none the less, That we love our freedom more.

Dare to whistle to that, and I denounce you as an aristocrat. Adieu, *mon ami*.”

Louis held out his hand to Maurice, which the young republican cordially shook, and went out thinking of a sonnet to Chloris.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT SORT OF MAN THE CITIZEN MAURICE LINDEY WAS.

WHILE MAURICE Lindey, having dressed quickly, proceeds to the section of La Rue Lepelletier, of which, as we already know, he was secretary, we will endeavour to lay before the public the antecedents of this young man, introduced upon the scene by one of those impulses so familiar to powerful and generous natures.

The young man had spoken correctly the preceding evening, when in reply he had said his name was Maurice Lindey, resident in La Rue de Roule. He might have added he was a child of that half aristocracy, accorded to the gentlemen of the robe, his ancestors, for two hundred years, had distinguished themselves by that same parliamentary opposition which had rendered so illustrious the names of Moles and Masson. His father, the good Lindey, who had passed his life grumbling against despotism, when on the fourteenth of July, ‘89, the Bastille had fallen by the hands of the people, died from sudden fright, and the shock of seeing despotism replaced by a liberty militant, leaving his only son independent by fortune and republican in principles.

The revolution which had closely followed this great event found Maurice in all the vigour and maturity of manhood becoming a champion prepared to enter the lists; his republican education improved by his great assiduity to the clubs, and from reading all the pamphlets of that period. God knows how many Maurice had read. Deep and rational contempt for the hierarchy, philosophical consideration of the events which formed the body, absolute denial of all nobility which was not personal, impartial appreciation of the past, ardour for new ideas, sympathy with the people, blended with more aristocratic organizations, such were the morals, not of those whom we have selected, but which history has given us as the heroes of our tale.

As to his personal appearance, he was in height five feet eight inches, from twenty-five to twenty-six years of age, and muscular as Hercules. His beauty was of the French cast, that is to say, fair complexion, blue eyes, curling chestnut hair, rosy lips, and ivory teeth.

After the portrait of the man, comes the position of the citizen. Maurice, not rich, but still independent, bore a name much respected, and, above all, popular. Maurice, known by his education, and principles still more liberal even than his education, Maurice placed himself, so to speak, at the head of a party composed of all the young citizen patriots. It was well that with the sansculottes he passed for rather lukewarm, and with the sectionaries as rather foppish. But the sansculottes no longer remembered his lukewarmness when they saw him snap in twain the knotted cudgels, and the sectionaries pardoned his elegance when he one day scientifically planted a blow between two eyes, that had been watching him in an offensive manner for some time past.

And now for the physical, moral, and civic combined, Maurice had assisted at the taking of the Bastille, he had been on the expedition to Versailles, had fought like a lion on the 10th of August, and in this memorable journey, it is only justice to observe, he had killed as many patriots as Swedes, not being more willing to permit an assassin under a blouse, than an enemy to the republic under a red coat. It was he who exhorted the defenders of the chateau to surrender themselves, and to prevent the shedding of blood; it was he who placed himself before the mouth of the cannon, to which a Parisian artilleryman was putting a light; he who by a window first entered the Louvre, regardless of the firing of five hundred Swiss and as many gentlemen in ambush; and when he perceived the signal of surrender, his avenging sword had already cut through more than ten uniforms. Then, seeing his friends leisurely massacring some prisoners, who having thrown down their arms, and, clasping their hands, supplicated for life; he furiously attacked these fiends, which had gained for him a reputation worthy of the good days of Borne and of Greece. War declared, Maurice enrolled himself, and departed for the frontier in the rank of lieutenant, with the first 1500 volunteers the city sent against the invaders, and who each day had been followed by 1500 others.

At the first battle in which he assisted, that is to say at Jemappes, he received a ball, which after having divided the muscles of the shoulder, lodged against the bone. The representative of the people knew Maurice, and returned to Paris for his recovery.

For a whole month, consumed by fever, he tossed upon his bed of suffering, but in January was able to resume his command, if not by name, at least in fact, of the club of Thermopyles, that is to say of one hundred young men of the Parisian citizens, armed to oppose any attempt in favour of the tyrant Capet; and yet more, Maurice, with contracted brows, dilated eyes, and pale face, his heart shrouded with a strange mixture of moral hatred and physical pity, assisted at the execution of the king, and perhaps he alone of all that throng remained silent when the head of the son of Saint Louis fell on the scaffold, and only raised on high his redoubtable sabre, while his friends, loudly shouting *Vive la liberte,* omitted to notice that one voice at least did not unite itself with their own.

This was the individual who on the morning of the 14th of March, bent his steps towards La Rue Lepelletier, and of whose stormy career our history will furnish further detail.

Towards 10 o’clock Maurice reached the section of which he was the secretary. The commotion was great. The question in agitation was, to vote an address to the Convention in order to repress the conspiracies of the Girondins. They impatiently awaited the arrival of Maurice.

There was no doubt of the return of the Chevalier de liaison Rouge, of the audacity with which this arch-conspirator had for the second time entered Paris, where he well knew a price was now fixed on his head.

To this circumstance was attributed the attempt made the preceding evening on the Temple, and each one expressed his hatred and indignation against the traitors and aristocrats.

Contrary to the general expectation, Maurice appeared preoccupied and silent, wrote down the proclamation, finished his employment in three hours, demanded if the sitting had terminated, and receiving an answer in the affirmative, took his hat, and proceeded towards La Rue Saint Honore.

Arrived there, Paris appeared quite different to him. He revisited the corner of La Rue de Coq, where during the night he had first seen the lovely Unknown struggling in the hands of soldiers. Then from thence he proceeded to the Bridge Marie, the same road he had travelled by her side, stopping where the patrols had stopped them, repeating in the same place (as if it had preserved an echo of their words), the sentences exchanged between them; only it was now one o’clock in the afternoon, and the sun shining brilliantly upon this walk, reminded him at every step of the occurrences of the past night.

Maurice crossed the bridge, and entered directly La Rue Victor, as it was then called.

"Poor woman," murmured Maurice, "she did not reflect yesterday that the duration of the night was only twelve hours, and that her secret would in all probability not last longer than the night. By the light of the sun, I will endeavour to find the door through which she vanished, and who knows but I may perhaps even see her at a window?"

He then entered the old Rue Saint Jacques, and placed himself in the same spot as the Unknown had placed him on the preceding evening. For an instant, he closed his eyes, perhaps foolishly expecting the kiss he had then received would again impress his lips. But he felt nothing but the remembrance; 'tis true that burned yet.

Maurice opened his eyes and saw two little streets, one to the right, the other to the left. They were muddy, dirty, and badly formed, furnished with barriers, cut by little bridges, thrown over a kennel. There might be seen the beams of arches, nooks, corners, and twenty doors propt up, fast falling into decay. Here indeed was misery in all its hideousness. Here and there was a garden enclosed in a fence, others by palisades of poles, some by walls, and skins hanging in the outhouses, diffusing around that disgusting odour always arising from a tan-yard.

Maurice's search lasted for nearly two hours, during which he found nothing, and divined nothing, and ten times he had retraced his steps to consider where he was. But all his efforts were in vain, his search was a fruitless one, as all trace of the young woman seemed to have been effaced by the fog and rain of the previous night.

"Truly," said Maurice, "I must be in a dream. This filthy place could not for an instant have afforded refuge for my beautiful fairy of last night."

There was, in this wild Republican, more real poetry than in his friend of the Anacreontic quatrains, since he clung to this idea, fearful to sully, even in thought, the spotless purity of the Unknown. But all hope had now forsaken him.

"Adieu," said he; "mysterious beauty, you have treated me like a child and a fool. Would she have led me here if she really lived in this wretched locality? No, she would only pass as a swan over the infected marsh, and, like a bird in the air, leave no trace behind."

CHAPTER VI.

THE TEMPLE.

THE SAME DAY, and the same hour, when Maurice, disappointed and unhappy, repassed the Bridge De la Tournelle, several municipals, accompanied by Sauterre, Commandant of the Parisian National Guard, made a visit of inquiry to the Temple, transformed into a prison, since the 13th of August, 1793.

The visit was made especially to an apartment in the third story, consisting of an antechamber and three rooms. One of these chambers was occupied by two females, a young girl, and a child of nine years old, all dressed in mourning. The elder of the females was about seven or eight and thirty. She was seated at a table reading.

The second, whose age appeared twenty-eight or twenty-nine, was engaged on a piece of tapestry.

The young girl of fourteen years was seated near the child, who, ill and in bed, closed his eyes as if asleep, although that was utterly impossible, owing to the noise made by the municipals. Whilst some moved the beds, others examined their clothes and linen; the rest, when their search was concluded, remained rudely staring at the unfortunate prisoners, who never even raised their eyes, the one from her book, the other from her embroidery, and the third from her brother.

The eldest of these women was tall, handsome, and very pale. She appeared to concentrate all her attention on her book, although in all probability her eyes read but not her mind. One of the municipals approached her, brutally snatched away her book, and flung it into the middle of the room. The prisoner stretched her hand across the table, took up the second volume, and continued to read.

The Montagnard made a furious gesture, as if he would take away the second, as he had the first, but at this attempt, which startled the prisoner at her embroidery near the window, the young girl sprang forward, and encircling the reader’s head with her arms, weeping, exclaimed, “My poor mother! my poor mother!” and then embraced her. As she did so the prisoner placed her mouth to her ear, and whispered — ”Marie, there is a letter concealed in the stove; remove it.”

“Come! come!” said the municipal, brutally dragging the young girl towards him, and separating her from her mother, “shall you soon have finished embracing?”

“Sir,” said she, “has the Convention decreed that children shall not embrace their mother?”

“No, but it has decreed that traitors, aristocrats, and *ci-devants* shall be punished, that *is* why I am here to interrogate you. Answer, Antoinette!”

She who was thus grossly accosted did not even deign to look at her examiner, but turned her head aside, while a flush passed over her face, pale, and furrowed with tears.

“It is impossible,” said he, “that you are ignorant of the attempt last night. Whence came it?”

The prisoners still maintained silence.

“Answer, Antoinette,” said Sauterre, approaching her, without remarking the almost frenzied horror which had seized the young woman at sight of this man, who, on the morning of the 21st of January, conducted Louis XVI. from the Temple to the scaffold. “Reply. They were conspiring last night against the Republic, and seeking your escape from the captivity in which you are expiating your crimes, by the will of the people. Tell me, do you know who are the conspirators?”

Marie started at contact with that voice, which she endeavoured to fly from by removing her chair to the greatest distance possible, but replied no more to this question than the former ones; paid no more deference to Santerre than she had done to the municipal.

“You are then determined not to reply,” said Santerre, stamping his foot furiously.

The prisoner took up the third volume from the table. Santerre turned himself away. The brutal power of this man, who commanded 80,000 men, who had only need of a gesture to cover the voice of the dying Louis XVI., was defeated by the dignity of a poor prisoner, whose head he could cause to fall, but whose will he could not bend.

“And you, Elizabeth,” said he, addressing the other female, who at that instant abandoned her tapestry to join her hands in prayer, not to these men, but to God, “will you reply?”

“I do not know what you ask,” said she; “therefore I cannot reply.”

"Morbleu! Citizen Capet," said Santerre, impatiently, "I think what I say is sufficiently clear, too. I again tell you, that yesterday an attempt was made for your escape, and you certainly must know the culprits."

"Having no communication with those outside, monsieur, we cannot possibly tell what they do, either for or against us."

"Very well," said the municipal; "we will now hear what your nephew will say."

And he approached the bed of the young Dauphin. At this menace, Marie Antoinette suddenly rose.

"Monsieur," said she, "my son is ill, and now asleep — do not wake him."

"Reply, then."

"I know nothing."

The municipal walked straight to the bed of the little prisoner, who, as we have said, feigned sleep.

"Come, wake up, Capet," said he, shaking him roughly.

The child opened his eyes and smiled.

The municipals then surrounded his bed.

The queen, agitated with fear and grief, made a sign to her daughter, who, profiting by this moment, glided from the apartment into the room adjoining, opened the mouth of the stove, and drew out a letter.

"What do you want with me?" asked the child.

"To inquire if you heard nothing during the night?"

"No; I was asleep."

"You are very fond of sleep, it seems."

"Yes; for when I sleep I dream."

"And what do you dream?"

"That I again see my father, whom you have killed."

"Then you heard nothing?" said Santerre, quickly.

"Nothing."

"These wolfs cubs are, in truth, well agreed with the she-wolf," said the municipal, furious with rage. "There has been, notwithstanding, a plot."

The queen smiled.

"She bullies us, the Austrian!" cried the municipal. "Well, since it is thus, let us execute in all its rigour the decree of the Commune. Get up, Capet."

"What would you do?" said the queen, forgetting herself. "Do you not see my son is ill, and suffering from fever? Would you wish to kill him?"

"Your son," said the municipal, "is the cause of constant alarm to the council of the Temple: he is the point at which all the conspirators aim, and flatter themselves they shall carry you off altogether. Well, let them come. Tison — call Tison."

Tison was a species of journeyman, charged with all the household work in the prison. He appeared. He was a man of forty years old, much sunburnt, of a rude and ferocious aspect, with matted black hair, overhanging his eyebrows.

"Tison," said Santerre, "who came yesterday to bring the prisoners' food?"

Tison uttered a name.

"And their linen, who brought it to them?"

"My daughter."

"Then your daughter is a laundress?"'

"Certainly."

"And you gave her the washing of the prisoners?"

"Why not? She gains as much by one as another; it is no longer the tyrant's money, but belongs to the nation, who pays for them."

"You were told to examine the linen with the greatest attention."

"Well, do I ever fail in my duty? In proof of which, they had yesterday a handkerchief tied in two knots. I have taken it to the council, who ordered my wife to wash, iron, and return it to Madame Capet, without saying anything about it."

At this remark of two knots being tied in the pocket-handkerchief, the Queen trembled, the pupils of her eyes dilated, and she and Madame Elizabeth exchanged hasty glances.

"Tison," said Santerre, "your daughter is a person of whose patriotism no one can entertain a doubt; but when she leaves the Temple to-day she returns there no more."

"Ah, mon Dieu!" said Tison, terrified, "what are you saying to me? I shall not see my daughter till I go out."

"You will not go out," said Santerre.

Tison looked wildly around, without allowing his eye to remain fixed on any particular object, and suddenly exclaimed — "I am not to go out; that is it, is it? Well, then, I will go out altogether. Give me my dismissal. I am neither traitor nor aristocrat, that I should be detained in prison. I tell you I will go out."

“*Citizen*,” said Santerre, “obey the orders of the Commune, and be silent, or I tell you it may be all the worse for you. Remain here and watch all that passes. There is an eye on you. I warn you of this.”

During this time the Queen, who thought herself for a moment forgotten, recovered by degrees, and replaced her son in his bed.

“Desire your wife to come up,” said the municipal to Tison.

He obeyed without a word. The threats of Santerre had rendered him meek as a lamb.

Tison’s wife came up.

“Come here, citoyenne,” said Santerre, “we are going into the antechambers; during that time, search all the prisoners.”

“Listen, wife,” said Tison; “they will not permit our daughter to come to the Temple.”

“They will not permit our daughter to come here! Then we shall see her no more.”

Tison mournfully shook his head.

“What do you say to this?”

“I say we will make a report to the Council of the Temple, and the Council shall decide it. In the meantime — ”

“In the meantime I will see my daughter again.”

“Silence,” said Santerre; “you came here for the purpose of searching the prisoners, search them, then, and afterwards we will see — ”

“But — now — ”

“Oh, oh!” said Santerre, knitting his brows; “you are contaminated, it appears to me.”

“Do as the Citizen-General tells you, wife,” he said; “afterwards, we shall see.”

And Tison regarded Santerre with a humble smile.

“Very well,” said the woman; “go, then, I am ready to search.”

The men went out.

“Ma chere, Madame Tison,” said the Queen; “you know — ”

“I only know, Citoyenne Capet,” said the horrible woman, gnashing her teeth, “that you are the cause of all the misery of the people; and also that I have reason to suspect you, and you know it.”

Four men waited at the door, to assist Tison’s wife, if the Queen offered any resistance.

The search commenced on the Queen.

There was found on her person a handkerchief tied in three knots, which unfortunately appeared a reply to the one spoken of by Tison; a pencil, a scapulary, and some sealing-wax.

“Ah! I knew it,” said Tison’s wife; “I have often told the municipals she wrote, the Austrian! The other day I found a lump of sealing-wax on the candlestick.”

“Ah, madame,” said the Queen, in a supplicating tone, “only show the scapulary, I entreat you.”

“Yes,” said the woman, “I feel pity for you, who have felt so much pity for me; to take my daughter from me.”

Madame Elizabeth and Madame Royal had nothing found upon them.

The woman Tison recalled the municipals, who entered, Santerre at their head. She showed them the articles found upon the Queen; which, as they passed from hand to hand, afforded subject for an infinite variety of conjectures; but the handkerchief tied in three knots excited, above all, the imagination of these persecutors of the royal race.

“Now,” said Santerre, “we are going to read the decree of the Convention to you.”

“What decree?” demanded the Queen.

“The decree which orders you to be separated from your son.”

“Is it, then, true that this decree exists?”

“Yes; the Convention has too much regard for the health of a child confided to its guardianship, to leave him in the care of a mother so depraved.”

The eyes of the Queen flashed like lightning.

“But form some accusation at least, tigers that you are.”

“That is not at all difficult,” said a municipal; and he pronounced one of those infamous accusations brought by Suetone against Agrippine.

“Oh!” cried the Queen, standing, pale with indignation, “I appeal to the heart of every mother.”

“That is all very fine,” said a municipal; “but we have already been here two hours, and cannot lose the whole day. Get up, Capet, and follow us.”

“Never, never!” cried the Queen, rushing between the municipals and the young Louis, preparing to defend the approach to his bed, as a tigress the entrance to her den. “Never will I permit you to carry away my child.”

“Oh! Messieurs,” said Madame Elizabeth, clasping her hands in an attitude of prayer, “Messieurs, in the name of Heaven, have pity on us both.”

“Then speak,” said Santerre; “state the names, avow the project of your accomplices; explain what they wished to intimate by the knots made in the pocket-handkerchief brought with your linen by Tison’s daughter, and the meaning of those tied in the handkerchief found in your pocket, and on these conditions I will leave you your child.”

A look from Madame Elizabeth seemed to implore the Queen to submit to this dreadful sacrifice.

Then quietly brushing from her eye a tear which sparkled like a diamond, “Adieu, my son,” cried she; “never forget your father who is in heaven, or your mother who will soon join him there, and never omit to repeat morning and evening the prayer I have taught you. Adieu! my son.”

She gave him a last kiss; then rising calm and inflexible, “I know nothing, Messieurs,” said she, “do as you please.”

But the Queen must have required more than the usual amount of fortitude contained in the heart of woman, and above all of a mother. She fell back fainting upon a chair, whilst they carried away the child, who with fast flowing tears held out his arms, but uttered not a single word or cry.

The door closed behind the municipals who carried away the child, and the three women remained alone. There was for a moment the deep silence of despair, interrupted only by occasional sobs.

The Queen first broke silence.

“My daughter,” said she, “that letter!”

“I burnt it, as you desired me, ma mere.”

“Without reading it?”

“Without reading it.”

“Adieu, then, to the last ray of hope, divine hope,” murmured Madame Elizabeth.

“You are right, my sister, you are right; it is almost beyond endurance.” Then turning towards her daughter, “But you at least saw the handwriting, Marie?”

“Yes, ma mere, for a moment.”

The Queen rose, went to the door, to make sure she was not observed, then drawing a pin from her hair, approached the wall, and from a chink drew out a small paper folded like a letter, and showing it to Madame Royale, “Collect your thoughts before you reply, my child,” said she; “was the writing the same as this?”

“Yes, yes, ma mere,” cried the princess; “I recognise it.”

“God be praised, then,” cried the Queen, falling with fervour on her knees. “If he could write since this morning, he is safe. Thanks, mon Dieu! thanks! So noble a friend deserves thy miraculous preservation.”

“Of whom do you speak, ma mere?” demanded Madame Royale. “Who is this friend? Tell me his name, that I may recommend him to God in my prayers.”

“You are right, my child; never forget it, this name, for it is the name of a gentleman replete with honour and courage, one not devoted to us through ambition, for he has only revealed himself since our misfortunes. He has never seen the Queen of France, or rather the Queen of France has never seen him, and he vows his life to her defence. Perhaps he will be recompensed as all virtue is now recompensed, by a dreadful death. But — if he dies.... oh! I shall still think of him in heaven.... he is called....” The Queen looked uneasily around, then lowering her voice, “He is called the Chevalier de Maison Rouge.... Pray for him.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE OATH OF THE GAMESTER.

THE ATTEMPTED abduction, so contestable was it, because it had had no one to commence the execution of it, had excited the anger of some, and the interest of others. That which likewise corroborated this event almost to a certainty, was that the Committee for General Security learned that three weeks or a mouth before a number of emigrants had entered France from different parts of the frontier. It was evident these people who thus risked their lives did not do so without design, and this design was in all probability to co-operate in carrying off the royal family.

Already, upon the proposition of the Conventionalist Asselim, the terrible decree had been promulgated, which condemned to death all emigrants, convicted of having returned to France, all Frenchmen convicted of having intended to emigrate, particularly all convicted of having assisted in their flight, or in their return, either a female or male emigrant; and lastly, all citizens convicted of having afforded shelter to an emigrant. With this dreadful law commenced the “Reign of Terror.” All that was wanting was the law for suspected persons. The Chevalier de Maison Rouge was an enemy far too active and audacious for his return to Paris, and his apparition in the Temple, not to call forth the gravest measures. More severe inspections than had previously taken place were made in a number of suspected houses, but with the exception of some female emigrants, who allowed themselves to be taken, and some old men, whose few remaining days they did not trouble themselves to dispute with the executioner, their researches produced no other result.

The sections, as may be imagined, were after this event much occupied for several days, and consequently the secretary of the section Lepelletier, one of the most influential in Paris, had little time to think of his unknown fair one. At first, as he had resolved on quitting La Rue Vieille St. Jacques, he had tried to forget her, but, as his friend Louis had observed to him —

Alas! endeavouring to forget But makes us recollect the more.

Maurice, however, neither said or confessed anything. He buried in his heart all the details of that adventure which he had been able to conceal from the scrutiny of his friend. But he who knew Maurice to be of a joyous and hilarious nature, and now saw him constantly sad and thoughtful, seeking solitude, doubted not, to use his own expression, that the rogue Cupid had passed that way.

It is remarkable that, during its eighteen centuries of monarchy, France had had few years so mythological as the year of our Lord 1793. In the meantime the chevalier was not taken, and he was no more spoken of. The widowed Queen, cruelly robbed of her child, contented herself by weeping, in company with her sister and daughter. The young dauphin was consigned to the care of "Simon the Shoemaker," this poor little martyr who, in the short space of three years, was reunited to his father. There was a moment's calm. The Montagnard volcano rested before devouring the Girondins.

Maurice felt the weight of this calm, as the heaviness of the atmosphere is felt in stormy weather, and not knowing how to dispose of his leisure, abandoned himself entirely to the ardour of a sentiment which, if not actually love itself, bordered closely upon it. He re-read his letter, again kissed his beautiful sapphire ring, and resolved (notwithstanding his oath) to make one more attempt, promising himself this should indeed be the last. The young man had first thought he would go to the section of the Jardin des Plantes, and there make inquiry from the secretary, his colleague. But the first idea (and we may add, which he still retained), that the beautiful Unknown was mixed up in some political plot, still restrained him, as the thought that any indiscretion on his part might be the means of sending this lovely woman to La Place de la Revolution, and her head to the block, caused his blood to curdle and *freeze* in his veins. He therefore determined on seeking this adventure alone, and without any further information. His plan, besides, was very simple. The catalogue of names inscribed on each door would certainly afford him some clue, and then, by interrogating the porter, he might be able to solve the mystery.

In his capacity of secretary of La Rue Lepelletier, he possessed full and entire right to make all inquiries.

Besides, Maurice, ignorant of the name of the Unknown, was able to judge of it by analogy. It was impossible so lovely a creature should not possess a name in harmony with her form, some name appertaining to sylph, fairy, or angel, since her arrival on earth must have been hailed as that of a superior and supernatural being. This name would then most infallibly guide him.

Maurice then dressed himself in a blouse of dark brown cloth, adorned his head with the “bonnet rouge,” worn on great occasions, and set out on his voyage of discovery alone. He had in his hand one of those knotted cudgels called “une Constitution,” which, wielded by his vigorous hand, was powerful as the club of Hercules, and in his pocket he placed his commission as secretary of the section Lepelletier. These were at once his physical security and his moral guarantee.

He prepared himself to review afresh La Rue St. Victor, La Rue Vieille St. Jacques, reading by light of the declining day all those names (inscribed in a hand more or less practised) upon the panels of every door.

Maurice had reached the hundredth house, and consequently read the hundredth list, and nothing had yet occurred to induce him to imagine that he was in the least degree upon the trail of the Unknown, when a good-natured shoemaker, noticing the anxiety and impatience depicted on the young man’s countenance, came out with his strap of leather and his punch, and looking at Maurice over his spectacles —

“Do you wish any information respecting the tenants of this house, Citizen?” said he; “if so, I shall be happy to give it to you.”

“Thanks, Citizen,” stammered Maurice; “I am looking for the name of a friend.”

“Tell me the name, Citizen; I know everybody in this quarter. Where does this friend live?”

“He lives, I think, in the Old Rue Jacques, but I fear he has removed.”

“But how is he named? I must know that.”

Maurice taken thus unawares, hesitated for a moment, then pronounced the first name that presented itself to his memory.

“Rene,” said he.

“And what trade?”

Maurice was surrounded by tanneries.

“A working tanner,” said he.

“In that case,” said a burgess, who stopped and regarded Maurice with a certain good nature, not totally exempt from distrust, “it is necessary to address yourself to his master.”

“That is true,” said the door-keeper; “it is quite right, the masters know the names of these workmen; there is the Citizen Dixmer, who is manager of a tannery, has more than fifty workmen in his yard, he will perhaps tell you.” Maurice turned round and saw a burgess of commanding figure, with a mild countenance, the richness of whose attire denoted opulence.

“Only as the citizen porter observes, it is necessary I should know the family name.”

“I have told you, Rene.”

“Rene is his baptismal name; it is the family name I require. All my workmen sign their family name.”

“Ma foi,” said Maurice, growing impatient under this species of interrogation, “the family name? I do not know it.”

“What,” said the burgess, with a smile, in which Maurice thought he discerned more irony than he wished to appear, “What, not know the surname of your friend?”

“No.”

“In that case, it is not probable you will find them,” and the burgess gravely bowing to Maurice, walked a short distance and entered a house in the Old Rue Saint Jacques.

“The fact is, that if you do not know his surname,” said the porter....

“Well, I do not know it,” said Maurice, who would not have been sorry to find some occasion to vent his ill temper, and was at the moment much inclined to seek a quarrel. “What have you to say to that?”

“Nothing, Citizen, nothing at all, only since you do not know the name of your friend, it is as Citizen Dixmer said, more than probable, you will not find him.” And the citizen porter went into his lodge, shrugging his shoulder. Maurice felt a great inclination to thrash this porter, but he was an old man, and his infirmities saved him. Besides, the day was drawing to a close, and he had only a few moments of daylight left. He availed himself of it by returning to the first street, then to the second, examined every door, searched in every nook, looked under every palisade, climbed each wall, threw a glance into the interior of every gateway, looked through the keyholes, knocked at some deserted warehouses without receiving any reply, till at length nearly two hours had elapsed in this useless investigation.

Nine o’clock struck; no more noise was heard, no movement seen in this deserted quarter, whose life seemed to have retired with the light of day. Maurice in despair made a retrograde movement, when all at once, at the winding of a narrow alley, he discerned a light burning. He immediately ventured into the dark passage, without remarking that at the moment even where he had thrust himself, a curious head, which for the last quarter of an hour (from the midst of a clump of trees, rising from under the wall), had followed all his movements, and then disappeared suddenly behind this wall. A short time after this head had disappeared, three men came out from a small door in this same wall, went into the alley, where Maurice had preceded them, while a fourth for greater security, locked the door of entrance into this alley. At the end of this alley, Maurice discovered a court; it was on the opposite side of this court the light was burning. He knocked at the door of a poor solitary house, but at the first sound the light was extinguished. He redoubled his efforts, but no one answered to his call, he saw they were determined to make no reply, so comprehending that it was only a useless waste of time, he crossed the court and re-entered the alley. At this moment the door of the house turned softly on its hinges, three men came out, and then the sound of a whistle was heard.

Maurice turned round, and saw three shadows within a short distance. He saw in the darkness, also (his eyes having become accustomed to this obscurity) the reflection of three glittering blades. He knew he was hemmed in. He would have brandished his club, but alley was so narrow that it touched the wall on either side. At the same moment a violent blow on the head stunned him. This was an unforeseen assault made upon him by the four men who entered through the door in the wall. Seven men at the same time threw themselves upon Maurice, and notwithstanding a desperate resistance, overpowered him, and succeeded in binding his hands and bandaging his eyes.

Maurice had not even uttered a cry, or called for aid. Strength and true courage suffer by themselves, and are tenacious of the help of a stranger. Besides, Maurice had often heard that no one would enter this deserted quarter. Maurice was thus, as we have said, thrown down and bound, but had not uttered a single complaint. He had reflected as to what would follow, that as they had bandaged his eyes they did not intend to kill him directly. At Maurice’s age, respite becomes hope. He recovered his presence of mind, and listened patiently.

“Who are you?” demanded a voice still breathless from the late struggle.

“I am a man they are murdering,” replied Maurice.

“What is more, you are a dead man if you speak so loud, or call for assistance, or even utter the least cry.”

“If I had wished to do so, I need not have waited till the present time.”

“Are you ready to answer my questions?”

“Let me hear them first, I shall then see whether I ought to reply.”

“Who sent you here?”

“No one.”

“You came then of your own accord?”

“Yes.”

“You lie.”

Maurice made a desperate effort to disengage his hands, but it was in vain.

“I never lie,” said he.

“In either case, whether you came of your own accord or were sent, you are a spy.”

“And you are cowards!”

“We cowards!”

“You are seven or eight against one man bound, and you insult that man. Cowards! cowards! cowards!”

This violence on the part of Maurice, instead of enraging his adversaries, appeared to produce a contrary effect. It was even a proof that the young man was not what they deemed him; a true spy would have trembled, and begged for mercy.

“There is nothing insulting in that,” said rob — a voice, milder, yet firmer than any that had previously been heard, “in the times we live in, one may be a spy without being a dishonest man, only it is at the risk of one’s life.”

“If that is your opinion, you are welcome to question me, I will answer you faithfully.”

“What brought you into this quarter?”

“To search here for a woman.”

An incredulous murmur followed this assertion. The breeze increased, and became a hurricane.

‘You lie!” said the same voice; “it is no woman — there is no woman in this quarter to follow; avow your intentions, or you die.”

“Well, then,” said Maurice, “you surely would not kill me for the mere pleasure of doing so, unless you are true brigands.”

And Maurice made a second effort, more strenuous than the first, to disengage his arms from the cord which secured them. It was useless, and at that moment he experienced a sharp pain in his breast, which made him flinch.

"Oh! you feel that," said one of the men; "there are eight more similar to this, with which you will claim acquaintance."

"Kill me, then," said Maurice, with resignation; "it will at least be finished at once."

"Who are you?" said the mild, but firm voice.

"Do you wish to know my name?"

"Yes, your name."

"I am Maurice Lindey."

"What!" cried a voice; "Maurice Lindey, the revolu — the patriot, Maurice Lindey, the secretary of the Section Lepelletier?"

These words were pronounced with so much warmth, that Maurice felt they were decisive. This reply was calculated to decide his fate. Maurice was incapable of fear; he drew himself up like a true Spartan, and replied in a firm voice —

"Yes, Maurice Lindey; yes, Maurice Lindey, secretary to the Section Lepelletier; yes, Maurice Lindey, the patriot, the revolutionist, the Jacobin; Maurice Lindey, in short, whose happiest day will be that on which he dies for liberty."

This reply was received with the silence of death.

Maurice presented his breast, expecting every moment the sword, of which he had only felt the point, would be plunged into his heart.

"Is this true?" said a voice full of emotion; "let us see, young man, that you lie not."

"Feel in my pocket," said Maurice, "and you will there find my commission. Look upon my breast, and if not effaced by my blood, you will see my initials, an M and L embroidered on my shirt."

Maurice felt himself immediately raised by strong arms, and carried to some distance. He first heard one door open, then a second, which he knew was narrower than the first, from the trouble the men found in carrying him through. The murmuring and whispering continued.

"I am lost!" said Maurice to himself; "they will fasten a stone round my neck, and cast me into the Briere."

In an instant he felt the men who bore him were mounting some steps. A warmer air fanned his face, and he was placed upon a seat. He heard a door double locked, and the sound of departing steps. He fancied he was left alone. He listened with as much attention as was possible in a man whose life hung upon a word, and thought he again heard the voice which had already struck upon his ear say, with a mixture of decision and mildness, “We will deliberate.”

CHAPTER VIII.

GENEVIEVE.

A QUARTER OF an hour passed away; it appeared an age to Maurice. And what more natural? Young, handsome, and vigorous, highly beloved and esteemed by a hundred devoted friends, with whom he sometimes dreamed of accomplishing great things, he felt himself suddenly, without preparation, liable to lose his life — the victim of a base ambuscade. He knew no one was shut in the chamber, but was he watched? He again exerted all his strength to break his bonds, till his iron muscles swelled, and the cords entered his flesh, but this, like all his former efforts, was useless.

It was the more terrible his hands being tied behind, he was unable to draw up his bandage. If he were only able to see, he might perhaps be able to escape. However, as these various attempts were made without opposition, and hearing no one stirring, he concluded he was quite alone.

His feet pressed upon something soft and heavy, it might be gravel or perhaps clay. An acrid and pungent smell announced the presence of vegetable matter. Maurice fancied he was in a greenhouse, or some place very like it. He took a step or two, hit the wall, turned, and, groping with his hands, felt some garden tools. He uttered an exclamation of joy. With unparalleled exertion he began to examine these tools, one after the other. His flight now became a question of time. If chance or Providence granted him five minutes, and if among these tools he found a sharp instrument, he was saved. He found a spade. From the way in which Maurice was bound, it required a great struggle to raise the spade a sufficient height for his purpose. He at length succeeded, and, upon the iron of the spade which he supported against the wall with his back, he at last cut, or rather wore away, the cord which confined his wrists. The operation was tedious; the iron cut slowly. The perspiration streamed from his face, he heard a noise as of some one approaching; with a tremendous effort the cord (rather worn) broke. This time it was a cry ofjoy he gave utterance to; now at least he was sure to die in defending himself. Maurice tore the bandage from his eyes. He was not deceived, but found himself in a kind of not greenhouse but pavilion, used as a receptacle for the more delicate plants, unable to outlive the winter in the open air. In a corner the gardening implements were stowed away, which had been the means of rendering him so important a service. Facing him was a window; he glanced towards it, and saw it was grated, and a man armed with a carbine placed sentinel before it.

On the other side of the garden, about thirty paces distant, perhaps rather less, rose a small turret, fellow to the one where Maurice remained prisoner. The blind was down, but through the blind a light was visible.

He approached the door and listened, another sentinel was placed before this door. These were the footsteps he had heard. But from the end of the corridor a confusion of voices resounded. The deliberation bad evidently degenerated into disputation.

Maurice could not hear distinctly what was said; some words, however, reached him, and amidst these words — as if for them only the distance was short — he distinguished plainly, Spy! Poniard! Death! Maurice redoubled his attention, a door opened, and he heard more distinctly.

“Yes,” said one voice, “it is assuredly a spy; he has discovered something, and is certainly sent to take us and our secret unawares. In freeing him we run the risk of his denouncing us.”

“But his word,” said a voice.

“His word — he will give it only to betray it. Is he a gentleman, that we should trust his word?”

Maurice ground his teeth at the idea which some folks still retained, that only a gentleman could keep his oath.

“But he does not know us; how can he denounce us?”

“No, he does not know us certainly, nor our occupations, but he knows the address, and will return; this time he will be well accompanied.”

This argument appeared conclusive.

“Then,” said a voice, which several times already had struck Maurice as belonging to the chief; “it is then quite decided.”

“Yes, a hundred times yes; I do not comprehend you with your magnanimity. Mon cher, if the Committee for the Public Safety caught us, you would see if they acted after this fashion.”

“You persist, then, in your decision, gentlemen?”

“Without doubt, and you are not, we hope, going to oppose it?”

“I have only one voice, gentlemen, it has been in favour of his liberation; you possess six, and they all vote for his death. Let it then be death.”

Maurice felt the blood freeze in his veins.

"Of course he will howl and cry," said the voice; "but have you removed Madame Dixmer?"

"Madame Dixmer!" murmured Maurice; "I begin now to comprehend I am in the house of the master tanner, who spoke to me in the old Rue Saint Jacques, and who went away laughing because I was unable to tell him the name of my friend. But how the devil can it be to his interest to assassinate me?"

Looking round about him, Maurice perceived an iron stake with a handle of ashtree wood.

"In any case," said he, "before they assassinate me, I will kill more than one of them."

And he sprung to secure this harmless instrument, which, in his hand, was to become a formidable weapon. He then retired behind the door, and so placed himself that he could see without being seen. His heart beat so tumultuously, that in the deep silence its palpitations might be heard. Suddenly Maurice shuddered from head to foot. A voice had said —

"If you act according to my advice, you will break a window, and through the bars kill him with a shot from a carbine."

"Oh! no, no — not an explosion," said another voice; "that might betray us. Besides, Dixmer, there is your wife."

"I have just looked at her through the blind; she suspects nothing — she is reading."

"Dixmer, you shall decide for us. Do you advocate a shot from the carbine, or a stroke from the poniard?"

"Avoid firearms as far as it is possible — the poniard."

"Then let it be the poniard. Allons!"

"Allons!" repeated five or six voices together.

Maurice was a child of the Revolution, with a heart of flint, and in mind, like many others at that epoch, an atheist. But at the worn "Allons!" pronounced behind the door, which alone separated him from death, he remembered the sign of the cross, which his mother had taught him when an infant he repeated his prayers at her knee.

Steps approached, stopped: then the key turned in the lock, and the door slowly opened.

During this fleeting moment, Maurice had said to himself, "If I lose this opportunity to strike the first blow, I am a dead man. If I throw myself upon the assassins, I take them unawares — gain first the garden, then the street, and am saved!"

Immediately, with the spring of a lion, and uttering a savage cry, which savoured more of menace than terror, he threw down the first two men, who, believing him bound and blindfolded, were quite unprepared for such an assault, scattered the others, took a tremendous leap over them thanks to his iron muscles, saw at the end of the corridor a door leading into the garden wide open, rushed towards it, cleared at a bound six steps, and found himself in the garden, debating if it were best to endeavour to run and gain the gate. This gate was secured by a lock and a couple of bolts. Maurice drew back the bolts, tried to open the lock, but it had no key.

In the meantime his pursuers, who had reached the steps, perceived him.

"There he is!" cried they; "fire upon him, Dixmer, fire! Kill him — kill him!"

Maurice uttered a groan; he was enclosed in the garden; he measured the walls with his eye — they were ten feet in height.

All this passed in a moment. The assassins rushed forward in pursuit of him.

Maurice was about thirty feet in advance, or nearly so; he looked round about him with the air of a condemned man who seeks concealment as the means of saving himself from the reality. He perceived the turret — the blind — and behind the blind the light burning.

He made but one bound — a bound of six feet — seized the blind, tore it down, passed through the window, smashing it, and alighted in a chamber, where a female sat reading.

The female rose terrified, calling for assistance.

"Stand aside, Genevieve — stand aside!" cried the voice of Dixmer; "stand aside, that I may kill him!"

And Maurice saw the carbine levelled at him. But scarcely had the woman looked at him, than she uttered a frightful cry, and instead of standing aside, as desired by her husband, rushed between him and the barrel of the gun.

This movement concentrated all Maurice's attention to the generous woman, whose first impulse was to protect him from danger and death. In his turn, he uttered a cry of astonishment.

It was the long sought-for Unknown.

"You!" cried he; "you — "

“Silence!” cried she.

Then, turning towards the assassins, who, variously armed, approached the window —

“Ah! you will not kill him!” cried she.

“He is a spy,” said Dixmer, whose usually placid countenance had assumed an expression of stern resolution; “he is a spy, and therefore must die.”

“A spy — he!” said Genevieve; “he a spy! Come here, Dixmer; I need only say one word to prove that you are strangely deceived.”

Dixmer and Genevieve approached the window, and in a low voice she uttered a few words. The master tanner raised his head quickly.

“He!” said he.

“He himself,” said Genevieve.

“You are certain, quite certain?”

This time the young woman did not reply, but smiling, held out her hand to Maurice.

The features of Dixmer now assumed a singular expression of gentleness and indifference. He placed the butt end of his musket on the ground.

“This is quite another thing,” said he.

Then making a sign to his companions to follow, he stepped aside with them, and after saying a few words, they disappeared.

“Conceal that ring,” murmured Genevieve; “it is known by every one here.”

Maurice quickly drew the ring from his finger, and slipped it into his waistcoat pocket. A moment afterwards the door of the pavilion opened, and Dixmer, unarmed, advanced towards Maurice.

“Pardon me, citizen,” said he to him, “that I had not known sooner the obligation I am under to you. My wife, while retaining a grateful remembrance of the service you rendered her on the 10th of March, had forgotten your name. We were therefore completely in ignorance with whom we were concerned; independent of this, believe me, we might not for a moment have entertained suspicion either of your honour or intentions. Again, I say, pardon me.”

Maurice was bewildered; with the greatest difficulty he preserved his equilibrium, he felt his head turn round, and was near falling. He supported himself against the mantel-piece. At length, — ”Why did you wish to kill me?” said he.

“This is the secret, citizen,” said Dixmer; “I confide it to your keeping. I am, as you already know, a tanner, and principal in this concern. The greater part of the acids I employ in the preparation of my skins are prohibited goods. Now the smugglers have received intelligence of an information laid before the council-general. I feared you were an informer. My smugglers were more alarmed than myself at your bonnet-rouge and formidable appearance, and I do not conceal from you that your death was resolved upon.”

“Pardieu! and well I know it,” said Maurice; “you tell me no news. I heard your consultation, and I have seen your carbine.”

“I have already apologized,” said Dixmer, in a kindly tone. “You must understand, that thanks to the unsettled state of the times, myself and partner, M. Morand, are likely to realize an immense fortune. We have the furnishing of the military bags, and finish from 1500 to 2000 each day. Owing to this blessed state of things in which we live, the municipality are much occupied, and have not time strictly to examine our accounts, so that it must be confessed we fish a little in troubled waters, the more so, as I have told you the preparatory materials we procure by smuggling allow us to gain two hundred per cent.”

“Diable!” said Maurice, “that appears to me an honest living enough, and I can now understand your dread lest a denunciation on my part should put an end to it; but now you know me, you fear me no longer. Is it not so?”

“Now,” said Dixmer. “I only require your promise.” Then, placing his hand on his shoulder, and smiling, “As it is only between friends,” said he, “may I inquire what brought you here, young man? But remember, if you wish to keep it secret, you are perfectly at liberty to do so.”

“I have told you, I believe,” murmured Maurice.

“Yes, a woman,” said the burgess; “I know there was something about a woman.”

“Mon Dieu! excuse me, citizen, I am aware some sort of explanation is due to you. Well, then, I sought a female, who the other evening, disguised, told me she resided in this quarter. I neither know her name, position, or place of abode. I only know I am madly in love with her, that she is short —

Genevieve was tall.

“That she is fair, and of a lively temperament.”

Genevieve was a brunette, with large pensive eyes.

“A grisette, in short,” continued Maurice; “so, to please her, I assumed the popular dress.”

“This explains it all,” said Dixmer, with an affectation of belief, which at least did not contradict his sullen look.

Genevieve coloured, and feeling herself blush, turned away.

“Poor Citizen Lindey,” said Dixmer, “what a miserable evening we have caused you to pass; and you are about the last I would wish to injure, so excellent a patriot, a brother; but, in short, I believed some ‘disinfected’ usurped your name.”

“Let us say nothing more on the subject,” said Maurice, who knew it was time for him to withdraw: “put me in the road, and let us forget that this has occurred altogether.”

“Put you in your road!” said Dixmer; “you leave us not yet, not yet; I give-or rather my partner and myself give — a supper to-night to those brave fellows who wished so much to slaughter you a little while ago. I reckon upon your supping with them, that you may see they are not such devils as they appear to be.”

“But,” said Maurice, overjoyed at the thought of being for a few hours near Genevieve, “I do not know really if I ought to accept — ”

“If you ought to accept!” said Dixmer; “I know you ought; these are good and staunch patriots as yourself. Besides, I shall not consider that you have forgiven me unless we break bread together.”

Genevieve uttered not a word. Maurice was in torment.

“The fact is,” said Maurice, “I fear I may be a constraint upon you, citoyenne; this dress — my ungentlemanly appearance —

Genevieve looked timidly towards him.

“I accept your invitation, citizen,” said he, bowing.

“I will go and secure our companions,” said Dixmer; “in the meantime, warm yourself, mon cher.”

He went out. Maurice and Genevieve remained alone.

“Ah! Monsieur,” said the young woman, in an accent to which she in vain tried to convey a tone of reproach, “yon have failed in your word, you have been exceedingly indiscreet.”

“Madame!” cried Maurice, “shall I expose you? Ah! in that case, pardon me, I will retire, and never — ”

“Dieu!” said she, rising, “you are wounded in the breast; your shirt is stained with blood.”

Indeed, upon the fine, white shirt of Maurice — a shirt forming a strange contrast to his coarser clothes — a large red spot of blood had spread itself, and had dried there.

"Do not be under any alarm, madame," said the young man, "one of the smugglers pricked me with his poniard."

Genevieve turned pale, and, taking his hand, "Forgive me," said she, "the wrong that has been done you; you saved my life, and I have nearly caused your death."

"Am I not sufficiently recompensed in finding you? You cannot for a moment imagine it was for another that I sought."

"Come with me," said Genevieve, interrupting him; "I will find you some clean linen. Our guests must not see you thus — it would be too great a reproach to them."

"I am a great trouble to you, Madame, I fear," said Maurice, sighing.

"Not at all; I only do my duty; and," she added, "I do it with much pleasure."

Genevieve then conducted Maurice to a large dressing-room, arranged with an air of elegance he had not expected to find in the house of a master tanner. It is true this master tanner appeared to be a millionaire. She then opened the wardrobes.

"Help yourself," said she; "you are at home." She withdrew. When Maurice came out, he found Dixmer, who had returned. "Allons! allons!" said he, "to table; it only waits for you."

CHAPTER IX.

THE SUPPER.

WHEN MAURICE entered with Dixmer and Genevieve into the salle-a-manger, situated in the body of the basement, where they had first conducted him, the supper was ready but the room vacant. He saw all the guests enter successively. They were six in number; men of agreeable exterior, for the most part young and fashionably dressed; two or three even wore the blouse and bonnet-rouge.

Dixmer introduced Maurice, naming his titles and qualifications. Then, turning toward Maurice, “You see,” said he, “Citizen Lindey, all those who assist me in my trade. Thanks to the times in which we live, thanks to the revolutionary principles which have effaced all distinction, we all live upon the same footing of sacred equality. Every day we assemble twice at the same table, and I am happy you have been induced to partake of our family repast. Allons! to table — citizens, to table.”

“And — Monsieur Morand,” said Genevieve, timidly, “do we not wait for him?”

“Ah, true!” said Dixmer. “This citizen, of whom I have already spoken, Citizen Lindey, is my partner. He conducts, if I may so express myself, the moral part of the establishment. He attends to the writing, keeps the cash, superintends the factories, pays and receives money, and, in short, works harder than any of us. The result is that he is sometimes rather late. I will go and tell him we are waiting.”

At this moment the door opened, and the Citizen Morand entered. He was a short man, dark, with bushy eyebrows, and wore green spectacles — like a man whose eyes are fatigued from excess of work — concealing his black eyes, but not so effectually their scintillating gleams. At the first words he uttered, Maurice recognised that mild, yet commanding voice engaged in his behalf, when endeavouring to save him from becoming a victim to that terrible discussion. He was habited in a brown coat, with large buttons, a white waistcoat; and his fine cambric shirt frill was often during dinner smoothed by a hand which Maurice, no doubt from its being that of a tradesman, admired much for its beauty and delicacy of appearance.

They all took their seats. Morand was placed on Genevieve's right hand, Maurice on her left. Dixmer sat opposite his wife. The rest of the guests seated themselves promiscuously round an oblong table. The supper was excellent. Dixmer had a capital appetite, and did the honours of the table with much politeness. The workmen, or those who pretended to be such, under this example, became excellent companions. The Citizen Morand spoke little, and ate still less; drank scarcely anything, and rarely smiled. Maurice, perhaps from the reminiscences his voice awakened, felt for him immediately a lively sympathy, only he was in doubt as to his age, and this rather annoyed him, as sometimes he imagined him to be a man of forty or fifty years, and at others quite young.

Dixmer, on placing himself at table, felt obliged to offer some explanation to his guests for the admission of a stranger into their little circle. He acquitted himself like an artless man, one unaccustomed to deceit; but the guests, as it seemed, were not difficult on this point; for, notwithstanding the awkwardness displayed by this manufacturer of hides in the introduction of the young man, they all appeared perfectly satisfied.

Maurice regarded him with astonishment.

"Upon my honour," said he to himself, "I shall really soon think that I myself am deceived. Is tins the same man who, with flaming eyes and furious voice, pursued me, gun in hand, and absolutely wished to kill me, three quarters of an hour since? At this moment one might take him for a hero rather than an assassin. Mon Dieu! how the love of hides transforms a man." While making these observations Maurice experienced a strange feeling of joy and grief, and felt unable to analyse his own emotions. He at length found himself near his beautiful Unknown, whom he had so ardently sought. As he had dreamed, she bore a charming name; he was intoxicated with the happiness of finding himself at her side; he drank in every word; and at each sound of her voice the most secret chord of his heart vibrated, but he was deeply wounded by all he saw. Genevieve was exactly what he had pictured her; the dream of a stormy night reality had not destroyed. Here was an elegant woman, of refined mind and superior education, affording another instance of what had so frequently occurred during the latter years preceding this present celebrated year '93. Here was a young woman of distinction compelled, from the utter ruin into which the nobility had fallen, to ally herself to a commoner and a trusty man. Dixmer appeared a brave man. He was incontestably rich, and his manners to Genevieve were those of a man uniting every endeavour to render a woman happy.

But could kindness, riches, or excellent intentions compensate her for what she had sacrificed; or remove the immense distance existing between husband and wife, between a poetical, distinguished, charming girl, and a vulgar-looking tradesman? With what could Genevieve fill up this abyss? Alas! Maurice now guessed too well. With love! And he therefore returned to his first opinion of the young woman, influenced by appearances on the evening of their meeting, that she was returning from some rendezvous d’amour.

The idea of Genevieve loving any one was torture to Maurice. He sighed, and deeply regretted having exposed himself to the temptation of imbibing a still larger dose of that poison termed love. At other moments, while listening to that ductile voice, so soft and harmonious, examining that pure and open countenance, evincing no fear that he should read every secret of her soul, he arrived at the conclusion that it was utterly impossible that this matchless creature would descend to deceit; and then he found a bitter pleasure in remembering this lovely woman belonged solely to this good citizen, with his honest smile and vulgar pleasantries, and would never be to him more than a passing acquaintance.

They conversed of course on politics. How could it be otherwise at an epoch when politics were mixed up in everything? Political subjects were even painted on the plates, political designs covered the walls, and politics were daily proclaimed in the streets. All at once, one of the guests who had hitherto preserved silence, inquired concerning the prisoners of the Temple.

Maurice started, in spite of himself. He had recognised the voice of that man, a strenuous advocate for extreme measures, who had first struck him with his dagger, and then advocated his death. Nevertheless, this man, an honest tanner, and head of the manufactory, at least so Dixmer represented him, incited the good humour of Maurice by the expression of ideas the most patriotic and principles the most revolutionary. The young man, under certain circumstances, was not inimical to these extreme measures, so much in fashion at this period, of which Danton was the apostle and hero. In this man’s place, whose voice he had heard, and from the effect of whose weapon his wound was still smarting, he would not have attempted to assassinate the man he imagined to be a spy, but would rather have locked him in the garden, and there, equally armed, sword to sword, have fought without mercy, without pity. This is what Maurice would have done; but he comprehended soon that this was too much to expect of a journeyman tanner. This man of extreme measures, who appeared to possess in his political ideas the same violent system as in his private conduct, then spoke of the Temple, and expressed surprise that the prisoners were confided to the guardianship of a permanent council liable to be corrupted, and to municipals whose fidelity had already been more than once tempted.

"Yes," said the Citizen Morand, "but it must be remembered that on every occasion, up to the present time, the municipals have fully justified the confidence reposed in them by the nation, and history will record it is not only Robespierre who merits the title of 'Incorruptible.'"

"Without doubt, without doubt," replied the interlocutor; "but, because a thing has not yet happened, it would be absurd to suppose it never can happen. As for the National Guard," continued the principal of the manufactory, "well, the companies of the different sections are assembled, each in their turn, on duty at the Temple, and that indifferently. Will you not admit that there might be, in a company of twenty or five-and-twenty men, a band of seven or eight determined characters, who one fine night might slaughter the sentinels and carry off the prisoners?"

"Bah!" said Maurice; "you see, citizen, this would be a foolish expedient. It would occupy them three weeks or a month, and then they might not succeed."

"Yes," replied Morand; "because one of those aristocrats who composed the patrolle had the impudence in speaking to let fall the word monsieur, I do not know to whom."

"And then," said Maurice, who wished to prove that the police of the Republic did their duty, "because the entrance of the Chevalier de Maison Rouge into Paris was already known — "

"Bah!" cried Dixmer.

"They knew that Maison Rouge had entered Paris?" wildly demanded Morand; "and did they know by what means he entered?"

"Perfectly."

"Ah! diable!" said Morand, leaning forward to look at Maurice, "I should be curious to know that, as up to the present moment no one can speak positively. But you, citizen, you, secretary to one of the principal sections in Paris, ought to be better informed."

“Doubtless; therefore, what I am about to tell you is the true statement of facts.”

All the guests and Genevieve appeared prepared to pay the greatest attention to this recital.

“Well,” said Maurice, “the Chevalier de Maison Rouge came from Vendee; as it appears, he had traversed all France with his usual good fortune. Arrived during the day at La Barriere du Roule, he waited till nine o’clock at night. At that hour a woman, disguised as a woman of the people, went out from the barriere, carrying to the chevalier a costume of chasseur of the National Guard. Ten minutes afterwards she re-entered with him; but the sentinel, who had seen her go out alone, felt rather suspicious when he saw her return with a companion. An alarm was given at the post, the post turned out, when the two culprits, knowing whom they were seeking, flung themselves into an hotel where a second door opened into Les Champs Elysees.

“It seems that a patrol devoted to the tyrants waited for the chevalier at the corner of La Rue Burre-du-Bec. You are acquainted with the rest.”

“Ah! ah!” said Morand; “this is very strange.”

“But positively true,” said Maurice.

“Yes, it has an air of truth: but the female, do you know what became of her?”

“No; she has disappeared, and they are quite ignorant who she is, or what she is.”

The partner of Citizen Dixmer, and Citizen Dixmer himself, appeared to breathe more freely.

Genevieve had listened to the whole of this recital, pale, silent, and immovable.

“But,” said Morand, with his usual coolness, “who can say that the Chevalier de Maison Rouge made one of the patrolle who caused the alarm at the Temple?”

“A municipal, one of my friends, that day on duty at the Temple. He recognised him.”

“He knew him from description.”

“He has formerly seen him.”

“And what sort of man, personally, is this Chevalier de Maison Rouge?”

“A man of five or six-and-twenty, short, fair, and of a pleasing countenance, with magnificent eyes and superb teeth.”

There was a profound silence.

"Well," said Morand, "if your friend the municipal recognised this pretended Chevalier de Maison Rouge, why did he not arrest him?"

"In the first place, not knowing of his arrival at Paris, he feared being the dupe of a resemblance; and then my friend, being rather lukewarm, acted as the lukewarm generally act, he let it alone."

"You would not have acted thus, citizen?" said Dixmer, laughing boisterously.

"No," said Maurice; "I confess it, I would rather find myself deceived than allow to escape so dangerous a man as the Chevalier de Maison Rouge."

"And what would you hare done, then, monsieur?" timidly inquired Genevieve.

"What would I have done, citoyenne?" said Maurice. "I would have walked direct up to the patrol, and placed my hand on the Chevalier's collar, saying to him, 'Chevalier de Maison Rouge, I arrest you as a traitor to the nation;' and my hand once upon his collar, I would not soon, release him, I can tell you."

"And what would happen then?" said Genevieve.

"It would happen he had done thus much for himself and friends, that the same hour they would be guillotined; that is all."

Genevieve shuddered, and darted on her neighbour a look of affright. But the Citizen Morand did not appear to notice this glance, and phlegmatically emptied his glass.

"The citizen Lindey is right," said he; "there was nothing else to do; but, unfortunately, it was not done."

"And," demanded Genevieve, "do you know what has become of the Chevalier de Maison Rouge?"

"Bah!" said Dixmer; "in all probability he did not wish to remain longer, and, finding his attempt abortive, quitted Paris immediately."

"And perhaps France even," added Morand.

"Not at all, not at all," said Maurice.

"What, has he had the imprudence to remain in Paris?" asked Genevieve.

"He has not stirred."

A movement of general astonishment followed this assertion, which Maurice had stated with so much confidence.

"This is only a supposition, citizen, on your part," said Morand; "merely a supposition, that is all."

"No; it is a positive fact that I affirm."

"Ah!" said Genevieve; "I acknowledge, for my part, I cannot believe it is as you say; it would be such an unpardonable imprudence."

"You are a woman, citoyenne; and can comprehend, then, what would outweigh, with a man of such a character as the Chevalier de Maison Rouge, all considerations of personal security?"

"And what can outweigh the dread of losing his life in a moment so dreadful?"

"Eh! Mon Dieu! Citoyenne!" said Maurice; "love."

"Love!" repeated Genevieve.

"Doubtless. Do you not know, then, that the Chevalier de Maison Rouge is enamoured of Marie Antoinette?"

Two or three incredulous laughs were faintly heard. Dixmer looked at Maurice as if he sought to penetrate the very depths of his soul. Genevieve felt the tears suffuse her eyes; and a shuddering she could not conceal from Maurice ran through her frame.

The Citizen Morand poured some wine into his glass, and at this moment carried it to his lips. His paleness would have alarmed Maurice, had not all the young man's attention been at the time centred on Genevieve.

"You are silent, citoyenne," murmured Maurice.

"Have you not said I should understand this because I was a woman? Well, we women, even if opposed to our princes, feel for such devotion."

"And that of the Chevalier de Maison Rouge is the height of devotion, and it is said he has never even spoken to the queen."

"Ah! there now, Citizen Lindey," said the man of extreme measures; "it seems to me, permit me to observe, that you are very indulgent to the Chevalier — "

"Monsieur," said Maurice, perhaps intentionally making use of a word which had ceased to be in vogue, "I love all brave and courageous natures, which do not refuse to fight when I meet them in the ranks of my enemies. I do not despair of one day encountering the Chevalier de Maison Rouge."

"And — " said Genevieve.

"If I meet him — Well; I shall fight him."

The supper was finished. Genevieve set the example, of retiring, by herself rising from table. At this moment the pendulum struck.

“Midnight!” said Morand, coolly.

“Midnight!” said Maurice; “midnight already?”

“That exclamation affords me much pleasure,” said Dixmer; “it proves you are not ennuye, and induces me to hope we may see you again. It is the door of a true patriot which opens to receive you; and, I trust, ere long, you will find it that of a sincere friend.”

Maurice bowed, and, turning towards Genevieve:

“Will the citoyenne also permit me to repeat my visit?” demanded he.

“I do more than permit. I request you to do so. Adieu, citizen;’’ and Genevieve retired.

Maurice took leave of all the guests, particularly saluting Morand, with whom he was much pleased; squeezed Dimmer’s hand, and went away bewildered; but, on the whole, more joyful than sad, from the various and unexpected events of the evening.

“Unfortunate encounter, unfortunate encounter!” said the young woman, after Maurice’s departure, and then bursting into tears in the presence of her husband, who had conducted her to her room.

“Bah!” said Dixmer, “the Citizen Lindey, a known patriot, secretary to a section, admired, worshipped, and highly popular, is, on the contrary, a great acquisition to a poor tanner who has contraband merchandise on his premises.”

“Do you think so, mon ami?” asked Genevieve, timidly.

“I think it is a warrant of patriotism, a seal of absolution, placed upon our house; and I thought, when parting this evening, that the Chevalier de Maison Rouge himself would be safe at our house.”

And Dixmer kissed his wife with an affection more paternal than conjugal, and left her in the little pavilion set apart for her special benefit, passing himself into another part of the building, which he inhabited with the guests we have seen assembled round his table.

CHAPTER X.

SIMON THE SHOEMAKER.

THE MONTH OF May had commenced. A bright clear day expanded the lungs tired of inhaling the icy fogs of winter, and the rays of the sun, warm and exhilarating, shone upon the black walls of the Temple. At the wicket of the interior, which separated the tower from the gardens, the soldiers of the post were smoking and laughing. But, notwithstanding the beauty of the day, and the offer made to the prisoners to descend and walk in the garden, the three females refused to do so; as, since the execution of her husband, the queen had obstinately secluded herself in her chamber, dreading to pass the door of the apartment lately occupied by the king on the second story. When by any chance she took the air, since the fatal occurrence of the 1st of January, she did so on the platform of the tower, where even the battlements were enclosed with shutters.

The National Guards on duty, who knew the three females had received permission to go out, waited in vain all day, wishing much to turn this same authority to some account. Towards five o'clock a man descended, and approached the sergeant in command of the post.

"Ah! ah! is that you, Father Tison?" said he, who appeared to be a right merry fellow.

"Yes, it is I, citizen; I bring you, on the part of the municipal Maurice Lindey, your friend, who is now up-stairs, this permission, granted by the Council of the Temple to my daughter, to pay a visit to her mother this evening."

"And you are going out just as your daughter is coming in? unnatural father!" said the sergeant.

"I am going much against my inclination, Citizen Sergeant. I also hope to see my poor child, whom I have not seen for two months, and to embrace her this evening. I am going out now. This service, this damned service, compels me to go out. It is necessary I should go to the commune to make my report. A fiacre is waiting for me at the door, with two gendarmes, and it is exactly the time when my poor Sophie will arrive."

“Unhappy parent,” said the sergeant.

“And, Citizen Sergeant, when my child comes to see her poor mother, who is dying to see her, you will allow her to pass?”

“The order is correct,” replied the sergeant, whom the reader has no doubt recognised as our friend Louis; “so I have nothing to say against it; when your daughter comes, she can pass.”

“Thanks, brave Thermopyle; thanks,” said Tison; and he went out to make his report to the commune, murmuring, “My poor wife, how happy she will be!”

“Do you know, sergeant,” said one of the National Guards, seeing Tison depart, and overhearing of the last words; “do you know there is something in this that makes my blood run cold?”

“What is it, Citizen Devaux?” demanded Louis.

“Why,” replied the compassionate National Guard, “to see this man, with his surly face and heart of stone, this pitiless guardian of the queen, go out with his eyes full of tears, partly of joy, partly of grief, thinking that his wife will see his daughter, and he shall not. It does not do to reflect upon it too much, sergeant; it really is grievous.”

“Doubtless that is why he does not reflect upon it himself, this man who goes out with tears in his eyes, as you term it.”

“Upon what should he reflect?”

“That it is three months since this woman he so brutally uses has seen her child. He does not think of her grief, only of his own, that is all. It is true this woman was queen,” continued the sergeant, in an ironical tone, rather difficult of comprehension; “and one is not obliged to feel the same respect for a queen as for the wife of a journeyman.”

“Notwithstanding, all this is very sad,” slid Devaux.

“Sad, but necessary,” said Louis. “The best way then, is, as you say, not to reflect.” And he began to sing —

“Where the branches met On a rocky stoue.

There I found Nicette, Seated all alone.”

Louis was in the midst of his pastoral ditty, when suddenly a loud noise was heard from the left side of the post, composed of oaths, menaces, and tears. “What is that?” demanded Devaux. “It sounded like the voice of a child,” said Louis, listening.

“In fact,” said the National Guard, “it is a poor little one they are beating. Truly they ought only to send here those who have no children.”

"Will you sing?" said a hoarse and drunken voice. And the voice sung in example —

"Madame Veto promised That all our heads should full — "

"No," said the child, "I will not sing."

"Will you sing:?"

And the voice recommenced —

"Madame Veto promised" —

"No! no!" said the child. "No, no, no."

"Ah! little beggar," said the hoarse voice; and the noise of a lash whirring through the air was distinctly heard. The infant screamed with agony.

"Ah! sacre bleu!" said Louis; "it is that rascally Simon beating the little Capet."

Several of the National Guards shrugged their shoulders. Two or three tried to smile. Devaux rose and went out.

"I said truly," murmured he, "that parents should never enter here."

All at once a low door opened, and the royal child, chased by the whip of his guardian, made a flying leap into the court, when something hard struck his leg, and fell on the ground behind him. He stumbled, and fell upon his knee. "Bring me my last, little monster, or else — " The child rose, and shook his head, in token of refusal.

"Ah! this is it, is it?" said the same voice. "Wait, you shall see." And the shoemaker Simon rushed into his hut as a wild beast to its den.

"Hallo! hallo!" said Louis, frowning. "Where are you going so fast, Master Simon?"

"To chastise this little wolfs cub," said the shoemaker.

"To chastise him, for what?"

"For what?"

"Yes."

"Because the little beggar will neither sing like a good patriot, nor work like a good citizen."

"Well, what have you to do with that?" said Louis. "Did the nation confide Capet to you that you might teach him to sing?"

"And what business have you to interfere, I should like to know, Citizen Sergeant?" said Simon, astonished.

"I interfere, as it becomes every man of feeling to do. It is unworthy of a man to see a child beaten, and to suffer him to be beaten."

"Bah! the son of a tyrant."

“He is a child; and the child has not participated in the crimes of the father. The child is not culpable, and, consequently, ought not to be punished.”

“And I tell you he was placed with me to do what I choose with him. I choose him to sing ‘Madame Veto,’ and he shall sing it.”

“Contemptible wretch!” said Louis. “‘Madame Veto’ is mother to this child. Would you yourself like your child to be made to sing that you were one of the canaille?”

“Me!” cried Simon. “Vile aristocrat of a sergeant.”

“No names,” said Louis. “I am not Capet; and they will not make me sing by force.”

“I will have you arrested, vile ci-devant.”

“You!” said Louis;” you have me arrested; you had better try to arrest a Thermopyle.”

“Good, good; he laughs best who laughs last. And now, Capet, pick up my last, and come and finish your shoe, or mille tonnerres.”

“And I,” said Louis, turning deadly pale, and advancing a few steps forward, his hands clenched, and his teeth set — ”I tell you he shall not pick up your last, he shall not make shoes; do you hear, idiot?”

“Ah! yes; you talk very largely; but that will not make me fear you any the more.”

“Ah! massacre,” roared Simon, turning pale With rage.

At the moment two women entered the court. One held a paper in her hand. She addressed herself to the sentinel.

“Sergeant,” cried the sentinel, “it is Tison’s daughter, who asks to see her mother.”

“Let her pass, since the Council of the Temple permit it,” said Louis, who did not wish to leave for a moment, for fear Simon should avail himself of his absence and again beat the child.

The sentinel passed the two women; but, hardly had they ascended four steps on the dark staircase, when they encountered Maurice Lindey, who at that moment was descending into the court. It was almost dark, so that he was unable to distinguish their features. Maurice stopped.

“Who are you, citizens?” said he; “and what do you want?”

“I am Sophie Tison,” said one of the women; “I obtained permission to visit my mother, and have come to see her.”

"Yes," said Maurice; "but this permission was for yourself only, citoyenne."

"I brought my friend, that there might be two of us in the midst of the soldiers, at least."

"Very good; but your friend cannot go up."

"As you please, citizen," said Sophie Tison, pressing the hand of her friend, who, close against the wall, seemed paralysed with surprise and terror.

"Citizens sentinels," said Maurice, raising his voice and addressing the sentinels who were stationed on every landing, "allow the Citoyenne Tison to pass, but do not permit her friend to pass; she will remain on the staircase; see that she is treated with all due respect."

"Yes, citizen," replied the sentinels.

"Go up, then," said Maurice.

The two women then passed on; and Maurice, leaping over the remaining five or six stairs, advanced rapidly into the court.

"What is all this?" said he to the National Guard; "and what is the cause of this noise? The cries of a child were heard in the prisoner's antechamber."

"It is this," said Simon; who, accustomed to the manners of the municipals, believed, on perceiving Maurice, that he came as an ally; "this traitor, this spy, this ci-devant, this aristocrat, prevents me from belabouring Capet;" and he shook his fists at Louis.

"Yes, mon Dieu, I did prevent it," said Louis, drawing his sword; "and if you again call me ci-devant, aristocrat, or traitor, I will run my sword through your body."

"A threat!" cried Simon; "the guard, the guard."

"I am the guard," said Louis; "so you had better not call; for if I come to you, I will exterminate you."

"Come here, Citizen Municipal, come here," said Simon, now seriously alarmed at Louis's threats.

"The sergeant is quite right," said the municipal, to whom he had appealed for assistance; "you are a disgrace to the nation, coward, to beat a child."

"And why did he beat him? do you comprehend," said Maurice.

"Because the child would not sing 'Madame Veto;' because the child would not insult his mother."

“Miserable wretch!” said Maurice.

“And you also?” said Simon; “I am surrounded with traitors.”

“Rogue!” cried the municipal, seizing Simon by the throat, and tearing the last from his hand; “try to prove that Maurice Lindey is a traitor.” And he applied the leather strap pretty heavily to the shoulders of the shoemaker.

“Thanks, monsieur,” said the child, who regarded this scene with the air of a Stoic; “but he will revenge himself upon me.”

“Come, Capet, come, my child,” said Louis; “if he beats you again, call for help; I will chastise him, the hangman. And now, Capet, return to your tower.”

“Why do you call me Capet? you know very well that Capet is not my name.”

“Not your name?” said Louis; “what is your name, then?”

“I am called Louis Charles de Bourbon. Capet is the name of one of my ancestors. I know the history of France; my father taught me.”

“And you want to teach a child to make old shoes to whom a king has taught the history of France?” cried Louis; “allons done.”

“Ah, rest assured,” said Maurice, “I will make my report.”

“And I mine,” said Simon; “and among other things I shall say, that instead of one woman being allowed to enter the tower, two were permitted to pass.”

At this moment two women went out from the keep. Maurice ran after them.

“Well, citoyenne,” said he, addressing the one by his side, “have you seen your mother?”

“Yes, citizen, thank you,” said she.

Maurice had wished to see the young girl’s friend, or at least to hear her voice, but she was enveloped in her mantle, and seemed determined not to utter a single word. He also thought she trembled. This appearance of fear excited his suspicion. He re-ascended the stairs quickly, and through the glazed partition saw the Queen endeavouring to hide something in her pocket which looked like a billet. “Ah! ah!” said he, “I have been duped.” He called his colleague.

“Citizen Agricola,” said he, “enter Marie Antoinette’s room, and do not lose sight of her.”

“Heyday!” said the municipal, “is it because...”

“Enter, I tell you, and do not lose sight of her for an instant, a moment, a second.”

The municipal entered the Queen’s apartment.

“Call the woman Tison,” said he to one of the National Guard.

Five minutes afterwards Tison’s wife arrived in high spirits.

“I have seen my daughter,” said she.

“Where was that?” demanded Maurice.

“Here, of course, in this ante-chamber.”

“Well; and did not your daughter ask to see the Austrian?”

“No.”

“Did she not enter her room?”

“No.”

“And during the time you were conversing with your daughter, did no one come out of the prisoners’ chamber?”

“How should I know? I was fully occupied with my daughter, whom I had not seen for three months.”

“Recollect yourself.”

“Ah, yes; I think I remember.”

“What?”

“The young girl came out.”

“Marie Therese?”

“Yes.”

“Did she speak to your daughter?”

“No.”

“Your daughter restored nothing to her?”

“No.”

“Did she pick up nothing from the ground?”

“My daughter?”

“No, the daughter of Marie Antoinette?”

“She picked up her pocket handkerchief.”

“Ah! malheureuse!” cried Maurice.

And he rushed toward the string of a bell which he pulled violently. It was an alarm bell.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BILLET.

THE OTHER TWO municipal guards came up hastily. A detachment of the post accompanied them. The doors were shut, and two sentinels intercepted the egress from each chamber.

“What do you want, Monsieur?” said the Queen to Maurice when he entered. “I was retiring to bed, when, five minutes since, the Citizen Municipal suddenly forced his entrance into my chamber, without informing me what he desired.”

“Madame,” said Maurice, bowing, “it is not my colleague who desires anything from you, it is myself.”

“You, Monsieur?” demanded Marie Antoinette, looking at Maurice, whose courteous behaviour had inspired her with almost gratitude; “and what do you desire?”

“I request you will be kind enough to show me the letter you were concealing in your pocket when I entered just now.”

Madame Royale and Madame Elizabeth trembled. The Queen turned very pale.

“You are mistaken, Monsieur; I concealed nothing.”

“You lie, Austrian,” cried Agricola.

Maurice quickly placed his hand on the arm of his colleague.

“One moment, my dear colleague,” said he; “leave me to speak to the citoyenne, I am a little bit of a lawyer.”

“Go on then, but you will not contrive it; morbleu!”

“You have concealed a letter, citoyenne,” said Maurice, austerely; “now it is necessary we should see this letter.”

“But what letter?”

“The letter that Tison’s daughter brought you, and which the citoyenne, your daughter “(Maurice alluded to the young princess), “picked up with her pocket handkerchief.”

The three females looked at each other with terror.

"But, Monsieur, this is worse than tyranny," said the Queen; "these women! these women!"

"Do not mistake," said Maurice, with firmness; "we are neither judges nor executioners, we are overseers; that is to say, your fellow-citizens, commissioned to guard you. We have our order; to violate it is treason. Citizen, I pray you to give me the letter you have concealed."

"Messieurs," said the Queen, with much hauteur, "since you are overseers, search, and deprive us of our rest to-night as usual."

"God forbid we should lay our hands upon these women. I am now going to inform the commune, and await its orders; but you cannot retire to bed, you must sleep upon these fauteuils, if you please, and we must guard you. If necessary, they will search you."

"What is the matter?" said Tison's wife, appearing at the door quite bewildered.

"It is this, citoyenne," said Maurice, "that by lending yourself to treasonable practices, you will debar yourself from seeing your daughter any more."

"From seeing my daughter? What do you tell me then, citizen?" demanded Tison's wife, who could not yet comprehend why she was not to see her daughter.

"I tell you, that your daughter did not come here to see you, but to bring a letter to the Citoyenne Capet; and, therefore, she will return here no more."

"But if she does not come here, I shall not be able to see her, as we are forbidden to go out."

"This time you have no one to blame but yourself — it was your fault," said Maurice.

"Oh!" screamed the poor woman, "why do you say it is my fault? Nothing has happened, I tell you. If I thought anything would happen, woe to you, Marie Antoinette; you should pay dearly for it." And the exasperated woman shook her fist at the Queen.

"Threaten no one," said Maurice; "but rather gain by kindness what we demand for you are a woman, and the Citoyenne Marie Antoinette, who is herself a mother, will take pity on you. To-morrow your daughter will be arrested — to-morrow imprisoned; then, if they discover anything, and you know that when they choose they always can do so, she is lost, and also her companion."

The woman Tison, who had listened to Maurice with terrified credulity, turned wildly towards the Queen.

“You hear, Antoinette? My daughter! It is you who will ruin my child!”

The Queen in her turn appeared bewildered, not by the fury which sparkled in the eyes of her female gaoler, but by the despair legible there. “Come, Madame Tison,” said she, “I have something to say to you.”

“Holloa! No cajolery; there are not too many of us,” said Maurice’s colleague. “Before the municipality — always before the municipality.”

“Never mind, Citizen Agricola,” said Maurice; “provided the permission comes from us, it does not matter in what fashion.”

“You are right, Citizen Maurice, but — ”

“Let us pass behind the glazed partition, Citizen Agricola; and if you think with me, we will turn our backs, and I am certain the individual for whom we evince this consideration will not make us repent it.”

The Queen heard these words, intended for her to hear, and cast upon the young man a look of grateful acknowledgment. Maurice carelessly turned his head, and walked to the other side of the glazed partition. Agricola followed him.

“You see this Queen,” said he to Agricola: “as a Queen she is very culpable, as a woman she is high-minded and dignified. They destroyed the crown — woe to the model.”

“Sacre bleu! you speak well. Citizen Maurice; I love to listen to you and your friend Tison. Is this also poetry you are reciting?”

.Maurice smiled.

During this conversation, the scene which Maurice had anticipated was passing on the other side.

The woman Tison approached the queen.

“‘Madame,” said the Queen, “your despair grieves me. I do not wish to deprive you of your daughter — that would be too cruel; but do you consider, that by doing what these men require, your child will be equally lost?”

“Do as they tell you,” cried the woman; “do as they say.”

“But first, at least, hear what the question is.”

“What the question is?” demanded the woman, with an almost savage curiosity.

“Your daughter brought a friend with her.”

“Yes, an artificiel, like herself. She did not like to come alone, because of the soldiers. This friend committed a letter to your daughter — your daughter let it fall. Marie, who was passing, picked it up. It is, doubtless, a paper of no consequence, but still one upon which evil-minded people might put a bad construction. Has not the Municipal just told you, if they wish to do so, they can do so?”

“What next? What next?”

“Well, this is all; you wish me to send back this paper — do you wish me to sacrifice a friend, without perhaps benefiting your daughter?”

“Do as they say,” cried the woman; “do as they say.”

“But if this paper implicates your daughter,” said the Queen; “do you understand?”

“My daughter is, like myself, a good patriot,” cried the housekeeper. “Dieu Merci. The Tisons are well known. Do what they tell you.”

“Mon Dieu!” said the Queen; “what can I say to convince you?”

“My child, I want them to return me my child,” cried Tison’s wife, stamping her feet. “Give me the paper, Antoinette, give me the paper.”

“There it is, Madame.” And the Queen tendered a paper to the wretched creature, which she seized, and held joyfully above her head, crying:

“Come here, come here, Citizen Municipals. I have the paper; take it, and give me back my child.”

“You would sacrifice our friends, my sister,” said Madame Elizabeth.

“No, my sister,” replied the Queen, mournfully, “I only sacrifice ourselves. This paper implicates no one.”

At the cries of the woman Tison, Maurice and his colleague came towards her, when she immediately held out the paper to them. They opened and read —

“A l’Orient! again an old friend.”

Maurice had no sooner cast his eyes on this paper than he started. The writing was not quite unknown to him.

“Mon Dieu!” cried he: “can it be that of Genevieve? but no, it is impossible; and I am mad. It resembles hers, certainly; but what communication can she have with the Queen?”

He turned round, and observed that Marie Antoinette was watching him attentively. As for the woman Tison, as she awaited her fate, she devoured Maurice with her eyes.

“You have done a good action,” said he, to Tison’s wife; “and you, citoyenne, a great one,” addressing the Queen.

“Then, Monsieur,” replied Marie Antoinette, “follow my example. Burn this paper, and you will perform a charitable one.”

“You are joking, Austrian,” said Agricola. “Burn a paper that may perhaps enable us to discover a whole covey of aristocrats? Ma foi! no; that would be too much like blockheads.”

“Do what? Burn it! — That might compromise my daughter,” said the woman Tison.

“I believe you; your daughter and some others,” said Agricola, taking the paper from the hands of Maurice, which, had he been alone, would most assuredly have been destroyed.

Ten minutes afterwards, the letter was deposited on the bureau of the members of the Commune, and commented upon in various ways.

“‘A 1’Orient — an old friend.’ What the devil can this mean?” said a voice.

“Pardieu!” replied a geographer; “to Lorient, that is clear enough. Lorient is a little town of Brittany, situated between Vannes and Quimper.”

“Morbleu! they ought to burn the town, if it be true that it shelters aristocrats, who keep watch still upon the Austrian.”

“It is the more dangerous,” said another, “that Lorient being a sea-port, they might establish communication with England.”

“I propose,” said a third, “that a mandate he forwarded to Lorient, that an inquiry may he made.”

This proposition made the minority smile, but excited the majority; they decreed a mandate should be sent to Lorient to watch the aristocrats.

Maurice had been informed of the consultation.

“I think it may perhaps mean the East,” said he, “but I am quite sure it is not in Brittany.”

The next day the Queen, who, as we have previously said, would no more enter the garden, to avoid passing the door of the apartment where her husband had been imprisoned, requested permission to ascend the tower to take the air, with her daughter and Madame Elizabeth. Her wish was instantly acceded to; but Maurice followed her, and mounting the stairs, ensconced himself behind a little turret; there, concealed, he awaited the result of the letter of the preceding evening. The Queen at first walked indifferently with Madame Elizabeth and her daughter, then stopped, whilst the two princesses continued their promenade; then turned towards the "East," and observed very attentively a house, at the windows of which were visible several persons. One of the number held a white pocket-handkerchief.

Maurice, on his part, drew a telescope from his pocket, and while he adjusted it, the Queen made a quick movement, as if to request those at the window to retire; but Maurice had already remarked the head of a man, with fair hair and pale complexion, whose salutation was so respectful as almost to border on humility. Behind this young man, for he appeared to be five or six and twenty years of age, a woman remained partially concealed from view. Maurice directed his glass towards her, and thought he recognised Genevieve. Immediately the female, who also held a telescope in her hand, drew back, dragging the young man away with her. Was this really Genevieve? Had she also recognised Maurice? Had this couple only retired at the signal given him by the Queen? Maurice waited a moment to see if this young man and woman would reappear; but seeing the window remain unoccupied, he recommended the strictest vigilance to his colleague, Agricola, quickly descended the staircase, and went to lie in ambush at the angle of La Rue Portefoin, to see if they came out of the house. It was in vain; no one appeared. He could not resist the suspicion which had entered his mind at the moment the companion of Tison's daughter had persisted in maintaining so obstinate a silence. Maurice directed his course towards the old Rue St. Jacques, where he arrived, bewildered by the strangest suspicions, doubts, and fears.

When he entered, Genevieve, attired in a white morning dress, was seated under an arbour of jasmine, where they were accustomed to take their breakfast. She, as usual, accorded Maurice a friendly greeting, and invited him to take a cup of chocolate with her. Dixmer, on his part, who had in the meantime arrived, expressed the greatest joy at meeting Maurice at this unexpected hour of the day; but before he permitted Maurice to take the cup of chocolate he had accepted (always enthusiastically attached to his trade), he insisted that his friend the Secretary to the "Section Lepelletier," should make a tour through the manufactory with him. Maurice consented.

"My dear Maurice," said he, "I have important news for you."

"Political?" asked Maurice, always occupied with one idea.

"Ah! dear citizen," said Dixmer, smiling, and taking the young man's arm, "do you think we trouble ourselves about politics? No, no; relating to business, Dieu merci! My honoured friend, Morand, who, as you know, is a celebrated chemist, has discovered the secret of staining leather red in an unequalled manner, that is to say, unalterable, a process never discovered till now. It is this colour I want to show you. Besides, you will see Morand at work; he is quite an artiste.”

Maurice did not exactly comprehend how making a red dye constituted an ‘artiste;’ but nevertheless accepted his offer, and followed Dixmer across the tan-yards, and in a separate sort of office saw the Citizen Morand at work. He wore blue spectacles, was in his working-dress, and seemed fully occupied in changing a skin from dirty white to purple. His hands and arms, visible under his sleeves, which were turned up, were red to the elbow.

He merely moved his head to Maurice, so entirely was he preoccupied.

“Well, Citizen Morand,” said Dixmer, “what say we?”

“We shall gain 100,000 livres by this process alone; but I have not slept for eight days, and these acids have affected my sight.”

Maurice left Dixmer with Morand, and joined Genevieve, murmuring softly, “It must be confessed the trade of municipal stupefies the hero! About eight days in the Temple, one might fancy oneself an aristocrat, and denounce oneself. Good Dixmer! Brave Morand! Sweet Genevieve!”

And for an instant they suspected me. Genevieve awaited Maurice with a sweet smile, calculated to make him forget all his latent cause for suspicion. She was as usual sweet, amiable, and charming. The hours passed in Genevieve’s society were those only in which Maurice could be said really to exist.

At all other times he was infected with that fever, which might be termed the fever of ‘93, by which Paris was separated into two camps, and existence rendered a perpetual combat. Towards noon he quitted Genevieve, and returned to the Tower of the Temple.

At the extremity of La Rue Sainte-Avoye, he encountered Louis, now relieved from guard. He left the ranks and came to meet Maurice, who still wore upon his countenance the impress of the happiness he had enjoyed in the society of the lovely Genevieve.

“Ah!” said Louis, cordially shaking his friend by the hand, “In vain you seek your anguish Within your heart to hide, I know for whom you languish, For whom so long you’ve sighed; Within your heart, within your eyes, Love reigns, and triumphs in his prize.”

Maurice put his hand in his pocket to search for the key. This was the method he adopted to put a stop to his friend’s poetical vein. But he saw the movement, and ran away, laughing. “Apropos,” said Louis, retracing his steps, “you have three days more at the Temple; I recommend the little Capet to your care.”

CHAPTER XII.

LOVE.

IN FACT MAURICE for some time had experienced a strange mixture of happiness and misery. It is always thus at the commencement of “des grandes passions.” His daily occupation at the Section Lepelletier, his evening visits to the old Rue Saint-Jacques, and some occasional visits to the club of the Thermopyles, filled up his days.

He did not dissimulate. He well knew that to see Genevieve daily was to imbibe large draughts of love unaccompanied by hope. Genevieve was a woman of retired manners and pleading appearance, who would frankly tender her hand to a friend, and would innocently approach his face with her lips, with the confidence of a sister, and the ignorance of a vestal, before whom the words of love appear as blasphemy.

Thus in the purest dreams that the first style of Raphael has traced upon the canvas is a Madonna with smiling lips, chaste eyes, and heavenly expression. It is necessary to borrow from the divine pupil of Perugino to portray the likeness of Genevieve.

In the midst of flowers, she imbibed their freshness and perfume; isolated by the occupation of her husband, and by her husband himself, she appeared to Maurice each time he saw her like a living enigma, of which he could not divine the meaning, and dare not ask it. One evening when, as usual, he remained alone with her, they were both seated at the same window by which he had entered, a few nights since, with so little ceremony; the perfume of the lilacs in full bloom floated upon the soft breeze that had succeeded the radiant sunset.

After a long silence, Maurice, having during this silence followed the intelligent and holy eye of Genevieve as she watched the appearance of the stars in the azure vault of heaven, ventured to inquire concerning the great disparity between herself and husband. She so young, and he already past the middle age; she so *distingue,* while everything around announced him a man of inferior birth and education; she so refined in her tastes, while her husband had not an idea beyond his manufactory.

"Here, at the abode of a master tanner, are harp, piano, and drawings, which you acknowledge to be your own. How is it that this aristocracy which I detest in others I adore in you."

Genevieve fixed upon Maurice a look full of candour.

"Thanks," said she, "for this inquiry; it proves to me you have not sought information concerning me from any one else."

"Never! madame, "said Maurice; "I have a devoted friend who would die for me; I have a hundred comrades ready to follow wherever I may lead them; but among all these hearts, when a woman is concerned, and above all, such a woman as Genevieve, I know but of one I would trust, and that one is myself."

"Thanks, Maurice," said the young woman, "I will myself tell you all you desire to know."

"Your maiden name first," said Maurice. "I only know your married one at present."

Genevieve detected the selfishness of love in this question, and smiled.

"Genevieve du Treilly," said she.

Maurice repeated, "Genevieve du Treilly."

"My family," continued Genevieve, "was ruined after the American war, in which both my father and elder brother had taken part."

"Both gentlemen?" said Maurice.

"No, no," said Genevieve, blushing.

"And yet you said your maiden name was Genevieve du Treilly."

"My family, Monsieur Maurice, was rich, but not noble."

"You challenge me," said the young man, smiling.

"Oh! no, no," replied Genevieve. "In America my father was connected with the father of Monsieur Morand. Monsieur Dixmer was managing man to Monsieur Morand. We were ruined, and Monsieur Morand, knowing that Monsieur Dixmer was a man of independent fortune, presented him to my father, who in his turn presented him to me.

"I saw he had beforehand formed a resolution of marriage. I understood it was the wish of my family. I did not love, neither had I ever loved any one, and I accepted him.

"I have now been Dixmer's wife for three years, and I am bound to say he has proved to me so good and excellent a husband, that notwithstanding the difference of taste and the disparity of age, I have never even for a moment experienced the slightest feeling of regret."

“But,” said Maurice, “when you married Monsieur Dixmer he was not at the head of this manufactory.”

“No, we lived at Blois. After the 10th of August Monsieur Dixmer purchased this house and the adjoining workshops, and that I might not be annoyed by the workmen, and to spare me the sight of many things repulsive to a person of my habits, which are, as you observed, Maurice, a little aristocratic, he gave me this pavilion, where I live alone retired, gratifying my various fancies and desires, and happy when a friend like yourself, Maurice, comes either to distract or partake in my reveries.”

And Genevieve tendered her hand to Maurice, which he ardently kissed. Genevieve blushed slightly.

“Now, my friend,” said the young woman, drawing away her hand, “you know how I became the wife of Monsieur Dixmer.”

“Yes,” said Maurice, regarding Genevieve with great attention; “but you have not told me how Monsieur Morand came to be associated with your husband.”

“Oh! that is very simple,” said Genevieve. “Monsieur Dixmer had, as I have told you, some fortune, but still not sufficient to engage alone in a large concern like this. The son of Monsieur Morand, his protector, as I have before said, this friend of my father, you will remember, provided half the funds, and as he possesses a good knowledge of chemistry, he devotes himself to various improvements with the energy you have remarked, and, thanks to which, the business of Monsieur Dixmer has extended considerably.”

“Monsieur Morand is also a great friend of yours, is he not, Madame?” said Maurice.

“Monsieur Morand is a noble hearted being, one of the worthiest men in existence,” gravely replied Genevieve.

“If he has given you no other proofs,” said Maurice, a little piqued at the importance accorded by Genevieve to the young man, the partner of her husband, “than dividing the expenses of this establishment with Monsieur Dixmer, and inventing a new colour for the morocco, allow me to say you rather overrate his merits.”

“He has given me many other proofs, monsieur,” said Genevieve.

“He is young, is he not?” said Maurice. “His wearing green spectacles renders it difficult to tell his age.”

“He is thirty-five.”

"You have known him, then, a long time?"

"From infancy."

Maurice bit his lips; he had always suspected Morand loved Genevieve.

"Oh!" said Maurice, "that explains his familiarity with you."

"It seems to me, monsieur," said Genevieve, smiling, "that this familiarity, which at least is only that of a friend, does not need any explanation."

"Oh! pardon me, madame, you know all affectionate natures are jealous, and my friendship was jealous of that you appear to feel for Monsieur Morand."

He was silent. Genevieve also remained silent. There were no more questions to-day respecting Morand, and Maurice quitted Genevieve, more than ever in love, for he was jealous.

So blinded was the young man by his passion, that he had not remarked, during the recital of Genevieve, many gaps, much hesitation, and many concealments, which, although at the moment had escaped his notice, now returned to his memory, and strangely tortured him; and then he might not be able to secure to himself the liberty allowed him by Dixmer, of conversing with Genevieve as often and as long as he pleased, and in solitude, as they now found themselves every evening; and more, not only had he become a constant and expected guest at the house — not only remained in perfect security with Genevieve, who seemed guarded by her angelic purity from any advances on the part of the young man, but he now escorted her in all the excursions made from time to time in that quarter. In the midst of this established intimacy one thing surprised him. The more he sought (perhaps the better to watch his sentiments for Genevieve) the friendship of Morand, by whose genius, notwithstanding his prejudice, he felt himself captivated, and whose pleasing manners won him more and more every day, the greater the inclination evinced by this whimsical man to avoid him.

Of this he complained bitterly to Genevieve; for he did not doubt but that Morand had discerned in him a rival, and therefore his conduct was actuated by jealousy.

"The citizen Morand hates me," said he one day to Genevieve.

"You?" said Genevieve, with a look of astonishment. "You — Monsieur Morand hate you?"

"Yes; I am sure of it."

“And why should he hate you?”

“Do you wish me to tell you?” cried Maurice.

“Without doubt,” replied Genevieve.

“Well, then, because I — ”

Maurice stopped; he was going to say, “because I love you.”

“I cannot tell you why,” replied Maurice, colouring. The fierce Republican near Genevieve was timid and confused as a young girl.

Genevieve smiled.

“Say,” replied she, “there is no sympathy between you, and I may perhaps believe you. You possess an ardent mind, an ambitious spirit, are a man of birth and education, while Morand is a merchant grafted on a chemist. He is timid and retiring. It is this timidity that deters him from taking the first step towards your acquaintance.”

“And who asks him to make the first advance towards me? I have made fifty to him, and he has never responded.”

“What is it, then?” said Genevieve.

Maurice chose to remain silent.

The day after this conversation with Genevieve, he arrived there at two o’clock in the afternoon, and found her ready dressed to go nut. “Welcome,” said she; “you will act as my chevalier?”

“Where are we going, then?” demanded Maurice.

“I am going to Antonil. It will be a delightful excursion. I mean to walk part of the way. Our carriage will convey us to the barrier, where it will wait for us. We will then walk to Auteuil, and when I have finished my business there, we will return to take-”

“Oh!” said Maurice, “what a delightful day you offer me!”

The two young people went out. Beyond Passy the carriage put them down. They sauntered along slowly and continued their journey on foot.

On arriving at Auteuil, Genevieve stopped.

“Wait for me,” said she, “at the entrance to the park; when I have finished I will rejoin you.”

“Where are you going, then?” demanded Maurice.

“To a friend’s house.”

“Where I cannot accompany you?”

Genevieve smilingly shook her head.

“Impossible!” said she.

Maurice bit his lip.

"Very well," said he; "I will wait."

"Ah! what?" said Genevieve.

"Nothing," replied Maurice. "Shall you be long?"

"If I had thought it would inconvenience you, Maurice, if I had known you were engaged," said Genevieve, "I would not have requested you to do me the slight favour to accompany me to-day. I might have asked — "

"Monsieur Morand," interrupted Maurice, sharply.

"No, you are aware Monsieur Morand is at the manufactory at Rambouillet, and does not return till this evening."

"Then to what do I owe the preference?"

"Maurice," said Genevieve, softly, "I cannot keep the person I came to see waiting; but if I am the least constraint upon your return to Paris, only send back the carriage."

"No, no, madame," replied Maurice, quickly, "I am at your service." He bowed to Genevieve, who, sighing softly, proceeded on her way, and entered Auteuil.

Maurice went to the appointed place, and continued walking backwards and forwards with long impatient strides, cutting off with his cane, like Tarquin, all the heads of the weeds, and flowers of the thistles, which he found upon the road; and this road being narrow and retired, left him at full liberty to trace and retrace his footsteps as often as he pleased. And what occupied his thoughts? The desire to know whether Genevieve loved him or not. Her manner to him was that of a friend, or sister, but he felt this was not sufficient. He loved her with an entire love. She had become his sole thought by day, his renewed dream by night. At one time, he only asked to see her again; he now required her to love him. Genevieve was absent for an hour, which to him had appeared an age; when he saw her returning with a smile upon her lips, Maurice, on the contrary, went to meet her with a frowning brow.

Genevieve, smiling, took his arm.

"Here I am," said she; "pardon me, *mon ami,* for having made you wait."

Maurice only replied by a bow; and they then entered a shady lane, which, by a winding path, conducted them into the high road.

It was one of those delicious evenings in spring, when every plant sends its fragrance on high, when every bird, either seated on the branches, or skipping from spray to spray, warbles its songs of praise to God; one of those evenings that seem destined to live for ever in our memory. Maurice was silent, Genevieve pensive. She plucked with one hand flowers for a bouquet, the other rested on the arm of Maurice.

“What is the matter with you?” said he, all at once, to Genevieve; “and what makes you so sad to-day?”

Genevieve might have answered — my happiness. She regarded him tenderly.

“But you,” said she, “are you not more than usually sad to-day?”

“I,” said Maurice, “have reason to be sad; I am unhappy; but you — ”

“You unhappy?”

“Doubtless; do you not perceive sometimes from my tremulous tones how much I suffer? Does it not often happen, when I am talking with you, or your husband, I am compelled suddenly to seek the air, because I feel as if my heart would burst?”

“But,” demanded Genevieve, embarrassed, “to what do you attribute this suffering?”

“If I were an affected lady,” said Maurice, attempting a laugh, “I should say it was a nervous attack.”

“And at this moment do you suffer?”

“Much,” said Maurice.

“Let us return, then.”

“What, already, madame?”

“Without doubt.”

“True,” said the young man; “I forgot Monsieur Morand would return from Rambouillet this evening; and it is fast approaching.” Genevieve looked at him reproachfully.

“Oh! again,” Said she.

“Why then did you, the other day, favour me with so high an eulogium on Monsieur Morand? It is your own fault.”

“How long is it since, to people we esteem,” demanded Genevieve, “we may not express our real opinion of an estimable man?”

“It must be a very lively esteem to cause you to accelerate your pace, as you at this moment are doing, for fear of being too late by a few minutes.”

“You are to-day absolutely unjust, Maurice. Have I not passed part of the day with you?”

“You are right; and I am indeed too exacting,” replied Maurice, subduing his impetuosity. “Let us return to meet Monsieur Morand.”

Genevieve felt her anger pass from her mind to her heart.

“Yes,” said she; “let us return to Monsieur Morand. He at least is a friend who never causes me pain.”

“They are, indeed, valuable friends,” said Maurice, “and I, for my part, should like a few such.”

They were now upon the high road; the horizon crimsoned as the departing rays of the setting sun glistened upon the gilt mouldings of the dome des Invalides. A star, which on the previous evening had attracted the attention of Genevieve, sparkled in the azure of heaven. Genevieve quitted Maurice’s arm with melancholy submission.

“Why have you made me suffer?” said she.

“Ah!” said Maurice; “I am not so clever as some people, and do not know how to make love.”

“Maurice!” said Genevieve.

“Oh, madame, if he is certainly so worthy and so just he ought not to suffer.”

Genevieve again placed her white hand within the powerful arm of Maurice.

“I pray you,” said she, in an altered tone, “to speak no more; to speak no more!”

“And why is that?”

“Because your voice makes me ill.”

“You are displeased with everything, even my voice?”

“Be silent, I conjure you.”

“I will obey you, madame.” And the impetuous young man passed his hand over his face, damp with perspiration.

Genevieve saw that he really suffered. “You are my friend, Maurice,” said Genevieve, looking at him kindly; “do not deprive me of your valuable friendship.”

“Oh! you would not long regret it,” said Maurice.

“You are mistaken,” said Genevieve, “I should regret it very long, and for ever.”

“Genevieve! Genevieve!” cried Maurice, “have pity upon me.”

Genevieve shuddered. It was the first time Maurice had uttered her name in these passionate accents.

“And now,” continued Maurice, “since you have divined me, let me tell you all, Genevieve, for might you kill me with a look, I have been silent too long; I will speak. Genevieve.”

"Monsieur," said the young woman, "I have supplicated you in the name of our friendship to remain silent; I still pray you to do so, if not for my sake, for your own. Not another word; in the name of Heaven! not another word."

"Friendship, friendship! if it be a friendship like this you profess for me, that you feel for Monsieur Morand, I wish for no more of your friendship — I, Genevieve, require more than others."

"Enough," said Madame Dixmer, with the gesture of a queen, "enough, Monsieur Lindey; here is our carriage, please to conduct me to my husband's house."

Maurice trembled with fever and emotion when Genevieve, to rejoin the carriage, which indeed was only a few paces distant, placed her hand on his arm.

They both entered the carriage; Genevieve took the front seat, and Maurice the one opposite. They traversed Paris without either one or the other having uttered a word. Only, all the way, Genevieve had held her handkerchief before her eyes. When they entered the building, Dixmer was occupied in his counting-house, Morand had just returned from Rambouillet, and was changing his dress. Genevieve held out her hand to Maurice, as she entered her chamber.

"Adieu! Maurice, you have wished it."

Maurice said nothing, but walked directly to the mantel-piece, where hung a portrait of Genevieve. He ardently kissed it, pressed it to his heart, replaced it, and went out. Maurice reached home without knowing how he arrived there; he had passed through Paris without seeing anything, without hearing anything; all that surrounded him appeared like a dream; he was unable to account for his actions, his words, or the sentiments which induced them. There are moments when the most serene spirits succumb under the violence of their own emotions.

It was, as we have said, rather a race than a return, on the part of Maurice. He undressed himself without the assistance of his valet-de-chambre, neither replied to his cook, who displayed his supper duly prepared for him, but taking the day's letters from the table, he read them all, one after the other, without comprehending a single word. The burning jealousy, that intoxication of reason, was not yet dissipated. At ten o'clock, Maurice mechanically sought his bed, as, indeed, he had done everything else since his parting with Genevieve.

If Maurice in his cooler moments had been told of this extraordinary behaviour in another, he would not have been able to comprehend it, but would have considered him mad to have pursued this desperate conduct, totally unauthorized either by too much reserve or too much "abandon" on the part of Genevieve. He now only felt this was a terrible blow to all his hopes, of which he had never even to himself rendered an account, and upon which, vague as they were, reposed all his visions of happiness, dreams which like an unseizable vapour floated shapelessly towards the horizon, and there disappeared. Thus it happened, as in similar cases, that Maurice, stunned by this blow, dropped asleep directly he found himself in bed, where he remained free from all sentiment till the morrow. He was awakened by the noise of the official opening the door, who came as usual to unclose the windows, which opened upon a large garden, and to bring some flowers.

At that time, in the year '93, much attention was paid to the culture of forced flowers, and Maurice dearly loved all flowers; but now without even bestowing a glance upon them, he half raised his heavy head, and supporting it on his hand, endeavoured to recall the events of the preceding evening. Maurice asked himself, without being able to account for it, the cause of this mad folly; the sole cause was jealousy of Morand; but the moment was certainly badly chosen to amuse himself by being jealous of a man, when this man was at Rambouillet, and whilst enjoying a *tete-a-tete* with the woman one loves, surrounded by the most enchanting scenery, on one of the lovely days of spring. It was not suspicion of the inmates at the house at Auteuil, where Genevieve had remained an hour, no, the incessant torment of his life was the idea that Morand loved Genevieve, and yet, singular fantasy of the brain, strange combination of caprice, not a gesture, a look, not even a word from Dixmer's partner had afforded the slightest grounds for this belief. The voice of the valet-de-chambre aroused him from this reverie.

"Citizen," said he, showing him the open letters on the table, "have you selected those you wished to keep, or shall they all be burned?"

"Burn what?" said Maurice.

"The letters the citizen read last night, before he retired to bed."

Maurice could not remember having read one.

"Burn all," said he.

"Here are two days' letters, citizen," said the official.

He presented a packet of letters to Maurice, and threw the others under the grate. Maurice took the letters, felt the impression of a seal, and fancied that he recognized the perfume of a friend, and looking over his correspondence he found an envelope and handwriting that made him tremble. This man, who bravely faced danger, trembled before the odour of a letter. The official approached Maurice to inquire what he would take, but he signified a wish to be alone. Maurice turned and returned this letter; he felt a presentiment it contained misery for him, and started and trembled before unknown misfortune. Having collected all his courage he at length opened it, and read as follows: —

“Citizen Maurice, — It has become necessary that we should burst these bonds — bonds which, on your side, affect to exceed the bounds of friendship. You are a man of honour, citizen, and now a night has passed since the occurrences of yesterday evening, you ought to comprehend that your presence at our house is no longer desirable. I leave it to you to excuse yourself in any way you think best to my husband. On the arrival this day of your letter to Monsieur Dixmer. I am convinced I shall regret the loss of an unfortunate friend, whom all social propriety will deter me from meeting for the future. Adieu for ever. — GENEVIEVE.

“P.S. — The bearer awaits your reply.”

Maurice called: the valet-de-chambre reappeared.

“Who brought this letter?”

“A citizen commissionaire.”

“Is he waiting?”

“Yes.”

Maurice did not for a moment hesitate, but, partly dressing, seated himself before his writing-desk, and taking the first sheet of paper that came to hand (he found it had on it the impression of a heart with the name of the Section), he wrote: —

“Citizen Dixmer, — I respected you, and I still do so, but I cannot visit you any longer.”

Maurice considered what reason he could assign for not visiting Dixmer, and one idea alone presented itself to his mind, that which at this epoch occurred to every one. He thus continued: —

“Certain rumors are afloat relative to your lukewarm-ness in public affairs. I have no wish to accuse you, and no mission to defend you.

Receive my respects, and feel assured your secrets will remain for ever buried in my heart."

Maurice did not even read this letter, written, as we have said, under the impression of the first idea that presented itself. He did not doubt the effect it would produce. Dixmer, an excellent patriot, as Maurice imagined from his conversation at least, would be much grieved at receiving it, his wife and Monsieur Morand would no doubt influence him not to reply, and forgetfulness would gradually spread itself like a dark veil over the past, laughing at the melancholy transformation. Maurice signed and sealed his letter, gave it the official, and the commissionaire departed. Then a slight sigh escaped the Republican; he took his hat and gloves and proceeded to the section. He hoped, poor Brutus, to recover his stoicism, by occupying himself with public affairs. These were indeed terrible: the 31st of May was preparing. The *terreur* which, like a torrent, precipitated itself from the height of la Montagne, endeavoured to carry away this dike, opposed to it by the Girondins, those audacious *Moderes* who had dared to demand vengeance for the massacres of September, and to wrestle for an instant to save the life of the King.

Whilst Maurice pursued his way with a rapidity that drove the fever from his heart to his head, the messenger had re-entered the old Rue St. Jacques, filling the dwelling there with terror and astonishment. The letter, after passing through Genevieve's hands, was given by her to Dixmer. Dixmer opened and read it, without at *first* understanding it; he then communicated the contents to the citizen Morand, who supported his head upon his hand. His face was pale as death. In the situation in which Dixmer, Morand, and their companions found themselves (a situation totally unknown to Maurice, but which our readers have penetrated) this letter was like a thunderbolt.

"Is this an upright, honest man?" asked Dixmer, much grieved.

"Yes," replied Morand, without the least hesitation.

"Never mind," said the advocate for extreme measures, "you see we were very wrong not to kill him."

"My friend," said Louis, "we struggle against violence, we brand it with the name of crime. We have acted rightly, whatever may be the result, in not assassinating this man. I again repeat I believe Maurice to possess a noble, generous spirit."

“Yes; but if so noble and generous a spirit belongs to this warm republican, perhaps he may regard it in the light of a crime, if he has made any discovery, not to immolate his own honour, as they say, ‘on the altar of the country.”‘

“But,” said Morand, “do you think he knows anything?”

“Do you not hear? he speaks of secrets buried in his own heart.

“These secrets are evidently those confided to him by me relative to our contraband transactions. He knows no others.”

“But this interview at Auteuil? does he suspect anything? you know he accompanied your wife?”

“It was I who told Genevieve to take Maurice with her as a protection.”

“Listen,” said Morand, “we shall soon see if these surmises be true. The turn of our battalion to guard the Temple arrives on the 2nd of June, that is to say, in eight days. You are captain, Dixmer, and I lieutenant; if our battalion or even our company receives a counter-order, like that received the other day by the battalion of la Butles-des-Moulins, which Santerre has replaced by that of Gravilliers, all is discovered, and we have only to flee from Paris, or die fighting. But if all follows in the usual course of things —

“We are lost all the same,” replied Dixmer.

“How so?”

“Pardieu! does not all devolve upon the co-operation of this young municipal? Was it not he who, without knowing it, must open the road for us to the Queen?”

“That is true!” said Morand, confounded.

“Yon see, then,” said Dixmer, knitting his brows, “that, at any price, we must renew our intimacy with this young man.”

“But, if he refuse, if he fear to compromise himself?”

“Listen!” said Dixmer, “I will question Genevieve; she saw him last, perhaps she may know something more.”

“Dixmer,” said Morand, “it is with pain I see you mixing Genevieve with all our plots, not that I fear any indiscretion on her part. Oh! great God! the drama we are acting is a dreadful one, and I blush and tremble at the same time to place the head of a woman at stake, as well as our own.”

“The head of a woman,” said Dixmer, “ponders as gravely as that of a man, when stratagem is required, and often achieves more by candour and beauty than by force, strength, power, or courage. Genevieve shares in our convictions and our sympathies. Genevieve shall also share our fate.”

“Well, my friend,” said Morand, “I have said all I ought to say. Genevieve is in every way worthy of the mission you have given her, or rather that she has taken upon herself. It is martyrs who become saints.”

And he held out his delicate and effeminate hand to Dixmer, who roughly pressed it between his own. Then Dixmer, recommending Morand and his companions to watch with increased vigilance, quitted them, and entered Genevieve’s apartments. She was seated before a table, bending over a piece of embroidery. She turned round at the noise of the opening door, and recognised Dixmer.

“Ah, it you, mon ami?” said she.

“Yes,” said Dixmer, with a placid, smiling countenance. “I have received a letter from your friend Maurice, which I cannot understand in the least. Read it, and then tell me what you think of it.”

Genevieve took the letter with a hand, of which (with all her self-command) she could not disguise the tremor, and read. Dixmer followed her eyes as they ran over every line.

“Well?” said he, when she had finished.

“Well! I think that Monsieur Maurice Lindey is an honest man, and from him we have nothing to fear,” replied Genevieve, with the greatest calmness.

“You think he is ignorant who the persons are you visited at Auteuil?”

“I am certain.”

“Why then this sudden determination? Did he appear yesterday less friendly and more silent than usual?”

“No,” said Genevieve, “I believe he was just the same.”

“Consider well before you answer me, Genevieve, for you must understand your reply will greatly influence our future projects.”

“Listen, then,” said she, with an emotion that overthrew all her attempt at calmness. “Wait — ”

“Well!” said Dixmer, all the muscles of his face slightly contracting; “collect your thoughts, Genevieve.”

“Yes!” said the young woman, “yes, I remember, yesterday he was not particularly civil. Monsieur Maurice,” continued she, “is a little tyrannical in his friendship, and,” hesitatingly added, “sometimes we have quarrelled for a whole week.”

“This is then merely a simple quarrel?” demanded Dixmer.

“Most probably.”

"Genevieve, understand this, in our position it is not probability that will suffice, it is certitude we require."

"Ah, well, mon ami, I am certain."

"This letter, then, would be only a pretext for not visiting us again?"

"Mon ami, as you wish it, I will tell you."

"Speak, Genevieve, speak: of any other woman I would not ask it."

"It is a pretext," said Genevieve, looking down.

"Ah!" said Dixmer. Then after a moment's silence he replaced it in his waistcoat, and placing his hand upon his wife's chair to compress the beatings of his heart.

"Will you do me a service?" said he.

"What service?" said Genevieve, turning round surprised.

"To prevent even the shadow of danger. Maurice is, perhaps, deeper in our secrets than we imagine. That which you believe a pretext may, perhaps, be a reality. Write him one word."

"I!" said Genevieve, starting.

"Yes, you. Tell him that you have opened the letter and desire an explanation. He will then call, you can interrogate him, and will easily discover what is the matter."

"Oh! no," cried Genevieve, "I cannot do as you wish me; I will not do it."

"Dear Genevieve, when interests so powerful as those that rest upon us are at stake, will you recoil before the paltry consideration of self-love?"

"I have told you my opinion of Maurice, monsieur," said Genevieve, "he is honest and brave, but capricious, and I do not choose to submit to any authority but that of my husband."

This answer, returned with so much calmness, and, at the same time, firmness, convinced Dixmer that to insist further at this moment would be worse than useless. He did not add another word, but looked at Genevieve, without seeming to do so, and went out. Morand was awaiting his return with great anxiety. Dixmer repeated word for word all that had occurred.

"Well!" said Morand, "we will wait, and think no more about it, rather than I would cast a shadow of suspicion on your wife, rather than wound her self-love, I would renounce — "

Dixmer placed his hand upon his shoulder.

"You are mad, monsieur," said he to him, "or else you do not know what you are saying."

"Do you think so, Dixmer?"

"I think, Chevalier, that you have no more coif-command than I have, to give utterance to sentiments on the impulse of the moment. Neither you, I, or Genevieve belong to ourselves, Morand. We are the chosen defenders of a certain cause, and this cause depends upon its supporters."

Morand trembled, and preserved a gloomy and thoughtful silence. They took several turns round the garden without exchanging a word. Then Dixmer left Morand.

"I have some orders to give," said he in a calm voice. "I must leave you, Monsieur Morand."

Morand held out his hand to Dixmer, and looked after him as he turned away.

"Poor Dixmer," said he, "I fear much that in all this you risk the most."

Dixmer returned to the manufactory, and having issued several orders, looked over the day-book, and distributed bread and fuel to the poor of the section, went home, and changed his working dress for his walking costume immediately on his arrival there.

An hour afterwards, Maurice Lindey, while deeply engaged in his readings and allocutions, was interrupted by the voice of his official, whispering in his ear, "Citizen Lindey, some one who, so he pretends at least, has something of importance to say to you, is waiting at your house." Maurice, on entering, was much surprised at meeting the master tanner, who had there comfortably installed himself, and was turning over the newspapers. All the way along he had questioned the domestic, who, of course, not knowing Dixmer, could afford him no clue to his recognition. On perceiving Dixmer, Maurice stopped at the threshold of the door, and blushed in spite of himself. Dixmer smilingly arose, and held out his hand.

"What ails you? and what have you written to me?" he inquired of the young man. "Indeed, my dear Maurice, I feel it sensibly. You designate me as 'lukewarm and a false patriot.' Now as you dare not repeat these accusations to my face, acknowledge you wish to seek a quarrel with me."

"I will avow anything you please, my dear Dixmer, for your conduct to me has always been that of a worthy man, but I have nevertheless made a resolution, and that resolution is irrevocable."

"But how is that?" said Dixmer, "when according to your own account you have nothing to reproach me with, and yet, notwithstanding, you leave us?"

"My dear Dixmer, believe me, acting as I now am, and depriving myself of such a friend, I must be actuated by powerful motives."

"Yes; but under any circumstances," said Dixmer, affecting to smile, "these reasons are not those you have written. What you have written to me is merely a subterfuge."

Maurice reflected an instant.

"Listen, Dixmer," said he; "we live in an epoch when a doubt conveyed in a letter could and would annoy you, I can well understand. It would then be acting like a dishonourable man to allow you to remain in this state of inquietude. Yes, Dixmer, the reasons I gave you were not the true ones."

This avowal, which should have cleared the face of the merchant, only seemed the more to cloud it.

"But at least tell me the motive," said Dixmer.

"I cannot tell you," said Maurice, "and yet I am certain if you knew it, you would afford me your approval."

Dixmer still continued to press him.

"Then you really wish to know it," said Maurice.

"Yes," replied Dixmer.

"Well, then," replied Maurice, who felt a sensation of relief as he approached the truth, "this is the truth. You have a young and beauteous wife, virtuous as she is beautiful; yet it is well known that I cannot visit at your house without my visits being misinterpreted."

Dixmer turned rather pale.

"Truly, then, my dear Maurice," said he, "you ought to thank the wife for the wrong you do the friend?"

"Understand," said Maurice, "I have not the folly to suppose my presence can be dangerous to your repose, or that of your wife; but it might, perhaps, afford subject for calumny, and you are aware the more absurd the scandal, the easier it gains belief."

"Absurd!" said Dixmer, shrugging his shoulders.

"Absurd, as much as you please," said Maurice, "but separate, we shall not the less be good friends, for we shall have nothing to reproach ourselves with, while, on the contrary, if near — "

"Well! What then?"

"There would be food for scandal."

"Do you think, Maurice, that I should believe — "

"Eh! mon Dieu!" said the young man.

"But why did you not write this instead of telling it to me, Maurice?"

"Just to avoid the scene of this moment."

"And are you vexed, Maurice, that I respected you sufficiently to demand an explanation?"

"No; on the contrary, I swear I am glad to have seen you once again before our final separation."

"Our final separation, citizen; you whom we esteem so much!" taking Maurice's hand and pressing it between his own.

Maurice started.

"Morand," continued Dixmer, who failed not to notice this start, "Morand said to me only this morning, 'Do all in your power to bring back Maurice."'

"Monsieur," said the young man, frowning, and drawing away his hand, "I do not believe I stand very high in the estimation of Monsieur Morand."

"You doubt it," said Dixmer.

"Me!" replied Maurice, "I neither believe or doubt it, and have no motive to inquire on the subject. When I went to your house it was to visit yourself and *jour* wife, and not on account of Monsieur Morand."

"You do not know him, Maurice," said Dixmer; "Morand possesses a noble soul."

"I grant it," said Maurice, smiling bitterly.

"Let us, however, return to the object of my visit," continued Dixmer.

Maurice bowed, like a man who hears all, but has nothing more to say.

"You say, then, that these reports have already circulated?"

"Yes, citizen."

"Well, then, let us speak frankly. Why should you pay any attention to the silly prattling of idle neighbours? Have you not your own clear conscience, Maurice, and Genevieve, has she not a sense of honour?"

"I am younger than you," said Maurice, who began to be astonished at this pertinacity, "and perhaps view things with more susceptibility. This is why I declare that on the reputation of such a woman as Genevieve, a shadow even should not be permitted to be cast. Permit me, therefore, my dear dear Dixmer, to adhere to my former resolution."

"And now," said Dixmer, "since we are in order for confession, tell me one thing more."

"What!" paid Maurice, colouring; "what more do you wish me to avow?"

"That it is neither politics, nor the report of your assiduities at my house, that induces you to leave us?"

"What is it, then?"

"The secret you have discovered."

"What secret?" demanded Maurice, with so *naive* an expression of curiosity, as completely to reassure the tanner.

"The secret of the smuggling affair, which you discovered the same evening when our singular acquaintance commenced. You have never forgiven me this fraud, and accuse me of being a bad republican, because I employ English produce in my manufactory."

"My dear Dixmer, I solemnly declare to you that when I visited at your house, I had totally forgotten I was in the house of a contrabandist."

"Truly?"

"Truly."

"Yon really, then, had no other reason for abandoning the house than that you have stated."

"Upon my honour."

"Well," said Dixmer, rising and offering his hand to the young man, "I hope you will consider this resolution, which has been productive of pain to us all, and will again return to us as usual."

Maurice bowed but made no reply, which was of course equivalent to a refusal. Dixmer left, annoyed at not having been able to re-establish an intimacy with this man, whom certain circumstances had rendered not only useful to him but absolutely indispensable. Maurice was agitated *by* a variety of emotions of a contrary nature. Dixmer entreated him to return. Genevieve would pardon him. Why then should he despond? Louis, in his place, would have selected a crowd of aphorisms from his favourite authors. But then he had Genevieve's letter, that formal adieu, which he had carried with him to the section and placed near his heart; also the little word received from her the day after he had rescued her from the cowards who insulted her; and, lastly, the obstinate jealousy still retained by this young man against the detestable Morand, the first cause of his rupture with Genevieve.

Maurice remained inflexible in his resolution. But it must be acknowledged, the privation of his daily visits to the old Rue Saint Jacques formed a sad blank in his existence; and when the hour arrived at which he had been accustomed to pay his daily visit to the quarter Saint Victor, he fell into a profound fit of melancholy, and began, from that moment, to survey every aspect of hope or regret. Each morning on awakening; he expected to receive a letter from Dixmer, and acknowledged to himself that he who had so firmly resisted all persuasion, would now at last yield to a letter; each day he sallied out in hopes of meeting Genevieve, and, beforehand, had arranged a thousand ways of speaking to her; each evening he returned in hopes of there finding a letter or message left since the morning, though, doubtless, it would bring an addition to the grief, now become his constant companion.

Often, in his hours of despair, his strong nature rebelled at the idea of enduring so much torture, without retaliating upon the primary cause of all his suffering and all his misery, Morand. Then he formed a project to go and seek some quarrel with Morand, but Dixmer's partner was so inoffensive and gentlemanly, that to insult or provoke him would be a cowardly proceeding on the part of a Colossus like Maurice.

It was fortunate Louis came to distract the attention of his friend from troubles which he obstinately concealed in his own heart, without having the power to destroy them. He had used every argument of theory and practice to secure to its country that heart totally engrossed by another love. But, although this was to be regretted, and although, in another state of mind, it might have dragged Maurice into the centre of the political whirlpool, it had not restored to the young Republican that first activity, which had distinguished him as a hero on the 14th of July and the 10th of August. These two systems, for the last ten months in view of each other, and which, thus far, had only carried on light attacks, and commenced a few skirmishes, prepared to meet body to body, when it was evident that the struggle once begun would end fatally for one or the other. These two systems, born from the breast of the revolution itself, were those of Moderation, represented by the Girondins, that is to say, by Bressot, Petion, Vergniaud, Valaze, Lanjuinais, Barbaroux, etc., and La Terreur, or La Montagne, represented by Danton, Robespierre, Chenier, Fabre, Marat, Collot d'Herbois, Hebert, etc., etc.

After the 10th of August, as after every action, the power appeared to pass into the hands of the Moderes. A ministry had been formed from the wreck of the former ministry, and of a new adjunction. Roland, Servien, and Clavieres, former ministers, had been recalled. Danton, Monge, and Le Brun had been nominated afresh. With one exception only, all these ministers belonged to the moderate party. Of course when we say "Moderate" we speak relatively. But the 10th of August had had its echo from afar, and the coalition hastened to march, not to the assistance of Louis XVI. personal, but to the royalist principles tottering at its basis. Then were heard the menacing words of Brunswick, and, as a terrible realization, Longwy and Verdun had fallen into the power of the enemy. Then a dreadful reaction had taken place — then Danton had dreams of the days of September, and realized the bloody dream, which displayed before the enemies of France an entire scene of immense assassination, ready to struggle for an existence, compromised with all the energy of despair.

September had saved France, but all, in saving her, had exceeded the limits of the law. France saved, energy became useless; the Moderes had regained some strength, and then wished to recriminate those dreadful days. The words murderer and assassin had been uttered, a new name had even been added to the national vocabulary — it was that of Septembriseurs Danton had bravely accepted. Clovis had for a moment inclined his head under the baptism of blood to raise it only still more lofty and menacing. Another opportunity to renew La Terreur presented itself, it was the process of the King. Violence and moderation entered, not altogether to wrestle against persons but principles. The hope of relative strength was founded on the royal prisoner. Moderation was overcome, and the head of Louis XVI. fell upon the scaffold. On the 10th of August, the 24th of January had rendered to the coalition all its energy. It was still the same man whom they opposed, but not the same fortune. Dumonriez, arrested in his progress by the disorder of all the administrations which prevented the succour of men or money reaching him, declared against the Jacobins, whom he accused of causing this disorganization, adopted the party of the Girondins, and ruined them in declaring himself their friend. Then La Vendee rose threatening the districts, misfortune producing treason, and treason misfortune. The Jacobins accused the Moderes, and wished to strike the blow on the 10th of March, that is to say, during the evening when our story commences. But too much precipitation on the part of their adversaries saved them, and perhaps also the rain, which had caused Petion (that profound anatomist of the Parisian mind) to remark —

"It rains! there will be nothing to-night." But since the 10th of March everything threatened ruin to the Girondins. Marat was accused and acquitted. Robespierre and Danton were reconciled as a lion and tiger would reconcile themselves before fighting the bull they both intended to devour; Henriot, the Septembriseur, nominated Commandant-General to the National Guard; everything presaged that awful day, which would carry away by storm the last dike the Revolution opposed to La Terreur. Such were the great events, in which under any other circumstances Maurice would have taken that active part, for which his powerful nature and exalted patriotism so fully qualified him. But happily, or unhappily, for Maurice, neither the exhortations of Louis, nor the terrible pro-occupations abroad, had been able to divert his mind from the one idea that possessed it; and when the 31st of May arrived, the fierce assailants of the Bastille and the Tuileries was laid upon his bed, devoured by that fever which destroys the strongest, and yet only requires a word to dissipate, a look to heal.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE THIRTY-FIRST OF MAY.

DURING THE MORNING of the 31st of May, when the tocsin and beat of drum had been sounding since the break of day, the battalion of the Faubourg St. Victor entered the Temple. When all the usual formalities had been gone through, and the post distributed, the municipals on service arrived, bringing with them four pieces of cannon, in addition to those already forming the battery at the gate of the Temple. At the same time Santerre arrived, with his epaulets of yellow wool, and a coat on which his patriotism was displayed by large spots of grease. He reviewed the battalion, which was in a proper state, but on counting the municipals, found only three.

"Why are there only three municipals?" inquired he; "and who is the bad citizen who fails us?"

"The absent citizen, General, is not, however, un tiede," replied our old acquaintance, Agricola; "for it is the Secretary of the Section Lepelletier, the chief of the brave Thermopyles, the citizen Maurice Lindey."

"Well, well," said Santerre, "I know as well as yourself the patriotism of the citizen Maurice Lindey; but that will not deter me, if he is not here in five minutes, from inscribing his name in the list of the absent."

And Santerre passed on to other details. A few paces from the General, at the moment he pronounced these words, a captain of chasseurs and a soldier had stationed themselves, one leaning against his gun, the other seated on a cannon.

"Did you hear?" said the captain to the soldier, in a low tone. "Maurice has not yet arrived."

"Yes; but rest assured he will arrive, he will not remain quiet at least."

"In case he should not come," said the captain, "I will place you sentinel on the staircase; and a? she ascends to the tower, you will be able probably to speak a won! to her."

At this moment a man, evidently a municipal, from his tricoloured scarf, entered; but this man being a stranger to the captain and the chasseur, they both regarded him attentively.

"Citizen General," said the new-comer, addressing Santerre, "I request you to accept me in place of Citizen Maurice Lindey, who is ill. Here is the medical certificate; my turn on guard arrives in eight days. I now exchange with him; in eight days he will do duty for me, as to day I will for him."

"Provided Capet and the Capets live eight days longer," said one of the municipals.

Santerre replied by a slight smile to this pleasantry, and turning towards Maurice's proxy —

"Very good," said he; "sign the register, in lieu of Maurice Lindey, and consign to the column of observations the reason for this exchange."

The captain and chasseur exchanged looks of delight, mingled with astonishment.

"In eight days," said they.

"Captain Dixmer," said Sauterre, "take your position in the garden with your company."

"Come, Morand," said the captain, to the chasseur his companion. The drum sounded, and the company, led by the master tanner, filed off in the direction prescribed. They placed their arms altogether, and the company divided itself into groups, which dispersed themselves according to their inclination, far and wide. Their place of promenade was the same garden where, *in* the time of Louis XVI., the royal family came sometimes to take the air. This garden was naked, barren, and desolate, completely despoiled of trees, flowers, or verdure of any kind. At about five-and-twenty paces, or perhaps rather nearer, that portion of the wall built on the Rue Porte Foin, rose a species of cottage, which the foresight of the municipality had established for the convenience of the National Guard stationed at the Temple, who during the days of riot, when they were not permitted to go out, found it an accommodation to take their meals in this little cottage. The direction of this little alehouse had been a matter of contention, till at length concession was made in favour of an excellent patriot, wife of a Fabourien, killed on the 10th of August, and who bore the name of Plumeau. This little cabin, built of planks and mud, rose in the middle of a border, of which the bounds may still be recognised by a hedge of dwarf box trees. It was composed of a simple chamber, twelve feet square, under which extended a cave, entered by steps rudely cut in the earth itself. Here the widow Plumeau stowed away her wine and provisions. This department was ultimately managed by herself and daughter, a girl of twelve or fifteen years of age. Hardly established at their bivouac, the National Guards separated, as we have said, some to saunter in the garden, while others chatted with the hostess. Some amused themselves by criticising the designs traced upon the walls, which were all of a patriotic tendency, such as the King pendant with this expression — " Monsieur Veto taking an air-bath;" or the King guillotined, with this — "Monsieur Veto spitting in the sack;" while some offered hints to Madame Plumeau concerning her gastronomical designs, that might more or less' excite their appetites. Among the latter were the captain and the chasseur whom we have previously remarked.

"Ah, Captain Dixmer!" said the cantiniere, "I have some famous Vin de Saumer."

"But, citizen Plumeau, in my opinion at least, the Vin de Saumer is nothing without the cheese of Brie," replied the captain, who, before he stated this opinion, had carefully looked round, and detected the absence of his favourite commodity.

"Ah! captain, it is true; but the last morsel has been consumed."

"Well," said the captain, "if there is no cheese of Brie, no Vin de Saumer for me, and remark, citoyenne Plumeau, the consumption is worth the trouble; listen to what I intend to propose to the company."

"But, captain, I ask you to wait only five minutes, and I will run and procure some at the house of the citoyenne concierge, who competes with me, and who always has it. I shall pay very dear, and you I am sure are too good a patriot to injure me."

"Yes, yes," replied Dixmer, "and in the mean time we will go into the vault, and select our own wines."

"Make yourself at home, captain, pray do."

And the widow Plumeau began to run with all her might towards the lodge of the concierge, whilst the captain and chasseur, provided with a light, raised the trap-door, and then descended into the cave.

"Good," said Morand, after an instant's examination, the cave advances in the direction of la Rue Porte Foin. It is nine or ten feet in depth, and there is no brickwork."

"What is the nature of the soil?" inquired Dixmer.

"Sandstone; it is all made earth; these gardens have been thrown into confusion, and then restored many times. There is no rock in any part."

“Be quick,” cried Dixmer, “I hear the sabots of our vivandiere; take two bottles of wine, and let us go up.”

They both appeared at the entrance of the trap-door as Madame Plumeau entered, carrying the cheese so strenuously insisted upon by Dixmer, while several chasseurs followed her, attracted by the presence of the said cheese. Dixmer did the honours; he offered twenty bottles of wine to his company, whilst the citizen Morand recounted the devotion of Curtius, the disinterestedness of Fabricius, and the patriotism of Brutus and Cassius, histories almost as much appreciated as the cheese of Brie, and the vin d’Anjou offered by Dixmer, which is not saying a little. Eleven o’clock struck. At half-past, the sentinels were relieved.

“Does not the Austrian take her walk in half-an-hour?” asked Dixmer of Tison, who passed the cabin.

“Half-an-hour after noon, exactly,” and he began to sing.

He was received with a shout of laughter from the National Guard. Dixmer immediately summoned those men in his company whose duty it was to mount guard at half-past eleven o’clock for an hour and-a-half, recommended them to hasten their breakfast, and made them take the arms to Morand, to place them, as it was agreed, on the highest story of the tower, in the same turret behind which Maurice was hidden the day he intercepted the signs intended for the Queen from the window of la Rue Porte Foin. If anyone had noticed Morand at the moment he received this message, simple as it was, he would have seen him blush beneath the masses of his long black hair. Suddenly a dull noise shook the court of the Temple, and sounds were heard like the roaring of a hurricane in the distance.

“What is that?” said Dixmer to Tison.

“Oh!” replied the jailer, “it is nothing; some little uproar they are making as these rascally Brissontins go to the guillotine.”

The noise increased, the roar of artillery was heard, and a crowd of people rushed past, near the Temple, shouting, “Long live the Sections,”

“Long live Henriot,”

“Down with the Brissontins,”

“Down with the Rolandists,”

“Down with Madame Veto.”

“Ah!” said Tison, clapping his hands, “I will go and open the door for Madame Veto, that without any disturbance she may enjoy the love the people evince for her.”

He approached the wicket of the donjon.

“Holloa! Tison,” cried a loud voice.

“Yes, General,” replied he, stopping short.

“Not to go out to-day,” said Santerre; “the prisoners are not to quit their chambers to-day.” This order was peremptory.

“Good,” said Tison, “so much the less trouble.”

Dixmer and Morand exchanged looks of disappointment, then waiting till the hour for duty had struck (though now uselessly), they both left to walk between the cabin and the wall built on the Rue Porte Foin. Morand began walking fast, a distance of easy and geometrical steps, that is to say of three feet.

“What distance?” inquired Dixmer.

“Sixty to sixty-one feet,” replied Morand.

“How many days will be required?”

Morand considered, then traced upon the ground some geometrical signs, which he effaced directly.

“Seven days at least are necessary,” said he.

“Maurice is guard in eight days,” murmured Dixmer. “It is then absolutely imperative that within eight days we should be reconciled to Maurice.”

The half hour struck, Morand, sighing, resumed his gun, and conducted by the corporal, went to relieve the sentinel who paraded the platform before the tower.

CHAPTER XIV.

DEVOTION.

THE DAY FOLLOWING these events, that is to say the 1st of June, at ten o'clock in the morning, Genevieve was seated in her accustomed place near the window. She asked herself why, for the last three weeks, the days for her rose so sad, why they passed so slowly, and lastly, why instead of anticipating each evening with delight, she now dreaded its return. Her nights above all were wretched, those nights that used to be so happy, those nights passed in dreaming of the past and of the future. At this moment her eyes fell upon a case of magnificent striped and crimson carnations, which since the winter she had removed from the little greenhouse where Maurice had been imprisoned, to bloom in her own apartment. Maurice had learned her to cultivate them in this case where they were enclosed; they were watered and daily trimmed as if Maurice had been there; for when he came in the evening, she delighted to show him, thanks to their united care, the progress they had made during the night. But since the cessation of Maurice's visits, the poor carnations had been quite neglected, and for want of requisite care and attention, the opening buds had withered, turned yellow, and fallen down outside the balustrade. Genevieve now comprehended from this sight alone the reason of her own melancholy. She said to herself — ''It is with flowers as with certain friendships, which we nourish and cultivate with ardour, till they bloom in the heart, and then in a moment a suspicion, a caprice, an unkindness, strikes at the root of this friendship, and the heart that this friendship has bound up and brought to life languishes and dies." The young woman experienced a sensation of anguish. She examined her inmost thoughts; the sentiments he had endeavoured to combat, and which she had hoped to conquer, she feared now more than ever would only die with her; then she felt a moment's despair, for she knew the struggle would become more and more impossible. She slowly bowed her head, imprinted a kiss upon the withered flowers, and wept. Her husband entered at this moment. He, on his side, was too much pre-occupied with his own thoughts to pay any attention to the emotions exhibited by his wife. It is true Genevieve rose quickly to meet him, and in so doing turned her face from the window.

"Well?" said she.

"Well, nothing new; impossible to approach her, impossible to pass her, impossible even to see her."

"What!" cried Genevieve, "with all the noise there has been in Paris."

"It is this very noise which has made the guard redouble their vigilance, from the fear that any one might avail themselves of the general excitement to make an attempt on the Temple, and the very moment when her Majesty was about to walk upon the platform, an order was issued by Santerre, that neither the Queen, Madame Royale, nor Madame Elizabeth should go out to-day."

"The poor chevalier: he would be much annoyed?"

"He was in despair when he saw this chance had thus escaped us, and turned so pale that I trembled lest he should betray himself."

"But," asked Genevieve timidly, "is there not then at the Temple any municipal of your acquaintance?"

"There ought to have been one, but he did not come."

"Who?"

"The citizen Maurice Lindey," said Dixmer, in a tone he endeavoured to render indifferent.

"And why did he not come?" said Genevieve, in her turn making a similar effort at self-command.

"He was ill."

"He: ill?"

"Yes, and seriously so. Patriot as you know him to be, he was obliged to cede his turn to another."

"This is most unfortunate."

"Mon Dieu, Genevieve," replied Dixmer, "if he had been there, as matters now stand, it might have been just the same. Unfriendly as we are at present, he might perhaps have avoided even speaking to me."

"I think, mon ami," replied Genevieve, "you exaggerate the unpleasantness of our situation. Monsieur Maurice may have taken a whim not to come here, but is not on that account our enemy. Coolness does not exclude politeness, and I am convinced on seeing you he would meet you half way."

“Genevieve,” replied Dixmer, “what we require from Maurice needs something more than politeness, — a firm and attached friendship. This feeling is destroyed: we have nothing further to hope from him.”

And Dixmer heaved a deep sigh, while his usually placid face bore a troubled expression.

“But,” said Genevieve, hesitatingly, “if you think that Monsieur Maurice is necessary to your projects — ”

“That is to say,” replied Dixmer, “that I despair of being able to succeed without him.”

“Well, then, why do you not try some new method with the Citizen Lindey?”

It seemed to her that in speaking of the young man by his surname, her voice sounded less tender than when she called him by his Christian name.

“No,” replied Dixmer, shaking his head, “any new proceeding would appear singular and necessarily awaken suspicion; and then, Genevieve, I see farther than you into this affair; Maurice feels deeply wounded.”

“Wounded! mon ami. What would you say? Speak.”

“You know as well as I do, Genevieve, that in our rupture with the Citizen Lindey there is no more than caprice.”

“To what, then, do you attribute this rupture?”

“To pride, perhaps,” said Dixmer, quickly.

“To pride!”

“Yes; he did us honour, in his opinion at least, this good Bourgeois of Paris — this demi-Aristocrat de robe — concealing his susceptibilities under his patriotism; he conferred honour upon us, this Republican so powerful in the section, in his club, in the municipality, by according his friendship to a manufacturer of hides. Perhaps we have made too few advances; perhaps we have forgotten ourselves.”

“If we had even been guilty of this, I think your last step would have redeemed all that,” replied Genevieve.

“Yes, supposing the offence came from me; but if, on the contrary, it proceeded from you.”

“From me! Do you imagine I have any ill-feeling towards Monsieur Maurice?” said Genevieve, astonished.

“Who knows: in a similar manner did you not at first even accuse him of caprice? I therefore still return to my first opinion, Genevieve: you did very wrong not to write to him.”

“Me!” cried Genevieve; “do you think so?”

“Not only now do I think so, but have done so ever since this rupture of the last three weeks.”

“And?” said Genevieve, timidly.

“I look upon this step as indispensable.”

“No, no! Dixmer, do not require this of me.”

“You know, Genevieve, I require nothing of you; I only entreat you. Well, listen: I request you to write to the Citizen Maurice.”

“But — ” said Genevieve.

“Hearken!” said Dixmer, interrupting her; “there is between you and Maurice either some serious cause of quarrel — for, as far as I am concerned, there is no complaint against my proceedings — or it emanates from childish folly.”

Genevieve did not reply.

“If this is merely a silly disagreement, it is folly to render it lasting; and if you have serious motives for quarrelling, situated as we are, you ought not even to value your dignity or self-respect. We must not place in the balance the quarrels of young people against objects of high interest. Make one effort; subdue your own feelings, and write one word only to Maurice Lindey, and he will return.”

Genevieve reflected for a moment.

“But,” said she, “could we not find some means less compromising to renew the friendly intercourse between Monsieur Maurice and yourself?”

“Compromising, do you call it? It appears to me to be the most natural way possible.”

“No, not for me, mon ami.”

“You are very opinionated, Genevieve.”

“Allow me to tell you, it is the first time, at least, that you have discovered it.”

Dixmer, who for some time had been crushing his handkerchief between his hands, now wiped the perspiration from his brow.

“Yes,” said he, “and it is this increases my astonishment.”

“Mon Dieu!” said Genevieve; “and is it possible, Dixmer, that you do not divine the cause of my resistance, and that you wish to force me to speak?”

And overcome with contending emotions, her head sunk upon her breast, and her arms fell listlessly by her sides. Dixmer appeared to make a strenuous effort to command himself, took Genevieve’s hand, compelled her to raise her head, looked into her eyes, and began to laugh, but in a manner so forced and unnatural, that had Genevieve been less agitated at the moment, it must have been perceptible even to her.

“I see how it is,” said be; “you are in the right, and I was blind. With your wit and distinction you have been fearful that Maurice ought not to admire you so much.”

Genevieve felt as if an icy chill had penetrated to her heart. This irony on the part of her husband relative to Maurice’s affection for her — that love of which, from the knowledge she possessed of the character of the young man, she could estimate the violence, and in which, though only acknowledged with deep remorse, she participated in the depths of her heart, — this irony petrified her. She felt it was utterly impossible to reply.

“I have guessed rightly, have I not?” said Dixmer. “Well, reassure yourself, Genevieve; I know Maurice to be a fierce Republican, whose heart contains no other love than love of country.”

“Monsieur,” exclaimed Genevieve, “are you certain of what you say?”

“Eh, without doubt,” replied Dixmer. “If Maurice loved you, instead of quarrelling with me he would redouble his attentions and civilities to one whom it was his interest to deceive. If Maurice loved you, he would not so easily renounce his title of ‘friend of the family,’ generally used to cover these treasons.”

“Do not, I beseech you,” cried Genevieve, “make a jest of these things.”

“I do not jest, madame; I only tell you Maurice does not love you, that is all.”

“And I — I,” said Genevieve, “tell you that you deceive yourself.”

“In that case,” replied Dixmer, “Maurice, who has had sufficient strength to tear himself away, is an honest man, and as they are rare, Genevieve, one cannot do too much to reclaim them when once lost. Genevieve, you will write to Maurice, will you not?”

“Oh! mon Dieu!” cried the young woman, resting her head between her hands, for he to whom she looked for support in a moment of danger had precipitated instead of restraining her fall.

Dixmer regarded her for a moment, then forcing a smile, “Allons chere amie,” said he; “no woman’s amour propre. If Maurice wishes to recommence a declaration, laugh at the second as you did at the first. I know you, Genevieve, you have a noble and excellent heart. I can depend on you.”

"Oh! mon Dieu!" said the young woman, sinking on her knees, "who can feel confidence in those who have no confidence in themselves?"

Dixmer turned pale, as if all his blood had retreated back to his heart.

"Genevieve," said he, "I have acted very wrong to cause you so much anguish of mind. I ought to have explained myself at once. Genevieve, we live at an epoch of self-sacrifice. I have devoted myself to the Queen, our benefactress, and not only my arm, not only my head, but my happiness. Others will give their lives; I do more than give her my life, I risk my honour, and if that perishes, only one more tear will fall into the ocean of miseries which are preparing to swallow up France. But my honour runs no risk under the guardianship of such a woman as Genevieve."

For the first time Dixmer had revealed the whole truth. Genevieve raised her head, and fixed her beautiful eyes, full of admiration, upon him; then slowly rose, and presented her face to him to kiss.

"You wish it?" said she.

Dixmer made a sign in the affirmative.

"Dictate, then," and she took up a pen.

"No; it is sufficient to use, not to abuse this worthy young man," said Dixmer; "and when he will reconcile himself to us on receipt of a letter from Genevieve, this letter should be from Genevieve, and not from Monsieur Dixmer."

And Dixmer a second time kissed his wife's forehead, thanked her, and went out.

Then Genevieve tremblingly wrote: —

"CITIZEN MAURICE, — You know how much my husband respects you. Three weeks of separation, which to us have appeared an age, have made you forget. Come, we await you; your return will be a real *fete*. — GENEVIEVE."

CHAPTER XV.

THE GODDESS REASON.

AS MAURICE HAD informed General Santerre the preceding evening, he was seriously ill whilst he kept his chamber. Louis in his daily visits had made use of every argument to induce him to enter into some amusements; but Maurice continued obstinate. There are some maladies we do not desire to heal. On the 1st of June he arrived towards one o’clock.

“Is there anything particular going on to-day,” asked Maurice, “that you are so superb?”

Indeed, Louis was most splendidly attired. The “bonnet rouge,” the “carmagnole,” and the tri-coloured girdle, ornamented with two instruments, then called the “cruets of the Abbe Maury,” but which before and since have been honestly termed pistols.

“In the first place,” said Louis, “it is generally the breaking of the ice of the Bironde which is in train for execution; but the drum beats. At this moment, for example, the ‘bonnet rouges’ chafe upon La Place du Carrousel; then, in particular, there is a grand solemnity to which I invite you after to-morrow.”

“But what is there to-day? You came to seek me, do you say?”

“Yes; to-day we have the rehearsal.”

“What rehearsal?”

“Why, the rehearsal of this great solemnity.”

“Mon cher,” said Maurice, “you know that it is now eight days since I last went out, consequently I am ignorant of everything, and therefore the more require to be fully informed.”

“What! Have I not told you?”

“You have told me nothing.”

“First, you already know, we had suppressed ‘God’ for some time past, and have replaced it by the ‘Supreme Being.”‘

“Yes, I know all that.”

“Eh bien, it seems they have found out one thing; that the ‘Supreme Being’ was a Modere, a Rolandist, and, in short, a Girondin.”

“Do not make a jest of anything holy, Louis; you know I do not like it.”

“What would you have, mon cher? it is necessary to accord with the age. I like the ancient God well enough; first, because I am accustomed to it. As for the ‘Supreme Being,’ it appears he has been really wrong, and since he has been above, everything has been playing at cross-purposes, consequently our legislators have decreed his downfall.” Maurice shrugged his shoulders.

“Shrug your shoulders as much as you please,” said Louis, “but now we are going to worship the ‘Goddess Reason.’”

“And are you engaged in all these masquerades?” said Maurice.

“Ah! mon ami, if you know the Goddess Reason as I know her, you would be one of her warmest partisans. Listen; I wish you to know her, and will present you to her.”

“A truce with all this folly. I am out of spirits, you well know.”

“The very thing, morbleu; she will enliven you; she is a nice girl. Ah! but you know the austere goddess whom the Parisians wish to crown with laurels, and promenade about in a gilded paper chair! It is — Guess.”

“How can I guess?”

“It is Arthemise.”

“Arthemise!” said Maurice, taxing his memory in vain to recollect the name.

“Yes; a handsome brunette, with whom I formed an acquaintance last year at the ball at the Opera; by the same token, you came to sup with us, and made her tipsy.”

“Ah! yes,” said Maurice. “I remember now. It is her, is it?”

“She has the best chance. I presented her to the concourse. All the Thermopyles have promised me their votes. In three days the general election will take place. To-day we enjoy the preparatory dinner, today we spill the wine of Champagne, perhaps after to-morrow we may spill blood! Let them spill what they like, Arthemise shall be goddess, or may the devil carry me away! Allons, come, we will help to put on her tunic.”

“Thanks; but I have always entertained a repugnance for things of this sort.”

“To robe goddesses? Peste! mon cher, you are difficult to please. Let me see; if that does not suit you, I will put it on, and you shall take it off.”

“Louis, I am ill, and not only out of spirits, but the gaiety of others makes me miserable.”

"Ah! that is it! You frighten me, Maurice; you neither laugh nor fight. Are you by any chance engaged in some plot?"

"Me? Would to God!"

"You ought to say, Would to the Goddess Reason!"

"Leave me, Louis; I cannot, and will not, go out. I am in bed, and there let me rest in peace."

Louis scratched his ear.

"Well," said he, "I see how it is."

"What do you see?"

"That you wait for the Goddess Reason."

"Corbleu!" cried Maurice, "spiritual friends are very troublesome. Go, or I shall utter a few imprecations on you and your goddess."

"Charge! — Charge!"

Maurice raised his hand to curse him, when he was interrupted by his official, who at this moment entered, bearing in his hand a letter for the citizen his brother. "Citizen Agricola," said Louis, "you enter at an unfortunate moment. Your master was about to become superb." Maurice let fall his hand, which he listlessly extended for the letter; but the instant he had touched it he started; and having eagerly examined both the seal and handwriting, grew very pale in the anticipation of bad tidings, and broke the seal hastily.

"Oh! our interest is awakened at last," said Louis." it seems to me."

Maurice heard him not; his whole soul was merged in the four lines of Genevieve. He read and re-read them three or four times over; and then raising his head, gazed at Louis like a man quite stupefied.

"Diable!" said Louis; "the sight of a letter, it appears, makes all fierce feeling subside."

Maurice read the letter for the fifth time, and a hue of vermilion suffused his face, the moisture disappeared from his eyes, and a deep sigh relieved his breast; then forgetting at once his illness and attendant weakness, he leapt from his bed.

"My clothes!" cried he to the astonished official; "my clothes, my dear Agesilas. Oh, my dear Louis — my poor Louis, I will attend you every day. Indeed I did not expect or hope for this. Here; my white trousers or frilled shirt, that they may dress my hair and shave me."

The official hastened to execute the orders of Maurice.

"Ah, Louis!" cried the young man, "I never till this moment knew what happiness meant."

"My poor Maurice," said Louis, "I think you require the visit I recommended to you."

"Oh! my dear friend, pardon me; for truly reason has forsaken me."

"Then I offer you mine," said Louis, laughing at his own execrable pun.

The most surpassing thing was, Maurice laughed also. His present happiness rendered this easy.

This was not all. "Wait," said he, cutting some orange blossom from a tree in full bloom; "present this from me to the worthy widow of Mansole."

"A la bonne heure!" said Louis; "in consideration of your gallantry, I pardon you. Then it appears to me you are absolutely in love, and I always feel profound respect for its unfortunate victims."

"Yes, I am in love," said Maurice, and his heart dilated with joy. "I am in love; and now, since she loves me, I may declare it; for since she has recalled me, must she not love me, Louis?"

"Doubtless," complacently replied the adorer of the goddess Reason; "but take care, Maurice, for the fashion in which you take this makes me fear for you."

"Bravo, bravo!" cried Maurice, clapping his hands; then taking to his heels, he descended the stairs four at once, and directed his steps towards the well-known old Rue Saint Jacques.

"He is worse than I thought him," said Louis, in his turn descending the staircase in rather a calmer mood. Arthemise was not Genevieve.

Hardly had Louis and his orange blossom arrived at La Rue Saint Honore, when a crowd of young citizens, to whom he had been accustomed to administer either kicks or halfpence, according to the humour he happened to be in, respectfully followed him — mistaking him, no doubt, for one of those virtuous individuals to whom St. Just had proposed they should offer the white robe and a bunch of orange blossoms. As the cortege every moment increased in numbers — for even at this epoch a virtuous man was a rare sight to behold — there were several thousand young citizens present when the bouquet was offered to Arthemise, a homage which made several other "Reasons" who had joined the ranks very ill with sick headache next day. It was on the same evening the famous song was circulated through Paris: —

"Long life to Goddess Reason — The pure, clear dawn of day."

And as it has arrived thus far without any knowledge of the author — a fact which has exceedingly exercised the sagacity of the revolutionary historian — we have almost the audacity to affirm it was composed for la belle Arthemise by our poetical friend, Hyacinthe Louis.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PRODIGAL CHILD.

MAURICE could not have been quicker, had he even possessed wings. The streets were crowded, but Maurice only remarked the crowd as it retarded his course; it was said everywhere that the Convention was sitting; that the majesty of the people was offended through the representatives, whom they prevented from coming out; and of this there seemed some probability, as the tingling of the tocsin was heard, and the thunder of the cannon sounding an alarm. But what at this moment, to Maurice, mattered either the tocsin or the cannon? What cared he whether the deputies were or were not able to come out, when the prohibition did not extend to him? So he quickened his pace, that was all. While running, he pictured to himself Genevieve waiting at the little window overlooking the garden, in order to see him, and that she would perceive him far off; and then her smile, more than ever charming, would welcome him back again. Dixmer also was no doubt informed of this happy return, and would tender him his coarse large hand, so frank and loyal in its greetings. He loved Dixmer; now, even his love almost extended to Morand, with his black locks and his green spectacles, behind which he fancied he could see the glitter of his brilliant but saturnine eyes. He loved the whole world, for he was happy, and would willingly have showered flowers ou the heads of all mankind, that they might be as happy as himself. But for once he was deceived. Poor Maurice! he deceived himself, as a man generally does when he reckons according to his wishes.

Instead of the sweet smile awaiting Maurice, which was to receive him when he would be seen from afar, Genevieve had determined on meeting Maurice with the most distant politeness — a feeble rampart with which to oppose the torrent that threatened to invade her heart. She had retired to her chamber on the first floor, and did not intend coming down till sent for. Alas! she also deceived herself. Dixmer alone was not deceived; he watched for Maurice through a wired lattice, and smiled ironically. Morand was gravely occupied in dyeing black some tails which are placed on white cat-skin to imitate ermine.

Maurice pushed open the little door of the alley, to enter unceremoniously through the garden, as of old; the door opening produced a peculiar sound, which indicated the arrival of Maurice.

Genevieve, who had stationed herself behind the closed window, started, and let fall the curtain she had drawn on one side.

The first sensation experienced by Maurice on entering his friend's house was disappointment. Not only was Genevieve absent from the window on the ground-floor, but on entering the little "salon" where he had uttered his last adieu, he found no one, and was compelled to announce himself, as if an absence of three weeks' duration had transformed him into a stranger. His heart was oppressed.

It was Dixmer whom Maurice first saw. He came forward, and embraced him with exclamations of joy.

Genevieve then came down. She tried in vain to restore some colour to her pallid cheek; but before she had proceeded twenty steps the blood receded to her heart. Maurice saw Genevieve appear in the shadow of the door; he advanced towards her smiling, intending to kiss her hand, and then only perceived how sadly she was changed. She on her part noticed with anxiety the attenuated frame of Maurice, and his fevered look of wild excitement.

"You are here, then, monsieur," said she, in a voice of which she could not subdue the emotion.

She had determined to address him with perfect indifference.

"Bon jour, Citizen Maurice; why have your visits been so rare of late?"

This fickleness appeared more strange still to Maurice; and now what a shadow was cast upon all.

Dixmer cut short this examination, and put an end to all reciprocal reproaches by ordering dinner to be served: it was nearly two o'clock. They passed into the *salle a manger*, where Maurice saw a cover was placed for him. Then the Citizen Morand arrived, dressed in the same chestnut-coloured coat and waistcoat — he always wore his green spectacles — and white frilled shirt.

Maurice was so affectionately disposed to all present, that while assembled before him he dismissed the suspicions and fears which intruded themselves upon his mind when absent from them. In short, what probability was there that Genevieve loved this little chemist? He was in love, and in consequence a fool to allow such folly to enter into his head.

Besides, the moment was badly chosen for jealousy. Maurice carried within his waistcoat pocket Genevieve's last letter, and his heart, bounding with joy, beat beneath it. Genevieve had recovered her serenity.

There is this peculiarity in the organization of women, that the present is able to efface all hues of the past, and distances all fears for the future. Genevieve felt happy, having resumed her self-command; that is to say, she became calm and dignified, though still kind — another shade which Maurice had not the requisite skill to comprehend. Louis would have found the explanation in "Parny," in "Berlin," or the "Gentil Bernard." The conversation turned upon the Goddess Reason. The fall of the Girondins, and the new mode of worship, were the prevailing topics of the day. Dixmer pretended he should not have been sorry to see this unparalleled honour offered to Genevieve. Maurice felt inclined to laugh, but Genevieve concurred in the opinion of her husband, whilst he regarded them both with astonishment, wondering that patriotism could so far mislead a sensible man like Dixmer, and a woman of so poetical and refined a nature as Genevieve. Morand developed the theory of female politicians. He cited "Theognie de Mirecourt," the heroine of the 10th of August, and Madame Roland, the "Soul" of the Girondins. Then, *enpassant,* he launched out against the "Tricoteuses." These words made Maurice smile. It was, however, a cruel joke against these female patriots, that they were latterly termed "the female leeches of the guillotine."

"Ah! Citizen Maurice," said Dixmer, "we respect patriotism, even when it' is mistaken."

"As for me," said Maurice, "as far as I know of patriotism, I always find the women sufficiently good patriots, if not too high aristocrats."

"You are quite right," said Morand; "and as for myself, I frankly confess I consider a woman very contemptible when she affects the demeanour of a man, and a man a coward, unworthy of the name, when he insults a woman, even were she his bitterest enemy."

Morand was gradually drawing Maurice on to delicate ground. Maurice, on his side, replied by an affirmative sign. The lists being opened, Dixmer, like the sounding herald, added —

"One moment, one moment, Citizen Morand; you except, I hope, those women who are known enemies of the nation?"

A silence of some moments succeeded this "parry and thrust" to the response of Morand and the sign of Maurice. Maurice first interrupted the silence.

“Let us except no one,” said he, sadly; “those females who have been enemies to the nation are now, it appears to me, sufficiently punished.”

“Yon allude to the prisoners of the Temple; to the Austrian, the sister and daughter of Capet?” cried Dixmer, with a rapidity which deprived his words of all expression.

Morand changed colour while awaiting the reply of the young Republican. It has been said that, could we have seen it, during this suspense, the marks of his nails were visible indented in his breast.

“Just so,” said Maurice; “it is of them I am speaking.”

“Who?” said Morand. “Is what they say of them true?”

“What do they say?” demanded the young man.

“That the prisoners are cruelly maltreated, sometimes even by those whose duty it is to: protect them.”

“There are individuals,” said Maurice, “who do not deserve the name of men. There are some cowards who, totally deficient in real courage, retain a desire to torture the vanquished, in order to persuade themselves that they are the conquerors.”

“You are not one of those men, Maurice, I am quite certain,” said Genevieve.

“Madame,” replied Maurice, “I who now speak to you, I have mounted guard near the scaffold on which perished the late King. My drawn sabre in my hand, I was prepared to slay any who attempted to rescue him. Notwithstanding, on his approach I removed my hat, and turning towards my men said — ’Citizens, I here warn you that the man who first insults the King receives my sabre through his body.’ And I defy any one to assert that a single shot was heard to proceed from my company. From my hand first enunciated those ten thousand placards affixed to the walls of Paris after the King’s return from Vincennes: — ’Whoever acknowledges the King shall be flogged. Whoever insults the King shall be hung.’

“Well,” continued Maurice, without noticing the fearful effect his words had produced on his listeners, “well, I have proved to you that I am a frank, good patriot, that I hate all kings and their partisans. Yet I declare, notwithstanding my opinion, which is nothing short of a deep conviction, that, notwithstanding the certainty I feel that the Austrian is in a great measure the cause of the miseries that desolate France, never, never shall any man, let him be who he may, even Santerre himself, insult the ex-queen in my presence.”

“Citizen,” said Dixmer, shaking his head as if he disapproved of so much hardihood, “are you aware you ought to be very sure of us before you speak of these things in our presence?”

“Before you, and before every one, Dixmer; and I will add, she may perhaps perish on the same scaffold as her husband, but I am not one to inspire a woman with fear, and I respect all those who are weaker than myself.”

“And the Queen, Monsieur Maurice?” demanded Genevieve, timidly; “has she sometimes evinced her sense of this delicacy, to which she is so little accustomed?”

“The prisoner has thanked me several times for my consideration for her, Madame.”

“Then she must witness your turn to guard with pleasure?”

“I believe she does, Madame,” replied Maurice.

“Then,” said Morand, tremulous as a woman, “since you have confessed to what no one can now doubt — that is to say, a generous heart — you will not persecute the child any more?”

“Me!” said Maurice; “ask the infamous Simon the weight of the arm of the municipal before whom he had the audacity to beat the little Capet,”

This answer produced a spontaneous movement at Dixmer’s table. All the guests rose respectfully; Maurice alone remained seated, and did not imagine he had elicited this mark of admiration.

“What is the matter?” said he, astonished.

“I thought some one called from the manufactory,” said Dixmer.

“No,” said Genevieve; “at first I thought so, too; but we are mistaken.” And every one resumed their seats.

“Ah! it is you, then, Citizen Maurice,” said Morand in a tremulous voice, “who are the municipal so much talked about, and who so nobly defended a child.”

“Talked about?” said Maurice, with a *naivete* almost sublime.

“Yours is a noble heart,” said Morand, rising from the table. That he might give way to his feelings he retired to the manufactory as if some pressing business there awaited him.

“Yes, citizen,” replied Dixmer, “they do speak about it, and it should be said that all those possessed with generous hearts applaud without knowing you."

"And let him remain unknown," said Genevieve. "The glory he would acquire would be replete with danger."

Thus in this singular conversation, without knowing it, each had contributed his word of heroism, devotion, and sensibility. There had nearly been the word — Love.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MIXERS.

AT THE MOMENT they left the table Dixmer was told that his notary awaited him in his study. He excused himself to Maurice, besides, he was accustomed to leave him thus, and proceeded to attend his man of business. He was negotiating for the purchase of a small house, Rue de la Corderie, facing the garden of the Temple. It was rather, as to the rest, a ruin than a house that Dixmer was purchasing, for the actual basement was in a state of dilapidation, but it was his intention to rebuild it. The bargain had not been delayed with the proprietor; that same morning the notary had seen him and agreed to pay 19,500 livres. He therefore brought the agreement for signature, and came to receive the requisite money for the purchase, as the proprietor would that day clear out the building, that the workmen might commence operations on the morrow.

The contract signed, Dixmer and Morand accompanied the notary to the Rue de la Corderie, to view this new acquisition, for they had purchased without seeing it. It was a house situated near where No. 20 now stands — three stories in height, and surmounted by a curved roof. The lower part at one time had been let to a wine-merchant, and contained some most excellent cellarage.

The proprietor, above all things, vaunted his cellars; they were the best part of the house. Dixmer and Morand appeared to attach very little interest to these cellars, yet both, as if from mere politeness, descended with the proprietor into what he called his vaults.

An exception to the general rule, he had not exaggerated. The cellars were magnificent, one of them extended under the Rue de la Corderie, and from this cellar they could hear the voitures roll over their heads. Dixmer and Morand did not appear to appreciate this advantage. They even spoke of filling them up, observing that, however convenient they might be to a wine-merchant, they became perfectly useless to honest bourgeoises, who intended to occupy the whole of the house. After the cellars they visited the first, second, and third story; from the third they completely overlooked the garden of the Temple. It was, as usual, invaded by the National Guard, who enjoyed this privilege, since the Queen never walked there now. Dixmer and Morand recognised their friend, the Widow Plumeau, with her usual activity, doing the honours of her cantine, but doubtless their anxiety to be in their turn remembered by her was not very great, as they kept themselves concealed behind the proprietor, while he expatiated on the advantages of this view, at once so varied and agreeable. The purchaser then wished to see the roof. The proprietor, doubtless, was unprepared for this emergency, since he had not got the key, but, influenced by the bundle of papers of assignment shown him, he descended to search for it.

"I was not deceived," said Morand, "and this house will answer our purpose exactly."

"And what do you say to the vaults?"

"That it is an interposition of Providence, which will spare us two days' labour at least."

"Do you think it may be in the direction of the cantine?"

"It inclines a little to the left, but that is of no consequence."

"But," said Dixmer, "how will you be able to follow your subterranean line with the certainty of its terminating where you wish?"'

"Rest assured," said Maraud; "that is my affair."

"If we were everyday to give a signal from here that we are watching?"

"But from the platform the Queen could not see it, for the curved roofs alone are less in height than the platform, and yet I doubt it."

"Never mind," said Dixmer, "either Maury or Toulun may see an opening somewhere, and they will inform the Queen."

And Dixmer tied several knots in a white calico curtain, passing it backwards and forwards before the window as if shaken by the wind.

Then both, equally impatient to visit the roof, awaited the proprietor's return on the staircase, having first closed the door, not wishing to afford the worthy man a sight of his waving curtain.

The roofs, as Morand had foreseen, did not reach the height of the summit of the Tower.

This was at once an advantage and disadvantage. A difficulty, because they could not communicate by signs with the Queen, and an advantage, because the very impracticability alone disarmed all suspicion.

The highest houses were naturally the objects of the strictest surveillance.

“It is necessary, either by means of Toulun, Maury, or Tison’s daughter, to find some way to tell her to keep upon the watch,” murmured Dixmer.

“I have thought of that,” said Morand.

They descended; the notary waited in the salon with the contract signed.

“It is all right,” said Dixmer; “the house suits me, so hand over to the proprietor the sum of 950,000 livres in payment, and let him give a receipt.”

The proprietor did so, first scrupulously counting the money.

“You understand, Citizen,” said Dixmer, “the principal clause, that the house must be vacated this evening; that, in short, I must put the workmen in to-morrow.”

“Well, Citizen, I agree to do so; you can take the keys this evening at eight o’clock; all will be free.”

“Pardon me,” said Dixmer, “but did you not tell me, Citizen notary, there was a way out leading into the Rue Porte-Foin?”

“Yes. Citizen,” said the proprietor; “but I had it closed; for having only one official, the poor devil had too much fatigue, being obliged to watch both doors. But it is so fastened up that at any time it can be reopened in two hours at least. Would you wish to convince yourselves, citizens?”

“Thanks, it is not necessary,” said Dixmer. “I attach no importance to this way out; it is useless to me.”

They then both left, having for the third time reminded the landlord of his promise that the apartments should be empty at eight o’clock that evening. At nine o’clock they both returned, followed by five or six men at a distance, of whom, in the confusion then reigning in Paris, no one took any notice. They both entered first. The landlord kept his word; the house was totally empty. They closed the shutters with the greatest care, sounded the brickwork, struck the steel, and lighted some wax candles which Morand carried in his pocket. Then one after another the six men entered. These were the ordinary guests of the master tanner, the same contrabandists who one evening wished to kill Maurice, but had now been converted into his friends. They closed the doors, and descended into the vaults. This vault, so contemptuously treated during the day, had become this evening the most important part of the house. Having first stopped up every crevice through which a curious eye might penetrate to the interior, Morand placed a cask upright, and began to trace geometrical lines upon a piece of paper laid upon it with a stick of chalk. While he was thus engaged, his companions, conducted by Dixmer, left the house, following the Rue de la Corderie, and at the corner of the Rue de Beunie stopped before a covered carriage. In this carriage was a man, who silently distributed to each one the instrument of a pioneer, to one a spade, to another a mattock, to this one a lever, to that a pickaxe; each man concealed his under his riding coat or mantle. The miners retraced the road to the small house, and the carriage disappeared. Morand had finished his calculation. He went straight to an angle of the cave. “There,” said he, “dig.”

And the work of deliverance immediately commenced.

The situation of the unhappy prisoners in the Temple became daily more serious and hourly more wretched. For an instant Madame Elizabeth and Madame Royale had indulged some hope. The municipals Toulun and Lepetre, touched with compassion for the august prisoners, had evinced some interest in them. At first little habituated to the marks of sympathy, the poor women were suspicious, but suspicion ceases to exist with hope. Besides, what now could happen to the Queen, separated from her son by a prison, from her husband by death. To follow him to the scaffold, this idea had possessed her for some time, and she finished by becoming accustomed to it. The first time Toulun and Lepetre returned on guard, the Queen particularly requested, if they really felt any interest in her misfortunes, they would describe to her the last moments of the king. This was putting their sympathy to a sad test. Lepetre had assisted at the execution; he obeyed the order of the Queen. The Queen demanded the journal containing the report of the execution. Lepetre promised to bring them when next on guard; it would be his turn again in three weeks. In the King’s time they had at the Temple four municipals; the King dead, they had only three, one to watch during the day, two during the night. Then Toulun and Lepetre invented a strategem that they might always keep watch together at night. The hours of guard were arranged thus: they wrote one ballot “day,” on two others “night.” Each drew his ballot from a hat, and chance decided the night watch. Every time that Toulon and Lepetre were on guard they wrote “day” on three ballots, and presented the hat to the municipal they wished to dispossess, and he, thrusting his hand into the improvisatory, unnecessarily drew forth a ballot on which was inscribed “day.” They then destroyed the other two, murmuring against the hazard which always decreed them the most wearisome watch of the two, that is to say, the night. When the Queen was sure of her guards she corresponded with the Chevalier de Maison Rouge. Then an escape was attempted, but the attempt was arrested. The

Queen and Madame Elizabeth were to flee disguised as municipal officers, with cards that would be provided for them. As to the two children, — that is to say, Madame Royale and the voting Dauphin, they had remarked that the man who came to light the lamps of the Temple was always accompanied by two children, the same age apparently as the Princess Royale and the Dauphin. It was, therefore, arranged that Turgy, of whom we have previously spoken, should dress himself as a lamplighter, and carry away the prince and princess. We will mention, in a few words, who Turgy was. Turgy was an old waiter of the King's, introduced at the Temple with part of the family from the Tuileries, for the King had at first been permitted a well-appointed table. The first month this consideration cost the nation thirty or forty thousand francs. It may easily be understood this prodigality could not last. The Commune decreed otherwise. They dismissed the chiefs, the cooks, and scullions, one single man-servant only was retained — that man was Turgy. He was naturally the medium of communication between the prisoners and their partisans, for Turgy was permitted to go out, and consequently was enabled to forward their letters, and introduce the replies. These billets were generally twisted round the stoppers of the *carafes*, containing the milk of almonds, brought to the Queen and Madame Elizabeth. They were written in lemon-juice, and perfectly illegible, till held near the fire. All was prepared for their escape, when one day Tison lighted his pipe with the paper stopper of the *carafe*. As the paper burned, the writing became visible. He instantly extinguished the half-burnt paper, and carried the remaining fragment to the council of the Temple, when, being held near the fire, they could only read a few disjointed words, the other part being burnt to ashes. They could merely recognise the handwriting of the Queen. Tison being questioned, mentioned some slight marks of attention and sympathy he fancied he had observed on the part of Lepetre and Toulun. They were immediately denounced to the municipality, and allowed no more to enter the Temple. Turgy remained. But suspicion was now excited to the highest degree. The princesses were never left a moment alone. All communication with the exterior was now utterly impossible. Madame Elizabeth had one day given Turgy a gold-handled knife to clean, which she used for cutting her fruit. Turgy, suspecting something, opened the blade, and in the handle found a letter. This letter contained an alphabet of signs. He returned the knife to Madame Elizabeth; but a municipal then present prevented him, and, in his turn, securing the knife, opened the blade; but fortunately the letter was no longer there. The municipal nevertheless confiscated the knife. It was at that time the indefatigable Chevalier de Maison Rouge dreamed of this second attempt, which they intended to carry into execution by means of the house which Dixmer had purchased. The prisoners, however, by degrees had now lost all hope. That day the Queen, terrified by the noise in the streets, which reached her ears, and learning from these cries they were debating the accusation of the Girondins, the last supporters of moderation, felt dreadfully depressed. The Girondins dead, the royal family lost their only defence against the Convention.

At seven o’clock the supper was served. The municipals examined every plate as usual, unfolded each napkin successively, searched the bread, the one with a fork, the other with his fingers, and concluded by breaking into pieces the macaroons and walnuts, for fear any letter should reach the prisoners. These precautions being concluded, the royal family were invited to their meal in these simple words —

“Widow of Capet, you may eat.”

The Queen shook her head, signifying she was not hungry. But at this moment Madame Royale advanced, as if to embrace her mother, and whispered:

“Seat yourself at table, Madame. I fancied Turgy made a sign.”

The Queen, tremblingly, raised her head. Turgy was opposite to her. The napkin laid over his left arm, and with his right hand he touched his eye. She immediately rose, without any further objection, and resumed her usual place at table. The two municipals assisted at their meals, being strictly prohibited from leaving the princesses alone for an instant with Turgy. The feet of the Queen and Madame Elizabeth met, and pressed each other under the table. As the Queen was seated opposite Turgy, not one of his gestures escaped her notice; besides, they were all so natural, that they neither could nor did inspire the municipals with any suspicion whatever. At the removal of the supper the same precautions were used as before; the smallest pieces of bread were broken and examined. After which, Turgy went out first, the two municipals following; the woman Tison remained. This woman had become ferocious since her separation from her daughter, of whose fate she was totally ignorant. Every time the Queen lavished a caress on Madame Royale, it threw her into an excess of rage almost bordering on frenzy; so much so, that the queen, who so well understood the griefs of a mother, often denied herself this consolation, now, alas! the only one left her, of pressing her daughter to her heart.

Tison came now to seek for his wife, who at first declared she would not leave till Capet's wife was in bed.

Madame Elizabeth then wished the Queen good night, and entered her chamber. The Queen and princess having also retired, Tison's wife took the candle and went out. The municipals had already thrown themselves upon their beds in the corridor. The moon, pale visitant of the unhappy princesses, glided by the opening of the first house, casting a diagonal ray across the window at the foot of the Queen's bed. For an instant everything remained calm and silent in the chamber, then a door turned softly on its hinges, a shadow passed over the rays of the moon, and approached the Queen. It was Madame Elizabeth.

"Did you see it?" said she in a whisper. "Yes," replied the Queen. "And you understood it?"

"So well, that I dare not believe it."

"Let us see; repeat the signs."

"First, then, he touched his eye to indicate he had some news for us; then he passed his napkin from his left to his right, by that he meant to say, they were occupied in our deliverance. Then he put his hand to his face, to signify that the expected aid would reach us from the interior, and not from a stranger. Then when you asked him not to forget the milk of almonds to-morrow, he made two knots in his pocket-handkerchief. Thus it is again the Chevalier de Maison-Rouge — noble-hearted man that he is."

"It is he," said Madame Elizabeth.

"Are you asleep, my child?" demanded the Queen.

"No, ma mere," replied Madame Royal.

"Then pray for you know who."

Madame Elizabeth quietly regained her chamber, and for some minutes during the silence of the night, the soft, sweet voice of the youthful princess might be heard addressing her prayer to God. It was at that moment, at a signal from Morand, the first stroke of the pickaxe sounded in the small house at Rue de la Corderie.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CLOUDS.

OPPOSED TO the intoxication of first appearances, Maurice was certainly much disappointed at the reception of Genevieve, and reckoned upon solitude to regain the road he had lost, or seemed to have lost, on the route to her affections. But Genevieve had wisely arranged her plan, and did not intend to allow him an opportunity for a *tete-a-tete,* being conscious of their danger even from the happiness they afforded her. Maurice anticipated the morrow. A kinswoman of Genevieve's, no doubt previously invited, came to call upon her, and Genevieve had retained her. This time there was nothing to be said, it could not be the fault of Genevieve. When leaving, Maurice was requested to escort this relation to Rue des Fosses Saint Victor, where she resided. Maurice went away pouting, but Genevieve smiled, and he construed this smile into a promise.

Alas! Maurice deceived himself. The next day, the 2nd of June, that terrible day that witnessed the downfall of the Girondins, Maurice dismissed his friend Louis, who absolutely wished to carry him off to the Convention, and that he should put everything aside, and accompany him to visit his fair friend. The Goddess of Liberty had a frightful rival in Genevieve. Maurice found Genevieve in her little salon, all grace and amiability, but near her was a young femme-di-chambre with the tri-coloured cockade, engaged in marking pocket-handkerchiefs in the angle of the window; she never left her place.

Maurice knitted his brows, and Genevieve perceiving he was not in the best temper possible, redoubled her assiduities; but since her amiability was not carried so far as to dismiss the young official, he impatiently left an hour earlier than usual. This might have happened by chance, perhaps. Maurice grew patient.. The evening, besides, from other causes, was so fearful, that long as it was since he had interested himself in politics, the report reached even him. It required nothing less than the downfall of a party who had reigned in France for ten months to withdraw his attention from his all engrossing passion for Genevieve. The next day witnessed the same management on the part of Genevieve, and Maurice having foreseen this, had arranged his plan. So ten minutes after his arrival, seeing that the young woman, having finished marking a dozen pocket handkerchiefs, commenced six dozen of table napkins, Maurice, we say, drew out his watch, rose, bowed to Genevieve, and went out without saying one word. Still more, as he left, he did not even once look back. Genevieve, who had risen to watch him across the garden, remained an instant speechless, pale and trembling, then dropt into her chair, thunderstruck at the effect of her diplomacy. At this moment Dixmer entered.

"Maurice gone?" said he, with astonishment.

"Yes," stammered Genevieve.

"But he had only just arrived."

"He was here a quarter of an hour, or nearly so."

"Then he will return?"

"I much doubt it."

"Leave us, Magnet," said Dixmer. The femme-de-chambre had assumed the name from hatred to that of Maria, from its unfortunately being the same as that of the Austrian. She rose at the command of her master, and quitted the room.

"Well, dear Genevieve," said Dixmer, "is peace restored between you and Maurice?"

"On the contrary, mon ami, I think we are cooler than ever."

"And this time, who is to blame?" said Dixmer.

"Maurice, without the slightest doubt."

"Permit me to judge."

"You cannot guess," said Genevieve, blushing.

"Why he is angry? No."

"It seems to me, it is some whim about Magnet."

"Bah! truly; then you must send the girl away. I will not deprive myself of a friend like Maurice for the sake of a femme-de-chambre."

"Oh!" said Genevieve, "he is not, I think, so angry as to require her to be sent away, it will suffice to —

"What?"

"To exile her from my chamber."

"And Maurice is right," said Dixmer; "it is you he comes to visit, and not Magnet; it is therefore quite unnecessary that she should be present."

“But, my dear Dixmer,” replied she, regarding her husband with astonishment.

“Genevieve,” replied Dixmer, “I hoped to have found in you an ally who would render more easy the task imposed upon, me, and find, on the contrary, that your fears redouble our dangers and difficulties. Four days since I thought all was arranged between us, and now all must commence over again. Have I not told you that I confide in you, in your honour? have I not told you that it is positively necessary that Maurice should become our friend, more intimately than before, but less suspicious than ever. Oh! mon Dieu! these women are an everlasting obstacle to our projects.”

“But, mon Dieu! is there no other way? I have told you before, that for all our sakes it would be better if Monsieur Maurice returned here no more.”

“Yes, for our sakes, perhaps, but for the sake of those far above us, those for whom we have promised to sacrifice our lives, fortune, and happiness, it is necessary that this young man should return. Are you aware they begin to suspect Turgy, and talk of placing another servant near the queen?”

“Well, I will send away Magnet.”

“Mon Dieu! Genevieve,” said Dixmer, with a movement of impatience, very unusual with him, “why do you speak to me thus? why stifle the ardour of my ideas by your own? why strive to create difficulties where too many already exist? Genevieve, act like an honourable, devoted woman, act as you feel you ought to act. I tell you, to-morrow I go out — to-morrow I take Morand’s place as engineer. I shall not dine with you, but he will, he has something to ask Maurice, and will explain to you what it is. What he has to request you may imagine, Genevieve, is a thing of vital import; it is not only the goal to which we march, but the way leading to it. It is the last hope of that devoted, noble-minded man, our protector, to whom we are bound to dedicate our lives.”

“And for whom I will freely give mine,” cried Genevieve, with enthusiasm.

“Well, this man, Genevieve, I cannot tell why, as you must have seen, is not loved by Maurice, by whom, above all things, it is necessary he should be respected. In short, from the bad temper in which you have put Maurice to-day, he may perhaps refuse Morand that which it is so imperative we should obtain at any price. Will you, now that I have told you, Genevieve, assist Morand with all your tact and delicacy of sentiment?”

“Oh! monsieur,” cried Genevieve, clasping her hands and turning pale, “let us speak no more on this subject.”

“Then,” said Dixmer, pressing his lips on his wife’s forehead, “reflect upon it, and form your resolution.” And he went out.

“Oh! mon Dieu! mon Dieu!” murmured Genevieve, with anguish, “they compel me to accept this love by violence, towards which my whole soul inclines!”

The next day, as we have already said, was Sunday. It was customary in the family of Dixmer, as in all the bourgeois families at that period, that the dinner should be longer and more ceremonious on that day than on any other. Since their intimacy, Maurice having received a general invitation, never omitted to dine with them on that day. Although they did not dine till two o’clock. Maurice had not arrived at noon. Prom the manner of their parting, Genevieve had almost despaired of seeing him. In short, twelve o’clock struck, then half-past, then one. It would be impossible to describe during this period what passed in the heart of Genevieve. She was at first dressed with the greatest simplicity; then, seeing that he delayed his coming, she, with a feeling of coquetry natural to the heart of woman, had placed a flower at her side, a flower in her hair, and still listened, her heart each moment more and more compressed. The dinner-hour had almost arrived, and Maurice had not appeared. About ten minutes to two, Genevieve heard the sound of horse’s steps, that sound she knew so well.

“Oh!” cried she, “his pride could not wrestle against his love. He loves me! he loves me!”

Maurice dismounted, and gave his horse to the gardener, desiring him to remain where he was. Genevieve saw with anxiety that the gardener did not lead the horse to the stables. Maurice on this day looked superlatively handsome. A splendid black coat, a white waistcoat, breeches of chamois leather, designed for limbs after the model of Apollo, a white cambric stock, and his waving hair, displaying a fresh, a beaming face, formed altogether a type of manly beauty. He entered. As we have already said, his presence dilated the heart of Genevieve, who received him joyfully. “Ah!” said she, holding out her hand, “you are come to dine with us, are you not?”

“On the contrary, citoyenne,” said Maurice, coldly, “I come to ask your permission to absent myself.”

“To absent yourself?”

“Yes, the sectional affairs claim my attention. I feared you might wait, and would accuse me of being wanting in politeness, therefore came to make my excuses in person.”

Genevieve again felt her heart sink within her.

“Ah! mon Dieu,” cried she, “and Dixmer, who does not dine at home, counted upon finding you here on his return, and desired me to detain you.”

“Ah! then, madame, I comprehend your insistence, it is a command of your husband’s; and I not to guess all this. I shall never cure myself of conceit.”

“Maurice!”

“It is for me, madame, to draw my inference from your actions rather than your words; it is for me, therefore, to comprehend, that if Dixmer is absent the greater the reason I should not remain. His absence would surely add to your constraint.”

“Why so?” timidly inquired Genevieve.

“Because you appear, since my return, sedulously to avoid me, because I returned for your sake, and yours only; you well know, mon Dieu, that ever since my return I have invariably found some one with you.”

“Then,” said Genevieve, “you *are* still angry, mon ami, although I endeavour to act for the best.”

“No, Genevieve, you would do much better to receive me as before, or drive me away altogether.”

“Maurice,” said Genevieve, tenderly, “understand my situation, consider my anguish, and do not enact the tyrant over me any longer.”

And the young woman regarded him mournfully.

Maurice remained silent.

“What do you require, then?” continued she.

“I require your love, Genevieve, since I now feel I cannot live without that love.”

“Maurice! have pity on me.”

“Then, madame, you leave me to die.”

“To die?”

“Yes, to die; or to forget.”

“You could, then, forget?” said Genevieve, the tears rushing from her heart to her eyes.

“Ah! no, no,” said Maurice, falling on his knees before her; “no, Genevieve, I may die, perhaps, but forget you, never, never.”

"And yet," replied Genevieve, with firmness, "that would be the best, Maurice, for this love is criminal."

"Have you said this to Monsieur Morand?" said Maurice, suddenly resuming his frigidity of manner.

"Monsieur Morand is not a madman like yourself, and has never yet compelled me to indicate to him how he should conduct himself in the house of a friend."

"We wager," said Maurice, smiling ironically, "that if Dixmer dines out Morand is not absent. Ah! I see, this is necessary to deter me, for while Morand is there, Genevieve, for ever at your side, not quitting you even for a single moment," continued he, contemptuously, "I should not love you, or rather I should not declare that I loved you."

"And I," cried Genevieve, driven to extremity by this eternal suspicion, and seizing the young man's arm with a species of frenzy, "I swear solemnly, Maurice, and let it be once for all, that whether you ever return here again or not, Morand has never breathed a word of love, that he neither loves me or ever will love me. I swear this on my honour — I swear this by the soul of my mother."

"Alas! alas!" said Maurice, "I wish I could believe you."

"Oh! believe me, poor fool," said she, with a smile (which, although anything but jealous, might have been a charming confession), "believe me. Besides, if you wish to know more, Morand loves a woman in whose presence all others sink into insignificance, as the flowers of the field fade before the stars of heaven."

"And who is this woman, able to eclipse all other women?" demanded Maurice, "when among the number we find Genevieve."

"Do we not always," said Genevieve, smiling, "consider the one we love as the *chef d'oeuvre* of the creation?"

"Then," said Maurice, if you do not love me, Genevieve — The young woman waited with anxiety the end of the sentence. "If you do not love me," continued Maurice, "will you swear never to love another?"

"Ah! that, Maurice, I will swear with all my heart," cried the young woman, delighted that he had thus compromised with her conscience.

Maurice seized her raised hands, and covered them with ardent kisses.

"And now," said he, "I will be kind, indulgent, and confiding. I will even be generous. I wish to see you smile, and myself to be happy."

"And you will ask me nothing more?"

“*I* will endeavour.”

“And now,” said Genevieve, I think it will he useless to hold the horse any longer. The Section will wait.”

“Oh, Genevieve! the whole world might wait, if I could only stay with you!”

Steps were heard in the court-yard.

“They come to tell us that dinner is ready,” said Genevieve. They silently pressed each other’s hands.”

It was Morand, who came to tell them they only awaited their presence at table. He, also, was in full dress for the Sunday’s dinner.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE REQUEST.

IN THE MEANTIME Morand did not a little excite the curiosity of Maurice. The most refined of fops could not discover a fault in the tie of his cravat, the folds of his boots, or the texture of his linen; but it must be allowed his hair and spectacles were always the same. It then appeared to Maurice, so much was he reassured by the oath of Genevieve, that he now, for the first time, viewed these locks and spectacles in a proper light.

“The devil!” said Maurice, to himself; “the devil take me if I am now ever again jealous of this worthy citizen Morand. Put on every day, if you choose, your full dress coat, or even make yourself one of cloth of gold, since from this time I promise to see nothing but your wig and spectacles, and above all, never again to accuse you of loving Genevieve.”

We can easily understand the shake of the hand bestowed upon the Citizen Morand at the conclusion of this soliloquy was more frank and cordial than usual. Contrary to custom, the party was small, covers being placed for only three on a narrow table. Genevieve was seated nearly opposite Maurice, between himself and the light, which reflected on her luxuriant black curls, tinged them with the blue hue of the raven’s wing, enhancing the brilliancy of her eyes and complexion. Beyond his pigeon-coloured suit, Morand appeared to have dismissed all recollection of the day from his mind — that brilliant mind, which Maurice had sometimes heard burst fresh from the lips of this singular man, which would no doubt have been accompanied by the flashes from his eyes, had they not been totally obscured by the green spectacles. He uttered a thousand witticisms, but never himself smiled; indeed, what added piquancy to his witticisms, and a strange charm to his sallies, was his own impenetrable gravity. This merchant, who had made numerous voyages, and visited various countries, trading in every sort of skin, from the skin of the panther to that of the rabbit; this chemist, with arms dyed with his own chemical preparations, was as conversant with Egypt as Herodotus, Africa as Lavaillant, and the opera and the boudoir as any fop.

“But the devil take me, Monsieur Morand,” said Maurice, “you are not only a clever man, but a scholar also.”

“Ah! I have both seen and read much,” said Morand; “and then it is necessary I should prepare *myself* in some degree for the life of pleasure I intend to lead, when I retire on my fortune. It is time, Citizen Maurice, it is time.”

“Bah!” said Maurice; “you talk like an old man. What age, then, are you?”

Morand turned round, startled by this question, natural as it certainly was.

“I am thirty-eight,” said he. “Ah! see what it is to be a scholar, as you term it. It makes one old.”

Genevieve began to laugh, and Maurice joined in; but Morand merely smiled.

“You have, then, made several voyages?” demanded Maurice, pressing Genevieve’s foot between his own.

“Part of my youth,” replied Morand, “was passed among foreigners.”

“And you have seen much? Pardon me, I ought to say, have observed much: for a man like yourself cannot see without observing,” replied Maurice.

“Ma foi! yes; seen much?” replied Morand, “I have almost seen everything.”

“Everything, citizen,” replied Maurice, laughing, “that is saying a great deal. If you were to search —

“Ah! yes, you are right; there are two things I have never seen. It is true, in our days, these two things have become rare.”

“What are they, then?” demanded Maurice.

“The first,” said Morand, “is a god.”

“Ah!” said Maurice, “but in lieu of a god I shall be able to show you a goddess, Citizen Morand.”

“How so?” interrupted Genevieve.

“Yes, a goddess of modern creation — the Goddess Reason. I have a friend, of whom you have sometimes heard me speak — my dear and brave Louis, with a heart of gold, whose only fault is that of making verses and vile puns.”

“Well?”

“Well, he selected for Paris a Goddess Reason, of good repute, and in whom they can discover nothing at all objectionable. It is the Citizen

Arthemise, ex-dancer to the Opera, and at present parfumeuse, Rue Martin. As soon as she is definitely received as goddess, I will show her to you."

Morand bowed his head in token of thanks, and continued —

"The other," said he, gravely, "is a king."

"Ah! that is more difficult," said Genevieve; "there are no more of them," she added, forcing a smile.

"You should have seen the last," said Maurice; "it would have been prudent to have done so."

"The result is," said Morand, "I have not the least idea of a crowned head; it must be very sad?"

"Very sad, indeed," said Maurice; "I respond to you, I who see one nearly every month."

"A crowned head?" demanded Genevieve.

"At least," said Maurice, "one that has borne the weight and miserable burden of a crown."

"Ah! yes, the Queen," said Morand;" truly, Monsieur Maurice, it must be a melancholy sight — "

"Is she as proud and beautiful as they say?" demanded Genevieve.

"Have you never seen her, then, madame?" demanded Maurice, surprised in his turn.

"I? never!" replied the young woman.

"Indeed?" said Maurice, "that is strange."

"And why strange?" said Genevieve. "We lived in the province till '91; since '91 we have resided in the old Rue St. Jacques, which much resembles the province, only there they have neither light nor air, and still less flowers. You are acquainted with my life, Monsieur Maurice. It has always been the same. How do you suppose I could have seen the Queen, when I have had no opportunity whatever of so doing?"

And I do not think you will avail yourself of that which, unfortunately, perhaps, may present itself," said Maurice.

"What do you mean to say?" demanded Genevieve.

"The citizen Maurice," replied Morand, "alludes to one thing no longer a secret."

"To what?" demanded Genevieve.

"To the probable condemnation of Marie Antoinette, and to her death upon the same scaffold where her husband died The citizen said, in short, that you would not avail yourself of the opportunity offered you of seeing her the day when she will quit the Temple for La Place de la Revolution."

"Oh, certainly not!" cried Genevieve, us Morand pronounced these words with the greatest sang-froid.

"Then you can only lament," said the impassible chemist; "for the Austrian is well guarded, and the Republic a fairy that renders invisible what seems best to her."

"I acknowledge, however," said Genevieve, "I have been very much wishing to see this poor woman."

"Let us see," said Maurice, anxious to gratify all the wishes of Genevieve; "have you really such an inclination? Then only say the word. I agree with the Citizen Morand, the Republic is a fairy; but I, in quality of municipal, am somewhat of a wizard."

"Could you allow me a sight of the Queen, you, monsieur?" cried Genevieve.

"Certainly, I can."

"And how?" exclaimed Morand, exchanging a rapid glance with Genevieve, which escaped the notice of the young man.

"Nothing more simple," said Maurice. "There are certainly some municipals of whom they are mistrustful; but as for me, I have given sufficient evidence of my devotion to the cause of liberty to render me above all suspicion. Besides, admittance to the Temple depends conjointly on the municipals and the chiefs of the post. Now, the chief of the post is, just at this moment, my friend Louis, who appears to me to be called indubitably to replace General Santerre, seeing that, in three months, he has risen from the rank of corporal to that of adjutant major. Well, come to me the day I shall be on guard, that is to say, next Thursday, at the Temple."

"Well," said Morand, "I hope now your wishes may be gratified. Take care that you find him."

"Oh! no, no," said Genevieve, "indeed, I cannot."

"And wherefore not?" said Maurice, who only anticipated in this visit to the Temple an opportunity of seeing Genevieve on a day when he could enjoy this happiness alone without the presence of others.

"Because it might, perhaps, dear Maurice, expose you to some unpleasant dispute; and if anything were to happen to you through gratifying a whim of mine, I should never, while I lived, forgive myself."

“You have spoken wisely, Genevieve,” said Morand. “Suspicion is very great, the best patriots are now even suspected. Renounce this project, which, as you say, is, after all, a mere caprice of curiosity.”

“They will say that you are envious, Morand, and that, not having yourself seen either King or Queen, you do not wish others to do so. Come, to end all discussion, join the party.”

“Me! ma foi! No.”

“It is then no longer the citoyenne Dixmer who wishes to visit the Temple; it is I who entreat you to come there, to divert a poor prisoner. For, the great door once closed upon me, I remain for twenty-four hours as much a prisoner as the king would be, or a prince of the blood.” And pressing between his own the foot of Genevieve — ” Come then,” said he, “I entreat *you!”*

“Voyons! Morand,” said Genevieve, “come with me.”

“It will be losing a day,” said Morand, “and will prevent my going where I ought on business.”

“Then I shall not go,” said Genevieve.

“But why?” demanded Morand.

“Because I cannot depend upon my husband to escort me; and if you will not accompany me — you, a respectable man, thirty-eight years of age — I have not the hardihood to encounter alone all the chasseurs, cannoniers, and grenadiers, requesting to speak to one of the municipals only three or four years older than myself.”

“Then,” said Morand, “since you deem my presence indispensable, citoyenne —

“Allons! allons! learned citizen, be as gallant as if you were a kind-hearted, ordinary man, and sacrifice half a day to the wife of your friend,” said Maurice.

“Well, let it be so,” said Morand.

“Now,” said Maurice. “I only require one thing from you, that is discretion. Any one visiting the Temple is considered a suspicious proceeding, and consequently, should any accident occur afterwards, we should all be guillotined. The Jacobins do not jest. Peste! you see how they have treated the Girondins.”

“Diable!” said Morand, “this observation of the citizen Maurice requires consideration. It would be a sort of retiring from business if I could not go out at all.”

“Have you not heard,” said Genevieve, smiling, “that the citizen Maurice said all?”

“Eh, bien! all?”

“All.”

“Yes, without doubt,” said Morand, “your company is very agreeable, but I much prefer, belle sentimentale, to live in your society than to die in it.”

“What the devil was I thinking of?” said Maurice to himself, “when I imagined this man loved Genevieve?”

“Then it is all settled,” said Genevieve. “I address myself to you, Morand, thoughtful, absent man that you are; remember it is on Thursday next; so do not on the Wednesday evening commence some chemical experiment that will occupy your time and attention for the next twenty-four hours, as it very frequently happens.”

“You may be perfectly easy on that point,” said Morand. “Besides, you can remind me.”

Genevieve then rose from table, and Maurice followed her example. Morand was about to leave also, and perhaps to follow them, when one of the workmen brought the chemist a small vial containing some liquid, which instantly engrossed all his attention.

“Let us make haste,” said Maurice, drawing away Genevieve.

“Oh! be assured,” said she, “he will remain there for an hour at the very least.”‘

And the young woman allowed him to take her hand, which he tenderly pressed between his own. She felt remorse for her treachery, and compensated for it by her kindness.

“Do you see,” said she to Maurice,’ crossing the garden, and showing him the carnations, which had been removed into the air, with the hope of reviving them, “do you see my flowers are all dead?”

“What killed them?” said Maurice; “your neglect? Poor carnations!”

“It was not my neglect, but your desertion, mon ami.”

“They required, my little Genevieve, some water; that was all; besides my absence should have left you plenty of time.”

“Ah!” said Genevieve, “but if the flowers were watered with tears, the poor carnations, as you call them, would they not then die?”

Maurice threw his arms round Genevieve, and, drawing her to him, before she had time to prevent him, pressed his lips upon the half-smiling, half-languishing eye, now fixed upon the drooping, dying flowers. Genevieve felt so much self-reproach, it made her lenient to others.

Dixmer returned home late, and on his return found Morand, Maurice, and Genevieve botanising in the garden.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FLOWER GIRL.

AT LENGTH THE anticipated Thursday, the day of Maurice's guard, arrived. It was now the month of June. The sky was of a deep and cloudless blue, and against this sheet of blue rose the heavy white mass of nine houses. The coming of that dreadful day was already foreseen, represented by the ancients as thirsting with an unquenchable thirst, and which, to borrow the phraseology of the plebeian Parisians, licked the pavement very dry. Paris was clean as a carpet, and perfumes filled the air, mounting to the trees, emanating from the flowers, circulating and intoxicating with joy, as if to render the inhabitants of the capital forgetful for a few moments of that vapour of blood which rose without intermission from the pavement of these places.

It was Maurice's duty to enter the Temple at nine o'clock; his two colleagues were Meruvault and Agricola. At eight o'clock he was in Rue Vieille Saint Jacques, in grand costume as citizen municipal, that is to say, with a tricoloured scarf tightly fastened around his tall and elegant frame. He as usual rode there on horseback, and on his route had an opportunity of receiving the sincere approbation, admiration, and eulogiums of the worthy patriots who saw him pass. Genevieve was already prepared; she wore a simple muslin dress, a species of light taffeta mantle, and a small bonnet, ornamented with a tri-coloured cockade. Thus attired, she appeared of dazzling beauty. Morand, who, as we have seen, had been earnestly solicited to accompany them, had, no doubt for fear of being mistaken for an aristocrat, attired himself in his usual costume — half-bourgeois, half-artisan. He entered alone, and his countenance betrayed great fatigue; he pretended to have been at work all night, in order to complete some urgent business.

Dixmer had gone out immediately after the return of his friend Morand.

"Well," demanded Genevieve, "what have you decided on, Maurice; and how are we to see the Queen?"

"Listen," said Maurice, "I have arranged everything. I shall arrive at the Temple with you, and then introduce you to my friend Louis, who commands the guard; I then take my post, and at a favourable moment I will come to see you."

"But," demanded Morand, "when are we to see the prisoners, and how are we to see them?"

"At either their breakfast or their dinner, if that will suit you, through the glazed partition of the Municipal."

"Perfectly," said Morand.

Maurice then saw Morand approach a sideboard at the further end of the salle-a-manger, and drink hastily a glass of pure wine, which rather surprised him, Morand being usually very abstemious, and indulging only in wine and water.

Genevieve saw that he regarded him with astonishment.

"Can you not fancy," said she, "he must be half dead with fatigue? he has taken nothing since yesterday morning."

"Did he not dine here?" asked Maurice.

"No, he Was trying some experiments in the city."

Genevieve took a useless precaution with respect to Maurice, since lover-like he was an egotist, and had merely bestowed upon the action of Morand that superficial attention which an amorous man might accord to any one, except the woman whom he loves. To his glass of wine Morand added a crust of bread, which he hastily swallowed.

"And now," said he, "dear Citizen Maurice, I am quite ready; when you choose we will depart."

Maurice, who was stripping the decayed petals from one of the dead carnations he had plucked in passing, now offered his arm to Genevieve, saying — " Let us set out."

They went, in short, Maurice so happy he could scarcely contain himself; he would have uttered cries of joy had he not restrained his emotion. What could he desire more? Not only had he acquired the certainty that she did not love Morand, but also the hope that he possessed her affection. The glorious sun shone upon the world, the arm of Genevieve was reposing within his own, whilst the public criers, shouting at the top of their voices the triumph of the Jacobins and the defeat of Brissot and his companions, announced that the country was saved.

There are truly moments of life when the heart of man seems too small to contain the joy or grief concentred there.

“Oh! what a lovely day,” exclaimed Morand.

Maurice turned round in surprise. This was the first burst of feeling he had ever heard issue from the lips of this singularly reserved and absent man.

“Oh! yes, it is indeed lovely,” said Genevieve, pressing closer the arm of Maurice, “if it would only continue till evening, pure and cloudless as it is now!”

Maurice applied this word, and his happiness redoubled each moment. Morand at the same time regarded Genevieve through his green spectacles with a peculiar expression. Perhaps he also applied her expressions. They thus crossed Le Petit-Pont, La Rue de la Janerie, and the bridge Notre Dame, they then proceeded to La Place de 1’Hotel de Ville, La Rue Bur-du-Bec and La Rue Sainte-Avoye. As they progressed, Maurice’s step became more and more elastic, while on the contrary, those of his male and female companions waxed slower and slower. They had reached the corner of La Rue des Vieilles Audriettes, when all at once a flowergirl impeded their passage, by offering them her basket filled with flowers.

“Oh! what magnificent carnations!” cried Maurice.

“Oh! yes, very beautiful,” said Genevieve, “it seems the cultivator of these had no other pre-occupation, for they are not withered and dead.”

This speech sank deep into the heart of the young man.

“Ah! my brave municipal,” said the flower-girl, “purchase a bouquet for the pretty citoyenne. She is dressed in white; look at these superb crimson carnations; white and purple look well together; she will place the bouquet upon her heart, and as her heart is near to your blue coat, there you have the national colours.” The flowergirl was young and pretty, her compliment was well turned and well chosen, for had it been made expressly for that occasion, it could not better have applied to the circumstances. Besides the flowers were almost symbolical; they were similar to those now dead.

“I will purchase one,” said Maurice, “since they are carnations; all other flowers I detest.”

“Ah! Maurice,” said Genevieve, “it is useless, we have so many of them in the garden.”

But although her lips uttered the refusal, her eyes expressed a longing desire to possess them.

Maurice selected the most beautiful of the bouquets. It was the one the pretty flowergirl had presented to him. It consisted of twenty deep red carnations, emitting an odour at once sweet and pungent; in the centre, towering above the rest, rose a magnificent carnation.

“Here,” said Maurice to the marchande, throwing on her basket an assignat of five livres, “that is for you.”

“Thanks, my brave municipal,” said the flower-girl, “a thousand thanks.”

And she went towards another couple, trusting the day commenced thus auspiciously would so continue till its close. During this apparently simple scene, which had only occupied a few seconds at most, Morand seemed scarcely able to support himself, and wiped the perspiration from his pallid brow, while Genevieve also turned pale and trembled.

She received the nosegay which Maurice presented to her, and clasping it in her lovely hand, held it to her face, less to inhale the odour than to conceal her emotion. The remainder of the journey was pleasant, at least as far as concerned Maurice. As for Genevieve, his gaiety was a constraint upon her, and Morand passed his day in a fashion peculiar to himself, that is to say, in smothered sighs or startling bursts of laughter, and occasionally uttering some formidable witticism, which fell upon the passers-by like sparks of fire.

At nine o’clock they reached the Temple.

Santerre called over the municipals.

“I am here,” said Maurice, leaving Genevieve under the care of Morand.

“Welcome,” said Santerre, holding out his hand to the young man.

Maurice took care not to refuse the hand thus offered to him. The friendship of Santerre was certainly most valuable at this epoch. At sight of this man who had commanded the famous rolling of drums, Genevieve shuddered, and Morand turned pale.

“Who is this handsome citoyenne?” demanded Santerre of Maurice, “and what does she do here?”

“She is the wife of the brave Citizen Dixmer; you have heard this excellent patriot spoken of, Citizen General?”

“Yes, yes,” replied Santerre, “the chief of a tannery, captain of chasseurs of the legion Victor.”

“The same.”

“Bon! bon! Ma foi, she is pretty. And this ugly fellow who has given her his arm?”

“That is the Citizen Morand, her husband’s partner, and chasseur in Dixmer’s company.”

Santerre approached Genevieve.

“Bonjour, citoyenne,” said he.

Genevieve made an effort.

“Bonjour, Citizen General,” replied she, smiling.

Santerre felt flattered by both title and smile.

“And what brings you here, belle patriote?” continued Santerre.

“The citoyenne,” replied Maurice, “has never seen the Widow Capet, and she wishes to see her.”

“Yes,” said Santerre, “before — ,” and he made an atrocious gesture. “Precisely,” replied Maurice, coldly.

“Very well,” said Sauterre, “only mind they are not seen entering the keep; it would be a bad example; besides, I confide all to you.”

Santerre again shook hands with Maurice, made an inclination of his head to Genevieve in a friendly and protecting manner, and quitted them to attend to his other various engagements.

After a great many evolutions of gendarmes and chasseurs, after some manoeuvring with cannon, the dull resounding of which, it was considered, carried to the environs a salutary lesson or admonition, Maurice took Genevieve’s arm, and followed closely by Morand, advanced towards the post, at the door of which Louis was vociferating loudly, commanding the manoeuvres of his battalion.

“Bon!” cried he, “why there is Maurice; peste! with a female, too, who appears to me rather agreeable. Does the stupid fellow wish to compare her with my Goddess Reason? If it were so, poor Arthemise!”

“Well! Citizen Adjutant,” said the Captain.

“Ah! that’s right; attention,” said Louis; “files to the left, left — bonjour, Maurice; not so quickly — ” The guns rolled, the company dispersed to their respective places, and when each was at his post, Louis hastened away to exchange compliments with his friend. Maurice presented Louis to Genevieve and Morand. Then an explanation commenced as to the purport of their visit.

“Yes, I understand,” said Louis, “yon wish your friends to enter the keep; that is easily managed. I will go directly and station the sentinels, then I will order them to admit you and your friends.”

In ten minutes afterwards Genevieve and Morand entered the suite of the three municipals, and placed themselves behind the glazed partition.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CRIMSON CARNATIONS.

THE QUEEN ROSE alone. Having been indisposed for two or three days, she had remained in bed longer than usual, but having heard from her sister that the sun was rising magnificently, she made an effort to quit her couch, and that she might so enabled to breathe the pure air with her daughter, had requested permission to walk on the platform, which had been granted her without the slightest difficulty. She had also been induced to act thus from another cause. Once, and it is true, once only, from the height of the tower, she had seen the Dauphin playing in the garden. But at the first signal of recognition between the mother and child Simon interfered, and compelled the boy to retire immediately. Never mind, she had seen him, that was a great source of happiness to her. True, the poor little prisoner was very pale and much changed. Then he was dressed as a child of the people, in a blouse and large trousers. But his beautiful fair waving curls were still left him, forming around him a glory which God no doubt intended to guard the infant martyr to heaven. If she could only see him once again, oh! what a cordial to the heart of the unhappy mother! There was yet another motive.

“My sister,” Madame Elizabeth had said to her, “you know we found in the corridor a straw standing upright in an angle of the wall. In the language of our signs this desires us to pay attention to everything around us, and to warn us of the approach of a friend.”

“That is true,” replied the Queen; who, regarding her sister and child with pity, had even herself encouraged them not to despair of their ultimate safety. The duties of the service accomplished, Maurice was then higher in authority in the keep of the Temple, since chance had elected him as guard during the day, and the other municipals, Agricola and Meruvault, as guards during the night. These municipals had left, after laying their “proces-verbal” before the council of the Temple.

“Eh bien. Citizen Municipal,” said the woman Tison, coming forward to salute Maurice, “you bring company, then, to see our caged pigeons? It is only I who am condemned no more to see my poor Heloise.”

"They are friends of mine," said Maurice, "who have never yet seen the female Capet."

"Ah! well, they will see admirably behind the partition."

"Assuredly," said Morand.

"Only," said Genevieve, "we shall present the appearance of the cruel impertinents who come from the other side of the iron grate to mock the misery of the unfortunate prisoners."

"Eh bien! why should not your friends see them on their way to the tower, since the woman will walk there to-day, with her sister and her daughter, for they have left her a daughter, while I who am not guilty they have deprived of mine. Oh these aristocrats! it will always be the case; let them do what they will, favour *is* always shown to them, Citizen Maurice."

"But they have removed her son," replied he.

"Ah! if I had a son," murmured the gaoleress, "I should lament my daughter less."

Genevieve during this time had exchanged looks with Morand several times. "Mon ami," said the young woman to Maurice, "the citoyenne is in the right. If you could by any means place me in the way of Marie Antoinette, it would be less repugnant to my feelings than *gazing* at her here. It seems to me this manner of viewing people is at once humiliating both to them and us."

"Kind Genevieve," said Maurice, "you possess true delicacy of mind."

"Pardieu! citoyenne," said one of Maurice's colleagues, who was at that moment breakfasting in the antechamber on bread and sausages, "if you were the prisoner, and Capet's wife felt curiosity to see you, she would not be so very particular about the indulgence of her fancy — the jade."

Genevieve, with a movement quicker than lightning, threw a rapid glance towards Morand, to note the effect of these words upon him. In effect, Morand started, a strange phosphorescent light gleamed from under his eyelids, and his hands were clenched for an instant, but all this was *so* momentary that it passed unperceived.

"What is the name of this municipal?" asked she of Maurice.

"It is the Citizen Meruvault," replied the young man; and then added, as if to apologize for his coarseness, "a stone-cutter."

Meruvault heard it, and in his turn stared at Maurice.

"Allons! Allons!" said the woman Tison; "finish your sausage and your half bottle, that I may take away."

"It is not the fault of the Austrian if I finish them now," grumbled the municipal; "for if she could have murdered me on the 10th of August she would have done so; thus the day when she 'sneezes in the sack' I shall be in the first rank, firm at my post."

Morand turned pale as death.

"Allons! Citizen Maurice," said Genevieve, "let us go where you promised to take us; here it seems as if I were a prisoner; I feel suffocated."

Maurice conducted Genevieve and Morand out, when the sentinels, previously instructed by Louis, allowed them to pass without any difficulty. They installed themselves in a little passage on the upper story, so that the moment when the Queen, Madame Royale, or Madame Elizabeth ascended to the gallery, these august personages could not do otherwise than pass before them.

As the promenade was fixed for ten o'clock, and they had only a few minutes to wait, Maurice not only did not quit his friends, but farther, in order that the slightest suspicion might not be excited by this rather illegal proceeding, having met Agricola, he took him with him. It struck ten.

"Open!" cried a voice from the base of the tower, which Maurice knew to be of that General Santerre. Immediately the guard assumed arms and closed the iron gratings; the sentinels also prepared arms. There was then heard in all the court a confused noise of iron, stones, and footsteps, which vividly impressed both Morand and Genevieve, for Maurice observed them both turn pale.

"And all these precautions to guard three poor women," murmured Genevieve.

"Yes," said Morand, endeavouring to smile; "if those who tempt them to escape were now here, and in our place saw what we see, it would disgust them with the trade."

"In fact," continued Genevieve, "I begin to think they will not save themselves."

"And I to hope," said Maurice, inclining towards the staircase as he spoke.

"Attention," cried he; "here are the prisoners."

"Name them to me," said Genevieve, "for I do not know either of them."

"The two first who are ascending are the sister and daughter of Capet. The last one, preceded by a little dog, is Marie Antoinette."

Genevieve made a step in advance. Morand, on the contrary, instead of looking at them, pressed himself close against the wall, his lips more livid and earthy than the stones of the keep.

Genevieve, with her white robe and bright pure eyes, appeared like an angel awaiting the prisoners to cheer them on their dark and dreary road, and to administer in passing a ray of comfort to their desolate and blighted hearts. Madame Elizabeth and Madame Royale pursued their way, having only thrown a glance of astonishment at the strangers. No doubt the former imagined they were those whom the signals announced, for turning round quickly to Madame Royale, she pressed her hand, and while so doing, dropped her pocket handkerchief, as if to inform the Queen.

"Pay attention, my sister," said she; "I have dropped my pocket handkerchief."

And she passed on with the young princess.

The Queen, with panting breath, accompanied with a short dry cough, indicating ill health, stooped to pick up the handkerchief which had fallen at her feet, when her little dog, more agile than its mistress, seized it, and ran forward to convey it to Madame Elizabeth. The Queen continued her ascent slowly, and after some steps found herself in her turn before Genevieve, Morand, and the young municipal.

"Flowers!" cried she; "oh! how long it is since I have seen any flowers. How deliciously they smell. You are happy to possess these flowers, Madame."

Quick as the idea formed in her mind, prompted by these melancholy words, Genevieve extended her hand to offer her bouquet to the Queen.

Then Marie Antoinette raised her head, looked at her, and an almost imperceptible blush passed over her colourless face.

But by a natural movement from an habitual passive obedience to regulation, Maurice put out his hand to arrest the arm of Genevieve. The Queen then remained hesitating, when, looking at Maurice, she recognised him as the young municipal who had always spoken to her with so much firmness, but at the same time tempered with equal respect.

"Is this forbidden, Monsieur?" said she.

"No, no, Madame. Genevieve, you can offer your bouquet," said Maurice.

"Oh! thanks, thanks, Monsieur," said the Queen with grateful acknowledgments; and bowing with gracious affability to Genevieve, the

Queen extended her emaciated hand, and selected at hazard a single carnation from the mass of flowers.

“Take all, madame, take all,” timidly said Genevieve.

“No,” said the Queen, with a fascinating smile, “this bouquet may come perhaps from one you love. I will not deprive you of it.”

Genevieve blushed, and at this blush the Queen smiled.

“Allons, allons! Citoyenne Capet,” said Agricola, “you must continue your route.”

The Queen bowed, and ascended the steps, but before she disappeared, turned round and murmured — ” The carnations smell very sweet, and she is very lovely.”

“She has not seen me,” murmured Morand, who, almost kneeling in the shade, had effectively escaped the notice of the Queen.

“But you had a good view of her, had you not, Morand? had not you, Genevieve?” said Maurice, doubly happy, first from the sight he had procured his friends, and also that he had afforded ever so slight a gratification to the unhappy prisoner.

“Oh! yes, yes,” said Genevieve, “and were I to live for a thousand years, I should never forget her.”

“And what do you think of her?”

“She is charming.”

“And you, Morand?”

Morand clasped his hands, but made no reply.

“Tell me,” said Maurice, in a whisper to Genevieve, “is it the Queen whom Morand worships?’

Genevieve started, but recovering herself instantly, replied smilingly, “It really looks like it.”

“You have not yet told me what you think of her, Morand,” persisted Maurice.

“I thought her very pale,” replied he.

Maurice retook the aim of Genevieve, to descend towards the court. In the dark staircase it seemed to him that Genevieve kissed his hand.

“What does that mean, Genevieve?”

“It means, Maurice, that I shall never forget, that to gratify a whim of mine you have risked your life.”

“Oh!” said Maurice, “what exaggeration of danger, Genevieve. Between you and I, you well know that gratitude is not the sentiment I wish to inspire you with,”

Genevieve pressed his arm softly.

Morand followed with faltering steps.

On quitting the court, Louis came to identify the two visitors, who then left the Temple, but before quitting it Genevieve made Maurice promise to dine the next day in the old Hue Saint Jacques.

CHAPTER XXII.

SIMON THE CENSOR.

WHEN Maurice returned to his post, in a state of transcendent happiness, he found Tison's wife weeping.

"What have they done to you now, mother?" asked Maurice.

"All this makes me furious," replied the gaoleress.

"What?"

"Because there is nothing but injustice for poor people in this world."

"But how?"

"You are rich, you are a bourgeois, you come here only for a day, and they permit pretty women to visit you here, who present bouquets to the prisoners; whilst I who nestle everlastingly in this dove-cot am not allowed to see my poor Sophie."

Maurice took her hand and slipped into it an assignat of ten livres.

"There, good woman, take that, and do not despair. Mon Dieu! the Austrian will not last for ever."

"Ten livres," said the gaoleress, "that is kind of you; but I would rather have even a papilotte that had curled my poor girl's hair."

As she finished these words, Simon, who was then coming up, heard them, and saw the gaoleress place in her pocket the money Maurice had given her. We will mention what sort of a temper Simon was in. As he entered the court he encountered Louis. Now a decided antipathy existed between these two men. This hatred was less induced by the violent scenes with which our readers are already familiar, than by the difference of race, an everlasting source of detestation, which, however mysterious it may at first appear, is easily explained. Simon was hideous, Louis handsome; Simon was low, Louis the very opposite; Simon was a republican bully, Louis one of those ardent patriots who had sacrificed everything to the revolution; and then, if they must come to blows, Simon instinctively felt that the fist of the fop lost none of its elegance when Maurice had decreed him to a plebian punishment.

Simon, on perceiving Louis, stopped short, and turned pale.

"It is still this battalion that mounts guard," growled he.

"Well," said a grenadier, who overheard this apostrophe, "one is as good as another, it seems to me." Simon drew a pencil from his pocket, and pretended to note down something on a piece of paper almost as black as his own hands.

"Ah!" said Louis, "you know how to write, then, Simon, since you are tutor to young Capet? Look, citizens, upon my honour he takes notes; it is Simon the Censor."

A universal shout of laughter proceeded from the ranks of the young national guards, almost all men of education, at the ridiculous title bestowed upon the wretched cobbler.

"Very well, very well," said he, grinding his teeth, and colouring with rage; "they say you have permitted strangers to enter the keep, and that without the consent of the Commune. Very well, I am going to draw out the proces-verbal for the municipal."

"At least he knows how to write that," said Louis; "it is Maurice, you know, brave Simon — Maurice with the Iron Hand, you remember that."

At this moment Morand and Genevieve went out. At this sight, Simon rushed into the keep, at the very moment, as we have said, when Maurice, by the way of consoling her, presented the woman Tison with the assignat for ten livres. Maurice paid no attention to the presence of this miserable wretch, whom by a natural instinct he always avoided if he by any chance encountered him, regarding him in the light of a disgusting and venomous reptile.

"Ah, well!" said Simon to Tison's wife; "so you wish to bring yourself to be guillotined, citoyenne?"

"I!" said the woman, who had just dried her eyes with her apron; "and why is that?"

"Why! because you receive money from the municipal for allowing aristocrats entrance to the Austrian."

"I!" said, the woman Tison; "be silent, you are mad!"

"This shall be consigned to the proces-verbal," said Simon, emphatically.

"Well, then, they are friends of the municipal Maurice, one of the best patriots that ever existed."

"Conspirators, I tell you; besides, the Commune shall be informed; it will judge for itself."

"Allons; you mean to denounce me, then, spy of the police!"

“Exactly so, if you do not denounce yourself.”

“Denounce what? what do you wish me to denounce?”

“All that has happened, then.”

“But nothing has happened.”

“Where were these aristocrats?”

“There, upon the staircase.”

“Has Capet’s wife ascended the stairs?”

“Yes.”

“And they spoke to her?”

“They exchanged two words.”

“Two words! and what perfume of this aristocrat’s do I smell here?’’

“It is the scent of the carnations.”

“Carnations! what carnations?”

“Why, the citoyenne had a bunch of them, which perfumed the whole place.”

“What citoyenne?”

“The one who saw the Queen pass.”

“You see plainly — and tell the Queen so — that conversing with these aristocrats will be your ruin. But what is this I am treading upon?” continued Simon, stooping down.

“Ah!” said the woman Tison, “it is a flower, a carnation; it must have fallen from the hand of the Citoyenne Dixmer, when Marie Antoinette took one from her bouquet.”

“The woman Capet took a flower from the Citoyenne Dixmer’s bouquet?” said Simon.

“Yes, and it was given her by me,” said Maurice, in a loud and menacing tone, who had been for some moments listening to this colloquy till his patience was nearly exhausted.

“It is all very well, it is all very well; one sees what one does see, and one knows what one says,” growled Simon, who still held in his hand the carnation crushed by his huge foot.

“And I also know one thing,” replied Maurice, “which I am now going to tell you; it is that you have nothing whatever to do in this keep, and that your honourable post of tormentor is down there with the little Capet, whom I would, for your own sake, recommend you not to chastise to-day, as I am here to defend him.”

"Do you threaten me? do you call me tormentor?" cried Simon, crushing the flower in his hand. "Ah! we shall see if it is permitted these aristocrats — Why, what can this be?"

"What?" asked Maurice.

"That I feel in this carnation? Ah! ah!"

The eyes of Maurice were transfixed with astonishment, as Simon drew from the calyx of the flower a small paper, rolled with the most exquisite care, which had been artistically introduced into the centre of the clustering leaves.

"Oh! mon Dieu!" said Maurice, "what can this mean?"

"We will know, we will know," said Simon, approaching the window. "Ah! you and your friend Louis told me I did not know how to read. Well! you shall see."

Louis had calumniated Simon; he had learned both to read and write. But the billet was so minute that Simon was obliged to have recourse to his spectacles. He consequently placed it on the window, while he proceeded to take an inventory of the contents of his pockets; but while thus engaged, the Citizen Agricola opened the door of the ante-chamber exactly facing the little window, thereby causing a current of air, which blew away the little paper, light as a feather from a bird's wing, so that when Simon, after a momentary exploration, had discovered his spectacles, placed them on his nose, and turned himself round, his search was useless — the paper had disappeared.

"There was a paper here," screamed Simon, crimson with rage; "there was a paper here. Look to yourself, citizen municipal, for it must and shall be found." And he descended precipitately, leaving Maurice in a state of stupefaction. Ten minutes afterwards three members of the Commune entered the keep. The Queen was still upon the platform, and strict orders had been issued that she should remain in total ignorance of all that had just occurred. The members of the Commune desired to be conducted to her presence. The first object which met their view was the crimson carnation, which she still retained in her hand. They regarded her with surprise, arid approaching her, — " Give us this flower," said the president of the deputation. The Queen, who had not previously noticed this interruption, started, and hesitated.

"Surrender your flower, madame," said Maurice, in terror, "I entreat you."

The Queen tendered them the carnation. The president took it and retired, followed by his colleagues, into a neighbouring apartment, to make an examination, and draw up the proces-verbal. They opened the flower — it was empty. Maurice breathed afresh.

"Wait a moment," said one of the members, "the heart of the carnation has been removed. The socket is empty, it is true, but in this socket, most unquestionably, a letter has been introduced."

"I am quite ready and willing," said Maurice, "to furnish all necessary explanation; "but first of all, I request that I may be arrested."

"It would not be right to avail ourselves of your proposition," said the president. "You are known as a staunch patriot. Citizen Lindey."

"And I will answer with my life for the friends I had the imprudence to bring with me."

"Answer for no one," replied the procurator.

A great conversation was now heard in the court. It was Simon, who, having long, and vainly sought for the little billet wafted away by the wind, now went to inform Santerre that an attempt had been made to carry off the Queen, with all the accessories which the charms of his excited imagination could lend to such an event. Santerre was in great haste — he investigated the Temple and changed the guard, to the great disgust of Louis, who strongly protested against this offence offered to his battalion.

"Ah! vile cobbler," said he to Simon, menacing him with his sabre, "I have you to thank for this; but only wait a little, I will have my revenge, and pay you in your own coin."

"I think rather that the nation will pay you," said the shoemaker, rubbing his hands.

"Citizen Maurice," said Santerre, "hold yourself in readiness for the command of the Commune, who will examine you."

"I await your orders, commandant; but I have already told you I desire to be arrested, and I again repeat my former request."

"Wait, wait," murmured Simon, sullenly; "since you feel so sure, we will soon settle that business for you." And he went to find the woman Tison.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE GODDESS REASON.

THEY SEARCHED during the whole day in the court, in the garden and its environs, for the little billet which had caused all this tumult, and which they no longer doubted contained the whole plot. They interrogated the Queen, after having first separated her from her daughter and sister, but elicited nothing more from her than having, on the staircase, encountered a young woman carrying a bouquet, she had drawn a single flower from the centre.

“Had she not plucked this flower with the consent of the municipal Maurice?”

She had nothing more to tell. This was the truth in all its force and simplicity. This was all reported to Maurice, and he in his turn declared the deposition of the Queen to be quite correct.

“But,” said the president, “there was still a plot.”

“Impossible,” said Maurice; “I was dining at Madame Dixmer’s, and proposed that she should see the prisoners, hearing her remark she had never done so; but neither the day nor the manner of so doing was arranged.”

“But the flowers were purchased,” said the president; “the bouquet had been made beforehand.”

“Not at all; I myself purchased these flowers from a flower-girl, who offered them to us at the corner of La Rue des Vieilles-Audriettes.”

“But at least this flower-girl presented the bouquet to you?”

“No, citizen; I selected it myself from ten or twelve others. Certainly, I purchased the most beautiful.”

“But was there a possibility of secreting this billet on your road to the tower?”

“Impossible, citizen. I never quitted Madame Dixmer’s side for a moment, and to perform the operation named on each flower — for remark that every flower, according to Simon’s account, contained a like billet — would at least occupy half a day or more.”

“But, in short, could not two prepared billets have been placed in the flowers?”

“It was in my presence the prisoner took one at hazard, after having declined the rest.”

“Then, in your opinion, Citizen Lindey, there was not a plot at all?”

“If it were a plot,” replied Maurice, “and I am the first not only to believe but to affirm it, my friends were not concerned in it. However, as the nation must necessarily experience alarm, I offer security by constituting myself prisoner.”

“Not at all,” said Santerre, “this act alone is sufficient proof. If you constitute yourself prisoner to answer for your friends, I constitute myself prisoner to answer for you. The thing is simple enough. There is no positive denunciation. Is it not so? No one will know what has passed. Inspect every occurrence more strictly, redouble your own vigilance especially, and we shall arrive at the bottom of this thing by avoiding publicity.”

“Thanks, commandant,” said Maurice; “but I reply to you as you would answer were you in my place. We ought not to stop here, it is necessary that the flower-girl should be discovered.”

“The flower-girl is far away, but be perfectly easy on that point; she shall be sought after. As for you, watch your friends, whilst I will guard the prison correspondence.”

No one had thought of Simon, but he had formed his own project. He arrived towards the conclusion of the sitting, and learned the decision of the Commune.

“Ah! then, it only requires a regular denunciation,” said he, “to settle this affair. Wait five minutes and I will bring it to you.”

“Who is it?” said the president.

“It is,” said Simon, “the courageous Citoyenne Tison who denounces the secret practices of that partisan of aristocracy, Maurice, and the intrigues of another equally false patriot, one of his friends, named Louis.”

“Take care, take care, Simon; your zeal for the nation perhaps misleads you. Maurice and Louis are tried and proved patriots.”

“That will be seen at the tribunal,” replied Simon.

“Consider well, Simon; this will be a disgraceful proceeding for all true patriots.”

“Disgraceful or not, what difference will that make to me? Do I dread disgrace? They shall at least learn all the truth concerning those who wish to betray them.”

“Then, you persist in a denunciation in the name of the woman Tison?”

“I will denounce myself, even this very night, to the Cordeliers, and you among the rest, Citizen President, if you are still unwilling to command the arrest of the traitor Maurice.”

“Well, let it be so,” said the president, who, according to custom in these miserable times, trembled before those who clamoured the loudest, “they shall be arrested.”

While this decision was forming against him, Maurice had returned to the Temple, where the following billet awaited him: —

“Our guard being violently broken up, I shall not be able, in all probability, to see you before to-morrow morning. Come, then, and breakfast with me; during that meal you shall give me a true and particular account of the plots and conspiracies discovered by Simon. — Yours faithfully, LOUIS.”

Maurice replied —

“There is nothing new, so sleep in peace to-night, and breakfast without me to-morrow, as, on reviewing the incidents of the day, I find I shall not, in all probability, be able to leave till noon. — Yours faithfully, “MAURICE.

“P.S. — As to the rest, I believe the conspiracy was only a false alarm, after all.”

Louis had, indeed, left at one o’clock, with the whole of his battalion, thanks to the brutal conduct of the shoemaker; he, however, consoled himself with a quatrain, and went to visit Arthemise. Arthemise was delighted to see Louis. The weather, as we have said, was magnificent, she therefore proposed a walk along the quay, to which Louis of course assented. They had walked some distance, discoursing on politics, Louis recounting his expulsion from the Temple, and vainly endeavouring to divine the cause, when, on reaching the height of La Rue des Barres, they perceived a flower-girl, who, like themselves, remounted the bank to the right of the Seine.

“Ah! Citizen Louis,” said Arthemise, “I hope you are going to present me with a bouquet?”

“Two, if you wish it,” said Louis; and they both redoubled their speed to overtake the flower-girl, who walked at a rapid pace. On arriving at the bridge Marie, the young girl stopped, and stooping under the parapet, emptied the contents of her basket into the river. The flowers separated, whirled round for an instant in the air, whilst the bouquets, dragged down by their own weight, fell more quickly, till at last both flowers and bouquets floated upon the surface, following the course of the water.

"Stop!" said Arthemise, regarding the flower-girl thus strangely occupied; "it is said — but yes — but no — but it — ah! this is strange."

The flower-girl placed her finger on her lips, as if to entreat her silence, and disappeared.

"Who is this, then?" said Louis; "do you know this mortal goddess?"

"No; I fancied at first — but certainly I am deceived."

"She, however, made a sign to you," persisted Louis.

"But why is she a flower-girl this morning?" said Arthemise to herself.

"You acknowledge, then, that you know her, Arthemise?" said Louis.

"Yes," replied Arthemise, "she is a flowergirl I sometimes deal with."

"At all events," said Louis, "she has a strange method of disposing of her merchandise."

And both, after having looked for the last time at the flowers, which, already arrived at the wooden bridge, had received a fresh impetus from the arm of the river which passed under its arches, continued their route towards the Rapee, where they anticipated dining *tete-a-tete*. This incident was forgotten for the moment, but as it was at least singular, and of rather a mysterious character, it vividly impressed Louis's poetical imagination. In the meantime, the denunciation brought by Tison's wife against Maurice and Louis caused a great tumult at the club of the Jacobins; and Maurice was informed at the Temple by the Commune that his safety was endangered by the public indignation. This was a recommendation to the young municipal to conceal himself if he were guilty; but with conscious rectitude, Maurice remained at the Temple, where he was found at his post when *they* came to arrest him. At the same time, Maurice was interrogated. Remaining firm in his resolution not to endanger the safety of his friends, in whom he felt the most implicit confidence, Maurice yet was not the man to sacrifice himself by a ridiculous silence worthy of a hero of romance, and therefore demanded the flowergirl should be tried. It was five o'clock in the afternoon when Louis returned home, and heard, at the same moment, the arrest of Maurice, and also the demand made by him. The flower-girl of the bridge Marie instantly recurred to his mind like a sudden revelation. This singular individual casting her flowers into the Seine; the coincidence of quarters; the half admission of Arthemise; all these facts combined, instinctively convinced him this was the solution of the mystery demanded by Maurice. He bounded from his chamber, flew rather than ran down four flights of stairs, and precipitated himself into the presence of the Goddess Reason, who was engaged in embroidering golden stars on a robe of azure blue. It was her robe of divinity.

“A truce to the stars, chere amie,” said Louis; “they have arrested Maurice, and in all human probability, before evening, I shall share the same fate.”

“Maurice arrested!”

“Mon Dieu! yes. In these times nothing is more common than the recurrence of these events; but they excite little attention, because they come in troops, that is all. Almost all great events originate in trifles. Never neglect trifles. Who was that flowergirl we met this morning, chere amie’?’

Arthemise started. What flower-girl?”

“The one who so recklessly cast her flowers into the Seine.”

“Eh! mon Dieu!” said Arthemise; “is this circumstance, then, so serious, that you return to urge me on that point?”

“So serious, chere amie, that I entreat you to answer my question without loss of time.”

“Mon ami, I cannot do so.”

“Goddess, with you nothing is impossible.”

“I am in honour bound to keep silence.”

“And I am bound in honour to make you speak.”

“But why do you insist upon it thus?”

“Why? — Corblieu! that Maurice may not have his throat cut.”

“Mon Dieu! Maurice guillotined?” cried the young woman, much alarmed.

“Unless you speak; indeed, unless you dare to reply while my head still remains upon my shoulders.”

“Ah! No, no,” said Arthemise, “it would be utter ruin.”

At this moment Louis’s official rushed into the apartment, “Ah! citizen,” cried he, “save yourself! save yourself!”

“And why?” demanded Louis.

“Because the gendarmes have arrived; and whilst they were forcing an entrance, I gained the next house by the roof, and hastened to prevent your return.”

Arthemise uttered a heartrending cry, for she truly loved Louis.

“Arthemise,” said Louis, “do you really place the’ life of a flower-girl in comparison with that of Maurice, and of your lover? If it is so, I declare to you that I no longer regard you as the Goddess Reason, but shall proclaim you the Goddess Folly.”

“Poor Heloise!” exclaimed the ex-danseuse of the Opera; “if I betray you, it is not my fault.”

“Well, well, chere amie,” said Louis, presenting a paper to Arthemise, “you have already favoured me with her Christian name, oblige me now with her surname and address.”

“Oh! write it, never, never!” cried Arthemise; “I would rather tell you.”

“Tell me, then, and rest assured I will not forget.”

And Arthemise, in an agitated voice, gave the name and address of the false flower-girl to Louis. “She is called Heloise Tison, and lives, Rue des Nonandieres, No. 24.”

At this name, Louis uttered an exclamation, and fled. He had not reached the corner of the street when a letter was delivered to Arthemise. It only contained three lines.

“Not a word concerning me, dear friend; the revelation of my name would infallibly ruin me. Wait till to-morrow. I quit Paris this night. Thine, — HELOISE.”

“Oh! mon Dieu!” cried the future goddess, “if I could only have divined this, I would have waited till to-morrow,” and she glanced from the window to recall Louis, if there was yet time, but he had disappeared.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

WE HAVE ALREADY said that in a few hours the news of this event had circulated through Paris. In short, there were at this epoch various indiscretions easy to comprehend on the part of a government of which the political schemes were concocted and unravelled in the street. This rumour gradually gained ground, till it at length reached the old Rue Saint Jacques, and two hours after the arrest of Maurice, they heard of his detention. Thanks to the activity of Simon, the details of the plot were quickly reported beyond the Temple; but, as of course every one added to the original, the news arrived in an unintelligible form at the master tanner's. One said a poisoned flower had been conveyed to the Queen, by means of which the Austrian would stupefy her guards, and thus be enabled to escape from the Temple; others said the report originated from certain suspicions entertained of the fidelity of the battalion dismissed by Santerre on the preceding evening. Already more victims were designated for the hatred of the people.

But the inhabitants of the old Rue Saint Jacques were not, of course, deceived as to the real nature of this event, and Morand on one side, Dixmer on the other, went out immediately, leaving Genevieve a victim to the most violent despair. If this misfortune had befallen Maurice, it was she who had been the sole cause of it. It was her hand that conducted this young man blindfold to the entrance of the dungeon which now enclosed him, and which, in all human probability, he would quit only for the scaffold. But, under any circumstances, Maurice should not lose his head on account of his devotion to her wishes. If Maurice were condemned, she would accuse herself before the tribunal, and would then confess all. She would take all the responsibility upon herself, to feel assured that, at the expense of her life, she might save Maurice. And Genevieve, instead of feeling any fear of death, experienced, on the contrary, almost a degree of happiness at the idea of dying for Maurice.

On quitting the house, Dixmer and Morand separated, the former took the road to La Rue de la Corderie, the latter hastened to La Rue des Nonandieres. Arriving at the end of the bridge Marie, Morand perceived a crowd of idlers and common people, at that time stationed at Paris, had congregated at the scene of the late event, as crows assemble on the field of battle. At this sight, Morand stopped short, a universal tremor shook his frame, and he leant for support against the parapet. At length, after a few seconds, he regained the almost miraculous power which under trying circumstances he exercised over his feelings, and mingling with the various groups, commenced his inquiries, and learnt that a short time before they had taken from La Rue des Nonandieres, 24, a young woman, most certainly guilty of the crime of which she stood then accused, as they surprised her while occupied in forming these packets. Morand inquired before what club the poor girl would be interrogated, and found they had conducted her to the section Mere, where he immediately followed her.

The club was thronged, but by making free use of his elbows and fists, he succeeded in forcing an entrance. The first sight he encountered was the tall and noble figure of Maurice, standing haughtily before the bench of the accused, and annihilating Simon by his looks.

“Yes, citizens,” cried Simon, “the Citoyenne Tison accuses the Citizen Lindey and the Citizen Louis. The Citizen Lindey mentions a flower-girl, upon whom he endeavours to cast all the blame; but, as I told you before, the flower-girl will not return, or be found again, and that it is a vile plot formed by a body of aristocrats, who toss back the ball from one to the other, like cowards, as they are. You have seen, besides, that the Citizen Louis had decamped when his presence was required; and he will return no more than the flower-girl.”

“Then you have lied, Simon,” cried a furious voice: “and he will return, for he is here.”

And Louis strode into the hull.

“Room for me,” said he, pushing aside the spectators. “Room for me.” And he placed himself near Maurice.

The entrance of Louis, so natural, and without affectation, yet combining all the freedom and strength inherent in the character of the young man, produced an immense effect upon the Tribunes, who instantly greeted him with cries of applause. Maurice contented himself by smiling and holding out his hand to his friend — the friend concerning whom he had said to himself, “I shall not long stand alone at the bench of the accused.”

The spectators gazed with visible interest on these two handsome young men, accused (like a demon envious of their youth and beauty) by the foul shoemaker of the Temple. He soon perceived the unfavourable impression he had made, and determined to strike the last blow.

“Citizens!” roared he; “I demand that the generous Citoyenne Tison should be heard, that she may speak, and bring forward her accusation.”

“Citizens,” said Louis, “I demand that the flower-girl, who is about to be arrested, and who no doubt will be brought before you, may be first heard.”

“No, no,” said Simon; “it is just some false evidence — some partisan of the aristocrats. Besides, the woman Tison is most impatient to forward the means ofjustice.”

During this time Louis took the opportunity to whisper to Maurice.

“Yes,” cried the Tribunes; “the deposition of the woman Tison; let her depose.”

“Is the woman Tison in the hall?” demanded the president.

“Without doubt she is here,” cried Simon. “Citoyenne Tison, answer for yourself.”

“I am here, president; but if I depose, will they give me back my daughter?” said the gaoleress.

“Your daughter has nothing, at all to do with the affair with which we are at present engaged,” said the president. “Make your deposition first, and then appeal to the Commune to redeem your child.”

“Do you hear?” said Simon; “the citizen president commands you to make your deposition. Do it quickly.”

“A moment,” said the president, turning towards Maurice, astonished at the calmness of a man generally so impetuous. “One moment. Citizen municipal, have you nothing to say first?”

“No, citizen president — except that before Simon attached the words ‘traitor and coward’ to a man like myself, it would have been better to have waited till he was more correctly informed on that subject, that is all.”

“You say that? you say that?” replied Simon, with the blustering accent peculiar to the plebeian Parisian.

“I say, Simon,” replied Maurice, with more of sorrow than anger, “that you will experience your punishment when you see who it is will presently be brought here.”

"Who will arrive here, then?" demanded Simon.

"Citizen president," said Maurice, without deigning to notice the question of his hideous accuser, "I unite with my friend Louis, in demanding that the young girl about to be arrested may be heard before this poor woman is compelled to speak, who, no doubt, has been prompted to this deposition."

"Listen, citoyenne," said Simon; "listen. They say down there that you are a false witness."

"I a false witness!" cried the woman Tison. "You shall see — you shall see. Wait."

"Citizen," said Maurice, "in pity desire this woman to remain silent."

"Ah! you are afraid," said Simon; "you are afraid."

"Citizen president, I require the deposition of the woman Tison."

"Yes! yes! the deposition!" cried the Tribunes.

"Silence!" cried the president; "the Commune returns."

At this moment the sound of a voiture was heard rolling outside, amidst the noise of shouts and arms.

Simon turned uneasily towards the door.

"Quit the box," said the president to him; "you have nothing more to tell." Simon descended.

At this moment some gendarmes entered, with the tide of curious idlers, which soon ebbed, and a woman was pushed towards the judgment hall.

"Is it her?" whispered Louis to Maurice.

"Yes it is," replied Maurice. "Miserable woman, she is utterly ruined and lost."

"The flower-girl! the flower-girl!" murmured the Tribunes, whose curiosity was raised to the highest pitch. "Is this the flower-girl?"

"I demand, before everything else," roared Simon, "the deposition of the woman Tison. Yon commanded her to depose, president, and she has not yet done so."

The woman was recalled, and entered upon a dreadful and circumstantial deposition. The flower-girl, it was true, was alone criminal, but Maurice and Louis were her accomplices. This denunciation produced an incredible effect upon the public mind, and now, indeed, Simon was in the ascendant.

"Gendarmes," said the president, "bring forward the flower-girl."

"Oh! this is frightful," said Maurice, concealing his face in his hands.

The flower-girl was called and placed before the tribune, exactly opposite to Tison's wife, whose testimony had convicted her of a capital crime the moment before. She raised her veil.

"Heloise!" cried the woman Tison; "my child. You here?"

"Yes, ma mere," replied the young woman in a low tone.

"And why do you enter between two gendarmes?"

"Because I am accused, ma mere."

"You! accused, and by whom?" cried the startled woman.

"By you, ma mere."

A frightful silence, like the precursor of death, fell suddenly upon this noisy assemblage, while the miserable feeling excited by this affecting scene weighed down every heart. "Her daughter," was whispered, as if by voices in the distance, "her daughter!" Unhappy woman! Maurice and Louis regarded both the accuser and the accused with sentiments of deep commiseration, mingled with respectful pity for their unhappy fate. Simon, anxious to witness the conclusion of this tragedy, in which he hoped both Maurice and Louis would remain actors, endeavoured to concentrate the attention of the woman, who gazed wildly around.

"What is your name, citoyenne?" said the president to the young girl, himself affected at the scene.

"Heloise Tison, citizen."

"What is your age?"

"Nineteen years."

"Where do you reside?"

"Rue des Nonandieres, 24."

"Did you sell the Citizen Lindey, whom you now see on the bench, a bouquet of carnations this morning?" The young girl turned round and looked at Maurice. "Yes, citizen, I did," said she.

The mother herself gazed at her daughter, her eyes dilated with terror.

"Are you aware that every carnation contained a billet addressed to the widow of Capet?"

"I know it," replied the accused.

A movement of horror and admiration spread itself through the hall. "Why did you offer these carnations to the Citizen Maurice?"

"Because I perceived that he wore the scarf of a municipal, and I imagined he was going to the Temple."

"Who are your accomplices?"

"I have none."

"What! have you then concocted this plot alone?"

“If it is a plot, I alone am concerned in it.”

“But the Citizen Maurice —

“Did he know that the flowers contained these billets?”

“Yes.”

“The Citizen Maurice is a municipal, the Citizen Maurice could converse with the Queen at any hour of the day or the night. The Citizen Maurice, if he wished to say anything to the Queen, had no occasion to write, he could speak.”

“And you do not know the Citizen Maurice Lindey?”

“I have sometimes seen him come to the Temple, whilst I was there, with my poor mother, but I only know him by sight.”

“Do you see, miserable wretch,” said Louis, shaking his ringer at Simon, who, dismayed at the turn of affairs, with his head lowered, was attempting to sneak away unperceived, “do you see what you have done?” Every one regarded Simon with looks of deep indignation.

The president continued. “Since you made up these bouquets, you, of course, are aware that each one contained a paper, and therefore must know also what was written upon that paper?”

“Of course I know it.”

“Well, then, tell us what it was?”

“Citizen,” said the young girl, with firmness, “I have told all I either can or will tell.”

“Then you refuse to answer this question?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know to what you expose yourself?”

“Yes.”

“You trust perhaps to your youth and beauty?”

“I trust in God.”

“Citizen Maurice Lindey, Citizen Hyacinth Louis,” said the president, “you are free. The Commune recognises your innocence, and admires your loyal spirit. Gendarmes, conduct the Citoyenne Heloise to the prison of the section.”

At these words the woman Tison seemed to awake, and, uttering a piercing cry, attempted to rush forward once more to embrace her daughter, but was withheld by the guards. “I forgive you, mother,” said the young girl, as they led her away. The woman Tison rushed forward, uttered a savage roar, and fell down as if dead. “Noble girl!” murmured Morand, filled with emotions too miserable to describe.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BILLET.

IMMEDIATELY following the events we are about to relate, the last scene of the drama unrolled itself, as a sad finale to this sudden change in the wheel of fortune. The woman Tison, struck as by a thunderbolt at what had occurred, and totally abandoned by those who had escorted her (for there is something even revolting in an involuntary crime, and it certainly amounts to a great crime, when, a mother condemns her own daughter to an ignominious death, were it even from excess of zealous patriotism) — the woman after remaining for some time in a state of insensibility, at length raised her head, looked wildly around, and finding herself deserted and alone, uttered a loud cry, and rushed towards the door.

At this door a few idlers more curious than the rest still remained congregated together, who dispersed when they beheld her, and pointing with their fingers, said one to another, “Do you see that woman? It is she who denounced her daughter.”

The wretched woman uttered a cry of despair, and rushed towards the Temple. But on reaching the third of la Rue Michel le Comte, a man placed himself in front of her, impeding her progress, and concealing his face and figure in his mantle.

“Are you content,” said he, “now you have killed your child?”

“Killed my child!” cried the poor woman, “killed my child! no, no, it is not possible.”

“It is so, notwithstanding, for your daughter has been arrested.”

“And where have they taken her?”

“To the Conciergerie; from there she will be sent to the Revolutionary Tribunal, and you know what becomes of those who are sent there.”

“Stand aside,” said the woman Tison,” and let me pass.”

“Where are you going?”

“To the Conciergerie.”

“What are you going there for?”

“To see her again.”

“They will not allow you to enter.”

“They will permit me to lie at the door, to live there, to sleep there. I will remain there till she goes out, and then at least I shall see her once more.”

“Suppose some one promised to restore you your child?”

“What is that you say?”

“I ask you, supposing a man were to promise to give you back your child, would you do what this man required of you in return?”

“Everything for my child; all for my Heloise!” cried the woman, wringing her hands. “All! all! all!”

“Listen,” said the Unknown. “It is God who now punishes you.”

“And for what?”

“For the tortures you have inflicted so mercilessly on a poor mother as unhappy as yourself.”

“Of whom do you speak? What do you mean?”

“You have often driven the unhappy prisoner to the very verge of despair, where you are yourself at this moment, by your revelations and brutalities. God now punishes you for all this by conducting this daughter, whom you love so much, to the scaffold.”

“You said there was some man who could save her, where is this man? what does he want? what will he demand?”

“This man requires that you cease to persecute the Queen, that you demand pardon for the outrages already committed against her, and if at any time you perceive that this woman, who is also a weeping, despairing mother, by any unforeseen circumstance, or by some miracle from Heaven, is upon the point of saving herself, instead of opposing her flight, you do all in your power to aid and abet it.”

“Listen, citizen,” said the woman Tison.

You are the man — is it not so?”

“Well.”

“It is you who promise to save my child?”

The Unknown remained silent.

“Will you engage to do it? Will you promise; will you swear it? Answer me.”

“All that a man can do to save a woman I will do to save your daughter.”

“He cannot save her,” cried the woman, uttering piercing cries, “he cannot save her. When he promised me he lied.”

"Do what you can for the Queen, and I will do all in my power for your daughter."

"What care I for the Queen? She is not my daughter. If they must decapitate some one it shall not be my daughter, it shall be her. They may cut my throat so that they spare my child's. They may lead me to the guillotine, so that they do not harm a hair of her head, and I will go there singing —

"Ah! ca ira, ca ira, ca ira."

And she commenced singing in a frightful voice, then suddenly stopped short, and burst into a fit of frenzied laughter. The man in the mantle himself appeared alarmed at this burst of folly, and retreated a step or two from her.

"Ah! you shall not escape me thus," said the woman Tison in despair, and retaining her hold of his mantle; "you shall not at one moment say 'do this, and I will rescue your child,' and afterwards say 'perhaps.' Will you save her?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"The day she is conducted from the Conciergerie to the scaffold."

"But why wait — why not to-night? this evening — this moment, even?"

"Because I cannot do so."

"Ah! you know you cannot, you well know you cannot," cried the woman Tison; "but as for me, I can."

"What can you do?"

"I can persecute the prisoner, I can watch the Queen, as you term her, aristocrat as you are, and I can enter the prison any hour of the day or night. All this will I do. We will see how much she shall escape; we will see. Yes, we shall see, since they will not save my daughter, who ought to do so if they could. Head for head. Do you like that? Marie-Antoinette has been Queen. Heloise Tison is only a poor girl. I know all this very well; but on the guillotine they are equals — all distinction ceases there."

"Well, it may be so," said the man in the mantle. "But you perform your part, and I will fulfil mine."

"Swear."

"I swear it."

"By what do you swear?"

"Anything you choose."

"Have you a child?"

"No."

"Well then," said the woman, in a disappointed tone, "by what can you swear?"

"Listen. I swear by God."

"Bah!" exclaimed the woman Tison, "you know very well they have demolished the ancient and have not yet decided on the new."

"I swear by the tomb of my father."

"Swear not by a tomb, for that is prophetic of evil. Oh, my God! my God! When I think that perhaps in three days I may swear by the tomb of my child also. My daughter! My poor Heloise!" cried the woman Tison, frantically; till at the sound of her voice, raised to a shrill scream, several windows were opened. At sight of the opened windows, another man, who seemed to detach himself from the wall, advanced towards the first.

"There is nothing can be done with this woman," said he; "she is mad."

"No: she is a mother," replied the former, and dragged his companion away. When she saw them leaving her, the woman Tison again returned to the subject.

"Where are you going?" cried she. "Are you going to rescue Heloise? Wait for me then — I will go with you. Wait for me; do wait for me." And the poor wretch followed them, screaming, till at the corner of the nearest street she lost sight of them altogether; and not knowing which way to turn, she remained for an instant undecided, looking on every side, when seeing only in the silence and darkness of the night a double symbol of death, she uttered a cry of horror and fell on the pavement without sense or motion. The clock struck ten. During this time, and whilst the same hour was resounding from the Temple clock, the Queen as usual sat in her chamber, between her daughter and her sister. Near her was a lighted lamp, concealed from the sight of the municipal, by Madame Royale, who pretended to embrace her mother, who was reading over again a small billet written on the smallest piece of paper imaginable, and in characters so minute, that her eyes, already nearly blinded by her scalding tears, scarcely retained strength to decipher it. The billet contained the following lines:

"To-morrow, Tuesday, demand permission to walk in the garden; this will be accorded without any difficulty, as an order has been issued to grant you this favour whenever you think proper to solicit it. After two or three turns, feign to feel fatigued, approach the cabin, and ask the widow Plumeau to allow you to sit down. Then, in a moment, pretend to feel worse, and faint away. They will then close all the doors, that they may be able to render you assistance, and you will remain with Madame Elizabeth and Madame Royale. Immediately the trap door of the cellar will open. Precipitate yourself, your sister and daughter through this aperture, and you are all three saved."

"Mon Dieu!" said Madame Royale, "our evil destiny tires in the pursuit."

"If this billet should prove only a trap," said Madame Elizabeth.

"No, no," said the Queen, "these characters have always indicated to me the presence of a mysterious but equally brave and faithful friend."

"Is it the Chevalier?" demanded Madame Royale.

"He himself," replied the Queen.

Madame Elizabeth clasped her hands.

"Let us each read the billet again very softly," replied the Queen, "so that if one of us forget any particulars, the others can supply them."

They all three re-read the letter, and had just finished so doing, when they heard the door of their chamber turn slowly on its hinges. The two princesses turned round; the Queen alone remained stationary, except by an imperceptible movement, she raised her hand to her hair and hid the billet in her head-dress. It was a municipal who opened the door.

"What is your business, monsieur?" demanded Madame Elizabeth and Madame Royale, at the same moment.

"Hum!" said the municipal, "it appears to me that you retire very late tonight?"

"Is there, then," said the Queen, with her usual dignity, "a new decree from the Commune, stating the hour at which I am to go to bed?"

"No, citoyenne," said the municipal; "but if necessary they will make one."

"In the meantime, monsieur," said Marie Antoinette, "respect — I do not say the chamber of the Queen — but that of a woman."

"Truly," growled the municipal, "these aristocrats always speak as if they were something — "

But in the meantime, subdued by the haughty dignity of her prosperity, but which three years of suffering had calmed down, he withdrew. An instant afterwards the lamp was extinguished, and the three females retired in darkness, as usual.

The next morning at nine o’clock, the Queen having re-read the letter before she arose, in order that she might not misconstrue any of the instructions contained there, tore it into almost invisible fragments. She then hastily finished her toilet, awoke her sister, and entered the chamber of the princess. A minute afterwards she came out, and called the municipals on guard.

“What do you want, citoyenne?” said one of them, appearing at the door, while the other did not even discontinue his breakfast to answer the royal appeal.

“Monsieur,” said Marie Antoinette,” I have just left my daughter’s chamber, and found her very ill. Her limbs are swollen for want of exercise; and you know, monsieur, it is I who have doomed her to this life of inaction. I received permission to walk in the garden, but in descending I must necessarily pass before the door of the room occupied by my husband in his lifetime. When I made the attempt my heart failed me, and I had not courage to do so, and have since limited my walks to the platform. Now, however, I find this exercise insufficient for my poor child. I therefore entreat you, Citizen municipal, in my name, to claim of General Santerre the renewal of this privilege.”

The Queen had pronounced these words in a manner at once so mild, yet dignified; had so strenuously avoided all allusions to anything that could wound the feelings of the Republican, that he who had entered her presence with his head covered, as for the most part was the custom of these men, gradually raised the bonnet rouge, and when she had finished, said, bowing respectfully to her —

“Rest assured, madame, your petition shall be laid before the Citizen General.” Then on retiring, as if to convince himself he had yielded to justice rather than weakness, “It is just,” said he, “after all; it is only right.”

“What is just?” demanded the other municipal.

“That this woman should be permitted to walk in the garden with her child, who is an invalid.”

“Bah!” said the other; “when she asks to be allowed to walk from the Temple to la Place de la Revolution, that will be permitted her fast enough.”

The Queen heard these words, and turned very pale, but still drew from them fresh courage for the great attempt she meditated. The municipal finished his breakfast, and descended. The Queen requested she might take hers in her daughter’s room, which was granted. Madame Royale, to confirm the statement concerning her ill health, did not quit her bed; the Queen and Madame Elizabeth remained near her.

At one o’clock, as usual, Santerre arrived. His coming was announced by the drums beating the march, and by the entrance of a fresh battalion, and other municipals, who came in their turn to relieve those on guard. When Sauterre had fully reviewed the battalion leaving, and the one about to take its place, and had paraded his large heavy-limbed horse round the court of the Temple, he stood still for a moment. This was for the purpose of receiving any claims, denunciations, or requests. The municipal, availing himself of this halt, approached him.

“Well, what do you want?” said Santerre, brusquely.

“Citizen,” said the municipal, “I come to entreat on the part of the Queen — ”

“Who is the Queen?” interrupted Sauterre.

“True!” said the municipal, astonished at his own mistake. “What have I said — I must be mad? I came to speak on the part of Madame Veto.”

“All in good time,” said Santerre. “Now I understand you, what have you to say to me?”

“The young Veto is ill, it appears, from want of proper air and exercise.”

“Well, is it necessary again to bring this before the public? The nation granted her permission to walk in the garden, and she refused it. Bon soir.”

“That is exactly it. She regrets this now, and requests you will permit her to do so.”

“There is no difficulty about that. You all hear,” said Santerre, “that Capet’s wife will come down to walk in the garden. Now,” addressing the whole battalion, “take care she does not abuse this favour granted her by the nation, by making her escape over the wall; for if that happens I will cut off every one of your heads.” A roar of laughter followed this pleasantry of the Citizen General. “Now that *is* settled,” said Santerre, “adieu. I am going to the Convention. It appears they are about to reunite Roland and Barbaroux, and the question is to deliver their passport to another world.” It was this intelligence that had put the Citizen General in such good humour. He then galloped away. The battalion just quitted guard followed him, then the municipals also gave place to those who had received Santerre’s instructions respecting the Queen. One of the municipals who went up to Marie Antoinette perceived, while thanking him, that her daughter turned from red to pale, while the sister seemed engaged in thanks to God.

"Ah!'' thought she, looking through the window towards Heaven, "your soul reposes there, seigneur; but will your terrible doom be allowed to fall heavily on us?"

"Thanks, monsieur," said she, with that fascinating smile which had proved the ruin of Bernane, and turned the heads of so many of his fellow-men; "thanks!"

Then turning round to her little dog, who leapt after her, walking on his hind-legs, for he well understood from the looks of his mistress that something unusual was about to take place:

"Come, Jet," said she, "we are going for a walk."

The little animal began to frisk and jump, and, after looking at the municipal attentively, comprehending, no doubt, that from this man originated the intelligence which had made his mistress so happy, ran towards him, and, wagging his long and silky tail, ventured even to caress him. This man, who perhaps might be insensible to the prayers of a Queen, could not resist the caresses of a little dog.

"If only on account of this little beast, you should go out more frequently, Citoyenne Capet. Humanity commands us to take care of every creature."

"At what hour shall we go out, monsieur?" demanded the queen. "Do you not think the sun would do us good?"

"You can go out when you please," said the municipal; "there has been no restriction on the subject. If you like to go out at mid-day, as that is the time they change the sentinels, there will be less bustle in the court."

"Then let it be at mid-day," said the Queen, pressing her hand to her side, to still the beating of her heart. And she regarded this man, who appeared to her less stern than his associates, and who, perhaps, for kindly yielding to the wishes of a prisoner, might fall a sacrifice to the conspiracy which they meditated. But at the moment when compassion was stealing over the heart of the woman, the mind of the Queen was aroused. She thought of the corpses of her faithful friends strewed upon the floors of the palace on the tenth of August; she recalled to memory the second of September, and the head of the Princess Lamballe, carried on a pike before her windows; she remembered the twenty-first of January, when her husband died upon the scaffold, the noise of drums extinguishing his feeble voice; then again she thought of her son, whose cries of distress had more than once reached her ears; and her heart became hardened.

“Alas!” cried she, “misfortune is like the blood of the ancient Hydras — it is teemful of crops of future evils!”

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE LITTLE DOG JET.

THE MUNICIPAL LEFT to call his colleagues, and to read the proces-verbal left by the former municipals. The Queen remained alone with her sister and child. They all three regarded each other. Then Madame Royale threw her arms round the Queen, and warmly embraced her. Madame Elizabeth approached her sister, and held out her hand.

“Let us offer up our prayers to God,” said the Queen, “but in a manner that no one hears us.”

It was one of those fatal epochs when prayer, that natural hymn of praise which God has implanted in every human heart, became suspicious in the eyes of these men, since prayer is an act of praise and acknowledgment for mercies received. But in the ideas of these guardians hope and gratitude afforded subject for inquietude, since the Queen could hope only for flight, and could thank God only for affording her the means of effecting it. This mental prayer concluded, all three remained without uttering a word.

Twelve o’clock struck, then three-quarters, then one. But the moment when the last stroke resounded from the bronze timbre, the noise of arms was heard on the spiral staircase ascending to the Queen.

“They are relieving sentinels,” said she; “they come to seek us.”

She saw her sister and daughter turn very pale.

“Courage!” said she, trembling herself with emotion.

“It is one o’clock,” said a voice from below. “Let the prisoners descend.”

“We are here, gentlemen,” replied the Queen, who, with a sentiment almost of regret, embraced at a glance the black walls and the rude appurtenances which had been more or less the companions of her captivity.

The first wicket opened, they gained the corridor, which, being dark, enabled the three captives to conceal their emotions. Before them frolicked little Jet; but when they arrived at the second — that is to say, the door from which Marie Antoinette endeavoured to turn her eyes — the faithful little animal first placed his nose to the ground, then laid his head upon his paws, and gave utterance to a succession of plaintive cries, which terminated in a prolonged howl. The queen passed on quickly, not having strength sufficient to recall her dog, and supported herself against the wall; then essaying to advance again a few steps, her limbs refused their office, and she felt herself compelled to stop. Her sister and daughter approached her, and for a few moments the three females remained motionless, forming a melancholy group, the mother resting her face upon the head of her daughter, when little Jet rejoined them.

“Well!” cried the voice, “do you or do you not mean to come down?”

“We are coming,” said the municipal, who had remained standing, respecting this grief in all its simplicity.

“Let us go now,” said the Queen, as she prepared to descend.

When the prisoners had reached the bottom of the staircase, opposite the doer, under which the sun shed his rays of bright gold, the rolling of the drum was heard summoning the guard; then a profound silence, the effect of curiosity, ensued, and the massive door opened, revolving slowly upon its creaking hinges. A woman was seated on the ground, or rather on the corner of the stone contiguous to this door. It was the woman Tison, whom the Queen had not seen for four-and-twenty hours, and whose absence at supper the preceding evening, and at their morning’s meal, had excited her surprise. The Queen already saw the light, the trees, the garden, and beyond the barrier which enclosed the garden her eyes eagerly sought the little hut of the canteen, where her friends so impatiently awaited her coming; when, at the sound of footsteps, the woman removed her hands, and the Queen beheld a pale and care-worn face beneath a mass of gray dishevelled locks. The change wrought in these few hours was so great that the Queen stood overwhelmed with astonishment. Then, with the deliberation peculiar to those deficient in reason, she knelt down before the door, impeding the passage of Marie Antoinette.

“What do you want, my good woman?” demanded the Queen.

“He said it was necessary that you should pardon me.”

“Who said so?” demanded the Queen.

“The man in the mantle,” replied the woman Tison.

The Queen looked at Madame Elizabeth and her daughter, surprised at this appeal.

“Go along, go,” said the municipal; “let the widow Capet pass; she has permission to walk in the garden.”

“I know it,” said the old woman; “that is why I came to wait for her here, since they will not allow me to go up; and I ought to ask her forgiveness. I was obliged to wait for her coming out, to see her.”

“But why, then, are you not permitted to go up?” demanded the Queen.

The woman began to laugh.

“Because they pretend that I am mad,” said she.

The Queen looked at her, and saw indeed that the wild eyes of the unhappy being reflected a strange light — that vague expression denoting all absence of intellect.

“Oh, mon Dieu!” said she. “Poor woman! what has happened?”

“Happened! Do you not know?” said the woman; “but if — you know very well, since it was on your account she was condemned.”

“Who?”

“Heloise.”

“Your daughter?”

“Yes, she — my poor child!”

“Condemned! by whom? How? Why?”

“Because she sold a bouquet.”

“What bouquet?”

“A bouquet of carnations. She is not a flower-girl,” continued the old woman, as if endeavouring to collect her thoughts, “then how could she sell this bouquet?”

The Queen shuddered; she felt an invisible link connected this scene with her present situation, and convinced her the time must not be lost in useless conversation.

“My good woman,” said she, “allow me to pass, I entreat you; you can tell me all this by-and-by.”

“No, now; you must pardon me, and I must assist you to escape, that he may save my daughter.”

The Queen turned pale as death. “Mon Dieu!” murmured she, raising her eyes to heaven, then turning towards the municipal, “Monsieur,” said she, “have the kindness to remove this woman; you see that she is mad.”

“Go, go, mother,” said the municipal; “decamp.”

But the woman clung to the wall, still reiterating, “She must pardon me, that he may save my daughter.”

“But who is he?”

“The man in the mantle.”

“Sister,” said Madame Elizabeth, “try to console her.”

“Oh, willingly,” said the Queen; “I believe, indeed, that will be the shortest way;” then turning towards the mad woman, “What do you desire, good woman?” said she.

“I wish you to pardon me all the suffering I have caused you by my unjust behaviour — all the denunciations I have made; and trust that when you see the man in he mantle, you will command him to save my daughter; for he will do all that you desire.”

“I do not know whom you mean by the man in the mantle,” said the Queen; “but that is not the question. If it is necessary to your piece of mind to obtain my pardon for all the offences you imagine you have committed against me, I freely forgive you, my poor woman, from the depths of my heart, and trust only that any one I may have offended will as sincerely pardon me.”

“Oh!” cried the woman Tison, with an indescribable accent of joy, “he will save my child, since you have forgiven me. Your hand, madame! your hand — ”

The Queen astonished, and at a loss to comprehend the meaning, presented her hand to the woman, who seized it, and ardently pressed her lips upon it. At this moment the hoarse voice of a hawker was heard in the Temple resounding from the street.

“This,” cried he, “is the judgment and decree condemning Heloise Tison to the penalty of death for the crime of conspiracy.”

Scarcely had these words reached the ears of the woman Tison, than rising from her knees, with an air of dogged resolution, she extended her arms to impede the passage of the Queen.

“Oh, mon Dieu!” cried the Queen, who had not lost one word of this sentence, so dreadful to her ears.

“Condemned to death!” cried the mother; “my child condemned! — my Heloise lost! He has not then saved her — and now he cannot save her! Too late — too late!”

“Poor woman,” said the Queen, “believe me, I feel for you.”

“You!” said she, looking at her fiercely with her blood-shot eyes. “You pity me? Never — never!”

“You are mistaken. I pity you from my heart; but do pray allow me to pass.”

The woman burst into a hoarse laugh.

“Let you pass? No, no. I would have assisted you to escape, because he promised, if I did so, he would rescue my daughter; but since she is condemned to death you shall not alone be saved.”

“Messieurs!” cried the Queen, “come to my aid. Do you not see that this woman is quite mad?”

“No, I am not mad; I know well what I am saying!” cried the woman. “It is the truth — there was a conspiracy, and Simon discovered all. It was my poor daughter who sold the bouquet. She confessed it before the revolutionary tribunal.... A bouquet of carnations... they had some papers concealed in them.”

“Madame,” said the Queen, “in the name of Heaven!”

The voice of the crier was again heard, repeating —

“This is the judgment and decree condemning the girl Heloise Tison to the punishment of death for the crime of conspiracy.”

“Do you hear it?” screamed the lunatic to the groups of national guards scattered around: “do you hear? Condemned to death: it is you who have killed my daughter — you, Austrian, you!”

“Messieurs,” said the Queen, “if you will not release me from this mad woman, allow me at least to return to my apartments. I cannot support the reproaches of this woman, unjust as they are; it crushes my heart,” and she turned away, sighing deeply.

“Yes, yes — weep, hypocrite!” cried the maddened wretch; “your bouquet will cost you dear.... She must have suspected you. Thus it is you doom all those to death who serve you. You carry misery, Austrian, everywhere! Your friends are dead — your husband and your defenders have all perished — and now they will sacrifice my unhappy child! When will your turn come, that no more may die for you?” And the miserable creature accompanied these last words with threatening gestures. The Queen hid her face between her hands.

“Unhappy woman,” observed Madame Elizabeth, venturing to speak, “are you aware that she whom you address is the Queen?”

“The Queen!” repeated the maniac, whose madness every moment increased, “if she is the Queen, let her defend my poor girl against the hangman, who seeks her life.... Who will show mercy to my poor Heloise?.... Kings can show mercy.... Render me back my child, and I will acknowledge her as queen. Till then, she is only a woman, and a woman who brings misery upon all, and kills all — ”

“Oh! have pity, madame!” cried Marie Antoinette; “you see my tears and distress,” and she again made an attempt to pass, not from any hope of escape, but to free herself from this cruel attack.

“You shall not pass!” roared the old woman. “You want to escape, Madame Veto.... I know it all, the man in the mantle told me you want to go and rejoin the Prussians. But you shall not escape,” continued she, clasping the robe of the Queen. “I will prevent you. A la lanterne, Madame Veto! To arms, citizens! let us march — ”

And with her arms wrestling, her grizzled locks dishevelled, and hanging over her haggard countenance — her blood-shot eyes — the unfortunate creature fell to the ground, in her fall tearing the robe she still held in her hand. The Queen, terrified, but disembarrassed at least of the maniac, was flying to the side of the garden, when all at once a terrible cry resounded, mingled with loud barking, and accompanied with a strange uproar, arousing the national guards from their stupor, who, attracted by the scene, immediately surrounded Marie Antoinette.

“To arms! to arms! Treason!” shouted a man, whom from his voice the Queen recognised as the shoemaker Simon. Near this man, who, sword in hand, guarded the threshold of the cabin, little Jet was barking furiously.

“To arms! every one to his post!” cried Simon; “we are betrayed. Compel the Austrian to turn back. To arms! to arms!” An officer ran forward, when Simon spoke to him, pointing with enraged gestures to the interior of the hut. The officer in his turn then cried “To arms!”

“Jet! Jet!” called the Queen, advancing some steps. But the dog only continued to bark more furiously. The national guard ran to arms, and rushed towards the hut, whilst the municipals took possession of the Queen, her daughter and sister, and compelled them to re-enter the wicket, which they closed behind them.

“Prepare your arms!” cried the municipals to the sentinels. And the sound of firearms was heard.

“It is there! it is there!’’ cried Simon.” under the trap I saw it shut again, I am certain of it. Besides, the Austrian’s dog, a good little animal, who was not in the plot, barked at the conspirators, who are no doubt still in the cave. Hold! he barks again.”

Indeed Jet, instigated by Simon’s cries and shouts, began to bark again more strenuously than before. The officer seized the ring of the trap, but seeing he was unable to raise it, two of the grenadiers went to his assistance, but without the slightest success.

“You perceive they hold the trap-door from below. Fire through the trap-door, my friends, fire!” said Simon.

“Oh!” cried Madame Plumeau, “you will break my bottles.”

“Fire!” repeated Simon, “fire!”

“Be silent, brawler,” said the officer, “and bring some hatchets, and begin to open the planks. Now let a few men hold themselves in readiness, and fire into the trap-door the instant an opening is made.” The groaning of planks and a sudden jerk informed the national guards that some movement was taking place in the interior. Directly afterwards they heard a motion under ground, like an iron portcullis being closed.

“Courage!” said the officer to the sappers, who worked indefatigably. The hatchets entered the planks. Twenty guns were lowered in the direction of the opening, which enlarged every moment. But through the aperture no one could be seen. The officer lighted a torch and threw it into the cave. It was empty. They then raised the trap-door, which now offered no resistance. “Follow me!” said the officer, bravely descending the ladder.

“En avant! en avant!” cried the national guards, following the example of their officer.

“Ah! Madame Plumeau,” said Simon, “you lent your cellar to the aristocrats.”

The wall was broken down, the humid soil was trampled by numerous feet, and a conduit of three feet wide and five feet high, like the branch of a trench, plunged in the direction of “la Rue de la Corderie,” The officer ventured into this opening, resolved to follow these aristocrats into the bowels of the earth; but when he had advanced three or four steps, he found all further progress impeded by an iron grating.

“Stop!” said he to those who were closely pressing behind him; “we can proceed no longer, here is a physical impediment.”

“Well,” said the municipal, who, having placed the prisoners in security, anxiously awaited the news; “well, what have you discovered?”

“Parbleu!” said the officer, reappearing, “it was doubtless a conspiracy; the aristocrats wanted to carry off the Queen, and of course she connived with them.”

“Peste!” cried the municipal, “send some one after the citizen Santerre, that he may inform the Commune.”

“Soldiers,” said the officer, “remain in this cellar, and if any one presents himself, kill him.”

And the officer, having issued his orders, remounted to make his report.

“Ah! ah!” said Simon, rubbing his hands — ” ah! ah! will they still say I am a fool? Brave Jet! Jet is a famous patriot, Jet has saved the Republic. Come here, Jet, come.” And the brute who had coaxed the poor little dog, the moment he approached him, raised his foot, and kicked him to a distance of several feet. “I like you, Jet,” said he; “ah! you will cut your mistress’s throat. Come here, Jet, come.” But instead this time of obeying him, Jet ran away howling, on the road towards the keep.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE TUSCADIN.

IT WAS NEAR TWO o'clock. Louis was promenading up and down in Maurice's room, while Agesilas polished his master's boots in the antechamber, only for the greater convenience of conversation the door remained open, and during his walk Louis stopped, and often addressed a few questions to the official. "And you say, citizen Agesilas, that your master left home this morning?"

"Oh! mon Dieu! yes."

"At the usual hour?"

"It might be ten minutes earlier, or ten minutes later, I cannot say exactly."

"And you have not seen him since?"

"No, citizen."

Louis continued his walk, and after three or four turns again stopped, and renewed his questions.

"Had he his sword with him?" demanded he.

"When he goes to the section, he invariably carries it."

"Are you sure he has gone to the section?"

"At least he told me so."

"In that case I shall join him," said Louis, "and if we miss one another, tell him I have been, and left to rejoin him."

"Wait," said Agesilas.

"Why?"

"I hear his footstep on the staircase."

Almost at the same moment the door opened, and Maurice entered. Louis bestowed a hasty glance upon him, and perceived nothing extraordinary in his appearance.

"So you are come at last," said he. "I have been waiting here these two hours."

"So much the better," said Maurice, smiling, "that has afforded you plenty of time to compose distichs and quatrains."

“Alas! mon ami, I have made none.”

“Why, is the world coming to an end?”

“My dear Maurice, I am very unhappy.”

“You unhappy?”

“Yes, I am miserable. I am suffering from remorse.”

“Remorse?”

“Eh! mon Dieu! Yes,” said Louis. “Between you and her there was no alternative — between you and her I would not hesitate, but, you see, Arthemise is in despair, for she was her friend.”

“Poor girl!”

“And it was she who gave me her address.”

“Yon had much better have allowed things to take their natural course.”

“Yes; and at this very moment you would have been condemned in her stead.”

“Powerfully argued, dear friend. But I who come to ask your advice, think you are too wise for that.”

“Never mind, ask away.”

“This poor girl: do you understand? I wish to attempt some means of saving her. Even if I could only give or receive a blow in her defence, I feel as if it would do me good.”

“You are mad, Louis,” said Maurice, shrugging his shoulders. “If I made an appeal to the revolutionary tribunal?’’ “It is too late, she is condemned.”

“Truly,” said Louis, “it is dreadful to see this poor girl sacrificed thus.”

“The more *so,* since it was my safety has entailed her death. But after all, Louis, we have one consolation. She was a conspirator.”

“Mon Dieu,” said Louis, “does not every one conspire now-a-days? She has done no more, poor girl, than every one else does.”

“Neither complain too much, nor too loudly, my friend,” said Maurice, “for we have to bear our share in this trouble. Believe me, we are not so fully cleared from the accusation of being her accomplices, that no stain remains behind. To-day, at the section, I was termed ‘Girondin,’ by the Captain of Chasseurs of Saint Leu; and I, at the same time, found it necessary to convince him, by a blow from my sword, that he was mistaken.”

“Then, that was the reason you returned so late?”

“Just so.”

“But why did you not inform me?”

“Because in affairs of this nature one cannot restrain oneself, and it is necessary to conclude them immediately, that they may make no noise.”

“And this canaille called you ‘Girondin,’ Maurice?”

“Eh, mon Dieu! yes; and this will convince you that another adventure of this nature, and we become unpopular; and you well know, Louis, in these times, unpopular is a symbolical term for suspect.”

“I well know it,” said Louis; “and that word appals the bravest heart; hut never mind.... It is repugnant to my feelings to allow this poor gill to die without soliciting her pardon, this poor Heloise to be led to the guillotine without asking her forgiveness.”

“What do you wish to do?”

“I wish you to remain here; you have nothing to reproach yourself with. With me, you see, the case is very different. Since I can do nothing for her, I will meet her on her way. I wish to go there, Maurice; do you comprehend me? She might even only give me her hand.”

“I will accompany you, then,” said Maurice.

“Impossible, my friend: you are a municipal, secretary to a section, and you have been tried, whilst I have only been your defender; they will think you guilty, therefore remain here. As for me, it is quite another thing. I risk nothing, and therefore may go.”

“Go, then,” said he; “but be prudent.”

Louis smiled, shook Maurice’s hand, and went out. Maurice opened his window, and looked a sad adieu; but before Louis had turned the corner of the street, he looked back more than once, and each time, as if drawn by magnetic influence and sympathy, Louis turned round, looked at him, and smiled. At last, when he disappeared at the corner of the quay, Maurice closed the window, threw himself into a fauteuil, and fell into one of those dreamy moods which in people of strong mind and vigorous constitution, often are the presentiments of misfortune, as they resemble the calm generally precursor of the storm. He was softly awakened from his reverie, or rather state of stupor, by his official, who, on returning from the execution of some commission, entered with the sprightly air of a servant anxious to communicate his budget of news. Seeing his master preoccupied, he dared not interrupt him, and therefore consoled himself by constantly passing and re-passing before him, without any reasonable cause for so doing.

“What is it?” at length said Maurice; “speak, if you have anything to tell me.”

“Ah! citizen, another desperate conspiracy.”

Maurice merely shrugged his shoulders.

“A conspiracy enough to make the hair of one’s head stand upright,” continued Agesilas.

“Indeed!” replied Maurice, like a man accustomed to hear daily of thirty conspiracies at this epoch.

“Yes, citizen,” replied Agesilas; “it drives me to frenzy, you see. Nothing else is thought of — it makes one’s flesh creep.”

“Let us hear this conspiracy,” said Maurice.

“The Austrian has failed in her attempt to escape.”

“Nonsense,” said Maurice, beginning to listen with the greatest avidity.

“It seems,” continued Agesilas.” that the widow Capet was in communication with the girl Tison, who is to be guillotined to-day. She has not escaped, unfortunate creature!”

“How had the Queen communication with this girl?” demanded Maurice, who felt the perspiration exuding at every pore.

“Through a carnation. Can you imagine, citizen, how they could have conveyed the plan to her in a carnation?”

“In a carnation? Who did this?”

“Monsieur le Chevalier de — wait then. He bears a fine title — but as for me, I forget all these names. A Chevalier de Chateau — what a fool I am! it is not a Chateau — a Chevalier de Maison.”

“De Maison Rouge?”

“That is it.”

“Impossible!”

“How impossible? when I told you they have found the trap-door, the subterranean passage and coaches.”

“On the contrary, you have told me nothing about all this.”

“Well, I am going to tell you, then.”

“Go on, then. If it is a story, it is at least a good one.”

“No, citizen, it is not a story; and, in proof of that, I had it from a citizen porter. The aristocrats had dug a mine, and this mine commenced at la Hue de la Corderie, and terminated in the cellar of the little cabin belonging to Madame Plumeau, who has narrowly escaped being arrested as an accomplice. This widow Plumeau — you see it all now, I hope?”

"Yes," replied Maurice; "but afterwards?"

"Capet's wife was to escape by the subterranean passage. She already had her foot on the first step, when Simon caught her by her robe. They beat to arms in the city, and the recall in the sections. Do you not hear the drum? There! It is said that the Prussians are at Dumartin, and have reconnoitred as far as the frontiers."

In the midst of this flow of words, a mixture of truth and falsehood, probability and impossibility, Maurice seized the winding thread. All sprung from the carnation presented before his eyes to the Queen, and purchased by himself from the poor miserable flower-girl. This carnation contained the plan of the plot, the whole of which now burst upon him, connected as it was with the events, more or less true, detailed by Agesilas. At this moment the noise of the drum was heard still, and Maurice listened to the crier in the street.

"Tremendous conspiracy discovered at the Temple by the Citizen Simon. Grand conspiracy in favour of the widow Capet, discovered at the Temple."

"Yes, yes," said Maurice; "it is just as I thought. There is some truth in all this. And Louis, in the midst of this popular excitation, goes to offer himself to this girl, and make himself a suspect."

Maurice took up his hat, clasped his swordbelt, and with two bounds was in the street.

"Where can he be?" said Maurice to himself. "Probably on the road to the concierge." And he rushed towards the quay.

At the extreme end of the Quai de la Megisserie, some pikes and bayonets, standing in the midst of the crowd, attracted his attention, and he fancied in the centre he could distinguish the costume of a National Guard, and in the group signs of hostile movements. He ran, his heart oppressed with the dread of impending misfortune, towards the assemblage on the banks of the river. The National Guard pressed by the company of Marseillais was Louis. He was very pale, his lips compressed, his eyes menacing: his hand upon the handle of his sword, measuring the place best calculated to strike the blows he fully intended to inflict on his cowardly assailants. Within two feet from Louis stood Simon. He was laughing ferociously, and pointing him out to the Marseillais and the populace, saying —

"Look at him! look well at him! He is one of those that I drove from the Temple yesterday for an aristocrat. He is one of those who favoured the correspondence with the carnations. This is an accomplice of the girl Tison, who will pass here presently. Well, do you see? — he walks quietly on the quay whilst his coadjutor goes to the guillotine; and, perhaps, she was even more to him than an assistant. She might be his mistress, and he is here to bid her farewell, or to try and save her!”

Louis was not the man to endure much more. He drew his sword from its scabbard. At the same time the crowd opened to admit a man, who rushed headlong into the group, whose broad shoulders had already knocked down two or three spectators who were preparing to become actors in this scene.

“Be happy, Simon,” said Maurice. “You regretted no doubt, that I was not with my friend to enable you to turn your new title of Denunciator to full account. Denounce! Simon, denounce! I am here.”

“Ma foi! Yes!” said Simon, with his hideous laugh; “and your arrival is very apropos. This,” continued he, “is the elegant Maurice Lindey, who was accused at the same time as the girl Tison, but was acquitted because he was rich.”

“A la lanterne! A la lanterne!” cried the Marseillais.

“Yes, forsooth, you had better make the attempt,” said Maurice, and advancing a step he pricked one of the foremost of the cutthroats in the forehead, so that the blood from his wound nearly blinded him.

“Have at the murderer!” cried the latter.

The Marseillais lowered their pikes, raised their hatchets, and loaded their guns, while the frightened crowd dispersed, leaving the two friends to contend alone against this storm of blows. They regarded each other with a last sad, yet sublime smile, while calmly awaiting their destruction from the whirlwind of iron and flame which threatened them, when, all at once, the door of the house against which they were leaning suddenly opened, and a swarm of young people, attired in the habits of those termed “Muscadins,” or Fops, each wearing a sword and brace of pistols in his girdle, rushed upon the Marseillais, and were instantly engaged in a terrific contest.

“Hurrah! hurrah!” cried Maurice and Louis simultaneously, animated by this unexpected relief, without reflecting that to fight in the ranks of the new-comers was to confirm Simon’s accusation, “Hurrah!” But if they were forgetful of their own safety, another thought for them. A short young man, about five-and-twenty years of age, with blue eyes, who fought without any intermission, with infinite science and valour, with a heavy sword, which any one would have thought his delicate and feminine hand incapable of wielding, perceiving that Maurice and Louis, instead of escaping by the door, which seemed to have been left open with that intention, remained fighting by his side, turned round, saying in a low voice: “Fly directly through this door; pay no attention to what we may do here, or you will uselessly compromise yourselves.” Then, seeing the two friends hesitate, he suddenly cried out, addressing himself to Maurice: “Away,” said he; “no patriots among us, Citizen Lindey; we are aristocrats here.”

At these words, united to the audacity which would induce a man publicly to accuse himself of what at this period must lead to certain death, the crowd uttered a loud shout. But the fair young man, without evincing any symptoms of alarm, pushed Maurice and Louis into the alley, where he closed the door behind them. He then, with the three or four friends who had been assisting him, threw himself into the melee, which was now considerably augmented by the approach of the fatal cart. Maurice and Louis, thus miraculously saved, regarded each other in amazement; but comprehending they had no time to lose, sought for some outlet. This seemed to have been managed expressly for them. They entered a court, and at the end discovered a small door concealed, which opened into la Hue Saint-Germaine-l’Auxerrois. At this moment a detachment of gendarmes opened from Pont au Change, who had soon swept over the quay, although, from the traverse street where our two friends had concealed themselves, they heard for an instant the noise of an obstinate struggle. They preceded the cart which conducted the hapless Heloise to the scaffold.

“Gallop!” cried a voice, “gallop!”

The cart preceded at a quick pace, and Louis saw the unfortunate girl standing, a smile upon her lips, and calm reliance in her eye, but was unable to exchange even a gesture with her, as she passed without seeing him, in the midst of a whirlwind of people, shouting, “To the guillotine with the aristocrat! to the guillotine!” The noise decreased in the distance till they reached the Tuileries. Then the little door through which Maurice and Louis had escaped again opened, and three or four Muscadins, with their clothes torn and stained with blood, passed through. It was probably all that remained of the little troop. The fair young man went through the last.

“Alas!” said he, “this cause is then accursed.” And casting from him his sword, notched and bloody, he rushed towards la Rue des Lavandieres.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE CHEVALIER DE MAISON ROUGE.

MAURICE hastened to return to the section to enter a complaint against Simon. It is true that before quitting Maurice, Louis had found a more expeditious way; this was to collect some Thermopyles to lie in wait for him, and kill him in a pitched battle. But Maurice was strenuously opposed to this plan.

“You are ruined,” said he, “if you make use of these means. Crush Simon, but do it legally. That ought to be an easy thing enough to the lawyers.”

Consequently, the next morning, Maurice laid a formal complaint before the section, but was both astonished and annoyed when the President turned a deaf ear, excusing himself by saying he could not interfere between two good citizens, each incited by the love of country.

“Good,” said Maurice. “I know now how to act to merit the reputation of a good citizen. To assemble the people, and to assassinate a man who displeases you; this you call being ‘incited by love of country.’ Well, I return to Louis’s opinion, which I was wrong to dispute. After today, as you hear, I shall adopt patriotism, and shall first experimentalize upon Simon.”

“Citizen Maurice,” said the President, “you are, after all; perhaps more to blame in this affair than Simon. He has discovered a conspiracy, which it was not his province to do so. You have seen nothing, although the discovery formed part of your duty; and more, you have held communication, accidentally or intentionally we know not which, with the enemies of the nation.”

“I?” said Maurice. “Well, this is something new. And with whom, pray, Citizen President?”

“With the Citizen Maison Rouge.”

“I?” said Maurice, stupefied. “I had communication with the Chevalier de Maison Rouge? I do not even know him — I never — ”

“You have been seen speaking to him.”

“I?”

"To shake his hand."

"I?"

"Yes."

"Where? When, Citizen President?" said Maurice, carried away by the firm conviction of his own innocence. "You have lied."

"Your zeal for your country carries you too far, Citizen Maurice," said the President, "and you will regret what you have said, when I tell you I can prove what I say to be true. I have advanced nothing but the truth. Here are three different reports accusing you."

"Now," said Maurice, "do you really think me simple enough to believe in your 'Chevalier de Maison Rouge?'"

"And why should you not believe it?"

"Because it is only the ghost of a conspirator, with whom you always have a conspiracy ready to amuse your enemies."

"Read the denunciations."

"I will read nothing," said Maurice. "I protest I have never seen the Chevalier — never spoken to him. Let any one who doubts my word of honour come and tell me so. I shall know how to answer him."

The President shrugged his shoulders. Maurice, who did not wish to be in arrears with any one, did the same. An air of gloomy silence pervaded the remainder of the sitting. After the meeting was concluded, the President, a staunch patriot, raised to the highest rank in the district by the votes of his fellow-citizens, approached Maurice, and said — " Come, Maurice, I want to speak to you."

Maurice followed the President, who conducted him into a little cabinet contiguous to that where the sittings were held. On arriving there, he regarded Maurice for a moment in silence; then placing his hand on his shoulder —

"Maurice," said he, "I knew and esteemed your father; this makes me esteem and love you. Believe me, you incur great danger from want of faith — the first falling off of a truly revolutionary spirit. Maurice, my friend, they who lose their faith also lose their fidelity. You do not believe in the enemies of the nation, therefore you pass near without seeing them, and become the instrument in their plots without being aware of it."

"What, the devil!" said Maurice. "I know, Citizen, I am a man of feeling, and possess some share of patriotic zeal, but my zeal does not render me a fanatic. There are twenty pretended conspiracies, to which the public assign the same name. I demand to face my accuser."

"You will not believe in the conspirator, Maurice," said the President; "then tell me, do you believe in the red carnations, for which Heloise Tison was yesterday guillotined?"

Maurice started.

"Do you believe in the subterranean passage, under the Temple garden, communicating from the cellar of the Citoyenne Plumeau to a certain house in La Rue de la Corderie?"

"No," said Maurice.

"Then do as Thomas the Apostle did — 'Go and see."'

"I am not on guard at the Temple, and they would not allow me to enter there."

"Any one may enter the Temple now."

"How is that?"

"Read the report, since you are so incredulous. I shall only proceed by official information."

"Well," said Maurice, reading the report, "this is to the point."

"Continue."

"They have transported the Queen to the Conciergerie," cried Maurice.

"Do you think that from a dream, or what you call an imaginary idea, or an idle story, that the Committee of Public Safety would have adopted so grave a measure?"

"This measure has been adopted, but will never be executed like many more I have seen, and all — "

"Read to the end," said the president, and he presented him with the last paper.

"The receipt of Richard, the gaoler of the Conciergerie," cried Maurice; "she has been there these two hours." This time Maurice remained deep in thought.

"The Commune, as you know," continued the president, "acts with profound judgment. It is digging a furrow long and straight in its course; its measures are not puerile, and it has put in execution the principle of Cromwell — 'It is not necessary to strike the king except upon the head.' Read this secret note from the minister of the police."

Maurice read: — "Seeing that we possess the certainty that the ci-devant Chevalier de Maison Rouge is in Paris — that he has been in several places

— that he has left traces of his appearance in various plots happily frustrated, I request all chiefs of the different sections to redouble their vigilance — ”

“Well?” said the president.

“I must believe this,” said Maurice, and he continued: “Description of the Chevalier de Maison Rouge. In height, five feet three inches, fair hair, blue eyes, straight nose, chestnut coloured beard,’ dimpled chin, soft voice, and hands like a female’s.”

At this description a strange light burst upon Maurice; he thought of the young man who commanded the troop of Muscadins, and who, on the preceding evening, saved the lives of himself and Louis, and so valiantly drew his sword upon the Marseillais in their defence.

“Mordieu!” exclaimed Maurice, “it must be he; in that case the denomination would not be false. I spoke to him, but I cannot remember taking his hand.”

“Maurice,” said the president, “what do you say to all this now, mon ami?”

“That I believe it,” said Maurice, musing sadly, who for some time past, without understanding what evil influence saddened his life, had noticed everything darkening around him.

“Do not jest thus with popularity,” said the president. “In these days, Maurice, popularity is life. As for unpopularity, it is to be suspected of treason, and the Citizen Maurice Lindey ought not even to be suspected of being a traitor.”

Maurice had nothing to reply to sentiments so much in accordance with his own. He thanked his old friend and quitted the section.

“Ah!” murmured he, “there is too much suspicion and skirmishing. Now,” drawing a deep breath, “now for peace, innocence, and joy — now to Genevieve.” And Maurice took the road to the old Rue St. Jacques.

When he reached the abode of the master tanner, Dixmer and Morand were supporting Genevieve, who was suffering from a violent attack of hysterics. Thus, instead of entering unceremoniously as he was accustomed to do, a servant met him in the passage.

“Announce me,” said he, “and if Dixmer cannot conveniently receive me, I will retire.”

The domestic entered the little pavilion, whilst Maurice remained in the garden. It seemed to him that something strange was going on in the house, and the workmen, instead of being occupied in their usual employment, were walking listlessly about the garden. At length Dixmer himself appeared.

“Come in, dear Maurice,” said he; “come in, you are not one of those against whom the door is closed.”

“What is the matter?” inquired the young man.

“Genevieve is ill,” said Dixmer; “indeed, more than ill — she is delirious.”

“Ah, mon Dieu!” cried the young man, overcome at again encountering trial and suffering; “what, then, is the matter with her?”

“You are aware, mon cher,” said Dixmer, “one never knows anything concerning the illness of women, especially their husbands.”

Genevieve was lying down on a chaise-lounge: near her stood Morand, offering her some salts, which she smelt occasionally.

“Well?” said Dixmer.

“Always the same thing,” replied Morand.

“Heloise! Heloise!” murmured the young woman, from between her closed teeth and white lips.

“Heloise!” repeated Maurice, in much surprise.

“Mon Dieu! yes,” replied Dixmer, quickly; “Genevieve most unfortunately saw the cart pass conveying the unhappy girl to the scaffold. Since then she has had five or six attacks of hysterics, and keeps on continually calling upon Heloise. But the most astonishing thing of all is, that in her she recognised the girl who sold the carnations, which you already know about,” said Morand.

“Certainly, I do know,” said Maurice, “when they barely failed of cutting my throat.”

“Ah! we have heard all that, dear Maurice, and, believe me, we have not been slightly alarmed; but Morand was at the sitting, and saw you fully acquitted and liberated.”

“Silence!” said Maurice; “she again speaks.”

“Oh! those empty, unintelligible words,” said Dixmer.

“Maurice,” murmured Genevieve; “they are going to kill Maurice. To him, Chevalier — to him!” A profound silence followed these words. “Maison Rouge,” again murmured Genevieve; “Maison Rouge.”

Maurice felt a slight suspicion, but he could make out nothing clearly, and was too much affected by the suffering of Genevieve to comment much upon her words.

“Have you called in a physician?” demanded Maurice.

“Oh! it will prove nothing,” said Dixmer; “a slight delusion, that is all.” And he shook his wife so violently by the arm, that she revived, and uttering a shrill cry, opened her eyes, which till now had remained closed.

‘‘Ah, you are both here, and Maurice with you. Oh! I am so glad to see you, mon ami; if you knew what I have — ” she corrected herself — ” what we have suffered for the last two days.”

“Yes, we are all here,” said Maurice; “have no more terror on that account. But there is one name above all others you must not accustom yourself to pronounce, seeing that at this moment it does not bear a very high repute.”

“What name?” quickly demanded Genevieve.

“The Chevalier de Maison Rouge.”

“Have I named the Chevalier de Mason Rouge?” inquired Genevieve, bewildered.

“Without doubt you have,” said Dixmer; “but understand, Maurice, there is nothing surprising in that, since it is said he was an accomplice with the girl Tison, and that it was he who concocted the whole plan of escape so happily frustrated yesterday.”

“I do not say there *is* anything surprising,” said Maurice; “I only say it is better to keep it concealed.”

“Who?” demanded Dixmer.

“The Chevalier de Maison Rouge, parbleu! The Commune seeks for him, and the bloodhounds have a fine scent.”

“Provided that, before they arrest him,” said Morand, “he has not accomplished some new enterprise that may succeed better than the last.”

“At all events,” said Maurice, “it will not be in favour of the Queen.”

“Why not?” demanded Morand.

“Because she is henceforth shielded from his bold attempts.”

“Where is she, then?” inquired Dixmer.

“At the Conciergerie,” replied Maurice; “she was taken there this evening.” Dixmer, Genevieve, and Morand uttered a cry which Maurice mistook for one of surprise. “Thus you see,” continued he, “adieu to the Chevalier’s plans for the Queen. The Conciergerie is more secure than the Temple.” Morand and Dixmer exchanged looks unperceived by Maurice.

“Ah! mon Dieu!” said Maurice; “Madame Dixmer has turned faint again.”

“Genevieve!” said Dixmer; “you must go to bed, my child; you suffer.”

Maurice took the hint. He respectfully kissed Genevieve’s hand, and quitted the house. Morand left with him, and accompanied him as far as the old Rue St. Jacques, where he parted with him to exchange some words with a man, a superior sort of domestic, who held a horse ready saddled and bridled. Maurice was so much occupied with his own thoughts, that he did not even inquire the man’s name; indeed, he and Morand had not exchanged a word since they quitted the house together. He took the road to la Rue des Fosses Saint Victor, and gained the quay. “It is strange,” said he, walking on. “Is my mind weakened, or are these events assuming importance? But everything appears to me as if viewed through a magnifying glass.” And to recover his equanimity. Maurice presented his face to the breeze, and leaning against the parapet of the bridge, was soon lost in thought.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE PATROL.

AS HE LOST HIMSELF in these reflections, and leaning against the parapet of the bridge enjoyed a melancholy pleasure in gazing on the dark still water, he heard the measured tread of a little troop, like that of a patrol. Maurice turned round; it was a company of the National Guard, arrived by the other extremity; and in the obscurity he fancied he recognised Louis. It was he, indeed. The instant he saw his friend Maurice he ran towards him with open arms.

"Found at last," cried Louis. "Morbleu! it is not without some trouble that we have rejoined you.

'But since I find a friend so fond, My fate assumes an aspect new.'

This time you will not complain, I hope, for I have given you Racine instead of Louis."

"But what do you do here as patrol?" inquired Maurice, anxiously.

"I am chief of the expedition, mon ami; the business is to establish our blemished reputation upon its original footing." Then turning towards his company — " Carry arms! Present arms! Shoulder arms!"

"There, mes enfans, it is not yet sufficiently dark, so you can talk over your little affairs, while we follow your example." Then returning to Maurice, "I have heard great news at the Section to-day," continued Louis.

What?"

"First, that you and I are beginning to be suspected."

"I know it. What next?"

"Secondly, that the whole conspiracy of the carnations was conducted by the Chevalier de Maison Rouge."

"I know that also."

"But this you do not know; that the conspiracy of the carnations and that of the subterranean passage are one and the same."

"Again, I know it."

"Then let us pass on to the third piece of news. This I am certain you cannot know. We go, this night, to capture the Chevalier de Maison Rouge."

“To take the Chevalier de Maison Rouge?”

“Yes.”

“Have you then turned gendarme?”

“No, but I am a patriot. A patriot owes something to his country. Now my country is horribly ravaged by this Chevalier, who forms plot upon plot. Well, my country commands me, being a patriot, to free her from this Chevalier de Maison Rouge, who distresses her horribly, and I obey my country.”

“It is all the same,” said Maurice, “but it is singular that you should be charged with this commission.”

“I am not charged, I charge myself, or rather I should say I solicited the commission. It required a brilliant stroke to reinstate us in our former position, while our re-establishment will not only prove security for our lives, hut still more the right of putting, at the very first opportunity offered, six ounces of lead into the belly of that hideous Simon.”

“But how are they sure it was the Chevalier who was the instigator of this subterranean plot?”

“They are not yet certain, but they presume so.”

“You proceed, then, upon inference?”

“No, we proceed by certainty.”

“How have you arranged all this?”

“Listen.”

“I am listening.”

“I had scarcely heard the cry ‘Grand conspiracy discovered by the Citizen Simon,’ that beast Simon (the miserable is everywhere), than I wished to judge of the truth for myself. Then, they named the subterranean passage.”

“Does it really exist?”

“It does; I have seen it; seen it with both my eyes. That I call seeing.

“There, why do you not whistle?”

“Because that is Moliere, and besides, these events, I must confess, appear to me rather too serious for pleasantry.”

“What could we jest about, if we did not jest about serious things?”

“You say, then, that you have seen it?”

“I repeat that I have seen the subterranean passage. It extends from the cellar of the widow Plumeau, to a house in La Rue de la Corderie, number twelve or fourteen, I cannot remember which.”

“Have you passed through it, Louis?”

“I have, the whole length, and, ma foi, it is a trench prettily cut, I can assure you, and moreover it was divided by three iron gratings, which they have been obliged to drive out one after the other, but which in case these conspirators had succeeded, would have given them time, by sacrificing two or three of them, to have placed Madame widow Capet in a place of safety. Happily it is not so, and this hideous Simon has discovered all.”

“But it appears to me,” said Maurice, “those who ought to have been first arrested were the inhabitants of the house in La Rue de la Corderie.”

“This would have been, had they not found the house perfectly uninhabited.”

“But at least this house must belong to some one?”

“Yes, to a new proprietor, but no one knows who; they know the house changed masters three weeks since, and that is all. The neighbours have often heard a noise, but the house being very old, they had imagined it was undergoing thorough repair. As to the late proprietor, he has left Paris. In the meantime I arrived.

“‘Pour Dieu!’ said I to Santerre, drawing him aside, ‘you are in an awkward situation.’

“‘Indeed we are,’ replied he.

“‘This house has been sold, has it not?’

“‘Yes it was, about three weeks ago.’

“‘Was it sold in the presence of a notary?’

“‘Yes.’

“‘Then we must find out all the notaries in Paris, to discover which of them sold this house, and then make him produce the agreement, and underneath will be found the name of the purchaser.’

“‘Well and good!’ said Santerre, ‘that is capital advice, and coming too from a man they accuse of not being a good patriot. Louis! Louis! I will re-establish you, or may the foul fiend seize me!’ To be brief,” continued Louis, “this was what was said and done. The notary was sought for, the act was found, and upon the agreement the name of the culprit was signed. Then Santerre took me aside, and I have engaged to arrest him.”

“Was this man the Chevalier de Maison Rouge?”

“No, only his accomplice, that is to say, in all probability he was so.”

“Then how is it you say you are going to arrest the Chevalier de Maison Rouge?”

“We are going to arrest them all together.”

“Do you, then, know this Chevalier de Maison Rouge?”

“Perfectly.”

“Have you seen the description of him?”

“Parbleu! Santerre gave it to me. Five feet two or three inches, fair hair, blue eyes, straight nose, &c.; besides, I have seen him.”

“When?”

“This very day.”

“Yon have seen him?”

“And so have you also.” Maurice started.

“The short, fair young man who rescued us this morning — he who commanded the troop of Muscadins, who fought so valiantly and struck so hard.”

“Was that the Chevalier?” demanded Maurice.

“Himself. They followed and lost him in the environs of the domicile of our proprietor of La Rue de la Corderie, so that we surmise they live together.”

“It seems probable.”

“It is certain.”

“But it seems to me, Louis,” added Maurice, “that if this evening you arrest those who rescued you this very morning, you are much wanting in gratitude.”

“Go along, then,” said Louis; “why you don’t suppose he saved us for our own sakes, do you?”

“For what else, then?”

“Not at all; they were in ambush to carry off the poor girl, Heloise Tison, as she passed to the scaffold. Our cutthroats embarrassed them, so they fell upon the cutthroats; that was the whole of it. We have been saved by a contre-coup. Now, as the intention is everything, and there was no intention, I have nothing to accuse myself with on the score of ingratitude. Besides, do you see, Maurice, the capital point is necessity, and the necessity is that we should reinstate ourselves by a brilliant achievement. And then I have promised him for you.”

“To whom?”

“To Santerre; he knows that you command this expedition.”

“How can that be?”

“‘Are you sure of arresting these criminals?’ said he to me.

“‘Yes,’ I replied; ‘if Maurice is with me.’

"'But are you sure of Maurice? Some time since he was looked upon as rather lukewarm.'

"'Those who say that are totally deceived. Maurice is no more lukewarm in the cause than I am myself.'

"'And you will answer for his fidelity?'

"'As for my own.' I then went to your house, but could not find you at home. I took this round first because it lay in my way, and then I remembered it was the one you usually frequented; so at last we have met."

"My dear Louis, I am in despair. I do not feel the slightest taste for this expedition. Say that you were not able to find me."

"Impossible! all our men have seen you."

"Well, then, say you met me and I was not willing to join you."

"Again impossible."

"But why so?"

"Because this time you will not only be considered lukewarm, but 'un suspect,' and you well know the fate of these suspects; they are conducted to La Place de la Revolution, and there invited to salute the statue of Liberty, only instead of doing so with the hat they substitute the head."

"Well, Louis, I hardly care how soon; but without doubt it seems strange to you to hear me say so."

Louis opened his eyes wide, and looked at Maurice.

"Well," said Maurice, "I am weary of life."

Louis burst into a roar of laughter.

"Ah! ah!" said Louis, "we have a quarrel with our beloved, and that fills us with melancholy ideas. Allons! bel Amadis! let us return to the man, and from that we shall pass to the citizen. As for me, I am never a better patriot than when I am embroiled with Arthemise. Apropos, her Divinity, the Goddess Reason, charged me with a thousand gracious messages for you."

"Pray thank her for me. Adieu, Louis."

"Adieu! how adieu?''

"Yes, I am going."

"Where are you going?"

"I am going home."

"Maurice, you will ruin yourself."

"I laugh at the idea."

"Maurice, reflect; my friend, reflect."

"I have done so."

“I have not repeated all — ”

“What?”

“That Santerre said to me.”

“What did he say?”

“When I asked for you to be chief of this expedition, he said to me, ‘Take care.”‘

“Of whom?”

“Of Maurice.”

“Of me?”

“Yes, Maurice; and he also added, ‘he often goes into that quarter.’”

“Into what quarter?”

“Into that of Maison Rouge.”

“How?” cried Maurice, “it is not here he hides himself.”

“They fancy so, since it is here his supposed accomplice resides, the purchaser of the house in La Rue de la Corderie.”

“Faubourg Victor?” demanded Maurice.

“Yes; Faubourg Victor.”

“And in what street?”

“In the old Rue St. Jacques.”

“Ah! mon Dieu!” murmured Maurice, as if struck by a thunderbolt. And he pressed his hand before his eyes. But after a moment’s interval, during which he had collected all his courage —

“What trade said he?”

“A master tanner.”

“His name?”

“Dixmer.”

“You are right, Louis,” said Maurice, by a violent effort controlling his emotion; “I will go with you.”

“And you do well; are you armed?”

“I always carry my sword.”‘

“Then also take a pair of pistols.”

“And you?”.

“I have my gun. Carry arms! lower arms! en avant, march!”

The patrol commenced its march, accompanied by Maurice, who walked near Louis. They were preceded by a man dressed in grey, who directed their movements. This was an agent of police. From time to time a shadow might be seen emerging from the angles of the streets or the doors of the houses, exchanging some words with the man in grey. This was the inspector. On arriving at the little street, the man in grey did not hesitate for an instant. He was well instructed, and entered the street at once. Before the door of the garden where Maurice had been so nearly garrotted, he stopped.

"It is here," said he.

"What is here?" demanded Louis.

"It is here we shall find the two principals."

Maurice supported himself against the wall; he felt as if he were sinking to the ground.

"Now," said the man in grey, "there are three entrances — the principal entrance, this one, and another which leads into a pavilion. I shall enter with six or eight men through the principal entrance, in the meantime keep guard here with four or five men, and place three sure men at the entrance to the pavilion."

"I will get over the wall," said Maurice, "and watch in the garden."

"The very thing," said Louis, "as from the interior you can open the door to us."

"Willingly," said Maurice, "but do not ungarrison the passage, or come till I call you. All that passes in the interior I shall see from the garden."

"You are acquainted with the house, then?" demanded Louis.

"Some time back I wished to buy it."

Louis proceeded to conceal his men in the corners of the hedges and angles of the doors, while the agent of police retired with six or eight national guards to force his way by the principal entrance. In an instant the noise of their receding steps was deadened in the distance, without having awakened the least suspicion. Maurice's men were at their post. They declared everything had remained perfectly quiet, and that nothing extraordinary was passing in the old street St. Jacques. Maurice then began to climb the wall.

"Listen," said Louis. "To what?"

"The word?"

"Right."

"Carnation and Vault. Stop all those who cannot repeat these two words. Permit all to pass who can. This is the pass-word."

"Thanks," said Maurice, dropping from the top of the wall into the garden.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE PASS-WORD.

THE FIRST BLOW was terrible. It indeed required all Maurice's self-command to enable him to conceal from Louis how powerfully he was affected by these startling events, but once in the garden, once alone, in the silence of night, his mind became more calm, and his ideas, instead of running disordered through his brain, became once more under the control of reason.

What! this house that Maurice had so often visited with the purest pleasure, this house which had formed for him a paradise on earth, was in reality only a den of sanguinary intrigues; the kind and nattering receptions bestowed on his ardent friendship, resulted then from sheer hypocrisy; the love of Genevieve from fear. The plan of the garden is well known, our readers having more than once followed our young folks there. Maurice glided from bush to bush till he was shaded from the moon's rays by the little outhouse where he had been imprisoned previous to his first introduction to the house. This outhouse was opposite the pavilion inhabited by Genevieve. But this evening, instead of a stationary light gleaming from her chamber, it moved frequently from one window to another. Maurice saw Genevieve through the curtain, evidently raised by accident, hastily packing some things in a portmanteau, and with astonishment beheld some weapons in her hands. He raised himself upon a post to enable him to penetrate farther into the room. A large fire was blazing on the hearth, where Genevieve was destroying papers. In a moment the door opened and a young man entered the room. At first Maurice imagined this man was Dixmer. The young woman ran towards him, seized his hands, and held them for an instant, while they stood facing each other, evidently the subjects of some deep emotion. What this emotion meant he could not divine, as their words did not reach his hiding-place. But all at once Maurice measured his height with his eye.

"This is not Dixmer," murmured he. Indeed the man who had entered was small and delicate, while Dixmer was tall and masculine. Jealousy is an active stimulant, and in a second he had analysed the height of this man in contrast to her husband.

"This is not Dixmer!" murmured he, compelled as it were to repeat it, to convince himself in reality of the perfidy of Genevieve.

He approached still nearer to the window, but the nearer he came the less he saw. His brain was on fire. Near him stood a ladder, the window was seven or eight feet high. He seized it, and planting it firmly against the wall, ascended and placed his eye at an aperture in the curtain.

Genevieve's unknown visitor was a fair young man, about twenty-six or twenty-seven years of age, with blue eyes and an elegant demeanour; he retained both the young woman's hands within his own, and was speaking soothingly, endeavouring fruitlessly to assuage the grief of Genevieve, which was plainly evinced by the tears which suffused her charming countenance. A slight noise, accidentally made by Maurice, caused the young man to turn his face towards the window. Maurice suppressed a cry of astonishment, he recognised his mysterious deliverer of the Place du Chatelet. At this moment Genevieve withdrew her hands from those of the Unknown, and went towards the fireplace to ascertain that the papers were utterly consumed.

Maurice could no longer command his indignation. All those fierce passions which torture the heart of man — Love, vengeance, and jealousy — lacerated him with their fangs of fire. He knew his time, pressed with violence against the badly-closed window, and vaulted into the chamber. At the same moment two pistols were pointed at his breast.

Genevieve, who had turned round at the noise, remained dumb on perceiving Maurice.

"Monsieur," said the young Republican, coldly, to him who for the second time held his life at his disposal, "Monsieur, you are the Chevalier de Maison Rouge."

"And what if I am?" replied the Chevalier.

"It is this — you are a brave man, and consequently a cool man; and I am about to say a few words to you."

"Speak," said the Chevalier, without lowering his pistols.

"You can kill me if you choose, but you cannot do so before I have uttered a cry, or rather I will not die without giving an alarm. Should I do so, the thousand men who surround this house will have reduced it to ashes ere the lapse of ten minutes; so lower your pistols and listen to what I have to say to Madame."

"To Genevieve!" said the Chevalier. "To me!" murmured the young woman. "Yes, to you."

Genevieve, pale as a statue, seized his arm, but he repulsed her coolly.

"You know what you have affirmed, Madame," said Maurice, with profound contempt. "I now see that you have told the truth. You, indeed, do not love Monsieur Morand."

"Maurice! listen to me," said Genevieve. "I have nothing to hear, Madame; you have severed with a single stroke every cord that united my heart with your own. You told me you did not love Morand, but you did not tell me you loved another."

"Monsieur," said the Chevalier, "you spoke of Morand; of what Morand do you speak?"

"Of Morand, the chemist."

"Morand, the chemist, stands before you. Morand, the chemist, is the Chevalier de Maison Rouge."

And extending his hand towards the table, he in an instant replaced his black wig which for so long a period had concealed him from the young Republican.

"Ah, yes," said he, with redoubled disdain; "yes, I understand it is not Morand that you love, since Morand does not exist, but his subterfuge; but, to speak more plainly, this is not the less contemptible."

The Chevalier made a threatening movement.

"Monsieur," said Maurice, "will you permit me to speak for a moment to Madame? Join in the conversation if you like, she will not be long, and then I will answer you."

Genevieve made a sign to Maison Rouge to entreat his patience.

"Thus, Genevieve, thus," continued Maurice, "you have made me a laughing-stock for my friends and a curse to myself. You have rendered me, blind fool that I was, an instrument in all your plots, and an easy tool in your hands. Listen to me. It was an infamous deed, but you will be punished, Madame, and Monsieur, who was going to kill me before your eyes. Before five minutes have elapsed he will be there, lying at your feet; and if his life be spared it will only be to lose his head upon the scaffold."

"He die!" cried Genevieve, "he lose his head upon the scaffold! But you do not know then, Maurice, that he is my protector, and that of my family;

that I will give my life for his, that if he dies I will die, and that if you are my love he is my religion!"

"Ah!" said Maurice, "perhaps you still mean to pretend that you love me. Really women are sadly weak and contemptible." Then turning to the young royalist, "Now, Monsieur," said he, "you must either kill me or die yourself."

"Why so?"

"Because, if you do not kill me, I shall arrest you."

Maurice extended his hand to seize him by the collar.

"I shall not dispute my life with you," said the Chevalier de Maison Rouge. And he flung his pistols on a chair.

"And why do you not dispute your life?"

"Because my life is not equivalent in value to the remorse I should experience in feeling that I had killed a brave man, and more than all since Genevieve loves you."

"Ah!" cried the young woman, clasping her hands, "you are always kind, brave, loyal, and generous, Armand!"

Maurice regarded them both almost stupefied with astonishment.

"Allow me," said the Chevalier," to return to my chamber. I give you my word of honour it is not to escape; I wish to conceal a portrait."

Maurice turned his eyes quickly towards that of Genevieve; it hung as usual in its place. Perhaps the Chevalier divined Maurice's thoughts; perhaps he wished to try his generosity to the utmost.

"I know," said he, "you are a republican, but I know also that you possess a pure and loyal heart. I will trust you to the end."

And he drew a miniature from his breast, and displayed it to Maurice. He beheld before him the portrait of the Queen. Maurice bowed his head, and rested his forehead on his hand.

"I await your orders, monsieur," said Maison Rouge; "if you still desire my arrest, will you knock at this door when it is time to give myself up to you? I value my life only while it is sustained by the hope of serving the Queen."

The Chevalier quitted the room without a gesture from Maurice offering to detain him.

As he left the chamber Genevieve cast herself at the young man's feet.

"Pardon, Maurice," sobbed she, "pardon for all the evil I have done: forgive my deception, forgive me, if only on account of my tears and suffering, for believe me I have wept much and suffered much. My husband left me this morning; I do not know where he is gone, and perhaps I may see him no more. And now I have only one friend left, a more than friend, a brother, and you will destroy him. Pardon, Maurice, pardon!”

Maurice raised the young woman.

“What do you wish?” said he. “There is fatality in all this. Every one stakes his life in these days; the Chevalier de Maison Rouge has played like all the rest, but he has lost the game, and he must therefore pay.”

“That means that he must die, if I understand you rightly?”

“Yes.”

“He must die, and it is you who tell me this?”

“It is not I, Genevieve; it is fatality.”

“Fatality has not uttered the last word, since you can save him.”

“At the expense of my word, and consequently of my honour. I comprehend, Genevieve.”

“Shut your eyes, Maurice; it is all that I ask; and as far as a woman may evince her gratitude I will promise you mine.”

“‘I should close my eyes to little purpose, madame, I assure you; there is a password given, and without this password no one could go out. Besides, the house, as I have told you, is already surrounded.”

“And you know it?”

“Doubtless I know it.”

“Maurice!”

“Well?”

“Mon ami, my dear Maurice, tell me this password, I must know it.”

“Genevieve,” cried Maurice, “do you mean to say to me, ‘Maurice, for the love I bear you, sacrifice your word and your honour, betray your cause, abjure your opinions.’ What do you offer me, Genevieve, in exchange for all this? you who tempt me thus.”

“Oh! Maurice, save him, save him first, and then ask of me my life.”

“Genevieve,” replied Maurice, in a desponding tone, “listen to me. I have one foot on the road to infamy; before I make a final descent I wish at least to find a sufficient excuse for so doing. Genevieve! swear to me you do not love the Chevalier de Maison Rouge.”

“I love him as a sister and a friend: not otherwise, I swear.”

“Genevieve, do you love me?”

“Maurice, I do love you; it is true, as God now hears me.”

“If I do what you ask me, will you thenceforth abandon relatives, friends, country, and fly with the traitor?”

“Maurice! Maurice!”

“She hesitates! she hesitates!” And he turned from her with all the violence of disdain. Genevieve, who was leaning upon him, feeling suddenly her support give way, fell upon her knees.

“Maurice,” said she, rising, and wringing her hands, “I will swear to do all that you require of me. Order, and I will obey.”

“You will be mine, Genevieve?”

“I will.”

“Swear it, by Christ.”

Genevieve extended her arms.

“Mon Dieu,” cried she, “thou didst pardon one poor sinful creature; I trust in thy mercy thou wilt also pardon me.”

And the large tears rained down her cheeks, falling upon her long curls hanging dishevelled on her bosom.

“Not thus!” said Maurice, “swear not thus! or I cannot accept that oath.”

“Mon Dieu!” replied she, “I swear to devote my life to Maurice, to die with him, and, if requisite, for him, if he will save my friend, my brother, my protector, the Chevalier de Maison Rouge.”

“He shall be saved,” said Maurice.

And he went towards his chamber.

“Monsieur,” said he, “resume your costume of the tanner Morand; I return your parole, you are free. And you, madame,” said he, turning to Genevieve, “these are the two passwords, ‘Carnation and Vault.’”And as if he entertained a horror of visiting the chamber where he had just pronounced the words which constituted him a traitor, he opened the window, and sprung from the room into the garden below.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SEARCH.

MAURICE had returned to his post in the garden, opposite the window of Genevieve, only it was now quite dark, she having left her apartment to enter that of the Chevalier.

It was time Maurice returned, for scarcely had he reached the angle of the out-house when the garden-door opened, and the man in grey appeared, followed by Louis, and five or six grenadiers.

“Well?” asked Louis.

“You see I am at my post,” said Maurice.

“And no one has attempted to force the watchword from you?’’ said Louis.

“No one,” replied Maurice, happy to escape by an evasion from the way in which the question was put to him. “No one. And what have you done?”

“Why, we have acquired the certainty that the Chevalier entered the house an hour ago, and has not left it since,” replied the agent of police.

“Do you know his chamber?” said Louis.

“His room is only separated from the Citoyenne Dixmer by a corridor.”

“Ah! Ah!” said Louis. “It appears this Chevalier de Maison Rouge is a gallant.”

Maurice felt the hot blood rush to his forehead; he closed his eyes, yet saw a thousand lights.

“Let us see,” said he, in a choking voice; “upon what do we decide?”

“We have decided,” said the police agent, “to arrest him in his chamber, perhaps in his bed.”

“He does not, then, suspect anything?”

“Absolutely nothing.”

“What is the ground-plan?” inquired Louis.

“We have had an exact plan,” said the man in grey. “A pavilion situated at an angle of the garden, there it is; you ascend four steps, do you see them here? and find yourself on a landing; to the right is the apartment of the Citoyenne Dixmer, no doubt it is that of which we see the window. Facing this window, at the back part, is a door opening on the corridor, and in this corridor the entrance to the chamber of the traitor.”

“Well, with so careful a specimen of topography,” said Louis, “we might, I think, as easily find our way blindfold as with our eyes open. Let us march.”

“Are the streets well guarded?” said Maurice, with an interest which the assistants very naturally attributed to his fear lest the Chevalier should escape.

“The streets, the passages, even the crossings,” said the man in grey. “I defy any one to pass who has not the watchword.”

Maurice shuddered; all these precautions being taken, made him fear that he had uselessly parted with his honour to add to his happiness.

“Now,” said the man in grey, “how many men do you require to secure the Chevalier?”

“How many men?” said Louis. “I hope Maurice and I are sufficient for that. Is it not so, Maurice?”

“Yes,” murmured he, “we are certainly sufficient.”

“Attend!” said the police agent; “now no pretending. Do you mean to take him?”

“Morbleu! Do we mean?” said Louis; “I should think so! Is it not, Maurice, necessary that we should take him?” Louis laid a stress upon these words, for, as he had truly said, suspicion began to settle upon them, and it was not wise to allow time for suspicion (which marched with such rapid strides at this epoch) to assume a firmer consistence, for Louis comprehended that no one would presume to doubt the staunch patriotism of two men who captured the Chevalier de Maison Rouge.

“Well, then,” said the police agent, “if you are in earnest, better take three men than two, and four than three, with you. The Chevalier invariably sleeps with pistols under his pillow, and his sword on a table by his side.”

“Eh! mordieu!” said one of the grenadiers of Louis’ company. “Let us go in without preference for any one; if he resists, we will cut him to pieces; if he surrender, we will reserve him for the guillotine.”

“Well done,” said Louis; “do we go in by the door or the window?”

“By the door,” said the agent of police; “perhaps by chance the key may remain in it, and if we enter by the window we must break some panes, and that would make a noise.”

“Let us go by the door, then,” said Louis, “as long as we enter, it little matters how. Aliens! sword in hand, Maurice.”

Maurice mechanically drew his sword from the scabbard, and the little troop advanced towards the pavilion. The information of the man in grey proved perfectly correct; they first found the steps, then the landing, and at last entered the vestibule.

“Ah!” cried Louis, joyfully, “the key is in the door.” In short, extending his hand in the dark, his fingers had encountered the cold key.

“Then open it, citizen lieutenant,” said the man in grey.

Louis cautiously turned the key in the lock. The door opened. Maurice wiped the perspiration from his brow.

“We shall find him here,” said Louis.

“Not yet,” said the man in grey, “if our chart is correct, this is the apartment of the Citoyenne Dixmer.”

“We can soon ascertain that,” said Louis; “light the was candle, some fire still remains.”

“Light the torches,” said the man in grey, “they are not so soon extinguished as candles,” at the same time taking two torches from the hand of a grenadier, which he lighted by the dying embers. He placed one in the hand of Maurice, the other of Louis. “You see,” said he, “I was not deceived; here is the door opening into the Citoyenne Dixmer’s sleeping apartment, and here the one opening into the corridor.”

“Now, for the corridor,” said Louis. They opened the door at the further end, which was not more firmly secured than the first, and found themselves fronting the door of the Chevalier’s chamber. Maurice had seen this door twenty times before, and never thought of inquiring where it led to. All his world was centred in the room where he was received by Genevieve. “Oh! oh!” said Louis, in a low voice, “we must change our tactics, no more keys, and the door locked.”

“Are you,” asked Maurice, at length able to articulate, “sure that he is here?”

“If our plan is correct, it ought to be here,” replied the police agent; “besides, we are about to ascertain that. Grenadiers, force open the door; and you, citizens, hold yourselves in readiness, and the instant the door is opened, precipitate yourselves into the chamber.” Four men, selected by the emissary of police, raised the butt-end of their muskets, and on a signal from the man who conducted this enterprise, gave one blow all together, when the door flew into a thousand fragments.

"Surrender! or you are a dead man," cried Louis, rushing into the chamber. No one replied, and the curtains of the bed were closely drawn.

"Make way," said the emissary of police, "and at the first movement of the curtains, fire!"

"Wait," said Maurice, "I will open them." And no doubt, in the hope that the Chevalier de Maison Rouge might be concealed behind them, Maurice hastily pulled back the curtain, which, rolling along the iron rods, left the tenantless bed exposed to view.

"Mordieu!" said Louis, "there is no one here."

"He must have escaped," murmured Maurice.

"Impossible, citizens, impossible," said the man in grey. "I tell you he was seen to enter here an hour ago, and no one has been seen to go out, and all the outlets from the garden are well guarded."

Louis opened the cabinets, the wardrobes, and looked everywhere, even where it was morally impossible a man could be concealed. "You see, however, that no one is here."

"No one!" repeated Maurice, with emotion, easily understood; "you see no one is here."

"To the chamber of the Citoyenne Dixmer," said the police agent, "perhaps he may be there!"

"Eh!" said Maurice, "respect the chamber of a woman."

"Certainly we will respect it, and the Citoyenne Dixmer also, but for all that we must visit it."

"What, the Citoyenne Dixmer?" said one of the grenadiers, delighted at the idea of making a wretched joke.

"No," Said Louis, "the chamber only."

"Then," said Maurice, "permit me to pass first."

"Pass on, then," said Louis, "you are captain in all honour," and leaving two men to guard the apartment, they returned to that where they had lighted their torches. Maurice approached the door, passing into the chamber of Genevieve. It was the first time he had ever entered there. His heart beat violently. The key was in the door. Maurice laid his hand upon the key, but still hesitated. "Well," said Louis, "open!"

"But," said Maurice, "if the Citoyenne Dixmer should be in bed?"

“We will look in her bed, under her bed, in the chimney, in the wardrobes, and then if we find no one there but herself, we will wish her good night,” said Louis.

“No, not so,” said the police agent, “we shall arrest her; the Citoyenne Genevieve Dixmer is an aristocrat, who has been recognised as an accomplice of the girl Tison, and the Chevalier de Maison Rouge.”

“Open it yourself, then,” said Maurice, “I do not arrest women.” The agent of police looked at Maurice sideways, and the men murmured among themselves.

“Oh! you grumble, do you?” said Louis; “then you shall have two to grumble about. I am of Maurice’s opinion,” and he made a step forward.

The man in grey seized the key, opened the door, and the soldiers rushed into the chamber. Two wax lights burned upon a little table, but the chamber of Genevieve, like that of the Chevalier de Maison Rouge, was uninhabited.

“Empty!” cried the police agent.

“Empty!” cried Maurice, turning pale; “where is she, then?”

Louis regarded Maurice with astonishment.

“Let us search,” said the agent of police, and, closely followed by the militia, he began to rummage the house from the cellars to the workshops. At length, when their backs were turned, Maurice, who had followed them impatiently with his eyes, in his turn darted into the chamber, opening the presses, which had already been opened, and calling, in a voice replete with anxiety, “Genevieve! Genevieve!” But Genevieve made no reply; the chamber was indeed vacated. Then he began to search the house in a species of frenzy, the greenhouse, even the outhouses, nothing was omitted, but all without success. Suddenly a noise was heard, a troop of armed men presented themselves at the door, exchanged the password with the sentinel, entered the garden, and dispersed themselves over the house. At the head of this reinforcement waved the red plume of Henriot.*

* The name of Santerre has been incorrectly introduced, as since the 3 rd of May Henriot commanded the National Guard.

“Well!” said he to Louis, “where is the conspirator?”

“How! where is the conspirator?”

“Yes! I ask what have you done with him?”

“I shall ask you that question. If your detachment had guarded the outlets properly, ere this he must have been arrested, since he was not in the house when we entered it.”

"What! do you mean to say," cried the furious general, "that you have really allowed him to escape?"

"We could not allow him to escape since we have never taken him."

"Then I can comprehend nothing," said Henriot.

"Why?" said Louis.

"Of the message you sent me by your envoy."

"We have sent none."

"Yes; a man in a brown coat, with black hair, and green spectacles, who came from you to inform me you were on the eve of capturing Maison Rouge, but that he defended himself like a lion, upon hearing which I hastened to your assistance."

"A man in a brown coat, black hair, and green spectacles?" repeated Louis.

"Yes, with a female on his arm."

"Young and pretty?" cried Maurice, glancing towards the general.

"Yes, young and pretty."

"It was her! the Citoyenne Dixmer."

"And he? Maison Rouge. Oh! miserable that I am not to hare killed them both!"

"Let us go, Citizen Lindey," said Henriot; "we may perhaps overtake them."

"But how the devil," said Louis, "came you to let them pass?"

"Pardieu!" said Henriot, "I allowed them to pass because they knew the password."

"They had the password?" said Louis; "then there is surely a traitor amongst us."

"No, no, Citizen Louis; you know, and we all know, we have no traitors among us."

Louis looked around him as if to detect the miscreant, and publicly proclaim his shame. He encountered the gloomy face and wandering eye of Maurice.

"Ah!" murmured he, "who could have foretold this?"

"This man cannot be very far off," said Henriot; "let us search the environs; perhaps he has fallen in with some patrol who, more clever than ourselves, will not fail to secure him."

"Yes, yes; let us search," said Louis; and, under the pretence of so doing, he seized Man rice by the arm, and drew him into the garden.

“Yes, let us search,” said the soldiers.

“But before we search — ” and one of them flung his still burning torch into an adjacent outhouse, filled with bundles of dried cow hair and rotten planks.

“Come,” said Louis, “come.”

Maurice offered no resistance. He followed Louis like a child; they both ran as far as the bridge without speaking again; when there they stopped, and Maurice turned round. The sky was red from the horizon to the Faubourg, and from above the houses ascended innumerable crimson stars.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE FIRE.

MAURICE shuddered as he extended his hand towards La Rue Saint Jacques.

“The fire!” said he, “the fire!”

“Yes,” said Louis, “the fire; what then?”

“Oh, mon Dieu! mon Dieu! if she has returned.”

“Who?”

“Genevieve.”

“Genevieve means Madame Dixmer, does it not?”

“Yes.”

“There is no danger of her return; she did not go away for that purpose.”

“Louis, I must find her. I will have my revenge.”

“Oh, oh!” said Louis.

“You will assist me in my search, will you not, Louis?”

“Pardieu! there will be no difficulty in that.”

“Why so?”

“Without doubt, if you are so much interested, as far as I am able to form an opinion on the Citoyenne Dixmer’s fate, you being intimate with her, ought, knowing her, also to know her friends. She has not quitted Paris; it is all the rage to remain there; she has taken refuge in the house of some confidential acquaintance, and to-morrow morning you will receive a billet from some ‘Rose,’ or some ‘Meuton,’ requesting you to present yourself at the house of the concierge, such a number, such a street, and inquire for Madame * * *; that is all.”

Maurice shrugged his shoulders; he well knew there was no one with whom Genevieve could take refuge.

“We shall not find her,” said he.

“Will you permit me to say one thing, Maurice?”

“What?”

“That it will be no great misfortune if we should not find her.”

“If we do not, Louis, I shall die.”

"Diable!" said the young man, "it is only this love, then, that has hitherto kept you alive."

"Yes," replied Maurice.

Louis reflected an instant. "Maurice," said he, "it is now nearly eleven o'clock, this quarter is deserted; here is a stone seat, particularly adapted for the reception of two friends. Accord me the favour of a private interview, as they described it under the ancient regime."

They both seated themselves upon the bench. "Speak," said Maurice, resting his aching head upon his hand.

"I give you my word of honour I will speak only in prose, mon ami, without exordium, periphrase, or commentary; I tell you one thing, it is, that we are ruining ourselves, or rather, you are ruining us."

"Why so?" demanded Maurice.

"There is, my friend, a decree issued by the Committee of Public Safety, which declares every man a traitor to his country who enters into any relationship with the acknowledged enemies of the said country. Alas! do you know this decree?"

"Doubtless I do," said Maurice.

"Well, it seems to me, you are not a vile traitor to your country. What say you? as Manlius says."

"Louis! At least you do not regard with idolatry in this country those who give house room, table and bed to Monsieur le Chevalier de Maison Rouge, who is not a high Republican, as I suppose, and has not been accused at any time of having taken part in the days of September. Ah! Louis," said Maurice, sighing heavily.

"Still, it appears to me," continued the moralist, "that you have been, and still are, too intimate with the enemies of your country. Aliens! allons! cher ami, do not rebel, and, like the fire, Enceladus, you will remove the mountain as you turn back."

Louis pronounced these words in the kindest manner possible, and glossed them over with an artifice truly Ciceronian. Maurice merely made a gesture of assent, but the gesture was considered an admission, and Louis continued. "If we exist in a green-house temperature, a healthy atmosphere, where the barometer invariably points to sixteen degrees (this, my dear Maurice, is elegant, comme il faut, we are occasionally rather aristocratic), we flourish and do well, but if scorched in a heat of thirty or forty degrees, the sap burns, so that it rises slowly, and from the excess of heat seems cold; when cold, then comes the blight of suspicion, you know this Maurice, and once suspected, you possess too much good sense not to know that we shall ere long be no more."

"Well, then," said Maurice, "they can kill me, and there will be an end of me, for I am weary of my life."

"A quarter of an hour ago, indeed scarcely so long," said Louis, "I left you to act according to your own pleasure on this subject; and then to die now, it is necessary to die a Republican, whilst you would die an aristocrat."

"Ah!" said Maurice, whose blood began to boil from impassioned grief, resulting from the consciousness of his own criminality, "you go too far, mon ami."

"I shall go further still, and inform you, that if you turn aristocrat — "

"You will denounce me?"

"For shame! No. I will confine you in a vault, and have you sought after to the sound of the drum, like a wild object, then I will proclaim that the aristocrats, knowing what was in reserve, had seized, victimized, and starved you, so that, like the prevot Elie de Beaumont, Monsieur Latude, and others, when found, you will be publicly crowned with flowers by the ladies of La Halle, and the rag-pickers of the section. Make haste, then, to appear an Aristides, else your business is quite concluded."

"Louis! Louis! I feel that you are right, but I am dragged along. I am sliding down the precipice. Leave me to my fate, for I am drawn to it."

"I shall not leave you, but I shall quarrel with you. Call to mind a few of the scenes enacted daily between Pylacles and Orestes — scenes which prove beyond all doubt that friendship is a paradox, since these model friends quarrelled without ceasing."

"Leave me to my fate, Louis, you had much better do so."

"I will never abandon you."

"Then, allow me to love, to be mad, at my ease; to be criminal, perhaps, for if I again see her, I fear I shall kill her."

"Or fall upon your knees. Ah, ah, Maurice, Maurice, to have loved an aristocrat, I never could have credited it. It is like poor Asselin with the Marquise de Charry."

"No more, Louis, I beseech you."

"Maurice, I will cure you, or may the devil take mo. I do not wish you to be drawn in the lottery of Saint Guillotine, as the grocer of la Rue des

Lombards observes. Maurice, you will exasperate me! Maurice, you will render me bloodthirsty! I feel as if I wanted to set fire to the isle of St. Louis! A torch! a firebrand!” Maurice smiled in spite of himself.

“You exasperate me with your folly,” continued Louis. “Drink, Maurice, become a drunkard, do anything; study political economy; but, for the love of Jupiter, let us fall in love with nothing but Liberty.”

“Or Reason?”

“Ah! the goddess talks much about you. She thinks you “charming mortal.”

“Are you not jealous?”

“Maurice, to save a friend I feel capable of any sacrifice.”

“Thanks, my poor Louis, and I truly appreciate your devotion; but the best way to console me is to saturate me in my grief. Adieu! Louis, go to Arthemise.”

“And you; where are you going?”

“I shall return home.”

And Maurice turned towards the bridge.

“You live, then, on the side of the old Rue St. Jacques now?”

“No; but it pleases me to go that way.”

“To look once again upon the place inhabited by your fair inconstant?”

“To see if she has not returned where she knows I am awaiting her. Ah! Genevieve, I could not have believed you capable of so much deceit.”

“Maurice, a tyrant who well knew the fair sex, since he died from having loved them too well, said —

Woe to the man who trusts his heart To woman, changeful as the breeze.”

Maurice sighed, and the two friends took the road to the old Rue St. Jacques. As they approached they heard a great noise, and saw the light increase; they listened to patriotic chants, which, on a brilliant day, in the glorious sunshine, or in the atmosphere of combat, sounded like hymns of heroism; but which, by the red light of an incendiary fire, savoured more of the degrading accents of a drunken rabble.

“Oh! mon Dieu! mon Dieu!” cried Maurice, forgetting that God was abolished, as he wiped the perspiration from his face.

Louis watched him attentively and muttered —

Alas! when caught in Cupid’s snare, To Prudence we must bid adieu.

All the inhabitants of Paris appeared moving towards the theatre of these events we are about to narrate. Maurice was obliged to cross a hedge formed by the grenadiers, the range of the sections, then the impetuous crowd of this always furious populace, at this epoch easily aroused, and who ran howling from spectacle to spectacle, without intermission. As they approached, Maurice impatiently hastened his steps; Louis, with some trouble, kept close behind him, for he did not like to leave him to himself for a moment. It was nearly all over. The fire had communicated from the outhouses, where the soldier had flung his torch, to the workshops, constructed of planks, so put together as to allow the free circulation of air, the merchandise was consumed, and the house itself was now in flames.

“Oh! mon Dieu!” said Maurice; “if she has returned, should she find herself in a chamber encircled by the devouring element, waiting for me, calling on me....” and Maurice, nearly insensible from grief, liked better to think of the folly of those who loved than of his treason. Maurice stooped, and entered the door he caught sight of through the mass of burning flame. Louis still followed him. He would have pursued him to the confines of hell. The whole was in flames; the fire had now indeed commenced its work of destruction on the staircase. Maurice hastened to visit the first floor, the salon, the chamber of Genevieve, of the Chevalier de Maison Rouge, and the corridors, calling, in a choking voice, “Genevieve! Genevieve!”

No one replied. On returning from the search our two friends saw volumes of flame now entering the door; but not heeding the shouts of Louis, who had clambered to the window, Maurice passed through the midst of them, then ran to the house, crossed, notwithstanding all impediments, a court-yard, strewed with broken marbles, discovered the salle-a-manger, the salon of Dixmer, Morand’s cabinet of chemistry, all filled with smoke, with fragments and broken glass. The fire had reached this part of the house, and the work of destruction would soon be complete. Maurice, as in the pavilion, did not omit visiting a single chamber, or leave unexamined even a corridor. He then descended to the cellars; perhaps Genevieve had taken refuge from the fire there. He found no one.

“Morbleu!” said Louis; “no one but a salamander could take refuge here, and it is not that fabulous animal that you are in search of. Let us go; we can make inquiry in this assemblage. Some one has perhaps seen her.”

It needed all Louis’s force to drag away Maurice — hope still detained him there. Then they commenced their investigation; they visited the environs, stopped all the females who passed, searched all the alleys, without any result. It was now one o'clock in the morning, and Maurice, notwithstanding his athletic vigour, was over powered and broken down with fatigue, and at length desisted from his worse than useless efforts. A carriage passed; Louis hailed it.

"Mon cher," said he to Maurice, "we have done all in the range of human possibility that we can do to recover Genevieve. We have broken our backs, been roasted, and have been cruelly cuffed for her. Cupid, however exacting he may be, could require no more from a man in love, and above all, from one who is not.

So jump into the carriage and let us return home."

Maurice submitted without making any reply. They arrived at Maurice's door without either of the friends having uttered a single word. As he descended from the carriage, they heard the window of his apartment closed.

"All right!" said Louis, "he is waiting; I shall rest easy now. Knock, however."

Maurice knocked, the door opened.

"Bon soir!" said Louis, "wait for me tomorrow morning to go out."

"Bon soir," said Maurice, mechanically, as the door closed behind him. Upon the first steps of the staircase he met his official.

"Ah! citizen Lindey," said he, "how much uneasiness you have caused us." The word "us" struck Maurice.

"You?" said he.

"Yes, I, and the little lady, who is waiting for you."

"The little lady," repeated Maurice, feeling the moment ill chosen to remind him of his former loves, "you were right to tell me. I shall sleep at Louis's."

"That is impossible; she was at the window, and saw you alight, and cried out, 'There he is!"'

"What can it matter anything she knows to me? I have no heart for love. Go upstairs, and tell this woman she is deceived." The official made a movement as if to obey him, then stopped.

"Ah! citizen," said he, "you are wrong. The little lady is already very sad; your message will drive her to despair."

"But," said Maurice, "who is this woman?"

"Citizen, I have not seen her face; it is concealed by her mantle, and weeps, that is all I know."

"She weeps?" said Maurice.

"Yes, but very softly, stifling her sobs."

"She weeps," again repeated Maurice; "there is then some one in the world who loves me sufficiently to feel anxious in my absence?" and he ascended slowly behind the official.

"Here he is, Citoyenne, here he is," cried he, rushing into the chamber. Maurice entered behind him.

He beheld, then, in the corner of the room, the trembling form (its face hid in the cushions) of a woman, whom he would have thought dead, but for the convulsive groaning, which made him start. He signed to his official to leave the room, who went out, closing the door behind him. Then Maurice ran to the young woman, who raised her head; "Genevieve!'' cried the young man, "Genevieve here, mon Dieu! am I then mad?"

"No, you are in possession of your senses, mon ami," replied the young woman. "I had promised to be with you if you would save the Chevalier de Maison Rouge. You have saved him, and I am here; I await you."

Maurice mistook the meaning of these words; he recoiled a step, and looked sadly at the young woman.

"Genevieve," said he, "you do not love me."

Genevieve regarded him with tearful eyes; then turning from him, leaned her head on the pillow of the sofa, and gave free utterance to her sobs and tears.

"Alas!" said Maurice, "it is evident that you no longer love me, and not only that you love me no more, Genevieve, but that you must entertain a feeling of hatred towards me, to experience this despair."

Maurice had spoken so nobly, yet with so much feeling, that Genevieve, anxious to correct him, took his hand, and attempted some explanation.

"Mon Dieu!" said she, "those we think the best will always be egotists."

"Egotists, Genevieve! what do you mean to say?"

"Can you not then imagine what I suffer? My husband a fugitive, my brother proscribed, our house in flames, and all this in one night: and then that dreadful scene between you and the Chevalier was added to the rest."

Maurice listened with delight, for it was impossible even for the most foolish passion not to admit that this accumulation of trouble was more than sufficient excuse for Genevieve's deep and violent grief. "And now you are come, I shall keep you; you will not leave me more?"

Genevieve started. “Where should I go?” replied she, with bitterness. “Have I an asylum, a shelter, a protector, save he who has put a price upon his protection? Oh! rash and foolish that I am; I stepped over the Pont Neuf, Maurice, and in passing I stopped to gaze at the dark water, dashing angrily against the angles of the arches; it attracted and fascinated me. Then, said I to myself, there, poor woman, is a shelter for you, there a grave, rest, and obliviousness.”

“Genevieve! Genevieve!’’ said Maurice, “you said that? then you do not love me?”

“I promised,” replied Genevieve, “I promised to come, and I am here.”

Maurice drew a deep breath, and cast his eyes upon the floor.

“Genevieve,” murmured he, “weep no more. Genevieve, console yourself for all your grief, since you love me. Tell me, Genevieve, for the sake of Heaven, that it was not the violence of my menaces that brought you hither. Assure me, that even had you not seen me this evening, on finding yourself alone, isolated and without an asylum, you would have come and received my oath, to return you that which I had compelled you to take.”

Genevieve regarded the young man with a look of intense gratitude. “Generous!” said she; “oh! mon Dieu! I thank thee, he is generous.”

“Listen, Genevieve,” said Maurice. “God, whom they have here driven from their temples, they cannot expel from our hearts, where he has implanted love. This evening, apparently so dark and gloomy, conceals behind its sombre curtain a silvery cloud. God has conducted you to me, Genevieve, and speaks to you through me. God is at length willing to compensate us for all the sufferings we have endured, for the virtue we have displayed in combating this love, as if this sentiment so long entertained, and so profound, could be a crime. Weep no more, Genevieve, weep no more; give me your hand. Do you wish to live in the house of your brother? do you wish he should kiss the hem of your robe, and pass over the threshold of his door without turning his head? Well; say but one word, make but one sign, and I am gone, and you are free. But on the other side, my adored Genevieve, will you call to mind how ardently I have loved you, and have only existed in this love, which it remains with you to render so fatal or so fortunate to me. I have been a traitor to my friends, and am become vile and contemptible in my own eyes; will you now remember that in all this I regarded your happiness for the present and the future? Ah! Genevieve, what will you reply? Ah! Genevieve, you who are an angel of *mercy*, will you render a man so happy, that he no longer regrets life, and ceases to desire eternal felicity? Then, instead of repelling me, smile, my Genevieve; let me place your hand upon my heart, and incline towards one who worships you from the inmost recesses of his soul. Genevieve, my love, my life, do not take back your vow!"

The heart of the young woman swelled at these words. The fatigue of her late suffering had worn out her strength, and though her tears no longer flowed, occasional sobs relieved her overcharged bosom.

"You still weep, my Genevieve," continued Maurice, with profound melancholy; "you still weep. Oh! reassure yourself. I will never impose my love on scornful grief, and never soil my lips with a kiss poisoned by a single tear of regret."

He averted his face, and coldly turned away.

"Ah! Maurice," murmured Genevieve, "do not abandon me, Maurice; I have no one left me in the world but you."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE MORROW.

A BEAUTIFUL SUN beamed across the green window-blinds, gilding the leaves of three large roses placed in a flower-stand before the window of Maurice. These flowers, more precious as the season was on the decline, perfumed with a delicious fragrance the little salle-a-m anger of spotless neatness, where at a table served with every elegancy, but without profusion, sat Maurice and Genevieve. The door was closed, for as the table contained all that was requisite, it was understood they waited on themselves. They heard the official stirring in the adjoining room. The warmth and life of the last few lovely days entered through the half open jalousie, making glitter like emeralds and rubies the rose-leaves caressed by the rays of the sun. Genevieve let fall upon her plate the golden fruit she held in her hand. She appeared to be deep in thought and smiling only with her lips, while her eyes languished with a melancholy expression. She remained thus silent, abstracted, and happy in the sun of her love, as the beautiful flowers in the sun of heaven. Soon her eyes sought those of Maurice, and encountered his gazing upon her. She placed her soft white arm upon the young man’s shoulder, and leaned against his breast with that faith and confidence far exceeding love. Genevieve looked at him without speaking, and blushed as she regarded him. Maurice slightly inclined his head to imprint a kiss upon the half open lips of Genevieve. He bent his head, whilst she turned pale, and closed her eyes, as the delicate flower conceals its calyx from the rays of light. They remained dreaming thus, when a sharp ring at the door-bell suddenly startled them.

The official entered mysteriously, and closed the door. “Here is the citizen Louis,” said he.

“Ah! dear Louis,” said Maurice, “I will go and dismiss him. Pardon, Genevieve.” Genevieve stopped him.

“Dismiss your friend, Maurice?” said she, “and such a friend; one who has consoled, assisted, and sustained you? No; I would no more drive such a friend from your house than from your heart. Let him come in, Maurice; let him come in."

"With your permission," said Maurice. "I wish it," said Genevieve. "Ah! you will find that to love you is not enough," cried Maurice, delighted with her delicacy; "it is necessary to adore you!"

Genevieve held her blushing face to the young man. He opened the door, and Louis entered, smart as usual in his costume of demi-muscadin. On perceiving Genevieve he manifested great surprise, which was succeeded by a respectful salute.

"Come here, Louis, come here, and look at madame; you are dethroned, Louis. I have now some one I prefer. I would have given my life for you; for her — I tell you nothing new, Louis — for her I have sacrificed my honour."

"Madame," replied Louis, in accents of deep emotion, "I shall endeavour to love Maurice the more, that he has not altogether ceased to love me."

"Sit down, monsieur," said Genevieve, smiling.

"Yes, sit down," said Maurice, who having pressed in his right hand that of his friend, and in his left that of his mistress, presented the appearance of a man arrived at the height of human felicity.

"Then you do not wish to die now? do not wish any longer to kill yourself?"

"What was that?" said Genevieve.

"Ah! mon Dieu!" said Louis, "man is a most versatile animal, and philosophers have good cause to despise his levity. Here is one, would you believe it, madame, who no later than yesterday evening wished to fling himself into the fire, throw himself into the water; who declared there was no more happiness for him in this world, and behold him this morning, gay, joyous, with a smile upon his lips, his countenance resplendent with happiness, life in his heart, seated at a well-furnished table; it is true he has not eaten much, but that does not prove he is unhappy."

"Did he wish to do all this?" said Genevieve.

"All this, and much more still. I will tell you all, some day, but at this moment I am very hungry; it is all Maurice's fault for making me yesterday evening run all over the quarter Saint Jacques. Permit me, then, to make an attack upon the breakfast, which I perceive you have neither of you yet touched."

“That is right,” said Maurice, with childish joy; “I have not breakfasted, neither have you, Genevieve.”

He watched Louis’s eyes as he uttered her name, but he evinced no surprise.

“Ah!’’ said Maurice, “you have already surmised who it was, Louis.”

“Parbleu!” said Louis, cutting himself a large slice of white and rosy ham.

“I, also, am hungry,” said Genevieve, holding her plate.

“Louis,” said Maurice, “I was ill yesterday.”

“You were worse than ill; you were mad.”

“Well, I think it is you who are suffering at this moment.”

“Why?”

“You have not yet given us any verses.”

“I will sing you one this moment,” said Louis.

“Phoebus, in the midst of the Graces, The lyre in his hand still retained, Till following of Venus the traces, ‘Twas lost, and could not be regained.’

“Always ready with a quatrain,” said Maurice, laughing.

“I am glad you are contented, as it is now necessary to turn our attention to more serious affairs.”

“Has anything new occurred, then?” said Maurice, anxiously.

“I am ordered on guard at the Conciergerie.”

“At the Conciergerie!” said Genevieve, “near the Queen?”

“Near the Queen. I believe so, madame.”

Genevieve turned pale. Maurice frowned, and made a sign to Louis, who cut himself another slice of ham, double the size of the first. The Queen had indeed been removed to the Conciergerie, where we will follow.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE CONCIERGERIE.

AT AN ANGLE OF the Pont au Change, and of the Quai aux Fleurs, rose the remains of the old palace of Saint Louis, called par excellence, the palace, as Rome is called the city, and which still continues to retain the royal cognomen, when the only kings who inhabit it are the registrars, the judges, and the pleaders. The house of justice was a large and sombre building, exciting more fear than love for the goddess. There might be seen united in this narrow space all the instruments and attributes of human vengeance. In the first ward were those who had been arraigned for crime; further on where they were tried; and lower down the dungeons of the condemned. By the door was a small space, where the red-hot iron stamped its mark of infamy; and about one hundred and fifty paces from the first, another space, far more extensive, where the last act of the fearful tragedy took place, that is to say, La Greve, where they finished the work previously sketched out for them at the palace.

Justice, as we see, reigned paramount over all. All these portions of the edifice joined one with another, sullen-looking, dark and grey, pierced by iron-grated windows, where the gaping arches resemble the grated dens extending along the side of the Quai des Lunettes. This is the Conciergerie. This prison contains dens washed by the black mud from the waters of the Seine; it also possesses mysterious issues, by which are conveniently conducted to the river those miserable victims whom it is their interest to remove. Seen in 1793, the Conciergerie liberally disgorged its prisoners, within the hour arrested and condemned to die upon the scaffold. At this epoch the old prison of Saint Louis was literally the Hold of Death. Under the arches some gates were hung, and at night a red lantern was suspended there, fit emblem of this abode of misery and despair.

The evening preceding the day when Louis, Maurice, and Genevieve were breakfasting together, a dull rumbling shook the pavement of the quay, and rattled the windows of the prison, then ceased before the arched gate. The gendarmes knocked with the handles of their swords, the gate opened, and a voiture entered the court; when the hinges had turned and the rusty bolt ground round, a female descended. The gaping wicket opened immediately to receive her, and closed upon her. Three or four curious heads protruded to gaze upon the prisoner by the light of the flambeau appeared in mezzo-tinto, then vanished in the darkness, while vulgar jokes and rude laughter passed between the men leaving, who could be heard though not Been. The person thus brought remained at the wicket with the gendarmes; she saw it would be necessary to pass through a second, but forgot at the same time to raise the foot and lower the head, as there is a step to ascend and a beam which descends. The prisoner, although unfortunately habituated to prison architecture, notwithstanding her long sojourn there, omitted to stoop, and struck her forehead violently against the bar.

"Are you much hurt, citoyenne?" demanded one of the gendarmes.

"Nothing can hurt me now," she replied tranquilly, and passed on without uttering a single complaint, although sanguinary traces of the injury remained upon her brow.

Shortly the arm-chair of the porter became visible — a chair more venerated by the prisoners than the throne of the king by his courtiers; for the concierge of a prison is the dispenser of favour, and all mercy is important to a prisoner, as sometimes the smallest kindness may change the darkest gloom to a heaven of light. The concierge, Richard, installed in his arm-chair, felt a due perception of his own importance. He remained undisturbed even when the rumbling of the carriage announced a new arrival. He inhaled some snuff, regarded the prisoner, opened a large register, and looked for a pen in the little ink-horn of black wood, where the ink, encrusted on the sides, retained in the centre a mouldy humidity, as in the midst of the crater of Vesuvius there always remains a certain degree of heat.

"Citizen Concierge," said the chief of the escort, "write, and write quickly, for they are impatiently awaiting us at the commune."

"I will not be long," said the concierge, at the same time emptying into the inkstand some drops of wine remaining at the bottom of his glass; "we are a good hand at this, thank God. Your name and surname, citoyenne," said he, and dipping his pen at the same time into this improvisatory ink, he commenced writing at the bottom of a page already nearly filled. The new arrival, whilst standing behind his chair, the citoyenne Richard, a female of benevolent aspect, contemplated with a mixture of astonishment and respect, this woman, so sad, so noble, and so proud.

“Marie Antoinette Jeanne Josephe de Lorraine,” replied the prisoner, “Archduchess of Austria and Queen of France.”

“Queen of France!” repeated the concierge, raising himself in astonishment by the arms of his chair.

“Queen of France,” repeated the prisoner, in the same voice.

“Otherwise called the widow of Capet,” said the chief of the escort.

“Under which of these names am I to designate her?” demanded the concierge.

“Whichever you please, only do it quickly,” said the chief of the escort.

The concierge reseated himself, and with a trembling hand wrote down the name, surname, and titles given him by the prisoner, inscriptions of which the ink still appears visible to this day upon the register of which the revolutionary rats of the Conciergerie have nibbled the leaf but respected the parts most precious. Richard’s wife still retained her position behind her husband’s chair, and remained standing with her hands clasped together, commiserating the situation of the unfortunate being before her.

“Your age?” continued the concierge.

“Thirty-seven years and nine months,” replied the Queen. Richard wrote this down, then the description, and finished with the regular notes and forms.

“There,” said he, “that is completed.”

“Where shall we conduct the prisoner?” said the chief of the escort.

Richard helped himself to a second pinch of snuff, and looked at his wife. “Dame,” said he, “we did not anticipate this, and have not long known it.”

“You must find out,” said the brigadier.

“There is the council chamber,” said Richard’s wife.

“Too large,” murmured Richard.

“So much the better, you can the more easily place the guards.”

“Go to the council chamber,” said Richard. “But it is not habitable at this moment, it has no bed.”

“True,” replied his wife, “I had quite forgotten that.”

“Bah!” said one of the gendarmes, “you can put a bed there to-morrow, and to-morrow will soon be here.”

“Besides, the citoyenne could occupy our chamber for one night; could she not, my man?” said Richard’s wife.

“And what are we to do?” said the concierge.

“Oh! we can do without a bed for one night; and, as the citizen gendarme observes, the night is nearly gone.”

“Then,” said Richard, “conduct the citoyenne to my chamber.”

“And in the meanwhile you will prepare our receipt?”

“It shall be ready on your return.”

Pilchard’s wife took the candle from the table, and went first to lead the way. Marie Antoinette followed without uttering a word, calm and pale as usual. Two turnkeys, at a sign from Richard’s wife, accompanied them. The Queen was shown her bed, on which the woman proceeded to place clean sheets. The turnkeys installed themselves outside; the door was closed, then double locked. And Marie Antoinette was left at last alone. How she passed that night no one ever knew. Probably in close communion with her God. On the next day the Queen was conducted to the council chamber. This was a long four-sided room, of which the wicket-door opened upon a corridor of the Conciergerie, divided the whole length by a partition, which did not reach the height of the ceiling. One of these compartments was occupied by the men on guard. The other was the chamber of the Queen. A window, thickly grated with small iron bars, lighted both these cells. A folding-screen, the substitute for a door, secluded the Queen from the guards, and closed the aperture in the middle. The whole of this room was paved with brick. The walls, at one period or another, had been decorated with gilt picture-frames, where still hung some shreds of paper fleur-de-lis. A bed was placed opposite the window, and a single chair near the light. This was all the furniture the royal prison contained. On entering, the Queen requested her books and work might be forwarded to her. They brought her the “Revolutions d’Angleterre,” which she had commenced in the Temple, the “Voyages de Jeune Anacharse,” and her tapestry. The gendarmes established themselves in the adjoining compartment. History has preserved their names, as it has done that of many others more infamous, associated by destiny in these great events, and who saw reflected on them a fragment of that light cast by the thunderbolt which destroys the thrones of kings, perhaps even the kings themselves. They were called Duchesne and Gilbert. These two men were selected by the Commune, who knew them to be staunch patriots. They were to remain at their post in their cell till the sentence of Marie Antoinette. They hoped by this measure to avoid the irregularities consequent upon a change of office several times during the day, and therefore laid the guards under a heavy responsibility. The Queen first became acquainted with this new regulation from the conversation of the gendarmes, who omitting to speak softly, their discourse reached her ears. She experienced at once joy and disquietude; for if, on the one hand, she felt that these men ought to be trustworthy since they had been chosen from a multitude; on the other side, she reflected her friends might more easily corrupt two known men at their post, than a hundred unknown individuals selected by chance, passing near her occasionally, and then only for a single day. On the first night before she retired one of the gendarmes, according to his usual custom, began to smoke. The noxious vapour glided imperceptibly round the screen, and through the aperture, enveloping the unfortunate Queen, whose misfortunes had irritated instead of deadening her nerves. She soon felt herself seized with nausea and swimming in the head; but true to her indomitable system of firmness, she uttered no complaint. During her melancholy vigil, whilst nothing disturbed the deep silence of the night, she fancied she heard plaintive cries outside. These cries were mournful and prolonged, there was about them something unearthly and piercing, like the howling of wind in the dark and deserted corridor, when the tempest borrows the human voice to animate the passions of the elements. She soon recognised the noises that had at first startled her, the doleful and persevering cry, as that of a dog running along the quay. She immediately remembered her poor little Jet, whom she never thought of when they removed her from the Temple, and now believed she could recognise his voice. Indeed, the poor little animal, who by his mistaken vigilance had ruined his mistress, had unperceived descended behind her, had followed the carriage as far as the grating of the Conciergerie, where he continued till he narrowly escaped being cut in two by the double door of iron which closed behind her. But the faithful creature had soon returned, and comprehending that his mistress was confined in this great stone building, he whined and howled, waiting, within ten feet of the sentinel, a caressive reply. The Queen replied by a heart-broken sigh, which reached the ears of her guards; but as this sigh was not repeated, and no other sound proceeded from the Queen’s chamber, they again composed themselves, and relapsed into their former state of drowsiness.

At break of day the Queen rose and dressed herself, then took her seat near the window, the light from which, intercepted by the grating of iron bars, fell with a bluish tint upon her emaciated hands, in which she held a book. She was apparently reading, but her thoughts were far away. The gendarme Gilbert half opened the screen, and regarded her in silence. The Queen heard the noise of the screen, but did not turn her head. She was so seated that the gendarme could see her head bathed in the morning light. Gilbert made a sign to his comrade to advance, and look through the opening with him. Duchesne approached.

“Look,” said Gilbert, in a low tone; “how very pale she is; it is frightful. Those red circles round her eyes denote her suffering. She has surely been weeping.”

“You well know,” said Duchesne, “Capet’s widow never weeps. She is too proud for that.”

“Then she must be ill,” said Gilbert, and raising his voice,” Tell me, Citoyenne Capet,” said he, “are you ill?”

The Queen slowly raised her eyes, and fixed an inquiring look upon the two men.

“Did you address me. Messieurs?” demanded she, in a voice full of sweetness, for she fancied she detected the accent of kindness in him who had spoken to her.

“Yes, citoyenne, we spoke to you,” replied Gilbert; “we feared you were ill.”

“Why so?”

“Because your eyes are so red.”

“And at the same time you are so pale,” added Duchesne.

“No, thank you, Messieurs, I am not ill, only I suffered much last night.”

“Ah! yes, your misfortunes!”

“No, Messieurs, my miseries are always the same; and my religion having taught me to carry them to the foot of the cross, I do not suffer more one day than another. No; I am ill because I could not rest last night.”

“Ah! your new lodging, and different bed,” said Duchesne.

“And then the lodging is not very comfortable,” added Gilbert.

“Ah! it is not that, Messieurs,” said the Queen, shaking her head. “Lofty or lowly, it is all the same to me.”

“What is it then?”

“I ask pardon for telling you; but I have suffered much inconvenience from the smell of tobacco, which Monsieur is inhaling at this moment.” Indeed, Gilbert was smoking, for, like many others, it was his habitual occupation.

“Mon Dieu!” cried he, much grieved, from the kindness with which the Queen had expressed herself. “Why did you not tell me so, citoyenne?”

“Because I thought I had no right to deprive you of any enjoyment.”

“Well, you shall be incommoded no more — by me at least,” said Gilbert, casting away his pipe, which broke upon the tiles, “for I will smoke no more.” He turned round, his companion followed, and he closed the screen.

“Possibly they may cut off her head, that is an affair of the nation; but why should we cause her any suffering, this poor woman? We are soldiers, and not hangmen, like Simon.”

“It rather savours of the aristocrat, comrade, what you did just now,” said Duchesne, shaking his head.

“What do you term an aristocrat? Explain yourself.”

“I call aristocrats all those who annoy the nation, and succour its enemies.”

“Then, according to your theory, I annoy the nation because I discontinue smoking the widow of Capet? Go along, then. As for me, I remember my oath to my country, and the order of my brigadier. As for my order, I know it by heart. Not to permit the prisoner to escape; not to allow any one to see her; to resist all correspondence she may endeavour to continue; and to die at my post. This is what I promised, and to this will I keep. Vive la nation!’’

“That is what I tell you,” said Duchesne. “It is not that I wish you to do so, but from my fear lest you should compromise yourself.”

“Hush! here is some one.”

The Queen had not lost one word of this last conversation, although carried on in a low voice. Captivity had rendered her hearing doubly acute.

The noise which had attracted his attention of the two guards was the sound of several steps approaching the door. It opened, and two municipals entered, followed by the concierge and some of the turnkeys.

“Well,” they inquired, “where is the prisoner?”

“Here she is,” replied the two gendarmes.

“How is she lodged?”

“You can see.” And Gilbert touched the screen.

“What do you wish?” demanded the Queen.

“It is the visit of the Commune, Citoyenne Capet.”

“This man is kind,” thought the Queen; “and if my friends — ”

“Very good, very good,” said the municipals, both entering the Queen’s chamber; “there is not much ceremony requisite here.”

The Queen did not even raise her head, and it might have been believed from her impassibility that she neither saw nor heard them, but fancied herself alone. The delegates of the Commune curiously observed everything around the chamber, sounded the wainscoting, the bed, shaking the grating of the window which looked upon the court of the Commune, and then having recommended to the gendarmes the utmost vigilance, took their departure without having addressed a word to the Queen, who on her part seemed not to have been aware of their presence.

CHAPTER XXXV.

LA SALLE DES PAS-PERDUS.

TOWARDS THE DECLINE of the day on which we have seen the municipals so carefully inspecting the Queen’s prison, a man attired in a grey blouse, his head covered with a mass of black hair, and on his head one of those hairy bonnets, which then amongst the people was a distinguishing mark of the most exaggerated patriotism, walked into the large hall so philosophically termed “La Salle des Pas-Perdus,” and seemed most attentively observing all the goers and comers forming the general population of this hall, a population considerably augmented at this period, when actions had acquired greater importance, and when the only pleading was to dispute their heads with the hangman and with Fouquier Tinville, their indefatigable purveyor.

The attitude assumed by this man whose portrait we are about to sketch was in very good taste. Society at this epoch was divided into two classes; the lambs and the wolves. The one naturally inspired the other with fear, since one-half of society devoured the other. Our fierce promenader was rather short, and wielded in his dirty black hand one of those knotted cudgels then called “constitutions.” It is true the hand that nourished this horrible weapon might have appeared rather small to any one who might amuse himself by acting vis-a-vis to this strange visitor who arrogated to himself the right to do so to others, but no one felt the least inclined to risk it, for this man’s aspect was far too terrible. Indeed, it was supposed this man with the cudgel caused much disquietude to several groups of scribes engaged in this discussion of public affairs, which at this time daily progressed from bad to worse, or from better to better, according as they were considered in a conservative or revolutionary point of view. These valorous folks looked askance at his black beard, his green eyes surmounted by overhanging eyebrows of tufted hair, and trembled whenever the promenade of the mighty patriot (a promenade the whole length of the hall) brought them in near contact with each other. This terror was augmented when each time they saw him approaching, or even looked at him too attentively; the man with the cudgel struck with its full weight upon the pavement his powerful weapon, which almost tore up the stones upon which it fell with a sonorous and clashing sound. But it was not only these brave men among the scribes, designated generally as the “rats of Paris,” who received this formidable impression; it was also the various individuals who entered the “La Salle des Pas-Perdus” by the great door, or through some of its narrow vomitaries, who also quickened their pace on perceiving the man with the cudgel, who obstinately continued his journey from one end of the hall to the other, finding each moment some pretext for dashing his weapon on the pavement. If these writers had been less timorous and the promenaders more clear-sighted, they would have discovered that our patriot, capricious like all eccentric or extreme natures, appeared to evince a preference for certain flagstones, those for instance situated a little distance from the wall on the right, near the centre of the hall, emitting a clear and ringing sound. He even finished by concentrating his anger upon some particular stones in the centre of the hall. At the same time he so far forgot himself as to stop and measure with his eye something in the distance. True, it was a momentary absence only, and he immediately resumed his former expression, which a gleam of pleasure had for a moment obliterated. Almost at the same moment another patriot — for at this epoch every one wore his opinions on his forehead, or rather on his dress — almost at the same moment, say we, another patriot entered by the door of the gallery, and without appearing the least in the world to partake of the fear generated by the former occupant, began to cross the hall at a pace equal to his own, so that in the centre of the promenade they encountered each other. The new arrival had, like the former, a hairy bonnet, a grey blouse, dirty hands, and in one of them a cudgel; indeed, in addition he carried a sword, which, struck against the stones at every step; and on the whole he appeared a greater subject for terror than his predecessor. The first had an air of ferocity, the last seemed replete with sinister cunning.

Although these two men appeared to belong to the same cause, and partook of the same opinions, the assembly ventured to watch the result, not of their meeting, for they were not walking in the same line, but their approach towards each other. At the first turn they were disappointed, as the patriots contented themselves with exchanging looks; at the same time the smaller of the two turned slightly pale, only from an involuntary movement of the lips it was evident it was not caused by fear, but by nausea. However, at the second turn, as if the patriot had made a violent effort, his countenance, till now so overcast, cleared up suddenly, and something like a smile passed over his lips as he inclined slightly to the left, with the evident intention of stopping the second patriot on his course. Near the centre they joined each other.

"Eh! Pardieu! here is the Citizen Simon," said the first patriot.

"Himself. But what do you want with the Citizen Simon? and who are you, first?"

"It seems, then, that you do not know me."

"I do not know you, and for an excellent reason — I never saw you."

"Not recognise me! — when I had the honour to carry the head of the Princess Lamballe!" At these words, pronounced with savage fury, and bursting passionately from the mouth of the patriot, Simon started.

"You?" said he, "you?"

"Well, that is surprising! I thought that you would remember your friends better than that, faith! Ah, citizen! you have forgotten me."

"That is all very well," said Simon; "but I do not recognise you."

"It is a great privilege to act as guardian to the young Capet; it brings you into notice. As for myself, I both know and esteem you."

"Ah! Thank you."

"It is not that — Are you taking a walk?"

"Yes; I am waiting for some one. And you?"

"I also."

"What is your name? I will make mention of you at the club."

"I am called Theodore."

"What else?"

"Nothing else: is not that quite sufficient?"

"Oh, perfectly. Who are you waiting for, Citizen Theodore?"

"A friend to whom I wish to make a pretty little denunciation."

"Indeed! Tell me, then."

"A whole covey of aristocrats."

"What are their names?"

"No, indeed; I only tell that to my friend."

"You are wrong; for here is mine advancing towards us, who, it seems to me, is sufficiently acquainted with business to settle at once all this affair."

"Fouquier Tinville!'' cried the first patriot.

"No one else, cher ami."

“That’s all right.”

“Yes. Good day, Citizen Fouquier.”

Fouquier Tinville, calm and pule, opening wide, according to habit, his large black eyes, shaded by his bushy eyebrows, at this moment entered by a door at the end of the hall, his register in his hand, and a bundle of papers under his arm. “Good day, Simon,” said he; “anything new?”

“Several things. The first, a denunciation from Citizen Theodore, who carried the head of the Princess Lamballe. I will introduce him to you.”

Fouquier fixed his scrutinizing glance upon the patriot, who, notwithstanding his strong nerves, felt rather uneasy while undergoing this examination.

“Theodore!” said he; “and who is Theodore?”

“I!” said the man in the blouse.

“You carried the head of the Princess Lamballe?” said the public accuser, with a great expression of doubt.

“I. Rue St. Antoine.”

“But I know a person who boasts that he did so,” said Fouquier.

“I know ten,” replied the Citizen Theodore, courageously; “but, indeed, as they all make some demand, and I ask nothing, at least I ought to have the preference, I hope.” This reply excited Simon’s laughter, and dispersed the cloud on the accuser’s brow.

“Eight,” said he; “and if you did not do it, you ought to have done so. But leave me now; Simon has some business to transact with me.”

Theodore retired, rather wounded by the frankness of the public accuser.

“One moment,” cried Simon. “Do not send him away so; let us first hear his denunciation.”

“Ah!” said Fouquier Tinville, with an absent air, “a denunciation?”

“Yes; a covey,” replied Simon.

“All in good time. Speak — what is the matter now?”

“Ah! not much; only the Chevalier de Maison Rouge and some of his friends.” Fouquier advanced a step, while Simon raised his arms towards heaven. “Is this the truth?” they exclaimed, both together. “The pure truth; will you take them?”

“Directly. Where are they?”

“I met the Chevalier de Maison Rouge in La Rue de la Grande Tissanderie.”

“You are mistaken; he is not in Paris,” replied Fouquier. “I tell you I have seen him.”

“Impossible! they have sent a hundred men in pursuit of him; he would not show himself in the streets of Paris.”

“It was him,” said the patriot. “Very brown, and a beard like a bear.” Fouquier shrugged his shoulders disdainfully.

“More folly,” said he; “the Chevalier de Maison Rouge is short, pale, and has not the sign of a beard.” The patriot dropped his weapon with an air of consternation. “Never mind, your good intention was all the same. Come, Simon, we must both make haste; they require the register, this is the time for the carts.”

“Well, there is nothing new; the child is well.” The patriot turned his back that he might not appear indiscreet, but remained in a position which enabled him to listen. “I will go,” said he, “lest I should intrude.”

“Adieu!” said Simon. “Good day,” said Fouquier.

“Tell your friend that you were deceived,” added Simon.

“Well, I shall wait.” And Theodore removed to a short distance, and stood resting on his cudgel. “So the child goes on well?” said Fouquier; “but the rest — I mould him to my will.”

“He will speak, then?”

“When I choose.”

“I think he will be afraid in the trial of Antoinette?”

“I think not; indeed, I am sure.”

Theodore was leaning against a pillar, his eyes directed towards the door. But his eye was wandering, while his ears were erect and uncovered under the hairy bonnet he wore. Perhaps he saw nothing, but most assuredly he heard something.

“Reflect well,” said Fouquier, “and do not make what is termed a blunder of this commission. “You feel sure that Capet will speak?”

“He will say all that I require.”

“Has he told you what we are going to ask him?”

“He has told me.”

“It is important, Simon, that you should promise this; the child’s evidence is fatal to the mother.”

“I count upon that, pardieu!”

“There will have been nothing equal to it seen since the intimacy between Neron and Narcisse. Once more, reflect, Simon.”

“One would fancy you took me for a brute, repeating constantly the same thing. Take this as an example; when I put leather in water it becomes supple, does it not?”

“But — 1 do not know,” replied Fouquier.

“It becomes soft, then. Well, in my hands the little Capet becomes supple as the softest leather. I have my own method for that.”

“It may be so,” said Fouquier. “Have you anything else to say?”

“I forgot. There is a denunciation.”

“Again? You will overwhelm me with business,” said Fouquier.

“One must serve the country.” Simon presented a small paper, black as the leather he had just mentioned, but certainly less supple. Fouquier received it and read the contents.

Again the Citizen Louis; you have a great hatred for this man.”

“I am always at daggers drawn with him. He said adieu, madame, to a woman who saluted him from a window yesterday evening. To-morrow, I hope to give you a little information concerning another ‘suspect;’ that Maurice who was Municipal at the Temple when that affair of the red carnation occurred.”

“Precisely, precisely,” said Fouquier, smiling at Simon.

He held out his hand, and then turned away with an eagerness that evinced little favour towards the shoemaker.

“What the devil do you want more? Many have been guillotined for much less.”

“Patience,” replied Fouquier, quietly; “everything cannot be done at the same time,” and he passed quickly through the wicket.

Simon looked round for the Citizen Theodore, to console himself with him. He was no longer to be seen. He had hardly gone beyond the western iron gate, when Theodore re-appeared at the corner of a writer’s hut. The occupant of the hut accompanied him.

“At what hour are the iron gates closed?” said Theodore to this man.

“At five o’clock.”

“And then what do they do here?”

“Nothing; the hall remains empty till to-morrow.”

“No rounds, no visits?”

“No, monsieur; oar barracks are locked.”

The word monsieur made Theodore knit his brows, and look round with defiance.

“Are the crowbar and pistols safe in the barracks?” said he.

“Yes, under the carpet.”

“Return home, then.... Apropos, show me again the chamber of the tribunal that has not a grated window, and looks upon the court near La Place Dauphine.”

“To the left, between the pillars under the lantern.”

“Go, now, and have the horse ready at the place assigned.”

“A glorious chance! — a glorious chance! — depend fully upon me.”

“Now is your time.... No one is looking.... Open your barrack.”

“It is done, monsieur; I will pray for you.”

“It is not for me you ought to pray. Adieu.”

And the Citizen Theodore, after an eloquent look, glided so adroitly under the low roof of the barrack, that he disappeared like the shadow of the writer who closed the door. The worthy scribe drew the key from the lock, took some papers under his arm, and went out of the vast saloon with the delightful thought that the stroke of five would disperse all these registers like an arreur guard of idle bees.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE CITIZEN THEODORE.

THE IMMENSE SALOON was enshrouded by the grey veil of night, of which the wretched echoes had learnt to repeat the severe words of the advocates, and the suppliant ones of the pleaders. From afar, in the distance, in the midst of the obscurity, upright and immovable, a white column seemed watching, in the centre of the hall, like a phantom protector over the sacred place. The only noise heard in this darkness was the nibbling and galloping of innumerable rats, who rummaged the papers enclosed in the writers huts, having first commenced by gnawing the wood. Sometimes the sound of a carriage penetrated as far as this sanctuary of Themis (an Academician, so called), and the loose clashing of keys, which appeared to proceed from under the ground; but all this only reverberated in the distance, and nothing resembling a noise ever interrupted the silent darkness, which was not even broken upon by the apparition of a star. Most unquestionably, much terror was occasioned at this horn by the saloon of a palace, whose walls of the exterior were yet stained with the blood of the victims of September — whose staircases had witnessed the descent in one day of twenty-five human beings condemned to an ignominious death, and separated only by a few feet from the cells of the Conciergerie, peopled with bleached skeletons. Notwithstanding, in the middle of this frightful night — in the midst of this almost solemn silence, a low grinding was heard; the door of a writer’s hut turned upon its creaking hinges, and a shadow, darker than the shadow of night, glided cautiously out of the barrack. Then the fierce patriot we have heard addressed as “Monsieur,” but who called himself Theodore, stepped lightly over the uneven stones. He held in his right hand a ponderous iron lever, and with his left felt in his belt to ascertain the safety of his double-barreled pistol.

“I reckoned twelve stones to this part of the cell, and here is the end of the first!” murmured he; and, as he calculated, groping with the point of his foot, to discover the chinks which time had rendered daily more perceptible.

“Let me see,” said he, stopping; “have I taken my measurement correctly? shall I possess strength sufficient? and she — will she have the courage? Oh, yes, her courage is known to me. Oh, mon Dieu! mon Dieu! When I shall take her hand — when I can say, Madame, you are saved!”

He suddenly paused, as if crushing this hope beneath his feet.

“Ah!” replied he, “fearful and foolish project. They say the others hid themselves under their bedclothes, or contented themselves by roaming about dressed as lacqueys through the Conciergerie; but they have not my motive for daring all — it is, that I not only desire to serve the Queen, but the woman. Well, to work; we will sum up the whole. To raise the stone is nothing, to leave it open is the danger — they may perhaps come the rounds; but yet they never do so. They cannot suspect anything, for I have not any accomplices, and what is required with an ardour like mine to overcome the dark passage? In three minutes I am under her chamber; in five minutes I raise the stone which is on the hearth. She will hear me working, but has too much firmness to feel alarmed; on the contrary, she will understand that a friend is near, and labouring for her deliverance. She is guarded by two men, who will doubtless hasten to the spot. Well, after all,” said the patriot, with a melancholy smile, looking first at the weapons concealed in his girdle, and then at the one he held poised in his hand, “a double shot from this pistol, or a couple of strokes from this iron bar. Poor creatures! — they will die like others not more culpable than themselves.” And the Citizen Theodore resolutely pressed his lever between the chinks of the flagstones. At this moment a vivid light gleamed like a ray of gold across the stones, and a noise, repeated by the echoes of the vault, caused the conspirator to turn, and then with a single bound to conceal himself in the stall. Soon voices, weakened by the distance, and softened by the emotion experienced by every one at night in a large and desolate building, reached the cars of Theodore. He stooped down, and through an aperture in the stall perceived first a man in military costume, whose large sabre, dangling against the pavement, partly produced the sound which had attracted his attention; then a man in a pistachio-coloured suit, holding a rule in his hand and a roll of papers under his arm; thirdly, a man in a large waistcoat of rateen and fur bonnet; and lastly, a fourth, with wooden shoes and a blouse. The iron gate, des Merciers, ground upon its sonorous hinges, rattling the chain intended to keep it open during the day. The four men entered.

“A round,” murmured Theodore. “God be praised! five minutes later and I should have been ruined.” He then with the utmost attention endeavoured to recognise the individuals who composed the round — indeed, three of them were known to him. He who walked first, clad in the costume of a general, was Henriot; the man in the hairy bonnet was Richard the concierge, and the man in the blouse was in all probability a turnkey. But the man in the pistachio-coloured coat he had never seen — he was totally unknown to him. Who or what could this man be? and what brought, at ten o’clock at night, to the Salle des Pas-Perdus, the general of the Commune, the guardian of the Conciergerie, a turnkey, and this man unknown? The Citizen Theodore remained kneeling, with one hand on his loaded pistol, whilst with the other he replaced his bonnet, which his precipitous movement had somewhat disarranged.

Up to this moment the nocturnal visitors had kept silence, or if they had spoken, their words had not reached the ears of the conspirator; but when about ten paces from his lurking place Henriot spoke, and his voice was distinctly heard by the Citizen Theodore. “We are now,” said he, “in la Salle des Pas-Perdus. It is for you now to guide us, Citizen Architect, and to endeavour to convince us that your revelation is no idle story; for you see the revolution has done justice to all this folly, and we believe no more in these subterranean passages than in ghosts. What do you say, Citizen Richard?” added Henriot, turning towards the man in the fur bonnet and rateen vest.

“I have never said there was any subterranean passage under the Conciergerie,” said he. “There is Gracchus, who has been turnkey for ten years, and consequently is acquainted with the whole of the Conciergerie, and he ignores the existence of the vault of which the Citizen Giraud has spoken. However, as the Citizen Giraud is the city architect, he ought to know better than any of us. It is his business.”

Theodore shivered from head to foot on hearing these words. ‘“Fortunately,” murmured he, “the saloon is large, and before they find what they search for, two days at least must expire.” But the architect opened his great roll of papers, put on his spectacles, and knelt down to examine more fully the plan by the trembling light of the lantern which Gracchus held in his hand.

“I fear,” said Henriot, ironically, “that the Citizen Giraud has been dreaming.”

"You will see, Citizen General, if I am a dreamer. Wait a little; wait."

"You see we are waiting," said Henriot.

"Good," said the architect; and he began to calculate. "Twelve and four make sixteen," said he, "and eight are twenty-four, which, divided by six, makes four, and then half remains; that is it. I maintain my opinion, and if I am deceived call me an ignoramus, that's all." The architect pronounced these words with an assurance which terrified the Citizen Theodore.

Henriot regarded the plan with a species of respect, seeing he admired more than he comprehended it.

"Now follow what I say."

"Where?" said Henriot.

"Upon this chart, which I have drawn. Pardieu! here we are! three feet from the wall is a moveable stone, I have marked A; do you see?"

"Certainly, I see A," said Henriot. "Do you think I do not know how to read?"

"Under this stone," continued the architect, "is a staircase; do you see? It is marked B."

"B!" said Henriot; "I see B, but I do not see the staircase," and the General smiled at his own facetiousness.

"When once the stone is raised, the foot once upon the last step, count fifty paces, look up, and you will find yourself exactly at the register where the subterraneous passage terminates, passing under the cell of the Queen."

"Capet's widow, you mean, Citizen Giraud," said Henriot, knitting his brows.

"Yes, Capet's widow."

"Why did you say the Queen?"

"The old custom."

"You say, then, it may be found under the register?" demanded Richard.

"Not only in the register, but also I will tell you in what part you will discover it: under the stone."

"That is curious," said Gracchus, "for I have noticed that every time I dropped a lug in that place the stone resounded. In short, if we find your statement correct, Citizen Architect, I shall pronounce geometry a tine thing."

"Then declare it, Citizen Henriot, for I am now going to conduct you to the place indicated by the letter A." The Citizen Theodore made his nails pierce his flesh.

“When I have seen it,” said Henriot, “when I have seen it; I rather resemble St. Thomas.”

“Ah! you said St. Thomas.”

“Yes, as you said ‘the Queen,’ from mere habit; but they cannot accuse me of conspiring with him.”

“Nor I with the Queen.” After this retort the architect delicately placed his rule, reckoned the distance, then stopped, having apparently finished his calculation, and struck upon a particular stone. This was the identical stone struck by the Citizen Theodore in his fit of frantic rage.

“It is here, Citizen General,” said the architect.

“You fancy so, Citizen Giraud.” Our concealed patriot so far forgot himself as to strike his thigh with his clenched hand, with difficulty suppressing a deep groan.

“lam positive,” said Giraud; “and your examination, combined with my report, will prove to the Convention I have not been deceived.”

“Yes, Citizen General,” continued the architect, with emphasis, “this stone opens upon a subterranean passage, terminating at the register, and passing below the cell of the widow Capet. Let us raise the stone; descend with me, and I will convince you that two men, even one man, could effect a rescue in a single night, without any one suspecting it.” A murmur of terror and admiration, elicited by the architect’s words, ran through the group, and faintly reached the Citizen Theodore, who seemed turned to stone.

“Look at the danger we run,” continued Giraud. “Well, now with a grating which I shall place in the middle of this underground passage, before it reaches the cell of the widow Capet, I shall save the country.”

“Ah! Citizen Henriot,” said Giraud, “that is an idea bordering on the sublime.”

“Perdition seize you, addle pated fool!” grumbled the patriot with redoubled fury.

“Now raise the stone,” said the architect to the Citizen Gracchus, who in addition to a lantern carried a crowbar. He commenced his work, and in a second the stone was raised. The passage appeared open, with the staircase lost in its profundity, while the moist air escaped like a pestilent vapour.

“Another abortive attempt,” murmured the Citizen Theodore. “Alas! Heaven does not will that she should escape, and her cause must be accursed!”

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE CITIZEN GRACCHUS.

FOR AN INSTANT the three men remained petrified at the entrance to the vault, while the turnkey plunged his lantern into the opening without being able to penetrate its depth. The architect triumphantly exulted over his companions from the summit of his genius.

“Well!” said he, at length.

“Ma foi! yes,” replied Henriot, “here incontestably is the passage. It only remains to know where it leads to.”

“Yes,” repeated Richard, “it remains to know that.”

“Well, then, descend yourself, Citizen Richard, and then you will see if I have told you the truth.”

“I have something better to do than go in there,” said the concierge. “We will return with you and the General to the Conciergerie. There you can raise the hearth-stone, and we shall see.”

“Very well,” said Henriot, “we will return.”

“But we must be careful,” said the architect; “this stone remaining unclosed, may offer an idea to some one.”

“Who the devil do you imagine ever comes here at this hour?” said Henriot.

“Besides,” said Richard, “the hall is deserted, and to leave Gracchus here is sufficient. Remain here, Citizen Gracchus, and we will return to you from the other side of the subterranean passage.”

“Let it be so, then,” said Gracchus.

“Are you armed?” demanded Henriot.

“I have my sword, and this crowbar. Citizen General.”

“Keep strict watch; in ten minutes we will be with you.” And having closed the iron gate, the three took their departure by the Gallery des Merciers, to find this particular entrance to the Conciergerie.

The turnkey watched their receding footsteps, and followed them with his eyes as far as he could see, and listened as long as he had anything to hear; then all relapsed into silence, and supposing himself in perfect solitude, he placed his lantern on the ground, then sat down, his legs overhanging the depths of the vault, and began to dream. The turnkeys did dream sometimes, but did not often trouble themselves to find out what was the subject of their dreams. All at once, in the midst of this profound reverie, he felt a hand pressed upon his shoulder. He turned round, and attempted, on seeing a stranger, to give the alarm, but at the same instant a pistol gleamed before his eyes. The accents were arrested in this throat, his arms fell listlessly by his side, and his eyes assumed the most suppliant expression.

"Not a word," said the intruder, "or you are a dead man!"

"What do you want, Monsieur?'' said the turnkey.

Even in '93, there were moments when they had not sufficiently tutored themselves, and omitted to say "Citizen."

"I wish," said the Citizen Theodore, "to be allowed to enter down there."

"What for?"

"Never mind."

The turnkey regarded the person who proffered this request with the most profound astonishment; but in the meantime his interlocutor fancied he detected a ray of intelligence on the man's countenance. He lowered the pistol.

"Do you refuse to make your fortune?"

"I don't know. Hitherto no one has ever made me a proposition on the subject."

"Well, then, I will begin."

"You offer to make my fortune?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean by a fortune?"

"Fifty thousand golden livres, for instance."

"Money is scarce, and fifty thousand livres now are worth a million."

"Well, I offer you that sum."

"To go down there?"

"Yes; but on condition that you come with me, and afford me your assistance in my undertaking."

"But what are you going to do? In five minutes this passage will be filled with soldiers, who will arrest you."

The Citizen Theodore was forcibly struck by this argument. "Cannot you prevent the soldiers from descending there?"

"I have no means of so doing, I know none, I search in vain."

Indeed, it was evident the turnkey taxed all the powers of his mental energies to discover some means of realizing the sum of fifty thousand livres.

“But,” demanded the Citizen Theodore, “could we not enter to-morrow?”

“Yes, but to-morrow a grate of iron will be placed across the passage, occupying the whole width, and for the greater security it is arranged that this partition should be entirely solid, and without even a door.”

“Then we must think of something else,” said Theodore. “Yes, we must find some other way,” said the turnkey.

It may seem from the manner in which Gracchus had been experimentalized, that an alliance was already formed between himself and the Citizen Theodore.

“Look at me,” said Theodore. “What do you do at the Conciergerie?”

“I am a turnkey.”

“What do you do?”

“I open the doors and shut them.”

“Do you sleep there?”

“Yes, Monsieur.”

“Do you take your meals there?”

“Not always. I have my hours of recreation.”

“And then?”

“I avail myself of them.”

“What to do?”

“To pay my respects to the mistress of a Cabaret du Puits-de-Noe, who has promised to marry me when I am possessed of twelve hundred francs.”

“Where is the Cabaret du Puits-de-Noe?”

“Near the Rue de la Vieille-Draperie.”

“Very well.”

“Hush, Monsieur.” The patriot listened. “Ah! ah!” said he. “Do you hear?”

“Yes. Voices and footsteps.”

“They are returning.”

“You see we should not have had time.” This momentarily became more evident.

“That is true. You are a brave youth, citizen, and are through me predestinated — ”

“To what?”

“To be rich one day.”

“God grant it.”

“You then still believe in God?”

“Sometimes one thing, sometimes another. To-day, for example.”

“Well?”

“I willingly believe.”

“Believe, then,” said the Citizen Theodore, putting ten louis into the man’s hand. “The devil!” said he, regarding the gold by the light of the lantern. “Is it serious?”

“It could not be more so.”

“What must I do?”

“Meet me to-morrow at the Puits-de-Noe, I will then tell you what I require of you. What is your name?”

“Gracchus.”

“Well, Citizen Gracchus, get yourself dismissed from here to-morrow by the Concierge Richard.”

“Dismissed! give up my place!”

“Do you reckon on remaining a turnkey, with fifty thousand livres?”

“No; but being a turnkey and poor, I am certain of not being guillotined.”

“Certain?”

“Or nearly so; whilst being free and rich — ”

“You will hide your money, and make love to a tricoleuse, instead of the mistress of Puits-de-Noe?”

“Well, then, it is settled.”

“To-morrow at the cabaret.”

“At what hour!’”

“At six in the evening.”

“Flee quickly; there they are. I tell you to be quick, because, I presume, you descend and go through the arches.”

“To-morrow,” repeated Theodore, hastening away.

And not before it was time, for the voices and steps approached, and lights were already visible in the obscurity of the underground passage. Theodore gained the gate indicated by the owner of the hut, then opened the lock with his crowbar, reached the window, threw it open, dropped softly into the street, and found himself upon the pavement of the Republic once again. Before quitting the Salle des Pas-Perdus he heard the Citizen Gracchus again question Richard, and also his reply.

“The Citizen Architect was quite right, the passage passes below the chamber of the widow Capet, and it was dangerous.”

“I believe it,” said Gracchus; and in this instance he told the entire truth.

Henriot reappeared at the opening of the staircase.

“And the workmen, Citizen Architect?” demanded he of Giraud.

“Before daybreak they will be here, the supporters fixed, and the gate hung,” replied a voice which seemed to proceed from the bowels of the earth.

“And you will have saved the country,” said Henriot, half in jest, half in earnest. “You little know the truth of what you say, Citizen General,” murmured Gracchus.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE ROYAL CHILD.

IN THE MEANTIME, as we have seen in the chapter preceding, the Queen’s trial was about to take place. It was already surmised that, by the sacrifice of this illustrious head, the popular hatred, so long since displayed in murmurs, would at length be satisfied. The means were not wanting for the completion of this tragedy, and in the meantime Fonquier Tinville, that fatal accuser, had resolved not to neglect the new mode of accusation which Simon had promised to place in his hands. The day after he and Simon had met in the Salle des Pas-Perdus, the noise of arms still continued to startle the prisoners who remained in the Temple. These prisoners were Madame Elizabeth, Madame Royale, and the child, who, after having been called “Your Majesty” from his cradle, was now styled the “little Capet.” General Henriot, with his tricoloured plume, his splendid horse, and large sword, followed by several of the National Guard, dismounted, and entered the dungeon where the royal child languished. By the General’s side walked a registrar of a very unprepossessing appearance, carrying a writing-desk, a large roll of paper, and waving in his hand a pen of immoderate length. Behind the scribe walked the public accuser.

We have seen, we know, and shall find that at a still later period, this dry, jaundiced, cold man, with his bloodshot eyes, made tremble before him the ferocious Henriot, even when cased in his armour. Several National Guards and a lieutenant followed them. Simon, smiling hypocritically, and holding his bonnet in one hand, and his shoemaker’s stirrup in the other, walked before to show them the way. They arrived at a very dirty chamber, spacious and cold, at the end of which, seated upon his bed, was the young Louis, in a state of perfect immobility. When we have seen the poor child fleeing from the brutal anger of Simon, he still retained a species of vitality, resenting the unworthy treatment of the shoemaker of the Temple; he fled, he wept, he prayed; then he feared and suffered, but still he hoped. But now both fear and hope had vanished; without doubt the suffering still existed, but if it still remained, the infant martyr, whom they had made pay after so cruel a fashion for his’ parents’ faults, buried it in the depths of his heart, and veiled it under an appearance of total insensibility, and did not even raise his head when the commissioners walked up to him. Without further ceremony, they instantly installed themselves. The public accuser seated himself at the head of the bed, Simon at the foot, the registrar near the window, the National Guard and their lieutenant on the side, and rather in the shade. Those among them who regarded the little prisoner with the slightest interest, or even curiosity, remarked the child’s pallor, his extraordinary embonpoint, resulting from his bloated appearance and the curvature of his legs, of which the joints began already to swell.

“The child is very ill,” said the lieutenant, with an assurance that caused Fouquier to turn round, though already seated, and prepared to question his victim.

The little Capet raised his eyes to discover who had uttered these words, and recognised the same young man who had already once before saved him from Simon’s cruelty in the court of the Temple. A sweet and intelligent glance shot from his deep blue eye, and that was all.

“Ah, ah! is that you, Citizen Louis?” said Simon, thus calling the attention of Fouquier Tinville to the friend of Maurice.

“Myself, Citizen Simon,” said Louis, with his usual nonchalance. And as Louis, though always ready to face danger, was not a man uselessly to seek it, he availed himself of this circumstance to bow to Fouquier Tinville, which salutation was politely returned.

“You observed, I think, citizen,” said the public accuser, “that the child was ill; are you a doctor?”

“I have studied medicine, at least, if I am not a medical man.”

“Well, and what do you discover in him?”

“What symptoms do you mean?” said Louis.

“Yes.”

“I find the cheeks and eyes puffed up, the hands thin and white, the knees swollen; and were I to feel his pulse, I should certainly count eighty or ninety pulsations in a minute.”

The child appeared insensible to the enumeration of his sufferings.

“And to what does science attribute the condition of the prisoner?”

Louis rubbed the tip of his nose, murmuring —

“Phyllis wants to make me speak, I am not the least inclined.”

“Ma foi! citizen,” replied he, “I am not sufficiently acquainted with the little Capet’s constitution to reply.

However — ”

Simon lent an attentive ear, and laughed in his sleeve to find his enemy so near committing himself.

“However,” said Louis, “I think he does not have sufficient exercise.”

“I believe the little scoundrel,” said Simon, “does not choose to walk.”

The child remained quite unmoved by this apostrophe of the shoemaker. Fouquier Tinville arose, advanced to Louis, and addressed some words to him in a low tone. No one heard the words, but it was evident they assumed the form of interrogatories.

“Oh! oh! do you believe that, citizen? It is a serious charge for a mother — ”

“Under any circumstances, we shall find out. Simon pretends he has heard him say so, and has engaged to make him acknowledge it.”

“This would be frightful,” said Louis; “but indeed it is possible; the Austrian is not exempt from sin, and right or wrong, does not concern me... they have made her out a Messalina; but not content with that, they wish to make her an Agrippina. I must acknowledge it appears to me rather hard.”

“This is what has been reported by Simon,” said the impassible Fouquier.

“I do not doubt that Simon has said all this. There are some men who stick at nothing, even the most impossible accusations. But do you not find,” said Louis, fixing his eyes steadily on Fouquier; “do you not find — you, an intelligent and upright man, possessed with a strong mind — that to inquire of a child concerning such circumstances as those which all the most natural and most sacred laws of nature command us to respect, is to insult the whole human nature in the person of a child?”

The accuser did not frown, but took a note from his pocket and showed it to Louis.

“The Convention enjoins me to inform,”

said he; “the rest does not concern me. I inform.”

“It is just,” said Louis; “and I declare that if this child acknowledges — ” And the young man shook his head, expressive of disgust.

“Besides,” continued Fouquier, “it is not only upon the denunciation of Simon that we proceed; the accusation is public.” And Fouquier drew a second paper from his pocket. This was a number of a work entitled “Le

Pere Duchesne;” which, as it is well known, was written by Hebert. The accusation indeed appeared there in full.

“It is written, and even printed,” said Louis, “but till I hear a similar declaration proved from the lips of the child — mind, I mean voluntarily, freely, and without menaces, notwithstanding Simon and Hebert. I shall disbelieve it, much as you in reality do yourself.”

Simon impatiently awaited the issue of this conversation.

The miserable creature was not aware of the power exercised upon an intelligent man, the looks which he receives from the crowd, expressive either of sympathy or subtle hatred. But Fouquier Tinville had felt the keen observance of Louis, and was anxious to be fully understood by him.

“The examination is now about to commence,” said the public accuser. “Registrar, resume your pen.” This individual, who came to draw out the proces-verbal, was waiting, like Henriot, Simon, and all the rest, till the colloquy between Fouquier and Louis bad ceased. The child alone appeared perfectly a stranger to the scene in which he was soon to become the principal actor, and had withdrawn the look which for an instant had gleamed with such bright intelligence.

“Silence,” said Henriot, “the Citizen Fouquier is going to interrogate the child.”

“Capet,” said the public accuser, “do you know what has become of your mother?”

The little Louis turned from an ashy paleness to a brilliant red, but made no reply.

“Did you hear me, Capet?” He still remained silent.

“Oh! he hears well enough,” said Simon.” only he is like the ape, he will not reply for fear he should be taken for a man, and so made to work.”

“Reply, Capet,” said Henriot; “it is the commission from the Convention that interrogates you. You must show obedience to its laws.”

The child turned pale, but did not reply. Simon made a frantic gesture of rage. With natures so stupid and brutal as his, anger becomes madness, more especially when accompanied by symptoms of drunkenness.

“Will you reply, wolf’s cub?” showing him the strap.

“Be quiet, Simon,” said Fouquier Tinville; “you have not the parole.”

“This word, which had taken its rise from the revolutionary tribunal, had escaped him.

“Do you hear, Simon?” said Louis. ‘‘This is the second time you have been told this in my presence: the first was when you accused Tison’s daughter, whom you had the pleasure of bringing to the scaffold.”

Simon was silent.

“Does your mother love you, Capet?” asked Fouquier.

Still the same silence.

“They say not,” continued the Accuser.

Something like a ghastly smile passed over the child’s pale lips.

“But then, I say,” roared Simon, “he has told me she loves him too much.”

“Look here, Simon,” said Louis, “you’re angry that the little Capet chatters so much when you are together, and remains silent before company to-day.”

“Oh! if we were together,” said Simon.

“Yes, if you were alone; but unfortunately you are not alone.”

“Oh! if you were, brave Simon, excellent patriot, how you would belabour the poor child, hey? But you are not alone, and dare not show your rage before honest men like us, who know that the ancients, whom we endeavour to take for our models, respected all who were weak. You dare not, for you are not valiant, my worthy man, when you have children of five feet six inches to combat with.”

“Oh!’’ muttered Simon, grinding his teeth.

“Capet,” said Fouquier, “have you confided any secrets to Simon?” The child never turned round, but his face assumed an expression of irony impossible to describe.

“About your mother?” continued Fouquier.

A look of supreme contempt passed over his countenance.

“Reply, yes or no,” cried Henriot.

“Say yes,” roared Simon, holding his leather stirrup over the child’s head.

The child shuddered, but made no movement to avoid the blow. Those present uttered a cry expressive of their disgust. Louis did more. Before the wretch could lower his arm he darted forward and seized him by the wrist.

“Will you let me go?” roared Simon, purple with rage.

“There is no harm,” said Fouquier, “in a mother loving her child. Tell us in what way your mother loved you, Capet. It may be useful to her.”

The young prisoner started at the idea of being useful to his mother.

"She loves me as a mother loves her son, monsieur," said he; "there are not two ways for mothers to love their sons, or sons to love their mothers."

"And I, little serpent, declare that you have told me your mother...."

"You have dreamt that," interrupted Louis, quietly. "You must often have the nightmare, Simon."

"Louis, Louis," growled Simon, grinding his teeth.

"Yes again, Louis. There is no way of beating Louis since he chastises the wicked; there is no way to denounce him for what he did in arresting your arm, as it was done before General Henriot and Fouquier Tinville, who approved it, and they are not lukewarm in the cause. There is then no way to bring him to the guillotine, as you did poor Heloise Tison. It is very grievous, very vexatious, very enraging; still it is so, my poor Simon."

"Too late! too late!" replied the shoemaker, with his mocking laugh.

"Yes, dear friends," said Louis, "I hope with the help of the Supreme Being — Ah! you expected I was going to say with the help of God, but I hope with the assistance of the Supreme Being, and my sword, to disembowel you first; but more aside, Simon, you prevent me from seeing."

"Brigand!"

"Be silent, you prevent me from hearing."

And Louis silenced him with a threatening look. Simon clenched his black hands and shook his fists, but, as Louis had told him, he was obliged to keep within bounds.

"Now he has begun to speak," said Henriot, "he will continue no doubt. Go on, Fouquier."

"Will you reply now?" demanded Fouquier.

The child returned to his former silence.

"You see, citizen, you see," said Simon, "the obstinacy of tills child is strange," troubled in spite of himself at this royal firmness.

"He is badly advised," said Louis.

"By whom?" demanded Henriot.

"By his patron."

"Do you accuse me?" cried Simon — "do you denounce me? Ah! that is curious — "

"Take it coolly," said Fouquier. Then turning towards the child, who, as we have said, remained perfectly insensible:

"My child," said he, "reply to the National Commission; do not aggravate your situation by refusing us any useful information. You have spoken to the citizen Simon about your mother, how you caress her and love her; how she caresses and loves you?”

Louis threw a glance around the assembly, which gleamed with hatred when it rested on Simon, but he did not reply.

“Do you feel yourself unhappy?” demanded the accuser; “are you uncomfortably lodged? and badly fed? and unkindly treated? Would you wish more liberty, better food, another prison, another guardian? Would you like a horse to ride upon, and some companions of your own age?”

Louis still maintained the profound silence he had only once broken, to defend his mother. The commission was utterly confounded at so much firmness and intelligence evinced by a child.

“These kings,” said Henriot, in a low voice, “what a race! They are like tigers, and all the young ones inherit their wickedness.”

“How are we to write the proces-verbal?” asked the registrar, much embarrassed.

“As there is no charge, Simon, there is nothing to write,” said Louis; “that will settle your affair exactly.”

Simon again shook ins fist at his implacable enemy.

Louis began to laugh.

“You will not laugh like that the day you will sneeze in the sack,” said Simon, drunk with fury.

“I do not know whether I shall precede or follow you in the little ceremony you menace me with,” said Louis; “but tin’s I do know, that many will laugh when your turn comes. Gods! I have spoken in the plural, gods! you will not be ugly then, Simon; you will be hideous.”

And Louis retired behind the commission, with a fresh burst of laughter. The commission having nothing more to attend to, withdrew, when the poor child, released from his tormentors, threw himself upon his bed, and began to sing a melancholy song which had been a great favourite of his deceased father.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE BOUQUET OF VIOLETS.

AS IT MIGHT BE foreseen, the felicity of Genevieve and Maurice was not of long continuance. In the tempest which unchains the wind and hurls the thunderbolt, the nest of the dove is shaken in the tree where it had retired for shelter. Genevieve passed from one terror to another. She no longer feared for Maison Rouge, she now trembled for Maurice. She knew her husband sufficiently well to feel convinced, the moment of his disappearance, he was saved, but sure of his safety, she thought now of her own. She dared not confide her griefs to the man, the least timid, at this epoch when no one was devoid of fear, but it was plainly evinced by her red eyes and pallid cheeks.

One day Maurice softly entered, so quietly indeed, that Genevieve, buried in a profound reverie, did not notice his entrance. He stopped upon the threshold and saw Genevieve sitting immovable, her eyes fixed on vacancy, her hands lying listlessly on her knees, her head hanging pensively upon her bosom. He gazed at her for a moment, with an expression of sadness, for all that was passing in the young girl's heart was suddenly revealed, as if he had read even to her latest thought. He stepped up to her.

"You have ceased to care for France, Genevieve; confess it is so. You fly from the air you breathe, and not without the greatest reluctance will you even approach the window."

"Alas!" said Genevieve, "I know I cannot conceal my thoughts from you, Maurice; you have divined rightly."

"It is nevertheless a fine country," said the young man; "life is here important, and well-occupied now. This bustling activity of the tribune, the clubs, the conspiracies, etc., renders sweeter the hours spent by our own fireside. One loves it the more ardently, may be from the fear of not being able to love it on the morrow, for on the morrow one may have ceased to exist."

Genevieve shook her head. "An ungrateful country to serve," said she.

"Why so?"

"Yes, you who have laboured so much for the cause of liberty, are you not to-day more than half suspected?"

"But you, dear Genevieve," said Maurice, with a look of tenderness, "you a sworn enemy to this liberty, you who have done so much against it, you yet sleep peaceable and inviolate beneath the roof of a Republican, and there, you see, is my recompense."

"Yes," said Genevieve, "but that cannot last long, that which is wrong cannot endure."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean to say that I, that is to say an aristocrat, that I who dream quietly of the defeat of your party, and the ruin of your plans; I who conspire, even in your house, the return of the ancient regime; I who, recognised, you would condemn to death and dishonour, pursuant to your opinions at least, I, Maurice, will not remain here as the evil genius of your house, I will not drag you to the scaffold."

"And where would you go, Genevieve?"

"Where shall I go, Maurice? One day when you are out I shall go and denounce myself, without saying where I come from."

"Oh!" cried the young man, wounded to the heart's core, "already ungrateful?"

"No," cried the young woman, throwing her arms round Maurice's neck, "it is love, and the most devoted love, I swear. I did not wish my brother should be taken and slaughtered as a rebel; I do not wish my lover to be arrested and guillotined as a traitor."

"And you will do this, Genevieve?"

"As truly as there is a God in heaven," replied the young woman; "besides, I not only experience fear but remorse," and she bowed her head as if it were a burden too heavy to be borne.

"Oh, Genevieve!" said Maurice.

"You will understand all that I say, all that I feel, Maurice, for you yourself experience this remorse. You know I gave myself to you whilst I belonged to another, and you have taken me without my possessing the right to dispose of myself."

"Enough," said Maurice, "enough." He turned pale, and a melancholy expression suffused his countenance, and firm resolution burned in his clear eyes. "I will show you, Genevieve, how entirely I love you," said the young man. “I will prove to you that no sacrifice is beyond my love. You hate France. Well, let it be so. We will quit France.”

Genevieve clasped her hands, and regarded her lover with enthusiastic admiration. “You will not deceive me, Maurice,” murmured she.

“Have lever deceived you?” said Maurice, “and is this the time? lam dishonouring myself for you.”

Genevieve approached her lips to Maurice’s, and remained hanging on the neck of her lover. “Yes, you are right,” said Genevieve.” it is I who deceive myself. What I feel is not remorse, perhaps it is a degradation to my love, but you will comprehend at least I love you far too much to feel any other emotion than the all-engrossing one, the fear of losing you. Let us go far away, Maurice; let us go far away where no one can ever reach us.”

“Oh! thanks,” said Maurice, transported with joy.

“But how can we flee?” said Genevieve, trembling at the thought. “It is not so easy to escape now-a-days from the poignard of the assassins of the Second of September, or the hatchet of the hangman of the Twenty-first of January.”

“Genevieve,” said Maurice, “God will protect us. Listen to me. A good action which I endeavoured to perform, apropos to this Second of September, which you have just named, is now about to receive the reward. I wished to save a poor priest who had studied with me. I went to Danton, and at his request the Committee of Public Safety signed a passport for the unfortunate man and his sister. This passport Danton forwarded to me, but the unhappy man, instead of seeking it at my house, as I had recommended him to do, was shut up by the Carmelites, and there he died.”

“And the passport?” said Genevieve.

“I have it now. It is worth a million. It is worth more than that, Genevieve, it comprises both life and happiness.”

“Oh! God be praised,” cried the young woman.

“Now, my property, as you are aware, consists of an estate, managed by an old servant of the family, a staunch patriot, and strictly loyal, in whom we may confide. He will send a remittance whenever I wish. On arriving at Boulogne, we will go to his house.”

“Where does he reside, then?”

“At Abbeville.”

“When shall we go, Maurice?”

“Within an hour.”

"No one need know of our departure."

"No one will know it. I will run to Louis; he has a cabriolet and no horse, whilst I have a horse and no carriage. We will set out immediately on my return. You remain here, Genevieve, and prepare everything for our departure. We want but little luggage; we can purchase all that we require in England. I shall give Scevola some commission that will remove him out of the way. Louis will explain our departure to him this evening. In that time we shall be far away."

"But if we should be stopped upon the road?"

"Have we not our passports? We shall go to Hubert's house; that is the steward's name. Hubert forms part of the municipality of Abbeville; from Abbeville to Boulogne he will accompany us as safeguard. At Boulogne we will purchase and freight a vessel. I could, besides, proceed to the Committee, and make them give me a mission to Abbeville. But no, not by fraud, Genevieve. Is it not better to risk our lives to save and secure our happiness?"

"Yes, yes, mon ami; and we shall succeed. But how you are perfumed this morning," said the young woman, concealing her face on Maurice's breast.

"True; I purchased a bunch of violets for you this morning, passing before the Palace d'Egalite; but, on my return, finding you so sad, I thought of nothing but inquiring the cause of your distress."

"Oh, give it to me; I will return it."

Genevieve inhaled the odour of the bouquet with intense delight, when suddenly her eyes suffused with tears.

"What is it?" said Maurice.

"Poor Heloise!" murmured Genevieve.

"Ah, yes!" said Maurice, with a sigh; "but let us think of ourselves, and leave the dead, wherever they may be, to rest in the grave dug by their devotion. Adieu! I am going."

"Return quickly."

"In less than half an hour I shall be here again."

"But if Louis is not at home?"

"What does it matter? his servant knows me. And even in his absence I can take what I please, as he would do here in mine."

"Very well."

"Now, my Genevieve, prepare everything; but, as I have told you, confine yourself to necessaries. I do not wish our departure to appear like a removal."

The young man advanced a step towards the door.

"Maurice," said Genevieve.

He turned round, and saw the young woman extend her arms towards him. "Au revoir! au revoir! dear love," said he; "in half an hour I shall be here."

Genevieve remained alone, occupied, as we have said, in preparations for their departure. She accomplished her task in feverish haste. As long as she remained in Paris, the part she was acting appeared to her doubly culpable. Once out of France, once among strangers, it seemed that her crime — a crime rather of fatality than her own, would weigh the less heavily on her conscience. She even hoped, isolated and in solitude, she might finish by forgetting the existence of any other man than Maurice. They would fly to England, everything was arranged. There they would hire a little cottage, standing alone, very retired, shut out from all eyes; they would change their names, and instead of two names would have one. Then they would have two servants, who would be perfectly ignorant of the past. Fortunately, both Genevieve and Maurice spoke English. Neither the one nor the other left anything to regret in France. Thus Genevieve commenced making preparations for their voyage, or rather flight. She took singular pleasure in selecting from the rest those objects for which Maurice had evinced any predilection. The coat setting off his tall figure to advantage, the cravat and waistcoat suitable to his complexion, the books whose leaves he had most frequently drawn upon. She had already made her selection, already the waiting trunks were on the floor, while clothes, linen and books strewed the chairs, the sofa, and the piano. Suddenly she heard the key turn in the lock. "Why Scevola has returned," said she: "surely Maurice could not have met him." And she continued her occupation. The doors of the saloon were open, and she heard Scevola moving in the antechamber. She held a roll of music in her hand, and was looking for some string to tie round it. "Scevola," cried she.

An approaching step sounded in the adjoining room. "I am here," said a voice.

At the sound of this voice Genevieve turned quickly round, and uttered a terrific cry. "My husband!" cried she.

"Himself," said Dixmer, coolly.

Genevieve was upon a chair, searching for some string in the wardrobe. She felt her head turn round, and extending her arms, fell backwards, wishing she could precipitate herself into an abyss beneath. Dixmer took her in his arms, and carried her to a sofa, where he seated himself also.

"What is the matter, my dear? What is it? My presence seems to have produced a most disagreeable effect upon you."

"I am dying," murmured Genevieve, turning from him, and pressing both hands over her eyes that she might shut out the frightful apparition.

"What," said Dixmer, "did you believe me dead, my dear, and did you take me for a ghost?"

Genevieve looked round her with a bewildered air, when, perceiving the portrait of Maurice, she glided from the sofa and fell upon her knees, as if to implore the assistance of this powerless and insensible image, which still continued to smile. The miserable woman fully comprehended the menaces concealed by Dixmer under his affected calmness.

"Oh, my dear child," continued the master tanner, "it was as well for me, perhaps, that you thought I was far from Paris; but I remained there. The day after I had quitted the house, I returned, and found in its stead a heap of ruins. I inquired after you. No one had seen you. I then commenced a search after you, and have had much trouble to find you. I vow I did not think you were here; however, I had my suspicions. So, as you see, I came. So here I am, and you see me. And how is dear Maurice? Indeed, I fear you have suffered much. You so staunch a Royalist, compelled to seek shelter under the roof of a Republican."

"My God! my God!" murmured Genevieve, "take pity upon me."

"After all, my dear," continued Dixmer, "what serves to console me most, is that you are so comfortably lodged here, and that you do not appear to have suffered much from the proscription. As for myself, since the burning of our house, and the ruin of our fortune, I have had my share of wandering adventures, sometimes living in a cave, another time a boat, and sometimes even in the common sewers with which the Seine abounds."

"Monsieur!" said Genevieve.

"You have there some beautiful fruit; as for me, I have often gone without any dessert, not having had any dinner." Genevieve, sobbing bitterly, supported her head between her hands. Not," continued Dixmer, "that I was destitute of money. I have, thank God! generally carried with me thirty thousand francs in gold, which at this time is worth five hundred thousand francs; by means of which the ‘collier,’ the ‘fisherman,’ or the ‘rag merchant,’ drew the louis from his pocket to purchase a morsel of cheese or a sausage. Eh! my God! yes, Madame, I have successively adopted these three costumes. To-day, the better to disguise myself, I am ‘en Patriot,”en exagere,’ en Marseillais.’ I lisp, and I swear; an outlaw cannot conceal himself as easily in Paris, as a young and pretty woman, and I have not the happiness of knowing an ardent young Republican, who would hide me from every eye.”

“Monsieur! monsieur!” cried Genevieve, “have mercy upon me; you *see* that I am dying.”

“Anxiety; I can understand you have had much anxiety about me, but console yourself, you see me now. I have returned, and we will now part no more, madame.”

“Oh! you will kill me!” cried Genevieve.

Dixmer regarded her with a frightful smile. “Kill an innocent woman! Oh, madame! what makes you say so? It must be that grief for my absence has turned your brain.”

“Monsieur!” said Genevieve, “monsieur! I beseech you to kill me at once, rather than torture me with these cruel railleries. No, I am not innocent, yes, I am criminal, yes, I merit death. Kill me, monsieur, kill me! — ”

“Then you acknowledge that you merit death?”

“Yes! Yes!”

“And to expiate this crime of which you accuse yourself, you will submit to death without complaint?”

“Strike, monsieur; I will not utter a cry, and instead of cursing I will bless the hand that strikes me.”

“No, madame, I do not wish to strike you, though in all probability you will die. Only your death instead of being as you seem to fear an ignominious one, shall be most glorious. Thank me, madame, whilst punishing, I will immortalize you.”

“What then will you do, monsieur?”

“You will follow the end to which we were tending when interrupted on our route. In your own eyes and in mine, you die guilty, in the eyes of the world you will die a martyr.”

"Oh! my God! you will drive me mad by speaking thus. Where are you conducting me? where are you dragging me?"

"In all probability to death."

"Leave me to offer up one prayer."

"To whom?"

"It matters not to you. The moment you deprive me of life, my debt is cancelled — my debt paid, I owe you nothing."

"True," said Dixmer, retiring into another room; "I will await you." And he left her once more alone.

Genevieve sank on her knees before the portrait, pressing her hands against her bursting heart.

"Maurice," said she, in a low tone, "pardon me; I could not expect to be happy, but I hoped to have made you so. Maurice, I am depriving you of a joy that constituted your life; pardon me for causing your death, my best beloved."

Then severing a ringlet from her mass of curls, she bound it round the bouquet of violets, and placed them beneath the portrait, which, insensible and speechless as it was, still appeared to assume an expression of grief at her departure. At least so it appeared to the unfortunate Genevieve, as she gazed at it through her tears.

"Well, are you ready, madame?" demanded Dixmer.

"So soon?" murmured Genevieve.

"Oh! take your time, madame," replied Dixmer; "I am in no hurry. Besides, I dare say Maurice will not be long, and I shall be delighted to thank him for all his kindness and hospitality towards you."

Genevieve trembled with terror at the idea of a meeting between her lover and husband. She raised herself by an effort, saying calmly, "It is finished, monsieur, and I am ready now."

Dixmer went out first, and the trembling Genevieve followed him. With half-closed eyes, her head turned round to look her last. She ascended the carriage which was waiting at the door. It rolled away. As Genevieve had truly said:

"It was finished."

CHAPTER XL.

THE CABARET DU PUITS DE NOE.

THIS MAN, ATTIRED in the blouse, whom we have seen traversing with long and rapid strides the Salle des Pas-Perdus, whom we have heard (during the expedition of the architect Giraud, General Henriot and Richard) conversing with the turnkey left to guard the subterranean passage, this enraged patriot, who had introduced himself to Simon as having carried the head of the Princess de Lamballe, found himself, on the next evening, about seven o’clock, at the Cabaret du Puits de Noe, situated, as we have said, at the corner of La Rue de la Vieille Drapene. He was seated at the end of a dirty room, redolent of tobacco and candles, pretending to devour a plate of fish, swimming in black butter. The room where he supped was nearly deserted; two or three habitues of the house alone remained after the rest who enjoyed the privilege of a daily visit to this establishment. The tables were for the most part empty; but we ought to remark, in honour to the Cabaret du Puits de Noe, that the stained tablecloths denoted the departure of a satisfactory number of satisfied guests. The three last successively disappeared, and at about a quarter to eight the patriot found himself alone. Then, with true aristocratic disgust, he pushed away the greasy plate, which an instant before he had appeared to think so delicious, and drew from his pocket a tablet of Spanish chocolate, which he ate slowly, and with a very different expression to that we have endeavoured to portray, on his countenance. From time to time, whilst eating his chocolate and black bread, he cast towards a glass door, shaded by a red and blue-checked curtain, anxious and impatient glances. Sometimes he interrupted his frugal repast to listen; in short, evinced an absence of mind sufficient to induce the mistress of the mansion (seated at her counter, and near the door on which the patriot so eagerly fixed his eyes) to conclude, that she might without vanity consider herself as the object of his pre-occupation. At length the door-bell sounded in’ a way that made him start; he drew the plate again before him, and without attracting the woman’s observation, threw half the contents to a famished-looking dog, and the remainder to a cat, who, spitefully seizing the dog's dainties, received in return some strokes from his paws. The door opened, and a man entered dressed almost the same as the patriot with the exception of the hairy cap which he had replaced with the bonnet-rouge. An enormous bunch of keys hung from his girdle, from which also depended a sword.

"My soup! my chop!" cried the man, entering the public room without removing his bonnet, or even saluting the mistress of the house by an inclination of his head, but with a sigh of fatigue seated himself at a table adjoining that where our patriot was discussing his black bread and chocolate. The mistress of the cabaret, in consequence of the deference she entertained for the newcomer, rose herself to order the requisite viands The two men turned — one to look into the street, the other towards the end of the room — not a word was exchanged between them till the mistress of the cabaret had totally disappeared. When the door had closed behind her, and the light from a single candle, suspended from the end of an iron wire so as to divide the light equally between the two guests, when at length the man in the bearskin bonnet — thanks to the light placed before him — saw that the room was deserted:

"Bon soir!" said he to his companion, without turning round.

"Bon soir!" said the new comer.

"Well," said the patriot, with the same affected indifference, "where are we now?"

"Well! it is done!"

"What is done?"

"As we agreed, I have had some conversation with Father Richard about the situation. I complained of swimming in the head, dimness of eyesight — in short, of general ill-health, and continual pain altogether."

"What then?"

"Father Richard called his wife, and she rubbed my temples with vinegar, and that revived me. Then, as we had arranged between us, I said that want of air produced this swimming in the head, that I made blood too fast, and that the duty at the Conciergerie, which contains at the present moment four hundred prisoners, was killing me."

"What did they say to that?"

"Richard's wife pitied me, and he took me to the door."

"It was not enough to take you to the door."

"But wait. Then his wife, who is a good soul, reproached him with having no h;-art, seeing that I was the father of a family."

"What did he say to that?"

"He said that she was right; but that the very first condition annexed to the situation of turnkey, was to remain within the prison to which he was attached; that the Republic did not jest, but would without ceremony cut the throats of those who grew dizzy in the exercise of their duty."

"Diable!" said the patriot.

"And he was not far wrong either; for since the Austrian has been there, it is a perfect hell of surveillance. Confound her." The patriot here gave his plate to the dog to lick, who was directly bitten by the cat. "Go on," said he, without turning round.

"At last, monsieur, I began to groan, and to say that I felt very ill; asked concerning the infirmary, and said I was certain my children would die of hunger if this pain was not removed."

"And Father Richard?"

"The Father Richard replied that turnkeys had no business with children."

"But you had his wife on your side, I suppose?"

"Fortunately! She made a great to do with her husband, reproached him with possessing a bad and hard heart, and Richard finished by saying to me:

"Well! Citizen Gracchus, speak to some one of your friends who will give you some security for his attendance, present him to me, and I promise to accept him as your substitute.' Upon which I left him, saying:

"'Very good, Father Richard, I will directly seek one."'

"And you have found one, my brave fellow."

At this moment the mistress of the establishment entered, bringing the Citizen Gracchus his soup and chop. This did not suit either the patriot or Gracchus, who had still some communication to make.

"Citoyenne," said the turnkey, "I have received a slight remuneration from Father Richard to-day, which will permit me to treat myself to some better fare. So bring me some pork, a drinking horn, and a bottle of Burgundy wine; send your servant to fetch the one from the pork-butcher's, and bring me the other yourself fresh from the cellar." The hostess immediately left to execute his orders.

"Well," said the patriot, "you are an intelligent lad."

"So far intelligent, that I do not hide from myself what, notwithstanding all your fine promises, will be the end of us both. Do you suspect what it may be?”

“Yes, perfectly.”

“We stake both our necks.”

“Do not be uneasy about mine.”

“It is not yours, monsieur, I must confess, that causes me the greatest uneasiness.”

“It is your own?”

“Yes.”

“But what if I estimate it at double its worth?”

“Ah! monsieur, there is nothing more precious than one’s neck.”

“Not yours.”

“Why not mine?”

“At this moment at least.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I mean to say your neck is not worth an old coin, seeing that, if I, for example, were an agent of the Committee of Public Safety, you would be guillotined to-morrow.” The turnkey suddenly turned round so brusquely, that the dog barked at him. He was pale as death.

“Neither turn round nor turn pale,” said the patriot, “but on the contrary finish your soup quietly. I am not an agent, friend. Let me once enter the Conciergerie, install me in your situation, give me the keys, and to-morrow I will count out to you 50,000 livres in gold.”

“Is this true at least?”

“Well, you have excellent security. My head.”

The turnkey considered for some seconds.

“Come,” said the patriot, who could see him in the glass, “do not indulge in meditations of evil. If you denounce me, as you will only have done your duty, you will not receive a sou from the Republic; if you serve me, and on the contrary are deficient in this same duty, as it is unjust in this world to do anything for nothing, I will give you 50,000 livres.”

“I understand perfectly,” said the turnkey. “I have all the inclination to do what you require, but I fear the results....”

“The results! And what have you to fear? I will not denounce you; on the contrary.”

“No doubt.”

“The day after I am duly installed, take a turn through the Conciergerie, and I will count you twenty-five rouleaux each containing 2000 francs.

These you can easily dispose of in your two pockets. With the money I will give you a card to leave France. You go, and wherever you are you will be not only rich, but independent."

"Well! it is settled, monsieur, let what will happen. I am a poor devil, who never meddled in politics. France has always got on very well without me, and will not perish through any fault of mine; if you do a wicked action so much the worse for you."

"At all events," said the patriot, "I think I shall never do worse than they are doing at this moment."

"Monsieur, permit me to decline passing an opinion upon the politics of the National Convention."

"You are a pattern of philosophy and carelessness. When, however, will you present me to Father Richard?"

"This evening, if you please."

"Yes, certainly; but who am I?"

"My cousin Murdoch."

"Murdoch, let it be then; the name pleases me. What trade?"

"A breeches-maker."

"Either breeches-maker or tanner. I have that at my fingers' ends."

"Are you a tanner?"

"I could be one."

"True."

"At what time will you present me?"

"In half an hour if you like."

"At nine o'clock, then."

"When shall I have the money?"

"To-morrow."

"You must be enormously rich?"

"I am in easy circumstances."

"A *ci-devant?* is it not so?"

"What does it matter?"

"To possess money, and give it away to run the risk of being guillotined; surely the ci-devants must be great blockheads."

"What would you have? The sansculottes have too much sense to leave any for others."

"Hush! here is my wine."

"This evening, in front of the Conciergerie."

“Yes.”

The patriot, paid his bill and went out. At the door was heard the stentorian voice, “Come, citoyenne! quick; the ribs of pork and the drinking-horn, my cousin Gracchus is dying of hunger.”

“Murdoch is a good fellow,” said the turnkey, tasting the wine poured out for him by the “cabaretiere,” and regarding her tenderly.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE REGISTRAR OF THE MINISTER OF WAR.

THE PATRIOT LEFT, but he had not gone far. Through the curtained window he kept watch over the turnkey to discover if he entered into conversation with any of the agents of the republican police, one of the best that ever existed, since one half of society closely watched the other, less from the great glory of government than for the still greater security of their heads. But nothing occurred to excite the patriot’s fears. At a few minutes before nine the turnkey rose, pinched the chin of the hostess, and went out. The patriot rejoined him at the quay of the Conciergerie, and they entered the prison together. On the same evening the affair was concluded, and Father Richard accepted Murdoch as a substitute for Gracchus. Two hours before this arrangement took place, another scene had been enacted in a different part of the prison, which, although apparently of no interest, was possessed of vital importance to the principal personages of this history. The registrar of the Conciergerie, fatigued with his day’s labour, was folding up his papers, and preparing to leave, when a man, conducted by the Citoyenne Richard, presented himself in his office.

“Citizen Registrar,” said she.” here is your fellow registrar of the Minister of War, who comes on the part of the Citizen Minister, to hasten some military matters.”

“Ah, citizen,” said the registrar, “you are too late; I have just put away all my papers.”

“Dear brother, pardon me,” said the newcomer, “but we are really so overwhelmed with business, that even running does not make up for lost moments, and our lost moments only are those occupied by others in eating and sleeping.”

“That alters the case, my dear fellow; so make haste, for, as you observe, it is near supper time, and I am very hungry. Have you your documents?”

“Here they are,” said the registrar of the Minister of War, exhibiting a portfolio of papers, which his brother, busy as he was, scrutinized with the strictest attention.

‘‘Oh! they arc all right,” said Richard’s wife, “and my husband has already thoroughly inspected them.”

“Never mind, never mind,” said the registrar, continuing his examination. The registrar remained like a man patiently awaiting the accomplishment of all due formalities. “Perfectly correct,” said the registrar of the Conciergerie, “and you can now commence as soon as you please. Have you many entries to make?”

“A hundred.”

“That will occupy you for several days. Therefore, dear brother, I wish to form a small establishment near you; that is to say if you will permit me.”

“How am I to understand you?” said the registrar of the Conciergerie.

“I will explain it to you fully, if you will join us at supper this evening. You say you are hungry.”

“I do not deny it.”

“Well, you shall see my wife, who is a good housekeeper, and you know me, and will acknowledge me for a good companion.”

“Ma foi! yes, you strike me as such, my dear brother;*yet*, notwithstanding — ”

“Oh! come without ceremony, and partake of some oysters that I will purchase as I pass La Place du Chatelet, a poulet of our own roasting, and a few dishes which Madame Durand excels in.”

“You tempt me, my brother,” said the registrar of the Conciergerie, astonished at the bill of fare, to which he was totally unaccustomed as a registrar paid by the revolutionary tribunal, at the rate of ten livres, in assignats, equal to two francs at the utmost.

“Then you will accept my invitation?’’

“Yes, willingly.”

“In that case, to work to-morrow; till this evening we part.”

“Sow we must part.”

“You will come early?”

“In an instant, only I must first inform the gendarmes who guard the Austrian.”

“Why must you tell them?”

“So that when they know that I am absent, and that there is no one at the wicket, they may become suspicious of every noise.”

“Ah! that is a very wise precaution, faith!”

“You understand now?”

"Perfectly."

"Go, then."

The registrar of the Conciergerie proceeded hastily to the wicket, which was opened by one of the gendarmes.

"Who is there?"

"I, the registrar, you know. I am going out. Bon soir; Citizen Gracchus."

"Bon soir, Citizen Registrar," and the wicket was shut.

The registrar of the Minister of War had paid the greatest attention to this scene, and whilst the door of the Queen's prison remained open, his looks rapidly penetrated to the first compartment, where, seeing the other gendarme, Duchesne, seated at table, he felt perfectly assured the Queen had only two guards, and when the registrar of the Conciergerie turned round, his face had resumed its expression of perfect stolid indifference. As they went out of the Conciergerie two men entered. They were the Citizen Gracchus and his cousin Murdoch. The cousin Murdoch and the registrar of the Minister of War, each by a simultaneous movement arising from the same feeling, appeared to shrink, the one at the sight of the hairy bonnet, the other from the broad-brimmed hat pulled down over the eyes.

"Who are these men?" asked the registrar of the Minister of War.

"I only know one of them; it is a turnkey named Gracchus."

"Ah!" said the other, with affected indifference, "do the turnkeys then go out of the Conciergerie?"

"They have their day."

The investigation did not proceed any further, and the new friends took the road to the Pont-au-Change. At the corner of the Place du Chatelet, the registrar of the Minister of War, according to agreement, purchased some oysters, and continued his way by the Quai de Greve. The dwelling of this individual was simple. The Citizen Durand inhabited three rooms on La Place de Greve, in a house without any porter. Each tenant had a key of the door in the passage, and it was agreed that if any one had omitted to take his key, he should intimate the same by one, two, or three raps with the knocker, according to the story he inhabited, and any one who was waiting, and heard the signal, then descended and opened the door; but the Citizen Durand having provided himself with his key, had nut any occasion to knock. They ascended two flights of stairs, when the Citizen Durand drew another key from his pocket, and they both entered. The registrar of the palace found his friend's wife much to his taste. She was a charming woman; indeed, an expression of profound melancholy diffused over her countenance, stamped it with an expression of deep interest. It has always been allowed that sadness is seductive in women, especially pretty women. It attracts all men without exception, even turnkeys; and turnkeys are but men after all; and what man possessed with natural feeling would not wish to console a pretty woman in affliction, and as the Citizen Dorut remarks, "To change the pale tint of the white rose to a roseate hue?" The two registrars did full justice to their excellent supper; it was only Madame Durand who eat nothing. In the meantime conversation proceeded. The registrar inquired of his brother registrar (with a curiosity the more remarkable in these days, when such frightful dramas were daily enacted) concerning the customs of Paris, the days of judgment, and the means of surveillance. The registrar of the palace, delighted at being listened to with so much deference, replied with the greatest complaisance, spoke of the manners of jailors, of Fouquier-Tinville, and lastly of the Citoyen Sanson, the principal actor in the tragedy daily performed upon La Place de la Revolution. Then in his turn, addressing his colleague and host, he made various inquiries concerning his vocation and ministry.

"Oh!" said Durand, "I am not so well informed as yourself, being a person of much less importance, seeing that I am rather secretary to the registrar than the incumbent of the place. I do the work of the registrar-in-chief — an obscure employment for me at least, but highly profitable to them; but that is the way with all these revolutionary commissioners. Heaven and earth may perhaps change one day, but these things never."

"Well, I will assist you, citizen," said the registrar of the palace, charmed with the excellence of his host's wine, and above all with the beaux yeux of Madame Durand.

"Thanks," said he to whom this offer had been made, "anything to vary the habits and locality is some distraction to a poor employee. I wish to hasten my work at the Conciergerie rather than to procrastinate it, and therefore thought if I might every day bring Madame Durand with me to the office, who is very dull here — "

"I do not see any inconvenience in that," said the registrar of the palace, delighted with the prospect of the charming recreation afforded him by his colleague.

"She can dictate the papers," said the Citizen Durand, "and occasionally when our work is finished, if you have not found this evening unpleasant, you can return, and spend an hour or two with us."

"Yes; but not too often," replied the registrar of the palace, foppishly; "for I declare I shall be scolded if my visits are less frequent than usual at a small house in La Rue du Petit Muse."

"Well! here is some one who will settle all these affairs. Is it not so, chere amie?"

Madame Durand, pale and melancholy as usual, raised her eyes towards her husband, and replied, "What you wish shall be done."

Eleven o'clock struck, announcing it was time to retire. The registrar of the palace arose, and took leave of his two friends, expressing the great pleasure he felt in making their acquaintance. The Citizen Durand conducted his friend to the landing, then re-entered the apartment. "Go, Genevieve, go to bed," said he.

The young woman made no reply, but rose directly, took her lamp, and withdrew to the bedroom on the right. Durand, or rather Dixmer, watched her departure, remained stationary for a moment with an expression of deep grief depicted upon his countenance, then passed into his own chamber on the opposite side.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE TWO BILLETS.

FROM THIS TIME the registrar of the Minister of War worked every evening indefatigably in his colleague’s office, while Madame Durand dictated from the registers previously prepared, which Durand copied with avidity. Durand strictly examined everything, whilst appearing to notice nothing. He had remarked that every evening, at nine o’clock, a basket of provisions, carried by either Richard or his wife, was placed at the door. The instant the registrar said to the gendarme, “I am going, citizen,” one of the guards, either Gilbert or Duchesne, came out, took the basket, and carried it to Marie Antoinette. During three consecutive evenings, when Durand had remained rather later at his post, the basket also was left untouched; since it was only when opening the door to say adieu to the registrar that the gendarme took in the basket containing the provisions, which, a quarter of an hour afterwards, was returned empty to the same place by one of the two guards. On the evening of the fourth day, it was the beginning of October, when, after the ordinary sitting, the registrar of the palace had withdrawn, and Durand, or rather Dixmer, remained alone with his wife; he laid down his pen, looked around and listened, as if his very life was at stake; he then rose hastily, and running towards the door of the wicket, raised the cloth which covered the contents of the basket, and in the new bread destined for the prisoner concealed a small silver purse. Pale and trembling with emotion, he quickly regained his seat, and sunk clown overpowered, placing one hand on his forehead, the other on his heart. Genevieve regarded him in silence; indeed, since the day her husband had taken her from Maurice, she had never spoken till he addressed her first. But this time she first broke silence. “Is it to be this evening?” she inquired.

“No; to-morrow,” replied Dixmer. He then rose, and having again looked and listened, closed the registers, and approaching the wicket, knocked at the door.

“What?” said Gilbert.

“Citizen,” said he, “I am now going.”

“Well,” said the gendarme, from the end of the cell, “good night.”

“Good night, Citizen Gilbert.” Durand heard the grinding of the bolt and knew that the gendarme was opening the door. He went out.

In the passage leading to the apartment of Father Richard by the court, he rushed against a turnkey dressed in a bear-skin bonnet, and dangling a heavy bunch of keys. Dixmer was much alarmed. Perhaps this man, brutal as the generality of his species, was about to interrogate him, to watch him, and perhaps finally to recognise him. He drew his hat over his eyes, while Genevieve concealed herself, as she best could, in the folds of her cloak. But he was mistaken. “Pardon!” said the turnkey only, although he was the man who had been nearly overthrown. Dixmer trembled at the sound of that sweet, soft voice. But the turnkey was doubtless pressed for time; he glided into the passage, opened Richard’s door, and disappeared. Dixmer continued his road, leading Genevieve.

“It is strange,” said he, when outside, and the gate had closed behind them, and the freshening breeze had cooled his fevered brow.

“Oh! — yes — ’tis very strange!” murmured Genevieve. In former times they would have communicated to each other the cause of their astonishment, but Dixmer now confined his thoughts to his own breast, and combated them as an hallucination; while Genevieve contented herself, on turning the angle of the Pont au Change, by casting a last look at the dark and gloomy palace, where something like the phantom of a lost friend awoke in her memory many sweet and bitter remembrances. Thus they both reached La Greve without having exchanged a single word. During this time the gendarme Gilbert had brought in the basket of provisions intended for the Queen. It contained some fruit, a cold chicken, a bottle of white wine, a “carafe” of water, and half a loaf. Having first raised the napkin, and ascertained that everything was arranged as usual, he opened the screen. “Citizen,” said he, “here is your supper.” Marie Antoinette divided the bread, but as her fingers pressed it, they came in contact with the silver. In an instant she comprehended the bread contained something unusual. When she looked around her the guard had disappeared. The Queen remained a moment immovable, calculating his retiring footsteps. When she felt certain he was seated by his comrade, and not till then, she drew the purse from its place of concealment. It contained a billet, which she opened, and read as follows: —

“Madame, be ready to-morrow at the hour when you receive this billet, as to-morrow at this hour a female will be introduced into your majesty’s prison. This female will exchange dresses with you, and you will then quit the Conciergerie on the arm of one of your most devoted servants. Do not be alarmed at any noise that passes in the first compartment; let neither cries nor groans deter you, only attire yourself quickly in the dress and mantle of the female who conies to take your majesty’s place.”

“This is devotion!” murmured the Queen. “Thank God, I am not, as it is said, an object of execration to all!”

She then re-read the billet, when the second part attracted her attention — ”Let neither cries nor groans deter you.”

“Oh! that means they will sacrifice my two guards. Poor men! who have evinced so much kindness and pity towards me! Oh! — never! — never!” She tore off part of the letter, and, having no pen or ink, pricked on the paper the following words: —

“I neither can nor will accept the sacrifice of any one’s life in exchange for my own.

M. A.”

She then replaced the paper in the purse, which she concealed in the other half of the broken bread. This operation was just completed when ten o’clock struck, and the Queen, holding the piece of bread in her hand, sadly counted the strokes which vibrated slowly and distantly, when she heard at one of the windows opening upon the court termed “la cour des femmes” a grating sound, like that produced by a diamond dividing the glass. This noise was followed by a clash upon the window, and was several times repeated, intended to conceal the cough of a man. Then at the corner of the glass a small roll of paper appeared, which glided slowly, and fell on the inside of the wall. The Queen then heard the sound of keys jingling and clashing against each other, and receding footsteps on the pavement. She was aware that the window was perforated at this corner, and that through this aperture the departing individual had conveyed a paper, which doubtless contained a billet. It was now lying on the ground. The Queen covered her eyes, listening if either of her guards were approaching, but heard them conversing in a low tone as usual, as if with the intention of not annoying her with their voices. Then she moved softly, holding her breath, and secured the paper, which contained some minute and hard substance concealed in a case, which, falling on the bricks, sounded like metal. It was the most exquisite file that could be imagined — more of the jewel than the tool — one of those inventions in steel with which the most feeble and uninitiated hand could, in a quarter of an hour, divide a bar of iron.

“Madame,” said the paper, “to-morrow, at half-past nine, a man will be conversing with the gendarmes who guard you through the window of the Gourdes Femmes. During this time your majesty will saw the bar of your window, going from the left to the right. Cut slanting; a quarter of an hour will suffice for your majesty; and then be prepared to escape through the window. This advice reaches you from one of your most devoted and faithful subjects, one who has consecrated his life to your majesty’s service, and would be happy also to sacrifice it for you.”

“Oh!” murmured the Queen, “it must be a snare. But no; this writing appears familiar to me — it is the same as at the Temple. It is — it must be the Chevalier do Maison Rouge! God is perhaps willing that I should escape.” And the Queen fell on her knees, and took refuge in prayer, the only balm and consolation undenied to the unfortunate prisoner.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE PREPARATIONS OF DIXMER.

THE MORROW, PREFACED by a sleepless night, at length arrived. The day broke at last, presenting a terrible appearance, when it might, without exaggeration, be said the sky was the colour of blood; indeed, each day at this epoch, and in this year, however beautiful the sun, had a livid hue. The Queen at length slept, but it was a sleep without repose. With her eyes closed, she saw nothing but blood; with her understanding deadened, she heard nothing but smothered cries of despair. She had dropped asleep with the file in her hand. One part of the day was devoted by her to prayer, and the guards seeing her often thus engaged, did not feel any alarm at what they considered an increase of religious feeling. From time to time, however, she examined the file transmitted to her by one of her intended deliverers, and compared the fragility of the instrument with the strength of the bar. Fortunately, these bars were only secured in the wall on one side — that is to say, at the lower part. The upper part was set in a cross-bar: the lower part divided, there was only to pull the bar, and it of course would yield. But it was not these physical difficulties which arrested the Queen. She perfectly comprehended the thing was practicable, and it was this *very* possibility which caused hope, like a brilliant meteor, to flash before her eyes. She felt that, to reach her, her friends must necessarily sacrifice her guards; and could she at any price consent to the death of the only individuals who, for a length of time, had evinced any interest in her, or pity for her? Then, opposed to this argument were the iron bars she was to saw asunder, and the bodies of these two men on the other side, who must fall in preventing her friends from coming to her deliverance. This comprised life, liberty, and perhaps vengeance — three things, above all, so sweet, that she asked pardon of God for so earnestly desiring them. She believed as to the rest, that not the slightest suspicion agitated the minds of her guards, that they had not any idea of a snare (if such a thing existed) into which it was intended the prisoner should fall. These simple men would have betrayed themselves to *eyes* so much exercised as those of this woman, habituated to detect evil from having so severely suffered from it. The Queen entirely abandoned the idea that these combined overtures were contrived as a trap; but as the fear of being betrayed into this snare disappeared, the still greater apprehension increased of some bloody scene being enacted before her very eyes.

"Strange destiny! sublime sight!" murmured she: "two conspiracies united to save a poor Queen, or rather a poor female prisoner, who has had no means of inducing or encouraging these conspiracies, which are about to take place at the same moment! Who knows? Perhaps there may be one only. Perhaps it may be a double mine, leading to one and the same point. If I will it, I might then be saved. But a poor woman sacrificed in my stead! — two men killed before this woman could reach me! God might perhaps forgive me. Impossible! impossible!" Then passed and repassed in her mind visions of the great devotion of serviteurs for their masters, and the ancient tradition of the right exercised by masters over the lives of their retainers — a phantasy almost effaced by the royal doom and death. "Anne of Austria might have accepted this," said she. "Anne of Austria would have yielded every consideration to the safety of the royal person. Anne of Austria is of the same blood, and was almost in the same situation as myself. What madness to be following the royal career of Anne of Austria in France! Was I not brought hither? Two Kings said, it is important that two royal children, who have never seen or loved each other, who perhaps never may love each other, should be married at the same altar, to die upon the same scaffold. And then will not my death accelerate that of my poor child, who in the eyes of my few friends is still King of France! And when my son, like his father, is dead, will not their shades both smile on me in pity, seeing that to spare some drops of plebeian blood I have stained with my blood the remains of the throne of St. Louis? In this anguish of thought, this fever of doubt, every pulsation redoubled, and in a tempest of terror and fear the unhappy Queen continued till the arrival of night. She had several times closely scrutinized her guards, but they exhibited an air of the greatest calm. Never had she been more forcibly struck by the invariable kindness and attention of these two uneducated men. When the darkness of night reigned in the cell, when the steps of the round, the noise of resounding arms, and the barking of dogs, awoke the echoes of the gloomy vaults; when all the horrors of the prison revealed themselves, gloomy and hopeless, Marie Antoinette, subdued by the natural weakness of a woman, succumbed to terror. “Oh! I will fly! I will fly!” said she. “Yes — yes; I will fly! When he comes, when he speaks, I will saw the bar. I will await what God and my deliverers ordain me. I owe it to my children; they shall not murder them. And if they are sacrificed, and I am free — oh, then, at least — ” She did not conclude; her eyes closed, and her deep emotion checked all utterance. This was a frightful vision to the unfortunate Queen, enclosed with gratings and iron bars. But, as usual, it soon disappeared, and in its stead another presented itself to her view. She saw herself in the midst of a dark, stern, inflexible army; she orders the fire to consume, the swords to be drawn, and vengeance to be taken on a nation she will no longer claim as her own.

During this time Gilbert and Duchesne were tranquilly preparing their evening repast. At this time, also, Dixmer and Genevieve entered the Conciergerie, and installed themselves in the office as usual. At the end of an hour the Registrar of the Palace, having completed his business, according to custom took his departure, leaving them alone to themselves. Directly the door had closed on his colleague, Dixmer rushed towards the empty basket placed at the door in exchange for that of the evening. Then seizing the bread, he found the purse, and turned pale whilst reading the letter of the Queen. Genevieve observed him tear it into a thousand pieces, and throw them into the mouth of the burning stove.

“It is well,” said he; “all is arranged.” Then turning towards Genevieve — ”Come here, Madame,” said he; “I must speak with you.” Genevieve, motionless and cold as marble, gave a gesture of assent, and approached him. “The time has arrived, Madame; listen to me.”

“Yes, Monsieur.”

“You prefer a death beneficial to your cause; a death that will ensure you blessings from one part and pity from the whole of the nation. Is it not so — to an ignominious and revengeful end of life?”

“Yes, Monsieur.”

“I might have killed you on the spot when I recognised you at the house of your lover; but a man who, like myself, consecrates his life to a holy and honourable cause, ought to be able to fling aside and forget his own private griefs, by rendering them subservient to this cause. This I have done, or rather I intend to do. I am, as you see, denied the pleasure of doing myself justice, and have also spared your lover.” Something resembling a bitter but fugitive smile flitted over the lips of Genevieve. “But as for your lover, you who know me should well be aware, I only bide my time.”

“Monsieur,” said Genevieve, “I await my fate. Then wherefore all this prelude?”

“Are you ready?”

“Yes, I am ready. Kill me, if you choose; you have good cause to do so.”

Dixmer looked at Genevieve, and started, in spite of himself. She at this moment appeared sublimely beautiful; a glory the most brilliant of all shone around her, — the glory that emanated from love. “To continue,” said Dixmer, “I have informed the Queen; she expects you, notwithstanding she will in all probability raise numerous objections. You must overrule them all.”

“Give me your orders, Monsieur, and I will execute them.”

“At the moment,” continued Dixmer, “I knock at the door, Gilbert opens it, and with this poniard “ — here Dixmer threw open his coat, and half drawing from its scabbard a double-edged poniard — ”with this I shall kill him.” Genevieve shuddered. Dixmer made a motion with his hand to command her attention. “The instant I strike him, dart into the second chamber, that of the Queen. There is, as you are aware, no door, only a screen. You will exchange clothes with her, whilst I despatch the other man. Then I shall take the Queen’s arm, and pass through the wicket with her.”

“Very well,” said Genevieve, coldly.

“You understand me?” said Dixmer. “You have been seen each evening in your black taffeta mantle, which conceals your face. Place your mantle upon her Majesty, and dress her precisely as you have been accustomed to dress yourself.”

“All shall be done as you desire me, Monsieur.”

“It remains now for me to pardon, and to thank you, Madame.”

Genevieve shook her head with a scornful smile. “I neither want your pardon nor your thanks, Monsieur,” said she, extending her hand. “What I have done, or rather am about to do, effaces my crime. I have only been guilty of weakness; and, again, this weakness (recall your own conduct), Monsieur, you all but forced me to commit. I withdrew myself from him; you drove me into his arms; so you are at the same time instigator, judge, and avenger. It remains for me to pardon you my death; and I do pardon you. It is I who should thank you for death, since life has become insupportable to me, separated from the only man I love; since that hour especially when you severed by your savage vengeance every tie that bound me to him.”

Dixmer drove his nails into his flesh. He strove to reply, but his voice failed him. He moved towards the wicket. “Time passes,” said he, at last. “Madame, every moment is of consequence. Are you ready?”

“I have told you, Monsieur,” replied Genevieve, with the calmness and courage of a martyr, “I attend you.”

Dixmer collected his papers, saw the gates were fast closed, so that no one could enter the wicket, and then wished to reiterate his instructions.

“It is unnecessary, Monsieur,” said Genevieve. “I know perfectly well all I have to do.”

“Then adieu!” and Dixmer extended his hand, as if at this supreme moment all recrimination was effaced before the grandeur of the situation, and the sublimity of the sacrifice. Genevieve, shuddering, touched with the tips of her fingers the proffered hand of her husband.

“Place yourself near me, Madame, and the moment I have struck Gilbert, pass on.”

“I am ready.”

Then Dixmer pressed with his right hand his large poniard; with his left he knocked at the gate.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE PREPARATIONS OF THE CHEVALIER.

DURING THE SCENE described in the preceding chapter as passing at the door of the wicket leading into the prison of the Queen, or rather into the first compartment occupied by the two gendarmes, other preparations were also taking place on the opposite side, — that is to say, in the Cour des Femmes. Suddenly a man appeared, like a statue of stone which had detached itself from the wall. He was followed by two dogs, and was humming the “Ca ira,” a song much in fashion at this period. He held in his hand a large bunch of keys, which, in passing, he had rattled against the bars which barricaded the window of the Queen. The royal prisoner at first started; but recognising the signal, immediately opened her window softly, to commence her work, with a hand more experienced than would have been believed, for more than once (in the blacksmith’s shop, where her royal husband amused himself by passing part of the day) she had often with her delicate fingers handled instruments similar to that upon which at this moment depended her every chance of safety and deliverance. Directly the man with the keys heard the Queen’s window open, he knocked at that of the gendarmes.

“Ah! Ah!” said Gilbert, looking through the window, “here is the Citizen Murdoch.”

“Himself,” said the turnkey. “Well, but it appears you keep strict watch?”

“Much as usual, citizen key-bearer. It seems to me you do not often find us at fault?”

“Ah!” said Murdoch; “and vigilance is more than ever necessary to-night.”

“Bah!” said Duchesne, who had now approached.

“Truly.”

“Why, then?”

“Open the window, and I will tell you all about it.”

Gilbert opened it, and shook hands with Murdoch, who had already made friends with the two gendarmes. “What is it, Citizen Murdoch?” repeated

Gilbert.

“The sitting of the Convention has been rather warm to-day. Have you read it?”

“No. What passed, then?”

“It was first stated the Citizen Hebert had made a discovery.”

“What?”

“It is, that the conspirators believed to be dead are found to be living. There are three living.”

“Oh! yes,” said Gilbert; “Delessert and Thierry; I have heard speak of that. They are in England, the scoundrels.”

“And the Chevalier de Maison Rouge,” said the key-bearer, raising his voice so that the Queen might hear.

“What, is he in England also?”

“Not at all,” said Murdoch; “he is in France,” still speaking in the same loud key.

“He has returned, then?”

“He has never quitted it.”

“Well, he has good courage,” said Duchesne.

“Indeed he has.”

“Well, are they going to arrest him?”

“Certainly; but that is much easier said than done.”

At this moment the Queen’s file grated so forcibly upon the iron bar that the key-bearer feared it might be heard, notwithstanding all his efforts at concealment. He hastily trod upon the paw of the nearest dog, who uttered a prolonged howl of pain.

“Oh! poor beast,” said Gilbert.

“Bah!” said the key-bearer, “he had not put on his sabots. Be quiet, Girondin; will you be quiet?”

“Is your dog named Girondin, Citizen Murdoch?”

“Yes; that is the name I have given him.”

“And you say this?” said Duchesne, who, imprisoned himself, took a lively interest in all that related to prisoners — ”you say this?”

“Truly, I say this, that in the Citizen Hebert you see a good patriot. I say that the Citizen Hebert has made a proposition to return the Austrian to the Temple. Dam; because they pretend she has only been withdrawn from the Temple to remove her from the immediate inspection of the Commune of Paris.”

“Yes; and from the attempts of this cursed Maison Rouge,” said Gilbert, “it seems that the subterranean passage did exist.”

“That was the reply the Citizen Saintez made; but Hebert said, the instant that was defeated, there was no more danger; that at the Temple, fewer precautions were requisite for the security of Marie Antoinette than here; and finally, that the Temple was differently enclosed to the Conciergerie, and another thing altogether.”

“Ma foi!” said Gilbert, “I wish they would remove her to the Temple.”

“I understand, you are tired of the confinement?”

“No; but it makes me melancholy.”

Maison Rouge coughed loudly, as the noise of the file biting through the iron bar was distinctly heard.

“What have they decided on?” said Duchesne, when the key-bearer’s cough had subsided.

“It is settled that she remains here; but her trial will take place immediately.”

“Poor woman!” said Gilbert.

Duchesne, whose sense of hearing was no doubt more acute than that of his colleague, or his attention less engrossed by the recital of Murdoch, stooped down to listen on the left side of the compartment.

The key-bearer saw the movement. “So you see, Citizen Duchesne, the attempts of the conspirators will become the more desperate, from the fact of their having less time before them for their execution. They are going to double the guards of the prisons, so look out, Citizen Gendarme, since the matter in question is nothing less than the irruption of an armed force into the Conciergerie. They will murder all, sacrifice every impediment, till they effect an entrance to the Queen — to the widow of Capet, I tell you.”

“Ah! bah! How can they get in?”‘

“Disguised as patriots, they will appear to recommence the 2nd of September. Poor wretches, and when once the gates are open! Bon soir.” There was an instant’s silence, produced by the astonishment of the guards, while the key-bearer heard with emotions of joy and terror the continued grating of the file. Nine o’clock struck. At the same moment there was a knock at the wicket, but the gendarmes, preoccupied, did not reply.

“Well, we shall see, we shall see,” said Gilbert.

“And if necessary, will die at our post like stanch republicans,” said Duchesne.

“She ought soon to have finished,” said the key-bearer to himself, wiping the drops of perspiration from his face.

“And you on your side,” said Gilbert, “keep on the look-out, I presume? They would spare you no more than us were such an event to take place.”

“I should think so,” said the key-bearer. “I pass the night in going the round, thus I am always on the alert; the rest of you, at least those who are relieved, can sleep every other night.” At this moment a second summons at the wicket was heard. Murdoch started; any event, however trifling, might mar the execution of his project.

“What is it, then?” demanded he in spite of himself.

“Nothing, nothing,” said Gilbert; “it is only the registrar of the Minister of War. He is going now, and come to inform me of it.”

“Oh! very well,” said Murdoch.

The registrar still continued to knock.

“Bon! bon!” cried Gilbert without leaving the window. “Bon soir! Adieu!”

“I think he is speaking,” said Duchesne, turning towards the door. The voice of the registrar was then heard.

“Come here, Citizen Gendarme,” said he; “I wish to speak to you.”

This voice, which appeared overpowered by emotion, and deprived of its natural accent, startled the key-bearer, who fancied he recognised it.

“What do you want, Citizen Durand?” said Gilbert.

“I wish to speak a word with you.”

“Well, you can tell me to-morrow.”

“No, this evening; it must be this evening,” replied the same voice.

“Oh!” murmured the key-bearer, “what is about to happen now? It is Dixmer s voice.”

Sinister and vibrating, this voice seemed to borrow something funereal from the far off echoes of the gloomy corridor. Duchesne turned round.

“Well,” said Gilbert, “if he wishes it I must go,” and he directed his steps towards the door.

The key-bearer availed himself of this moment, when the attention of the two gendarmes was thus occupied by this unforeseen circumstance. He ran towards the window of the Queen. “Is it done?” said he.

“I have more than half finished,” said the Queen.

“Oh, mon Dieu! mon Dieu!” murmured he; “make haste! make haste!”‘

“Well, Citizen Murdoch,” said Duchesne, “what has become of you?”

“Here I am,” said the key-bearer, returning quickly to the window of the first compartment. At that very same moment, even as he turned to resume his former station, a frightful cry resounded through the prison, then an imprecation, and noise of a sword being drawn from the scabbard.

“Villain! brigand!” cried Gilbert, and the sound of a struggle was heard in the corridor. The door then opened, displaying to the eyes of the turnkey two shadows struggling in the wicket, and thus affording free passage to a female, who, pushing aside Duchesne, rushed into the Queen’s chamber. Duchesne, without noticing the woman, ran to his comrade’s assistance. The turnkey sprang towards the other window, and beheld the female on her knees before the Queen, praying and supplicating her Majesty to exchange dresses with her. He lowered his burning eyes, endeavouring to gain a clearer view of this woman whom he feared he had already recognised. All at once he uttered a dreadful cry.

“Genevieve! Genevieve!” murmured he.

The Queen had dropped the file from her hand, and seemed transfixed with despair. Here, alas! was another attempt rendered abortive.

The turnkey seized the bar with both hands, shook it with all his strength, but the file had not accomplished its work; the bar of iron would not yield to his efforts. During this time Dixmer had, wrestling, struggling with Gilbert, reached the prison, and there attempted to force his entrance with him, but Duchesne leaning against the door prevented him. But he was unable to close it, for Dixmer in despair had placed his arm between the gate and wall. In his hand he still retained the poniard, which in the contest, blunted by the buckle of the belt, had glided over the turnkey’s breast, tearing open his coat and lacerating his flesh. The two men encouraged each other to reunite their efforts, at the same time calling loudly for assistance. Dixmer felt his arm must break: he placed his shoulder against the door, shook it violently, and succeeded in withdrawing his bruised arm. The door closed with a great noise; Duchesne drew the bolts, whilst Gilbert turned the key; a rapid step was heard in the corridor, then all was over. The two gendarmes searched everywhere around them. They detected the sound of the assumed turnkey wrenching the bar; then Gilbert rushed into the Queen’s chamber, where he found Genevieve entreating her Majesty on her knees to exchange clothes with her. Duchesne seized his gun, and ran to the window; he discovered a man hanging to the bar, which he shook with rage, frantically endeavouring in vain to break it.

He pointed his gun: the young man saw it levelled at him.

“Oh yes! yes!” said he, “kill me! kill me!” and, sublime in his despair, he bared his breast to the storm.

“Chevalier,” said the Queen, “Chevalier, I entreat you to live.”

At the sound of the Queen’s voice the Chevalier sank upon his knees. The gun was discharged, but this movement saved him; the ball passed over his head. Genevieve, imagining her friend was dead, fell upon the ground without sense or motion. When the smoke was dissipated, no one remained in La Cour des Femmes. Ten minutes afterwards, thirty soldiers, led by two Commissaries, searched the whole of the Conciergerie, even its most inaccessible retreats. They discovered no one; the registrar had passed, calm and smiling, before Father Richard’s arm-chair. As to the turnkey, he had gone out crying, “Alarm! Alarm!” The sentinel opposed his egress with his bayonet, but the two dogs seized him by the throat. It was only Genevieve who was arrested, interrogated, and imprisoned.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE INQUIRY.

WE CAN NO LONGER leave in forgetfulness one of the principal personages of this history, he who, during the accomplishment of the various incidents of the preceding chapter, had suffered most of all, and whose anxieties merit the liveliest sympathy on the part of our readers. The sun shone gloriously in La Rue de la Monnaie, and the gossips were discoursing merrily at their doors (as if for the last ten months a mist of blood had not hung over the city, tinging all nature with its sanguinary hue), when Maurice returned home, bringing, as he had promised, the cabriolet with him. He gave the bridle of the horse to a shoeblack on the pavement of Saint Eustache, and hastily ran up stairs, his heart filled with joy.

Love is a vivifying sentiment. It animates hearts long deadened to every other sensation — it peoples the desert — it resuscitates before the eyes the shade of the beloved object — it causes the voice which sings in the soul of the lover to display before him the entire creation illumined by the brilliant rays of hope and happiness, at the same time it is egotistical, blinding him who loves to all but the existence of the beloved object.

Maurice neither saw these women nor listened to their commentaries, he alone saw Genevieve preparing for a departure which was at last to bring them durable happiness; he only heard Genevieve singing carelessly her customary song, and this little song burred so sweetly in his ear that he might have sworn he was listening to the varied modulations of her voice, mingled with the less harmonious sound of closing locks. Upon the landing Maurice stopped; the door was half open, it was generally kept closed, and this circumstance surprised Maurice. He looked all round, thinking Genevieve was in the corridor. She was not there. He entered, looked in the antechamber, the dining — -room, the saloon. He visited the bed-chamber, but anteroom, saloon, and bed-chamber were all empty. He loudly called. No one replied. The official, as he knew, had gone out. Maurice imagined that, during his absence, Genevieve had perhaps required some cord to fasten her trunk, or provision de voyage to store in the carriage, and had gone out to purchase it. He thought it imprudent, but, although every moment his anxiety increased, he in reality feared nothing.

Maurice waited for some time, walking up and down the room with long impatient strides, and occasionally leaning out of the window, which, half-opened, admitted puffs of air charged heavily with rain. But soon he fancied he heard a step upon the staircase: he listened, it was not that of Genevieve; he ran to the landing, looked over the palisade, and recognised the official, who leisurely mounted the stairs after the manner of domestics.

“Scevola!” cried he. The official raised his head.

“Ah! is it you, citizen?”

“Yes. Where is the citoyenne?”

“The citoyenne?” demanded Scevola, with much surprise, as he continued mounting the stairs.

“Have you seen her below?”

“No.”

“Go down, then, and ask the porter, and inquire of all the neighbours.” Scevola descended.

“Quicker! quicker!” said his master; “do you not see I am burning with impatience?”

After waiting five or six minutes, and Scevola not having made his appearance, Maurice re-entered the apartment, and again leaned out of the window. He saw Scevola enter several shops and leave them without having gained any fresh intelligence. He called him. The official raised his head, and saw his master impatiently looking from the window. Maurice signed to him to come up.

“It is impossible she can have gone out,” said Maurice to himself, and again he called, “Genevieve! Genevieve!’’

All was silent as death; even the solitary chamber appeared no longer to have an echo. Scevola reappeared.

“Well?” demanded Maurice.

“The porter is the only person who has seen her.”

“The porter has seen her; how was that?”

“He saw her go out.”

“She is gone out, then?”

“It seems so.”

“Alone! It is impossible Genevieve would go out alone.”

“She was not alone, citizen; she had a man with her.”

“How! a man with her?”

“That is what the porter says, at least.”

“Go and seek him. I must find out who this man is.”

Scevola made a step towards the door, then, turning, “Wait,” said he, appearing to reflect.

“What is it?” said Maurice. “Speak, or you will be the death of me.”

“Perhaps it was the man who ran after me.”

“What for?”

“To ask me for the key.”

“What key?”

“The key of your apartment.”

“You gave the key of the apartment to a stranger?” cried Maurice, seizing with both hands the official by the collar.

“It was not to a stranger, Monsieur, it was to one of your friends.”

“Ah! yes, to one of my friends. It is Louis, no doubt it is so. She has gone out with Louis,” and smiling a ghastly smile Maurice wiped away the drops of agony which had gathered on his brow.

“No, Monsieur; no, it was not he. I know Monsieur Louis very well.”

“Who was it, then?”

“You know the man came here one day?”

“What day?”

“The day when you were so sad, and he took you away with him, and you returned so happy.”

Scevola had remarked all these things. Maurice regarded him with a bewildered air; a cold shudder ran through all his veins. Then, after a long silence, “Dixmer!” cried he. “Ma foi! yes. I think it was him, Citizen.” Maurice tottered, and fell back upon the chair.

“Oh! my God!” murmured he. When he re-opened his eyes they encountered the violets, forgotten, or rather left there by Genevieve. He rushed towards them, seized and kissed them; then, remarking where she had placed them: “Doubtless,” said he, “these violets... it is her last adieu.”

When Maurice turned round he perceived for the first time the trunk was half full, the rest of the linen remained on the ground, or in the half-opened wardrobe. The cord which lay upon the ground had no doubt fallen from Genevieve’s hand at the apparition of Dixmer. It was all explained now. The scene rose vivid and terrible before his eyes, between those four walls that had lately witnessed so much happiness. Till now Maurice had remained crushed and heartbroken. Now the reaction was fearful. His rage was bordering on frenzy. He rose, closed the window, took from the top of his secretaire a pair of pistols, ready loaded for their intended journey, looked to the priming, and finding all right placed them in his pocket. He also furnished himself with two rouleaux of louis, which, notwithstanding his patriotism, he had thought it political to conceal at the bottom of a drawer, and taking his sabre in his hand: “Scevola,” said he, “you are attached to me, I think; you have served my father and myself for fifteen years.”

“Yes, citizen,” replied the official, terrified at the pallor and nervous trembling he had never before remarked in his master, who had always been justly considered one of the most courageous and vigorous of men, “yes, what are your orders for me?”

“Listen! if this lady who lived here....” He stopped — his voice trembled so much in pronouncing these words he was unable to proceed. “If she should return,” continued he, after a moment’s pause, “receive her, close the door after her, take this gun, and station yourself upon the staircase, and, for your head, for your life, for your soul, do not permit a single person to enter here. If any one should force the door, defend it. Strike! kill! kill! and fear nothing, Scevola, for I will answer for all.” The young man’s impetuous harangue, his vehement confidence, electrified Scevola.

“I will not only kill, but will even suffer death for the Citoyenne Genevieve,” said he.

“Thanks. Now attend. This apartment is odious to me, and since I cannot find her I will no longer remain here; if she has been able to effect her escape, if she has returned, place before the window the Japan vase, with the pearls, which she loves so much. That is, during the day. At night, put a lantern. Every time I pass the end of the street I shall know, and if I see neither vase nor lantern I shall still continue my researches.”

“Be prudent, Monsieur! Oh! pray be prudent!” continued Scevola. His master made no reply, but rushing from the chamber flew down the staircase as if possessed of wings, and ran towards Louis’s house. It would be difficult to paint the astonishment and rage of our worthy poet when he heard the news, much as he wished to recommence the touching elegies addressed by Orestes to Pylades. “And you do not know where she is?” he repeated incessantly.

“Lost! disappeared!” shrieked Maurice, in a tone of despair, “he has killed her, Louis, he has killed her!”

“No, my dear friend; no, Maurice; he has not killed her; it is not after so many days of reflection that he would be likely to kill a woman like Genevieve. If he had thought of doing so, he would have done it on the spot, and have left her corpse there in token of his just vengeance. No, no; he has taken her away, only too happy at having regained his lost treasure.”

“You do not know, Louis — you do not know; this man had something fatal in his look.”

“You are mistaken,” said Louis, “he always struck me as a brave man. He has taken her as the sacrifice. He will stop with her, and they will die together. Where, then, is the danger?”

These words redoubled Maurice’s fury.

“I will find her! I will find her, or perish in the attempt!” cried he.

“Oh! as to that, we are certain to find her,” said Louis; “only calm yourself. They fail in success who do not reflect; and when agitated as you are, we reflect badly and unwisely.”

“Adieu, Louis, adieu!”

“Where are you going, then?”

“I am going.”

“You will leave me, then? Why is that?”

“Because this concerns me only. I alone should risk my life to save Genevieve’s.”

“Do you wish to die?”

“I will face all. I will find out the president of the Committee of Surveillance. I will speak to Hebert, to Danton, to Robespierre. I will avow all, that she may be restored to me.”

“Very well,” said Louis; and without adding another word, he rose, adjusted his belt, put on his military cap; and as Maurice had done, provided himself with a pair of pistols, ready loaded, which he put in his pocket.

“Let us go,” said he, simply.

“But you will compromise yourself,” said Maurice.

“Well, what next?”

“Where shall we seek her first?” said Maurice.

“We will first search in the old quarter; you know? Vieille Rue Saint Jacques; then we will watch for Maison Rouge, as where he will be, doubtless Dixmer will be also; then we will draw near the houses in La Vieille Corderie. Yon know they talk of transferring Marie Antoinette to the

Temple; believe me, men like them will not, till the last moment, abandon the hope of serving her."

"Yes," repeated Maurice, "you are right.... Maison Rouge, do you think he is in Paris?"

"Dixmer is there."

"It is true, it is true; of course they will be together," said Maurice, to whom these vague ideas seemed partially to restore reason.

The two friends went out to commence their search immediately, but all in vain. Paris is large, and well adapted for concealment. Never was a pit known to conceal more obscurely the secret confided to its keeping by crime or misery. A hundred times Maurice and Louis passed over La Place de Greve; a hundred times glanced at the house that contained Genevieve, watching without ceasing for Dixmer, as the priests watch the victim destined for a sacrifice. Genevieve, on her side, seeing herself destined to perish, like all generous souls, accepted the sacrifice, and only wished to die quietly and unnoticed; besides, she dreaded less for Dixmer than the cause of the Queen — the publicity that Maurice would not fail to give to his vengeance. She kept, then, a silence as profound as if death had already sealed her lips.

In the meantime, without saying anything to Louis, Maurice had applied to the members of the terrible Committee of Public Safety; and Louis, without speaking to Maurice, had, on his part, determined on a similar proceeding. Thus, on the same day, a red cross was affixed by Fouquier-Tinville to both their names, and the word "Suspects" united them in a sanguinary embrace.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE SENTENCE.

ON THE 23D DAY of the month of the second year of the French Republic, one and indivisible, corresponding to the 14th of October, 1793, old style, as it was then called, a curious crowd had since the morning invaded the galleries of the hall where the revolutionary sittings were held. The passages of the Palace, the avenues of the Conciergerie, were lined with greedy and impatient spectators, who made over one to another their reports and passions, as the waves transmit ‘their froth and foam. Notwithstanding the curiosity which agitated each spectator — an agitation caused by this curiosity — every wave of this troubled sea, enclosed between two barriers — the exterior one which propelled them, and the interior which repelled them — this flux and reflux of human beings were thus kept almost stationary in the places they had at first taken. Thus, those more conveniently situated, comprehending it was necessary they should obtain forgiveness for their good fortune, kept this object in view by transmitting to these, their neighbours less comfortably and commodiously placed than themselves, and who in their turn recounted to others, the first words they heard, and all they saw.

Near the door of the tribunal a group of men were collected, rudely disputing for ten lines of space in width and height — for ten lines in breath sufficed to see between two shoulders the corner of the hall and the form of the judges — for ten lines in height was sufficient to overlook the entire hall and the figure of the accused. Unfortunately, this entrance to the passage of the hall, this narrow defile, was almost entirely filled by a man with broad shoulders, and his arms akimbo, who most effectually excluded the wavering crowd, ready to drop into the hall, if this rampart of flesh were to give way.

This immovable man was young and handsome, and at every push bestowed on him by the crowd, he shook his head of hair, thick as a lion’s mane, under which gleamed a dark and resolute expression; then, when either by a look or a movement he had repelled the crowd and resisted their violent attacks, he fell back into his attentive immobility. A hundred times this compact mass had, notwithstanding, striven hard to overthrow him — as from his great height, to see anything behind him was utterly impossible — but, as we have said, firm as a rock he stood his ground. In the meantime, at the other extremity of this human sea, in the midst of the crushing crowd, another man was forcing a passage, with a perseverance almost amounting to ferocity. Nothing impeded his indefatigable exertions; neither the cries of those he left behind, the fearful imprecations of those he almost stifled in passing, nor the wails of the women — for there were many females in this crowd.

To blows he responded with blows; to imprecations, by a look before which the most courageous quailed; to complaints, by a carelessness bordering on disdain. At last he arrived behind the powerful young man, who, so to speak, closed the entrance to the hall. In the midst of the general expectation — for all were anxious to see how the contest between two such rude antagonists would terminate — he essayed his peculiar method, which consisted in planting his elbows between two spectators, and thus breaking through. He was, notwithstanding, a short young man, whose wan face and emaciated appearance betokened latent illness.

His elbows had scarcely touched the young man before him, when he, indignant at the aggression, turned sharply round, at the same moment raising his clenched fist, which threatened, in falling, to crush the slender form of the intruder.

The two antagonists now found themselves face to face, when a cry of recognition escaped from each.

“Ah! Monsieur Maurice,” said the delicate young man, with an accent of inexpressible anguish, “permit me to pass; only let me see her, I entreat you; then kill me afterwards.”

Maurice — for it was he — felt himself affected by admiration and compassion, excited by this ceaseless devotion, this adventurous daring.

“You here!” murmured he. “How imprudent!”

“Yes; but I am exhausted — Oh, mon Dieu! she speaks. Let me see her — let me listen to her.”

Maurice drew aside, and the young man passed before him, and being at the head of the crowd there was nothing now to intercept the view of him who had undergone so many blows, so much buffeting to attain his end. All this scene, and the murmurs it occasioned, aroused the curiosity of the judges. The accused also turned round, and immediately perceived and recognised the Chevalier. A shudder ran through the Queen’s frame, seated in the iron arm-chair. The interrogation, conducted by the President Harmand, interpreted by Fouquier-Tinville, discussed by Cheveau Lagarde, the defender for the Queen, lasted as long as the strength of the judges and the accused permitted. During all this time, Maurice remained motionless in his place, whilst several times already the concourse was renewed both in the hall and the corridors. The Chevalier leaned against a pillar. He was no less pale than the marble that supported him. The day was succeeded by a dark night; some lighted candles on the tables of the jurors, and some smoky lamps on the walls of the hall, threw a red and sinister expression on the noble face of that woman who had formed the bright and beautiful ornament of the splendid fetes at Versailles. She was alone there, replying in brief and dignified language to the questions of the President, and occasionally addressed some words to her counsel in a low voice. Her white and polished forehead retained all its original pride. She was neither humbled nor cast down. She was attired in a black dress, which she had worn ever since her husband’s death. The judges retired from the hall. The sitting had terminated.

“Have I evinced too much hauteur, monsieur?” said she, addressing herself to Cheveau Lagarde.

“Ah, madame,” replied he, “you are always right when you act like yourself.”

“How proud she is!” cried a woman among the audience, as if a voice from the people had replied to the question of the unfortunate Queen to her advocate.

The Queen turned and looked at her.

“Yes,” repeated the woman, “you are proud, Antoinette; and I tell you, pride has been the ruin of you.”

The Queen blushed. The Chevalier turned towards the female who had uttered these words, and replied, softly, “She was Queen.”

Maurice, seized him by the wrist, saying, in a low tone, “Take care; do not forget yourself.”

“Oh, Monsieur Maurice,” replied the Chevalier, “you are a man yourself, and you know you are speaking to a man. Tell me, oh, tell me, do you think they will condemn her?”

“I do not think,” said Maurice; “I am sure of it.”

“What! a woman!” said the Chevalier, with a deep groan.

“No, a Queen,” said Maurice; “you have yourself said so.”

The Chevalier in his turn seized Maurice by the wrist, and with a force of which he appeared incapable, compelled him to bend his ear. It was half-past three in the morning. Many vacuums were visible amongst the spectators, and a few lights burning here and there served only to render darkness visible. In one of the most obscure parts of the hall were the Chevalier arid Maurice, listening to what the former was telling him.

“Why are you here? what brings you here?” demanded the Chevalier; “you, monsieur, who have not a tiger’s heart?”

“Alas!” said Maurice, “to discover what has become of an unfortunate woman.”

“Yes, yes,” said Maison Rouge, “she whom her husband forced into the Queen’s cell? the female it surprised me so to see?”

“Genevieve?”

“Yes, Genevieve.”

“Then Genevieve is a prisoner, sacrificed by her husband, killed by Dixmer. Oh! I comprehend all, I understand all now. Chevalier, tell me all that has occurred, tell me where she is, tell me where I can find her. Chevalier! this woman constitutes my life; do you hear me?”

“I witnessed all. I was there when she was arrested. I was there also to effect the escape of the Queen, but our different projects not having been communicated to each other, injured instead of assisting our mutual cause.”

“Why did you not save her, at least? your sister, Genevieve!”

“How could I when an iron bar divided us? Oh! if you had only been there, if you had united your efforts with mine, the bar must have yielded, and both might have been saved.”

“Genevieve! Genevieve!” murmured Maurice. Then regarding Maison Rouge with an indefinable expression of hatred and rage, “And Dixmer? Where is he?” demanded he.

“I know not; he saved himself, as I did also.”

“Oh!” said Maurice, grinding his teeth, “if ever I meet him....”

“Yes; I understand. But there is nothing yet to despair about concerning Genevieve,” said Maison Rouge; “her case is not yet desperate; but the Queen.... Oh! stop, Maurice, you are a sensitive man, an influential man. You have friends.... Oh! I pray to you as I would to my God.... Maurice, help me te save the Queen. Maurice! Genevieve supplicates you through me.”

“Pronounce not that name, monsieur. Who knows, but that, like Dixmer, you may have sacrificed this unhappy woman;”‘

“Monsieur,” replied the Chevalier, haughtily, “when I attach myself to a cause, I know better than to sacrifice any one but myself.”

Maurice was about to reply, when the door of the chamber of debate opened.

“Silence! monsieur, silence,” said the Chevalier, “the judges are returning.” And Maurice felt the hand tremble which Maison Rouge had placed upon his arm. “Ah!” murmured the Chevalier, “my heart fails me now.”

“Have courage and constrain yourself, or you are lost,” said Maurice.

The tribunal re-entered, and the news of its return spread rapidly through the corridors and galleries. The crowd again congregated in the hall, and even the dim lights appeared to burn brighter at this solemn and decisive moment. The Queen rose, and stood erect, haughty, and immovable, her eyes fixed, her lips closed. The decree was then read which doomed the Queen to death. She heard her sentence without even turning pale, or uttering a sigh; her countenance evinced not the slightest emotion. Then turning towards the Chevalier, she regarded him with a long and eloquent look, as if to indicate her gratitude to this man whom she had ever seen a living statue of devotion, and supported on the arm of the officer of the gendarmes who commanded the forces, with a calm and dignified demeanour she quitted the court.

Maurice drew a deep sigh. “Thank God,” said he, “nothing in this declaration can compromise Genevieve; there is yet hope.”

“Thank God!” murmured the Chevalier on his side. “It is all finished, and the struggle at length terminated. I have not strength to go farther.”

“Courage! monsieur,” said Maurice, in a low voice.

“I will take courage, monsieur,” replied the Chevalier; and having shaken hands, they disappeared by different outlets. The Queen was re-conducted to the Conciergerie, the large clock struck four as she entered. At the end of Pont Neuf, Maurice was stopped by Louis.

“Halt!” said he; “you do not pass here.”

“Why?”

“First, where are you going?”

“I am going home. I can return there now, since I know what has become of her.”

“So much the better; but you must not enter there.”

“For what reason?”

“The reason is, that two hours ago the gendarmes went there to arrest you.”

“Ah!” cried Maurice. “Well, there is the greater reason.”

“Are you mad? And Genevieve?”

“You are right. But where are we to go?”‘

“To my house. Pardieu!”

“But I shall ruin you.”

“The more reason,” said Louis, dragging Maurice away with him.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE PRIEST AND THE EXECUTIONER.

ON LEAVING THE COURT, the Queen had been conducted back to the Conciergerie. On reaching her chamber she had taken a pair of scissors, and cut off her long and beautiful curls, rendered still more so from the absence of powder, which had been totally abolished two years since; these she enclosed in a packet, and on the paper was inscribed, “For my son and daughter.” She then seated herself, or rather sank into a chair, and worn out with fatigue, the trial having lasted eighteen hours, she fell asleep. At seven o’clock the noise of the opening screen roused her from her troubled sleep, and turning round, she beheld a man perfectly unknown to her.

“What do you want?” demanded she.

He approached and saluted her as respectfully as if she had not been the Queen.

“I am called Sanson,” said he.

The name was sufficient. The Queen slightly shuddered.

“You are here in good time, monsieur; could you not have made it rather later?”

“No, madame,” replied Sanson; “I received orders to come.”

As he uttered these words, he advanced still nearer to the Queen. At this moment everything about this man was expressive and terrible.

“I understand,” said the prisoner, “you wish to cut off my hair?”

“It is necessary, madame,” replied the executioner.

“I know it, monsieur; and I wished to spare you the trouble. My hair is on the table.”

Sanson followed the direction of the Queen’s hand.

“Only,” said she, “I wish these curls sent to my children, to-night.”

“Madame,” said Sanson, “this does not concern me.”

“However, I thought... notwithstanding...”

“Oh! I get nothing,” replied the executioner; “the clothes, the jewels, unless formally made over to me, all go to La Salpetriere, and are allotted to the poor of the hospital. The Committee of Public Safety arrange these things."

"But, monsieur," persisted Marie Antoinette, "may I at least depend upon this packet being forwarded to my children?"

Sanson remained silent.

"I will endeavour to do so," said Gilbert.

The prisoner cast upon him a look of deep gratitude.

"I came," said Sanson, "to cut off your hair; but since you have done so, I can, if you wish it, leave you for a short period alone."

"I entreat you to do so, monsieur. I wish to collect my scattered thoughts, and offer up a prayer."

Sanson bowed, and retired, when the Queen once more found herself in solitude. Whilst the condemned threw herself upon her knees before a low chair which served her as a prie-Dieu, a scene no less terrible was passing in the parsonage of the small church Saint Laudry, in the city. The cure' was dressing, the old housekeeper had prepared the humble morning meal, when a loud summons at the gate was heard. Even in our day, an unexpected visit is in general the precursor of some event, either a baptism, a marriage, "in extremis," or a confession: but at this epoch the visit of a stranger would announce some matter of far graver import. Indeed, at this period the priest was no longer the mandatory of God, but rendered his account to man. However, the Abbe Giraud was of the number of those who had least cause for fear, as he had taken an oath to the Constitution — in him conscience and probity had spoken louder than amour-propre or religious spirit. No doubt the Abbe Giraud admitted the possibility of a proficiency in the government, and much regretted the abuses committed under the name of the Divine will, and had, while retaining his God, accepted the fraternity of the Republican regime.

"Go and see, Dame Jacinthe," said he, "who disturbs us at this early hour, and if the business is of no very pressing nature, say that this morning I have been sent for to the Conciergerie, and must go there directly."

Dame Jacinthe, otherwise called Madeline, had accepted this flowery appellation in lieu of her own, as the Cure Giraud had taken the title of citizen instead of that of abbe. At the suggestion of her master, Jacinthe hastened down the steps to the little garden leading to the entrance gate. She drew back the bolts, when a thin pale young man, much agitated, but with a frank and sweet expression, presented himself before her.

"Monsieur 1'Abbe Giraud?" said he.

Jacinthe, not slow to remark the disordered dress, the neglected beard, and the nervous tremor of the new comer, augured unfavourably of him.

"Citizen," said she, "there is here neither monsieur nor abbe."

"Pardon me, madame," replied the young man, "I meant to say the Cure of St. Laudry."

Jacinthe, notwithstanding her patriotism, was struck by the word "madame," with which they ought only have addressed an empress. She, however, replied —

"You cannot see him now; he is repeating his breviary."

"In that case, I will wait," replied the young man.

"But," said Jacinthe, in whom this obstinate persistence revived the first unfavourable impression, "you will wait in vain, for he is summoned to the Conciergerie, and must go there immediately."

The young man turned frightfully pale, or rather from pale to livid.

"It is, then, true," murmured he; then, raising his voice, "This, madame, is the subject which brings me to the Abbe Giraud."

And in spite of the old woman, he had, whilst speaking, effected an entrance; then coolly but firmly drawing the bolts, and notwithstanding the expostulations and even menaces of Dame Jacinthe, he not only entered the house, but also the chamber of the cure, who on perceiving him uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Forgive me, Monsieur le Cure," immediately said the young man, "I wish to speak to you on a very serious subject; permit us to be alone."

The aged priest had experienced deep sorrow, and knew what it was to endure. He discerned deep and devouring passion in the confusion of the young man, and intense emotion in his fevered tones.

"Leave us, Dame Jacinthe," said he.

The visitor impatiently followed with his eyes the receding steps of the housekeeper, who, from being accustomed to the confidence of her master, hesitated to comply; then when at length the door was closed, "Monsieur le Cure," said the unknown, "you will first wish to know who I am. I will tell you. I am a proscribed man, doomed to death, who only at this moment lives from the power of audacity; I am the Chevalier de Maison Rouge."

The abbe started in horror from his armchair.

"Fear nothing!" said the Chevalier, "no one has seen me enter here, and those who even might see me would never know me. I have altered much these last two months.”

“But what do you wish, citizen?” asked the cure.

“You are going this morning to the Conciergerie, is it not so?”

“Yes, the Concierge has sent for me.”

“Do you know why?”

“To an invalid, or some dying person, perhaps even to one condemned.”

“You are right; it is to one condemned.”

The old priest regarded the Chevalier with astonishment.

“But do you know who this person is?” demanded Maison Rouge.

“No; I do not know.”

“This person is the Queen.”

The abbe uttered an exclamation of grief.

“The Queen! oh! my God!”

“Yes, monsieur, the Queen. I made inquiry as to the priest who would attend her, and learned it was you. I therefore came directly to seek an interview.”

“But what do you require of me?” asked the cure, alarmed at the wild accents of the Chevalier.

“I wish — I wish nothing, monsieur. I implore, I entreat, I supplicate you.”.

“For what, then?”

“To allow me to enter with you into the presence of her Majesty?”

“You are mad,” said the cure; “you would not only ruin me, but would sacrifice yourself.”

“Fear nothing.”

“The poor woman is condemned, and that is the end of her,”

“I know it, and it is not to make any attempt to save her that I wish to see her, it is... but listen to me, my father, you are not listening.”

“I do not listen to you, since what you ask is impossible; I do not listen to you, since you act like a man bereft of his senses,” said the aged man. “I do not listen to you, because you terrify me.”

“My father, reassure yourself,” said the young man, endeavouring to calm himself; “believe me, my father, I am in my senses. The Queen, I know, is lost; but if I could only for an instant prostrate myself at her feet, it would save my life. If I do not see her, I will kill myself, and as you will have caused my despair, you will, at the same moment, destroy both body and soul.”

“My son! my son!” replied the priest, “you ask me to sacrifice my life for you. Old as I am, my existence is still necessary to the unfortunate; old as I am, to precipitate my own death, is to commit an act of suicide.”

“Do not refuse me, my father,” replied the Chevalier; “you must have a curate, an acolothist; take me, let me go with you.”

The priest tried to maintain his firmness, which was gradually giving way.

“No, no,” said he; “this would be a defalcation from duty; I have sworn to the Constitution, and I am bound heart, soul, and conscience. The unhappy woman condemned to death is a guilty Queen; I would accept death if by so doing I could benefit a fellow creature, but I will not depart from the path of duty.”

“But,” cried the Chevalier, “when I have told you, and again repeat, even swear to you, I do not want to save the Queen; here by the Evangelist, by the crucifix I swear I do not go to the Conciergerie to prevent her death.”

“What is your motive, then?” said the old man, affected by his undisguised accents of despair.

“Hearken,” said the Chevalier, whose soul seemed to speak from his lips; “she was my benefactress, she is attached to me, to see me for the last time will afford her happiness, and will, I am certain, prove a consolation to her.”

“And this is all that you desire?” demanded the cure, yielding to these irresistible accents.

“Absolutely all.”

“And you have woven no plot to attempt to rescue the condemned?”

“None. I am a Christian, my father; and if there rests in my heart a shadow of deceit; if, as I hope to live, I deal falsely in this, may God visit me with eternal damnation.”

“No, no,” said the cure; “I can promise nothing,” as the innumerable dangers attendant on an act so imprudent returned to his mind.

“Now listen to me, my father,” said the Chevalier, in a voice hoarse with emotion; “I have spoken like a submissive child, I have not uttered one bitter word or uncharitable sentiment, no menace has escaped my lips; yet now my head whirls, fever burns in my veins, now despair rushes into my heart; now I am armed: behold! here is my dagger.” And the young man drew from his bosom a polished blade which threw a livid reflection on his trembling hand. The cure drew back quickly.

“Fear nothing,” said the Chevalier, with a mournful smile; “others knowing you to be so strict an observer of your word, would have terrified you into an oath. But no’ I have supplicated, and I still continue to supplicate, with hands clasped, my forehead in the dust, that I may see her for a single moment. Look! here is your guarantee.” And he drew from his pocket a billet, which he presented to Giraud, who opened it, and read as follows: —

“I, Rene, Chevalier de Maison Rouge, declare by God and my honour, that I have by threats of death compelled the worthy cure of Saint Laudry to carry me to the Conciergerie, notwithstanding his refusal and great repugnance to do so. In proof of which I have signed —

“MAISON ROUGE.”

“It is well,” said the priest; “but swear to me once again that you will be guilty of no imprudence; it is not sufficient that my life is saved, I am answerable also for yours.”

“Think not of that,” said the Chevalier. “Then you consent?”

“I must, since you so absolutely insist. You can wait outside, and when she comes to the wicket, you will see her.”

The Chevalier seized the hand of the old priest, and kissed it with all the ardour and respect he would the crucifix.

“Oh!” murmured the Chevalier: “she shall die at least like a Queen, and the hand of the executioner shall never touch her.”

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE CART.

IMMEDIATELY after having obtained this permission from the cure of Saint Laudry, Maison Rouge withdrew into a cabinet, the door of which being half opened, he had recognised as the priest’s dressing-room. There his long beard and mustachios speedily disappeared under the stroke of the razor; and then only he was fully aware of his frightful pallor and altered appearance. It was terrible to behold. He re-entered perfectly calm, and seemed to have forgotten that notwithstanding the absence of his beard and mustachios, he might still probably be known at the Conciergerie. He followed the abbe, whom, during his momentary absence, two officials were seeking; and with the cool audacity which casts aside suspicion, entered the iron gate at this time opening into the court of the palace. He was, like the Abbe Giraud, dressed in black, sacerdotal habits at that period being abolished. In the register they found about fifty persons assembled; some employed about the prison, some deputies, some commissaries, all waiting in the expectation of seeing the Queen pass; there might be some mandatories, and many idlers. His heart bounded *so* violently on finding himself opposite the wicket, that he heard not even the parley that ensued between the abbe, the gendarmes, and the Concierge. Only a man with a pair of scissors in his hand, and a piece of stuff newly cut, pushed against Maison Rouge upon the threshold. He turned round and recognised the executioner.

“What do you want, citizen?” demanded Sanson.

The Chevalier endeavoured to repress the shudder which, in spite of himself, ran through his veins.

“You see, Citizen Sanson,” replied the Chevalier, “that I accompany the cure of Saint Laudry.”

“Oh! very well,” said the executioner, drawing himself on one side, and issuing orders to his assistant.

During this time Maison Rouge had passed into the interior of the register, and from there into the compartment inhabited by the two gendarmes. These men were overcome by contending emotions. Proud and haughty as she had been to others, how sweet and condescending see had ever been to them! They seemed more like her servants than her guards. In his present position the Chevalier could not obtain a view of the Queen — the screen was closed! It had opened to give entrance to the cure, but directly closed behind him. When the Chevalier entered, the conversation had already commenced.

"Monsieur," said the Queen, in a clear and firm voice, "since you have sworn yourself to the Republic — to those who have condemned me to death — I have no confidence in you. We do not worship the same God!"

"Madame," said Giraud, struck by this profession of faith so unworthy of her, "a Christian about to die should dismiss all hatred from her heart, and ought not to repulse her God, under whatever form he may be presented to her."

Maison Rouge advanced a step to open the screen, hoping that when she saw him, and knew what brought him, she would change her opinion in regard to the cure; but the gendarmes detected the movement.

"But," said Maison Rouge, "I am acolothist to the cure!"

"Then, since she refuses the cure," said Duchesne, "she does not require you."

"But still, perhaps, she may accept me," said he, raising his voice; "it is impossible she would refuse me." But Marie Antoinette was too much engrossed by the sentiment which agitated her either to hear or recognise the Chevalier's voice.

"Go, monsieur," continued she; "leave me," addressing Giraud, "since at this time we in France live under the regime of liberty, I claim the right to die according to my own fashion."

Giraud offered some resistance.

"Leave me, monsieur," said she. "I desire you to leave me."

Giraud endeavoured to speak.

"I will not hear you," said she; "leave me!" with the gesture of Marie Therese.

Giraud went out.

Maison Rouge essayed to gain a glimpse of her through the opening in the screen, but the prisoner had turned her back. The executioner's assistant crossed before the cure; he came in holding a cord in his hand. The two gendarmes pushed the Chevalier towards the door; before, amazed, despairing, and utterly bewildered, he had been able to utter a cry, or make the slightest movement to effect his purpose, he found himself, with the cure, in the corridor of the turnkey. This corridor brought them again into the register, where the news of the Queen’s refusal had already circulated, where the Austrian pride of Marie Antoinette was to some the pretext of the coarsest invectives, and to others the subject of secret admiration. “Go,” said Richard, to the abbe, “return home, since she repulses you, and let her die as she likes.”

“She is in the right,” said Richard’s wife, “and I would act the same.”

“Then you would do wrong, citoyenne,” said the cure.

“Be silent,” said the concierge, opening his eyes very wide; “what does this concern you? Go, abbe, go!”

“No,” said Giraud, “no; I will, notwithstanding all, accompany her; one word, only one word, if she will listen, might bring her back to duty; besides, I am sent by the order of the Commune, and I must discharge my office.”

“Send back your sexton, then,” brutally observed the adjutant-major, commandant of the armed forces. He had been formerly an actor of French comedy, named Grammont. The eyes of the Chevalier flashed lightning, as he thrust his hand into his breast, where Giraud knew he had concealed a poniard. He arrested him with a suppliant look.

“Spare my life,” said he, in a low voice; “you see all your hopes are lost, do not ruin hers. I will mention you on the route; I swear to you I will tell her you risked your life that you might see her once more on earth.”

These words calmed the effervescence of the young man, and the ordinary reaction taking place, he sank into a state of quiescence. This man of heroic mind, of marvellous power, had arrived at the termination of both strength and will, and glided irresolute, or rather exhausted and vanquished, into a state of torpor that might have been imagined to be the precursor of death.

“Yes, I believe,” said he, “it should be thus; the cross for Jesus, the scaffold for her, Gods and Kings drink deep of the chalice presented to them by men.” This thought produced resignation, and now, totally prostrated, he allowed himself to be pushed without offering any resistance, except an occasional involuntary groan, to the outer gate, passive as Ophelia when, devoted to death, she found herself borne away by the remorseless waves.

At the foot of the gate, and at the doors of the Conciergerie, a crowd was assembled, which, unless once seen, it was impossible to describe. Impatience rules every passion, and each passion speaks its own language, and these combined formed an immense and prolonged uproar, as if the whole noise and the entire population of Paris were on this occasion concentrated in the quarter of the Palais de Justice. In front of this crowd the whole army was encamped, with guns intended to guard the procession, and also to secure the enjoyment to those who came to witness the last act of the tragedy.

It would have been vain to attempt to pierce this profound rampart, increasing gradually, since the condemnation of the Queen was now known not only at Paris, but by the patriots of the Faubourgs, Maison Rouge, expelled from the Conciergerie, naturally found himself in the first rank among the soldiers, who instantly demanded who he was. He replied, "he was the curate of the Abbe Giraud, but having bound himself by the same oath, he, like the cure, had been dismissed, and refused by the Queen," on which the soldiers, in their turn, pushed him into the first row of spectators, where he was again compelled to repeat what he had previously told them.

Then the cry arose, "He has just left."

"He has seen her."

"What did she say?"

"What did she do?"

"Is she as haughty as usual?"

"Is she cast down?"

"Does she weep?"

The Chevalier replied to all these questions in a feeble but sweet and affable tone, as if his voice was the last manifestation of life suspended on his lips. His answer was couched in the language of truth and simplicity. It contained an eulogium of the firmness of Marie Antoinette, and that which he recounted with the sublimity and faith of an evangelist cast sorrow and remorse over many hearts.

When he spoke of the little Dauphin, and of Madame Royale; of this Queen without a throne; of this wife without a husband; this mother bereft of her children; this woman alone, and abandoned, without a friend, surrounded by executioners, more than one face here and there assumed a sad expression, and more than one tear of regret was clandestinely wiped from eyes previously animated by hatred. The palace clock struck eleven.

All murmuring at this moment ceased. One hundred thousand human beings counted these strokes, echoed by the pulsations of their own hearts. When the last vibration had ceased and died away in the distance, a loud noise was heard within the gates, and, at the same time, a cart advancing from the side of the Quai aux Fleurs broke through the crowd, then the guards, and drew up at the bottom of the steps. The Queen soon appeared on the top of the staircase; she made a motion of astonishment and horror, her respiration was laborious and slow; her hair was cut short, the greater portion had turned gray during her captivity, and this shade of silver rendered still more delicate the mother-of-pearl pallor which at this moment lent an almost angelic beauty to this daughter of the Caesars. She was attired in a white robe, her hands were fastened at her back. When she appeared with the Abbe Giraud on her right, who, notwithstanding all opposition, would still accompany her, and the executioner on her left, both dressed in black, there ran throughout the crowd a murmur, that God alone, who reads all hearts, could comprehend and sum up the truth. A man passed between the executioner and Marie Antoinette; it was Grammont. He conducted her to the fatal car. The Queen recoiled. “Mount!” said Grammont. This word was distinctly heard by all. Emotion held every breath suspended on the lips of the spectators. A blush suffused the face of the Queen, mounting even to the roots of her hair, but immediately receded, leaving her face a ghastly paleness, and blanching her half-open lips.

“Why a car for me,” said she, “when the King had a carriage to convey him to the scaffold?”

The Abbe Giraud advanced, and addressed a few words to her in a low tone; doubtless he condemned this last cry of royal pride. The Queen remained silent, but tottered so much, that Sanson held out his arms to support her; but she recovered her self-possession before he could touch her. She then descended the staircase, whilst the assistants placed a foot-board behind the car. The Queen went first, the abbe followed her. When the car was in motion it caused a great movement in the assemblage; and the soldiers, at the same time, ignorant of its cause, united their efforts to push back the crowd, and consequently a large space was cleared between the people and the vehicle of death, when suddenly a mournful howling was heard. The Queen started, and instantly rose, looking around her. She then saw her little dog, which had been lost for two months, who unable to follow her into the Conciergerie, regardless of kicks, blows, and thrusts, rushed towards the car; but almost directly poor Jet, thin even to emaciation, starving and bruised, disappeared under the horses’ feet. The Queen followed him with her eyes; she could not speak, for her voice was drowned in the noise; she could not raise her hands, for they were tied; and had she been able to do either, who would have listened to her? Having closed her eyes for an instant, she soon revived. He was in the arms of a pale young man, who, standing on a cannon, was conspicuous above the crowd, and prompted by an inexplicable impulse, pointed towards heaven. Marie Antoinette looked upwards and smiled sweetly.

The Chevalier uttered a groan, as if this smile had broken his heart; and as the fatal car turned towards the Pont-au-Change, he fell back amongst the crowd, and disappeared.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE SCAFFOLD.

UPON LA PLACE DE LA REVOLUTION, leaning against a lamp-post, two men were waiting. Of those who followed with the crowd, some were carried to La Place du Palais, others to La Place de la Revolution, whilst the rest spread, impatient and tumultuous, over the whole road separating the two places. When the Queen reached the instrument of punishment, which, defaced by the sun and storm, worn by the hand of the executioner, and, most horrible, blunted by too frequent contact with its victims, it reared its head with a sinister pride over the subjacent mass, like a queen ruling her people. The two men, arm-in-arm, and speaking by fits and starts, with pale lips and contracted brows, were Louis and Maurice. Lost in the crowd, but not in a way calculated to excite suspicion, they continued in a low tone their conversation, which was perhaps not the least interesting one circulating amongst the various groups, which, like an electric chain, agitated this living sea from the Pont-au-Change to the Pont de la Revolution.

"See," said Maurice, as the hideous monster reared her red arms; "might it not be said that she calls us, and smiles from her wicket, in anticipation of a frightful mouthful?"

"I," said Louis, "must confess I do not belong to the school of poetry which sees everything couleur de rouge. I see it en rose, and even at the foot of this dreadful machine I will sing and hope still. 'Dum spiro spero.'"

"You hope, when they murder women?"

"Maurice," said Louis, "child of the Revolution, do not deny your mother. Ah! Maurice, remain a staunch and loyal patriot. She who is condemned to die is unlike all other women, she is the evil genius of France."

"Oh! it is not her that I regret; it is not for her I weep!" cried Maurice.

"Yes, I understand, it is Genevieve."

"Ah!" said Maurice, "there is one thought that drives me mad. It is that Genevieve is in the hands of those purveyors to the guillotine, Hebert and

Fouquier Tinville, in the hands of the men who sent here the poor Heloise, and are now sending the proud Mane Antoinette.”

“Well!” said Louis, “it is this thought that inspires me with hope. When the anger of the people has feasted two tyrants it will be for some time satiated at least, like the boa constrictor, who requires three months to digest what he has devoured. Then it will swallow no more; and, as it is said by the prophets of the Faubourg, ‘the lesser morsels will have no cause for fear.”‘

“Louis! Louis!” said Maurice, “I am more positive than you, and I say it in a whisper, but am ready to repeat it aloud, Louis, I hate the new Queen, who seems destined to succeed the Austrian whom she destroys. It is a sad queen whose purple is daily dyed in blood, and to whom Sanson is prime minister.”

“Bah! we shall escape.”

“I do not believe it,” said Maurice, shaking his head, “to avoid being arrested at your house we have no resource but to live in the street.”

“Bah! we can quit Paris; there is nothing to prevent us. We need not complain then. My uncle will await us at St. Omer; money, passport, nothing will be wanting. There exists not the gendarme who shall arrest us; what do you think? We remain in Paris because we choose to do so.” —”No, that is not correct, excellent friend, devoted and faithful as you are. You remain because I wish to continue here.”

“And you wish to remain to discover Genevieve. Well! nothing is more simple, just, or natural. You think she is in prison; nothing more probable. You wish to keep watch over her, and on that account we cannot quit Paris.”

Maurice drew a deep sigh; it was evident his thoughts were wandering.

“Do you remember the death of Louis XVI?” said he. “I can see him yet, pale with pride and emotion. I was then one of the chiefs in this crowd, where I conceal myself to-day. I was greater at the foot of the scaffold than the King upon it had ever been. What changes, Louis! and when one thinks that nine short months have sufficed to work this change.”

“Nine months of love, Maurice!.... Love lost Troy!”

Maurice sighed; his wandering thoughts now took another direction.

“Poor Maison Rouge,” said he; “it is a sad thing for him!’’

“Helas!” said Louis, “shall I tell you what appears to me the most melancholy thing about the revolution?”

“Yes,” said Maurice.

“It is that one often has for friends those we should prefer as enemies, and for enemies those we would wish...”

“It gives me much pain to think of one thing,” interrupted Maurice.

“What?”

“It is that he did not invent some project to save the Queen. He must be mad!”

“A man with the strength of ten thousand.”

“I tell you he was mad. I know that to save Genevieve....” Louis frowned.

“I again tell you, Maurice,” said he, “you are wild. No; even were it possible for you to save Genevieve, you would only become a bad citizen. But enough of this. Maurice, let us listen. Look how the heads undulate; see, there is Sanson’s valet raising himself from under the basket, and looking in the distance. The Austrian arrives.”

In short, as if to accompany this movement which Louis had remarked, a shuddering, prolonged and unceasing, pervaded the crowd. It was one of those hurricanes which commence with a whistle and terminate with a bellow. Maurice raised himself by the help of the lamp-post, and looked towards la Rue Saint Honore.

“Yes,” said he, shuddering, “there it is.” And another machine now made its appearance, almost as revolting as the guillotine. It was the fatal car. On the right and left glittered the arms of the escort, while in front marched Grammont, replying with flashes of his sabre to the shouts and cries of some fanatics. But even as the cart advanced these cries subsided under the haughty courage of the condemned. Never had a countenance commanded more respect, never had Marie Antoinette looked more the Queen. Her proud courage inspired her assistants with terror. Indifferent to the exhortations of the Abbe Giraud, who still accompanied her, her face moved neither to the right nor left; her deep thought was as immutable as her look; even the jolting motion of the cart upon the uneven pavement did not by its violence disturb the rigidity of her features; she might have been taken for a royal statue riding in the car, had it not been for her brilliant eyes, and her hair, which had escaped from her cap, being waved about by the wind. A silence equal to that of the desert fell suddenly upon those three hundred thousand spectators of this scene, witnessed by the heavens for the first time by the light of the sun. On the right, where Maurice and Louis were standing, the wheels of the cart were heard, and the breathing of the horse. The car stopped at the foot of the scaffold. The Queen, who doubtless was not conscious at the moment, awoke, and understood it all; she threw a haughty glance upon the crowd, and again encountered the restless eyes of the pale young man she had previously seen standing on the cannon. He was now mounted on a stone, and repeated the respectful salutation he had before offered her as she left the Conciergerie. He then disappeared. Many persons seeing him, it was soon reported, from his being dressed in black, that a priest was in attendance on Marie Antoinette, to give her absolution ere she ascended the scaffold. As to the rest, no one disturbed the Chevalier. There is in the highest moments a supreme respect for certain things. The Queen cautiously descended the steps from the car, supported by Sanson, who to the last moment, in accomplishing the task to which he himself appeared to be condemned, treated her with the most marked respect.

As the Queen walked towards the steps of the scaffold some of the horses reared, and several of the foot guards and soldiers appeared to oscillate and lose their equilibrium; then a shadow was seen to glide under the scaffold, but tranquillity was almost instantaneously re-established, since no one was willing to quit his place at this solemn moment — no one was willing to lose the minutest detail in the dreadful tragedy about to be accomplished. All eyes were directed towards the condemned. The Queen was already on the platform of the scaffold. The priest still continued to address her; an assistant softly placed himself behind her, while another removed the handkerchief from her shoulders. Marie Antoinette felt the touch of the infamous hand upon her neck, and making a brusque movement trod upon Sanson’s foot, who, without her having seen him, was engaged in fixing the fatal plank. Sanson drew back.

“Excuse me, Monsieur,” said the Queen; “I did not do it intentionally.” These were the last words pronounced by the daughter of the Caesars, the Queen of France, the widow of Louis XVI.

As the clock of the Tuileries struck a quarter after twelve, the Queen was launched into eternity. A terrible cry — a shout comprising at once joy, terror, sorrow, triumph, expiation — rose like a storm, smothering in its birth a feeble burst of lamentation which issued from beneath the scaffold. The gendarmes heard it notwithstanding, feeble as it was, and advanced some steps in front. The crowd, now less compact, expanded like a river whose dike has been enlarged, threw down the fence, dispersed the guards, and rushed like the returning tide to beat the foot of the scaffold, which was already shaking. Each one wished for a nearer view of the royal remains of her whom they had considered the destruction of France. But the gendarmes had another object in view — they sought the shadow which had repassed their lines, and glided beneath the scaffold. Two of them returned leading between them by the collar a pale young man, whose hand contained a blood-stained handkerchief, which he pressed to his heart; he was followed by a little spaniel howling piteously.

"Death to the aristocrat! death to the ci-devant!" cried some men of the people; "he has dipped his handkerchief in the Austrian's blood — to death with him!"

"Great God," said Maurice to Louis, "do you recognise him? do you recognise him?"

"Death to the royalist!" repeated these madmen; "take away the handkerchief he wishes to preserve as a relic, wrest it from him, tear it from him."

A haughty smile flitted across the young man's lips, he tore open his shirt, bared his breast, and dropped the handkerchief. "Gentlemen," said he, "this blood is not the Queen's but my own. Let me die in peace." And a deep gushing wound appeared widely gaping under the left breast. The crowd uttered one cry and retired. The young man sank slowly upon his knees, and gazed upon the scaffold as a martyr looks upon the altar.

"Maison Rouge," whispered Louis to Maurice.

"Adieu!" murmured the young man, bowing his head with an angelic smile, "adieu! or rather, au revoir!" and he expired in the midst of the stupefied guards.

"There is still this expedient, Louis," said Maurice, "before becoming an unworthy citizen."

The little spaniel turned towards the corpse, terrified and howling lamentably.

"Why, here is Jet," said a man, holding a large club in his hand, — " why, here is Jet; come here, old fellow."

The dog advanced towards him, but was scarcely within arm's length of the man who had called him, when the brutal wretch raised his club and dashed out his brains, at the same time bursting into a hoarse laugh.

"Cowardly wretch!" cried Maurice.

"Silence!" said Louis, "or we are lost. It is Simon."

CHAPTER L.

THE VISIT TO THE DOMICILE.

LOUIS AND MAURICE returned to their mutual home, but the latter, in order not to compromise his friend too openly, usually absented himself during the day, and returned at night. In the midst of these events, being present always at the removal of the prisoners to the Conciergerie, he watched daily for the sight of Genevieve, not having been yet able to discover her place of imprisonment. Louis, since his visit to Fouquier Tinville, had succeeded in convincing him that on the first ostensible act he was lost, and would then have sacrificed himself without having benefited Genevieve, and Maurice, who would willingly have thrown himself into prison in the hope of being united to his mistress, became prudent from the fear of being separated from her for ever. He went every morning to the Carmelites at Port Libre, the Madelonnettes at St. Lazare, from La Force to the Luxembourg; he stationed himself before these prisons to watch the cars as they came out to convey the accused to the revolutionary tribunal. Then, when he had scanned the victims, he proceeded to the other prisons to prosecute this hopeless search, as he soon became aware that the activity of ten men would prove inadequate to keep watch over the thirty-three prisons which Paris could boast of at this period. He therefore contented himself by going daily to the tribunal, there to await the coming of Genevieve. He was already beginning to despair. Indeed, what resource; remained to a person condemned, after their arrest? Sometimes the tribunal, whose sittings commenced at ten o’clock, had condemned twenty or thirty people by four o’clock: those first condemned, had six hours to live, but the last, sentenced at a quarter to four, fell at half-past beneath the axe. To resign Genevieve to submit to a similar fate, would be ceasing to fight then against destiny. Oh! if he had known beforehand of the imprisonment of Genevieve, how Maurice would have tracked the blind human justice of this epoch; how easily and promptly he had torn Genevieve from prison! Never were escapes more easy, and it may be said never were they so rare. All the nobles once placed in prison, installed themselves as in a chateau, and died at leisure. To fly was to withdraw from the consequences of a duel; the women even blushed at liberty acquired at this price.

But Maurice would not have shown himself so scrupulous. To kill the dogs, to alter the door keys, what more simple? Genevieve was not one of those splendid names calculated to attract general attention.... She would not dishonour herself by flying, and besides... when could she be disgraced! Oh! as he bitterly called to mind the gardens of Port Libre, so easy to scale, the chambers of Madelonnettes, so easy of access to the street, the low walls of the Luxembourg, and the dark corridors of the Carmelites, where a resolute man could so easily penetrate by opening a window.

But was Genevieve in one of these prisons? Then devoured by doubt, and worn out with anxiety, he loaded Dixmer with imprecations, he threatened, and nourished his hatred against this man, whose cowardly vengeance concealed itself under an apparent devotion to the royal cause.

“I will find him out thus,” thought Maurice, “if he wishes to save the unhappy woman, he will show himself; if he wishes to ruin her, he will insult her.... I will find him out, the scoundrel, and it will be an evil day for him!”

On the morning of the day, when the events occurred which we are about to relate, Maurice went out early to take his usual station at the revolutionary tribunal, leaving Louis asleep.

He was suddenly awakened by a loud noise at the door, the voices of women, and the butt-ends *of* guns. He threw around him the startled glance of a surprised man, who wished to convince himself that nothing that could compromise him was in view. Four sectionaries, two gendarmes, and a commissary entered at the same moment. This visit was sufficiently significant, and Louis hastened to dress himself.

“Do you come to arrest me?” said he.

“Yes, Citizen Louis.”

“What for?”

“Because you are suspected.”

“Ah! all right.”

The commissary muttered some words in a low tone, about arrest by proces-verbal.

“Where is your friend?” said he immediately.

“What friend?”

“The Citizen Maurice Lindey.”

"At home, probably."

"No; he lodges here."

"He! go along! Search, and if you find..."

"Here is the denunciation," said the commissary, "it is plain enough;" offering Louis a paper with vile writing and enigmatical orthography.

It stated that every morning the Citizen Lindey was seen going out of the Citizen Louis's house, suspected, and ordered for arrest. The denunciation was signed "Simon."

"Why, the cobbler will lose his practice if he follows two trades at the same time — a spy and boot-mender. He is a Caesar, this Monsieur Simon," and he burst into a fit of laughter.

"The Citizen Maurice, where is the Citizen Maurice?" said the commissary. "We summon you to deliver him up."

"When I tell you he is not here!"

The commissary passed into the chamber adjoining, then ascended to the loft where Louis's official slept, and at last opened a lower apartment, but found no trace of Maurice. But upon the dining-room table a recently written letter attracted the attention of the commissary. It was from Maurice, who had deposited it there on leaving in the morning (as they slept together) without awakening his friend.

"I go to the tribunal," said Maurice; "take breakfast without me. I shall not return till night."

"Citizens," said Louis, "however anxious I may feel to obey your commands, I cannot follow you en chemise. Allow my official to assist me."

"Aristocrat," said a voice, "do you require assistance to put on your breeches?"

"Ah! mon Dieu! yes," said Louis; "I resemble the Citizen Dagobert, — mind, I did not say king."

"Well, dress," said the commissary, "but make haste."

The official came down to help his master to dress. However, it was not exactly that Louis required a valet de chambre, it was that nothing might escape the notice of the official, and that consequently he might detail everything to Maurice.

"Now, messieurs, — pardon, citizens. Now, citizens, I am ready, and will follow you; but permit me, I beg, to carry with me the last volume of

Lettres a Emile, by Monsieur Demonstier, which has just appeared, and I have not read. It will enliven the hours of my captivity."

"Your captivity," said Simon, sharply, now become municipal in his turn, and entering, followed by four sectionaries, "that will not last long. You figure in the proces of the woman who wanted to assist the Austrian to escape. They try her to-day, and to-morrow your turn will come."

"Cobbler," said Louis, "you cut your soles too quickly."

"Yes; but what a nice stroke from the leather-cutting knife!" replied Simon; "you will see, you will see, my fine grenadier."

Louis shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," said he, "let us go; I am waiting for you."

As each one turned round to descend the staircase Louis bestowed on the municipal Simon so vigorous a kick with his foot that he sent him rolling and howling down the entire flight of stairs. The sectionaries could not restrain their laughter. Louis put his hands in his pockets.

"In the exercise of my functions," said Simon, livid with rage.

"Pardieu!" said Louis, "are we not all here in the exercise of our functions?"

He got into the carriage, and was conducted by the commissary to the Palais de Justice.

CHAPTER LI.

LOUIS.

IF FOR THE SECOND time the reader is willing to follow us to the revolutionary tribunal, we shall find Maurice in the same place where we have already seen him, only now infinitely more pale and agitated. At the moment our scene again opens upon the lugubrious theatre, whither we are led by a tissue of events rather than by our own inclinations, the jury were deliberating, a cause had just been tried: two of the accused had already, by one of those insolent precautions by which they ridiculed the judges, attired themselves for the scaffold, and were conversing with their counsel, whose words somewhat resembled those of a physician who despairs of the life of his patient. The people of the tribune were this day in a ferocious mood, calculated to excite the severity of the jury placed under the immediate surveillance of the tricoteuses and inhabitants of the suburbs. The juries under these circumstances became more excited and energetic, resembling an actor who redoubles his efforts beneath the eyes of a censorious public. Since ten in the morning five condemnations had already taken place under the decisions of these harsh and insatiable juries. The two individuals who now found themselves on the bench of the accused awaited the decisive moment, when “yes” or “no” would return them to life or doom them to death. The people of the nation, rendered savage by the daily occurrence of these spectacles, now become their favourite pastime, prepared themselves by exclamations and anticipations for the awful moment.

“There! there! look at the tall one,” said a tricoteuse, who, not having a bonnet, wore a tricoloured cockade, large as a hand, on her breast, —”there! is he not pale? they say he is almost dead now.”

The condemned regarded the woman with a contemptuous smile.

“What do you say?” said her neighbour; “why, he is smiling.”

“Yes, the wrong side of his mouth.”

One of the men looked at his watch.

“What is the time?” inquired his companion.

“A quarter to one. This has lasted three-quarters of an hour.”

“The same as at Dagobert, that unfortunate town, where you arrive at noon, and are hung in an hour.”

“And the short one! the short one!” cried another person, “will he not be ugly when he sneezes in the sack?”

“Bah! it is done so quickly, you will barely have time to perceive it.”

“Then we will demand the head from Sanson; one has a right to see it.”

“Look, what a beautiful blue coat he has on, the tyrant. It is rather a pleasant thing that the poor can shorten the rich and well-dressed people.”

Indeed, as the executioner had told the Queen, the poor inherited the spoils of each victim; they were carried immediately to the Salpetriere, after the execution, and distributed among the indigent; and there even the clothes of the unfortunate Queen had been conveyed.

Maurice heard this whirlwind of words without paying any attention; every moment was occupied by one engrossing thought, to the exclusion of all else. For several days his heart beat only at certain moments, and by fits and starts, as from time to time hope or fear appeared to suspend all vital action, and these perpetual oscillations to bruise the most tender sensibilities of his soul.

The jury returned to their places, and as had been fully anticipated, the President pronounced the condemnation of the two accused, who were directly removed, walking with a firm and erect step; for at this epoch every one learnt how to die boldly.

The solemn and sinister voice of the usher was again heard.

“Citizen, the public accuser against the Citoyenne Genevieve Dixmer.”

A shudder ran through Maurice’s frame, and a cold sweat bedewed his brow. The little door by which the accused entered suddenly opened, and Genevieve appeared. She was dressed in white; her ringlets were tastefully arranged, instead of being cut short, hanging in long masses of clustering curls. Doubtless, at the last Genevieve wishes to create a favourable impression on those who would see her.

Maurice beheld Genevieve, and felt that all the strength he had collected was inadequate to this occasion, notwithstanding he had awaited this blow, since for twelve days he had not omitted a single sitting, and three times already had the name of Genevieve proceeded from the mouth of the public accuser, and reached his ear: but there are certain griefs and miseries so profound that it is quite impossible to sound the depths of the abyss.

All those who witnessed the appearance of this young female, so lovely, so pale and innocent, uttered a simultaneous cry: some of fury — for at this period there existed a class of people who detested everything bordering on superiority of beauty, riches, and even of birth — others of admiration, and some of pity. Genevieve, doubtless, amongst all these cries, had recognised one cry, amidst all these voices had distinguished one voice, for she turned in the direction of Maurice, whilst the President, looking up from time to time, turned over the law papers of the accused.

At the first glance she discovered Maurice, concealed as his features were under the broad brim of a large hat which he wore; and, turning round with a sweet smile, and a gesture still more engaging, she pressed her rosy but trembling hands upon her lips, and depositing her whole soul with her breath, she gave wings to a last kiss, which only one in this vast crowd had the right to appropriate to himself. A murmur of interest ran through the hall. Genevieve recalled, turned towards her judges, but stopping suddenly in the midst of this movement, her eyes dilated, and fixed with an indefinable expression of horror towards one point of the hall. Maurice in vain raised himself on his toes; he saw nothing, or rather something of more consequence claimed his attention upon this scene — that is to say, the tribunal.

Fouquier Tinville had commenced reading the act of accusation. This act stated that Genevieve Dixmer was the wife of an obstinate conspirator, suspected of having assisted the ex-Chevalier de Maison Rouge in all his successive attempts to rescue the Queen. She had, besides, been surprised at the feet of the Queen, entreating her to exchange garments with her, and offering to die in her stead. This absurd fanaticism, continued the act, merited, no doubt, the admiration of the centre-revolutionists; but in our day every French citizen owes his life to the nation; it is therefore double treason to sacrifice it to the enemies of France.

Genevieve, when interrogated as to having been recognised on her knees before the Queen, as stated by the two gendarmes, Gilbert and Duchesne, and entreating her to exchange vestments, simply replied, “Yes.”

“Then,” said the president, “inform us of your plan, and what hope you entertained of its success.”

Genevieve smiled. “A woman might conceive hopes,” said she, “but a woman could not form a plan like this of which I am the victim.”

“How came you there, then?”

"Not of my *own* accord. I was driven to it."

"Who compelled you?" demanded the public accuser.

"Those who menaced me with death if I did not obey;" and again the agitated look of the young woman was centred on that part of the hall invisible to Maurice.

"But to escape from this death which menaced you, did you face death which must result from your condemnation."

"When I consented, the knife was at my throat, whilst the guillotine was only in perspective. I succumbed under present violence."

"Why did you not call for assistance? all good citizens would have defended you."

"Alas! Monsieur," said Genevieve, in a voice at once so sad and sweet, that caused Maurice's heart to beat tumultuously, "I had no one near me."

Commiseration succeeded to interest, as interest had succeeded to curiosity. Many heads were lowered, some to conceal their tears, many to allow them to flow freely. Just then Maurice perceived on his left an immovable head and an inflexible countenance. It was Dixmer, standing dark, gloomy, and implacable, never for a moment losing sight of Genevieve or of the tribunal.

The blood rushed to the young man's temples, rage mounted from his heart to his forehead, filling his whole being with intense desire for vengeance. He flung at Dixmer a look so replete with burning hatred, so condensed and powerful, that he, as if attracted by the electric fluid, turned his head towards his enemy. Their glances encountered like two flashes.

"Tell us the names of your instigators," said the president.

"There was only one, Monsieur."

"Who?"

"My husband."

"Do you know where he is?"

"Yes."

"Inform us of his retreat?"

"He has been brutal, but I will not be a coward. It is not for me to tell you his retreat, but for you to find him." Maurice looked at Dixmer. He never moved. One idea flitted through the young man's brain. It was to denounce him himself: but he quickly suppressed the thought. "No," said he, "it is not thus that he should die."

"Then you refuse to assist us in our search?" said the president.

“I think, Monsieur, I could not do so without rendering myself as contemptible in the eyes of others as he is in mine.”

“Are there any witnesses?” demanded the president. “There is one,” replied the usher. “Call the witness.”

“Maximilien Jean Louis!” shouted the usher.

“Louis!” cried Maurice, “oh! mon Dieu! what has happened, then.” This scene took place the same day that Louis had been arrested, and Maurice was in utter ignorance of all that had occurred. “Louis!” murmured Genevieve, looking round with anxious solicitude. “Why does not the witness answer to the call?” demanded the president.

“Citizen President,” said Fouquier Tinville, “upon a recent denunciation the witness was arrested at his own house, he will be here directly.” Maurice started.

“There is another still more important witness, but we have not yet been able to find him.” Dixmer turned towards Maurice smiling. Perhaps the same idea flitted through the mind of the husband which had before entered that of the lover. Genevieve, pale and horror-stricken, uttered a low groan.

At this moment Louis entered followed by two gendarmes. After him, and by the same door, Simon appeared, who came to take his seat in the judgment hall, according to custom in that locality. “Your name and surname?”, inquired the president. “Maximilien Jean Louis.”

“Your trade?”

“An independent gentleman.”

“You will not remain so long,” muttered Simon, shaking his fist. “Are you related to the prisoner at the bar?”

“No; but I have the honour of being one of her friends.”

“Did you know there was a conspiracy to carry off the Queen?”

“How could I know it?”

“She might have confided in you?”

“In me! a member of the section of the Thermopyles?”

“Notwithstanding, you have sometimes been seen with her.”

“That might have been seen often.”

“Did you recognise her as an aristocrat?”

“I knew her as the wife of a master tanner.”

“But her husband did not in reality follow the business which he pretended to.”

“Of that I am ignorant; her husband was not one of my friends.”

“Tell me what you know of this husband.”

“Oh! very willingly. He is a villain, who — ”

“Monsieur Louis,” said Genevieve, “have mercy.”

Louis continued unmoved. “He is a villain, who has sacrificed the poor woman before you, not even to his political opinions but to private hatred. Pooh! I look upon him as lower and more degraded even than Simon.” Dixmer became livid with rage. Simon wished to speak, but a gesture from the president imposed silence. “You appear to know the whole history, Citizen Louis,” said Fouquier; “continue your account.”

“Pardon me, Citizen Fouquier,” said Louis, rising; “I know nothing more.” He bowed, and reseated himself.

“Citizen Louis,” said Fouquier, “it is your bounden duty to enlighten this tribunal.”

“It will not be much enlightened by all I have to say. As to this poor woman, I again repeat she has only acted under compulsion. Look at her; does she look like a conspirator? What she has done she was compelled to do. That is all.”

“You think so?”

“I know so.”

“In the name of the law,” said Fouquier, “I require that the witness Louis shall be placed before this tribunal as an accomplice of this woman.”

Maurice groaned, whilst Genevieve buried her face in her hands. Sanson screamed out in a transport of joy, “Citizen accuser, you are the saviour of your country!”

As to Louis, he leapt over the balustrade without making any reply, and seating himself near to Genevieve, took her hand, and respectfully kissed it, saying, “Bon jour, madame,” with a coolness which electrified the assembly; “how do you find yourself?’’ Then he took his seat on the bench of the accused.

CHAPTER LII.

SEQUEL TO THE PRECEDING.

ALL THIS SCENE had passed before Maurice like a fantastic vision. Leaning upon the handle of his sword, which he had never quitted, he saw his friends precipitated one after another into that gulf which never yields back its victims; and this dangerous fancy so affected him that be asked himself why he, the companion of these unfortunates, should still cling to the brink of the precipice, and not surrender himself to the infatuation which was dragging him with them. In leaping the balustrade Louis saw the dark figure and sneering features of Dixmer. When, as we have said, he had placed himself near her, Genevieve whispered in his ear.

"Ah! mon Dieu!" said she, "do you know that Maurice is here?"

"Where? Do not look round directly; one look might prove his ruin. Calm yourself."

"Behind us, near the door. What a trial for him if we are all condemned!"

Louis regarded the young woman with tender sympathy.

"We shall be," said he. "I conjure you not to doubt it. The deception would be too cruel if you were to permit yourself to hope."

"Oh! mon Dieu!" said Genevieve, "pity our poor friend, who will remain alone in the world."

Louis then turned round towards Maurice, and Genevieve also could not refrain from glancing at him. His eyes were fixed upon them both, and one hand was placed upon his heart.

"There is one way to save you," said Louis.

"Are you sure?" said Genevieve, her eyes sparkling with joy.

"Oh! of that one I am sure," replied Louis.

"Oh! if you can save me how I will bless you?"

"But this way," replied the young man.

Genevieve read his hesitation in his eyes. "You have also seen him?" said she.

"Yes, I saw him. Will you be saved? Let him, in his turn, take his seat in the iron arm-chair, and you shall be safe." Dixmer, doubtless from Louis's look and the expression of his countenance, divined what he uttered. He at first turned pale, but soon recovered his satanic look and sinister smile.

“Impossible!” said Genevieve; “the most I can do is to hate him.”

“Say that he knows your generous nature, and defies you.”

“No doubt; for he is sure of him, of me, of us all.”

“Genevieve! Genevieve! I am less perfect than yourself. Let me entreat you. Let him perish.”

“No, Louis, I conjure you. Nothing in common with this man, not even death. It seems to me I should be unfaithful to Maurice were I to die with Dixmer.”

“But you will not die.”

“To live by his death.”

“Ah!” said Louis, “Maurice has reason to love you; you are an angel, and heaven is the angel’s home. Poor dear Maurice!”

In the meantime Simon, who could not overhear the conversation between the accused devoured their looks instead of their words.

“Citizen gendarme,” said he, “prevent those conspirators from continuing their plots against the republic, even in the revolutionary tribunal.”

“You know, Citizen Simon,” replied the gendarme, “they will conspire here no more, and if they do so now it will not be for long. These citizens are only conversing together, and since the law does not forbid them to do so in the car, why should it be forbidden at the tribunal?”

This gendarme was Gilbert, who, having recognised the prisoner taken in the Queen’s chamber, avowed with his ordinary honesty the interest which he could not help according to her courage and devotion. The president having consulted the benchers, by the request of Fouquier Tinville, commenced his questions.

“Accused Louis,” demanded he, “of what nature was your acquaintance with the Citoyenne Dixmer?”

“Of what nature, Citizen President? Friendship’s pure flame bound us to one another. She loved me as a sister, I loved her as a brother.”

“Citizen Louis,” said Fouquier Tinville, “your poetry is out of season here, and the rhyme is bad.”

“Why so?”

“You have a syllable too long.”

“Cut it off! cut it off! citizen accuser, that *is* your trade, you know.” The imperturbable countenance of Fouquier Tinville assumed a pallid hue at this horrible pleasantry.

"And in what light," demanded the president, "did the Citizen Dixmer view this liaison of a man, a pretended republican, with his wife?"

"As to that I can tell you nothing, declaring to never having been intimate with the Citizen Dixmer, and never having felt any desire to be so."

"But," said Fouquier Tinville, "you did not tell us that your friend Maurice Lindey formed the link of this pure friendship between yourself and the accused."

"If I did not say so," replied Louis, "it was because it seemed to me wrong so to speak, and I find that you even might take example from me."

"The citizen jury," said Fouquier Tinville, "will appreciate this singular alliance between an aristocrat and two republicans, and at the very moment even when this aristocrat is convicted of the blackest plot that could be concocted against the nation."

"How should I know anything concerning this plot you speak of?" demanded Louis, disgusted by the brutality of the argument.

"You were acquainted with this woman, you were her friend, you term yourself her brother, you speak of her as your sister, and you knew all her proceedings. Is it then probable, as you have yourself remarked," continued the president, "that she would have committed this act imputed to her, alone?"

"She did not commit it alone," replied Louis, repeating the technical words used by the president; "since, as she has told you and I have told you, and again repeat it, her husband compelled her."

"Then how is it you are not acquainted with the husband," said Fouquier Tinville, "since the husband was united with the wife?"

It remained only for Louis to recount the first disappearance of Dixmer, to mention the amours of Genevieve and his friend, and, in short, to relate the manner in which Dixmer had carried off and concealed his wife in some impenetrable retreat. It needed only this to exculpate himself from all connivance, and to elucidate the whole mystery. But for this he must betray the secrets of his two friends; to do this would be to shame Genevieve before five hundred people. Louis shook his head as if saying no to himself.

"Well," demanded the president, "what do you reply to the public accuser?"

"That his logic is crushing," said Louis; "and I am now convinced of one thing which I never even suspected before."

"What is that?"

"That I am, it appears, one of the most frightful conspirators that has ever been seen." This declaration elicited a roar of laughter; even the jury could not refrain, so ludicrous was the young man's pronunciation of these words. Fouquier felt the ridicule; and since with his usual indefatigable perseverance he had managed to possess himself of all the secrets of the accused, as well known to him as to themselves, he could not help feeling towards Louis a sentiment of pity mingled with admiration.

"Citizen Louis," said he, "speak and defend yourself. The tribunal will lend a willing ear. We are acquainted with your previous conduct, and it has always been that of a staunch republican." Simon essayed to speak; but the president made him a signal to remain silent.

"Speak, Citizen Louis," said he; "we are all attention." But Louis only shook his head.

"This silence is confession," said the president.

"Not so," said Louis; "silence is silence, that is all."

"Once more," said Fouquier Tinville, "will you speak?"

Louis turned towards the audience to encounter the eyes of Maurice, and to learn from them what course he would wish him to pursue; but Maurice made no sign to him to speak, and Louis maintained his former silence. This was self-condemnation. All that followed was quickly executed. Fouquier resumed his accusation, the president continued the debates, the jury retired, and unanimously returned a verdict of "guilty" against Louis and Genevieve. The president condemned them both to suffer the penalty of death. Two o'clock sounded from the large clock of the palace. The president had just time sufficient to pronounce the condemnation as the clock struck. Maurice heard the double sound, and confounded one with another. When the vibration had ceased, his strength was utterly exhausted. The gendarmes led away Genevieve and Louis, who had offered her his arm. Both saluted Maurice, but in different ways. Louis smiled; but Genevieve, pale and trembling, wafted him a last kiss upon her fingers, bathed in tears. She had till the last moment nourished the hope of life, and now wept, not the loss of life, but love, which must perish with her. Maurice, half mad, had not replied to his friends' farewell. He rose, pale and bewildered, from the bench on which he had fallen. His friends had disappeared. He felt only one sentiment alive within him. It was the hatred which corroded his heart. He threw a last look around him and recognised

Dixmer, who was leaving with the rest of the spectators, and at that moment stooped to pass under the arched door of the passage. With the eagerness of a prohibited cause, Maurice sprang from bench to bench, and reached the door. Dixmer had already passed through, and descended into the darkened corridor. Maurice followed behind him. At the moment Dixmer planted his foot on the pavement of the grand hall, Maurice placed his hand upon his shoulder.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE DUEL.

AT THIS EPOCH it was always a serious thing to feel a touch upon the shoulder. Dixmer turned, and recognised Maurice.

“Ah! bon jour, citizen republican,” said Dixmer, without evincing any other emotion than an almost imperceptible start, which he immediately repressed.

“Bon jour, citizen coward,” replied Maurice. “You were waiting for me, were you not?”

“That is to say,” replied Dixmer, “that, on the contrary, I had ceased to expect you.”

“Why was that?”

“Because I expected you sooner.”

“I still arrive too soon for you, assassin!” added Maurice, with a voice, or rather a murmured growl, since it resembled the grumbling of a storm, gathered in his heart, as his looks were like the lightning’s flashes.

“You fling fire from your eyes, citizen,” replied Dixmer. “We shall be recognised, and followed.”

“Yes, and you fear to be arrested, do you not? You dread lest you might be conducted to the scaffold, where you send others. Let them arrest us, so much the better; for it seems to me, that not to do so now is a culpable omission on the part of national justice.”

“Like omitting your name in the list of people of honour. Is it not so — since yours has disappeared?”

“Well, we shall speak about all that, I hope; but, in the meantime, you are revenged — miserably revenged — upon a woman. Why, since you have waited for me elsewhere, did you not do so at my house, when you stole away Genevieve?

“You were the first thief, I believe.”

“Neither by your spirit nor your words have I ever estimated you, monsieur. I judge you better by your actions — witness the day when you wanted to murder me. That day your true nature displayed itself — that day your genuine nature spoke."

"And I have more than once regretted I did not listen to it," said Dixmer, coolly.

"Well," said Maurice, touching his sword, "I offer you your revenge."

"To-morrow, if you like, but not to-day."

"And why to-morrow?"

"Or this evening."

"Why not directly?"

"Because I am engaged till five o'clock."

"Another hideous project!" said Maurice; "another ambush!"

"Really, Monsieur Maurice, you are rather ungrateful," replied Dixmer. "In truth you are. Here, for six months I have allowed you to make love to my wife — for six months have permitted your meetings, and have not noticed your smiles. Never man, you must confess, has evinced so little of the tiger in his composition as myself."

"That is to say, you thought I might be useful, and you could mould me to your purpose."

"Without doubt," returned Dixmer, calmly, who ruled his own passion to increase that of Maurice. "Without doubt; whilst, that you might betray your republic, rob me of the affections of my wife, that you might dishonour yourselves — you by your treason, she by her adulterous love — I remained the sage and hero. I waited, and I triumphed."

"Horrible!" said Maurice.

"Is it not? Yes, you appreciate your own conduct fully, monsieur. It is horrible! — it is infamous?"

"You deceive yourself, monsieur; the conduct I term horrible and infamous is that of the man, to whom the honour of a woman being confided had sworn to guard this honour pure and unsullied, and who, instead of keeping his word and oath, employed her beauty as a shameful bait where love had already ensnared her feeble heart. It was your sacred duty beyond all others to protect this woman, and, instead of protecting her, you have sold her."

"That is what I had to do, monsieur," replied Dixmer. "I am going to tell you I had to save my friend who united with me in this sacred cause. Even as I have sacrificed my property to this cause, so have I sacrificed my honour. As for me, I am completely forgotten, completely struck out; I have considered myself the last. Now my friend is no more; he died by the poniard. My Queen is no more; she died an ignominious death on the scaffold. Now! now! I can think of my revenge.”

“Say of your assassination.”

“One does not kill an adulteress at a blow; she is punished for her crime.”

“This sin you imposed upon her, therefore it was rendered lawful.”

“You think so,” said Dixmer with a devilish smile. “Judge from her remorse if she believes she has acted lawfully.”

“Those who punish strike at once. You, you do not punish, for while striking you fly, and whilst casting her head to the guillotine you conceal yourself.”

“Me! I fly! I hide myself! when did you see that, poor idiot that you are?” demanded Dixmer. “Is it concealing myself to assist in her condemnation? Is it flying when I go into the Salle des Morts to fling her my last adieu.”

“You are going to see her again! to fling her a last adieu!” cried Maurice.

“Decidedly you are not expert at revenge, citizen,” replied Dixmer, shrugging his shoulders. “Thus in my situation you would abandon these events to their strength alone, these circumstances to their natural course; thus, for example, the adulterous woman having merited death, the moment she has received the punishment of death I am quits with her, or rather she is quits with me. No, Citizen Maurice, I know better than that. I have discovered a way to return this woman the evil she has done me. She loves you, and will die far from you; she detests me, and I will be near her again. There!” said he, drawing a pocket-book from his pocket; “do you see this? It contains a card signed by the registrar of the palace. With this card I can gain near access to the condemned. I will penetrate to Genevieve; I will call her ‘Adulteress!’ I shall see her curls fall under the hand of the vile executioner, and as they are severed she shall still hear my voice repeating, ‘Adulteress!’ I will even accompany her to the fatal car, and, as she plants her foot upon the scaffold, the long, last sound that greets her ear, shall be the word, ‘Adulteress!’”

“Take care; she has not strength to support so much cowardice; she will denounce you.”

“No,” cried Dixmer, “she hates me too much for that. If she had wished to denounce me she would have done so when her friend urged her so softly. If she did not denounce me to save her life, she will not do so that I may die with her, for she well knows in that case I should retard her execution for a day; she well knows that if she denounces me, I shall go with her not only to the lowest step of the Palais, but even to the scaffold; she well knows that, instead of leaving her at the foot of the ladder, I will ascend into the car with her, and that, seated by her side, the whole length of the road I will constantly repeat the one dreadful word, 'Adulteress;' that even on the scaffold I will continue to do so till the moment she sinks into eternity and the accusation falls with her."

Dixmer was frightful in this state of anger and hatred. He seized Maurice by the hand and shook it with a force unknown to the young man, upon whom this had acted with a contrary effect: as Dixmer became excited Maurice grew calm.

"Listen," said the young man, "in your vengeance you have omitted one thing."

"What?"

"That you will be able to tell her, on leaving the tribunal, I have seen your lover, and have killed him."

"On the contrary, I prefer telling her that you live, and will suffer for the remainder of your days, from the spectacle of her death."

"You shall kill me, notwithstanding," said Maurice, "or," added he, turning round, and finding himself nearly master of his position, "I will kill you."

And pale with emotion and excited by fury, finding his strength redoubled, from the restraint he had imposed upon his feelings, while listening to the unfolding of Dixmer's horrible project, he seized him by the throat, and drew him backwards towards a staircase, which led towards the high bank of the river. At the contact with his hand, Dixmer, in his turn, felt hatred rush over him like a boundless wave.

"You need not compel me by force, I will follow."

"Come, then. Are you armed?"

"I will follow you."

"No, go first; but I give you notice, at the least sign or gesture, I will cleave your skull in twain with my sword."

"You know I am a stranger to fear," said Dixmer, with a smile rendered frightful from his pallor.

"Fear of my sword," said Maurice, "no; but fear of losing your revenge. Now, however, we are face to face — dismiss that fear."

They had, indeed, arrived at the water’s brink; and had any one seen and followed them, they could not have arrived in time to prevent the duel from taking place; besides, an equal desire for vengeance now animated both. Whilst speaking, they had descended the little staircase, and gained the nearly deserted quay; for as the condemnations continued, seeing it was two o’clock at least, the crowd still filled the judgment-hall, the corridors, and the courts. They appeared equally to thirst for each other’s blood.

They plunged themselves under one of those arches, leading from the cells of the Conciergerie to the river; at this time drained, but then foul and saturated with water, serving more than once as a means of conveyance for the corpses, which floated far away from the dungeons, leaving no trace behind. Maurice placed himself between Dixmer and the water.

“I decidedly think I shall kill you, Maurice,” said Dixmer, “you tremble so much.”

“And I, Dixmer,” said Maurice, taking his sword in hand, and carefully enclosing him, so as to cut off all retreat, “I, on the contrary, believe that I shall kill you; and having killed you, shall remove from your pocket-book the card signed by the registrar of the Palace.”

“Ah! you have buttoned up your coat beautifully; but my sword shall open it, were it even formed of brass like the cuirasses of old.”

“And this paper,” roared Dixmer, “you will take it, will you?”

“Yes,” said Maurice, “I will make use of this card. I with this talisman will secure an entrance to Genevieve. I will sit next her in the car — I will murmur in her ear while life remains, ‘I love thee:’ and when the last stroke has fallen, I will murmur still ‘I have loved thee.”‘

Dixmer made a movement with his left hand to take the card from his right, and together with the pocket-book to cast them into the river, when rapid as a thunderbolt, sharp as a hatchet, Maurice’s sword fell upon his hand, nearly severing it from the wrist. The wounded man uttered a cry, and shaking his mutilated limb, flung himself furiously on his antagonist. There in the obscurity of this gloomy vault, the deadly combat commenced. The two men were enclosed in a space so narrow that the sword strokes, swerving from the line of body, glided upon the humid pavement, and were with difficulty prevented from striking the sides of the arch, more especially as these impediments redoubled the attacks and impatience of the combatants. Dixmer, who, as he felt his lifeblood flow, was aware that his strength diminished, also charged Maurice so furiously, that he was compelled to step backward; in so doing he lost his footing, and his enemy’s sword entered his breast. But by a movement rapid as thought, kneeling as he was, he raised the blade with his left arm, and turned the point towards Dixmer, who maddened with rage, darted forward, and impelled by the inclining ground, fell on the sword, the point of which entered his body. Thus impaled, and uttering a fearful imprecation, the two bodies rolled to the outside of the arch. One only rose. It was Maurice — Maurice covered with blood, but that blood the blood of his enemy. He drew his sword towards him, and as he slowly raised it the blade appeared to him even to thirst for the remnant of life which still agitated with a nervous shuddering the limbs of Dixmer. Then, when assured that he was dead, he stooped towards the corpse, opened the dead man’s coat, withdrew the card, and hurried away directly. But on looking at himself, he felt assured that in his present state he should not proceed far without being arrested. He was literally covered with blood. He approached the water’s edge, and bending towards the river, washed his hands and coat, and then rapidly ascended the staircase, casting a last look towards the arch, from whence a red smoking stream issued, advancing slowly towards the river. On arriving near the palace, he opened the pocket-book, and there found the card signed by the registrar. “Thanks, just God!” murmured he, and he rapidly mounted the steps leading to la Salle des Morts. It struck three.

CHAPTER LIV.

LA SALLE DES MORTS.

IT MUST BE REMEMBERED that the registrar of the palace had opened his jailor’s book to Dixmer, and had also entered into an arrangement with him which the presence of “Madame” rendered peculiarly agreeable. This man, it may be imagined, was terribly alarmed when the news of Dixmer’s plot was communicated to him. He would doubtless be considered as nothing less than an accomplice of Dixmer, his false colleague, and therefore condemned to die with the wretched Genevieve. Fouquier Tinville had summoned him to appear before him. It may easily be understood that this poor man would have some trouble to prove himself innocent in the eyes of the public accuser; he had, however, succeeded in so doing, thanks to Genevieve, whose declaration had clearly established his utter ignorance of the plot of her husband. He had succeeded, thanks to Dixmer’s flight, and above all from the interest excited in Fouquier Tinville, who wished to preserve his administration free from all stain.

“Citizen,” said he, flinging himself upon his knees before Fouquier, “pardon me, for I have been deceived.”

“Citizen,” replied the public accuser, “a man who in these days permits himself to be deceived deserves to be guillotined.”

“I may have been a blockhead, citizen,” replied the registrar, who was longing to call Fouquier Tinville Monseigneur.

“Blockhead or not,” replied the rigid accuser, “no one should allow his love for the Republic to sleep. The spies of the Capitol were only geese, yet they were sufficiently awake to save Rome.” The registrar looked upon this argument as totally unanswerable; he groaned, and remained waiting.

“I pardon you,” said Fouquier Tinville. “I will go so far as to defend you, since I do not wish one of my employees to be even suspected; but you will bear in mind that at the least word that reaches my ears, the least revival of this affair, you will leave instantly.”

It is scarcely necessary to say with what anxiety this man sought the newspapers, always ready to tell what they know, and sometimes more than they can certify, even if they caused the heads of ten men to fall on the scaffold. He sought Dixmer everywhere, to recommend him to keep his own counsel; but he had very naturally changed his apartments, and was nowhere to be found. Genevieve had been placed on the bench of the accused, but had already, without any reservation, declared that neither herself or husband had any accomplices, and he thanked the poor woman with his eyes as she passed before him to surrender herself to the tribunal. Whilst she was passing, and he was returning to the office to fetch some law papers for Fouquier Tinville, he all at once saw Dixmer's apparition approaching him with a calm and quiet step. This vision petrified him. "Oh!" said he, as if he had seen a spectre.

"Do you not know me?" said the newcomer.

"Do I know you? You are the Citizen Durand, or rather the Citizen Dixmer."

"Just so."

"But are you dead, citizen?"

"Not yet, as you see."

"I wish to tell you they will arrest you."

"Who wants to arrest me? — no one knows me."

"But I know you, and it only needs one word from me to send you to the guillotine."

"And two words from me only will send you there with me."

"It is too bad of you to say that."

"No; it is logic."

"How do you make that out?" Make haste — speak quickly; for the less time we are together the less danger we incur from each other."

"My wife is about to be condemned, is it not so?"

"I greatly fear for her; poor woman!"

"Well, I wish to see her once more, to bid her adieu."

"Where?"

"In the Salle des Morts."

"Would you dare to enter there?"

"Why not?"

"Oh!" said the registrar, like a man whose thoughts made him shudder.

"There must be some way," continued Dixmer.

"To enter the Salle des Morts?" Without doubt there is."

"How?"

“To procure a card.”

“And where are these cards procured?”

The registrar turned frightfully pale, and murmured, “Where are they procured, you ask?”

“I inquire where are they to be procured?” replied Dixmer; “the question is plain enough, I think.”

“They are procured — here.”

“Ah! true; and who usually signs them?”

“The registrar.”

“But you are the registrar?”

“Doubtless I am.”

“Then, as it has so happened,” said Dixmer, seating himself, “you can sign a card for me?”

The registrar made one bound.

“Do you ask for my head, citizen?” said he.

“No, I ask you for a card, that is all.”

“I am going to arrest you, unhappy man,” said he, summoning all his energy.

“Do,” said Dixmer, “and the next moment I will denounce you as an accomplice, and instead of leaving me to enter the famous saloon alone, you shall accompany me.”

The registrar turned ghastly pale.

“Villain!” said he.

“There is no villany in that,” said Dixmer; “I wish to speak to my wife, and all I require of you is a card to enable me to do so.”

“Is it then so imperative that you should speak to her?”

“It seems so, since I risk my head by coming here.”

This appeared very plausible to the registrar, and Dixmer immediately perceived that this staggered him.

“Rest assured,” said he, “no one shall know anything. The devil! why surely sometimes a similar case to mine must present itself to your notice.”

“Very rarely; it is by no means a common occurrence.”

“Well, then, let us arrange it in another way.”

“If it is possible. I should ask nothing better.”

“Nothing is more possible. Enter by the door of the condemned; there a card is not required: then, when you have spoken to your wife, call me, and I will let you out.”

“That will not answer,” said Dixmer; “unfortunately there is a story current in the city.”

“What story?”

“The history of a poor hunchback, who mistook the door, thinking to enter the archives, but instead of so doing, found himself in the saloon, of which we are now speaking. Only since he had entered by the door of the condemned, in lieu of the large door, as he had no card to prove his identity, once there, he was not permitted to go out. They strenuously maintained that since he entered the door with the other condemned, he was condemned likewise. In vain he protested, swore, appealed; no one believed him, no one came to his assistance, no one helped him to get out. So that, notwithstanding his protestations, his imprecations, and supplications, the executioner first cut off his hair, and then finished by cutting his throat. Is this anecdote true, citizen registrar? You ought to know better than any one else.”

“Alas! yes, it is too true,” said the registrar, trembling.

“Yon must see then that, with such antecedents, I should be a fool to enter this cutthroat place without a card.”

“But I shall be there. I tell you.”

“If when you were called you should be otherwise engaged? If you should forget?” Dixmer laid particular stress on these last words, “if you should forget.”

“But then I promise you.”

“No; besides it would compromise you. They would see me speaking to you; and, in short, it does not suit me; I prefer having a card.”

“Impossible!”

“Then, cher ami, I will speak, and we will both take a journey together to La Place de la Revolution.”

The registrar, frantic with terror, and half dead with fear, signed the pass for a citizen. Dixmer rose and went out precipitately, to take his station in the judgment-hall, where we have already recognised his presence. The rest is known to us. At the same moment the registrar, to avoid all accusation of connivance, seated himself near Fonquier Tinville, leaving the management of the office to his head clerk. At ten minutes before three, Maurice, furnished with a card, crossing a hedge of turnkeys and gendarmes, arrived without interruption at the fatal door. When we say fatal, we exaggerate, for there were two doors, the principal one by which those possessing cards entered and returned, and the door of the condemned, by which no one departed except to the scaffold. The place that Maurice entered was divided into two compartments, one of these was set apart for those employed in registering the name of the arrivals, the other, furnished only with wooden benches, was appropriated for the reception of those who were arrested and those who were condemned, which at this period amounted to pretty much the same thing. The hall was very dark, lighted only from a glass window of the partition which divided it from the register office. A female dressed in white, in a half fainting attitude, lay in a corner, supported against the wall. A man was standing in front of her, from time to time shaking his head. His arms were crossed upon his breast, and he hesitated to speak to her, as if fearful of restoring her to the consciousness she appeared to have lost. Around these two individuals several condemned persons were scattered promiscuously, some giving vent to their feelings in sobs and groans, others joining in patriotic songs, whilst the remainder walked rapidly up and down, as if to chase away the thoughts which devoured them. This was indeed the antechamber of death, and the furniture rendered it worthy of the name. Here were seen half-opened coffins filled with straw, seeming as if to invite the living to their beds of repose, the provisional receptacles for the ashes of the dead. A large wardrobe was erected in the wall opposite the window.

A prisoner, prompted by curiosity, opened it, but recoiled with horror. It contained the blood-stained garments of those executed on the preceding evening; long tresses of hair hanging here and there, the executioners perquisites, who sold them to the relatives when not enjoined by the authorities to burn these precious relics. Maurice, trembling with emotion, at length opened the door, when the whole tableau at once presented itself to his view. He advanced three steps into the hall and fell at Genevieve’s feet. The unfortunate woman uttered a cry, which Maurice stifled on her lips. Louis, weeping, pressed his friend in his arms; these were the first tears he had shed. Strange it was that all these unhappy individuals, assembled to die together, scarcely looked even at the touching tableau presented to their view by their unfortunate fellow-creatures, but every one suffered too much himself to take part in the miseries of others. The three friends remained for a moment united in a deep silence, happy, almost joyous. Louis first disengaged himself from the wretched group.

“Are you, then, condemned also?” said he, to Maurice.

"Yes," replied he.

"O, happiness!" murmured Genevieve.

But the joy of those who have only one hour to live cannot last even as long as their life. Maurice having contemplated Genevieve with looks of ardent and profound affection, turned towards Louis.

"Now," said he, taking Genevieve's hands within his own, "let us talk together."

"Yes!" said Louis, "let us converse while the time remains to us. It is only right so to do. What do you wish to say to me, Maurice?"

"You have been arrested through me, condemned for her; as for Genevieve and I, let us pay our debt; it is not fair, at the same time, that you should be made to pay also."

"I do not understand you."

"Louis, you are free."

"I free? you are mad," said Louis.

"No, I am not mad; I repeat that you are free; see, here is the pass. They will inquire who you are; you are employed at the register of the Carmelites, and are going to speak to the registrar of the Palace; you have, from motives of curiosity, requested a pass from him to see the condemned; you have seen them, and are now leaving, perfectly satisfied with your visit."

"This is a joke, is it not?"

"No, indeed, my friend, here is the card, take advantage of it. You are not a lover, like myself; you do not wish to die that you may be enabled to pass a few more minutes in the society of the well-beloved of your heart, and not to lose a second of eternity with her."

"But, Maurice," replied Louis, "if one might be able to get out from here — a circumstance I swear to you I could not have believed possible — why do you not save madame first? as to yourself, we will consider afterwards about that."

"Impossible!" said Maurice, with a frightful oppression at his heart; "this card is for a citizen, not for a citoyenne; besides, Genevieve would not depart and leave me here to live herself, while knowing that I remained to die."

"If she would not, then why should I? Do you imagine I possess less courage than a woman?"

"No, dear friend; I know and acknowledge your bravery, but nothing can excuse your obstinacy in this case. Then profit by this moment, and allow us the supreme felicity of knowing and feeling that you are free and happy."

"Happy!" said Louis; "you are facetious, surely? happy without you, eh? What the devil am I to do in this world without you? In Paris, without my usual avocations, without seeing you again; to weary you no more with my bouts-rimes; ah, pardieu, no!"

"Louis, my friend — "

"Exactly; it is because I am your friend that I persist in my opinion, with the prospect of recovering you both; were I a prisoner as I now am I would tear down the walls, but to save myself, and go out from here alone into the streets, my head bowed down with a feeling resembling remorse, and a continued cry in my ears: 'Maurice! — Genevieve!' To pass into certain quarters and before certain houses where I have seen your persons, but shall now only recognise your shadows; to arrive at last to execrate this dear Paris that I love so well; ah, ma foi, no! And I find there was good reason to proscribe these kings; might not this be the motive of King Dagobert?"

"And what relation has King Dagobert with what concerns us?"

"What? Did not this frightful tyrant say of the grand Eloi: 'He is not such good company that one cannot quit him?' Ah, well! I am a Republican. I say one never ought to quit good company, even the guillotine; I feel very comfortable here, and I will remain."

"Poor fellow! poor fellow!" said Maurice.

Genevieve said nothing, but looked at them with eyes suffused with tears.

"You regret your life, then?" said Louis.

"Yes, on her account."

"And I have nothing to regret in mine, not even on account of the Goddess Reason, who, I had forgotten to tell you, has latterly behaved most shamefully to me; who will not take the trouble even to console herself, like the other Arthemises of old. I shall go to my death perfectly cool and rather facetious. I will amuse all the beggarly wretches who follow the car. I will repeat a pretty quatrain to Monsieur Sanson, and wish the company good-night — that is to say — wait then" — Louis interrupted himself. "Ah! if so," said he, "I will go out. I well know I love no one, but I forgot that I hated some one. The time, Maurice, the time?"

"Half-past three."

"I have time, mon Dieu! there is time."

"Certainly!" cried Maurice; "there are nine more accused persons still to be tried, this will not terminate before five o'clock; we have therefore nearly two hours' respite."

"That is all that I require; lend me your card, and also twenty sous."

"Ah, mon Dieu! what are you going to do?" murmured Genevieve. Maurice pressed his hand; it was important to him that Louis should go out.

"I have my own plan," said Louis.

Maurice drew his purse from his pocket, and placed it in his friend's hand. "Now, the card, for the love of God — I ought to say for the love of the Supreme Being." Maurice gave him the pass. Louis kissed Genevieve's hand, and availing himself of the moment when a fresh batch of the condemned were ushered in, he leapt the benches, and presented himself before the principal entrance.

"Eh!" said the gendarme, "here is one, it appears to me, trying to escape."

Louis drew himself up, and presented his card. "Hold, citizen gendarme," said he, "and learn to know people better."

The gendarme recognised the signature of the registrar, but belonging to a class of functionaries rather wanting in confidence, and as at this moment the registrar himself came down from the tribunal with a nervous shudder, which had not left him since he had so imprudently hazarded his signature, "Citizen registrar," said he, "here is a pass bearing your signature, with which this person wishes to leave the Salle des Morts; is it all right?"

The registrar turned pale with fright, and feeling convinced that if he turned his eyes in that direction it would only be to encounter the terrible figure of Dixmer, hastily seizing the card, quickly replied, "Yes, yes, it is my signature."

"Then," cried Louis, "if it is your signature, return it to me."

"No," said the registrar, tearing it into a thousand pieces, "these cards can only be once available."

Louis remained for a moment irresolute.

"So much the worse," said he; "but above all things it is necessary I should kill him;" and he passed through the office.

Maurice had followed Louis with an emotion easy to comprehend. When he had disappeared, Maurice returned, saying with an exultation nearly amounting to joy, "He is saved! Genevieve; the card is destroyed, therefore he cannot return. Besides, even if he were able to do so, the sitting of the

Tribunal will have terminated at five o’clock. He will return, but we shall have ceased to live.”

Genevieve shuddered, and breathed a deep sigh..” Oh, press me in your arms,” said she, “and let us separate no more. Why is it not possible, oh, my God! for one blow to annihilate us both, that together we might breathe our last sigh?”

Then retiring into the deep shade of the gloomy hall, Genevieve placed herself near Maurice, who closely twined his arms around her. Thus they remained, rendered by the strength of their love insensible to the surrounding scene, almost to the approach of even death itself. Half-an-hour passed thus.

CHAPTER LV.

WHY LOUIS WENT OUT.

SUDDENLY A LOUD noise was heard; the gendarmes opened the lower door, behind them appeared Sanson and his assistants, the latter carrying rolls of cord.

"Oh! mon ami! mon ami!" said Genevieve; "the fatal moment has arrived, and I feel that my senses are leaving me."

"There you are wrong," said the cheering voice of Louis:

"Here you are wrong, en verite, Since death is now la liberte."

"Louis!" cried Maurice, in despair.

"Well, that is good, now, is it not? I have adopted your opinion since yesterday evening, and could not be so contemptible — "

"Ah! that is the question. You are returned, unhappy man, you are returned."

"I considered that was our agreement. But listen, as what I have to say to you will also interest madame."

"Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!"

"Allow me to speak, or I shall not have time to tell you all. I wished to go out that I might purchase a knife in la Rue de la Baullerie."

"What did you want with a knife?"

"I wished to despatch this nice Monsieur Dixmer." Genevieve shuddered.

"Ah!" said Maurice, "I comprehend."

"I purchased it. Listen attentively to what I tell you, and you will understand your friend has a soul for logic; indeed, I begin to think I should have been a mathematician instead of a poet. Unfortunately, it is now too late. This is the way I reasoned: Monsieur Dixmer has compromised his wife; Monsieur Dixmer came to be present at her trial; and Monsieur Dixmer will not deprive himself of the pleasure of seeing her pass in the fatal car; and, above all, he will accompany us. I will then look for him in the foremost of the spectators. I will glide near him, and say, 'Bonjour, Monsieur Dixmer;' and then I will drive my knife into his ribs, or his heart."

“Louis!” cried Genevieve.

“Rest assured, dear friend, Providence had arranged all. Picture to yourself the spectators, instead of remaining stationary in front of the palace, according to their usual custom, make a demi-turn to the right, and assemble on the borders of the quay.

“Oh! said I to myself, it is doubtless a dog drowned. Why should not Dixmer be there? Even a dog drowning will serve to pass away the time. I approached the parapet, and beheld all along the high bank a troop of people, who, throwing their arms aloft into the air, and uttering loud exclamations, stooped down to gaze into the water beneath. I joined them and also looked down... there was something... guess what it was...”

“Dixmer!” said Maurice, in a gloomy tone.

“Yes. How could you guess that? Yes, it was Dixmer, severely wounded. The unfortunate wretch killed himself in expiation, no doubt.”

“Ah!” said Maurice, with a sad smile, “do you think so?”

Genevieve let her head droop between her two hands. She was too feeble to support these successive emotions.

“Yes, I thought so, from his blood-stained sword being found near him.... at least sometimes.... he had not met any one”....

Maurice, without reply, availing himself of the moment when Genevieve, overpowered by emotion, did not observe him, opened his coat and displayed to Louis his waistcoat and shirt stained with blood.

“Ah! this alters the case,” said Louis, as he held out his hand to Maurice. “Now,” said he, whispering in his ear, “they have not searched *me,* seeing that I entered in Sanson’s suite. I have the weapon still if the guillotine is too revolting to your feelings.” Maurice seized his arm with a joyful expression. “No,” said he, “she would suffer too much.” And he returned the knife to Louis.

“You are right,” said he, “long live Monsieur Guillotine. Why, what is it, after all? a fillip on the neck, as I observed to Danton. And what is that, after all?” And he flung his knife in the midst of a group of the condemned, one of whom immediately seized and buried it in his breast. He was dead in an instant. At the same moment Genevieve awoke and uttered a piercing cry. She felt the pressure of the executioner’s hand upon her shoulder.

CHAPTER LVI.

LONG LIVE SIMON!

AT THE SOUND of this cry Maurice understood that the struggle was about to commence. The influence of love may be able to exalt the love to heroism — it may, against natural instinct, impel a human being to desire death, but it had not in this instance extinguished the fear of pain. It was evident that Genevieve resigned herself the more patiently to death since Maurice was to die with her; but resignation did not exclude suffering, and to quit this world is not only to fall into the abyss termed fathomless and unknown, but also to suffer in the descent. Maurice, at a glance, embraced the entire scene, and thought of what would follow. In the centre of the hall lay the suicide, from whose breast the gendarme had just torn the weapon of destruction, fearing, probably, it might be useful to some others. Around him were several individuals mute with despair, and scarcely heeding him, inscribing in their pocket-books some indistinct words, or pressing each other's hands; some repeating, without any intermission, a cherished name, as if imbecile; or bathing with tears a portrait, a ring, or tress of hair; some hurling imprecations against tyranny, a word banished and cursed by each one in turn, and sometimes even by the tyrants themselves. In the midst of these unfortunates, Sanson, grown old, less from his fifty years than his miserable and dispiriting occupation; Sanson, of a mild disposition, and as much their consoler as his terrible vocation permitted him to be, to this one offered advice, to that one some sad consolation or encouragement, finding some Christian responses to their accents of despair as well as to bravado.

"Citoyenne," said he to Genevieve, "I must remove the handkerchief, and raise or cut off your hair, if you please."

Genevieve began to tremble.

"Come, m'amie," said Louis, softly, ‘‘take courage."

"May I remove madame's hair?" demanded Maurice.

"Oh, yes," cried Genevieve; "I entreat you to permit him to do so, Monsieur Sanson."

"Do so, then," said the old man, turning away his head.

Maurice gently removed the handkerchief from her neck, and Genevieve, stooping, fell on her knees before the young man, presenting her charming head, appearing more beautiful in her grief than she had ever been in her days of sunshine and happiness.

M hen Maurice had completed his funeral operation, his hands were so tremulous and his countenance betrayed so much grief, that Genevieve exclaimed, “Ah! I am courageous, Maurice.”

Sanson turned round.

“Is it not so, monsieur!” said she — ”am I not courageous?”

“Certainly, citoyenne,” replied the executioner, in a mild voice, “for yours is true courage.”

In the meantime the first assistant had run over the list forwarded by Fouquier Tinville.

“Fourteen,” said he.

Sanson counted the condemned.

“Fifteen, including the dead,” said he; “why, how is this?”

Maurice and Genevieve counted after him, both struck by the same thought.

“You say there are only fourteen condemned, and that there are fifteen,” said she.

“Yes; the Citizen Fouquier Tinville must have been mistaken.”

“Ah! you spoke falsely, then,” said Genevieve, turning to Maurice; “you were not condemned.”

“And why wait for to-morrow, when you die to-day?” said Maurice.

“Ami,” said she, smiling, “you reassure me: I now am convinced it is easy to die.”

“Louis,” said Maurice, “now for the last time.... no one here can recognize you.... say that you came to bid me adieu.... say that you have been shut in by mistake.... call the gendarme who saw you go out. I will be the true condemned who ought to die. But you, my friend, we supplicate to live to guard our memory: there is yet time, Louis; we entreat you.”

Genevieve joined her hands in an attitude of prayer. Louis took both her hands and kissed them.

“I have said no, and I mean no,” said Louis, in a firm voice; “say no more on the subject, or I shall think I am a constraint upon you.”

“Fourteen,” repeated Sanson, “and here are fifteen;” then elevating his voice, “Is there any one here who can protest against this?” said he; “is there anyone here who can prove he is here by mistake?”

Perhaps some lips half opened at this question, but closed again without uttering a single word, since those who might have lied were ashamed to do so, and those who would not have lied were determined not to speak.

A silence of several minutes ensued, during which the assistants continued their mournful office.

“Citizens, we are ready....” was then pronounced in the dull and solemn tones of old Sanson. He was answered only by sobs and groans.

“Well!” said Louis, “let it be so.

‘To die for our country Is of all fates the best!’

Yes, to die for our country; but decidedly I begin to think we do not die for her, but for the pleasure of those who witness our deaths. Ma foi, Maurice, I have adopted your opinion. I am disgusted with the Republic.”

“The call!” said a commissary, at the door. Several gendarmes entered the hall, closing up the issues, thus placing themselves between life and the condemned, as if to prevent them from returning to it. The summons was repeated. Maurice, who had seen the condemned who had destroyed himself, when his name was called answered in his stead, and then found the number was correct. The corpse was removed from the hall, but if his identity had been established, and he had been recognised as one condemned, he would have been guillotined with the rest, though already dead. The survivors were pushed towards the outlet, in order that as each passed before the wicket their hands might be tied behind their backs. For the space of ten minutes not a word was exchanged between these unfortunates, the executioners alone seemed endowed with life or motion.

Maurice, Genevieve, and Louis, not being any longer able to retain their hold of each other, successively presented themselves, that they might not be separated. When the condemned were removed from the Conciergerie into the court, the scene became truly appalling. Several fainted at the sight of the carts, and the turnkeys were compelled to assist them to mount the steps of these vehicles of death. Behind the still closed doors was heard the confused murmur of the crowd, and it might be imagined from the sound that the concourse was immense. Genevieve courageously ascended the car; Maurice at her side sustained her; he sprang in rapidly after her. Louis did not hurry himself, but carefully selected his seat at the left of Maurice. The doors opened, and foremost in the crowd stood Simon. The two friends immediately recognized him; indeed the recognition was mutual. He was standing upon a stone near which the cars must pass, for there were three of them. The car containing our three friends moved first.

"Eh! bonjour, brave grenadier," said Simon to Louis; "you are going to try the effect of my leather-cutting machine, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Louis, "and I will be careful not to notch it, that it may be ready when your turn comes." The two remaining cars now followed the direction of the first. And now commenced a terrific tempest of cries, shouts, groans, and maledictions, surrounding and following the condemned.

"Courage, Genevieve, take courage," murmured Maurice.

"Oh!" replied the young woman, "I do not regret life, since I die with you: I regret only that my hands are tied, and I cannot embrace you before I die."

"Louis," said Maurice." feel in my waistcoat pocket, there you will find a knife."

"Mon Dieu!" said Louis, "a penknife; I should be ashamed to die, garroted like a calf."

Maurice placed his pocket on a level with his friend's hands; Louis found the knife, which between them they succeeded in opening. Maurice then placed it between his teeth, and severed the cord which bound Louis's hands, who, the moment they were free, performed the same office for Maurice.

"Make haste," said the young man; "Genevieve is fainting."

In fact, to accomplish this operation Maurice had for a moment turned from Genevieve, when, as if all her strength had been derived from him, her eyes closed, and her head sank upon her breast.

"Genevieve, open your eyes, mon ami," said Maurice; "we have only a few minutes more to see each other in this world."

"The cords wound me," murmured the veiling woman.

Maurice unbound them. She immediately reopened her eyes, and rose, radiant with almost celestial beauty. She threw one fair arm around Maurice's neck, with the other hand seized that of Louis, and thus, all three standing in the cart, with two more victims lying at their feet, wrapt in the stupor of anticipated death, they gazed towards heaven with a look of ardent gratitude for having been permitted to support and console each other, whilst those who had outraged and insulted them previously were now perfectly silent. The scaffold was in sight. Maurice and Louis beheld it. Genevieve did not: she saw nought beside her lover. The car stopped.

"I love thee," said Maurice to Genevieve; "I love thee."

"The woman first, the woman first," shouted a thousand voices.

"Thanks, good people," said Maurice; "who then can call you cruel?"

He took Genevieve within his arms, pressed his lips fondly upon hers, and delivered her to Sanson.

"Courage!" cried Louis; "courage!"

"I have it," slid Genevieve; "I have it.

"I love thee," murmured Maurice; "I love thee."

They were no longer victims about to be slaughtered, but friends making a festival of death.

"Adieu!" cried Genevieve to Louis.

"Au revoir!" replied he.

And Genevieve disappeared under the fatal swinging-gate.

"To thee! Louis. To thee! Maurice."

"Hark she calls you."

At this moment Genevieve uttered the last cry.

"Come," said she.

A furious uproar ascended from the crowd. The fair and graceful head had fallen. Maurice rushed forward.

"It *is* exactly correct," said Louis; "let us follow logic. Are you listening, Maurice?"

"Yes."

"She loved you, and they have murdered her first: you are not condemned, and therefore die the second; and I, who have done nothing, being the greater criminal of the three, die the last.

'And thus you see 'tis all explained Through studying logic.'

Ma foi, Citizen Sanson, I promised you a quatrain, but you must be content with a distich."

"I did love thee!" murmured Maurice, lying on the fatal plank, and smiling at the head of his beloved, "I did lo — " The knife cut short the last word.

"Now for my turn," said Louis, bounding on the scaffold, "and be quick, or I shall lose my head. Citizen Sanson, I have committed bankruptcy for two verses, instead of which I offer you a pun."

Sanson placed him in his turn.

“Let us see,” said Louis, “it is the fashion to cry long live something, when dying. Once it was, Vive le Roi, but now there is no king; then once the cry was, Vive la Liberte, but there is no more liberty. Ma foi, Long live Simon, who unites us all three.”

And the head of the generous and noble-hearted young man fell near those of Maurice and Genevieve.

THE END

THE MARRIAGES OF PÈRE OLIFUS

Translated by Alfred Allinson

This short novel was first published in 1849 and was written in collaboration with Paul Bocage as a loosely based sequel to *Mille-et-un fantômes*, a series of short stories by various writers. The tale is unusual for the Dumas canon, although there are typical conventions found elsewhere in the young writer's work. The novel tells the story of Père Olifus, a Dutchman and a traveller, who marries several times and suffers many misadventures with his wives.

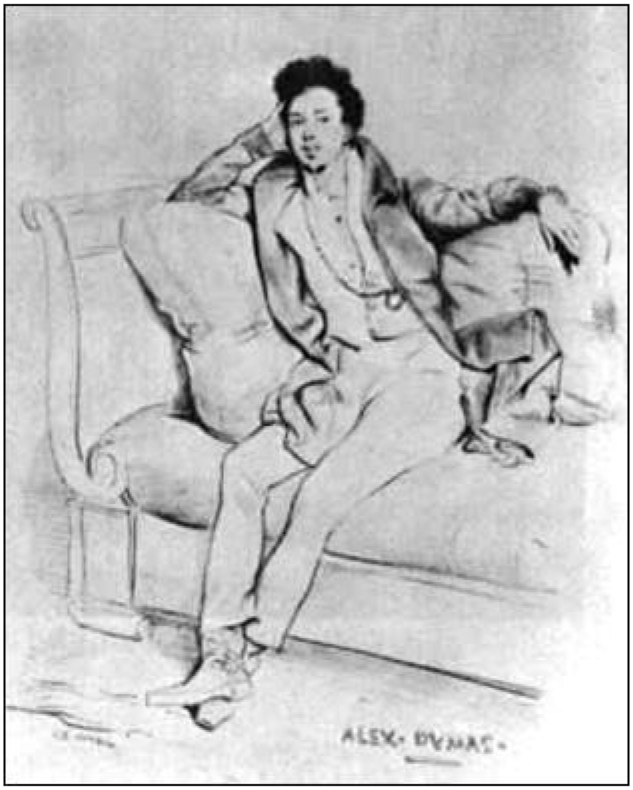

Dumas as a young man

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CHAPTER I.

THE RAVEN FANCIER.

ONE morning in the month of March, 1848, on passing from my bedroom to my study, I found lying on my desk as usual a pile of newspapers, and atop of this pile of newspapers a pile of letters.

Among the letters was one missive with a great red seal which attracted my particular attention. It was unstamped and addressed merely to “Monsieur Alexandre Dumas, Paris,” — circumstances which pointed to its having been delivered by hand.

The writing had a character of its own, something midway between the English and the German styles. Whoever had traced the words was evidently a person used to command and possessed of a certain determination of mind, the whole modified by outbursts of feeling and eccentricities of thought that at times made him altogether a different man from what he usually appeared.

I am very fond, when I receive a letter in an unknown hand and the said letter appears to come from somebody of importance, I am very fond of conjecturing beforehand, from the two or three lines of address traced by the individual in question, his rank, personal habits and general character.

After duly making my reflexions, I opened the letter and read as follows:

“The Hague, Feb. 22, 1848.

“Sir, — I do not know whether Eugène Vivier, the distinguished artist who came to pay us a visit in the course of last winter, and whose acquaintance I had the happiness to make, has told you I am one of your most constant readers. I may indeed claim to belong to their number, great as it is. To mention that I have read *Mademoiselle de Belle-Isle, Amaury, Les Trois Mousquetaires, Vingt Ans Apres, Bragelonne* and *Monte Cristo,* would be paying you too unmeaning a compliment.

“I have long been wishing to offer you a souvenir and at the same time make you acquainted with one of our greatest national artists, Monsieur Backhuisen.

“Allow me therefore, sir, to send you herewith four drawings of this artist’s, representing the most striking scenes of your Romance of *The Three Musketeers*.

“I bid you farewell and beg you to believe, sir, your very good friend “WILLIAM, PRINCE OF ORANGE.”

I must confess this letter, dated 22nd February, 1848, that is to say the day on which the Parisian revolution broke out, and received on the next day but one after that in which the mob had wanted to kill me on the ground that I was a *friend of Princes*, caused me a sensible thrill of gratification.

The fact is, to the poet the foreigner represents posterity, standing as he does outside our petty literary animosities, our trivial artistic jealousies! The foreigner, like the future, judges the author by his works, and the wreath that comes across the frontier is woven of the same flowers as those we cast upon a tomb.

Nevertheless curiosity was even stronger than gratitude. The first thing I did was to open the package that lay in one corner of my desk, and there I found according to promise four charming drawings, — one representing D’Artagnan and his yellow horse arriving at Meung, another the ball at which Milady cuts the diamond studs from Buckingham’s doublet, another the bastion of Saint-Gervais and the fourth the death of Milady.

This done, I wrote to the Prince to thank him. I had long known my correspondent to be a true artist. I was aware that he was a composer of distinction, and two brother Princes, men not likely to be mistaken in their judgment either of men or things, had often told me about him, the Duc d’Orléans to wit and Prince Jérome Napoléon.

The former, as is very generally known, had a charming talent as an engraver. I possess proofs of his that are models of what an etching or a mezzotint should be.

As for the latter I have some verses of his, the existence of which he has probably forgotten, of a republican cast which once cost him a heavy imposition at the Gymnasium of Stuttgart, and which were given to me at Florence in 1839 or 1840 by the fascinating Princesse Mathilde.

In especial I had heard speak of the Princess of Orange as being one of those highly gifted women who, when they are not called Elizabeth or Christina, are known as Madame de Sévigné or Madame de Staël.

The final result was that, when the Prince of Orange was called to succeed his father on the throne of Holland, the idea almost inevitably suggested itself to my mind to make the journey to Amsterdam to be present at the coronation of the new King and offer my accumulated thanks in person to the ex-Prince of Orange.

I started accordingly on the 9th May, 1849. Next day the morning papers announced the fact that I was on my way to Amsterdam to write an account of the coronation festivities. They had said the same when on October 3rd, 1846, I left Paris for Madrid. I beg pardon of the journals that are so good as to chronicle my doings; but when I accept the invitations of Princes, I go as a guest and not as a reporter.

This small matter explained, I come back to the house of my departure. Besides the pleasure of locomotion and the satisfaction of the craving to breathe from time to time a different air, a delightful surprise awaited me. Just as I was passing from the waiting room on to the platform of the railway station, I felt someone twitch the skirts of my coat.

“Where are you off to like that?” asked the individual who had taken this means of attracting my attention.

I uttered a cry of wonder:

“And you?” I asked in return.

“I am going to Holland.”

“Why, so am I.”

“To see the Coronation?”

“Precisely.”

“So am I. Have you been invited formally. Eh?”

““No; but I know the King to bi an artistic Prince, and as the breed is grown scarce since the death of the Duke of Orleans, I am anxious to see him crowned.”

My travelling companion was Biard. You must know Biard by name, if you do not know him personally. Biard, as you are aware, is the gifted painter of the clever *Revue de la Garde Nationale dans un Village, Le Baptêmie du Bonhomme Tropique, Les Honneurs Partagés,* the designer of the poetical canvas showing two Laplanders, at the foot of an iceberg cracking and tottering to its fall, shooting past each in his canoe and embracing as they go by, the delineator of those delightful portraits of women full of charm and brilliancy which were to be seen at the exhibitions of the last two years. More than this, — it is one of my bad habits to think of the man first, the artist second, in these cases, — he is the charming talker, the indefatigable narrator, the world-wide traveller, the kind-hearted friend, the ungrudging fellow-artist, who is so ready to forget his own claims whenever he speaks of other men's, — in a word such a travelling companion as I hope my readers may have to go round the world with, and as I was enchanted to have found to share my Dutch excursion.

It was a year or two since we had met. What a strange life we lead, to be sure; we are delighted to meet, enchanted to see each other, we spend hours, days, a week in enjoyment of the chance pleasure of each other's society, we come back in the same railway carriage, and drive home in the same cab, we shake hands declaring with the utmost seriousness, "Well, well, how silly it is never to see each other; let us manage better in future," — and we never meet again! Each returns to his own life, throws himself into his own work again, builds his own pile, ant-hill or giant's castle, the true magnitude of which only posterity can adjudicate, and its duration time decide.

A jovial night of good talk it was that night on the road to Brussels seated between Biard and my son. There were five or six other passengers in the Diligence; I wonder if they could make anything of our conversation. I have my doubts. After fifty leagues of road and five or six hours' travelling, I wonder whether they thought us men of intellect or simple idiots; I cannot tell. Our minds work in so strange a fashion; our wits jump so suddenly from the high levels of philosophy to the vilest pun! our temperament is so special, so individual, so eccentric! it is so much the appanage of a peculiar caste that a long initiation, as it were, is needed to comprehend its manifestation in words!

Still one may have too much of a good thing, even of laughing, and about two o'clock in the morning the talk ran dry; about three we fell asleep; about five they woke us up to examine our baggage; about eight we finally arrived at Brussels.

At that capital perfect quiet reigned, and if one had not heard so much abuse spoken, in French of France, one might have forgotten that such a country existed. We were back again in the full enjoyment of monarchical institutions.

A curious country this Belgium, a land that keeps its King because that King is always perfectly ready to go. True he is a man of infinite tact is King Leopold I. At each Revolution that breaks out in France, at each revolt that threatens at Brussels, he runs out on his balcony hat in hand, and signifies his desire to speak. When he has procured silence:

“My children,” says the Monarch,’ “you are aware they made me King against my wish. I did not want a throne, before they gave me one, and since I have had one, I have often longed to be rid of it; so if you are like me and have had enough of Royalty, give me an hour, — I don’t ask for more, — and in an hour I will be out of the Kingdom. I have encouraged the building of railways for this express purpose. Only be good, and don’t break things; that would not be the slightest use, you know.”

To this little harangue the populace replies:

“Oh! we don’t want you to go away. We felt the need of making a little noise, that was all. We have kicked up our little row, and now we feel quite happy again. Long live the King!”

After which King and people part better pleased with each other than ever.

All the way as we came along, Biard had been dinning in my ears, “Never mind, when we get to Brussels, I am going to take you to see something you have never seen before.” And in my self-conceit, every time he said so, I had shrugged my shoulders.

I had been at Brussels perhaps ten times already, and on one of these occasions I had seen the Park, the Botanical Garden, the Palace of the Prince of Orange, the Church of Sainte-Gudule, the Boulevard de Waterloo, the shops of Méline and Cans, the Palace of the Prince de Ligne. What could there be left for me to see?

Accordingly, the moment we arrived, “Come along,” said I to Biard, “let’s see what I have never seen before.”

“Come along,” he replied laconically, — and we set off together, Biard, my son Alexandre and myself.

Our guide led us straight to a handsome looking house, not far from the Cathedral, stopped before a carriage door and rang the bell without the smallest sign of hesitation.

The door was opened by a manservant, whose strange appearance struck me at the first glance. The tips of his fingers were red with blood, while the man’s waistcoat and trousers were literally covered with feathers or rather down coming from the plumage of all sorts of birds. Moreover, he had a singular trick of turning his head about, a semi-circular movement like that of some species of climbing birds.

“Friend,” Biard addressed him, “will you be so kind as to inform your master that a party of foreigners visiting Brussels are desirous of seeing his curiosities?”

“Sir,” returned the man, “my master is not at home, but in his absence I have his orders to do the honours of the collection.”

Damned unfortunate!” muttered Biard. Then turning to me, “It will not be so interesting,” he said, “but no matter, let us persevere.”

The servant was waiting our pleasure; we nodded to him, and he stepped off to show us the way.

“Notice the way he walks,” Biard whispered to me;” that is a curiosity in itself.”

Indeed our worthy cicerone had the gait not of a man but of a bird, and the particular bird he seemed to have taken as his model was the magpie.

First we traversed a square courtyard inhabited by a cat and two or three storks. The cat looked at us defiantly; the storks on the contrary, standing motionless on their long red legs, seemed full of confidence in our peaceful intentions.

All the way across the courtyard I observed nothing specially out of the common in our leader’s way of walking, beyond the afore-mentioned twisting about of the head, and a certain stately gravity in his fashion of putting one leg in front of the other. He moved along, as I have said, in the solemn way magpies do, when they do walk solemnly.

Presently we came to the garden, — a small botanical garden, square like the courtyard, but larger. It was filled with a host of flowers, duly labelled and planted out in a number of beds divided by walks, so that each one of the said beds could easily receive due and proper attention.

No sooner were we in the garden than our guide’s whole demeanour altered. His solemn march became a series of hops. From three or four paces away he would catch sight of an insect, — a caterpillar, or a beetle; instantly, with a jerk of the loins impossible to describe, he would take two or three little jumps forward, both feet held together, then a jump to one side; alighting on one foot he would stoop suddenly on the same side, catch the creature, without ever missing, between thumb and finger, toss it on to the path and stamp down on it the foot he held suspended in the air with all the weight of his body. Thus there was not a second lost between discovery, capture and execution of the offender. Justice satisfied, he would jump back with a little sideways hop into the same path that we were following.

Every time he saw an insect of any sort or kind, the same operation was repeated, — but with such rapidity and address that we could pursue our way unhindered towards a detached building which seemed to be item No. 1 of the exhibition we had come to see.

The door stood wide open, showing the interior, which was square and fitted with a continuous series of pigeon-holes. At the first glance I concluded these receptacles were full of different sorts of seeds. I supposed I was about to examine the collection of some expert horticulturist, and expected to see interesting varieties of haricot beans, lentils and vetches. But on coming closer and looking carefully, I saw that what I had taken for botanical specimens were nothing more nor less than birds’ eyes, — eagles’ eyes, vultures’ eyes, parrots’ eyes, falcons’ eyes, ravens’

eyes, magpies’ eyes, starlings’ eyes, blackbirds’ eyes, finches’ eyes, sparrows’ eyes, tomtits’ eyes, eyes of every kind and species of feathered creature.

It looked for all the world like a stock of assorted ammunition, from balls of twelve to the pound down to the finest small shot. Thanks to a chemical preparation, no doubt the invention of the I owner of the collection, the eyes had all preserved their colour, consistency, and one might almost say their expression. Only, removed as they were from their orbits and deprived of the eyelids, they had assumed one and all a ferocious, menacing aspect. Above each division a ‘label indicated to what bird belonged the particular eyes in it.

Oh! Coppelius! Doctor Coppelius! thou fantastic creation of Hoffmann’s brain, thou who were always asking for *oyes*, fine *oyes*, hadst thou but come to Brussels, in what profusion wouldst thou have found the objects thou wast ever in persevering search of for thy daughter Olympia!

“Now, gentlemen,” said our guide when he thought we had had time enough to examine this first section of the show, would you like to go on to the raven gallery?”

Never was name better deserved. Picture a long corridor, ten feet broad and twelve high, lighted by windows giving on a garden, the walls entirely covered by ravens nailed on their backs with wings outspread and legs and neck extended. The whole length of the room they formed a series of fantastic circles and extravagantly contorted arabesques.

Some were dropping to pieces, falling into dust, others were in every stage of putrefaction; others again were new and fresh, and some still writhing and screaming in their death agony. There might be eight or ten thousand of them altogether.

I turned to Biard, full of grateful thanks; it was quite true, I had never seen anything like it before.

"And it is your master," I asked the servant, "who devotes his time to tracing all these cabalistic shapes on the wall?"

"Oh! yes, sir, nobody but my master ever touches his ravens. He would be furious if anyone dared to interfere!"

"But then he has agents all over Belgium to supply him with birds?"

No, sir, he catches them himself."

"How does he catch them himself? and where?"

"Up there, on the roof," — and so saying, he pointed to a roof, in which I could certainly make out a piece of mechanism, the ingenious details of which the distance made it impossible to distinguish.

I am a great fowler myself, though I do not carry my passion for ornithology to the same insane and extravagant lengths as our worthy Brussels amateur. I have limed and netted hundreds of birds as a boy; so these details began to rouse my curiosity.

"But tell me now," I urged the man, "how does your master manage? The raven is one of the cleverest, most cunning, wily, shy birds in all nature."

"It is so, sir, against the old methods, gun, poison, limed twig; but not when the bass viol is used."

"What do you mean, — *when the bass viol is used?"*

"I mean this, sir. A raven is pretty sure to be afraid of a man holding a gun, or even a man holding nothing, in his hands; but is he likely to be afraid of a man playing the bass viol? " "So your master adopts Orpheus' tactics and lures the ravens to him by playing the bass viol?"

"No, I don't mean that quite."

"Well, what do you mean?"

"See here, I will explain the thing; my master keeps a decoy."

"A decoy, eh?"

"Yes, a tame raven. Look, the old villain is hopping about yonder in the garden," and he pointed to a raven pottering about the garden walks, a fellow with a ruff and almost white with age.

"He gets up at four o'clock in the morning."

"The raven?"

"No, no, my master. Oh! the raven, he never goes to sleep; day and night he keeps his eyes always open, plotting mischief all the while. I don't believe myself he's a real raven at all, I think he's a devil. Well, my master gets up at four in the morning, before daylight; he comes down in his dressing- own and sets his old ruffian of a decoy bird in the centre of the net you see up there in the roof, at the far end of the garden. He ties the string that works the net to his foot: then he takes his bass viol and begins playing *Une fièvre brûlante*. His tame raven croaks, and the ravens of St. Gudule hear him; they fly up, only to see a friend eating white cheese and a gentleman playing the bass viol. Why should they be afraid, I should like to know? They come and sit cheek by jowl with the decoy, and the more my master rumbles, rumbles, rumbles with his bow on the strings, the more they come. Then crack! suddenly he pulls in his foot; the net closes, the silly things are caught, and there you are!"

"And then your master nails them to the wall?"

"Oh! my master, you know, ceases to be a man then and turns into a tiger. He drops his instrument, unties the string, runs to the wall, scrambles up a ladder, grips the ravens, jumps down again, crams his mouth full of nails, seizes a hammer, and tap! tap! there's a raven crucified, caw, caw, caw as much as ever he likes. It excites my master, all this duet. There, you see how it is."

"Is it long since your master was taken with this mania?"

"Oh! ten years ago, sir. It's his life, it's meat and drink to him. If he were to go three days without catching a raven, he would fall ill; if it lasted a week, it would kill him. Now, would you like to see the tomtits' gallery?"

"Certainly I should." The long room, papered with dead birds, the air impregnated with the dusty miasma of corruption, the convulsive struggles and hoarse screams of the dying ravens, all this was like to raise my gorge if I tarried much longer.

Once more we crossed the garden, and it was only then, when I looked at the decoy raven with the ruff out of one eye and the old manservant out of the other, that I observed the striking similarity of their movements when engaged in the discovery and execution of insects. Evidently either the raven had copied the servant, or the servant had copied the raven.

For my own part, inasmuch as it was matter of common knowledge that the raven lives to be a hundred and twenty years old, and the servant man was only forty, I suspect the latter of being the plagiarist.

We soon came to the tomtits' gallery. This was a small detached building standing in the opposite corner of the garden. The walls were covered with the wings and heads of house-sparrows, variegated with embroideries made of the wings and heads and tails of tomtits. Picture a great grey curtain with patterns in yellow and blue. The patterns represented wheels, circles, stars, arabesques, — in fact every sort of fantastic figure a morbid fancy could frame out of the bodies and legs and heads and beaks of birds.

In the intervening spaces between the different patterns were cats' heads fastened against the wall, with open mouths, wrinkled cheeks and sparkling eyes; each head had its accompanying fore-paws crossed below it, like the death's heads and cross-bones you see on tombstones.

The heads had inscriptions above each conceived in such terms as these:

MISOUF, — condemned to suffer the penalty of death, on Jan. 10th, 1846, for having injured two Goldfinches and a Tomtit.

THE DOCTOR, — condemned to suffer the penalty of death, on July 7th, 1847, for having stolen a sausage from the frying- pan.

BLUCHER, — condemned to suffer the penalty of death, June 10th, 1848, for having drunk up a bowl of milk put on one side for my breakfast.

"Ah ha! "I observed, "so it seems your master, like our feudal Barons of old, claims the right of executing justice, high and low."

"Yes, sir, as you see; and he allows no appeal against his sentences. He says that if everybody did like him and destroyed all robbers, thieves and murderers, there would soon be left in the world none but gentle, well-behaved animals, and that mankind, only having good examples to copy, would then improve."

I bowed my acknowledgment of the possible truth of the axiom; I respect collections without understanding their motives. At Ghent I once visited an amateur who collected buttons. Well, at first glance it seemed a ridiculous fad, but the interest grew as you looked closer. He had classified his buttons chronologically into groups, from the IXth century downwards. The collection began with a button from the Royal robe of Charlemagne and ended with one from Napoleon's uniform. There were regimental buttons of every body of troops ever levied in France, from the Free Archers of Charles VII. to the Sharpshooters of Vincennes; there were buttons of wood, of lead, of copper, of zinc, silver buttons, gold buttons, ruby, emerald, diamond buttons. The intrinsic value; of the collection as a whole was estimated at 100,000 francs, and had cost the owner perhaps 300,000 to get together.

In London I knew an Englishman who collected the ropes with which people had been hanged. He had travelled in; all parts of the world and likewise kept in j touch with a number of correspondents; by his own efforts and those of his agents, he was in relation with the public executioners of the four quarters of the globe.; Directly a man was hanged in Europe, Asia, Africa or America, the hangman cut a bit off the rope, and despatched it along with a certificate of authenticity to our collector, who in return forwarded *him* the price of his packet. One of his ropes had cost him a hundred pounds sterling; true it was the one which had had the honour of strangling Sultan Selim III., — an event in connexion with which English diplomacy, as all the world knows, had not been perfectly above suspicion.

I had just finished copying Blucher’s epitaph, the cat who drank the milk,’ when half-past nine struck at St. Gudule’s. We had barely half an hour left to catch the train for Antwerp; so I added my gratuity to what Biard had already given the man on our entrance, and we sallied out at a run from this city of dead fowl.

Our guide expressed his gratitude by hopping with us as far as the door, whence he followed us with his eyes, twisting his neck in his own peculiar fashion the while, till he lost sight of us at the turning of the street. We reached the station just as the locomotive was giving its final whistle.

CHAPTER II.

GAUFRES AND GHERKINS.

WE arrived at Antwerp at eleven. Not to miss the boat, which sailed at noon, we had breakfast on the Quay, right opposite where the vessel lay. By midday we were all aboard, and at five minutes after the hour we started, under a fine, gentle, penetrating rain that I take to be a speciality of Antwerp, for I have invariably encountered it every time I have visited that city.

Biard was under some apprehension as to what sort of accommodation we should find at Rotterdam, The Hague and Amsterdam, a ceremony such we had come to see being bound to attract a great crowd of travellers. But I am a man of foresight. Besides, what town is there in Europe where I have not some resident acquaintance?

In 1840, I was travelling down the Rhone. Going on board at Lyons at four o’clock in the morning, I had dropped asleep about eleven or twelve in the day, under shelter of the deck awning, fanned by the fresh breeze that generally blows along the courses of rivers.

So soft and sweet were my slumbers that, albeit half wakened two or three times over by various accidental circumstances, I had refused to open my eyes for fear of interrupting my nap altogether. So I had remained impassive, my wits floating idly in the vague twilight of semi-consciousness. Presently I was disturbed in my pleasant reverie for the third or fourth time; this time my brain, still but half awake, became conscious nevertheless of two women’s voices speaking French tinged with a suspicion of an English accent.

I opened my eyes quietly, and looking cautiously about me from beneath my half closed lids, I beheld a group made up of two young women of eighteen or twenty, a young man of twenty-six or twenty-eight, and another of thirty-four or thirty-five.

The two ladies were charming, — a charm due both to their personal beauty, and still more to that unaffected almost unconscious grace of carriage that Englishwomen possess. Their two companions were both men of distinguished appearance.

A discussion was agitating this group of persons, turning upon the best route to follow; should they leave the boat at Avignon or go on to Aries? It was a momentous question, and one presenting many difficulties for a party of foreigners with no better guide than “Richard.”

“I wish,” one of the ladies hazarded, “I wish someone who has made the journey both by Aries and by Avignon would kindly tell us which is the better way to go.”

The wish seemed specially addressed to me. I had travelled three or four times from Lyons to Marseilles by the Rhône, and had gone by each of the two places named. I thought the moment opportune for introducing myself, and that the service I could do my fellow travellers might well excuse my boldness.

I opened my eyes altogether, and half bowing, I broke in:

“If, gentlemen, you will permit the author of the *Impressions de Voyage* to enlighten you on the all-important point in question, I may inform these ladies that it is more repaying to go by Aries than by Avignon.”

The two girls blushed; their two companions turned to me with polite smiles on their faces. It was clear they already knew my name before I spoke, and had been informed who I was while I was asleep.

“And why so, may I ask?” inquired the elder of the two gentlemen.

“In the first place, because you will have an opportunity of seeing Aries, and Aries is well worth seeing. Secondly, from Aries to Marseilles you will have a road free from dust and very interesting into the bargain, passing as it does between the *Camargue*, that is to say, Marius’ camp in old days, on the one hand, and the *Crau* on the other.”

“But we have to be at Marseilles by the day after to-morrow.”

“So we shall.”

“We are leaving by the Leghorn Steamer.”

“I am going by the same boat.”

“We wish to be in Florence for the Feast of San Giovanni.”

“I am expected there on the same date.”

“How can we get from Aries to Marseilles?”

“I have my caleche on board. We are five, and it holds six. We will hire post horses, and picnic *en route* as we go along. I will be your cicerone to all the sights.”

The two travellers glanced at their fair companions. The latter gave an almost imperceptible nod to signify their assent, and the thing was settled. It was still honeymoon time with the two couples, and during that happy period the lady, as everybody knows, has the right to decided all debateable questions.

We had a charming journey. At Arles we visited the *Armes*, and bought sausages. At Marseilles we were lodged by Méry and dined at Courty's. Arrived at Florence, we watched the chariot races from Signor Finzi's windows and the illuminations of the Arno from the Prince of Corsini's Palace.

At last the time came to part. I was staying on at Florence, my companions were to make the grand tour of Italy. We were lavish in promises to meet again, and exchanged cards in case they should ever come to Paris or I should visit Holland.

The travellers' cards were — one Monsieur Jacobson's of Rotterdam, the other Monsieur Wittering's, of Amsterdam. Contrary to the usual way in such cases, these promises were fulfilled, nay! more than fulfilled, for Monsieur Jacobson afterwards became a friend, instead of a mere travelling acquaintance, and found occasion to do me a service which many friends would hesitate to perform.

Under these circumstances, I had written immediately, before starting for Holland to Monsieur Jacobson at Rotterdam to announce my coming. This assured me of a right royal welcome, both at his own house at Rotterdam, and afterwards at Monsieur Wittering's as well.

Indeed Monsieur Jacobson is not only a pleasant and intelligent travelling companion and a highly respected banker, but he is an enthusiastic amateur as well. Our most charming canvases by Decamps, Dupré, Rousseau, Scheffer, Diaz, which we so often see leaving France for Holland, he is the buyer who robs us of these treasures. I had only to mention his name therefore completely to reassure Biard.

As for The Hague, Jacquand must have arrived there a week ago at least, with his picture of *William the Silent selling his Plate to the Jews to find means to carry on the War of Independence*, and he had been instructed to engage a room for me at the Hôtel de la Cour-Impériale.

So we could glide down the Scheldt in peace of mind, and, in the brief intervals when wind and rain allowed us to go on deck, gaze at the series of Paul Potters, Hobbemas and Van der Veldes which we were steaming past.

We passed Dordrecht with its forest of windmills, beside which those of Puerto-Lapice are mere dwarfs. At Dordrecht everybody has his windmill; there are windmills on the river banks, windmills in the gardens, windmills on top of the houses, there are little windmills, big, windmills, Brobdignagian windmills, windmills for children, for grown men, for greybeards. All are the same shape; but each individual paints his windmill to suit his fancy; there are grey ones with white edgings that look like widows in half mourning, there are brown ones with black edgings that look like Capuchin monks at a funeral, there are white ones with blue edgings that look like clowns at a fair. Nothing can well be queerer and more fantastic than all these great motionless piles with their ever turning sails. Side by side with these monsters, under the very shadow of their wings, so to speak, are ranged little red houses with green shutters, clean, trim and cosy, peeping out from behind avenues of trees with close-clipped foliage and white-washed stems. Imagine all this sweeping past you at two hundred and twenty horse-power speed, and allow it must afford a fascinating panorama.

As we approached Rotterdam, we encountered constantly increasing numbers of vessels; there were as many ships gliding over the water as windmills standing still on land. These likewise are of every size and build, three-masters, brigs, sloops, luggers; there are some in particular that have a physiognomy quite their own, with a great mainsail of plain canvas and a small blue sail at top of the mast. They look for all the world like huge sugar-loaves still wrapped in their grey and blue paper coverings and put to dissolve in the river. Yes, dissolve is the word, for the further away they get, the more they seem to melt, as it were, and sink into the river. The whole scene is active, bustling, alive with business; you feel you are coming to the true Holland of old days; one vast harbour that year by year sent forth a Swarm of ten thousand merchantmen.

At eight that evening the boat made fast to the quay at Rotterdam. Hardly was the gangway in position ere I heard my own name pronounced. It turned out to be one of Jacobson’s clerks come to tell me his employer had left that very day for Amsterdam, where I was eagerly expected by his brother-in-law Wittering, in whose house Gudin it seemed had been comfortably Installed ever since the day before.

Another piece of good news! So Gudin was here, like Biard and myself, to see the Coronation, and Gudin is not only a friend, but a fellow-craftsman as well. He is at least as much a poet as a painter, — witness his shipwrecked sailor clinging to a single spar with a single star in the sky to guide his course.

We sprang ashore. There was not a minute to lose; the train started at nine o'clock for The Hague, and it was now half-past eight. We hurried across the town with that important, pre-occupied air peculiar to people running after locomotives. We had the same good luck as at Brussels and reached the station in the nick of time.

Three quarters of an hour later we were pushing our way through a scene of wild dissipation, — a *kermesse* full of noise, dancing, shouting and band-playing, crowded with travelling shows, gaufre sellers' stalls and gherkin purveyors' booths.

The two last, the gherkin dealers and gaufre sellers, deserve a special description, inasmuch as nothing in any way equivalent to these curious institutions is. to be found at home.

In Holland people get drunk on gherkins and hard-boiled eggs, and eat gaufres and drink punch to get sober again.

The intending reveller simply halts in front of one of the booths where vegetables in vinegar are for sale, he lays down five sous on the counter, takes a fork in his right hand and a hard-boiled egg in his left. Then he prods his fork into a great tub in which lumps of cucumber as big as a common gherkin are floating about like real fish.

He pulls out one of these pieces and gulps it down, immediately applying on top of it a hard-boiled egg. This pleasant alternation is continued till the patient's stomach cries *hold, enough!* Happy they whose gastric capacity is double, triple, quadruple; they have to pay no more than their neighbours. Five sous is the recognised price to everybody.

The physicians of all countries have made scientific and moral observations on the various forms of intoxication, — spirituous intoxication, vinous intoxication, intoxication with beer, intoxication with gin, all have been studied. There is only intoxication with cucumber that has never yet had a systematic report devoted to it.

I will do my best to supply the want. No sooner is a Dutchman drunk on gherkins than he feels an irresistible temptation to indulge in reckless dissipation. Accordingly he marches up, to the gaufre sellers' stalls.

These stalls merit a more detailed description. As a rule four women keep them, two matronly and middle-aged, two young and attractive looking. All four are dressed in Frisian costume.

The latter includes a pleated bodice more or less graceful and a skirt more or less elegant. It is not there the originality of the costume lies, but in a double skull cap of gilt copper, which fits tight to the temples on either side of the head. Two little gold ornaments stick out at either outer extremity of the wearer's eyebrows, like a pair of miniature fire-dogs. On the copper plaques are usually fixed two or three curls of false hair. Atop of all is perched a cap with side pieces of lace.

You would hardly think it, but this strange conglomeration of a copper covering giving the head the appearance of a gilt skull, hair growing on the copper and lace mitigating the too brilliant reflections of such parts as it covers, forms a very agreeable looking *tout ensemble.*

The two dames of a certain age sit, one in a chair by the door, the other behind the counter, where they seem permanent fixtures. The lady at the door sells gaufres, while the other at the counter serves out punch.

Meantime the two girls flit about and devote themselves to the task of attracting customers. They recognise at a glance any cucumber consumer who has taken too much and beckon him to come in. If this is not enough, they dart out and lay hands upon him.

Once inside the booth, which is provided with private rooms at the rear for the benefit of customers of a retiring disposition, a plateful of gaufres and a small bowl of punch are set before the strayed reveller. One of the girls attends to his wants, and in a quarter of an hour or so the man leaves the place as sober as a judge. Such was the process we saw again and again repeated that evening of May 10th, just four and twenty hours after quitting Paris.

We had covered, thanks to the numerous turns and twists of the Scheldt, no less than a hundred and sixty leagues during the said twenty four hours. Whereupon, finding our beds already prepared for us by the forethought of our friend Jacquand, we turned in to the accompaniment of the most infernal din of discordant musical instruments I have ever heard in my life.

CHAPTER III.

MERMAIDS AND SIRENS.

MEMORY, kind gift of God whereby men live again in their past lives, magic mirror that lends the objects it reflects the vague poetry of twilight, the soft outlines of distance, with me thy presence is especially vivid, thy attraction irresistible! I take up my pen fully and firmly resolved to take a bird’s eye survey, with never a thought of stopping between start and finish. But lo! all along the way memory has set up landmarks to draw my attention, and I find myself, in spite of myself, soul and body, a bondsman to the past. My mind that was for skimming the intervening space as swift as the lightning, hovers uncertainly, like the soap bubble borne upon the breeze, which iridescent with sapphire, ruby and opal hues, reflects on its ephemeral sphere houses, fields and sky, — an eternal world on the surface of a world to perish in another moment.

So it was in the present instance; I had planned to devote one short chapter to our journey, — reaching the French frontier, crossing Belgium, descending the Scheldt, reaching Amsterdam, and embarking for Monnikendam, where I was to find Père Olifus. But you see how on the way I have been detained, one after the other, by Biard, the King of the Belgians, the man with the bass viol, the windmills of Dordrecht, the ships at Ysselmonde, Jacobson’s letter, Jacquand, the *kermesse* at The Hague, the gherkin dealers and gaufre sellers, the pretty Frisians with their gold head-dresses. You see how I have stopped repeatedly at every object, animate and inanimate by the way side; how I have again and again pointed my finger, turned my head aside, and halted; how at the opening of my third chapter I am only at The Hague on the eve of the Coronation, and shall want all the rest of this chapter for what I have to say of the King and Queen, Amsterdam with its three hundred canals, its thirty thousand flags, its two hundred thousand inhabitants. My readers must just forgive me; God has made me so; and they must take me as I am, or else shut the book once for all.

All the same I have good hopes of getting to Monnikendam by the end of the chapter. But there, man proposes, we all know, and God disposes. Anyway, like the paper boats children launch on a brook, which for them is a river, I am going to let myself drift down the current of my narrative, at the risk of capsizing to-day and not reaching my destination till to-morrow.

I had a letter from King Jérôme Napoléon for his niece the Queen of Holland, which on my arrival I had at once forwarded to its address. The result was found myself awakened next morning by the arrival of a special messenger from the Palace. I poked my head out of the feather bed in which I lay buried and asked why they had called me so early.

His Majesty's aide-de-camp had, it seems, brought me on behalf of his Royal Master a permit to join, myself and my companions, the special train, and was to send me later tickets for the diplomatic stand from which to view the Coronation ceremony.

The special train was to leave at eleven o'clock, and it was now nine; so I thanked the messenger and tried to extract myself from my bed. I say "tried to extract myself," and that is the best way to put it; indeed it is no easy thing to escape from a Dutch bed, shaped as it is like a box and furnished with two mattresses stuffed with feathers, in which you sink bodily and which close over you.

It is really beyond belief the variety existing with regard to the accessories and shape of a piece of household furniture which in every country of the world has the same end in view, viz., to rest the human body. Stay-at-home folks may suppose that everywhere people must of course go to bed in the same fashion, or pretty nearly so; but they are mightily mistaken. Place side by side an English bed, an Italian bed, a Spanish bed, a German bed and a Dutch bed, submit them to the inspection of a Parisian man of science who has never seen any other but a French bed, and you will have a whole volume of conjectures, each more extravagant than the other, as to the different uses for which these different articles of furniture are presumably employed. He will assign a hundred different purposes before he guesses they are one and all intended for sleeping in.

Luckily I have long been familiar with the most out-of-the-way descriptions of beds, and I had slept quite soundly on my Dutch couch. Alas! Alexandre and Biard had not fared equally well. Since seven in the morning they had been out and about in search of a bath. They hoped water would wash away the feathers, and the bath remove the effect of the bed. At half-past nine they returned, having traversed the whole town three times over and visited every museum and bric-à-brac shop therein, but without discovering anything in the shape of a public bath. It is only fair to remark that the sea is only a league from The Hague.

I had just, and only just, the time left to visit the museum myself. There was one thing I wanted to see, apart from the Rembrandts, Van Dycks, Hobbemas, Paul Potters and all the other masterpieces of Dutch art, and that was, in the ground floor rooms in the middle of this most interesting collection, a glass-case in which are preserved several specimens of mermaids.

The mermaid is a product peculiar to Holland and her Colonies. As you may, or may not, know, there are two distinct classes of mermaid, — the Siren and the Nereid.

The Siren is the good old antique monster, with a woman's head and a fish's tail. They are the daughters of Parthenopé, Ligeia and Leucosia. If we are to believe the authors of the XVIth, XVIIth and even XVIIIth Centuries, Sirens are not at all uncommon. The English ship's-captain John Smith saw in 1614, in the English Islands of the West Indies, a Siren having the upper part of her body exactly like a woman. She was swimming along with all imaginable grace, when he first saw her in the depths of the sea. Her great eyes, albeit a trifle round, her well shaped nose, albeit just a little flat, her pretty ears, albeit a bit longish, made up a very agreeable personality, to which long green locks gave a certain strangeness that was not without charm. As ill luck would have it, the fair water-witch suddenly turned head over heels, and Captain John Smith, who was by way of falling in love with her, noticed that from the navel downwards the woman was nothing more nor less than a fish. True the fish had a double tail, but a double tail is a poor substitute after all for a pair of legs.

Doctor Kircher informs us, in a scientific report, that a Siren was caught in the Zuider Zee and dissected at Leyden by the learned Professor Pieter Paw. In the same paper he speaks of a Siren that was found in Denmark, and that learned to spin and foretell the future. This Siren had long locks, not of hair however but a network of fleshy fibres. She had a pleasing face, arms longer than a man's, her fingers joined together with a web of cartilage like a goose's foot, the breasts round and firm, the skin covered with scales so white and fine that from a distance she had all the appearance of possessing a smooth, ivory complexion. She told how Tritons and Sirens form a submarine population, which sharing the cunning and instinct of monkey and beaver, build themselves, in spots inaccessible to divers, rockwork grottoes strewn with beds of sand, wherein they rest and sleep and live.

Johann Philip Abelinus relates, in the first volume of his *Theatrum Europoeum*, how in the year 1619 certain Councillors of the King of Denmark, sailing from Norway to Copenhagen, saw a merman walking in the sea and carrying a bunch of herbs upon his head. A bait was thrown concealing a hook. The merman, it would seem, was just as greedy as any ordinary human being, for he was quickly attracted by the tempting bit of bacon, took it in his mouth and was hauled on board the ship. But no sooner was he landed on the deck than he began to speak the purest Danish and threaten the vessel with shipwreck. At the first words he uttered, the sailors as may well be supposed were intensely astonished, and when presently he proceeded to threats, their surprise changed into terror. They made all haste to pitch the man of the sea back into his native element with a thousand excuses for having incommoded him. It should be added in fairness that, as this is the only known instance of a talking merman, the commentators on Abelinus’ text hold it was not really a Triton, but a phantom.

Johnston records that in 1403 a mermaid was captured in a lake in Holland into which she had been cast by the sea. She consented to wear clothes, became accustomed to a diet of bread and milk, and learned to spin, but remained dumb.

Finally, — we have kept the best to the last, like the set-piece at a display of fireworks, — Dimas Bosque, physician to the Viceroy of the Island of Manara, records, in a letter quoted in Bartolo’s *History of Asia*, that as he was walking by the seashore in company with a Jesuit Father, a band of fishermen came running up breathlessly to invite the Priest to go aboard their vessel to see a strange marvel. The Jesuit accepted their offer, and Dimas Bosque went with him.

In the ship were sixteen fishes with human faces, nine females and seven males, which the fishermen had just caught with one haul of the net. They were taken ashore and minutely examined. Their ears projected like ours, and were of cartilage covered with fine skin. Their eyes were like ours in colour, shape and position; they were enclosed in orbits deeply sunk under the forehead, were provided with eyelids, and had not, like fishes’ eyes, different axes of vision. The nose only differed from the human nose in being somewhat flattened like a negro’s, and slightly cloven like a bull-dog’s. Mouth and lips exactly resembled our own. The teeth were square and set close together. Their bosom was broad and covered with the whitest of white skin, allowing the blood-vessels to show through.

The females had round, firm breasts, and some were evidently suckling young, for on pressure a very white and very pure milk was exuded. Their arms were two cubits long and thicker than ours; they were jointless, the hands being attached to the elbow. Lastly, the lower belly, beginning with the hips and thighs, divided into a double tail, like a fish’s.

It will be readily understood what a stir such a capture made. The Viceroy bought their catch from the fishermen, and partitioned this company of Tritons and Sirens among his friends and acquaintances as presents.

The Dutch Resident received for his share a Siren. This he forwarded to his Government at home, and the latter handed the curiosity over to the Museum at The Hague.

Obviously a veritable and authentic Siren, a Siren duly ticketed and exhibited in a Museum, a Siren declared by science to be none of the breed of Lazarillo de Tormes or Cadet-Roussel-Esturgeon, but really and truly a genuine ‘descendant of the River Achelotis and the Nymph Calliopé, was an infinitely greater curiosity than a gallery of ravens, even though there might be ten thousand ravens therein. For after all we can see ravens any day and every day, whereas Sirens are getting rarer and rarer. Accordingly, not knowing if I should ever be at The Hague again, I was very unwilling to miss the opportunity of seeing a J Siren.

Nevertheless, eager as I was to enjoy this pleasure, I was pulled up short on J first entering the Museum. I knew it was in this same collection that the coat was shown which William of Nassau, Prince of Orange, by history surnamed The Silent, was wearing when he was assassinated at Delft by Balthazar Gérard on July 10th, 1584.

It was a historical memento whose attraction outweighed in my mind that of all the Sirens and Mermaids in the world. So I begged the cicerone to show me first of all the case containing these relics of the past, and afterwards the body of the famous mermaid.

The clothes worn by the founder of the Dutch Republic, the author of the Union of Utrecht, the husband of the widow of Téligny, are to be seen to the left hand on entering the first gallery; for more than three hundred years now they have been exposed to the veneration of the people for whom he breathed his last sigh.

“Lord! have pity on my soul and these poor people!” were William the Silent’s words as he fell.

Doublet, vest and shirt, blood-stained all, are there, together with the bullet that pierced his breast and the pistol from which it was fired. It is a living, everlasting malediction against the assassin!

I know nothing which more rouses to thought, stirs reverie and promotes romantic dreams than the sight of material objects. How much is suggested by Ravaillac’s knife, by Balthazar Gerard’s pistol bullet! Who can say what three inches of steel or an ounce of lead weigh in the scales of human destiny.

Chance, Providence, Fate, — the world will grow grey pondering the sphinx-like riddle of these three words.

One day I mean to return to The Hague, only to see once more that bloodstained shirt, that pistol and pistol bullet.

But it was a quarter to eleven, I had only a few minutes to call my own. I asked to see my Siren, and was taken to case No. 449. This contained three monsters, — a Faun, a Vampire and a Siren. It was the Siren I was after, and I left Vampire and Faun unregarded.

She was mummified and pretty much the colour of a Carib’s head. Her eyes were shut, the nose flattened to the face; the lips stuck to the teeth, which were yellow with time. The bosom could be made out, though fallen away, and a few short hairs bristled on the head. The lower part of the body ended duly in a fish’s tail. There was nothing to be said; it was a Siren sure enough.

On being questioned, my cicerone then told the story of the physician Dimas Bosque, the Jesuit Father, the Viceroy of Manara and the Dutch Resident, to the same effect as I have already recounted.

“It appears,” he said to me when he had done, “that you are anxious for information about animals of the sort.”

I must say I thought my guide’s language a trifle impertinent, — classifying with animals a creature boasting of a woman’s head, a woman’s hands and a woman’s breasts. However, as I had no time to argue the point, I merely replied:

“Most anxious, I assure you, and if you could give me....”

“Oh! I am not exactly in a position — but I can tell you where to learn all details.”

“Where is that? quick, tell me.”

“At Monnikendam.”

“Pray, what is Monnikendam?”

“It is a small place two leagues from Amsterdam, at the head of a small inlet of the Zuider Zee.”

“And I shall obtain information there about the Sirens?”

“Yes, certainly, about the Sirens; and about the Mermaids too, — which is even more curious.”

“Then there is one in the Museum at Monnikendam?”

“No, but there is one in the churchyard; you will see her husband and her children, which will be quite as amusing.”

“She was married then, she has had children, — your mermaid?”

“Yes, she was both wife and mother. True, her children deny her; but there, her husband will tell you the whole story.” — ; “Does he speak French?”

“Oh! he speaks all languages. He is an old sea-dog.”

“And you say his name is?”

“Père Olifus.”

“Where shall I find him?”

“Perhaps at Amsterdam itself; he owns a boat in which he carries passengers from Amsterdam to Monnikendam.’ If you do not come across him at the former you will at the latter place, where his daughter Margaret keeps the Inn of the *Bonhomme Tropique.*”

“Père Olifus is his name, you say?”

“Père Olifus, yes.” — :

“Very good,” — and casting a last look at the Siren, of which Biard made a sketch, we leapt into our hackney-coach, shouting to the man to drive his hardest for the railway station.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BONHOMME TROPIQUE.

HOLLAND is the country par *excellence* for railways. From The Hague to Amsterdam the Dutch engineers have not had a single ravine to fill in, not so much as a nutshell to cut through. Everywhere the country is the same, — a vast meadow intersected by watercourses, diversified with clumps of trees of the most brilliant green, sheep buried in their fleeces, cows wearing top-coats.

Nothing can be more scrupulously exact than the landscapes of the Dutch masters. When you have seen Hobbema and Paul Potter, you have seen Holland. When you have seen Teniers and Terburg, you have seen the Dutch. Nevertheless all who have not been to Holland should go. Even after Hobbema and Paul Potter, Holland is a fine country to see; even after Teniers and Terburg the Dutch are delightful people to know.

In two hours we were at Amsterdam. A quarter of an hour later we were mounting the steps of a charming house situated on the Keisergruatz. A servant was waiting to announce our approach, and next minute Madame Wittering, Messieurs Wittering, Jacobson and Gudin came running forward to meet and greet us.

Madame Wittering was still just the same charming personage I had already had the honour of meeting on three different occasions, — pretty, gentle, blushing like a girl, a delightful combination of the Parisienne and the Englishwoman. Her sister, Madame Jacobson, was in London. Gudin was then, as I have mentioned, just arrived from Scotland.

The table was laid. But there, when I say “the table was laid,” I am speaking as if I were still at home in my own country; in Holland the table is always laid, laid permanently. It is the most hospitable country in the world, — hospitable in every sense of the expression. Each of us had his room ready prepared for him in this beautiful house, which partook of the character at once of castle and cottage. It was a pleasure to see the brilliant window-panes, the shining door-handles, the carpets everywhere, in the reception rooms, in the corridors and on the stairs, the well-trained servants you never see but know to be always there, busy keeping the house clean, bright and in good order.

While marshalling us to table Madame Wittering reminded us that the King made his public entry at three o’clock and that she had reserved for us at one of her friends’ houses a window from which to view the procession. We made the best of our time and at a quarter to three proceeded to the house where we were expected.

We were now at May nth. Just a week ago I had witnessed at Paris the Fête of May 4th. Separated by a week of time and a hundred and fifty leagues of distance, I beheld a second fête which at first sight seemed a sequel to the first. At Amsterdam as at Paris, at Paris and at Amsterdam, we passed under an avenue of tri-coloured flags amidst the shouts of the populace. Only the French flags carried the three colours vertically, the Dutch flags horizontally; only at Paris they were shouting “Down with Royalty,” and at Amsterdam, “Long live the King!”

We were presented to our hosts for the time being. Here was another specimen of a Dutch gentleman’s house; it was a little larger than Wittering’s and like his stood between a canal and a garden, the front to the canal, the back to the garden. The ceilings were decorated with fine paintings. I had expected to meet at every step in Holland with lacquer furniture, porcelain vases of Chinese and Japanese workmanship, crowding the dining-rooms and drawing-rooms. But the Dutch are like those wealthy owners who think little of the precious things they possess; I saw plenty of French étagères, some Dresden china figures, but very few screens, Chinese jars or such like nick-nacks.

About a quarter past three we heard a great hurly-burly, which brought us running to the windows. It was the beginning of the procession. First came the band, then the cavalry, then a crowd of pedestrians and carriages mixed together, then finally a national guard on horse-back, dressed in ordinary clothes with no arms but a riding-whip, with nothing to distinguish them from other people but a broad sash of crimson velvet.

The whole was preceded by two or three hundred workmen and street-boys tossing their caps in the air and singing the National Anthem of Holland.

Only strangely enough the National Anthem of the Dutch, the most Republican people in the world, is a Monarchical hymn.

Whilst I was conning over all the State entries of Royalties that I had ever seen in my life, the procession came filing past and the King arrived in front of our window, the centre figure of a dozen General Officers and Grand Officials of the Palace. He was a man of thirty or thirty-two, fair-haired, with blue eyes to which he can give, as occasion demands, a fine expression of gentleness or determination, and a beard covering the lower part of the face. The general effect was gracious and sympathetic, his greetings to the people kind and affable.

I bowed as he passed, and turning his head he accorded me a special look and wave of the hand. I could not suppose this peculiar favour was meant for me, so I turned round to see who it was had just received the honour. Jacobson understood and said “No, no, it was you the King bowed to.”

“I! impossible, he does not know me.”

“That is just the reason why he singled you out. He knows all our faces by heart. He saw a strange face and said to himself ‘that is my poet. ‘“

And the strangest part is it was true, and the next day the King told me so himself.

The King was on horse-back and wore an Admiral’s uniform. A great gilt coach came next drawn by eight white horses, each led by a groom in livery. Each side of the coach, perched on the steps, a page could be recognised by his uniform of scarlet and gold. A woman of twenty five or twenty six, two children of from six to eight, were seated in the coach. They kept bowing to the people, the children thoughtlessly and heedlessly, their Mother only too full of thought and care perhaps. They were the Queen, the Prince of Orange and Prince Maurice.

No face at once more gracious or more melancholy was ever seen than the Queen’s; she possesses all a woman’s sweetness combined with a Princess’s majesty. I had the honour of three interviews with her during the two days I spent at Amsterdam, and I have not forgotten one word she said to me. May her people be kind and faithful to her and may God never change her sadness into sorrow.

The procession passed on and vanished in the distance, — a strange sight in these days when Kings seem branded with the stigma of fate!

Alas! which is in the right, kings or peoples? This is the great enigma to which were sacrificed Charles the First and Louis the Sixteenth; the Restoration of 1660 put the people in the wrong; the Revolution of 1848 has done the same for Kings. The Future must decide; but I will stake my money on the People.

The Show was over and I had nothing more to do at Amsterdam until eleven o’clock next day, so I begged my Hosts to excuse me for the interval, at the same time asking them for information as to the best means of reaching Monnikendam.

They seemed surprised. What strange caprice was this? What could I have to do at Monnikendam. I took good care not to tell them I was going there in search of a mermaid! I simply said I must go to Monnikendam. So they detailed Wittering’s brother to bear me company.

Alexandre separated from me; he wanted to visit Broek. Biard followed my fortunes and announced that he would accompany me to Monnikendam. The fact is, I think, he was rather ashamed of himself; he had been to the North Cape and from that furthermost point of Europe had looked out upon two Oceans without discovering a single mermaid in either of them. His own star had failed him; he was counting upon mine.

I went down to the Harbour and started, or rather begged my guide to start, in quest of Père Olifus. The search was long in vain; his boat was there right enough, but her owner was not. At last he was unearthed in a sort of long-shore pot-house which he made his headquarters. He was told that a traveller was starting for Monnikendam and would go with nobody but him. The preference flattered his vanity; he tore himself away from his glass and came forward with a smile to meet me.

“This is Père Olifus,” said the man who at Wittering’s request had kindly undertaken to find him. I handed my scout a florin. Père Olifus noticed this, and seeing the price I was ready to pay for him, grew more amiable than ever.

Meantime I was scrutinizing my man with an interest corresponding to his importance, — and Biard was sketching him. He was an old sea-dog, as I had been told, of sixty to sixty four, more like a seal than a man. White-haired and white beard both an inch long and as stiff as a mop; round china-blue and peering eyes; a mouth from ear to ear showing two pairs of yellow teeth above and below like a walrus’s; a mahogany coloured complexion. He was dressed in wide trousers that had once been blue and a sort of hooded wraprascal, along the seams of which could still be distinguished traces of embroidery that showed the garment in question to have been originally Spanish or Neapolitan.

One of his cheeks was distended by an enormous quid of tobacco that looked like a swelling. From time to time he ejected a spurt of black saliva from his mouth with the whistling sound chewers of the weed affect.

“Ah! so you are French,” he said to me.

“How do you know.”

“Lord! it would be poor work to have seen the four quarters of the world, — Europe, Asia, Africa and America, and not to know a man at the first glance. French, I say French, French!” and he started singing:

“Mourir pour la patrie.”

I stopped him in the middle; “Not that, Père Olifus, please — sing something else.”

“Why so?”

“Because I know that tune.”

“Good! as you please. So you want to go to Monnikendam.

« Yes.”

“And you make a point of Père Olifus taking you there, eh?”

« Yes.”

“Well and good! we will take you over, without charging.”

“And why without charging?”

“Because I have eyes in my head and can see what I can see. Are you sleeping there, at Monnikendam?”

“Yes.”

“Well and good; then I recommend you to the Inn of the *Bonhomme Tropique.”*

“That is precisely where I am going.”

“It’s kept by my daughter Margaret.”

“I know it is.”

“Ah!” cried Père Olifus, “you know it is, eh? “ — And he fell into a brown study.

“Well! suppose we make a start, Père Olifus?”

“Yes, yes, let us be off.” Then looking round at me: “I know why *you* are coming.”

“You do?”

“Yes, I know; you are a savant and you want to make me talk.”

“And does it hurt you to talk, Père Olifus, if we moisten the conversation with schnapps at the beginning, rum in the middle and rack punch to finish up with.”

“Oh, ho! so you know the proper order?”

“Oh Lord! no, it was just a guess.”

“Well and good; I am ready to talk, but not before the children, mind you!”

“You shall see them,” — then turning to three different quarters of the compass, he gave a whistle. At this sound, which bore a strong resemblance to the screech of a locomotive engine, I; saw five great lads come running up, all making for one common centre, — the group formed by Biard, Père Olifus and myself.

“Ho, Joachim! ho, Thomas! ho, Philip! ho, Simon and Jude!” he cried in Dutch; “hurry a bit I say. Here is a customer for us and for your sister Margaret.”

Catching the name Margaret, and judging by the way Père Olifus spoke to the five great lads who were running up, I gathered, the sense more or less of what he had just said.

“Oh, ho! Père Olifus, and is this a sample, pray, of the fine family they told me about?”

“That was at The Hague, was is not, at the Museum? I shall have to send him a remittance, that old scamp. Yes, there are my five boys.”

“Then you have five boys and a girl?”

“A girl and five boys, two of them twins, Simon and Jude. The eldest is twenty-five.”

“And all by the same mother,” I asked with some little hesitation.

Olifus looked at me: “By the same mother, yes; on that side certain sure; I could not say as much on the other side of... But hush! here come the children; not a word before them.”

The boys filed in front of me, touching their caps to me and casting doubtful looks at their father. It struck them no doubt that the old man had been talking a bit too much already.

“Come, come, lads, get aboard!” cried Père Olifus, “and let’s show the gentlemen we should do all right in a hundred tonner, if need be.”

Three of the young fellows leapt nimbly into the boat while the two others hauled on the chain to bring her up to the quay-side. Père Olifus got aboard actively enough and we settled down in the stern. Simon and Jude followed us and crew and passengers were complete. The two former apparently always worked together and they now set to work to step the mast, which was lying at the bottom of the boat. Meantime their father took the helm. Joachim unhitched the painter and Philip and “And where are the children?”

Thomas, each armed with an oar, worked their way through the thousands of boats, barges and ships which crowded the Harbour.

Once free from these obstacles, we hoisted sail: the wind was favourable and we made good way. In another ten minutes we had doubled the low point which had hitherto blocked our view and were sailing on the open Zuider Zee.

In half-an-hour we were in the Strait between Tidam and the Island of Mar- ken. Olifus laid a finger on my arm.

“Do you see those tall reeds yonder?” he asked.

“On the shore of the Island you mean? yes, I can see them.”

“That is where I found her.”

“Found whom?”

“Hush! hush!”

Joachim had noticed his father’s gesture and turning in our direction had shrugged his shoulders most disrespectfully and cast a look of reproach at his father.

“Well, well, what now, boys?” exclaimed the latter, “there’s no harm done,” — and not another word was said.

In five minutes more we were in the little inlet and could make out the village nestling on our left.

Several times the young men had turned their looks to the South. They did not seem exactly afraid, but were evidently anxious.

“What is wrong with your boys? “I asked, “they appear to be on the look out for something.”

“Yes, they are on the look out for something they would as lief not see.”

“And what is that?”

“The wind, the south wind; to-night the dykes will want looking to most likely. So much the better for us...”

“Why so?”

“Oh we shall be left at peace and can talk at our ease.”

“Then it doesn’t annoy you to talk about...”

“Annoy *me?* on the contrary it eases my heart. But they, they seem one and all to have taken sides with that confounded carrion of a *Buchold*. There I have let the word slip out, and they have heard it. Look how Simon and Jude are scowling at me. Yet they are the youngest, they are not yet twenty. Well, they are just as bad as the others."

"Whom do you mean by the *Buchold,* eh?"

The lads looked round with an angry frown.

"Now why need you go repeating the word? you are going to make yourself finely welcome, you are."

Indeed our five sailor lads seemed to be very much annoyed; so I said no more.

We were drawing up to the little village, which as we came nearer seemed to rise out of the waters.

"Don't seem to be looking," Père Olifus said to me, "but cast a glance to your left."

I did so and saw a grave-yard. The old man winked triumphantly. "That's where she lies," he said.

I understood, but contented myself with a little nod by way of answer. Our dialogue however brief, and wordless on my part, as it had been, had not escaped Thomas, who doubtless by way of protest against the feelings of satisfaction his father seemed to experience, heaved a sigh and made the sign of the Cross.

"So, your children are Catholics?" I asked him.

"Oh, good Lord! yes, don't speak of it, there is nothing they don't do to make me mad, the rascals. However I have no right to blame them; it's not their fault but their mother's."

"Ah! their mother was..."

"The day I found her, I left her unguarded for just a moment. In that moment; bless me! if the Curé did not take and baptize her."

"Father! father!" protested Philip, who sat nearest to us, turning round sharply.

"Be easy!" said the old man, "we are only talking of St. John who baptized our Lord in the Jordan, — nothing else, I assure you."

So saying he got up in the boat and waved his cap.

"Ho, Margaret!" he shouted, hailing a handsome girl of nineteen or twenty, who was standing at the threshold of her door. "Get your best bedroom ready and cook a good supper; I am bringing you a customer."

Then turning to me, he added, "Go on ahead and wait for me in your room. While the boys are at the dykes, I will come up and see you and while we smoke a pipe and drink a glass of schnapps I will tell you all about it."

I made him a silent assent, to which he replied with a knowing wink. Then landing with the help of Simon and Jude we stepped up to the portal of the *Bonhomme Tropique,* where stood our fair hostess awaiting us with a smile on her pretty lips.

CHAPTER V.

FIRST MARRIAGE OF PERE OLIFUS.

WE were warmly welcomed by Mile Marguerite Olifus. She showed us to a double-bedded room and asked us if we should prefer to take our meals in our chamber or in the common dining- room. The hope that Père Olifus would tell us the story of his adventures led us to choose the former alternative. Then she wished to know what we would rather have for supper and we said we would trust entirely to Mile Marguerite's selection. The whole conversation of course was conducted by signs; but the language of signs, ridiculous enough between men who get angry and impatient, becomes a very agreeable mode of intercourse when practised with a pretty woman who smiles in your face all the time. The net result was that, without a single word having been uttered on either side, at the end of ten minutes we perfectly understood each other's meaning.

Père Olifus was not mistaken; the wind began to blow harder and harder. There was no positive danger, but as a measure of precaution the dykes had to be watched. From the window we saw three of Père Olifus' sons making for the shore; the remaining two, Simon and Jude, went into a neighbouring house, where we learnt subsequently they were courting two sisters.

Whilst we were looking out through the ever darkening twilight at the stir of street and harbour, our table was furnished, to begin with, with a dish of grilled salmon and another of hard-boiled eggs piping hot.

These eggs, of the size of pigeon's, were green with red spots: they were lapwings' eggs, which are found in abundance in May, and have a much more delicate flavour than fowls' eggs. A bottle of Bordeaux towered in the midst of these national comestibles, like a tall slender steeple lording it over the lowly roofs of a village. We took our places with a sailor's appetite; both wine and food were of the best.

However, the meal after all was not the main thing; what we looked for with most impatience was the appearance of Père Olifus. During dessert we heard on the stairs the sound of heavy footsteps advancing furtively. The door opened and Père Olifus, a bottle under his arm and his pipe in his mouth, entered laughing to himself.

“Hush,” he said, “here I am.”

“And in good company it would appear.”

“Oh, yes, I said to myself there are two Frenchmen, we must be four strong to make head against them, so I took a bottle of schnapps, a bottle of rum, a bottle of rack-punch and here I am.”

“Upon my word, Père Olifus,” I told him, “the more I hear you speak, the more you surprise me; you speak French more like a subject of His Late Majesty Louis XlVth than a sailor-man of His Majesty William III.”

“The fact is, I am a Frenchman at bottom,” said Père Olifus, winking one eye.

“How do you mean *at bottom?”*

“Why, my father was a Frenchman and my mother a Dane; my grandfather was French and my grandmother came from Hamburg. As for my children, I am proud to say they have a French father, while their mother... Oh! for their mother I won’t make bold to say quite what she was; *they* at any rate are true Dutchmen. It would not have happened if I had been there to attend to their bringing up; but I was in the Indies.”

“Still, you used to come home now and again! “I suggested with a laugh.

“That is where you are wrong; I never did.”

“Then your wife used to go out to join you?”

“Yes and no.”

“What do you mean *‘yes and no ‘?”*

“Here’s where the plot thickens, look you. It seems distance goes for nothing when you have a witch for a wife.”

“Now we are coming to it, eh?”

“That is so; anyhow I am going to tell you the whole story; but first a glass of schnapps, it is the real stuff I give you my word. To your good health!”

“The same to you, friend.”

“Well, as I was saying, I am a Frenchman, son of a Frenchman, sailors from father to son, of the old sea-dog, Jack-tar breed. I was born at sea and I hope to die there.”

“How is it you never joined the Navy — a man of your kidney?”

“Oh! I served in the Emperor’s time; but in 1810, good-night! I was nabbed and sent to England — I suppose to learn English; I found it useful later on, as you will hear. In 1814 I came back here to Monnikendam; it was there the Emperor had pressed me. I was an industrious man and I used to make all sorts of straw- work nick-nacks on the hulks and then sell them to the English ladies who came to visit the prisoners; so that I came home with quite a little capital, something like three or four hundred florins. I bought a boat, called myself captain and made it my business to carry passengers to Amsterdam, Purmeren, Edam, Hoorn, in fact all along the coast.

"This went on from 1815 to 1820. I was now thirty-five and they were always asking me, 'why don't you get married, Père Olifus? 'But I used to say, 'Not I! I am a salt-water man, a sort of merman, and I shan't marry until I have found a mermaid." And why do you want to marry a mermaid, Père Olifus? ' Why,' says I, 'because mermaids don't talk, you know.'

"I ought to tell you that two or three hundred years ago they once found a mermaid cast up on the sands; they taught her to make a curtsey and spin, but they never taught her, no never, to say a word."

"Yes, I know; well?"

"You see, a woman who can make a curtsey and spin, and never say a word is a perfect treasure; but the real truth is, look you, I did not believe in mermaids, I had made up my mind not to marry.

"One day, it was the 20th September, 1823, — I shall not forget the day in a hurry, there had been heavy weather the day before, the wind blowing in hard from the North Sea. I was coming back from taking an Englishman over to Amsterdam and as I was making the passage between Cape Tidam and the little Island of Marken, just where the reeds grow, the place I shewed you as we came here, we catch sight of something that looked like an animal thrashing the water.

"We pulled towards the spot and the nearer we pulled the more like a human being it looks. We shout 'hold on, hold on, never fear, we are coming,' but the more we shout, the more the creature struggles. We get there, and lo and behold it is a woman kicking about in the water.

"There was a Parisian in the boat, a wag, and he says to me, 'Why Père Olifus, it's a mermaid, there is the wife for you.' When I heard the word, look you, I should have sheered off, if I had not been a fool. But not I, I was as curious as a porpoise and I push on for the shore, crying, 'By the Lord! it is a woman anyway and what is more, like to drown; must take her aboard, that is flat.'

"'She has not much on,' said the Parisian; the fact is, she was stark naked.

"'Oh, never you fear,' was all I said, and with the word, I jumped into the water and took her in my arms.

"She had fainted away. We tried to draw her out from among the reeds; but I don't know how she managed it, the rushes had made a knot round one leg that the tightest of sailor's knots was a fool to it. Finally we had to cut her loose. Then we laid her in the bottom of the boat, threw our sea-cloaks over her and steered for Monnikendam. We conjectured there had been a shipwreck in the neighbourhood and that the poor woman had been washed ashore and got entangled in the reeds. But the Parisian shook his head; he would have it the woman had fainted with terror when she saw us, and declared it was a mermaid, a Nereid, not a ship-wrecked woman at all. Then he lifted up a corner of the boat-cloaks and looked at her.

"I looked at her too and I must confess I rather liked looking. She was a pretty creature, apparently twenty or twenty- two at the most, fine arms and beautiful, bust; only her hair had a greenish tinge, but as her complexion was of the whitest, this was not unbecoming.

"While I was looking she opened an eye. This was green too, but it was none the less fascinating for all that. When I saw she had opened her eye I dropped the corner of the cloak again, asking her pardon if I had been indiscreet and promising her that when I got to Monnikendam I would go to the Burgomaster Vanclief's and borrow his daughter's finest frock to give her. She said nothing and I thought it was shame kept her dumb, and I signed to the others to say nothing, only telling them to bend to their oars with a will.

"Suddenly the cloaks were lifted, she springs up to leap overboard. What an idiot I was ever to have stopped her!"

"You held her back?"

"Exactly so, by her green hair. What followed ought to have opened my eyes; all alone as she was, she all but mastered the whole six of us. The Parisian for his part got a clout in the eye of her... He told me solemnly he had never seen a finer bit of boxing at the Courtille in Paris.

"For my part I thought she was a madwoman bent upon drowning herself. I seized her round the body and though her skin was as slippery as an eel's, I managed to hold her while my companions tied her hand and foot. Once securely bound she gave in, and after uttering a scream or two and shedding a few tears, made up her mind to lie quiet.

“There was not a man amongst us but had got his gruel, but the Parisian was in the worst case; every five minutes he kept bathing his eye with sea-water. If ever you get a bit of a whack, ‘tis a sovereign remedy, look you, is sea-water. Soon we landed and as the news spread of the treasure trove we had picked up, the whole village came running to the waterside. We carried the woman into the house and I sent to ask Burgomaster Vanclief’s daughter if she would be so good as to lend one of her dresses to the shipwrecked girl. Ignorance is bliss, you know.

“The Burgomaster’s daughter soon appeared bringing a complete costume with her. I introduced her into the room where our prisoner lay on a bed still tied and bound. The latter recognised her, it would seem, as a being of her own sex, for after motioning to the girl to untie her hands, and the latter having quickly done her this service, she began to scrutinize her with much curiosity, fingering her clothes as if to see whether or no they were part of her body and peeping under her dress. This the Burgomaster’s daughter very obligingly allowed her to do, pointing out the difference between skin and clothes, and undressing and dressing again to teach her the resemblance there was between them when they were naked and the difference when they were clothed.

“Coquetry, look you, is a vice that comes as natural to the savage as to the civilized woman, to the civilized woman as to the mermaid; our prisoner, instead of trying to escape, instead of any more cries and tears, began to examine with interest the gowns and bodices, the cap and gilt ornaments of the head-dress. Next she signified that she wanted to put them on!. She had only once seen how all these articles were adjusted and fastened and unfastened; but there, she was almost as clever about it as if she had never done anything else all her life but dress and undress. When her toilet was complete she looked about for water to see her reflection in it. The Burgomaster’s daughter handed her a mirror; she looked at herself, uttered a cry of surprise, and burst out laughing like a mad thing.

“It was at that moment the Curé came in and insisted, come what might, on baptizing her. Only when the Curé wanted to remove her cap she very nearly tore the good man’s eyes out of his head. He had to explain to her that it was only for a moment her head was to be bared; all the same she never let go either cap or gold ornaments, which she carefully put on again without anybody’s help directly the Priest was out of the room.

“I was dying to see her. So I went upstairs and asked the Burgomaster’s daughter if I might come in; whereupon she threw open the door. My five comrades were at my back, craning their necks in the passage; the Parisian brought up the rear with a compress of salt and water over his eye.

“I looked about for the Mermaid, but I did not recognise her. What I saw was a pretty Frisian girl; her hair was a trifle green, but what of that? green and gold, you know, go very well together.

“The Burgomaster’s daughter dropped me a sweeping curtsey. The Mermaid marked how she did it and followed suit. What things women are, sir, what actresses, what hypocrites, to be sure! It was barely two hours since she had made acquaintance with human beings and there she was laughing and crying, looking at herself in the glass and dropping curtseys. Oh it should surely have opened my eyes; but what is written is written!

“I began a conversation with her by means of signs. I asked her if she was not hungry. I knew it was through the stomach you make animals love you, and somehow I had a great wish, if only out of curiosity, to make this woman love me. She told me ‘yes ‘in the same way; whereupon I brought her watermelons, grapes, pears, and anything else in the way of fruit I could procure. She manifested no surprise, but pounced upon the viands directly she saw them. Only when she had eaten the fruit, she was for eating the plate, and we had all the difficulty in the world in making her understand that this was not eatable.

“Meantime the Curé had taken *his* precautions. He had explained to the Burgomaster’s daughter that, albeit the mermaid might be a fish, she was a fish that bore too strong a resemblance to a woman to remain lodged in a bachelor’s house. Accordingly, just as she was finishing her meal, the Burgomaster came for her with his wife and his other daughter.

“The two new friends started off, as happily as could be, arm in arm. Only the mermaid walked barefoot; she could not wear the shoes they had brought her, — not that they were too small, for it was just the opposite; but this part of her accoutrement was the last thing she could get accustomed to.

“Coming to the door, she cast a look at the sea. Perhaps she felt a sudden longing to return to her old home, but she would have had to push her way through the whole population of the village, which had assembled about the house to see her pass; besides she would have spoilt her fine clothes. She only shook her head and set off quietly for the Burgomaster’s house, followed by the assembled inhabitants of Monnikendam, shouting in chorus ‘the *Buchold!* the *Buchold!* ‘which means in Low Dutch the Water-maid. As she had no name of her own, the title stuck to her.

- “I had said a hundred times over that I would only marry a mermaid; and lo! here was one ready for me. So that night all my friends toasted my approaching marriage with the Buchold; she was young, she was pretty, she had looked at me out of her green eyes in a sort of way that I did not dislike, she was dumb; upon my word I was not loath to join in the toast.

“Three months later she could do everything a woman need do, — except speak. In her Frisian costume, she was the prettiest girl, not only in all Holland, but in all Frisia to boot; she did not seem ill-disposed towards me, and I was in love with her like a calf. I had every right to her, seeing it was I who had saved her life, and there were no difficulties to be apprehended from her relatives. So in due course I married her.

“She was wedded at the Town Hall before the Burgomaster under the name of Marie the Buchold, his reverence the Curé having deemed it becoming, when he baptized her, to give her the name of the Mother of Our Lord.

“There was a great dinner at my expense, followed by a ball, at which the newly-wed Marie did the honours, — by signs, drinking, eating, dancing like any other woman, only all the while as dumb as a tench. The guests were unanimous in their felicitations; seeing her so pretty and sweet *and dumb*, all said with one accord, ‘Lucky dog, Olifus, eh? lucky dog!’

“Next morning I woke at ten o’clock. She was awake already and was watching my slumbers. I opened my eyes suddenly, and I fancied I read on her features a strange look of mockery and mischief. However, directly she saw my eyes fixed on her, her face resumed its ordinary expression, and for the moment I forgot all about the other.

“‘Good morning, little wife,’ I said.

“‘Good morning, little husband,’ she answered back.

“I gave vent to a cry of despair, and the sweat rose to my brow; my wife could talk!

“It seems marriage had loosened the string of her tongue. This happened December 22nd, 1823.”

“And now your good health, sir,” added Père Olifus, tossing off a second glass of schnapps, and inviting Biard and myself to do the like, “and don’t you marry a mermaid!”

So saying, he passed the back of his hand over his lips, and resumed the thread of his narrative.

CHAPTER VI.

CONJUGAL TRIBULATIONS.

“MEANTIME, as my wife appeared to have got the use of her tongue only to say soft and pleasant things to me, I readily enough consoled myself for my disappointment. In fact, for a whole month I was perfectly happy. Everybody congratulated me; only the Parisian, when I boasted of my good luck, would answer by striking up:

“Va-t’en voir s’ils viennent, Jean,
Va-t’en voir s’ils viennent.

I must do him the justice to say *he* had distrusted the Buchold from the first.

“After a month of halcyon days, I began to see that foul weather was brewing; there were still occasional intervals of calm, but it was the calm that comes before the storm. As an old sailor should, I foresaw what was ahead and prepared to face it.

“It began about a voyage I had made to Amsterdam; she would have it I had paid a visit to an old sweetheart of mine who lived down by the harbour, and that I had spent the night with her.

“I must tell you that in less than a week my wife had learnt to say whatever she wanted, and that now, at the end of a month, she could have given lessons to any language master at Amsterdam, Rotterdam or The Hague. What angered me most in what she said about my visit to Amsterdam was the fact that it was true; you might have thought the witch-wife had followed me there, gone into the house with me, and seen everything that happened. I denied the facts till all was blue, but she would not be argued out of it, and threatened that the very next time such a thing occurred she would make me remember it. I took her threats for what women’s threats are worth as a rule, and as nothing in the world is more unbearable than a cross face, I cajoled and pacified the Buchold to such good purpose that she thought no more about it, or at any rate, appeared to think no more about it.

“A fortnight slipped by in comparative peace. At the end of that time I took some travellers over to Edam. They were to return the same evening to Monnikendam; but they were artists, and had found capital subjects to draw; so they told me they would keep me till the following day. Of course I might have gone back, telling them that as they did not keep to their agreement, I was not going to keep to mine, but as you will understand, a man does not treat good customers like that. Moreover, I had an old sweetheart at Edam, and I had not seen her since my marriage with the Buchold; she had given me a little nod from behind her window curtain as I passed down the street, and I had replied by a wink of the eye. This meant, being interpreted: ‘That’s all settled; if I have a moment to spare, I shall give you a look in.’ Now I had more than a moment; I had a whole night.

“This time I felt quite secure. My fair friend had to be careful; so whenever T went to see her before my marriage, it was always at night, by climbing a garden wall, opening a little door in a fence and scrambling into her room by the window. Nobody had ever known about these nocturnal expeditions, and nobody would know now. At eleven o’clock the night was as black as ink; I made my way to the wall and scaled it, opened the door I have mentioned, and scrambled in by the window — all successfully.”

“By gad!” said Biard, “you have a very graphic way of telling a story, Père Olifus; here’s to the health of your pretty sweetheart.”

“Oh! sir, it would be more to the point to drink to mine,” said Père Olifus in melancholy tones, draining a third glass of schnapps.

“Pooh! why, what could come to you in her room under these pleasant circumstances?”

“It was not in the room, sir, I came to grief, but as I left it.”

“Go on, Père Olifus, we are all attention; you are quite a Laurence Sterne at a story; go on.”

“Well, as I came out, — it was before daylight, you understand — she had to be careful as I have told you, and for my own part, after what had happened at home on my return from Amsterdam, I was not particularly anxious to be seen, — well, as I came out, after passing the little door in the fence, I encountered an obstacle in the middle of the garden walk, a mere nothing, a bit of twine, something stretched across my path. I had my knife in my pocket; I opened it, and slash! I cut the cord.

“But at the same moment, look you, I received a crack with a stick across the loins, — my word! such a crack! ‘You scoundrel! ‘I shouted, and seized hold of the stick. But there was nobody there, only a pear tree, to which the stick was fastened in a very ingenious way; by cutting the thread I had released the stick, and the stick once released came thump on my back. I scuttled off rubbing my back. My first thought had been that the girl’s father or her brothers had got an inkling of what was going on, and being afraid to attack me face to face, they had prepared this ambuscade. However, as nobody had laughed or made a sound or even stirred, I made off on tip-toe and back to my inn.

“At ten o’clock we left Edam, and half an hour later were in the harbour of Monnikendam. The instant I could make out my own house, I saw the Buchold standing at the door; she was waiting for me with looks of irritation that struck me as ominous. For my own part I put on a most smiling expression. No sooner had I crossed the threshold than she slammed to the door behind me.

“‘Ah!’ she began, ‘here’s pretty behaviour for a man six weeks married.’

“‘What behaviour? ‘I asked, with a look of extreme innocence.

“‘You dare to ask me that! ‘she cried.

“‘Certainly I do.’

“‘Hold your tongue, and answer my questions.’ Her green eyes were flashing fire.

“‘Where were you last night at eleven o’clock? tell me that. Where did you stay from eleven o’clock till five next morning? What happened to you as you came out from the place where you had spent those six hours?”

“‘I don’t know what you mean.’

“‘Oh, you don’t, don’t you?’

“‘No, I don’t.’

“‘Well then, I am going to tell you. You left the Inn at eleven o’clock, you climbed over a wall, you opened a door, you scaled a window, you got into a room where you stopped until five o’clock in the morning. At five in the morning you came out again, and you received a blow with a stick, and you went back to the Inn, rubbing your back. Just tell me, pray, if it is not all true.’

“Of course I said it was not, though I must confess I did not do so with the same confidence as the other time; besides, I bore my condemnation upon my person, for I had the mark of the stick across my shoulders.

“Still all the time I kept making sheep’s eyes at the Buchold. I managed to kiss her hand and presently her cheek, and grumbling still she ended by forgiving me.

“‘Take care,’ she said, ‘next time you won’t get off so cheaply.’

“‘Oh no! ‘I said to myself, ‘next time, mind you, I will keep a better look out, and then we shall see.’

“She nodded her head as if to say, ‘Yes, *we shall see!’*

“That witch of a Buchold, it really seemed as if she could read my thoughts.

“However, this time again we patched up the quarrel.

“A week later I took a party of travellers to Stavoren. It was a long way, and it was out of the question to get back the same day; I did not know how to pass the time, when suddenly I remembered I had a sweetheart in that neighbourhood. It was a pretty girl who lived at a mill on the banks of a pretty little lake between Bath and Stavoren. In former days when I went to see her, I used to swim across the lake, and as her window gave on the water she had only to reach me a hand and there I was in her room.

“This time it was even more convenient, for the lake was frozen. I borrowed a pair of skates. At ten o’clock I set out from Stavoren, at a quarter past ten I was by the lake side; at twenty- five minutes past I was under the fair lady’s window. I gave the usual signal and the window opened. They had heard of my marriage at the mill, so my sweetheart might well have shown some resentment. But she was a good-natured wench, so I soon made my peace.

“At six o’clock I took my leave. J felt perfectly secure; the lake was utterly lonely, nobody had seen me come and nobody was likely to see me go. I put on my skates and away I went. At the third or fourth stroke I felt the ice cracking under me. I tried to turn back, but it was too late. Something was dragging me towards a place where I could hear the water lapping; the ice had been broken whilst I was in the mill. In front of me was a channel of open water; I pressed hard on my heels, but all to no purpose. I came to the hole, and ‘good-night,’ I was in the lake.

“Luckily I can dive like a seal. I held my breath and looked for an opening. It is no easy job to find one’s bearings underneath the ice, I can tell you. At last I saw what looked like a strip of thinner ice; I was swimming towards it, when suddenly I felt something catch me by the leg and draw me down to the bottom. I was just opening my mouth to take a breath of air, but instead of that I swallowed a great gulp of water.

"Everything went black, and I heard a buzzing in my ears; I felt that if I did not rid myself, and that mighty quick, of what was dragging me down, I was a lost man. I kicked out with all my might, and to some purpose, for the thing that was pulling me let go. I took advantage of my release to rise to the surface. For two or three seconds more I banged with my head against the ice; finally stifling, half-dead, almost f-ainting, I succeeded producing a solution of continuity, as the mathematicians put it.

I got my head above the water, I took a deep, deep breath, I clung on to the ice, but the more I tried to get on to it, the more it kept breaking away. Eventually by a tremendous effort I dragged myself full length on to the slippery surface; and my weight being distributed, the ice held good. I got to my feet and struck out with my skates. Never a ship running free before the wind went the pace I went. I made a good thirty knots an hour, but on reaching the bank I was at the end of my strength.

"I lost consciousness, and when I recovered my Senses I found myself in a warm bed and saw I was in the room at the inn from which I had set out the night before. Some peasants going to market had found me stretched on the ground, half-dead and three parts frozen; they had lifted me into their cart and brought me back to Stavoren, where the landlady, who knew me, had taken every care of me.

"Two hours later, thanks to a bowl of punch, which I swallowed steaming hot, I was as well as ever. Our travellers had finished what they had to do by ten o'clock; they were in a hurry to get back; and so was I, for I was not a little anxious about the reception that awaited me at home. We hoisted sail at eleven with a fair wind. It is twelve leagues pretty near from Stavoren to Monnikendam, and we covered the distance in six hours, which is good going.

"This time it was not on the threshold of the door that the Buchold was waiting for me, it was at the water's edge. Her green eyes glittered in the gloom like two emeralds. She signed to me to go in front of her into the house. I said nothing, but my mind was made up, if she aggravated me too far, to give her one of those little marital corrections which they say women require every three months or so, if they are to become perfect wives. So I went quietly into the house and shut the door myself. Then taking a seat —

"'Well, what now? 'said I. "'What now, indeed! 'she screamed. "'Yes, what do you want? '"'What do I want! I want to tell you, you are a blackguard to go trapesing about the way you do, running the risk of getting drowned and leaving your poor wife a widow with a child upon her hands.' "'Eh, what, a child? '"'Yes, you villain, I am with child, you know that well enough! '"'Not t! Upon my word.' " Well, if you didn't know it, I'll tell you so now.'

"'I am glad to hear it.' "'So you are glad to hear it.' "'Would you have me say I am sorry to hear it?'

"'There you go, bandying words with me instead of asking my pardon.' "'Your pardon for what? '"'For running about o' nights like a were-wolf, for going courting miller girls. Is it a proper time for skating, I ask you that, eh, six o'clock in the morning?'

"Come now,' said I, 'I am getting sick of your spying ways, and if you don't let me be — '

"'What will you do? '"I had a fine Bengal-bamboo, as whippy as a rush, which I used for beating my clothes with on Sundays. I took it from its corner and made it whistle about the Buchold's ears.

"'See that, my pet! I need say no more.'

"'Oh, ho! 'cried she. 'You threaten me, do you? Just you wait a moment.'

"Her eyes shot two flashes of green lightning: she sprang upon my bamboo, tore it from my hands as easily as I might have done with a child, and setting her teeth, gave me a thrashing — Oh, Lord, a thrashing that would have made the devil wince.

"I had forgotten the business in the boat when she had come near trouncing all six of us, you know; but at the first blows she gave me, I remembered it, never fear. I tried to resist, but it was a perfect hail-storm! I began with threatening and cursing and swearing, and I finished by crying for mercy. I had my bellyful, as they say, and more than my bellyful.

"When she saw I was on my knees, she stopped striking.

"'There,' she said, 'that is all right! that will do for this time, but don't let me catch you at it again, or next time you won't get off so cheaply.'

"'Tarnation! 'I muttered, 'unless you kill me outright...'

"'Silence! let's get to bed,' she said, 'indeed you must be tired!'

"I was worse than tired, I was utterly done up. I went to bed without a word; I turned my nose to the wall; I shut my eyes; I pretended to go to sleep, but I took good care to keep one eye open.

CHAPTER VII.

FLIGHT.

““YOU understand I was not wasting my time. The life I was leading was past bearing; and I was pondering over some way of escaping the Buchold’s clutches and paying her back into the bargain. I did not know why, but I had a shrewd idea it was my wife who-had set the trap at Edam and broken the ice on the lake of Stavoren.

“Nor was that all. You will remember I had felt something dragging me by the leg to the bottom of the water, and that I had only got rid of this something by kicking out with all my might. Now it struck me forcibly that it was not something but *somebody*, that had caught me by the leg, and I strongly suspected that somebody was the Buchold.

“Some day or other, I thought to myself, I shall surely find out if it was really she.

“‘But how? ‘said I, interrupting Père Olifus in his narrative.

“Lord! sir, you must remember I had my skates on my feet. I had not troubled, before I kicked out, to take them off. Now a kick with a skate is not a nice thing, least of all when you kick straight downwards. Well, my kick had been straight downwards, and if it was the Buchold who had received it she was bound to bear the marks of it somewhere.

“Very true!”

“So I said to myself we must lie low and pretend to have forgotten all about the stick-at Edam, the ducking at Stavoren and the thrashing at Monnikendam; if she it was, she shall pay for everything at one blow. This resolve taken, I turned round and went to sleep.

“Next morning, while she was still asleep, I lifted the sheets and peeped underneath; she had not the smallest mark of a skate on any part of her body. Only I noticed that, instead of putting on her nightcap, as usual, she was wearing her Frisian cap of copper.

“‘Good! ‘said I, ‘if you still keep it on to-morrow it means that there is something underneath.’ But I never let on, you know; I began dressing, and meantime the Buchold awoke. Her first movement was to put her hand to her head.

"'Good! 'said I again, 'we shall find out, never fear.' But I said it under my breath, pretending to smile all the time. On her part, I am bound to say, directly the first moment of anger was over, she seemed to think no more about it; but then the first moment was a caution! The day passed without either of us mentioning the little incident of the night before, and we might have been a pair of turtle-doves.

"When night came we went to bed. As before, the Buchold retained her Frisian cap. All night long I longed like the devil to get up, light the lamp, and open the little catch fastening that confounded cap. But it was as if she did it on purpose to thwart me; you would have thought the woman had a fever — she never once left off turning and twisting from side to side. I waited patiently, hoping that next night she would sleep more peacefully.

"Next night came, and I had my wish this time, for she slept like a log. I got up softly and lit the lamp. The Buchold was lying on her side just as I wanted. I touched the catch, the metal opened, and underneath, just above the temple, I saw a long cut there was no mistaking, The blade of the skate had cut her head open, and but for her confounded green locks, which had deadened the blow, would have cracked her skull.

"I saw it all. Not only was it my wife who had arranged the trap at Edam and broken the ice on the lake, but it was she too who had dragged me down by the leg, with the full intention of drowning me. This done, back she would have gone to Monnikendam, and as we had arranged for all my little property to go to the survivor, she would have inherited everything I had, dear clever little woman!

"There was nothing to be done with such a creature, and my mind was soon made up. I had put all my money in a bag beforehand; with this I meant to take ship for some foreign land, I cared not what, and there, happen what might, I would live peaceful and happy, always provided it were far enough away from the Buchold. With this purpose in view, I put out the lamp, dressed quietly, took my bag of money from the cupboard, and crept to the door on tiptoe.

"I was just putting my hand on the latch when I felt a clutch on my collar and found myself being dragged forcibly back. I looked round and saw it was that witch-wife of a Buchold; she had only been pretending sleep, and had followed all my proceedings.

"'Ah ha! 'she cried, 'so that's what you are after? After deceiving me, you forsake me, and after forsaking me, you are going to ruin me I Wait a bit, you wait a bit!'

"So saying, she took the bamboo from its corner; but meantime I seized one of the fire-dogs from the hearth. Both struck simultaneously; but I kept my feet, while she fell with a crash and a scream, or rather a hoarse moan, and lay still.

"'Good!'said I, 'she is dead; upon my soul! so much the better; I have not hurt her half as much as she wanted to hurt me.'

"Then, after making sure that my bag of money was safe in my pocket, I hurried out of the house, shut the door behind me, pitched the key into the sea, and started running across the open country towards Amsterdam. In half an hour I was on the seashore. I woke up a fisherman of my acquaintance, who was asleep in his hut. I told him I was sa unhappy with my wife that I had made up my mind that very night to leave the country. I begged him therefore to take me to Amsterdam, where I would seize the first opportunity that offered for leaving Holland, The fellow got into his clothes, launched his boat, and hoisted sail for Amsterdam.

"In another half-hour we were entering the harbour. A magnificent three-master was at that very moment setting sail for the Indies. It never took me long to make up my mind. "Pon my word! 'I said to my friend, 'here's the ship for me, and if the Captain is only reasonable and don't ask too much passage money, we shall soon strike a bargain.'

"So I hailed the Captain and he stepped up to the bulwarks.

"'Boat ahoy! who are you? 'he asked.

"'Someone wanting to know if you have room left for a passenger.'

"'Yes; pull round to the starboard quarter, and you will find the ladder.'

"'It is not worth the trouble; just heave me a rope's-end.'

"'Good! you are a sailor-man, it seems.'

"'Something like it.'

"Then turning to the fisherman.

"'Now, my lad,' said I 'I want you to drink my health, and here's a ten florin bit for you.'

"'Why, thunder and lightning, what's this?'

"'What's wrong? 'I asked.

"This was wrong, I had just opened my bag, and instead of being full of money it was full of stones.

"'Pon life! my lad,' I said to the fisherman, showing him my bag, 'see for yourself; I meant you well, but I have been robbed.'

"'Nonsense!'

"'I have, honour bright! 'and I emptied the contents of my bag into the boat.

"'Well, well! I am sorry for you, Père Olifus,' said the fine fellow! 'Anyway you meant me well, and I will drink your health all the same, never fear.'

"'Ho there! 'bawled a voice from the deck; 'the anchor's a-peak.'

"I wrung the fisherman's hand, grasped he line, and sprang up the side like a squirrel.

"'Come aboard, sir,' said I on reaching the deck.

"'Well,' asked the Captain, 'and where are your trunks?'

"'What does a deck-hand want with a trunk?'

"'Deck-hand? you said passenger.'

"'Passenger, did I? then it was a slip of the tongue. I meant to say, 'have you still room for a hand?"

'"Well, you seem a handy sort of chap,' said the Captain. 'Yes, I have room for a hand, and what's more, at forty francs a month wages; I am a Captain in the East India Company's service, and they pay good money.'

"'If they pay good money, they will have good work, that's all about it.'

"The Captain said no more, neither did I; and the bargain was every bit as binding as if all the attorneys in Holland had had a finger in the pie.

"Next day but one we were on the high seas.

CHAPTER VIII.

MAN OVERBOARD.

“THE first land we saw after losing sight of the coast of France was the little island of Porto-Santo lying to the north of Madeira. Madeira itself was hid in a fog, and only became visible two hours later.

“We left the harbour of Funchal to port, and continued our course. The fourth day after doubling Madeira we had a view of the Peak of Teneriffe, which alternately appeared and disappeared in the rolling billows of mist, which looked like another sea beating upon its flanks. We held on without stopping, and were soon sailing a sea that was like one vast cress-bed; thick layers of dark green seaweed, turning to yellow, covered the surface of the ocean and formed those clustering bunches of vegetable matter which sailors call the ‘grapes of the tropics.’

“It was not the first time I had made such-like voyages. I had been twice to, Buenos Ayres, and I had seen what mariners call blue water, so I was quite in my element and felt at ease. The ship was a stout sailer and made seven or eight knots an hour. Every knot took me a mile further from the Buchold, and what better could I wish for? We crossed the line, and there were the usual high jinks on board. I showed my papers duly authenticated by Father Neptune, and instead of being douched with salt water, I douched other people.

“The Captain was a good sort, and he had broached a puncheon of rum, so that when I turned in I was pretty well half- seas over. Suddenly, as I lay there snoozing, you know, now singing to myself, now snoring, making snatches at the cockroaches, which I took for flying fish, suddenly I thought I saw a tall white figure come down the hatchway and stalk up to my hammock. As it drew nearer, I recognised the Buchold; I may have gone on snoring perhaps, but I left off singing, I give you my word.

“‘Ah ha! ‘she cried, ‘twice over you have broken my head, once with a skate, and once with a fire-dog; but instead of repenting in sackcloth and ashes, look at the pretty state you are in, you tosspot!’

“I tried to answer her, but the funny thing was, it was she who was talking now, while I had gone dumb.

“‘Oh, it’s no use,’ she went on. ‘You are not only dumb, you are paralysed too; just try to escape, now do.’

“She saw quite well what I was about, the confounded creature, and that I was making superhuman efforts to climb out of my hammock; but there, my leg was as stiff as the mainmast and it would have needed the capstan to shift me. So I made the best of it; I hove to and lay there as steady as a buoy.

“Luckily I could shut my eyes and not see her — that was some consolation; but unluckily I could not shut my ears and not hear her. She talked and she scolded and she railed till it became only a buzzing in my ears, without my hearing the separate words, then I ceased to hear even the buzzing, then I heard the bells strike; then the boatswain’s mate bawling —

“‘Second watch on deck! ‘“‘You know what the watches are? ‘asked Père Olifus, turning to me.

“‘Yes, yes,’ I told him; ‘go on with your story.’

“Now I belonged to the second watch; they were calling me. I heard them calling, but I couldn’t stir hand or foot. I could only say to myself: ‘You are in for a good thing, Olifus; you are going to get a taste of the triangle. Now then, you miserable fellow, they’re calling you; now, lazy bones, get up! ‘All this inside my noddle; outside not a limb moved.

“Suddenly I feel someone shaking me. Thinking it is the Buchold, I try to make myself small. Another shake more vigorous still, but I don’t budge an inch. Next I hear an oath fit to tear the mainsail and a voice bawling — “‘Halloa, are you dead? ‘“Good! I recognise the voice of the boatswain’s mate.

“‘No, no, I am not dead — I am not dead, sir; here I am. Only just help me out of my hammock.’

“‘What! Help you out of your hammock?’

“‘Yes, I can’t budge an inch by myself.’

“‘God forgive me, I think he is not sober yet. Just you wait,’ and so saying he picks up a broom handle that was lying handy.

“I don’t know if it was fear that gave me strength or whether my fit of numbness had passed, but I hop out of my hammock as light as a bird, crying —

"'Here I am, here I am! It is all along of that damned Buchold! Verily, she was born for my undoing, that creature was.'

"'Buchold or no Buchold, don't let it happen to-morrow,' said the boatswain's mate, 'or we shall see.'

"'Oh, to-morrow! 'I cried, as I drew on my breeches and scrambled up the hatchway ladder, 'there's no fear of that.'

"'Yes, to-morrow you won't be drunk, I understand. This time I will say no more about it: We don't cross the line every day. On deck, and smart's the word.'

"Never have I seen such a night. The sky, I give you my word, sir, seemed powdered with gold-dust instead of stars.

For the sea, it was rippling under a gentle breeze that seemed wafting one to Paradise. More than that, the ship seemed to set the waves afire as she ploughed through them. There was nothing to do on deck; she was going under full sail, royals and studding-sails all set, like a girl going to mass of a Sunday.

"I leant over the side and looked at the water. You can't imagine anything so fine. They say it's little fish that cause it; *I* like to think it is God Almighty does it. It was just as if there were fifty Roman candles all along the ship's hull. There were fireworks without end that shot up flames in the vessel's wake, all blazing against the dark outlines of the waves, as if they were shaking out the folds of a great fiery flag at the bottom of the sea.

"Suddenly in the middle of it all I catch sight of something like a human form tossing and rolling. I see it plainer and plainer! What is it? the Buchold!

"You need not ask if I tried to spring back; but, good Lord! I was stuck to the bulwarks like a dried cod, so that I couldn't get away. Playing about in the water, turning head over heels, diving and floating, she was beckoning and smiling and tempting me, till I felt my feet slipping and my head turning. I tried to hold on, but I could find nothing to clutch; I tried to cry out, but I could not utter a sound; something was drawing me on, and on, and on. Ah, cursed Siren! I felt my hair stand on end; I was sweating at every pore. I was slipping, slipping away, and felt myself going, going, head first. Cursed, cursed Siren!

"Suddenly someone caught me by the slack of my breeches.

"'Ho there, Olifus, are you gone mad? 'cried the boatswain's mate, hauling me inboard. 'Help, help here, quick! a couple of hands, help, I say.'

"They ran up only just in time! I was dragging him overboard with me. I fell back, thud! on the deck. I tell you, sir, I was wet to the skin; my teeth were chattering and my eyes rolling.

"'Good,' said the boatswain's mate, 'when a man has fits, he should say so, anyway; it's not the first time, I wager. Well, this is a pretty kettle of fish, a deck-hand with epilepsy. Very fine indeed. You are no better than a silly woman, Olifus!'

"It's quite true, sir, I was kicking my heels and stammering and stuttering as I spoke. 'No, no, it is not a fit, it is the Buchold. Did you not see her? '"'See what?'

"'The Buchold; there she was playing about in the water and in the fire like a salamander; she was calling me and enticing me and dragging me overboard she was, the cursed siren!'

"'What's that you are talking about sirens, eh?'

"'Oh, nothing, nothing... "Look you, sir," Père Olifus interrupted himself to say, "if you are going long voyages, you must never talk to the hands about sirens or nereïds or mermaids or mermen or any such things. On shore it is all right; on shore they make a joke of it, sailor-men do, but at sea they don't like it, it frightens them.

"Anyway, I had precious nearly gone overboard, and, but for the boatswain's mate, I should certainly have been in Davy Jones's locker. I went and sat down by the mizzen-mast; I passed my arm round a stay and waited for morning. When daylight came, I thought it was all a dream; only as I was in a high fever I saw there must have been some reality in it after all. It was plain enough; I had given the Buchold one over the head, and such a good one it had killed her dead, and it was her soul had come to claim my prayers.

"Unfortunately the boats of the East India Company do not carry Chaplains; if there had been a Chaplain on board, I should have got him to sing a mass, and that would have settled it. As it was I thought of another dodge sailors are familiar with. I took a nutmeg, wrote the Buchold's name on it, wrapped it up in a bit of rag, and clapped the whole thing in a tin box, scratched two crosses on the lid with a star between them, and when darkness came on, threw the talisman into the sea, saying a *De profundis;* then I went below and I turned into my hammock.

"I was no sooner there than I heard a shout of 'Man overboard!'

"You know, when you hear that cry, it is meant for everybody; on board ship, if it is my mate's turn to-day, it may very likely be mine to-morrow. I leapt out of my hammock, and ran up on; deck.

"There was a moment's confusion, everybody speaking at once, and asking a hundred questions. However, in every well-found ship there is always a man with a knife told off to cut loose the lifebuoy and pitch it into the sea; the fellow had done his duty, and the buoy was now tossing in the ship's wake.

"Meantime the Captain was shouting: 'Put your helm down; let go your topsails; slack away your halliards and top- gallantsail sheets.'

"That's how it's done, you know, when a man falls overboard. The ship is hove to, and to do this, if you didn't slack off sheets and halliards, while she was falling away, you would have some of your stu'n-sail booms carried away for certain, and your studding-sails split — especially if she was running free.

"At the same time they were hoisting out a boat by the tackles. They took a rope strong enough to bear the strain, passed it down and through a block attached to the falls, and so got her launched.

"Meanwhile all hands were crowded astern. It was a regular life-buoy that had been dropped, carrying a port fire, which burned merrily, so that we could see someone swimming away, swimming away for the buoy!

"When I say we could see, I'm wrong. I was the only one that could. I kept saying, 'Do you see, do you see? 'but the others only answered, 'No, we don't see anything.'

"Then presently they began to look about them and mutter, 'It's all mighty funny, we seem to be all here! Who was it saw a man tumble overboard? 'but everybody said 'I didn't, I didn't.'

"'Well then, who shouted man overboard! 'but everybody said the same, 'I didn't, I didn't.'

"Meantime the swimmer had reached the buoy, I could distinctly see someone clinging to it, clinging on top of it.

"« Good,' said I, 'he has got hold of it.'

"'Got hold of what?'

"'Why, the buoy.'

"'Who has got hold of it?'

"'The man overboard, to be sure.'

"'You can see someone on the buoy?'

"'Good Lord, of course I can!'

"'Oh ho! it is Olifus who sees someone on the buoy,' muttered the boatswain's mate. 'I always thought that I had good eyes until now, but I suppose I was wrong.'

"By this time the boat was launched and was pulling for the buoy.

"'Boat ahoy! 'hailed the boatswain's mate.

"'Can you see anybody on the buoy?'

"'Nobody.'

"'Look here, I have got a notion in my head,' said the boatswain's mate, turning to the hands.

"« What's that.'

"'Why, that it was Olifus who shouted man overboard!'

"'Good Lord! what next?'

"'Hang it! nobody is missing, nobody can see a soul on the buoy; there is only Olifus says someone is overboard, only Olifus can see someone sticking to the buoy; he must have his reasons for it all.'

"'I don't say someone is missing, I say there is someone on the buoy,'

"'Well, we shall see; here comes the boat, bringing it back.'

"Indeed by this time the boat had reached the buoy, made it fast astern, and was towing it along in the wake.

"I could distinctly see a figure seated on that confounded buoy, and the nearer the boat came the more plainly could I make it out.

"'Boat ahoy! 'hailed the boatswain's mate. 'What have you got there?'

"'Nothing.'

"'What, nothing! 'I cried, 'can't you see?'

"'Well, well!'but what is the matter with the man? you would think his eyes were going to jump out of his head.'

"The fact is, you see, I had just seen how things stood, and I was saying to myself, well, I *am* damned. Would you believe it, sir, the figure on the buoy was the Buchold, whom I thought I had thrown into the sea in a tin box.

"'Don't bring her aboard,' I screamed, 'pitch her into the sea... Don't you see it's a siren? Don't you see it's a mermaid? Don't you see it's the foul fiend!'

"'Come, come, the man is stark, staring mad; lash the fellow down and tell the surgeon.' In two twos I was lashed tight and carried to a cot in the sick bay; then the surgeon appeared, lancet in hand.

"'Oh, no!'said he, 'it is nothing; a bit of brain fever, that's all. I am going to bleed him heavily, and if he is not dead in three days, why, there is a good chance he will get over it.'

"I remember nothing more except that I felt a prick in my arm, that I saw the blood running, and fainted away.

"However, I did not faint so quick but I beard the Captain say in a big voice — "'Nobody, eh? 'and all hands answer 'Nobody.'

"'Ah! that scoundrel Olifus, I can promise him one thing, and that is to put him ashore on the first land we touch at.'

"This was the pleasant bit of news I heard before I lost consciousness.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PEARL FISHERY.

“THE Captain was as good as his word; when I came to myself I was indeed on shore. I inquired in what part of the world I might be, and learnt that the three-master, the *Jean de Witte* — that was the name of my ship — had put in at Madagascar and landed me there.

“As I had served three months and a half aboard the *Jean de Witte*, I found under my pillow a sum of a hundred and forty francs, which was full pay for my three months and a half. You see the Captain had behaved well after all. He might have kept back a month’s pay, seeing I had been lying disabled for the last month. During that month, though I knew nothing about it, we had touched at St. Helena, doubled the Cape, and cast anchor at Tamatave, where they had put me ashore.

“As it was not at Tamatave that I wanted to start an enterprise of any sort, but rather in the Indies, I made inquiries of my landlord about means of getting there. A ship sailing for the Indies was a rare event at Tamatave, so my landlord advised me to make for Sainte-Marie, where I should have a better chance. A vessel was to sail in a week’s time for Pointe-Larrée; I made up my mind to take passage in her, if I felt better within the next seven days. There was only one thing I dreaded, sir, only one thing that could throw me back, that was if by any chance they had landed my wife along with me.

“The first night, look you, I passed in transports of mortal terror; at the slight sound I cried ‘There’s the Buchold,’ and the sweat came out on my forehead; you understand I was a bit feverish still. At last day dawned. Nothing had happened, and I breathed more freely.

“The second night, still nothing. The third, the same. The fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, nothing. I began to make giant strides towards recovery. So when my landlord came and asked me:

“‘Come, are you well enough to start for Sainte-Marie?’

“‘I should think so,’ said I, — and in ten minutes I was ready.

“Our accounts were soon settled; he would not take a penny. I was not displeased to pay him in thanks instead of hard cash, seeing how much better provided I was with the first than the second. So I did not press him; we shook hands warmly and I went on board for Pointe-Larrée.

“It was not without trepidation that I found myself again at sea. Every fish I caught sight of I thought was my wife. They wanted to fish on the way, but I begged them so hard not to, that the crew had not the heart to drop a line. I was not really at ease till we reached Pointe-Larrée. The sea was the Buchold’s element; but as I had not seen her during the passage I told myself, ‘good! she has lost the scent.’

“All the same I resolved that I would go overland from Pointe-Larrée to Tintingue. The land was my element, and I felt that I was the stronger there. It was funny all the same, for up to now I had never seen what good the land was except for filling watercasks and drying fish. So I struck a bargain with two blacks, who for a knife and fork I had, which could be put together and separated into two again, agreed to guide me from Pointe-Larrée to Tintingue. You understand I was bound to spare my hundred and forty francs all I could.

“Next day we started. It could hardly be called going over *land,* mind you; for everywhere the road was intersected with rivers and marshes, where we had the water up to our middles. Here and there we could see islands of firm ground, which were swarming with game. “Are you a sportsman, sir? “‘Yes, I am.”

“Well, if you had been there, you would have had a fine time. Guinea-fowl, turtle-doves, quails, green pigeons, blue pigeons, were flying about in thousands, so that merely by using our sticks we got materials for a dinner fit for a king. At mid-day we called a halt under a clump of palm-trees and prepared our meal. I plucked the guinea-fowl, my negroes lit a fire and we shook down a shower of dates — the King of Holland never ate better — and so fell to. There was only one thing we lacked, a good bottle of Bordeaux or Edinburgh ale, but as I am a philosopher and can dispense with what I have not got, I made my way to a brook to satisfy my thirst.

“Seeing this, one of my guides said:

“‘No good drink water, massa.’

“‘Why certainly,’ I told him, ‘I know it’s not good; I would much rather have wine.’

“‘Massa rather hab wine?’

"'Why, of course, massa much rather have wine,' I returned impatiently.

"'Well den, me gib him some.'

"'What, wine?'

"'Yes, massa, new wine; come wid me."

"I followed the fellow, muttering to myself:

"'Ah, my joker, if you are going to play me a trick, I will make it hot for you when we get to our journey's end.'

"I said *when we get to our journeys end,* look you, because *en route* my rascals might easily have turned the tables upon me, whereas once there...

"Yes, yes, I understand."

"Well, I followed him; after going thirty or forty yards, he stopped, and looking about him:

"Come 'long, massa, come 'long, massa, here is the cask,' he said pointing to a tree.

"I was still muttering to myself, 'Ah, my joker, if you are playing me a trick.'"

"Well, it was a ravenala the tree he pointed out to you," put in Biard.

Olifus looked at him with wide eyes of wonder.

"What, you know that, do you?"

"Know that? of course I do."

"Yes, as you say, it was a ravenala, otherwise called the Traveller's Tree. Well, I had knocked about the world a bit, I had, yet I did not know the tree; so when he plucked a leaf which he gave me folded up into a cup, saying to me:

"'Lay hold, massa, and no spill a drop I continued to say to myself, 'Ah, ha, my joker! if...'

"Weil, sir, he made a slash with my knife in the bark, and there came a gush of water, look you — or I should say, wine — I doffed my hat to him, sir, as if that monkey-faced nigger had been a man like myself. I drank first and my guides after me, and then I drank again. I could have gone on drinking all day, but they told me we must be starting afresh. I would fain have put a spigot in the tree, I was so sorry to see such good liquor running to waste, but they assured me that I should find ravenalas all the way: that there were whole forests of ravenalas in Madagascar. For the moment I felt a strong wish to stop in Magadascar for good and all and cultivate one of these forests. Next day we reached Tintingue; my guides had not deceived me, all the way along we had found ravenalas, which I tapped.

“At Tintingue, as luck would have it, I met with a rich Cingalese who followed the pearl fishery. The fishing season, which is in March, had arrived and he had come to recruit divers on the Zanzibar coast, and among the subjects of King Radhama, who are reputed the best pearl fishers in the world. He saw that I was a European, and as he was looking for a manager of the fisheries, he thought I might suit him. It suited me to perfection; I asked him to take me on trial, and he agreed. A fortnight later we cast anchor in the roadstead of Colombo.

“There was no time to lose; the fishing was already begun. After merely touching at Colombo, we weighed anchor again for Condatchy, which is the emporium of the Island.

“My Cingalese was one of the principal lessees of the fisheries. We set off with a perfect fleet of boats, and steered for the Island of Manaar, near which are the fishing-grounds.

“Our flotilla consisted of ten boats, each carrying twenty men. Of these twenty hands, ten form the crew for working the vessel, ten are divers. The boats are of a special build; they are long and broad, have only one mast and sail, and do not draw more than eighteen inches. I was the skipper in charge of one of these boats.

“I had warned my employer beforehand that I knew nothing about pearl-fishing, but that I was first-rate at seamanship, and, as a matter of fact, he soon saw I managed my boat in a fashion that made the other skippers look like mere land-lubbers. However, after three days’ work I saw one thing plainly — that our divers, if they were smart fellows, could sometimes make, in one day, ten times what I as captain could gain in a month. This arose from the fact that the divers are allowed a share, namely, a tenth, of the pearls they gather: so that if a man is lucky and comes across a bank of pearl oysters he may earn ten, fifteen, even twenty thousand livres during the season, which lasts two months, whilst in the same two months I was paid five hundred livres, neither more nor less.

“Accordingly I set to work to master the method these men employed. After all, it was nothing so very difficult; each diver would take between his two feet or would fasten round his loins a stone weighing ten pounds or so, then weighted with this stone, which enabled him to sink to the bottom, he would leap overboard, holding a string bag in one hand while he collected with the other as many oysters as he could find. When he runs short of air, he shakes the line that ties him to the boat and they haul him back to the surface. There is one of the crew in charge of each rope, so that the diver may never have to signal more than once. This is why the crew number the same as the divers. The fishing was excellent, and there was only one thing I regretted, that I had joined as captain instead of diver. At Monnikendam I had enjoyed some reputation for my powers of staying under water, an accomplishment which had stood me in good stead when I was forced to find a way out from under the ice, you remember, on the lake of Stavoren. There was only one thing that consoled me somewhat — the horrid fear I had of encountering the Buchold, if I took to diving; that would indeed have been no joke, so I gave up the idea. I had rather be skipper all my life at two hundred and fifty livres a month.

“Moreover, that was not the only danger. The sharks know the fishing season as well as if they kept almanacks, and it is incredible, during the two months it lasts, what multitudes of these fish come cruising about the Gulf of Manaar. There was never a day without a fatal accident.

But I am bound to say, if it had only been sharks, that would not have stopped my turning diver; what I did fear was the Buchold.

“Amongst our divers we had a negro and his son. They were two splendid specimens of humanity, Africans, who had been presented to my Cingalese master by the Imaum of Muscat himself; the boy was fifteen and the father thirty- five. They were the boldest and best divers we had. During the ten or twelve days the fishing had lasted, the two had gathered by themselves almost as many oysters as the eight other fishermen all put together. I had taken a fancy to the little black lad, and amongst all his companions he it was that I specially watched in his dives; so each time he left the water he always came and laid his winnings between my legs, and I looked after his interests. He was called Abel.

“One day he dives as usual. Now he used always to remain under water fifteen or twenty seconds — which is an enormous long while, remember. This time, contrary to custom, scarcely has he disappeared before he shakes the line. But there, there, the man who was in charge of the rope was thinking of something else, having just seen the poor boy plunge into the sea. I shout to him: ‘Haul in, man; haul in, you fool! Can’t you see there is something wrong down below? Haul in, I say! ‘But the fellow was too late. I see a great red stain rise to the surface, and then in the middle of it the lad splashing about with one leg bitten off above the knee. Next instant the father comes up, sees his child’s face convulsed with agony, and the water dyed red with blood, but he does not make a sound. Only his countenance, usually as black as ebony, has turned the colour of ashes. He climbs into the boat with the lad in his arms, lays him across my knees, whips out a great knife, cuts the line fastening the stone round his waist and the one tying him to the boat, and plunges in, just as the shark was coming to the surface. I shout: ‘Look out, you fellows, I know my man; we are going to see something worth looking at.’ The words were hardly out of my mouth when, lo! the shark, whose dark fin was just visible above the surface, begins lashing the sea with his tail and then dives too; there was a wild whirling, swirling and eddying, and the lad yelling, with blazing eyes, quite forgetting his pain, ‘Well done, father, well done! Kill him, kill him, kill him! ‘and trying to jump out of the boat with his poor mangled leg. Believe me, you will never see anything to match what happened before our eyes; the fight lasted a quarter of an hour — a full quarter of an hour. During all that time he only rose five times to the surface to get breath, and cast a look at his son, as much as to say: ‘Never fear, my boy, you shall be avenged.’ Then down he went again, and instantly the sea is agitated once more as if by a submarine tempest. For twenty yards all round the sea was reddened with blood; the great fish would leap six feet out of the water, and we could see its belly slashed open and the entrails protruding. Presently the sea grew calmer; it was not the man now that came up to breathe — it was the fish. At last the death agony began. The shark turned over on its back, lashed the air furiously with its tail, dived, reappeared, dived again; then you could see what looked like flashes of silver glittering under the waves. It was the monster rising to the surface, belly uppermost, rolling about as helpless as a log. The shark was dead.

“Then the negro came up too, climbed on board, took his child in his arms and sat down at the foot of the mast. The surgeon of a French vessel which was lying in the Bay of Colombo amputated poor Abel’s leg, and the lessee of the fisheries allowed the father to keep the whole of the oysters he had secured.

“Looking at the shark floating on the surface and counting its sixty-three wounds, two of which pierced the heart, I had made the reflection that since a man can defend himself against a shark and kill it in fair fight, he ought to be able to defend himself against a woman and get the best of her, even though she be a mermaid. I felt ashamed of my cowardice, and learning that the two negroes’ share of pearl oysters was valued at over twelve thousand livres for ten days' fishing, I was tormented with the thought of making my fortune too. So the first time my Cingalese friend came to pay us a visit, as he never failed to do every four or five days, I asked him as a favour to exchange my berth as skipper for that of a common diver.

"The proposal appeared to annoy him. 'Olifus,' he said to me in Dutch, I am sorry you should ask me that; you are one of my best skippers, and if I have to double your pay to keep you, I am ready to do it.'

"'You are very kind,' I replied, 'but, look you, I am Breton by race, with a strain of Dutchman thrown in; when a thing once gets into my head, it sticks there so tight I can't drive it out, even if I want to. I have got it into my head to fish for pearls, and fish for pearls I will, that and nothing else.'

"'Can you dive, anyway?'

"'Oh! I was born in Denmark, the land of seals,'

"'Well, let's see what you can do.'

"'Oh, if that's all,' said I, I will soon show you.'

"In a jiffy I had stripped naked, tied a ten-pound stone round my ankles, and taken a net in my left hand, as I had seen the other divers do. Nor did I forget to slip a good stout knife into my belt and tied my life-line in the place poor little Abel used to occupy. Then I said to myself, 'My word! if the Buchold is there, I cannot help it; we shall see what we shall see,' and sprang into the sea.

"The depth was about seven fathoms. I sank quickly to the bottom, then opened my eyes and looked about me. It was a terrible moment! But there was no Buchold, and there *were* pearl oysters in shovelfuls. I filled my net and pulled the line for them to haul me up. I had stayed, this first try, for ten seconds under water.

"I poured out the contents of my net at the great man's feet.

"'There,' said I, 'what do you say to that?'

"'I say that you are a handy diver; no doubt about it. You can make your fortune, and I have no right to hinder you.'

"His readiness to do what I wished made me feel a bit ashamed of myself. I compared his behaviour with my own, and recognised he was the better man.

"'However,' I told him, 'since you engaged me as skipper and not as diver, you have a right to ask more of me than of the others.'

"'No,' said he, we will settle it differently, I hope, to everybody's satisfaction. You are a good skipper, and a good diver; be skipper for me and diver for yourself. The divers are entitled to one-tenth of their take; as you are doing work for me, I will give you an eighth of yours; that is to say, you shall be skipper seven days and the eighth day diver. It is understood, of course, that all you take on the eighth day will be your own. Does that suit your book? ‘“I should just think it did.’ “‘Well now, as the season is already begun some while ago, let’s suppose our bargain was struck a week ago, and call to-morrow the eighth day.’

“There was nothing more to be said, except to thank him; so I took his hand and kissed it, which is the way they have of thanking people in that country.

“‘awaited the morrow with impatience.”

CHAPTER X.

NAHI-NAVA-NAHINA.

"I HAD done quite right," went on Père Olifus after exchanging the schnapps for the rum. "The fishing proved excellent; during the six days I devoted myself to this employment, I collected pearls to the value of something like seven thousand francs, and I saw no sharks and no Buchold.

"The season came to an end. I thanked my Cingalese, offering him my services for the following year, and after turning my pearls into cash, I retired to Negombo, a charming little village lying amidst meadows and plantations of cinnamon trees. My intention was to utilise the whole space of time that must intervene between the two fishing seasons, by trading either in cinnamon wood or Indian shawls or precious stuffs. This was an easy matter, the population of Colombo, one of the capitals of the island and only a few leagues distant from Negombo, being still preponderatingly Dutch.

"'began by buying a house at Negombo. This was no very heavy expense; for three hundred francs I secured one of the prettiest in the place. It was a charming cottage built of bamboos bound together with cocoa- nut fibre; it had only one storey of three rooms, but three rooms was quite as many as I wanted. For a hundred and fifty francs I purchased the most complete outfit in all the island. It consisted of a bedstead, four mats, a mortar for pounding rice, six earthenware platters and a cocoa-nut grater.

"I had already decided on the business I meant to follow; this was to buy European stuffs at Colombo and barter them with the Bedaths.

"I must now tell you who and what the Bedaths are. They are a race of savages who lurk in the woods, are independent, have no king, and live by the chase. The fellows have no need of houses, having neither town nor villages, nor even so much as a hut. Their bed is the foot of a tree, fenced with thorny branches; if an elephant, lion, or tiger tries to break through the hedge they have built, the noise wakes them, they scramble up their tree, and from there make mock of tigers, lions, or elephants. As for snakes, whether *cobra-di-capello, caravilla, tii- polonga,* or *bodru-pam,* four scoundrelly reptiles that kill a man as if he were a fly, they don't care a hang for any of them, for they possess charms against their bites; so there is only the *pembera,* which is not poisonous certainly, but which swallows a man as we do an oyster, that they need fear; but you will understand reptiles of twenty-five to thirty feet long are not common. In a word, they have no houses, and do very well without them.

"This is the way you trade with them. When they require any manufactured article such as iron, or European stuffs, they creep up to the towns or villages and deposit in a spot agreed upon a quantity of wax, honey, or ivory; they write in broken Portuguese on a leaf what they want, and you supply them with it. So I put myself into communication with the Bedaths and bartered with them for ivory.

"Meanwhile, I had made acquaintance with some of my neighbours. I was particularly friendly with a worthy Cingalese trader, an inveterate draughts- player and a dealer in cinnamon. Ten times over he had ruined himself at play, and ten times over he had made another fortune, only to lose it again. He was the best judge of spices in all the island perhaps, and after merely glancing at a cinnamon tree, 'Right! 'he would say, 'that's the real stuff, that's the best quality cinnamon.' I ought to tell you that in Ceylon there are ten different sorts of cinnamon trees, and that the most knowing are liable to mistake one for the other; but this man was infallible. How did he distinguish them? was it by the shape of the leaf, which is like that of the orange? was it by the scent of the flower? was it by its little yellow fruit, about as big as an olive? I have no notion. He would just pick out a cinnamon tree, strip off the outer bark, break up the inner, dry it, roll it up in cocoanut cloth, put his name on the parcel and the thing was done; buyers never even asked to look at a sample.

"The stuff sold and paid for, he made the money fly, I can tell you, and anybody who wanted a match at draughts knew where to find an adversary ready.

"Now you know, or perhaps you don't know, that the Cingalese are inveterate gamblers. When they have no money left, they stake their furniture; when they have no furniture left, they stake their houses; when they have no houses left; they stake a finger, two fingers, three fingers..."

"What do you mean, *a finger, two fingers, three fingers!* "I interrupted him to ask.

"It's perfectly simple! the loser lays his finger on a stone; the winner takes a little hatchet and chops it off very neatly at the joint agreed upon. You understand, a man is not obliged to stake the whole finger, he can stake one joint. The player who has lost dips his finger in boiling oil; this cauterises the wound, and he goes on playing. My neighbour Vampunivo had three fingers missing on the left hand: he had stopped at the thumb and the first finger, but I won't warrant that by this time they have not shared the fate of the others. Between Vampunivo and myself, you will understand, things did not go this length; I have too much respect for my person; I used to stake a pearl or an elephant's tooth against a parcel of cinnamon. I lost or won as the case might be, and there it ended.

"One evening when we were engaged on our game of draughts, suddenly I saw on the threshold a beautiful girl, who came forward and threw her arms round Vampunivo's neck. It was his daughter; she was sixteen and had only been married five times.

"I ought to explain that in Ceylon bride and bridegroom can make trial of each other, and afterwards separate if not satisfied; the probationary period varies from a fortnight to three months. Now the beautiful Nahi-Nava-Nahina, — this was how Vampunivo's daughter was called, had made five such trials, and in every case being disappointed with her husbands, had returned to the paternal roof.

"I saw they had family affairs to talk over, so I withdrew discreetly. Next day Vampunivo came to see me. His daughter had asked him two or three times over who was the European playing draughts with him when she came in, and he wished me to make her acquaintance.

"Nahi-Nava-Nahina, I have said so before, was a superb creature; I had fallen in love with her at first sight, and apparently she had returned the compliment. The Cingalese custom of taking on trial and separating if not found suitable appealed to me strongly from every point of view; at the end of a week we were of one mind, she to make a sixth experiment, and I to venture on a second.

"The marriage ceremony is promptly and easily performed amongst the Cingalese; the dowry is discussed and decided, an astrologer fixes the wedding-day, the relatives of the happy pair assemble, and the company take seats round a table, in the middle of which rises a pyramid of rice set upon cocoanut leaves. Each guest helps himself to a handful of rice and eats it. After this mark of friendship the bride approaches the bridegroom; each of them has made three or four little balls of rice and coconut, which they exchange and swallow like pills. The bridegroom presents the bride with a piece of white linen cloth and the ceremony is complete.

"The matter was soon arranged. On my side I gave her father four elephants' tusks and he gave me a bale of cinnamon. An astrologer fixed the day of our marriage. When it arrived we ate our handfuls of rice, after which I swallowed two little balls which the charming Nahi-Nava- Nahina had prepared for me. I gave her a piece of cloth as white as snow, and we were married.

"The custom in Ceylon is for the married couple to be conducted separately to the nuptial chamber, the wife first, the husband afterwards. They are led there in solemn procession to the sound of cymbals, drums and tom-toms, with half the population of the place in attendance.

"I had had the marriage-chamber arranged to the best of my ability. At ten o'clock in the evening the village came for the fair Nahi-Nava-Nahina, who started for my house after throwing me a last look — and what a look!

"I was dying to follow her, but time had to be allowed her girl companions to conduct the bride home and put her to bed. So I perforce remained another half hour at my father-in-law's. He proposed a game of draughts to pass the time — as if I were likely to be in a state of mind for such an amusement!

"At last my turn came. I set out at a pace my comrades had all the difficulty in the world to keep up with. On the threshold I found the village girls dancing and singing, and raising Cain generally. They tried to block my way, but, Lord Almighty! I should have forced a passage through a square of infantry under the circumstances.

"I entered the* room. The lights had been extinguished, but I could hear a soft sound of breathing, gentle as a summer breeze, which guided me to the bed.

"I was just thinking that Nahi-Nava-Nahina's first five husbands must have been a sort of gentlemen very hard to please, when all of a sudden I heard a voice that sent a shudder through me from head to foot.

"'Ah — h — h! 'the voice began, heaving a long-drawn sigh, "'Eh, what? 'I cried, springing up in bed.

"'Yes, yes! it is I,' continued the same voice.

"'What, you, the Buchold?'

"'Why, certainly.'

"At that very moment, sir, a moonbeam shot through the window and made the room as light as day.

"'My dear,' went on the Buchold, 'I have come to tell you the news, that for two months now you have had a son. I have called him Joachim, after the Saint who presides over the day he was born.'

"'I have had a son for two months now? 'I cried. 'Why, how can that be? we have only been married nine.'

"'You know very well, dear, there are such things as premature confinements, and the doctors say children born at seven months have as good a chance of life as the rest.'

"'H'm! 'I muttered. "'I chose for his god-father,' she resumed, 'the Burgomaster Vanclief, under whose roof, you remember, I spent the three months before our marriage" 'Ah! 'I interjected. "'Yes — and he has promised to bring him up.' "Ah, ha!'

"'What do you mean by *Ah, ha?* "'Oh, nothing! Good, bravo for Master Joachim! what's done is done. Only, why the devil do *you* meddle with what's happening in Ceylon, when I don't meddle with things at Monnikendam?'

"'Ungrateful wretch! 'she replied, 'so this is how you receive the proofs of fond and undying affection I give you! Do you know many women ready to come four thousand leagues to spend a night with their husband?'

"'Ah! then you have come to spend only one night with me? 'I asked, a good deal relieved.

"'Alas! that is all? 'she sighed; 'how can I forsake the poor innocent darling yonder far away? '" Very true!

"'Who has nobody but me.' "'You are quite right.' "'And this is the sort of welcome you give me, you wretch!'

"Why, I think I have not given you such a bad welcome, eh?'

"'Yes, because you took me for somebody else.'

"I scratched my head; by-the-bye what had become of that *somebody else J* The thought made me a bit anxious; but for the moment what made me most anxious, I am free to confess, was the Buchold.

"I reflected what was the best thing to do; and decided, as she said nothing about the fire-dog incident, to say nothing either, as she never mentioned the mutiny affair, to be equally reticent, in fact, as she declared her intention of leaving me at daybreak, to be as agreeable to her as I could so long as the night lasted. This judicious resolve obviated any further dispute between us.

“About three in the morning I fell asleep. When I awoke, I looked about me, to find I was alone. “Only there was a mighty rumpus outside the door. It was the fair Nahi- Nava-Nahina’s father who had come with all his kinsfolk to congratulate me on my wedding night. You will readily understand that my first thought, before opening the door, was to wonder what had become of the beautiful Nahi-Nava- Nahina. I felt anything but comfortable as to the fate of the poor woman, knowing the Buchold as I did.

“I called to her under my breath, not daring to make any loud outcry,Nahi- Nava-Nahina! Nahi-Nava-Nahina!! charming Nahi-Nava-Nahina!!! ‘and I thought I heard a sigh in answer. It seemed to come from a little closet that adjoined the bedroom. I opened the closet and I found the poor Nahi-Nava-Nahina bound hand and foot, a gag in her mouth, and laid neatly on a mat.

“I rushed to her, untied and ungagged her and tried to explain the matter; but as you may suppose, I had to do with a mighty angry woman.

“She had not understood all that had passed between us — the Buchold and me — because we had talked Dutch; but she had gathered the general sense all the same.

“Do what I could, it was impossible to pacify her. She declared to her relatives that she was still more dissatisfied with the result of her sixth trial than with the five others; that European husbands had even a worse way of treating their wives than Cingalese ones; and that she was determined to quit a house where she was condemned to spend the first night of marriage lying tied and bound and gagged on a mat, while her husband in the next room was —

“All were hot against me, fathers, brothers, nephews, cousins, second cousins; and seeing it was plainly impossible for me to remain at Negombo after such an adventure, I made up my mind to return to her father his bale of cinnamon, while leaving him my four elephants’ tusks, and departing to seek my fortune in some other part of the Indies.

“Accordingly I hastened to realise all my little capital, which came to ten or twelve thousand livres, and finding a ship just sailing for Goa, I went on board a week after my second marriage, which, as you have heard, had turned out so strangely.

Père Olifus heaved a sigh that clearly showed the profound impression the beautiful Nahi-Nava-Nahina had left on his mind; then, after swallowing a glass of rum, he continued his narrative.

CHAPTER XI.

THE AUTO-DA-FÊ.

“DURING the week I had been compelled to stay on at Negombo after my marriage I had had an anxious time. The Cingalese, when they have a grudge against a man, have a curious way of their own sometimes of paying him out. In Italy you arrange to have your enemy knifed; in Spain you knife him yourself; but in either case the thing has its risks. You pay a man to strike for you — the man may denounce you. You do the deed yourself — you may be seen at work. But in Ceylon, a land of ancient civilisation, they are far ahead of barbarous European countries. In Ceylon you kill your man by accident.

“As a rule this is the sort of accident by means of which an enemy is disposed of. You must know that Ceylon is the native land of elephants. Elephants are as common there as ducks in Holland. Ceylon supplies the whole world with ivory and the whole of India with elephants.

“Now elephants, as you know, are highly intelligent animals, which in those countries fulfil many functions, including that of executioner. In the latter case they learn their duties so well that they proceed in exact accordance with the directions given them. When the criminal is condemned to be quartered, they tear off his limbs, legs and arms one after the other, and then kill him. When death is the sentence they seize the unfortunate man with their trunk, throw him up in the air and catch him on their tusks. When there are extenuating circumstances, they pick up the patient in their trunk as before, whirl him three times round, as a countryman does with a sling, and toss him up in the air; unless he knocks against a tree or falls on too hard a bit of ground, he will get off sometimes with a broken leg, or a dislocated arm. Accordingly I had noticed that in Ceylon it is very seldom an elephant passes a cripple without giving him a little nod of recognition.

“Now, you will understand, everybody keeps his elephant, and each elephant has his driver. You invite a driver to smoke a pipe of opium, to chew a quid of betel, or to drink a glass of brandy, and you say to him:

"'I would gladly give 10,20, 30,40, 50 rupees to the man who should come and inform me that so-and-so is dead,' mentioning, of course, the name of the man you wish to get rid of.

"'You mean it? 'says the elephant- driver.

"'Upon my word of honour, I do.'

"'Here's my hand, and if I hear of his death I promise to be the first to bring you the news.' A week or so later you are told how an elephant passing some worthy man who was in no way interfering with him, suddenly turned savage, seized him with his trunk and, in spite of his driver's cries, threw him so high, so high that he was dead before he came down again.

"The same evening the driver is found lying about dead drunk, and on being questioned he answers that he is intoxicated with despair. Next day the dead man is buried according to the custom of the country, that is to say, they tear up a tree, hollow it out, put the body inside, fill the remaining space with pepper, and leave it so till they have got leave to burn it.

"Well, this is the fate I feared. So, during the few remaining days I spent at Negombo, whenever I saw an elephant on one side of the road, I used to cry, 'I know your tricks,' — and passed by on the other. So I was far from sorry when I found myself aboard a stout little brig, doing her eight knots an hour up the Malabar coast. Three weeks after my departure from Negombo I stepped ashore at Goa..

"I had embarked on a Portuguese vessel, and I observed the Captain to be in the greatest possible haste to reach port; he clapped on all sail even in heavy weather, and I could not help asking him why he was in such a desperate hurry. On this he told me he was a devout Catholic, and he thought it would be a fine thing for his salvation if he could arrive in time to be present at the *Auto-da-Fê* of 1824.

"I ought to tell you that these ceremonies at Goa take place only every two or three years, but they are all the finer for that very reason. Well, he was the devil of a fellow, and he did so well that, with God's help, we arrived three days before the date of the great event.

"Thanks to him, I procured lodgings on the very day of my arrival with a Portuguese family. At first I had intended to make arrangements to take all my meals with the household; but the captain, who was the right sort, advised me to wait a bit, as Portuguese habits, might possibly not be to my liking. As a matter of fact, being invited on the day of my arrival to dine with my hosts, and: seeing them eat everything, even the soup, from the same dishes, I made up my mind to keep a separate establishment for the future. That very evening I searched high and low, and succeeded in finding a little house to let near the harbour. It was admirably situated, had a verandah and a charming garden; yet the rent was only two rupees a month, in other words, a trifle over five francs."

"Look here, Biard," I exclaimed,. turning to my companion, "suppose we went to Goa."

Well, well! "Biard returned, with the air of a man not displeased at the suggestion.

"Go by all means," said Père Olifus; ''it's a fine country, where a man can live for next to nothing. There are magnificent women; only beware of the *troa* and the Inquisition."

"The *troa*, what is that?" I asked him.

"Just let me go on with my story," resumed Olifus, "and you will find out in due course. The house secured, it was the same as at Negombo, it had to be furnished, and this was equally cheaply done. Only as I had all my little fortune in the shape of gold, I was obliged to have recourse to the public moneychangers, whose business is to give foreigners, at a high rate of profit, a miserable copper money in exchange for their gold and silver. Two or three times lover in the course of the same day I visited them, and two or three times over had occasion to put my hand in my pocket. Now each time I did so people saw me extract five-florin and ten-florin pieces, and very soon the report spread 'through a poor impoverished town like Goa that a rich Nabob had come to the place. So the same evening I received visits from two or three noble dames and damsels, who, as is the custom of the country, sent in their servant to ask an alms, whilst they waited outside in a palanquin at the door, in case I wished to see them. I was still greatly fatigued with my journey, so I contented myself with sending them what remained of my copper money, two or three rupees or thereabouts, which further confirmed the popular notion that I was a rich merchant.

"Next day I visited the sights of the town — the churches, which are very fine, in particular that of Our Lady of Pity; the Royal Hospital, which is on the river banks and which I mistook at first for a palace; the square of St. Catherine, where is held a market all day and every day, supplying everything you can want, furniture, clothes, vegetables, utensils of every kind, slaves male and female; the Statue of Lucretia, which supplies water for the whole town, gushing from the wound she gave herself; the trees planted by St. Francis Xavier, which thanks to their sacred origin have never been touched either by axe or pruning-hook. Finally I returned home, convinced by my observations that the best trade to adopt amongst all I had seen was that of a fruit-dealer.

“This is how the business is conducted at Goa. You buy in the bazaar fifteen or so pretty slave-girls costing twenty or twenty-five crowns; you dress them elegantly, with rings on their fingers and ear-rings in their ears, and you put a basket of fruit on their head; then at eight o’clock in the morning you send them out into the town. Rich young men who are fond of fruit and talking to fruit- girls, invite them into their houses for conversation. Some of them empty their baskets as often as eight or ten times a day. Now, supposing this only brings in one rupee each time to their master, the latter of course only giving them what he pleases, as they are his slaves, it is clear that the business is not unprofitable.

“What struck me at first was the fact that the streets seemed frequented only by slaves, half-castes and natives. From time to time, it is true, you would see a palanquin go past carried by negroes, but so closely shut up as to leave nothing visible of the fair occupant, who for her part had openings so contrived as to let her look out at her ease. I complained the first day of this absence of women, which gives the streets of Goa a mournful and deserted appearance; but I was told that on the next day but one I should have an opportunity of seeing on the Plain of St. Lazarus all that was best and brightest in the town. On further inquiries I found that this was the spot where the Auto-da-Fé was held.

“I had been told it was extremely difficult without possessing influence in high quarters to get reserved places, while to secure the ordinary seats you had to wait hours outside. But I was supposed to be a rich man, as I have said, and so everybody sent to offer me places; for these they had the effrontery to ask as much as two or three *pagodas* at first, but the price diminished the longer I stood out, and eventually I obtained a ticket immediately underneath the Viceroy’s box for two rupees.

“The ceremony was fixed for the feast of St. Dominic, the patron Saint of the Inquisition, and I believe that the night before nobody probably except myself went to bed in all Goa. There was nothing but dances, singing and serenading in the streets, and it was plain that, as I had heard said a score of times in the course of the day, something highly agreeable to Goa was to take place on the morrow.

“I had my place reserved in the circular tier of seats which were raised right round the Auto-da-Fé, so that I could enjoy one after the other all the details of the spectacle.

“In the first instance I saw the condemned victims leave their prison; they numbered about two hundred.

“I asked how long the ceremony was to last, as so large a number of sufferers must require at least a week to dispose of. But my neighbour, who was a rich Portuguese merchant of the town, replied with a melancholy shake of the head that the Court of the Inquisition was relaxing in zeal every day, and that amongst all this crowd of heathens and heretics only three were condemned to be burned, the rest having escaped the severer penalties of the Holy Office and being condemned merely to terms of imprisonment — fifteen, ten, five, or two years, some even merely fined, to make a public recantation, and to be present at the punishment of the three poor wretches who had been adjudged worthy of death. I then asked which were the ones destined to the stake; whereupon my obliging informant told me it was perfectly easy to distinguish them, inasmuch as on the long, black gowns they wore they had their portraits standing on burning embers with flames rising all about them and devils dancing in the flames; those who were condemned to imprisonment, instead of flames rising from the hem of the robe to the girdle, had flames descending from the girdle downwards; those whose punishment merely consisted in a recantation and being present at the execution, wore black gowns with white stripes, without any flames either ascending or descending.

“All the condemned were led in the first instance from the prison to the Jesuit church, where they were sternly rebuked and exhorted; after this their sentences were read out to them, though each doubtless knew his fate already, thanks to the gown he had on. Finally, mass duly heard and judgment read, the funeral procession set out for the Plain of St. Lazarus.

My spice-dealer had told me quite true, and this time my complaint had been entirely unjustifiable. All that was rich, wealthy, and elegant among the ladies of Goa was assembled there within a space the size of an ordinary bull-ring; the seats were loaded everywhere to breaking-point. In the midst rose the stake with the wood piled about it; the former was triangular and had an iron ring fixed in each face to keep the condemned man in position, and fronting each ring an altar surmounted by a cross, to the end the sufferer might enjoy the happiness of looking upon the Christ till the last moment of his existence.

“We found no small difficulty, my companion and myself, in reaching our places; however, we succeeded at last, entering at the same moment as the condemned, who appeared on the scene of their doom through a door hung with a black curtain spangled with silver tears.’

“Their entrance was greeted with a great outburst of chanting, while the ladies began to roll between their fingers magnificent rosaries, some of amber; others of pearl, darting glances the while to right and left from under their half- lifted veils. I think I was recognised for the supposed rich pearl-merchant, for not a few of these flattering looks came my way. It is also true that, being directly underneath the Viceroy’s box, I may have mistaken many looks intended for him, as aimed at myself.

“The function began. They took the three sufferers under the arms and helped them to climb to the stake, which was a matter of some difficulty. You will easily understand it is not pleasant to be burnt alive. Finally, half by their own efforts, half by the help of others, they reached the platform. They were fastened to the rings with iron chains, for of course ropes would soon have been burnt through, and then the poor fellows, no doubt, would have leapt down and started running, all: afire as they were, about the ring. This would have been a scandal for everybody in general and a calamity for their own souls in particular, as their thoughts would then have turned to making good their flight instead of accomplishing an edifying death; but, thanks to the iron chains which imprisoned feet and waist and neck, there is no danger of their moving a limb.

“But the most ingenious arrangement has its weak point; and instead of this danger there is another, namely, that the relatives of the condemned man may bribe the executioner, so that the latter, while fastening the chain round his neck, gives it an extra twist and strangles the victim. Then, you see, the sight loses more than half its interest, for to see a dead man burnt is quite a different thing from seeing a living one suffer the same fate. But on this occasion the executioner was a man of conscience, and all could feel assured that the sufferers were alive, for, rising above the prayers of the spectators, their cries for mercy could be plainly heard for more than ten minutes.

“When all was over, everyone ran to fill a little bag with ashes from the pile,, these ashes possessing, it would appear, the same privilege as the rope with which a man has been hanged, viz., that of bringing good luck to families.

“I had just filled my bag like the rest when I felt a note slipped into my hand. I turned round to see an old woman, who | put her finger on her lip, pronounced the two words ‘Read it,’ and walked away. After a few moments’ surprise and hesitation I opened the note and read:

“‘This evening at 10 o’clock you are | expected in the garden of the third house to the right of the great tank. The house in question has green sun-blinds; there are two cocoanut palms before the door. You must climb the wall and stop under the *tree of sadness*, where the same duenna who gave you this note will come for you.’

“I turned to look for the duenna and found she had halted a short distance away. I waved my hand in token of assent; she answered with a bow and disappeared.”

CHAPTER XII.

DONNA INEZ.

“I HAD a pretty clear notion where the place of assignation was. From the top of the town wall I had examined all the neighbourhood, and I had especially noticed, as a charming promenade, the banks of the tank referred to, on which all the rich Portuguese have pleasure-houses surrounded by gardens. As for the *tree of sadness*, so-called because it flowers only by night, I knew it from having seen one in the garden of the house I had taken.

“At half-past nine I left the city. I had with me three or four pearls, fine enough to ensure that my present, if it so happened I had a present to make, should not be despised. To guard against accidents I slipped a Cingalese poniard under my waistcoat, resolved to face bravely the risks of my nocturnal adventure.

“At a quarter to ten I reached the little house, which I recognised readily enough from the description I had received. I made a circuit in search of a spot in the garden-wall where I could climb over without undue difficulty. Presently I found a door, and it occurred to me that, to save me the trouble of climbing the wall, they had perhaps left this door open. I was not mistaken; it gave way when I pushed it, and I found myself in the garden.

“Once inside, I found no difficulty in discovering the place where I was to wait. Guided by its exquisite perfume, in another instant I was concealed beneath the heavy foliage of the *tree of sadness*. Its flowers, which open at ten at night, to close again at daybreak, were shedding balmy odours, and some of the multitude of blossoms that covered it fell about me like snowflakes inviting me to rest upon the soft and fragrant carpet they formed. Although, as you may have observed, my nature is far from poetical, I could not but feel the charm of the lovely night, and if I have a regret at this moment of speaking, it is to be talking to you like an old sea-dog as I am, and not like a poet, as you are, or a painter, as your friend is.”

We bowed, both of us, Biard and myself.

“I do assure you, Père Olifus,” I told him, “you are wrong to depreciate your merits; you tell a story as well as Monsieur Bernardin de Saint-Pierre.”

“I thank you,” Père Olifus replied, “for although I do not know who Monsieur Bernardin de Saint-Pierre may be, I gather it is a compliment you are paying me. Now I will go on with my story.

“I had been waiting about a quarter of an hour when I heard a rustling of silk, the sound of footsteps, and presently made out a figure timidly approaching. I called softly, and on hearing my voice the other came straight towards me, threw me one end of her girdle while she held the other, and, walking before me, led me without a word towards the house.

“The building, except for two or three windows through which the light from inside filtered by the interstices of the jalousies, was in complete darkness and looked still blacker from the fact that, being painted red, its outlines were lost in the gloom. The threshold crossed, it grew doubly dark. Then the duenna drew in the girdle towards her till she found my hand; taking this she led me up a staircase and along a corridor. Finally, opening a door from which poured a flood of light, she pushed me into a room in which a woman of twenty or twenty-two, and extremely pretty, was lying upon a mattress covered with magnificent china silk and resting upon a couch of bamboo. In the middle of the room, which was cooled by a great punkah hanging from the ceiling, that seemed to swing of its own accord, stood a table loaded with conserves and pastry.

“In these days I was young, good- looking and the reverse of shy. I paid my greetings to the lady, who received me as might be expected from a woman who after all had invited me to come. I took a seat beside her. In Ceylon and at Buenos-Ayres I had learnt to chatter a little Spanish more or less badly. Now Spanish and Portuguese are close akin; then, besides the language of words, which you don’t always understand, there is a language of signs, which is always comprehensible. She pointed to the collation, which, she said, had been waiting for me a whole hour. I told her that if it had been waiting for me so long we ought not to keep it waiting any longer; and thereupon we took our places. There was only one glass between us, as is usual at such-like *tête-à-têtes* in Spain and Portugal. The port and madeira sparkled in two decanters, one like ruby the other like topaz. I had just tasted the two wines, which I found excellent, and was proceeding to attack the pastry and conserves when suddenly the duenna rushed in panic-stricken and whispered two words in her mistress’s ear.

"'Halloa! 'I asked, 'what is the matter?'

"'Nothing,' my fair companion answered quietly; 'it is only my husband, who was to have stayed at Gondapore three or four days longer, but who comes bursting in on us like a bombshell; he always does like that, the hideous half- caste!'

"'Oh, ho! 'said I, 'and is he jealous by any chance, your husband?'

"'As jealous as a tiger.'

"'So that if he found me here..

"'He would kill you.'

"'It is as well to know,' I said, drawing my dagger from my bosom and laying it on the table; 'no harm in taking precautions.'

"'Why, what are you doing? 'she exclaimed.

"'Well, you know, there is a proverb that says, better kill the devil than let the devil kill you.'

"'Oh, there is no need to kill anybody,' she said, laughing, and showing as she laughed a row of pearls beside which those j I had in my pocket would have looked j black.

"'How so?'

"'I will make it all right.'

"'Oh, very well then.'

"'Only go into that closet — it gives on a balcony — and don't lose sight of what is going to happen in this room. If my husband takes a single step towards the closet, which is not unlikely, slip out on the balcony and jump down — it is only twelve feet above the ground.'

"'Good!'

"'Away with you! I will do my best to arrange matters so that his coming back need make no difference in our plans.'

"'So much the better!'

Be easy. Now go; I hear his step on the stairs.'

"I darted into the closet. She meantime threw out of an open window the porcelain plate and silver service which might betray my presence. Then drawing from her bosom a little sachet embroidered with silver, she took from it a tiny phial containing a greenish liquid, and poured a few drops of it over the pastry which formed the summit of the pyramid; this done she rose and advanced half-way to the entrance. At that moment the door opened.

“The man she spoke of as a hideous half-caste was a magnificent Hindoo, the colour of fine Florentine bronze, with a short crisp beard. He wore a rich Mussulman costume, although he was a Christian or something like it.

“Ah, sir,” Père Olifus said, interrupting himself, “I do not know if you have studied women, but whether women of the land or women of the sea, I do believe the prettier they are, the more crafty and hypocritical creatures you will find them. This one, who was as beautiful as a dream, looked at her husband with the very same smile she had bestowed on me the moment before. But in spite of this gracious welcome the newcomer appeared dissatisfied and uneasy. He looked all about him, peering and sniffing like the ogre in search of fresh flesh. His eyes seemed to travel towards the closet. He made a step in my direction, and I made two to the rear. He touched the handle of the door, and I dropped from the balcony among the thick branches of a tree. I saw a black shadow suspended above my head. I held my breath, and presently the shadow disappeared. I breathed once more, and climbing softly up again, soon brought my head level with the balcony, only to find it empty.

“I was filled with curiosity to see what was happening in the room I had just left. I scrambled back on to the balcony with all the nimbleness of a sailor, and advanced on tip-toe to see, if possible, what lay beyond the half-opened door.

“Husband and wife were seated at table side by side, the wife holding her husband lovingly in her arms, while the latter was greedily devouring the cakes on which his wife had poured the green liquor. The man’s back was towards me, while the woman partly faced me; she saw me peeping round the door, and winked at me out of the corner of her eye as much as to say, you are going to see something happen soon.

“In fact, next minute, the husband lifted his glass and pledged his wife’s health with a fervour that was almost delirious. Next he struck up a song, which ended with a boisterous grand finale of rattling plates and broken bottles as he hammered on the table with his knife. Finally he sprang up and fell to dancing a wild waltz, folding his table- napkin round him. Then the woman left the table, walked to the door from behind which I was a hidden witness of this weird sight, opened it and said quietly in a matter of fact tone, ‘Come here!’

“‘Come here!’ I replied, ‘very delightful no doubt, but — ’

"'Nonsense! 'she said, drawing me forward. 'Come when I tell you to come.'

"I shrugged my shoulders and did as I was bid.

"Indeed her husband, utterly absorbed in the pantomimic dance he had chosen, went on with his *pas seul*, entirely regardless of his surroundings, winding and unwinding his napkin about his person in all sorts of elegant and affected poses. Then presently, the latter proving too scanty for his purpose, he unrolled his turban and began the shawl dance.

"Meantime, his wife had led me to the sofa where she was lying when I first entered, and in reply to every remark I made to her only shrugged her shoulders. Seeing this, I held my tongue. After three quarters of an hour's dancing, the husband, who seemed to have been enjoying himself very much too, was snoring like an organ pipe. I took advantage of the circumstance to demand an explanation as to the drops of green liquor poured over the pastry, inasmuch as I had a strong suspicion that the husband's sudden passion for song and dance was not unconnected with them. I was right; they were drops of *troa.*"

"Well and good! my dear Monsieur

Olifus," I remarked. "Will you now explain what *troa* is? You told me, like the clever narrator you are, that you would do me this favour at the proper time and place; I think the proper time and place are come."

"Sir, *troa* is a herb which grows abundantly in the Indies. They extract the juice when it is still green, or else powder the seeds when it is ripe. This juice or this powder is then mixed with the food of the person you wish to be rid of for the time being. The person in question thereupon becomes completely absorbed in himself, sings, dances, and goes to sleep, ceasing entirely to see everything that goes on about him; when he wakes up, as he has lost all memory of what has occurred, you tell him the first cock and bull story that comes into your head and he believes it.

"This is what *troa* is, a very convenient thing to have about you, as you may suppose; indeed I am assured that the women of Goa are always provided with either *troa* juice in a phial or *troa* powder in a sachet.

"At five o'clock next morning my fair Portuguese begged me to help her put her husband to bed: then as day was on the point of breaking, we took leave of each other, promising to meet again.

"For a moment I had entertained the idea of loading up a ship with *troa* and despatching her to Europe together with a detailed description of the virtues of the cargo; but I was assured the stuff would deteriorate on the voyage, so I reluctantly abandoned the speculation, which nevertheless I still think might not have been such a bad one.

“Meantime my fruit business prospered amain; my ten slaves brought me in, taking one day with another, six rupees clear profit, which is an enormous income for Goa, where everything is dirt-cheap. So my friend the spice-merchant presently let fall some words anent marriage with his daughter, Donna Inez, a charming young lady, who had been piously brought up at the convent of the Annunciation, and whom I had already met once or twice at his house.

“Donna Inez was very lovely and seemed a sweet, modest girl. I began to weary of my Portuguese mistress, who one by one was grabbing all my pearls. Then, mind you, nature had certainly ‘meant me for a married man, till women disgusted me with the idea. So I readily agreed to my friend’s proposals, and Donna Inez was brought home from her convent, this time with the express intention of bringing us together.

“She was still the same sweet modest girl I had before seen and admired; only her eyes were red and swollen. I asked the reason of this redness, which pointed to her having shed many tears; but I was told that Donna Inez was so innocent and unsophisticated that, when they had spoken to her about leaving her Convent, she had burst into torrents of weeping. I asked the girl herself about these regrets, and the charming creature told me in so many words that she had no wish to marry, and that she felt real grief at leaving her Convent, in which she found as a rule every satisfaction she could desire. I smiled to myself at her charming *naïveté*; and as I had no doubt that marriage would produce the same effect on her as a journey does on the traveller, that is to say, delight her with the charm of novelty, I paid no further heed whether to her regret or its reasons.

“Accordingly my marriage with Donna Inez was settled by common consent between the spice-merchant and myself; we agreed upon the amount of the dowry, and three weeks later, having fulfilled all necessary preliminaries, we were united with great pomp at the Cathedral Church. I will say nothing about the marriage ceremonies, which are much the same as in France. Donna Inez appeared to have completely forgotten her convent. She was as gay as decency permitted, and when the moment for retiring arrived, she asked my leave with charming modesty to withdraw to the bedroom, craving only a quarter of an hour's grace to have time to undress and prepare for bed.

"However, to help my patience I found a little collation ready for me, nicely set out on plates of fine china; there was a bottle of Muscat wine of San-Lucar, which sparkled so invitingly in its crystal prison that I fell very philosophically to drinking my fair bride's health. I had never tasted such wine before, I do assure you, sir, and I know what wine is. Then I ate some of the fruit. I was a dealer in fruit myself, as you know; but I had never tasted such fruit. The wine was nectar, the fruit ambrosia.

"Then everything had a certain appetising smack, an agreeable sub-acid the fair Nahi-Nava-Nahina. He was held at the baptismal font by the highly respectable Monsieur Van Brock, engineer of the dykes, who has promised me to be a second father to the dear child.'

"'No doubt,' I said, 'my dear wife, this is good news, I grant you that; but, as I had already waited five or six months to hear it, I could very well have waited just five or six days longer.'

"'Yes, I quite understand,' said the Buchold; 'in that case I should not have disturbed your marriage with the lovely Donna Inez.'

"'Quite right, if I *must* tell you the truth.'

"'Ungrateful wretch!'

"'Ungrateful! Why?'

"'Yes, ungrateful, when I have made such haste to prevent your being shamefully deceived.'

"'How? Shamefully deceived?'

"'Yes, indeed, shamefully deceived! Did not your wife ask you for a quarter of an hour to prepare for bed?'

"'Yes, she did.'

"'During that interval did you not drink a glass of Muscat wine of San Lucar and eat a banana?'

"'Why, yes, I seem to remember the fact.'

"'And from that moment onwards what do you remember?'

"'Nothing.'

"'Well, my sweet friend, that wine was mixed with *troa* juice, that banana was sprinkled with *troa* powder.'

"'Death and damnation!

"'So that, while you were sleeping like a drunkard and snoring like a Kaffir...'

"'Well!'

"'Your chaste bride..

"'Well, my chaste bride..

"'A very pious young lady who once a week used to confess to a handsome Cordelier Friar, while she was at her Convent...'

"'Well, well, my chaste bride...'

"'Well, would you like to see what she was doing during that interval.'

"'Was she confessing by any chance? 'I cried.

"'Precisely; look there.' And so saying she led me to a crack in the partition wall, through which I could see what was happening in the bedroom.

flavour, that would have kept me eating and drinking all night long; only the first glass of wine and the first banana made me feel so happy and so pleased with myself that I started singing a sea-song.

"Now, sir, I should tell you that I never sing, my voice being so cracked that I frighten 'myself if ever I attempt the most trifling air. Well, that night, sir, I seemed to sing like a nightingale without any effort, and I found it so delightful to listen to my own voice that I felt my feet itching to be cutting double shuffles and hornpipes, and I felt myself rising involuntarily from the floor, as if instead of drinking a glass of Muscat wine I had imbibed a barrel of inflammable gas. In a word, the temptation grew so strong that I soon began to dance, beating time with a knife on the bottom of my plate, which rang out like a drum. I could see myself in a mirror, and I felt proud of my performance. The more I looked at myself, the more pleased I grew, till by dint of singing, my voice gave out, by dint of dancing, my legs failed me, by dint of staring at myself, I could see nothing but pink and blue flames. Worn out with delight, I went and lay down on a great sofa, feeling the happiest man on earth.

"I do pot know how long I slept, but I woke with a delicious feeling of coolness at the soles of my feet. I stretched out my arms and felt my wife beside me; I thought it was to her I owed the sense of blissful comfort I experienced, — and upon my word!... I showed myself duly grateful.

"I heard a long-drawn sigh.

"I tell you, sir, the sound of that sigh so vividly recalled the one I had heard once before at Negombo, the first night of my marriage with the beautiful Nahi- Nava-Nahina, that I shuddered from head to foot.

"'Halloa! 'I cried.

"'Well, I am only sighing,' she said.

"I tell you, sir, in an instant I turned as cold as ice, my teeth chattered, and between them I faltered, 'The Buchold, the Buchold.'

"'Why, certainly, the Buchold, who has come to tell you, my dear little husband, that you are father of a second son, as pretty as Cupid, who will be six months old to-morrow, and whom I have called Thomas in memory of the day when I came to stop your marriage with "What I beheld, sir, was so humiliating for a husband — particularly on his wedding night — that I seized a stout bamboo which happened by a miraculous chance to be handy, burst open the door and fell to belabouring Donna Inez' confessor, who fled yelling as loud as the heretics I had seen burned the third day after my arrival in Goa. As for my wife, I was proceeding to reproach her bitterly for her conduct, but with the utmost assurance —

"'Very well, sir,' she said, 'you can complain to my father, and I will complain to the Inquisition.'

"'And what complaint will you make, my fine madam? 'I asked.

"'I will complain of your interrupting my religious exercises by beating a holy man, who for three years has been known to all the world as my confessor. Begone, sir, you are a heretic; and as I will not live with a heretic, I am going back to my Convent,' and with the words she stalked out proud as a queen.

"As for me, the mere word '*heretic* look you, had filled me with terror; already I saw myself clothed in a black gown painted with ascending flames; already I saw myself bound feet and neck and waist to the stake on the plain of St. Lazarus! The result was, I made up my mind on the spot; I collected my little hoard, to which I added two or three thousand livres I had saved in my fruit business since coming to Goa. Remembering that I had seen in the roadstead the day before a ship ready to sail for Java, I had myself rowed out to her without a moment's delay, abandoning house, garden and furniture to whoso might choose to take them.

"Luckily the vessel was only waiting for an east wind and a falling tide to take her out of harbour. I arrived on board with the wind in one hand and the tide in the other, so to speak. I agreed to pay the captain ten pagodas for my passage, and I had the satisfaction, just as the first rays of dawn whitened the church roofs of Goa, to feel wind and tide carrying me gently out to sea.

“My precaution had not been in vain; two years afterwards I was burned in effigy on the plain of St. Lazarus.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SUTTEE.

"'A MAN proposes, but God disposes.'

This, the truest of all proverbs, seems to have been especially made for the sailor. We started from Goa in the early days of June, a period at which winter is beginning. Now anyone who has not seen the storms of the Malabar coast does not know what storms are. One of these tempests drove us into Calicut, and willy nilly, we had to stay there.

"However, the Indian winters have this advantage, that they include the least possible proportion of cold, but only wind, cloud and lightning; hence fruit ripens as well in -winter as in autumn. At the same time anybody who is tired of winter has no great way to go to find another season. He has only to cross the Ghauts, which run from north to south, and in two days, instead of being on the coast of Malabar, he will find himself on the coast of Coromandel, and instead of being drenched by the wintry rains of the Persian Gulf, he will be roasted by the summer heats of the Gulf of Bengal. In all the world there is nothing finer than this stretch of coast, with its palms and cocoa-nuts always green and leafy, which in high winds bend over like the arches of a bridge; nothing finer than these plains and plateaux, these rivers and lakes, in which towns, villages and country houses are sweetly reflected, and which extend from Cape Comorin all the way to Mangalore. When I found we were driven into harbour and the captain told me he could not possibly put to sea again for two or three months, I quickly made up my mind, and being by this time more than half a Hindoo, I resolved to start in trade at Calicut. I could do this without risk of danger, inasmuch as, Calicut belonging to the English, who are Protestants, I had nothing to fear from my friends the Inquisitors of Goa. Besides, within ten leagues of Calicut I had Mahé, which is a French factory, where I could claim protection.

"What struck me first and foremost was the length of the ears everywhere to be seen. Till then I had always considered my own ears to be of a very respectable size, an advantage I owed to the frequency with which my father and mother had been in the habit of pulling them in my boyhood; but I now remarked that mine had not acquired half the dimensions to which the human ear can attain. The reason is that at Calicut the children's ears are pierced directly they are born, and from that moment their parents ingeniously insert in the opening a dried palm-leaf twisted into a roll, which having a constant tendency to unroll, enlarges the hole so enormously that there are ears to be seen through which you can put your fist. You may imagine how proud are the possessors of such a personal advantage; they are the dandies of the country.

"My first care on landing had been to hire a Naïr, a sort of janissary or dragoman, to visit the town and its environs and help me in the bargains and purchases I had to make. We set out in due course for Calicut, but on the way we were overtaken by such a hurricane that I found myself obliged to take shelter in a Malabar pagoda. It was the very same spot where, four hundred years before my time, Vasco da Garna had landed.

"As the interior of the temple was adorned with pictures and images, Vasco and his companions mistook the pagoda for a Christian church, and when men dressed in calico, looking not unlike Catholic priests in undress, poured water and ashes on their heads, they were still further confirmed in their belief. All the same, one of Da Gama's companions, disturbed at the sight of the strange- looking idols, and anxious not to compromise his eternal salvation, supplemented his prayer with this saving clause:

"'Whether I am or am not in the Devil's house, it is to God I address my supplication.'

"For my own part, being something of a heathen, I offered no supplication whether to God or Devil. I simply waited until the rain was over.

"I had always heard speak of a commercial procedure frequently employed at Calicut, which could not fail to interest me, now that I was about to establish a business of one sort or another there. A creditor meeting his debtor, I had been told, had only to trace a circle round him and I was assured the latter could not leave it, under pain of death, till the debt for which he was liable had been paid. I had even been assured that on one occasion the King himself had met a merchant whom he had been continually putting off from day to day for three months; the man drew a line round the King's horse, and the King sat there motionless as an equestrian statue till the sum was brought from the palace which he required to liquidate his debt. The incident had really happened, but in times long ago, and the law we have mentioned had now grown practically obsolete.

“But another was still in force, albeit the English had declared that Hindoo wives were not bound to obey it, a law which orders wives to be burned on the bodies of their deceased husbands. Now as if I were destined to witness all the different kinds of auto-da-fé that are practised on the west coast of India, I was no sooner settled at Calicut than it was announced that a Brahmin had just died and that his wife had resolved to be burned on his tomb.

“Thus I arrived in the nick of time to witness a suttee. This was too curious a sight for any European to miss, especially one who was blessed with a wife who, so far from burning herself on his tomb, would no doubt have lit a bonfire in token of her satisfaction on the day of her consort’s death.

“Accordingly I made definite arrangements with my Naïr to stay on for a month in my service. He was a man of some intelligence, who struck a bargain with me for a half *faron* a day and undertook to secure me a place from which to witness the ceremony.

“The appointed day fell upon the following Sunday, and the rite was to be carried out in an open plain a quarter of a league from the city. The funeral pile, built of the most combustible materials and the most inflammable wood, was, I can scarcely say, raised, but at any rate set up, in a trench, so that the whole presented the appearance of a crater presently to be filled with fire and flame. On the pile lay the husband’s dead body embalmed in such a way as to await his wife without becoming too offensive in the meantime.

“At the hour agreed upon, namely ten o’clock in the morning, the Brahmin’s widow, bare-footed and bare-headed, and clad in a long white robe, left her husband’s house to the sound of flutes, drums and tom-toms, and was led with great state and ceremony to the funeral pile. Once outside the city, she encountered on the road an English officer and a dozen men, stationed there by orders of the Governor of Calicut.

“The officer approached her and asked her in Hindostani, which I could perfectly well understand:

“‘Do you die of your own free will?’

“‘Yes,’ she replied, ‘of my own free will entirely.’

"'In case your family should be constraining you, I am here to rescue you; appeal to my help, and in the name of my Government I will take you away with me.'

"'No one is constraining me; I am to be burned with my own full and free consent; so let me pass.'

"As I have said, I was near enough to the speakers to hear the dialogue, and I must confess I was struck with admiration at the sight of such bold determination. At the same time, it is true, the widow was speaking to a Christian, before whom she was not sorry to make a parade of her religion, while all those devilish Brahmins were confusing her by singing their deafening litanies in her ears.

"So she went on her way intrepidly towards the pile; when she came to the edge of the trench, which was already partly filled with flame, the Brahmins crowded round and made her drink a potion which seemed to give her added strength. My Nai'r said that the one who handed her the liquor and who was the most energetic in urging her to the sacrifice was her uncle.

"Be this as it may, the Brahmins now drew back, and the poor woman, after bidding farewell to her family and distributing her jewellery amongst her female friends, retired four steps and then amidst the cries and encouragements of the priests, to the sound of deafening and discordant music, ran forward and sprang into the burning volcano.

"But no sooner was she there than she found the atmosphere a trifle warm apparently, and in spite of the opium she had drunk, in spite of the chanting priests and drumming musicians, she uttered scream after scream and dashed out of the fire quicker than she had gone into it. I could not but admire the foresight displayed by my worthy Inquisitors at Goa, who fix a stake in the middle of the pile, and to this stake fasten an iron ring to keep the victim from bolting.

"In the present case all present, I am bound to say, at sight of the woman 'failing so egregiously in her duties as a widow, uttered loud cries of indignation and rushed to catch the fugitive and put her back into the flames. In particular just in front of me stood a charming little Calicut girl of ten or twelve, who was furious with anger, and declared that when her time came to be burned she would never behave so; she kept shouting at the top of her voice:

"'Burn the renegade! burn her, burn her, burn her! ' — and all repeated the cry except myself, the English officer and his men. These latter made every effort to reach the victim, but, as you may suppose, they were easily kept back by the angry crowd. The renegade, as my pretty little neighbour called her, was seized, lifted from her feet, carried back to the trench, and thrown bodily into the heart of the flames. Then they threw on top of her faggots, fire-brands, logs, dried grass, and whatever else they could lay hands on. Even then she managed to push aside the blazing mass, and once more scrambled out of the pit. Then by sheer force of despair she rushed, a pillar of flame, through the terrified and shrinking spectators, and plunged into a brook that ran some fifty yards away from the pile. Such a thing had never been known before, all present declared, shocked and astounded at such a scandal. Above all, my pretty little Calicut friend could not get over her astonishment that any woman could so far forget her duties towards her husband; she could only repeat again and again, 'How differently I should behave, how very differently!'

"Then she ran with the rest of the crowd towards the brook where the half- burned renegade had fled for refuge. I followed her, for I already felt no little admiration for her beauty.

"When we came to the banks of the stream, the poor creature was crying —

"'Help, Englishmen! Save me, save me! 'But the English were hustled back whenever they tried to approach, and could do nothing. Then catching sight of her uncle, the same who had been so anxious to have her burned:

"'Uncle,' she cried, 'save me, have pity on me. I will leave my family, I will live like a pariah and beg my bread.'

"'Well, well, so be it,' her uncle replied in a coaxing voice. 'Let me wrap you in this wet sheet and carry you back to the house.'

"But as he said the words, he winked to his fellow Brahmins as much as to say —

"'Let be; once wrapped in the sheet, she will be in our power.'

"No doubt she too had seen his look and understood its meaning, for instead of trusting herself to her uncle, she cried, 'No, no, I will not! Go back, leave me alone, leave me alone! I will go by myself.'

"But her uncle would not be denied; no doubt he had made himself responsible for his niece and was determined she should keep her word. So he gave her his oath by the waters of the Ganges that he would take her back safe to the house. That oath is so sacred that the unhappy woman believed his promise. She threw herself into the wet sheet, in which her uncle enveloped her like a mummy. Then, arms and legs being securely pinioned, he took her on his shoulders, yelling, ‘To the fire, to the fire,’ and set off at a run for the trench, followed by the whole population repeating the same horrid cry.

“The little Calicut maiden was filled with intense admiration. When the Brahmin uttered the sacred oath she had been on the point of cursing him for a pariah, but when she saw that the oath was only a means to cajole his niece, and that the Brahmin fully intended to break it:

“‘Oh, the good man,’ she cried clapping her hands, ‘the worthy man! the holy man.’

“I failed quite to understand how one could be a good worthy holy man in virtue of breaking one’s oath, but my little Hindoo spoke with such an air of conviction, and her whole person breathed such an air of grace and innocence, that I felt persuaded in spite of myself, masculine vanity no doubt contributing to the result, that the poor widow was certainly very sadly to blame to feel such hesitation about burning herself on her husband’s body.

“Accordingly I added my acclamations to those of the crowd generally, when I saw this good, worthy, holy man hurl back into the flaming pit his wretched niece, so well secured this time that, struggle as she might, in five or six minutes the fire had worked its will upon her.

“My little Calicut friend was in a state of wild enthusiasm. So much conjugal devotion in the heart of a mere child touched me, and I asked her what she was called and who she was.

“She was called Amaru, which you will agree is a very pretty name, and her father belonged to the caste of the Veissiahs, that is to say, directors of agriculture and commerce. Thus he belonged to the third class, having above him only the Rajah class and the Brahmin class, and below him that of the Sudras. The post he held at Calicut corresponded to that of Syndic or Superintendent of the Harbour. Hewasaman who could be very useful to me; therefore as my Nàir knew him personally, it was agreed that he should make me acquainted with him on the following day.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BRAHMIN’S SLIPPERS.

“THE result of the visit I paid to the fair Amaru’s father was that I made up my mind to stay at Calicut and establish a business in spices.

“My first care was to buy a house. Houses are cheaper at Calicut even than at Goa. True the most substantial edifice at Calicut is of sun-dried earth, and the highest does not exceed eight feet.

“For twelve crowns I found myself owner of a house which the seller handed over to me, together with three snakes attached to the property. I told him I was not very fond of snakes and that the first thing I should do would be to break their backs; but he warned me solemnly against committing any such folly. At Calicut snakes perform the same functions cats do in Europe, killing the rats and mice with which otherwise the houses would be overrun.

“I asked him to introduce me to these reptiles which I had just become possessed of, so that I might get to know them. Indeed, it was important for both parties to come to a good understanding to avoid any unauthorised intruder coming into the house. My landlord gave a whistle and they came to call like dogs.

“In three days’ time, thanks to two or three bowls of milk with which I had liberally supplied them, we were the best friends in the world. Nevertheless I am bound to confess that the first few times I found one or other of them in my bed, when I retired or woke up in the morning, I felt a certain repugnance at such close contact; but by degrees I grew used to them, and thought no more about it.

“The trade I had especially chosen to devote myself to was that of growing and selling *cardamum*, a sort of pepper which is only to be got at the druggists’ shops in Europe, but of which all the inhabitants of the Islands of the Indian Ocean are inordinately fond. During my stay in Ceylon, I had learnt the importance of this article and I resolved to make it the main basis of my commercial enterprise.

“It so happened I had arrived in the rainy season, which is the best time for clearing the land for planting *cardamum*. This process indeed is simple enough; during the winter the soil in the neighbourhood of Calicut produces a perfect forest of weeds, which serve as manure; you sow your seed and four months later you reap your harvest.

“Accordingly I rented a large extent of ground on the outskirts of Calicut and began my clearing operation, not however, as is usual in these districts, trusting entirely to a score or so of sudras, who far removed from the master’s eye, cheat him in every possible way in their day’s work, but superintending everything personally. To render this surveillance more effective, I began by building four huts for myself at the four corners of my property. This was an easy matter and involved little expense, inasmuch as I possessed a large supply of cocoanut palms on my estate. Now, as everybody knows, the tree in question is a perfect godsend for this climate; with its wood the natives build houses and roof them with its leaves; its bark is used for making mats, its pith for food; the bud produces wine, the nut oil, and the sap sugar.

“Now by distilling this wine I manufactured a species of brandy by means of which I could persuade my sudras to do whatever I chose to ask them. My crop felt the good effects of these distributions of *tari*. No such yield of *cardamum* had ever been known at Calicut as my ten or twelve acres gave; not only was it abundant, but it was of prime quality too, and I resolved to devote five or six years to this business, at the end of which period my fortune would be made, especially if I went to Ceylon to sell personally the harvest I had myself reaped at Calicut. To do this nothing was needful but to charter a small ship, and towards the end of the summer season to sail for Ceylon, when I had secured a full cargo. Now two crops would suffice to load a ship, and there are two crops every year at Calicut.

“Meantime I continued to visit my old friend Nachor and my young friend the charming Amaru. I had not forgotten that the father could be of great service to me in the matter of charterparties, custom-house dues and so on, and I must admit the sublime devotion to conjugal obligations which the girl had displayed on the great day of the Suttee had deeply touched my heart. Now old Nachor was no fool; he had seen me pay ready money for everything I had purchased or rented, and when he saw how successfully I managed my affairs, he had no doubt I was on the high road to fortune. Consequently he welcomed me like a man who is anxious to make his house agreeable to his guest, so that the latter may repeat his visits as often as he can.

"The end of it all was that in eight or ten months' time the matter was pretty well decided between Nachor and myself, always excepting the charming Amaru's consent, and this I ventured to think I had on one or two occasions read in her pretty eyes.

"An accident that might have had lamentable consequences led on the contrary to a more rapid consummation of our wishes. Perhaps we all desired the same thing, but the girl's modesty prevented her confessing as much. One day I had invited father and daughter to pay a visit to my plantations, and proposing to spend the whole day in the fields, I had had four collations prepared in my four huts. Suddenly Amaru, who was walking immediately behind the slave employed to beat along both sides of the path with a stick to drive away venomous reptiles, gave a loud shriek. A little green snake of the most poisonous species, the bite of which is invariably fatal, had darted out of a tuft of grass and fastened upon one corner of her scarf. I had seen the creature's spring and heard the girl's scream, and with the cane I carried had caught the snake so adroit a blow that it released its hold; then as I wore heavy boots, I had crushed its head under my heel.

"But though she had escaped all immediate danger, the charming Amaru was in a terrible state; instead of dying of snake-bite, she seemed like to die.of fear. Lying back in my arms, she was as pale and looked as fragile as a water- lily. Pressing her to my bosom, I carried her to the hut, where breakfast awaited us. The child who was barely twelve felt scarcely heavier than a dream or a vapour; only her heart beating against mine proved she was a living being.

"Once inside the hut the charming Amaru plucked up courage and consented to partake of some grains of rice; but when it came to setting forth again, the same terror seized her and she declared she had made up her mind not to walk another step. Nothing could have pleased me better than such a declaration. I offered her the same means of transport by which she had been conveyed to where she was. She threw a glance at her father, who nodded his consent; so I took up Amaru in my arms once more and we started out afresh. This time, fearing to burden me overmuch, she threw her arm round my neck, so that her face came close to mine while our hair and breath intermingled, circumstances which appeared to give her as much pleasure as they did me. At the first hut I had hoped I might be loved; at the second I was sure of it; at the third Amaru had told me so; at the fourth our union was agreed upon, and it only remained to fix the day.

"This date was decided by Nachor. He was a man of much sagacity, he had seen the crop sown, but he wished to see the harvest garnered; so he fixed the ceremony for the month of July. This suited me very well; it was the time when I hoped to despatch my little ship or rather to sail it myself to Ceylon, and I was not sorry to be in a position to leave someone behind me to superintend the work and workmen on my estate. Amaru, fearing green snakes as she did, was ineligible for the post of inspector; but Nachor had shown me that he understood what he was about, and there was no doubt that when it became a question of looking after the interests of his only daughter, which would now be identical with my own, he would perform his duties admirably, We were now at the end of May; so after all, I was not condemned to any very long period of waiting.

"Nachor and Amaru followed the Hindoo religion. It was therefore agreed that we should be married according to the Brahminical rite. Accordingly, though everything was really settled between us, I looked about for a Brahmin to make formal request to Nachor in my name for his daughter's hand. Such is the custom of the country, and I saw no harm in conforming to it. I had no acquaintances among the Brahmins; but Amaru suggested the tall fellow who had rolled his niece in a sheet, after swearing a false oath by the waters of the Ganges, and then thrown her into the fiery furnace in spite of her cries and supplications. I had nothing to say against him except that he was a poor sort of relation to have; but as the errand he was going to do for me with Nachor did not make him my uncle, what did that matter to me? So on the day agreed upon he left my house to go to Amaru's. Twice over at different intervals he came back again professing each time to have encountered evil omens by the way; but the third time, happiest presages having taken their place, he returned finally to inform me that Amaru's hand was mine and all I had to do now was to choose a day agreeable to the Brahmin.

"I told him every day was alike to me, so his day should be mine. Thereupon the Brahmin chose Friday. I thought for a moment of objecting, as you know in Europe we have certain prejudices about Friday; but I had boasted every day was alike to me, so I was not going to stultify myself and answered:

“‘Friday be it then, always provided it is next Friday!’

“The happy day arrived. It was at Nachor’s house that the ceremony was to be performed; and about five o’clock in the evening I proceeded thither. We mutually presented each other with the betel. The fire Homan was kindled with the wood Ravistu. The tall scamp of a Brahmin, the hero of the suttee, took three handfuls of rice and scattered them over Amaru’s head. He took three more and did the same to me, after which Nachor poured water into a great wooden bowl, washed my feet, then held out his hand to his daughter. Amaru laid her hand on her father’s, Nachor sprinkled some drops of water in the palm, laid two or three pieces of money there, and presented Amaru to me, addressing her thus:

“‘I have nothing more henceforth to do with you. I give you over to the power of another.’

“Thereupon the Brahmin drew from a little case the veritable marriage tie, that is to say, the *tali*, a knot of ribbon from which is suspended a little gold skull. This he showed to the company, afterwards handing it to me that I might tie it about my wife’s neck. This done, we ‘were married. But the custom of the country decrees that the marriage! festivities last five days, till the expiration of which period the husband cannot claim his wife. Accordingly for the first four days I was so well watched by the young men and maidens among the guests that I was barely allowed so much as to kiss the bride’s little finger. I tried to tell her by my looks how tedious I found the interval, while she gazed at me in a way that seemed to say, ‘True, it is long, but you must be patient! ‘and with this promise I had to be content.

“At length the fifth day came and passed and ended; at night-fall we were led in procession to my house. In the outer room a collation was spread; I did the honours to my friends, while they were undressing my wife and putting her to bed. Then after a while, when I thought nobody was looking at me I slipped away towards the bedroom door, quite willing to abandon the rest of the house to my guests, provided they left me the little room where the lovely Amaru was awaiting me. But at the door to my surprise I stumbled over something; I felt the obstacle with my hand and found it was a pair of slippers.

“A pair of slippers at Amaru’s door! What could it mean? The circumstance gave me pause for a moment, but next minute I kicked the slippers to one side and tried to open the door.

“The door was locked. I called in my softest voice, ‘Amaru! Amaru! Amaru! ‘expecting her every moment to come and open it; but though I could hear quite plainly that there was someone, or rather two people, in the room, I received no answer. You may imagine my feelings. But for those confounded slippers I might have doubted still; but as things were, I was just beginning to thump the door with all my might when I felt my arm seized. Turning round I saw it was Nachor.

“‘By the Lord!’ I cried, ‘I am glad to see you. You must help me to punish your infamous daughter.’

“‘What do you mean? ‘asked Nachor.

“‘I mean to say she is locked up there with a man, neither more nor less.’

“‘With a man? ‘cried Nachor.’ In that case she is no daughter of mine; if it is true, you may put her in prison, or kill her, if you will; you have every right.’

“‘So much the better! If I have the right I will use it, I promise you that.’

“‘But what makes you think so?’

“‘Why, by God! the noise I can hear in the room and besides, the slippers,’ — and so saying I kicked over the incriminating articles towards Nachor. The latter picked up one slipper and then the other, and examining them carefully:

“‘Oh! happy Olifus! ‘he cried. ‘Oh! twice blessed husband! How highly privileged is our family amongst all others! My son, thank Vishnu and his wife Lackemi, thank Siva and his wife Parvati, thank Brahma and his wife Sarasvati, thank Indra and his wife witi, thank the tree Kalpa, the cow Kamaderu and the bird Garruda. A holy man deigns to do for you what as a rule he does only for the King of the country; he spares you the trouble you were about to take and in nine months, if the eight great Gods of Hindustan turn not away their looks of favour from us and from your wife, we shall have a Brahmin in our family.’

“‘Pardon me! ‘I exclaimed,’ but I have no sort of wish to have a Brahmin in my family. I am no laggard, and the trouble the holy man takes I would gladly have taken myself. I am not King of the country, and therefore I do not regard this as an honour. I will thank neither the bird Garruda, nor the cow Kamaderu, nor the tree Kalpa, nor Indra nor Brahma, nor Siva, nor Vishnu, but I will break the back of your rascally Brahmin, who burnt his niece alive after swearing by the waters of the Ganges that he would take her home again.’

“So saying, I seized a stout bamboo, fully determined to put my threat into execution. But at Nachor’s cries all the crowd of guests came running up; seeing which, I threw away my bamboo and rushed into a small adjoining room, locking the door behind me. There I could give free vent to my fury. I threw myself on the mat-covered floor and rolled in frenzy, cursing and swearing.

“In the middle of my transports, I felt a woman’s arms about me and a mouth pressed against mine. I felt no very great surprise. Amongst my slaves of the fourth class, the Sudra caste that is to say, there was a pretty child who had sometimes looked at me in a way I had found agreeable. Her fidelity and sympathy with my calamity at the very time I had completely forgotten the poor girl, touched me.

“‘Ah! my poor Holaoheni,’ I said to her, ‘I think verily there is a curse on me and my wives. So I swear henceforth to marry no more, but having found a pretty mistress like you, to ask no more.

See here — ’ and I paid her back the kiss she had given me.

“‘Ah! ‘she sighed five minutes later.

“‘Great God! ‘I cried, ‘it is not Holaoheni; then who can it be? Oh God, Oh God, can it again be — ’ And the same cold sweat that I had already experienced on three similar occasions bedewed my brow!

“‘Yes! you ungrateful wretch, it is I again, it is I always; it is I who am never weary of being repulsed, insulted and deceived, and still come back to you each time I have good news to tell you.’

“Good! ‘said I, unlacing the conjugal embrace about my neck:

“I know what your news is; you are come to tell me I am father of a third child?’

“‘Whom I have called Philip, in memory of the day when I came to warn you that your third wife was deceiving you. Alas! to-day I have no need to warn you, you have found it out yourself, my poor dear!’

“‘Bah,’ I cried, losing all patience, ‘it is all very well, but here I am with three boys on my hands; surely that’s about enough!’

“‘Ah! yes, so you would like a girl; well, well, to-day is the twentieth of July, St. Margaret’s Day; by that blessed Saint’s good offices you may hope to have your prayers fulfilled.’

“I heaved a sigh.

“‘Now, my dear! ‘she resumed, ‘you will understand that with a family like mine one cannot stay long away from home; and if it were not for the very honourable the Heer Van Tigel, a senator of Amsterdam, who has promised to cherish and protect our poor Philip, as if he were his own son, and who in my absence is so good as to look after him and his brothers, I should not have been able to pay you even this short visit.'

"'So you are leaving me? 'I said.

"'Yes, but before I go, let me give you a piece of advice.'

"'Very good!'

"'You are angry with that poor dear good Brahmin, who, thinking he was doing you a service....'

"'Certainly I am!'

"'Be quits with him, that is only fair. But do it cleverly; avenge yourself as they do in these parts, without exposing yourself to danger. Remember, your life belongs to your wife and children.'

"'I cannot deny it,' I faltered, 'still, your advice is good; now, what do you recommend?'

"'Oh! good Lord! you know what it says in the Bible, "Seek, and thou shalt find." You have a ship ready loaded, a good bit of stuff worth two or three thousand rupees in India, twice as much in Ceylon, three times as much in Java. Go to Trincomalee or Batavia, and I promise you a good market. Good-bye, my dear, or rather "au revoir "; for you will force me, I very much fear, to make one or two more voyages in the Indian Ocean. Luckily, I am like Mahomet, and when the mountain will not come to me, I go to the mountain. By-the-bye, do not forget at the first opportunity to burn a taper to St. Margaret.'

"'Yes, yes,' I told her, lapsing into a brown study. 'Never fear, I will do my best to keep sound and well for your sake and our dear children's... and if on the way I come across a chapel of St. Margaret... Ah! I have found it,' I suddenly cried.

"I waited for the Buchold to ask me what I had just found, but she was already gone.

"What had I found? — A means of vengeance!

"I called one of my slaves, who was famous for his skill in charming snakes, and promised him ten *farons,* if before to-morrow morning he brought me a green snake. Half-an-hour later he brought me the reptile required in a box. It was the best and most deadly of its kind, a genuine '*emerald necklace'*. I gave him twelve *farons* instead of ten, and he departed, commending me to the eight great gods of Hindustan.

“For my part I began by stowing about my person all I possessed in the way of coin, gems and pearls. Then I crept on tip-toe to my wife’s room and opened the box in which my snake was imprisoned just over the Brahmin’s slipper; the creature finding a nest that seemed to have been made expressly for it, quietly coiled itself up inside, and I went off to my little ship, which was tossing in the harbour with its cargo of *cardamum* on board.

“True, I was abandoning a house worth twelve crowns and a stock of furniture worth eight. But, my word! in great crises we must be ready to bear a trifling loss.

“My crew had been warned they might get sailing orders at any moment, and all was ready. We had nothing to do but lift anchor and up sails, — which we did without unnecessary noise or blare of trumpet.

“When day dawned we were already more than ten leagues from the coast.

“I have never heard a word since of that big scamp of a Brahmin; but it seems probable that by this time he is permanently cured, and has been for twenty years or more, of his bad habit, when he goes into a room, of leaving his slippers at the door.

“Upon my word!” said Père Olifus at this point, looking at the dead body of his second bottle, “I think the rum is playing me false; it is high time to go on to the rack-punch.”

CHAPTER XV.

FIFTH AND LAST MARRIAGE OF PÉRE OLIFUS.

AS may be supposed, the narrator had not enlivened the narration of his first four marriages with a bottle of gin and a bottle of rum to follow, without the recollections of the past, mingled with the present libations, producing some signs of emotion in his story. We felt convinced, Biard and myself, that if he had still to tell us about a sixth or seventh marriage, we should be obliged either to impound the bottle of rack-punch or else put off to the morrow, the final scenes of the conjugal Odyssey of the Ulysses of Monnikendam.

Fortunately he himself reassured us, for after drinking his whack of rack-punch and passing the back of his hand across his lips, he said, in the tone of a man making a public announcement:

“‘Fifth and last marriage of Père Olifus.”

After which, he went on in his ordinary voice:

“Accordingly I made sail with my little ship, — she was a sort of lugger, that was all, carrying a crew of six hands, — trusting to what fate might bring us. We intended anyhow to double Cape Comorin, and if the wind held good and the weather kept favourable, to leave Ceylon on the port bow and make Sumatra and Java. Sumatra *or* Java, what cared I, the further I went towards the Pacific Ocean, the more sure I was of a market for my *cardamum.*

“The seventh day out we sighted Ceylon; with my glass I could even discern the houses of Port de Galle. But there, the wind was fresh, and we had still before us pretty near a month of good weather. So I turned her head from the land, which seemed to draw us towards it, and steered for Acheen, sailing my cockle-shell over the Indian Ocean with as much calmness and confidence as if she had been the best clipper-ship out of Rotterdam.

“All went well for the first five days, and afterwards too, as we shall see; only in the second watch of the sixth night a little accident occurred which precious near sent us all to fish for pearls at the bottom of the Gulf of Bengal. The five preceding nights I had steered the ship myself, and everything had gone well. But now we were on the high seas, and neither rock nor shoal was charted within miles, while thanks to our low masts and small spread of canvas we could easily escape, especially at night, the notice of pirates, however sharp-sighted. So I put the handiest of my men at the helm, went down to the ‘tween-decks, lay down atop of my bales, and fell asleep.

“I do not know how long I had been, sleeping, when suddenly I was awoke by a mighty rumpus over my head.

“The hands were running wildly about the decks, shouting, and yelling, praying and swearing. One thing was plain that the ship was in danger, and imminent danger. The greater the peril, the more imperatively it claimed my presence; so without troubling my head further as to its precise nature, I rushed to the hatchway and sprang on deck.

“The sea was smooth, the sky spangled with stars, except where an enormous mass that seemed to hang above our heads, ready to fall at any moment on the ship, made a dark blotch in the sky. All eyes were fixed upon it, all efforts were directed to avoiding it. But what *was* this strange and terrifying object? Your man of science would have devoted his energies to solving the problem and been swallowed up before he discovered the secret. But I was a man of action. I sprang aft and put the helm hard-a-port; at that moment a smart puff from the nor’-nor’-west — God must have sent it us — struck the ship and sent her flying forward like a startled horse. Consequently, just as the impending mass came down, instead of falling right atop of us, as it had threatened to do, it grazed our poop, and it was we who now found ourselves high on the crest of a wave instead of down in the trough of the sea.

“What had come so near overwhelming us was an enormous Chinese junk with a hull as round as a calabash, which had come upon us without a word of warning. I had learned in Ceylon and at Goa a few words of Chinese — not, perhaps, of the most polite kind, but at any rate not wanting in vigour. I seized my speaking- trumpet and hurled these like a broadside at the subjects of the Sublime Emperor.

“But to our amazement not a soul replied. Then we noticed for the first time that the junk lay like a log, as if there was no one on deck to steer a course; no light was visible either through the portholes or in the binnacle. It might have been a great dead fish, the carcase of Leviathan. She was under bare poles, and altogether the thing was so extraordinary as to demand investigation. We knew the Chinese were very lazy fellows, but the laziest of lubbers are not in the habit of going to the devil quite so calmly as all this. I gathered that something out of the common had befallen ship or crew, and as we had still a couple of hours or more to wait for daylight, I manoeuvred so as to keep company with the junk. This was easy enough to do, the only danger being that of a collision with her, for she rolled about like a log. I kept the lugger under a single sail, so as to guard against this risk.

"Little by little day dawned, and as the darkness lessened, we strained our eyes to make out any signs of life in the huge vessel; but not a soul stirred. Either she was a derelict or all hands were fast asleep. I hauled in as close as possible. I sang out all the Chinese words I knew; one of my crew who had lived ten years at Macao hailed them in the same language. But no one answered. Then we determined to make a circuit of the hulk to see if all was as quiet to starboard as to port; just the same, only an accommodation ladder hung from the starboard bulwarks. I worked in as near as I could, got hold of the ladder, and in five minutes stood on her decks. It was plain something had happened of a disagreeable nature to the junk's crew. Broken woodwork, flying cordage, rags and tatters of clothing, here and there pools of blood; everything pointed to a desperate fight, a fight in which the Chinese had evidently had the worst of it.

"While I was making my survey of the deck, I thought I heard stifled groans from below. I tried to get down into the lower-decks, but the hatches were battened down. I looked round and caught sight of a marlinspike lying by the capstan, which seemed the very thing for my purpose. Using this as a lever, I prized off the cover of one of the hatchways and let in daylight below decks.

"At the same moment the groans grew louder. I climbed down with some trepidation, I must confess, but half-way down the ladder I saw a sight that restored my confidence. On the main deck, ranged in a row like mummies, and tied up like sausages, lay a score of Chinese gnawing their gags and grimacing more or less hideously, according as nature had endowed them with more or less patience.

"I went up to the one who seemed the most important man amongst them; he had the honour and distinction of being bound with the thickest ropes and had the biggest gag in his mouth. I unlashed him and ungagged him as fast as I could; he proved to be the owner and skipper of the junk, Tsing-

Fong by name. His first act was to thank me very cordially, as far as I could make out what he said; then he begged me to help him set free his companions. In less than ten minutes the whole ship's company was at large. The instant a man found himself at liberty, he dashed down into the hold, where he disappeared from sight. I was curious to see what made them rush so hurriedly below, and I found the poor wretches had broached a water cask and were drinking greedily. They had not eaten or drunk for three days; but as they had suffered from the torments of thirst even more than from those of hunger, their first business was to assuage the former. Two drank to such excess that they died of the effects; a third ate so much that he burst.

"The explanation of the disaster, which had at first seemed so incomprehensible to us, was really quite simple. The ship had been boarded in the night by Malabar pirates and the crew mastered after a brief struggle, the marks of which we had seen on the decks. Then, to be free from interruption in ransacking the cargo, the pirates had bound, gagged, and deposited all hands, captain included, in the 'tween- decks; after which they had appropriated whatever they pleased of the ship's lading, damaging or throwing overboard part of what they could not carry off. Then, hoping no doubt to pay a second visit to the junk, they had clewed up all the sails and left her to drift. In this helpless condition she had come near running into us.

"The delight of captain and crew can be imagined when they found themselves delivered by us, or rather by me, after three days of anguish, from their very unpleasant predicament. They threw a rope to my men, four of whom climbed up to the deck, while the two others made fast the lugger astern of the junk, where she looked no bigger than a boat towed in the wake of a brig of the ordinary size. The tow-rope made fast, the two remaining members of my crew joined us on the Chinese vessel. Our next business was to bring the latter and her crew into a condition to continue her voyage. The subjects of the Sublime Emperor are poor sailors and arrant cowards; they shouted and gesticulated with the best, but would never have got things ship-shape if we had not done it for them.

"This accomplished, after seeing to the wounded, heaving the dead overboard, and getting the junk under sail, we decided that as the cargo had been taken out of her by the pirates, it was useless to pursue the voyage to Madras. Moreover, the captain was resolved to turn back. The fact is, he had hoped to get a cargo of *cardamum* at Madras, and there I was with a cargo of that very commodity on board. Only, as you will understand, the first thing the pirates had explored was Tsing-Fong's cash-box, which therefore was now in no condition to supply the eight thousand rupees at which my cargo was valued. Accordingly it was agreed that we should sail in company as far as Manilla, where the captain had a correspondent, and where consequently, thanks to the credit he enjoyed from the Straits of Malacca to the Straits of Corea, we could fix up our bargain. Having no particular preference for one port over another, and no special objection to the Philippines, I accepted the proposal, only making one condition, that I should be responsible for the navigation, for I had no sort of wish to make acquaintance with the pirates.

"Whether it was wounded vanity or suspicion as to my intentions, Captain Tsing-Fong raised sundry objections, but when he saw that, thanks to my handling, his clumsy vessel, which till then had been rolling like a barrel, began to cleave the waters like a fish, he folded his hands on his stomach, and nodded his head up and down, pronounced two or three times over the two syllables *'Hi-o, Hi-o,'* which means 'wonderful,' and troubled his head no further.

"The result was we cleared the Straits of Malacca without accident, passed safely through the archipelago of the Arambas, and rounding the Islet of the Corregidor, which stands like a sentinel guarding the entrance of the Bay, we entered the mouths of the Passig River, and cast anchor safe and sound by nightfall in front of the Custom House buildings.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BEZOAR-STONE.

"CAPTAIN TSING-FONG proved true to his word, and the very day after our arrival took me to see his correspondent, a wealthy cigar manufacturer, who offered either to pay me my eight thousand rupees in specie or else to supply me with merchandise to a corresponding amount, and this at a rate nobody but himself could afford, in consequence of the extent and far-reaching nature of his commercial transactions. The Philippine Islands, indeed, may be considered the common emporium of the world; there are to be found gold and silver from Peru, diamonds from Golconda, topazes, sapphires and cinnamon from Ceylon, pepper from Java, cloves and nutmegs from the Moluccas, camphor from Borneo, pearls from Manaar, carpets from Persia, benzoin and ivory from Cambodia, musk from the Loo Choo Islands, silks from Bengal, and porcelain from China. I was free to choose amongst all these commodities, and finally select such as should seem to promise the surest and quickest profit. However, as I was in no immediate hurry, having realised a very pretty little sum on my *cardamum*, I resolved to spend some time at Manilla, and study, during my stay in the Philippines, whichever branch of trade seemed most likely to be advantageous to a speculator who, starting with a hundred and forty francs, now possessed thirty thousand or so in ready cash to start in business with.

"I began by visiting the two cities, Manilla, the Spanish settlement, and Bedondo, the native town. The former is a congeries of monasteries, nunneries, churches and houses, squarely and solidly built, but arranged on no particular plan, with thick high walls loop-holed at irregular intervals and gardens that isolate them one from the other. The population consists of monks nuns cloaked Spaniards riding in shabby palanquins or stalking gravely along, cigar in mouth, like Castilian hidalgos of the time of Don Quixote de la Mancha. The town, therefore, which was spacious enough for a hundred thousand inhabitants, and possesses eight, is dull and dismal to a degree.

“This was not at all what I wanted; so, shaking my head in disgust, I determined to explore Bedondo. Next morning, after taking my chocolate, I directed my steps towards the commercial town, and the nearer I approached the more loudly I heard those sounds of life and stir that were entirely lacking in that tomb they call Manilla. I breathed more freely; the grass seemed greener and the sunshine brighter. So I hastened to pass the fortifications and cross the drawbridges of the military quarter, and, like a man emerging from a subterranean vault, I suddenly found myself on the Bridge of Stone, as it is called. From that point onwards all was animation and bustle. The bridge was crowded with Spaniards in palanquins, half-castes on foot armed with great parasols, Creoles followed by their attendants, peasants from the neighbouring villages, Chinese merchants, Malay workmen; the noise and tumult and confusion were a positive pleasure to a man who had begun to think he was dead and buried after staying two days in Manilla.

“So farewell to the gloomy town and its dull houses; farewell to the noble senors, and greeting to the merry suburb, greeting to Bedondo with its hundred and forty thousand inhabitants; greeting to its elegant houses and busy population; greeting to the quay where pulleys creak and bales are unloaded from every quarter of the world, where lie side by side Chinese junks, *pirogues* from New Guinea, *proas* from the Malay Peninsula, brigs and barques and clippers from Europe. There is no privilege, pride and exclusiveness; a man is taken for what he is worth; everyone is known at the first glance by his costume, before he opens his mouth; Malays, Americans, Chinese, Spaniards, Dutchmen, Madagascans, Hindoos are for ever elbowing their way through the endless ocean of Tagals, male and female. These formed the indigenous population of the islands when the Spaniards first conquered them, and may be recognised, so far as the men are concerned, by their costume, which is not unlike the Norman peasant’s, a shirt that hangs loosely like a blouse over linen trousers, a loosely tied cravat, a felt hat with flapping brim, buckled shoes, a rosary round the neck, and a little scarf worn like a plaid. The women wear high Spanish combs, a long veil flowing behind, a bodice of white linen, which covers the bosom but leaves the body bare between breast and navel, a striped petticoat reaching to the ankles, a bright coloured sash rolled round the waist, and tiny slippers that leave the feet almost bare. A cigar is always between their lips, the smoke of which makes their ardent eyes seem more ardent still as seen through it.

"Yes, this was the place I preferred; good-bye to Manilla and bravo to Bedondo. I only returned to Manilla to fetch my baggage and have it transferred to Bedondo. My friend, the Chinese captain's correspondent, approved of my resolve, which he declared was that of a man of sense; he had himself a house at Bedondo, whither he used to come on Sundays to recover from the boredom of the preceding week. He even made me an offer of a sort of cottage, attached to this house, but with a separate entrance on the quay; this, however, I would not accept except as a tenant, and it was agreed that, for the sum of thirty rupees a year, I should have the use and enjoyment of the same, as our lawyers at home put it, with all its conveniences and appurtenances.

"After three days' observation I had learned that the main business and chief occupation of your Tagal is cock-fighting. You cannot go from end to end of the quay of Bedondo without coming across ten, fifteen, twenty circles of spectators gathered about two feathered champions with whose destiny are bound up those of two, three, four, or five Tagal families. Not only does a native family that owns a fighting-cock live by its winnings, but, moreover, relatives and neighbours gain a livelihood by backing the same bird. From that source come the wife's tortoise- shell combs, gold rosaries, and glass-bead necklaces, the husband's pocket-money and the cigar he smokes; so the cock is the spoilt child of the house. A Tagal mother neglects her brats to look after her cock; she trims his feathers and sharpens his spurs. As for the master of the house, he will not intrust the bird to anybody when away from home, not even to his wife; he tucks it under his arm and takes it with him when he sallies forth on business and pleasure. If he meets another fancier by the way, challenges are exchanged and bets laid, and the two owners squat down face to face. Each puts up his bird, and at once a ring is formed, in which the two fiercest passions of mankind find scope — gambling and fighting. Upon my life, you can live a merry life at Bedondo.

"Another branch of industry is in vogue among the Tagals bearing a strong resemblance to the quest of the philosopher's stone, that of the bezoar hunters. Nature, which has made the Philippines the emporium of all the poisons in the world, has given the same islands the bezoar- stone, which is the general and universal antidote."

“By the Lord! “I exclaimed, breaking in on the flow of Père Olifus’ story, “now you have let drop the word *bezoar,* I should be glad to know what to think of the matter. I have heard much talk of it, particularly in the *Arabian Nights*; I have seen the rarest gems — the *balais,* or straw-coloured ruby, the garnet in the rough, the carbuncle, but, search as I might, I have never seen a a bezoar; no dealer has ever been able to show me the smallest sample.’’

“Well, sir,” Père Olifus replied, “I have. I have seen, touched and even swallowed one, else, as you shall see, I should not be enjoying at the present moment the honour of drinking a glass of liquor to your very good health.”

So saying, the worthy man tossed off a glass of punch at one gulp, bowing his compliments to Biard and myself.

“Well, I must tell you,” he resumed, “that not only does the bezoar exist, but that there are three different kinds of it — the bezoar found in the intestines of the cow, in those of the goat, and those of the monkey. The stone of the first kind is the least valuable; twenty carats of this is not so precious as seven of the second, and seven of this as one of the last.

“It is chiefly in the kingdom of Golconda that the goats are found which produce the bezoar. Are they a distinct species? It cannot be so, for of two kids by the same mother one will give bezoar and the other not. The goatherds have only to touch their goats in a particular spot and in a particular way to know how things stand; they can count through the hide the number of stones the intestines contain and calculate their value to a nicety. Thus the bezoar can be, and often is, bought whilst the animal is still alive.

“All the same a trader of Goa had a curious and unfortunate experience whilst I was living on the Malabar coast. He bought in the mountains of Golconda four goats containing bezoars: he carried them a hundred and fifty miles from their birthplace, opened two of them directly and found the bezoars inside them, but considerably diminished in size. Ten days later he killed a third; when the carcase came to be examined, it was evident ihere had been a bezoar once, but this had disappeared. Finally in another month he killed the fourth, and it showed no trace whatever of the precious stone, which had utterly and entirely vanished. This would seem to prove there is some special tree or special herb grows in the mountains of Golconda to which cows and goats owe the formation of the bezoar.

“One of the native industries of the Philippines, as we have said, is hunting the monkeys which give the bezoar. The monkey bezoar is as precious compared to the inferior sorts as the diamond is to paste, pebble or rock crystal. A single stone is worth a thousand, two thousand, ten thousand livres. One pinch of this bezoar, powdered and dissolved in a glass of water, is an effectual antidote against the most terrible poisons of the Philippines or even the *upas* of Java.

“It is incredible how largely poisons are employed from Luzon to Mindanao, especially in times of cholera, for the symptoms being the same, advantage is taken of the prevalence of the disease for husbands to get rid of their wives, wives of their husbands, nephews of their uncles, debtors of their creditors, and so on, and so on.

“But the race which is most in evidence at Bedondo is the Chinese. They occupy the best quarter of the town on the banks of the Passig. Their houses are built, half of stone, half of bamboo; these are handsome buildings, well ventilated and sometimes adorned with paintings outside, having stores and shops on the ground floor. And what stores! what shops they are! It is enough, look you, to make a man’s mouth water, to say nothing of a heap of quaint little Chinese figures that squat in front of the doors and wag their heads and make eyes askance at the passers-by.

“As I had saved the life of a Chinese captain, and rescued a Chinese crew and a Chinese junk, I found myself well received at Bedondo. Besides, the correspondent of Captain Tsing-Fong, the same from whom I rented the cottage I lived in, traded more especially with the subjects of the Sublime Emperor.

“The first Sunday he came to spend at Bedondo he gave up entirely to me. He asked me if I was a sportsman, and I made bold to say I was. Thereupon he told me he had arranged a shooting party for the following Sunday, and if I would join it I need not trouble my head about preparations, as on reaching his friend’s country house I should find a complete outfit ready for me. I accepted gladly. We were to go up the Passig river and shoot near a charming little lake in the interior, called the Laguna.

“The following Saturday we started from Bedondo in a boat with six sturdy rowers, and it wanted all that number, I can tell you, to make headway against the current. It was a delightful journey; not only were the two banks of the stream charmingly diversified, but also, to the right and left of us, the *pirogues*, passing up and down the waterway, presented as pretty a spectacle as you could wish to see.

"After three hours rowing we halted at a pretty fishing village, the inhabitants of which go down to Bedondo every evening to sell their day's catch. It is prettily reflected in the placid water, with its rice-fields waving in the wind, its clusters of palms and bamboos, and its high-roofed huts that look like great bird-cages hanging from the trees. We had stopped in order to rest our men and dine ourselves. The meal over and the oarsmen refreshed, we set out again. Eventually, just as the sun was setting, we saw the Lake of Laguna, which is thirty leagues round, glittering in front of us like an immense mirror. By seven o'clock we entered the lake, and two hours later reached the house of our host's friend. He was a Frenchman, Monsieur de La Géronnière by name, who had lived for the last fifteen years on the banks of the Laguna lake, on a charming property known as Hala-Hala. He welcomed us with truly Oriental hospitality; but when he learned that I was a Éuropean, of French origin, when we had exchanged a few words in a language which, except in the bosom of his family, he did not have occasion to speak once a year, he could not make enough of me.

"He was all the better pleased because I assumed no airs of grandeur or superiority. 'You do me too much honour,' I told him; 'I am only a poor sailor-man of Monnikendam, a poor ship's captain of Ceylon, a poor trader of Goa; I am a rough, honest fellow, and you must take me for what I am.' So they took Père Olifus for what he was, — a good fellow who gave himself no airs.

"That night I was faithful to my professions, and took things as they came, finding no fault either with bottle or bed. They had made me tell my adventures, which were listened to with the greatest attention; only unfortunately they started a ridiculous idea in my host's head, namely to marry me a fifth time.

"But I declared I had definitely decided it was my wisest course never again to intrust my happiness to a woman; the beautiful Nahi-Nava-Nahina, the lovely Donna Inez and the charming Amaru had disgusted me with the whole species.

"'Pooh!' my correspondent replied, 'You have not seen our Chinese beauties at Bedondo yet; when you have, you will tell me a different tale.'

"The result was, I went to bed with thoughts of matrimony running in my head, and dreamt I was wedding a Chinese widow, who had so tiny, tiny,

tiny a foot I could not believe she was a widow at all.

CHAPTER XVII.

A SPORTING ADVENTURE.

"AT five o'clock in the morning I was awakened by the barking of dogs and the sound of horns. I thought I was still at The Hague on a hunting morning, when King William is starting for the chase in the park of Loo. Far from it; I was four thousand leagues away, more or less, on the banks of Lake Laguna and we were going shooting in the mountains of the Philippines. The game we were going to pursue was the stag, the wild boar and the buffalo; the game that might perhaps pursue us was the tiger, the crocodile and the ibitin.

"As to the tiger, I had been duly warned, if I put up whether a single peacock or a flock of them I must look out for tigers, which are never far away. For the crocodile, whenever I went near the lake, I must beware of tree trunks lying on the banks. These are almost always crocodiles, which sleep with one eye open, and snap off an arm or leg, as you pass near them.

"The ibitin is another matter. It is a reptile thirty feet long, first cousin of the boa-constrictor, which twines itself round trees like a great creeper and hangs there motionless; then suddenly, when least expected, it drops on stag, wild boar or buffalo, crushes its victim against a tree, breaking its bones, and macerating its flesh, and ends by swallowing it whole. It will attack a man when it gets the chance, and will make its dinner with equal avidity on Tagal, Chinaman or European.

"The means of defence are quite simple; the great thing is to know how to use them. You must carry in your belt a hunting knife as keen as a razor. The ibitin is not poisonous, what it does is to stifle you and crush you to death; so you slip between yourself and one of the serpent's coils enfolding your body, the weapon in question, and slash, with a sideways slice you cut the creature in two. At the moment of starting, my host put in my belt a magnificent hunting-knife, with which he had already, he told me, despatched two or three ibitins. As for poisonous snakes, as there are no remedies against their bites, it was mere waste of time to look for any.

"Two months before this date, Monsieur de La Géronnière had lost a charming native girl of sixteen or eighteen, who he supposed had been carried off and devoured by a tiger, a crocodile or a serpent. Poor Shimindra had gone out one fine evening and never come back, and spite of all the efforts made to find her, she had never been heard of again.

"I am bound to admit that when my host told me of all the dangers we should run in the course of our day's sport, I began to think it was a strange way of enjoying oneself. We rode to the spot where the shooting was to begin; there we dismounted and proceeded to penetrate the woods.

"The first game I put up was a fine flight of peacocks. I marked carefully the place, and making a wide détour, had the satisfaction of not disturbing the tiger whose presence was denoted by the birds.

"Ten minutes more and I heard a shot, Monsieur de La Géronnière had just killed a stag. It was my turn next; hearing a great disturbance in front of me and seeing the brushwood move, I let fly blindfold. I cannot say my bullet hit the wild boar; rather the wild boar ran into my bullet. Everybody congratulated me on my magnificent shot. I had killed a *rogue*; that is what they call old solitary wild boars in your country, is it not?"

I nodded my head in affirmation.

"My wild boar was grallocked and loaded on the shoulders of four Tagals. I was invited to continue my exploits, and assured that my first shot had proved me a master of the craft.

"I tell you, sir, there is nothing like flattery for undoing a man. I thought now that I had killed a wild-boar, I was going to kill a tiger, a rhinoceros, and an elephant. I started off again through the forest, asking nothing better than to meet face to face all the monsters of the Philippines. In my ardour I failed to notice that little by little I was increasing my distance from the rest of the party. I had been told we should have to go uphill for two hours or so, and now after barely three-quarters of an hour's walking I found myself on a downward slope. Suddenly thirty paces away I heard a terrific bellow. I turned in the direction of the sound and saw a buffalo. It was a fair shot. Only, as my gun shook a little, I don't quite know why, in my hands, I rested it upon the branch of a tree as I pulled the trigger.

"Scarcely had I done so when I saw two bloodshot eyes coming towards me, while the animal's hoofs tore up the soil in a long furrow. I loosed my second shot; but instead of checking the animal's speed, this seemed only to increase it. I had only time to throw away my gun, seize a branch of a tree under which I stood, and haul myself on to it by the strength of my arms, and thence climb up into the higher branches.

“But I was far from being done with my buffalo yet. He could not climb the tree after me, but he could and did guard the trunk. For the first ten minutes I jeered at him: Oh! stamp about, my good fellow,’ I said, ‘stamp about; little I care for you.’ However, after another ten minutes I began to realize that the matter was more serious than I had at first supposed. When an hour had elapsed, I understood by the calm systematic way he marched round and round the tree that his mind was made up to be my jailor, until he could be my executioner. From time to time he would lift his head and look at me with his bloodshot eyes, bellowing defiance the while, then set to work cropping the grass around my tree as much as to say: ‘There, you see I have all I want, grass to eat, the morning and evening dew to quench my thirst, while you, as you are a carnivorous animal, and have not yet acquired the habit of living on leaves, one day or another you will have to come down. And when you do, look out for my hoofs, beware of my horns! you are in for a bad time, I think!’

“Luckily Père Olifus is the kind of man who is quick to make up his mind and act upon his resolution. I said to myself: ‘Olifus, my lad, the longer you wait, the worse it will be for you. Give your buffalo an hour to go away, and then if he is not gone, well, we shall see what we shall see.’ I looked at my watch and found that it was eleven o’clock; I said: ‘Good! at mid-day, there will be “a fight to the death.’

“As I had feared, the buffalo instead of leaving the tree, kept on his sentry-go, every now and again lifting his nose in the air and bellowing with all his might. For my part, every ten minutes I looked at my watch and took a drink from my flask. At the end of the fifteenth minute I said to him: ‘Attention, my friend, you have only ten minutes more, and if within those ten minutes you don’t go by yourself, we will go together.’ But at the fifty-ninth minute, instead of going, he lay down, stretching out his head towards the foot of the tree, dilating his nostrils, and from time to time casting up at me an angry look that seemed to say: ‘Oh! we shall be here a while yet; never fear.’

“Now I had made up my mind things should go differently. At the sixtieth minute I gulped down what was left of the rum in my flask, a goodish drop. I put my knife between my teeth and jumped down, judging my distance so as to alight two feet behind my enemy, and laid hold of his tail with my left hand as I had seen the *toreros* do at Cadiz and Rio Janeiro.

"Quick as the buffalo was, I was quicker, and by the time he was on his legs I was fast to his tail. He whisked round two or three times, which only gave me an opportunity of twisting his tail more firmly round my wrist. Then seeing that if only I held on tight in my present position, he could not touch me with his horns, I began to pluck up courage, while he on the contrary began to bellow with disappointed rage.

"'Wait a bit,' I cried; 'aha! my friend, so you bellow with rage; now I am going to make you bellow with pain.'

"So saying, I took my knife and drove it into his body. It seems I had hit upon a tender spot; he reared like a prancing horse and sprang forward so suddenly and violently that he nearly tore my arm from the socket. But I held on and let him drag me along, while again and again and yet again I stabbed him. It was an experience I trust you may never have to undergo! Look you, it lasted a quarter of an hour, and in that quarter of an hour I travelled more than two leagues, through brambles and bogs and brooks. I might as well have been tied on to the tail of a locomotive. But all the time I kept my knife going, shouting: 'Ah! you scoundrel, ah, you villain! ah, you ruffian! you want to kill me, do you? stop a bit, stop a bit.' He was more than angry, he was mad, so mad that, coming to the top of a precipice, he never looked, but sprang over. But I had seen what was coming, and let go. I pulled up at the very edge, while he fell crash to the bottom.

"I poked my head over and saw the beast stretched dead on the rocks below. As for me, I am bound to say I was in scarcely better case; I was battered, bruised, cut and bleeding, but there were no bones broken. I picked myself up, cut down a sapling to steady my tottering steps, and set out for a brook I could see sparkling through the trees a hundred yards off. Coming to the banks I knelt down and began to wash the blood from my face, when I heard a voice crying in French, 'Help, help, help! 'I turned in the direction from which the cries came, and saw a girl almost naked running towards me with arms outstretched and showing signs of the liveliest terror. She was pursued by a negro of sorts holding a stick in his hand and coming on with such agility that though he was a hundred yards from her when I first saw them, he had caught her up in a moment, seized her in his arms, and borne her away into the thickest of the forest.

“This sight, the agonised tones of her appeal, the brutality of the wretch who had swung her over his shoulder and was carrying her away into the depths of the wood, all combined to restore my strength. I forgot my fatigue and dashed off in pursuit crying, ‘Stop! stop!’

“But seeing himself followed, the ravisher redoubled his efforts. The burden he carried seemed scarcely to check his speed. I could not understand how any human being could be endowed with such vigour, and I told myself under my breath that when we came face to face I might very likely regret having constituted myself the knight-errant of this distressed damsel.

“Meantime I was gaining on the fellow very slowly, and in spite of the sort of concentrated fury that filled me, I am not at all sure whether I should ever have overtaken him, if his unhappy victim had not seized the branch of a tree and clung to it with such tenacity that her ravisher stopped dead. Seizing her round the body, he used all his strength to make her let go, whilst she kept screaming: ‘Help, help! Save me! In heaven’s name do not desert me!’

“I was not more than twenty-five or thirty yards from her when suddenly the negro, seeing he was going to be attacked, determined, it would seem, to take the initiative, and letting go the woman, he advanced upon me, stick in air.

“In three bounds he was in front of me. I uttered a cry of amazement; what I had taken for a negro was an ape.

“Fortunately I had a stick, too; and as I knew well how to use it, I quickly assumed a posture of defence, for instead of attacking I was now to be attacked. As for the woman, directly she felt herself free, she had described a circle and come to seek shelter behind me, crying: ‘Courage, courage, sir. Oh! save me from this monster! Oh! do not desert me!’

“While parrying his blows and hitting out at him in a way that evidently startled, but did not discourage him, I examined my opponent. He was a great stalwart ape, all hairy, and standing nearly six feet high, with a greyish beard. Nature had taught him to use his stick with an address and activity that came very near giving him the victory. Fortunately for the honour of science, it was not so quite. After a ten minutes’ bout, with battered fingers and bruised flanks and bleeding face he began to give ground; but his only object was to reach a tree, up which he scrambled as quick as lightning — not however to stay there, but in order to spring down upon me from above.

Luckily I saw the movement and guessed his purpose; I drew my knife and held it above my head at the full stretch of my arm. Attack and defence were simultaneous. I felt an overwhelming weight crash down on my head. Both of us rolled over on the ground, but I was the only one to regain my feet. The knife had pierced his heart.

“The beast uttered a yell, bit at the grass with his teeth, tore up the earth with his nails, gave two or three convulsive movements, and expired.

“‘Oh! a very fine thing this sport,’ I cried, ‘if ever they catch me at it again, the devil fly away with me!’

“‘Then are you sorry you came? ‘said a gentle voice behind me.

“‘Great heavens! no,’ I said, turning round, ‘since I have been able to do you a service, my pretty child. But the deuce! how came you to be in the woods, what pleasure can you find in living with a monkey, and how is it you speak French?’

“‘I am in the woods because I have been carried off there; I found no pleasure in living with an ape, for did I not call you to rescue me, and I speak French because I was maid with Madame de La Géronnière.’

“‘Then,’ I cried, ‘you are called Shimindra? ‘“Yes.’

“‘You are the girl who disappeared some two months ago?’

“‘Yes, but now tell me, how do you come to know my name and my story?’

“‘Why, because Monsieur de La Géronnière told me both, of course.’

“‘So you know Monsieur de La Géronnière?’

“‘I am shooting with him. He is in the forest now, but whereabouts I have no notion; for I must tell you frankly, I have utterly lost my bearings.’

“‘Oh! don’t let that trouble you, *I* know my way quite well.’

“‘But as you knew your way, why did you not come back home.’

“‘Because night and day that odious beast never lost sight of me. I had made a score of futile attempts to escape; and if Providence had not brought you to this brook, most likely I should never have seen the homes of men again.’

“‘Well,’ I told her, ‘if you take my advice, charming Shimindra, we will go back now to the homes of men, as quick as may be; for I confess I shall feel much safer there than here.’

“‘So be it, I am ready; but first let me tell you a secret which will reward you for the gallant act you have just done. The horrible orang-outang you have just saved me from belongs to the very species of apes you have been told of as that from which the purest and best bezoar is obtained.'

"'Really and truly?'

"'You may assure yourself of the truth of what I say, while I go and repair the disorder of my dress with the help of a few cocoa-nut leaves.'

"I looked at the graceful Shimindra, and seeing that her toilet did indeed claim some attention, I nodded my assent. Then, full of curiosity and hope and fear, I once more unsheathed the knife which had already stood me in such good stead during the day's adventures and proceeded to the examination of my enemy's body.

"Shimindra and I found in the animal's intestines a beautiful blue stone veined with gold and as big as a pigeon's egg. It was one of the finest bezoars you could wish to see.

"'Now,' said Shimindra, 'if I may give you a piece of advice, it is to make no boast to anybody of possessing such a treasure; else you will not keep it long, even if they have to murder you to get hold of it.'

"I thanked Shimindra for her warning. Then, as the girl had by this time plaited herself quite a pretty and coquettish petticoat out of cocoa-nut leaves, and there was nothing to detain either of us in the woods — on the contrary, I was extremely anxious to be quit of them, — I begged Shimindra to act as my guide and show me the shortest way back to the house. Two hours later we arrived at Hala-Hala to the great surprise and delight of all assembled there, who thought I had surely shared Shimindra's supposed fate, and now saw me return in her company.'

"I related my adventures and Shimindra hers, but neither of us said one word of the bezoar.

CHAPTER XVIII.

VANLY-CHING.

“A WEEK later I was installed at Bedondo, and as I was bound to have a housekeeper of some sort to put in charge of my house, I asked Monsieur de La Géronnière to give me the charming Shimindra, and he very obligingly agreed to do so. My mind was made up. The branch of trade I meant to follow was Manilla cigars. Even in Europe they run the Havana article close, and throughout the Indian seas they enjoy the preference.

“What had especially suggested the idea to me was the circumstance that in Monsieur de La Géronnière’s establishment it was the charming Shimindra to whose care the cigar boxes were entrusted. I resolved, therefore, instead of buying the article ready-made, to have it manufactured on my own premises under Shimindra’s superintendence, and so substantially increase the profits.

“Nothing could be easier. We had a sort of shed built in the garden; Shimindra engaged ten young Tagal girls, some of whom came from the Royal manufactory of Manilla, and by the following day I enjoyed the pleasure of seeing my enterprise in full swing. Thanks to Shimindra’s active surveillance and her special knowledge, I had nothing to do and plenty of time to do it in.

“This proved my ruin. It is incredible how a casual word, no matter how trivial or even nonsensical, will sometimes stick in the wits and lead to unforeseen consequences. You may remember the two or three words my correspondent had let fall at Monsieur de La Géronnière’s supper table about Chinese beauties and a fifth marriage for me; well, there was not an hour of the day and still less of the night that I did not dream of them. No sooner was I in bed and asleep than a regular procession of Chinese damsels marched past my bed, showing me feet — feet that Cinderella’s slipper would have been many sizes too big for. It was very strange. I had Shimindra, whose beauty was unquestionable, there were half a score of girls in my cigar factory the plainest of whom, with her great dark eyes, her great velvety eyebrows, the fascinating charm of all her person, would have turned a Parisian’s head; yet with all this I could think of nothing but my Chinese charmers.

“The result was that the instant I was out of bed I would go wandering through the Chinese quarter, visiting all the shops, pricing fans, porcelains and screens, picking up two words of Chinese here, two words of Cochin-Chinese there, stammering out all sorts of compliments to the tiny feet hidden under the trailing robes, and returning home at night more determined than ever to satisfy my new caprice.

“In the middle of all this, I had met a charming little tea-shop keeper, owning one of the prettiest shops in Bedondo, who had particularly fascinated me by the way she ate her rice with her chopsticks, the instruments which Chinese ladies use instead of spoons and forks. It was more than mere skill, it was as good as a conjuring trick, and I really think it was vanity made pretty Vanly-Ching always have a pilau put on the table whenever there were strangers.

“By the bye, it should be noticed that the two words Vanly-Ching mean *ten thousand lilies,* so you see the godfathers and godmothers of my Chinese fair one had done her justice by giving her a name to harmonize with her beauty.

“I made enquiries of my correspondent, and the latter, at the very first word I said, lifted his finger to the height of his eye and exclaimed: ‘Oh ho! you scamp! you scamp! you — !’

“This meant, being interpreted: ‘Come, come, you are a mighty lucky fellow to have put your hand on such a prize at the first shot; you have done well!’ — and I quite agreed with him.

“Next he informed me that the fascinating Vanly-Ching was a little Chinese orphan; that she had been adopted by a celebrated physician, who had fallen in love with her when she was only twelve, and had married her, though he had reached the age of sixty-five.

“Providence, however, decreed that so disproportionate a union should not last long. In three months’ time the worthy doctor was dead of a disease, the nature of which he could not clearly diagnose himself. However, he was happy in his last moments, for never was man better nursed in sickness than he was by his good young wife; so he left her all he died possessed of, amounting to some two or three thousand rupees. It was a poor recompense for the devotion the widow had lavished upon him during his illness and the extreme grief she had displayed after his death.

"With the three thousand rupees she had inherited, the young widow set up, in one of the quietest corners of the town, a little business in fans, which thanks to her thrift and clever management began to prosper amazingly.

"But the most remarkable circumstance about this premature widowhood of the pretty child was that, instead of listening to all the many offers made her by the fine gentlemen of Bedondo, instead of losing the good reputation she had won by some foolish act, she would accept no protection but that of an old mandarin, a friend of her husband's, who used to come every day to bewail with her the bereavement they had suffered. Thus the widow and the mandarin got into the habit of lamenting together — the former her husband, the latter his friend; the result was that one fine morning it was announced that, in order to bewail their loss more at their ease, the two inconsolables were going to be married.

"Accordingly, a year after the death of her first husband the fascinating Vanly- Ching wedded the Mandarin. But once united and enjoying each other's company all day long, the pair it seems wept so much, and wept so sore, that the Mandarin, who was fifty, could not bear the strain of such a deluge of tears, and in two months time departed this life.

"The fascinating Vanly-Ching, who was only fifteen, naturally bore her sorrow better, so that though she had now to bewail at once her first and her second husbands, her beauty soon shone out more resplendent than ever through her tears.

"She had inherited from the late Mandarin a sum of five or six hundred pagodas; this little addition to her fortune enabled her to launch out into a more extensive business in a more fashionable district. Instead of fans, she took up porcelain, and the fame of her establishment and its pretty proprietress began to spread far and wide in Bedondo. So much so indeed, that the Judge of the High Court of Bedondo, who had been on intimate terms with both the first and second husbands of the fair Vanly-Ching, and who had therefore been able to appreciate how happy the Doctor had been during the three months and the Mandarin during the two months they had lived with her, set about the task of consoling her. Vanly-Ching declared her grief was so deep that she thought this would be impossible; but as the Judge pressed the point, she ended by telling him she was willing to try.

"The wedding took place after a year's interval. So long a delay is not obligatory, but Vanly-Ching was so careful an observer of the proprieties that nothing in the world would have induced her to seek consolation before the fitting time. Nevertheless, the Judge had no leisure to administer complete consolation for more than a month after his marriage. On the morrow of the day on which he had inherited a considerable sum of money from a distant relative at Macao, and on which he had given a dinner to a few friends to celebrate the happy event, he unfortunately died of a surfeit of swallows’ nests.

“But before expiring, he declared that the month he had just spent was the happiest of his life. As he had realised his legacy the moment it was his, the fair widow could, thanks to this money, still further extend her business, and established in the principal street of Bedondo the imposing tea-shop in which I had seen her wag her pretty head and eat rice.

“All this information, as you may suppose, completed my infatuation. The charming Vanly-Ching had had considerable experience of widowhood, but so little of marriage that she must evidently be the delicious hour I had dreamt of. So I opened my mind to my correspondent and told him how eagerly I desired to be her fourth husband and take her as my fifth wife.

“It is never news to a woman when you tell her you love her; they always know it before we do so. The fair Vanly-Ching manifested no surprise at my proposal, but said she had been expecting it. Such being her state of mind, she was able to give me an immediate answer, and this was favourable. She liked me well enough; but as she always made a point of being loved for herself alone, she insisted on my making out a rough statement of my fortune. If this were equal or superior to her own, she would believe in my disinterested affection; if inferior, she must suppose that base cupidity was my motive, and not true love at all.

“This seemed to me sensible and reasonable. I sent to ask her if she preferred my reckoning in francs, rupees, or pagodas; she said it was all the same to her, as she was equally familiar with the monetary systems of all countries. I was not so strong as she was at figures, and so I chose francs, and sent her next day the following paper:

“‘Correct Schedule of all profits made in the Indies and present means possessed by me, Jérôme Françoise Olifus.

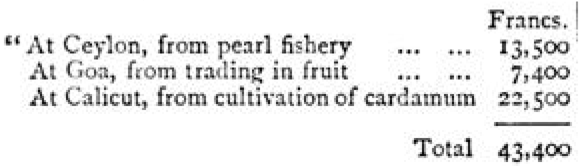

	Francs.
“ At Ceylon, from pearl fishery … …	13,500
At Goa, from trading in fruit … …	7,400
At Calicut, from cultivation of cardamum	22,500
Total	43,400

"'Memo: at Bedondo — from manufacture of cigars... profit accruing not yet verified, but this can easily be done.'

"Not a bad little nest-egg, you must allow. I had not wasted my time in the four years since I had left Monnikendam.

"Vanly-Ching drew out her statement in the same form and sent it to me — as follows:

"'Correct Schedule of all profits made by Vanly-Ching, tea-trader of Bedondo, in the different trades she has at different times followed:

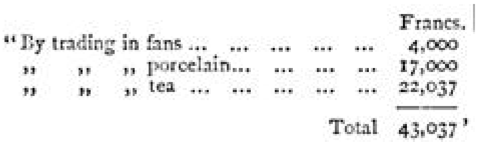

	Francs.
"By trading in fans	4,000
,, ,, ,, porcelain...	17,000
,, ,, ,, tea	22,037
Total	43,037'

"Thus within a trifle of 363 francs our fortunes balanced; I had even the advantage, as I had in store two hundred thousand cigars or so ready for delivery.

"Still I must confess that, instead of pluming myself in any way on this advantage, I was happy to possess some little pecuniary superiority over the beautiful Vanly-Ching, to compensate for all the physical superiorities she could boast over me.

This much allowed, and the fact duly established that I was marrying Vanly- Ching for love of her sweet self and not for her cash-box, the wedding was fixed for three months and seven days after date, the precise period when the mourning for her third husband came to an end. She had shown every delicacy; whilst remaining faithful to the memory of the deceased Judge, she was determined not to keep me waiting one minute longer than was necessary.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CHOLERA MORBUS.

"'THE report of my forthcoming marriage with Vanly-Ching was soon bruited abroad in Bedondo, and naturally enough produced different effects on the different inhabitants of the town, who for the last two or three years had been wont to mark the most trivial actions of the Chinese beauty. While some disapproved, others approved; many shook their heads, saying that the first husband had died at the end of three months, the second at the end of two months, the third at the end of one month, and that to keep the account straight, I should probably die on my wedding- night.

"But the one of all others who felt the blow most was poor Shimindra. The kindness I had shown the girl for some while had made her entertain the hope of becoming my wife. In a moment of despair she admitted to me to what heights her ambition had soared; but I had no difficulty in making her quickly understand what altogether superior claims Vanly-Ching, widow of a doctor, a mandarin, and a judge, had over a mere slave-girl like herself.

"It ended in Shimindra's resuming an attitude of proper humility, frankly confessing she ought never to have cherished such thoughts. At the same time, knowing that my rival had asked me to make a schedule of my property, she begged me not to include the bezoar in my list. As apart from it my fortune equalled or indeed surpassed my future bride's, I raised no difficulties about promising what Shimindra asked; and the bezoar suspended round my neck in a little leather purse still remained a secret between us two.

"Every evening I was admitted to the house to pay court to my intended; so the time passed rapidly enough. As I spoke only a little Chinese and she spoke very little Hindustani and not a word of Dutch or French, our conversation was carried on chiefly by signs and gestures. There were times when this provoked a boldness of expression I should certainly never have ventured on in words, but I must say to the credit of the charming creature, she kept intact the reputation she had earned for virtue, and while granting me some trifling and unimportant favours, she never allowed me to discount the privileges of a husband to any serious extent.

“At length the happy day arrived. The day but one before I had had a great fright; several cases of cholera had been reported at Cavite and one or two at Bedondo, so that I trembled lest the presence of the epidemic might lead Vanly-Ching to put off the date of our marriage; but the fair Chinese was not one to be easily daunted, and the circumstance made no difference to her arrangements.

“The day appointed, the 27th of October, was kept as a high day and holiday by all the inhabitants of Bedondo. From earliest dawn there was a throng round the bride’s door. It was the fourth time the fair Chinese had been carried through the town in bridal array; but the crowd was never weary of seeing her. By immemorial custom a Chinese bride is escorted through the streets to the accompaniment of music and singing. This, I have been informed by a learned Dutchman who lived at Manilla, bears a great resemblance to the nuptial processions of ancient Greece. On occasion of a first marriage the bride wears a thick veil over her face in sign of maidenhood; when she marries a second, third, or fourth time, the Chinese bride wears nothing to conceal her features. Of course this was the case with Vanly-Ching, and the circumstance gave me much satisfaction, for I could overhear frequent exclamations among the bystanders of:’ Lucky dog that Olifus, eh? lucky dog!’

“The rest of the ceremony is much the same as that observed in Siam. When the couple have arranged matters, the parents of the young man visit the parents of the girl and present them with seven bottles of betel; a week later the future husband comes himself and brings fourteen; then he stays at the father-in- law’s house for a month, to become properly acquainted with his future wife. Finally, on the day that is to complete the ceremonial, the parents meet, accompanied by the relatives and oldest friends of the two families, and deposit in a purse, one bracelets, another a ring, a third a sum of money; one of them takes a lighted candle, which he passes seven time round the presents, while all the rest utter loud cries of joy, wishing long life and the best of health to the young couple.

“Next follows a grand feast, followed by a little *tête-à-tête* supper, before finally retiring to the marriage chamber.

“As for Vanly-Ching and myself, we gladly dispensed with all this ritual. She had shown me the casket in which her little fortune was locked up; I had shown her my commercial bills and securities countersigned by the correspondent of my Chinese captain, payable at sight and to bearer. Each of us possessed forty thousand francs to leave to whichever survived; this was at least as good as seven boxes of betel, or even fourteen.

"Parents and relations, neither of us could boast of any; so the ceremonies of the purse and bracelets, of the lighted candles passed seven times around the presents, and of the shouts of joy wishing us long life and good health, were omitted. We contented ourselves with the grand dinner and the little confidential supper to follow.

"The state dinner was a magnificent affair; Vanly-Ching had ordered it and superintended it. It comprised the most choice viands; there were mice in honey, shark with woodlouse sauce, earth-worms in castor oil, swallows' nests served with powdered crab, and bamboo salad, the whole washed down with copious *congou,* with which attendants bearing enormous silver tea-pots kept filling our cups. We drank to the Emperor of China, the King of Holland, the East India Company and our own happy union, always holding the cup in two hands and doing *chin-chin,* that is to say, wagging the head from right to left and left to right like dancing dolls, after which everybody displayed the bottom of his cup to show it was empty.

"During the course of dinner the fascinating Vanly-Ching seemed to look at me with some anxiety and kept whispering to her neighbours. Two or three times she turned to me to ask me in the gentlest voice in the world:

"'How do you feel, my dear?'

"'Very well,' I told her, 'very well indeed.'

"But in spite of this assurance, she shook her head and kept sighing so sadly that I really began to be anxious about myself, and, on rising from the table, looked at myself in a mirror. The examination reassured me; my face was beaming with happiness and health.

"The company, however, appeared to think otherwise; for two or three of the guests, before leaving, came up to me to ask if I was ill, and in spite of my answer in the negative, wrung my hand pathetically as they took their leave.

"I even thought I heard the word 'cholera 'mentioned in a whisper; but when I asked if any of our acquaintances had been attacked by the disease, they said No; so I came to the conclusion I had misunderstood.

"I looked round for my beautiful bride, who approached me with anxious eyes. I tried to question her, but she only gazed at me and wiped away a tear, murmuring, ‘Poor fellow, poor fellow! ‘I took leave of my guests, whom I longed to be rid of, rubbing my nose against theirs, as the custom is. My correspondent was the last to go. I rubbed his nose with extra cordiality, for it was he, you will remember, who had acted as intermediary in the negotiations leading to my marriage. I pointed with a knowing smile to the lovely Vanly, who was making softly for the bed-chamber, giving him to understand I was on the point of following her.

“‘You would do much better to send for the doctor,’ he said — and with these startling words he followed the other departing guests.

“I could make nothing of it. However, I was not going to trouble my head to find out what it all meant. I shut the house door, and hurried eagerly into the bed-chamber.

“The beautiful Vanly was already there, standing by the table, on which was spread a charming collation set out among fruits and flowers; she was busy pouring a pink liquid from one vessel into another. I had never seen anything look more appetising; it was for all the world like distilled rubies.

“‘Look here, darling ‘I said as I came in, ‘can you tell me why it is my present circumstances, which I find pre-eminently satisfactory, seem to call for pity on the part of everybody else? They keep asking me how I feel, am I a little better, and advise me to send for the doctor. Upon my word! I seem to be like a certain character in a French play I once saw at Amsterdam; all his friends try to persuade him he has got the fever and tell him this so often and so emphatically that he ends by believing them, and after bidding good night all round, goes off and takes to his bed.’

“‘Ah! ‘faltered Vanly, ‘if it was only the fever you had, with Peruvian bark we could cure that.’

“‘What! if it was only the fever I had, but I have not got the fever, I beg to tell you.’

“‘Dear Olifus,’ said Vanly, ‘now that we two are alone, now you need make no concealment, tell me frankly what you feel.’

“‘What I feel? I feel a most burning desire to tell you I love you, — and better still, to...’

‘“And not the least little cramp in your stomach? ‘asked Vanly.

“‘Not the very least.’

“‘Not a slight chill?’

“‘Quite the contrary.’

“‘Not a touch of colic?

“‘Come, come; why, if I had the cholera, darling, you could not ask me more questions.’

“‘Why, yes,” precisely... now you have said the word.’

“‘What next?’

“‘We thought we noticed during supper “‘Noticed what?’

‘“That you turned pale and put your hand several times to your stomach, and later on...’

“‘Oh, the fact is, just at first I could not quite stomach the look of your mice in honey; then you see your woodlouse sauce... we don’t use these sauces, you see, in my country. To top all, your castor oil dressing... but there, it passed off with the help of a little fresh air. Why, God bless me, what an idea, to think I am going to have the cholera on my wedding night of all times! Ha, ha, ha!’

“‘Well, my dear, that is precisely what everybody did think. I am perfectly certain that twenty-nine out of the thirty guests who have just left us are convinced that you will be dead by to-morrow morning.’

“‘What! dead of the cholera? ‘“‘Yes, of the cholera.’ “‘Great God, impossible! ‘“‘It is as I say.’

“‘Come now, frankly... can it be..... can it really be?’

“Oh! sir, what a wonderful thing imagination is, to be sure! after laughing at Bazile, whom they over-persuaded into having the fever, here was I feeling my pulse and rubbing my stomach, almost believing I had the cramp already, and was going to have the colic directly. Anyway, one thing was beyond doubt. I was getting colder and colder, I could feel I was!

“‘Poor dear fellow,’ said Vanly, looking at me compassionately, ‘fortunately the complaint has not made much progress yet, and my first husband bequeathed me an infallible specific.’ “‘Against the cholera? ‘“‘Precisely.’

“‘Oh, the worthy man! well, dearest Vanly, now is the very time to use it: this specific of yours.’

“‘Oh, ho! so you admit you are ill? ‘“‘Yes, I begin to think so. Oh Lord! what is that?’

“‘Quick, dear, quick! the *collimulligrubs* are coming on!’

“‘What, the *collimumigrubs?* ‘“The word sounds bad enough in English; but in Chinese it was much worse; so when she told me the *collimulligrubs* were coming on, I thought indeed it was all up!

"'The *collimiilligrubs*! 'I could only repeat, sinking on a chair. 'Well, then, dearest Vanly, what is to be done?'

"'Only to drink at once a glass of this red liquor I was mixing when you came in, feeling certain, poor fellow, what was coming.'

"Then quick, the glass, quick, the red liquor! Oh, oh! the *collimulligrubs* are coming on again. Quick, quick, quick! '"Vanly poured out the red liquor into a glass, which she handed me. I took it with a trembling hand, raised it to my lips, and was just going to drain the contents to the last drop when I saw Vanly turn pale and fix her eyes on the door of the room.

"At the same moment I heard a well- known voice crying:

"'In Heaven's name, Olifus, do not drink it!'

"'Shimindra,' I exclaimed, 'deuce take it, what are you doing here!'

"'I am here to do for you what you did for me — to save your life.'

"'Ah, dear Shimindra, so you too have a cure for cholera.'

"'No, I have no cure, and it would be useless if I had.'

"'Useless, do you say, useless?'

"'Yes, useless and needless!'

"'Then I have not got the cholera?'

"'Not you.'

"'But if it is not the cholera, what is it?'

"'It is this,' — and Shimindra fixed her eyes on Vanly, who grew paler and paler, 'it is this — you have married a poisoner.'

"Vanly gave a sharp cry as if a serpent had bitten her.

"'A poisoner? 'I stammered.

"'Are you going to listen to that woman? 'my wife asked.

"'My good Shimindra,' I observed, shaking my head, 'surely you are going too far.'

"'A poisoner, I tell you,' the girl reiterated.

"By this time Vanly was livid.

"'We will just reckon up your victims, madame,' went on Shimindra, 'and see how you poisoned them each.'

'"Oh! come away, Olifus, come away,' wailed Vanly.

"'No, stay here and hear me! 'ordered Shimindra.

"Then, looking straight at Vanly:

"'You poisoned your first husband, the doctor, with the bean of St. Ignatius, which grows so plentifully at Mindanao. You poisoned your second husband, the Mandarin, with the *ticunas* of America. You poisoned your third husband, the judge, with the *ouari*, of Guiana. Last of all, this evening you were going to poison your fourth husband, Olifus, with the *upas* of Java.'

"'You lie, you lie,' cried Vanly.

"'I lie, do I? 'said Shimindra; 'very well, if I lie, drink this glass of pink liquor which you were going to give your husband under pretence that he had the cholera.'

"So saying, she took the glass, which I had put down on the table, and offered it to Vanly. I fully expected Vanly would have snatched the glass from her hands, and drunk off its contents. But not a bit of it! on the contrary, she shrank away, stepped backwards to the door, opened it and fled.

"I darted after her; 'Oh! dearest Vanly,' I cried, 'fear nothing, come back; I do not believe her, the thing is impossible.'

"'Impossible!' cried Shimindra in despair at my incredulity; 'impossible, you say!'

"'Yes, I do; and unless you give me a proof...'

"'And if I do give you a proof! 'cried Shimindra, 'if I give you a proof, you will believe.'

"'Why, then I must.'

"'You will believe this woman is a poisoner?'

"'Certainly I will.'

"'And you will cease to love her?'

"'How! cease to love her! not only that, but I will denounce her, I will accuse her, I will have her hanged, drawn and quartered.'

"'You swear you will?'

"'Yes, I swear.'

"'Well, then,' said Shimindra, 'here is the proof — ' and she swallowed the glass of pink liquor off at one gulp, before I could do a thing or say a word to stop her.

"I gave a great cry of grief and horror, for indeed, poor girl, I had nothing to allege against her, and I loved her dearly.

"'Now,' she said, falling into my arms, 'you will understand the reason why the report was bruited amongst your guests that you were attacked with the cholera. Indeed, scarcely had Shimindra pronounced the words ere I saw her turn deadly pale, and pressing her hand to her bosom, she exhibited every sign of the most acute suffering.

CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION.

‘WHAT I saw left no room for VV doubt. Vanly was guilty, and Shimindra was poisoned. I had only one wish — to save the poor woman’s life, who had sacrificed herself for mine.

“‘Help, help! ‘I shouted, ‘a doctor, a doctor.’

“Then, as no one answered, for Vanly had taken her precautions, and there was not a soul in the house, I threw open the window.

“‘Help! ‘I halloed again, ‘help! a doctor, a doctor!’

“Fortunately, at the moment a dock porter was passing along the quay; he heard my shouts, knew my voice, and put himself at my orders.

“‘A doctor, fetch a doctor! ‘I called, tossing him a gold piece.

“He picked up the coin, nodded his head, and went off at his utmost speed. In five minutes he returned with a Bonze or medicine-man, who practised among the common people out of charity, and who enjoyed a great reputation for skill and sanctity among the riverside population.

“But though scarcely ten minutes had elapsed since Shimindra had swallowed the poison, the drug had already worked terrible havoc. The breathing was loud and stertorous, the muscles of the abdomen and trunk were beginning to contract; the lips were covered with froth, the head was thrown back convulsively, and vomiting was beginning. I ran to meet the doctor, and hurried him in to Shimindra.

“‘Oh! oh,’ he cried, the moment he set eyes on her, ‘the woman has the cholera, or else... — ’ he stopped and hesitated.

“‘Or else? ‘I insisted.

“‘Or else she has been poisoned.’

“‘What with?’

“‘With the *upas* of Java.’

“‘That’s it,’ I cried, ‘yes, yes, she has been poisoned with the *upas* of Java. What antidote is there?’

“‘There is no antidote, — or if there is...’

“‘Go on.’

"'It is so rare...'

"'Tell me what it is, this antidote?'

"'Bezoar stone.'

"'Bezoar, you say?'

"'Yes, but bezoar of the cow, not bezoar of the goat...'

"'But bezoar of the ape?'

"'No doubt, no doubt, but where to get it...'

"I gave a cry of joy.

"'Look!' I said, 'look,' — and I drew my bezoar stone from its leather sachet.

"Shimindra raised her head.

"'Ah! 'she murmured, 'then he loves me a little still.'

"'Oh! oh!' exclaimed the Bonze, 'tis the blue bezoar, the true and genuine bezoar of the ape.'

"'Yes, the true and genuine; I can answer for it, as I took it myself. But lose no time; look at your patient,' and I pointed to Shimindra, who was writhing in the agonies of imminent death.'

"'Oh! have no fear now,' he said, 'we have time enough.'

"'But,' I insisted, 'in five minutes the girl will be dead.'

"'Yes, if in three minutes she is not saved.'

"So saying, the Bonze set to work grating the bezoar into a glass of water as calmly as he might have done with a bit of sugar. Instantly the water turned a beautiful blue, then gradually changed to opal with flashes of gold through it.

"No doubt this was the proper moment for administering the drug; signing to me to raise Shimindra's head, the Bonze inserted between her teeth, by this time convulsively clenched, the edge of the glass, which she all but broke.

"But at the first drops the dying woman swallowed her muscles relaxed, her head rested naturally on her shoulders, her stiffened arms fell back by her sides, the rattle in her throat ceased, and a slight moisture beaded her parched brow.

"Shimindra emptied the glass; then, * Oh, God,' she exclaimed, 'it is life you have given me to drink.'

"Presently, throwing me a last look, thanking me with a last smile, trying to give me a last caress, she heaved a sigh, shut her eyes, and sank into a lethargy. But this caused us no alarm; life was being renewed under this semblance of death.

“I could not leave her under Vanly-Ching’s roof, and I had not the least wish to remain there myself; my house was only fifty yards from where we were. I took Shimindra in my arms and sallied out, accompanied by the Bonze. I shut and locked the door, and handing the key to the holy man, begged him to take it at once to the judge of the High Court, successor of Vanly-Ching’s last husband but one, and tell him everything he had seen. Meantime I carried home Shimindra, who only required, so the doctor assured me, a good, long, quiet sleep. Then, after laying Shimindra on her bed, I went and lay down too.

“To tell you all that passed through my mind, once the light was put out, as worn out with fatigue, I lay in that dreamy state that is neither sleeping nor waking, would be impossible. My four wives seemed to have agreed to assemble at the foot of my bed. There was Nahi- Nava-Nahina, there was Donna Inez, there was Amaru, there was Vanly-Ching, all claiming me, snatching and disputing more like incarnate furies than tender wives; while poor Shimindra, to whom the nearness of death seemed to have given wings, hovered over me and did what she could to defend me, fighting against them and chasing them away. But, driven out by the door, the endless series of my wives came back by the windows, swooped down on my bed and fought for me. I felt myself being torn in pieces, and expected every moment to lose an arm to one, a leg to another.

“Suddenly the door opened, and there appeared on the threshold a ghostlike veiled figure, before which my four Eastern wives vanished and fled. The newcomer approached, and waving Shimindra away with an imperative gesture, calmly lay down beside me.

“Well, upon my word! this last arrival was doing me so great a service that I took refuge in her arms and, after some minutes more of wakefulness, dropped asleep there.

“Next morning the first beams of daylight striking right in my face awoke me. I opened my eyes and gave vent to a cry of wonder. I was in bed with the Buchold.

“But so pale, so changed a Buchold, that I had not the heart to chide her for coming; she struck me as having but a short time left to live. Besides, I could not forget the service she had rendered me in the night.

“‘What, is it you?’ I said.

"'Yes, it is I; ill as I am, I have not hesitated to come in person, in order to bring you a piece of good news.'

"'Ah! yes, you are a mother again,' I said.

"'Yes, it is a girl, a charming little girl; I promised you I would call her Margaret, and I have done so.'

"'And who is the godfather this time?'

"'Oh, you will be glad and proud, my dear; it is one of the most celebrated professors of the University of Leyden, the Doctor Van Holstentius.'

"'Yes, I know his name.' "'Well, he has promised me to love the dear child as if she were his own daughter, but....'

"'But what?'

"'I am much afraid, when I am no longer there....'

"'How! when you are no longer there, have you left Monnikendam then, never to return?'

"£ No, no, indeed, my dear; I am going to start home again directly, never fear. But we are none of us immortal, and if I should chance to die, our poor children....'

"'Would they not have each his godfather, who loves him as if he were his own child? Would they not have the Burgomaster Vanclief, the engineer Van Brock, the Senator Van Tigel, Dr. Van Holstentius, ete?'

"'Alas! 'replied the Buchold, 'my experience with you has taught me how much reliance can be placed on men's promises. There was more of vain profession than reality in the pledges given by our illustrious protectors; at this moment of speaking, my dear Olifus, but for your friend and neighbour Simon Van Groot, harbourmaster of Monnikendam, I don't know what would have become of us, me and the children I have, and the others I may have.'

"'What! the others you may have? what day of the month are we at? '"'The 28th of October.' "'Yes, but what Saint is the day dedicated to?'

"'Two great and holy saints, my dear, St. Simon and St. Jude.'

"'Oh! it is too much,' I cried. 'This time I shall not get off without a brace of twins.'

"'In any case,' said the Buchold, 'they will be the last.'

"'What makes you say so? '"'Yes, they will be the last; don't you see how changed I am?'

“Indeed, as I have already said, her changed looks had struck me the moment I saw her.

“‘Very true? ‘I said, ‘what ails you?’” She smiled sadly. ‘Can you suppose,’ she said, ‘that journeys such as I take are not exhausting? Four times I have come to see you, without a murmur; going and returning, it is a matter of thirty-two thousand leagues, — four times round the world. Will you find many women to do as much for... for a scoundrel who only thinks of deceiving his poor faithful wife? Ah me! ‘ — and the Buchold shed some tears.

“What she said was so true that I felt touched.

“‘Well, but why do you come? ‘I asked her.

“£ Why? because I love you, when all is said and done. Ah! if only you had stayed at Monnikendam, we might have been so happy?’

“‘With your delightful temper! come, now!’

“‘What do you mean? What spoilt my temper was jealousy. And why was, I jealous? Because I loved you so fondly. Look here, it is five years now since it all happened; do you still tell me your visits were quite innocent, those visits to Amsterdam and Edam and Stavoren?’

“I scratched my ear.

“‘Lord! ‘I stammered, ‘to tell the real truth...

“‘There, you see, you were in the wrong. Nov/, have you anything of the { same sort to bring up against me?’

““Nothing, I grant you, so long as I was at home.’

“‘But since then, I think…’

“‘Since then things are not so simple. But still, there is nothing more to be said — for me, at any rate, appearances are on, your side, and the dates fit in, don’t I they.’

“‘Yes, to a day.’

“I heaved a sigh. ‘Ah! the fact is,’ I said, with an air of reflection, ‘a man travels far afield to find happiness...

“‘Yes, and find wives, eh? come, let us just run through the list of your ‘wives.’

“‘What need of that? I know it by heart, surely; besides, I am cured of f marriage and marrying.’

“‘Alas, alas! poor fellow, there is nothing like home and hearth, and children; come back, come back, you will find all this, — but without me perhaps.’

“‘Come, come.’

“‘I know what I am saying,’ she sighed,’ shaking her head sadly. ‘But I should die in peace if I could hope that, to take their mother’s place.... my poor children.... my poor children....’

“‘Very good, very good! — but don’t lets break down; we shall see, we shall see; only go back yourself.’

“‘Indeed, I must.’

“‘And say I am coming.’

“‘Really and truly?’

“‘One moment; I make no promises. I will do what I can; I can say no more.’

“‘Farewell. I leave you in this hope.’

“‘Farewell, dearest. We shall see some day.’

“‘Yes, we shall see.... Farewell.’

“The Buchold gave me a last kiss, heaved another sigh, and left me.

“This last appearance of the Buchold had impressed me quite differently from her previous visits. Moreover, in comparison with the women of my native land, these Cingalese, Spanish, Malabar and Chinese beauties after all left something to be desired. So there was only poor Shimindra to counterbalance European influences; and she was only a slave- girl after all, — with a past.

“The net result was that I could think of nothing else but how to wind up my affairs and return to Europe as soon as possible.

‘‘But, before leaving the East, I took care to provide for Shimindra’s future. I left her my cigar business, which was in full activity, and what was left of my bezoar. True, this was diminished in size, but even so, it was well worth two or three thousand rupees, — the more so as its efficacy had been proved beyond a doubt.

“As for Vanly-Ching, she had utterly disappeared, carrying her money-box with her, and for the remaining five months I lived at Bedondo, not a word was heard of her.

“Finally, on the 15th of February, 182g, just about six years from the date of my first arrival in the Indies, I left Bedondo, after realising a sum of forty- five thousand francs, against which my Chinese correspondent gave me first-rate bills drawn upon some of the best firms in Amsterdam.

“The voyage was a long one, because of the calms we met with under the Equator. Six months after my departure from Manilla we sighted Cape

Ushant, which we doubled, and entered the Channel, and at last, on the 16th of August, 182g, dropped anchor in the harbour of Rotterdam.

“There was nothing to delay me in that city, so the same day I took coach to Amsterdam, and on my arrival there engaged a boat to convey me to Monnikendam. It so happened it was my old friend the fisherman’s, the same man who, six years and six months before, had rowed me aboard the *Jean de Witte*, who had not been able to get his fare paid, and who nevertheless had promised to drink my health, a promise which he had faithfully kept.

“This time, instead of a bag of pebbles, I had in my pocket a pocket-book containing a pretty little sum of forty-five thousand livres. So when I stepped ashore at Monnikendam, as I owed him not only for my last passage but for my first as well, together with interest and compound interest for more than six years, I gave him twenty-five florins — such a windfall as he had not had for many a day.

“Then I made my way to my house. In the doorway I saw as I approached a nurse in mourning, suckling two infants — and I understood everything.

“I walked into the living-room on the ground floor, where my three boys and their sister were assembled. The three lads took to their heels when they saw me. As for their little sister, as she could not yet walk alone, she had to stay where she was.

“I realised I was merely a stranger in the eyes of these poor innocents; I picked up my little Margaret in my arms, who promptly began to scream at the top of her voice, and made for the door again, intending to make myself known to some neighbour or other.

“But at that moment Simon Van Groot, hearing that a stranger had arrived and gone in the direction of the Buchold’s house, and guessing how things were, arrived on the spot; he had rallied the three flying lads, and was also accompanied by the wet-nurse and her two charges.

“In a moment everything was explained.

“‘And the poor Buchold? ‘I asked.

“‘You have come two months too late, my dear Olifus,’ Simon Van Groot replied. ‘The Buchold died in giving birth to your twins.’

“‘Ah! yes, Simon and Jude.’

“‘Precisely. In your absence, I looked after the family. The creditors had sold the house and furniture. I redeemed them both. I felt sure you would come back one day, and I wanted you, to say nothing of the children, to find things the same as you left them.’

“‘I thank you, Van Groot.’

“‘There is only our poor Buchold...’

“‘What do you mean, Simon? we are all mortal.’

“‘Alas! you will never find her like again.’

“‘No, I should think not.’

“We fell into each other’s arms, and mingled our tears, Van Groot and I; then we settled up our accounts. I paid him back the price of house and furniture, which I intended should be Margaret’s some day.

“Then I invested six thousand francs for each of the three boys, keeping the interest for my own use till their coming of age. Last of all, I put aside nine thousand francs as my own share, that I might never be a burden to anybody, and only have to put my hand in my pocket to find my bottle of schnapps, rum and rack-punch handy.”

“And you have never seen the Buchold again?” I asked him.

“Oh! yes, once. She came to tell me that I was rid of her for ever, as she had just been married again to Simon Van Groot, who had been buried the day before; the old scamp, he had asked to be interred beside her.

“So you see,” added Père Olifus, draining his last glass of the rack-punch, “I am well rid of her, for this world and the next. At least, I hope so!”

Thereupon he broke into a laugh that was peculiar to the man, and slipped under the table, whence next moment came a sound of snoring that left us in no doubt as to the peacefulness of the slumbers which had just descended on this simple heart, this conscience void of offence!

At the same moment the door opened; I turned, and heard a soft tuneful voice speaking. It was Margaret who appeared on the threshold, a lamp in her hand.

“It is time, gentlemen,” she said, “you were in bed. I will show you to your room. My poor father has tired you out, I am afraid, with his stories? But we must not be too hard on him. He spent six years in the madhouse at Horn, whilst our poor mother was still alive. He was discharged only partially cured. His brain is full of fancies and fairy-tales, especially when he indulges in over-much strong waters — which often happens. He will be sane enough when he wakes up, and completely forget, as he always does, all about his voyages to the Indies, which never happened except in his disordered brain.”

We went to bed after this explanation, which certainly struck us as infinitely less improbable than all the rigmarole old Olifus had reeled off. Next morning we asked to see him to say goodbye; but we were told that he had set off at daybreak to take a traveller to Stavoren.

Consequently we left Monnikendam without knowing which had been telling us lies, the old toothless mouth of Père Olifus, or his daughter Margaret’s pretty fresh lips.

However, there was one circumstance prejudiced us against the fair hostess of the *Bonhomme Tropique*; whereas the night before she had talked to us only by signs, suddenly next morning she had found herself able to speak excellent French, wherein to give us the explanation above detailed.

It is for such persons as have been in the Indies to judge whether Père Olifus ever really visited the countries of which he has given an account, and which we in turn have described on his responsibility, or whether he merely viewed Madagascar, Ceylon, Negombo, Goa, Calicut, Manilla and Bedondo from the windows of the madhouse at Horn.

THE END

CHICOT THE JESTER

AN ABRIDGED TRANSLATION OF *La dame de Monsoreau*

Anonymous translation, 1857

This novel was first published in 1846 and is concerned with fraternal royal strife at the court of Henri III. Tragically caught between the millstones of history are the gallant Count de Bussy and the woman he adores, la Dame de Monsoreau.

Le Château de Monsoreau today

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The 2009 television adaptation

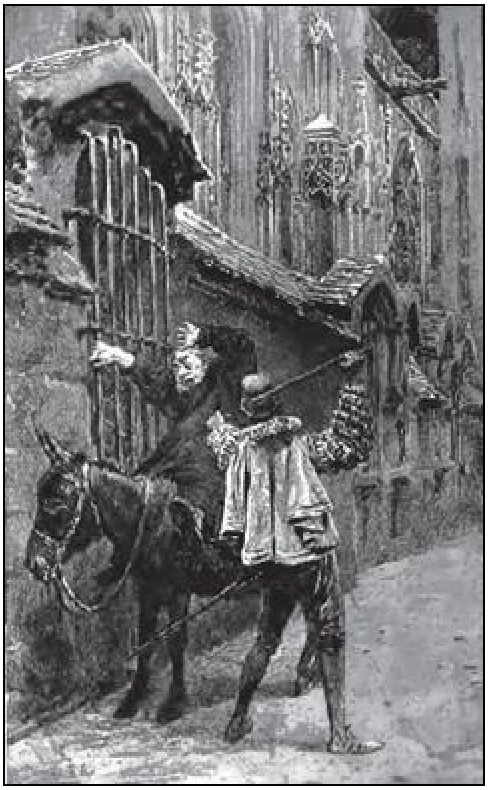

CHAPTER I.

THE WEDDING OF ST. LUC.

On the evening of a Sunday, in the year 1578, a splendid fête was given in the magnificent hotel just built opposite the Louvre, on the other side of the water, by the family of Montmorency, who, allied to the royalty of France, held themselves equal to princes. This fête was to celebrate the wedding of François d’Epinay de St. Luc, a great friend and favorite of the king, Henri III., with Jeanne de Crossé-Brissac, daughter of the marshal of that name.

The banquet had taken place at the Louvre, and the king, who had been with much difficulty induced to consent to the marriage, had appeared at it with a severe and grave countenance. His costume was in harmony with his face; he wore that suit of deep chestnut, in which Clouet described him at the wedding of Joyeuse; and this kind of royal specter, solemn and majestic, had chilled all the spectators, but above all the young bride, at whom he cast many angry glances. The reason of all this was known to everyone, but was one of those court secrets of which no one likes to speak.

Scarcely was the repast finished, when the king had risen abruptly, thereby forcing everyone to do the same. Then St. Luc approached him, and said: “Sire, will your majesty do me the honor to accept the fête, which I wish to give to you this evening at the Hôtel Montmorency?” This was said in an imploring tone, but Henri, with a voice betraying both vexation and anger, had replied:

“Yes, monsieur, we will go, although you certainly do not merit this proof of friendship on our part.”

Then Madame de St. Luc had humbly thanked the king, but he turned his back without replying.

“Is the king angry with you?” asked the young wife of her husband.

“I will explain it to you after, mon amie, when this anger shall have passed away.”

“And will it pass away?”

“It must.”

Mademoiselle de Brissac was not yet sufficiently Madame de St. Luc to insist further; therefore she repressed her curiosity, promising herself to satisfy it at a more favorable time.

They were, therefore, expecting St. Luc at the Hôtel Montmorency, at the moment in which our story commences. St. Luc had invited all the king's friends and all his own; the princes and their favorites, particularly those of the Duc d'Anjou. He was always in opposition to the king, but in a hidden manner, pushing forward those of his friends whom the example of La Mole and Coconnas had not cured. Of course, his favorites and those of the king lived in a state of antagonism, which brought on rencontres two or three times a month, in which it was rare that some one was not killed or badly wounded.

As for Catherine, she was at the height of her wishes; her favorite son was on the throne, and she reigned through him, while she pretended to care no more for the things of this world. St. Luc, very uneasy at the absence of all the royal family, tried to reassure his father-in-law, who was much distressed at this menacing absence. Convinced, like all the world, of the friendship of Henri for St. Luc, he had believed he was assuring the royal favor, and now this looked like a disgrace. St. Luc tried hard to inspire in them a security which he did not feel himself; and his friends, Maugiron, Schomberg, and Quelus, clothed in their most magnificent dresses, stiff in their splendid doublets, with enormous frills, added to his annoyance by their ironical lamentations.

"Eh! mon Dieu! my poor friend," said Jacques de Levis, Comte de Quelus, "I believe now that you are done for. The king is angry that you would not take his advice, and M. d'Anjou because you laughed at his nose."

"No, Quelus, the king does not come, because he has made a pilgrimage to the monks of the Bois de Vincennes; and the Duc d'Anjou is absent, because he is in love with some woman whom I have forgotten to invite."

"But," said Maugiron, "did you see the king's face at dinner? And as for the duke, if he could not come, his gentlemen might. There is not one here, not even Bussy."

"Oh! gentlemen," said the Duc de Brissac, in a despairing tone, "it looks like a complete disgrace. Mon Dieu! how can our house, always so devoted to his majesty, have displeased him?"

The young men received this speech with bursts of laughter, which did not tend to soothe the marquis. The young bride was also wondering how St. Luc could have displeased the king. All at once one of the doors opened and the king was announced.

“Ah!” cried the marshal, “now I fear nothing; if the Duc d’Anjou would but come, my satisfaction would be complete.”

“And I,” murmured St. Luc; “I have more fear of the king present than absent, for I fear he comes to play me some spiteful tricks.”

But, nevertheless, he ran to meet the king, who had quitted at last his somber costume, and advanced resplendent in satin, feathers, and jewels. But at the instant he entered another door opened just opposite, and a second Henri III., clothed exactly like the first, appeared, so that the courtiers, who had run to meet the first, turned round at once to look at the second.

Henri III. saw the movement, and exclaimed:

“What is the matter, gentlemen?”

A burst of laughter was the reply. The king, not naturally patient, and less so that day than usual, frowned; but St. Luc approached, and said:

“Sire, it is Chicot, your jester, who is dressed exactly like your majesty, and is giving his hand to the ladies to kiss.”

Henri laughed. Chicot enjoyed at his court a liberty similar to that enjoyed thirty years before by Triboulet at the court of François I., and forty years after by Longely at the court of Louis XIII. Chicot was not an ordinary jester. Before being Chicot he had been “De Chicot.” He was a Gascon gentleman, who, ill-treated by M. de Mayenne on account of a rivalry in a love affair, in which Chicot had been victorious, had taken refuge at court, and prayed the king for his protection by telling him the truth.

“Eh, M. Chicot,” said Henri, “two kings at a time are too much.”

“Then,” replied he, “let me continue to be one, and you play Duc d’Anjou; perhaps you will be taken for him, and learn something of his doings.”

“So,” said Henri, looking round him, “Anjou is not here.”

“The more reason for you to replace him. It is settled, I am Henri, and you are François. I will play the king, while you dance and amuse yourself a little, poor king.”

“You are right, Chicot, I will dance.”

"Decidedly," thought De Brissac, "I was wrong to think the king angry; he is in an excellent humor."

Meanwhile St. Luc had approached his wife. She was not a beauty, but she had fine black eyes, white teeth, and a dazzling complexion.

"Monsieur," said she to her husband, "why did they say that the king was angry with me; he has done nothing but smile on me ever since he came?"

"You did not say so after dinner, dear Jeanne, for his look then frightened you."

"His majesty was, doubtless, out of humor then, but now--"

"Now, it is far worse; he smiles with closed lips. I would rather he showed me his teeth. Jeanne, my poor child, he is preparing for us some disagreeable surprise. Oh I do not look at me so tenderly, I beg; turn your back to me. Here is Maugiron coming; converse with him, and be amiable to him."

"That is a strange recommendation, monsieur."

But St. Luc left his wife full of astonishment, and went to pay his court to Chicot, who was playing his part with a most laughable majesty.

The king danced, but seemed never to lose sight of St. Luc. Sometimes he called him to repeat to him some pleasantry, which, whether droll or not, made St. Luc laugh heartily. Sometimes he offered him out of his comfit box sweetmeats and candied fruits, which St. Luc found excellent. If he disappeared for an instant, the king sent for him, and seemed not happy if he was out of his sight. All at once a voice rose above all the tumult.

"Oh!" said Henri, "I think I hear the voice of Chicot; do you hear, St. Luc?--the king is angry."

"Yes, sire, it sounds as though he were quarreling with some one."

"Go and see what it is, and come back and tell me."

As St. Luc approached he heard Chicot crying:

"I have made sumptuary laws, but if they are not enough I will make more; at least they shall be numerous, if they are not good. By the horn of Beelzebub, six pages, M. de Bussy, are too much."

And Chicot, swelling out his cheeks, and putting his hand to his side, imitated the king to the life.

"What does he say about Bussy?" asked the king, when St. Luc returned. St. Luc was about to reply, when the crowd opening, showed to him six pages, dressed in cloth of gold, covered with chains, and bearing on their breasts the arms of their masters, sparkling in jewels. Behind them came a young man, handsome and proud; who walked with his head raised and a haughty look, and whose simple dress of black velvet contrasted with the splendor of his pages. This was Bussy d'Amboise. Maugiron, Schomberg, and Quelus had drawn near to the king.

"See," said Maugiron, "here is the servant, but where is the master? Are you also in disgrace with him, St. Luc?"

"Why should he follow Bussy?" said Quelus.

"Do you not remember that when his majesty did M. de Bussy the honor to ask him if he wished to belong to him, he replied that, being of the House of Clermont, he followed no one, and belonged to himself."

The king frowned.

"Yes," said Maugiron, "whatever you say, he serves the Duc d'Anjou."

"Then it is because the duke is greater than the king."

No observation could have been more annoying to the king than this, for he detested the Duc d'Anjou. Thus, although he did not answer, he grew pale.

"Come, come, gentlemen," said St. Luc, trembling, "a little charity for my guests, if you please; do not spoil my wedding day."

"Yes," said the king, in a mocking tone; "do not spoil St. Luc's wedding-day."

"Oh!" said Schomberg, "is Bussy allied to the Brissacs?--since St. Luc defends him."

"He is neither my friend nor relation, but he is my guest," said St. Luc. The king gave an angry look. "Besides," he hastened to add, "I do not defend him the least in the world."

Bussy approached gravely behind his pages to salute the king, when Chicot cried:

"Oh, la! Bussy d'Amboise, Louis de Clermont, Comte de Bussy, do you not see the true Henri, do you not know the true king from the false? He to whom you are going is Chicot, my jester, at whom I so often laugh."

Bussy continued his way, and was about to bow before the king, when he said:

"Do you not hear, M. de Bussy, you are called?" and, amidst shouts of laughter from his minions, he turned his back to the young captain. Bussy reddened with anger, but he affected to take the king's remark seriously, and turning round towards Chicot:

“Ah! pardon, sire,” said he, “there are kings who resemble jesters so much, that you will excuse me, I hope, for having taken a jester for a king.”

“Hein,” murmured Henri, “what does he say?”

“Nothing, sire,” said St. Luc.

“Nevertheless, M. Bussy,” said Chicot; “it was unpardonable.”

“Sire, I was preoccupied.”

“With your pages, monsieur,” said Chicot; “you ruin yourself in pages, and, par la mordieu, it is infringing our prerogatives.”

“How so? I beg your majesty to explain.”

“Cloth of gold for them, while you a gentleman, a colonel, a Clermont, almost a prince, wear simple black velvet.”

“Sire,” said Bussy, turning towards the kings’ minions, “as we live in a time when lackeys dress like princes, I think it good taste for princes to dress like lackeys.”

And he returned to the young men in their splendid dress the impertinent smiles which they had bestowed on him a little before. They grew pale with fury, and seemed only to wait the king’s permission to fall upon Bussy.

“Is it for me and mine that you say that?” asked Chicot, speaking like the king.

Three friends of Bussy’s now drew near to him. These were Charles d’Antragues, François, Vicomte de Ribeirac, and Livarot. Seeing all this, St. Luc guessed that Bussy was sent by Monsieur to provoke a quarrel. He trembled more than ever, for he feared the combatants were about to take his house for a battle-field. He ran to Quelus, who already had his hand on his sword, and said, “In Heaven’s name be moderate.”

“Parbleu, he attacks you as well as us.”

“Quelus, think of the Duc d’Anjou, who supports Bussy; you do not suppose I fear Bussy himself?”

“Eh! Mordieu, what need we fear; we belong to the king. If we get into peril for him he will help us.”

“You, yes; but me,” said St. Luc, piteously.

“Ah dame, why do you marry, knowing how jealous the king is in his friendships?”

“Good,” thought St. Luc, “everyone for himself; and as I wish to live tranquil during the first fortnight of my marriage, I will make friends with M. Bussy.” And he advanced towards him. After his impertinent speech, Bussy had looked round the room to see if any one would take notice of it. Seeing St. Luc approach, he thought he had found what he sought.

"Monsieur," said he, "is it to what I said just now, that I owe the honor of the conversation you appear to desire?"

"Of what you have just said, I heard nothing. No, I saw you, and wished to salute you, and thank you for the honor you have done me by your presence here."

Bussy, who knew the courage of St. Luc, understood at once that he considered the duties of a host paramount, and answered him politely.

Henri, who had seen the movement said, "Oh, oh! I fear there is mischief there; I cannot have St. Luc killed. Go and see, Quelus; no, you are too rash--you, Maugiron."

But St. Luc did not let him approach Bussy, but came to meet him and returned with him to the king.

"What have you been saying to that coxcomb?" asked the king.

"I, sire?"

"Yes, you."

"I said, good evening."

"Oh! was that all?"

St. Luc saw he was wrong. "I said, good evening; adding, that I would have the honor of saying good morning to-morrow."

"Ah! I suspected it."

"Will your majesty keep my secret?" said St. Luc.

"Oh! parbleu, if you could get rid of him without injury to yourself----"

The minions exchanged a rapid glance, which Henri III. seemed not to notice.

"For," continued he, "his insolence is too much."

"Yes, yes," said St. Luc, "but some day he will find his master."

"Oh!" said the king, "he manages the sword well. Why does he not get bit by some dog?" And he threw a spiteful glance on Bussy, who was walking about, laughing at all the king's friends.

"Corbleu!" cried Chicot, "do not be so rude to my friends, M. Bussy, for I draw the sword, though I am a king, as well as if I was a common man."

"If he continue such pleasantries, I will chastise Chicot, sire," said Maugiron.

"No, no, Maugiron, Chicot is a gentleman. Besides, it is not he who most deserves punishment, for it is not he who is most insolent."

This time there was no mistaking, and Quelus made signs to D'O and D'Epernon, who had been in a different part of the room, and had not heard what was going on. "Gentlemen," said Quelus, "come to the council; you, St. Luc, go and finish making your peace with the king."

St. Luc approached the king, while the others drew back into a window.

"Well," said D'Epernon, "what do you want? I was making love, and I warn you, if your recital be not interesting I shall be very angry."

"I wish to tell you that after the ball I set off for the chase."

"For what chase?"

"That of the wild boar."

"What possesses you to go, in this cold, to be killed in some thicket?"

"Never mind, I am going."

"Alone?"

"No, with Maugiron and Schomberg. We hunt for the king."

"Ah! yes, I understand," said Maugiron and Schomberg.

"The king wishes a boar's head for breakfast to-morrow."

"With the neck dressed à l'Italienne," said Maugiron, alluding to the turn-down collar which Bussy wore in opposition to their ruffs.

"Ah, ah," said D'Epernon, "I understand."

"What is it?" asked D'O, "for I do not."

"Ah! look round you."

"Well!"

"Did any one laugh at us here?"

"Yes, Bussy."

"Well, that is the wild boar the king wants."

"You think the king----"

"He asks for it."

"Well, then, so be it. But how do we hunt?"

"In ambush; it is the surest."

Bussy remarked the conference, and, not doubting that they were talking of him, approached, with his friends.

"Look, Antragues, look, Ribeirac," said he, "how they are grouped; it is quite touching; it might be Euryale and Nisus, Damon and Pythias, Castor and----. But where is Pollux?"

"Pollux is married, so that Castor is left alone."

"What can they be doing?"

"I bet they are inventing some new starch."

“No, gentlemen,” said Quelus, “we are talking of the chase.”

“Really, Signor Cupid,” said Bussy; “it is very cold for that. It will chap your skin.”

“Monsieur,” replied Maugiron, politely, “we have warm gloves, and doublets lined with fur.”

“Ah! that reassures me,” said Bussy; “do you go soon?”

“To-night, perhaps.”

“In that case I must warn the king; what will he say to-morrow, if he finds his friends have caught cold?”

“Do not give yourself that trouble, monsieur,” said Quelus, “his majesty knows it.”

“Do you hunt larks?” asked Bussy, with an impertinent air.

“No, monsieur, we hunt the boar. We want a head. Will you hunt with us, M. Bussy?”

“No, really, I cannot. To-morrow I must go to the Duc d’Anjou for the reception of M. de Monsoreau, to whom monseigneur has just given the place of chief huntsman.”

“But, to-night?”

“Ah! To-night, I have a rendezvous in a mysterious house of the Faubourg St. Antoine.”

“Ah! ah!” said D’Epernon, “is the Queen Margot here, incognito, M. de Bussy?”

“No, it is some one else.”

“Who expects you in the Faubourg St. Antoine?”

“Just so, indeed I will ask your advice, M. de Quelus.”

“Do so, although I am not a lawyer, I give very good advice.”

“They say the streets of Paris are unsafe, and that is a lonely place. Which way do you counsel me to take?”

“Why, I advise you to take the ferry-boat at the Pré-aux-Clercs, get out at the corner, and follow the quay until you arrive at the great Châtelet, and then go through the Rue de la Tixanderie, until you reach the faubourg. Once at the corner of the Rue St. Antoine, if you pass the Hôtel des Tournelles without accident, it is probable you will arrive safe and sound at your mysterious house.”

“Thanks for your route, M. de Quelus, I shall be sure to follow it.” And saluting the five friends, he went away.

As Bussy was crossing the last saloon where Madame de St. Luc was, her husband made a sign to her. She understood at once, and going up, stopped him.

“Oh! M. de Bussy,” said she, “everyone is talking of a sonnet you have made.”

“Against the king, madame?”

“No, in honor of the queen; do tell it to me.”

“Willingly, madame,” and, offering his arm to her, he went off, repeating it.

During this time, St. Luc drew softly near his friends, and heard Quelus say:

“The animal will not be difficult to follow; thus then, at the corner of the Hôtel des Tournelles, opposite the Hôtel St. Pol.”

“With each a lackey?” asked D’Epernon.

“No, no, Nogaret, let us be alone, and keep our own secret, and do our own work. I hate him, but he is too much a gentleman for a lackey to touch.”

“Shall we go out all six together?”

“All five if you please,” said St. Luc.

“Ah! it is true, we forgot your wife.”

They heard the king’s voice calling St. Luc.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “the king calls me. Good sport, au revoir.”

And he left them, but instead of going straight to the king, he ran to where Bussy stood with his wife.

“Ah! monsieur, how hurried you seem,” said Bussy. “Are you going also to join the chase; it would be a proof of your courage, but not of your gallantry.”

“Monsieur, I was seeking you.”

“Really.”

“And I was afraid you were gone. Dear Jeanne, tell your father to try and stop the king, whilst I say a few words tête-à-tête to M. Bussy.” Jeanne went.

“I wish to say to you, monsieur,” continued St. Luc, “that if you have any rendezvous to-night, you would do well to put it off, for the streets are not safe, and, above all, to avoid the Hôtel des Tournelles, where there is a place where several men could hide. This is what I wished to say; I know you fear nothing, but reflect.”

At this moment they heard Chicot's voice crying, "St. Luc, St. Luc, do not hide yourself, I am waiting for you to return to the Louvre."

"Here I am, sire," cried St. Luc, rushing forward. Near Chicot stood the king, to whom one page was giving his ermine mantle, and another a velvet mask lined with satin.

"Sire," said St. Luc, "I will have the honor of lighting your majesties to your litters."

"No," said Henri, "Chicot goes one way, and I another. My friends are good-for-nothings, who have run away and left me to return alone to the Louvre. I had counted on them, and you cannot let me go alone. You are a grave married man, and must take me back to the queen. Come, my friend, my litter is large enough for two."

Madame de St. Luc, who had heard this, tried to speak, and to tell her father that the king was carrying away her husband, but he, placing his fingers on his month, motioned her to be silent.

"I am ready, sire," said he, "to follow you."

When the king took leave, the others followed, and Jeanne was left alone. She entered her room, and knelt down before the image of a saint to pray, then sat down to wait for her husband's return. M. de Brissac sent six men to the Louvre to attend him back. But two hours after one of them returned, saying, that the Louvre was closed and that before closing, the captain of the watch had said, "It is useless to wait longer, no one will leave the Louvre to-night; his majesty is in bed."

The marshal carried this news to his daughter.

CHAPTER II.

HOW IT IS NOT ALWAYS HE WHO OPENS THE DOOR, WHO ENTERS THE HOUSE.

The Porte St. Antoine was a kind of vault in stone, similar to our present Porte St. Denis, only it was attached by its left side to buildings adjacent to the Bastile. The space at the right, between the gate and the Hôtel des Tournelles, was large and dark, little frequented by day, and quite solitary at night, for all passers-by took the side next to the fortress, so as to be in some degree under the protection of the sentinel. Of course, winter nights were still more feared than summer ones.

That on which the events which we have recounted, and are about to recount took place, was cold and black. Before the gate on the side of the city, was no house, but only high walls, those of the church of St. Paul, and of the Hôtel des Tournelles. At the end of this wall was the niche of which St. Luc had spoken to Bussy. No lamps lighted this part of Paris at that epoch. In the nights when the moon charged herself with the lighting of the earth, the Bastile rose somber and majestic against the starry blue of the skies, but on dark nights, there seemed only a thickening of the shadows where it stood. On the night in question, a practised eye might have detected in the angle of the wall of the Tournelles several black shades, which moved enough to show that they belonged to poor devils of human bodies, who seemed to find it difficult to preserve their natural warmth as they. stood there. The sentinel from the Bastile; who could not see them on account of the darkness, could not hear them either, for they talked almost in whispers. However, the conversation did not want interest.

“This Bussy was right,” said one; “it is a night such as we had at Warsaw, when Henri was King of Poland, and if this continues we shall freeze.”

“Come, Maugiron, you complain like a woman,” replied another: “it is not warm, I confess; but draw your mantle over your eyes, and put your hands in your pockets, and you will not feel it.”

“Really, Schomberg,” said a third, “it is easy to see you are German. As for me, my lips bleed, and my mustachios are stiff with ice.”

"It is my hands," said a fourth; "on my honor, I would not swear I had any."

"You should have taken your mamma's muff, poor Quelus," said Schomberg.

"Eh! mon Dieu, have patience," said a fifth voice; "you will soon be complaining you are hot."

"I see some one coming through the Rue St. Paul," said Quelus.

"It cannot be him; he named another route."

"Might he not have suspected something, and changed it?"

"You do not know Bussy; where he said he should go, he would go, if he knew that Satan himself were barring his passage."

"However, here are two men coming."

"Ma foi! yes."

"Let us charge," said Schomberg.

"One moment," said D'Epernon; "do not let us kill good bourgeois, or poor women. Hold! they stop."

In fact, they had stopped, and looked as if undecided. "Oh, can they have seen us?"

"We can hardly see ourselves!"

"See, they turn to the left; they stop before a house they are seeking--they are trying to enter; they will escape us!"

"But it is not him, for he was going to the Faubourg St. Antoine."

"Oh! how do you know he told you right?"

At this supposition they all rushed out, sword in hand, towards the gentlemen.

One of the men had just introduced a key into the lock; the door had yielded and was about to open, when the noise of their assailants made them turn.

"What is this? Can it be against us, Aurilly?" said one.

"Ah, monseigneur," said the other, who had opened the door, "it looks like it. Will you name yourself, or keep incognito?"

"Armed men--an ambush!"

"Some jealous lover; I said the lady was too beautiful not to be watched."

"Let us enter quickly, Aurilly; we are safer within doors."

"Yes, monseigneur, if there are not enemies within; but how do you know----"

He had not time to finish. The young men rushed up; Quelus and Maugiron made for the door to prevent their entering, while Schomberg, D’O, and D’Epernon prepared to attack in front. But he who had been called monseigneur turned towards Quelus, who was in front, and crossing his arms proudly, said:

“You attack a son of France, M. Quelus!”

Quelus drew back, trembling, and thunderstruck.

“Monseigneur le Duc d’Anjou!” he cried.

“The Duc d’Anjou!” repeated the others.

“Well, gentlemen,” cried the duke.

“Monseigneur,” stammered D’Epernon, “it was a joke; forgive us.”

“Monseigneur,” said D’O, “we did not dream of meeting your highness here!”

“A joke!” said the duke; “you have an odd manner of joking, M. d’Epernon. Since it was not intended for me, whom did your jest menace?”

“Monseigneur,” said Schomberg; “we saw St. Luc quit the Hôtel Montmorency and come this way; it seemed strange to us, and we wished to see what took him out on his wedding night.”

“M. de St. Luc--you took me for him?”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“M. de St. Luc is a head taller then I am.”

“It is true, monseigneur; but he is just the height of M. Aurilly.”

“And seeing a man put a key in a lock, we took him for the principal,” added D’O.

“Monseigneur cannot suppose that we had the shadow of an ill-will towards him, even to disturb his pleasures?”

As he listened, the duke, by a skilful movement, had, little by little, quitted the door, followed by Aurilly, and was now at some distance off.

“My pleasures!” said he, angrily; “what makes you think I was seeking pleasure?”

“Ah, monseigneur, in any case pardon us, and let us retire,” said Quelus.

“It is well; adieu, gentlemen; but first listen. I was going to consult the Jew Manasses, who reads the future; he lives, as you know, in Rue de la Tournelle. In passing, Aurilly saw you and took you for the watch, and we, therefore, tried to hide ourselves in a doorway. And now you know what to believe and say; it is needless to add, that I do not wish to be followed,” and he turned away.

"Monseigneur," said Aurilly, "I am sure these men have bad intentions; it is near midnight, and this is a lonely quarter; let us return home, I beg."

"No, no; let us profit by their departure."

"Your highness is deceived; they have not gone, but have returned to their retreat: look in the angle of the Hôtel des Tournelles."

François looked, and saw that Aurilly was right; it was evident that they waited for something, perhaps to see if the duke were really going to the Jew.

"Well, Monseigneur," continued Aurilly, "do you not think it will be more prudent to go home?"

"Mordieu! yet it is annoying to give up."

"Yes; but it can be put off. I told your highness that the house is taken for a year; we know the lady lodges on the first story. We have gained her maid, and have a key which opens the door: you may wait safely."

"You are sure that the door yielded?"

"Yes, at the third key I tried."

"Are you sure you shut it again?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

Aurilly did not feel sure, as he said, but he did not choose to admit it.

"Well, I will go; I shall return some other time." And the duke went away, promising to payoff the gentlemen for their interruption.

They had hardly disappeared, when the five companions saw approach a cavalier wrapped in a large cloak. The steps of his horse resounded on the frozen ground, and they went slowly and with precaution, for it was slippery.

"This time," said Quelus, "it is he."

"Impossible," said Maugiron.

"Why?"

"Because he is alone, and we left him with Livarot, Antragues, and Ribeirac, who would not have let him run such a risk."

"It is he, however; do you not recognize his insolent way of carrying his head?"

"Then," said D'O, "it is a snare."

"In any case, it is he; and so to arms!"

It was, indeed, Bussy, who came carelessly down the Rue St. Antoine, and followed the route given him by Quelus; he had, as we have seen, received the warning of St. Luc, and, in spite of it, had parted from his friends at the Hôtel Montmorency. It was one of those bravadoes delighted in by the valiant colonel, who said of himself, “I am but a simple gentleman, but I bear in my breast the heart of all emperor; and when I read in Plutarch the exploits of the ancient Romans, I think there is not one that I could not imitate.” And besides, he thought that St. Luc, who was not ordinarily one of his friends, merely wished to get him laughed at for his precautions; and Bussy feared ridicule more than danger.

He had, even in the eyes of his enemies, earned a reputation for courage, which could only be sustained by the rashest adventures. Therefore, alone, and armed only with a sword and poniard, he advanced towards the house where waited for him no person, but simply a letter, which the Queen of Navarre sent him every month on the same day, and which he, according to his promise to the beautiful Marguerite, went to fetch himself, alone, and at night.

When he arrived at the Rue St. Catherine, his active eye discerned in the shade the forms of his adversaries. He counted them: “Three, four, five,” said he, “without counting the lackeys, who are doubtless within call. They think much of me, it seems; all these for one man. That brave St. Luc did not deceive me; and were his even the first sword to pierce me I would cry, ‘Thanks for your warning, friend.’“ So saying, he continued to advance, only his arm held his sword under his cloak, of which he had unfastened the clasp.

It was then that Quelus cried, “To arms.”

“Ah, gentlemen,” said Bussy, “it appears you wish to kill me: I am the wild boar you had to hunt. Well, gentlemen, the wild boar will rip up a few of you; I swear it to you, and I never break my word.”

“Possibly,” said Schomberg; “but it is not right, M. Bussy d’Amboise, that you should be on horseback and we on foot.” And as he spoke, the arm of the young man, covered with white satin, which glistened in the moonlight, came from under his cloak, and Bussy felt his horse give way under him. Schomberg had, with an address peculiar to himself, pierced the horse’s leg with a kind of cutlass, of which the blade was heavier than the handle and which had remained in the wound. The animal gave a shrill cry and fell on his knees. Bussy, always ready, jumped at once to the ground, sword in hand.

“Ah!” cried he, “my favorite horse, you shall pay for this.” And as Schomberg approached incautiously, Bussy gave him a blow which broke his thigh. Schomberg uttered a cry.

"Well!" said Bussy, "have I kept my word? one already. It was the wrist of Bussy, and not his horse's leg, you should have cut."

In an instant, while Schomberg bound up his thigh with his handkerchief, Bussy presented the point of his long sword to his four other assailants, disdaining to cry for help, but retreating gradually, not to fly, but to gain a wall, against which to support himself, and prevent his being attacked behind, making all the while constant thrusts, and feeling sometimes that soft resistance of the flesh which showed that his blows had taken effect. Once he slipped for an instant. That instant sufficed for Quelus to give him a wound in the side.

"Touched," cried Quelus.

"Yes, in the doublet," said Bussy, who would not even acknowledge his hurt. And rushing on Quelus, with a vigorous effort, he made his sword fly from his hand. But he could not pursue his advantage, for D'O, D'Epernon, and Maugiron attacked him, with fresh fury. Schomberg had bound his wound, and Quelus picked up his sword. Bussy made a bound backwards, and reached the wall. There he stopped, strong as Achilles, and smiling at the tempest of blows which rained around him. All at once he felt a cloud pass over his eyes. He had forgotten his wound, but these symptoms of fainting recalled it to him.

"Ah, you falter!" cried Quelus.

"Judge of it!" cried Bussy. And with the hilt of his sword he struck him on the temple. Quelus fell under the blow. Then furious--wild, he rushed forward, uttering a terrible cry. D'O and D'Epernon drew back, Maugiron was raising Quelus, when Bussy broke his sword with his foot, and wounded the right arm of D'Epernon. For a moment he was conqueror, but Quelus recovered himself, and four swords flashed again. Bussy felt himself lost. He gathered all his strength to retreat once more step by step. Already the perspiration was cold on his brow, and the ringing in his ears and the cloud over his eyes warned him that his strength was giving way. He sought for the wall with his left hand; to his astonishment, it yielded. It was a door not quite closed. Then he regained hope and strength for a last effort. For a second his blows were rapid and violent. Then he let himself glide inside the door, and pushed it to with a violent blow. It shut, and Bussy was saved. He heard the furious blows of his enemies on the door, their cries of rage, and wrathful imprecations. Then, the ground seemed to fail under his feet, and the walls to move. He made a few steps forward, and fell on the steps of a staircase. He knew no more, but seemed to descend into the silence and obscurity of the tomb.

CHAPTER III.

HOW IT IS SOMETIMES DIFFICULT TO DISTINGUISH A DREAM FROM THE REALITY.

Bussy had had time, before falling, to pass his handkerchief under his shirt, and to buckle the belt of his sword over it, so as to make a kind of bandage to the open wound whence the blood flowed, but he had already lost blood enough to make him faint. However, during his fainting fit, this is what Bussy saw, or thought he saw. He found himself in a room with furniture of carved wood, with a tapestry of figures, and a painted ceiling. These figures, in all possible attitudes, holding flowers, carrying arms, seemed to him to be stepping from the walls. Between the two windows a portrait of a lady was hung. He, fixed to his bed, lay regarding all this. All at once the lady of the portrait seemed to move, and an adorable creature, clothed in a long white robe, with fair hair falling over her shoulders, and with eyes black as jet, with long lashes, and with a skin under which he seemed to see the blood circulate, advanced toward the bed. This woman was so beautiful, that Bussy made a violent effort to rise and throw himself at her feet. But he seemed to be confined in there by bonds like those which keep the dead body in the tomb, while the soul mounts to the skies. This forced him to look at the bed on which he was lying, and it seemed to him one of those magnificent beds sculptured in the reign of Francis I., to which were suspended hangings of white damask, embroidered in gold.

At the sight of this woman, the people of the wall and ceiling ceased to occupy his attention; she was all to him, and he looked to see if she had left a vacancy in the frame. But suddenly she disappeared; and an opaque body interposed itself between her and Bussy, moving slowly, and stretching its arms out as though it were playing blindman’s buff. Bussy felt in such a passion at this, that, had he been able, he would certainly have attacked this importunate vision; but as he made a vain effort, the newcomer spoke:

“Well,” said he, “have I arrived at last?”

“Yes, monsieur,” said a voice so sweet that it thrilled through Bussy, “and now you may take off your bandage.” Bussy made an effort to see if the sweet voice belonged to the lady of the portrait, but it was useless. He only saw the pleasant face of a young man, who had just, as he was told, taken off his bandage, and was looking curiously about him.

“To the devil with this man,” thought Bussy, and he tried to speak, but fruitlessly.

“Ah, I understand now,” said the young man, approaching the bed; “you are wounded, are you not, my dear sir? Well, we will try to cure you.”

“Is the wound mortal?” asked the sweet voice again, with a sad accent, which brought tears into the eyes of Bussy.

“I do not know yet, I am going to see; meanwhile, he has fainted.”

This was all Bussy heard, he seemed to feel a red-hot iron in his side, and then lost all consciousness. Afterwards, it was impossible for Bussy to fix the duration of this insensibility.

When he woke, a cold wind blew over his face, and harsh voices sounded in his ears; he opened his eyes to see if it were the people of the tapestry speaking, and hoping to see the lady again, looked round him. But there was neither tapestry nor ceiling visible, and the portrait had also disappeared. He saw at his right only a man with a white apron spotted with blood; at his left, a monk, who was raising his head; and before him, an old woman mumbling her prayers. His wondering eyes next rested on a mass of stone before him, in which he recognized the Temple, and above that, the cold white sky, slightly tinted by the rising sun. He was in the street.

“Ah, thank you, good people,” said he, “for the trouble you have taken in bringing me here. I wanted air, but you might have given it to me by opening the window, and I should have been better on my bed of white damask and gold than on the bare ground. But never mind, there is in my pocket, unless you have paid yourselves, which would have been prudent, some twenty golden crowns; take, my friends, take.”

“But, my good gentleman,” said the butcher, “we did not bring you here, but found you here as we passed.”

“Ah, diable! and the young doctor, was he here?”

The bystanders looked at each other.

“It is the remains of delirium,” said the monk. Then, turning to Bussy, “I think you would do well to confess,” said he, “there was no doctor, poor young man; you were here alone, and as cold as death.”

Bussy then remembered having received a sword stroke, glided his hand under his doublet, and felt his handkerchief in the same place, fixed over his wound by his sword-belt.

"It is singular," said he.

Already profiting by his permission, the lookers-on were dividing his purse.

"Now, my friends," said he, "will you take me to my hôtel?"

"Ah, certainly," said the old woman, "poor dear young man, the butcher is strong, and then he has his horse, on which you can ride."

"Yes, my gentleman, my horse and I are at your service."

"Nevertheless, my son," said the monk, "I think you would do well to confess."

"What are you called?" asked Bussy.

"Brother Gorenflot."

"Well Brother Gorenflot, I trust my hour has not yet arrived and as I am cold, I wish to get quickly home and warm myself."

"What is your hotel called?"

"Hôtel de Bussy."

"How!" cried all, "you belong to M. de Bussy?"

"I am M. de Bussy himself."

"Bussy," cried the butcher, "the brave Bussy, the scourge of the minions!" And raising him, he was quickly carried home, whilst the monk went away, murmuring, "If it was that Bussy, I do not wonder he would not confess!"

When he got home, Bussy sent for his usual doctor, who found the wound not dangerous.

"Tell me," said Bussy, "has it not been already dressed?"

"Ma foi," said the doctor, "I am not sure."

"And was it serious enough to make me delirious?"

"Certainly."

"Ah!" thought Bussy, "was that tapestry, that frescoed ceiling, that bed, the portrait between the windows, the beautiful blonde woman with black eyes, the doctor blindfolded, was this all delirium? Is nothing true but my combat? Where did I fight? Ah, yes, I remember; near the Bastile, by the Rue St. Paul. I leaned against a door, and it opened; I shut it--and then I remember no more. Have I dreamed or not? And my horse! My horse must have been found dead on the place. Doctor, pray call some one."

The doctor called a valet. Bussy inquired, and heard that the animal, bleeding and mutilated, had dragged itself to the door of the hotel, and had been found there.

"It must have been a dream," thought he again: "how should a portrait come down from the wall and talk to a doctor with a bandage on his eyes? I am a fool; and yet when I remember she was so charming," and he began to describe her beauties, till he cried out, "It is impossible it should have been a dream; and yet I found myself in the street, and a monk kneeling by me. Doctor," said he, "shall have to keep the house a fortnight again for this scratch, as I did for the last?"

"We shall see; can you walk?"

"I seem to have quicksilver in my legs."

"Try."

Bussy jumped out of bed, and walked quickly round his room.

"That will do," said the doctor, "provided that you do not go on horseback, or walk ten miles the first day."

"Capital! you are a doctor; however, I have seen another to-night. Yes, I saw him, and if ever I meet him, I should know him."

"I advise you not to seek for him, monsieur; one has always a little fever after a sword wound; you should know that, who have had a dozen."

"Ah, mon Dieu!" cried Bussy, struck with a new idea, "did my dream begin outside the door instead of inside? Was there no more a staircase and a passage, than there was a bed with white and gold damask, and a portrait? Perhaps those wretches, thinking me dead, carried me to the Temple, to divert suspicion, should any one have seen them hiding. Certainly, it must be so, and I have dreamed the rest. Mon Dieu! if they have procured for me this dream which torments me so, I swear to make an end of them all."

"My dear seigneur," said the doctor, "if you wish to get well, you must not agitate yourself thus."

"Except St. Luc," continued Bussy, without attending; "he acted as a friend, and my first visit shall be to him."

"Not before five this evening."

"If you wish it; but, I assure you, it is not going out and seeing people which will make me ill, but staying quietly at home."

"Well, it is possible; you are always a singular patient; act as you please, only I recommend you not to get another wound before this one is healed."

Bussy promised to do his best to avoid it, and, after dressing, called for his litter to take him to the Hôtel Montmorency.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW MADAME DE ST. LUC HAD PASSED THE NIGHT.

Louis de Clermont, commonly called Bussy d’Amboise, was a perfect gentleman, and a very handsome man. Kings and princes had sought for his friendship; queens and princesses had lavished on him their sweetest smiles. He had succeeded La Mole in the affections of Queen Marguerite, who had committed for him so many follies, that even her husband, insensible so long, was moved at them; and the Duke François would never have pardoned him, had it not gained over Bussy to his interests, and once again he sacrificed all to his ambition. But in the midst of all his successes of war, ambition, and intrigue, he had remained insensible; and he who had never known fear, had never either known love.

When the servants of M. de St. Luc saw Bussy enter, they ran to tell M. de Brissac.

“Is M. de St. Luc at home?” asked Bussy.

“No, monsieur.”

“Where shall I find him?”

“I do not know, monsieur. We are all very anxious about him, for he has not returned since yesterday.”

“Nonsense.”

“It is true, monsieur.”

“But Madame de St. Luc?”

“Oh, she is here.”

“Tell her I shall be charmed if she will allow me to pay my respects to her.”

Five minutes after, the messenger returned, saying Madame de St. Luc would be glad to see M. de Bussy.

When Bussy entered the room, Jeanne ran to meet him. She was very pale, and her jet black hair made her look more so; her eyes were red from her sleepless night, and there were traces of tears on her cheeks.

“You are welcome, M. de Bussy,” said she, “in spite of the fears your presence awakens.”

“What do you mean, madame? how can I cause you fear?”

“Ah! there was a meeting last night between you and M. de St. Luc? confess it.”

“Between me and St. Luc!”

“Yes, he sent me away to speak to you; you belong to the Duc d’Anjou, he to the king. You have quarrelled--do not hide it from me. You must understand my anxiety. He went with the king, it is true--but afterwards?”

“Madame, this is marvelous. I expected you to ask after my wound----”

“He wounded you; he did fight, then?”

“No, madame; not with me at least; it was not he who wounded me. Indeed, he did all he could to save me. Did he not tell you so?”

“How could he tell me? I have not seen him.”

“You have not seen him? Then your porter spoke the truth.”

“I have not seen him since eleven last night.”

“But where can he be?”

“I should rather ask you.”

“Oh, pardieu, tell me about it, it is very droll.”

The poor woman looked at him with astonishment.

“No, it is very sad, I mean. I have lost much blood, and scarcely know what I am saying. Tell me this lamentable story, madame.”

Jeanne told all she knew; how the king had carried him off, the shutting of the doors of the Louvre, and the message of the guards.

“Ah! very well, I understand,” said Bussy.

“How! you understand.”

“Yes; his majesty took him to the Louvre and once there he could not come out again.”

“And why not?”

“Ah! that is a state secret.”

“But my father went to the Louvre, and I also, and the guards said they did not know what we meant.”

“All the more reason that he should be there.”

“You think so?”

“I am sure of it, and if you wish to be so also----”

“How?”

“By seeing.”

“Can I?”

“Certainly.”

“But if I go there, they win send me away, as they did before.”

“Would you like to go in?”

“But if he is not there?”

“I tell you he is there. Come; but they will not let in the wife of St. Luc.”

“You laugh at me, and it is very cruel in my distress.”

“No, dear lady, listen. You are young, you are tall, and have black eyes; you are like my youngest page, who looked so well in the cloth of gold yesterday.”

“Ah I what folly, M. Bussy,” cried Jeanne, blushing.

“I have no other method but this. If you wish to see St. Luc----”

“Oh! I would give all the world to see him.”

“Well, I promise that you shall without giving anything.”

“Oh, but----”

“I told you how.”

“Well, I will do it; shall I send for the dress?”

“No, I will send you a new one I have at home; then you must join me this evening at the Rue St. Honoré. and we will go together to the Louvre.” Jeanne began to laugh, and gave her hand to Bussy.

“Pardon my suspicions,” said she.

“Willingly,” and taking leave he went home to prepare.

Bussy and Madame de St. Luc met at the appointed time; Jeanne looked beautiful in her disguise. At the end of the Rue St. Germain-l’Auxerrois they met a large party in which Bussy recognized the Duc d’Anjou and his train.

“Ah,” said he, “we will make a triumphal entry into the Louvre.”

“Eh! monseigneur,” cried he to the duke.

The prince turned. “You, Bussy!” cried he joyfully, “I heard you were badly wounded, and I was going to your hotel.”

“Ma foi, monseigneur, if I am not dead, it is thanks to no one but myself. You get me into nice situations; that ball at St. Luc’s was a regular snare, and they have nearly drained all the blood out of my body.”

“They shall pay for it, Bussy; they shall pay dearly.”

“Yes, you say so,” said Bussy, with his usual liberty, “and you will smile on the first you meet.”

“Well! accompany me to the Louvre, and you shall see.”

“What shall I see, monseigneur?”

“How I will speak to my brother.”

"You promise me reparation?"

"I promise you shall be content. You hesitate still, I believe."

"Monseigneur, I know you so well."

"Come, I tell you."

"This is good for you," whispered Bussy to Jeanne. "There will be a quarrel between the brothers, and meanwhile you can find St. Luc."

"Well," said he to the prince, "I follow you; if I am insulted, at least I can always revenge myself."

And he took his place near the duke, while his page kept close to him.

"Revenge yourself; no, Bussy," said the prince, "I charge myself with it. I know your assassins," added he, in a low tone.

"What I your highness has taken the trouble to inquire?"

"I saw them."

"How so?" cried Bussy, astonished.

"Oh! I had business myself at the Porte St. Antoine. They barely missed killing me in your place. Ah! I did not know it was you they were waiting for, or else----"

"Well?"

"Had you this new page with you?" asked the prince, without finishing his sentence.

"No, I was alone, and you?"

"I had Aurilly with me; and why were you alone?"

"Because I wish to preserve my name of the brave Bussy."

"And they wounded you?"

"I do not wish to give them the pleasure of knowing it, but I had a severe wound in the side."

"Ah! the wretches; Aurilly said he was sure they were bent on mischief."

"How! you saw the ambush, you were with Aurilly, who uses his sword as well as his lute, you thought they had bad intentions, and you did not watch to give aid?"

"I did not know who they were waiting for."

"Mort diable! when you saw the king's friends, you might have known it was against some friends of yours. Now, as there is hardly any one but myself who has courage to be your friend, you might have guessed that it was I."

"Oh! perhaps you are right, my dear Bussy, but I did not think of all that."

When they entered, “Remember your promise,” said Bussy, “I have some one to speak to.”

“You leave me, Bussy?”

“Yes, I must, but if I hear a great noise I will come to you, so speak loud.”

Then Bussy, followed by Jeanne, took a secret staircase, traversed two or three corridors, and arrived at an antechamber.

“Wait here for me,” said he to Jeanne.

“Ah, mon Dieu! you leave me alone.”

“I must, to provide for your entrance.”

CHAPTER V.

HOW MADAME DE ST. LUC PASSED THE SECOND NIGHT OF HER MARRIAGE.

Bussy went straight to the sleeping-room of the king. There were in it two beds of velvet and satin, pictures, relics, perfumed sachets from the East, and a collection of beautiful swords. Bussy knew the king was not there, as his brother had asked to see him, but he knew that there was next to it a little room which was occupied in turn by all the king's favorites, and which he now expected to find occupied by St. Luc, whom the king in his great affection had carried off from his wife. Bussy knocked at the antechamber common to the two rooms. The captain of the guards opened.

"M. de Bussy!" cried he.

"Yes, myself, dear M. de Nancey; the king wishes to speak to M. de St. Luc."

"Very well, tell M. de St. Luc the king wants him."

"What is he doing?"

"He is with Chicot, waiting for the king's return from his brother."

"Will you permit my page to wait here?"

"Willingly, monsieur."

"Enter, Jean," said Bussy, and he pointed to the embrasure of a window, where she went to hide herself. St. Luc entered, and M. de Nancey retired.

"What does the king want now?" cried St. Luc, angrily; "ah! it is you, M. de Bussy,"

"I, and before everything, let me thank you for the service you rendered me."

"Ah! it was quite natural; I could not bear to see a brave gentleman assassinated: I thought you killed."

"It did not want much to do it, but I got off with a wound, which I think I repaid with interest to Schomberg and D'Epernon. As for Quelus, he may thank the bones of his head: they are the hardest I ever knew."

"Ah! tell me about it, it will amuse me a little."

"I have no time now, I come for something else. You are ennuyé----"

"To death."

"And a prisoner?"

"Completely. The king pretends no one can amuse him but me. He is very good, for since yesterday I have made more grimaces than his ape, and been more rude than his jester."

"Well, it is my turn to render you a service: can I do it?"

"Yes, go to the Marshal de Brissac's, and reassure my poor little wife, who must be very uneasy, and must think my conduct very strange."

"What shall I say to her?"

"Morbleu! tell her what you see; that I am a prisoner, and that the king talks to me of friendship like Cicero, who wrote on it; and of virtue like Socrates, who practised it. It is in vain I tell him I am ungrateful for the first, and incredulous as to the last: he only repeats it over again."

"Is that all I can do for you?"

"Ah, mon Dieu! I fear so."

"Then it is done."

"How so?"

"I guessed all this, and told your wife so."

"And what did she say?"

"At first she would not believe; but I trust now," continued he, glancing towards the window, "she will yield to evidence. Ask me something more difficult."

"Then, bring here the griffin of Signor Astolfo, and let me mount en croupe, and go to my wife."

"A more simple thing would be to take the griffin to your wife and bring her here."

"Here!"

"Yes, here."

"To the Louvre, that would be droll."

"I should think so. Then you would be ennuyé no longer?"

"Ma foi! no, but if this goes on much longer, I believe I shall kill myself."

"Well! shall I give you my page?"

"To me?"

"Yes, he is a wonderful lad."

"Thank you, but I detest pages."

"Bah! try him."

"Bussy, you mock me."

"Let me leave him."

"No."

"I tell you, you will like him."

"No, no, a hundred times, no."

"Hola, page, come here."

Jeanne came forward, blushing.

"Oh!" cried St. Luc, recognizing her, in astonishment.

"Well! shall I send him away?"

"No, no. Ah Bussy, I owe you an eternal friendship."

"Take care, you cannot be heard, but you can be seen."

"It is true," said St. Luc, retreating from his wife. Indeed, M. de Nancey was beginning to wonder what was going on, when a great noise was heard from the gallery.

"Ah! mon Dieu!" cried M. de Nancey, "there is the king quarreling with some one."

"I really think so," replied Bussy, affecting inquietude; "can it be with the Duc d'Anjou, who came with me?"

The captain of the guard went off in the direction of the gallery.

"Have I not managed well?" said Bussy to St. Luc.

"What is it?"

"M. d'Anjou and the king are quarrelling; I must go to them. You profit by the time to place in safety the page I have brought you; is it possible?"

"Oh, yes; luckily I declared I was ill and must keep my room."

"In that case, adieu, madame, and remember me in your prayers." And Bussy went off to the gallery, where the king, red with fury, swore to the duke, who was pale with anger, that in the scene of the preceding night Bussy was the aggressor.

"I affirm to you, sire," cried the duke, "that D'Epernon, Schomberg and Quelus were waiting for him at the Hôtel des Tournelles."

"Who told you so?"

"I saw them with my own eyes."

"In that darkness! The night was pitch dark."

"I knew their voices."

"They spoke to you?"

"They did more, they took me for Bussy, and attacked me."

"You?"

"Yes, I."

“And what were you doing there?”

“What does that matter to you?”

“I wish to know; I am curious to-day.”

“I was going to Manasses.”

“A Jew?”

“You go to Ruggieri, a poisoner.”

“I go where I like: I am the king. Besides, as I said, Bussy was the aggressor.”

“Where?”

“At St. Luc’s ball.”

“Bussy provoked five men? No, no, he is brave, but he is not mad.”

“Par la mordieu! I tell you I heard him. Besides, he has wounded Schomberg in the thigh, D’Epernon in the arm, and half killed Quelus.”

“Ah! really I did not know; I compliment him on it.”

“I will make example of this brawler.”

“And I, whom your friends attack, in his person and in my own, will know if I am your brother, and if----”

At this moment Bussy, dressed in pale-green satin, entered the room.

“Sire!” said he, “receive my humble respects.”

“Pardieu! here he is,” cried Henri.

“Your majesty, it seems, was doing me the honor of speaking of me.”

“Yes, and I am glad to see that, in spite of what they told me, your look shows good health.”

“Sire, blood drawn improves the complexion, so mine ought to be good this morning.”

“Well, since they have wounded you, complain, and I will do you justice.”

“I complain of nothing, sire.”

Henri looked astonished. “What did you say?” said he to the duke.

“I said that Bussy had received a wound in his side.”

“Is it true, Bussy?”

“The first prince of the blood would not lie, sire.”

“And yet you do not complain?”

“I shall never complain, sire, until they cut off my right-hand, and prevent my revenging myself, and then I will try to do it with the left.”

“Insolent,” murmured Henri.

“Sire,” said the duke, “do justice; we ask no better. Order an inquiry, name judges, and let it be proved who prepared the ambush and the intended murder.”

Henri reddened. “No,” said he, “I prefer this time to be ignorant where the wrong lies, and to pardon everyone. I wish these enemies to make peace, and I am sorry that Schomberg and D’Epernon are kept at home by their wounds. Say, M. d’Anjou, which do you call the most forward to fight of all my friends, as you say you saw them?”

“Sire, it was Quelus.”

“Ma foi! yes,” said Quelus, “his highness is right.”

“Then,” said Henri, “let MM. Bussy and Quelus make peace in the name of all.”

“Oh! Oh!” said Quelus, “what does that mean, sire?”

“It means that you are to embrace here, before me.” Quelus frowned.

“Ah, signor,” cried Bussy, imitating a pantaloon, “will you not do me this favor?”

Even the king laughed. Then, approaching Quelus, Bussy threw his arms round his neck, saying, “The king wishes it.”

“I hope it engages us to nothing,” whispered Quelus.

“Be easy,” answered Bussy, “we will meet soon.”

Quelus drew back in a rage, and Bussy, making a pirouette, went out of the gallery.

CHAPTER VI.

LE PETIT COUCHER OF HENRI III.

After this scene, beginning in tragedy and ending in comedy, the king, still angry, went to his room, followed by Chicot, who asked for his supper.

“I am not hungry,” said the king.

“It is possible, but I am.”

The king did not seem to hear. He unclasped his cloak, took off his cap, and, advancing to the passage which led to St. Luc’s room, said to Chicot, “Wait here for me till I return.”

“Oh! do not be in a hurry,” said Chicot. No sooner was the king gone, than Chicot opened the door and called “Hola!”

A valet came. “The king has changed his mind,” said Chicot, “he wishes a good supper here for himself and St. Luc, above all, plenty of wine, and despatch.”

The valet went to execute the orders, which he believed to be the king’s. Henri meanwhile had passed into St. Luc’s room. He found him in bed, having prayers read to him by an old servant who had followed him to the Louvre, and shared his captivity. In a corner, on an armchair, his head buried in his hands, slept the page.

“Who is that young man?” asked the king.

“Did not your majesty authorize me to send for a page.”

“Yes, doubtless.”

“Well, I have profited by it.”

“Oh!”

“Does your majesty repent of having allowed me this little indulgence?”

“No, no, on the contrary, amuse yourself, my son. How are you?”

“Sire, I have a fever.”

“Really, your face is red; let me feel your pulse, I am half a doctor.”

St. Luc held out his hand with visible ill-humor.

“Oh!” said the king, “intermittent--agitated.”

“Yes, sire, I am very ill.”

“I will send you my doctor.”

“Thank you, sire, but I hate Miron.”

“I will watch you myself. You shall have a bed in my room, and we will talk all night.”

“Oh!” cried St Luc, “you see me ill, and you want to keep me from sleeping. That is a singular way to treat your patient, doctor.”

“But you cannot be left alone, suffering as you are.”

“Sire, I have my page, Jean.”

“But he sleeps.”

“That is what I like best, then he will not disturb me.”

“Well, come and assist at my going to bed.”

“Then I shall be free to come back to bed?”

“Perfectly.”

“Well, so be it. But I shall make a bad courtier, I assure you; I am dying with sleep.”

“You shall yawn at your ease.”

“Sire, if your majesty will leave me, I will be with you in five minutes.”

“Well, then, five minutes, but no longer.”

As soon as the door was shut, the page jumped up. “Ah! St. Luc,” cried she, “you are going to leave me again. Mon Dieu! I shall die of fright here, if they discover me.”

“My dear Jeanne, Gaspard here will protect you.”

“Had I not better go back?”

“If you really wish it, Jeanne,” said St. Luc, sadly, “you shall. But if you are as good as you are beautiful, if you have any feeling in your heart for me, you will wait here a little. I shall suffer so much from my head and nerves that the king will not long keep so sad a companion.”

“Go, then,” said Jeanne, “and I will wait.”

“My dear Jeanne, you are adorable. Trust me to returns as soon as possible, Besides, I have an idea, which I will tell you when I return.”

“An idea which will restore your liberty?”

“I hope so.”

“Then go,”

“Gaspard,” said St. Luc, “prevent any one from entering here, and in a quarter of an hour lock the door, and bring me the key to the king’s room. Then go home, and tell them not to be uneasy about Madame la Comtesse, and come back to-morrow.”

Then St. Luc kissed his wife's hand, and went to the king, who was already growing impatient. Jeanne, alone and trembling, hid behind the curtains of the bed. When St. Luc entered he found the king amidst a perfect carpet of flowers, of which the stalks had been cut off-roses, jasmine, violets, and wall-flowers, in spite of the severe weather, formed an odorous carpet for Henry III. The chamber, of which the roof was painted, had in it two beds, one of which was so large as to occupy a third of the room. It was hung with gold and silk tapestry, representing mythological figures and the windows had curtains to match. From the center of the ceiling hung, suspended by a golden chain, a silver gilt lamp, in which burned a perfumed oil. At the side of the bed was a golden satyr, holding in his hand a candelabrum, containing four rose-color wax candles, also perfumed.

The king, with his naked feet resting on the flowers, was seated on a chair of ebony inlaid with gold; he had on his knees seven or eight young spaniels, who were licking his bands. Two servants were curling his hair, his mustachios, and beard, a third was covering his face with a kind of cream, which had a most delightful scent.

"Here," cried Chicot, "the grease and the combs, I will try them too."

"Chicot," said Henri, "your skin is too dry, and will use too much cream, and your beard is so hard, it will break my combs. Well, my son," said he, turning to St. Luc, "how is your head?"

St. Luc put his hand to his head and groaned.

"Imagine!" continued Henri, "I have seen Bussy d'Amboise."

"Bussy!" cried St. Luc, trembling.

"Yes, those fools! five of them attacked him, and let him escape. If you had been there, St. Luc----"

"I should probably have been like the others."

"Oh! no, I wager you are as good as Bussy. We will try to-morrow."

"Sire, I am too ill for anything."

Henri, hearing a singular noise, turned round, and saw Chicot eating up all the supper that had been brought for two.

"What the devil are you doing, M. Chicot?" cried Henri.

"Taking my cream internally, since you will not allow me to do it outwardly."

"Go and fetch my captain of the guards," said Henri.

"What for?" asked Chicot, emptying a porcelain cup of chocolate.

“To pass his sword through your body.”

“Ah! let him come, we shall see!” cried Chicot, putting himself in such a comical attitude of defense that every one laughed.

“But I am hungry,” cried the king; “and the wretch has eaten up all the supper.”

“You are capricious, Henri; I offered you supper and you refused. However, your bouillon is left; I am no longer hungry, and I am going to bed.”

“And I also,” said St. Luc, “for I can stand no longer.”

“Stay, St. Luc,” said the king, “take these,” and he offered him a handful of little dogs.

“What for?”

“To sleep with you; they will take your illness from you.”

“Thanks, sire,” said St. Luc, putting them back in their basket, “but I have no confidence in your receipt.”

“I will come and visit you in the night, St. Luc.”

“Pray do not, sire, you will only disturb me,” and saluting the king, he went away. Chicot had already disappeared, and there only remained with the king the valets, who covered his face with a mask of fine cloth, plastered with the perfumed cream, in which were holes for the eyes, nose, and mouth; a cap of silk and silver fixed it on the forehead and ears. They next covered his arms with sleeves made of wadded silk, and then presented him with kid gloves, also greased inside.

These mysteries of the royal toilet finished, they presented to him his soup in a golden cup. Then Henri said a prayer, a short one that night, and went to bed.

When settled there, he ordered them to carry away the flowers, which were beginning to make the air sickly, and to open the window for a moment. Then the valet closed the doors and curtains, and called in Narcissus, the king’s favorite dog, who, jumping on the bed, settled himself at once on the king’s feet. The valet next put out the wax-lights, lowered the lamp, and went out softly.

Already, more tranquil and nonchalant than the lazy monks of his kingdom in their fat abbeys, the King of France no longer remembered that there was a France.--He slept.

Every noise was hushed, and one might have heard a bat fly in the somber corridors of the Louvre.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW, WITHOUT ANY ONE KNOWING WHY, THE KING WAS CONVERTED BEFORE THE NEXT DAY.

Three hours passed thus.

Suddenly, a terrible cry was heard, which came from the king’s room.

All the lights in his room were out, and no sound was to be heard except this strange call of the king’s. For it was he who had cried.

Soon was heard the noise of furniture falling, porcelain breaking, steps running about the room, and the barking of dogs-mingled with new cries. Almost instantly lights burned, swords shone in the galleries, and the heavy steps of the Guards were heard.

“To arms!” cried all, “the king calls.”

And the captain of the guard, the colonel of the Swiss, and some attendants, rushed into the king’s room with flambeaux.

Near an overturned chair, broken cups, and disordered bed, stood Henri, looking terrified and grotesque in his night-dress. His right hand was extended, trembling like a leaf in the wind, and his left held his sword, which he had seized mechanically.

He appeared dumb through terror, and all the spectators, not daring to break the silence, waited with the utmost anxiety.

Then appeared, half dressed and wrapped in a large cloak, the young queen, Louise de Lorraine, blonde and gentle, who led the life of a saint upon earth, and who had been awakened by her husband’s cries.

“Sire,” cried she, also trembling, “what is the matter? Mon Dieu! I heard your cries, and I came.”

“It--it is nothing,” said the king, without moving his eyes, which seemed to be looking up the air for some form invisible to all but him.

“But your majesty cried out; is your majesty suffering?” asked the queen.

Terror was so visibly painted on the king’s countenance, that it began to gain on the others.

“Oh, sire!” cried the queen again, “in Heaven’s name do not leave us in this suspense. Will you have a doctor?”

"A doctor, no," cried Henri, in the same tone, "the body is not ill, it is the mind; no doctor--a confessor."

Everyone looked round; nowhere was there to be seen any traces of what had so terrified the king. However, a confessor was sent for; Joseph Foulon, superior of the convent of St. Généviève, was torn from his bed, to come to the king. With the confessor, the tumult ceased, and silence was reestablished; everyone conjectured and wondered--the king was confessing.

The next day the king rose early, and began to read prayers then he ordered all his friends to be sent for. They sent to St. Luc, but he was more suffering than ever. His sleep, or rather his lethargy, had been so profound, that he alone had heard nothing of the tumult in the night, although he slept so near. He begged to be left in bed. At this deplorable recital, Henri crossed himself, and sent him a doctor.

Then he ordered that all the scourges from the convent should be brought to him, and, going to his friends, distributed them, ordering them to scourge each other as hard as they could.

D'Epernon said that as his right arm was in a sling, and he could not return the blows he received, he ought to be exempt, but the king replied that that would only make it the more acceptable to God.

He himself set the example. He took off his doublet, waistcoat, and shirt, and struck himself like a martyr. Chicot tried to laugh, as usual, but was warned by a terrible look, that this was not the right time, and he was forced to take a scourge like the others.

All at once the king left the room, telling them to wait for him. Immediately the blows ceased, only Chicot continued to strike D'O, whom he hated, and D'O returned it as well as he could. It was a duel with whips.

The king went to the queen, gave her a pearl necklace worth 25,000 crowns, and kissed her, which he had not done for a year. Then he asked her to put off her royal ornaments and put on a sack.

Louise, always good, consented, but asked why her husband gave her a necklace, and yet made such a request.

"For my sins," replied he.

The queen said no more, for she knew, better than any one, how many he had to repent of.

Henri returned, which was a signal for the flagellation to recommence. In ten minutes the queen arrived, with her sack on her shoulders. Then tapers were distributed to all the court, and barefooted, through the snow, all the courtiers and fine ladies went to Montmartre, shivering. At five o’clock the promenade was over, the convents had received rich presents, the feet of all the court were swollen, and the backs of the courtiers sore. There had been tears, cries, prayers, incense, and psalms. Everyone had suffered, without knowing why the king, who danced the night before, scourged himself to-day. As for Chicot, he had escaped at the Porte Montmartre, and, with Brother Gorenflot, had entered a public-house, where he had eaten and drank. Then he had rejoined the procession and returned to the Louvre.

In the evening the king, fatigued with his fast and his exercise, ordered himself a light supper, had his shoulders washed, and then went to visit St. Luc.

“Ah!” cried he, “God has done well to render life so bitter.”

“Why so, sire?”

“Because then man, instead of fearing death, longs for it.”

“Speak for yourself, sire, I do not long for it at all.”

“Listen, St. Luc, will you follow my example?”

“If I think it a good one.”

“I will leave my throne, and you your wife, and we will enter a cloister. I will call myself Brother Henri----”

“Pardon, sire, if you do not care for your crown, of which you are tired, I care very much for my wife, whom I know so little. Therefore I refuse.”

“Oh! you are better.”

“Infinitely better, sire; I feel quite joyous, and disposed for happiness and pleasure.”

“Poor St. Luc!” cried the king, clasping his hands.

“You should have asked me yesterday, sire, then I was ill and cross. I would have thrown myself into a well for a trifle. But this evening it is quite a different thing. I have passed a good night and a charming day. Mordieu, vive la joie!”

“You swear, St. Luc.”

“Did I, sire? but I think you swear sometimes.”

“I have sworn, St. Luc, but I shall swear no more.”

“I cannot say that; I will not swear more than I can help, and God is merciful.”

“You think he will pardon me?”

"Oh! I speak for myself, not for you, sire. You have sinned as a king, I as a private man, and we shall, I trust, be differently judged."

The king sighed. "St. Luc," said he, "will you pass the night in my room?"

"Why, what should we do?"

"We will light all the lamps, I will go to bed, and you shall read prayers to me."

"No, thank you, sire."

"You will not?"

"On no account."

"You abandon me, St. Luc!"

"No, I will stay with your majesty, if you will send for music and ladies, and have a dance."

"Oh, St. Luc, St. Luc!"

"I am wild to-night, sire, I want to dance and drink."

"St. Luc," said the king, solemnly, "do you ever dream?"

"Often, sire."

"You believe in dreams?"

"With reason."

"How so?"

"Dreams console for the reality. Last night I had a charming dream."

"What was it?"

"I dreamed that my wife----"

"You still think of your wife?"

"More than ever, sire; well, I dreamed that she, with her charming face--for she is pretty, sire----"

"So was Eve, who ruined us all."

"Well, my wife had procured wings and the form of a bird, and so, braving locks and bolts, she passed over the walls of the Louvre, and came to my window, crying, 'Open, St. Luc, open, my husband.'"

"And you opened?"

"I should think so."

"Worldly."

"As you please, sire."

"Then you woke?"

"No, indeed, the dream was too charming; and I hope to-night to dream again; therefore I refuse your majesty's obliging offer. If I sit up, let me at least have something to pay me for losing my dream. If your majesty will do as I said----”

“Enough, St. Luc. I trust Heaven will send you a dream to-night which will lead you to repentance.”

“I doubt it, sire, and I advise you to send away this libertine St. Luc, who is resolved not to amend.”

“No, no, I hope, before to-morrow, grace will have touched you as it has me. Good night, I will pray for you.”

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW THE KING WAS AFRAID OF BEING AFRAID.

When the king left St. Luc, he found the court, according to his orders, in the great gallery. Then he gave D'O, D'Epernon and Schomberg an order to retire into the provinces, threatened Quelus and Maugiron to punish them if they quarreled anymore with Bussy, to whom he gave his hand to kiss, and then embraced his brother François.

As for the queen, he was prodigal in politeness to her.

When the usual time for retiring approached, the king seemed trying to retard it. At last ten o'clock struck.

"Come with me, Chicot," then said he, "good night, gentlemen."

"Good night, gentlemen," said Chicot, "we are going to bed. I want my barber, my hairdresser, my valet de chambre, and, above all, my cream."

"No," said the king, "I want none of them to-night; Lent is going to begin."

"I regret the cream," said Chicot.

The king and Chicot entered the room, which we already know.

"Ah ça! Henri," said Chicot, "I am the favorite to-night. Am I handsomer than that Cupid, Quelus?"

"Silence, Chicot, and you, gentlemen of the toilette, go out."

They obeyed, and the king and Chicot were left alone.

"Why do you send them away?" asked Chicot, "they have not greased us yet. Are you going to grease me with your own royal hand? It would be an act of humility."

"Let us pray," said Henri.

"Thank you, that is not amusing. If that be what you called me here for, I prefer to return to the bad company I have left. Adieu, my son. Good night."

"Stay," said the king.

"Oh! this is tyranny. You are a despot, a Phalaris, a Dionysius. All day you have made me tear the shoulders of my friends with cow-hide, and now we are to begin again. Do not let us do it, Henri, when there’s but two, every blow tells.”

“Hold your tongue, miserable chatterer, and think of repentance.”

“I repent! And of what? Of being jester to a monk. Confiteor--I repent, mea culpa, it is a great sin.”

“No sacrilege, wretch.”

“Ah! I would rather he shut up in a cage with lions and apes, than with a mad king. Adieu, I am going.”

The king locked the door.

“Henri, you look sinister; if you do not let me go, I will cry, I will call, I will break the window, I will kick down the door.”

“Chicot,” said the king, in a melancholy tone, “you abuse my sadness.”

“Ah! I understand, you are afraid to be alone. Tyrants always are so. Take my long sword, and let me take the scabbard to my room.”

At the word “afraid,” Henri shuddered, and he looked nervously around, and seemed so agitated and grew so pale, that Chicot began to think him really ill, and said,--

“Come, my son, what is the matter, tell your troubles to your friend Chicot.”

The king looked at him and said, “Yes, you are my friend, my only friend.”

“There is,” said Chicot, “the abbey of Valency vacant.”

“Listen, Chicot, you are discreet.”

“There is also that of Pithiviers, where they make such good pies.”

“In spite of your buffooneries, you are a brave man.”

“Then do not give me an abbey, give me a regiment.”

“And even a wise one.”

“Then do not give me a regiment, make me a counselor; but no, when I think of it, I should prefer a regiment, for I should be always forced to be of the king’s opinion.”

“Hold your tongue, Chicot, the terrible hour approaches.”

“Ah! you are beginning again.”

“You will hear.”

“Hear what?”

“Wait, and the event will show you. Chicot, you are brave!”

“I boast of it, but I do not wish to try. Call your captain of the guard, your Swiss, and let me go away from this invisible danger.”

“Chicot, I command you to stay.”

“On my word, a nice master. I am afraid, I tell you. Help!”

“Well, drôle, if I must, I will tell you all.”

“Ah!” cried Chicot, drawing his sword, “once warned, I do not care; tell, my son, tell. Is it a crocodile? my sword is sharp, for I use it every week to cut my corns.” And Chicot sat down in the armchair with his drawn sword between his legs.

“Last night,” said Henri, “I slept----”

“And I also,” said Chicot.

“Suddenly a breath swept over my face.”

“It was the dog, who was hungry, and who licked your cream.”

“I half woke, and felt my beard bristle with terror under my mask.”

“Ah! you make me tremble deliciously.”

“Then,” continued the king, in a trembling voice, “then a voice sounded through the room, with a doleful vibration.”

“The voice of the crocodile! I have read in Marco Polo, that the crocodile has a voice like the crying of children; but be easy, my son, for if it comes, we will kill it.”

“‘Listen! miserable sinner,’ said the voice----”

“Oh! it spoke; then it was not a crocodile.”

“‘Miserable sinner,’ said the voice, ‘I am the angel of God.’“

“The angel of God!”

“Ah! Chicot, it was a frightful voice.”

“Was it like the sound of a trumpet?”

“‘Are you there?’ continued the voice, ‘do you hear, hardened sinner; are you determined to persevere in your iniquities?’“

“Ah, really; he said very much the same as other people, it seems to me.”

“Then, Chicot, followed many other reproaches, which I assure you were most painful.”

“But tell me what he said, that I may see if he was well informed?”

“Impious! do you doubt?”

“I? all that astonishes me is, that he waited so long to reproach you. So, my son, you were dreadfully afraid?”

“Oh, yes, the marrow seemed to dry in my bones.”

“It is quite natural; on my word, I do not know what I should have done in your place. And then you called?”

“Yes.”

"And they came?"

"Yes."

"And there was no one here?"

"No one."

"It is frightful."

"So frightful, that I sent for my confessor."

"And he came?"

"Immediately."

"Now, be frank, my son; tell the truth for once. What did he think of your revelation?"

"He shuddered."

"I should think so."

"He ordered me to repent, as the voice told me."

"Very well. There can be no harm in repenting. But what did he think of the vision?"

"That it was a miracle, and that I must think of it seriously. Therefore, this morning----"

"What have you done"

"I gave 100,000 livres to the Jesuits."

"Very well."

"And scourged myself and my friends."

"Perfect! but after?"

"Well, what do you think of it, Chicot? It is not to the jester I speak, but to the man of sense, to my friend."

"Ah, sire, I think your majesty had the nightmare."

"You think so?"

"Yes, it was a dream, which will not be renewed, unless your majesty thinks too much about it."

"A dream? No, Chicot, I was awake, my eyes were open."

"I sleep like that."

"Yes, but then you do not see, and I saw the moon shining through my windows, and its light on the amethyst in the hilt of my sword, which lay in that chair where you are."

"And the lamp?"

"Had gone out."

"A dream, my son."

"Why do you not believe, Chicot? It is said that God speaks to kings, when He wishes to effect some change on the earth."

"Yes, he speaks, but so low that they never hear Him."

"Well, do you know why I made you stay?--that you might hear as well as I."

"No one would believe me if I said I heard it."

"My friend, it is a secret which I confide to your known fidelity."

"Well, I accept. Perhaps it will also speak to me."

"Well, what must I do?"

"Go to bed, my son."

"But----"

"Do you think that sitting up will keep it away?"

"Well, then, you remain."

"I said so."

"Well, then, I will go to bed."

"Good."

"But you will not?"

"Certainly not, I will stay here."

"You will not go to sleep?"

"Oh, that I cannot promise; sleep is like fear, my son, a thing independent of will."

"You will try, at least?"

"Be easy; I will pinch myself. Besides, the voice would wake me."

"Do not joke about the voice."

"Well, well, go to bed."

The king sighed, looked round anxiously, and glided tremblingly into bed. Then Chicot established him in his chair, arranging round him the pillows and cushions.

"How do you feel, sire?" said he.

"Pretty well; and you?"

"Very well; good night, Henri."

"Good night, Chicot; do not go to sleep."

"Of course not," said Chicot, yawning fit to break his jaws.

And they both closed their eyes, the king to pretend to sleep, Chicot to sleep really.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW THE ANGEL MADE A MISTAKE AND SPOKE TO CHICOT, THINKING IT WAS THE KING.

The king and Chicot remained thus for some time. All at once the king jumped up in his bed. Chicot woke at the noise.

“What is it?” asked he in a low voice.

“The breath on my face.”

As he spoke, one of the wax lights went out, then the other, and the rest followed. Then the lamp also went out, and the room was lighted only by the rays of the moon. At the same moment they heard a hollow voice, saying, apparently from the end of the room,--

“Hardened sinner, art thou there?”

“Yes,” said Henri, with chattering teeth.

“Oh!” thought Chicot, “that is a very hoarse voice to come from heaven; nevertheless, it is dreadful.”

“Do you hear?” asked the voice.

“Yes, and I am bowed down to the earth.”

“Do you believe you obeyed me by all the exterior mummeries which you performed yesterday, without your heart being touched?”

“Very well said,” thought Chicot. He approached the king softly.

“Do you believe now?” asked the king, with clasped hands.

“Wait.”

“What for?”

“Hush! leave your bed quietly, and let me get in.”

“Why?”

“That the anger of the Lord may fall first on me.”

“Do you think He will spare me for that?”

“Let us try,” and he pushed the king gently out and got into his place.

“Now, go to my chair, and leave all to me.”

Henri obeyed; he began to understand.

“You do not reply,” said the voice; “you are hardened in sin.”

“Oh! pardon! pardon!” cried Chicot, imitating the king’s voice. Then he whispered to Henri, “It is droll that the angel does not know me.”

“What can it mean?”

“Wait.”

“Wretch!” said the voice.

“Yes, I confess,” said Chicot; “I am a hardened sinner, a dreadful sinner.”

“Then acknowledge your crimes, and repent.”

“I acknowledge to have been a great traitor to my cousin Condé, whose wife I seduced.”

“Oh! hush,” said the king, “that is so long ago.”

“I acknowledge,” continued Chicot, “to have been a great rogue to the Poles, who chose me for king, and whom I abandoned one night, carrying away the crown jewels. I repent of this.”

“Ah!” whispered Henri again: “that is all forgotten.”

“Hush! let me speak.”

“Go on,” said the voice.

“I acknowledge having stolen the crown from my brother D’Alençon, to whom it belonged of right, as I had formerly renounced it on accepting the crown of Poland.”

“Knave!” said the king.

“Go on,” said the voice.

“I acknowledge having joined my mother, to chase from France my brother-in-law, the King of Navarre, after having destroyed all his friends.”

“Ah!” whispered the king, angrily.

“Sire, do not let us offend God, by trying to hide what He knows as well as we do.”

“Leave politics,” said the voice.

“Ah!” cried Chicot, with a doleful voice, “is it my private life I am to speak of?”

“Yes.”

“I acknowledge, then, that I am effeminate, idle, and hypocritical.”

“It is true.”

“I have ill-treated my wife--such a worthy woman.”

“One ought to love one’s wife as one’s self, and prefer her to all things,” said the voice, angrily.

“Ah!” cried Chicot, “then I have sinned deeply.”

“And you have made others sin by your example.”

"It is true."

"Especially that poor St. Luc; and if you do not send him home to-morrow to his wife, there will be no pardon for you."

"Ah!" said Chicot to the king, "the voice seems to be friendly to the house of Cossé."

"And you must make him a duke, to recompense him for his forced stay."

"Peste!" said Chicot; "the angel is much interested for M. de St. Luc."

"Oh!" cried the king, without listening, "this voice from on high will kill me."

"Voice from the side, you mean," said Chicot.

"How I voice from the side?"

"Yes; can you not hear that the voice comes from that wall, Henri?--the angel lodges in the Louvre."

"Blasphemer!"

"Why, it is honorable for you; but you do not seem to recognize it. Go and visit him; he is only separated from you by that partition."

A ray of the moon falling on Chicot's face, showed it to the king so laughing and amused, that he said, "What! you dare to laugh?"

"Yes, and so will you in a minute. Be reasonable, and do as I tell you. Go and see if the angel be not in the next room."

"But if he speak again?"

"Well, I am here to answer. He is vastly credulous. For the last quarter of an hour I have been talking, and he has not recognized me. It is not clever!"

Henri frowned. "I begin to believe you are right, Chicot," said he.

"Go, then."

Henri opened softly the door which led into the corridor. He had scarcely entered it, when he heard the voice redoubling its reproaches, and Chicot replying.

"Yes," said the voice, "you are as inconstant as a woman, as soft as a Sybarite, as irreligious as a heathen."

"Oh!" whined Chicot, "is it my fault if I have such a soft skin--such white hands--such a changeable mind? But from to-day I will alter--I will wear coarse linen----"

However, as Henri advanced, he found that Chicot's voice grew fainter, and the other louder, and that it seemed to come from St. Luc's room, in which he could see a light. He stooped down and peeped through the keyhole, and immediately grew pale with anger.

“Par la mordieu!” murmured he, “is it possible that they have dared to play such a trick?”

This is what he saw through the keyhole. St. Luc, in a dressing-gown, was roaring through a tube the words which he had found so dreadful, and beside him, leaning on his shoulder, was a lady in white, who every now and then took the tube from him, and called through something herself, while stifled bursts of laughter accompanied each sentence of Chicot’s, who continued to answer in a doleful tone.

“Jeanne de Cossé in St. Luc’s room! A hole in the wall! such a trick on me! Oh! they shall pay dearly for it!”. And with a vigorous kick he burst open the door.

Jeanne rushed behind the curtains to hide herself, while St. Luc, his face full of terror, fell on his knees before the king, who was pale with rage.

“Ah!” cried Chicot, from the bed, “Ah! mercy!--Holy Virgin! I am dying!”

Henri, seizing, in a transport of rage, the trumpet from the hands of St. Luc, raised it as if to strike. But St. Luc jumped up and cried--

“Sire, I am a gentleman; you have no right to strike me!”

Henri dashed the trumpet violently on the ground. Some one picked it up; it was Chicot, who, hearing the noise, judged that his presence was necessary as a mediator. He ran to the curtain, and, drawing out poor Jeanne, all trembling--

“Oh!” said he, “Adam and Eve after the Fall. You send them away, Henri, do you not?”

“Yes.”

“Then I will be the exterminating angel.”

And throwing himself between, the king and St. Luc, and waving the trumpet over the heads of the guilty couple, said--

“This is my Paradise, which you have lost by your disobedience; I forbid you to return to it.”

Then he whispered to St. Luc, who had his arm round his wife--

“If you have a good horse, kill it, but be twenty leagues from here before to-morrow.”

CHAPTER X.

HOW BUSSY WENT TO SEEK FOR THE REALITY OF HIS DREAM.

When Bussy returned home again, he was still thinking of his dream. "Morbleu!" said he, "it is impossible that a dream should have left such a vivid impression on my mind. I see it all so clearly;--the bed, the lady, the doctor. I must seek for it--surely I can find it again." Then Bussy, after having the bandage of his wound resettled by a valet, put on high boots, took his sword, wrapped himself in his cloak, and set off for the same place where he had been nearly murdered the night before, and nearly at the same hour.

He went in a litter to the Rue Roi-de-Sicile, then got out, and told his servants to wait for him. It was about nine in the evening, the curfew had sounded, and Paris was deserted. Bussy arrived at the Bastile, then he sought for the place where his horse had fallen, and thought he had found it; he next endeavored to repeat his movements of the night before, retreated to the wall, and examined every door to find the corner against which he had leaned, but all the doors seemed alike.

"Pardieu!" said he, "if I were to knock at each of these doors question all the lodgers, spend a thousand crowns to make valets and old women speak, I might learn what I want to know. There are fifty houses; it would take me at least five nights."

As he spoke, he perceived a small and trembling light approaching.

This light advanced slowly, and irregularly, stopping occasionally, moving on again, and going first to the right, then to the left, then, for a minute, coming straight on, and again diverging. Bussy leaned against a door, and waited. The light continued to advance, and soon he could see a black figure, which, as it advanced, took the form of a man, holding a lantern in his left hand. He appeared to Bussy to belong to the honorable fraternity of drunkards, for nothing else seemed to explain the eccentric movements of the lantern. At last he slipped over a piece of ice, and fell. Bussy was about to come forward and offer his assistance, but the man and the lantern were quickly up again, and advanced directly towards him, when he saw, to his great surprise, that the man had a bandage over his eyes. “Well!” thought he, “it is a strange thing to play at blind man’s buff with a lantern in your hand. Am I beginning to dream again? And, good heavens! he is talking to himself. If he be not drunk or mad, he is a mathematician.”

This last surmise was suggested by the words that Bussy heard.

“488, 489, 490,” murmured the man, “it must be near here.” And then he raised his bandage, and finding himself in front of a house, examined it attentively.

“No, it is not this,” he said. Then, putting back his bandage, he recommenced his walk and his calculations. “491, 492, 493, 494; I must be close.” And he raised his bandage again, and, approaching the door next to that against which Bussy was standing, began again to examine.

“Hum!” said he, “it might, but all these doors are so alike.”

“The same reflection I have just made,” thought Bussy.

However, the mathematician now advanced to the next door, and going up to it, found himself face to face with Bussy.

“Oh!” cried he, stepping back.

“Oh!” cried Bussy.

“It is not possible.”

“Yes; but it is extraordinary. You are the doctor?”

“And you the gentleman?”

“Just so.”

“Mon Dieu! how strange.”

“The doctor,” continued Bussy, “who yesterday dressed a wound for a gentleman?”

“Yes, in the right side.”

“Exactly so. You had a gentle, light, and skilful hand.”

“Ah, sir, I did not expect to find you here.”

“But what were you looking for?”

“The house.”

“Then you do not know it?”

“How should I? They brought me here with my eyes bandaged.”

“Then you really came here?”

“Either to this house or the next.”

“Then I did not dream?”

“Dream?”

“I confess I feared it was all a dream.”

“Ah! I fancied there was some mystery.”

“A mystery which you must help me to unravel.”

“Willingly.”

“What is your name?”

“Monsieur, to such a question I ought, perhaps, to reply by looking fierce, and saying, ‘Yours, monsieur, if you please; but you have a long sword, and I only a lancet; you seem to me a gentleman, and I cannot appear so to you, for I am wet and dirty. Therefore, I reply frankly: I am called Rémy-le-Haudouin.”

“Very well, monsieur; I thank you. I am Louis de Clermont, Comte de Bussy.”

“Bussy d’Amboise! the hero Bussy!” cried the young doctor, joyfully. “What, monsieur, you are that famous Bussy----?”

“I am Bussy,” replied he. “And now, wet and dirty as you are, will you satisfy my curiosity?”

“The fact is,” said the young man, “that I shall be obliged, like Epaminondas the Theban, to stay two days at home, for I have but one doublet and trousers. But, pardon, you did me the honor to question me, I think?”

“Yes, monsieur, I asked you how you came to this house?”

“M. le Comte, this is how it happened; I lodge in the Rue Beauheillis, 502 steps from here. I am a poor surgeon, not unskilful, I hope.”

“I can answer for that.”

“And who has studied much, but without any patients. Seven or eight days ago, a man having received behind the Arsenal a stab with a knife, I sewed up the wound, and cured him. This made for me some reputation in the neighborhood, to which I attribute the happiness of having been last night awoke by a pretty voice.”

“A woman’s?”

“Yes, but, rustic as I am, I knew it to be the voice of a servant. I know them well.”

“And what did you do?”

“I rose and opened my door, but scarcely had I done so, when two little hands, not very soft, but not very hard, put a bandage over my eyes, without saying anything.”

"'Oh!' she said, 'come, do not try to see where you are going, be discreet, here is your recompense;' and she placed in my hand a purse."

"Ah! and what did you say?"

"That I was ready to follow my charming conductress. I did not know if she were charming or not, but I thought that the epithet, even if exaggerated, could do no harm."

"And you asked no more?"

"I had often read these kinds of histories in books, and I had remarked that they always turned out well for the doctor. Therefore I followed, and I counted 498 paces."

"Good; then this must be the door."

"It cannot be far off, at all events, unless she led me by some detour, which I half suspect."

"But did she pronounce no name?"

"None."

"But you remarked something?"

"All that one could with one's fingers, a door with nails, then a passage, and then a staircase----"

"On the left?"

"Yes; and I counted the steps. Then I think we came to a corridor, for they opened three doors."

"Well?"

"Then I heard another voice, and that belonged to the mistress, I am sure; it was sweet and gentle."

"Yes, yes, it was hers."

"Good, it was hers."

"I am sure of it."

"Then they pushed me into the room where you were, and told me to take off my bandage, when I saw you----"

"Where was I?"

"On a bed."

"A bed of white and gold damask?"

"Yes."

"In a room hung with tapestry?"

"Just so."

"And a painted ceiling?"

"Yes, and between two windows----"

“A portrait?”

“Yes.”

“Representing a woman about nineteen?”

“Yes.”

“Blonde, and beautiful as an angel?”

“More beautiful.”

“Bravo! what did you do then?”

“I dressed your wound.”

“And, ma foi! very well.”

“As well as I could.”

“Admirably! this morning it was nearly well.”

“It is thanks to a balm I have composed, and which appears to me sovereign, for many times, not knowing who to practise upon, I have made wounds on myself, and they were always well in two or three days.”

“My dear M. Rémy, you are a charming doctor. Well, afterwards?”

“You fainted again. The voice asked me how you were.”

“From whence?”

“From a room at the side.”

“So you did not see her?”

“No.”

“And you replied?”

“That the wound was not dangerous, and in twenty-four hours would be well.”

“She seemed pleased?”

“Charmed; for she cried, ‘I am very glad of that.’“

“My dear M. Rémy, I will make your fortune. Well?”

“That was all; I had no more to do; and the voice said, ‘M. Rémy----’“

“She knew your name?”

“Yes; ‘M. Rémy,’ said she, ‘be a man of honor to the last; do not compromise a poor woman carried away by an excess of humanity. Take your bandage, and let them take you straight home.’“

“You promised?”

“I gave my word.”

“And you kept it?”

“As you see, for I am seeking now.”

“You are an honest man, and here is my hand,” cried Bussy.

"Monsieur, it will be an eternal glory for me to have touched the hand of Bussy d'Amboise. However, I have a scruple. There were ten pistoles in the purse."

"Well?"

"It is too much for a man who charges five sous for his visits, when he does not give them gratis, and I was seeking the house----"

"To return the purse?"

"Just so."

"My dear M. Rémy, it is too much delicacy; you have earned the money well, and may surely keep it."

"You think so?" said Rémy, well pleased.

"But I also am in your debt; indeed, it was I who ought to have paid you, and not the lady. Come, give me your confidence. What do you do in Paris?"

"What do I do? I do nothing; but I would if I had a connection."

"Well, that is just right; I will give you a patient. Will you have me? I am famous practise; for there is scarcely a day when I do not deface God's noblest work for others, or they for me. Will you undertake the care of all the holes I make in the skin of others or others in mine?"

"Ah, M. le Comte! this honor."

"No; you are just the man I want. You shall come and live with me; you shall have your own rooms, and your own servants; accept, or you will really annoy me."

"M. le Comte, I am so overjoyed, I cannot express it. I will work--I will make a connection----"

"But, no, I tell you, I keep you for myself and my friends. Now, do you remember anything more?"

"Nothing."

"Ah, well! help me to find out, if it be possible."

"I will."

"And you, who are a man of observation, how do you account for it, that after being doctored by you, I found myself by the Temple, close to the ditch."

"You!"

"Yes, I. Did you help to take me there?"

"Certainly not, and I should have opposed it if they had consulted me; for the cold might have done you much harm."

“Then I can tell nothing. Will you search a little more with me?”

“I will if you wish it; but I much fear it will be useless for all these houses are alike.”

“Well, we must come again by day.”

“Yes; but then we shall be seen.”

“Then we must inquire.”

“We will, monseigneur.”

“And we shall unravel the mystery. Be sure, Rémy, now there are two of us to work.”

CHAPTER XI.

M. BRYAN DE MONSOREAU.

It was more than joy, it was almost delirium, which agitated Bussy when he had acquired the certainty that the lady of his dream was a reality, and had, in fact, given him that generous hospitality of which he had preserved the vague remembrance in his heart. He would not let the young doctor go, but, dirty as he was, made him get into the litter with him; he feared that if he lost sight of him, he too would vanish like a dream. He would have liked to talk all night of the unknown lady, and explain to Rémy how superior she was even to her portrait; but Rémy, beginning his functions at once, insisted that he should go to bed: fatigue and pain gave the same counsel and these united powers carried the point.

The next day, on awaking, he found Rémy at his bedside. The young man could hardly believe in his good fortune, and wanted to see Bussy again to be sure of it.

“Well!” said he, “how are you, M. le Comte?”

“Quite well, my dear Esculapius; and you, are you satisfied?”

“So satisfied, my generous protector, that I would not change places with the king. But I now must see the wound.”

“Look.” And Bussy turned round for the young surgeon to take off the bandage. All looked well; the wound was nearly closed. Bussy, quite happy, had slept well, and sleep and happiness had aided the doctor.

“Well,” said Bussy, “what do you say?”

“I dare not tell you that you are nearly well, for fear you should send me back to the Rue Beauheillis, five hundred paces from the famous house.”

“Which we will find, will we not, Rémy?”

“I should think so.”

“Well, my friend, look on yourself as one of the house, and to-day, while you move your things, let me go to the fête of the installation of the new chief huntsman.”

“Ah! you want to commit follies already.”

“No, I promise to be very reasonable.”

“But you must ride.”

“It is necessary.”

“Have you a horse with an easy pace?

“I have four to choose from.”

“Well, take for to-day the one you would choose for the lady of the portrait you know.”

“Know! Ah, Rémy, you have found the way to my heart forever; I feared you would prevent me from going to this chase, or rather this imitation of one, and all the ladies of the Court, and many from the City, will be admitted to it. Now, Rémy, this lady may be there. She certainly is not a simple bourgeoise--those tapestries, that bed, so much luxury as well as good taste, show a woman of quality, or, at least, a rich one. If I were to meet her there!”

“All is possible,” replied Rémy, philosophically.

“Except to find the house,” sighed Bussy. “Or to penetrate when we have found it.”

“Oh! I have a method.”

“What is it?”

“Get another sword wound.”

“Good; that gives me the hope that you will keep me.”

“Be easy, I feel as if I had known you for twenty years, and could not do without you.”

The handsome face of the young doctor grew radiant with joy.

“Well, then,” said he, “it is decided; you go to the chase to look for the lady, and I go to look for the house.”

“It will be curious if we each succeed.”

There had been a great chase commanded in the Bois de Vincennes, for M. de Monsoreau to enter on his functions of chief huntsman. Most people had believed, from the scene of the day before, that the king would not attend, and much astonishment was expressed when it was announced that he had set off with his brother and all the court. The rendezvous was at the Point St. Louis. It was thus they named a cross-road where the martyr king used to sit under an oak-tree and administer justice. Everyone was therefore assembled here at nine o’clock, when the new officer, object of the general curiosity, unknown as he was to almost everyone, appeared on a magnificent black horse. All eyes turned towards him.

He was a man about thirty-five, tall, marked by the smallpox, and with a disagreeable expression. Dressed in a jacket of green cloth braided with silver, with a silver shoulder belt, on which the king's arms were embroidered in gold; on his head a cap with a long plume; in his left hand a spear, and in his right the éstortuaire [Footnote: The éstortuaire was a stick, which the chief huntsman presented to the king, to put aside the branches of the trees when he was going at full gallop.] destined for the king, M. de Monsoreau might look like a terrible warrior, but not certainly like a handsome cavalier.

"Fie! what an ugly figure you have brought us, monseigneur," said Bussy, to the Duc d'Anjou, "are these the sort of gentlemen that your favor seeks for out of the provinces? Certainly, one could hardly find such in Paris, which is nevertheless as well stocked with ugliness. They say that your highness made a great point of the king's appointing this man."

"M. de Monsoreau has served me well, and I recompense him," replied the duke.

"Well said, monseigneur, it is rare for princes to be grateful; but if that be all, I also have served you well, and should wear the embroidered jacket more gracefully, I trust, than M. de Monsoreau. He has a red beard, I see also, which is an additional beauty."

"I never knew that a man must be an Apollo, or Antinous, to fill an office at court."

"You never heard it; astonishing!"

"I consult the heart and not the face--the services rendered and promised."

"Your highness will say I am very envious; but I search, and uselessly, I confess, to discover what service this Monsoreau can have rendered you."

"You are too curious, Bussy," said the duke, angrily.

"Just like princes," cried Bussy, with his ordinary freedom, "they ask you everything; but if you ask a question in return, you are too curious."

"Well! go and ask M. de Monsoreau, himself."

"Ah! you are right. He is but a simple gentleman, and if he do not reply, I shall know what to say."

"What?"

"Tell him he is impertinent." And, turning from the prince, Bussy approached M. de Monsoreau, who was in the midst of the circle.

Bussy approached, gay and smiling, and his hat in his hand.

"Pardon, monsieur, but you seem all alone. Is it that the favor which you enjoy has already made you enemies?"

"I do not know, monsieur, but it is probable. But, may I ask, to what I owe the honor that you do me in invading my solitude?"

"Ma foi, to the great admiration that M. le Duc d'Anjou has inspired in me for you."

"How so?"

"By recounting to me the exploit for which you were made chief huntsman."

M. de Monsoreau grew so frightfully pale, that the marks in his face looked like black spots on his yellow skin; at the same time he looked at Bussy in a manner that portended a violent storm. Bussy saw that he had done wrong; but he was not a man to draw back; on the contrary, he was one of those who generally repair an indiscretion by an impertinence.

"You say, monsieur," said Monsoreau, "that the Duke recounted to you my last exploit?"

"Yes, monsieur, but I should much like to hear the story from your own lips."

M. de Monsoreau clasped his dagger tighter in his hand, as though he longed to attack Bussy.

"Ma foi, monsieur," said he, "I was quite disposed to grant your request, and recognize your courtesy, but unfortunately here is the king arriving, so we must leave it for another time."

Indeed, the king, mounted on his favorite Spanish horse, advanced rapidly towards them. He loved handsome faces, and was therefore little pleased with that of M. de Monsoreau. However, he accepted, with a good grace, the éstortuaire which he presented to him, kneeling, according to custom. As soon as the king was armed, the chase commenced.

Bussy watched narrowly everyone that passed, looking for the original of the portrait, but in vain; there were pretty, even beautiful and charming women, but not the charming creature whom he sought for. He was reduced to conversation, and the company of his ordinary friends. Antragues, always laughing and talking, was a great amusement.

"We have a frightful chief huntsman," said he to Bussy, "do you not think so?"

"I find him horrible; what a family it must be if his children are like him. Do you know his wife?"

“He is not married.”

“How do you know?”

“From Madame de Vendron, who finds him very handsome, and would willingly make him her fourth husband. See how she keeps near him.”

“What property has he?”

“Oh! a great deal in Anjou.”

“Then he is rich?”

“They say so, but that is all; he is not of very good birth. But see, there is M. le Duc d’Anjou calling to you.”

“Ah! ma foi, he must wait. I am curious about this man. I find him singular, I hardly know why. And such an odd name.”

“Oh! it comes from Mons Soricis; Livarot knows all about that.--Here, Livarot; this Monsoreau----”

“Well.”

“Tell us what you know about him----”

“Willingly. Firstly, I am afraid of him.”

“Good, that is what you think; now tell us what you know.”

“Listen. I was going home one night----”

“It begins in a terrible manner.”

“Pray let me finish. It was about six months ago, I was returning from my uncle D’Entragues, through the wood of Méridor, when all at once I heard a frightful cry, and I saw pass, with an empty saddle, a white horse, rushing through the wood. I rode on, and at the end of a long avenue, darkened by the approaching shades of night, I saw a man on a black horse; he seemed to fly. Then I heard again the same cry, and I distinguished before him on the saddle a woman, on whose mouth he had his hand. I had a gun in my hand--you know I aim well, and I should have killed him, but my gun missed fire.”

“Well?”

“I asked a woodcutter who this gentleman on the black horse was, and he said, ‘M. de Monsoreau.’“

“Well,” said Antragues, “it is not so uncommon to carry away a woman, is it, Bussy?”

“No; but, at least, one might let them cry out.”

“And who was the woman?”

“That I do not know; but he has a bad reputation,”

“Do you know anything else about him?”

“No; but he is much feared by his tenantry. However, he is a good hunter, and will fill his post better than St. Luc would have done, for whom it was first destined.”

“Do you know where St. Luc is?”

“No; is he still the king’s prisoner?”

“Not at all; he set off at one o’clock this morning to visit his country house with his wife.”

“Banished?”

“It looks like it.”

“Impossible!”

“True as the gospel; Marshal de Brissac told me so this morning.”

“Well! it has served M. de Monsoreau----”

“Ah! I know now.”

“Know what?”

“The service that he rendered to the duke.”

“Who? St. Luc?”

“No; Monsoreau.”

“Really.”

“Yes, you shall see; come with me,” and Bussy, followed by Livarot and Antragues, galloped after the Duc d’Anjou.

“Ah, monseigneur,” said he, “what a precious man M. de Monsoreau is.”

“Ah! really; then you spoke to him?”

“Certainly.”

“And asked him what he had done for me?”

“Certainly; that was all I spoke to him for.”

“And what did he say?”

“He courteously confessed that he was your purveyor.”

“Of game?”

“No; of women.”

“What do you mean, Bussy?” cried the duke angrily.

“I mean, monseigneur, that he carries away women for you on his great black horse, and that as they are ignorant of the honor reserved for them, he puts his hand on their mouths to prevent their crying out.”

The duke frowned, and ground his teeth with anger, grew pale, and galloped on so fast, that Bussy and his, companions were left in the rear.

“Ah! ah! it seems that the joke is a good one,” said Antragues.

“And so much the better, that everyone does not seem to find it a joke,” said Bussy.

A moment after, they heard the duke’s voice calling Bussy. He went, and found the duke laughing.

“Oh!” said he, “it appears that what I said was droll.”

“I am not laughing at what you said.”

“So much the worse; I should have liked to have made a prince laugh, who hardly ever does so.”

“I laugh at your inventing a false story to find out the true one.”

“No, I told you the truth.”

“Well, then, as we are alone, tell me your little history. Where did it happen?”

“In the wood of Méridor.”

The duke grew pale again, but did not speak.

“Decidedly,” thought Bussy, “the duke is mixed up with that story. Pardieu! monseigneur,” said he, “as M. de Monsoreau seems to have found the method of pleasing you so well, teach it to me.”

“Pardieu! yes, Bussy, I will tell you how. Listen; I met, by chance, at church, a charming woman, and as some features of her face, which I only saw through a veil, recalled to me a lady whom I had much loved, I followed her, and found out where she lived. I have gained over her servant, and have a key of the house.”

“Well, monseigneur, all seems to go well for you.”

“But they say she is a great prude, although free, young, and beautiful.”

“Ah! you are romancing.”

“Well, you are brave, and love me?”

“I have my days.”

“For being brave?”

“No, for loving you.”

“Well, is this one of the days?”

“I will try and make it one, if I can serve your highness.”

“Well, I want you to do for me what most people do for themselves.”

“Make love to her, to find out if she be a prude?”

“No, find out if she has a lover. I want you to lay in wait and discover who the man is that visits her.”

“There is a man then?”

“I fear so.”

“Lover, or husband?”

“That is what I want to know.”

“And you want me to find out?”

“If you will do me that great favor----”

“You will make me the next chief huntsman.”

“I have never yet done anything for you.”

“Oh! you have discovered that at last.”

“Well, do you consent?”

“To watch the lady?”

“Yes.”

“Monseigneur, I confess I do not like the commission.”

“You offered to do me a service, and you draw back already!”

“Because you want me to be a spy.”

“I ask you as a friend.”

“Monseigneur, this is a sort of thing that every man must do for himself, even if he be a prince.”

“Then you refuse?”

“Ma foi! yes.”

The duke frowned. “Well, I will go myself,” said he, “and if I am killed or wounded, I shall say that I begged my friend Bussy to. undertake the task, and that for the first time he was prudent.”

“Monseigneur, you said to me the other night, ‘Bussy, I hate all those minions of the king’s who are always laughing at and insulting us; go to this wedding of St. Luc’s, pick a quarrel and try to get rid of them.’ I went; they were five and I was alone. I defied them all; they laid wait for me, attacked me all together, and killed my horse, yet I wounded three of them. To-day you ask me to wrong a woman. Pardon, monseigneur, but that is past the service which a prince should exact from a gallant man, and I refuse.”

“So be it; I will do my work myself, or with Aurilly, as I have done already.”

“Oh!” said Bussy, with a sudden thought.

“What?”

“Were you engaged on it the night when you saw the ambush laid for me?”

“Just so.”

“Then your beautiful unknown lives near the Bastile.”

“Opposite the Rue St. Catherine. It is a dangerous place, as you know.”

"Has your highness been there since?"

"Yesterday."

"And you saw?"

"A man spying all about and who at last stopped at her door."

"Was he alone?"

"Yes, at first. Afterwards he was joined by another, with a lantern in his hand."

"Ah!"

"Then they began to talk together, and at last, tired of waiting, I went away. And before I venture into the house where I might be killed----"

"You would like one of your friends to try it."

"They would not have my enemies, nor run the same risk; and then they might report to me----"

"In your place I would give up this woman."

"No, she is too beautiful."

"You said you hardly saw her."

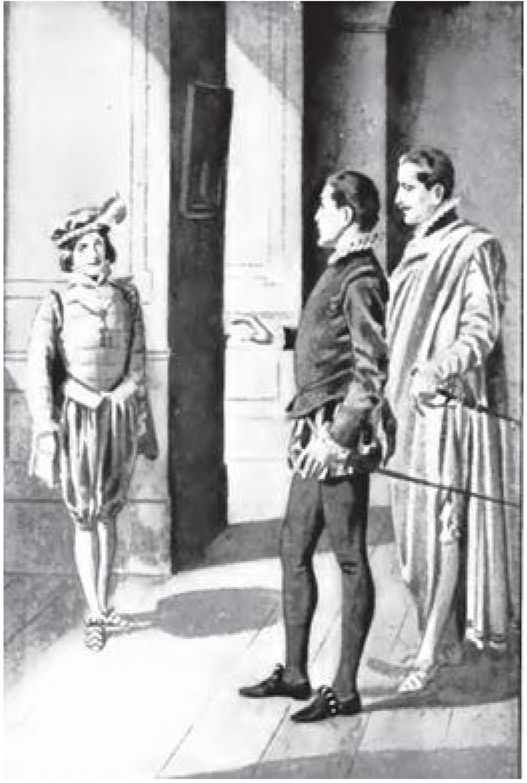

"I saw her enough to distinguish splendid blonde hair, magnificent eyes, and such a complexion!"

"Ah! ah!"

"You understand! one does not easily renounce such a woman."

“No, I feel for you.”

“You jest.”

“No, on my word, and the proof is, that if you will give me my instructions, I will watch this evening.”

“You retract your decision?”

“There is no one but the pope infallible; now tell me what I am to do.”

“You will have to hide a little way off, and if a man enter, follow him to find out who he is?”

“But if, in entering, he close the door behind him?”

“I told you I had a key.”

“Ah! true; then there is only one more thing to fear, that I should follow a wrong man to a wrong door.”

“You cannot mistake; this door is the door of an alley, and at the end of the alley there is a staircase; mount twelve steps, and you will be in a corridor.”

“How do you know all this, if you have never been in?”

“Did I not tell you I had gained over the servant? She told me all.”

“Mon Dieu! how convenient it is to be a prince. I should have had to find out all for myself, which would have taken me an enormous time, and I might have failed after all.”

“Then you consent?”

“Can I refuse your highness? But will you come with me to show me the house?”

“Useless; as we return from the chase, we will make a detour, and pass through the Porte St. Antoine, and I will point it out to you.”

“Very well, and what am I to do to the man if he comes?”

“Only follow him till you learn who he is. I leave to you your mode of action. And not a word to any one.”

“No, on my honor.”

“And you will go alone?”

“Quite.”

“Well, then, it is settled; I show you the door on our way home; then you come with me, and I give you the key.” Bussy and the prince then rejoined the rest. The king was charmed with the manner in which M. de Monsoreau had conducted the chase.

“Monseigneur,” then said M. de Monsoreau to the duke, “I owe my place and these compliments to you.”

“But you know that you must go to-night to Fontainebleau, where the king will hunt to-morrow and the day after.”

“I know, monseigneur; I am prepared to start to-night.”

“Ah, M. de Monsoreau, there is no more rest for you,” said Bussy, “you wished to be chief huntsman, and you are so, and now you will have at least fifty nights’ rest less than other men. Luckily you are not married.”

At this joke, Monsoreau’s face was covered once more with that hideous paleness which gave to him so sinister an aspect.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW BUSSY FOUND BOTH THE PORTRAIT AND THE ORIGINAL.

The chase terminated about four o’clock in the evening, and at five all the court returned to Paris. As they passed by the Bastile, the duke said to Bussy, “Look to the right, at that little wooden house with a statue of the Virgin before it; well, count four houses from that. It is the fifth you have to go to, just fronting the Rue St. Catherine.”

“I see it; and look! at the sound of the trumpets announcing the king, all the windows are filled with gazers.”

“Except the one I show you, where the curtains remain closed.”

“But there is a corner lifted,” said Bussy, with a beating heart.

“Yes, but we can see nothing. The lady is well guarded. However, that is the house.”

When Bussy returned, he said to Rémy, “Have you discovered the house?”

“No, monseigneur.”

“Well, I believe I have been more lucky.”

“How so, monsieur, have you been seeking?”

“I passed through the street.”

“And you recognized the house?”

“Providence, my dear friend, has mysterious ways.”

“Then you are sure?”

“Not sure, but I hope.”

“And when shall I know if you are right?”

“To-morrow morning.”

“Meanwhile, do you want me?”

“No, my dear Rémy.”

“Shall I not follow you?”

“Impossible.”

“Be prudent, monseigneur.”

“Ah! the recommendation is useless, my prudence is well known.”

Bussy dined like a man who does not know when he will sup, then, at eight o'clock, choosing the best of his swords, and attaching, in spite of the king's orders, a pair of pistols to his belt, went in his litter to the corner of the Rue St. Paul.

He easily recognized the house again, and then, wrapped in his cloak, hid at the corner of the street, determined to wait for two hours, and at the end of that time, if no one came, to act for himself. He had scarcely been there ten minutes, when he saw two cavaliers coming. One of them dismounted, gave his horse to the other, who was probably a lackey, and who went away with the horses, and advanced towards the house pointed out to Bussy, and, after glancing round to see if he were observed, opened the door and went in. Bussy waited two or three minutes, and then followed him. He advanced slowly and softly, found the staircase, and went up. In the corridor he stopped, for he heard a voice say, "Gertrude, tell your mistress that it is I, and that I must come in."

This was said in an imperious tone, and, a minute after, Bussy heard a woman's voice say:

"Pass into the drawing-room, Monsieur, and madame will come to you."

Then he heard the sound of a door shutting. He made a few steps silently, and extending his hand, felt a door; he went in, found a second in which was a key; he turned it, and entered the room tremblingly. The room in which he found himself was dark, except from the light shining from another. By this he could see two windows, hung with tapestry, which sent a thrill of joy through the young man's heart. On the ceiling he could faintly see the mythological figures; he extended his hand, and felt the sculptured bed. There was no more doubt, he was in the room where he had awakened the night of his wound.

Bussy hid behind the bed-curtains to listen. He heard in the adjoining room the impatient step of the unknown; from time to time he stopped, murmuring between his teeth, "Will she come?"

Presently a door opened, and the rustling of a silk dress struck on Bussy's ear. Then he heard a woman's voice, expressive at once of fear and disdain, saying:

"Here I am, monsieur, what do you want now?"

"Madame," replied the man, "I have the honor of telling you that, forced to set off to-morrow morning for Fontainebleau, I come to pass the night with you."

“Do you bring me news of my father?”

“Madame, listen to me----”

“Monsieur, you know what we agreed yesterday, when I consented to become your wife, that, before all things, either my father should come to Paris, or I should go to him.”

“Madame, as soon as I return from Fontainebleau, I give you my word of honor, but meanwhile----”

“Oh! monsieur, do not close the door, it is useless; I will not pass a single night under the same roof with you until you bring me my father.” And the lady, who spoke, thus, whistled through a silver whistle, which was then the manner of calling servants.

Immediately the door opened, and a young, vigorous-looking girl entered. As she went in, she left the door open, which threw a strong light into the room where Bussy was hid, and between the two windows he saw the portrait. Bussy now crept noiselessly along to where he could peep into the room. However carefully he moved, the floor creaked. At the noise the lady turned, she was the original of the portrait. The man, seeing her turn, turned also; it was M. de Monsoreau.

“Ah!” thought Bussy, “the white horse, the woman carried away, there is some terrible history.”

Bussy, as we have said, could see them both; she, standing up, pale and disdainful. He, not pale, but livid, agitated his foot impatiently.

“Madame,” said he, at last, “do not hope to continue with me this character of a persecuted woman; you are at Paris, in my house, and, still more, you are Comtesse de Monsoreau, that is to say, my Wife.

“If I am your wife, why refuse to conduct me to my father? Why continue to hide me from the eyes of the world?”

“You have forgotten the Duc d’Anjou, madame.”

“You assured me that, once your wife, I should have no more to fear from him.”

“That is to say----”

“You promised me that.”

“But still, madame, I must take precautions.”

“Well, monsieur, when you have taken them, return to me.”

“Diana,” said the count, who was growing visibly angry, “Diana, do not make a jest of this sacred tie.”

"Act so, monsieur, that I can have confidence in the husband, and I will respect the marriage."

"Oh! this is too much!" cried the count. "I am in my own house, you are my wife, and this night you shall be mine."

Bussy put his hand on his sword-hilt, and made a step forward, but Diana did not give him time to appear.

"Stay," said she, drawing a poignard from her belt, "here is my answer." And rushing into the room where Bussy was, she shut the door and locked it, while Monsoreau exhausted himself in menaces and in blows on the door.

"If you break this door you will find me dead on the threshold."

"And be easy, madame, you shall be revenged," said Bussy.

Diana was about to utter a cry, but her fear of her husband was strong enough to restrain her. She remained pale and trembling, but mute.

M. de Monsoreau struck violently with his foot, but convinced that Diana would execute her menace, went out of the drawing-room, shutting the door violently behind him. Then they heard him going down the stairs.

"But you, monsieur," said Diana, turning to Bussy, "who are you, and how came you here?"

"Madame," said Bussy, opening the door, and kneeling before her, "I am the man whose life you preserved. You cannot think that I come to your house with any bad designs." As the light streamed in, Diana recognized him at once.

"Ah! you here, monsieur," cried she, clasping her hands, "you were here--you heard all?"

"Alas! yes, madame."

"But who are you? your name, monsieur?"

"Madame, I am Louis de Clermont, Comte de Bussy."

"Bussy! you are the brave Bussy!" cried Diana, filling with joy the heart of the young man. "Ah! Gertrude!" cried she, turning to her servant, who, hearing her mistress talking to some one, had entered in terror, "Gertrude, I have no more to fear, for from this time I place myself under the safeguard of the most noble and loyal gentleman in France." Then holding out her hand to Bussy.

"Rise, monsieur," said she, "I know who you are, now you must know who I am."

CHAPTER XIII.

WHO DIANA WAS.

Bussy rose, bewildered at his own happiness, and entered with Diana into the room which M. de Monsoreau had just quitted. He looked at Diana with astonishment and admiration; he had not dared to hope that the woman whom he had sought for, would equal the woman of his dream, and now the reality surpassed all that he had taken for a caprice of his imagination. Diana was about nineteen, that is to say in the first éclât of that youth and beauty which gives the purest coloring to the flower, the finest flavor to the fruit. There was no mistaking the looks of Bussy; Diana felt herself admired. At last she broke the silence.

“Monsieur,” said she, “you have told me who you are, but not how you came here.”

“Madame, the cause of my presence here will come naturally out of the recital you have been good enough to promise me; I am sure of it, from some words of your conversation with M. de Monsoreau.”

“I will tell you all, monsieur; your name has been sufficient to inspire me with full confidence, for I have always heard of it as of that of a man of honor, loyalty, and courage.”

Bussy bowed, and Diana went on.

“I am the daughter of the Baron de Méridor--that is to say, the only heiress of one of the noblest and oldest names in Anjou.”

“There was,” said Bussy, “a Baron de Méridor, who, although he could have saved himself, came voluntarily and gave up his sword at the battle of Pavia, when he heard that the king was a prisoner, and begged to accompany Francis to Madrid, partook his captivity, and only quitted him to come to France and negotiate his ransom.”

“It was my father, monsieur, and if ever you enter the great hall of the Château de Méridor you will see, given in memory of this devotion, the portrait of Francis I., painted by Leonardo da Vinci.”

“Ah!” said Bussy, “in those times kings knew how to recompense their followers.”

"On his return from Spain my father married. His two first children, sons, died. This was a great grief to the Baron de Méridor. When the king died, my father quitted the court, and shut himself with his wife in the Château de Méridor. It was there that I was born, ten years after the death of my brothers.

"Then all the love of the baron was concentrated on the child of his old age; his love for me was idolatry. Three years after my birth I lost my mother, and, too young to feel my loss, my smiles helped to console my father. As I was all to him, so was he also all to me. I attained my sixteenth year without dreaming of any other world than that of my sheep, my peacocks, my swans, and my doves, without imagining that this life would change, or wishing that it should.

"The castle of Méridor was surrounded by vast forests, belonging to the Duc d'Anjou; they were filled with deer and stags, whom no one thought of tormenting, and who had grown quite familiar to me; some of them would even come when I called them, and one, a doe, my favorite Daphne, my poor Daphne, would come and eat out of my hand.

"One spring I had missed her for a month, and was ready to weep for her as for a friend, when she reappeared with two little fawns. At first they were afraid of me, but seeing their mother caress me, they soon learned to do the same.

"About this time we heard that the Duc d'Anjou had sent a governor into the province, and that he was called the Comte de Monsoreau. A week passed, during which everyone spoke of the new governor. One morning the woods resounded with the sound of the horn, and the barking of dogs. I ran to the park, and arrived just in time to see Daphne, followed by her two fawns, pass like lightning, pursued by a pack of hounds. An instant after, mounted on a black horse, M. de Monsoreau flew past me.

"I cried out and implored pity for my poor protegee, but he did not hear me. Then I ran after him, hoping to meet either the count or some of his suite and determined to implore them to stop this chase, which pierced my heart. I ran for some time without knowing where, for I had lost sight of both dogs and hunters.

"Soon I could not even hear them, so I sat down at the foot of a tree, and began to cry. I had been there about a quarter of an hour, when I heard the chase again. The noise came nearer and nearer, and, darting forward, I saw my poor Daphne again; she had but one fawn with her now, the other had given way through fatigue. She herself was growing visibly tired, and the distance between her and the hounds was less than when I saw her first.

“As before, I exerted myself in vain to make myself heard. M. de Monsoreau saw nothing but the animal he was chasing; he passed more quickly that ever, with his horn to his mouth, which he was sounding loudly. Behind him two or three hunters animated the dogs with horn and voice. All passed me like a tempest, and disappeared in the forest. I was in despair, but I ran on once more and followed a path which I knew led to the castle of Beaugé. belonging to the Duc d’Anjou, and which was about six miles from the castle of Méridor. It was not till I arrived there that I remembered that I was alone, and far from home.

“I confess that a vague terror seized me, and that then only I thought of the imprudence and folly of my conduct. I followed the border of the lake, intending to ask the gardener (who, when I had come there with my father, had often given me bouquets) to take me home, when all at once I heard the sound of the chase again. I remained motionless, listening, and I forgot all else. Nearly at the same moment the doe reappeared, coming out of the wood on the other side of the lake, but pursued so closely that she must be taken immediately. She was alone, her second fawn had fallen, but the sight of the water seemed to reanimate her, and she plunged in as if she would have come to me. At first she swam rapidly, and I looked at her with tears in my eyes, and almost as breathless as herself; insensibly her strength failed her, while the dogs seemed to grow more and more earnest in their pursuit. Soon some of them reached her, and, stopped by their bites, she ceased to advance. At this moment, M. de Monsoreau appeared at the border of the lake, and jumped off his horse. Then I collected all my strength to cry for pity, with clasped hands. It seemed to me that he saw me, and I cried again. He heard me, for he looked at me; then he ran towards a boat, entered it, and advanced rapidly towards the animal, who was fighting among the dogs. I did not doubt that, moved by my voice, he was hastening to bring her succor, when all at once I saw him draw his hunting knife, and plunge it into the neck of the poor animal. The blood flowed out, reddening the water at the lake, while the poor doe uttered a doleful cry, beat the water with her feet, reared up, and then fell back dead.

“I uttered a cry almost as doleful as hers, and fell fainting on the bank. When I came to myself again, I was in bed, in a room of the château of Beaugé, and my father, who had been sent for, standing by me. As it was nothing but over-excitement, the next morning I was able to return home; although I suffered for three or four days. Then my father told me, that M. de Monsoreau, who had seen me, when I was carried to the castle, had come to ask after me; he had been much grieved when he heard that he had been the involuntary cause of my accident and begged to present his excuses to me, saying, that he could not be happy until he had his pardon from my own lips.

"It would have been ridiculous to refuse to see him, so, in spite of my repugnance, I granted his request. He came the next day; I felt that my behavior must have seemed strange, and I excused it on the ground of my affection for Daphne. The count swore twenty times, that had he known I had any interest in his victim, he would have spared her with pleasure; but his protestations did not convince me, nor remove the unfavorable impression I had formed of him. When he took leave, he asked my father's permission to come again. He had been born in Spain and educated at Madrid, and it was an attraction for my father to talk over the place where he had been so long a prisoner. Besides, the count was of good family, deputy-governor of the province, and a favorite, it was said, of the Due d'Anjou; my father had no motive for refusing his request, and it was granted. Alas! from this moment ceased, if not my happiness, at least my tranquillity. I soon perceived the impression I had made on the count; he began to come every day, and was full of attentions to my father, who showed the pleasure he took in his conversation, which was certainly that of a clever man.

"One morning my father entered my room with an air graver than usual, but still evidently joyful. 'My child,' said he, 'you always have said you did not wish to leave me.'

"'Oh! my father,' cried I, 'it is my dearest wish.'

"'Well, my Diana,' continued he, embracing me, 'it only depends now on yourself to have your wish realized.' I guessed what he was about to say, and grew dreadfully pale.

"'Diana, my child, what is the matter?' cried he.

"'M. de Monsoreau, is it not?' stammered I. 'Well?' said he, astonished. 'Oh! never, my father, if you have any pity for your daughter, never----'

"'Diana, my love,' said he, 'it is not pity I have for you, but idolatry; you know it; take a week to reflect, and if then----'

"'Oh! no, no,' cried I, 'it is useless; not a day, not a minute! No, no, no!' and I burst into tears. My father adored me, and he took me in his arms, and gave me his word that he would speak to me no more of this marriage.

"Indeed, a month passed, during which I neither heard of nor saw M. de Monsoreau. One morning we received an invitation to a grand fête which M. de Monsoreau was to give to the Duc d'Anjou, who was about to visit the province whose name he bore. To this was added a personal invitation from the prince, who had seen my father at court. My first impulse was to beg my father to refuse, but he feared to offend the prince, so we went. M. de Monsoreau received us as though nothing had passed, and behaved to me exactly as he did to the other ladies.

"Not so the duke. As soon as he saw me, he fixed his eyes on me, and scarcely ever removed them. I felt ill at ease under these looks, and begged my father to go home early. Three days after M. de Monsoreau came to Méridor; I saw him from the windows, and shut myself up in my own room. When he was gone, my father said nothing to me, but I thought he looked gloomy.

"Four days passed thus, when, as I was returning from a walk, the servants told me that M. de Monsoreau was with my father, who had asked for me several times, and had desired to be immediately informed of my return. Indeed, no sooner had I entered my room, than my father came to me.

"'My child,' said he, 'a motive which I cannot explain to you, forces me to separate myself from you for some days. Do not question me, but be sure that it is an urgent one, since it determines me to be a week, a fortnight, perhaps a month, without seeing you.' I trembled, I knew not why, but I fancied that the visits of M. de Monsoreau boded me no good.

"'Where am I to go, my father?' asked I.

"'To the château of Lude, to my sister, where you will be hidden from all eyes. You will go by night.' 'And do you not accompany me?' 'No, I must stay here, to ward off suspicion; even the servants must not know where you are going.' 'But then, who will take me there?' 'Two men whom I can trust.' 'Oh! mon Dieu! father,' I cried. The baron embraced me. 'It is necessary, my child,' said he.

"I knew my father's love for me so well that I said no more, only I asked that Gertrude, my nurse, should accompany me. My father quitted me, telling me to get ready.

"At eight o'clock (it was dark and cold, for it was the middle of winter) my father came for me. We descended quietly, crossed the garden, when he opened himself a little door leading to the forest, and there we found a litter waiting, and two men; my father spoke to them, then I got in, and Gertrude with me.

"My father embraced me once more, and we set off. I was ignorant what danger menaced me, and forced me to quit the castle of Méridor. I did not dare to question my conductors, whom I did not know. We went along quietly, and the motion of the litter at last sent me to sleep, when I was awoke by Gertrude, who, seizing my arm, cried out, 'Oh, mademoiselle, was is the matter?'

"I passed my head through the curtains. We were surrounded by six masked cavaliers, and our men, who had tried to defend me, were disarmed. He who appeared the chief of the masked men approached me, and said; 'Reassure yourself, mademoiselle, no harm will be done to you, but you must follow us.'

"'Where?' I asked. 'To a place,' he replied, 'where, far from having anything to complain of, you will be treated like a queen.' 'Oh! my father! my father!' I cried. 'Listen, mademoiselle,' said Gertrude, 'I know the environs, and I am strong; we may be able to escape.'

"'You must do as you will with us, gentlemen,' said I, 'we are but two poor women, and cannot defend ourselves.' One of the men then took the place of our conductor, and changed the direction of our litter."

Here Diana stopped a moment, as if overcome with emotion.

"Oh, continue, madame, continue," cried Bussy.

It was impossible for Diana not to see the interest she inspired in the young man; it was shown in his voice, his gestures, his looks. She smiled, and went on.

"We continued our journey for about three hours, then the litter stopped. I heard a door open, we went on, and I fancied we were crossing a drawbridge. I was not wrong, for, on looking out of the litter, I saw that we were in the courtyard of a castle. What castle was it? We did not know. Often, during the route, we had tried to discover where we were, but seemed to be in an endless forest. The door of our litter was opened, and the same man who had spoken to us before asked us to alight. I obeyed in silence. Two men from the castle had come to meet us with torches; they conducted us into a bedroom richly decorated, where a collation waited for us on a table sumptuously laid out.

"'You are at home here, madame,' said the same man, 'and the room for your servant is adjoining. When you wish for anything, you have but to strike with the knocker on this door, and some one, who will be constantly in the antechamber, will wait on you.' This apparent attention showed that we were guarded. Then the man bowed and went out, and we heard him lock the door behind him.

"Gertrude and I were alone. She was about to speak, but I signed her to be silent, for perhaps some one was listening. The door of the room which had been shown us as Gertrude's was open, and we went in to examine it. It was evidently the dressing-room to mine, and was also locked. We were prisoners. Gertrude approached me, and said in a low tone: 'Did demoiselle remark that we only mounted five steps after leaving the court?' 'Yes,' said I. 'Therefore we are on the ground floor.' 'Doubtless.' 'So that----' said she, pointing to the window. 'Yes, if they are not barred.' 'And if mademoiselle had courage.' 'Oh! yes, I have.'

"Gertrude then took a light, and approached the window. It opened easily, and was not barred; but we soon discovered the cause of this seeming negligence on the part of our captors. A lake lay below us, and we were guarded by ten feet of water better than by bolts and bars. But in looking out I discovered where we were. We were in the château of Beaugé, where they had brought me on the death of my poor Daphné. This castle belonged to the Duc d'Anjou, and a sudden light was thrown upon our capture. We shut the window again, and I threw myself, dressed, on my bed, while Gertrude slept in a chair by my side. Twenty times during the night I woke, a prey to sudden terror; but nothing justified it, excepting the place where I found myself, for all seemed asleep in the castle, and no noise but the cry of the birds interrupted the silence of the night. Day appeared, but only to confirm my conviction that flight was impossible without external aid; and how could that reach us? About nine they came to take away the supper and bring breakfast. Gertrude questioned the servants, but they did not reply. Our morning passed in fruitless plans for escape, and yet we could see a boat fastened to the shore, with its oars in it. Could we only have reached that, we might have been safe.

"They brought us our dinner in the same way, put it down, and left us. In breaking my bread I found in it a little note. I opened it eagerly, and read, ‘A friend watches over you. To-morrow you shall have news of him and of your father.’ You can imagine my joy. The rest of the day passed in waiting and hoping. The second night passed as quietly as the first; then came the hour of breakfast, waited for impatiently, for I hoped to find another note. I was not wrong, it was as follows:--’The person who had you carried off will arrive at the castle of Beaugé at ten o’clock this evening; but at nine, the friend who watches over you will be under your windows with a letter from your father, which will command the confidence you, perhaps, might not otherwise give. Burn this letter.

“I read and re-read this letter, then burned it as I was desired. The writing was unknown to me, and I did not know from whom it could have come. We lost ourselves in conjectures, and a hundred times during the morning we went to the window to see if we could see any one on the shores of the lake, but all was solitary. An hour after dinner, some one knocked at our door, and then entered. It was the man who had spoken to us before. I recognized his voice; he presented a letter to me.

“‘Whom do you come from?’ asked I. ‘Will mademoiselle take the trouble to read, and she will see.’ ‘But I will not read this letter without knowing whom it comes from.’ ‘Mademoiselle can do as she pleases; my business is only to leave the letter,’ and putting it down, he went away. ‘What shall I do?’ asked I of Gertrude. ‘Read the letter, mademoiselle; it is better to know what to expect.’ I opened and read.”

Diana, at this moment, rose, opened a desk, and from a portfolio drew out the letter. Bussy glanced at the address and read, “To the beautiful Diana de Méridor.”

Then looking at Diana, he said--

“It is the Duc d’Anjou’s writing.”

“Ah!” replied she, with a sigh, “then he did not deceive me.”

Then, as Bussy hesitated to open the letter--

“Read,” said she, “chance has initiated you into the most secret history of my life, and I wish to keep nothing from you.”

Bussy obeyed and read--

“An unhappy prince, whom your divine beauty has struck to the heart, will come at ten o’clock to-night to apologize for his conduct towards you--conduct which he himself feels has no other excuse than the invincible love he entertains for you.

“FRANÇOIS.”

“Then this letter was really from the duke?” asked Diana.

“Alas! yes; it is his writing and his seal.”

Diana sighed. “Can he be less guilty than I thought?” said she.

“Who, the prince?”

“No, M. de Monsoreau.”

“Continue, madame, and we will judge the prince and the count.”

“This letter, which I had then no idea of not believing genuine, rendered still more precious to me the intervention of the unknown friend who offered me aid in the name of my father; I had no hope but in him. Night arrived soon, for it was in the month of January, and we had still four or five hours to wait for the appointed time. It was a fine frosty night; the heavens were brilliant with stars, and the crescent moon lighted the country with its silver beams. We had no means of knowing the time, but we sat anxiously watching at Gertrude’s window. At last we saw figures moving among the trees, and then distinctly heard the neighing of a horse.

“It is our friends,’ said Gertrude. ‘Or the prince,’ replied I. ‘The prince would not hide himself.’ This reflection reassured me. A man now advanced alone: it seemed to us that he quitted another group who were left under the shade of the trees. As he advanced, my eyes made violent efforts to pierce the obscurity, and I thought I recognized first the tall figure, then the features, of M. de Monsoreau. I now feared almost as much the help as the danger. I remained mute, and drew back from the window. Arrived at the wall, he secured his boat, and I saw his head at our window. I could not repress a cry.

“‘Ah, pardon,’ said he, ‘but I thought you expected me.’ ‘I expected some one, monsieur, but I did not know it was you.’ A bitter smile passed over his face. ‘Who else,’ said he, ‘except her father, watches over the honor of Diana de Méridor?’ ‘You told me, monsieur, in your letter, that you came in my father’s name.’ ‘Yes, mademoiselle, and lest you should doubt it, here is a note from the baron,’ and he gave me a paper. I read--

“‘MY DEAR DIANA,--M. de Monsoreau can alone extricate you from your dangerous position, and this danger is immense. Trust, then, to him as to the best friend that Heaven can send to us. I will tell you later what from the bottom of my heart I wish you to do to acquit the debt we shall contract towards him,

“‘Your father, who begs you to believe him, and to have pity on him, and on yourself, "'BARON DE MÉRIDOR.'

"I knew nothing against M. de Monsoreau; my dislike to him was rather from instinct than reason. I had only to reproach him with the death of a doe, a very light crime for a hunter. I then turned towards him. 'Well?' said he. 'Monsieur, I have read my father's letter, it tells me you will take me from hence, but it does not tell me where you will take me.' 'Where the baron waits for you.' 'And where is that?' 'In the castle of Méridor.' 'Then I shall see my father?' 'In two hours.'

"'Ah I monsieur, if you speak truly----' I stopped. The count waited for the end of my sentence. 'Count on my gratitude,' said I in a trembling tone, for I knew what he might expect from my gratitude. 'Then, mademoiselle,' said he, 'you are ready to follow me?' I looked at Gertrude. 'Reflect that each minute that passes is most precious,' said he, 'I am nearly half an hour behind time now; it will soon be ten o'clock, and then the prince will be here.' 'Alas! yes.' 'Once he comes, I can do nothing for you but risk without hope that life which I now risk to save you.' 'Why did not my father come?' I asked. 'Your father is watched. They know every step he takes.' 'But you----' 'Oh! I am different; I am the prince's friend and confidant.' 'Then if you are his friend----' 'Yes, I betray him for you; it is true, as I told you just now, I am risking my life to save you.' This seemed so true, that although I still felt repugnance, I could not express it. 'I wait,' said the count, 'and stay; if you still doubt, look there.' I looked, and saw on the opposite shore a body of cavaliers advancing. 'It is the duke and his suite,' said he, 'in five minutes it will be too late.'

"I tried to rise, but my limbs failed me. Gertrude raised me in her arms and gave me to the count. I shuddered at his touch, but he held me fast and placed me in the boat. Gertrude followed without aid. Then I noticed that my veil had come off, and was floating on the water. I thought they would track us by it, and I cried, 'My veil; catch my veil.' The count looked at it and said, 'No, no, better leave it.' And seizing the oars, he rowed with all his strength. We had just reached the bank when we saw the windows of my room lighted up. 'Did I deceive you? Was it time?' said M. de Monsoreau. 'Oh I yes, yes,' cried I, 'you are really my saviour.'

"The lights seemed to be moving about from one room to the other. We heard voices, and a man entered who approached the open window, looked out, saw the floating veil, and uttered a cry. 'You see I did well to leave the veil,' said the count, 'the prince believes that to escape him you threw yourself into the lake.’ I trembled at the man who had so instantaneously conceived this idea.”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TREATY.

There was a moment’s silence. Diana seemed almost overcome. Bussy was already vowing eternal vengeance against her enemies. She went on:

“Scarcely had we touched the shore, when seven or eight men ran to us. They were the count’s people, and I thought I recognized among them the two men who had escorted me when I left Méridor. A squire held two horses, a black one for the count and a white one for me. The count helped me to mount, and then jumped on his own horse. Gertrude mounted en croupe behind one of the men, and we set off at full gallop. The count held the bridle of my horse. I said to him that I was a sufficiently good horsewoman to dispense with this, but he replied that the horse was inclined to run away. When we had gone about ten minutes, I heard Gertrude’s voice calling to me, and turning, I saw that four of the men were taking her by a different path from that which we were following. ‘Gertrude,’ cried I, ‘why does she not come with me?’ ‘It is an indispensable precaution,’ said the count; ‘if we are pursued we must leave two tracks, and they must be able to say in two places that they have seen a woman carried away by men. There is then a chance that M. d’Anjou may take a wrong road, and go after your servant instead of you.’ Although specious, this reply did not satisfy me, but what could I do? Besides, the path which the count was following was the one which led to the Château de Méridor. In a quarter of an hour, at the rate at which we are going, we should have been at the castle, when all at once, when we came to a cross road which I knew well, the count, instead of following the road to the castle, turned to the left, and took a road which led away from it. I cried out, and in spite of our rapid pace had already my hand on the pommel in order to jump off, when the count, seizing me round the waist, drew me off my horse, and placed me on the saddle before him. This action was so rapid that I had only time to utter a cry. M. de Monsoreau put his hand on my mouth, and said, ‘Mademoiselle, I swear to you, on my honor, that I only act by your father’s orders, as I will prove to you at the first halt we make. If this proof appears to you insufficient, you shall then be free.’ ‘But, monsieur,’ cried I, pushing away his hand, ‘you told me you were taking me to my father!’ ‘Yes, I told you so, because I saw that you hesitated to follow me, and a moment’s more hesitation would have ruined us both, as you know. Now, do you wish to kill your father? Will you march straight to your dishonor? If so, I will take you to Méridor.’ ‘You spoke of a proof that you acted in the name of my father.’ ‘Here it is,’ said the baron, giving me a letter, ‘keep it, and read it at the first stoppage. If, when you have read it, you wish to return to Méridor, you are free; but if you have any respect for your father’s wishes you will not.’ ‘Then, monsieur,’ I replied, ‘let us reach quickly our stopping-place, for I wish to know if you speak the truth.’ ‘Remember, you follow me freely.’ ‘Yes, as freely as a young girl can who sees herself placed between her father’s death and her own dishonor on the one hand, and on the other the obligation to trust herself to the word of a man whom she hardly knows.’ ‘Never mind, I follow you freely, monsieur, as you shall see if you will give me my horse again.’ The count called to one of his men to dismount and give me his horse. ‘The white mare cannot be far,’ said he to the man; ‘seek her in the forest and call her, she will come like a dog to her name or to a whistle; you can rejoin us at La Châtre.’ I shuddered in spite of myself. La Châtre was ten leagues from Méridor, on the road to Paris. ‘Monsieur,’ said I, ‘I accompany you, but at La Châtre we make our conditions.’ ‘Mademoiselle, at La Châtre you shall give me your orders.’ At daybreak we arrived at La Châtre, but instead of entering the village we went by across-road to a lonely house. I stopped. ‘Where are we going?’ I asked. ‘Mademoiselle,’ said the count, ‘I appeal to yourself. Can we, in flying from a prince next in power to the king, stop in an ordinary village inn, where the first person would denounce us?’ ‘Well,’ said I, ‘go on.’ We resumed our way. We were expected, for a man had ridden on before to announce our arrival. A good fire burned in a decent room, and a bed was prepared. ‘This is your room,’ said the count, ‘I will await your orders.’ He went out and left me alone. My first thought was for my letter. Here it is, M. de Bussy; read.”

Bussy took the, letter and read:

“MY BELOVED DIANA--As I do not doubt that, yielding to my prayer, you have followed the Comte de Monsoreau, he must have told you that you had the misfortune to please M. le Duc d’Anjou, and that it was this prince who had you forcibly carried away and taken to the castle of Beaugé;

judge by this violence of what the prince is capable, and with what you were menaced. Your dishonor I could not survive; but there is a means of escape--that of marrying our noble friend. Once Countess of Monsoreau, the count would protect his wife. My desire is, then, my darling daughter, that this marriage should take place as soon as possible, and if you consent, I give you my paternal benediction, and pray God to bestow upon you every treasure of happiness.

“Your father, who does not order, but entreats,

“BARON DE MÉRIDOR.”

“Alas!” said Bussy, “if this letter be from your father, it is but too positive.”

“I do not doubt its being from him, and yet I read it three times before deciding. At last I called the count. He entered at once; I had the letter in my hand. ‘Well, have you read it?’ said he. ‘Yes,’ I replied. ‘Do you still doubt my devotion and respect?’ ‘This letter imposes belief on me, monsieur; but in case I yield to my father’s wishes, what do you propose to do?’ ‘To take you to Paris, mademoiselle; that is the easiest place to hide you.’ ‘And my father?’ ‘As soon as there is no longer danger of compromising you, you know he will come to you wherever you are.’ ‘Well, monsieur, I am ready to accept your protection on the conditions you impose.’

“‘I impose nothing, mademoiselle,’ answered he, ‘I simply offer you a method of safety.’ ‘Well, I will accept this safety on three conditions.’ ‘Speak, mademoiselle.’ ‘The first is, that Gertrude shall return to me.’ She is here. ‘The second is, that we travel separately to Paris.’ ‘I was about to propose it to you.’ ‘And the third is, that our marriage, unless I myself acknowledge some urgent necessity for it, shall only take place in presence of my father.’ ‘It is my earnest desire; I count on his benediction to draw upon us that of heaven.’

“I was in despair. I had hoped for some opposition to my wishes. ‘Now, mademoiselle,’ said he, ‘allow me to give you some advice.’ ‘I listen, monsieur.’ ‘Only to travel by night.’ ‘Agreed.’ ‘To let me choose the route, and the places where you should stop. All my precautions will be taken with the sole aim of escaping the Duc d’Anjou.’ ‘I have no objection to make, monsieur.’ ‘Lastly, at Paris, to occupy the lodging I shall prepare for you, however simple and out of the way it may be.’ ‘I only ask to live hidden, monsieur, the more out of the way, the better it will suit me.’ ‘Then, as we are agreed on all points, mademoiselle, it only remains for me to present to you my humble respects, and to send to you your femme de chambre.’ ‘On my side! monsieur, be sure that if you keep all your promises, I will keep mine.’ ‘That is all I ask,’ said the count, ‘and the promise makes me the happiest of men.’

“With these words, he bowed and went out. Five minutes after, Gertrude entered. The joy of this good girl was great; she had believed herself separated from me forever. I told her all that had passed. As I finished, we heard the sound of a horse’s hoofs. I ran to the window; it was M. de Monsoreau going away. He had fulfilled two articles of the treaty. We passed all the day in that little house, served by our hostess; in the evening the chief of our escort appeared, and asked me if I were ready. I said yes, and five minutes after, we set off. At the door I found my white mare. We traveled all night, and stopped at daybreak. I calculated we had gone about thirty-five miles, but my horse had a very easy pace, and on leaving the house a fur cloak had been thrown over me to protect me from the cold. It took us seven days to reach Paris in this manner, and I saw nothing of the count. We entered the city at night, and the first object I saw, after passing through the gate, was an immense monastery; then we crossed the river, and in ten minutes we were in the Place de la Bastile. Then a man who seemed to be waiting for us, advanced and said, ‘It is here.’ The chief of our escort jumped off his horse, and presented me his hand to dismount also. A door was open, and the staircase lighted by a lamp. ‘Madame,’ said the man to me, ‘you are now at home. At this door finishes the mission I received; may I flatter myself I have fulfilled it according to your wishes?’ ‘Yes, monsieur,’ said I, ‘I have only thanks to give you. Offer them in my name to all your men; I would wish to reward them in a better manner, but I possess nothing.’ ‘Do not be uneasy about that, madame,’ said he, ‘they are largely recompensed.’

“Then the little troop went away, and we went up the stairs of our house, and found ourselves in a corridor. Three doors were open; we entered the middle one, and found ourselves in the room where we now stand. On opening the door of my bedroom, to my great astonishment I found my own portrait there. It was one which had hung at Méridor, and the count had doubtless begged it of my father. I trembled at this new proof that my father regarded me already as his wife.

"Nothing was wanting in the room; a fire burned in the grate, and a supper was ready in the sitting-room. I saw with satisfaction that it was laid for one only, and yet when Gertrude said, 'Well, mademoiselle, you see the count keeps his promises.'--'Alas! yes,' replied I with a sigh, for I should have preferred that by breaking his word he should have given me an excuse to break mine. After supper, we examined the house, but found no one in it. The next day Gertrude went out, and from her I learned that we were at the end of the Rue St. Antoine, near the Bastile. That evening, as we were sitting down to supper, some one knocked. I grew pale.

"'If it be the count?' asked Gertrude. 'You must open to him; he has kept his promises, and I must keep mine.' A moment after he entered. 'Well, madame,' said he, 'have I kept my word?' 'Yes, monsieur, and I thank you for it.' 'Then you will receive me?' said he, with an ironical smile. 'Enter, monsieur,' said I, 'have you any news?' 'Of what, madame?' 'Of my father, firstly?' 'I have not been to Méridor and have not seen the baron.' 'Then of Beaugé, and the Duc d'Anjou?' 'I have been to Beaugé, and have spoken to the duke.' 'What does he say?' 'He appears to doubt.' 'Of what?' 'Of your death.' 'But you confirmed it?' 'I did all I could.' 'Where is the duke?' I then asked. 'He returned to Paris yesterday. One does not like to stay in a place where one has the death of a woman to reproach one's self with.' 'Have you seen him in Paris?' 'I have just left him.' 'Did he speak of me?' 'I did not give him time; I spoke incessantly of a promise which he made to me.' 'What is it?' 'He promised me as a reward for services rendered to him, to make, me chief huntsman.' 'Ah, yes,' said I, thinking of my poor Daphné 'you are a terrible hunter, I know.' 'It is not for, that reason I obtain it, but the duke dare not be ungrateful to me.'

"'Can I write to my father?' said I. 'Doubtless; but your letters may be intercepted.' 'Am I forbidden to go out?' 'Nothing is forbidden; but I beg to point out to you that you may be followed.' 'At least I must go on Sunday to mass.' 'It would be better not; but if you do, I advise you to go to St. Catherine.' 'Where is that?' 'Just opposite you.' There was a silence. Then I said, 'When shall I see you again, monsieur?' 'When I have your permission to come.' 'Do you need it?' 'Certainly, as yet I am a stranger to you.' 'Monsieur,' said I, half frightened at this unnatural submission, 'you can return when you like, or when you think you have anything important to communicate.'

"'Thanks, madame,' said he, 'I will use your permission, but not abuse it. I know you do not love me, and I will not abuse a situation which forces you to receive me. You will, I trust, gradually become accustomed to the thought, and be willing, when the moment shall arrive, to become my wife.' 'Monsieur,' said I, 'I appreciate your delicacy and frankness. I will use the same frankness. I had a prejudice against you, which I trust that time will cure.' 'Permit me,' said he, 'to partake this anticipation and live in the hopes of that happy moment.' Then bowing respectfully, he went out."

CHAPTER XV.

THE MARRIAGE.

“A strange man,” said Bussy.

“Yes, is he not, monsieur? When he was gone I felt sadder and more frightened than ever. This icy respect, this ironical obedience, this repressed passion, which now and then showed itself in his voice, frightened me more than a will firmly expressed, and which I could have opposed, would have done. The next day was Sunday; I had never in my life missed divine service, so I took a thick veil and went to St. Catherine’s, followed by Gertrude, and no one seemed to remark us.

“The next day the count came to announce to me that the duke had fulfilled his promise, and had obtained for him the place of chief huntsman, which had been promised to M. de St. Luc. A week passed thus: the count came twice to see me, and always preserved the same cold and submissive manner. The next Sunday I went again to the church. Imprudently, in the midst of my prayers, I raised my veil. I was praying earnestly for my father, when Gertrude touched me on the arm. I raised my head, and saw with terror M. le Duc d’Anjou leaning against the column, and looking earnestly at me. A man stood by him.”

“It was Aurilly,” said Bussy.

“Yes, that was the name that Gertrude told me afterwards. I drew my veil quickly over my face, but it was too late: he had seen me, and if he had not recognized me, at least my resemblance to her whom he believed dead had struck him. Uneasy, I left the church, but found him standing at the door and he offered to me the holy water as I passed. I feigned not to see him, and went on. We soon discovered that we were followed. Had I known anything of Paris, I would have attempted to lead them wrong, but I knew no more of it than from the church to the house, nor did I know any one of whom I could ask a quarter of an hour’s hospitality; not a friend, and only one protector, whom I feared more than an enemy.”

“Oh! mon Dieu!” cried Bussy, “why did not Heaven, or chance, throw me sooner in your path?”

Diana thanked the young man with a look.

“But pray go on,” said Bussy, “I interrupt you, and yet I am dying to hear more.”

“That evening M. de Monsoreau came. I did not know whether to tell him of what had happened, but he began, ‘You asked me if you could go to mass, and I told you you were free, but that it would be better not to do so. You would not believe me: you went this morning to St. Catherine’s, and by a fatality the prince was there and saw you.’ ‘It is true, monsieur; but I do not know if he recognized me.’ ‘Your face struck him; your resemblance to the woman he regrets appeared to him extraordinary, he followed you home, and made inquiries, but learned nothing, for no one knew anything.’ ‘Mon Dieu!’ cried I. ‘The duke is persevering,’ said he. ‘Oh! he will forget me, I hope.’

“‘No one forgets you who has once seen you,’ said he. ‘I did all I could to forget you, and I have not succeeded.’ And the first passionate look that I had seen flashed from the eyes of the count. I was more terrified by it than I had been by the sight of the prince. I remained mute. ‘What will you do?’ asked the count. ‘Can I not change my abode--go to the other end of Paris, or, better still, return to Anjou?’ ‘It will be useless; the duke is a terrible bloodhound, and now he is on your track, he will follow you wherever you go till he finds you.’ ‘Oh! mon Dieu! you frighten me.’ ‘I tell you the simple truth.’ ‘Then what do you advise me to do?’ ‘Alas!’ said he, with a bitter irony. ‘I am a man of poor imagination. I had formed a plan, but it does not suit you; I can find no other.’ ‘But the danger is perhaps less pressing than you imagine.’

“‘The future will show us, madame,’ said the count, rising. ‘I can but add that the Comtesse de Monsoreau would have the less to fear from the prince, as my new post places me under the direct protection of the court.’ I only replied by a sigh. He smiled bitterly, and as he went down-stairs I heard him giving vent to oaths. The next day, when Gertrude went out, she was accosted by a young man whom she recognized as the one who had accompanied the prince, but she remained obstinately silent to all his questions. This meeting inspired me with profound terror; I feared that M. de Monsoreau would not come, and that they would invade the house in his absence. I sent for him, he came at once. I told him all about the young man, whom I described.

"'It was Aurilly;' he said, 'and what did Gertrude answer?' 'She did not answer at all.' 'She was wrong,' said he. 'Why?' 'We must gain time.' 'Time?' 'Yes, I am now dependent on the Duc d'Anjou; in a fortnight, in a week perhaps, he will be in my power. We must deceive him to get him to wait.' 'Mon Dieu!' 'Certainly; hope will make him patient. A complete refusal will push him to extremities.' 'Monsieur, write to my father; he will throw himself at the feet of the king. He will have pity on an old man.' 'That is according to the king's humor, and whether he be for the time friendly or hostile to the duke. Besides, it would take six days for a messenger to reach your father, and six days for him to come here. In twelve days, if we do not stop him, the duke will have done all he can do.'

"'And how to stop him?' I cried. A smile passed over the lips of M. de Monsoreau at this first appeal to his protection. 'Madame,' said he, 'will you permit me to pass two or three hours in your room? I may be seen going out, and would rather wait till dark.' I signed him to sit down. We conversed; he was clever and had traveled much, and at the end of the time I understood, better than I had ever done before, the influence he had obtained over my father. When it grew dark, he rose and took leave. Gertrude and I then approached the window, and could distinctly see two men examining the house. The next day, Gertrude, when she went out, found the same young man in the same place. He spoke to her again, and this time she answered him. On the following day she told him that I was the widow of a counselor, who, being poor, lived in retirement. He tried to learn more, but could extract nothing further from her. The next day, Aurilly, who seemed to doubt her story, spoke of Anjou, of Beaugé, and Méridor. Gertrude declared these names to be perfectly unknown to her. Then he avowed that he came from the Duc d'Anjou, who had seen and fallen in love with me; then came magnificent offers for both of us, for her, if she would introduce the prince into my house, and for me, if I would receive him.

"Every evening M. de Monsoreau came, to hear what was going on, and remained from eight o'clock to midnight, and it was evident that his anxiety was great. On Saturday evening he arrived pale and agitated.

"'You must promise to receive the duke on Tuesday or Wednesday,' said he. 'Promise! and why?' 'Because he has made up his mind to come in, and he is just now on the best terms with the king; we have nothing to expect from him.' 'But before then will anything happen to help me?' 'I hope so. I expect from day to day the event which is to place the duke in my power. But tomorrow I must leave you, and must go to Monsoreau.’ ‘Must you?’ cried I with a mixture of joy and terror. ‘Yes, I have there a rendezvous which is indispensable to bring about the event of which I speak.’ ‘But if you fail, what are we to do?’ ‘What can I do against a prince, if I have no right to protect you, but yield to bad fortune?’

“‘Oh! my father! my father!’ cried I. The count looked at me. ‘What have you to reproach me with?’ said he. ‘Nothing, on the contrary.’ ‘Have I not been a devoted friend, and as respectful as a brother?’ ‘You have behaved throughout like a gallant man.’ ‘Had I not your promise?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Have I once recalled it to you?’ ‘No.’ ‘And yet you prefer to be the mistress of the duke, to being my wife?’ ‘I do not say so, monsieur.’ ‘Then decide.’ ‘I have decided.’ ‘To be Countess of Monsoreau?’ ‘Rather than mistress of the duke.’ ‘The alternative is flattering. But, meanwhile, let Gertrude gain time until Tuesday.’ The next day Gertrude went out, but did not meet Aurilly. We felt more frightened at his absence than we had done at his presence. Night came, and we were full of terror. We were alone and feeble, and for the first time I felt my injustice to the count.”

“Oh! madame!” cried Bussy, “do not be in a hurry to think so, his conduct conceals some mystery, I believe.”

“All was quiet,” continued Diana, “until eleven o’clock. Then five men came out of the Rue St Antoine, and hid themselves by the Hôtel des Tournelles. We began to tremble; were they there for us? However, they remained quiet, and a quarter of an hour passed; then we saw two other men approach. By the moonlight Gertrude recognized Aurilly. ‘Alas! mademoiselle; it is they,’ cried she. ‘Yes,’ cried I, trembling, ‘and the five others are to help them.’ ‘But they must force the door,’ said Gertrude, ‘perhaps the neighbors will come and help us.’ ‘Oh! no, they do not know us, and they will not fight against the duke. Alas! Gertrude, I fear we have no real defender but the count.’ ‘Well! then, why do you always refuse to marry him?’ I sighed.”

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MARRIAGE.

“The two men approached the window. We gently opened it a little way, and heard one say, ‘Are you sure it is here?’ ‘Yes, monseigneur, quite sure,’ said the other. ‘It is the fifth house from the corner of the Rue St. Paul.’ ‘And you are sure of the key?’ ‘I took the pattern of the lock.’ I seized Gertrude’s arm in terror. ‘And once inside’ he went on, ‘the servant will admit us; your highness has in your pocket a golden key as good as this one.’ ‘Open, then.’ We heard the key turn in the lock but all at once the ambushed men rushed forward, crying, ‘a mort! a mort!’ I could not understand this, only I saw that unexpected help had come to us, and I fell on my knees, thanking Heaven. But the prince had only to name himself, when every sword went back into the scabbard, and every foot drew back.”

“Yes, yes,” said Bussy, “it was for me they came, not for the prince.”

“However, this attack caused the prince to retire, and the five gentlemen went back to their hiding-place. It was evident that the danger was over for that night, but we were too unquiet to go to bed. Soon we saw a man on horseback appear, and then the five gentlemen immediately rushed on him. You know the rest, as the gentleman was yourself.”

“On the contrary, madame, I know only that I fought and then fainted.”

“It is useless to say,” continued Diana, with a blush, “the interest that we took in the combat so unequal, but so valiantly sustained. Each blow drew from us a shudder, a cry, and a prayer. We saw your horse fall, and we thought you lost, but it was not so; the brave Bussy merited his reputation. At last, surrounded, menaced on all sides, you retreated like a lion, facing your foes, and came to lean against our door; the same idea came to both of us, to go down and open to you, and we ran towards the staircase; but we had barricaded the door, and it took us some minutes to move the furniture, and as we arrived on the stairs, we heard the door shut. We stopped, and looked at each other, wondering who had entered. Soon we heard steps, and a man appeared, who tottered, threw up his arms, and fell on the first step. It was evident that he was not pursued, but had put the door, so luckily left open by the duke, between hint and his adversaries. In any case we had nothing to fear; it was he who needed our help. Gertrude ran and fetched a lamp, and we found you had fainted, and carried you to the bed. Gertrude had heard of a wonderful cure made by a young doctor in the Rue Beautrellis, and she offered to go and fetch him. 'But,' said I, 'he might betray us.' 'I will take precautions' said she. She took money and the key, and I remained alone near you, and--praying for you."

"Alas!" said Bussy, "I did not know all my happiness, madame."

"In a quarter of an hour Gertrude returned, bringing the young doctor with his eyes bandaged."

"Yes, it was at that moment I recovered my senses and saw your portrait, and thought I saw you enter," said Bussy.

"I did so; my anxiety was stronger than my prudence. The doctor examined your wound and answered for your life."

"All that remained in my mind," said Bussy, "like a dream, and yet something told me," added he, laying his hand upon his heart, "that it was real."

"When the surgeon had dressed your wound, he drew from his pocket a little bottle containing a red liquor, of which he put some drops on your lips. He told me it was to counteract the fever and produce sleep, and said that the only thing then was to keep you quiet. Gertrude then bandaged his eyes again, and took him back to the Rue Beautrellis, but she fancied he counted the steps."

"He did so, madame."

"This supposition frightened us. We feared he would betray us, and we wished to get rid of every trace of the hospitality we had shown you. I gathered up my courage; it was two o'clock, and the streets were deserted; Gertrude was strong, and I aided her, and between us we carried you to the Temple. Luckily we met no one, but when we returned, I fainted with emotion."

"Oh! madame!" cried Bussy, "how can I ever repay you for what you have done for me?"

There was a moment's silence, and they heard the clock of St. Catherine's church strike. "Two o'clock," cried Diana, "and you here!"

"Oh! madame, do not send me away without telling me all. Suppose that God had given you a brother, and tell this brother what he can do for his sister."

“Alas! nothing now; it is too late.”

“What happened the next day?” said Bussy; “what did you do on that day when I thought constantly of you, without feeling sure if you were not a vision of my delirium?”

“During that day, Gertrude went out, and met Aurilly. He was more pressing than ever. He said nothing of the night before, but asked for an interview for his master. Gertrude appeared to consent, but she asked until the Wednesday--that is to-day--to decide. Aurilly promised that his master would wait until then. That evening, M. de Monsoreau returned. We told him all, except about you.

“‘Yes,’ said he, ‘I heard of all this. Then he has a key.’ ‘Can we not change the lock?’ ‘He will get another key.’ ‘Put on bolts? ‘He will come with ten men and force the door. ‘But the event which was to give you full power over him?’ ‘Is postponed indefinitely.’ I stood in despair. ‘Monsieur,’ said I, ‘the duke has promised to wait till Wednesday; I ask you to wait till Tuesday.’ ‘Tuesday evening I will be here, madame,’ and without another word he went out. I followed him with my eyes, but instead of going away he stood in the corner by the Hôtel des Tournelles, and seemed determined to watch me all night. Every proof of devotion he gave me was like a knife in my heart. The two days passed rapidly, but what I suffered it is impossible to describe. When Tuesday evening came, I felt exhausted, and all emotion seemed dead within me.

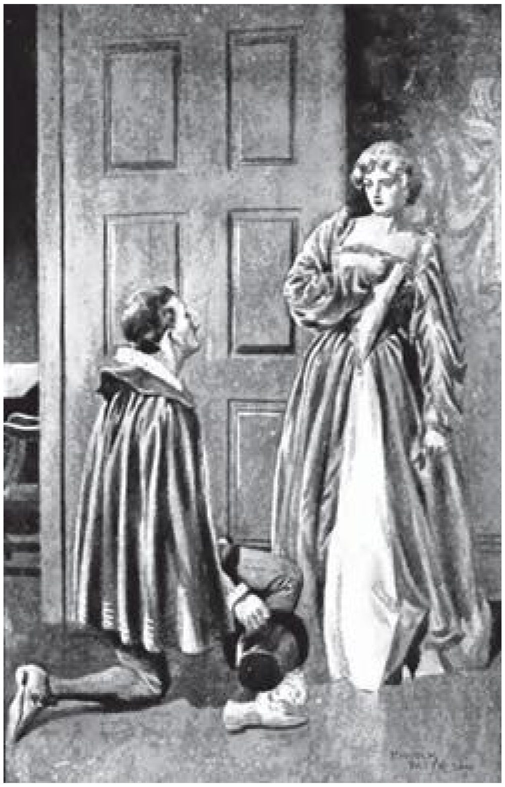

“Gertrude went to the window. ‘Madame,’ cried she, ‘four men! I see four men! They approach, they open the door--they enter! It is, doubtless, the duke and his followers.’ For an answer, I drew my poniard, and placed it near me on the table. ‘See,’ said I. An instant after, Gertrude returned, ‘It is the count,’ said she. He entered. ‘Gertrude tells me,’ said he, ‘that you took me for the duke, and were ready to kill yourself.’ It was the first time I had ever seen him moved. Gertrude was wrong to tell you,’ said I. ‘You know that I am not alone.’ ‘Gertrude saw four men.’ ‘You know who they are?’ ‘I presume one is a priest, and the others witnesses.’ ‘Then, you are ready to become my wife?’ ‘It was so agreed; only I stipulated that except in an urgent case, I would only marry you in the presence of my father.’ ‘I remember; but do you not think the case urgent?’ ‘Yes, and the priest may marry us, but, until I have seen my father, I will be your wife only in name.’

“The count frowned, and bit his lips. ‘I do not wish to coerce you,’ said he; ‘you are free; but look here.’ I went to the window, and saw a man wrapped in a cloak, who seemed trying to get into the house.”

“Oh! mon dieu!” cried Bussy; “and this was yesterday?”

“Yes, about nine o’clock. Presently, another man, with a lantern, joined him. I thought it was the duke and his followers.

"'Now,' said, M de Monsoreau, 'shall I go or stay?' I hesitated a moment, in spite of my father's letter and of my given word, but those two men there----"

"Oh! unhappy that I am," cried Bussy, "it was I and Rémy, the young doctor."

"You!" cried Diana.

"Yes, I; I, who, more and more convinced of the reality of my dream, sought for the house where I had been, and the woman, or rather angel, who had appeared to me. Oh! I am unfortunate. Then," continued he, after a pause, "you are his wife?"

"Since yesterday."

There was a fresh silence.

"But," said Diana at last, "how did you enter this house?"

Bussy silently showed his key.

"A key! where did you get it?"

"Had not Gertrude promised the prince to enter tonight? He had seen M. de Monsoreau here, and also myself, and fearing a snare, sent me to find out."

"And you accepted this mission?"

"It was my only method of penetrating to you. Will you reproach me for having sought at once the greatest joy and the greatest grief of my life?"

"Yes, for it is better that you should see me no more, and forget me."

"No, madame; God has brought me to you, to deliver you from the toils in which your enemies have taken you. I vow my life to you. You wish for news of your father?"

"Oh, yes! for, in truth, I know not what has become of him."

"Well, I charge myself with finding out; only think of him who henceforth will live but for you."

"But this key?"

"This key I restore to you, for I will receive it only from your hands; but I pledge you my word as a gentleman, that never sister could trust in a brother more devoted and respectful."

"I trust to the word of the brave Bussy. Here, monsieur," and she gave back the key.

"Madame, in a fortnight we will know more;" and, saluting Diana with a respect mingled with love and sadness, Bussy took leave. Diana listened to his retreating steps with tears in her eyes.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOW HENRI III. TRAVELED, AND HOW LONG IT TOOK HIM TO GET FROM PARIS TO FONTAINEBLEAU.

The sun, which shone four or five hours after the events which we have just recorded had taken place, saw, by his pale light, Henri III. set off for Fontainebleau, where a grand chase was projected. A crowd of gentlemen, mounted on good horses and wrapped in their fur cloaks, then a number of pages, after them lackey, and then Swiss, followed the royal litter. This litter, drawn by eight mules richly caparisoned, was a large machine, about fifteen feet long and eight wide, on four wheels, furnished inside with cushions and curtains of silk brocade. In difficult places they substituted for the mules an indefinite number of oxen.

This machine contained Henri III., his doctor, and his chaplain, Chicot, four of the king's favorites, a pair of large dogs, and a basket of little ones, which the king held on his knees, and which was suspended from his neck by a golden chain. From the roof hung a gilded cage containing turtle doves, quite white, with a black ring round their necks. Sometimes the collection was completed by the presence of two or three apes. Thus this litter was commonly termed the Noah's Ark.

Quelus and Maugiron employed themselves with plaiting ribbons, a favorite diversion of that time; and Chicot amused himself by making anagrams on the names of all the courtiers. Just as they passed the Place Maubert, Chicot rushed out of the litter, and went to kneel down before a house of good appearance.

"Oh!" cried the king, "if you kneel, let it be before the crucifix in the middle of the street, and not before the house. What do you mean by it?"

But Chicot, without attending, cried out in a loud voice:

"Mon Dieu! I recognize it, I shall always recognize it--the house where I suffered! I have never prayed for vengeance on M. de Mayenne, author of my martyrdom, nor on Nicholas David, his instrument. No; Chicot is patient, Chicot can wait, although it is now six years that this debt has been running on, and in seven years the interest is doubled. May, then, my patience last another year, so that instead of fifty blows of a stirrup-leather which I received in this house by the orders of this assassin of a Lorraine prince, and which drew a pint of blood, I may owe a hundred blows and two pints of blood! Amen, so be it!”

“Amen!” said the king.

Chicot then returned to the litter, amidst the wondering looks of the spectators.

“Why, Chicot, what does all this mean?” said the king.

“Sire, it means that Chicot is like the fox--that he licks the stones where his blood fell, until against those very stones he crushes the heads of those who spilt it.”

“Explain yourself.”

“Sire, in that house lived a girl whom Chicot loved, a good and charming creature, and a lady. One evening when he went to see her, a certain prince, who had also fallen in love with her, had him seized and beaten, so that Chicot was forced to jump out of window; and as it was a miracle that he was not killed, each time he passes the house he kneels down and thanks God for his escape.”

“You were, then, well beaten, my poor Chicot?”

“Yes, sire, and yet not as much as I wished.”

“Why--for your sins?”

“No, for those of M. de Mayenne.”

“Oh! I understand; your intention is to render to Cæsar----”

“Not to Cæsar, sire--Cæsar is the great general, the valiant warrior, the eldest brother, who wishes to be king of France. No, you must settle with him; pay your debts, and I will pay mine.”

Henri did not like to hear his cousin of Guise spoken of, and this made him serious. It was three o’clock in the afternoon when they arrived at Juvisy and the great hotel of the “Cour de France.”

Chicot, looking out of the litter, saw at the door of the hotel several men wrapped in cloaks. In the midst of them was a short, stout person, whose large hat almost covered his face. They went in quickly on seeing the litter, but not before the look of this person had had time to excite Chicot’s attention. Therefore he jumped out, and asking a page for his horse, which was being led, let the royal litter go on to Essones, where the king was to sleep, while he remained behind, and, cautiously peeping in through a window, saw the men whom he had noticed sitting inside. He then entered the hotel, went into the opposite room, asked for a bottle of wine, and placed himself so that, although he could not be seen, no one could pass by without his seeing them.

"Ah!" said he to himself, "shall I be forced to make my payment sooner than I expected?"

Soon Chicot found that by keeping the door open he could both see into the room and hear what was said.

"Gentlemen," said the short fat man to his companions, "I think it is time to set out; the last lackey of the cortege is out of sight, and I believe now that the road is safe."

"Perfectly so, monseigneur," replied a voice which made Chicot tremble, and which came from the mouth of a person as tall as the other was short, as pale as he was red, and as obsequious as he was arrogant.

"Ah! M. Nicolas," said Chicot, "tu quoque, that is good. It will be odd if I let you slip this time!"

Then the short man came out, paid the bill, and, followed by the others, took the road to Paris. Chicot followed them at a distance. They entered by the Porte St. Antoine, and entered the Hôtel Guise. Chicot waited outside a full hour, in spite of cold and hunger. At last the door reopened, but, instead of seven cavaliers wrapped in their cloaks, seven monks came out, with their hoods over their faces, and carrying immense rosaries.

"Oh!" said Chicot, "is, then, the Hôtel Guise so embalmed in sanctity that wolves change into lambs only by entering it? This becomes more and more interesting."

And he followed the monks as he had followed the cavaliers, for he believed them to be the same. The monks passed over the bridge of Notre Dame, crossed the city and the petit pont, and went up the Rue St. Geneviève.

"Oh!" said Chicot, as he passed the house where he had kneeled in the morning, "are we returning to Fontainebleau? In that case I have made a round."

However, the monks stopped at the door of the Abbey of St. Geneviève, in the porch of which stood another monk, who examined everyone's hand.

"Why," said Chicot, "it seems that to be admitted to night into the abbey one must have clean hands!"

Then he saw, with astonishment, monks appear from every street leading to the abbey, some alone, some walking in pairs, but all coming to the abbey.

“Ah!” said Chicot, “is there a general chapter at the abbey to-night? I have never seen one, and I should like it much.”

The monks entered, showing their hands, or something in them, and passed on.

“I should like to go also,” thought Chicot; “but for that I want two things--a monk’s robe, for I see no layman here, and then this mysterious thing which they show to the porter, for certainly they show something. Ah, Brother Gorenflot, if you were here!”

The monks continued to arrive, till it seemed as if half Paris had taken the frock.

“There must be something extraordinary to-night,” thought Chicot. “I will go and find Gorenflot at the Corne d’Abondance; he will be at supper.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

BROTHER GORENFLOT.

To the beautiful day had succeeded a beautiful evening, only, as the day had been cold, the evening was still colder. It was one of those frosts which make the lights in the windows of an hotel look doubly tempting. Chicot first entered the dining-room, and looked around him, but not finding there the man he sought for, went familiarly down to the kitchen. The master of the establishment was superintending a frying-pan full of whitings. At the sound of Chicot's step he turned.

"Ah! it is you, monsieur," said he, "good evening, and a good appetite to you."

"Thanks for the wish, but you know I cannot bear to eat alone."

"If necessary, monsieur, I will sup with you."

"Thanks, my dear host, but though I know you to be an excellent companion, I seek for some one else."

"Brother Gorenflot, perhaps?"

"Just so; has he begun supper?"

"No, not yet; but you must make haste nevertheless, for in five minutes he will have finished."

"Monsieur!" cried Chicot, striking his head.

"Monsieur, it is Friday, and the beginning of Lent."

"Well, and what then?" said Chicot, who did not hold a high opinion of Gorenflot's religious austerity.

Boutromet shrugged his shoulders. "Decidedly, something must be wrong," said Chicot, "five minutes for Gorenflot's supper! I am destined to see wonders to-day."

Chicot then advanced towards a small private room, pushed open the door, and saw within the worthy monk, who was turning negligently on his plate a small portion of spinach, which he tried to render more savory by the introduction into it of some cheese. Brother Gorenflot was about thirty-eight years of age and five feet high. However, what he wanted in height, he made up in breadth, measuring nearly three feet in diameter from shoulder to shoulder, which, as everyone knows, is equal to nine feet of circumference. Between these Herculean shoulders rose a neck of which the muscles stood out like cords. Unluckily this neck partook of the same proportions; it was short and thick, which at any great emotion might render Brother Gorenflot liable to apoplexy. But knowing this, perhaps, he never gave way to emotions, and was seldom so disturbed as he was when Chicot entered his room.

“Ah, my friend! what are you doing?” cried Chicot, looking at the vegetables and at a glass filled with water just colored with a few drops of wine.

“You see, my brother, I sup,” replied Gorenflot in a powerful voice.

“You call that supper, Gorenflot! Herbs and cheese?”

“We are in the beginning of Lent, brother; we must think of our souls,” replied Gorenflot, raising his eyes to heaven.

Chicot looked astounded; he had so often seen Gorenflot feast in a different manner during Lent.

“Our souls!” said he; “and what the devil have herbs and water to do with them?”

“We are forbidden to eat meat on Wednesdays and Fridays.”

“But when did you breakfast?”

“I have not breakfasted, my brother,” said the monk.

“Not breakfasted! Then what have you done?”

“Composed a discourse,” said Gorenflot proudly.

“A discourse, and what for?”

“To deliver this evening at the abbey.”

“That is odd.”

“And I must be quick and go there, or perhaps my audience will grow impatient.”

Chicot thought of the infinite number of monks he had seen going to the abbey, and wondered why Gorenflot, whom certainly he had never thought eloquent, had been chosen to preach before M. de Mayenne and the numerous assemblage. “When are you to preach?” said he.

“At half-past nine.”

“Good; it is still a quarter to nine, you can give me a few minutes. Ventre de biche! we have not dined together for a week.”

“It is not our fault, but I know that your duties keep you near our King Henry III., while my duties fill up my time.”

“Yes, but it seems to me that is so much the more reason why we should be merry when we do meet.”

“Yes, I am merry,” said Gorenflot, with a piteous look, “but still I must leave you.”

“At least, finish your supper.”

Gorenflot looked at the spinach, and sighed, then at the water, and turned away his head.

“Do you remember,” said Chicot, “the little dinner at the Porte Montmartre, where, while the king was scourging himself and others, we devoured a teal from the marshes of the Grauge-Batelière, with a sauce made with crabs, and we drank that nice Burgundy wine; what do you call it?”

“It is a wine of my country, La Romanée.”

“Yes, yes, it was the milk you sucked as a baby, worthy son of Noah.”

“It was good,” said Gorenflot, “but there is better.”

“So says Claude Boutromet, who pretends that he has in his cellar fifty bottles to which that is paltry.”

“It is true.”

“True, and yet you drink that abominable red water. Fie!” And Chicot, taking the glass, threw the contents out of window.

“There is a time for all, my brother,” said Gorenflot, “and wine is good when one has only to praise God after it, but water is better when one has a discourse to pronounce,”

“Opinions differ, for I, who have also a discourse to pronounce, am going to ask for a bottle of Romanée. What do you advise me to take with it, Gorenflot?”

“Not these herbs, they are not nice.” Chicot, seizing the plate, threw it after the water, and then cried, “Maître Claude.”

The host appeared.

“M. Claude, bring me two bottles of your Romanée, which you call so good.”

“Why two bottles,” said Gorenflot, “as I do not drink it?”

“Oh! if you did I would have four or six, but if I drink alone, two will do for me.”

“Indeed; two bottles are reasonable, and if you eat no meat with it, your confessor will have nothing to reproach you with.”

"Oh, of course not; meat on a Friday in Lent!" And going to the larder, he drew out a fine capon.

"What are you doing, brother?" said Gorenflot, following his movements with interest.

"You see I am taking this carp."

"Carp!" cried Gorenflot.

"Yes, a carp," said Chicot, showing him the tempting bird.

"And since when has a carp had a beak?"

"A beak! do you see a beak? I only see a nose."

"And wings?"

"Fins!"

"Feathers?"

"Scales, my dear Gorenflot, you are drunk."

"Drunk! I, who have only eaten spinach and drunk water?"

"Well, your spinach has overloaded your stomach, and your water has mounted to your head."

"Parbleu! here is our host, he shall decide."

"So be it, but first let him uncork the wine."

M. Boutromet uncorked a bottle and gave a glass to Chicot. Chicot swallowed and smacked his lips.

"Ah!" said he, "I have a bad memory, I cannot remember if it be better or worse than that at Montmartre. Here, my brother, enlighten me," said he, giving a little to the monk, who was looking on with eager eyes.

Gorenflot took the glass, and drank slowly the liquor it contained.

"It is the same wine," said he, "but I had too little to tell whether it be better or worse."

"But I want to know, and if you had not a sermon to preach, I would beg you to drink a little more."

"If it will give you pleasure, my brother."

Chicot half filled the monk's glass. Gorenflot drank it with great gravity.

"I pronounce it better," said he.

"You flatter our host."

"A good drinker ought, at the first draught, to recognize the wine, at the second, the quality, and, at the third, the age."

"Oh! I should like to know the age of this wine."

"Give me a few drops more, and I will tell you."

Chicot filled his glass. He drank it off, and then said, "1561."

“Right,” cried Claude Boutromet, “it was 1561.”

“Brother Gorenflot,” cried Chicot, “they have beatified men at Rome who were worth less than you.”

“A little habit,” said Gorenflot, modestly.

“And talent; for I flatter myself I have the habit, and I could not do it. But what are you about?”

“Going to my assembly.”

“Without eating a piece of my carp?”

“Ah I true; you know still less of eating than drinking. M. Boutromet, what is the name of this animal?”

The innkeeper looked astonished. “A capon,” said he.

“A capon!” cried Chicot, with an air of consternation.

“Yes, and a fine one.”

“Well!” said Gorenflot, triumphantly.

“Well I it seems I was wrong, but as I wish to eat this capon, and yet not sin, be so kind, brother, as to throw a few drops of water upon it, and christen it a carp.”

“Ah! ah!”

“Yes, I pray you, save me from mortal sin.”

“So be it,” cried Gorenflot, “but there is no water.”

“Oh! the intention is all; baptize it with wine, my brother; the animal will be less Catholic but quite as good.” And Chicot refilled the monk’s glass. The first bottle was finished.

“In the name of Bacchus, Momus, and Comus, trinity of the great saint Pantagruel, I baptize thee, carp,” said Gorenflot.

“Now,” said Chicot, “to the health of the newly baptized; may it be cooked to perfection, and may M. Boutromet add to the excellent qualities which it has received from nature.”

“To his health,” cried Gorenflot, interrupting a hearty laugh to swallow his wine.

“M. Claude, put this carp at once on the spit, cover it with fresh butter, with shalots in it, and put some toast in the frying-pan, and serve it hot.” Gorenflot approved with a motion of his head.

“Now, M. Boutromet, some sardines and a tunny fish, meanwhile; it is Lent, and I wish to make a maigre dinner. And let me have two more bottles of wine.”

The smell of the cookery began to mount to the brain of the monk. Yet he made a last effort to rise.

"Then you leave me, after all?" said Chicot.

"I must," said Gorenflot, raising his eyes to heaven.

"It is very imprudent of you to go to pronounce a discourse fasting."

"Why?"

"Because your strength will fail you. Galen has said it. Pulmo hominis facile deficit."

"Alas! yes."

"You see, then?"

"Luckily, I have zeal."

"Ah! but that is not enough; I advise you to eat some sardines, and drink a little of this nectar."

"A single sardine, then, and one glass." Chicot gave him the sardine, and passed him the bottle. He himself took care to keep sober.

"I feel myself less feeble," said Gorenflot.

"Oh! you must feel quite strong before you go, and so I advise you to eat the fins of the carp." And as they entered with the pullet, Chicot cut off a leg and thigh, which Gorenflot soon despatched.

"What a delicious fish!" said Gorenflot. Chicot cut off the other leg and gave it to Gorenflot, while he ate the wings.

"And famous wine," said he, uncorking another bottle.

Having once commenced, Gorenflot could not stop. His appetite was enormous; he finished the bird, and then called to Boutromet. "M. Claude," said he, "I am hungry; did you not offer me omelet just now?"

"Certainly."

"Well, bring it."

"In five minutes."

"Ah!" said Gorenflot, "now I feel in force; if the omelet were here, I could eat it at a mouthful, and I swallow this wine at a gulp." And he swallowed a quarter of the third bottle.

"Ah! you were ill before."

"I was foolish, friend; that cursed discourse weighed on my mind; I have been thinking of it for days."

"It ought to be magnificent."

"Splendid."

"Tell me some of it while we wait for the omelet."

“No, no; not a sermon at table.”

“We have beautiful discourses at the court, I assure you.”

“About what?”

“About virtue.”

“Ah! yes, he is a very virtuous man, our King Henri III.”

“I do not know if he be virtuous; but I know that I have never seen anything there to make me blush.”

“You blush!”

At this moment M. Boutromet entered with the omelet and two more bottles.

“Bring it here,” cried the monk, with a smile, which showed his thirty-two teeth.

“But, friend, I thought you had a discourse to pronounce.”

“It is here,” cried Gorenflot, striking his forehead.

“At half-past nine.”

“I lied; it was ten.”

“Ten! I thought the abbey shut at nine.”

“Let it shut; I have a key.”

“A key of the abbey!”

“Here, in my pocket.”

“Impossible; I know the monastic rules. They would not give the key to a simple monk.”

“Here it is,” said Gorenflot, showing a piece of money.

“Oh, money! you corrupt the porter to go in when you please, wretched sinner! But what strange money!”

“An effigy of the heretic, with a hole through his heart.”

“Yes, I see it is a tester of the Béarn king’s, and here is a hole.”

“A blow with a dagger. Death to the heretic. He who does it is sure of Paradise.”

“He is not yet drunk enough;” so thought Chicot; and he filled his glass again.

“To the mass!” cried Gorenflot, drinking it off.

Chicot remembered the porter looking at the hands of the monks, and said--

“Then, if you show this to the porter----”

“I enter.”

“Without difficulty?”

“As this wine into my stomach.” And the monk absorbed a new dose.

“And you pronounce your discourse?”

“And I pronounce my discourse. I arrive--do you hear? The assembly is numerous and select. There are barons, counts, and dukes.”

“And even princes?”

“And even princes. I enter humbly among the faithful of the Union----”

“The Union--what does that mean?”

“I enter; they call Brother Gorenflot, and I advance----”

At these words the monk rose. “And I advance,” continued he, trying to do so, but at the first step he rolled on the floor.

“Bravo!” cried Chicot; “you advance, you salute the audience and say----”

“No, it is my friends who say, Brother Gorenflot--a fine name for a leaguer, is it not?”

“A leaguer,” thought Chicot: “what truths is this wine going to bring out?”

“Then I begin.” And the monk rose, and leaned against the wall.

“You begin,” said Chicot, holding him up.

“I begin, ‘My brothers, it is a good day for the faith, a very good day, my brothers; it is a very good day for the faith.’“

After this, as Chicot loosed his hold, Gorenflot fell full length again on the floor, and before many minutes a loud snoring was heard.

“Good,” said Chicot, “he is in for twelve hours sleep. I can easily undress him.”

He then untied the monk’s robe, and pulled it off; then rolled Gorenflot in the tablecloth, and covered his head with a napkin, and hiding the monk’s frock under his cloak, passed into the kitchen.

“M. Boutromet,” said he, “here is for our supper, and for my horse; and pray do not wake the worthy Brother Gorenflot, who sleeps sound.”

“No, no; be easy, M. Chicot.”

Then Chicot ran to the rue St. Etienne, put on the monk’s robe, took the tester in his hand, and at a quarter to ten presented himself, not without a beating heart, at the wicket of the Abbey St. Geneviève.

CHAPTER XIX.

HOW CHICOT FOUND OUT THAT IT WAS EASIER TO GO IN THAN OUT OF THE ABBEY.

Chicot, from the cloak and other things under the monk’s robe, looked much larger across the shoulders than usual. His beard was of the same color as Gorenflot’s, and he had so often amused himself with mimicking the monk’s voice and manner of speaking that he could do it perfectly. Now, everyone knows that the beard and the voice are the only things which are recognizable from under the depths of a monk’s hood. Chicot exhibited his coin, and was admitted without difficulty, and then followed two other monks to the chapel of the convent. In this chapel, built in the eleventh century, the choir was raised nine or ten feet above the rest of the building, and you mounted into it by two lateral staircases, while an iron door between them led from the nave to the crypt, into which you had to descend again. In this choir there was a portrait of St. Geneviève, and on each side of the altar were statues of Clovis and Clotilda.

Three lamps only lighted the chapel, and the imperfect light gave a greater solemnity to the scene. Chicot was glad to find that he was not the last, for three monks entered after in gray robes, and placed themselves in front of the altar. Soon after, a little monk, doubtless a lad belonging to the choir, came and spoke to one of these monks, who then said, aloud,--

“We are now one hundred and thirty-six.”

Then a great noise of bolts and bars announced that the door was being closed. The three monks were seated in armchairs, like judges. The one who had spoken before now rose and said--

“Brother Monsoreau, what news do you bring to the Union from the province of Anjou?”

Two things made Chicot start, the first was the voice of the speaker, the second the name of Monsoreau, known to the court only the last few days. A tall monk crossed the assembly, and placed himself in a large chair, behind the shadow of which Chicot had kept himself.

“My brothers,” said a voice which Chicot recognized at once as that of the chief huntsman, “the news from Anjou is not satisfactory; not that we fail there in sympathy, but in representatives. The progress of the Union there had been confided to the Baron de Méridor, but he in despair at the recent death of his daughter, has, in his grief, neglected the affairs of the league, and we cannot at present count on him. As for myself, I bring three new adherents to the association. The council must judge whether these three, for whom I answer, as for myself, ought to be admitted into the Union.”

A murmur of applause followed and as Monsoreau regained his seat,--”Brother la Hurière,” cried the same monk, “tell us what you have done in the city of Paris.”

A man now took the chair and said, “My brothers, you know I am devoted to the Catholic faith, and I have given proofs of this devotion on the great day of its triumph. Yes, my brothers, I glory in saying that I was one of the faithful of our great Henri de Guise, and that I followed his orders strictly. I have now noted all the heretics of the Quartier St. Germain l’Auxerrois, where I shall hold the hotel of the Belle-Etoile, at your service, my brothers. Now, although I no longer thirst for the blood of heretics as formerly, I do not delude myself as to the real object of the holy Union which we are forming. If I am not deceived, brothers, the extinction of private heretics is not all we aim at. We wish to be sure that we shall never be governed by a heretic prince. Now, my friends, what is our situation? Charles IX., who was zealous, died without children; Henri Ill. will probably do the same, and there remains only the Duc d’Anjou, who not only has no children either, but seems cold towards us.”

“What makes you accuse the prince thus?” said the monk who always spoke.

“Because he has not joined us.”

“Who tells you so, since there are new adherents?”

“It is true; I will wait; but after him, who is mortal, and has no children, to whom will the crown fall? To the most ferocious Huguenot that can be imagined, to a renegade, a Nebuchadnezzar?” Here the acclamations were tremendous.

“To Henri of Béarn,” continued he, “against whom this association is chiefly directed--to Henri, who the people at Pau, or Tarbes, think is occupied with his love affairs, but who is in Paris!”

“In Paris! impossible!” cried many voices.

“He was here on the night when Madame de Sauve was assassinated, and perhaps is here still.”

“Death to the Béarnais!” cried several.

“Yes, doubtless, and if he came to lodge at the Belle-Etoile, I answer for him; but he will not come. One does not catch a fox twice in the same hole. He will lodge with some friend, for he has friends. The important thing is to know them. Our union is holy, our league is loyal, consecrated and blessed by the Pope; therefore I demand that it be no longer kept secret, but that we go into the houses and canvass the citizens. Those who sign will be our friends, the others our enemies, and if a second St. Bartholomew come, which seems to the faithful to be more necessary daily, we shall know how to separate the good from the wicked.”

Thunders of acclamation followed. When they were calm, the monk who always spoke said,--

“The proposition of Brother la Hurière, whom the union thanks for his zeal, will be taken into consideration by the superior council.”

La Hurière bowed, amidst fresh applause.

“Ah! ah!” thought Chicot, “I begin to see clearly into all this. The Guises are forming a nice little party, and some fine morning Henri will find that he has nothing left, and will be politely invited to enter a monastery. But what will they do with the Duc d’Anjou?”

“Brother Gorenflot,” then cried the monk.

No one replied.

“Brother Gorenflot,” cried the little monk, in a voice which made Chicot start; for it sounded like a woman’s. However, he rose, and speaking like the monk, said,--

“Here I am; I was plunged in profound meditation.” He feared not to reply, for the members had been counted, and therefore the absence of a member would have provoked an examination. Therefore, without hesitation, he mounted the chair and began.

“My brothers, you know that I purvey for the convent, and have the right of entering every dwelling. I use this privilege for the good of religion. My brothers,” continued he, remembering Gorenflot’s beginning, “this day, which unites us, is a good one for the faith. Let us speak freely, my brothers, since we are in the house of God.

"What is the kingdom of France? A body. '*Omnis civitas corpus est*.' What is the first requisite of a body? Good health. How do we preserve this? By prudent bleedings at times. Now it is evident that the enemies of our religion are too strong; we must therefore once more bleed that great body we call society. This is what is constantly said to me by the faithful, who give me ham, eggs, or money for the convent."

Several murmurs of approbation interrupted Chicot, then he went on.

"Some may object that the church abhors blood. But they do not say what blood, and I wager that it is not the blood of heretics it abhors. And then another argument; I said, 'the church;' but are we the church? Brother Monsoreau, who spoke so well just now, has, I doubt not, his huntsman's knife in his belt. Brother la Hurière manages the spit; I, myself, who speak to you--I, Jacques Gorenflot, have carried the musket in Champagne. It now remains to us to speak of our chiefs, of whom it seems to me, poor monk as I am, that there is something to say. Certainly, it is very well and prudent to come at night under a monk's robe, to hear Brother Gorenflot preach; but it appears to me that their duties do not stop there. So much prudence may make the Huguenots laugh. Let us play a part more worthy of the brave people we are. What do we want? The extinction of heresy. Well, that may be cried from the housetops, it seems to me. Why not march in holy procession, displaying our good cause, and our good partisans, but not like the thieves, who keep looking round them to see if the watch is coming. Who is the man who will set the example? Well, it is I, Jacques Gorenflot; I, unworthy brother of the order of St. Geneviève, poor and humble purveyor of the convent. It shall be I, who with a cuirass on my back, a helmet on my head, and a musket on my shoulder, will march at the head of all good Catholics who will follow me. This I would do, were it only to make those chiefs blush, who, while defending the Church, hide, as if their cause was a bad one."

This speech, which corresponded with the sentiments of many there, was received with shouts of applause; and the more so, as up to this time Gorenflot had never shown any enthusiasm for the cause. However, it was not the plan of the chiefs to let this enthusiasm proceed. One of the monks spoke to the lad, who cried in his silvery voice, "My brothers, it is time to retire; the sitting is over."

The monks rose, all determined to insist on the procession at the next meeting. Many approached the chair to felicitate the author of this brilliant speech; but Chicot, fearful of being recognized, threw himself on his knees and buried his head in his hands, as if in prayer. They respected his devotions, and went towards the door. However, Chicot had missed his chief aim. What had made him quit the king was the sight of M. de Mayenne and Nicolas David, on both of whom he had, as we know, vowed vengeance; and although the duke was too great a man to be attacked openly, Nicolas David was not, and Chicot was so good a swordsman as to feel sure of success if he could but meet him. He therefore began to watch each monk as he went out, and perceived to his terror that each, on going out, had to show some sign again. Gorenflot had told him how to get in, but not how to get out again.

CHAPTER XX.

HOW CHICOT, FORCED TO REMAIN IN THE ABBEY, SAW AND HEARD THINGS VERY DANGEROUS TO SEE AND HEAR.

Chicot hastened to get down from his chair, and to mix among the monks so as to discover, if possible, what signs they used. By peeping over their shoulders, he found out that it was a farthing, with a star cut in the middle. Our Gascon had plenty of farthings in his pocket, but unluckily none with a star in it. Of course, if when on coming to the door he was unable to produce the necessary signs, he would be suspected and examined. He gained the shade of a pillar, which stood at the corner of a confessional, and stood there wondering what he should do. An assistant cried, "Is everyone out, the doors are about to be shut."

No one answered; Chicot peeped out and saw the chapel empty, with the exception of the three monks, who still kept their seats in front of the choir.

"Provided they do not shut the windows, it is all I ask," thought Chicot.

"Let us examine," said the young lad to the porter. Then the porter lifted a taper, and, followed by the young lad, began to make the tour of the church. There was not a moment to lose. Chicot softly opened the door of the confessional, slipped in, and shut the door after him. They passed close by him, and he could see them through the spaces of the sculpture.

[Illustration: CHICOT THE JESTER.]

"Diable!" thought he, "he cannot stay here all night, and once they are gone, I will pile chairs upon benches, Pelion on Ossa, and get out of the window. Ah! yes, but when I have done that, I shall be, not in the street, but in the court. I believe it will be better to pass the night in the confessional; Gorenflot's robe is warm."

"Extinguish the lamps," now cried the lad; and the porter with an immense extinguisher put out the lamps, and left the church dark, except for the rays of the moon which shone through the windows. The clock struck twelve.

"Ventre de biche!" said Chicot, "Henri, if he were here, would be nicely frightened; but, luckily, I am less timid. Come, Chicot, my friend, good night and sleep well.”

Then Chicot pushed the inside bolt, made himself as comfortable as he could, and shut his eyes. He was just falling asleep, when he was startled by a loud stroke on a copper bell, and at the same time the lamp in the choir was relighted, and showed the three monks still there.

“What can this mean?” thought Chicot, starting up. Brave as he was, Chicot was not exempt from superstitious fears. He made the sign of the cross, murmuring, “Vade retro, Satanas!” But as the lights did not go out at the holy sign, Chicot began to think he had to deal with real monks and real lights; but at this moment one of the flagstones of the choir raised itself slowly, and a monk appeared through the opening, after which the stone shut again. At this sight Chicot’s hair stood on end, and he began to fear that all the priors and abbés of St. Geneviève, from Opsat, dead in 533, down to Pierre Boudin, predecessor of the present superior, were being resuscitated from their tombs, and were going to raise with their bony heads the stones of the choir. But this doubt did not last long.

“Brother Monsoreau,” said one of the monks to him who had just made so strange an appearance.

“Yes, monseigneur,” said he.

“Open the door that he may come to us.”

Monsoreau descended to open the door between the staircases, and at the same time the monk in the middle lowered his hood, and showed the great scar, that noble sign by which the Parisians recognized their hero.

“The great Henri of Guise himself!” thought Chicot, “whom his very imbecile majesty believes occupied at the siege of La Charité. Ah! and he at the right is the Cardinal of Lorraine, and he at the left M. de Mayenne--a trinity not very holy, but very visible.”

“Did you think he would come?” said La Balafré to his brothers.

“I was so sure of it, that I have under my cloak where-with to replace the holy vial.”

And Chicot perceived, by the feeble light of the lamp, a silver gilt box, richly chased. Then about twenty monks, with their heads buried in immense hoods, came out of the crypt, and stationed themselves in the nave. A single one, conducted by M. de Monsoreau, mounted the staircase, and placed himself at the right of M. de Guise. Then M. de Guise spoke. “Friends,” said he, “time is precious; therefore I go straight to the point. You have heard just now, in the first assembly, the complaints of some of our members, who tax with coldness the principal person among us, the prince nearest to the throne. The time is come to render justice to this prince; you shall hear and judge for yourselves whether your chiefs merit the reproach of coldness and apathy made by one of our brothers, the monk Gorenflot, whom we have not judged it prudent to admit into our secret.”

At this name, pronounced in a tone which showed bad intentions towards the warlike monk, Chicot in his confessional could not help laughing quietly.

“Monsieur,” said the duke, now turning towards the mysterious personages at his right, “the will of God appears to me manifest; for since you have consented to join us, it shows that what we do is well done. Now, your highness, we beg of you to lower your hood, that your faithful friends may see with their own eyes that you keep the promise which I made in your name, and which they hardly dared to believe.”

The mysterious personage now lowered his hood, and Chicot saw the head of the Duc d’Anjou appear, so pale that, by the light of the lamp, it looked like that of a marble statue.

“Oh, oh!” thought Chicot, “the duke is not yet tired of playing for the crown with the heads of others!”

“Long live Monseigneur le Duc d’Anjou!” cried the assembly.

The duke grew paler than ever.

“Fear nothing, monseigneur,” said Henri de Guise; our chapel is deaf, and its doors are well closed.”

“My brothers,” said the Comte de Monsoreau, “his highness wishes to address a few words to the assembly.”

“Yes, yes!” cried they.

“Gentlemen,” began he, in a voice so trembling that at first they could hardly distinguish his words, “I believe that God, who often seems insensible and deaf to the things of this world, keeps, on the contrary, His piercing eyes constantly on us, and only remains thus careless in appearance in order to remedy, by some great blow, the disorders caused by the foolish ambitions of men. I also have kept my eyes, if not on the world, at least on France. What have I seen there? The holy religion of Christ shaken to its foundation by those who sap all belief, under the pretext of drawing nearer to God, and my soul has been full of grief. In the midst of this grief, I heard that several noble and pious gentlemen, friends of our old faith, were trying to strengthen the tottering altar. I threw my eyes around me, and saw on one side the heretics, from whom I recoiled with horror; on the other side the elect, and I am come to throw myself into their arms. My brothers, here I am."

The applause and bravos resounded through the chapel. Then the cardinal, turning to the duke, said:

"You are amongst us of your own free will?"

"Of my free will, monsieur."

"Who instructed you in the holy mystery?"

"My friend, the Comte de Monsoreau, a man zealous for religion."

"Then," said the Duc de Guise, "as your highness has joined us, have the goodness to tell us what you intend to do for the league."

"I intend to serve the Catholic religion in all its extent."

"Ventre de biche!" thought Chicot, "why not propose this right out to the king? It would suit him excellently--processions, macerations, extirpation of heresy, fagots, and auto-da-fés! Go on, worthy brother of his majesty, noble imbecile, go on!"

And the duke, as if sensible of the encouragement, proceeded: "But the interests of religion are not the sole aim which you gentlemen propose. As for me, I see another; for when a gentleman has thought of what he owes to God, he then thinks of his country, and he asks himself if it really enjoys all the honor and prosperity which it ought to enjoy. I ask this about our France, and I see with grief that it does not. Indeed, the state is torn to pieces by different wills and tastes, one as powerful as the other. It is, I fear, to the feebleness of the head, which forgets that it ought to govern all for the good of its subjects, or only remembers this royal principle at capricious intervals, when the rare acts of energy are generally not for the good, but the ill of France, that we must attribute these evils. Whatever be the cause, the ill is a real one, although I accuse certain false friends of the king rather than the king himself. Therefore I join myself to those who by all means seek the extinction of heresy and the ruin of perfidious counselors."

This discourse appeared profoundly to interest the audience, who, throwing back their hoods, drew near to the duke.

"Monseigneur," said the Duc de Guise, "in thanking your royal highness for the words you have just uttered, I will add that you are surrounded by people devoted not only to the principles which you profess, but to the person of your highness; and if you have any doubt, the conclusion of this sitting will convince you."

"Monseigneur," said the cardinal, "if your highness still experiences any fear, the names of those who now surround you will, I hope, reassure you. Here is M. le Gouverneur d'Aunis, M. d'Antragues, M. de Ribeirac, and M. de Livarot, and gentlemen whom your highness doubtless knows to be as brave as loyal. Here are, besides, M. de Castillon, M. le Baron de Lusignan, MM. Cruce and Leclerc, all ready to march under the guidance of your highness, to the emancipation of religion and the throne. We shall, then, receive with gratitude the orders that you will give us."

Then M. de Mayenne said: "You are by your birth, and by your wisdom, monseigneur, the natural chief of the Holy Union, and we ought to learn from you what our conduct should be with regard to the false friends of his majesty of whom you just now spoke."

"Nothing more simple," replied the prince, with that feverish excitement which in weak natures supplies the place of courage to weak minds; "when venomous plants grow in a field, we root them up. The king is surrounded, not with friends, but with courtiers, who ruin him, and cause a perpetual scandal in France and all Christendom."

"It is true," said the Duc de Guise, in a gloomy tone.

"And," said the cardinal, "these courtiers prevent us, who are his majesty's true friends, from approaching him as we have the right to do by our birth and position."

"Let us, then," said M. de Mayenne, "leave the heretics to the vulgar leaguers; let us think of those who annoy and insult us, and who often fail in respect to the prince whom we honor, and who is our chief."

The Duc d'Anjou grew red.

"Let us destroy," continued Mayenne, "to the last man, that cursed race whom the king enriches, and let each of us charge ourselves with the life of one. We are thirty here; let us count."

"I," said D'Antragues, "charge myself with Quelus."

"I with Maugiron," said Livarot.

"And I with Schomberg," said Ribeirac.

"Good!" said the duke; "and there is Bussy, my brave Bussy, who will undertake some of them."

"And us!" cried the rest.

M. de Monsoreau now advanced. "Gentlemen," said he, "I claim an instant's silence. We are resolute men, and yet we fear to speak freely to each other; we are intelligent men, and yet we are deterred by foolish scruples. Come, gentlemen, a little courage, a little hardihood, a little frankness. It is not of the king's minions that we think; there does not lie our difficulty. What we really complain of is the royalty which we are under, and which is not acceptable to a French nobility; prayers and despotism, weakness and orgies, prodigality for fêtes which make all Europe laugh, and parsimony for everything that regards the state and the arts. Such conduct is not weakness or ignorance--it is madness."

A dead silence followed this speech. Everyone trembled at the words which echoed his own thoughts. M. de Monsoreau went on.

"Must we live under a king, foolish, inert, and lazy, at a time when all other nations are active, and work gloriously, while we sleep? Gentlemen, pardon me for saying before a prince, who will perhaps blame my temerity (for he has the prejudices of family), that for four years we have been governed, not by a king, but by a monk."

At these words the explosion so skilfully prepared and as skilfully kept in check, burst out with violence.

"Down with the Valois!" they cried, "down with Brother Henri! Let us have for chief a gentleman, a knight, rather a tyrant than a monk."

"Gentlemen!" cried the Duc d'Anjou, hypocritically, "let me plead for my brother, who is led away. Let me hope that our wise remonstrances, that the efficacious intervention of the power of the League, will bring him back into the right path."

"Hiss, serpent, hiss," said Chicot to himself.

"Monseigneur," replied the Duc de Guise, "your highness has heard, perhaps rather too soon, but still you have heard, the true meaning of the association. No! we are not really thinking of a league against the Béarnais, nor of a league to support the Church, which will support itself: no, we think of raising the nobility of France from its abject condition. Too long we have been kept back by the respect we feel for your highness, by the love which we know you to have for your family. Now, all is revealed, monseigneur, and your highness will assist at the true sitting of the League. All that has passed is but preamble."

"What do you mean, M. le Duc?" asked the prince, his heart beating at once with alarm and ambition.

"Monseigneur, we are united here, not only to talk, but to act. To-day we choose a chief capable of honoring and enriching the nobility of France; and as it was the custom of the ancient Franks when they chose a chief to give him a present worthy of him, we offer a present to the chief whom we have chosen."

All hearts beat, and that of the prince most of any; yet he remained mute and motionless, betraying his emotion only by his paleness.

"Gentlemen," continued the duke, taking something from behind him, "here is the present that in your name I place at the feet of the prince."

"A crown!" cried the prince, scarcely able to stand, "a crown to me, gentlemen?"

"Long live François III.!" cried all the gentlemen, drawing their swords.

"I! I!" cried the Duke, trembling with joy and terror. "It is impossible! My brother still lives; he is the anointed of the Lord."

"We depose him," said the duke, "waiting for the time when God shall sanction, by his death, the election which we are about to make, or rather, till one of his subjects, tired of this inglorious reign, forestalls by poison or the dagger the justice of God."

"Gentlemen!" said the duke, feebly.

"Monseigneur," then said the cardinal, "to the scruple which you so nobly expressed just now, this is our answer. Henri III. was the anointed of the Lord, but we have deposed him; it is you who are going to be so. Here is a temple as venerable as that of Rheims; for here have reposed the relics of St Geneviève, patroness of Paris; here has been embalmed the body of Clovis, our first Christian king; well, monseigneur, in this holy temple, I, one of the princes of the Church, and who may reasonably hope to become one day its head, I tell you, monseigneur, that here, to replace the holy oil, is an oil sent by Pope Gregory XIII. Monseigneur, name your future archbishop of Rheims, name your constable, and in an instant, it is you who will be king, and your brother Henri, if he do not give you up the crown, will be the usurper. Child, light the altar."

Immediately, the lad, who was evidently waiting, came out, and presently fifty lights shone round the altar and choir.

Then was seen on the altar a miter glittering with precious stones, and a large sword ornamented with fleur-de-lis. It was the archbishop's miter and the constable's sword. At the same moment the organ began to play the Veni Creator. This sudden stroke, managed by the three Lorraine princes, and which the Duc d'Anjou himself did not expect, made a profound impression on the spectators. The courageous grew bolder than ever, and the weak grew strong. The Duc d'Anjou raised his head, and with a firmer step than might have been expected, walked to the altar, took the miter in the left hand and the sword in the right, presented one to the cardinal and the other to the duke. Unanimous applause followed this action.

“Now, gentlemen,” said the prince to the others, “give your names to M. de Mayenne, grand Master of France, and the day when I ascend the throne, you shall have the cordon bleu.”

“Mordieu!” thought Chicot, “what a pity I cannot give mine; I shall never have such another opportunity.”

“Now to the altar, sire,” said the cardinal.

“Monsieur de Monsoreau my colonel, MM. de Ribeirac and d’Antragues my captains, and M. Livarot, my lieutenant of the guards, take your places.”

Each of those named took the posts which, at a real coronation, etiquette would have assigned to them. Meanwhile, the cardinal had passed behind the altar to put on his pontifical robes; soon he reappeared with the holy vial. Then the lad brought to him a Bible and a cross. The cardinal put the cross on the book and extended them towards the Duc d’Anjou, who put his hand on them, and said,--

“In the presence of God, I promise to my people to maintain and honor our holy religion as a Christian king should. And may God and His saints aid me!”

Then the Duc de Guise laid the sword before the altar, and the cardinal blessed it and gave it to the prince.

“Sire,” said he, “take this sword, which is given to you with the blessing of God, that you may resist your enemies, and protect and defend the holy Church, which is confided to you. Take this sword that, with it, you may exercise justice, protect the widow and the orphan, repair disorders, so that, covering yourself with glory by all the virtues, you will be a blessing to your people.”

Then the prince returned the sword to the Duc de Guise, and knelt down. The cardinal opened the gold box, and, with the point of a golden needle, drew out some holy oil; he then said two prayers, and taking the oil on his finger, traced with it a cross on the head of the prince, saying, “Ungo dein regem de oleo sanctificato, in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti.”

The lad wiped off the oil with an embroidered handkerchief. Then the cardinal took the crown, and, holding it over the head of the prince, said, “God crown thee with the crown of glory and justice.” Then, placing it, "Receive this crown, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

All brandished their swords and cried, "Long live François III."

"Sire," said the cardinal, "you reign henceforth over France."

"Gentlemen," said the prince, "I shall never forget the names of the thirty gentlemen who first judged me worthy to reign over them; and now adieu, and may God have you in His holy keeping."

The Duc de Mayenne led away the new king, while the other two brothers exchanged an ironical smile.

CHAPTER XXI.

HOW CHICOT LEARNED GENEALOGY.

When the Duc d’Anjou was gone, and had been followed by all the others, the three Guises entered the vestry. Chicot, thinking of course this was the end, got up to stretch his limbs, and then, as it was nearly two o’clock, once more disposed himself to sleep.

But to his great astonishment, the three brothers almost immediately came back again, only this time without their frocks. On seeing them appear, the lad burst into so hearty a fit of laughing, that Chicot could hardly help laughing also.

“Do not laugh so loud, sister,” said the Duc de Mayenne, “they are hardly gone out, and might hear you.”

As he spoke, the seeming lad threw back his hood, and displayed a head as charming and intelligent as wan ever painted by Leonardo da Vinci. Black eyes, full of fun, but which could assume an expression almost terrible in its seriousness, a little rosy month, and a round chin terminating the perfect oval of a rather pale face. It was Madame de Montpensier, a dangerous syren, who had the soul of a demon with the face of an angel.

“Ah, brother cardinal,” cried she, “how well you acted the holy man! I was really afraid for a minute that you were serious; and he letting himself be greased and crowned. Oh, how horrid he looked with his crown on!”

“Never mind,” said the duke, “we have got what we wanted, and François cannot now deny his share. Monsoreau, who doubtless had his own reasons for it, led the thing on well, and now he cannot abandon us, as he did La Mole and Coconnas.”

Chicot saw that they had been laughing at M. d’Anjou, and as he detested him, would willingly have embraced them for it, always excepting M. de Mayenne, and giving his share to his sister.

“Let us return to business,” said the cardinal, “is all well closed?”

“Oh, yes!” said the duchess, “but if you like I will go and see.”

“Oh, no; you must be tired.”

“No; it was too amusing.”

"Mayenne, you say he is here?"

"Yes."

"I did not see him."

"No, he is hidden in a confessional."

These words startled Chicot fearfully.

"Then he has heard and seen all?" asked the duke.

"Never mind, he is one of us."

"Bring him here, Mayenne."

Mayenne descended the staircase and came straight to where Chicot was hiding. He was brave, but now his teeth chattered with terror. "Ah," thought he, trying to get out his sword from under his monk's frock, "at least I will kill him first!" The duke had already extended his hand to open the door, when Chicot heard the duchess say:

"Not there, Mayenne; in that confessional to the left."

"It was time," thought Chicot, as the duke turned away, "but who the devil can the other be?"

"Come out, M. David," said Mayenne, "we are alone."

"Here I am, monseigneur," said he, coming out.

"You have heard all?" asked the Duc de Guise.

"I have not lost a word, monseigneur."

"Then you can report it to the envoy of his Holiness Gregory XIII.?"

"Everything."

"Now, Mayenne tells me you have done wonders for us; let us see."

"I have done what I promised, monseigneur; that is to say, found a method of seating you, without opposition, on the throne of France!"

"They also!" thought Chicot; "everyone wants then to be King of France!"

Chicot was gay now, for he felt safe once more, and he had discovered a conspiracy by which he hoped to ruin his two enemies.

"To gain a legitimate right is everything," continued Nicolas David, "and I have discovered that you are the true heirs, and the Valois only a usurping branch."

"It is difficult to believe," said the duke, "that our house, however illustrious it may be, comes before the Valois."

"It is nevertheless proved, monseigneur," said David, drawing out a parchment. The duke took it.

"What is this?" said he.

"The genealogical tree of the house of Lorraine."

"Of which the root is?"

"Charlemagne, monseigneur."

"Charlemagne!" cried the three brothers, with an air of incredulous satisfaction, "Impossible!"

"Wait, monseigneur; you may be sure I have not raised a point to which any one may give the lie. What you want is a long lawsuit, during which you can gain over, not the people, they are yours, but the parliament. See, then, monseigneur, here it is. Ranier, first Duc de Lorraine, contemporary with Charlemagne;--Guibert, his son;--Henri, son of Guibert----"

"But----" said the duke.

"A little patience, monseigneur. Bonne----"

"Yes," said the duke, "daughter of Ricin, second son of Ranier."

"Good; to whom married?"

"Bonne?"

"Yes."

"To Charles of Lorraine, son of Louis IV., King of France."

"Just so. Now add, 'brother of Lothaire, despoiled of the crown of France by the usurper, Hugh Capet.'"

"Oh! oh!" said the duke and the cardinal.

"Now, Charles of Lorraine inherited from his brother Lothaire. Now, the race of Lothaire is extinct, therefore you are the only true heirs of the throne."

"What do you say to that, brother?" cried the cardinal.

"I say, that unluckily there exists in France a law they call the Salic law, which destroys all our pretensions."

"I expected that objection, monseigneur," said David, but what is the first example of the Salic law?"

"The accession of Philippe de Valois, to the prejudice of Edward of England."

"What was the date of that accession?"

"1328," said the cardinal.

"That is to say, 341 years after the usurpation of Hugh Capet, 240 years after the extinction of the race of Lothaire. Then, for 240 years your ancestors had already had a right to the throne before the Salic law was invented. Now, everyone knows that the law cannot have any retrospective effect."

“You are a clever man, M. David,” said the Duc de Guise.

“It is very ingenious,” said the cardinal.

“It is very fine,” said Mayenne.

“It is admirable,” said the duchess; “then I am a princess royal. I will have no one less than the Emperor of Germany for a husband.”

“Well; here are your 200 gold crowns which I promised you.”

“And here are 200 others,” said the cardinal, “for the new mission with which we are about to charge you.”

“Speak, monseigneur, I am ready.”

“We cannot commission you to carry this genealogy yourself to our holy Father, Gregory XIII.”

“Alas! no; my will is good, but I am of too poor birth.”

“Yes, it is a misfortune. We must therefore send Pierre de Gondy on this mission.”

“Permit me to speak,” said the duchess. “The Gondys are clever, no doubt, but ambitious, and not to be trusted.”

“Oh! reassure yourself. Gondy shall take this, but mixed with other papers, and not knowing what he carries. The Pope will approve, or disapprove, silently, and Gondy will bring us back the answer, still in ignorance of what he brings. You, Nicolas David, shall wait for him at Chalons, Lyons, or Avignon, according to your instructions. Thus you alone will know our true secret.”

Then the three brothers shook hands, embraced their sister, put on again their monk’s robes, and disappeared. Behind them the porter drew the bolts, and then came in and extinguished the lights, and Chicot heard his retreating steps fainter and fainter, and all was silent.

“It seems now all is really over,” thought Chicot, and he came out of the confessional. He had noticed in a corner a ladder destined to clean the windows. He felt about until he found it, for it was close to him, and by the light of the moon placed it against the window. He easily opened it, and striding across it and drawing the ladder to him with that force and address which either fear or joy always gives, he drew it from the inside to the outside. When he had descended, he hid the ladder in a hedge, which was planted at the bottom of the wall, jumped from tomb to tomb, until he reached the outside wall over which he clambered. Once in the street he breathed more freely; he had escaped with a few scratches from the place where he had several times felt his life in danger. He went straight to the

Corne d’Abondance, at which he knocked. It was opened by Claude Boutromet himself, who knew him at once, although he went out dressed as a cavalier, and returned attired as a monk.

“Ah! is it you?” cried he.

Chicot gave him a crown, and asked for Gorenflot.

The host smiled, and said, “Look!”

Brother Gorenflot lay snoring just in the place where Chicot had left him.

CHAPTER XXII.

HOW M. AND MADAME DE ST. LUC MET WITH A TRAVELING COMPANION.

The next morning, about the time when Gorenflot woke from his nap, warmly rolled in his frock, our reader, if he had been traveling on the road from Paris to Angers, might have seen a gentleman and his page, riding quietly side by side. These cavaliers had arrived at Chartres the evening before, with foaming horses, one of which had fallen with fatigue, as they stopped. They entered the inn, and half an hour after set out on fresh horses. Once in the country, still bare and cold, the taller of the two approached the other, and said, as he opened his arms: “Dear little wife, embrace me, for now we are safe.”

Then Madame de St. Luc, leaning forward and opening her thick cloak, placed her arms round the young man’s neck and gave him the long and tender kiss which he had asked for. They stayed the night in the little village of Courville four leagues only from Chartres, but which from its isolation seemed to them a secure retreat; and it was on the following morning that they were, as we said, pursuing their way. This day, as they were more easy in their minds, they traveled no longer like fugitives, but like schoolboys seeking for moss, for the first few early flowers, enjoying the sunshine and amused at everything.”

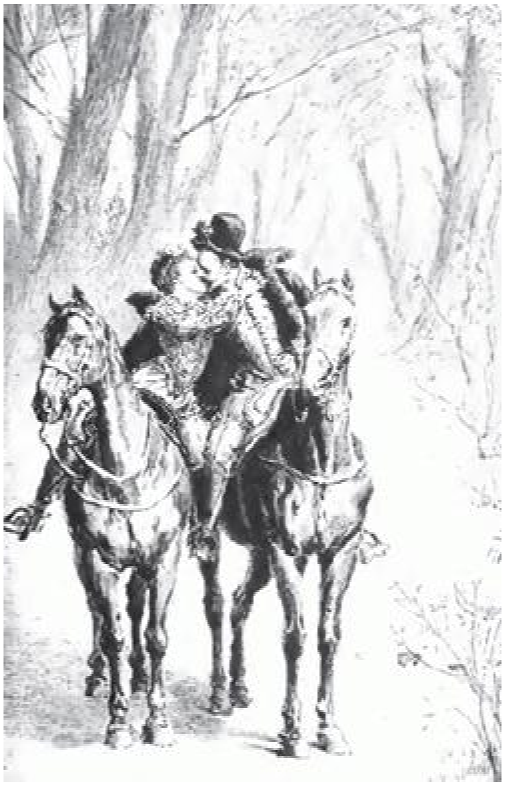

"Morbleu!" cried St. Luc, at last, "how delightful it is to be free. Have you ever been free, Jeanne?"

"I?" cried she, laughing, "never; it is the first time I ever felt so. My father was suspicious, and my mother lazy. I never went out without a governess and two lackeys, so that I do not remember having run on the grass, since, when a laughing child, I ran in the woods of Méridor with my dear Diana, challenging her to race, and rushing through the branches. But you, dear St. Luc; you were free, at least?"

"I, free?"

"Doubtless, a man."

"Never. Brought up with the Duc d'Anjou, taken by him to Poland, brought back to Paris, condemned never to leave him by the perpetual rule of etiquette; pursued, if I tried to go away, by that doleful voice, crying, 'St. Luc, my friend, I am ennuyé, come and amuse me.' Free, with that stiff corset which strangled me, and that great ruff which scratched my neck! No, I have never been free till now, and I enjoy it."

"If they should catch us, and send us to the Bastile?"

"If they only put us there together, we can bear it."

"I do not think they would. But there is no fear, if you only knew Méridor, its great oaks, and its endless thickets, its rivers, its lakes, its flower-beds and lawns; and, then, in the midst of all, the queen of this kingdom, the beautiful, the good Diana. And I know she loves me still; she is not capricious in her friendships. Think of the happy life we shall lead there."

"Let us push on; I am in haste to get there," and they rode on, stayed the night at Mans, and then set off for Méridor. They had already reached the woods and thought themselves in safety, when they saw behind them a cavalier advancing at a rapid pace. St. Luc grew pale.

"Let us fly," said Jeanne.

"Yes; let us fly, for there is a plume on that hat which disquiets me; it is of a color much in vogue at the court, and he looks to me like an ambassador from our royal master."

But to fly was easier to say than to do; the trees grew so thickly that it was impossible to ride through them but slowly, and the soil was so sandy that the horses sank into it at every step. The cavalier gained upon them rapidly, and soon they heard his voice crying,--

"Eh, monsieur, do not run away; I bring you something you have lost."

"What does he say?" asked Jeanne.

"He says we have lost something."

"Eh! monsieur," cried the unknown, again, "you left a bracelet in the hotel at Courville. Diable! a lady's portrait; above all, that of Madame de Cossé. For the sake of that dear mamma, do not run away."

"I know that voice," said St. Luc.

"And then he speaks of my mother."

"It is Bussy!"

"The Comte de Bussy, our friend," and they reined up their horses.

"Good morning, madame," said Bussy, laughing, and giving her the bracelet.

"Have you come from the king to arrest us?"

"No, ma foi, I am not sufficiently his majesty's friend for such a mission. No, I found your bracelet at the hotel, which showed me that you preceded me on my way."

"Then," said St. Luc, "it is chance which brings you on our path."

"Chance, or rather Providence."

Every remaining shadow of suspicion vanished before the sincere smile and bright eyes of the handsome speaker.

"Then you are traveling?" asked Jeanne.

"I am."

"But not like us?"

"Unhappily; no."

"I mean in disgrace. Where are you going?"

"Towards Angers, and you?"

"We also."

"Ah! I should envy your happiness if envy were not so vile."

"Eh! M. de Bussy, marry, and you will be as happy as we are," said Jeanne; "it is so easy to be happy when you are loved."

"Ah! madame, everyone is not so fortunate as you."

"But you, the universal favorite."

"To be loved by everyone is as though you were loved by no one, madame."

"Well, let me marry you, and you will know the happiness you deny."

"I do not deny the happiness, only that it does not exist for me."

"Shall I marry you?"

"If you marry me according to your taste, no; if according to mine, yes."

"Are you in love with a woman whom you cannot marry?"

"Comte," said Bussy, "beg your wife not to plunge dagger in my heart."

"Take care, Bussy; you will make me think it is with her you are in love."

"If it were so, you will confess, at least, that I am a lover not much to be feared."

"True," said St. Luc, remembering how Bussy had brought him his wife. "But confess, your heart is occupied."

"I avow it."

"By a love, or by a caprice?" asked Jeanne.

"By a passion, madame."

"I will cure you."

"I do not believe it."

"I will marry you."

"I doubt it."

"And I will make you as happy as you ought to be."

"Alas! madame, my only happiness now is to be unhappy."

"I am very determined."

"And I also."

"Well, will you accompany us?"

"Where are you going?"

“To the château of Méridor.”

The blood mounted to the cheeks of Bussy, and then he grew so pale, that his secret would certainly have been betrayed, had not Jeanne been looking at her husband with a smile. Bussy therefore had time to recover himself, and said,--

“Where is that?”

“It is the property of one of my best friends.”

“One of your best friends, and--are they at home?”

“Doubtless,” said Jeanne, who was completely ignorant of the events of the last two months; “but have you never heard of the Baron de Méridor, one of the richest noblemen in France, and of----”

“Of what?”

“Of his daughter, Diana, the most beautiful girl possible?”

Bussy was filled with astonishment, asking himself by what singular happiness he found on the road people to talk to him of Diana de Méridor to echo the only thought which he had in his mind.

“Is this castle far off, madame?” asked he.

“About seven leagues, and we shall sleep there to-night; you will come, will you not?”

“Yes, madame.”

“Come, that is already a step towards the happiness I promised you.”

“And the baron, what sort of a man is he?”

“A perfect gentleman, a preux chevalier, who, had he lived in King Arthur’s time, would have had a place at his round table.”

“And,” said Bussy, steadying his voice, “to whom is his daughter married?”

“Diana married?”

“Would that be extraordinary?”

“Of course not, only I should have been the first to hear of it.”

Bussy could not repress a sigh. “Then,” said he, “you expect to find Mademoiselle de Méridor at the château with her father?”

“We trust so.”

They rode on a long time in silence, and at last Jeanne cried:

“Ah! there are the turrets of the castle. Look, M. de Bussy, through that great leafless wood, which in a month, will be so beautiful; do you not see the roof?”

“Yes,” said Bussy, with an emotion which astonished himself; “and is that the château of Méridor?”

And he thought of the poor prisoner shut up in the Rue St. Antoine.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE OLD MAN.

Two hours after they reached the castle. Bussy had been debating within himself whether or not to confide to his friends what he knew about Diana. But there was much that he could tell to no one, and he feared their questions, and besides, he wished to enter Méridor as a stranger.

Madame de St. Luc was surprised, when the report sounded his horn to announce a visit, that Diana did not run as usual to meet them, but instead of her appeared an old man, bent and leaning on a stick, and his white hair flying in the wind. He crossed the drawbridge, followed by two great dogs, and when he drew quite near, said in a feeble voice,--

“Who is there, and who does a poor old man the honor to visit him?”

“It is I, Seigneur Augustin!” cried the laughing voice of the young woman.

But the baron, raising his head slowly, said, “You? I do not see. Who is it?”

“Oh, mon Dieu!” cried Jeanne, “do you not know me? It is true, my disguise----”

“Excuse me,” said the old man, “but I can see little; the eyes of old men are not made for weeping, and if they weep too much, the tears burn them.”

“Must I tell you my name? I am Madame de St. Luc.”

“I do not know you.”

“Ah! but my maiden name was Jeanne de Cosse-Brissac.”

“Ah, mon Dieu!” cried the old man, trying to open the gate with his trembling hands. Jeanne, who did not understand this strange reception, still attributed it only to his declining faculties; but, seeing that he remembered her, jumped off her horse to embrace him, but as she did so she felt his cheek wet with tears.

“Come,” said the old man, turning towards the house, without even noticing the others. The château had a strange sad look; all the blinds were down, and no one was visible.

"Is Diana unfortunately not at home?" asked Jeanne. The old man stopped, and looked at her with an almost terrified expression. "Diana!" said he. At this name the two dogs uttered a mournful howl. "Diana!" repeated the old man; "do you not, then, know?"

And his voice, trembling before, was extinguished in a sob.

"But what has happened?" cried Jeanne, clasping her hands.

"Diana is dead!" cried the old man, with a torrent of tears.

"Dead!" cried Jeanne, growing as pale as death.

"Dead," thought Bussy; "then he has let him also think her dead. Poor old man! how he will bless me some day!"

"Dead!" cried the old man again; "they killed her."

"Ah, my dear baron!" cried Jeanne, bursting into tears, and throwing her arms round the old man's neck.

"But," said he at last, "though desolate and empty, the old house is none the less hospitable. Enter."

Jeanne took the old man's arm, and they went into the dining-hall, where he sunk into his armchair. At last, he said, "You said you were married; which is your husband?"

M. de St. Luc advanced and bowed to the old man, who tried to smile as he saluted him; then, turning to Bussy, said, "And this gentleman?"

"He is our friend, M. Louis de Clermont, Comte de Bussy d'Amboise, gentleman of M. le Duc d'Anjou."

At these words the old man started up, threw a withering glance at Bussy, and then sank back with a groan.

"What is it?" said Jeanne.

"Does the baron know you, M. de Bussy?" asked St. Luc.

"It is the first time I ever had the honor of seeing M. de Méridor," said Bussy, who alone understood the effect which the name of the Duc d'Anjou had produced on the old man.

"Ah! you a gentleman of the Duc d'Anjou!" cried the baron, "of that monster, that demon, and you dare to avow it, and have the audacity to present yourself here!"

"Is he mad?" asked St. Luc of his wife.

"Grief must have turned his brain," replied she, in terror.

"Yes, that monster!" cried he again; "the assassin who killed my child! Ah, you do not know," continued he, taking Jeanne's hands; "but the duke killed my Diana, my child--he killed her!"

Tears stood in Bussy’s eyes, and Jeanne said:

“Seigneur, were it so, which I do not understand, you cannot accuse M. de Bussy of this dreadful crime--he, who is the most noble and generous gentleman living. See, my good father, he weeps with us. Would he have come had he known how you would receive him? Ah, dear baron, tell us how this catastrophe happened.”

“Then you did not know?” said the old man to Bussy.

“Eh, mon Dieu! no,” cried Jeanne, “we none of us knew.”

“My Diana is dead, and her best friend did not know it! Oh, it is true! I wrote to no one; it seemed to me that everything must die with her. Well, this prince, this disgrace to France, saw my Diana, and, finding her so beautiful, had her carried away to his castle of Beaugé to dishonor her. But Diana, my noble and sainted Diana, chose death instead. She threw herself from the window into the lake, and they found nothing but her veil floating on the surface.” And the old man finished with a burst of sobs which overwhelmed them all.

“Oh, comte,” cried St. Luc, “you must abandon this infamous prince; a noble heart like yours cannot remain friendly to a ravisher and an assassin!”

But Bussy instead of replying to this, advanced to M. de Méridor.

“M. le Baron,” said he, “will you grant me the honor of a private interview?”

“Listen to M. de Bussy, dear seigneur,” said Jeanne; “you will see that he is good and may help you.”

“Speak, monsieur,” said the baron, trembling.

Bussy turned to St. Luc and his wife, and said:

“Will you permit me?”

The young couple went out, and then Bussy said: “M. le Baron, you have accused the prince whom I serve in terms which force me to ask for an explanation. Do not mistake the sense in which I speak; it is with the most profound sympathy, and the most earnest desire to soften your griefs, that I beg of you to recount to me the details of this dreadful event. Are you sure all hope is lost?”

“Monsieur, I had once a moment’s hope. A noble gentleman, M. de Monsoreau, loved my poor daughter, and interested himself for her.”

“M. de Monsoreau! Well, what was his conduct in all this!”

“Ah, generous; for Diana had refused his hand. He was the first to tell me of the infamous projects of the duke; he showed me how to baffle them, only asking, if he succeeded, for her hand. I gave my consent with joy; but alas! it was useless--he arrived too late--my poor Diana had saved herself by death!”

“And since then, what have you heard of him?”

“It is a month ago, and the poor gentleman has not dared to appear before me, having failed in his generous design.”

“Well, monsieur,” said Bussy, “I am charged by the Duc d’Anjou to bring you to Paris, where his highness desires to speak to you.”

“I!” cried the baron, “I see this man! And what can the murderer have to say to me?”

“Who knows? To justify himself perhaps.”

“No, M. de Bussy, no, I will not go to Paris; it would be too far away from where my child lies in her cold bed.”

“M. le Baron,” said Bussy firmly, “I have come expressly to take you to Paris, and it is my duty to do so.”

“Well, I will go,” cried the old man, trembling with anger; “but woe to those who bring me. The king will hear me, or, if he will not, I will appeal to all the gentlemen of France. Yes, M. de Bussy, I will accompany you.”

“And I, M. le Baron,” said Bussy, taking his hand, “recommend to you the patience and calm dignity of a Christian nobleman. God is merciful to noble hearts, and you know not what He reserves for you. I beg you also, while waiting for that day, not to count me among your enemies, for you do not know what I will do for you. Till to-morrow, then, baron, and early in the morning we will set off.”

“I consent,” replied the old baron, moved by Bussy’s tone and words; “but meanwhile, friend or enemy, you are my guest, and I will show you to your room.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOW REMY-LE-HAUDOUIN HAD, IN BUSSY’S ABSENCE, ESTABLISHED A COMMUNICATION WITH THE RUE ST. ANTOINE.

M. and Madame de St. Luc could hardly recover from their surprise. Bussy, holding secret interviews with M. de Méridor, and then setting off with him for Paris, appearing to take the lead in a matter which at first seemed strange and unknown to him, was to the young people an inexplicable phenomenon. In the morning the baron took leave of his guests, begging them to remain in the castle. Before Bussy left, however, he whispered a few words to Madame de St. Luc, which brought the color to her cheeks, and smiles to her eyes.

It was a long way from Méridor to Paris, especially for the old baron, covered with wounds from all his battles, and for his old horse, whom he called Jarnac. Bussy studied earnestly during the journey to find his way to the heart of the old man by his care and attentions, and without doubt he succeeded, for on the sixth morning, as they arrived at Paris, M. de Méridor said:

“It is singular, count, but I feel less unquiet at the end than at the beginning of my journey.”

“Two hours more, M. le Baron, and you shall have judged me as I deserve.”

“Where are we going--to the Louvre?”

“Let me first take you to my hotel, that you may refresh yourself a little, and be fit to see the person to whom I am leading you.”

The count’s people had been very much alarmed at his long absence, for he had set off without telling any one but Rémy. Thus their delight on seeing him again was great, and they all crowded round him with joyous exclamations. He thanked them, and then said, “Now assist this gentleman to dismount, and remember that I look upon him with more respect than a prince.”

When M. de Méridor had been shown to his room, and had had some refreshment, he asked if they should set out.

“Soon, baron; and be easy--it will be a happiness for you as well as for us.”

“You speak in a language which I do not understand.”

Bussy smiled, and left the room to seek Rémy.

“Well! dear Hippocrates!” said he, “is there anything new?”

“Nothing; all goes well.”

“Then the husband has not returned?”

“Yes, he has, but without success. It seems there is a father who is expected to turn up to make the dénouement.”

“Good,” said Bussy, “but how do you know all this?”

“Why, monseigneur, as your absence made my position a sinecure, I thought I would try to make some little use of my time; so I took some books and a sword to a little room which I hired at the corner of the Rue St. Antoine, from whence I could see the house that you know.”

“Very good.”

“But as I feared, if I were constantly watching, to pass for a spy, I thought it better to fall in love.”

“In love?”

“Oh yes, desperately with Gertrude; she is a fine girl, only two inches taller than myself, and who recounts, capitally.”

“Recounts?”

“Yes; through her I know all that passes with her mistress. I thought you might not dislike to have communications with the house.”

“Rémy, you are a good genius, whom chance, or rather Providence, has placed in my way. Then you are received in the house?”

“Last night I made my entrance on the points of my toes, by the door you know.”

“And how did you manage it?”

“Quite naturally. The day after you left, I waited at my door till the lady of my thoughts came out to buy provisions, which she does every morning. She recognized me, uttered a cry, and ran away.”

“Then?”

“Then I ran after her, but could hardly catch her, for she runs fast; but still, petticoats are always a little in the way. ‘Mon Dieu!’ cried she. ‘Holy Virgin!’ said I. ‘The doctor!’ ‘The charming housekeeper.’ She smiled, but said, ‘You are mistaken, monsieur, I do not know you.’ ‘But I know you,’ I replied, ‘and for the last three days I have lived but for you, and I adore you so much, that I no longer live in the Rue Beautreillis, but at the corner of this street, and I changed my lodging only to see you pass in and out.’“

“So that now you are----”

“As happy as a lover can be--with Gertrude.”

“Does she suspect you come from me?”

“Oh no, how should the poor doctor know a great lord like M. de Bussy. No, I said, ‘And how is your young master?’ ‘What young master?’ ‘The one I cured.’ ‘He is not my master.’ ‘Oh! I thought, as he was in your mistress’s bed----’ ‘Oh! no, poor young man! we have only seen him once since.’ ‘Do you know his name?’ ‘Oh! yes; he is the Seigneur de Bussy.’ ‘What! the brave Bussy?’ ‘Yes himself.’ ‘And your mistress?’ ‘Oh! she is married!’ ‘Yes, but still she may think sometimes of a handsome young man when she has seen him lying wounded in her bed.’ ‘Oh, to be frank, I do not say she does not think of him; we talk of him very often.’ ‘What do you say about him?’ I asked. ‘I recount all I hear about his prowess, and I have even taught her a little song about him, which she sings constantly.’“ Bussy pressed the young man’s hand; he felt supremely happy.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

On descending into the court, M. de Méridor found a fresh horse, which Bussy had had prepared for him; another waited for Bussy, and attended by Rémy, they started. As they went along, the baron could not but ask himself by what strange confidence he had accompanied, almost blindly, the friend of the prince to whom he owed all his misfortunes. Would it not have been better to have braved the Duc d'Anjou, and instead of following Bussy where it pleased him to lead, to have gone at once to the Louvre, and thrown himself at the feet of the king? What could the prince say to him? How could he console him? Could soft words heal his wound?

When they stopped, "What," said the baron, "does the Duc d'Anjou live in this humble house?"

"Not exactly, monsieur, but if it is not his dwelling, it is that of a lady whom he has loved."

A cloud passed over the face of the old gentleman. "Monsieur," said he, "we provincials are not used to the easy manners of Paris; they annoy us. It seems to me that if the Duc d'Anjou wishes to see the Baron de Méridor, it ought to be at his palace, and not at the house of one of his mistresses."

"Come, come, baron!" said Bussy, with his smile, which always carried conviction with it, "do not hazard false conjectures. On my honor, the lady who you are going to see is perfectly virtuous and worthy in all respects."

"Who is she then?"

"She is the wife of a friend of yours."

"Really! but then, monsieur, why did you say the duke loved her?"

"Because I always speak truth. But enter, and you shall see accomplished all I have promised you."

"Take care; I wept for my child, and you said, 'Console yourself, monsieur, the mercy of God is great;' to promise me a consolation to my grief was almost to promise me a miracle."

"Enter, monsieur," said Bussy, with his bright smile. Bussy went in first, and, running up to Gertrude, said, "Go and tell Madame de Monsoreau that

M. de Bussy is here, and desires to speak to her. But," continued he, in a low voice, "not a word of the person who accompanies me."

"Madame de Monsoreau!" said the old man in astonishment. But as he feebly mounted the staircase, he heard the voice of Diana crying,--

"M. de Bussy. Gertrude? Oh! let him come in!"

"That voice!" cried the baron, stopping. "Oh! mon Dieu! mon Dieu!"

At that moment, as the baron tremblingly held on to the banister, and looked around him, he saw at the top of the staircase, Diana, smiling, and more beautiful that ever. At this sight the old man uttered a cry and would have fallen, had he not caught hold of Bussy, who stood by him.

"Diana alive! Diana, oh, my God!"

"Mon Dieu! M. de Bussy!" cried Diana, running down, "what is the matter with my father?"

"He thought you dead, madame, and he wept, as a father must weep for a daughter like you."

"How!" cried Diana; "and no one undeceived him?"

"No one."

"No," cried the old man, recovering a little, "no one, not even M. de Bussy."

"Ungrateful," said Bussy.

"Oh! yes! you are right; for this moment repays me for all my griefs. Oh! my Diana! my beloved Diana!" cried he, drawing his daughter to him with one hand, and extending the other to Bussy. But all at once he cried, "But you said I was to see Madame de Monsoreau. Where is she?"

"Alas! my father!" cried Diana.

Bussy summoned up all his strength. "M. de Monsoreau is your son-in-law," he said.

"What! my son-in-law! and every one--even you, Diana--left me in ignorance."

"I feared to write, my father; he said my letters would fall into the hands of the prince. Besides, I thought you knew all."

"But why all these strange mysteries?"

"Ah, yes, my father; why did M. de Monsoreau let you think me dead, and not let you know I was his wife?"

The baron, overwhelmed, looked from Bussy to Diana.

"M. de Monsoreau my son-in-law!" stammered he.

"That cannot astonish you, father; did you not order me to marry him?"

"Yes, if he saved you."

"Well! he did save me," said Diana, sinking on to a chair, "not from misfortune, but from shame."

"Then why did he let me think you dead? I, who wept for you so bitterly. Why did he let me die of despair, when a single word would have restored me?"

"Oh! there is some hidden mystery," cried Diana; "my father, you will not leave me again; M. de Bussy, you will protect us."

"Alas! madame! it belongs to me no more to enter into your family secrets. Seeing the strange maneuvers of your husband, I wished to bring you a defender; you have your father, I retire."

"He is right," said the old man, sadly.

"M. de Monsoreau feared the Duc d'Anjou, and so does M. de Bussy."

Diana cast a glance at the young man. He smiled and said, "M. le Baron, excuse, I beg, the singular question I am about to ask; and you also, madame, for I wish to serve you. M. le Baron, ask Madame de Monsoreau if she be happy in the marriage which she has contracted in obedience to your orders."

Diana burst into tears for her only answer. The eyes of the baron filled also, for he began to fear that his friendship for M. de Monsoreau had tended to make his daughter unhappy.

"Now!" said Bussy, "is it true that you voluntarily promised him your daughter's hand?"

"Yes, if he saved her."

"And he did save her. Then, monsieur, I need not ask if you mean to keep your promise."

"It is a law for all, and above all for gentlemen; you know that, M. de Bussy. My daughter must be his."

"Ah!" cried Diana, "would I were dead!"

"Madame," said Bussy, "you see I was right, and that I can do no more here. M. le Baron gives you to M. de Monsoreau, and you yourself promised to marry him when you should see your father again safe and well."

"Ah! you tear my heart, M. de Bussy," cried Diana, approaching the young man; "my father does not know that I fear this man, that I hate him; my father sees in him only my saviour, and I think him my murderer."

"Diana! Diana!" cried the baron, "he saved you."

“Yes,” cried Bussy, “but if the danger were less great than you thought; what do we know? There is some mystery in all this, which I must clear up. But I protest to you, that if I had had the happiness to be in the place of M. de Monsoreau, I would have saved your young and beautiful daughter without exacting a price for it.”

“He loved her,” said M. de Méridor, trying to excuse him.

“And I, then----” cried Bussy; and, although he stopped, frightened at what he was about to say, Diana heard and understood.

“Well!” cried she, reddening, “my brother, my friend, can you do nothing for me?”

“But the Duc d’Anjou,” said the baron.

“I am not aware of those who fear the anger of princes,” said Bussy; “and, besides, I believe the danger lies not with him, but with M. de Monsoreau.”

“But if the duke learns that Diana is alive, all is lost.”

“I see,” said Bussy, “you believe M. de Monsoreau more than me. Say no more; you refuse my aid; throw yourself, then, into the arms of the man who has already so well merited your confidence. Adieu, baron; adieu, madame, you will see me no more.”

“Oh!” cried Diana, taking his hand. “Have you seen me waver for an instant; have you ever seen me soften towards him? No. I beg you, on my knees, M. de Bussy, not to abandon me.”

Bussy seized her hands, and all his anger melted away like snow before the sun.

“Then so be it, madame,” said he; “I accept the mission, and in three days--for I must have time to go to Chartres to the prince--you shall see me again.” Then, in a low tone to her, he said, “We are allied against this Monsoreau; remember that it was not he who brought you back to your father, and be faithful to me.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

HOW BROTHER GORENFLOT AWOKE, AND THE RECEPTION HE MET WITH AT HIS CONVENT.

Chicot, after seeing with pleasure that Gorenflot still slept soundly, told M. Boutromet to retire and to take the light with him, charging him not to say anything of his absence. Now M. Boutromet, having remarked that, in all transactions between the monk and Chicot, it was the latter who paid, had a great deal of consideration for him, and promised all he wished. Then, by the light of the fire which still smouldered, he wrapped Gorenflot once more in his frock, which he accomplished without eliciting any other signs of wakefulness than a few grunts, and afterwards making a pillow of the table-cloth and napkins, lay down to sleep by his side. Daylight, when it came, succeeded in at last awakening Gorenflot, who sat up, and began to look about him, at the remains of their last night’s repast, and at Chicot, who, although also awake, lay pretending to snore, while, in reality, he watched.

“Broad daylight!” said the monk. “Corbleu, I must have passed the night here. And the abbey! Oh, dear! How happy he is to sleep thus!” cried he, looking at Chicot. “Ah! he is not in my position,” and he sighed. “Shall I wake him to ask for advice? No, no, he will laugh at me; I can surely invent a falsehood without him. But whatever I invent, it will be hard to escape punishment. It is not so much the imprisonment, it is the bread and water I mind. Ah! if! had but some money to bribe the brother jailer.”

Chicot, hearing this, adroitly slipped his purse from his pocket and put it under him. This precaution was not useless, for Gorenflot, who had been looking about him, now approached his friend softly, and murmuring:

“Were he awake, he would not refuse me a crown, but his sleep is sacred, and I will take it,” advanced, and began feeling his pockets. “It is singular,” said he, “nothing in his pockets. Ah! in his hat, perhaps.”

While he searched there Chicot adroitly emptied out his money, and stuffed the empty purse into his breeches pocket.

"Nothing in the hat," said the monk. "Ah! I forgot," and thrusting in his hand, he drew from the pocket the empty purse. "Mon Dieu," cried he, "empty! and who will pay the bill?"

This thought terrified him so much that he got up and made instantly for the door, through which he quickly disappeared. As he approached the convent, his fears grew strong, and seeing a concourse of monks standing talking on the threshold, he felt inclined to fly. But some of them approached to meet him; he knew flight was hopeless, and resigned himself. The monks seemed at first to hesitate to speak to him, but at last one said:

"Poor dear brother!"

Gorenflot sighed, and raised his eyes to Heaven.

"You know the prior waits for you?"

"Ah! mon Dieu!"

"Oh! yes; he ordered that you should be brought to him as soon as you came in."

"I feared it," said Gorenflot. And more dead than alive, he entered the convent, whose doors closed on him. They led him to the prior. Gorenflot did not dare to raise his eyes, finding himself alone with his justly irritated superior.

"Ah! it is you at last," said the abbé.

"Reverend sir----"

"What anxiety you have given me."

"You are too good, my father," said Gorenflot, astonished at this indulgent tone.

"You feared to come in after the scene of last night?"

"I confess it."

"Ah, dear brother, you have been very imprudent."

"Let me explain, father."

"There is no need of explanations; your sally----"

"Oh! so much the better," thought Gorenflot.

"I understand it perfectly. A moment of enthusiasm carried you away; enthusiasm is a holy virtue, but virtues, exaggerated become almost vices, and the most honorable sentiments, when carried to excess, are reprehensible."

"Pardon, my father," said Gorenflot, timidly, "but I do not understand. Of what sally do you speak?"

"Of yours last night."

“Out of the convent?”

“No; in it. I am as good a Catholic as you, but your audacity frightened me.”

Gorenflot was puzzled. “Was I audacious?” asked he.

“More than that--rash.”

“Alas! you must pardon me, my father. I will endeavor to correct myself.”

“Yes; but meanwhile, I fear the consequences for you and for all of us. Had it passed among ourselves, it would have been nothing.”

“How, is it known to others?”

“Doubtless; you know well there were more than a hundred laymen listening to your discourse.”

“My discourse!” said Gorenflot, more and more astonished.

“I allow it was fine, and that the universal applause must have carried you on, but to propose to make a procession through the streets of Paris, with a helmet on your head and a partisan on your shoulder, appealing to all good Catholics, was rather too strong, you will allow.” Gorenflot looked bewildered.

“Now,” continued the prior, “this religious fervor, which burns so strongly in your heart, will injure you in Paris. I wish you therefore to go and expend it in the provinces.”

“An exile!” cried Gorenflot.

“If you remain here, much worse may happen to you, my dear brother.”

“What?”

“Perpetual imprisonment, or even death.”

Gorenflot grew frightfully pale; he could not understand how he had incurred all this by getting tipsy in an inn, and passing the night out of the convent.

“By submitting to this temporary exile, my dear brother, not only will you escape this danger, but you will plant the banner of our faith in the provinces, where such words are less dangerous than here, under the eyes of the king. Set off at once, then, brother; perhaps the archers are already out to arrest you.”

“The archers, I!” said Gorenflot.

“I advise you to go at once.”

“It is easy to say ‘go,’ but how am I to live?”

“Oh! nothing more easy. You will find plenty of partisans who will let you want for nothing. But go, in Heaven’s name, and do not come back till you are sent for.” And the prior, after embracing him, pushed him to the door. There he found all the community waiting for him, to touch his hands or his robe.

“Adieu!” said one, embracing him, “you are a holy man; do not forget me in your prayers.”

“I, a holy man!” thought Gorenflot.

“Adieu, brave champion of the faith,” said another.

“Adieu, martyr,” said a third, “the light will soon come.”

Thus was he conducted to the outside of the convent, and as he went away he exclaimed, “Devil take me, but either they are all mad, or I am.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

HOW BROTHER GORENFLOT REMAINED CONVINCED THAT HE WAS A SOMNAMBULIST, AND BITTERLY DEPLORED THIS INFIRMITY.

Until the day when this unmerited persecution fell on Brother Gorenflot, he had led a contemplative and easy life, diverting himself on occasions at the Corne d'Abondance, when he had gained a little money from the faithful. He was one of those monks for whom the world began at the prior of the convent, and finished at the cook. And now he was sent forth to seek for adventures. He had no money; so that when out of Paris and he heard eleven o'clock (the time for dinner at the convent) strike, he sat down in dejection. His first idea was to return to the convent, and ask to be put in confinement, instead of being sent in to exile, and even to submit to the discipline, provided they would insure him his repasts. His next was more reasonable. He would go to the Corne d'Abondance, send for Chicot, explain to him the lamentable situation into which he had helped to bring him, and obtain aid from this generous friend. He was sitting absorbed in these reflections, when he heard the sound of a horse's feet approaching. In great fear, he hid behind a tree until the traveler should have passed; but a new idea struck him. He would endeavor to obtain some money for his dinner. So he approached tremblingly, and said, "Monsieur, if five patera, and five aves for the success of your projects would be agreeable to you----"

"Gorenflot!" cried the cavalier.

"M. Chicot!"

"Where the devil are you going?"

"I do not know. And you?"

"Oh! I am going straight before me."

"Very far?"

"Till I stop. But you--what are you doing outside the barriers?"

"Alas! M. Chicot! I am proscribed," said Gorenflot, with an enormous sigh.

“What?”

“Proscribed, I tell you. My brothers reject me from their bosom: I am anathematized, excommunicated.”

“Bah! what for?”

“Listen, M. Chicot; you will not believe me, perhaps, but I do not know.”

“Perhaps you were met last night gadding about.”

“Do not joke; you know quite well what I was doing last night.”

“Yes, from eight till ten, but not from ten till three.”

“How, from ten till three?”

“Yes, at ten you went out.”

“I?”

“Yes, and I asked you where you were going.”

“And what did I say?”

“That you were going to pronounce a discourse.”

“There was some truth in that,” murmured Gorenflot.

“Yes, and you even told me part of it; it was very long, and there were terrible things against the king in it.”

“Bah!”

“So terrible, that I should not wonder if you were arrested for them.”

“M. Chicot, you open my eyes; did I seem quite awake when I spoke?”

“I must say you seemed very strange; you looked like a man who talks in his sleep.”

“Yet, I feel sure I awoke this morning at the Corne d’Abondance.”

“Well, of course; you came in again at three o’clock. I know; you left the door open, and made me cold.”

“It is true, then?”

“True! ask M. Boutromet.”

“M. Boutromet?”

“Yes, he opened to you on your return. And you were so full of pride when you came in, that I said to you,--’Fie, compère; pride does not become mortals, more especially monks.’“

“And of what was I proud?”

“Of the success your discourse had met with, and the compliments paid to you by the Duc de Guise and M. de Mayenne.”

“Now I understand all.”

“That is lucky. Then you confess you went to the assembly; what did you call it? Oh! the Holy Union.”

Gorenflot groaned. “I am a somnambulist,” he said.

“What does that mean?”

“It means, that with me mind is stronger than matter; so that while the body sleeps, the spirit wakes, and sometimes is so powerful that it forces the body to obey.”

“Ah! compère, that sounds much like magic; if you are possessed, tell me so frankly; for, really a man who walks and makes discourses in his sleep in which he attacks the king is not natural. Vade retro, Satanas!”

“Then,” cried Gorenflot, “you abandon me also. Ah! I could not have believed that of you.”

Chicot took pity on him. “What did you tell me just now?” said he.

“I do not know; I feel half mad, and my stomach is empty.”

“You spoke of traveling.”

“Yes, the holy prior sends me.”

“Where to?”

“Wherever I like.”

“I also am traveling, and will take you with me.”

Gorenflot looked bewildered.

“Well! do you accept?” continued Chicot.

“Accept! I should think so. But have you money to travel with?”

“Look,” said Chicot, drawing out his purse.

Gorenflot jumped for joy.

“How much?” said he.

“One hundred and fifty pistoles.”

“And where are we going?”

“You shall see.”

“When shall we breakfast?”

“Immediately.”

“What shall I ride?”

“Not my horse; you would kill it.”

“Then what must I do?”

“Nothing more simple; I will buy you an ass.”

“You are my benefactor, M. Chicot. Let the ass be strong. Now, where do we breakfast?”

“Here; look over this door and read.”

Gorenflot looked up, and saw, “Here eggs, ham, eel-pies, and white wine may be had!” At this sight, Gorenflot’s whole face expanded with joy.

“Now,” said Chicot, “go and get your breakfast, while I go and look for an ass for you.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HOW BROTHER GORENFLOT TRAVELED UPON AN ASS, NAMED PANURGE, AND LEARNED MANY THINGS HE DID NOT KNOW BEFORE.

What made Chicot so indifferent to his own repast was, that he had already breakfasted plentifully. Therefore, he sat Gorenflot down to eggs and bacon, while he went among the peasants to look for an ass. He found a pacific creature, four years old, and something between an ass and a horse; gave twenty-two livres for it, and brought it to Gorenflot, who was enchanted at the sight of it, and christened it Panurge. Chicot, seeing by the look of the table that there would be no cruelty in staying his companion's repast, said,--

"Come, now we must go on; at Mélun we will lunch."

Gorenflot got up, merely saying, "At Mélun, at Mélun."

They went on for about four leagues, then Gorenflot lay down on the grass to sleep, while Chicot began to calculate.

"One hundred and twenty leagues, at ten leagues a day, would take twelve days." It was as much as he could reasonably expect from the combined forces of a monk and an ass. But Chicot shook his head. "It will not do," he said, "if he wants to follow me, he must do fifteen."

He pushed the monk to wake him, who, opening his eyes, said, "Are we at Mélun? I am hungry."

"Not yet, compère, and that is why I woke you; we must get on; we go too slow, ventre de biche!"

"Oh, no, dear M. Chicot; it is so fatiguing to go fast. Besides, there is no hurry: am I not traveling for the propagation of the faith, and you for pleasure? Well, the slower we go, the better the faith will be propagated, and the more you will amuse yourself. My advice is to stay some days at Mélun, where they make excellent eel-pies. What do you say, M. Chicot?"

"I say, that my opinion is to go as fast as possible; not to lunch at Mélun, but only to sup at Monterau, to make up for lost time."

Gorenflot looked at his companion as if he did not understand.

“Come, let us get on,” said Chicot.

The monk sat still and groaned.

“If you wish to stay behind and travel at your ease, you are welcome.”

“No, no!” cried Gorenflot, in terror; “no, no, M. Chicot; I love you too much to leave you!”

“Then to your saddle at once.”

Gorenflot got on his ass this time sideways, as a lady sits, saying it was more comfortable; but the fact was that, fearing they were to go faster, he wished to be able to hold on both by mane and tail.

Chicot began to trot, and the ass followed. The first moments were terrible for Gorenflot, but he managed to keep his seat. From time to time Chicot stood up in his stirrups and looked forward, then, not seeing what he looked for, redoubled his speed.

“What are you looking for, dear M. Chicot?”

“Nothing; but we are not getting on.”

“Not getting on! we are trotting all the way.”

“Gallop then!” and he began to canter.

Panurge again followed; Gorenflot was in agonies.

“Oh, M. Chicot!” said he, as soon as he could speak, “do you call this traveling for pleasure? It does not amuse me at all.”

“On! on!”

“It is dreadful!”

“Stay behind then!”

“Panurge can do no more; he is stopping.”

“Then adieu, compère!”

Gorenflot felt half inclined to reply in the same manner, but he remembered that the horse, whom he felt ready to curse, bore on his back a man with a hundred and fifty pistoles in his pocket, so he resigned himself, and beat his ass to make him gallop once more.

“I shall kill my poor Panurge!” cried he dolefully, thinking to move Chicot.

“Well, kill him,” said Chicot quietly, “and we will buy another.”

All at once Chicot, on arriving at the top of a hill, reined in his horse suddenly. But the ass, having once taken it into his head to gallop, was not so easily stopped, and Gorenflot was forced to let himself slide off and hang on to the donkey with all his weight before he could stop him.

“Ah, M. Chicot!” cried he, “what does it all mean? First we must gallop fit to break our necks, and then we must stop short here!”

Chicot had hidden himself behind a rock, and was eagerly watching three men who, about two hundred yards in advance, were traveling on quietly on their mules, and he did not reply.

“I am tired and hungry!” continued Gorenflot angrily.

“And so am I,” said Chicot; “and at the first hotel we come to we will order a couple of fricasseed chickens, some ham, and a jug of their best wine.”

“Really, is it true this time?”

“I promise you, compère.”

“Well, then, let us go and seek it. Come, Panurge, you shall have some dinner.”

Chicot remounted his horse, and Gorenflot led his ass. The much-desired inn soon appeared, but, to the surprise of Gorenflot, Chicot caused him to make a detour and pass round the back. At the front door were standing the three travelers.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HOW BROTHER GORENFLOT CHANGED HIS ASS FOR A MULE, AND HIS MULE FOR A HORSE.

However, Gorenflot's troubles were near their end for that day, for after the detour they went on a mile, and then stopped at a rival hotel. Chicot took a room which looked on to the high-road, and ordered supper. But even while he was eating he was constantly on the watch. However, at ten o'clock, as he had seen nothing, he went to bed, first, however, ordering that the horse and the ass should be ready at daybreak.

"At daybreak?" uttered Gorenflot, with a deep sigh.

"Yes; you must be used to getting up at that time."

"Why so?"

"For matins."

"I had an exemption from the superior." Chicot ordered Gorenflot's bed to be placed in his room. With daylight he was up and at the window, and before very long he saw three mules coming along. He ran to Gorenflot and shook him.

"Can I not have a moment's rest?" cried the monk, who had been sleeping for ten hours.

"Be quick; get up and dress, for we are going."

"But the breakfast?"

"Is on the road to Monterau."

"Where is Monterau?"

"It is the city where we breakfast, that is enough for you. Now, I am going down to pay the bill, and if you are not ready in five minutes, I go without you."

A monk's toilet takes not long; however, Gorenflot took six minutes, and when he came down Chicot was starting. This day passed much like the former one, and by the third, Gorenflot was beginning to get accustomed to it, when towards the evening, Chicot lost all his gaiety. Since noon he had seen nothing of the three travelers; therefore he was in a very bad humor. They were off at daybreak and galloped till noon, but all in vain; no mules were visible. Chicot stopped at a turnpike, and asked the man if he had seen three travelers pass on mules.

“Not to-day,” was the reply, “yesterday evening about seven.”

“What were they like?”

“They looked like a master and two servants!”

“It was them,” said Chicot; “ventre de biche! they have twelve hours’ start of me. But courage!”

“Listen, M. Chicot!” said Gorenflot, “my ass can do no more, even your horse is almost exhausted.” Chicot looked, and saw, indeed, that the poor animals were trembling from head to foot.

“Well! brother,” said he, “we must take a resolution. You must leave me.”

“Leave you; why?”

“You go too slow.”

“Slow! why, we have galloped for five hours this morning.”

“That is not enough.”

“Well, then, let us go on; the quicker we go, the sooner we shall arrive, for I suppose we shall stop at last.”

“But our animals are exhausted.”

“What shall we do then?”

“Leave them here, and take them as we come back.”

“Then how are we to proceed?”

“We will buy mules.”

“Very well,” said Gorenflot with a sigh. Two mules were soon found, and they went so well that in the evening Chicot saw with joy those of the three travelers, standing at the door of a farrier’s. But they were without harness, and both master and lackeys had disappeared. Chicot trembled. “Go,” said he, to Gorenflot, “and ask if those mules are for sale, and where their owners are.” Gorenflot went, and soon returned, saying that a gentleman had sold them, and had afterwards taken the road to Avignon.

“Alone?”

“No, with a lackey.”

“And where is the other lackey?”

“He went towards Lyons.”

“And how did they go on?”

“On horses which they bought.”

“Of whom?”

“Of a captain of troopers who was here, and they sold their mules to a dealer, who is trying to sell them again to those Franciscan monks whom you see there.”

“Well, take our two mules and go and offer them to the monks instead; they ought to give you the preference.”

“But, then, how shall we go on?”

“On horseback, morbleu.”

“Diable!”

“Oh! a good rider like you. You will find me again on the Grand Place.” Chicot was bargaining for some horses, when he saw the monk reappear, carrying the saddles and bridles of the mules.

“Oh! you have kept the harness?”

“Yes.”

“And sold the mules?”

“For ten pistoles each.”

“Which they paid you?”

“Here is the money.”

“Ventre de biche! you are a great man, let us go on.”

“But I am thirsty.”

“Well, drink while I saddle the beasts, but not too much.”

“A bottle.”

“Very well.”

Gorenflot drank two, and came to give the rest of the money back to Chicot, who felt half inclined to give it to him, but reflecting that if Gorenflot had money he would no longer be obedient, he refrained. They rode on, and the next evening Chicot came up with Nicolas David, still disguised as a lackey, and kept him in sight all the way to Lyons, whose gates they all three entered on the eighth day after their departure from Paris.

CHAPTER XXX.

HOW CHICOT AND HIS COMPANION INSTALLED THEMSELVES AT THE HOTEL OF THE CROSS, AND HOW THEY WERE RECEIVED BY THE HOST.

Chicot watched Nicolas David into the principal hotel of the place, and then said to Gorenflot, “Go in and bargain for a private room, say that you expect your brother, then come out and wait about for me, and I will come in when it is dark, and you can bring me straight to my room. Do you understand?”

“Perfectly.”

“Choose a good room, as near as possible to that of the traveler who has just arrived; it must look on to the street, and on no account pronounce my name.”

Gorenflot acquitted himself marvelously of the commission. Their room was only separated by a partition from that of Nicolas David.

“You deserve a recompense,” said Chicot to him, “and you shall have sherry wine for supper.”

“I never got tipsy on that wine; it would be agreeable.”

“You shall to-night. But now ramble about the town.”

“But the supper?”

“I shall be ready against your return; here is a crown meanwhile.”

Gorenflot went off quite happy, and then Chicot made, with a gimlet, a hole in the partition at about the height of his eye. Through this, he could hear distinctly all that passed, and he could just see the host talking to Nicolas David, who was professing to have been sent on a mission by the king, to whom he professed great fidelity. The host did not reply, but Chicot fancied he could see an ironical smile on his lip whenever the king’s name was mentioned.

“Is he a leaguer?” thought Chicot; “I will find out.”

When the host left David he came to visit Chicot, who said, “Pray sit down, monsieur; and before we make a definitive arrangement, listen to my history. You saw me this morning with a monk?”

"Yes, monsieur."

"Silence! that monk is proscribed."

"What! is he a disguised Huguenot?"

Chicot took an offended air. "Huguenot, indeed! he is my relation, and I have no Huguenot relations. On the contrary, he is so fierce an enemy of the Huguenots, that he has fallen into disgrace with his majesty Henri III., who protects them, as you know."

The host began to look interested. "Silence," said he.

"Why, have you any of the king's people here?"

"I fear so; there is a traveler in there."

"Then we must fly at once, for proscribed, menaced----"

"Where will you go?"

"We have two or three addresses given to us by an innkeeper we know, M. la Hurière."

"Do you know La Hurière?"

"Yes, we made his acquaintance on the night of St. Bartholomew."

"Well, I see you and your relation are holy people; I also know La Hurière. Then you say this monk----"

"Had the imprudence to preach against the Huguenots, and with so much success that the king wanted to put him in prison."

"And then?"

"Ma foi, I carried him off."

"And you did well."

"M. de Guise offered to protect him."

"What! the great Henri?"

"Himself; but I feared civil war."

"If you are friends of M. de Guise, you know this;" and he made a sort of masonic sign by which the leaguers recognized each other.

Chicot, who had seen both this and the answer to it twenty times during that famous night, replied, "And you this?"

"Then," said the innkeeper, "you are at home here; my house is yours, look on me as a brother, and if you have no money----"

Chicot drew out his purse. The sight of a well-filled purse is always agreeable, even to a generous host.

"Our journey," continued Chicot, "is paid for by the treasurer of the Holy Union, for we travel to propagate the faith. Tell us of an inn where we may be safe."

“Nowhere more so than here, and if you wish it, the other traveler shall turn out.”

“Oh! no; it is better to have your enemies near, that you may watch them. But, what makes you think he is our enemy?”

“Well! first he came disguised as a lackey, then he put on an advocate’s dress, and I am sure he is no more an advocate than he is a lackey, for I saw a long rapier under his cloak. Then he avowed he had a mission from the king!”

“From Herod, as I call him.”

“Sardanapalus.”

“Bravo!”

“Ah! I see we understand each other.”

“Then we are to remain here?”

“I should think so.”

“Not a word about my relation.”

“Of course not.”

“Nor of me.”

“Oh, no! But hush! here is some one.”

“Oh, it is the worthy man himself!”

The host turned to Gorenflot, and made a sign of the leaguers. Gorenflot was struck with terror and astonishment.

“Reply, my brother,” said Chicot; “he is a member.”

“Of what?”

“Of the Holy Union,” said Bernouillet, in a low tone.

“You see all is safe; reply,” said Chicot.

Gorenflot replied, to the great joy of the innkeeper.

“But,” said Gorenflot, who did not like the conversation, “you promised me some sherry.”

“Sherry, Malaga, Alicant--every wine in my cellar is at your disposal.”

Gorenflot looked at Chicot in amazement.

For three following days Gorenflot got drunk, first on sherry, next on Malaga, then on Alicant; afterwards he declared he liked Burgundy best, and returned to that. Meanwhile, Chicot had never stirred from his room, and had constantly watched Nicolas David, who, having appointed to meet Pierre de Gondy at this inn, would not leave the house. On the morning of the sixth day he declared himself ill, and the next day worse. Bernouillet came joyfully to tell Chicot.

“What! do you think him in danger?”

“High fever, my dear brother; he is delirious, and tried to strangle me and beat my servants. The doctors do not understand his complaint.”

“Have you seen him?”

“Yes; I tell you he tried to strangle me.”

“How did he seem?”

“Pale and furious, and constantly crying out.”

“What?”

“Take care of the king! they want to hurt the king! Then he constantly says that he expects a man from Avignon, and wishes to see him before he dies.”

As for Gorenflot, he grew visibly fatter every day, so much so, that he announced to Chicot with terror one day that the staircase was narrowing. Neither David, the League, nor religion occupied him; he thought of nothing but how to vary his dinner and wine, so that Bernouillet often exclaimed in astonishment, “To think that that man should be a torrent of eloquence!”

CHAPTER XXXI.

HOW THE MONK CONFESSED THE ADVOCATE, AND THE ADVOCATE THE MONK.

At last M. Bernouillet came into Chicot's room, laughing immoderately.

"He is dying," said he, "and the man has arrived from Avignon."

"Have you seen him?"

"Of course."

"What is he like?"

"Little and thin."

"It is he," thought Chicot; and he said, "Tell me about his arrival."

"An hour ago I was in the kitchen, when I saw a great horse, ridden by a little man, stop before the door. 'Is M. Nicolas here?' asked he. 'Yes, monsieur,' said I. 'Tell him that the person he expects from Avignon is here.' 'Certainly, monsieur, but I must warn you that he is very ill.' 'All the more reason for doing my bidding at once.' 'But he has a malignant fever.' 'Oh, pray, then, be quick!' 'How! you persist?' 'I persist.' 'In spite of the danger!' 'In spite of everything I must see him.' So I took him to the room, and there he is now. Is it not odd?"

"Very droll."

"I wish I could hear them."

"Go in."

"He forbade me to go in, saying he was going to confess."

"Listen at the door."

Bernouillet went, and Chicot went also to his hole: but they spoke so low that he could hear nothing, and in a few minutes Gondy rose and took leave. Chicot ran to the window, and saw a lackey waiting with a horse, which M. de Gondy mounted and rode off.

"If he only has not carried off the genealogy. Never mind, I shall soon catch him if necessary; but I suspect it is left here. Where can Gorenflot be?"

M. Bernouillet returned, saying, "He is gone."

"The confessor?"

"He is no more a confessor than I am."

"Will you send me my brother as soon as he comes in."

"Even if he be drunk?"

"Whatever state he is in."

Bernouillet went, and Chicot remained in a state of indecision as to what to do, for he thought, "If David is really so ill, he may have sent on the despatches by Gondy." Presently he heard Gorenflot's voice, singing a drinking song as he came up the stairs.

"Silence, drunkard!" said Chicot.

"Drunkard, indeed!"

"Yes; but come here and speak seriously, if you can."

"What is it now?"

"It is, that you never think of the duties of your profession, that you wallow in greediness and drunkenness, and let religion go where it pleases."

Gorenflot looked astonished. "I!" he gasped.

"Yes, you; you are disgraceful to see; you are covered with mud; you have been drunk in the streets."

"It is too true!"

"If you go on so, I will abandon you."

"Chicot, my friend, you will not do that? Am I very guilty?"

"There are archers at Lyons."

"Oh, pity! my dear protector, pity!"

"Are you a Christian or not?"

"I not a Christian!"

"Then do not let a neighbor die without confession."

"I am ready, but I must drink first, for I am thirsty."

Chicot passed him a jug of water, which he emptied.

"Now who am I to confess?"

"Our unlucky neighbor who is dying."

"Let them give him a pint of wine with honey in it."

"He needs spiritual aid as well as temporal. Go to him."

"Am I fit?" said Gorenflot, timidly.

"Perfectly."

"Then I will go."

"Stay; I must tell you what to do."

"Oh! I know."

"You do not know what I wish."

"What you wish?"

"If you execute it well, I will give you one hundred pistoles to spend here."

"What must I do?"

"Listen; your robe gives you authority; in the name of God and the King, summon him to give up the papers he has just received from Avignon."

"What for?"

"To gain one hundred pistoles, stupid."

"Ah! true; I go."

"Wait a minute. He will tell you he has confessed."

"But if he has?"

"Tell him he lies; that the man who has just left him is no confessor, but an intriguer like himself."

"But he will be angry."

"What does that matter, since he is dying?"

"True."

"Well; one way or the other, you must get hold of those papers."

"If he refuses?"

"Refuse him absolution, curse him, anathematize him----"

"Oh, I will take them by force."

"Good; and when you have got them, knock on the wall."

"And if I cannot get them?"

"Knock also."

"Then, in any case I am to knock?"

"Yes."

Gorenflot went, and Chicot placed his ear to the hole in the wall. When Gorenflot entered, the sick man raised himself in his bed, and looked at him with wonder.

"Good day, brother," said Gorenflot.

"What do you want, my father?" murmured the sick man, in a feeble voice.

"My son, I hear you are in danger, and I come to speak to you of your soul."

"Thank you, but I think your care is needless; I feel better."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"It is a ruse of Satan, who wishes you to die without confession."

“Then he will be deceived, for I have just confessed.”

“To whom?”

“To a worthy priest from Avignon.”

“He was not a priest.”

“Not!”

“No.”

“How do you know?”

“I knew him.”

“You knew the man who has just gone?”

“Yes; and as you are not better, and this man was not a priest, you must confess.”

“Very well,” replied the patient, in a stronger voice, “but I will chose to whom I will confess.”

“You will have no time to send for another priest, and I am here.”

“How! no time, when I tell you I am getting well?”

Gorenflot shook his head. “I tell you, my son, you are condemned by the doctors and by Providence; you may think it cruel to tell you so, but it is what we must all come to sooner or later. Confess, my son, confess.”

“But I assure you, father, that I feel much stronger.”

“A mistake, my son, the lamp flares up at the last, just before it goes out. Come, confess all your plots, your intrigues, and machinations!”

“My intrigues and plots!” cried David, frightened at this singular monk, whom he did not know, but who seemed to know him so well.

“Yes; and when you have told all that, give me up the papers, and perhaps God will let me absolve you.”

“What papers?” cried the sick man, in a voice as strong as though he were quite well.

“The papers that the pretended priest brought you from Avignon.”

“And who told you that he brought me papers?” cried the patient, putting one leg out of bed.

Gorenflot began to feel frightened, but he said firmly, “He who told me knew well what he was saying; give me the papers, or you shall have no absolution.”

“I laugh at your absolution,” cried David, jumping out of bed, and seizing Gorenflot by the throat, “and you shall see if I am too ill to strangle you.”

Gorenflot was strong, and he pushed David back so violently that he fell into the middle of the room. But he rose furious, and seizing a long sword, which hung on the wall behind his clothes, presented it to the throat of Gorenflot, who sank on a chair in terror.

“It is now your turn to confess,” said he, “speak, or you die.”

“Oh!” cried Gorenflot, “then you are not ill--not dying.”

“It is not for you to question, but to answer.”

“To answer what?”

“Who are you?”

“You can see that.”

“Your name?”

“Brother Gorenflot.”

“You are then a real monk?”

“I should think so.”

“What brings you to Lyons?”

“I am exiled.”

“What brought you to this inn?”

“Chance.”

“How long have you been here?”

“A fortnight.”

“Why did you watch me?”

“I did not.”

“How did you know that I had the papers?”

“Because I was told so.”

“Who told you?”

“He who sent me here.”

“Who was that?”

“I cannot tell you.”

“You must.”

“Oh! oh! I will cry out.”

“And I will kill.”

Gorenflot cried out, and a spot of blood appeared on the point of the sword.

“His name?” cried David.

“Oh! I can hold out no more.”

“Speak.”

“It was Chicot.”

“The king’s jester!”

“Himself.”

“And where is he?”

“Here!” cried a voice, and Chicot appeared at the door with a drawn sword in his hand.

CHAPTER XXXII.

HOW CHICOT USED HIS SWORD.

Nicolas David, in recognizing him whom he knew to be his mortal enemy, could not repress a movement of terror, during which Gorenflot slipped a little to the side, crying out, “Help, friend! come to my aid!”

“Ah, Monsieur David, it is you!” said Chicot; “I am delighted to meet you again!” Then, turning to Gorenflot, he said, “My good Gorenflot, your presence as monk was very necessary just now, when we believed monsieur dying; but now that he is so well, it is with me he must deal; therefore, do me the favor to stand sentinel on the threshold, and prevent any one from coming in to interrupt our little conversation.” Gorenflot, who asked no better than to go, was soon out of the room; but David, having now recovered from his surprise, and confident in his skill as a swordsman, stood waiting for Chicot, with his sword in his hand and a smile on his lips.

“Dress yourself, monsieur,” said Chicot; “I do not wish to take any advantage of you. Do you know what I have come to seek in this room?”

“The rest of the blows which I have owed you on account of the Duc de Mayenne, since that day when you jumped so quickly out of the window.”

“No, monsieur; I know the number, and will return them. Be easy. What I have come for is a certain genealogy which M. Pierre de Gondy took to Avignon, without knowing what he carried, and, equally in ignorance, brought back to you just now.”

David turned pale. “What genealogy?” he said.

“That of M. de Guise, who descends, as you know, in a direct line from Charlemagne.”

“Ah, you are a spy! I thought you only a buffoon.”

“Dear M. David, I will be both if you wish it: a spy to hang you, and a buffoon to laugh at it after.”

“To hang me!”

“High and dry, monsieur; I hope you do not lay claim to be beheaded like a gentleman.”

“And how will you do it?”

“Oh, very easily; I will relate the truth, for I must tell you, dear M. David, that I assisted last month at the meeting held in the convent of St. Geneviève.”

“You!”

“Yes; I was in the confessional in front of yours, and it was very uncomfortable there, especially as I was obliged to wait to go out until all was finished. Therefore I heard all, saw the coronation of M. d’Anjou, which was not very amusing; but then the genealogy was delightful.”

“Ah! you know about the genealogy?” cried David, biting his lips with anger.

“Yes, and I found it very ingenious, especially that part about the Salic law; only it is a misfortune to have so much intellect, one gets hung for it; therefore, feeling myself moved with tender pity for so ingenious a man, I said to myself, ‘Shall I let this brave M. David be hung?’ and I took the resolution of traveling with, or rather behind, you. I followed you, therefore, not without trouble, and at last we arrived at Lyons. I entered the hotel an hour after you, and have been in the adjoining room; look, there is only a partition between, and, as you may imagine, I did not travel all the way from Paris to Lyons to lose sight of you now. I pierced a little hole, through which I had the pleasure of watching you when I liked, and I confess I gave myself this pleasure several times a day. At last you fell ill; the host wished to get rid of you, but you were determined to wait here for M. de Gondy. I was duped by you at first, for you might really have been ill, so I sent you a brave monk, to excite you to repentance; but, hardened sinner that you are, you tried to kill him, forgetting the Scripture maxim, ‘He who strikes with the sword shall perish with the sword.’ Then I came to you, and said, ‘We are old friends; let us arrange the matter.’“

“In what manner?”

“It would be a pity that such a man as you should disappear from the world; give up plots, trust me, break with the Guises, give me your papers, and, on the faith of a gentleman, I will make your peace with the king.”

“While, on the contrary, if I do not give them to you?”

“Ah! then, on the faith of a gentleman, I will kill you! But if you give them to me, all shall be forgotten. You do not believe me, perhaps, for your nature is bad, and you think my resentment can never be forgotten. But, although it is true that I hate you, I hate M. de Mayenne more; give me what will ruin him, and I will save you. And then, perhaps, you will not believe this either, for you love nothing; but I love the king, foolish and corrupted as he is, and I wish that he should reign tranquilly--which is impossible with the Mayennes and the genealogy of Nicolas David. Therefore, give me up the genealogy, and I promise to make your name and your fortune."

David never moved.

"Well," said Chicot, "I see all that I say to you is but wasted breath; therefore, I go to get you hanged. Adieu, M. David," and he stepped backwards towards the door.

"And you think I shall let you go out," cried the advocate.

"No, no, my fine spy; no, no, Chicot, my friend, those who know of the genealogy must die. Those who menace me must die."

"You put me quite at my ease; I hesitated only because I am sure to kill you. Crillon, the other day, taught me a particular thrust, only one, but that will suffice. Come, give me the papers, or I will kill you; and I will tell you how--I will pierce your throat just where you wished to bleed Gorenflot."

Chicot had hardly finished, when David rushed on him with a savage laugh. The two adversaries were nearly matched in height, but Chicot, who fenced nearly every day with the king, had become one of the most skilful swordsmen in the kingdom. David soon began to perceive this, and he retreated a step.

"Ah! ah!" said Chicot, "now you begin to understand. Once more; the papers."

David, for answer, threw himself again upon Chicot, and a new combat ensued. At last Chicot called out,--

"Here is the thrust," and as he spoke, he thrust his rapier half through his throat.

David did not reply, but fell at Chicot's feet, pouring out a mouthful of blood. But by a natural movement he tried to drag himself towards his bed, so as to defend his secret to the last.

"Ah!" cried Chicot, "I thought you cunning, but I see you are a fool. I did not know where the papers were, and you have shown me----" and while David rolled in the agonies of death, he ran to the bed, raised the mattress, and found under it a roll of parchment. At the moment in which he unrolled it to see if it was the document he sought, David raised himself in a rage and then fell back dead. Chicot saw with joy that he held what he wanted. The Pope had written at the bottom, "Fiat ut voluit Deus; Deus jura hominum fecit.” After placing it in his breast, he took the body of the advocate, who had died without losing more blood, the nature of the wound making him bleed inwardly, put it back in the bed, turned the face to the wall, and, opening the door, called Gorenflot.

“How pale you are!” said the monk, as he entered.

“Yes, the last moments of that man caused me some emotion.”

“Then he is dead?”

“Yes.”

“He was so well just now.”

“Too well; he swallowed something difficult of digestion, and died of it.”

“The wretch wanted to strangle me, a holy man, and he is punished for it.”

“Pardon him, you are a Christian.”

“I do, although he frightened me much.”

“You must do more; you must light the lamps, and say some prayers by his bed.”

“Why?”

“That you may not be taken prisoner as his murderer.”

“I, a murderer! it was he who tried to murder me.”

“Mon Dieu! yes, and as he could not succeed, his rage made him break a blood-vessel. But till your innocence is established they might annoy you much.”

“I fear you are right.”

“Then do what I tell you. Install yourself here, and recite all the prayers you know, or do not know; then, when evening comes, go out and call at the ironmonger’s at the corner of the street. There you will find your horse; mount him, and take the road to Paris; at Villeneuve-le-Roi sell him, and take Panurge back.”

“Ah! that good Panurge; I shall be delighted to see him again. But how am I to live?”

Chicot drew from his pocket a handful of crowns and put them into the large hand of the monk.

“Generous man!” cried Gorenflot. “Let me stay with you at Lyons; I love Lyons.”

“But I do not stay here; I set off at once, and travel too rapidly for you to follow me.”

“So be it, then.”

Chicot installed the monk by the bed, and went downstairs to the host.

"M. Bernouillet," said he, "a great event has taken place in your house."

"What do you mean?"

"The hateful royalist, the enemy of our religion upstairs, received to-day a messenger from Rome."

"I know that: it was I who told you."

"Well, our holy father, the Pope, had sent him to this conspirator, who, however, probably did not suspect for what purpose."

"And why did he come?"

"Go up-stairs, lift up the bedclothes, look at his neck, and you will see."

"You frighten me."

"I say no more. The Pope did you honor in choosing your house for the scene of his vengeance."

Then Chicot put ten crowns into the hand of the host, and went down to the stable to get out the horses. M. Bernouillet went up and found Gorenflot praying. He looked as directed, and found the wound.

"May every enemy of our religion die thus," said he to Gorenflot.

"Amen," replied the monk.

These events passed about the same time that Bussy brought the Baron de Méridor back to his daughter.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HOW THE DUC D’ANJOU LEARNED THAT DIANA WAS NOT DEAD.

The month of April had arrived. The great cathedral of Chartres was hung with white, and the king was standing barefooted in the nave. The religious ceremonies, which were for the purpose of praying for an heir to the throne of France, were just finishing, when Henri, in the midst of the general silence, heard what seemed to him a stifled laugh. He turned round to see if Chicot were there, for he thought no one else would have dared to laugh at such a time. It was not, however, Chicot who had laughed at the sight of the two chemises of the Holy Virgin which were said to have such a prolific power, and which were just being drawn from their golden box; but it was a cavalier who had just stopped at the door of the church, and who was making his way with his muddy boots through the crowd of courtiers in their penitents’ robes and sacks. Seeing the king turn, he stopped for a moment, and Henri, irritated at seeing him arrive thus, threw an angry glance at him. The newcomer, however, continued to advance until he reached the velvet chair of M. le Duc d’Anjou, by which he knelt down. He, turning round, said, “Bussy!”

“Good morning, monseigneur.”

“Are you mad?”

“Why so?”

“To come here to see this nonsense.”

“Monseigneur, I wish to speak to you at once.”

“Where have you been for the last three weeks?”

“That is just what I have to tell you.”

“Well, you must wait until we leave the church.”

“So much the worse.”

“Patience, here is the end.”

Indeed, the king was putting on one of these chemises, and the queen another. Then they all knelt down, and afterwards the king, taking off his holy tunic, left the church.

"Now, monseigneur," said Bussy, "shall we go to your house?"

"Yes, at once, if you have anything to tell me."

"Plenty of things which you do not expect."

When they were in the hotel the duke said, "Now sit down and tell me all; I feared you were dead."

"Very likely, monseigneur."

"You left me to look after my beautiful unknown. Who is this woman, and what am I to expect?"

"You will reap what you have sown, monseigneur--plenty of shame."

"What do you mean?" cried the duke.

"What I said."

"Explain yourself, monsieur; who is this woman?"

"I thought you had recognized her."

"Then it was her?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"You saw her?"

"Yes."

"And she spoke to you?"

"Certainly. Doubtless you had reason to think her dead, and you perhaps hoped she was so."

The duke grew pale.

"Yes, monseigneur," continued Bussy, "although you pushed to despair a young girl of noble race, she escaped from death; but do not breathe yet, do not think yourself absolved, for, in preserving her life, she found a misfortune worse than death."

"What is it? what has happened to her?"

"Monseigneur, a man preserved her honor and saved her life, but he made her pay for this service so dearly that she regrets his having rendered it."

"Finish."

"Well, monseigneur, Mademoiselle de Méridor, to escape becoming the mistress of the Duc d'Anjou, has thrown herself into the arms of a man whom she detests, and is now Madame de Monsoreau."

At these words the blood rushed furiously into the duke's face.

"Is this true?" said he.

"Pardieu! I said it," said Bussy, haughtily.

"I did not mean that; I did not doubt your word, Bussy, I wondered only if it were possible that one of my gentlemen had had the audacity to interfere between me and a woman whom I honored with my love.”

“And why not?”

“Then you would have done so?”

“I would have done better; I would have warned you that your honor was being lost.”

“Listen, Bussy,” said the prince, becoming calmer, “I do not justify myself, but M. de Monsoreau has been a traitor towards me.”

“Towards you?”

“Yes, he knew my intentions.”

“And they were?”

“To try and make Diana love me.”

“Love you!”

“Yes, but in no case to use violence.”

“Those were your intentions?” said Bussy, with an ironical smile.

“Certainly, and these intentions I preserved to the last, although M. de Monsoreau constantly combated them.”

“Monseigneur, what do you say! This man incited you to dishonor Diana?”

“Yes.”

“By his counsels?”

“By his letters. Would you like to see them?”

“Oh! if I could believe that!”

“You shall see.”

And the duke, opening a little cabinet, and taking out a letter, said, “Since you doubt your prince’s words, read.”

Bussy took it and read,--

“MONSEIGNEUR,

“Be quite easy; the coup-de-main can be executed without risk, for the young person sets off this evening to pass a week with an aunt who lives at the château of Lude. I charge myself with it, and you need take no trouble as for the scruples of the young lady, be sure that they will vanish in the presence of your highness: meanwhile I act; and this evening she will be at the château of Beaugé.

“Your highness’s respectful servant, “BRYAN DE MONSOREAU.”

“Well, what do you say, Bussy?”

“I say that you are well served, monseigneur.”

"You mean betrayed."

"Ah, true; I forgot the end."

"The wretch! he made me believe in the death woman----"

"Whom he stole from you; it is black enough."

"How did he manage?"

"He made the father believe you the ravisher, and offered himself to rescue the lady, presented himself at the château of Beaugé with a letter from the Baron de Méridor, brought a boat to the windows, and carried away the prisoner; then shut her up in the house you know of, and by constantly working upon her fears, forced her to become his wife."

"Is it not infamous?"

"Only partly excused by your conduct, monseigneur."

"Ah! Bussy, you shall see how I will revenge myself!"

"Princes do not revenge themselves, they punish," said Bussy.

"How can I punish him?"

"By restoring happiness to Madame de Monsoreau."

"But can I?"

"Certainly."

"How?"

"By restoring her to liberty. The marriage was forced, therefore it is null."

"You are right."

"Get it set aside, then, and you will have acted like a gentleman and a prince."

"Ah, ah!" said the prince, "what warmth! you are interested in it, Bussy."

"I! not at all, except that I do not wish people to say that Louis de Clermont serves a perfidious prince and a man without honor."

"Well, you shall see. But how to do it?"

"Nothing more easy; make her father act."

"But he is buried in Anjou."

"Monseigneur, he is here in Paris."

"At your house?"

"No, with his daughter. Speak to him, monseigneur, that he may see in you, not what he does now, an enemy, but a protector--that he who now curses your name may bless you."

"And when can I see him?"

"As soon as you return Paris."

"Very well."

“It is agreed, then?”

“Yes.”

“On your word as a gentleman?”

“On my faith as a prince.”

“And when do you return?”

“This evening; will you accompany me?”

“No, I go first; where shall I meet your highness?”

“To-morrow; at the king’s levee.”

“I will be there, monseigneur.”

Bussy did not lose a moment, and the distance that took the duke fifteen hours to accomplish, sleeping in his litter, the young man, who returned to Paris, his heart beating with joy and love, did in five, to console the baron and Diana the sooner.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HOW CHICOT RETURNED TO THE LOUVRE, AND WAS RECEIVED BY THE KING HENRI III.

All was quiet at the Louvre, for the king, fatigued with his pilgrimage, had not yet risen, when two men presented themselves together at the gates.

“M. Chicot,” cried the younger, “how are you this morning?”

“Ah, M. de Bussy.”

“You come for the king’s levee, monsieur?”

“And you also, I presume?”

“No; I come to see M. le Duc d’Anjou. You know I have not the honor of being a favorite of his majesty’s.”

“The reproach is for the king, and not for you.”

“Do you come from far? I heard you were traveling.”

“Yes, I was hunting. And you?”

“Yes, I have been in the provinces; and now will you be good enough to render me a service?”

“I shall be delighted.”

“Well, you can penetrate into the Louvre, while I remain in the ante-chamber; will you tell the duke I am waiting for him?”

“Why not come in with me?”

“The king would not be pleased.”

“Bah!”

“Diable! he has not accustomed me to his most gracious smiles.”

“Henceforth, for some time, all that will change.”

“Ah, ah! are you a necromancer, M. Chicot?”

“Sometimes; come, take courage, and come in with me.”

They entered together; one went towards the apartments of the Duc d’Anjou, and the other to those of the king.

Henri was just awake, and had rung, and a crowd of valets and friends had rushed in; already the chicken broth and the spiced wine were served, when Chicot entered, and without saying a word, sat down to eat and drink.

“Par la mordieu!” cried the king, delighted, although he affected anger; “it is that knave of a Chicot, that fugitive, that vagabond!”

“What is the matter, my son?” said Chicot, placing himself on the immense seat, embroidered with fleur-de-lis, on which the king was seated.

“Here is my misfortune returned,” said Henri; “for three weeks I have been so tranquil.”

“Bah! you always grumble. One would think you were one of your own subjects. Let me hear, Henriquet, how you have governed this kingdom in my absence.”

“Chicot!”

“Have you hung any of your curled gentlemen? Ah! pardon, M. Quelus, I did not see you.”

“Chicot, I shall be angry,” said the king; but he ended by laughing, as he always did; so he went on: “But what has become of you? Do you know that I have had you sought for in all the bad parts of Paris?”

“Did you search the Louvre?”

Just then M. de Monsoreau entered.

“Ah! it is you, monsieur,” said the king; “when shall we hunt again?”

“When it shall please your majesty; I hear there are plenty of wild boars at St. Germain en Laye.”

“The wild boar is dangerous,” said Chicot; “King Charles IX., I remember, was nearly killed by one. And then spears are sharp also; is it not so, Henri? and do you know your chief huntsman must have met a wolf not long ago?”

“Why so?”

“Because he has caught the likeness; it is striking.”

M. de Monsoreau grew pale, and turning to Chicot, said:

“M. Chicot, I am not used to jesters, having lived little at court, and I warn you that before my king I do not like to be humiliated, above all when I speak of my duties.”

“Well, monsieur,” said Chicot, “we are not like you, we court people laughed heartily at the last joke.”

“And what was that?”

“Making you chief huntsman.”

Monsoreau looked daggers at Chicot.

“Come, come,” said Henri, “let us speak of something else.”

“Yes, let us speak of the merits of Nôtre Dame de Chartres.”

"Chicot, no impiety."

"I impious! it is you, on the contrary; there were two chemises accustomed to be together, and you separated them. Join them together and a miracle may happen."

This illusion to the estrangement of the king and queen made everyone laugh.

Monsoreau then whispered to Chicot, "Pray withdraw with me into that window, I wish to speak to you." When they were alone, he went on, "Now, M. Chicot, buffoon as you are, a gentleman forbids you; do you understand? forbids you to laugh at him, and to remember that others may finish what M. de Mayenne began."

"Ah! you wish me to become your creditor, as I am his, and to give you the same place in my gratitude."

"It seems to me that, among your creditors, you forget the principal."

"Indeed, I have generally a good memory. Who may it be?"

"M. Nicolas David."

"Oh! you are wrong; he is paid."

At this moment Bussy entered.

"Monsieur," said he to the count, "M. le Duc d'Anjou desires to speak with you."

"With me?"

"With you, monsieur."

"Do you accompany me?"

"No, I go first, to tell the duke you are coming," and he rapidly disappeared.

"Well?" said the duke.

"He is coming."

"And he suspects nothing?"

"Nothing; but if he did, what matter? is he not your creature? Does he seem to you less guilty than he did yesterday?"

"No, a hundred times more so."

"He has carried off, by treason, a noble young girl, and married her equally treasonably; either he must ask for the dissolution of the marriage himself, or you must do it for him."

"I have promised."

"I have your word?"

"You have."

“Remember that they know and are anxiously waiting.”

“She shall be free, Bussy; I pledge my word.”

Bussy kissed the hand which had signed so many false promises. As he did so, M. de Monsoreau entered, and Bussy went to the corridor, where were several other gentlemen. Here he had to wait as patiently as might be for the result of this interview, on which all his future happiness was at stake. He waited for some time, when suddenly the door of the duke’s room opened, and the sound of M. de Monsoreau’s voice made Bussy tremble, for it sounded almost joyful. Soon the voices approached, and Bussy could see M. de Monsoreau bowing and retiring, and he heard the duke say:

“Adieu, my friend.”

“My friend!” murmured Bussy.

Then Monsoreau said, “Your highness agrees with me that publicity is best?”

“Yes, yes; an end to all mysteries.”

“Then this evening I will present her to the king.”

“Do so; I will prepare him.”

“Gentlemen,” then said Monsoreau, turning towards those in the corridor, “allow me to announce to you a secret; monseigneur permits me to make public my marriage with Mademoiselle Diana de Méridor, who has been my wife for more than a month, and whom I intend this evening to present to the court.”

Bussy, who had been hidden behind a door, staggered, and almost fell at this unexpected blow. However, he darted a glance of contempt at the duke, towards whom he made a step, but he, in terror, shut his door, and Bussy heard the key turn in the lock. Feeling that if he stayed a moment longer he should betray before everyone the violence of his grief, he ran downstairs, got on his horse, and galloped to the Rue St. Antoine. The baron and Diana were eagerly waiting for him, and they saw him enter pale and trembling.

“Madame,” cried he, “hate me, despise me; I believed I could do something and I can do nothing. Madame, you are now the recognized wife of M. de Monsoreau, and are to be presented this evening. I am a fool--a miserable dupe, or rather, as you said, M. le Baron, the duke is a coward and a villain.”

And leaving the father and daughter overcome with grief, he rushed wildly away.

CHAPTER XXXV.

WHAT PASSED BETWEEN M. DE MONSOREAU AND THE DUKE.

It is time to explain the duke’s sudden change of intention with regard to M. de Monsoreau. When he first received him, it was with dispositions entirely favorable to Bussy’s wishes.

“Your highness sent for me?” said Monsoreau.

“You have nothing to fear, you who have served me so well, and are so much attached to me. Often you have told me of the plots against me, have aided my enterprises forgetting your own interests, and exposing your life.”

“Your highness----”

“Even lately, in this last unlucky adventure----”

“What adventure, monseigneur?”

“This carrying off of Mademoiselle de Méridor--poor young creature!”

“Alas!” murmured Monsoreau.

“You pity her, do you not?” said the duke.

“Does not your highness?”

“I! you know how I have regretted this fatal caprice. And, indeed, it required all my friendship for you, and the remembrance of all your good services, to make me forget that without you I should not have carried off this young girl.”

Monsoreau felt the blow. “Monseigneur,” said he, “your natural goodness leads you to exaggerate, you no more caused the death of this young girl than I did.”

“How so?”

“You did not intend to use violence to Mademoiselle de Méridor.”

“Certainly not.”

“Then the intention absolves you; it is a misfortune, nothing more.”

“And besides,” said the duke, looking at him, “death has buried all in eternal silence.”

The tone of his voice and his look struck Monsoreau. “Monseigneur,” said he, after a moment’s pause, “shall I speak frankly to you?”

“Why should you hesitate?” said the prince, with astonishment mingled with hauteur.

“Indeed, I do not know, but your highness has not thought fit to be frank with me.”

“Really!” cried the duke, with an angry laugh.

“Monseigneur, I know what your highness meant to say to me.”

“Speak, then.”

“Your highness wished to make me understand that perhaps Mademoiselle de Méridor was not dead, and that therefore those who believed themselves her murderers might be free from remorse.”

“Oh, monsieur, you have taken your time before making this consoling reflection to me. You are a faithful servant, on my word; you saw me sad and afflicted, you heard me speak of the wretched dreams I had since the death of this woman, and you let me live thus, when even a doubt might have spared me so much suffering. How must I consider this conduct, monsieur?”

“Monseigneur, is your highness accusing me?”

“Traitor!” cried the duke, “you have deceived me; you have taken from me this woman whom I loved----”

Monsoreau turned pale, but did not lose his proud, calm look. “It is true,” said he.

“True, knave!”

“Please to speak lower, monseigneur; your highness forgets, that you speak to a gentleman and an old servant.”

The duke laughed.

“My excuse is,” continued he, “that I loved Mademoiselle de Méridor ardently.”

“I, also,” replied François, with dignity.

“It is true, monseigneur; but she did not love you.”

“And she loved you?”

“Perhaps.”

“You lie! you know you lie! You used force as I did; only I, the master, failed, while you, the servant, succeeded by treason.”

“Monseigneur, I loved her.”

“What do I care?”

“Monseigneur, take care. I loved her, and I am not a servant. My wife is mine, and no one can take her from me, not even the king. I wished to have her, and I took her."

"You took her! Well! you shall give her up."

"You are wrong, monseigneur. And do not call," continue he, stopping him, "for if you call once--if you do me a public injury----"

"You shall give up this woman."

"Give her up! she is my wife before God----"

"If she is your wife before God, you shall give her up before men. I know all, and I will break this marriage, I tell you. To-morrow, Mademoiselle de Méridor shall be restored to her father; you shall set off into the exile I impose on you; you shall have sold your place; these are my conditions, and take care, or I will break you as I break this glass." And he threw down violently a crystal cup.

"I will not give up my wife, I will not give up my place, and I will remain in France," replied Monsoreau.

"You will not?"

"No, I will ask my pardon of the King of France--of the king anointed at the Abbey of St. Geneviève; and this new sovereign will not, I am sure, refuse the first request proffered to him." François grew deadly pale, and nearly fell.

"Well, well," stammered he, "this request, speak lower--I listen."

"I will speak humbly, as becomes the servant of your highness. A fatal love was the cause of all. Love is the most imperious of the passions. To make me forget that your highness had cast your eyes on Diana, I must have been no longer master of myself."

"It was a treason."

"Do not overwhelm me, monseigneur; I saw you rich, young and happy, the first Christian prince in the world. For you are so, and between you and supreme rank there is now only a shadow easy to dispel. I saw all the splendor of your future, and, comparing your proud position with my humble one, I said, 'Leave to the prince his brilliant prospects and splendid projects, scarcely will he miss the pearl that I steal from his royal crown.'"

"Comte! comte!"

"You pardon me, monseigneur, do you not?"

At this moment the duke raised his eyes, and saw Bussy's portrait on the wall. It seemed to exhort him to courage, and he said, "No, I cannot pardon you; it is not for myself that I hold out, it is because a father in mourning--a father unworthily deceived--cries out for his daughter; because a woman, forced to marry you, cries for vengeance against you; because, in a word, the first duty of a prince is justice.”

“Monseigneur, if justice be a duty, gratitude is not less so; and a king should never forget those to whom he owes his crown. Now, monseigneur, you owe your crown to me.”

“Monsoreau!” cried the duke, in terror.

“But I cling to those only who cling to me.”

“I cannot--you are a gentleman, you know I cannot approve of what you have done. My dear count, this one more sacrifice; I will recompense you for it; I will give you all you ask.”

“Then your highness loves her still!” cried Monsoreau, pale with jealousy.

“No, I swear I do not.”

“Then, why should I? I am a gentleman; who can enter into the secrets of my private life?”

“But she does not love you.”

“What matter?”

“Do this for me, Monsoreau.”

“I cannot.”

“Then----” commenced the duke, who was terribly perplexed.

“Reflect, sire.”

“You will denounce me?”

“To the king dethroned for you, yes; for if my new king destroyed my honor and happiness, I would return to the old.”

“It is infamous.”

“True, sire; but I love enough to be infamous.”

“It is cowardly.”

“Yes, your majesty, but I love enough to be cowardly. Come, monseigneur, do something for the man who has served you so well.”

“What do you want?”

“That you should pardon me.”

“I will.”

“That you should reconcile me with M. de Méridor.”

“I will try.”

“That you will sign my marriage contract with Mademoiselle de Méridor.”

“Yes,” said the prince, in a hoarse voice.

“And that you shall honor my wife with a smile when I shall present her to his majesty.”

“Yes; is that all?”

“All, monseigneur.”

“You have my word.”

“And you shall keep the throne to which I have raised you.--There remains now, only,” thought Monsoreau, “to find out who told the duke.”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CHICOT AND THE KING.

That same evening M. de Monsoreau presented his wife in the queen’s circle. Henri, tired, had gone to bed, but after sleeping three or four hours, he woke, and feeling no longer sleepy, proceeded to the room where Chicot slept, which was the one formerly occupied by St. Luc; Chicot slept soundly, and the king called him three times before he woke. At last he opened his eyes and cried out, “What is it?”

“Chicot, my friend, it is I.”

“You; who?”

“I, Henri.”

“Decidedly, my son, the pheasants must have disagreed with you; I warned you at supper, but you would eat so much of them, as well as of those crabs.”

“No; I scarcely tasted them.”

“Then you are poisoned, perhaps. Ventre de biche! how pale you are!”

“It is my mask,” said the king.

“Then you are not ill?”

“No.”

“Then why wake me?”

“Because I am annoyed.”

“Annoyed! if you wake a man at two o’clock in the morning, at least you should bring him a present. Have you anything for me?”

“No; I come to talk to you.”

“That is not enough.”

“Chicot, M. de Morvilliers came here last evening.”

“What for?”

“To ask for an audience. What can he want to say to me, Chicot?”

“What! it is only to ask that, that you wake me?”

“Chicot, you know he occupies himself with the police.”

“No; I did not know it.”

“Do you doubt his watchfulness?”

“Yes, I do, and I have my reasons.”

“What are they?”

“Will one suffice you?”

“Yes, if it be good.”

“And you will leave me in peace afterwards?”

“Certainly.”

“Well, one day--no, it was one evening, I beat you in the Rue Foidmentel; you had with you Quelus and Schomberg.”

“You beat me?”

“Yes, all three of you.”

“How, it was you! wretch!”

“I, myself,” said Chicot, rubbing his hands, “do I not hit hard?”

“Wretch!”

“You confess, it was true?”

“You know it is, villain.”

“Did you send for M. de Morvilliers the next day?”

“You know I did, for you were there when he came.”

“And you told him the accident that had happened to one of your friends?”

“Yes.”

“And you ordered him to find out the criminal?”

“Yes.”

“Did he find him?”

“No.”

“Well, then, go to bed, Henri; you see your police is bad.” And, turning round, Chicot refused to say another word, and was soon snoring again.

The next day the council assembled. It consisted of Quelus, Maugiron, D’Epernon, and Schomberg. Chicot, seated at the head of the table, was making paper boats, and arranging them in a fleet. M. de Morvilliers was announced, and came in, looking grave.

“Am I,” said he, “before your majesty’s council?”

“Yes, before my best friends; speak freely.”

“Well, sire, I have a terrible plot to denounce to your majesty.”

“A plot!” cried all.

“Yes, your majesty.”

“Oh, is it a Spanish plot?”

At this moment the Duc d'Anjou, who had been summoned to attend the council, entered.

"My brother," said Henri, "M. de Morvilliers comes to announce a plot to us."

The duke threw a suspicious glance round him. "Is it possible?" he said.

"Alas, yes, monseigneur," said M. de Morvilliers.

"Tell us all about it," said Chicot.

"Yes," stammered the duke, "tell us all about it, monsieur."

"I listen," said Henri.

"Sire, for some time I have been watching some malcontents, but they were shopkeepers, or junior clerks, a few monks and students."

"That is not much," said Chicot.

"I know that malcontents always make use either of war or of religion."

"Very sensible!" said the king.

"I put men on the watch, and at last I succeeded in persuading a man from the provosty of Paris to watch the preachers, who go about exciting the people against your majesty. They are prompted by a party hostile to your majesty, and this party I have studied, and now I know their hopes," added he, triumphantly. "I have men in my pay, greedy, it is true, who, for a good sum of money, promised to let me know of the first meeting of the conspirators."

"Oh! never mind money, but let us hear the aim of this conspiracy."

"Sire, they think of nothing less than a second St. Bartholomew."

"Against whom?"

"Against the Huguenots."

"What have you paid for your secret?" said Chicot.

"One hundred and sixty thousand livres."

Chicot turned to the king, saying, "If you like, for one thousand crowns, I will tell you all the secrets of M. de Morvilliers."

"Speak."

"It is simply the League, instituted ten years ago; M. de Morvilliers has discovered what every Parisian knows as well as his *ave*."

"Monsieur," interrupted the chancellor.

"I speak the truth, and I will prove it," cried Chicot.

"Tell me, then, their place of meeting."

"Firstly, the public streets; secondly, the public streets."

"M. Chicot is joking," said the chancellor; "tell me their rallying sign."

"They are dressed like Parisians, and shake their legs when they walk."

A burst of laughter followed this speech; then M. de Morvilliers said, "They have had one meeting-place which M. Chicot does not know of."

"Where?" asked the king.

"The Abbey of St. Geneviève."

"Impossible!" murmured the duke.

"It is true," said M. de Morvilliers, triumphantly.

"What did they decide?" asked the king.

"That the Leaguers should choose chiefs, that every one should arm, that every province should receive a deputy from the conspirators, and that all the Huguenots cherished by his majesty (that was their expression)----"

The king smiled.

"Should be massacred on a given day."

"Is that all?" said the duke.

"No, monseigneur."

"I should hope not," said Chicot; "if the king got only that for one hundred and sixty thousand livres, it would be a shame."

"There are chiefs----"

The Duc d'Anjou could not repress a start.

"What!" cried Chicot, "a conspiracy that has chiefs! how wonderful! But we ought to have more than that for one hundred and sixty thousand livres."

"Their names?" asked the king.

"Firstly, a fanatic preacher; I gave ten thousand livres for his name."

"Very well."

"A monk called Gorenflot."

"Poor devil!" said Chicot.

"Gorenflot?" said the king, writing down the name; "afterwards----"

"Oh!" said the chancellor, with hesitation, "that is all." And he looked round as if to say, "If your majesty were alone, you should hear more."

"Speak, chancellor," said the king, "I have none but friends here."

"Oh! sire, I hesitate to pronounce such powerful names."

"Are they more powerful than I am?" cried the king.

"No, sire; but one does not tell secrets in public."

"Monsieur," said the Duc d'Anjou, "we will retire."

The king signed to the chancellor to approach him, and to the duke to remain. M. de Morvilliers had just bent over the king to whisper his communication, when a great clamor was heard in the court of the Louvre.

The king jumped up, but Chicot, running to the window, called out, “It is M. de Guise entering the Louvre.”

“The Duc de Guise,” stammered the Duc d’Anjou.

“How strange that he should be in Paris,” said the king, reading the truth in M. de Morvilliers’ look. “Was it of him you were about to speak?” he asked.

“Yes, sire; he presided over the meeting.”

“And the others?”

“I know no more.”

“You need not write that name on your tablets! you will not forget it,” whispered Chicot.

The Duc de Guise advanced, smiling, to see the king.

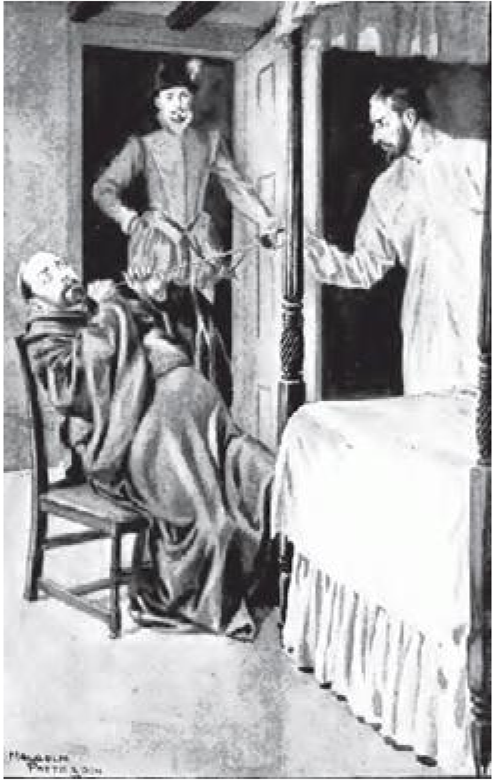

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WHAT M. DE GUISE CAME TO DO AT THE LOUVRE.

Behind M. de Guise there entered a great number of officers, courtiers, and gentlemen, and behind them a concourse of the people; an escort less brilliant, but more formidable, and it was their cries that had resounded as the duke entered the Louvre.

“Ah! it is you, my cousin,” said the king; “what a noise you bring with you! Did I not hear the trumpets sound?”

“Sire, the trumpets sound in Paris only for the king, and in campaigns for the general. Here the trumpets would make too much noise for a subject; there they do not make enough for a prince.”

Henri bit his lips. “Have you arrived from the siege of La Charité only to-day?”

“Only to-day, sire,” replied the duke, with a heightened color.

“Ma foi! your visit is a great honor to us.”

“Your majesty jests, no doubt. How can my visit honor him from whom all honor comes?”

“I mean, M. de Guise,” replied Henri, “that every good Catholic is in the habit, on returning from a campaign, to visit God first in one of his temple’s--the king only comes second. ‘Honor God, serve the king,’ you know, my cousin.”

The heightened color of the duke became now still more distinct; and the king, happening to turn towards his brother, saw with astonishment, that he was as pale as the duke was red. He was struck by this emotion in each, but he said:

“At all events, duke, nothing equals my joy to see that you have escaped all the dangers of war, although you sought them, I was told in the rashest manner; but danger knows you and flies you.”

The duke bowed.

“But I must beg you, my cousin, not to be so ambitious of mortal perils, for you put to shame sluggards like us, who sleep, eat, and invent new prayers.”

"Yes, sire," replied the duke, "we know you to be a pious prince, and that no pleasure can make you forget the glory of God and the interests of the Church. That is why we have come with so much confidence to your majesty."

"With confidence! Do you not always come to me with confidence, my cousin?"

"Sire, the confidence of which I speak refers to the proposition I am about to make to you."

"You have a proposition to make to me! Well, speak, as you say, with confidence. What have you to propose?"

"The execution of one of the most beautiful ideas which has been originated since the Crusades."

"Continue, duke."

"Sire, the title of most Christian king is not a vain one; it makes an ardent zeal for religion incumbent on its possessor."

"Is the Church menaced by the Saracens once more?"

"Sire, the great concourse of people who followed me, blessing my name, honored me with this reception only because of my zeal to defend the Church. I have already had the honor of speaking to your majesty of an alliance between all true Catholics."

"Yes, yes," said Chicot, "the League; ventre de biche, Henri, the League. By St. Bartholomew! how can you forget so splendid an idea, my son?"

The duke cast a disdainful glance on Chicot, while d'Anjou, who stood by, as pale as death, tried by signs, to make the duke stop.

"Look at your brother, Henri," whispered Chicot.

"Sire," continued the Duc de Guise, "the Catholics have indeed called this association the Holy League, and its aim is to fortify the throne against the Huguenots, its mortal enemies; but to form an association is not enough, and in a kingdom like France, several millions of men cannot assemble without the consent of the king."

"Several millions!" cried Henri, almost with terror.

"Several millions!" repeated Chicot; "a small number of malcontents, which may bring forth pretty results."

"Sire," cried the duke, "I am astonished that your majesty allows me to be interrupted so often, when I am speaking on serious matters."

"Quite right," said Chicot; "silence there."

“Several millions!” repeated the king; “and against these millions, how many Huguenots are there in my kingdom?”

“Four,” said Chicot.

This new sally made the king and his friends laugh, but the duke frowned, and his gentlemen murmured loudly.

Henri, becoming once more serious, said, “Well, duke, what do you wish? To the point.”

“I wish, sire--for your popularity is dearer to me than my own--that your majesty should be superior to us in your zeal for religion--I wish you to choose a chief for the League.”

“Well!” said the king, to those who surrounded him, “what do you think of it, my friends?”

Chicot, without saying a word, drew out a lion’s skin from a corner, and threw himself on it.

“What are you doing, Chicot?” asked the king.

“Sire, they say that night brings good counsel; that must be because of sleep; therefore I am going to sleep, and to-morrow I will reply to my cousin Guise.”

The duke cast a furious glance on Chicot, who replied by a loud snore.

“Well, sire!” said the duke, “what does your majesty say?”

“I think that, as usual, you are in the right, my cousin; convoke, then, your principal leaguers, come at their head, and I will choose the chief.”

“When, sire?”

“To-morrow.”

The Duc de Guise then took leave, and the Duc d’Anjou was about to do the same, when the king said,--

“Stay, my brother, I wish to speak to you.”

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CASTOR AND POLLUX.

The king dismissed all his favorites, and remained with his brother. The duke, who had managed to preserve a tolerably composed countenance throughout, believed himself unsuspected, and remained without fear.

"My brother," said Henri, after assuring himself that, with the exception of Chicot, no one remained in the room, "do you know that I am a very happy prince?"

"Sire, if your majesty be really happy, it is a recompense from Heaven for your merits."

"Yes, happy," continued the king, "for if great ideas do not come to me, they do to my subjects. It is a great idea which has occurred to my cousin Guise."

The duke make a sign of assent, and Chicot opened his eyes to watch the king's face.

"Indeed," continued Henri, "to unite under one banner all the Catholics, to arm all France on this pretext from Calais to Languedoc, from Bretagne to Burgundy, so that I shall always have an army ready to march against England, Holland, or Spain, without alarming any of them--do you know, François, it is a magnificent idea?"

"Is it not, sire?" said the duke, delighted.

"Yes, I confess I feel tempted to reward largely the author of this fine project."

Chicot opened his eyes, but he shut them again, for he had seen on the face of the king one of his almost imperceptible smiles, and he was satisfied.

"Yes," continued Henri, "I repeat such a project merits recompense, and I will do what I can for the author of this good work, for the work is begun--is it not, my brother?"

The duke confessed that it was.

"Better and better; my subjects not only conceive these good ideas, but, in their anxiety to be of use to me, hasten to put them in execution. But I ask you, my dear François, if it be really to the Duc de Guise that I am indebted for this royal thought?”

“No, sire, it occurred to the Cardinal de Lorraine twenty years ago, only the St. Bartholomew rendered it needless for the time.”

“Ah! what a pity he is dead; but,” continued Henri, with that air of frankness which made him the first comedian of the day, “his nephew has inherited it, and brought it to bear. What can I do for him?”

“Sire,” said François, completely duped by his brother, “you exaggerate his merits. He has, as I say, but inherited the idea, and another man has given him great help in developing it.”

“His brother the cardinal?”

“Doubtless he has been occupied with it, but I do not mean him.”

“Mayenne, then?”

“Oh! sire, you do him too much honor.”

“True, how could any good ideas come to such a butcher? But to whom, then, am I to be grateful for aid to my cousin Guise?”

“To me, sire.”

“To you!” cried Henri, as if in astonishment. “How! when I saw all the world unchained against me, the preachers against my vices, the poets against my weaknesses, while my friends laughed at my powerlessness, and my situation was so harassing, that it gave me gray hairs every day: such an idea came to you, François--to you, whom I confess, for man is feeble and kings are blind, I did not always believe to be my friend! Ah! François, how guilty I have been.” And Henri, moved even to tears, held out his hand to his brother.

Chicot opened his eyes again.

“Oh!” continued Henri, “the idea is triumphant. Not being able to raise troops without raising an outcry, scarcely to walk, sleep, or love, without exciting ridicule, this idea gives me at once an army, money, friends, and repose. But my cousin spake of a chief?”

“Yes, doubtless.”

“This chief, you understand, François, cannot be one of my favorites; none of them has at once the head and the heart necessary for so important a post. Quelus is brave, but is occupied only by his amours. Maugiron is also brave, but he thinks only of his toilette. Schomberg also, but he is not clever. D’Epernon is a valiant man, but he is a hypocrite, whom I could not trust, although I am friendly to him. But you know, François, that one of the heaviest taxes on a king is the necessity of dissimulation; therefore, when I can speak freely from my heart, as I do now, I breathe. Well, then, if my cousin Guise originated this idea, to the development of which you have assisted, the execution of it belongs to him."

"What do you say, sire?" said François, uneasily.

"I say, that to direct such a movement we must have a prince of high rank."

"Sire, take care."

"A good captain and a skilful negotiator."

"The last particularly."

"Well, is not M. de Guise all this?"

"My brother, he is very powerful already."

"Yes, doubtless; but his power makes my strength."

"He holds already the army and the bourgeois; the cardinal holds the Church, and Mayenne is their instrument; it is a great deal of power to be concentrated in one family."

"It is true, François; I had thought of that."

"If the Guises were French princes, their interest would be to aggrandize France."

"Yes, but they are Lorraines."

"Of a house always rival to yours."

"Yes, François; you have touched the sore. I did not think you so good a politician. Yes, there does not pass a day but one or other of these Guises, either by address or by force, carries away from me some particle of my power. Ah! François, if we had but had this explanation sooner, if I had been able to read your heart as I do now, certain of support in you, I might have resisted better, but now it is too late."

"Why so?"

"Because all combats fatigue me; therefore I must make him chief of the League."

"You will be wrong, brother."

"But who could I name, François? who would accept this perilous post? Yes, perilous; for do you not see that he intended me to appoint him chief, and that, should I name any one else to the post, he would treat him as an enemy?"

"Name some one so powerful that, supported by you, he need not fear all the three Lorraine princes together."

"Ah, my good brother, I know no such person."

"Look round you, brother."

"I know no one but you and Chicot who are really my friends."

"Well, brother."

Henri looked at the duke as if a veil had fallen from his eyes. "Surely you would never consent, brother! It is not you who could teach all these bourgeois their exercise, who could look over the discourses of the preachers, who, in case of battle, would play the butcher in the streets of Paris; for all this, one must be triple, like the duke, and have a right arm called Charles and a left called Louis. What! you would like all this? You, the first gentleman of our court! Mort de ma vie! how people change with the age!"

"Perhaps I would not do it for myself, brother, but I would do it for you."

"Excellent brother!" said Henri, wiping away a tear which never existed.

"Then," said the duke, "it would not displease you for me to assume this post?"

"Displease me! On the contrary, it would charm me."

François trembled with joy. "Oh! if your majesty thinks me worthy of this confidence."

"Confidence! When you are the chief, what have I to fear? The League itself? That cannot be dangerous can it, François?"

"Oh, sire?"

"No, for then you would not be chief, or at least, when you are chief, there will be no danger. But, François, the duke is doubtless certain of this appointment, and he will not lightly give way."

"Sire, you grant me the command?"

"Certainly."

"And you wish me to have it?"

"Particularly; but I dare not too much displease M. de Guise."

"Oh, make yourself easy, sire; if that be the only obstacle, I pledge myself to arrange it."

"When?"

"At once."

"Are you going to him? That will be doing him too much honor."

"No, sire; he is waiting for me."

"Where?"

"In my room."

“Your room! I heard the cries of the people as he left the Louvre.”

“Yes; but after going out at the great door he came back by the postern. The king had the right to the first visit, but I to the second.”

“Ah, brother, I thank you for keeping up our prerogative, which I had the weakness so often to abandon. Go, then, François, and do your best.”

François bent down to kiss the king’s hand, but he, opening his arms, gave him a warm embrace, and then the duke left the room to go to his interview with the Duc de Guise. The king, seeing his brother gone, gave an angry growl, and rapidly made his way through the secret corridor, until he reached a hiding-place whence he could distinctly hear the conversation between the two dukes.

“Ventre de biche!” cried Chicot, starting up, “how touching these family scenes are! For an instant I believed myself in Olympus, assisting at the reunion of Castor and Pollux after six months’ separation.”

CHAPTER XXXIX.

IN WHICH IT IS PROVED THAT LISTENING IS THE BEST WAY TO HEAR.

The Duc d’Anjou was well aware that there were few rooms in the Louvre which were not built so that what was said in them could be heard from the outside; but, completely seduced by his brother’s manner, he forgot to take any precautions.

“Why, monseigneur,” said the Duc de Guise. “how pale you are!”

“Visibly?”

“Yes, to me.”

“The king saw nothing?”

“I think not; but he retained you?”

“Yes.”

“And what did he say, monseigneur?”

“He approves the idea, but the more gigantic it appears, the more he hesitates to place a man like you at the head.”

“Then we are likely to fail.”

“I fear so, my dear duke; the League seems likely to fail.”

“Before it begins.”

At this moment Henri, hearing a noise, turned and saw Chicot by his side, listening also. “You followed me, Knave!” said he.

“Hush, my son,” said Chicot; “you prevent me from hearing.”

“Monseigneur,” said the Duc de Guise, “it seems to me that in this case the king would have refused at once. Does he wish to dispossess me?”

“I believe so.”

“Then he would ruin the enterprise?”

“Yes; but I aided you with all my power.”

“How, monseigneur?”

“In this--the king has left me almost master, to kill or reanimate the League.”

“How so?” cried the duke, with sparkling eyes.

“Why, if, instead of dissolving the League, he named me chief----”

"Ah!" cried the duke, while the blood mounted to his face.

"Ah! the dogs are going to fight over their bones," said Chicot; but to his surprise, and the king's, the Duc de Guise suddenly became calm, and exclaimed, in an almost joyful tone:

"You are an adroit politician, monseigneur, if you did this."

"Yes, I did; but I would not conclude anything without speaking to you."

"Why so, monseigneur?"

"Because I did not know what it would lead us to."

"Well, I will tell you, monseigneur, not to what it will lead us--that God alone knows--but how it will serve us. The League is a second army, and as I hold the first, and my brother the Church, nothing can resist us as long as we are united."

"Without counting," said the Duc d'Anjou, "that I am heir presumptive to the throne."

"True, but still calculate your bad chances."

"I have done so a hundred times."

"There is, first, the King of Navarre."

"Oh! I do not mind him; he is entirely occupied by his amours with La Fosseuse."

"He, monseigneur, will dispute every inch with you; he watches you and your brother; he hungers for the throne. If any accident should happen to your brother, see if he will not be here with a bound from Pau to Paris."

"An accident to my brother," repeated François.

"Listen, Henri," said Chicot.

"Yes, monseigneur," said the Duc de Guise, "an accident. Accidents are not rare in your family; you know that, as well as I do. One prince is in good health, and all at once he falls ill of a lingering malady; another is counting on long years, when, perhaps, he has but a few hours to live."

"Do you hear, Henri?" said Chicot, taking the hand of the king, who shuddered at what he heard.

"Yes, it is true," said the Duc d'Anjou, "the princes of my house are born under fatal influences; but my brother Henri is, thank God, strong and well; he supported formerly the fatigues of war, and now that his life is nothing but recreation--"

"Yes; but, monseigneur, remember one thing; these recreations are not always without danger. How did your father, Henri II., die, for example? He, who also had happily escaped the dangers of war. The wound by M. de

Montgomery’s lance was an accident. Then your poor brother, François, one would hardly call a pain in the ears an accident, and yet it was one; at least, I have often heard it said that this mortal malady was poured into his ear by some one well known.”

“Duke!” murmured François, reddening.

“Yes, monseigneur; the name of king has long brought misfortune with it. Look at Antoine de Bourbon, who died from a spot in the shoulder. Then there was Jeanne d’Albret, the mother of the Béarnais, who died from smelling a pair of perfumed gloves, an accident very unexpected although there were people who had great interest in this death. Then Charles IX., who died neither by the eye, the ear, nor the shoulder, but by the mouth----”

“What do you say?” cried François, starting back.

“Yes, monseigneur, by the mouth. Those hunting books are very dangerous, of which the pages stick together, and can only be opened by wetting the finger constantly.”

“Duke! duke! I believe you invent crimes.”

“Crimes! who speaks of crimes? I speak of accidents. Was it not also an accident that happened to Charles IX. at the chase? You know what chase I mean; that of the boar, where, intending to kill the wild boar, which had turned on your brother, you, who never before had missed your aim, did so then, and the king would have been killed, as he had fallen from his horse, had not Henri of Navarre slain the animal which you had missed.”

“But,” said the Duc d’Anjou, trying to recover himself, “what interest could I have had in the death of Charles IX., when the next king would be Henri III.?”

“Oh! monseigneur, there was already one throne vacant, that of Poland. The death of Charles IX. would have left another, that of France; and even the kingdom of Poland might not have been despised. Besides, the death of Charles would have brought you a degree nearer the throne, and the next accident would have benefited you.”

“What do you conclude from all this, duke?” said the Duc d’Anjou.

“Monseigneur, I conclude that each king has his accident, and that you are the inevitable accident of Henri III., particularly if you are chief of the League.”

“Then I am to accept?”

“Oh! I beg you to do so.”

“And you?”

"Oh! be easy; my men are ready, and to-night Paris will be curious."

"What are they going to do in Paris to-night?" asked Henri.

"Oh! how foolish you are, my friend; to-night they sign the League publicly."

"It is well," said the Duc d'Anjou, "till this evening then."

"Yes, till this evening," said Henri.

"How!" said Chicot, "you will not risk going into the streets to-night?"

"Yes, I shall."

"You are wrong, Henri; remember the accidents."

"Oh! I shall be well accompanied; will you come with me?"

"What! do you take me for a Huguenot? I shall go and sign the League ten times. However, Henri, you have a great advantage over your predecessors, in being warned, for you know your brother, do you not?"

"Yes, and, mordieu! before long he shall find it out."

CHAPTER XL.

THE EVENING OF THE LEAGUE.

Paris presented a fine sight, as through its then narrow streets thousands of people pressed towards the same point, for at eight o’clock in the evening, M. le Duc de Guise was to receive the signatures of the bourgeois to the League. A crowd of citizens, dressed in their best clothes, as for a fête, but fully armed, directed their steps towards the churches. What added to the noise and confusion was that large numbers of women, disdaining to stay at home on such a great day, had followed their husbands, and many had brought with them a whole batch of children. It was in the Rue de l’Arbre Sec that the crowd was the thickest. The streets were literally choked, and the crowd pressed tumultuously towards a bright light suspended below the sign of the Belle Etoile. On the threshold a man, with a cotton cap on his head and a naked sword in one hand and a register in the other, was crying out, “Come come, brave Catholics, enter the hotel of the Belle Etoile, where you will find good wine; come, to-night the good will be separated from the bad, and to-morrow morning the wheat will be known from the tares; come, gentlemen, you who can write, come and sign;--you who cannot write, come and tell your names to me, La Hurière; vive la messe!” A tall man elbowed his way through the crowd, and in letters half an inch high, wrote his name, ‘Chicot.’ Then, turning to La Hurière, he asked if he had not another register to sign. La Hurière did not understand raillery, and answered angrily. Chicot retorted, and a quarrel seemed approaching, when Chicot, feeling some one touch his arm, turned, and saw the king disguised as a simple bourgeois, and accompanied by Quelus and Maugiron, also disguised, and carrying an arquebuse on their shoulders.

“What!” cried the king, “good Catholics disputing among themselves; par la mordieu, it is a bad example.”

“Do not mix yourself with what does not concern you,” replied Chicot, without seeming to recognize him. But a new influx of the crowd distracted the attention of La Hurière, and separated the king and his companions from the hotel.

"Why are you here, sire?" said Chicot.

"Do you think I have anything to fear?"

"Eh! mon Dieu! in a crowd like this it is so easy for one man to put a knife into his neighbor, and who just utters an oath and gives up the ghost."

"Have I been seen?"

"I think not; but you will be if you stay longer. Go back to the Louvre, sire."

"Oh! oh! what is this new outcry, and what are the people running for?"

Chicot looked, but could at first see nothing but a mass of people crying, howling, and pushing. At last the mass opened, and a monk, mounted on a donkey, appeared. The monk spoke and gesticulated, and the ass brayed.

"Ventre de biche!" cried Chicot, "listen to the preacher."

"A preacher on a donkey!" cried Quelus.

"Why not?"

"He is Silenus," said Maugiron.

"Which is the preacher?" said the king, "for they speak both at once."

"The underneath one is the most eloquent," said Chicot, "but the one at the top speaks the best French; listen, Henri."

"My brethren," said the monk, "Paris is a superb city; Paris is the pride of France, and the Parisians a fine people." Then he began to sing, but the ass mingled his accompaniment so loudly that he was obliged to stop. The crowd burst out laughing.

"Hold your tongue, Panurge, hold your tongue," cried the monk, "you shall speak after, but let me speak first."

The ass was quiet.

"My brothers," continued the preacher, "the earth is a valley of grief, where man often pan quench his thirst only with his tears."

"He is drunk," said the king.

"I should think so."

"I, who speak to you," continued the monk, "I am returning from exile like the Hebrews of old, and for eight days Panurge and I have been living on alms and privations."

"Who is Panurge?" asked the king.

"The superior of his convent, probably but let me listen."

"Who made me endure this? It was Herod; you know what Herod I speak of. I and Panurge have come from Villeneuve-le-Roi, in three days, to assist at this great solemnity; now we see, but we do not understand. What is passing, my brothers? Is it to-day that they depose Herod? Is it to-day that they put brother Henri in a convent?--Gentlemen," continued he, "I left Paris with two friends; Panurge, who is my ass, and Chicot, who is his majesty's jester. Can you tell me what has become of my friend Chicot?"

Chicot made a grimace.

"Oh," said the king, "he is your friend." Quelus and Maugiron burst out laughing. "He is handsome and respectable," continued the king.

"It is Gorenflot, of whom M. de Morvilliers spoke to you."

"The incendiary of St. Geneviève?"

"Himself!"

"Then I will have him hanged!"

"Impossible!"

"Why?"

"He has no neck."

"My brothers," continued Gorenflot: "I am a true martyr, and it is my cause that they defend at this moment or, rather, that of all good Catholics. You do not know what is passing in the provinces, we have been obliged at Lyons to kill a Huguenot who preached revolt. While one of them remains in France, there will be no tranquillity for us. Let us exterminate them. To arms! to arms!"

Several voices repeated, "To arms!"

"Par la mordieu!" said the king, "make this fellow hold his tongue, or he will make a second St. Bartholomew!"

"Wait," said Chicot, and with his stick he struck Gorenflot with all his force on the shoulders.

"Murder!" cried the monk.

"It is you!" cried Chicot.

"Help me, M. Chicot, help me! The enemies of the faith wish to assassinate me, but I will not die without making my voice heard. Death to the Huguenots!"

"Will you hold your tongue?" cried Chicot. But at this moment a second blow fell on the shoulders of the monk with such force that he cried out with real pain. Chicot, astonished, looked round him, but saw nothing but the stick. The blow had been given by a man who had immediately disappeared in the crowd after administering this punishment.

"Who the devil could it have been?" thought Chicot, and he began to run after the man, who was gliding away, followed by only one companion.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE RUE DE LA FERRONNERIE.

Chicot had good legs, and he would have made the best use of them to join the man who had beaten Gorenflot if he had not imagined that there might be danger in trying to recognize a man who so evidently wished to avoid it. He thought the best way not to seem to watch them was to pass them; so he ran on, and passed them at the corner of the Rue Tirechappe, and then hid himself at the end of the Rue des Bourdonnais. The two men went on, their hats slouched over their eyes, and their cloaks drawn up over their faces, with a quick and military step, until they reached the Rue de la Ferronnerie. There they stopped and looked round them. Chicot, who was still ahead, saw in the middle of the street, before a house so old that it looked falling to pieces, a litter, attached to which were two horses. The driver had fallen asleep, while a woman, apparently unquiet, was looking anxiously through the blind. Chicot hid himself behind a large atone wall, which served as stalls for the vegetable sellers on the days when the market was held in this street, and watched. Scarcely was he hidden, when he saw the two men approach the litter, one of whom, on seeing the driver asleep, uttered an impatient exclamation, while the other pushed him to awaken him. “Oh, they are compatriots!” thought Chicot. The lady now leaned out of the window, and Chicot saw that she was young, very pale, but very beautiful. The two men approached the litter, and the taller of the two took in both of his the little white hand which was stretched out to him.

“Well, ma mie,” asked he, “how are you?”

“I have been very anxious,” replied she.

“Why the devil did you bring madame to Paris?” said the other man rudely.

“Ma foi! it is a malediction that you must always have a petticoat tacked to your doublet!”

“Ah, dear Agrippa,” replied the man who had spoken first, “it is so great a grief to part from one you love.”

"On my soul, you make me swear to hear you talk! Did you come to Paris to make love? It seems to me that Béarn is large enough for your sentimental promenades, without continuing them in this Babylon, where you have nearly got us killed twenty times to-day. Go home, if you wish to make love, but, here, keep to your political intrigues, my master."

"Let him scold, ma mie, and never mind him; I think he would be ill if he did not."

"But, at least, ventre St. Gris, as you say, get into the litter, and say your sweet things to madame; you will run less risk of being recognized there than in the open street."

"You are right, Agrippa. Give me a place, ma mie, if you permit me to sit by your side."

"Permit, sire; I desire it ardently," replied the lady.

"Sire!" murmured Chicot, who, carried away by an impulse, tried to raise his head, and knocked it against the stone wall. Meanwhile the happy lover profited by the permission given, and seated himself in the litter.

"Oh! how happy I am," he cried, without attending in the least to the impatience of his friend--"ventre St. Gris, this is a good day. Here are my good Parisians, who execrate me with all their souls, and would kill me if they could, working to smooth my way to the throne, and I have in my arms the woman I love. Where are we, D'Aubigné? when I am king, I will erect here a statue to the genius of the Béarnais."

"The Béarn----" began Chicot, but he stopped, for he had given his head a second bump.

"We are in the Rue de la Ferronnerie, sire," said D'Aubigné, "and it does not smell nice."

"Get in then, Agrippa, and we will go on."

"Ma foi, no, I will follow behind; I should annoy you, and, what is worse, you would annoy me."

"Shut the door then, bear of Béarn, and do as you like." Then to the coachman he said, "Lavarrenne, you know where."

The litter went slowly away, followed by D'Aubigné.

"Let me see," said Chicot, "must I tell Henri what I have seen? Why should I? two men and a woman, who hide themselves; it would be cowardly. I will not tell; that I know it myself is the important point, for is it not I who reign? His love was very pretty, but he loves too often, this dear Henri of Navarre. A year ago it was Madame de Sauve, and I suppose this was La Fosseuse. However, I love the Béarnais, for I believe some day he will do an ill turn to those dear Guises. Well! I have seen everyone to-day but the Duc d’Anjou; he alone is wanting to my list of princes. Where can my François III. be? Ventre de biche, I must look for the worthy monarch.”

Chicot was not the only person who was seeking for the Duc d’Anjou, and unquiet at his absence. The Guises had also sought for him on all sides, but they were not more lucky than Chicot. M. d’Anjou was not the man to risk himself imprudently, and we shall see afterwards what precautions had kept him from his friends. Once Chicot thought he had found him in the Rue Bethisy; a numerous group was standing at the door of a wine-merchant; and in this group Chicot recognized M. de Monsoreau and M. de Guise, and fancied that the Duc d’Anjou could not be far off. But he was wrong. MM. de Monsoreau and Guise were occupied in exciting still more an orator in his stammering eloquence. This orator was Gorenflot, recounting his journey to Lyons, and his duel in an inn with a dreadful Huguenot. M. de Guise was listening intently, for he began to fancy it had something to do with the silence of Nicolas David. Chicot was terrified; he felt sure that in another moment Gorenflot would pronounce his name, which would throw a fatal light on the mystery. Chicot in an instant cut the bridles of some of the horses that were fastened up, and giving them each a violent blow, sent them galloping among the crowd, which opened, and began to disperse in different directions. Chicot passed quickly through the groups, and approaching Gorenflot, took Panurge by the bridle and turned him round. The Duc de Guise was already separated from them by the rush of the people, and Chicot led off Gorenflot to a kind of cul-de-sac by the church of St. Germain l’Auxerrois.

“Ah! drunkard!” said he to him, “ah! traitor! you will then always prefer a bottle of wine to your friend.’

“Ah! M. Chicot,” stammered the monk.

“What! I feed you, wretch, I give you drink, I fill your pockets and your stomach, and you betray me.”

“Ah! M. Chicot!”

“You tell my secrets, wretch.”

“Dear friend.”

“Hold your tongue; you are but a sycophant, and deserve punishment.”

And the monk, vigorous and strong, powerful as a bull, but overcome by wine and repentance, remained without defending himself in the hands of

Chicot, who shook him like a balloon full of air.

“A punishment to me, to your friend, dear M. Chicot!”

“Yes, to you,” said Chicot, striking him over the shoulders with his stick.

“Ah! if I were but fasting.”

“You would beat me, I suppose; I, your friend.”

“My friend! and you treat me thus!”

“He who loves well chastises well,” said Chicot, redoubling his proofs of friendship. “Now,” said he, “go and sleep at the Corne d’Abondance.”

“I can no longer see my way,” cried the monk, from whose eyes tears were falling.

“Ah!” said Chicot, “if you wept for the wine you have drunk! However, I will guide you.”

And taking the ass by the bridle, he led him to the hotel, where two men assisted Gorenflot to dismount, and led him up to the room which our readers already know.

“It is done,” said the host, returning.

“He is in bed?”

“Yes, and snoring.”

“Very well. But as he will awake some day or other, remember that I do not wish that he should know how he came here; indeed, it will be better that he should not know that he has been out since the famous night when he made such a noise in the convent, and that he should believe that all that has passed since is a dream.”

“Very well, M. Chicot; but what has happened to the poor monk?”

“A great misfortune. It appears that at Lyons he quarreled with an agent of M. de Mayenne’s and killed him.”

“Oh! mon Dieu!”

“So that M. de Mayenne has sworn that he will have him broken on the wheel.”

“Make yourself easy, monsieur; he shall not go out from here on any pretext.”

“Good. And now,” said Chicot, as he went away, “I must find the Duc d’Anjou.”

CHAPTER XLII.

THE PRINCE AND THE FRIEND.

We may remember that the Duc de Guise had invited the Duc d’Anjou to meet him in the streets of Paris that evening. However, he determined not to go out of his palace unless he was well accompanied; therefore the duke went to seek his sword, which was Bussy d’Amboise. For the duke to make up his mind to this step he must have been very much afraid; for since his deception with regard to M. de Monsoreau he had not seen Bussy, and stood in great dread of him. Bussy, like all fine natures, felt sorrow more vividly than pleasure; for it is rare that a man intrepid in danger, cold and calm in the face of fire and sword, does not give way to grief more easily than a coward. Those from whom a woman can draw tears most easily are those most to be feared by other men. Bussy had seen Diana received at court as Comtesse de Monsoreau, and as such admitted by the queen into the circle of her maids of honor; he had seen a thousand curious eyes fixed on her unrivaled beauty. During the whole evening he had fastened his ardent gaze on her, who never raised her eyes to him, and he, unjust, like every man in love, never thought how she must have been suffering from not daring to meet his sympathizing glance.

“Oh,” said he to himself, seeing that he waited uselessly for a look, “women have skill and audacity only when they want to deceive a guardian, a husband, or a mother; they are awkward and cowardly when they have simply a debt of gratitude to pay, they fear so much to seem to love--they attach so exaggerated a value to their least favor, that they do not mind breaking their lover’s heart, if such be their humor. Diana might have said to me frankly, ‘I thank you for what you have done for me, but I do not love you.’ The blow would have killed or cured me. But no; she prefers letting me love her hopelessly; but she has gained nothing by it, for I no longer love her, I despise her.”

And he went away with rage in his heart.

“I am mad,” thought he, “to torment myself about a person who disdains me. But why does she disdain me, or for whom? Not, surely, for that long, livid-looking skeleton, who, always by her side, covers her incessantly with his jealous glances. If I wished it, in a quarter of an hour I could hold him mute and cold under my knee with ten inches of steel in his heart, and if I cannot be loved, I could at least be terrible and hated. Oh, her hatred! Rather than her indifference. Yes, but to act thus would be to do what a Quelus or a Maugiron would do if they knew how to love. Better to resemble that hero of Plutarch whom I so much admired, the young Antiochus, dying of love and never avowing it, nor uttering a complaint. Am I not called the brave Bussy?"

He went home, and threw himself on a chair. How long he remained there he did not know when a man approached him.

"M. le Comte," said he, "you are in a fever."

"Ah, is it you, Rémy?"

"Yes, count. Go to bed,"

Bussy obeyed, and all the next day Rémy watched by him, with refreshing drinks for his body and kind words for his mind. But on the day after Bussy missed him. "Poor lad!" thought he, "he was tired and wanted air; and then doubtless Gertrude expected him; she is but a femme de chambre, but she loves, and a femme de chambre who loves is better than a queen who does not."

The day passed, and Rémy did not return. Bussy was angry and impatient. "Oh!" cried he, "I, who still believed in gratitude and friendship, will henceforth believe in nothing." Towards evening he heard voices in his ante-chamber, and a servant entered, saying, "It is Monseigneur the Duc d'Anjou."

"Let him enter," said Bussy, frowning.

The duke, on entering the room, which was without lights, said, "It is too dark here, Bussy."

Bussy did not answer; disgust closed his mouth. "Are you really ill," said the duke, "that you do not answer?"

"I am very ill."

"Then that is why I have not seen you for two days?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

The prince, piqued at these short answers, began to examine the room.

"You seem to me well lodged, Bussy," said he.

Bussy did not reply.

"Bussy must be very ill," said the duke to an attendant who stood by, "why was not Miron called? The king's doctor is not too good for Bussy." When the servant was gone, "Are you in grief, Bussy?" said the duke.

"I do not know."

The duke approached, becoming more and more gracious as he was rebuffed. "Come, speak frankly, Bussy," said he.

"What am I to say, monseigneur?"

"You are angry with me?"

"I! for what? besides, it is no use to be angry with princes." The duke was silent.

"But," said Bussy, "we are losing time in preambles; to the point, monseigneur. You have need of me, I suppose?"

"Ah, M. de Bussy!"

"Yes, doubtless; do you think I believe that you come here through friendship; you, who love no one?"

"Oh, Bussy, to say such things to me!"

"Well, be quick, monseigneur, what do you want? When one serves a prince, and he dissimulates to the extent of calling you his friend, one must pay for the dissimulation by being ready to sacrifice everything, even life, if necessary."

The duke colored, but it was too dark to see it. "I wanted nothing of you, Bussy, and you deceive yourself in thinking my visit interested. I desire only, seeing the fine evening, and that all Paris is out to sign the League, that you should accompany me a little about the streets."

Bussy looked at him. "Have you not Aurilly to go with you?"

"A lute-player!"

"Ah, monseigneur, you do not mention all his qualities; I believed that he fulfilled other functions for you. Besides, you have a dozen other gentlemen; I hear them in the ante-chamber."

At this moment the door opened. "Who is there?" said the duke, haughtily. "Who enters unannounced where I am?"

"I, Rémy," replied the young man, without any embarrassment.

"Who is Rémy?"

"The doctor, monseigneur," said the young man.

"And my friend," said Bussy. "You heard what monseigneur asks?" continued he, turning to Rémy.

"Yes, that you should accompany him; but----"

“But what?” said the duke.

“But you cannot do it!”

“And why so?” cried the duke.

“Because it is too cold out of doors.”

“Too cold!” cried the duke, surprised that any one should oppose him.

“Yes, too cold. Therefore I, who answer for M. Bussy’s life to himself and to his friends, must forbid him to go out.” And he pressed Bussy’s hand in a significant manner.

“Very well,” said the duke, “if the risk be so great, he must stay.” And he turned angrily to the door; but returning to the bed, he said, “Then you have decided not to come?”

“Monseigneur, you hear that the doctor forbids me.”

“You ought to see Miron, he is a great doctor.”

“I prefer my friend.”

“Then adieu.”

“Adieu, monseigneur.”

No sooner was the duke gone than Rémy said, “Now, monsieur, get up at once, if you please.”

“What for?”

“To come out with me. This room is too warm.”

“You said just now to the duke that it was too cold outside.”

“The temperature has changed since.”

“So that----” said Bussy, with curiosity.

“So that now I am convinced that the air will do you good.”

“I do not understand.”

“Do you understand the medicines I give you? Yet you take them. Come, get up; a walk with M. d’Anjou is dangerous, with me it is healthy. Have you lost confidence in me? If so, send me away.”

“Well, as you wish it.” Ana he rose, pale and trembling.

“An interesting paleness,” said Rémy.

“But where are we going?”

“To a place where I have analyzed the air to-day.”

“And this air?”

“Is sovereign for your complaint, monseigneur.”

Bussy dressed, and they went out.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ETYMOLOGY OF THE RUE DE LA JUSSIENNE.

Rémy took his patient by the arm, and led him by the Rue Coquillière down to the rampart.

“It is strange,” said Bussy, “you take me near the marsh of the Grange-Batelier, and call it healthy.”

“Oh, monsieur, a little patience; we are going to turn round the Rue Pagavin, and get into the Rue Montmartre--you will see what a fine street that is.”

“As if I do not know it.”

“Well, so much the better; I need not lose time in showing you its beauties, and I will lead you at once into a pretty little street.”

Indeed, after going a few steps down the Rue Montmartre, they turned to the right.

“This,” said Rémy, “is the Rue de la Gypecienne, or Egyptienne, which you like; often called by the people the Rue de la Gyssienne, or Jussienne.”

“Very likely; but where are we going?”

“Do you see that little church?” said Rémy. “How nicely it is situated; I dare say you never remarked it before.”

“No, I did not know it.”

“Well, now that you have seen the exterior, enter and look at the windows--they are very curious.”

There was such a pleased smile on the young man’s face, that Bussy felt sure there must have been some other reason for making him enter than to look at the windows which it was too dark to see. The chapel was lighted, however, for service, and Rémy began examining a fresco of the Virgin Mary, which was a continual source of complaint to the women who frequented the church, as they said that it attracted the attention of the young shopkeepers away from them.

“You had some other object in bringing me here than that I should admire the St. Marie, had you not?”

“Ma foi! no.”

“Then let us go.”

“Wait a moment; the service is finishing.”

“Now let us go,” said Bussy; “they are moving;” and he walked to the door.

“At least take some holy water.”

Bussy obeyed, and Rémy making a sign to a woman who stood near, she advanced, and Bussy grew suddenly pale, for he recognized Gertrude. She saluted him and passed on, but behind her came a figure which, although closely veiled, made his heart beat fast. Rémy looked at him, and Bussy knew now why he had brought him to this church. Bussy followed the lady, and Rémy followed him. Gertrude had walked on before, until she came to an alley closed by a door. She opened it, and let her mistress pass. Bussy followed, and the two others disappeared.

It was half-past seven in the evening, and near the beginning of May; the air began to have the feeling of spring, and the leaves were beginning to unfold themselves. Bussy looked round him, and found himself in a little garden fifty feet square, surrounded by high walls covered with vines and moss. The first lilacs which had begun to open in the morning sun sent out their sweet emanations, and the young man felt tempted to think that so much perfume and warmth and life came to him only from the presence of the woman he loved so tenderly.

On a little wooden bench sat Diana, twisting in her fingers a sprig of wall-flower, which she had picked, without knowing what she did. As Bussy approached her, she raised her head, and said timidly, “M. le Comte, all deception would be unworthy of us; if you found me at the church of St. Marie l’Egyptienne, it was not chance that brought you there.”

“No, madame; Rémy took me out without my knowing where I was going, and I swear to you that I was ignorant----”

“You do not understand me, monsieur, I know well that M. Rémy brought you there, by force, perhaps.”

“No, madame, not by force; I did not know that he was going to take me to see any one.”

“That is a harsh speech,” said Diana, sadly, and with tears in her eyes. “Do you mean that had you known, you would not have come?”

“Oh, madame!”

“It would have been but just, monsieur; you did me a great service, and I have not thanked you. Pardon me, and receive all my thanks.”

“Madame----” Bussy stopped; he felt so overcome, that he had neither words nor ideas.

“But I wished to prove to you,” continued Diana, “that I am not ungrateful, nor forgetful. It was I who begged M. Rémy to procure for me the honor of this interview; it was I who sought for it, forgive me if I have displeased you.”

“Oh, madame! you cannot think that.”

“I know,” continued Diana, who was the strongest, because she had prepared herself for this interview, “how much trouble you had in fulfilling my commission; I know all your delicacy; I know it and appreciate it, believe me. Judge, then, what I must have suffered from the idea that you would misunderstand the sentiments of my heart.”

“Madame, I have been ill for three days.”

“Oh! I know,” cried Diana, with a rising color, “and I suffered more than you, for M. Rémy, he deceived me, no doubt; for he made me believe----”

“That your forgetfulness caused it. Oh! it is true.”

“Then I have been right to do as I have done; to see you, to thank you for your kindness, and to swear to you an eternal gratitude. Do you believe that I speak from the bottom of my heart?”

Bussy shook his head sadly, and did not reply.

“Do you doubt my words?” said Diana.

“Madame, those who feel a kindness for you, show it when they can. You knew I was at the palace the night of your presentation, you knew I was close to you, you must have felt my looks fixed on you, and you never raised your eyes to me, you never let me know by a word, a sign, or a gesture, that you were aware of my presence; but perhaps you did not recognize me, madame, you have only seen me twice.” Diana replied with so sad a glance of reproach, that Bussy was moved by it.

“Pardon, madame,” said he; “you are not an ordinary woman, and yet you act like them. This marriage----”

“I was forced to conclude it.”

“Yes, but it was easy to break.”

“Impossible, on the contrary.”

“Did you not know that near you watched a devoted friend?”

“Even that made me fear.”

“And you did not think of what my life would be, when you belonged to another. But perhaps you kept the name of Monsoreau from choice?”

“Do you think so?” murmured Diana; “so much the better.” And her eyes filled with tears. Bussy walked up and down in great agitation.

“I am to become once more a stranger to you,” said he.

“Alas!”

“Your silence says enough.”

“I can only speak by my silence.”

“At the Louvre you would not see me, and now you will not speak to me.”

“At the Louvre I was watched by M. de Monsoreau, and he is jealous.”

“Jealous! What does he want then? mon Dieu! whose happiness can he envy, when all the world is envying his?”

“I tell you he is jealous; for the last two or three days he has seen some one wandering round our new abode.”

“Then you have quitted the Rue St. Antoine?”

“How!” cried Diana thoughtlessly, “then it was not you?”

“Madame, since your marriage was publicly announced, since that evening at the Louvre, where you did not deign to look at me, I have been in bed, devoured by fever, so you see that your husband could not be jealous of me, at least.”

“Well! M. le Comte, if it be true that you had any desire to see me, you must thank this unknown man; for knowing M. de Monsoreau as I know him, this man made me tremble for you, and I wished to see you and say to you, ‘Do not expose yourself so, M. le Comte; do not make me more unhappy than I am.’“

“Reassure yourself, madame; it was not I.”

“Now, let me finish what I have to say. In the fear of this man--whom I do not know, but whom M. de Monsoreau does perhaps--he exacts that I should leave Paris, so that,” said Diana, holding out her hand to Bussy, “you may look upon this as our last meeting, M. le Comte. To-morrow we start for Méridor.”

“You are going, madame?”

“There is no other way to reassure M. de Monsoreau; no other way for me to be at peace. Besides, I myself detest Paris, the world, the court, and the Louvre. I wish to be alone with my souvenirs of my happy past; perhaps a little of my former happiness will return to me there. My father will accompany me, and I shall find there M. and Madame de St. Luc, who expect me. Adieu, M. de Bussy.”

Bussy hid his face in his hands. “All is over for me,” he murmured.

“What do you say?” said Diana.

“I say, madame, that this man exiles you, that he takes from me the only hope left to me, that of breathing the same air as yourself, of seeing you sometimes, of touching your dress as you pass. Oh! this man is my mortal enemy, and if I perish for it, I will destroy him with my own hands.”

“Oh! M. le Comte!”

“The wretch; it is not enough for him that you are his wife: you, the most beautiful and most charming of creatures, but he is still jealous. Jealous! The devouring monster would absorb the whole world!”

“Oh! calm yourself, comte; mon Dieu; he is excusable, perhaps.”

“He is excusable! you defend him, madame?”

“Oh! if you knew!” cried Diana, covering her face with her hands.

“If I knew! Oh! madame, I know one thing; he who is your husband is wrong to think of the rest of the world.”

“But!” cried Diana, in a broken voice, “if you were wrong, M. le Comte, and if he were not.”

And the young woman, touching with her cold hand the burning ones of Bussy, rose and fled among the somber alleys of the garden, seized Gertrude’s arm and dragged her away, before Bussy, astonished and overwhelmed with delight, had time to stretch out his arms to retain her. He uttered a cry and tottered; Rémy arrived in time to catch him in his arms and make him sit down on the bench that Diana had just quitted.

CHAPTER XLIV.

HOW D’EPERNON HAD HIS DOUBLET TORN, AND HOW CHOMBERG WAS STAINED BLUE.

While M. la Hurière piled signature upon signature, while Chicot consigned Gorenflot to the Corne d’Abondance, while Bussy returned to life in the happy little garden full of perfume and love, the king, annoyed at all he had seen in the city, and furious against his brother, whom he had seen pass in the Rue St. Honoré, accompanied by MM. de Guise and Monsoreau, and followed by a whole train of gentlemen, re-entered the Louvre, accompanied by Maugiron and Quelus. He had gone out with all four of his friends, but, at some steps from the Louvre, Schomberg and D’Epernon had profited by the first crush to disappear, counting on some adventures in such a turbulent night. Before they had gone one hundred yards D’Epernon had passed his sword-sheath between the legs of a citizen who was running, and who tumbled down in consequence, and Schomberg had pulled the cap off the head of a young and pretty woman. But both had badly chosen their day for attacking these good Parisians, generally so patient; for a spirit of revolt was prevalent in the streets, and the bourgeois rose, crying out for aid, and the husband of the young woman launched his apprentices on Schomberg. He was brave; therefore he stopped, put his hand on his sword, and spoke in a high tone. D’Epernon was prudent; he fled.

Henri had entered his room at the Louvre, and, seated in his great armchair, was trembling with impatience, and seeking a good pretext for getting into a passion. Maugiron was playing with Narcissus, the large greyhound, and Quelus was sitting near.

“They go on!” cried Henri, “their plot advances; sometimes tigers, sometimes serpents; when they do not spring they glide.”

“Oh, sire!” said Quelus, “are there not always plots in a kingdom? What the devil could all the sons, brothers, and cousins of kings do if they did not plot?” And Quelus irreverently turned his back to the king.

“Hear, Maugiron,” said the king, “with what nonsense he tries to put me off.”

“Well, sire, look at Narcissus; he is a good dog, but when you pull his ears, he growls, and when you tread on his toes he bites.”

“Here is the other comparing me to my dog!”

“Not so, sire; I place Narcissus far above you, for he knows how to defend himself, and you do not.” And he also turned his back.

“That is right,” cried the king, “my good friends, for whom they accuse me of despoiling the kingdom, abandon me, insult me! Ah, Chicot! if you were here.”

At this moment, however, the door opened, and D’Epernon appeared, without hat or cloak, and with his doublet all torn.

“Bon Dieu!” cried Henri, “what is the matter?”

“Sire,” said D’Epernon, “look at me; see how they treat the friends of your majesty.”

“Who has treated you thus?”

“Mordieu, your people; or rather the people of; M. le Duc d’Anjou, who cried, ‘Vive la Messe!’ ‘Vive Guise!’ ‘Vive François!--vive everyone, in fact, except the king.”

“And what did you do to be treated thus?”

“I? nothing. What can a man do to a people? They recognized me for your majesty’s friend, and that was enough.”

“But Schomberg?”

“Well?”

“Did he not come to your aid? did he not defend you?”

“Corboeuf! he had enough to do on his own account.”

“How so?”

“I left him in the hands of a dyer whose wife’s cap he had pulled off, and who, with his five or six apprentices, seemed likely to make him pass an unpleasant quarter of an hour.”

“Par la mordieu! and where did you leave my poor Schomberg? I will go myself to his aid. They may say,” continued he, looking at Maugiron and Quelus, “that my friends abandon me, but they shall never say that I abandon them.”

“Thanks, sire,” said a voice behind Henri; “thanks, but here I am; I extricated myself without assistance; but, mein Gott! it was not without trouble.”

“It is Schomberg’s voice,” cried all, “but where the devil is he?”

“Here I am,” cried the voice; and indeed, in the corner of the room they saw something that looked not like a man but a shadow.

“Schomberg,” cried the king, “where do you come from, and why are you that color?”

Indeed, Schomberg from head to foot was of a most beautiful blue.

“Der Teufel!” cried he, “the wretches! It is not wonderful that the people ran after me.”

“But what is the matter?”

“The matter is, that they dipped me in a vat, the knaves; I believed that it was only water, but it was indigo.”

“Oh, mordieu!” cried Quelus, bursting out laughing, “indigo is very dear; you must have carried away at least twenty crowns’ worth of indigo.”

“I wish you had been in my place.”

“And you did not kill any one?”

“I left my poniard somewhere, that is all I know, up to the hilt in a sheath of flesh; but in a second I was taken, carried off, dipped in the vat, and almost drowned.”

“And how did you get out of their hands?”

“By committing a cowardice, sire.”

“What was that?”

“Crying, ‘Vive la Ligue!’“

“That was like me; only they made me add, ‘Vive le Duc d’Anjou!’“ said D’Epernon.

“And I also,” cried Schomberg; “but that is not all.”

“What, my poor Schomberg, did they make you cry something else?”

“No, that was enough, God knows; but just as I cried, ‘Vive le Duc d’Anjou,’ guess who passed.”

“How can I guess?”

“Bussy; his cursed Bussy, who heard me.”

“He could not understand.”

“Parbleu! it was not difficult to understand. I had a poniard at my throat, and I was in a vat.”

“And he did not come to your rescue?”

“It seemed as though he was in a dreadful hurry; he scarcely seemed to touch the ground.”

“Perhaps he did not recognize you, as you were blue.”

“Ah! very likely.”

“He would be excusable,” said the king; “for, indeed, my poor Schomberg, I should hardly have known you myself.”

“Never mind; we shall meet some other time, when I am not in a vat.”

“Oh! as for me,” said D’Epernon, “it is his master I should like to punish.”

“The Duc d’Anjou, whose praises they are singing all over Paris,” said Quelus.

“The fact is, that he is master of Paris to-night,” said D’Epernon.

“Ah, my brother! my brother!” cried the king. “Ah! yes, sire; you cry, ‘my brother,’ but you do nothing against him; and yet it is clear to me that he is at the head of some plot.” said Schomberg.

“Eh, mordieu! that is what I was saying just before you came in, to these gentlemen, and they replied by shrugging their shoulders and turning their backs.”

“Not because you said there was a plot, sire, but because you do nothing to suppress it.”

“And, now,” said Quelus, “we say, ‘Save us,’ sire; or rather, save yourself; to-morrow M. de Guise will come to the Louvre, and ask you to name a chief for the League; if you name M. d’Anjou, as you promised, he, at the head of one hundred thousand Parisians, excited by this night, can do what he likes.”

“Then,” said Henri, “if I take a decisive step, you will support me?”

“Yes, sire.”

“If, sire, you will only give me time to remodel my dress,” said D’Epernon.

“Go to my room, D’Epernon; my valet de chambre will give you what you want.”

“And I, sire, must have a bath,” said Schomberg.

“Go to my bath.”

“Then I may hope, sire, that my insult will not remain unavenged.”

Henri remained silent a moment, and then said, “Quelus, ask if M. d’Anjou has returned to the Louvre.”

Quelus went, but came back, and said that the duke had not yet returned.

“Well, you, Quelus and Maugiron, go down and watch for his entrance.”

“And then?”

“Have all the doors shut.”

“Bravo! sire.”

“I will be back in ten minutes, sire,” said D’Epernon.

“And my stay will depend on the quality of the dye,” said Schomberg.

“Come as soon as possible,” said the king.

The young men went out, and the king, left alone, kneeled down on his prie-Dieu.

CHAPTER XLV.

CHICOT MORE THAN EVER KING OF FRANCE.

The gates of the Louvre were generally closed at twelve, but the king gave orders that they should be left open on this night till one. At a quarter to one Quelus came up.

"Sire," said he, "the duke has come in."

"What is Maugiron doing?"

"Watching that he does not go out again."

"There is no danger."

"Then----"

"Let him go to bed quietly. Whom has he with him?"

"M. de Monsoreau and his ordinary gentlemen."

"And M. de Bussy?"

"No; he is not there."

"So much the better."

"What are your orders, sire?"

"Tell Schomberg and D'Epernon to be quick, and let M. de Monsoreau know that I wish to speak to him."

Five minutes after, Schomberg and D'Epernon entered; the former with only a slight blue tint left, which it would take several baths to eradicate, and the latter newly clothed. After them, M. de Monsoreau appeared. "The captain of the guards has just announced to me that your majesty did me the honor to send for me," said he.

"Yes, monsieur; when I was out this evening, I saw the stars so brilliant, and the moon so clear, that I thought it would be splendid weather for the chase to-morrow; so, M. le Comte, set off at once for Vincennes, and get a stag turned out ready for me."

"But, sire, I thought that to-morrow your majesty had given a rendezvous to Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou and M. de Guise, in order to name a chief for the League."

"Well, monsieur?" said the king haughtily.

"Sire, there might not be time."

“There is always time, monsieur, for those who know how to employ it; that is why I tell you to set off at once, so that you may have all ready for to-morrow morning at ten. Quelus, Schomberg, have the door of the Louvre opened for M. de Monsoreau, and have it closed behind him.”

The chief huntsman retired in astonishment. “It is a whim of the king’s,” said he to the young men.

“Yes.”

They watched him out, and then returned to the king.

“Now,” said Henri, “silence, and all four of you follow me.”

“Where are we going, sire?” said D’Epernon.

“Those who follow will see.”

The king took a lantern in his hand, and led the young men along the secret corridor, which led to his brother’s rooms. A valet-de-chambre watched here; but before he had time to warn his master, Henri ordered him to be silent, and the young men pushed him into a room and locked the door.

Henri opened his brother’s door. François had gone to bed full of dreams of ambition, which the events of the evening had nourished; he had heard his name exalted, and the king’s abused. Conducted by the Duc de Guise, he had seen the Parisians open everywhere for him and his gentlemen, while those of the king were insulted and hooted. Never since the commencement of his career had he been so popular, and consequently so hopeful. He had placed on the table a letter from M. de Guise, which had been brought to him by M. de Monsoreau. His surprise and terror were great when he saw the secret door open, and still more when he recognized the king. Henri signed to his companions to remain on the threshold, and advanced to the bed, frowning, but silent.

“Sire,” stammered the duke, “the honor that your majesty does me is so unlooked for----”

“That it frightens you, does it not? But stay where you are, my brother; do not rise.”

“But, sire, only--permit me----” and he drew towards him the letter of M. de Guise.

“You are reading?” asked the king.

“Yes, sire.”

“Something interesting to keep you awake at this time of night?”

“Oh, sire, nothing very important; the evening courier----”

"Oh, yes, I understand--Courier of Venus; but no, I see I am wrong--they do not seal billet-doux with seals of that size."

The duke hid the letter altogether.

"How discreet this dear François is!" said the king, with a smile which frightened his brother. However, making an effort to recover himself, he said:

"Did your majesty wish to say anything particular to me?"

"What I have to say to you, monsieur, I wish to say before witnesses. Here, gentlemen," continued he, turning to the four young men, "listen to us; I order you."

"Sire," said the duke, with a glance full of rage and hatred, "before insulting a man of my rank, you should have refused me the hospitality of the Louvre; in the Hotel d'Anjou, at least, I should have been free to reply to you."

"Really, you forget, then, that wherever you are, you are my subject; that I am the king, and that every house is mine."

"Sire, I am at the Louvre, at my mother's."

"And your mother is in my house. But to the point--give me that paper."

"Which?"

"That which you were reading, which was on your table, and which you hid when I came in."

"Sire, reflect."

"On what?"

"On this, that you are making a request unworthy of a gentleman, and fit only for a police-officer."

The king grew livid. "That letter, monsieur!"

"A woman's letter, sire."

"There are some women's letters very good to see, and dangerous not to see--such as those our mother writes."

"Brother!"

"This letter, monsieur!" cried the king, stamping his foot, "or I will have it torn from you by my Swiss!"

The duke jumped out of bed, with the letter crumpled in his hand, evidently with the intention of approaching the fire. But Henri, divining his intention, placed himself between him and the fire.

"You would not treat your brother thus?" cried the duke.

“Not my brother, but my mortal enemy. Not my brother, but the Duc D’Anjou, who went all through Paris with M. de Guise, who tries to hide from me a letter from one of his accomplices, the Lorraine princes.”

“This time,” said the duke, “your police are wrong.”

“I tell you I saw on the seal the three merlets of Lorraine. Give it to me, mordieu! or----”

Henri advanced towards his brother and laid his hand on his shoulder. François had no sooner felt the touch of his hand than, falling on his knees, he cried out, “Help! help! my brother is going to kill me.”

These words, uttered in an accent of profound terror, startled the king and mitigated his rage. The idea passed quickly through his mind that in their family, as by a curse, brother had always assassinated brother.

“No, my brother,” said he, “you are wrong; I do not wish to hurt you, but you cannot contend with me. I am the master, and if you did not know it before, you know it now.”

“Yes, my brother, I acknowledge it.”

“Very well, then give me that letter; the king orders it.”

The duke let it fall, and the king picked it up, but without reading it put it in his pocket-book.

“Is that all?” said the duke, with his sinister glance.

“No, monsieur, you must keep your room until my suspicions with respect to you are completely dissipated. The room is commodious, and not much like a prison; stay here. You will have good company--at least, outside the door, for this night these four gentlemen will guard you; to-morrow they will be relieved by a guard of Swiss.”

“But, my friends--cannot I see them?”

“Who do you call your friends?”

“M. de Monsoreau, M. de Ribeirac, M. Antragues, and M. de Bussy.”

“Oh, yes, he, of course.”

“Has he had the misfortune to displease your majesty?”

“Yes.”

“When, sire?”

“Always, but particularly to-night.”

“To-night! what did he do?”

“Insulted me in the streets of Paris.”

“You?”

“My followers, which is the same thing.”

"Bussy! you have been deceived, sire."

"I know what I say."

"Sire, M. de Bussy has not been out of his hotel for two days. He is at home, ill in bed, burning with fever."

The king turned to Schomberg, who said, "If he had fever, at all events he had it in the Rue Coquillière."

"Who told you he was there?" said the duke.

"I saw him."

"You saw Bussy out of doors?"

"Yes, looking well and happy, and accompanied by his ordinary follower, that Rémy."

"Then I do not understand it; I saw him in bed myself; he must have deceived me."

"It is well; he will be punished with the rest," said the king.

"If M. de Bussy went out alone after refusing to go out with me----"

"You hear, gentlemen, what my brother says. But we will talk of him another time; now I recommend my brother to your care; you will have the honor of serving as guard to a prince of the blood."

"Oh! sire," said Quelus, "be satisfied; we know what we owe to M. le Duc."

"It is well; adieu, gentlemen."

"Sire," cried the duke, "am I really a prisoner, are my friends not to visit me, and am I not to go out?" And the idea of the next day presented itself to his mind, when his presence would be so necessary to M. de Guise. "Sire," cried he again, "let me at least remain near your majesty; it is my place, and I can be as well guarded there as elsewhere. Sire, grant me this favor."

The king was about to yield to this request and say, "Yes," when his attention was attracted to the door, where a long body, with its arms, its head, and everything that it could move, was making signs to him to say "No." It was Chicot.

"No," said Henri to his brother; "you are very well here, and here you must stay."

"Sire----"

"It is my pleasure, and that is enough," said the king, haughtily.

"I said I was the real King of France," murmured Chicot.

CHAPTER XLVI.

HOW CHICOT PAID A VISIT TO BUSSY, AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

The next morning, about nine, Bussy was eating his breakfast, and talking with Rémy over the events of the previous day.

“Rémy,” said he, “did you not think you had seen somewhere that gentleman whom they were dipping in a vat in the Rue Coquillière?”

“Yes, M. le Comte, but I cannot think of his name.”

“I ought to have helped him,” said Bussy, “it is a duty one gentleman owes to another; but, really, Rémy, I was too much occupied with my own affairs.”

“But he must have recognized us, for we were our natural color, and it seemed to me that he rolled his eyes frightfully, and shook his fist at us.”

“Are you sure of that, Rémy? We must find out who it was; I cannot let such an insult pass.”

“Oh!” cried Rémy, “I know now who he was.”

“How so?”

“I heard him swear.”

“I should think so; any one would have sworn in such a situation.”

“Yes, but he swore in German.”

“Bah!”

“Yes, he said, ‘Gott verdomme.’“

“Then it was Schomberg?”

“Himself, M. le Comte.”

“Then, my dear Rémy, get your salves ready.”

“Why so, monsieur?”

“Because, before long, you will have to apply them either to his skin or to mine.”

“You would not be so foolish as to get killed, now you are so well and so happy; St. Marie l’Egyptienne has cured you once, but she will get tired of working miracles for you.”

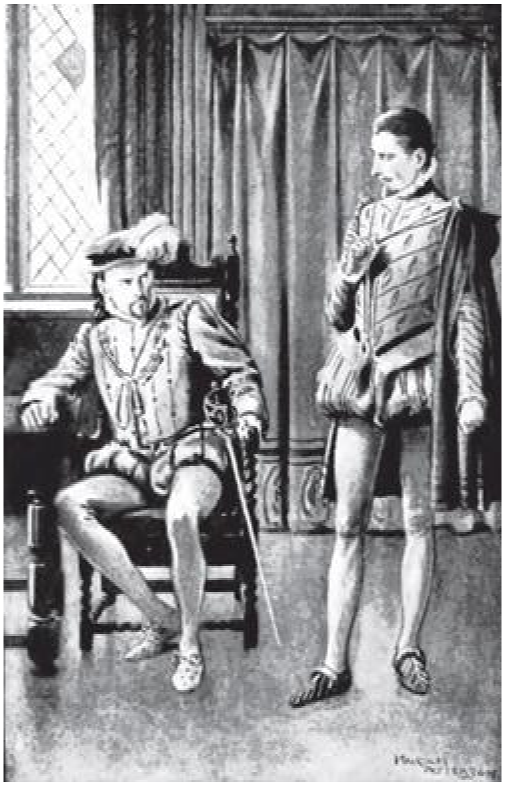

“On the contrary, Rémy, you cannot tell how pleasant it feels to risk your life when you are happy. I assure you I never fought with a good heart when I had lost large sums at play, when things had gone wrong, or when I had anything to reproach myself with; but when my purse is full, my heart light, and my conscience clear, I go boldly to the field, for I am sure of my hand; it is then I am brilliant. I should fight well to-day, Rémy, for, thanks to you,” said he, extending his hand to the young man, “I am very happy.”

“Stay a moment, however; you will, I hope, deprive yourself of this pleasure. A beautiful lady of my acquaintance made me swear to keep you safe and sound, under pretext that your life belongs to her.”

“Good Rémy!”

“You call me good Rémy, because I brought you to see Madame de Monsoreau, but shall you call me so when you are separated from her? and unluckily the day approaches, if it be not come.”

“What do you mean?”

“Do you not know that she is going to Anjou, and that I myself have the grief of being separated from Gertrude. Ah----”

Bussy could not help smiling at the pretended grief of the young man.

“You love her, then?” he said.

“I should think so; you should see how she beats me.”

“And you let her do it?”

“Oh! yes.”

“But to return to Diana, Rémy; when shall we set off?”

“Ah! I expected that. On the latest possible day I should say.”

“Why so?”

“Firstly, because it seems to me that M. le Duc d’Anjou will want you here.”

“After?”

“Because M. de Monsoreau, by a special blessing, does not suspect you in the least, and would suspect something immediately if he saw you disappear from Paris at the same time as his wife.”

“What do I care for that?”

“No; but I care. I charge myself with curing the sword strokes received in duels, for, as you manage your sword well, you never receive very serious ones; but not the blows given secretly by jealous husbands; they are animals, who, in such cases, strike hard.”

“Well I my dear friend, if it is my destiny to be killed by M. de Monsoreau.”

“Well!”

“Well! he will kill me.”

“And then, a week after, Madame de Monsoreau will be reconciled to her husband, which will dreadfully enrage your poor soul, which will see it from above or below, without being able to prevent it.”

“You are right, Rémy; I will live.”

“Quite right; but that is not all, you must be charmingly polite to him; he is frightfully jealous of the Duc d’Anjou, who, while you were ill in bed, promenaded before the house with his Aurilly. Make advances, then, to this charming husband, and do not even ask him what has become of his wife, since you know quite well.”

“You are right, Rémy, I believe. Now I am no longer jealous of the bear, I will be civil to him.”

At this moment some one knocked at the door.

“Who is there?” cried Bussy.

“Monsieur,” replied a page, “there is a gentleman below who wishes to speak to you.”

“To speak to me so early; who is it?”

“A tall gentleman, dressed in green velvet.”

“Can it be Schomberg?”

“He said a tall man.”

“True, then Monsoreau, perhaps; well, let him enter.” After a minute the visitor entered.

“M. Chicot!” cried Bussy.

“Himself, M. le Comte.”

Rémy retired into another room, and then Chicot said, “Monsieur, I come to propose to you a little bargain.”

“Speak, monsieur,” said Bussy, in great surprise.

“What will you promise me if I render you a great service?”

“That depends on the service, monsieur,” replied Bussy, disdainfully.

Chicot feigned not to remark this air of disdain. “Monsieur,” said he, sitting down and crossing his long legs, “I remark that you do not ask me to sit down.”

The color mounted to Bussy’s face.

“Monsieur,” continued Chicot, “have you heard of the League?”

“I have heard much of it,” said Bussy.

“Well, monsieur, you ought to know that it is an association of honest Christians, united for the purpose of religiously massacring their neighbors, the Huguenots. Are you of the League, monsieur? I am.”

“But--monsieur----”

“Say only yes, or no.”

“Allow me to express my astonishment----”

“I did myself the honor of asking you if you belonged to the League.”

“M. Chicot, as I do not like questions whose import I do not understand, I beg you to change the conversation before I am forced to tell you that I do not like questioners. Come, M. Chicot, we have but a few minutes left.”

“Well! in a few minutes one can say a great deal; however, I might have dispensed with asking you the question, as if you do not belong to the League now, you soon will, as M. d’Anjou does.”

“M. d’Anjou! Who told you that?”

“Himself, speaking to me in person, as the gentlemen of the law say, or rather write; for example, that dear M. Nicolas David, that star of the Forum Parisiense. Now you understand that as M. d’Anjou belongs to the League, you cannot help belonging to it also; you, who are his right arm. The League knows better than to accept a maimed chief.”

“Well, M. Chicot, what then?”

“Why, if you do belong to it, or they think you are likely to do so, what has happened to his royal highness will certainly happen to you.”

“And what has happened to him?”

“Monsieur,” said Chicot, rising and imitating M. de Bussy’s manner of a little before, “I do not love questions, nor questioners, therefore I have a great mind to let them do to you what they have done to-night to the duke.”

“M. Chicot,” said Bussy, with a smile, “speak, I beg of you; where is the duke?”

“He is in prison?”

“Where?”

“In his own room. Four of my good friends guard him. M. de Schomberg, who was dyed blue yesterday, as you know, since you passed during the operation; M. d’Epernon, who is yellow from the fright he had; M. de Quelus, who is red with anger; and M. de Maugiron, who is white with ennui; it is beautiful to see; not to speak of the duke, who is going green with terror, so that we shall have a perfect rainbow to delight our eyes.”

“Then, monsieur, you think my liberty in danger?”

“Danger! monsieur; suppose that they are already on the way to arrest you.”

Bussy shuddered.

“Do you like the Bastile, M. de Bussy? it is a good place for meditation, and M. Laurent Testu, the governor, keeps a good cook.”

“They would send me to the Bastile?”

“Ma foi! I ought to have in my pocket something like an order to conduct you there. Would you like to see it?” and Chicot drew from his pocket an order from the king in due form, to apprehend, wherever he might be, M. Louis de Clermont, Seigneur de Bussy. “Written very nicely by M. Quelus,” continued Chicot.

“Then, monsieur,” cried Bussy, “you are really rendering me a service?”

“I think so; do you agree with me?”

“Monsieur, I beg you to tell me why you do it; for you love the king, and he hates me.”

“M. le Comte, I save you; think what you please of my action. But do you forget that I asked for a recompense?”

“Ah, true.”

“Well?”

“Most willingly, monsieur.”

“Then some day you will do what I ask you?”

“On my honor, if possible.”

“That is enough. Now mount your horse and disappear; I go to carry this order to those who are to use it.”

“Then you were not to arrest me yourself?”

“I! for what do you take me?”

“But I should abandon my master.”

“Have no scruples; he abandons you.”

“You are a gentleman, M. Chicot.”

Bussy called Rémy. To do him justice, he was listening at the door.

“Rémy, our horses!”

“They are saddled, monsieur.”

“Ah!” said Chicot, “this young man knows what he is about.”

Bussy thanked Chicot once more, and went down.

“Where are we going?” said Rémy.

“Well----” said Bussy, hesitating.

“What do you say to Normandy?” said Chicot.

“It is too near.”

“Flanders, then?”

“Too far.”

“Anjou is a reasonable distance, monsieur,” said Rémy.

“Well, then, Anjou,” said Bussy, coloring.

“Adieu, monsieur!” said Chicot.

“It is destiny,” said Rémy, when he was gone.

“Let us be quick, and perhaps we may overtake her,” said Bussy.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE CHESS OF M. CHICOT, AND THE CUP AND BALL OF M. QUELUS.

Chicot returned joyfully to the Louvre. It was a great satisfaction to him to have saved a brave gentleman like Bussy.

M. de Guise, after having received in the morning the principal Leaguers, who came to bring him the registers filled with signatures, and after having made them all swear to recognize the chief that the king should appoint, went out to visit M. d’Anjou, whom he had lost sight of about ten the evening before. The duke found the prince’s valet rather unquiet at his master’s absence, but he imagined that he had slept at the Louvre.

The Due de Guise asked to speak to Aurilly, who was most likely to know where his master was. Aurilly came, but stated he had been separated from the prince the evening before by a pressure of the crowd, and had come to the Hôtel d’Anjou to wait for him, not knowing that his highness had intended to sleep at the Louvre. He added that he had just sent to the Louvre to inquire, and that a message had been returned that the duke was still asleep.

“Asleep at eleven o’clock! not likely. You ought to go to the Louvre, Aurilly.”

“I did think of it, monseigneur, but I feared that this was only a tale invented to satisfy my messenger, and that the prince was seeking pleasure elsewhere, and might be annoyed at my seeking him.”

“Oh, no; the duke has too much sense to be pleasure-seeking on a day like this. Go to the Louvre; you will be sure to find him there.”

“I will if you wish it; but what shall I say to him?”

“Say that the convocation at the Louvre is fixed for two o’clock, and that it is necessary that we should have a conference first. It is not at the time when the king is about to choose a chief for the League that he should be sleeping.”

“Very well, monseigneur, I will beg his highness to come here.”

“And say that I am waiting impatiently for him. Meanwhile I will go and seek M. de Bussy.”

“But if I do not find his highness, what am I to do?”

“Then make no further search for him. In any event I shall be at the Louvre at a quarter before two.”

Aurilly passed through the courtiers who crowded the Louvre, and made his way to the duke’s apartments. At the door he found Chicot playing chess. Aurilly tried to pass, but Chicot, with his long legs blocked up the doorway. He was forced to touch him on the shoulder.

“Ah, it is you, M. Aurilly.”

“What are you doing, M. Chicot?”

“Playing chess, as you see.”

“All alone?”

“Yes, I am studying; do you play?”

“Very little.”

“Yes, I know you are a musician, and music is so difficult an art, that those who give themselves to it must sacrifice all their time.”

“You seem very serious over your game.”

“Yes, it is my king who disquiets me; you must know, M. Aurilly, that at chess the king is a very insignificant person, who has no will, who can only go one step forward or back, or one to the right or left, while he is surrounded by active enemies, by knights who jump three squares at a time, by a crowd of pawns who surround him, so that if he be badly counseled he is a ruined king in no time, ma foi.”

“But, M. Chicot, how does it happen that you are studying this at the door of his royal highness’ room?”

“Because I am waiting for M. Quelus, who is in there.”

“Where?”

“With his highness.”

“With his highness! What is he doing there? I did not think they were such friends.”

“Hush!” then he whispered in Aurilly’s ear “he is come to ask pardon of the duke for a little quarrel they had yesterday.”

“Really!”

“It was the king who insisted on it; you know on what excellent terms the brothers are just now. The king would not suffer an impertinence of Quelus’s to pass, and ordered him to apologize.”

"Really!"

"Ah! M. Aurilly, I think that we are entering the golden age; the Louvre is about to become Arcadia, and the two brothers Arcades ambo."

Aurilly smiled, and passed into the ante-chamber, where he was courteously saluted by Quelus, between whose hands a superb cup and ball of ebony inlaid with ivory was making rapid evolutions.

"Bravo! M. Quelus," said Aurilly.

"Ah! my dear M. Aurilly, when shall I play cup and ball as well as you play the lute?"

"When you have studied your plaything as long as I have my instrument. But where is monseigneur? I thought you were with him."

"I have an audience with him, but Schomberg comes first."

"What! M. de Schomberg, also!"

"Oh! mon Dieu; yes. The king settled all that. He is in the next room. Enter, M. Aurilly, and remind the prince that we are waiting for him."

Aurilly opened the second door and saw Schomberg reclining on a kind of couch, from which he amused himself by sending from a tube little balls of earth through a gold ring, suspended from the ceiling by a silk thread, while a favorite dog brought him back the balls as they fell.

"Ah! guten morgen, M. Aurilly, you see I am amusing myself while I wait for my audience."

"But where is monseigneur?"

"Oh! he is occupied in pardoning D'Epernon and Maugiron. But will you not enter, you who are privileged?"

"Perhaps it would be indiscreet."

"Not at all; enter, M. Aurilly, enter." And he pushed him into the next room, where the astonished musician perceived D'Epernon before a mirror, occupied in stiffening his mustachios, while Maugiron, seated near the window, was cutting out engravings, by the side of which the bas-reliefs on the temple of Venus Aphrodite would have looked holy.

The duke, without his sword, was in his armchair between these two men, who only looked at him to watch his movements, and only spoke to him to say something disagreeable: seeing Aurilly, he got up to meet him.

"Take care monseigneur," said Maugiron, "you are stepping on my figures."

"Mon Dieu!" cried the musician, "he insults my master!"

"Dear M. Aurilly," said D'Epernon, still arranging his mustachois, "how are you?"

"Be so kind as to bring me here your little dagger," said Maugiron.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, do you not remember where you are?"

"Yes, yes, my dear Orpheus, that is why I ask for your dagger; you see M. le Duc has none."

"Aurilly!" cried the duke, in a tone full of grief and rage, "do you not see that I am a prisoner?"

"A prisoner! to whom?"

"To my brother; you might know that by my jailers."

"Oh! if I had but guessed it."

"You would have brought your lute to amuse his highness," said a mocking voice behind them, "but I thought of it, and sent for it; here it is."

"How does your chess go on, Chicot?" said D'Epernon.

"I believe I shall save the king, but it is not without trouble. Come, M. Aurilly, give me your poniard in return for the lute; a fair exchange."

The astonished musician obeyed.

"There is one rat in the trap," said Quelus, who returned to his post in the antechamber, only exchanging his cup and ball for Schomberg's shooting tube.

"It is amusing to vary one's pleasures," said Chicot; "so for a change I will go and sign the League."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE RECEPTION OF THE CHIEFS OF THE LEAGUE.

The time for the great reception drew near. Paris, nearly as tumultuous as the evening before, had sent towards the Louvre its deputation of leaguers, its bodies of workmen, its sheriffs, its militia, and its constantly-increasing masses of spectators.

The king, on his throne in the great hall, was surrounded by his officers, his friends, his courtiers, and his family, waiting for all the corporations to defile before him, when M. de Monsoreau entered abruptly.

"Look, Henriquet," said Chicot, who was standing near the king.

"At what?"

"At your chief huntsman; pardieu, he is well worth it. See how pale and dirty he is!"

Henri made a sign to M. de Monsoreau, who approached.

"How is it that you are at the Louvre, monsieur? I thought you at Vincennes."

"Sire, the stag was turned off at seven o'clock this morning, but when noon came, and I had no news, I feared that some misfortune had happened to your majesty, and I returned."

"Really!"

"Sire, if I have done wrong, attribute it to an excess of devotion."

"Yes, monsieur, and I appreciate it."

"Now," said the count, hesitatingly, "if your majesty wishes me to return to Vincennes, as I am reassured----"

"No, no, stay; this chase was a fancy which came into our head, and which went as it came; do not go away, I want near me devoted subjects, and you have just classed yourself as such."

Monsoreau bowed, and said, "Where does your majesty wish me to remain?"

"Will you give him to me for half an hour?" said Chicot to the king, in a low voice.

"What for?"

“To torment him a little. You owe me some compensation for obliging me to be present at this tiresome ceremony.”

“Well, take him.”

“Where does your majesty wish me to stand?” again asked M. de Monsoreau.

“Where you like; go behind my armchair, that is where I put my friends.”

“Come here,” said Chicot, making room for M. de Monsoreau, “come and get the scent of these fellows. Here is game which can be tracked without a hound. Here are the shoemakers who pass, or rather, who have passed; then here are the tanners. Mort de ma vie! if you lose their scent, I will take away your place.”

M. de Monsoreau listened mechanically; he seemed preoccupied, and looked around him anxiously.

“Do you know what your chief huntsman is hunting for now?” said Chicot, in an undertone, to the king.

“No.”

“Your brother.”

“The game is not in sight.”

“Just ask him where his countess is.”

“What for?”

“Just ask.”

“M. le Comte,” said Henri, “what have you done with Madame de Monsoreau? I do not see her here.”

The count started, but replied, “Sire, she is ill, the air of Paris did not agree with her; so having obtained leave from the queen, she set out last night, with her father, for Méridor.”

“Paris is not good for women in her situation,” said Chicot.

Monsoreau grew pale and looked furiously at him.

“This poor countess!” continued Chicot, “she will die of ennui by the way.”

“I said that she traveled with her father.”

“A father is very respectable, I allow, but not very amusing; and if she had only that worthy baron to amuse her it would be sad; but luckily----”

“What!” cried the count.

“What?”

“What do you mean by ‘luckily’?”

“Ah, it was an ellipsis I used.”

The count shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, but it was. Ask Henri, who is a man of letters."

"Yes," said the king; "but what did your adverb mean?"

"What adverb?"

"'Luckily.'"

"'Luckily' means luckily. Luckily, then, there exist some of our friends, and very amusing ones, who, if they meet the countess, will amuse her, and as they are going the same way, it is probable they will. Oh, I see them from here; do you not, Henri; you, who are a man of imagination? There they go, on a good road, well mounted, and saying sweet things to Madame la Comtesse, which she likes very much, dear lady."

M. de Monsoreau was furious, but he could not show it before the king; so he said as mildly as he could, "What, have you friends traveling to Anjou?"

"Good; pretend to be mysterious."

"I swear to you----"

"Oh! you know they are there, although I saw you just now seeking for them mechanically among the crowd."

"You saw me?"

"Yes, you, the palest of all chief huntsmen, past, present, and future, from Nimrod to M. d'Aulefort, your predecessor."

"M. Chicot!"

"The palest, I repeat."

"Monsieur, will you return to the friends of whom you spoke, and be so good as to name them, if your super-abundant imagination will let you."

"Seek, monsieur. Morbleu, it is your occupation to hunt out animals, witness the unlucky stag whom you deranged this morning, and who thought it very unkind of you. Seek."

The eyes of M. de Monsoreau wandered anxiously again.

"What!" cried he, seeing a vacant place by the king, "not the Duc d'Anjou?"

"Taint! Taint! the beast is found."

"He is gone to-day."

"He is gone to-day, but it is possible that he set out last night. When did your brother disappear, Henri?"

"Last night."

"The duke gone!" murmured Monsoreau, paler than ever.

"I do not say he is gone, I say only that he disappeared last night, and that his best friends do not know where he is," said the king.

"Oh!" cried the count, "if I thought so----"

"Well; what should you do? Besides, what harm if he does talk nonsense to Madame de Monsoreau? He is the gallant of the family, you know."

"I am lost!" murmured the count, trying to go away. But Chicot detained him.

"Keep still; mordieu! you shake the king's chair. Mort de ma vie, your wife will be quite happy with the prince to talk to, and M. Aurilly to play the lute to her." Monsoreau trembled with anger.

"Quietly, monsieur," continued Chicot; "hide your joy, here is the business beginning; you should not show your feelings so openly; listen to the discourse of the king."

M. de Monsoreau was forced to keep quiet. M. de Guise entered and knelt before the king, not without throwing an uneasy glance of surprise on the vacant seat of M. d'Anjou. The king rose, and the heralds commanded silence.

CHAPTER XLIX.

HOW THE KING N AXED A CHIEF WHO WAS NEITHER THE DUC DE GUISE NOR M. D’ANJOU.

“Gentlemen,” said the king, after assuring himself that his four friends, now replaced by ten Swiss, were behind him, “a king hears equally the voices which come to him from above and from below, that is to say, what is commanded by God, or asked by his people. I understand perfectly that there is a guarantee for my people, in the association of all classes which has been formed to defend the Catholic faith, and therefore I approve of the counsels of my cousin De Guise. I declare, then, the Holy League duly constituted, and as so great a body must have a powerful head, and as it is necessary that the chief called to sustain the Church should be one of its most zealous sons, I choose a Christian prince for the chief, and declare that this chief shall be”--he made a slight pause--”Henri de Valois, King of France and Poland.”

The Duc de Guise was thunderstruck. Large drops stood on his forehead, and he looked from one to the other of his brothers. All the leaguers uttered a murmur of surprise and discontent. The cardinal stole up to his brother, and whispered:

“François; I fear we are no longer in safety here. Let us haste to take leave, for the populace is uncertain, and the king whom they execrated yesterday, will be their idol for two or three days.”

During this time the king had signed the act prepared beforehand by M. de Morvilliers, the only person, with the exception of the queen mother, who was in the secret, then he passed the pen to the Duc de Guise, saying:

“Sign, my cousin; there, below me, now pass it to M. le Cardinal and M. de Mayenne.”

But these two had already disappeared. The king remarked their absence, and added, “Then pass the pen to M. de Monsoreau.”

The duke did so, and was about to retire, but the king said, “Wait.”

And while the others signed, he added, “My cousin, it was your advice, I believe, to guard Paris with a good army, composed of all the forces of the

League. The army is made, and the natural general of the Parisians is the king."

"Assuredly, sire."

"But I do not forget that there is another army to command, and that this belongs of right to the bravest soldier in my kingdom; therefore go and command the army."

"And when am I to set out, sire?"

"Immediately."

"Henri, Henri!" whispered Chicot; but, in spite of his signs and grimaces, the king gave the duke his brevet ready signed. He took it and retired, and was soon out of Paris. The rest of the assembly dispersed gradually, crying, "Vive le Roi! and Vive la Ligue!"

"Oh, sire!" cried the favorites, approaching the king, "what a sublime idea you have had!"

"They think that gold is going to rain on them like manna," said Chicot, who followed his master about everywhere with lamentations. As soon as they were left alone, "Ah! M. Chicot!" said Henri, "you are never content. Diable! I do not ask even for complaisance, but for good sense."

"You are right, Henri; it is what you want most."

"Confess I have done well."

"That is just what I do not think."

"Ah! you are jealous, M. Roi de France."

"I! Heaven forbid. I shall choose better subjects for jealousy."

"Corbleu."

"Oh! what self-love."

"Am I or not king of the League?"

"Certainly you are; but----"

"But what?"

"You are no longer King of France."

"And who is king then?"

"Everybody, except you; firstly, your brother----"

"My brother!"

"Yes, M. d'Anjou."

"Whom I hold prisoner."

"Yes, but prisoner as he is, he was consecrated."

"By whom was he consecrated?"

"By the Cardinal de Guise. Really, Henri, you have a fine police. They consecrate a king at Paris before thirty-three people, in the church of St. Genevieve, and you do not know of it!"

"Oh! and you do?"

"Certainly I do."

"How can you know what I do not?"

"Ah! because M. de Morvilliers manages your police, and I am my own."

The king frowned.

"Well, then, without counting Henri de Valois, we have François d'Anjou for king," continued Chicot; "and then there is the Duc de Guise."

"The Duc de Guise!"

"Yes, Henri de Guise, Henri le Balfré."

"A fine king! whom I exile, whom I send to the army."

"Good! as if you were not exiled to Poland; and La Charité is nearer to the Louvre than Cracow is. Ah, yes, you send him to the army--that is so clever; that is to say, you put thirty thousand men under his orders, ventre de biche! and a real army, not like your army of the League; no, no, an army of bourgeois is good for Henri de Valois, but Henri de Guise must have an army of soldiers--and what soldiers? hardened warriors, capable of destroying twenty armies of the League; so that if, being king in fact, Henri de Guise had the folly one day to wish to be so in name, he would only have to turn towards the capital, and say, 'Let us swallow Paris, and Henri de Valois and the Louvre at a mouthful,' and the rogues would do it. I know them."

"You forget one thing in your argument, illustrious politician."

"Ah, diable! it is possible! If you mean a fourth king----"

"No; you forget that before thinking of reigning in France, when a Valois is on the throne, it would be necessary to look back and count your ancestors. That such an idea might come to M. d'Anjou is possible; his ancestors are mine, and it is only a question of primogeniture. But M. de Guise!"

"Ah! that is just where you are in error."

"How so?"

"M. de Guise is of a better race than you think."

"Better than me, perhaps," said Henri, smiling.

"There is no perhaps in it."

"You are mad. Learn to read, my friend."

“Well, Henri, you who can read, read this;” and he drew from his pocket the genealogy which we know already, handing it to Henri, who turned pale as he recognized, near to the signature of the prelate, the seal of St. Peter.

“What do you say, Henri? Are not your fleur-de-lys thrown a little in the background?”

“But how did you get this genealogy?”

“I! Do I seek these things? It came to seek me.”

“Where?”

“Under the bolster of a lawyer.”

“And what was his name?”

“M. Nicolas David.”

“Where was he?”

“At Lyons.”

“And who took it from under the bolster?”

“One of my good friends.”

“Who is he?”

“A monk.”

“His name?”

“Gorenflot.”

“What! that abominable leaguer, who uttered those incendiary discourses at St. Genevieve, and again yesterday in the streets of Paris?”

“You remember the history of Brutus, who pretended to be a fool?”

“He is, then, a profound politician? Did he take it from the advocate?”

“Yes, by force.”

“Then he is brave?”

“Brave as Bayard.”

“And having done this, he has not asked for any recompense?”

“He returned humbly to his convent, and only asks me to forget that he ever came out.”

“Then he is modest?”

“As St. Crepin.”

“Chicot, your friend shall be made a prior on the first vacancy.”

“Thanks for him, Henri.”

“Ma foi!” said Chicot to himself, “if he escapes being hung by Mayenne, he will have an abbey.”

CHAPTER L.

ETEOCLES AND POLYNICES.

This day of the League terminated brilliantly and tumultuously, as it began. The friends of the king rejoiced, the preachers proposed to canonize Brother Henri, and spoke everywhere of the great deeds of the Valois. The favorites said, “The lion is roused.” The leaguers said, “The fox has discovered the snare.”

The three Lorraine princes, as we have seen, had left Paris, and their principal agent, M. de Monsoreau, was ready to start for Anjou. But as he was leaving the Louvre, Chicot stopped him.

“Where are you going in such a hurry?” said he.

“To his highness.”

“His highness?”

“Yes, I am unquiet about him. We do not live in times when a prince ought to travel without a good escort.”

“Well, if you are unquiet, so am I.”

“About what?”

“About his highness also.”

“Why?”

“Do you not know what they say?”

“That he has gone to Anjou.”

“No; that he is dead.”

“Bah!” said Monsoreau, with a tone of surprise, not unmixed with joy, “you told me he was traveling.”

“Diable! they persuaded me so, but now I have good reason to think that if the poor prince be traveling, it is to another world.”

“What gives you these mournful ideas?”

“He entered the Louvre yesterday, did he not?”

“Certainly; I came in with him.”

“Well! he has never been seen to come out.”

“From the Louvre?”

“No.”

“Where is Aurilly?”

“Disappeared.”

“But his people?”

“Disappeared.”

“You are joking, are you not, M. Chicot?”

“Ask!”

“Whom?”

“The king.”

“I cannot question his majesty.”

“Oh! yes, if you go about it in the right way.”

“Well,” said the count. “I cannot remain in this uncertainty.” And leaving Chicot, he went to the king’s apartment.

“Where is the king?” he asked: “I have to render an account to him of the execution of some orders he gave me.”

“With M. le Duc d’Anjou,” replied the man.

“With the Duke; then he is not dead?”

“I am not so sure of that.”

M. de Monsoreau was thoroughly bewildered; for if M. d’Anjou were in the Louvre, his absence on such a day was unaccountable.

Immediately after the sitting, Quelus, Maugiron, Schomberg, and D’Epernon, in spite of the ennui they experienced there, were so anxious to be disagreeable to the duke that they returned to him. He, on his part, was mortally ennuyé, as well as anxious, which, it must be confessed, the conversation of these gentlemen was not calculated to remove.

“Do you know, Quelus,” said Maugiron, “that it is only now I begin to appreciate our friend Valois; really he is a great politician.”

“Explain yourself,” said Quelus, who was lounging on a chair.

“While he was afraid of the conspiracy, he kept it quiet; now he speaks of it openly, therefore he is no longer afraid of it.”

“Well?”

“If he no longer fears it, he will punish it; you know Valois, he has certainly many good qualities, but clemency is not one of them.”

“Granted.”

“Then if he punishes these conspirators there will be a trial, and we shall have a fine spectacle.”

“Unless, which is possible, on account of the rank of the accused, they arrange it all quietly.”

“That would be my advice, certainly; it is better in family affairs.”

Aurilly glanced at the prince.

“Ma foi,” said Maugiron, “I know one thing; that in the king’s place I would not spare the high heads, which are always the most guilty. I would make an example of one or two--one, at all events.”

“I think it would be well to revive the famous invention of sacks.”

“What was that?”

“A royal fancy in the year 1550; they shut up a man in a sack, in company with three or four cats, and threw them into the water. The minute the cats felt the water they attacked the man, and there passed in the sack things which unluckily could never be seen.”

“Really, Quelus, you are a well of science, and your conversation is most interesting.”

“They could not apply this invention to the chiefs; they have the right to be beheaded; but to the small fry, I mean the favorites, squires, and lute-players.”

“Gentlemen----” stammered Aurilly.

“Do not reply to them, Aurilly,” said François, “it cannot be addressed to me.” As he spoke the king appeared on the threshold. The duke rose. “Sire,” cried he, “I appeal against the unworthy treatment I meet with from your followers.”

Henri did not seem to hear. “Good morning, Quelus,” said he kissing his favorite on both cheeks; “good morning, the sight of you rejoices my soul, and you, my poor Maugiron, how are you?”

“I am terribly ennuyé, sire; when I undertook to guard your brother, I thought he was more amusing. Oh I the tiresome prince; are you sure he is the son of your father and mother?”

“Sire! you hear,” cried the prince, “is it your wish that your brother should be insulted?”

“Silence, monsieur,” said Henri, “I do not like my prisoners to complain.”

“Prisoner, or not, I am your----”

“The title which you are about to invoke,” interrupted the king, “is fatal to you. My brother guilty, is doubly guilty.”

“But if he is not?”

“He is.”

“Of what crime?”

"Of having displeased me."

"Sire, have our family quarrels need of witnesses?"

"You are right, monsieur. My friends, let, me speak a little to my brother."

"I will take Aurilly," said Maugiron.

"Now we are alone, monsieur," said the king, when they were gone.

"I waited for this moment impatiently."

"And I also; ah, you want my crown, my worthy Eteocles; you made of the League a means, and of the throne an aim, and were consecrated in a corner of Paris, to be able to proclaim yourself to the Parisians shining with holy oil."

"Alas! your majesty will not let me speak."

"What for?--to lie, or to tell me things which I know already? But no, you would lie; for to confess what you have done, would be to confess that you merit death. You would lie, and I would spare you that shame."

"My brother, is it your intention to overwhelm me with outrages?"

"If what I say is an outrage, it is I who lie, and I ask no better. Speak then, I listen; tell me you are not disloyal, and at the same time unskilful."

"I do not know what your majesty means; you speak enigmas."

"Then I will explain my words; you have conspired against me, as formerly you conspired against my brother Charles, only then it was by the aid of Henri of Navarre, and now it is with the assistance of the Duc de Guise. It is true that formerly you crawled like a serpent; now you wish to spring like the lion; after perfidy, open force; after poison, the sword."

"Poison! what do you mean?" cried François, with flashing eyes.

"The poison with which you assassinated our brother Charles, which you destined for Henry of Navarre, your associate. That fatal poison is known; our mother has used it so often, which is doubtless the reason why you renounced it on this occasion, and preferred rather the part of captain of the League. But look me in the face, François, and learn that a man like you shall never kill me. A sword! Ah! I should like to see you here in this room alone with me, holding a sword. I have conquered you in cunning, and in a combat you would be killed. Dream no longer of struggling against me in any manner, for from this moment I act as king--as master--as despot; I shall watch you everywhere, follow you everywhere, and, at the least suspicion, I will throw you to the axe of my executioner. This is what I had to say to you in private, and I will order you to be left alone to-night to ponder over my words.”

“Then, sire, for a suspicion, I have fallen into disgrace with you?”

“Say, under my justice.”

“But, at least, sire, fix a term to my captivity, that I may know what to expect?”

“You will know when you hear your sentence read.”

“Can I not see my mother?”

“What for? There were but three copies in the world of the famous hunting-book which killed my poor brother, and of the two others, one is in London and the other at Florence. Besides, I am not a Nimrod, like my poor brother; adieu, François.”

“Gentlemen,” said the king, opening the door, “the Duc d’Anjou has requested to be alone to-night to reflect on an answer he has to make to me to-morrow morning. Leave him then alone, except occasional visits of precaution. If he be troublesome, call me; I have the Bastile ready, and the governor, M. Laurent Testu, is the best man in the world to conquer ill tempers.”

“Sire,” cried François, trying a last effort, “remember I am your----”

“You were also the brother of Charles IX., I think.”

“At least restore me to my friends.”

“I deprive myself of mine to give them to you.” And Henri shut the door, while the duke fell in despair into his armchair.

CHAPTER LI.

HOW PEOPLE DO NOT ALWAYS LOSE THEIR TIME BY SEARCHING EMPTY DRAWERS.

The scene which the duke had just had with the king made him regard his position as desperate. The minions had not allowed him to be ignorant of what had passed, and he had heard the people cry, “Vive le roi!” He felt himself abandoned by the other chiefs, who had themselves to save. In his quarrels with his brother Charles he had always had for confidants, or rather dupes, those two devoted men, Coconnas and La Mole, and, for the first time in his life, feeling himself alone and isolated, he felt a kind of remorse at having sacrificed them. During that time his sister Marguerite loved and consoled him. How had he recompensed her?

He had recently had near him a brave and valiant heart and sword--Bussy, the brave Bussy. And he had offended him to please Monsoreau, who had his secret, with which he always threatened him, and which was now known to the king. He had therefore quarreled with Bussy gratuitously, and, above all, uselessly, which as a great politician once said, “was more than a crime, it was a mistake!” How he would have rejoiced in his present situation, to know that Bussy was watching over him; Bussy the loyal, Bussy the universal favorite. It would have been probable liberty and certain vengeance.

But as we have said, Bussy, wounded to the heart, kept away from the prince, so the prisoner remained fifty feet above the ground, with the four favorites in the corridor, without counting the court full of Swiss. Besides this, one or other of the young men entered from time to time, and, without seeming even to notice the prince, went round the room, examined the doors and windows, looked under the beds and tables, and glanced at the curtains and sheets.

“Ma foi!” said Maugiron, after one of these visits, “I have done; I am not going to look after him any more to-night.”

“Yes,” said D’Epernon, “as long as we guard him, there is no need of going to look at him.”

“And he is not handsome to look at,” said Quelus.

“Still,” said Schomberg, “I think we had better not relax our vigilance, for the devil is cunning.”

“Yes, but not cunning enough to pass over the bodies of four men like us.”

“That is true,” said Quelus.

“Oh!” said Schomberg, “do you think, if he wants to fly, he will choose our corridor to come through? He would make a hole in the wall.”

“With what?”

“Then he has the windows.”

“Ah! the windows, bravo, Schomberg; would you jump forty-five feet?”

“I confess that forty-five feet----”

“Yes, and he who is lame, and heavy, and timid as----”

“You,” said Schomberg.

“You know I fear nothing but phantoms--that is an affair of the nerves.”

“The last phantom was,” said Quelus, “that all those whom he had killed in duels appeared to him one night.”

“However,” said Maugiron, “I have read of wonderful escapes; with sheets, for instance.”

“Ah! that is more sensible. I saw myself, at Bordeaux, a prisoner who escaped by the aid of his sheets.”

“You see, then?”

“Yes, but he had his leg broken, and his neck, too; his sheets were thirty feet too short, and he had to jump, so that while his body escaped from prison, his soul escaped from his body.”

“Besides,” said Quelus, “if he escapes, we will follow him, and in catching him some mischief might happen to him.”

So they dismissed the subject. They were perfectly right that the duke was not likely to attempt a perilous escape. From time to time his pale face was at the window which overlooked the fosses of the Louvre, beyond which was an open space about fifteen feet broad, and then the Seine rolled calm as a mirror. On the other side rose, like a giant, the tower of Nesle.

He had watched the sunset and the gradual extinction of all the lights. He had contemplated the beautiful spectacle of old Paris, with its roofs gilded by the last rays of the sun, and silvered by the first beams of the moon; then little by little he was seized with a great terror at seeing immense clouds roll over the sky and announce a storm. Among his other weaknesses, the Duc d’Anjou was afraid of thunder, and he would have given anything to have had his guardians with him again, even if they insulted him. He threw himself on his bed, but found it impossible to sleep. Then he began to swear, and break everything near him. It was a family failing, and they were accustomed to it at the Louvre. The young men had opened the door to see what the noise meant, and seeing that it was the duke amusing himself, they had shut it again, which redoubled his anger. He had just broken a chair, when a crashing of glass was heard at the window, and he felt a sharp blow on his thigh. His first idea was that he was wounded by some emissary of the king’s.

“Ah! I am dead!” he cried, and fell on the carpet. But as he fell his hand came in contact with a larger and rougher substance than a ball.

“Oh! a stone,” thought he, and feeling his leg, he found it uninjured. He picked up the stone and looked at it, and saw that it was wrapped in a piece of paper. Then the duke’s ideas began to change. Might not this stone come from a friend as well as an enemy. He approached the light, cut the silk which tied the paper round the stone and read,--

“Are you tired of keeping your room? Do you love open air and liberty? Enter the little room where the Queen of Navarre hid your poor friend, M. de la Mole, open the cupboard, and, by displacing the lowest bracket, you will find a double bottom; in this there is a silk ladder; attach it yourself to the balcony, two vigorous arms will hold it at the bottom. A horse, swift as thought, will lead you to a safe place.

“A FRIEND.”

“A friend!” cried the prince; “oh! I did not know I had a friend. Who is this friend who thinks of me?” And the duke ran to the window, but could see no one.

“Can it be a snare?” thought he; “but first let me see if there is a double bottom and a ladder.”

The duke then, leaving the light where it was for precaution, groped his way to the cabinet, which he knew so well. He opened it, felt for the bottom shelf, and, to his great joy, found what he looked for. As a thief escapes with his booty, the duke rushed into the next room with his prey. Ten o’clock struck; the duke thought of his hourly visitors, and hid his ladder under a cushion, on which he sat down. Indeed, five minutes had not passed before Maugiron appeared in a dressing-gown, with a sword in one hand and a light in the other. As he came in one of his friends said to him, “The bear is furious, he was breaking everything just now; take care he does not devour you, Maugiron.”

Maugiron made his usual examination; he saw a broken window, but thought the duke had done it in his rage.

“Maugiron!” cried Schomberg, from outside, “are you already eaten that you do not speak? In that case, sigh, at least, that we may know and avenge you.”

The duke trembled with impatience.

“No, no,” said Maugiron, “on the contrary, my bear is quite conquered.”

And so saying he went out and locked the door. When the key had ceased to turn in the lock the duke murmured,--

“Take care, gentlemen, or the duke will be too much for you.”

CHAPTER LII.

VENTRE ST. GRIS.

Left alone, the duke, knowing he had at least an hour before him, drew out his ladder and carefully examined the fastenings.

"The ladder is good," said he, at length, "and will not break."

Then he unrolled it all, and counted thirty-eight rounds of fifteen inches each.

"The length is sufficient," said he, "there is nothing to fear on that point. Ah! but if it were some of those cursed minions who sent me to the ladder? If I attach it to the balcony they will let me do it, and while I am descending they will cut the cords. But, no; they could not be foolish enough to think I would fly without barricading the door, and I should have time to fly before they could force it. But what person in the world, except my sister herself, could know of a ladder hidden in her dressing-room? What friend of mine can it be?"

Suddenly an idea struck him, and he cried, "Bussy!"

Indeed, Bussy, whom so many ladies adored, Bussy was a hero to the Queen of Navarre, and his only true friend--was it Bussy? Everything made him think so. The duke, of course, did not know all his motives for being angry with him, for he did not know his love for Diana, and believed him to be too noble to think of resentment when his master was a prisoner. He approached the window again, and fancied he could see in the fog the indistinct forms of three horses and two men by the river. Two men. These must be Bussy and Rémy. He then looked through the keyhole, and saw his four guardians; two were asleep, and two had inherited Chicot's chessboard and were playing. He extinguished his light.

Then he opened his window, and looked over the balcony; the gulf below him looked dreadful in the darkness, and he drew back. But air and liberty have an attraction so irresistible to a prisoner, that François, on withdrawing from the window, felt as if he were being stifled, and for an instant something like disgust of life and indifference to death passed through his mind. He fancied he was growing courageous, and, profiting by this moment of excitement, he seized the ladder, fixed it to the balcony, then barricaded the door as well as he could, and returned to the window. The darkness was now great, and the first growlings of the storm began to make themselves heard; a great cloud with silver fringes extended itself like a recumbent elephant from one side to the other of the river. A flash of lightning broke the immense cloud for a moment, and the prince fancied that he saw below him in the fosse the same figures he had imagined before. A horse neighed; there was no more doubt--he was waited for.

He shook the ladder to see if it was firm, then he put his leg over the balustrade and placed his foot on the first step. Nothing can describe the anguish of the prisoner at this moment, placed between a frail silk cord on the one hand and his brother’s cruel menaces on the other. But as he stood there he felt the ladder stiffened; some one held it. Was it a friend or an enemy? Were they open arms or armed ones which waited for him? An irresistible terror seized him; he still held the balcony with his left hand, and made a movement to remount, when a very slight pull at the ladder came to him like a solicitation. He took courage, and tried the second step. The ladder was held as firm as a rock, and he found a steady support for his foot. He descended rapidly, almost gliding down, when all at once, instead of touching the earth, which he knew to be near, he felt himself seized in the arms of a man who whispered, “You are saved.” Then he was carried along the fosse till they came to the end, when another man seized him by the collar and drew him up, and after having aided his companion in the same way, they ran to the river, where stood the horses. The prince knew he was at, the mercy of his saviours, so he jumped at once on a horse, and his companions did the same. The same voice now said, “Quick!” And they set off at a gallop.

“All goes well at present,” thought the prince, “let us hope it will end so. Thanks, my brave Bussy,” said he to his companion on the right, who was entirely covered with a large cloak.

“Quick!” replied the other.

They arrived thus at the great ditch of the Bastile, which they crossed on a bridge improvised by the Leaguers the night before. The three cavaliers rode towards Charenton, when all at once the man on the right entered the forest of Vincennes, saying only, “Come.” The prince’s horse neighed, and several others answered from the depths of the forest. François would have stopped if he could, for he feared they were taking him to an ambush, but it was too late, and in a few minutes he found himself in a small open space, where eight or ten men on horseback were drawn up.

"Oh! oh!" said the prince, "what does this mean, monsieur?"

"Ventre St. Gris! it means that we are saved."

"You! Henri!" cried the duke, stupefied, "you! my liberator?"

"Does that astonish you? Are we not related, Agrippa?" continued he, looking round for his companion.

"Here I am," said D'Aubigné.

"Are there two fresh horses, with which we can go a dozen leagues without stopping?"

"But where are you taking me, my cousin?"

"Where you like, only be quick, for the King of France has more horses than I have, and is rich enough to kill a dozen if he wishes to catch us."

"Really, then, I am free to go where I like?"

"Certainly, I wait your orders."

"Well, then, to Angers."

"To Angers; so be it, there you are at home."

"But you?"

"I! when we are in sight of Angers I shall leave you, and ride on to Navarre, where my good Margot expects me, and must be much ennuyée at my absence."

"But no one knew you were here?"

"I came to sell three diamonds of my wife's."

"Ah! very well."

"And also to know if this League was really going to ruin me."

"You see there is nothing in it."

"Thanks to you, no."

"How! thanks to me?"

"Certainly. If, instead of refusing to be chief of the League, when you knew it was directed against me, you had accepted, I was ruined. Therefore, when I heard that the king had punished your refusal with imprisonment, I swore to release you, and I have done so."

"Always so simple-minded," thought François, "really, it is easy to deceive him."

"Now for Anjou," thought the king. "Ah! M. de Guise, I send you a companion you do not want."

CHAPTER LIII.

THE FRIENDS.

While Paris was in this ferment, Madame de Monsoreau, escorted by her father and two servants, pursued their way to Méridor. She began to enjoy her liberty, precious to those who have suffered. The azure of the sky, compared to that which hung always menacingly over the black towers of the Bastile, the trees already green, all appeared to her fresh and young, beautiful and new, as if she had really come out of the tomb where her father had believed her. He, the old baron, had grown young again. We will not attempt to describe their long journey, free from incidents. Several times the baron said to Diana,--

"Do not fear, my daughter."

"Fear what?"

"Were you not looking if M. de Monsoreau was following us?"

"Yes, it was true, I did look," replied she, with a sigh and another glance behind.

At last, on the eighth day, they reached the château of Méridor, and were received by Madame de St. Luc and her husband. Then began for these four people one of those existences of which every man has dreamed in reading Virgil or Theocritus. The baron and St. Luc hunted from morning till evening; you might have seen troops of dogs rushing from the hills in pursuit of some hare or fox, and startling Diana and Jeanne, as they sat side by side on the moss, under the shade of the trees.

"Recount to me," said Jeanne, "all that happened to you in the tomb, for you were dead to us. See, the hawthorn is shedding on us its last flowers, and the elders send out their perfume. Not a breath in the air, not a human being near us; recount, little sister."

"What can I say?"

"Tell me, are you happy? That beautiful eye often swimming in tears, the paleness of your cheeks, that mouth which tries a smile which it never finishes--Diana, you must have many things to tell me."

"No, nothing."

“You are, then, happy with M. de Monsoreau?”

Diana shuddered.

“You see!” said Jeanne.

“With M. de Monsoreau! Why did you pronounce that name? why do you evoke that phantom in the midst of our woods, our flowers, our happiness?”

“You told me, I think,” said Jeanne, “that M. de Bussy showed much interest in you.”

Diana reddened, even to her round pretty ears.

“He is a charming creature,” continued Jeanne, kissing Diana.

“It is folly,” said Diana; “M. de Bussy thinks no more of Diana de Méridor.”

“That is possible; but I believe he pleases Diana de Monsoreau a little.”

“Do not say that.”

“Does it displease you?”

“I tell you he thinks no more of me; and he does well--oh, I was cowardly.”

“What do you say?”

“Nothing, nothing.”

“Now, Diana, do not cry, do not accuse yourself. You cowardly! you, my heroine! you were constrained.”

“I believed it; I saw dangers, gulfs under my feet. Now, Jeanne, these dangers seem to me chimerical, these gulfs as if a child could cross them. I was cowardly, I tell you; oh, I had no time to reflect.”

“You speak in enigmas.”

“No,” cried Diana, rising, “it was not my fault, it was his. The Duc d’Anjou was against him; but when one wishes a thing, when one loves, neither prince nor master should keep you back. See, Jeanne, if I loved----”

“Be calm, dear friend.”

“I tell you, *we* were cowardly.”

“‘We!’ of whom do you speak? That ‘we’ is eloquent, my dearest Diana.”

“I mean my father and I; you did not think anything else, did you? My father is a nobleman--he might have spoken to the king; I am proud, and do not fear a man when I hate him. But *he* did not love me.”

“You lie to yourself! you know the contrary, little hypocrite!”

“You may believe in love, Jeanne, you, whom M. de St. Luc married in spite of the king; you, whom he carried away from Paris; you, who pay him by your caresses for proscription and exile.”

“And he thinks himself richly repaid.”

“But I--reflect a little, do not be egotistical--I, whom that fiery young man pretended to love--I, who fixed the regards of that invincible Bussy, he who fears no one--I was alone with him in the cloister of l’Egyptienne--we were alone; but for Gertrude and Rémy, our accomplices, he could have carried me off. At that moment I saw him suffering because of me; I saw his eyes languishing, his lips pale and parched with fever. If he had asked me to die to restore the brightness to his eyes, and the freshness to his lips, I should have died. Well, I went away, and he never tried to detain me. Wait still. He knew that I was leaving Paris, that I was returning to Méridor; he knew that M. de Monsoreau--I blush as I tell it--was only my husband in name; he knew that I traveled alone; and along the road, dear Jeanne, I kept turning, thinking I heard the gallop of his horse behind us. But no, it was only the echo of my own. I tell you he does not think of me. I am not worth a journey to Anjou while there are so many beautiful women at the court of France, whose smiles are worth a hundred confessions from the provincial, buried at Méridor. Do you understand now? Am I forgotten, despised----”

She had not finished when the foliage of the oak rustled, a quantity of mortar and moss fell from the old wall, and a man threw himself at the feet of Diana, who uttered an affrighted cry.

Jeanne ran away--she recognized him.

“Here I am!” cried Bussy, kissing the dress of Diana.

She too recognized him, and, overcome by this unexpected happiness, fell unconscious into the arms of him whom she had just accused of indifference.

CHAPTER LIV.

BUSSY AND DIANA.

Faintings from love seldom last any length of time, nor are they very dangerous. Diana was not long in opening her eyes, and finding herself supported by Bussy.

“Oh!” murmured she, “it was shocking, count, to surprise us thus.”

Bussy expected other words, men are so exacting, but Diana said no more, and, disengaging herself gently from his arms, ran to her friend, who, seeing her faint, had returned softly, and stood a little way off.

“Is it thus that you receive me, madame?”

“No, M. de Bussy, but----”

“Oh! no ‘but,’ madame,” sighed Bussy, drawing near again.

“No, no, not on your knees!”

“Oh! let me pray to you an instant, thus!” cried the count. “I have so longed for this place.”

“Yes, but to come to it, you jumped over the wall. Not only is it not suitable for a man of your rank, but it is very imprudent.”

“How so?”

“If you had been seen?”

“Who could have seen me?”

“Our hunters, who, a quarter of an hour ago, passed by this wall.”

“Do not be uneasy, madame, I hide myself too carefully to be seen.”

“Hidden! really!” said Jeanne, “tell us how, M. de Bussy.”

“Firstly, if I did not join you on the road, it was not my fault, I took one route and you another. You came by Rambouillet, and I by Chartres. And then judge if your poor Bussy be not in love; I did not dare to join you. It was not in the presence of your father and your servants that I wished to meet you again, for I did not desire to compromise you, so I made the journey stage by stage, devoured by impatience. At last you arrived. I had taken a lodging in the village, and, concealed behind the window, I saw you pass.”

“Oh! mon Dieu! are you then at Angers under your own name?”

“For what do you take me? I am a traveling merchant; look at my costume, it is of a color much worn among drapers and goldsmiths. I have not been remarked.”

“Bussy, the handsome Bussy, two days in a provincial town and not remarked; who would believe that at court?” said Jeanne.

“Continue, count,” said Diana, blushing; “how do you come here from the town?”

“I have two horses of a chosen race; I leave the village on one, stopping to look at all the signs and writings, but when out of sight my horse takes to a gallop, which brings him the four miles in half an hour. Once in the wood of Méridor I ride to the park wall, but it is very long, for the park is large. Yesterday I explored this wall for more than four hours, climbing up here and there, hoping to see you. At last, when I was almost in despair, I saw you in the evening returning to the house; the two great dogs of the baron were jumping round you. When you had disappeared, I jumped over, and saw the marks on the grass where you had been sitting. I fancied you might have adopted this place, which is charming, during the heat of the sun, so I broke away some branches that I might know it again, and sighing, which hurts me dreadfully----”

“From want of habit,” said Jeanne.

“I do not say no, madame; well, then, sighing, I retook my way to the town. I was very tired, I had torn my dress in climbing trees, but I had seen you, and I was happy.”

“It is an admirable recital,” said Jeanne, “and you have surmounted dreadful obstacles; it is quite heroic; but in your place I would have preserved my doublet, and above all, have taken care of my white hands. Look at yours, how frightful they are with scratches.”

“Yes, but then I should not have seen her whom I came to see.”

“On the contrary, I should have seen her better than you did.”

“What would you have done then?”

“I would have gone straight to the Château de Méridor. M. le Baron would have pressed me in his arms, Madame de Monsoreau would have placed me by her at table, M. de St. Luc would have been delighted to see me, and his wife also. It was the simplest thing in the world, but lovers never think of what is straight before them.”

Bussy smiled at Diana. “Oh, no,” he said, “that would not have done for me.”

“Then I no longer understand what good manners are.”

“No,” said Bussy, “I could not go to the castle; M. le Baron would watch his daughter.”

“Good!” said Jeanne, “here is a lesson for me,” and kissing Diana on the forehead, she ran away. Diana tried to stop her, but Bussy seized her hands, and she let her friend go. They remained alone.

“Have I not done well, madame,” said Bussy, “and do you not approve?”

“I do not desire to feign,” said Diana, “besides, it would be useless; you know I approve; but here must stop my indulgence; in calling for you as I did just now I was mad--I was guilty.”

“Mon Dieu! What do you say?”

“Alas I count, the truth; I have a right to make M. de Monsoreau unhappy, to withhold from him my smiles and my love, but I have no right to bestow them on another: for, after all, he is my master.”

“Now, you will let me speak, will you not?”

“Speak!”

“Well! of all that you have just said, you do not find one word in your heart.”

“How!”

“Listen patiently; you have overwhelmed me with sophisms. The commonplaces of morality do not apply here; this man is your master, you say, but did you choose him? No; fate imposed him on you, and you submitted. Now, do you mean to suffer all your life the consequences, of this odious constraint? I will deliver you from it.”

Diana tried to speak, but Bussy stopped her.

“Oh! I know what you are going to say; that if I provoke M. de Monsoreau and kill him, you will see me no more. So be it; I may die of grief, but you will live free and happy, and you may render happy some gallant man, who in his joy will sometimes bless my name, and cry, ‘Thanks, Bussy, thanks, for having delivered us from that dreadful Monsoreau;’ and you, yourself, Diana, who will not dare to thank me while living, will thank me dead.”

Diana seized his hand.

“You have not yet implored me, Bussy; you begin with menaces.”

“Menace you! oh! could I have such an intention, I, who love you so ardently, Diana. I know you love me; do not deny it, I know it, for you have avowed it. Here, on my knees before you, my hand on my heart, which has never lied, either from interest or from fear, I say to you, Diana, I love you, for my whole life. Diana, I swear to you, that if I die for you, it will be in adoring you. If you still say to me, ‘go,’ I will go without a sigh, or complaint, from this place where I am so happy, and I should say, ‘this woman does not love me, and never will love me.’ Then I should go away, and you would see me no more, but as my devotion for you is great, my desire to see you happy would survive the certainty that I could never be happy myself.”

Bussy said this with so much emotion, and, at the same time firmness, that Diana felt sure that he would do all he said, and she cried,--

“Thanks, count, for you take from me all remorse by your threats.”

Saying these words, she gave him her hand, which he kissed passionately. Then they heard the light steps of Jeanne, accompanied by a warning cough. Instinctively the clasped hands parted. Jeanne saw it.

“Pardon, my good friends, for disturbing you,” said she, “but we must go in if we do not wish to be sent for. M. le Comte, regain, if you please, your excellent horse, and let us go to the house. See what you lose by your obstinacy, M. de Bussy, a dinner at the château, which is not to be despised by a man who has had a long ride, and has been climbing trees, without counting all the amusement we could have had, or the glances that might have passed. Come, Diana, come away.”

Bussy looked at the two friends with a smile. Diana held out her hand to him.

“Is that all?” said he; “have you nothing to say?”

“Till to-morrow,” replied she.

“Only to-morrow.”

“To-morrow, and always.”

Bussy uttered a joyful exclamation, pressed his lips to her hand, and ran off. Diana watched him till he was out of sight.

“Now!” said Jeanne, when he had disappeared, “will you talk to me a little?”

“Oh! yes.”

“Well! to-morrow I shall go to the chase with St. Luc and your father.”

“What, you will leave me alone at the château!”

“Listen, dear friend; I also have my principles, and there are certain things that I cannot consent to do.”

“Oh, Jeanne!” cried Diana, growing pale, “can you say such things to me?”

“Yes, I cannot continue thus.”

“I thought you loved me, Jeanne. What cannot you continue?”

“Continue to prevent two poor lovers from talking to each other at their ease.” Diana seized in her arms the laughing young woman.

“Listen!” said Jeanne, “there are the hunters calling us, and poor St. Luc is impatient.”

CHAPTER LV.

HOW BUSSY WAS OFFERED THREE HUNDRED PISTOLES FOR HIS HORSE, AND PARTED WITH HIM FOR NOTHING.

The next day, Bussy left Angers before the most wakeful bourgeois had had their breakfast. He flew along the road, and Diana, mounted on a terrace in front of the castle, saw him coming, and went to meet him. The sun had scarcely risen over the great oaks, and the grass was still wet with dew, when she heard from afar, as she went along, the horn of St. Luc, which Jeanne incited him to sound. She arrived at the meeting-place just as Bussy appeared on the wall. The day passed like an hour. What had they to say? That they loved each other. What had they to wish for? They were together.

"Diana," said Bussy at length, "it seems to me as though my life had begun only to-day. You have shown me what it is to live."

"And I," replied she, "who not long ago would have willingly thrown myself into the arms of death, would now tremble to die and lose your love. But why do you not come to the castle? My father would be glad to see you, and M. de St. Luc is your friend."

"Alas, Diana, if I came once, I should be always there; all the province would know it, and if it came to the ears of that ogre, your husband, he would hasten here. You forbid me to deliver you from him----"

"Oh, yes!"

"Well, then, for the safety of our happiness, we must guard our secret. Madame de St. Luc knows it, and her husband soon will. I have written him a line this morning, asking him for an interview at Angers, and when he comes I will make him promise never to breathe a word of this. It is the more important, dear Diana, as doubtless they are seeking me everywhere. Things looked grave when I left Paris.

"You are right; and then my father is so scrupulous that, in spite of his love for me, he is capable of denouncing me to M. de Monsoreau."

"Let us hide ourselves well, then; I fear some evil spirit, jealous of our happiness."

"Say adieu to me, then; and do not ride so fast--your horse frightens me."

"Fear nothing; he knows the way, and is the gentlest and safest horse I ever rode. When I return to the city, buried in sweet thoughts, he takes the way without my touching the bridle."

At last the sound of the returning chase was heard, the horns playing an air agreed upon with Jeanne, and Bussy left. As he approached the city, he remarked that the time was approaching when the gates of the city would be closed. He was preparing to ride on quickly, when he heard behind him the gallop of horses. For a lover who wishes to remain concealed, as for a robber, everything seems a menace. Bussy asked himself whether he should ride on or draw up and let them pass, but their course was so rapid that they were up to him in a moment. There were two.

"Here is the city," said one, with a Gascon accent; "three hundred more blows with the whip, and one hundred with the spur; courage and vigor!"

"The beast has no more breath--he shivers and totters; he will not go on; and yet I would give a hundred horses to be in my city before nightfall."

"It is some Angers man out late," thought Bussy. "But look, the horse is falling; take care, monsieur," cried he; "quit your horse--he is about to fall."

Indeed, as he spoke the animal fell heavily on his side, shook his legs convulsively, then suddenly his breath stopped, his eyes grew dim, and he was dead.

"Monsieur!" cried the cavalier to Bussy, "three hundred pistoles for your horse!"

"Ah, mon Dieu!" cried Bussy, drawing near.

"Do you hear me, monsieur? I am in haste."

"Ah! my prince, take it for nothing," cried Bussy, who had recognized tae Duc d'Anjou.

At the same moment they heard the click of a pistol, which was cocked by the duke's companion.

"Stop, M. d'Aubigné," cried the duke, "it is Bussy, I believe."

"Oh! yes, my prince, it is I. But what, in Heaven's name are you doing, killing horses on the road at this hour?"

"Ah! is it M. de Bussy?" said D'Aubigné, "then you do not want me any more. Permit me to return to him who sent me?"

"Not without receiving my sincere thanks and the promise of a lasting friendship."

"I accept it, monseigneur, and will recall your words to you some day."

"M. D'Aubigné! I am in the clouds," murmured Bussy.

“Did you not know? As you are here, did you not expect me?” said the prince, with an air of suspicion which did not escape Bussy, who began to reflect that his secret residence in Anjou might seem very strange to the prince.

“I did better than expect you,” said Bussy, “and as you wish to enter the town before the gates are closed, jump into the saddle, monseigneur.”

The prince accepted, and Bussy mounted behind him, asking himself if this prince, dressed in black, were not the evil spirit sent already to disturb his happiness.

“Where do we go now, monseigneur?” said he, as they entered the city.

“To the castle. Let them hoist my banner and convoke the nobility of the district.”

“Nothing more easy,” said Bussy, full of surprise, but willing to be docile. The news was soon spread through the city that the duke had arrived, and a crowd soon collected.

“Gentlemen!” cried the duke, “I have come to throw myself into my good city of Angers. At Paris the most terrible dangers have menaced my life--I had lost even my liberty. I succeeded in escaping, thanks to some good friends, and now I am here I feel my tranquillity and my life assured.”

The people cried, “Long live our seigneur.”

“Now let me sup,” said the prince, “I have had nothing since the morning.”

The city was illuminated, guns were fired, the bells of the cathedral were rung, and the wind carried to Méridor the noisy joy of the good Angevins.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE DIPLOMACY OF THE DUC D’ANJOU.

When the duke and Bussy were left alone, the duke said, “Let us talk.” François, who was very quick, had perceived that Bussy had made more advances to him than usual, therefore he judged that he was in some embarrassing situation, and that he might, by a little address, get an advantage over him. But Bussy had had time to prepare himself, and he was quite ready.

“Yes, let us talk, monseigneur,” replied he.

“The last day I saw you, my poor Bussy, you were very ill.”

“It is true, monseigneur, I was very ill, and it was almost a miracle that saved me.”

“There was near you a doctor very devoted to you, for he growled at everyone who approached you.”

“True, prince, Rémy loves me.”

“He kept you rigorously to your bed, did he not?”

“At which I was in a great rage, as your highness might have seen.”

“But, if that were the case, why did you not send the doctor to the devil, and come out with me as I begged you to do? But as it was a grave affair, you were afraid to compromise yourself.”

“Did you say I was afraid?”

“I did say so.”

“Well, then, it was a lie!” said Bussy, jumping up from his chair; you lied to yourself, monseigneur, for you do not believe a single word of what you say. There are twenty scars on my body, which prove the contrary. I never knew fear, and, ma foi, I know people who cannot say the same.”

“You have always unanswerable arguments, M. de Bussy,” cried the duke, turning very pale; “when you are accused, you cry louder than your accuser, and then you think you are right.”

“Oh! I am not always right, I know well, but I know on what occasions I am wrong.”

“And what are they?”

“When I serve ungrateful people.”

“Really, monsieur, I think you forget yourself,” said the duke, with some dignity. Bussy moved towards the door, but the prince stopped him.

“Do you deny, monsieur,” said he, “that after refusing to go out with me, you went out immediately after?”

“I deny nothing, monseigneur, but I will not be forced to confession.”

“Tell me why you would not go out with me.”

“I had business.”

“At home?”

“Or elsewhere.”

“I thought that when a gentleman was in the service of a prince, his principal business was that of the prince.”

“And who does your business generally, monseigneur, if not I?”

“I do not say no; generally I find you faithful and devoted, and, I will say more, I excuse your bad humor.”

“You are very good.”

“Yes, for you had some reason to be angry.”

“Ah! you confess it.”

“Yes, I promised you the disgrace of M. de Monsoreau. It seems you hate him very much.”

“I! not at all. I find him very ugly, and should have liked him away from court, not to have had to look at him. It seems, however, that you admire him, and there is no accounting for tastes.”

“Well, then, as that was your sole excuse, you were doubly wrong to refuse to accompany me, and then to go out after, and commit follies.”

“Follies! what did I do?”

“Doubtless, you do not like MM. d’Epernon and Schomberg, neither do I, but one must have some prudence. Kill them, and I should be grateful to you, but do not exasperate them.”

“What did I do to them?”

“Why, you had D’Epernon stoned.”

“I!”

“Yes, so that his clothes were torn to pieces.”

“Good! and what about M. Schomberg?”

“You will not deny that you had him dyed indigo color? When I saw him three hours after, he was still bright blue. Do you call that a joke?” And the prince laughed in spite of himself, and Bussy joined him.

“Then,” said he, “they think it was I who played them these tricks!”

“Perhaps it was I.”

“And you have the conscience to reproach a man who had such fine ideas.”

“Well, I pardon you. But I have another complaint to make. What did you do to deliver me from my unlucky situation?”

“You see, I came to Anjou.”

“It seems to me that you would have been more useful nearer.”

“Ah! there we differ; I preferred coming to Anjou.”

“Your caprice is a bad reason.”

“But, if I came to gather your partisans?”

“Ah! that is different. What have you done?”

“I will explain that to you to-morrow; at present I must leave you.”

“Why!”

“I have to see an important person.”

“Oh, very well; but be prudent.”

“Prudent! are we not the strongest here?”

“Never mind, risk nothing. Have you done much?”

“I have only been here two days.”

“But you keep yourself concealed, I hope.”

“I should think so. Look at my dress; am I in the habit of wearing cinnamon-colored clothes?”

“And where are you lodging?”

“Ah! I hope you will appreciate my devotion; in a tumble-down old house, near the ramparts. But you, my prince, how did you get out of the Louvre? How was it that I found you on the road, with M. d’Aubigné for a companion?”

“Because I have friends.”

“You! friends!”

“Yes, friends that you do not know.”

“Well, and who are they?”

“The King of Navarre and D’Aubigné, whom you saw.”

“The King of Navarre! Ah! true, did you not conspire together?”

“I never conspired, M. de Bussy.”

“No; ask poor La Mole and Coconnas.”

“La Mole,” said the prince, gloomily, “died for another crime than the one alleged against him.”

“Well, never mind him. How the devil did you get out of the Louvre?”

“Through the window.”

“Which window?”

“That of my bedroom.”

“Then you knew of the rope-ladder?”

“What rope-ladder?”

“In the cupboard.”

“Ah! it seems you knew it,” cried the prince, turning pale.

“Oh! your highness knows I have sometimes had the happiness of entering that room.”

“In the time of my sister Margot. Then you came in by the window?”

“As you came out. All that astonishes me is, that you knew of the ladder.”

“It was not I who found it.”

“Who then?”

“I was told of it.”

“By whom?”

“By the King of Navarre.”

“Ah! the King of Navarre knew of it; I should not have thought so. However, now you are here safe and sound, we will put Anjou in flames, and Béarn and Angoumois will catch the light, so we shall have a fine blaze.”

“But did you not speak of a rendezvous?”

“It is true; the interest of the conversation was making me forget. Adieu, monseigneur.”

“Do you take your horse?”

“If it will be useful to you, monseigneur, you may keep it, I have another.”

“Well! I accept; we will settle that later.”

The duke gave Bussy his hand, and they separated.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE IDEAS OF THE DUC D’ANJOU.

Bussy returned home, but instead of St. Luc, whom he expected, he found only a letter fixing their meeting for the next day. About six in the morning St. Luc started, and rode straight to Bussy’s house.

“Accept the hospitality of my poor hut, St. Luc,” said Bussy, “I am encamped here.”

“Yes, like a conqueror on the field of battle.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, dear Bussy, that my wife has no secrets from me, and has told me all. Receive my compliments, but, since you have sent for me, permit me to give you a piece of advice.”

“Well.”

“Get rid as soon as possible of that abominable Monsoreau; no one at the court knows of your love for his wife, so when you marry the widow, no one will say you killed him on purpose.”

“There is but one obstacle to this project, which presented itself to my mind, as to yours.”

“What is it?”

“That I have sworn to Diana to respect the life of her husband, as long as he does not attack me.”

“You were very wrong.”

“Why so?”

“Because if you do not take the initiative, he will discover you, and will kill you.”

“I cannot break my oath to Diana. Besides, he who is now a monster in all eyes, would be thought an angel in his tomb.”

“Therefore I do not advise you to kill him yourself.”

“Oh, St. Luc, no assassins.”

“Who spoke of assassins?”

“Of what then?”

"Nothing; an idea passed through my mind; I will tell you what it was at another time. I do not love this Monsoreau much more than you, although I have not the same reason to detest him, so let us speak of the wife instead of the husband."

Bussy smiled. "You are a capital companion, St Luc," said he, "and you may count on my friendship. Now my friendship consists of three things, my purse, my sword, and my life. Now, what about Diana?"

"I wished to ask if you were not coming to Méridor."

"My dear friend, I thank you, but you know my scruples."

"I know all. At Méridor you fear to meet Monsoreau, although he is eighty leagues off; fear to have to shake his hand, and it is hard to shake the hand of the man you wish to strangle; you fear to see him embrace Diana, and it is hard to see that of the woman you love."

"Ah! how well you understand!" cried Bussy, with rage; "but, my dear friend, did you not hear last night the noise of bells and guns?"

"Yes; and we wondered what it meant."

"It meant that the Duc d'Anjou arrived last night."

St. Luc jumped up. "The duke here! We heard he was imprisoned at the Louvre."

"That is just why he is now at Angers. He managed to escape through a window, and came here."

"Well?"

"Well, here is an excellent opportunity to revenge yourself for the king's persecutions. The prince has already a party, he will soon have troops, and we shall have something like a little civil war."

"Oh! oh!"

"And I reckoned on you to help us."

"Against the king?" said St. Luc, with sudden coldness.

"Not precisely against the king, but against those who fight against us."

"My dear Bussy, I came here for country air, not to fight against his majesty."

"But let me present you to monseigneur."

"Useless, my dear Bussy, I do not like Angers."

"My dear St. Luc, you will do me a great service by consenting; the duke asked me what I came here for, and, not being able to tell because of his own passion for Diana, I said that I had come to draw to his cause all the gentlemen in the Canton; I even told him I had a rendezvous with one this morning.”

“Well! tell him you have seen the gentleman, and that he asks six months to consider. Listen, I will always help you to defend Diana, you shall help me to defend my wife. We will make a treaty for love, but not for politics.”

“I see, I must yield to you, St. Luc, for you have the advantage over me. I want you, and you do not want me.”

“On the contrary, it is I who claim your protection.”

“How so?”

“Suppose the rebels besiege and sack Méridor.”

The two friends laughed; then, as the duke had sent to inquire for Bussy, they separated with renewed promises of friendship, and charmed with each other.

Bussy went to the ducal palace, where already all the nobility of the provinces were arriving. He hastened to arrange an official reception, a repast and speeches, and having thus cut out some hours’ occupation for the prince, mounted his other horse, and galloped to Méridor. The duke made some good speeches, and produced a great effect, giving himself out for a prince persecuted by the king on account of the love of the Parisians for him. When Bussy returned, it was four in the afternoon; he dismounted, and presented himself to the duke all covered with dust.

“Ah! my brave Bussy, you have been at work?”

“You see, monseigneur.”

“You are very hot.”

“I have ridden fast.”

“Take care not to get ill again.”

“There is no danger.”

“Whence do you come?”

“From the environs. Is your highness content? have you had a numerous assemblage?”

“Yes, I am pretty well satisfied, but I missed some one.”

“Who?”

“Your protege, the Baron de Méridor.”

Bussy changed color.

“And yet we must not neglect him,” continued the duke, “he is influential here.”

“You think so?”

"I am sure of it. He was the correspondent of the League at Angers, chosen by M. de Guise, and the Guises choose their men well. He must come, Bussy."

"But if he does not come?"

"I will go to him."

"To Méridor?"

"Why not?"

"Oh, why not, certainly," cried Bussy, with flashing eyes, "a prince may do anything."

"Then you think he is still angry with me?"

"How should I know?"

"You have not seen him?"

"No."

"As one of the great men of the province, I thought----"

"I was not sufficiently fortunate in the former promises I made him to be in a hurry to present myself to him."

"Has he not attained his object?"

"How so?"

"He wanted his daughter to marry the count, and she has done so."

Bussy turned his back on the duke, who, at the same moment, moved towards another gentleman who entered the room. Bussy began to reflect on what the duke's projects were with regard to the baron--whether they were purely political, or whether he was still seeking to approach Diana; but he imagined that, embroiled with his brother, banished from the Louvre, and the chief of provincial insurrection, he had sufficiently grave interests at stake to outweigh his love fancies. He passed the night banqueting with the duke and the Angevin gentlemen, then in dancing with the Angevin ladies. It is needless to say that he was the admiration of the latter, and the hatred of the husbands, several of whom looked at him in a way which did not please him, so that, curling his mustachios, he invited three or four of them to take a walk with him by moonlight; but his reputation had preceded him, and they all declined.

At the door Bussy found a laughing face waiting for him, which he believed to be eighty leagues off.

"Ah," cried he joyfully, "it is you, Rémy."

"Yes monsieur."

"I was going to write to you to join me."

“Really!”

“On my word.”

“That is capital; I was afraid you would scold me.”

“For what?”

“For coming without leave. But I heard that Monsieur le Duc d’Anjou had escaped, and had fled here. I knew you were here also, and I thought there might be civil war, and many holes made in skins, so I came.”

“You did well, Rémy; I wanted you.”

“How is Gertrude, monsieur?”

“I will ask Diana the first time I see her.”

“And, in return, every time I see her I will ask for news of Madame de Monsoreau.”

“You are charming.”

Meanwhile they had reached Bussy’s lodging.

“Here is my palace; you must lodge as you can.”

“It will not be difficult; I could sleep standing, I am so tired.”

Bussy rose early the next morning, and went to the ducal palace, leaving word for Rémy to follow him. The duke had prepared a list of important things to be done: firstly, a walk round the walls to examine the fortifications; secondly, a review of the inhabitants and their arms; thirdly, a visit to the arsenal; fourthly, correspondence.

“Ah!” cried the duke, “you already!”

“Ma foi! yes, monseigneur; I could not sleep, your highness’s interests were so much on my mind. What shall we do this morning? Shall we hunt?”

“How!” said the duke, “you pretend to have been thinking all night of my interests, and the result of so much meditation is to propose to me a hunt!”

“True,” said Bussy; “besides, we have no hounds.”

“And no chief huntsman.”

“Ah, ma foi! the chase would be more agreeable without him.”

“Ah, I am not like you--I want him; he would have been very useful to us here.”

“How so?”

“He has property here.”

“He!”

“He or his wife.”

Bussy bit his lips.

“Méridor is only three leagues off, you know that,” continued the duke, “you, who brought the old baron to me.”

“Dame! I brought him because he hung on to my cloak. However, my protection did not do him much good.”

“Listen,” said the duke, “I have an idea.”

“Diable!” said Bussy, who was always suspicious of the duke’s ideas.

“Yes; it is that, if Monsoreau had the advantage over you at first, you shall have it now.”

“What do you mean?”

“It is very simple; you know me, Bussy?”

“I have that misfortune.”

“Think you I am the man to submit to an affront with impunity?”

“Explain yourself, monseigneur.”

“Well, he stole the young girl I loved to make her his wife; now I will steal his wife!”

Bussy tried to smile, but made a grimace instead.

“Steal his wife!” stammered he.

“Nothing more easy, she is here, and you told me she hated her husband; therefore, without too much vanity, I may flatter myself she will give me the preference, if I promise her----”

“What, monseigneur?”

“To get rid of her husband for her.”

“You will do that?”

“You shall see. Meanwhile I will pay a visit to Méridor.”

“You will dare?”

“Why not?”

“You will present yourself before the old baron, whom you abandoned after promising me----”

“I have an excellent excuse to give him.”

“Where the devil will you find it?”

“Oh! I will say to him, I did not break this marriage, because Monsoreau, who knew that you were one of the principal agents to the League, threatened to denounce you to the king.”

“Has your highness invented that?”

“Not entirely.”

“Then I understand.”

“Yes, I shall make him believe that by marrying his daughter I saved his life.”

“It is superb.”

“Well! order the horses, and we will go to Méridor.”

“Immediately, monseigneur.” Bussy then went to the door, but turned back and said, “How many horses will your highness have?”

“Oh, four or five, what you like.”

“If you leave it to me, I shall take a hundred.”

“What for?” cried the prince, surprised.

“To have at least twenty-five I can rely on in case of attack.”

“Attack!”

“Yes, I have heard that there are thick woods in that neighborhood, and it would not surprise me if we fell into some ambush.”

“Ah, do you think so?”

“Monseigneur knows that true courage does not exclude prudence; I will order one hundred and fifty.”

And he moved towards the door.

“A moment,” said the prince. “Do you think I am in safety at Angers?”

“Why, the town is not very strong, but well defended----”

“Yes, but it may be badly defended; however brave you are, you can be but in one place at a time.”

“True.”

“Then if I am not in safety here--and I am not if Bussy doubts----”

“I did not say I doubted.”

“If I am not safe, I had better make myself so. I will go to the castle and entrench myself.”

“You are right, monseigneur.”

“And then another idea.”

“The morning is fruitful.”

“I will make the Méridors come here.”

“Monseigneur, you are grand to-day. Now let us visit the castle.”

Bussy went out while the prince was getting ready, and found Rémy waiting. He wrote hastily a little note, picked a bunch of roses from the conservatory, rolled the note round the stems, went to the stable, brought out his horse, and, putting Rémy on it, and giving him the bouquet, led him out of the city.

“Now,” said he, “let Roland go; at the end of this road you will find the forest, in the forest a park, round the park a wall, and at that part of the wall where Roland stops, throw over this bouquet.”

“He whom you expect does not come,” said the note, “because he who was not expected has come, and is more menacing than ever, for he loves still. Take with the lips and the heart all that is invisible to the eyes in this paper.”

In half an hour Rémy reached his destination, carried by his horse, and threw over the bouquet; a little cry from the other side told him it had been received. Then Rémy returned, in spite of his horse, which seemed much put out at losing its accustomed repast on the acorns. Rémy joined Bussy as he was exploring a cave with the prince.

“Well,” said he to his messenger, “what did you hear or see?”

“A wall, a cry, seven leagues,” replied Rémy laconically.

CHAPTER LVIII.

A FLIGHT OF ANGEVINS.

Bussy contrived to occupy the duke so well with his preparations for war during two days, that he found no time to think of Méridor, and from time to time, under pretext of examining the outer fortifications, jumped on Roland, and arrived at a certain wall, which he got over all the more quickly because each time he made some stone fall, and was, in fact, gradually making a breach.

Towards the end of the third day, as an enormous convoy of provisions was entering the city, the produce of a tax levied by the duke on his good Angevins, as M. d’Anjou, to make himself popular, was tasting the black bread and salt fish of the soldiers, they heard a great noise at one of the gates of the city, where a man, mounted on a white horse, had presented himself. Now Bussy had had himself named Captain-General of Anjou, and had established the most severe discipline in Angers; no one could go out of or enter the town without a password; all which had no other aim than to prevent the duke from sending a messenger to Méridor without his knowledge.

The man on the white horse had arrived at a furious gallop, and had attempted to enter, but had been stopped.

“I am Antragues,” said he, “and desire to speak to the Duc d’Anjou.”

“We do not know Antragues,” they replied, “but as for seeing the duke, you shall be satisfied, for we shall arrest you, and conduct you to him.”

“You are a nice fellow, truly, to talk of arresting Charles Balzac d’Antragues, Baron de Cuneo, and Comte de Graville.”

“We will do so, however,” replied the bourgeois, who had twenty men behind him.

“Wait a little, my good friends. You do not know the Parisians. Well, I will show you a specimen of what they can do.”

“Let us arrest him!” cried the furious militia.

“Softly, my little lambs of Anjou; it is I who will have that pleasure.”

“What does he say?” asked the bourgeois.

“He says that his horse has only gone ten leagues, and will ride over you all.” And drawing his sword and swinging it furiously round, he cut off in his passage the blades of the nearest halberts, and in less than ten minutes fifteen or twenty of them were changed into broom-handles.

“Ah! this is very amusing!” cried he, laughing, and as he spoke stunning one of the bourgeois with a blow on the head with the flat of his sword. However, as more and more bourgeois crowded to the attack, and Antragues began to feel tired, he said, “Well, you are as brave as lions; I will bear witness to it; but, you see, you have nothing left but the handles of your halberts, and you do not know how to load your muskets. I had resolved to enter the city, but I did not know it was guarded by an army of Cæsars. I renounce my victory over you. Good evening, I am going away; only tell the prince that I came here expressly to see him.”

However, the captain had managed to communicate the fire to the match of his musket, but just as he was raising it to his shoulder, Antragues gave him such a furious blow upon the fingers that he dropped it.

“Kill him! kill him!” cried several voices, “do not let him escape!”

“Ah!” said Antragues, “just now you would not let me come in, now you will not let me go out. Take care, that will change my tactics, and instead of the flat of my sword, I will use the point--instead of cutting the halberts, I will cut the wrists. Now, will you let me go?”

“No, no, he is tired, kill him!”

“Well, then, take care of your hands!”

Scarcely had he spoken when another cavalier appeared, riding furiously also, and who cried out as he approached:

“Antragues, what are you doing among all these bourgeois?”

“Livarot!” cried Antragues. “Mon Dieu, you are welcome; Montjoie and St. Denis, to the rescue!”

“I heard four hours ago that you were before me, and I have been trying to catch you. But what is the matter; do they want to massacre you?”

“Yes, they will neither let me in nor out.”

“Gentlemen!” said Livarot, “will you please to step either to the right or left, and let us pass.”

“They insult us! kill them!” cried the people.

“Oh! this is Angers’ manners!” said Livarot, drawing his sword.

“Yes, you see; unluckily, there are so many of them.”

“If there were but three of us!”

"And here is Ribeirac coming."

"Do you hear him?"

"I see him. Here, Ribeirac!"

"Are you fighting?" cried Ribeirac.

"Good morning, Livarot; good morning, Antragues."

"Let us charge them," said Antragues.

The bourgeois looked in stupefaction at this reinforcement that was about to join the attacking party.

"They are a regiment," said the captain of the militia.

"This is only the advanced guard," cried another.

"We are fathers of families, and our lives belong to our children," said others, and they all tried to fly, fighting with each other to get out of the way.

At this stage of the affair Bussy and the prince arrived, followed by twenty cavaliers, to ascertain the cause of the tumult. They were told that it was three incarnate devils from Paris who were making all the disturbance.

"Three men, Bussy; see who they are."

Bussy raised himself in his stirrups, and his quick eye soon recognized Livarot.

"Mort de ma vie, monseigneur," cried he, "they are our friends from Paris who are besieging us."

"No!" cried Livarot, "on the contrary, it is these people who are killing us."

"Down with your arms, knaves," cried the duke, "these are friends."

"Friends!" cried the bourgeois, "then they should have had the password; for we have been treating them like Pagans and they us like Turks."

Livarot, Antragues, and Ribeirac advanced in triumph to kiss the duke's hand.

"Monseigneur," said Bussy, "how many militia do you think there were here?"

"At least one hundred and fifty."

"You have not very famous soldiers, since three men beat them."

"True, but I shall have the three men who did beat them."

CHAPTER LIX.

ROLAND.

Thanks to the reinforcement which had arrived, M. le Duc d’Anjou could go where he pleased; he explored the ramparts of the surrounding country and castles. The Angevin gentlemen found liberty and amusement at the court of the duke, and the three friends were soon intimate with many of these nobles, especially those who had pretty wives. The general joy was at its height when twenty-two riding horses, thirty carriage horses, and forty mules, together with litters, carriages and wagons, arrived at Angers, all the property of the duke. We must allow that the saddles were not paid for, and that the coffers were empty, but still it made a magnificent effect. The duke’s reputation for wealth was henceforward solidly established, and all the province remained convinced that he was rich enough to war against all Europe if need were, therefore they did not grudge the new tax which the prince imposed upon them. People never mind giving or lending to rich people, only to poor ones; therefore the worthy prince lived like a patriarch on all the fat of the land. Numerous cavaliers arrived to offer to him their adhesions, or their offers of service. One afternoon, however, about four o’clock, M. de Monsoreau arrived on horseback at the gates of Angers. He had ridden eighteen leagues that day; therefore his spurs were red, and his horse covered with foam, and half dead. They no longer made difficulties about letting strangers enter, therefore M. de Monsoreau went straight through the city to the palace, and asked for the duke.

“He is out reconnoitering,” replied the sentinel.

“Where?”

“I do not know.”

“Diable! What I have to say to him is very pressing.”

“First put your horse in the stable, or he will fall.”

“The advice is good; where are the stables?”

As he spoke a man approached and asked for his name. M. de Monsoreau gave it. The major-domo (for it was he) bowed respectfully, for the chief huntsman’s name was well known in Anjou.

“Monsieur,” said he, “please to enter and take some repose. Monseigneur has not been out more than ten minutes, and will not be back till eight o’clock.”

“Eight o’clock! I cannot wait so long; I am the bearer of news which cannot be too soon known to his highness. Can I not have a horse and a guide?”

“There are plenty of horses, but a guide is a different thing, for his highness did not say where he was going.”

“Well, I will take a fresh horse, and try to discover him.”

“Probably you will hear where he has passed, monsieur.”

“Do they ride fast?”

“Oh no.”

“Well, get me a horse then.”

“Will monsieur come into the stables and choose one? they all belong to the duke.” Monsoreau entered. Ten or twelve fine horses, quite fresh, were feeding from the manger, which was filled with grain.

Monsoreau looked over them, and then said, “I will take this bay.”

“Roland?”

“Is that his name?”

“Yes, and it is his highness’s favorite horse. M. de Bussy gave him to the duke, and it is quite a chance that it is here to-day.”

Ronald was soon saddled, and Monsoreau rode out of the stable.

“In which direction did they start?” asked he.

The man pointed it out.

“Ma foi!” said Monsoreau, “the horse seems to know the way.”

Indeed, the animal set off without being urged, and went deliberately out of the city, took a short cut to the gate, and then began to accelerate his pace: Monsoreau let him go. He went along the boulevard, then turned into a shady lane, which cut across the country, passing gradually from a trot to a gallop.

“Oh!” thought Monsoreau, as they entered the woods, “one would say we were going to Méridor. Can his highness be there?” and his face grew black at the thought.

“Oh!” murmured he, “I who was going to see the prince, and putting off till to-morrow to see my wife; shall I see them both at the same time?”

The horse went on, turning always to the right.

“We cannot be far from the park,” said he.

At that moment his horse neighed, and another answered him. In a minute Monsoreau saw a wall, and a horse tied to a neighboring tree.

“There is some one,” thought he, turning pale.

CHAPTER LX.

WHAT M. DE MONSOREAU CAME TO ANNOUNCE.

As M. de Monsoreau approached, he remarked the dilapidation of the wall; it was almost in steps, and the brambles had been torn away, and were lying about. He looked at the horse standing there. The animal had a saddle-cloth embroidered in silver, and in one corner an F. and an A. There was no doubt, then, that it came from the prince’s stables; the letters stood for François d’Anjou. The count’s suspicions at this sight became real alarm; the duke had come here, and had come often, for, besides the horse waiting there, there was a second that knew the way. He tied up his horse near to the other, and began to scale the wall. It was an easy task; there were places for both feet and hands, and the branches of an oak-tree, which hung over, had been carefully cut away. Once up, he saw at the foot of a tree a blue mantilla and a black cloak, and not far off a man and woman, walking hand in hand, with their backs turned to the wall, and nearly hidden by the trees. Unluckily, with M. de Monsoreau’s weight a stone fell from the wall on the crackling branches with a great noise.

At this noise the lovers must have turned and seen him, for the cry of a woman was heard, and a rustling of the branches as they ran away like startled deer. At this cry, Monsoreau felt cold drops on his forehead, for he recognized Diana’s voice. Full of fury, he jumped over the wall, and with his drawn sword in his hand, tried to follow the fugitives, but they had disappeared, and, there was not a trace or a sound to guide him. He stopped, and considered that he was too much under the influence of passion to act with prudence against so powerful a rival. Then a sublime idea occurred to him; it was to climb back again over the wall, and carry off with his own the horse he had seen there. He retraced his steps to the wall and climbed up again; but on the other side no horse was to be seen; his idea was so good, that before it came to him it had come to his adversary. He uttered a howl of rage, clenching his fists, but started off at once on foot. In two hours and a half, he arrived at the gates of the city, dying with hunger and fatigue, but determined to interrogate every sentinel, and find out by what gate a man had entered with two horses. The first sentinel he applied to said that, about two hours before, a horse without a rider had passed through the gate, and had taken the road to the palace; he feared some accident must have happened to his rider. Monsoreau ground his teeth with passion, and went on to the castle. There he found great life and gaiety, windows lighted up, and animation everywhere. He went first to the stable, and found his horse in the stall he had taken him from; then, without changing his dress, he went to the dining-room. The prince and all his gentlemen were sitting round a table magnificently served and lighted. The duke, who had been told of his arrival, received him without surprise, and told him to sit down and sup with him.

"Monseigneur," replied he, "I am hungry, tired, and thirsty; but I will neither eat, drink, nor sit down till I have delivered my important message."

"You come from Paris?"

"Yes, in great haste."

"Well, speak."

Monsoreau advanced, with a smile on his lips and hatred In his heart, and said, "Monseigneur, your mother is advancing hastily to visit you."

The duke looked delighted. "It is well," said he; "M. de Monsoreau, I find you to-day, as ever, a faithful servant; let us continue our supper, gentlemen."

Monsoreau sat down with them, but gloomy and preoccupied. He still seemed to see the two figures among the trees, and to hear the cry of Diana.

"You are overcome with weariness," said the prince to him, "really, you had better go to bed."

"Yes," said Livarot, "or he will go to sleep in his chair."

"Pardon, monseigneur, I am tired out."

"Get tipsy," said Antragues; "there is nothing so good when you are tired. To your health, count!"

"You must give us some good hunts," said Ribeirac, "you know the country."

"You have horses and woods here," said Antragues.

"And a wife," added Livarot.

"We will hunt a boar, count," said the prince.

"Oh, yes, to-morrow!" cried the gentlemen.

"What do you say, Monsoreau?"

"I am always at your highness's orders, but I am too much fatigued to conduct a chase to-morrow; besides which, I must examine the woods."

"And we must leave him time to see his wife," cried the duke.

"Granted," cried the young men; "we give him twenty-four hours to do all he has to do."

"Yes, gentlemen, I promise to employ them well."

"Now go to bed," said the duke, and M. de Monsoreau bowed, and went out, very happy to escape.

CHAPTER LXI.

HOW THE KING LEARNED THE FLIGHT OF HIS BELOVED BROTHER, AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

When Monsoreau had retired, the repast continued, and was more gay and joyous than ever.

"Now, Livarot," said the duke, "finish the recital of your flight from Paris, which Monsoreau interrupted."

Livarot began again, but as our title of historian gives us the privilege of knowing better than Livarot himself what had passed, we will substitute our recital for that of the young man.

Towards the middle of the night Henri III. was awoke by an unaccustomed noise in the palace. It was oaths, blows on the wall, rapid steps in the galleries, and, amidst all, these words continually sounding, "What will the king say?"

Henri sat up and called Chicot, who was asleep on the couch.

Chicot opened one eye.

"Ah, you were wrong to call me, Henri," said he; "I was dreaming that you had a son."

"But listen."

"To what? You say enough follies to me by day, without breaking in on my nights."

"But do you not hear?"

"Oh, oh! I do hear cries."

"Do you hear, 'What will the king say?'"

"It is one of two things--either your dog Narcissus is ill, or the Huguenots are taking their revenge for St. Bartholomew."

"Help me to dress."

"If you will first help me to get up."

"What a misfortune!" sounded from the antechamber.

"Shall we arm ourselves?" said the king.

"We had better go first and see what is the matter."

And almost immediately they went out by the secret door into the gallery. "I begin to guess," said Chicot; "your unlucky prisoner has hanged himself."

"Oh, no; it cannot be that."

"So much the worse."

"Come on;" and they entered the duke's chamber.

The window was open, and the ladder still hung from it. Henri grew as pale as death.

"Oh, my son, you are not so blasé as I thought!" said Chicot.

"Escaped!" cried Henri, in such a thundering voice that all the gentlemen who were crowded round the window turned in terror. Schomberg tore his hair, Quelus and Maugiron struck themselves like madmen; as for D'Epernon, he had vanished. This sight calmed the king.

"Gently, my son," said he, laying hold of Maugiron.

"No! mordieu!" cried he, "I will kill myself!" and he knocked his head against the wall.

"Hola! help me to hold him."

"It would be an easier death to pass your sword through your body!" said Chicot.

"Quelus, my child," said the king, "you will be as blue as Schomberg when he came out of the indigo."

Quelus stopped, but Schomberg still continued to tear at his hair.

"Schomberg, Schomberg, a little reason, I beg."

"It is enough to drive one mad!"

"Indeed, it is a dreadful misfortune; there will be a civil war in my kingdom. Who did it--who furnished the ladder? Mordieu! I will hang all the city! Who was it? Ten thousand crowns to whoever will tell me his name, and one hundred thousand to whoever will bring him to me, dead or alive!"

"It must have been some Angevin," said Maugiron.

"Oh yes! we will kill all the Angevins!" cried Quelus. However, the king suddenly disappeared; he had thought of his mother, and, without saying a word, went to her. When he entered, she was half lying in a great armchair: She heard the news without answering.

"You say nothing, mother. Does not this flight seem to you criminal, and worthy of punishment?"

“My dear son, liberty is worth as much as a crown; and remember, I advised you to fly in order to gain a crown.”

“My mother, he braves me--he outrages me!”

“No; he only saves himself.”

“Ah! this is how you take my part.”

“What do you mean, my son?”

“I mean that with age the feelings grow calm--that you do not love me as much as you used to do.”

“You are wrong, my son,” said Catherine coldly; “you are my beloved son, but he of whom you complain is also my son.”

“Well, then, madame, I will go to find other counselors capable of feeling for me and of aiding me.”

“Go, my son; and may God guide your counselors, for they will have need of it to aid you in this strait.”

“Adieu, then, madame!”

“Adieu, Henri! I do not pretend to counsel you--you do not need me, I know--but beg your counselors to reflect well before they advise, and still more before they execute.”

“Yes, madame, for the position is difficult.”

“Very grave,” replied she, raising her eyes to heaven.

“Have you any idea who it was that carried him off?” Catherine did not reply.

“I think it was the Angevins,” continued the king.

Catherine smiled scornfully.

“The Angevins!”

“You do not think so?”

“Do you, really?”

“Tell me what you think, madame.”

“Why should I?”

“To enlighten me.”

“Enlighten you! I am but a doting old woman, whose only influence lies in her prayers and repentance.”

“No, mother; speak, you are the cleverest of us all.”

“Useless; I have only ideas of the last century; at my age it is impossible I should give good counsel.”

“Well, then, mother, refuse me your counsel, deprive me of your aid. In an hour I will hang all the Angevins in Paris.”

"Hang all the Angevins!" cried Catherine, in amazement.

"Yes, hang, slay, massacre, burn; already, perhaps, my friends are out to begin the work."

"They will ruin themselves, and you with them."

"How so?"

"Blind! Will kings eternally have eyes, and not see?"

"Kings must avenge their injuries, it is but justice, and in this case all my subjects will rise to defend me."

"You are mad."

"Why so?"

"You will make oceans of blood flow. The standard of revolt will soon be raised; and you will arm against you a host who never would rise for François."

"But if I do not revenge myself they will think I am afraid."

"Did any one ever think I was afraid? Besides, it was not the Angevins."

"Who was it then? it must have been my brother's friends."

"Your brother has no friends."

"But who was it then?"

"Your enemy."

"What enemy?"

"O! my son, you know you have never had but one; yours, mine, your brother Charles's; always the same."

"Henri of Navarre, you mean?"

"Yes, Henri of Navarre."

"He is not at Paris."

"Do you know who is at Paris, and who is not? No, you are all deaf and blind."

"Can it have been he?"

"My son, at every disappointment you meet with, at every misfortune that happens to you of which the author is unknown, do not seek or conjecture; it is useless. Cry out, it is Henri of Navarre, and you will be sure to be right. Strike on the side where he is, and you will be sure to strike right. Oh! that man, that man; he is the sword suspended over the head of the Valois."

"Then you think I should countermand my orders about the Angevins?"

"At once, without losing an instant. Hasten; perhaps you are already too late."

Henry flew out of the Louvre to find his friends, but found only Chicot drawing figures in the sand with a stone.

CHAPTER LXII.

HOW, AS CHICOT AND THE QUEEN MOTHER WERE AGREED, THE KING BEGAN TO AGREE WITH THEM.

"Is this how you defend your king?" cried Henri.

"Yes, it is my manner, and I think it is a good one."

"Good, indeed!"

"I maintain it, and I will prove it."

"I am curious to hear this proof."

"It is easy; but first, we have committed a great folly."

"How so?" cried Henri, struck by the agreement between Chicot and his mother.

"Yes," replied Chicot, "your friends are crying through the city, 'Death to the Angevins!' and now that I reflect, it was never proved that they had anything to do with the affair. And your friends, crying thus through the city, will raise that nice little civil war of which MM. de Guise have so much need, and which they did not succeed in raising for themselves. Besides which, your friends may get killed, which would not displease me, I confess, but which would afflict you, or else they will chase all the Angevins from the city, which will please M. d'Anjou enormously."

"Do you think things are so bad?"

"Yes, it not worse."

"But all this does not explain what you do here, sitting on a stone."

"I am tracing a plan of all the provinces that your brother will raise against you, and the number of men each will furnish to the revolt."

"Chicot, Chicot, you are a bird of bad augury."

"The owl sings at night, my son, it is his hour. Now it is dark, Henri, so dark that one might take the day for the night, and I sing what you ought to hear. Look!"

"At what?"

"My geographical plan. Here is Anjou, something like a tartlet, you see; there your brother will take refuge. Anjou, well managed, as Monsoreau and Bussy will manage it, will alone furnish to your brother ten thousand combatants.”

“Do you think so?”

“That is the minimum; let us pass to Guyenne; here it is, this figure like a calf walking on one leg. Of course, you will not be astonished to find discontent in Guyenne; it is an old focus for revolt, and will be enchanted to rise. They can furnish 8,000 soldiers; that is not much, but they are well trained. Then we have Béarn and Navarre; you see these two compartments, which look like an ape on the back of an elephant--they may furnish about 16,000. Let us count now--10,000 for Anjou, 8,000 for Guyenne, 16,000 for Béarn and Navarre; making a total of 34,000.”

“You think, then, that the King of Navarre will join my brother?”

“I should think so.”

“Do you believe that he had anything to do with my brother’s escape?”

Chicot looked at him. “That is not your own idea, Henri.”

“Why not?”

“It is too clever, my son.”

“Never mind whose idea it was; answer my question.”

“Well! I heard a ‘Ventre St. Gris’ in the Rue de la Ferronnerie.”

“You heard a ‘Ventre St. Gris!’ But it might not have been he.”

“I saw him.”

“You saw Henri of Navarre in Paris?”

“Yes.”

“You saw my mortal enemy here, and did not tell me?”

“I am not a spy. Then there are the Guises; 20,000 or 25,000 men under the orders of the Duc de Guise will make up altogether a nice little army.”

“But Henri of Navarre and the Duc de Guise are enemies.”

“Which will not prevent them from uniting against you; they will be free to fight with each other when they have conquered you.”

“You are right, Chicot, and my mother is right. I will call the Swiss.”

“Oh, yes! Quelus has got them.”

“My guards, then.”

“Schomberg has them.”

“My household at least.”

“They have gone with Maugiron.”

“Without my orders?”

“And when do you ever give orders, except, perhaps, to flagellate either your own skin, or that of others?--But about government.--Bah! allow me to observe that you have been a long time finding out that you rank seventh or eighth in this kingdom.”

“Here they are!” cried the king, as three cavaliers approached, followed by a crowd of men on foot and on horseback.

“Schomberg! Quelus! come here,” cried the king. They approached.

“I have been seeking you, and waiting for you impatiently. What have you done? Do not go away again without my permission.”

“There is no more need,” said Maugiron, who now approached, “since all is finished.”

“All is finished?”

“Heaven be praised,” said D’Epernon, appearing all at once, no one knew from whence.

“Then you have killed them?” cried the king; “well, at least the dead do not return.”

“Oh! we had not that trouble; the cowards ran away, we had scarcely time to cross our swords with them.”

Henri grew pale. “With whom?” said he.

“With Antragues?”

“On the contrary, he killed a lackey of Quelus’s.”

“Oh!” murmured the king, “here is a civil war lighted up.”

Quelus started. “It is true,” said he.

“Ah” said Chicot. “You begin to perceive it, do you?”

“But, M. Chicot, you cried with us, ‘Death to the Angevins!’“

“Oh! that is a different thing; I am a fool, and you are clever men.”

“Come, peace, gentlemen; we shall have enough of war soon.”

“What are your majesty’s orders?”

“That you employ the same ardor in calming the people as you have done in exciting them, and that you bring back all the Swiss, my guards, and my household, and have the doors of the Louvre closed, so that perhaps tomorrow the bourgeois may take the whole thing for a sortie of drunken people.”

The young men went off, and Henri returned to his mother.

“Well,” said she, “what has passed?”

“All you foresaw, mother.”

“They have escaped?”

“Alas! yes.”

“What else?”

“Is not that enough?”

“The city?”

“Is in tumult; but that is not what disquiets me.”

“No, it is the provinces.”

“Which will revolt.”

“What shall you do?”

“I see but one thing.”

“What is that?”

“To withdraw the army from La Charité, and march on Anjou.”

“And M. de Guise?”

“Oh, I will arrest him if necessary.”

“And you think violent measures will succeed?”

“What can I do, then?”

“Your plan will not do.”

“Well, what is your idea?”

“Send an ambassador.”

“To whom?”

“To your brother.”

“An ambassador to that traitor! You humiliate me, mother.”

“This is not a moment to be proud.”

“An ambassador will ask for peace?”

“Who will buy it if necessary.”

“With what? mon Dieu!”

“If it were only to secure quietly, afterwards, those who have gone to make war on you.”

“I would give much for that.”

“Well, then, the end is worth the means.”

“I believe you are right, mother; but whom shall I send?”

“Seek among your friends.”

“My mother, I do not know a single man to whom I could confide such a mission.”

“Confide it to a woman, then.”

“My mother, would you consent?”

“My son, I am very old, and very weak, and death will perhaps await me on my return; but I will make this journey so rapidly that your brother and his friends will not have had time to learn their own power.”

“Oh, my good mother!” cried Henri, kissing her hands, “you are my support, my benefactress!”

“That means that I am still Queen of France,” murmured she.

CHAPTER LXIII.

IN WHICH IT IS PROVED THAT GRATITUDE WAS ONE OF ST. LUC’S VIRTUES.

The next morning, M. de Monsoreau rose early, and descended into the courtyard of the palace. He entered the stable, where Roland was in his place.

“Are the horses of monseigneur taught to return to their stable alone?” asked he of the man who stood there.

“No, M. le Comte.”

“But Roland did so yesterday.”

“Oh, he is remarkably intelligent.”

“Has he ever done it before?”

“No, monsieur; he is generally ridden by the Duc d’Anjou, who is a good rider, and never gets thrown.”

“I was not thrown,” replied the count, “for I also am a good rider; no, I tied him to a tree while I entered a house, and at my return he had disappeared. I thought he had been stolen, or that some passer-by had played a bad joke by carrying him away; that was why I asked how he returned to the stable.”

“He returned alone, as monsieur said just now.”

“It is strange. Monseigneur often rides this horse, you say?”

“Nearly every day.”

“His highness returned late last night?”

“About an hour before you.”

“And what horse did he ride? was it a bay with a white star on his forehead?”

“No, monsieur, he rode Isolin, which you see here.”

“And in the prince’s escort is there any one who rides such a horse as I describe?”

“I know of no one.”

“Well,” said Monsoreau, impatiently, “saddle me Roland.”

“Roland?”

"Yes, are there any orders against it?"

"No; on the contrary, I was told to let you have any horse you pleased."

When Roland was saddled, Monsoreau said to the man, "What are your wages?"

"Twenty crowns, monsieur."

"Will you earn ten times that sum at once?"

"I ask no better. But how?"

"Find out who rode yesterday the horse I described."

"Ah, monsieur, what you ask is very difficult, there are so many gentlemen come here."

"Yes, but two hundred crowns are worth some trouble."

"Certainly, M. le Comte, and I will do my best to discover."

"That is right, and here are ten crowns to encourage you."

"Thanks, M. le Comte."

"Well, tell the prince I have gone to reconnoiter the wood for the chase."

As he spoke he heard steps behind him, and turned.

"Ah, M. de Bussy!" he cried.

"Why, M. le Comte, who would have thought of seeing you here!"

"And you, who they said was so ill."

"So I am; my doctor orders absolute rest, and for a week I have not left the city. Ah! you are going to ride Roland; I sold him to the duke, who is very fond of him."

"Yes, he is an excellent animal; I rode him yesterday."

"Which makes you wish for him again to-day?"

"Yes."

"You were speaking of a chase."

"Yes, the prince wishes for one."

"Whereabouts is it to be?"

"Near Méridor. Will you come with me?"

"No, thank you, I do not feel well."

"Oh!" cried a voice from behind, "there is M. de Bussy out without permission."

"Ah! there is my doctor scolding. Adieu, comte."

Bussy went away, and Monsoreau jumped into the saddle.

"What is the matter?" said Rémy; "you look so pale, I believe you are really ill."

"Do you know where he is going?"

"No."

"To Méridor."

"Well, did you hope he would not?"

"Mon Dieu! what will happen, after what he saw yesterday?"

"Madame de Monsoreau will deny everything."

"But he saw her."

"She will say he did not."

"She will never have the courage."

"Oh, M. de Bussy, is it possible you do not know women better than that!"

"Rémy, I feel very ill."

"So I see. Go home, and I will prescribe for you."

"What?"

"A slice of fowl and ham, and some lobster."

"Oh, I am not hungry."

"The more reason I should order you to eat."

"Rémy, I fear that that wretch will make a great scene at Méridor. I ought to have gone with him when he asked me."

"What for?"

"To sustain Diana."

"Oh, she will sustain herself. Besides, you ought not to be out; we agreed you were too ill."

"I could not help it, Rémy, I was so unquiet."

Rémy carried him off, and made him sit down to a good breakfast.

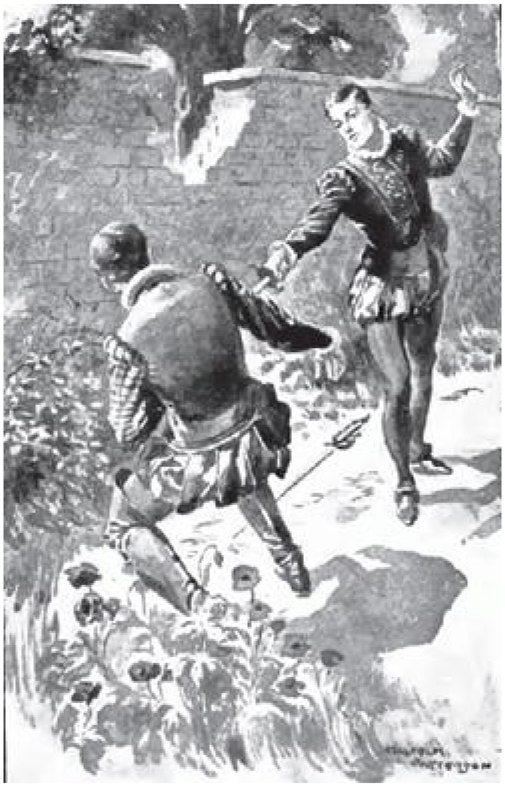

M. de Monsoreau wished to see if it were chance or habit that had led Roland to the park wall; therefore he left the bridle on his neck. Roland took precisely the same road as on the previous day, and before very long M. de Monsoreau found himself in the same spot as before. Only now the place was solitary, and no horse was there. The count climbed the wall again, but no one was to be seen; therefore, judging that it was useless to watch for people on their guard, he went on to the park gates. The baron, seeing his son-in-law coming over the drawbridge, advanced ceremoniously to meet him. Diana, seated under a magnificent sycamore, was reading poetry, while Gertrude was embroidering at her side. The count, seeing them, got off his horse, and approached them.

"Madame," said he, "will you grant me the favor of an interview?"

"Willingly, monsieur."

"What calm, or rather what perfidy!" thought the count.

"Do you do us the honor of remaining at the chat?" asked the baron.

"Yes, monsieur, until to-morrow, at least."

The baron went away to give orders, and Diana reseated herself, while Monsoreau took Gertrude's chair, and, with a look sufficient to intimidate most people, said:

"Madame, who was in the park with you yesterday?"

“At what time?” said Diana, in a firm voice.

“At six.”

“Where?”

“Near the copse.”

“It must have been some one else, it was not I.”

“It was you, madame.”

“What do you know about it?”

“Tell me the man’s name!” cried Monsoreau, furiously.

“What man?”

“The man who was walking with you.”

“I cannot tell, if it was some other woman.”

“It was you, I tell you.”

“You are wrong, monsieur.”

“How dare you deny it? I saw you.”

“You, monsieur?”

“Yes, madame, myself. And there is no other lady here.”

“You are wrong again; there is Jeanne de Brissac.”

“Madame de St. Luc?”

“Yes, my friend.”

“And M. de St. Luc?”

“Never leaves her; theirs was a love-match; you must have seen them.”

“It was not them; it was you, with some man whom I do not know, but whom I will know, I swear. I heard your cry.”

“When you are more reasonable, monsieur, I shall be ready to hear you; at present I will retire.”

“No, madame, you shall stay.”

“Monsieur, here are M. and Madame de St. Luc, I trust you will contain yourself.”

Indeed, M. and Madame de St. Luc approached. She bowed to Monsoreau, and St. Luc gave him his hand; then, leaving his wife to Monsoreau, took Diana, and after a walk they returned, warned by the bell for dinner, which was early at Méridor, as the baron preserved the old customs. The conversation was general, and turned naturally on the Duc d’Anjou, and the movement his arrival had caused. Diana sat far from her husband, between St. Luc and the baron.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE PROJECT OF M. DE ST. LUC.

When the repast was over, Monsoreau took St. Luc's arm and went out. "Do you know," said he, "that I am very happy to have found you here, for the solitude of Méridor frightened me."

"What, with your wife? As for me, with such a companion I should find a desert delightful."

"I do not say no, but still----"

"Still, what?"

"I am very glad to have met you here."

"Really, monsieur, you are very polite, for I cannot believe that you could possibly fear ennui with such a companion, and such a country."

"Bah! I pass half my life in the woods."

"The more reason for being fond of them, it seems to me. I know I shall be very sorry to leave them; unluckily, I fear I shall be forced to do so before long."

"Why so?"

"Oh! monsieur, when is man the arbiter of his own destiny? He is like the leaf of the tree, which the wind blows about. You are very fortunate."

"Fortunate; how?"

"To live amongst these splendid trees."

"Oh! I do not think I shall stay here long; I am not so fond of nature, and I fear these woods; I think they are not safe."

"Why? on account of their loneliness, do you mean?"

"No, not that, for I suppose you see friends here."

"Not a soul."

"Ah! really. How long is it since you had any visitor?"

"Not since I have been here."

"Not one gentleman from the court at Angers?"

"Not one."

"Impossible."

"It is true."

“Then I am wrong.”

“Perfectly; but why is not the park safe, are there bears here?”

“Oh, no.”

“Wolves?”

“No.”

“Robbers?”

“Perhaps. Tell me, monsieur, Madame de St. Luc seemed to me very pretty; is she not?”

“Why, yes.”

“Does she often walk in the park?”

“Often; she adores the woods, like myself.”

“And do you accompany her?”

“Always.”

“Nearly always?”

“What the devil are you driving at?”

“Oh; mon Dieu, nothing; or, at least, a trifle.”

“I listen.”

“They told me----”

“Well?”

“You will not be angry?”

“I never am so.”

“Besides, between husbands, these confidences are right; they told me a man had been seen wandering in the park.”

“A man.”

“Yes.”

“Who came for my wife?”

“Oh! I do not say that.”

“You would be wrong not to tell me, my dear Monsoreau. Who saw him? pray tell me.”

“Oh! to tell you the truth, I do not think it was for Madame de St. Luc that he came.”

“For whom, then?”

“Ah! I fear it is for Diana.”

“Oh! I should like that better.”

“What?”

“Certainly; you know we husbands are an egotistical set. Everyone for himself, and God for us all.”

“The devil rather.”

“Then you think a man entered here?”

“I think so.”

“And I do more than think,” said St. Luc, “for I saw him.”

“You saw a man in the park?”

“Yes.”

“When?”

“Yesterday.”

“Alone?”

“With Madame de Monsoreau.”

“Where?”

“Just here to the left.” And as they had walked down to the old copse, St. Luc pointed out the spot where Bussy always came over.

“Ah!” continued he, “here is a wall in a bad state; I must warn the baron.”

“Whom do you suspect?”

“Of what?”

“Of climbing over here to talk to my wife.” St. Luc seemed to reflect.

“Diable!” said he, “it could only have been----”

“Whom?”

“Why, yourself.”

“Are you joking, M. de St. Luc?”

“Ma foi, no; when I was first married I did such things.”

“Come! you are trying to put me off; but do not fear, I have courage. Help me to seek, you will do me an immense favor.”

St. Luc shook his head. “It must have been you,” said he.

“Do not jest, I beg of you; the thing is serious.”

“Do you think so?”

“I am sure of it.”

“Oh! and how does this man come?”

“Secretly.”

“Often?”

“I fear so; look at the marks in the wall.”

“Well, I suspected it, but I always fancied it was you.”

“But I tell you, no!”

“Oh, I believe you, my dear sir.”

“Well, then----”

“It must have been some one else.”

Monsoreau began to look black, but St. Luc preserved his easy nonchalance.

"I have an idea," said he.

"Tell me."

"If it were----"

"Well!"

"But, no."

"Pray speak."

"The Duc d'Anjou."

"I thought so at first, but I have made inquiries, and it could not have been he."

"Oh! he is very cunning."

"Yes, but it was not he."

"Wait, then."

"Well!"

"I have another idea; if it was neither you nor the duke, it must have been I."

"You?"

"Why not?"

"You to come on horseback to the outside of the park, when you live inside!"

"Oh, mon Dieu! I am such a capricious being."

"You, who fled away when you saw me!"

"Oh! any one would do that."

"Then you were doing wrong," cried the count, no longer able to keep in his anger.

"I do not say so."

"You are mocking me," cried the count, growing very pale, "and have been doing so for a quarter of an hour."

"You are wrong, monsieur," said St. Luc, drawing out his watch, and looking steadily at him; "it has been twenty minutes."

"You insult me."

"And you insult me with your questions like a constable."

"Ah! now I see clearly."

"How wonderful, at ten o'clock in the morning. But what do you see?"

"I see that you act in concert with the traitor, the coward, whom I saw yesterday."

"I should think so; he is my friend."

"Then I will kill you in his place."

"Bah! in your own house, and without crying, gare. Ah! M. de Monsoreau, how badly you have been brought up, and how living among beasts spoils the manners."

"Do you not see that I am furious?" howled the count.

"Yes, indeed, I do see it, and it does not become you at all; you look frightful."

The count drew his sword.

"Ah!" said St. Luc, "you try to provoke me; you see I am perfectly calm."

"Yes, I do provoke you."

"Take the trouble to get over the wall; on the other side we shall be on neutral ground."

"What do I care!"

"I do; I do not want to kill you in your own house."

"Very well!" said Monsoreau, climbing over.

"Take care; pray do not hurt yourself, my dear count; those stones are loose," said St. Luc. Then he also got over.

CHAPTER LXV.

HOW M. DE ST. LUC SHOWED M. DE MONSOREAU THE THRUST THAT THE KING HAD TAUGHT HIM.

"Are you ready?" cried Monsoreau.

"No; I have the sun in my eyes."

"Move then; I warn you I shall kill you."

"Shall you really? Well, man proposes, and God disposes. Look at that bed of poppies and dandelions."

"Well!"

"Well, I mean to lay you there." And he laughed as he drew his sword. Monsoreau began the combat furiously, but St. Luc parried his thrusts skilfully.

"Pardieu! M. de Monsoreau," said he, "you use your sword very well; you might kill any one but Bussy or me."

Monsoreau grew pale.

"As for me," continued St. Luc, "the king, who loves me, took the trouble to give me a great many lessons, and showed me, among other things, a thrust, which you shall see presently. I tell you, that you may have the pleasure of knowing you are killed by the king's method; it is very flattering." And then suddenly he rushed furiously on Monsoreau, who, half wild with rage as he was, parried five thrusts, but received the sixth full in his chest.

"Ah!" said St. Luc, "you will fall just where I told you," as Monsoreau sank down on the poppies. Then, wiping his sword, he stood quietly by, watching the changes which came over the face of the dying man.

"Ah, you have killed me!" cried Monsoreau.

"I intended to do so, but now I see you dying, devil take me if I am not sorry for what I have done. You are horribly jealous, it is true, but you were brave. Have you any last wish? If so, tell it to me; and, on the faith of a gentleman, it shall be executed. Are you thirsty? Shall I get you water?"

Monsoreau did not reply. He turned over with his face to the earth, biting the ground, and struggling in his blood. Then he tried to raise his head, but fell back with a groan.

"Come, he is dead; let me think no more about him. Ah! but that is not so easy, when you have killed a man." And jumping back over the wall, he went to the château. The first person he saw was Diana talking to his wife.

"How well she will look in black," thought he. Then, approaching them, "Pardon me," said he, "but may I say a few words to Jeanne?"

"Do so; I will go to my father,"

"What is it?" said Jeanne, when Diana was gone; "you look rather gloomy."

"Why, yes."

"What has happened?"

"Oh, mon Dieu! an accident."

"To you?"

"Not precisely to me, but to a person who was near me."

"Who was it?"

"The person I was walking with."

"M. de Monsoreau?"

"Alas! yes; poor dear man."

"What has happened to him?"

"I believe he is dead."

"Dead!" cried Jeanne, starting back in horror.

"Just so."

"He who was here just now talking----"

"Yes, that is just the cause of his death; he talked too much."

"St. Luc, you are hiding something from me!" cried Jeanne, seizing his hands.

"I! Nothing; not even the place where he lies."

"Where is it?"

"Down there behind the wall; just where Bussy used to tie his horse."

"It was you who killed him."

"Parbleu! that is not very difficult to discover."

"Unlucky that you are!"

"Ah, dear friend! he provoked me, insulted me, drew the sword first."

"It is dreadful! the poor man!"

"Good; I was sure of it; before a week is over he will be called St. Monsoreau."

"But you cannot stay here in the house of the man you have killed."

“So I thought at once, and that is why I came to ask you to get ready.”

“He has not wounded you?”

“No, I am perfectly unhurt.”

“Then, we will go.”

“As quickly as possible, for you know the accident may be discovered at any moment.”

“Then Diana is a widow.”

“That is just what I thought of.”

“After you killed him?”

“No, before.”

“Well, I will go and tell her.”

“Spare her feelings.”

“Do not laugh. Meanwhile you get the horses saddled. But where shall we go?”

“To Paris.”

“But the king?”

“Oh! he will have forgotten everything by this time; besides, if there is to be war, as seems probable, he will be glad of me. But I must have pen and ink.”

“For what?”

“To write to Bussy; I cannot leave Anjou without telling him why.”

“No, of course not; you will find all that you require in my room.” St. Luc went in, and wrote,--

“DEAR FRIEND,

“You will learn, by report, ere long, the accident which has happened to M. de Monsoreau; we had together, by the old copse, a discussion on broken-down walls and horses that go home alone. In the heat of the argument, he fell on a bed of poppies and dandelions so hard that he died there.

“Your friend for life, “St. Luc.

“P. S. As you may think this rather improbable, I must add that we had our swords in our hands. I set off at once for Paris to make peace with the king, Anjou not seeming to me very safe after what has occurred.”

Ten minutes after a servant set off for Angers with this letter, while M. and Madame de St. Luc went out by another door, leaving Diana much grieved at their departure, and much embarrassed how to tell the baron what had occurred. She had turned away her eyes from St. Luc as he passed.

“That is the reward for serving your friends,” said he to his wife; “decidedly all people are ungrateful excepting me.”

CHAPTER LXVI.

IN WHICH WE SEE THE QUEEN-MOTHER ENTER THE TOWN OF ANGERS, BUT NOT TRIUMPHANTLY.

At the same time that M. de Monsoreau fell under the sword of St. Luc, a flourish of trumpets sounded at the closed gates of Angers. It was Catherine de Medicis, who arrived there with rather a large suite. They sent to tell Bussy, who rose from his bed, and went to the prince, who immediately got into his. Certainly the airs played by the trumpets were fine, but they had not the virtue of those which made the walls of Jericho fall, for the gates did not open. Catherine leaned out of her litter to show herself to the guards, hoping the sight of her would do more than the sound of the trumpets. They saw her, and saluted her courteously, but did not open the gates. Then she sent a gentleman to demand admittance, but they replied that Angers being in a state of war, the gates could not be opened without some necessary formalities. Catherine was furious. At last Bussy appeared, with five other gentlemen.

"Who is there?" cried he.

"It is her majesty the queen mother, who has come to visit Angers."

"Very well, go to the left, and about eighty steps off you will find the postern."

"A postern for her majesty!" cried the gentleman. But Bussy was no longer there to hear, he and his friends had ridden off towards the indicated spot.

"Did your majesty hear?" asked the gentleman.

"Oh! yes, monsieur, I heard; let us go there, if that be the only way to get in."

The cortege turned to the left, and the postern opened.

"Your majesty is welcome to Angers," said Bussy.

"Thank you, M. de Bussy," said the queen, descending from her litter, and advancing towards the little door. Bussy stopped her. "Take care, madame," said he, "the door is low, and you will hurt yourself."

"Must I then stoop?" replied she; "it is the first time I ever entered a city so."

Once through the gate she re-entered her litter to go to the palace, Bussy and his friends escorting her.

"Where is my son?" cried she; "why do I not see M. d'Anjou?"

"Monseigneur is ill, madame, or else your majesty cannot doubt that he would have come himself to do the honors of his city."

Catherine was sublime in hypocrisy.

"Ill--my poor child, ill!" cried she; "ah! let us hasten to him; is he well taken care of?"

"Yes, madame, we do our best."

"Does he suffer?"

"Horribly, he is subject to these sudden indispositions."

"It was sudden, then?"

"Mon Dieu! yes, madame."

When they arrived at the palace, Bussy ran up first to the duke.

"Here she is!" cried he.

"Is she furious?"

"Exasperated."

"Does she complain?"

"No, she does worse, she smiles."

"What do the people say?"

"They looked at her in mute terror; now, monseigneur, be careful."

"We stick to war?"

"Pardieu, ask one hundred to get ten, and with her you will only get five."

"Bah! you think me very weak. Are you all here? Where is Monsoreau?"

"I believe he is at Méridor."

"Her majesty the queen mother!" cried the usher at the door.

Catherine entered, looking pale. The duke made a movement to rise, but she threw herself into his arms and half stifled him with kisses. She did more--she wept.

"We must take care," said Antragues to Ribeirac, "each tear will be paid for by blood."

Catherine now sat down on the foot of the bed. At a sign from Bussy everyone went away but himself.

"Will you not go and look after my poor attendants, M. de Bussy? you who are at home here," said the queen.

It was impossible not to go, so he replied, “I am happy to please your majesty,” and he also retired.

Catherine wished to discover whether her son were really ill or feigning. But he, worthy son of such a mother, played his part to perfection. She had wept, he had a fever. Catherine, deceived, thought him really ill, and hoped to have more influence over a mind weakened by suffering. She overwhelmed him with tenderness, embraced him, and wept so much that at last he asked her the reason.

“You have run so great a risk,” replied she.

“In escaping from the Louvre, mother?”

“No, after.”

“How so?”

“Those who aided you in this unlucky escape----”

“Well?”

“Were your most cruel enemies.”

“She wishes to find out who it was,” thought he.

“The King of Navarre,” continued she, “the eternal scourge of our race----”

“Ah! she knows.”

“He boasts of having gained much by it.”

“That is impossible, for he had nothing to do with it; and if he had, I am quite safe, as you see. I have not seen the King of Navarre for two years.”

“It was not only of danger I spoke!”

“Of what, then?” replied the duke, smiling, as he saw the tapestry shake behind the queen.

“The king’s anger,” said she, in a solemn voice; “the furious anger which menaces you----”

“This danger is something like the other, madame; he may be furious, but I am safe here.”

“You believe so?”

“I am sure of it; your majesty has announced it to me yourself.”

“How so?”

“Because if you had been charged only with menaces, you would not have come, and the king in that case would have hesitated to place such a hostage in my hands.”

“A hostage! I!” cried she, terrified.

“A most sacred and venerable one,” replied the duke, with a triumphant glance at the wall.

Catherine was baffled, but she did not know that Bussy was encouraging the duke by signs.

“My son,” said she at length, “you are quite right; they are words of peace I bring to you.”

“I listen, mother, and I think we shall now begin to understand each other.”

CHAPTER LXVII.

LITTLE CAUSES AND GREAT EFFECTS.

Catherine had, as we have seen, had the worst of the argument. She was surprised, and began to wonder if her son were really as decided as he appeared to be, when a slight event changed the aspect of affairs. Bussy had been, as we said, encouraging the prince secretly at every word that he thought dangerous to his cause. Now his cause was war at any price, for he wished to stay in Anjou, watch M. de Monsoreau, and visit his wife. The duke feared Bussy, and was guided by him. Suddenly, however, Bussy felt himself pulled by his cloak; he turned and saw Rémy, who drew him gently towards him.

"What is it, Rémy?" said he impatiently. "Why disturb me at such a moment?"

"A letter."

"And for a letter you take me from this important conversation."

"It is from Méridor."

"Oh! thank you, my good Rémy."

"Then I was not wrong?"

"Oh, no; where is it?"

"That is what made me think it of importance; the messenger would only give it to you yourself."

"Is he here?"

"Yes."

"Bring him in."

Rémy opened the door, and a servant entered.

"Here is M. de Bussy," said Rémy.

"Oh, I know him well," said the man, giving the letter.

"Did she give it to you?"

"No; M. de St. Luc."

As Bussy read, he grew first pale, then crimson. Rémy dismissed the servant, and Bussy, with a bewildered look, held out the letter to him.

"See," said he, "what St. Luc has done for me."

“Well,” said Rémy, “this appears to me to be very good and St. Luc is a gallant fellow.”

“It is incredible!” cried Bussy.

“Certainly; but that is nothing. Here is our position quite changed; I shall have a Comtesse de Bussy for a patient.”

“Yes, she shall be my wife. So he is dead.”

“So, you see, it is written.”

“Oh, it seems like a dream, Rémy. What! shall I see no more that specter, always coming between me and happiness? It cannot be true.”

“It is true; read again, ‘he died there.’“

“But Diana cannot stay at Méridor--I do not wish it; she must go where she will forget him.”

“Paris will be best; people soon forget at Paris.”

“You are right; we will return to the little house in the Rue des Tournelles, and she shall pass there her months of widowhood in obscurity.”

“But to go to Paris you must have----”

“What?”

“Peace in Anjou.”

“True; oh, mon Dieu! what time lost.”

“That means that you are going at once to Méridor.”

“No, not I, but you; I must stay here; besides, she might not like my presence just now.”

“How shall I see her? Shall I go to the castle?”

“No; go first to the old copse and see if she is there; if she is not then go to the castle.”

“What shall I say to her?”

“Say that I am half mad.” And pressing the young man’s hand, he returned to his place behind the tapes try.

Catherine had been trying to regain her ground.

“My son,” she had said, “it seemed to me that a mother and son could not fail to understand each other.”

“Yet you see that happens sometimes.”

“Never when she wishes it.”

“When they wish it, you mean,” said the duke, seeking a sign of approbation from Bussy for his boldness.

“But I wish it, my son, and am willing to make any sacrifices to attain peace.”

“Oh!”

“Yes, my dear child. What do you ask?--what do you demand? Speak.”

“Oh, my mother!” said François, almost embarrassed at his own easy victory.

“Listen, my son. You do not wish to drown the kingdom in blood--it is not possible; you are neither a bad Frenchman nor a bad brother.”

“My brother insulted me, madame, and I owe him nothing, either as my brother or king.”

“But I, François--you cannot complain of me?”

“Yes, madame, you abandoned me.”

“Ah! you wish to kill me. Well, a mother does not care to live to see her children murder each other!” cried Catherine, who wished very much to live.

“Oh, do not say that, madame, you tear my heart!” cried François, whose heart was not torn at all.

Catherine burst into tears. The duke took her hands, and tried to reassure her, not without uneasy glances towards the tapestry.

“But what do you want or ask for, mother? I will listen,” said he.

“I wish you to return to Paris, dear child, to return to your brother’s court, who will receive you with open arms.”

“No, madame, it is not he whose arms are open to receive me--it is the Bastile.”

“No; return, and on my honor, on my love as a mother, I solemnly swear that you shall be received by the king as though you were king and he the Duc d’Anjou.”

The duke looked to the tapestry.

“Accept, my son; you will have honors, guards.”

“Oh, madame, your son gave me guards--his four minions!”

“Do not reply so; you shall choose your own guards, and M. de. Bussy shall be their captain, if you like.”

Again the duke glanced to the wall, and, to his surprise, saw Bussy smiling and applauding by every possible method.

“What is the meaning of this change?” thought the duke; “is it that he may be captain of my guards? Then must I accept?” said he aloud, as though talking to himself.

“Yes, yes!” signed Bussy, with head and hands.

“Quit Anjou, and return to Paris?”

“Yes!” signed Bussy, more decidedly than ever.

“Doubtless, dear child,” said Catherine, “it is not disagreeable to return to Paris.”

“Well, I will reflect,” said the duke, who wished to consult with Bussy.

“I have won,” thought Catherine.

They embraced once more, and separated.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

HOW M. DE MONSOREAU OPENED AND SHUT HIS EYES, WHICH PROVED THAT HE WAS NOT DEAD.

Rémy rode along, wondering in what humor he should find Diana, and what he should say to her. He had just arrived at the park wall, when his horse, which had been trotting, stopped so suddenly that, had he not been a good rider, he would have been thrown over his head. Rémy, astonished, looked to see the cause, and saw before him a pool of blood, and a little further on, a body, lying against the wall. "It is Monsoreau!" cried he; "how strange! he lies dead there, and the blood is down here. Ah! there is the track; he must have crawled there, or rather that good M. de St. Luc leaned him up against the wall that the blood might not fly to his head. He died with his eyes open, too."

All at once Rémy started back in horror; the two eyes, that he had seen open, shut again, and a paleness more livid than ever spread itself over the face of the defunct. Rémy became almost as pale as M. de Monsoreau, but, as he was a doctor, he quickly recovered his presence of mind, and said to himself that if Monsoreau moved his eyes, it showed he was not dead. "And yet I have read," thought he, "of strange movements after death. This devil of a fellow frightens one even after death. Yes, his eyes are quite closed; there is one method of ascertaining whether he is dead or not, and that is to shove my sword into him, and if he does not move, he is certainly dead." And Rémy was preparing for this charitable action, when suddenly the eyes opened again. Rémy started back, and the perspiration rolled off his forehead as he murmured, "He is not dead; we are in a nice position. Yes, but if I kill him he will be dead." And he looked at Monsoreau, who seemed also to be looking at him earnestly.

"Oh!" cried Rémy, "I cannot do it. God knows that if he were upright before me I would kill him with all my heart; but as he is now, helpless and three parts dead, it would be an infamy."

"Help!" murmured Monsoreau, "I am dying."

"Mordieu!" thought Rémy, "my position is embarrassing. I am a doctor, and, as such, bound to succor my fellow-creatures when they suffer. It is true that Monsoreau is so ugly that he can scarcely be called a fellow-creature, still he is a man. Come, I must forget that I am the friend of M. de Bussy, and do my duty as a doctor."

"Help!" repeated the wounded man.

"Here I am," said Rémy.

"Fetch me a priest and a doctor."

"The doctor is here, and perhaps he will dispense with the priest."

"Rémy," said Monsoreau, "by what chance--"

Rémy understood all the question might mean. This was no beaten road, and no one was likely to come without particular business.

"Pardieu!" he replied, "a mile or two off I met M. de St. Luc----"

"Ah! my murderer."

"And he said, 'Rémy, go to the old copse, there you will find a man dead.'"

"Dead?"

"Yes, he thought so; well, I came here and saw you."

"And now, tell me frankly, am I mortally wounded?"

"I will try to find out."

Rémy approached him carefully, took off his cloak, his doublet and shirt. The sword had penetrated between the sixth and seventh ribs.

"Do you suffer much?"

"In my back, not in my chest."

"Ah, let me see; where?"

"Below the shoulder bone."

"The steel must have come against a bone." And he began to examine. "No, I am wrong," said he, "the sword came against nothing, but passed right through." Monsoreau fainted after this examination.

"Ah! that is all right," said Rémy, "syncope, low pulse, cold in the hands and legs: Diable! the widowhood of Madame de Monsoreau will not last long, I fear."

At this moment a slight bloody foam rose to the lips of the wounded man.

Rémy drew from his pocket his lancet case; then tearing off a strip from the patient's shirt, bound it round his arm.

"We shall see," said he, "if the blood flows. Ah, it does! and I believe that Madame de Monsoreau will not be a widow. Pardon, my dear M. de Bussy, but I am a doctor."

Presently the patient breathed, and opened his eyes.

"Oh!" stammered he, "I thought all was over."

"Not yet, my dear monsieur; it is even possible----"

"That I live!"

"Oh, mon Dieu! yes; but let me close the wound. Stop; do not move; nature at this moment is aiding my work. I make the blood flow, and she stops it. Ah! nature is a great doctor, my dear sir. Let me wipe your lips. See the bleeding has stopped already. Good; all goes well, or rather badly."

"Badly!"

"No, not for you; but I know what I mean."

"You think I shall get well?"

"Alas! yes."

"You are a singular doctor, M. Rémy."

"Never mind, as long as I cure you," said he, rising.

"Do not abandon me," said the count.

"Ah! you talk too much. Diable! I ought to tell him to cry out."

"What do you mean?"

"Never mind; your wound is dressed. Now I will go to the castle and fetch assistance."

"And what must I do meanwhile?"

"Keep quite still; do not stir; breathe lightly, and try not to cough. Which is the nearest house?"

"The château de Méridor."

"Which is the way to it?" said Rémy, affecting ignorance.

"Get over the wall, and you will find yourself in the park."

"Very well; I go."

"Thanks, generous man."

"Generous, indeed, if you only knew all."

He soon arrived at the château, where all the inhabitants were busy looking for the body of the count; for St. Luc had given them a wrong direction. Rémy came among them like a thunderbolt, and was so eager to bring them to the rescue, that Diana looked at him with surprise, "I thought he was Bussy's friend," murmured she, as Rémy disappeared, carrying with him a wheelbarrow, lint and water.

CHAPTER LXIX.

HOW M. LE DUC D’ANJOU WENT TO MÉRIDOR TO CONGRATULATE MADAME DE MONSOREAU ON THE DEATH OF HER HUSBAND, AND FOUND HIM THERE BEFORE HIM.

As soon as the duke left his mother, he hastened to Bussy to know the meaning of all his signs. Bussy, who was reading St. Luc’s letter for the fifth time, received the prince with a gracious smile.

“How! monseigneur takes the trouble to come to my house to seek me.”

“Yes mordieu, I want an explanation.”

“From me?”

“Yes, from you.”

“I listen, monseigneur.”

“You tell me to steel myself against the suggestions of my mother, and to sustain the attack valiantly. I do so; and in the hottest of the fight you tell me to surrender.”

“I gave you all those charges, monseigneur, because I was ignorant of the object for which your mother came; but now that I see that she has come to promote your highness’s honor and glory----”

“How! what do you mean?”

“Doubtless: what does your highness want? To triumph over your enemies, do you not? For I do not believe, as some people say, that you wish to become King of France.”

The duke looked sullen.

“Some might counsel you to it, but believe me they are your most cruel enemies. Consider for yourself, monseigneur; have you one hundred thousand men--ten millions of livres--alliance with foreigners--and, above all, would you turn against your king?”

“My king did not hesitate to turn against me.”

“Ah! there you are right. Well! declare yourself--get crowned--take the title of King of France--and if you succeed, I ask no better; I should grow great with you.”

"Who speaks of being king?" cried the duke, angrily; "you discuss a question which I have never proposed, even to myself."

"Well, then, that is settled. Let them give you a guard and five hundred thousand livres. Obtain, before peace is signed, a subsidy from Anjou, to carry on the war. Once you have it, you can keep it. So, we should have arms and money, and we could do----God knows what."

"But once they have me at Paris, they will laugh at me."

"Oh! impossible, monseigneur; did you not hear what the queen mother offered you?"

"She offered me many things."

"That disquiets you?"

"Yes."

"But, among other things, she offered you a company of guards, even if I commanded it."

"Yes, she offered that."

"Well, accept; I will be captain; Antragues and Livarot lieutenants; and Ribeirac ensign. Let us get up your company for you, and see if they dare to laugh at you then."

"Ma foi! I believe you are right, Bussy; I will think of it."

"Do so, monseigneur."

"What were you reading so attentively when I came in?"

"Oh! a letter, which interests you still more than me. Where the devil were my brains, that I did not show it to you?"

"What is it?"

"Sad news, monseigneur; Monsoreau is dead."

"What!" cried the duke, with a surprise which Bussy thought was a joyful one.

"Dead, monseigneur."

"M. de Monsoreau!"

"Mon Dieu! yes; are we not all mortal?"

"Yes; but so suddenly."

"Ah! but if you are killed?"

"Then, he was killed?"

"So it seems; and by St. Luc, with whom he quarreled."

"Oh, that dear St. Luc!"

"I did not think he was one of your highness's friends."

"Oh, he is my brother's, and, since we are to be reconciled, his friends are mine. But are you sure?"

"As sure as I can be. Here is a letter from St. Luc, announcing it; and I have sent Rémy, my doctor, to present my condolences to the old baron."

"Oh, Monsoreau!" cried the prince, with his malignant smile.

"Why monseigneur, one would say you hated the poor count."

"No, it was you."

"Of course I did; did he not humiliate me through you?"

"You remember it still."

"But you, monseigneur, whose friend and tool he was----"

"Well, well, get my horse saddled, Bussy."

"What for?"

"To go to Méridor; I wish to pay a visit to Madame Monsoreau. I have been projecting one for some time, and I do not know why it has not taken place sooner."

"Now Monsoreau is dead," thought Bussy, "I do not care; I will protect Diana. I will go with him, and see her."

A quarter of an hour after, the prince, Bussy, and ten gentlemen rode to Méridor, with that pleasure which fine weather, turf, and youth always inspire in men on horseback.

The porter at the château came to ask the names of the visitors.

"The Duc d'Anjou," replied the prince.

The porter blew his horn, and soon windows were opened, and they heard the noise of bolts and bars as the door was unfastened, and the old baron appeared on the threshold, holding in his hand a bunch of keys. Immediately behind him stood a lady.

"Ah, there is the beautiful Diana!" cried the duke; "do you see her, Bussy?"

Diana, indeed, came out of the house, and behind her came a litter, on which lay Monsoreau, his eyes shining with fever and jealousy as he was carried along.

"What does this mean?" cried the duke to his companion, who had turned whiter than the handkerchief with which he was trying to hide his emotion.

"Long live the Duc d'Anjou!" cried Monsoreau, raising his hand in the air by a violent effort.

"Take care, you will hurt yourself," said a voice behind him. It was Rémy.

Surprise does not last long at court, so, with a smile, the duke said, “Oh, my dear count, what a happy surprise! Do you know we heard you were dead?”

“Come near, monseigneur, and let me kiss your hand. Thank God, not only I am not dead, but I shall live; I hope to serve you with more ardor than ever.”

As for Bussy, he felt stunned, and scarcely dared to look at Diana. This treasure, twice lost to him, belonged still to his rival.

“And you, M. de Bussy,” said Monsoreau, “receive my thanks, for it is almost to you that I owe my life.”

“To me!” stammered the young man, who thought the count was mocking him.

“Yes, indirectly, it is true, for here is my saviour,” said he, turning to Rémy, who would willingly have sunk into the earth. Then, in spite of his signs, which he took for precautions to himself, he recounted the care and skill which the young doctor had exhibited towards him.

The duke frowned, and Bussy looked thunders. The poor fellow raised his hands to heaven.

“I hear,” continued the count, “that Rémy one day found you dying, as he found me. It is a tie of friendship between us, M. de Bussy, and when Monsoreau loves, he loves well; it is true that when he hates, it is also with all his heart.”

“Come, then,” said the duke, getting off his horse, “deign, beautiful Diana, to do us the honors of the house, which we thought to find in grief, but which we find still the abode of joy. As for you, Monsoreau, rest--you require it.”

“Monseigneur!” said the count, “it shall never be said that Monsoreau, while he lived, allowed another to do the honors of his house to you; my servants will carry me, and wherever you go, I shall follow.”

Bussy approached Diana, and Monsoreau smiled; he took her hand, and he smiled again. It was only the duke he feared.

“Here is a great change, M. le Comte,” said Diana.

“Alas! why is it not greater!”

CHAPTER LXX.

THE INCONVENIENCE OF LARGE LITTERS AND NARROW DOORS.

Bussy did not quit Diana; the smiles of Monsoreau gave him a liberty which he was only too glad to make use of.

"Madame," said he to Diana, "I am in truth the most miserable of men. On the news of his death, I advised the prince to return to Paris, and to come to terms with his mother; he did so, and now you remain in Anjou."

"Oh, Louis," replied she, "we dare not say that we are unhappy; so many happy days, so many joys--do you forget them all?"

"I forget nothing, madame; on the contrary, I remember but too much, and that is why I suffer as I do at losing this happiness. What shall I do if I return to Paris, a hundred leagues from you? My heart sinks at the thought, Diana."

Diana looked at him, and saw so much grief in his eyes, that she said, "Well, if you go to Paris, I will go also."

"How! will you quit M. de Monsoreau?"

"No, he would not allow me to do so; he must come with us."

"Wounded, ill as he is? Impossible!"

"He will come, I tell you." And, leaving Bussy, she went to the prince. The count frowned dreadfully.

"Monseigneur," said she, "they say your highness is fond of flowers; if you will come with me, I will show you the most beautiful in Anjou."

The duke offered her his hand.

"Where are you about to take monseigneur?" asked Monsoreau uneasily.

"Into the greenhouse."

"Ah! well, carry me there."

"Ma foi!" thought Rémy, "I was right not to kill him, for he will soon kill himself."

Diana smiled on Bussy, and said to him, in a low voice, "Do not let M. de Monsoreau suspect that you are about to leave Anjou, and I will manage all."

“Good!” said Bussy, and approaching the prince, he whispered, “Do not let Monsoreau know that we intend to make peace.”

“Why not?”

“Because he might tell the queen-mother, to make a friend of her.”

“You suspect him, then?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Well, so do I; I believe he only counterfeited death to deceive us.”

“No, he really received a sword-thrust through his body, and but for that fool of a Rémy, he would have died; I believe his soul must be glued to his body.”

They arrived at the conservatory, and Diana continued to smile charmingly on the prince. He passed first, then Diana, and Monsoreau wished to follow, but it was impossible. His litter was too large to go through the door. At this sight he uttered a groan. Diana went on quietly, without looking at him, but Bussy, who understood her, said to him:

“It is useless to try, M. le Comte, your litter will not pass.”

“Monseigneur!” cried Monsoreau, “do not go into that conservatory, some of the flowers exhale dangerous perfumes.”

Then he fainted, and was carried to his room.

Bussy went to tell Diana what had happened, and she left the duke to go to the castle.

“Have we succeeded?” said Bussy to her as she passed.

“I hope so; do not go away without having seen Gertrude.”

When Monsoreau opened his eyes again, he saw Diana standing at his bedside.

“Ah! it is you, madame,” said he, “to-night we leave for Paris.”

Rémy cried out in horror, but Monsoreau paid no attention.

“Can you think of such a thing, with your wound?” said Diana, quietly.

“Madame, I would rather die than suffer, and were I to die on the road, we start to-night.”

“As you please, monsieur.”

“Then make your preparations.”

“My preparations are soon made, but may I ask the reason of this sudden determination?”

“I will tell you, madame, when you have no more flowers to show to the prince, and when my doors are large enough to admit litters.”

Diana bowed.

“But, madame----” said Rémy.

“M. le Comte wishes it,” replied she, “and my duty is to obey.” And she left the room.

As the duke was making his adieux to the Baron de Méridor, Gertrude appeared, and said aloud to the duke that her mistress regretted that she could not have the honor of saying farewell to his highness; and softly to Bussy that Diana would set off for Paris that evening. As they went home again, the duke felt unwilling to leave Anjou now that Diana smiled on him. Therefore he said, “I have been reflecting, Bussy,” said he.

“On what, monseigneur?”

“That it is not wise to give in at once to my mother.”

“You are right, she thinks herself clever enough without that.”

“But by dragging it on for a week, and giving fêtes, and calling the liability around us, she will see how strong we are.”

“Well reasoned, but still----”

“I will stay here a week; depend upon it I shall draw new concessions from the queen.”

Bussy appeared to reflect. “Well, monseigneur,” said he, “perhaps you are right, but the king, not knowing your intentions, may become annoyed; he is very irascible.”

“You are right, but I shall send some one to the king to announce my return in a week.”

“Yes, but that some one will run great risks.”

“If I change my mind, you mean.”

“Yes, and in spite of your promise, you would do so if you thought it your interest.”

“Perhaps.”

“Then they will send your messenger to the Bastile.”

“I will give him a letter, and not let him know what he is carrying.”

“On the contrary, give him no letter, and let him know.”

“Then no one will go.”

“Oh! I know some one.”

“Who?”

“I, myself.”

“You!”

“Yes, I like difficult negotiations.”

“Bussy, my dear Bussy, if you will do that, I shall be eternally grateful.”

Bussy smiled. The duke thought he hesitated.

"And I will give you ten thousand crowns for your journey," added he.

"Thanks, monseigneur, but these things cannot be paid for."

"Then you will go?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Whenever you like."

"The sooner the better."

"This evening if you wish it."

"Dear Bussy."

"You know I would do anything for your highness. I will go to-night; you stay here and enjoy yourself, and get me something good from the queen-mother."

"I will not forget."

Bussy then prepared to depart as soon as the signal arrived from Méridor. It did not come till the next morning, for the count had felt himself so feeble that he had been forced to take a night's rest. But early in the morning a messenger came to announce to Bussy that the count had set off for Paris in a litter, followed on horseback by Rémy, Diana, and Gertrude. Bussy jumped on his horse, and took the same road.

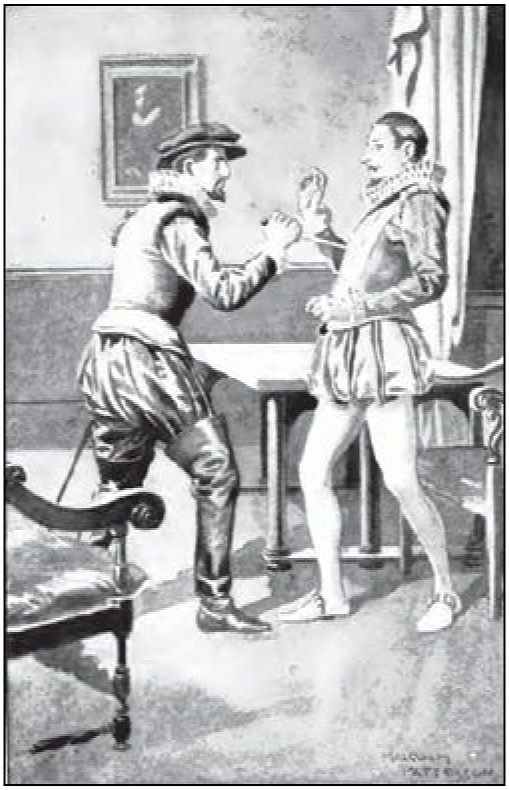

CHAPTER LXXI.

WHAT TEMPER THE KING WAS IN WHEN ST. LUC REAPPEARED AT THE LOUVRE.

Since the departure of Catherine, Henri, however, confident in his ambassador, had thought only of arming himself against the attacks of his brother. He amused, or rather ennuyéd, himself by drawing up long lists of proscriptions, in which were inscribed in alphabetical order all who had not shown themselves zealous for his cause. The lists became longer every day, and at the S---- and the L----, that is to say, twice over, was inscribed the name of M. de St. Luc. Chicot, in the midst of all this, was, little by little, and man by man, enrolling an army for his master. One evening Chicot entered the room where the king sat at supper.

"What is it?" asked the king.

"M. de St. Luc."

"M. de St. Luc?"

"Yes."

"At Paris?"

"Yes."

"At the Louvre?"

"Yes."

The king rose, red and agitated.

"What has he come for? The traitor!"

"Who knows?"

"He comes, I am sure, as deputy from the states of Anjou--as an envoy from my rebellious brother. He makes use of the rebellion as a safe conduct to come here and insult me."

"Who knows?"

"Or perhaps he comes to ask me for his property, of which I have kept back the revenues, which may have been rather an abuse of power, as, after all, he has committed no crime."

"Who knows?"

“Ah, you repeat eternally the same thing; mort de ma vie! you tire my patience out with your eternal ‘Who knows?’“

“Eh! mordieu! do you think you are very amusing with your eternal questions?”

“At least you might reply something.”

“And what should I reply? Do you take me for an ancient oracle? It is you who are tiresome with your foolish suppositions.”

“M. Chicot?”

“M. Henri.”

“Chicot, my friend, you see my grief and you laugh at me.”

“Do not have any grief.”

“But everyone betrays me.”

“Who knows? Ventre de biche! who knows?”

Henri went down to his cabinet, where, at the news of his return, a number of gentlemen had assembled, who were looking at St. Luc with evident distrust and animosity. He, however, seemed quite unmoved by this. He had brought his wife with him also, and she was seated, wrapped in her traveling-cloak, when the king entered in an excited state.

“Ah, monsieur, you here!” he cried.

“Yes, sire,” replied St. Luc.

“Really, your presence at the Louvre surprises me.”

“Sire, I am only surprised that, under the circumstances, your majesty did not expect me.”

“What do you mean, monsieur?”

“Sire, your majesty is in danger.”

“Danger!” cried the courtiers.

“Yes, gentlemen, a real, serious danger, in which the king has need of the smallest as well as the greatest of those devoted to him; therefore I come to lay at his feet my humble services.”

“Ah!” said Chicot, “you see, my son, that I was right to say, ‘who knows.’“

Henri did not reply at once; he would not yield immediately. After a pause, he said, “Monsieur, you have only done your duty; your services are due to us.”

“The services of all the king’s subjects are due to him, I know, sire; but in these times many people forget to pay their debts. I, sire, come to pay mine, happy that your majesty will receive me among the number of your creditors."

"Then," said Henri, in a softer tone, "you return without any other motive than that which you state; without any mission, or safe-conduct?"

"Sire, I return simply and purely for that reason. Now, your majesty may throw me into the Bastile, or have me shot, but I shall have done my duty. Sire, Anjou is on fire; Touraine is about to revolt; Guienne is rising. M. le Duc d'Anjou is hard at work."

"He is well supported, is he not?"

"Sire, M. de Bussy, firm as he is, cannot make your brother brave."

"Ah! he trembles, then, the rebel."

"Let me go and shake St. Luc's hand," said Chicot, advancing.

The king followed him, and going up to his old favorite, and laying his hand on his shoulder, said,--

"You are welcome, St. Luc!"

"Ah! sire," cried St. Luc, kissing the king's hand, "I find again my beloved master."

"Yes, but you, my poor St. Luc, you have grown thin."

"It is with grief at having displeased your majesty," said a feminine voice. Now, although the voice was soft and respectful, Henri frowned, for it was as distasteful to him as the noise of thunder was to Augustus.

"Madame de St. Luc!" said he. "Ah! I forgot."

Jeanne threw herself at his feet.

"Rise, madame," said he, "I love all that bear the name of St. Luc." Jeanne took his hand and kissed it, but he withdrew it quickly.

"You must convert the king," said Chicot to the young woman, "you are pretty enough for it."

But Henri turned his back to her, and passing his arm round St. Luc's neck, said,--

"Then we have made peace, St. Luc?"

"Say rather, sire, that the pardon is granted."

"Madame!" said Chicot, "a good wife should not leave her husband," and he pushed her after the king and St. Luc.

CHAPTER LXXII.

IN WHICH WE MEET TWO IMPORTANT PERSONAGES WHOM WE HAVE LOST SIGHT OF FOR SOME TIME.

There are two of the personages mentioned in this story, about whom the reader has the right to ask for information. We mean an enormous monk, with thick eyebrows and large lips, whose neck was diminishing every day; and a large donkey whose sides were gradually swelling out like a balloon. The monk resembled a hogshead; and the ass was like a child's cradle, supported by four posts.

The one inhabited a cell at St. Genevieve, and the other the stable at the same convent. The one was called Gorenflot, and the other Panurge. Both were enjoying the most prosperous lot that ever fell to a monk and an ass.

The monks surrounded their illustrious brother with cares and attentions, and Pan urge fared well for his master's sake.

If a missionary arrived from foreign countries, or a secret legate from the Pope, they pointed out to him Brother Gorenflot, that double model of the church preaching and militant; they showed Gorenflot in all his glory, that is to say, in the midst of a feast, seated at a table in which a hollow had been cut on purpose for his sacred stomach, and they related with a noble pride that Gorenflot consumed the rations of eight ordinary monks. And when the newcomer had piously contemplated this spectacle, the prior would say, "See how he eats! And if you had but heard his sermon one famous night, in which he offered to devote himself for the triumph of the faith. It is a mouth which speaks like that of St. Chrysostom, and swallows like that of Gargantua."

Every time that any one spoke of the sermon, Gorenflot sighed and said:

"What a pity I did not write it!

"A man like you has no need to write," the prior would reply. "No, you speak from inspiration; you open your mouth, and the words of God flow from your lips."

"Do you think so?" sighed Gorenflot.

However, Gorenflot was not perfectly happy. He, who at first thought his banishment from the convent an immense misfortune, discovered in his exile infinite joys before unknown to him. He sighed for liberty; liberty with Chicot, the joyous companion, with Chicot, whom he loved without knowing why. Since his return to the convent, he had never been allowed to go out. He never attempted to combat this decision, but he grew sadder from day to day. The prior saw this, and at last said to him:

"My dear brother, no one can fight against his vocation; yours is to fight for the faith; go then, fulfil your mission, only watch well over your precious life, and return for the great day."

"What great day?"

"That of the Fête Dieu."

"Ita," replied Gorenflot; it was the only Latin word he knew, and used it on all occasions. "But give me some money to bestow in alms in a Christian manner."

"You have your text, have you not, dear brother?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Confide it to me."

"Willingly, but to you alone; it is this: 'The flail which threshes the corn.'"

"Oh, magnificent! sublime!" cried the prior.

"Now, my father, am I free?"

"Yes, my son, go and walk in the way of the Lord."

Gorenflot saddled Panurge, mounted him with the aid of two vigorous monks, and left the convent about seven in the evening. It was the same day on which St. Luc arrived at Paris from Méridor.

Gorenflot, having passed through the Rue St. Etienne, was going to have turned to the right, when suddenly Panurge stopped; a strong hand was laid on his croup.

"Who is there?" cried Gorenflot, in terror.

"A friend."

Gorenflot tried to turn, but he could not.

"What do you want?" said he.

"Will my venerable brother show me the way to the Corne d'Abondance?"

"Morbleu! it is M. Chicot," cried Gorenflot, joyfully.

“Just so; I was going to seek you at the convent, when I saw you come out, and followed you until we were alone. Ventre de biche! how thin you are!”

“But what are you carrying, M. Chicot?” said the monk, “you appear laden.”

“It is some venison which I have stolen from the king.”

“Dear M. Chicot! and under the other arm?”

“A bottle of Cyprus wine sent by a king to my king.”

“Let me see!”

“It is my wine, and I love it much; do not you, brother?”

“Oh! oh!” cried Gorenflot, raising his eyes and hands to Heaven, and beginning to sing in a voice which shook the neighboring windows. It was the first time he had sung for a month.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

DIANA’S SECOND JOURNEY TO PARIS.

Let us leave the two friends entering the Corne d’Abondance, and return to the litter of M. Monsoreau and to Bussy, who set out with the intention of following them. Not only is it not difficult for a cavalier well mounted to overtake foot travelers, but it is difficult not to pass them. This happened to Bussy.

It was the end of May, the heat was great, and about noon M. de Monsoreau wished to make a halt in a little wood, which was near the road, and as they had a horse laden with provisions, they remained there until the great heat of the day had gone by. During this time Bussy passed them, but he had not traveled, as we may imagine, without inquiring if a party on horseback, and a litter carried by peasants, had been seen. Until he had passed the village of Durtal, he had obtained the most satisfactory information, and, convinced that they were before him, had ridden on quickly. But he could see nothing of them, and suddenly all traces of them vanished, and on arriving at La Flèche he felt certain he must have passed them on the road. Then he remembered the little wood, and doubted not that they had been resting there when he passed. He installed himself at a little inn, which had the advantage of being opposite the principal hotel, where he doubted not that Monsoreau would stop; and he remained at the window watching. About four o’clock he saw a courier arrive, and half an hour afterwards the whole party. He waited till nine o’clock, and then he saw the courier set out again, and after him the litter, then Diana, Rémy, and Gertrude on horseback. He mounted his horse and followed them, keeping them in sight. Monsoreau scarcely allowed Diana to move from his side, but kept calling her every instant. After a little while, Bussy gave a long, shrill whistle, with which he had been in the habit of calling his servants at his hotel. Rémy recognized it in a moment. Diana started, and looked at the young man, who made an affirmative sign; then he came up to her and whispered:

“It is he!”

“Who is speaking to you, madame?” said Monsoreau.

“To me, monsieur?”

“Yes, I saw a shadow pass close to you, and heard a voice.”

“It is M. Rémy; are you also jealous of him?”

“No, but I like people to speak out, it amuses me.”

“There are some things which cannot be said aloud before M. le Comte, however,” said Gertrude, coming to the rescue.

“Why not?”

“For two reasons; firstly, because some would not interest you, and some would interest you too much.”

“And of which kind is what M. Rémy has just whispered?”

“Of the latter.”

“What did Rémy say to you, madame?”

“I said, M. le Comte, that if you excite yourself so much, you will be dead before we have gone a third of the way.”

Monsoreau grew deadly pale.

“He is expecting you behind,” whispered Rémy, again, “ride slowly, and he will overtake you.”

Monsoreau, who heard a murmur, tried to rise and look back after Diana.

“Another movement like that, M. le Comte, and you will bring on the bleeding again,” said Rémy.

Diana turned and rode back a little way, while Rémy walked by the litter to occupy the count. A few seconds after, Bussy was by her side.

“You see I follow you,” said he, after their first embrace.

“Oh! I shall be happy, if I know you are always so near to me.”

“But by day he will see us.”

“No; by day you can ride afar off; it is only I who will see you, Louis. From the summit of some hill, at the turn of some road, your plume waving, your handkerchief fluttering in the breeze, would speak to me in your name, and tell me that you love me.”

“Speak on, my beloved Diana; you do not know what music I find in your voice.”

“And when we travel by night, which we shall often do, for Rémy has told him that the freshness of the evening is good for his wounds, then, as this evening, from time to time, I will stay behind, and we will tell each other, with a rapid pressure of the hands, all our thoughts of each other during the day.”

“Oh! I love you! I love you!” murmured Bussy. “Oh! to see you, to press your hand, Diana.”

Suddenly they heard a voice which made them both tremble, Diana with fear, and Bussy with anger.

“Diana!” it cried, “where are you? Answer me.”

“Oh! it is he! I had forgotten him,” said Diana. “Sweet dream, frightful awaking.”

“Listen, Diana; we are together. Say one word, and nothing can separate us more; Diana, let us fly! What prevents us? Before us is happiness and liberty. One word, and we go; one word, and lost to him, you belong to me forever.”

“And my father?”

“When he shall know how I love you?”

“Oh! a father!”

“I will do nothing by violence, dear Diana; order, and I obey.”

“It is our destiny, Bussy; but be strong, and you shall see if I know how to love.”

“Must we then separate?”

“Comtesse!” cried the voice, “reply, or, if I kill myself in doing it, I will jump from this infernal litter.”

“Adieu, Bussy, he will do as he says.”

“You pity him?”

“Jealous!” said Diana, with an adorable smile.

Bussy let her go.

In a minute she was by the litter, and found the count half fainting.

“Ah!” cried he, “where were you, madame?”

“Where should I have been? Behind you.”

“At my side, madame; do not leave me again.”

From time to time this scene was renewed. They all hoped he would die with rage; but he did not die: on the contrary, at the end of ten days, when they arrived at Paris, he was decidedly better. During these ten days Diana had conquered all Bussy’s pride, and had persuaded him to come and visit Monsoreau, who always showed him much friendship. Rémy watched the husband and gave notes to the wife.

“Esculapius and Mercury,” said he; “my functions accumulate.”

CHAPTER LXXIV.

HOW THE AMBASSADOR OF THE DUC D’ANJOU ARRIVED AT THE LOUVRE, AND THE RECEPTION HE MET WITH.

As neither Catherine nor the Duc d’Anjou reappeared at the Louvre, the dissension between the brothers became apparently every day more and more certain. The king thought, “No news, bad news.” The minions added, “François, badly counseled, has detained the queen-mother.”

Badly counseled. In these words were comprised all the policy of this singular reign, and the three preceding ones. Badly counseled was Charles IX. when he authorized the massacre of St. Bartholomew. Badly counseled was François II. when he ordered the massacre at Amboise. Badly counseled had been Henri II. when he burned so many heretics and conspirators. And now they dared not say, “Your brother has the family blood in his veins; he wishes, like the rest, to dethrone or poison; he would do to you what you did to your elder brother; what your elder brother did to his, what your mother has taught you to do to one another.” Therefore they said, “Your brother is badly counseled.”

Now, as only one person was able to counsel François, it was against Bussy that the cry was raised, which became every day more and more furious. At last the news was spread that the duke had sent an ambassador. At this the king grew pale with anger, and the minions swore that he should be cut to pieces, and a piece sent to all the provinces of France as a specimen of the king’s anger. Chicot said nothing, but he reflected. Now the king thought much of Chicot’s reflections, and he questioned him about them.

“Sire,” replied he, “if your brother sends an ambassador, it is because he feels himself strong enough to do so; he who is prudence itself. Now, if he is strong, we must temporize with him. Let us respect his ambassador, and receive him with civility. That engages you to nothing. Do you remember how your brother embraced Admiral Coligny, who came as ambassador from the Huguenots?”

“Then you approve of the policy of my brother Charles?”

"Not so, but I cite a fact; and I say to you, do not hurt a poor devil of a herald, or ambassador; perhaps we may find the way to seize the master, the mover, the chief, the great Duc d'Anjou, with the three Guises; and if you can shut them up in a place safer than the Louvre, do it."

"That is not so bad."

"Then why do you let all your friends bellow so?"

"Bellow!"

"Yes; I would say, roar, if they could be taken for lions, but they are more like bearded apes."

"Chicot, they are my friends."

"Friends! I would lay any bet to make them all turn against you before to-morrow."

"Well, what do you advise?"

"To wait, my son. Half the wisdom of Solomon lies in that word. If an ambassador arrive, receive him courteously. And as to your brother, kill him if you can and like, but do not degrade him. He is a great knave, but he is a Valois; besides, he can do that well enough for himself."

"It is true, Chicot."

"One more lesson that you owe me. Now let me sleep, Henri; for the last week I have been engaged in fuddling a monk."

"A monk! the one of whom you have already spoken to me?"

"Just so. You promised him an abbey."

"I?"

"Pardieu! it is the least you can do for him, after all be has done for you."

"He is then still devoted to me?"

"He adores you. Apropos, my son----"

"What?"

"In three weeks it will be the Fête Dieu."

"Well!"

"Are we to have some pretty little procession?"

"I am the most Christian king, and it is my duty to set an example to my subjects."

"And you will, as usual, stop at the four great convents of Paris?"

"Yes."

"At St. Geneviève?"

"Yes, that is the second I stop at."

"Good."

“Why do you ask?”

“Oh, nothing--I was curious. Now I know all I want, so good night, Henri!”

But just as Chicot prepared to leave, a great noise was heard.

“What is that noise?” said the king.

“It is ordained that I am not to sleep. Henri, you must get me a room in the town, or I must leave your service; the Louvre becomes insupportable.”

At this moment the captain of the guards entered, saying, “Sire, it is an envoy from M. le Duc d’Anjou.”

“With a suite?”

“No, sire, alone.”

“Then you must receive him doubly well, Henri, for he is a brave fellow.”

“Well,” said the king, very pale, but trying to look calm, “let all my court assemble in the great hall.”

CHAPTER LXXV.

WHICH IS ONLY THE END OF THE PRECEDING ONE.

Henri sat on his throne in the great hall, and around him was grouped an eager crowd. He looked pale and frowning.

"Sire," said Quelus to the king, "do you know the name of the ambassador?"

"No; but what does it matter?"

"Sire, it is M. de Bussy; the insult is doubled."

"I see no insult," said the king, with affected sang-froid.

"Let him enter," continued he. Bussy, with his hat in his hand, and his head erect, advanced straight to the king, and waited, with his usual look of pride, to be interrogated.

"You here, M. de Bussy!" said the king; "I thought you were in Anjou."

"Sire, I was, but you see I have quitted it."

"And what brings you here?"

"The desire of presenting my humble respects to your majesty."

The king and courtiers looked astonished; they expected a different answer.

"And nothing else?" said the king.

"I will add, sire, the orders I received from the Duc d'Anjou to join his respects to mine."

"And the duke said nothing else?"

"Only that he was on the point of returning with the queen-mother, and wished me to apprise your majesty of the return of one of your most faithful subjects."

The king was choked with surprise.

"Good morning, M. de Bussy," said Chicot.

Bussy turned, astonished to find a friend in that place.

"Good day, M. Chicot; I am delighted to see you."

"Is that all you have to say, M. de Bussy?" asked the king.

"Yes, sire; anything that remains to be said, will be said by the duke himself."

The king rose and went away, and Bussy continued to converse with Chicot, until the king called to him. As soon as Bussy was alone, Quelus approached him.

"Good morning, M. Quelus," said Bussy graciously; "may I have the honor of asking how you are?"

"Very bad."

"Oh, mon Dieu! what is the matter?"

"Something annoys me infinitely."

"Something! And are you not powerful enough to get rid of it?"

"It is not something, but some one, that M. Quelus means," said Maugiron, advancing.

"And whom I advise him to get rid of," said Schomberg, coming forward on the other side.

"Ah, M. de Schomberg! I did not recognize you."

"Perhaps not; is my face still blue?"

"Not so; you are very pale. Are you not well?"

"Yes, it is with anger."

"Oh I then you have also some one who annoys you?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And I also," said Maugiron.

"Really, gentlemen, you all look very gloomy."

"You forget me," said D'Epernon, planting himself before Bussy.

"Pardon me, M. d'Epernon, you were behind the others, as usual, and I have so little the pleasure of knowing you, that it was not for me to speak first."

It was strange to see Bussy smiling and calm among those four furious faces, whose eyes spoke with so terrible an eloquence, that he must have been blind or stupid not to have understood their language.

But Bussy never lost his smile.

"It seems to me that there is an echo in this room," said he quietly.

"Look, gentlemen," said Quelus, "how provincial M. de Bussy has become; he has a beard, and no knot to his sword; he has black boots and a gray hat."

"It is an observation that I was just making to myself, my dear sir; seeing you so well dressed, I said to myself, 'How much harm a few weeks' absence does to a man; here am I, Louis de Clermont, forced to take a little

Gascon gentleman as a model of taste.’ But let me pass; you are so near to me that you tread on my feet, and I feel it in spite of my boots.”

And turning away, he advanced towards St. Luc, whom he saw approaching.

“Incredible!” cried all the young men, “we insulted him; he took no notice.”

“There is something in it,” said Quelus.

“Well!” said the king, advancing, “what were you and M. de Bussy saying?”

“Do you wish to know what M. de Bussy said, sire?”

“Yes, I am curious.”

“Well, I trod on his foot, and insulted him, and he said nothing.”

“What, gentlemen,” cried Henri, feigning anger, “you dared to insult a gentleman in the Louvre!”

“Alas! yes, sire, and he said nothing.”

“Well! I am going to the queen.”

As the king went out of the great door, St. Luc reentered by a side one, and advanced towards the four gentlemen.

“Pardon, M. Quelus,” said he, “but do you still live in the Rue St. Honoré?”

“Yes, my dear friend; why do you ask?”

“I have two words to say to you.”

“Ah!”

“And you, M. de Schomberg?”

“Rue Béthisy,” said Schomberg, astonished.

“D’Epernon’s address I know.”

“Rue de Grenelle.”

“You are my neighbor. And you, Maugiron?”

“Near the Louvre. But I begin to understand; you come from M. de Bussy.”

“Never mind from whom I come; I have to speak to you, that is all.”

“To all four of us?”

“Yes.”

“Then if you cannot speak here, let us all go to Schomberg’s; it is close by.”

“So be it.”

And the five gentlemen went out of the Louvre arm in arm.

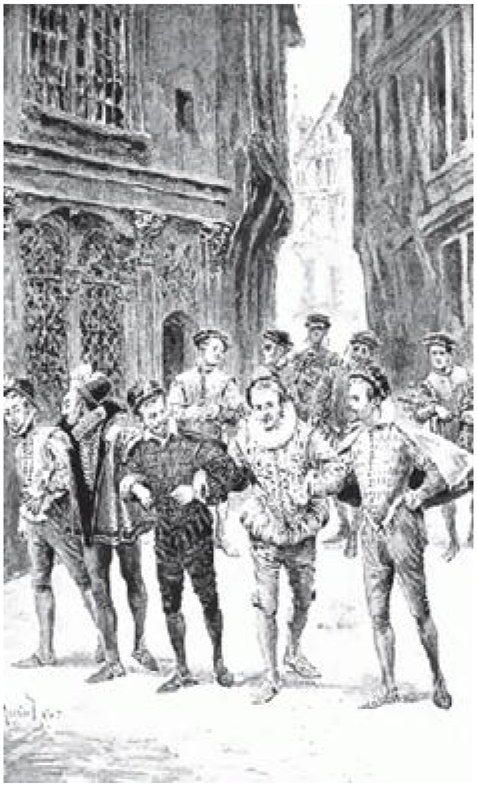

CHAPTER LXXVI.

HOW M. DE ST. LUC ACQUITTED HIMSELF OF THE COMMISSION GIVEN TO HIM BY BUSSY.

Let us leave St. Luc a little while in Schomberg’s room, and see what had passed between him and Bussy.

Once out of the hall, St. Luc had stopped, and looked anxiously at his friend.

“Are you ill?” said he, “you are so pale; you look as though you were about to faint.”

“No, I am only choking with anger.”

“You do not surely mind those fellows?”

“You shall see.”

“Come, Bussy, be calm.”

“You are charming, really; be calm, indeed! if you had had half said to you that I have had, some one would have been dead before this.”

“Well, what do you want?”

“You are my friend; you have already given me a terrible proof of it.”

“Ah! my dear friend,” said St. Luc, who believed Monsoreau dead and buried, “do not thank me, it is not worth while; certainly the thrust was a good one, and succeeded admirably, but it was the king who showed it me, when he kept me here a prisoner at the Louvre.”

“Dear friend.”

“Never mind Monsoreau; tell me about Diana. Was she pleased at last? Does she pardon me? When will the wedding take place?”

“Oh! my dear friend, we must wait till Monsoreau is dead.”

“What!” cried St. Luc, starting back as though he had put his foot on a pointed nail.

“Yes; poppies are not such dangerous plants as you thought; he did not die from his fall on them, but is alive and more furious than ever.”

“Really?”

“Yes, and he talks of nothing but vengeance, and of killing you on the first occasion.”

"And I have announced his death to everyone; he will find his heirs in mourning. But he shall not give me the lie; I shall meet him again, and if he escapes me a second time----"

"Calm yourself, my dear St. Luc; really, I am better off than you would think; it is the duke whom he suspects, and of whom he is jealous. I am his dear Bussy--his precious friend. That is only natural, for it was that fool of a Rémy who cured him.

"What an idiot he must have been!"

"He has an idea that, as an honest man and a doctor, it is his duty to cure people. However, Monsoreau says he owes his life to me, and confides his wife to my care."

"Ah! I understand that this makes you wait more patiently for his death. However, I am quite thunderstruck at the news."

"But, now, my friend, let us leave Monsoreau."

"Yes, let us enjoy life while he is still ill; but once he is well, I shall order myself a suit of mail, have new locks put on my doors, and you must ask the Duc d'Anjou if his mother has not given him some antidote against poison. Meanwhile, let us amuse ourselves."

"Well, my dear friend, you see you have only rendered me half a service."

"Do you wish me to finish it?"

"Yes, in another way."

"Speak."

"Are you great friends with those four gentlemen?"

"Ma foi! we are something like cats and dogs in the sun; as long as we an get the heat, we agree, but if one of us took the warmth from another, then I do not answer for the consequences."

"Well, will you go for me to M. Quelus, first?"

"Ah!"

"And ask him what day it will please him that I should cut his throat, or he mine?"

"I will."

"You do not mind it?"

"Not the least in the world. I will go at once if you wish it."

"One moment; as you go, just call on M. Schomberg and make him the same proposal."

"Schomberg too? Diable, how you go on! Well, as you wish."

"Then, my dear St. Luc, as you are so amiable, go also to M. Maugiron, and ask him to join the party."

"What, three! Bussy, you cannot mean it. I hope that is all."

"No; from him go to D'Epernon."

"Four!"

"Even so, my dear friend; I need not recommend to a man like you to proceed with courtesy and politeness towards these gentlemen. Let the thing be done in gallant fashion."

"You shall be content, my friend. What are your conditions?"

"I make none; I accept theirs."

"Your arms?"

"What they like."

"The day, place, and hour?"

"Whatever suits them."

"But----"

"Oh! never mind such trifles, but do it quickly; I will walk in the little garden of the Luxembourg; you will find me there when you have executed your commission."

"You will wait, then?"

"Yes."

"It may be long."

"I have time."

We know how St. Luc found the four young men, and accompanied them to Schomberg's house. St. Luc remained in the ante-chamber, waiting until, according to the etiquette of the day, the four young men were installed in the saloon ready to receive him. Then an usher came and saluted St. Luc, who followed him to the threshold of the saloon, where he announced M. d'Espinay de St. Luc.

Schomberg then rose and saluted his visitor, who, to mark the character of the visit, instead of returning it, put on his hat. Schomberg then, turning towards Quelus, said,

"I have the honor to present to you M. Jacques de Levis, Comte de Quelus."

The two gentlemen bowed, and then the same ceremony was gone through with the others. This done, the four friends sat down, but St. Luc remained standing and said to Quelus, "M. le Comte, you have insulted M. le Comte Louis de Clermont d'Amboise, Seigneur de Bussy, who presents to you his compliments, and calls you to single combat on any day and hour, and with such arms as may please you. Do you accept?"

"Certainly; M. de Bussy does me much honor."

"Your day and hour, M. le Comte?"

"To-morrow morning at seven o'clock."

"Your arms?"

"Rapier and dagger, if that suits M. de Bussy."

St. Luc bowed. Then he addressed the same questions to the others, and received the same answers.

"If we all choose the same day and hour, M. de Bussy will be rather embarrassed," said Schomberg.

"Certainly," replied St. Luc, "M. de Bussy may be embarrassed, but he says that the circumstance would not be new to him, as it has already happened at the Tournelles."

"And he would fight us all four?"

"All four."

"Separately?"

"Separately, or at once."

The four young men looked at each other; then Quelus, red with anger, said:

"It is very fine of M. de Bussy, but however little we may be worth, we can each do our own work; we will accept, therefore, the count's proposal, fighting separately, or rather, which will be still better, as we do not seek to assassinate a gallant man, chance shall decide which of us shall fight M. de Bussy."

"And the three others?"

"Oh! M. de Bussy has too many friends, and we too many enemies, for them to remain with folded arms. Do you agree to this, gentlemen?"

"Yes!" cried all.

"If MM. Ribeirac, Antragues, and Livarot would join the party, it would be complete."

"Gentlemen," said St. Luc, "I will transmit your desires to M. de Bussy, and I believe I may promise that he is too courteous not to agree to your wishes. It therefore only remains for me to thank you in his name."

Then he took his leave, after throwing his purse to the four lackeys, whom he found outside, to drink to their masters’ healths.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

IN WHAT RESPECT M. DE ST. LUC WAS MORE CIVILIZED THAN M. DE BUSSY, THE LESSONS WHICH HE GAVE HIM, AND THE USE WHICH M. DE BUSSY MADE OF THEM.

St. Luc returned, proud of having executed his commission so well. Bussy thanked him, but looked sad, which was not natural to him.

“Have I done badly?” said St. Luc.

“Ma foi, my dear friend, I only regret you did not say, ‘at once.’“

“Why! what is the hurry?”

“I wish to die as soon as possible.”

St. Luc looked at him in astonishment.

“Die! at your age, with your name, and Diana!”

“Yes, I shall kill them, I know, but I shall receive some good blow which will tranquilize me forever.”

“What black ideas, Bussy!”

“A husband whom I thought dead, and who has returned to life; a wife who can scarcely quit the bedside of the pretended dying man. Not to see her, smile on her, touch her hand. Mon Dieu!----”

St. Luc interrupted him with a burst of laughter. “Oh!” cried he, “the innocent man. Why, no lover can be more fortunate than you.”

“Prove that to me.”

“You are the friend of M. de Monsoreau.”

“Yes, I am ashamed to say, he calls me his friend.”

“Well! be his friend.”

“Oh! and abuse this title!”

“Is he really your friend?”

“He says so.”

“No; for he makes you unhappy. Now the end of friendship is to make one another happy. At least, so his majesty says, and he is learned in friendship. So, if he makes you unhappy, he is not your friend; therefore you may treat him either as a stranger, and take his wife from him, or as an enemy, and kill him if he murmurs.”

"In fact, I hate him. But do you, not think he loves me?"

"Diable! Take away his wife and see."

"I must continue to be a man of honor."

"And let Madame de Monsoreau cure her husband both physically and morally. For it is certain that if you get yourself killed, she will attach herself to the only man who remains to her."

Bussy frowned.

"But," added St. Luc, "here is my wife; she always gives good advice. She has been picking herself a bouquet in the gardens of the queen-mother, and will be in a good humor. Listen to her; she speaks gold."

Jeanne arrived radiant, full of happiness and fun. Bussy saluted her in a friendly manner, and she held out her hand to him, saying, with a smile, "How go on the love affairs?"

"They are dying."

"They are wounded and fainting; perhaps you can restore them, Jeanne?"

"Let me see; show me the wound."

"In two words, this is it: M. de Bussy does not like smiling on M. de Monsoreau, and he thinks of retiring."

"And leaving Diana to him?"

"Oh! madame, St. Luc does not tell you that I wish to die."

"Poor Diana!" murmured Jeanne, "decidedly men are ungrateful."

"Good! this is the conclusion my wife draws."

"I, ungrateful!" cried Bussy, "because I fear to render my love vile, by practising a disgraceful hypocrisy?"

"Oh! monsieur, that is only a pretext. If you were really in love, you would fear but one thing--not to be loved in return."

"But, madame, there are sacrifices----"

"Not another word. Confess that you love Diana no longer; it will be more worthy of a gallant man."

Bussy grew pale.

"You do not dare to tell her; well, I will."

"Madame! madame!"

"You are rich, you men, with your sacrifices. And does she make none? What! expose herself to be massacred by that tiger of a Monsoreau, preserve her position only by employing a strength of will of which Samson or Hannibal would have been incapable. Oh! I swear, Diana is sublime, I could not do a quarter of what she does every day."

“Thank you!” said St. Luc.

“And he hesitates!” continued she, “he does not fall on his knees and say his mea culpa.”

“You are right,” said Bussy, “I am but a man, that is to say, an imperfect creature, inferior to the most commonplace woman.”

“It is lucky you are convinced of it.”

“What do you order me?”

“To go at once and pay it visit----”

“To M. de Monsoreau?”

“Who speaks of him?--to Diana.”

“But he never leaves her.”

“When you went so often to see Madame de Barbezieux, had she not always near her that great ape who bit you because he was jealous?”

Bussy began to laugh, and St. Luc and Jeanne followed his example.

“Madame,” then said Bussy, “I am going to M. de Monsoreau’s house; adieu.”

He went there, and found the count in bed; he was delighted to see him, and told him that Rémy promised that his wound would be cured in three weeks. Bussy recounted to him the commission with which he had been charged, and his visit to the court.

“The duke has still projects on foot, has he not?”

“I believe so.”

“Do not compromise yourself for that bad man; I know him: he is perfidious, and will not hesitate to betray you.”

“I know it.”

“You are my friend, and I wish to put you on your guard.”

“You must sleep after the dressing of your wound,” said Rémy.

“Yes, my dear doctor. My friend, take a turn in the garden with Madame de Monsoreau.”

“I am at your orders,” replied Bussy.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

THE PRECAUTIONS OF M. DE MONSOREAU.

St. Luc was right, and Jeanne was right, and Bussy soon acknowledged it. As for Diana, she gave herself up to the two instincts that Figaro recognizes as inborn in mankind, to love and to deceive. M. de Monsoreau grew better and better. He had escaped from fever, thanks to the application of cold water, that new remedy which Providence had discovered to Ambrose Paré, when all at once he received a great shock at hearing of the arrival in Paris of the duke with the queen-mother. The day after his arrival, the duke, under the pretext of asking after him, presented himself at his hotel, and it was impossible to close his door against a prince who showed so much interest in him. M. de Monsoreau therefore was obliged to receive the prince, who was most amiable to him and to his wife. As soon as he was gone, M. de Monsoreau took Diana's arm, and in spite of Rémy's remonstrances walked three times round his armchair; and, from his satisfied air, Diana was sure he was meditating on some project.

The next day the duke came again, and this time Monsoreau walked round his room. That evening Diana warned Bussy that her husband had certainly some project in his head. A few minutes after, when Bussy and Monsoreau were alone, "When I think," said Monsoreau, "that this prince, who smiles on me, is my mortal enemy, and tried to have me assassinated by M. de St. Luc----"

"Oh, assassinated! take care, M. le Comte. St. Luc is a gentleman, and you confess yourself that you provoked him, drew the sword first, and received your wound in fair fight."

"Certainly; but it is not the less true that he obeyed the wishes of M. d'Anjou."

"Listen! I know M. de St. Luc, and I can assure you he is devoted to the king, and hates the duke. If your wound had come from Antragues, Livarot, or Ribeirac, it might be so; but not from St. Luc."

"You do not know," replied Monsoreau, obstinate in his opinion. At last he was able to go down into the garden. "That will do," said he; "now we will move.”

“Why move?” said Rémy. “The air is good here, and there is plenty of amusement.”

“Too much; M. d’Anjou fatigues me with his visits, and he always brings with him a crowd of gentlemen, and the noise of their spurs destroys my nerves.”

“But where are you going?”

“I have ordered them to get ready my little house at the Tournelles.”

Bussy and Diana exchanged a look of loving remembrance.

“What, that little place?” cried Rémy, imprudently.

“What! do you know it?”

“Who does not know the houses of the chief huntsman? particularly I, who lived in the Rue Beautrellis.”

“Yes, yes, I will go there. It is a fortress, and one can see from the window, three hundred yards off, who is coming to visit you, and avoid them if you like, particularly when you are well!”

Bussy bit his lips; he feared a time might come when Monsoreau might avoid him. Diana thought of the time when she had seen Bussy in that house, lying fainting on the bed.

“You cannot do it,” said Rémy.

“Why not, if you please, monsieur?”

“Because the chief huntsman of France must hold receptions--must keep valets and equipages. Let him have a palace for his dogs, if he likes, but not a dog-kennel for himself.”

“It is true, but----”

“But I am the doctor of the mind as of the body; it is not your residence here that displeases you.”

“What then?”

“That of madame; therefore send her away.”

“Separate?” cried Monsoreau, fixing on Diana a look, more of anger than love.

“Then give up your place--send in your resignation. I believe it would be wise; if you do not do your duty, you will displease the king, and if you do----”

“I will do anything but quit the countess,” said Monsoreau, with closely-shut teeth. As he spoke, they heard in the courtyard a noise of voices and horses’ feet.

“The duke again!” cried he.

“Yes,” said Rémy.

Immediately after the prince entered, and Monsoreau saw his first glance given to Diana. He brought to her, as a present, one of those masterpieces, of which the artists of that day were in the habit of producing two or three in the course of a lifetime. It was a poniard, with a handle of chased gold. This handle was a smelling-bottle, and on the blade a chase was carved with admirable skill; horses, dogs, trees, game, and hunters, mingled together in an harmonious pêle-mêle, on this blade of azure and gold.

“Let me see,” cried Monsoreau, who feared there was a note hidden in the handle.

The prince separated the two parts. “To you, who are a hunter,” said he, “I give the blade: to the countess, the handle. Good-morning, Bussy, you are then a friend of the count’s, now?”

Diana reddened, but Bussy said:

“Your highness forgets that you asked me to inquire after M. de Monsoreau.”

“It is true.”

The prince sat down, and began to talk to Diana. In a few minutes he said, “Count, it is dreadfully warm in your rooms. I see the countess is stifling. I will give her my arm for a turn in the garden.”

The husband looked furious.

“Give me an arm,” said he to Bussy, and he got up and followed his wife.

“Ah!” said the duke, “it seems you are better.”

“Yes, monseigneur, and I hope soon to be able to accompany Madame de Monsoreau wherever she goes.”

“Good; but meanwhile, do not fatigue yourself.”

Monsoreau was obliged to sit down, but he kept them in view.

“Count,” said he to Bussy, “will you be amiable enough to escort Madame de Monsoreau this evening to my house at the Tournelles?”

“You cannot do that, monsieur,” said Rémy.

“Why not?”

“Because M. d’Anjou would never forgive you if you helped to play him such a trick.”

Bussy was about to cry, “What do I care?” but a glance from Rémy stopped him.

“Rémy is right,” said Monsoreau, “it would injure you; to-morrow I will go myself.”

“You will lose your place.”

“It is possible; but I shall keep my wife.”

The next day they went to the old house; Diana took her old room, with the bed of white and gold damask. A corridor only separated it from that of the count. Bussy tore his hair with rage.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

A VISIT TO THE HOUSE AT LES TOURNELLES.

The duke became more and more in love with Diana, as she seemed always to escape him, and with his love for her, his hatred of Monsoreau increased. On the other side he had not renounced his political hopes, but had recommenced his underhand machinations. The moment was favorable, for many wavering conspirators had been encouraged by the kind of triumph which the weakness of thy king, and the cunning of Catherine, had given to the duke; however, he no longer confided his projects to Bussy, and showed him only a hypocritical friendship. He was vaguely uneasy at seeing him at Monsoreau's house, and envious of the confidence that Monsoreau, so suspicious of himself, placed in him. He was frightened also at the joy and happiness which shone in Diana's face. He knew that flowers only bloom in the light of the sun, and women in that of love. She was visibly happy, and this annoyed him. Determined to use his power, both for love and vengeance, he thought it would be absurd to be stayed in this purpose by such ridiculous obstacles as the jealousy of a husband, and the repugnance of a wife. One day he ordered his equipages, intending to visit Monsoreau. He was told that he had moved to his house in the Rue St. Antoine.

"Let us go there," said he to Bussy. Soon the place was in commotion at the arrival of the twenty-four handsome cavaliers, each with two lackeys, who formed the prince's suite. Both Bussy and the prince knew the house well; they both went in, but while the prince entered the room, Bussy remained on the staircase. It resulted from this arrangement that the duke was received by Monsoreau alone, while Bussy was received by Diana, while Gertrude kept watch. Monsoreau, always pale, grew livid at sight of the prince.

"Monseigneur, here! really it is too much honor for my poor house!" cried he, with a visible irony.

The prince smiled. "Wherever a suffering friend goes, I follow him," replied he. "How are you?"

“Oh, much better; I can already walk about, and in a week I shall be quite well.”

“Was it your doctor who prescribed for you the air of the Bastile?” asked the prince, with the most innocent air possible.

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“Did you not like the Rue des Petits-Pères?”

“No, monseigneur; I had too much company there--they made too much noise.”

“But you have no garden here.”

“I did not like the garden.”

The prince bit his lips. “Do you know, comte,” said he, “that many people are asking the king for your place?”

“On what pretext, monseigneur?”

“They say you are dead.”

“Monseigneur, you can answer for it that I am not.”

“I answer for nothing; you bury yourself as though you were dead.”

It was Monsoreau’s turn to bite his lips.

“Well, then, I must lose my place,” said he.

“Really?”

“Yes; there are things I prefer to it.”

“You are very disinterested.”

“It is my character, monseigneur.”

“Then of course you will not mind the king’s knowing your character?”

“Who will tell him?”

“Diable! if he asks me about you, I must repeat our conversation.”

“Ma foi! monseigneur, if all they say in Paris were reported to the king, his two ears would not be enough to listen with.”

“What do they say at Paris, monsieur?” asked the prince sharply.

Monsoreau tried to calm himself. “How should a poor invalid, as I am, know?” said he. “If the king is angry at seeing his work badly done, he is wrong.”

“How so?”

“Because, doubtless, my accident proceeds, to some extent, from him.”

“Explain yourself.”

“M. de St. Luc, who wounded me, is a dear friend of the king’s. It was the king who taught him the thrust by which he wounded me, and it might have been the king who prompted him.”

"You are right; but still the king is the king."

"Until he is so no longer."

The duke trembled. "Is not Madame de Monsoreau here?" said he.

"Monseigneur, she is ill, or she would have come to present her respects to you."

"Ill! poor woman! it must be grief at seeing you suffer."

"Yes, and the fatigue of moving."

"Let us hope it will be a short indisposition. You have so skilful a doctor."

"Yes, that dear Rémy----"

"Why, he is Bussy's doctor."

"He has lent him to me."

"You are, then, great friends?"

"He is my best, I might say my only, friend."

"Adieu, come!"

As the duke raised the tapestry, he fancied he saw the skirt of a dress disappear into the next room, and immediately Bussy appeared at his post in the middle of the corridor. Suspicion grew stronger with the duke.

"We are going," said he to Bussy, who ran down-stairs without replying; while the duke, left alone, tried to penetrate the corridor where he had seen the silk dress vanish. But, turning, he saw that Monsoreau had followed, and was standing at the door.

"Your highness mistakes your way," said he.

"True," said the duke, "thank you." And he went down with rage in his heart. When he returned home, Aurilly glided into his room.

"Well," said the duke, "I am baffled by the husband!"

"And, perhaps, also by the lover, monseigneur."

"What do you say?"

"The truth."

"Speak, then."

"I hope your highness will pardon me--it was in your service."

"I pardon you in advance. Go on."

"After your highness had gone up-stairs, I watched under a shed in the courtyard."

"Ah! What did you see?"

"I saw a woman's dress; I saw this woman lean forward, and then I heard the sound of along and tender kiss."

“But who was the man?”

“I cannot recognize arms.”

“No, but you might gloves.”

“Indeed, it seemed to me----”

“That you recognized them?”

“It was only a guess.”

“Never mind.”

“Well, monseigneur, they looked like the gloves of M. de Bussy.”

“Buff, embroidered with gold, were they not?”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“Ah! Bussy! yes, it was Bussy. Oh, I was blind and yet not blind; but I could not believe in so much audacity.”

“But your highness must not believe it too lightly; might there not have been a man hidden in her room?”

“Yes, doubtless, but Bussy, who was in the corridor, would have seen him.”

“That is true.”

“And then the gloves----”

“Yes, and besides the kiss, I heard----”

“What?”

“Three words, ‘Till to-morrow evening.’“

“Oh! mon Dieu!”

“So that, if you like, we can make sure.”

“Aurilly, we will go.”

“Your highness knows I am at your orders.”

“Ah! Bussy, a traitor! Bussy, the honest man--Bussy, who does not wish me to be King of France;” and the duke, smiling with an infernal joy, dismissed Aurilly.

CHAPTER LXXX.

THE WATCHERS.

The duke kept Bussy near him all day, so as not to lose sight of his movements. Bussy did not care, so that he had his evenings free. At ten o'clock he wrapped himself in his cloak, and with a rope ladder under his arm went towards the Bastile. The duke, who did not know that he had a ladder, and could not believe in any one walking alone at night through the streets of Paris, thought Bussy would certainly call at his hotel for a horse and a servant, and lost ten minutes in preparations. During those ten minutes, Bussy, active and in love, had already gone three-fourths of the distance. He was lucky, as brave people generally are, and met with no accident by the way, and on arriving saw a light in the windows. It was the signal agreed on between him and Diana. He threw his ladder up to the balcony, it had six hooks to it, and was sure to fasten itself somewhere. At the noise, Diana put out her light and opened the window to fasten the ladder. The thing was done in a moment. Diana looked all around; the street seemed deserted. Then she signed to Bussy to mount, and he was up in five seconds. The moment was happily chosen, for while he got in at the window, M. de Monsoreau, after having listened patiently fur a quarter of an hour at his wife's door, descended the stairs painfully, leaning on the arm of a confidential valet, and it so happened that he opened the street-door just as the ladder was drawn up, and the window closed. He looked around, but the streets were deserted.

"You have been badly informed," said he to the servant.

"No, monsieur, I have just left the Hôtel d'Anjou, and they told me that the duke had ordered two horses for this evening. But perhaps it was not to come here."

"Where else should he go?" said Monsoreau, with a somber air. He, like all jealous persons, thought the whole world had nothing to do but to torment him.

"Perhaps I should have done better to stay in her room," murmured he. "But they probably have signals for corresponding; she would have warned him of my presence, and I should have learned nothing. It is better to watch outside. Come, conduct me to the hiding-place, whence you say one can see everything."

"Come, monsieur."

About twenty-five steps from the door was an enormous heap of stones belonging to demolished houses, and serving for fortifications to the children of the neighborhood when they played at battles. In the midst was a space, which could contain two people. The valet spread a cloak, on which Monsoreau sat down, while his servant sat at his feet, with a loaded musket placed beside him. Diana had prudently drawn her thick curtains, so that scarcely a ray of light showed through, to betray that there was life in this gloomy house.

They had been watching about ten minutes, when two horses appeared at the end of the street. The valet pointed to them.

"I see," said Monsoreau.

The two men got off their horses, and tied them up at the corner of the Hôtel des Tournelles.

"Monseigneur," said Aurilly, "I believe we have arrived too late; he must have gone straight from your hotel and must have entered."

"Perhaps so; but if we did not see him go in, we can see him come out."

"Yes, but when?"

"When we please."

"Would it be too curious to ask how you mean to manage?"

"Nothing is more easy; we have but to knock at the door, and ask after M. de Monsoreau. Our lover will be frightened at the noise, and as you enter the house he will come out at the window, and I, who am hidden outside, shall see him."

"And Monsoreau?"

"What can he say? I am his friend, and was uneasy about him, as he looked so ill yesterday; nothing can be more simple."

"It is very ingenious, monseigneur."

"Do you hear what they say?" asked Monsoreau of his valet.

"No, monsieur, but we soon shall, for they are coming nearer."

"Monseigneur," said Aurilly, "here is a heap of stones which seems made on purpose for us."

"Yes, but wait a moment, perhaps we can see through the opening of the curtain." And they stood for some minutes trying to find a place to peep through. Meanwhile, Monsoreau was boiling with impatience, and his hand approached the musket.

"Oh! shall I suffer this?" murmured he, "shall I devour this affront also? No, my patience is worn out. Mordieu! that I can neither sleep, nor wake, nor even suffer quietly, because a shameful caprice has lodged in the idle brain of this miserable prince. No, I am not a complaisant valet; I am the Comte de Monsoreau, and if he comes near, on my word, I will blow his brains out. Light the match, René."

At this moment, just as the prince was about to seek his hiding-place, leaving his companion to knock at the door, Aurilly touched his arm.

"Well, monsieur, what is it?" asked the prince.

"Come away, monseigneur, come."

"Why so?"

"Do you not see something shining there to the left?"

"I see a spark among that heap of stones."

"It is the match of a musket, or arquebuse."

"Ah! who the devil can be in ambush there?"

"Some friend or servant of Bussy's. Let us go and make a detour, and return another way. The servant will give the alarm, and we shall see Bussy come out of the window."

"You are right; come;" and they went to their horses.

"They are going," said the valet.

"Yes. Did you recognize them?"

"They seemed to me to be the prince and Aurilly."

"Just so. But I shall soon be more sure still."

"What will monsieur do?"

"Come."

Meanwhile, the duke and Aurilly turned into the Rue St. Catherine, intending to return by the boulevard of the Bastile.

Monsoreau went in, and ordered his litter.

What the duke had foreseen happened. At the noise that Monsoreau made, Bussy took the alarm, the light was extinguished, the ladder fixed, and Bussy, to his great regret, was obliged to fly, like Romeo, but without having, like him, seen the sun rise and heard the lark sing. Just as he touched the ground, and Diana had thrown him the ladder, the duke and Aurilly arrived at the corner of the Bastile. They saw a shadow suspended from Diana’s window, but this shadow disappeared almost instantaneously at the corner of the Rue St. Paul.

“Monsieur,” said the valet to Monsoreau, “we shall wake up the household.”

“What do I care?” cried Monsoreau, furiously. “I am master here, I believe, and I have at least the right to do what M. d’Anjou wished to do.”

The litter was got ready, and, drawn by two stout horses, it was soon at the Hôtel d’Anjou.

The duke and Aurilly had so recently come in that their horses were not unsaddled. Monsoreau, who had the entree, appeared on the threshold just as the duke, after having thrown his hat on a chair, was holding out his boots to a valet to pull off. A servant, preceding him by some steps, announced M. de Monsoreau. A thunderbolt breaking his windows, could not have astonished the prince more.

“M. de Monsoreau!” cried he, with an uneasiness he could not hide.

“Myself, monseigneur,” replied he, trying to repress his emotion, but the effort he made over himself was so violent that his legs failed him, and he fell on to a chair which stood near.

“But you will kill yourself, my dear friend,” said the duke; “you are so pale, you look as though you were going to faint.”

“Oh, no; what I have to say to your highness is of too much importance; I may faint afterwards.”

“Speak, then, my dear comte.”

“Not before your people, I suppose.”

The duke dismissed everyone.

“Your highness has just come in?” said Monsoreau.

“As you see, comte.”

“It is very imprudent of your highness to go by night in the street.”

“Who told you I had been in the streets?”

“The dust on your clothes.”

“M. de Monsoreau, have you another employment besides that of chief huntsman?”

“Yes, that of spy, monseigneur; all the world follow that calling now, more or less, and I, like the rest.”

“And what does this profession bring you, monsieur?”

“Knowledge.”

“It is curious.”

“Very curious.”

“Well, tell me what you have to say.”

“I came for that.”

“You permit me to sit down?” said the duke.

“No irony, monseigneur, towards an old and faithful servant, who comes at this hour and in this state to do you a service. If I sat down, on my honor, it was because I could not stand.”

“A service! to do me a service?”

“Yes.”

“Speak, then.”

“Monseigneur, I come on the part of a great prince.”

“From the king?”

“No; M. le Duc de Guise.”

“Ah! that is quite a different thing. Approach, and speak low.”

CHAPTER LXXXI.

HOW M. LE DUC D’ANJOU SIGNED, AND AFTER HAVING SIGNED, SPOKE.

There was a moment’s silence. Then the duke said: “Well, M. le Comte, what have you to say to me from the Duc de Guise?”

“Much, monseigneur.”

“They have written to you?”

“No; the duke writes no more since that strange disappearance of Nicholas David. They have come to Paris.”

“MM. de Guise are at Paris?”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“I have not seen them.”

“They are too prudent to expose themselves or your highness to any risk.”

“And I was not told!”

“I tell you now.”

“What have they come for?”

“They come, monseigneur, to the rendezvous you gave them.”

“That I gave them!”

“Doubtless; on the day when your highness was arrested you received a letter from M. de Guise, and replied to it verbally, through me, that they were to come to Paris from the thirty-first of May to the second of June. It is now the thirty-first of May, and if your highness has forgotten them, they have not forgotten you.”

François grew pale. So many events had passed since, that he had forgotten the rendezvous. “It is true,” said he, at length, “but the relations which then existed between us exist no longer.”

“If that be so, monseigneur, you would do well to tell them, for I believe they think differently.”

“How so?”

“You, perhaps, think yourself free as regards them, but they feel bound to you.”

“A snare, my dear comte, in which a man does not let himself be taken twice.”

“And where was monseigneur taken in a snare?”

“Where? at the Louvre, mordieu.”

“Was it the fault of MM. de Guise?”

“I do not say so, but they never assisted me to escape.”

“It would have been difficult; they were flying themselves.”

“It is true.”

“But when you were in Anjou, did they not charge me to tell you that you could always count on them, as they on you, and that the day you marched on Paris, they would do the same?”

“It is true, but I did not march on Paris.”

“You are here.”

“Yes; but as my brother’s ally.”

“Monseigneur will permit me to observe that he is more than the ally of the Guises.”

“What then?”

“Their accomplice.”

The duke bit his lips.

“And you say they charged you to announce their arrival to me?”

“They did me that honour.”

“But they did not tell you the motive of their return?”

“They told me all, knowing me to be the confidant of your highness.”

“Then they have projects. What are they?”

“The same always.”

“And they think them practicable?”

“They look upon them as certain.”

“And these projects have for an aim----”

The duke stopped, not daring to finish.

“To make you King of France; yes, monseigneur.”

The duke felt the flush of joy mount to his face.

“But,” said he “is the moment favorable?”

“Your wisdom must decide.”

“My wisdom?”

“Yes, the facts cannot be contradicted. The nomination of the king as head of the League was only a comedy, quickly seen through and appreciated. Now the reaction has commenced, and the entire state is rising against the tyranny of the king and his creatures. Sermons are a call to arms, and churches are places where they curse the king, instead of praying to God. The army trembles with impatience; the bourgeois league together; our emissaries bring in nothing but signatures and new adherents to the League. In a word, the king's reign touches on its close. Now, do you renounce your former projects?"

The duke did not reply.

"Monseigneur knows that he may speak frankly to me."

"I think," said the duke, "that considering my brother has no children, that his health is uncertain, and that after him the crown will come naturally to me, there is no reason why I should compromise my name and my dignity, in a useless struggle, and try to take, with danger, what will come to me in due course."

"Your highness is in error; your brother's throne will only come to you if you take it. MM. de Guise cannot be kings themselves, but they will only allow to reign a king of their own making, a king whom they substitute for the reigning one. They count on your highness, but if you refuse, they will seek another."

"And who will dare to seat himself on the throne of Charlemagne?"

"A Bourbon instead of a Valois, monseigneur; a son of St, Louis, instead of a son of St. Louis."

"The king of Navarre?"

"Why not? He is young, and brave,"

"He is a Huguenot."

"Was he not converted at the St. Bartholomew?"

"Yes, and he abjured afterwards."

"Oh, monseigneur, what he did for his wife, he will do again for the crown."

"They think, then, that I will yield my rights without a struggle."

"The case is provided for."

"I will fight."

"They are men of war."

"I will put myself at the head of the League."

"They are the soul of it."

"I will join my brother."

"Your brother will be dead."

"I will call the kings of Europe to my aid."

“They will think twice before making war on a people.”

“My party will stand by me.”

“Your party, I believe, consists of M. de Bussy and myself.”

“Then I am tied.”

“Nearly so. You can do nothing without the Guises; with them, everything. Say the word, and you are king.”

The duke walked about for a few minutes, in great agitation, then stopped, and said, “Go on, count.”

“This, then, is the plan. In eight days the Fête Dieu will take place, and the king meditates on that day a great procession to the convents of Paris. There, the guards will remain at the door, the king will stop before each altar, kneel down, and say five paters and five aves.”

“I know all that.”

“He will go to St. Geneviève----”

“Yes.”

“He will enter with a suite of five or six persons, and behind them, the doors will be closed.”

“And then----”

“Your highness knows the monks who will do the honors of the Abbey to his majesty.”

“They will be the same----”

“Who were there when your highness was crowned.”

“They will dare to lay hands on the Lord’s anointed?”

“Oh! to shave him, only.”

“They will never dare to do that to a king.”

“He will not be a king then.”

“How so?”

“Have you never heard of a holy man who preaches sermons, and is going to perform miracles?”

“Brother Gorenflot?”

“Just so.”

“The one who wished to preach the League with his arquebuse on his shoulder?”

“The same.”

“Well! they will conduct the king into his cell; once there, he will be asked to sign his abdication, then, when he has signed, Madame de Montpensier will enter, scissors in hand. She wears them now, hanging to her side; they are charming scissors, made of gold, and admirably chased, to do him honor. You understand the rest. We announced to the people that the king, experiencing a holy repentance for his sins, has announced his intention of never more leaving the convent. If there are any who doubt, M. de Guise holds the army, M. le Cardinal the Church, and M. de Mayenne the bourgeois; and with these three powers you can make the people believe what you like."

"But they will accuse me of violence," said the duke.

"You need not be there."

"They will look on me as a usurper."

"Monseigneur forgets the abdication."

"The king will refuse."

"It seems that Brother Gorenflot is not only clever, but strong."

"The plan is then settled?"

"Quite."

"And they do not fear that I shall denounce it?"

"No, monseigneur; for in that case, they have another, not less sure."

"Ah!"

"Yes."

"And this one?"

"I do not know; they thought me too much your friend to trust me with it."

"Well, I yield, count. What must I do?"

"Approve."

"I do."

"Words are not enough."

"What then?"

"Writing."

"It is a folly to suppose I will ever consent to that."

"And why not?"

"If the conspiracy fail----"

"It is just in case it should, that they ask for your signature."

"Then they wish to shelter themselves behind my name?"

"Just so."

"Then I refuse."

"You cannot."

"I cannot refuse?"

"No."

"Are you mad?"

"To refuse is to betray."

"Let them think as they like; at all events I will choose my own danger."

"Monseigneur, you choose badly."

"I will risk it," cried François, endeavoring to keep firm.

"For your own interest I advise you not to do so."

"But I shall compromise myself by signing."

"In refusing, you assassinate yourself."

François shuddered.

"They would dare?" said he.

"They would dare anything, monseigneur. The conspirators have gone so far, that they must succeed at any cost."

The duke, with his usual indecision, felt terribly perplexed.

"I will sign," said he, at last.

"When?"

"To-morrow."

"No, monseigneur; if you sign, it must be at once."

"But M. de Guise must draw up the agreement."

"It is already drawn-here it is;" and Monsoreau drew a paper from his pocket: it was a full adhesion to the scheme. The duke read it though, growing more and more pale as he did so.

"Here is the pen, monseigneur."

"Then I must sign?"

"If you wish to do so; no one forces you."

"Yes, they do, since they menace me with assassination."

"I do not menace you, monseigneur--I only warn you."

"Give me the pen."

And, snatching it eagerly, he signed the paper. Monsoreau watched him with an eye full of hatred and hope, and no sooner had the duke finished than, exclaiming "Ah!" he seized the paper, buttoned it into his doublet, and wrapped his cloak over it.

François looked at him with astonishment, for a flash of ferocious joy played over his face.

"And now, monseigneur, be prudent," said he.

"How so?"

"Do not run about the streets with Aurilly, as you did just now."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that, this evening, you pursued with your love a woman whom her husband adores, and whom he is jealous of, enough to kill any one who approaches her without permission."

"Is it of you and your wife that you are speaking?"

"Yes, monseigneur. I have married Diana de Méridor; she is mine, and no one shall have her while I live--not even a prince; I swear it by my name and on this poniard!" and he touched with his poniard the breast of the prince, who started back.

"Monsieur, you menace me!" cried François, pale with rage.

"No, monseigneur; once more, I say, I only warn you."

"Of what?"

"That no one shall make love to my wife."

"And I warn you that you are too late, and that some one makes love to her already."

Monsoreau uttered a terrible cry. "Is it you?" cried he.

"You are mad, count!"

"No, I am not; prove your words."

"Who was hidden this evening, twenty steps from your door, with a musket?"

"I."

"Well, comte, during that time there was a man with your wife."

"You saw him go in?"

"I saw him come out."

"By the door?"

"No, by the window."

"Did you recognize him?"

"Yes."

"Name him, monseigneur, or I do not answer for myself."

The duke half smiled.

"M. le Comte," said he, "on my faith as a prince, on my soul, within a week I will tell you his name."

"You swear it."

"I swear it."

"Well, monseigneur, you have a week; but----" said he, touching the paper in his breast.

"Come back in eight days."

“Good! in eight days I shall have regained all my strength, ready for vengeance.”

CHAPTER LXXXII.

A PROMENADE AT THE TOURNELLES.

In course of time the Angevin gentlemen had returned to Paris, although not with much confidence. They knew too well the king, his brother, and mother, to hope that all would terminate in a family embrace. They returned, therefore, timidly, and glided into the town armed to the teeth, ready to fire on the least suspicion, and drew their swords fifty times before the Hôtel d'Anjou on harmless bourgeois, who were guilty of no crime but of looking at them. They presented themselves at the Louvre, magnificently dressed in silk, velvet, and embroidery. Henri III. would not receive them; they waited vainly in the gallery. It was MM. Quelus, Maugiron, Schomberg, and D'Epernon who came to announce this news to them, with great politeness, and expressing all the regrets in the world.

"Ah, gentlemen," said Antragues, "the news is sad, but, coming from your mouths, it loses half its bitterness."

"Gentlemen," said Schomberg, "you are the flower of grace and courtesy. Would it please you to change the reception which you have missed into a little promenade?"

"Ah! gentlemen, we were about to propose it."

"Where shall we go?" said Quelus.

"I know a charming place near the Bastile," said Schomberg.

"We follow you, go on."

Then the eight gentlemen went out, arm in arm, talking gaily on different subjects, until Quelus said, "Here is a solitary place, with a good footing."

"Ma foi, yes."

"Well! we thought that you would one day accompany us here to meet M. de Bussy, who has invited us all here."

"It is true," said Bussy.

"Do you accept?" said Maugiron.

"Certainly; we rejoice at such an honor."

"That is well," said Schomberg; "shall we each choose an opponent?"

“No,” said Bussy, “that is not fair; let us trust to chance, and the first one that is free can join the others.”

“Let us draw lots then,” said Quelus.

“One moment,” said Bussy, “first let us settle the rules of the game.”

“They are simple; we will fight till death ensues!”

“Yes, but how?”

“With sword and dagger.”

“On foot?”

“Oh, yes! on horseback one’s movements are not so free.”

“Then, on foot.”

“What day?”

“The soonest possible.”

“No,” said D’Epernon, “I have a thousand things to settle and a will to make; I would rather wait five or six days.”

“So be it.”

“Then draw lots.”

“One moment! divide the ground into four compartments, each for a pair.”

“Well said.”

“I propose for number one, the long square between the chestnuts; it is a fine place.”

“Agreed.”

“But the sun? one would be turned to the east.”

“No,” said Bussy, “that is not fair;” and he proposed a new position, which was agreed to.

Schomberg and Ribeirac came first. They were the first pair; Quelus and Antragues the second; then Livarot and Maugiron the third. D’Epernon, who saw himself left to Bussy, grew very pale.

“Now, gentlemen,” said Bussy, “until the day of the combat, let us be friends. Will you accept a dinner at the Hôtel Bussy?”

All agreed, and returned with Bussy to his hotel, where a sumptuous banquet united them till morning.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

IN WHICH CHICOT SLEEPS.

The movements of the young men had been remarked by the king and Chicot. The king walked up and down, waiting impatiently for his friends to return; but Chicot followed them at a distance, and saw enough to be satisfied of their intentions. When he returned to the house he found the king, walking up and down, muttering.

“Ah! my dear friend! do you know what has become of them?” cried Henri.

“Whom? your minions?”

“Alas! yes, my poor friends.”

“They must lie very low by this time.”

“Have they been killed?” cried Henri; “are they dead?”

“Dead I fear----”

“And you laugh, wretch?”

“Oh! my son, dead drunk.”

“Oh! Chicot, how you terrified me. But why do you calumniate these gentlemen?”

“On the contrary, I praise them.”

“Be serious, I beg; do you know that they went out with the Angevins?”

“Of course, I know it.”

“What was the result?”

“What I tell you; that they are dead drunk.”

“But Bussy!”

“He is intoxicating them; he is a dangerous man.”

“Chicot, for pity’s sake----”

“Yes; Bussy has given a dinner to your friends; how do you like that?”

“Impossible! They are sworn enemies.”

“Have you good legs?”

“What do you mean?”

“Will you go to the river?”

“I would go to the end of the world to see such a thing.”

“Well! go only to the Hôtel Bussy.”

“Will you accompany me?”

“Thank you, I have just come from there.”

“But----”

“Oh! no; I, who have seen, do not need to be convinced. Go, my son, go. You disquiet yourself about your friends; you first pity them as if they were dead, and when you hear they are not dead, you are uneasy still----”

“You are intolerable, M. Chicot.”

“Would you have preferred that they should each have had seven or eight wounds by a rapier?”

“I should like to be able to depend on my friends.”

“Oh! ventre de biche, depend upon me; I am here, my son, only feed me. I want pheasant and truffles.”

Henri and his only friend went to bed early, the king still sighing.

The next day, at the petite levée of the king, MM. Quelus, Schomberg, Maugiron, and D’Epernon presented themselves. Chicot still slept. The king jumped from his bed in a fury, and tearing off the perfumed mask from his face, cried, “Go out from here.”

The young men looked at each other in wonder.

“But, sire, we wished to say to your majesty----”

“That you are no longer drunk, I suppose.”

Chicot opened his eyes.

“Your majesty is in error,” said Quelus, gravely.

“And yet I have not drunk the wine of Anjou.”

“Oh! I understand,” said Quelus, smiling.

“What?”

“If your majesty will remain alone with us, we will tell you.”

“I hate drunkards and traitors.”

“Sire,” cried three of the gentlemen.

“Patience, gentlemen,” said Quelus, “his majesty has slept badly, and had unpleasant dreams. A few words will set all right.”

“Speak then, but be brief.”

“It is possible, sire, but difficult.”

“Yes; one turns long round certain accusations.”

“No, sire, we go straight to it,” replied Quelus, looking again at Chicot and the usher, as though to reiterate his request that they might be left alone. The king signed to the usher to leave the room, but Chicot said, “Never mind me, I sleep like a top," and closing his eyes again, he began to snore with all his strength.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

WHERE CHICOT WAKES.

"Your majesty," said Quelus, "knows only half the business, and that the least interesting half. Assuredly, we have all dined with M. de Bussy, and to the honor of his cook, be it said, dined well. There was, above all, a certain wine from Austria or Hungary, which really appeared to me marvelous. But during the repast, or rather after it, we had the most serious and interesting conversation concerning your majesty's affairs."

"You make the exordium very long."

"How talkative you are, Valois!" cried Chicot.

"Oh! oh! M. Gascon," said Henri, "if you do not sleep, you must leave the room."

"Pardieu, it is you who keep me from sleeping, your tongue clacks so fast."

Quelus, seeing it was impossible to speak seriously, shrugged his shoulders, and rose in anger.

"We were speaking of grave matters," said he.

"Grave matters?"

"Yes," said D'Epernon, "if the lives of eight brave gentlemen are worth the trouble of your majesty's attention."

"What does it mean, my son?" said Henri, placing his hand on Quelus's shoulder.

"Well, sire, the result of our conversation was, that royalty is menaced--weakened, that is to say, that all the world is conspiring against you. Sire, you are a great king, but you have no horizon before you; the nobility have raised so many barriers before your eyes, that you can see nothing, if it be not the still higher barriers that the people have raised. When, sire, in battle one battalion places itself like a menacing wall before another, what happens? Cowards look behind them, and seeing an open space, they fly; the brave lower their heads and rush on."

"Well, then forward!" cried the king, "mordieu! am I not the first gentleman in my kingdom? Were they not great battles that I fought in my youth? Forward, then, gentlemen, and I will take the lead; it is my custom in the mêlée."

"Oh! yes, sire," cried the young men, with one voice.

"And," said Quelus, "against these ramparts which are closing round your majesty, four men will march, sure to be applauded by you, and glorified by posterity."

"What do you mean, Quelus?" cried the king, with eyes in which joy was tempered by solicitude; "who are these four men?"

"I, and these other gentlemen," replied Quelus, with pride; "we devote ourselves, sire."

"To what?"

"To your safety."

"Against whom?"

"Against your enemies."

"Private enmities of young men?"

"Oh! sire, that is the expression of vulgar prejudice; speak like a king, sire, not like a bourgeois. Do not profess to believe that Maugiron detests Antragues, that Schomberg dislikes Livarot, that D'Epernon is jealous of Bussy, and that I hate Ribeirac. Oh! no. They are all young, and agreeable, and might love each other like brothers: it is not, therefore, a rivalry between man and man, which places the swords in our hands; it is the quarrel of France with Anjou, the dispute as to the rights of the populace against the prerogatives of the king. We present ourselves as champions of royalty in those lists, where we shall be met by the champions of the League, and we came to say, 'Bless us, sire, smile on those who are going to die for you.' Your blessing will, perhaps, give us the victory, your smile will make us die happy."

Henri, overcome with emotion, opened his arms to Quelus and the others. He united them in his heart; and it was not a spectacle without interest, a picture without expression, but a scene in which manly courage was allied to softer emotions, sanctified by devotion. Chicot looked on, and his face, ordinarily indifferent or sarcastic, was not the least noble and eloquent of the six.

"Ah!" cried the king, "I am proud to-day, not of being King of France, but of being your friend; at the same time, as I know my own interests best, I will not accept a sacrifice, of which the result will deliver me up, if you fall, into the hands of my enemies. France is enough to make war on Anjou;

I know my brother, the Guises, and the League, and have often conquered more dangerous foes."

"But, sire, soldiers do not reason thus, they never take ill luck into their calculations."

"Pardon me, Maugiron; a soldier may act blindly, but the captain reflects."

"Reflect, then, sire, and let us act, who are only soldiers," said Schomberg: "besides, I know no ill luck; I am always successful."

"Friend, friend," said the king, sadly, "I wish I could say as much. It is true, you are but twenty."

"Sire," said Quelus, "on what day shall we meet MM. Bussy, Livarot, Antragues and Ribeirac?"

"Never; I forbid it absolutely."

"Sire, excuse us, the rendezvous was arranged before the dinner, words were said which cannot be retracted."

"Excuse me, monsieur," said Henri, "the king absolves from oaths and promises by saying, 'I will, or I will not,' for the king is all-powerful. Tell these gentlemen, therefore, that I have menaced you with all my anger it you come to blows; and that you may not doubt it yourselves, I swear to exile you, if----"

"Stop! sire; do not swear; because, if for such a cause we have merited your anger, and this anger shows itself by exiling us, we will go into exile with joy, because, being no longer on your majesty's territories, we can then keep our promises, and meet our adversaries."

"If these gentlemen approach you within range of an arquebuse, I will throw them all into the Bastile."

"Sire, if you do so we will all go barefooted, and with cords round our necks, to M. Testu, the governor, and pray to be incarcerate with them."

"I will have them beheaded, then; I am king, I hope."

"We will cut our throats at the foot of their scaffold."

Henri kept silent for a long time; then, raising his eyes, said, "God will surely bless a cause defended by such noble hearts."

"Yes, they are noble hearts," said Chicot, rising; "do what they wish, and fix a day for their meeting. It is your duty, my son."

"Oh I mon Dieu! mon Dieu!" murmured Henri.

"Sire, we pray you," cried all the four gentlemen, bending their knees.

“Well! so be it. Let us trust that God will give us the victory. But let us prepare for the conflict in a Christian manner. If I had time, I would send all your swords to Rome, that the Pope might bless them. But we have the shrine of St. Genevieve, which contains most precious relics: let us fast, and do penance, and keep holy the great day of the Fête Dieu, and then the next day----”

“Ah! sire, thanks; that is in eight days!” cried the young men.

And they seized the hands of the king, who embraced them all once more, and, going into his oratory, melted into tears.

“Our cartel is ready,” said Quelus, “we have but to add the day and hour. Write, Maugiron, the day after the Fête Dieu. Here is a table.”

“It is done,” said Maugiron, “now who will carry the letter?”

“I will, if you please,” said Chicot, approaching, “but I wish to give you a piece of advice. His majesty speaks of fasts and macerations. That is all very well after the combat, but before, I prefer good nourishment, generous wine, and eight hours’ sleep every night.”

“Bravo, Chicot!”

“Adieu, my little lions,” replied the Gascon, “I go to the Hôtel Bussy.” He went three steps and returned, and said, “Apropos, do not quit the king during the Fête Dieu; do not go to the country, any of you, but stay by the Louvre. Now, I will do your commission.”

CHAPTER LXXXV.

THE FÊTE DIEU.

During these eight days events were preparing themselves, as a tempest gathers in the heavens during the calm days of summer. Monsoreau had an attack of fever for twenty-four hours, then he rallied, and began to watch, himself; but as he discovered no one, he became more than ever convinced of the hypocrisy of the Duc d’Anjou, and of his bad intentions with regard to Diana.

Bussy did not discontinue his visits by day, but, warned by Rémy of this constant watchfulness, came no more at night to the window.

Chicot divided his time between the king, whom he watched like a child, and his friend Gorenflot, whom he had persuaded to return to his convent. He passed hours with him in his cell, always bringing with him large bottles in his pocket, and the report begin to be spread that Gorenflot had nearly persuaded him to turn monk.

As for the king, he gave constant lessons in fencing to his friends, teaching them new thrusts, and, above all, exercising D’Epernon, to whom fate had given so skilful an adversary, that he was visibly preoccupied by it.

Any one walking in the streets of Paris at certain hours, might have met the strange monks, of whom our first chapters furnished some description, and who resembled troopers more than monks. Then, to complete the picture, we must add that the Hôtel de Guise had become at once mysterious and turbulent, the most peopled within and the most deserted without that can be imagined; that meetings were held every night in the great hall, and with all the blinds and windows hermetically closed, and that these meetings were preceded by dinners, to which none but men were invited, and which were presided over by Madame de Montpensier. Of all these meetings, however, important though they were, the police suspected nothing. On the morning of the great day, the weather was superb, and the flowers which filled the streets sent their perfumes through the air. Chicot, who for the last fortnight had slept in the king’s room, woke him early; no one had yet entered the royal chamber.

“Oh, Chicot!” cried the king, “you have woke me from one of the sweetest dreams I ever had in my life.”

“What was it, my son?”

“I dreamed that Quelus had run Antragues through the body, and was swimming in the blood of his adversary. Let us go and pray that my dream may be realized. Call, Chicot, call.”

“What do you want?”

“My hair-cloth and my scourge.”

“Would you not prefer a good breakfast?”

“Pagan, would you go to hear mass on the Fête Dieu with a full stomach?”

“Even so.”

“Call, Chicot.”

“Patience; it is scarcely eight o’clock, and you will have plenty of time to scourge yourself. Let us talk first. Converse with your friend; you will not repent it, Valois, on the faith of a Chicot.”

“Well, talk; but be quick.”

“How shall we divide our day, my son?”

“Into three parts.”

“In honor of the Trinity; very well, let me hear these three parts.”

“First, mass at St. Germain l’Auxerrois.”

“Well?”

“Return to the Louvre, for a collation.”

“Very good.”

“Then, a procession of penitents through the streets, stopping at the principal convente of Paris, beginning at the Jacobine and finishing at St. Geneviève, where I have promised the prior to stay till to-morrow in the cell of a saint, who will pray for the success of our arms.”

“I know him.”

“The saint?”

“Yes, perfectly.”

“So much the better; you shall accompany me, and we will pray together.”

“Yes; make yourself easy.”

“Then dress yourself, and come.”

“Wait a little.”

“What for?”

“I have more to ask.”

“Be quick, then, for time passes.”

“What is the court to do?”

“Follow me.”

“And your brother?”

“Will accompany me.”

“Your guard?”

“The French guard wait for me at the Louvre, and the Swiss at the door of the Abbey.”

“That will do; now I know all.”

“Then I may call?”

“Yes.”

Henri struck on his gong.

“The ceremony will be magnificent,” said Chicot.

“God will accept our homage, I hope.”

“But tell me, Henri, before any one comes in, have you nothing else to say to me?”

“No, I have given you all the details.”

“Have you settled to sleep at St. Genevieve?”

“Doubtless.”

“Well, my son, I do not like that part of the program.”

“How so?”

“When we have dined I will tell you another plan that has occurred to me.”

“Well, I consent.”

“Whether you consent or not, it will be all the same thing.”

“What do you mean?”

“Hush! here are your valets.”

As he spoke, the ushers opened the door, and the barber, perfumer, and valet of the king entered, and commenced to execute upon his majesty one of those toilets which we have described elsewhere. When the king was dressing, the Duc d’Anjou was announced. He was accompanied by M. de Monsoreau, D’Epernon, and Aurilly. Henri, at the sight of Monsoreau, still pale and looking more frightful than ever, could not repress a movement of surprise.

“You have been wounded, comte, have you not?”

“Yes, sire”

"At the chase, they told me."

"Yes sire."

"But you are better now?"

"I am well."

"Sire," said the duke, "would it please you that, after our devotions, M, de Monsoreau should go and prepare a chase for us in the woods of Compiègne?"

"But do you not know that to-morrow----"

He was going to say, "Four of your friends are to fight four of mine;" but he stopped, for he remembered that it was a secret.

"I know nothing" said the duke; "but if your majesty will inform me----"

"I meant that, as I am to pass the night at the Abbey of St. Genevieve, I should perhaps not be ready for to-morrow; but let the count go; if it be not to-morrow, it shall be the day after."

"You hear?" said the duke to Monsoreau.

"Yes monseigneur."

At this moment Quelus and Schomberg entered. The king received them with open arms.

Monsoreau said softly to the duke, "You exile me, monseigneur."

"Is it not your duty to prepare the chase for the king?"

"I understand--this is the last of the eight days fixed by your highness, and you prefer sending me to Compiègne to keeping your promise."

"No, on the contrary; I keep my promise."

"Explain yourself."

"Your departure will be publicly known."

"Well?"

"Well, do not go, but hide near your house; then, believing you gone, the man you wish to know will come; the rest concerns yourself: I engage for no more."

"Ah! if that be so----"

"You have my word."

"I have better than that, I have your signature."

"Oh, yes, mordieu! I know that."

Aurilly touched D'Epernon's arm and said, "It is done; Bussy will not fight to-morrow."

"Not fight!"

"I answer for it."

“Who will prevent it?”

“Never mind that.”

“If it be so, my dear sorcerer, there are one thousand crowns for you.”

“Gentlemen,” said the king, who had finished his toilet, “to St. Germain l’Auxerrois.”

“And from there to St. Genevieve?” asked the duke.

“Certainly,” replied Henri, passing into the gallery where all his court were waiting for him.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

WHICH WILL ELUCIDATE THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER.

The evening before M. de Monsoreau had returned to his home from the Hôtel Guise, and had found Bussy there. Then, in his friendship for this brave gentleman, he had taken him aside, and said:

"Will you permit me to give you a piece of advice?"

"Pray do."

"If I were you, I should leave Paris to-morrow."

"I! and why so?"

"All that I can tell you is, that your absence may save you from great embarrassment."

"How so?"

"Are you ignorant of what is to take place to-morrow?"

"Completely."

"On your honor?"

"On my word as a gentleman."

"M. d'Anjou has confided nothing to you?"

"Nothing; M. d'Anjou confides nothing to me beyond what all the world knows."

"Well! I, who am not the Duc d'Anjou, who love my friends for their own sakes, and not for mine, I will tell you, my dear count, that he is preparing for grave events to-morrow, and that the parting of Guise and Anjou meditate a stroke which may end in the fall of the king."

Bussy looked at M. de Monsoreau with suspicion, but his whole manner expressed so much sincerity that it was impossible to doubt him.

"Count," replied he, "my sword belongs to the Duc d'Anjou. The king, against whom I have done nothing, hates me, and has never let slip an occasion of doing or saying something wounding to me; and to-morrow I tell you--but you alone, remember--I am about to risk my life to humiliate Henri de Valois in the person of his favorites."

"Then you are resolved to risk all the consequences of your adherence to the duke?"

"Yes."

"You know where it may lead you?"

"I know where I will stop; whatever complaints I have against the king, I will never lift a hand against him; but I will let others do what they like, and I will follow M. d'Anjou to protect him in case of need."

"My dear comte," said Monsoreau, "the Duc d'Anjou is perfidious and a traitor; a coward, capable, from jealous or fear, of sacrificing his most faithful servant--his most devoted friend; abandon him, take a friend's counsel, pass the day in your little house at Vincennes, go where you like, except to the procession of the Fête Dieu."

"But why do you follow the duke yourself?"

"For reasons which concern my honor. I have need of him for a little while longer."

"Well! that is like me; for things which concern my honor I must follow the duke."

The Comte de Monsoreau pressed his hand, and they parted.

The next morning Monsoreau announced to his wife his approaching departure for Compiègne, and gave all the necessary orders. Diana heard the news with joy. She knew from her husband of the duel which was arranged between Bussy and D'Epernon, but had no fear for the result, and looked forward to it with pride. Bussy had presented himself in the morning to the Duc d'Anjou, who, seeing him so frank, loyal, and devoted, felt some remorse; but two things combated this return of good feeling--firstly, the great empire Bussy had over him, as every powerful mind has over a weak one, and which annoyed him; and, secondly, the love of Bussy for Diana, which awoke all the tortures of jealousy in his heart. Monsoreau, it was true, inspired him with equal dislike and fear, but he thought, "Either Bussy will accompany me and aid my triumph, and then if I triumph, I do not care for Monsoreau, or Bussy will abandon me, and then I owe him nothing, and I will abandon him in return."

When they were in the church, the duke saw Rémy enter, and going up to his master, slide a note into his hand.

"It is from her," thought he; "she sends him word that her husband is leaving Paris."

Bussy put the note into his hat, opened, and read it, and the prince saw his face radiant with joy and love. The duke looked round; if Monsoreau had been there, perhaps he would not have had patience to wait till the evening to denounce Bussy.

The mass over, they returned to the Louvre, where a collation waited for the king in his room, and for his gentlemen in the gallery. On entering the Louvre, Bussy approached the duke.

"Pardon, monseigneur," said he, "but can I say two words to you?"

"Are you in a hurry?"

"Very much so."

"Will it not do during the procession? we shall walk side by side."

"Monseigneur must excuse me, but what I wished to ask is, that I need not accompany you."

"Why so?"

"Monseigneur, to-morrow is a great day, and I would wish to retire to-day to my little house at Vincennes."

"Then you do not join the procession with the king and court?"

"No, monseigneur, if you will excuse me."

"Will you not rejoin me at St. Geneviève?"

"Monseigneur, I wish to have the whole day to myself."

"But if anything should occur when I have need of my friends?"

"As monseigneur would only want me to draw my sword against my king, it is a double reason for excusing myself," replied Bussy; "my sword is engaged against M. d'Epernon."

Monsoreau had told the duke the night before that he might reckon on Bussy; this change, therefore, must have been occasioned by Diana's note.

"Then," said the duke, "you abandon your chief and master?"

"Monseigneur, he who is about to risk his life in a bloody duel, as ours will be, has but one master, and it is to Him my last devotions will be paid."

"You know that I am playing for a throne, and you leave me."

"Monseigneur, I have worked enough for you; I will work again to-morrow, do not ask me for more than my life."

"It is well!" said the duke, in a hollow voice, "you are free; go, M. de Bussy."

Bussy, without caring for the prince's evident anger, ran down the staircase of the Louvre, and went rapidly to his own house.

The duke called Aurilly. "Well! he has condemned himself," said he.

"Does he not follow you?"

"No."

"He goes to the rendezvous?"

"Yes."

"Then it is for this evening?"

"It is."

"Is M. de Monsoreau warned?"

"Of the rendezvous--yes; but not yet of the man."

"Then you have decided to sacrifice the count?"

"I have determined to revenge myself; I fear now but one thing."

"What is that?"

"That Monsoreau will trust to his strength, and that Bussy will escape him."

"Reassure yourself, monseigneur."

"Why?"

"Is M. de Bussy irrevocably condemned?"

"Yes, mordieu! A man who dictates to me--who takes away from me her whom I was seeking for--who is a sort of lion, of whom I am less the master than the keeper--yes, Aurilly, he is condemned without mercy."

"Well, then, be easy, for if he escape Monsoreau, he will not escape from another."

"And who is that?"

"Does your highness order me to name him?"

"Yes, I do."

"It is M. d'Epernon."

"D'Epernon! who was to fight him to-morrow?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"How is that?"

Aurilly was about to reply, when the duke was summoned; for the king was at table, and had sent for his brother.

"You shall tell me during the procession," said the duke.

We will now tell our readers what had passed between Aurilly and D'Epernon. They had long known each other, for Aurilly had taught D'Epernon to play on the lute, and, as he was fond of music, they were often together. He called upon Aurilly to tell him of his approaching duel, which disquieted him not a little. Bravery was never one of D'Epernon's prominent qualities, and he looked on a duel with Bussy as certain death. When Aurilly heard it, he told D'Epernon that Bussy practised fencing every morning with an artist, lately arrived, who was said to have borrowed from all nations their best points, until he had become perfect. During this recital D'Epernon grew livid with terror.

"Ah! I am doomed," said he.

"Well?"

"But it is absurd to go out with a man who is sure to kill me."

"You should have thought of that before making the engagement."

"Peste! I will break the engagement."

"He is a fool who gives up his life willingly at twenty-five. But, now I think of it----"

"Well."

"M. de Bussy is sure to kill me."

"I do not doubt it."

"Then it will not be a duel, but an assassination."

"Perhaps so."

"And if it be, it is lawful to prevent an assassination by----"

"By?"

"A murder."

"Doubtless."

"What prevents me, since he wishes to kill me, from killing him first?"

"Oh, mon Dieu! nothing; I thought of that myself."

"It is only natural."

"Very natural."

"Only, instead of killing him with my own hands, I will leave it to others."

"That is to say, you will hire assassins?"

"Ma foi! yes, like M. de Guise for St. Megrim."

"It will cost you dear."

"I will give three thousand crowns."

"You will only get six men for that, when they know who they have to deal with."

"Are not six enough?"

"M. de Bussy would kill four before they touched him. Do you remember the fight in the Rue St. Antoine?"

"I will give six thousand; if I do the thing, I will take care he does not escape."

"Have you your men?"

"Oh, there are plenty of unoccupied men-soldiers of fortune."

"Very well; but take care."

"Of what?"

"If they fail they will denounce you."

"I have the king to protect me."

"That will not hinder M. de Bussy from killing you."

"That is true."

"Should you like an auxiliary?"

"I should like anything which would aid me to get rid of him."

"Well, a certain enemy of your enemy is jealous."

"And he is now laying a snare for him?"

"Ah!"

"Well?"

"But he wants money; with your six thousand crowns he will take care of your affair as well as his own. You do not wish the honor. of the thing to be yours, I suppose?"

"Mon Dieu! no; I only ask to remain in obscurity."

"Send your men, and he will use them."

"But I must know who it is."

"I will show you in the morning."

"Where?"

"At the Louvre."

"Then he is noble?"

"Yes:"

"Aurilly, you shall have the six thousand crowns."

"Then it is settled?"

"Irrevocably."

"At the Louvre, then?"

"Yes, at the Louvre."

We have seen in the preceding chapter how Aurilly said to D'Epernon, "Be easy, Bussy will not fight to-morrow."

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

THE PROCESSION.

As soon as the collation was over, the king had entered his room with Chicot, to put on his penitent’s robe and had come out an instant after, with bare feet, a cord round his waist, and his hood over his face; the courtiers had made the same toilet. The weather was magnificent, and the pavements were strewn with flowers; an immense crowd lined the roads to the four places where the king was to stop. The clergy of St. Germain led the procession, and the Archbishop of Paris followed, carrying the holy sacrament; between them walked young boys, shaking censers, and young girls scattering roses. Then came the king, followed by his four friends, barefooted and frocked like himself.

The Duc d’Anjou followed in his ordinary dress, accompanied by his Angevins. Next came the principal courtiers, and then the bourgeois. It was one o’clock when they left the Louvre. Crillon and the French guards were about to follow, but the king signed to them to remain. It was near six in the evening before they arrived before the old abbey, where they saw the prior and the monks drawn up on the threshold to wait for his majesty. The Duc d’Anjou, a little before, had pleaded great fatigue, and had asked leave to retire to his hotel, which had been granted to him. His gentlemen had retired with him, as if to proclaim that they followed the duke and not the king, besides which, they did not wish to fatigue themselves before the morrow. At the door of the abbey the king dismissed his four favorites, that they also might take some repose. The archbishop also, who had eaten nothing since morning, was dropping with fatigue, so the king took pity on him and on the other priests and dismissed them all. Then, turning to the prior, Joseph Foulon, “Here I am, my father,” said he; “I come, sinner as I am, to seek repose in your solitude.”

The prior bowed, and the royal penitent mounted the steps of the abbey, striking his breast at each step, and the door was immediately closed behind him.

“We will first,” said the prior, “conduct your majesty into the crypt, which we have ornamented in our best manner to do honor to the King of heaven and earth.”

No sooner had the king passed through the somber arcade, lined with monks, and turned the corner which led to the chapel, than twenty hoods were thrown into the air, and eyes were seen brilliant with joy and triumph. Certainly, they were not monkish or peaceful faces displayed, but bristling mustaches and embrowned skins, many scarred by wounds, and by the side of the proudest of all, who displayed the most celebrated scar, stood a woman covered with a frock, and looking triumphant and happy. This woman, shaking a pair of golden scissors which hung by her side, cried:

“Ah! my brothers, at last we have the Valois!”

“Ma foi, sister, I believe so.”

“Not yet,” murmured the cardinal.

“How so?”

“Shall we have enough bourgeois guards to make head against Crillon and his guards?”

“We have better than bourgeois guards; and, believe me, there will not be a musket-shot exchanged.”

“How so?” said the duchess. “I should have liked a little disturbance.”

“Well, sister, you will be deprived of it. When the king is taken he will cry out, but no one will answer; then, by persuasion or by violence, but without showing ourselves, we shall make him sign his abdication. The news will soon spread through the city, and dispose in our favor both the bourgeois and the troops.”

“The plan is good, and cannot fail,” said the duchess. “It is rather brutal,” said the Duc de Guise; “besides which, the king will refuse to sign the abdication. He is brave, and will rather die.”

“Let him die, then.”

“Not so,” replied the duke, firmly. “I will mount the throne of a prince who abdicates and is despised, but not of an assassinated man who is pitied. Besides, in your plans you forget M. le Duc d’Anjou, who will claim the crown.”

“Let him claim, mordieu!” said Mayenne; “he shall be comprised in his brother’s act of abdication. He is in connection with the Huguenots, and is unworthy to reign.”

“Are you sure of that?”

“Pardieu! did he not escape from the Louvre by the aid of the King of Navarre?”

“Well?”

“Then another clause in favor of our house shall follow; this clause shall make you lieutenant-general of the kingdom, from which to the throne is only a step.”

“Yes, yes,” said the cardinal, “all that is settled; but it is probable that the French guards, to make sure that the abdication is a genuine one, and above all, a voluntary one, will insist upon seeing the king, and will force the gates of the abbey if they are not admitted. Crillon does not understand joking, and he is just the man to say to the king, ‘Sire, your life is in danger; but, before everything, let us save our honor.’“

“The general has taken his precautions. If it be necessary to sustain a siege, we have here eighty gentlemen, and I have distributed arms to a hundred monks. We could hold out for a month against the army; besides, in case of danger, we have the cave to fly to with our prey.”

“What is the Duc d’Anjou doing?”

“In the hour of danger he has failed, as usual. He has gone home, no doubt, waiting for news of us, through Bussy or Monsoreau.”

“Mon Dieu! he should have been here; not at home.”

“You are wrong, brother,” said the cardinal; “the people and the nobles would have seen in it a snare to entrap the family. As you said just now, we must, above all things, avoid playing the part of usurper. We must inherit. By leaving the Duc d’Anjou free, and the queen-mother independent, no one will have anything to accuse us of. If we acted otherwise, we should have against us Bussy, and a hundred other dangerous swords.”

“Bah! Bussy is going to fight against the king’s minions.”

“Pardieu! he will kill them, and then he will join us,” said the Duc de Guise; “he is a superior man, and one whom I much esteem, and I will make him general of the army in Italy, where war is sure to break out.”

“And I,” said the duchess, “if I become a widow, will marry him.”

“Who is near the king?” asked the duke.

“The prior and Brother Gorenflot.”

“Is he in the cell?”

“Oh no! he will look first at the crypt and the relics.”

At this moment a bell sounded.

“The king is returning,” said the Duc de Guise; “let us become monks again.” And immediately the hoods covered ardent eyes and speaking scars, and twenty or thirty monks, conducted by the three brothers, went towards the crypt.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

CHICOT THE FIRST.

The king visited the crypt, kissed the relics-often striking his breast, and murmuring the most doleful psalms. At last the prior said, “Sire, will it please you now to depose your earthly crown at the feet of the eternal king?”

“Let us go!” said the king.

They arrived at the cell, on the threshold of which stood Gorenflot, his eyes brilliant as carbuncles.

Henri entered. “Hic portus salutis!” murmured he.

“Yes,” replied Foulon.

“Leave us!” said Gorenflot, with a majestic gesture; and immediately the door shut, and they were left alone.

“Here you are, then, Herod! pagan! Nebuchadnezzar!” cried Gorenflot, suddenly.

“Is it to me you speak, my brother?” cried the king, in surprise.

“Yes, to you. Can one accuse you of anything so bad, that it is not true?”

“My brother!”

“Bah! you have no brother here. I have long been meditating a discourse, and now you shall have it. I divide it into three heads. First, you are a tyrant; second, you are a satyr; third, you are dethroned.”

“Dethroned!”

“Neither more or less. This abbey is not like Poland, and you cannot fly.”

“Ah! a snare!”

“Oh, Valois, learn that a king is but a man.”

“You are violent, my brother.”

“Pardieu! do you think we imprison you to flatter you?”

“You abuse your religious calling.”

“There is no religion.”

“Oh, you are a saint, and say such things!”

“I have said it.”

“You speak dreadfully, my brother.”

"Come, no preaching; are you ready?"

"To do what?"

"To resign your crown; I am charged to demand it of you."

"You are committing a mortal sin."

"Oh! I have right of absolution, and I absolve myself in advance. Come, renounce, Brother Valois."

"Renounce what?"

"The throne of France."

"Rather death!"

"Oh! then you shall die! Here is the prior returning. Decide!"

"I have my guards--my friends; they will defend me."

"Yes, but you will be killed first."

"Leave me at least a little time for reflection."

"Not an instant!"

"Your zeal carries you away, brother," said the prior, opening the door; and saying to the king, "Your request is granted," he shut it again.

Henri fell into a profound reverie. "I accept the sacrifice," he said, after the lapse of ten minutes.

"It is done--he accepts!" cried Gorenflot.

The king heard a murmur of joy and surprise.

"Read him the act," said a voice, and a monk passed a paper to Gorenflot.

Gorenflot read it to the king, who listened with his head buried in his hands.

"If I refuse to sign?" cried he, shedding tears.

"It will be doubly your ruin," said the Duc de Guise, from under his hood. "Look on yourself as dead to the world, and do not force your subjects to shed the blood of a man who has been their king."

"I will not be forced."

"I feared so," said the duke to his sister. Then, turning to his brother, "Let everyone arm and prepare," said he.

"For what?" cried the king, in a miserable tone.

"For anything."

The king's despair redoubled.

"Corbleu!" cried Gorenflot, "I hated you before, Valois, but now I despise you! Sign, or you shall perish by my hand!"

"Have patience," said the king; "let me pray to my divine Master for resignation."

“He wishes to reflect again,” said Gorenflot.

“Give him till midnight,” said the cardinal.

“Thanks, charitable Christian!” cried the king:

“His brain is weak,” said the duke; “we serve France by dethroning him.”

“I shall have great pleasure in clipping him!” said the duchess.

Suddenly a noise was heard outside, and soon they distinguished blows struck on the door of the abbey, and Mayenne went to see what it was. “My brothers,” said he, “there is a troop of armed men outside.”

“They have come to seek him,” said the duchess.

“The more reason that he should sign quickly.”

“Sign, Valois, sign!” roared Gorenflot.

“You gave me till midnight,” said the king, piteously.

“Ah! you hoped to be rescued.”

“He shall die if he does not sign!” cried the duchess. Gorenflot offered him the pen. The noise outside redoubled.

“A new troop!” cried a monk; “they are surrounding the abbey!”

“The Swiss,” cried Foulon, “are advancing on the right!”

“Well, we will defend ourselves; with such a hostage in our hands, we need not surrender.”

“He has signed!” cried Gorenflot, tearing the paper from Henri, who buried his face in his hands.

“Then you are king!” cried the cardinal to the duke; “take the precious paper.”

The king overturned the little lamp which alone lighted the scene, but the duke already held the parchment.

“What shall we do?” said a monk. “Here is Crillon, with his guards, threatening to break in the doors!”

“In the king’s name!” cried the powerful voice of Crillon.

“There is no king!” cried Gorenflot through the window.

“Who says that?” cried Crillon.

“I! I!”

“Break in the doors, Monsieur Crillon!” said, from outside, a voice which made the hair of all the monks, real and pretended, stand on end.

“Yes, sire,” replied Crillon, giving a tremendous blow with a hatchet on the door.

“What do you want?” said the prior, going to the window.

“Ah! it is you, M. Foulon,” replied the same voice, “I want my jester, who is in one of your cells. I want Chicot, I am ennuyé at the Louvre.”

“And I have been much amused, my son,” said Chicot, throwing off his hood, and pushing his way through the crowd of monks, who recoiled, with a cry of terror.

At this moment the Duc de Guise, advancing to a lamp, read the signature obtained with so much labor. It was “Chicot I.”

“Chicot!” cried he; “thousand devils!”

“Let us fly!” said the cardinal, “we are lost.”

“Ah!” cried Chicot, turning to Gorenflot, who was nearly fainting, and he began to strike him with the cord he had round his waist.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

INTEREST AND CAPITAL.

As the king spoke and the conspirators listened, they passed from astonishment to terror. Chicot I. relinquished his role of apparent terror, threw back his hood, crossed his arms, and, while Gorenflot fled at his utmost speed, sustained, firm and smiling, the first shock. It was a terrible moment, for the gentlemen, furious at the mystification of which they had been the dupes, advanced menacingly on the Gascon. But this unarmed man, his breast covered only by his arms--this laughing face, stopped them still more than the remonstrance of the cardinal, who said to them that Chicot’s death could serve no end, but, on the contrary, would be terribly avenged by the king, who was the jester’s accomplice in this scene of terrible buffoonery.

The result was, that daggers and rapiers were lowered before Chicot, who continued to laugh in their faces.

However, the king’s menaces and Crillon’s blows became more vehement, and it was evident that the door could not long resist such an attack. Thus, after a moment’s deliberation, the Duc de Guise gave the order for retreat. This order made Chicot smile, for, during his nights with Gorenflot, he had examined the cave and found out the door, of which he had informed the king, who had placed there Torquenot, lieutenant of the Swiss guards. It was then evident that the leaguers, one after another, were about to throw themselves into the trap. The cardinal made off first, followed by about twenty gentlemen. Then Chicot saw the duke pass with about the same number, and afterwards Mayenne. When Chicot saw him go he laughed outright. Ten minutes passed, during which he listened earnestly, thinking to hear the noise of the leaguers sent back into the cave, but to his astonishment, the sound continued to go further and further off. His laugh began to change into oaths. Time passed, and the leaguers did not return; had they seen that the door was guarded and found another way out? Chicot was about to rush from the cell, when all at once the door was obstructed by a mass which fell at his feet, and began to tear its hair.

"Ah! wretch that I am!" cried the monk. "Oh! my good M. Chicot, pardon me, pardon me!"

How did Gorenflot, who went first, return now alone? was the question that presented itself to Chicot's mind.

"Oh! my good M. Chicot!" he continued to cry, "pardon your unworthy friend, who repents at your knees."

"But how is it you have not fled with the others?"

"Because the Lord in His anger has struck me with obesity, and I could not pass where the others did. Oh! unlucky stomach! Oh! miserable paunch!" cried the monk, striking with his two hands the part he apostrophized. "Ah! why am not I thin like you, M. Chicot?"

Chicot understood nothing of the lamentations of the monk.

"But the others are flying, then?" cried he, in a voice of thunder.

"Pardieu! what should they do? Wait to be hung? Oh! unlucky paunch!"

"Silence, and answer me."

"Interrogate me, M. Chicot; you have the right."

"How are the others escaping?"

"As fast as they can."

"So I imagine; but where?"

"By the hole."

"Mordieu! what hole?"

"The hole in the cemetery cellar."

"Is that what you call the cave?"

"Oh! no; the door of that was guarded outside. The great cardinal, just as he was about to open it, heard a Swiss say, 'Mich dwistel,' which means, 'I am thirsty.'"

"Ventre de biche! so then they took another way?"

"Yes, dear M. Chicot, they are getting out through the cellar."

"How does that run?"

"From the crypt to the Porte St. Jacques."

"You lie; I should have seen them repass before this cell."

"No, dear M. Chicot; they thought they had not time for that, so they are creeping out through the air-hole."

"What hole?"

"One which looks into the garden, and serves to light the cellar."

"So that you----"

“I was too big, and could not pass, and they drew me back by my legs, because I intercepted the way for the others.”

“Then he who is bigger than you?”

“He! who?”

“Oh! Holy Virgin, I promise you a dozen wax candles, if he also cannot pass.”

“M. Chicot!”

“Get up.”

The monk raised himself from the ground as quickly as he could.

“Now lead me to the hole.”

“Where you wish.”

“Go on, then, wretch.”

Gorenflot went on as fast as he was able, while Chicot indulged himself by giving him a few blows with the cord. They traversed the corridor, and descended into the garden.

“Here! this way,” said Gorenflot.

“Hold your tongue, and go on.”

“There it is,” and exhausted by his efforts, the monk sank on the grass, while Chicot, hearing groans, advanced, and saw something protruding through the hole. By the side of this something lay a frock and a sword. It was evident that the individual in the hole had taken off successively all the loose clothing which increased his size; and yet, like Gorenflot, he was making useless efforts to get through.

“Mordieu! ventrebleu! sangdien!” cried a stifled voice. “I would rather pass through the midst of the guards. Do not pull so hard, my friends; I shall come through gradually; I feel that I advance, not quickly, it is true, but I do advance.”

“Ventre de biche!” murmured Chicot, “it is M. de Mayenne. Holy Virgin, you have gained your candles.”

And he made a noise with his feet like some one running fast.

“They are coming,” cried several voices from inside.

“All!” cried Chicot, as if out of breath, “it is you, miserable monk!”

“Say nothing, monseigneur!” murmured the voices, “he takes you for Gorenflot.”

“Ah! it is you, heavy mass--pondus immobile; it is you, indigesta moles!”

And at each apostrophe, Chicot, arrived at last at his desired vengeance, let fall the cord with all the weight of his arm on the body before him.

"Silence!" whispered the voices again; "he takes you for Gorenflot."

Mayenne only uttered groans, and made immense efforts to get through.

"Ah! conspirator!" cried Chicot again; "ah! unworthy monk, this is for your drunkenness, this for idleness, this for anger, this for greediness, and this for all the vices you have."

"M. Chicot, have pity," whispered Gorenflot.

"And here, traitor, this is for your treason," continued Chicot.

"Ah! why did it not please God to substitute for your vulgar carcass the high and mighty shoulders of the Duc de Mayenue, to whom I owe a volley of blows, the interest of which has been accumulating for seven years!"

"Chicot!" cried the duke.

"Yes, Chicot, unworthy servant of the king, who wishes he had the hundred arms of Briareus for this occasion."

And he redoubled his blows with such violence, that the sufferer, making a tremendous effort, pushed himself through, and fell torn and bleeding into the arms of his friends. Chicot's last blow fell into empty space. He turned, and saw that the true Gorenflot had fainted with terror.

CHAPTER XC.

WHAT WAS PASSING NEAR THE BASTILE WHILE CHICOT WAS PAYING HIS DEBT TO Y. DE MAYENNE.

It was eleven at night, and the Duc d’Anjou was waiting impatiently at home for a messenger from the Duc le Guise. He walked restlessly up and down, looking every minute at the clock. All at once he heard a horse in the courtyard, and thinking it was the messenger, he ran to the window, but it was a groom leading up and down a horse which was waiting for its master, who almost immediately came out. It was Bussy, who, as captain of the duke’s guards, came to give the password for the night. The duke, seeing this handsome and brave young man, of whom he had never had reason to complain, experienced an instant’s remorse, but on his face he read so much joy, hope, and happiness, that all his jealousy returned. However, Bussy, ignorant that the duke was watching him, jumped into his saddle and rode off to his own hotel, where he gave his horse to the groom. There he saw Rémy.

“Ah! you Rémy?”

“Myself, monsieur.”

“Not yet in bed?”

“I have just come in. Indeed, since I have no longer a patient, it seems to me that the days have forty-eight hours.”

“Are you ennuyé?”

“I fear so.”

“Then Gertrude is abandoned?”

“Perfectly.”

“You grew tired?”

“Of being beaten. That was how her love showed itself.”

“And does your heart not speak for her to-night?”

“Why to-night?”

“Because I would have taken you with me.”

“To the Bastile?”

“Yes.”

“You are going there?”

“Yes.”

“And Monsoreau?”

“Is at Compiègne, preparing a chase for the king.”

“Are you sure, monsieur?”

“The order was given publicly this morning.”

“Ah, well; Jourdain, my sword.”

“You have changed your mind?”

“I will accompany you to the door, for two reasons.”

“What are they?”

“Firstly, lest you should meet any enemies.” Bussy smiled.

“Oh! mon Dieu, I know you fear no one, and that Rémy the doctor is but a poor companion; still, two men are not so likely to be attacked as one. Secondly, because I have a great deal of good advice to give you.”

“Come, my dear Rémy, come. We will speak of her; and next to the pleasure of seeing the woman you love, I know none greater than talking of her.”

Bussy then took the arm of the young doctor, and they set off. Rémy on the way tried hard to induce Bussy to return early, insisting that he would be more fit for his duel on the morrow.

Bussy smiled. “Fear nothing,” said he.

“Ah! my dear master, to-morrow you ought to fight like Hercules against Antæus--like Theseus against the Minotaur--like Bayard--like something Homeric, gigantic, impossible; I wish people to speak of it in future times as the combat, par excellence, and in which you had not even received a scratch.”

“Be easy, my dear Rémy, you shall see wonders. This morning I put swords in the hands of four fencers, who during eight minutes could not touch me once, while I tore their doublets to pieces.”

So conversing, they arrived in the Rue St. Antoine.

“Adieu! here we are,” said Bussy.

“Shall I wait for you?”

“Why?”

“To make sure that you will return before two o’clock, and have at least five or six hours’ sleep before your duel.”

“If I give you my word?”

“Oh! that will be enough; Bussy’s word is never doubted.”

“You have it then.”

“Then, adieu, monsieur.”

“Adieu, Rémy.”

Rémy watched, and saw Bussy enter, not this time by the window, but boldly through the door, which Gertrude opened for him. Then Rémy turned to go home; but he had only gone a few steps, when he saw coming towards him five armed men, wrapped in cloaks. When they arrived about ten yards from him, they said good night to each other, and four went off in different directions, while the fifth remained stationary.

“M. de St. Luc!” said Rémy.

“Rémy!”

“Rémy, in person. Is it an indiscretion to ask what your lordship does at this hour so far from the Louvre?”

“Ma foi! I am examining, by the king’s order, the physiognomy of the city. He said to me, ‘St. Luc, walk about the streets of Paris, and if you hear any one say I have abdicated, contradict him.’“

“And have you heard it?”

“Nowhere; and as it is just midnight, and I have met no one but M. de Monsoreau, I have dismissed my friends, and am about to return.”

“M. de Monsoreau?”

“Yes.”

“You met him?”

“With a troop of armed men; ten or twelve at least.”

“Impossible!”

“Why so?”

“He ought to be at Compiègne.”

“He ought to be, but he is not.”

“But the king’s order?”

“Bah! who obeys the king?”

“Did he know you?”

“I believe so.”

“You were but five?”

“My four friends and I.”

“And he did not attack you?”

“On the contrary, he avoided me, which astonished me, as on seeing him, I expected a terrible battle.”

“Where was he going?”

“To the Rue de la Tixanderie.”

“Ah! mon Dieu!”

“What?”

“M. de St. Luc, a great misfortune is about to happen.”

“To whom?”

“To M. de Bussy.”

“Bussy! speak, Rémy; I am his friend, you know.”

“Oh! M. de Bussy thought him at Compiègne.”

“Well?”

“And, profiting by his absence, is with Madame de Monsoreau.”

“Ah!”

“Do you not see? he has had suspicions, and has feigned to depart, that he might appear unexpectedly.”

“Ah! it is the Duc d’Anjou’s doing, I believe. Have you good lungs, Rémy”

“Corbleu! like a blacksmith’s bellows.”

“Well! let us run. You know the house?”

“Yes.”

“Go on then.” And the young men set off like hunted deer.

“Is he much in advance of us?” said Rémy.

“About a quarter of an hour.”

“If we do but arrive in time!”

CHAPTER XCI.

THE ASSASSINATION.

Bussy, himself without disquietude or hesitation, had been received by Diana without fear, for she believed herself sure of the absence of M. de Monsoreau. Never had this beautiful woman been more beautiful, nor Bussy more happy. She was moved, however, by fears for the morrow's combat, now so near, and she repeated to him, again and again, the anxiety she felt about it, and questioned him as to the arrangements he had made for flight. To conquer was not all; there was afterwards the king's anger to avoid, for it was not probable that he would ever pardon the death or defeat of his favorites.

"And then," said she, "are you not acknowledged to be the bravest man in France? Why make it a point of honor to augment your glory? You are already superior to other men, and you do not wish to please any other woman but me, Louis. Therefore, guard your life, or rather--for I think there is not a man in France capable of killing you, Louis--I should say, take care of wounds, for you may be wounded. Indeed, it was through a wound received in fighting with these same men, that I first made your acquaintance."

"Make yourself easy," said Bussy, smiling; "I will take care of my face--I shall not be disfigured."

"Oh, take care of yourself altogether. Think of the grief you would experience if you saw me brought home wounded and bleeding, and that I should feel the same grief on seeing your blood. Be prudent, my too courageous hero--that is all I ask. Act like the Roman of whom you read to me the other day: let your friends fight, aid the one who needs it most, but if three men--if two men attack you, fly; you can turn, like Horatius, and kill them one after another."

"Yes, my dear Diana."

"Oh, you reply without hearing me, Louis; you look at me, and do not listen."

"But I see you, and you are beautiful."

“Do not think of my beauty just now! Mon Dieu! it is your life I am speaking of. Stay, I will tell you something that will make you more prudent--I shall have the courage to witness this duel.”

“You!”

“I shall be there.”

“Impossible, Diana!”

“No; listen. There is, in the room next to this, a window looking into a little court, but with a side-view of the Tournelles.”

“Yes, I remember--the window from which I threw crumbs to the birds the other day.”

“From there I can have a view of the ground; therefore, above all things, take care to stand so that I can see you; you will know that I am there, but do not look at me, lest your enemy should profit by it.”

“And kill me, while I had my eyes fixed upon you. If I had to choose my death, Diana, that is the one I should prefer.”

“Yes; but now you are not to die, but live.”

“And I will live; therefore tranquilize yourself, Diana. Besides, I am well seconded--you do not know my friends; Antragues uses his sword as well as I do, Ribeirac is so steady on the ground that his eyes and his arms alone seem to be alive, and Livarot is as active as a tiger. Believe me, Diana, I wish there were more danger, for there would be more honor.”

“Well, I believe you, and I smile and hope; but listen, and promise to obey me.”

“Yes, if you do not tell me to leave.”

“It is just what I am about to do. I appeal to your reason.”

“Then you should not have made me mad.”

“No nonsense, but obedience--that is the way to prove your love.”

“Order, then.”

“Dear friend, you want a long sleep; go home.”

“Not already.”

“Yes, I am going to pray for you.”

“Pray now, then.”

As he spoke, a pane of the window flew into pieces, then the window itself, and three armed men appeared on the balcony while a fourth was climbing over. This one had his face covered with a mask, and held in his right hand a sword, and in his left a pistol.

Bussy remained paralyzed for a moment by the dreadful cry uttered by Diana at this sight. The masked man made a sign, and the three others advanced. Bussy put Diana back, and drew his sword.

"Come, my brave fellows!" said a sepulchral voice from under the mask; "he is already half-dead with fear."

"You are wrong," said Bussy; "I never feel fear."

Diana drew near him.

"Go back, Diana," said he. But she threw herself on his neck. "You will get me killed," said he; and she drew back.

"Ah!" said the masked man, "it is M. de Bussy, and I would not believe it, fool that I was! Really, what a good and excellent friend! He learns that the husband is absent, and has left his wife alone, and fears she may be afraid, so he comes to keep her company, although on the eve of a duel. I repeat, he is a good and excellent friend!"

"Ah! it is you, M. de Monsoreau!" said Bussy; "throw off your mask."

"I will," said he, doing so.

Diana uttered another cry; the comte was as pale as a corpse, but he smiled like a demon.

"Let us finish, monsieur," said Bussy; "it was very well for Homer's heroes, who were demigods, to talk before they fought; but I am a man--attack me, or let me pass."

Monsoreau replied by a laugh which made Diana shudder, but raised Bussy's anger.

"Let me pass!" cried he.

"Oh, oh!"

"Then, draw and have done; I wish to go home and I live far off."

During this time two other men mounted into the balcony.

"Two and four make six," said Bussy, "where are the others?"

"Waiting at the door."

Diana fell on her knees, and in spite of her efforts Bussy heard her sobs.

"My dear comte," said he, "you know I am a man of honor."

"Yes, you are, and madame is a faithful wife."

"Good, monsieur; you are severe, but, perhaps, it is deserved; only as I have a prior engagement with four gentlemen, I beg to be allowed to retire to-night, and I pledge my word, you shall find me again, when and where you will."

Monsoreau shrugged his shoulders.

“I swear to you, monsieur,” said Bussy, “that when I have satisfied MM. Quelus, Schomberg, D’Epernon, and Maugiron, I shall be at your service. If they kill me, your vengeance will be satisfied, and if not----”

Monsoreau turned to his men. “On, my brave fellows,” said he.

“Oh!” said Bussy, “I was wrong; it is not a duel, but an assassination.”

“Yes.”

“We were each deceived with regard to the other; but remember, monsieur, that the Duc d’Anjou will avenge me.”

“It was he who sent me.”

Diana groaned.

Instantaneously Bussy overturned the prie-Dieu, drew a table towards him, and threw a chair over all, so that in a second he had formed a kind of rampart between himself and his enemies. This movement had been so rapid, that the ball fired at him from the arquebuse only struck the prie-Dieu. Diana sobbed aloud. Bussy glanced at her, and then at his assailants, crying, “Come on, but take care, for my sword is sharp.”

The men advanced, and one tried to seize the prie-Dieu, but before he reached it, Bussy’s sword pierced his arm. The man uttered a cry, and fell back.

Bussy then heard rapid steps in the corridor, and thought he was surrounded. He flew to the door to lock it, but before he could reach it, it was opened, and two men rushed in.

“Ah! dear master!” cried a well-known voice, “are we in time?”

“Rémy!”

“And I?” cried a second voice, “it seems they are attempting assassination here.”

“St. Luc!” cried Bussy, joyfully. “Ah! M. de Monsoreau, I think now you will do well to let us pass, for if you do not, we will pass over you.”

“Three more men,” cried Monsoreau. And they saw three new assailants appear on the balcony.

“They are an army,” cried St. Luc.

“Oh! God protect him!” cried Diana.

“Wretch!” cried Monsoreau, and he advanced to strike her. Bussy saw the movement. Agile as a tiger, he bounded on him, and touched him in the throat; but the distance was too great, it was only a scratch. Five or six men rushed on Bussy, but one fell beneath the sword of St. Luc.

“Rémy!” cried Bussy, “carry away Diana.”

Monsoreau uttered a yell and snatched a pistol from one of the men.

Rémy hesitated. “But you?” said he.

“Away! away! I confide her to you.”

“Come, madame,” said Rémy.

“Never! I will never leave him.”

Rémy seized her in his arms.

“Bussy, help me! Bussy!” cried Diana. For any one who separated her from Bussy, seemed an enemy to her.

“Go,” cried Bussy, “I will rejoin you.”

At this moment Monsoreau fired, and Bussy saw Rémy totter, and then fall, dragging Diana with him. Bussy uttered a cry, and turned.

“It is nothing, master,” said Rémy. “It was I who received the ball. She is safe.”

As Bussy turned, three men threw themselves on him; St. Luc rushed forward, and one of them fell. The two others drew back.

“St. Luc,” cried Bussy, “by her you love, save Diana.”

“But you?”

“I am a man.”

St. Luc rushed to Diana, seized her in his arms, and disappeared through the door.

“Here, my men, from the staircase,” shouted Monsoreau.

“Ah! coward!” cried Bussy.

Monsoreau retreated behind his men. Bussy gave a back stroke and a thrust; with the first he cleft open a head, and with the second pierced a breast.

“That clears!” cried he.

“Fly, master!” cried Rémy.

“Diana must save herself first,” murmured he.

“Take care,” cried Rémy again, as four men rushed in through the door from the staircase. Bussy saw himself between two troops, but his only cry was, “Ah! Diana!”

Then, without losing a second, he rushed on the four men; and taken by surprise, two fell, one dead, one wounded.

Then, as Monsoreau advanced, he retreated again behind his rampart.

“Push the bolts, and turn the key,” cried Monsoreau, “we have him now.” During this time, by a great effort, Rémy had dragged himself before Bussy, and added his body to the rampart.

There was an instant’s pause. Bussy looked around him. Seven men lay stretched on the ground, but nine remained. And seeing these nine swords, and hearing Monsoreau encouraging them, this brave man, who had never known fear, saw plainly before him the image of death, beckoning him with its gloomy smile.

“I may kill five more,” thought he, “but the other four will kill me. I have strength for ten minutes’ more combat; in that ten minutes let me do what man never did before.”

And rushing forward, he gave three thrusts, and three times he pierced the leather of a shoulder-belt, or the buff of a jacket, and three times a stream of blood followed.

During this time he had parried twenty blows with his left arm, and his cloak, which he had wrapped round it, was hacked to pieces.

The men changed their tactics; seeing two of their number fall and one retire, they renounced the sword, and some tried to strike with the butt-ends of their muskets, while others fired at him with pistols. He avoided the balls by jumping from side to side, or by stooping; for he seemed not only to see, hear, and act, but to divine every movement of his enemies, and appeared more than a man, or only man because he was mortal. Then he thought that to kill Monsoreau would be the best way to end the combat, and sought him with his eyes among his assailants, but he stood in the background, loading the pistols for his men. However, Bussy rushed forward, and found himself face to face with him. He, who held a loaded pistol, fired, and the ball, striking Bussy’s sword, broke it off six inches from the handle.

“Disarmed!” cried Monsoreau.

Bussy drew back, picking up his broken blade, and in an instant it was fastened to the handle with a handkerchief; and the battle recommenced, presenting the extraordinary spectacle of a man almost without arms, but also almost without wounds, keeping six enemies at bay, and with ten corpses at his feet for a rampart. When the fight began again, Monsoreau commenced to draw away the bodies, lest Bussy should snatch a sword from one of them. Bussy was surrounded; the blade of his sword bent and shook in his hand, and fatigue began to render his arm heavy, when suddenly, one of the bodies raising itself, pushed a rapier into his hand. It was Rémy’s last act of devotion. Bussy uttered a cry of joy, and threw away his broken sword: at the same moment Monsoreau fired at Rémy, and the ball entered his brain. This time he fell to rise no more.

Bussy uttered a cry. His strength seemed to return to him, and he whirled round his sword in a circle, cutting through a wrist at his right hand, and laying open a cheek at his left. Exhausted by the effort, he let his right arm fall for a moment, while with his left he tried to undraw the bolts behind him. During this second, he received a ball in his thigh, and two swords touched his side. But he had unfastened the bolt, and turned the key. Sublime with rage, he rushed on Monsoreau, and wounded him in the breast.

"Ah!" cried Bussy, "I begin to think I shall escape." The four men rushed on him, but they could not touch him, and were repulsed with blows. Monsoreau approached him twice more, and twice more was wounded. But three men seized hold of the handle of his sword, and tore it from him. He seized a stool of carved wood, and struck three blows with it, and knocked down two men; but it broke on the shoulder of the third, who sent his dagger into Bussy's breast.

Bussy seized him by the wrist, forced the dagger from him, and stabbed him to the heart. The last man jumped out of the window. Bussy made two steps to follow him, but Monsoreau, raising himself from the floor, where he was lying, wounded him in the leg with his dagger. The young man seized a sword which lay near, and plunged it so vigorously into his breast, that he pinned him to the floor.

"Ah!" cried Bussy, "I do not know if I shall live, but at least I shall have seen you die!"

Bussy dragged himself to the corridor, his wounds bleeding fearfully. He threw a last glance behind him. The moon was shining brilliantly, and its light penetrated this room inundated with blood, and illuminated the walls pierced by balls, and hacked by blows, and lighted up the pale faces of the dead, which even then seemed to preserve the fierce look of assassins.

Bussy, at the sight of this field of battle, peopled by him with slain, nearly dying as he was, experienced a feeling of pride. As he had intended, he had done what no man had done before him. There now remained to him only to fly.

But all was not over for the unfortunate young man. On arriving on the staircase, he saw arms shine in the courtyard; some one fired, and the ball pierced his shoulder. The court being guarded, he thought of the little window, where Diana had said she would sit to see the combat, and as quickly as he could he dragged himself there, and locked the door behind him; then he mounted the window with great difficulty, and measured the distance with his eyes, wondering if he could jump to the other side.

"Oh, I shall never have the strength!" cried he.

But at that moment he heard steps coming up the staircase; it was the second troop mounting. He collected all his strength, and made a spring; but his foot slipped, and he fell on the iron spikes, which caught his clothes, and he hung suspended.

He thought of his only friend.

"St. Luc!" cried he, "help! St. Luc!"

"Ah, it is you, M. de Bussy," answered a voice from behind some trees.

Bussy shuddered, for it was not the voice of St. Luc.

"St. Luc!" cried he again, "come to me! Diana is safe! I have killed Monsoreau!"

"Ah! Monsoreau is killed?" said the same voice.

"Yes." Then Bussy saw two men come out from behind the trees.

"Gentlemen," cried he, "in heaven's name, help an unfortunate nobleman, who may still escape if you aid him."

"What do you say, monseigneur?" said one.

"Imprudent!" said the other.

"Monseigneur," cried Bussy, who heard the conversation, "deliver me, and I will pardon you for betraying me."

"Do you hear?" said the duke.

"What do you order?"

"That you deliver him from his sufferings," said he, with a kind of laugh.

Bussy turned his head to look at the man who laughed at such a time, and at the same instant an arquebuse was discharged into his breast.

"Cursed assassin! oh, Diana!" murmured he, and fell back dead.

"Is he dead?" cried several men who, after forcing the door, appeared at the windows.

"Yes," said Aurilly. "But fly; remember that his highness the Duc d'Anjou was the friend and protector of M. de Bussy."

The men instantly made off, and when the sound of their steps was lost, the duke said, "Now, Aurilly, go up into the room and throw out of the window the body of Monsoreau."

Aurilly obeyed, and the blood fell over the clothes of the duke, who, however, raised the coat of the dead man, and drew out the paper which he had signed.

“This is all I wanted,” said he; “so now let us go.”

“And Diana?”

“Ma foi! I care no more for her. Untie her and St. Luc, and let them go.”

Aurilly disappeared.

“I shall not be king of France,” murmured the duke, “but, at all events, I shall not be beheaded for high treason.”

CHAPTER XCII.

HOW BROTHER GORENFLOT FOUND HIMSELF MORE THAN EVER BETWEEN A GALLOWS AND AN ABBEY.

The guard placed to catch the conspirators got none of them; they all escaped, as we have seen; therefore, when Crillon at last broke open the door, he found the place deserted and empty. In vain they opened doors and windows; in vain the king cried, “Chicot!” No one answered.

“Can they have killed him?” said he. “Mordieu! if they have they shall pay for it!”

Chicot did not reply, because he was occupied in beating M. de Mayenne, which gave him so much pleasure that he neither heard nor saw what was passing. However, when the duke had disappeared, he heard and recognized the royal voice.

“Here, my son, here!” he cried, trying at the same time to raise Gorenflot, who, beginning to recover himself, cried, “Monsieur Chicot!”

“You are not dead, then?”

“My good M. Chicot, you will not give me up to my enemies?”

“Wretch!”

Gorenflot began to howl and wring his hands.

“I, who have had so many good dinners with you,” continued Gorenflot; “I, who drank so well, that you always called me the king of the sponges; I, who loved so much the capons you used to order at the Corne d’Abondance, that I never left anything but the bones.”

This climax appeared sublime to Chicot, and determined him to clemency.

“Here they are! Mon Dieu,” cried Gorenflot, vainly trying to rise, “here they come, I am lost! Oh! good M. Chicot, help me!” and finding he could not rise, he threw himself with his face to the ground.

“Get up,” said Chicot.

“Do you pardon me?”

“We shall see.”

“You have beaten me so much.”

Chicot laughed; the poor monk fancied he had received the blows given to Mayenne.

"You laugh, M. Chicot."

"I do, animal."

"Then I shall live?"

"Perhaps."

"You would not laugh if your Gorenflot was about to die."

"It does not depend upon me, but on the king; he alone has the power of life and death."

At this moment lights appeared, and a crowd of embroidered dresses and swords shining in the light of the torches.

"Ah! Chicot! my dear Chicot, how glad I am to see you," cried the king.

"You hear, good M. Chicot," whispered Gorenflot, "this great prince is glad to see you."

"Well?"

"Well! in his happiness he would not refuse you a favor; ask for my pardon."

"What! from Herod?"

"Oh! silence, dear M. Chicot."

"Well! sire, how many have you caught?" said Chicot, advancing.

"Confiteor," said Gorenflot.

"Not one," said Crillon, "the traitors must have found some opening unknown to us."

"It is probable."

"But you saw them?" said the king.

"All."

"You recognized them, no doubt?"

"No, sire."

"Not recognized them?"

"That is to say, I recognized only one."

"Who was that?"

"M. de Mayenne."

"M. de Mayenne, to whom you owed----"

"Yes, sire; we are quits."

"Ah! tell me about that, Chicot."

"Afterwards, my son; now let us think of the present."

"Confiteor," repeated Gorenflot.

"Ah! you have made a prisoner," said Crillon, laying his large hand on the monk's shoulder.

Chicot was silent for a minute, leaving Gorenflot a prey to all the anguish of such profound terror that he nearly fainted again.

At last Chicot said, "Sire, look well at this monk."

"The preacher Gorenflot," cried Henri.

"Confiteor, confiteor," repeated he.

"Himself," said Chicot.

"He who----"

"Just so," interrupted Chicot.

"Ah, ah!"

Gorenflot shook with terror, for he heard the sounds of swords clashing.

"Wait," said Chicot, "the king must know all." And, taking him aside, "My son," said he, "thank God for having permitted this holy man to be born thirty-five years ago, for it is he who has saved us all."

"How so?"

"It was he who recounted to me the whole plot, from the alpha to the omega."

"When?"

"About a week ago; so that if ever your majesty's enemies catch him he will be a dead man."

Gorenflot heard only the last words, "a dead man"; and he covered his face with his hands.

"Worthy man," said the king, casting a benevolent look on the mass of flesh before him, "we will cover him with our protection."

Gorenflot perceived the nature of the look, and began to feel relieved.

"You will do well, my king," said Chicot.

"What must we do with him?"

"I think that as long as he remains in Paris he will be in danger."

"If I gave him guards."

Gorenflot heard this proposition of Henri's. "Well!" thought he, "I shall get off with imprisonment; I prefer that to beating, if they only feed me well."

"Oh! no, that is needless," said Chicot, "if you will allow me to take him with me."

"Where?"

"Home."

“Well! take him, and then return to the Louvre.”

“Get up, reverend father,” said Chicot.

“He mocks me,” murmured Gorenflot.

“Get up, brute,” whispered Chicot, giving him a sly kick.

“Ah! I have deserved it,” cried Gorenflot.

“What does he say?” asked the king.

“Sire, he is thinking over all his fatigues and his tortures, and when I promised him your protection, he said, ‘Oh! I have well merited that.’“

“Poor devil!” said the king, “take good care of him.”

“Oh! be easy, sire, he will want for nothing with me.”

“Oh! M. Chicot, dear M. Chicot,” cried Gorenflot, “where am I to be taken to?”

“You will know soon. Meanwhile, monster of iniquity, thank his majesty.”

“What for?”

“Thank him, I tell you.”

“Sire,” stammered Gorenflot, “since your gracious majesty----”

“Yes,” interrupted Henri, “I know all you did for me, in your journey from Lyons, on the evening of the League, and again to-day. Be easy, you shall be recompensed according to your merits.”

Gorenflot sighed.

“Where is Panurge?” said Chicot.

“In the stable, poor beast.”

“Well! go and fetch him, and return to me.”

“Yes, M. Chicot.”

And the monk went away as fast as he could, much astonished not to be followed by guards.

“Now, my son,” said Chicot, “keep twenty men for your own escort, and send ten with M. Crillon to the Hôtel d’Anjou and let them bring your-brother here.”

“Why?”

“That he may not escape a second time.”

“Did my brother----”

“Have you repented following my advice to-day?”

“No, par le mordieu.”

“Then do what I tell you.”

Henri gave the order to Crillon, who set off at once.

"And you?" said Henri.

"Oh! I am waiting for my saint."

"And you will rejoin me at the Louvre?"

"In an hour; go, my son."

Henri went; and Chicot, proceeding to the stables, met Gorenflot coming out on his ass. The poor devil had not an idea of endeavoring to escape from the fate that he thought awaited him.

"Come, come," said Chicot, "we are waited for." Gorenflot made no resistance, but he shed many tears.

CHAPTER XCIII.

WHERE CHICOT GUESSES WHY D'EPERNON HAD BLOOD ON HIS FEET AND NONE IN HIS CHEEKS.

The king, returning to the Louvre, found his friends peacefully asleep, except D'Epernon, whose bed was empty.

"Not come in yet; how imprudent," murmured the king to Chicot, who had also returned, and was standing with them by their beds. "The fool; having to fight to-morrow with a man like Bussy, and to take no more care than this. Let them seek M. d'Epernon," said he, going out of the room, and speaking to an usher.

"M. d'Epernon is just coming in, sire," replied the man.

Indeed, D'Epernon came softly along, thinking to glide unperceived to his room.

On seeing the king he looked confused.

"Ah! here you are at last," said Henri; "come here and look at your friends. They are wise! they understand the importance of the duel to-morrow; but you, instead of praying and sleeping like them, have been running about the streets. Corbleu; how pale you are! What will you look like to-morrow?"

D'Epernon was indeed pale, but at the king's remark he colored.

"Now go to bed," continued Henri, "and sleep if you can."

"Why not?"

"Much time you will have. You are to fight at daybreak; and at this time of year the sun rises at four. It is now two; you have but two hours to sleep."

"Two hours well employed go a long way."

"You will sleep, then?"

"Well, sire!"

"I do not believe it."

"Why not?"

"Because you are agitated; you think of to-morrow."

"I will sleep, sire, if your majesty will only let me."

"That is just," said Chicot.

Indeed D’Epernon undressed and got into bed, with a calm and satisfied look, that seemed, both to the king and Chicot to augur well.

“He is as brave as a Cæsar,” said the king.

“So brave that I do not understand it,” said Chicot.

“See, he sleeps already.”

Chicot approached the bed to look.

“Oh!” said he.

“What is it?”

“Look,” and he pointed to D’Epernon’s boots.

“Blood!”

“He has been walking in blood.”

“Can he be wounded?” said the king, anxiously.

“Bah! he would have told us; and, besides, unless he had been wounded like Achilles in the heel----”

“See, the sleeve of his doublet is also spotted. What can have happened to him?”

“Perhaps he has killed some one to keep his hand in.”

“It is singular. Well, to-morrow, at least----”

“To-day, you mean.”

“Well! to-day I shall be tranquil.”

“Why so?”

“Because those cursed Angevins will be killed.”

“You think so, Henri?”

“I am sure of it; my friends are brave.”

“I never heard that the Angevins were cowards.”

“No, doubtless; but my friends are so strong; look at Schomberg’s arm; what muscle!”

“Ah! if you saw Autragues’s! Is that all that reassures you?”

“No; come, and I will show you something.”

“Where?”

“In my room.”

“And this something makes you confident of victory?”

“Yes.”

“Come, then.”

“Wait, and let me take leave of them. Adieu, my good friends,” murmured the king, as he stooped and imprinted a light kiss on each of their foreheads.

Chicot was not superstitious, but as he looked on, his imagination pictured a living man making his adieux to the dead.

"It is singular," thought he. "I never felt so before--poor fellows."

As soon as the king quitted the room, D'Epernon opened his eyes; and, jumping out of bed, began to efface, as well as he could, the spots of blood on his clothes. Then he went to bed again.

As for Henri, he conducted Chicot to his room, and opened a long ebony coffer lined with white satin.

"Look!" said he.

"Swords!"

"Yes! but blessed swords, my dear friend."

"Blessed! by whom?"

"By our holy father the Pope, who granted me this favor. To send this box to Rome and back, cost me twenty horses and four men."

"Are they sharp?"

"Doubtless; but their great merit is that they are blessed."

"Yes, I know that; but still I should like to be sure they are sharp."

"Pagan!"

"Let us talk of something else."

"Well, be quick."

"You want to sleep?"

"No, to pray."

"In that case we will talk. Have you sent for M. d'Anjou?"

"Yes, he is waiting below."

"What are you going to do with him?"

"Throw him into the Bastile."

"That is very wise: only choose a dungeon that is deep and safe--such for example, as those which were occupied by the Constable de St. Paul, or Armagnac."

"Oh! be easy."

"I know where they sell good black velvet, my son."

"Chicot! he is my brother."

"Ah! true; the family mourning is violet. Shall you speak to him?"

"Yes, certainly, if only to show him that his plots are discovered."

"Hum!"

"Do you disapprove?"

"In your place I should cut short the conversation, and double the imprisonment."

"Let them bring here the Duc d'Anjou," said the king.

A minute after the duke entered, very pale and disarmed. Crillon followed him.

"Where did you find him?" asked the king.

"Sire, his highness was not at home, but I took possession of his hotel in the king's name, and soon after he returned, and we arrested him without resistance."

"That is fortunate." Then, turning to the prince, he said, "Where were you, monsieur?"

"Wherever I was, sire, be sure it was on your business."

"I doubt it."

François bowed.

"Come, tell me where you were while your accomplices were being arrested."

"My accomplices!"

"Yes; your accomplices."

"Sire, your majesty is making some mistake."

"Oh! this time you shall not escape me; your measure of crime is full."

"Sire, be moderate; there is certainly some one who slanders me to you."

"Wretch! you shall die of hunger in a cell of the Bastile!"

"I bow to your orders, whatever they may be."

"Hypocrite! But where were you?"

"Sire, I was serving your majesty, and working for the glory and tranquillity of your reign."

"Really! your audacity is great."

"Bah!" said Chicot, "tell us about it, my prince; it must be curious."

"Sire, I would tell your majesty, had you treated me as a brother, but as you have treated me as a criminal, I will let the event speak for itself."

Then, bowing profoundly to the king, he turned to Crillon and the other officers, and said, "Now, which of you gentlemen will conduct the first prince of the blood to the Bastile?"

Chicot had been reflecting, and a thought struck him.

"Ah!" murmured he, "I believe I guess now why M. d'Epernon had so much blood on his feet and so little in his cheeks."

CHAPTER XCIV.

THE MORNING OF THE COMBAT.

The king did not sleep all night, and very early in the morning he set off, accompanied by Chicot, to examine the ground where the combat was to take place.

"Quelus will be exposed to the sun," said he; "he will have it at his right, just in his only eye; whereas Maugiron, who has good eyes, will be in the shade. That is badly managed. As for Schomberg, his place is good; but Quelus, my poor Quelus!"

"Do not torment yourself so, my king, it is useless."

"And D'Epernon; I am really unjust not to think of him; he, who is to fight Bussy. Look at his place, Chicot, he who will have to give way constantly, for Bussy is like a tiger, he has a tree on his right and a ditch on his left."

"Bah!" said Chicot, "I am not concerned about D'Epernon."

"You are wrong; he will be killed."

"Not he; be sure he has taken precautions."

"How so?"

"He will not fight."

"Did you not hear what he said before going to bed?"

"That is just why I think he will not fight."

"Incredulous and distrustful!"

"I know my Gasçon, Henri; but if you will take my advice, you will return to the Louvre."

"Do you think I can stay there during the combat?"

"I do not wish you not to love your friends, but I do wish you not to leave M. d'Anjou alone at the Louvre."

"Is not Crillon there?"

"Crillon is only a buffalo--a rhinoceros--a wild boar; while your brother is the serpent, whose strength lies in his cunning."

"You are right; I should have sent him to the Bastile."

When Chicot and the king entered, the young men were being dressed by their valets.

“Good morning, gentlemen,” said he; “I find you all in good spirits, I hope?”

“Yes, sire,” said Quelus.

“You look gloomy, Maugiron.”

“Sire, I am superstitious, and I had bad dreams last night, so I am drinking a little wine to keep up my spirits.”

“My friend, remember that dreams are the impressions of the previous day, and have no influence on the morrow.”

“Yes, sire,” said D’Epernon, “I also had bad dreams last night; but, in spite of that, my hand is steady and fit for action.”

“Yes,” said Chicot, “you dreamed you had blood on your boots; that is not a bad dream, for it signifies that you will be a conqueror, like Alexander or Cæsar.”

“My friends,” said Henri, “remember you fight only for honor; the past night has seated me firmly on my throne, therefore do not think of me; and, above all things, no false bravery; you wish to kill your enemies, not to die yourselves.”

The gentlemen were now ready, and it only remained to take leave of their master.

“Do you go on horseback?” asked he.

“No, sire, on foot.”

They each kissed his hand, and D’Epernon said, “Sire, bless my sword.”

“Not so, D’Epernon; give tip your sword--I have a better one for each of you. Chicot, bring them here.”

“No, sire, send your captain of the guards; I am but a Pagan, and they might lose their virtue by coming through my hands.”

“What are these swords, sire?” said Schomberg.

“Italian swords, my son, forged at Milan.”

“Thanks, sire.”

“Now go, it is time,” said the king, who could hardly control his emotion.

“Sire,” said Quelus, “shall we not have your majesty’s presence to encourage us?”

“No, that would not be right; you will be supposed to fight without any one being cognizant of it, and without my sanction. Let it appear to be the result of a private quarrel.”

When they were gone, the king threw himself down in tears.

“Now,” said Chicot, “I will go to see this duel, for I have an idea that something curious will happen with regard to D’Epernon.” And he went off.

Henri shut himself up in his own room, first saying to Crillon, who knew what was to take place, “If we are conquerors, Crillon, come and tell me; if not, strike three blows on the door.”

CHAPTER XCV.

THE FRIENDS OF BUSSY.

The friends of the Duc d’Anjou had passed as good and tranquil a night as those of the king, although their master had not taken the same care of them. After a good supper, they had all retired to sleep at Antragues’s house, which was nearest to the field of battle. Antragues, before supper, had gone to take leave of a little milliner whom he adored, Ribeirac had written to his mother, and Livarot had made his will. They were up early in the morning, and dressed themselves in red breeches and socks, that their enemies might not see their blood, and they had doublets of gray silk. They wore shoes without heels, and their pages carried their swords, that their arms might not be fatigued.

The weather was splendid, for love, war, or walking; and the sun gilded the roofs, on which the night dew was sparkling. The streets were dry, and the air delightful.

Before leaving the house, the young men had sent to the Hôtel d’Anjou to inquire for Bussy, and had received a reply that he had gone out the evening before and had not yet returned.

“Oh!” said Antragues, “I know where he is; the king ordered a grand chase at Compiègne, and M. de Monsoreau was to set off yesterday. It is all right, gentlemen; he is nearer the ground than we are, and may be there before us. We will call for him in passing.”

The streets were empty as they went along; no one was to be seen except peasants coming from Montreuil or Vincennes, with milk or vegetables.

The young men went on in silence until they reached the Rue St. Antoine.

Then, with a smile, they glanced at Monsoreau’s house.

“One could see well from there, and I am sure poor Diana will be more than once at the window,” said Antragues.

“I think she must be there already,” said Ribeirac, “for the window is open.”

“True, but what can be the meaning of that ladder before it?”

“It is odd.”

“We are not the only ones to wonder,” said Livarot, “see those peasants, who are stopping their carts to look.”

The young men arrived under the balcony. “M. de Monsoreau,” they cried, “do you intend to be present at our combat? if so, be quick, for we wish to arrive first.”

They waited, but no one answered.

“Did you put up that ladder?” asked Antragues of a man who was examining the ground.

“God forbid!” replied he.

“Why so?”

“Look up.”

“Blood!” cried Ribeirac.

“The door has been forced,” said Antragues; and seizing the ladder, he was on the balcony in a moment.

“What is it?” cried the others, seeing him turn pale.

A terrible cry was his only answer. Livarot mounted behind him. “Corpses! death everywhere!” cried he. And they both entered the room. It bore horrible traces of the terrible combat of the previous night. A river of blood flowed over the room; and the curtains were hanging in strips from sword cuts.

“Oh! poor Rémy!” cried Antragues, suddenly.

“Dead!”

“Yes.”

“But a regiment of troopers must have passed through the room,” cried Livarot. Then, seeing the door of the corridor open, and traces of blood indicating that one or more of the combatants had also passed through there, he followed it. Meanwhile, Antragues went into the adjoining room; there also blood was everywhere, and this blood led to the window. He leaned out and looked into the little garden. The iron spikes still held the livid corpse of the unhappy Bussy. At this sight, it was not a cry, but a yell, that Antragues uttered. Livarot ran to see what it was, and Ribeirac followed.

“Look!” said Antragues, “Bussy dead! Bussy assassinated and thrown out of window.”

They ran down.

“It is he,” cried Livarot.

“His wrist is cut.”

“He has two balls in his breast.”

"He is full of wounds."

"Ah! poor Bussy! we will have vengeance!"

Turning round they came against a second corpse.

"Monsoreau!" cried Livarot.

"What! Monsoreau also."

"Yes, pierced through and through."

"Ah! they have assassinated all our friends."

"And his wife? Madame de Monsoreau!" cried Antragues; but no one answered.

"Bussy, poor Bussy."

"Yes, they wished to get rid of the most formidable of us all."

"It is cowardly! it is infamous!"

"We will tell the duke."

"No," said Antragues, "let us not charge any one with the care of our vengeance. Look, my friends, at the noble face of the bravest of men; see his blood, that teaches that he never left his vengeance to any other person. Bussy! we will act like you, and we will avenge you."

Then, drawing his sword, he dipped it in Bussy's blood.

"Bussy," said he, "I swear on your corpse, that this blood shall be washed off by the blood of your enemies."

"Bussy," cried the others, "we swear to kill them or die."

"No mercy," said Antragues.

"But we shall be but three."

"True, but we have assassinated no one, and God will strengthen the innocent. Adieu, Bussy!"

"Adieu, Bussy!" repeated the others; and they went out, pale but resolute, from that cursed house, around which a crowd had begun to collect.

Arriving on the ground, they found their opponents waiting for them.

"Gentlemen," said Quelus, rising and bowing, "we have had the honor of waiting for you."

"Excuse us," said Antragues, "but we should have been here before you, but for one of our companions."

"M. de Bussy," said D'Epernon, "I do not see him. Where is he?"

"We can wait for him," said Schomberg.

"He will not come."

All looked thunderstruck; but D'Epernon exclaimed:

"Ah! the brave man par excellence--is he, then, afraid?"

“That cannot be,” said Quelus.

“You are right, monsieur,” said Livarot.

“And why will he not come?”

“Because he is dead.”

“Dead!” cried they all, but D’Epernon turned rather pale.

“And dead because he has been assassinated,” said Antragues. “Did you not know it, gentlemen?”

“No; how should we?”

“Besides, is it certain?”

Antragues drew his sword. “So certain that here is his blood,” said he.

“M. de Bussy assassinated!”

“His blood cries for vengeance! do you not hear it, gentlemen?” said Ribeirac.

“What do you mean?”

“‘Seek whom the crime profits,’ the law says,” replied Ribeirac.

“Ah! gentlemen, will you explain yourselves?” cried Maugiron.

“That is just what we have come for.”

“Quick! our swords are in our hands!” said D’Epernon.

“Oh! you are in a great hurry, M. le Gascon; you did not crow so loud when we were four against four!”

“Is it our fault, if you are only three?”

“Yes, it is your fault; he is dead because you preferred him lying in his blood to standing here; he is dead, with his wrist cut, that that wrist might no longer hold a sword; he is dead, that you might not see the lightning of those eyes, which dazzled you all. Do you understand me? am I clear?”

“Enough, gentlemen!” said Quelus. “Retire, M. d’Epernon! we will fight three against three. These gentlemen shall see if we are men to profit by a misfortune which we deplore as much as themselves. Come, gentlemen,” added the young mall, throwing his hat behind him, and raising his left hand, while he whirled his sword with the right, “God is our judge if we are assassins!”

“Ah! I hated you before,” cried Schomberg, “and now I execrate you!”

“On your guard, gentlemen!” cried Antragues.

“With doublets or without?” said Schomberg.

“Without doublets, without shirts; our breasts bare, our hearts uncovered!”

The young men threw off their doublets and shirts.

“I have lost my dagger,” said Quelus; “it must have fallen on the road.”

“Or else you left it at M. de Monsoreau’s, in the Place de la Bastile,” said Antragues.

Quelus gave a cry of rage, and drew his sword.

“But he has no dagger, M. Antragues,” cried Chicot, who had just arrived.

“So much the worse for him; it is not my fault,” said Antragues.

CHAPTER XCVI.

THE COMBAT.

The place where this terrible combat was to take place was sequestered and shaded by trees. It was generally frequented only by children, who came to play there during the day, or by drunkards or robbers, who made a sleeping-place of it by night.

Chicot, his heart palpitating, although he was not of a very tender nature, seated himself before the lackeys and pages, on a wooden balustrade.

He did not love the Angevins, and detested the minions, but they were all brave young men, and in their veins flowed a generous blood, which he was probably destined to see flow before long.

D’Epernon made a last bravado, “What! you are all afraid of me?” he cried.

“Hold your tongue,” said Antragues.

“Come away, bravest of the brave,” said Chicot, “or else you will lose another pair of shoes.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that there will soon be blood on the ground, and that you will walk in it, as you did last night.”

D’Epernon became deadly pale, and, moving away, he seated himself at some distance from Chicot.

The combat began as five o’clock struck, and for a few minutes nothing was heard but the clashing of swords; not a blow was struck. At last Schomberg touched Ribeirac in the shoulder, and the blood gushed out; Schomberg tried to repeat the blow, but Ribeirac struck up his sword, and wounded him in the side.

“Now let us rest a few seconds, if you like,” said Ribeirac.

Quelus, having no dagger, was at a great disadvantage; for he was obliged to parry with his left arm, and, as it was bare, on each occasion it cost him a wound. His hand was soon bleeding in several places, and Antragues had also wounded him in the breast; but at each wound he repeated, “It is nothing.”

Livarot and Maugiron were still unwounded.

Ribeirac and Schomberg recommenced; the former was pierced through the breast, and Schomberg was wounded in the neck.

Ribeirac was mortally wounded, and Schomberg rushed on him and gave him another; but he, with his right hand, seized his opponent’s, and with his left plunged his dagger into his heart.

Schomberg fell back, dragging Ribeirac with him. Livarot ran to aid Ribeirac to disengage himself from the grasp of his adversary, but was closely pursued by Maugiron, who cut open his head with a blow of his sword. Livarot let his sword drop, and fell on his knees; then Maugiron hastened to give him another wound, and he fell altogether.

Quelus and Maugiron remained against Antragues. Quelus was bleeding, but from slight wounds.

Antragues comprehended his danger; he had not the least wound, but he began to feel tired, so he pushed aside Quelus’ sword and jumped over a barrier; but at the same moment, Maugiron attacked him behind; Antragues turned, and Quelus profited by this movement to get under the barrier.

“He is lost!” thought Chicot.

“Vive le roi!” cried D’Epernon.

“Silence, if you please, monsieur,” said Antragues. At this instant Livarot, of whom no one was thinking, rose on his knees, hideous from the blood with which he was covered, and plunged his dagger between the shoulders of Maugiron, who fell, crying out, “Mon Dieu! I am killed!”

Livarot fell back again, fainting.

“M. de Quelus,” said Antragues, “you are a brave man; yield--I offer you your life.”

“And why yield?”

“You are wounded, and I am not.”

“Vive le roi!” cried Quelus; “I have still my sword!” And he rushed on Antragues, who parried the thrust, and, seizing his arm, wrested his sword from him, saying, “Now you have it no longer.”

“Oh, a sword!” cried Quelus; and, bounding like a tiger on Antragues, he threw his arms round him.

Antragues struck him with his dagger again and again, but Quelus managed to seize his hands, and twisted round him like a serpent, with arms and legs. Antragues, nearly suffocated, reeled and fell, but on the unfortunate Quelus. He managed to disengage himself, for Quelus' powers were failing him, and, leaning on one arm, gave him a last blow.

"Vive le r----" said Quelus, and that was all. The silence and terror of death reigned everywhere.

Antragues rose, covered with blood, but it was that of his enemy.

D'Epernon made the sign of the cross, and fled as if he were pursued by demons.

Chicot ran and raised Quelus, whose blood was pouring out from nineteen wounds.

The movement roused him, and he opened his eyes.

"Antragues," said he, "on my honor, I am innocent of the death of Bussy."

"Oh! I believe you, monsieur," cried Antragues, much moved.

"Fly!" murmured Quelus; "the king will never forgive you."

"I cannot abandon you thus, even to escape the scaffold."

"Save yourself, young man," said Chicot; "do not tempt Providence twice in one day."

Antragues approached Ribeirac, who still breathed.

"Well?" asked he.

"We are victors," said Antragues, in a low tone, not to offend Quelus.

"Thanks," said Ribeirac; "now go."

And he fainted again.

Antragues picked up his own sword, which he had dropped, then that of Quelus, which he presented to him. A tear shone in the eyes of the dying man. "We might have been friends," he murmured.

"Now fly," said Chicot; "you are worthy of being saved."

"And my companions?"

"I will take care of them, as of the king's friends."

Antragues wrapped himself in a cloak which his squire handed to him, so that no one might see the blood with which he was covered, and, leaving the dead and wounded, he disappeared through the Porte St. Antoine.

CHAPTER XCVII.

THE END.

The king, pale with anxiety, and shuddering at the slightest noise, employed himself in conjecturing, with the experience of a practised man, the time that it would take for the antagonists to meet and that the combat would last.

“Now,” he murmured first, “they are crossing the Rue St. Antoine--now they are entering the field--now they have begun.” And at these words, the poor king, trembling, began to pray.

Rising again in a few minutes, he cried:

“If Quelus only remembers the thrust I taught him! As for Schomberg, he is so cool that he ought to kill Ribeirac; Maugiron, also, should be more than a match for Livarot. But D’Epernon, he is lost; fortunately he is the one of the four whom I love least. But if Bussy, the terrible Bussy, after killing him, falls on the others! Ah, my poor friends!”

“Sire!” said Crillon, at the door.

“What! already?”

“Sire, I have no news but that the Duc d’Anjou begs to speak to your majesty.”

“What for?”

“He says that the moment has come for him to tell you what service he rendered your majesty, and that what he has to tell you will calm a part of your fears.”

“Well, let him come.”

At this moment they heard a voice crying, “I must speak to the king at once!”

The king recognized the voice, and opened the door.

“Here, St. Luc!” cried he. “What is it? But, mon Dieu! what is the matter? Are they dead?”

Indeed, St. Luc, pale, without hat or sword, and spotted with blood, rushed into the king’s room.

“Sire!” cried he, “vengeance! I ask for vengeance!”

“My poor St. Luc, what is it? You seem in despair.”

“Sire, one of your subjects, the bravest, noblest, has been murdered this night--traitorously murdered!”

“Of whom do you speak?”

“Sire, you do not love him, I know; but he was faithful, and, if need were, would have shed all his blood for your majesty, else he would not have been my friend.”

“Ah!” said the king, who began to understand; and something like a gleam of joy passed over his face.

“Vengeance, sire, for M. de Bussy!”

“M. de Bussy?”

“Yes, M. de Bussy, whom twenty assassins poniarded last night. He killed fourteen of them.”

“M. de Bussy dead?”

“Yes, sire.”

“Then he does not fight this morning?”

St. Luc cast a reproachful glance on the king, who turned away his head, and, in doing so, saw Crillon still standing at the door. He signed to him to bring in the duke.

“No, sire, he will not fight,” said St. Luc; “and that is why I ask, not for vengeance--I was wrong to call it so--but for justice. I love my king, and am, above all things, jealous of his honor, and I think that it is a deplorable service which they have rendered to your majesty by killing M. de Bussy.”

The Duc d’Anjou had just entered, and St. Luc’s words had enlightened the king as to the service his brother had boasted of having rendered him.

“Do you know what they will say?” continued St. Luc. “They will say, if your friends conquer, that it is because they first murdered Bussy.”

“And who will dare to say that?”

“Pardieu! everyone,” said Crillon.

“No, monsieur, they shall not say that,” replied the king, “for you shall point out the assassin.”

“I will name him, sire, to clear your majesty from so heinous an accusation,” said St. Luc.

“Well! do it.”

The Duc d’Anjou stood quietly by.

“Sire,” continued St. Luc, “last night they laid a snare for Bussy, while he visited a woman who loved him; the husband, warned by a traitor, came to his house with a troop of assassins; they were everywhere--in the street--in the courtyard, even in the garden."

In spite of his power over himself, the duke grew pale at these last words.

"Bussy fought like a lion, sire, but numbers overwhelmed him, and--"

"And he was killed," interrupted the king, "and justly; I will certainly not revenge an adulterer."

"Sire, I have not finished my tale. The unhappy man, after having defended himself for more than half an hour in the room, after having triumphed over his enemies, escaped, bleeding, wounded, and mutilated: he only wanted some one to lend him a saving hand, which I would have done had I not been seized by his assassins, and bound, and gagged. Unfortunately, they forgot to take away my sight as well as my speech, for I saw two men approach the unlucky Bussy, who was hanging on the iron railings. I heard him entreat them for help, for in these two men he had the right to reckon on two friends. Well, sire, it is horrible to relate--it was still more horrible to see and hear--one ordered him to be shot, and the other obeyed."

"And you know the assassins?" cried the king, moved in spite of himself.

"Yes," said St. Luc, and turning to the prince, with an expression of intense hatred, he cried, "the assassin, sire, was the prince, his friend."

The duke stood perfectly quiet and answered, "Yes, M. de St. Luc is right; it was I, and your majesty will appreciate my action, for M. de Bussy was my servant; but this morning he was to fight against your majesty."

"You lie, assassin!" cried St. Luc. "Bussy, full of wounds, his hands cut to pieces, a ball through his shoulder, and hanging suspended on the iron trellis-work, might have inspired pity in his most cruel enemies; they would have succored him. But you, the murderer of La Mole and of Coconnas, you killed Bussy, as you have killed, one after another, all your friends. You killed Bussy, not because he was the king's enemy, but because he was the confidant of your secrets. Ah! Monsoreau knew well your reason for this crime."

"Cordieu!" cried Crillon, "why am I not king?"

"They insult me before you, brother," said the duke, pale with terror.

"Leave us, Crillon," said the king. The officer obeyed.

"Justice, sire, justice!" cried St. Luc again.

"Sire," said the duke, "will you punish me for having served your majesty's friends this morning?"

"And I," cried St. Luc, "I say that the cause which you espouse is accursed, and will be pursued by the anger of God. Sire, when your brother protects our friends, woe to them." The king shuddered.

Then they heard hasty steps and voices, followed by a deep silence; and then, as if a voice from heaven came to confirm St. Luc's words, three blows were struck slowly and solemnly on the door by the vigorous arm of Crillon. Henri turned deadly pale.

"Conquered," cried he; "my poor friends!"

"What did I tell you, sire?" cried St. Luc. "See how murder succeeds."

But the king saw nothing, heard nothing; he buried his face in his hands, and murmured. "Oh! my poor friends; who will tell me about them?"

"I, sire," said Chicot.--"Well!" cried Henri.

"Two are dead, and the third is dying."

"Which is the third?"--"Quelus."

"Where is he?"--"At the Hôtel Boissy."

The king said no more, but rushed from the room.

St. Luc had taken Diana home to his wife, and this had kept him from appearing sooner at the Louvre. Jeanne passed three days and nights watching her through the most frightful delirium. On the fourth day, Jeaune, overcome by fatigue, went to take a little rest: two hours after, when she returned, Diana was gone.

Quelus died at the Hôtel Boissy, in the king's arms, after lingering for thirty days.

Henri was inconsolable. He raised three magnificent tombs for his friends, on which their effigies were sculptured, life-size, in marble. He had innumerable masses said for them, and prayed for their souls himself night and morning. For three months Chicot never left his master. In September, Chicot received the following letter, dated from the Priory of Beaume:

"DEAR M. CHICOT--The air is soft in this place, and the vintage promises to be good this year. They say that the king, whose life I saved, still grieves much. Bring him to the priory, dear M. Chicot; we will give him wine of 1550, which I have discovered in my cellar, and which is enough to make one forget the greatest grief; for I find in the Holy Writ these words, 'Good wine rejoices the heart of man.' It is in Latin. I will show it you. Come, then, dear M. Chicot; come, with the king, M. d'Epernon, and M. de St. Luc, and we will fatten them all.

"The reverend prior,

“DOM GORENFLOT,

“Your humble servant and friend.

“P.S.--Tell the king that I have not yet had time to pray for the souls of his friends; but when the vintage is over; I shall not fail to do so.”

“Amen,” said Chicot; “here are poor devils well recommended to Heaven.”

THE END

JOSEPH BALSAMO

OR

MEMOIRS OF A PHYSICIAN

Anonymous translation, 1847

Published in 1846, this novel forms the first part of a series that concerns the life and personality of the Count of Cagliostro, along with *The Queen's Necklace*, *Ange Pitou* and *The Countess de Charny*. This first volume of the series follows the machinations of the eponymous character who wants to bring happiness to men by undermining the monarchies of the world, seeking to establish governments based on popular sovereignty. Balsamo is an enigmatic protagonist, who is portrayed as an alchemist, conspirator and Freemason, in quest of bringing down the French monarchy.

Joseph Balsamo played by Jean Marais in the 1971 television adaptation

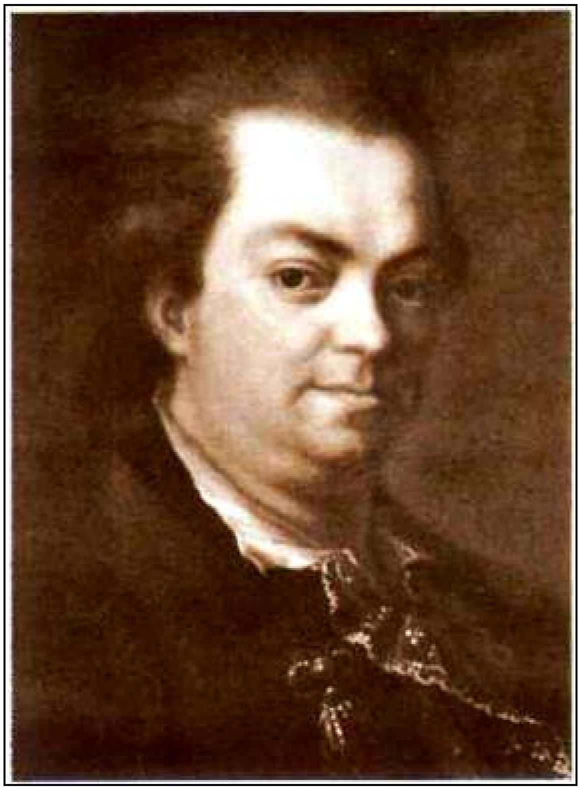
The Count of Cagliostro

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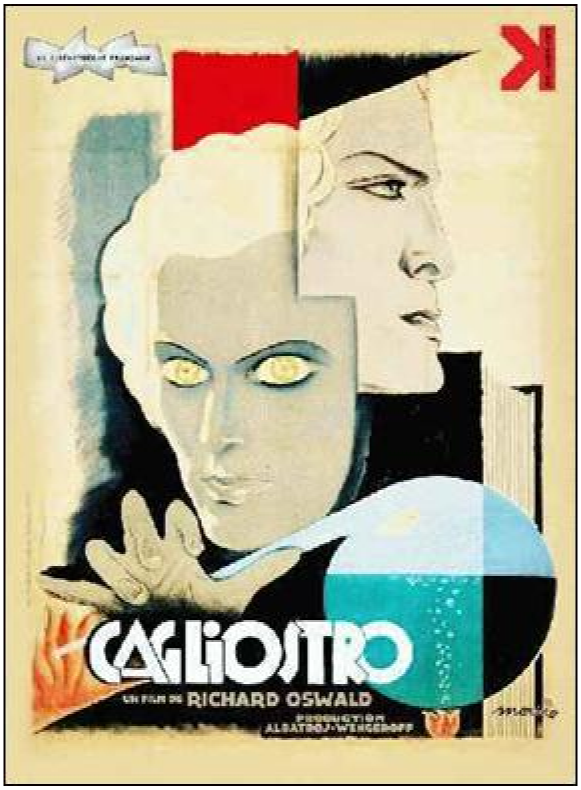
CAGLIOSTRO
UN FILM DE RICHARD OSWALD
PRODUCTION
ALBATROS-WENGEROFF

The 1929 film adaptation

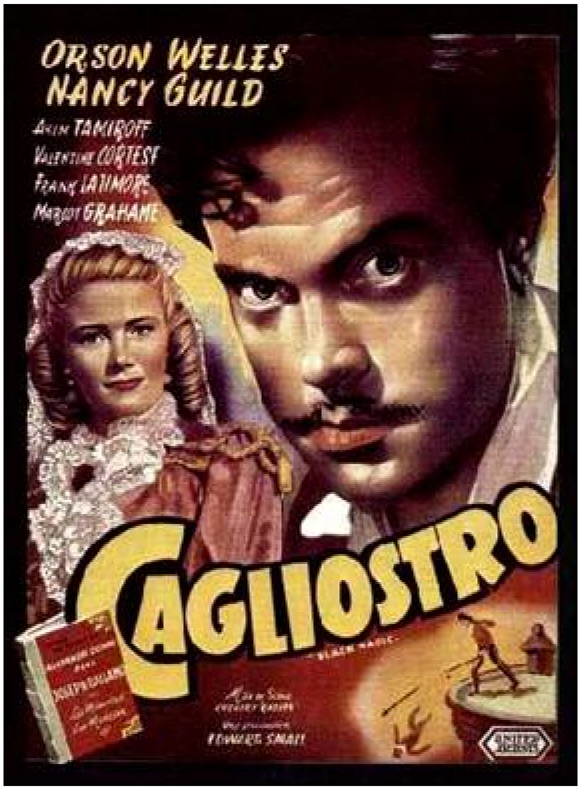
ORSON WELLES
NANCY GUILD
AKIM TAMIROFF
VALENTINE CORTESE
FRANK LATIMORE
MARGOT GRAHAME
CAGLIOSTRO
"BLACK MAGIC"
EDWARD SMALL

The 1949 movie version

VOLUME I.

INTRODUCTORY.

NEAR the source of the Seltz, on the left bank of the Rhine, some leagues from the imperial city of Worms, there begins a range of mountains, the scattered and rugged summits of which disappear northward like a herd of wild buffaloes vanishing in a mist.

These mountains, which from their lofty summits overlook an almost desert region, and seem but to form an attendant train to one which is their chief, have each a peculiar figure, and each bears a name indicating some tradition connected with it. One is the King's Chair — another the Wild-rose Stone; this the Falcon's Rock — that the Serpent's Crest.

The highest of all, which raises to the clouds its granite top, girt with a crown of ruins, is Mont Tonnerre.

When evening deepens the shadows of the lofty oaks — when the last rays of the sun die away on the peaks of this family of giants, we might imagine that silence descended from these sublime heights to the plain — that an invisible hand unfolded from their declivities the dark blue veil through which we see the stars, to wrap it over the world, wearied with the toil and the noise of day. Waking gives place to sleep, and all the tenants of earth and air repose.

Even then is not heard the stream of the Seltz, pursuing its mysterious course by the fir-trees on its banks, stopping not by day or night, for it must hurry on to the Rhine, which to it *is* eternity. The sands of its current are so smooth, its reeds so flexible, its rocks so richly clothed with moss, that not one of its waves murmurs, from Morsheim, where it rises, to Freewenheim, where it finishes its course.

A little above its source, between Albisheim and Kircheim-Poland, a road, winding deep between two rugged walls of rock, leads to Danenfels. Beyond Danenfels the road becomes a path; it narrows, is lost, and the eye seeks in vain anything on which to rest, except the slopes of Mont Tonnerre, whose lightning-blasted summit is hidden by a belt of trees impenetrable to the eye.

In fact, once under those trees, leafy as the oaks of Dodona of old, the traveler may in open day continue his way unseen by any one on the plain below. Were his horse hung with more bells than any mule in Spain, not a sound would be heard; were his trappings of gold and jewels like those of an emperor, not a ray from them would pierce through the foliage, so powerful is the density of the forest in extinguishing sound, and its darkness in dimming the brightest colors.

Even at the present day, when our highest mountains have become mere observatories for everyday tourists, on whose lips the most fearful of the legends of poetry call up a smile of doubt, even now this solitude has its terrors. A few miserable looking houses, outposts of neighboring villages, appear here and there, but at a distance from the magic belt, to show that man is to be found in that region. Their inhabitants are millers, who carry their flour to Rockenhausen or Alzey, or shepherds who herd their flocks around the mountain, they and their dogs trembling often to hear some enormous fir-tree fall with age, crashing in the unknown depths of the forest.

All the fireside tales of the country are gloomy, and that path which is lost beyond Danenfels, among the heath and furze of the mountains, has not always, they say, led good Christians to a safe shelter. Perhaps there yet may live one of those country people who has heard his father or his grandfather tell what we are now about to relate.

On the 6th of May, 1770, at that hour when the waters of the great river are tinged with a pale rose color, that is to say, when the inhabitants of the Rhingau see the setting sun sink behind the spire of Strasburg Cathedral, which divides it into two hemispheres of fire — a man who came from Mayence, having passed through Alzey and Kircheim-Poland, appeared beyond the village of Danenfels. He followed the path so long as the path was visible, then when all trace of it vanished, dismounting from his horse, he fastened its bridle to the first fir-tree of the pathless forest.

The animal neighed uneasily, and the woods seemed to start at a sound so unusual.

“Gently, gently, Djerid! — twelve leagues are enough for you — here you must wait my return.”

The traveler tried to peer into the recesses of the forest, but in vain — he could only see masses of dark shadows relieved upon shadows yet darker. Turning then to his horse, whose Arab name declared his race and swiftness, he took his head between his hands, approached his lips to the smoking nostrils of the animal and said, “Farewell, my good horse! — farewell, if it be fated that we meet not again.”

As he said these words he looked quickly around, as if he feared they might have been overheard,-or as if he desired it. The horse shook his silky mane, pawed and neighed, as he would in the desert on the approach of the lion. The traveler stroked down his head with a smile which seemed to say, “Thou art not wrong, Djerid, there is danger here.”

Then, having decided beforehand, no doubt, not to oppose force against this danger, the unknown adventurer drew from his saddlebow two richly mounted pistols, took out their balls, and sprinkled the powder on the ground. This done, he put them back in their place. Then he unbuckled a sword with a steel handle, wrapped the belt of it round it, and put all together under the saddle, so that the pummel of the sword was toward the horse's shoulder. After these formalities, the traveler shook off the dust from his boots, took off his gloves, felt in his pockets, and having found a pair of small scissors and a penknife with a tortoise-shell handle, he threw first the one and then the other over his shoulder, without looking where they fell. That done, he again stroked Djerid, breathed deeply, as if to expand his chest, feeling that his strength was about to be taxed, and sought a pathway among the trees. He found none, and at last entered the forest at a venture.

It is time that we should give our readers some idea of the traveler's appearance, as he is destined to play an important part in our history.

He was a man apparently of thirty or two-and-thirty years of age, of middle height, but admirably made, and his every movement exhibited a fine combination of strength and flexibility of limb. He was dressed in a traveling coat of black velvet, with gold buttons, under which appeared an embroidered waistcoat; tight-fitting breeches of leather, and polished boots, on limbs which might have served as a model for a sculptor, completed his costume. As to his face, whose rapid changes of expression bespoke him of a southern race, there were in it both tact and power of character. His eye, which could express every feeling, seemed to read the soul of any one on whom it rested. His complexion, naturally dark, had been rendered darker by exposure to a warmer sun than ours. His mouth large, but well formed, showed a fine set of teeth, the whiteness of which was heightened by contrast with the darkness of his skin. His foot was long, but finely formed, and his hand small, but sinewy.

Scarcely had he advanced two steps among the dark fir trees, when he heard the quick tramp of hoofs in the direction where he had left his horse. His first movement was to turn back, but he stopped himself; however, he could not resist the wish to know the fate of Djerid — he raised himself on tiptoe and glanced through an opening. Djerid had disappeared, guided by an in visible hand which had untied his bridle. A slight frown contracted the brow of the unknown, yet something like a smile curled his chiseled lips.

Then he went on his way toward the center of the forest.

For a few steps further the twilight aided him, then it left him, and in darkness so thick, that seeing no longer where to place his foot, he stopped.

"I got on very well to Danenfels, for from Mayence to Danenfels there is a road," said he aloud, "and from Danenfels to the Dark Heath, because there is a path, and from the Dark Heath hither, though there is neither road nor path, because I could see where I was going — but now I must stop — I see nothing." Scarcely had he pronounced these words, in a dialect half French, half Sicilian, when a light appeared about fifty paces from the traveler.

"Thanks," said he, "now as the light moves I shall follow."

The light moved steadily on, with a gliding motion, as we sometimes see a light move over the stage of a theater.

The traveler might have gone about a hundred steps farther when he thought he felt a breathing at his ear. He started.

"Turn not," said a voice on the right, "or thou art dead!"

"Good!" replied the immovable traveler.

"Speak not," said a voice on the left, "or thou art dead!"

The traveler bowed without speaking.

"But if thou art afraid," said a third voice, which, like that of Hamlet's father, seemed to come from the bowels of the earth, "turn back; that will declare that thou abandonest thy scheme, and thou shalt be permitted to go."

The traveler made a gesture of dissent with his hand, and went on.

The night was so dark and the forest so thick that he could not advance without occasionally stumbling, and his progress was slow. For nearly an hour the flame moved on, and he followed without hearing a murmur, and without showing a symptom of fear.

All at once it disappeared.

The traveler was out of the forest. He raised his eyes, and in the dark blue sky saw some twinkling stars.

He continued to advance in the direction of the place where the light had disappeared, and soon saw arise before him a ruin, the specter, as it were, of some ancient castle.

Next, his foot struck against some of its fragments. Then something cold passed his temples and sealed up his eyes, and he saw not even the shadows of outward objects.

A bandage of wet linen bound his head. This was only what he expected, no doubt, as he made no effort to remove it. He only silently stretched out his hand, like a blind man imploring a guide. His gesture was understood. A cold, dry, bony hand grasped the fingers of the traveler.

He knew that it was the hand of a skeleton, but if that hand had been endowed with sensation, it would have felt that his did not tremble.

Then the traveler felt himself rapidly drawn on for about a hundred paces. Suddenly the hand released its grasp, the bandage fell from his eyes, he stopped — he was on the summit of Mont Tonnerre.

II. — HE WHO IS.

In the midst of a glade formed by larches, bare with age, rose one of those feudal castles which the Crusaders, on their return from the Holy Land, scattered over Europe. The gateways and arches had been finely sculptured, and in their niches were statues; but these lay broken at the foot of the walls, and creeping plants and wild flowers now filled their places.

The traveler on opening his eyes found himself before the damp and mossy steps of the principal entrance; on the first of these steps stood the phantom by whose bony hand he had been led thither. A long shroud wrapped it from head to foot, and the eyeless sockets darted flames. Its fleshless hand pointed to the interior of the ruins as the termination of the traveler's journey. This interior was a hall, the lower part of which was but half seen, but from its vaults, heaped with ruins, flickered a dim and mysterious light.

The traveler bowed in assent. The phantom mounted slowly step by step to the hall and plunged into the ruins. The unknown followed calmly and slowly up the eleven steps which this specter had trodden, and entered also.

With the noise of a clashing wall of brass the great gate of the portal closed behind him.

At the entrance of a circular hall, lighted by three lamps, which cast a greenish light, the phantom stopped. The traveler, ten steps farther back, stopped in his turn.

“Open thine eyes!” said the phantom.

“I see!” replied the unknown.

The phantom then drew, with a proud gesture, a two-edged sword from beneath his shroud, and struck it against a column of bronze. A hollow metallic groan responded to its blow.

Then all round the hall arose stone seats, and numerous phantoms, like the first, appeared. Each was armed with a two-edged sword, and each took his place on a seat, and seen by the pale green light of the three lamps they might have been taken, so cold and motionless were they, for statues on their pedestals. And these human statues came out in strange relief on the black tapestry of the walls.

Some seats were placed in advance of the others, on which sat six specters who seemed like chiefs — one seat was vacant.

He who sat on the middle seat arose.

“Brethren, how many are present?” he asked, turning to the assembly.

“Three hundred,” replied the phantoms with one voice. It thundered through the hall, and died away among the funereal hangings on the walls.

“Three hundred,” replied the president, “and each speaks for ten thousand companions! Three hundred swords which are equal to three millions of poniards!'

Then he turned to the traveler. “What dost thou wish?” he asked.

“To see the light,” replied the other.

“The paths which lead to the mountain of fire are rugged and difficult. Fearest thou not.”

“I fear nothing.”

“One step forward and you cannot return. Reflect!”

“I stop not till I reach the goal.”

“Wilt thou swear?”

“Dictate the oath!”

The president raised his hand, and with a slow and solemn voice, pronounced these words; “In the name of the crucified Son, swear to break all bonds of nature which unite thee to father, mother, brother, sister, wife, relation, friend, mistress, king, benefactor, and to any being whatever to whom thou hast promised faith, obedience, gratitude, or service!"

The traveler, with a firm voice, repeated these words, and then the president dictated the second part of the oath.

"From this moment thou art free from the pretended oath thou hast taken to thy country and its laws; swear thou to reveal to the new head whom thou acknowledgest all that thou hast seen or done, read or guessed, and henceforward to search out and penetrate into that which may not openly present itself to thine eyes."

The president stopped; the unknown repeated the words.

"Honor and respect the *aqua tofana*, as a prompt, sure, and necessary means of ridding the world by the death or idiocy of those who would degrade truth or tear it from us."

An echo could not have been more exact than the unknown in repeating the words of the president.

"Flee from Spain, flee from Naples, flee from every accursed land; flee from the temptation of revealing aught that thou shalt now see and hear! Lightning is not more quick to strike than will be the invisible and inevitable knife, wherever thou mayest be shouldst thou fail in thy secrecy."

Spite of the threat conveyed in these last words, no trace of emotion was seen on the face of the unknown; he pronounced the end of the oath with a voice as calm as at the beginning.

"And now," continued the president, put on his forehead the sacred band!"

Two phantoms approached the unknown — he bowed his head — one of them bound round it a crimson ribbon covered with silver characters, placed alternately with the figure of our Lady of Loretto; the other tied it behind, just at the nape of the neck. Then they left his side.

"What wouldst thou ask?" inquired the president.

"Three things."

"Name them!"

"The hand of iron, the sword of fire, the scales of adamant."

"Why the hand of iron?"

"To stifle tyranny."

"Why the sword of fire?"

"To banish the impure from the earth."

"And why the scales of adamant?"

“To weigh the destinies of humanity.”

“Canst thou withstand the necessary trials?”

“Courage is prepared for all trials.”

“The proofs! the proofs!” cried many voices.

“Turn!” said the president.

The unknown obeyed, and found himself face to face with a man pale as death, bound and gagged.

“What seest thou?” asked the president.

“A malefactor or a victim.”

“A traitor! One who took the oath as thou hast done, and then revealed the secrets of our order.”

“A criminal, then.”

“Yes,” What penalty has he incurred?”

“Death.”

The three hundred phantoms repeated “Death!” and, in spite of all his efforts, the condemned was dragged into a darker part of the hall. The traveler saw him struggle with his executioners — he heard his choking voice — a dagger glimmered for an instant — a blow was struck — and a dead and heavy sound announced a body falling on the earthy floor.

“Justice is done!” said the unknown, turning to the ghastly assembly, who, from beneath their shrouds, had devoured the sight with greedy looks.

“Then,” said the president, “thou dost approve what hast been done?”

“Yes, if he who has fallen was really guilty.”

“Thou wilt drink to the death of every man who, like him, would betray our secrets?”

“I will!”

“Whatever be the draught?”

“Whatever be the draught.”

“Bring the cup,” said the president.

One of the two executioners brought the unknown a red tepid liquor in a human skull. He took this frightful cup, raised it above his head, saying, “I drink to the death of every man who shall betray the secrets of this holy society.”

Then, bringing it to his lips, he drained it to the last drop, and returned it calmly to him who had presented it.

A murmur of surprise ran through the assembly, and the phantoms seemed to look at each other through their half-opened shrouds.

“Good!” said the president. “The pistol!”

A phantom drew near the president, holding in one hand a pistol and in the other a ball and a charge of powder.

“Thou promisest passive obedience to our behests?”

“Yes.”

“Even if this obedience be put to the proof against thyself?”

“He who enters here is no longer his own; he belongs to all.”

“Then thou obeyest whatever order be given thee?”

“I obey.”

“This instant?”

“This instant!”

“No pause?”

“No pause!”

“Take this pistol — load it!”

The unknown took the pistol and loaded it, all the dread assembly looking on the operation in a silence only broken by the sighs of the wind among the arches of the ruin.

“The pistol is loaded,” said the unknown.

“Art thou sure?” asked the president.

A smile passed over the lips of the traveler as he tried the pistol, showing that it was loaded. The president bowed in token of being satisfied.

“Yes,” said he, “it is loaded.”

“What am I to do with it?”

“Cock it.”

The unknown cocked the pistol, and its click was distinctly heard in the intervals of silence in the dialogue.

“Now put it to thy forehead,” said the president.

He obeyed unhesitatingly. The silence seemed to deepen over the assembly, and the lamps to turn pale. These were real phantoms, for not a breath was then heard. “Fire!” said the president.

The cock was heard to snap, the flint flashed, but the powder in the pan alone took fire, and no report accompanied its quick flame.

A shout of admiration burst from every breast, and the president involuntarily extended his hand to the unknown.

But two proofs were not sufficient to satisfy all and some voices shouted, “The dagger! the dagger!”

“You demand that, also?” said the president.

“Yes — the dagger! the dagger!” replied the voices.

“Bring the dagger,” said the president.

“It is useless,” said the unknown, making a disdainful movement with his head.

“Useless!” cried the assembly.

“Yes, useless!” he replied, with a voice which drowned *every* other; “useless! You lose time, and it is precious.”

“What mean you?” asked the president.

“I tell you I know your secrets — that these proofs of yours are but child's play, unworthy of men. I tell you that I know the body which lies there is not dead; that I have not drunk blood; that, by a spring, the charge fell into the butt at the moment I cocked the pistol. Such things may frighten cowards. Rise, pretended corpse, thou hast no terrors for the brave.”

Another shout made the vaults ring.

“Thou knowest our mysteries, then?” said the president. “Thou art one of the illuminated or a traitor!”

“Who art thou?” demanded the three hundred voices; and on the instant, twenty swords, in the hands of the nearest phantoms, were pointed, with a motion as precise as if directed by a military signal, at the bosom of the unknown.

He smiled, shook the thick curls of his hair, which, unpowdered, were only retained by the ribbon which had been bound round his head, and said, calmly, *“I am Tie who is.”*

Then he turned his eyes slowly around the living wall which hemmed him in, and gradually sword after sword sank before him.

“Thou hast spoken rashly,” said the president. “Doubtless thou knowest not the import of thy words.”

The stranger shook his head and smiled.

“I have spoken the truth.”

“Whence comest thou?”

“I come whence comes the light.”

“But we have learned that thou comest from Sweden.”

“I might come from Sweden, and yet from the East.”

“Then we know thee not. Who art thou?”

“Who am I? Ay, ye shall know more. Ye pretend not to understand me; but first I will tell you who you are!”

The phantoms started, and the clang of their swords was heard as they grasped them in their right hands and raised them to the level of the stranger's breast.

“First,” said he, “thou who questionest me, who believest thyself a god, and who art but the forerunner of one, thou who representest Sweden, I shall name thee, that the rest may know I can also name them. Swedenborg, how comes it thy familiars told thee not that he whom thou waitedst for was on the road?”

“They did declare it to me,” replied the president, putting aside a fold of his shroud in order to see him better who spoke, and in doing so, contrary to all the habits of the association, he showed a white beard and the venerable face of a man of eighty.

“Good!” replied the stranger. “On thy left is the representative of England or of old Caledonia. I grant you, my lord, if the blood of your grandfather flows in your veins, England's extinguished light maybe rekindled.”

The swords sank — anger gave place to astonishment.

“Ah, captain,” said the unknown, addressing one on the left of the president, “in what port waits thy good ship? A noble frigate the *Providence.* Its name augurs well for America.”

Then, turning toward him on I he right —

“Look, Prophet of Zurich, thou hast carried physiognomy almost to divination — read the lines on my face, and acknowledge my mission.”

He to whom he spoke recoiled.

“Come,” said he, turning to another, “descendant of Pelago, we must drive the Moors a second time from Spain — an easy task if the Castilians yet retain the sword of the Cid!”

The fifth chief remained so still, so motionless, that the voice of the unknown seemed to have turned him to stone.

“And to me,” said the sixth; “hast thou naught to say to me?”

“Ay,” replied the traveler, turning on him a look which read his heart, “ay, what Jesus said to Judas; but not yet.”

The chief turned paler than his shroud, and a murmur running through the assembly seemed to demand the cause of this singular accusation.

“Thou forgettest the representative of France,” said the president.

“He is not here,” replied the stranger haughtily; “and that thou knowest well, since his seat is vacant. Learn, then, that snares make him smile who sees in darkness, who acts in spite of the elements, and who lives in spite of death.”

“Thou art young,” replied the president, “and thou speakest as if from divine authority. Reflect! boldness overcomes only the weak or the ignorant.”

A disdainful smile played over the lips of the stranger.

“You are all weak, since you have no power over me! you are all ignorant, since ye know not who I am! Boldness, then, alone might overcome you; but why should one all-powerful so overcome?”

“Give us the proof of your boasted power?” said the president.

“Who convoked you?” asked the unknown, becoming the interrogator instead of the interrogated.

“The grand assembly.”

“And not without a cause hast thou,” pointing to the president, “come from Sweden; thou,” and he turned from one to another of the five chiefs as he spoke, “thou from London, thou from New York, thou from Zurich, thou from Madrid, thou from Warsaw, and you all,” looking round the assembly, “from the four winds of heaven, to meet in the sanctuary of the dreaded faith.”

“No,” replied the president, “not without cause, for we came to meet him who has founded in the East a mysterious faith, joining two worlds in one belief, entwining mankind with the bonds of brotherhood.”

“Is there any sign by which you shall know him?”

“Yes,” said the president; “and an angel has revealed it to me.”

“You alone know it?”

“I alone.”

“You have revealed it to none?”

“To none.”

“Name it.”

The president hesitated.

“Name it! the hour is come.”

“He will bear on his breast a diamond star, and on it three letters, the signification of which is only known to himself.”

“Declare the letters.”

“L. P. D.”

The stranger rapidly threw open his coat and vest, and on his fine Holland shirt shone like a flaming star the diamond, and the three letters formed of rubies.

"It is he!" cried the president.

"He whom we await?" asked the chiefs.

"The Great Copt?" murmured the three hundred voices.

"Now," cried the stranger triumphantly, "do you believe me when I say,' I am he that *is'?"*

"Yes," said the phantoms, prostrating themselves before him.

"Speak, master," said the president, "speak; we shall obey!"

III. — L. P. D.

There was silence for some moments, during which the unknown seemed to collect his thoughts. Then he began:

"Sirs, ye but weary your arms with your swords; lay them aside, and lend an attentive ear, for you shall learn much from the few words which I am about to utter."

All were profoundly attentive.

"The sources of great rivers are sacred, therefore unknown. Like the Nile, the Ganges, the Amazon, I know to what I tend, not whence I come. All that I can reveal is that, when the eyes of my spirit first opened to comprehend external things, I was in Medina, the holy city, playing in the gardens of the Mufti Salaaym. He was a venerable man, kind as a father to me, yet not my father; for though he looked on me with love, he spoke to me with respect. Thrice a day he left me, and then came another old man, whose name I may pronounce with gratitude, yet with fear. He was called Althotas, and him the seven great spirits had taught all that the angels know, in order to comprehend God. He was my tutor, my master, my friend — a friend to be venerated indeed, for his age was double that of most among you."

His solemn tone, his majestic deportment, deeply impressed the assembly; they seemed trembling with anxiety to hear more.

He continued:

"When I reached my fifteenth year I was initiated into the mysteries of nature. I knew botany, not as one of your learned men, who has acquired only the knowledge of the plants of his own corner of the world — to me were known the sixty thousand families of plants of the whole earth. My master, pressing his hands on my forehead, made a ray of celestial light descend on my soul; then could I perceive beneath the seas the wondrous vegetations which are tossed by the waves, in the giant branches of which are cradled monsters unknown to the eye of man.

“All tongues, living and dead, I knew. I could speak *every* language spoken from the Dardanelles to the Straits of Magellan. I could read the dark hieroglyphics on those granite books, the pyramids. From Sanchoniathon to Socrates, from Moses to Jerome, from Zoroaster to Agrippa, all human knowledge was mine.

“Medicine I studied, not only in Hippocrates, in Galen, and in Averrhoes, but in that great teacher, Nature. I penetrated the secrets of the Copts and the Drusi's. I gathered up the seeds of destruction and of scarcity. When the simoom or I he hurricane swept over my head, I threw to it one of those seeds, which its breath bore on, carrying death or life to whomsoever I had condemned or blessed.

“In the midst of these studies I reached my twentieth year. Then my master sought me one day in a grove, to which I had retired from the heat of the day. His face was at the same moment grave and smiling. He held a little vial in his hand. 'Acharat,' said he, 'I have told thee that nothing is born, nothing dies in the world — that the cradle and the coffin are twins; that man wants only to see into past existences to be equal to the gods, and that when that power shall be acquired by him, he will be as immortal as they. Behold! I have found the beverage which will dispel his darkness, thinking that I had found that which destroys death. Acharat, I drank of it yesterday — see, the vial is not full; drink thou the rest to-day.

“I had entire confidence in my venerable master, yet *my* hand trembled as it touched the vial which he offered me, as Adam's might have done when Eve presented him with the apple.

“'Drink!' said he, smiling.

“I drank.

“Then he placed his hands on my head, as he always did when he would make light penetrate to my soul.

“'Sleep!' said he.”

“Immediately I slept, and I dreamed that I was lying on a pile of sandal-wood and aloes. An angel, passing by on the behests of the Highest from the east to the west, touched the pile with the tip of his wing, and it kindled into flame. Yet I, far from being afraid — far from dreading the fire — lay voluptuous in the midst of it, like the phoenix, drawing in new life from the source of all life.

“Then my material frame vanished away; my soul only remained. It preserved the form of *my* body, but transparent, impalpable; it was lighter than the atmosphere in which we live, and it rose above it. Then, like Pythagoras, who remembered that in a former state he had been at the siege of Troy, I remembered the past. I had experienced thirty-two existences, and I recalled them all. I saw ages pass before me like a train of aged men in procession. I beheld myself under the different names which I had borne from the day of *my* first “birth to that of my last death. You know, brethren — and it is an essential article of our faith — that souls, those countless emanations of the Deity, fill the air, and are formed into numerous hierarchies, descending from the sublime to the base; and the man who, at the moment of his birth, inhales one of those pre-existing souls, gives it up at his death, that it may enter on a new course of transformations.”

He said this in a tone so expressive of conviction, and his look had something so sublime, that the assembly interrupted him by a murmur of admiration.

“When I awoke,” continued the illuminated, “I felt that I was more than man — that I was almost divine. Then I resolved to dedicate not only my present existence, but all my future ones, to the happiness of man.

“The next day, as if he had guessed my thoughts, Althotas said to me, 'My son, twenty years ago thy mother expired in giving birth to thee. Since that time, invincible obstacles have prevented thy illustrious father revealing himself to thee. We shall travel, we shall meet thy father; he will embrace thee, but thou wilt not know him.'

“Thus, in me, as in one of the elect, all was mysterious — past, present, future.

“I bade adieu to the Mufti Salaaym, who blessed me and loaded me with presents, and we joined a caravan going to Suez.,

“Pardon me, sirs, if I give way for a moment to emotion, as I recall that one day a venerable man embraced me; a strange thrill ran through me as I felt his heart beat against mine.

“He was the Cheriffe of Mecca, a great and illustrious prince, who had seen a hundred battles, and at the raising of his hand three millions of men bent their heads before him. Althotas turned away to hide his feelings, perhaps not to betray a secret, and we continued our road.

“We went into the heart of Asia; we ascended the Tigris; we visited Palmyra, Damascus, Smyrna, Constantinople, Vienna. Berlin, Dresden, Moscow, Stockholm. Petersburg, New York, Buenos Ayres, the Cape of Good Hope, and Aden; then, being near the point at which we had set out, we proceeded into Abyssinia, descended the Nile, sailed to Rhodes, and, lastly, to Malta. Before landing, a vessel came out to meet us, bringing two knights of the order; they saluted me and embraced Althotas, and conducted us in a sort of triumph to the palace of the Grand Master, Pinto.

“Now, you will ask me, sirs, how it came that the Mussulman Acharat was received with honor by those who have vowed the extermination of the infidels. Althotas, a Catholic, and himself a Knight of Malta, had always spoken to me of one only God, omnipotent, universal, who, by the aid of angels, his ministers, made the world a harmonious whole, and to this whole he gave the great name of Cosmos. I was, then, not a Mussulman but a theosophist.

“My journeyings ended; but in truth, all that I had seen had awakened in me no astonishment, because for me there was nothing new under the sun, and in my preceding thirty-two existences I had visited the cities before through which I had lately passed. All that struck me was some change in their inhabitants. Now I would hover over events and watch the progress of man. I saw that all minds tend onward, and that this tendency leads to liberty. I saw that prophets had been raised up from time to time to aid the wavering advances of the human race; and that men, half blind from their cradle, make but one step toward the light in a century. Centuries are the days of nations.

“'Then,' said I to myself, 'so much has not been revealed to me that it should remain buried in my soul; in vain does the mountain contain veins of gold, in vain does the ocean hide its pearls, for the persevering miner penetrates to the bowels of the mountain, the diver descends to the depths of the ocean, but better than the mountain or the ocean, let me be like the sun, shedding blessings on the whole earth.'

“You understand, then, that it is not to go through some masonic ceremonies I have come from the East. I have come to say to you, brethren, take the wings and the eyes of the eagle! rise above the world, and cast your eyes over its kingdoms!

“Nations form but one vast body. Men, though born at different periods, in different ranks, arrive all in turn at that goal to reach which they were created. They are continually advancing, though seemingly stationary, and if they appear to retreat a step from time to time, it is but to collect strength for a bound which shall carry" them over some obstacle in their way.

"France is the advance-guard of nations. Put a torch in her hand, and though it kindle a wide-spreading flame, it will be salutary, for it will enlighten the world.

"The representative of France is not here — it may be that he has recoiled at the task imposed on him. Well, then! we must have a man who will not shrink from it — I will go to France."

"You are in France," said the president.

"Yes; the most important post I take myself — the most perilous work shall be mine."

"You know what passes in France, then?" inquired the president.

The stranger smiled.

"I know, for I myself have prepared all. An old king, weak, vicious, yet not so old, not so weak, not so vicious as the monarchy which he represents, sits on the throne of France. He has but few years to live. Events must be prepared to succeed his death. France is the keystone of the arch; let but this stone be unfixed, and the monarchial edifice will fall! *Ay,* the day that Europe's most arrogant sovereigns shall hear that there is no longer a king in France, bewildered, they will of themselves rush into the abyss left by the destruction of the throne of Saint Louis!"

Here, he on the right of the president spoke, and his German accent announced that he was a Swiss. "Most venerated master, hast thou then calculated all?" he asked. — "All!" replied the Great Copt.

"Your pardon if I say more — but on our mountains, in our valleys, by our lakes, our words are free as the winds and the waters — let me say, then, that a great event is on the eve of arriving, and that to it the French monarchy may owe its regeneration. I have seen, great master, a daughter of Maria Theresa traveling in state toward France to unite the blood of seventeen emperors with that of the successor of the sixty-one kings of France, and the people rejoiced blindly, as they do when their chains are slackened, or when they bow beneath a gilded joke. I would infer, then, that the crisis is not yet come!"

All turned to him who so calmly and boldly had spoken to their master.

"Speak on, brother," said the Great Copt; "if thy advice be good, it shall be followed. We are chosen of Heaven, and we may not sacrifice the interests of a world to wounded pride.”

The deputy from Switzerland continued, amid deep silence; “My studies have convinced me of one truth, that the physiognomy of men reveals, to the eye which knows how to read it, their virtues and their vices. We may see a composed look or a smile, for these, caused “by muscular movements, are in their power, but the great type of character is still imprinted legibly on the countenance, declaring what passes in the heart. The tiger can caress, can give a kindly look, but his low forehead, his projecting face, his great occiput, declare him tiger still. The dog growls, shows his teeth, but his honest eye, his intelligent face, declare him still the friend of man. God has imprinted on each creature's face its name and nature. I have seen the young girl who is to reign in France; on her forehead I read the pride, the courage, the tenderness, of the German maiden. I have seen the young man who is to be her husband; calmness, Christian meekness, and a high regard for the rights of others, characterize him. Now France, remembering no wrongs, and forgetting no benefits, since a Charlemagne, a Louis, and a Henry have been sufficient to preserve on the throne twenty base and cruel kings; France, who hopes on, despairs never, will she not adore a young, lovely, kindly queen, a patient, gentle, economical king? and this, too, after the disastrous reign of Louis XV. — after his hateful orgies, his mean revenges, his Pompadours and Dubarries? Will not France bless her youthful sovereigns, who will bring to her as their dowry peace with Europe? Marie Antoinette now crosses the frontier; the altar and the nuptial bed are prepared at Versailles. Is this the time to begin in France your work of regeneration? Pardon if I have dared to submit these thoughts to you, whose wisdom is infallible!”

At these words, he whom the Great Copt had addressed as the apostle of Zurich bowed as he received the applause of the assembly and awaited a reply.

He did not wait long.

“If you read physiognomy, illustrious brethren, I read the future. Marie Antoinette is proud; she will interfere in the coming struggle, and will perish in it. Louis Augustus is mild; he will yield to it, and will perish with her, but each will fall through opposite defects of character. Now they esteem each other, but short will be their love; in a year they will feel mutual contempt. Why, then, deliberate, brethren, to discover whence comes the light? It is revealed; to me. I come from the East, led, like the shepherds, by a star, which foretells a second regeneration of mankind. Tomorrow I begin my work. Give me twenty years for it — that will be enough, if we are united and firm.”

“Twenty years?” murmured several voices — “the time is long.”

The Great Copt turned to those who thus betrayed impatience.

“Yes,” said he, “it is long to those who think that a principle is destroyed, as a man is killed, with the dagger of Jacques Clement or the knife of Damiens. Fools! — the knife kills the man, but, like the pruning-hook, it lops a branch that the other branches may take its place. In the stead of the murdered king rises, up a Louis XIII., a stupid tyrant — a Louis XIV., a cunning despot — a Louis XV., an idol whose path is wet with tears of blood, like the monstrous deities of India, crushing with changeless smile women and children, who cast garlands before their chariot wheels. And you think twenty years too long to efface the name of king from the hearts of thirty millions of men, who but lately offered to God their children's lives to purchase that of Louis XV.! And you think it an easy task to make France hate her lilies, which, bright as the stars of heaven, grateful as the odors of flowers, have borne light, charity, victory, to the ends of the world! Try! try, brethren! I give you, not twenty years — I give you a century. You, scattered, trembling, unknown each to the other, known only to me, who only can sum up your divided worth, and tell its value — to me, who alone can unite you in one fraternal chain — I tell you, philosophers, political economists, theorists, that in twenty years those thoughts which you whisper in your families, which you write with uneasy eye in the solitude of your old somber towers, which you tell one another with the dagger in your hands, that you may strike the traitor who would repeat them in tones louder than your own — I tell you, that these thoughts shall be proclaimed aloud in the streets, printed in the open face of day, spread through Europe by peaceful emissaries, or by the bayonets of five hundred thousand soldiers, battling for liberty, with your principles inscribed on their standards. You who tremble at the name of the Tower of London; you, who shrink at that of the prisons of the Inquisition, hear me — me, who am about to dare the Bastille! I tell you, that we shall see those dreaded prisons in ruins, and your wives and children shall dunce on their ashes. But that cannot be until, not the monarch, but the monarchy, is dead — until religious domination is despised — until social inferiority is extinguished — until aristocratic castes and unjust division of lands are no more. I ask twenty years to destroy an old world, and make a new one — twenty years! — twenty seconds of eternity! — and you say it is too long!"

The silence of admiration and of assent followed the words of this dark prophet; he had obtained the sympathy of the representatives of the hopes of Europe who surrounded him.

The Great Copt enjoyed for some minutes his triumph; then, feeling that it was complete, he went on:

"Now, brethren, now that I am going to devote myself to our cause — to beard the lion in his den — to risk my life for the freedom of mankind — now, what will you do for that to which you say you are ready to give up life, liberty, and fortune? This is what I am here to demand."

A deeper silence fell on the assembly than when he last ceased to speak; it seemed as if the motionless phantoms around him were absorbed by a fateful thought, which, when expressed, should shake twenty thrones.

The six chiefs conversed for a moment apart, and then returned to the president. The president spoke:

"In the name of Sweden, I offer for the overthrow of the throne of Vasa the miners who established it and one hundred thousand crowns."

The Great Copt made an entry in his tablets.

Another on the left spoke.

"I, sent by Scotland and Ireland, can promise nothing from England — our firm opponent — but from poor Scotland, from poor Ireland, I shall bring three thousand men and three thousand crowns yearly."

He wrote again. "And you?" said he, turning to one whose vigorous frame and restless spirit seemed wearied by his phantom robe, and who replied:

"I represent America, whose stones, whose trees, whose waters, whose every drop of blood are vowed to rebellion. While we have gold we will give it — while we have blood we will shed it — let us but be free first. Though now divided, marked, and disunited, we are the links of a gigantic chain, and could some mighty hand join two of them, the rest will unite themselves. Begin then, oh, great master with us! If thou wouldst rid France of royalty, free us from a foreign yoke first."

"It shall be so," replied the master; "you shall first be free, and France shall help you. Wait! brother, but I promise thou shalt not wait long."

Then he turned to the Swiss deputy, who replied to his look:

“I can promise nothing. Our republic has been long the ally of the French monarchy, to which it sold its blood at Marignan and Pavia; its sons are faithful — they will give that for which they have been paid; for the first time, I am ashamed of their fidelity.”

“So! — but we shall conquer without them, and in spite of them. And you, representative of Spain?”

“I am poor; I can offer only three thousand of my brothers, with a contribution of a thousand reals yearly. Our Spaniards are indolent; they sleep on a bed of pain — provided they sleep, they care not.”

“Good! — And you?” said he to another.

“I represent Russia and Poland. My people are either discontented nobles or wretched serfs. The serf, who owns not even his life, can offer nothing; but three thousand nobles have promised twenty louis d'ors each annually.”

Then all the representatives in turn declared what those from whom they came would give for the great cause. Some were deputies from small kingdoms, some from large principalities, some from impoverished states, but all declared that they would add something to what had been offered. Their promises were written on the tablets of the Great Copt, and they were bound by an oath to keep them.

“Now,” said he, “you have seen and recognized the initials of our watchword — let it be placed *on* your hearts, and *in* them; for we, the sovereign lord of the east and west, have decreed the downfall of the lily. Hear it, then, brethren; LILIA PEDIBUS DESTRUE.”

Loud was their shout at this explanation of the mysterious letters — so loud that the gorges of the mountains reechoed to it.

“And now, retire,” said the master, when silence had succeeded, “retire by those subterranean passages which lead to the quarries of Mont Tonnerre. Disperse, before the rising of the sun. You shall see me once more, and it will be on the day of our triumph! Go!”

His words were followed by a masonic sign, understood only by the six heads of the assembly, so that they remained around him when the rest had disappeared.

“Swedenborg,” said he, “thou art truly inspired. God thanks thee by me for thy efforts in his cause. I shall give thee an address to which thou shalt send the promised money to France.”

The president bowed, and departed, full of astonishment at that intelligence which had discovered his name.

"I grant thee, Fairfax," continued the master, "thou art worthy of thy great ancestor. Remember me to Washington when next thou writest to him."

Fairfax bowed and followed Swedenborg.

"Come, Paul Jones," said the Copt, "thou spokest bravely; thou shalt be the hero of America. Let her be ready at the first signal!"

The American thrilled in every nerve, as if the breath of some divine being had passed over him, and retired also.

"And now, as to thee, Lavater, abjure thy theories; it is the time for action. Study no longer what man is, but what he may be. Go! Woe to thy countrymen if they rise against us; for our people will devour in its wrath, as the wrath of God devours."

The trembling Swiss bowed and departed.

"Hear, Ximenes," he went on, addressing the Spaniard, "thou art zealous, but distrustful. Thy country sleeps, but it is because none awakes her. Go! Castile is still the country of the Cid!"

The last of the six was advancing, but by a gesture the Copt forbade him.

"Scieflort of Russia, before a month thou wilt betray our cause, but in a month thou shalt be no more."

The Russian envoy fell on his knees, but a threatening movement of the master made him rise, and with tottering steps he also departed.

And now this singular man, whom we have introduced as the hero of our drama, left alone, looked around the empty, silent hall, buttoned up his black velvet coat, fixed his hat firmly on his head, touched the spring of the great bronze gate which had closed behind him, and sallied out into the defiles of the mountain. Though he had neither guide nor light, he went on rapidly, as if lead by an invisible hand.

Having passed the thick belt of trees, he looked for his horse; but not seeing him, he listened, and soon thought he heard a distant neighing. He whistled with a peculiar modulation, and in a moment Djerid could be seen coming forward like a faithful and obedient dog. The traveler sprang to the saddle, and quickly disappeared in the darkness, which spread over the heath extending from Mont Tonnerre to Danenfels.

CHAPTER I.

The Storm.

EIGHT DAYS AFTER the scene just related, about five in the evening, a carriage with four horses and two postilions left Ponta-Mousson, a small town between Nancy and Metz. It had taken fresh horses at an inn, in spite of the recommendation of an attentive hostess who was on the lookout for belated travelers, and continued on its road to Paris. Its four horses had scarcely turned the corner of the street, when a score of children and half a score of gossips, who had watched the progress of their being put to, returned to their respective dwellings with gestures and exclamations expressive in some of great mirth, in others of great astonishment.

All this was because nothing like that carriage had for fifty years passed the bridge which good King Stanislaus threw across the Moselle to facilitate the intercourse of his little kingdom with France. We do not except even those curious vehicles of Alsace, which bring from Phalsbourg to our fairs two-headed wonders, dancing bears, and the wandering tribes of harlequins and gypsies.

In fact, without being either a child or a curious old gossip, surprise might have arrested one's steps on seeing this primitive machine, on four massive wheels, roll by with such velocity that every one exclaimed, “What a strange way of traveling post!”

As our readers, fortunately for them, did not see it pass, we shall describe it.

First, then, the principal carriage — we say principal, because in front it was a sort of cabriolet — the principal carriage was painted light blue, and bore on its panels a baronial scroll, surmounting a J and a B entwined. Two windows — large windows, with white muslin curtains — gave it light, only these windows, invisible to the profane vulgar, looked frontwise into the cabriolet. A grating covered them, through which one might speak to the inhabitants of the carriage.

This carriage, which was eight feet long, had no light but from the windows, and no air but from a ventilator on the top; and then, to complete its oddity, a chimney rising about a foot above the roof offered to the passers-by the pleasant sight of a light cloud of smoke lengthening into a bluish trail behind it. At the present day we should only have thought it a new invention, combining the power of steam with that of horses.

This would have seemed so much the more probable, that the carriage, preceded as we have said by four horses and two postilions, was followed by one horse fastened to it by his bridle. His tall head, slender legs, narrow chest, and silky mane and tail bespoke him of Arab race. He was ready saddled, which inferred that one of the travelers shut up in this Noah's ark sometimes enjoyed the pleasure of riding beside the carriage.

At Pont-a-Mousson the postilion who left had received, besides the pay for the horses, a double gratuity, presented by a strong but white hand, slipped through the leather curtains of the cabriolet, which shaded it as imperviously as the muslin ones did the carriage.

“Many thanks, my lord,” said the astonished postilion, quickly taking off his cap and bowing low.

A sonorous voice replied in German (for at Nancy German is still understood, though no longer spoken), “*Schnell! Schneller!*” which means, “Fast! faster!”

Postilions understand nearly all languages; above all, when accompanied by the sound of certain metals, of which it is said they are rather fond. So the two new postilions did their utmost to keep to a gallop, but after efforts which did more honor to their arms than to the powers of their horses, wearied out, they fell into a trot, getting on at the rate of two and a half or three leagues an hour.

Toward seven, they changed at St. Mihiel; the same hand passed through the curtains payment for the last stage, and the same voice uttered a similar injunction.

There is no doubt the strange vehicle excited there the same curiosity as at Pont-a-Mousson, for as night was fast approaching, its appearance was still more fantastic.

Beyond Saint Mihiel there is a steep hill, and travelers must be satisfied to let the horses walk. It took half-an-hour to proceed a quarter of a league.

On the top the postilions stopped a moment to breathe their horses, and the travelers in the carriage, by withdrawing the curtains, might have gazed on a wide prospect, had not the mists of evening begun to veil it slightly.

The weather had been clear and warm until three in the afternoon — toward evening, however, it became oppressive. A great white cloud from the south seemed as if intentionally to follow the carriage, threatening to overtake it before it reached Bar-le-Duc, where the postilions resolved at all risks to pass the night.

The road, shut in between the hill and a rugged declivity, descended to a valley, in which was seen the winding Meuse, and was so steep that it was dangerous to allow the horses to do anything but walk, which prudent plan the postilions adopted. The cloud advanced, and as it brooded over, and almost touched the ground, continually extended its limits by drawing the vapors arising from the soil; so was it observed in ill-boding whiteness to overwhelm the bluish clouds which seemed to take up their station to windward, like ships preparing for an engagement. Soon, with the rapidity of the floodtide, it spread, until it hid the last rays of the sun. A dim gray light struggled through upon the scene, and although no breeze swept along, the leaves shivered, and put on the dark tinge which they assume in the deepening twilight succeeding sunset.

Suddenly a flash illuminated the cloud, the heavens burst into sheets of flame, and the startled eye might penetrate the immeasurable depths of the firmament.

At the same moment the thunder rolled from tree to tree, shaking the earth, and hurrying on the vast cloud like a maddened steed. On went the carriage, sending forth its smoke, now changed in color by the changes of the atmosphere.

In the meantime the heavens grew darker and darker, but a purple light appeared from the carriage, as if the person within, careless of the storm, had lighted a lamp, and went on with some work which he had to accomplish. The vehicle was now on a level part of the mountain, and when about to begin the descent, a peal of thunder more violent than the first rent the clouds, and the rain fell, at first in large drops, then thick and smarting, like arrows darted from the heavens.

The postilions seemed to consult together, and then stopped.

“Well!” cried the voice which had before spoken, but now in excellent French; “what the devil are you doing?”

“We were consulting whether we should go on,” replied the postilions.

“I think you ought to ask me, not one another — on with you!”

The postilions obeyed, for there was that in the voice which forbade all thought of disobedience, and the carriage began to descend.

“Good!” said the voice, and the leather curtains, which had been half opened, fell between the traveler and the postilions.

But the road had become so slippery from the torrents of rain that the horses stopped of themselves.

“Sir,” said the leading postilion, “it is impossible to go any farther.”

“Why?” asked the voice within.

“Because the horses only slip — they cannot get on — they will fall.”

“How far are we from the next place where we change?”

“A good way, sir; four leagues.”

“Well, postilion, put silver shoes on your horses, and they will get on,” and as he said this the stranger opened the curtain, and held out four crowns.

“Many thanks!” said the postilion, receiving them in his broad hand, and slipping them into his great boot.

“The gentleman spoke, I think,” said the other postilion, who had heard the sound of money, and did not wish to be excluded from so interesting a conversation.

“Yes, the gentleman says we must push on.”

“Have you anything to say against that, *my* friend?” asked the traveler, in a kind voice, but with a firmness that showed he would brook no contradiction.

“Why, as to myself I have nothing to say; but the horses won't stir.”

“What is the use of your spurs, then?”

“I have buried them in the sides of the poor jades, and, if it has made them move a step, may Heaven —

He had not time to finish his oath, for a frightful peal of thunder interrupted him.

“This is no weather for Christians to be out in.” said the honest fellow. “See, sir, see! the carriage is going of itself; in five minutes it will go fast enough — Jesus Dieu! there we go!”

And, in fact, the heavy machine pressing on the horses, they lost their footing. It then made a progressive movement, and, according to the mathematical increase of forces, its velocity augmented, till, with the rapidity of an arrow, it was visibly nearing the edge of a precipice.

It was not now only the voice of the traveler which was heard; his head was seen thrust out of the cabriolet.

“Stupid fellow!” cried he, “will you kill us? To the left! the leaders to the left!”

“Ah, monsieur, I wish from my heart I saw you on the left,” replied the frightened postilion, vainly trying to recover the reins.

“Joseph!” cried a female voice now first heard, “Joseph! Help! Help! Oh, Holy Virgin!”

Indeed, danger so terrible and so imminent might well call forth that ejaculation. The carriage, impelled by its own weight, neared the precipice — already one of the leaders appeared suspended over it; three revolutions of the wheel, and horses, carriage, and postilions would all have been precipitated, crushed and mangled, to its base, when the traveler, springing from the cabriolet on the pole, seized the postilion by the collar, lifted him like a child, flung him two paces from him, leaped into the saddle, and, gathering up the reins, called to the second postilion:

“To the left, rascal, or I will blow out thy brains!”

The command acted like magic. By an extraordinary effort the postilion gave an impulse to the carriage, brought it to the middle of the road, on which it began to roll on rapidly, with a noise that contended with that of the thunder. “Gallop!” cried the traveler; “gallop! if you slacken your speed I will run you through the body and your horses, too!”

The postilion felt that this was no vain menace; he redoubled his efforts, and the carriage descended with frightful speed. As it thus passed in the night, with its fearful noise, its flaming chimney, and its stifled cries from within, it might have been taken for some infernal chariot drawn by phantom horses, and pursued by a hurricane.

But if the travelers escaped from one danger, they met another. The cloud which had hung over the valley was as rapid as the horses. From time to time, as a flash rent the darkness, the traveler raised his head, and then, by its gleam, anxiety, perhaps fear, might have been seen on his face — for dissimulation was not wanted then — God only saw him. Just as the carriage had reached level ground, and was only carried on by its own impetus, the cloud burst with an awful explosion. A violet flame, changing to green and then to white, wrapped the horses — the hind ones reared, snuffing the sulphurous air — the leaders, as if the ground had given way beneath their feet, fell flat; but almost instantly the horse upon which the postilion was mounted regained his feet, and, finding his traces snapped by the shock, he carried off his rider, who disappeared in the darkness, while the carriage, after proceeding ten yards farther, was stopped by encountering the dead body of the lightning-stricken horse. All this was accompanied by piercing shrieks from the female in the vehicle.

There was a moment of strange confusion in which no one knew whether he was dead or living. The traveler felt himself all over to assure himself of his own identity. He was safe and sound, but the woman had fainted. Although he suspected this from the silence which had succeeded to her shrieks, it was not to her that his first cares were directed. Scarcely had he lighted on the ground when he hastened to the back of the vehicle.

There was the beautiful Arabian horse of which we have spoken — terrified — rigid — with every hair rising as if life were in it. He tugged violently at his fastening, shaking the door to the handle of which he was secured. His eye was fixed, the foam was on his nostrils, but after vain efforts to break away, he had remained, horror-stricken by the tempest; and when his master whistled to him in his usual manner, and put out his hand to caress him, he bounded aside, neighing, as if he did not know him.

“Ay, always that devil of a horse,” muttered a broken voice from the carriage; “curse him, he has broken my wall!”

Then, with double emphasis, this voice cried in Arabic, “Be still, demon!”

“Do not be angry with Djerid, master,” said the traveler, loosing the horse, which he now tied to one of the hind wheels; “he has been frightened, that is all; and indeed one might well have been frightened at less.”

Saying this, he opened the carriage door, let down the slop, entered, and closed the door after him.

CHAPTER II.

Althotas.

THE TRAVELER FOUND himself face to face with an old man with gray eyes, a hooked nose, and trembling but busy hands. He was half buried in a great chair, and turned, with his right hand, the leaves of a manuscript on parchment, called “La Chiave del Gabinetto”; in his left he held a silver skimming-dish.

His attitude, his occupation, his face, motionless and deeply wrinkled, alive only, as it were, in the eyes and mouth, may seem strange to the reader, but they were certainly very familiar to the traveler; for he scarcely cast a look on the old man, nor on all that surrounded him, and yet it was worth the trouble.

Three walls — so the old man called the sides of the carriage — were covered by shelves filled with books. These walls shut in his chair, his usual and principal seat, while above the books had been planned for his convenience several articles for holding vials, decanters, and boxes set in wooden cases as earthen and glassware are secured at sea. He could thus reach anything without assistance, for his chair was on wheels, and with the aid of a spring he could raise it and lower it to any height necessary to attain what he wanted.

The room, for so we must call it, was eight feet long, six wide, and six high. Opposite the door was a little furnace with its shade, bellows and tongs. Al that moment there boiled in a crucible a mixture which sent out by the chimney the mysterious smoke of which we have spoken, and which excited so much surprise in old and young who saw the carriage pass.

Besides the vials, boxes, books, and papers strewed around, copper pincers were seen, and pieces of charcoal which had been dipped in various liquids; there was also a large vase half full of water, and from the roof, hung by threads, were bundles of herbs, some apparently gathered the night before, others a hundred years ago. A keen odor prevailed in this laboratory, which in one less strange would have been called a perfume.

As the traveler entered, the old man wheeled his chair with wonderful ease to the furnace, and was about to skim the mixture in the crucible attentively — nay, almost respectfully — but disturbed by the appearance of the other, he grumbled, drew over his ears his cap of velvet, once black, and from under which a few locks of silver hair peeped out. Then he sharply pulled from beneath one of the wheels of his chair the skirt of his long silk robe — a robe now nothing but a shapeless, colorless, ragged covering. The old man appeared to be in a very bad humor, and grumbled as he went on with his operation.

"Afraid — the accursed animal! Afraid of what? He has shaken the wall, moved the furnace, spilled a quart of my elixir in the fire. Acharat, in Heaven's name, get rid of that brute in the first desert we come to!"

"In the first place," said the other, smiling, "we shall come to no deserts; we are in France. Secondly, I should not like to leave to his fate a horse worth a thousand louis d'ors, or rather, a horse above all price, for he is of the race of Al Borach."

"A thousand louis d'ors! I will give you them, or what is equal to them. That horse has cost me more than a million, to say nothing of the time, the life, he has robbed me of."

"What has he done? — poor Djerid!"

"What has he done? The elixir was boiling, not a drop escaping — true, neither Zoroaster nor Paracelsus says that none must escape, but Borri recommends it."

"Well! dear master, in a few moments more the elixir will boil again."

"Boil? See! there is a curse on it — the fire is going out. I know not what is falling down the chimney."

"I know what is falling," said the disciple, laughing; "water!"

"Water? — water? Then the elixir is ruined; the operation must be begun again — as if I had time to lose! Heaven and earth!" cried the old man, raising his hands in despair, "water! What kind of water, Acharat?"

"Pure water, master — rain from the sky. Have you not seen that it rained?"

"How should I see anything when I am at my work? Water! You see, Acharat, how this troubles my poor brain! For six months — nay, for a year — I have been asking you for a funnel for my chimney! You never think of anything — yet, what have you to do, you who are young? Thanks to your neglect, it is now the rain, now the wind, which ruins all my operations; and yet, by Jupiter! I have no time to lose! You know it — the day decreed is near; and, if I am not ready for that day — if I have not found the elixir of life — farewell to the philosopher! farewell to the wise Althotas! My hundredth year begins on the 15th of July, at eleven at night, and from this time to that, my elixir must attain perfection.”

“But it is going on famously, dear master!”

“Yes, I have made some trials by absorption. My left arm, nearly paralyzed, has regained its power — then, only eating, as I do, once in two or three days, and taking a spoonful of my elixir, though yet imperfect, I have more time, and am assisted on by hope. Oh, when I think that I want but one plant, but one leaf of a plant, to perfect my elixir, and that we have perhaps passed by that plant a hundred — five hundred — a thousand times! — perhaps our horses have trodden it, our wheels crushed it, Acharat — that very plant of which Pliny speaks, and which no sage has yet found or discovered, for nothing is lost. — But stay, Acharat, you must ask its name from Lorenza in one of her trances!”

“Fear not, master! I will ask her.”

“Meantime,” said the philosopher, with a deep sigh, “my elixir remains imperfect, and three times fifteen days will be necessary to reach the point at which I was to-day. Have a care, Acharat, your loss will be as great as mine, if I die, and my work incomplete! But what voice is that? Does the carriage move?”

“No, master — you hear thunder.”

“Thunder?”

“Yes, we have nearly all been killed by a thunderbolt; but my silk coat protected me!”

“Now, see to what your childish freaks expose me, Acharat! To die by a thunderbolt, to be stupidly killed by an electric fire that I would myself bring down from heaven, if I had time, to boil my pot — this is not only exposing me to accidents which the malice or awkwardness of men bring on us, but to those which come from Heaven, and which may be easily prevented.”

“Your pardon, master; I do not understand.”

“What! did I not explain to you my system of points — my paper-kite conductor? When I have found my elixir, I shall tell it you again; but now, you see, I have not time.”

“And you believe one may master the thunderbolt of heaven?”

“Certainly — not only master it, but conduct it where you choose; and when I have passed my second half century, when I shall have but calmly to await a third, I shall put a steel bridle on a thunderbolt, and guide it as easily as you do Djerid. Meantime, put a funnel on my chimney, I beg you!”

“I shall. Rest easy.”

“I shall! — always the future, as if we could both look forward to the future! Oh, I shall never be understood!” cried the philosopher, writhing in his chair, and tossing his arms in despair. “' Be calm!' — he tells me to be calm; and in three months, if I have not completed my elixir, all will be over! But so that I pass my second half century — that I recover my powers of motion — I shall meet no one who says, 'I shall do ' — I shall then myself exclaim, 'I have done!'”

“Do you hope to say that, with regard to our great work? ”

“Yes! were I but as sure of — oh, heavens! — discovering the elixir as I am of making the diamond!”

“Then you are sure of that?”

“It is certain, since I have already made some.”

“Made some?”

“Yes, look!”

“Where?”

“On your right, in the little glass vase.”

The traveler anxiously seized the little crystal cup, to the bottom and sides of which adhered an almost impalpable powder.

“Diamond dust? ” cried the young man.

“Yes, diamond dust — but in the middle of it?”

“Yes! yes! a brilliant of the size of a millet-seed.”

“The size is nothing; we shall attain to the union of the dust, and make the grain of millet-seed a grain of hemp-seed, and of the grain of hemp-seed a pea. But first, my dear Acharat, put a funnel on my chimney, and a conductor on the carriage, that the rain may not descend through my chimney, and that the lightning may go and sport itself elsewhere.”

“Yes, yes — doubt it not! Be calm!”

“Again, again, this eternal 'Be calm!' You make me swear. Youth! — mad youth! — presumptuous youth!” cried the old man, with a laugh of scorn, which showed all his toothless gums and made his eyes sink deeper in their hollow sockets.

“Master,” said Acharat, “your fire is going out, your crucible cooling. But what is in the crucible?”

“Look into it!”

The young man obeyed, uncovered the crucible, and found in it a heap of vitrified charcoal, about the size of a small seed.

“A diamond!” cried he; then, after a slight examination of it — “ Yes, but stained, incomplete, valueless!”

“Because the fire was put out — because there is no funnel on the chimney.”

“Let me look at it again, master,” said the young man, turning in his hand the diamond, which sometimes shot forth brilliant rays, and sometimes was dull. “Good! — pardon me, and take some food.”

“It is unnecessary; I took my spoonful of elixir two hours ago.”

“You are mistaken, dear master; it was at six in the morning that you, took it.”

“Well, and what o'clock is it now?”

“Half-past eight in the evening.”

“Heaven and earth! — another day past! — gone forever! But the days are shorter than they were; there are not twenty-four hours in them now.”

“If you will not eat, sleep at least for some minutes.”

“Well, yes, I will sleep two hours — yes, just two hours. Look at your watch, and in two hours awake me.”

“I promise to do so.”

“Dost thou know, dear Acharat,” said the old man in a caressing tone, “when I sleep, I always fear it will be for eternity — so in two hours you will wake me. Will you not? Promise it — swear it!”

“I swear it, master.”

“In two hours?”

“In two hours!”

Just then something like the trampling of a horse was heard, and then a shout which indicated alarm and surprise.

“What does that mean?” cried the traveler; and hurriedly opening the carriage door, he leaped out.

CHAPTER III.

Lorenza Feliciani.

WE SHALL NOW INFORM the reader what passed outside, while the philosopher and the traveler were conversing inside the carriage.

At the noise of the thunderbolt, which struck down two of the horses and caused the other two to rear so frightfully, the lady in the cabriolet, as we have said, had fainted. She remained for some minutes motionless; then, as fear alone had caused her to swoon, by slow degrees her consciousness returned.

“Ah, Heaven!” she exclaimed, “abandoned here — helpless — with no human creature to take pity on me!”

“Madame,” replied a timid voice, “I am here, if I can be of any service to you.”

At the sound of this voice, which seemed close to her ear, the young lady rose, put her head out between the leather curtains, and found herself face to face with a young man who was standing on the step of the cabriolet.

“It was you who spoke, sir?” said she.

“Yes, madame,” answered the young man.

“And you offered me your services?”

“Yes.”

“But first tell me what has happened.”

“The thunderbolt, which fell almost on your carriage, broke the traces of the front horses, and one of them ran off with the postilion.”

The lady looked uneasily around.

“And he who rode the hinder horses?” she asked.

“He has just got into the carriage, madame.”

“Has he not been injured?”

“Not in the least.”

“Are you sure?”

“He leaped from his horse, at least, like a man all safe and sound.”

“Heaven be praised!” and the young lady breathed more freely. “But who are you, sir, who are here so opportunely to offer me assistance?”

“Madame, overtaken by the storm, I was down in that hollow, which is merely the entrance to a quarry, when all at once I heard a carriage coming with alarming speed. I at first supposed the horses had run off, but soon saw that they were managed by a powerful hand. Then the thunderbolt fell with a tremendous explosion, and I thought for an instant that all was over with me. Indeed, on recovering, all that I have related seemed but a dream.”

“Then you are not sure that the gentleman entered the carriage?”

“Oh, yes, madame; I had quite recovered, and distinctly saw him enter.”

“Make yourself certain, I entreat you, that he is in the carriage.”

“But how?”

“Listen; if he be there you will hear two voices.”

The young man jumped down from the step, and approached the door of the carriage.

“Yes, madame,” said he, returning to her, “he is there.”

The young lady, by a movement of her head, seemed to say, “It is well,” but she remained for some time as if plunged in a deep reverie.

During this time the young man had leisure to examine her appearance. She was about three or four-and-twenty years of age; a brunette in complexion, but of that rich brown which is more beautiful than the most delicate tint of the rose; her fine blue eyes, raised to heaven, from which she seemed to 'ask counsel, shone like two stars; and her black hair, which she wore without powder, notwithstanding the fashion of the day, fell in jetty curls on her neck. All at once she roused herself, as if she had decided on her part.

“Sir,” said she, “where are we now?”

“On the road from Strasbourg to Paris, madame.”

“On what part of the road?”

“Two leagues from Pierrefitte.”

“What is Pierrefitte?”

“A village.”

“And, after Pierrefitte, what is the next stage?”

“Bar-le-Duc.”

“Is it a town?”

“Yes, madame.”

“A large one?”

“About four or five thousand inhabitants.”

“Is there any cross-road *by* which one could get more directly to Bar-le-Duc?”

“No, madame — at least, I know of none.”

“Peccato!” murmured she, falling back in the cabriolet. The young man waited, expecting to be questioned further; but, as she kept silence, he moved a step or two away. This roused her, for, leaning out again, she called hurriedly, “Monsieur!”

The young man returned.

“I am here, madame,” said he, approaching her.

“One question, if you please.”

“Speak, madame.”

“There was a horse behind the carriage?”

“Yes, madame.”

“Is he there still?”

“No, madame; the person who got into the carriage untied him and fastened him to the wheel.”

“Nothing, then, has injured the horse?”

“I think not.”

“He is a valuable animal, and I should like to be sure that he is safe; but how can I reach him through this mud?”

“I can bring the horse here,” said the young man.

“Oh, yes, do so, I pray; I shall be forever grateful to you.”

The young man approached the horse, who tossed his head and neighed.

“Do not be afraid,” said the female; “he is as gentle as a lamb; “then, in a low voice, she murmured, “Djerid, Djerid!”

The animal evidently knew the voice to be that of his mistress, for he snorted, and stretched out his intelligent head toward the cabriolet. During this time the young man was untying him, but the horse no sooner felt his bridle in unpracticed hands than at one bound he was free, and twenty paces from the carriage.

“Djerid!” repeated the young woman in her most caressing tones, “Djerid! here, here!”

The Arabian tossed his head, snuffed the air, and came toward the cabriolet, pawing as if in time to some musical air.

The lady leaned out. “Come, Djerid, come,” said she.

And the obedient animal advanced toward the hand which she held out to caress him. Then with her slender hand she seized him by the mane, and sprang as lightly into the saddle as the goblin in the German ballads, who leaps behind unwary travelers and holds on by their belts. The young man hurried toward her, but she waved him off imperiously.

“Hearken!” said she; “though young, or rather, because you are young, you ought to be humane. Do not oppose my flight. I leave a man whom I love; but my religion is still dearer to me. That man will destroy my soul if I stay with him longer; he is an atheist and a necromancer. God has warned him by his thunders; may he profit by the warning. Tell him what I have said, and receive my blessing for what you have done for me. Farewell!”

At that word, light as a vapor, she disappeared, borne away by the aerial Djerid. The young man, seeing her flee, could not prevent a cry of astonishment escaping his lips. It was this cry which startled the traveler in the carriage.

CHAPTER IV.

Gilbert.

THE CRY HAD, as we have said, roused the traveler. He leaped out, shut the door carefully after him, and looked uneasily around.

The first object which he beheld was the young man standing there in alarm. The lightning, which flashed incessantly, enabled him to examine him from head to foot, a practice which seemed habitual with the traveler when any unknown person or thing met his eye. He was a youth of sixteen or seventeen years old, little, thin, and muscular. His black eyes, which he fixed boldly on any object which attracted his attention, wanted mildness, but had a certain kind of beauty; his nose, small and turned up, his thin lip and projecting cheek-bones, betokened cunning and circumspection; and the strong curve of his chin announced firmness.

“Did you shout just now?” asked the traveler.

“Yes, sir.”

“And why?”

“Because” — He stopped short.

“Because?” repeated the traveler.

“Sir, there was a lady in the cabriolet.”

“Yes!”

And the eyes of Balsamo darted on the carriage as if they could have penetrated its sides.

“There was a horse tied to the wheel.”

“Yes; where the devil is he?”

“Sir, the lady has fled on the horse.” The traveler, without uttering a word, sprang to the cabriolet, undrew the curtains, and a flash of lightning showed him it was empty.

“Sang du Christ!” shouted he, loud almost as the thunder which pealed at that moment.

Then he looked round, as if for some means of recovering the fugitives, but soon felt that it was vain.

“To try to overtake Djerid,” he muttered, “with a common horse, would be to hunt the gazelle with the tortoise; but I shall know where she is, unless —

He felt hurriedly in the pocket of his vest, and drew from it a little case, opened it, and took out of a folded paper a curl of black hair. At the sight of it the traveler's face lost its anxious expression, and his manner became calm — at least, in appearance.

“Well,” said he, wiping the perspiration from his forehead, “well, and did she say nothing on leaving?”

“Oh yes, sir.”

“What did she say?”

“That she quitted you not through hatred, but fear; that she is a good Christian, and that you — ”

He hesitated.

“And that I!”

“I know not how to tell it.”

“Padre! tell it.”

“That you are an atheist and an infidel; that God has given you a last warning by the storm; that she understood that warning, and conjures you not to be deaf to it.”

A smile of contempt curled the lip of the traveler. “And this was all she said?”

“Yes, this was all.”

“Well, let us speak of something else,” and all trace of disquietude passed away from the traveler's countenance.

The young man remarked all these emotions reflected on his face, with a curiosity indicating no deficiency on his side of powers of observation.

“And now,” said the traveler, “what is your name, my young friend?”

“Gilbert, sir.”

“Gilbert! — that is merely a baptismal name.”

“It is the name of our family.”

“Well! my dear Gilbert, Providence has sent you to my aid.”

“I shall be happy, if I can oblige you, sir.”

“Thank you. At your age one is obliging for the mere pleasure of the thing; but what I am going to ask is only a trifle — merely if you can direct me to a shelter for the night?”

“Why, in the first place, there is that rock under which I was sheltering just now.”

“Yes,” said the traveler, “but I should like something more like a house, where I could have a good supper and a good bed.”

“That would be very difficult to find.”

“Are we then so far from the next village?”

“From Pierrefitte?”

“It is called Pierrefitte, then?”

“Yes, sir; it is about a league and a half off.”

“A league and a half! — let us see — surely there is some habitation nearer?”

“There is the chateau of Taverney, about three hundred paces from this.”

“Well, then — ”

“What, sir!” and the young man opened his eyes in astonishment.

“Why did you not say so at once?”

“The chateau of Taverney is not a hotel.”

“Is it inhabited?”

“Yes.”

“By whom?”

“Why, by the Baron de Taverney, of course.”

“What is this Baron de Taverney?”

“He is the father of Mademoiselle Andree, sir.”

“Very pleasing intelligence, indeed; but I mean what sort of a man is he?”

“An old nobleman, sir, of sixty or sixty-five years of age; he once was rich, they say.”

“Ay, and poor now! — that is the history of all those old barons. Well, show me the way to this baron's abode.”

“To the Baron de Taverney's?” he asked, in alarm.

“Then you refuse?”

“No, sir; but — ”

“Well?”

“He will not receive you.”

“He will not receive a gentleman in need of shelter? — Is he a bear, your baron?”

“Dame!” said the young man, with an expression which said plainly, “not much unlike one.”

“Never mind, I'll run the risk.”

“Remember, I do not advise it.”

“Bah!” said the traveler, “bear as he is, he won't eat me!”

“No — but he may shut the door in your face.”

“Then I'll break it open; so, if you refuse to be my guide — ”

“I don't refuse, sir.”

“Show me the way then.”

“Willingly, sir.”

The traveler leaped into the cabriolet and brought from it a little lantern. The young man hoped, as it was not lighted, that he should be obliged to open the carriage, and that then its interior would be disclosed. But the traveler did nothing of the kind; he put the lantern into Gilbert's hand.

“What shall I do with it, sir?”

“It will light you on the way, while I lead the horses.”

“But it *is* not lighted.”

“I am going to light it.”

“Oh, you have a fire in the carriage?”

“And in my pocket,” replied the traveler.

“But in this rain the tinder won't kindle.”

“Open the lantern,” said the traveler, smiling.

Gilbert obeyed.

“Hold your hat over my hands.”

Gilbert obeyed, regarding with curiosity what followed, for he knew no other means of procuring a light than with a flint and tinder.

The traveler took from his pocket a very small silver case, drew from it a match, which he rubbed in some sort of inflammable paste, and it kindled instantly, with a slight crackling.

Gilbert started; the traveler smiled at his surprise, which was natural enough at that time, when phosphorus was only known to a few chemists, who kept the secret for their own advantage. The candle in the lantern being lighted by the match, he put up the little case. The young man followed his movements with greedy eyes; it was evident he would have given a great deal for such a treasure.

“Now that we have light, lead on.”

“Follow now, then, sir;” and Gilbert advanced, while his companion, taking the horse by the bit, dragged him after.

The weather was now not so bad, the rain had ceased, and the thunder was only heard muttering at a distance. The traveler seemed to wish for more conversation.

“You know this baron, then, *my* good fellow?”

“Certainly, sir, since I have lived in his house from *my* infancy.”

“A relation?”

“No, sir.”

“Your guardian?”

“No.”

“Your master?”

The young man started and colored with anger at the word *master* — “I am not a servant, sir,” said he.

“Well, but you are surely something or other?”

“I am the son of an old tenant of the baron's; my mother nursed Mademoiselle Andree.”

“I understand; being the young lady's foster-brother — for I presume she is young — you live at free quarters in the house.”

“She is sixteen, sir.”

Now in the traveler's last words there — was something like two questions, but Gilbert avoided any reply to that which concerned himself. The traveler seemed to observe this, and gave his interrogations another turn.

“How did you happen to be out during such weather?”

“I was under a rock near the road.”

“What were you doing there?”

“I was reading.”

“You were reading?”

“Yes.”

“What were you reading?”

“'Le Contrat Social,' by Rousseau.”

The traveler looked at the young man with surprise.

“Did you get that book in the baron's library?”

“No, sir; I bought it.”

“Where? — at Bar-le-Duc?”

“No, sir; from a peddler. They roam this way now and then, and bring us some tolerably good books.”

“Who told you 'Le Contrat Social' was a good book?”

“I soon found that out, as I read it.”

“Have you read bad books, then, that you know the difference so well?”

“Yes.”

“What do you call bad books?”

“Why, 'Le Sofa,' 'Tanza'i,' and 'Neadarne,' and books of that description.”

“But where the deuce did you get such books?”

“In the baron's library.”

“And how does the baron get new novels in this den of his?”

“They are sent him from Paris.”

“So this poor baron spends his money on that sort of trash?”

“No; they are given him.”

“Given him? By whom?”

“By one of his friends, a great nobleman.”

“A great nobleman! Do you know his name?”

“The Duc de Richelieu.”

“What! — the old marshal?”

“Yes, the marshal.”

“I take it for granted he does not leave such books in Mademoiselle Andree's way?”

“Indeed, sir, he leaves them in everybody's way.”

“Is Mademoiselle Andree of your opinion,” asked the traveler, with a sly smile, “that they are bad?”

“She does not read them, sir,” replied Gilbert, dryly.

The traveler was silent for a minute — this character, a singular mixture of shame and boldness, of good and evil, interested him in spite of himself.

“And why did you read those books when you knew they were bad?”

“Because I did not know when I began them.”

“But you soon found it out?”

“Yes.”

“And nevertheless you went on?”

“Yes.”

“But why?”

“They taught me things I did not know before.”

“And 'Le Contrat Social?'”

“It teaches me things that I have guessed.”

“How so?”

“Why, that men are brothers — that societies in which there are serfs or slaves are ill constituted — that one day we shall all he equal.”

“Oh, ho!” said the traveler. There was a short silence.

“So my good fellow,” continued the traveler in a low voice, “you wish to be instructed?”

“Yes, sir, that is my most ardent wish.”

“And what do you wish to learn?”

“Everything.”

“For what purpose?”

“To raise myself in the world.”

“And how high would you rise?”

Gilbert hesitated. No doubt he had his mind made up on that point, but it was evidently a secret, and he would not reveal it.

“As high as man can rise,” he replied.

“Well, have you studied anything?”

“Nothing. How can I study, not being rich, and living at Taverney?”

“Then you know nothing of mathematics?”'

“No.”

“Nor of natural philosophy?”

“No.”

“Nor of chemistry?”

“No; I know only how to read and write — but I shall know all those things.”

“When?”

“Some day or other.”

“But how?”

“I don't know yet.”

“Strange creature!” muttered the traveler.

“And then — !” murmured Gilbert, speaking to himself.

“Well! then — ?”

“Nothing.”

They had now proceeded for about a quarter of an hour; the rain had ceased, and the earth sent up those odoriferous exhalations which in spring follow a great storm.

Gilbert seemed reflecting — all at once he said, “Sir, do you know the cause of storms?”

“Certainly.”

“You really do!”

“Yes.”

“You know the cause of the thunderbolt?”

The traveler smiled. “It is the meeting of two streams of the electric fluid — one from the clouds, the other from the earth.”

Gilbert sighed. “I do not understand that,” said he.

Perhaps the traveler would have explained the matter more clearly, but just then a light appeared through the trees.

“Ah! what is that?” asked the stranger.

“It is Taverney.”

“We have reached it, then?”

“Yes; this is the gate of the back entrance.”

“Open it.”

“And do you think the gate of Taverney, sir, can be opened with a push?”

“Is it a fortified place, then? Knock.”

Gilbert approached the gate, and timidly gave one knock.

“Pardieu! they will never hear that. Knock loudly!”

Nothing, indeed, indicated that Gilbert's knock had been heard — all was silent.

“You must take the responsibility upon yourself, sir, then,” said Gilbert.

“Don't be troubled about that.”

Gilbert hesitated no longer — left the knocker, and pulled a string which made a bell sound so loud, one might have heard it a mile off.

“Ma fou! if your baron does not hear that,” said the traveler, “he must be deaf.”

“Hark! I hear Mahon barking.”

“Mahon? That is no doubt a compliment from your baron to his friend the Duc de Richelieu?”

“I don't know what you mean, sir.”

“Mahon was the last place taken by the marshal.”

“Oh, sir, I told you I know nothing,” and Gilbert sighed again.

These sighs revealed to the stranger some hidden ambition, some secret cause of pain.

A step was heard. “Here is some one at last,” said the stranger.

“It is Master la Brie,” said Gilbert.

The gate opened, but La Brie, taken by surprise at seeing the stranger and the carriage when he expected no one but Gilbert, would have shut it again.

“Excuse me, my friend, but I have come here purposely, and you must not shut the door in my face.”

“But, sir, I must tell the baron that an unexpected visitor —

“Never mind — I shall run the risk of his looking a little cross at me; but he shall not turn me out, I can tell you, until I have got warmed, dried, and fed. They say you have good wine in this part of the country — do you happen to know?”

La Brie, instead of replying, was going to make further resistance, but it was in vain; the traveler pushed in, and Gilbert closed the gate after him, the two horses and carriage being in the avenue. La Brie, seeing himself vanquished, proceeded as quickly as his old limbs would permit toward the house, to announce his own defeat, shouting with all his strength, “Nicole Legay, Nicole Legay!”

“Who is this Nicole?” asked the stranger, calmly making his way to the house.

“Nicole Legay, sir?” replied Gilbert, with symptoms of some inward emotion.

“Yes — she whom Master la Brie is calling!”

“Mademoiselle Andree's waiting-maid, sir.”

In the meantime, in answer to the calls of La Brie, a light appeared under the trees, borne by a beautiful young girl.

“What do you want, La Brie? What is all this fuss?” asked she.

“Quick, Nicole,” cried the quivering voice of the old man, “run and tell the baron a strange gentleman is come to ask shelter.”

Nicole did not wait to be told twice, but flew off toward the chateau so quickly that in a moment she was out of sight.

As to La Brie, having thus satisfied himself that the baron should not be taken by surprise, he stopped and took breath.

The message soon produced an effect. A sharp commanding voice was heard from the house, repeating, with an accent by no means indicating a wish to be hospitable — “A strange gentleman? Who is he? — people don't come in that way without sending up their names!”

“Is it the baron himself?” asked he who was the cause of all the disturbance.

“Oh, yes, sir,” replied the poor frightened old man, “you hear what he says?”

“He asks my name, I think?”

“Yes. I forgot to ask it, sir.”

“Say, the Baron Joseph Balsamo. Our titles being the same, he will perhaps not be so angry.”

La Brie, a little emboldened by the rank of the stranger, announced him as he requested.

“Well,” grumbled the voice from the house, “since he is there, he must come in. Here, sir — this way — this way.”

The stranger advanced quickly; but just as he reached the foot of the stone steps leading up to the door, he turned to see whether Gilbert were there or not. Gilbert had disappeared.

CHAPTER V.

The Baron De Taverney.

ALTHOUGH IN some degree forewarned by Gilbert of the poverty of the Baron de Taverney, the person who had caused himself to be announced as the Baron Joseph Balsamo could not help being surprised at the miserable appearance of the abode called by Gilbert, with emphasis, a chateau.

The house was built in the form of an oblong square of one story in height, with a square tower at each corner. Its irregular appearance had, however, something pleasing and picturesque, seen by the pale light of the moon, shining out from between the huge masses of the clouds left by the storm. There were six windows in the low building, and two in each tower — that is, one window in each of its stories. A broad flight of steps led up to the hall-door, but they were so broken and rugged that they seemed rather a sort of precipice than a staircase.

Such was the dwelling, on the threshold of which the stranger was received by the Baron de Taverney, in his dressing-gown, and holding a candlestick in his hand. The baron was a little old man of from sixty to sixty-five years of age, with a keen eye and a high retreating forehead. He wore an old wig, which from frequent accidents with the' candles on the mantelpiece had lost all the curls which the rats, which frequented his wardrobe, had left it. He held in his hand a napkin of very dubious whiteness, which indicated that he had been disturbed when going to sit down to supper.

In his malicious countenance, which slightly resembled that of Voltaire, two expressions struggled for mastery — politeness required a smile for his guest, but vexation turned it to a rather decided atrabilious sneer. And thus lighted as he was by the candle in his hand, the flickering of which disturbed his features, the Baron de Taverney could not well be called anything but a very ugly nobleman.

“Sir,” said he, “may I know to what fortunate circumstance I owe the pleasure of seeing you?”

“Simply, sir, to the storm, which frightened my horses and caused them very nearly to destroy my carriage; one of *ray* postilions was thrown from his horse, the other galloped off with his, and I know not what I should have done, had I not met a young man who conducted me to your chateau, assuring me that your hospitality was well known.”

The baron raised his light to endeavor to discover the unlucky wight who had, by this piece of information, been the cause of the unwelcome visit. Balsamo also looked around for his guide, but he had retired.

“And do you know the name of the young man who pointed out my chateau?” asked the Baron de Taverney, as if he 'wanted to return him thanks.

“Gilbert, I think, is his name.”

“Ha! Gilbert! I scarcely thought him fit even for that — an idle dog! — a philosopher, you must know, sir!”

The threatening tone in which these epithets were uttered showed that there was little sympathy between the lord and his vassal.

“However, sir,” said the baron, after a moment's silence, as expressive as his words, “will you be good enough to enter?”

“Allow me first, sir, to see after my carriage, which contains some very valuable articles.”

“La Brie!” cried the baron, “La Brie! get some assistance, and put the gentleman's carriage under the shed in the yard — there are still some laths of a roof there. I can't answer for your horses, however, getting a good feed, but as they are not yours, but the postmaster's, you need not care very much.”

“In truth, sir,” said the traveler, beginning to get impatient, “I fear that I am giving you quite too much trouble.”

“Not at all, sir — not at all — no trouble to me — but you will be rather poorly lodged, I warn you.”

“Sir, I assure you I feel exceedingly grateful.”

“Pray, do not deceive yourself as to what we can do for you,” said the baron, raising his candle, so as to throw its rays in the direction where Balsamo was assisting La Brie to wheel his carriage under the shed, and elevating his voice in proportion as his guest retreated — “Pray do not deceive yourself — Taverney is a dull abode, a wretched place!”

The traveler was too busy to reply; he chose the best covered part of the shed to shelter the carriage, and having pointed it out to La Brie, slipped a louis-d'or into his hand, and returned to the baron.

La Brie put the louis in his pocket, supposing it only a crown, and thanking Heaven for his good fortune.

“Heaven forbid I should think so ill of your chateau as you speak of it!” said Balsamo, bowing to the baron, who, as the only proof of the truth of his assertion, shook his head, and lead the guest through a wide, damp antechamber, grumbling as he proceeded — ” Oh, all very good! but I know what I am saying — I know, unfortunately, my own means, and I assure you they are very limited.

If you are a Frenchman, sir — but your German accent shows you are not, and yet your name is Italian, but that is no matter — if you are a Frenchman. I repeat, the name of Taverney may recall some recollections of splendor — it was once called Taverney the rich!”

Balsamo expected a sigh at this conclusion, but there was none. “Philosophy!” thought he.

“This way, this way!” cried the baron, opening the dining-room door. “Hola! M. la Brie! wait at supper, now, as if you were yourself a hundred footmen in one!”

La Brie bustled about in obedience to this command.

“I have no servant but this, sir,” said Taverney; “he is a very bad one, but I have not the means of getting a better. The fool has been with me twenty years without getting a penny of wages. I feed him about as well as he waits on me. He is an ass, you see!”

Balsamo continued to study this character. “No heart,” thought he; “yet perhaps all this was merely affectation.”

The baron shut the door of the dining-room, and then, as he held his light high above his head, the traveler saw distinctly its size and its furniture.

It was a large, low hall, which had formerly been the principal apartment of a small farm-house, raised by its owner to the rank of a chateau. It was so scantily furnished, that, at the first glance, it appeared empty. Straw chairs, with carved backs, some engravings from the battlepieces of Lebrun, framed in black varnished wood, and a large oak cupboard, dark with age and smoke, were all its ornaments. In the middle stood a little round table on which was a dish of partridges and cabbage. The wine was in a stone jar, and the plate, unpolished, worn, and battered, consisted of three covers, one tankard and one saltcellar — but this last article was very massive, exquisitely chased, and looked like a diamond among worthless pebbles.

“There, sir, there!” said the baron, offering a seat to his guest, whose scrutinizing look on all around did not escape him. “Oh, you are looking at my saltcellar. You admire it. Good taste — and very polite, too, for you fix on the only tiling here worth looking at. I assure you, sir, I am particularly obliged. But, no, I forgot — I have one other valuable commodity — my daughter! '

“Mademoiselle Andree?” said Balsamo.

“Faith, yes! Mademoiselle Andree!” said the host, surprised that his guest was so well informed. “I shall present you to her. Andree! Andree! come hither, child — don't be afraid.”

“I am not afraid, father,” answered a sweet and clear voice, and a tall and beautiful girl entered the room, in a manner perfectly unembarrassed, and yet quite free from forwardness.

Joseph Balsamo, though, as we have seen, perfectly master of himself, could not prevent an involuntary bow at sight of all-powerful beauty like hers. Andree de Taverney seemed indeed sent to adorn and brighten all around her. She had dark auburn hair, of a rather lighter shade at her temples and neck, black eyes — clear, with dilated pupils-and a steady and majesty look, like that of an eagle, yet the mildness of that look was inexpressible. Her small mouth, formed like Apollo's bow, was brilliant as coral; her tapering hands were antique in form, as were her arms, and dazzlingly fair. Her figure, flexible and firm, was like that of the statue of some pagan goddess to which a miracle had given life. Her foot might bear a comparison with that of the huntress Diana, and it seemed only by a miracle that it could support the weight of her body. Her dress was of the simplest fashion, yet suited her so well, that it seemed as if one from the wardrobe of a queen would not have been so elegant or so rich.

All these details were perceived by Balsamo in the first glance, as the young lady passed from the door to the table. On his side, the baron had not lost a single impression produced on the mind of his guest by the rare union of perfections in his daughter.

“You were right,” whispered Balsamo, turning to his host, “Mademoiselle Andree is perfection.”

“Do not flatter poor Andree, sir,” said the baron, carelessly; “she has just returned home from her convent, and she will believe all you say — not that I am afraid of her coquetry — on the contrary, the dear child is not enough of a coquette, but, like a good father, I am cultivating in her that first and most important quality for a woman.”

Andree looked down and blushed; although she tried to avoid listening, she could not but overhear her father's words.

“Did they tell mademoiselle that at the convent?” asked Joseph Balsamo, laughing; “and was that precept part of the instructions of the nuns?”

“Sir,” replied the baron, “I have my own way of thinking on particular subjects, as you may see.”

This was so self-evident that Balsamo merely bowed in assent.

“No,” continued he, “I do not imitate those fathers who say to their daughters, 'Be prudes, be rigid, be blind — think of nothing but honor, delicacy, devotion.' Fools! It is as if the fathers of the knights of old had sent those champions into the lists — after having taken off all their armor — to fight an adversary armed cap-a-pie. Pardieu! That is not the way I shall bring up my daughter Andree, though she be brought up in this miserable den.”

Although Balsamo perfectly agreed with the baron as to the propriety of this last epithet, yet he deemed it polite to contradict it.

“Oh, all very well,” resumed the old man, “but I know the place, I tell you. Yet, though now so far from the sun of Versailles, my daughter shall know the world which I formerly knew so well myself; and if she enter it, it shall be with an arsenal of weapons forged by my experience and my recollections. But I must confess, sir, the convent has ruined all my plans. As if that was what I wanted, my daughter was the first boarder who really practiced the precepts there taught, and followed the letter of the Gospel. C'orbleu! was not that being prettily served?”

“Mademoiselle is an angel,” replied Balsamo, “and in truth, sir, what you say does not surprise me.”

Andree bowed her thanks for this compliment, and sat down in obedience to a look from her father.

“Be seated, baron,” said the host, “and if you are hungry, eat. “What a horrible ragout that fool La Brie has given us!”

“Partridges! Do you call that horrible?” said the guest, smiling. “You slander your supper. Partridges in May! Are they from your own estate?”

“My estates! it is long since I had one. My respectable father left me some land indeed, but it was eaten and digested long enough ago. Oh, Heaven be praised! I have not an inch of ground. That good-for-nothing

Gilbert, who can only read and dream, must have stolen a gun, powder, and shot, from some one or other, and he kills birds, poaching on the estates of my neighbors. He will be caught and sent to the galleys some day, and certainly I shall not interfere, it will be a good riddance; but Andree likes game, so I am obliged to overlook Monsieur Gilbert's freaks.”

Balsamo watched Andree's lovely fare as this was said, but not a change, not the slightest blush, disturbed it.

He was seated at table between her and the baron, and she helped him, without appearing in the least annoyed at the scantiness of the repast, to a portion of the dish procured by Gilbert and cooked by La Brie, and so heartily abused by the baron. During this time poor La Brie, who heard all the eulogiums passed on himself and Gilbert, handed the plates with a deprecating air, which became quite triumphant at each word of praise the guest bestowed on his cookery.

“He has not even salted his abominable ragout!” cried the baron, after he had devoured two wings of a partridge, which his daughter had placed before him on a tempting layer of cabbage. “Andree, pass the saltcellar to the Baron Balsamo.”

Andree obeyed, extending her arm with exquisite grace.

“Ah, you are admiring the saltcellar again!” said the host.

“No, sir, you are wrong this time,” replied Balsamo; “I was admiring mademoiselle's hand.”

“Ah! very good indeed — a perfect Richelieu! But since you have the saltcellar in your own hand, examine it; it was made for the regent “by the goldsmith Lucas. It represents the loves of the satyrs and “bacchantes — a little free, but pretty.”

Balsamo saw that the little figures so admirably executed were something worse than free, and he could not but admire the unconsciousness with which Andree had offered him the saltcellar.

But as if the baron had determined to put to the proof that innocence which carries with it such a charm, he began to point out in detail the beauties of his favorite piece of plate, in spite of all Balsamo's efforts to change the conversation.

“Come, eat, baron,” said Taverney, “for I warn you there is no other dish. Perhaps you are expecting the roast and other removes; if so, great will be your disappointment.”

“Pardon me, sir,” said Andree, in her usual calm manner, “but if Nicole has rightly understood me, we shall have another dish. I have given her the receipt for one.”

“The receipt! you have given a receipt to your maid! the femme-de-chambre turned cook! It only requires one step more — turn cook yourself, I beg you! Did the Duchesse de Chateauroux or the Marchioness de Pompadour ever cook for the king? On the contrary, it was he who dressed omelets for them. Jour de Dieu! have I lived to see women cooking in my house? Baron, excuse my daughter, I beseech you.”

“But, father, “we must eat,” said Andree quietly. “Well, Legay,” added she in a louder tone, “is it done?”

“Yes, mademoiselle,” replied the maid, bringing in a dish of a very tempting odor.

“I know one at least who will not eat of that dish!” said the baron, furious, and breaking his plate as he spoke.

“Perhaps *you* will eat some, sir?” said Andree coldly. Then, turning to her father, “You know, sir, we have now only seven plates of that set which my mother left me;” and, so saying, she proceeded to carve the smoking viands which Mademoiselle Legay, the pretty waiting-maid, had just placed on the table.

CHAPTER VI.

Andree De Taverney.

THE SEARCHING intellect of Balsamo found ample food for study in each detail of the strange and isolated life led by this family in a corner of Lorraine.

The saltcellar alone revealed to him one phase of the baron's character, or rather his character in all its bearings. He called up all his penetration, therefore, as he scrutinized the features of Andree while she handed him that saltcellar.

At length, whether moved by curiosity or some deeper feeling, Balsamo gazed on Andree so fixedly, that two or three times, in less than ten minutes, the eyes of the young girl met his. At first she bore his look without confusion, but its intensity became by degrees so great that a feverish impatience, which made the blood mount to her cheeks, took possession of her; then, feeling that this look had something supernatural in its power, she tried to brave it, and, in her turn, she gazed at the baron with her large, limpid, dilated eyes. But this time again she was obliged to yield, and, filled with the magnetic fluid which flowed in streams from his flaming orbs, her eyelids weighed down, sunk timidly, no longer to be raised but with hesitation.

While this silent struggle went on between the young girl and the mysterious traveler, the baron grumbled, laughed, found fault, and swore like a true country gentleman, and pinched La Brie whenever he was within his reach, feeling that he must vent his spleen on some one. He was going to do the same to Nicole, when his eyes, for the first time no doubt, rested on the hands of the young waiting-maid. The baron was an adorer of fine hands — all his youthful follies might be attributed to the power of a fine hand over him.

“Only see!” cried he, “what pretty fingers this little rogue has! how the nail tapers — it would bend over the tip! — a great beauty if washing bottles and cutting wood did not wear down the horn; for it is horn you have at the ends of your fingers, Mademoiselle Nicole."

Not accustomed to compliments from her master, Nicole looked at him with a half smile, in which there was more astonishment than gratification.

"Yes, yes," said the baron, who saw what passed in the mind of the young flirt, "now turn away — play the coquette, I beg of you; but I must inform you, my dear guest, that Mademoiselle Nicole Legay, this young lady here present, is not a prude like her mistress, and is not at all afraid of a compliment."

Balsamo turned quickly toward the baron's daughter, and saw an expression of supreme disdain on her handsome features; then, thinking it right to adapt his expression to hers, he looked haughtily away, at which Andree seemed pleased, and regarded him with less sternness, or rather with less uneasiness, than before.

"Would you think, sir," continued the baron, chucking Nicole under the chin, "would you think that this damsel had been in a convent with my daughter, and is really what one might call educated? Oh! Mademoiselle Nicole would not quit her mistress for a moment. There is a devotedness in her which would greatly delight the philosophers who maintain that these creatures have souls."

"Sir," said Andree, displeased, "it is not devotedness which prevents Nicole from leaving me; it is because I order her to remain."

Balsamo rolled his eyes to Nicole, to see the effect of these contemptuous words, and he observed, from her compressed lips, that she was not insensible to the humiliations to which her position of domestic exposed her. But the emotion was transitory; for, in turning away to hide it, her eyes rested with interest on a window of the room which looked into the courtyard. Everything roused the curiosity of Balsamo, and, as he followed her eyes, he thought he saw what interested her — the face of a man at the window. "In truth," thought he, "every one has a mystery in this house, and I hope soon to know Mademoiselle Andree's. I have found out the baron's, and I guess what Nicole's is." While thus communing with himself, the baron observed his absence of mind.

"You are in a reverie, my dear guest," said he. "Well, it is infectious here — it attacks every one. Let me reckon; first, Mademoiselle de Taverney falls into reveries; then Mademoiselle Nicole does the same; then the good-for-nothing fellow who shot the partridges is in a perpetual reverie, and very likely the partridges were in a reverie when he shot them.”

“Gilbert?” asked Balsamo.

“Yes. Oh, a philosopher like Monsieur la Brie here! But excuse me; perhaps you are a friend of theirs? If so, I warn you you will be none of mine.”

“No, sir; I am neither for them nor against them,” replied Balsamo. “I know nothing of them.”

“Ventrebleu! so much the better. They are wretches as mischievous as they are ugly; the monarchy will be ruined by their opinions. No one laughs now; they read, they read! And what, I pray you? Sentiments like this; *Under a monarchical government it is difficult for a people to be virtuous;* or this; *Monarchy is an institution invented for the corruption of the morals of men, and the purpose of enslaving them!* or else this; *If the power of kings comes from God, it comes as diseases and other scourges of the human race come from him.* You call that improving, I hope! A virtuous people! Now, I ask you, of what use would they be? Everything has gone wrong since the king spoke to Voltaire and read Diderot!”

At this moment Balsamo thought he saw the pale face, which he had seen before, again appear at the window; but it vanished when he looked in that direction.

“Is mademoiselle a philosopher?” asked Balsamo, turning to Andree with a smile.

“I don't even know what philosophy is,” replied Andree. “I like what is serious.”

“Ha! mademoiselle!” cried the baron, “then, in my opinion, nothing is more serious than good living — like that. I pray you.”

“But mademoiselle does not hate life, I presume?” said Balsamo.

“That depends on circumstances,” replied Andree.

“What a stupid phrase,” exclaimed the baron; “would you believe it, sir, my son once made me, word for word, a similar reply?”

“You have a son, then, sir?”

“Oh, mon Dieu! sir, yes! I have that misfortune. The Chevalier de Taverney, lieutenant in the body-guard of the Dauphin — a most excellent young man! And the baron uttered these four words as if he would have crushed each letter in them.

“I congratulate you, sir, “said Balsamo, with a bow.

“Oh yes! another philosopher, sir! Upon the honor of a gentleman, it is sickening! Did he not speak to me the other day about giving the negroes their freedom! 'And what about sugar?' asked I,' for I like my coffee very sweet, and so does Louis XV.' 'Sir,' replied he,' is it not better to go without sugar than to make a whole race suffer?' 'A race of monkeys,' said I, and I think it was saying a great deal in their praise. Well! What do you think he said next? — ma foi! there must be something in the air to turn people's “heads! He replied to me, 'that all men were brothers!' I the brother of a Hottentot!”

“Oh, that was going rather far!”

“Hey! what do you think of that? I am in great luck with my two children, am I not? No one will say that I shall be truly represented in my descendants. The sister is an angel — the brother an apostle! Drink, sir, drink! The wine is detestable!”

“I think it exquisite,” said Balsamo, still looking at Andree.

“Then you *are* a philosopher! Take care, or I shall order my daughter to preach you a sermon. But, no, philosopher-, have no religion. Still, religion was a very convenient thing — one believed in God and the king, and all was settled. Now people believe in neither one nor the other — they must know so much — read so much — I prefer never doubting. In my time, our only study was to amuse ourselves — to play at faro and dice, and to fence — we ruined duchesses, and were ruined by opera-dancers — that was my history to a tittle! The whole of Taverney went to the opera. It is the only tiling I regret, for a ruined man is not worth the name of man. You think me old, don't you? Well, it is because I am ruined, and live in this den; because my wig is shabby, and my coat a relic of antiquity. But look at my friend, the marshal, with his coats of the newest cut, and his well-curled wig, and his ten thousand a-year. He looks young, fresh, and gay, and yet he is ten years older than I, sir! — ten years, I assure you!”

“You speak of Monsieur de Richelieu?”

“Yes, the same.”

“The duke?”

“Why, faith, not the cardinal, I think — I do not go quite so far back. Besides, the cardinal never did what his nephew did; he did not last so long.”

“I am surprised that, with such powerful friends at court, you should have left it.”

“Oh, a temporary retreat! I shall return to it some day or other,” and the old baron east a singular look on his daughter. Balsamo did not allow it to pass unnoticed.

“But,” said he, “the marshal might at least advance your son?”

“My son! He hates him.”

“Hates the son of his friend?”

“He is quite right.”

“And do *you* say so, sir?”

“Pardieu! I tell you he is a philosopher — he abhors him!”

“And Philip returns him the compliment,” said Andree, with perfect calmness. “Remove these things, Legay!”

The young girl, roused from her fixed contemplation of the window, hastened to obey.

“Ah,” said the baron, sighing, “one used to sit after supper till two in the morning — we had what was fit to eat thru, and when the eating was over, we drank. But how drink this stuff, when we are not occupied in eating? Legay, bring a flask of Maraschino, if there be one.”

“Do so,” said Andree, for the maid seemed to wait for her orders before obeying those of the baron.

The baron threw himself back in his chair, shut his eyes, and sighed with a grotesque sort of melancholy.

“You were speaking of the Marshal de Richelieu,” said Balsamo, who appeared not inclined to let the conversation drop.

“Yes,” said Taverney, “I was speaking of him,” and he hummed an air as melancholy as his sighs.

“If he hate your son, and if he be right to hate him because he is a philosopher, he must retain all his friendship for you, since you are not one.”

“Philosopher! no, Heaven be praised!”

“You must surely have claims on the administration! You have served the king?”

“Fifteen years. I was the marshal's aid-de-camp — we served together in the campaign of Mahon. Our friendship is of long standing — let me see; it began at the siege of Philipsbourg — that was in the year 1742 or '43.”

“So,” said Balsamo, “you were at the siege of Philipsbourg? I was there myself.” The old man sat upright in his chair and stared at the stranger.

“Excuse me; but what is your age, my respected guest?”

“Oh, I am not old,” said Balsamo, holding out his glass to be filled with Maraschino by the fair hand of Andree. The baron interpreted the stranger's answer in his own way, and concluded that Balsamo had some reason for concealing his age.

“Sir,” said he, “allow me to say that you do not appear to be old enough to have served at Philipsbourg — that siege took place twenty-eight years ago, and you seem to be about thirty.”

“Oh, anybody might be taken for thirty.”

“Pardieu, then, I wish *I* could; it is just thirty years since I was that age.

Mademoiselle Andree gazed with increasing and irresistible curiosity on the stranger, for every word revealed him in a new light.

“You astonish me, sir,” said the baron. “Unless you are all this time mistaken in the name, and are thinking of some other town than Philipsbourg. I should say you were not more than thirty; would not you, Andree, say the same?”

“Yes, indeed,” replied she, trying to bear the powerful eye of their guest, but this time again in vain.

“No, no,” said the latter, “I mean what I say — I mean the famous siege of Philipsbourg, at which the Due de Richelieu killed his cousin, the Prince de Lixen, in a duel. The affair took place as they were returning from the trenches, on the high road; he ran his sword right through his body! I passed just as he expired in the arms of the Prince de Deux Ponts; he was seated against the side of a ditch when Richelieu was coolly wiping his sword.”

“On my honor, you amaze me, sir,” said the baron; “it occurred precisely as you say.”

“You have heard the affair described?” asked Balsamo, coolly.

“I was there. I had the honor of being second to the marshal; he was not marshal then, but that is no matter.”

“Let me think.” said Balsamo, turning and gazing firmly on him — “ Were you not then a captain?”

“Precisely.”

“You were in the queen's regiment of light horse, which was cut to pieces at Fontenoy?”

“Perhaps you were at Fontenoy, too?” asked the baron, endeavoring to jest.

“No,” replied Balsamo; “I was dead at that time.”

The baron stared — Andree started — Nicole crossed herself.

“But to return to what we were saying. You wore the uniform of the light horse, I remember perfectly, at that time; I saw you as I passed; you were holding your own and the marshal's horse, while they fought. I went up to you and asked you about the duel — you gave me the details.”

“I?”

“Yes, you, pardieu! — I recognize you now — you bore the title of chevalier — they called you *the little chevalier.*”

“Mordieu!” cried the baron, all amazed.

“Excuse me that I did not sooner recognize you; but thirty years change a man. Let us drink the marshal's health, my dear baron.”

He raised his glass, and drained it to the last drop.

“You saw me there?” cried the baron; “impossible!”

“I saw you,” said Balsamo.

“On the high road?”

“On the high road.”

“Holding the horses?”

“Holding the horses.”

“While the duel was going on?”

“As the prince was expiring, I said.”

“Then you are fifty.”

“I am old enough to have seen what I tell you.”

The baron threw himself back in his chair, but in so ridiculous a pet that Nicole could not help laughing. Andree, instead of laughing, seemed to be in a reverie, her eyes open, and fixed on those of Balsamo. He appeared now to have attained his object. Suddenly rising, he sent from his flaming eyeball two or three lightning flashes full on her. She started, as if from an electric shock. Her arms stiffened, her neck bent, she smiled, yet as if involuntarily, on the stranger, then closed her eyes.

“Do you, also, mademoiselle, believe I speak falsely when I say that I was present at the siege of Philipsbourg?”

“No, sir, I believe you,” she articulated, making a violent effort.

“Then it is I who am only a dotard,” said the baron; “the gentleman, no doubt, has come back from the other world!”

Nicole gazed on him with horror.

“Who knows?” replied Balsamo, in so solemn a tone that he was yet more horrified.

“Well, then, baron,” resumed the old man, “to have done with jesting, are you really more than thirty? — you do not look more!”

“Sir,” said Balsamo, “would you believe me if I told you a very incredible thing?”

“I do not promise that,” said the baron, looking knowing, while Andree listened with eager attention. “I am very incredulous, I must candidly warn you.”

“What use is there, then, in putting a question, when you will not listen to my reply?”

“Well, I will believe you. There! — are you satisfied?”

“Then, sir, I have only to repeat what I have told you, and to add that I knew you personally at the siege of Philipsbourg.”

“Then you must have been a child?”

“Undoubtedly.”

“Four or five years old at most?”

“No, I was forty-one.”

The baron burst into a loud fit of laughter, which Nicole re-echoed.

“I told you you would not believe me,” said Balsamo, gravely.

“But how is it possible to believe that? at least, give me some proofs.”

“That is easy. I was forty-one then, but I do not say that I was the man I am.”

“Oh,” cried the baron, “this is going back to paganism. Was there not a philosopher — for those wretches flourished in every century — was there not a Greek philosopher who would not eat beans because he pretended they had had souls, as my son says negroes have — who was he? — what the deuce was his name?”

“Pythagoras,” said Andree.

“Yes, Pythagoras; the Jesuits taught me that. Father Poree made me compose Latin verses on it, with little Arouet. I remember they thought mine much the best. Pythagoras? — yes.”

“Well, how do you know that I am not Pythagoras?” replied Balsamo, quietly.

“I do not deny that you may be Pythagoras, but Pythagoras was not at the siege of Philipsbourg; at least, I did not see him there.”

“No; but you saw the Viscount Jean des Barreaux, who was in the black musketeers.”

“Yes, I knew him well, but he was no philosopher, although he did hate beans, and never ate them when he could help it.”

“Well! Do you recollect, the day after the duel, Des Barreaux was in the trenches with you?”

“Yes, perfectly well.”

“For you know the black musketeers and the light horse always mounted guard together, every seven days.”

“True enough. What next?”

“That very evening the grape-shot fell like hail, and Des Barreaux was dull; he asked you for a pinch of snuff, and you offered him your gold box.”

“On which was the likeness of a female?”

“Exactly. I see her now. She was fair, was she not?”

“Mordieu!” cried the baron, terrified, “you are right. Well, then?”

“Well, then,” continued Balsamo, “as he was taking that pinch of snuff, a ball carried off his head, just in the same way that Marshal Berwick's was carried away formerly.”

“Alas! yes, I remember,” said the baron; “poor Des Barreaux!”

“And now, sir, you see I must have seen and known you at the siege of Philipsbourg, since I was that very Des Barreaux.”

The baron fell back once more in his chair, almost stupefied at these words; but, recovering, he cried, “Why, this is sorcery — magic! A hundred years ago you would have been burned, my dear guest. Upon my honor, I think I can smell a sort of corpse-like odor!”

“Sir,” said Balsamo, “no true sorcerer or magician has ever yet been burned; it is fools who have anything to do with the faggot. But a truce to this conversation. Mademoiselle de Taverney *is* asleep; it seems that metaphysics and the occult sciences have few attractions for her.”

In fact, Andree, overcome by an unknown irresistible power, felt her head sink on her breast, like a flower whose cup bends under its weight of dew.

At the last words of Balsamo, she made an effort to shake off the influence that like a subtle fluid stole upon her. She shook her head, arose, seemed about to full, but, supported by Nicole, left the dining-room. At the same moment the face which had been looking in at the window, and which Balsamo had long ago recognized as Gilbert's, also disappeared. An instant after he heard Andree begin to play with vigor on her harpsichord. He had followed her with his eye as she left the room, and could not help exclaiming triumphantly, as she disappeared, “I may say, like Archimedes, *Eureka!”*

“Archimedes! Who was he?” asked the baron.

“A good sort of a fellow — a savant whom I knew two thousand one hundred and fifty years ago,” said Balsamo.

CHAPTER VII.

Eureka.

WHETHER THIS piece of extravagance was too much for the baron, whether he had not heard it, or whether, having heard it, he thought it best to get rid of his strange guest, we know not, but he made no reply to it; but when the sound of Andree's harpsichord proved that she was engaged in the next apartment, he offered to procure Balsamo the means of proceeding to the nearest town.

“I have an old horse who, though on his last legs, will carry you so far; and you would at least procure good lodgings. There is, indeed, a room and a bed at Taverney; but my ideas of hospitality are rather peculiar — *'good or none'* is my motto.”

“Then you wish to send me away!” said Balsamo, hiding his vexation under a smile. “That is treating me like an intruder.”

“No, indeed; it is treating you like a friend, my dear guest. Lodging you here would be really treating you as an enemy. I say this in all conscience, but with great regret, for I am delighted with your society.”

“Then, pray do not force me to rise when I am tired — to get on horseback when I would rather stretch my limbs in bed. Do not represent your hospitable resources as worse than they are, if you would not have me believe that I have been so unfortunate as to incur your dislike.”

“Oh!” said the baron, “since you view the matter in that light, you shall stay.”

Then looking round for La Brie, who was in a corner, he cried, “Come hither, you old rascal!” La Brie advanced a few steps timidly. “Ventrebleu! come hither, I say! Is the red room fit to accommodate a gentleman, think you?”

“Oh, certainly, sir,” replied the old servant; “you know it is occupied by M. Philip when he comes to Taverney.”

“It may do very well for a poor devil of a lieutenant who comes to pass a month with a ruined father, and at the same time very unfit for a rich nobleman who travels post with four horses!”

“I assure you.” said Balsamo, “I shall be perfectly content with it.”

The baron grinned, as if he would have said, “I know better;” then he added aloud, “La Brie, show the stranger to the red room, since he is determined to be cured of all wish to return to Taverney. Well, you have decided to stay, I suppose?” said he, turning to Balsamo.

“Yes — if you permit it.”

“Stay! there are still other means.”

“Means for what?”

“To avoid having to make the journey on horseback.”

“What journey?”

“To Bar-le-Dur.”

Balsamo waited quietly to hear this new plan developed.

“You were brought here by posthorses, were you not?”

“Yes, unless Satan brought me.”

“I at first almost suspected he did, for you do not seem to be on bad terms with him.”

“You do me infinitely more honor than I deserve.”

“Well, the horses that brought your carriage could now take it away?”

“No; there are only two horses left of the four, and the carriage is heavy. Besides, post-horses must rest.”

“Ha! another reason. You are determined, I see, to remain.”

“Because I wish to see you again tomorrow, and express my gratitude to you for your hospitality.”

“That you could easily repay.”

“How?”

“Since you are on such good terms with his satanic majesty, beg him to permit me to discover the philosopher's stone.”

“Why, M, le Baron, if you really wish for it — ”

“The philosopher's stone! Parbleu! if I really wish for it!”

“In that case you must apply to another individual than the devil.”

“To whom, then?”

“To me! as I heard Corneille say about a hundred years ago, when he was reciting me a part of one of his comedies.”

“Ha! La Brie, you old rascal!” cried the baron, who began to find the conversation rather dangerous at such an hour, and with such a man, “try and find a wax candle, and light the gentleman to his room.”

La Brie hastened to obey, and during this search, almost as dubious in its result as that for the philosopher's stone, he desired Nicole to precede him upstairs and air the red room. Nicole being gone, Andree was delighted to find herself alone. She felt as if she required to reflect. The baron bid Balsamo good-night and retired to bed.

Balsamo looked at his watch, for he remembered the promise he had made to Althotas — a promise now impossible to fulfill, the two hours having expired. He asked La Brie if the carriage was still in the place he had pointed out. La Brie replied that unless it would move away of itself, it must be there. He then asked what had become of Gilbert. La Brie assured him that the lazy fellow was no doubt in bed two hours ago. Then, after having studied the topography of the passage which led to the red room, Balsamo went out to waken Althotas.

The Baron de Taverney had not spoken falsely respecting the discomfort of this apartment; it was as poorly furnished as all the other rooms of the chateau.

An oaken bed with a faded green damask coverlet, and hangings of the same material looped up above it; an oaken table with twisted legs; a huge stone chimney-piece of the time of Louis XIII., to which in winter a fire might impart some appearance of comfort, but which now, wanting that, wanting all ornaments and utensils, wanting wood, and stuffed with old newspapers, only made the place look still more dreary. Such was the apartment of which Balsamo was for one night to be the fortunate possessor.

We must add that there were two chairs and a wardrobe painted of a gray color.

While La Brie was endeavoring to give a habitable appearance to the room, which Nicole had aired before retiring to her own apartment, Balsamo had wakened Althotas and returned to the house. When he reached Andree's door, he stopped to listen. From the moment Andree left the dining-room, she felt that she had escaped from the mysterious influence which the stranger exercised over her, and to rouse herself completely from its power, she continued to play on her harpsichord. Its sound reached Balsamo through the closed door, and, as we have said, he stopped to listen.

After a minute or two he made several gestures with a sweeping circular motion which might have been mistaken for a species of conjuration, since Andree, struck again by the sensation she had previously experienced, ceased to play, let her arms fill immovible by her side, and turned toward the door with a slow stiff motion, as if she were obeying a command against her own free will. Balsamo smiled in the dark as if he saw through the door. No doubt this was all he wanted, for he stretched out his left hand, and, having found the balustrade of the staircase, which was steep and broad, he ascended to the red room. In proportion as he increased his distance, Andree, with the same slow rigid motion, returned to her harpsichord, and when Balsamo reached the highest stair, he heard her resume the first notes of the air which he had interrupted.

Having entered his chamber, he dismissed La Brie. La Brie was evidently a good servant, accustomed to obey on the instant; but now, after moving a few steps toward the door, he stopped.

“Well?” said Balsamo.

La Brie slipped his hand into his waistcoat pocket, and seemed feeling for something in its silent depths, but he did not reply.

“Have you anything to say to me, my friend?” inquired Balsamo, approaching him.

La Brie made a great effort over himself, and pulled his hand out of his pocket.

“I merely wished to say, sir, that you made a mistake this evening.”

“Did I?” said Balsamo. “How so?”

“You meant to give me a crown, and you gave me a louis-d'or;” and he opened his hand and disclosed to view the new shining piece.

Balsamo looked at the old servant with an expression of admiration which indicated he had not the highest opinion of men as far as probity was concerned.

“'*And honest!'*” said he, “as Hamlet says; “and, feeling in his own pocket, he drew out a second louis-d'or, which he laid beside the first in La Erie's hand.

La Erie's joy at this munificence could not be described. For twenty years he had not once seen gold, and in order to convince him that he was really the happy possessor of such a treasure, Balsamo had to put the money with his own hand into La Erie's pocket. He bowed to the ground, and was retiring without turning his back on the stranger, when the latter stopped him.

“At what hour does the family usually rise in the morning?” asked he.

"Monsieur de Taverney rises late, but Mademoiselle de Taverney is always up at a very early hour."

"At what hour?"

"About six o'clock."

"Who sleeps above this room?"

"I do, sir."

"And below?"

"No one; the vestibule is under this."

"Thank you, my friend; now you may go."

"Good-night, sir."

"Good-night; but, by-the-by, see that my carriage be all safe."

"You may depend on me, sir."

"If you near any noise, or see any light, do not be alarmed; I have an old lame servant in it who travels with me everywhere. Tell M. Gilbert not to interfere with him; and tell him also, if you please, not to go out to-morrow morning until I have spoken to him. Can you remember all this?"

"Oh, certainly! But are you going to leave us so soon, sir?"

"I am not quite sure," said Balsamo, with a smile; "yet, strictly speaking, I ought to be at Bar-le-Duc to-morrow evening."

La Brie sighed resignedly, gave a last glance at the bed, and, taking up the candle, went toward the fireplace to give a little warmth to the great damp room by setting fire to the papers, as he had no wood.

"No, never mind," said Balsamo, preventing him; "leave the old papers; if I do not sleep, I can amuse myself by reading them."

La Brie bowed and retired.

Balsamo listened until the steps of the old servant had died away on the stairs, and until he heard them overhead. Then he went to the window. In the opposite tower there was a light in the window of a garret, the curtains of which were but half closed. It was Legay's room. She was thoughtfully unfastening her gown and handkerchief, and from time to time she opened her window and leaned out to see into the courtyard. Balsamo looked at her with more attention than he had chosen to bestow on her during supper. "What a singular resemblance!" he murmured to himself. At this moment the light in the garret was extinguished, although its occupant was not yet ill bed.

Balsamo leaned against the wall, listening anxiously. The notes of the harpsichord still sounded in his ears. He assured himself that its harmony alone awoke the midnight silence a round; then, opening the door, which La Brie had shut, he cautiously descended the stairs, and gently pushed open the door of the salon.

Andree heard nothing; her white hands continued to wander over the old yellow keys of the instrument. Opposite her was a mirror set in an old carved frame, the gilding of which had changed to a dull gray. The air she played was melancholy, or rather, she played merely harmonies instead of an air. No doubt it was all extempore; and she was thus reproducing in music her early recollections, or indulging in the dreams of her imagination. Perhaps her spirit, saddened by her residence at Taverney, had left the chateau to wander in the large shady gardens of the convent of the Annonciades at Nancy, ringing with the merry voices of troops of happy boarders. Whether such were her dreams or not, her vague gaze seemed to lose itself in the somber mirror before her, which reflected only indistinctly the different objects in the vast apartment, dimly lighted by the single candle placed on the harpsichord.

Sometimes she suddenly ceased. It was when she recalled the strange vision of the evening, and her unaccountable impressions; but before her thoughts had time to take any precise form, her heart beat, she felt a thrill run through her limbs, and she started as though a living being had come into contact with her. All at once, as she tried to account for these feelings, they returned. She felt a thrill as if from an electric shock. Her eye became fixed, her floating thoughts became embodied as it were, and she perceived something move over the dim mirror.

The door of the salon had opened noiselessly, and in the doorway a shadow appeared. She shuddered, her fingers wandered involuntarily over the keys; yet nothing could be more easily accounted for than the appearance of the fig tree. Might it not be her father, or Nicole, or La Brie, who, before retiring, had returned to the apartment upon some household errand? La Erie's visits of that kind were frequent; and on these occasions the faithful creature never made a sound. But no; the eyes of her soul showed her that the being whom she did not see was none of those we have named.

The shadow drew nearer, becoming more distinct in the mirror, and when within the circle of the light afforded by the candle the stranger was seen, his dress of black velvet increasing the ghastly pallor of his face; he had, for some mysterious reason, laid aside the silk one which he wore at supper.*

She would have turned and screamed, but Balsamo extended his arms, and she remained motionless. She made another effort; “Sir,” said she, “in the name of Heaven, what do you want?”

He smiled, the glass reflected his smile, and she watched it with eager gaze, but he did not reply.

She tried once more to rise, but could not; an irresistible power, a paralyzing feeling, which was not without a pleasurable sensation attending it, fixed her to her chair, while her eye never left the magic mirror. This new sensation alarmed her, for she felt that she was altogether in the power of the unknown. She made another almost supernatural effort to call for aid, but Balsamo extended both his hands above her head, and no sound escaped her lips. She continued dumb, her bosom loaded with a stupefying heat which ascended slowly in invading billows to her brain. She had no longer strength or will; her head sank on her shoulder.

At this moment Balsamo thought he heard a slight noise; he turned — the face of the man he had seen before was at the window. He frowned, and, strange to say, the frown was reflected on the young girl's face.

* It is well known that silk is a bad conductor, and repels the electric fluid. It is almost impossible to magnetize a person who wears a dress of silk.

Then, turning again to Andree, he drew down his hands, which he had hitherto held above her head; then he raised them again gently, again drew them clown, and continued thus to overwhelm her with column upon column of the electric fluid.

“Sleep!” said he.

She still struggled against his power.

“Sleep!” he repeated, in a voice of command, “sleep! it is my will!”

Then all her faculties yielded to that all-powerful will; she leaned her elbow on the harpsichord, drooped her head on her hand, and slept.

Balsamo now, without turning his face from her, left the room, closed the door, and went up to his own chamber. Scarcely had he retired when the face once more appeared at the window. It was Gilbert's.

CHAPTER VIII.

Attraction.

GILBERT, whose menial position in the chateau of Taverney caused him to be excluded from the salon, watched all the evening those whose rank permitted them that privilege. During supper he saw Balsamo's looks and gestures. He remarked Andree's attention to him, the baron's unusual affability, and the respectful eagerness of La Brie-.

“When the party rose from table, he hid in a clump of shrubs, lest Nicole, in closing the shutters, or in going to her own room, might see him and put an end to his espionage. Nicole had, indeed, made her round to secure all for the night, but one of the shutters of the salon she was forced to leave open, the half unfixed hinge of which would not permit it to close. Gilbert knew that such was the case, so he remained out, certain that he could continue his watchings when Legay was gone.

His watchings, have we said? What reason had Gilbert to watch? Having been brought up at Taverney, did he not know it perfectly, as well as the habits of the family? The reason was, that on that evening he had other motives than those which usually actuated him; he not only watched, but waited.

“When Nicole quitted the salon, leaving Andree there, after having slowly closed the doors and shutters, she walked for a few minutes up and down in front of the house, as if she expected some one. Then she looked furtively on all sides, peeped into the salon, waited a little longer, and at length made up her mind to go to bed.

Gilbert, motionless, bending down close to the trunk of a tree, and scarcely venturing to breathe, saw every movement and gesture of Nicole; and when she had disappeared, and when he saw a light in the windows of her apartment, he stole again on tip-toe to the window, leaned forward, and continued, although scarcely knowing why, with eager eyes to devour Andree, who was sitting at her harpsichord in a listless attitude.

Just then Joseph Balsamo entered the salon. Gilbert started, and every faculty was strained to enable him to comprehend the scene which we have just described. He thought that Balsamo complimented Andree on her musical talent, that she replied with her usual coldness; that, with a smile, he repeated his praise, and that then she stopped to reply, and to dismiss him for the night. He admired the grace with which the stranger retired backward; but he had in reality understood nothing of the scene, as it had all passed in silence. He had heard no words, he had seen the lips and hands of the pair before him move, and close observer as he was, he discovered no mystery in what appeared to pass so naturally.

Balsamo gone, Gilbert remained no longer in an attitude of observation, but apparently lost in observation of Andree, so beautiful in her careless attitude; but soon, to his amazement, he discovered that she was asleep. He remained for some moments longer in the same position, to be certain that such was the case; then, when he was quite convinced, he clasped his forehead with both hands, like one who feared for his senses in the flood of thoughts and sensations which poured on his brain. “Oh!” said he, wildly, “her hand! — that my lips might only touch her hand! Gilbert, Gilbert, rouse thee! I will do it!”

As he spoke, he rushed into the anteroom and reached the door of the salon, which, as when Balsamo entered, opened without noise. But scarcely was it open, scarcely did he find the young girl before him without anything separating them, than he felt all the importance of the step he had taken. He, the son of a fanner and a peasant woman — he, the timid young man, who in his lowness dared hardly raise his eyes to his haughty mistress — he was going to press to his lips the hem of the robe or the tip of the finger of this sleeping majesty, who, if she awoke, would with a look crush him to the dust. At this idea, all that had intoxicated him and made him bold vanished; he stopped and clung to the door-post, for he trembled and felt as if he should fall.

But Andrew's meditation or sleep (for Gilbert could not yet decide whether she slept or was only buried in thought) was so deep that he in no way disturbed her; yet one might have heard the beating of his heart, which he tried in vain to still. He remained a minute gazing on her. She stirred not; she was so beautiful, with her head gently bent forward on her hand, her long unpowdered hair falling on her shoulders, that the flame, which fear for a moment had extinguished, rekindled. His madness returned — he must at least touch something touched by her. He made a step toward her; the floor creaked under his unsteady footstep, a cold moisture stood on his forehead. But she seemed to have heard nothing.

“She sleeps!” he murmured; “oh joy! she sleeps!”

But before he advanced three steps farther he stopped again. It was the unusual brightness of the candle which alarmed him now, for it had burned down in the socket, and gave, as is usual, a larger flame just before it expired. But not a sound, not a breath in the house. La Brie had retired to bed, and no doubt to sleep, and the light in Nicole's chamber was extinguished.

“Courage!” said he, and he advanced anew. Strange, the floor creaked again; but Andree stirred not, and Gilbert himself could scarcely avoid being frightened by this mysterious repose.

“She sleeps!” repeated he again, with that varying resolution peculiar to the lover and the coward — and he who is not master of his heart is always a coward; “she sleeps! Oh, heaven! oh, heaven!”

In the midst of all these feverish altercations of fear and hope, he still advanced, and at last found himself within two paces of Andree. Then he felt as if fascinated. He would have fled, were flight possible; but once within the circle of attraction, of which she was the center, he felt himself rooted to the spot, and, conquered, subdued, he fell on both his knees.

Andree remained motionless as a statue. Gilbert took the hem of her dress in both hands, and kissed it; then he looked up slowly, breathlessly — his eyes met hers, which were wide open, yet she saw him not.

Gilbert no longer knew what to think; he was overwhelmed with astonishment. For a moment the horrible idea that she was dead flashed across his mind; he seized her hand — it was warm, and the pulse beat softly; but this hand remained unresistingly in his. Then, bewildered by having touched it, he imagined that she saw, that she felt, that she had discovered his maddening passion — poor blinded heart! — that she expected his visit, that her silence indicated consent, her immovability favor. He raised her hand to his lips, and imprinted on it a long and burning kiss. Immediately a shudder ran through her frame, and Gilbert felt that she repelled him.

“lam lost!” he murmured, relinquishing her hand, and throwing himself upon the floor.

Andree rose as if moved by a spring, and not once casting her eyes to the floor, on which Gilbert lay overcome *lay* shame and fear, without even strength to ask a pardon which he knew would not be granted, her head erect, her neck rigid, and with a painful and constrained step, she moved toward the door. She passed on like one drawn by a secret spell to an unseen goal, and in passing she touched Gilbert's shoulder. He raised himself on one hand, turned slowly, and followed her with eyes full of amazement. She opened the door, passed into the anteroom, and reached the foot of the stairs. Pale and trembling, Gilbert dragged himself after her en his knees.

"Oh," thought he, "she is so indignant that she would not herself deign to show her anger. She is going to the baron to relate my shameful infatuation, and I shall be turned 'out like a disgraced lackey!"

The thought that he should be dismissed — that he should no longer see her who was his light, his life, his soul — gave him courage; he arose and hurried after her. "Oh, pardon, mademoiselle! in the name of Heaven, pardon!" murmured he.

Andree appeared not to have heard him, passed on, but did not enter her father's apartment. Gilbert breathed more freely. She advanced toward the staircase, and began to ascend.

"Great heaven!" murmured he, "where can she be going? That is the way to the red room, which the stranger occupies, and to La Erie's loft. It may be to call him — yet, she would ring; she must be going — oh, impossible, impossible!" and he wrung his hands with rage at the thought that she was going into Balsamo's apartment.

She stopped before the door. A cold perspiration trickled down Gilbert's forehead; he grasped the iron of the balustrade that he might not fall — for he had continued to follow her — and all that he saw and all that he fancied filled him with horror.

Balsamo's door was half open. Andree did not knock, but pushed it wider, and entered the room. The light within fell on her noble features, and was reflected with a golden luster from her large open eyes. Gilbert could see the stranger standing in the middle of the chamber, with his eyes fixed, his brow contracted, and one hand extended with a commanding gesture.

This was all; the door was shut again.

Gilbert felt his strength abandon him. He put his hand to his head and fell heavily on the cold stone of the upper step of the stairs, but with his eyes turned on the accursed door, which entombed his past dreams, his present happiness, his future hopes.

CHAPTER IX.

Clairvoyance.

BALSAMO advanced to meet the young lady, who moved toward him in a direct line, rigid in her movement as the bronze statue in Don Juan. However strange her coming might seem to another than Balsamo, he appeared in no degree surprised at it.

“I commanded you to sleep,” said he; “do you sleep?”

She sighed, but did not answer. Balsamo drew nearer her, imparting to her still more of the electric fluid.

“It is my will that you speak,” he said.

She started.

“Have you heard my command?”

Andree assented by a gesture.

“Then why do you not speak?”

She put her hand to her throat, as if to indicate that she could not articulate.

“Well, sit down!” said Balsamo.

He took her by the hand which Gilbert had so lately kissed without her being conscious, and his touch gave her that shudder which she had then exhibited, but which had been caused by the electric fluid descending on her at that moment from the room above. Led by him, she made three steps backward and sat down in an armchair.

“Do you see?” he asked.

Her eyes dilated as if she tried to take In all the rays of light in the apartment.

“I do not mean to ask if you see with your eyes. Do you see inwardly? ” and, drawing from under his embroidered coat a little rod of steel, he touched her heaving breast. She bounded as if a dart of flame had pierced her and entered her heart, and then her eyes closed.

“And now you begin to see?” he said.

She bowed in assent.

“And you will soon speak?”

“Yes!” replied Andree; but at the same moment she put her hand to her head in a manner expressive of great suffering.

“What is the matter?” asked Balsamo.

“I am in pain.”

“Wherefore?”

“Because you force me to see and speak.”

He made several movements over her head, as if to lessen the influence of the electricity.

“Do you suffer now?”

“Not so much.”

“Well, then, look where you are.”

Her eyes remained closed, but her face expressed great surprise.

“I am in the red chamber!” she murmured.

“With whom?”

“With you!” continued she, shuddering.

“What is the matter?”

“I am afraid — I am ashamed!”

“Of what? — are we not united by sympathy?

“Yes, certainly.”

“And you know that I have caused you to come here with a pure intention?”

“True, true,” said she.

“That I respect you as a sister?”

“I know it, indeed!” and her face grew calm, then again was troubled.

“You do not tell me all — you do not pardon me entirely.”

“Because I see that though you would not wrong me, you would another, perhaps.”

“'Possibly,” he muttered; “but look not at that!” he added in an authoritative tone.

Her face resumed its usual expression.

“Are all asleep in the house?”

“I do not know.”

“Then look and see.”

“Where shall I look?”

“Let me see — first, in your father's room; what is he doing?”

“He is in bed.”

"Asleep?"

"No; he is reading."

"What is he reading?"

"One of those bad books which he wishes me to read."

"And you will not read them?"

"No;" said she, with an expression of the greatest scorn on her features.

"Well, we are safe, then — look in Nicole's room."

"There is no light in her room."

"But you do not want light to see."

"Not if you command me."

"See! it is my will."

"Ah, I see!"

"What?"

"She is half undressed — she is opening her door softly — she is going downstairs!"

"So — where is she going?"

"She stops at the courtyard gate — she waits behind it — she watches!"

Balsamo smiled. "Is she watching to see whether you are out?"

"No."

"Well, that is the principal matter; for when a young lady is free from her father's and her waiting-maid's eye, she has nothing to fear unless —

"No."

"You are replying to my thought."

"I see it."

"Then you have no lover?"

"I?" asked she, disdainfully.

"Yes; you might he in love — young people do not leave their convents to he shut up. They give liberty to their hearts when their persons are set free!"

Andree shook her head. "My heart is free," she said, sadly; and such an expression of candor and virgin modesty lighted her features, that Balsamo exclaimed with rapture, "A lily! — a true pupil! — a clairvoyante!" — and he clasped his hands with joy and gratitude.

Then turning again to Andree; "But if you do not love, you may be loved," said he.

"I do not know," replied she, softly.

“What! you do not know!” he cried, imperiously. “When I question, I expect a proper answer!” and he touched her bosom again with the steel rod. She started, but without evincing so much pain as before.

“Yes, I see,” said she, “but be gentle, or you will kill me.”

“What do you see?”

“Oh — but no! It cannot be,” said she.

“What, then, do you see!”

“A young man, who ever since my leaving the convent, has followed me, watched me, brooded on me, yet always secretly.”

“Who is this young man?”

“I do not see his face. I see his coat — it is like that of a workman.”

“Where is he?”

“At the foot of the stairs. He seems in sorrow — he weeps.”

“Why can you not see his face?”

“It is hidden in his hands.”

“Look through his hands.”

She made an effort; then exclaimed. “No — it is impossible — Gilbert!”

“Why impossible?”

“He? — he dare not love me!” cried she, with a lofty expression of disdain.

Balsamo smiled like one who knows mankind, and who is aware that there is no distance the heart will not overleap, were there an abyss between it and its object.

“And what is he doing at the foot of the staircase?”

“Stay; he removes his hands from his face — he seizes the balustrade — he rises — he ascends.”

“Ascends where?”

“Up here — but no matter — he dares not come in.”

“Why not?”

“Because he is afraid,” said she, with a smile of contempt.

“But he will listen?”

“Yes; for he is now putting his ear to the door.”

“That annoys you?”

“Yes, he may hear what I say.”

“And would he use it against her whom he loves?”

“Yes, in a moment of passion or jealousy — in such a moment he would be capable of anything.”

“Then let us get rid of him,” said Balsamo, and he walked noisily to the door.

Gilbert's hour to be courageous was not yet come, for, at the noise, fearing to be caught, he jumped astride on the balustrade and slid down noiselessly to the bottom of the staircase. Andree uttered a stifled cry.

“Look no more in that direction,” said Balsamo, returning toward her; “the loves of the vulgar are of no importance. Speak to me of the Baron of Taverney, will you?”

“I will answer what you choose,” said she, sighing.

“The baron is very poor, is he not?

“Very poor.”

“Too poor to allow you any amusement?”

“Oh, yes.”

“You are heartily tired of Taverney?”

“Heartily!”

“You are ambitions, perhaps?”

“No.”

“You love your father?”

“Yes,” said the young girl with hesitation.

“Yet I thought this evening your filial love was not very apparent,” said Balsamo, smiling.

“I am vexed at him for having wasted my mother's fortune, so that poor Maison Rouge has to pass his time in garrison, and cannot worthily support the dignity of our family.”

“Who is this Maison Rouge?”

“My brother Philip.”

“Why do you call him Maison Rouge?”

“It is, or rather it was, the name of one of our castles, and the eldest of the family bears it until the death of the chief — then he is called Taverney.”

“You love your brother, then?”

“Oh, dearly, dearly!”

“More than any one in the world?”

“More than any one in the world!”

“Why do you love him so warmly, and your father so coldly?”

“Because he has a noble heart; he would die for me.”

“And your father?”

She was silent. Doubtless Balsamo thought it better not to force her against her will on this point; and perhaps, also, he already knew as much of the baron as he wished.

“And where is the Chevalier Maison Rogue at this moment?”

“Where is Philip?”

“Yes!”

“In the garrison at Strasbourg.”

“Do you see him there?”

“Where?”

“At Strasbourg.”

“I do not see him.”

“Do you know that town?”

“No.”

“I know it — let us visit it together — will you?”

“Yes; with pleasure!”

“Now. Is he at the theater?”

“No.”

“Is he at the coffee-house in the square with the other officers?”

“No.”

“Has he gone back to his apartment? I wish that you should look for him there.”

“I see nothing. I think he is not in Strasbourg.”

“Do you know the road from thence?”

“No.”

“I know it — follow me! Is he at Save rue?”

“No.”

“Is he at Saarbruck?”

“No.”

“Is he at Nancy?”

“Stay! — stay!” The young girl seemed collecting all her powers — her heart beat — her bosom heaved. “I see him! — I see him! — dear Philip — what joy!”

“What is he doing?”

“Dear Philip!” continued Andree, her eyes sparkling with joy.

“Where is he?”

“On horseback, riding through a town I know well.”

“What town?”

“Nancy! Nancy! where I was at the convent.”

“Are you sure that it is he?”

“Oh, yes, the torches around show his face.”

“Torches?” said Balsamo, with surprise; “why, are there torches?”

“He is on horseback, at the door of a magnificent carriage, richly gilt.”

“Ah!” cried Balsamo, who appeared to comprehend this, “who is in the carriage?”

“A young lady — oh, how majestic she is! how graceful! how beautiful! Strange, I almost fancy *I* have seen her before; no — it is Nicole's features which resemble hers.”

“Nicole resembles the young lady who is so beautiful and so majestic?”

“Yes, yes; but as a jasmine may be said to resemble a lily.”

“Let us see what is passing at Nancy at this moment.”

“The young lady bends forward, and makes a sign to Philip to approach; he obeys, and takes off his hat respectfully.”

“Can you hear what they say?”

“I am listening,” said Andree, impressing silence on Balsamo by a gesture. “I hear, I hear!” murmured she.

“What does the young lady say?”

“She orders him, with a sweet smile, to hasten the pace of the horses. She says she will require her escort to be ready at six in the morning, as she wishes to stop on the road.”

“To stop? Where?”

“My brother is just asking her. Heavens! she wishes to stop at Taverney, to see my father! Such a great princess at our poor house! What shall we do — without plate — almost without linen?”

“Do not be uneasy; that will be provided for.”

“Oh, thanks, thanks!” And the young girl, who had half risen from her seat, sank back with a heavy sigh, completely exhausted.

Balsamo immediately approached her, and, by some magnetic passes in an opposite direction, changed the course of the electric fluid. A calm sleep then stole over her lovely frame, which had bent down exhausted, her head sinking on her palpitating bosom.

“Recover thy strength,” said Balsamo, gazing at her with a stern delight; “I shall soon require thy light again. O Science!” continued he, with the rapture of exalted faith, “thou alone never deceivest us; to thee, then, man ought to sacrifice every feeling. This young girl is beautiful, pure as an angel; and He who made beauty and innocence knows bow dear they ought to be to us. But let the creature perish — how pure, how perfect, how beautiful soever she be — if I can but make her speak the words of truth! Let all the delights of the world — love, passion, rapture — exist no longer for me, if I can only with a firm step advance on the path of light and science. And now, young girl, now that my will has given thee strength, awake! — or rather, sink again in the sleep which reveals all things! Speak again, but now it is for me that thou must speak.”

He spread his hands over her head and forced her to sit up by breathing upon her. Seeing her ready and submissive, he took from his pocket-book a curl of jet-black hair, which he put into Andree's hand.

“See!” he commanded.

“Again!” said she, with anguish. “Oh, no, let me rest — it is too painful; and just now I felt so happy!”

“See!” replied Balsamo, pitilessly, touching her again with the steel rod.

She wrung her hands, struggling to evade the tyranny of the experimenter. The foam was on her lips, as formerly it gathered on those of the pythoness on her sacred tripod.

“I see, I see!” cried she, with the despair of a subdued will.

“What do you see?”

“A woman.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Balsamo, with wild joy, “science is not, then, a useless word, like virtue! Mesmer is greater than Brutus! Describe the woman, that I may know you really see her whom I would have you see.”

“She is a brunette, tall, with blue eyes, jet-black hair, and sinewy arms.”

“What is she doing?”

“She gallops, she flies forward, carried by a splendid horse, reeking with sweat and foam.”

“In what direction?”

“There, there!” said the young girl, pointing to the west.

“On the highway?”

“Yes.”

“Toward Chalons?”

“Yes!”

“Good!” said Balsamo; “she takes the road winch I shall take — she goes to Paris, as I do; I shall find her there. Now rest,” said he; and he took from Andree's hand the curl of hair.

Her arms fell powerless by her side.

“Now return to your harpsichord!”

Andree arose, and made a step toward the door, but, overcome by inexpressible fatigue, her limbs refused to support her. She staggered.

“Renew your strength and walk!” said Balsamo, enveloping her anew with magnetic passes; and she, like the generous steed that braces every nerve to fulfill his master's will, unjust though it be, walked erect. Balsamo opened the door, and, still sleeping, she descended the stairs.

CHAPTER X.

Nicole Legay.

WHILE THE SCENE of interrogation was passing in Balsamo's chamber, Gilbert remained under the railings at the foot of the staircase in a state of indescribable torture. Not daring to ascend again to listen at the door of the red chamber, he fell into despair, and this despair was increased tenfold by the feeling of his weakness and his inferiority.

Balsamo was only a man (for Gilbert, being a profound thinker, a philosopher in embryo, had small faith in sorcerers); but then this man was strong, and he was weak — this man was courageous, and Gilbert was not so yet. Twenty times he arose, determined to beard the stranger, and twenty times his trembling limbs bent under him and he sank on his knees. Then the thought struck him that he would get a ladder used by La Brie (who was at the same time cook, butler and gardener) for nailing the jessamine and honeysuckle against the walls, and, by propping it against the balcony of the apartment, be enabled to mount to the window, and witness what he so ardently desired to discover.

He passed stealthily into the courtyard, ran to the spot where the, ladder lay, but, as he was stooping to take it up, he thought he heard a noise in the direction of the house, and he turned. He was almost certain that in the obscurity he saw a human form enter the dark frame of the open door, but moving so quickly and so noiselessly that it appeared rather a specter than a living being. He let the ladder fall, and, his heart beating audibly, hastened back toward the chateau.

Some minds are constitutionally superstitious, and these are generally the most exalted and the richest in fancy. They admit the fabulous more readily than the rational, because what is natural is too common for them, impelled as they are toward the impossible, or at least the ideal. Such spirits delight in the darkness of the forest, the depths of which they people with phantoms or genii. The ancients, who were poets in all things, saw these fantastic beings in open day; but as their sun, warmer and brighter than ours, forbade the fancy to bring forth specters and demons, they filled the forest with smiling dryads and woodnymphs. Gilbert, born in a gloomier clime, imagined he saw a spirit. This time, in spite of his incredulity, he recalled the words of the woman who had fled from Balsamo, and the idea flashed across his mind that the sorcerer might have summoned up some evil spirit to do his bad behests. But Gilbert had always, after a first impression, a second not more encouraging, for it was the result of reflection. He recalled all the arguments of powerful minds against the belief in the return of spirits to this world, and thinking of the article Specter in the "Philosophical Dictionary" restored his courage; but it was only to give him another apprehension, better founded and more alarming.

If he had indeed seen any one, it must have been a real individual deeply interested in watching him. Fear suggested M. de Taverney; his conscience whispered another name. He looked up to Nicole's apartment; her candle was out, not a ray of light was visible; not a whisper, not a movement, not a light in all the house, except in the stranger's room. He looked, he listened; then, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, he took up the ladder again, convinced that he had been deceived, and that this vision had been the result of a suspension of his observing faculties, rather than of their exercise.

Just as he was about to place his ladder, Balsamo's door opened and then shut. At this sound he hurried in, and saw Andree glide out and descend the stairs without noise, and without a light, as if guided and supported by a supernatural power. Having reached the landing place, she passed by where he had now concealed himself in the shade, her dress touching him as she passed, and continued her way. The baron was asleep, La Brie in bed, Nicole in the other turret, Balsamo's door closed; he could not be surprised by any one. He made a violent effort and followed her, adapting his step to hers, and keeping at a distance from her. She passed through the anteroom into the salon; but, although she left the door open, he stopped just before he reached it. Should he enter? He hesitated, then resolved; but, just as his foot was on the threshold, an arm was stretched out in the darkness, and he was firmly grasped. Gilbert turned, his heart panting as if it would burst his bosom.

"So I have caught you at last!" whispered an angry voice close at his ear. "Deny now, if you can, that you have meetings — that you are in love with her!"

Gilbert had not strength to shake himself loose from the gripe which detained him, yet it was only that of a young girl — it was simply the hand of Nicole Legay that held him.

“What do you mean?” whispered he, impatiently.

“Oh, I am to speak it out, then!” and Nicole raised her voice nearly to the loudest pitch.

“No; for God's sake be quiet!“ replied Gilbert, between his closed teeth, and dragging her away from the door.

“Well, come with me, then!”

This was what Gilbert wanted, for, by going away with her, he took her away from Andree. He followed Nicole, who led the way into the courtyard, shutting the door behind her when he hail passed.

“But,” said Gilbert, “mademoiselle will be retiring to her apartment; she will call you to help her to undress, and you will not be in the house.”

“Do you think I care for that now? Let her call or not, I must speak to you.”

“You might put off until to-morrow what you have got to say, Nicole. You know Mademoiselle Andree is strict.”

“Yes, I would advise her to be strict — particularly with me.”

“To-morrow, Nicole, I promise.”

“You promise! I know what your fine promises are. This very day you promised to meet me near Maison Rouge. Where were you? Why, in the very opposite direction, since you brought the traveler here! Your promises indeed! I believe them just as I did those of our confessor at the Annonciades, who swore to keep secret what we confessed, and then told all our sins to the abbess!”

“But, Nicole, you will be dismissed if you are seen.”

“And you — will you not be dismissed for being in love with my young lady? Do you think the baron too generous for that?”

“He could surely have no motive for dismissing me,” said Gilbert, endeavoring to defend himself.

“Oh, none in the world! The baron, perhaps, allows you to pay your addresses to his daughter. I really did not know he was quite so great a philosopher!”

Gilbert might easily have proved to Nicole, by relating what he had just witnessed, that, if he was to blame, at least Andree was not privy to his misconduct; and, incredible as her visit to the stranger's apartment would have appeared, Nicole, thanks to the good opinion women have of one another, would have believed him. But deeper reflection arrested the words on his lips. Andree's secret was one that might serve him, as it placed her completely in his power; and as he loved Andree infinitely more than he feared Nicole, he was silent on the singular events he had just witnessed.

"Well," said he, "since you insist on having an explanation, let us understand each other."

"Oh, that is easily done. But you are right — this is a bad place for it; let us go to my room."

"To your room? Impossible!"

"Why so?"

"We might be surprised."

"Indeed! and who would surprise us? Mademoiselle? True; she might be jealous about her sweet youth! Unfortunately for her, since her secret is discovered. I am nut afraid of her. Mademoiselle Andree jealous of Nicole! What an honor!" And the forced laugh of the young girl frightened Gilbert more than any invective or menace could possibly have done.

"It is not mademoiselle of whom I am afraid," said he; "I am only anxious on your own account, Nicole."

"Oh, most anxious, no doubt! But you are going to my room for no bad purpose; and you have often told me, where there is no bad intention there should be no shame. Philosophers are Jesuits sometimes; and our confessor at the Annonciades told me all that before you. Come, come, no more false reasons! Come to my room; I am resolved you shall!"

"Nicole!" said he, grinding his teeth.

"Well! what more, pray?"

"Take care!" and he raised his hand.

"Oh. I am not afraid! You struck me once; but you were jealous then. At that time you loved me, and I allowed you to strike me. But I shall not now — no, no, no! for you no longer love me, and it is I who am jealous now."

"But what will you do?" cried Gilbert, grasping her wrist.

"I shall scream, and mademoiselle will hear me. I advise you to let go your hold of me."

Gilbert dropped her hand; then, seizing the ladder, and dragging it cautiously after him, he placed it against the wall of the turret, so that it reached nearly to Nicole's window.

“See how things turn in this world,” said she maliciously; “the ladder which was to assist you to climb to mademoiselle's apartment must merely serve you to descend from my humble attic. Very flattering for me, is it not?”

Nicole, perceiving the advantage she had gained, declared her triumph with that precipitate eagerness which women, unless, indeed, of very superior minds, often exhibit — a victory which is often too dearly purchased.

Gilbert, who felt himself in a false position, was silent, and followed the young girl, reserving all his powers for the approaching contest.

In the first place, however, like a prudent general, he satisfied himself on two points. The first was, in passing before the window, that Mademoiselle de Taverney was still in the salon; and the second, on reaching Nicole's chamber, that, in case of necessity, he could reach the ladder without much risk of breaking his neck, and thus allow himself to slide to the ground.

Nicole's room was as simple in its furniture as the rest of the house. It was a loft, the walls of which were covered with a drab and green paper. A wooden bed, and a large geranium placed near the window, were its whole furniture and decorations, except a large bonnet-box, given her by Andree, which served both for table and wardrobe. Nicole sat down on the edge of the bed, Gilbert on a corner of the box. She had had time to calm down while ascending the stairs, and now, completely mistress of herself, she felt strong in having justice on her side. Gilbert, on the contrary, was agitated, and could not recover his coolness; his anger had increased as hers decreased.

“So,” said she, “you are in love with mademoiselle, and you have attempted to deceive me?”

“Who told you I was in love with mademoiselle?”

“Dame! were you not going to a rendezvous with her?”

“How do you know that I had a rendezvous with her?”

“How do I know? Why, there was no one else to go to but the sorcerer!”

“Well, I might have been going to him; I am ambitious.”

“Say envious.”

“It is the same word taken in a bad sense.”

“Don't let us dispute about words — you love me no longer.”

“Yes, I do — I love you still.”

“Then why do you avoid me?”

“Because you quarrel with me whenever I meet you.”

“That is because you always avoid me.”

“You know I am shy — that I love solitude.”

“Yes; and you seek solitude ladder in hand!”

Gilbert was beaten on, his first move.

“Come, come! — Be frank if you can, Gilbert, and confess that you no longer love me, or that you love two women at once.”

“Well! and if I did, what would you say?”

“I should say it was monstrous!”

“No, no! that there was an error somewhere.”

“In your heart?”

“No — in our social state. You know there are nations where every man is allowed seven or eight wives.”

“They are not Christians,” said Nicole pettishly.

“They are philosophers,” said Gilbert, with dignity.

“So, Master Philosopher, you would wish me to take a second lover, as you have done!”

“I would not be unjust and tyrannical; I should not wish to repress the impulses of your heart. Freedom, blessed freedom, respects free-will. If you change your love, Nicole, I shall not force you to a fidelity which, in my opinion, is unnatural.”

“Ah, I see plainly you no longer love me!”

Gilbert was great in argument — not that he was skillful in logic, but he was an adept in paradox, and, however little he knew, he still knew more than Nicole. She had read only what amused her — he what taught him a little also — and, as they talked, he regained his presence of mind while Nicole began to lose hers.

“Has the great philosopher any memory?” asked Nicole, with an ironical smile.

“Sometimes,“ replied Gilbert.

“Then you have not forgotten, perhaps, what you said to me five months ago when I came with mademoiselle from the Annonciades?”

“I have forgotten — tell it me.”

“You said, 'I am poor;' it was the day we were reading among the old ruins.”

“Well, go on.”

“You trembled very much that day —

“Very likely — I am naturally timid; but I do all I can to correct that fault, and some others also.”

“So that when you have corrected all your faults,” said Nicole, laughing, “you will be perfect.”

“I shall be strong — wisdom gives strength.”

“Where did you read that, pray?”

“Never mind — return to what you were saying.”

Nicole felt that she was losing ground every minute.

“Well, you said to me, 'I am poor — no one loves me; yet there is something here,' and you pressed your hand on your heart.”

“No, Nicole; if I pressed my hand anywhere when I said that, it must have been on my forehead. The heart is merely a forcing-pump, which drives the blood to the extremities of the body — read the article Heart in the 'Philosophical Dictionary;'“ and Gilbert drew himself up proudly. Humble before Balsamo, he gave himself the airs of a prince before Nicole.

“You are right, Gilbert; it must have been your head which you struck. Well, striking your forehead, you said, 'I am treated here worse than a dog; indeed, Mahon is in a happier condition than I.' I replied that they were wrong not to love you; that if you had been my brother I should have loved you also. I think, however, I said that from my heart, not from my head; but perhaps I am wrong, for I never read the 'Philosophical Dictionary.'

“You ought to read it, Nicole.”

“Then you threw your arms round me. You said, 'You are an orphan — I am one, too; let us love one another as if we were brother and sister — no I better than if we were; for if we were, we should be forbidden to love as I wish we should;' then you kissed me.”

“Very possibly!”

“Did you think then as you spoke?”

“Oh, yes — one generally thinks what one says at the time one says it.”

“So that now — ?”

“Now I am five months older than I was. I have learned things of which I knew nothing then, and I look forward to things which I do not yet know; I think differently now.”

“You are a deceiver, a hypocrite, a liar!” exclaimed she, furiously.

“No more than a traveler, should he make two different answers to the same question — if you asked him in a valley what he thought of the prospect, and again when he had got to the top of a mountain which before had closed his view."

"So, then, you will not marry me?"

"I never said I would marry you," said Gilbert contemptuously.

"And yet," cried the exasperated girl, "I think Nicole Legay fully the equal of Sebastian Gilbert."

"All human beings are equal; but nature or education makes certain faculties greater in, one man than another, and according as these faculties are more or less developed, men differ from one another."

"So that your faculties being more developed than mine, you are raised above me?"

"Quite correct! — you do not reason yet, Nicole, but you understand."

"Yes, yes! I understand!" cried Nicole, with redoubled passion.

"What do you understand?"

"That you are a bad man."

"It is possible. Many are born with bad inclinations. Rousseau himself had such, but he corrected them — I shall do the same."

"Oh, heavens!" cried Nicole, "how could I ever love such a man?"

"You did not love me, Nicole," replied Gilbert, coldly; "I pleased you — that was all. You had just come from Nancy, where you had only seen students whom you laughed at, or soldiers who frightened you; so you took a fancy to me, and for a month or two we enjoyed our dream of love. But should we therefore be tied together to be eternally miserable? You see, Nicole, if we bound ourselves for our lives in a moment of happiness, we should give up our free-will, and that would be absurd!"

"Is that philosophy?" asked Nicole.

"I think so," replied Gilbert.

"Then there is nothing sacred in the eyes of philosophers?"

"Oh, yes! — reason is."

"Yet I think you once said something about being faithful to the choice of the heart. You recollect your theory on marriages — "

"On unions, Nicole, for I shall never marry."

"You will never marry?"

"No! I shall be a learned man — a philosopher. Science requires perfect freedom of the mind, and philosophy that of the body."

"Monsieur Gilbert," said she, "you are a wretch; and whatever I am, I am at least better than you."

“Now,” said Gilbert, rising, “we are only losing time — you in abusing me, I in listening to you — let us end! You loved me because you took pleasure in loving”

“Well?”

“Well! — there is no reason in the world that I should make myself unhappy, because you did a thing which gave you gratification.”

“Fool!” she exclaimed, “you think you can confound my common sense — and you pretend not to fear me.”

“Fear you! Why, Nicole, jealousy is turning your brain!”

“Jealous!” she cried, stamping her foot, “and why should I be jealous! Is their a prettier girl in the province than I? — if I had but as white hands as mademoiselle — and I shall have some day, when I do no more hard work. You are my first lover, it is true; but you are not the first man who has paid court to me. Gilbert, Gilbert! do not force me to seek revenge on you — do not make me leave the narrow path in which a last remembrance of my mother and the regular repetition of my prayers have kept me. Gilbert, if you do, you may have to reproach yourself with bringing many evils on yourself and others.”

“All in good time,” said Gilbert. “So now that you have got to the summit of your dignity, Nicole, I am perfectly satisfied on one point.”

“And what may that be?” inquired the girl.

“Simply that if I consented now to marry you — ”

“What then?”

“Why, that you would refuse me.”

Nicole paused, her clenched hands and gnashing teeth showing the workings of her mind.

“You are right,” she exclaimed at length. “Yes; I also begin to ascend that mountain of which you spoke. I see a wider prospect before me. The wife of a learned man, a philosopher! No, I am destined for something greater than that! Mount your ladder! and don't, break your neck — though I begin to think it would be a blessing for many persons if you would — perhaps even a blessing for yourself.”

She turned her back on him. Gilbert stood a moment wavering and irresolute; for Nicole, excited by anger and jealousy, was truly beautiful. But he had resolved to break with her — Nicole could blast at once his love and his ambition. His decision — was made.

In a few seconds, Nicole, hearing no sound, looked behind her. She was alone in the apartment.

“Gone!” she murmured; “and mademoiselle — oh, I shall know to-morrow whether she loves him or not!”

She went to the window and looked out; all was dark, every light extinguished. She stole on tiptoe to her young lady's door and listened.

“She is in bed — she sleeps soundly,” said she, “but to-morrow I shall know all!”

CHAPTER XI.

Waiting-maid and Mistress.

THE CALMNESS with which Nicole returned to her room was not affected. Young, strong, full of an uncultivated self-confidence, she was blessed with that faculty so important for those who would govern where they love — the faculty of forgetting; and she could sleep after she had arranged with the little malicious sprites that dwelt in her heart her plan of vengeance.

Mademoiselle de Taverney appeared to her even more guilty than Gilbert. This aristocratic girl, rigid in her prejudices, elevated in her pride, who at their convent would descend to familiarity with none below the daughters of marquises — this statue, outwardly so cold, but yet with feeling in its marble bosom — this statue, warming to life for a rural Pygmalion like Gilbert, became contemptible in her estimation. For Nicole felt that Gilbert was her inferior in everything but a little reading, and thought that she had condescended very much when she, the waiting-maid of the daughter of a ruined baron, put herself on a level with the son of a poor peasant.

What, then, could she think of her mistress, if she really returned Gilbert's love?

She calculated that, in relating what she had seen to the baron, she should fall into a great error; first, because he would only laugh at the affair, box Gilbert's ears, and turn him out of doors; next, because it would deprive her of her power over Gilbert and Andree. What pleasure she should have — she, the waiting-maid — in seeing them turn pale or red as her eye fell on them! This idea flattered her pride and soothed her vindictive spirit; 'and, at this idea, her reflections ceased — she slept.

It was day when she awoke, fresh, light-hearted, and her mind prepared for everything. She took her usual time to dress — that is, an hour. She looked at herself in the piece of broken glass which served as her mirror; her eyes appeared to her more brilliant than ever — her lips had not lost their brightness nor their roundness — her teeth were perfect — her neck, which she took particular care to hide from the sun, was white as a lily. Seeing herself so handsome, she began to think she could easily make her young lady jealous. Thus armed personally and mentally, she opened Andree's door, as she was authorized to do whenever, at seven o'clock, her mistress had not rung for her.

When Nicole entered the room she stopped in amazement.

Pale, her beautiful hair damp with perspiration, Andree lay on her bed in a heavy sleep, in which she sometimes writhed as if in pain. She was still in the dress which she had worn the day before. Her breathing was hurried, and now and then a low groan escaped her lips. Nicole looked at her for a minute, and shook her head, for she acknowledged to herself that there could be no beauty which could contest the palm with Andree's.

She went to the window and opened the shutters. A stream of light poured in, and made Mademoiselle Taverney's violet-veined eyelids quiver. She awoke — tried to rise, but felt, at the same time, such great weakness and such excessive pain that she fell back on her pillow with a cry of suffering.

“Oh! mademoiselle, what is the matter?” asked Nicole.

“Is it late?” said Andree, rubbing her eyes.

“Very late, madame — much later than your usual hour for rising.”

“I do not know what is the matter with me, Nicole,” said she, looking around her, “I feel so oppressed — so ill!”

Nicole fixed her eyes on her mistress before replying; “It is the commencement of a cold that you have caught, madame, last night.”

“Last night!” replied Andree, surprised; then, looking at her disordered dress, “Have I really lain down without undressing? How could that be?”

“If mademoiselle would reflect — ”

“I don't recollect anything about it,” replied Andree, leaning her head on her hand; “what has happened? — I am going mad?” She sat up on the bed, and looked round for the second time all bewildered. Then, after reflecting; “Oh! yes, I remember I was very much tired — very much exhausted yesterday — it was the storm, no doubt — then I fell asleep on the music-stool at my harpsichord — but, after that, I remember nothing. I must have come up to my room half asleep, and thrown myself on my bed without strength to undress.”

“You should have called me, madame,” said Nicole; “mademoiselle knows that I am always ready to wait on her.”

“I either did not think of it, or had not strength to do it.”

“Hypocrite!” muttered Nicole to herself — then she added; “But mademoiselle must have stayed very late at her harpsichord then, for before she came up to her room, hearing a noise, I went down — ” She stopped, hoping to discover in Andree something like agitation — a blush, perhaps; no! — Andree was calm, and her countenance, that clear mirror of her soul, was undisturbed. “I went down,” repeated Nicole.

“Well?”

“Well, madame, your were not at your harpsichord.”

Andree looked up, but there was only surprise to be read in her lovely eyes. “Very strange!” said she.

“It is quite true, however.”

“You say I was not in the salon? but I never left it for a moment till I came to bed.”

“Mademoiselle will pardon me for contradicting her.”

“But where was I, then?”

“Mademoiselle must know that better than I,” said Nicole, shrugging her shoulders.

“You must he wrong, Nicole,” said Andree, mildly; “I only remember feeling cold and stiff, and having great difficulty in walking.”

“Oh, but when I saw mademoiselle, she walked very well,” said Nicole, almost with a sneer.

“You saw me walk?”

“Yes, indeed, madame.”

“But just now you said I was not in the salon.”

“It was not in the salon I saw mademoiselle.”

“Where, then?”

“In the vestibule, near the staircase.”

“I?”

“Yes; I think I ought to know mademoiselle when I see her,” said Nicole, with an affected laugh.

“I am certain, however,” said Andree, with great simplicity, after she had again tried to recall the events of the night, “that I did not stir out of the salon.”

“I am, however, quite as certain that I saw mademoiselle in the vestibule — I thought, indeed, she had just come in from a walk in the garden — it was a beautiful night after the storm — and it is very pleasant to walk out when the air is so cool, and when the flowers smell so sweet — is it not, madame?”

“Oh, but you know I dare not walk out at night! I am too timid.”

“Mademoiselle might have some one with her, and then she would not be afraid.”

“And whom, pray, could I have with me?” asked Andree, without the least suspicion that she was undergoing a cross-examination.

Nicole was afraid to proceed further in her investigation — Andree's coolness she thought the height of dissimulation — but she judged it best to give the conversation another turn.

“Mademoiselle was saying that she felt in pain?”

“Yes, indeed, I feel in great pain — and so weak, so low — I did nothing yesterday but what I do every day, yet I am so tired — perhaps I am going to be ill.”

“It may be some sorrow which caused that feeling of weariness — I have felt it myself.”

“Oh, you have sorrows, have you, Nicole?”

This was said with a disdainful carelessness which gave Nicole courage to speak more plainly.

“Oh yes, madame,” she replied; “yes, I have.”

Andree got slowly out of bed and, while proceeding to undress, that she might dress again, she said, “Well, let me hear them.”

“Indeed I have just come to tell mademoiselle” — she stopped.

“To tell what? You look frightened, Nicole.”

“I look frightened, and mademoiselle looks tired; so, doubtless, we are both suffering.”

This piece of familiarity displeased Andree. She smiled slightly, exclaiming, “Oh!”

The intonation of her voice might have made Nicole reflect, but she was not to be daunted.

“Since mademoiselle wishes me to speak, I shall do so.”

“Well, go on.”

“'I wish to get married, madame.”

“Oh! Is that what you are thinking of? Why, you are not seventeen, yet.”

“Mademoiselle is only sixteen, and yet does she not sometimes think of marrying?”

“What reason have you to suppose so?” asked Andree, severely.

Nicole was just opening her mouth to say something impertinent, but she knew that that would cut short the conversation, which she had no desire should end yet.

“I beg mademoiselle's pardon — I cannot certainly know her thoughts — I am but a country girl — I follow nature.”

“That is a strange expression!”

“ Is it not natural for a woman to love, and to wish to be loved?” “Perhaps so. Well?”

“Well; I am in love.”

“And the person you love loves you?”

“I think so, madame ” — then reflecting that this reply was not decided enough under the circumstances, she added, “Indeed, I am sure of it.”

“You are not wasting your time at Taverney, from your own account, Mademoiselle Nicole!”

“One must think of the future, madame; you are a lady, and doubtless some rich relation will leave you a fortune. I must do the best I can for myself.”

All this appeared natural enough, and forgetting Nicole's little piece of impertinence, Andree's goodness of heart began to resume the ascendancy.

“Very true,” said she; “but I should like to know who is your choice.”

“Ah, you do know him, madame!” said Nicole, fixing her eyes on Andree.

“I know him?”

“Yes, very well.”

“Who is it, then? — do not keep me in suspense.”

“I am afraid mademoiselle will be displeased.”

“I displeased?”

“Yes, mademoiselle.”

“Then it is some improper person whom you have chosen?”

“I dare not say that, madame.”

“Then tell it without fear. It is the duty of masters to take an interest in the welfare of their dependents who perform their duties satisfactorily — and you know I am satisfied with you.”

“You are very kind, madame.”

“Well, tell me quickly, and finish lacing me.”

Nicole collected all her firmness and all her powers of penetration, as she said, “Well, madame, it is Gilbert whom I have chosen.”

To her great surprise Andree betrayed no emotion of any kind; she only said:

“What, little Gilbert — my nurse's son!”

“Yes, madame, the same.”

“And he loves you?”

Now was the decisive moment.

“He has told me so twenty times.”

“Well, marry him,” replied Andree, calmly. “I see nothing to prevent it. You have no relations — he is an orphan — you are each of you free from control.”

“Certainly,” stammered Nicole, quite amazed at the matter ending so differently from what she had expected. “Mademoiselle gives her permission, then?”

“My full permission, only you are both very young yet.”

“We shall live longer together.”

“And you have neither one nor other any money.”

“We shall work.”

“What can he work at? — he is good for nothing.”

This dissimulation was too much for Nicole. She could not contain herself.

“Mademoiselle must allow me to say that speaking so of poor Gilbert is treating him very ill!”

“It is treating him as he deserves — he is a lazy fellow.”

“Oh, mademoiselle, he reads a great deal — he wishes so to be well informed.”

“He will not work.”

“For mademoiselle he does all that he can.”

“For me?”

“Mademoiselle must know that, when she ordered him to procure game for her every day, and he does so.”

“I ordered him?”

“Yes; and he often goes twenty miles for it.”

“Indeed! I confess I never thought about it.”

“About the game?” asked Nicole, sarcastically.

“What does that witticism mean?” asked Andree, getting a little impatient, for she felt irritable and unwell.

“I have no wit, madame — wit is for great ladies. I am a poor girl, and tell things plainly as they are,” replied Nicole, “and mademoiselle is unjust to Gilbert, who is so very attentive to all her wishes.”

“He only does his duty as a servant, if he be so.”

“But Gilbert is not a servant, madame; he receives no wages.”

“He is the son of an old tenant — he is kept — he is fed, and he does nothing in return. But why defend so warmly this lad, when he was not attacked?”

“Oh, I knew very well that mademoiselle would not attack him.”

“More words that I do not understand!”

“Mademoiselle will not understand.”

“Enough! Explain this moment what you mean.”

“Mademoiselle must certainly have no difficulty to know what I mean.”

“I know nothing — and I shall not take the trouble of finding out; you ask my consent to your marriage?”

“Yes, and I would beg of you, mademoiselle, not to be angry with Gilbert for loving me.”

“What can it matter to me whether he loves you or does not love you? You are really very tiresome.”

“Perhaps mademoiselle has said the same to Gilbert?”

“I! — do I ever speak to your Gilbert? — you are crazy, I think.”

“If mademoiselle does not speak to him now, it is not very long since she did speak.”

Nicole turned on her a look of ineffable scorn. “You have been trying for an hour to let me hear some specimen of your impertinence; say it at once, I command you.”

“But — ” began Nicole, a little alarmed.

“You say that I have spoken to Gilbert?”

“Yes, madame, I say so!”

A thought flashed across Andree's mind, but it was so absurd that she burst into a fit of laughter. “Heaven forgive me!” she exclaimed, “I do believe the poor girl is jealous. Be not uneasy, Legay, I know so little of your Gilbert, that I do not even know the color of his eyes!” And Andree felt quite prepared to pardon what she now thought not impertinence, but mere folly. But Nicole did not want to be pardoned, because she looked on herself as the injured person.

“It is not the way to know their color to look at them by night,” said she.

“Did you speak?” asked Andree, now beginning to understand, but scarcely willing to allow herself to entertain the thought.

“I said that if mademoiselle only speaks to Gilbert at night, she will not see very well what his features are.”

“Take care!” said Andree, turning pale, “and explain instantly what you mean.”

“That is easily done. Last night I saw — ”

“Be silent — some one calls me!”

In fact, a voice just then called, from the court in front of the house, “Andree! Andree!”

“It is the baron, madame,” said Nicole, “with the strange gentleman.”

“Go down and say that I cannot appear, that I am indisposed, and then return and let me know the end of this extraordinary history of yours.”

“Andree!” cried her father again, “it is merely the Baron Balsamo, who wishes to bid you good-morning and inquire after your health.”

“Go, I tell you,” said she to Nicole, and she pointed to the door with the gesture of a queen.

But when Nicole was gone, Andree felt a strange sensation; she had resolved not to appear, yet she was impelled by an irresistible power to the window left open by her waiting-maid. She saw Balsamo below; he bowed, at the same time fixing his eyes steadily on her. She trembled, and held by the window to prevent herself from falling.

“Good-morning, sir,” said she, in reply to his salutation, and just as she pronounced the words, Nicole, whom she had sent to say she should not, appear, advanced toward the gentlemen, looking with open mouth at this instance of caprice in her mistress.

Andree had scarcely spoken, when she sank deprived of strength on a chair; Balsamo still continued to gaze on her.

CHAPTER XII.

The Morning.

THE TRAVELER had risen early, in order to look after his carriage and inquire how Althotas had got on. No one was up at that hour in the castle but Gilbert, who followed with his eyes every movement of the stranger. But he could discover little, as Balsamo closed the carriage door too carefully for his inquisitive looks to penetrate its mystery.

Seeing the baron's abode by the clear light of a sunny morning, Balsamo was struck by the different impression it made on him from what it had done the preceding night. In fact, the little white and red chateau — for it was built of stone and brick — made a pretty picture, surrounded as it was by a grove of sycamores and laburnums of a large size, the flowers of which hung on the roof of the low building, and girt the towers with a crown of gold. In front of the court there was a small piece of water, surrounded by a broad border of turf and a hedge of acacias, on which the eye rested with pleasure, confined as the view was on this side by the tall chestnut and ash trees of the avenue.

Balsamo turned along a broad walk on the left, and had scarcely advanced twenty paces when he found himself in the midst of a thick shrubbery of maples, palms, and lindens, among which the roses and syringas, steeped by the rain of the preceding night, sent forth a delicious perfume. Through the hedge of privet which bordered the walk peeped jasmine and honeysuckle, and in the distance could be seen a long alley, lined with pink hawthorn and wild roses, leading to a wood.

Balsamo at last arrived at the extremity of the demesne. Here, on a slight elevation, stood the massive ruins of an ancient castle, one of the towers of which was still standing almost uninjured, and clothed from its base to its summit with luxuriant shoots of the ivy and wild vine. Viewed from this point, the demesne of Taverney, though but seven or eight acres in extent, wanted neither dignity nor elegance.

After having spent about an hour in examining the ruins, Balsamo was returning toward the house, when he saw the baron leave it by the side-door, his slight frame buried in an Indian flowered dressing-gown, and proceed to prune and arrange his little parterre. He hastened to meet him, and now having still further sounded the poverty of his host, his politeness was more decided in its expression than it had been the night before.

“Allow me, sir,” said he, “to offer you my excuses for the trouble I have given you, and, at the same time, my respectful thanks for your hospitality. I should not have ventured to come down before knowing that you were up, but the view of Taverney from my window was so charming, that I could not resist my desire to revisit those imposing ruins, and to see your beautiful garden.”

“The ruins,” said the baron, after having politely wished, the stranger good morning — ” the ruins, sir, are fine — indeed, the only thing that is fine at Taverney.”

“It was a large castle!”

“Yes; it was mine — or rather my ancestors'. They called it Maison-Rouge, which name has long been joined to Taverney — indeed, our barony is Maison Rouge; but, my dear guest, let us not talk of things no longer in being.”

Balsamo bowed in submission.

“Allow me rather to make my excuses to you for your poor accommodation here. I told you beforehand what my house was.”

“I have been delighted with it.”

“A dog-kennel! a dog-kennel, sir! A very favorite place with the rats, since the foxes, lizards, and adders drove them from the other castle! Ah, pardieu! sir, you, who are a sorcerer or something very near it, you certainly ought to raise up with a stroke of your wand the old castle in its glory again — above all, not forgetting the two thousand acres which formerly surrounded it. I'll wager, however, that instead of thinking of doing me such a service, you have been so polite as to go to sleep in an execrable bed!”

“Oh, sir — ”

“No — no — don't attempt to say anything in its favor! it is an execrable bed — it is my son's.”

“You must permit me to say, that such as the bed is, it appeared to me excellent. I cannot but feel ashamed of having intruded on you, and I am deeply indebted for the kindness with which you have received me. It would give me sincere pleasure to make a return, if it were in my power."

"Well, there is an opportunity," replied the old man, with a mocking smile, and pointing to La Brie, who was coming with a glass of water on a splendid plate of Dresden china, "just turn this into Burgundy, Chambertin, or any other good wine, and you will do me a most essential service."

Balsamo smiled; the old man took the smile for a refusal, and at one draught swallowed the water presented to him.

"An excellent specific," said Balsamo; "water is highest among the elements, for the Holy Spirit was borne on it before the creation of the world. Nothing can resist its action; it penetrates stone, and we may yet discover that the diamond can be dissolved by it."

"I shall be dissolved by it, I fear," replied the baron. ""Will you pledge me? The water has some advantages over my wine; it is in capital order, and it is not yet exhausted. It is not like my Maraschino."

"If you had ordered a glass for me as well as for yourself, I might have been able to use it for your advantage."

"Good; explain that for me — is it not still time?"

"Then tell your servant to bring me a glass of very pure water."

"La Brie, do you hear, you old rascal?"

La Brie hastened to obey.

"How!" said the baron, turning to his guest, "does the glass of water which I drink every morning contain any properties, any secrets which are unknown to me? Have I for ten years been making chemical experiments, as Monsieur Jourdain made prose, without being aware of it?"

"I do not know what you have been doing;, but you shall see what I can do."

"Thank you, my good fellow." said Balsamo, taking the glass from La Brie, who had brought it with marvelous rapidity.

He held the glass on a level with his eyes, and seemed to interrogate the water which it contained; in the sunlight the little beads on its surface were bright as diamonds, and streaked with violet color.

"Oh, the deuce!" cried the baron, laughing, "can anything beautiful be seen in a glass of water?"

"Yes, baron, to-day, at least, something very beautiful."

And Balsamo appeared doubly attentive in his occupation, the baron, in spite of himself, looking a little serious, and La Brie gazing with open mouth at what was going on.

“What do you see, pray? — I am bursting with impatience to know. A good estate for me? A new Maison-Rouge to set me on foot again?”

“I see something which induces me to beg you to be on the alert.”

“Ay! — am I going to be attacked?”

“No; but this morning you will receive a visit.”

“Then, you have yourself ordered some one to meet you here. That was wrong, sir, very wrong. There may be no partridges this morning — remember that!”

“I speak seriously, my dear baron, and what I say is most important — some one is at this moment on the way to Taverney.”

“Some one? What sort of a visitor, tell me, pray? — for I must confess (you must have perceived it from the rather reception I gave you) that every one annoys me who comes here. So, what sort of visitor? be precise, my dear sorcerer; if possible, be precise in your description.”

“I can very easily tell all you wish,” and Balsamo again raised the glass to his searching eye.

“Well, do you see anything?”

“I see everything distinctly.”

“Speak, oh speak. Sister Anne!”

“I see a lady of great consequence coming.”

“Bah! indeed! — coming without being invited?”

“She has invited herself — your son brings her.”

“Philip brings her?”

“Yes, himself.”

The baron laughed heartily.

“She is brought by my son? The great lady brought by my son.”

“Yes, baron.

“You know my son, then?”

“I never saw him in my life.”

“And my son at this moment is —

“Is about a mile off.”

“My dear sir, he is in garrison at Strasbourg, and unless he has deserted, which he has not, I can swear, he is bringing nobody hither.”

“He is bringing a great lady hither — a very exalted personage. Ah, hold! there is one thing I ought to tell you — you had better keep out of sight that little rogue with the horn at her fingerends.”

“Nicole Legay. Why, pray?”

“Because her features resemble those of the lady who is coming.”

“A great lady resemble Nicole! — that is absurd!”

“Why so? I bought a slave once who resembled Cleopatra so much that there was some idea of sending her to Rome to pass for that queen in Octavius's triumph.”

“Ah! another attack of your old malady!”

“You must surely see, my dear baron, that this matter cannot concern me — I only speak for your own good.”

“But why should Nicole's resemblance to the great lady offend her? ”

“Suppose you were the king of France, which I am far from wishing, or the dauphin, which I wish still less, should you be flattered, on entering a house, to find among the servants one whose face was a counterpart of your august visage?”

“Oh, the devil! — that would be a sad dilemma! So, then, you think —

“I think that the most high and mighty lady who is coming would not be pleased to see her living image in a short petticoat and cotton handkerchief.”

“Oh, well,” said the baron, still laughing, “we must see about it; but, after all, my dear baron, what delights me most in this affair is, that my son is coming — that dear Philip! — without giving us a note of warning,” and he laughed louder than before.

“So you are pleased with my prediction?” said Balsamo gravely.

“I am glad of it; but in your place I should set about giving some orders.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

“I shall think of it, my dear guest, I shall think of it.”

“You have very little time.”

“And you are serious, then?”

“No one could be more serious. If you wish to receive the great personage who does you the honor of visiting you properly you have not a minute to lose.”

The baron shook his head.

“Yon still doubt?” asked Balsamo.

“I warn you, you have to do with a most confirmed skeptic.” And just then he turned to call his daughter, in order to communicate his guest's prediction to her, as we have before related. We have seen how the young girl replied to her father's invitation, and how Balsamo's gaze had drawn her, as if by fascination, to the window.

Nicole stood looking with amazement at La Brie, who was making signs to her, and trying to understand what had been said.

"I am dreadfully hard of belief," repeated the baron, "and unless I saw — "

"Then, since you must see, look there," said Balsamo, pointing to the avenue, where a horseman appeared galloping toward them.

"Ha!" cried the baron, "there indeed is — "

"Monsieur Philip!" said Nicole, standing on tiptoe.

"My young master!" exclaimed La Brie joyfully.

"My brother, my brother!" cried Andree, stretching out her arms at the window.

"Is it your son, my dear baron?" asked Balsamo, in a careless tone.

"Yes; pardieu! it is!" exclaimed he, stupefied with astonishment.

"This is but the beginning," said Balsamo.

"You are positively a sorcerer, then," said the baron, more submissively than before.

A triumphant smile hovered on the stranger's lips.

The horse came on at full speed, reeking with moisture, passed the last rows of trees, and, while still in motion, the rider leaped to the ground, and hastened to embrace his father, who only muttered, "What the devil! what the devil!"

"It is really I," said Philip, who saw his father's perplexity; "it is indeed."

"Doubtless — I see that plainly enough; but what brought you hither at this time?"

"Father, a great honor awaits our house!"

The old man looked up inquiringly.

Philip went on; "In an hour Marie Antoinette Josephe, archduchess of Austria and dauphiness of France, will be here."

The baron looked as deeply humbled as he had before looked sarcastic, and, turning to Balsamo, said only, "Pardon me!"

"Sir," returned Balsamo, "I leave you with your son; it is long since you have met, and you must have much to say to each other."

Bowing to Andree, who, full of joy at the arrival of her brother, had hastened down to meet him, he retired, making a sign to Nicole and La

Brie, which they doubtless understood, for they disappeared with him among the trees of the avenue.

CHAPTER XIII.

Philip De Taverney.

PHILIP DE TAVERNEY, Chevalier de Maison-Rouge, did not in the least resemble his sister, yet was as fine a specimen of manly beauty as she was of feminine loveliness. His features were noble and regular, his figure and carriage graceful in the extreme, and the expression of his eyes was at the same time mild and haughty.

Like all distinguished minds, wearied by the narrow and chilling forms of life, he was disposed to melancholy, without being sad. To this, perhaps, he owed his mildness of temper, for he was naturally proud, imperious, and reserved. The necessity of associating with the poor, his real equals, as with the rich, his equals in rank, had softened a character inclined to be overbearing and scornful.

Philip had scarcely embraced his father when Andree, roused from her magnetic torpor by his arrival, hastened down to throw herself on his bosom. The sobs which accompanied this action showed how dear he was to the heart of the tender girl.

Philip took her hand and his father's and drew them into the salon, where, being now alone, he sat down between them.

“You are incredulous, my dear father — you are surprised, my dear sister,” said he; “yet nothing is more true than that in a few minutes the dauphiness will be in our poor abode.”

“Ventrebleu!” cried the baron; “she must be prevented, whatever it cost! The dauphiness here! — we should be dishonored forever! This would be a specimen of the nobility of France to present her! No, no; it must not be. But tell me, 'what the deuce put my house into her head?”

“Oh, it is a complete romance.”

“A romance!” said Andree; “relate it, brother — my dear good brother!”

“My dear good brother!” repeated the baron; “she seems quite pleased.”

“Yes; for is not Philip pleased, my dear father?”

“Because Master Philip is an enthusiast. But for me, who look at things in a more serious manner, I see nothing very agreeable in it.”

“You will be of a different opinion when I relate what has occurred.”

“Well, relate it quickly,” grumbled the old man.

“Yes, yes, relate it!” exclaimed Andree impatiently.

“Well, I was in garrison at Strasbourg, as you know. Now, you are aware that it was by Strasbourg that the dauphiness was to enter France.”

“Know it! How should we know anything in this den?” asked the baron.

“Well, at Strasbourg, brother?” said Andree.

“Well, we were waiting on the glacis from six in the morning, for we did not know positively at what hour Madame la Dauphine would arrive. It rained in torrents, and our clothes were dripping. The major sent me forward to endeavor to discover the cortege. I had galloped about a league, when all at once, at a turn in the road, I found myself close to the advanced guard of the escort. I spoke a few words to them, and just then her royal highness put her head out of the carriage window, and asked who 1 was. It seems I had been called to to stop; but I had already set off at full gallop — all my fatigue, was forgotten in an instant.”

“And the dauphiness?” asked Andree.

“She is not older than you, and beautiful as an angel.”

“But, Philip,” said the baron, rather hesitatingly.

“Well, father?”

“"Does she not resemble some one you have seen?”

“Some one that I have seen?”

“Yes; endeavor to recollect.”

“No, I know no one like Madame la Dauphine!” he exclaimed, enthusiastically.

“What! not Nicole, for instance?”

“Ha! that is most strange! Now you say so, I do think she is like her; but oh, so much inferior in beauty and grace! But how could you know that she was like her?”

“Faith! a sorcerer told me.”

“A sorcerer?”

“Yes; and he predicted her coming and yours this morning.”

“The stranger?” asked Andree, timidly.

“Is it he who was beside you, sir, when I arrived, and who retired so discreetly?”

“Yes, the same; but go on, Philip, go on.”

“Perhaps it would be better to make some preparations,” said Andree.

“No — the more you prepare, the more ridiculous we shall appear. Go on, Philip, I tell you!”

“I returned to Strasbourg, and told the governor, the Count de Stainville. We set out immediately to meet her royal highness, and we were at the Kehl gate when the procession came in sight. I was close to the governor.”

“Stay!” said the baron; “I once knew a Count de Stainville.”

“Brother-in-law to the prime minister, the Duke de Choiseul.”

“It is the same. Go on, then, go on.”

“The dauphiness, who is young, perhaps likes young faces, for she listened very inattentively to the governor and all the time fixed her eyes on me, although I kept respectfully in the background. Then, pointing to me, she said, 'Is not that the gentleman who was the first to meet me?' 'Yes, madame,' replied the governor. 'Approach, sir,' said she. I approached her. 'What is your name?' asked the dauphiness in the sweetest voice I ever heard. 'The Chevalier de Taverney Maison-Rouge,' I replied, stammering. 'Pray take a note of that name on your tablets, my dear friend,' said the dauphiness, turning to an old lady, who, I have since learned, is the Countess de Langershausen, her governess. My name was written. Then, turning again to me, she said, 'Ah, sir, you have suffered very much from your exposure to this frightful weather; I am extremely sorry for having been the cause of it.'”

“Oh, how good the dauphiness must be! What kindness and consideration!” said Andree, with delight.

“Very well, very well indeed,” muttered the baron, with, a smile indicative of a father's partiality, and, at the same time, of his bad opinion of women, and even of queens. “But, go on, Philip.”

“What did you say?” asked Andree.

“I said not a word; I bowed to the very ground. She passed on.”

“What! you said nothing”?” exclaimed the baron.

“I had no voice, I assure you, sir; my heart heat so rapidly — I was so much agitated.”

“What the devil! do you think I had nothing to say when, about your age, I was presented to the Princess Leczinska?”

“But, sir, you had always a great deal of wit,” Philip replied.

Andree pressed his hand.

“I profited by her royal highness's departure,” continued Philip, “to hasten to my apartment and changed my clothes; for I was wet to the skin and covered with mud from head to foot.”

“Poor dear brother!” whispered Andree.

“When the dauphiness,” Philip continued, “reached the town-hall, she had to receive the congratulations of the principal inhabitants; that being over, it was announced that dinner was served. A friend of mine, the major of my regiment, since told me that, while at table, she looked several times round on the officers who were present, and at last she said, 'I do not see the young officer who was sent to meet me this morning; has he not been told that I wished to thank him?' The major stepped forward. 'Madame,' said he, 'Lieutenant de Taverney was obliged to retire and change his dress, that he might present himself in a more suitable manner before you.' A moment after, I entered the room, and I had not been five minutes in it when the dauphiness perceived me. She made a sign to me to approach; I obeyed. 'Sir,' said she, 'should you object to follow me to Paris?' 'Oh, madame,' I cried, 'it would only make me too happy; but I am in garrison at Strasbourg, and I am not my own master.' 'Well, I shall arrange that matter with the governor;' and she made a gesture for me to retire. In the evening she said to the governor, 'Sir, I have a vow to fulfill, and you must assist me in it.' 'I shall consider it a sacred duty, madame,' he replied. 'You must know,' she continued, 'that I made a vow to take into my own service the first Frenchman, whoever he should be, whom I should meet on touching the soil of France, and that I would make him and his family happy, if, indeed, princes can make any one happy.' 'Madame,' said the governor, 'princes are God's representatives on earth; but may I ask,' continued he, 'who was the person who had the good fortune to be first met by your royal highness”?' 'The Chevalier de Taverney Maison-Rouge, a young lieutenant.' 'We shall all be jealous of the Chevalier de Taverney, madame,' replied the governor, 'but we shall not place any obstacle in the way of his high fortune; the ties which engage him here shall be broken, and he shall depart at the same time as your highness.' So the day on which the dauphiness left Strasbourg, I was ordered to accompany her on horseback, and since then have never left the door of her carriage.”

“Oh!” said the baron, with his former singular smile, “strange enough, but not impossible!” — “What, father?”

“Oh, never mind!”

“'But, brother,” said Andree, “I don't seen what all this has to do with the dauphiness coming hither.”

“Wait till you hear. Yesterday morning we arrived at Nancy about eleven o'clock, and were passing through the town by torch-light. The dauphiness called me to her. 'I wish,' said she, 'to depart early to-morrow morning.' 'Your highness is going to make a long march, then?' 'No — that I wish to stop on the road, and can you guess where?' she asked, smiling. 'No, madame.' 'I mean to stop at Taverney, to see your father and sister.' 'My father and my sister! — what — your royal highness knows — ' 'I have made inquiries, and know that they live only two hundred paces from the road which we are traveling.' The perspiration broke on my forehead, and trembling, as you may suppose, I hastened to reply, 'My father's house, madame, is not worthy to receive so great a princess — we are poor.' 'So much the better,' replied she; 'I shall therefore, I am certain, be received more cordially and more simply; however poor you may be, there will be always a cup of milk for a friend who wishes to forget for a moment that she is Archduchess of Austria and Dauphiness of France.' 'Oh, madame,' said I. This was all — respect forbade me to go farther.”

“Stupid fellow!” cried the baron.

“One might have thought that her royal highness guessed what was passing in my mind, for she added; 'Do not be afraid; I shall not stay long; but since you think that I shall suffer any inconvenience by this visit, it is only fair, for I caused you to suffer on my arrival at Strasbourg.' Who could resist such charming words, father?”

“Oh, it would have been impossible!” cried Andree; “she is so sweet, so good, she will be satisfied with my flowers and a cup of my milk, as she says.”

“Yes; but she will not be very well satisfied with my chairs, which will dislocate her bones, and my hangings, which will disgust her. Devil take all whims! So! France will be well governed with a woman who takes such caprices. Plague on it! A strange reign it will be, to judge from the commencement,” said the baron, angrily.

“Oh, father, how can you say such things of a princess who is honoring us so highly?”

“Who is dishonoring us, rather!” cried the old man. “Taverney was forgotten, buried under the ruins of Maison Rouge. I intended that if it came to light again it should be in a suitable manner, and now the whims of a girl are going to drag us into day — dusty, shabby, wretched I — and the gazettes, on the watch for everything absurd, will amuse their readers with the visit of a great princess to this den of Taverney. Cordieu! I have an idea — ”

The young people started at the manner in which he pronounced these words.

“What do you mean, sir?” demanded Philip.

The baron muttered to himself — “If the Duke of Medina burned his palace that he might embrace a queen, I may well burn my kennel to get rid of the visit of a princess. Let her come! — let her come!”

Philip and Andree only heard the last words, and they looked at each other uneasily.

“It cannot be long before she be here, sir,” said Philip. “I took the way through the wood, in order to get some minutes in advance of the cortege; it will soon be here.”

“Then I must not lose time,” said the baron; and, with the agility of twenty, he left the salon. He hastened to the kitchen, snatched a flaming piece of wood from the hearth, and proceeded to his barns; but just as he raised his arm to throw it into a heap of straw, he was seized by Balsamo, who flung to a safe distance the burning brand.

“What are you about, sir,” cried he; “the Archduchess of Austria is not a Constable de Bourbon, whose presence contaminates, so that we should rather burn our house than permit her to enter it!”

The old man stopped, pale, trembling, and his habitual smile banished from his lips; he had gathered all his strength to enable him to resolve on making his poverty yet greater by the destruction of his dwelling, rather than be disgraced, according to his ideas, by allowing its mediocrity to be seen.

“Come, sir, come,” continued Balsamo; “you have only time to throw off your dressing-gown and put yourself in better trim. The Baron of Taverney, whom I knew at the siege of Philipsbourg, wore the grand cross of the order of St. Louis — any coat will be rich and elegant when decorated with that.”

“But, sir, shall I show to our dauphiness that poverty which I wished to hide from you?”

“Be not uneasy, we shall manage to occupy her attention so that she shall not know whether your house be new or old, poor or rich. Be hospitable, sir, it is your duty as a gentleman! What will the enemies of the dauphiness —

and she has many — what will they do, if her friends burn their castles rather than receive her under their roof? Let us not thus anticipate that vengeance which is to come! — everything in its predestined time.”

The baron again showed an involuntary submission to Balsamo, and hurried to his children, who, uneasy at his absence, were seeking him on every side.

As to Balsamo, he retired in silence, like a man intent on some work which he had undertaken, and which he must complete.

CHAPTER XIV.

Marie Antoinette Josephe, Archduchess of Austria.

AS BALSAMO had said, there was no time to be lost, for now on the road — generally so peaceful — which led to the Baron of Taverney's dwelling, a great sound of carriages, horses, and voices was heard.

Three carriages, one of which was covered with gilding and mythological bas-reliefs, and which, notwithstanding its magnificence, was not less dusty and bespattered than the others, stopped at the great gate of the avenue. Gilbert held it open, his eyes distended, his whole frame trembling with feverish agitation at the sight of so much magnificence. Twenty gentlemen on horseback, all young and splendidly dressed, drew up near the principal carriage, from which a young girl of sixteen, dressed with great simplicity, but with her hair elaborately piled on her forehead, got out, assisted by a gentleman in black, who wore, saltier-wise, under his mantle, the ribbon of St. Louis.

Marie Antoinette, for it was she, brought with her a reputation for beauty which the princesses destined to share the thrones of the kings of France have not always possessed. It was difficult to say whether her eyes were beautiful or not, yet they were capable of every expression, more particularly of the opposite expressions of mildness and scorn. Her nose was finely formed, her upper lip beautiful, but the lower lip, her aristocratic inheritance from seventeen emperors, was too thick and prominent. Her complexion was lovely; her neck, shoulders, and bust were of marble whiteness and beautifully formed; her hands truly regal. At times, when roused to energy, her carriage was majestic, firm, and decided; at other times, when not excited, soft, undulating — one might almost say caressing. No woman ever made a more graceful courtesy — no queen ever bowed with more tact and discrimination. This day the most expressive sweetness shone in her countenance. She had resolved to be only the woman, and to forget the dauphiness. She wore a dress of white silk, and her beautiful bare arms supported a mantel of rich lace.

Scarcely had she touched the ground when she turned to assist one of her ladies of honor whom age had weakened a little, and, refusing the arm of the gentleman in black, she advanced, inhaling the fresh air, and looking around as if determined to enjoy to the utmost the few moments of freedom with which she was indulging herself.

“Oh, what a beautiful situation!” she exclaimed; “what magnificent trees! and such a pretty little house! How happy one might be in this healthful air, under those trees, which form so sweet a retirement!”

At this moment Philip appeared, followed by Andree, on whose arm the baron leaned. She was dressed in a simple gown of gray silk, and the baron in a coat of blue velvet, the remains of some of his old magnificence; he had not forgotten Balsamo's recommendation, and wore his ribbon of St. Louis. On seeing the three approach, the dauphiness stopped. Her escort then grouped itself around her — the officers holding their horses by the bridles, and the courtiers, hat in hand, whispering to one another. Philip drew near, pale with agitation, yet with a noble bearing.

“With your royal highness's permission,” said he, “I have the honor of presenting to you the Baron de Taverney Maison Rouge, my father, and Claire Andree de Taverney, my sister.”

The baron bowed profoundly, like a man who knew how to bow to queens. Andree showed, in her graceful timidity, the most flattering kind of politeness — sincere respect. Marie Antoinette looked at the two young people, and recalling what Philip had said of their poverty, she guessed what they suffered at that moment.

“Madame,” said the baron, with dignity, “your royal highness does too much honor to the Chateau of Taverney — such a humble abode is not worthy to receive so much rank and beauty!”

“I know that it is the abode of an old soldier of France,” replied the dauphiness, “and my mother, the Empress Maria Theresa, who was a distinguished warrior, has told me that often in your country those richest in glory are the poorest in meaner treasures,” and with ineffable grace she extended her lovely hand to Andree, who, kneeling, kissed it.

The baron was, however, still haunted by the idea which had so much tormented him, that the train of the dauphiness was about to crowd into his little house, in which there could not be found chairs for a fourth of their number. The dauphiness hastened to relieve him from all embarrassment.

"Gentlemen," said she, turning to those who formed her escort, "I must not impose on you the trouble of following me in all my caprices. You will wait here, if you please; in half an hour I shall return. Come with me, my good Langershausen," she added in German to the lady whom she had assisted out of the carriage, "and you sir," said she to the gentleman in black, "have the goodness to follow us!"

This personage, though dressed thus simply, was remarkable for the elegance of his manners, and was about thirty years of age, and very handsome. He drew to one side to allow the princess to pass. Marie Antoinette took Andree for her guide, and made a sign for Philip to come near his sister.

As to the baron, he was left to the personage of high rank, doubtless, to whom the dauphiness had granted the honor of accompanying her.

"So you are a Taverney Maison-Rouge?" said he, playing with his splendid ruffles of the most expensive lace, and turning to the baron with truly aristocratic impertinence.

"Must I reply, sir, or my lord?" asked the baron, with equal impertinence.

"You may say simply prince, or your eminence, which you choose," the other replied.

"Well, then, your eminence, I am a Taverney Maison-Rouge! a real one!" said the baron, in that tone of raillery which he so seldom abandoned.

His eminence, who had the usual tact of great nobles, felt that he had to do with no country clown, and continued, "This is your summer residence?"

"Summer and winter," answered the baron, who wished to put an end to disagreeable queries, but accompanying each reply with a low bow.

Philip could not help turning from time to time uneasily toward his father, for the house, as they drew nearer it, wore an aspect threatening and ironical, as if pitilessly determined to show all their poverty. The baron had already resignedly extended his hand to point the way to the door of his house, when the dauphiness, turning to him, said, "Excuse me, sir, if I do not enter; these shades are so delightful that I could pass my life in them. I am tired of rooms. For fifteen days I have been received in rooms — I, who love the open air, the shade of trees, and the perfume of flowers." Then, turning to Andree, "You will bring me a cup of milk here, under these beautiful trees — will you not?"

"Your highness," said the baron, turning pale, "how should we dare to offer you such poor refreshment?"

"I prefer it, sir, to anything else. Newlaid eggs and milk formed my banquets at Schoenbrunn."

All at once La Brie, swelling with pride, in a splendid livery and a napkin on his arm, appeared under an archway of jessamine, the shade of which had attracted the eye of the dauphiness. In a tone in which importance and respect were strangely mixed, he announced, "Her royal highness is served!"

"Am I in the dwelling of an enchanter?" cried the princess, as she ran rather than walked to the perfumed alley.

The baron, in his uneasiness, forgot all etiquette, left the gentleman in black, and hurried after the dauphiness. Andree and Philip looked at one another with mingled astonishment and anxiety, and followed their father.

Under the clematis, jessamine, and woodbine was placed an oval table, covered with a damask cloth of dazzling whiteness, on which was arranged, in a brilliant service of plate, a collation the most elegant and rare. There were exotic fruits made into the most delicious confections; biscuits from Aleppo, oranges from Malta, and lemons of extraordinary size, all arranged in beautiful vases. Wines, the richest and most esteemed, sparkled like the ruby and the topaz, in decanters ornamented and cut in Persia, and in the center, in a silver vase, was placed the milk for which the dauphiness had asked.

Marie Antoinette looked around and saw surprise and alarm imprinted on the face of her host, and on the countenance of his son and daughter. The gentlemen of her escort were delighted with what they saw, without understanding it, and without endeavoring to understand it.

"You expected me, then, sir?" said she to the baron.

"I, madame!" stammered he.

"Yes; you could not in ten minutes have all this prepared, and I have only been ten minutes here," and she looked at La Brie with an expression which said, "above all, when you have only one servant!"

"Madame," answered the baron, "your royal highness was expected, or rather, your coming was foretold to me."

"Your son wrote to you?"

"No, madame."

"No one knew that I was coming here, as I did not wish to give you the trouble which I see I have done. It was only late last night that I expressed my intention to your son, and he reached this but half an hour before me."

“Scarcely a quarter of an hour, madame.

“Then some fairy must have revealed to you what was to occur. Mademoiselle's godmother, perhaps?”

“Madame,” said the baron, offering a chair to the princess, “it was not a fairy who announced my good fortune to me.”

“Who, then?” asked she, observing that he hesitated.

“An enchanter, madame!”

“An enchanter — how can that be?”

“I know nothing of the matter, for I do not meddle with magic myself, yet to that, madame, I am indebted for being able to entertain your highness in a tolerable fashion.”

“In that case we must not touch anything, since the collation is the work of sorcery. His eminence,” added she, pointing to the gentleman in black, who had fixed his eye on a Strasbourg pie, “seems in a hurry to begin, but we shall assuredly not eat of this enchanted collation, and you, dear friend,” turning to her governess, “distrust the Cyprus wine, and do as I do!” and she poured some water from a globe-formed carafe with a narrow neck into a golden goblet.

“In truth,” said Andree, with alarm, “her royal highness is perhaps right!”

Philip trembled with surprise, and ignorant of what had passed the evening before, looked alternately at his father and his sister for explanation.

“But I see,” continued the dauphiness, “his eminence is determined to sin, in spite of all the canons of the Church.”

“Madame,” replied the prelate, “we princes of the Church are too worldly to be able to believe that Heaven's wrath will fall on us about a little refreshment for the body, and, above all, too humane to feel the least inclination to burn an honest sorcerer for providing us with good things like these!”

“Do not jest. I pray, monseigneur,” said the baron. “I swear to you that a sorcerer — a real sorcerer — foretold to me, about an hour ago, the arrival of her royal highness and my son!”

“And has an hour been sufficient for you to prepare this banquet?” demanded the dauphiness. “In that case you are a greater sorcerer than your sorcerer!”

“No, madame, it was he who did all this, and brought the table up through the ground, ready served as you see.”

“On your word, sir?”

“On the honor of a gentleman!” replied the baron.

“Ha!” said the cardinal, in a serious tone, putting back the plate which he had taken, “I thought you were jesting. Then you have in your house a real magician?”

“A real magician! — and I should not wonder if he has made all the gold on that table himself.”

“Oh, he must have found out the philosopher's stone!” cried the cardinal, his eyes sparkling with covetousness.

“See how the eyes of his eminence sparkle! He who has been seeking all his life for the philosopher's stone!” said the dauphiness.

“I confess to your royal highness,” replied his very worldly eminence, “that nothing interests me more than the supernatural — nothing is so curious, in my estimation, as the impossible.”

“Ah! I have traced the vulnerable part, it seems!” said the dauphiness; “every great man has his mysteries, particularly when he is a diplomatist — and I — I warn your eminence, know a great deal of sorcery. I sometimes find out things — if not impossible, if not supernatural, at least incredible!” and the eye of the dauphiness, before so mild, flashed as from an internal storm, but no thunder followed. His eminence alone doubtless understood what this meant, for he looked evidently embarrassed. The dauphiness went on:

“To make the thing complete, M, de Taverney, you must show us your magician — where is he? In what box have you hidden him?”

“Madame,” answered the baron, “he is much more able to put me and my house in a box, than I to put him!”

“In truth you excite my curiosity,” said Marie Antoinette. “I must positively see him!”

The tone in which this was uttered, although still retaining the charm which Marie Antoinette knew so well to assume, forbade all idea of refusal to comply with her wish.

The baron understood this perfectly, and made a sign to La Brie, who was contemplating with eager eyes the illustrious guests, the sight of whom seemed to make up to him for his twenty years of unpaid wages.

“Tell Baron Joseph Balsamo,” said his master, “that her royal highness the dauphiness desires to see him.” La Brie departed.

“Joseph Balsamo!” said the dauphiness. “What a singular name!”

“Joseph Balsamo!” repeated his eminence, as if reflecting, “I think I know that name.”

Five minutes passed in silence — then Andree felt a thrill run through her frame — she heard, before it was perceptible to other ears, a step advancing under the shade of the trees — the branches were put aside — and Joseph Balsamo stood face to face with Marie Antoinette.

CHAPTER XV.

Magic.

BALSAMO BOWED humbly; but no sooner had he raised his head than he fixed his bright, expressive eyes firmly but respectfully on the face of the dauphiness, and waited calmly until she should interrogate him.

"If it is you of whom the Baron de Taverney has been speaking to us, draw near, sir, that we may better see what a magician is."

Balsamo advanced another step and bowed.

"Your profession is to foretell events, sir?" said the dauphiness, regarding him with more curiosity than she would herself have been willing to acknowledge, and sipping some milk which had been handed her.

"It is not my profession, but I do foretell events."

"We have been brought up in an enlightened creed," said the dauphiness, "and the only mysteries in which we believe are those of the Catholic faith."

"They are to be venerated," replied Balsamo, reverently; "but here is Monseigneur the Cardinal de Rohan, who will tell your royal highness, though he be a prince of the Church, that they are not the only mysteries which deserve to be regarded with respect."

The cardinal started; he had not told his name, it had not been pronounced, yet this stranger knew it. Marie Antoinette did not appear to remark this circumstance, but continued:

"You will confess, sir, that at least they are the only mysteries which cannot be controverted?"

"Madame," answered Balsamo, with the same respect, "as well as faith there is certainty."

"You speak rather obscurely, sir. Although thoroughly French in heart, I am but indifferently acquainted with the niceties of the language, and must beg you to be less enigmatic if I am to comprehend you."

"And I, madame, would entreat that all may remain unexplained. I should deeply regret to unveil to so illustrious a princess a future which might not correspond to her hopes.”

“This becomes serious,” said Marie Antoinette; “the gentleman wishes to excite my curiosity, that I may command him to tell my fortune.”

“God forbid that your royal highness should force me to do it!”

“Yes,” replied the dauphiness; “for you would be rather puzzled to do it!” and she laughed.

But the dauphiness's laugh died away without meeting an echo from any of the attendants. Every one present seemed to submit tacitly to the influence of the singular man, who was, for the moment, the center of general attraction.

“Come, confess it frankly,” said the dauphiness.

Balsamo bowed.

“Yet it was you who predicted my arrival to the Baron de Taverney,” resumed Marie Antoinette, with a slight movement of impatience.

“Yes, madame, it was I.”

“And how did he do it?” she added, turning to the baron, as if she felt the necessity of a third party taking share in this strange dialogue.

“Very simply, madame — merely by looking in a glass of water.”

“Was it so?” she asked of Balsamo.

“Yes, madame,” answered he.

“Then, having read the future for the Baron de Taverney in a glass of water, surely you can read it for me in a decanter.”

“Perfectly well, madame.”

“And why refuse to do so?”

“Because the future is uncertain; and if I saw a cloud on it — He stopped.

“Well?”

“It would give me pain to sadden your royal highness.”

“Have you known me before, or do you now see me for the first time? ”

“I have had the honor of seeing your royal highness when a child, in your native country, with your august mother.”

“You have seen my mother, then?”

“I have had that honor. She is a great and powerful queen.”

“Empress, sir.”

“I used the word queen in reference to the heart and mind; and yet —

“Reservations concerning my mother?” said the dauphiness haughtily.

“The greatest hearts have weaknesses, madame, particularly where they think the happiness of their children is concerned.”

“History, I trust, sir, will not discover one single weakness in Maria Theresa.”

“Because history will not know what is known only to the Empress Maria Theresa, to your royal highness, and to myself.”

“We have a secret, sir! we three!” said the dauphiness, smiling disdainfully.

“We three, madame!” replied Balsamo solemnly.

“Come, then, tell this secret, sir!”

“It will then be no longer one.”

“No matter; tell it!”

“Is it your royal highness's will?”

“It is.”

Balsamo bowed. “There is in the Palace of Schoenbrunn,” said he, “a cabinet, called the Dresden cabinet, on account of the splendid vases of porcelain which it contains — ”

“Yes,” said the dauphiness; “go on.”

“This cabinet forms a part of the private suite of rooms of the Empress Maria Theresa; in it she writes her letters.”

“Yes.”

“On a certain day, about seven in the morning, when the empress had not yet risen, your royal highness entered this cabinet by a door through which you alone were permitted to pass; for your royal highness is the favorite daughter of her imperial majesty.”

“Well, sir?”

“Your highness approached a writing desk, on which lay open a letter which her imperial majesty had written the night before. Your royal highness read that letter; and doubtless some expressions in it must have been displeasing to you, for you took a pen, and with your own hand erased three words.”

The dauphiness blushed slightly.

“What were the words erased?” she asked anxiously.

“They were too condescending, doubtless, and showed too great affection for the person to whom they were addressed. This was a weakness, and to this it was I alluded in speaking of your august mother.”

“Then you remember the words?”

“Assuredly.”

“Repeat them to me.”

"They were; 'My dear friend.'"

Marie Antoinette bit her lip and turned pale.

"Shall I tell your royal highness to whom the letter was addressed?"

"No; but you may write the name."

Balsamo drew out a pocket-book with gold clasps, and, having written some words on one of the leaves, he tore it out, and, bowing, presented it to the dauphiness. Marie Antoinette unfolded the leaf, read it, and looked with astonishment at the man, who, though he bowed low before her, seemed to have it in his power to direct her fate.

The letter was addressed to the mistress of King Louis XV. — "To the Marchioness de Pompadour."

"All this is true, sir," said Marie Antoinette, after a pause; "and although I am ignorant by what means you have become acquainted with these circumstances, I cannot speak falsely, and I must declare that what you have said is true."

"Then," said Balsamo, "will your royal highness permit me to retire, satisfied with this harmless proof of my art?"

"No, sir," replied the dauphiness; "the more I know of your powers, the more desirous I become to have my fate foretold. You have spoken only of the past; let me learn what the future will be."

The princess spoke these words with a feverish impatience, which she in vain endeavored to conceal from her auditors.

"I am ready, if your royal highness commands me, to declare it; yet let me supplicate you not to do so."

"I have never expressed a command twice; and you will recollect, sir, that I have already commanded once."

"Let me at least consult the oracle whether it may be revealed to your royal highness or not," he said entreatingly.

"Good or bad, sir," replied Marie Antoinette, "I will know it. If good, I shall take it for flattery; if bad, I shall hold it as a warning, and shall be obliged to you for it. Begin!"

Balsamo took the round carafe with the narrow neck, and placed it on a golden saucer; the rays of the sun, striking on this, shone dimly yellow in the water, and seemed to offer something worthy of deep consideration to the attentive soothsayer. Every one was silent. At length he placed the carafe again on the table, and shook his head.

"Well, sir?" said the dauphiness.

"I cannot speak it," replied Balsamo.

"You cannot, because you have nothing to tell me," replied Marie Antoinette, a little contemptuously.

"There are things which must never be said to princes, madame," replied Balsamo, in a tone which seemed to express his determination to oppose her wishes.

"Yes, when those things, I repeat, may be expressed by the word nothing."

"It is not that which prevents me, madame; on the contrary, it is the very reverse."

The dauphiness smiled disdainfully, Balsamo appeared embarrassed, the cardinal began to laugh outright, and the baron drew near, grumbling:

"So, my magician has exhausted himself! His powers have not lasted very long! It only remains for us to see all these fine things turned into vine-leaves, as we have read in Eastern tales."

"I should rather have had the simple vine leaves," said Marie Antoinette, "than these fine things displayed by the gentleman for the purpose of getting himself presented to me."

"Deign to remember, madame," replied Balsamo, who was deadly pale, "that I did not solicit this honor."

"It was not difficult for you to guess, sir, that, I should ask to see you."

"Pardon him, madame," said Andree, in a low voice; "he thought he was doing right."

"And I tell you he was doing wrong," replied the princess, so as only to be heard by Andree and Balsamo. "No one can elevate himself by humiliating an old man; and when we can have the pewter goblet of a gentleman to drink in, we need not the golden one of a mountebank!"

Balsamo started, as if a viper had bitten him. "Madame," said he, greatly agitated, "I am ready to let you know your destiny, since your blindness impels you to desire such knowledge."

He pronounced these words in a tone so firm and so threatening, that all present felt the blood chilled in their veins.

"Gib im kein gehoer, meine Tochter,"* said the old lady to Marie Antoinette. "Lass sie hoeren, sie hat wissen wotten, und so sol sie wissen,"** replied Balsamo. *" Do not listen to him, my daughter."

**"Let her — she wishes to know, and she shall know."

These words spoken in German, a language which was understood by only a few present, seemed to render more mysterious what was going on.

“No,” said the dauphiness, resisting the entreaties of her venerable governess; “let him say what he desires to say; — were I now to permit him to be silent, he would believe me afraid.”

Balsamo heard these words, and a dark furtive smile played for a second on his lips. “It is as I said,” he muttered to himself; “the courage of bravado merely.”

“Speak!” said the dauphiness; “speak, sir.”

“Then your royal highness is decided?”

“I never go back from a decision once made.”

“In that case, madame, I would entreat that we may be alone.”

She made a sign which those around understood — all retired.

“This is not a bad plan for obtaining a private audience,” said the dauphiness, turning to Balsamo; “is it not, sir?”

“I would beg your royal highness not to irritate me!” replied Balsamo; “I am but an instrument of Providence to enlighten you on those sorrows which await you. Insult fortune, if you will — she can revenge herself; but for me, I am but the gloomy herald of the misfortunes she has in store for you.”

“Then it appears that misfortunes await me?” said the dauphiness, mildly, touched by Balsamo's respectful manner.

“Yes — terrible misfortunes.”

“First — will my family be happy?”

“That which you have left, or that to which you are going?”

“Oh, my own family — my mother, my brother Joseph, my sister Caroline?”

“Your misfortunes will not reach them.”

“They are mine alone, then?”

“They are yours, and those of your new family.”

“The royal family of France includes three princes, the Duke de Berry, the Count de Provence, and the Count D'Artois, what will be their fate?”

“They will all reign.”

“Then I shall have no children?”

“You will have children.”

“Not sons?”

“Some of them sons.”

“My sorrows, then, will be caused by their death?”

“You will grieve that one is dead, but most will you grieve that the other lives.”

“Will my husband love me?”

“Yes, too well.”

“Shall I not, then, be able to bear my grief, supported by my husband and my family?”

“Neither will support you.”

“The love of my people will still be mine?”

“The people! — the ocean in a calm! — have you seen the ocean in a storm, madame?”

“By doing good I shall prevent the storm; or, if it rise, shall rise above it!”

“The higher the wave, the deeper the abyss.”

“God will defend me.”

“Alas! there are heads which he himself foredooms!”

“What mean you, sir; shall I not, then, be queen?”

“Yes, madame, but would to Heaven that you were not to be!”

She smiled disdainfully.

“Did you remark,” he continued, “the tapestry of the first room in which you slept after having entered France?”

“Yes, sir.”

“"What did it represent?”

“The slaughter of the innocents.”

“Have not the grim faces of the murderers haunted your memory?”

“I confess that they have.”

“Had you not a storm on the way hither?”

“Yes; a thunderbolt fell, and nearly on my carriage.”

“"Were not those omens?”

“Fatal omens?”

“It would be difficult to interpret them as happy ones!”

The dauphiness let her head fall on her bosom, and raising it after a minute's silence, “Speak!” said she; “in what manner shall I die?

He shook his head.

“Speak!”

“I dare not.”

“It is my will that you should,” she said, imperiously.

“Have mercy — have mercy on yourself!”

“Speak, sir, or I shall say that all this is but an absurd fable. Take care! — the daughter of Maria Theresa is not to be jested with! — the woman who holds in her hand the destiny of thirty millions of men is not to be trifled with!”

He continued silent.

“You know no more,” she said, contemptuously; “your imagination is exhausted.”

“My knowledge of the future is not exhausted, madame; and if you will force me — ”

“Yes, I will hear all.”

He seized the carafe on the golden saucer, placed it in a dark hollow, where some rocks formed a sort of grotto; then he took the hand of the archduchess, and drew her under the vault.

“Are you ready?” he asked the princess, who was alarmed by his rapid movements.

“Yes.”

“On your knees, then! — on your knees! — and pray to God to spare you the dreadful end of all your greatness, which you are now to witness!”

She obeyed mechanically, and fell on both knees.

He pointed with a wand to the glass globe, in the center of which must have appeared some dark and terrible form, for the dauphiness, in trying to rise, trembled and sank again to the ground with a shriek of horror — she had fainted.

The baron hastened to her assistance, and in a few minutes she came to herself. She put her hand to her forehead, as if to recall her thoughts, then suddenly exclaimed, “The carafe! — the carafe!”

The baron presented it to her. The water was perfectly limpid — not a stain mingled with it. Balsamo was gone.

CHAPTER XVI.

The Baron De Taverney Thinks He Sees At Last a Small Opening Into the Future.

THE BARON was the first to perceive that the dauphiness had fainted, he had kept on the watch, more uneasy than any one else at what might take place between her and the sorcerer. Hearing her cry of terror, and seeing Balsamo spring out of the grotto, he ran to the spot.

The dauphiness's first request was to see the carafe; her second, that no injury should be done the magician; and it was well she made this request, for no sooner had Philip heard her cry than he bounded after him like an angry lion.

When her lady of honor came near, and ventured to question her in German, she only drew from her that Balsamo had in no way been wanting in respect to her — that she thought the storm of the preceding night, and her long journey, had fatigued her and brought on a nervous attack. Her replies were translated to the Cardinal de Rohan, who stood by, but dared not himself ask for information. In courts, people are obliged to be satisfied with half answers, so what the dauphiness said satisfied nobody, but every one appeared perfectly satisfied. Philip then drew near and said:

“I am obliged to obey your royal highness's orders, yet it is with regret that I do so — the half-hour during which you intended to stay is past, and the horses are ready.”

“Thanks, sir,” said she, with a smile full of fascinating languor, “but I must alter my determination — I do not feel able to set out just now — if I could sleep for a few hours, I should be quite restored.”

“Your royal highness knows what a poor abode ours is,” the baron stammered out.

“Oh, sir, any place will do — a little rest is all I want!” She said this as if again fainting, and her head sank again on her bosom.

Andree disappeared to prepare her room for her, and having in a few minutes returned, she stood beside the dauphiness, not daring to speak until some indication was given that she might do so. At length Marie Antoinette raised her head, smiled to Andree, and, with her hand, made a sign to her to draw nearer.

“ The room is ready for your royal highness — we entreat only —

But she was not permitted to finish her apology — the dauphiness interrupted her.

“Thank you! — thank you! May I ask you to summon the Countess of Langershausen, and to lead us to the apartment?”

Andree obeyed — the old lady of honor advanced. “Give me your arm, my dear friend,” said the dauphiness to her in German, “for indeed I have scarcely strength enough to walk without support.”

The baroness obeyed; Andree approached to assist her. Turning soon after to Andree, the dauphiness asked —

“Do you understand German, then, mademoiselle?”

“Yes, madame, I even speak it a little,” replied Andree, in German.

“That is delightful!” exclaimed the dauphiness, “that makes my plan still more agreeable.”

Andree dared not ask her august guest what her plan was, although she longed to know it. The dauphiness leaned on the arm of the Countess de Langershausen, and advanced slowly, her limbs trembling under her. As she issued from the trees in front of the grotto, she heard the cardinal's voice.

“What!” said he, “Count de Stainville, do you mean to insist on speaking to her royal highness, notwithstanding her orders to the contrary?”

“I must insist on doing so.” replied the governor of Strasbourg, in a firm voice, “her royal highness will pardon me, I am certain.”

“And I, sir, on the contrary, insist — ”

“Let the governor come forward,” said the dauphiness appearing at the opening of the trees, which formed a verdant arch above her head. “Come forward, Count de Stainville.”

Every one bowed at her command, and drew back to allow free passage to the brother-in-law of the then all-powerful minister who governed France. The count looked around, as if to request a private audience. Marie Antoinette understood that he had something important to say to her, but before she could express a wish to be left alone, all had withdrawn.

“A dispatch from Versailles, madame,” said the count in a low voice, and presenting a letter which he had kept concealed under his plumed hat.

The dauphiness took it, and read the address. “It is for you, sir, not for me,” she said; “open it and read it, if it contain anything that concerns me.”

“The letter is addressed to me,” he replied, “but in the corner is a mark agreed on between my brother, Madame Choiseul, and myself, indicating that the letter is for your royal highness.”

“True; I did not observe it.”

She opened the letter, and read the following lines:

“The presentation of Madame Dubarry is decided on, if she can only procure some noble lady to present her. We still hope she may not find one; but the only sure means to prevent the presentation will be for her royal highness the dauphiness to make all speed. Her royal highness once at Versailles, no one will dare to offer such an insult to the court.”

“Very well,” said the dauphiness, folding up the letter, without the slightest symptom of emotion, or even of interest.

“Will your royal highness now retire to repose a little?” asked Andree, timidly.

“No, I thank you, mademoiselle; the air has revived me; I have quite recovered,” and abandoning the arm of her lady-of-honor, she walked forward firmly and rapidly. “My horses immediately!” said she.

The cardinal looked with inquisitive surprise at the count.

“The dauphin is becoming impatient,” whispered the latter, and this falsehood appearing a secret confided to him alone, his eminence was satisfied. As to Andree, her father had taught her to respect the whims of crowned heads, and she was not at all surprised at the change in Marie Antoinette's intentions. The latter, therefore, turning, and seeing no alteration in the sweet expression of her countenance, said:

“Thanks, mademoiselle; your hospitable reception has made a deep impression on me.”

Then, turning to the baron, she continued:

“Sir, you must know, that on leaving Vienna, I made a vow to advance the fortune of the first Frenchman whom I should meet on the frontiers of France. That Frenchman was your son. But I do not intend to stop there — your daughter shall not be forgotten either.”

“Oh, your highness!” murmured Andree.

"Yes, I mean to make you one of my maids of honor. You are noble, are you nut?" she added, again addressing the baron.

"Oh, your highness!" cried the baron with delight, for all his dreams seemed realized by what he heard; "although poor, our descent is unblemished; yet so high an honor — "

"It is only due to you. Your son will defend the king as you have done; your daughter will serve the dauphiness — the one you will inspire with every loyal sentiment, the other with every virtuous one. Shall I not be faithfully served, sir?" she said, turning to Philip, who knelt in gratitude at her feet, without words to express his emotion.

"But — " murmured the baron — for his feelings did not prevent him from reflecting.

"Yes, I understand," said the dauphiness, "you have preparations to make, yet they cannot take long."

A sad smile passed over the lips of Andree and Philip, a bitter one over those of the baron, and Marie Antoinette stopped, for she felt that she might unintentionally have wounded their pride.

"At least," she resumed, "if I may judge by your daughter's desire to please me. Besides, I shall leave you one of my carriages; it will bring you after us. I must call the Count de Stainville to my aid."

The count approached.

"I shall leave one of my carriages for the Baron de Taverney, whom I wish to accompany me to Paris with his daughter. Appoint some one to accompany their carriage, and to cause it to be recognized as belonging to my suite."

"Come forward, Monsieur de Beausire!"

"This very moment, madame," answered the count.

A young man, of about five-and-twenty years of age, with an easy and graceful carriage, and a lively and intelligent eye, advanced, hat in hand, from the ranks of the escort of the dauphiness.

"Let one of the carriages remain behind," said the count, "for the Baron de Taverney; you will accompany the carriage yourself."

"And, sir," said the dauphiness, "join us again as soon as possible. I authorize you to have double relays of horses, if necessary."

The baron and his children were profuse in their acknowledgments.

"This sudden departure will not put you to much inconvenience, I hope, sir," said the dauphiness.

“We are too happy to obey your royal highness's orders,” replied the baron.

“Adieu! adieu!” said she, with a smile. “Gentlemen, conduct me to my carriage. Chevalier de Taverney, to horse!”

Philip kissed his father's hand, embraced his sister, and leaped lightly into his saddle.

The glittering train swept on, and in a quarter of an hour had disappeared like an evening vapor; there remained no human being in the avenue of Taverney but a young man, who, sitting on one of the low pillars of the gate, pale and sorrowful, followed with a longing eye the last cloud of dust which was raised by the horses' feet, and which served to show the road they had taken. The young man was Gilbert.

Meantime, the salon of Taverney presented a singular scene. Andree, with clasped hands, reflected on the unexpected and extraordinary event which had so suddenly interrupted the course of her calm life, and she believed herself in a dream. The baron was pulling some hairs, which were rather too long, out of his gray eyebrows, and settling the bosom of his shirt. Nicole, leaning against the door, looked at her master and mistress, and La Brie, with his arms hanging down and his mouth open, looked at Nicole.

The baron was the first to rouse himself from his reverie.

“Scoundrel!” cried he to La Brie, “are you standing there like a statue, and that gentleman, one of the king's body-guard, waiting without?”

La Brie made a bound toward the door, got one leg hooked in the other, staggered to his feet and disappeared. In a short time he returned.

“What is the gentleman doing?” asked the baron.

“Making his horse eat the pimpernels.”

“Leave him alone, then. And the carriage?”

“It is in the avenue.”

“The horses harnessed?”

“Yes, sir — four horses — such beautiful animals! — they are eating the pomegranates.”

“The king's horses have a right to eat whatever they like. By-the-by, the sorcerer?”

“He is gone, sir.”

“And has left all the plate on the table! It is not possible. He will return, or will send some one for it.”

“I don't think he will, sir. Gilbert saw him set out with his wagon.”

“Gilbert saw him set out with his wagon!” the baron repeated, in a thoughtful tone.

“Yes, sir.”

“That wretch, Gilbert, sees everything. Go and pack my trunk.”

“It is packed, sir.”

“What! — it is packed?”

“Yes, as soon as I heard what her royal highness the dauphiness said, I went into your room, and packed your clothes and linen.”

“ Who told you to do so, you officious rascal?” “Dame, sir! I thought I was only anticipating your orders.”

“Fool! Go, then, and help my daughter.”

“Thank you, father; but I have Nicole.”

The baron began to reflect again.

“But, zounds, scoundrel! it is impossible.”

“What is impossible, sir?”

“What you have not thought of, for you think of nothing.”

“But what is it, sir?”

“That her royal highness would go without leaving something with Monsieur de Beausire, or the sorcerer without leaving a message with Gilbert.”

At this moment a low whistle was heard from the courtyard.

“What is that?”

“It is a call for me, sir,” replied La Brie.

“And who calls, pray?”

“The gentleman, sir.”

“The gentleman left by the dauphiness?”

“Yes, sir. And here is Gilbert coming as if he had got something to say to you.”

“Go, then, stupid animal!”

La Brie obeyed with his usual alacrity.

“Father,” said Andree, approaching him, “I know what troubles you. Recollect, I have thirty louis-d'ors, and that beautiful watch set with diamonds, which Queen Marie Lezinska gave my mother.”

“Yes, my dear, yes!” replied the baron; “but keep them, keep them. You must have a handsome dress for your presentation. I may discover some means — hush! here is La Brie.”

“Sir,” cried La Brie as he came in, holding in one hand a letter, and in the other some money, “see what the dauphiness left for me — ten louis-d'ors, sir! — ten louis-d'ors!”

“And that letter, rascal?”

“Oh, the letter is for you, sir — from the sorcerer.”

“From the sorcerer? Who gave it you?”

“Gilbert, sir.”

“I told you so, stupid animal! Give it me — give it me!”

He snatched the letter, tore it open, and read these words:

“SIR — Since a hand so august has touched the plate I left with you, it belongs to you; keep it as a relic, and remember sometimes your grateful guest.

JOSEPH BALSAMO.”

“La Brie!” cried the baron, after a moment's reflection, “is there not a good goldsmith at Bar-le-Duc?”

“Oh, yes, sir, the one who soldered Mademoiselle Andree's silver brooch!”

“Very well! Andree, lay aside the goblet out of which her royal highness drank, and let the rest of the service be put up in the carriage with us. And you, beast that you are, help the gentleman outside to a glass of what remains of our good wine.”

“One bottle, sir,” said La Brie, with deep melancholy.

“That is enough.”

“Now, Andree,” said the baron, taking both his daughter's hands, “courage, my child. We are going to court; there are plenty of titles to be given away there; rich abbeys — regiments without colonels — pensions going to waste. It is a fine country, the court! The sun shines brightly there; put yourself always in its rays, my child; for you are worthy to be seen. Go, my love go!”

Andree went out, followed by Nicole.

“Hallo! La Brie, you monster!” cried the baron; “attend to the gentleman, I tell you.”

“Yes, sir,” answered La Brie from a distant part of the cellar.

“I,” continued the baron, going toward his room, “must go and arrange my papers. We must be out of this hole in an hour. Do you hear, Andree?

And we are leaving it in good style, too. What a capital fellow that sorcerer is! I am becoming as superstitious as the devil. But make haste. La Brie, you wretch!” “I was obliged to go feeling about, sir, in the cellar; there is not a candle in the house.”

“It was time to leave it, it appears,” said the baron.

CHAPTER XVII.

Nicole's Twenty-five Louis-d'ors.

IN THE MEANTIME Andree made active preparations for her departure, and Nicole assisted her with an ardor which quickly dissipated the little cloud that had arisen between them in the morning.

“She is a good girl,” said Andree to herself, “devoted and grateful; she has faults, but what human creature has not? Let me forget them.”

Nicole was not a girl who was slow to observe the expression of her mistress's face. “Fool that I was!” said she to herself; “I was nearly quarreling with my young lady, and all about that young good-for-nothing Gilbert! and she going to Paris, and will take me with her! One is sure of making one's fortune in Paris.”

Andree was the first to speak.

“Put my lace in a bandbox,” said she.

“What bandbox, mademoiselle?”

“Really, I don't know. Have we one at all?””

“Oh, yes — the one you gave me; it is in my room.”

And Nicole ran to bring it with an obliging air, which disposed Andree still more in her favor.

“But this bandbox is your own,” said Andree, when she reappeared with the article in her hand, “and you may want it yourself, my poor Nicole.”

“Oh, you have more need of it, mademoiselle; and besides, it ought to be yours — you lent it me.”

“When people get married and set up housekeeping, they require many little things; so just now you have most need of the box. Keep it to put your bridal finery in.”

“Oh, mademoiselle,” said Nicole, gayly, shaking her head, “my finery will not take up much room.”

“But if you marry, Nicole, I should wish you to be happy — and rich.”

“Rich?”

“Yes, rich according to your rank.”

“Then you have found some fermier-general for me, mademoiselle?”

“No! but I have found a dowry.”

“Indeed, mademoiselle?”

“You know what is in my purse?”

“Yes, madame; twenty-five shining louis-d'ors.”

“They are yours, Nicole.”

“Twenty-five louis-d'ors!” cried Nicole with rapture; “it is indeed a fortune!”

“My poor girl! I am glad you think so.”

“And you really give them to me, madame?”

“I wish I could give you more.”

Nicole felt surprised — moved; the tears came to her eyes; she seized her young lady's hand and kissed it.

“Do you think your husband will be satisfied?”

“Oh, quite satisfied!” said Nicole. “At least. I hope so.”

She reflected that Gilbert had doubtless refused her hand through fear of poverty, and that now when she was rich matters would turn out differently. Then she determined immediately to offer him a share of her young lady's generous gift, and to attach him to her by gratitude. Such was Nicole's generous plan. Andree looked at her as she reflected. “Poor girl!” sighed she; “may she be happy in her simple life!”

Nicole heard the words and started from her reverie. They opened to her fancy a whole Eldorado of silks, diamonds, lace, and love — things of which Andree had not thought. But Nicole turned away her eyes from the gold and purple cloud brightening her horizon, and resisted the temptation. “After all, madame,” said she, “I shall be happy here — in a humble way.”

“Reflect seriously on what you are going to do.”

“Yes, mademoiselle, I shall reflect on it.”

“That is right. Make yourself happy in the way you propose, if you can; but do not be foolish.”

“You are very kind, mademoiselle. And let me say now, that I was very foolish this morning — but I hope mademoiselle will forgive me. When one is in love —

“Then you are really in love with Gilbert?”

“Yes, mademoiselle; I — I loved him,” said Nicole.

“Is it possible!” said Andree, smiling. “What can you see to admire in the young man? The first time I meet him I must take a look at this M. Gilbert who steals young girls' hearts.”

“Is he not going with us to Paris, mademoiselle?” inquired Nicole, who wished to be fully informed on every point before taking the step she meditated.

“Of what use would he be there? He is not a domestic, and could not take charge of a horse in Paris. Idle people at Taverney live like the birds; however poor the soil, it feeds them. But in Paris an idle person would cost too much — we could not support him.”

“But if I marry him?” stammered Nicole.

“Well, if you marry him, you shall live here with him at Taverney. You shall take care of this house which my mother was so fond of.”

Andree pronounced these words in so firm a voice that Nicole could no longer doubt. Yet she hesitated before speaking again. Andree, seeing her hesitation, thought that her mind was wandering from the pleasures of a Parisian life to those of the quiet country, and that she knew not how to decide. So she went on gently; “Nicole, the decision which you are now to make will affect all your future life. Be not hasty; I shall give you one hour; it is little, but you are prompt, and I think it will be sufficient to enable you to choose between continuing to serve me or having a husband — between me and Gilbert.”

“An hour! Oh, yes, mademoiselle, I can decide in a hour.”

“Collect all my clothes, and my mother's! I would not leave behind those relics so dear to me. Then go, and return in an hour fully decided; but whatever your determination be, here are your twenty-five louis-d'ors. If you marry, they shall be your dowry; if you continue in my service, your wages for two years.”

Nicole took the purse from Andree's hands and kissed it. Then she completed her task — not a great one, certainly — hurried downstairs, and Andree saw her cross the courtyard and enter the avenue. Not finding Gilbert there, she flew to a window on the ground-floor, which was that of his room, and tapped at it. He was bustling about with his back to the window; but hearing her drumming, he turned, and like a thief caught in the fact, he quickly abandoned his occupation.

“Oh, is it you, Nicole?” said he.

“Yes, it is!” she replied, smiling, but with something very decided in her tone.

“You are welcome,” said he, coming forward and opening the window.

Nicole felt that there was kindness in his reception of her, and held out her hand; he took it, pressed it — ” This is a good beginning,” thought she, “farewell my journey to Paris!” and to Nicole's praise, it must be said, she did not sigh at this thought.

“You know,” said the young girl, leaning her elbows on the window; “you know, Gilbert, that the family are leaving Taverney and going to Paris?”

“Yes, I know.”

“Well, I am to go to Paris too.”

“I did not know that; but I congratulate you if you are pleased at going.”

“How you say that!”

“I say it plainly, I think — if you are pleased at going.”

“My being pleased depends —

“Why do you stop? depends — ?”

“My being pleased or not depends on you.”

“I don't understand you,” said Gilbert, seating himself on the window so that his knees touched Nicole's arm, and they could thus converse unseen and unheard.

Nicole looked at him tenderly — he shook his head, insinuating that he understood her look no more than her words.

“Well,” said she, “since all must be told, listen to what I am going to say.”

“I hear you,” replied Gilbert, coldly.

“In plain words, my young lady offers to take me to Paris with her — ”

“Very well — go on!”

“Unless — ”

“Unless what?”

“Unless I get married here.”

“Then you still think of getting married?” he answered, quite unmoved.

“Yes, more particularly since I have become rich.”

“Oh, you have become rich?” he asked, so phlegmatically, that Nicole knew not what to think.

“Very rich, Gilbert!”

“Indeed?”

“Yes, indeed!”

“And how did that miracle come about?”

“My young lady has given me a marriage portion.”

“You are very fortunate. I congratulate you, Nicole.”

“Look!” said she, pouring out of the purse into her hand the twenty-five louis d'ors, and watching Gilbert's eyes to discover some ray of pleasure or covetousness in them.

Gilbert moved not a muscle. “On my word, it is a nice little sum!” said he.

“And that is not all,” continued Nicole. “The baron will be rich once more; the old castle will be rebuilt, and the care of it given — ”

“To the fortunate husband of Nicole,” said Gilbert, with an irony not so well concealed but that it grated on Nicole's fine ear; yet she restrained her anger.

“And Nicole's husband — do you not know him?”

“I? No.”

“Have you, then, grown stupid, or do I no longer speak French?” cried the young girl, who began to show symptoms, of impatience.

“I understand you, perfectly,” replied Gilbert; “you offer to make me your husband, do you not, Mademoiselle Legay?”

“Yes, Monsieur Gilbert.”

“And it is since you have become rich that you have thought of this,” returned Gilbert, hastily. “I am truly grateful to you indeed — I am indeed!”

“Well,” said Nicole, frankly, and holding out her hand, “take it!”

“I?”

“You accept it, do you not?”

“No; I refuse it!”

Nicole sprang up from her leaning position. “Gilbert,” said she, “you have a bad heart; and, trust me, what you now do will not bring you happiness. If I felt any warmer sentiment, in making the offer I have just done, than a sense of duty and honor, trust me, I would now be miserable indeed; but having become rich, I did not wish it to be said that Nicole would look down on her old friend Gilbert. However, all is now over between us.”

Gilbert made a gesture of indifference.

“What I think of your conduct in the matter, you must be well aware. I, whose character you know to be as free and independent as your own, had decided to bury myself here, from an old prepossession for you, when I had it in my power to go to Paris, which may be for me a scene of triumph! I would have borne to see before me, every day of the year, for a whole lifetime, that cold and impenetrable face, the mask of so many wicked thoughts. You have not felt that there was any sacrifice in this; so much the worse for you, Gilbert! I do not say that you will regret me; but remember, you may yet feel remorse for the contempt and scorn you have shown rue! Guided by you, I should have been a virtuous, happy, and contented woman; now, I am abandoned on the ocean of life, without a keeping or a guiding hand! Gilbert, if I fall, God will not hold you innocent of my fall! Farewell!”

And the proud young girl turned away, without anger or impatience, but having shown, as all impassioned natures do in, the time of trial, true generosity of soul.

Gilbert shut his window quietly, and returned to the mysterious occupation in which she had interrupted him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Farewell to Taverney.

NICOLE, before entering her mistress's apartment, stopped on the staircase to subdue some gathering emotions of resentment rising in her bosom. The baron encountered her as she stood motionless, thoughtful, her brows contracted and leaning on her hand, and, seeing her so pretty, he kissed her, as the Duke de Richelieu would have done at thirty years of age. Roused from her reverie by this piece of gallantry, Nicole hurried up to Andree's room, and found her just closing her trunk.

"Well," said Mademoiselle de Taverney, "have your reflections ended?"

"Yes, madame," replied Nicole, very decidedly.

"You will marry?"

"No, madame."

"What! after all your first love?"

"My love will never do for me what the kindness of mademoiselle has done for me. I belong to you, mademoiselle, and wish always to belong to you. I know the mistress I have; I do not know the master I might have."

Andree was touched with this unlooked-for exhibition of affectionate feeling in the giddy Nicole, and was far from suspecting that this choice had been a forced one. She smiled, pleased to find one human being better than she had expected.

"You do well, Nicole," she replied, "to attach yourself to me. I shall not forget this trust to me; and if any good fortune befall me, you shall share it."

"Oh, mademoiselle, I have quite decided I will go with you!"

"Without regret?"

"Blindly."

"I do not like that answer, Nicole. I should not wish you at some future day to reproach yourself with having blindly trusted me and followed me."

"I shall never have to reproach anyone but myself, mademoiselle."

"Then you have had an explanation with your lover? I saw you talking with him."

Nicole blushed, then bit her lip. She forgot that Andree's window was opposite that at which she had spoken to Gilbert.

“It is true, mademoiselle,” replied Nicole.

“And you told him all?”

Nicole thought Andree had some particular reason for this question, and, all her former suspicions returning, she answered, “I told him I would have nothing more to do with him.”

It was plain that the two women would never understand each other — the one pure as the diamond, the other without any fixed principle of conduct, though having occasional impulses of goodness.

In the meantime, the baron had completed all his arrangements. An old sword, which he had worn at Fontenoy, some parchments establishing his right to travel in his majesty's carriages, and a litter of old papers, formed the most bulky part of his baggage. La Brie followed, tottering under the weight of an almost empty trunk. In the avenue they found the gentleman of the king's bodyguard, who, while waiting, had drained to the last drop his bottle of wine. The gallant had remarked the fine waist and pretty ankle of Nicole, who was going back and forward with messages, and he had kept peeping about in the hope of exchanging a word with her. He was roused, however, to more active occupation by the “baron's request that he would order the carriage to the door; he started, bowed, and in a sonorous voice summoned the coachman.

The carriage drew up. La Brie put the trunk on behind with an indescribable mixture of joy and pride in his looks. “I am really,” murmured he, carried away by his enthusiasm, and thinking he was alone, “going to get into the king's carriage!”

“Behind it, behind it, my worthy friend!” replied Beausire, with a patronizing smile.

“What, sir, are you going to take La Brie with you?” said Andree. “Who will take care of Taverney?”

“Why, pardieu! the good-for-nothing philosopher.”

“Gilbert?”

“Yes; has he not a gun?”

“But how will he live?”

“By his gun, to be sure! Don't be uneasy — he will have excellent fare; blackbirds and thrushes are not scarce at Taverney.”

Andree looked at Nicole; the latter began to laugh. “And is that all the compassion you show for him, ungrateful girl?”

“Oh, mademoiselle,” replied Nicole, “he is very clever with his gun — he will not die of hunger!”

“But, sir,” continued Andree, “we must leave him two or three louis-d'ors.”

“To spoil him? Very fine indeed! He is vicious enough as he is!”

“He must have something to live on,” persisted Andree.

“The neighbors will help him if he is in want.”

“Don't be uneasy, madame,” said Nicole; “he will have no cause to ask their assistance.”

“At all events,” replied Andree, “leave him two or three crowns.”

“He would not accept them.”

“He would not accept them? Then he is proud, this M. Gilbert of yours.”

“Oh, mademoiselle, he is not mine, Heaven be praised!”

“Come, come!” said the baron, “let Gilbert go to the devil! The carriage is waiting; get in, my love.”

Andree did not reply. She cast a farewell look on the old chateau, and then got into the heavy and ponderous carriage. The baron seated himself beside her. La Brie, still wearing his splendid livery, and Nicole, who seemed never to have known such a person as Gilbert, mounted on the box. The coachman rode one of the horses as postilion.

“But Monsieur l'Exempt, where shall he sit?” exclaimed the baron.

“On my horse, sir, on my horse,” replied Beausire, still eying Nicole, who colored with delight at having so soon replaced a rude peasant admirer by an elegant gentleman.

The carriage, drawn by four strong horses, started into rapid motion. The trees of the avenue glided away on each side, and disappeared one by one, sadly bending before the east wind, as if to bid farewell to their owners who abandoned them. The carriage reached the gate. Gilbert stood there, upright, immovable, his hat in his hand. He did not seem to see Andree, yet he watched her least movement; her eyes were fixed on the dear home she was leaving, so as to keep it in view as long as possible.

“Stop an instant!” cried the baron to the postilion.

The carriage stopped.

“So, Monsieur Good-for-nothing, you are going to be happy — quite alone, like a real philosopher! Nothing to do — nobody to scold you. Don't let the house take fire; and, hark ye, take care of Mahon!”

Gilbert bowed, but did not reply. He felt as if Nicole's looks were a weight too great to be borne — he feared to meet her triumphant ironical smile, as he would the touch of red-hot iron.

“Go on, postilion!” cried the baron.

Nicole did not smile — it even required more than her habitual power over herself to prevent her expressing aloud her pity for the poor young man thus heartlessly abandoned. She was obliged to keep her eye on Monsieur de Beausire, who looked so well on his prancing horse.

Now, as Nicole kept her eyes fixed on M, de Beausire, she did not see that Gilbert was gazing, his soul in his eyes, on Andree. Andree saw nothing but the house in which she was born — in which her mother died. The carriage disappeared. Gilbert, a moment before of so little importance in the eyes of the travelers — was now nothing to them.

The baron, Andree, Nicole, and La Brie having passed through the gates of the avenue, entered a new world. Each had a peculiar subject for reflection. The baron thought that at Bar-le-Duc he could easily raise five or six thousand crowns on Balsamo's plate. Andree repeated a prayer her mother had taught her, to keep away the demon of pride and ambition. Nicole covered her neck more closely with her handkerchief, to the great chagrin of M, de Beausire. La Brie, with his hand in his pocket, counted over the ten louis-d'ors of the dauphiness, and the two of Balsamo. II, de Beausire galloped at the side of the carriage.

Gilbert closed the gates of Taverney, whose hinges, as usual, creaked with a melancholy sound. Then he ran to his little room, pulled out his oaken chest of drawers, behind which he found a bundle ready tied up in a napkin, and slung it on his stick. After this, pushing his hands into his hay-stuffed mattress, he drew out something wrapped in a bit of paper — it was a shining crown-piece — his savings for three or four years. He opened the paper — looked at his crown to assure himself that it had not been changed, and then put it in his pocket, still wrapped in its paper.

Mahon, on seeing Gilbert, began to howl loudly, making furious leaps the whole length of his chain. Seeing one by one his friends leave him, his fine instinct told him that Gilbert was also about to abandon him, and he howled louder and louder.

“Hush!” cried Gilbert, “hush, Mahon!”

Then smiling bitterly at the parallel which occurred to his mind, he muttered, “Have they not abandoned me like a dog? Why should not I abandon thee like a man?” But, after a minute's reflection, he added, “They abandoned me free, at least — free to seek for food. Well, then, Mahon, I will do for thee what they did for me, neither more nor less;" and going to the hook to which the dog's chain was fastened, he slipped it off. “You are free!” said he; “provide for yourself as you like!”

The dog bounded toward the house; but, finding the doors all closed, he sprang toward the ruins and disappeared.

“And now,” said Gilbert, “we shall see which has most instinct — the dog or the man!”

So saying, he went out by the small gate — closed it — double-locked it, and threw the key over the wall.

But nature speaks with the same voice in almost all hearts. Gilbert felt something like what Andree experienced in leaving Taverney, only with her sentiments mingled regret for the quiet past, with his hopes for a more stirring future.

“Farewell!” said he, turning to look for the last time at the chateau, whose pointed roof appeared peeping over the sycamores and laburnums, “farewell! abode in which I have suffered so much, where every one hated me and threw me food grudgingly, as if I had been a hungry hound. Be cursed! — my heart bounds with joy at my freedom, for thy walls inclose me no more! Farewell! prison! — hell! — den of tyrants! Farewell forever!”

And after this imprecation, Gilbert sprang forward on the road which the carriage had taken, fancying that he yet heard the roll of its distant wheels.

CHAPTER XIX.

Gilbert's Crown-piece.

AFTER HALF an hour's headlong race, Gilbert uttered a wild shriek of joy; he saw the carriage about a quarter of a league before him, slowly ascending a hill. He felt his heart dilate with pride, as he thought that he, with only youth, strength, spirit, was about to do all that wealth, power, and rank could accomplish. Then, indeed, might the baron have called Gilbert a philosopher, had he seen him, his stick on his shoulder, his small bundle slung on it, walking on with rapid strides, leaping down every slope which could shorten his path, and stopping at every ascent, chafing with impatience, as if saying to the horses, “You do not go fast enough for me; see, I am obliged to wait for you.”

Philosopher? Yes! and he deserved the name, if it be philosophy to despise all that contributes to ease and to enjoyment. It was an interesting spectacle, one worthy of the Creator of energetic and intelligent creatures, to see the young man bounding forward on his way, all dusty and panting, for an hour or more, until he had overtaken the carriage, and then resting with delight when the horses were compelled to pause for breath. Gilbert that day must have inspired every one with admiration who could have followed him in spirit as we do; and who knows but that even the proud Andree might have been moved could she have seen him, and that her contempt for his indolence would have changed to admiration of his energy?

The day passed on in this manner. The baron stopped an hour at Bar-le-Duc, which gave Gilbert time to get in advance of him. He had heard the order to stop at the goldsmith's; so, having passed the town, by a detour, without entering it, he hid in a thicket until he saw the carriage coming, and when it had passed, followed it as before. Toward evening it came up with the train of the dauphiness, at the little village of Brillon, the inhabitants of which were crowded on a neighboring hill, and made the air resound with their shouts of welcome. Gilbert had not eaten a morsel during the entire day, except a morsel of bread which he had brought with him from Taverney; but, in return, he had drunk plentifully from a rivulet which crossed the road, and the water of which was so fresh and limpid, that Andree had requested that the carriage might stop, and alighted herself to fill the chased cup, the only article of Balsamo's service which the baron could be persuaded to retain. Gilbert saw all this, hidden by some trees on the roadside. Then, when the carriage had passed on, he emerged from his hiding place, and advancing to the stream, at the same spot where Mademoiselle Taverney had stood, he lifted the water in his hand, and drank from the same source.

Evening came on, shrouding the landscape in her dusty mantle, until at last he saw nothing but the light from the large lanterns which were fastened on each side of the carriage; this pale gleam, ever hurrying onward in the distance, looked like a phantom impelled forward by some strange destiny. Then night came on. They had traveled twelve leagues; they were at Combles. The equipages stopped — Gilbert was sure that it was for the night, that he should have time to stop for a couple of hours in a barn, and how vigorously should he afterward pursue his way! He approached to listen for Andree's voice — the carriage still continued stationary. He glided into a deep doorway; he saw Andree by the glare of the torch-light, and heard her asking what hour it was. A voice replied, “Eleven o'clock.” At that moment Gilbert no longer felt fatigue, and would have rejected with scorn an offer of a seat in a vehicle. Versailles already appeared in view — Versailles, all gilded, shining, the city of nobles and kings! — and beyond appeared Paris, grim, immense — the city of the people!

Two things roused him from his ecstasy — the noise of the carriages setting out again, and the complaints of his stomach, which cried “hunger!” very distinctly. On went the carriages, Gilbert following, his hunger unappeased. At midnight they stopped at, Saint Dizier. For the night? No! only to change horses; while, in the meantime, the illustrious travelers took a little refreshment by torch-light.

Gilbert had need of all his courage, and he sprang to his feet from the bank where he had seated himself, as he heard them depart, with an energy of determination which made him forget that, ten minutes before, his wearied legs had bent under him in spite of all his efforts.

“Well,” cried he, “go, go! — I shall stop also for refreshment at Saint Dizier; I shall buy some bread and a slice of bacon; I shall drink a glass of wine, and for five sous I shall be refreshed as well as the masters."

Gilbert entered the town. The train having passed, the good folks were closing their doors and shutters; but our philosopher saw a good-looking inn not yet shut up, where the large dishes of fowls and other things showed that the attendants of the dauphiness had only had time to levy a very slight contribution. He entered the kitchen resolutely; the hostess was there, counting what her gains had been.

"Excuse me, madame; but can I have some bread and ham?" said Gilbert.

"We have no ham, but you can have fowl."

"No, thank you; I ask for ham because I wish for ham — I don't like fowl."

"That is a pity, my little fellow, for we have only fowl; but it shall not be dearer," she added, smiling, "than ham. Take half a one, or, indeed, take a whole one for tenpence, and that will be provision for you for to-morrow. We thought her royal highness would have stayed all night, and that we should have sold all these things to the attendants; but, as she only just passed through, they will be wasted."

One would have thought that, the offer being so good, and the hostess so kind, Gilbert would have gladly embraced it; but that would be to have misunderstood his character entirely.

"No, thank you," replied he, "I shall satisfy myself in a more humble manner; I am neither a prince nor a footman."

"Well, then," said the good woman, "I will give you the fowl, my little Artaban."

"I am not a beggar, either," replied he, in a mortified tone, "I buy what I wish, and pay for it."

And he majestically plunged his hand into his breeches' pocket; it went down to the elbow — in vain he fumbled in his vast pocket, turning paler and paler. The paper in which the crown had been, he found — but the crown was gone! Tossed about by his rapid movements, it had worn the paper, then the thin lining of his pocket, and had slipped out at his knee; for he had unfastened his garters to give freer play to his limbs.

His paleness and trembling touched the good woman. Many in her place would have rejoiced at his pride being brought down; but she felt for him, seeing suffering so powerfully expressed in the changes of his countenance.

"Come, my poor boy!" said she, "you shall sup and sleep here; then, to-morrow, if you must go on, you shall do so."

“Oh, yes, yes!” exclaimed Gilbert, “I must go on — not to-morrow, but now — now!”

And snatching up his bundle without waiting to hear more, he darted out of the house, to hide his shame and grief in the darkness. He rushed on, alone, truly alone in the world; for no man is more alone than he who has just parted with his last crown — more particularly if it be the only one he ever possessed.

To turn back to look for his crown would have been to begin a hopeless task — besides, it would make it impossible for him ever to come up with the carriages. He resolved to continue his way. After he had gone about a league, hunger, which his mental suffering had made him forget for a time, awoke more keen than ever. Weariness also seized on every limb — on every sinew; yet, by incredible efforts, he had once more come in sight of the carriages. But fate, it would seem, had decided against him. They stopped only to change horses, and so quickly, that he had not five minutes to rest himself.

Again he set out. The day began to dawn — the sun appeared above a broad circle of dark clouds, foretelling one of those burning days of May which sometimes precede the heats of summer. How could Gilbert bear the noon of that day? In his pride he thought that horses — men — the destinies — had united against him — him alone! Like Ajax, he shook his clenched fist at the heavens; and if he did not say, like him, “I shall escape in spite of the gods!” it was because he knew by heart “The Social Contract” better than the Odyssey. At last, however, as Gilbert had dreaded, the moment arrived when he found the utter impossibility of proceeding much farther. By a last and almost despairing effort, he summoned up all his remaining force, and once more overtook the carriages, of which he had previously lost sight, and which, under the influence of his heated and feverish imagination, he fancied were surrounded with a strange, fantastic halo.

The noise of the wheels sounded like thunder in his ears, and almost maddened his brain; he staggered on, his blackened lips wide apart — his eyes fixed and staring — his long hair clinging to his forehead, bathed in perspiration — and his movements seeming rather the effect of some clever piece of mechanism than those of a thinking being. Since the evening before he had traveled upward of twenty leagues, and his weary and fainting limbs now refused to carry him farther. A mist overspread his eyes — strange noises sounded in his ears — the earth seemed to reel under him

— he endeavored to utter a cry, and staggered forward, beating the air wildly with his arms. At last his voice returned to utter hoarse cries of rage against his conquerors. Then, tearing his hair with both hands, he reeled forward, and fell heavily to the ground — with the consolation of having, like a hero of antiquity, fought the battle to the last!

"Hallo, there! Hallo, madman!" cried a hoarse voice just as he fell, accompanying his shouts with the loud cracking of a whip.

Gilbert heard him not — he had fainted.

"Hallo! I say — hallo! Morbleu! the fellow will be smashed!" And this time his words were accompanied by a vigorous lash, which reached Gilbert's waist, and cut into the flesh.

But Gilbert felt nothing — he remained immovable under the feet of the horses of a carriage, which was issuing into the high road from a by-way between Thieblemont and Vauclere.

A shrill cry was heard from the carriage, which the horses carried along like a whirlwind. The postilion made an almost superhuman effort, but could not prevent one of the horses, which was placed as a leader, from leaping over Gilbert. The other two, however, he succeeded in pulling up. A lady stretched her body half out of the carriage. "Heavens!" cried she, "you have killed the poor boy!"

"Why, faith, madame," replied the postilion, endeavoring to discover the body amid the cloud of dust which the horses' feet had raised, "I am almost afraid we have."

"Poor creature — poor boy. Do not move a step farther!" and opening the door of the carriage herself, she sprang out.

The postilion had already alighted, and dragging Gilbert's body from between the wheels, he expected to find it bruised and bloody; the lady assisted him with all her force.

"What an escape!" he cried, "not a scratch — not a kick!"

"But he has fainted," said the lady.

"Only from fear. Let us place him against the bank; and, since madame is in haste, let us go on."

"Impossible. I would not leave any creature in such a state."

"Pooh! it's nothing, madame; he will soon recover."

"No, no! — poor fellow! he is some runaway lad from college, and has undertaken a journey beyond his strength. See how pale he is; he might die. No; I will not leave him. Lift him into the carriage, on the front seat."

The postilion obeyed — the lady got in — Gilbert was laid lengthways on a good cushion, his head supported by the well-stuffed side of the carriage.

“And now.” cried the lady, “we have lost ten minutes — a crown if you make up for them.”

The postilion cracked his whip above his head; the horses knew what this threatened, and set off at a gallop.

CHAPTER XX.

Gilbert Recovers the Loss of His Crown.

WHEN GILBERT returned to consciousness, he was in no small degree surprised to find himself placed as he was, with a young lady watching him anxiously.

This young lady was about five-and-twenty, with large gray eyes, a nose slightly retrousse, cheeks embrowned by a southern sun, and a delicately formed little mouth, which added to the naturally cheerful and laughing expression of her face something of circumspection and finesse. Her neck and arms, which were beautifully formed, were displayed to advantage by a closely-fitting bodice of violet-colored velvet with golden buttons, while the skirt of her dress of gray silk was so enormously wide as to fill almost the entire carriage.

Gilbert continued for some time to gaze on this face, which looked on his smilingly and with much interest, and he could scarcely persuade himself that he was not in a dream.

“Well, my poor fellow,” said the lady, “are you not better now?”

“Where am I?” asked he, languidly.

“You are in safety now, my little fellow!” replied the lady, who spoke with a strong southern accent; “but just now you were in great danger of being crushed under the wheels of my carriage. What could have happened to you, to make you fall in that manner just in the middle of the highway?”

“I was overcome by weakness, madame, from having walked too much.”

“Then you have been some time on the road?”

“Since yesterday, at four in the afternoon.”

“And how far have you walked?”

“I think about eighteen leagues.”

“What! in fourteen hours?”

“Oh, I ran all the way!”

“Where are you going, then?”

“To Versailles.”

"And you came from — "

"From Taverney."

"Taverney! Where is that?"

"It is a chateau, situated between Pierrefitte and Bar-le-Duc."

"But you have scarcely had time to eat on the way?"

"I not only had not time, but I had not the means."

"How so?"

"I lost my money on the way."

"So that since yesterday you have eaten nothing?"

"Only a few mouthfuls of bread, which I brought with me."

"Poor fellow! but why did you not beg something?"

"Because I am proud, madame," said he, smiling scornfully.

"Proud! It is all very fine to be proud; but when one is dying of hunger — "

"Better death than dishonor."

The lady looked at the sententious speaker with something like admiration.

"But who are you, my friend," said she, "who speak in this style?"

"I am an orphan."

"What is your name?"

"Gilbert."

"Gilbert what?"

"Gilbert nothing."

"Ah!" said the lady, still more surprised.

Gilbert felt that he had produced an effect, and felt as if he were another Rousseau.

"You are very young to wander about in this way," continued the lady.

"I was left, deserted and alone, in an old chateau, which the family had abandoned. I did as they had done — I abandoned it in my turn."

"Without any object in view?"

"The world is wide; there is room for all."

"And you lost your purse? Was it well filled?"

"There was only one crown in it," said he, divided between the shame of confessing his poverty and the fear of naming a large sum, which might have excited the suspicion that it had not been fairly obtained.

"One crown for such a journey! Why, it would scarcely have been sufficient to purchase bread for two days; and the distance! good heavens!

from Bar-le-Duc to Paris is nearly sixty-five leagues!”

“I never counted the leagues, madame; I only said, I must get to Paris.”

“And, thereupon, you set out, my poor simpleton?”

“Oh, I have good legs!”

“Good as they are, they failed, you see.”

“Oh! it was not my legs — it was hope which failed me.”

“Why, indeed, you looked before you fell as if in great despair.”

Gilbert smiled bitterly.

“What was passing in your mind? You struck your forehead with your clenched hand, and tore out your hair by handfuls.”

“Indeed, madame?” asked Gilbert, rather embarrassed.

“Oh! I am certain of it; and it was that, I think, which prevented you hearing or seeing the carriage.”

Gilbert's instinct told him that he might increase his consequence, and still more awaken the interest of the lady by telling the whole truth.

“I was, indeed, in despair,” said he.

“And about what?” said the lady.

“Because I could not keep up with a carriage which I was following.”

“Indeed,” said the young lady, smiling, “this is quite a romance. Is there love in the case?”

All Gilbert's resolution could not prevent himself from blushing.

“And what carriage was it, my little Roman?”

“A carriage in the train of the dauphiness.”

“What do you tell me! Is the dauphiness before us?”

“She is, indeed.”

“I thought her scarcely yet at Nancy. Are no honors paid her on the way, that she advances so rapidly?”

“ Oh, yes, madame; but her royal highness seems to have some reason for being in haste.”

“In haste? Who told you so?”

“I guessed it.”

“On what grounds?”

“Why, she said at first she would stay two or three hours at Taverney, and she only stayed three-quarters of an hour.”

“Do you know if she received any letters from Paris?”

“I saw a gentleman in a dress covered with embroidery, who had one in his hand as he entered.”

“Did you hear his name mentioned?”

“No; I merely know that he is the governor of Strasbourg.”

“What! the Count de Stainville, brother-in-law to the Duke de Choiseul! Horrible! Faster, postilion, faster!”

A vigorous lash was the reply, and Gilbert felt the speed of the carriage increase.

“But she must stop to breakfast.” said the lady, as if speaking to herself, “and then we shall pass her. Postilion, what is the next town?”

“Vitry, madame.”

“How far are we from it?”

“Three leagues.

“Where shall we change horses?”

“At Vauclere.”

“Well, drive on, and if you see a train of carriages on the road before us, let me know.”

While the lady was exchanging these words with the postilion, Gilbert had again nearly fainted. When she once more turned toward him, he was pale, and his eyes were closed.

“Poor child!” said she, “he is fainting again. It is my fault; I made him talk when he was dying of hunger, instead of giving him something to eat.”

She took from the pocket of the carriage a richly-carved flask, with a little silver goblet hanging round its neck by a chain, and poured out some of the contents for Gilbert. On this occasion he did not require to be asked twice.

“Now,” said the lady, “eat a biscuit; in an hour or so you shall breakfast more solidly.”

“Thank you, madame,” said Gilbert, gladly taking the biscuit, as he had done the wine.

“As you have now recovered a little strength,” said she, “tell me, if you are disposed to make a confidant of me, what induced you to follow a carriage in the train of the dauphiness?”

“Well, madame, you shall hear the truth. I was living with the Baron de Taverney when her royal highness came. She commanded him to follow her to Paris; he obeyed. I was an orphan' and consequently nobody thought of me; they left me there, without food and without money. So I resolved, since everybody was going to Versailles, with the assistance of good horses and fine, coaches, I, with the assistance of only my legs, would go to

Versailles, and as soon as the horses. But fate was against me! If I had not lost my money, I should have had something to eat last night; and if I had eaten last night, I should have overtaken them this morning."

"Very well. You showed courage, and I like that; but you forgot that at "Versailles people cannot live on courage alone."

"I shall go to Paris."

"But in that respect Paris resembles Versailles exceedingly."

"If courage will not support me, labor will!"

"A good answer, my little fellow! But what sort of labor? Your hands do not seem those of a workman or porter."

"I shall study."

"I think you seem to know a great deal already."

"Yes, for I know that I know nothing!" replied Gilbert, remembering the aphorism of Socrates.

"And may I ask, my young friend, what branch of study you would choose?"

" I think, madame, that the best is that which teaches man to be most useful to his fellows. Besides, man is so frail a being, that he should learn the cause of his weakness, in order that he may know his strength. I should like to know, some day, why my stomach prevented my legs from carrying me any farther this morning; and if it was not that weakness of my stomach which summoned up the phantoms which distressed my brain."

"Really, you would make an excellent physician; and you speak already most learnedly on the science of medicine. In ten years you shall have me for a patient."

"I shall try to deserve that honor, madame."

They had now reached the place where they were to change horses. The young lady asked for information respecting the dauphiness, and found that she had passed through that place a quarter of an hour "before; she intended to stop at Vitry, to change horses and to breakfast.

A fresh postilion took the place of the former one. The lady allowed him to leave the village at the usual speed; but when they had got a little beyond the last house —

"Postilion," said she, "will you undertake to come up with the carriages of the dauphiness?"

"Certainly, madame."

" Before they reach Vitry?"

“Diable! they are going full trot.”

“Yes; but if you were to go at a gallop?”

The postilion looked at her.

“Treble pay,” said she.

“If you had said so at first,” replied he, “we should have been a quarter of a league farther by this time.”

“Well, here is a crown on account; make up for lost time.”

The postilion's arm was stretched back, the lady's forward, and their hands met. The horses received a sharp lash, and the carriage started off like the wind.

During the change of horses, Gilbert had alighted and washed his face and hands at a fountain, had smoothed down his hair, which was very thick, and had altogether improved his appearance very much.

“In truth,” said the lady to herself, “he is handsome enough for a physician; “and she smiled.

Having finished her dialogue with the postilion, she turned once more to Gilbert, whose paradoxes and sententious humor amused her exceedingly. From time to time she interrupted herself in a burst of laughter, which his philosophizing caused her, to lean out of the carriage and look anxiously before her. They had gone about a league in this way, when she uttered a cry of joy — she had caught a sight of the last wagons of the dauphiness's train as they were slowly ascending a steep hill, and now there appeared in advance of them about twenty carriages, from which many of the travelers had got out and were walking beside them. Gilbert slipped out his head also, desirous to catch a glimpse of Mademoiselle de Taverney in the midst of the crowd of pigmies, and thought he discovered Nicole by her high cap.

“And now, madame,” said the postilion, “what must we do?”

“We must get before them.”

“Get before them! But you know we cannot pass the carriage of the dauphiness.”

“Why not?”

“Because it is expressly forbidden. Peste! pass the king's horses! I should be sent to the galleys.”

“Now listen, my good fellow; manage it as you please, but I must positively get before those carriages.”

“I thought you belonged to the train of her royal highness?” said Gilbert, inquiringly.

“It is very proper to wish for information,” replied she, “but we should not ask indiscreet questions.”

“I beg your pardon, madame,” said he, reddening.

“Well, postilion, what are we to do?”

“Why, faith! this — keep behind till we reach Vitry, and then, if her highness stops, obtain her permission to go on before her.”

“Ay; but then it would be asked who I was — I should have to tell. No, no, that will not do; we must find out some other way.”

“Madame,” said Gilbert, “if I might give an opinion — ”

“Yes, yes, my young friend; if you have any good advice., give it.”

“Could we not take some by-road which would bring us round to Vitry, and so get before the dauphiness without having been wanting in respect to her?”

“Excellent! The boy is right!” cried the young lady. “Postilion, is there a by-road?”

“To go where?”

“Where you like, provided you leave the dauphiness behind.”

“There is, in fact, a by-road leading round Vitry, and joining the high road again at Lachaussee.”

“That is it! that is the very thing!” cried the lady.

“But, madame, if I take that road, you must double the pay.”

“Two louis-d'ors for you, if we get to Lachaussee before the dauphiness.”

“Madame is not afraid, then, of her carriage being broken?”

“I care for nothing! If it breaks, I shall proceed on horseback.”

And, turning to the right, they entered a cross-road full of deep ruts, bordered by a little river, which falls into the Marne between Lachaussee and Martigny.

The postilion kept his word; he did all that human powers could do to break the carriage, but, at the same time, to arrive before the dauphiness. A dozen times Gilbert was thrown into the lady's arms, and a dozen times she into his. Intimacy springs up quickly from jolting on in the loneliness of a carriage; and, after two hours' traveling on this by-road, it seemed to Gilbert as if he had known his companion ten years, and she, on her part, would have sworn she had known him since his birth. About eleven o'clock they came again on the high road between Vitry and Chalons. A courier whom they met told them that the dauphiness was not only staying to breakfast at Vitry, but that she meant to take two hours' repose. He added that he had been sent forward to desire those who attended to the horses to have them in readiness between three and four o'clock. This news filled the lady with joy. She gave the postilion the two louis-d'ors which she promised him; and, turning to Gilbert, “So now,” said she, “we shall be able to dine at the next stopping-place!”

But fate had decided that Gilbert should not dine there.

CHAPTER XXI.

In Which a New Personage Makes His Appearance.

FROM THE TOP of the hill which the lady's carriage was ascending, the village of Lachaussee might be seen; it was there she was to change horses and stop to dine. It was a lovely little village, with its thatched cottages scattered here and there at the caprice of the owners; some in the very middle of the road, some half hidden under the shade of a little grove which bordered the highway, and some following the course of the little river which we have mentioned, over which the inhabitants had placed temporary and rustic bridges to reach their dwellings.

At that moment, however, the most remarkable feature in the village was a man, who, looking down the brook, was standing right in the middle of the road, as if he had been ordered to keep watch there. Sometimes he looked up, sometimes down the road; then he turned a longing eye toward a beautiful gray horse with long inane and tail, which was fastened to the window-shutter of a cabin, which he shook in his impatient tossing of his head — an impatience which was the more excusable, as, from the fact of his being saddled, it might be presumed he was waiting for his master, who was inside.

From time to time the stranger ventured to approach the horse to pat his side, or pass his hand down his slender legs; and then, when he luckily escaped the kick which was always vouchsafed him at each attempt, he returned to his occupation of watching the road. Wearied at last by his fruitless watching, he knocked on the window shutter.

“Hallo! In there!” he shouted.

“Who is there?” replied a man's voice — and the shutter was opened.

“Sir,” said the stranger, “if your horse is to be sold, the buyer is here at hand.”

“You can see he has no wisp at his tail,” answered the other, who appeared to be a countryman; and he shut the window.

This answer did not appear to satisfy the stranger, so he knocked again. He was a tall, stout man, with a ruddy complexion, a black beard, and large sinewy hands peeping out from fine lace ruffles. He wore a hat edged with gold lace, and set on crosswise, like those officers of the provinces who try to look fierce in the eyes of the poor Parisians. He knocked a third time — but no answer. He got impatient.

“Do you know, my honest fellow,” cried he, “you are not very polite? and if you don't open your shutter, I'll break it in!”

At this threat the shutter opened, and the same face as before appeared.

“But when you were told the horse is not for sale,” replied the peasant, for the second time, “what the devil — is not that enough?”

“But when I tell you that I want a fast animal!”

“Well, if you want one, can you not go to the post-house? there are sixty of the king's there; you surely can choose from among them. But leave a man who has only one that one!”

“I tell you this is the very one I want!”

“A nice proposal, indeed! An Arabian —

“That is the reason I want it.”

“Very possibly — but it is not for sale.”

“Whose is it?”

“You are very curious!”

“And you mighty discreet!”

“Well, it belongs to a person asleep in the house.”

“A man or a woman?”

“A woman.”

“Tell the woman, then, that I will give her five hundred pistoles for her horse.”

“Oh! ho!” said the peasant, staring; “five hundred pistoles! That is a sum!”

“Tell her it is the king who wants her horse.”

“The king?”

“Yes, in person!”

“Oh, come! you are not the king, are you?”

“No — but I represent him.”

“You represent him?” said the peasant, taking off his hat.

“Come, come! make haste! The king is in a hurry!” and the burly stranger cast another impatient glance toward the highway.

“Well, when the lady awakes I will tell her.”

“Yes, but I can't wait till she wakes.”

“What is to be done then?”

“Parbleu! awaken her!”

“Awaken her? certainly not.”

“Well, I shall do it myself!”

But just as the stranger who pretended to be the representative of his majesty advanced to knock at the window of the upper story with the handle of his long whip, he caught a glimpse of a carriage coming along at the utmost speed of the worn-out horses. His quick eye recognized it instantly, and he sprang forward to meet it — it was that in which were Gilbert and his guardian angel. On seeing this man, who made signs to him to stop, the postilion gladly obeyed, for he scarcely knew whether the horses could take him to the post-house.

“Chon! my dear Chon! is it you at last?”

“It is, Jean,” replied the lady addressed by this singular name. “And what are you doing here?”

“Pardieu, a pretty question! I am waiting for you.”

And he leaped on the step of the carriage, and putting in his long arms, seized her and covered her with kisses.

“Ha!” said he, all at once observing Gilbert, who looked on with surprise at these strange proceedings. “What the deuce have you here?”

“Oh, a little philosopher, and very amusing,” replied Mademoiselle Chon, little caring whether she hurt or flattered the pride of her new acquaintance.

“And where did you pick him up?”

“On the road; but that is not the question.”

“True,” said the person who was called Jean. “What about our old countess de Bearn?”

“All settled!”

“What! settled?”

“Yes, she will come.”

“But what did you say to her?”

“That I was her lawyer's daughter — that I was passing through Verdun, and that my father desired me to tell her her lawsuit was coming on. I merely added that her presence in Paris had now become indispensable for its success.”

“What did she say to that?”

"She opened her little gray eyes — took a long pinch of snuff — said that Monsieur Flageot was the cleverest man in the world, and — gave orders for her departure!"

"Admirable, Chon! I shall make you my ambassador extraordinary. And now, shall we breakfast?"

"With all my heart! for this poor child is dying of hunger. But we must be quick, for she will soon overtake us."

"Who? the old countess? Nonsense."

"No — the dauphiness."

"Bah! The dauphiness is scarcely at Nancy yet."

"She is at Vitry! three leagues off!"

"Peste! That alters the case! Drive on! drive on! postilion!"

"Where, sir?"

"To the post-house."

The carriage drove off, with the stranger still standing on the step, and soon drew up before the inn door.

"Quick! quick!" said Chon. "Let us have some cutlets — a fowl — some eggs — and a bottle of Burgundy. We must see out again instantly."

"Excuse me, madame," said the innkeeper, stepping forward, "but in that case it must be with your own horses."

"How!" said Jean, leaping heavily down from the step of the carriage. "With our own horses?"

"Certainly; or at least with those that brought you."

"Impossible!" said the postilion; "they have already done a double stage. See what a state they are in!"

"In good earnest," said Chon, "it would be utterly impossible to proceed farther with them."

"But what prevents your giving us fresh horses?" asked Jean.

"Merely that I have none."

"What the devil! you know the regulations — it is your duty to have horses."

"By the regulations, sir, I ought to have fifteen horses; now, I have eighteen."

"Why, all we want is three."

"Yes, but they are all out."

"What! all the eighteen?"

"Yes, sir."

“Damnation!” thundered the traveler.

“Oh, viscount! viscount!” cried Chon.

“Yes, yes, Chon — don't be afraid — I will keep calm. And when will your miserable hacks be in?” continued the viscount, turning to the host.

“Faith, sir, I don't know — it all depends on the postilions. Perhaps in an hour — perhaps in two hours.”

“Now, my good fellow,” said Viscount Jean, placing his hat on one side, and setting out his right leg. “I wish you just to understand this — I never jest!”

“I am sorry for it, sir. I should like you much better if you did.”

“Now, take ray advice! Let the horses be harnessed before I get angry!”

“Go into the stable yourself, sir; and if you find a horse there, you shall have it for nothing.”

“Indeed! — and what if I should find sixty?”

“It would be just the same as if there were none; for these sixty horses are the king's.”

“Well, what then?”

“What then! — they are not to be hired out!”

“What the devil are they here for, then?”

“For the use of her royal highness the dauphiness!”

“Mon Dieu! sixty horses, and we cannot get one.”

“But you know, sir — ”

“I know one thing, and that is, that I am in a hurry —

“It is a pity.”

“And,” continued the viscount, without heeding the postmaster's interruption, “as the dauphiness will not be here before the evening —

“What do you say?” exclaimed the host, all alarmed.

“I say that the horses will be back before she arrives!”

“Can it be possible you would propose? —

“Parbleu!” said the viscount, going into the stable, “I will have three horses; I don't want eight, like royal personages, although I have a right to them — by alliance at least.”

“But I say you shall not have one!” said the host, throwing himself, in desperation, between the stranger and his horses.

“Scoundrel!” cried the viscount, turning pale with anger, “do you know who I am?”

“Viscount, viscount, in Heaven's name, no broils!” cried Chon.

“You are right, my good little Chon;” then, after a moment's thought, he turned with his most charming smile to the host; “my good fellow, no more words, now for deeds! I shall take the responsibility off your shoulders.”

“How so?” asked the host, by no means satisfied even with the stranger's now gracious visage.

“I shall help myself; these three horses suit me exactly.”

“And you call that freeing me from all responsibility?”

“Certainly; you have not given them to me — it was I who took them.”

“I tell you the thing is impossible!”

“We shall see that. Where is the harness?”

“Let no one stir, at his peril!” cried the host to two or three grooms loitering about.

“Scoundrels!” cried the viscount.

“Jean, my dear Jean!” exclaimed Chon, “you will only bring us into some disagreeable situation. When on a mission like this we must endure — ”

“Everything except delay,” said Jean, with the utmost coolness; “and, since these rogues won't help me, I shall do the business myself.” And Jean coolly took from the wall three sets of harness, and fitted them on three of the horses.

“Jean, Jean, I entreat you, do not be rash!” cried Chon, clasping her hands.

“Do you wish to arrive in Paris or not?” said the viscount, grinding his teeth.

“Of course I do. All is lost if we do not hasten on!”

“Well, then, leave me alone.” And, separating three horses — not the worst — from the others, he led them to the carriage.

“Take care, sir, take care!” cried the host; “it is high treason to steal those horses!”

“I am not going to steal them, you fool; I'm only going to borrow them. Come on, my little pets!”

The host sprang forward to catch the reins; but before he could touch them, he was rudely repulsed by the stranger.

“Brother, brother!” cried Mademoiselle Chon.

“Ah! he is her brother!” muttered Gilbert to himself, breathing more freely.

At this moment a window was opened on the opposite side of the way, and a lovely female face was seen. She appeared quite alarmed at the noise.

“Oh, it is you, madame?” cried Jean, who immediately perceived her.

“How, sir — me?” she replied, in bad French.

“Yes; you are awake now. Will you sell your horse?”

“My horse?”

“Yes, the gray Arabian, tied to the window-shutter there. You know I offered you five hundred crowns!”

“My horse is not for sale, sir,” said she, shutting the window.

“Well, I am not in luck to-day — people will neither sell nor hire; but, corbleu! I'll take the Arabian if she won't sell it; and I'll drive these hacks to the devil, if they won't hire them. Come, Patrice!”

The footman on his sister's carriage jumped down.

“Harness them!” said Jean.

“Help! help!” shouted the host.

Two grooms ran forward.

“Jean! — viscount!” cried poor Chon, writhing in the carriage, and endeavoring in vain to open the door. “You are mad; — we shall all be slaughtered!”

“Slaughtered! It is we who shall slaughter them, I hope. We are three against three! Come out, my young philosopher!” thundered Jean, addressing Gilbert, who never stirred, so great was his astonishment; “come out, and do something — sticks, stones, or fists — anything will do! Morbleu! you look like a saint carved on stone!”

Gilbert gave an inquiring and supplicating glance at his protectress, but she held him by the arm. The host, in the meantime, bawled incessantly, dragging the horses to one side, while Jean pulled them to the other. But the struggle could not last forever. Jean, wearied and heated, dealt the defender of the horses such a blow with his clenched fist that the latter fell back into the horsepond, among his frightened ducks and geese, shouting, as he plunged in, “Help! murder! murder!”

The viscount, thus rid of his adversary, lost no time in harnessing the horses.

“Help, in the name of the king! Help!” cried the host, rising and endeavoring to rally his frightened grooms.

“Who calls for help in the name of the king?” cried a cavalier, riding at full speed into the yard of the post-house, and reining up his horse, bathed in sweat and foam, in the very midst of the actors in this tumultuous scene.

“The Chevalier Philip de Taverney!” muttered Gilbert to himself, sinking down in the carriage to escape observation.

Chon, who lost no opportunity of acquiring information, heard the young man's name.

CHAPTER XXII.

Viscount Jean.

THE YOUNG LIEUTENANT of the bodyguard of the dauphin — for it was he — leaped from his horse at the aspect of this strange scene, which began to collect about the post-house all the women and children of the village. On seeing Philip, the post-master was ready to throw himself on his knees before his protector, whom Providence had sent him so opportunely.

"Sir, sir!" cried he; "do you know that this person is about to take by force some of the horses of her royal highness the dauphiness?"

Philip drew back, as if he heard what was absolutely incredible. "And who has made this attempt?" he inquired.

"I, sir! — mordieu! — I, myself!" said Jean.

"It cannot be, sir; otherwise you are either mad or not a gentleman!"

"Excuse me, sir. I am in my perfect senses, and have the entree at court."

"How! — You are in your perfect senses, and are received at court, and yet you dare to take the horses of the dauphiness?"

"In the first place, there are sixty horses — her royal highness can only employ eight — and it would be strange, indeed, if I should unluckily pitch upon the very ones she wanted."

"True, sir — there are sixty horses," replied the young man, "and her royal highness will only employ eight; but that does not hinder every horse, from the first to the sixtieth, being for her service; and between these horses no distinction can be made."

"You are mistaken, sir — it is made!" said the viscount, contemptuously, "since I have taken these three for myself. Shall I go on foot, when rascally lackeys are drawn by four horses? Mordieu! let them be satisfied, as I am, with three, and there will be enough for us all."

"If the lackeys have four horses, sir, it is by the king's order, and now have the goodness to order your footman to take those horses back to the stable." These words Philip pronounced firmly, but with so much politeness that none but a ruffian would have answered otherwise than respectfully.

“You may be right, my dear lieutenant,” answered Jean, “to speak in this manner, if it be a part of your duty to attend to the cattle; but I did not know that the gentlemen of the dauphin's bodyguard had been raised to the rank of grooms. Therefore, take my advice, shut your eyes — tell your people to do the same — and — a good day to you I”

“Sir, whether I have been raised or lowered to the rank of groom is not the question — what I do is my duty, and I am commanded by the dauphiness herself to attend to the relays.”

“Oh, that alters the case; but allow me to tell you that you are filling a sorry office, M. Lieutenant, and if this is the way the young lady begins to treat the army — ”

“Of whom do you speak, sir?” interrupted Philip.

“Why, parbleu! of the Austrian.”

The chevalier turned as pale as death.

“Do you dare,” he exclaimed, “to speak — ”

“I not only dare to speak,” interrupted Jean, “but I dare to act! — Come, Patrice — hasten, we are pressed for time.”

Philip seized the first horse by the bridle. “Sir,” said he, in a perfectly calm voice, “do me the favor to give your name.”

“Do you wish particularly to know it?”

“Yes.”

“Well, then, I am the Viscount Jean Dubarry.”

“What! — you are the brother of her — ”

“Who will send you to rot in the Bastille, if you say one word more; “and Jean jumped into the carriage.

Philip approached the door. “Viscount Jean Dubarry,” said he, “you will do me the honor to come out.”

“Yes, ma foi! I have a great deal of time for that!” said the viscount, endeavoring to shut the door.

“If you hesitate one instant, sir,” replied Philip, preventing him with his left hand from closing the carriage door, “I give you my word of honor I will run you through the body!” and, as he spoke, he drew his sword.

“Oh!” cried Chon, “we shall be murdered. Give up the horses, Jean — give them up!”

“What! you threaten me,” shouted Jean, grinding his teeth and snatching up his sword, which he had laid on the seat of the carriage before him.

“And the threat shall be followed up — do you hear? — in a moment,” and the young man's sword glanced before Jean's eyes.

“We shall never get away,” whispered Chon, “if you do not manage this officer by gentle means.”

“Neither gentleness nor violence shall stop me in the discharge of my duty,” said Philip, who had overheard the advice, bowing; “I recommend you, madame, to advise Monsieur le Viscount to submit in time, or in the name of the king, whom I represent, I shall be forced to kill him if he resist, or to arrest him if he do not.”

“And I tell you I shall have the horses in spite of you!” shouted Jean, leaping out of the carriage and drawing his sword.

“That remains to be proved, sir,” said Philip, putting himself on his guard; “are you ready?”

“Lieutenant,” said the brigadier commanding under Philip, “there are six of our men near — shall I — ?”

“Do not stir! — Do not stir! — this is a personal quarrel. Now, sir, I am at your service.”

Mademoiselle Chon shrieked, and Gilbert wished the carriage had been as deep as a well, to hide him.

Jean began the attack; he was a good swordsman, but anger prevented him from turning his skill to advantage. Philip, on the contrary, was as cool as if he had been playing with a foil in the fencing-school. The viscount advanced, retired, leaped to the right, to the left, shouting in making his passes like the fencing-master of a regiment; while the chevalier, with closed teeth and steady eye, immovable as a statue, watched all his adversary's movements, and divined his intentions. Every one in the yard was silent, attentively looking on; even Chon ceased to scream. For some minutes the combat continued without Jean's feints, shouts, and movements producing any effect, but also without his having permitted Philip, who was studying his opponent's play, to touch him once. All at once, however, the viscount sprung back, uttering a cry of pain, and at the same moment his ruffles were stained with blood, which ran down his fingers in large drops — he was wounded in the arm.

“You are wounded, sir,” said Philip.

“Sacrebleu, I feel it well enough,” said he, turning pale and letting his sword fall.

The chevalier took it up and restored it to him; “Take it, sir,” said he, “and never again be guilty of a similar folly.”

“Plague take it! — if I have my follies, I pay for them,” growled the viscount. “Come and dress this scrape, dear Chon,” added he to his sister, who sprung from the carriage and hastened to his assistance.

“You will do me the justice, madame,” said Philip, “to acknowledge that all this has not been caused by my fault. I deeply regret having been driven to such extremities before a lady,” and bowing, he retired. “Let those horses be unharnessed and taken back to the stable,” said he to the post-master.

Jean shook his fist at him.

“Oh!” cried the host, “this is just in the nick of time; three horses coming in that have been out! Courtin, Courtin! — quick! put them to the gentleman's carriage.”

“But, master — ” said the postilion.

“Come, come! no reply; the gentleman is in a hurry. Don't be uneasy, sir, you shall have the horses.”

“All very fine; but your horses should have been here half an hour ago,” growled Dubarry, stamping with his foot, as he looked at his arm, pierced through and through, which Chon was binding up with her handkerchief.

Meantime Philip had mounted his horse again, and was giving his orders as if nothing had occurred.

“Now, brother, now! let us go” said Chon, leading him toward the carriage.

“And my Arabian?” said he. “Ah, ma foi! let him go to the devil, for I am in for a day of ill-luck,” and he got into the carriage.

“Oh,” said he, perceiving Gilbert. “I cannot stretch my legs with this fellow.”

“Let me out, pray,” said Gilbert, “and I will walk.”

“In the devil's name go, then,” replied Jean.

“No, no,” said Chon, “I must keep my little philosopher — sit opposite me, and you will not annoy him;” and she held Gilbert by the arm; then, bending forward, she whispered to her brother, “Hi; knows the man who wounded you.”

A gleam of joy flashed from the viscount's eyes; “Oh, very well! — let him stay — what is the fellow called?”

“The Chevalier Philip de Taverney.”

Just then the young officer passed the carriage.

“Oh, you are there, my little gendarme,” shouted the viscount; “you look wonderfully fierce just now, but my turn will come some day.”

“I shall be at your service, sir, whenever you please,” answered Philip, calmly.

“Yes, yes, we shall see that, Monsieur Philip de Taverney,” said the viscount, leaning forward to see what effect the mention of his name would have on the young man, when he must be so far from expecting to hear it.

Philip looked up with surprise, and indeed with a slight feeling of uneasiness, but immediately recovering his self-possession, and taking off his hat, with the utmost grace, “A pleasant journey, Viscount Jean Dubarry,” said he.

The carriage rolled on rapidly. “Thousand devils!” said the viscount, making a horrible grimace; “do you know, my little Chon, I am suffering dreadful pain?”

“The first place where we change I shall send for a doctor for you, while this poor fellow breakfasts, “replied Chon.

“Ah! true, true, we have not breakfasted, but the pain I suffer — and I am in agony with thirst — takes away all appetite.”

“Will you drink a glass of wine from my flask?”

“Certainly! — give it me.”

“Sir,” said Gilbert, “will you allow me to remark that wine is very bad for you in your present condition.”

“Really you are quite a physician, my little philosopher!”

“No, sir — but I hope to be so one day. I have read, however, in a treatise written for people in the army, that the first things forbidden the wounded are spirits, wine and coffee.”

“Ah, you read that! — well, I shall not drink the wine.”

“But if Monsieur le Viscount would permit me to take his handkerchief and dip it in that brook, and then wrap it 'round his arm, I am sure it would ease his pain.”

“Do, do!” said Chon; “stop, postilion!”

Gilbert got out to follow up his proposition. “This boy will be a horrid plague to us,” said the viscount, “I have a great mind to tell the postilion to drive on and leave him there, handkerchief and all.”

“You would be wrong — that boy can be very useful to us.”

“How so?”

“He has already given me some important information about the dauphiness — and did he not just now tell you the name of your adversary?”

“True! — well, let him stay.”

Gilbert returned, and the application of the wet bandage to the viscount's arm, as he had foretold, relieved him greatly.

“Faith, he was right — I feel much better,” said he, “let us have a little chat.” Gilbert opened his ears to their utmost extent. The conversation which ensued, and which was conducted in the lively and brilliant patois of Provence, would have sadly puzzled a Parisian ear, and Gilbert, master of himself as he was, could not avoid a slight movement of impatience, which Mademoiselle Chon having perceived, quieted with a gentle smile. This smile reminded the poor boy of the kindness with which he was treated. Circumstances had brought him in contact with a nobleman honored with the royal favor. “Ah!” thought he, “if Andree saw me in this magnificent carriage!” — and his heart swelled with pride. New ideas and hopes took possession of him, and Nicole no longer cost him a thought.

In the meantime, the brother and sister resumed their conversation, still however in the Provencal dialect.

Suddenly the viscount leaned forward, “See, there he is!” cried he.

“What?”

“The Arabian which I wished to buy.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Chon, “what a splendid woman the rider is!”

“Call her, Chon, she will not perhaps be so much afraid of you — I would give a thousand crowns for the horse.”

“And how much for the woman?” said Chon, laughing.

“I would give all I have for her — but call her.”

“Madame!” cried Chon, “madame!”

But the stranger appeared not to hear, or not to understand. Wrapped in a long white mantle, and her face shaded by a large beaver hat with drooping feathers, she flew past them like an arrow, crying; “ Avanti, Djerid, avanti!”

“She is an Italian,” said the viscount. “Mordieu, what a splendid woman! — if it were not for the pain of my arm, I would jump out and run after her.”

“I know her!” said Gilbert.

“Why, the little fellow is a directory for the whole province; he knows every one.”

“Who is she?” asked Chon.

“Her name is Lorenza, and she is the sorcerer's wife.”

“What sorcerer?”

“The Baron Joseph Balsamo.”

The brother and sister looked at each other with an expression which said, “We did well to keep him!”

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Countess Dubarry's Morning Levee.

WHILE MADEMOISELLE Chon and Viscount Jean are traveling post on the Chalons road, let us introduce the reader to another member of the same family.

In the suite of rooms at Versailles which the Princess Adelaide, daughter of Louis XV., had once occupied, his majesty had installed his mistress, the Countess Dubarry, not without keenly studying beforehand the effect which this piece of policy would produce on his court. The favorite, with her merry whims and her careless joyous humor, had transformed that wing of the palace, formerly so quiet, into a scene of perpetual merriment and tumult, and every hour she issued thence her commands for a banquet or a party of pleasure.

But what appeared still more unusual on these magnificent staircases, was the never-ceasing stream of visitors ascending them, and crowding an antechamber filled with curiosities from all parts of the globe — certainly containing nothing so curious as the idol worshiped by this crowd.

The day after that on which the scene which we have just described occurred at the little village of Lachaussee, about nine in the morning, the countess, lovely as an eastern houri, was at the important duties of the toilet.

“No news of Chon?” asked she of one of her tiring-women.

“No, madame.”

“Nor of the viscount?”

“No, madame.”

“Do you know has Bischi received any?”

“A message was sent to your sister's, madame, this morning, but there were no letters.”

“It is very tiresome waiting in this way,” said the countess, pouting her lovely mouth; “I am in a wretched humor — I pity all who may come near me to-day. Will some means never be invented of conversing at a hundred leagues' distance? Is my antechamber passably filled this morning?"

"Can madame think it necessary to ask?"

"Dame! but listen! Doree — the dauphiness is coming! — I shall be abandoned for that sun, I, who am only a little twinkling star — but tell me, who is there this morning?"

"The Duke d'Aiguillon, madame, the Prince de Soubise, Monsieur de Sartines, the President Maupeou —

"And the Duke de Richelieu?"

"Not yet, madame."

"How? — neither to-day nor yesterday? — He is afraid of compromising himself — you must send one of my servants to the Hotel du Hanovre to inquire if the duke is ill."

"Yes, madame; will you receive all who are waiting at once, or do you wish to give any one a private audience?"

"Monsieur de Sartines first — I must speak to him alone."

The order was transmitted by the countess's woman to a tall footman who waited in the corridor leading from her bed-chamber to the anterooms, and the minister of police immediately appeared, dressed in black, and endeavoring by an insinuating smile to moderate the severe expression of his gray eyes and thin lips.

"Good-morning, my dear enemy!" said the countess, without looking round, but seeing him in the mirror before her.

"Your enemy, madame!"

"Yes; my world is divided into only two classes — friends and enemies — I admit no neutrals, or class them as enemies."

"And you are right, madame; but tell me how I, notwithstanding my well known devotion to your interests, deserve to be included in either one or other of these classes?"

"By allowing to be printed, distributed, sold, and sent to the king, a whole ocean 'of pamphlets, libels, verses — all against me. It is ill-natured — stupid — odious!"

"But, madame, I am not responsible."

"Yes, sir, you are; for you know the wretch who wrote them."

"Madame, if they were all written *by* one author, we should not have the trouble of sending him to the Bastille — Hercules himself would sink under such a labor!"

“Upon my word, you are highly complimentary to me.”

“If I were your enemy, madame. I should not speak the truth thus.”

“Well, I believe you! — we understand each other now. But one thing still gives me some uneasiness.”

“What is that, madame?”

“You are on good terms with the Choiseuls.”

“Madame, M, de Choiseul is prime minister; he issues his orders and I must obey them.”

“So if Monsieur de Choiseul orders that I am to be vexed, tortured, worried to death, you will allow me to be vexed, tortured, worried! — Thank you!”

“Let us discuss matters a little,” said Sartines, sitting down without being asked to do so, but without any displeasure being exhibited on the part of the favorite, for much must be pardoned in the man who knew better than any other all that was doing in France. “Let us discuss this a little — and first, what have I done for you these three days past?”

“You informed me that a courier had been sent from Chanteloup to hasten the arrival of the dauphiness.”

“Was that done like an enemy?”

“But about the presentation on which you know my heart is set — what have you been doing for me?”

“Doing all I possibly could.”

“Monsieur de Sartines, you are not candid!”

“Ah, madame! I assure you, you are unjust. Did I not find and bring you Viscount Jean from the back room of a tavern in less than two hours, when you wanted him in order to send him I don't know where, or rather I do know where.”

“I had much rather you had allowed my brother-in-law to stay there,” said Madame Dubarry, laughing, “a man allied to the royal family of France!”

“Well, but was that not a service to be added to my many other services?”

“Oh, very well! — but just tell me what you did for me yesterday.”

“Yesterday, madame!”

“Oh, you may well endeavor to recollect — that was your day for obliging others.”

“I don't understand you, madame.”

“Well I understand myself — answer, sir, what were you doing yesterday?”

“Yesterday morning I was occupied as usual, writing with my secretary.”

“Till what hour?”

“Till ten.”

“What did you do then?”

“I sent to invite a friend of mine from Lyons, who had made a wager he would come to Paris without my knowing, and my footman met him just at the barrier.”

“Well, after dinner?”

“I sent to the Austrian lieutenant of police information of the haunt of a famous robber whom he could not discover.”

“And where is he?”

“At Vienna.”

“So you are not only the Minister of Police at Paris, but perform the same duties for foreign courts?”

“Yes, madame — in my leisure moments.”

“Well, I shall take a note of that. Then, after having dispatched the courier to Vienna — ?”

“I went to the opera.”

“To see the little Guimard? Poor Soubise!”

“No — to arrest a famous pickpocket, whom I did not disturb so long as he kept to the fermiers-general, but who had the audacity to rob two or three noblemen.”

“You should say the indiscretion. Well — after the opera — ?”

“After the opera?”

“Yes. That seems to be rather a puzzling question — is it not?”

“No. After the opera? let me think — ”

“So. How much your memory has failed of late.”

“Oh! after the opera — yes, I remember — ”

“Well?”

“I went to the house of a certain lady who keeps a gaming-table, and I myself conducted her to Fort-l'Eveque.”

“In her carriage?”

“No — in a fiacre.”

“Well?”

“Well, that is all.”

"No, it is not!"

"I got into ray fiacre again."

"And whom did you find in it?"

He reddened.

"Oh!" cried the countess, clapping her little hands, "I have really had the honor of making a minister of police blush!"

"Madame — " stammered Sartines.

"No — I shall tell you who was in the fiacre — it was the Duchesse de Grammont!"

"The Duchesse de Grammont?"

"Yes, the Duchesse de Grammont — who came to ask you to contrive to get her admitted to the king's private apartments."

"Ma foi, madame!" said the minister, shifting uneasily in his chair. "I may give up my portfolio to you. It is you who manage the police of Paris, not I."

"To tell the truth, sir, I have a police of my own. So beware! Oh, the Duchesse de Grammont in a fiacre with the minister of police at midnight! It was capital! Do you know what I did?"

"No, but I am afraid it was something dreadful — fortunately it was very late."

"But night is the time for vengeance!"

"And what, then, did you do?"

"As I keep a police of my own, I keep a body of writers also — shocking, ragged, hungry scribblers!"

"Hungry? you must feed them badly."

"I don't feed them at all. If they became fat they would be as stupid as the Prince de Soubise; fat, we are told, absorbs the gall."

"Go on — I shudder at the thought of them."

"I recollected all the disagreeable things you have allowed the Choiseuls to do against me, and determined to be revenged. I gave my legion of famishing Apollos the following programme; First, Monsieur de Sartines, disguised as a lawyer, visiting an innocent young girl who lives in a garret, and giving her, on the thirtieth of every month, a wretched pittance of a hundred crowns."

"Madame, that is a benevolent action which you are endeavoring to misconstrue."

"It is only such actions which can be misconstrued. My second scene was Monsieur de Sartines, disguised like a reverend missionary, introducing himself into the convent of the Carmelites of the Rue Saint Antoine."

"I was taking those good nuns some news from the Indies."

"East or West Indies — which? My third scene is Monsieur de Sartines, disguised as lieutenant of the police, driving through the streets at midnight in a fiacre with the Duchesse de Grammont."

"No, madame," exclaimed he. "No — you would not bring ridicule on my administration in that manner!"

"Why, do you not bring ridicule on mine?" said the countess, laughing; "but wait! I set my rogues to work, and they began like boys at college, with exordium, narration, and amplification — and I have received this morning an epigram, a song, and a ballad, of which you are the subject."

"You are not serious?"

"Perfectly so; and to-morrow you shall receive them all three."

"Why not to-day?"

"*I* must have some time first to distribute them. Is not that the *way?* Besides, the police ought always to hear last about any new affair. I assure you, you will be very much amused! I laughed three-quarters of an hour at them this morning, and the king was nearly dead with laughing — it was that which made him so late."

"I am ruined!" cried Sartines, clasping his hands.

"Ruined? Nonsense! You are only celebrated in song. Am I ruined by all the verses made on me? No — I only get in a passion at them, and then for revenge I determine to put somebody else in a passion too. Ah, what delightful verses! I have ordered some wine to my literary scorpions, and I expect by this time their senses are wrapped up in happy oblivion."

"Ah, countess, countess!"

"But, pardieu, *you*, must hear the epigram;

"'Oh, France, how wretched is thy fate, When women hold the helm of state.'"

"No, no — I am wrong; that is the scandal perpetrated against myself. But there are so many, I confound them. Listen, listen! here it is;"

"'A perfumer once sought of a painter a sign,
His skill than his genius was duller,
For in a huge bottle, with knavish design,
He makes Boynes, Maupeou, and Terray to shine,

Displayed in their own proper color.
But for Sartines still room in the vessel he leaves.
And he labels the mixture the essence of thieves.'" "Cruel woman, you will send me mad!" cried Sartines.

"Now we must look at the poem. You must know it is Madame de Grammont who speaks;

"Dear minister, you know my skin
Is to the purest snow akin;
Then grant to me this single thing —
Oh, say so, say so, to the king.'"

"Madame, madame!" cried Sartines, more furious than ever.

"Nonsense!" said the countess. "You need not be so uneasy about these little poems; I have only had ten thousand copies of them struck off."

"You have a press, then?"

"Certainly. Has not the Duke de Choiseul one?"

"Let your printer take care!"

"Oh, it is kept in my own name — I am the printer."

"Shocking, shocking! And the king laughs at these calumnies?"

"Laughs? He sometimes gives me rhymes himself, when my own inspiration fails."

"You know how I serve you, and you treat me thus?"

"I know that you are betraying me — the Duchesse de Grammont wishes to ruin me."

"Madame, I declare to you she took me quite unawares!"

"You confess, then, that I was informed correctly?"

"I am forced to confess it."

"Why did you not tell me?"

"I came now for that purpose."

"I don't believe you."

"Upon my honor!"

"I bet two to one against that pledge."

"Behold me at your feet!" and he fell on his knees. "I beg forgiveness."

"You are in the position in which you ought to be."

"Let us make peace, countess, in Heaven's name!"

"So you are afraid of a few bad verses — you, a man, a minister! Yet you never reflect how many wretched hours such things make me spend — I, a poor, weak woman!"

"You are a queen."

"A queen — not presented at court!"

"I swear to you, I have never done anything hurtful to your interests!"

"No, but you have allowed others to do so. The matter, however, is now, not the doing nothing against them, but the doing all in your power to forward them. Are you on my side — yes or no?"

"Certainly, on your side."

"Will you assist me? Will you allow nothing to interpose to hinder my presentation?"

"For myself, I promise everything."

"No," said the countess, stamping with her foot, "Pure faith! I will not accept that; there is a loophole in it to creep out at! You will be supposed to do nothing against me yourself, but the Duke de Choiseul will do all. Give me up the Choiseul party, bound hand and foot, or I will annihilate *you* — destroy you! Take care! verses are not my only weapons!"

"Do not threaten me, madame," said Sartines, thoughtfully; "there are difficulties about this presentation which you cannot understand."

"Obstacles have purposely been thrown in the way of it. You can remove them."

"It would require a hundred persons to do so."

"You shall have a million!"

"The king will not give his consent."

"He shall give it!"

"And when you have got it, how get a lady to present you?"

"I am seeking for one now."

"It is quite useless — there is a league against you."

"At Versailles?"

"Yes. All the ladies have refused, in order to pay their court to the Duke de Choiseul, the Duchesse de Grammont, the dauphiness, and the whole prudish party."

"Do not fear; I have nearly obtained what I want."

"Ha! it was for that you sent your sister to Verdun!"

"So you know that, do you?" said she, angrily.

"Oh, I have also my police, you know!" said Sartines, laughing.

"And your spies?"

"And my spies."

"In my apartments?"

“In your apartments.”

“In my stable, or in my kitchen?”

“In your antechamber — in your salon — in your bedroom — under *your* pillow.”

“Now, as the first pledge of our peace,” said the countess, “give me the names of those spies.”

“No, countess; I should not wish to embroil you with your friends.”

“But name only the last who told you a secret.”

“What would you do?”

“I would turn him out.”

“If you begin in that way, you will soon have to live in an empty house.”

“This is frightful!”

“Yet perfectly true. Oh, you know we could not govern without spies! So excellent a politician as you must have discovered that long ago.”

Madame Dubarry leaned her elbow on a table, and seemed to reflect for some minutes; then she said, “You are right. Let us say no more on the subject. What are to be the conditions of our treaty?”

“Make them yourself. You are the conqueror.”

“I am as magnanimous as Semiramis. Let me hear what you wish.”

“Well, then, you are never to speak to the king about petitions on the subject of wheat; for, traitress! you have promised your support to those petitions.”

“Very well. Take away all the petitions with you; they are in a, box there.”

“As a reward, here is a document drawn up by the peers of the kingdom respecting presentations, and the right of sitting in the royal presence.”

“A document which you were charged to give his majesty?”

“Yes.”

“But what will you say to them?”

“That I have given it. You will thus gain time; and you are too clever in your tactics not to take advantage of it.”

At this moment the folding-doors were thrown open, and a negro announced, “The king!”

The two allies hastened to hide their mutual pledges of peace and good understanding, and turned to salute his majesty, Louis — the fifteenth of that name.

CHAPTER XXIV.

King Louis the Fifteenth.

THE KING ENTERED with head erect, with a firm step, his eye full of life, and a smile on his lips. As the doors were opened, a double file of bowing heads was seen, belonging to the courtiers, who had been long waiting in the antechamber, and who were now more desirous of admittance than ever, since they could thus pay their court to two powers at once; but the doors closed on them, for the king made a sign that no one should follow him. He found himself alone, therefore, with the countess and the minister of police (for we need not reckon the waiting-maid or the little negro boy).

“Good-morning, countess!” said the king, kissing Madame Dubarry's hand; “ha! fresh as any rose, I see! Good morning, Sartines! Is this your cabinet, where you write your dispatches? Heavens! what heaps of papers! Hide them, hide them! Ha! what a beautiful fountain, countess!”

And, with the versatile curiosity of one always in search of something to amuse him, he fixed his eyes on a large china ornament, which had been brought in since the evening before and placed in a corner of the countess's bedroom.

“Sire,” replied the countess, “it is a Chinese fountain; by turning this cock, the water comes out and makes these birds sing and these fishes swim; then the doors of the pagoda open, and there comes out a procession of mandarins.”

“Very pretty — very pretty indeed!”

At this moment the little negro walked across the room, dressed in the fantastic fashion in which, at this period, they dressed their Osmans and Othellos; he wore a little turban, ornamented with a lofty plume of feathers, on one side of his head; a vest, embroidered with gold, which permitted his ebony arms to be seen; and slashed breeches of white brocaded satin; round his waist was a scarf of various bright colors, which connected the breeches with a richly-embroidered jacket; and a dagger, ornamented with precious stones, was stuck in the scarf bound around his waist.

“Peste!” cried the king, “how splendid Zamore is to-day!”

The negro stopped to admire himself before a mirror.

“Sire, he has a favor to ask of your majesty.”

“Madame,” replied the king, with a courtly smile, “I am afraid Zamore is very ambitious.”

“How so, sire?”

“Because he has already been granted the greatest favor he can desire.”

“What is that?”

“The same that has been granted me.”

“I do not understand you, sire.”

“You have made him your slave.”

“Oh, how charming, sire!” cried the countess.

The minister of police bowed in assent, and bit his lip to prevent himself from smiling.

“But,” asked the king, “what can Zamore desire?”

“The reward of his long and numerous services.”

“Yes; he is twelve years old.”

“His long and numerous future services.”

“Oh, very well!”

“Yes, indeed, sire. Past services have been rewarded long enough; it is now time to begin and reward future ones. There would not then be so much ingratitude.”

“Ha! not a bad idea,” said the king. “What do you think of it, Sartines?”

“That it would benefit all devoted servants of your majesty, sire; therefore I support it.”

“Well, countess, what does Zamore want?”

“Sire, you know my little country seat of Luciennes?”

“I have merely heard it spoken of.”

“It is your own fault; I have invited you to it a hundred times.”

“You know the etiquette, dear countess; unless on a journey, the king can only sleep in a royal chateau.”

“And for that very reason I wish you to make Luciennes a royal chateau, and Zamore its governor.”

“But, countess, that would be a burlesque.”

“I love burlesques, sire.”

“The governors of the other castles would all exclaim, and this time with reason.”

"Let them exclaim; they have often done so without reason. Kneel down, Zamore." The little fellow knelt.

"For what is he kneeling?" asked the king.

"For the reward you are going to give him for bearing my train, and putting all the prudes of the court in a rage."

"He is really a hideous creature," said the king, bursting into a fit of laughter.

"Rise, Zamore," said the countess; "you are appointed governor of Luciennes."

"But indeed, madame — "

"I shall send Zamore all the writings necessary for his governorship. And now, sire, you may come to Luciennes; you have one more royal chateau from this day."

"Is there any way of refusing her anything, Sartines?"

"There may be a way, sire," replied Sartines, "but it has not yet been discovered."

"And if it should be found out, sire, there is one thing certain — it is M, de Sartines who will be the discoverer."

"How can you think so, madame," asked Sartines, trembling.

"Sire, only imagine that I have requested a favor of M, de Sartines for three months past, and it is not yet granted.

"And what is it?" asked the king.

"Oh, he knows very well!"

"I! — I swear to you, madame —

"Does it fall under the duties of his office?"

"Yes; either in his or those of his successor."

"Madame," cried Sartines, "you really make me uneasy."

"What is the request?" again inquired the king.

"To find me a sorcerer."

Sartines breathed more freely.

"To burn him," said the king. "It is rather too hot, countess; wait till the winter."

"No, sire; I wish to present him with a golden wand."

"Then the sorcerer foretold you some misfortune which has not befallen you."

"On the contrary, sire, he predicted a piece of good fortune which has come to pass."

“Let us hear it then, countess,” said (lie king, throwing himself back in an armchair, like one who was not quite sure whether the tale would tire him or amuse him, but who must run the chance.

“With all my heart; but if I tell the tale, you must contribute the half of the sorcerer's reward.”

“The whole, if you like!”

“Royalty said — now listen.”

“I am all attention.”

“There was once —

“It begins like a fairy tale.”

“It *is* one, sire.”

“Delightful — I love enchanters!”

“There was once a poor young girl, who, at the time my story commences, had neither page, nor carriage, nor negro, nor parrot, nor monkey —

“Nor king,” added Louis.

“Oh, sire!”

“And what did the poor young girl do?”

“She trotted about through the streets of Paris like any other common mortal, only she always went very quick; for it is said she was very pretty, and she was afraid of meeting some rude man.”

“The young girl was a Lucretia — eh?”

“Oh, your majesty knows there have been no Lucretias since the year — I don't know what — of the foundation of Rome.”

“Oh, heavens! countess, are you going to become learned?”

“No; if I were learned I should have given you a wrong date; now, I gave you none.”

“True,” said the king; “go on.”

“The young girl one day was trotting along, as usual, when all at once, while crossing the Tuileries, she discovered that a man was following her.”

“Oh, the deuce! Then she stopped, I presume.”

“Ah, sire, what a bad opinion you have of women! It is easily seen you have only associated with marchionesses and duch —

“And princesses! — eh?”

“I am too polite to contradict your majesty; but what frightened the young girl was, that a fog came on, which became every moment denser.”

“Sartines, do you know what causes fogs?” The minister, thus taken unawares, started.

“Ma foi, no, sire!”

“Nor I. Well, go on, dear countess.”

“She ran as fast as she could, passed through the gate, and found herself in the square which bears your majesty's name, when she found the unknown, from whom she thought she had escaped, face to face with her. She uttered a cry — ”

“Was he so very ugly, then?”

“No, sire, he was a handsome young man, of six or eight and twenty, of a dark complexion, with large speaking eyes, and a pleasing voice.”

“And the heroine was afraid! Peste! how easily she was frightened!”

“She was not quite so much so when she looked at him; still, it was not a pleasant situation in that dense fog. So, clasping her hands, she said; 'I implore you, sir, not to do me any harm.' The unknown shook his head, smiled, and replied, 'Heaven is my witness. I have no evil intentions toward you.' 'What, then do you want?' I asked. 'To obtain a promise from you.' 'What can I promise you, sir?' 'Promise to grant me the first favor I shall ask when — ' 'When?' repeated the young girl likewise. 'When you are queen.'”

“And what did the young girl do?” said the king.

“Sire, she thought it would be engaging herself to nothing, so she promised.”

“And what became of the sorcerer?”

“He disappeared.”

“And Sartines refuses to find him? he is wrong.”

“Sire, I do not refuse; but I cannot find him.”

“Oh, sir,” said the countess, “that word *cannot* should never be in the dictionary of the police.”

“Madame, we are on his track.”

“Yes; what you always say when you are baffled.”

“It is the truth; but consider what trivial directions you have given.”

“How! — trivial! — young, handsome, dark complexion, black hair, splendid eyes, a pleasing voice.”

“Oh, the devil I how you speak of him, countess! — Sartines, I forbid you to find that young man,” said the king.

“You are wrong, sire; for I only wish to ask one simple question.”

“Is it about yourself?”

“Yes.”

“Well, what is it? — his prediction is accomplished.”

“Do you think so?”

“Yes; yon are queen.”

“Very nearly.”

“What has the sorcerer, then, to tell you more?”

“He has to tell me when the queen will be presented.”

“That is no concern of his,” and the king made a grimace which showed that he thought they were getting on dangerous ground.

“And whose concern is it?”

“Your own.”

“Mine?”

“Yes; you must find a lady to present you.”

“Oh! very likely, among the prudes of the court! Your majesty knows they are all sold to Choiseul and Prasliu.”

“What! was there not an agreement made between us that the ministers should never be named here?”

“I did not promise, sire.”

“Well, I request you to leave them in their places, and keep your own place. Believe me, the best is yours.”

“Alas! then for foreign affairs and the navy!”

“Countess,” interrupted the king, “in Heaven's name, no politics!”

At this moment Doree entered, and whispered a word or two in her mistress's ear.

“Oh, certainly, certainly*!*” cried she.

“What is it?” asked the king.

“Chon, sire, who has just returned from a journey, and wishes to pay her respects to your majesty.”

“Let her come in! let her come in. Indeed, for some days past. I felt that I wanted something, without knowing exactly what it was.”

“Thanks, sire!” said Chon, as she entered — then, going up to her sister, she whispered; “It is all settled!”

The countess uttered an exclamation of joy.

“Well, what now*!*” asked the king.

“Nothing, sire. I am only glad to see her again. '

“I am glad, too. How do you do, little Chon?”

“May I say a word or two, sire, to my sister?”

“Yes, yes, child; and while you are talking together, I shall ask Sartines where you have been.”

“Sire,” said the minister, wishing to avoid being questioned on that point, “may I beg your majesty to allow me a few moments on business of the utmost importance?”

“Oh, I have very little time now. M, de Sartines.” said the king, beginning to yawn.

“Only two words, your majesty.”

“About what?”

“About those people with the second sight — these illuminati — these workers of miracles — ”

“Pooh! jugglers! Give them permission to exercise their trade, and there will be nothing to fear from them.”

“The matter is more serious than your majesty supposes. Every day we have new masonic lodges formed — they are now a powerful sect, attracting to them all the enemies of monarchy — the philosophers, the encyclopedists. “Voltaire is to be received by them in great state.”

“He? he is dying.”

“He, sire! Oh! no, sire, he is not such a fool.”

“He has confessed.”

“Merely a trick.”

“In the habit of a Capuchin.”

“That was an impiety, sire. But, with regard to these freemasons, they are always active — they write, they talk, they form associations, correspond with foreign countries — they intrigue, they threaten — even now they are full of expectation of a great chief or head of the whole body, as I have learned from some words which escaped from one of their number.”

“Well. Sartines, when this chief comes, catch him and put him in the Bastille, and the whole affair is settled.”

“Sire, these persons have great resources.”

“Have they greater than you, sir, who have the whole police of a large kingdom?”

“Your majesty was induced to expel the Jesuits — it was the philosophers whom you should have expelled.”

“Come, come! — no more about those poor quill-drivers!

“Sire, those quills are dangerous which are cut by the pen-knife of Damiens.”

Louis XV turned pale.

“These philosophers, sire, whom you despise — — ”

“Well, sir?”

“Will destroy the monarchy, sire.”

“How long will they take to do that?”

Sartines stared at this coolness.

“How can I tell, sire? Perhaps fifteen, twenty, or thirty years.”

“Well, my dear friend, in fifteen or twenty years I shall be no more; so talk of all these things to my successor.”

And the king turned to Madame Dubarry, who, seeming to have waited for this movement, said, with a heavy sigh, “Oh, heavens! what is it you tell me, Chon?”

“Yes, what is it?” asked the king, “for you both look very wretched.”

“Oh, sire, there is good cause for it!”

“Speak — let me hear what has happened.”

“My poor brother!”

“Poor Jean!”

“Do you think it must be cut off?”

“They hope not.”

“Cut off? — what?”” asked the king.'

“His arm, sire!”

“Cut off the viscount's arm! — why, pray?”

“Because he has been very seriously wounded.”

“Wounded in the arm.”

“Oh, yes, sire.”

“Ay, in some drunken squabble in a filthy tavern.”

“No, sire; on the highway.”

“But how did that happen?”

“It happened because an enemy wished to assassinate him, sire.”

“Ah, the poor viscount!” exclaimed the king, who had very little feeling for the sufferings of others, although he could look wonderfully compassionate. “But to assassinate him! This is a serious matter, is it not, Sartines?”

The minister looked much less moved than the king, but was, in realty, a great deal more uneasy on the subject. He drew near the sisters.

“Can it be possible,” asked he, anxiously, “that such a misfortune has occurred?”

“Oh, yes, sir, it is but too possible,” said Chon, very mournfully.

“Assassinated! — but how?”

“He was waylaid.”

“Waylaid? Ha! Sartines, this is an affair for you,” said the king.

“Relate all the circumstances, madame,” said the minister, “and do not, I entreat you, allow your just resentment to exaggerate them. We shall, by being strictly just, be most severe; and, where things are looked at closely and coolly, they are often not so very serious as we at first apprehended.”

“Oh,” cried Chon, “this is not an affair which has been related to me! I saw the whole!”

“Well, but what did you see, Chon?” inquired the king.

“I saw a man fall on my brother, and, having forced him to draw in self-defense, wound him shockingly.”

“Was the man alone?” asked Sartines.

“No, indeed he had six others with him.”

“The poor viscount!” said the king, looking at the countess, that he might know exactly what degree of grief to exhibit — “forced to fight! poor fellow I” But, seeing that she did not relish this pleasantry — “And he was wounded?” he added in a compassionate voice.

“But how did the quarrel come about?” asked the minister of police, trying if it were possible to betray her into telling the truth.

“Oh, in the most trifling way in the world! All about post-horses which I wanted in order to hasten back to my sister, as I had promised to be with her this morning.”

“Ha! Sartines, this merits punishment, does it not?” said the king.

“It does, sire, and I shall take all the necessary information on the subject. What was the name of the aggressor, madame, his condition — his rank?”

“His rank? — he is a military man — an officer in the bodyguard of the dauphin, I think. As to his name — he is called Baverney, Faverney, Taverney — yes, Taverney — that is it.”

“Madame, to-morrow he shall sleep in the Bastille.”

“Oh, no!” said the countess, who until now had very diplomatically kept silence; “Oh, no!”

“Why, oh no?” asked the king; “why should not the fellow be imprisoned? You know I detest the military.”

“And I repeat, sire,” said the countess, doggedly, “that I am quite sure nothing will be done to the man who assassinated the viscount,” "Ha! countess, this is very curious — explain it, if you please."

"That is easily done — he will be protected."

"And who will protect him?"

"The person at whose instigation he acted."

"And that person will protect him against us? Oh, that is rather too much, countess!"

"Madame — " stammered the Count de Sartines, for he felt that a blow was coming, and he was not prepared to ward it off.

"Yes!" exclaimed the countess, "he will be protected against you, and there will be nothing said. Do you suppose you are the master, sire?"

The king felt the blow which the minister had foreseen, and he determined to bear it.

"I see that you are going to plunge into politics," said he, "and find out some reasons of state for a paltry duel!"

"There, now! you abandon me already; the assassination has become nothing but a duel, now that you suspect the quarter whence it comes!"

"So! I am in for it!" said the king, going to the great Chinese fountain, turning the cock, and making the birds sing, the fishes swim, and the mandarins come out.

"And you don't know who aimed this blow?" asked the countess, pulling the ears of Zamore, who was lying at her feet.

"No, on my word!" said the king.

"Or suspect?"

"I swear I don't. Do you, countess?"

"No. I don't suspect, I know positively — I am going to tell you, and it will be no news to you, I am certain!"

"Countess, countess, do you know that in what you said you gave the lie to your king?" and Louis tried to look dignified.

"Sire, I know I am a little warm, but if you think I shall quietly allow my brother to be killed by the Duke de Choiseul —

"Yes — there it is — Choiseul again!" exclaimed the king in a loud voice, as if he had not expected this name, which for the last ten minutes he had been dreading.

"Well, it is because your majesty is determined not to see that he is my worst enemy; but I see it plainly, for he does not even take the trouble to hide his hatred from me."

"He is far from hating any one to that degree that he would cause him to be assassinated."

"There you see — when Choiseul is mentioned, you are on his side immediately."

"Now, my dear countess, politics again!"

"Oh, Monsieur de Sartines!" cried she, "is it not dreadful to be treated thus?"

"No, no — if it be as you think —

"I know what I think," she interrupted, passionately, "and what I am sure of — the affair will be given up!"

"Now, do not get angry, countess," said the king, "it shall not be given up — you shall be defended, and so well — "

"So well what?"

"So well that he who attacked poor Jean shall pay dearly for it."

"Yes, the instrument will be broken, but the hand that directed it will be taken and kindly pressed!"

"Well, but is it not right to punish this Monsieur Taverney, who actually committed the assault?"

"Oh, certainly, but it is not right, that what you do for me is no more than would be done to a soldier who should give a blow to *a* shopkeeper at the theater. I will not be treated like every common person. If you do not do more for those whom you love than for those who are indifferent to you, I had rather remain alone in obscurity like these latter — their relations, at least, are not assassinated!"

"Oh, countess!" said the king, imploringly, "I got up for once in such good spirits, disposed to be gay, happy, and pleased with every one, and now you are spoiling my morning completely."

"Very fine, indeed! It is a delightful morning for me, of course, when my relations are being massacred!"

The king, in spite of his internal fears of the terrible storm that was gathering, could not help smiling at the word "massacred." The countess started up in a towering passion.

"Ah! is that the way you pity me?" said she.

"Now, now — do not get angry."

"Yes — I will get angry!"

"You are very wrong — you look lovely when you smile — but really ugly in a passion."

"What matters it to me how I look, when my beauty does not prevent me from being sacrificed to state intrigues."

"Now, my dear countess —

"No, no. Choose between me and Choiseul!"

"Dear creature, it is impossible to choose — you are both necessary to me."

"Well, then, I shall retire and leave the field to my enemies; I shall die of grief, but the Duke de Choiseul will be satisfied, and that will console you."

"I swear to you, countess, that he has not any dislike to you; on the contrary, he admires you. He is an excellent man, after all," added the king, in a louder tone, that the minister of police might hear him.

"An excellent man! Sire, *you* wish to *drive* me to desperation. An excellent man who causes people to be assassinated?"

"Mere suspicion." said the king.

"And, besides," Sartines ventured to say, "a quarrel, a duel between military men is so common — so natural!"

"Ha! Monsieur le Sartines, and are you also against me?" cried the countess.

The minister of police understood this *tu quoque*, and retreated before her anger. There was a moment of deep and ominous silence.

"Ah, Chon!" said the king, in the midst of the general consternation, ""you see your handiwork!"

"Your majesty will pardon me," said she, "if the grief of the sister has made me forget for a moment my duty as a subject."

"Kind creature!" murmured the king. "Come, countess, forget and forgive!"

"Yes, sire, I shall forgive — only I shall set out for Luciennes, and thence for Boulogne."

"Boulogne-sur-mer?" asked the king.

"Yes, sire; I shall quit a kingdom where the king is afraid of his minister."

"Madame!" exclaimed Louis, with an offended air.

"Sire, that I may not any longer be wanting in respect to you, permit me to retire," and the countess rose, observing with the corner of her eye what effect her movement had produced.

The king gave his usual heavy sigh of weariness, which said plainly, "I am getting rather tired of this." Chon understood what the sigh meant, and saw that it would be dangerous to push matters to extremity. She caught her sister by the gown, and approaching the king:

"Sire," said she, "my sister's affection for the poor viscount has carried her too far. It is I who have committed the fault — it is I who must repair it. As the humblest of your majesty's subjects, I beg from your majesty justice for *my* brother. I accuse nobody — your wisdom will discover the guilty."

"Why, that is precisely what I wish myself," said the king, "that justice should be done. If a man have not committed a certain crime, let him not be reproached with it; but if he have, let him be punished." And Louis looked toward the countess as he spoke, with the hope of once more catching the hopes he had entertained of an amusing morning — a morning which seemed turning out so dismally. The good-natured countess could not help pitying the king, whose want of occupation and emptiness of mind made him feel tired and dispirited except when with her. She turned half round, for she had already made a step toward the door, and said, with the sweetest submission, "Do I wish for anything but justice? — only let not *my* well-grounded suspicions be cruelly repulsed."

"Your suspicions are sacred to me, countess," cried the king; "and if they be changed into certainty, *you* shall see. But now I think of it — how easy to know the truth! — let the Duke de Choiseul be sent for."

"Oh, your majesty knows that he never comes into these apartments — he would scorn to do so. His sister, however, is not of his mind — she wishes for nothing better than to be here."

The king laughed. The countess, encouraged by this, went on; "The Duke de Choiseul apes the dauphin — he will not compromise his dignity."

"The dauphin is religious, countess."

"And the duke a hypocrite, sire."

"I promise you, — *my* dear countess, you shall see him here, for I shall summon him. He must come, as it is on state business, and we shall have all explained in Chon's presence, who saw all — we shall confront them, as the lawyers say. Eh, Sartines? Let some one go for the Duke de Choiseul."

" And let some one bring me my monkey. Doree, *my* monkey!" cried the countess.

These words, which were addressed to the waiting-maid, who was arranging a dressing-box, could be heard in the anteroom when the door was opened to dispatch the usher for the prime minister, and they were responded to by a broken, lisping voice:

“The countess's monkey! — that must be me — I hasten to present myself.”

And with these words entered a little hunchback, dressed with the utmost splendor.

“The Duke de Tresmes!” said the countess, annoyed by his appearance; “I did not summon you, duke.”

“You asked for your monkey, madame,” said the duke, bowing to the king, the countess, and the minister, “and seeing among the courtiers no ape half so ugly as myself, I hastened to obey your call,” and the duke laughed, showing his great teeth so oddly that the countess could not help laughing also.

“Shall I stay?” asked the duke, as if his whole life could not repay the favor.

“Ask his majesty, duke — he is master here.”

The duke turned to the king, with the air of a suppliant.

“Yes, stay, duke, stay!” said the king, glad to find any additional means of amusement. At this moment the usher threw open the doors.

“Oh!” said the king, with a slight expression of dissatisfaction on his face, “is it the Duke de Choiseul already!”

“No, sire,” replied the usher, “it is monseigneur the dauphin, who desires to speak to you.”

The countess almost started from her chair with joy, for she imagined the dauphin was going to become her friend; but Chon, who was more clear-sighted, frowned.

“Well, where is the dauphin?” asked the king, impatiently.

“In your majesty's apartments — his royal highness awaits your return.”

“It is fated I shall never have a minute's repose,” grumbled the king. Then, all at once remembering that the audience demanded by the dauphin might spare him the scene with M, de Choiseul, he thought better of it. “I am coming,” said he, “I am coming. Good-by, countess. See how I am dragged in all directions!”

“But will your majesty go just when the Duke de Choiseul is coming?”

“What can I do? — the first slave is the king. Oh, if those rogues of philosophers knew what it is to be a king! — but above all, a king of France.”

“But, sire, you can stay.”

“Oh, I must not keep the dauphin waiting. People say already that I have no affection except for my daughters.”

“But what shall I say to the duke?”

“Oh, tell him to come to my apartments, countess.”

And, to put an end to any farther remonstrance, he kissed her hand, and disappeared running, as was his habit whenever he feared to lose a victory gained by his temporizing police and his petty cunning. The countess trembled with passion, and clasping her hands she exclaimed, “So he has escaped once more!”

But the king did not hear those words; the door was already closed behind him, and he passed through the anterooms, saying to the courtiers, “Go in, gentlemen, go in, the countess will see you; but you will find her very dull, on account of the accident which has befallen poor Viscount Jean.”

The courtiers looked at one another in amazement, for they had not heard of the accident. Many hoped that the viscount was dead, but all put on countenances suitable to the occasion. Those who were best pleased looked the most sympathetic, and they entered.

CHAPTER XXV.

The Salon of Timepieces.

IN THAT LARGE HALL of the palace of Versailles which was called the Salon of Timepieces, a young man walked slowly up and down, with his arms hanging and his head bent forward. He appeared to be about seventeen years of age, was of a fair complexion, and his eyes were mild in their expression; but it must be acknowledged that there was a slight degree of vulgarity in his demeanor. On his breast sparkled a diamond star, rendered more brilliant by the dark violet-colored velvet of his coat; and his white satin waistcoat, embroidered with silver, was crossed by the blue ribbon supporting the cross of St. Louis.

None could mistake in this young man the profile so expressive of dignity and kindliness which formed the characteristic type of the elder branch of the House of Bourbon, of which he was at once the most striking and most exaggerated image. In fact, Louis Auguste, duke de Berry, dauphin of France (afterward Louis XVI.), had the Bourbon nose even longer and more aquiline than in his predecessors. His forehead was lower and more retreating than Louis XV. 's, and the double chin of his grandfather was so remarkable in him, that although he was at the time we speak of young and thin, his chin formed nearly one-third of the length of his face.

Although well made, there, was something embarrassed in the movement of his legs and shoulders, and his walk was slow and rather awkward. Suppleness, activity, and strength seemed centered only in his arms, and more particularly in his fingers, which displayed, as it were, that character which in other persons is expressed on the forehead, in the mouth, and in the eyes. The dauphin continued to pace in silence the Salon of Timepieces — the same in which, eight years before, Louis XV, had given to Madame de Pompadour the decree of the parliament exiling the Jesuits from the kingdom — and as he walked he seemed plunged in reverie.

At last, however, he seemed to become impatient of waiting there alone, and to amuse himself he began to look at the timepieces, remarking, as Charles V, had done, the differences which are found in the most regular clocks. These differences are a singular but decided manifestation of the inequality existing in all material things, whether regulated or not regulated by the hand of man. He stopped before the large clock at the lower end of the salon — the same place it occupies at present — which, by a clever arrangement of machinery, marks the days, the months, the years, the phases of the moon, the course of the planets — in short, exhibiting to the still more curious machine called man, all that is most interesting in his progressive movement through life to death.

The prince examined this clock with the eye of an amateur, and leaned now to the right, now to the left, to examine the movement of such or such a wheel. Then he returned to his place in front, watching how the second-hand glided rapidly on, like those flies which, with their long slender legs, skim over the surface of a pond without disturbing the liquid crystal of its waters. This contemplation naturally led him to think that a very great number of seconds had passed since he had been waiting there. It is true, also, that many had passed before he had ventured to send to inform the king that he was waiting for him.

All at once the hand on which the young prince's eyes were fixed stopped as if by enchantment., the wheels ceased their measured rotation, the springs became still, and deep silence took possession of the machine, but a moment before so full of noise and motion. No more ticking, no more oscillations, no more movement of the wheels or of the hands. The timepiece had died.

Had some grain of sand, some atom, penetrated into one of the wheels, and stopped its movements? or was the genius of the machine resting, wearied with its eternal agitation? Surprised by this sudden death, this stroke of apoplexy occurring before his eyes, the dauphin forgot why he had come thither, and how long he had waited. Above all, he forgot that hours are not counted in eternity by the beating of metal upon metal, nor arrested even for a moment in their course by the hindrance of any wheel, but that they are recorded on the dial of eternity, established even before the birth of worlds by the unchangeable hand of the Almighty. He therefore opened the glass door of the crystal pagoda, the genius of which had ceased to act, and put his head inside to examine the timepiece more closely. But the large pendulum was in his way; he slipped in his supple fingers, and took it off. This was not enough; the dauphin still found the cause of the lethargy of the machine hidden from him. He then supposed that the person who had the care of the clocks of the palace had forgotten to wind up this timepiece, and he took down the key from a hook and began to wind it up like a man quite accustomed to the “business. But he could only turn it three times — a proof that something was astray in the mechanism. He drew from his pocket a little file, and with the end of it pushed one of the wheels; they all creaked for half a second, then stopped again.

The malady of the clock was becoming serious; the dauphin, therefore, began carefully to unscrew several parts of it, laying them all in order on a console beside him. Then, drawn on by his ardor, he began to take to pieces still more and more of the complicated machine, and to search minutely into its most hidden and mysterious recesses. Suddenly he uttered a cry of joy — he discovered that a screw which acted on one of the springs had become loose, and had thus impeded the movement of the motive wheel.

He immediately began to screw it; and then, with a wheel in his left hand, and his little file in his right, he plunged his head again into the interior of the clock.

He was busy at his work, absorbed in contemplation of the mechanism of the timepiece, when a door opened, and a voice announced, “The king!”

But the dauphin heard nothing but the melodious sound of that ticking, which his hand had again awakened, as if it were the beating of a heart which a clever physician had restored to life.

The king looked around on all sides, and it was some minutes before he discovered the dauphin, whose head was hidden in the opening, and whose legs alone were visible. He approached, smiling, and tapped his grandson on the shoulder.

“What the devil are you doing there?” said he. The dauphin drew out his head quickly, but, at the same time, with all the care necessary to avoid doing any harm to the beautiful object which he had undertaken to mend.

“Sire — your majesty sees,” replied the young man, blushing at being surprised in the midst of his occupations, “I was amusing myself until you came.”

“Yes, in destroying my clock — a very pretty amusement!”

“Oh no, sire! I was mending it. The principal wheel would not move; it was prevented by this screw. I have tightened the screw, and now it goes.”

“But you will blind yourself with looking into that thing. I would not put my head into such a trap for all the gold in the world.”

“Oh, it will do me no harm, sire — I understand all about it. I always take to pieces, clean and put together again, that beautiful watch which your majesty gave me on my fourteenth birthday.”

“Very well; but stop now, if you please, and leave your mechanics. You wish to speak to me?”

“I, sire?” said the young man, coloring again.

“Of course, since you sent to say you were waiting for me.”

“It is true, sire,” replied the dauphin, with downcast eyes.

“Well, what is it? Answer me — if it is of no importance I must go, for I am just setting off for Marly.” Louis XV, as was his custom, already sought to escape.

The dauphin placed his wheel and his file on a chair, which indicated that he had really something important to say, since he interrupted his important work for it.

“Do you want money!” asked the king, sharply. “If so, I shall send you some;” and he made a step toward the door.

“Oh no, sire; I have still a thousand crowns remaining of the sum I received last month.”

“What economy!” said the king; “and how well Monsieur de la Vauguyon has educated him! I think he has precisely all the virtues I have not.”

The young prince made a violent effort over himself. “Sire,” said he, “is the dauphiness yet very far distant?”

“Do you not know as well as I how far off she is?” replied the king.

“I?” stammered out the dauphin.

“Of course — you heard the account of her journey read yesterday. Last Monday she was at Nancy, and she ought to be now about forty-five leagues from Paris.”

“Sire, does not your majesty think her royal highness travels very slowly?”

“By no means,” replied the king; “I think she travels very fast for a woman. And then, you know, there are the receptions and the rejoicings on the road. She travels at least ten leagues every two days, one with another.”

“I think it very little, sire,” said the dauphin, timidly.

Louis XV. was more and more astonished at the appearance of impatience, which he had been far from suspecting.

“Come, come,” said he, smiling slyly, “don't be impatient; your dauphiness will arrive soon.”

“Sire, might not these ceremonies on the road be shortened?” continued the dauphin.

“Impossible; she has already passed through two or three towns, where she should have made a stay, without stopping.”

“But these delays will be eternal; and then, sire, I think besides — ” said the dauphin, still more timidly.

“Well, what do you think? Let me hear it; speak!”

“I think that the service is badly performed.” — ” How? — what service?”

“The service for the journey.”

“Nonsense! I sent thirty thousand horses to be ready on the road, thirty carriages, sixty wagons — I don't know how many carts. If carts, carriages, and horses were put in file, they would reach from this to Strasbourg. How can you say, then, there is bad attendance on the road?”

“Well, sire, in spite of all your majesty's goodness, I am almost certain that what I say is true; but perhaps I have used an improper term, and instead of badly performed, I should have said badly arranged.”

The king raised his head, and fixed his eyes on the dauphin; he began to comprehend that more was meant than met the ear, in the few words which his royal highness had ventured to utter.

“Thirty thousand horses,” he repeated, “thirty carriages, sixty wagons, two regiments. I ask you, M. Philosopher, have you ever heard of a dauphiness entering France with such an attendance as that before?”

“I confess, sire, that things have been royally done, and as your majesty alone knows how to do them. But has your majesty specially recommended that these horses and carriages should be employed solely for her royal highness and her train?”

The king looked at his grandson for the third time. A vague suspicion began to sting him, a slight remembrance to illuminate his mind, and a sort of confused analogy between what the dauphin was saying and a disagreeable circumstance of late occurrence began to suggest itself to him.

“A fine question!” said he. “Certainly, everything has been ordered for her royal highness, and for her alone, and therefore, I repeat, she cannot fail to arrive very soon. But why do you look at me in that way?” added he, in a decided tone, which to the dauphin seemed even threatening. “Are you amusing yourself in studying my features as you study the springs of your mechanical works?”

The dauphin had opened his mouth to speak, but became silent at this address.

“Very well,” said the king, sharply; “it appears you have no more to say — hey? Are you satisfied now? Your dauphiness will arrive soon; all is arranged delightfully for her on the road; you are as rich as Croesus with your own private purse. And now, since your mind is at ease, be good enough to put my clock in order again.”

The dauphin did not stir.

“Do you know,” said the king, laughing, “I have a great mind to make you the principal watchmaker for the palace, with a good salary?”

The dauphin looked down, and, intimidated by the king's look, took up the wheel and the file which he had laid on the chair. The king, in the meantime, had quietly gained the door.

“What the devil,” said he, looking at him, “did he mean with his badly arranged service? Well, well! I have escaped another scene, for he is certainly dissatisfied about something.”

In fact, the dauphin, generally so patient, had stamped with his foot as the king turned away from him.

“He is commencing again,” murmured the king, laughing; “decidedly, I have nothing for it but to fly.” But just as he opened the door, he saw on the threshold the Duke de Choiseul, who bowed profoundly.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The Court of King Petaud.

THE KING MADE a step backward at the sight of this new actor in the scene, come, no doubt, to prevent him from escaping as he had hoped. “Ha!” thought he, “I had forgot him; but he is welcome, and I will make him pay for what the others have made me suffer.”

“Ha! you are there!” cried he. “I sent for you — did you know that?”

“Yes, sire,” replied the minister, coldly; “I was dressing to wait on your majesty when your orders reached me.”

“I wished to speak to you on serious matters,” said the king, frowning, in order, if possible, to intimidate his minister. Unfortunately for the king. Monsieur de Choiseul was one of the men least likely to be daunted in his dominions.

“And I also, if it please your majesty,” said he, bowing, “have serious matters to speak of.” At the same time, he exchanged a look with the dauphin, who was still half hidden by the clock.

The king stopped short. “Ha! thought he, “now I am caught between two fires; there is no escape.”

“You know, I presume,” said the king, hastily, in order to have the first word, “that poor Viscount Jean has had a narrow escape from assassination, that is to say, that he has received a wound in his arm?”

“I came to speak of that affair to your majesty.”

“I understand — you wished to prevent unpleasant reports?”

“I wished, sire, to anticipate all remarks.”

“Then you know the whole particulars, sir?” inquired the king, in a significant manner.

“Perfectly.”

“Ha!” said the king, “I was told so in a place likely to be well-informed.”

The Duke of Choiseul seemed quite unmoved. The dauphin continued turning the screw in the clock, his head bent down, but he lost not a syllable of the conversation.

“I shall now tell you how the affair happened,” said the king.

“Does your majesty think that you have been well-informed?” asked Monsieur de Choiseul.

“Oh, as to that —

“We are all attention, sire.”

“We!” repeated the king.

“Yes; his royal highness the dauphin and I.”

“His royal highness the dauphin?” repeated the king, turning his eyes from the respectful Choiseul to the attentive Louis Augustus, “and pray in what does this squabble concern his royal highness?”

“It concerns his royal highness,” said the duke, bowing to the young prince, “because her royal highness the dauphiness was the cause of it.”

“The dauphiness the cause?” said the king, starting.

“Certainly; if you are ignorant of that, sire, your majesty has been very badly informed.”

“The dauphiness and Jean Dubarry!” said the king; “this is likely to be a curious tale! Come, explain this, Monsieur de Choiseul, conceal nothing, even though it were the dauphiness herself who pierced Dubarry's arm!”

“Sire, it was not the dauphiness!” replied Choiseul, still calm and unmoved; “it was one of the gentlemen of her escort.”

“Oh,” said the king, again becoming grave, “an officer whom you know.”

“No, sire, but an officer whom your majesty ought to know, if you remember all who have served you well — an officer whose father's name was honored at Philipsbourg, at Fontenoy, at Mahon — a Taverney — Maison-Rouge.”

The dauphin seemed to draw a deeper breath, as if to inhale the name and thus preserve it in his memory.

“A Maison Rouge,” said the king; “certainly I know the name; and why did he attack Jean, whom I like so much; Perhaps because I like him! — such absurd jealousies, such discontents, are almost seditious!”

“Sire, will your majesty deign to listen to me,” said Monsieur de Choiseul.

The king saw there was no other way for him to escape from this troublesome business but by getting in a passion, and he exclaimed, “I tell you, sir, that I see the beginning of a conspiracy against my peace, an organized persecution of my family!”

"Ah, sire," said Monsieur de Choiseul, "is it for defending the dauphiness, your majesty's daughter-in-law, that these reproaches are cast on a brave young man?"

The dauphin raised his head and folded his arms. "For my part," said he, "I cannot but feel grateful to the man who exposed his life for a princess who in a fortnight will be my wife."

"Exposed his life! — exposed his life!" stammered the king; "what about? Let me know that — what about?"

"About the horses of her royal highness, the dauphiness," replied the duke; "Viscount Jean Dubarry, who was already traveling very fast, took upon him to insist on having some of those horses which were appropriated to the use of her royal highness — no doubt that he might get on still faster."

The king bit his lip and changed color — the threatening phantom from which he had so lately hoped to escape now reappeared in all its horrors. "It is not possible," murmured he, to gain time. "I know the whole affair — you have been misinformed, duke."

"No, sire, I have not been misinformed; what I have the honor to tell your majesty is the simple truth. Viscount Jean Dubarry offered an insult to the dauphiness by insisting on taking for his use horses appointed for her service. After having ill-treated the master of the posthouse, he was going to take them by force when the Chevalier Philip de Taverney arrived, sent forward by her royal highness to have horses in readiness for her, and after he had several times summoned him in a friendly and conciliating manner — "

"Oh, oh!" grumbled the king.

"I repeat, sire, after he had several times, in a friendly and conciliating manner, summoned the viscount to desist, he was at length obliged to draw his sword."

"Yes," said the dauphin, "I pledge myself for the truth of what the duke asserts."

"Then you also know of this affair;" said the king, exceedingly surprised.

"I know all the circumstances perfectly, sire." replied the dauphin.

The minister bowed, delighted at having such a supporter. "Will your royal highness deign to proceed?" said he. "His majesty will doubtless have more confidence in the assertions of his august son than in mine."

“Yes, sire,” continued the dauphin, without testifying for the Duke de Choiseul's zeal in his cause all that gratitude which might have been expected, “yes, sire, I know the circumstances, and I had come to tell your majesty that Viscount Dubarry has not only insulted the dauphiness in interfering with the arrangements made for her journey, but he has also insulted me in opposing a gentleman of my regiment who was doing his duty.”

The king shook his head. “We must inquire,” said he; “we must inquire.”

“I have already inquired, sire,” said the dauphin, gently, “and have no doubt in the matter; the viscount drew his sword on *my* officer.”

“Did he draw first?” asked the king, happy to seize any chance of putting his adversary in fault.

The dauphin colored, and looked to the minister for assistance.

“Sire,” said the latter, “swords were crossed by two men, one of whom was insulting, the other defending, the dauphiness — that is all.”

“Yes, but which was the aggressor?” asked the king; “I know poor Jean — he is as gentle as a lamb.”

“The aggressor, in my opinion, sire,” said the dauphin, with his usual mildness, “is he who is in the wrong.”

“It is a delicate matter to decide,” replied the king; “the aggressor he who is in the wrong? — in the wrong? — but if the officer was insolent?”

“Insolent!” cried the Duke de Choiseul; “insolent toward a man who wanted to take by force horses sent there for the use of the dauphiness? Is it possible you can think so, sire?”

The dauphin turned pale, but said nothing. The king saw that he was between two fires.

“I should say warm, perhaps, not insolent,” said he.

“But your majesty knows,” said the minister, taking advantage of the king's having yielded a step, to make a step forward; “your majesty knows that a zealous servant can never be in the wrong.”

“Oh, perhaps! But how did you become acquainted with this event, sir?” said he, turning sharply to the dauphin, without ceasing, however, to observe the duke, who endeavored vainly to hide the embarrassment which this sudden question caused him.

“By a letter, sire,” replied the dauphin.

“A letter from whom?”

“A letter from a person concerned for her royal highness, the dauphiness, and who thinks it singular that any one should dare to affront her.”

“"Ha!” cried the king, “more mysteries, secret correspondences, plots! Every one is beginning again to plan annoyances for me, as in the time of the Marchioness de Pompadour!”

“No, sire,” said the minister, “this affair is no plot, and can be settled very simply. It is the crime of treason in the second degree; let the guilty person be punished, and all will be settled.”

At this word, punished, Louis XV, saw in fancy the countess furious, and Chon in a rage — he saw peace flying from his dwelling (peace, which he had been seeking all his life, but had never been able to find), and intestine war with crooked nails and eyes red with tears entering in her stead.

“Punished!” cried he, “without the accused having been heard? — without knowing which side is in the right? You make a very extraordinary proposal to me, duke — you wish to draw odium on me!”

“But, sire, who will henceforward respect her royal highness the dauphiness, if a severe example is not made of the person who first insulted her?”

“Certainly, sire,” added the dauphin, “it would be a scandal.”

“An example? — a scandal?” cried the king. “Mordieu! if I make an example of all the scandalous things that go on around me, I may pass my life in signing arrests for the Bastille! I have signed enough of them as it is, Heaven knows!”

“In this case it is necessary, sire,” said the duke.

“Sire, I entreat your majesty,” said the dauphin.

“What! do you not think him punished already, by the wound he has received?”

“No, sire; for he might have wounded the Chevalier de Taverney.”

“And in such a case, what would you have done?”

“I should have demanded his head.”

“But that was only what was done in the case of Monsieur de Montgomery, for killing King Henri II.,” said the king.

“He killed the king by accident, sir. Viscount Dubarry insulted the dauphiness intentionally.”

“And you, sir,” said the king, turning to the dauphin, “do you wish to have Jean's head? ”

“No, sire; I am not in favor of the punishment of death, as your majesty knows; I shall merely demand from you the viscount's banishment.”

The king started up.

“Banishment for a tavern quarrel? Louis, you are severe, notwithstanding your philanthropical notions; it is true that before becoming philanthropist you were a mathematician, and —

“Will your majesty deign to proceed?”

“A mathematician would sacrifice the universe to his problem.”

“Sire,” said the dauphin, “I have no ill-will toward the Viscount Dubarry, personally.”

“With whom, then, are you angry?”

“With the insulter of her royal highness the dauphiness.”

“What a model for husbands!” cried the king, ironically; “but I am not so easy of belief. I see very well who is attacked under all this — I see to what people would lead me with their exaggerations!”

“Sire,” said M, de Choiseul, “do not be misled — nothing has been exaggerated — the public are indignant at the insolence which has been shown in this affair.”

“The public? — there is another monster with which you frighten yourself, or rather with which you would frighten me. Shall I listen to this public, which by the thousand mouths of libelists, and pamphleteers, and ballad-mongers, tells me that I am robbed, tossed in a blanket, betrayed on all hands? No, no; I let the public talk, and I laugh. Do as I do. Pardieu! close your ears — and when your great public is tired of bawling it will stop. There you are again, making your discontented bow — and Louis is putting on a sulky face! Heavens! is it not singular that what is done for the lowest individual cannot be done for me? I cannot be allowed to live quietly in my own fashion! Everybody hates what I love, and eternally loves what I hate! Am I in my senses, or am I a fool? Am I the master, or am I not?”

The dauphin took up his file, and returned to his work in the clock. The Duke de Choiseul bowed exactly as before.

“There now — no answer! Answer something, will you? Mordieu! you will kill me with vexation — first at your talk, then at your silence! — with your petty hatreds and your petty fears!”

“I do not hate the Viscount Dubarry,” said the dauphin, smiling.

“And I do not fear him, sire,” said the minister, haughtily.

“You are both very ill-natured,” cried the king, pretending to be in a great passion, when he was in reality only out of temper; “you wish to make me the laughing-stock of all Europe — to give my cousin of Prussia something to make jests on — to make me realize the court of King Petaud, which that rascal, Voltaire, has described — but, I will not be what you wish! — no! — you shall not have that satisfaction. I know what concerns my own honor, and I shall attend to it in my own way, and only as I choose myself!”

“Sire,” said the dauphin, with that immovable mildness which characterized him, but at the same time with that constant perseverance of his, “this is not a matter which concerns your honor — it is the dignity of the dauphiness which has been attacked.”

“His royal highness is right, sire.” said the duke, “let but your majesty speak the word, and no one will again dare to insult her.”

“ And who would insult her? — no one intended to insult her. Jean is a stupid fellow, but he is not malignant.”

“Well, then, sire,” continued the minister, “let it be placed to the account of stupidity, and let him ask pardon of the Chevalier de Taverney for his mistake.”

“I said before,” cried the king, “that I have nothing to do in the affair; let Jean ask pardon, he is at liberty to do so; or let him decline, he is at liberty also.”

“The affair given up in that way, sire, I must take the liberty to inform your majesty, will be talked about.”

“So much the better!” exclaimed the king, “let it be talked about until I am deafened with it, provided I don't hear all this nonsense of yours!'

“Then,” replied the minister, with his imperturbable coolness, “I am authorized by your majesty to say that Viscount Dubarry did right?”

“Authorized by me? — authorized by me? — and in an affair of which I understand nothing! You mean, I see, to drive me to extremities; but take care, duke! — take care, and, Louis, I advise you to be more cautious how you conduct yourself toward me! I shall leave you to think of what I have said, for I am tired out — I cannot bear this any longer. Goodby, gentlemen! I am going to see my daughters, and then I shall take refuge at Marly, where I may hope for some tranquillity, if you do not follow me.”

At this moment, and as the king was going toward the door, it was opened, and an usher appeared.

“Sire,” said he, “her royal highness the Princess Louise is awaiting your majesty in the gallery to bid you farewell.”

“To bid me farewell?” exclaimed the king, in alarm, “where is she going?”

“Her royal highness says that she has had your majesty's permission to leave the palace.”

“Ha! another scene! — this is my bigot daughter going to show off some of her follies — in truth, I am the most wretched of men!”

And he left the apartment running.

“His majesty has given us no answer,” said the Duke de Choiseul; “what has your royal highness decided on?”

“Ah, there it strikes!” said the young prince, listening with either a real or a pretended joy to the clock which he had made to go once more.

The minister frowned and retired backward from the Salon of Timepieces, leaving the dauphin alone.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Madame Louise of France.

THE KING'S eldest daughter awaited him in the great gallery of Lebrun, the same in which Louis XIV., in 1683, had received the Doge Imperiali and the four Genoese senators sent to implore pardon for the republic.

At the farther end of the gallery, opposite the door by which the king must enter, were three or four ladies of honor, who seemed in the utmost consternation. Louis arrived just at the moment when groups began to form in the vestibule, for the resolution which the princess had taken only that morning was now spreading on all sides through the palace.

The Princess Louise possessed a majestic figure and a truly regal style of beauty, yet a secret sadness had left its lines on her fair forehead. Her austere practice of every virtue, and her respect for the great powers of the State — powers which for the last fifty years had only obtained a semblance of respect from interest or from fear — had caused her to be regarded with veneration by the court. We must add that she was loved even by the people, although a feeling of disaffection toward their *masters* was now general. The word tyrants had not yet been heard.

She was loved because her virtue was not stern. She was not loudly talked of, but all knew that she had a heart. She manifested this every day by works of charity, while others only showed it by shameless self-indulgence. Louis XV, feared this daughter, for the simple reason that he esteemed her. There were even times when he went so far as to be proud of her; and she was the only one of his children whom he spared in his sharp raillery or his silly familiarities. He called her madame, while the Princesses Adelaide, Victoria, and Sophie, he named Loque, Chiffe, and Graille.* Since the period when Marshal Saxe carried with him to the tomb the soul of the Turennes and the Condes, and with the Queen Maria Leczinska passed away the governing mind of a Maria Theresa, all became mean and worthless around the throne of France. The Princess Louise, whose character was truly regal, and, compared with those around her, seemed even heroic, alone remained to adorn the crown, like a pearl of price amid false stones and tinsel. We should be wrong in concluding from this that Louis XV, loved his daughter. Louis, it is well known, loved no one but himself; we only affirm that he preferred her to all his other children.

*Tag, rag, and scrap.

When he entered, he found the princess in the center of the gallery, leaning on a table inlaid with crimson jasper and lapis lazuli. She was dressed entirely in black, and her beautiful hair, which was without powder, was covered by a double roll of lace. A deeper shade of sadness than usual rested on her brow. She looked at no one in the apartment, but from time to time her melancholy gaze wandered over the portraits of the kings of Europe which ornamented the gallery, at the head of whom were those of her ancestors, the kings of France.

The black dress which she wore was the usual traveling costume of princesses. It concealed large pockets, still worn as in the times of the good housewife-like queens, and the Princess Louise, imitating them in that also, had the numerous keys of her chests and wardrobes suspended at her waist by a gold chain.

The king's face assumed a very serious expression when he saw how silent all in the gallery were, and how attentively they awaited the result of the interview between him and his daughter. But the gallery was so long that the spectators at either end might see, but they could not hear what passed — they had a right to see — it was their duty not to hear.

The princess advanced a few steps to meet the king, and taking his hand she kissed it respectfully.

“They tell me you are setting out on a journey, madame,” said he; “are you going into Picardy?”

“No, sire,” she replied.

“Then I presume,” said he in a louder voice, “that you are about to make a pilgrimage to Noirmontiers?”

“No, sire. I am going to retire to the convent of the Carmelites at St. Denis, of which you know I have the right to be abbess.”

The king started, but he preserved his countenance unmoved, although in reality his heart was troubled.

“Oh, no — no! my daughter!” he said, “you will not leave me. It is impossible you can leave me!”

“My dear father, it is long since I decided on abandoning the world — your majesty permitted me to make that decision — do not now, I entreat you, my dear father, oppose my wishes.”

“Yes, certainly, you wrung from me the permission of which you speak. I gave it, but still hoped that when the moment of departure came your heart would fail you. You ought not to bury yourself in a cloister — by acting so, you forget what is due to your rank — it is grief or want of fortune which makes the convent be sought as a refuge. The daughter of the king of France is certainly not poor; and, if she be unhappy, the world ought not to know it.”

The king's thoughts and even his language seemed to become more elevated as he entered more and more into the part he was called on to play — that of a king and a father. This is, indeed, a part never played ill, when pride and regret inspire the actor.

“Sire,” replied the princess, perceiving her father's emotion, and fearful that it might affect her more deeply than she desired at that moment, “Sire, do not by your tenderness for me weaken my resolution — my grief is no vulgar grief — therefore, my resolution to retire from the world is not in accordance with the usual customs of our day.”

“Your grief?” exclaimed the king, as if from a real impulse of feeling. “Have you, then, sorrows, my poor child?”

“Heavy, heavy sorrows, sire!”

“Why did you not confide them to me, my dearest daughter?”

“Because they are sorrows not to be assuaged by any mortal hand.”

“Not by that of a king?”

“Ah, no, sire!”

“Not by a father's hand?”

“No, sire, no!”

“But you are religious, Louise; does not religion give you strength?”

“Not sufficient strength yet, sire; therefore, *I* retire to a cloister in order to obtain more. In silence God speaks to the heart of man — in solitude man communes with God.”

“But, in acting thus, you are making a sacrifice for which nothing can compensate. The throne of France casts a majestic shadow over the children of its kings — ought not this reflected greatness to be sufficient for you?”

“The shadow of the cell is better, sire — it refreshes the weary spirit — it soothes the strong as well as the weak — the humble as well as the proud

— the high as well as the low.”

“Do you fear any danger by remaining? In that case, Louise, cannot the king defend you?”

“Sire, may God, in the first place, defend the king!”

“I repeat, Louise, that mistaken zeal leads you astray. It is good to pray, but not to pray always; and you — so good, so pious! — can you require such constant prayer?”

“Oh, my father! never can I offer up prayers enough to avert from us the woes which threaten us. If God has given me a portion of goodness — if for twenty years my only effort has been to purify my soul, I fear, alas! that I am yet far from having attained the goodness and the purity necessary for an expiatory sacrifice.”

The king started back and gazed at the princess with surprise. “Never have I heard you speak thus before, my dear child,” said he; “your ascetic life is making your reason wander.”

“Oh, sire, do not speak thus of a devotion the truest that ever subject offered to a king, or daughter to a father, in a time of need. Sire, that throne, of which you but now so proudly spoke as lending a protecting shade to your children — that throne totters. You feel not the blows which are dealt at its foundations, but I have seen them. Silently a deep abyss is preparing, which will engulf the monarchy! Sire, has any one ever told you the truth?”

The princess looked around to discover whether the attendants were fur enough to be out of hearing of her words, then she resumed:

“Well, sire, I know the truth! Too often have I heard the groans which the wretched send forth, when, as a Sister of Mercy, I visited the dark, narrow streets, the filthy lanes, the dismal garrets of the poor. In those streets, those lanes, those garrets, I have seen human beings dying of cold and hunger in winter, of heat and thirst in summer. You see not, sire, what the country is — you, who go merely from Versailles to Marly, and from Marly to Versailles. But in the country there is not grain — I do not say to feed the people, but even to sow for a new harvest — for the land, cursed by some adverse power, has received, but has given nothing back. The people, wanting bread, are filled with discontent. The air is filled in the twilight and at night with voices telling them of weapons, of chains, of prisons, of tyranny; and at these voices they awake, cease to complain, and commence to threaten. The parliaments demand the right of remonstrance — that is, the right to say to you openly what they whisper in private — 'King, you are ruining the kingdom — save it! — or we shall save it ourselves.' The soldiers, with their idle swords, furrow the land in which the philosophers have scattered the seeds of liberty. Men now see things which they formerly saw not, for our writers have laid all open to them — they know all that we do, and frown whenever their *masters* pass by. Your majesty's successor is soon to be married. When Anne of Austria's son was married, the city of Paris made presents to the new queen; now, it is not only silent, and offers nothing, but you have been obliged to use force to collect the taxes to pay the expense of bringing the daughter of Caesar to the palace of the son of St. Louis.

"The clergy had long ceased to pray to God; but, seeing the lands given away, privileges exhausted, coffers empty, they have begun again to pray for what they call the happiness of the people. And then, sire, must I tell you what you know so well — what you have seen with so much bitterness, although you have spoken of it to none? The kings, your brothers, who formerly envied us, now turn away from us. Your four daughters, sire, princesses of France, have not found husbands, and there are twenty princes in Germany, three in England, sixteen in the States of the North, without naming our relations, the Bourbons of Spain and Naples, who forget us, or turn away from us like the others. Perhaps the Turk would have taken us, had we not been daughters of his Most Christian Majesty. Not for myself, my father, do I care for this, or complain of it. Mine is a happy state, since it leaves me free; since I am not necessary to anyone of my family, and may retire from the world — in meditation and poverty may pray God to avert from your head, and from my nephew's, the awful storm I see gathering on the horizon of the future."

"My child! my daughter! it is your fears which make the future appear so dreadful."

"Sire, sire, remember that princess of antiquity, that royal prophetess! She foretold to her father and to her brothers war, destruction, conflagration, and her predictions were laughed at — they called her mad! Do not treat me as she was treated! Take care, oh, my father! — reflect, my king!"

Louis XV. folded his arms, and his head sank on his bosom. "My daughter," said he, "you speak very severely. Are those woes which you denounce caused by me?"

"God forbid that I should think so! They are the fruit of the times in which we live. You are whirled on in the career of events as we are all.

Only listen, sire, to the applause in the theater which follows any allusion against royalty. See, in the evenings, what joyous crowds descend the narrow stairs of the galleries, while the grand marble staircase is deserted. Sire, both the people and the courtiers have made for themselves pleasures quite apart from our pleasures. They amuse themselves without us; or rather, when we appear in the midst of their pleasures, they become dull. Alas!” continued the princess, her eyes swimming with tears — “alas! poor young men, affectionate young women! — love, sing, forget, be happy! Here, when I went among you, I only disturbed your happiness. Yonder, in my cloister, I shall serve you! Here, you hid your glad smiles in my presence, for fear of displeasing me. There, I shall pray — oh, God! with all my soul — for my king, for my sisters, for my nephews, for the people of France — for all whom I love with the energy of a heart which no earthly passion has exhausted.”

“My daughter,” said the king, after a melancholy silence, “I entreat you not to leave me — not at this moment, at least; you will break my heart!”

The princess seized Ms hand, and, fixing her eyes full of love on his noble features — ” No!” said she, “no, my father — not another hour in this palace! No, it is time for me to pray; I feel in myself strength to redeem, by my tears, those pleasures for which you sigh — you, who are yet young. You are the kindest of fathers, you are ever ready to pardon!”

“Stay with us, Louise! — stay with us!” said the king, pressing her to his heart.

The princess shook her head. “'My kingdom is not of this world!” said she, disengaging herself from her father's embrace. “Farewell, my father! — I have told you to-day what, for ten years, has laid heavy on my heart. The burden became too great. Farewell! I am satisfied — see, I can smile; I am now, at length, happy — I regret nothing!”

“Not even me, *my* daughter?”

“Ah, I should regret you, were I never to see you again; but you will sometimes come to St. Denis? You will not quite forget your child?”

“Oh, never, never!”

“Do not, my dear father, allow yourself to be affected. Let it not appear that this separation is to be a lasting one. My sisters, I believe, know nothing of it yet; ray women alone have been my confidantes. For eight days I have been making all my preparations; and I wish, that the report of my departure should only be spread when the great doors of St. Denis shall have closed on me; their heavy sound will prevent me from hearing any other.”

The king read in his daughter's eyes that her resolution was irrevocable. He wished, therefore, that she should go without disturbance. If she feared that sobs might shake her resolution, he feared them still more for his nerves. Besides, he wished to go to Marly that day, and too much grief at Versailles might have obliged him to put off his journey. He reflected, also, that when issuing from some orgies unfit both for a king and a father, he should never more meet that grave, sad face, which seemed always to reproach him for the careless, worthless existence which he led; and this thought was not disagreeable to him.

“Be it, then, as you wish, my child!” said he; “but, at least, receive, before you go, the blessing of a father whom you have always made perfectly happy.”

“Give me your hand only, sire, and let me kiss it. Bestow your precious blessing on me in thought.”

To those who knew the decision of the princess, it was a solemn spectacle to see her at every step she made advancing, yet in life, to the tombs of her ancestors — those ancestors who, from their golden frames, seemed to thank her that she hastened to rejoin them.

At the door of the gallery the king bowed, and returned without uttering a word. The court, according to etiquette, followed him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Loque, Chiffe, and Graille.

THE KING passed on to what was called the Cabinet of the Equipages. It was there that he was accustomed, before going to hunt or to drive out, to pass a few minutes in giving particular orders concerning the vehicles and attendants he should require during the rest of the day.

At the door of the gallery he bowed to the courtiers, and, by a wave of his hand, indicated that he wished to be alone. When they had left him, he passed through the cabinet to a corridor which led to the apartments of the princesses. Having reached the door, before which hung a curtain, he stopped for a moment, shook his head, and muttered between his teeth:

"There was but one of them good, and she is gone!"

This very flattering speech for those who remained was answered by a shrill chorus of voices; the curtain was raised, and the furious trio saluted their father with cries of "Thank you, father, thank you!"

"Ha, Loque!" said he, addressing the eldest of them, the Princess Adelaide. "You heard what I said — so much the worse for you. Be angry or not, just as you like — I only spoke the truth."

"Yes," said the Princess Victoire, "you tell us nothing new, sire. We always knew that you preferred Louise to us."

"In faith, quite true, Chiffe."

"And why do you prefer Louise?" asked the Princess Sophie, in a sharp voice.

"Because Louise never gave me any trouble," replied the king, showing that good-humored frankness of which, when he was perfectly pleased, Louis XV, was so complete a type.

"Oh, but she will give you trouble yet, rest assured!" replied the Princess Sophie, with such a peculiar emphasis that it drew the attention of the king more particularly to her. "I should be rather surprised if she did not, for she is not very fond of you."

“And pray, what do you know about her, Graille?” said he. “Did Louise, before going away, make you her confidante?”

“I can say most truly,” answered the princess, “that I return her affection with interest.”

“Oh, very well. Hate one another — detest one another as much as you choose; I am perfectly content; only do not summon me to restore order in the kingdom of the Amazons. However, I should like to know how poor Louise is to give me trouble.”

“Poor Louise!” repeated the three princesses, making different grimaces at the words. “You wish to know how she will give you trouble? Well, I shall tell you,” said the Princess Sophie.

The king stretched himself in a large easy-chair, placed near the door, so that he could at any moment make his escape.

“Louise is retiring to a convent, because she wishes to carry on some experiments which she cannot make so well in the palace.”

“Come, come!” said the king, “no insinuations against the virtue of your sister. No one beyond these walls has ever dared to sully that, though many things are said of you for which it were well there were no grounds. Do not you begin this subject!”

“I?”

“Yes, you!”

“Oh, I was not going to attack Louise's virtue,” said the Princess Sophie, very much hurt by the peculiar accent her father had given to the you, and by the marked repetition of it; “I only said she was going to make experiments.”

“Well, and if she does make experiments in chemistry, if she does make firearms, and wheels for chairs, if she does play on the flute, the drum, or the harpsichord, or even the violin — what harm would there be in it?”

“The experiments to which I alluded were experiments in politics.”

The king started — the princess went on.

“She is going to study philosophy and theology. She will continue the commentaries on the bull 'Unigenitus' — indeed, we must seem very useless beings when compared with her — a lady who writes theories concerning governments, systems of metaphysics, and theology!”

“And if these pursuits lead your sister to heaven, what harm can you see in them?” said the king, struck, however, with the connection there was between what the Princess Sophie was saying, and the manner of the

Princess Louise's departure, accompanied as it had been by a political exhortation. “If you envy her happiness you are very bad Christians.”

“No, on my honor!” said the Princess Victoire, “she has my full permission to go, but I shall take care not to follow her.”

“Nor I!” responded the Princess Adelaide.

“Nor I!” said the Princess Sophie.

“Besides, she always detested us,” said the first.

“You all?” the king asked.

“Yes, detested us all,” they replied.

“Oh, then, I see,” he said, “poor Louise has chosen to go to heaven that she may not meet any of her family again!”

This sarcasm made the three sisters laugh, but rather constrainedly, and Adelaide, the eldest, brought all her wit into play in order to deal her father a more weighty blow than he had given them.

“Ladies,” said she, with the sneering tone which was peculiar to her when roused from that habitual indolence which had procured for her the name of Loque, “you have either not found out, or you do not dare to tell the king, the real cause of Louise's departure!”

“Come, Loque — come! you have got some wicked tale to tell, I see. Let us hear it!”

“Sire, I fear it might vex you a little.”

“No, no — say you hope it will vex me, that would be nearer the truth.”

Madame Adelaide bit her lips. “Then I shall tell you the truth, sire.”

“Very fine! If you ever do tell the truth, cure yourself of the habit. The habit? Do I ever tell it? and yet you see I am not the worse for it, Heaven be praised!” and he shrugged his shoulders.

“Speak, sister, speak,” said the other two sisters, impatient to hear anything that might wound their father.

“Sweet little creatures!” growled the king; “see how they love their father!” But he consoled himself by thinking that he returned their love in kind.

“Well,” continued the Princess Adelaide; “what Louise dreaded most — for she was very precise on the score of etiquette — was — ”

“Was what?” exclaimed the king; “come, finish, since you have gone so far!”

“It was, sire, then, the intrusion of new faces at court.”

"Do you say intrusion?" asked he, by no means pleased with this beginning, for he saw to what it tended. "Intrusion? Are there intruders, then, in my palace? Am I forced to receive persons against my will?"

By this adroit turn he hoped to change the course of the conversation. But the Princess Adelaide felt herself on the right scent, and she was too cunning and too malicious to lose it, when she had so good an end in view as the annoyance of her father.

"Perhaps I was not quite correct — perhaps I used the wrong word — instead of intrusion, I should have said introduction."

"Oh, ah!" said the king, "that is an improvement — the other word was a disagreeable one, I confess — I like introduction better."

"And yet," continued the princess, "that is not the right word either."

"What is it, then?"

"It is presentation."

"Yes," cried the other sisters, "yes, you have found the right word now."

The king bit his lip. "Oh, do you think so?" said he.

"Yes," replied the Princess Adelaide, "my sister was very much afraid of new presentations."

"Well?" said the king, feeling what must come, and thinking it best to have done with it as speedily as possible, "well? go on!"

"Well, sire, she was consequently afraid of seeing the Countess Dubarry presented at court."

"Ha!" cried the king, with a burst of passion which he could not repress; "so you have been all this time getting this out! Mordieu! Madame Tell-truth, how you beat about the bush!"

"Sire," replied the princess, "if I have so long delayed in telling your majesty this, it is because respect closed my lips, and I should not have opened them but by your own command."

"Yes, yes; you would never have opened them, I suppose, to yawn, or to speak, or to bite!"

"I am quite certain, however, sire, that I have discovered the real motive which has made my sister retire into a convent."

"Well! — you are wrong!"

"Oh, sire!" they all three repeated, shaking their heads, "oh, sire! we are quite certain of what we say."

"Pshaw! You are all of a tale, I see. There is a conspiracy in my family. This is the reason the presentation cannot take place — this is the reason the princesses can never be seen when persons wish to visit them — that they give no answers to petitions, or requests for an audience.”

“What petitions? What requests for an audience?” asked the Princess Adelaide.

“Oh, you know,” replied the Princess Sophie, “the petitions of Mademoiselle Jeanne Vaubernier.” (This was the Countess Dubarry's name in the days of her poverty.)

“Yes,” added the Princess Victoire, “the requests for an audience of Mademoiselle Lange.” (Another name which she had borne.)

The king started up, furious with passion; his eye, generally calm and mild, now flashed in a manner rather alarming for the three sisters, and as none of this royal trio of heroines seemed courageous enough to bear the paternal wrath, they bent their heads before the storm.

“And now,” cried he, “was I wrong when I said the best had left me?”

“Sire,” said the Princess Adelaide, “you treat us very ill — worse than you treat your dogs!”

“And justly, too. My dogs, when I go near them, receive me kindly — caress me — they are real friends. So, adieu, ladies! I shall go to Charlotte, Bellefille, and Gredinet. Poor animals! Yes, I love them! And I love them more particularly because they do not bark out the truth.”

The king left the apartment in a rage; but had not taken three steps in the anteroom, when he heard his daughters singing in chorus the first verse of a ballad ridiculing the Countess Dubarry, which was then sung through the streets of Paris.

He was about to return — and perhaps the princesses would not have fared well had he done so — but he restrained himself, and went on, calling loudly, that he might not hear them, “Hola! the captain of the greyhounds! the captain of the greyhounds!”

The officer who bore this singular title hurried forward.

“Let the dogs be loosed!”

“Oh, sire!” cried the officer, placing himself in the king's way, “do not advance another step!”

“What now? what now?” said the king, stopping before a door, from under which was heard the sniffing of dogs, aware that their master was near.

“Sire,” said the officer, “pardon me, but I cannot permit your majesty to enter here.”

"Oh, I understand — the kennel is out of order. "Well, then, let Gredinet be brought out."

"Sire," continued the officer, with alarm depicted on his face, "Gredinet has neither eaten nor drunk for two days, and it is feared he is mad."

"Oh!" cried the king, "I am really the most wretched of men! Gredinet mad! This alone was wanting to complete my vexation!"

The officer of the greyhounds thought it his duty to shed a tear to make the scene more perfect. The king turned on his heel, and retired to his private cabinet, where his valet was waiting. He, seeing the king's face so disturbed, hid himself in the recess of a window — and the king, looking upon him rather as a piece of furniture than a man, strode up and down his room talking to himself.

"Yes. I see it — I see it plainly," said he; "the Duke de Choiseul laughs at me — the dauphin looks upon himself as already half master, and thinks he will be wholly so when he has his little Austrian beside him on the throne. Louise loves me — but so sternly, that she preaches me a sermon and leaves me. My three other daughters sing songs, in which I am ridiculed under the name of Blaise. My grandson, the Count de Provence, translates Lucretius; and his brother, the Count d'Artois, is a dissipated scapegrace. My dogs go mad, and would bite me. Decidedly, there is only the poor countess who loves me. To the devil, then, with those who would annoy her!"

Then with a sort of settled despair, he seated himself at that table on which Louis XIV, wrote his proudest letters and signed his latest treaties.

"I know now," continued he, "why every one wishes to hasten the arrival of the dauphiness. They think when she shows herself, I shall become her slave, and be governed by her family. I'faith, I shall see her soon enough, that dear daughter-in-law of mine, particularly if her arrival is to be the signal for new troubles. Let me be quiet as long as I can, and for that purpose, the longer she is delayed on the road the better. She was to have passed through Rheims and Noyon without stopping, and to come immediately to Compiegne. I shall insist on the first arrangement. Three days at Rheims — and one — no, faith — two! Bah! three days at Noyon! That would be six days I should gain — yes, six good days!"

He took a pen, and wrote in person an order to the Count de Stainville to stop three days at Rheims and three days at Noyon.

Then, sending for a courier, "Don't draw bridle," said he, "until you have delivered this according to its address."

Then with the same pen he wrote:

“DEAR COUNTESS — To-day we install Zamore in his government. I am just setting out for Marly. This evening, at Luciennes, I shall tell you all I now think.

“FRANCE.”

“Here, Lebel,” said he to the valet, “take this letter to the countess, and keep on good terms with her — I advise you.”

The valet bowed and left the room.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The Countess De Bearn.

THE PRINCIPAL object of all the fury of the court, and their stumbling-block on this dreaded occasion — the Countess de Bearn — was, as Chon said, traveling rapidly to Paris. Her journey thither was the result of one of those bright ideas which sometimes came to Viscount Jean's Assistance in his times of trouble.

Not being able to find among the ladies of the court one who would present the Countess Dubarry, and since she could not be presented without a lady to introduce her, he cast his eye on the provinces. He examined country-seats — searched carefully in the towns — and at last found what he wanted on the banks of the Meuse, in an old Gothic-looking country seat, but one kept in good order.

Now, what he wanted was an old lady fond of law, and having a lawsuit on hand. The old lady with the lawsuit was the Countess de Bearn.

The lawsuit was an affair on which all her fortune depended, and which was to be heard before Monsieur de Maupeou, who had lately taken up the cause of the Countess Dubarry, having discovered — what had remained hidden until then — that he was related to her, and now called her cousin. Looking forward to the appointment of Lord Chancellor through her interest, he showed the king's favorite all the warmth of a friendship naturally arising from such a substantial basis. This friendship and this interest had procured for him from the king the office of vice-chancellor, and from the world in general the pithy denomination of the vice.

The Countess de Bearn was a thin, angular, agile little woman, always on the alert, always rolling her eyes like those of a frightened cat, from under her gray eyebrows. She still wore the dress which had been fashionable in her youth, and as the capricious goddess of fashion has sensible fits now and then, it so happened that the costume of the young girl of 1740 should be precisely that of the old woman of 1770.

Broad guipure, pointed mantelet, an enormous coif, an immense bag, and a neck-handkerchief of flowered silk — such was the costume in which Chon, the well-beloved sister and confidante of the Countess Dubarry, found the Countess de Bearn arrayed, when she presented herself before her as Mademoiselle Flageot, the daughter of the lawyer in Paris who had the management of her suit. The old countess wore the costume of her early days as much from taste as from economy. She was not one of those persons who blush for their poverty, because her poverty had not been caused by her own fault. She regretted, indeed, not being rich for her son's sake, to whom she would have wished to leave a fortune worthy of his name. The young man was thoroughly country-bred, timid to a fault, caring much more for what belonged to the substantial things of life than to the honors of renown.

The countess's sole consolation was in calling the lands which were contested with the Saluce family “my estate”; but as she was a woman of sense, she felt that if she wanted to borrow money on that estate, not a usurer in France — and there were some bold enough in running risks at that period — would lend it her; not an attorney — and there were some not very scrupulous then, as there have been at all times — would procure her the smallest sum on such a guarantee.

Forced, then, to live on the annual rents of those lands that were not disputed, the Countess de Bearn, having only one thousand crowns a year, kept very far from court; for there she must have spent nearly twelve livres a day in the hire of a carriage to take her to her lawyer's and to the judge's. She was still more determined in keeping aloof, since she had despaired of her cause being heard for four or five years at least. Lawsuits, even in the present day, are, in truth, tedious affairs; but still, without living to the age of the patriarchs, a person who commences one has some hope of seeing it to an end; but, formerly, a suit extended through two or three generations, and was like those fabulous plants of the Arabian tales, which blossomed only at the end of two or three centuries.

The Countess de Bearn, therefore, did not wish to lose the remains of her patrimony in recovering the ten-twelfths of it which were disputed. She was what is always called “a woman of the old school,” sagacious, prudent, firm, avaricious. She could certainly have managed her suit much better herself than any advocate, lawyer, or attorney; but she was called Bearn, and that name prevented her from doing many things which economy might have prompted. Like the divine Achilles in his tent, suffering a thousand deaths when he heard the trumpet, although feigning to be deaf to it, she, in her retirement, was devoured by regret and anguish. She passed her days in deciphering old parchments, her spectacles on her nose; and at night, on her pillow, she pleaded with such eloquence the cause of the estate claimed by the Saluces, that she was always successful — a termination of the affair which she could but wish her advocate to arrive at.

It may readily be imagined that in such a temper of mind, the arrival of Chon and the news she brought were very agreeable to Madame de Bearn.

The young count was with his regiment.

We always believe what we wish to believe; so Madame de Bearn was very easily caught by the young lady's tale.

There was, however, a shadow of suspicion in the countess's mind. She had known Master Flageot twenty years, and had visited him two hundred times in his narrow, dark street; but she had never seen a child playing on the square bit of carpet which looked so little on the floor of his large office, and had there been children there, they would surely have found their way into it to get a toy or a cake from the clients.

But what was the use of thinking about the lawyer and his office, and his carpet'; What was the use of trying to remember anything about it? Flageot's daughter was Flageot's daughter — and there she was! Moreover, she was married, and — what banished the last shadow of suspicion — she had not come on purpose to Verdun, she was going to join her husband at Strasbourg.

Perhaps the countess ought to have asked Mademoiselle Flageot for a letter from her father to assure herself of her identity; but if a father could not send his own child without a letter, to whom could he intrust a confidential mission '; Then why such fears? What could cause such suspicions? Why should any one travel sixty leagues to tell her a tale without any foundation on fact?

If she had been rich, a banker's or a financier's wife, taking with her carriages, plate and diamonds, she might have thought it was a plot got up by robbers. But she laughed to herself when she thought what a disappointment any robbers would experience who should be so ill-advised as to attack her.

So Chon having disappeared with her plain dark dress, and her shabby little one-horse chaise which she had taken at the last post, leaving her carriage behind her, the countess, convinced that the time was come for her to make a sacrifice, got into her old coach, and urged on the postilions so well, that she passed through Lachaussee an hour before the dauphiness, and reached the gate of Saint-Denis five or six hours after Chon herself.

As she had little luggage, and as the most important thing for her was to receive information from her lawyer, she ordered her coach to drive to the Rue du Petit-Lion, and stop before Master Flageot's door. The vehicle, we may be assured, did not stop there without attracting a great number of curious spectators — and the Parisians are all curious — who stared at the venerable machine which seemed to have issued from the coachhouse of Henry IV. — so antique was it in its solidity, its monumental form, and its scalloped leather curtains, which ran with a disagreeable creaking on a copper rod, covered with verdigris.

The Rue du Petit-Lion was not wide, and the countess's equipage filled it up very majestically. Having alighted and paid the postilions, she ordered them to take it to the inn where she usually stopped — “Le Coq Chantant,” in the Rue Saint-Germain-des-Pres.

She ascended Monsieur Flageot's dark stairs, holding by the greasy cord which served instead of a hand-rail. The staircase was cool, and it refreshed the old lady, who was tired by her long and rapid journey. When Margaret, his servant, announced the Countess de Bearn, Master Flageot pulled up his stockings, which he had allowed to fall nearly to his ankles on account of the heat, with one hand, fixed on his wig with the other, then hastily threw on a dimity dressing-gown, and, so adorned, advanced smiling to the door. In this smile, however, there was such an expression of surprise that the countess could not help saying, “Well, well! my dear sir, it is I.”

“Yes, indeed,” replied he, “I see plainly enough, madame, that it is you!”

Then, modestly wrapping his dressing gown round him, he led the countess to a large leathern armchair, in the lightest corner of the apartment, carefully putting aside the papers which covered his desk, for he knew the old lady to be curious in the extreme.

“And now, madame,” said Master Flageot, gallantly, “permit me to express my pleasure at this agreeable surprise.”

The countess had leaned back in her chair, and raised her feet from the floor to allow Margaret to slip between it and her brocaded satin shoes a leather cushion; but at this phrase she started up hastily. “How?” exclaimed she, drawing her spectacles from their case, and putting them on, so that she might see his face the better — “ surprise?”

“Most assuredly; I thought you at your estates, madame,” replied the lawyer, adroitly flattering the old lady by bestowing this title on the countess's three acres of kitchen-garden.

“Well. I was there; but, on the first intimation from you, I left them.”

“Intimation from me?” said the astonished advocate.

“Yes, at your first word, or counsel, or advice, or whatever you please to call it.”

Flageot's eyes looked as large as the countess's glasses.

“I have been very expeditious,” continued she, “and I hope you are satisfied.”

“I am delighted to see you, madame, as I always am; but allow me to say, that I do not see how I have been the cause of your visit.”

“Not the cause? Most certainly you have been the entire cause of it!”

“I?”

“Yes, you, undoubtedly. Well, have you no news to tell me?”

“Oh, yes, madame; it is said the king is meditating some great stroke of policy with regard to the parliament. But may I offer you some refreshment?”

“But what does it matter to me about the king and his strokes of policy?”

“About what, then, did you inquire, madame?”

“About my suit, of course. Is there anything new about it?”

“Oh, as to that,” said Flageot, shaking his head sorrowfully, “nothing, absolutely nothing!”

“That is to say, nothing —

“No — nothing, madame.”

“You mean nothing since your daughter spoke to me about it; but as that was only the day before yesterday, I can readily understand that there may not be much new since then.”

“My daughter, madame?”

“Yes.”

“Did you say my daughter?”

“Yes, your daughter, whom you sent to me.”

“Pardon me, madame; but it is quite impossible that I could send my daughter to you.”

“Impossible?”

“Yes, for a very simple reason — I have no daughter.”

“Are you sure?” asked the countess.

“Madame,” replied Flageot. “I have the honor to be a bachelor!”

“Come, come!” said the countess, as if she supposed him jesting.

M. Flageot became uneasy; he called Margaret to bring in some refreshment, but, more particularly, that she might watch the countess. “Poor woman!” said he to himself, “her head is turned.”

“What,” said she, returning to the charge, “you have not a daughter?”

“No, madame.”

“Not one married at Strasbourg?”

“No, madame, by no means.”

“And you did not send that daughter,” pursued the countess, “on her way thither, to tell me that my suit was called in?”

“Nothing of the kind, madame.”

The countess started from her chair, and clasped her hands.

“Drink a little of something, madame; it will do you good,” said M. Flageot, and at the same time he made a sign to Margaret to bring a tray, on which were two glasses of beer. But the old lady was not thinking of her thirst, and she pushed away the tray so rudely that Dame Margaret, who appeared to be a privileged sort of person, was affronted,

“But let us understand each other,” said the countess, eying Master Flageot over her spectacles, “explain all this, if you please.”

“Certainly, madame. Margaret, you need not go; the countess will perhaps drink something presently. Let us explain.”

“Yes, let us explain; for, upon my honor, my dear sir, you are quite incomprehensible to-day. I begin to think the hot weather has turned your brain.”

“Do not be angry, dear madame,” said Flageot, maneuvering with the hindfeet of his chair, so that he got by degrees farther from the countess, “Do not get angry, and let us talk over the matter quietly.”

“Yes, yes, certainly. You say you have not a daughter?”

“No, madame, I have not one, and I regret it deeply, since it appears you would be pleased that I had, although —

“Although what?” repeated the countess.

“Although, for my own part, I should prefer a son. Boys succeed better in the world, or rather, don't turn out so ill as girls in the present day.”

The countess looked more and more alarmed.

“What!” said she, “have you not sent for me to Paris by a sister, a niece, a cousin — by some person, in short?”

“I never thought of such a thing, madame, knowing how expensive it is staying in Paris.”

“But my suit?”

“I should always have taken care to let you know in time, before the pleading came on.”

“Before it came on?”

“Yes.”

“Has it not come on, then?”

“Not that I know of, madame.”

“It has not been called?”

“No.”

“And it is not likely to come on soon?”

“Oh, no, madame, certainly not.”

“Then,” cried the old lady, rising, “I have been tricked! — I have been most basely deceived!”

Flageot pushed back his wig, muttering. “I fear it, indeed, madame.”

“Master Flageot!” cried the countess.

The lawyer started on his seat, and made a sign to Margaret to keep near, in order to defend him.

“Master Flageot,” continued the countess, “I will not submit to such an indignity as this; I will address the minister of police, to discover the impudent creature who insulted me thus!”

“Oh.” said Flageot, “it is a very doubtful affair.”

“And when she is found,” continued the countess, almost speechless with anger, “I shall bring an action against her.”

“Another lawsuit!” said the lawyer, sorrowfully.

These words made the poor lady fall from the height of her passion, and a heavy fall it was.

“Alas,” said she, “I came here so happy!”

“But what did that woman say to you, madame?”

“First, that she was sent by you.”

“Shocking intriguer!”

“That you desired her to say that the trial was coming on — was very near — that I could scarcely be in time with all the speed I could make.”

“Alas! madame,” repeated Flageot, in his turn, “the trial is very far from coming on.”

“Yes, so far from it, I suppose, that it is quite forgotten.”

“Forgotten! — sunk, buried, madame; and unless a miracle were to happen — and you know miracles are very rare nowadays — ”

“Oh, yes!” murmured the countess, with a sigh.

M. Flageot replied by another sigh, a faithful echo of the countess's.

“Well, sir, one thing is certain,” she added.

“What is it, madame?”

“I shall not survive this.”

“Oh, don't say so! you would be quite wrong.”

“Oh, heaven! — oh, heaven!” exclaimed the poor countess; “my strength is completely exhausted.”

“Courage, madame, courage!” said Flageot.

“But have you no advice to give me? — none?”

“Oh, yes! — my advice is to return to your estates, and after this never believe anybody who does not bring you a letter from me, in my own hand.”

“I must return, indeed.”

“It will be the wisest plan.”

“Well, sir,” said the countess, with a groan, “believe me, we shall never meet again — at least, not in this world.”

“What an infamous affair!”

“I must have some very cruel enemies.”

“It has been a trick of the opposite party, I would swear!”

“It is a very mean trick, I must say.”

“A mean, sorry trick, indeed!”

“Justice! — justice!” cried the countess, “my dear sir, she is the cave of Cacus!”

“And why is it?” he replied; “because justice is not what it was — because the parliament is opposed — because Monsieur de Maupeou must be chancellor, forsooth, instead of remaining what he ought to be, president.”

“M. Flageot, I think I could drink something now.”

“Margaret!” cried the lawyer — for Margaret had left the room, seeing the peaceable turn affairs were taking. She now entered with the tray and the two glasses which she; had carried away. The countess drank her glass of beer very slowly, after having touched the lawyer's glass with hers, then she gained the anteroom, after a sad and solemn curtsey and a still more sorrowful leave-taking.

The lawyer followed her, his wig in his hand. She was in the lobby, and was reaching out her hand for the cord to aid her in her descent, when a hand was laid on hers, and a head gave her a thump on the chest. The head and the hand were those of a clerk, who was mounting the stairs four steps at a time.

The old lady, muttering and grumbling, arranged her petticoats and continued on her way, while the clerk, having reached the lobby, pushed open the lawyer's door, and with the open and joyous voice for which the clerks of the parliament were noted, cried out, “Here, Master Flageot! — here! — it is about the Bearn business;” and he held out a paper.

To rush up the stairs at that name — push by the clerk — to throw herself on Flageot — to snatch the paper from him — to shut herself up with him in his office — all this was effected by the countess before the clerk had recovered from two boxes on the ear which Margaret bestowed, or seemed to bestow on him, in return for two kisses.

“Well!” cried the old lady, “what is it? Master Flageot — what is it?”

“Faith, I can't tell, madame; but if you will give me back the paper, I shall let you know.”

“True, true, my good Muster Flageot! Read it — read it!”

He looked at the signature.

“It is from Guildon, our attorney,” said he.

“Good heavens!”

“He desires me,” continued Flageot, with surprise amounting almost to bewilderment — “he desires me to be ready to plead on Tuesday, for your affair is to come on!”

“To come on?” cried the countess; “take care, Master Flageot, take care! — no more tricks — I should never recover from another.”

“Madame,” replied Flageot, still bewildered at the intelligence, “if there be any trick, any jest in this, Guildon is the author of it; and it is certainly the first time in his life that he has jested.”

“But are you certain the letter is from him?”

“It is signed Guildon — see!”

“I see it is. To be called this morning and pleaded on Tuesday. Well, then, you see, my dear sir, the lady who came to me was not a cheat.”

“It appears not.”

“Then, since she was not sent by you — but are you sure she was not?”

“Pardieu! — am I sure of it?”

“By whom was she sent, then?”

“Yes, by whom?”

“For she must have been sent by some one.”

“It is a complete riddle to me.”

“And to me also. Let me read the paper again. Yes, my dear Master Flageot, the pleading is to come on — it is written so — and before the president, Maupeou.”

“The devil! — is that there?”

“Yes, certainly.”

“That is vexatious.”

“How so?”

“Because M. Maupeou is a great friend of your opponents.”

“You know that!

“He is always with them.”

“Ha! — I am truly unfortunate! Now we are more embarrassed than ever!”

“But, for all that,” said the lawyer, “you must wait on him.”

“He will receive me very badly!”

“That is probable.”

“Oh, Master Flageot, what do you tell me?”

“The truth, madame.”

“What! you not only lose courage yourself, but you try to deprive me of mine?”

“With the Chancellor Maupeou you must not hope for anything favorable.”

“You, so timid! — you, a Cicero!”

“Cicero would have lost the cause of Ligarius had he pleaded before Verres instead of Caesar,” replied Master Flageot, finding nothing more humble to say in return for the high compliment of his client.

“Then you advise me not to wait on him?”

“Heaven forbid, madame, I should advise anything so irregular; but I pity you sincerely for having to undergo such an interview.”

“You really speak like a soldier who meant to desert his post. One would think you feared to, undertake the business.”

“Madame.” replied the lawyer, “I have lost causes which seemed much more likely to be gained by me than this of yours does.”

The countess sighed, but summoning all her energy, she said, with a kind of dignity which made a complete contrast to all that had been comic in the scene. “I shall carry the matter through — it shall not be said that having right on my side I gave way before a cabal. I shall lose my cause, but I shall, at least, act as a woman of rank and character — such as there are few at court in the present day. You will accompany me, will you not. M. Flageot, in my visit to the vice-chancellor?”

“Madame.” replied the lawyer, also calling up all his dignity to his aid, “we opposition members of the parliament of Paris have sworn to have no intercourse beyond necessary audiences with those who betrayed the parliament in the affair of Monsieur d'Aiguillon. 'Union is strength.' and as the vice-chancellor tacked about perpetually in that business, we have determined to keep aloof until he shows his real colors.”

“My suit is doomed, I see,” sighed the countess; “the lawyers quarrel with the judges — the judges with the clients. No matter! I shall persevere to the end!”

“May Heaven assist you, madame!” said Flageot, flinging his dressing-gown over his left arm as a Roman senator might have done his toga.-

“This is but a poor sort of an advocate,” murmured she to herself. “I am afraid I shall have less chance with him before the parliament than I had at home on my pillow;” then aloud, with a smile, under which she strove to hide her uneasiness, “Adieu, M. Flageot, adieu — study the case thoroughly, I entreat you — we know not how things may turn out.”

“Oh, madame,” said Master Flageot, “do not fear as to the pleading — I shall do you justice — I shall make some terrible allusions.”

“Allusions to what, sir?”

“To the corruption of Jerusalem, madame, which I shall compare to the accursed cities on which the fire of Heaven descended. You understand — no one can mistake — by Jerusalem I mean Versailles.”

“M. Flageot,” exclaimed the old lady, “do not compromise yourself — or rather, do not compromise my cause.”

“Oh, madame, with Monsieur de Maupeou for judge, your cause is lost. But then, let the world hear of us; since we cannot obtain justice, let us at least strike terror to the wicked.”

“Sir, sir! — ”

“Let us be philosophic — let us thunder — ”

“Deuce take you, with your thunder!” muttered the countess; “fool of a lawyer — you are thinking only of making a figure with your fag-ends of philosophy. Come, I will go to the vice-chancellor — he at least is no philosopher. I may do better with him than with you, after all.”

And the countess left M. Flageot, having, poor old lady, in two days, mounted all the degrees of the scale of hope, and descended all those in that of disappointment.

CHAPTER XXX.

The Vice.

THE OLD COUNTESS trembled in every limb as she proceeded toward Monsieur de Maupeou's residence. However, one thought had quieted her a little on the road — it was so late that in all probability she would not be admitted, and she should merely have to tell the porter when she should come again.

In fact, it was about seven in the evening, and although it was still light, the habit of dining at four, which the nobility had adopted, had caused all business to be suspended from dinner until the next day. Although Madame de Bearn anxiously longed to see the chancellor, she was, nevertheless, consoled by the thought that she should not see him. This is one of the frequent contradictions of the human mind which we can always understand but never explain.

The countess presented herself, therefore, quite certain that the porter would refuse her admittance; and had even prepared a crown to offer the Cerberus to induce him to put her name on the list of those who requested an audience. On reaching the house, she found an usher talking to the porter, as if giving him an order. She waited discreetly, that she might not interrupt these two personages; but, on perceiving her in her hackney-coach, the usher withdrew. The porter approached and demanded her name.

“Oh, I know.” said she, “that it is not probable I shall have the honor of seeing his excellency.”

“No matter, madame,” replied the porter; “have the goodness to tell me your name.”

“The Countess de Bearn,” she replied.

“My lord is at home,” answered he.

“What did you say?” asked the countess, almost dumb with astonishment.

“I say that my lord is at home,” repeated he.

“But of course he will not receive visitors?”

“He will receive you, madame.”

Madame de Bearn got out of the coach, hardly knowing whether she was asleep or awake.

The porter pulled a cord — a bell rang twice. The usher appeared at the top of the steps, and the porter made a sign to the countess to enter.

“You wish to speak to my lord?” asked the usher.

“I wish for that honor, but I scarcely hoped to obtain it.”

“Have the goodness to follow me, madame.”

“And yet people speak so ill of this chancellor,” said the countess to herself, as she went along, following the usher — ” yet he has certainly one good quality — he admits persons on business at all hours. A chancellor? — it is strange!”

Yet still she shuddered at the idea that she should find him so much the more stern, so much the more ungracious, because he was assiduous at his duties. M, de Maupeou, buried under a great wig, and dressed in a suit of black velvet, was waiting in his cabinet, with the doors open. The countess, on entering, cast a rapid glance around. She saw with surprise that he was alone — that the mirrors reflected no other face than her own and that of the meager, yellow, busy chancellor.

The usher announced — ” Madame the Countess de Bearn.” The chancellor rose up stiffly, as if he had no joints, and, by the same movement, leaned his back against the chimney piece.

The countess made the necessary three curtseys.

hit short, complimentary speech which followed the curtseys was rather embarrassed — she did not expect the honor — she did not think that a minister who had so much to do would deprive himself of the hours necessary for recreation, etc., etc.

The chancellor replied that time was, no doubt, as precious to his majesty's subjects as to his majesty's ministers — that, nevertheless, he admitted, there were distinctions to be made as to the importance of the affairs brought before him; consequently, he always gave the greater part of his time to those whose business was most urgent.

Fresh curtseys on the part of the countess, then an embarrassed silence, for compliments were ended, and her request must now be made.

The chancellor waited, stroking his chin.

“My lord,” said she, “I have presented myself before you, to explain to you an affair on which my whole fortune depends.”

The chancellor bowed, as if to intimate that she should go on.

"My lord," she continued, "you must know that all my property, or rather my son's, is at stake in a suit now pending between us and the family of the Saluces."

The vice-chancellor continued to stroke his chin.

"But your equity is so well known to me, my lord, that although I am aware of your interest in — indeed, I may say your friendship for — the adverse party, I have not hesitated an instant in coining to entreat you to hear me."

The chancellor could not help smiling on hearing himself praised for his equity, a quality for which he was about as famous as Dubois was for the apostolical virtues on which he had been complimented fifty years before.

"You are right, madame," said he, "in saying that I am a friend of your opponents, but you are also right in thinking that, when I accepted the seals, I laid aside all friendship. I shall reply to you, then, without any bias, as becomes the supreme head of justice."

"Heaven bless you, my lord!" cried the old countess.

"I shall examine your affair as a simple jurisconsult," continued the chancellor.

"I thank your lordship — your skill in these matters is well known."

"Your cause comes on soon, I think."

"Next week, my lord!"

"In the meantime, what are your wishes respecting it?"

"That your lordship would look into the documents."

"I have already done so."

"Well," asked the old countess, trembling, "and what do you think of it, my lord?"

"I think that there is not a doubt on the subject."

"Not a doubt of my gaining?"

"No — of your losing."

"Then you think, my lord, I shall lose?"

"Undoubtedly — I shall, therefore, give you one piece of advice."

"What is it?" asked the countess, with a last ray of hope.

"It is — if you have any payments to make, the cause being tried, and sentence pronounced, to have your funds ready."

"Oh, my lord, we shall be ruined then!"

"Surely you know, madame, that justice never takes into account anything respecting the consequences of her decrees."

"But, my lord, there should be mercy as well as justice."

"And, for fear of justice being influenced by mercy, she is made blind, madame."

"But your lordship will not refuse me your advice?"

"Certainly not — ask it, madame. I am ready."

"Is there no means of entering into an arrangement, by which the sentence might not be so harsh?"

"Do you know any of your judges?"

"Not one of them, my lord."

"That is unfortunate. Messieurs de Saluces, your opponents, are connected with three-fourths of the parliament."

The countess shuddered.

"But observe," continued the chancellor, "that that does not alter the main grounds of the question, for a judge does not permit himself to be influenced by private feelings."

This was about as true as that he possessed the virtue of equity, or Dubois the apostolic virtues, but it made the poor countess nearly faint.

"But, after all," continued the chancellor, "the judge having done all that integrity demands, of course leans more to a friend than to a person about whom he is indifferent — that is only just, when it is just — and as it will be just that you should lose your cause, they may in their sentence make the consequences of that loss very unpleasant to you."

"But all that your lordship says is very alarming."

"As far as I am concerned, I shall refrain from saying anything that might have an influence on the minds of others; but, as I am not a judge myself, I may speak to you of the state of affairs."

"Alas, my lord, I suspected one thing!"

The vice-chancellor fixed on her his little gray eyes.

"I suspected that, the adverse party living in Paris, they might become connected with the judges, and thus be all-powerful."

"Because, in the first place, they have justice on their side."

"How painful it is, my lord, to hear such words from the lips of a man infallible as you are!"

"I merely say all this to you because it is the truth, and yet," continued II, de Maupeou, with an affected frankness, "I should like, upon my word, to serve you."

The countess started; she thought that she saw some hidden meaning, if not in the chancellor's words, at least in his thoughts, which concealed behind it something favorable to her.

“Besides,” he proceeded, “the name you bear is one of the noblest in France, and that is in itself a powerful recommendation to me.”

“Ah, my lord, it will not prevent me from losing my suit.”

“As to that, I have no power either one way or the other.”

“Oh, my lord, my lord!” cried the countess, shaking her head, “how things go in this world now!”

“You seem to infer, madame, that in the good old times they went better.”

“Alas, my lord, I cannot but think so. I recall with pleasure the time when you were merely a king's advocate in the parliament, and when you made those “beautiful speeches which I, then a young woman, went to listen to, and which I applauded with such enthusiasm. What fire! — what eloquence! — what virtue! Ah, my lord, in those times there were no plots, no cabals, no favoritism! I should have gained my suit then.”

“Yet we had Madame de Phalaris then, who tried to reign occasionally when the regent shut his eyes, and we had too La Souris, who went about picking up what crumbs she could manage to gather.”

“Oh, my lord, but Madame de Phalaris was really a lady of rank, and La Souris was such a good-natured girl.”

“Yes; so nothing was refused them.”

“Or, rather, they could refuse no one.”

“Come, madame,” said the chancellor, laughing in a manner that astonished the old lady more and more, it was so open and natural, “come, do not make me speak ill of my own administration, through affection for my youthful days.”

“But, my lord, when I think of those days I must lament my lost fortune, my ruined family.”

“You see, countess, what it is not to go with the times, not to sacrifice to the idols of the day.”

“Alas, my lord, those idols care not for worshipers who come with empty hands!”

“What can you know about them?”

“ I?” — “Yes; you have never tried them, I think.”

“My lord, you speak to me really like a friend.”

“Well — are we not about the same age, countess?”

“Oh! why am I not twenty! and you, my lord, a simple advocate again? — you would plead for me, and I should gain my suit.”

“Unhappily, we are not twenty, countess,” said the vice chancellor, with a gallant sigh; “we must only; therefore, beg those who are twenty to assist us, since you confess that that is the age to have influence. What! — do you know no one at court?”

“Some old noblemen who have left it now, I once knew, but they would blush for their old friend in her poverty. Stay, my lord, I have still the privilege of being received at court! I might go to Versailles — yet of what use would it be? Oh, had I again only my two hundred thousand crowns of income, people would come to visit me! — perform that miracle for me, my lord!”

The chancellor pretended not to hear this last phrase. “In your place,” said he, “I should forget the old, as they have forgotten me. I should apply to the young, and beat up for recruits among them. Do you happen to know the princesses at all?””

“They must have forgotten me.”

“And besides, they have no influence. Do you know the dauphin?”

“No.”

“And after all, he is so busy about his archduchess, who is about to arrive, that he can think of nothing else. Let me see — among the favorites — is there any one —

“I don't even know their names.”

“Monsieur d'Aguillim?”

“A coxcomb of whom such shameful things are said! — that he hid in a well while others were fighting! — Fie! fie!”

“Pooh I we must not believe the half of what we hear — but stay — let me think —

“Do — do, my lord; think of some one!”

“Yes; why not? Yes! ha! — yes!”

“Who, my lord — who?”

“Why not apply to the countess herself?”

“To the Countess Dubarry?” said the old lady, spreading out her fan.

“Yes; she is really a kind creature.”

“Indeed!”

“And anxious to be useful.”

“I am of too ancient a family to please her, my lord.”

“You are mistaken, countess; she tries to attach high families to her.”

“Do you think so?” asked the old countess, already beginning to waver in her opposition.

“Do you know her?” asked the chancellor.

“Oh, good heavens! no!”

“Ah, there is the mischief! She is the person who has real influence.”

“Yes, yes, she has influence; but I never saw her.”

“ Nor her sister Chon?”

“No.”

“Nor her sister Bischi?”

“No.”

“Nor her brother Jean?”

“No.”

“Nor her negro Zamore?”

“What — her negro, my lord?”

“Yes, her negro is one of the governing powers.”

“What! — that little fright, whose picture is sold in the streets, which looks like that of a dressed-up pug-dog? '

“Yes, the same.”

“I know that African!” cried the countess, with offended dignity. “How should I know him, my lord?”

“Well, well! I see you do not wish to keep your estates, countess.”

“How is that?”

“Because you speak contemptuously of Zamore.”

“But what has Zamore to do in the matter?”

“He might gain your suit for you — that is all.”

“He? That Moor? — that Hottentot! How could he gain it for me?”

“By saying to his mistress that you wished to gain it. You know what influence is; he makes his mistress do what he chooses, and she makes the king do what she chooses.”

“Then Zamore governs France, my lord?”

“Hum!” replied the chancellor, nodding his head. “He has a great deal of influence; and I had rather quarrel with — with the dauphiness, for instance — than with Zamore.”

“Great Heaven!” exclaimed the countess, “if it were not a grave person like your lordship who told me such things, I could not believe them.”

“Oh, I am not the only one who will tell them you. Everybody can tell them. Ask any of the dukes and peers if they ever forget, when going to Marly or Luciennes, to take comfits for Zamore to put in his mouth, or pearls for him to hang in his ears. I, who speak to you, am I not the chancellor of France, or something very near it? Well, what was I doing when you came in? I was drawing up a governor's commission for Zamore.”

“A governor's commission?”

“Yes; Monsieur Zamore is appointed governor of the castle of Luciennes.”

“The very same title with which they rewarded the Count de Bearn after twenty years' service.”

“Yes; he was made governor of the castle of Blois. I remember that.”

“But what a degradation! Good heavens! the monarchy is dead!”

“It is very ill, at least; and you know, countess, when an invalid draws near his end, people try to get all they can from him!”

“No doubt — no doubt; but the question is how to get near this invalid.”

“Do you know what you must do to be well received by the Countess Dubarry?”

“What?”

“You must get admitted by being the bearer of this commission for her negro.”

“I?”

“It will be an excellent beginning.”

“Do you think so, my lord?” said the poor countess, all alarmed.

“” I am sure of it; but —

“But what?”

“Do you know any one acquainted wit h her?”

“No one but yourself, my lord.”

“Oh, as for me, it would be difficult for me to introduce you.”

“Assuredly,” said the poor old lady, tossed to and fro by alternate hopes and fears, “assuredly, fortune is hostile to me! Your lordship has received me in a manner quite unexpected, for indeed I did not expect to be admitted to an audience; then, you have inclined me to pay my court to Madame Dubarry — I, a Bearn! — and I am ready to undertake the hateful task of delivering the commission for her wretch of a negro, and now I cannot even get an introduction to her!”

The chancellor began again to stroke his chin, and appeared very thoughtful, when suddenly the usher announced, “M, le Viscount Jean Dubarry!”

At this name the chancellor made a gesture of amazement, and the countess sank back breathless in her chair.

“Now, say that fortune has abandoned you! Ah! countess, countess, Heaven is working in your favor.”

Then, turning to the usher, without giving the old lady time to recover, he desired that the viscount should be admitted instantly. The usher withdrew, and in a moment after our old acquaintance Jean Dubarry entered, with his arm in a sling.

After the usual number of bows were made on both sides, and as the countess, trembling and undecided, was trying to rise in order to take leave — for the chancellor by a slight movement of the head had indicated to her that her audience was ended — ” Pardon me, my lord,” said the viscount; “pardon me, madame — I interrupt you, I fear — but I beg of you not to go away; I have only two words to say to his lordship.”

The countess sat down again without requiring to be pressed, her heart full of joy and expectation.

“But, perhaps, sir, I shall be in your way?” she stammered.

“Oh, madame, not at all — not at all. I merely wish to lodge a short complaint with his lordship.”

“A complaint! — Against whom?” exclaimed the chancellor.

“An attack upon me, my lord! — an assassination! One cannot pass over such things as that. Let them abuse us, make ballads about us, blacken us, we can survive all that; but when it comes to cutting our throats — mordieu! we die!”

“Explain the affair, I beg,” said the chancellor, pretending to be very much horrified.

“It is easily done — but I fear I am interrupting this lady's audience.”

“The Countess de Bearn,” said the chancellor, introducing the old lady to the Viscount Jean Dubarry.

Dubarry retreated gracefully to make his bow, the countess to make her curtsey; and both saluted as ceremoniously as if they had been at court.

“After you, sir,” said she.

“Madame, I would not be guilty of such treason against gallantry for the world.”

“Oh, sir, my business only concerns money, in yours honor is concerned; yours is therefore more urgent.”

“Then, madame,” said the viscount, “since it is your wish, I shall take advantage of your obliging permission.” And he related his tale to the chancellor, who listened very gravely.

“You will require witnesses,” said Monsieur de Maupeou, after a moment's reflection.

“Ah,” cried Dubarry, “how easily one discovers, even in those words, the upright judge who can only be influenced by irrefutable truth! Well, I can procure witnesses.”

“My lord,” said the countess, “the viscount has found one already.”

“What witness?” they both asked.

“I, myself,” the countess replied.

“You?” exclaimed the chancellor.

“Sir,” said she, addressing the viscount, “did not this affair happen at the village of Lachaussee?”

“Yes, madame.”

“At the post-house?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I shall be your witness. I passed through the place where the attack was made on you two hours after it happened.”

“Really, madame?” said the chancellor.

“Yes,” continued the countess, “and everybody was talking of what had just taken place.”

“Take care!” said the viscount, “take care, madame! — if you consent to aid me in this matter, very likely the Choiseuls will find some means of making you repent of it.”

“Ah!” said the chancellor, “and the more easily that the Countess de Bearn is engaged in a lawsuit, her chance of gaining which is very doubtful, I am afraid.”

“Oh, my lord,” cried the old lady, putting her hand to her head, “I sink from one difficulty to another!”

“Lean upon the viscount,” said the chancellor, in a half whisper; “he has a powerful arm to assist you.”

“Only one at present,” said Dubarry, with a simper. “But I know a certain person who has two good arms — they can reach far, and I offer you their aid.”

“Oh, Monsieur le Viscount, are you serious in making me such an offer?”

“It is only service for service, madame. I accept your aid — you accept mine. Is it agreed?”

“Do I accept yours? Oh, sir, you do me too much honor!”

“Then, madame, will you take a seat in my carriage; I am just going to pay a visit to my sister?”

“Without any reason — without any preparations? Oh, sir, I dare not —

“You have a reason, madame,” said the chancellor, slipping into her hand Zamore's commission.

“My lord, you are my tutelary genius!” cried the old lady, taking the document. “Monsieur le Viscount, you are the flower of the French nobility.”

“At your service,” said the viscount, pointing the way to the countess, who was as quick as a bird to take it.

“Thanks for my sister,” whispered Jean in the chancellor's ear; “thank you, cousin! But did I play my part well? — eh?”

“Admirably,” said Maupeou; “but pray make the countess laugh by telling her how I played mine. But, take care! the old lady is as sharp as a needle!”

At that moment the countess turned; the two gentlemen bowed formally to one another, as if taking a ceremonious adieu.

A splendid carriage, with attendants in the royal livery, waited at the door; the old lady took her place in it quite elated; Jean seated himself beside her, and they departed.

After the king left Madame Dubarry, as we have formerly related, after a very cold and constrained reception, the countess was left alone with Chon and her brother, who had not appeared at first for fear of his wound being examined, it being, in reality, very trifling. The result of this family council was, that the countess, instead of going to Luciennes as she had told the king, set off for Paris. She had there, in the Rue de Valois, a snug little house which served as a place of rendezvous for all her family, every member of which was constantly running backward and forward, hither and thither, as business or pleasure led them.

The countess being installed in this domicile of hers, took a book and waited. Meantime the viscount prepared his battery.

It might be about half-past seven by the large dial of the church of St. Eustache, when the Countess de Bearn and Viscount Dubarry passed by on their way to his sister's.

The conversation on her side expressed great reluctance to avail herself of the good fortune which had fallen in her way. On his, there was the assumption of a sort of dignity in being her patron, with repeated exclamations at the happy chance which enabled him to introduce her to the Countess Dubarry. In return, the old lady never ceased praising the politeness and affability of the chancellor. All these fits on both sides, however, did not prevent the horses from going as fast as they could, and they reached their place of destination a little before eight.

“Permit me, madame,” said the viscount, leaving the old lady in an anteroom, “to inform the Countess Dubarry of the honor you have done her.”

“Oh, sir!” said the countess, “do not, I entreat you, allow my unseasonable visit to disturb her.”

Jean approached Zamore, who was watching for his return out of one of the windows, and whispered something in his ear.

“"What a dear little negro!” cried the countess; “is he your sister's, sir?”

“Yes; he is one of her favorites, madame.”

“I congratulate her on having such a one.”

At this moment a footman opened the folding-doors of the salon where Madame Dubarry usually granted audiences, and requested the countess to walk in there. While the old lady was sighing over the luxurious furniture of the apartment, Jean was with his sister announcing his prize. “Is it really she?” asked Madame Dubarry.

“Flesh and blood!”

“Does she suspect anything — ?”

“Nothing in the world.”

“And how did the Vice behave?”

“Admirably! — everything conspired to favor us.”

“Do not let us leave her too long alone, lest she should suspect something.”

“You are right; for I assure you, she seems to me cunning enough.”

“Where is Chon?”

“At Versailles, you know.”

“Well, she must not by any means let herself be seen.”

“Oh, I warned her!”

“Now, princess, enter.”

Madame Dubarry gently pushed open the door of her boudoir and entered the salon.

All the ceremonial necessary to the l'etiquette of those days was scrupulously gone through by the two actresses, mutually desirous of pleasing. Madame Dubarry was the first to speak.

“I have already thanked my brother, madame, for having procured me the honor of this visit, allow me now to thank you also for having consented to his wish.”

“I know not, madame.” replied the old lady, “in what terms to thank you for this gracious reception of me.”

“Madame,” said the countess, in her turn, with a curtsey of profound respect, “it is only due to a lady of your rank to place myself at your disposal, if I can be of service to you in any way.”

And three more curtseys having been made on each side, the countess invited Madame de Bearn to be seated.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Zamore's Commission.

“MADAME,” SAID the favorite, “pray let me hear your wishes — I am all attention.”

“Permit me, sister,” said Jean, who continued standing, “to disabuse your mind of the idea that the Countess de Bearn comes with a petition — not at all — the chancellor has simply asked her to perform a little office for him.”

The old lady turned a grateful look on the viscount, and held out to the countess the patent signed by the vice-chancellor declaring Luciennes a royal castle, and Zamore its governor.

“Then it is I who, am the person obliged,” said the countess, glancing at the document; “if I could only be so fortunate, madame, as to be of any service to you in return.”

“Oh, that you can readily be!” exclaimed the old lady, with a frankness which enchanted the brother and sister.

“Pray let me know how, madame?”

“You were kind enough to say that my name is not quite unknown to you, madame.”

“Unknown? — a Bearn!”

“Then you have perhaps heard of a lawsuit which threatens my whole property.”

“Oh, yes! — a suit between you and the family of the Saluces?”

“Alas, madame, yes!”

“I know all about it, madame, I heard his majesty the other evening speak of it to my cousin the chancellor.”

“His majesty speak of my lawsuit?”

“Yes, madame.”

“And in what terms, pray?”

“Alas! my dear madame!” — and Madame Dubarry shook her head.

“As lost, as lost — was it not?” exclaimed the old lady, with anguish.

“If I must speak the truth, madame, it was.”

“His majesty said so?”

“ His majesty had too much prudence and delicacy to pronounce sentence decidedly, but he seemed to look upon the adverse party as already in possession of the estate.”

“Oh, heavens! madame, if his majesty were but rightly informed on the subject — if he knew that all this was about a bond really discharged! yes, madame, the two hundred thousand francs have been paid. I have not a receipt for the money, certainly; but I have a moral certainty that it was paid. I could, if I was allowed to plead in person before the parliament, demonstrate it by inference.”

“By inference?” exclaimed Madame Dubarry, who did not understand one word of what she said, but who appeared to pay the most serious attention.

“Yes, madame, by inference”

“The proof by inference is admissible,” said Jean.

“Do you think so, sir?” asked the old lady.

“Yes, I think it is,” replied the viscount, with profound gravity.

“Well, then, by inference I could prove that the bond for two hundred thousand francs with the interest accumulated, amounting to a total of about one million — I could prove that this bond, bearing date 1406, was discharged by Guy Gaston, the fourth Count of Bearn, on his deathbed in 1417; for there it is written by his own hand in his will — 'Being on my deathbed, and owing nothing to any man, and ready to appear before God — '

“Well?” said Madame Dubarry.

“Well, madame, if he owed nothing to any man, he owed nothing to the family of the Saluces, otherwise he would have said — 'owing two hundred thousand francs,' instead of saying, 'owing nothing to any man.'”

“Most undoubtedly he would have said so,” exclaimed Jean. “But have you no other proof?” asked the favorite.

“Than his word? — none, madame; but he was called Gaston the Irreproachable.”

“And your opponents have the bond?”

“Yes; they have, and that is just what makes the affair more intricate.”

She should have said, “That is just what clears up the matter;” but she looked at things in her own point of view.

“So your conviction is, madame, that the bond was discharged,” said Jean.

“Yes, sir, that is my decided conviction,” exclaimed Madame de Bearn, warmly.

“Do you know,” said the countess, turning to her brother, as if deeply penetrated by that conviction, “the proof by inference, as the Countess de Bearn calls it, changes the face of things wonderfully.”

“Oh, wonderfully!” returned Jean.

“And very unpleasantly for my opponents,” continued the countess; “the terms of Gaston IV.'s will are most positive — 'owing nothing to any man — '

“It is not only clear, it is logical,” said Jean; “he owed nothing to any man, therefore, of course he had paid what he owed.”

“Therefore he had paid what he owed,” repeated the Countess Dubarry.

“Oh, madame, why are you not my judge?” ejaculated the old lady.

“Formerly.” said the viscount, “we should not have had recourse to the tribunals to settle an affair of that kind — the judgment of Heaven would have been enough. For my part, I am so convinced of the goodness of your cause, that, did the old custom still exist, I should willingly offer myself for your champion.”

“Oh, sir!”

“Yes, I should act as did my grandfather, Dubarry Moore, who had the honor of being connected with the royal family of the Stuarts, when he fought in the lists for the beautiful Edith of Scarborough, and made his adversary confess that he lied in his throat. But unhappily,” continued the viscount, with a sigh of disdain for the degeneracy of the age, “we live not in those glorious times, and gentlemen, when they claim their rights, must submit their causes to the judgment of a set of pettifoggers who have not the sense to understand a phrase so clear as — 'owing nothing to any man.'”

“But, brother,” said the countess, “it is three hundred years since those words were written, so you must allow that the gentlemen of the long robe may well pause a little before deciding on them.”

“Oh, no matter — no matter — I am certain that if his majesty heard the Countess de Bearn state her case herself as she has done to us — ”

“I should convince his majesty — should I not, sir?”

“I am certain of it.”

“Yes; but how am I to obtain an audience of his majesty?”

“You must come and visit me at Luciennes; and as his majesty does me the honor of coming sometimes to see me then —

“My dear,” interrupted the viscount, “that is all very well, but it depends on chance.”

“Viscount,” replied the favorite, with a sweet smile, “you know that I depend a good deal on chance, and I have no reason to complain.”

“Yes, but the Countess de Bearn might go to Luciennes for a week or a fortnight, and yet not meet his majesty.”

“That is true.”

“In the meantime, her cause is to come on on Monday or Tuesday.”

“On Tuesday, sir.”

“And this is Friday evening.”

“Ah, then,” said Madame Dubarry, with a countenance all disappointment, “we must not reckon upon that.”

“What shall we do?” said the viscount, as if in deep thought. “What a devil of a business!”

“I might have an audience at Versailles,” suggested the old lady, timidly.

“Oh, you will not obtain it.”

“But through your influence, madame?”

“Oh, my influence would be of no avail. His majesty detests business matters — and, besides, his mind is now full of one thing only.”

“The parliaments?” asked Madame de Bearn.

“No — my presentation.”

“Ah!” said the old lady.

“For you know, madame, in spite of the opposition of Monsieur de Choiseul and Madame de Grammont, the king has decided that I shall be presented.”

“I was not aware, madame.”

“It is a settled affair,” said Jean.

“And when will the presentation take place, madame?”

“Oh! very soon.”

“You see the king wishes it to be before the arrival of the dauphiness, that he may invite my sister to share the festivities at Compiegne.”

“Ah — I understand. Then you have all the arrangements made for your presentation,” said the old countess, sighing.

“Oh, yes,” replied the viscount, “the Baroness d'Alogny — do you know the Baroness d'Alogny?”

“No, sir. Alas! I scarcely know any one now. It is twenty years since I was at court.”

“Well, it is the Baroness d'Alogny who is to present my sister. The king loads her with favors — her husband is chamberlain — he is to be raised from a baron to a count — the son is to go into the guards — her orders on the king's privy purse are to be made payable by the city of Paris, and the day of the presentation she is to receive twenty thousand crowns paid down; so she is eager for it, you may be sure!”

“Yes, I can readily understand that,” said the old lady, smiling.

“Oh, but now I think of it — ” cried Jean.

“Of what?” asked the Countess Dubarry.

“What a misfortune! — what a misfortune!” continued he, “that I did not meet madame a week sooner at our cousin the vice-chancellor's.”

“Why, pray?”

“Why, we had no positive engagement then with the Baroness d'Alogny.”

“Dear brother, you speak like a sphinx — I do not understand you.”

“You do not understand?”

“No.”

“I will wager something the Countess de Bearn understands!”

“No, sir, I do not, indeed.”

“Last week you had not decided who should present you?”

“Undoubtedly.”

“Well — the Countess de Bearn — but perhaps, madame, I am taking too great a liberty?”

“No, sir — no.”

“Then madame could have presented you, and the king would have done for her what he is going to do for the Baroness d'Alogny.”

“Alas!” said the old lady, opening her eyes to their utmost extent.

“Oh, if you knew,” continued Jean, “all the favors his majesty heaped on the family of the baroness, as soon as he knew she had offered to introduce Jeanne! There was only one thing in the affair that vexed him —

“Ah, one thing vexed him?”

“Yes — one single thing — 'One thing vexes me,' said he. 'The lady who presents the Countess Dubarry I should have wished to bear an historical name,' and as he said that, he looked at the picture of Charles I., by Vandyck.”

“Yes, I understand,” said the old lady; “his majesty turned to that picture on account of the alliance between the Dubarry-Moores and the Stuarts, of which you spoke just now.”

“Precisely.”

“The fact is,” said the old lady, with a slight air of hauteur, “I never heard of the family of D'Alogny.”

“A good family, however,” said the countess; “they have brought forward all the necessary proofs, or nearly all.”

“Pardieu!” cried Jean, suddenly starting in his chair.

“Well, what is the matter?” said Madame Dubarry, scarcely able to refrain from laughing outright at the contortions of her brother-in-law.

“Monsieur has hurt himself, perhaps?” asked the old lady anxiously.

“No,” said Jean, sinking slowly back again into his chair, “it was an idea which just then occurred to me.”

“What idea?” said the countess, laughing; “it almost overturned you.”

“It must certainly have been a good one,” said Madame de Bearn.

“Excellent!”

“Well? we are all anxiety to hear it.”

“It has only one fault.”

“Well?”

“It is impossible.”

“No matter; let us hear it.”

“Suppose you were to tell the Baroness d'Alogny the king's remark when he looked at Charles I.'s portrait?”

“Oh, brother, that would not be polite, we cannot think of it.”

The old lady sighed.

“It is vexatious too,” continued the viscount, as if speaking to himself; “the affair could have been so easily arranged; — the Countess de Bearn, who not only bears such an ancient name, but is besides a woman of distinguished talent, would offer herself in the place of the Baroness d'Alogny; she would have gained her lawsuit; her son would have got a commission as lieutenant in the guards, and as madame must, of course, have been put to considerable expense in her frequent visits to Paris, there would have been adequate compensation allowed. Such an opportunity does not occur twice in a lifetime!”

“Alas, no!” exclaimed the old lady, quite overcome by this unforeseen blow.

The fact is, that any one in the position of the old litigant would have felt inclined to echo her exclamation, and like her would have sunk back, overwhelmed, in the easy chair.

"Now, brother," said the countess, in a tone of great compassion, "you see you are giving pain to Madame de Bearn; was it not enough that I was forced to tell her I could do nothing for her with the king before my presentation?"

"Oh, if I could delay my suit," sighed the countess.

"For only eight days," said Dubarry.

"Yes, in eight days," resumed Madame de Bearn, "in eight days madame will be presented."

"Yes; but the king will be at Compiegne in eight days — he will be in the midst of festivities — the dauphiness will have arrived."

"Stop! I have another idea. No — yes — no — yes, yes! — I have hit it!"

"What is it, sir?" said Madame de Bearn, whose whole soul seemed to hang upon the viscount's lips, and who repeated mechanically the monosyllables he uttered.

"Your presentation is still a secret; no one knows that you have got a lady to present you?"

"No; for the king wishes it to fall like a thunderbolt on the court."

"Well, the Countess de Bearn will demand an audience of the king, as she is not supposed to know any more about your presentation than others, for the purpose of offering to present you. The king, at such an offer from a lady of her rank, will be delighted; he will receive her, thank her, will ask her what he can do for her. She will introduce the subject of her lawsuit, and explain her views respecting it — his majesty will give them a favorable consideration, and the suit which she thought lost — is gained!"

The favorite fixed her eager gaze on the old lady, who probably began to suspect that there was some snare laid for her. "I am a poor unknown creature," said she; "his majesty would not, perhaps —

"Enough. I merely wished to give you a friendly advice on the matter," said Jean.

"Oh, sir, I am only too sensible — " said the countess, hesitating.

"It is not a bad idea," replied Madame Dubarry, smiling; "but perhaps madame would not like to descend to anything like a trick, even to gain her lawsuit."

“Quite true, madame,” said the old lady, hoping to get off by this means; “I had much rather do you some real service to obtain your friendship.”

“Indeed, nothing could be more condescending,” said the favorite, with a slight shade of irony which did not escape the penetration of Madame de Bearn.

“Well, I have still another means,” said Jean. The old lady listened anxiously.

“Really, brother, your imagination is as fertile in resources as that of M, de Beaumarchais. Let us hear this last idea.”

“It is that the Countess de Bearn shall render you the real service which she wishes to do. Can you not persuade the Baroness d'Alogny to yield her rights to the countess? — you need not tell her plumply the king's observation, but you could, with your tact, make her understand that he preferred the countess's ancient name.”

This time the attack was direct; he thought there could be no evasive answer, but the countess found one.

“I should not like to interfere with that lady's arrangements,” said she; “among persons of quality a certain attention to these engagements must be observed.”

Madame Dubarry made a gesture of anger and disappointment, but the viscount by a look restrained her.

“Observe, madame,” said Jean, “I insist on nothing. Like many in the world, you have a lawsuit, which very naturally you wish to gain. It appears, however, that, on the contrary, you are likely to lose it; you are in despair; just at that moment I arrive; I feel for you; I take an interest in an affair which does not in the remotest degree concern me; I endeavor to make it turn out favorably for you. I am wrong — let us say no more about it!” and Jean rose from his seat.

“Oh, sir,” exclaimed the old lady in despair, for she now saw that the Dubarrys, who had been till then indifferent, were going to use their influence against her; “oh, sir, believe me, I am truly grateful to you! I feel how benevolent have been your intentions.”

“As for myself,” replied Jean, playing to the life the part of a person perfectly unconcerned, “it matters not whether my sister be presented by the Baroness d'Alogny, the Countess de Polastron, or the Countess de Bearn.”

“Oh, certainly, sir.”

“Only I confess I felt annoyed that the royal favor should be bestowed on some mean spirit, actuated by sordid interest — a spirit yielding to our power, because it is impossible to undermine it.”

“Oh, that is what will most probably happen.” said the favorite.

“While,” continued Jean, “the Countess de Bearn, almost an entire stranger to us, and coming forward without any solicitation on our part, and prompted solely by her kindness and good nature to offer her services, appears to me worthy of all the advantages which would thereby accrue to her.”

The old lady was probably about to disclaim that goodwill which the viscount did her the honor to attribute to her, but Madame Dubarry did not give her time.

“The fact is,” said she, “the king would not refuse anything to a lady who would act as you describe.”

“What? the king would not refuse anything, do you say?”

“Even more — he would say with his own lips to the vice-chancellor, 'M, de Maupeou, I wish that everything should be settled about the lawsuit as the Countess de Bearn wishes;' but it seems, however, as if you saw some difficulty in the matter. Very good. But you will at least do me the justice, I hope, to believe that I was actuated by a sincere wish to serve you, madame,” and the viscount bowed.

“Indeed, sir, my heart is filled with gratitude to you!”

“Pray do not speak of it,” said the gallant viscount.

“But the Baroness d'Alogny would not yield up her right?” resumed the old lady, after a short pause.

“Still, his majesty would not be the less grateful to you for your offer.”

“But supposing,” persisted the old lady, who was determined to view the matter in the worst light, in order to see to the bottom of the affair — “supposing the baroness would yield her privilege to me, she would not so readily give up the accompanying advantages.”

“The king's kindness is inexhaustible, madame,” said the favorite.

“If I offered my services, madame,” replied the old lady, drawn on more and more both by her interest and the clever manner in which they played their parts, “I should leave out of view the gaining of my cause — for, to say the truth, a suit which every one thinks lost to-day, will not be easily gained to-morrow.”

"Oh — but if the king were favorable!" exclaimed Jean, eager to combat her new doubts.

"Well," said the favorite. "I confess I am of the countess's opinion, viscount."

"You are?" said he, staring at her with open eyes.

"Yes — I think it would be more honorable for a lady of her ancient name to allow her suit to go as it may. Then there would be nothing binding on the king — nothing to impede his munificence to her; and if he did not wish, in the present state of the parliaments, to interfere with the course of justice, he might offer her compensation for the loss of the suit."

"Ah," sighed the old lady, "how could he offer anything to compensate for the loss of two hundred thousand francs?"

"Why, in the first place," replied Madame Dubarry, "there might, for instance, be a royal gift of one hundred thousand francs."

The partners in this scheme looked at their victim with eager eyes.

"I have a son — " said she.

"So much the better! One more loyal servant of the State."

"But do you think, madame, there would be anything done for my son?"

"I can answer for it," said Jean, "that the least he might expect would be a lieutenancy in the guards."

"Have you any other relations?" inquired the Countess Dubarry.

"I have a nephew."

"Well, we should find out something for your nephew," said the viscount.

"I think we may leave that in your hands, viscount," said the favorite, laughing, "as you have just given us proofs of so brilliant an imagination!"

"Well," continued the viscount, apparently determined to bring matters to an issue, "if his majesty did all these things for you, would you think it tolerably well?"

"I should think him extremely generous, and should offer you, madame, all my thanks — convinced that it was to you alone I should be indebted for his generosity."

"Then," asked the favorite, "you really take our proposal seriously into consideration?"

"Yes, madame — most seriously," replied the old lady, turning pale at the very thought of the obligation to which she pledged herself.

"And you permit me to mention you to his majesty?"

"Pray do me that honor," replied she, with a deep sigh.

“Madame, I shall do so with the least possible delay — indeed, this very evening,” said the favorite, rising to terminate the interview. “And in the meantime, I trust that I have secured your friendship.”

“I feel so highly honored by yours, madame,” said the old lady, beginning her curtseys again, that I almost feel as if all this were a dream.”

“Let us see, once more,” said Jean, wishing to fix the matter so firmly in the old countess's mind that it might be secure from all change. “One hundred thousand francs first, to make up for the loss of the suit; a lieutenancy for the young count; and something for a nephew.”

“Something?”

“I shall find out something good — that is my affair.”

“And when shall I have the honor of seeing you again, madame?” asked the old lady.

“To-morrow morning my carriage shall be at your door to take you to Luciennes — the king will be there. To-morrow, at ten o'clock, I shall have fulfilled my promise — his majesty will be informed, and will expect you.”

“Allow me to accompany you, madame,” said Jean, offering his arm.

“By no means, sir!”

“Well, then, to the top of the stairs?”

“Since you insist on it — ” and she took the viscount's arm.

“Zamore!” cried the countess.

Zamore appeared.

“Light this lady downstairs, and order my brother's carriage forward to the door.”

The two ladies exchanged a last curtsey. At the top of the staircase Jean bade the old countess adieu, and returned to his sister, while Madame de Bearn majestically descended the grand staircase. Zamore marched first — then came two footmen with lights — and then the old lady, her train (rather a short one) borne by a third footman.

The brother and sister watched at the window, following with their eyes to the very carriage the precious chaperone, sought with so much care, and found with so much difficulty. Just as she reached the door a chaise entered the courtyard, and a young lady sprang out.

“Ah, Mistress Chon!” cried Zamore, opening his enormous mouth to its widest extent with delight. “How do you do this evening, Mistress Chon?”

The Countess de Bearn stood petrified! In the new arrival she recognized her visitor — the false daughter of Master Flageot. Dubarry hurriedly opened a window, and made frantic signs to his sister — but she did not see them.

“Has that little fool, Gilbert, been here?” inquired Chou of a lackey, without perceiving the countess.

“!No, madame,” replied one of the footmen; “we have not seen him.”

It was just then that, looking up, she saw her brother — and following the direction of his hand, discovered Madame de Bearn. Chon recognized her — hastily pulled down her hood, and rushed into the vestibule.

The old lady, without appearing to have remarked anything, got into the carriage and gave her address to the coachman.

CHAPTER XXXII.

The King Gets Tired.

THE KING, WHO had gone to Marly, as he had said he would, ordered his carriage at three o'clock in the afternoon, and drove from that to Luciennes. He supposed that Madame Dubarry, on receiving his note, would immediately leave Versailles, and hasten there to wait for him.

He was rather surprised, therefore, on entering the chateau, to find Zamore — looking very little like a governor — occupied in plucking out the feathers of a parrot, which, in return, was endeavoring to bite him.

The two favorites were rivals, like the Duke de Choiseul and the Countess Dubarry.

The king installed himself in the small salon, and dismissed his attendants. Although the most inquisitive gentleman in his kingdom, he was not in the habit of questioning servants or lackeys; but Zamore was neither a servant nor a lackey; he occupied a middle place between the monkey and the parrot. The king, therefore, questioned Zamore.

“Is the countess in the garden?”

“No, master.” This word the favorite, in one of her whims, had ordered to take the place of majesty at Luciennes.

“Is she at the lake, feeding the carp?” This lake had been dug at a vast expense out of the side of the hill. It was fed with water from the aqueduct, and filled with great numbers of the finest carp, brought from Versailles.

“No, master,” again answered Zamore.

“Where is she, then?”

“In Paris, master.”

“What! Did the countess not come to Luciennes?”

“No, master — but she sent Zamore.”

“What to do?”

“To wait for the king.”

“Ah ha! so you are delegated to receive me? Very agreeable indeed! Thank you, countess! Thank you! I am to have the society of Zamore!” And he rose from his chair rather piqued.

“Oh, no, the king is not to have the society of Zamore,” said the negro.

“Why not?”

“Because Zamore is going away.”

“Where are you going?”

“To Paris.”

“Then I am to be left alone? Better and better. But why go to Paris?”

“To find Mistress Barry and tell her the king is at Luciennes.”

“Oh, the countess desired you to tell me that, then?”

“Yes, master.”

“And did she tell you what I was to do till she came?”

“She said you were to sleep.”

“Ah!” said the king to himself, “she will not be long, and she has some surprise for me; “then he added aloud, “Go then and bring back the countess. But how will you travel?”

“On the great white horse with the scarlet housings.”

“And how long does it take for the great white horse to go to Paris?”

“I do not know,” said the negro boy; “but he goes fast, fast, fast! Zamore likes to go fast!”

“Indeed! I am extremely fortunate to find that Zamore likes to go fast.”

And he stationed himself at the window to see Zamore depart.

A tall footman lifted him on the horse, and with the happy ignorance of childhood, the little negro set off at a gallop on his gigantic steed.

The king, being left alone, asked a footman at last if there were anything new at Luciennes. The servant replied that there was only Monsieur Boucher, who was painting the countess's boudoir.

“Oh, Boucher, poor Boucher, is he here?” said the king, with a slight appearance of satisfaction; “and where is he?”

“In the summer-house; shall I show your majesty the way to it?”

“No, no; I should rather go and see the carps. Give me a knife.”

“A knife, sire?”

“Yes, and a large loaf.” The valet returned carrying a large loaf, with a long knife stuck in it, on a china plate. The king made a sign to the valet to accompany him, and with a pleased air led the way to the pond.

The feeding of carps was a traditional occupation in the Bourbon family, the Grand Monarque never missing it for a single day. Louis XV, seated himself on a mossy bank, from which the view before him was charming.

There lay the little lake, with its velvet slopes of turf; beyond it a village nestled between two hills; further off, the towers of Saint Germain, with their wooded terraces, and further still the blue declivities of Saunois and Cormeilles; while, above all this, the gray and rose-tinged sky hung like a magnificent cupola. The weather had been stormy, and the foliage of the trees looked dark and heavy against the pale green of the meadows; the waters of the lake, glassy and immovable as a vast surface of oil, were disturbed from time to time by some silvery lashing fish springing up to seize the unwary fly, and checkering it with wide-spreading circles of alternate black and white. At the margin might be perceived the enormous snouts of a number of fish, which, fearless of hook or net, sucked the leaves of pendant plants, and with their huge fixed eyes, which seemed incapable of sight, stared at the gray lizards and green frogs sporting among the bulrushes.

When the king, like a man profoundly skilled in the art of killing time, had looked at the landscape on all sides, when he had counted the houses in the village, and the villages in the distance, he took the plate with the loaf, placed it beside him, and began to cut off large pieces of the bread.

The carps heard the sound of the knife in the crust, and accustomed to that noise, which announced their dinner hour, they immediately flocked as close as possible to the bank, to show themselves to his majesty and solicit their daily meal. They would have done the same for any footman in his service, but the king naturally thought that all this trouble was for him alone.

He threw in one after another the pieces of bread, which first disappearing for an instant, and then, returning to the surface, were contended for for some time, then, gradually crumbling away by the action of the water, were seized and seen no more. It was indeed a curious and amusing enough sight to see all these crusts pushed hither and thither by the invisible snouts, and tossed on the surface of the water, until the moment when they were swallowed.

At the end of about half an hour, his majesty, having in that time patiently cut one hundred bits of crust, had the satisfaction of seeing that not one remained floating. He began now, however, to feel rather tired of the sport, and he remembered that Monsieur Boucher might amuse him a little; he would not certainly be as good a resource as the carps, but in the country we must take what we can get.

Louis, therefore, turned toward the summer-house. Boucher had heard that he was at Luciennes, and though he went on painting, or seeming to paint, he followed the king with his eyes, saw him turn in the direction of the summer-house, and radiant with joy, he adjusted his ruffles and mounted on his ladder, for he had been warned not to appear to know that the king was there. He heard a step on the floor of the room, and began to daub a fat Cupid stealing a rose from a shepherdess in a blue satin gown and straw hat. His hand trembled, his heart beat. The king stopped on the threshold.

“All, Boucher,” cried he; “how you smell of turpentine!” and he walked on.

Poor Boucher, although he knew the king had no taste for the fine arts, did expect some other kind of compliment, and was nearly falling from his ladder. He came down and went away with the tears in his eyes, without scraping his palette or washing his brushes, which, in general, he was so careful to do.

His majesty pulled out his watch — it was seven o'clock.

Louis returned to the house, teased the monkey, made the parrot speak, pulled out all the drawers of the cabinets, one after the other, and ransacked their contents.

Evening drew on. The king was not fond of darkness, and the apartments were lighted up. But he did not like solitude either.

“My horses in a quarter of an hour!” said he. “Ma foi!” added he, “I shall just give her one quarter of an hour; not a minute longer.”

As he said this, he stretched himself on a sofa opposite the fireplace, to watch the course of the fifteen minutes, that is, of nine hundred seconds. At the four hundredth beat of the timepiece, which represented a blue elephant carrying a pink sultana, he was asleep.

As may be supposed, the footman who came to announce his majesty's carriage took care not to awake him. The result of this attention to his august slumber was, that when he awoke of his own accord, he found himself face to face with the Countess Dubarry, who was looking at him with her eyes wide open. Zamore stood in a corner waiting for orders.

“Ah! you are here at last, countess,” said the king, sitting up on the sofa.

“Yes, sire, here I am,” said the countess, “and here I have been a pretty longtime.”

“Oh! a pretty longtime?”

“An hour and a half at least. But how your majesty does sleep!”

“Faith, countess, you were not here, and I was getting shockingly tired; and then I sleep so badly at night. Do you know, I was on the point of going away!”

“Yes, I saw your majesty's carriage at the door.”

The king looked at his watch.

“Half-past ten — then I have slept nearly three hours!”

“After that, sire, say that you cannot sleep well at Luciennes!”

“Oh, faith, very well; but what the devil do I see there?” said he, looking at Zamore.

“You see the governor of Luciennes, sire.”

“Not yet, not yet,” said the king, laughing. “The little wretch has put on his uniform before having been appointed; he reckons on my word, then?”

“Sire, your word is sacred, and he is right in reckoning on it. But Zamore has something more than your word, or rather something less — he has his commission; the vice-chancellor sent it to me. The oath is now the only formality which is wanting; make him swear quickly, and then betake himself to his post.”

“Approach, governor,” said the king.

Zamore came forward. He was dressed in a uniform, with an embroidered collar and a captain's epaulettes, with short breeches, silk stockings, and a sword like a spit. He walked with a stiff, measured step, an enormous three-cornered hat under his arm.

“Can he swear?” asked the king.

“Oh, yes, sire; try him.”

“Advance,” cried he, looking curiously at the black puppet.

“On your knees!” said the countess.

“Swear!” said the king.

The child placed one hand on his heart, the other in the king's hand, and said, “I swear fealty and homage to my master and mistress; I swear to defend to the death the castle in my keeping, and to eat the last pot of sweetmeats rather than surrender, should I be attacked.”

The king laughed as much at the form of the oath as at the gravity with which Zamore pronounced it.

“In return for this oath,” he replied with suitable gravity, “I confer on you the sovereign rights of justice on high and low, on all inhabiting air, earth, fire, and water, in this castle.”

“Thank you, master,” said Zamore, rising.

“And now,” said the king, “go and show off your fine clothes in the kitchens, and leave us alone; go!”

As Zamore went but at one door, Chon entered by another.

“Ah, and you there, too, my little Chon! Come, I shall hear the truth from you.”

“Take care, sire, that you are not disappointed in your expectations!” said Chon; “the truth is, it would be for the first time in my life. If you wish to learn the truth, apply to my sister — she is incapable of speaking falsely.”

“Is that true, countess?”

“Sire, Chon has too flattering an opinion of me — bad example has ruined me — and from this evening forth I am determined to lie like a real countess, if the truth will not serve me.”

“Oh, ho!” said the king; “I suspect Chon has something to conceal from me. I must get from the police a report of what has occurred to-day.”

“From which police, sire — Sartines' or mine?”

“Oh, from Sartines!”

“What will you pay him for it?”

“If he tell me anything worth hearing, I shall not be niggardly.”

“Well, then, give my police the preference, and take my report. I shall serve you — royally.”

“You will even sell your own secrets?”

“Why not, if I am well paid?”

“Come, then, let me hear the report — but no fibs, remember!”

“Sire, you insult me.”

“I mean, no equivocations.”

“Well, sire, get your funds ready — I am about to begin my report.”

“They are ready,” said the king, jingling some money in his pocket.

“In the first place, the Countess Dubarry was seen in Paris, in the Rue de Valois, about two o'clock in the afternoon.”

“Well, I know that — go on!”

“About six o'clock Zamore proceeded to join her there.”

“Very possibly; but what did Madame Dubarry go to Paris for?”

“Sire, to meet the lady who is to present her.”

“Pooh!” said the king, with a grimace which he could not altogether conceal, “she is very well as she is, without being presented.”

“You know the proverb, sire, nothing is so dear to us as that which we have not.”

“So she is absolutely determined to find this lady to present her?”

“We have found her, sire.”

The king started, and shrugged his shoulders.

“I like that movement, sire; it shows that your majesty would be annoyed at the defeat of the Grammonts, the Guemenees, and all the hypocrites of the court,” said the countess.

“I beg your pardon; did you speak?”

“Yes — I am sure you are in league with those persons.”

“In league? — countess, learn one thing, that the king only leagues with kings.”

“True — but all your kings are friends of the Duke de Choiseul.”

“Let us return to your chaperone, countess.”

“With all my heart, sire.”

“You have succeeded in manufacturing a lady, then?”

“I found one ready made, and very well made — a Countess de Bearn — a family who have numbered princes among their ranks. She will not dishonor the relative of the relatives of the Stuarts, I hope!”

“The Countess de Bearn!” exclaimed the king, with surprise. “I know only of one, who lives somewhere near Verdun.

“It is the very same — she has come to Paris on purpose to present me.”

“Ha! and when is the affair to take place?”

“To-morrow, at eleven o'clock in the morning, I am to give her a private audience, and, at the same time, if it be not too presumptuous, she will request the king to name a day — and you will name the earliest — will you not, dear France?”

The king burst into a forced laugh.

“Certainly, certainly,” said he, kissing the countess's hand. Then all at once. “To-morrow, at eleven?” added he.

“Yes — at breakfast.”

“Impossible! my dear countess.”

“Impossible! — why?”

“I shall not breakfast here — I must return this evening.”

“What!” said the countess, who felt an icy pang shoot through her heart at these words; “you are going to leave us, sire?”

“I am forced to do so, dear countess — I have to meet Sartines on very important business.”

“As you please, sire; but you will at least sup here, I hope?”

“Oh, yes, I shall sup, I think — yes, I am rather hungry — I shall sup.”

“Order supper, Chon,” said the countess, making at the same time a private signal to her, which no doubt referred to some previous arrangements. Chon left the room. The king had seen the signal in a mirror, and although he could not comprehend its meaning, he suspected some snare.

“Ah!” said he, “on second thoughts I think it will be impossible to stay even for supper — I must not lose a moment — I have some papers to sign — to-day is Saturday.”

“As you please, sire — shall I order the horses?”

“Yes, fairest.”

“Chon!”

Chon reappeared.

“His majesty's horses!” said the countess.

“Very well,” said Chon, with a smile, and she left the room again.

A moment afterward her voice was heard in the anteroom, ordering the king's carriage.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

The King Is Amused.

THE KING, delighted at this exercise of his authority, which punished the countess for leaving him alone so long, at the same time that it freed him from the trouble of settling the affair of her presentation, walked toward the door of the salon.

Chon entered.

“Well, are my attendants there?”

“No, sire, there is not one of them in the anteroom.”

The king advanced into the anteroom himself — ” My attendants!” cried he. No one answered; there seemed not to be even an echo in the silent chateau.

“Who the deuce would believe,” said the king, returning to the salon, “that I am the grandson of the man who once said, 'I was very near having to wait!” and he went to a window, opened it, and looked out.

The space in front of the chateau was as deserted as the anterooms — no horses, no attendants, no guards. Night alone displayed to the eyes and to the soul all its calmness and all its majesty. The lovely moon shone brightly on the woods of Chatou, whose lofty summits rustled gently like the waves of the sea rippled by a breeze. The Seine, on whose bosom glittered a long line of light, looked like a gigantic serpent trailing its slow length along, its windings being visible from Bougival to Maisons, that is, for four or five leagues; and then, in the midst of this heavenly scene, a nightingale burst forth with such a sweet and varied song as she only gives in the month of May, as if she felt that nature was worthy of her music in the early days of spring alone — days which are scarcely come ere they are gone.

All this beauty and harmony were lost on Louis XV. — a king not much of a dreamer, a poet, or an artist, but, on the contrary, a good deal of a sensualist.

“Come, countess!” said he, considerably annoyed, “give the necessary orders, I entreat — what the deuce! — this jest must have an end.”

"Sire," replied the countess, with that charming pouting air which became her so well, "I do not command here."

"Nor do I," replied the king, "for you see how I am obeyed."

"It is neither you nor I who command."

"Who is it, then? — Is it you, Chon?"

"I?" said the young lady, who was seated on a couch on the other side of the apartment exactly opposite the countess, who occupied a similar one on the near side — "I find the task of obeying so difficult that I have no inclination for that of commanding."

"But who is the master, then?"

"The governor, sire, certainly."

"Monsieur Zamore?"

"Yes."

"Ah, very true! Well, let some one ring for him."

The countess stretched out her arm with a most graceful air of nonchalance to a silken cord ending in a tassel of beads. A footman, who had no doubt received his lesson beforehand, was ready in the anteroom and appeared.

"The governor," said the king.

"The governor," replied the valet, respectfully, "is on guard, watching over his majesty's precious life."

"Where is he?"

"Going his rounds, sire."

"Going his rounds?" repeated the king.

"Yes, with four officers, sire."

The king could not help smiling.

"That is droll enough," said he; "but it need not prevent my horses from being harnessed immediately."

"Sire, the governor ordered the stables to be closed, lest some marauder might enter them."

"And where are my grooms?"

"Gone to bed, sire."

"Gone to bed! — by whose orders?"

"The governor's, sire."

"And the gates of the castle?"

"Are locked, sire."

"Very well — then you must get the keys."

“The governor has them at his belt, sire.”

“A well-guarded castle, indeed — Peste! what order is kept!”

The footman, seeing that the king ceased to question him, retired. The countess, reclining gracefully on a couch, continued to bite off the leaves of a beautiful rose, beside which her lips seemed like coral. “Come, sire,” said she, at length, with a fascinating smile, “I must take compassion on your majesty — give me your arm and let us set out in search of some one to help you — Chon, light the way.”

Chon went before, ready to apprise them of any dangers which they might encounter. At the very first turn in the corridor the king's nose was saluted by an odor quite, sufficient to awaken the appetite of the most fastidious epicure.

“Ah, ha! what is that, countess?” said he, stopping.

“Oh, only supper, sire! I thought your majesty intended doing me the honor of supping at Luciennes, and I made arrangements accordingly.”

The king inhaled the gastronomic perfume two or three times, while he called to mind that his stomach had already given him certain tokens of its existence; then he thought what a fuss there must be before his grooms could be awakened, that would take half an hour at least; a quarter more to harness the horses; ten minutes to reach Marly — and when at Marly, where he was not expected, he should only get a put-off of a supper. All these things passed through his mind as he stood at the dining-room door, inhaling the seductive steam of the viands. Two covers were placed on the table, which was splendidly lighted and sumptuously laid out.

“Peste!” said Louis, “you have a good cook, countess.”

“Oh, sire, this is merely his first effort; the poor devil has been doing wonders to deserve your majesty's approbation. Indeed, he is so sensitive, that he might perhaps, in his disappointment, cut his throat, as poor Vatel did.”

“Really? — do you think so?”

“There was to be an omelet of pheasants' eggs on which he especially prided himself.”

“An omelet of pheasants' eggs? — I adore omelets of pheasants' eggs.”

“What a pity you must go.”

“Well, countess, we must not vex your cook,” said the king, laughing; “and perhaps, while we are supping, Master Zamore may return from his rounds.”

“Ah! sire, a capital idea,” said the countess, unable to conceal her delight at having gained this first step. “Come, sire, come!”

“But who will wait on us?” said the king, looking round in vain for an attendant.

“Ah! sire,” said Madame Dubarry, “is your coffee less grateful when presented to you by me?”

“No, countess; and still more when you make it for me.”

“Well, come then, sire.”

“Two covers only! Has Chon supped, then?”

“Sire. I did not venture without your majesty's express command —

“Come, come,” said the king, taking a plate and cover from a sideboard himself, “come, my little Chon; sit there opposite us.”

“Oh, sire!” said Chon.

“Yes, yes! play the very humble and very obedient subject, you little hypocrite. Sit here, countess, near me — beside me. What a beautiful profile you have!”

“Is this the first time you have observed it, dear France?”

“How should I observe it, when I am so happy in looking at your full countenance? Decidedly, countess, your cook is first-rate. What soup!”

“Then I was right in sending away the other?”

“Quite right — quite right.”

“Sire, follow my example — you see it will be to your advantage.”

“I do not understand you.”

“I have turned off my Choiseul — turn off yours.”

“Countess, no politics. Give me some Madeira.”

The king held out his glass; the countess took up a decanter to help him, and as she raised it up, her white fingers and rosy nails were seen to advantage.

“Pour gently and slowly,” said the king.

“Not to shake the wine, sire?”

“No, to give me more time to admire your hand.”

“Assuredly, sire,” said the countess, laughing; “your majesty is in the vein of making discoveries!”

“Faith, yes,” said the king, now in perfect good humor again, “and think I am in the fair way of discovering —

“A new world?”

"No, I am not so ambitious; besides, I find a kingdom as much as I can manage. No, only an isle — a little nook — an enchanted mountain — a palace of which a certain fair lady will be the Armida, and the entrance to which will be defended by all kinds of monsters."

"Sire," said the countess, presenting the king with a glass of iced champagne, a luxury quite new at that period, "here is some water just drawn from the river Lethe."

"The river Lethe, countess? are you sure?"

"Yes, sire; it was poor Jean who brought it from the shades below, from which you know he has just narrowly escaped."

"Countess, I drink to his happy resurrection. But no politics, I beg."

"Then I don't know what to talk about, sire. If you would relate something — you who have such a happy gift of telling a story."

"No — but I shall repeat you some verses."

"Verses?"

"Yes, verses. Is there anything surprising in that word?"

"I thought your majesty detested them."

"Parbleu! out of each hundred thousand manufactured, ninety thousand are against myself!"

"And those which your majesty is going to give me, belong to the ten thousand which cannot even make you look favorable on the ninety thousand."

"No, countess — these are addressed to you."

"To me? By whom?"

"By M, de Voltaire.:

"He charged your majesty to deliver them?"

"Not at all; he sent them direct to your highness."

"How? — without a cover?"

"No; inclosed in a charming letter."

"Ah, I understand; your majesty has been at work this morning with the postmaster. But read the verses, sire; read Monsieur de Voltaire's verses."

Louis XV, opened the paper and read;

"Goddess of pleasure, soft queen of the graces,
"Why blend, with the fetes which make Paphos to ring,
Foul threat'ning suspicions and hideous disgraces —
The fate of a hero, oh! why should'st thou bring?

Still dear our Ulysses his country shall hold.
The State's mighty bulwark — the monarch's delight,
None wiser in counsel, in battle more bold,
And Ilion can tell how resistless his might!

“Fair Venus, thy throne all the gods shall surround,
Thy beauty celestial all tongues shall declare,
The roses of joy in thy path shall abound —
Then calm the rough waters and smile on our prayer.
Ah! why should thy anger burn fiercely and high
'Gainst the hero whom foemen still tremble to meet,
For, how can he draw from such beauty a sigh,
Save in breathing his vows as he kneels at her feet?”

“Decidedly, sire,” said the countess, more piqued than gratified by this poetical offering, “Monsieur de Voltaire wishes to recommend himself to your favor.”

“He loses his pains, then,” said the king. “He is a firebrand who would burn Paris if he returned to it. Let him stay with his friend, my cousin Frederick II.; we can do very well with Monsieur Rousseau. But take the verses, countess, and study them.”

She took the paper, made a match of it, and laid it beside her plate.

“Some tokay, sire,” said Chon.

“From the vaults which supply his majesty the emperor of Austria,” said the countess.

“From the emperor's vaults?” said the king. “Pardieu! no one is supplied from them but myself.”

“Very true, sire,” said the countess; “so I had it from your butler.”

“Ah!” said the king, “and you have seduced — ”

“No, sire, I have ordered.”

“Well answered, countess! I was a fool.”

“Will the king take coffee?” asked Chon.

“Oh, certainly.”

“And will his majesty burn it, as usual?” asked the countess.

“If the lady of the castle permit.” The countess rose. “But what are you doing?”

“I am going to wait on you myself.”

“Well,” said the king, leaning back in his chair like a man who had made an excellent supper, and whose humors were, therefore, in a happy state of equilibrium. “Well, I see that my best plan is to let you do as you like, countess.”

The countess brought a silver stand, with a little coffee pot containing the boiling mocha; she then placed before the king a plate on which was a silver cup and a carafe of Bohemian glass, and beside the plate she laid the match which she had just folded.

The king, with that profound attention which he always bestowed on this operation, calculated his sugar, measured his coffee, and, having gently poured on it the brandy, so that it swam on the surface, he took the little roll of paper, lighted it at a candle, and communicated the flame to the liquor. Five minutes afterward he enjoyed his coffee with all the delight of a finished epicure.

The countess looked on till he had finished the last drop; then she exclaimed, “Oh, sire, you have burned your coffee with M, de “Voltaire's verses. That is a bad omen for the Choiseuls!”

“I was wrong,” said he, laughing; “you are not a fairy — you are a demon.”

The countess rose.

“Does your majesty wish to know whether the governor has returned?”

“Zamore? — Bah! for what purpose?”

“To allow you to go to Marly, sire.”

“True,” said the king, making a great effort to rouse himself from that state of comfort in which he found himself. “Well, countess, let us see — let us see!”

The countess made a sign to Chon, who vanished.

The king began his search for Zamore again; but, it must be confessed, with very different feelings from those which had before influenced him. Philosophers say that we behold things either dark or bright, according to the state of our stomachs, and, as kings have stomachs like other men — in general, indeed, not so good as other men, but still communicating the sensation of comfort or discomfort to the rest of the body in the same manner — our king appeared in the most charming humor which it was possible for a king to be in; and his search ended without his discovering Zamore, and without his being displeased at his want of success.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Voltaire and Rousseau.

AT TEN O'CLOCK THE NEXT morning, the king, though he had supped so well, began to think of breakfast; but, going to a window, he saw his carriage and all his attendants ready for his departure. Zamore, with folded arms, was giving, or pretending to give, orders.

“What is this, countess?” said he; “are we not to breakfast? One would' think you were going to send me away fasting!”

“Heaven forbid, sire! but I thought your majesty had to meet Monsieur de Sartines at Marly.”

“Pardieu!” said the king, “could not Sartines be told to come here? — it is so near!”

“Your majesty will do me the honor to believe that that idea occurred to me before your majesty.”

“And, besides, the morning is too fine for work; let us breakfast.”

“Your majesty must first give me a few signatures for myself.”

“For the Countess de Bearn?”

“Yes; and then name the day and the hour.”

“What day and hour?”

“The day and hour for my presentation.”

“Ma for!” said the king, “it must be so, I suppose; fix the day yourself.”

“Sire, the sooner the better.”

“Is all ready?”

“Yes.”

“You have learned to make your three curtseys?”

“I have practiced them for more than a year.”

“You have your dress?”

“In twenty-four hours it will be ready.”

“And you have your chaperon?”

“In an hour she will be here.”

“And now, countess, for a bargain!

"What is it?"

"That you will never again speak of that affair of the Viscount Jean with the Baron de Taverney."

"Must I sacrifice the poor viscount?"

"Yes, faith!"

"Well, sire, I shall speak no more of it. The day?"

"The day after to-morrow."

"The hour?"

"Half-past ten at night, as usual."

"It is settled?"

"It is settled."

"On your royal word?"

"On the word of a gentleman."

"Give me your hand on it, France!" and Madame Dubarry held out her pretty little hand, in which the king placed his own.

This morning all Luciennes felt the gayety of its master. He had yielded on one point on which he had long before determined to yield; but then he had gained another. This was certainly a decided advantage. He would give one hundred thousand crowns to Jean on condition that he went to drink the waters of the Pyrenees, in Auvergne; that would pass for banishment in the eyes of the Choiseul party. There were louis-d'ors that morning for the poor, cakes for the carps, and praises for Boucher's paintings.

Eleven o'clock struck. The countess, although attending assiduously to the king at his breakfast, could not help looking, from time to time, at the clock, which moved too slowly for her wishes. His majesty had taken the trouble to say, that when the Countess de Bearn arrived, she was to be shown into the breakfast room. The coffee was served, tasted, drunk, still she came not. Suddenly the tramping of a horse's feet was heard. The countess ran to a window. It was a messenger from the viscount, who leaped from his horse reeking with foam. At sight of him she felt a chill run through her veins, for she knew all could not be right; but it was necessary to hide her uneasiness in order to keep the king in good humor. She returned to his side and sat down.

A moment afterward, Chon entered with a note in her hand. There was no means of escape; it must be read before the king.

"What is that, sweet Chon?" said the king; "a love-letter?"

"Oh, certainly, sire."

“From whom?”

“From the poor viscount.”

“Are you quite certain?”

“Look at it, sire.”

The king recognized the writing, and thinking the note might contain something about the Lachaussee affair, “Very well,” said he, pushing it aside, “very well — that is enough.”

The countess was on thorns.

“Is the note for me?” she asked.

“Yes, countess.”

“Will your majesty permit me —

“Oh, yes — read it — read it; and, in the meantime, Chon will repeat 'Maitre Corbeau' to me.” So saying, he pulled her on his knee, and began to sing — sadly out of tune, indeed — for Rousseau has recorded that Louis had the worst ear in his kingdom.

The countess retired into the recess of a window, and read the following epistle;

“Do not expect the old wretch; she pretends that she scalded her foot yesterday, and is obliged to keep her room. You may thank Chon's most opportune arrival yesterday for this. The old wretch recognized her immediately, and so put an end to our little comedy.

“It was fortunate that that little wretch, Gilbert, who is the cause of this misfortune, was lost. I would have wrung his neck about! However, he may be assured it is in store for him, if ever he cross my path.

“But to return to the point — on to Paris at once, or we are lost. JEAN.”

“What is the matter?” inquired the king, surprised at the sudden paleness which overspread the countess's face.

“Nothing, sire; it is only a bulletin of Jean's health.”

“Does not the dear viscount get better, then?”

“Oh, yes, thank you, sire, much better,” said the countess. “But I hear a carriage enter the courtyard.”

“Oh, our old countess, I suppose!”

“No, sire, it is M, de Sartines.”

“Well, what then?” exclaimed the king, seeing that Madame Dubarry was moving toward the door.

“ Well, sire, I shall leave you with him and go to dress.”

“And what about Bearn?”

“When she comes, sire, I shall let your majesty know,” replied the countess, crumpling the viscount's note in the pocket of her dressing-gown.

“Then you abandon me?” said the king, with a melancholy air.

“Sire, remember this is Sunday; you have papers to sign.” So saying she presented her fresh and rosy cheeks to the king, who kissed them, and she left the room.

“Devil take all signatures,” said the king, “and those who bring them! Who was it that invented ministers and portfolios?”

He had scarcely finished this malediction, when the minister and the portfolio entered by a door opposite that lay which the countess had departed. The king sighed again, more deeply than before.

“Ah! are you there, Sartines?” said he. “How very punctual you are.”

This was said in a tone which left it very doubtful whether the words were intended as a eulogium or a reproach.

The minister opened his portfolio, and busied himself in taking out and arranging his papers. Just then the sound of the wheels of a carriage was heard, grating on the sand of the avenue.

“Wait a little, Sartines,” said the king, and he ran to the window.

“What!” said he, “the countess is driving off!”

“It is she, indeed, sire,” said the minister.

“But is she not going to wait for the Countess de Bearn?”

“Sire. I am inclined to think she is tired of waiting, and goes to find her.”

“Yet the old lady had decided on coming this morning.”

“Sire, I am almost certain that she will not come.”

“Then you know something about the matter, Sartines?”

“Sire, I am obliged to know a little about everything, otherwise your majesty would be dissatisfied with me.”

“Well, what has happened? Tell me, Sartines.”

“To the old countess, sire?”

“Yes.”

“A very common case, sire — difficulties have arisen.”

“Then the Countess de Bearn really will not come?”

“Hmm! there was rather more certainty of it yesterday evening than there is this morning.”

"Poor countess!" said the king, unable, in spite of himself, to conceal a gleam of satisfaction which sparkled in his eyes.

"Ah, sire, the quadruple alliance and the family compact were trifles in comparison with this presentation!"

"Poor countess!" repeated the king, shaking his head, "she will never accomplish her purpose."

"I fear it, sire, unless your majesty concerns yourself about it."

"She was so certain that now all was in the right train."

"And what makes the matter worse for the countess," said M, de Sartines, "is, that if she be not presented before the arrival of the dauphiness, it is probable she never will be presented at all."

"More than probable! Sartines, you are right. They say that my daughter-in-law is very strict, very devout, very prudish. Poor countess!"

"It will certainly annoy her very much, sire, if she be not presented; but, on the other hand, it will relieve your majesty from many annoyances."

"Do you think so, Sartines?"

"Oh, yes, sire! The envious, the libelers, the ballad-mongers, the flatterers, the journalists, will not have so much to say. If she was presented, sire, it would cost us at least one hundred thousand francs additional for the police."

"Indeed — ? poor countess! and yet she wishes so much to be presented."

"Your majesty knows you have only to command, and her wishes will be gratified."

"What do you mean, Sartines? Do you imagine that I could meddle in such an affair? Can I, by signing an order, make people polite to Madame Dubarry? Is it you, Sartines, a man of sense, who advise such an innovation to satisfy the whims of the countess?"

"Oh, by no means, sire! I merely say, as your majesty says, poor countess!"

"Besides," said the king, "her position is not so desperate, after all. You always look at things on the dark side, Sartines. Who can tell, whether the Countess de Bearn may not change her mind? Who can be certain that the dauphiness will arrive so soon? It will take four days yet before she can reach Compiegne, and in four days much may be done. Let me see. Have you anything for me to do this morning, Sartines?"

"Oh, your majesty, only three papers to sign;" and the minister of police drew out the first from his portfolio.

“Oh!” said the king, “a lettre-de-cachet.”

“Yes, sire.”

“And against whom!”

“Your majesty may see.”

“Oh! against the Sieur Rousseau? What Rousseau is that, Sartines, and what has he done?”

“Done, sire! — written 'Le Contrat Social.'”

“Oh, then, it is Jean-Jacques whom you wish to shut up in the Bastille?”

“Sire, he disturbs the public peace.”

“And what the deuce did you expect he would do?”

“Besides, I don't propose to shut him up.”

“Of what use is this letter, then?”

“Sire, merely to have a weapon ready.”

“ — Not that I am at all fond of your philosophers, mark ye.”

“Your majesty has good cause not to love them.”

“But people will exclaim against us. Besides, I think we authorized him to come to Paris.”

“No, sire; we said we should tolerate him on condition that he did not appear in public.”

“And does he appear in public?”

“He is always to be seen.”

“In his Armenian dress?”

“Oh no, sire. We ordered him to lay it aside.”

“And he obeyed?”

“Yes, but complaining loudly all the time of our persecution.”

“And how does he dress now?”

“Oh, like other people, sire.”

“Then he cannot be so much remarked?”

“What, sire! a man who has been forbidden to appear in public not remarked! And then, only guess where he goes every day!”

“To the Marshal de Luxembourg's, to Monsieur d'Alembert's, to Madame d'Epinay's?”

“To the Cafe de la Regence, sire! He plays chess there every evening. He must be mad upon that point, for he always loses; and it requires every evening a company of soldiers to keep order among the crowds around the house.”

"Well," said the king, "the Parisians are even greater fools than I thought them. Let them go on amusing themselves in that way, Sartines; while they do so, they will not shout starvation!"

"But, sire, if some fine day he should take it into his head to make a speech, as he did in London?"

"Oh! in that case, as there would be criminality and public infringement of the laws, you would not require a lettre-de-cachet, Sartines."

The minister saw that the king did not wish the arrest of Rousseau to rest on the royal responsibility, so he did not press the matter farther.

"But, sire," said he, "there is another philosopher."

"Another!" replied the king, languidly, "shall we never have done with them?"

"Ah, sire, it is they who have never done with us!"

"And who is this one?"

"Monsieur de Voltaire."

"Has he also returned to Prance?"

"No, sire; it would be much better, perhaps, that he had, for then we could watch him."

"What has he been doing?"

"It is not he who has been doing anything, it is his partisans; they are actually going to have a statue erected in his honor!"

"Equestrian, I suppose?"

"No, sire; and yet I assure you he is a famous captor of towns!"

The king shrugged his shoulders.

"Sire, there has not been seen such a one since Poliorcetes," continued Sartines. "He obtains information from all quarters; his writings reach all quarters; the highest persons in your kingdom turn smugglers for the sake of his books. I seized, the other day, eight boxes full of them; two were addressed to the Duke de Choiseul."

"It is very amusing!"

"Sire, only reflect that they are now doing for him what is only done for kings — they are decreeing him a statue."

"Sartines, statues are not decreed by others for kings, they decree them to themselves. And who is to make this fine work of art?"

"The sculptor Pigale. He has set out for Ferney to execute the model. In the meantime, subscriptions are pouring in; and observe, sire, it is only authors who are permitted to subscribe. All come with their offerings; they make quite a procession every day. Even Rousseau brought his two louis-d'ors.”

“Well,” said the king, “what can I do in the matter? I am not an author, it does not concern me.”

“Sire, I thought of proposing to your majesty to put an end, by royal command, to this demonstration.”

“I shall take good care not to do any such thing, Sartines. Instead of decreeing him a bronze statue, they would then decree him one of gold. Let them alone. Mon Dieu! he will look even uglier in bronze than in flesh and blood!”

“Then your majesty desires that the matter should take its own course!”

“Let us understand one another, Sartines! Desire is not the word. I should be very glad to put an end to these things, certainly; but how can I? — it is impossible. The time is passed when royalty could say to the spirit of philosophy, as God says to the ocean, 'Thus far shalt thou go and no farther!' To blame loudly but uselessly; to aim a blow, but strike short of our aim; that would only serve to show our own weakness. Let us turn away our eyes, Sartines, and pretend not to see.” The minister sighed.

“At least, sire,” said he, “if we do not punish the men, let us suppress their works. Here is a list of books which, in my opinion, should instantly be proscribed; some attack the throne, some the altar; some teach rebellion, others sacrilege.”

The king took the list, and read in a languid voice —

“'The Sacred Contagion; or, the Natural History of Superstition.'

“'The System of Nature; or, Laws of the Physical and Moral World.'”

“'Instructions of the Capuchin at Ragusa, to Brother Pediculoso, on his setting out for the Holy Land.'”

He had not read one-fourth of the list when he let it fall, while an expression of sadness and dejection overspread his usually unmoved countenance. He remained thoughtful, and for some minutes seemed quite overcome.

“Sartines,” said he at last, “one might as well undertake to move the world. Let others try it.”

The minister looked at him with that perfect understanding of his wishes which the king loved in those who approached him, as it saved him the trouble of thinking and acting.

“A tranquil life, sire,” said he, “a tranquil life — is not that what your majesty wishes?”

The king nodded.

“Oh, yes!” said he. “I ask for nothing else from your philosophers, encyclopedists, thaumaturgi, illuminati, poets, economists, journalists — tribes that come one knows not whence — that are always bustling, writing, croaking, calumniating, calculating, preaching, complaining. Let them be crowned — let statues be raised to them — let temples be built to them — but let them leave me in peace.”

Sartines arose, bowed, and left the apartment, muttering, as he went. “It is fortunate we have on our money — 'Domine salvum fac regem.'”

Then the king, now left to himself, took a pen, and wrote to the dauphin the following lines:

“You have requested me to hasten the arrival of her royal highness the dauphiness, and I wish to gratify you.

“I have ordered that there shall be no stay made at Noyon — consequently, on Tuesday morning she will be at Compiegne.

“I shall be there myself precisely at ten o'clock — that is to say, a quarter of an hour before her.”

“Thus,” said he to himself, “I shall get rid of that foolish affair of the presentation, which annoys me more than Voltaire and Rousseau, and all the philosophers, past, present, and to come. The affair will then be between the poor countess, the dauphin and dauphiness. Ma foi, it is only fair that young minds, with strength for it, should contend with these vexations, hatreds, and revenges! Children should early learn to suffer — it is an excellent part of education.”

Delighted at having thus got rid of the difficulty, and certain that he would not be reproached with either favoring or hindering this presentation, about which all Paris was occupied, the king entered his carriage and drove off to Marly, where the court was waiting for him.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Chaperon and Debutante.

THE POOR COUNTESS — let us continue to apply the epithet which the king had given her, for at this moment she truly deserved it — the poor countess hurried like one in despair to Paris. Chon, terrified by Jean's paragraph concerning Gilbert, shut herself up in the boudoir at Luciennes to hide her grief and anxiety, lamenting the fatal whim which induced her to pick up Gilbert on the high road.

Having reached the outskirts of Paris, the countess found a coach awaiting her. In the coach were Viscount Jean and a lawyer, with whom he seemed to be arguing in the most energetic manner. The moment he perceived the countess he leaped out, and made a sign to his sister's coachman to stop.

“Quick, countess!” said he. “Quick, get into my carriage, and drive to the Rue Saint-Germain-des-Pres!”

“Is the old lady going to give us the slip?” said Madame Dubarry, changing carriages, while the lawyer, on a sign from the viscount, followed her example.

“I fear it, countess,” replied Jean. “I fear she is giving us a Roland for our Oliver.”

“But what has happened?”

“You shall hear. I staved in Paris because I am always suspicious, and in this case I was not wrong, as you will see. At nine last night I went prowling about the inn of the Coq Chantant. All quiet — no movement — no visitors; all looked well. Consequently, I thought I might go home to bed — and to bed I went. This morning I awoke at break of day. I roused Patrice, and ordered him to go and keep watch at the corner of the street. Well, at nine — observe, that was an hour sooner than I had appointed — I drove up to the hotel. Patrice had seen nothing to cause the least anxiety, so I boldly walked upstairs. At the door of the countess's room a maid-servant stopped me, and told me that the countess could not leave the house to-day, and perhaps it would be eight days before she could move from her apartment. I confess that, although prepared for some rebuff, I was not for that! 'What,' cried I,' she cannot go out! What is the matter?' 'She is ill.' 'Ill? Impossible! Yesterday she was perfectly well.' 'Yes, sir, but madame likes to make her own chocolate; and tins morning, when it was boiling, she spilled it over her foot, and she is scalded. On hearing the countess's cries I hastened in, and I found her nearly fainting. I carried her to her bed, and I think she is at present asleep.' I was as white as your lace, countess, and could not help crying out, 'It is a lie!' 'No, my dear Viscount Dubarry,' replied a sharp voice, which seemed to pierce the very wall, 'it is not a lie! I am in horrible pain.' I sprang to the side whence the voice came, and burst through a glass door which I could not open — the old countess was really in bed. 'Ah, madame!' I exclaimed — but it was all I could utter; I was in such a rage! I could have strangled her with pleasure. 'Look there,' said she, pointing to an old kettle which was lying on the floor, 'there is the coffee-pot that did all the mischief.' I flew to the coffee-pot, and stamped on it with both feet; it will make no more chocolate, I can answer for it. 'What a misfortune!' cried the old lady, piteously; 'it must be the Baroness d'Alogny who will present your sister. But what can we do? It was so written, as the Easterns say.' “Heavens! Jean, you drive me to despair!” exclaimed the countess.

“Oh! I do not despair yet, if you go to her; it was for that that I sent for you.”

“But why do you not despair?”

“Why! because you are a woman, and can do what I cannot; you can make the dressing be taken off; and, if you discover that it is an imposture, you can tell her that her son shall never be anything but a clown — that she shall never touch a farthing from the estate of the Saluces — in short, you can play off the imprecations of Camilla on her, much better than I the fury of Orestes.”

“Is this all a jest?” cried the countess.

“No, I assure you.”

“And where does our sibyl lodge?”

“At the Coq Chantant, Rue Saint-Germain-des-Pres, a great black house, with a monstrous cock painted on an iron plate — when the iron creaks, the cock crows.”

“I shall have a dreadful scene with her.”

“No doubt of it; but you must take your chance. Shall I go with you?”

“No; you would spoil all.”

“Just what our lawyer said; I was consulting him on that point when you drove up. For your information, I may tell you that he says to beat a person in his own house renders you liable to fine and imprisonment, while to beat him out of it — ”

“Is nothing!” said the countess. “You know that better than any one else.”

Jean grinned an ugly smile.

“Debts,” said he, “that are long in being paid, are paid with interest; and if ever I meet my man again —

“I would much rather, at present, speak of my woman!”

“I have nothing more to tell you, so be off!”

“But where will you wait for me?”

“In the inn itself. I shall ask for a bottle of wine, and sit there, in case you want a helping hand.”

“Drive on, coachman,” cried the countess.

“Rue Saint-Germain-des-Pres, at the sign of the Coq Chantant,” added the viscount.

In a quarter of an hour they where in the street honored by possessing the Coq Chantant. At some distance from the inn Madame Dubarry left her carriage and proceeded on foot. She feared that the noise of the wheels might put the old lady on the alert — that she might suspect what visitor was coining — and might have time to hide.

Alone, then, she entered the gaping porch of the inn. No one saw her until she was at the foot of the staircase; there she encountered the hostess.

“The Countess de Bearn?” said she.

“She is very ill, madame, and cannot see any one.”

“Yes, I am aware; and I came to know exactly how she is.”

And, light as a bird, she was at the top of the stairs in a moment.

“Madame, madame!” cried the hostess, “a lady is going to force her way into your room.”

“Who is she?” asked the old lady, from a distant part of the room.

“I,” said the favorite, appearing on the threshold with a face perfectly suited to the occasion, for she first smiled out of compliment, and then looked sad, by way of condolence.

“You here, madame?” exclaimed the old lady, turning pale.

“Yes, dear madame, I came to express my sympathy for your misfortune, of which I have just heard. Pray tell me how this accident happened.”

“But, madame, I dare not ask you to sit down in such a miserable place as this.”

“I know, madame, that you have a castle in Touraine, and can excuse your being obliged to receive your friends here in an inn.” And she sat down so determinedly that the old lady saw she must allow her to have her way.

“You seem in great pain, madame,” said the favorite.

“Oh, in dreadful pain!' “The right leg? But, good heavens, how did you manage to scald it?”

“Nothing more simple — I held the chocolate kettle in my hand, the handle gave way, and I received the boiling water on my ankle.”

“How shocking!”

The old lady sighed. “Yes, shocking, indeed,” said she; “but this is always the case; misfortunes never come singly.”

“You are aware that the king expected you this morning?”

“Oh! madame, that intelligence makes my sufferings infinitely greater.”

“His majesty is far from satisfied, madame, that you did not pay your visit.”

“But the pain I am in will be a sufficient apology; and I trust yet to be able to offer to his majesty my very humble excuses.”

“I do not tell you that to cause you any vexation,” said the countess, seeing that the old lady was assuming a little formality, “but merely to let you know that his majesty felt grateful for the offer you made me.”

“You see, madame, that it is now impossible for me to fulfill it.”

“Certainly; but may I ask you a question?”

“I shall be delighted to hear it.”

“Does not your present state arise from having experienced some sudden agitation?”

“Very possibly,” said the old lady, bowing slightly; “I must acknowledge that I was deeply moved by your gracious reception of me.”

“Yes; but there was another thing besides.”

“Another thing? nothing that I know of, madame.”

“Oh, yes; an unexpected meeting with a person on leaving my house.”

“I did not meet any one; I was in your brother's carriage.”

“Before getting into the carriage?”

The old lady seemed to be tasking her memory.

“Just as you were going down the stairs to the vestibule?”

The old lady seemed more intent in trying to recall the events of yesterday.

“Yes,” said the favorite, rather impatiently; “some one entered the court as you left my house.”

“I am so unfortunate, madame, as not to be able to recollect any one entering.”

“A lady — now you remember.”

“I am so short-sighted that at two paces from me, madame, I cannot distinguish any one.”

“Oh, ho!” said the favorite to herself; “she is too cunning for me! I shall never succeed by these means. Come — to the point at once. Then since you did not see the lady,” she continued aloud. “I must tell you that she is my sister-in-law, Mademoiselle Dubarry.”

“Oh, very well, madame; but as I have never had the pleasure of seeing her — ”

“Yes,” interrupted the other, “you have seen her — only when you saw her it was under the name of Flageot.”

“So!” cried the old lady, with a bitterness which she could not dissemble — “So that pretended Mademoiselle Flageot, who caused me to undertake the journey to Paris, is your sister-in-law?”

“She is, madame.”

“And who sent her to me?”

“I did.”

“To mystify me?”

“No, to serve you, while at the same time you should serve me.”

The old lady bent her thick gray eyebrows. “I do not think,” said she, “her visit will turn out very profitable to me.”

“Did the vice-chancellor receive you ill, then, madame?”

“Empty promises.”

“But it seems to me that I offered you something more tangible than promises.”

“Madame, God disposes, though man proposes.”

“Come, madame, let us view the matter seriously. You have scalded your foot!”

“Scalded it very badly.”

“Could you not, in spite of this accident — painful, no doubt, but after all, nothing dangerous — make an effort to bear the journey to Luciennes in my carriage, and stand before his majesty for one minute?”

“It is quite impossible, madame.”

“Is the injury so very serious?”

“Serious, indeed.”

“And pray who dresses it for you, and nurses you?”

“Like all housekeepers, I have excellent recipes for burns, and I dress it myself.”

“Might I take the liberty of requesting to see your specific?”

“Oh, yes, it is in that phial on the table.”

“Hypocrite!” thought the countess, “to carry her dissimulation to such a point! She is as cunning as a fox, but I shall match her. Madame,” added she, aloud, “I also have an excellent oil for accidents of this kind; but, before applying it, it is necessary to know what kind of scald it is — whether it is inflamed, or blistered, or the skin broken.”

“Madame, the skin is broken,” said the old lady.

“Oh, heavens! how you must suffer. Shall I apply my oil to it?”

“With all my heart, madame. Have you brought it?”

“No, but I shall send for it. In the meantime, I must see the state of your leg.”

“Oh, madame!” exclaimed the old lady, “I could not think of permitting you to see such a spectacle. I know too well what is due to good manners.”

“Delightful!” thought Madame Dubarry, “she is now fairly caught.” Then she added, “Where we can serve our fellow-beings, madame, we must not stand upon etiquette,” and she stretched out her hand toward the old lady's leg, which was extended on the sofa.

Madame de Bearn uttered a scream of pain.

“Very well acted,” said Madame Dubarry to herself, watching her every feature distorted with anguish.

“How you frightened me, madame,” said the old lady; “it is almost death to me to touch it;” and, with pale cheeks and half-closed eyes, she leaned back as if nearly fainting.

“Do you allow me to look at it?”

“If you choose, madame,” said the old lady, in a weak and suffering voice.

Madame Dubarry did not lose an instant; she took out the pins in the bandages, and rapidly unrolled them. To her great surprise, she was permitted to go on. “When it comes to the last covering,” thought she, “she will scream, and try to prevent me from seeing it; but, though she kill herself calling on me to stop, I will see the leg!” and she proceeded in her task.

Madame de Bearn groaned, but offered no resistance.

At last the bandages were untied, the last covering was removed, and a real wound caused by a scald lay before Madame Dubarry's eyes. Here ended the old lady's diplomacy. Livid and inflamed, the wound spoke for itself. The Countess de Bearn might have seen and recognized Chon; but if so, her courage and determination raised her far above Portia and Mutius Scevola. Madame Dubarry gazed at her in silent admiration. The old lady, now somewhat recovered, enjoyed her victory to the utmost; her inflamed eye brooded with satisfaction on the countess kneeling at her feet. Madame Dubarry replaced the bandages with that delicate care which women exercise toward the suffering, placed the limb once more on its cushion, and took her seat beside the couch.

“Come, madame,” said she, “I see of what you are capable, and I beg your pardon for not having begun this subject in the way in which I ought with such a woman as you. Make your own conditions.”

The eyes of the old lady sparkled, but it was only for a moment. “In the first place,” said she, “state what your wishes are, and then I shall see if I can be of any service to you.”

“Madame, I wish to be presented at Versailles by you, though it cost you another hour of the horrible suffering which you have endured this morning.”

The Countess de Bearn listened unflinchingly. “Anything else, madame?” said she.

“That is all. Now for your turn.”

“I must have,” replied Madame de Bearn, with a decision which showed clearly that she treated with the countess as one power with another, “I must have two hundred thousand francs of my lawsuit secured to me.”

“But if you gain your cause, you will then have four hundred thousand.”

“No; for I look on the disputed two hundred thousand as mine already, and the other two hundred thousand I shall reckon as merely an additional piece of good fortune to that of possessing the honor of your acquaintance.”

"You shall have them, madame — well?"

"I have a son, whom I love tenderly, madame. Our house has already been distinguished by military genius; but, born to command, we make but indifferent subalterns. My son must have a company immediately, and next year a colonel's commission."

"Who will pay all the necessary expenses, madame?"

"The king. You perceive that if I expended on my son the sum which I am to receive from you, I should be as poor tomorrow as I am to-day."

"At the lowest, I may reckon that at six hundred thousand francs."

"Four hundred thousand, supposing the commission worth two hundred thousand, which is a high estimate."

"This shall be granted you also."

"I have now to request from the king payment for a vineyard in Touraine, containing four acres, which the engineers deprived me of eleven years ago in making a canal."

"But they paid you then?"

"Yes, they paid me according to the valuator's estimate; but I value it at just double the sum."

"Well, you shall be paid a second time. Is that all?"

"Excuse me. I am out of cash, as you may suppose, madame, and I owe Master Flageot something about — nine thousand francs."

"Nine thousand francs!"

"Yes; it is absolutely necessary to pay him; he is an excellent lawyer."

"I have not the least doubt of it, madame. Well, I shall pay these nine thousand francs out of my own private purse. I hope you will acknowledge that I am accommodating."

"Perfectly accommodating. But I think I have also proved that I wish to serve you."

"I have only to regret that you scalded yourself," replied the favorite, with a smile.

"I do not regret it, madame, since, in spite of the accident, my devotion to your interests will, I trust, give me strength to be useful to you."

"Let us sum up," said Madame Dubarry.

"Pardon me one moment. I had forgotten one thing. Alas, it is so long since I have been at court that I have no dress fit for it."

"I foresaw that, madame, and yesterday, after your departure, I ordered a dress for you. To-morrow, at noon, it will be ready."

“I have no diamonds.”

“Boemer & Bossange will give you tomorrow, on my order, a set of ornaments worth two hundred and ten thousand livres, which, the following day, they will take back at two hundred thousand. Thus your indemnity will be paid.”

“Very well, madame; I have nothing more to wish.”

“I am delighted to hear it.”

“However, about my son's commission?”

“His majesty will give it you himself.”

“And for the attendant expenses?”

“The order will be given with the commission.”

“Quite right. There now only remains about the vineyard — four acres —

“How much were they worth?”

“Six thousand livres an acre; it was excellent land.”

“I will now subscribe an obligation to pay you twenty-four thousand livres, which will be about the whole.”

“There is the writing-desk, madame.”

“I shall do myself the honor to hand the desk to you.”

“To me?”

“Yes, that you may write a little letter to his majesty which I shall dictate — a fair return, you know.”

“Very true,” replied the old lady; and arranging her paper, and taking a pen, she waited. Madame Dubarry dictated:

“SIRE — The happiness which I feel on learning that your majesty has accepted my offer to present my dear friend, the Countess Dubarry — ”

The old lady made a grimace and her pen began to spit.

“You have a bad pen,” said the favorite; “you must change it.”

“It is unnecessary, madame; I shall get accustomed to it.”

“Do you think so?”

“Yes.”

Madame Dubarry continued:

— “Emboldens me to solicit your majesty to look on me with a favorable eye, when I shall appear at Versailles to-morrow, as you have deigned to permit me to do. I venture to hope, sire, that I merit your majesty's favor, inasmuch as I am allied to a house, every chief of which has shed his blood for the princes of your august race.”

“Now sign, if you please,” said the favorite.

And the countess signed:

“ANASTASIE EUPHEMIE RODOLPHE, COUNTESS DE BEARN.”

The old lady wrote with a firm hand, in great letters, half an inch long, and sprinkled her letter with a sufficient quantity of aristocratic mistakes in orthography.

When she had signed, still holding the letter fast with one hand, she passed with the other the paper, pen and ink to Madame Dubarry, who in a little straight sharp hand signed the obligation to pay the sums above stated.

Then she wrote a letter to Boemer & Bossange, the crown jewelers, requesting them to give the bearer the set of diamond and emerald ornaments called Louise, because they had belonged to the Princess Louise, aunt to the dauphin, who sold them to obtain funds for her charities.

That done, the ladies exchanged their papers.

“Now,” said Madame Dubarry, “give me a proof of your friendship, my dear countess.”

“With all my heart, madame.”

“I am sure that if you come to me, Tronchin will cure you in less than three days. Come then, and you can at the same time try my oil, which is really excellent.”

“Well, but do not let me detain you, madame,” said the prudent old lady; “I have some matters to settle here before I can set out.”

“Then you refuse me?”

“On the contrary, madame, I accept your invitation, but not at this moment. It is just now striking one o'clock by the abbey clock; give me until three, and at five precisely I shall be at Luciennes.”

“Permit my brother then to return with the carriage at three.”

“Certainly.”

“In the meantime take care of yourself.”

“Fear nothing; you have my word, and though my death should be the consequence, I shall present you to-morrow at Versailles.”

“Good-by, then, my dear madame.”

“Good-by, my charming friend.”

And so saying they parted, the old lady, with her foot still on the cushion, and her hand on her papers; the countess in better spirits than on her arrival, but certainly rather vexed that she had not been able to make better terms with an old woman from the country — she, who could outwit the king of France when she chose.

Passing by the door of the principal salon, she saw Jean, who, doubtless merely to prevent any one harboring suspicions as to the cause of his long stay, was taking a second bottle of wine. Perceiving his sister, he jumped up from his chair and ran after her.

“Well?” cried he.

“Well. I may say as Marshal Saxe once said to his majesty in the battlefield of Fontenoy, 'Sire, learn from this spectacle how dearly a victory may be purchased.'”

“Then we have conquered?”

“Yes — only it costs us about a million.”

Jean made a frightful grimace.

“Why, I had no chance; I must either take her at that or give her up.”

“But it is abominable.”

“It is as I tell you; and perhaps, if you make her angry, she will make us pay double.”

“Pardieu! what a woman!”

“She is a Roman!”

“She is a Greek!”

“Never mind! Greek or Roman, be ready to bring her to Luciennes at three o'clock. I shall never be easy until I have her under lock and key.”

“I shall not stir from this,” said Jean.

“And I, on my side, shall hasten to prepare everything,” said the countess.

She sprang into her carriage.

“To Luciennes!” said she. “To-morrow I shall say, to Marly!”

Jean followed the carriage with his eyes. “We cost France a pretty little sum,” said he. “No matter! it is very flattering for the Dubarrys!”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Marshal Richelieu's Fifth Conspiracy.

THE KING returned to hold his court at Marly as usual. Less the slave of etiquette than Louis XIV., who sought, even in the evening parties of his courtiers, means of exhibiting his power, Louis XV, sought in them only news, of which he was inordinately fond, and, above all, a variety of faces around him, a gratification which he preferred to all others, particularly if they were smiling ones.

In the evening of the day on which the interview just related took place, and two hours after the Countess de Bearn (who this time kept her promise faithfully) was comfortably installed in Madame Dubarry's cabinet, the king was playing cards at Marly, in the blue drawing-room.

On his left sat the Duchesse d'Ayen, on his right the Princess de Guemeuee. His majesty appeared very absent, losing, in consequence of inattention to his game, eight hundred louis d'ors. Rather sobered by his loss — for, like a true descendant of Henry IV., Louis loved to win — the king left his cards, and retired into the recess of a window to talk to Monsieur de Malesherbes, son of the ex-chancellor, while Monsieur de Maupeou, who was conversing with the Duke de Choiseul in an opposite window, watched the interview with an anxious eye. In the meantime, after the king left the card-table a circle was formed near the fireplace. The Princesses Adelaide, Sophie, and Victoire, attended by their ladies of honor and their equerries, had placed themselves there on their return from a walk in the gardens.

Around the king, who must certainly have been talking of some matter of importance, as the gravity of Monsieur de Malesherbes was well known, were grouped, but at a respectful distance, generals, admirals, great dignitaries of the state, noblemen, and judges. The little court at the fireplace, therefore, was left a good deal to itself, and seemed bent on more lively conversation, if one might judge by the skirmishing with which they began.

The principal bodies of the group, besides the three princesses, were the Duchesse de Grammont, the Princess de Guemenee, the Duchesse de Choiseul, the Marchioness de Mirepoix, and the Duchesse de Polastron.

At the moment when we approach this group, the Princess Adelaide had just ended an anecdote of a bishop banished from his diocese by the grand penitentiary. It was tolerably scandalous, and it is as well unrelated here.

“Well,” said the Princess Victoire, “it is only a month since that bishop was sitting here among us!”

“Oh, we shall have worse than he sitting among us,” said the Duchesse de Grammont, “if his majesty receive those who, not having been yet received, are now determined to be received.”

Every one understood from the tone in which these words were uttered who was meant, and at once felt what turn the conversation was taking.

“Fortunately, wishing to be received, and being received, are two different things, duchesse,” said a little elderly man, joining in the conversation. He was seventy-four years of age, but looked only fifty, so elegant was his shape, his voice so unbroken, his leg so well shaped, his eye so lively, his skin so fair, and his hand so beautiful.

“Ah, here is M, de Richelieu,” said the duchess, “advancing his scaling ladders, and going to take our conversation by assault, as he did Mahon. Still something of the soldier, my dear marshal!”

“Still something of the soldier! Ah! duchesse, you are very severe!”

“Well! But did I not speak the truth?”

“The truth! When?”

“Just now, when I said that a certain person wished to force the king's doors?”

“Oh, you know, countess, I am always of your opinion, even when you speak ill of all my friends!”

Some laughed, although it had already been whispered that the marshal's wit was on the wane.

“If you say such things,” continued the duchess, “I shall not go on with my history, and you will lose a great deal, I assure you.”

“Heaven forbid that I should interrupt it! I am all attention!

The circle drew closer around the duchess. She cast a glance toward the window to be certain that the king was still there. He was still in the same position; but, although he continued to converse with Monsieur de Malesherbes, he kept a watchful eye on the group at the fireplace, and just at that moment his eye met that of Madame de Grammont. The duchess felt somewhat intimidated by its expression, but she had made a beginning, and would not be stopped.

“You must know,” she continued, addressing herself particularly to the three princesses, “that a certain lady — her name is of no consequence, is it? — has lately taken it into her head that she will see us, the privileged of the land, sitting in our glory.”

“See us — where?” asked the marshal.

“Oh, at Versailles, at Marly, at Fontainebleau.”

“Very well — very well!”

“The poor creature knows nothing of our meetings except from having seen, with the rest of the mob, the king at dinner with his guests. How disagreeable, with a barrier between them and the great, and an usher with his rod driving them before him!”

The marshal took snuff noisily out of his box of Sevres porcelain. “But,” said he, “in order to join our circle at Versailles, at Marly, at Fontainebleau, one must be presented.”

“Precisely; the lady in question has requested to be presented.”

“Then I'll wager the king has consented; he is so kind.”

“Unfortunately, something more is necessary than the king's permission; there must be a chaperon to present the lady.”

“Yes; but chaperons are rather scarce,” said the Marchioness de Mirepoix, “witness the fair Bourbonnais, who has sought but has not found one.”

“Pardon me,” replied the duchess; “she has sought so well that she has found what she wants. But what a chaperon! a frank, sincere, real, country dame! She was brought away from her dovecot, petted, and caressed, and dressed — ”

“It is perfectly shocking,” interrupted the Princess de Guemenee, “but just when the dear dame had been sufficiently petted, and caressed, and dressed, she fell downstairs from the top to the bottom and broke her leg.”

“So there can be no presentation?” exclaimed the Princess de Guemenee.

“Not a shadow,” said the duchess.

“See how gracious Providence is!” said the marshal, raising his hands and eyes to heaven.

“Gracious!” said the Princess Victoire, “not to the poor country dame; I really pity her.”

“On the contrary, your royal highness may congratulate her,” said the duchess; “of two evils she has chosen the least.” She stopped short, for again her eye met the king's.

“If the ladies who have been presented,” said the Princess de Guemenee, “were courageous and faithful to the sentiments of honor of the ancient nobility of France, they would go in a body to return thanks to the lady from the country who showed so much sublimity of mind as to break her leg.”

“Yes, faith,” said the marshal, “that is a great idea! But what is the name of the excellent lady who has saved us in this great danger? We have nothing now to fear; have we, duchesse?”

“Oh, nothing; she is in her bed, her leg bound up, and unable to move a step.”

“But if the lady should find another chaperon?” said the princess; “she is so indefatigable.”

“Oh, do not be afraid; it is not so easy to find chaperons.”

At this moment the throng of courtiers separated, and the king approached; the group became silent. A moment afterward his clear and well-known voice was heard; “Adieu, ladies. Good-night, gentlemen.”

Every one rose.

The king advanced toward the door, then, turning before leaving the room, he said, “By-the-by, there will be a presentation to-morrow at Versailles.”

These words fell like a thunderbolt on the assembly. The king glanced round the group of ladies, who looked at each other and turned pale; then he left the apartment without adding another word. Scarcely had he crossed the threshold with the long train of gentlemen attending him, when there was a general explosion among the princesses and the ladies around them.

“A presentation!” stammered the Duchesse de Grammont, her lips quite livid. “What does his majesty mean?”

“Eh! duchesse,” said the marshal, with one of those smiles which even his best friends could not pardon; “can this be the presentation you have just been speaking of?”

The princesses bit their lips with vexation.

“Oh, it is impossible,” murmured the duchess.

“Ah, duchesse,” said the marshal, “they do set legs so well nowadays!”

The Duke de Choiseul approached his sister, the Duchesse de Grammont, and pressed her arm as a warning; not to go too far; but she was too deeply wounded to attend to him.

“It would be an insult to us all,” she exclaimed.

“Yes; an insult indeed!” repeated the Princess de Guemenee.

Monsieur de Choiseul saw he could do nothing more, and walked a short distance off.

“Oh, your royal highnesses,” cried the duchess, addressing the king's three daughters, “there is no resource for us now but in you! You, the highest ladies in the kingdom, will you endure it? Must we be exposed, in the only asylum remaining for ladies of rank, to meet a person with whom we should not allow our chambermaids to associate?”

The princesses, instead of replying, hung down their heads.

“Oh, your royal highnesses, in Heaven's name!” exclaimed she, “save us.”

“The king is master in this as in everything else,” said the Princess Adelaide, sighing.

“That is true,” said the Duke de Richelieu.

“But the entire court of France will be compromised in the affair,” cried the duchess. “Gentlemen, have you then no regard for the honor of your families?”

“Ladies,” said the Duke de Choiseul, trying to laugh, “as this seems bordering on a conspiracy, you must allow me to retire, and to take with me M, de Sartines. Will you come, marshal?”

“I? — faith, I adore conspiracies! — I shall certainly stay,” replied Marshal Richelieu. The two ministers departed.

There now remained around the princesses eight or ten of the ladies who had espoused most warmly the league against the presentation. Richelieu was the only gentleman. The ladies looked at him suspiciously, as if he had been a Trojan in the Grecian camp.

“I represent my daughter, the Countess d'Egmont,” said he; “go on, ladies, go on.”

“Your royal highnesses,” the Duchesse de Grammont began, “there is a means by which we can show our sense of the infamous nature of the proceedings, and for my part I shall make use of the means.”

“What is it?” all exclaimed.

“We have been told that the king is master,” she continued.

“And I reply it is just and right that he should be,” said the marshal.

“He is master in his own palace, but we are mistresses in our own houses. Now, what is to prevent me from giving my coachman directions to drive to Chanteloup to-night, instead of to Versailles?”

“ Or what is to prevent others from imitating you?” said the Princess de Guemenee.

“Why should we not all imitate the duchesse?” asked the Marchioness de Mirepoix.

“Oh, your royal highnesses,” exclaimed the duchess, again addressing the princesses; “what a noble example it would be for you to give the court!”

“The king would be angry with us,” said the Princess Sophie.

“No, your royal highness; I am certain he would not. On the contrary, it would make him reflect; and he has such exquisite sense, such perfect tact, that he will afterward acknowledge you to be in the right, and he will be grateful to you.”

“ It is true,” said the Princess Victoire, encouraged by the general spirit of rebellion; “the king said nothing when we refused to admit the visits of the countess, but on a public occasion like this he might not be disposed to forgive us.”

“No, certainly.” replied the duchess; “if you were the only ladies who absented yourselves, but when he sees that we have all left the court?”

“All!” exclaimed the party.

“Yes, all!” replied the old marshal.

“Then you are of the plot?” said the Princess Adelaide.

“Certainly I am, and therefore I wish to speak.”

“Speak, marshal, speak!” said Madame de Grammont.

“We must proceed methodically,” said he. “It is not enough all to shout in chorus this or that. I have known people say, 'This is what I shall do,' but at the moment of action they have done the very contrary. Now, as I have the honor to make one in this conspiracy, I do not wish to he left by myself, as I always was when I took part in the conspiracies under the late king and under the regency.”

“Upon my word, marshal, you forget yourself. Among the Amazons you take upon you the airs of a leader,” said the duchess.

“Madame, I beg you to consider that I may have some right to that position. You hate Madame Dubarry — there I have let the name slip out, but nobody heard it! — you hate her more than I; but I am more compromised than you."

"How is that?"

"I have not been at Luciennes for eight days, nor at her apartments at Versailles for four. The affair has gone so far that a footman was sent to ask if I was ill; so I a in already looked on with suspicion. However, I am not ambitious — I yield the leadership to you; you have set the affair on foot, you have stirred us all, you revolutionize our consciences — yours must be the baton of command."

"No, I must follow their royal highnesses," said the duchess, respectfully.

"Oh, pray let us remain passive," said the Princess Adelaide; "we are going to Saint Denis to see our sister Louise; she will keep us there, and of course there can be nothing said."

"Nothing, nothing at all, unless by some very ill-disposed person," said the marshal.

"As for me," said the Duchesse de Grammont, "I have to go to Chanteloup, because it is hay-making season."

"Bravo!" cried the duke; "an excellent reason."

"I must stay at home; one of my children is ill, and I have to nurse him," said the Princess de Guemenee.

"I," said the Duchesse de Polastron, "have felt a giddiness all this evening; I am sure I shall be dangerously ill if Tronchin do not bled me to-morrow."

"And I!" said the Marchioness de Mirepoix, majestically, "I shall not go to Versailles, because I shall not — that is my reason."

"Excellent! excellent!" said the marshal; "all this is quite logical; but we must swear."

"What! we must swear?"

"Yes; conspirators always swear, from the plot of Catiline down to that of Cellamare, in which I had the honor of participating. We always swore; it is true the thing did not succeed at all the better for it, still, let us respect old customs. Let us swear, then — you shall see how solemn it is!"

He extended his hand in the midst of the group of ladies, and said with proper dignity, "I swear."

All the ladies repeated the oath, with the exception of the princesses, who slipped away.

“Now that all is over,” said the marshal, “when once people have sworn in conspiracies, they never do anything more.”

“Oh, what a fury she will be in,” said the Duchesse de Grammont, “when she finds herself all alone in the grand salon!”

“Hum!” said the marshal; “the king will most probably banish us for a little.”

“Ah!” cried the Princess de Guemenee, “what kind of court would it be if we were banished? The king of Denmark is expected; who will be presented to him? The dauphiness is expected; to whom will she be presented? Besides, a whole court is never exiled — a selection is made.”

“I know that very well, and I fear I run a great risk of being chosen for the distinction of banishment!” said the marshal. “I have always been distinguished in that way. Four times have I been selected for it, at the lowest reckoning — this is my fifth conspiracy, ladies.”

“Do not be afraid, marshal,” said the Duchesse de Grammont; “if any one be marked out for banishment. I shall be the person.”

“Or your brother, the Duke de Choiseul — take care, duchesse!” replied the marshal.

“My brother is of my mind — he could submit to misfortune, not to an insult.”

“It will be neither you, marshal, nor you, duchesse, who will be banished, “said the Marchioness de Mirepoix; “I shall be the victim. The king will never pardon me for being less condescending to the countess than I was to the marchioness.”

“That is true,” said the marshal; “you were always called the favorite of the favorite. I am sorry for you now — we shall be banished together.”

“Let him banish us all,” said the Princess de Guemenee, rising; '-'for I trust none of us will draw back from the resolution which we have taken.”

“We cannot draw back after our oath,” said the marshal.

“Besides,” said the Duchesse de Grammont, “I have still other resources.”

“You?”

“Yes; she cannot be presented to-morrow evening without three things.”

“What three?”

“A hairdresser, a dress, and a carriage.”

“Certainly.”

“Well, she shall not be at Versailles at ten o'clock — the king will become impatient — he will dismiss the court, and the presentation will be postponed till the Greek Kalends, on account of the arrival of the dauphiness.”

A burst of delight followed this new episode in the conspiracy, but while applauding even more loudly than the others, the Duke de Richelieu and the Marchioness de Mirepoix exchanged glances — the same idea had occurred simultaneously to the two old courtiers.

At eleven o'clock all the conspirators, lighted by a lovely moon, were speeding along the roads to Versailles and Saint Germain.

Marshal Richelieu, however, mounted his groom's horse, and while his carriage, with the blinds drawn closely down, bore him ostensibly to Versailles, he reached Paris by a cross-road.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

No Hairdresser, No Dress, No Carriage.

IT WOULD have been in bad taste for the Countess Dubarry to have gone merely from her apartments in the palace of Versailles to the grand salon where the presentations took place. Besides, at Versailles there were not the necessary appliances and means for such an important day.

But a better reason than any of these was, that it was not the custom. The highly favored being who was to be presented always arrived with the noise and state of a foreign ambassador, whether it were from her house in the town of Versailles, or in Paris. Madame Dubarry chose to arrive from the latter place.

At eleven o'clock in the morning, therefore, she was at her house in the Rue de Valois with the Countess de Bearn, whom she kept under lock and key when she did not keep her under her smiles, and whose burn was attended to most carefully — every secret of medicine and chemistry being exhausted on it.

From the preceding evening Jean, Chon, and Doree had been at work; and any one — who could have seen them at their work, would have formed an exalted idea of the power of gold, or the greatness of human intellect.

The one made sure of the hairdresser, the other harassed the seamstress. Jean took the department of the carriage to himself, but also cast an eye occasionally on the hairdresser and the dressmakers. The countess, occupied with flowers, diamonds, and lace, was buried in boxes, cases, and caskets, and gave audiences every hour to couriers from Versailles, who informed her how matters were going on. Orders had been given for lighting the queen's drawing-room, and no change had taken place in the king's intentions.

About four the viscount came in, pule, agitated, but joyful.

“Well?” asked the countess.

“Well, all will be ready!”

“The hairdresser?”

“I went to him myself; Doree was with him; but, to make sure of him, I slipped fifty louis-d'ors into his hand. He will dine here at six o'clock precisely, so you may be quite easy on that score.”

“My dress?”

“It will be a perfect wonder! Chon is superintending it; there are six-and-twenty workwomen at it, sewing on the pearls, the ribbons, and the trimmings. They go on breadth by breadth at the work, and it would certainly require eight days for any other persons than ourselves to have it finished. It is a prodigious undertaking!”

“But do you say they are doing it breadth by breadth?”

“Yes, my dear — there are thirteen breadths of the stuff; two workwomen at each breadth — one works at the right, the other at the left, putting on the jewels and trimmings; then at the last they will all be joined together. It will take them two hours yet; at six you will have it.”

“Are you quite sure, Jean?”

“Yesterday I made a calculation with an engineer about it. There are ten thousand stitches in each breadth; that is, five thousand for each workwoman. In such thick stuff, a woman can only make one stitch in five seconds; that is, twelve in one minute, seven hundred and twenty in one hour, and seven thousand two hundred in ten hours. I leave out two thousand two hundred for needle-threading and slipped stitches, and this leaves four good hours about work.”

“And what about the carriage?”

“Oh, I'll answer for it. The varnish is now getting dry in a large store heated to fifty degrees. It is an elegant vis-a-vis, compared with which the carriages sent for the dauphiness are a mere trifle. Besides the coats of arms on the four panels there is the war cry of the Dubarrys; 'Boutes en avaut!' on each side. Besides that, I made them paint on one place two doves billing and cooing, and in another a heart pierced with a dart — the whole surrounded by bows and arrows, quivers and torches. There is such a crowd of people at Francian's to see it! It will be here exactly at eight.”

At this moment Chon and Doree came in and confirmed all that Jean had said.

“Thank you, my brave aides-de-camp!” said the countess.

“My sweet sister.” said the viscount, “your eyes look a little dim — had you not better sleep for an hour? — it would quite revive you.”

“Sleep! — no! I shall sleep to-night, and that is more than some will do.”

While these preparations were going on, the report of the intended presentation had spread through all Paris. Idle and careless as they appear, no people love news more than the Parisians. None knew better all the courtiers and all the intrigues of Versailles than the Parisian cockney of the eighteenth century, though debarred from the festivities of the palace, and seeing only the hieroglyphics on the carriages and the curious liveries of the footmen. At that period such or such a nobleman was known to the whole city. The reason was simple. The court at that period formed the principal attraction in the theaters and in the gardens. Marshal Richelieu in his place at the Italian opera, Madame Dubarry in a coach rivaling that of royalty itself, were constantly before the public, like some favorite comedian or admired actress of the present day.

People are much more interested in faces that are well known to them. Every one in Paris knew Madame Dubarry's face, constantly shown where a rich and pretty woman likes to be seen — in the theaters, in the public walks, in the shops. Besides, she was easily recognized by means of portraits, caricatures, and by her negro page, Zamore. The affair of the presentation, therefore, occupied the city nearly as much as the court. This day there was a crowd near the Palais Royal; but, poor Philosophy! it was not to see Rousseau playing chess at the Cafe de la Regence; it was to see the favorite in her fine coach and her handsome dress, of which they had heard so much. There was something deep in Jean Dubarry's expression, “We cost a pretty little sum to France!” And it was natural that France, represented by Paris, should wish to enjoy the sight for which they had paid so dearly. Madame Dubarry knew her people well, for they we're much more her people than they had been Queen Maria Leczinska's. She knew that they loved to be dazzled by magnificence; and, as she was good-natured, she labored to make the spectacle correspond to the expense to which she put them.

Instead of sleeping, as her brother advised her, she took a bath about five o'clock. Then, about six o'clock, she began to expect her hairdresser; and, while she waits, we shall explain, if we can, what hairdressing then was.

It was building a complete edifice. This was the commencement of the castles which the ladies of the court of the young king, Louis XVI., erected with towers and bastions on their heads. May we not, even in this frivolity of fashion, discover something presaging that a mine was dug beneath the feet of all who were, or all who pretended to be, great? (>r that by some mysterious divination, the women of the aristocracy had learned they should have a short time to enjoy their titles — that they, therefore, made the most of them, bearing them aloft on their heads; and as if — fatal omen! — not having long to keep their heads, they must decorate those heads to the utmost point which extravagance can attain, and raise them as high as possible above the vulgar!

To plait the hair; to elevate it on a silken cushion; to roll it about a hoop of whalebone; to adorn it with diamonds, pearls, and flowers; to sprinkle it with powder, which made the eyes brilliant and the complexion fresh; to blend into harmony with the complexion pearl, ruby, opal, diamond, flowers of all hues and of all forms — to do all this, a man must be not only a great artist, but the most patient of his race.

As a proof that such a man was esteemed great, the hairdresser was the only tradesman allowed to wear a sword.

This explanation may account for the fifty louis-d'ors given by Jean Dubarry to the hairdresser of the court. It may account, also, for some fears lest the great Lubin (the court hairdresser of that day was called Lubin) might not be so punctual or so skillful on the occasion as was desirable.

The fears about his punctuality were, alas! too well founded. Six o'clock struck, and the hairdresser did not appear; then half-past six came; then a quarter to seven. One thought inspired some hope in the anxious hearts of all; it was, that a man of Monsieur Lubin's importance would naturally make people wait a little. But seven struck. The viscount feared that the dinner prepared for the hairdresser might be cold when he came, and the great artist might be dissatisfied. He sent a servant to say that dinner waited.

The servant returned in a quarter of an hour. Those only who have waited under similar circumstances can tell how many seconds there are in such a quarter of an hour.

The servant had spoken to Madame Lubin herself, who assured him that Monsieur Lubin had set out for the countess's, that if he were not then there, he must be on the way.

“Perhaps,” said Jean, “he has been delayed in consequence of not getting a carriage. We will wait a little.”

“Besides,” said the countess, “there will be no time lost; my hair can be attended to when I am half dressed; the presentation does not take place until ten; we have still three hours, it will only take one to go to Versailles.

In the mean time, to employ me, Chon, show me my dress. Where is Chon? Chon! Chon! my dress, my dress!”

“Your dress has not come yet, madame,” said Doree, “and your sister went ten minutes ago to see about it herself.”

“Oh,” exclaimed the viscount, “I hear a noise of wheels! It is the carriage brought home, no doubt.”

The viscount was mistaken; it was Chon, who had come back full speed.

“My dress!” cried the countess, while Chon was still in the vestibule; “my dress!”

“Has it not come?” asked Chon, terror-stricken.

“No.”

“Oh, well, it can't be long. When I got to the dressmaker's she had just set out in a fiacre with two of her women, bringing the dress to fit it on.”

“It is a good way from her house to this, and as you drove very fast no doubt you have passed her,” said Jean.

“Yes, yes! certainly!” replied Chon, yet she could not suppress a vague feeling of apprehension.

“Viscount,” said the countess, “you had better send about the carriage, that there may be no disappointment on that side at least.”

“You are right, Jeanne,” and Dubarry opened the door. “Let some of you,” cried he, “take the new horses to Francian's for the carriage, so that they may be all ready harnessed when it arrives.”

The coachman and the horses set off. As the sound of their trampling died away, Zamore entered with a letter.

“A letter for Mistress Barry,” said he.

“Who brought it?”

“A man.”

“A man? What sort of man?”

“A man on horseback.”

“And why did he give it to you?”

“Because Zamore was at the door.”

“But read it! Read it rather than question him!” cried Jean.

“You are right, viscount.”

“Ay, provided there be nothing annoying in the letter,” he muttered.

“Oh, no! it is some petition for his majesty.”

“It is not folded like a petition.”

“Really, viscount, you are full of fears,” said the countess, smiling, and she broke the seal. At the first line she shrieked, and fell back in her chair half-dead.

“No hairdresser, no dress, no carriage!” she cried. Chon sprang toward her. Jean seized the letter. It was evidently the writing of a woman, and ran thus:

“MADAME — Be not too confident. This evening you shall have no hairdresser, no dress, no carriage. I hope this information will reach you in time to be useful to you. As I do not desire your gratitude, I do not give you my name. Guess who I am, and you will have discovered

“A sincere friend.”

“Oh!” shouted Dubarry, “all is over! Sang bleu! I must kill somebody! By all the devils! I'll run Lubin through the body! It is half-past seven, and he not here! Confound him! Damn him!”

And as Dubarry was not to be presented that evening, he did not care about his hair, but tore it out unmercifully in handfuls.

“But the dress! Good heavens! the dress!” cried Chon; “a hairdresser could easily be found!”

“Oh, I defy you to find one! What sort of wretch would he be? A murderer! A slaughterer! Oh, death and damnation!”

The countess said nothing, but sighs burst from her bosom, which might have softened the Choiseuls themselves could they but have heard them.

“Let us think, let us think!” said Chou, “a little calmness only. Let us find out another hairdresser, and send to the dressmaker to know what has become of the dress!;'

“No hairdresser!” murmured the almost fainting countess; “no dress! no carriage!”

“Yes, no carriage!” cried Jean; “it does not come either! It is a plot, countess, it is a plot! Cannot Sartines find out the authors of it? Cannot Maupeou hang them? Can they not with their accomplices be burned in the marketplace? I will have the hairdresser broken on the wheel! the dressmaker torn to pieces with pincers! the coachmaker flayed alive!”

At length the countess recovered a little from her state of stupefaction, but it was only to feel more poignantly all the horror of her situation.

“All is lost!” she exclaimed. “Those who have bought over Lubin are rich enough to remove all the good hairdressers from Paris. None are left me but wretches who would destroy my hair! — and my dress! — my poor dress!

— and my new carriage! I thought the sight of it would have made them burst with envy!”

Dubarry did not answer — but, rolling his eyes fearfully, strode up and down the room, striking himself against the angles of the apartment; and as often as he encountered any ornament or small article of furniture, abandoning his hair, he dashed them into the smallest morsels possible, and then stamped on them with his feet.

In the midst of this scene of horror, which, spreading from the boudoir to the anterooms, and from the anterooms to the court, caused all the domestics to run hither and thither with twenty different and contradictory orders, a young man in a light green coat, a satin waistcoat, lilac breeches, and white silk stockings, got out of a cabriolet, crossed the court, stepping from stone to stone on the tips of his toes, entered the open door abandoned by all the servants, mounted the stairs, and tapped at the countess's dressing-room door.

Jean was just stamping on a tray with a set of Sevres porcelain, which he had pulled down with the tail of his coat while he was dealing a blow with his fist to a great Chinese mandarin. When the noise of these feats had subsided a little, three gentle, discreet, modest taps were heard.

Then followed profound silence; all were in such a state of expectation that no one could ask who was there.

“Excuse me,” said an unknown voice, “but I wish to speak to the Countess Dubarry.”

“Sir, people do not enter here in that way!” cried a servant, who had discovered the stranger, and had run after him to prevent his farther advance.

“Never mind! never mind!” cried Jean, flinging open the door with a hand which might have driven in the gates of Gaza. “Worse cannot happen to us now. What do you want with the countess?”

The stranger avoided the shock of this sudden meeting by springing backward, and falling into the third position.

“Sir,” said he, “I came to offer my services to the Countess Dubarry.”

“What services, sir?”

“My professional services, sir.”

“What is your profession?”

“I am a hairdresser!” and the stranger bowed a second time.

“Oh,” cried Jean, falling on his neck, “a hairdresser! Come in! come in!”

"Come in! Come in, my dear sir!" cried Chon, almost taking the astonished young man in her arms.

"A hairdresser!" cried Madame Dubarry, raising her hands to heaven. "A hairdresser? An angel! Were you sent by Monsieur Lubin, sir?"

"I was not sent by any one. I read in the gazette that the Countess Dubarry was to be presented this evening; then, said I to myself, suppose that the Countess Dubarry had no dressmaker? — it is nut probable, but it is possible — so I think I shall try."

"What is your name, sir?" asked the countess, a little cooled by this account.

"Leonard, madame."

"Leonard? You are not known to any one ':

"If you accept my services, madame, to-morrow every one will know me."

"Hum!" said Jean, "there are two kinds of hairdressing."

"If madame distrusts my skill, I shall retire."

"We have no time to try you," said Chon.

"Why make any trial?" cried the young man, walking round the countess in a fit of enthusiasm. "I know, madame, that all eyes must be drawn to you by the style of your hair, and already in contemplating you I have invented a head which will have a most powerful effect."

And the young man made a gesture with his hand, so full of confidence in himself, that the countess's resolution was a little shaken, and hope sprang up in the hearts of Chon and Jean.

"Have you, really?" said she, quite astonished at the young man's ease — for he was now leaning back, hand on hip, as the great Lubin himself would have done.

"Yes — but, madame, I must see your dress, that I may make the ornaments harmonize with it."

"Oh, my dress! my dress!" cried the countess, recalled by his words to the terrible reality.

Jean struck his forehead fiercely. "Oh, imagine, sir," cried he — " imagine what a horrid trick! They have carried off dress — dressmaker — all! Chon, Chon, dear Chon!" and Dubarry, tired of tearing out his hair, gave way to a downright fit of sobbing.

"Suppose you were to go back to the dressmaker's, Chon?" said the countess, “For what purpose? You know she had set out to come hither.”

“Alas! alas!” murmured the countess, falling back in her chair, “of what use is a hairdresser when I have no dress?”

At this moment the door-bell rung; all the doors had been carefully shut, and even bolted, by the porter, lest any other should slip in as the hairdresser had done.

“Some one rings,” said the countess.

Chon sprang to a window.

“A bandbox!” cried she.

“A bandbox!” cried the countess.

“Coming in?” cried Jean.

“Yes — no — yes. It is given to the porter — run, Jean, run!”

He dashed down the stairs, got before all the footmen, and snatched the bandbox from the porter.

Chon looked through the window.

He pulled off the lid, plunged his hand into the depths of the bandbox, and uttered a yell of joy. It contained a beautiful dress of Chinese satin, with flowers put on, and a complete trimming of lace of immense value.

“A dress! A dress!” shouted Chon, clapping her hands.

“A dress?” repeated the countess, almost sinking under her joy, as she had before under her grief.

“Who gave it you, rogue?” asked the viscount of the porter.

“A woman, sir, whom I don't know.”

“Where is she?”

“Sir, she laid it on the step of the door, cried 'For the countess,' and disappeared.”

“Well, we have got a dress — that is the main thing!”

“Come up, Jean, come up!” called Chon, “my sister is dying with impatience.”

“Look!” said Jean, returning to the room, “look! — admire! See what fate sends you!”

“But it will not go on — it will not fit — it was not made for me. Mon Dieu! mon Dieu! what a misfortune, for it is beautiful!”

Chon quickly measured it.

“The same length, the same width in the waist!” she exclaimed.

“What admirable stuff!” said Jean.

“It is miraculous!” said Chon.

“It is terrible!” said the countess.

“Not at all,” replied the viscount, “for it proves, that although you have great enemies, you have also devoted friends.”

“It cannot be sent by a friend,” said Chon, “for how should a friend know of the plot formed against us? It must be sent by a sylph.”

“Let it be sent by his Satanic Majesty!” exclaimed the countess, “I care not, provided it assists me to oppose the Choiseuls! Whoever sent it, he cannot be so much of a demon as they.”

“And now,” said Jean, “I am sure that you may confidently submit your head to this gentleman.”

“Why do you think so?”

“Because he has been sent by the same person who sent the dress.”

“I?” said Leonard, with the most innocent surprise.

“Come, come, my dear sir! acknowledge that it was all a tale about the gazette!”

“The simple truth, sir. Here is the paper — I kept it for curl-papers,” and he drew out the gazette in which the presentation was announced.

“Now,” said Chon, “let him set to work — it is eight o'clock.”

“Oh, we have time enough!” said the hairdresser, “it will only take an hour to go to Versailles.”

“Yes, if we have a carriage,” said the countess.

“Oh, mordieu! that is true!” exclaimed Jean. “That wretch, Francian, does not come.”

“You know we have been warned; no hairdresser, no dress, no carriage!” repeated the countess.

“Now, if the coachmaker should not keep his word?” said Chon..

“No; here he is, here he is!” cried Jean.

“And the carriage, the carriage?” exclaimed the countess.

“It is at the door, no doubt. But what is the matter with the coachmaker?”

At that moment Francian rushed in, all in alarm.

“Oh, viscount!” cried he, “the carriage was on its way hither, when at the corner of a street it was seized by four men; they knocked down my young man, who was bringing it, seized the reins, and set off with it at a gallop.”

“I told you so! — I told you so!” said Dubarry, sitting down resignedly in his chair.

“But, brother,” exclaimed Chon, “exert yourself! — do something!”

“What for?”

“To get a carriage! the horses here are done out, and the carriages dirty. Jeanne cannot go in any of them.”

“Bah! the little birds find food when they don't expect it, and we got a hairdresser and a dress in our need. Yes, our unknown friend will not forget a carriage!”

“Hush!” cried Chon, “surely I heard carriage wheels.”

“Yes, it is stopping,” he replied.

Then, springing to a window which he opened, he shouted to the servants, “Run, rascals, run! Quick, quick! Find out our benefactor!”

A carriage, lined with white satin, and drawn by two splendid bay horses, stood before the door. But neither coachman nor footman was to be seen; a common street porter held the horses by the head. A crown had been given to him by a person unknown to him at the end of the street, with orders to lead the carriage to the countess's door.

They looked at the panels; the arms were replaced by a simple rose.

The whole of this counterplay against the miseries with which the evening had commenced lasted about an hour.

Jean had the carriage taken into the yard, and the gates locked on it; he carried up the key with him. On returning to the dressing-room, he found the hairdresser about to give the countess the first proof of his profound knowledge of his art.

“Sir,” cried the viscount, seizing him by the arm, “if you do not declare who is our protecting genius, that we may make known our eternal gratitude to him, I swear — ”

“Allow me,” said the young man, interrupting him very phlegmatically, “allow me to say, sir, that you are doing me the honor of squeezing my arm so tight, that I fear my hand will be quite stiff when I shall have to dress the countess's hair, and it is now eight o'clock.”

“Leave him alone, Jean, leave him alone!” cried the countess.

Jean sank down in his chair.

“A miracle!” exclaimed Chon; “it is a perfect fit — only an inch too long in front; but ten minutes will alter that!”

“And what is the carriage like?” asked the countess.

“It is in the best style,” replied Jean; “I got into it; it is lined with white satin and perfumed with essence of roses.”

“All is right — all is right!” cried the countess, clapping her little hands with delight. “Now, Monsieur Leonard, if you succeed on this occasion, your fortune is made!”

Leonard took possession of her head, and the very first touch of the comb revealed a skillful hand. Rapidity, taste, marvelous precision, a complete knowledge of the relation between the moral and the physical — all these he displayed in the accomplishment of his important duty.

When he had, at the end of three-quarters of an hour, given the finishing touch to the splendid edifice which he had reared on the countess's head, he would have modestly retired, after having washed his hands in a basin which Chon presented to him, as if he had been a king.

“Now, sir,” said Dubarry, “you must know that I am as ardent in my loves as in my hatreds — as you have gained my esteem, pray tell me who you are.”

“You know already, sir, who I am — my name is Leonard — I am only a beginner.”

“A beginner? — Sang bleu! you are a thorough master of your profession.”

“You shall be my hairdresser, Monsieur Leonard,” said the countess, looking at herself in a little glass which she had in her hand; “and I shall pay you on each occasion like this fifty louis-d'ors. Chon, count out one hundred for this time — he shall have fifty of earnest money.”

“I told you, madame, that you would make my reputation.”

“But you must dress no one's hair but mine.”

“Keep your hundred louis-d'ors, then, madame — I prefer my liberty — to it I owe the honor of having this evening dressed your hair. Liberty is the first of human blessings.”

“A philosophical hairdresser!” exclaimed Dubarry, raising his hands to heaven; “to what shall we come at last? Well, my dear Monsieur Leonard. I shall not quarrel with you — take your hundred louis-d'ors and keep your secret and your liberty. Now, countess, to your carriage!”

The last words were addressed to the Countess de Bearn, who entered stiff and stately, and dressed like an image in a shrine, She was brought out of her room just when she was to be made use of.

“Now,” cried Jean to the servants, “let four of you take her, and carry her downstairs, and if you hurt her, so as to make her heave one sigh, I'll flay you alive!”

While he was superintending this delicate and important operation, assisted by Chon, the countess turned to seek for Monsieur Leonard; he had disappeared.

“But how did he go?” murmured Madame Dubarry, who had not yet quite recovered from the influence of the many surprises of the evening.

“How did he go? Why, through the floor, or up through the ceiling, of course, as all genii do. Take care, countess, that your head-dress does not turn into a heap of mud, your dress into a spider's web, and your coach into a pumpkin, drawn by two rats!”

Having given utterance to this last fear, Jean took his place beside the Countess de Bearn, and her fortunate goddaughter.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

The Presentation.

VERSAILLES, LIKE EVERYTHING really great, is and will long be a fair and lovely scene. Though moss should cover its mouldering walls — though its gods of marble, bronze and lead should lie shattered around their broken fountains — though its broad alleys of clipped trees should remain in all the wild luxuriance of nature — though it should become but a heap of ruins — it will always present to the thinker and the poet a great and touching spectacle. Let such look from its circle of ephemeral splendor to the eternal horizon beyond, and it will be long ere thought and fancy sink to rest again!

But it was, above all, in its days of pomp and splendor that Versailles was fairest to look upon; when its gay and thoughtless population, restrained by a crowd of soldiers still more gay than themselves, thronged its gilded gates — when carriages lined with velvet and satin, blazoned with armorial bearings, thundered over its pavements at the full speed of their prancing steeds — when every window, blazing with light like those of an enchanted palace, exposed to view the moving throng, radiant with diamonds, rubies, sapphires, and bending to the gesture of one man, as bends before the wind a field of golden corn, with its bright flowers of crimson, white and blue; yes, Versailles was brilliant indeed, when its gates sent forth couriers to all the powers of the earth — when kings, princes, nobles, generals, learned men, from all parts of the civilized world, trod its rich carpets and its inlaid floors!

But when, for some great ceremony, all its sumptuous furniture was displayed, and its sumptuousness doubled by the magic of a thousand lights, even the coldest imagination must have glowed on beholding what human invention and human power could do. Such was the ceremony observed on the reception of an ambassador, or the presentation of the nobles attending the court.

Louis XIV., the creator of etiquette, a system which shut up each individual within bounds beyond which he could not pass, desired that the favored few initiated into the magnificence of his regal life should be struck with such veneration that ever afterward they could only regard the palace as a temple, and the king as its presiding deity, to whose presence some had the right of approaching nearer than others.

Versailles, then, still magnificent, although already showing symptoms of degeneration, had opened all its doors, lighted all its chandeliers, and exhibited all its splendor for the presentation of Madame Dubarry. The people, inquisitive, though hungry and wretched, forgetting, strange anomaly, both their hunger and wretchedness, that they might gaze on so much grandeur, filled the Place d'Armes and the avenues leading to the palace. Every window of the chateau poured out floods of light, and the lusters from a distance looked like stars gleaming in an atmosphere of golden dust.

The king left his private apartments exactly at ten. He was dressed rather more richly than usual; that is, his lace was finer, and the buckles alone of his garters and his shoes were worth a million.

The Count de Sartines had informed him of the conspiracy entered into by the ladies the evening before, so that there was a shade of anxiety on his brow, and he trembled lest he should see only gentlemen in the grand salon. But he was soon reassured, when on entering the salon set apart for presentations, he saw, amid a cloud of lace and powder mingled with the blaze of diamonds, first, his three daughters, then the Marchioness de Mirepoix, who had talked so loudly among the plotters — in short, all the turbulent spirits who had sworn not to come were there.

Marshal Richelieu, like a general on the eve of an engagement, hurried from one to another, saying to this one, “Ah, I have caught you, perfidious one!” whispering to another, “I was certain you would not keep your oath!” and to a third, “Remember what I told you about conspiracies!”

“But, marshal,” replied the ladies, “you are here yourself!”

“Oh, I represent my daughter! I represent the Countess d'Egmont. Look around, you will not find Septimanie! She alone has kept faith with the Duchesse de Grammont and the Princess de Guemenee, so I am pretty certain what my fate will be. To-morrow I shall enter on my fifth banishment, or my fourth trip to the Bastille. Most certainly I shall never again conspire.”

The king entered. There was a profound silence, during which ten o'clock struck — the hour fixed for the ceremony. His majesty was surrounded by a numerous court, and was attended by about fifty gentlemen, who, not having sworn to come to the presentation, were, probably, for that reason present.

The king observed, at the first glance, that the Duchesse de Grammont, the Princess de Guemenee, and the Countess d'Egmont were wanting in this splendid assembly.

He approached the Duke de Choiseul, who affected great calmness, but in spite of all his efforts was somewhat disturbed.

“I do not see the Duchesse de Grammont here,” said the king.

“Sire, my sister is ill,” replied the Duke de Choiseul, “and desired me to present her very humble respects to your majesty.”

“So much the worse!” said the king, and he turned his back on the duke. In doing so, he found himself face to face with the Prince de Guemenee.

“And the Princess do Guemenee,” said he, “where is she? have you not brought her, prince?”

“It was impossible, sire; when I called at her hotel in order to accompany her here, I found her in bed.”

“Oh! so much the worse! so much the worse!” said the king. “Ah, here is the marshal! Good-evening, marshal.”

The old courtier bowed with all the suppleness of a youth.

“You are not ill, at least!” said the king, loud enough for De Choiseul and De Guemenee to hear him. “Whenever, sire, I have in prospect the happiness of seeing your majesty, I am perfectly well,” replied Richelieu.

“But,” said the king, looking round, “I do not see your daughter, the Countess d'Egmont; how comes it that she is not here?”

The duke's features assumed an expression of deep regret.

“Alas! sire, my poor daughter is really not able to lay her humble homage at your majesty's feet — this evening, above all others — ill, sire, ill!”

“So much the worse,” said the king. “Ill! The Countess d'Egmont, who enjoys the finest health in France? So much the worse! so much the worse!” And the king left the marshal as he had left M, de Choiseul and M, de Guemenee.

Then he completed the circuit of the salon, and particularly complimented the Marchioness de Mirepoix, who did not feel altogether at her ease.

"You see what the price of treachery is," whispered the marshal in her ear; "to-morrow you will be loaded with honors, while we — I shudder to think of it?" and he sighed,

"But I think you have rather betrayed the Choiseuls yourself, since you are here, and yet you swore —

"For my daughter, for my poor Septimanie, marchioness; she will be disgraced for being too faithful!"

"To her father," replied the marchioness.

The marshal pretended not to hear this remark, which might have passed for an epigram.

"Do you not think," said he, "that the king is uneasy?"

"I think he has reason to be so; it is a quarter past ten."

"True; and the countess not here! Shall I tell you what I think?"

"Yes."

"I have some fears."

"Fears about what?"

"Fears that something disagreeable may have happened to that poor countess. You know whether I am right or not, marchioness."

"I! how should I know?"

"Yes; you were up to the neck in the conspiracy."

"Well, I may tell you in confidence, marshal, that I cannot help sharing your fears."

"Oh! our friend the duchesse is a fierce antagonist; she has fled, and like the Parthians, she wounds in fleeing. See how restless the Duke de Choiseul is, although he wishes to appear calm; he cannot stay a moment in one position, and he keeps his eyes always on the king. Come! confess that there is some plot in the wind."

"I know nothing of it, duke; but, like you, I have suspicions."

"But what can they gain by their plot?"

"Time, my dear marshal, and you know the proverb, 'He who gains time, gains all.' To-morrow something may occur to put off the presentation sine die. The dauphiness may reach Compiegne to-morrow instead of four days hence; perhaps they only wished to gain to-morrow."

"Do you know, marchioness, this little tale of yours has all the appearance of truth. There is no sign of her coming."

"And see, the king is becoming impatient!"

“That is the third time he has approached the window; he is really annoyed.”

“Things will be much worse presently.”

“How so?”

“It is twenty minutes past ten, is it not?”

“Yes.”

“Then I may now tell you — ”

“What?”

The marchioness looked around, then whispered, “She will not come.”

“Oh, heavens! but, marchioness, it will he a scandalous affair.”

“It will perhaps cause a lawsuit — a criminal suit. I know from good authority that there will be in the case robbery, abduction, treason. The Choiseuls have played a bold game.”

“Very imprudent in them.”

“Passion rendered them blind.”

“You see what an advantage we have over them, in not being governed by our passions; we are cool, and can look at things calmly.”

“Observe, the king is going again to the window.”

Gloomy, anxious, and irritated, Louis had drawn near a window, leaned his head on a carved frame, and pressed his forehead to the cool glass.

During this time the conversation of the courtiers sounded like the rustling of the leaves of a forest before a tempest. All eyes wandered from the king to the timepiece, and from the timepiece to the king. The half-hour struck, the clear vibrating sound died away in the vast salon.

Monsieur de Maupeou approached the king.

“Delightful weather, sire,” said he, timidly.

“Very fine, very fine! Do you understand anything of this matter, Monsieur de Maupeou?”

“Of what, sire?”

“About this delay — the poor countess.”

“She must be ill, sire,” replied the chancellor.

“I can comprehend that the Duchesse de Grammont may be ill, that the Princess de Guemenee may be ill, that the Countess d'Egmont may be ill, but not that she should be ill.”

“Sire, very great emotion often causes illness, and the countess's joy was so great.”

“Ah! there is no longer any hope,” said Louis, shaking his head; “she will not come now.”

Although the king had uttered these words in a low voice, there was so profound a silence in the salon that every one heard them. No one, however, had time to reply, even in thought, for just then the noise of a carriage was heard in the court of the palace. All heads moved; eyes interrogated eyes.

The king came forward to the middle of the salon, that through the open doors he might see the whole length of the gallery.

“I am afraid,” whispered the marchioness to the marshal, with a meaning smile, “that some bad news is coming.”

But suddenly the king's face brightened, and his eyes flashed with pleasure.

“The Countess Dubarry! the Countess de Bearn!” cried the usher to the grandmaster of the ceremonies.

These two names made all hearts beat, many with very opposite emotions. A crowd of courtiers, impelled by ungovernable curiosity, drew near the king.

The Marchioness de Mirepoix was nearest him; clasping her hands, she exclaimed, as if ready to fall down and worship, “Oh, how beautiful she is! how beautiful she is!”

The king turned a gracious smile on her.

“She is not a woman,” said Richelieu; “she is a fairy.”

The king sent the remainder of the smile in the direction of the old courtier.

In fact, the countess never had appeared more lovely; never had such a perfect representation of gentle agitation and modesty, never had a more charming figure or more noble carriage, graced the queen's salon at Versailles, which, nevertheless, as we have said, was the salon of presentations.

Lovely in the extreme, dressed with the most perfect taste, and above all, her hair dressed exquisitely, the countess advanced, conducted by Madame de Bearn, who, notwithstanding her suffering, did not betray it by the slightest gesture; yet every movement caused each fiber of her frame to quiver, while from her dry and fevered cheeks the rouge dropped off atom by atom.

Every eye was fixed upon the pair who presented such a strange contrast. The did lady, her neck uncovered as in the time of her youth, her headdress standing up a foot above her head, and her large eyes glittering in their deep sockets, like those of an osprey, seemed, in her splendid dress and with her skeleton appearance, the type of the past leading forward the present.

So striking was the contrast, that it seemed to the king as if his favorite had never looked so beautiful as now, when receiving her from the hand of the old Countess de Bearn.

Just as the countess, according to the etiquette, sank on her knee to kiss the king's hand, Louis seized her arm, raised her up, and in a few words rewarded her for all she had suffered during the last fortnight.

“You are at my feet, countess!” said he. “It is I who should be, and who always wish to be, at yours.”

Then he extended his arms to her, following the usual ceremonial, but on this occasion the embrace was not a pretended but a real one.

“You have a lovely god-daughter, madame,” said the king to the Countess de Bearn; “but she has as noble a chaperon, and one whom I rejoice to see again in my court.” The old lady bowed.

“Go and pay your respects to my daughters,” whispered the king to Madame Dubarry, “and show them that you know how to make a curtsey. I hope you will have cause to be satisfied with their reception of you.”

The two ladies advanced in the space which was formed around them, while the eager looks of all followed every movement which they made.

The king's three daughters, seeing them approach, rose as if moved by springs, and remained standing. Their father fixed a look on them which commanded them to be polite.

The princesses, a little agitated, returned Madame Dubarry's curtsey, which she made much lower than etiquette demanded, and this they thought such good taste that they embraced her as the king had done, and delighted him by their cordiality.

From that moment the countess's success became a triumph, and the slower and less adroit courtiers had to wait an hour before they could get their bow made to the queen of the night.

She, free from coldness or any feelings of recrimination, received all advances favorably, and seemed to forget all the treachery used against her. Nor was this mere pretense; for her heart was too full of joy to be anything but magnanimous, or to have room for a single unamiable feeling.

Marshal Richelieu showed a knowledge of tactics worthy of the victor of Mahon. While vulgar courtiers waited in their places the result of the presentation, in order to decide whether they should offer incense to the idol or turn their backs on her, he took up a position behind the countess's chair, like a fugleman who serves as a guide by which to deploy a troop of cavalry on a given point. The result was that at last he found himself close to Madame Dubarry, without being troubled by the crowd. The Marchioness de Mirepoix knew that her old friend had been successful in war; she therefore imitated his tactics, and gradually drew her seat near that of the favorite.

Conversation now commenced among the different groups. The countess was criticised from head to foot. She, supported by the love of the king, by the gracious reception of the princesses, and by the high rank of the lady who had presented her, looked round less timidly on the men, and sought out her enemies among the women.

An opaque body obscured her view.

“Ah! Marshal Richelieu,” said she, “I was obliged to come here in order to meet you.”

“ How so, madame?”

“Is it not eight days since I have seen you, either at Versailles, or in Paris, or at Luciennes.”

“I wished to render the pleasure greater of seeing you here this evening,” replied the old courtier.

“You guessed that I should be here?”

“I was certain of it.”

“Oh, marshal, you knew it, and you did not tell your poor friend who knew nothing about it.”

“What! madame, you did not know that you were to be here?”

“No; I was like Aesop when a magistrate arrested him in the street; 'Where are you going?' said he. 'I don't know,' replied the fabulist. 'Then you shall go to prison,' the other replied. 'You see plainly,' said Aesop, 'that I did not know where I was going.' In like manner, duke, I had some idea that I should go to Versailles, but I was not sure. That is why you would have done me a great service had you come and told me that I should be here. But you will come to see me now — will you not?”

“Madame,” replied Richelieu, without being moved by her raillery, “I really do not understand how it was that you were not sure of being here.”

“I shall tell you; it was because snares were laid on all sides for me,” and she looked steadily at him; but he bore her look without wincing.

“Snares! Good heavens! How could that be?”

“First, they stole my hairdresser.”

“Stole your hairdresser!”

“Yes.”

“But why did you not inform me? I could have sent you — (but let us speak low, if you please) — could have sent you a treasure; my daughter, Madame d'Egmont, found him out. He is quite a superior artist to all others, even the royal hairdressers — my little Leonard.”

“Leonard?” cried Madame Dubarry.

“Yes, a young man whom she hides from every one. But you have no reason to complain, countess; your hair is charmingly dressed; and, singularly enough, the design is exactly like the sketch which the Countess d'Egmont ordered from Boucher for her own head-dress, and which she intended to have used this evening had she not been ill. Poor Septimanie!”

The countess started, and again fixed a searching look upon the marshal; but he continued, smiling and impenetrable.

“But pardon me, countess, for interrupting you,” said he; “you were speaking of snares.”

“Yes, after having carried off my hairdresser, they stole my dress — a most beautiful dress.”

“How shocking! However, it was not of much consequence, as you had another dress so wonderfully beautiful as that you wear. It is Chinese silk, with flowers embroidered on it. Well, if you had applied to me in your trouble, as you must always do for the future. I could have sent you a dress, which my daughter had ordered, so like that, that I could swear it was the same.”

Madame Dubarry seized both the duke's hands, for she now began to suspect who was the enchanter who had befriended her in her difficulties.

“Do you know in whose carriage I came, marshal?” said she.

“In your own, no doubt.”

“No; they stole my carriage as well as my hairdresser.”

“Why, it was a regular ambuscade! In whose carriage, then, did you come?”

“Will you tell me first what the Countess d'Egmont's carriage is like?”

“I think that for this evening she had ordered one lined with white satin; but there was not time to paint the coat of arms.”

“Yes,” exclaimed the countess, “and they substituted a rose instead! Marshal, marshal, you are an adorable man!” and she held out to him both her hands, which he covered with kisses. All at once he felt her start.

“What is the matter, countess?” inquired he, looking round.

“Marshal,” said the countess, with an alarmed air, “who is that man near the Prince de Guemenee?”

“In a Prussian uniform?”

“Yes — the dark man with black eyes, and such an expressive countenance.”

“He is some officer of rank, countess, whom his Prussian majesty has sent, no doubt, to do honor to your presentation.”

“Do not jest, marshal; I know that man. He was in France three or four years ago; I have sought him everywhere, but could never discover him.”

“I think you must be mistaken, countess. He is the Count de Fenix, a foreigner, and only arrived in France yesterday or the day before.”

“Observe how he looks at me.”

“Every one looks at you, you are so beautiful.”

“He bows to me! — lie bows to me! — do you see him?”

“Every one bows to you — at least, all who have not already done so.”

But the countess, who seemed greatly agitated, paid no attention to the duke's gallant speeches, but kept her eyes riveted on the stranger who had attracted her attention. Then rising, as if involuntarily, she advanced a few steps toward the unknown.

The king, who kept his eye fixed on her, observed this movement, and thought that she desired to be near him; and us etiquette had been sufficiently attended to in keeping so long from her side, he approached to congratulate her on her success. Her thoughts, were, however, too much engaged to be turned from their object.

“Sire,” said she, “who is that Prussian officer with his back to the Prince de Guemenee?”

“And who is looking at us at this moment?” asked the king.

“Yes.”

“That strongly marked face, that square head, framed as it were in the gold collar?”

“Yes — yes — the same.”

“He is an accredited agent of my cousin of Prussia — some philosopher like himself, I think. I desired him to be here this evening, as I wished

Prussian philosophy to enhance, by its ambassador, the triumph of Cotillon III.”

“But what is his name, sire?”

“Let me think — ah I — yes — the Count de Fenix.”

“It is the same,” murmured she to herself; “yes, I am sure it is he.”

The king waited a few moments, in order to give Madame Dubarry time to ask further questions if she wished to do so; but finding that she did not speak, he said in a loud voice, “Ladies, her royal highness the dauphiness will arrive tomorrow at Compiegne; we shall meet her precisely at noon. All the ladies who have been presented will go, except, however, those who are ill, for the journey might be fatiguing, and her royal highness would be sorry to aggravate their indisposition.”

As the king pronounced these words, he looked sternly at the Duke de Choiseul, the Prince de Guemenee, and the Marshal de Richelieu.

There was a profound silence; every one understood the meaning of the royal words — they carried disgrace in their front.

“Sire,” said Madame Dubarry, who had remained near the king, “may I request your gracious pardon for the Countess d'Egmont?”

“Why so, may I ask!”

“Because she is the daughter of Marshal Richelieu, who is my most faithful friend.”

“Richelieu?”

“I am certain he is, sire.”

“I shall do what you wish, countess,” said the king.

The king then approached the marshal, who had watched every movement of the countess's lips, and, if he had not heard her words, had at least guessed their meaning.

“I hope, my dear marshal,” said he, “that the Countess d'Egmont will be better to-morrow?”

“Certainly, sire; if your majesty desire it, she will even come out this evening.”

And Richelieu made a bow which expressed at once respect and gratitude.

The king then whispered a word in the countess's ear.

“Sire,” replied she, with a curtsey accompanied by a charming smile, “I am your majesty's obedient servant.”

The king, by a wave of his hand, saluted all the assembly and retired.

Scarcely had he crossed the threshold when the countess's eyes turned again on the singular man who had before attracted her so strongly.

This man bowed like the rest as the king passed along, but even as he bowed there was something haughty, almost threatening, in the expression of his countenance. When Louis XV, had disappeared, he made way for himself through the different groups, and stopped within two paces of Madame Dubarry. The countess, attracted by an inexplicable curiosity, made one step forward, so that, as the unknown bowed to her, he could say in a low voice and so as not to be overheard, “” Do you know me again, madame?”

“Yes, sir; you are the prophet whom I met in the Place Louis XV.”

The stranger fixed his clear and penetrating glance on her.

“Well, did I speak falsely, madame, when I predicted you should be queen of Franc,'?”

“No, sir; your prediction is accomplished, or at least nearly so, and I am ready to fulfill my part of the engagement. Speak, sir, what do you desire?”

“This place is ill chosen for such a purpose; besides, the moment for me to make my request is not yet come.”

“Whenever it does come, you will find me ready to grant it.”

“May I, at any time, in any place, at any hour, have liberty to be admitted to your presence?”

“I promise it.”

“Thanks.”

“But under what name shall I expect you? Under that of the Count de Fenix?”

“No, under that of Joseph Balsamo.”

“Joseph Balsamo,” repeated the countess to herself, while the mysterious stranger disappeared among the groups of courtiers — “Joseph Balsamo! — I shall not forget it!”

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Compiegne.

THE FOLLOWING morning Compiegne awoke transported, intoxicated with joy; or rather to be more exact, Compiegne never went to rest.

The evening before, the first detachment of the king's guards had entered the town, and while the officers took up their position, the magistrates, assisted by the lord high steward and other functionaries, prepared the town for the distinguished honor which was to be conferred on it. Triumphal arches composed of evergreens, roses, and lilacs; inscriptions in Latin, French, and German; compositions in verse and prose, occupied all the sub-magistracy of Picardy from night till morn.

Young girls dressed in white, according to immemorial usage; municipal officers clad in black; monks attired in gray; the clergy in their richest vestures; officers and soldiers in their new uniforms — all were at their posts, ready to advance on the first signal of the arrival of the dauphiness.

The dauphin had arrived incognito with his two brothers about eleven o'clock the night before. Very early in the morning he mounted his horse, as if he had been a private gentleman, and, followed by his brothers, the Count de Provence and the Count d'Artois, the one fifteen and the other thirteen years of age, he galloped off in the direction of Ribecourt, the road by which the princess was to approach. It was not to the young prince, we must confess, that this gallant idea had first occurred; it was suggested by his tutor, Monsieur de Lavanguyon, who had been desired by the king to instruct his august pupil in all the duties which the next twenty-four hours would impose upon him. The tutor, therefore, had thought it right, in order to maintain the honor of the monarchy, to cause him to follow the traditional example of the kings of his race — Henry IV., Louis XIII., Louis XIV., and Louis XV. — who desired to see their future wives without any of the illusions of dress and ornament, and therefore met them when not expected on the road.

Mounted on swift horses, the three brothers accomplished three or four leagues in half an hour; the eldest had set out serious, the two others laughing. At half-past eight they returned; the dauphin still serious, the Count de Provence almost ill-tempered, the Count d'Artois more gay than before. The dauphin was uneasy, the Count de Provence envious, and the Count d'Artois enchanted, about one and the same thing — the beauty of the dauphiness. The grave, jealous, and careless character of each prince respectively was written on his face.

At ten o'clock the look-out employed to watch for the expected train announced that a white flag was displayed on the steeple of the church of Cleves, which was to be the signal that the dauphiness was approaching. The bells of the church commenced to ring, and were answered by the firing of cannon.

At that instant, as if he had only waited for this signal, the king entered Compiegne in a carriage drawn by eight horses, between a double file of his body-guards, and followed by the immense train of the carriages of the court. The guards and dragoons, at a gallop, opened a passage through the crowd, which was divided between two feelings, desire to see the king and curiosity with regard to the, dauphiness. One hundred carriages, drawn by four horses each, extending nearly a league in length, contained four hundred ladies, and as many lords, of the noblest families of France. These hundred carriages were escorted by outriders, heyducks, footmen, and pages. The gentlemen of the king's household were on horseback, and formed a brilliant army, glittering like a sea of velvet and gold, waving plumes, and silk, in the midst of the dust raised by the horses' feet.

They halted an instant at Compiegne, then slowly proceeded to the spot agreed on for the meeting, and marked by a cross near the village of Magny. All the young nobility thronged around the-dauphin, and all the old around the king.

On the other side the dauphiness was also slowly approaching the appointed place.

At length the two parties met. On both sides the courtiers left their carriages; two only remained occupied — that of the king and that of the dauphiness. The door of the dauphiness's carriage was open, and the young archduchess sprang lightly to the ground, and advanced to the royal carriage. The king, on perceiving his daughter-in-law, ordered the door to be opened, and hurriedly got out.

The dauphiness had calculated her time so well, that just as the king put his foot to the ground she was close to him, and she sank on her knee. He raised the young princess and embraced her tenderly, yet casting a look upon her which made her blush.

“His royal highness the dauphin,” said the king, introducing his grandson, who had kept behind the dauphiness without being perceived by her, at least ostensibly.

The dauphiness made him a graceful curtsey; he bowed, blushing in his turn.

Then after the dauphin came his two brothers, then the three princesses; the dauphiness had something gracious to say to each.

“While these introductions were going on, Madame Dubarry stood anxiously behind the princesses. Would she be thought of? — would she be forgotten?

After the introduction of the Princess Sophie, the last of the king's daughters, there was a pause; every breath was suspended. The king seemed to hesitate; the dauphiness seemed to expect some incident concerning which she had been previously informed.

The king looked round, and seeing the countess within reach, took her hand; all near him stepped back, and he found himself in the midst of a circle with the dauphiness.

“The Countess Dubarry,” said he, “my very dear friend.”

The dauphiness turned pale, yet a gracious smile appeared on her white lips, “Your majesty is happy,” said she, “in possessing so charming a friend; and I am not surprised at the attachment which she inspires.”

Every one heard these words with astonishment amounting to stupefaction. It was evident that the dauphiness followed the instructions of the court of Austria; perhaps the very words she repeated were dictated by Maria Theresa.

The Duke de Choiseul then thought that his presence was necessary. He advanced to be presented in his turn; but the king made a sign with his head, the trumpets sounded, the drums beat, the cannon were fired. His majesty took the young princess's hand, to conduct her to her carriage. She passed close to the Duke de Choiseul. Did she see him or did she not? It was impossible to see; but it is certain that she made no sign of recognition. At the moment when she entered her carriage, the bells of the town pealed out, and their clear tones were heard above all the other festive sounds.

The countess returned to her carriage, all radiant with delight and pride.

There was a halt for about ten minutes while the king was reentering his carriage and giving his orders to return to Compiegne. During this time, conversation, which had been suspended from respect or by the interest of the scene, again became general. Dubarry drew near his sister's carriage — she received him with smiles, expecting his congratulations.

“Jeanne,” said he, pointing to a gentleman on horseback, who was talking at the door of a carriage in the train of the dauphiness;” do you know that young man?”

“No,” replied the countess; “but do you know what the dauphiness said when the king presented me to her?”

“I am not thinking of that. That young man is the Chevalier Philip de Taverney.”

“He who wounded you?”

“"Yes; and do you know who that beautiful creature is with whom he is talking?”

“The young girl so pale and so majestic?”

“Yes, she at whom the king is looking at this moment — I think he is asking the dauphiness her name.”

“Well, what then?”

“That young girl is Taverney's sister.”

“Ah!” exclaimed the countess.

“Jeanne, I don't know why, but I think you have as much reason to fear the sister as I the brother.”

“You are a fool!”

“No, I am tolerably wise; and I shall, at all events, look after the youth.”

“Well, then, I shall keep an eye on the girl.”

“Hush! He is your friend. Marshal Richelieu!” The marshal drew near, shaking his head.

“What is the matter, my dear marshal?” inquired the countess, with her most fascinating smile; “you seem dissatisfied with something.”

“Don't you think, countess,” said the duke, “that we all seem very grave, not to say sorrowful, for such a joyous occasion? Formerly, I know, we were much more gay when we went to meet a princess as amiable and as beautiful as this, the mother of his royal highness the dauphin. Was it because we were younger then?”

"No," answered a voice behind the marshal; "no, my dear marshal, but because the monarchy was not so old."

"Heaven and earth!" exclaimed the marshal, "it is the Baron de Taverney! Countess, one of my oldest friends, for whom I solicit your kindness — the Baron de Taverney Maison-Rouge."

"The father," whispered Jean and the countess to each other, as they stooped to salute the baron.

"To your carriages, gentlemen — to your carriages!" cried the major of the guards commanding the escort.

The two old gentlemen bowed to the countess and to the viscount, and both entered the same carriage, delighted to meet once more after so long a separation.

"And now," said the viscount, "shall I tell you another thing, my dear? I have as little love for the father as for the children."

"What a pity," replied the countess, "that that little wretch, Gilbert, ran away! He was brought up in their house, and could have told us so much about them."

"Pshaw! I shall find him again, now that I have nothing else to think about."

Their conversation was interrupted by the carriages being again put in motion.

After having passed the night in Compiegne, the two courts — the one the sunset, the other the dawn, of an age — set out on the following day for Paris — that yawning gulf which was to entomb them both!

CHAPTER XL.

The Patroness and the Patronized.

IT IS NOW TIME that we should return to Gilbert, of whose flight the reader has been made aware by an imprudent exclamation of his protectress, Mademoiselle Chon, but of whom we have since heard nothing.

Our philosopher had cooled very much in his admiration of his patroness from the moment that he had, during the preliminaries of the duel between Philip de Taverney and Viscount Jean, become aware that her name was Dubarry.

Often at Taverney, when, hidden by some hedge, he had followed Andree and her father in their walks, he had heard the baron explain, at great length, all about the Dubarry family. The hatred of the old baron to Madame Dubarry — a feeling which in him, however, sprang from no dislike to what was in itself vicious — found a ready echo in Gilbert's heart, arising principally from her conduct being regarded by Andree with contempt and reprobation, sentiments which may be taken as expressing the general opinion of the nation toward her whole family.

During the journey Chon was too much occupied with matters of a more serious import to pay any attention to the change of feeling which the knowledge of who were his traveling companions had produced in Gilbert. She reached Versailles, therefore, only thinking of how the viscount's wound, since it would not redound to his honor, might be turned to his greatest profit.

As to Gilbert, scarcely had he entered the capital — if not of France, at least of the French monarchy — than he forgot every unpleasant thought, and gave free scope to his undisguised admiration. Versailles, so majestic and stately, with its lofty trees already beginning to show symptoms of decay, touched his heart with that religious sadness which poetic minds always experience in contemplating the mighty works of nature, or those erected by the perseverance of man.

From this impression — a very novel one to Gilbert, and one against which his innate pride struggled in vain — he became silent and submissive, overcome by wonder and admiration.

The feeling of his inferiority crushed him to the earth. When the great lords in their stars and ribbons passed by him, how deeply did he feel the wretchedness of his attire! How inferior did he feel, even to the porters and footmen! How did he tremble when, in his hob-nailed shoes, he had to walk over the shining marble or polished inlaid floors!

At such times he felt that the protection of his patroness was indispensable to him, unless he wished to sink into absolute nothingness. He drew near her, that it might be seen he belonged to her; yet it was for the very reason that he needed her that he disliked her.

We are already aware that Madame Dubarry occupied at Versailles the magnificent suite of rooms formerly inhabited by the Princess Adelaide. The gold, the marble, the perfumes, the carpets, the hangings, at first intoxicated Gilbert; and it was only after these had become somewhat familiar to him that this understanding — dazzled by the reflected light which so many marvels cast on it — roused itself in the end to a clear perception of surrounding objects, and he found that he was in a little attic room, hung with serge — that there had been placed before him a basin of soup, some cold mutton, and a custard. The servant who brought these eatables had said, with the tone of a master, “Remain here!” and then left him.

But Gilbert soon found that the picture had its sunny side. From the window of his garret he could see the park of Versailles, studded with marble statues, and ornamented with fountains. Beyond were the dense and lofty summits of the trees, rolling like a sea of verdure; and farther still, the checkered plains, and the blue horizon of the neighboring mountains. The only subject which occupied Gilbert's mind while eating his dinner was that, like the greatest lords of France, without being either a courtier or a lackey, without having been introduced there either by birth or baseness, he was living in Versailles, in the palace of the king.

His dinner, too, was an excellent one, when compared with those to which he had been accustomed. When it was over, he returned to his contemplation at the window. Meantime Chon had, as the reader may remember, joined her sister — had whispered that her business with Madame de Bearn was happily executed — and then related aloud the accident which their brother met with at Lachaus, see. This accident, although it made a great noise at first, was lost, as the reader has seen, in that great gulf which swallowed up so many things much more important — the king's indifference.

Gilbert had fallen into one of those reveries to which he often gave way while meditating on what was beyond his comprehension, or on what was impracticable for him to accomplish, when he was told that his patroness requested his presence. He took his hat, brushed it, compared by a glance his old worn coat with the new one of the footman, and saying to himself that that of the latter was a livery coat, he followed him. Yet, notwithstanding this philosophic reflection, he could not help blushing with shame to observe how little he resembled the men who elbowed him, and how much out of keeping he was with everything around him.

Chon was descending to the court at the same time as himself, with this difference, that she took the grand staircase, he a little back one more resembling a ladder. A carriage was waiting for them. It was a kind of low phaeton, containing seats for four persons, and resembled that historical vehicle in which the great king used to drive out with Madame de Montespan, Madame de Foutanges, and frequently with them the queen.

Chon got in and took the front seat, with a large box and a little dog beside her; the other seat was for Gilbert and a kind of steward called Monsieur Grange. Gilbert hastened to take the place behind Chon, in order to keep up his dignity; the steward, without thinking there was any degradation in the matter, placed himself behind the box and the dog.

As Mademoiselle Chon, like all who inhabited Versailles, felt joyous on leaving the great palace to inhale the air of the woods and the meadows, she became communicative, and was scarcely out of the town, when she turned half round and said, “Well, what do you think of Versailles, M. Philosopher?”

“It is very beautiful, madame; but are we quitting it already?”

“Yes — now we are going to our own home.”

“That is to say, to your home, madame,” said Gilbert, with the tone of a half-tamed bear.

“That is what I meant. I shall introduce you to my sister; try to please her. All the greatest noblemen in France are only too happy if they can succeed in doing so. By-the-by, Grange, you must order a complete suit for this boy.”

Gilbert blushed up to the eyes.

“What kind of suit, madame?” asked the steward. “The usual livery?”

Gilbert half started from his seat.

“Livery?” cried he, with a fierce look at the steward.

Chon burst into a laugh.

“No,” said she; “you will order — but no matter, I will tell you another time. I have an idea, on which I wish for my sister's opinion. But take care to have the suit ready at the same time as Zamore's.”

“Very well, madame.”

“Do you know Zamore?” asked Chon, turning to Gilbert, who began to be very much alarmed by the conversation.

“No, madame, I have not that honor,” replied he.

“He will be a young companion of yours; he is going to be governor of the chateau of Luciennes. Endeavor to gain his friendship — for Zamore is a good creature, in spite of his color.”

Gilbert was about to ask of what color he was; but recollecting the reproof he had already received on the subject of curiosity, he refrained, for fear of another reprimand.

“I shall try,” he answered, with a dignified smile.

They reached Luciennes. The philosopher saw everything; the road, lately planted — the shady slopes — the great aqueduct, which resembled a work of the Romans — the dense wood of chestnut trees — the varied and magnificent prospect of plains and woods stretching away on both sides of the Seine to Maisons.

“This, then,” said he to himself, “is the country-seat which cost France so much, and of which I have heard the baron often speak!”

Bounding dogs and eager domestics ran out to welcome Chon, and interrupted Gilbert in the midst of his aristocratico-philosophical reflections.

“Has my sister arrived?” asked Chon.

“No, madame, but there are visitors waiting for her.”

“Who are they?”

“The chancellor, the minister of police, and the Duke d'Aiguillon.”

“Well, run quickly and open my sister's private cabinet, and tell her when she arrives that I am there; do you understand? Oh, Sylvia,” added she, addressing a femme-de-chambre who had taken from her the box and the little dog, “give the box and Misapouf to Grange, and take my little philosopher to Zamore.”

Sylvia looked all round, doubtless to find out what sort of animal Chon was speaking of; but her eyes and those of her mistress happening to rest on Gilbert at the same moment, Chon made a sign that the young man was the person in question.

“Come!” said Sylvia.

Gilbert, still more and more surprised at all that he saw, followed the femme-de-chambre, while Chon, light as a bird, disappeared by a side-door of the pavilion.

Had it not been for the commanding tone in which Chon addressed her, Gilbert would have taken Mademoiselle Sylvia to be a great lady rather than a femme-de-chambre, as her dress resembled Andree's much more than Nicole's. The young and handsome waiting woman took him by the hand with a gracious smile; for her mistress's words showed that, if not an object of affection, he was chosen at least through some new whim.

“What is your name, sir?” said she.

“Gilbert, mademoiselle,” replied the young man, in a gentle voice.

“Well, sir, I am going to introduce you to my lord Zamore.”

“To the governor of the chateau of Luciennes?”

“Yes, to the governor.”

Gilbert pulled down his sleeves, dusted his coat a little, and wiped his hands with his handkerchief. He was in reality rather intimidated at the idea of appearing before so important a personage; but he recalled Chon's remark, “Zamore is a good creature,” and recovered his courage. He was already the friend of a countess and a viscount; he was going to be the friend of a governor. “Well,” thought he, “surely people calumniate the court; it is certainly easy enough to find friends in it; at least, as far as my experience goes, I have found every one kind and hospitable.”

Sylvia threw open the door of an anteroom, which, from its splendor, might rather have been supposed a boudoir. The panels of the walls were of tortoiseshell, inlaid with copper gilt; and one might have imagined himself in the atrium of Lucullus, but that that ancient Roman used pure gold to decorate his walls.

There, in an immense armchair, half-buried in cushions, sitting cross-legged and gnawing chocolate cakes, reposed my lord Zamore, whom we already know, but whom Gilbert till now had never seen. The effect, therefore, which the governor of Luciennes produced on the mind of the philosopher was rather curiously depicted in his face. He stared with all his might “at the strange being, for it was the first time he had ever seen a negro.

“Oh, oh!” cried he, “what is that?”

As for Zamore, he never raised his head, but continued to munch his cakes, rolling his eyes and showing the whites of them in the excess of his enjoyment.

“That,” said Sylvia, “is my lord Zamore.”

“That person?” said Gilbert, almost dumb with amazement.

“Yes, to be sure,” answered Sylvia, laughing in spite of herself at the turn the scene was taking.

“He the governor?” continued Gilbert. “That ape the governor of the chateau of Luciennes? Oh, mademoiselle, you are certainly jesting with me!”

At these words Zamore raised his hi-ad and showed his white teeth.

“Me governor,” said he, “me not ape.”

Gilbert looked from Zamore to Sylvia, and his glance, at first uneasy, became wrathful, when the young woman, in spite of all her efforts, burst into a fit of laughter. As for Zamore, grave and solemn as an Indian fetish, he plunged his black claw in a satin bag, and took out a handful of his cakes.

At this moment the door opened, and the steward entered, followed by a tailor.

“Here,” said he, pointing to Gilbert, “is the person for whom you are to make the suit; take the measure according to the directions I gave you.”

Gilbert mechanically submitted his arms and shoulders to be measured, while Sylvia and Grange were talking in another part of the room, and at every word of the steward the chambermaid laughed louder and louder.

“Oh, it will be delightful!” she said. “And will he wear a pointed cap, like Sganarello?”

Gilbert heard no more; he rudely pushed the tailor aside, and absolutely refused to submit to the rest of the ceremony. He knew nothing about Sganarello; but the name, and particularly Sylvia's mirth, plainly declared that he was some pre-eminently ridiculous personage.

“It is of no consequence,” said the steward to the tailor; “don't hurt him! I suppose you can do very well with the measure you have taken.”

“Certainly,” replied the tailor, “for width does no harm in such suits. I shall make it very wide.”

“Whereupon Sylvia, the steward, and the tailor, walked off, leaving Gilbert with the little negro, who continued to gnaw his cakes and roll his great eyes. What an enigma was all this to the poor country lad! What fears, what anguish, did the philosopher experience, in seeing his dignity as a man evidently more compromised at Luciennes than ever it had been at Taverney!

However, he tried to talk to Zamore. It occurred to him that he might be some Indian prince, such as he had read of in the romances of M. Crebillon the younger. But the Indian prince, instead of replying, made the circuit of the apartment from mirror to mirror, admiring his splendid clothes like a bride in her wedding-dress. After that he got astride on a chair with wheels, and impelling it with his feet, he whirled round the antechamber some dozen times with a velocity which showed that he had made a profound study of that ingenious exercise.

Suddenly a bell rang. Zamore jumped up from his chair, and hurried through one of the doors in the direction of the sound. This promptness in obeying the silvery tinkling convinced Gilbert that Zamore was not a prince.

For a moment he entertained the idea of following him; but on reaching the end of the passage which led into a salon, he saw so many blue ribbons and red ribbons, guarded by lackeys so bold, impudent, and noisy, that he felt a chill run through his veins, and, with the cold perspiration on his forehead, he returned to his anteroom.

An hour passed. Zamore did not return; Sylvia was seen no more. Any human face would have seemed then to Gilbert better than none, were it even that of the dreaded tailor who was to complete the mystification with which he was threatened.

Just at that moment the door by which he had entered the room opened, and a footman appeared and said, “Come!”

CHAPTER XLI.

The Physician Against His Will.

GILBERT FELT IT rather disagreeable to be obliged to obey a footman; nevertheless, he lost no time in following him, for he thought that now there was some prospect of a change in his condition, and it seemed to him that any change must be for the better.

Chon, now completely her own mistress, after having initiated her sister into the whole affair of the Countess de Bearn, was breakfasting very much at her ease in a charming morning-dress, beside a window shaded with acacias and chestnut trees.

She was eating with an excellent appetite, and Gilbert remarked that a pheasant and truffles justified the relish with which she enjoyed her breakfast.

The philosopher, having entered the apartment, looked around to discover his place at the table, but there was no plate for him, and he was not even asked to sit down.

Chon merely cast a glance on him; then, after swallowing a little glass of wine, as clear and yellow as a topaz:

“Well, my dear doctor,” said she, “how have you got on with Zamore?”

“How have I got on with him?”

“Yes; I hope you have become acquainted with him?”

“How could one make acquaintance with an animal like that, who never speaks, and who, when one speaks to him, only rolls his eyes?”

“Really you frighten me!” said Chon, without stopping one moment in her repast, and without her countenance showing any expression at all corresponding to her words. “Your friendship is difficult to gain, then?”

“Friendship presupposes equality, madame.”

“A noble maxim,” said Chon. “Then you don't think yourself the equal of Zamore?”

“That is to say, that I do not think him my equal,” replied Gilbert.

“In truth,” said Chon, as if talking to herself, “he is charming!”

Then turning to Gilbert, she remarked his stately air.

"So, my dear doctor," said she, "you do not easily bestow your affections?"

"No, madame, not easily."

"Then I was mistaken when I thought you held me as your friend, and as a good friend, too?"

"Madame," said Gilbert, very stiffly, "I feel for you naturally a liking, but — "

"Oh! a thousand thanks for your condescension! you really overwhelm me! and how long do you think, my scornful young gentleman, it would require to gain your affection?" "A long time, madame; and there are even persons who, whatever they did, could never obtain it."

"Oh! then that explains the reason why, after having been eighteen years in the Baron de Taverney's house, you left it all at once. The Taverneys were not so fortunate as to obtain your affections — that was it, was it not?"

Gilbert blushed.

"Well? you don't answer," continual Chon.

"I have nothing to reply, madame, but that friendship and confidence must be merited."

"Oh! it appears, then, that your friends at Taverney did not merit your friendship and confidence?"

"Not all of them, madame."

"Ah! and what had those done who were so unfortunate as not to please you?"

"I do not complain of them, madame." answered he, proudly.

"Well, well. I perceive, M. Gilbert, that I am also one of the unfortunates excluded from your confidence; yet, believe me, it is not from any want of a desire to obtain it, but from my not knowing the right means of doing so!"

Gilbert bit his lip.

"But to shorten the matter," added she with an inquisitiveness which he felt must be for some object, "the Taverneys did not behave quite satisfactorily to you. Tell me, if you please, what was your occupation in their establishment?"

This was rather an embarrassing question, as Gilbert certainly could not say that he held any particular office at Taverney.

"Madame," said he, "I was — I was their confidential adviser."

At these words, which he pronounced most phlegmatically and philosophically, Chon was seized with such a fit of laughter that she threw herself back in her chair.

“Do you doubt my words?” asked Gilbert, frowning.

“Heaven preserve me from such a rash act, my dear friend I Really, you are so fierce, that one can scarcely venture to speak to you. I merely asked what sort of people the Taverneys were. Believe me, it was with no other intention than that of serving you, by assisting you to be revenged' on them.”

“If I am revenged, madame, it must be by myself.”

“All very well; but we have a cause of complaint against the Taverneys ourselves; and, as you have one, or perhaps indeed several, we are naturally allies in our wish for revenge.”

“You are quite mistaken, madame. Should I think of vengeance, mine could have no connection with yours. You speak of all the Taverneys, while I have different shades of feeling toward different members of the family.”

“The Chevalier Philip de Taverney, for instance, is he in the number of your friends or enemies?”

“I have nothing to say against the chevalier. He never did me either good or ill. I neither love him nor hate him; I am quite indifferent to him.”

“Then you would not give evidence before the king, or before the Duke de Choiseul, against M. Philip de Taverney?”

“Give evidence about what?”

“About the duel with my brother.”

“I should say all that I know about it, if I were called upon to give evidence.”

“And what do you know about it?”

“The truth.”

“But what do you call truth? That is a word whose meaning is very vague.”

“No; not to the man who can distinguish between good and evil — between justice and injustice.”

“I understand you; justice is on the side of the Chevalier de Taverney, injustice on that of Viscount Dubarry?”

“Yes, madame, so I think, if I must speak conscientiously.”

“So this is the creature I picked up on the highway!” said Chon, sharply; “I am rewarded in this way by one who owes it to me that he is living!”

“That is to say, madame, who does not owe you his death.”

“It is all the same.”

“On the contrary, madame, it is very different.”

“How different?”

“I do not owe my life to you; you merely prevented your horses from depriving me of it; besides, it was not you, but the postilion.”

Chon fixed a penetrating look on the young logician, who showed so little scruple in the choice of his terms.

“I should have expected,” said she, in a milder tone, and allowing a smile to steal over her features, “a little more gallantry from you. Come, come! you will give evidence against the chevalier, will you not?”

“No, madame — never.”

“And why not, you foolish fellow?”

“Because the viscount was in the wrong.”

“And, pray, how was he in the wrong?”

“By insulting the dauphiness; while, on the contrary, the chevalier — ”

“Well, what?”

“Was right in defending her.”

“Oh, ho! then it appears you belong to the dauphiness's party?”

“No; I am only for justice.”

“Hold your tongue, Gilbert, you are a fool! Do not let any one hear you talk in that way here.”

“Then permit me to remain silent when I am questioned.”

“In that case, let us change the subject.”

Gilbert bowed, in token of assent.

“And now, my little friend,” said the young lady, in rather a harsh tone of voice, “what do you intend to do here, if you refuse to make yourself agreeable?”

“Must I perjure myself in order to make myself agreeable?”

“Perjure! where did you learn all those grand words?”

“In the knowledge that I have a conscience to which I must be faithful.”

“Pshaw!” said Chon; “when we serve a master, the master takes all the responsibility from our conscience.”

“But I have no master,” growled Gilbert.

“Indeed? — well, answer my question. What do you mean to do here?”

“I did not think that I required to study to be agreeable when I could be useful.”

"You are mistaken, we can get useful people anywhere; we are tired of them."

"Then I shall go away."

"You will go away?"

"Yes, of course. I did not ask to come here; I am therefore free."

"Free?" exclaimed Chon, who began to get angry at this resistance to her will, a thing to which she was by no means accustomed. "Free? indeed you are not!"

Gilbert's brow contracted.

"Come, come!" said she, seeing by his frown that he would not easily renounce his freedom, "let us be friends. You are a handsome lad, and very virtuous, which makes you very amusing, were it only for the contrast which you will present to everybody else about us. Only keep a guard upon that love of truth of yours."

"I shall take care to keep it," said Gilbert.

"Yes; but we understand the word in two different senses; I mean to keep it to yourself. You need not exhibit it in the lobbies and anterooms of Luciennes or Versailles."

"Hum!" said Gilbert.

"There is no occasion for 'hum!' You are not so learned, M. Philosopher, but that you may learn something from a woman; and let this be your first maxim, 'to hold your tongue is not to lie' — remember that!"

"But if any one questions me?"

"Who would question you? — are you mad, my friend? Who in the world would ever think about you but myself? You have not yet founded a school, M. Philosopher, I presume. It will require some little searching and trouble before you happen upon a body of followers. You shall live with me; and before four times four-and-twenty hours, I shall transform you into a perfect courtier."

"I doubt that," replied Gilbert majestically. Chon shrugged her shoulders.

Gilbert smiled.

"Now," said Chon, "to settle the matter at once, you have only to endeavor to please three persons."

"What three?"

"The king, my sister, and myself."

"What must I do to please?"

“Have you not seen Zamore?” asked the young lady, avoiding a direct reply.

“The negro?” said Gilbert, with the utmost contempt.

“Yes, the negro.”

“What similarity is there between him and me?”

“Try to make a similarity of fortune, my good friend. That negro has already two thousand livres per annum from the king's privy purse. He is to be appointed governor of Luciennes; and even those that laugh at his thick lips and his black face call him sir, and even my lord!”

“I shall not be one of those,” said Gilbert.

“Oh! I thought that the first principle of you philosophers was that all men are equal.”

“That is the very reason that I shall not call Zamore my lord.”

Chon was beaten with her own weapons. It was her turn to bite her lips.

“So you are not ambitious?” said she.

“Oh, yes, I am!” replied Gilbert, with sparkling eyes.

“And if I remember rightly your ambition was to be a physician.”

“I look upon the mission of soothing the pain and suffering of our fellow creatures as the noblest in the world.”

“Well, your dream shall be realized.”

“How so?”

“You shall be a physician — and the king's physician to boot.”

“I?” cried Gilbert, “I, who know not even the first principles of medical science? You jest, madame.”

“Well, and what does Zamore know about portcullises, and drawbridges, and counterscarps? He does not trouble his head about such things, yet that does not prevent him from being governor of Luciennes with all a governor's privileges.”

“Ah, yes, yes, I understand!” said Gilbert, bitterly. “You have only one buffoon, and that is not sufficient. The king is getting tired and wishes for another.”

“There,” said Chon, “you are putting on your long face again. You make yourself so ugly, my little man, it is really quite delightful to see you. Keep all those ridiculous faces till the wig is on your head and the sugar-loaf hat over the wig, then, instead of being ugly, they will be comical.”

Gilbert frowned more darkly still.

“I should think you might be glad of the post of the king's physician, when the Duc de Tresmes solicits that of my sister's monkey.”

Gilbert made no answer. Chon thought of the proverb, “Silence gives consent.”

“As a proof that you are in favor,” said she, “you shall not eat with servants.”

“Ah! thank you, madame,” replied Gilbert.

“I have already given orders to that effect.”

“And where shall I eat?”

“Along with Zamore.”

“I?”

“Yes, the king's governor and his physician may surely eat together; go now to your dinner.”

“I am not hungry,” answered Gilbert, rudely.

“Very well,” said Chon, quietly; “you are not hungry now, but you will be in the evening.”

Gilbert shook his head.

“To-morrow, then, or the day after tomorrow you may be. Oh, we know how to tame rebels here; and if you continue obstinate we have besides the corrector of our pages to do our will!”

Gilbert shuddered and turned pale.

“Go to my lord Zamore now,” she added, sharply; “you will be very well treated with him; his table is excellent. But no ingratitude, remember, or we shall teach you to be grateful.”

Gilbert let his head fall on his breast, an invariable symptom that instead of going to reply, he was going to act.

The footman who had showed him to Chon's apartment waited at the door, and on his dismissal conducted him to a little dining-room adjoining the anteroom.

Zamore was at table. Gilbert took his place at the table, but he could not be made to eat.

Three o'clock struck, Madame Dubarry set off for Paris. Chon, who was to join her there a short time after, left instructions for the taming of her bear. Plenty of sweetmeats were to be his reward if he became docile; plenty of threats, and at last the dungeon, if he continued rebellious.

At four o'clock a complete suit, such as that worn by the “medecin malgre lui,” was brought into Gilbert's apartment. There was the pointed cap, the wig, the black jacket, and the long black robe; in addition to these, they sent him a collar, a wand, and a large book. The footman who carried them in exhibited the various articles one by one. Gilbert no longer manifested any disposition to rebel. Grange entered after the footman, and instructed him how all the different parts of the dress should be worn. Gilbert listened most patiently.

"I thought," said he, at length, "that doctors formerly carried a little writing-case and a roll of paper?"

"Yes, faith, he is right," replied the steward; "go and bring him a long writing-case, which he can hang at his girdle."

"With pen and paper," added Gilbert, "I must have every part of my costume complete."

The footman hastened to execute the order, and at the same time to tell Chon how obliging Gilbert had become. Chon was so much delighted, that she gave the messenger a little purse with eight crowns in it, to hang with the writing-case at the girdle of this model of a physician.

"Thank you," said Gilbert to the person who brought it, "now may I be left alone to dress?"

"Well, make haste," replied Grange, "so that mademoiselle may see you before she goes to Paris."

"Half an hour," said Gilbert, "I only ask half an hour!"

"You may take three-quarters, if you like, my dear doctor," said the steward, shutting the door carefully, as if it had been that of his money-box.

Gilbert stole on tip-toe to the door, to be certain that the footsteps were dying away in the distance; then he glided to the window and looked down. There was a terrace about eighteen feet below him, covered with fine gravel, and bordered by lofty trees, which shaded the balconies of the windows.

Gilbert tore his long robe into three pieces which he tied lengthwise together, placed the hat on the table, and near it the purse and the following note:

"MADAME — Liberty is the first of blessings. Man's most sacred duty is to preserve it. You endeavored to enslave me — I set myself free. — GILBERT."

This letter he folded and addressed to Mademoiselle Chon; then he tied his twelve feet of serge to the bars of the window, slipped between them with the suppleness of an eel, and when at the end of his cord, dropped down to the terrace at the risk of breaking his neck. Though a little stunned by the fall, he lost not a moment in gaining the trees, among which he glided stealthily, and running as fast as his limbs would carry him, he disappeared in the direction of Villa d'Avray.

When, at the end of half an hour, they came to seek for him, he was already far beyond their reach.

CHAPTER XLII.

The Old Han.

GILBERT had avoided the highway through fear of pursuit; he glided from one plantation to another, until he reached a sort of forest, and there he stopped. He had traveled a league and a half in about three-quarters of an hour.

The fugitive looked around him, and finding himself quite alone, he felt so much courage that he thought he might venture nearer the high-road. He therefore turned in the direction which, according to his calculation of his position, he supposed would lead to Paris.

But some horses which he saw near the village of Roquencourt, led by grooms in orange liveries, frightened him so much, that he was cured of all desire to be on the public road, and he returned to the woods.

“Let me keep in the shade of the trees,” said he to himself; “if I am pursued, it will certainly be on the high-road. In the evening, from tree to tree, from one opening to another, I shall steal on to Paris. They say Paris is very large, and as I am little, I can easily hide there.”

This idea was rendered still more agreeable to him by the fineness of the weather, the shade of the forest, and the softness of the mossy sward. The sun was now disappearing behind the hills of Marly, and the vegetation, dried by the scorching heat of the day, exhaled the sweet perfume of the spring — a mingled odor of the plant and of the flower.

Evening came on. It was the hour when, beneath the darkening skies, silence falls more softly and more deeply on all things, when the closing flower-cup shuts in the insect sleeping on its bosom. The gilded flies return with ceaseless hum to the hollow oak which serves them as an asylum; the birds hurry silently to their nests, their wings rustling through the foliage; and the only sung which is heard is the clear whistle of the blackbird, and the timid warble of the redbreast.

Gilbert was familiar with the woods; he was well acquainted both with their sounds and with their silence. Without giving way, therefore, to reflection, or to idle fear, he threw himself at full length on the heath, on which there yet remained here and there a red leaf of the preceding winter.

Far from feeling anxious or disturbed, he experienced rather a vague and boundless sense of joy. He inhaled with rapture the pure and free air, feeling, with the pride of a stoic, that he had once more triumphed over the snares laid for human weakness. What though he had neither bread, nor money, nor shelter — had he not his beloved liberty? Was he not the free and uncontrolled master of his destiny?

He stretched himself, therefore, at the foot of a gigantic chestnut tree, where between two of its moss-covered roots he found a luxurious couch; then, gazing up at the calm and smiling heavens, he gradually sank to sleep.

The warbling of the birds awoke him; it was scarcely day. Raising himself on his elbow, stiff and painful from contact with the hard wood, he saw, in the dawning light, an opening from which three paths branched off through the wood. Here and there a rabbit scudded past him with its ears drooping, and brushing away the dew in its course, or a stag bounded past, with its sharp quick leaps, stopped to gaze at the unknown object under the tree, and then, alarmed, darted off with a more rapid flight.

Gilbert jumped to his feet, but no sooner had he done so than he felt he was hungry. The reader may remember that he had refused to dine with Zamore, so that since his breakfast in the attic at Versailles he had eaten nothing. On finding himself once more under the leafy arches of a forest, he who had so boldly traversed the great woods of Lorraine and Champagne, he almost thought himself beneath the trees of Taverney or among the brakes of Pierrefitte, surprised by the morning beams after a nocturnal expedition to procure game for his fair mistress.

But at Taverney he had always found by his side a partridge or a pheasant which he had shot, while here he found only his hat, rather the worse for his journey, and now nearly unfit to wear after the damps of the night.

It was not, then, all a dream, as he had on first awakening supposed. Versailles and Luciennes were realities, from his triumphal entry into the first till his forcible escape from the last.

But what more than all else served to recall him to his real position was his hunger, now becoming sharper and sharper every moment.

Then he mechanically sought around for some of those delicious mulberries, those, wild cherries, or pungent roots, which, though acrid like the radish, the woodman loves to find as he plods in the morning to his labor with his tools on his shoulder. But this was not the season for such things, and besides, he saw around him only the ash, the beech, and other trees which bear no fruit.

"Well," said he to himself, "I will go direct to Paris. I cannot be more than three or four leagues from it — five, at the most — I can be there in two hours. What matter is it to suffer for a couple of hours, when I am sure after that of not having to suffer any longer? In Paris every one has bread, and the first artisan whom I meet will not refuse me bread for my work, when he knows that I am honest and industrious. In Paris I shall be able in one day to procure food for the next. What do I want more? Nothing, except that every succeeding day may see me increase in strength, in elevation of character, in greatness of mind, and approach nearer and nearer the object of my wishes."

Gilbert redoubled his speed; he now wished to find the high-road, but he had lost all means of directing his course. At Taverney, and in the woods around it, he knew the east and the west; every ray of light was to him an index of the hour. At night every star, although unknown to him by its name of Venus, Lucifer, or Saturn, served him as a guide. But her he was in a new world; he knew neither places nor objects, and was forced to seek his way, groping by chance.

"Fortunately," said he, "I saw fingerposts, on which the roads were pointed out."

He proceeded toward an opening where one of these directing-posts was placed. It pointed to three roads; one road led to Marais-Jaune, another to Champ-de-l'Alouette, a third to Trou-Sale. Gilbert was not much assisted by this; he ran for three hours from one place to another, very often finding himself in the same spot from which he set out, and as far from the high-road as ever.

The perspiration poured down his face. A dozen times he threw off his coat and vest to climb some colossal chestnut-tree; but when he had reached its summit, he saw nothing but Versailles — Versailles now on his right, now on his left — Versailles, toward which, by some fatality, he seemed constantly impelled. He was half frantic with rage; but at last his efforts were so far successful that he first passed Viroflay, then Chaville, then Sevres.

Half-past five sounded from the clocktower of Heudon when he reached the Capuchin convent between Sevres and Bellevue; there, climbing on a cross at the risk of breaking it, and of being himself broken on the wheel by order of the parliament, as Sirven had been, he saw from that height the Seine, the village, and the smoke of the nearest houses. Beyond this he saw a great mass of buildings on the horizon, dimly distinguished in the morning vapors. That must be Paris, he thought; so feeling no longer either fatigue or hunger, he directed his course thither, and only stopped when out of breath from his excessive speed.

He was now in the woods of Meudon, between Fleury and Plessis-Piquet.

“Come,” said he, looking around, “no false shame! I shall no doubt soon meet some early workman going to his day's labor with a loaf under his arm. I shall say to him, 'All men are brethren, and ought to help one other. You have more bread there than you will want this day, while I am dying of hunger,' and then he will give me the half of his loaf.”

Hunger rendering Gilbert more and more philosophical, he continued his reflections.

“In truth,” said he, “should not everything be in common among men on this earth? Has the Eternal Source of all things given to this man or to that the air which fertilizes the soil, or the soil which produces the fruit? No. Some, it is true, have usurped a power over these things; but in the eyes of their Maker, in the eyes of the philosopher, no one possesses them. He who holds them is only the man to whom the Creator has lent them.”

Gilbert, in all this, was but condensing by a natural instinct the vague and indefinite ideas of the period which men felt, as it were, floating in the air and hovering above their heads, like clouds impelled in one direction, and forming a threatening mass, from which at length the tempest would burst.

“Some, “continued he, “retain by force what should belong to all. Well, then, from such we should tear by force what by right they should share with us. If my brother, who has too much bread, refuse me a portion of that bread, why, then, I shall take it from him by force; I shall follow the law of nature, the source of all sound sense and of all justice, since it arises from our natural wants. But I must yield if my brother say to me, 'The portion you ask for is that of my wife and of my children,' or if he should say,' I am stronger than you, and I shall keep what I have in spite of you.'”

He was in this temper of mind, which bore a striking resemblance to that of a hungry wolf, when he reached an open space among the trees; in its center was a pond of muddy water, margined with reeds and water-lilies, on the surface of which sported myriads of flies, dotting its glassy bosom with innumerable circles. The grassy slope which descended to the water's edge was closely studded with bunches of myosotis, and resembled a bed of turquoises and emeralds. The background of the picture, that is, the circle around the pool and the bank, was formed of a hedge of tall aspens, the interstices between whose golden trunks was filled up with the thick and leafy branches of the alder. Six paths led down to this spot; two of which, radiant with golden light, might have seemed to the imagination avenues to the palace of the glorious luminary of day; the four others, diverging like rays of a star, were lost in the blue depths of the forest.

This verdant salon seemed fresher and more flowery than any other part of the wood. Gilbert entered it by one of the dark alleys.

The first object which he perceived, when, after having at a glance taken in its extent and circumference, his eyes rested on nearer objects, was a man seated on the fallen trunk of a tree, near a deep ditch. The expression of his face was mild, yet refined and penetrating, and he was dressed in a coat of coarse brown cloth, breeches of the same, and a waistcoat of gray jean. His well-made sinewy legs were incased in gray cotton stockings, and his shoes with buckles were dusty here and there, yet showed on the soles and points traces of the morning dew.

Near him on the grass was placed a box, painted green, wide open, and filled with plants recently gathered. He had between his legs a stout stick, with a smooth round handle, and terminated at the opposite end by a little spade about two inches broad and three long.

Gilbert embraced in one rapid glance all these details which we have given; but what first drew his attention was a piece of bread, from which the old man from time to time broke off small pieces to eat, sharing them benevolently with the linnets and the wrens, who fixed from afar a longing eye on the food, stooped on it the moment it was thrown to them, and then, flew with joyful twittering to their thick foliage above.

The old man watched them with an eye at once gentle and animated, then, extending his hand to a checked handkerchief beside him, he drew from it a cherry from time to time, as a relish with his mouthful of bread.

“Ha! this is the man for me!” said Gilbert, brushing aside the branches of the trees and making four steps toward the solitary man, who looked up as he approached; but he had not advanced a third of the distance which separated them, when, perceiving the calmness and gentleness of the old man's countenance, he stopped and took off his hat.

The old man, finding himself no longer alone, cast a hurried glance on his box and then on his coat. He shut the former and buttoned up the latter.

CHAPTER XLIII.

The Botanist.

GILBERT TOOK COURAGE and walked close up; but he opened his mouth and shut it again before he could utter a word. His philosophy wavered, and it seemed to him that he was about to entreat alms, and not to demand a right.

The old man observed this timidity, and it seemed to banish on his side all feelings of apprehension.

“Do you wish to speak to me, my friend?” said he, smiling, and laying down his bread on the trunk of the tree on which he sat.

“Yes, sir,” replied Gilbert.

“What do you wish to say?”

“Sir, I see you throw your bread to the birds as if we were not told that God feeds them.”

“Doubtless he does feed them, young man; but the hand of man is one of the means which he employs for that purpose. If you mean your words as a reproach, you are wrong; for neither in the silent wood nor in the crowded street is the bread ever lost which we cast from our hand. In the one place the birds pick it up, in the other the poor.”

“Well, sir,” said Gilbert, singularly moved by the soft penetrating voice of the old man, “although we are in the woods, I know a man who would dispute your bread with the birds.”

“Can it be you, my friend!” cried the old man; “are you, then, hungry?”

“Very, very hungry, sir, and if you will permit me —

The old man seized his bread at once with eager compassion. Then reflecting for a moment, ho looked at Gilbert with a keen and searching glance.

In fact, Gilbert so little resembled a starving man, that some consideration might be permitted. His coat was clean, except where it was in some places stained by its contact with the ground; his shirt was white, for at Versailles the evening before he had taken a clean one from his bundle, yet it was rendered damp by the den-s; it was quite evident that he had passed the night in the wood.

Besides all this, his hands were white and slender, like those of a man of thought rather than of labor.

Gilbert did not want tact; he read the stranger's distrust and hesitation in his countenance, and hastened to anticipate further conjectures which he readily saw would not be favorable to him.

“We are always hungry, sir,” he said, “when we have not eaten for twelve hours, and it is now twenty-four since I have had any food.”

The emotion expressed on the young man's face, his tremulous voice, and his extreme paleness, all declared that his words were true. The old man hesitated, or rather feared, no longer; he held out to Gilbert his bread arid the handkerchief containing his cherries.

“Thank you, sir, thank you,” said Gilbert, gently pushing aside the handkerchief containing the cherries; “nothing but the bread, it is quite sufficient.”

And he broke it in two, keeping one half for himself and returning the other to the old man; then he sat down on the grass a couple of paces from his companion, who looked at him with increasing wonder.

The repast did not last very long. There was but little bread, and Gilbert was very hungry. The old man did not disturb his occupation by a word; he continued to observe him furtively but silently, bestowing apparently great attention on the plants and flowers in his box, which, when he opened it again, raised their odoriferous heads to the level of the edge, as if to inhale the air. But seeing Gilbert approach the pond, he cried hastily, “Do not drink that water, young man; it is rendered unwholesome by the remains of last year's plants, and by the spawn of frogs now on its surface. Take instead a few of these cherries, they will refresh you as much as the water. Take them, I beg of you, for you are not a forward guest, I see.”

“It is true, sir, forwardness is the reverse of my nature, and I fear nothing so much as being intrusive. I have just experienced that at Versailles.”

“Oh, you come from Versailles?” said the stranger, eying Gilbert with a strong expression of curiosity.

“Yes, sir.”

“It is a rich town; one must be either very poor or very proud to be starving there.”

“I am both, sir.”

“You have had a quarrel with your master, perhaps?” said the stranger, while ho apparently arranged the plants in his box, yet giving Gilbert a rapid interrogating glance.

“I have no master, sir.”

“My friend,” replied the old man, putting on his hat, “that is too ambitious a reply.”

“It is the truth, however.”

“No, young man. Every one has his master here below; we do not place our pride on a proper object when we say that we have no master.”

“How?”

“Yes. Whether old or young, it is so ordered that we must submit to some ruling power. Some are ruled by men, others by principles; and the severest masters are not always those who order with the voice or strike with the hand.”

“Be it so,” said Gilbert. “Then I am governed by principles. I confess. Principles are the only masters which a reflecting mind can recognize without shame.”

“And what are your principles? Let me hear them? You seem to be very young, my friend, to have any decided principles.”

“Sir, I know that all men are brethren, and that every man from his birth is bound to fulfill certain duties toward his fellowmen. I know that God has bestowed on me a certain amount of value in society; and as I acknowledge the worth of other men. I have a right to exact from them that they should acknowledge mine, If I do not exaggerate its importance. So long as I do nothing unjust and dishonorable, I merit some regard, even were it only as a human being.”

“Oh, oh!” said the stranger, “you have studied, I perceive.”

“Alas! sir, I have not; but I have read the 'Discours sur l'Inegalite des Conditions,' and 'Le Contrat Social!' From those two books I have learned all that I know, and even all that I have dreamed.”

At these words the eyes of the stranger flashed, and by an involuntary movement he was nearly destroying a beautiful xeranthemum, which he was trying to place securely in his box.

“And such are the principles which you profess?” said he.

“They may not be yours, sir,” replied the young man; “but they are those of Jean Jacques Rousseau.”

“But,” said the stranger, with a distrust so apparent that it was rather humbling to Gilbert's vanity; “but are you sure you have rightly understood those principles?”

“I understand French, I think, sir, particularly when it is pure and poetical.”

“You see that you do not,” said the old man, smiling; “for what I ask you, if not poetical, is at least quite plain. I mean, have your philosophical studies enabled you to understand the groundwork of the system of — ”

He stopped, almost blushing.

“Of Rousseau, sir?” continued Gilbert. “Oh, sir! I have not studied my philosophy in a college; but there is an instinct within me which revealed the excellence and utility of 'Le Contrat Social' above all other books that I had read.”

“A dry book for a young man, sir — a barren subject for reverie at twenty years of age — a bitter and unfragrant flower for fancy in its springtime!” said the old man with gentle sadness.

“Misfortune ripens man before his time, sir,” answered Gilbert; “and as to reverie, if we give it a free and unrestrained course, it very often leads to ill.”

The stranger opened his eyes, which he usually kept half closed in his moments of calmness and reflection, a peculiarity which gave an indefinable charm to his countenance.

“To whom do you allude?” asked he, reddening.

“Not to any one, sir,” said Gilbert.

“Oh, yes, you do.”

“No — I assure you I do not.”

“You appear to have studied the philosopher of Geneva. Do you not allude to his life?”

“I know nothing of his life,” replied Gilbert, frankly.

“Do you not?” and the stranger sighed. “Young man, he is a wretched creature.”

“Impossible! Jean Jacques Rousseau wretched? Then there is no justice on earth. Wretched? The man who has devoted his life to the happiness of mankind?”

“Well, well! I see that you know nothing about him. Let us speak of yourself, my friend, if you please.”

“I should prefer going on with our present subject. What can I tell you of myself worth hearing, sir, I, who am a mere nobody?”

“And besides, you do not know me, and are afraid of trusting a stranger.”

“Oh, sir, what have I to fear from any one? Who can make me more wretched than I am? Recollect in what guise I came before you — alone, poor, hungry.”

“Where were you going?”

“I was going to Paris. Are you a Parisian, sir?”

“Yes — that is to say — no.”

“Which of the two am I to believe?” asked Gilbert, smiling.

“” I abhor falsehood, and every moment I perceive how necessary it is to reflect before speaking. I am a Parisian, if by that is meant a man who has lived in Paris for a long time, and has mixed in its society; but I was not born in that city. But why do you ask?”

“It was from an association of ideas, arising out of our conversation. I thought if you lived in Paris you might have seen Rousseau, of whom we were speaking just now.”

“I have indeed seen him sometimes.”

“People look at him as he passes by — do they not? He is admired, and pointed out as the benefactor of the human race?”

“No; children, incited by their parents, follow him, and throw stones at him!”

“Good heavens!” exclaimed Gilbert, with the most painful astonishment, “but at least he is rich?”

“He has sometimes to ask himself, as you asked yourself this morning, 'Where shall I procure a breakfast?”

“But poor as he is, he is esteemed — has influence — is respected?”

“He knows not at night, when he lies down, whether he may not in the morning awake in the Bastille.”

“Oh, how he must hate mankind!”

“He neither loves them nor hates them; he is disgusted with them — that is all.”

“How can we avoid hating people who treat us ill?” cried Gilbert; “ I cannot comprehend that.”

“Rousseau has always been free, sir — Rousseau has always been strong enough to rely on himself alone. It is strength and freedom which make men mild and kind — slavery and weakness alone make them malevolent.”

"Those are my reasons for wishing to be free," said Gilbert, proudly. "I have long thought what you have just so well explained to me."

"But one may tie free even in prison, my friend," replied the stranger. "Suppose Rousseau were in the Bastille to-morrow — and he certainly will be in it one day or other — he would think and write as freely as among the mountains of Switzerland. I have never thought, for my part, that man's freedom consists in his being able to do whatever he wills, but that he should not, by any human power, be forced to do what is against his will."

"Has Rousseau written what you have just said, sir?"

"I think he has."

"It is not in 'The Social Contract?'"

"No, it is in a new work of his, called 'The Reveries of a Solitary Walker.' '

"Sir," said Gilbert, warmly, "I think we shall agree on one point."

"What is that?"

"That we both love and admire Rousseau."

"Speak for yourself, young man; you are still in the age of illusions."

"We may be deceived about things, but not about men."

"Alas! you will learn at a later period that it is in the characters of men more than in aught else that we are deceived. Rousseau may be a little more just than other men, but believe me, he has faults, and very great ones."

Gilbert shook his head in a way which showed that he was far from being convinced; but notwithstanding this rather uncivil demonstration, the stranger continued to treat him with the same kindness.

"Let us return to the point at which we set out," said the stranger. "I was saying that you had quitted your master at Versailles."

"And I," replied Gilbert, but more mildly than before, "I answered that I had no master; I should have added that it depended entirely on myself to have one, and a very illustrious one too, and that I had refused a situation which many would have sought eagerly."

"A situation?"

"Yes; one in which I should only have had to talk for the amusement of great lords in want of such an occupation; but I thought that being young and able to study and push my way in life, I ought not to lose my most precious years, and compromise in my person the dignity of man."

"And you decided well. But have you any fixed plan of pursuing your career?"

“Sir, I should wish to be a physician.”

“A noble profession. In it you may choose between real science, ever modest and self-sacrificing, and quackery, ever noisy and empty. If you would become a physician, young man, study; if a quack, nothing but impudence and effrontery are necessary.”

“But it requires a great deal of money to study, does it not, sir?”

“It certainly requires some money; I should not say a great deal.”

“In fact, I believe that Jean Jacques Rousseau, who knows everything, studied at no expense.”

“At no expense? Oh, young man!” said the stranger, with a sad smile, “do you call it no expense when we expend the most precious of God's gifts — innocence, health, sleep? These are what it has cost the philosopher of Geneva to acquire the little that he knows.”

“The little?” repeated Gilbert, almost angrily.

“Yes; ask any one about him, and you will hear him spoken of as I speak of him.”

“In the first place, he is a great musician.”

“Oh, because King Louis XV, sang a song out of an opera of Rousseau's composing, that does not make it a good opera.”

“But he is a great botanist; I have only seen a few odd sheets of his letters on botany, but you, who gather plants in the woods, have read them, I dare say.”

“ Oh, sometimes a person thinks himself a botanist, and is only — ”

“Only what?”

“Only an herborist — and even — ”

“And which are you — herborist or botanist?”

“A very humble herborist, and a very ignorant one, when I contemplate those marvels of God's creation — plants and flowers!”

“He is a Latin scholar.”

“A very bad one.”

“But I read in a newspaper that he translated an ancient author called Tacitus.”

“Because, in his pride — alas! every man has his moment of pride — because, in his pride, he thought he could undertake anything. In the preface, however, to the first book — the only one which he translated — he says he does not understand Latin well; and Tacitus, who is a rude antagonist, soon wearied him. No, no, my good young man, in spite of your admiration, there is no such thing as a man of universal knowledge; and believe me, almost all men lose in depth what they gain in superficies. A little river, when swollen by the rains, may overflow its banks till it looks like a lake, but try to sail on it, and your boat will soon touch the ground."

"Then you think Rousseau a superficial man?"

"Yes; perhaps he presents a greater superficies than other men, but that is all."

"There are some, I think, who would be very glad to be superficial in his fashion."

"Do you intend that for me?" asked the stranger, with a good-natured frankness which quite disarmed Gilbert.

"Oh, no, sir! I am too much delighted to converse with you to say anything disagreeable to you."

"In what way does my conversation delight you? Let me hear, for I do not think you would flatter me for a morsel of bread and a few cherries."

"You do me justice; I would not flatter to obtain the empire of the world. You shall hear why I am pleased; you are the first person who has ever spoken to me without haughtiness — who has reasoned with me in a tone of kindness — as if speaking to a young man, and not a child — Although we did not agree about Rousseau, there has been in all that you have said something so calm and elevated, that it attracted me. I seem, when talking to you, to be in a richly furnished salon, the window-shutters of which are closed, but of which, notwithstanding the darkness, I can guess the richness and magnificence. I know that you could, if you wished, permit a ray of light to penetrate into your conversation which would dazzle me."

"But you yourself speak with a certain degree of refinement, which might lead me to think that you had received a better education than you have confessed."

"It is the first time, sir, that I have spoken so, and I am surprised myself at the terms which I have employed; there are even some of them of which I do not quite understand the signification, and which I have only heard once. I have met with them in books, but I did not comprehend them."

"Have you read much?"

"Too much; but I shall re-read."

The old man looked at Gilbert in astonishment.

"Yes. I read all that fell in my way, whether good or bad; I devoured all. Ah, if I had only had some one to direct me what I ought to forget and what

I ought to remember.' But excuse me, sir; I was forgetting that although your conversation is delightful to me, it does not therefore follow that mine must be so to you. You are herborizing, and I perhaps interfere with your occupation."

Gilbert made a movement as if to withdraw, but at the same time with the greatest desire to be detained. The little gray eyes of the stranger were fixed on him, and they seemed to read his heart.

"No," said he, "ray box is almost full; I only want a few mosses; I have been told there are some very beautiful hair-mosses in this quarter."

"Stay, stay," said Gilbert, "I think I have seen what you want on a rock just now."

" Far from this?"

"No, not more than fifty paces."

"But how do you know that description of moss?"

"I have lived almost all my life in the woods, sir; and then the daughter of the gentleman at whose house I was brought up was fond of botany; she had an herbal, and under each plant the name was written in her own hand. I have often looked at the plants and the writing, and then I knew them when I saw them again in the woods."

"Then you felt a taste for botany?"

"Oh, sir, whenever I heard Nicole say — Nicole was the waiting-maid of Mademoiselle Andree — when I heard Nicole say that her mistress had been trying in vain to find some particular plant, I asked her to get me the form of that plant. Then, without knowing that I had asked for it, Mademoiselle Andree would frequently sketch it in a moment, and Nicole would bring the drawing to me. I would then scour the fields, meadows, and woods until I had found the plant in question. When found, I dug it up and planted it in the lawn, where Mademoiselle Andree could see it, and, full of joy, she would exclaim on discovering it, 'How strange! Here is the very plant which I have been searching for everywhere!'"

The old man looked at Gilbert with even more attention than he had yet bestowed on him; and if Gilbert, on reflecting on the purport of what he had said, had not cast down his eyes and blushed, he would have seen that this attention was mingled with an expression of tender interest.

"Well, young man," said he, "continue to study botany; it will lead by a short route to a knowledge of medicine. God has made nothing in vain, and one day or other the utility of each plant will be distinctly marked in the book of science. Learn first to know simples, afterward you can study their properties.”

“Are there not schools in Paris?”

“Yes, and even some gratuitous ones. The school of surgery, for instance, is one of the benefits which we owe to the present reign.”

“I shall follow the course prescribed in it.”

“Nothing can be more easy, for your parents, seeing your inclinations, will no doubt provide you an adequate maintenance.”

“I have no parents; but I am not afraid; I can provide for myself by my labor.”

“Certainly, and as you have read Rousseau's works, you know that he says that every man, even a prince, ought to be taught some manual trade.”

“I have not read 'Emile.' I think it is in 'Emile' he has given that recommendation?”

“It is.”

“I have heard the Baron de Taverney turn that advice into ridicule, and regret that he had not made his son a carpenter.”

“And what did he make him?”

“An officer.”

The old man smiled.

“Yes, our nobles are all so. Instead of teaching their children any trade by which life might be preserved, they teach them the trade of killing. When a revolution comes, and exile after revolution, they will be forced to beg their bread from foreigners, or to sell them their swords, which is still worse. You, however, are not the son of a noble; you know a trade, I presume?”

“Sir, I have already told you I know nothing. Besides, I must confess that I have always had an invincible repugnance for all labors requiring strong rough movements of the body.”

“Ah.” — aid the old man, “you are lazy.”

“Oh, no; I am not lazy. Instead of putting me to the labor of a mechanic, place me in a room half dark, and give me books, and you shall see whether I will not work day and night at the labor of my own choosing.”

The stranger looked at the young man's white and slender hands.

“It is a sort of predisposition or instinct,” said he. “Sometimes this repugnance for manual labor leads to a good result; but it must be well directed. Well,” continued he, “if you have not been at college, you have at least been at school?”

Gilbert shook his head.

“You can read and write?”

“My mother had just time before she died to teach me to read. My poor mother, seeing that I was not strong, always said, 'He will never make a good workman; he must be a priest or a learned man.' When I showed any distaste for my lessons, she would say, 'Learn to read, Gilbert, and you will not have to cut wood, drive a team, or break stones.' So I commenced to learn, but unfortunately I could scarcely read when she died.”

“And who taught you to write?”

“I taught myself.”

“You taught yourself?”

“Yes, with a stick which I pointed, and with some sand which I made fine by putting it through a sieve. For two years I wrote the letters which are used in printing, copying them from a book. I did not know that there were any others than these, and I could soon imitate them very well. But one day, about three years ago, when Mademoiselle Andree had gone to a convent, the steward handed me a letter from her for her father, and then I saw that there existed other characters. M, de Taverney, having broken the seal, threw the cover away; I picked it up very carefully, and when the postman came again, I made him read me what was on it. It was. 'To the Baron de Taverney-Maison-Rouge, at his chateau, near Pierrefitte.' Under each of these letters I put its corresponding printed letter, and found that I had nearly all the alphabet. Then I imitated the writing; and in a week had copied the address ten thousand times perhaps, and had taught myself to write. You see, sir, that I am not extravagant in my expectations; since I can read and write — have read all that I could — have reflected on all that I read — why may I not perhaps find a man who requires my pen, a blind man who wants eyes, or a dumb man who wants a tongue?”

“But you forget that then you will have a master, and that is what you do not want. A secretary or a reader is only a sort of upper servant, after all.”

“That is true,” replied Gilbert, a little downcast; “but no matter, I must accomplish my object. I shall stir the paving-stones of Paris; I shall turn water-carrier if necessary, but I will attain my object, or I shall die in attempting it — and that will also be accomplishing an object.”

“Well,” replied the stranger, “you seem indeed full of ardor and courage — excellent qualities.”

“But have you not a profession yourself, sir? You are dressed like a man employed in the finances.”

The old man smiled sadly.

“I have a profession,” said he; “every man ought to have one, but mine is a complete stranger to everything connected with finance. A financier would not come out herborizing.”

“Are you an herborist by profession, then?”

“Almost.”

“Then you are poor?”

“Yes.”

“It is the poor who are charitable, for poverty makes them wise, and good advice is better than a louis-d'or. Give me your advice then.”

“I shall do more than that.”

Gilbert smiled.

“I suspected that,” said he.

“On how much do you think you could live?”

“Oh, very little!”

“But perhaps you do not know how expensive living is in Paris?”

“Yesterday I saw Paris for the first time from the hills near Luciennes.”

“Then you are not aware that living in great towns is dear?”

“How much does it cost? Give me an idea.”

“Willingly. For instance, what costs a sou in the country, costs three sous in Paris.”

“Well,” said Gilbert, “if I got any kind of shelter to rest in after my work; I should only need for my food six sous a day.”

“Ah!” cried the stranger, “that is what I like, young man! Come with me to Paris, and I shall find you an independent profession by which you may live.”

“Oh, sir!” cried Gilbert, with rapture; then, after a moment's reflection, “But it must really be an occupation; I must not live on alms.”

“Do not be afraid of that, my child. I am not rich enough to bestow much in charity, and not foolish enough to do it without knowing the object better.”

This little sally of misanthropy pleased Gilbert, instead of giving him offense. “That is right!” said he; “I like such language. I accept your offer and thank you for it.”

“So you decide upon coming to Paris with me?”

“Yes, sir, if you have no objection.”

“Of course I have no objection, since I make you the offer.”

“What shall I have to do with you?”

“Nothing — but to work. But you shall regulate the quantity of your work yourself. You are young, you ought to be happy and free — even idle if you like, after you have gained the privileges of leisure,” said the stranger, smiling in spite of himself; then, raising his eyes to heaven, he exclaimed with a deep sigh, “O youth! O vigor! O freedom!” Then he rose with the assistance of his stick.

As he said these words, an expression of deep and poetic melancholy overspread his fine features.

“And now,” he continued, in a more cheerful voice, “now that you have got an employment, will you object to help me to fill another box with plants? I have some sheets of paper here in which we can class the others according to their orders. But, by-the-by, are you hungry?

“I have still some bread.”

“Keep it for the afternoon, if you please, sir.”

“Well, but at least eat the cherries; they will be troublesome to carry with us.”

“On that account I shall eat them. But allow me to carry your box; you will then be more at your ease, and I think, thanks to habit, my legs will tire yours.”

“Ah, see! you bring me good fortune. There is the vicris hieracioides, which I sought in vain until now, and just under your foot — take care! — the cerastium aquaticum. Stop, stop! Do not gather them! Oh! you are not an herborist yet. The one is too moist to be gathered now, the other not advanced enough. We can get the vicris hieracioides in the afternoon when we pass this way, and the cerastium a week hence. Besides, I wish to show it growing to a friend whose patronage I mean to solicit for you. And now, show me the place where you saw the beautiful mosses.”

Gilbert walked on, the old man followed him, and both disappeared in the shades of the forest.

CHAPTER XLIV.

Monsieur Jacques.

GILBERT, DELIGHTED AT his good fortune, which had hitherto befriended him in his utmost need, walked on, turning from time to time toward the stranger who had by a few words made him at once so submissive and docile. In this manner he led him to the spot where the mosses grew; they were really splendid specimens, and when the old man had made a collection of them, they went in search of other plants.

Gilbert was a much better botanist than he thought himself. Accustomed to the woods from his infancy, he was familiar with all the plants that grew in them; but he knew them only by their vulgar names. When he named them in that manner, his companion told him the corresponding scientific term, which Gilbert, on finding another plant of the same family, would endeavor to repeat. If he miscalled the Greek or Latin term, the stranger repeated it in syllables, and gave him its derivation. Then he explained how it was adapted to the nature of the plant; and thus Gilbert learned not only its botanical name, but the Greek or Latin one by which Pliny, Linnaeus, or Jussieu had distinguished it.

From time to time he said, “What a pity, sir, that I cannot gain my six sous by botanizing every day with you! Oh, I should never rest a moment, and indeed I should not want even the six sous; a piece of bread such as you gave me this morning would be sufficient for a whole day. I have just drunk from a spring of excellent water, as good as that at Taverney, and last night I slept under a tree here, and I am sure I slept better than I should have done under the roof of a chateau.”

“My friend,” replied the stranger, with a smile, “winter will come; the plants will be withered and the spring frozen; the north wind will whistle through the naked trees instead of this gentle breeze which agitates their leaves. You will then require a shelter, clothes, and fire, and you must be economical with your six sous that you may obtain them.”

Gilbert sighed, gathered more plants, and asked more questions.

They spent thus the greater part of the day in the woods of Alnay, Plessis-Piquet, and Clamart-sous-Meudon.

Gilbert, according to his usual custom, soon became familiar with his companion, who questioned him with admirable address; but there was in the young man something distrustful and circumspect, and he revealed as little as possible of his past life.

At Chatillon the stranger bought some bread and milk, but it was with difficulty he prevailed upon Gilbert to take the half of his purchase. Then, refreshed, they set out for Paris, that they might enter it while it was yet daylight.

The young man's heart beat high at the mere thought of being in Paris, and he could not conceal his emotion when, from the hill of Vanvres, he perceived St. Genevieve, the Invalides, Notre-Dame, and that vast sea of houses whose rolling billows seemed to lave the declivities of Montmartres, Belleville, and Menil Montant.

“O, Paris! Paris!” murmured he.

“Yes, Paris, a mass of houses, an abyss of ills!” said the old man. “If the griefs and crimes which those houses inclose were to appear on their exteriors, from every stone would ooze a tear or a drop of blood!”

Gilbert heard, and repressed his enthusiasm, and thus checked, it soon died away of itself.

The suburb by which they entered the city was filthy and squalid; sick persons on litters were carried past him to the hospitals; children, half-naked, were playing in the dirt among dogs, cows, and pigs. His brow grew dark.

“You think all this hideous,” said the stranger; “well, in a short time you will not even see these things! People are rich who have a pig or a cow; they will soon have neither one nor other. Their children give them pleasure; soon they will bring them only sorrow. As to filth, you will always find that everywhere.”

Gilbert had been inclined to look on Paris with a gloomy eye; the picture of it which his companion drew did not, therefore, displease him. The old man, at first prolix in his declamation, gradually sunk into abstraction and silence as they approached the center of the city. He seemed so full of anxious thoughts, that Gilbert had not courage to ask him the name of a large garden which he saw through a railing, nor of a bridge by which the Seine was crossed. The garden was the Luxembourg — the bridge the Pont

Neuf. At last, however, as they still proceeded onward, and as the stranger's meditation appeared to have changed into uneasiness, he ventured to say, “Do you live far from this, sir?”

“Not very far,” answered the stranger, whom this question evidently made more morose.

They proceeded along the Rue du Four, passing the magnificent Hotel de Soissons, the windows and the principal entrance of which look on the street, but whose splendid gardens extend to the streets of Grenelle and Deux-Ecus.

They passed by a church which Gilbert thought very beautiful — he stopped a moment to gaze at it.

“That is a beautiful building,” said he.

“It is Saint Eustache,” replied the old man; then, looking up, “Eight o'clock! Good heavens! make haste, young man, make haste!”

The stranger strode on faster; Gilbert followed him.

“By-the-by,” said he, after some minutes of a silence so ungenial that Gilbert began to feel uneasy, “I forgot to tell you that I am married.”

“Oh!” said Gilbert.

“Yes; and my wife, like a true Parisian housekeeper, will scold us, I dare say, for coming in so late. Besides, I must tell you, she is very suspicious of strangers.”

“Do you wish me to leave you, sir?” said Gilbert, whose heart was chilled by these words.

“Not at all, not at all! I invited you to come home with me, and you shall come.”

“I follow you, then,” answered the young man.

“Now, here we are! — down this street — to the right!”

Gilbert raised his eyes, and, by the last gleams of expiring day, he read at the corner of the street, above a grocer's shop, the words — “Rue Plastriere.”

The old man continued to hurry on faster, and as he approached nearer his house, his feverish agitation seemed to increase. Gilbert feared to lose sight of him, and, in his haste, knocked against the passers-by, the burdens of the porters, and the poles of carriages and litters. His companion seemed to have completely forgotten him in his hurried progress, absorbed as he was by one disagreeable thought.

At last he stopped before a door, in the upper part of which was a grating. A little string hung out through a hole — the stranger pulled it, and the door opened. He then turned, and seeing Gilbert standing undecided whether to enter or not, he said, “Come on!” Gilbert obeyed, and the old man shut the door.

After a few steps forward in the dark, Gilbert's foot struck against a narrow, steep staircase; but the old man, accustomed to the place, had already mounted half the flight. Gilbert overtook him, ascended with him, and stopped when he stopped. This was on an old half worn-out mat, in a lobby with two doors in it.

The stranger pulled a cord near one of these doors, and a sharp tinkling bell rang; then, from the interior of one of the rooms was heard the shuffling of slipshod feet dragging along the floor. The door opened, and a woman of from fifty to fifty-five years of age appeared.

Two voices immediately arose together — one, that of the stranger; the other, that of the woman who opened the door.

“Am I too late, dear Therese?” he murmured, timidly.

“A pretty hour, Jacques, to sup at!” she replied, rudely.

“Come, come, we shall soon make all that right!” replied the stranger, affectionately, shutting the door, and then turning to receive the tin box from Gilbert's hands.

“Oh, a porter to carry your box!” cried the old woman; “it only wanted that! So you could not carry all that nasty stuff of grass and herbs yourself. Indeed! a porter for Monsieur Jacques! I beg pardon, he is becoming quite a great gentleman!”

“Well, well, be calm, Therese,” quietly replied he whom she addressed so insolently by the name of Jacques, arranging his plants on the mantelpiece.

“Pay him, then, and send him away; we don't want a spy here.”

Gilbert, turned as pale as death, and sprang to the door. Jacques stopped him.

“This gentleman,” said he, with less timidity than he had shown at first, “is not a porter, still less a spy. He is a guest whom I have brought.”

The old woman's arms fell powerless by her side.

“A guest?” said she. “Certainly we are in great need of guests.”

“Come, Therese,” said the stranger, in a tone still affectionate, but in which a shade of derision might be detected; “light a candle — I am heated, and we are thirsty.”

The old woman still grumbled, loudly at first, but gradually subsiding. Then she proceeded to strike a light.

While the dialogue lasted, and the murmurs succeeding it, Gilbert remained silent and immovable, nailed to the floor within a step or two of the door, which he deeply regretted having entered.

Jacques perceived what the young man was suffering.

“Come forward. Monsieur Gilbert,” said he; “come forward, I beg of you.”

The old woman turned to see the person to whom her husband spoke with this affected politeness, and Gilbert had thus an opportunity of seeing her yellow, morose face, by the first light of the miserable candle which she had placed in a copper candlestick.

That face awoke in him, at the first glance, a violent antipathy. It vas wrinkled, pimpled, and filled, as it were, with gall; the eyes were sharp but meaningless; there was also a pretended softness spread over those vulgar features at that moment, which the old woman's voice and manner so completely contradicted, that Gilbert's dislike was if possible increased.

The old woman, on her side, found the thin pale face, circumspect silence, and stiff demeanor of the young man little to her taste.

“I see, gentlemen,” said she, “that you are hot, and I am sure you must be thirsty. Indeed, passing a day in the shade of the woods is so fatiguing, and stooping from time to time to gather a plant so laborious an occupation! — for this gentleman is a botanist also, no doubt — that is the trade of people who have no trade!”

“The gentleman,” replied Jacques, in a voice becoming every moment firmer, “is a kind, good young man, who did me the honor to bear me company all the day, and whom my Therese will, I am sure, receive like a friend.”

“There is enough of supper for two, but not for three,” grumbled she.

“He is easily satisfied, and so am I.”

“Oh, yes — all very fine! — I know what that means. I tell you plainly, there is not bread enough for your double moderation, and I am not going down three flight s of stairs to get any more, I assure you. Besides, at this hour the baker's would be shut.”

“Then I shall go down myself,” replied Jacques, frowning; “open the door Therese.”

“Oh, but — ”

“I will go down, I tell you!”

“Well, well,” said the old woman, in a discontented voice, but at the same time yielding to the absolute tone which her opposition had called forth from Jacques; “am I not always ready to satisfy your whims? I think we can do with what we have. Come to supper.”

“Sit by me,” said Jacques, leading Gilbert into the next room, where a little table was prepared for the master and mistress of the house. On it were laid two plates, beside one of which a napkin folded and tied with a red ribbon, and beside the other, one tied with white, pointed out where each took his seat.

The walls of the room, which was small and of a square shape, were covered with a pale blue paper, with a white pattern, and its only ornaments were two large maps. The rest of the furniture consisted of six straw-seated chairs, the aforesaid table, and a kind of cabinet filled with stockings to be mended.

Gilbert sat down. The old woman placed a plate before him, then she brought a spoon, worn thin by use, a knife and fork, and a brightly polished pewter goblet.

“Are you not going down?” asked Jacques.

“It is not necessary,” she replied, in a sharp tone, showing the spite which filled her heart at his having gained a victory over her. “It is not necessary. I found half a loaf in the pantry. That makes a pound and a half of bread for us all — we must make it do.”

So saying, she put the soup on the table.

Jacques was helped first, then Gilbert, and the old woman ate out of the tureen. All three were very hungry. Gilbert, intimidated by the discussion on domestic economy to which he had given rise, kept his appetite as much within bounds as possible; but, notwithstanding, he had finished his soup first. The old woman cast a wrathful look on his plate, so prematurely empty.

“Who called to-day?” asked Jacques, in order to change the current of her thoughts.

“Oh, everybody, as usual!” replied she. “You promised Madame de Boufflers her four pieces, Madame d'Escars two airs, Madame de Penthievre a quartet with an accompaniment — some persons came themselves, others sent for what they wanted. But what of that? Monsieur was botanizing; and as people cannot amuse themselves and do their work at the same time, the ladies had to go without their music!”

Jacques did not say a word, to the great astonishment of Gilbert, who expected to see him get angry; but as it only concerned himself, it did not disturb him.

To the soup succeeded a morsel of boiled beef, served on a common earthenware dish, scraped and cracked by the edge of the knife. Jacques helped Gilbert moderately enough, for Therese had her eye upon him; then he took a piece about the same size for himself, and handed the dish to her.

The old woman seized on the loaf and cut a slice for Gilbert — so small a slice that Jacques blushed. He waited until she had helped him and herself — then he took the loaf into his own hands.

“You shall cut your own bread, my young friend,” said he; “and cut it according to your appetite, I beg of you. Bread ought to be doled out only to those who waste it.”

A moment afterward appeared a dish of kidney-beans stewed in butter.

“Look how green they are!” said Jacques. “They are of our own keeping — we have an excellent method for that.” And he passed the dish to Gilbert.

“Thank you, sir,” said the latter, “but I have eaten quite enough — I am not hungry.”

“The young gentleman is not of your opinion about my kidney-beans,” said Therese, angrily. “He prefers, no doubt, fresh gathered ones; but they are early vegetables, and rather above our means.”

“No, madame. On the contrary, I think these appear very nice indeed, and I am sure I should like them; but I never eat of more than one dish.”

“And you drink water?” said Jacques, handing him the jug.

“Always, sir.”

Jacques poured out a small glass of wine for himself.

“And now, wife,” said he, “you will begin and get this young man's bed ready — he must be tired, I am sure.”

Therese let her knife and fork fall from her hands, and fixed her angry eyes on her husband.

“Bed? Are you mad? If you bring any one to sleep here, he must sleep in your own bed, I can tell you. You are really becoming deranged! Or perhaps you are going to take up a boarding house? If you are, you may get a cook and waiting maid; it is quite enough for me to be your servant, without being servant to other people!”

“Therese,” replied Jacques, resuming his serious and firm tone; “Therese, pray listen to me. It is only for one night. This young man has never set foot in Paris before. He came under my protection, and I will not permit him to sleep in an inn; I will not, though I should, as you say, have to resign to him my own bed.” After this second exhibition of firmness and resolution, the old man awaited the result.

Therese, who had watched him while he spoke, appearing to study every muscle of his face, seemed now to understand that she must give up the contest — and she suddenly changed her tactics. She was certain of being beaten if she continued Gilbert's enemy; she therefore began to fight for him, but certainly like an ally who intended treachery.

“Well, well,” said she; “since the young gentleman has come home with you, he must be a friend of yours; and it is better, as you say, that he should remain under our roof. I shall make him a bed as well as I can in your study, near the bundles of papers.”

“No, no,” said Jacques, quickly. “A study is not a fit place to sleep in — he might set fire to the papers.”

“A great misfortune, truly!” muttered Therese to herself. Then she added aloud; “In that case, I can put him in front of the cupboard in the anteroom.”

“No, no!”

“Well, you see, however much I wish it, I can't manage it, unless he take your bed or mine.”

“I do not think, Therese, you are looking in the right quarter.”

“What do you mean?”

“Why, we have the garret, you know.”

“The garret? The loft, you mean.”

“No, it is not a loft. It is a room, a little garret-like I confess, but wholesome, and with a splendid view of the neighboring gardens — a thing very unusual in Paris.”

“Oh, what matters it, sir,” exclaimed Gilbert, “whether it be a loft or not? Even if it were, I should be but too glad of it, I assure you.”

“But stay — that cannot be,” cried Therese; “it is there that I dry our linen.”

“The young man will not disturb it, Therese. You will take care, will you not, my young friend, that no accident happens to my good housekeeper's linen? We are poor, and any loss is serious to us.”

“Oh, do not be afraid, sir.”

Jacques rose and approached Therese. “I do not wish, my dear Therese,” said he, “that this young man should be ruined. Paris is a dangerous place for a stranger; while here, we can watch over his conduct.”

“Then you have taken him to educate? He will pay for his board, this pupil of yours?”

“No; but I answer for it he shall cost you nothing. From to-morrow he will provide for himself. As for lodging, since the garret is almost useless to us, let us do him this slight service.”

“How well idle people understand each other!” muttered Therese, shrugging her shoulders.

“Sir,” said Gilbert, more wearied even than his host of this struggle for a hospitality which was so humbling to him, and which was only gained by fighting for every inch of ground — ” Sir, I have never yet given trouble to any one, and I shall certainly not begin with you, who have been so good to me. Permit me, therefore, to leave you, if you please. I saw, near the bridge which we crossed, some trees with benches under them. I shall sleep very well, I assure you, on one of those benches.”

“Yes,” said Jacques, “to be taken up by the watch as a vagabond.”

“Which he is,” muttered Therese to herself, as she removed the supper things.

“Come, come, young man,” Jacques added, “there is, as well as I can remember, a very good straw mattress upstairs, and that is surely better than a bench?”

“Oh, sir, I have never slept on anything but a straw mattress,” said Gilbert; then correcting this truth by a slight fib, “a feather bed always overheated me,” added he.

Jacques smiled. “Straw is certainly cool and refreshing,” said he. “Take that bit, of candle which is on the table, and follow me.”

Therese did not even look at them. She sighed — she was defeated.

Gilbert rose gravely and followed his protector. Passing through the anteroom he saw a cistern of water. “Sir,” asked he, “is water dear in Paris?”

“No, my friend; but were it dear, water and bread are two things which no man has a right to refuse his fellowman who begs for them.”

“Oh, the reason I asked is, that at Taverney water cost nothing, and cleanliness is the luxury of, the poor.”

“Take some, my friend,” said Jacques, pointing to a large earthenware pitcher; and he preceded the young man to his sleeping apartment, surprised to find united in a youth of his age all the strength of mind of the lower classes with all the refined tastes of the higher.

CHAPTER XLV.

Monsieur Jacques' Garret.

THE STAIRCASE, narrow and steep even at its commencement in the hall below, became still more narrow and more steep from the third story, on which Jacques lived, to the rooms above. It was therefore with considerable difficulty that they reached what was really a loft. Therese was right for once; it was neither more nor less than a loft, divided into four compartments, three of which were uninhabited.

To say the truth, they were all, except the one destined for Gilbert, uninhabitable.

The roof sloped precipitately down and formed an acute angle with the floor. In the middle of the slope, a skylight in a broken frame, without glass, admitted both light and air; the former rather scantily, the latter superabundantly, particularly during high winds in winter.

Fortunately summer was near; and yet, in spite of the approaching warm weather, the candle which Jacques held was nearly blown out on entering the loft.

The mattress of which Jacques had spoken so boastingly lay on the floor, and at the first glance seemed to be in itself the whole furniture of the place. Here and there were piles of old printed papers, which had turned yellow at the edges from age, and in the midst of them were some books half gnawed away by rats.

From two cords which were stretched from one side of the loft to the other, and the first of which was nearly strangling Gilbert, hung, dancing in the night breeze, several paper bags containing kidney-beans dried in their pods, a few bundles of aromatic herbs, some household linen, and several articles of female attire almost in rags.

“It is not a very handsome place,” said Jacques, “but sleep and darkness make a humble cabin equal to a sumptuous palace. Sleep, my young friend, as you ought to sleep at your age, and tomorrow morning you may believe I hat you have slept in the Louvre. But, above all things, take care of fire.”

“Yes, sir,” said Gilbert, a little bewildered at ail that he had heard and seen.

Jacques left the room smiling, then returned.

“To-morrow we shall have some conversation,” said he; “you will have no objection to work, will you?”

“You know, sir, that on tin; contrary, to work is my strongest wish.”

“That is right,” said Jacques, and he turned away.

“To work in an honorable way, you understand, sir,” added the punctilious Gilbert.

“I know of no other, my young friend; so then, good-night.”

“Good-night, and thank you, sir.”

Jacques retired, closed the door, and Gilbert was left alone in his garret.

At, first amazed, then stupefied at the thought that he was in Paris, he asked himself could this really be Paris? could there be in Paris such rooms as his?

He then reflected that, in reality. Monsieur Jacques was bestowing charity on him, and as he had seen alms bestowed at Taverney, not only did his surprise subside, but gradually gave way to gratitude, so much difference was there in the manner of performing the two, acts.

Then, candle in hand, and taking every precaution against fire, as recommended by Jacques, he went over all parts of his garret; thinking so little of Therese's clothes that he would not take even an old gown to serve him for a quilt.

Hi; stopped at the piles of printed papers. They roused his curiosity to the utmost; but they were tied up, and he did not touch them.

With outstretched neck and eager eye he passed from these parcels to the bags of kidney-beans. The bags were made of very white paper also printed, and were fastened together by pins.

In making rather a hurried movement, he touched the rope with his head and one of the bags fell. Paler and more frightened than if he had been discovered breaking open a strong bag, Gilbert hastened to gather up the beans scattered on the floor and to return them to the bag.

During this process he naturally looked at the paper, and mechanically read a few words. These words excited his interest; he pushed aside the beans, and sitting down on his mattress he read with eagerness, for the words were so completely in unison with his own character and feelings that he could almost imagine them to have been written, not only for, but by himself. They were as follows:

“Besides, grisettes, tradesmen's daughters, and filles-de-chambre never presented any temptation to me — I was influenced by ladies alone. Every one has his whim, and this was mine. I do not agree with Horace on this point. It is not, however, mere admiration of rank or wealth which induces tins preference; it is the superior delicacy of complexion, the soft white hands, the becoming attire, the air of delicacy and order exhibited in the whole person, the taste which appears in every gesture and every expression, the dress so much finer and better formed, the shoes of more delicate workmanship, the more judicious blending of ribbons and laces, the hair arranged with superior care. Thus adorned, I should prefer the plainest features to beauty without them. This preference may be — and I feel that it is — very ridiculous, but my heart has made it almost in spite of me.”

Gilbert started, and the perspiration burst from his forehead — his thoughts could not be better expressed, his desires more clearly defined, nor his tastes more perfectly analyzed. But Andree, though thus adorned, did not require these auxiliaries to set off “the plainest features.” All these were subservient to her peerless beauty.

After this came a delightful adventure of a young man with two young girls. Their setting out all together on horseback was related, and all the pretty little fears of the ladies were described. Then their nocturnal return was told in the most charming style.

Gilbert's interest increased; he unfolded the bag and read all that was in it; then he looked at the pages that he might if possible go on regularly with what was so interesting. The paging was not regular, but he found seven or eight bags which seemed in the narrative to have some connection. He took out the pins, emptied the beans on the floor, put the sheets together, and proceeded to read.

He was thinking of the happiness he should have, passing the whole night w reading, and the pleasure he should find in unpinning the long file of bags yet untouched, when suddenly a slight crackling was heard; the candle, being low, had heated the copper around it, it sank in the melted grease, a disagreeable odor filled the loft, and in a moment all was darkness.

This event took place so quickly that Gilbert had no time to prevent it, and he could have wept with vexation at being interrupted in the middle of his reading. He allowed the papers to slip from his hands on the heap of beans near his bed, throw himself on his mattress, and in spite of his disappointment soon slept profoundly.

He did not wake until roused by the noise of taking off the padlock with which Jacques had closed the door the night before. It was broad daylight, and as Gilbert opened his eyes he saw his host enter softly.

His eyes immediately rested on the kidney-beans scattered on the floor, and the bags turned into their original form. Jacques' glance had taken the same direction.

Gilbert felt the blush of shame covering his cheeks, and scarcely knowing what he said, he murmured, “Good-morning, sir.”

“Good morning, my friend,” said Jacques; “have you slept well?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Are you a somnambulist?”

Gilbert did not know what a somnambulist was, but he understood that the question referred to the beans no longer in their bags, and to the bags despoiled of their contents.

“Ah, sir,” said he, “I understand why you ask me that question. Yes, I have been guilty of this misconduct; I humbly confess it, but I think I can repair it.”

“Yes. But why is your candle burned out?”

“I sat up too late.”

“But why sit up?” asked Jacques distrustfully.

“To read, sir.”

The old man's eyes wandered with increasing interest all round the garret.

“This first leaf,” said Gilbert, taking up the first page which he had unpinned and read, “this first leaf, which I looked at by chance, interested me so much; but, sir, you, who know so much, do you know what book this is taken from?”

Jacques glanced careless at it and said, “I don't know.”

“It is a romance, I am sure,” said Gilbert, “and a charming romance too.”

“A romance? Do you think so?”

“Yes; for love is spoken of here as in romances, only much better.”

“Well, as I see at the foot of this page the word 'confessions,' I think that it may be a true history.”

“Oh no! The man who speaks thus does not speak of himself. There is too much frankness in his avowals, too much impartiality in his judgments.”

“You are wrong,” answered the old man quickly; “the author wished to give an example of that kind to the world.”

“Do you know who is the author?”

“The author is Jean Jacques Rousseau.”

“Rousseau?” cried the young man impetuously.

“Yes; these are some leaves from his last work.”

“So this young man, as he speaks of himself here, poor, unknown, almost begging on the highway, was Rousseau, that is to say, the man who was one day to write 'Le Contrat Social,' and 'Emile'?”

“The same — or rather not the same,” said the old man, with an expression of deep melancholy — ” no, not the same; the author of the 'Le Contrat' and 'Emile' is the man disenchanted with the world, life, glory, almost with the Deity himself; the other — the other Rousseau is the child entering a world rosy as the dawn — a child with all the joys and all the hopes of that happy age! Between the two Rousseaus lies an abyss which will forever prevent them from being one — thirty years of misery!”

The old man shook his head, let his arms sink by his side, and appeared lost in reverie.

Gilbert was delighted, not saddened, by what he heard. “Then,” said he, “all that I read last night was not a charming fiction?”

“Young man, Rousseau has never lied; remember his motto, 'Vitam impendere vero!'”

“I have seen it, but as I do not know Latin I did not understand it.”

“ It means to give one's life for the truth. But my wife must have risen by this time; let us go down; a man determined to work can never begin the day too early. Rouse, young man, rouse.” “And so,” said Gilbert, “it is possible that a man of such an origin as Rousseau may be loved by a lady of rank? Oh heavens! what it is to inspire with hope those who, like him, have dared to raise their eyes above them!”

“You love,” said Jacques, “and you find an analogy between your situation and that of Rousseau?”

Gilbert blushed, but did not answer this interrogation.

“But all women,” said he, “are not like those of whom I read; how many are proud, haughty, disdainful, whom it would be only folly to love!”

“And yet, young man,” replied the other, “such occasions have more than once presented themselves to Rousseau.”

“That is true, sir; pardon me for having detained you; but there are some subjects which intoxicate me, and some thoughts which make me almost mad.”

“Come, come! I fear you are in love!” said the old man.

Instead of replying, Gilbert commenced to make up the bags again with the help of the pins, and fill them with the kidney beans. Jacques looked on.

“You have not been very splendidly lodged,” said he; “but, after all, you have had what “was necessary, and if you had been earlier up you might have inhaled through your window the perfume of the garden trees, which, in the midst of the disagreeable odors that infest a great town, is certainly very agreeable. The gardens of the Rue Jussienne are just below, and to breathe in the morning the fragrance of their flowers and shrubs is to a poor captive a happiness for all the rest of the day.”

“It certainly conveys an agreeable sensation to me,” said Gilbert; “but I am too much accustomed to those things to pay any particular attention to them.”

“Say rather that you have not yet been long enough the inhabitant of a town to know how much the country is to be regretted. But you have done; let us go down.”

And motioning Gilbert to precede him, he shut the door and put on the padlock.

This time, Jacques led his companion directly to the room which Therese the evening before had named the study. Its furniture was composed of glass cases containing butterflies, plants, and minerals, a book-case of walnut-tree wood, a long narrow table, with a green and black baize cover worn out by constant use, on which were a number of manuscripts arranged in good order, and four arm-chairs stuffed and covered with hair-cloth. Every article was waxed and shining, irreproachable as to neatness and cleanliness, but chilling to the eye and the heart, so dim and gray was the light admitted through the drab curtains, and so far removed from comfort were the cold ashes on the black hearth.

A little harpsichord of rosewood on four straight legs, the strings of which vibrated as the carriages passed in the street, and the slight ticking of a timepiece placed over the fireplace, were all that seemed to give life to this species of tomb.

But Gilbert entered it with profound respect. The furniture seemed to him almost sumptuous, since it was, as nearly as possible, the same as that of the chateau of Taverney, and the polished floor, above all, struck him with awe.

"Sit down," said Jacques, pointing to a second little table placed in the recess of a window, "and I shall explain what occupation I intend for you."

Gilbert eagerly obeyed.

"Do you know what this is?" asked the old man, showing him some paper ruled with lines at equal distances.

"Certainly," said he; "it is music paper."

"Well, when one of these leaves has been filled up properly by me, that is, when I have copied on it as much music as it will contain, I have earned ten sous; that is the price which I fixed myself. Do you think you can learn to copy music?"

"Oh yes, sir! I think so."

"But does not all this little black dotting of spots joined together by single, double, and triple strokes, swim before your eyes?"

"Yes, sir. At the first glance I cannot distinguish them well, but on looking more closely I shall be able to separate one note from another; for instance, here is a Fa."

"And the note above that, crossing the second line?"

"That is Sol."

"Then you can read music?"

"I know only the names of the notes; I do not understand their value."

"Do you know when they are minimes, crotchets, quavers, and semi-quavers?"

"Oh yes; I know that."

"And that mark?"

"It is a rest."

"And that?"

"A sharp."

"And that?"

"A flat."

"Very well! And so, with this ignorance of yours," said Jacques, his eye beginning to darken with the distrust which seemed natural to him, "with this ignorance of yours, you speak of music as you spoke of botany, and as you would have spoken of love had I not cut you short."

"Oh, sir," replied Gilbert, blushing, "do not ridicule me!"

"No, my child; I am only surprised at you. Music is an art which is seldom learned until after other studies, and you told me you had received no education; in fact, that you had been taught nothing.”

“That is the truth, sir.”

“But you could not have found out of yourself that this black point was a Fa.”

“Sir,” said Gilbert, looking down with an embarrassed air, “in the house where I lived there was a — a — young lady — who played on the harpsichord.”

“Oh! the same who studied botany?”

“Yes, sir; and she played very well.”

“Indeed?”

“Yes, and I adore music!”

“All that does not account for your knowing the notes?”

“Sir, Rousseau says that the man who enjoys the effect without seeking to know the cause, allows half his powers to lie dormant.”

“Yes; but he also says that man in acquiring that knowledge loses his joyousness, his innocence, and his natural instincts.”

“What matters it, if he find in the search itself an enjoyment equal to all the pleasures which he loses?”

Jacques turned toward him, still more surprised. “Ha!” said he, “you are not only a botanist and a musician, but also a logician.”

“Ah, sir, I am unfortunately neither a musician, a botanist, nor a logician! I can distinguish one note from another, one sign from another, that is all.”

“You can sol-fa, then?”

“No — not in the least, sir.”

“Well, no matter. Will you try to copy this? Here is some ruled paper, but take care of wasting it; it is very dear; and now I think of it, it would be better for you to take some common paper, rule it yourself, and make a trial on it.”

“Oh! sir, I shall do whatever you recommend. But allow me to say, that this is not an occupation for my whole lifetime. It would be much better to become a public writer than copy music which I do not understand.”

“Young man, young man, you speak without reflection. Is it by night that a public writer gains his bread?”

“No, certainly.”

“Well, listen to me; with practice a man can copy in two or three hours at night five or even six of these pages; for that he will get three francs. A man can live on that sum; you will not contradict that, you, who would be content with six sous? Thus, you see, with two hours' work at night you could earn sufficient to enable you to attend the school of surgery, of medicine, and of botany.”

“Oh,” cried Gilbert, “now I understand, and I thank you from my very heart.” And so saying, he seized eagerly the paper which the old man offered him.

CHAPTER XLVI.

Who Monsieur Jacques Was.

GILBERT SET TO work with the greatest ardor, and his paper was soon covered with careful copies of what was placed before him. The old man looked at him for some time, and then sat down at the other table to correct printed sheets like those of which the bags containing the kidney-beans had been made.

They had passed three hours in this way, and the timepiece had just struck nine, when Therese entered hurriedly. Jacques raised his head.

“Quick, quick!” said she, “come into the other room! Here is another prince come to visit you. When will this procession of grandees be over? I only hope he will not take it into his head to breakfast with us, as the Duke de Chartres did the other day.”

“Who is this prince?” asked Jacques, in a low voice.

“Monseigneur the Prince de Conde.”

At this name Gilbert let fall on his paper a *sol* which looked much more like a dinner plate than a note.

“A prince! A grandee!” he muttered to himself.

Jacques left the study smiling; Therese followed, and closed the door behind her.

Then Gilbert looked around, and finding that he was alone, sat bolt upright with astonishment.

“But where am I then?” exclaimed he. “Princes, highnesses, calling on Monsieur Jacques. The Duke de Chartres, the Prince de Conde, calling on a copier of music!”

He approached the door to listen; his heart beat strangely.

The first greetings were over between Jacques and the prince, and the latter was speaking.

“I should have liked,” he said, “to take you with me.”

“Why so, monseigneur?” said Jacques.

"To introduce you to the dauphiness. A new era is opening for philosophy, my dear philosopher."

"A thousand thanks for your kindness, my lord, but it is impossible for me to accompany you."

"Yet, six years ago, you accompanied Madame de Pompadour to Fontainebleau?"

"I was six years younger then. Now I am chained to my armchair by infirmities."

"And by misanthropy."

"And if it were so, my lord, you must allow that the world is not worth the trouble of putting one's self out of the way for it."

"Well, I shall let you off for St. Denis, and the grand ceremonial; but I must take you to Muette, where her royal highness will sleep the night after tomorrow."

"Then her royal highness arrives at Saint Denis the day after to-morrow?"

"Yes, with all her retinue. Come, two leagues are easily traveled. Report bespeaks her highness an excellent musician; a pupil of Gluck's."

Gilbert heard no more.

The day after to-morrow the dauphiness and all her retinue would be at St. Denis; these words suggested only one idea to him, that the next day but one Andree would be two leagues distant from him.

Of the two feelings which he experienced, the stronger overcame the weaker. Love put an end to curiosity. For a moment it seemed to him as if he had not room to breathe. He ran to a window to open it, but it was fastened inside with a padlock, no doubt to pi-event those on the opposite side of the street from ever having an opportunity of seeing what passed in the study.

He sank on his chair.

"Oh, I will never listen at doors again," said he; "I must not try to penetrate the secrets of this man, apparently so humble, whom a prince calls his friend and wishes to present to the future queen of France — to the daughter of emperors — whom Mademoiselle Andree addressed almost kneeling at her feet. And yet perhaps I might hear something of Mademoiselle Andree. No, no! I should seem like a lackey; La Brie used to listen at doors."

And he courageously retired from the door. But his hands trembled so much that he could not write, and indeed he required some more exciting pursuit to divert his thoughts; he therefore seized a book on the other table.

“'The Confessions!'” he read with joyful surprise, “'embellished with a likeness of the author, Jean Jacques Rousseau,' and I have never yet seen a likeness of Rousseau!” and he hastily turned the silk paper which covered the engraving.

No sooner did it meet his eye than he uttered a cry of amazement. At that moment Jacques opened the doors.

Gilbert compared his face with the likeness in the book, which he held in his hand, then, pale and trembling, he let the volume fall, exclaiming, “I am in the house of Jean Jacques Rousseau!”

“Let me see, my child, how you have copied your music,” said Rousseau, smiling, and inwardly better pleased with this involuntary homage than with many of the thousand triumphs of his glorious life. And passing by the trembling Gilbert, he approached the table and commenced to examine his work.

“Your notes are not badly formed,” said he, “but they are carelessly joined together. Here, there should be a rest to make the time complete. Then, see, the bars which divide it are not quite straight. Make the semi-breves by two semi-circles; it is not important that they should join. The note made perfectly round is ungraceful, and the stalk does not join with it so well. Yes, my friend, you are indeed in the house of Jean Jacques Rousseau.”

“Oh, pardon me, sir, for all the foolish words which I have uttered!” exclaimed Gilbert, clasping his hands and ready to fall on his knees.

“Was it necessary that a prince should come to visit me,” said Rousseau, shrugging his shoulders, “to enable you to discover in me the unhappy persecuted philosopher of Geneva? Poor child! Happy in your ignorance of persecution?”

“Oh, yes. I am happy, very happy! But it is in seeing you, in knowing you, in being near you!”

“Thanks, my child, thanks. But it is not enough to be happy, you must work. Now that you have made a trial, take this rondeau and copy it on some proper music-paper; it is short and easy — above all things observe neatness. But how did you discover — ?”

Gilbert, with a swelling heart, took up the volume and pointed to the portrait.

“Oh yes, my likeness burned in effigy on the first page of the 'Emile!' However, the auto-da-fe diffuses light as well as the rays of the sun.”

“Ah! sir, *my* wildest dreams never exceeded this! To live with you! My highest ambition never hoped for more!”

“You cannot live with me, my friend,” said Jean Jacques, “for I do not take pupils; as for guests, you perceive that I am not rich enough to entertain them, certainly not to receive them as regular inmates.”

A cold perspiration stood on Gilbert's forehead. Rousseau took his hand.

“However,” said he, “do not despair. From the moment I first saw you, I have been studying your character. In it there is much which requires to be corrected, but there is also much to esteem. Learn to subdue your inclinations. Distrust your pride, that gnawing worm, which is the bane of philosophy. Copy music, and wait patiently for better times.'”

“Oh, heavens!” said Gilbert, “I feel bewildered when I think of what has happened to me.”

“'What has happened to you is very simple and very natural, my child; you were flying I know not whence, for I did not seek to know your secret, and in your flight you met a man gathering plants in a wood. He had bread, you had none; he shared his with you. You did not know where to seek an asylum for the night, he offered you the shelter of his roof. The man might have been called by any name, he happened to be called Rousseau. That is the whole affair. This man said to you, the first precept of philosophy is — man, suffice for thyself. Now, my friend, when you have copied your rondeau, you will have gained your bread for this day. Copy your rondeau, therefore.”

“Oh, sir, what kindness!”

“As for your lodging, that is yours into the bargain; only, no reading at night, or if you must have a candle, let it be your own; otherwise, Therese will scold. In the meantime, are you hungry?”

“Oh, no, sir,” replied Gilbert, in a choking voice.

“There is enough left from our supper of last night to serve for this morning's breakfast. Do not stand on ceremony; this repast is the last you will get at my table, unless by invitation, if we remain friends.”

Gilbert made a movement as if to speak, but Rousseau interrupted him.

“There is in the Rue Plastriere,” continued he, “a modest eating-house for mechanics; you can dine there on moderate terms, for I shall recommend you to the proprietor. In the meantime, come and breakfast.”

Gilbert followed Rousseau without daring to reply. He was completely subdued; but at least it was by a man superior to most other men.

After a few mouthfuls he left the table and returned to his task. He spoke truly; his emotion was so great that it had taken away his appetite. During the whole day he never raised his eyes from the paper, and at eight in the evening, after having torn three sheets, he had succeeded in copying legibly and neatly a rondeau of four pages.

“I will not flatter you,” said Rousseau, “it is not yet well done, but it is legible; what you have done is worth ten sous; here is the money.”

Gilbert took it with a low bow.

“There is some bread in the cupboard, M. Gilbert,” said Therese, on whom the young man's modest demeanor, mildness, and industry, had produced a favorable impression.

“Thank you, ma'am,” replied Gilbert, “believe me, I shall never forget your kindness.”

“Here,” said she, holding the bread out to him.

He was about to refuse, but looking at Rousseau he saw, by the slight frown which contracted his piercing eye, and the curl which hovered on his delicately formed lips, that the refusal would wound him.

“I accept your kind offer,” said he.

He then withdrew to his little chamber, holding in his hand the six silver sous and the four copper ones which he had just received.

“At last,” said he, on entering his garret, “I am my own master. But stay — not yet, since I hold in my hand the bread of charity.”

And although he felt hungry, he laid down the piece of bread on the sill of the skylight, and did not eat it. Then, fancying that sleep would enable him to forget his hunger, he blew out his candle and stretched himself on his straw pallet.

He was awake before daybreak on the following morning, for in truth he had slept very little during the night. Recollecting what Rousseau had said about the gardens, he leaned out of the skylight, and saw below him the trees and shrubs of a very beautiful garden, and beyond the trees the hotel to which the garden belonged, the entrance to which was from the Rue Jussienne.

In one corner of the garden, quite surrounded by shrubs and flowers, there stood a little summer-house, the windows of which were closed. Gilbert at first thought that the windows were closed on account of the earliness of the hour; but observing that the foliage of the trees had grown up against the shutters, he was convinced that the summer-house must have been unoccupied since the preceding winter at least. He returned, therefore, to his admiring contemplation of the noble lime-trees, which partially concealed from view the main body of the hotel.

Two or three times, during his survey, Gilbert's eyes had turned toward the piece of bread which Therese had cut for him the evening before; but although hunger pleaded loudly, he was so much the master of himself that he refrained from touching it.

Five o'clock struck. Gilbert was persuaded that the door of the passage must now be open; and washed, brushed and combed, for Rousseau had furnished his garret with all that was necessary for his modest toilet, he descended the stairs, with his piece of bread under his arm.

Rousseau, who this time was not the first a-foot, and who from a lingering suspicion perhaps, and the better to watch his guest, had left his door open, heard him descend, and narrowly observed his movements. He saw Gilbert leave the house with 'the bread under his arm; a poor man came up to him, and he saw Gilbert give him the bread, and then enter a baker's shop which was just opened and buy some more.

“Now,” said Rousseau, “he will go to a tavern and his poor ten sous will soon vanish.”

But he was mistaken. Gilbert ate his bread as he walked along; then, stopping at a fountain at the corner of the street, he took a long draught; ate the rest of his bread; drank again, rinsed his mouth, washed his hands, and returned toward the house.

“Ha!” said Rousseau, “I fancy that I am luckier than Diogenes, and have found a man!” And hearing Gilbert's footsteps on the stairs, he hastened to open the door.

The entire day was spent in uninterrupted labor Gilbert brought to his monotonous task activity, intelligence, and unshrinking assiduity. What he did not perfectly comprehend he guessed, and his hand, the slave of his iron will, traced the notes without hesitation and without mistake. By evening he had copied seven pages, if not elegantly, at least with scrupulous correctness.

Rousseau examined his work with the eye both of a critical judge and a philosopher. As a critical judge he criticised the forms of the notes, the fineness of the joinings, the spaces for the rests and dots; but he acknowledged that there was a decided improvement since the day before, and he gave Gilbert twenty-five sous.

As a philosopher he admired the strength of resolution which could bend the ardent temperament and active and athletic frame of a young man of eighteen to such constant and unceasing labor.

For Rousseau had discovered that in that young heart there lurked an ardent passion; but whether ambition or love he had not yet ascertained.

Gilbert gazed thoughtfully at the money which he had received, it was a piece of twenty-four sous and a single sou. He put the sou in his waistcoat pocket, probably with the other sous which were remaining from the little sum of the day before, and grasping the silver with evident satisfaction in his right hand, he said:

“Sir, you are my master, since you give me work and also lodge me in your house gratis. I think it only right, therefore, that I should communicate to you all my intentions, otherwise I might lose your regard.”

Rousseau looked at him with a lowering eye. “What are you going to do?” said he. “Have you any other intention than that of working to-morrow?”

“Sir — for to-morrow, yes. With your permission, I should like to be at liberty to-morrow.”

“What to do?” said Rousseau, “to idle?”

“Sir,” said Gilbert, “I wish to go to St. Denis.”

“To St. Denis?”

“Yes; her highness the dauphiness is to arrive there to-morrow.”

“Ah! — true; there are to be festivities in honor of her arrival.”

“That is it, sir.”

“I thought you less of a sight-seer, my young friend,” said Rousseau. “I gave you credit, at first, on the contrary, for despising the pomps of absolute power.”

“Sir — ”

“Look at me — me, whom you pretend to take for a model. Yesterday one of the *royal* princes came to invite me to court. Well, observe, citizen as I am, I refused his invitation; not to go as you would go, my poor lad, on foot, and standing on tiptoe to catch a glimpse, over the shoulder of a guardsman, of the king's carriage as it passes, but to appear before princes — to be honored by a smile from princesses.”

Gilbert nodded his approbation.

“And why did I refuse?” continued Rousseau, with vehemence. “Because a man ought not to have two faces; because the man who has written that royalty is an abuse ought not to be seen bending before a king. Because I — who know that every festivity of the great robs the people of some portion of that comfort which is now scarcely sufficient to keep them from revolt — I protest by my absence against all such festivities.”

“Sir,” said Gilbert, “believe me, I comprehend all the sublimity of your philosophy.”

“Doubtless; and yet, since you do not practice it, permit me to tell you — '

“Sir,” said Gilbert, “I am not a philosopher.”

“Tell me, at least, what you are going to do at St. Denis.”

“Sir. I am discreet.”

Rousseau was struck by these words; he saw that there was some mystery concealed under this obstinate desire, and he looked at this young man with a sort of admiration which his character inspired.

“Oh, very well!” said he, “I see you have a motive; I like that better.”

“Yes, sir. I have a motive; one, I assure you, in no way connected with an idle love for pomp or show.”

“So much the better. — Or, perhaps, I should say, so much the worse. There is something unfathomable in your look, young man, and I seek in vain in its expression for the frankness and calm of youth.”

“I told you, sir, that I have been unhappy,” replied Gilbert, sorrowfully, “and for the unhappy there is no youth. Then, you consent to give me to-morrow to myself.”

“Yes.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Remember, however,” said Rousseau, “that while you are gazing at the vain pomps of the world defiling in procession before you, I shall, in one of my herbals, be passing in review the splendor and variety of nature.”

“Sir,” said Gilbert, “would you not have left all the herbals in the world the day when you went to visit Mademoiselle Galley after having presented her with the bouquet?”

“Good!” said Rousseau. “True, you are young. Go to St. Denis, my child.”

Then, when Gilbert, with a joyful countenance, had left the room:

“It is not ambition,” said he, “it is love.”

CHAPTER XLVII.

The Sorcerer's Wife.

AT THE MOMENT WHEN Gilbert, after his hard day's labor, was munching in his loft his bread dipped in cold water, and inhaling with delight the pure air of the gardens below him, a woman mounted on a magnificent Arabian horse was advancing at full gallop toward Saint-Denis, along that road which was now deserted, but which on the morrow was to be crowded with so much rank and fashion. She was dressed with elegance, but in a strange and peculiar style, and her face was hidden by a thick veil. On entering the town she proceeded straight to the Carmelite Convent, and dismounting, she knocked with her delicately-formed finger at the wicket, while her horse, which she held by the bridle, snorted and pawed the ground with impatience.

Several inhabitants of the town, struck with curiosity, gathered around her. They were attracted in the first place by her foreign attire, then by her perseverance in knocking.

“What is it you want, madame?” said one of them at length.

“You see, sir,” she replied, with a strongly marked Italian accent, “I wish to obtain admittance.”

“In that case, you are taking the wrong way. This gate is only opened once a day to the poor, and the hour is now past.”

“What must I do, then, to gain an audience of the superior?”

“You must knock at that little door at the extremity of the wall, or else ring at the grand entrance.”

Another person now approached.

“Do you know, madame,” said he, “that the present abbess is her royal highness, Madame Louise of France?”

“I know it, sir, thank you,” she replied.

“Vertudieu! What a splendid animal!” exclaimed a dragoon, gazing in admiration at the foreigner's steed. “Now, that horse, if not too old, is worth five hundred louis-d'ors, as sure as mine is worth a hundred pistoles!”

These words produced a great effect on the crowd.

At that moment, a canon, who, unlike the dragoon, looked only at the rider to the exclusion of her steed, made his way toward her, and by some secret known to himself alone, opened, the wicket of the tower.

“Enter, madame,” said he, “and lead in your horse, if you please.”

The woman, eager to escape from the gaze of the crowd, which seemed to terrify her, hurried in, and the gate was closed behind her.

The moment the foreigner found herself alone in the large courtyard, she shook the bridle loose on the horse's neck, and the noble animal, rejoiced to feel himself at liberty, made his trappings clash, and pawed the ground so loudly that the portress, who happened for the moment to be off her post, hastened out from the interior of the convent.

“What do you want, madame?” cried she, “and how did you gain admittance here?”

“A charitable canon opened the gate for me,” said the stranger. “As for my business, I wish if possible to speak to the superior.”

“Madame will not receive any one this evening.”

“Yet I have been told that it is the duty of superiors of convents to admit, at any hour of the day or of the night, their sisters of the world who come to implore their succor.”

“Possibly so, in ordinary circumstances; but her royal highness, who only arrived the day before yesterday, is scarcely installed in her office yet, and holds this evening a chapter of our order.”

“Oh, madame!” replied the stranger, “I come from a great distance — I come from Rome. I have traveled sixty leagues on horseback, and am almost exhausted.”

“What can I do? The orders of the superior are positive.”

“My sister, I have to reveal to your abbess matters of the highest importance.”

“Return to-morrow.”

“It is impossible. I have stayed one day in Paris, and already during that day — besides, I cannot sleep at an inn.”

“Why so?”

“Because I have no money.”

The nun gazed in amazement at this woman, covered with jewels, and mistress of a flue horse, who pretended that she had no money to pay for a night's lodging.

"Oh, do not heed my words! Do not examine my dress!" said the young woman; "perhaps I did not speak the precise truth when I said I had no money, for no doubt I could obtain credit in any inn. But what I want is not a lodging but a, refuge."

"Madame, this is not the only convent in St. Denis, and each convent has an abbess."

"Yes, yes! I know that well; but it is not a common abbess who can protect me."

"I think you are wrong in persisting thus. The Princess Louise no longer takes any interest in affairs of this world."

"What matters it to you? Only just tell her that I wish to speak to her."

"She is holding a chapter, I tell you."

"After it is over, then?"

"It has scarcely begun."

"I can go into the church and wait there in prayer."

"I am sorry, madame, that I cannot permit you to wait there."

"Oh, then I am mistaken! I am not in the house of God!" cried the stranger, with such vehemence of voice and look, that the nun, alarmed, dared no longer oppose her wishes.

"If you be really in great distress," said she, "I shall try what I can do."

"Oh! tell her royal highness," added the foreigner, "that I come from Rome, that I have made only two halts on the road, one at Mayence, the other at Strasbourg; that during the last four days I have only taken the time absolutely necessary for myself and my horse to regain strength to continue our journey."

"I shall tell her, sister," and the nun hastened off.

A moment after a lay sister appeared, followed by the portress.

"Well?" exclaimed the stranger, impatient to know what reply had been sent.

"Her royal highness says, madame," replied the lay sister, "it is quite impossible to give you an audience this evening; but that nevertheless the hospitality of the convent shall be extended to you, since you are in such urgent want of an asylum. You may follow me, therefore, sister, and if you have made so long a journey as you say, and are fatigued, you can retire to rest at once."

"But my horse?"

"Rest assured he shall be taken care of, my sister."

“He is as gentle as a lamb. He is called Djerid, and comes when addressed by that name. I entreat you will take care of him, for he is a most valuable animal.”

“He shall be treated as if he were one of the king's horses.”

“Thanks.”

“In the meantime, conduct madame to her apartment,” said the lay sister to the portress.

“Not to my apartment — to the church! I do not require sleep, but prayer.”

“The chapel is open, my sister,” said the nun, pointing to a little side door which gave admittance to the church.

“And I shall see the superior in the morning?” asked the stranger.

“To-morrow morning? That is also impossible.”

“Why so?”

“Because to-morrow morning there will be a grand reception.”

“And for whom can a reception be more necessary than for an unfortunate like me?”

“Her royal highness the dauphiness will do us the honor to spend two hours here on her way through town to-morrow. It is a great honor for our convent, and a high solemnity for us poor nuns; so that, you understand, the abbess is most anxious that everything should be worthy of the royal guests we expect.”

“But in the meantime,” said the stranger, looking around with a shudder, “while I wait the leisure of your august superior, shall I be in safety here?”

“Undoubtedly, my sister. Our house is a refuge even for the guilty, much more for — ”

“For fugitives,” said the stranger. “It is well; then no one can enter here?”

“No one — that is, not without an order.”

“Oh, but if he procures an order! Good heavens! He who is so powerful that his power at times terrifies me.”

“He? — who?” asked the nun.

“Oh, no one — no one.”

“The poor creature is deranged, I fear,” murmured the nun to herself.

“The church! The church!” repeated the stranger, so wildly as in some degree to justify this suspicion.

“Come, my sister, let me lead you to it.”

“Yes, yes, I am pursued, look you — quick! The church!”

“Oh, the walls of St. Denis are strong!” said the nun, with a compassionate smile. “Believe me, after such a journey as you have described, you had much better go and rest in a good bed than bruise your knees on the stones of our chapel.”

“No, no! I wish to pray — I wish to pray that God will rescue me from my pursuers!” cried the young woman, hurriedly entering the church by the door which the nun pointed out, and shutting the door behind her.

The nun, curious as all nuns are, hastened round to the principal entrance, and, advancing softly, saw the unknown praying and sobbing before the altar, her face bowed to the ground.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Parisians.

THE NUNS had informed the stranger correctly, when they told her that the chapter of the convent was assembled in conclave. Madame Louise of France presided at the meeting, her first exercise of supreme authority, and assisted in their deliberation as to the best means of giving the daughter of the Cassars a reception worthy of her august character and station.

The funds of the convent were rather low. The late abbess, on resigning her functions, had carried away with her a large portion of the lace, which was her private property, as well as the reliquaries and ostensoirs, which it was the practice of superiors, who were all taken from the highest families, to lend to their convents, on devoting themselves to the service of God from the most worldly motives.

Madame Louise, on learning of the intended visit of the dauphiness, had sent an express to Versailles, and the same night a wagon had arrived loaded with hangings, lace, and ornaments, to the value of six hundred thousand livres.

Consequently, when the tidings were spread of the royal splendor which was to be exhibited at the reception of the dauphiness, all the ardent curiosity of the Parisians was redoubled — those same Parisians whom Mercier describes as provoking only a smile when seen in private life, but when assembled in masses arousing reflections more calculated to make us weep and tremble.

Therefore, from earliest dawn, the citizens of the capital, having learned from public report the route which the dauphiness was to take, began to issue from their dens, and, at first in parties of ten or twenty, then in hundreds, and finally in thousands, poured out toward St. Denis.

The French and Swiss guards, and the regiments stationed at St. Denis, were under arms, and formed a line on each side of the road to keep back the waves of the living tide which rolled on toward the gates of the cathedral, and mounted even to the sculptured projections of the building. A sea of heads appeared everywhere, children's peeping from above the porches of doors, men's and women's thronging the windows. Besides these, thousands of curious spectators, who had arrived too late to secure places, or who, like Gilbert, preferred their liberty to the constraint and inconvenience of being shut up during the whole day in one spot, swarmed like ants on every side, climbing the trees which bordered the road from St. Dem's to Muette, or dispersed here and there wailing for the procession.

The cortege, although still possessing a numerous train of sumptuous equipages, and troops of domestics in splendid liveries, had considerably diminished after leaving Compiegne; for, except for the great lords, it was found impossible to keep pace with the king, who doubled and tripled the usual stages, by means of relays posted on the road.

Those of lesser note had therefore remained at Compiegne, or had taken post-horses and returned to Paris to give their stud a breathing interval. But after a day's repose at their own domiciles, masters and domestics now thronged toward St. Denis both to witness the preparations and to get another glimpse of the dauphiness, whom they had already only partially seen. And then, besides the court carriages, were there not those of the parliament, the financiers, the rich merchants, the ladies of fashion and those of the opera? Were there not, in addition, hired horses and carriages, as well as the caravans, which rolled toward St. Denis, crammed with the good citizens of Paris, both male and female, who managed to arrive by this means somewhat later than they could have accomplished the distance on foot? It may easily be imagined, therefore, what a formidable army directed its march toward St. Denis on the morning of the day when the gazettes and placards announced that the dauphiness was to arrive, forming into a dense mass before the convent of the Carmelites, and, when no more room could be obtained within the privileged inclosure, stretching away in long lines on the roads by which the dauphiness and her suite were to arrive and depart. Now, let any one picture to himself in this crowd, which was the terror even of the Parisian, Gilbert, insignificant in appearance, alone, undecided, ignorant of the localities, and too proud even to ask a question — for since he was in Paris he had determined to pass for a Parisian — he who had never seen a hundred people assembled together in his life.

At first he saw pedestrians thinly scattered along the road; at La Chapelle they began to increase, and at St. Denis they seemed to rise out of the ground, and presented much the appearance of an immense field bristling with ears of corn. For a longtime past Gilbert had seen nothing, lost as he was in the crowd; he could not look over the heads of those around him, and, swept along in the throng, he blindly followed where the concourse of spectators led him.

At last he saw some children perched on a tree, and longed to imitate their example, but he dared not take off his coat. He made his way, however, to the foot of the tree, just as one of those unfortunates, who like himself were deprived of all view of the horizon, and who staggered onward, trampling others and being trampled on themselves, was struck by the bright idea of questioning their lucky neighbors perched in safety on the branches, and learned from one of them that there was a large space vacant between the convent and the guards. Gilbert, emboldened by this intelligence, ventured in his turn to ask whether the carriages were yet in sight.

They had not yet appeared — but on the road, about a quarter of a league beyond St. Denis, a great cloud of dust was plainly visible. This was what Gilbert wished to know; the carriages not being in sight, it was now his business to ascertain precisely by what route they would approach; but nevertheless he held on his way, traversing the crowd in perfect silence — a mode of procedure which in Paris leads irresistibly to the conclusion that the person practicing it is either an Englishman or deaf and dumb.

Scarcely had Gilbert extricated himself from the multitude, when he perceived, seated behind a ditch, the family of a humble tradesman at breakfast.

There was a blue-eyed daughter, tall and fair, modest and timid.

There was the mother, a fat, laughing little woman, with white teeth and rosy cheeks.

There was an aunt, tall, bony, dry, and harsh.

There was the father, half-buried in an immense camlet coat, which was usually brought out of his chest only on Sundays, but which he ventured to put on on so grand an occasion as the present, and of which he took more care than he did of his wife and daughter, being certain that the latter could take care of themselves.

There was the servant-maid, who did nothing but laugh. She carried an enormous basket containing everything necessary for breakfast, and even under its weight the stout lass had never ceased laughing and singing, encouraged as she was by her master, who took the burden when she was fatigued.

In those days a domestic was one of the family, and occupied a position in it very analogous to that of the house-dog, beaten sometimes, excluded never.

Gilbert contemplated by stealth this group which was so new to him. Shut up at Taverney from his birth, he had hitherto seen only the lord and the lackey, the citizen was altogether a novelty to him.

He saw these honest people employ in their domestic economy a system of philosophy, which, although not drawn from the teachings of Plato and Socrates, was modeled much after that of Bias, a little extended.

They had brought with them as much food as they possibly could, and were determined to make the most of it.

The father was carving one of those appetizing pieces of roast veal, so much in vogue with the Parisian tradesmen. Nicely browned, dainty, and tempting, it reposed amid a bed of carrots, onions, and bacon, in the dish in which the day before it had been baked, carefully placed there by the good housekeeper. The maid had then carried it to the baker, who, while baking his loaves, had given it an asylum in his oven along with a score of such dishes destined to assist the enjoyments of the following day.

Gilbert chose out a place for himself at the foot of a neighboring elm, and dusted it carefully with his checked pocket-handkerchief. He then took off his hat, spread his handkerchief on the ground, and seated himself. He paid no attention to his neighbors, which they remarking, naturally directed a good deal of their own to him.

“That is a careful young man,” said the mother.

The daughter blushed. She always did so when a young man was mentioned before her, a trait in her character which grave the highest gratification to her parents.

The father turned, “And a handsome lad, too,” said he.

The daughter blushed still more deeply than before.

“He looks tired.” said the servant-maid, “and yet he has not been carrying anything.”

“Rather say lazy.” said the aunt.

“Sir,” said the mother, addressing Gilbert, with that familiarity which is found nowhere but among the Parisians, “are the carriages still far off?”

Gilbert turned, and seeing that these words were addressed to him, rose and bowed.

“A most polite young man,” said the mother.

This remark added a still deeper dye to the daughter's cheeks.

“I do not know, madame,” answered Gilbert; “I only heard that a cloud of dust was seen about a quarter of a league off.”

“Draw nearer, sir,” said the honest tradesman, “and if you have not breakfasted — ” and he pointed to the excellent repast which was spread on the grass.

Gilbert approached the group. He had not breakfasted, and the seducing odor of the viands tempted him strongly; but he jingled his twenty-five sous in his pocket, and reflecting that for the third of this sum be could purchase a breakfast almost as good as that which was offered to him, he would not accept any favor from people whom he saw for the first time.

“Thank you, sir,” said he, “a thousand thanks; but I have already breakfasted.”

“Ah!” said the good woman, “I see that you are a prudent young man. But from where you are seated you will see nothing.”

“Why,” replied Gilbert, smiling, “in that case you will not see anything yourselves, as you are in the same position as myself.”

“Oh, it is a very different matter with us! We have a nephew a sergeant in the French guards.”

The young girl looked like a peony.

“His post this morning will be before Le Paon Bleu.”

“If I am not taking too great a liberty,” said Gilbert, “may I ask where Le Paon Bleu is?”

“Just opposite the Carmelite Convent,” replied the mother. “He has promised to keep places for us behind his detachment. He will then give us his bench, and we shall see at our ease all the company get out of their carriages.”

It was now Gilbert's turn to redden; he had refused to eat with the good people, but he longed to be of their party.

Nevertheless, his philosophy, or rather his pride, whispered; “It is very well for women to require some one to assist them, but I, a man, have arms and shoulders of my own.”

“All those who do not get placed like us,” continued the mother, as if guessing his thoughts, “will only see empty carriages — no great sight in truth, for empty carriages can be seen everywhere, and certainly not worth the trouble of coming as far as St. Denis for.”

“But, madame,” said Gilbert, “it seems to me that many besides yourself will endeavor to secure the place you speak of.”

“Yes; but every one has not a nephew in the guards to assist them.”

“Ah! true!” murmured Gilbert.

As he said this, his face wore an expression of disappointment which did not escape Parisian penetration.

“But,” said the husband, well skilled in divining the wishes of his wife, “this gentleman can accompany us if he pleases.”

“Oh, sir. I fear I should be troublesome,” replied Gilbert.

“Bah! not at all,” said the good woman; “on the contrary, you will assist us in reaching our places. We have only one man now to depend on, and then we should have two.”

No other argument could have had so much weight in determining Gilbert. The idea that he could be useful, and by so doing pay for the favor which was offered him, put him quite at his ease and relieved every scruple.

He accepted the offer.

“We shall see to whom he will offer his arm,” said the aunt.

This assistance was indeed a real Godsend to Gilbert. How, without it, could he have passed through a barrier of thirty thousand persons, each more favored than himself by rank, wealth, or strength, and, above all, by the practice they had acquired in obtaining places at fetes, where every one seizes the best he can procure?

Had our philosopher “been less of a theoretical and more of a practical man, the present occasion would have furnished him with an admirable opportunity for studying the dynamics of society.

The carriage with four horses burst like a cannon-ball through the mass; all fell back on each side before its running footman, with his plumed hat, his gayly striped jacket, and his thick stick, who rushed on in advance, frequently preceded by two formidable coach-dogs.

The carriage with two horses advanced more slowly, and whispered a sort of password in the ear of' a guardsman, after which it proceeded to take its place in the cortege before the convent.

Single horsemen, although overlooking the crowd from their elevated position, were forced to advance at a foot-pace, and only gained a good position after a thousand jostlings, interruptions, and oaths.

Lastly, the poor pedestrian, trodden, trampled on, and tossed about, was driven forward like the foam of the wave by a thousand waves rolling on behind. Sometimes raising himself on tiptoe to see over the heads of his neighbors; sometimes wrestling like Antaeus, to fall like him to his mother earth; seeking his way through the multitude, and when he had found it, dragging after him his family — almost always a troop of women — whom the Parisian alone ventures to attempt, conducting through such scenes.

Lowest of all, or rather, superior to all, in such circumstances, was the man of the very dregs of the people. With unshaven beard and ragged cap, his arms naked to the elbow, and his garments held together by some fragment of a cord, indefatigably working with elbows, with shoulders, and with feet, and ever and anon uttering a savage and sardonic laugh, he made his way among the crowd as easily as Gulliver amid the Lilliputians.

Gilbert, who was neither a great lord with a carriage-and-four, nor a member of parliament with two, nor a soldier on horseback, nor a Parisian, nor a man of the people, must have infallibly been trampled under foot by the throng, had he not been under the protection of the tradesman. Backed by him he felt powerful, and boldly offered his arm to the mother of the family.

“Impertinent fellow!” said the aunt.

They set out; the father gave his sister and his daughter each an arm, and the maid-servant followed behind with the huge basket.

“Gentlemen, may I trouble you?” said the good woman, with her ready laugh. “Gentlemen, if you please, a little room. Gentlemen, be good enough — ”

And every one fell back and yielded a passage to her and Gilbert, while in their wake glided the rest of the party.

Foot by foot, step by step, they managed to advance five hundred paces, and then found themselves close to that formidable line of French guards on which the tradesman and his family rested all their hopes. The daughter had by this time regained her natural color. Once there, the citizen mounted on Gilbert's shoulders to look over the soldier's heads, and perceived at twenty yards' distance from him his wife's nephew twisting his mustaches. The good man made such outrageous gestures with his hat, that at last his nephew's attention was attracted to him; he came forward, asked his comrades to make way a little, and obtained a slight opening in their ranks.

Through this chink slipped Gilbert and the good woman, then the citizen himself, the sister and daughter, and after them the stout lass with the basket. Their troublesome journey was over, and mutual thanks were exchanged between Gilbert and the head of the family. The mother endeavored to detain him by their side, the aunt said he had better go, and they separated, not to meet again.

In the open space in which Gilbert now found himself, none but privileged persons were admitted, and he therefore easily reached the trunk of a large linden-tree, mounted upon a stone near it, and, supporting himself by a low branch, waited patiently.

About half an hour after he had thus installed himself, the cannon roared, the rattling of the drums was heard, and the great bell of the cathedral sent forth its first majestic peal.

CHAPTER XLIX.

The King's Carriages.

A DULL HEAVY SOUND was heard in the distance, which became stronger and deeper as it advanced. As Gilbert listened, he felt every nerve in his body vibrate painfully.

The people were shouting “God save the king!” It was the fashion then.

Onward came a cloud of prancing horses covered with housings of gold and purple; these were the musketeers, the gendarmes, and Swiss horse-guards. Then followed a massive carriage magnificently decorated.

Gilbert perceived in it a blue ribbon and a majestic head not uncovered. He saw the cold penetrating light of the royal look, before which every form bent and every head was uncovered. Fascinated — motionless — breathless, he forgot to take oil his hat.

A violent blow roused him from his trance; his hat rolled on the ground.

He sprang forward, lifted it up, and looking round, saw the tradesman's nephew looking at him with that truculent smile which is peculiar to the soldier.

“Well,” said he, “so you don't take off your hat to the king?”

Gilbert turned pale, and looked at his hat covered with dust.

“It is the first time I ever saw the king,” said he, “and I forgot to salute him, it is true. But I did not know — '

“You did not know?” said the soldier, frowning.

Gilbert feared that he should be driven from the spot where he was so well placed for seeing Andree, and love conquered pride.

“Pardon me,” said he, “I am from the country.”

“And you have come to Paris to be educated, my little man?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Gilbert, swallowing his rage.

“Well, since you are seeking instruction,” said the sergeant, arresting Gilbert's hand as he was just going to put his hat on his head, “learn this; you must take off your hat to the dauphiness as well as to the king, and to their royal highnesses the princes as well as to the dauphiness; in short, you must take it off to all the carriages on which you see the fleur-de-lis. Do you know the fleur-de-lis, my little fellow, or must I show you what it is?"

"Quite unnecessary, sir; I know it."

"It is well you know even that much." grumbled the sergeant.

The royal carriages continued to file past. As each reached the door of the convent, it stopped to permit its occupants to alight. This operation caused every five minutes a general halt along the whole line.

At one of these halts, Gilbert felt as if a fiery sword had pierced his heart. He became giddy, everything swam before his eyes, and he trembled so violently that he was forced to grasp his branch more firmly to prevent himself from falling.

About ten paces from him, in one of the carriages with the fleur-de-lis to which the sergeant had desired him to take off his hat, he had just perceived Andree. Dressed in white, and dazzling with beauty, she seemed to his excited eyes some angelic being from a higher sphere.

He uttered a stifled cry; but immediately afterward, conquering his agitation, he commanded his heart to be still and his gaze steady; and so great was his self-control, that he succeeded.

Andree, on her side, wishing to know why the procession had stopped, leaned forward out of the carriage, and directing her clear and limpid gaze around, she perceived Gilbert, and at once recognized him. Gilbert feared that on seeing him she would be surprised and would point him out to her father.

He was not mistaken. With an air of astonishment she turned toward the Baron de Taverney, who, decorated with his red ribbon, sat with great dignity beside her, and directed his attention to Gilbert.

"Gilbert?" cried the baron, starting, "Gilbert here? And who, pray, will take care of Mahon at Taverney?"

The young man heard these words distinctly, and with the most studied respect he bowed to Andree and the baron. It required all his strength to accomplish this feat.

"It is really he!" continued the baron, on perceiving our philosopher. "It is the little rascal himself!"

The idea of Gilbert being in Paris was one so far removed from his thoughts, that, at first he would not believe his daughter's assertions, and could hardly credit even his own eyes. As for Andree, whom Gilbert examined closely, after the first slight shade of surprise had passed away, her countenance resumed an expression of most perfect calm. The baron leaned out of the carriage window and signed to Gilbert to approach; but as he attempted to obey, the sergeant stopped him.

“You see that I am called,” said he.

“By whom?” demanded the sergeant.

“The gentleman in that carriage.”

The sergeant's eye followed the direction of Gilbert's finger, and rested on the Baron de Taverney's carriage.

“Pray allow him to come this way, sergeant, “said the baron. “I wish to speak to the lad — two words only.”

“Four, sir, four, if you like,” replied the soldier. “You have plenty of time; they are now reading an address at the gate, and I dare say it will occupy half an hour. Pass through, young man.”

“Come hither, you rascal!” said the baron to Gilbert, who affected to walk at his usual pace, “and tell me by what accident it happens you are here when you ought to be at Taverney!”

Gilbert saluted Andree and the baron a second time and replied:

“It was no accident which brought me to Paris, sir; I came hither of my own free will.”

“Your free will, you scoundrel? — Do you talk of your will to me?”

“Why not? Every free man has the right to possess it.”

“Oh, ho! Free man! You imagine yourself free, do you, you little wretch?”

“Certainly I am; I have never sold my freedom to any one.”

“Upon my word, this is an amusing sort of scoundrel!” exclaimed the baron, confounded at the coolness with which Gilbert spoke. “Your freewill led you to Paris! — And how did you travel, pray! — What assistance had you, may I ask?”

“I came on foot.”

“ On foot!” said Andree, with a sort of pity in her tone.

“And pray what do you intend to do in Paris?” inquired the baron.

“To get educated first — then make my fortune.”

“Educated?”

“Yes, I am certain of being educated.”

“Make your fortune?”

“I hope to make it.”

“And in the meantime what do you do? Beg?”

"Beg!" exclaimed Gilbert, with lofty scorn.

"You steal, then?"

"Sir," said Gilbert, with a look so proud and fierce that it fixed Andree's attention on him for a moment, "sir, did I ever steal from you?"

"What can your idle hands do but steal?"

"What those of a man of genius do — a man whom I wish to imitate, were it only in his perseverance," replied Gilbert. "They copy music."

Andree turned toward him; "Copy music?" said she.

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"You know music, then?" inquired she, with the same contemptuous tone in which she would have said, "It is false."

"I know my notes, and that is enough for a copyist."

"And how the devil did you learn your notes, you rascal?" cried the baron.

"Yes, how?" added Andree, smiling.

"I love music, sir, passionately, and when Mademoiselle Andree played on the harpsichord every day, I hid myself that I might listen."

"Good-for-nothing fellow!"

"At first I remembered the airs; then, as they were written in a music-book, by degrees I learned to read the notes from the book."

"From my music-book?" exclaimed Andree, with the utmost indignation; "did you dare to touch my music-book?"

"No, mademoiselle, I did not permit myself to do so; but as it remained open on the harpsichord, sometimes in one place, sometimes in another, I endeavored to read in it, but without touching it. My eyes would not soil the pages."

"You will see," cried the baron, "that the fellow will assert next that he plays on the piano like Haydn."

"I should probably have been able by this time to play," said Gilbert, "had I dared to place my fingers on the keys."

Andree again glanced at that face which was animated by a sentiment only to be compared to the fanaticism of a martyr eager for the stake; but the baron, who did not possess his daughter's clear and comprehensive intellect, felt his choler rise on reflecting that the young man was in the right, and that he had been treated inhumanly in being left with Mahon at Taverney. It is not easy to pardon in an inferior the wrong which he proves you have done him, and the baron therefore became more furious in proportion as his daughter became calm.

“Wretch!” cried he, “you steal away; you go running about like a vagabond, and when questioned about your mode of life, you utter such a tissue of absurdities as those which we have just heard! But it shall not be my fault if rogues and pickpockets infest the king's highways.”

Andree by a gesture entreated her father to be calm; she felt that ungoverned anger destroys all superiority in the person giving way to it. But the baron thrust aside her hand, which she had placed on his arm, and continued; “I shall recommend you to the notice of the Count de Sartines, and you shall speedily take a turn in the Bicetre, you scarecrow of a philosopher.”

Gilbert stepped back, crushed his hat under his arm, and pale with anger, exclaimed: “Learn, my lord baron, that since I arrived in Paris I have found protectors in whose antechambers your Count de Sartines would be glad to wait.”

“Indeed?” said the baron. “In that case I shall take care, if you escape a prison, that you do not escape a good caning — Andree, call your brother!”

Andree leaned forward out of the carriage and said in a low voice to Gilbert — “Take my advice, M. Gilbert, and retire.”

“Philip, Philip!” shouted the old man.

“Leave us!” said Andree again to the young man, who remained silent and motionless in his place, as if in ecstatic contemplation.

An officer, summoned by the baron's cries, hurried forward to the carriage door; it was Philip, dressed in his captain's uniform. The young man was splendidly attired, and seemed in high spirits.

“How! Gilbert?” he exclaimed with a good-humored smile on recognizing the young man. “Gilbert here! How do you do. Gilbert? Well, what do you want with me, my dear father?”

“How do you do, M. Philip?” replied Gilbert.

“What do I want?” said the baron furiously. “I want you, to take the sheath of your sword and chastise this scoundrel!”

“But what has he done?” asked Philip, gazing by turns, with increasing astonishment, at the angry face of his father and the rigid and motionless features of Gilbert.

“Done? he — he — has — beat him, Philip, — beat him like a dog!” cried the baron. Taverney turned to his sister.

“What has he done, Andree? has he insulted you?”

“Insulted her!” repeated Gilbert.

“No. Philip, no!” replied Andree, “he has done nothing wrong; my father is in error. Gilbert is no longer in our service, and has a perfect right to go where he pleases; but my father will not understand this, and is angry at finding him here.”

“Is that all?” said Philip.

“Nothing more, brother; and I cannot imagine why my father should be so angry, particularly on such a subject, and about things and persons that do not deserve even a thought. Philip, look whether the train is moving on.”

The baron was silent, overcome by the lofty serenity of his daughter. Gilbert's heart sank in his breast, crushed and withered under her contempt. For a moment a feeling akin to hatred darted though his heart. He would have preferred the mortal thrust of Philip's sword — ay, even a lash of his whip, to her insulting scorn.

He was almost fainting; fortunately the address had now ended, and the cortege once more moved on. The baron's carriage advanced with the rest, and Andree disappeared from before his eyes like a vision. Gilbert remained alone — he could have wept — he could have groaned aloud — he thought that he could no longer bear the weight of his sufferings

Just then a hand rested on his shoulder. He turned and saw Philip, who, having given his horse to a soldier of his regiment to hold, returned smiling toward him.

“Come, let me hear what has happened, my poor Gilbert,” said he, “and why you have come to Paris.”

His frank and cordial tone touched the young man's heart.

“Oh, sir,” replied he, with a sigh, his stern stoicism melting at once, “what would I have done at Taverney, I ask you? I must have died of despair, ignorance, and hunger.”

Philip started; his generous heart was struck, as Andree's had been, by the misery and destitution in which Gilbert had been left.

“And you think, my poor fellow, to succeed in Paris without money, protectors, or resources?”

“I trust so, sir. A man who is willing to work rarely dies of hunger, where there are other men who wish to do nothing.”

Philip was struck by this reply; until then he had always looked on Gilbert as a commonplace domestic.

“But have you any means of buying food?” said he.

“I can earn my daily bread, M. Philip. That is sufficient for one who has never had any cause for self-reproach, but that of having eaten bread not gained by his toil.”

“I hope you do not say so with reference to that which you received at Taverney, my poor lad. Your father and mother were faithful servants, and you were always willing to make yourself useful.”

“I only did my duty, sir.”

“Listen to me, Gilbert. You are aware that I always liked you. I have always looked upon you in a more favorable light than others, whether justly or the reverse the future will show. What others called haughty pride, I termed delicacy; where others saw rudeness and ill-breeding, I perceived only honest bluntness.”

“Ah, chevalier!” said Gilbert, breathing more freely.

“I really wish you well, Gilbert.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Young like you, and like you also in an unhappy position. I was perhaps on that account more disposed to feel for and pity you. Fortune has blessed me with abundance; let me assist you until fortune smiles on you in your turn.”

“Thanks, sir, many thanks.”

“What do you think of doing? You're too proud to accept of a situation as servant.”

Gilbert shook his head with a scornful smile. “I wish to study,” said he.

“But in order to study you must have masters, and to pay them you must have money.”

“I can earn money, sir.”

“Earn money? How much can you earn?”

“ Twenty-five sous a day, and in a short time perhaps thirty and even forty sous.” “But that is barely enough for food.”

Gilbert smiled.

“Perhaps,” continued Philip. “I am not taking the right way of offering you my services.”

“Your services to me, M. Philip!”

“Yes, my services. Are you ashamed to accept them?”

Gilbert made no answer.

“Men are sent on earth to aid one another,” continued Maison-Rouge. “Are we not all brethren?”

Gilbert raised his head and fixed his intelligent gaze on the chevalier's noble countenance.

“Does this language surprise you?” said he.

“No, sir,” said Gilbert, “it is the language of philosophy; but it is not usual to hear such from persons of your rank.”

“Yet it is the language of the times. The dauphin himself shares in these sentiments. Come, do not be proud with me,” continued Philip. “What I lend you, you can repay me one day or other. Who knows but you may yet be a Colbert or a Vauban?”

“Or a Tronchin.” said Gilbert.

“Yes, or a Tronchin. Here is my purse, let me share its contents with you.”

“Thank you, sir,” said the indomitable Gilbert, moved in spite of himself by Philip's genial kindness; “but I do not want anything — only — only — believe me, I am as grateful to you as if I had accepted your offer.”

And, bowing, he disappeared in the crowd, leaving the young captain lost in astonishment. The latter waited a few minutes, as if he could not believe his eyes or ears, but finding that Gilbert did not return, he mounted his horse and returned to his post.

CHAPTER L.

The Demoniac.

THE NOISE of the carriages, the prolonged and merry peal of the bells, the joyful beating of the drums, all the pomp and ceremony of the day — a faint reflection of that world, now lost to her forever — faded from the Princess Louise's mind like an idle wave which had rolled up to the walls of her cell and then retreated.

When the king had departed, after having once more endeavored, but in vain, to win his daughter back to the world by a mixture of paternal entreaty and royal command, and when the dauphiness, who had been at the first glance struck by the real greatness of soul displayed by her august aunt, had also disappeared with her gay throng of courtiers, the superior of the Carmelites gave orders that the hangings should be taken down, the flowers removed, and the lace with which the convent had been decorated once more placed in its usual repository.

Of all the sisterhood of the Carmelites she alone was unmoved when the massive gates of the convent, which had for a moment opened to the world, closed heavily again on their solitude.

Then she summoned the sister who acted as treasurer of the convent.

“During these two noisy and bustling days,” asked she, '-'have the poor received their usual alms?”

“Yes, madame.”

“Have the sick been visited?”

“Yes, madame.”

“Did the soldiers receive some refreshment before they departed?”

“They received the wine and the bread which you ordered, madame.”

“Then no one is ill or sick in the convent?”

“No one, madame.”

The princess approached a window and softly inhaled the cool and perfumed breeze which was wafted toward her on the humid wings of evening. The treasurer waited respectfully until her august superior should give her an order or dismiss her. Madame Louise commenced to pluck off the leaves of the roses and jessamine which twined around the windows and climbed up the walls of the building. Heaven alone knows what were the thoughts of the poor royal recluse at that moment.

Suddenly the door of a detached building in the courtyard, close at hand, was shaken by the violent kick of a horse. Madame Louise started.

“What nobleman of the court has remained after the rest at St. Denis?” asked she.

“His eminence the Cardinal de Rohan, madame.”

“Are his horses here, too?”

“No, madame; they are at the chapter-house of the abbey, where he is to pass the night.”

“What noise was that, then?”

“Madame, it was caused by the foreign woman's horse.”

“What woman?” asked Madame Louise, endeavoring to recollect.

“The Italian who came yesterday to request the protection of your royal highness.”

“Ah! true, I remember now. Where is she?”

“In her chamber, or in the church.”

“How has she conducted herself since she came?”

“Since yesterday she has refused all nourishment except dry bread, and has spent the entire night praying in the chapel.”

“Some great criminal, doubtless?” said the superior, frowning.

“I do not know, madame; she has spoken to no one since she arrived.”

“What sort of a woman is she?”

“Extremely handsome, and with an expression at once gentle and haughty.”

“This morning, during the ceremony, where was she?”

“In her chamber, close to the window, where I saw her, half hidden by the curtain, watching with anxious eyes every person who entered, as if in each she feared an enemy.”

“She is some poor erring creature of he world in which I once lived and reigned. Admit her.” The nun made a movement to retire. “Ah! By-the-by, what is her name?” asked the princess.

“Lorenza Feliciani.”

“I know no one of that name,” said Madame Louise, reflecting; “no matter, introduce her.”

The superior seated herself in her chair of state, which was of carved oak, made in the reign of Henry II., and had been used by the last nine abbesses of the Carmelites. It was a formidable judgment-seat, before which had trembled many a poor novice caught on the slippery path between spiritual and temporal things.

A moment afterward the nun entered, leading in the strange lady, who was covered from head to foot with the long veil we have before mentioned.

The Princess Louise possessed the piercing eye peculiar to her family, and as Lorenza Feliciani appeared before her, she fastened a stern and searching glance on her. But she saw in the young woman's demeanor so much humility, grace, and beauty, and in the large eyes, filled with tears, which she turned on her, such an innocent and supplicating expression, that her feeling of harshness gave place immediately to one of compassion and kindness.

“Draw near, madame,” said the princess.

The stranger advanced hesitatingly, and was about to kneel, when the princess prevented her.

“Is not your name, madame,” said she, “Lorenza Feliciani?”

“Yes, madame.”

“And you wish to confide a secret to me?”

“Oh! I burn to do so.”

“But why had you not recourse to the tribunal of penance? I have only power to console; a priest can not only console, but pardon.”

“I require only consolation, madame,” replied Lorenza; “and, besides, it is to a woman alone that I dare relate what I have to tell you.”

“Then it is a strange story which you are about to narrate?”

“Yes, strange indeed. But hear me patiently, madame; it is to you alone, I repeat, that I dare confide it, both because you are a woman, and because you are all-powerful to protect me.”

“Protect you? Are you pursued, then? Are you in danger?”

“Oh, yes, madame, yes!” cried the stranger, with wild alarm.

“But reflect, madame,” said the princess, “that this is a convent, and not a fortress; that those worldly thoughts which agitate the breasts of men penetrate not here; that strife and combat are here extinguished; that this is not a house of justice, of force, or repression, but simply the house of God.”

“Oh! that is what I seek!” said Lorenza. “Yes, I seek the house of God, for there alone can I find shelter and repose.”

“But God admits not of revenge. How then do you ask his servant to avenge you? Address yourself to the magistrates.”

“They can do nothing against him whom I dread.”

“"Who is he, then?” asked the abbess, with a mysterious and involuntary dread.

Lorenza approached close to the princess in a nervous and excited manner.

“Who is he, madame?” said she. “He is, I firmly believe, one of those demons who war against man, and whom Satan, their prince, has gifted with superhuman power.”

“How? what mean you?” exclaimed the princess, recoiling as if to satisfy herself that she was not addressing a lunatic.

“And I — I — wretch that I am!” continued Lorenza, writhing her snow-white and rounded arms, which seemed modeled from those of some antique statue, “I crossed the path of that man — and now — I am — I am — ”

“What? What?”

Lorenza again approached the princess, and, as if terrified herself at what she was about to utter, she whispered hoarsely, “I am possessed by the demon!”

“Possessed?” cried the princess. “Take care, madame! Are you sure you are in your senses? Are you not —

“Mad — you would say — no, no, I am not mad — but I may become so if you abandon me.”

“But, madame,” said the princess, recovering her firmness, “permit me to observe that you seem to me in all respects one of the favored of Heaven; you are rich and beautiful, you express yourself rationally, and I see in your countenance nothing betokening that terrible and mysterious disease called possession.”

“Madame, it is in my life, it is in the adventures winch have befallen me, that the baleful secret lies which I would willingly conceal even from myself.”

“Explain yourself calmly. Am I the first to whom you have disclosed your sufferings? Your parents, your friends — ”

“My parents!” exclaimed the young woman, clasping her hands with agony, “my poor parents! Shall I never see you again? Friends?” added she, bitterly, “alas, madame, have I any friends?”

“Come, let us proceed regularly, my poor child,” said Madame Louise, endeavoring to restore order to the stranger's incoherent words; “tell me all. Who are your parents? How came you to abandon them?”

“Madame, I am a native of Rome, and I lived in Koine with them. My father belongs to the ancient nobility, but, like all our patricians, he is poor. I have also a mother, and a brother older than myself. In France, I believe, when a family such as mine has a son and daughter, the portion of the daughter is sacrificed to purchase the son's sword; with us the daughter is sacrificed to put the son forward in the church. Consequently I received no education, as all our patrimony was required to pay for my brother's education, that, as my poor brother innocently said, he might one day be a cardinal; and for this purpose my parents submitted to every privation, and decided on making me take the veil in the Carmelite Convent at Subiaco.”

“And you — what did you say?”

“Nothing, madame. From childhood I had been taught to look forward to such an event as inevitable. Besides, I was not consulted; my parents commanded — I had only to obey.”

“But yet — ”

“Ah! madame, we Roman girls are helpless instruments in the hands of others. Almost all my young friends, who had brothers, had paid this debt for the advancement of their families. I had therefore no reason to complain; all that was done was in the ordinary course of things. My mother merely caressed me a little more than usual as the time for my leaving her approached. At last the day for the commencement of my novitiate arrived; my father prepared his five hundred crowns, my dowry for the convent, and we set out for Subiaco. It is only about nine leagues from Rome to Subiaco, but the roads are bad, and our journey was slow and fatiguing. Nevertheless, it pleased me. I welcomed it as a last enjoyment, and whispered adieu to the trees, the shrubs, the rocks, and even to the withered grass which lined the road. How could I tell if at the convent I should see trees, rocks, or shrubs? Suddenly, in the midst of my fancies, as we wound along between a wood and a mass of overhanging rock, the carriage stopped. My mother shrieked — my father seized his pistols, My thoughts descended suddenly to earth, for those who had stopped us were bandits.”

“My poor child!” said the princess, becoming more and more interested in the narrative.

“Well — shall I confess it, madame? — I was not much terrified, for these men had stopped us to take our money, and this money was the sum destined for my dowry to the convent. Consequently, if there was no dowry, my entrance into the convent would be delayed until my father could collect five hundred crowns more, and I knew well the time and trouble it had taken to amass these. But when the robbers, after having shared the booty, instead of permitting us to continue our journey, turned and seized me, regardless of the tears of my mother and the efforts of my father to defend me, I was struck with a sort of nameless terror, and shrieked aloud. They bound my hands, in spite of my struggles, and held me there while they threw the dice to ascertain to whom I should belong. I had abandoned all hope; my mother had fainted away, and my father lay writhing on the earth. At this moment a man mounted on horseback appeared among the robbers. He had spoken in a low voice to one of the sentinels on passing him, and the man had allowed him to proceed, exchanging a sign with him as he did so. He was of the middle height, of commanding features, and with a fixed and resolute glance; he continued to advance calmly at the usual pace of his steed, and when he had arrived opposite me he stopped. The bandit who was holding me bound, turned suddenly at the first blast which the stranger gave on a little whistle fixed to the end of his whip, and allowed me to slip from his hands. 'Come hither,' said the unknown; and, as the man appeared to hesitate, he leaned forward and whispered in his ear the single word 'Mac.' 'Benac,' replied the bandit; and then, like a lion subdued and crouching under the lash, he proceeded to untie my hands, as well as those of my father and mother. Then, as the money had been already divided, each man of the troop came forward in his turn to lay his share on a stone. Not a crown of the entire sum was wanting. 'Now, go!' said he to the banditti, and instantly every man disappeared among the surrounding woods.

“'Lorenza Feliciani,' said the stranger then, addressing me and fixing on me a look which had more than human power in it, 'proceed on your way; you are free!' My father and mother thanked this stranger, who knew me, but whom we did not know, and entered the carriage again. I accompanied them with a sort of regret; for some strange, irresistible power seemed to attract me to the man who had thus saved me. He remained immovable in the same spot, as if to protect our retreat, and as long as I could distinguish his form my eyes were fixed on him, and it was only when he was lost to view that the oppressive feeling which weighed upon my bosom was removed.”

“But who was this extraordinary man?” asked the princess, interested by the simplicity of the narrative.

“Deign to hear me farther, madame,” said Lorenza. “Alas! all is not yet told.”

“I listen.” said Madame Louise.

The young woman proceeded:

“Two hours afterward we reached Subiaco. During the rest of our journey we never ceased conversing about this mysterious protector, who had come so suddenly, like an angelic messenger, to our assistance, and whose power seemed so inexplicable and unbounded. My father, less credulous than I, thought that he must be the captain of one of the numerous troops of robbers which infest the neighborhood of Rome; but in this I could not agree, although I dared not openly oppose my opinion to my father's, which was the result of years and experience. My instinctive feeling of gratitude toward this man who had so wonderfully saved me revolted against the idea that he was a bandit; and every evening, in my devotions, I offered up a prayer to the Virgin for my unknown protector.

“The same day I entered the convent. I felt sadder, but also more resigned. An Italian, and consequently superstitious, I believed that God, by delivering me from the bandits, had wished to preserve me pure and unsullied for his service. I therefore gave myself up with ardor to the fulfillment of every duty of religion; and my father, learning this, drew up a petition to the Sovereign Pontiff to entreat him to shorten the period of my novitiate. I signed this document, which was expressed in terms so warm and earnest, that his holiness, seeing in it only the aspirations of a soul disgusted with the world, granted me a dispensation which fixed the term of my novitiate at a month instead of a year.

“This news, when announced to me, inspired me with neither joy nor grief. I was like one already dead to the world. For fifteen days I was kept closely confined, lest any worldly desires might arise in my breast. At the end of that time I was allowed to descend with the other sisters to the chapel. I entered and took my place behind the curtain which separated, or affected to separate, the nuns from the congregation. Looking through one of the openings, which seemed to me, as it were, a loophole from which I could obtain a last glance at the world I was leaving, I saw a man standing up alone in the middle of the kneeling crowd. He seemed to devour me with his eyes, and I felt again that strange sensation of uneasiness which I had before experienced, and which seemed to draw me, as it were, away from myself, as I had seen my brother draw a needle after the loadstone, even through a leaf of paper or a piece of wood.

“Overcome, subdued, without force to struggle against my feelings, I leaned forward, and with clasped hands, I murmured, 'Thanks, thanks!' The nuns looked at me with surprise. They could not comprehend my words or gestures, and, following my glance, they rose on their seats and gazed down into the body of the church. I also gazed, trembling. The stranger had disappeared. They questioned me, but I only turned pale and red by turns, and stammered out some incoherent words. From that moment, madame,” cried Lorenza, in a despairing voice, “the demon possessed me!”

“Nevertheless,” replied the princess, smiling, “I see nothing supernatural in all that you have related. Calm yourself, my sister, and proceed.”

“Ah, madame! it is because you cannot understand what I felt. Heart, soul, mind — the demon possessed all!”

“My sister, I fear greatly that this demon was only love,” said Madame Louise.

“Oh, love could not have made me suffer thus! Love would not so have oppressed my heart — it would not have shaken my frame as the storm shakes a slender reed! Love would not have whispered in my ear the sinful thought which haunted me at that moment.”

“What thought, my child?”

“Ought not I to have disclosed all to my confessor, madame?”

“Doubtless.”

“Well, the demon that possessed me whispered me, on the contrary, to keep it secret. I feared what he would think of me.”

“An evil thought, indeed; but it is often a very innocent demon which puts such thoughts in the heart of a woman. — Proceed.”

“On the following day I was summoned to the parlor. I found there one of my neighbors of the Via Frattina at Rome, a young married lady, who regretted very much the loss of my society, because every evening we used to meet to talk and sing together. Behind her, close to the door, stood a man wrapped in a cloak, who seemed her servant. He did not turn toward me, but I turned toward him; he did not speak, yet I knew him. He was my unknown protector. The same thrilling sensation I had already experienced shot through my frame. I felt my whole being subdued by the power of this man. Had it not been for the bars which held me captive, I should certainly have followed him. Although enveloped closely in his mantle, rays of light seemed to shoot from him which dazzled me; profound as was his silence, it had sounds which spoke to me a harmonious language. I made a violent effort to subdue my feelings, and asked my friend who the man was who accompanied her. She did not know him. Her husband, who had purposed accompanying her, had been prevented by some engagement, and had brought this friend of his, a stranger to her, to be her companion.

"My friend was religious, and, seeing in a corner of the parlor a Madonna who had the reputation of possessing miraculous powers, she would not depart without offering up a prayer before her. While she was engaged in her devotions, the man entered the room, approached close to me, uncovered his face, and fixed his glowing eyes on mine. I waited for him to speak — my bosom heaved as if in expectation of his words, but he contented himself with putting his arms through the bars which separated us, and extended them above my head. Immediately an inexpressible feeling of delight seized on my whole frame. He smiled; I returned his smile, closing my eyes, which seemed weighed down by an overpowering languor, as I did so. Then, as if he had merely wished to assure himself of his power over me, he immediately retired. As he disappeared I recovered by degrees the use of my senses; but I was still under the dominion of this strange hallucination, when my friend, having finished her prayer, rose, and, embracing me, took her leave. When I was undressing at night, I found in my bosom a note containing these words; 'In Rome, the man who loves a nun is punished by death. Will you kill him to whom you owe your life?' From that moment the demon possessed me entirely, for I lied before Heaven, madame, in not confessing that I thought of this man much more than of my salvation!"

Lorenza, terrified at what she had disclosed, paused to discover what impression it had produced on the mild and intelligent countenance of the princess.

“Still, “replied the princess, firmly, “all this is not possession by the evil one; it is merely the result of an unhappy passion, and I must again repeat that such thoughts cannot be spoken of here, except to express regret for them.”

“Regret? madame,” cried Lorenza. “What! you behold me in tears at your feet, beseeching you to rescue me from the power of this fearful man, and yet you doubt my regret? Oh! I feel more than regret — I feel remorse.”

“And yet,” said Madame Louise, “up to this point — ”

“Ah, madame, you have not yet heard all. Wait till I have finished, and then. I beseech you, judge me mercifully. Three days in the week we attended divine service in the chapel. The unknown was always present. I wished to resist him — I pretended that I was ill — I resolved not to go down. Alas for human weakness! — When the hour arrived, I descended with the nuns, as it were in despite of my own will. If he were not in the church when I entered, I had some moments of calm; but, as he drew near, I felt him coming. I could have said, 'Now he is a hundred paces off; now he is at the door; now he is in the church,' and that without even looking in the direction by which he came. Then, when he had reached his accustomed place, although my eyes had been fastened on my prayer-book, while I murmured the words before me, they turned involuntarily and rested on him. I could neither read nor pray; my whole looks — my whole thoughts — my whole being — were engrossed by this man. At first I could not look at him without fear; then I longed to see him; then my thoughts seemed to meet his; and often I saw him as in a dream in the night, and felt him pass beneath my window.

“The state of my mind did not escape the notice of my companions. The abbess was informed of it, and she in turn informed my parents. Three days before I was to pronounce my vows, my father, my mother, and my brother — the only relations I had in the world — entered my cell. They came ostensibly to bid me farewell, but I saw plainly that they had some other motive, and when my mother was left alone with me, she questioned me closely. And here the power of the evil one may clearly be seen; for instead of telling all, as I ought to have done, I denied everything obstinately.

“On the day when I was to take the veil, a strange struggle took place within me. I both dreaded and wished for the moment which was to give me up entirely to the service of God; and I felt that if the demon meditated a last effort to subdue me to his will, it would be at this solemn moment that he would attempt its execution."

"And had that strange man never written to you since the first letter which you found in your bosom?" asked the princess.

" Never, madame."

"And at that time you had never spoken to him?"

"Never, except in thought."

"Nor written to him?"

"Oh, never!"

"Proceed; you were at the day when you were to take the veil."

"That day, as I have told your highness, I hoped was to end my tortures, and I was impatient for the ceremony. 'When I belong to God entirely,' I thought, 'He will defend me against the demon who now wrestles with me for the possession of my soul.' In the meantime the hour arrived. I descended to the church, pale, restless, but yet less agitated than usual. My father, my mother, my brother, my friend from the Via Frattina who had come before to see me, and many other of our friends, were there. The inhabitants of the neighboring villages also thronged the church, for the report had been spread that I was lovely, and a lovely victim, they say, is most acceptable to the Lord.

"The service began. I would have hastened it by my prayers; for he was not present, and in his absence I felt that I was mistress of myself. Already the priest had raised the crucifix before me, and I was just about to extend my arm toward it, when the trembling which invariably announced the approach of my persecutor seized me. Forced by an irresistible attraction, I turned round and saw him standing near the pulpit, gazing at me more fixedly than he had ever yet done. In vain I endeavored to keep my eyes on the priest — service, ceremony, prayers, faded from my sight. I believe I was questioned concerning the rite; I remember I was pulled by the arm to arouse me, but I tottered like some inanimate object trembling on its base. I was shown the scissors, from which a ray of sunlight was reflected back with dazzling brightness, but I did not even wink. Then I felt the cold steel on my neck, and heard its sharp point in my hair.

"From that moment it seemed to me as if all strength left me; my soul rushed from my body to meet his, and I fell motionless on the pavement; yet, strange to say, not like one who had fainted, but like one overcome by sleep. I heard a loud murmur, and almost immediately after became insensible. The ceremony was interrupted with frightful tumult.”

The princess clasped her hands with a gesture of compassion.

“Ah, madame, was not that terrible?” said Lorenza; “and is it not easy to see in such an event the intervention of the enemy of man?”

“Take care, my poor girl,” said the princess, in a tone of tenderness and pity; “I think you are too much disposed to attribute to miraculous power that which is simply the result of human weakness. On seeing that man you fainted, that is all. — Proceed.”

“Oh, madame, do not say so, or at least, wait till you have heard all before you judge. Had I fainted, should I not have come to myself in ten minutes, or a quarter of an hour, or an hour at most? Should I not have been surrounded by my sister nuns, and have resumed courage and faith on seeing them?”

“Doubtless,” said Madame Louise. “Well, was it not so?”

“Madame,” said Lorenza, in a low, hurried whisper, “when I was restored to consciousness it was night. I felt a rapid, jolting motion, which fatigued me, and I raised my head, thinking that I was under the vaulted roof of the chapel, or within the curtains of my cell. I saw rocks, trees, clouds; then I felt a warm breath fanning my cheeks. I thought that it was the sick nurse who was endeavoring to restore me, and I made an effort to thank her. Madame, my head was resting on the bosom of a man — that man my persecutor! I felt myself to ascertain whether I was really alive, or if I was awake. I could not restrain a cry of terror. I was dressed in white, and wore on my head a crown of white roses like a bride, or like a maiden dressed for the tomb.”

The princess uttered an exclamation of astonishment. Lorenza hid her face in her hands.

“The next day,” continued Lorenza, sobbing, “I made inquiries, and ascertained that it was Wednesday. For three days, therefore, I had remained insensible. I am ignorant of all that happened during that time.”

CHAPTER LI.

The Count De Fenix.

A LONG and painful silence succeeded to this narrative, during which each of the two ladies seemed absorbed in her reflections. The princess was the first to break it.

"And you lent no assistance to this man to carry you off?" said she.

"None, madame."

"You are ignorant how you left the convent?"

"I am quite ignorant."

"Yet a convent is kept carefully guarded; there are bars to the windows; the walls are very high; there is a portress who keeps the keys of the grates always at her side. That is especially the case in Italy, where the rules are even more severe than in France."

"Madame. I can only reply, that from the moment of my awaking from my trance until now, I have searched my memory to discover any trace of what must have occurred; but in vain."

"But did you not reproach him for what he had done?"

"Oh yes, madame!"

"What was his excuse?"

"That he loved me."

"And what did you reply to that?"

"That I had a horror of him."

"Then you did not love him?"

"Oh no, no!"

"Are you quite certain?"

"Alas, madame, what I felt for that man was singular indeed! When he was present I was no longer myself; what he willed, I willed; what he commanded. I did; my soul had no power, my mind no will; a look from him subdued and fascinated me. Sometimes he seemed to inspire me with thoughts which were not mine; sometimes he seemed to draw from me ideas so deeply hidden that I had never even guessed that I possessed them. Oh! do you not see, madame, that there was magic in all this?"

"It is certainly strange, if not supernatural," said the princess. "But after you had been carried off, how did you live with that man?"

"He displayed the warmest affection for me, the sincerest attachment."

"He was a vicious man, no doubt?

"I do not think he was, madame; there was, on the contrary, something lofty and inspired in his manner of speaking."

"Come, come! you loved him; confess it!"

"No, no, madame," said the young woman, with mournful bitterness; "no. I did not love him."

"Then you ought to have left him; you ought to have appealed to the public authorities, and demanded to be restored to your parents."

"Madame, he watched me so closely that I could not fly."

"But why not write, then?"

"Wherever we stopped on the road, the house seemed to belong to him alone, and every one obeyed him. Several times I asked for pen, ink, and paper, but those to whom I applied were doubtless desired by him not to obey me, for they never even answered me."

"And how did you travel?"

"At first in a post-chaise; but at Milan, instead of a carriage we entered a kind of moving house, in which we continued our journey."

"But he must have sometimes left you alone?"

"Yes; but at these times, before leaving me, he approached me and said, 'Sleep!' I slept, and did not awake until his return."

The princess shook her head incredulously.

"You would have been able to escape," said she, "had you endeavored to do so with energy."

"Alas! madame, and yet it seemed to me as if I did; but perhaps I was fascinated."

"Yes; fascinated by words of love, and by his caresses."

"He seldom spoke of love, madame, and except a kiss imprinted on my forehead in the morning and one in the evening, he bestowed no caresses on me."

"Strange, strange indeed!" murmured the princess; then, as if some suspicion had crossed her mind, she said aloud; "And you are ready to assert again that you do not love him?"

"I do assert it again, madame."

"And no earthly bond unites you to him?"

"None, madame."

"Then should he claim you, he would have no right over you?"

"None, madame, none."

"But," added the princess, after a moment's reflection. "How did you escape at last? I do not understand that."

"Madame. I took advantage of a violent storm which occurred while we were near a town called Nancy, I think. He left the part of the carriage in which I was, to go into another compartment of it, to talk to an old man who was with us. Then I leaped on his horse and fled."

"And why did you prefer remaining in France to returning to Italy?"

"I reflected that I could not return to Rome, since my parents and friends there would certainly imagine I had been the accomplice of that man, and perhaps refuse to receive me. I resolved therefore to come to Paris, and to endeavor to remain concealed; or to try and reach some other great city, where no eye — and, above all, his — could discover me. When I reached Paris, madame, every one was speaking of your retirement into the Convent of the Carmelites. They lauded your piety, your charity toward the wretched, your pity for the afflicted. A ray of hope darted through my soul, and I was struck with the conviction that you would be generous enough to receive me, and powerful enough to protect me."

"You appeal always to my power, my poor child. Is he, then, so powerful?"

"Oh, yes, madame!"

"But who is he, then? Through delicacy I have until now refrained from asking his name; but if I am to defend you, I must know against whom."

"Oh, madame, even on that point I cannot enlighten you. I know neither who he is nor what he is. All that I know is, that a king could not inspire more respect, a deity could not receive greater adoration, than he, from those to whom he deigns to reveal himself."

"But how do they address him? What is his name?"

" I have heard him addressed by different names; at present, however, I remember only two of them. One is given him by the old man, who, as I told you, traveled with us from Milan; the other he gives himself."

"What does the old man call him?"

"Acharat — is not that a heathenish name, madame?"

“And what is his other name?”

“Joseph Balsamo.”

“And what can you tell me of him?”

“That he seems to know all persons, to penetrate into all things; he is contemporary with all times, has lived in all ages. He speaks — may Heaven pardon such blasphemies! — he speaks of Alexander, Caesar, and Charlemagne, as if he had known them, yet I am sure they have been dead a very long time. But what is worse, he will talk of Caiaphas, Pilate, and our blessed Saviour, as if he had been present at the crucifixion.”

“He is same charlatan, I perceive,” said the princess.

“I do not know exactly what that means, madame; but what I do know is, that he is a dangerous, terrible man. All yield to him, all bend before him, all fall prostrate at his word. You think him defenseless, he is armed; you think him alone, and he causes men to rise out of the earth; and that without an effort; by a gesture, a word, a smile.”

“It is well,” said the princess. “Whoever he be, take courage, my child, you shall be protected from him.”

“By you, madame, by you?”

“Yes, by me; so long as you yourself do not abandon my protection. But cease from this time to believe, and above all cease to endeavor to make me believe, in the superstitious visions which are the offspring of your diseased imagination. The walls of St. Denis will guard you securely against infernal powers, and against powers even more to be feared, those of wicked men. And now, madame, what are your intentions?”

“With these jewels, which belong to me, madame, I wish to pay my dowry to some convent — to this convent, if possible.”

And Lorenza laid on a table precious bracelets, valuable rings, a magnificent diamond and other jewels, the whole worth about twenty thousand crowns.

“Are those ornaments your own?” asked the princess.

“Yes, madame. He gave them to me, and I devote them to the church. I have only one wish with regard to his property.”

“What is that?”

“That his Arabian horse, Djerid, the instrument of my deliverance, be restored to him if he demand it.”

“But with regard to yourself, you will on no account return to him?”

“On no account.”

“Then what will you do? Am I to assume that it is your wish to enter this convent and continue in the practice of those duties which were interrupted at Subiaco by the extraordinary circumstances you have related to me?”

“It is my dearest wish, madame; at your feet I supplicate its fulfillment.”

“Be tranquil, my child; from this day you shall live with us; and when, by the exemplary conduct which I expect from you, you have shown that you deserve that favor, you shall take the vows, and I answer for it, no one shall carry you away from St. Denis while your abbess watches over you.”

Lorenza threw herself at the feet of her benefactress, and poured forth expressions of gratitude the most tender and the most sincere; but all at once, rising on one knee, she listened, turned pale, and trembled.

“Oh, heavens! Oh, heavens!” she exclaimed.

“What is the matter?” asked Madame Louise.

“My whole frame trembles. He is coming! He is coming!”

“Who is coming?”

“He who has sworn to destroy my soul.”

“That man?”

“Yes, that man — do you not see how my hand trembles. Oh!” continued she, in a tone of anguish, “he approaches! — he is near!”

“You are mistaken.”

“No, madame, no! Hold me! He draws me to him against my will. Hold me! Hold me!”

Madame Louise seized her by the arm.

“Courage! courage! my poor child,” said she; “were it even he, you are in safety here.”

“He approaches! He approaches!” cried Lorenza, with despair and horror in her voice, her eyes fixed, and her arms extended toward the door of the room.

“This is madness. Dare any one, think you, enter unannounced the apartment of Madame Louise of France? To obtain admittance, he must be the bearer of an order from the king.”

“Oh, madame, I know not how he procured an entrance,” cried Lorenza, recoiling with terror; “but I do know that he is ascending the stairs — that he is scarcely ten paces distant — that he is here.”

At that moment the door opened. Alarmed at such a strange coincidence, the princess could not prevent herself from starting back. A nun appeared.

“Who is there?” asked the abbess, hurriedly, “and what do you want?”

“Madame, a gentleman has just arrived who wishes to speak to your royal highness?”

“His name?”

“The Count de Fenix.”

“Is that he?” asked the princess, turning to Lorenza, “and do you know that name?”

“I do not know that name — but it is he, madame — it is he!”

“What does this gentleman want?” inquired the princess, addressing the nun.

“Having been sent on a mission to the king of France by his majesty the king of Prussia, he wishes, he says, to have the honor of a moment's conversation with your royal highness.”

The princess reflected for a moment; then, turning to Lorenza, “Retire into that cabinet,” said she. Lorenza obeyed. “And you, sister,” continued the princess, “admit this gentleman.” The nun curtseyed low and left the room.

Having ascertained that the door of the cabinet was securely fastened, the princess seated herself in her armchair, and awaited the termination of the strange scene in which she found herself involved. Yet she could not subdue a certain degree of agitation.

Almost immediately the nun reappeared, followed by the person whom we have already seen, on the day of the presentation, announce himself as the Count de Fenix.

He was dressed in the same costume, a Prussian uniform, with the military wig and black stock. His large expressive eyes were cast down at first in the presence of the royal abbess, but only in a manner to indicate the respect which any gentleman, how high soever his rank, was called on to exhibit before a princess of France. But immediately raising them again, with a look which almost implied that he had already shown too great humility.

“Madame,” said he, “I thank your royal highness for the favor you have shown me; but I did not doubt that I should obtain this favor, knowing that your royal highness is the generous patron of the unhappy.”

“Sir, I endeavor to assist all such,” replied the princess, with dignity; for she felt certain that she should, before the lapse of many minutes, put to shame this man, who so impudently dared to claim her protection, after having deceived and ill-treated one confided to his care.

The count bowed, without betraying any consciousness of understanding the double meaning of her words.

She then continued, with something of irony in her tone; “In what way can I render you any assistance, sir?”

“You can aid me in a matter of the greatest moment, madame.”

“Speak, sir!”

“None but weighty considerations could have induced me, madame, to intrude on your royal highness in this retreat which you have chosen; but you have, I believe, given shelter here to a person in whom I am deeply interested.”

“The name of that person, sir?”

“Lorenza Feliciani.”

“And how does her fate concern you? Is she your relation, your sister?”

“She is my wife.”

“Your wife?” said the princess, raising her voice so that she might be heard in the cabinet. “Lorenza Feliciani is the Countess de Fenix?”

“Yes, madame, Lorenza Feliciani is the Countess de Fenix,” replied the count with the utmost coolness.

“I have no Countess de Fenix in this convent, sir,” replied the princess.

But the count was not to be so repulsed. “Perhaps, madame,” said he, “your royal highness is not convinced that Lorenza Feliciani and the Countess de Fenix are one and the same person;”

“I confess, sir, that you have guessed my thoughts; I am not well convinced on that point.”

“If your royal highness will but command Lorenza Feliciani to be brought hither, you will soon have all doubts on that head cleared away. I entreat your highness's pardon for urging the matter thus, but I am tenderly attached to the young lady, and she herself, I think, regrets being separated from me.”

“Do you think so, sir?”

“Yes, madame, unworthy as I am, I think so.

“Ah!” thought the princess, “Lorenza was right; this is indeed a most dangerous man.”

The count preserved the most perfect calmness of demeanor, and adhered to the most courtly politeness.

“I must temporize,” thought the princess to herself.

“Sir,” said she. “I cannot give up to you a woman who is not here. If you love, as you say you do, the person whom you seek, I can easily understand why you thus persist in endeavoring to find her; but believe me, to be successful you must seek elsewhere.”

The count, on entering the room, had cast a rapid glance on every article in it, and his eyes had rested for a single instant only, but that had been sufficient, on a table in a dark corner, on which Lorenza had placed those jewels which she had offered to pay as her dowry to the convent. He knew them again instantly.

“If your royal highness would have the goodness to recollect, and I venture to entreat you to do so, you will remember that Lorenza Feliciani was very lately in this room, that she placed on that table those jewels, and that, after having had the honor of conversing with your royal highness, she withdrew.”

Just then he caught the eye of the princess turning unconsciously toward the cabinet. “She withdrew,” he continued, “into that cabinet, so that now I only wait for the permission of your royal highness to order her to return hither, which she will do immediately, I feel certain.”

The princess colored with shame at the thought that she had lowered herself so far as to attempt to deceive this man, from whom, as it seemed, nothing could be hidden; and she could not conceal her vexation at the uselessness of all her efforts. She recollected, however, that Lorenza had fastened the door from within, and that, consequently, nothing but the impulse of her own free will could induce her to leave the cabinet.

“But even suppose she were here,” said she, “what would she do?”

“Nothing, madame; she would merely tell your highness that she wishes to go with me, being my wife.”

This last word reassured the princess, for she recollected the protestations of Lorenza.

“Your wife!” exclaimed she, with indignation. “Are you sure of that?”

“Your highness does not seem to believe me. Nevertheless, it is not quite incredible that the Count de Fenix should have married Lorenza Feliciani, and that, having married her, he demands back his wife.”

“His wife!” she repeated impatiently; “you dare to say Lorenza Feliciani is your wife?”

“Yes, madame, I dare to say so,” answered the count, with the most natural air in the world, “because it is true.”

"You are married to her?"

"I am."

"Legitimately?"

"Certainly, and if your royal highness thus persists in doubting my word, I shall place before your eyes the register of my marriage, signed by the priest who united us."

The princess started; so much coolness and self-possession shook all her convictions.

The count opened his pocket-book and unfolded a paper. "This is the register of my marriage, madame, and the proof that I have a right to claim that woman us my wife; if your royal highness will read it and note the signature — "

"The signature!" repeated the princess, in a tone of doubt more insulting to the stranger than her indignation had been, "but if this signature —

"This signature is that of the vicar of Saint Jean de Strasbourg, who is well known to Prince Louis, Cardinal de Rohan, and if his highness were here —

"His highness is here!" cried the princess, fixing her flashing eyes on the count. "He has not yet left St. Denis, and is now with the canons of the cathedral; so that nothing is easier for us than to ascertain the truth of what you assert."

"That is indeed a fortunate circumstance for me." replied the count, coolly putting up the paper again in his pocketbook. "When your royal highness has heard the cardinal's testimony, I trust that your highness's unjust suspicions will be dispelled."

"Sir, this impudent perseverance is most revolting to me," said the princess, ringing her bell violently.

The nun who had introduced the count appeared.

"Let my groom mount his horse instantly, and carry this note to his highness the Cardinal de Rohan; he will be found at the chapter of the cathedral. Let him come hither without a moment's delay — I wait his arrival anxiously."

While giving these directions, the princess wrote hastily a few words on a slip of paper, and, handing it to the nun, she added in a whisper — "Let a couple of archers of the guard he placed in the corridor, and take care that no one leave the convent without my permission."

The count had followed all the movements of the princess, whom he now saw determined to contest the point with him to the very last; but, evidently decided not to yield the victory to her, he drew nearer to the door of the cabinet while she was writing, fixed his eyes on it, pronounced some words in a low voice, and extending his hands toward it, moved them to and fro with a regular and steady motion.

The princess, turning, saw him in this attitude, and exclaimed — “What are you doing there, sir?”

“Madame,” said the count, “I am adjuring Lorenza Feliciani to appear, and declare to you of her own free will that I am not an impostor nor a forger. But this is not to prevent your royal highness from requiring the other proofs you have mentioned.”

“Sir!”

“Lorenza Feliciani,” cried the count, overpowering all opposition, even that of the princess, “leave that cabinet and come hither — come!”

But the door remained closed.

“Come forth! — it is my will!” repeated the count.

Then the key was heard turning in the lock, and the princess, with inexpressible alarm, saw the young girl enter, her eyes fixed on the count without any expression either of anger or hatred.

“What are you doing, my child?” cried the princess. “Why do you return to the man from whom you fled? You were in safety here — I told you so.”

“She is also in safety in my house, madame,” answered the count. “Are you not, Lorenza? Are you not safe with me?”

“Yes!” replied the young girl.

The princess, overcome with astonishment, clasped her hands and sank back in her chair.

“And now. Lorenza,” added the count, quietly, but yet with a tone of command, “I am accused of having made you act contrary to your wishes. Say, have I ever done so?”

“Never,” answered the young girl, clearly and distinctly, yet without accompanying the denial by any movement.

“In that case!” cried the princess, “what do you mean by all that tale of your having been carried off?”

Lorenza remained silent, and looked at the count as if life and speech hung on his lips.

“Her highness wishes doubtless to know how you left the convent, Lorenza. Relate to her all that happened, from the moment of your fainting until you awoke in the post-chaise.”

Lorenza was still silent.

“Relate all that occurred from first to last — do not omit anything,” continued the count; “it is my will that you should do so.”

“I do not remember,” she replied.

“Search your memory, and you will recollect all.”

“Ah, yes, yes!” said Lorenza, in the same monotonous tone, “now I remember.”

“Speak, then.”

“When I fainted, at the very moment that the scissors touched my hair, I was carried back to my cell and laid on my bed. My mother remained with me until night, then, seeing that I continued in the same state of insensibility, they sent for the village surgeon. He felt impulse, passed a looking-glass before my lips, and, discovering no sign of life in me, pronounced me dead.”

“But how do you know all that?” asked the princess.

“Her highness wishes to know how you know that,” repeated the count.

“Strange!” replied Lorenza, “I was able to see and hear, but I could not open my eyes, nor speak, nor move. I was in a sort of lethargy.”

“In fact,” said the princess, “Tronchin has sometimes spoken to me of persons who had fallen into a lethargy, and who, being to all appearance dead, were interred alive.”

“Proceed, Lorenza.”

“My mother was in despair, and would not believe that I was dead; she said that she would pass that night and the following day by my side. She did so; but the thirty-six hours during which she watched over me passed away without my making the slightest movement, or without a sigh having escaped my lips. Thrice a priest came to visit my mother; and each time he told her that it was rebelling against the will of God thus to persist in keeping my body on earth when He possessed my soul; for, as I had died at the moment when I was pronouncing my vows, he did not doubt, he said, but that my soul had winged its flight to heaven. My mother, by her entreaties, prevailed on him to allow her to watch by me another night — that of Monday. On Tuesday morning they found me still insensible.

“My mother withdrew, vanquished, leaving me to the nuns, who by this time were loud in their exclamations against her impiety. The tapers were lighted in the chapel, in which, according to custom. I was to be laid out during one day and night. As I had not pronounced my vows, the sisters dressed me in a white robe, put a crown of white roses on my head, crossed my arms on my bosom, and placed my coffin on a bier. During this last operation a thrill of horror ran through my veins; for I repeat, although my eyelids were closed. I saw everything as if they had been wide open.

“The bier was carried into the church, and there — my face still uncovered, as is the custom in Italy — I was placed in the middle aisle, with lighted tapers around me, and a vase of holy water at my feet. During the day the peasants of Subiaco entered the church, prayed for me, and sprinkled my body with the holy water. Night came on; and, as the visitors had ceased, the doors of the church were closed, except a little side door, and the nun who took care of the sick remained alone beside me.

“One terrible thought never left me during my trance, and now it became more dreadful; on the morrow I was to be buried — buried alive, if some unknown power did not come to my aid! I heard the hours strike, one after another; first nine, then ten, then eleven. Each stroke found an echo in my trembling heart; for, oh, horror! I listened to my own death-knell.

“What efforts did I not make to break my icy sleep — to burst the iron bonds which held me down in my coffin! But Heaven at last had pity on me. Midnight struck. At the very first stroke, my frame was shaken by a convulsive shudder, like that which I always experienced when Acharat approached me; then my heart was stirred, and I beheld him appeal at the door of the church.”

“Were your feelings at that moment those of fear?” asked the Count de Fenix.

“No; they were feelings of happiness, joy, ecstasy! For I knew that he came to snatch me from the dreadful death which seemed before inevitable. He advanced slowly toward my coffin, looked on me for a moment with a melancholy smile — then he said, 'Arise, follow me!' The bonds which fastened me were broken at that powerful voice; I rose, and I put one foot out of the coffin. 'Are you glad to live?' he asked. 'Oh, yes!' I replied. 'Follow me, then,' said he.

“The sister who was appointed to watch the dead had fulfilled this duty toward so many of the nuns that she had become careless and indifferent, and slept soundly in her chair. I passed close by her without awaking her, as I followed him, who, for the second — time, had saved me from death. We reached the outer court and once more saw the cloudless firmament, studded with stars, and felt the cool night-breeze, which the dead feel not, but which is so grateful to the living.

“'And now,' said he, 'before leaving the convent, choose for yourself. Do you wish to be a nun or to follow me?' 'I will follow you,' I replied. We reached the entrance gate; it was locked. 'Where are the keys?' he asked. 'In the pocket of the portress, on a chair near her bed,' I replied. 'Enter the lodge,' said he, 'and bring them without making any noise to awake her.' I obeyed, entered the lodge, found the key, and brought it to him.

“Five minutes afterward the gate was opened, and we were in the street. I took his arm, and we hurried toward the outskirts of the village of Subiaco. About a hundred paces from its last house, a postchaise was in waiting; we entered it and drove off at a rapid pace.”

“And no force was used — no threat was uttered — you followed him voluntarily?”

Lorenza remained mute.

“Her royal highness asks you, Lorenza, if by any threat, any violence, you were forced to accompany me?”

“No.”

“And why did you do so?”

“Say, why did you accompany me?”

“Because I loved you,” said Lorenza.

The Count de Fenix turned toward the princess with a triumphant smile.

CHAPTER LII.

The Cardinal De Rohan.

STRONG AS was the mind of the Princess Louise, all that she had just heard seemed so extraordinary to her, that she could not help asking herself whether the man who stood before her were not a real magician, disposing of hearts and understandings at his will.

But the Count de Fenix was not yet satisfied.

“That is not all, madame,” said he, “and your royal highness has only heard a part of our history. Some doubts might remain on your mind did you not hear the rest from her own lips.”

Then, turning toward the young woman —

“Do you remember, dear Lorenza.” said he, “the rest of our journey? — and how we visited Milan, the lake Maggiore the Oberland, the Righi, and the magnificent Rhine — the Tiber of the north?”

“Yes,” answered she, still in the same monotonous voice — “yes; Lorenza saw all that.”

“Dragged onward by that man, was it not, my child? — yielding to an irresistible power which you did not yourself comprehend?” asked the princess.

“Why should you think so, madame, after what your highness has heard? But if you wish for yet more palpable and material proofs, here is a letter written by Lorenza to me. I was obliged to leave her alone for a short time at Mayence. Well! she regretted me and longed for my return; for in my absence she wrote me these lines, which your highness may read.”

The count took out of his pocket-book a note, which he handed to the princess. She read as follows:

“Return, Acharat! When you leave me, all hope and joy depart. Ah, when shall I be yours through all eternity?

“LORENZA.”

The princess rose, auger flashing in her eyes, and approached Lorenza with the note in her hand. The young woman appeared neither to see nor hear her. Her whole soul seemed to hang on the count's lips.

"I understand." said the count, quickly, before the princess could utter a word; "your highness doubts whether this note be really written by her or not. That point can easily be settled. Lorenza, speak! Who wrote this note?"

He took the note, placed it in her hand, and she immediately pressed it to her heart.

"Lorenza wrote it," said she.

"Does Lorenza know what it contains?"

"Yes."

"Then tell the princess what is in the letter, that she may believe me when I say you love me. Tell her — it is my

will."

Lorenza appeared to make an effort; then without opening the note, or turning her eves on it, she read its contents.

"This is incredible." said the princess; "I cannot trust the evidence of my own senses; there is something inexplicable and supernatural in all this."

"It was this letter," continued the Count de Fenix, as if he had not heard what the princess said, "which determined me to hasten our marriage. I loved Lorenza as much as she loved me. We were in a position which might have given rise to unfounded suspicions. Besides, in the adventurous life which I led, some accident might happen to me — I might be killed — I might die, and I wished, in case of such an event, that all my fortune should belong to Lorenza. On arriving at Strasbourg, therefore, we were married?"

"You were married?"

"Yes, madame."

"It is impossible!"

"Why so, madame?" said the count, smiling. "What is there impossible in the fact that the Count de Fenix should marry Lorenza Feliciam!"

"But she told me that she is not your wife."

The count, without replying, turned to Lorenza; "Do you remember on what day we were married?" asked he.

"Yes." she replied; "it was the third of May."

"Where?"

"At Strasbourg."

"In what church?"

“In the cathedral; in the chapel of St. John.”

“Did you offer any opposition to our union.”

“No; I was only too happy.”

“Because, Lorenza,” continued the count, “the princess thinks that the marriage was forced on you — that you hate me.” As he said these words he took renza's hand; a thrill of rapture seemed to run through her whole frame.

“I hate you!” she exclaimed; “oh, no! I love you; you are good, you are generous, you are powerful!”

The count turned toward the princess, as if he had said, “You hear.”

Seized with a kind of horror, the princess had recoiled from the pair before her, and sank at the foot of an ivory crucifix which was fastened against the black velvet hangings of the room.

“Does your royal highness wish for any further information?” asked the count, as be released Lorenza's hand.

“Sir,” cried the princess, “do not approach me! — nor she either!”

At this moment the noise of wheels was heard in the courtyard, and a carriage stopped at the entrance door.

“Ah!” exclaimed the princess, “here comes the cardinal, and we shall now know the truth.”

The Count de Fenix bowed, said a few words to Lorenza in a low voice, and waited with the patience of a man perfectly secure of his position. A moment afterward the door opened, and his eminence the Cardinal de Rohan was announced.

The princess, reassured by the presence of a third person, resumed her seat, and desired him to be admitted. The cardinal entered; but scarcely had he made his salutation to the princess, when, perceiving the count, he exclaimed with surprise, “You here, sir!”

“Do you know this person?” asked the princess, more and more astonished.

“Yes, madame,” said the cardinal.

“Then,” cried she, “you will tell me what he is.”

“Nothing is more easy.” replied the cardinal; “the gentleman is a sorcerer.”

“A sorcerer!” murmured the princess.

“Pardon me, madame,” said the count; “but I trust that his highness will explain his words to your satisfaction.”

“Has the gentleman been making any predictions to your royal highness, that I see you with a countenance of so much alarm?” asked M, de Rohan.

“The register of the marriage! The register, immediately!” exclaimed the princess.

The cardinal stared with the utmost surprise, not comprehending what this exclamation meant.

“Here it is,” said the count, presenting it to the cardinal.

“Sir, what is this?” said he.

“I wish to know,” said the princess, “whether the signature to that document be genuine or not.”

The cardinal took the paper and read it.

“Yes,” said he, “it is a perfectly legal register of a marriage, and the signature is that of Monsieur Remy, vicar of St. John's, in Strasbourg. But in what way does that concern your royal highness?”

“Oh, it concerns me deeply, sir! — So the signature is correct?”

“ Certainly; but I will not guarantee that it may not have been extorted — “ “Extorted!” cried the princess. “Yes, that is possible.”

“And the consent of Lorenza, also?” said the count, with a tone of irony which was aimed directly at the princess.

“But by what means, cardinal — by what means could this signature have been extorted? Do you know?”

“By means which this gentleman has at his disposal — by means of magic!

“Magic? Is it you, cardinal, who speak to me of magic?”

“Yes, I have said that this gentleman is a sorcerer; and I shall not unsay it.”

“Your eminence must be jesting!”

“By no means; and the proof is, that I am going, in the presence of your highness, to have a very serious explanation with him.”

“I was myself going to request it from your highness,” said the count.

“Excellent! But pray, do not forget,” said the cardinal, haughtily, “that it is I who am the questioner.”

“And do not forget, also,” said the count, “that I will answer all your questions before her royal highness, if you insist upon it; but I feel certain that you will not insist.”

The cardinal smiled contemptuously.

“Sir,” said he, “to play the magician well is, in our times, rather a difficult task. I have seen you at work, and, to do you justice, you were very successful; but every one will not show the patience, and, above all, the generosity, of her royal highness the dauphiness.”

“The dauphiness!” exclaimed the princess.

“Yes, madame,” said the count; “I have had the honor of being presented to her royal highness.”

“And how did you repay that honor, sir? Come! Speak.”

“Alas! much worse than I could have wished; for I have no personal hatred against men, and above all none against women.”

“But what did he really do before my august niece?” asked the princess.

“I had the misfortune, madame, to tell her the truth, which she demanded of me.”

“Yes,” said the cardinal, “a truth which made her swoon!”

“Was it my fault,” cried the count, in that commanding tone which he could at times assume, “was it my fault that the truth was so terrible that it produced such effects? Was it I who sought the princess? Did I request to be presented to her? On the contrary, I avoided her; I was brought before her almost by force, and she positively commanded me to reply to her questions.”

“But what, then, sir, was that truth which you declare to have been so terrible?” asked the princess.

“The truth which was hidden by the veil of futurity. I raised the veil, and then she beheld that future which appeared so alarming to your royal highness, that you fled for shelter from it to a cloister to offer up tears and prayers before the altar — ”

“Sir! sir!” cried the princess.

“Is it my fault, if the future, which was revealed to her as one of the sainted, was shadowed forth to me as a prophet, and if the dauphiness, whom it threatens personally, terrified at the sight, fainted when I declared it to her?”

“You hear him acknowledge it!” said the cardinal.

“Alas!” sighed the princess.

“For her reign is doomed.” continued the count, “as the most fatal and disastrous to the monarchy of any on record.”

“Oh, sir!” exclaimed the princess.

"For yourself, madame," continued the count, "your prayers have perhaps obtained favor, for you will not see those events which I foretell; you will be in the bosom of the Lord when they come to pass. But pray! Pray always!"

The princess, overcome by his prophetical words, which agreed too well with the terrors of her own soul, sank again on her knees at the foot of the crucifix, and commenced to pray fervently.

The count turned to the cardinal, and, preceding him toward the embrasure of a window, "Now that we are alone," said he, "what does your eminence wish with me?"

The cardinal hastened to join him. The princess seemed wholly absorbed in her prayers, and Lorenza remained silent and motionless in the middle of the room. Her eyes were wide open, but she seemed to see nothing. The two men stood apart in the embrasure of the window, half concealed by the curtains.

"What are your highness's wishes?" repeated the count.

"First, I wish to know who you are," replied the cardinal.

"Yet you seem to know. Did you not say that I was a sorcerer?"

"Yes; but when I met you formerly you were called Joseph Balsamo, and now you are called the Count de Fenix."

"Well, that only proves that I have changed my name, nothing more."

"Very true; but are you aware that such changes may make M. de Sartines, the minister of police, rather inquisitive about you?"

The count smiled.

"Oh, sir," said he, "this is a petty warfare for a Rohan! What! your eminence quibbles about names? Verba et voces, as the Latin has it. Is there nothing worse with which I can be reproached?"

"You seem to have become satirical," said the cardinal.

"I have not become so; it is my character."

"In that case I shall do myself the pleasure of lowering your tone a little."

"Do so, sir."

"I am certain I shall please the dauphiness by so doing."

"Which may be not altogether useless to you, considering the terms on which you stand at present with her," answered Balsamo, with the greatest coolness.

"And, suppose, most learned dealer in horoscopes, that I should cause you to be arrested?" said the cardinal.

"I should say that your eminence would commit a very grave mistake in doing so."

"Indeed?" said the prince-cardinal, with withering contempt, "And, pray, who will suffer from my mistake?"

"Yourself, my lord cardinal."

"Then I shall give the order for your arrest this moment, sir; and we shall soon know who this Baron Balsamo, Count de Fenix, is, this illustrious branch of a genealogical tree not to be discovered in any field of heraldry in Europe!"

"But why has your highness not asked for information respecting me from your friend the Count de Breteuil?"

"M, de Breteuil is no friend of mine."

"That is to say, he is no longer so. Yet he must have been one of your best friends when you wrote him a certain letter —

"What letter?" asked the cardinal, drawing nearer to the count.

"A little closer, M, le Cardinal. I do not wish to speak loud, for fear of compromising you — that letter which you wrote from Vienna to Paris, to endeavor to prevent the marriage of the dauphin."

The prelate could not repress a gesture of alarm.

"I know that letter by heart," continued the count, coldly.

"Then Breteuil has turned traitor?"

"How so?"

"Because when the marriage was decided on, I demanded back my letter, and he told me he had burned it."

"Ah! he dared not tell you he had lost it!"

"Lost it?"

"Yes, and you know that a lost letter may be found by some one."

"And so my letter — "

"Was found by me. Oh! by the merest chance, I assure you, one day, when crossing the marble court at Versailles."

"And did you not return it to the Count de Breteuil?"

"I took good care not to do so."

"Why so?"

"Because, being a sorcerer, I knew that although I wished to be of all the service I could to your highness, you wished to do me all the harm you could. So, you understand — ? A disarmed man who journeys through a wood, where he knows he will be attacked, would be a fool not to pick up a loaded pistol which he found at his foot."

The cardinal's head swam, and he was obliged to lean against the window-frame for a few minutes; but after an instant's hesitation, during which the count eagerly watched every variation of his countenance:

"So be it," said he. "It shall never be said that a prince of my house gave way before the threats of a charlatan. Though that letter should be shown to the dauphiness herself — though, in a political point of view, it ruin me. I shall maintain my character as a loyal subject and faithful ambassador. I shall say what is the truth, that I thought the alliance hurtful to the interests of my country, and my country will defend me, and weep for my fate."

"But if some one should happen to relate how the young, handsome, gallant ambassador, confident in the name of Rohan and the title of prince, and being most graciously received by the Archduchesse Marie Antoinette, said so, not because he saw anything in the marriage hurtful to France, but because in his vanity he imagined he saw something more than affability in her manner toward him? What would the loyal subject and faithful ambassador reply then?"

"He would deny, sir, that there ever had existed the sentiment that your words imply; there is no proof that it did exist."

"Yes, sir, you mistake. There is the strongest proof, in the coldness of the dauphiness toward you."

The cardinal hesitated.

"My lord," said the count, "trust me it is better for us to remain good friends than to quarrel — which we should have done before this, had I not been more prudent than you."

"Good friends?"

"Why not? Our friends are those who render us good offices."

"Have I ever asked you for any?"

"No, and that is where you have been wrong; for during the two days you were in Paris — "

"I in Paris?"

"Yes, you. Why attempt to hide that from me, who am a sorcerer? You left the dauphiness at Soissons, you came post to Paris by Villers-Cotterets, and Dammartin — that is to say, the shortest road — and you hastened to request your kind friends there for assistance, which they all refused. After their refusals you once more set out post for Compiegne in despair."

The cardinal seemed overwhelmed. “And what sort of assistance might I have expected from you,” he asked, “had I addressed myself to you?”

“That assistance which a man who makes gold can grant.”

“And what matters it to me that you can make gold?”

“Peste! when your highness has to pay five hundred thousand francs within forty-eight hours! Am I not right? — Is not that the sum?”

“Yes; that is indeed the sum.”

“And yet you ask what matters it to have a friend who can make gold? It matters just this, that the hundred thousand francs which you cannot procure elsewhere, you may procure from him.”

“And where?” asked the cardinal.

“In the Rue St. Claude.”

“How shall I know your house?”

“By a griffin's head in bronze, which serves as knocker to the gate.”

“When may I present myself?”

“The day after to-morrow, my lord, and afterward you may come as often and whenever you please. But stay; we have just finished our conversation in time, for the princess, I see, has ended her prayers.”

The cardinal was conquered, and, no longer attempting to resist, he approached the princess; “Madame,” said he, “I am obliged to confess that the Count de Fenix is perfectly correct; his register of marriage is authentic and valid, and he has explained all the circumstances to my perfect satisfaction.”

The count bowed. “Has your royal highness any further commands for me?” he asked.

“I wish to speak once more to the young woman,” she replied. Then, turning to Lorenza, “Is it of your own free and unrestrained will that you leave this convent, in which you sought refuge?”

“Her highness asks you,” said Balsamo, quickly, “whether it is of your own free and unfettered choice that you leave this convent. Answer, Lorenza.”

“Yes,” said the young woman, “it is of my own free and unfettered will.”

“And to accompany your husband, the Count de Fenix?”

“And to accompany me?” repeated the count.

“Oh, yes!” exclaimed Lorenza.

“In that case,” said the princess, “I wish to retain neither one nor other; for it would be doing violence to your feelings. But if there is in all this anything out of the common order of events, may the vengeance of Heaven fall on him who, for his own advantage or profit, troubles the harmony, the proper course of nature! Go, Count de Fenix! Go, Lorenza Feliciani! — only take with you your jewels.”

“They are for the use of the poor, madame,” said the count, “and distributed by your hands, the alms will be doubly acceptable to God. I only demand back my horse, Djerid.”

“You can claim him as you pass, sir. Go.”

The count bowed low, and gave his arm to Lorenza, who took it and left the room without uttering a word.

“Ah, my lord cardinal,” said the princess, shaking her head sorrowfully, “there are incomprehensible and fatal omens in the very air which we breathe!”

CHAPTER LIII.

The Return From Saint Denis.

AFTER LEAVING Philip, Gilbert, as we have said, had re-entered the crowd. But not now with a heart bounding with joyful anticipation did he throw himself into the noisy billow of human beings; his soul was wounded to the quick, and Philip's kind reception of him, and all his friendly offers of assistance, had no power to soothe him.

Andree never suspected that she had been cruel to Gilbert. The lovely and serene young girl was entirely ignorant that there could be between her and the son of her nurse any point of contact either for pain or for pleasure. She revolved above all the lower spheres of life, casting light or shadow on them according as she herself was gay or sad. But now the shadow of her disdain had fallen on Gilbert and frozen him to the soul, while she, following only the impulse of her nature, knew not even that she had been scornful. But Gilbert, like a gladiator disarmed, had offered his naked breast to the full brunt of her haughty looks and disdainful words, and now, bleeding at every pore, his philosophy suggested nothing better than the consolation of despair.

From the moment that he once more plunged into the crowd, he cared neither for horses nor men. Collecting all his strength, he dashed forward like a — wild boar with a spear in its side, and, at the risk of being crushed or trodden under foot, he opened a passage for himself through the multitude. When the denser mass of the people had been crossed, he began to breathe more freely, and looking round, he discovered that he was alone, and that around him was the green grass, the cool water, and solitude.

Without knowing whither he was going, he had advanced toward the Seine, and he now found himself opposite the isle of St. Denis. Exhausted, not from fatigue of body but from anguish of mind, he sunk on the turf, and grasping his head with both hands, he began to roar hoarsely, as if by these inarticulate sounds alone could he express his rage and grief.

All those vague and senseless hopes which until then had shed a glimmering light on the darkness of his soul, and whose existence he scarcely ventured to confess even to himself, were now at one blow utterly annihilated. To whatsoever height genius, science, or study might raise him in the social scale, he must to Andree always remain the Gilbert that he had been; a thing or a man — to use her own words to her father — not worth the slightest regard, not worth even the trouble of being looked down on.

For a moment he had thought that, seeing him in Paris, learning that he had come on foot, knowing that he had determined to struggle out of obscurity into light — he had thought that Andree would applaud his resolution; but, instead of applause, what had he met with as the reward of so much fatigue and of Such firm determination? The same scornful indifference with which he had been treated at Taverney. Even more — was she not almost angry when she heard that his eyes had had the audacity to look on her music-book? Had he only touched that music-book with the tip of his finger, he would have been doubtless considered only worthy to be burned at the stake.

By weak characters, any deception, any mistake, with regard to those they love, is quickly forgotten, and they bend under the blow only to rise again stronger and more persevering than before. They vent their sufferings in complaints and tears, but their resistance is only passive; nay, their love often increases by that which should destroy it, and they whisper to themselves that their submissiveness will at last have its reward. Toward that reward they steadfastly advance, whether the road be easy or the reverse; if it be unfavorable, they will be longer in attaining their end, that is all, but they will attain it at last.

It is not thus with strong minds, obstinate natures, and powerful wills. They are indignant when they see their own blood flowing; at the sight their energy augments so furiously that they seem to hate rather than to love. Indeed, with them love and hate are so closely allied that they often are not aware of the transition from one to the other. So it was with Gilbert. When he flung himself on the ground, overcome by his feelings, did he love or hate Andree? He knew not; he suffered intensely, that was all. But, not having the virtue of long-suffering, he shook off his dejection of soul, and determined to carry into practice some energetic resolution.

“She does not love me!” thought he, “it is true; but had I any right to hope that she would? The only feeling that I had a right to hope for was that kindly interest which attaches to the unfortunate who strive with energy to rise above their wretchedness. Her brother felt this; she did not feel it. He said, 'Who knows? perhaps you may become a Colbert, a Vauban!' If I became either one or other he would do me justice; he would give me his sister as a reward for the glory I had won for myself, as he would now give her in exchange for my personal nobility, had I been born his equal. But as for her — oh yes! I feel it — yes, although Colbert or Vauban, I should never be to her other than Gilbert! What she despises in me is what nothing can efface, nothing gild, nothing cover — it is the lowness of ray birth. As if, supposing I attain my object, I should not then be greater, having risen to her level, than if I had been born beside her! Ah, senseless, unthinking creature! Woman! — woman! — that is, imperfection! Do you trust in her open look, her expansive forehead, her beaming smile, her queenly carriage, her beauty which makes her worthy to be an empress? Fool! she is an affected, starched country girl, bound up, swathed, in aristocratic prejudices. The gay and showy young noblemen with empty heads — mere weathercocks — who have all the means and appliances for learning, but who know nothing — they are her equals; they are things and men on whom she may bestow attention! But Gilbert? — Gilbert is a dog — nay, lower than a dog I She asked, I think, for news of Mahon; she did not ask how it had fared with Gilbert. Oh, she knows not then that I am as strong as they! — That, if clothed like them, I should be as handsome! — that I have what they have not, an inflexible will; and that if I wished — ”

A threatening smile curled his lip, and he left the sentence unfinished; then slowly, and with a deep frown, his head sank on his breast. What passed at that moment in his dark and gloomy soul? Under what terrible idea did that pale forehead, already furrowed with painful thoughts, droop? Who shall tell? Is it the boatman who slowly glides down the river in his skiff, humming the song of Henri-Quatre? Is it the laughing washerwoman who is returning from the splendid scene at St. Denis, and who, turning aside from her path to avoid him, probably takes the young loiterer for a thief, lying as he is at full length on the grass amid the lines hung with linen.

After half an hour's reflection, Gilbert arose, calm and resolved. He approached the bank of the Seine, and refreshed himself with a deep draught of water; then, looking around, he saw on his left the distant waves of people pouring out of St. Denis. Amid the throng he could distinguish the principal carriages forced to go slowly from the crowd of spectators that pressed on them, and taking the road to St. Ouen.

The dauphiness had expressed a desire that her entrance into the kingdom should be a family festival, and the good Parisians had taken advantage of this kind wish to place their families so near the royal train, and many of them had mounted on the seats of the footmen, and some held on by the heavy springs which projected from the carriages, without manifesting the least fear.

Gilbert soon recognized Andree's carriage; Philip was galloping, or rather, we should say, reining in his prancing horse, close beside it.

“It is well,” said he; “I must know whither she is going, and for that purpose I must follow her.”

The dauphiness was to sup at Muette in private with the king, the dauphin, the Count de Provence, and the Count d'Artois. At St. Denis the king had invited the dauphiness, and had given her a list of the guests and a pencil, desiring her to erase the name of any one whom she did not wish to be present. Now, it must be confessed that Louis carried his forgetfulness of the respect due to her so far as to include in it the name of Madame Dubarry. It was the last on the list, and when the dauphiness reached it her cheek turned pale and her lip quivered; but, following the instructions of the empress her mother, she recovered her self-possession, and with a sweet smile returning the list and the pencil to the king, she expressed herself most happy to be admitted thus from the first to the intimacy of his family circle.

Gilbert knew nothing of all this, and it was only at Muette that he discovered the equipage of the countess, followed by Zamore on his tall white charger. Fortunately it was dark; and, concealing himself behind a clump of trees, he lay down and waited.

The king supped with his daughter-in-law and his mistress, and was in charming spirits; more especially when he saw the dauphiness receive the countess even more graciously than she had done at Compiegne. But the dauphin seemed grave and anxious, and, pretending that he suffered from a violent headache, retired before they sat down to supper. The entertainment was prolonged until eleven o'clock.

In the meantime the retinue of the dauphiness — and the haughty Andree was forced to acknowledge that she formed one of them — supped in tents to the music of the king's private band, who had been ordered to attend for that purpose. Besides these — as the tents could not accommodate all — fifty gentlemen supped at tables spread in the open air, waited on by fifty lackeys in the royal livery.

Gilbert, still hidden in the clump of trees, lost nothing of this spectacle; while he supped at the same time as the others on a piece of bread which he had bought at Clichy-la-Garenne.

After supper, the dauphiness and the king appeared on a balcony to take leave of their guests. As each person departed, he passed below the balcony to salute his majesty and her royal highness. The dauphiness already knew many who had accompanied her from Compiegne, and those whom she did not know the king named to her. From time to time, a gracious word, or a well-turned compliment fell from her lips, diffusing joy in the breasts of those to whom it was addressed.

Gilbert, from his distant post, saw the meanness of their homage, and murmured, “I am greater than those people, since for all the gold in the world I would not do what they are doing.”

At last the turn of the Baron de Taverney and his family came. Gilbert rose on one knee.

“M. Philip,” said the dauphiness, “I give you leave of absence, in order that you may accompany your father and your sister to Paris.”

Gilbert heard these words distinctly, which, in the silence of the night, and amid the respectful attention of all around, vibrated in his ears.

Then she added; “Monsieur de Taverney, I cannot promise you apartments until I install my household at Versailles. You can, therefore, in the meantime, accompany your daughter to Paris. Do not forget me, mademoiselle.”

The baron passed on with his son and daughter. They were succeeded by many others, to whom the dauphiness made similar speeches, but Gilbert cared no longer for her words. He glided out of the clump of trees and followed the baron amid the confused cries of two hundred footmen running after their masters and calling to a hundred coachmen, while their shouts were accompanied by the thundering of numerous carriages rolling along the paved road.

As the baron had one of the carriages of the court at his command, it waited for them apart from the general crowd. When, accompanied by Andree and Philip, he had entered it, the latter said to the footman who was closing the door, “Mount on the seat beside the coachman, my friend.”

“Why so? why so?” asked the baron, hastily.

“Because the poor devil has been on his legs since morning, and must be tired by this time.”

The baron grumbled something which Gilbert did not hear, while the footman mounted beside the coachman.

Gilbert drew nearer. At the moment when they were about to start, it was perceived that the trace had become unbuckled. The coachman jumped down, and the coach remained for a few moments stationary.

“It is very late,” said the baron.

“I am dreadfully fatigued,” said Andree. “Are you sure we shall get beds?” “I hope so.” said Philip; “I sent on La Brie and Nicole from Soissons with a letter to a friend of mine, desiring him to engage a small garden pavilion for us, which his mother and sister occupied last year. It is not a very splendid abode, but it is suitable enough; you do not wish to receive company — you only want a stopping-place for the present.”

“Faith,” exclaimed the baron, “whatever it is, it will be better than Taverney.”

“Unfortunately, father, that is true,” replied Philip, in a melancholy tone.

“Are there any trees?” asked Andree.

“Oh yes; and very fine ones too. But, in all probability, you will not have long to enjoy them, for as soon as the marriage is over, you will be presented at court.”

“Well, this is all a dream, I fear.” said the baron; “do not awake us too soon, Philip. Have you given the proper direction to the coachman?”

Gilbert listened anxiously.

“Yes, father.”

Gilbert, who had heard all this conversation, had for a moment hoped to discover the address.

“No, matter,” said he, “I shall follow them; it is only a league to Paris.”

The trace was fastened, the coachman mounted his seat, and the carriage was again in motion.

But the king's horses go fast when they are not in a procession which obliges them to go slowly, and now they darted forward so rapidly that they recalled to poor Gilbert's recollection the road to Lachaussee, his weakness, and his fainting. He made an effort and reached the footboard behind, which was vacant, as the weary footman was seated beside the coachman. Gilbert grasped it, sprang up, and seated himself. But scarcely bad he done so, when the thought struck him that he was behind Andree's carriage, and in the footman's place.

“No, no,” muttered the inflexible young man, “it shall never be said that I did not struggle to the last; my legs are tired, but my arms are strong.”

Then seizing the footboard with his hands, he followed at full speed, supported by the strength of his arms, and keeping his hold in spite of jolts and shocks, rather than capitulate with his conscience.

“At least I shall know her address,” murmured he. “True, I shall have to pass one more bad night; but to-morrow I shall rest while I copy my music. Besides, I have still some money, and I may take two hours for sleep if I like.”

Then he reflected that as Paris was such a large place, and as he was quite unacquainted with it, he might lose his way after the baron and his daughter should have entered the house chosen for them by Philip. Fortunately it was then near midnight, and day would break at halfpast three.

As all these reflections passed through Gilbert's mind, he remarked that they were passing through a spacious square, in the center of which was a large equestrian statue.

“Ha! This looks like the Place des Victoires,” cried he, with a mingled sensation of surprise and joy.

The carriage turned. Andree put her head out of the window and looked back. “It is the statue of the late king,” said Philip; “we are now near the house.”

They descended a steep street so rapidly that Gilbert was nearly thrown under the wheels.

“Here we are, at last!” cried Philip.

Gilbert sprang aside, and hid himself behind the corner of the neighboring street.

Philip leaped out, rang the bell, and turning, received Andree in his arms.

The baron got out last.

“Well, “cried he, “are those scoundrels going to keep us here all night!”

At that moment the voices of La Brie and Nicole were heard, and a gate was opened. The three travelers disappeared in a dark court, and the gate closed behind them.

The carriage drove off on its way to the king's stable. The house which had received the strangers was in no way remarkable in, its appearance; but the lamps of the carriage, in passing, had flashed on that next to it, and Gilbert read over the gateway the words;' Hotel d'Annenonville."

It only remained for him to discover the name of the street. He gained the nearest extremity, that by which the carriage had disappeared, and to his great surprise, he found himself close to the fountain at which he was in the habit of drinking. He advanced a few steps farther in a street parallel to that which he had left, and discovered the baker's shop where he usually bought his loaf. Doubting still, he went back to the corner of the street; and there, by the light of a neighboring lamp, he read the words which had struck him when returning with Rousseau from their botanical excursion in the forest of Meudon three days before — Rue Plastriere! Andree, consequently, was not one hundred paces distant from him — not so far off as she had been at Taverney, when he slept in his little room at the castle gate!"

Then he regained his domicile, scarcely daring to hope to find the end of the cord left out, by which the latch of the door was lifted. But Gilbert's star was in the ascendant; a few raveled threads were hanging out, by which he pulled the whole, and the door opened gently at his touch.

He felt his way to the stairs, mounted step by step without making the least noise, and at last put his hand on the padlock of the garret door, in which Rousseau had kindly left the key.

Ten minutes afterward, fatigue asserted its power over his disquieted thoughts, and he slept soundly, although longing for the morrow.

CHAPTER LIV.

The Garden Pavilion.

HAVING COME in late, and thrown himself hastily on his bed, Gilbert had forgotten to place over his window the blind which intercepted the light of the rising sun. At five o'clock, therefore, the rays of light beaming through the window awoke him. He sprang up, fearing that he had slept too long.

Accustomed as he had been to a country life, Gilbert could guess the hour at all times with the utmost precision by the direction of the shadows, and by the paler or warmer tints of light. He ran, therefore, to consult his clock.

The faintness of the morning beams, barely tinging with their light the topmost boughs of the trees, reassured him; and he found that instead of having risen too late, he had risen too early. He finished his toilet at the garret window, thinking over the events of the preceding day, and exposing with delight his burning and oppressed forehead to the refreshing morning breeze. Then he remembered that Andree lodged in the next street, near the Hotel d'Armenonville, and he tried to guess in which of all the houses that he saw she might be.

The sight of the lofty trees on which he looked down, recalled her question to Philip — 'Are there any trees there?”

“Might they not have chosen that uninhabited house in the garden?” said Gilbert to himself.

This idea naturally led him to fix his attention on the garden pavilion, where, by a singular coincidence, a sort of noise and stir began to be apparent.

One of the window-shutters of the little abode, which had not been opened apparently for a considerable time, was shaken by an awkward or feeble hand. The wood yielded above, but held fast, by the damp no doubt, to the frame at the bottom, it resisted the effort made to open it. A second shake more violent than the first had a better effect; the two shutters creaked, gave way, and falling back quickly, exposed to view a young girl all in a glow with her exertions, and beating off the dust from her hands.

Gilbert uttered a cry of surprise, and stepped back. The young girl whose face was still flushed with sleep, and who was stretching herself in the fresh air, was Mademoiselle Nicole.

There was no longer any room for doubt. The lodging which Philip had said La Brie and Nicole were preparing was the house before him, and the mansion through whose gateway he had seen the travelers disappear must have its gardens adjoining the rear of the Rue Plastriere. Gilbert's movement was so abrupt, that if Nicole had not been completely absorbed in the lazy meditations so delightful at the moment of waking, she must have discovered our philosopher at his skylight.

But Gilbert had retired all the more speedily, as he had no intention that Nicole, of all persons in the world, should spy him out in so elevated a situation. Had he been on a first-floor, and had his open window showed a background of rich hangings or sumptuous furniture, he would not have been so anxious to avoid her eye; but a garret on the fifth story declared him to be still so low in the social scale, that he took the greatest care to hide himself. Moreover, there is always, in this world, a great advantage in seeing without being seen. And then, if Andree should discover that he watched her, would it not be sufficient either to induce her to change her abode, or prevent her walking in the garden?

Alas! Gilbert's pride still made him of too great importance in his own eyes. What was Gilbert to Andree? Would she have moved her finger, either to approach or to avoid him? But these were far from being Nicole's sentiments, and her, consequently, he must shun.

He hid himself carefully therefore; but as he did not wish to withdraw from the window entirely, he ventured to peep out cautiously at one corner.

A second window on the ground-floor of the pavilion, exactly below the first, just then opened, and a white form appeared at it. It was Andree, seemingly just awakened. She was enveloped in a dressing-gown, and was occupied in searching for the slipper which had escaped from her tiny foot, and was lying beneath a chair. It was in vain that Gilbert, each time that he saw Andree, vowed to build up between them a barrier of hatred instead of giving way to love; the same effect was produced by the same cause. He was obliged to lean against the wall for support; his heart palpitated as if it would have burst, and sent the blood in boiling currents through his whole frame. However, by degrees, his throbbing arteries beat with a calmer motion, and reflection resumed her sway. The problem he had to solve was, as we have said, to see without being seen. He took one of Therese's gowns and fastened it with a pin to one of the cords which crossed his window; and, sheltered by this impromptu curtain, he could watch Andree without running any risk of being discovered by her. The lovely young girl, following Nicole's example, stretched out her snowy arms, and then, folding them on the window, she looked out on the garden. Her countenance expressed the liveliest satisfaction at all she saw. Lofty trees shaded the walks with their drooping branches, and everywhere verdure cheered her eye. She, who smiled so seldom on human beings, smiled on the inanimate objects around her.

The house in which Gilbert lived attracted her eye for a moment, like all the others which surrounded the garden; but as from her apartment only the garrets of the houses were visible, and, consequently, from them alone could she be seen, she paid no farther attention. How could the proud young girl take any interest in the concerns of a race so far removed from her sphere? Andree felt convinced, therefore, that no one saw her by whom it was of the least importance that she should not be seen, and that within the bounds of her tranquil retreat there appeared none of those prying or satirical Parisian faces so much dreaded by ladies from the provinces.

The effect was immediate. Leaving her window wide open, so that the fresh and perfumed air might penetrate to the farthest extremity of her apartment, she proceeded toward the mantelpiece and rang a bell.

Nicole appeared, undid the straps of a shagreen dressing-case of the reign of Queen Anne, took from it a tortoise-shell comb, and began to comb out Andree's hair. In a moment the long tresses and shining curls spread like a glossy veil over her shoulders.

Gilbert gave a stifled sigh. At that distance he scarcely saw the beauty of her locks, but he saw Andree herself, a thousand times more lovely in this deshabille than she would have been in the most splendid attire. He grazed, his whole soul in his eyes.

By chance, as Nicole continued to dress her hair, Andree raised her eyes and fixed them on Gilbert's garret.

“Yes, yes!” said he, “look — gaze, as much as you please — it is all in vain — you can see nothing, and I see all.”

But Gilbert was mistaken; Andree did see something. It was the gown which he had hung up, and which, being blown about, had got wrapped round his head like a turban. She pointed out this strange object to Nicole.

Nicole, stopping in her complicated task, pointed with the comb which she held in her hand toward the skylight, and seemed to ask her mistress if that were the object which she meant.

All these gestures, which Gilbert devoured with the greatest eagerness, had, without his suspecting it, a third spectator. Suddenly a rude hand snatched Therese's gown from his head, and he was ready to sink with shame on seeing Rousseau beside him.

“What the devil are you doing there, sir?” cried the philosopher, with a terrible frown, and a scrutinizing glance at the gown borrowed, without leave asked, from his wife.

“Nothing, sir, nothing at all,” replied Gilbert, endeavoring to turn Rousseau's attention from the window.

“Nothing? Then why did you hide yourself with the gown?”

“The sun hurts my eyes.”

“This window looks toward the west, and the sun dazzles you when rising? You have very delicate eyes, young man!”

Gilbert stammered out some unconnected words, but, feeling that he was only getting deeper in the mire, he at last hid his head in his hands.

“You are speaking falsely, and you are afraid,” said Rousseau; “therefore you have been doing wrong.”

After this terrible syllogism, which seemed to complete Gilbert's confusion. Rousseau planted himself exactly opposite the window.

From a feeling too natural to require explanation, Gilbert, who so lately trembled to be discovered at the window, rushed forward when he saw Rousseau standing before it.

“Ah, ah!” said the latter, in a tone which froze the blood in Gilbert's reins; “the garden-house is inhabited now.”

Gilbert was dumb.

“And by persons,” continued the philosopher, “who seem to know my house, for they are pointing to it.”

Gilbert, trembling lest he had advanced too far, stepped back quickly; but neither his movement, nor the cause which produced it, escaped the jealous eye of Rousseau; he saw that Gilbert feared to be seen.

“No.” cried he, seizing the young man by the arm, “you shall not escape, my young friend; there is some plot under this, I know by their pointing to your garret. Place yourself here, if you please; “and he dragged him opposite the skylight, in the full view of those beneath. — “Oh! no, sir; no — have mercy!” cried Gilbert, struggling to escape.

But to escape, which for a young and active man like Gilbert would have been an easy task, he must have engaged in a contest with Rousseau — Rousseau, whom he venerated like some superior being — and respect restrained him.

“You know those women,” said Rousseau; “and they know you?”

“No, no, no, sir!”

“Then, if you do not know them, and if they do not know you, why not show yourself?”

“Monsieur Rousseau, you have sometimes had secrets yourself. Show some pity for mine.”

“Ah! traitor!” cried Rousseau. “Yes, I know what sort of a secret yours is. You are a creature of Grimm or Holbach's — you have been tutored to act a part in order to impose upon my benevolence — you have gained admittance into my house, and now you betray me to them. Oh, thrice-sodden fool that I am! Silly lover of nature! I thought I was aiding a fellow-creature, and I was bringing a spy into my house!”

“A spy!” exclaimed Gilbert, indignantly.

“Come, Judas, on what day am I to be sold?” continued Rousseau, folding Therese's gown tragically about him, and thinking himself sublime in his grief, when unfortunately he was only ridiculous.

“Sir, you calumniate me,” said Gilbert.

“Calumniate you, you little serpent!” exclaimed Rousseau. “Did I not find you corresponding with my enemies by signs? Making them understand, perhaps, what is the subject of my new work?”

“Sir, had I gained admittance to your house in order to betray the secret of your work, it would have been easier for me to copy some of the manuscripts in your desk than to inform others of the subject by signs.”

This was true; and Rousseau felt so plainly that he had given utterance to one of those absurdities which escaped him when his monomania of suspicion was at its height, that he got angry.

“Sir,” said he, “I am sorry for you, but experience has made me severe. My life has been one long series of deceptions. I have been ever the victim of treachery; I have been betrayed, sold, made a martyr, by every one that surrounded me. I am, you must be aware, one of those illustrious unfortunates on whom government has put its ban. In such a situation it is pardonable to be suspicious. Now, I suspect you, therefore you shall leave my house."

Gilbert was far from expecting this peroration. To be turned out? He clenched his hands tightly, and a flash of anger, which almost made Rousseau tremble, lighted up his eyes. The flash was only momentary, however, for the thought occurred to him, that in leaving Rousseau's house he should lose the happiness of seeing Andree every hour of the day, as well as forfeit the friendship of Rousseau; this would be to add misery to shame. His untamable pride gave way, and, clasping his hands; "Sir," said he, "listen to me! One word, only one word!"

"I am pitiless," said Rousseau; "men have made me by their injustice more cruel than the tiger. You are in correspondence with my enemies. Go to them. I do not prevent you. League with them, I do not oppose your doing so. Only leave my house!"

"Sir, those two young girls are not your enemies; they are Mademoiselle Andree and Nicole."

"And who is Mademoiselle Andree?" said Rousseau, who had heard Gilbert pronounce this name twice or thrice before, and was, consequently, not entirely unacquainted with it; "come! who is Mademoiselle Andree? Speak!"

"Mademoiselle Andree, sir, is the daughter of the Baron de Taverney. Oh, pardon me, sir, for daring to say so to you, but I love her more than you ever loved Mademoiselle Galley or Madame de Warens! It is she; whom I have followed on foot to Paris, without money and without bread, until I fell down on the road exhausted with hunger and fatigue. It is she whom I went to see yesterday at St. Denis, whom I followed, unseen by her, to Muette, and from that to a street near this. It is she whom by chance I discovered this morning to be the occupant of this garden-house; and it is she for whose sake I burn to be a Turenne, a Richelieu, or a Rousseau!"

Rousseau knew the human heart; and felt assured that no one acting a part could speak with the trembling and impassioned accents of Gilbert, or accompany his words with gestures so true to nature.

"So," said he, "this young lady is Mademoiselle Andree?"

"Yes, Monsieur Rousseau."

"Then you know her?"

"Sir, I am the son of her nurse."

“Then you lied just now when you said you did not know her; and if you are not a traitor, you are a liar.”

“Sir, you tear my very heart. Indeed, you would hurt me less were you to kill me on the spot.”

“Pshaw! Mere phrases! Style of Diderot and Marmontel. You are a liar, sir.”

“Well; yes, yes!” said Gilbert, “I am a liar, sir; and so much the worse for you if you do not feel for one so forced to lie. A liar! a liar! I leave you, sir, but I leave you in despair, and my misery will one day weigh heavy on your conscience.”

Rousseau stroked his chin as he looked at this young” man, in whom he found so many points of character resembling his own.

“He has either a great soul, or he is a great rogue,” said he to himself; “but if they are plotting against me, “why not hold in my hand a clew to the plot?”

Gilbert had advanced toward the door, and now, with his hand on the lock, stood waiting for the flat which was to banish or recall him.

“Enough on this subject, my son,” said Rousseau. “If you are as deeply in love as you say, so much the worse for you. But it is now late; you lost the whole of yesterday, and we have to-day thirty pages to copy. Quick, Gilbert. Be on the alert!”

Gilbert seized the philosopher's hand, and pressed it to his lips; he would not certainly have done so much for a king's. But before leaving the room, and while Gilbert, still deeply moved, stood leaning against the door, Rousseau again placed himself at the window to take a last look at the young girls. Andree had just thrown off her dressing-gown, and taken her gown from Nicole's hands. She saw his pallid countenance and searching eye, and, starting back, she ordered Nicole to close the window. Nicole obeyed.

“So,” said Rousseau, “my old face frightens her; his young one would not have had the same effect. Oh, lovely youth!” added he, sighing:

“'O gioventu primavera dell' eta!
O primavera gioventu dell' anno!'”

and, once more hanging up Therese's gown on its nail, he went downstairs in a melancholy mood, followed by Gilbert, for whose youth he would, perhaps, at that moment have exchanged his renown, which then rivaled that of Voltaire, and shared with it the admiration of the world.

CHAPTER LV.

The House in the Rue St. Claude.

THE RUE ST. CLAUDE, in which the Count de Fenix had appointed to meet the Cardinal de Rohan, was not so different at that period from what it is at the present day but that some vestiges of the localities we are about to describe may yet be discovered. It abutted then, as it does now, on the Rue St. Louis and the boulevard, to the latter of which it descended with rather a steep inclination. It boasted of fifteen houses and seven lanterns, and was remarkable besides for two lanes, or culs de sac, which branched off from it, the one on the left, the other on the right; the former serving as the boundary of the Hotel de Voysins, while the latter took a slice off the large garden of the Convent of St. Sacrament. This last-mentioned lane, shaded on one side by the trees of the convent garden, was bordered on the other by the high dark wall of a house, the front of which looked toward the Rue St. Claude.

This wall, resembling the visage of a Cyclops, had only one eye, or if the reader like it better, only one window; and even that, covered with bars and grating, was horribly gloomy.

Just below this window, which was never opened, as one might perceive from the spiders' webs that curtained it over, was a door studded with large nails, which indicated, not that the house was entered, but that it might be entered, on this side.

There were no dwellings in this lane, and only two inhabitants. These were a cobbler in a wooden box, and a stocking-mender in a cask, both shading themselves from the heat under the acacias of the convent garden, which threw their broad shadow on the dusty lane from nine in the morning. In the evening the stocking-mender returned to her domicile, the cobbler put a padlock on his castle, and no guardian watched over the lonely street, save the stern and somber eye of the window we have spoken of.

Besides the door just mentioned, the house which we have undertaken to describe so accurately had another and the principal entrance in the Rue St.

Claude. This entrance was a large gateway surmounted with carved figures in relief, which recalled the architecture of the times of Louis XIII., and was adorned with the griffin's head for a knocker which the Count de Fenix had indicated to the Cardinal de Rohan as distinguishing his abode.

As for the windows, they looked on the boulevard, and were opened early in the morning to admit the fresh air. But as Paris, at that period, and above all in that quarter, was far from safe, it occasioned no astonishment to see them grated, and the walls near them bristling with iron spikes. Indeed, the whole appearance of the house, at the first glance, suggested the idea of a fortress. Against enemies, thieves, or lovers, it presented iron balconies with sharp points; a deep moat separated the building from the boulevard, and to obtain entrance on this side it would have required ladders at least thirty feet long, for the wall which inclosed, or rather buried, the courtyard was fully that height.

This house, before which in the present day a spectator would be arrested by curiosity on beholding its singular aspect, was not very remarkable in 1770. On the contrary, it seemed to harmonize with the quarter of the city in which it stood, and if the worthy inhabitants of the Rue St. Louis, and the not less worthy denizens of the Rue St. Claude, shunned its neighborhood, it was not on account of its reputation, which was then intact, but on account of the lonely boulevard of the Porte St. Louis, and the Pont-aux-Choux, both of which were in very bad odor with the Parisians. In fact, the boulevard on this side led to nothing but the Bastille, and as there was not more than a dozen houses in the space of a quarter of a league, the city authorities had not thought it worth their while to light such a desert region. The consequence was, that after eight o'clock in summer, and four in winter, the vacuum became a sort of chaos, with the agreeable addition of robbers.

It was, however, on this very boulevard, toward nine o'clock in the evening, and about three quarters of an hour after the visit to St. Denis, that a carriage drove rapidly along. It bore the coat of arms of the Count de Fenix on its panels. The count himself, mounted on Djerid, who whisked his long and silky tail as he snuffed the stifling atmosphere, rode about twenty paces in advance. Within it, resting on cushions, and concealed by the closed blinds, lay Lorenza fast asleep. The gate opened, as if by enchantment, at the noise of the wheels, and the carriage, after turning into the dark gulf of the Rue St. Claude, disappeared in the courtyard of the house we have just described, the gate of which seemed to close behind it without the aid of human hands.

There was most assuredly no occasion for so much mystery, since no one was there to see the Count de Fenix return, or to interfere with him had he carried off in his carriage the treasures of the Abbey of St. Denis.

In the meantime we shall say a few words respecting the interior of this house, of which it is of importance that our readers should know something, since it is our intention to introduce them to it more than once.

In the courtyard of which we have spoken, and in which the springing grass labored by a never-ceasing effort to displace the pavement, were seen on the right the stables, on the left the coachhouses, while at the back a double flight of twelve steps led to the entrance door.

On the ground-floor, the house, or at least as much of it as was accessible, consisted of a large antechamber, a dining-room remarkable for the quantity of massive plate heaped on its sideboards, and a salon, which seemed quite recently furnished, probably for the reception of its new inmates.

From the antechamber a broad staircase led to the first floor, which contained three principal apartments. A skillful geometrician, however, on measuring with his eye the extent of the house outside, and observing the space within it, would have been surprised to find it contain so little accommodation. In fact, in the outside apparent house there was a second hidden house, known only to those who inhabited it.

In the antechamber, close beside a statue of the god Harpocrates — who, with his finger on his lips, seemed to enjoin the silence of which he is the symbol — was concealed a secret door opening with a spring, and masked by the ornaments of the architecture. This door gave access to a staircase which, ascending to about the same height as the first floor on the other staircase, led to a little apartment lighted by two grated windows looking on an inner court. This inner court was the box, as it were, which enclosed the second house and concealed it from all eyes.

The apartment to which this staircase led was evidently intended for a man. Beside the bed, and before the sofas and couches, were spread instead of carpets the most magnificent furs which the burning climes of Africa and India, produced. There were skins of lions, tigers, and panthers, with their glaring eyes and threatening teeth. The walls, hung with Cordova leather stamped in large and flowing arabesques, were decorated with weapons of every kind, from the tomahawk of the Huron to the crid of the Malay; from the sword of the crusader to the kandjiar of the Arab; from the arquebuse, incrusted with ivory, of the sixteenth century, to the damasked barrel inlaid with gold of the eighteenth. The eye in vain sought in this room for any other outlet than that from the staircase; perhaps there were several, but, if so, they were concealed and invisible.

A German domestic, about five-and-twenty or thirty years of age, the only human being who had been seen wandering to and fro in that vast mansion for several days, bolted the gate of the courtyard; and, opening the carriage-door while the stolid coachman unharnessed his horses, he lifted out Lorenza in his arms and carried her into the antechamber. There he laid her on a table, covered with red cloth, and drew down her long white veil over her person.

Then he left the room to light at the lamps of the carriage a large chandelier, with seven branches, and returned with all its lights burning. But in that interval, short as it was, Lorenza had disappeared.

The Count de Fenix had followed close behind the German, and had no sooner been left alone with Lorenza than he took her in his arms and carried her by the secret staircase we have described to the chamber of arms, after having carefully closed both the doors behind him. Once there, he pressed his foot on a spring in the corner of the lofty mantelpiece, and immediately a door, which formed the back of the fireplace, rolled back on its noiseless hinges, and the count with his burden again disappeared, carefully closing behind him with his foot the mysterious door.

At the back of the mantelpiece was a second staircase, consisting of a flight of fifteen steps covered with Utrecht velvet, after mounting which he reached a chamber elegantly hung with satin, embroidered with flowers, of such brilliant colors and so naturally designed, that they might have been taken for real. The furniture was richly gilt. Two cabinets of tortoiseshell inlaid with brass; a harpsichord, and a toilet-table of rosewood, a beautiful bed, with transparent curtains, and several vases of Sevres porcelain, formed the principal articles; while chairs and couches, arranged with the nicest order in a space of thirty feet square, served to complete the decoration of the apartment, to which was attached a dressing-closet and a boudoir. These latter had no windows; but lamps filled with perfumed oil burned in them day and night, and, let down from the ceiling, we're trimmed by invisible hands. The sleeping-chamber, however, had two windows hung with rich and heavy curtains;, but, as it w-as now night, the curtains had nothing to conceal.

Not a sound, not a breath was heard in this chamber, and an inhabitant might have thought himself a hundred miles from the world. But gold, cunningly wrought, shone on every side; beautiful paintings smiled from the walls; and lusters of Bohemian glass glittered and sparkled like eyes looking on the scene, when, after having placed Lorenza on a sofa, the count, not satisfied with the trembling radiance of the boudoir, proceeded to light the rose-colored wax-candles of two candelabra on the chimney-piece.

Then, returning to Lorenza and placing himself before her, he knelt with one knee on a pile of cushions, and exclaimed softly, “Lorenza!”

The young girl, at this appeal, raised herself on her elbow, although her eyes remained closed. But she did not reply.

“Lorenza,” he repeated, “do you sleep in your ordinary sleep, or in the magnetic sleep?”

“In the magnetic sleep,” she answered.

“Then, if I question you, you can reply?”

“I think so.”

The Count de Fenix was silent for a moment, then he continued:

“Look in the apartment of the Princess Louise, whom we left three-quarters of an hour ago.”

“I am looking.”

“What do you see?”

“The princess is praying before retiring to bed.”

“Do you see the Cardinal de Rohan in the convent?”

“No.”

“In any of the corridors or courts?”

“No.”

“Look whether his carriage be at the gate?”

“I do not see it.”

“Pursue the road by which we came. Do you see carriages on it?”

“Yes; several.”

“Do you see the cardinal's among them?”

“No.”

“Come nearer Paris — now?”

“Now I see it.”

“Where?”

“At the gate of the city.”

“Has it stopped?”

“Yes; the footman has just got down.”

“Does the cardinal speak to him?”

“Yes; he is going to speak.”

“Lorenza, attend! It is important that I should know what the cardinal says.”

“You should have told me to listen in time. But, stop! — the footman is speaking to the coachman.”

“What does he say?”

“The Rue St. Claude, in the Marais, by the boulevard.”

“Thanks, Lorenza.”

The count wrote some words on a piece of paper, which he folded round a plate of copper, doubtless to give it weight; then he pulled a bell, pressed a string, and, a small opening appearing in the wall, he dropped the note down. The opening closed again instantly. It was in this way that the count, in the inner apartments of his house, gave his orders to Fritz, his German servant.

CHAPTER LVI.

The Double Existence. Sleep.

RETURNING to Lorenza, Balsamo said, “Will you converse with your friend now?”

“Oh, yes!” she replied. “But speak yourself the most — I love so to hear your voice.”

“Lorenza, you have often said that you would be happy if you could live with me, shut out from all the world.”

“Yes; that would be happiness indeed!”

“"Well, your wish is realized. No one can follow us to this chamber — no one can enter here; we are alone, quite alone.”

“Ah, so much the better.”

“Tell me, is this apartment to your taste?”

“Order me to see it, then!”

“I order you.”

“Oh, what a charming room!”

“You are pleased with it, then?” asked the count, tenderly.

“Oh, yes! There are my favorite flowers — my vanilla heliotropes, my crimson roses, my Chinese jessamines! — Thanks, my sweet Joseph; how kind and good you are!”

“I do all I can to please you, Lorenza.”

“Oh! you do a hundred times more than I deserve.”

“You think so!”

“Yes.”

“Then you confess that you have been very ill-natured.”

“Very ill-natured? — Oh, yes. But you forgive me, do you not?”

“I shall forgive you when you explain to me the strange mystery which I have sought to fathom ever since I knew you.”

“It is this, Balsamo. There are in me two Lorenzas, quite distinct from each other; one that loves and one that hates you. So there are in me two lives; in one I taste all the joys of paradise, in the other experience all the torments of hell.”

“And those two lives are sleep and waking?”

“Yes.”

“You love me when you sleep, and you hate me when you are awake?”

“Yes.”

“But why so?”

“I do not know.”

“You must know.”

“No.”

“Search carefully; look within yourself; sound your own heart.”

“Yes, I see the cause now.”

“What is it?”

“When Lorenza awakes, she is the Roman girl, the superstitious daughter of Italy; she thinks science a crime, and love a sin. Her confessor told her that they were so. She is then afraid of you, and would flee from you to the confines of the earth.”

“And when Lorenza sleeps?”

“Ah! then she is no longer the Roman, no longer superstitious; she is a woman. Then she reads Balsamo's heart and mind; she sees that his heart loves her, that his genius contemplates sublime things. Then she feels her littleness compared with him. Then she would live and die beside him, that the future might whisper softly the name of Lorenza, when it trumpets forth that of Cagliostro!”

“It is by that name then that I shall become celebrated?”

“Yes, by that name.”

“Dear Lorenza! Then you will love this new abode, will you not?”

“It is much more splendid than any of those you have already given me, but it is not on that account that I shall love it.”

“For what, then?”

“I shall love it because you have promised to live in it with me.”

“Then, when you sleep, you see clearly that I love you; ardently love you?”

The young girl smiled faintly. “Yes,” said she, “I do see that you love me, and yet,” added she, with a sigh, “there is something which you love better than Lorenza.”

“What is it?” asked Balsamo, starting.

“Your dream.”

“Say, my task.”

“Your ambition.”

“Say, my glory.”

“Ah, heaven! Ah, heaven!” and the young girl's breast heaved, while the tears forced their way through her closed eyelids.

“What do you see?” asked Balsamo, with alarm; for there were moments when her powers of seeing the unseen startled even him.

“Oh, I see darkness, and phantoms gliding through it; some of them hold in their hands their crowned heads, and you — you are among them, like a general in the thick of the battle! You command, and they obey.”

“Well,” said Balsamo, joyfully, “and does that not make you proud of me?”

“Oh, no, for I seek my own figure amid the throng which surrounds you, and I cannot see myself! — I shall not be there,” murmured she sadly. “I shall not be there!”

“Where will you be then?”

“I shall be dead.”

Balsamo shuddered.

“Dead? my Lorenza!” cried he, “dead? — no, no! — we shall live long together to love one another.”

“You love me not.”

“Oh, yes!”

“Ah,” continued she, “I feel that I am nothing to you!”

“You, my Lorenza, nothing? — You are my all, my strength, my power, my genius! Without you I should be nothing. You possess my whole soul — is not that enough to make you happy?”

“Happy?” repeated she, contemptuously, “do you call this life of ours happy?”

“Yes; for in my mind to be happy is to be great.”

She sighed deeply.

“Oh, could you but know, dearest Lorenza, how I love to read the uncovered hearts of men, and govern them within their own passions!”

“Yes, I serve you in that, I know.”

“That is not all. Your eyes read for me the hidden book of the future. What I could not learn with twenty years of toil and suffering, you, my gentle dove, innocent and pure, you teach me when you wish. Foes dog my steps, and lay snares for me — you inform me of every danger. On my understanding depend my life, my fortune, my freedom — you give that understanding the eye of the lynx, which dilates and sees clearly in the darkness. Your lovely eyes, closing to the light of this outward world, open to supernatural splendors which they watch for me. It is you who make me free, rich, powerful.”

“And you in return make me wretched,” she exclaimed, in a tone of despair, “for all that is not love.”

“Yes, it is,” he replied, “a holy and pure love.”

“And what happiness attends it? Why did you force me from my country, my name, my family — why obtain this power over me — why make me your slave, if I am never to be yours in reality?”

“Alas! why, rather,” asked he, “are you like an angel, infallible in penetration, by whose help I can subject the universe? Why are you able to read all hearts within their corporeal dwelling, as others read a book behind a pane of glass? It is because you are an angel of purity, Lorenza — because your spirit, different from those of the vulgar, sordid beings who surround you, pierces through every obstacle.”

“And thus you regard my love less than the vain chimeras of your brain? Oh! Joseph, Joseph,” added she passionately, “you wrong me, cruelly!”

“Not so, for I love you; but I would raise you with myself to the throne of the world.”

“Oh! Balsamo,” murmured she, “will your ambition ever make you happy as my love would?”

As she spoke she threw her arms around him. He struggled to release himself, beat back the air loaded with the magnetic fluid, and at length exclaimed. “Lorenza, awake! — Awake! — It is my will.”

At once her arms released their hold, the smile which had played on her lips died away, and she sighed heavily. At length her closed eyes opened; the dilated pupils assumed their natural size; she stretched out her arms, appeared overcome with weariness, and fell back at full length, but awake, on the sofa.

Balsamo, seated at a little distance from her, heaved a deep sigh. “Adieu, my dream!” murmured he to himself. “Farewell happiness!”

CHAPTER LVII.

The Double Existence. Waking.

AS SOON AS Lorenza had recovered her natural powers of sight, she cast a hurried glance around her. Her eyes roamed over all the splendid trifles which surrounded her on every side, without exhibiting any appearance of the pleasure which such things usually give to women.

At length they rested with a shudder on Balsamo, who was seated at a short distance, and was watching her attentively.

“You again!” said she, recoiling; and all the symptoms of horror appeared in her countenance. Her lips turned deadly pale, and the perspiration stood in large drops on her forehead. Balsamo did not reply.

“Where am I?” she asked.

“You know whence you come, madame,” said Balsamo; “and that should naturally enable you to guess where you are.”

“Yes; you are right to remind me of that; — I remember now. I know that I have been persecuted by you, pursued by you, torn by you from the arms of the royal lady whom I had chosen to protect me.”

“Then you must know also, that this princess, all-powerful though she be, could not defend you?”

“Yes; you have conquered her by some work of magic!” cried Lorenza, clasping her hands. “Oh, Heaven, deliver me from this demon!”

“In what way do I resemble a demon, madame?” said Balsamo, shrugging his shoulders. “Once for all, abandon, I beg of you, this farrago of childish prejudices which you brought with you from Rome; have done with all those absurd superstitions which you learned in your convent, and which have formed your constant traveling companions since you left it.”

“Oh, my convent! Who will restore me my convent?” cried Lorenza, bursting into tears.

“In fact,” said Balsamo, ironically, “a convent is a place very much to be regretted!”

Lorenza darted toward one of the windows, drew aside the curtains, and, opening it, stretched out her hand. It struck against a thick bar supporting an iron grating, which, although hidden by flowers, was not the less efficacious in retaining a prisoner.

“Prison for prison,” said she; “Hike that better which conducts toward heaven than that which sends to hell.”

And she dashed her delicate hands against the iron bars.

“If you were more reasonable, Lorenza, without you would find only the flowers, the bars, at your windows.”

“Was I not reasonable when you shut me up in that other moving prison, with that vampire whom you called Althotas? And yet you kept me a prisoner, you watched me like a lynx, and, whenever you left me, you breathed into me that spirit which takes possession of me, and which I cannot overcome. Where is he, that horrible old man, whose sight freezes me with terror? In some corner here, is he not? Let us keep silent, and we shall hear his unearthly voice issue from the depths of the earth.”

“You really give way to your imagination like a child, madame. Althotas, my teacher, my friend, my second father, is an inoffensive old man, who has never seen or approached you; or, if he has seen you, has never paid the least attention to you, immersed as he is in his task.”

“His task?” murmured Lorenza. “And what is his task, pray?”

“He is trying to discover the elixir of life — what all the greatest minds have been in search of for the last six thousand years.”

“And you — what are you trying to discover?”

“The means of human perfectibility.”

“Oh, demons! demons!” said Lorenza raising her hands to heaven.

“Ah!” said Balsamo, rising, “now your fit is coming on again.”

“My fit?”

“Yes; your fit. There is one thing, Lorenza, which you are not aware of; it is, that your life is divided into two equal periods. During one you are gentle, good, and reasonable; during the other you are mad.”

“And it is under this false pretext of madness that you shut me up?”

“Alas! I am obliged to do so.”

“Oh, be cruel, barbarous, pitiless, if you will — shut me up, kill me — but do not play the hypocrite; do not pretend to compassionate while you destroy me!”

“But only reflect a moment,” said Balsamo, without anger, and even with a caressing smile; “is it torture to live in an elegant, commodious apartment like this?”

“Grated windows — iron bars on all sides — no air — no air.”

“The bars are for the safety of your life, I repeat. Lorenza.”

“Oh!” cried she, “he destroys me piecemeal, and tells me he cares for my life!”

Balsamo approached the young girl, and, with a friendly gesture, endeavored to take her hand; but, recoiling as if from the touch of a serpent:

“Oh! do not touch me!” said she.

“Do you hate me, then, Lorenza?”

“Ask the sufferer if he hates his executioner.”

“Lorenza! Lorenza! it is because I do not wish to be your executioner that I deprive you of a little of your liberty. If you could go and come as you liked, who knows what you might do in the moments of your madness?”

“What I might do? Oh, let me once be free, and you shall see what I would do!”

“Lorenza, you treat the husband whom you have chosen in the sight of heaven very strangely.”

“I chose you? Never! never!”

“You are my wife, notwithstanding.”

“Yes; that indeed must have been the work of the demon.”

“Poor insensate!” said Balsamo, with a tender look.

“But I am a Roman woman.” murmured Lorenza; “and one day I shall be revenged.”

Balsamo shook his head gently.

“You only say that to frighten me, Lorenza, do you not?” said he, smiling.

“No, no; I shall do what I say.”

“Woman!” exclaimed Balsamo, with a commanding voice, “you pretend to be a Christian; does not your religion teach you to render good for evil? What hypocrisy is yours, calling yourself a follower of that religion, and vowing to yourself to render evil for good?”

Lorenza appeared for an instant struck by these words. “Oh!” said she, “it is not vengeance to denounce to society its enemies; it is a duty.”

“If you denounce me as a necromancer, as a sorcerer, it is not society whom I offend, but God; but if I be such, the Deity by a sign can destroy me. He does not do so. Does He leave my punishment weak to men, subject to error like myself?”

“He bears with you,” murmured the young girl; “He Avails for you to reform.”

Balsamo smiled.

“And in the meantime,” said he, “He counsels yon to betray your friend, your benefactor, your husband?”

“My husband? Ah! thank Heaven — your hand has never touched mine that I have not blushed or shuddered at its contact.”

“O mystery! Impenetrable mystery!” murmured Balsamo to himself, replying rather to his own thoughts than to Lorenza's words.

“Once for all,” said Lorenza, “why do you deprive me of my liberty?”

“Why, after having given yourself voluntarily to me, do you now wish for liberty? Why do you flee from him who protects you? Why do you ask a stranger for protection against him who loves you? Why do you threaten him who has never yet threatened you; and say you will reveal secrets which are not yours, and of which you do not comprehend the import?”

“Oh!” said Lorenza, without replying to his questions, “the prisoner who has firmly determined to be free, will be so, sooner or later, and your bars of iron shall not keep me, any more than your moving cage kept me!”

“Fortunately for you, Lorenza, the bars are strong,” answered Balsamo with a threatening calmness.

“God will send me some storm like that of Lorraine — some thunderbolt which will break them.”

“Trust me, you had better pray to Heaven to avert such an occurrence. Do not give way, I advise you, to the fancies of your overheated brain. Lorenza. I speak to you as a friend.”

There was such an expression of concentrated anger in Balsamo's voice, such a gloomy and threatening fire darted from his eyes, such a strange and nervous movement in his white and muscular hand, as he pronounced each word slowly and solemnly, that Lorenza, subdued in the very height of her rebellion, listened to him in spite of herself.

“You see, my child,” continued he, in the same calm and threatening tone, “I have endeavored to make this prison a habitation fit for a queen. Were you a queen, you could here want for nothing. Calm, then, this wild excitement. Live here as you would have lived in your convent. Accustom yourself to my presence; love me as a friend, as a brother. I have heavy sorrows; I shall confide them to you; I am often and deeply deceived; a smile from you will console me. The more I see you kind, attentive, patient, the more I shall lighten the rigor of your imprisonment. Who knows but that in a year, nay, in six months perhaps, you may be as free as I am, always supposing that you no longer entertain the wish to steal your freedom."

"No, no!" cried Lorenza, who could not comprehend that so terrible a resolve should be expressed in a voice so gentle; "no! More promises! More falsehoods! You have carried me off, and by violent means. I belong to myself, and to myself alone; restore me therefore to the house of God, at least, if you will not grant me my full liberty. I have until now submitted to your tyranny, because I remembered that you once saved me from robbers; but my gratitude is already weakened. A few days more of this insulting imprisonment, and it will expire; and then — take care! — I may begin to suspect that you had some secret connection with those robbers!"

"You do me the honor, then, to take me for a captain of banditti?" said Balsamo, ironically.

"I know not what you are, but I have perceived signs; I have heard strange words."

"You have perceived signs and words?" exclaimed Balsamo, turning pale.

"Yes, yes; I have intercepted them; I know them; I remember them."

"But you will never tell them to any living soul? You will shut them up in the depths of your heart?"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Lorenza, full of delight, in her anger, that she had found the vulnerable point of her antagonist, "I shall treasure them up religiously in my memory; I shall murmur them over to myself, and on the first opportunity shall say them aloud to others. I have already told them."

"To whom?"

"To the princess."

"Well, Lorenza, listen!" said Balsamo, clenching; his hands till the nails entered the flesh. "If you have told them once, you shall never tell them again; never shall the words you have spoken again cross your lips, for I shall keep every door closely shut; I shall sharpen the points on those bars, and raise the walls around this house, if need be, as high as those of Babel."

"I have already told you, Balsamo," exclaimed Lorenza, "that no prison can hold a captive forever, especially when the love of liberty is aided by hatred of the tyrant."

“Very well, leave your prison, then; but mark me, you have only twice to do so. The first time I shall chastise you so cruelly that your eyes will have no more tears to shed, the second time that your veins shall have no more blood to pour out.”

“Great heavens! He will murder me!” screamed the young girl, in the highest paroxysm of fury, tearing her hair and writhing on the carpet.

He looked at her for an instant with a mixture of anger and compassion. At length compassion seemed to prevail.

“Come. Lorenza,” said he, “be calm; some future day you will be well rewarded for all you surfer now, or think you suffer.”

“Imprisoned! imprisoned!” cried Lorenza, without listening to him.

“Be patient.”

“Struck!”

“It is a period of probation.”

“Mad! mad!”

“You shall be cured.”

“Oh, put me in a madhouse at once! Shut me up at once in a real prison!”

“No; you have too well prepared me for what you would do in such a case.”

“Death! then.” screamed Lorenza, “instant death!” And bounding up with the suppleness and rapidity of some wild animal, she rushed forward to dash her head against the wall.

Balsamo had only to extend his hand toward her and to pronounce, by his will rather than his lips, one single word, to arrest her progress; Lorenza, checked in her wild career, staggered and fell into Balsamo's arms. — She was asleep.

The strange enchanter, who seemed to have subdued in this woman all that belonged to her physical existence, without having been able to triumph over the moral life, raised her, and carried her to her couch; then, having laid her on it, he imprinted a long kiss on her forehead, drew the curtains, and retired.

A soft and soothing sleep wrapped her in its embrace, as the mantle of a kind mother wraps the froward child after it has long suffered and wept.

CHAPTER LVIII.

The Visit.

LORENZA WAS not mistaken. A carriage, after having entered Paris by the Barriere St. Denis, and traversing the faubourg of that name throughout its entire length, had turned the angle formed by the last house and the Porte St. Denis, and was rapidly advancing along the boulevard. This carriage contained Monsieur Louis de Rohan, bishop of Strasbourg, whose impatience led him to anticipate the time fixed upon for seeking the sorcerer in his den.

The coachman, a man of mettle, and well accustomed to aid the handsome prelate in his gallant adventures amid the darkness and perils of certain mysterious streets, was by no means discouraged, when, after having passed the boulevards of St. Denis and St. Martin, still thronged with people and well lighted, he received the order to proceed along the lonely and dismal boulevard of the Bastille. The carnage stopped at the corner of the Rue St. Claude, on the boulevard itself, and, after a whispered order from its master, took up a concealed position under the trees about twenty paces off.

Then M, de Rohan, who was dressed in the ordinary costume of a civilian, glided down the street, and knocked at the door of the house, which he easily recognized by the description of it given to him by the Count de Fenix.

Fritz's footsteps echoed in the courtyard, and the door was opened.

“Is it not here that the Count de Fenix resides?” asked the prince.

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“Is he at home?”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“Well, say that a gentleman wishes to see him.”

“His highness the Cardinal de Rohan, is it not?” asked Fritz.

The prince stood perfectly confounded. He looked all around him, and at his dress, to see whether anything in his retinue or costume had revealed his rank; but he was alone, and in the dress of a layman.

“How do you know my name?” said he.

“My master has just told me this very instant that he expected your eminence.”

“Yes — but to-morrow, or the day after.”

“No, monseigneur — this evening.”

“Your master told you that he expected me this evening?”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“Very well; announce me, then,” said the cardinal, putting a double louis-d'or into Fritz's hand.

“In that case,” said Fritz, “will your eminence have the goodness to follow me?”

The cardinal made a gesture in the affirmative.

Fritz then advanced with a rapid step toward the antechamber, which was lighted by a massive bronze candelabrum, containing twelve wax tapers. The cardinal followed, surprised and thoughtful.

“My friend,” said he, stopping at the door of the salon, “there must be a mistake, I think, and in that case I do not wish to intrude on the count. It is impossible that he can expect me, for he was not aware that I intended to come tonight.”

“Monseigneur is the Prince-Cardinal de Rohan, bishop of Strasbourg, is he not?” inquired Fritz.

“Yes, my friend.”

“Well, then, it is monseigneur whom my master, the count, expects.”

And lighting successively the candles of two other candelabra in the salon. Fritz bowed and retired.

Five minutes elapsed, during which the cardinal, agitated by a strange emotion, gazed at the elegant furniture of this salon, and at the eight pictures by the first masters which hung from the walls. The door opened, and the Count de Fenix appeared on the threshold.

“Good-evening, my lord!” said he, simply.

“I am told that you expected me,” exclaimed the cardinal, without replying to this salutation — “that you expected me this evening? It is impossible!”

“I beg your pardon, my lord, but I did expect you,” replied the count. “Perhaps you doubt the truth of my words on seeing the poor reception I give you? But I have only very lately arrived in Paris, and can scarcely call myself installed here yet; your eminence must, therefore, be good enough to excuse me.”

“You expected me! But who could have told you that I was coming?”

“Yourself, my lord.”

“How so?”

“Did you not stop your carriage at the Barriere St. Denis?”

“Yes.”

“Did you not summon your footman to the carriage-door, and give him the order, 'Rue St. Claude, in the Marais, by the Faubourg St. Denis and the boulevard' — words which he repeated to the coachman?”

“Yes, certainly; but you must have seen and heard me.”

“I did see and hear you, my lord.”

“Then you were there.”

“No, my lord, I was not there.”

“And where were you?”

“I was here.”

“You saw me and heard me from this?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Come, come!”

“Monseigneur forgets that I am a sorcerer.”

“Ah, true, I did forget that! Bui, monsieur, what am I to call you? — The Baron Balsamo, or the Count de Fenix?”

“In my own house, my lord, I have no name; I am called the master.”

“Yes, that is the hermetical title. So then, master, you expected me?”

“I did expect you.”

“And your laboratory is heated?”

“My laboratory is always heated, my lord.”

“And you will permit me to enter it?”

“I shall have the honor of conducting your eminence there.”

“And I shall follow you, but only on one condition.”

“What is that?”

“That you promise not to place me personally in contact with the devil. I am terribly afraid of his majesty Lucifer.”

“Oh, my lord!”

“Yes, for in general you employ for such a purpose the greatest rogues unhanged — discarded soldiers of the guards, or fencing-masters without pupils, who, in order to play the part of Satan naturally, treat their dupes to sundry fillips and tweaks of the nose, after first putting out the lights.”

“My lord.” said Balsamo, smiling, “my devils never forget that they have the honor of dealing with princes, and ever bear in mind the Prince de Conde's speech to one of them who would not keep still, viz., that if he did not conduct himself more decently, he would so rub him down with an oaken towel that he should never need washing again.”

“I am delighted to hear that you manage your imps so well. Let us proceed to the laboratory, then.”

“Will your eminence have the goodness to follow me?”

“Proceed!”

CHAPTER LIX.

Gold

THE CARDINAL DE ROHAN and Balsamo wound along a narrow staircase which ran parallel with the great staircase, and, like it, led to the apartments on the first floor. There, in a vaulted apartment, appeared a door which Balsamo opened, and a very gloomy corridor was disclosed to the cardinal's views, who entered it resolutely.

Balsamo closed the door behind them. At the noise which this door made in closing, the cardinal looked back with a slight feeling of trepidation.

“My lord,” said Balsamo, “we have now arrived. We have but one more door to open and close; but let me warn you not to be alarmed at the sound it will make, for it is of iron.”

The cardinal, who had started at the sound of the first door, was glad to be thus prepared in time, for otherwise the grating noise of its hinges and lock would have jarred disagreeably on nerves even less susceptible than his. They descended three steps and entered the laboratory.

The first aspect of this new apartment was that of a large room with the beams and joists of the ceiling left in their original state, and containing a huge lamp with a shade, several books, and a great number of chemical and other philosophical instruments.

After a few seconds the cardinal began to feel that he breathed with difficulty.

“What is the meaning of this?” said he, “I am stifling here, master; the perspiration pours from my forehead? What noise is that?”

“Behold the cause, my lord,” said Balsamo, drawing back a large curtain of asbestos cloth, and disclosing to view an immense brick furnace, in the center of which two holes glared in the darkness like the gleaming eyes of a panther.

This furnace was situated in the middle of a second apartment, double the size of the first, which the prince had not perceived, hidden as it was by the asbestos curtain.

“Ah-ha!” cried the prince, retreating two or three steps, “that looks a little alarming.” — “It is a furnace, my lord.”

“Yes, but this furnace of yours has a very diabolical sort of a look. What are you cooking in it?”

“What your eminence asked from me.”

“What I asked from you?”

“Yes. I think your eminence said you wished for a specimen of my handiwork. I had not intended beginning the operation till to-morrow evening, as you were not to visit me till the day following; but your eminence having changed your intention, as soon as I heard you set out for my abode, I kindled the furnace and put in the ingredients for amalgamation; so that now the furnace is boiling, and in ten minutes you will have your gold. Permit me to open this ventilator to give a current of fresh air.”

“What! those crucibles on the furnace — ”

“Will in ten minutes give your highness gold as pure as that of the sequins of Venice, or the florins of Tuscany.”

“I should like to see it, if it is at all practicable.”

“Certainly. But you must use some necessary precautions.”

“What precautions?”

“Cover your face with this mask of asbestos with glass eyes; otherwise your sight might be injured by the glowing heat.”

“Peste! I must take care of that. I attach a good deal of value to my eyes, and would not give them for the hundred thousand crowns which you have promised me.”

“I thought so, for your eminence's eyes are very fine.”

This compliment was by no means displeasing to the cardinal, who was not a little vain of his person.

“Ha!” said he, putting on his mask, “so it seems we are to see what gold is?”

“I trust so, my lord.” “Gold, to the value of one hundred thousand crowns?”

“Yes, my lord, perhaps even a little more; for I made a very abundant mixture.”

“Upon my honor, you are a most generous sorcerer,” said the prince, with a joyous palpitation of the heart.

"Less so than your highness, who so kindly compliments me. In the meantime, my lord, may I beg you to keep back a little while I take off the lid of the crucible?"

And Balsamo, having put on a short shirt of asbestos, seized with a vigorous arm a pair of iron pincers, and raised the cover, now red hot, which revealed to view four crucibles of a similar form, some containing a mixture of a vermilion color, others a whitish matter, although still retaining something of a purple transparent hue.

"And that is gold!" said the prelate in a half whisper, as if he feared to disturb the mystery which was being accomplished before him.

"Yes, my lord. These four crucibles contain the substance in different stages, some of them having been subject to the process twelve, others only eleven hours. The mixture — and this is a secret which I reveal only to a friend of the hermetic science — is thrown into the matter at the moment of ebullition. But, as your eminence may see, the first crucible is now at a white heat; it has reached the proper stage, and it is time to pour it out. Be good enough to keep back, my lord."

The prince obeyed with the promptitude of a soldier at the command of his captain, and Balsamo, laying aside the pincers already heated by contact with the crucibles, rolled forward to the furnace a sort of movable anvil in which were hollowed eight cylindrical molds of equal caliber.

"What is this, my dear sorcerer?" asked the prince.

"This, my lord, is the mold in which your ingots are to be cast."

"Ah-ha!" exclaimed the cardinal, and he redoubled his attention.

Balsamo spread over the floor a thick layer of white tow as a sort of protection against accidents; then, placing himself between the furnace and the anvil, he opened a huge book, and, wand in hand, repeated a solemn incantation. This ended, he seized an enormous pair of tongs intended for grasping the weighty crucibles.

"The gold will be splendid, my lord," said he; "of the very finest quality."

"What! Are you going to lift off that flaming pot?"

"Which weighs fifty pounds? Yes, my lord; few founders, I may say it without boasting, possess my muscles and my dexterity. Fear nothing, therefore."

"But if the crucible were to break?"

"Yes, that happened with me once, my lord — in the year 1399. I was making an experiment with Nicolas Flamel, in his house in the Rue des

Ecrivains, near the church of St. Jacques-la-Boucherie. Poor Flamel was nearly losing his life; and I lost twenty-seven marks of a substance even more precious than gold.”

“What the devil is that you are saying; master?”

“The truth.”

“Do you mean to make me believe that you pursued the great work in 1399, along with Nicolas Flamel?”

“Precisely so, my lord. We found out the secret together, about fifty or sixty years before, when experimenting with Pierre le Bon in the town of Pola. He did not shut up the crucible quickly enough, and I lost the use of my right eye for nearly twelve years in consequence of the evaporation.”

“Pierre le Boil, who composed that famous book, the 'Margarita Pretiosa,' printed in 1330?”

“The very same, my lord.”

“And you knew Pierre le Bon and Flamel?”

“I was the pupil of the one and the teacher of the other.”

And while the terrified prelate asked himself whether the personage at his side was not the devil in person and not one of his satellites, Balsamo plunged his long tongs into the furnace. The alchemist's grasp was sure and rapid. He seized the crucible about four inches from the top, satisfied himself, by raising it up a little, that his hold was firm; then, by a vigorous effort, which strained every muscle in his frame, he heaved up the terrible pot from the glowing furnace. The handle of the tongs turned glowing red immediately; then, rippling over the fused matter within, were seen white furrows like lightning streaking a black sulphureous cloud; then the edges of the crucible turned a brownish red, while the conical base appeared still rose-colored and silver beneath the shade of the furnace; then the metal, on the surface of which had formed a violet-colored scum, crusted here and there with gold, hissed over the mouth of the crucible, and fell flashing into the dark mold, around the top of which the golden wave, angry and foaming, seemed to insult the vile metal with which it was forced into contact.

“Now for the second,” said Balsamo, seizing another crucible; and another mold was filled with the same strength and dexterity as the first. The perspiration poured from the operator's forehead; and the cardinal, standing back in the shade, crossed himself. In fact, the scene was one of wild and majestic horror.

Balsamo, his features lighted by the reddish glare of the glowing metal, resembled one of the damned of Michael Angelo or Dante, writhing in the depths of their flaming caldrons; while over all brooded the feeling of the mysterious and unknown.

Balsamo took no breathing time between the two operations; time pressed.

“There will be a slight loss,” said he, after having filled the second mold. “I have allowed the mixture to boil the hundredth part of a minute too long.”

“The hundredth part of a minute!” exclaimed the cardinal, no longer seeking to conceal his stupefaction.

“It is enormous in alchemy,” replied Balsamo, quietly; “but in the meantime, your eminence, here are two crucibles emptied, and two molds filled with one hundred pounds' weight of pure gold.”

And, seizing the first mold with his powerful tongs, he plunged it into water, which hissed and bubbled around it for some time. Then he opened it and took out a lump of solid gold in the form of a sugar-loaf flattened at each extremity.

“We shall have some time to wait for the other crucibles,” said Balsamo. “Will your eminence in the meantime be seated, or would you prefer to breathe for a few moments a cooler atmosphere than this?”

“And that is really gold?” asked the cardinal, without replying to the operator's question.

Balsamo smiled. The cardinal was his.

“Do you doubt it, my lord?”

“Why — you know — science is so often mistaken — ”

“Prince, your words do not express your whole meaning,” said Balsamo. “You think that I am deceiving you, and deceiving you wittingly. My lord, I should sink very low in my own opinion could I act such a part, for my ambition in that case would not extend beyond the walls of my cabinet, which you would leave filled with wonder, only to be undeceived on taking your ingot to the first goldsmith you should meet. Come, come, my lord! Do not think so meanly of me, and be assured that, if I wished to deceive you, I should do it more adroitly, and with a higher aim. However, your eminence knows how to test gold?”

“Certainly. By the touchstone.”

“You have doubtless had occasion, my lord, to make the experiment yourself, were it only on Spanish doubloons, which are much esteemed in play because they are of the purest gold, but which, for that very reason, are frequently counterfeited.”

“In fact, I have done so before now.”

“Well, my lord, here are the stone and the acid.”

“By no means; I am quite convinced.”

“Milord, do me the favor to assure yourself that these ingots are not only gold, but gold without alloy.”

The cardinal appeared unwilling to give this proof of his incredulity, and yet it was evident that he was not convinced. Balsamo himself tested the ingots, and showed the result of the experiment to his guest.

“Twenty-eight carats,” said he; “and now I may pour out the two others.”

Ten minutes afterward the four ingots lay side by side on the tow, heated by their contact.

“Your eminence came here in a carriage, did you not? At least when I saw you you were in one.”

“Yes.”

“If your lordship will order it to the door, my servants shall put the ingots into it.”

“One hundred thousand crowns!” murmured the cardinal, as he took off his mask to feast his eyes on the gold lying at his feet.

“And as for this gold, your highness can tell whence it comes, having seen it made!”

“ Oh, yes; I shall testify —

“Oh, no!” said Balsamo, hastily; “savants are not much in favor in France! Testify nothing, my lord. If instead of making gold I made theories, then, indeed, I should have no objection.”

“Then, what can I do for you?” said the prince, lifting an ingot of fifty pounds with difficulty in his delicate hands.

Balsamo looked at him steadily, and without the least respect began to laugh.

“What is there so very ludicrous in what I have said?” asked the cardinal.

“Your eminence offers me your services, I think. Would it not be much more to the purpose were I to offer mine to you?”

The cardinal's brow darkened.

“You have obliged me, sir,” said he, “and I am ready to acknowledge it; but if the gratitude I am to bear you proves a heavier burden than I imagined, I shall not accept the obligation. There are still, thank Heaven, usurers enough in Paris from whom I can procure, half on some pledge and half on my bond, one hundred thousand crowns, the day after to-morrow. My episcopal ring alone is worth forty thousand livres.” And the prelate held out his hand, as white as a woman's, on which shone a diamond the size of a small nut.

“Prince,” said Balsamo, bowing, “it is impossible that you can for a moment imagine that I meant to offend you.” Then, as if speaking to himself, he proceeded; “It is singular that the truth should always produce this effect on those who bear the title of prince.”

“What mean you?”

“Your highness proposes to serve me; now I merely ask you, my lord, of what nature could those services be which your eminence proposes to render me?”

“Why, in the first place, my credit at court.”

“My lord, my lord, you know too well that that credit is much shaken; in fact, I should almost as soon take the Duke de Choiseul's, and yet he has not perhaps a fortnight to hold his place. Take my word for it, prince, as far as credit goes, depend on mine. There is good and sterling gold. Every time that your eminence is in want of any, let me know the night before, and you shall have as much as you like. And with gold, my lord, cannot all things be procured?”

“Not all,” murmured the cardinal, sinking into the grade of a protege, and no longer even making an effort to regain that of patron.

“Ah! true. I forgot that your lordship desires something more than gold — something more precious than all the riches of the earth. But in this, science cannot assist you; it is the province of magic. My lord, say the word, and the alchemist is ready to become the magician.”

“Thank you, sir; but I want for nothing more; I desire nothing farther,” said the cardinal, in a desponding voice.

Balsamo approached him.

“My lord,” said he, “a prince, young, handsome, ardent, rich, and bearing the name of Rohan, ought not to make such a reply to a magician.”

“Why not, sir?”

“Because the magician reads his heart, and knows the contrary.”

"I wish for nothing; I desire nothing." repeated the cardinal, almost terrified.

"I should have thought, on the contrary, that your eminence's wishes were such as you dared not avow, even to yourself, since they are those of a — king!"

"Sir," said the cardinal, with a start, "you allude, I presume, to a subject which you introduced before, when I saw you at St. Denis?"

"I confess it, my lord."

"Sir, you were mistaken then, and you are equally mistaken now."

"Do you forget, my lord, that I can read as plainly what is passing at this moment in your heart as, a short time ago, I saw your carriage enter the city, drive along the "boulevard, and stop beneath the trees, about fifty paces from my house."

"Then explain yourself; tell me what you mean."

"My lord, the princes of your family have always aimed at a high and daring passion; you have not degenerated from your race in that respect."

"I do not know what you mean, count," stammered the prince.

"On the contrary, you understand me perfectly. I could have touched many chords which vibrate in your heart, but why do so uselessly? I have touched the one which was necessary, and it vibrates deeply. I am certain."

The cardinal raised his head, and with a last effort at defiance met the clear and penetrating glance of Balsamo. Balsamo smiled with such an expression of superiority that the cardinal cast down his eyes.

"Oh! you are right, my lord; you are right; do not look at me, for then I read too plainly what passes in your heart — that heart, which, like a mirror, gives back the form of the objects reflected in it."

"Silence! Count de Fenix — silence!" said the cardinal, completely subdued.

"Yes, you are right; it is better to be silent, for the moment has not yet come to let such a passion be seen."

"Not yet, did you say?"

"Not yet."

"Then that love may, in some future time, bear fruit?"

"Why not?"

"And can you tell me, then, if this love be not the love of a madman, as it often seems to myself, and as it ever will seem, until I have a proof to the contrary?"

“You ask much, my lord. I can tell you nothing without being placed in contact with the person who inspires your love; or, at least, with something belonging to her person.”

“What would be necessary?”

“A ringlet, however small, of her beautiful golden hair, for example.”

“Yes; you are a man profoundly skilled in the human heart; you read it as I should read an open book.”

“Alas! that is just what your great grand-uncle, the Chevalier Louis de Rohan, said to me when I bade him farewell on the platform of the Bastille, at the foot of the scaffold which he ascended so courageously!”

“He said that to you — that you were profoundly skilled in the human heart?”

“Yes; and that I could read it; for I had forewarned him that the Chevalier de Preault would betray him. He would not believe me, and the Chevalier de Preault did betray him.”

“But what a singular analogy you draw between my ancestor and myself!” said the cardinal, turning pale in spite of himself.

“I did so merely to remind you of the necessity of being prudent, my lord, in obtaining a tress of hair whose curling locks are surmounted by a crown.”

“No matter how obtained; you shall have the tress, sir.”

“It is well. In the meantime, here is your gold, my lord; I hope you no longer doubt its being really gold?”

“Give me a pen and paper.”

“What for, my lord?”

“To give you a receipt for the hundred thousand crowns which you are so good as to lend me.”

“A receipt to me, my lord? For what purpose?”

“I borrow often, my dear count; but I tell you beforehand, I never take gifts.”

“As you please, prince.”

The cardinal took a pen from the table, and wrote a receipt for the money in an enormous illegible hand, and in a style of orthography which would shock a poor curate's housekeeper of the present day.

“Is that right?” asked he, as he handed it to Balsamo.

“Perfectly right,” replied the count, putting it in his pocket without even looking at it.

“You have not read it, sir!”

“I have your highness's word ; and the word of a Rohan is better than any pledge.” “Count de Fenix,” said the cardinal, with a slight inclination, very significant from a man of his rank, “you speak like a gentleman; and if I cannot lay you under any obligation to me, I am at least fortunate in being obliged to such a man.”

Balsamo bowed in his turn, and rang a bell, at the sound of which Fritz appeared.

The count spoke a few words to him in German. He stooped, and like a child carrying a handful of oranges — a little embarrassed, to be sure, but by no means oppressed with the burden — he carried off the eight ingots wrapped up in tow.

“He is a perfect Hercules, that fellow,” said the cardinal.

“He is tolerably strong, indeed, my lord; but since he has been in my service, I give him every day three drops of an elixir compounded by my learned friend, the doctor Althotas. So you see the rogue profits by it; in a year he will be able to carry a hundred weight with one hand.”

“Wonderful! incomprehensible!” murmured the cardinal, “I shall never be able to resist speaking of all this!”

“Oh! speak of it by all means,” replied Balsamo, laughing; “but remember that, by so doing, you bind yourself to come in person and extinguish the flame of the fagots, if by chance the parliament should take it in their heads to burn me alive in the Place de Greve.”

And, having escorted his illustrious visitor to the outer gate, Balsamo took leave of him with a respectful bow.

“But I do not see your servant?” said the cardinal.

“He has gone to carry the gold to your carriage, my lord.”

“Does he know where it is?”

“Under the fourth tree to the right, on the boulevard; that was what I said to him in German, my lord.”

The cardinal raised his hands in astonishment, and disappeared in the darkness.

Balsamo waited for Fritz's return, and then entered the house, closing all the doors carefully behind him.

CHAPTER LX.

The Elixir of Life.

BALSAMO BEING now alone, proceeded to listen at Lorenza's door. She was still sunk in a soft and gentle sleep. He half opened a wicket in the door, and contemplated her for some time in a sweet and tender reverie. Then, shutting the wicket, he crossed the apartment which we have described, and which separated Lorenza's apartment from the laboratory, and hastened to extinguish the fire in the furnace by throwing open an immense conduit, which allowed the heat to escape into the chimney, and at the same time gave passage to the water of a reservoir on the roof.

Then, carefully placing the cardinal's receipt in a black morocco case:

“The word of a Rohan is good, murmured he; “but for myself alone; and it is well that the brethren yonder should know how I employ their gold.”

As these words died away on his lips, three short, quick taps on the ceiling made him raise his head.

“Oh, oh!” said he, “there is Althotas calling me.”

Then, while he continued his task of giving air to the laboratory, and arranging everything in order, the taps were repeated louder than before.

“So, he is getting impatient; it is a good sign.”

And Balsamo took a long iron rod and knocked on the ceiling in answer. He then proceeded to move an iron ring fixed in the wall; and, by means of a spring which was disclosed to view, a trap-door was detached from the ceiling and descended to the floor of the laboratory. Balsamo placed himself in the center of this machine, which, by means of another spring, gently rose with its burden — with as much ease as in the opera the gods and goddesses are carried up to Elysium — and the pupil found himself in the presence of the master.

The new dwelling of the old alchemist might be about eight or nine feet high and sixteen in diameter; it was lighted from the top like a well, and hermetically closed on the four sides. This apartment, as the reader may observe, was a perfect palace when compared with his habitation in the vehicle.

The old man was seated in his armchair on wheels, in the center of a marble table formed like a horseshoe, and heaped up with a whole world, or rather a whole chaos, of plants, phials, tools, books, instruments, and papers covered with cabalistic characters.

He was so absorbed that he never raised his head when Balsamo appeared. The light of an astral lamp, suspended from the culminating point of the window in the roof, fell on his bald, shining head. He was turning to and fro in his fingers a small white bottle, the transparency of which he was trying before his eye, as a good housekeeper tries the eggs which she buys at market. Balsamo gazed on him at first in silence; then, after a moment's pause:

“Well,” said he, “have you any news?”

“Yes, yes; come hither, Acharat, you see me enchanted — transported with joy! I have found — I have found —

“What?”

“Pardieu! what I sought.”

“Gold?” “Gold, indeed! I am surprised at you!” — “The diamond?”

“Gold? diamonds? The man raves! A fine discovery, forsooth, to be rejoiced at;”

“Then what you have found is your elixir?”

“Yes, my son, yes! — the elixir of life! Life? — what do I say? — the eternity of life!”

“Oh!” said Balsamo, in a dejected voice (for he looked on this pursuit as mere insanity), “so it is that dream which occupies you still?”

But Althotas, without listening, continued to gaze delightedly at his phial.

“At last,” said he, “the combination is complete; the elixir of Aristaeus, twenty grains; balm of Mercury, fifteen grains; precipitate of gold, fifteen grains; essence of the cedar of Lebanon, twenty-five grains.”

“But it seems to me, that, with the exception of the elixir of Aristaeus, this is precisely your last combination, master?”

“Yes; but I had not then discovered one more ingredient, without which all the rest are as nothing.”

“And have you discovered it now?”

“Yes.”

“Can you procure it?”

“I should think so!”

“What is it?”

“We must add to the several ingredients, already combined in this phial, the three last drops of the life-blood of an infant.”

“Well, but where will you procure this infant?” said Balsamo, horror-struck.

“I trust to you for that.”

“To me? You are mad, master!”

“Mad? And why?” asked the old man, perfectly unmoved at this charge, and licking with the utmost delight a drop of the fluid which had escaped from the cork of the phial and was trickling down the side.

“Why, for that purpose, you must kill the child.”

“Of course, we must kill him; and the handsomer he is, the better.”

“Impossible!” said Balsamo, shrugging his shoulders; “children are not taken in that way to be killed.”

“Bah!” cried the old man, with hideous coolness, “and what do they do with them, then?”

“Pardieu! They rear them.”

“Oh! Then the world is changed lately? It is only three years ago since we were offered as many infants as we chose for four charges of powder and half a bottle of eau-de-vie.”

“Was that in Congo, master?”

“Yes, yes, in Congo! It is quite the same to me whether the child be black or white. Those who were offered to us. I remember, were sweet, playful, curly-headed little things.”

“Ah! Yes,” said Balsamo; “but unfortunately, my dear master, we are not in Congo.”

“Oh! we are not in Congo?” said Althotas. “And where are we, then?”

“In Pans.”

“In Paris? Well, if we were to embark from Marseilles, we could be in Congo in six weeks.”

“Yes, no doubt. But I am obliged to remain in France.”

“You are obliged to remain in France? And why so, may I ask!”

“Because I have business here.”

“Business?”

“Yes; important business.”

The old man burst into a prolonged and ghastly laugh.

"Business!" said he; "business in France! True, I forgot, you have your clubs to organize!"

"Yes, master."

"Conspiracies to set on foot?"

"Yes, master."

"And you call that business?" And the aged man again commenced to laugh, with an air of mockery and sarcasm. Balsamo remained silent, collecting his forces for the storm which was brewing, and which he felt approach.

"Well, and how is this business of yours getting on?" said the old man, turning with difficulty in his chair, and fixing his large gray eyes on his pupil.

Balsamo felt his glance pierce him like a ray of light.

"How far have I advanced?" asked he.

"Yes."

"I have thrown the first stone, and the waters are troubled."

"Troubled? And what slime have you stirred up? — eh?"

"The best — the slime of philosophy."

"Oh! so you are setting to work with your Utopias, your baseless visions, your fogs and mists! Fools! Ye discuss existence or non-existence of God, instead of trying like me to make gods of yourselves. And who are these famous philosophers with whom you are connected? Let me hear."

"I have already gained over the greatest poet and the greatest atheist of the age. He is soon expected in France, whence he has been in a manner exiled, and he is to be made a freemason at the lodge which I have established in the old monastery of the Jesuits, in the Rue Pot-de-Fer."

"What is his name?"

"Voltaire."

"I never heard of him. Well, who else have you?"

"I am very soon to have a conference with the man who has done more to overturn established ideas than any other in this age — the man who wrote 'Le Contrat Social.'"

"What is he called?"

"Rousseau."

"I never heard of him."

"Very probably, as you read only Alphonso the Tenth, Raymond Sully, Peter of Toledo, and Albertus Magnus."

“They are the only men who really lived, because all their lives they were occupied by that great question; to be, or not to be.”

“There are two methods of living, master.”

“I know only one, for my part, viz., to exist. But let us return to your philosophers. You called them, I think — ?”

“Voltaire and Rousseau.”

“Good. I shall remember those names. And you propose by means of these men — ”

“To make myself master of the present, and to undermine the future.”

“Then, it appears the people in this country are very stupid, since they can be led by ideas!

“On the contrary, it is because they have too much mind that ideas have more power over them than facts. Besides, I have an auxiliary more powerful than all the philosophers on earth.”

“What is that?”

“Love of change. It is now some sixteen hundred years since monarchy was established in France, and the people are wearied of it.”

“So that you think they will overthrow it?”

“I am sure of it.”

“And you would help them to begin the work?”

“Ay! With all my strength.”

“Fool;”

“How so?”

“What will you gain by the overthrow of this monarchy?”

“I? Nothing. But the people will gain happiness.”

“Come, as I am satisfied with what I have done to-day, I am willing to waste a little time on you. Explain then, first, how you are to attain to this happiness, and afterward what happiness is.”

“How I am to attain to it?”

“Yes, to this universal happiness of yours, or to the overthrow of the monarchy, which in your eyes seems to be the same thing.”

“Well, there exists at this moment a ministry which is the last rampart of the monarchy, intelligent, industrious, courageous, and which might perhaps maintain this tottering and worn-out machine for twenty j-ears longer; but they will assist me to overturn it.”

“Who? Your philosophers?”

“No. The philosophers support it, on the contrary.”

“What! Your philosophers support a ministry which supports a monarchy to which they themselves are hostile? What fools these philosophers of yours are!”

“It is because the prime minister is himself a philosopher.”

“So! I understand — they mean to govern in the person of this minister. They are not fools, then; they are selfish.”

“I do not wish to discuss what they are,” exclaimed Balsamo, who began to get impatient. “All I know is, that this ministry overturned, every one will cry havoc, and let slip the dogs of war on their successors. First, there will be against them the philosophers, then the parliament. The philosophers will blame, the parliament will blame; the ministry will persecute the philosophers, and will dissolve the parliament. Then both mind and matter will combine, and organize a silent league — an opposition, obstinate, tenacious, incessant, which will attack, undermine, shake all. Instead of parliaments, judges will be appointed; these judges, nominated by the king, will move heaven and earth in defense of royalty. They will be accused, and with truth, of venality, of connivance, of injustice. The nation will arise, and then 'the monarchy will have against it the philosophers — that is, mind; the parliaments — that is, the middle class; the people — that is, the lever, which Archimedes sought, and with which he could have raised the world.”

“Well, when you have raised the world, you can only let it fall back again into its old place.”

“Yes; but in falling back it will crush the monarchy to atoms.”

“And when the monarchy is crushed to atoms — to adopt your false metaphors and inflated language — what will arise on its ruins?”

“Liberty!”

“Ah! the French will then be free?”

“They cannot fail to be so soon.”

“All free?”

“All.”

“There will then be in France thirty millions of free men?”

“Yes.”

“And among those thirty millions of free men, has it never occurred to you that there might be one, with a little more brains than the rest, who, some fine morning, will seize on the liberty of the twenty-nine millions nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine, in order that he might have a little more liberty himself? You remember that dog we had at Medina, who ate up what was intended for all the other dogs?"

"Yes; but you may remember also, that one day the others combined together and strangled him."

"Because they were dogs; in such a case men would have done nothing."

"Then you place man's intelligence below that of a dog, master?"

"All examples prove it."

"What examples?"

"I think you may recall among the ancients a certain Caesar Augustus, and among the moderns a certain Oliver Cromwell, who bit rather deeply into the Roman cake and the English cake, without any great resistance having been offered by those from whom they snatched it."

"Well; and supposing that the man of whom you speak should arise, he will be mortal, he will die; and before dying he will have done good even to those whom he may have oppressed; for he will have changed the nature of the aristocracy. Being obliged to lean for support on something, he will choose that which is strongest — the people. Instead of an equality which degrades, he will establish an equality which elevates; for equality has no fixed range; it adapts itself to the level of him who makes it. Now, in elevating the people in the social scale, he will have introduced a principle unknown until his time. A revolution will make the French free; a protectorate under another Caesar Augustus, or another Oliver Cromwell, will make them equal."

Althotas wheeled round in his armchair.

"Oh, the stupidity of man!" he cried. "Busy yourself for twenty years in educating a child — teach him all that you know — that at thirty he may come and tell you — 'Men will be equal!'"

"Certainly, men will be equal — equal before the law."

"And before death, fool? — before death, that law of laws, will they be equal, when one shall die at three days old and another at one hundred years? Equal? Men equal as long as they are subject to death? — Oh, fool! Tin-ice sodden fool!"

And Althotas threw himself back in his chair to laugh at his ease, while Balsamo, grave and sad, sat with his head leaning on his hand.

The old man at length turned a look of pity on him.

"Am I," said he, "the equal of the workman who munches his coarse bread? of the sucking babe? of the driveling old man sunk in second childhood? Wretched sophist that you are! Men can be equal only when they are immortal; for, when immortal, they will be gods, and gods alone are on an equality with one another."

"Immortal!" murmured Balsamo. "Immortal! — 'Tis a chimera."

"A chimera? Yes; a chimera like steam — a chimera like the electric fluid — a chimera like everything which is sought — which is not yet discovered — but which will be discovered. Rake up the dust of by-gone worlds, lay bare one after another the superincumbent strata, each of which represents a social state now passed away; and in these human strata — in this detritus of kingdoms — in these slimy deposits of time, into which modern investigation has pierced like an iron plowshare — what do you read? Is it not that men have, in all ages, sought what I seek, under the various names of the highest good, human happiness, perfection? When did they not seek it? They sought it in the days of Homer, when men lived two hundred years — they sought it in the days of the patriarchs, when they lived eight centuries. They did not find that highest good — that well-being — that perfection; for, if they had, this decrepit world would now be fresh, youthful, roseate as the morning dawn. Instead of that we have suffering, death, decay. Is suffering good? Is death lovely? Is decay fair to look upon?"

Here the old man was interrupted by his short, dry cough, and Balsamo had a moment to reply.

"You acknowledge," said he, "that no one has yet discovered that elixir of life which you seek. I tell you that no one will ever discover it. Submit to God."

"Fool! No one has discovered it; therefore no one will discover it! By that mode of reasoning we should never have made any discoveries. But do you think that all discoveries are new things, inventions? Far from it; they are forgotten things found again. Why should things, once found, be forgotten? Because life is too short for the discoverer to draw from his discovery all the deductions which belong to it. Twenty times has man been on the point of grasping the elixir of life. Do you think that the Styx was merely a dream of Homer's? Do you think that Achilles, almost immortal, because vulnerable in his heel alone, was a fable? No; Achilles was the pupil of Chiron, as you are my pupil. That word Chiron means either best or worst. Chiron was a sage whom they have depicted as a Centaur, because by his learning he had endowed man with the strength and swiftness of the horse.

Well, like me, he had almost found the elixir of immortality. Perhaps, like me, he wanted only three drops of blood. The want of those three drops of blood rendered Achilles vulnerable in his heel; death found a passage — it entered. Well, what have you to say to that?”

“I say,” replied Balsamo, visibly shaken, “that I have my task and you have yours; let each fulfill his own at his own personal risk and danger. I will not second yours by a crime.”

“By a crime?”

“Yes; and by such a crime-as would raise a whole people, with cries of indignation in pursuit of you — a crime which would cause you to hang on one of those infamous gibbets from which your science has not secured the best men any more than the worst.”

Althotas struck the marble table with his dry and fleshless hands. “Come!” said he, “be not a humane idiot — the worst race of idiots which exist in the world! Let us just converse a little on these laws of yours — these brutal and absurd laws, written by animals of your species who shudder at a drop of blood shed for a wise purpose, but gloat over torrents of the vital fluid shed on scaffolds, before the ramparts of cities, or on those plains which they call fields of battle! Your laws, ignorant and selfish, sacrificing the future generation to the present, and which have taken for their motto; 'Live to-day; for to-morrow we die!' Let us speak of them, I say.”

“Say what you have to say — I am listening,” said Balsamo, becoming more and more gloomy.

“Have you a pencil? I wish you to make a little calculation.”

“I can calculate without pen or pencil — proceed with what you have to say.”

“What was this that your project was? Oh! I remember. You are to overturn a ministry, dissolve the parliament, establish venal judges, cause a national bankruptcy, stir up rebellion, kindle a revolution, overturn the monarchy, raise up a protectorate, and hurl down the protector. The revolution is to bring freedom — the protectorship equality. Then, the French being free and equal, your task will be accomplished? Is not that it?”

“Yes; do you look on the thing as impossible?”

“I do not believe in impossibility. You see I play fairly with you.”

“Well, what then?”

“In the first place, France is not England, where what you wish to do has already been done — plagiarist that you are! France is not an isolated land, where ministers may be dismissed, parliaments dissolved, iniquitous judges established, bankruptcy brought about, revolt fomented, revolution kindled, the monarchy overturned, a protectorship established, and the protector then overthrown, without other nations interfering a little in these movements. France is soldered to Europe as the liver to the frame of man. It has roots in all nations; its fibers extend through every people. Try to tear up the liver of this great machine which is called the European continent, and for twenty, thirty, forty years perhaps, the whole body will quiver. But I shall take the lowest number, I shall say twenty years. Is that too much, oh sage philosopher?”

“No, it is not too much.” said Balsamo; “it is not even enough.”

“However, I am satisfied with it. Twenty years of war, of a bloody, mortal, incessant strife — let me see — I put down that at two hundred thousand dead each year. That is not too high a calculation, considering that there will be fighting at the same time in Germany. Italy, Spain, and Heaven knows where else! Two hundred thousand men a year, in twenty years make four millions. Allowing each man seventeen pounds of blood, which is nearly the natural quantity, that will make — seventeen multiplied by four — let me see — that will make sixty-eight millions of pounds of blood, shed for the attainment of your object. I, for my part, ask but three drops! Say, now, which of us is mad? — which of us is the savage? — which of us the cannibal? Well, you do not answer?”

“Yes, master, I do answer, that three drops of blood would be nothing were you sure of success.”

“And you, who would shed sixty-eight millions of pounds, are you sure of success? Speak? If you be sure, lay your hand on your heart and say, 'Master, for these four millions of dead, I guarantee the happiness of the human race!'”

“Master,” said Balsamo, evading a direct reply, “in the name of Heaven seek for some other means than this!”

“Ah, you dare not answer me! You dare not answer me!” exclaimed Althotas, triumphantly.

“You are deceived, master, about the efficacy of the means — it is impossible.”

“Ay? So you give advice, so you contradict me, so you give me the lie, do you?” said Althotas, rolling his gray eyes from beneath his white and shaggy eyebrows with an expression of concentrated anger.

“No, master — but I cannot help reflecting on the difficulties in your way — I, who am brought every day into contact with the world, in opposition to men — who have to struggle against princes, and who do not live like you, secluded in a corner, indifferent to all that passes around you, and careless whether your actions are forbidden or authorized by the laws — a pure abstraction, in short, of the savant and the scholar. I, in short, who see the difficulties, warn you of them. That is all.”

“You could easily set-aside all those difficulties if you chose.”

“Say rather if I believed that you were in the right.”

“You do not believe so, then?”

“No,” said Balsamo.

“You are only tempting me!” cried Althotas.

“No, I merely express my doubts.”

“Well — come; do you believe in death?”

“I believe in what is. Now death is.”

Althotas shrugged his shoulders.

“Death is,” continued Balsamo; “that is one point which you will not contest.”

“No, it is incontestable. It is omnipresent, invincible, too — is it not?” added the old man with a smile which made his adept shudder.

“Oh, yes, master; omnipresent, and, above all, invincible!”

“And when you see a corpse, the cold sweat bedews your forehead, regret pierces your heart?”

“No — the cold sweat does not bedew my forehead, because I am familiar with every form of human misery; grief does not pierce my heart, because I attach little value to life. I only say in the presence of a corpse; 'Death! death! thou art as powerful as God. Thou reignest as a sovereign, O death, and none can prevail against thee! '

Althotas listened to Balsamo in silence, giving no other sign of impatience than that of turning a scalpel eagerly in his fingers; but when the pupil had ended his painful and solemn invocation, the master looked around him with a smile, and his piercing eyes, which seemed to penetrate nature's most hidden secrets, rested on a poor black dog, which lay trembling in a, corner of the room on a little heap of straw. It was the last of three animals of the same species which Althotas had demanded for his experiments, and which Balsamo had procured for him.

“Take that dog,” said Althotas, “and place it on the table.”

Balsamo obeyed.

The creature, which seemed to have a presentiment of its fate, and which had, no doubt, already been in the hands of the experimenter, began to tremble, struggle, and howl, as soon as it felt the contact of the marble table.

“And so,” said Althotas, “you believe in life, do you not, since you believe in death?”

“Certainly.”

“There is a dog which appears to me quite alive. What do you think?”

“He is alive, assuredly, because he howls, struggles, is terrified.”

“How ugly black dogs are! By-the-by, remember the first opportunity to get me some white ones.”

“I will endeavor to do so.”

“Well, you say this one is alive? Bark, my little fellow, bark!” said the old man with his frightful laugh, “we must convince my Lord Acharat that you are alive.” And he touched the dog on a certain muscle, which made him bark or rather howl immediately.

“Very well; now bring forward the air-pump, and put the dog under the receiver. But I forgot to ask you in which death you have the firmest belief.”

“I do not know what you mean, master; death is death.”

“Very just; that is my opinion also. Then, since death is death, make a vacuum, Acharat.”

Balsamo turned a handle, and the air which was inclosed with the dog in the receiver rushed out by means of a tube with a sharp whistling sound. The little dog seemed at first restless, then looked around, snuffed the air uneasily, raised its head, breathed noisily and hurriedly, and at last sunk down — suffocated, swollen, senseless.

“Now, the dog is dead of apoplexy, is he not?” said Althotas; “a very good kind of death, as it does not cause much suffering.”

“Yes.”

“Is he really dead?”

“Certainly he is.”

“You do not seem quite convinced. Acharat.”

“Yes, I assure you I am.”

“Oh, you know my resources, do you not? You suppose that I have discovered the art of insufflation, do you not? — that other problem which consists in restoring life by making the vital air circulate in a body which has not been wounded, as in a bladder which has not been pierced?”

“No; I suppose nothing. I simply believe that the dog is dead.”

“However, for greater security, we shall kill him twice. Lift up the receiver, Acharat.”

Acharat raised the glass shade. The dog did not stir; his eyelids were closed, and his heart had ceased to beat.

“Take this scalpel, and without wounding the larynx, divide the vertebral column.”

“I do so only to satisfy you.”

“And also to put an end to the poor animal in case it should not be quite dead,” replied Althotas, smiling with that kind of obstinate pertinacity peculiar to the aged.

Balsamo made an incision with the keen blade, which divided the vertebral column about two inches below the brain, and laid bare a large bloody wound. The animal, or rather the dead body of the animal, remained motionless.

“Ha! by my faith, he was quite dead,” said Althotas. “See! not a fiber moves, not a muscle stirs, not one atom of his flesh recoils at this second attempt.”

“I shall acknowledge all that as often as you like,” said Balsamo, impatiently.

“Then you are certain that you behold an animal, inert, cold, forever incapable of motion. Nothing can prevail against death, you say. No power can restore life, or even the semblance of life to this poor creature?”

“No power, except that of God.”

“Yes, but God turns not aside from his established laws. When God kills, as He is supreme wisdom, He has a reason for doing so; some benefit is to result from it. An assassin, I forget his name, said that once, and it was well said. Nature has an interest in Death. Then you see before you a dog as dead as it is possible to be. Nature has taken possession of her rights over him.”

Althotas fixed his piercing eye on Balsamo, who, wearied by the old man's dotage, only bowed in reply.

“Well,” continued Althotas, “what would you say if this dog opened his eye and looked at you!”

"I should be very much surprised, master."

"You would be surprised? Ha! I am delighted to hear it." On uttering these words with his dreary hollow laugh, the old man drew near the dog a machine composed of plates of metal separated by dampers of cloths; the center of this apparatus was swimming in a mixture of acidulated water; the two extremities, or poles, as they are called, projected from the trough.

"Which eye do you wish him to open, Acharat?" asked the old man.

"The right."

He placed the two poles of the machine in juxtaposition, separated, however, from each other by a small piece of silk, and fixed them on a muscle in the neck. Instantly the dog opened the right eye and looked steadily at Balsamo, who recoiled with horror.

"Shall we now pass to the jaw?" asked Althotas.

Balsamo made no reply; he was overpowered with astonishment.

Another muscle was touched; and the eye having closed, the jaws opened, showing the sharp white teeth, and below them the gums red and quivering apparently with life.

"This is, in truth, strange!" murmured Balsamo, unable to conceal his agitation.

"You see that death is not so powerful after all," said Althotas, triumphing at the discomfiture of his pupil, "since a poor old man like me, who must soon be its prey, can turn it — the inexorable one — from its path." Then, with a sharp ringing laugh, he suddenly added; "Take care. Acharat, the dog who just now seemed as if he would bite you, is going to give you chase. Take care!"

And, in fact, the dog, with its neck laid open, its gaping mouth, and quivering eye, rose suddenly on its four legs, and staggered for a moment, its head hanging down hideously. Balsamo felt his hair stand on end, and he recoiled to the wall of the apartment, uncertain whether to fly or remain.

"Come, come, I do not wish to kill you with fright in trying to instruct you," said Althotas, pushing aside the dead body and the machine. "Enough of experiments like that."

Immediately the body, ceasing to be in contact with the battery, fell down, stiff and motionless, as before.

"Could you have believed that of death, Acharat? Did you think it so kindly disposed?"

"It is strange, in truth — very strange!" replied Balsamo, drawing nearer.

“You see, my child, that we may arrive at what I seek, for the first step toward it is made. What is it to prolong life, when we have already succeeded in annihilating death?”

“But we must not assume that yet,” objected Balsamo; “for the life which you have just restored is only factitious.”

“With time we shall discover the real life. Have you not read in the Roman poets that Cassidaeus restored life to dead bodies?”

“Yes; in the works of the poets.”

“Do not forget, my friend, that the Romans called poets vates.”

“But I have still an objection to offer.”

“Let me hear it! Let me hear it!”

“If your elixir of life were made, and if you caused this dog to swallow some of it, he would live eternally?”

“Without doubt.”

“But suppose he fell into the hands of an experimenter like you, who cut his throat — what then?”

“Good! good!” cried the old man, joyfully, and rubbing his hands together; “this is what I expected from you.”

“Well, if you expected it, reply to it.”

“I ask no better.”

“Will your elixir prevent a chimney from falling on a man's head, a pistol-ball from going through his heart, a horse from giving him a kick that shall destroy him?”

Althotas looked at Balsamo with the eye of a bravo who feels that he has exposed himself to his adversary's blow.

“No, no, no!” said he; “you are a real logician, my dear Acharat. No, I cannot prevent the effects of the chimney, or of the ball, or of the horse, while there are houses, firearms, and horses.”

“However, you can bring the dead to life?”

“Why, yes — for a moment — not for an indefinite period. In order to do that I must first discover the spot where the soul is lodged, and that may be rather tedious — but I can prevent the soul from leaving the body by a wound.”

“How so?”

“By causing the wound to close up.”

“Even if an artery be divided.”

“Certainly.”

"Ah! I should like to see that done."

"Very well, look!" And before Balsamo could prevent him, the old man opened a vein in his left arm with a lancet. There was so little blood in his body, and it circulated so slowly, that it was some time before it issued from the wound, but at last it did flow abundantly.

"Great Heaven!" exclaimed Balsamo.

"Well, what is the matter?" said Althotas.

"You have wounded yourself seriously."

"That is because you are so skeptical; you must see and touch before you will believe."

He then took a little phial which he had placed near him, and poured a few drops of its contents on the wound.

"Look!" said he.

At the touch of this magic fluid the blood ceased to flow, the flesh contracted, closing up the vein, and the wound became merely like the prick of a pin, too small an opening for the vital stream to issue from.

This time Balsamo gazed at the old man in amazement.

"That is another of my discoveries, Achurat. What do you think of it?"

"Oh, master, you are the most learned of men."

"Yes, acknowledge that if I have not conquered death, I have at least dealt it a blow from which it will not readily recover. The bones of the human body are easily broken; I shall render them, my son, as hard as steel. It has blood, which when it is shed carries life along with it. I shall prevent the blood from leaving the body. The flesh is soft and can be pierced without difficulty; I shall make it invulnerable as that of the paladins of the middle ages, which blunted the edge of swords and axes. But to do all that it requires an Althotas who shall live three hundred years. Well, give me then what I ask, and I shall live one thousand! Oh, my dear Acharat, all depends on you! Give me back my youth! give me back the vigor of my body; give me back the freshness of my ideas; and you shall see whether I fear the sword, the ball, the tottering wall, or the stupid beast which bites or kicks. In my fourth youth, Acharat, that is, before I have lived to the age of four men, I tell you I shall have renewed the face of the world — I shall have made for myself and for a regenerated race of men a new world, without falling chimneys, without swords, without musket-balls, without kicking horses; for men will then understand that it is better to live to help and love one another than to tear each other to pieces, and to destroy each other."

“It is true, master; or, at least, it is, possible.”

“Well, bring me the child, then.”

“Give me time to reflect on the matter, and reflect on it yourself.”

Althotas darted on his adept a glance of sovereign scorn.

“Go,” said he, “go! I shall yet convince you that I am right. And, in truth, the blood of man is not so precious an ingredient that a substitute for it may not be found. Go! I shall seek — I shall find. Go! I need you not.”

Balsamo struck the trap-door with his foot, and descended into the lower apartment, mute, melancholy, and wholly subdued by the genius of this man, who compelled him to believe in impossibilities, by accomplishing them before his eyes.

CHAPTER LXI.

Inquiries.

THIS NIGHT, so long and so fertile in events, during which we have been borne about, as in the cloud of the mythological deities, from St. Denis to Muette, from Muette to the Rue Coq-Heron, from the Rue Coq-Heron to the Rue Plastriere, and from thence to the Rue St. Claude, bad been employed by Madame Dubarry in efforts to bend the king's mind to her new political views. She insisted in particular on the danger there would be in allowing the Choiseuls to gain ground with the dauphiness.

The king replied to this with a shrug, “That the dauphiness was a child, and the Duke de Choiseul was an elderly minister, and that consequently there was no danger, seeing that he could not amuse her, and she would not understand him.” Then, enchanted with this bon mot, the king cut short all further explanations.

But if the king was enchanted, the countess was far from being so, as she thought she perceived symptoms of his majesty's throwing off her yoke.

Louis XV, was a male coquette. His greatest happiness consisted in his making his mistresses jealous, providing always that their jealousy did not assume the form of obstinate quarrels and prolonged sulkiness.

Madame Dubarry was jealous; in the first place from vanity, secondly, from fear. It had cost her too much pains to attain her present elevated position, and it was too far removed from her point of departure, for her to dare, like Madame de Pompadour, to tolerate other favorites near the king. Madame Dubarry, then, being jealous, was determined to probe to the bottom this sudden change in the king's manner.

The king replied to her in these memorable words, in which there was not one particle of truth; “I am thinking very seriously about the happiness of my daughter-in-law; I really do not know whether the dauphin will make her happy or not.”

“Why not, sire?”

“Because Louis, at Compiegne. St. Denis, and Muette, seemed to me much more occupied with any other woman than his own wife.”

“In truth, sire, if your majesty had not told me this yourself, I should not have believed it; for the dauphiness is lovely.”

“She is rather thin.”

“She is so young.”

“Oh, as for that, look at Mademoiselle de Taverney; she is the same age as the archduchess!”

“Well, sire?”

“Well, she is a faultless beauty.”

A flash from the countess's eye warned the king of his mistake.

“And you yourself, dear countess,” he added quickly, “you yourself, at sixteen, were as round as one of our friend Boucher's shepherdesses, I am sure.”

This little bit of adulation smoothed matters in some degree, but the blow had taken effect. Madame Dubarry therefore assumed the offensive.

“Ah!” said she, bridling, “so she is very handsome, this Mademoiselle de Taverney?”

“Handsome! How should I know?” replied the king.

“What? You praise her, and yet you do not know, you say, whether she is handsome or not?”

“I know that she is not thin, that is all.”

“Then you have seen her, and looked rather narrowly at her?”

“Ah! my dear countess, you push me rather closely. You know that I am short-sighted; a mass strikes me, but deuce take the details! In looking at the dauphiness I saw bones and nothing more.”

“And in looking at Mademoiselle de Taverney you saw masses, to use your own expression; for the dauphiness is an aristocratic beauty, Mademoiselle de Taverney a vulgar one.”

“Oh, ho!” said the king, “by this mode of reckoning, Jeanne, you will never be an aristocratic beauty! Come, you must be jesting, I think.”

“Very good; a compliment!” thought the countess to herself. “Unfortunately this compliment only serves as the outer covering of another compliment which is not intended for me.” Then aloud:

“On my honor,” said she. “I shall be very glad if her royal highness the dauphiness chooses for her ladies of honor those that are a little attractive; a court of old women is frightful.”

“My fairest one, you need not tell that to me. I said the same thing to the dauphin yesterday; but our newly fledged husband seems quite indifferent about the matter.”

“And suppose for a beginning she were to take this Mademoiselle de Taverney?”

“I think she has already chosen her,” replied Louis.

“Ah! you know that, sire?”

“At least, I fancy I heard some one say so.”

“She has no fortune, I hear.”

“No, but she is of an old family. The Taverneys-Maison-Rouge are of ancient descent, and have served the state honorably.”

“Who patronizes them?”

“I have no idea. But I think they are beggars, as you say.”

“In that case it cannot be the Duke de Choiseul; otherwise they would actually burst with pensions.”

“Countess, countess, I beseech you, no politics!”

“Do you call it politics to say that the Choiseuls are robbing you?”

“Certainly it is,” said the king, rising.

An hour afterward, the king arrived at the great Trianon, delighted at having awakened the countess's jealousy, but repeating to himself, in a half-whisper, as the Duke de Richelieu might have done at thirty, “Really, jealous women are very tiresome!”

No sooner had his majesty left Madame Dubarry, than she also rose and passed into her boudoir, where Chon awaited her, impatient to near the news.

“Well!” said she, “your star has been in the ascendant these last few days — presented to the dauphiness the day before yesterday — invited to her table yesterday!”

“A great triumph, truly!”

“What! Do you speak in that tone? Are you aware that, at this moment, a hundred carriages are hastening to Luciennes, that their occupants may obtain a smile from you?”

“I am sorry to hear it.”

“Why so?”

“Because they are losing their time. Neither the carriages nor their owners shall have a smile from me this morning.”

“Ah! this is a cloudy morning, then, countess?”

"Yes; very cloudy! My chocolate, quick — ray chocolate!"

Chon rang the bell, and Zamore appeared.

"My chocolate!" said the countess.

Zamore retired, walking very slowly and with a most majestic strut.

"The wretch intends that I should die of hunger!" cried the countess. "A hundred blows of the whip if you do not run."

"Me not run — me governor," said Zamore majestically.

"Ah! You governor?" exclaimed the countess, seizing a little riding-whip with a silver handle, which she used for keeping peace among the spaniels and monkeys; "governor, indeed! Wait, governor, and you shall see!"

At this spectacle Zamore took to flight, slamming the doors behind him and uttering loud cries.

"Really. Jeanne, you are perfectly ferocious to-day," said Chon.

"I am at liberty to be so if I please, am I not?"

"Oh, very well; but in that case you must permit me to leave you, my dear!"

"Why so?"

"I am afraid of being devoured."

Three taps were heard at the door.

"Well, who is knocking now?" said the countess impatiently.

"Whoever he is, he will get a warm reception," muttered Chon.

"Oh! I should advise you to give me a bad reception!" said Jean, throwing open the door with a majestic air.

"Well, and what would happen if you were ill received? For, after all, the thing is possible."

"It would happen," said Jean, "that I should never come back."

"Well?"

"And that you would lose a great deal more than I should by receiving me badly."

"Impertinent fellow!"

"Ah! I am impertinent, because I do not flatter. What is the matter with her this morning, Chon, my beauty?"

"Don't speak to me about her, Jean. She is perfectly insufferable. Oh, here is the chocolate."

"Oh, well, never mind her, then. How do you do, chocolate? I am very glad to see you, my dear chocolate!" continued Jean, taking the tray from the servant, placing it on a little table in the corner, and seating himself before it.

“Come, Chon — come!” said he; “those who are too proud to speak shall not have any.”

“You are quite delightful, you two!” said the countess, seeing that Chon by a sign gave Jean to understand that he might breakfast alone. “You pretend to be hurt, and yet you do not see that I am suffering.”

“What is the matter, then?” said Chon, approaching her.

“No!” exclaimed the countess, pettishly. “Neither of them bestow a thought on what torments me.”

“And what does torment you?” asked Jean, coolly cutting a slice of bread and butter.

“Do you want money?” asked Chon.

“Oh! as for money, the king shall want before I.”

“I wish you would lend me a thousand louis-d'ors, then,” said Jean; “I require them very much.”

“A thousand fillips on your great red nose!”

“The king has positively decided on keeping that abominable Choiseul, then?” asked Chon.

“Great news that! You know very well that the Choiseuls are immovable.”

“Then the king has fallen in love with the dauphiness.”

“Now you are coming nearer it. But look at that beast stuffing himself with chocolate! He would not move his little finger to save me from destruction. Oh, those two creatures will be the death of me!”

Jean, without paying the least attention to the storm which was raging behind him, cut a second slice, buttered it carefully, and poured out another cup of chocolate.

“How! The king is really in love?” cried Chon, clasping her hands and turning pale.

Madame Dubarry nodded, as much as to say, “You have hit it.”

“Oh! if it be so, we are lost!” continued Chon; “and will you suffer that, Jeanne? But whom has he fancied?”

“Ask your brother there, who is purple with chocolate, and who looks as if he was just going to burst. He will tell you, for he knows, or at least he suspects.” Jean raised his head.

“Did you speak?” said he.

"Yes, most obliging brother! — most useful ally!" said Jeanne, "I was asking you the name of the person whom the king has fancied."

Jean's mouth was so well filled that it was with great difficulty he sputtered out, "Mademoiselle de Taverney."

"Mademoiselle de Taverney! Oh, mercy on us!" cried Chon.

"He knows it, the wretch!" shrieked the countess, throwing herself back in her chair, and clasping her hands — " he knows it, and he eats!"

"Oh!" said Chon, visibly deserting from her brother's camp to enter that of her sister.

"I wonder," cried the countess, "what prevents me from tearing out his two great ugly eyes! Look at them, all swollen with sleep, the lazy wretch! He has just got up, my dear, just got up!"

"You are mistaken," said Jean, "I have not been in bed at all."

"And what were you doing, then, you glutton?"

"Why, faith, I have been running up and down all night and all morning, too."

"I told you so. Oh, who is better served than I am? No one — no one to tell me where that girl is!"

"Where she is?" asked Jean.

"Yes."

"Where should she be but in Paris?"

"In Paris? But whereabouts in Paris."

"Rue Coq-Heron."

"Who told you so?"

"The coachman who drove her; I waited for him at the stables and questioned him."

"He told you — "

"That he had just driven the entire Taverney family to a little hotel in the Rue Coq-Heron, situated in a garden adjoining the Hotel d'Armenonville."

"Oh, Jean, Jean!" cried the countess, "this reconciles me to you, my dear. But now what we want is to know the particulars. How she lives? Whom she sees? What she does? Does she receive any letters? These are the important points."

"Well, you shall know all that."

"But how? But how?"

"Ah! Just so. Now try to find out how yourself. I have found out a great deal for my share."

"Oh," said Chon, "there might be lodgings to let in the Rue Coq-Heron."

"An excellent idea!" exclaimed the countess. "You must hasten to the Rue Coq-Heron, Jean, and hire a house. We will conceal some one there who can see every one that goes in or comes out. We shall know all. Quick! Order the carriage."

"It is useless — there is neither house nor lodging to be let in that street."

"How do you know?"

"Faith, in the surest way that one can know! — I have inquired; but there are apartments — "

"Where — where?"

"In the Rue Plastriere?"

"And where is the Rue Plastriere?

"It is a street whose rear looks toward the garden of the hotel."

"Well! quick, quick!" said the countess, "let us hire an apartment in the Rue Plastriere."

"It is already hired," said Jean.

"Admirable man!" cried the countess; "kiss me, Jean."

Jean wiped his mouth, kissed Madame Dubarry on both cheeks, and then made a ceremonious bow of thanks for the honor that had been done him.

"Was it not luck?" said he.

"But I hope no one recognized you?"

"Who the devil should recognize me in a street like that?"

"And what have you engaged?"

"A little apartment in an obscure out-of-the-way house."

"But they must have asked for whom?"

"Certainly they did."

"And what did you say?"

"That it was for a young widow — are you a widow, Chon?"

"Of course I am!" said Chon.

"Excellent!" said the countess. "Then it is Chon who shall be installed in the apartment; she will watch, she will spy — but not a moment must be lost."

"Therefore I shall set off at once," said Chon. "The carriage! the carriage!"

"The carriage!" repeated Madame Dubarry, ringing loud enough to have awakened the whole household of the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood.

Jean and the countess knew perfectly what they had to dread from Andree's presence. She had, even on her first appearance, attracted the king's attention, therefore she was dangerous.

“This girl,” said the countess, while the horses were being put to, “is not a true provincial if she have not brought some rustic lover with her from her dovecot at Taverney; let us but discover the swain, and patch up a marriage at once. Nothing would cool the king like a marriage between country lovers.”

“Oh, the devil! I am not quite so sure of that,” said Jean; “I rather distrust his Most Christian Majesty. But the carriage is ready.”

Chon sprang into it, after having embraced her sister and pressed Jean's hand.

“But why not take Jean?” asked the countess.

“No, no; I shall go my own way.” replied Jean. “Wait for me in the Rue Plastriere; I shall be your first visitor in your new domicile.”

Chon drove off. Jean seated himself at his table again, and poured out a third cup of chocolate.

Chon called first at the family residence and changed her dress, studying as much as possible to assume the costume and appearance of a tradesman's wife. Then, when she was satisfied with her labors, she threw over her aristocratic shoulders a meager black silk mantle; ordered a sedan chair to the door, and about half an hour afterward, she and Sylvie were mounting the steep, narrow staircase leading up to' the fourth story of a house in the Rue Plastriere. For in a fourth story was situated that lodging so fortunately procured by the viscount.

When she reached the landing of the second story, Chon turned, for she heard some one following her. It was the old proprietress of the house, who lived on the first floor, and who, hearing a noise, had come out to see what caused it, and was rather puzzled at beholding two women, so young and pretty, enter her abode. Raising her snappish countenance to the landing above her, her gaze was met by two faces whose smiling expression formed a strong contrast to her own.

“Stop, ladies, stop!” cried she; “what do you want here?”

“The lodging which my brother was to engage for us, ma'am,” said Chon, assuming the serious air of a widow. “Have you not seen him, or can we have made a mistake in the house?”

“Oh, no.” replied the old proprietress; “you are quite right; it is on the fourth story. Poor young creature! A widow at your age!”

“Alas! alas!” sighed Chon, raising her eyes to heaven.

“But do not grieve; you will be very pleasantly situated in the Rue Plastriere. It is a charming street; you will hear no noise, and your apartment looks into the gardens.”

“That is just what I wished, ma'am.”

“And besides, by means of the corridor, you can see into the street when any procession is passing, or when the learned dogs are exhibited.”

“Thank you; that will be a great relief to me,” sighed Chon, and she continued to ascend.

The old proprietress followed her with her eyes until she reached the fourth story. Then Chon, after shutting the door, hurried to the window which looked on the garden.

Jean had committed no mistake; almost immediately below the window of the apartment which he had engaged was the garden pavilion which the coachman had described to him.

Soon, however, all doubts were removed; a young girl came forward to the window of the pavilion, and seated herself before a little embroidery frame. It was Andree.

CHAPTER LXII.

The Apartment in the Rue Plastriere.

CHON HAD not scrutinized the young girl many seconds, before Viscount Juan, ascending the stairs four at a time, like a lawyer's clerk, appeared on the threshold of the pretended widow's apartment.

“Well?” said he, inquiringly.

“Is it you, Jean? In truth, you frightened me.”

“Well, what do you say to if?”

“Why, that I shall be admirably situated here for seeing all that passes; unluckily, I shall not be able to hear everything.”

“Ah! faith, you want too much. By-the-by, I have another piece of news for you.”

“What is it?”

“Wonderful!”

“Pooh!”

“Incomparable!”

“What a bore the man is with his exclamations!”

“The philosopher — ”

“Well, what of the philosopher?”

“It is commonly said, 'The wise man is for all events prepared.' Now. I am a wise man, but I was not prepared for this.”

“I should like to know when you will finish. Perhaps this girl is in the way. In that case, Mademoiselle Sylvie, step into the next room.”

“Oh, there is no occasion whatever. That charming girl is not in the way; quite the contrary. Remain. Sylvie, remain.” And the viscount chucked the handsome waiting-maid's chin, whose brow began already to darken at the idea that something was about to be said which she was not to hear.

“Let her stay, then; but speak.”

“Why, I have done nothing else since I have been here.”

“And said nothing. So hold your tongue, and let me watch; that will be more to the purpose.”

“Don't be out of temper! As I was saying, then, I was passing the fountain — ”

“Positively, you never said a word about it.”

“Why, there you interrupt me again.”

“No.”

“I was passing the fountain, then, and bargaining for some old furniture for this frightful lodging, when all at once I felt a stream of water plashing my stockings.”

“How very interesting all this is!”

“Only wait; you are in too great a hurry, my dear. Well, I looked, and I saw — guess what — I will give you a hundred guesses — ”

“Do go on.”

“I saw a young gentleman obstructing the jet of the fountain with a piece of bread, and by means of this obstacle causing the water to diverge and to spurt upon me.”

“I can't tell you how much your story interests me,” said Chon, shrugging her shoulders.

“Only wait. I swore lustily on feeling myself splashed; the bread-soaker turned round, and I saw — ”

“Who? Gilbert?”

“Himself — bare-headed, his waistcoat open, stockings dangling about his heels — slices unbuckled — in complete undress, in short.”

“Gilbert! — And what did he say?”

“I recognized him at once, and he recognized me. I advanced; he retreated. I stretched out my arm; he stretched his legs; and off he scampered, like a greyhound, among the carriages and the waterporters.”

“You lost sight of him, then?”

“Parbleu! I believe so. You surely do not suppose that I would start off and run, too?”

“True; it was impossible, I admit. And so we have lost him.”

“All! what a pity!” ejaculated Mademoiselle Sylvie.

“Oh! most certainly,” said Jean; “I owe him a sound thrashing; and if I had once laid hands upon him, he should have lost nothing for waiting, I promise you; but he guessed my kind intentions toward him, and made good use of his legs.”

“No matter; here he is in Paris; that is the essential point; and, in Paris, if you are not on very bad terms with the lieutenant of police, you may find whatever you seek."

"We must find him."

"And when we have got him, we must keep him, too."

"He must be shut up," said Mademoiselle Sylvie; "only, this time, a safer place must be chosen for the purpose."

"And Sylvie will carry his bread and water to that safe place — will you not, Sylvie?" said the viscount.

"It is no subject for jesting, brother," said Chon; "that lad saw the affair of the post-horses, and if he had motives for bearing us a grudge, we might have reason to fear him."

"And therefore," replied Jean, "I made up my mind, while ascending your stairs, to call on M, de Sartines and inform him of my discovery. M. de Sartines will reply, that a man, bare-headed, his stockings about his heels, his shoes unbuckled, soaking his bread at a fountain, must live near the spot where he has been seen in such a plight, and he will then engage to find him for us."

"What can he do here without money?"

"Go errands."

"He! A philosopher of that wild breed! I am surprised at you!"

"He has perhaps found out a relation," said Sylvie; "some old devotee, who gives him the crusts that are too stale for her lapdog."

"Enough, enough, Sylvie! Put the house linen into that old chest; and come you, brother, to our observatory."

Accordingly the pair approached the window with the greatest caution. Andree had quitted her embroidery, and extended her limbs carelessly upon an armchair; then stretched out her hand to a book lying on another chair within her reach, opened it, and was soon absorbed in what the spectators supposed must be a most interesting subject, for the young girl remained motionless from the moment that she commenced to read.

"Oh! the studious creature!" said Mademoiselle Chou; "what can she be reading there?"

"First indispensable article of furniture," replied the viscount, taking from his pocket an opera-glass, which he drew out and pointed at Andree, resting it upon the angle of the window for the purpose of steadying it. Chon watched his movements with impatience.

"Well, let us see; is the creature really handsome?" asked she.

"Admirable! She is an exquisite girl! What arms! what hands! what eyes! — lips too tempting for St. Anthony — feet, oh! divine feet! and the ankle — what an ankle under that silk stocking!"

"Oh! I should advise you to fall in love with her; that would complete the affair," said Chon, peevishly.

"Well, after all, that would be no bad idea either, especially if she would grant me a little love in return; that would somewhat cheer our poor countess."

"Come, hand me that glass, and a truce to your gabble, if that is possible. Yes, in truth, the girl is handsome, and it is impossible that she should not have a lover. She is not reading — look, the book is slipping out of her hand! There, it drops! — slay — I told you, Jean, she was not reading — she is lost in thought."

"Or sleep."

"With her eyes open! Lovely eyes, upon my word."

"At any rate," said Jean, "if she have a lover, we shall have a good view of him here."

"Yes, if he comes in the daytime; but if he should come at night?"

"The deuce! I did not think of that; and yet it is the first thing that I ought to have thought of; that proves how very simple I am."

"Yes; simple as a lawyer."

"However, now that I am forewarned. I shall devise something."

"What an excellent glass this is!" said Chon. "I can almost read the characters in the book."

Chon had leaned forward out of the window, attracted by her curiosity; but she pulled back her head faster than she had advanced it.

"Well, what is the matter?" asked the viscount.

Chon grasped his arm. "Look cautiously, brother," said she; "look, who is that person leaning out of yonder garret-window on the left? Take care not to be seen."

"Oh, ho!" cried Dubarry, in a low tone; "it is my crust-soaker, God forgive me!"

"He is going to throw himself out!"

"No; he has fast hold of the parapet."

"But what is he looking at with those piercing eyes, with that wild eagerness?"

“He is watching somebody.” The viscount struck his forehead. “I have it!” he exclaimed. — “What?”

“By heavens, he is watching the girl!”

“Mademoiselle de Taverney?”

“Yes, yes; that's the inamorato of the dove-cot. She comes to Paris — he hastens hither too; she takes lodgings in the Rue Coq-Heron — he sneaks away from us to go and live in the Rue Plastriere. He is looking at her, and she is musing.”

“Upon my word, it is true,” said Chon. “Observe that look, how intently fixed. That lurid fire of his eyes. He is distractedly in love.”

“Sister,” said Jean, “let us not give ourselves any further trouble to watch the lady; he will do our business.”

“Yes; for his own interest.”

“No; for ours. Now let me go and see that dear Sartines. Pardieu! we have a chance. But take care, Chon, not to let the philosopher see you; you know how quickly he decamps!”

CHAPTER LXIII.

Plan of Campaign.

M, DE SARTINES had returned home at three in the morning, extremely fatigued, but at the same time highly pleased, with the entertainment which he had got up on the spur of the moment for the king and Madame Dubarry. Rekindled by the arrival of the dauphiness, the popular enthusiasm had greeted his majesty with sundry shouts of “Vive le Roi!” greatly diminished in volume since that famous illness at Metz, during which all France had been seen in the churches or on pilgrimage, to obtain the restoration to health of the young Louis XV., called at that time the well-beloved. On the other hand, Madame Dubarry, who scarcely ever failed to be insulted in public by curtain exclamations of a particular kind, had, contrary to her expectation, been graciously received by several rows of spectators judiciously placed in front; so that the pleased monarch had smiled graciously on M, de Sartines, and the lieutenant of police reckoned upon a handsome acknowledgment. In consequence, he thought that he might lie till noon, which he had not done for a very longtime; and, on rising, he had taken advantage of this kind of holiday which he gave himself, to try on some dozen or two of new wigs, while listening to the reports of the night. At the sixth wig, and when about a third through the reports, the Viscount Jean Dubarry was announced.

“Good!” thought M, de Sartines, “here come my thanks. But who knows? women are so capricious. Show M, le Vicomte into the drawing-room.”

Jean, already fatigued with his forenoon's work, seated himself in an armchair, and the lieutenant of police, who speedily joined him, felt convinced that there would be nothing unpleasant in this interview. Jean appeared in fact in the highest spirits. The two gentlemen shook hands.

“Well, viscount,” said M, de Sartines; “what brings you so early?”

“In the first place,” replied Jean, who was accustomed above all things to flatter the self-love of those whose good offices he needed, “in the first place, I was anxious to congratulate you on the capital arrangements of your fete yesterday."

"Ah! many thanks. Is it officially?"

"Officially, as far as regards Luciennes."

"That is all I want. Is it not there that the sun rises?"

"Ay, and retires to rest occasionally."

And Dubarry burst into a loud and rather vulgar laugh, but one which gave his physiognomy that good-natured look which it frequently required. "But," said he, "besides the compliments which I have to pay you, I have come to solicit a service also."

"Two, if they are possible."

"Not so fast; I hope to hear you say so, by-and-by. When a thing is lost in Paris, is there any hope of finding it again?"

"If it is either worth nothing, or worth a great deal, there is."

"What I am seeking is of no great value," said Jean, shaking his head.

"And what are you in search of?"

"I am in search, of a lad about eighteen years old."

M, de Sartines extended his hand to a paper, took a pencil, and wrote.

"Eighteen years old; what is your lad's name?"

"Gilbert."

"What does he do?"

"As little as he can help, I suppose."

"Where does he come from?"

"From Lorraine."

"With whom was he?"

"In the service of the Taverneys."

"They brought him with them?"

"No, my sister Chon picked him up on the high-road, perishing with hunger; she took him into her carriage and brought him to Luciennes, and there — "

"Well, and there?"

"I am afraid the rogue has abused the hospitality he met with."

"Has he stolen anything?"

"I do not say that. But, in short, he absconded in a strange way."

"And you would now like to get him back?"

"Yes."

"Have you any idea where he can be?"

“I met him yesterday at the fountain which forms the corner of the Rue Plastriere, and have every reason to think that he lives in the street. In fact, I believe, if necessary, that I can point out the house.”

“Well, but if you know the house, nothing is easier than to have him seized there. What do you wish to do with him when you have caught him? Have him shut up at Charentou? — in the Bicetre?”

“Not precisely that.”

“Oh! whatever you please, my dear fellow. Don't stand on ceremony.”

“No, on the contrary, this lad pleased my sister, and she would have liked to keep him about her, as he is intelligent. If one could get him back for her by fair means, it would be more desirable.”

“We must try. You have not made any inquiry in the Rue Plastriere to learn with whom he is?”

“Oh, no! You must understand that I did not wish to attract attention, for fear of losing the advantage I had observed. He had already perceived me, and scampered off as if the devil was at his heels; and, if he had known that I was aware of his retreat, he would perhaps have decamped.”

“Very likely. Rue Plastriere, you say. At the end, the middle, or the beginning of the street.”

“About one-third down.”

“Rest satisfied, I will send a clever fellow thither for you.”

“Ah, my dear lieutenant, a man, let him be ever so clever, will always talk a little.”

“No, our people never talk.”

“The young one is cunning as a fox.”

“Ah! I comprehend. Pardon me for not having seen your drift sooner. You wish me to go myself? In fact, you are right; it will be better, for there are perhaps difficulties in the way which you are not aware of.”

Jean, though persuaded that the magistrate was desirous to assume a little consequence, was not disposed to diminish in the slightest degree the importance of his part. He even added, “It is precisely on account of these difficulties which you anticipate that I am desirous to have your personal assistance.”

M, de Sartines rang for his valet-de-chambre. “Let the horses be put to,” said he.

“I have a carnage,” said Jean.

“Thank you, but I had rather have my own. Mine is without arms, and holds a middle place between a hackney-coach and a chariot. It is freshly painted every month, and for that reason is scarcely to be recognized again. In the meantime, while they are putting the horses to, permit me to try how my new wigs fit me.”

“Oh! by all means,” said Jean.

M, de Sartines summoned his wigmaker. He was an artist of the first water, and brought his client a perfect assortment of wigs; they were of all forms, of all colors, of all dimensions, and of all denominations. M, de Sartines occasionally changed his dress three or four times a day for the purpose of his exploring visits, and he was most particular with regard to the regularity of his costume. While the magistrate was trying on his twenty-fourth wig, a servant came to tell him that the carriage was ready.

“You will know the house again?” said M, de Sartines to Jean, when they were in the carriage.

“Certainly; I see it from this place.”

“Have you examined the entrance?”

“That was the first thing I looked to.”

“And what sort of an entry is it?”

“An alley.”

“Ah! an alley; one-third down the street, you say?”

“Yes, with a private door.”

“With a private door? The deuce! Do you know on what floor your runaway lives?”

“In the attics. But you will see it directly; I perceive the fountain.”

“At a foot-pace, coachman,” said M, de Sartines.

The coachman moderated his speed; M, de Sartines drew up the glasses.

“Stop,” said Jean; “it is that dingy-looking house.”

“Ah, precisely,” exclaimed M, de Sartines, clasping his hands; “that is just what I feared.”

“What! Are you afraid of something?”

“Alas! Yes.”

“And what are you afraid of?

“You are unlucky.”

“Explain yourself.”

“Why, that dingy house where your runaway lives is the very house of Monsieur Rousseau, of Geneva.”

“Rousseau, the author?”

“Yes.”

“Well, and how does that concern you?”

“How does that concern me? Ah! it is plain enough that you are not lieutenant of police, and that you have nothing to do with philosophers.”

“Pooh, pooh! Gilbert at Monsieur Rousseau's — what an improbable story!”

“Have you not said that your youth is a philosopher?”

“Yes.”

“Well — 'birds of a feather' — you know.”

“And supposing that he should be at Monsieur Rousseau's?”

“Yes, let us suppose that.”

“What would be the consequence?”

“That you would not have him.”

“Pardieu! Why not?”

“Because Monsieur Rousseau is a man who is much to be dreaded.”

“Why not shut him up in the Bastille, then?”

“I proposed it the other day to the king, but he dared not.”

“What! dared not?”

“No, no; he wanted to leave the responsibility of his arrest to me; and by my faith, I was not bolder than the king.”

“Indeed!”

“It is as I tell you. We have to look twice, I assure you, before we bring all those philosophers about our ears. Peste! Take a person away from Monsieur Rousseau's? No, my dear friend, it will not do.”

“In truth, my dear magistrate, you appear to be excessively timorous. Is not the king the king? Are you not his lieutenant of police?”

“And, in truth, you citizens are charming fellows. When you have said, 'Is not the king the king?' you fancy that you have said all that is necessary. Well, listen to me, my dear viscount. I would rather arrest you at Madame Dubarry's than remove your Monsieur Gilbert from Monsieur Rousseau's.”

“Really! Many thanks for the preference.”

“Yes, upon my honor — there would be less outcry. You have no idea what delicate skins those literary men have; they cry out at the slightest scratch, as if you were breaking them upon the wheel.”

“But let us not conjure up phantoms; look you, is it quite certain that Monsieur Rousseau has harbored our fugitive? This house has four floors.

Does it belong to him, and does he alone live in it?”

“Monsieur Rousseau is not worth a denier, and, consequently, has no house in Paris; there are probably from fifteen to twenty other inmates besides himself in yonder barrack. But take this for a rule of conduct; whenever ill luck appears at all probable, reckon upon it; whenever good luck, never reckon upon that. There are always ninety-nine chances for the ill and one for the good. But, however, wait a moment. As I suspected what would happen, I have brought my notes with me.”

“What notes?”

“My notes respecting Monsieur Rousseau. Do you suppose that he can take a step without our knowing whither he is gone?”

“Ha! indeed! Then he is really dangerous?”

“No; but he makes us uneasy. Such a madman may at any time break an arm or a leg, and people would say it was we who had broken it.”

“A good thing if he would break his neck some day.”

“God forbid!”

“Permit me to tell you that this is quite incomprehensible to me.”

“The people stone this honest Genevese from time to time, but they allow no one else to do so; and if the smallest pebble were flung at him by us, they would stone us in return.”

“Excuse me, but in truth, I know not what to make of all these doings.”

“And so we must use the most minute precautions. Now let us verify the only chance which is left us; viz., that he does not lodge with Monsieur Rousseau. Keep yourself out of sight, at the back of the carriage.”

Jean obeyed, and M, de Sartines ordered the coachman to walk the horses a few paces to and from the street.

He then opened his portfolio, and took some papers out of it. “Let me see,” said he, “if your youth is with Monsieur Rousseau. Since what day do you suppose him to have been there?”

“Ever since the sixteenth.”

“'17th. — Monsieur Rousseau was seen herborizing at six o'clock in the morning in the wood of Meudon; he was alone.'”

“He was alone!”

“Let us proceed. 'At two o'clock in the afternoon, he was herborizing again, but with a young man.'”

“Ah, ha!” cried Jean.

“With a young man,” repeated M, de Sartines, “do you understand?”

“That's he, mordieu! that's he!”

“The young man is mean-looking —

“That is he!”

“'The two individuals pick up plants, and dry them in a tin box.'”

“The devil! the devil!” exclaimed Dubarry.

“That is not all. Listen further; 'In the evening he took the young man home; at midnight the young man had not left the house.'”

“Well.”

“'18th. — The young man has not left the house, and appears to be installed at Monsieur Rousseau's.'”

“I have still a gleam of hope.”

“You are decidedly an optimist! No matter, tell me your hope.”

“It is that he has some relation in the house.”

“Come! we must satisfy you, or rather, utterly destroy your hopes. Halt, coachman.”

M, de Sartines alighted. He had not taken ten steps before he met a man in gray clothes, and of very equivocal aspect. This man, on perceiving the illustrious magistrate, took off his hat and replaced it, without appearing to attach further importance to his salutation, although respect and attachment had been expressed in his look. M, de Sartines made a sign; the man approached, received some whispered instructions, and disappeared in Rousseau's alley. The lieutenant of police returned to his carriage. Five minutes after, the man in gray made his appearance again and approached the door.

“I shall turn my head to the right,” said Dubarry, “that I may not be seen.”

M, de Sartines smiled, received the communication of his agent, and dismissed him.

“Well?” inquired Dubarry.

“Well! the chance was against you, as I apprehended; it is with Rousseau that your Gilbert lodges. You must give him up, depend upon it.”

“Give him up?”

“Yes. You would not, for a whim, raise all the philosophers in Paris against us, would you?”

“Oh, heavens! and what will my sister Jeanne say?”

“Is she so much attached to Gilbert?” asked M, de Sartines.

“Indeed she is.”

“Well, in that case, you must resort to gentle means, coax M. Rousseau, and, instead of letting Gilbert be taken from him by force, he will give him up voluntarily.”

“As well set us to tame a bear.”

“It is perhaps not so difficult a task as you imagine. Do not despair; he is fond of pretty faces; that of the countess is very handsome, and Mademoiselle Chon's is not unpleasing. Let me see — the countess will make a sacrifice for her whim?”

“She will make a hundred.”

“Would she consent to fall in love with Rousseau?”

“If it is absolutely necessary.”

“It will perhaps be useful; but to bring the parties together, we shall need a third person. Are you acquainted with any one who knows Rousseau?”

“M, de Conti.”

“Won't do; he distrusts princes. We want a nobody, a scholar, a poet.”

“We never see people of that sort.”

“Have I not met M, de Jussieu at the countess's?”

“The botanist?”

“Yes.”

“I' faith, I believe so; he comes to Trianon, and the countess lets him ravage her flower-beds.”

“That is your affair; and Jussieu is a friend of mine too.”

“Then the thing is done.”

“Almost.”

“I shall get back my Gilbert, then?”

M, de Sartines mused for a moment. “I begin to think you will,” said he, “and without violence, without noise. Rousseau will deliver him up to you, bound hand and foot.”

“Do you think so?”

“I am sure of it.”

“And what must be done to bring this about?”

“The merest trifle. You have, no doubt, a piece of vacant ground toward Meudon or Marly?”

“Oh! no want of that. I know ten such between Luciennes and Bougival.”

“Well, get built upon it — what shall I call the thing? — a philosopher's trap.”

“Excuse me, what was it you said?”

“I said, a philosopher's trap.”

“Pardieu! and how is that built?”

“I will give you a plan of it; rest satisfied. And now, let us be off; we begin to be noticed. To the hotel, coachman.”

CHAPTER LXIV.

The Two Fetes.

THE IMPORTANT events of history are to the novelist what gigantic mountains are to the traveler. He surveys them, he skirts their foot, he salutes them as he passes, but he does not climb them. In like manner we shall survey, skirt, and salute that august ceremony, the marriage of the dauphiness at Versailles. The ceremonial of France is the only chronicle that ought to be consulted in such a case. It is not, in fact, in the splendor of the Versailles of Louis XV., in the description of the court-dresses, the liveries, the pontifical ornaments, that our particular history, that modest follower who takes a by-path leading along the high road of the history of France, would find anything to pick up. Let us leave the ceremony to be performed amid the brilliant sunshine of a fine day in May; let us leave the illustrious spectators to retire in silence, and to describe or comment on the marvels of the exhibition which they had just witnessed;, and let us return to our peculiar events and personages, which also have, historically speaking, a certain value.

The king, weary of the ceremonies, and especially of the dinner, which had been long and was an exact imitation of that given on the marriage of the great dauphin, son of Louis XIV. — the king retired to his apartments at nine o'clock and dismissed everybody. The dauphin and his bride had also retired to their apartments; and the immense crowd of spectators of the ceremony thronged the courtyard and the terraces of Versailles, now one blaze of light, and waited anxiously for the fireworks, which were to be exhibited on a scale of unusual magnificence.

The evening, at first lovely and serene, by degrees became overcast, and gusts of wind, gradually increasing in violence, tossed the branches wildly to and fro, as if they had been shaken by some giant arm; while immense masses of clouds hurried across the heavens, like squadrons rushing to the charge. The illuminations were suddenly extinguished, and, as if fate had determined to turn the general rejoicings into gloom, no sooner had the first rockets been discharged than the rain descended in torrents, as if the heavens had opened, and a loud and startling peal of thunder announced a terrible convulsion of the elements.

Meanwhile, the people of Versailles and Paris fled like a flock of frightened birds, scattered over the gardens, in the roads, in the woods, pursued in all directions by thick hail, which beat down the flowers in the gardens, the foliage in the forest, the wheat and the barley in the fields. By morning, however, all this chaos was reduced to order, and the first rays of light, darting from between copper-colored clouds, displayed to view the ravages of the nocturnal hurricane.

Versailles was no longer to be recognized. The ground had imbibed that deluge of water, the trees had absorbed that deluge of fire; everywhere were seas of muddy water, and trees broken, twisted, calcined, by that serpent with burning gripe called lightning. As soon as it was light Louis XV., whose terror was so great that be could not sleep, ordered Lebel, who had never left him during the night, to dress him. He then proceeded to the bridal-chamber, and, pushing open the door, shuddered on perceiving the future queen of France reclining on a prie-Dieu, pale, and with eyes swollen and violet colored, like those of the sublime Magdalene of Rubens. Her terror, caused by the hurricane, had at length been suspended by sleep, and the first dawn of morning which stole into the apartment tinged with religious respect her long white robe with an azure hue. At the further end of the chamber, in an armchair pushed back to the wall, and surrounded by a pool of water which had forced its way through the shattered windows, reposed the dauphin of France, pale as his young bride, and, like her, having the perspiration of nightmare on his brow. The nuptial bed was in precisely the same state as on the preceding evening.

Louis XV, knit his brow; a pain, keener than any he had yet felt, darted through that brow like a red-hot iron. He shook his head, heaved a deep sigh, and returned to his apartments, more gloomy and more affrighted, perhaps, at that moment than he had been during the night.

On the 30th of May, that is, on the second day after that tremendous night, that night fraught with presages and warnings, Paris celebrated in its turn the marriage festival of its future sovereign. The whole population poured, in consequence, toward the Place Louis XV., where were to be exhibited the fireworks, that necessary accompaniment to every great public solemnity, which the Parisian accepts scoffingly, but which he cannot dispense with. The spot was judiciously chosen. Six hundred thousand spectators could move about there at their ease. Around the equestrian statue of Louis XV, had been erected a circular scaffolding, which, by raising the fireworks ten or twelve feet above the ground, enabled all the spectators in the place to see them distinctly. The Parisians arrived, according to custom, in groups, and spent some time in choosing the best places, an inalienable privilege of the first comers. Boys found trees, grave men posts, women the railings of fences and temporary stands, erected in the open air, as usual at all Parisian festivities, by gypsy speculators, whose fertile imagination allows them to change their mode of speculation every day. About seven o'clock, along with the earliest of the spectator's, arrived several parties of police.

The duty of watching over the safety of Paris was not performed by the French Guards, to whom the city authorities would not grant the gratuity of a thousand crowns demanded by their colonel, the Marshal Duke de Biron.

That regiment was both feared and liked by the population, by whom each member of the corps was regarded at once as a Caesar and a Mandarin. The French Guards, terrible on the field of battle, inexorable in the fulfillment of their functions, had, in time of peace and out of service, a frightful character for brutality and misconduct. On duty they were handsome, brave, intractable; and their evolutions delighted women and awed husbands; but, when dispersed among the crowd as mere individuals, they became the terror of those whose admiration they had won the day before, and severely persecuted the people whom they would have to protect on the morrow. Now, the city, finding in its old grudge against these night-brawlers and sharpers a reason for not giving a thousand crowns to the French Guards — the city, we say, sent merely its civil force, upon the specious pretext that in a family festivity, like that in preparation, the usual guardians of the family ought to be sufficient. The French Guards, on leave therefore, mingled among the groups mentioned above, and, as licentious as they would under other circumstances have been severe, they produced among the crowd, in their quality of soldier-citizens, all those little irregularities which they would have repressed with the butts of their muskets, with kicks and cuffs, nay even with taking the offenders into custody, if their commander, their Caesar Biron, had had a right to call them on that evening soldiers.

The shrieks of the women, the grumbling of the citizens, the complaints of the hucksters, whose cakes and ginger-bread were eaten without being paid for, raised a sham tumult preparatory to the real commotion, which could not fail to take place when six hundred thousand sight-loving persons should be assembled on that spot, and constituted so animated a scene, that the Place Louis XV., about eight o'clock in the evening, presented much the appearance of one of Tenier's pictures on a large scale, and with French instead of Dutch merrymakers. After the gamins, or street boys of Paris, at once the most impatient and the idlest in the known world, had taken or clambered up to their places; after the citizens and the populace had settled themselves in theirs, the carriages of the nobility and the financiers arrived. No route had been marked out for them; and they therefore entered the place at random by the Rue de la Madeline and the Rue St. Honore, setting down at the new buildings, as they were called, those who had received invitations for the windows and balconies of the governor's house, from which an excellent view could be obtained of the fireworks.

Such of the persons in carriages as had not invitations, left their equipages at the corner of the place, and, preceded by their footmen, mingled in the crowd, already very dense, but in which there was still room for any one who knew how to conquer it. It was curious to observe with what sagacity those lovers of sights availed themselves, in their ambitious progress, of every inequality of ground. The very wide, but as yet unfinished, street which was to be called the Rue Royale, was intersected here and there by deep ditches, on the margins of which had been heaped the mould thrown out of them and other rubbish. Each of these little eminences had its group, looking like a loftier billow rising above the level of that human ocean.

From time to time this wave, propelled by other waves behind it, toppled over, amid the laughter of the multitude, not yet so crowded, is to cause such falls to be attended with danger, or to prevent those who fell from scrambling to their feet again.

About half-past eight, all eyes, hitherto wandering in different directions, began to converge toward the same point, and to fix themselves on the scaffolding which contained the fireworks. It was then that elbows, plied without ceasing, commenced to maintain in good earnest the position they had gained, against the assaults of incessantly re-enforced invaders.

These fireworks, designed by Ruggieri, were intended to rival (a rivalship, by the way, which the storm two evenings before had rendered easy) — those executed at Versailles by Torre, the engineer. It was known in Paris that Versailles had derived little pleasure from the royal liberality, which had granted fifty thousand livres for their exhibition, since the very first discharges had been extinguished by the rum, and, as the weather was fine on the evening of the 30th of May, the Parisians reckoned upon a certain triumph over their neighbors of Versailles.

Besides, Paris expected much more from the old established popularity of Ruggieri, than from the recent reputation of Torre.

Moreover, the plan of Ruggieri, less capricious and less vague than that of his colleague, bespoke pyrotechnical intentions of a highly distinguished order. Allegory, which reigned supreme at that period, was coupled with the most graceful architectural style, and the scaffolding represented the ancient temple of Hymen, which, with the French, rivals in ever-springing youth the temple of Glory. It was supported by a gigantic colonnade, and surrounded by a parapet, at the angles of which dolphins, open-mouthed, only awaited the signal to spout forth torrents of flames. Facing the dolphins rose, majestically upon their urns, the Loire, the Rhone, the Seine, and the Rhine — that river which we persist in naturalizing and accounting French in spite of all the world, and, if we may believe the modern lays of our friends the Germans, in spite even of itself, — all four — we mean the rivers — ready to pout-forth, instead of water, blue, white, green and rose-colored flames, at the moment when the colonnade should be fired.

Other parts of the works, which were to be discharged at the same time, were to form gigantic vases of flowers on the terrace of the temple of Hymen.

Lastly, still upon this same palace, destined to support so many different things, rose a luminous pyramid, terminated by the terrestrial globe. This globe, after emitting a rumbling noise like distant thunder, was to burst with a crash and to discharge a mass of colored girandoles.

As for the bouquet — so important and indeed indispensable an accompaniment that no Parisian ever judges of fireworks but by the bouquet — Ruggieri had separated it from the main body of the structure. It was placed toward the river, close to the statue, in a bastion crammed with spare rockets, so that the effect would be greatly improved by this additional elevation of six or eight yards, which would place the foot of the sheaf as it were upon a pedestal.

Such were the details which had engrossed the attention of all Paris for a fortnight previous. The Parisians now watched with great admiration Ruggieri and his assistants passing like shades amid the lurid lights of their scaffolding, and pausing, with strange gestures, to fix their matches and to secure their priming.

The moment, therefore, that the lanterns were brought upon the terrace of the building — an appearance which indicated the approach of the discharge — it produced a strong sensation in the crowd, and some rows of the most courageous recoiled, producing a long oscillation which extended to the very extremities of the assembled multitude.

Carriages now continued to arrive in quick succession, and began to encroach more and more upon the place; the horses resting their heads upon the shoulders of the rearmost spectators, who began to feel uneasy at the close vicinity of these dangerous neighbors. Presently the crowd, every moment increasing, collected behind the carriages, so that it was not possible for them to withdraw from their position even had they been desirous to do so, embedded as they were in this compact and tumultuous throng. Then might be seen — inspired by that audacity peculiar to the Parisians when in an encroaching mood, and which has no parallel except the long-suffering of the same people when encroached upon — French guards, artisans, and lackeys, climbing upon the roofs of these carriages, like shipwrecked mariners upon a rocky shore.

The illumination of the boulevards threw from a distance its ruddy glare upon the heads of the thousands of spectators, amid whom the bayonet of a city official, flashing like lightning, appeared as rare as the ears of corn left standing in a field leveled by the reaper.

On either side of the new buildings, now the Hotel Crillon and the Garde Meuble of the Crown, the carriages of the invited guests — between which no precaution had been taken to leave a passage — had formed a triple rank which extended on one side from the boulevard to the Tuileries, and on the other from the boulevard to the Rue des Champs Elysees, turning like a serpent thrice doubled upon itself.

Along this triple row of carriages were seen wandering, like specters on the banks of the Styx, such of the invited as were prevented by the carriages of those earlier on the ground from reaching the principal entrance. Stunned by the noise, and unwilling, especially the ladies, who were dressed in satin from head to foot, to step upon the pavement, they were hustled to and fro by the waves of the populace, who jeered them for their delicacy, and, seeking a passage between the wheels of the carriages and the feet of the horses, crept onward as well as they could to the place of their destination — a goal as fervently desired as a haven of refuge by mariners in a storm.

One of these carriages arrived about nine o'clock, that is to say, a very few minutes before the time fixed for the commencement of the fireworks, in expectation of making its way toward the governor's door; but the attempt, so warmly disputed for some time back, had at this moment become extremely hazardous, if not impracticable. A fourth row of carriages had begun to form, re-enforcing the first three, and the mettled horses, tormented by the crowd, had become furious, lashing out right and left upon the slightest provocation, and already causing several accidents unnoticed amid the noise and bustle of the crowd.

Holding by the springs of this carriage, which was attempting to force its way through the concourse, walked a youth, pushing aside all comers who endeavored to avail themselves of this means of locomotion, which he seemed to have confiscated for his exclusive use. When the carriage stopped, the youth stepped aside, but without losing his hold of the protecting spring, which he continued to grasp with one hand. He could thus overhear, through the open door, the animated conversation of the party in the vehicle.

A female head, attired in white and adorned with a few natural flowers, leaned forward out of the carriage door. Immediately a voice exclaimed:

“Come, Andree, provincial that you are, you must not lean out in that manner, or, mordieu! you run a great risk of being kissed by the first bumpkin that passes. Don't you see that our carriage is swimming as it were in the middle of this mob, just as if it were in the middle of the river. We are in the water, my dear, and dirty water it is; let us not soil ourselves by the contact.”

The young lady's head was drawn back into the carriage.

“We cannot see anything from this, sir,” said she; “if our horses were to make a half turn, we could see from the door of the carriage, and be almost as well off as if we were at the governor's window.”

“Turn about a little, coachman,” cried the baron.

"It is impossible, Monsieur le Baron; I should be obliged to crush ten persons."

"Well, pardieu! crush away."

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Andree.

"Oh, father!" cried Philip.

"Who is that baron that talks of crushing poor folk?" cried several threatening voices.

"Parbleu!" it is I," said Taverney, leaning out, and exhibiting as he did so a broad red ribbon crossed over his breast.

At that time people still paid some respect to broad ribbons — even to red ones. There was grumbling, but on a descending scale.

"Wait, father. I will alight," said Philip, "and see if there is any possibility of advancing."

"Take care, brother, or you will be killed. Hark to the neighing of the horses, which are fighting with one another!"

"Say rather the roaring," resumed the baron. "Stay! we will alight. Tell them to make way, Philip, and let us pass."

"Ah, father!" said Philip, "you are quite a stranger to the Paris of the present day. Such lordly airs might have passed current formerly, but nowadays they are but little heeded; and you have no wish to compromise your dignity, I am sure."

"Still, when these saucy fellows know who I am — "

"My dear father," said Philip, smiling, "were you the dauphin himself they would not stir an inch for you. At this moment, particularly, I should fear tile consequences of such a step, for I see the fireworks are about to commence."

"Then we shall see nothing!" said Andree, with vexation.

"It is your own fault, pardieu!" replied the baron; "you were upward of two hours at your toilet."

"Brother," said Andree, "could I not take your arm and place myself among the crowd?"

"Yes, yes, my sweet lady," exclaimed several voices, touched with her beauty; "yes, come along; you are not very large and we'll make room for you."

"Should you like to come, Andree?" asked Philip.

"Oh! yes," said Andree; and she sprang lightly from the carriage without touching the steps.

“Very well,” said the baron; “but I, who care not a straw about fireworks, will stay where I am.”

“Yes, remain here,” said Philip; “we will not go far, my dear father.”

In fact, the mob, ever respectful when not irritated by any passion, ever paying homage to that sovereign goddess called beauty, opened to make way for Andree and her brother; and a good-natured citizen, who with his family occupied a stone bench, desired his wife and daughter to make room for Andree between them. “Philip placed himself at his sister's feet, who leaned with one hand on his shoulder. Gilbert had followed them, and was stationed about four paces off, with his eyes riveted upon Andree.

“Are you comfortably placed, Andree?” asked Philip.

“Excellently,” replied the young girl.

“See what it is to be handsome!” said the viscount, smiling.

“Yes, yes, handsome — very handsome!” murmured Gilbert.

Andree heard those words; but as they proceeded doubtless from the lips of one of the populace, she cared no more about them than an Indian god cares for the offering which a poor pariah lays at his feet.

CHAPTER LXV.

The Fireworks.

ANDREE AND her brother had scarcely settled themselves in their new position when the first rockets pierced the clouds, and a prodigious shout arose from the crowd, thenceforward alive only to the spectacle which was exhibiting in the center of the place.

The commencement of the fireworks was magnificent, and in every respect worthy of the high reputation of Ruggieri. The decorations of the temple were progressively lighted up, and soon presented one sheet of flame. The air rang with plaudits; but these plaudits were soon succeeded by frantic cheers, when the gaping mouths of the dolphins and the urns of the rivers began to spout forth streams of fire of different colors, which crossed and intermingled with each other.

Andree, transported with astonishment at this sight, which has not its equal in the world — that of a population of seven hundred thousand souls, frantic with delight in front of a palace in flames — did not even attempt to conceal her feelings.

At three paces distant from her, hidden by the herculean shoulders of a porter who held his child aloft over his head, stood Gilbert, gazing at Andree for her own sake, and at the fireworks because she was looking at them. Gilbert's view of Andree was in profile; every rocket lighted up that lovely face, and made him tremble with delight. It seemed to him that the whole crowd shared in his admiration of the heavenly creature whom he adored. Andree had never before seen Paris, or a crowd, or the splendors of a public rejoicing; and her mind was stunned by the multiplicity of novel sensations which beset it at once.

On a sudden, a bright light burst forth and darted in a diagonal line toward the river. It was a bomb, which exploded with a crash, scattering the various colored fires which Andree admired.

“Look, Philip, how beautiful that is!” said she.

“Good heavens!” exclaimed her brother, without making her any reply, “how ill that last rocket was directed! It must certainly have deviated from its course; for, instead of describing a parabola, it went off almost horizontally.”

Philip had scarcely finished this expression of an uneasiness which began to be manifested in the agitation of the crowd, when a hurricane of flame burst from the bastion upon which were placed the bouquet and the spare fireworks. A crash equal to that of a hundred peals of thunder, crossing in all directions, bellowed through the place; and, as if the fire had contained a discharge of grape-shot, it put to the rout the nearest spectators, who for a moment felt the unexpected flame scorch their faces.

“The bouquet already! the bouquet already!” cried the more distant of the crowd. “Not yet! it is too early!”

“Already?” repeated Andree. “Ah, yes; it is too early!”

“No,” said Philip, “no; it is not the bouquet, it is an accident, which in a moment will agitate this prodigious crowd, now so calm, like the ocean in a storm. Come, Andree, let us return to our carriage — come along!”

“Oh! let me stay a little longer, Philip — it is so beautiful!”

“Andree, we have not a moment to lose; follow me. It is the misfortune which I feared. Some stray rocket has set fire to the bastion. Hark! they are crushing one another yonder! Don't you hear their cries? Those are not cries of joy, but shrieks of distress. Quick! quick! to the carriage. Gentlemen, gentlemen, allow us to pass.”

And Philip, throwing his arm round his sister's waist, drew her toward the place where he had left his father, who, uneasy on his side, and dreading, from the noise which he heard, a danger of the nature of which he could form no conception, although he was thoroughly convinced of its existence, put his head out of the carriage door, and looked about for his children. It was already too late, and the prediction of Philip was verified. The bouquet, composed of fifteen thousand fusees, exploded, scattering about in all directions, and pursuing the spectators like those fiery darts which are flung at the bulls in the arena to provoke them to fight.

The people, at first astonished, then terrified, recoiled from the force of mere instinct with resistless impetus, communicating the same movement to the myriads of spectators in the rear, who, breathless and suffocated, pressed backward in their turn on those behind them. The scaffolding took fire; children shrieked; squalling women, almost stifled, raised them in their arms; and the police, thinking to silence the screamers and to restore order by violence, struck right and left at random.

All these combined causes made the waving sea of people which Philip spoke of fall like a water-spout on that corner of the Place where he was; and instead of rejoining the baron's carriage, as he calculated upon doing, the youth was hurried away by the mighty and irresistible current, of which no description could convey any idea; for individual strength, increased tenfold by terror and anxiety, was again augmented a hundred-fold by the junction of the general strength.

At the moment when Philip drew Andree away, Gilbert had resigned himself to the stream which carried them along; but he had not gone above twenty paces before a band of fugitives, turning to the left into the Rue de la Madeleine, surrounded Gilbert and swept him away, foaming with rage on finding himself separated from Andree.

Andree, clinging fast to Philip's arm, was inclosed in a group which was striving to get out of the way of a carriage dragged along by a pair of furious horses. Philip saw it approaching swiftly and threateningly; the horses' eyes flashed fire, and they snorted foam from their nostrils. He made superhuman efforts to avoid it, but all in vain. He saw the crowd open behind him; he perceived the foaming heads of the two ungovernable animals; he saw them rear, like the two marble horses which guard the entrance of the Tuileries, and, like the slave who is striving to subdue them, letting go Andree's arm, and pushing her as far as he could out of the way of danger, he sprang up to seize the rein of the horse that was next to him. The animal reared a second time; Andree saw her brother sink back, fall, and disappear from her sight. She shrieked, extended her arms, was hustled to and fro in the crowd, and in a moment found herself alone, tottering, borne along like a feather by the wind, and just as incapable of resisting the force that was hurrying her away.

The stunning cries, far more terrible than those of the battlefield; the neighing of horses; the frightful noise of wheels, grinding now the pavement, now the bodies of the slain, the lurid flames of the scaffolds — which were on fire; the sinister gleaming of swords drawn by some of the infuriated soldiers; and over all this ensanguined ciaos, the bronze statue, tinged by the ruddy reflections, and seeming to preside over the carnage — were more than was needed to disturb Andree's reason, and paralyze her strength. Besides, the power of a Titan would have been impotent in such a struggle — a struggle for life and limb — of one against all. Andree uttered a piercing shriek; a soldier, opening himself a passage through the crowd, was striking the people with his sword, and the weapon flashed over her head. She clasped her hands, like a shipwrecked mariner when the last wave is passing over him, and exclaiming; “Oh, my God!” sunk to the ground. Whoever fell in that scene might give himself up for lost!

But that terrible, that despairing shriek, was heard and answered. Gilbert, carried to a distance from Andree, had by dint of struggling once more approached her. Bending beneath the same wave which had engulfed Andree, he raised himself again, made a frantic leap at the sword which had unwittingly threatened her, grasped the throat of the soldier who was going to strike, and hurled him to the ground. Beside the soldier lay a female form dressed in white; he raised her up and bore her off as though he had been a giant.

When he felt that lovely form, that corpse perhaps, pressed to his heart, a gleam of pride lighted up his countenance — his force and courage rose with the circumstances — he felt himself a hero! He flung himself and his burden into a stream of people, whose torrent would certainly have leveled a wall in their flight. Supported by this group, which lifted him up and bore him along with his lovely burden, he walked or rather rolled onward for some minutes. All at once the torrent stopped, as if broken by some opposing obstacle. Gilbert's feet touched the ground, and not till then was he sensible of the weight of Andree. He looked up to ascertain what the obstacle might be, and perceived that he was within a few steps of the Garde-Meuble. That mass of stone had broken the mass of flesh.

During that momentary and anxious halt, he had time to look at Andree. Overcome by a sleep heavy as that of death, her heart had ceased to beat, her eyes were closed, and her face was of a violet tinge, like a white rose that is fading. Gilbert thought that she was dead. He shrieked in his turn, pressed his lips at first to her dress, to her hand, then, emboldened by her insensibility, he covered with kisses that cold face, those eyes swollen beneath their sealed lids. He blushed, wept, raved, strove to transfuse his soul into the bosom of Andree, feeling astonished that his kisses, which might have warmed a marble statue, had no effect upon that inanimate form. All at once Gilbert felt her heart beat under his hand.

“She is saved!” exclaimed he, on perceiving the swart and blood-stained mob dispersing, and hearing the imprecations, the shrieks, the sighs, the agony of the victims die 'away in the distance. “She is saved, and it is I who have saved her!”

The poor fellow, who stood leaning with his back against the wall, and his eyes turned toward the bridge, had not looked to his right. Before the carriages, which, long detained by the crowd, but now hemmed in less closely, began once more to move, and soon came on galloping as if coachmen and horses had been seized with a general frenzy, fled twenty thousand unfortunate creatures, mutilated, wounded, bruised one against the other. Instinctively they fled close to the walls, against which the nearest of them were crushed. This mass swept away or suffocated all those who, having taken up their position near the Garde-Meuble, imagined that they had escaped the wreck. A fresh shower of blows, of living and dead bodies, rained on Gilbert. He found one of the recesses formed by the iron gates, and stationed himself there. The weight of the fugitives made the wall crack.

Gilbert, nearly stifled, felt ready to lose his hold, but with a last desperate effort, mustering all his strength, he encompassed Andrew's body with his arms, resting his head on the bosom of the young girl. One would have supposed that he meant to suffocate her whom he was protecting.

“Farewell,” murmured he, biting rather than kissing her dress; “farewell!” And he raised his eyes to Heaven, as if directing a last supplicating glance to it for assistance. Then a strange sight met his vision.

Mounted on a post, holding with his right hand by a ringlet into the wall, while with his left hand he seemed to be rallying an army of fugitives, was a man, who, looking at the furious sea raging at his feet, sometimes dropped a word, sometimes made a gesture. At that word, at that gesture, some individual among the crowd might be seen to pause, struggle, and by a violent effort strive to reach the man. Others who had already reached him seemed to recognize the newcomers as brothers, and assisted to drag them out of the crowd, raising, supporting, and drawing them toward them.

In this manner, by acting together, this knot had like the pier of a bridge which divides and resists the water, succeeded in dividing the crowd and holding in check the flying masses.

Every moment fresh stragglers, seeming to rise out of the ground at those strange words and singular gestures, swelled the retinue of this man. Gilbert raised himself by a last effort; he felt that there was safety, for there was calmness and power. A last dying gleam from the burning scaffold, leaping up only to expire, fell upon his face. Gilbert uttered a cry of amazement; “Oh! let me die!” he murmured; “let me die, but save her!”

Then, with a sublime forgetfulness of self, raising the young girl in both his arms, he exclaimed, “Baron de Balsamo, save Mademoiselle Andree de Taverney!”

Balsamo heard that voice which cried to him, like that in the Bible, from the depths, he beheld a white figure raised above the devouring waves, he leaped from his post to the ground, crying, “This way!” His party overturned all that obstructed their course, and, seizing Andree, still supported in Gilbert's sinking arms, he lifted her up, and, impelled by a movement of that crowd which he had ceased to repress, he bore her off without once turning to look behind.

Gilbert endeavored to utter a last word. Perhaps, after imploring the protection of this strange man for Andree, he might have solicited it for himself; but he had only strength to press his lips to the drooping arm of the young girl, and to snatch, with a wild and despairing grasp, a portion of her dress.

After that last kiss, after that final farewell, the young man had nothing left to live for; he made no further struggle, but closing his eyes, sunk dying upon a heap of dead.

VOLUME II.

CHAPTER LXVI.

The Field of the Dead.

GREAT STORMS are always succeeded by calms, fearful in their very stillness, but bearing healing on their wings.

It was about two o'clock in the morning. The moon, wading between large white clouds which hovered over Paris, showed in strong relief by her wan and sickly light the inequalities of this sad spot, and the pits and holes in which so many of the fleeing crowd had found an untimely grave.

Here and there in the moonlight, which was obscured from time to time by the large white floating clouds we have mentioned, might be seen, on the margin of the slopes and in the ditches, heaps of corpses with disordered attire, stiffened limbs, livid and discolored faces, and hands stretched out in an attitude of terror or of prayer.

In the center of this place, a heavy tainted smoke, emitted from the burning embers of the timber, contributed to give to the Place Louis XV. the appearance of a battlefield.

Over this bloody and desolate plain flitted, with rapid and mysterious steps, shadowy figures, who stopped, looked stealthily round, bent down, and then fled. They were the robbers of the slain, attracted to their prey like vultures to the decaying carrion. They had not been able to rob the living, and they came to despoil the dead. Surprised at seeing themselves anticipated by their fellow robbers, they might be seen escaping sullenly and fearfully at the sight of the tardy baronets which menaced them. But the robber and the lazy watchman were not the only persons moving among the long ranks of the dead.

There were some there who, furnished with lanterns, might have been taken for curious lookers-on. Sad lookers-on, alas! for they were parents and anxious friends, whose children, brothers, friends, or lovers had not returned home. They had come from great distances, for the dreadful news had already spread over Paris like a hurricane, scattering dismay and horror, and their anxiety had been quickly changed into active search. It was a sight perhaps more dreadful to behold than the catastrophe, itself. Every expression was portrayed on these pale faces, from the despair of those who discovered the corpse of the beloved being, to the gloomy uncertainty of those who had found nothing, and who cast an anxious and longing glance toward the river, which flowed onward with a monotonous murmur.

It was reported that many corpses had already been thrown into the river by the provostry of Paris, who wished to conceal the fearful number of deaths their guilty imprudence had occasioned.

Then, when they had satiated their eyes with this fruitless spectacle, and standing ankle deep in the Seine, had watched with anguished hearts its dark waters flow past unburdened with the loved bodies of those whom they sought, they proceeded, lantern in hand, to explore the neighboring streets, where it was said many of the wounded had dragged themselves, to seek for help, or at least to flee from the scene of their sufferings.

“When unfortunately they found among the dead the object of their search — the lost and wept-for friend — then cries succeeded to their heartrending surprise, and their sobs, rising from some new point of the bloody scene, were responded to by other and distant sobs.

At times the place resounded with noises of a different kind. All at once a lantern falls and is broken — the living has fallen senseless on the dead, to embrace him for the last time.

There are yet other noises in this vast cemetery. Some of the wounded, whose limbs have been broken by the full, whose breast has been pierced by the sword, or crushed by the weight of the crowd, utters a hoarse cry, or groans forth a prayer, and then those who hope to find in the sufferer a friend, hastily approach, but retire when they do not recognize him.

In the meantime, at the extremity of the place, near the garden, a field-hospital is formed by the kindness and charity of the people. A young surgeon, known as such by the profusion of instruments which surround him, has the wounded men and women brought to him; he bandages their wounds, and while he tends them, he speaks to them in words winch rather express hatred for the cause than pity for the effect.

To his two robust assistants, who pass the sufferers in bloody review before him, he cries incessantly;

“The women of the people, the men of the people, first! They can be easily recognized; they are almost always more severely wounded, certainly always less richly dressed.”

At these words, repeated after each dressing with a shrill monotony, a young man who, torch in hand, is seeking among the dead, has twice already raised his head. From, a large wound which furrows his forehead a few drops of crimson blood are falling. One of his arms is supported by his coat, which he has buttoned over it; and his countenance, covered with perspiration, betrays deep and absorbing emotion.

At these words of the surgeon, which he has heard as we have said for the second time, he raises his head, and looking sadly on the mutilated limbs which the operator seems almost to gloat over:

“Oh, sir,” said he, “why do you make a choice among the victims?”

“Because,” replied the surgeon, raising his head at this interruption, “because no one will care for the poor if I do not think of them, and the rich are always well looked after. Lower your lantern, and search upon the ground; you will find a hundred poor people for one rich or noble. In this catastrophe, with a good fortune which will in the end weary even Providence, the noble and the rich have paid the tribute they generally pay — one in a thousand.”

The young man raised his torch to a level with his bleeding forehead.

“Then I am that one,” said he, without the least anger; “I, a gentleman, lost among so many others in the crowd, wounded in the forehead by a horse's hoof, and my left arm broken by falling into a pit. You say that the noble and the rich are sought after and cared for; you see plainly, however, that my wounds are not yet dressed.”

“You have your hotel; your physician. Return home, since you can walk.”

“I do not ask for your cares, sir; I seek my sister, a beautiful young girl of sixteen — killed probably, alas! though she is not of the people. She wore a white dress, and a chain with a cross round her neck. Though she has her hotel and her physician, answer me, for pity's sake, sir, have you seen her whom I seek?”

“Sir,” said the young surgeon, with a feverish vehemence which showed that the ideas he expressed had long boiled within his breast, “sir, humanity is *my* guide. It is to her service I devote myself; and, when I leave the noble on their bed of death to assist the suffering people, I obey the true laws of humanity, who is my goddess. All this day's misfortunes have been caused by you. They arose from your abuses, from your usurpations. Therefore, bear the consequences. No, sir, I have not seen your sister.”

And after this harsh apostrophe, the operator returned to his task. A poor woman had just been brought to him, whose two legs were fractured by a carriage.

"See!" he exclaimed, calling after Philip, who was rushing away, "see! Do the poor bring their carriages to the public festivals to break the legs of the rich?"

Philip, who belonged to that class of the young nobility from which sprung the Lafayettes and Lamoths, had often professed the same maxims which terrified him in the mouth of this young man, and their application recoiled upon him like a judgment. His heart bursting with grief, he left the neighborhood of the hospital and continued his sad search. He had not proceeded many steps, when, carried away by his grief, he could not repress a heartrending cry of:

"Andree! Andree!"

At that moment there passed by him, walking with hasty steps, a man already advanced in years, dressed in a gray cloth coat and milled stockings, his right hand resting on a stick, while with the left he held one of those lanterns made of a candle inclosed in oiled paper.

Hearing Philip's cry of grief, he guessed what he must be suffering, and murmured:

"Poor young man!"

But as he seemed to have come for the same purpose as himself, he passed on. Then all at once, as if he reproached himself for having passed unheeding by so much suffering, without attempting to console it:

"Sir," said he, "pardon me for mingling my grief with yours; but those who are struck by the same blow should lean on each other for support. Besides, you may be useful to me. You have already sought for a considerable time. I see, as your light is nearly extinguished, and you must therefore be acquainted with the most fatal localities of the place."

"Oh, yes, sir, I know them!"

"Well, I also seek some one."

"Then look first in the great ditch; you will find more than fifty corpses there."

"Fifty! Just Heaven! So many victims killed at a fete!"

"So many! Sir, I have already looked at a thousand faces, and have not yet found my sister."

"Your sister?"

"It was yonder, in that direction, that she was. I lost her near the bench. I have found the place since, but no trace of her was visible. I am about to recommence the search, beginning with the bastion."

"To which side did the crowd rush, sir?"

"Toward the new buildings, in the Rue de la Madeleine."

"Then it must have been toward this side?"

"Yes, and I therefore searched on this side first; but there were dreadful scenes here. Besides, although the tide flowed in that direction, a poor bewildered woman soon loses her senses in such a scene; she knows not whither she goes, and endeavors to escape in the first direction that presents itself."

"Sir, it is not probable that she would struggle against the current. I am about to search the streets on this side; come with me, and, both together, we may perhaps find — "

"And whom do you seek? Your son?" asked Philip, timidly.

"No, sir; but a child whom I had almost adopted."

"And you allowed him to come alone?"

"Oh! he is a young man of eighteen or nineteen. He is master of his own actions; and as he wished to come, I could not hinder him. Besides, we were far from expecting this horrible catastrophe! But your light is going out."

"Yes, sir, I see it."

"Come with me; I will light you."

"Thank you — you are very good; but I fear I shall incommode you."

" Oh, do not fear, since I must have searched for myself. The poor child generally came home very punctually," continued the old man, proceeding in the direction of the streets; "but this evening I felt a sort of foreboding. I waited up for him; it was already eleven o'clock, when my wife heard of the misfortunes of this fete from a neighbor. I waited for two hours longer, still hoping that he would return. Then, as he did not appear, I thought it would be base and cowardly in me to sleep without having news of him."

"Then we are going toward the houses?" asked the young man.

"Yes; you said the crowd must have rushed to this side, and it certainly has done so. The unfortunate boy had doubtless been carried this way also! He is from the provinces, and is alike ignorant of the usages and the localities of this great town. Probably this was the first time he had ever been in the Place Louis XV."

"Alas! my sister is also from the provinces, sir."

"What a fearful sight!" said the old man, turning away from a group of corpses clasped together in death.

"Yet it is there we must look." replied the young man, resolutely holding his light over the heap of dead.

"Oh! I shudder to look at it, for I am a simple and unsophisticated man, and the sight of destruction causes in me an unconquerable horror."

"I had the same horror; but this evening I have served my apprenticeship to butchery and death! Hold, here is a young man of about eighteen; he has been suffocated, for I see no wounds. Is it he whom you seek?"

The old man made an effort, and held his lantern close to the body.

"No, sir," said he, "no; my child is younger, has black hair, and pale complexion."

"Alas! all are pale to-night," replied Philip.

"Oh! see," said the old man, "here we are, at the foot of the Garde-Meuble. Look at these tokens of the struggle. This blood upon the walls, these shreds of garments upon the iron bars, these torn dresses on the points of the railing!"

"It was here — it was certainly here," murmured Philip.

"What sufferings!"

"Oh, heavens!"

"What?"

"Something white under these corpses! My sister had a white dress on. Lend me your lamp, sir. I beseech you."

In fact, Philip had seen and snatched a shred of white cloth. He let go his hold, having but one hand to take the lamp.

"It is a fragment of a woman's dress, held firmly in a young man's hand," cried he; "of a white dress like my sister's. Oh! Andree! Andree!" And the young man uttered heartrending sobs. The old man now approached.

"It is he!" exclaimed he, opening his arms.

This exclamation attracted the young man's attention.

"Gilbert!" exclaimed Philip in his turn.

"You know Gilbert, sir?"

"Is it Gilbert whom you seek?"

These two questions were uttered simultaneously. The old man seized Gilbert's hand; it was as cold as death. Philip opened the young man's dress, pushed aside the shirt, and placed his hand upon his heart.

"Poor Gilbert!" said he.

“My dear child!” subbed the old man.

“He breathes! — he lives. He lives, I tell you!” exclaimed Philip.

“Oh! do you think so?”

“I am certain of it — his heart beats.”

“It is true,” replied the old man. “Help! help! There is a surgeon yonder.”

“Oh! let us succor him ourselves, sir; just now I asked that man for help, and he refused me.”

“He must help my child!” cried the old man, indignantly. “He *must.* Assist me, sir, to carry Gilbert to him.”

“I have only one arm, but it is at your service, sir,” replied Philip.

“And I, old as I am, feel strong again! Come!”

The old man seized Gilbert by the shoulders; the young man took his two feet under his right arm, and in this manner they advanced toward the group in the midst of which the surgeon was operating.

“Help! help!” cried the old man.

“The men of the people first! The men of the people first!” replied the surgeon, faithful to his maxim, and sure, each time he replied thus, of exciting a murmur of applause among the group which surrounded him.

“It is a man of the people whom I am bringing,” replied the old man, with vehemence, but beginning to share in the general admiration which the firm and resolute tone of the young operator excited.

“After the women, then,” said the surgeon; “men have more strength to support pain than women.”

“A simple bleeding will suffice, sir,” replied the old man.

“Oh! is it you again, my young nobleman?” said the surgeon, perceiving Philip before he saw the old man.

Philip did not reply. The old man thought that these words were addressed to him.

“I am not a nobleman,” said he, “I am a man of the people; my name is Jean Jacques Rousseau.”

The doctor gave a cry of astonishment, and making an imperative gesture:

“Give place,” said he, “to the man of nature! Make room for the emancipator of the human race! Place for the citizen of Geneva!”

“Thanks, sir,” said Rousseau, “thanks!”

“Has any accident happened to you?” asked the young doctor.

“Not to me, but to this poor child. See!”

“Ah! you too,” cried the physician, “you too, like myself, represent the cause of humanity.”

Rousseau, deeply moved by this unexpected triumph, could only stammer forth some almost unintelligible words. Philip, dumb with astonishment at finding himself in the presence of the philosopher whom he admired so highly, remained standing apart. Those who stood around assisted Rousseau to lay the fainting Gilbert upon the table. It was at this moment that the old man glanced at the person whose assistance he was imploring. He was a young man about Gilbert's age, but his features presented no appearance of youth. His sallow complexion was withered like that of an old man; his heavy and drooping eyelids covered an eye like a serpent's, and his mouth was distorted as if in an epileptic fit.

His sleeves turned back to the elbow, his arms covered with blood, surrounded by lifeless and bleeding limbs, he seemed more like an executioner at work, and glorying in his task, than a physician accomplishing his sad and holy mission.

Nevertheless, Rousseau's name seemed to have had so much influence over him as to cause him to lay aside for an instant his usual brutality; he gently opened Gilbert's sleeve, tied a band of linen round his arm, and opened the vein.

The blood flowed at first drop by drop, but after some moments the pure and generous current of youth spouted forth freely.

“Ha! we shall save him,” said the operator. “But he will require great care; his chest has been rudely pressed.”

“I have now to thank you, sir,” said Rousseau, “and praise you, not for the exclusive preference you show for the poor, but for your care and kindness toward them. All men are brothers.”

“Even the noble, even the aristocrats, even the rich?” asked the surgeon, his piercing eye flashing from beneath his heavy eyelid.

“Even the noble, the aristocrats, the rich, when they suffer,” said Rousseau.

“Sir,” said the operator, “excuse me. I am from Baudry, near Neufchatel; I am a Switzer like yourself, and therefore a democrat.”

“A countryman?” cried Rousseau, “a native of Switzerland! Your name, sir, if you please?”

“An obscure name, sir; the name of a retiring man who devotes his life to study, waiting till he may, like yourself, devote it to the good of humanity.

My name is Jean Paul Marat.”

“Thanks, Monsieur Marat,” said Rousseau. “But while enlightening the people as to their rights, do not excite them to vengeance; for if they should ever revenge themselves, you will perhaps be terrified at their reprisals.”

Marat smiled a fearful smile. “Oh! if that day should happen during my life!” said he; “if I could only have the happiness to witness it!”

Rousseau heard these words, and, alarmed at the tone in which they were uttered, as a traveler trembles at the first mutterings of the far-distant thunder, he took Gilbert in his arms, and attempted to carry him away.

Two volunteers to help Monsieur Rousseau! Two men of the people!” cried the surgeon.

“Here! here! here!” cried twenty voices simultaneously.

Rousseau had only to choose; he pointed to the two strongest, who took the youth up in their arms.

As be was leaving the place he passed Philip.

“"Here, sir,” said he, “I have no more use for the lantern; take it.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Philip; “many thanks.”

He seized the lantern, and while Rousseau once more took the way to the Rue Plastriere, he continued his search.

“Poor young man!” murmured Rousseau, turning back, and seeing Philip disappear in the blocked-up and encumbered streets. He proceeded on his way shuddering, for he still heard the shrill voice of the surgeon echoing over the field of blood, and crying:

“The men of the people! None but the men of the people! Woe to the noble, to the rich, to the aristocrats!”

CHAPTER LXVII.

The Return.

WHILE THE countless catastrophes we have mentioned were rapidly succeeding each other, M. de Taverney escaped all these dangers as if by a miracle.

Unable to oppose any physical resistance to the devouring force which swept away everything in its passage, but at the same time calm and collected, he had succeeded in maintaining his position in the center of a group which was rolling onward toward the Rue de la Madeleine. This group, crushed against the parapet walls of the place, ground against the angles of the Garde-Meuble, had left a long trail of wounded and dead in its path; but, decimated as it was, it had yet succeeded in conducting the remnant of its number to a place of safety. When this was accomplished, the handful of men and women who had been left dispersed themselves over the boulevards with cries of joy, and M. de Taverney found himself, like his companions, completely out of danger.

What we are about to say would be difficult to believe, had we not already so frankly sketched the character of the baron. During the whole of this fearful passage, M. de Taverney — may God forgive him! — had absolutely thought only of himself. Besides that he, was not of a very affectionate disposition, he was a man of action; and, in the great crises of life, such characters always put the adage of Caesar's, “age quod agis,” in practice. We shall not say, therefore, that M. de Taverney was utterly selfish, we shall merely admit that he was absent. But once upon the pavement of the boulevards, once more master of his actions, sensible of having escaped from death to life, satisfied, in short, of his safety, the baron gave a deep sigh of satisfaction, followed by a cry — feeble and wailing — a cry of grief.

“My daughter!” said he, “my daughter!” and he remained motionless, his hands fell by his side, his eyes were fixed and glassy, while he searched his memory for all the particulars of their separation.

“Pour dear man!” murmured some compassionate women.

A group had collected around the baron, ready to pity, but above all to question. But M. de Taverney had no popular instincts; he felt ill at ease in the center of this compassionate group, and making a successful effort, he broke through them, and, we say it to his praise, made a few steps toward the place.

But these few steps were the unreflecting movement of paternal love, which is never entirely extinguished in the heart of man. Reason immediately came to the baron's aid and arrested his steps.

We will follow, with the reader's permission, the course of his reasoning. First, the impossibility of returning to the Place Louis XV. occurred to him. In it there was only confusion and death, and the crowds which were still rushing from it would have rendered any attempt to pass through them as futile as for the swimmer to seek to ascend the fall of the Rhine at Schaffhausen. Besides, even if a Divine arm enabled him to reach the place, how could he hope to find one woman among a hundred thousand women? And why should he expose himself again, and fruitlessly, to a death from which he had so miraculously escaped?

Then came hope, that light which ever gilds the clouds of the darkest night. Was not Andree near Philip, resting on his arm, protected by his manly strength and his brother's heart?

That he, the baron, a feeble and tottering old man, should have been carried away, was very natural; but that Philip, with his ardent, vigorous, hopeful nature — Philip, with his arm of iron — Philip, responsible for his sister's safety — should be so, was impossible. Philip had struggled and must have conquered.

The baron, like all selfish men, endowed Philip with those qualities which his selfishness denied to himself, but which nevertheless he sought in others — strength, generosity, and valor. For one selfish man regards all other selfish men as rivals and enemies, who rob him of those advantages which he believes he has the right of reaping from society.

M. de Taverney, being thus reassured by the force of his own arguments, concluded that Philip had naturally saved his sister; that he had perhaps lost some time in seeking his father to save him also, but that probably, nay, certainly, he had taken the way to the Rue Coq-Heron, to conduct Andree, who must be a little alarmed by all the scene, home.

He therefore wheeled round, and descending the Rue des Capucines, he gained the Place des Conquetes, or Louis le Grand, now called the Place des Victoires.

But scarcely had the baron arrived within twenty paces of the hotel, when Nicole, placed as sentinel on the threshold, where she was chattering with some companions, exclaimed; “And Monsieur Philip? and Mademoiselle Andree? What has become of them! “For all Paris was already informed by the earliest fugitives of the catastrophe, which their terror had even exaggerated.

“Oh heavens!” cried the baron, a little agitated, “have they not returned, Nicole?”

“No, no, sir, they have not been seen.”

“They most probably have been obliged to make a detour,” replied the baron, trembling more and more in proportion as the calculations of his logic were demolished; and he remained standing in the street waiting in his turn along with Nicole, who was sobbing, and La Brie, who raised his clasped hands to heaven.

“Ah! here is M. Philip!” exclaimed Nicole, in a tone of indescribable terror; for Philip was alone.

And in the darkness of the night, Philip was seen running toward them, breathless and despairing.

“Is my sister here?” cried he, while yet at a distance, as soon as he could see the group assembled at the door of the hotel.

“Oh, my God!” exclaimed the baron, pale and trembling.

“Andree! Andree!” cried the young man, approaching nearer and nearer; “where is Andree?”

“We have not seen her; she is not here, Monsieur Philip. Oh, heavens! my dear young lady!” cried Nicole, bursting into tears.

“And yet you have returned?” said the baron, in a tone of anger, which must seem to the reader the more unjust, that we have already made him acquainted with the secrets of his logic.

Philip, instead of replying, approached and showed his bleeding face, and his arm, broken and hanging at his side like a withered branch.

“Alas! alas!” sighed the old man, “Andree! my poor Andree!” and he sunk back upon the stone bench beside the door.

“I will find her, living or dead!” exclaimed Philip gloomily. And he again started off with feverish activity. Without slackening his pace, he secured his left arm in the opening of his vest, for this useless limb would have fettered his movements in the crowd, and if he had had a hatchet at that moment, he would have struck it off. It was then that he met on that fatal field of the dead, Rousseau, Gilbert, and the fierce and gloomy operator who, covered with blood, seemed rather an infernal demon presiding over the massacre, than a beneficent genius appearing to succor and to help. During a great portion of the night Philip wandered over the Place Louis XV., unable to tear himself away from the walls of the Garde-Meuble, near which Gilbert had been found, and incessantly gazing at the piece of white muslin which the young man had held firmly grasped in his hand.

But when the first light of day appeared, worn-out, ready to sink among the heaps of corpses scarcely paler than himself, seized with a strange giddiness, and hoping, as his father had hoped, that Andree might have returned or been carried back to the house, Philip bent his steps once more toward the Rue Coq-Heron. While still at a distance he saw the same group he had left there, and guessing at once that Andree had not returned, he stopped. The baron, on his side, had recognized his son.

“Well?” cried he.

“What! has my sister not returned?” asked the young man.

“Alas!” cried, with one voice, the baron, Nicole, and La Brie.

“Nothing — no news — no information — no hope?”

“Nothing?”

Philip fell upon the stone bench of the hotel; the baron uttered a savage exclamation.

At this very moment a hackney-coach appeared at the end of the street; it approached slowly, and stopped in front of the hotel. A woman's head was seen through the door, resting on her shoulders, as if she had fainted. Philip, roused by this sight, hastened toward the vehicle. The door of the coach opened, and a man alighted, bearing the senseless form of Andree in his arms.

“Dead! dead! — They bring us her corpse!” cried Philip, falling on his knees.

“Dead!” stammered the baron, “oh, sir, is she indeed dead?”

“I think not, gentlemen,” calmly replied the man who carried Andree; “Mademoiselle de Taverney, I hope, is only in a swoon.”

“Oh! the sorcerer, the sorcerer!” cried the baron.

“The Count de Balsamo?” murmured Philip.

“The same, sir, and truly happy in having recognized Mademoiselle de Taverney in this frightful melee.”

“In what part of it, sir?” asked Philip.

“Near the Garde-Meuble.”

“Yes,” said Philip. Then his expression of joy changing suddenly to one of gloomy distrust —

“You bring her back very late, count,” said he.

“Sir,” replied Balsamo, without seeming in the least surprised, “you may easily comprehend my embarrassing situation. I did not know your sister's address, and I had no resource but to take her to the Marchioness de Sevigny's, a friend of mine who lives near the royal stables. Then this honest fellow whom you see, and who assisted me to rescue the young lady — come hither, Courtois.” Balsamo accompanied these last words by a sign, and a man in the royal livery appeared from the coach. “Then,” continued Balsamo, “this worthy fellow, who belongs to the royal stables, recognized the young lady as having one evening driven her from Muette to your hotel. Mademoiselle Taverney owes this lucky recognition to her marvelous beauty. I made him accompany me in the coach, and I have the honor to restore Mademoiselle de Taverney to you with all the respect due to her, and less injured than you think.” And as he concluded he gave the young girl into the care of her father and Nicole.

For the first time, the baron felt a tear trembling on his eyelids, and though, no doubt, inwardly surprised at this mark of feeling, he permitted it to roll unheeded down his wrinkled cheeks. Philip held out the only hand he had at liberty to Balsamo.

“Sir,” he said, “you know my name and my address. Give me an opportunity of showing my gratitude for the service you have rendered us.”

“I have only fulfilled a duty,” replied Balsamo. “Do I not owe you hospitality?” And bowing low, he made a few steps to retire, without replying to the baron's invitation to enter. But returning:

“Excuse me,” said he, “but I omitted to give you the exact address of the Marchioness de Sevigny. She lives in the Rue St. Honore, near the Fueillants. I thought it necessary to give you this information, in case Mademoiselle de Taverney should think proper to call on her.”

There was in this precision of details, in this accumulation of proofs, a delicacy which touched Philip deeply, and affected even the baron.

“Sir,” said the baron, “my daughter owes her life to you.”

“I know it, sir, and I feel proud and happy at the thought,” replied Balsamo.

And this time, followed by Courtois, who refused Philip's proffered purse, he entered the fiacre, which drove off rapidly.

Almost at the same moment, and as if Balsamo's departure had put an end to her swoon. Andree opened her eyes, but she remained for some moments mute, bewildered, and with a wild and staring look.

“Oh, heavens!” murmured Philip; “has Providence only half restored her to us? Has her reason fled?”

Andree seemed to comprehend these words, and shook her head; but she remained silent, and as if under the influence of a sort of ecstasy. She was still standing, and one of her arms was extended in the direction of the street by which Balsamo had disappeared.

“Come, come,” said the baron; “it is time to put an end to all this. Assist your sister into the house, Philip.”

The young man supported Andree with Ins uninjured arm, Nicole sustained her on the other side; and, walking on, but after the manner of a sleeping person, she entered the hotel and gained her apartments. There, for the first time, the power of speech returned.

“Philip! My father!” said she.

“She recognizes us! she knows us again!” exclaimed Philip.

“Of course, I know you again; but oh, heavens! what has happened?”

And Andree closed her eyes, but this time not in a swoon, but in a calm and peaceful slumber.

Nicole, left alone with her young mistress, undressed her and put her in bed.

When Philip returned to his apartments, he found there a physician whom the thoughtful La Brie had run to summon, as soon as the anxiety on Andree's account had subsided.

The doctor examined Philip's arm. It was not broken, but only dislocated, and a skillful compression replaced the shoulder in the socket from which it had been removed. After the operation, Philip, who was still uneasy on his sister's account, conducted the doctor to her bedside.

The doctor felt her pulse, listened to her breathing, and smiled.

“Your sister sleeps as calmly as an infant.” said he. “Let her sleep, chevalier; there is nothing else necessary to be done.”

As for the baron, sufficiently reassured on his children's account, he had long been sound asleep.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

M. De Jussieu.

WE MUST again transport the reader to the house in the Rue Plastriere where M. de Sartines had sent his agent, and there, on the morning of the 31st of May, we shall once more find Gilbert stretched upon a mattress in Therese's room, and, standing around him, Therese and Rousseau with several of their neighbors, contemplating this specimen of the dreadful event at the remembrance of which all Paris still shuddered.

Gilbert, pale and bleeding, opened his eyes; and, as soon as he regained his consciousness, he endeavored to raise himself and look round as if he were still in the Place Louis XV. An expression of profound anxiety, followed by one of triumphant joy, was pictured in his features; then a second cloud flitted across his countenance, which resumed its somber hue.

“Are you suffering, my dear child?” inquired Rousseau, taking his hand affectionately.

“Oh! who has saved me?” asked Gilbert. “Who thought of me, lonely and friendless being that I am?”

“What saved you, my child, was the happy chance that you were not yet dead. He who thought of you was the same Almighty Being who thinks of all.”

“No matter; it is very imprudent,” grumbled Therese, “to go among such a crowd.”

“Yes, yes, it is very imprudent,” repeated all the neighbors with one voice.

“Why, ladies,” interrupted Rousseau, “there is no imprudence when there is no manifest danger, and there is no manifest danger in going to see fireworks. When danger arrives under such circumstances, you do not call the sufferer imprudent, but unfortunate. Any of us present would have done the same.”

Gilbert looked round, and seeing himself in Rousseau's apartment, endeavored to speak; but the effort was too much for him, the blood gushed from his mouth and nostrils, and he sank back insensible. Rousseau had been warned by the surgeon of the Place Louis XV., and was therefore cot alarmed. In expectation of a similar event, he had placed the invalid on a temporary mattress without sheets.

“In the mean time,” said he to Therese, “you may put the poor lad to bed.”

“Where?”

“Why here, in my bed.”

Gilbert heard these words. Extreme weakness alone prevented his replying immediately, but he made a violent effort, and, opening his eyes, said, slowly and painfully, “No, no; upstairs.”

“You wish to return to your own room?”

“Yes, yes, if you please; “and he completed with his eyes, rather than with his tongue, this wish, dictated by a recollection still more powerful than pain, and which with him seemed to survive even his consciousness.

Rousseau, whose own sensibility was so extreme, doubtless understood him, for he added:

“It is well, my child; we will carry you up. He does not wish to inconvenience us,” said he to Therese, who had warmly applauded the resolution. It was therefore decided that Gilbert should be instantly installed in the attic he preferred.

Toward the middle of the day, Rousseau came to pass the hours he usually spent in collecting his favorite plants by the bedside of his disciple; and the young man, feeling a little better, related to him, in a low and almost inaudible voice, the details of the catastrophe. But he did not mention the real cause why he went to see the fireworks. Curiosity alone, he said, led him to the Place Louis, XV. Rousseau could not suspect anything farther, unless he had been a sorcerer, and he therefore expressed no surprise at Gilbert's story, but contented himself with the questions he had already put, and only recommended patience. He did not speak either of the fragment of muslin which had been found in Gilbert's hand, and of which Philip had taken possession.

Nevertheless, this conversation, which, on both sides, bordered so narrowly on the real feelings of each, was no less attractive on that account; and they were still deeply absorbed in it, when, all at once, Therese's step was heard upon the landing.

“Jacques!” said she, “Jacques!”

“Well, what is it?”

“Some prince coming to visit me, in my turn,” said Gilbert, with a feeble smile.

“Jacques!” cried Therese, advancing and still calling.

“Well! What do you want with me?”

Therese entered.

“M. de Jussieu is below,” said she; “he heard that you were in the crowd during that night, and he has come to see if you have been hurt.”

“The good Jussieu!” said Rousseau. “Excellent man, like all those who, from taste or from necessity, commune with nature, the source of all good. Be calm, do not move, Gilbert; I will return.”

“Yes, thank you,” said the young man,

Rousseau left the room.

But scarcely was he gone when Gilbert, raising himself as well as he could, dragged himself toward the skylight from which Andree's window could be seen.

It was a most painful effort for a young man without strength, almost without the power of thought, to raise himself upon the stool, lift the sash of the skylight, and prop himself upon the edge of the roof. Gilbert, nevertheless, succeeded in effecting this, but once there, his eyes swam, his hand shook, the blood rushed to his lips, and he fell heavily upon the floor.

At that moment the door of the garret was opened, and Rousseau entered, followed by Jussieu, to whom he was paying great civility.

“Take care, my dear philosopher; stoop a little here,” said Rousseau. “There is a step there — we are not entering a palace.”

“Thank you; I have good eyes and stout limbs,” replied the learned botanist.

“Here is some one come to visit you, my little Gilbert,” said Rousseau, looking toward the bed. “Oh! good heavens! where is he? He has got up, the unfortunate lad!”

And Rousseau, seeing the window open, commenced to vent his displeasure in affectionate grumblings. Gilbert raised himself with difficulty, and said, in an almost inaudible voice, “I wanted air.”

It was impossible to scold him, for suffering was plainly depicted in his pale and altered features.

“In fact,” interrupted M. de Jussieu, “it is dreadfully warm here. Come, young man, let me feel your pulse; I am also a doctor.”

“And better than many regular physicians,” said Rousseau, “for you are a healer of the mind as well as of the body.”

“It is too much honor — ” murmured Gilbert feebly, endeavoring to shroud himself from view in his humble pallet.

“M. de Jussieu insisted on visiting you,” said Rousseau, “and I accepted his offer. Well, dear doctor, what do you think of his chest?”

The skillful anatomist felt the bones, and sounded the cavity by an attentive auscultation.

“The vital parts are uninjured.” said he. “But who has pressed you in his arms with so much force?”

“Alas! sir, it was death!” said Gilbert.

Rousseau looked at the young man with astonishment.

“Oh! you are bruised, my child, greatly bruised; but tonics, air, leisure will make all that disappear.”

“So leisure; I cannot afford it,” said the young man, looking at Rousseau.

“What does he mean?” asked Jussieu.

“Gilbert is a determined worker, my dear sir,” replied Rousseau.

“Agreed; but he cannot possibly work for a day or two yet.”

“To obtain a livelihood,” said Gilbert, “one must work every day; for every day one eats.”

“Oh! you will not consume much food for a short time, and your medicine will not cost much.”

“However little they cost, sir,” said Gilbert, “I never receive alms.”

“You are mad,” said Rousseau, “and you exaggerate. I tell you that you must be governed by M. de Jussieu's orders, who will be your doctor in spite of yourself. Would you believe it,” continued he, addressing M. de Jussieu, “he has begged me not to send for one?”

“Why not?”

“Because it would have cost me money, and he is proud.”

“But,” replied M. de Jussieu, gazing at Gilbert's fine expressive features with growing interest, “no matter how proud; he is, he cannot accomplish impossibilities. Do you think yourself capable of working, when you fell down with the mere exertion of going to the window?”

“It is true,” sighed Gilbert, “I am weak; I know it.”

“Well, then, take repose, and, above all, mentally. You are the guest of a man whom all men obey, except his guest.”

Rousseau, delighted at this delicate compliment from so great a man, took his hand and pressed it.

“And, then,” continued M. de Jussieu, “you will become an object of particular care to the king and the princes.”

“I!” exclaimed Gilbert.

“You, a poor victim of that unfortunate evening. The dauphin, when he heard the news, uttered cries of grief; and the dauphiness, who was going to Marly, remained at Trianon to be more within reach of the unfortunate sufferers.”

“Oh, indeed!” said Rousseau.

“' Yes, my dear philosopher; and nothing is spoken of but the letter written by the dauphin to M. de Sartines.”

“I have not heard of it.”

“'It is at once simple and touching. The dauphin receives a monthly pension of two thousand crowns. This morning his month's income had not be>-n paid. The prince walked to and fro quite alarmed, asked for the treasurer several times, and as soon as the latter brought him the money, sent it instantly to Paris with two charming lines to M. de Sartines, who has just shown them to me.”

“Ah, then you have seen M. de Sartines to-day?” said Rousseau, with a kind of uneasiness, or rather distrust.

“Yes; I have just left him,” replied M. de Jussieu, rather embarrassed. “I had to ask him for some seeds. So that,” added he quickly, “the dauphiness remained at Versailles to tend her sick and wounded.”

“'Her sick and wounded?” asked Rousseau.

“Yes; Monsieur Gilbert is not the only one who has suffered. This time the lower classes have only paid a partial quota to the accident; it is said that there are many noble persons among the wounded.”

Gilbert listened with inexpressible eagerness and anxiety. It seemed to him that every moment the name of Andree would be pronounced by the illustrious naturalist. But M. de Jussieu rose.

“So our consultation is over?” said Rousseau.

“' And henceforward our science will be useless with regard to this young invalid; air, moderate exercise, the woods — ah! by-the-by, I was forgetting — ”

“What?”

“Next Sunday I am to make a botanical excursion to the forest of Marly; will you accompany me, my illustrious fellow laborer?”

“Oh!” replied Rousseau, “say rather your unworthy admirer.”

“Parbleu! that will be a fine opportunity for giving our invalid a walk. Bring him.”

“So far?”

“The distance is nothing; besides, my carriage takes me as far as Bougival, and I can give you a seat. We will go by the Princess's Road to Luciennes, and from thence proceed to Marly. Botanists stop every moment; our invalid will carry our camp-stools; you and I will gather samples; he will gather health.”

“What an amiable man you are, my dear Jussieu!” said Rousseau.

“Never mind; it is for my own interest. You have, I know, a great work ready upon mosses, and as I am feeling my way a little on the same subject you will guide me.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Rousseau, whose satisfaction was apparent in spite of himself.

“And when there,” added the botanist, “we shall have a little breakfast in the open air, and shall enjoy the shade and the beautiful flowers. It is settled?”

“Oh, certainly.”

“For Sunday, then?”

“Delightful. It seems to me as if I were fifteen again. I revel beforehand in all the pleasure I have in prospect,” replied Rousseau, with almost childish satisfaction.

“And you, my young friend, must get stronger on your legs in the meantime.”

Gilbert stammered out some words of thanks, which M. Jussieu did not hear, and the two botanists left Gilbert alone with his thoughts, and above all with his fears.

CHAPTER LXIX.

Life Returns.

IN THE MEANTIME, while Rousseau believed his invalid to be on the high road to health, and while Therese informed all her neighbors that, thanks to the prescriptions of the learned doctor, M. de Jussieu. Gilbert was entirely out of danger, during this period of general confidence the young man incurred the worst danger he had yet run, by his obstinacy and his perpetual reveries. Rousseau could not be so confident, but that he entertained in his inmost thoughts a distrust solidly founded on philosophical reasonings.

Knowing Gilbert to be in love, and having caught him in open rebellion to medical authority, he judged that he would again commit the same faults if he gave him too much liberty. Therefore, like a good father, he had closed the padlock of Gilbert's attic more carefully than ever, tacitly permitting him meanwhile to go to the window, but carefully preventing his crossing the threshold. It may easily be imagined what rage this solicitude, which changed his garret into a prison, aroused in Gilbert's breast, and what hosts of projects crowded his teeming brain. To many minds constraint is fruitful in inventions. Gilbert now thought only of Andree, of the happiness of seeing and watching over the progress of her convalescence, even from afar; but Andree did not appear at the windows of the pavilion, and Gilbert, when he fixed his ardent and searching looks on the opposite apartments, or surveyed every nook and corner of the building, could only see Nicole carrying the invalid's draught on a porcelain plate, or M. de Taverney surveying the garden, and vigorously taking snuff, as if to clear and refresh his intellect. Still these details tranquilized him, for they betokened illness, but not death.

“There,” thought he, “beyond that door, behind that blind, breathes, sighs, and suffers, she whom I adore, whom I idolize — she whose very sight would cause the perspiration to stand upon my forehead and make my limbs tremble — she to whose existence mine is forever riveted — she for whom I alone breathe and live!;”

And then, leaning forward out of his window — so that the inquisitive C'hon thought, twenty times in an hour, that he would throw himself out — Gilbert, with his practiced eye, look the measure of the partitions, of the floors, of the depth of the pavilion, and constructed an exact plan of them in his brain. There M. de Taverney slept; there must be the kitchen; there Philip's apartments; there the cabinet occupied by Nicole; and, last of all, there must be Andree's chamber — the sanctuary at the door of which he would have given his life to remain for one day kneeling.

This sanctuary, according to Gilbert's plan, was a large apartment on the ground floor, guarded by an antechamber, from which opened a small cabinet with a glass door, which, agreeably to Gilbert's arrangement, served as Nicole's sleeping chamber.

“Oh'!” exclaimed the excited youth in his fits of jealous fury, “how happy are the beings who are privileged to walk in the garden on which my window and those of the staircase look. How happy those thoughtless mortals who tread the gravel of the parterre! For there, during the silence of night, may be heard Mademoiselle Andree's plaints and sighs.”

Between the formation of a wish and its accomplishment there is a wide gulf; but fertile imaginations can throw a bridge across. They can find the real in the impossible; they know how to cross the broadest rivers and scale the highest mountains, by a plan peculiarly their own.

For the first few days Gilbert contented himself with wishing. Then he reflected that these much envied, happy beings were simple mortals, endowed, as he was, with limbs to tread the soil of the garden, and with arms to open the doors. Then, by degrees, he pictured to himself the happiness there would be in secretly gliding into this forbidden house — in pressing his ears against the Venetian blinds, through which the sounds from the interior were, as it were, filtered. With Gilbert, wishing did not long suffice; the fulfillment must be immediate.

Besides, his strength returned rapidly; youth is fruitful and rich. At the end of three days, his veins still throbbing with feverish excitement, Gilbert felt himself as strong as he had ever been in his life.

He calculated that, as Rousseau had locked him in, one of the greatest difficulties — that of obtaining an entrance into the hotel of the Taverneys by the street door — was placed out of the question; for, as the entrance-door opened upon the Rue Coq-Heron, and as Gilbert was locked up in the Rue Plastriere, he could not of course reach any street, and had therefore no need to open any doors. There remained the windows. That of his garret looked down upon a perpendicular wall of forty-eight feet in depth.

No one, unless he were drunk or mad, would venture to descend it. “Oh! those doors are happy inventions after all,” thought he, clenching his hands, “and yet Monsieur Rousseau, a philosopher, locks them!”

To break the padlock! That would be easily done; but if so, adieu to the hospitable roof which had sheltered him.

To escape from Luciennes, from the Rue Plastriere, from Taverney — always to escape, would be to render himself unable to look a single creature in the face without fearing to meet the reproach of ingratitude.

“No!” thought he, “Monsieur Rousseau shall know nothing of it.”

Leaning out of his window. Gilbert continued:

“With my hands and my legs, those instruments granted to free men by nature, I will creep along the tiles, and, keeping in the spout — which is narrow indeed, but straight, and therefore the direct road from one end to the other — I shall arrive, if I get on so far, at the skylight parallel to this. Now, this skylight belongs to the stairs. If I do not reach so far, I shall fall into the garden; that will make a noise, people will hasten from the pavilion, will raise me up, will recognize me, and I die nobly, poetically, pitied! That would be glorious!

“If I arrive, as everything leads me to believe I shall, I will creep in under the skylight over the stairs, and descend barefooted to the first story, the window of which also opens in the garden, at fifteen feet from the ground. I jump. Alas, my strength, my activity are gone! It is true that there is an espalier to assist me. Yes, but this espalier with its rotten framework will break, I shall tumble down, not killed nobly and poetically, but whitened with plaster, my clothes torn, ashamed, and looking as if I had come to rob the orchard! Odious thought! M. de Taverney will order the porter to flog me, or La Brie to pull my ears.

“No! I have here twenty pack-threads, which, twisted together, will make a rope, according to Monsieur Rousseau's definition that many straws make a sheaf. I shall borrow all these pack-threads from Madame Therese for one night, I shall knot them together, and when I have reached the window on the first floor, I shall tie the rope to the little balcony, or even to the lead, and slip down into the garden.”

When Gilbert had inspected the spout, attached and measured the cords, and calculated the height by his eye, he felt himself strong and determined.

He twisted the pieces of twine together and made a tolerably strong rope of them, then tried its strength by hanging to a beam in his garret, and, happy to find that he had only spat blood once during his efforts, he decided upon the nocturnal expedition.

The better to hoodwink Monsieur Jacques and Therese, he counterfeited illness, and kept his bed until two o'clock, at which time Rousseau went out for his after-dinner walk and did not return till the evening. When Rousseau paid a visit to his attic, before setting out, Gilbert announced to him his wish of sleeping until the next morning; to which Rousseau replied, that as he had made an engagement to sup from home that evening, he was happy to find Gilbert inclined to rest.

With these mutual explanations they separated. When Rousseau was gone, Gilbert brought out his pack-threads again, and this time he twisted them permanently.

He again examined the spout and the tiles; then placed himself at the window to keep watch on the garden until evening.

CHAPTER LXX.

The Aerial Trip.

GILBERT WAS now prepared for his entrance into the enemy's camp, for thus he mentally termed M. de Taverney's grounds, and from his window he explored the garden with the care and attention of a skillful strategist who is about to give battle, when, in this calm and motionless mansion, an incident occurred which attracted the philosopher's attention.

A stone flew over the garden wall and struck against the angle of the house. Gilbert, who had already learned that there can be no effect without a cause, determined to discover the cause, having seen the effect.

But although he leaned out as far as possible, he could not discover the person in the street who had thrown the stone. However, he immediately comprehended that this maneuver had reference to an event which just then took place; one of the outside shutters of the ground-floor opened cautiously, and through the opening appeared Nicole's head.

On seeing Nicole, Gilbert made a plunge back in his garret, but without losing sight of the nimble young girl. The latter, after throwing a stealthy glance at all the windows, particularly at those of the pavilion, emerged from her hiding-place and ran toward the garden, as if going to the espalier where some lace was drying in the sun. It was on the path which led toward the espalier that the stone had fallen, and neither Nicole nor Gilbert lost sight of it. Gilbert saw her kick this stone, which, for the moment, became of such great importance, before her several times, and she continued this maneuver until she readied the flower border, in which the espalier stood. Once there, Nicole raised her hands to take down the lace, let fall some of it, and, in picking it up again, seized the stone.

As yet Gilbert could understand nothing of this movement, but seeing; Nicole pick up the stone as a greedy school-boy picks up a nut, and unroll a slip of paper, which was tied round it, he at once guessed the degree of importance which was attached to this aerolite.

It was, in fact, neither more nor less than a note which Nicole had found rolled round the stone. The cunning girl quickly unfolded it, read it, and put it into her pocket, and then immediately discovered that there was no more occasion for looking at the lace; it was dry.

Meanwhile Gilbert shook his head, saying to himself, with the blind selfishness of men who entertain a bad opinion of women, that Nicole was in reality a viciously inclined person, and that he, Gilbert, had performed an act of sound and moral policy in breaking off so suddenly and so boldly with a girl who had letters thrown to her over the wall.

Nicole ran back to the house, and soon reappeared, this time holding her hand in her pocket. She drew from it a key, which Gilbert saw glitter in her hand for a moment, and then the young girl slipped this key under a little door which served to admit the gardener, and which was situated at the extremity of the wall opposite the street, and parallel to the great door which was generally used.

“Good!” said Gilbert, “I understand — a love-letter and a rendezvous. Nicole loses no time; she has already a new lover.”

And he frowned with the disappointment of a man who thinks that his loss should cause an irreparable void in the heart of the woman he abandons, and who finds this void completely filled.

“This may spoil all my projects,” he continued, seeking a factitious cause for his ill-humor. “No matter,” resumed he, after a moment's silence, “I shall not be sorry to know the happy mortal who succeeds me in Mademoiselle Nicole's good graces.”

But Gilbert, on certain subjects, had a very discerning judgment. He calculated that the discovery which he had made, and which Nicole was far from suspecting, would give him an advantage over her which might be of use to him, since he knew her secret, with such details as she could not deny, while she scarcely suspected his, and, even if she did, there existed no facts which could give a color to her suspicions-. During all these goings and comings, the anxiously expected night had come on.

The only thing which Gilbert now feared was the return of Rousseau, who might surprise him on the roof or on the staircase, or might come up and find his room empty. In the latter case, the anger of the philosopher of Geneva would be terrible, but Gilbert hoped to avert the blow by means of the following note, which he left upon his little table, addressed to the philosopher:

“'MY DEAR AND ILLUSTRIOUS PROTECTOR — Do not think ill of me, if, notwithstanding your recommendations, and even against your order, I have dared to leave my apartment. I shall soon return, unless some accident, similar to that which has already happened to me, should again take place; but at the risk of a similar, or even a worse accident, I must leave my room for two hours.”

“'I do not know what I shall say when I return,” thought Gilbert; “but at least Monsieur Rousseau will not be uneasy or angry.”'

The evening was dark. A suffocating heat prevailed, as it often does during the first warmths of spring. The sky was cloudy, and at half-past eight the most practiced eye could have distinguished nothing at the bottom of the dark gulf into which Gilbert peered.

It was then, for the first time, that the young man perceived that he breathed with difficulty, and that sudden perspirations bedewed his forehead and breast — unmistakable signs of a weak and unhinged system. Prudence counseled him not to undertake, in his present condition, an expedition for which strength and steadiness in all his members were peculiarly necessary, not only to insure success, but even for the preservation of his life; but Gilbert did not listen to what his physical instincts counseled.

His moral will spoke more loudly; and to it, as ever, the young man rowed obedience.

The moment had come. Gilbert rolled his rope several times round his neck, and commenced, with beating heart, to scale the skylight; then, firmly grasping the casement, he made the first, step in the spout toward the skylight on the right, which was, as we have said, that of the staircase, and about two fathoms distance from his own.

His feet in a groove of lead, at the utmost eight inches wide, which groove, though it was supported here and there by holdfasts of iron, yet, from the pliability of the lead, yielded to his steps; his hands resting against the tiles, which could only be a point of support for his equilibrium, but no help in case of falling, since the fingers could take no hold of them; this was Gilbert's position during this aerial passage, which lasted two minutes, but which seemed to Gilbert to occupy two centuries.

But Gilbert determined not to be afraid; and such was the power of will in this young man that he succeeded. He recollected to have heard a rope-dancer say, that to walk safely on narrow ways one ought never to look downward, but about ten feet in advance, and never think of the abyss beneath, but as an eagle might, that is, with the conviction of being able to float over it at pleasure. Besides, Gilbert had already put these precepts in practice in several visits he had paid to Nicole — that Nicole who was now so bold that she made use of keys and doors instead of roofs and chimneys. In this manner he had often passed the sluices of the mill at Taverney, and the naked beams of the roof of an old barn. He arrived, therefore, at the goal without a shudder, and once arrived there, he glided beneath the skylight, and with a thrill of joy alighted on the staircase. But on reaching the landing-place he stopped short. Voices were heard on the lower stories; they were those of Therese and certain neighbors of hers, who were speaking of Rousseau's genius, of the merit of his books, and of the harmony of his music.

The neighbors had read “La Nouvelle Heloise,” and confessed frankly that they found the book obscure. In reply to this criticism Madame Therese observed that they did not understand the philosophical part of this delightful book. To this the neighbors had nothing to reply, except to confess their incompetence to give an opinion on such a subject.

This edifying conversation was held from one landing-place to another; and the fire of discussion, ardent as it was, was less so than that of the stoves on winch the savory suppers of these ladies were cooking. Gilbert was listening to the arguments, therefore, and snuffing the smell of the viands, when his name, pronounced in the midst of the tumult, caused him to start rather unpleasantly. “After my supper,” said Therese,” I must go and see if that dear child does not want something in his attic.”

This dear child gave Gilbert less pleasure than the promise of the visit gave him alarm. Luckily, he remembered that Therese, when she supped alone, chatted a long time with her bottle, that the meat seemed savory, and that after supper meant — ten o'clock. It was now only a quarter to nine. Besides, it was probable that, after supper, the course of ideas in Therese's brain would take a change, and that she would then think of anything else rather than of the dear child.

But time was slipping past, to the great vexation of Gilbert, when all at once one of the joints of the allied dames began to burn.

The cry of the alarmed cook was heard, which put an end to all conversation, for every one hurried to the theater of the catastrophe. Gilbert profited by this culinary panic among the ladies to glide down the stairs like a shadow.

Arrived at the first story, he found the leading of the window well adapted to hold his rope, and, attaching it by a slipknot, he mounted the window-sill and began rapidly to descend.

He was still suspended between the window and the ground, when a rapid step sounded in the garden beneath him. He had sufficient time, before the step readied him, to return, and holding fast by the knots he watched to see who this untimely visitor was.

It was a man, and as he proceeded from the direction of the little door, Gilbert did not doubt for an instant but that it was the happy mortal whom Nicole was expecting.

He fixed ail his attention therefore upon this second intruder, who had thus arrested him in the midst of his perilous descent. By his walk, by a glance at his profile, seen from beneath his three-cornered hat, and by the particular mode in which this hat was placed over the corner of his attentive ear, Gilbert fancied he recognized the famous Beausire, that exempt whose acquaintance Nicole had made in Taverney.

Almost immediately he saw Nicole open the door of the pavilion, hasten into the garden, leaving the door open, and light and active as a bird, direct her steps toward the greenhouse, that is to say, in the direction in which M. Beausire was already advancing.

This was most certainly not the first rendezvous which had taken place, since neither one nor other betrayed the least hesitation as to their place of meeting.

“Now I can finish my descent,” thought Gilbert; “for if Nicole has appointed this hour for meeting her lover, it must be because she is certain of being undisturbed. Andree must be alone then — oh heavens! alone.”

In fact, no noise was heard in the house, and only a faint light gleamed from the windows of the ground-floor. Gilbert alighted upon the ground without any accident, and, unwilling to cross the garden, he glided gently along the wall till he came to a clump of trees, crossed it in a stooping posture, and arrived at the door which Nicole had left open without having been discovered. There, sheltered by an immense aristolochia, which was trained over the door and hung down in large festoons, he observed that the outer apartment, which was a spacious antechamber, was, as he had guessed, perfectly empty. This antechamber communicated with the interior of the house by means of two doors, one open, the other closed; Gilbert guessed that the open one was that belonging to Nicole's chamber. He softly entered this room, stretching out his hands before him for fear of accident, for the room was entirely without light; but, at the end of a sort of corridor, was seen a glass door whose framework was clearly designed against the light of the adjoining apartment. On the inner side of this glass door was drawn a muslin curtain.

As Gilbert advanced along the corridor, he heard a feeble voice speaking in the lighted apartment; it was Andree's, and every drop of Gilbert's blood rushed to his heart. Another voice replied to hers; it was Philip's. The young man was anxiously inquiring after his sister's health.

Gilbert, now on his guard, proceeded a few steps farther, and placed himself behind one of those truncated columns surmounted by a bust, which, at that period, formed the usual ornament of double doors. Thus concealed, he strained his eyes and ears to the utmost stretch; so happy, that his heart melted with joy; so fearful, that the same heart shrunk together till it seemed to become only a minute point in his breast.

He listened and gazed.

CHAPTER LXXI.

The Brother and Sister.

GILBERT, AS we have said, gazed and listened. He saw Andree stretched on a reclining chair, her face turned toward the glass door, that is to say, directly toward him. This door was slightly ajar.

A small lamp with a deep shade was placed upon an adjoining table — which was covered with books, indicating the only species of recreation permitted to the invalid — and lighted only the lower part of Mademoiselle de Taverney's face. Sometimes, however, when she leaned back, so as to rest against the pillow of the reclining chair, the light overspread her marble forehead, which was veiled in a lace cap. Philip was sitting at the foot of her chair with his back toward Gilbert; his arm was still in a sling, and all exercise of it was forbidden.

It was the first time that Andree had been up, and the first time also that Philip had left his room. The young people, therefore, had not seen each other since that terrible night, but each knew that the other was recovering, and hastening toward convalescence. They had only been together for a few moments, and were conversing without restraint, for they knew that even if any one should interrupt them, they would be warned by the noise of the bell attached to the door which Nicole had left open. But of course they were not aware of the circumstance of the door having been left open, and they calculated upon the bell.

Gilbert saw and heard all, therefore; for through this open door, he could seize every word of their conversation.

“So now,” Philip was saying, just as Gilbert took his place behind a curtain hung loosely before the door of a dressing-room, “so now you breathe more easily, my poor sister?”

“Yes, more easily; but still with a slight pain.”

“And your strength?”

“Returns but slowly; nevertheless, I have been able to walk to the window two or three times to-day. How sweet the fresh air is, how lovely the flowers! It seems to me that, surrounded with air and flowers, it is impossible to die.”

“But still you are very weak; are you not. Andree?”

“Oh, yes! for the shock was a terrible one! Therefore,” continued the young girl, smiling and shaking her head, “I repeat that I walk with difficulty, and am obliged to lean on the tables and the projecting points of the wainscoting. Without this support my limbs bend under me, and I feel as if I should every moment fall.”

“ Courage, Andree! The fresh air and the beautiful flowers you spoke of just now will cure you, and in a week you will be able to pay a visit to the dauphiness, who, I am informed, sends to inquire so kindly for you.”

“Yes, I hope so, Philip; for the dauphiness in truth seems most kind to me.”

And Andree, leaning back, put her hand upon her chest and closed her lovely eyes.

Gilbert made a step forward with outstretched arms.

“You are in pain, my sister?” asked Philip, taking her hand.

“Yes, at times I have slight spasms, and sometimes the blood mounts to my head, and my temples throb; sometimes again I feel quite giddy, and my heart sinks within me.”

“Oh,” said Philip dreamily, “'that is not surprising; you have met with a dreadful trial, and your escape was almost miraculous.”

“Miraculous is in truth the proper term, brother.”

“But, speaking of your miraculous escape, Andree.” said Philip, approaching closer to his sister, to give more emphasis to the question, “do you know I have never yet had an opportunity of speaking to you of this catastrophe?”

Andree blushed and seemed uneasy, but Philip did not remark this change of color, or at least did not appear to remark it.

“I thought, however,” said the young girl, “that the person who restored me to you gave all the explanations you could wish; my father, at least, told me he was quite satisfied.”

“Of course, my dear Andree; and this man, so far as I could judge, behaved with extreme delicacy in the whole affair; but still, some parts of his tale seemed to me, not suspicious, indeed, but obscure — that is the proper term.”

“How so, and what do you mean, brother?” asked Andree, with the frankness of innocence.

“For instance,” said Philip, “there is one point which did not at first strike me, but which has since seemed to me to bear a very strange aspect.”

“Which?” asked Andree.

“Why, the very manner in which you were saved. Can you describe it to me?”

The young girl seemed to make an effort over herself.

“Oh! Philip,” said she, “I have almost forgotten — I was so much terrified.”

“No matter, my sweetest Andree; tell me all you remember.”'

“Well, you know, brother, we were separated about twenty paces from the Garde-Meuble. I saw you dragged away toward the garden of the Tuileries, while I was drawn toward the Rue Royale. For an instant I could distinguish you making fruitless attempts to rejoin me. I stretched out my arms toward you, crying, Philip! Philip! when all at once I was, as it were, seized by a whirlwind, which raised me aloft and bore me in the direction of the railings. I felt the living tide carrying me toward the wall, where I must be dashed to atoms; I heard the cries of those who were crushed against the railings; I felt that my turn would come to be crushed and mangled; I could almost calculate the number of seconds I had yet to live, when, half dead and almost frantic, raising my hands and eyes to Heaven in a last prayer, I met the burning glance of a man who seemed to govern the crowd and whom the crowd seemed to obey.”

“And this man was the Count Joseph Balsamo?”

“Yes; the same whom I had already seen at Taverney — the same who, even there, inspired me with such a strange terror; he, in short, who seems to be endowed with some supernatural power, who has fascinated my sight with his eyes, my ears with his voice; who has made my whole being tremble by the mere touch of his finger on my shoulder.”

“Proceed, proceed, Andree,” said Philip, his features and voice becoming gloomier as she spoke.

“Well, this man seemed to tower aloft above the catastrophe, as if human suffering could not reach him. I read in his eyes that he wished to save me — that he had the power to do so. Then something extraordinary took place in me and around me. Bruised, powerless, half dead as I was, I felt myself raised toward this man as if some unknown, mysterious, invincible power drew me to him. I felt as if some strong arm, by a mighty effort, was lifting me out of the gulf of mangled flesh in which so many unhappy victims were suffocating, and was restoring me to air, to life. Oh, Philip!” continued Andree, with a sort of feverish vehemence, “I feel certain it was that man's look which attracted me to him. I reached his hand; I was saved!

“'Alas!” murmured Gilbert, “she had eyes only for him; and I — I — who was dying at her feet — she saw me not!”

He wiped his brow, bathed in perspiration.

“That is how the affair happened, then?” asked Philip.

“Yes; up to the moment when I felt myself out of danger. Then, whether all my force bad been exhausted in the last effort I had made, or whether the terror I had experienced had outstripped the measure of my strength, I do not know, but I fainted?”

“And at what time do you think you fainted?”

“About ten minutes after we were separated, brother.”

“Yes,” pursued Philip, “that was about midnight. How then did it happen that you did not return till three o'clock? Forgive me this catechizing, which may seem ridiculous to you, dear Andree, but I have a good reason for it.”

“Thanks. Philip,” said Andree, pressing her brother's hand. “Three days ago I could not have replied to you as I have now done; but to-day — it may seem strange to you what I am about to say — but to day my mental vision is stronger; it seems to me as if some will stronger than my own ordered me to remember, and I do remember.”

“Then tell me, dear Andree, for I am all impatience to know, did this man carry you away in his arms?”

“'In his arms?” said Andree, blushing; “I do not well recollect. All I know is, that he extricated me out of the crowd. But the touch of his hand caused me the same feeling as at Taverney, and scarcely had he touched me when I fainted again, or rather, I sunk to sleep; for fainting is generally preceded by a painful feeling, and on this occasion I only felt the pleasing sensation attendant on sleep.”

“In truth, Andree, what you tell me seems so strange, that if any other related these things, I should not believe them. But proceed,” continued he, in a voice which betrayed more emotion than he was willing to let appear.

As for Gilbert, he devoured Andree's every word, for he knew that, so far at least, each word was true.

“When I regained my consciousness,” continued the young girl, “I was in a splendidly furnished salon. A femme-de-chambre and a lady were standing beside air, but they did not seem at all uneasy, for when I awoke they were smiling benevolently.”

“Do you know what time this was. Andree?”

“The half-hour after midnight was just striking.”

“Oh!” said the young man, breathing freely, “that is well. Proceed, Andree, with your narrative.”

“I thanked the ladies for the attentions they lavished on me; but knowing how uneasy you would be, I begged them to send me home immediately. Then they told me that the count had returned to the scene of the accident to assist the wounded, but that he would return with a carriage and convey me back himself to our hotel. In fact, about two o'clock I heard a carriage roll along the street; then the same sensation which I had formerly felt on the approach of that man overpowered me; I fell back trembling and almost senseless upon a sofa. The door opened. In the midst of my confusion I could still recognize the man who had saved me; then for a second time I lost all consciousness. They must then have carried me down, placed me in the carriage, and brought me here. That is all I can remember, brother.”

Philip calculated the time, and saw that his sister must, have been brought direct from the Rue des Ecuries-du-Louvre to the Rue Coq-Heron, as she had been from the Place Louis XV. to the Rue des Ecuries-du-Louvre; and, joyfully pressing her hands, he said in a frank, cheerful voice:

“Thanks, my dear sister, thanks; all the calculations correspond exactly. I will call upon the Marchioness de Sevigny and thank her in person. In the meantime, one word more upon a subject of secondary importance.”

“Speak.”

“Do you remember seeing among the crowd any face with which you were acquainted?”

“No; none.”

“The little Gilbert's, for example?”

“In fact,” said Andree, endeavoring to recall her thoughts, “I do remember to have seen him. At the moment when we were separated, he was about ten paces from me.”

“She saw me!” murmured Gilbert.

“Because, while searching for you, Andree. I discovered the poor lad.”

“Among the dead?” asked Andree, with that peculiar shade of interest which the great testify for their dependents.

“No, he was only wounded; he was saved, and I hope he will recover.”

“Oh! I am glad to hear it,” said Andree; “and what injury had he received?”

“His chest was greatly bruised.”

“Yes, yes, against thine, Andree!” murmured Gilbert.

“But,” continued Philip, “the strangest circumstance of all, and the one which induced me to speak of the lad, was, that I found in his hand, clenched and stiffened by pain, a fragment of your dress.”

“That is strange, indeed.”

“Did you not see him at the last moment?”

“At the last moment, Philip, I saw so many fearful forms of terror, pain, selfishness, love, pity, avarice, and indifference, that I felt as if I had passed a year in the realms of torment, and as if these figures were those of the damned passing in review before me. I may, therefore, have seen the young man, but I do not remember him.”

“And yet the piece of stuff torn from your dress? — and it was your dross, Andree, for Nicole has examined it.”

“Did you tell the girl for what purpose you questioned her?” asked Andree; for she remembered the singular explanation she had had at Taverney with her waiting-maid on the subject of this same Gilbert.

“Oh no. However, the fragment was in his hand. How can you explain that?”

“Oh! very easily!” said Andree, with a calmness which presented a strange contrast to the fearful beating of Gilbert's heart; “if he was near me when I felt myself raised aloft, as it were, by this man's look, he has probably clung to me to profit by the help I was receiving, in the same manner as a drowning man clings to the belt of the swimmer.”

“Oh!” said Gilbert, with a feeling of angry contempt at this explanation of the young girl; “oh, what an ignoble interpretation of my devotion! How these nobles judge us sons of the people! Monsieur Rousseau is right; we are worth more than they; our hearts are purer, and our arms stronger.”

As he once more settled himself to listen to the conversation of the brother and sister, which he had for a moment lost during this aside, be heard a noise behind him.

“Oh, heavens!” murmured he, “some one in the anteroom!”

And hearing the step approach the corridor. Gilbert drew back into the dressing-room, letting the curtain fall before him.

“Well! Is that madcap Nicole not here?” said the Baron de Taverney's voice, as he entered his daughter's apartment, touching Gilbert with the flaps of his coat as he passed.

“I dare say she is in the garden,” said Andree, with a tranquillity which showed that she had no suspicion of the presence of a third person; “'good-evening, my dear father.”

Philip rose respectfully; the baron motioned him to remain where he was, and taking an armchair, sat down near his children.

“Ah! my children,” said the baron, “it is a long journey from the Rue Coq-Heron to Versailles, when, instead of going in a good court carriage, you have only a fiacre drawn by one horse. However, I saw the dauphiness, nevertheless.”

“Ah!” said Andree, “then you have just arrived from Versailles, my dear father?”

“Yes; the princess did me the honor to send for me, having heard of the accident which had happened to my daughter.”

“Andree is much better, father,” said Philip.

“I am perfectly aware of it, and I told her royal highness so, who was kind enough to promise that, as soon as your sister is completely restored, she will summon her to Petit-Trianon, which she has fixed upon for her residence, and which she is now having decorated according to her taste.”

“I! — I at court!” said Andree, timidly.

“It is not the court, my child. The dauphiness has quiet and unobtrusive habits, and the dauphin hates show and noise. They will lire in complete retirement at Trianon. However, from what I know of her highness the dauphiness's disposition, her little family parties will turn out in the end much better than Beds of Justice and meetings of States-General. The princess has a decided character, and the dauphin. I am told, is learned.”

“Oh, it will always be the court! Do not deceive yourself, sister,” said Philip, mournfully.

“The court!” said Gilbert to himself, with an emotion of concentrated rage and despair. “The court! that is a summit which I cannot reach, or a gulf into which I cannot dash myself. In that case, farewell, Andree! Lost! — lost to me forever!”

“But, my father,” replied Andree, “we have neither the fortune which would warrant our choosing such a residence, nor the education necessary for those who move in its lofty circle. What shall I, a poor girl, do among those brilliant ladies, whose dazzling splendor I on one occasion witnessed, whose minds I thought so empty, but at the same time so sparkling? Alas! my brother, we are too obscure to mingle among so many dazzling lights.”

The baron knit his brow.

“Still the same absurd ideas!” said he. “In truth, I cannot understand the pains which my family take to depreciate everything which they inherit from me, or which relates to me. Obscure! Really, mademoiselle, you are mad. Obscure! — a Taverney-Maison-Rouge obscure! And who will shine, pray, if you do not! Fortune? — pardieu! we know what the fortunes of the court are? The sun of royalty fills them, the same sun makes them blow — it is the great vivifier of court nature. I have ruined myself at court and no w I shall grow rich again at court, that's all. Has the king no more money to bestow upon his faithful servants? And do you really think I would blush at a regiment being offered to my eldest son, at a dowry being granted to you, Andree, at a nice little appanage conferred on myself, or at finding a handsome pension under my napkin some day at dinner? No, no, fools alone have prejudices; I have none. Besides, it is only my own property which is given back to me. Do not, therefore, entertain these foolish scruples. There remains only one of your objections — your education, of which you spoke just now. But, mademoiselle, remember, that no young lady of the court has been educated as you have been. Nay, more; you have, besides the education usually given to the daughters of the noblesse, the solid acquirements more generally confined to the families of lawyers or financiers. You are a musician, and you draw landscape's, with sheep and cows, which Berghem need not disclaim. Now, the dauphiness absolutely dotes on cows, on sheep, and on Berghem. You are beautiful; the king cannot fail to notice it. You can converse; that will charm the Count d'Artois and the Count de Provence; you will not only be well received, therefore, but adored. Yes, yes,” continued the baron, rubbing his hands, and chuckling in so strange a manner that Philip gazed at his father to see if the laugh was really produced by a human mouth, “adored! I have said the word.”

Andree cast down her eyes, and Philip, taking her hand, said:

"Our father is right, Andree, you are everything he described. None can be more worthy to enter Versailles than you."

"But I shall be separated from you." replied Andree.

"By no means, by no means," interrupted the baron; "Versailles is large, my dear."

"Yes, but Trianon is little," replied Andree, haughty and rather unmanageable when she was opposed.

"Trianon will always be large enough to provide a chamber for M. de Taverney. A man such as I am always finds room," added he, with a modesty which meant — always knows how to make room for himself.

Andree, not much comforted by this promised proximity of her father, turned to Philip.

"My sister," said the latter, "you will certainly not belong to what is called the court. Instead of placing you in a convent and paying your dowry, the dauphiness, who wishes to distinguish you, will keep you near herself in some employment. Etiquette is not so rigid now as m the time of Louis XIV. Offices are more easily fused together and separated. You can occupy the post of reader or companion to the dauphiness; she will draw with you, she will always keep you near her; probably you will never appear in public, but you will enjoy her immediate protection, and consequently, will inspire envy. That is what you fear, is it not?"

"Yes, my brother."

"However," said the baron, "we shall not grieve for such a trifle as one or two envious persons. Get better quickly, therefore, Andree, and I shall have the pleasure of taking you to Trianon myself; it is the dauphiness's commands."

"Very well, father, I shall go."

"Apropos, Philip, have you any money?" asked the baron.

"If you want some, sir," replied the young man, "I have not enough to offer you; if you wish to give me some, I shall answer you, on the contrary, that I have enough for myself."

"True, you are a philosopher," said the baron, laughing sarcastically. "Are you a philosopher, also, Andree, who have nothing to ask from me, or is there anything you wish for?"

"I am afraid of embarrassing you, father."

"Oh I we are not at Taverney now. The king has sent me five hundred louis-d'ors; on account, his majesty said. Think of your wardrobe, Andree."

“Thank you, my dear father,” said the young girl, joyously.

“There, there,” said the baron, “see the extremes — only a minute ago she wanted nothing, now she would ruin the emperor of China. But no matter, ask — fine dresses will become you well, Andree.”

Then, giving her a very affectionate kiss, the baron opened the door of an apartment which separated his own from his daughter's chamber, and left the room, saying:

“ That cursed Nicole is not here to show me light.”

“Shall I ring for her, father?”

“No, I have La Brie, who is sleeping in some armchair or other; good-night, my children.”

Philip now rose in his turn.

“Good-night, brother,” said Andree. “I am dreadfully tired. It is the first time I have spoken so much since my accident. Good-night, dear Philip.”

And she gave her hand to the young I man, who kissed it with brotherly affection, but at the same time with a sort of respect with which his sister always inspired him, and retired, touching, as he passed, the door behind which Gilbert was concealed.

“Shall I call Nicole?” asked he, as he left the room.

“No, no,” said Andree, “I can undress alone; adieu, Philip.”

CHAPTER LXXII.

What Gilbert Had Foreseen.

WHEN ANDREE was alone she rose from the chair, and a shudder passed through Gilbert's frame.

The young girl stood upright, and with her hands, white as alabaster, she took the hair-pins one by one from her headdress, while the light shawl in which she was wrapped slipped from her shoulders, and showed her snowy graceful neck, and her arms, which, raised carelessly above her head, displayed to advantage the muscles of her exquisite throat and bosom, palpitating under the cambric.

Gilbert, on his knees, breathless intoxicated, felt the blood rush furiously to his heart and forehead. Fiery waves circulated in his veins, a cloud of flame descended over his sight, and strange feverish noises boiled in his ears. His state of mind bordered on madness. He was on the point of crossing the threshold of Andree's door, and crying:

“Yes, thou art beautiful! thou art, indeed, beautiful! But be not so proud of thy beauty, for thou owest it to me — I saved thy life!”

All at once, a knot in her waistband embarrassed the young girl; she became impatient, stamped with her foot, and sat down weak and trembling on her bed, as if this slight obstacle had overcome her strength. Then, bending toward the cord of the bell, she pulled it impatiently.

This noise recalled Gilbert to his senses. Nicole had left the door open to hear, therefore she would come.

“Farewell, my dream!” murmured he. “Farewell, happiness! henceforth only a baseless vision — henceforth only a remembrance, ever burning in my imagination, ever present to my heart!”

Gilbert endeavored to rush from the pavilion, but the baron on entering had closed the doors of the corridor after him. Not calculating on this interruption, he was some moments before he could open them.

Just as he entered Nicole's apartment, Nicole reached the pavilion. The young man heard the gravel of the garden walk grinding under her steps. He had only time to conceal himself in the shade, in order to let the young girl pass him; for after crossing the antechamber, the door of which she locked, she flew along the corridor as light as a bird.

Gilbert gained the antechamber and attempted to escape into the garden, but Nicole, while running on and crying; “I am coming, mademoiselle! I am coming! I am just closing the door!” had closed it indeed, and not only closed it and double-locked it, but in her confusion had put the key into her pocket.

Gilbert tried in vain to open the door. Then he had recourse to the windows, but they were barred, and after five minutes' investigation, he saw that it was impossible to escape.

The young man crouched into a corner, fortifying himself with the firm resolve to make Nicole open the door for him.

As for the latter, when she had given the plausible excuse for her absence, that she had gone to close the windows of the greenhouse, lest the night air might injure her young lady's flowers, she finished undressing Andree, and assisted her to bed.

There was a tremulousness in Nicole's voice, an unsteadiness in her hands, and an eagerness in all her attentions, which were very unusual, and indicated some extraordinary emotion. But from the calm and lofty sphere in which Andree's thoughts revolved, she rarely looked down upon the lower earth, and when she did so, the inferior beings whom she saw seemed like atoms in her eyes. She therefore perceived nothing. Meanwhile Gilbert was boiling with impatience, since he found the retreat thus cut off. He now longed only for liberty.

Andree dismissed Nicole after a short chat, in which the latter exhibited all the wheedling manner of a remorseful waiting maid.

Before retiring, she turned back her mistress's coverlet, lowered the lamp, sweetened the warm drink which was standing in a silver goblet upon an alabaster night lamp, wished her mistress good-night in her sweetest voice, and left the room on tip-toe. As she came out she closed the glass door. Then, humming gayly, as if her mind was perfectly tranquil, she crossed the antechamber and advanced toward the door leading into the garden.

Gilbert guessed Nicole's intention, and for a moment he asked himself if he should not, in place of making himself known, slip out suddenly, taking advantage of the opportunity to escape when the door should be opened. But in that case he would be seen without being recognized, and he would be taken for a robber. Nicole would cry for help, he would not have time to reach the cord, and even if he should reach it, he would be seen in his aerial flight, his retreat discovered, and himself made the object of the Taverneys' displeasure, which could not fail to be deep and lasting, considering the feeling evinced toward him by the head of the house.

True, he might expose Nicole, and procure her dismissal; but of what use would that be to him? He would in that case have done evil without reaping any corresponding advantage, in short, from pure revenge; and Gilbert was not so feebleminded as to feel satisfied when he was revenged. Useless revenge was to him worse than a bad action, it was folly.

As Nicole approached the door where Gilbert was in waiting, he suddenly emerged from the shadow in which he was concealed, and appeared to the young girl in the full rays of the moonlight which was streaming through the window. Nicole was on the point of crying out, but she took Gilbert for another, and said, after the first emotion of terror was past:

“You here! What imprudence!”

“Yes, it is I.” replied Gilbert, in a whisper; “but do not cry out for me more than you would do for another.”

This time Nicole recognized her interlocutor.

“Gilbert!” she exclaimed, “oh, Heaven!”

“I requested you not to cry out.” said the young man, coldly.

“But what are you doing here, sir?” exclaimed Nicole, angrily.

“Come,” said Gilbert, as coolly as before, “a moment ago you called me imprudent, and now you are more imprudent than I.”

“I think I am only too kind to you in asking what you are doing here,” said Nicole; “for I know very well.”

“What am I doing, then?”

“You came to see Mademoiselle Andree.”

“Mademoiselle Andree?” said Gilbert, as calmly as before.

“Yes, you are in love with her; but, fortunately, she does not love you.”

“Indeed?”

“But take care, Monsieur Gilbert,” said Nicole, threateningly.

“Oh, I must take care?”

“Yes.”

“Of what?”

“Take care that I do not inform on you.”

"You, Nicole?"

"Yes, I; take care I don't get you dismissed from the house."

"Try," said Gilbert, smiling.

"You defy me."

"Yes, absolutely defy you."

"What will happen, then, if I tell mademoiselle, Monsieur Philip, and the baron, that I met you here?"

"It will happen as you have said — not that I shall be dismissed — I am, thank God, dismissed already — — but that I shall be tracked and hunted like a wild beast. But she who will be dismissed will be Nicole."

"How Nicole?"

"Certainly; Nicole, who has stones thrown to her over the walls."

"Take care, Monsieur Gilbert," said Nicole, in a threatening tone, "a piece of mademoiselle's dress was found in your hand upon the Place Louis XV."

"You think so?"

"Monsieur Philip told his father so. He suspects nothing as yet, but if he gets a hint or two, perhaps he will suspect in the end."

"And who will give him the hint?"

"I shall."

"Take care, Nicole! One might suspect, also, that when you seem to be drying lace, you are picking up the stones that are thrown over the wall!"

"It is false!" cried Nicole. Then, retracting her denial, she continued; "At all events, it is not a crime to receive a letter — not like stealing in here while mademoiselle is undressing. Ah! what will you say to that, Monsieur Gilbert?"

"I shall say, Mademoiselle Nicole, that it is also a crime for such a well-conducted young lady as you are to slip keys under the doors of gardens."

Nicole trembled.

"I shall say," continued Gilbert, "that if I, who am known to M. de Taverney, to Monsieur Philip, to Mademoiselle Andree, have committed a crime in entering here, in my anxiety to know how the family I so long served were, and particularly Mademoiselle Andree, whom I endeavored so strenuously to save on the evening of the fireworks that a piece of her dress remained in my hand — I shall say that if I have committed this pardonable crime, you have committed the unpardonable one of introducing a stranger into your master's house, and are now going to meet him a second time, in the greenhouse, where you have already spent an hour in his company — ”

“Gilbert! Gilbert!”

“Oh! how virtuous we are, all of a sudden, Mademoiselle Nicole! You deem it very wicked that I should be found here, while — ”

“Gilbert!”

“Yes, go and tell mademoiselle that I love her. I shall say that it is you whom I love, and she will believe me, for you were foolish enough to tell her so at Taverney.”

“Gilbert, my friend!”

“And you will be dismissed, Nicole; and in place of going to Trianon, and entering the household of the dauphiness with mademoiselle — instead of coquetting with the fine lords and rich gentlemen, as you will not fail to do if you remain with the family — instead of nil this, you will be sent to enjoy the society of your admirer, M. Beausire, an exempt, a soldier! Oh! what a direful fall! What a noble ambition Mademoiselle Nicole's is — to be the favored fair one of a guardsman!” And Gilbert began to hum, in a low voice, with a most malicious accent:

“'In the Garde Francaise
I had a faithful lover.'”

“In mercy, Monsieur Gilbert,” said Nicole, “do not look at me in that ill-natured manner. Your eyes pierce me, even in the darkness. Do not laugh either — your laugh terrifies me.”

“Then open the door,” said Gilbert, imperatively; “open the door for me, Nicole, and not another word of all this.”

Nicole opened the door with so violent a nervous trembling that her shoulders and head shook like those of an old woman.

Gilbert tranquilly stepped out first, and seeing that the young girl was leading him toward the door of the garden, he said:

“No, no; you have your means for admitting people here, I have my means for leaving it. Go to the greenhouse, to M. Beausire, who must be waiting impatiently for you, and remain with him ten minutes longer than you intended to do. I will grant you this recompense for your discretion.”

“Ten minutes, and why ten minutes?” asked Nicole, trembling.

“Because I require ten minutes to disappear. Go, Nicole, go; and, like Lot's wife, whose story I told you at Taverney, when you gave me a rendezvous among the hay-stacks, do not turn round, else something worse will happen to you than to be changed into a statue of salt. Go, beautiful siren, go; I have nothing else to say to you.”

Nicole, subdued, alarmed, conquered, by the coolness and presence of mind shown by Gilbert, who held her future destiny in his hands, turned with drooping head toward the greenhouse, where Beausire was already uneasy at her prolonged absence.

Gilbert, on his side, observing the same precautions as before to avoid discovery, once more reached the wall, seized his rope, and, assisted by the vine and trelliswork, gained the first story in safety, and quickly ascended the stairs. As luck would have it, he met no one on his way up; the neighbors were already to bed, and Therese was still at supper.

Gilbert was too much excited by his victory over Nicole to entertain the least fear of missing his foot in the leaden gutter. He felt as if he could have walked on the edge of a sharpened razor, had the razor been a league long. He regained his attic in safety therefore, closed the window, seized the note, which no one had touched, and tore it in pieces. Then he stretched himself with a, delicious feeling of languor upon his bed.

Half an hour afterward Therese kept her word, and came to the door to inquire how he was.; Gilbert thanked her, in a voice interrupted by terrific yawns, as if he were dying of sleep. He was eager to be alone, quite alone, in darkness and silence, to collect his thoughts, and analyze the varied emotions of this ever-memorable day.

Soon, indeed, everything faded from his mind's eye; the baron, Philip, Nicole, Beausire, disappeared from view, to give place to the vision of Andree at her toilet, her arms raised above her head, and detaching the pins from her long and flowing hair.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

The Botanists.

THE EVENTS which we have just related happened on Friday evening; so that it was the second day after that the excursion which Rousseau looked forward to with so much pleasure was to take place.

Gilbert, indifferent to everything since he had heard that Andree was so soon to depart for Trianon, had spent the entire day leaning on his window-sill. During this day the window of Andrew's room remained open, and once or twice the young girl had approached it as if to breathe the fresh air. She was pale and weak; but it seemed to Gilbert as if he would wish for nothing more than that Andree should always inhabit that pavilion, that he should always have his attic, and that, once or twice every day, Andree should come to the window as he had seen her that day.

The long-looked-for Sunday at last arrived. Rousseau had already made his preparations the day before; his shoes were carefully blackened, and his gray coat, at once light and warm, was taken from the chest, to the great annoyance of Therese, who thought a blouse or a linen frock quite good enough for such a purpose. But Rousseau had completed his toilet without replying. Not only his own clothes, but Gilbert's also had been passed in review with the greatest care, and the latter's had even been augmented by a pair of irreproachable stockings and new shoes, which Rousseau had presented with him as an agreeable surprise.

The herbal also was put in the nicest trim. Rousseau had not forgotten his collection of mosses, which was to play a part in the proceedings of the day. Impatient as<i child, he hastened more than twenty times to the window to see if the carriage that was passing was not M. de Jussieu's. At last he perceived a highly varnished chariot, a pair of splendid horses with rich harness, and an immense powdered footman standing at his door. He ran instantly to Therese, exclaiming:

“Here it is! here it is!”

And crying to Gilbert:

“Quick, quick, the carnage is waiting.”

“Well,” said Therese, sharply, “if you are so fond of riding in a coach, why did you not work in order to have one of your own, like M. de Voltaire?”

“Be quiet!” grumbled Rousseau.

“Dame! you always say you have as much talent as he.”

“I do not say so, hark you!” cried Rousseau, in a rage; “I say — I say nothing!”

And all his joy fled, as it invariably did, at the mention of that hated name. Luckily M. de Jussieu entered.

He was pomatumed, powdered, fresh as the spring. His dress consisted of a splendid coat of ribbed Indian satin, of a light gray color, a vest of pale lilac silk, white silk stockings of extraordinary fineness, and bright gold buckles.

On entering Rousseau's apartment he filled the room with a delightful perfume, which Therese inhaled without concealing her admiration.

“How handsome you are!” said Rousseau, looking askance at Therese, and comparing his modest dress and clumsy equipment with the elegant toilet of M. de Jussieu.

“Oh, I am afraid of the heat,” said the elegant botanist.

“But the wood is damp. If we botanize in the marshes, your silken stockings —

“Oh, we can choose the driest places.”

“And the aquatic mosses? Must we give them up for to-day?”

“Do not be uneasy about that, my dear colleague.”

“One would think you were going to a ball, or to pay your respects to ladies.”

“Why should we not honor Dame Nature with a pair of silk stockings?” replied M. do Jussieu, rather embarrassed; “does she not deserve that we should dress ourselves for her?”

Rousseau said no more; from the moment that M. de Jussieu invoked Nature, he agreed with him that it was impossible to honor her too highly.

As for Gilbert, notwithstanding his stoicism, he gazed at M. do Jussieu with envious eyes. Since he had observed so many young exquisites enhance their natural advantages with dress, he had seen the utility, in a frivolous point of view, of elegance, and whispered to himself that this silk, this lace, this linen, would add a charm to his youth; and that if Andree saw him dressed like M. de Jussieu instead of as he was, she would then deign to look at him.

The carriage rolled off at the utmost speed of two fine Danish horses, and an hour after their departure the botanists alighted at Bougival, and turned to the left by the chestnut walk.

This walk, which at present is so surpassingly beautiful, was then at least quite as much so; for the portion of the rising ground which our explorers had to traverse, already planted by Louis XIV., had been the object of constant care since the king had taken a fancy to Marly.

The chestnut-trees, with their ruddy bark, their gigantic branches, and their fantastic forms — sometimes presenting in their knotty circumvolutions the appearance of a huge boa twining itself round the trunk — sometimes that of a bull prostrate upon the butcher's block and vomiting a stream of black and clotted blood — the moss-covered apple-trees and the colossal walnuts, whose foliage was already assuming the dark-blue shade of summer — the solitude, the picturesque simplicity and grandeur of the landscape, which, with its old shadowy trees, stood out in bold relief against the clear blue sky; — all this, clothed with that simple and touching charm which Nature ever lends to her productions, plunged Rousseau into a state of ecstasy impossible to be described.

Gilbert was calm, but moody; his whole being was absorbed in this one thought:

“Andree leaves the garden pavilion and goes to Trianon.”

Upon the summit of the little hill, which the three botanists were climbing on foot, was seen the square tower of Luciennes.

The sight of this building, from which he had fled, changed the current of Gilbert's thoughts, and recalled rather unpleasant recollections, unmingled, however, with fear. From his position in the rear of the party he saw two protectors before him; and, feeling himself in safety, he gazed at Luciennes as a shipwrecked sailor from the shore looks upon the sandbank upon which his vessel has struck.

Rousseau, spade in hand, began to fix his looks on the ground; M. de Jussieu did the same, but with this difference, that the former was searching for plants, while the latter was only endeavoring to keep his stockings from the damp.

“What a splendid Lepopodium!” exclaimed Rousseau.

“Charming,” replied M. de Jussieu; “but let us pass on, if you have no objection.”

“Ah! the Lysimachia Fenella! it is ready for culling; look!'

“Pluck it, then, if it gives you pleasure.”

“Oh! just as you please. But are we not botanizing, then?”

“Yes, yes; but I think we shall find better upon that height, yonder.”

“As you please — let us go, then.”

“What hour is it?” asked M. de Jussieu; “in my hurry I forgot my watch.”

Rousseau pulled a very large silver watch from his pocket.

“Nine o'clock,” said he.

“Have you any objection that we should rest a little?” continued M. de Jussieu.

“Oh! what a wretched walker you are,” said Rousseau. “You see what it is to botanize in fine shoes and silk stockings.”

“Perhaps I am hungry.”

“Well, then, let us breakfast; the village is about a quarter of a mile from this.”

“Oh, no; we need not go so far.”

“How so? Have you our breakfast in your carriage?”

“Look yonder — into that «thicket?” said M. de Jussieu, pointing with his hand toward the part of the horizon he indicated.

Rousseau stood upon tiptoe, and shaded his eyes with his hand.

“I can see nothing,” said he.

“What! Do you not see that little rustic roof?”

“No.”

“Surmounted by a weather-cock, and the walls thatched with red and white straw — a sort of rustic cottage, in short?”

“Yes, I see it now; a little building seemingly newly erected.”

“A kiosk, that is it.”

“Well?”

“Well! we shall find there the little luncheon I promised you.”

“Very good,” said Rousseau. “Are you hungry, Gilbert?”

Gilbert, who had not paid any attention to this debate, and was employed in mechanically knocking off the heads of the wild flowers, replied:

“Whatever you please, sir.”

“Come, then, if you please,” said M. de Jussieu; “besides, nothing need prevent our gathering simples on the way.”

“Oh,” said Rousseau, “your nephew is a more ardent botanist than you. I spent a day with him botanizing in the woods of Montmorency, along with a select party. He finds well, he gathers well, he explains well.”

“Oh! he is young; he has his name to make yet.”

“Has he not yours already made? Oh! comrade, comrade, you botanize like an amateur.”

“Come, do not be angry, my dear philosopher; hold! here is the beautiful Planlago Monanthos. Did you find anything like that at your Montmorency?”

“No, indeed,” said Rousseau, quite delighted; “I have often searched for it in vain. Upon the faith of a naturalist it is magnificent!”

“Oh, the beautiful pavilion!” said Gilbert, who had passed from the rear-guard of the party into the van.

“Gilbert is hungry,” replied M. de Jussieu.

“Oh, sir, I beg your pardon; I can wait patiently until you are ready.”

“Let us continue our task a little longer,” said Rousseau, “inasmuch as botanizing after a meal is bad for digestion; and besides, the eye is then heavy, and the back stiff. But what is this pavilion called?”

“The House-trap,” answered M. de Jussieu, remembering the name invented by M. de Sartines.

“What a singular name!”

“Oh! the country, you know, is the place for indulging all sorts of caprices.”

“To whom do those beautiful grounds belong?”

“I do not exactly know.”

“You must know the proprietor, however, since you are going to breakfast there,” said Rousseau, pricking up his ears with a slight shade of suspicion.

“Not at all — or rather, I know every one here, including the game-keepers, who have often seen me in their inclosures, and who always touch their hats, and sometimes offer me a hare or a string of woodcocks as a present from their masters. The people on this and the neighboring estates let me do here just as if I were on my own grounds. I do not know exactly whether this summer-house belongs to Madame de Mirepoiz or Madame d'Egmont, or — in short, I do not know to whom it belongs. But the most important point, my dear philosopher, I am sure you will agree with me, is, that we shall find there bread, fruit, and pastry.”

The good-natured tone in which M. de Jussieu spoke dispelled the cloud of suspicion which had already begun to darken Rousseau's brow. The philosopher wiped his feet on the grass, rubbed the mould off his hands, and, preceded by M. de Jussieu, entered the mossy walk which wound gracefully beneath the chestnut trees leading up to the hermitage.

Gilbert, who had again taken up his position in the rear, closed the march, dreaming of Andree, and of the means of seeing her when she should be at Trianon.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

The Philosophers in The Trap.

ON THE SUMMIT of the hill, which the three botanists were ascending with some difficulty, stood one of those little rustic retreats, with gnarled and knotty pillars, pointed gables, and windows festooned with ivy and clematis, which are the genuine offspring of English architecture, or to speak more correctly, of English gardening, which imitates Nature, or rather invents a species of nature for itself, thus giving a certain air of originality to its creations.

This summer-house, which was large enough to contain a table and six chairs, was floored with tiles and carpeted with handsome matting. The walls were covered with little mosaics of flint, the product of the river's beach, mingled with foreign shells of the most delicate tints, gathered from the shores of the Indian Ocean.

The ceiling was in relief, and was composed of fir-cones and knotty excrescences of bark, arranged so as to imitate hideous profiles of fauns or savage animals, who seemed suspended over the heads of the visitors. The windows were each stained with some different shade, so that, according as the spectator looked out of the violet, the red, or the blue glass, the woods of Vesinet seemed tinted by a stormy sky, bathed in the burning rays of an August sun, or sleeping beneath the cold and frosty atmosphere of December. The visitor had only to consult his taste, that is to say, choose his window, and look out.

This sight pleased Gilbert greatly, and he amused himself with looking through the different tinted windows at the rich valley which lies stretched beneath the feet of a spectator situated on the hill of Luciennes, and at the noble Seine winding in the midst.

A sight nearly as interesting however, at least in M. de Jussieu's opinion, was the tempting breakfast spread in the center of the summer-house, upon a table formed of gnarled and fantastic woodwork, on which the bark had been allowed to remain.

There was the exquisite cream for which Marly is celebrated, the luscious apricots and plums of Luciennes, the crisp sausages of Nanterre smoking upon a porcelain dish, without the least trace being seen of any one who could have brought them thither; strawberries peeping from a graceful little basket lined with vine leaves, and, besides the fresh and glistening pats of butter, were rolls of homely peasant bread, with its rich brown crust, so dear to the pampered appetite of the inhabitant of towns. This sight drew an exclamation of admiration from Rousseau, who, philosopher as he was, was not the less an unaffected gourmand, for his appetite was as keen as his taste was simple.

“What folly!” said he to M. de Jussieu; “bread and fruit would have been sufficient, and even then, as true botanists and industrious explorers, we ought to have eaten the bread and munched the plums without ceasing our search among the grass or along the hedge-rows. Do you remember, Gilbert, our luncheon at Plessis-Piquet?”

“Yes, sir; the bread and cherries which appeared to me so delicious?”

“Yes, that is how true lovers of nature should breakfast.”

“But, my dear master,” interrupted M. de Jussieu, “if you reproach me with extravagance, you are wrong; a more modest meal was never — ”

“Oh!” cried the philosopher, “you do your table injustice, my Lord Lucullus.”

“My table? — by no means,” said Jussieu. “Who are our hosts, then?” resumed Rousseau, with a smile which evinced at once good humor and constraint, “Sprites?”

“Or fairies!” said M. de Jussieu, rising and glancing stealthily toward the door.

“Fairies?” exclaimed Rousseau, gayly; “a thousand blessings on them for their hospitality! I am excessively hungry. Come, Gilbert, fall to.”

And he cut a very respectable slice from the brown loaf, passing the bread and the knife to his disciple. Then, while taking a huge bite, he chose out some plums from the dish. Gilbert hesitated.

“Come, come!” said Rousseau. “The fairies will be offended by your stiffness, and will imagine you are dissatisfied with their banquet.”

“Or that it is unworthy of you, gentlemen,” uttered a silvery voice from the door of the pavilion, where two young and lovely women appeared arm in arm, smiling, and making signs to M. de Jussieu to moderate his obeisances.

Rousseau turned, holding the half-tasted bread in his right hand and the remains of a plum in his left, and beholding these two goddesses, at least such they seemed to him by their youth and beauty, he remained stupefied with astonishment, bowing mechanically, and retreating toward the wall of the summer-house.

“Oh, countess!” said M. de Jussieu, “you here? What a delightful surprise!”

“Good-day, my dear botanist,” said one of the ladies, with a grace and familiarity perfectly regal.

“Allow me to present M. Rousseau to you,” said Jussieu, taking the philosopher by the hand which held the brown bread.

Gilbert also had seen and recognized the ladies. He opened his eyes to their utmost width, and, pale as death, looked out of the window of the summer-house, with the idea of throwing himself from it. “Good-day, my little philosopher,” said the other lady to the almost lifeless Gilbert, patting his cheek with her rosy fingers.

Rousseau saw and heard — he was almost choking with rage. His disciple knew these goddesses, and was known to them. Gilbert was almost fainting.

“Do you not know her ladyship, the countess, M. Rousseau?” asked Jussieu.

“No,” replied he, thunderstruck; “it is the first time, I think —

“Madame Dubarry,” continued M. de Jussieu.

Rousseau started up, as if he stood on a red-hot plowshare.

“Madame Dubarry!” he exclaimed.

“The same, sir.” said the young lady with surpassing grace, “who is most happy to have received in her house, and to have been favored with a nearer view of, the most illustrious thinker of the age.”

“Madame Dubarry!” continued Rousseau, without remarking that his astonishment was becoming a grave offense against good breeding. “She! and doubtless this pavilion is hers, and doubtless it is she who has provided this breakfast.”

“You have guessed rightly, my dear philosopher; she and her sister,” continued Jussieu, ill at ease in presence of this threatening storm.

“Her sister, who knows Gilbert!”

“Intimately,” replied Chon, with that saucy boldness which respected neither royal whims nor philosophers' fancies.

Gilbert looked as if he wished the earth would open and swallow him, so fiercely did Rousseau's eye rest upon him.

“Intimately!” repeated Rousseau; “Gilbert knew madame intimately, and I was not told of it? But in that case I was betrayed, I was sported with.”

Chon and her sister looked at each other with a malicious smile.

M. de Jussieu in his agitation tore a Malines ruffle worth forty louis-d'ors. Gilbert clasped his hands as if to entreat Chon to be silent, or Monsieur Rousseau to speak more graciously to him. But, on the contrary, it was Rousseau who was silent, and Chon who spoke.

“Yes,” said she, “Gilbert and I are old friends; he was a guest of mine. Were you not, little one?”

— What! are you already ungrateful for the sweetmeats of Luciennes and Versailles?”

This was the final blow; Rousseau's arms fell stiff and motionless.

“Oh!” said he, looking askance at the young man, “that was the way, was it, you little scoundrel?”

“Monsieur Rousseau!” murmured Gilbert.

“Why, one would think you were weeping for the little tap I gave your cheek,” continued Chon, “Well, I always feared you were ungrateful.”

“Mademoiselle!” entreated Gilbert.

“Little one,” said Madame Dubarry, “return to Luciennes; your bon-bons and Zamore await you, and though you left it in rather a strange manner, you shall be well received.”

“Thank you, madame,” said Gilbert, dryly; “when I leave a place, it is because I do not like it.”

“And why refuse the favor that is offered to you?” interrupted Rousseau, bitterly. “You have tasted of wealth, my dear Monsieur Gilbert, and you had better return to it.”

“But, sir, when I swear to you — ”

“Go! — go! I do not like those who blow hot and cold with the same breath.”

“But you will not listen to me, Monsieur Rousseau.”

“Well?”

“I ran away from Luciennes, where I was kept locked up.”

“A trap! — I know the malice of men.”

“But, since I preferred you to them, since I accepted you as my host, my protector, my master —

“But, Monsieur Rousseau, if I wished for riches, I should accept the offer these ladies have made me.”

“Monsieur Gilbert, I have been often deceived, but never twice by the same person; you are free, go where you please.”

“But where? Good heavens!” cried Gilbert, plunged in an abyss of despair, for he saw his window, and the neighborhood of Andree, and his love, lost to him forever — for his pride was hurt at being suspected of treachery; and the idea that his self-denial, his long and arduous struggle against the indolence and the passions natural to his age, was misconstrued and despised, stung him to the quick.

“Where?” said Rousseau. “Why, in the first place, to this lady, of course; where could you meet a lovelier or more worthy protector?”

“Oh! my God! — my God!” cried Gilbert, burying his head in his hands.

“Do not be afraid,” said M. de Jussieu, deeply wounded, as a man of the world, by Rousseau's strange sally against the ladies; “you will be taken care of, and whatever you may lose in one way, you will be amply compensated for.”

“You see,” said Rousseau, bitterly, “there is M. de Jussieu, a learned man, a lover of nature, one of your accomplices,” added he, with a grin which was meant for a smile, “who promises you assistance and fortune, and you may be sure that what M. de Jussieu promises he can perform.”

As he spoke, Rousseau, no longer master of himself, bowed to the ladies with a most majestic and did the same to M. de Jussieu, and then, without even looking at Gilbert, he calmly left the pavilion.

“Oh! what an ugly animal a philosopher is!” said Chon, coolly looking after the Genevese, who walked, or rather stumbled, down the path.

“Ask what you wish,” said M. de Jussieu to Gilbert, who still kept his face buried in his hands.

“Yes, ask, Monsieur Gilbert,” added the countess, smiling on the abandoned disciple.

The latter raised his pale face, pushed back the hair which perspiration and tears had matted over his forehead, and said with a firm voice:

“Since you are kind enough to offer me an employment, I would wish to be assistant gardener at Trianon.”

Chon and the countess looked at each other, and the former, with her tiny little foot, touched her sister's with a triumphant glance. The countess made a sign with her head that she understood perfectly.

“Is that practicable, M. de Jussieu?” asked the countess; “I should wish it very much.”

“If you wish it, madame,” replied he, “it is done.”

Gilbert bowed, and put his hand upon his heart, which now bounded with joy as a few moments before it had been overwhelmed with grief.

CHAPTER LXXV.

The Apologue.

IN THAT LITTLE cabinet at Luciennes, where we have seen the Count Jean Dubarry imbibe so much chocolate, to the great annoyance of the countess, the Marshal de Richelieu was lunching with Madame Dubarry, who, while amusing herself with pulling Zamore's ears, carelessly reclined at full length upon a couch of brocaded satin, while the old courtier uttered sighs of admiration at each new position the charming creature assumed.

“Oh, countess!” said he, smirking like an old woman, “your hair is falling down; look, there is a ringlet drooping on your neck. Ah! your slipper is falling off, countess.”

“Bah! my dear duke, never mind,” said she, absently, and pulling a handful of hair from Zamore's head while she took a fresh position on the couch, more lovely and fascinating than that of Venus in her shell.

Zamore, entirely insensible to these graceful attitudes, bellowed with anger. The countess endeavored to quiet him by taking a handful of sugar-plums from the table, and filling his pockets with them. But Zamore was sulky, turned his pocket inside out, and emptied his sugar-plums upon the carpet.

“Oh, the little scoundrel!” continued the countess, stretching out her tiny foot till it came in contact with the fantastic hose of the little negro.

“Oh, have mercy!” cried the old marshal; “upon my faith, you will kill him.”

“Why cannot I kill everything which angers me to-day!” said the countess; “I feel merciless!”

“Oh!” said the duke, “then perhaps I displease you.”

“Oh, no! quite the contrary; you are an old friend, and I perfectly adore you; but the fact is, I believe I am going mad.”

“Can it be that those whom you have made mad have smitten you with their complaint?”

“Take care! you provoke me dreadfully with your gallant speeches, of which you do not believe one word.”

“Countess, countess! I begin to think you are not mad, but ungrateful.”

“No, I am neither mad nor ungrateful; I am — ”

“Well! confess. What are you?”

“I am angry, duke.”

“ Indeed?”

“Are you surprised at that?”

“Not in the least, countess; and upon my honor you have reason to be so.”

“Ah! that is what annoys me in you, marshal.”

“Then there is something in my conduct which annoys you, countess?”

“Yes.”

“And what is this something, pray? I am rather old to begin to correct my faults, and yet there is no effort I would not make for you.”

“Well, it is that you do not even know what is the cause of my anger, marshal.”

“Oh, is that all?”

“Then you know what vexes me?”

“Of course! Zamore has broken the Chinese fountain.”

“An imperceptible smile played around the young countess's mouth; but Zamore, who felt himself guilty, drooped his bead humbly, as if the skies were pregnant with clouds of blows and kicks.

“Oh, yes!” said the countess, with a sigh; “yes, duke, you are right; that is it, and in truth you are a very deep politician.”

“I have always been told so,” replied M. de Richelieu, with an air of profound modesty.

“Oh, I can see that without being told, duke. Have you not guessed the cause of my annoyance immediately, without looking to the right or left? It is superb.”

“Superb, indeed; but still that is not all.”

“Indeed!”

“No, I can guess something else.”

“And what can you guess?”

“That you expected his majesty yesterday evening.”

“Where?”

“Here.”

“Well! what then?”

“And that his majesty did not come.”

The countess reddened, and raised herself slightly upon her elbow.

“Oh!” said she.

“And yet,” said the duke, “I have just arrived from Paris.”

“Well, what does that prove?”

“Pardieu! that I could not of course know what passed at Versailles; and yet-”

“My dear duke, you are full of mystery to-day. When a person begins, he should finish, or else not have commenced.”

“You speak quite at your ease, countess. Allow me, at least, to take breath. Where was I?”

“You were at — 'and yet.'”

“Oh, yes! true; and yet I not only know that his majesty did not come, but also why he did not come.”

“Duke, I have always thought you a sorcerer; and only wanted proof to be certain of the fact.”

“Well! that proof I will now give you.”

The countess, who attached much more interest to this conversation than she wished to let appear, relinquished her hold of Zamore's head, in whose hair her long taper fingers had been carelessly playing.

“Give it, duke, give it,” said she.

“Before my lord governor?” asked the duke.

“Vanish, Zamore,” said the countess to the negro boy, who, mad with delight, made only one bound from the boudoir to the antechamber.

“An excellent stop.” murmured Richelieu; “then I must tell you all, countess?”

“What! did that monkey Zamore embarrass you, duke?”

“To tell the truth, countess, any one can embarrass me.”

“Yes, I can understand that. But is Zamore any one?”

“Zamore is neither blind, deaf, not dumb; therefore he is some one. I distinguish by the title of some one, every person who is my equal in the hearing, seeing, and speaking faculties, every person who can see what I do, hear and repeat what I say; every person, in short, who might betray me. This theory explained, I proceed.”

“Yes, yes, duke, proceed; you will gratify me exceedingly.”

“Gratify! I think not, countess; but no matter, I must go on. Well, the king was at Trianon yesterday.”

“The little or the great Trianon?”

“The little. The dauphiness was leaning on his arm.” — — “Ah!”

“And the dauphiness, who is charming as you know — ”

“Alas!”

“Coaxed him so much, with dear papa here, and dear papa there, that his majesty, who has a heart of gold, could not resist her. So after the walk came supper, and after supper amusing games; so that, in short — ”

“In short,” said Madame Dubarry, pale with impatience, “in short, the king did not come to Luciennes — that is what you would say?”

“Exactly.”

“Oh, it is perfectly easily explained; his majesty found there all that he loves.”

“Ah! by no means, and you are far from believing one word of what you say; all that pleases him he found, no doubt.”

“Take care, duke, that is much worse; to sup, chat, and play is all that he wants. And with whom did he play?”

“With M. de Choiseul.”

The countess made an angry gesture.

“Shall I not pursue the subject further, countess?” asked Richelieu.

“On the contrary, sir, speak on.”

“You are as courageous, madame, as you are witty; let me therefore take the bull by the horns, as the Spaniards say.”

“Madame de Choiseul would not forgive you for that proverb, duke.”

“Yet it is not inapplicable. I told you then, madame, that M. de Choiseul, since I must name him, held the cards; and with so much good fortune, so much address — ”

“That he won.”

“By no means; that he lost, and that his majesty won a thousand louis-d'ors at piquet, a game on which his majesty piques himself very much, seeing that he plays it very badly.”

“Oh! that Choiseul, that Choiseul!” murmured Madame Dubarry. “But Madame de Grammont was of the party also, was she not?”

“That is to say, countess, she was paying her respects before her departure.”

“The duchess!”

“Yes; she is very foolish, I think.”

“Why so?”

“Finding that no one persecutes her, she pouts; finding that no one exiles her, she exiles herself.”

“Where to?”

“To the provinces.”

“She is going to plot.”

“Parbleu, what else would you expect her to do? Well, as she is about to set out, she very naturally wished to take leave of the dauphiness, who, naturally, is very fond of her. That is why she was at Trianon.”

“The great?”

“Of course. The little Trianon is not yet furnished.”

“Ah! her highness the dauphiness, by surrounding herself with all these Choiseuls, shows plainly which party she intends to embrace.”

“No, countess, do not let us exaggerate; to-morrow the duchess will be gone.”

“And the king was amused where I was absent!” cried the countess, with indignation not unmixed with terror.

“Yes; it is perfectly incredible, countess; but still it is so. Well, what do you conclude from it?”

“That you are well-informed, duke.”

“Is that all?”

“No.”

“Finish, then.”

“I gather from it that we shall all be lost if we do not rescue the king from the clutches of these Choiseuls, either with his consent or without it.”

“Alas!”

“I say we,” resumed the countess; “but do not fear, duke; I speak only of our own family.”

“And your friends, countess; permit me to claim that title. So then — ”

“Then you are one of my friends?”

“I think I have said so, madame.”

“That is not enough.”

“I think I have proved it.”

“That is better. And you will assist me?”

“With all my power, countess; but — ”

“But what?”

“I cannot conceal from you that the task is difficult.”

“Are these Choiseuls positively not to be rooted out then?”

“They are firmly planted, at least,”

“Then, whatever our friend La Fontaine may say, neither wind nor storm can prevail against this oak?”

“The minister is a lofty genius.”

“Bah! you speak like an encyclopedist!”

“Am I not a member of the Academy?”

“Oh! you are so slightly so.”

“True, you are right; my secretary is the member, not I. But, nevertheless, I maintain my opinion.”

“But may I ask in what does this mighty genius shine?”

“In this, madame, that he has made such a piece of work with the parliament and the English, that the king cannot do without him.”

“The parliament? Why, he excites it against his majesty.”

“Of course; therein lies his cleverness.”

“He provokes the English to war.”

“Of course. Peace would ruin him.”

“That is not genius, duke.”

“What is it then, countess?”

“It is high treason.”

“When high treason is successful, countess, it is genius, and a lofty description of genius too.”

“Then, by that mode of reasoning, I know some one who is as great a genius as M. de Choiseul.”

“Bah!”

“Why, he has at least caused the parliament to revolt.”

“You puzzle me exceedingly, countess.”

“Do you not know him, duke? He belongs to your own family.”

“Can I have a man of genius in my family? Do you speak of my uncle, the cardinal duke, madame?”

“No; I mean the Duke d'Aiguillon, your nephew.”

“Ah! Monsieur d'Aiguillon. Yes, true, it was he who set that affair of La Chalotais moving. 'Pon honor, he is a brave youth. Yes, true; that was a tough piece of work. Countess, there is a man whom a woman of spirit should gain over to her cause.”

“Are you aware, duke,” said the countess, “that I do not know your nephew?”

“Indeed, madame? You don't know him?”

“No; I have never seen him.”

“Poor fellow! In fact, I now remember that since you came to court, he has always been at Brittany. Let him look to himself when he first sees you; he has not latterly been accustomed to the sun.”

“What does he do among all those black gowns — a nobleman of spirit like him?”

“He revolutionizes them, not being able to do better. You understand, countess, every one takes pleasure where they can find it, and there is not much to be had in Brittany. Ah! he is an active man. Peste! what a servant the king might have in him, if he wished. Parliament would not be insolent to him. Oh! he is a true Richelieu. Permit me, therefore, countess — ”

“What?”

“To present him to you on his first appearance.”

“Does he intend to visit Paris soon?”

“Oh! madame, who knows? Perhaps he will have to remain another luster in Brittany, as that scoundrel, Voltaire, says; perhaps he is on his way hither; perhaps two hundred leagues off; or perhaps at the barrier.”

And while he spoke, the marshal studied the lady's features to see what effect his words produced. But after having reflected for a moment, she said:

“Let us return to the point where we left off.”

“Wherever you please, countess.”

“Where were we?”

“At the moment when his majesty was enjoying himself so much at Trianon in the company of M. de Choiseul.”

“And when we were speaking of getting rid of this Choiseul, duke.”

“That is to say, when you were speaking of getting rid of him, countess.”

“Oh! I am so anxious that he should go,” said the favorite, “that I think I shall die if he remains. Will you not assist me a little, my dear duke?”

“Oh!” said Richelieu, bridling, “in politics, that is called an overture.”

“Take it as you will, call it what you please, but answer categorically.”

“Oh! what a long ugly adverb, in such a pretty little mouth.”

“Do you call that answering, duke?”

“No, not exactly; I call that preparing my answer.”

“Is it prepared?” — ” Wait a little.”

“You hesitate, duke?”

“Oh, no!”

“Well, I am listening.”

“What do you think of apologues, countess?”

“Why, that they are very antiquated.”

“Bah! the sun is antiquated also, and yet we have not invented any better means of seeing.”

“ Well, let me hear your apologue, then; but let it be clear.”

“As crystal, fair lady. Let us suppose then, countess — you know one always supposes something in an apologue.”

“How tiresome you are, duke.”

“You do not believe one word of what you say, countess, for you never listened to me more attentively.”

“I was wrong, then; go on.”

“Suppose, then, that you were walking in your beautiful garden at Luciennes, and that you saw a magnificent plum, one of those Queen Claudes which you are so fond of, because their vermilion and purple tints resemble your own.”

“Go on, flatterer.”

“Well, I was saying, suppose you saw one of these plums at the extremity of one of the loftiest branches of the tree, what would you do, countess?”

“I would shake the tree, to be sure!”

“Yes, but in vain, for the tree is large and massive, and not to be rooted out, as you said just now; and you would soon perceive that without even succeeding in shaking it, you would tear your charming little hands against its rough bark. And then you would say, reclining your head to one side in that adorable manner which belongs only to you and the flowers; “Oh! how I wish I had this plum upon the ground!' and then you would get angry.”

“That is all very natural, duke.”

“I shall certainly not be the person to contradict you.”

“Go on, my dear duke; your apologue is exceedingly interesting.”

“All at once, when turning your little head from side to side, you perceive your friend the Duke de Richelieu, who is walking behind you, thinking.”

“Of what?”

“What a question! Pardieu! of you; and you say to him with your heavenly voice; 'Oh! duke, duke!'”

“Well?”

“'You are a man; you are strong; you took Mahon; shake this devil of a plum-tree for me, that I may pluck this provoking plum!' Is not that it, countess?”

“Exactly, duke; I repeated that to myself while you were saying it aloud. But what did you reply?”

“Reply? Oh! I replied; 'How you run on, countess! Certainly nothing could give me greater pleasure; but only look how firm the tree is, how knotty the branches. I have a sort of affection for my hands as well as you, though they are fifty years older than yours.'”

“Ah!” said the countess, suddenly, “yes, yes; I comprehend.”

“Then finish the apologue. What did you say to me?”

“I said, 'My little marshal, do not look with indifferent eyes upon this plum, which you look at indifferently only because it is not for you. Wish for it along with me, my dear marshal; covet it along with me; and if you shake the tree properly, if the plum falls, then we will eat it together.'”

“Bravo!” exclaimed the duke, clapping his hands.

“Is that it?”

“Faith, countess, there is no one like you for finishing an apologue. By mine honor, as my deceased father used to say, it is right well tricked out.”

“You will shake the tree, duke?”

“With two hands and three hearts, countess.”

“And the plum was really a Queen Claude?”

“I am not quite sure of that, countess.”

“What was it, then?”

“Do you know it seemed much more like a portfolio dangling from the tree.”

“Then we will divide the portfolio.”

“Oh no! for me alone. Do not envy me the morocco, countess. There will fall so many beautiful things from the tree along with the portfolio when I shake it, that you will not know how to choose.”

“Then, marshal, it is a settled affair?”

“I am to have M. de Choiseul's place?”

“If the king consents.”

“Does not the king do all you wish?”

“You see plainly he does not, since he will not send this Choiseul away.”

“Oh! I trust the king will gladly recall his old companion.”

“And you ask nothing for the Duke d'Aiguillon?”

“No, faith. The rascal can ask for himself.”

“Besides, you will be there. And now it is my turn to ask.”

“That is but just.”

“What will you give me?”

“Whatever you wish.”

“I want everything.”

“That is reasonable.”

“And shall I have it?”

“What a question! But will you be satisfied, at least, and ask me for nothing farther.”

“Except the merest trifle. You know M. de Taverney?”

“He is a friend of forty years' standing.”

“He has a son?”

“And a daughter. Well?”

“That is all.”

“How! all?”

“Yes; the other demand I have to make shall be made in proper time and place. In the meantime, we understand each other, duke?”

“Yes, countess.”

“Our compact is signed.”

“Nay more — it is sworn.”

“ Then shake the tree for me.”

“Oh, rest satisfied; I have the means.”

“What are they?”

“My nephew.”

“What else?”

“The Jesuits.”

“Oh! ho!”

“I have a very nice little plan cut and dry.”

“May I know it?”

“Alas! countess — ”

“Well, you are right.”

“You know, secrecy — ”

“Is half the battle. I complete your thought for you.”

“You are charming.”

“But I wish to shake the tree also.”

“Oh, very well; shake away, countess; it can do no harm.”

“But when will you begin to undermine, duke?” asked the countess.

“To-morrow. And when do you commence to shake?”

A loud noise of carriages was heard in the courtyard, and almost immediately cries of “Long live the king!” rose on the air.

“I?” said the countess, glancing at the window, “I shall commence directly.”

“Bravo!”

“Retire by the little staircase, duke, and wait in the courtyard. You shall have my answer in an hour.”

CHAPTER LXXVI.

The Make-shift of His Majesty Louis XV.

LOUIS XV. was not so easy tempered that one could talk politics wit h him every day; for in truth politics were his aversion, and when he was in a bad temper he always escaped from them with this argument, which admitted of no reply:

"Bah! the machine will last out my time."

When circumstances were favorable, it was necessary to take advantage of them; but it rarely happened that the king did not regain the advantage which a moment of good humor had caused him to lose.

Madams Dubarry knew her king so well that, like fishermen well skilled in the dangers of the sea, she never attempted to start in bad weather.

Now the present visit of his majesty to Luciennes was one of the best opportunities possible. The king had done wrong the previous day, and knew beforehand that he should receive a scolding; he would therefore be an easy prey.

But however confiding the game which the hunter lies in wait for in his lurking place, it has always a certain instinct which must be guarded against. But this instinct is set at naught if the sportsman knows how to manage it.

The countess managed the royal game she had in view and which she wished to capture, in the following manner;

We have said that she was in a most becoming morning dress, like those in which Boucher represents his shepherdesses. Only she had no rouge on, for Louis XV. had a perfect antipathy to rouge.

The moment his majesty was announced, the countess seized her pot of rouge and began to rub her cheeks with it vigorously.

The king saw what the countess was doing from the anteroom.

"Fie!" said he, as he entered, "how she daubs herself!"

"Ah! good-day, sire," said the countess, without interrupting her occupations even when the king kissed her on the neck.

“You did not expect me, it seems, countess?” asked the king.

“Why do you think so, sire?”

“Because you soil your face in that manner.”

“On the contrary, sire, I was certain that I should have the honor of receiving your majesty in the course of the day.”

“How you say that, countess!”

“Indeed?”

“Yes, you are as serious as Monsieur Rousseau when he is listening to his own music.”

“That is because I have serious things to say to your majesty.”

“Oh! I see what is coming, countess — reproaches.”

“I reproach you, sire? — and why, pray?”

“Because I did not come yesterday.”

“Oh, sire, do me the justice not to imagine that I pretend to monopolize your majesty.”

“My little Jeanne, you are getting angry.”

“Oh! no, sire, I am angry already.”

“But hear me, countess; I assure you I never ceased thinking of you the whole time.”

“Pshaw!”

“And the evening seemed interminable to me.”

“But, once more, sire, I was not speaking of that at all. Your majesty may spend your evenings where you please, without consulting any one.”

“Quite a family party, madame; only my own family.”

“Sire, I did not even inquire.”

“Why not?”

“Dame! you know it would be very unbecoming for me to do so.”

“Well,” said the king, “if that is not what you are displeased with me for, what is it, then? We must be just in this world.”

“I have no complaint to make against you, sire.”

“But since you are angry —

“Yes, I am angry, sire; that is true but it is at being made a make-shift.”

“You a make-shift? Good heavens!”

“Yes. I! The Countess Dubarry! The beautiful Jeanne, the charming Jeaunette, the fascinating Jeauneton, as your majesty calls me; I am a make-shift.”

“But how?”

"Because I have my king, my lover, only when Madame de Choiseul and Madame de Grammont do not want him."

"Oh! oh! countess — "

"Oh, I give you my honor, sire, I say what I think. But what can you expect from me? I am an uneducated woman. I am the mistress of Blaise — the beautiful Bourbonnaise, you know."

"Countess, the Choiseuls will be revenged."

"What matter, if they revenge-e themselves with my vengeance?"

"They will despise us."

"You are right. Well, I have an excellent plan which I shall carry into execution at once."

"And that is?" asked the anxious king.

"Simply to go at once."

The king shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah! you do not believe me, sire?"

"No, indeed!"

"That is because you do not take the trouble to reason — you confound me with others."

"How so?"

"Madame de Chateauroux wanted to be a goddess, Madame de Pompadour aimed at being a queen. Others wished to be rich, powerful, or to humiliate the ladies of the court by the weight of their favors. I have none of these defects."

"That is true."

"But yet I have many good qualities."

"That is also true."

"Mere words, of course."

"Oh, countess! no one knows your worth better than I do."

"Well, but listen. What I am going to say will not alter your conviction."

"Speak."

"In the first place, I am rich, and independent of every one."

"Do you wish to make me regret that, countess?"

"Then I have not the least ambition for all that flatters these ladies, the least desire for what they aim at; my only wish is to love sincerely him whom I have chosen, whether he be a soldier or a king. When I love him no longer, I care for nothing else."

"Let me trust you care a little for me yet, countess."

“I have not finished, sire.”

“Proceed, madame.”

“I am pretty, I am young, and may reasonably hope for ten years more of beauty; and the moment I cease to be your majesty's favorite, I shall be the happiest and most honored woman in the world. You smile, sire — I am sorry to tell you it is because you do not reflect. When you had had enough, and your people too much, of your other favorites, you sent them away, and your people blessed you and execrated the disgraced favorite more than ever; but I shall not wait until I am sent away. I shall leave the place, and make it known publicly that I have left it. I shall give a hundred thousand livres to the poor, I shall retire to a convent for a week, and in less than a month my portrait will be hung up in all the churches as that of a converted sinner.”

“Oh! countess, you do not speak seriously?” said the king.

“Look at me, sire, and see if I am serious or not. I swear to you that I never was more serious in my life.”

“Then you will commit this folly. Jeanne? But do you not see that by so doing you place yourself at the mercy of my whim, my lady the countess?”

“No, sire; to do so would be to say, 'choose between this and that;' whereas I say, 'adieu, sire!' — nothing more.”

The king turned pale, but this time with anger.

“If you forget yourself so far, madame, take care.”

“Of what, sire?”

“I shall send you to the Bastille, and you will find the Bastille rather more tiresome than a convent.”

“Oh! sire,” said the countess, clasping her hands, “if you would but do me that favor it would delight me!”

“Delight you? How so?”

“Yes, indeed. My secret ambition has always been to be popular, like M. de la. Chalotais, or M. de Voltaire. I only want the Bastille for that. A little of the Bastille, and I shall be the happiest of women. I can then write memoirs of myself, of your ministers, of your daughters, of yourself, and transmit the virtues of Louis the Well-Beloved to the remotest posterity. Give me the lettre-de-cachet, sire. Here, I will provide the pen and ink.”

And she pushed a pen and an inkstand which were upon the work-table toward the king.

The king, thus braved, reflected a moment; then, rising:

“Very well, madame,” said he. “Adieu.”

“My horses!” cried the countess, “Adieu, sire.”

The king made a step toward the door.

“Chon!” said the countess.

Chon entered.

“My trunks, my traveling equipage, and post-horses,” said she; “quick! lose no time!”

“Post-horses!” said Chon, startled. “Good heavens! what is the matter?”

“We must leave this as quickly as possible, my dear, else the king will send us to the Bastille. There is no time to be lost. Make haste, Chon, make haste.”

This reproach stung Louis to the heart. He approached the countess and took her hand.

“Forgive my warmth, countess,” said he.

“In truth, sire, I am surprised you did not threaten me with the gibbet.”

“Oh! countess!”

“Of course. Thieves are always hanged.”

“Thieves?”

“Yes; do I not steal the Countess de Grammont's place?”

“Countess!”

“Dame! that is my crime, sire.”

“Be just, countess; you irritated me.”

“And how?”

The king took her hands. “We were both wrong. Let us forgive each other.”

“Are you serious in your wish for a reconciliation, sire?”

“On my honor.”

“Go, Chon.”

“Without ordering anything?” asked Chon.

“No; order what I told you.”

“Countess!”

“But let them wait for fresh orders.”

“Ah!” Chon left the room.

“Then you wish me to remain?” said the countess.

“Above all things.”

“Reflect on what you say, sire.”

The king reflected, but he could not retract; besides, he wanted to see how far the requirements of the victor would go.

“Go,” said he.

“Immediately. Mark, sire! I go without asking anything.”

“I observed it.”

“But if I remain, I shall ask for something.”

“Well, what is it? I merely ask for information.”

“Ah! you know very well.”

“No.”

“Yes, for you make a grimace.”

“M. de Choiseul's dismissal, is it?”

“Exactly.”

“It is impossible, countess.”

“My horses, then.”

“But, ill-natured creature that you are — ”

“Sign my lettre-de-cachet for the Bastille, or the letter which dismisses the minister.”

“There is an alternative,” said the king.

“Thanks for your clemency, sire; it seems I shall be permitted to go without being arrested.”

“Countess, you are a woman.”

“Fortunately I am.”

“And you talk politics like an angry rebellious woman. I have no grounds for dismissing M. de Choiseul.”

“I understand he is the idol of the parliament; he encourages them in their revolt.”

“But there must be some pretext.”

“A pretext is the reason of the weak.”

“Countess, M. de Choiseul is an honest man, and honest men are rare.”

“Honest! he sells you to the gentlemen of the black robe, who swallow up all the gold in the kingdom.”

“No exaggeration, countess.”

“Half, then.”

“Good heavens!” cried Louis XV.

“But I am talking folly. What are parliaments, Choiseuls, governments to me? What is the king to me, when I am only his make-shift?”

“Once more that word!”

“Always.”

“Give me two hours to consider, countess.”

“Ten minutes, sire. I will retire into my apartment; slip your answer under the door — there are pen, ink, and paper. If in ten minutes you have not replied, and replied as I wish, adieu. Think no more of me, I shall be gone. If not —

“If not?”

“Then you have once more your Jeanne.”

Louis XV. kissed the hands of the countess, who, like the Parthian, threw back her most fascinating smile on him as she left the room.

The king made no opposition, and the countess locked herself into the next apartment.

Five minutes afterward a folded paper grazed the silken mat and the rich carpet beneath the door.

The countess eagerly devoured the contents of the letter, hastily wrote some words with a pencil on a scrap of paper, and, opening the window, threw the paper to M. de Richelieu, who was walking in the little courtyard under an awning, in great trepidation lest he should be seen, and therefore keeping himself out of view as much as possible.

The marshal unfolded the paper, read it, and, in spite of his five-and-sixty years, hastily ran to the large courtyard, and jumped into his carriage.

“Coachman,” said he, “to Versailles, as quick as possible!”

The paper which was thrown to M. de Richelieu from the window merely contained these words; “I have shaken the tree — the portfolio has fallen!”

CHAPTER LXXVII.

How King Louis XV. Transacted Business.

THE NEXT DAY there was a great commotion at Versailles. Whenever two courtiers met there, there was nothing but mysterious signs and significant shakes of the hand, or else folded arms, and looks upward, expressive of their grief and surprise.

M. de Richelieu, with a number of his partisans, was in the king's antechamber at Trianon, about ten o'clock.

The Count Jean, all bedizened with lace and perfectly dazzling, conversed with the old marshal, and conversed gayly, if his joyous face could be taken as testimony of the fact.

About eleven o'clock the king passed quickly through the gallery, and entered the council-chamber without speaking to any one.

At about five minutes past eleven, M. de Choiseul alighted from his carriage and crossed the gallery with his portfolio under his arm.

As he passed through the throng there was a hurried movement among the courtiers, who all turned round as if talking among themselves, in order to avoid bowing to the minister.

The duke paid no attention to this maneuver; he entered the closet where the king was turning over some papers while sipping his chocolate.

“Good-morning, duke,” said the king familiarly; “are we charmingly this morning?”

“Sire, M. de Choiseul is quite well, but the minister is very ill, and comes to request that your majesty, since you have not yet spoken, will accept his resignation. I thank the king for permitting me to take the initiative in this matter; it is a last favor, for which I am deeply grateful.”

“How, duke? Your resignation? what does all that mean?”

“Sire, your majesty yesterday signed for Madame Dubarry an order which deposes me. This news is already spread all over Paris and Versailles. The evil is done; nevertheless, I was unwilling to leave your majesty's service without receiving a formal order with the permission. For, nominated officially, I can consider myself dismissed only by an official act.”

“What! duke,” exclaimed the king, laughing, for the severe and lofty attitude of M. de Choiseul made him almost tremble, “did you, a man of genius and skilled in official forms, did you believe that?”

“But, sire,” said the surprised minister, “you have signed.”

“What?”

“A letter, in the possession of Madame Dubarry.”

“Ah! duke, have you never felt the want of peace? You are most fortunate! Madame de Choiseul must indeed be a model.”

The duke, offended by the comparison, frowned.

“Your majesty,” said he, “has too much firmness of character, and above all, too much tact and discretion, to mix up affairs of state with what you deign to call household matters.”

“Choiseul, I must tell you how that affair happened; it is very amusing. You are aware that you are very much feared in that quarter.”

“Rather say hated, sire.”

“Hated if you will. Well! this madcap countess left me no alternative but to send her to the Bastille, or to thank you for your services.” — "A Veil, sire?”

“Well, duke, you must confess that it would have been a pity to lose the sight which Versailles presents this morning. I have been amused since yesterday with seeing the courtiers depart in all directions and watching the faces brighten up or lengthen. Since yesterday Cotillon III. is queen of France. It is exceedingly amusing.”

“But the end of all this, sire?”

“The end, my dear duke,” said the king, seriously, “the end will always remain the same. You know me; I always seem to yield, but I never yield in reality. Let the women swallow the honored morsel I throw them now and then, as to another Cerberus; but let us live quietly, uninterruptedly, always together. And since we are on the chapter of explanations, keep this one for yourself. Whatever report you may hear, whatever letter you may receive from me, do not absent yourself from Versailles. As long as I continue to say to you what I now do, duke, we shall be good friends.”

The king extended his hand to his minister, who bowed over it, without gratitude and without anger.

“And now, my dear duke, let us to business.”

“At your majesty's pleasure,” replied the minister, opening his portfolio.

“Well, tell me something of these fireworks to begin with.”

“Ah, that was a great disaster, sire.”

“Whose fault was it?”

“M. Bignon's, the provost of the merchants.”

“Did the people cry out very much?”

“Oh! very much.”

“Then, perhaps we had better dismiss this M. Bignon.”

“One of the members of parliament was nearly killed in the melee, and his colleagues therefore took the matter up warmly. But the advocate general, Seguier, made a very eloquent speech to prove that this misfortune was the work of fate alone. His speech was applauded, and so the affair is over for the present.”

“So much the better! Let us pass to the parliament, duke. Ah! we are reproached for that.”

“I am blamed, sire, for not supporting M. d'Aiguillon against M. de la Chalotais. But who blames me? The very people who carried your majesty's letter about with all the demonstrations of joy. Remember, sire, that M. d'Aiguillon overstepped the bounds of his authority in Brittany, that the Jesuits were really exiled, and that 1L de la Chalotais was right. Your majesty has publicly acknowledged the innocence of the attorney-general. The king cannot thus be made to stultify himself. To his minister that is nothing, but in presence of his people — !”

“In the meantime the parliament feels itself strong.”

“And it is strong. Hove can it be otherwise? The members are reprimanded, imprisoned, persecuted, and then declared innocent! I do not accuse M. d'Aiguillon of having commenced this affair of La Chalotais, but I can never forgive him for having been in the wrong in it.”

“Oh! come, duke, the evil is done, think of the remedy. How can we bridle these insolent minions?”

“Let the intrigues of the chancellor cease — let M. d'Aiguillon have no more support, and the anger of the parliament will at once subside.”

“But that would be to yield, duke.”

“Then your majesty is represented by M. d'Aiguillon, and not by me?”

This was a home thrust, and the king felt it.

“You know,” said he, “I do not like to affront my servants, even when they have been in the wrong. But no more of this unfortunate business; time will decide who is right. Let us speak of foreign affairs. I am told we shall have a war?”

“Sire, if there be war, it will be a just and necessary war.”

“With the English?”

“Does your majesty fear the English?”

“Oh! upon the sea.”

“Your majesty may rest tranquil. My cousin the Duke de Praslin, your Minister of Marine, will tell you that he has sixty-four men-of-war, not including those which are on the stocks. Besides, there are materials sufficient to construct twelve more in a year. Then there are fifty first-rate frigates — a respectable force with which to meet a naval war. For a continental war we have more than all that, we have the remembrance of Fontenoy.”

“Very well; but why must I fight the English, my dear duke? A much less skillful minister than you, the Abbe Dubois, always avoided a war with England.”

“I dare say, sire. The Abbe Dubois received six hundred pounds sterling per month from the English.”

“Oh, duke!”

“I have the proof, sire.”

“Well, be it so. But where are the grounds for war?”

“England covets all the Indies; I have been obliged to give the most stringent and hostile orders to your officers there. The first collision will call forth demand for redress from England; my official advice is that we do not listen to them. Your majesty's government must make itself respected by force, as it used to do by corruption.”

“Oh, let us pocket the affront. Who will know what happens in India? It is so far from here!”

The duke bit his lips.

“There is a casus belli nearer home, sire,” said he.

“Another? What is that?”

“The Spaniards claim the Malouine and Falkland islands. The port of Egmont was arbitrarily occupied by the English; the Spaniards drove them from it by main force. The English are enraged; they threaten the Spaniards with instant war if they do not give them satisfaction.”

“Well! but if the Spaniards are in the wrong, let them unravel the knot themselves.”

“And the family compact, sire? Why did you insist on the signing of this compact, which allies so closely all the Bourbons in Europe against English encroachment?”

The king hung his head.

“Do not be uneasy, sire.” continued Choiseul; “you have a formidable army, an imposing fleet, and sufficient money. I can raise enough without making the people cry out. If we have a war, it will be an additional glory to your majesty's reign, and it will furnish the pretext and excuse for several aggrandizements which I have in project.”

“But in that case, duke, we must have peace in the interior; let there not be war everywhere.”

“But the interior is quiet, sire,” replied the duke, affecting not to understand.

“No! no! you see plainly it is not. You love me and serve me well. Others say they love me, and their conduct does not at all resemble yours. Let there be concord between all shades of opinion; let me live happily, my dear duke.”

“It is not my fault, sire, if your happiness is not complete.”

“That is the way to speak. Well! come, then, and dine with me to-day.”

“At Versailles, sire?”

“No; at Luciennes.”

“I regret exceedingly, sire, that I cannot, but my family is in great alarm on account of the reports which were spread yesterday. They think I am in disgrace with your majesty, and I cannot let so many loving hearts suffer.”

“And do those of whom I speak not suffer, duke? Remember how happily we three used to live together in the time of the poor marchioness.”

The duke drooped his head, his eyes dimmed, and he uttered a half-suppressed sigh.

“Madame de Pompadour was extremely jealous of your majesty's glory, and had lofty political ideas, sire. I confess that her character sympathized strongly with my own. I often emulated and strove along with her in the great enterprises she undertook; yes, we understood each other.”

“But she meddled with politics, duke, and every one blamed her for it.”

“True!”

“The present one, on the contrary, is mild as a lamb; she has never yet asked me for a single lettre-de-cachet, even against the pamphleteers and sonnet writers. Well, they reproach her as if she followed in the other's footsteps. Oh, duke! it is enough to disgust one with progress. — Come, will you make your peace at Luciennes?”

“Sire, deign to assure the Countess Dubarry that I esteem her as a charming woman, and well worthy of the king's love, but — ”

“Ah! a but, duke —

“But,” continued M. de Choiseul, “that my conviction is, that if your majesty is necessary for the welfare of France, a good minister is of more importance to your majesty in the present juncture than a charming mistress.”

“Let us speak no more of it, duke, and let us remain good friends. But calm Madame de Grammont, and let her not lay any more plots against the countess; the women will embroil us.”

“Madame de Grammont, sire, is too anxious to please your majesty; that is her failing.”

“But she displeases me by annoying the countess, duke.”

“Well, Madame de Grammont is going, sire; we shall see her no more. That will be an enemy the less.”

“I did not mean that; you go too far. But my head burns, duke; we have worked this morning like Louis XIV. and Colbert — quite in the style of the Grand Siecle, as the philosophers say. Apropos, duke, are you a philosopher?”

“I am your majesty's humble servant,” replied M. de Choiseul.

“You charm me; you are an invaluable man. Give me your arm, I am quite giddy.”

The duke hastened to offer his arm to his majesty.

He guessed that the folding doors would be thrown open, that the whole court was in the gallery, and that he should be seen in this triumphant position. After having suffered so much, he was not sorry to make his enemies suffer in their turn.

The usher, in fact, now opened the doors, and announced the king in the gallery.

Louis XV. crossed the gallery, leaning heavily on M. de Choiseul's arm, talking and smiling, without remarking, or seeming to remark, how pale Jean Dubarry was and how red M. de Richelieu.

But M. de Choiseul saw these shades of expression very well. With elastic step, lofty head, and sparkling eyes, he passed before the courtiers, who now approached as eagerly as they had before kept away.

“There,” said the king, at the end of the gallery, “wait for me, I will take you with me to Trianon. Remember what I have told you.”

“I have treasured it up in my heart,” replied the minister, well knowing what a sting this cutting sentence would inflict on his enemies.

The king once more entered his apartments.

M. de Richelieu broke the file, and hastened to press the minister's hand between his meager fingers, exclaiming; “It is long since I knew that a Choiseul bears a charmed life.”

“Thank you,” said the duke, who knew how the land lay.

“But this absurd report?” continued the marshal.

“The report made his majesty laugh very heartily,” said Choiseul.

“I heard something of a letter — ”

“A little mystification of the king's,” replied the minister, glancing while he spoke at Jean, who lost countenance.

“Wonderful! wonderful!” repeated the marshal, turning to the viscount as soon as the Duke de Choiseul was out of sight.

The king ascended the staircase, calling the duke, who eagerly followed him.

“We have been played upon.” said the marshal to Jean.

“Where are they going?”

“To the Little Trianon, to amuse themselves at our expense.”

“Hell and furies!” exclaimed Jean. — “Ah! excuse me, marshal.”

“It is now my turn,” said the latter. “We shall see if my plans are more successful than those of the countess.”

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

The Little Trianon.

WHEN LOUIS XIV. had built Versailles, and had felt the inconvenience of grandeur, when he saw the immense salons full of guards, the anterooms thronged with courtiers, the corridors and entresols crowded with footmen, pages and officers, he said to himself that Versailles was indeed what Louis XIV. had planned, and what Mansard, Le Brun, and Le Notre had executed — the dwelling of a deity, but not of a man. Then the Grand Monarque, who deigned to be a man in his leisure moments, built Trianon that he might breathe more freely, and enjoy a little retirement. But the sword of Achilles, which had fatigued even Achilles himself, was an insupportable burden to his puny successor.

Trianon, the miniature of Versailles, seemed yet too pompous to Louis XV., who caused the Little Trianon, a pavilion of sixty feet square, to be built by the architect Gabriel.

To the left of this building was erected an oblong square, without character and without ornament; this was the dwelling of the servants and officers of the household. It contained about ten lodgings for masters, and had accommodation for fifty servants. This building still remains entire, and is composed of a ground-floor, a first story, and attic. This ground floor is protected by a paved moat, which separates it from the planting; and all the windows in it, as well as those of the first-floor, are grated. On the side next Trianon the windows are those of a long corridor, like that of a convent.

Eight or nine doors opening from the corridor gave admittance to the different suites of apartments, each consisting of an anteroom and two closets, one to the left, the other to the right, and of one, and sometimes two, underground apartments, looking upon the inner court of the building. The upper story contains the kitchens and the attics, the chambers of the domestics. Such is the Little Trianon.

Add to this a chapel about six or seven perches from the chateau, which we shall not describe, because there is no necessity for our doing so, and because it is too small to deserve our notice.

The topography of the establishment is, therefore, as follows; a chateau looking with its large eyes upon the park and wood in front; and, on the left, looking toward the offices, which present to its gaze only the barred windows of the corridors and the thickly trellised ones of the kitchens above.

The path leading from the Great Trianon, the pompous residence of Louis XIV., to the little, was through a kitchen garden which connected the two residences by means of a wooden bridge.

It was through this kitchen and fruit garden, which La Quintinie had designed and planted, that Louis XV. conducted M. de Choiseul to the Little Trianon after the laborious council we have just mentioned. He wished to show him the improvements he had made in the new abode of the dauphin and dauphiness.

M. de Choiseul admired everything, and commented upon everything, with the sagacity of a courtier. He listened while the king told him that the Little Trianon became every day more beautiful, more charming to live in; and the minister added that it would serve as his majesty's private residence.

“The dauphiness,” said the king, “is rather wild yet, like all young Germans; she speaks French well, but she is afraid of a slight accent, which to French ears betrays the Austrian. At Trianon she will see only friends, and will speak only when she wishes. The result will be that she will speak well.”

“I have already had the honor to remark,” said M. de Choiseul, “that her royal highness is accomplished, and requires nothing to make her perfect.”

On the way, the two travelers found the dauphin standing motionless upon a lawn, measuring the sun's altitude.

M. de Choiseul bent low, but as the dauphin did not speak to him, he did not speak either.

The king said, loud enough to be heard by his grandson:

“Louis is a finished scholar, but he is wrong thus to run his head against the sciences; his wife will have reason to complain of such conduct.”

“By no means, sire,” replied a low, soft voice issuing from a thicket.

And the king saw the dauphiness running toward him. She had been talking to a man furnished with papers, compasses, and chalks.

“Sire,” said the princess. “M. Mique, my architect.”

“Ah!” exclaimed the king, “then you too are bitten by that mania, madame?”

“Sire, it runs in the family.”

“You are going to build?”

“I am going to improve this great park, in which every one gets wearied.”

“Oh! oh! my dear daughter, you speak too loud; the dauphin might hear you.”

“It is a matter agreed upon between us, my father,” replied the princess.

“To be wearied?”

“No; but to try to amuse ourselves.”

“And so your highness is going to build?” asked M. de Choiseul.

“I intend making a garden of this park, my lord duke.”

“Ah! poor Le Notre!” said the king.

“Le Notre was a great man, sire, for what was in vogue then, but for what I love — ”

“What do you love, madame?”

“Nature.”

“Ah! like the philosophers.”

“Or like the English.”

“Good! Say that before Choiseul, and you will have a declaration of war immediately. He will let loose upon you the sixty-four ships and forty frigates of his cousin, M. de Praslin.”

“Sire.” said the dauphiness, “I am going to have a natural garden laid out here by Monsieur Robert, who is the cleverest man in the world in that particular branch of horticulture.”

“And what do you call a natural garden?” asked the king. “I thought that trees, and flowers, and even fruit, such as I gathered as I came along, were natural objects.”

“Sire, you may walk a hundred years in your grounds, and you will see nothing but straight alleys, or thickets cut off at an angle of forty-five degrees, as the dauphin says, or pieces of water wedded to lawns, which in their turn are wedded to perspectives, parterres, or terraces.”

“Well, that is ugly, is it!”

“It is not natural.”

“There is a little girl who loves nature!” said the king, with a jovial rather than a joyous air. “Well, come; what will you make of my Trianon?”

“Rivers, cascades, bridges, grottoes, rocks, woods, ravines, houses, mountains, fields.” — "For dolls?” said the king.

“Alas! sire, for kings such as we shall be,” replied the princess, without remarking the blush which overspread her grandfather's face, and without perceiving that she foretold a sad truth for herself.

“Then you will destroy; but what will you build?”

“I shall preserve the present buildings.”

“Ah! your people may consider themselves fortunate that you do not intend to lodge them in these woods and rivers you speak of, like Hurons, Esquimaux, and Greenlanders. They would live a natural life there, and M. Rousseau would call them children of nature. Do that, my child, and the encyclopedists will adore you.”

“Sire, my servants would be too cold in such lodgings.”

“Where will you lodge them, then, if you destroy all? Not in the palace; there is scarcely room for you two there.”

“ Sire, I shall keep the offices as they are.”

And the dauphiness pointed to the windows of the corridor which we have described.

“What do I see there?” said the king, shading his eyes with his hand.

“A woman, sire,” said M. de Choiseul.

“A young lady whom I have taken into my household,” replied the dauphiness.

“Mademoiselle de Taverney,” said Choiseul, with his piercing glance.

“Ah!” said the king, “so you have the Taverneys here?”

“Only Mademoiselle de Taverney, sire.”

“A charming girl! What do you make of her?”

“My reader.”

“Very good,” said the king, without taking his eye from the window through which Mademoiselle de Taverney, still pale from her illness, was looking very innocently, and without in the least suspecting that she was observed.

“How pale she is,” said M. de Choiseul.

“She was nearly killed on the 31st of May, my lord duke.”

“Indeed? Poor girl!” said the king. “That M. Bignon deserves to be disgraced.”

“She is quite convalescent again,” said M. de Choiseul, hastily.

“Thanks to the goodness of Providence, my lord.”

"Ah!" said the king, "she has fled."

"She has perhaps recognized your majesty; she is very timid."

"Has she been with you long?"

"Since yesterday, sire; I sent for her when I installed myself here."

"What a melancholy abode for a young girl," said Louis. "That Gabriel was a clumsy rogue. He did not remember that the trees, as they grew, would conceal and darken this whole building."

"But I assure you, sire, that the apartments are very tolerable."

"That is impossible," said Louis XV.

"Will your majesty deign to convince yourself?" said the dauphiness, anxious to do the honors of her palace.

"Very well. Will you come, Choiseul?"

"Sire, it is two o'clock. I have a parliamentary meeting at half-past two. I have only time to return to Versailles."

"Well, duke, go; and give those black gowns a shake for me. Dauphiness, show me these little apartments, if you please; I perfectly dote upon interiors."

"Come, M. Mique," said the dauphiness to her architect, "you will have an opportunity of profiting by the opinion of his majesty, who understands everything so well."

The king walked first, the dauphiness followed.

They mounted the little flight of steps which led to the chapel, avoiding the entrance of the courtyard, which was at one side. The door of the chapel is to the left; the staircase, narrow and unpretending, which leads to the corridor, on the right.

"Who lives here?" asked Louis XV.

"No one yet, sire."

"There is a key in the door of the first suite of apartments."

"Ah, yes, true. Mademoiselle de Taverney enters it to-day."

"Here?" said the king, pointing to the door.

"Yes, sire."

"And is she there at present? If so, let us not enter."

"Sire, she has just gone down; I saw her walking under the veranda of the court."

"Then show me her apartments as a specimen."

"As you please," replied the dauphiness.

And she introduced the king into the principal apartment, which was preceded by an anteroom and two closets.

Some articles of furniture which were already arranged, several books, a pianoforte, and, above all, an enormous bouquet of the most beautiful flowers, which Mademoiselle de Taverney had placed in a Chinese vase, attracted the king's attention.

“Ah!” said he, “what beautiful flowers! And yet you wish to change the garden. Who supplies your people with such splendid flowers? Do they keep some for you?”

“It is in truth a beautiful bouquet.”

“The gardener takes good care of Mademoiselle de Taverney. Who is your gardener here?”

“I do not know, sire. M. de Jussieu undertook to procure them for me.”

The king gave a curious glance around the apartments, looked again at the exterior, peeped into the courtyard, and went away. His majesty crossed the park, and returned to the Great Trianon, where his equipages were already in waiting for a hunt which was to take place after dinner, in carriages, from three till six o'clock.

The dauphin was still measuring the sun's altitude.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

The Conspiracy Is Renewed.

WHILE THE KING, in order to reassure M. de Choiseul and not to lose any time himself, was walking in Trianon till the chase should commence, Luciennes was the center of a reunion of frightened conspirators, who had flown swiftly to Madame Dubarry, like birds who have smelled the sportsman's powder.

Jean and Marshal Richelieu, after having looked at each other ill-humoredly for some time, were the first to take flight. The others were the usual herd of favorites, whom the certain disgrace of the Choiseuls had allured, whom his return to favor had alarmed, and who, no longer finding the minister there to fawn upon, had returned mechanically to Luciennes, to see if the tree was yet strong enough for them to cling to as before.

Madame Dubarry was taking a siesta after the fatigues of her diplomacy, and the deceptive triumph which had crowned it, when Richelieu's carriage rolled into the court with the noise and swiftness of a whirlwind.

“Mistress Dubarry is asleep,” said Zamore, without moving.

Jean sent Zamore rolling on the carpet with a scientific kick, inflicted upon the most highly ornamented portion of his governor's uniform.

Zamore screamed, and Chon hastened to inquire the cause.

“You are beating that little fellow again, you brute!” said she.

“And I shall exterminate you, too,” continued Jean, with kindling eyes, “if you do not immediately awaken the countess.”

But there was no need to awaken the countess; at Zamore's cries, at the growling tones of Jean's voice, she had suspected some misfortune, and hastened into the room, wrapped in a dressing gown.

“What is the matter?” exclaimed she, alarmed at seeing Jean stretched at full length upon the sofa to calm the agitation of his bile, and at finding that the marshal did not even kiss her hand.

“The matter! the matter!” said Jean. “Parbleu! what is always the matter — the Choiseuls!”

"How!"

"Yes! mille tonnerres! firmer than ever."

"What do you mean?"

"The Count Dubarry is right," continued Richelieu; "Monsieur the Duke de Choiseul is firmer than ever."

The countess drew the king's letter from her bosom.

"And this?" said she, smiling.

"Have you read it aright, countess?" asked the marshal.

"Why, I fancy I can read, duke," replied Madame Dubarry.

"I do not doubt it, madame. Will you allow me to read it also?"

"Oh, certainly; read."

The duke took the paper, unfolded it slowly, and read:

"To-morrow I shall thank M. de Choiseul for his services. I promise it positively. — Louis."

"Is that clear?" said the countess.

"Perfectly clear," replied the marshal, with a grimace.

"Well! what?" said Jean.

"Well! It is to-morrow that we shall be victorious, and nothing is lost as yet."

"How! To-morrow? The king signed that yesterday, therefore to-morrow is to-day."

"Pardon me, madame," said the duke; "as there is no date to the note, to-morrow will always be the day after you wish to see M. de Choiseul dismissed. In the Rue de la Grange-Bataliere, about one hundred paces from my house, there is a tavern, on the signboard of which is written in red characters, 'Credit given tomorrow.' To-morrow — that is never."

"The king mocks us!" said Jean, furiously.

"Impossible," said the alarmed countess; "impossible. Such a trick would be unworthy — "

"Ah, madame, his majesty is so merry," said Richelieu.

"He shall pay for this, duke." said the countess, in a tone of anger.

"After all, countess, we must not be angry with the king; we cannot accuse his majesty of cheating or tricking us, for the king has performed what he promised."

"Oh," said Jean, with a more than vulgar shrug of his shoulders.

"What did he promise?" cried the countess. "To thank Choiseul for his services."

"And that is precisely what he has done, madame. I heard his majesty myself thank the duke for his services. The word has two meanings; in diplomacy, each takes the one he prefers. You have chosen yours, the king has chosen his. Therefore there is no more question of tomorrow. It is to-day, according to your opinion, that the king should have kept his promise, and he has done so. I who speak to you heard him thank Choiseul."

"Duke, this is no time for jesting, I think."

"Do you think I am jesting, countess? Ask Count Jean."

"No, by Heaven! We were in no humor for laughing this morning when Choiseul was embraced, flattered, feasted by the king, and even now he is walking arm in arm with him in Trianon."

"Arm in arm!" exclaimed Chon, who had slipped into the room, and who raised her snowy arms like a second Niobe in despair.

"Yes, I have been tricked," said the countess; "but we shall see. Chon, countermand my carriage for the chase. I shall not go."

"Good!" said Jean.

"One moment," cried Richelieu. "No hurry, no pouting. Ah! forgive me, countess, for daring to advise you; I entreat you to pardon me."

"Go on, duke; do not apologize. I think I am losing my senses. See how I am placed; I did not wish to meddle with politics, and the first time I touch upon them, self-love launches me so deeply. You were saying — "

"That pouting would not be wise now. The position is difficult, countess. If the king is so decidedly in favor of these Choiseuls, if the dauphiness has so much influence over him, if he thus openly breaks a lance with you, you must — "

"Well, what?"

"You must be even more amiable than you are at present, countess. I know it is impossible; but in a position like ours the impossible becomes necessary. Attempt the impossible, then."

The countess reflected.

"For, in short," said the duke, "if the king should adopt German manners — "

"If he should become virtuous!" exclaimed Jean, horrified.

"Who knows, countess?" said Richelieu; "novelty is such an attractive thing."

"Oh! as for that," replied the countess, with a nod of incredulity, "I do not believe it."

“More extraordinary things have happened, countess. You know the proverb of the devil turning hermit. So you must not pout.”

“But I am suffocating with rage.”

“Parbleu! countess, I can believe you; but suffocate before us, breathe freely before the enemy. Do not let the king, that is to say, M. de Choiseul, perceive your anger.”

“And shall I go to the chase?”

“It would be most politic.”

“And you, duke?”

“Oh. I? If I should have to crawl on all-fours, I shall go.”

“Come in my carriage, then!” cried the countess, to see what face her ally would put on.

“Oh, countess,” replied the duke, smirking to hide his vexation, “it is such an honor — ”

“That you refuse?”

“I? Heaven forbid! But, take care; you will compromise yourself.”

“He confesses it — he dares to confess it,” cried Madame Dubarry.

“Countess! countess! M. de Choiseul will never forgive me.”

“Are you already on such good terms with M. de Choiseul?”

“Countess. I shall get into disgrace with the dauphiness.”

“Would you rather we should each continue the war separately, without sharing the spoil? It is still time. You are not compromised, and you may yet withdraw from the association.”

“You misunderstand me, countess,” said the duke, kissing her hands. Did I hesitate on the day of your presentation to send you a dress, a hair-dresser, and a carriage? Well, I shall not hesitate any more to-day. I am bolder than you imagine, countess.”

“Then it is agreed. We will go to this hunt together, and that will serve me as a pretext for not seeing or speaking to any one.”

“Not even to the king?”

“Oh! on the contrary, I shall give him such sweet words that he will be in despair.”

“Bravo! that is good tactics.”

“But you, Jean, what are you doing there? Do endeavor to rise from those cushions; you are burying yourself alive, my good friend.”

“You want to know what I am doing, do you? Well. I am thinking — ”

“Of what?”

“I am thinking that all the ballad-writers of the town and the parliament are setting us to all possible tunes; that the 'Nouvelles a la main' is cutting us up like meat for pies; that the 'Guzetier Cuirasse' is piercing us for want of a cuirass; that the 'Journal des Observateurs' observes us even to the marrow of our bones; that, in short, to-morrow we shall be in so pitiable a state that even a Choiseul might pity us.

“And what is the result of your reflections?” asked the duke.

“Why, that I must hasten to Paris to buy a little lint and no inconsiderable quantity of ointment to put upon our wounds. Give me some money, my little sister.”

“How much?” asked the countess.

“A trifle; two or three hundred louis.”

“You see, duke,” said the countess, turning to Richelieu, “that I am already paying the expenses of the war.”

“That is only the beginning of the campaign, and what you sow to-day, tomorrow you will reap.”

The countess shrugged her shoulders slightly, rose, went to her chiffoniere, and, opening it, took out a handful of bank-notes, which, without counting them, she handed to Jean, who, also without counting them, pocketed them with a deep sigh.

Then, rising, yawning, and stretching himself like a man overwhelmed with fatigue, he took a few steps across the room.

“See,” said he, pointing to the duke and the countess, “these people are going to amuse themselves at the chase, while I have to gallop to Paris. They will see gay cavaliers and lovely women, and I shall see nothing but hideous faces of scribbling drudges. Certainly, I am the turnspit of the establishment.”

“Mark me, duke,” said the countess, “he will never bestow a thought on us. Half my bank-notes will be squandered on some opera girl, and the rest will disappear in a gambling-house. That is his errand to Paris, and yet he bemoans himself, the wretch! Leave my sight, Jean, you disgust me.”

Jean emptied three plates of bonbons, stuffed the contents into his pocket, stole a Chinese figure with diamond eyes from the landing, and stalked off with a most majestic strut, pursued by the exclamations of the countess.

“What a delightful youth!” said Richelieu, in the tone of a parasite who praises a spoiled brat, while all the time he is inwardly devoting him to the infernal regions; “he is very dear to you, I suppose, countess?”

"As you say, duke, he has fixed all his happiness in me, and the speculation brings him three or four hundred thousand livres a-year."

The clock struck.

"Half-past twelve, countess," said the duke. "Luckily you are almost dressed. Show yourself a little to your courtiers, who might otherwise think there was an eclipse, and then let us to our carriages. You know how the chase is ordered?"

"His majesty and I arranged it yesterday; they were to proceed to the forest of Marly, and take me up in passing."

"Oh! I am very sure the king has not changed the programme."

"In the meantime, duke, let me hear your plan; it is your turn now."

"Madame, I wrote yesterday to my nephew, who, if I may believe my presentiments, is already on his way hither."

"M. d'Aiguillon?"

"I should not be surprised if he crosses my letter on the road, and if he were here to-morrow or the day after, at the latest."

"Then you calculate upon him?"

"Oh! madame, he does not want for sense."

"No matter who it is, for we are at the last extremity. The king might perhaps submit, but he has such a dreadful antipathy to business."

"So that — "

"So that I fear he will never consent to give up M. de Choiseul."

"Shall I speak frankly to you, countess?"

"Certainly."

"Well! I think so, too. The king will find a hundred stratagems like that of yesterday. His majesty has so much wit! And then, on your side, countess, you will never risk losing his love for the sake of an unaccountable whim."

And while he spoke the marshal fixed a searching glance on Madame Dubarry.

"Dame! I must reflect upon that." "You see, countess, M. de Choiseul is there for an eternity; nothing but a miracle can dislodge him."

"Yes, a miracle," repeated Jeanne.

"And, unfortunately, we are not now in the age of miracles."

"Oh!" said Madame Dubarry, "I know some one who can work miracles yet."

"You know a man who can work miracles, and yet you did not tell me so before?"

“I only thought of it this moment, duke.”

“Do you think he could assist us in this affair?”

“I think he can do everything.”

“Oh! indeed? And what miracle has he worked? Tell me, that I was judge of his skill by the specimen.”

“Duke,” said Madame Dubarry, approaching Richelieu and involuntarily lowering her voice, “he is a man who, ten years ago, met me upon the Place Louis XV. and told me I should be queen of France.”

“Indeed! that is in truth miraculous; and could he tell me, think you, if I shall die prime minister?”

“Don't you think so?”

“Oh, I don't doubt it in the least. What is his name?”

“His name will tell you nothing.”

“Where is he?”

“Ah! that I don't know.”

“He did not give you his address?”

“No; he was to come to me for his recompense.”

“What did you promise him?”

“Whatever he should ask.”

“And he has not come?”

“No.”

“Countess, that is even more miraculous than his prediction. We must certainly have this man.”

“But how shall we proceed?”

“His name, countess — his name?”

“He has two.”

“ Proceed according to order — the first?” “The Count de Fenix.”

“What! the man you pointed out to me on the day of your presentation?”

“Yes; the Prussian officer.”

“Oh! I have no longer any faith in him. All the sorcerers I have ever known had names ending in i or o.”

“That exactly suits, duke; for his second name is Joseph Balsamo.”

“But have you no means of finding him out?”

“I shall task my brain, duke. I think I know some one who knows him.”

“Good! But make haste, countess. It is now a quarter to one.”

“I am ready. My carriage, there!”

Ten minutes afterward Madame Dubarry and M. de Richelieu were seated side by side, and driving rapidly on their way to the hunting party.

CHAPTER LXXX.

The Sorcerer Chase.

A long train of carriages filled the avenues of the forest of Marly, where the king was hunting. It was what was called the afternoon chase.

In the latter part of his life, Louis XV. neither shot at nor rode after the game; he was content with watching the progress of the chase.

Those of our readers who have read Plutarch, will perhaps remember that cook of Mark Antony's, who put a boar on the spit every hour, so that among the six or seven boars which were roasting, there might always be one ready whenever Mark Antony wished to dine.

The reason of this was that Mark Antony, as governor of Asia Minor, was overwhelmed with business; he was the dispenser of justice, and as the Sicilians are great thieves (the fact is confirmed by Juvenal), Mark Antony had abundance of work on his hands. He had therefore always five or six roasts in various degrees of progress on the spit, waiting for the moment when his functions as judge would permit him to snatch a hasty morsel.

Louis XV. acted in a similar manner. For the afternoon chase there were three or four stags started at different hours, and accordingly as the king felt disposed he chose a nearer or more distant “view halloo.”

On this day his majesty had signified his intention of hunting until four o'clock. A stag was therefore chosen which had been started at twelve, and which might consequently be expected to run until that hour.

Madame Dubarry, on her side, intended to follow the king as faithfully as the king intended to follow the stag. But hunters propose and fate disposes. A combination of circumstances frustrated this happy project of Madame Dubarry's, and the countess found in fate an adversary almost as capricious as herself.

While the countess, talking politics with M. de Richelieu, drove rapidly after the king, who in his turn drove rapidly after the stag, and while the duke and she returned in part the bows which greeted them as they passed, they all at once perceived about fifty paces from the road, beneath a magnificent canopy of verdure, an unfortunate caleche revolving its wheels in the air, while the two black horses which should have drawn it were peacefully munching; the one the bark of a beech-tree, the other the moss growing at his feet.

Madame Dubarry's horses, a magnificent pair presented to her by the king, had outstripped all the other carriages, and were the first to arrive in sight of the broken carriage.

“Ha! an accident!” said the countess, calmly.

“Faith, yes!” said the Duke de Richelieu, with equal coolness, for sensibility is little in fashion at court; “the carriage is broken to pieces.”

“Is that a corpse upon the grass?” asked the countess. “Look, duke.”

“I think not, it moves.”

“Is it a man or a woman?”

“I don't know. I cannot see well.”

“Ha! it bows to us.”

“Then it cannot be dead.”

And Richelieu at all hazards took off his hat.

“But, countess,” said he, “it seems to me — ”

“And to me also —

“That it is his eminence Prince Louis.”

“The Cardinal de Rohan in person!”

“What the deuce is he doing there?” asked the duke.

“Let us go and see,” replied the countess. “Champagne, drive on to the broken carriage.”

The coachman immediately left the high road and dashed in among the lofty trees.

“Faith, yes, it is my lord cardinal,” said Richelieu.

It was in truth his eminence, who was lying stretched upon the grass, waiting until some of his friends should pass.

Seeing Madame Dubarry approach, he rose.

“A thousand compliments to the countess!” said he.

“How, cardinal! is it you?”

“Myself, madame.”

“On foot?”

“No, sitting.”

“Are you wounded?”

“Not in the least.”

“And how in all the world do you happen to be in this position?”

“Do not speak of it, madame; that brute of a coachman, a wretch whom I sent for to England, when I told him to cut across the wood in order to join the chase, turned so suddenly, that he upset me and broke my best carriage.”

“You must not complain, cardinal,” said the countess; “a French coachman would have broken your neck, or at least your ribs.”

“Very possibly.”

“Therefore, be consoled.”

“Oh! I am a little of a philosopher, countess; only I shall have to wait, and that is fatal.”

“How, prince! to wait? A Rohan wait?”

“There is no resource.”

“Oh, no! I would rather alight and leave you my carriage.”

“In truth, madame, your kindness makes me blush.”

“Come, jump in, prince — jump in.”

“No, thank you, madame, I am waiting for Soubise, who is at the chase, and who cannot fail to pass in a few moments.”

“But if he should have taken another road?”

“Oh! it is of no consequence.”

“My lord, I entreat you will.”

“No, thank you.”

“But why not?”

“I am unwilling to incommode you.”

“Cardinal, if you refuse to enter, I shall order one of the footmen to carry my train, and I shall roam through the woods like a Dryad.”

The cardinal smiled, and thinking that a longer resistance might be interpreted unfavorably by the countess, he consented to enter the carriage. The duke had already given up his place, and taken his seat upon the bench in front. The cardinal entreated him to resume his former position, but the duke was inflexible.

The countess's splendid horses soon made up for the time which had thus been lost.

“Excuse me, my lord,” said the countess, addressing the cardinal, “has your eminence been reconciled to the chase?”

“How so?”

“Because this is the first time I have had the pleasure of seeing you join in that amusement.”

“By no means, countess. I had come to Versailles to have the honor of paying my respects to his majesty, when I was told he was at the chase. I had to speak to him on some important business, and therefore followed, hoping to overtake him; but, thanks to this cursed coachman, I shall not only lose his majesty's ear, but also my assignation in town.”

“You see, madame.” said the duke, laughing, “monseigneur makes a free confession! — he has an assignation.”

“In which I shall fail, I repeat,” replied the cardinal.

“Does a Rohan, a prince, a cardinal, ever fail in anything?” said the countess.

“Dame!” said the prince, “unless a miracle comes to my assistance.”

The duke and the countess looked at each other; this word recalled their recent conversation.

“Faith! prince.” said the countess, “speaking of miracles, I will confess frankly that I am very happy to meet a dignitary of the church, to know if he believes in them.”

“In what, madame?”

“Parbleu! in miracles.” said the duke.

“The Scriptures give them as an article of faith, madame,” said the cardinal, trying to look devout.

“Oh! I do not mean those miracles,” replied the countess.

“And of what other miracles do you speak, madame?”

“Of modern miracles.”

“Those indeed, I confess, are rather more rare,” said the cardinal. “But still — ”

“But still, what?”

“Faith, I have seen things, which, if they were not miraculous, were at least very incredible.”

“You have seen such things, prince?”

“On my honor.”

“But you know, madame,” said Richelieu, laughing, “that his eminence is said to be in communication with spirits, which, perhaps, is not very orthodox.”

“No, but which must be very convenient,” said the countess. “And what have you seen, prince?”

“I have sworn not to reveal it.”

“Oh! that begins to look serious.”

"It is a fact, madame."

"But if you have promised to observe secrecy respecting the sorcery, perhaps you have not done so as regards the sorcerer?"

"No."

"Well, then, prince, I must tell you that the duke and myself came out to-day with the intention of seeking some magician."

"Indeed?" — " Upon my honor."

"Take mine."

"I desire no better."

"He is at your disposal, countess."

"And at mine also, prince?"

"And at yours also, duke."

"What is his name?"

"The Count de Fenix."

The countess and the duke looked at each other and turned pale.

"That is strange," said they, both together.

"Do you know him?" asked the prince.

"No. And you think him a sorcerer?"

"I am positive of it."

"You have spoken to him, then?"

"Of course."

"And you found him — "

"Perfect."

"On what occasion, may I ask?"

The cardinal hesitated.

"On the occasion of his foretelling my fortune."

"Correctly?"

"He told me things of the other world."

"Has he no other name than the Count de Fenix?"

"I think I have heard him called — "

"Speak, sir," said the countess, impatiently.

"Joseph Balsamo, madame."

"Is the devil very black?" asked Madame Dubarry all at once.

"The devil, countess? I have not seen him."

""What are you thinking of, countess?" cried Richelieu. "Pardieu! that would be respectable company for a cardinal."

"And did he tell you your fortune without showing you the devil?"

"Oh! certainly," said the cardinal, "they only show the devil to people of no consideration; we can dispense with him."

"But say what you will, prince," continued Madame Dubarry, "there must be a little devilry at the bottom of it."

"Dame! I think so."

"Blue fire, specters, infernal caldrons which smell horribly while they burn, eh?"

" Oh, no! my sorcerer is most polite and well-bred; he is a very gallant man, and receives his visitors in good style." "Will you not have your horoscope drawn by this man, countess?" said Richelieu.

"I long to do so, I confess."

"Do so, then, madame."

"But where is all this accomplished?" asked Madame Dubarry, hoping that the cardinal would give her the wished-for address.

"In a very handsome room, fashionably furnished."

The countess could scarcely conceal her impatience.

"Very well," said she; "but the house?"

"A very fine house, though in a singular style of architecture."

The countess stamped with rage at being so ill understood. Richelieu came to her assistance.

"But do you not see, my lord," said he, "that madame is dying to know where your sorcerer lives?"

"Where he lives, you say? Oh! well." replied the cardinal, "eh! faith — wait a moment — no — yes — no. It is in the Marais, near the corner of the boulevard, Rue St. Francois — St. Anastasie — no. However, it is the name of some saint."

"But what saint. You must surely know them all?"

"No, faith. I know very little about them," said the cardinal; "but stay — my fool of a footman must remember."

"Oh! very fortunately he got up behind," said the duke. "Stop, Champagne, stop."

And the duke pulled the cord which was attached to the coachman's little finger, who suddenly reined in the foaming horses, throwing them on their sinewy haunches.

"Olive," said the cardinal, "are you there, you scoundrel?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Where did I stop one evening in the Marais — a long time back?"

The lackey had overheard the whole conversation, but took care not to appear as if he had done so.

"In the Marais?" said he, seeming to search his memory.

"Yes, near the boulevards."

"What day, my lord?"

"One day when I was returning from. St. Denis. The carriage, I think, waited for me in the boulevards."

"Oh, yes, my lord," said Olive, "I remember now. A man came and threw a very heavy parcel into the carriage; I remember it perfectly."

"Very possibly," replied the cardinal, "but who asked you about that, you scoundrel?"

"What does your eminence wish, then?"

"To know the name of the street."

"Rue St. Claude, my lord."

"Claude, that is it!" cried the cardinal. "I would have laid any wager it was the name of a saint."

"Rue St. Claude!" repeated the countess, darting such an expressive glance at Richelieu, that the marshal, fearing to let any one guess his secrets, above all when it concerned a conspiracy, interrupted Madame Dubarry by these words:

"Ha! countess — the king!"

"Where?"

"Yonder."

"The king! the king!" exclaimed the countess. "To the left, Champagne, to the left, that his majesty may not see us."

"And why, countess?" asked the astonished cardinal. "I thought that, on the contrary, you were taking me to his majesty."

"Oh! true, you wish to see the king, do you not?"

"I came for that alone, madame."

"Very well! you shall be taken to the king — — "

"But you?"

"Oh! we shall remain here."

"But, countess —

"No apologies, prince, I entreat; every one to his own business. The king is yonder, under those chestnut-trees; you have business with the king; very well, the affair is easily arranged. Champagne!"

Champagne pulled up.

“Champagne, let us alight here, and take his eminence to the king.”

“What! alone, countess?”

“You wished to have an audience of his majesty, cardinal?”

“It is true.”

“Well! you shall have his ear entirely to yourself.”

“All! this kindness absolutely overwhelms me.” And the prelate gallantly kissed Madame Dubarry's hand.

“But where will you remain yourself, madame?” inquired he.

“Here, under these trees.”

“The king will be looking for you.”

“So much the better.”

“He will be uneasy at not seeing you.”

“And that will torment him — just what I wish.”

“Countess, you are positively adorable,”

“That is precisely what the king says when I have tormented him. Champagne, when you have taken his eminence to the king, you will return at full gallop.”

“Yes, my lady.”

“Adieu, duke,” said the cardinal.

“Au revoir, my lord,” replied the duke.

And the valet having let down the step, the duke alighted and handed out the countess, who leaped to the ground as lightly as a nun escaping from a convent, while the carriage rapidly bore his eminence to the hillock from which his Most Christian Majesty was seeking, with his short-sighted eyes, the naughty countess whom every one had seen but himself.

Madame Dubarry lost no time. She took the duke's arm, and drawing him into the thicket —

“Do you know.” said she, “that it must have been Providence who sent that dear cardinal to us, to put us on the trace of our man!”

“Then we are positively to go to him?”

“I think so; but — ”

“What, countess?”

“I am afraid, I confess it.”

“Of whom?”

“Of the sorcerer. Oh, I am very credulous.”

“The deuce!”

“And you, do you believe in sorcerers?”

“Dame! I can't say no, countess.”

“My history of the prediction —

“Is a startling fact. And I myself,” said the old marshal, scratching his ear, “once met a certain sorcerer.”

“Bah!”

“Who rendered me a very important service.”

“What service, duke?”

“He resuscitated me.”

“He resuscitated you!”

“Certainly; I was dead, no less.”

“Oh! tell me the whole affair, duke.”

“Let us conceal ourselves, then.”

“Duke, you are a dreadful coward.”

“Oh, no, I am only prudent.”

“Are we well placed here?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“Well! the story! the story!”

“Well, I was at Vienna — it was the time when I was ambassador there — when one evening, while I was standing under a lamp, I received a sword thrust through my body. It was a rival's sword, and a very unwholesome sort of thing it is, I assure you. I fell — I was taken up — I was dead.”

“What? you were dead?”

“Yes, or close upon it. A sorcerer passes, who asks who is the man whom they are carrying. He is told it is I; he stops the litter, pours three drops of some unknown liquid into the wound, three more between my lips, and the bleeding stops, respiration returns, my eyes open, and I am cured.”

“It is a miracle from heaven, duke.”

“That is just what frightens me; for, on the contrary, I believe it is a miracle of the devil.”

“True, marshal, Providence would not have saved a dissipated rake like you. Honor to whom honor is due. And does your sorcerer still live?”

“I doubt it, unless he has found the elixir of life.”

“Like you, marshal?”

“Do you believe these stories, then?”

“I believe everything. He was very old?”

“Methuselah in person.”

"And his name?"

"All! a magnificent Greek name — Althotas."

"What a terrible name, marshal!"

"Is it not, madame?"

"Duke, there is the carriage returning. Are we decided? Shall we go to Paris and visit the Rue St. Claude?"

"If you like. But the king is waiting for you."

"That would determine me, duke, if I had not already determined. He has tormented me. Now, France, it is your turn to suffer!"

"But he will think you are lost — carried off."

"And so much the more that I have been seen with you, marshal."

"Stay, countess, I will be frank with you; I am afraid."

"Of what?"

""I am afraid that you will tell all this to some one, and that I shall be laughed at."

"Then we shall both be laughed at together, since I go with you."

"That decides me, countess. However, if you betray me, I shall say — "

"What will you say?"

"I shall say that you came with me tete-a-tete."

"No one will believe you, duke."

"Ah! countess, if the king were not there!"

"Champagne! Champagne! Here, behind this thicket, that we may not be seen. Germain, the door. That will do. Now to Paris, Rue St. Claude, in the Marais, and let the pavement smoke for it."

CHAPTER LXXXI.

The Courier.

IT WAS SIX o'clock in the evening. In that chamber in the Rue Saint Claude into which we have already introduced our readers, Balsamo was seated beside Lorenza, now awake, and was endeavoring by persuasion to soften her rebellious spirit, which refused to listen to all his prayers.

But the young girl looked askance at him, as Dido looked at AEneas when he was about to leave her, spoke only to reproach him, and moved her hand only to repulse his.

She complained that she was a prisoner, a slave; that she could no longer breathe the fresh air, nor see the sun. She envied the fate of the poorest creatures, of the birds, of the flowers. She called Balsamo her tyrant.

Thru, passing from reproaches to rage, she tore into shreds the rich stuffs which her husband had given her, in order by this semblance of gayety and show to cheer the solitude he imposed on her.

Balsamo, on the other hand, spoke gently to her, and looked at her lovingly. It was evident that this weak, irritable creature filled an immense place in his heart, if not in his life.

“Lorenza,” said he to her, “my beloved, why do you display this spirit of resistance and hostility? Why will you not live with me, who love you inexpressibly, as a gentle and devoted companion? You would then have nothing to wish for; you would be free to bloom in the sun, like the flowers of which you spoke just now; to stretch your wing like the birds whose fate you envy. We would go everywhere together. You would not only see the sun which delights you so much, but the factitious sun of splendor and fashion — those assemblies to which the women of this country resort. You would be happy according to your tastes, while rendering me happy in mine. Why will you refuse this happiness, Lorenza? — you who, with your beauty and riches, would make so many women envious?”

“Because I abhor you,” said the haughty young girl.

Balsamo cast on Lucrenza a glance expressive at once of anger and pity.

"Live, then, as you condemn yourself to live," said he; "and since you are so proud, do not complain."

"I should not complain, if you would leave me alone. I should not complain, if you did not force me to speak to you. Do not come into my presence, or when you do enter my prison, do not speak to me, and I shall do as the poor birds from the south do when they are imprisoned in cages — they die, but do not sing."

Balsamo made an effort to appear calm.

"Come, Lorenza," said he, "a little more gentleness and resignation. Look into a heart which loves you above all things. Do you wish for books?"

"No."

"Why not? Books would amuse you."

"I wish to weary myself until I die."

Balsamo smiled, or rather endeavored to smile.

"You are mad," said he; "you know very well that you cannot die while I am here to take care of you, and to cure you when you fall ill."

"Oh!" cried Lorenza, "you will not cure me when you find me strangled with this scarf against the bars of my window." — Balsamo shuddered.

"Or when," continued she, furiously, "I have opened this knife and stabbed myself to the heart."

Balsamo, pale as death, and bathed in cold perspiration, gazed at Lorenza, and with a threatening voice:

"No, Lorenza." said he, "you are right; I shall not cure you, then, I shall bring you back to life."

Lorenza gave a cry of terror. She knew no bounds to Balsamo's power, and believed his threat. Balsamo was saved. While she was plunged in this fresh abyss of suffering which she had not foreseen, and while her vacillating reason saw itself encircled by a never-ceasing round of torture, the sound of the signal bell pulled by Fritz reached Balsamo's ear. It struck three times quickly, and at regular intervals.

"A courier," said he.

Then after a pause another ring was heard.

"And in haste," he said.

"Ah!" said Lorenza, "you are about to leave me, then!"

He took the young girl's cold hand in his. "Once more and for the last time, Lorenza," said he, "let us live on good terms with each other, like brother and sifter. Since destiny unites us to each other, let us make it a friend and not an executioner.”

Lorenza did not reply. Her eye, motionless and fixed in a sort of dreamy melancholy, seemed to seek some thought which was ever flying from her into infinite space, and which perhaps she could not find because she had sought it too long and too earnestly, like those who, after having lived in darkness, gaze too ardently on the sun, and are blinded by excess of light. Balsamo took her hand and kissed it without her giving any sign of life. Then he advanced toward the chimney. Immediately Lorenza started from her torpor, and eagerly fixed her gaze upon him.

“Oh!” said he, “you wish to know how I leave this, in order to leave it one day after me and flee from me as you threatened. And therefore you awake — therefore you look at me.”

Then, passing his hand over his forehead, as if he imposed a painful task on himself, he stretched his hand toward the young girl, and said, in a commanding voice, looking at her as if he were darting a javelin against her head and breast:

“Sleep!”

The word was scarcely uttered when Lorenza bent like a flower upon its stem; her head, for a single moment unsteady, drooped and rested against the cushion of the sofa; her hands, of an opaque and waxen whiteness, glided down her side, rustling her silken dress.

Balsamo, seeing her so beautiful, approached her and pressed his lips upon her lovely forehead.

Then Lorenza's features brightened, as if a breath from the God of Love himself had swept away the cloud which rested on her brow. Her lips opened tremulously, her eyes swam in voluptuous tears, and she sighed as the angels must have sighed when in earth's youthful prime they stooped to love the children of men.

Balsamo looked upon her for a moment, as if unable to withdraw his gaze; then, as the bell sounded anew, he turned toward the chimney, touched a spring, and disappeared behind the flowers.

Fritz was waiting for him in the salon, with a man dressed in the closely-fitting jacket of a courier, and wearing thick boots armed with longspurs.

The commonplace and inexpressive features of this man showed him to be one of the people; but his eye had in it a spark of sacred fire, which seemed to have been breathed into him by some superior intelligence.

His left hand grasped a short and knotty whip, while with his right hand he made some signs to Balsamo, which the latter instantly recognized, and to which, without speaking, he replied by touching his forehead with his forefinger.

The postilion's hand moved upward to his breast, where it traced another sign, which an indifferent observer would not have remarked, so closely did it resemble the movement made in fastening a button.

To this sign the master replied by showing a ring which he wore upon his finger.

Before this powerful signet the messenger bent his knee.

“Whence come you?” asked Balsamo.

“From Rouen, master.”

“What is your profession?”

“I am a courier in the service of the Duchesse de Grammont.”

“Who placed you there?”

“The will of the Great Copt.”

“What orders did you receive when you entered the service?”

“To have no secret from the master.”

“Whither are you going?”

“To Versailles.”

“What are you carrying?”

“A letter.”

“For whom?”

“For the minister.”

“Give it me.”

The courier took a letter from a leathern bag fastened upon his shoulders behind, and gave it to Balsamo.

“Shall I wait?” asked he.

“Yes.”

“Very well.”

“Fritz!”

The German appeared.

“Keep Sebastian concealed in the offices.”

“He knows my name,” murmured the adept, with superstitious fear.

“He knows everything,” said Fritz, drawing him away.

When Balsamo was once more alone, he looked at the unbroken, deeply cut seal of the letter, which the imploring glance of the messenger had entreated him to respect as much as possible. Then, slowly and pensively, he once more mounted toward Lorenza's apartment, and opened the door of communication.

Lorenza was still sleeping, but seemingly tired and enervated by inaction. He took her hand, which she closed convulsively, and then he placed the letter, sealed as it was, upon her heart.

“Do you see?” he asked.

“Yes, I see,” replied Lorenza.

“What is the object which I hold in my hand?”

“A letter.”

“Can you read it?”

“I can.”

“Do so, then.”

With closed eyes and palpitating bosom, Lorenza repeated, word for word, the following lines, which Balsamo wrote down as she spoke:

“DEAR BROTHER — As I had foreseen, my exile will be at least of some service to us. I have this morning seen the president of Rouen; he is for us, but timid. I urged him in your name; he has at last decided, and the remonstrance of his division will be in Versailles within a week. I am just about setting off for Rennes to rouse Karadeuc and La Chalotais, who are sleeping on their post. Our agent from Cauilebec was in Rouen. I have seen him. England will not stop midway; she is preparing a sharp notification for the cabinet of Versailles. X — — asked me if he should produce it, and I authorized him to do so. You will receive the last pamphlets of Morando and Delille against the Dubarry. They are petards which might blow up a town. A sad report reached me, that there was disgrace in the air; but as you have not written to me, I laugh at it. Do not leave me in doubt, however, and reply courier for courier. Your message will find me at Caen, where I have some of our gentlemen riding quarantine. Adieu, I salute you. — — DUCHESSE DE GRAMMONT.”

After reading thus far, Lorenza stopped.

“You see nothing more?” asked Balsamo.

“I see nothing.”

“No postscript?” — "No.”

Balsamo, whose brow had gradually smoothed as Lorenza read the letter, now took it from her.

“A curious document,” said he, “and one for which I would be well paid. Oh! how can any one write such things?” he continued. “Yes, it is always women who are the ruin of great men. This Choiseul could not have been overthrown by an army of enemies, by a world of intrigues, and now the breath of a woman crushes while it caresses him. Yes, we all perish by the treachery or the weakness of women. If we have a heart, and in that heart a sensitive chord, we are lost.”

And, as he spoke, Balsamo gazed with inexpressible tenderness at Lorenza, who palpitated under his glance.

“Is it true, what I think?” said he.

“No, no, it is not true!” she replied eagerly; “you see plainly that I love you too dearly to do you any hurt, like those women you spoke of without sense and without heart.”

Balsamo allowed himself to be caressed by the arms of his enchantress; — all at once a double ring of Fritz's bell was repeated twice.

“Two visits,” said Balsamo.

A single violent ring completed the telegraphic message.

“Important ones,” continued the master; and, disengaging himself from Lorenza's arms, he hastened from the apartment, leaving the young girl still asleep. On his way he met the courier, who was waiting for orders.

“Here is your letter,” said he.

“What am I do with it?”

“Deliver it as addressed.”

“Is that all?”

“Yes.”

The courier looked at the envelope and at the seal, and seeing them as intact as when he had brought them, expressed his satisfaction, and disappeared in the darkness.

“What a pity not to keep such an autograph,” said Balsamo, “and, above all, what a pity not to be able to forward it by a safe hand to the king.”

Fritz now appeared.

“Who is there?” he asked.

“A man and a woman.”

“Have they been here before?”

“No.”

“Do you know them?”

“No.”

“Is the woman young?”

“Young and handsome.”

“The man?”

“From sixty to sixty-five years of age.”

“Where are they?”

“In the salon.”

Balsamo entered.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

The Evocation.

THE COUNTESS had completely concealed her face in a hood. As she had found time in passing to call at the family residence, she had assumed the dress of a citizen's wife. She had come in a hackney-coach with the marshal, who, even more timid than she, had donned a gray dress like that of a superior servant in a respectable household.

“Do you recognize me, count?” said Madame Dubarry.

“Perfectly, Madame la Comtesse.”

Richelieu had remained in the background.

“Deign to be seated, madame, and you, also, monsieur.”

“This is my steward,” said the countess.

“You err, madame,” said Balsamo, bowing; “the gentleman is the Marshal Duke de Richelieu, whom I recognize easily, and who would be very ungrateful if he did not recognize me.”

“How so?” asked the duke, quite confounded, as Tallemant des Reaux would say.

“My lord duke, a man owes a little gratitude, I think, to those who have saved his life.”

“Ah, ah! duke,” said the countess, laughing; “do you hear, duke?”

“What! you have saved my life, count?” asked Richelieu, quite astounded.

“Yes, my lord; at Vienna, in the year 1725, when you were ambassador there.”

“In 1725! But you were not born then, my dear sir.”

Balsamo smiled.

“It seems to me that I was, my lord duke,” said he, “since I met you, dying, or rather dead, upon a litter; you had just received a sword-thrust right through your body, and I poured three drops of my elixir upon the wound. There, hold! — the place where you are ruffling your Alencon lace — rather fine, I must say, for a steward.”

“But,” interrupted the marshal, “you are scarcely thirty-five years of age, count.”

“There, duke,” cried the countess, laughing heartily, “there, you are before the sorcerer; do you believe now?”

“ I am stupefied, countess. But at that period,” continued the duke, addressing Balsamo, “you called yourself — ”

“Oh! duke, we sorcerers change our name in each generation. Now, in 1725, names ending in us, os, or as, were the fashion; and I should not be surprised if, at that time, I had been seized with the whim of bartering my name for some Latin or Greek one. This being premised, I wait your commands, countess, and yours also, my lord.”

“Count, the marshal and I have come to consult you.”

“You do me too much honor, madame, especially if this idea arose naturally in your minds.”

“Oh! in the most natural manner in the world, count; your prediction still haunts my thoughts, only I fear it will not be realized.”

“Fever doubt the dictates of science, madame.”

“Oh! oh!” said Richelieu; “but our crown is a hazardous game, count. It is not here an affair of a wound which three drops of elixir can cure.”

“No; but of a minister whom three words can ruin,” replied Balsamo. “Well, have I guessed rightly? Tell me.”

“Perfectly,” said the trembling countess. “Tell me, in truth, what think you of all this, duke?”

“Oh! do not let such a trifle astonish you, madame,” said Balsamo; “whoever sees Madame Dubarry and Richelieu uneasy, may guess the cause without magic.”

“But,” added the marshal, “if you can give us the remedy, I will perfectly adore you.”

“The remedy for your complaint?”

“Yes; we are ill of the Choiseul.”

“And you wish to be cured?”

“Yes, great magician.”

“Count, you will not leave us in our embarrassment,” said the countess; “your honor is engaged.”

“My best services are at your command, madame; but I first wish to know if the duke had not some definite plan formed when he came here?”

“I confess it, count. Really it is delightful to have a count for a sorcerer; we do not need to change our modes of speech.”

Balsamo smiled.

“Come,” said he, “let us be frank.”

“'Pon honor. I wish for nothing else,” replied the duke.

“You had some consultation to hold with me!”

“That is true.”

“Ah, deceiver!” said the countess, “you never spoke of that to me.”

“I could only speak of it to the count, and that in the most secret corner of his ear,” replied the marshal.

“Why, duke?”

“Because you would have blushed, countess, to the whites of your eyes.”

“Oh! tell it now, marshal, just to satisfy my curiosity. I am rouged, so you shall see nothing;.”

“Well!” said Richelieu, “this is what I thought. Take care, countess. I am going to take a most extravagant flight.”

“Fly as high as you will, duke, I am prepared.”

“Oh, but I fear you will beat me the moment you hear what I am about to say.”

“You are not accustomed to be beaten, my lord duke,” said Balsamo to the old marshal.

“Well,” continued he, enchanted with the compliment, “here it is. Saving the displeasure of madame, his maj — how am I to express it?”

“How tiresome he is!” cried the countess.

“You will have it, then?”

“Yes, yes; a hundred times, yes!”

“Then I will venture. It is a sad thing to say, count, but his majesty is no longer amusable. The word is not of my originating, countess; it is Madame de Maintenon's.”

“There is nothing in that which hurts me, duke,” said Madame Dubarry.

“So much the better; then I shall feel at my ease. Well, the count, who discovers such precious elixirs, must —

“Find one which shall restore to the king the faculty of being amused.”

“Exactly.”

“Oh! duke, that is mere child's play — the a b c of our craft. Any charlatan can furnish you with a philter —

“Whose virtue,” continued the duke, “would be put to the account of madame's merit.”

“Duke!” exclaimed the countess.

“Oh! I knew you would be angry; but you would have it.”

“My lord duke,” replied Balsamo, “you were right. Look! the countess blushes. But just now we agreed that neither wounds nor love were to be treated of at present. A philter will not rid France of M. de Choiseul. In fact, if the king loved madame ten times more than he does, and that is impossible, M. de Choiseul would still retain the same influence over his mind which madame exerts over his heart.”

“Very true,” said the marshal; “but it was our only resource.”

“You think so?”

“Dame! find another.”

“Oh! that would be easy.”

“Easy! do you hear, countess? — these sorcerers stop at nothing.”

“Why should I stop, where the only thing necessary is simply to prove to the king that M. de Choiseul alone betrays him — that is to say, what the king would think betraying; for of course M. de Choiseul does not think he betrays him in acting as he does.”

“And what does he do?”

“You know as well as I do, countess; he supports the parliament in their revolt against the royal authority.”

“Certainly; but we must know by what means.”

“By the means of agents who encourage them by promising them impunity.”

“Who are the agents? We must know that.”

“Do you believe, for example, that Madame de Grammont is gone for any other purpose than to sustain the ardent, and warm the timid?”

“Certainly; she left for no other reason,” exclaimed the countess.

“Yes; but the king thinks it a simple exile.”

“It is true.”

“How can you prove to him that in this departure there is any tiling more than he supposes?”

“By accusing Madame de Grammont.”

“Ah! if there were nothing necessary but to accuse her, count!” said the marshal.

“But, unfortunately, the accusation must be proved,” added the countess.

“And if this accusation were proved, incontrovertibly proved, do you think M. de Choiseul would still be minister?”

“Certainly not,” said the countess.

“Nothing is necessary then but to discover the treachery of M. de Choiseul,” pursued Balsamo, with assurance; “and to display it clearly, precisely, and palpably before the eyes of his majesty.”

The marshal threw himself back upon an armchair, and laughed loud and long.

“Charming!” he exclaimed; “he stops at nothing! Discover M. de Choiseul in the act of committing treason! — that is all, nothing more!”

Balsamo remained calm and unmoved, waiting until the marshal's mirth had subsided.

“Come,” said Balsamo, “let us speak seriously, and recapitulate.”

“So be it.”

“Is not M. de Choiseul suspected of encouraging the revolt of the parliament-?”

“Granted; but the proof?”

“Is not M. de Choiseul supposed,” continued Balsamo, “to be attempting to bring about a war with England, in order that he may become indispensable?”

“It, is so believed; but the proof?”

“Is not M. de Choiseul the declared enemy of the countess, and does he not seek, by all possible means, to drag her from the throne I promised her?”

“Ah! all this is very true,” said the countess; “but once more I repeat, it must be proved. Oh! that I could prove it!”

“What is necessary for that? A mere trifle.”

The marshal gave a low whistle.

“Yes, a mere trifle!” said he, sarcastically.

“A confidential letter for example,” said Balsamo.

“Yes; that is all — a mere nothing.”

“A letter from Madame de Grammont would do, would it not, marshal?” continued the count.

“Sorcerer, my good sorcerer, find me such a one!” cried Madame Dubarry. “I have been trying for five years; I have spent a hundred thousand livres per annum, and have never succeeded.”

“Because you never applied to me, madame,” said Balsamo.

"How so?" said the countess.

"Without doubt, if you had applied to me, I could have assisted you."

"Could you? Count, is it yet too late?"

The count smiled.

"It is never too late," said he.

"Oh, my dear count!" said Madame Dubarry, clasping her hands.

"You want a letter, then?"

"Yes."

"From Madame de Grammont?"

"If it is possible."

"Which shall compromise M. de Choiseul on the three points which I have mentioned?"

"I would give — one of my eyes to see it."

"Oh! countess, that would be too dear; inasmuch as this letter — I will give it you for nothing."

And Balsamo drew a folded paper from his pocket.

"What is that?" asked the countess, devouring the paper with her eyes.

"Yes, what is that?" repeated the duke.

"The letter you wished for."

And the count, amid the most profound silence, read the letter, with which our readers are already acquainted; to his two astonished auditors.

As he read, the countess opened her eyes to their utmost width, and began to lose countenance.

"It is a forgery," said Richelieu, when the letter had been read. "Diable! we must take care."

"Monsieur, it is the simple and literal copy of a letter from the Duchesse de Grammont, which a courier, dispatched this morning from Rouen, is now carrying to the Duke de Choiseul at Versailles."

"Oh, heavens!" cried the marshal, "do you speak truly, Count Balsamo?"

"I always speak the truth, marshal."

"The duchesse has written such a letter?"

"Yes, marshal."

"She could not be so imprudent."

"It is incredible, I confess; but so it is."

The old duke looked at the countess, who had not the power to utter a single word.

“Well,” said she, at last, “I am like the duke, I can scarcely believe — excuse me, count — that Madame de Grammont, a woman of sense, should compromise her own position, and that of her brother, by a letter so strongly expressed. Besides, to know of such a letter, one must have read it — ”

“And then,” said the marshal, quickly, “if the count had read this letter, he would have kept it; it is a precious treasure.” Balsamo gently shook his head.

“Oh,” said he, “such a plan might suit those who have to break open letters in order to ascertain their contents — but not those who, like myself, can read through the envelopes. Fie upon you! Besides, what interest could I have in ruining M. de Choiseul and Madame de Grammont? You come to consult me, as friends, I presume, and I answer you in the same manner. You wish me to render you a service. I do so. You do not mean I suppose, to ask me the price of my consultation, as you would the fortune-tellers of the Quai de la Ferraille?”

“Oh, count!” said Madame Dubarry.

“Well, I give you this advice, and you seem not to comprehend it. You express a wish to overthrow M. de Choiseul, and you seek the means. I tell you one. You approve of it. I put it into your hands, and — you do not believe it.”

“Because — because — count — I — ”

“The letter exists, I tell you, for I have the copy.”

“But who told you of its existence, count?” cried Richelieu.

“Ah! that is a great word — who told me! You wish to know, in one moment, as much as I know; I, the worker, the sage, the adept who has lived three thousand seven hundred years.”

“Oh! oh!” said Richelieu, discouraged; “you are going to alter the good opinion I had formed of you, count.”

“I do not ask you to believe me, my lord duke, it is not I who brought you hither from the chase.”

“Duke, he is right,” said the countess. “Monsieur de Balsamo, pray do not be hasty.”

“He who has time never gets impatient, madame.”

“Will you be so good as to add another favor to those you have already conferred upon me, and tell me how these secrets are revealed to you.”

“I shall not hesitate, madame.” said Balsamo, speaking as if he was searching for each word separately; “the revelation is made to me by a voice.”

“By a voice!” cried the duke and the countess, simultaneously; “a voice tells you all?”

“Everything I wish to know.”

“Was it a voice that told you what Madame de Grammont has written to her brother?”

“I repeat, madame, it is a voice which tells me.”

“Miraculous!”

“Why, do you not believe it?”

“Well, no, count,” said the duke; “how do you imagine I can believe such things?”

“Would you believe it if I told you what the courier who carries the letter to M. de Choiseul is doing at this moment?”

“Dame!” exclaimed the countess.

“I would believe it,” cried the duke, “if I heard the voice; but messieurs the necromancers and magicians have the sole privilege of seeing and hearing the supernatural.”

Balsamo looked at Richelieu with a singular expression, which made a shudder pass through the veins of the countess, and even sent a slight chill to the heart of the selfish skeptic called the Duke de Richelieu.

“Yes,” said he, after a long silence, “I alone see and hear supernatural objects and sounds, but when I am in the society of people of rank — of your talent, duke, and of your beauty, countess, I display my treasures and share them. Would you wish greatly to hear the mysterious voice which speaks to me?”

“Yes,” said the duke, clenching his hands tightly that he might not tremble.

“Yes,” stammered the countess, trembling.

“Well, duke — well, countess, you shall hear it. What language shall it speak?”

“French, if you please,” said the countess. “I know no other; any other would frighten me.”

“And you, duke?”

“As madame said, French; for then I shall be able to repeat what the devil says, and to discover if he speaks the language of my friend, M. de Voltaire, correctly.”

Balsamo, his head drooping on his breast, crossed over to the door leading into the salon, which opened, as we are aware, on the stairs.

"Permit me," said he, "to conceal you here, in order not to expose you to the risk of discovery."

The countess turned pale, approached the duke, and took his arm.

Balsamo, almost touching the door leading to the stairs, made a step toward that part of the house in which Lorenza was, and pronounced in a low voice the following words, in the Arabic tongue, which we translate:

"My friend — do you hear me? If so, pull the cord of the bell twice."

Balsamo waited to see the effect of these words, and looked at the duke and countess, who opened their eyes and ears, and the more so that they could not understand what the count said.

The bell sounded twice distinctly.

The countess started from her sofa, and the duke wiped his forehead with his handkerchief.

"Since you hear me," continued Balsamo in the same language, "press the marble button which forms the right eye of the sculptured figure on the chimneypiece; the back will open; pass out by this opening, cross my room, descend the stairs, and enter the apartment adjoining the one in which I am."

Immediately a faint noise, like a scarcely audible breath, told Balsamo that his order had been understood and obeyed.

"What language is that?" asked the duke, pretending assurance. "The cabalistic language?"

"Yes, duke; the language used for the summoning of spirits."

"You said we should understand it.."

"What the voice said, but not what I say."

"Has the devil appeared yet?"

"Who spoke of the devil, duke?"

"Whom do you evoke but the devil?"

"Every superior spirit, every supernatural being, can he evoked."

"And the superior spirit, the supernatural being — ?"

Balsamo extended his hand toward the tapestry which closed the door of the next apartment.

"Is in direct communication with me, my lord."

"I am afraid," said the countess; "are you, duke?"

“ Faith, countess, I confess to you that I would almost as soon be at Mahon or at Philipsbourg.” “Madame la comtesse, and you, my lord duke, listen, since you wish to hear,” said Balsamo, severely, and he turned toward the door.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

The Voice.

THERE WAS a moment of silence, then Balsamo asked in French:

“Are you there?”

“I am,” replied a clear, silvery voice, which, penetrating through the hangings and the doors, seemed to those present rather like a metallic sound than a human voice.

“Peste! it is becoming interesting,” said the duke; “and all without torches, magic, or Bengal lights.”

“It is fearful,” whispered the countess.

“Listen attentively to my questions,” continued Balsamo.

“I listen with my whole being.”

“First tell me how many persons are with me at this moment?”

“Two.”

“Of what sex?”

“A man and a woman.”

“Read the man's name in my thoughts.”

“The Duke de Richelieu.”

“And the woman's?”

“Madame, the Countess Dubarry.”

“Ha!” said the duke, “this is becoming serious.”

“I never saw anything like it,” murmured the trembling countess.

“Good!” said Balsamo; “now read the first sentence of the letter I hold in my hand.”

The voice obeyed.

The duke and the countess looked at each other with astonishment bordering upon admiration.

“What has become of the letter I wrote at your dictation?”

“It is hastening on.”

“In which direction?”

“Toward the East.”

“Is it far?” — "Yes, very far.”

“Who is carrying it?”

“A man dressed in a green vest, leathern cap, and large boots.”

“On foot or on horseback?”

“On horseback.”

“What kind of a horse?”

“A piebald horse.”

“Where do you see him?”

There was a moment's silence.

“Look,” said Balsamo, imperatively.

“On a wide road, planted with trees.”

“But on which road?”

“I do not know; all the roads are alike.”

“What! does nothing indicate what road it is — no post nor inscription?”

“Slay! stay! A carriage is passing near the man on horseback; it crosses his course, coming toward me.”

“What kind of carriage?”

“A heavy carriage, full of abbes and soldiers.”

“A stage coach,” said Richelieu.

“Is there no inscription upon the carriage?” asked Balsamo.

“Yes.” said the voice.

“Read it.”

“Versailles is written in yellow letters upon the carriage, but the word is nearly effaced.”

“Leave the carriage and follow the Conner.”

“I do not see him now.”

“Why do you not see him?”

“Because the road turns.”

“Turn the corner, and follow him.”

“Oh! he gallops as quickly as his horse can fly! He looks at his watch.”

“What do you see in front of the horse?”

“A long avenue, splendid buildings, a large town.”

“Follow him still.”

“I follow.”

“Well?”

“The courier redoubles his blows, the animal is bathed in perspiration; its ironshod hoofs strike the pavement so loudly that all the passers-by look round. Ah! the courier dashes into a long street which descends. He turns to the right. He slackens his horse's speed. He stops at the door of a large hotel.”

“Now you must follow him attentively, do you hear?”

The voice heaved a sigh.

“You are tired. I understand.”

“Oh! crushed with weariness.”

“Cease to be fatigued, I will it.”

“Ah! Thanks.”

“Are you still fatigued?”

“No.”

“Do you still see the courier?”

“Yes, yes; he ascends a large stone staircase. He is preceded by a valet in blue and gold livery. He crosses large salons full of splendid gilt ornaments. He stops at a small lighted closet. The valet opens the door and retires.”

“What do you see?”

“The courier bows.”

“To whom does he bow?”

“He bows to a man seated at a desk, with his back toward the door.”

“How is the man dressed?”

“Oh, in full dress, as if he were going to a ball.”

“Has he any decoration?”

“He wears a broad blue ribbon crosswise on his breast.”

“His face?”

“I cannot see. Ah! — ”

“What?” — ” He turns.”

“What sort of features has he?”

“A keen glance, irregular features, beautiful teeth.”

“What age?”

“From fifty-five to fifty-eight years of age.”

“The duke!” whispered the countess to the marshal; “it is the duke!”

The marshal made a sign as if to say, “Yes, it is he; but listen.”

“Well?” asked Balsamo.

“The courier gives a letter to the man with the blue ribbon — ”

“You may say to the duke; he is a duke.”

“The courier,” repeated the obedient voice, “takes a letter from a leathern bag behind him, and gives it to the duke. The duke breaks the seal, and reads it attentively.”

“Well?”

“He takes a pen and a sheet of paper and writes.”

“He writes!” said Richelieu. “Diable! if we could only know what he writes?”

“Tell me what he writes,” commanded Balsamo.

“I cannot.”

“Because you are too far away. Enter the room. Are you there?”

“Yes.”

“Look over his shoulder.”

“I am doing so.”

“Now read.”

“The writing is bad, small, irregular.”

“Read it; I will it.”

The countess and Richelieu held their breaths.

“Read,” repeated Balsamo, more imperatively still.

“My sister,” said the voice, trembling and hesitating.

“It is the reply,” said the duchess and Richelieu in the same breath.

“My sister,” continued the voice, “do not be uneasy. The crisis took place, it is true; it was a dangerous one; that is true also; but it is over. I am anxiously awaiting to-morrow, for to-morrow it will be my turn to act on the offensive, and everything leads me to expect a decisive triumph.

“The parliament of Rouen, Milord X — , the petards, are all satisfactory.

“To-morrow, after my interview with the king, I shall add a post scriptum to my letter, and send it you by the same courier.”

Balsamo, with his left hand extended, seemed to drag each word painfully from the voice, while with the right hand he hastily took down those lines which M. de Choiseul was at the same time writing in his closet at Versailles.

“Is that all?” asked Balsamo.

“That is all.”

“What is the duke doing now?”

“He folds the paper on which he has just written, and puts it into a small portfolio, which he takes from the pocket in the left side of his coat.”

“You hear,” said Balsamo, to the almost stupefied countess. — " Well?”

“Then he sends away the courier.”

“What does he say to him?”

"I only heard the end of the sentence."

"What was it?"

"'At one o'clock at the postern gate of Trianon.' The courier bows and retires."

"Yes," said Richelieu, "he makes an appointment to meet the courier when his audience is over, as he says in his letter."

Balsamo made a sign with his hand to command silence.

"What is the duke doing now?" he asked.

"He rises. He holds the letter he has received in his hand. He goes straight toward his bed, enters the passage between it and the wall, and presses a spring which opens an iron box. He throws the letter into the box and closes it.

"Oh!" cried the countess and the duke, turning pale, "this is in truth magical."

"Do you know now what you wish to know, madame?" asked Balsamo.

"Count," said Madame Dubarry, approaching him with terror, "you have rendered me a service which I would pay with ten years of my life, or rather, which I can never pay. Ask what you wish."

"Oh! madame, you know we have already an account."

"Speak; say what you wish."

"The time has not yet come."

"Well, when it comes, if it were a million — "

Balsamo smiled.

"Oh! countess," exclaimed the marshal, "you should rather ask the count for a million. Cannot a man who knows what he knows, and who sees what he sees, discover diamonds and gold in the bosom of the earth as easily as he discovers the thoughts in the heart of man?"

"Then, count," said the countess, "I bow myself before you in my weakness."

"No, countess, one day you will acquit your debt toward me. I shall give you the opportunity."

"Count," said Richelieu to Balsamo, "I am conquered — crushed. I believe."

"As Saint Thomas believed, duke. I do not call that believing, but seeing."

"Call it what you will. I will make the amends honorable; and, in future, if I am asked about sorcerers, I shall know what to say."

Balsamo smiled.

“Madame,” said he to the countess, “will you permit me to do one thing now?”

“Speak.”

“My spirit is wearied. Let me restore it to liberty by a magic formula.”

“Do so, sir.”

“Lorenza.” said Balsamo, in Arabic, “thanks, I love you; return to your apartment by the same way you came, and wait for me. Go, my beloved.”

“I am very tired,” replied in Italian the voice, softer still than even during the evocation. “Hasten, Acharat.”

“I come,” and the footsteps died away in the distance with the same rustling noise with which they had approached.

Then Balsamo, after a few moments' interval, during which he convinced himself of Lorenza's departure, bowed profoundly but with majestic dignity to his visitors, who returned to their fiacre more like intoxicated persons than human beings gifted with reason, so much were they staggered and absorbed by the crowd of tumultuous ideas which assailed them.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

Disgrace.

THE NEXT MORNING, as the great clock of Versailles struck eleven, King Louis XV. issued from his apartment, and crossing the adjoining gallery, called in a loud and stern voice:

“Monsieur de la Vrilliere!”

The king was pale, and seemed agitated. The more he endeavored to hide his emotion, the more evident it became from the embarrassment of his looks, and the rigid tension of his usually impassible features.

A death-like stillness pervaded the long ranks of courtiers, among whom the Duke de Richelieu and Count Jean Dubarry might be seen, both seemingly calm, and affecting indifference or ignorance as to what was going on.

The Duke de la Vrilliere approached, and took a lettre-de-cachet from the king's hand.

“Is the Duke de Choiseul at Versailles?” asked the king.

“Yes, sire. He returned from Paris yesterday, at two o'clock in the afternoon.”

“Is he in his hotel, or in the chateau?”

“In the chateau, sire.”

“Carry this order to him, duke,” said the king.

A shudder ran through the whole file of spectators, who bent down whispering, like ears of corn under the blast of a tornado.

The king, frowning, as if he wished to add terror to this scene, haughtily entered his closet, followed by the captain of the guard and the commandant of the Light Horse.

All eyes followed M. de la Vrilliere, who slowly crossed the courtyard, and entered M. de Choiseul's apartments, rather uneasy at the commission with which he was charged.

During this time, loud and eager conversations, some threatening, some timid, burst forth on all sides around the old marshal, who pretended to be even more surprised than the others, but who, thanks to his cunning smile, duped no one.

M. de Vrilliere returned, and was immediately surrounded.

“Well?” cried every one.

“Well? It was an order of banishment.”

“Of banishment?”

“Yes; in due form.”

“Then you have read it, duke? '

“I have.”

“Positively?”

“Judge for yourselves.”

And the Duke de la Vrilliere repeated the following lines which he had treasured up with the retentive memory which marks the true courtier:

“My cousin — The displeasure which your conduct causes me obliges me to exile you to Chanteloup, whither you must repair in four-and-twenty hours from this time. I should have sent you further, had it not been for the particular esteem I feel for Madame de Choiseul, whose health is exceedingly interesting to me. Take care that your conduct does not force me to proceed to ulterior measures.”

A long murmur ran through the group which surrounded M. de la Vrilliere.

“And what did he reply to you, M. de St. Florentin?” asked Richelieu, affecting not to give to the duke either his new name or his new tide.

“He replied, 'Duke, I feel convinced of the great pleasure you feel in being the bearer of this letter.'”

“That was harsh, my poor duke,” said Jean.

“What could you expect, count? A man does not receive such a tile thrown upon his head without crying out a little.”

“Do you know what he will do?” asked Richelieu.

“Most probably obey.”

“Hum!” said the marshal.

“Here is the duke coming!” said Jean, who stood as sentinel at the window.

“Coining here?” exclaimed the Duke de la Vrilliere.

“I told you so, M. de St. Florentin.”

“He is crossing the courtyard,” continued Jean.

“Alone?”

“Quite alone; his portfolio under his arm.”

“Oh! good heavens!” said Richelieu, “if yesterday's scene should be repeated!”

“Do not speak of it; I shudder at the thought,” replied Jean.

He had scarcely spoken, when the Duke de Choiseul appeared at the entrance of the gallery with head erect and confident look, alarming his enemies, or those who would declare themselves such on his disgrace, by his calm and piercing glance.

As no one expected this step after what had happened, no one opposed his progress.

“Are you sure you read correctly, duke?” asked Jean.

“Parbleu!”

“And he returns after such a letter as you have described?”

“Upon my honor, I cannot understand it.”

“The king will, send him to the Bastille.”

“That would cause a fearful commotion!”

“I should almost pity him.”

“Look! he is going to the king. It is incredible.”

In fact, without paying attention to the show of resistance which the astounded usher offered, M. de Choiseul entered the king's closet. Louis, on seeing him, uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

The duke held his lettre-de-cachet in his hand, and showed it to the king almost smilingly.

“Sire,” said he, “as your majesty had the goodness to forewarn me yesterday, I have, indeed, received a letter to-day.”

“Yes, sir,” replied the king.

“And as your majesty had the goodness yesterday to tell me not to look upon any letter as serious which was not ratified by the express words of the king, I have come to request an explanation.”

“It will be very short, my lord duke.” replied the king. “To-day, the letter is valid.”

“Valid?” said the duke. “So offensive a letter to so devoted a servant?”

“A devoted servant, sir, does not make his master play a ridiculous part.”

“Sire.” replied the minister, haughtily. “I was born near the throne, that I might comprehend its majesty.”

“Sir,” replied the king, in a severe voice, “I will not keep you in suspense. Yesterday evening you received a courier from Madame de Grammont in your closet at Versailles.”

“It is true, sire.”

“He brought you a letter.”

“Are a brother and sister forbidden to correspond?”

“Wait a moment, if you please. I know the contents of that letter.”

“Oh, sire!”

“Here it is. I took the trouble to copy it with my own hand.”

And the king handed to the duke an exact copy of the letter he had received.

“Sire!”

“Do not deny it, duke; you placed the letter in an iron coffer standing at your bedside.”

The duke became pale as a specter.

“That is not all,” continued the king, pitilessly; “you have replied to Madame de Grammont's letter. I know the contents of that letter also. It is there in your portfolio, and only wants the post scriptum, which you are to add when you leave me. You see I am well informed, am I not?”

The duke wiped his forehead, on which the large drops of perspiration were standing, bowed without uttering a word, and left the closet, tottering as if he had been struck with apoplexy. Had it not been for the fresh air which fanned his face, he must have fallen.

But he was a man of strong will. When he reached the gallery he had regained his strength, and with erect forehead passed the hedge of courtiers, and entered his apartments in order to burn and lock up several papers. A quarter of an hour afterward, he left the chateau in his carriage.

M. de Choiseul's disgrace was a thunderbolt which set all France in flames.

The parliament, sustained in reality by the tolerance of the minister, proclaimed that the State had lost its firmest pillar. The nobility supported him as being one of themselves. The clergy felt themselves soothed by this man, whose personal dignity, often carried even to the extent of pride, gave almost an appearance of sanctity to his ministerial functions.

The encyclopedist or the philosophical party, who were very numerous, and also very strong, because they were re-en forced by all the enlightened, clever, and caviling spirits of the age, cried out loudly when the government was taken from the hands of a minister who admired Voltaire, pensioned the encyclopedia, and preserved, by developing them in a more useful manner, the traditions of Madame de Pompadour, the female Mecaenas of the writers of the “Mercure” and of philosophy in general.

The people had far better grounds for complaint than any of the other malcontents. They also complained, but without reasoning, and, as they always do, they hit the truth and laid bare the bleeding wound.

M. de Choiseul, absolutely speaking, was a bad minister and a bad citizen, but relatively he was a paragon of virtue, of morality, and of patriotism. When the people, dying of hunger in the fields, heard of his majesty's prodigality and of Madame Dubarry's ruinous whims, when open warnings were sent him, such as “L'homme aux quarante ecus,” or advices like “Le Contrat Social,” and secret revelations like the “Nouvelles a la main,” and the “Idees singulieres d'un bon citizen.” they were terrified at the prospect of falling back into the impure hands of the favorite, less respectable than a collier's wife, as Bauveau said, and into the hands of the favorite's favorites; and wearied with so much suffering, they were alarmed to behold the future looking even blacker than the past.

It was not that the people, who had strong antipathies, had also strong sympathies. They did not like the parliament, because they who ought to have been their natural protectors had always abandoned them for idle inquiries, questions of precedence, or selfish interests; and because, dazzled by the borrowed light of the royal omnipotence, they imagined themselves something like an aristocracy, occupying an intermediate place between the nobility and the people.

They disliked the nobility from instinct, and from memory. They feared the sword as much as they hated the church. Their position could not therefore be affected by the disgrace of M. de Choiseul, but they heard the complaints of the nobility, of the clergy, of the parliament, and this noise joined to their own murmurs made an uproar which intoxicated them. The consequence of these feelings was regret, and a sort of a quasi popularity for the name of Choiseul.

All Paris — the word in this case can be justified by the facts — accompanied the exile on his way to Chanteloup as far as the town gates.

The people lined the road which the carriage was to take, while the members of the parliament and the court, who could not be received by the duke, stationed themselves in their carriages in front of the crowd of people, that they might salute him as he passed, and bid him adieu.

The procession was the densest at the Barriere d'Enfer, which is on the road to Touraine, at which place there was such a conflux of foot passengers, horsemen, and carriages, that the traffic was interrupted for several hours.

When the duke had crossed the barrier, he found himself escorted by more than a hundred carriages, which formed a sort of triumphal procession around him.

Acclamations and sighs followed him on all sides, but he had too much sense and penetration not to know that all this noise was not so much occasioned by regret for him personally, as by the fear of those unknown people who were to rise upon his ruin.

A short way from the barrier a postchaise, galloping along the crowded road, met the procession, and had it not been for the skill of the postilion, the horses, white with foam and dust, would have dashed against M. de Choiseul's equipage.

A head bent forward out of the carriage window, and II. de Choiseul leaned out also from his.

M. d'Aiguillon bowed profoundly to the fallen minister whose heritage he had come to canvass. M. de Choiseul threw himself back in the carriage; a single second had sufficed to wither the laurels which had crowned his disgrace.

But at the same moment, as a compensation no doubt, a carriage drawn by eight horses and bearing the royal arms of France, which was seen advancing along the cross-road from Sevres to St. Cloud, and which, whether by accident, or on account of the crowd, did not turn into the high-road, also crossed before M. de Choiseul's carriage. The dauphiness, with her lady of honor, Madame de Xnailles, was on the back seat of the carriage, on the front was Mademoiselle Andree de Taverney. M. de Choiseul, crimson with exultation and joy, bent forward out of the door, and bowed profoundly.

“Adieu, madame,” said he, in a low voice.

“Au revoir, M. de Choiseul,” replied the dauphiness, with an imperial smile, and a majestic contempt of all etiquette.

“Long live M. de Choiseul!” cried a voice, enthusiastically, after the dauphiness had spoken.

At the sound of the voice, Mademoiselle Andree turned round quickly.

“Make way! make way!” cried her highness's grooms, forcing Gilbert, pale as death, and pressing forward in his eagerness, to range himself with the other people on the road.

It was indeed our hero, who, in his philosophical enthusiasm, had cried out, “Long live M. de Choiseul!”

CHAPTER LXXXV.

The Duke D'aiguillon.

WHILE MELANCHOLY visages and red eyes were the order of the day on the road from Paris to Chanteloup, Luciennes was radiant with blooming faces and charming smiles.

It was because at Luciennes was enthroned, not a mere mortal, although the most beautiful and most adorable of mortals, as the poets and courtiers declared, but the real divinity which governed France.

The evening after M. de Choiseul's disgrace, therefore, the road leading to Luciennes was thronged with the same carriages which, in the morning, had rolled after the exiled minister. There were, besides, the partisans of the chancellor, and the votaries of corruption and self-interest, and altogether they made an imposing procession.

But Madame Dubarry had her police, and Jean knew, to a baron, the names of those who had strewn the last flowers over the expiring Choiseuls. He gave a list of these names to the countess, and they were pitilessly excluded, while the courage of the others in braving public opinion was rewarded by the protecting smile and the complete view of the goddess of the day. What joy and what congratulations echoed on all sides! Pressings of the hand, little smothered laughs, and enthusiastic applause, seemed to have become the habitual language of the inhabitants of Luciennes.

After the great throng of carriages, and the general crowd, followed the private receptions. Richelieu, the secret and modest hero, indeed, but yet the real hero of the day, saw the crowd of visitors and petitioners pass away, and remained the last in the countess's boudoir.

“It must be confessed,” said the countess, “that the Count Balsamo, or De Fenix, whichever name you give him, marshal, is one of the first men of the age. It would be a thousand pities if such sorcerers were still burned.”

“Certainly, countess, he is a great man,” replied Richelieu.

“And a very handsome man, too; I have taken quite a fancy for him, duke.”

“You will make me jealous,” said Richelieu laughing, and eager besides to direct the conversation to a more positive and serious subject. “The Count de Fenix would make a dreadful minister of police.”

“I was thinking of that,” replied the countess; “only it is impossible.”

“Why, countess?”

“Because he would render colleagues impossible.”

“How so?”

“Knowing everything — seeing into their hand —

Richelieu blushed beneath his rouge.

“Countess,” replied he, “if he were my colleague. I would wish him to see into mine always, and communicate the cards to you; for you would ever see the knave of hearts on his knees before the queen, and prostrate at the feet of the king.”

“Your wit puts us all to the blush, my dear duke,” replied the countess. “But let us talk a little of our ministry. I think you mentioned that you warned your nephew d'Aiguillon of what would take place.”

“He has arrived, madame, and with what Roman augurs would have called the best conjunction of omens possible; his carriage met Choiseul's leaving Paris.”

“That is indeed a favorable omen,” said the countess. “Then he is coming here?”

“Madame, I thought that if M. d'Aiguillon was seen at Luciennes at such a time, it would give rise to unpleasant comment; I begged him, therefore, to remain in the village, until I should send for him according to your orders.”

“Send for him immediately, then, marshal, for we are alone, or very nearly so.”

“The more willingly that we quite understand each other; do we not, countess?”

“Certainly, duke. You prefer war to finance, do you not? or do you wish for the marine?”

“I prefer war, madame; I can be of most service in that department.”

“True; I will speak of it to the king. You have no antipathies?”

“For whom?”

“For any colleagues his majesty might present to you.”

“I am the least difficult man in the world to live with, countess; but allow me to send for my nephew, since you are good enough to grant him the favor of an audience.”

Richelieu approached the window and looked into the courtyard, now illuminated by the last rays of the setting sun. He made a, sign to one of his footmen who was keeping his eye fixed upon the window, and who darted off as soon as he received the signal. Lights were now brought in.

Ten minutes after the footman had disappeared, a carriage rolled into the courtyard. The countess turned quickly toward the window.

Richelieu saw the movement, which seemed to him an excellent prognostic for M. d'Aiguillon's affairs, and consequently for his own.

“She likes the uncle,” said he to himself, “and she is in a fair way to like the nephew. We shall be masters here.”

While he was feasting on these chimerical visions, a slight noise was heard at the door, and the confidential valet-de-chambre, throwing it open, announced the Duke d'Aiguillon.

He was an extremely handsome and graceful nobleman, richly, and at the same time elegantly and tastefully, dressed. M. d'Aiguillon had passed his earliest prime, but he was one of those men who, whether judged by their looks or minds, seem young until old age renders them infirm.

The cares of government had traced no wrinkles on his brow; they had only enlarged the natural fold which seems to be the birthplace of great thoughts both in statesmen and in poets. His air and carriage were lofty and commanding, and his handsome features wore an expression at once of intelligence and melancholy, as if he knew that the hatred of ten millions of men weighed upon his head, but at the same time wished to prove that the weight was not beyond his strength.

M. d'Aiguillon had the most beautiful hands in the world; they looked white and delicate, even when buried in the softest folds of lace. A well-turned leg was prized very highly at that period, and the duke's was a model of manly elegance and aristocratic form. He combined the suavity of the poet with the nobility of the lord and the suppleness and ease of the dashing guardsman. He was thus a beau ideal for the countess in the three several qualities which the instinct of this beautiful sensualist taught her to love.

By a remarkable coincidence, or rather by a chain of circumstances skillfully contrived by M. d'Aiguillon, these two objects of public animadversion, the favorite and the courtier, had, with all their mutual advantages, never yet met each other face to face at court.

For the last three years M. d'Aiguillon had managed to be very busy either in Brittany or in his closet, and had not once shown himself at court, knowing well that a favorable or unfavorable crisis must soon take place. In the first case, it would be better to be comparatively unknown; in the second, to disappear without leaving any trace behind, and thus be able easily to emerge from the gulf under new auspices, and in a new character.

Another motive influenced his calculations — a motive winch is the main-spring of romance, but which nevertheless was the most powerful of all.

Before Madame Dubarry was a countess, and every evening touched the crown of France with her lips, she had been a lovely, smiling, and adored creature — she had been loved, a happiness she could no longer hope for, since she was feared.

Among all the young, rich, powerful, and handsome men who had paid court to Jeanne Vaubernier, among all the rhymers who had coupled her in their verses with the epithets of angel and divinity, the Duke d'Aiguillon had formerly figured in the first rank; but whether it was that the duke was not sufficiently ardent, or whether Mademoiselle Lange was not so easily pleased as her detractors pretended, or lastly, whether the sudden attachment of the king had separated two hearts ready to unite, is not known, but the fact remains that M. d'Aiguillon got his verses, acrostics, bouquets, and perfumes returned, and Mademoiselle Lange closed her door in the Rue des Petits Champs against him. The duke hastened to Brittany, suppressing his sighs; Mademoiselle Lange wafted all hers toward Versailles, to the Baron de Gonesse, that is, the king of France.

d'Aiguillon's sudden disappearance had troubled Madame Dubarry very little, for she feared the remembrances of the past; but when subsequently she saw the silent attitude of her former admirer, she felt at first perplexed, then astonished, and, being in a good position for judging of men, she ended by thinking him a man of profound tact and discretion.

For the countess this was a great distinction, but it was not all, and the moment was perhaps come when she might think d'Aiguillon a man of heart.

We have seen that the marshal, in all his conversations with Madame Dubarry, had never touched upon the subject of his nephew's acquaintance with Mademoiselle Lunge. This silence, from a man accustomed, as the old duke was, to say the most difficult things in the world, had much surprised and even alarmed the countess. She, therefore, impatiently awaited M. d'Aiguillon's arrival, to know how to conduct herself, and to ascertain whether the marshal had been discreet or merely ignorant.

The duke entered, respectful, but at the same time easy, and sufficiently master of himself to draw the distinction in his salutation between the reigning sultana and the court lady. By this discriminating tact he instantly gained a protectress quite disposed to find good perfect, and perfection wonderful.

M. d'Aiguillon then took his uncle's hand, and the latter, advancing toward the countess, said in his most insinuating voice:

“The Duke d'Aiguillon, madame. It is not so much my nephew as one of your most ardent servants whom I have the honor to present to you.”

The countess glanced at the duke as the marshal spoke, and looked at him like a woman, that is to say, with eyes which nothing can escape. But she saw only two heads bowing respectfully before her, and two faces erect, serene, and calm after the salutation was over.

“I know, marshal, that you love the duke,” said the countess. “You are my friend. I shall request M. d'Aiguillon, therefore, in deference to his uncle, to imitate him in all that will be agreeable to me.”

“That is the conduct I had traced out beforehand for myself, madame,” said d'Aiguillon, with another bow.

“You have suffered much in Brittany?” asked the countess.

“Yes, madame, and it is not yet over,” replied d'Aiguillon.

“I believe it is, sir; besides, there is M. de Richelieu, who will be a powerful assistance to you.”

d'Aiguillon looked at Richelieu as if surprised.

“Ah.” said the countess, “I see that the marshal has not yet had time to have any conversation with you. That is very natural, as you have just arrived from a journey. Well, you must have a thousand things to say to each other, and I shall therefore leave you, marshal, for the present. My lord duke, pray consider yourself at home here.”

So saying, the countess retired; but she did not proceed far. Behind the boudoir there opened a large closet filled with all sorts of fantastic baubles with which the king was very fond of amusing himself when he came to Luciennes. He preferred this closet to the boudoir, because in it one could hear all that was said in the next room. Madame Dubarry, therefore, was certain to hear the whole conversation between the duke and his nephew, and she calculated upon forming from it a correct and irrevocable opinion of the latter.

But the duke was not duped; he knew most of the secrets of every royal and ministerial residence. To listen when people were speaking of him was one of his means; to speak while others were overhearing him was one of his ruses.

He determined, therefore, still joyous at the reception which d'Aiguillon had met with, to proceed in the same vein, and to reveal to the favorite, under cover of her supposed absence, such a plan of secret happiness and of lofty power complicated with intrigues, as would present a double bait too powerful for a pretty woman, and above all for a court lady, to resist.

He desired the duke to be seated, and commenced:

“You see, duke, I am installed here.”

“Yes, sir, I see it.”

“I have had the good fortune to find the favor of this charming woman, who is looked upon as a queen here, and who is one in reality.” d'Aiguillon bowed.

“I must tell you, duke,” continued Richelieu, “what I could not say in the open street — that Madame Dubarry has promised me a portfolio!”

“Ah!” said d'Aiguillon, “that is only your desert, sir.”

“I do not know if I deserve it or not, but I am to have it — rather late in the day, it is true. Then, situated as I shall be. I shall endeavor to advance your interests, d'Aiguillon.”

“Thank you, my lord duke; you are a kind relative, and have often proved it.”

“You have nothing in view, d'Aiguillon?”

“Absolutely nothing, except to escape being degraded from my title of duke and peer, as the parliament insist upon my being.”

“Have you supporters anywhere?”

“Not one.”

“You would have fallen, then, had it not been for the present circumstances?”

“I should have bit the dust, my lord duke.”

“Ah! you speak like a philosopher. Diable! that is the reason I am so harsh, my poor d'Aiguillon, and address you more like a minister than an uncle.”

“My uncle, your goodness penetrates me with gratitude.”

“When I sent for you in such a hurry, you may be certain it was because I wished you to play an important part here. Let me see; have you reflected on the part M. de Choiseul played for ten years?”

“Yes; certainly his was an enviable position.”

“Enviable! Yes, enviable, when along with Madame de Pompadour he governed the king, and exiled the Jesuits; but very sad when, having quarreled with Madame Dubarry, who is worth a hundred Pompadours, he was dismissed from office in four and twenty hours. You do not reply.”

“I am listening, sir, and am endeavoring to discover your meaning.”

“You like M. de Choiseul's first part best, do you not?”

“Certainly.”

“Well, my dear duke, I have decided upon playing this part.”

d'Aiguillon turned abruptly toward his uncle:

“Do you speak seriously?” said he.

“Yes. Why not?”

“You intend to be a candidate for Madame Dubarry's favor?”

“Ah! diable! you proceed too fast. But I see you understand me. Yes, Choiseul was very lucky; he governed the king, and governed his favorite also. It is said he was attached to Madame de Pompadour — in fact, why not? Well, no, I cannot act the lover; your cold smile tells me plainly so! You, with your young eyes, look compassionately at my furrowed brow, my bending knees, and my withered hands, which were once so beautiful. In place of saying, when I was speaking of Choiseul's part, that I would play it, I should have said we will play it,”

“Uncle!”

“No, she cannot love me, I know it; nevertheless — I may confess it to you without fear, for she will never learn it! — I could have loved this woman beyond everything — but — ”

D'Aiguillon frowned. “But — ” said he.

“I have a splendid project,” continued the marshal. “This part, which my age renders impossible for me, I will divide into two.”

“Ha!” said d'Aiguillon.

“Some one of my family,” continued Richelieu, “will love Madame Dubarry. Parbleu! a glorious chance — such an accomplished woman!”

And Richelieu, in saying these words, raised his voice.

“You know it cannot be Fronsac. A degenerate wretch, a fool, a coward, a rogue, a gambler — duke, will you be the man?”

“I?” cried d'Aiguillon; “are you mad, uncle?”

“Mad! What! you are not already on your knees before him who gives you this advice? What! you do not bound with joy? You do not burn with gratitude? You are not already out of your senses with delight at the manner in which she received you? You are not yet mad with love? Go, go!” cried the old marshal, “since the days of Alcibiades there has been but one Richelieu in the world, and I see there will be no more after him.”

“My uncle,” replied the duke, with much agitation, either feigned, and in that case it was admirably counterfeited, or real, for the proposition was sudden, “my uncle. I perceive all the advantage you would gain by the position of which you speak; you would govern with the authority of M. de Choiseul, and I should be the lover who would constitute that authority. The plan is worthy of the cleverest man in France, but you have forgotten one thing in projecting it.”

“What!” cried Richelieu uneasily, “is it possible you do not lore Madame Dubarry? Is that it? — fool! — triple fool! — wretch! — is that it?”

“Ah! no, that is not it, my dear uncle,” cried d'Aiguillon, as if he knew that not one of his words was lost; “Madame Dubarry, whom I scarcely know, seems to me the most charming of women. I should, on the contrary, love Madame Dubarry madly, I should love her only too well; that is not the question.”

“What is it, then?”

“This, my lord duke. Madame Dubarry will never love me, and the first condition of such an alliance is love. How do you imagine the beautiful countess could distinguish among all the gentlemen of this brilliant court — surrounded as she is by the homage of so much youth and beauty — how should she distinguish one who has no merit, who is already no longer young, who is overwhelmed with sorrows, and who hides himself from all eyes because he feels that he will soon disappear forever? My uncle, if I had known Madame Dubarry in the period of my youth and beauty, when women admired in me all that is lovable in a man, then she might have given me a place in her memory. That would have been much. But now there is no hope — neither past, nor present, nor future. No, uncle, we must renounce this chimera. You have pierced my hart by presenting it to me in such bright and glowing colors.”

During this tirade, which was delivered with a fire which Mole might have envied, and Lekain would have thought worthy of imitation, Richelieu bit his lips, muttering to himself:

“Has the man guessed that the countess is listening? Peste! he is a clever dog. He is a master of his craft. In that case, I must take care!”

Richelieu was right; the countess was listening, and every word d'Aiguillon spoke sunk deep into her heart. She eagerly drank in the charm of this confession, and appreciated his exquisite delicacy in not betraying the secret of their former intimacy to his nearest confidant, for fear of throwing a shadow over a perhaps still dearly cherished portrait.

“Then you refuse?” said Richelieu.

“Oh! as for that, yes, my uncle, for unfortunately I see it is impossible.”

“But try, at least, unfortunate that you are!”

“And how?”

“You are here one of us — you will see the countess every day; please her, morbleu!”

“With an interested aim? Never! If I should be so unfortunate as to please her with this unworthy view, I should flee to the end of the world, for I should be ashamed of myself.”

Richelieu scratched his chin.

“The thing is settled,” said he to himself, “or d'Aiguillon is a fool.”

All at once a noise was heard in the courtyard, and several voices cried out, “The king!”

“Diable!” cried Richelieu, “the king must not see me here; I shall make my escape.”

“And I?” said the duke.

“It is different with you; he must see you. Remain; and, for God's sake, do not throw the handle after the ax.”

With these words Richelieu stole out by the back stairs, saying, as he left the room:

“Adieu till to-morrow.”

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

The King Divides the Spoils.

WHEN THE Duke d'Aiguillon was left alone, he felt at first somewhat embarrassed. He had perfectly understood all his uncle had said to him — perfectly understood that Madame Dubarry was listening — perfectly understood, in short, that, for a clever man, it was necessary in this conjuncture to seem a man of heart and to play alone that part in which the old marshal sought to obtain a share.

The king's arrival luckily interrupted the explanation which must have resulted from the puritanical declaration of M. d'Aiguillon.

The marshal was not a man to remain long a dupe, nor above all one who would make another's virtue shine with exaggerated brilliancy at the expense of his own.

But, being left alone, d'Aiguillon had time to reflect.

The king had in truth arrived. Already his pages had opened the door of the antechamber, and Zamore had darted toward the monarch, begging for bonbons — a touching familiarity which Louis, when he was in a bad temper, punished by sundry fillips on the nose or boxes on the ears, both exceedingly disagreeable to the young African.

The king installed himself in the Chinese cabinet; and what convinced d'Aiguillon that Madame Dubarry had not lost a word of his conversation with his uncle, was the fact that he, d'Aiguillon, overheard the entire interview between Madame Dubarry and the king.

His majesty seemed fatigued, like a man who has raised an immense weight. Atlas was less enfeebled when his day's work was done, and when he had held the world suspended on his shoulders for twelve hours.

Louis XV. allowed his favorite to thank, applaud, and caress him, and tell him the whole particulars of M. de Choiseul's departure, which amused him exceedingly.

Then Madame Dubarry ventured. It was fair weather for politics; and besides, she felt herself strong enough at that moment to have raised one of the four quarters of the world.

"Sire," said she, "you have destroyed, that is well; you have demolished, that is superb; but now you must think about rebuilding."

"Oh! it is done," said the king, carelessly.

"You have a ministry!"

"Yes."

"What! all at once, without breathing?"

"See what it is to want common sense. Oh! — woman that you are! — before sending away your cook, must you not, as you said the other day, have a new one in readiness?"

"Repeat to me that you have formed the cabinet."

The king raised himself upon the immense sofa on which he was lying rather than sitting, using the shoulders of the beautiful countess for his principal cushion.

"One would think, Jeannette," said he, "to hear you making yourself so uneasy, that you know my ministry, and wish to find fault with them, or propose another."

"Well," said the countess, "that would not be so absurd as you seem to imagine."

"Indeed! Then you have a ministry?"

"You have one, have you not?" replied she.

"Oh! it is my place to have one, countess. Let me see your candidates."

"By no means; tell me yours."

"Most willingly, to set you the example."

"In the first place, then, who have you for the navy, where that dear M. de Praslin was?"

"Ah! something new, countess; a charming man, who has never seen the sea."

"Who is it?"

"'Pon honor, it is a splendid idea. I shall make myself very popular, and I shall be crowned in the most distant seas — in effigy, of course."

"But who, sire? Who is it?"

"I would wager you do not guess in a thousand attempts. It is a member of parliament, my dear; the first president of the parliament of Besancon."

"M. de Boynes?"

"The same. Peste! how learned you are! You know all these people!"

“I cannot help it; you talk parliament to me the whole day. Why, the man would not know an oar if he saw it.”

“So much the better. M. de Praslin knew his duties too well, and made me pay dearly for all his naval constructions.”

“Well, the finance department, sire?”

“Oh! that is a different affair; I have chosen a special man.”

“A financier?”

“No; a soldier. The financiers have crushed me too long already.”

“Good heavens! And the war department?”

“Do not be uneasy; for that I have chosen a financier, Terray. He is a terrible scrutinizer of accounts! He will find errors in all Uncle Choiseul's additions. I may tell you that I had some idea of putting a wonderful man in the war department — every inch a man, as they say. It was to please the philosophers.”

“Good. But who? Voltaire?”

“Almost. The Chevalier de Muy — a Cato.”

“Oh, heaven! You alarm me.”

“It was all arranged. I had sent for the man, his commission was signed, he had thanked me, when my good or my evil genius — judge which — prompted me to ask him to come to Luciennes this evening to sup and chat with us.”

“Fie! Horrible!”

“Well, countess, that was exactly what de Muy replied.”

“He said that to you?”

“Expressed in other words, countess. He said that his most ardent wish was to serve the king, but as for serving Madame Dubarry, it was impossible.”

“Well, that was polite of your philosopher.”

“You must know, countess, I held out my hand to him — for his brevet, which I tore in pieces with a most patient smile, and the chevalier disappeared. Louis XIV. would have let the rascal rot in one of those ugly dens in the Bastille; but I am Louis XV., and I have a parliament which gives me the whip, in place of my giving it to the parliament. Ha!”

“No matter, sire,” said the countess, covering her royal lover with kisses, “you are not the less a clever man.”

“That is not what the world in general says. Terray is execrated.”

“Who is not? And for foreign affairs?”

“That honest fellow, Berlin, whom you know.”

“No.”

“Then whom you do not know.”

“But, among them all, I cannot find one good minister.”

“So be it; now tell me yours.”

“I will only tell you one.”

“You dare not tell me; you are afraid.”

“The marshal.”

“The marshal! What marshal?” said the king, making a wry face.

“The Duke de Richelieu.”

“That old man? That chicken-hearted wretch?”

“Good! The conqueror of Mahon a chicken-hearted wretch!”

“That old debauchee?”

“Sire, your companion.”

“An immoral man, who frightens all the women.”

“That is only since he no longer runs after them.”

“Do not speak to me of Richelieu; he is my raw-head-and-bloody-bones. The conqueror of Mahon took me into all the gaming-houses in Paris. We were lampooned. No! no! — Richelieu! The very name puts me beside myself.”

“You hate them so much?”

“Whom?”

“The Richelieus.”

“I abhor them.”

“All?”

“All. What a worthy duke and peer M. Fronsac makes. He has deserved the rack twenty times.”

“I give him up; but there are more Richelieus in the world than he.”

“Ah! yes; d'Aiguillon.”

“Well?”

The reader may judge if, at these words, the ears of the nephew were not strained in the boudoir.

“I ought to hate him more than all the others, for he hounds all the bawlers in France upon me; and yet — it is a weakness which I cannot conquer — he is bold and does not displease rue.”

“He is a man of spirit!” cried the countess.

"A brave man, and zealous in the defense of the royal prerogative. Hs is a model of a peer!"

"Yes, yes — a hundred times, yes! Make something of him."

The king looked at the countess and folded his arms.

"What, countess! Is it possible that you propose such a thing to me, when all France demands that I should exile and degrade this man?"

Madame Dubarry folded her arms in her turn.

"Just now," said she, "you called Richelieu chicken-hearted — the name belongs more properly to yourself."

"Oh, countess!"

"You are very proud because you have dismissed M. de Choiseul."

"Well, it was not an easy task."

"You have done it, and you have done well; but you are afraid of the consequences."

"I!"

"Of course. What do you accomplish by sending away M. de Choiseul?"

"Give the parliament a kick in the seat of honor."

"And you will not give them two? Diable! Raise both your feet — one after the other, be it understood. The parliament wished to keep Choiseul; you send him away. They want to send away d'Aiguillon; keep him."

"I do not send him away."

"Keep him — improved and considerably enlarged."

"You want an office for this firebrand?"

"I want a recompense for him who defended you at the risk of his position and fortune."

"Say of his life, for he will be stoned some fine morning, along with your friend Maupeou."

"You would encourage your defenders very much, if they could only hear you."

"They pay me back with interest, countess."

"Do not say so; facts contradict you in this case."

"Ah, well! But why this eagerness for d'Aiguillon?"

"Eagerness! I do not know him; I have seen and spoken to him to-day for the first lime."

"Ah! that is a different affair. Then it is from conviction of his merit — and I respect conviction in others, because I never have it myself."

“Then give Richelieu something in d'Aiguillon's name, since you will not give d'Aiguillon anything in his own.”

“Richelieu? nothing! Never, never, never!”

“Then something to M. d'Aiguillon, since you refuse Richelieu?”

“What! give him a portfolio! That is impossible at present.”

“I understand that; but after some time, perhaps. Remember that he is a man of resources and action, and that with Terray, d'Aiguillon, and Maupeou you will have the three heads of Cerberus. Remember, too, that your minister is only a jest which cannot last.”

“You are mistaken, countess, it will last three months.”

“In three months, then, I have your promise?”

“Oh! oh! countess.”

“That is enough; in the meantime, something for the present.”

“But I have nothing.”

“You have the light horse; M. d'Aiguillon is an officer — what is called a sword; give him your light horse.”

“Very well, he shall have them.”

“Thanks!” exclaimed the countess, transported with joy, “a thousand thanks!”

And M. d'Aiguillon could hear a very plebeian kiss resound on the cheeks of his majesty Louis XV.

“In the meantime,” said the king, “order supper to be served, countess.”

“No,” said she, “there is nothing here; you have overpowered me with politics. My people have made speeches and fireworks, but no supper.”

“Then come to Marly. I will take you with me.”

“Impossible! My poor head is splitting in pieces.”

“With headache?”

“Dreadful headache.”

“You must go to bed, countess.”

“I am just going to do so, sire.”

“Adieu! then.”

“Au revoir, rather.”

“I am somewhat like M. de Choiseul; I am dismissed.”

“Yes, but accompanied, feasted, cajoled,” said the giddy creature, pushing the king gently toward the door, and from thence to the foot of the stairs, laughing loudly, and turning round at each step.

On the peristyle the countess stopped, candle in hand.

“Countess,” said the king, turning round and ascending a step.

“Sire?”

“I trust the poor marshal will not die of it.”

“Of what?”

“Of the portfolio which he has missed.”

“How ill-natured you are!” said the countess, escorting him with another loud laugh.

And his majesty drove off, very much delighted with his last quolibot upon the duke, whom he really hated.

When Madame Dubarry returned to her boudoir, she found d'Aiguillon on his knees before the door, his hands clasped, his eyes ardently fixed upon her. She blushed.

“I have failed,” said she. “The poor marshal!”

“Oh, I know all!” said he; “I could hear — thanks, madame — thanks!”

“I thought I owed you that,” she replied, with a sweet smile; “but rise, duke, else I shall think your memory is as retentive as your mind is highly cultivated.”

“That may well be, madame; my uncle has told you I am nothing but your admiring and zealous servant.”

“And the king's; tomorrow you must go and pay your respects to his majesty — rise, I beg.” And she gave him her hand, which he kissed respect fully.

The countess seemed to be deeply moved, for she did not add a single word.

M. d'Aiguillon was also silent, as deeply moved as she. At last, Madame Dubarry, raising her head, said:

“Poor marshal, he must know this defeat.”

M. d'Aiguillon looked upon these words as a dismissal, and bowed.

“Madame,” said he, “I am going to him.”

“Oh, duke! unpleasant news is always soon enough told; do something better — sup with me!”

The day was gained. d'Aiguillon, as we have seen, was a lucky man.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

The Antechambers of The Duke De Richelieu.

M. DE RICHELIEU, like all the courtiers, had a hotel at Versailles, one at Paris, a house at Marly, and another at Luciennes; a residence, in short, near each of the palaces or residences of the king.

Louis XIV., when he multiplied his places of residence so much, had imposed on all men of rank — on all those privileged to attend at the grand and little receptions and levees, the obligation of being very rich, that they might keep pace at once with the splendor of his household, and the flights of his whims.

At the period of the disgrace of MM. de Choiseul and de Praslin, M. de Richelieu was living in his house at Versailles; and it was there that he returned after having presented his nephew to Madame Dubarry at Luciennes.

Richelieu had been seen in the forest of Marly with the countess, he had been seen at Versailles after the minister's disgrace, his long and secret audience at Luciennes was known; and this, with the indiscretions of Jean Dubarry, was sufficient for the whole court to think themselves obliged to go and pay their respects to M. de Richelieu.

The old marshal was now going in his turn to inhale that delightful incense of praises, flatteries, and caresses, which every interested person offered without discrimination to the idol of the day.

M. de Richelieu, however, was far from expecting all that was to happen to him; but he rose that morning with the firm resolution of closing his nostrils against the incense, as Ulysses closed his ears with wax against the songs of the sirens. The result which he expected could not be known until next day, when the nomination of the new minister would be announced by the king himself.

Great was the marshal's surprise therefore when he awoke, or rather, was awakened by the loud noise of carriages, to hear from his valet that the courtyards of the hotel, as well as the anterooms and salons, were filled with visitors.

“Oh!” said he, “it seems I make some noise already.”

“It is still early, my lord marshal,” said his valet-de-chambre, seeing the duke's haste in taking off his nightcap.

“Henceforward,” replied the duke, “there will be no such word as early for me, remember that.”

“Yes, sir.”

“What did you reply to the visitors?”

“That you were not up yet.”

“Nothing more?”

“Nothing more.”

“That was exceedingly stupid. You should have added that I was late up last night, or better still, you should have — let me see, where is Rafte?”

“M. Rafte is asleep,” said the valet.

“What! asleep! let him be called, the wretch!”

“Well,” said a fresh and smiling old man, who appeared at the door, “here is Rafte; what is he wanted for?”

All the duke's bombast ceased at these words.

“Ah! I was certain that you were not asleep.”

“And if I had been asleep, where would have been the wonder? It is scarcely daylight.”

“But, my dear Rafte, you see that I do not sleep.”

“That is another thing, you are a minister — how should you sleep?”

“Oh! now you are going to scold me,” said the marshal, making a wry face before the glass; “are you not satisfied?”

“I! What benefit is it to me? You will fatigue yourself to death and then you will be ill. The consequence will be that I shall have to govern the state, and that is not so amusing, sir.”

“How old you are gelling, Rafte!”

“I am just four years younger than yourself, sir. Yes. I am getting old.”

The marshal stamped with impatience.

“Did you come through the antechambers?” asked he.

“Yes.”

“Who is there?”

“All the world.”

“What do they speak of?”

“Every one is telling what favors he is going to ask from you.”

“That is very natural. But what did you hear about my appointment?”

“Oh! I would much rather not tell you that.”

“What! Criticisms already?”

“Yes, and from those who have need of your assistance! What will they say, sir, whose assistance you need?”

“Ah! Rafte,” said the old man, affecting to laugh, “those who would say you flatter me — ”

“Well, sir,” said Rafte, “why the devil did you harness yourself to this wagon called a ministry? Are you tired of living and of being happy?”

“My dear fellow, I have tasted everything but that.”

“Corbleu! you have never tasted arsenic! Why do you not take some in your chocolate, from curiosity?”

“Rafte, you are an idle dog; you think that, as my secretary, you will have more work, and you shrink — you confessed as much, indeed.”

The marshal dressed himself with care.

“Give me a military air,” said he to his valet, “and hand me my military orders.”

“It seems we are in the war department?” said Rafte.

“Good heavens! yes. It seems we are there.”

“Oh I But I have not seen the king's appointment,” continued Rafte; “it is not confirmed yet.”

“The appointment will come in good time, no doubt.”

“Then, no doubt is the official word to-day?”

“You become more disagreeable, Rafte, as you get older. You are a formalist, and superstitiously particular. If I had known that, I would not have allowed you to deliver my inauguration speech at the Academic; that made you pedantic.”

“But listen, my lord; since we are in the government, let us be regular. This is a very odd affair.”

“What is odd?”

“Monsieur the Count de la Vaudraye, whom I met just now in the street, told me that nothing had yet been settled about the ministry.”

Richelieu smiled.

“M. de la Vaudraye is right.” said he. “But have you already been out, then?”

“Pardieu! I was obliged. This cursed noise of carriages awoke me; I dressed, put on my military orders also, and took a turn in the town.”

“Ah! M. Rafte makes merry at my expense.”

“Oh! my lord, God forbid. But —

“But what?”

“On my walk. I met some one.”

“Whom?”

“The secretary of the Abbe Terray.”

“Well?”

“Well! he told me that his master was appointed to the war department.”

“Oh! ho!” said Richelieu, with his eternal smile.

“What does monseigneur conclude from this?”

“That if M. Terray is appointed to the war department. I am not; that if he is not, I may perhaps be.”

Rafte had satisfied his conscience; he was a bold, indefatigable, ambitious man, as clever as his master, and much better armed than he, for he knew himself to be of low origin and dependent, two defects in his coat of mail which for forty years he had exercised all his cunning, strength, and acuteness to obviate. When Rafte saw his master so confident, he believed he had nothing more to fear.

“Come, my lord,” said he, “make haste; do not oblige them to wait too long; that would be a bad commencement.”

“I am ready; but tell me once more who is there?”

“Here is the list.”

He presented a long list to his master, who saw with increasing satisfaction the names of the first among the nobility, the law, and the finance.

“Suppose I should be popular, hey. Rafte?”

“We are in the age of miracles,” replied the latter.

“Ha! Taverney!” said the marshal, continuing to peruse the list. “What does he come here for?”

“I have not the least idea, my lord marshal; but come, make your entree,” and the secretary, with an authoritative air, almost pushed his master into the grand salon. Richelieu ought to have been satisfied; his reception might have contented the ambition of a prince of the blood royal. But the refined cunning and craft which characterized the period, and particularly the class of society we are speaking of, only too well assisted Richelieu's unlucky star, which had such a disagreeable contretemps in store for him.

From propriety and respect for etiquette, all this crowded levee abstained from pronouncing the word minister before Richelieu; some were bold enough to venture as far as the word congratulation, but they knew that they must pass quickly over the word, and that Richelieu would scarcely reply to it.

For one and all, this morning visit was a simple demonstration of respect, a mere expression of good-will; for at this period such almost imperceptible shades of policy were frequently understood and acted upon by the general mass of the community. There were certain of the courtiers who even ventured, in the course of conversation, to express some wish, desire, or hope.

The one would have wished, he said, to have his government rather nearer Versailles; and it gratified him to have an opportunity of speaking on the subject to a man of such great influence as M. de Richelieu.

Another said he had been three times forgotten by M. de Choiseul in the promotions of the knights of the order, and he reckoned upon M. de Richelieu's obliging memory to refresh the king's, now that there existed no obstacle in the way of his majesty's good-will. In short, a hundred requests more or less grasping, but all veiled by the highest art, were preferred to the delighted ears of the marshal.

Gradually the crowd retired; they wished, as they said, to leave the marshal to his important occupations.

One man alone remained in the salon; he had not approached as the others had; he had asked for nothing; he had not even presented himself.

When the courtiers had gone, this man advanced toward the duke with a smile upon his lips.

“Ah! Monsieur de Taverney!” said the marshal; “I am enchanted to see you, truly enchanted.”

“I was waiting, duke, to pay you my compliments, and to offer you my sincere congratulations.”

“Ah! indeed? and for what?” replied Richelieu, for the cautious reserve of his visitors had imposed upon him the necessity of being discreet, and even mysterious.

“On your new dignity, duke.”

“Hush, hush!” said the marshal, “let us not speak of that; nothing is settled; it is a mere rumor.”

“Nevertheless, my dear marshal, there are many people of my opinion, for your salons were full.”

“In truth, I do not know why.”

“Oh! I know very well.”

“Why then? Why?”

“One word from me.”

“What word?”

“Yesterday I had the honor of paying my respects to the king at Trianon. His majesty spoke to me of my children, and ended by saying; “You know M. de Richelieu, I think; pay your compliments to him.”

“Ah! his majesty said that?” replied Richelieu, with a glow of pride, as if these words had been the official brevet, the destination of which Rafte doubted, or at least deplored its delay.

“So that,” continued Taverney, “I soon suspected the truth; in fact, it was not difficult to do so, when I saw the eagerness of all Versailles; and I hastened to obey the king by paying my compliments to you, and to gratify my own feelings by reminding you of our old friendship.”

The duke had now reached a pitch of intoxication. It is a defect in our nature from which the highest minds cannot always preserve themselves. He saw in Taverney only one of those expectants of the lowest order — poor devils who had fallen behind on the road of favor, who are useless even as proteges, useless as acquaintances, and who are reproached with coming forth from their obscurity, after a lapse of twenty years, to warm themselves at the sun of another's prosperity.

“I see what you are aiming at,” said the marshal, harshly; “you have some favor to ask of me.”

“You have said it, duke.”

“Ah!” grumbled Richelieu, seating himself on, or rather plumping into, the sofa.

“I told you I had two children,” continued Taverney, pliant and cunning, for he perceived the coolness of his great friend, and therefore only advanced the more eagerly; “I have a daughter whom I love very dearly, and who is a model of virtue and beauty. She is placed with her highness the dauphiness, who has been condescending enough to grant her her particular esteem. Of my beautiful Andree, therefore, I need not speak to you. Her path is smoothed; her fortune is made. Have you seen my daughter? Did I not once present her to you somewhere? Have you not heard of her?”

“Pshaw! — I don't know,” said Richelieu, carelessly, “perhaps so.”

“No matter,” pursued Taverney, “there is my daughter settled. For my own part, I want nothing; the king grants me a pension upon which I can live. I confess I would like to have some emolument to enable me to rebuild Maison-Rouge, where I wish to end my days, and with your interest and my daughter's — ”

“Ha!” thought Richelieu, who until now had not listened, so lost was he in contemplation of his grandeur, but whom the words, “my daughter's interest,” had roused from his reverie. “Oh! ho! your daughter! Why, she is a young beauty who annoys our good countess; she is a little scorpion who is sheltering herself under the wings of the dauphiness, in order to bite some one at Luciennes. Come, I will not be a bad friend, and as for gratitude, this dear countess who has made me a minister shall see if I am wanting in time of need.” Then aloud:

“Proceed,” said he to the Baron de Taverney in a naughty tone.

“Faith, I am near the end,” replied the latter, promising himself to laugh in his sleeve at the vain marshal if he could only get what he wanted from him.

“I am anxious, therefore, only about my son Philip, who bears a lofty name, but who will never be able to support it worthily unless some one assists him. Philip is a bold and thoughtful youth; rather too thoughtful, perhaps, but that is the result of his embarrassed position. You know, the horse which is reined in too tightly droops its head.”

“What is all this to me?” thought Richelieu, giving most unequivocal signs of weariness and impatience.

“I want some one,” continued Taverney remorselessly, “some one in authority like yourself, to procure a company for Philip. Her highness the dauphiness, on entering Strasbourg, raised him to the rank of captain, but he still wants a hundred thousand livres to enable him to purchase a company in some privileged regiment of cavalry. Procure that for me, my powerful friend.”

“Your son,” said Richelieu, “is the young man who rendered the dauphiness a service, is he not?”

“A most essential service,” replied Taverney; “it was he who forced the last relay for her royal highness from that Dubarry who wanted to seize it by force.”

“Oh! oh!” thought Richelieu, “that is just it; the most violent enemies of the countess. He comes at the right time, this Taverney! He advances claims which are sufficient to damn him forever.”

“You do not answer, duke?” said Taverney, Fathered soured by the marshal's obstinate silence.

“It is perfectly impossible, my dear M. de Taverney,” replied the marshal, rising to show that the audience was over.

“Impossible? Such a trifle impossible? An old friend tell me that?”

“Why not? Is it any reason, because you are a friend, as you say, that you should seek to make me commit treason both against friendship and justice? You never came to see me for twenty years, for during that time I was nothing; now that I am a minister, you come.”

“M. de Richelieu, it is you who are unjust at this moment.”

“No, my dear friend, no; I do not wish to see you dangling in my antechambers; I am a true friend, and therefore —

“You have some reason for refusing me, then?”

“I!” exclaimed Richelieu, much alarmed at the suspicion Taverney might perhaps form; “I! a reason!”

“Yes; I have enemies.”

The duke might have replied what he thought, but that would have been to discover to the baron that he tried to please Madame Dubarry from gratitude — it would have been to confess that he was the minister of the favorite; and that the marshal would not have confessed for an empire. He therefore hastily replied:

“You have no enemy, my dear friend; but I have many. To grant requests at once, without examining claims, would expose me to the accusations of continuing the Choiseul system. My dear sir, I wish to leave behind some trace of my administration of affairs. For twenty years I have projected reforms, improvements, and now they shall blossom. Favoritism is the ruin of France; I will protect merit. The writings of our philosophers are bright torches, whose light has not shone for me in vain; they have dissipated all the mists of ignorance and superstition which brooded over the past, and it was full time it should be so, for the well-being of the state. I shall therefore examine your son's claims neither more nor less than I should do those of any other citizen. I must make this sacrifice to my conscience — a grievous sacrifice, no doubt, but which, after all, is only that of one man for the benefit of three hundred thousand. If your son, M. Philip de Taverney, proves that, he merits my favor, he shall have it, not because his father is my friend, not because he bears the name he does, but because he is a man of merit. That is my plan of conduct."

"You mean your system of philosophy," replied the old baron, biting his nails with rage, and adding to his anger by reflecting how much humiliation and how many petty cowardices this interview had cost him.

"Philosophy, if you will, sir; it is a noble word."

"Which dispenses good things, marshal, does it not?"

"You are a bad courtier!" said Richelieu, with a cold smile.

"Men of my rank are courtiers only of the king."

"Oh! M. Rafte, my secretary, has a thousand of your rank in my antechambers everyday," replied Richelieu; "they generally come from some obscure den or other in the provinces, where they have learned to be rude to their pretended friends while they preach concord."

"Oh! I am well aware that a Maison-Rouge, a title which dates from the crusades, does not understand concord so well as a Vignerol fiddler."

The marshal had more tact than Taverney. He could have had him thrown out of the windows, but he only shrugged his shoulders and replied:

"You are rather behind the time, most noble scion of the crusades; you only remember the calumnious memoir presented by parliament in 1720, and have not read that of the peers and dukes in reply. Be kind enough to walk into my library, my dear sir; Rafte will give it to you to read."

As he was bowing his antagonist out with this apt repartee, the door opened, and a man entered noisily, crying:

"Where is my dear duke?"

This man, with ruddy visage, eyes dilated with satisfaction, and joyous air, was neither more nor less than Jean Dubarry.

On seeing this new-comer, Taverney started back with surprise and vexation.

Jean saw the movement, recognized the face, and turned his back.

"I understand," said the baron, quietly, "and I shall retire. I leave the minister in most distinguished company."

And he left the room with dignity.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

Richelieu Is Disabused.

FURIOUS AT this extremely provoking exit, Jean made two steps after the baron; then, returning to the marshal, he said, shrugging his shoulders:

“You receive such people here?”

“Oh! my dear sir, you mistake; on the contrary, I send such people away.”

“Do you know who this gentleman is?”

“Alas! Yes.”

“No, but do you know really?”

“He is a Taverney.”

“He is a man who wishes to make his daughter the king's favorite —

“Oh, come!”

“A man who wishes to supplant us, and who takes all possible means to do so. But Jean is there, and Jean has his eyes about him.”

“You think he wishes — ”

“It is a very difficult matter to see what he wishes, is it not? One of the dauphin's party, my dear sir; — and they have their little stabber too.”

“Bah!”

“A young man, who looks quite ready to fly at people's throats — a bully, who pinks Jean's shoulder — poor Jean!”

“Yours? Is it a personal enemy of yours, my dear count?” asked Richelieu, feigning surprise.

“Yes; he was my adversary in that affair of the relay, you know.”

“Indeed! What a strange sympathy. I did not know that, and yet I refused all his demands; only, if I had known, I should not only have refused him but kicked him out. But do not be uneasy, count, I have now this worthy bully under my thumb, and he shall find it out to his cost.”

“Yes, you can cure him of his taste for attacking people on the highway. For in fact — hah! by-the-by, I have not yet congratulated you.”

“Why, yes, count; it seems the affair is definitely settled.”

“Oh! it is all completed. Will you permit me to embrace you?”

“With all my heart.”

“Faith, there was some trouble; but the trouble is nothing when you succeed. You are satisfied, are you not?”

“Shall I speak frankly? Yes; for I think I can be useful.”

“No doubt of that. But it is a bold stroke; there will be some growling.”

“Am I not liked by the public?”

“You? Why, there is no question of you, either one way or other; it is he who is execrated.”

“He?” said Richelieu, with surprise; “who? he?”

“Of course,” interrupted Jean. “Oh! the parliament will revolt, it will be a second edition of the flagellation of Louis XIV. They are whipped, duke, they are whipped.”

“Explain.”

“Why, it explains itself. The parliament of course hate the author of their persecutions.”

“Ah! you think that?”

“I am certain of it, as all France is. No matter, duke, it was a capital stroke of you to send for him that way, just at the very heat of the affair.”

“Whom? Whom, duke? I am on thorns — I do not understand one word of what you say.”

“Why, I speak of M. d'Aiguillon, your nephew.”

“Well! what then?”

“Well, I say it was well-advised of you to send for him.”

“Ah! very good, very good. You mean to say he will assist me?”

“He will assist us all. Do you know he is on the best terms with little Jeanne?”

“Oh! indeed?”

“On the best terms. They have already had a chat together, and understand each other perfectly, as it seems to me.” — "You know that?”

“Why, I saw D'Aiguillon's carriage leave Luciennes late yesterday evening, and as he only arrived yesterday morning in Paris, it seems to me that he must be a great favorite with Jeanne to obtain an audience so early.”

“Yes, yes,” said Richelieu, rubbing his hands; “he must have supped there. Bravo, d'Aiguillon!”

“And so there you are all three, like Orestes and Pylades, with the addition of another Pylades.”

At this moment, and as the marshal was rubbing his hands with great glee, d'Aiguillon entered the salon.

The nephew saluted his uncle with an air of condolence which was sufficient to enable Richelieu, without understanding the whole truth, at least to guess the greatest part of it.

He turned pale, as though he had received a mortal wound. It flashed across his mind that at court there exist neither friends nor relatives, and that every one seeks only their own aggrandizement.

“I was a great fool!” thought he. “Well, d'Aiguillon?” continued he aloud, repressing a deep sigh.

“Well, marshal?”

“It is a heavy blow to the parliament,” said Richelieu, repeating Jean's words.

d'Aiguillon blushed.

“You know it?” said he.

“The count has told me all,” replied Richelieu; “even your late stay at Luciennes last night. Your appointment is a triumph for my family.”

“Be assured, marshal, of my extreme regret.”

“What the devil does he mean by that?” said Jean, folding his arms.

“Oh, we understand each other.” interrupted Richelieu; “we understand each other.”

“That is a different affair; but for my part, I do not understand you. Regret! Ah! yes, because he will not be recognized as minister immediately — yes, yes, I see.”

“Oh! there will be an interim!” said the marshal, feeling a ray of hope — that constant guest in the heart of the ambitious man and the lover — once more dawn in his breast.

“Yes, marshal, an interim.”

“But, in the meantime,” cried Jean, “he is tolerably well paid; the finest command in Versailles.”

“Ah! a command?” said Richelieu, pierced by a new wound.

“M. Dubarry perhaps exaggerates a little,” said the Duke d'Aiguillon.

“But, in one word, what is this command?”

“The king's light horse.”

Richelieu again felt his furrowed cheeks grow pale.

“Oh! yes,” said he, with a smile which it would be impossible to describe; “yes, it is indeed a trifling appointment for such a charming man.

But what can you expect, duke — the loveliest woman in the world, were she even the king's favorite, can only give what she has.”

It was now d'Aiguillon's turn to grow pale.

Jean was scrutinizing the beautiful Murillus which adorned Richelieu's walls.

Richelieu slapped his nephew on the shoulder.

“Luckily,” said he, “you have the promise of approaching advancement. Accept my congratulations, duke — my sincere compliments. Your address, your cleverness in negotiations, is only equaled by your good fortune. Adieu, I have some business to transact. Do not forget me in the distribution of your favors, my dear minister.”

d'Aiguillon only replied:

“Your interests and mine, my lord marshal, are henceforth one and the same.”

And, saluting his uncle, he left the room with the dignity which was natural to him; thus escaping from one of the most embarrassing positions he had ever experienced in a life strewn with so many difficulties.

“An admirable trait in d'Aiguillon's character,” said Richelieu, the moment the former had disappeared, to Jean, who was rather at a loss to know what to think of this exchange of politeness between the nephew and uncle, “and one that I admire particularly, is his artlessness. He is at once frank and high-spirited; he knows the court, and is withal as simpleminded as a girl.”

“And then he loves you so well!” said Jean. — ” Like a lamb.”

“Oh.” said Jean, “he is more like your son than M. de Fronsac.”

“By my faith, yes, count — by my faith, yes.”

While replying thus, Richelieu kept walking round his chair in great agitation; he sought but could not find.

“Ah, countess,” he muttered, “you shall pay me for this!”

“Marshal,” said Jean, with a cunning look, “we four will realize that famous fagot of antiquity; you know, the one that could not be broken.”

“We four, my dear M. Jean! how do you understand that?”

“My sister as power. d'Aiguillon as authority, you as advice, and I as vigilance.”

“Very good! very good!

“And now let them attack my sister; I defy them all.”

“Pardieu!” said Richelieu, whose brain was boiling.

“Let them set up rivals now!” exclaimed Jean, in ecstasies with his plans and his visions of triumph.

“Oh!” said Richelieu, striking his forehead.

“Well, my dear marshal, what is the matter?”

“Nothing! I think your idea of a league admirable.”

“Is it not?”

“And I enter body and soul into your plans.”

“Bravo!”

“Does Taverney live at Trianon with his daughter?”

“No; he lives in Paris.”

“The girl is very handsome, my dear count.”

“If she were as beautiful as Cleopatra or — my sister, I do not fear her, now that we are leagued together.”

“You said Taverney lives in Paris, in the Rue St. Honore. I think?”

“I did not say Rue St. Honore; it is the Rue Coq-Heron in which he lives. Have you any plan of chastising these Taverneys, that you ask?”

“Yes, count, I think I have found a capital plan.”

“You are an incomparable man, but I must leave you now; I will to see what they say in town.”

“Adieu, then, count. Apropos, you have not told me who the new ministers are.”

“Oh, mere birds of passage; Terray, Berlin, and I know not who else. Mere counters in the hands of d'Aiguillon — the real minister, though his appointment is deferred for a short time.”

“And perhaps indefinitely adjourned,” thought the marshal, directing his most gracious smile to Jean as an affectionate adieu.

Jean retired, Rafte entered. He had heard all, and knew how to conduct himself; all his suspicions were now realized. He did not utter a word to his master, he knew him too well. He did not even call the valet-de-chambre; he assisted him with his own hands to undress, and conducted him to his bed, in which the old marshal, shivering with fever, immediately buried himself, after taking a pill which his secretary made him swallow.

Rafte drew the curtains and retired. The antechamber was thronged with eager listening valets. Rafte took the head valet aside.

“Attend to the marshal carefully,” said he, “he is ill. He has had a serious vexation this morning; he was obliged to disobey the king.”

“Disobey the king!” exclaimed the alarmed valet.

"Yes, his majesty sent a portfolio to my lord, but as he was aware that he owed it to the solicitations of the Dubarry, he refused. Oh! it was a noble resolve, and the Parisians ought to build him a triumphal arch; but the shock was great, and our master is ill. Look to him carefully!"

After these words, whose circulating power he knew beforehand, Rafte returned to his closet.

A quarter of an hour afterward all Versailles was informed of the noble conduct and lofty patriotism of the marshal, who in the meantime slept soundly upon the popularity his secretary had gained for him.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

The Dauphin's Family Repast.

THE SAME DAY, about three o'clock, Mademoiselle Taverney left her apartment to attend upon the dauphiness, who was in the habit of being read to for a short time before dinner.

The abbe who had held the post of first reader to her royal highness no longer exercised his functions, as, for some time previous, ever since certain diplomatic intrigues in which he had displayed a very great talent, for business, he had employed himself entirely in important political affairs.

Mademoiselle Taverney therefore set out, dressed as well as circumstances would permit, to fulfill her office. Like all the guests at Trianon, she still suffered considerable inconvenience from the rather sudden installation in her new abode, and had not yet been able to arrange her furniture, or make the necessary provisions for establishing her modest household. She had therefore, on the present occasion, been assisted in her toilet by one of the femmes-de-chambre of Madame de Noailles, that starched lady of honor whom the dauphiness nicknamed Madame Etiquette.

Andree was dressed in a blue silk robe, with long waist, which fitted admirably to her slender figure. This robe opened in front, and displayed beneath a muslin skirt relieved with three falls of embroidery. Short sleeves, also of muslin, embroidered in the same manner as the dress, and festooned and tapering to the shoulder, were admirably in keeping with a habit shirt, worked a la paysanne, which modestly concealed her neck and shoulders. Her beautiful hair, which fell in long and luxuriant ringlets upon his shoulders, was simply tied with a ribbon of the same color as her dress, a mode of arrangement which harmonized infinitely better with the noble, yet modest and retiring air of the lovely young girl, and with her pure and transparent complexion never yet sullied by the touch of rouge, than the feathers, ornaments, and laces which were then in vogue.

As she walked, Andree drew on a pair of white silk mittens upon the slenderest and roundest fingers in the world, while the tiny points of her high-heeled shoes of pale blue satin left their traces on the gravel of the garden walk.

When she readied the pavilion of Trianon, she was informed that the dauphiness was taking a turn in the grounds with her architect and her head gardener. In the apartment of the first story overhead she could hear the noise of a turning lathe with which the dauphin was making a safety-lock for a coffer which he valued very highly.

In order to rejoin the dauphiness Andree had to cross the parterre, where, notwithstanding the advanced period of the season, flowers carefully covered through the night raised their pale beads to bask in the setting rays of a sun even paler than themselves. And as the evening was already closing in, for in that season it was dark at six o'clock, the gardener's apprentices were employed in placing the bell-glasses over the most delicate plants in each bed.

While traversing a winding alley of evergreens clipped into the form of a hedge, bordered on each side by beds of Bengal roses, and opening on a beautiful lawn, Andree all at once perceived one of these gardeners, who, when, he saw her, raised himself upon his spade, and bowed with a more refined and studied politeness than was usual in one of his station.

She looked, and in this workman recognized Gilbert, whose hands, notwithstanding his labor, were yet white enough to excite the envy of M. de Taverney.

Andree blushed in spite of herself; it seemed to her that Gilbert's presence in this place was too remarkable a coincidence to be the result of chance.

Gilbert repeated his bow, and Andree returned it, but without slackening her pace.

She was too upright and too courageous, however, to resist the promptings of her heart, and leave the question of her restless soul unanswered. She turned back, and Gilbert, whose cheek had already become as pale as death, and whose dark eye followed her retreating steps with a somber look, felt as if suddenly restored to life, and bounded forward to meet her.

“You here, M. Gilbert?” said Andree, coldly.

“Yes, mademoiselle.”

“By what chance?”

“Mademoiselle, one must live, and live honestly.”

“But do you know that you are very fortunate?”

“Oh! yes, mademoiselle, very fortunate,” said Gilbert.

“I beg your pardon; what did you say?”

“I said, mademoiselle, that I am, as you think, very fortunate.” “Who introduced you here?”

“M. de Jussieu, a protector of mine.”

“Ah!” said Andree, surprised; “then you know M. de Jussieu?”

“He is the friend of my first protector — of my master. M. Rousseau.”

“Courage, then, Monsieur Gilbert,” said Andree, making a movement to proceed.

“Do you find yourself better, mademoiselle?” asked Gilbert, in a trembling voice.

“Better? How so?” said Andree, coldly.

“Why — the accident?”

“Oh, yes, thank you. Monsieur Gilbert. I am better; it was nothing.”

“Oh! you wore nearly perishing,” said Gilbert, almost speechless with emotion, “the danger was terrible.”

Andree now began to think that it was high time to cut short this interview with a workman in the most public part of the royal park.

“Good-day, Monsieur Gilbert,” said she.

“Will mademoiselle not accept a rose?” said Gilbert, trembling, and the drops of perspiration standing on his forehead.

“But, sir,” replied Andree, “you offer me what is not yours to give.”

You Offer Me What Is Not Yours To Give

Gilbert, surprised and overwhelmed by this reply, could not utter a word. His head drooped, but as he saw Andree looking at him with something like a feeling of joy at having manifested her superiority, he drew himself up, tore a branch covered with flowers from the finest of the rose-trees, and began to pull the roses to pieces with a coolness and dignity which surprised and startled the young girl.

She was too just and too kind-hearted not to see that she had gratuitously wounded the feelings of an inferior who had unthinkingly committed a breach of propriety. But like all proud natures who feel themselves in the wrong, she preserved silence when perhaps an apology or a reparation was hovering upon her lips.

Gilbert added not a word either; he threw away the branch and resumed his spade; but his character was a mixture of pride and cunning, and while stooping to his work, he kept his eye stealthily fixed on Andree's retreating figure. At the end of the walk she could not help looking round. She was a woman.

This weakness was sufficient for Gilbert; he said to himself that in this last struggle he had been victorious.

“She is weaker than I am,” thought he, “and I shall govern her. Proud of her beauty, of her name, of her advancing fortunes, indignant at my love, which she perhaps suspects, she is only the more an object of adoration to the poor working man who trembles while he looks at her. Oh! this trembling, this emotion, unworthy of a man! Oh! these acts of cowardice which she makes me commit, she shall one day repay me for them all! But to-day I have worked enough,” added he; “I have conquered the enemy. I, who ought to have been the weakest, since I love, have been a hundred times stronger than she.”

He repeated these words once more with a wild burst of joy, as he convulsively dashed back the dark hair from his thoughtful brow. Then he stuck his spade deep into the flower-bed, bounded through the hedge of cypress and yew-tree with the speed of a roebuck, and, light as the wind, threaded a parterre of plants under bell-glasses, not one of which he touched, notwithstanding the furious rapidity of his career, and posted himself at the extremity of a turn, which he had reached, by describing a diagonal course, before Andree, who followed the winding of the path.

From his new position he saw her advancing, thoughtful and almost humbled, her lovely eyes cast down, her moist and motionless hand gently rustling her dress as she walked. Concealed behind the thick hedge. Gilbert heard her sigh twice as if she were speaking to herself. At last she passed so close to the trees which sheltered him that had he stretched out his arm he might have touched hers, as a mad and feverish impulse prompted him to do.

But he knit his brow with an energetic movement almost akin to hatred, and, placing his trembling hand upon his heart:

“Coward again!” said he to himself. Then he added softly, “but she is so beautiful!”

Gilbert might have remained for a considerable time sunk in contemplation, for the walk was long and Andree's step was slow and measured, but this walk was crossed by others, from which some troublesome visitor might at any moment make his appearance, and fate treated Gilbert so scurvily that a man did in fact advance from the first alley upon the left — that is to say, almost opposite the clump of evergreens behind which he was concealed.

This intruder walked with a methodic and measured step; he carried his head erect, held, his hat under his right arm, and his left hand resting upon his sword. He wore a velvet coat underneath a pelisse lined with sable fur, and pointed his foot as he walked, which he did with the easy grace of a man of high rank and breeding.

This gentleman as he advanced perceived Andree, and the young girl's figure evidently pleased him, for he quickened his pace and crossed over in an oblique direction, so as to reach as soon as possible the path on which Andree was walking and intercept her course.

When Gilbert perceived this personage, he involuntarily gave a slight cry, and took to flight like a startled lapwing. The intruder's maneuver was successful; he was evidently accustomed to it, and in less than three minutes he was in advance of Andree, whom three minutes before he had been following at some distance.

When Andree heard his footstep behind her she moved aside a little to let the man pass, and when he had passed she looked at him in her turn. The gentleman looked also, and most eagerly; he even stopped to see better, and, returning after he had seen her features:

“Ah! mademoiselle,” said he, in a very kind voice; “whither are you hastening so quickly, may *I* ask?”

At the sound of this voice Andree raised her head, and saw about twenty paces behind her two officers of the guards following slowly; she spied a blue ribbon peeping from beneath the sable pelisse of the person who addressed her, and pale and startled at this unexpected rencontre, and at being accosted thus graciously, she said, bending very low:

“The king!”

“Mademoiselle — — ” replied Louis XV., approaching her; “excuse me, I have such bad eyes that I am obliged to ask your name.”

“Mademoiselle de Taverney,” stammered the young girl, so confused and trembling that her voice was scarcely audible.

“Oh! yes; I remember. I esteem myself fortunate in meeting you in Trianon, mademoiselle,” said the king.

“I was proceeding to join her royal highness the dauphiness, who expects me,” said Andree, trembling more and more.

“I will conduct you to her, mademoiselle,” replied Louis XV., “for I am just going to pay a visit to my daughter in my quality of country neighbor. Be kind enough to take my arm, as we are proceeding in the same direction.”

Andree felt a cloud pass before her eyes, and the blood flow in tumultuous waves to her heart. In fact, such an honor for the poor girl as the king's arm, the sovereign lord of all France, such an unhoped-for, incredible piece of good fortune, a favor which the whole court might envy, seemed to her more like a dream than a reality.

She made such a deep and reverential curtsey that the king felt himself obliged to bow a second time. When Louis XV. was inclined to remember Louis XIV., it was always in matters of ceremonial and politeness. Such traditions, however, dated further back, and were handed down from Henry IV.

He offered his hand therefore to Andree, who placed the burning points of her fingers upon the king's glove, and they both continued to advance toward the pavilion, where they had been informed that the dauphiness with her architect and her head gardener would be found.

We can assure the reader that Louis XV., although not particularly fond of walking, chose the longest road to conduct Andree to the little Trianon. Although the king was apparently unaware of his error, the two officers who walked behind perceived it but too plainly, and bemoaned themselves bitterly, as they were lightly clad and the weather was cold.

They arrived too late to find the dauphiness where they had expected, as Marie Antoinette had just set out for Trianon, that she might not keep the dauphin waiting, for he liked to sup between six and seven o'clock.

Her royal highness arrived therefore at the exact hour, and as the punctual dauphin was already upon the threshold of the salon that he might lose no time in reaching the dining-room the moment the maitre d'hotel appeared, the dauphiness threw her mantle to a femme-de-chambre, took the dauphin's arm with a winning smile, and drew him into the dining-room.

The table was laid for the two illustrious hosts. They occupied each, the center of the table, so as to leave the place of honor vacant, which, since several unexpected visits of the king, was never occupied in his majesty's absence, even when the room was filled with guests.

At this end of the table, the king's cover and cadenas occupied a considerable space; but the maitre d'hotel, not calculating upon it being occupied this evening, was conducting the service on this side.

Behind the dauphiness's chair, leaving the necessary space between for the valets to pass, was stationed Madame de Noailles, stiff and upright, and yet wearing as amiable an expression on her features as she could conjure up for the festive occasion.

Near Madame de Noailles were some other ladies, whose position at the court gave them the right, or merited the privilege, of being present at the supper of their royal highnesses.

Three times a week Madame de Noailles supped at the same table with the dauphin and dauphiness; but on the days when she did not sup with them, she would not for anything in the world have missed being present. Besides, it was a delicate mode of protesting against the exclusion of the four days out of seven.

Opposite the Duchesse de Noailles, surnamed by the dauphiness Madame Etiquette, was the Duke de Richelieu, on a raised seat very similar to her own.

He was also a strict observer of forms; but his etiquette was undistinguishable to a casual observer, being always veiled beneath the most perfect elegance and sometimes beneath the wittiest raillery.

The result of this antithesis between the first gentleman of the bed-chamber and the first lady of honor of the dauphiness was that the conversation, always dropped by the Duchesse de Noailles, was incessantly renewed by M. de Richelieu.

The marshal had traveled through all the courts of Europe, and had adopted the tone of elegance in each which was best suited to his character; so that, from his admirable tact and propriety, he knew exactly what anecdotes to relate at the table of the youthful couple, and what would be suitable to the private suppers of Madame Dubarry.

Perceiving this evening that the dauphiness had a good appetite, and that the dauphin was voracious, he concluded that this would give no heed to the conversation going on around them, and that he had consequently only to make Madame de Noailles suffer an hour of purgatory in anticipation.

He began therefore to speak of philosophy and theatrical affairs, a twofold subject of conversation doubly obnoxious to the venerable duchess. He related the subject of one of the last philanthropic sallies of the philosopher of Ferney, the name already given to the author of the “Henriade.” and when he saw the duchess on the tenterhooks, he changed the text and detailed all the squabbles and disputes which, in his office of gentleman of the chamber, he had to undergo in order to make the actresses in ordinary to the king play more or less badly.

The dauphiness loved the arts, and above all the theater; she had sent a complete costume for Clytemnestra to Mademoiselle Raucourt, and she therefore listened to M. de Richelieu not only with indulgence but with pleasure.

Then the poor lady of honor, in violation of all etiquette, was forced to fidget on her bench, blow her nose noisily, and shake her venerable head, without thinking of the cloud of powder which at each movement fell upon her forehead, like the cloud of snow which surrounds the summit of Mont Blanc at every gust of the east wind.

But it was not enough to amuse the dauphiness — the dauphin must also be pleased. Richelieu abandoned the subject of the theater, for which the heir to the crown had never displayed any great partiality, to discourse of humanity and philosophy. When he spoke of the English, he did so with all the warmth and energy which Rousseau displays in drawing the character of Edward Bromston.

Now Madame de Noailles haled the English as much as she did the philosophers. To admit a new idea was a fatiguing operation for her, and fatigue deranged the economy of her whole person. Madame de Noailles, who felt herself intended by nature for a conserver, growled at all new ideas like a dog at a frightful mask.

Richelieu, in playing this game, had a double end in view; he tormented Madame Etiquette, which evidently pleased the dauphiness, and he threw in, here and there, some virtuous apophthegm, some axiom in mathematics, which was rapturously received by the dauphin, the royal amateur of exact sciences.

He was paying his court, therefore, with great skill and address, and from time to time directing an eager glance toward the door, as if he expected some one who had not yet arrived, when a cry from the foot of the staircase echoed along the arched corridors, was repeated by two valets stationed at regular intervals from the entrance door, and at last reached the dining salon:

“The king!”

At this magic word Madame de Noailles started bolt upright from her seat, as if moved *by* a spring; Richelieu rose more slowly, and with easy grace; the dauphin hastily wiped his mouth with his napkin, and stood up before his seat, his face turned toward the door.

As for the dauphiness, she hastened toward the staircase to meet the king, and do the honors of her mansion to him.

CHAPTER XC.

The Queen's Hair.

THE KING STILL held Mademoiselle de Taverney by the hand when they reached the landing-place, and it was only on arriving there that he bowed to her, so courteously and so low, that Richelieu had time to see the bow, to admire its grace, and to ask himself to what lucky mortal it was addressed.

His ignorance did not last long. Louis XV. took the arm of the dauphiness, who had seen all that passed, and had already perfectly recognized Andree.

“My daughter,” said he, “I come without ceremony to ask you for my supper. I crossed the entire park in my way hither, and happening to meet Mademoiselle de Taverney, requested her to accompany me.”

“Mademoiselle de Taverney!” murmured Richelieu, almost, dizzy at this unexpected stroke. “On my faith, I am almost too fortunate!”

“I shall not only be not angry with mademoiselle, who is late,” replied the dauphiness graciously, “but I have to thank her for bringing your majesty to us.”

Andree, whose cheeks were dyed with as deep a red as the ripe and tempting cherries which graced the epergne in the center of the table, bowed without replying.

“Diable! diable! she is indeed beautiful,” thought Richelieu; “and that old scoundrel Taverney said no more for her than she deserves.”

The king had already taken his seat at the table after having saluted the dauphin. Gifted like his grandfather with an obliging appetite, the monarch did justice to the improvised supper which the maitre d'hotel placed before him as if by magic. But while eating, the king, whose back was turned toward the door, seemed to seek something, or rather some one.

In fact, Mademoiselle de Taverney had enjoyed no privilege, as her position in the dauphiness's household was not yet fixed, had not entered the dining-room, and after her profound reverence in reply to the king's salutation, had returned to the dauphiness's apartment, lest her services might be required, as they had been once or twice already, to read to her highness after she had retired to bed.

The dauphiness saw that the king was looking for the beautiful companion of his walk.

“M. de Coigny,” said she to a young officer of the guards who was standing behind the king, “pray request Mademoiselle de Taverney to come up; with Madame de Noailles' permission, we will discard etiquette for this evening!”

M. de Coigny left the room, and almost immediately afterward returned, introducing Andree, who, totally at a loss to comprehend the reason for such a succession of unusual favors, entered trembling.

“Seat yourself there, mademoiselle,” said the dauphiness, “beside Madame de Noailles.”

Andree mounted timidly on the raised seat, but she was so confused that she had the audacity to seat herself only about a foot distant from the lady of honor. She received, in consequence, such a terrific look that the poor child started back at least four feet, as if she had come in contact with a Leyden jar highly charged.

The king looked at her and smiled.

“Ah! ca,” said the duke to himself, “it is scarcely worth my while to meddle with the affair; everything is progressing of itself.” The king turned and perceived the marshal, who was quite prepared to meet his look.

“Good-day, duke,” said Louis; “do you agree well with the Duchesse de Noailles?”

“Sire,” replied the marshal, “the duchesse always does me the honor to treat me as a madcap.”

“Oh! Were you also on the road to Chanteloup, duke?”

“I, sire! Faith no; I am too grateful for the favors your majesty has showered on my family.”

The king did not expect this blow; he was prepared to rally, but he found himself anticipated.

“What favors have I showered, duke?”

“Sire, your majesty has given the command of your light horse to the Duke d'Aiguillon.”

“Yes; it is true, duke.”

“And that is a step which must have put all the energy, all the skill of your majesty to the task. It is almost a coup d'etat.”

The meal was now over; the king waited for a moment, and then rose from table.

The conversation was taking an embarrassing turn, but Richelieu was determined not to let go his prey. Therefor?, when the king began to chat with Madame de Noailles, the dauphiness, and Mademoiselle de Taverney. Richelieu maneuvered so skillfully that he soon found himself in the full fire of a conversation which he directed according to his pleasure.

“Sire,” said he, “your majesty knows that success emboldens.”

“Do you say so for the purpose of informing us that you are bold, duke?”

“Sire, it is for the purpose of requesting a new favor from your majesty, after the one the king has already deigned to grant. One of my best friends, an old servant of your majesty, has a son in the gendarmes; the young man is highly deserving, but poor. He has received from an august princess the brevet title of captain, but he has not yet got the company.”

“The princess? my daughter?” asked the king, turning toward the dauphiness.

“Yes, sire,” said Richelieu, “and the father of this young man is called the Baron de Taverney.”

“My father!” involuntarily exclaimed Andree. “Philip! Is it for Philip, my lord duke, that you are asking for a company *'!*”

Then, ashamed of this breach of etiquette, Andree made a step backward, blushing, and clasping her hands with emotion.

The king turned to admire the blush which mantled on the cheek of the lovely girl, and then glanced at Richelieu-with a pleased look, which informed the courtier how agreeable his request had been.

“In truth,” said the dauphiness, “he is a charming young man, and I had promised to make his fortune. How unfortunate princes are! When God gives them the best intentions, he deprives them of the memory and reasoning powers necessary to carry their intentions into effect. Ought I not to have known that this young man was poor, and that it was not sufficient to give him the epaulet without at the same time giving him the company?”

“Oh, madame! how could your royal highness have known that *'!*”

“Oh, I knew it!” replied the dauphiness quickly, with a gesture which recalled to Andree's memory the modest but yet happy home of her childhood; “yes, I knew it, but I thought I had done everything necessary in giving a step to M. Philip de Taverney. He is called Philip, is he not, mademoiselle?”

“Yes, madame.”

The king looked round on these noble and ingenuous faces, and then rested his graze on Richelieu, whose face was also brightened by a ray of generosity, borrowed doubtless from his august neighbor.

“Duke,” said he, in a low voice, “I shall embroil myself with Luciennes.”

Then, addressing Andree, he added quickly; “Say that it will give you pleasure, mademoiselle.”

“Ah! sire,” said Andree, clasping her hands, “I request it as a boon from your majesty.”

“In that case, it is granted,” said Louis. “You will choose a good company for this young man, duke; I will furnish the necessary funds, if the charges are not already paid and the post vacant.”

This good action gladdened all who were present. It procured the king a heavenly smile from Andree, and Richelieu a warm expression of thanks from those beautiful lips, from which, ii. Ins youth, he would have asked for even more.

Several visitors arrived in succession, among whom was the Cardinal de Rohan, who since the installation of the dauphiness at Trianon had paid his court assiduously to her.

But during the whole evening the king had kind looks and pleasant words only for Richelieu. He even commanded the marshal's attendance, when, after bidding farewell to the dauphiness, he set out to return to his own Trianon. The old marshal followed the king with a heart bounding with joy.

While the king, accompanied by the duke and his two officers, gained the dark alleys which lead from the palace, the dauphiness had dismissed Andree.

“You will be anxious to write this good news to Paris, mademoiselle,” said the princess, “you may retire.”

And preceded by a footman carrying a lantern, the young girl traversed the walk of about a hundred paces in length which separates Trianon from the offices.

Also, in advance of her, concealed by the thick foliage of the shrubbery, bounded a shadowy figure which followed all her movements with, sparkling eyes. It was Gilbert.

When Andree had arrived at the entrance, and began to ascend the stone staircase, tin; valet left her and returned to the antechambers of Trianon.

Then Gilbert, gliding into the vestibule, reached the courtyard, and climbed by a small staircase as steep as a ladder into his attic, which was opposite Andree's windows and was situated in a corner of the building.

From this position he could see Andree call a femme-de-chambre of Madame de Noailles to assist her, as that lady had her apartments in the same corridor. But when the girl had entered the room, the window curtains fell like an impenetrable veil between the ardent eyes of the young man and the object of his wishes.

At the palace there now only remained M. de Rohan, redoubling his gallant attentions to the dauphiness, who received them but coldly.

The prelate, fearing at last to be indiscreet, inasmuch as the dauphin had already retired, took leave of her royal highness with the expression of the deepest and most tender respect. As he was entering his carriage, a waiting-woman of the dauphiness approached, and almost leaned inside the door.

“Here,” said she.

And she put into his hand a small paper parcel, carefully folded, the touch of which made the cardinal start.

“Here,” he replied hastily, thrusting into the girl's hand a heavy purse, the contents of which would have been a handsome salary. Then, without losing time, the cardinal ordered the coachman to drive to Paris, and to ask for fresh orders at the barrier. During the whole way, in the darkness of the carriage, he felt the paper, and kissed the contents like some intoxicated lover. At the barrier he cried, “Rue St. Claude.” A short time afterward he crossed the mysterious courtyard, and once more found himself in the little salon occupied by Fritz, the silent usher.

Balsamo kept him waiting about a quarter of an hour. At last he appeared, and gave as a reason for his delay the lateness of the hour, which had prevented him from expecting the arrival of visitors.

In fact, it was now nearly eleven o'clock at night.

“That is true, baron,” said the cardinal; “and I must request you to excuse my unseasonable visit. But you *may* remember you told me one day, that to be assured of certain secrets —

“I must have a portion of the person's hair of whom we were speaking on that day,” interrupted Balsamo, who had already spied the little paper which the unsuspecting prelate held carelessly in his hand.

“Precisely, baron.”

“And you have brought me this hair, sir; very well.”

“Here it is. Do you think it would be possible to return it to me again after the trial?”

“Unless fire should be necessary; in which case — ”

“Of course, of course,” said the cardinal. “However, I can procure some more. Can I have a reply?”

“To-day?”

“You know I am impatient.”

“I must first ascertain, my lord.”

And Balsamo took the packet of hair, and hastily mounted to Lorenza's apartment.

“I shall now know,” said he, on the way, “the secret of this monarchy; the mysterious fate which destiny has in store for it!”

And from the other side of the wall, even before opening the secret door, he plunged Lorenza into the magnetic sleep. The young girl received him therefore with an affectionate embrace. Balsamo could scarcely extricate himself from her arms. It would be difficult to say which was the most grievous for the poor baron, the reproaches of the beautiful Italian when she was awake, or her caresses when she slept. When he had succeeded in loosening the chain which her snowy arms formed around his neck:

“My beloved Lorenza,” said he, putting the paper in her hand, “can you tell me to whom this hair belongs?”

Lorenza took it and pressed it against her breast, and then to her forehead. Though her eyes were open, it was only by means of her head and breast that she could see in her sleep.

“Oh!” said she, “it is an illustrious head from which this hair has been taken.”

“Is it not? — and a happy head too? Speak.”

“She may be happy.”

“Look well, Lorenza.”

“Yes, she may be happy; there is no shadow as yet upon her life.”

“Yet she is married.”

“Oh!” said Lorenza, with a sigh.

“Well! — what? What means my Lorenza?”

“Strange!” said she, “strange indeed! She is married like myself, pure and spotless as I am; but unlike me, dear Balsamo, she does not love her husband.”

“Oh, fate!” said Balsamo. “Thanks, Lorenza, I know all I wished to know.”

He embraced her, put the hair carefully into his pocket, and then, cutting a lock off the Italian's black tresses, he burned it at the wax-light and inclosed the ashes in the paper which had been wrapped round the hair of the dauphiness.

Then he left the room, and while descending the stairs he awoke the young woman.

The prelate, agitated and impatient, was waiting and doubting.

“Well, count?” said he.

“Well, my lord, the oracle has said you may hope.”

“It said so!” exclaimed the prince, transported with joy.

“Draw what conclusion you please, my lord; the oracle said that this woman, did not love her husband.”

“Oh!” said M. de Rohan, with a thrill of joy.

“I was obliged to burn the hair to obtain the revelation by its essence. Here are the ashes, which I restore to you most scrupulously, after having; gathered them up as if each atom were worth a million.”

“Thanks, sir, a thousand thanks; I can never repay you.”

“Do not speak of that, my lord. I must recommend you, however, not to swallow these ashes in wine, as lovers sometimes do; it causes such a dangerous sympathy that your love would become incurable, while the lady's heart would cool toward you.”

“Oh! I shall take care,” said the prelate, almost terrified. “Adieu, count, adieu.”

Twenty minutes afterward his eminence's carriage crossed M. de Richelieu's at the corner of the Rue des Petits Champs so suddenly that it was nearly upset in a deep trench which had been dug for the foundation of a new building.

The two noblemen recognized each other.

“Ha! prince,” said Richelieu with a smile.

“Ha! duke,” replied Louis de Rohan, with his finger upon his lips.

And they disappeared in opposite directions.

CHAPTER XCI.

M. De Richelieu Appreciates Nicole.

M. DE RICHELIEU drove straight to M. de Taverney's modest hotel in the Rue Coq-Heron.

Thanks to the privilege we possess, in common with the devil on two sticks, of entering every house, be it ever so carefully locked, we are aware before M. de Richelieu that the baron was seated before the fireplace, his feet resting upon the immense andirons which supported a smoldering log, and was lecturing Nicole, sometimes pausing to chuck her under the chin, in spite of the rebellious and scornful poutings of the young waiting-maid. But whether Nicole would have been satisfied with the caress without the sermon, or whether she would have preferred the sermon without the caress, we can give no satisfactory information.

The conversation between the master and the servant turned upon the very important point, that at a certain hour of the evening Nicole never came when the bell was rung; that she had always something to do in the garden or, in the greenhouse; and that everywhere but in these two places she neglected her business.

Nicole, turning backward and forward with a charming and voluptuous grace, replied:

“So much the worse! I am dying with weariness here; you promised I should go to Trianon with mademoiselle.”

It was thereupon that the baron thought it proper in charity to pat her cheeks and chuck her chin, no doubt to distract her thoughts from dwelling on so unpleasant a subject; but Nicole continued in the same vein, and, refusing all consolation, deplored her unhappy lot.

“Yes,” sighed she, “I am shut up within four horrible walls; I have no company; I have no air; while I had the prospect of a pleasant and fortunate future before me.”

“What prospect?” said the baron.

"Trianon," replied Nicole; "Trianon, where I should have seen the world — where I should have looked about me — where I should have been looked at."

"Oh! oh! *my* little Nicole," said the baron.

"Well, sir, I am a woman, and as well worth looking at as another, I suppose?"

"Cordieu! how she talks," said the baron to himself. "What fire! what ambition!"

And he could not help casting a look of admiration at so much youth and beauty. Nicole seemed at limes thoughtful and impatient.

"Come, sir," said she, "will you retire to bed, that I may go to mine!"

"One word more, Nicole."

All at once the noise of the street-bell made Taverney start and Nicole jump.

"Who can be coming," said the baron, "at half-past eleven o'clock at night? Go, child, and see."

Nicole hastened to open the door, asked the name of the visitor, and left the street door half open. Through this lucky opening a, shadow, which bad apparently emerged from the courtyard, glided out, nut without making noise enough to attract the attention of the marshal, for it was he who hurried and saw the flight. Nicole preceded him, candle in hand, with a beaming look.

"Oh! oh!" said the marshal, smiling, and following her into the room, "this old rogue of a Taverney only spoke to me of his daughter."

The duke was one of those men who do not require a second glance to see, and see completely. The shadowy figure which he had observed escaping made him think of Nicole, and Nicole of the shadow. When he saw her pretty face, he guessed what errand the shadow had come upon, and, judging from her saucy and laughing eye, her white teeth, and small waist, he drew a tolerably correct picture of her character and tastes.

At the door of the salon, Nicole, not without a palpitation of the heart, announced:

"His lordship the Duke de Richelieu."

This name was destined to cause a sensation that evening. It produced such an effect upon the baron, that he arose from his armchair and walked straight to the door, not being able to believe the evidence of his ears.

But before he reached the door, he perceived M. de Richelieu in I he shadow of the corridor.

"The duke!" He stammered.

"Yes, my dear friend, the duke himself." replied Richelieu, in his most whining voice. "Oh! that surprises you, after your visit the other day? Well, nevertheless, nothing can be more real. In the meantime, your hand, if you please."

"My lord duke, you overwhelm me."

"Where have your wits fled to, my dear friend?" said the old marshal, giving his hat and cane to Nicole, and seating himself comfortably in an armchair, "you are getting rusty, you dote; you seem no longer to know the world!"

"But yet, duke," replied Taverney, much agitated, "it seems to me that the reception you gave me the other day was so significant that I could not mistake its purport."

"Hark ye, my old friend." answered Richelieu, "the other day you behaved like a school-boy, and I like a pedant. Between us there was only the difference of the ferula. You are going to speak — I will save you the trouble; you might very probably say some very foolish things to me, and I might reply in the same vein. Let us leave the other day aside, therefore, and come direct to the present time. Do you know what I have come for this evening?"

"No, certainly."

"I have come to bring you the company which you asked me for your son the other day, and which the king has granted. Diable! can you not understand the difference? The day before yesterday I was a quasi-minister, and to ask a favor was an injustice; but to-day, when I am simply Richelieu and have refused the portfolio, it would be absurd not to ask; I have therefore asked and obtained, and I now bring it to you."

"Duke, can this be true? And is this kindness on your part — ?"

"It is the natural consequence of my duty as your friend. The minister refused, Richelieu asks and gives."

"Ah, duke, you enchant me — you are a true friend!"

"Pardieu!"

"But the king — the king, who confers such a favor on me — "

"The king scarcely knows what he has done; or perhaps I am mistaken, and he knows very well."

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that his majesty has, no doubt, some motive for provoking Madame Dubarry just now; and you owe this favor which he bestows upon you more to that motive than to my influence.”

“You think so?”

“I am certain of it, for I am aiding and abetting. You know it is on account of this creature that I refused the portfolio?”

“I was told so, but — ”

“But you did not believe it. Come, say it frankly.”

“Well, I confess that —

“You always thought me not likely to be troubled by many scruples of conscience — is that it?”

“At least, that I thought you without prejudices.”

“My friend, I am getting old, and I no longer care for pretty faces except when they can be useful to me. And besides I have some other plans. But, to return to your son; he is a splendid fellow!”

“But on bad terms with that Dubarry who was at your house when .1 had the folly to present myself.”

“I am aware of it, and that is why I am not a minister.”

“Oh! you refused the portfolio in order not to displease my son?”

“If I told you so you would not believe me. No, that is not the reason. I refused it because the requirements of the Dubarrys, which commenced with the exclusion of your son, would have ended in enormities of all kinds.”

“Then you have quarreled with these creatures?”

“Yes and no. They fear me — I despise them; it is tit for tat.”

“It is heroic, but imprudent.”

“Why?”

“The countess has still some power.”

“Pooh!” said Richelieu.

“How you say that!”

“I say it like a man who feels the weakness of his position, and who, if necessary, would place the miner in a good position to blow up the whole place.”

“I see the true state of the case; you do *my* son a favor partly to vex the Dubarrys.”

“Principally for that reason, and your perspicacity is not at fault. Your son serves me as a grenade; I shall cause an explosion by his means. But, apropos, baron, have you not also a daughter?”

“Yes.”

“Young — — lovely as Venus — and who lives at present at Trianon?”

“Ah! then you know her?”

“I have spent the evening in her company, and have conversed about her for a full hour with the king.”

“With the king?” cried Taverney, his cheeks in a flame. “The king has spoken of my daughter — of Mademoiselle Andree de Taverney?”

“The king himself, my friend. Do I vex you in telling you this?”

“Vex me? No, certainly not. The king honors me by looking at my daughter — but — the king —

“Is immoral, is that what you were going to *say?”*

“Heaven forbid that I should talk evil of his majesty. He has a right to adopt whatever morals he chooses.”

“Well! what does this astonishment mean, then? Do you pretend to say that Mademoiselle Andree is not an accomplished beauty, and that therefore the king may not have looked upon her with admiration?”

Taverney did not reply; he only shrugged his shoulders and fell into a reverie, during which the unrelenting inquisitorial eye of the Duke de Richelieu was still fixed upon him.

“Well, I guess what you would say, if, instead of thinking to yourself, you would speak aloud,” continued the old marshal, approaching his chair nearer the baron's. “You would say that the king is accustomed to bad society, that he mixes with low company, and that therefore he is not likely to admire this noble girl, so modest in her demeanor and so pure and lofty in her ideas, and is not capable of appreciating the treasures of her grace and beauty.”

“Certainly, you are a great man, duke; you have guessed my thoughts exactly,” said Taverney.

“But confess, baron,” continued Richelieu, “that our master should no longer force us gentlemen, peers and companions of the king of France, to kiss the vile, open hand of a creature like Dubarry. It is time that he should restore us to our proper position. After having sunk from La Chateauroux, who was a marquise and of stuff to make duchesses, to La Pompadour, who was the daughter and the wife of a farmer of the public revenues, and from

La Pompadour to the Dubarry, who calls herself simply Jeanneton, may he not fall still farther and plunge us into the lowest pitch of degradation? It is humiliating for us, baron, who wear a coronet on our caps, to bow the head before such trumpery creatures.”

“Oh! you only speak the truth,” said Taverney. “How evident is it that the court is deserted on account of these new fashions!”

“No queen, no ladies; no ladies, no courtiers. The king elevates a grisette to the rank of a consort, and the people are upon the throne, represented, by Mademoiselle Jeanne Vaubernier, a seamstress of Paris.”

“It is so, and yet — ”

“You see then, baron!” interrupted the marshal, “what a noble career there is open for a woman of mind who should reign over France at present.”

“Without doubt,” said Taverney, whose heart was beating fast; “but unluckily the place is occupied.”

“For a woman,” continued the marshal, “who would have the boldness of these creatures without their vice, and who would direct her views and calculations to a loftier aim. For a woman who would advance her fortune so high, that she should be talked of when the monarchy itself should no longer exist. Do you know if your daughter has intellect, baron?”

“Lofty intellect, and above all, good sense.”

“She is very lovely.”

“Is she not?”

“Her beauty is of that soft and charming character which pleases men so much, while her whole being is stamped with that air of candor and virgin purity which imposes respect even upon women. You must take great care of that treasure, my old friend.”

“You speak of her with such fire —

“I! I am madly in love with her, and would marry her to-morrow were I twenty instead of seventy-four years of age! But is she comfortably placed? Has she the luxury which befits such a lovely flower? Only think, baron! this evening she returned alone to her apartments, without waiting-women or lackey. A servant of the dauphin carried a lantern before her! That looks more like a servant than a lady of her rank.”

“What can I do, duke? you know I am not rich.”

“Rich or not, your daughter must at least have a waiting-maid.”

Taverney sighed.

"I know very well," said he, "that she wants one, or at least, that she ought to have one."

"Well! have you none?"

The baron did not reply.

"Who is that pretty girl you had here just now?" continued Richelieu. "A fine spirited looking girl, i'faith."

"Yes, but — I — I cannot send her to Trianon."

"Why not, baron? On the contrary, she seems to me perfectly suited for the post; she would make a capital femme-de-chambre."

"You did not look at her face then, duke?"

"I! — I did nothing else."

"You looked at her and did not remark her strange resemblance?"

"To whom?"

"To — guess. Come hither, Nicole."

Nicole advanced; like a true waiting woman, she had been listening at the door. The duke took her by both hands and looked her steadily in the face, but the impertinent gaze of this great lord and debauchee did not alarm or embarrass her for a moment.

"Yes," said he, "it is true; there is a resemblance."

"You know to whom, and you see therefore that it is impossible to expose the fortunes of our house to such an awkward trick of fate. Would it be thought agreeable that this little minx of a Nicole should resemble the most illustrious lady in France?"

"Oh, no!" replied Nicole sharply, and disengaging herself from the marshal's grasp, the better to reply to M. de Taverney, "is it so certain that this little minx resembles this illustrious lady so exactly? Has this lady the low shoulder, the quick eye, the round ankle, and the plump arm of the little minx?"

Nicole was crimson with rage, and therefore ravishingly beautiful.

The duke once more took her pretty hands in his, and with a look full of caresses and promises:

"Baron," said he, "Nicole has certainly not her equal at court, at least in *my* opinion. As for the illustrious *lady* to whom she has, I confess, a slight resemblance, we shall know how to spare her self-love. You have fair hair of a lovely shade, Mademoiselle Nicole; you have eyebrows and nose of a most imperial form; well, in one quarter of an hour employed before the mirror, these imperfections, since the baron thinks them such, will disappear. Nicole, my child, would you like to be at Trianon?”

“Oh!” said Nicole, and her whole soul full of longing was expressed in this monosyllable.

“You shall go to Trianon, then, my dear, and without prejudicing in any way the fortunes of others. Baron, one word more.”

“Speak, my dear duke.”

“Go, my pretty child,” said Richelieu, “and leave us alone a moment.”

Nicole retired. The duke approached the baron.

“I press you the more to send your daughter a waiting-maid, because it will please the king. His majesty does not like poverty, and pretty faces do not frighten him. Let me alone, I understand what I am about.”

“Nicole shall go to Trianon, if you think it will please the king,” replied the baron, with a meaning smile.

“Then, if you will allow me, I will bring her with me; she can take advantage of the carriage.”

“But still, her resemblance to the dauphiness! We must think of that, duke.”

“I have thought of it. This resemblance will disappear in a quarter of an hour under Rafte's hands, I will answer for it. Write a note to your daughter to tell her of what importance it is that she should have a femme-de-chambre, and that this femme-de-chambre should be Nicole.”

“You think it important that it should be Nicole.”

“I do.”

“And that no other than Nicole would do?”

“Upon my honor, I think so.”

“Then I will write immediately.”

And the baron sat down and wrote a letter, which he handed to Richelieu.

“And the instructions, duke?”

“I will give them to Nicole. Is she intelligent?”

The baron smiled.

“Then you confide her to me, do you not?” said Richelieu.

“That is your affair, duke; you asked me for her, I give her to you; make of her what you like.”

“Mademoiselle, come with me,” said the duke, rising and calling into the corridor, “and that quickly.”

Nicole did not wait to be told twice. Without asking the baron for his consent, she made up a packet of clothes in five minutes, and light as a bird, she flew downstairs and took her place beside the coachman.

Richelieu took leave of his friend, who repeated his thanks for the service he had rendered Philip. Of Andree not a word was said; it was necessary to do more than speak of her.

CHAPTER XCII.

The Transformation.

NICOLE WAS overjoyed. To leave Taverney for Paris was not half so great a triumph as to leave Paris for Trianon. She was so gracious with M. de Richelieu's coachman, that the next morning the reputation of the new femme-de-chambre was established throughout all the coach-houses and antechambers, in any degree aristocratic, of Paris and Versailles.

When they arrived at the Hotel de Hanover, M. de Richelieu took the little waiting-maid by the hand and led her to the first story, where M. Rafte was waiting his arrival, and writing a multitude of letters, all on his master's account.

Amid the various acquirements of the marshal, war occupied the foremost rank, and Rafte had become, at least in theory such a skillful man of war, that Polybius and the Chevalier de Fobard, if they had lived at that period, would have esteemed themselves fortunate could they have perused the pamphlets on fortifications and maneuvering, of which Rafte wrote one every week. M. Rafte was busy revising the plan of a war against the English in the Mediterranean when the marshal entered, and said:

“Rafte, look at this child, will you?”

Rafte looked.

“Very pretty,” said he, with a most significant movement of the lips.

“Yes, but the likeness, Rafte? It is of the likeness I speak.”

“Oh! true. What the deuce!”

“You see it, do you not?”

“It is extraordinary; it will either make or mar her fortune.”

“It will ruin her in the first place; but we shall arrange all that. You observe she has fair hair, Rafte; but that will not signify much, will it?”

“It will only be necessary to make it black, my lord,” replied Rafte, who had acquired the habit of completing his master's thoughts, and sometimes even of thinking entirely for him.

“Come to my dressing table, child,” said the marshal, “this gentleman, who is a very clever man, will make you the handsomest and the least easily recognized waiting-maid in France.”

In fact, ten minutes afterward, with the assistance of a composition which the marshal used every week to dye the white hairs beneath his wig black, a piece of coquetry which he often affected to confess by the bedside of some of his acquaintances, Rafte had dyed the beautiful auburn hair of Nicole a splendid jet black.

Then he passed the end of a pin, blackened in the flame of a candle, over her thick fair eyebrows, and by this means gave such a fantastic look to her joyous countenance, such an ardent and even somber fire to her bright clear eyes, that one would have said she was some fairy bursting by the power of an incantation from the magic prison in which her enchanter had held her confined.

“Now, my sweet child,” said Richelieu, after having handed a mirror to the astonished Nicole, “look how charming you are, and how little like the Nicole you were just now. You have no longer a queen to fear, but a fortune to make.”

“Oh, my lord!” exclaimed the young girl.

“Yes, and for that purpose it is only necessary that we understand each other.”

Nicole blushed and looked down; the cunning one expected, no doubt, some of those flattering words which Richelieu knew so well how to say.

The duke perceived this, and, to cut short all misunderstandings, said:

“Sit down in this armchair beside M. Rafte, my clear child. Open your ears wide, and listen to me. Oh! do not let M. Rafte's presence embarrass you; do not be afraid; he will, on the contrary, give us his advice. You are listening, are you not?”

“Yes, my lord,” stammered Nicole, ashamed at having thus been led away by her vanity.

The conversation between M. de Richelieu, M. Rafte, and Nicole lasted more than an hour, after which the marshal sent the little femme-de-chambre to sleep with the other waiting-women in the hotel.

Rafte returned to his military pamphlet, and Richelieu retired to bed, after having looked over the different letters which conveyed to him intelligence of all the acts of the provincial parliaments against M. d'Aiguillon and the Dubarry clique.

Early the next day, one of his carriages without his coat of arms conducted Nicole to Trianon, set her down at the gate with her little packet, and immediately disappeared. Nicole, with head erect, mind at ease, and hope dancing in her eyes, after having made the necessary inquiries, knocked at the door of the offices.

It was ten o'clock in the morning. Andree, already up and dressed, was writing to her father to inform him of the happy event of the preceding day, of which M. de Richelieu, as we have already seen, had made himself the messenger. Our readers will not have forgotten that a flight of stone steps led from the garden to the little chapel of Trianon; that on the landing-place of this chapel a staircase branched off toward the right to the first story, which contained the apartments of the ladies-in-waiting, which apartments opened off a long corridor, like an alley, looking upon the garden.

Andree's apartment was the first upon the left hand in this corridor. It was tolerably large, well-lighted by windows looking upon the stable court, and preceded by a little bedroom with a closet on either side. This apartment, however insufficient, if one considers the ordinary household of the officers of a brilliant court, was yet a charming retreat, very habitable, and very cheerful as an asylum from the noise and bustle of the palace. There an ambitious soul could fly to devour the affronts or the mistakes of the day, and there, too, a humble and melancholy spirit could repose in silence and in solitude, apart from the grandeur of the gay world around.

In fact, the stone steps once ascended and the chapel passed, there no longer existed either superiority, duty, or display. There reigned the calm of a convent, and the personal liberty of prison life. The slave of the palace was a monarch when she had crossed the threshold of her modest dwelling. A gentle yet lofty soul such as Andree's found consolation in this reflection; not that she flew here to repose after the fatigues of a disappointed ambition, or of unsatisfied longings; but she felt that she could think more at her ease in the narrow bounds of her chamber than in the rich salons of Trianon, or those marble halls which her feet trod with a timidity amounting almost to terror.

From this sequestered nook, where the young girl felt herself so well and so appropriately placed, she could look without emotion on all the splendor which, during the day, had met her dazzled eye. Surrounded by her flowers, her harpsichord, and her German books — such sweet companions to those who read with the heart — Andree defied fate to inflict on her a single grief, or to deprive her of a single joy.

“Here,” said she, when in the evening, after her duties were over, she returned to throw around her shoulders her dressing-gown with its wide folds, and to breathe with all her soul, as with all her lungs; “here I possess nearly everything I can hope to possess till my death. I may one day perhaps be richer, but I can never be poorer than I now am. There will always be flowers, music, and a consoling page to cheer the poor recluse.”

Andree had obtained permission to breakfast in her own apartment when she felt inclined. This was a precious boon to her, for she could thus remain in her own domicile until twelve o'clock, unless the dauphiness should command her attendance for some morning reading or some early walk. Thus free, in fine weather she set out every morning with a book in her hand, and traversed alone the extensive woods which lie between Versailles and Trianon; then, after a walk of two hours, during which she gave full play to meditation and reverie, she returned to breakfast, often without having seen either nobleman or servant, man or livery.

When the heat began to pierce through the thick foliage, Andree had her little chamber fresh and cool with the double current of air from the door and the window. A small sofa covered, with Indian silk, four chairs to match, a simple yet elegant bed with a circular top, from which the curtains of the same material as the covering of the furniture fell in deep folds, two china vases placed upon the chimneypiece, and a square table with brass feet, composed her little world, whose narrow confines bounded all her hopes and limited all her wishes.

Andree was seated in her apartment, therefore, as we have said, and busily engaged in writing to her father, when a little modest knock at the door of the corridor attracted her attention.

She raised her head on seeing the door open, and uttered a slight cry of astonishment when the radiant face of Nicole appeared, entering from the little antechamber.

CHAPTER XCIII.

How Pleasure to Some Is Despair to Others.

“GOOD-DAY, mademoiselle, it is I,” said Nicole, with a joyous curtsey, which nevertheless, from the young girl's knowledge of her mistress's character, was not unmixed with anxiety.

“You! And how do you happen to be here?” replied Andree, putting down her pen, the better to follow the conversation which was thus commenced.

“Mademoiselle had forgotten me, so I came —

“But if I forgot you, mademoiselle, it was because I had my reasons for so doing. Who gave you permission to come?”

“Monsieur the baron, of course, mademoiselle,” said Nicole, smoothing the handsome black eyebrows which she owed to the generosity of M. Rafte with a very dissatisfied air.

“My father requires your services in Paris, and I do not require you here at all. You may return, child.”

“Oh, then, mademoiselle does not care — I thought mademoiselle had been more pleased with me. It is well worth while loving,” added Nicole, philosophically, “to meet with such a return at last.”

And she did her utmost to bring a tear to her beautiful eyes.

There was enough of heart and feeling in this reproach to excite Andree's compassion.

“My child,” said she, “I have attendance here already, and I cannot permit myself unnecessarily to increase the household of the dauphiness by another mouth.”

“Oh! as if this mouth was so large!” said Nicole, with a charming smile.

“No matter, Nicole, your presence here is impossible.”

“On account of this resemblance?” said the young girl. “Then you have not looked at my face, mademoiselle?”

“In fact, you seem changed.”

“I think so! A fine gentleman, he who got the promotion for M. Philip, came to us yesterday, and as he saw the baron quite melancholy at your being here without a waiting-maid, he told him that nothing was easier than to change me from fair to dark. He brought me with him, dressed me as you see, and here I am.”

Andree smiled.

“You must love me very much,” said she, “since you are determined at all risks to shut yourself up in Trianon, where I am almost a prisoner.”

Nicole cast a rapid but intelligent glance round the room.

“The chamber is not very gay,” said she, “but you are not always in it?”

“I? Of course not,” replied Andree; “but you?”

“Well, I?”

“You, who will never enter the salons of madame the dauphiness; you, who will have neither the resource of the theater, nor the walk, nor the evening circle, but will always remain here — you will die of weariness.”

“Oh!” said Nicole, “there is always some little window or other; one can surely see some little glimpse of the gay world without, were it only through the chinks of the door. If a person can see, they can also be seen — that is all I require, so do not be uneasy on my account.”

“I repeat, Nicole, that I cannot receive you without express orders from my father.”

“Is that your settled determination?”

“It is.”

Nicole drew the Baron de Taverney's letter from her bosom.

“There,” said she, “since my entreaties and my devotion to you have had no effect, let us see if the order contained in this will have more power.”

Andree read the letter, which was in the following terms:

“I am aware, and indeed it is already remarked, my dear Andree, that you do not occupy the position at Trianon which your rank imperatively requires. You ought to have two femmes-de-chambre and a valet, as I ought to have clear twenty thousand pounds per annum; but as I am satisfied with one thousand pounds, imitate my example, and content yourself with Nicole, who in her own person is worth all the servants you ought to have.

“Nicole is quick, intelligent, and devoted to you, and will readily adopt the tone and manners of her new locality. Your chief care indeed will he not to stimulate her, but to repress her anxiety. Keep her, then; and do not imagine that I am making any sacrifice in depriving myself of her services.

Incase you should think so, remember that his majesty, who had the goodness to think of us, remarked on seeing you (this was confided to me by a good friend), that you required a little more attention to your toilet and general appearance. Think of this; it is of great importance.

"YOUR AFFECTIONATE FATHER."

This letter threw Andree into a state of grief and perplexity. She was then to be haunted, even in her new prosperity, by the remembrance of that poverty which she alone did not feel to be a fault, while all around seemed to consider it as a crime.

Her first impulse was to break her pen indignantly, to tear the letter she had commenced, and to reply to her father's epistle by some lofty tirade expressive of philosophical self-denial, which Philip would have approved of with all his heart. But she imagined she saw the baron's satirical smile on reading this chef-d'oeuvre, and her resolution vanished. She merely replied to the baron's order, therefore, by a paragraph annexed to the news of Trianon which she had already written to him according to his request.

"My father," she added, "Nicole has this moment arrived, and I receive her, since you wish it; but what you have written on this subject has vexed me. Shall I be less ridiculous with this village girl as waiting-maid, than when I was alone amid this wealthy court? Nicole will be unhappy at seeing me humbled; she will be discontented; for servants feel proud or humbled in proportion to the wealth or poverty of their masters. As to his majesty's remark, my father, permit me to tell you that the king has too much good sense to be displeased at my incapacity to play the grand lady, and, besides, his majesty has too much heart to have remarked or criticised my poverty without transforming it into a wealth to which your name and services would have had a legitimate claim in the eyes of all."

This was Andree's reply, and it must be confessed that her ingenuous innocence, her noble pride, had an easy triumph over the cunning and corruption of her tempters.

Andree said no more respecting Nicole. She agreed to her remaining, so that the latter, joyous and animated, she well knew why, prepared on the spot a little bed in the cabinet on the right of the antechamber, and made herself as small, as aerial, and as exquisite as possible, in order not to inconvenience her mistress by her presence in this modest retreat. One would have thought she wished to imitate the rose-leaf which the Persian sages let fall upon a vase filled with water to show that something could be added without spilling the contents.

Andree set out for Trianon about one o'clock. She had never been more quickly or more gracefully attired. Nicole had surpassed herself; politeness, attention, and zeal — nothing had been wanting in her services.

When Mademoiselle de Taverney was gone, Nicole felt herself mistress of the domicile, and instituted a thorough examination of it. Everything was scrutinized, from the letters to the smallest knickknack on the toilet-table, from the mantelpiece to the most secret corners of the closets. Then she looked out of the windows to take a survey of the neighborhood.

Below her was a large courtyard, in which several hostlers were dressing and currying the splendid horses of the dauphiness. Hostlers! pshaw! Nicole turned away her head.

On the right was a row of windows on the same story as those of Andree's apartment. Several heads appeared at these windows, apparently those of chambermaids and floor-scrubbers. Nicole disdainfully proceeded in her examination.

On the opposite side, in a large apartment, some music-teachers were drilling a class of choristers and instrumentalists for the mass of St. Louis. Without ceasing her dusting operations, Nicole commenced to sing; after her own fashion, thus distracting the attention of the masters, and causing the choristers to sing false.

But this pastime could not long satisfy Mademoiselle Nicole's ambition. When the masters and the singers had quarreled, and been mystified sufficiently, the little waiting-maid proceeded to the inspection of the higher story. All the windows were closed, and, moreover, they were only attics, so Nicole continued her dusting. But a moment afterward, one of these attic windows was opened without her being able to discover by what mechanism, for no one appeared. Some person however must have opened this window; this some person must have seen Nicole and yet nut have remained to look at her, thereby proving himself a most impertinent some person. At least, such was Nicole's opinion. But she, who examined everything so conscientiously, could not avoid examining the features of this impertinent; and she therefore returned every moment from her different avocations to the window to give a glance at this attic — that is, at this open eye from which the eyeball was so obstinately absent. Once she imagined that the person fled as she approached; but this was incredible, and she did not believe it.

On another occasion she was almost certain of the fact, having seen the back of the fugitive, surprised, no doubt, by a prompter return than he had anticipated. Then Nicole had recourse to stratagem. She concealed herself behind the curtain, leaving the window wide open to drown all suspicion.

She waited a long time, but at last a head of black hair made its appearance; then came two timid hands, which supported, buttress like, a body bending over cautiously; and, finally, a face showed itself distinctly at the window. Nicole almost fell, and grasped the curtain so tightly, in her surprise, that it shook from top to bottom.

It was Monsieur Gilbert's face which was looking at her from this lofty attic. But the moment Gilbert saw the curtain move, he comprehended the trick, and appeared no more. To mend the matter, the attic window was closed.

No doubt Gilbert had seen Nicole; he had been astonished, and had wished to convince himself of the presence of his enemy; and when he found himself discovered instead, he had fled in agitation and in anger. At least, Nicole interpreted the scene thus, and she was right, for this was the exact state of the case.

In fact, Gilbert would rather have seen his Satanic majesty in person than Nicole. The arrival of this spy caused him a thousand terrors. He felt an old leaven of jealousy against her, for she knew his secret of the garden in the Rue Coq-Heron.

Gilbert had fled in agitation, but not in agitation alone, but also in anger, and biting his nails with rage.

“Of what use now is my foolish discovery, of which I was so proud?” said he to himself. “Even if Nicole had a lover in Paris, the evil is done, and she will not be sent away from this on that account; but if she tells what I did in the Rue Coq-Heron, I shall be dismissed from Trianon. It is not I who govern Nicole — it is she who governs me. Oh, fury!”

And Gilbert's inordinate self-love, serving as a stimulant to his hatred, made his blood boil with frightful violence. It seemed to him that Nicole, in entering that apartment, had chased from it, with a diabolical smile, all the happy dreams which Gilbert from his garret had wafted thither every night along with his vows, his ardent love, and his flowers. Had Gilbert been too much occupied to think of Nicole before, or had he banished the subject from his thoughts on account of the terror with which it inspired him? We cannot determine; but this we do know, at least, that Nicole's appearance was a most disagreeable surprise for him.

He saw plainly that, sooner or later, war would be declared between them; but, as Gilbert was prudent and politic, he did not wish the war to commence until he felt himself strong enough to make it energetic and effective. With this intention he determined to counterfeit death until chance should present him with a favorable opportunity of reviving, or until Nicole, from weakness or necessity, should venture on some step which would deprive her of her present vantage ground. Therefore, all eye, all ear, when Andree was concerned, but at the same time ceaselessly vigilant, he continued to make himself acquainted with the state of affairs in the first apartment of the corridor, without Nicole ever having once met him in the gardens.

Unluckily for Nicole, she was not irreproachable, and even had she been so for the present, there was always one stumbling-block in the past over which she could be made to fall.

At the end of a week's ceaseless watching, morning, noon, and night, Gilbert at last saw through the bars of his window a plume which he fancied he recognized. This plume was a source of constant agitation to Nicole, for it belonged to M. Beausire, who, following the rest of the court, had emigrated from Paris to Trianon.

For a long time Nicole was cruel; for a long time she left M. Beausire to shiver in the cold, and melt in the sun, and her prudence drove Gilbert to despair; but one fine morning, when M. Beausire had, doubtless, overleaped the barrier of mimic eloquence, and found an opportunity of bringing persuasive words to his aid, Nicole profited by Andree's absence to descend to the courtyard and join M. Beausire, who was assisting his friend, the superintendent of the stables, to train a little Shetland pony.

From the court they passed into the garden, and from thence into the shady avenue which leads to Versailles. Gilbert followed the amorous couple with the ferocious joy of a tiger who scents his prey. He counted their steps, their sighs, learned by heart all he heard of their conversation, and it may be presumed that the result pleased him, for the next day, freed from all embarrassment, he displayed himself openly at his attic window, humming a song and looking quite at ease, and so far from fearing to be seen by Nicole, that, on the contrary, he seemed to brave her look.

Nicole was mending an embroidered silken mitten belonging to her mistress; she heard the song, raised her head, and saw Gilbert. The first evidence she gave of Ids presence was a contemptuous pouting, which bordered on the bitter, and breathed of hostility at a league's distance. But Gilbert sustained this look with such a singular smile, and there was such provoking intelligence in his air and in his manner of singing, that Nicole looked down and blushed.

“She understands me,” thought Gilbert; “that is all I wished.” On subsequent occasions Gilbert continued the same behavior, and it was now Nicole's turn to tremble. She went so far as to long for an interview with him, in order to free her heart from the load with which the satirical looks of the young gardener had burdened it.

Gilbert saw that she sought him. He could not misunderstand the short dry coughs which sounded near the window whenever Nicole knew him to be in his attic, nor the goings and comings of the young girl in the corridor when she supposed he might be ascending or descending the stairs. For a short time he was very proud of this triumph, which he attributed entirely to his strength of character and wise precautions. Nicole watched him so well that once she spied him as he mounted to his attic. She called him, but he did not reply.

Prompted either by curiosity or fear, Nicole went still farther. One evening she took off her pretty high-heeled slippers, a present from Andree, and with a trembling and hurried step she ventured into the corridor, at the end of which she saw Gilbert's door. There was still sufficient daylight to enable Gilbert, aware of Nicole's approach, to see her distinctly through the joining, or rather through the crevices of the panels. She knocked at the door, knowing well that he was in his room, but Gilbert did not reply.

It was, nevertheless, a dangerous temptation for him. He could, at his ease, humble her who thus came to entreat his pardon, and prompted by this thought, he had already raised his hand to draw the bolt which, with his habitual precaution and vigilance, he had fastened to avoid surprise.

“But no,” thought he, “no. She is all calculation; it is from fear or interest alone that she comes to seek me. She therefore hopes to gain something by her visit; but if so, what may I not lose?”

And with this reasoning he let his hand fall again by his side. Nicole, after having knocked at the door two or three times, retired frowning. Gilbert therefore kept all his advantage, and Nicole had only to redouble her cunning in order not to lose hers entirely. At last, all these projects and counter-projects reduced themselves to this dialogue, which took place between the belligerent parties one evening at the chapel door, where chance had brought them together.

“Ha! good-evening, Monsieur Gilbert; you are here, then, are you?”

“Oh! good-evening, Mademoiselle Nicole; you are at Trianon?”

“As you see — waiting-maid to mademoiselle.”

“And I am assistant-gardener.”

Then Nicole made a deep curtsey to Gilbert, who returned her a most courtly bow, and they separated. Gilbert ascended to his attic as if he had been on his way thither, and Nicole left the offices and proceeded on her errand; but Gilbert glided down again stealthily, and followed the young femme-de-chambre, calculating that she was going to meet M. Beausire.

A man was indeed waiting for her beneath the shadows of the alley; Nicole approached him. It was too dark for Gilbert to recognize M. Beausire; rind the absence of the plume puzzled him so much, that he let Nicole return to her domicile, and followed the man as far as the gate of Trianon.

It was not M. Beausire, but a man of a certain age, or rather certainly aged, with a distinguished air, and a brisk gait, notwithstanding his advanced years. When he approached, Gilbert, who carried his assurance so far as almost to brush past him, recognized M. de Richelieu.

“Peste!” said he, “first an officer, now a marshal of France! Mademoiselle Nicole ascends in the scale.”

CHAPTER XCIV.

The Parliaments.

WHILE ALL THESE minor intrigues, hatched and brought to light beneath the linden trees and amid the alleys of Trianon, formed a sufficiently animated existence for the insects of this little world, the great intrigues of the town, like threatening tempests, spread their vast wings over the palace of Themis, as M. Jean Dubarry wrote in mythological parlance to his sister.

The parliaments, those degenerate remains of the ancient French opposition, had taken breath beneath the capricious government of Louis XV.; but since their protector, M. de Choiseul, had fallen, they felt the approach of danger, and they prepared to meet it by measures as energetic as their circumstances would permit.

Every general commotion is kindled at first lay some personal quarrel, as the pitched battles of armies commence by skirmishes of outposts. Since M. de la Chalotais had attacked M. d'Aiguillon, and in so doing had personified the struggle of the tiers-etat with the feudal lords, the public mind had taken possession of the question, and would not permit it to be deferred or displaced.

Now the king — whom the parliament of Brittany and of all France had deluged with a flood of petitions, more or less submissive and foolish — the king, thanks to Madame Dubarry, had just given his countenance to the feudal against the tiers party, by nominating M. d'Aiguillon to the command of his light horse.

M. Jean Dubarry had described it very correctly; it was a smart fillip to “the dear and trusty counselors, sitting in high court of parliament.”

“How would the blow be taken?”

Town and court asked itself this question every morning at sunrise; but members of parliament are clever people, and where others are much embarrassed they see clearly. They began with agreeing among themselves as to the application and the result of this blow, after which they adopted the following resolution, when it had been clearly ascertained that the blow had been given and received:

“The court of parliament will deliberate upon the conduct of the ex-governor of Brittany, and give its opinion thereon.”

But the king parried the blow by sending a message to the peers and princes, forbidding them to repair to the palace, or be present at any deliberation which might take place concerning M. d'Aiguillon. They obeyed to the letter.

Then the parliament, determined to do its business itself, passed a decree, in which, after declaring that the Duke d'Aiguillon was seriously inculpated and tainted with suspicion, even on matters which touched his honor, it proclaimed that that peer was suspended from the functions of the peerage, until, by a judgment given in the court of peers, with the forms and solemnities prescribed by the laws and customs of the kingdom, the place of which nothing can supply, he had fully cleared himself from the accusations and suspicions now resting on his honor.

But such a decree passed merely in the court of parliament before those interested, and inscribed in their reports, was nothing; public notoriety was wanting, and, above all, that uproar which song alone ventures to raise in France, and which makes song the sovereign controller of events and rulers. This decree of parliament must be heightened and strengthened by the power of song.

Paris desired nothing better than to take part in this commotion. Little disposed to view either court or parliament with favor, Paris in its ceaseless movement was waiting for some good subject for a laugh, as a transition from all the causes for tears which had been furnished it for centuries.

The decree was therefore properly and duly passed, and the parliament appointed commissioners, who were to have it printed under their own eyes. Ten thousand copies of the decree were to be struck off, and the distribution organized without delay.

Then, as it was one of their rules that the person interested should be informed of what the court had done respecting him, the same commissioners proceeded to the hotel of the Duke d'Aiguillon, who had just arrived in Paris for an important interview, no less indeed than to have a clear and open explanation, which had become necessary between the duke and his uncle, the marshal.

Thanks to Rafte, all Versailles had been, informed within an hour of the noble resistance of the old duke to the king's orders, touching the portfolio of M. de Choiseul. Thanks to Versailles, all Paris and all France had learned the same news; so that Richelieu had found himself for some time past on the summit of popularity', from which he made political grimaces at Madame Dubarry and his clear nephew.

The position was unfavorable for M. d'Aiguillon, who was already so unpopular. The marshal, hated, but at the same time feared, by the people, because he was the living type of that nobility which was so respected and so respectable under Louis XV. — the marshal, so Protean in his character, that, after having chosen a part, he was able to withdraw from it without difficulty when circumstances required it, when a bon-mot might be the result — Richelieu, we repeat, was a dangerous enemy; the more so as the worst part of his enmity was always that which he concealed, in order, as he said, to create a surprise.

The Duke d'Aiguillon, since his interview with Madame Dubarry, had two flaws in his coat of mail. Suspecting how much anger and thirst for revenge Richelieu concealed under the apparent equality of his temper, he acted as mariners do in certain cases of difficulty — he burst the waterspout with his cannon, assured that the danger would be less if it were faced boldly. He set about looking everywhere for his uncle, therefore, in order to have a serious conversation with him; but nothing was more difficult to accomplish than this step, since the marshal had discovered his wish. Marches and countermarches commenced. When the marshal saw his nephew at a distance, he sent him a smile, and immediately surrounded in itself by people who rendered all communication impossible, thus putting the enemy at defiance as from an impregnable fort.

The Duke d'Aiguillon burst the waterspout. He simply presented himself at his uncle's hotel at Versailles; but Rafte, from his post at the little window of the hotel looking upon the Court, recognized the liveries of the duke, and warned his master. The duke entered the marshal's bedroom, where he found Rafte alone, who, with a most confidential smile, was so indiscreet as to inform the nephew that his uncle had not slept at home that night.

M. d'Aiguillon bit his lips and retired. When he returned to his hotel, he wrote to the marshal to request an audience. The marshal could not refuse to reply. If he replied, he could not refuse an audience; and if he granted the audience, how could he refuse a full explanation; M. d'Aiguillon resembled too much those polite and engaging duelists, who hide their evil designs under a fascinating and graceful exterior, lead their man upon the ground with bows and reverences, and there put him to death without pity.

The marshal's self-love was not so powerful as to mislead him; he knew his nephew's power. Once in his presence, his opponent would force from him either a pardon or a concession. Now, Richelieu never pardoned any one, and concessions to an enemy are always a dangerous fault in politics. Therefore, on receipt of M. d'Aguillon's letter, he pretended to have left Paris for several days.

Rafte, whom he consulted upon this point, gave him the following advice:

“We are on the fair way to ruin M. d'Aiguillon. Our friends of the parliament will do the work. If M. d'Aiguillon, who suspects this, can lay his hand upon you before the explosion, he will force from you a promise to assist him in case of misfortune; for your resentment is of that kind that you cannot openly gratify it at the expense of your family interest. If, on the contrary, you refuse, M. d'Aiguillon will leave you knowing you to he his enemy and attributing all his misfortunes to you; and he will go away comforted, as people always are when they have found out the cause of their complaint, even although the complaint itself be not removed.”

“That is quite true.” replied Richelieu; “but I cannot conceal myself forever. How many days will it be before the explosion takes place?”

“Six days, my lord.”

“Are you sure?”

Rafte drew from his pocket a letter from a counselor of the parliament. This letter contained only the following lines:

“It has been decided that the decree shall be passed. It will take place on Thursday, the final day fixed on by the company.”

“Then the affair is very simple,” replied the marshal; “send the duke back his letter with a note from your own hand:

“MY LORD DUKE — You have doubtless heard of the departure of my lord marshal for .... Change of air has been judged indispensable by the marshal's physician, who thinks him rather overworked. If, as I believe is the case, after what you did me the honor to tell me the other day, you wish to have an interview with my lord, I can assure you that on Thursday evening next the duke, on his return from.... will sleep in his hotel in Paris, where you will certainly find him.”

“And now,” added the marshal, “hide me somewhere until Thursday.”

Rafte punctually fulfilled these instructions; the letter was written and sent, the hiding-place was found. Only one evening. Richelieu, who began to feel very much wearied, slipped out and proceeded to Trianon to speak to Nicole. He risked nothing, or thought he risked nothing, by this step, knowing the Duke d'Aiguillon to be at the pavilion of Luciennes. The result of this maneuver was, that even if M. d'Aiguillon suspected something, he could not foresee the blow which menaced him until he had actually met his enemy's sword.

The delay until Thursday satisfied him; on that day he left Versailles with the hope of at last meeting and combating this impalpable antagonist. This Thursday was, as we have said, the day on which parliament was to proclaim its decree.

An agitation, low and muttering as yet, but perfectly intelligible to the Parisian, who knows so well the level of these popular waves, reigned in the wide streets through which M. d'Aiguillon's carriage passed. No notice was taken of him, for he had observed the precaution of coming in a carriage without a coat of arms or other heraldic distinctions.

Here and there he saw busy-looking crowds, who were showing each other some paper which they read with many gesticulations, and collecting in noisy groups, like ants round a piece of sugar fallen to the ground. But this was the period of inoffensive agitation; the people were then in the habit of congregating together in this manner for a corn tax, for an article in the “Gazette de Holland,” for a verse of Voltaire's, or for a song against Dubarry or Maupeou.

M. d'Aiguillon drove straight to M. de Richelieu's hotel. He found there M. Rafte.

“The marshal,” the secretary said, “was expected every moment; some delay of the post must have detained him at the barrier.”

M. d'Aiguillon proposed waiting, not without expressing some impatience to Rafte, for he took this excuse as a new defeat. His ill-humor increased however when Rafte told him that the marshal would be in despair on his return to find that M. d'Aiguillon had been kept waiting; that besides, he was not to sleep in Paris, as he had at first intended; and that, most probably, he would not return from the country alone, and would just call in passing at his hotel to see if there was any news; that therefore M.

d'Aiguillon would be wiser to return to his house, where the marshal could call as he passed.

"Listen, Rafte," said d'Aiguillon, who had become more gloomy during this mysterious reply; "you are my uncle's conscience, and I trust you will answer me as an honest man. I am played upon, am I not, and the marshal does not wish to see me? Do not interrupt me, Rafte; you have been a valuable counselor to me, and I might have been, and can yet be, a good friend to you; must I return to Versailles?"

"My lord duke, I assure you, upon my honor, you will receive a visit at your own house from the marshal in less than an hour."

"Then I can as well wait here, since he will come this way."

"I have had the honor of informing you that he will probably not be alone."

"I understand. And I have your word, Rafte?"

At these words the duke retired deep in thought, but with an air as noble and graceful as the marshal's was the reverse, when, after his nephew's departure, he emerged from a closet, through the glass door of which he had been peeping.

The marshal smiled like one of those hideous demons which Callot has introduced in his "Temptations."

"He suspects nothing, Rafte?" said he.

"Nothing, my lord."

"What hour is it?"

"The hour has nothing to do with the matter, my lord. You must wait until our little procureur of the chatelet makes his appearance. The commissioners are still at the printer's."

Rafte had scarce finished, when a footman opened a secret door, and introduced a personage, very ugly, very greasy, very black — one of those living pens for which Monsieur Dubarry professed such a profound antipathy.

Rafte pushed the marshal into a closet, and hastened, smiling, to meet this man.

"Ah! it is you, M. Flageot?" said he; "I am delighted to see you!"

"Your servant, Monsieur Rafte. Well! the business is done."

"Is it printed?"

"Five thousand are struck off. The first proofs are already scattered over the town, the others are drying."

“What a misfortune, my dear M. Flageot! What a blow to the marshal's family!”

M. Flageot, to avoid the necessity of answering — that is, of telling a lie — drew a large silver box from his pocket, and slowly inhaled a pinch of Spanish snuff.

“Well, what is to be done now?” asked Rafte.

“The forms, my dear sir, the forms. The commissioners, now that they are sure of the printing and the distribution, will immediately enter their carriages, which are waiting at the door of the printing-office, and proceed to make known the decree to M. the Duke d'Aiguillon, who happens luckily — I mean unfortunately, M. Rafte — to be in his hotel in Paris, where they can have an interview with him in person.”

Rafte hastily seized an enormous bag of legal documents from a shelf, which he gave to M. Flageot, saying:

“These are the suits which I mentioned to you, sir; the marshal has the greatest confidence in your abilities, and leaves this affair, which ought to prove most remunerative, entirely in your hands. I have to thank you for your good offices in this deplorable conflict of M. d'Aiguillon's with the all-powerful parliament of Paris, and also for your very valuable advice.”

And he gently, but with some haste, pushed M. Flageot, delighted with the weight of his burden, toward the door of the antechamber. Then, releasing the marshal from his prison:

“Quick, my lord, to your carriage! You have no time to lose if you wish to be present at the scene. Take care that your horses go more quickly than those of the commissioners.”

CHAPTER XCV.

In Which It Is Shown That the Path of a Minister Is Not Always Strewn With Roses.

THE MARSHAL DE RICHELIEU'S horses did go more quickly than those of the commissioners, for the marshal entered first into the courtyard of the Hotel d'Aiguillon.

The duke did not expect his uncle, and was preparing to return to Luciennes to inform Madame Dubarry that the enemy had been unmasked, when the announcement of the marshal's arrival roused his discouraged mind from its torpor.

The duke hastened to meet his uncle, and took both his hands in his with a warmth of affection proportionate to the fear he had experienced. The marshal was as affectionate as the duke; the tableau was touching. The Duke d'Aiguillon, however, was manifestly endeavoring to hasten the period of explanation, while the marshal, on the contrary, delayed it as much as possible, by looking at the pictures, the bronzes, or the tapestry, and complaining of dreadful fatigue.

The duke cut off the marshal's retreat, imprisoned him in an armchair, as M. de Villars imprisoned the Prince Eugene in Marchiennes, and commenced the attack.

“Uncle,” said he, “is it true that you, the most discriminating man in France, have judged so ill of me as to think that my self-seeking did not extend to us both?”

There was no longer room for retreat; Richelieu decided on his plan of action.

“What do you mean by that?” replied he, “and in what do you perceive that I judged unfavorably of you or the reverse, my dear nephew?”

“Uncle, you are offended with me.”

“But for what and how?”

“Oh! these loopholes, my lord marshal, will not serve you; in one word, you avoid me when I need your assistance.”

“Upon my honor, I do not understand you.”

“I will explain, then. The king refused to nominate you for his minister, and because I, on my part, accepted the command of the light horse, you imagine that I have deserted and betrayed you. That dear countess, too, who loves you so well!”

Here Richelieu listened eagerly, but not to his nephew's words alone.

“You say she loves me well, this dear countess?” he added.

“And I can prove it.”

“But, my dear fellow, I never doubted it. I send for you to assist me to push the wheel; you are younger, and therefore stronger than I am; you succeed, I fail. That is in the natural course of things, and on my faith I cannot imagine why you have all these scruples. If you have acted for my interest, you will be a hundred-fold repaid, if against me — well! I shall only return the fisticuff. Does that require explanation?”

“In truth, uncle —

“You are a child, duke. Your position is magnificent; a peer of France, a duke, a commander of the light horse, minister in six weeks — you ought to be beyond the influence of all futile intrigues. Success absolves, my dear child. Suppose — I like apologues — suppose that we are the two mules in the fable. But what noise is that?”

“Nothing, my dear uncle, proceed.”

“There is something; I hear a carriage in the courtyard.”

“Do not let it interrupt you, uncle, pray; your conversation interests me extremely. I like apologues, too.”

“Well, my friend, I was going to say that when you are prosperous you will never meet with reproaches, nor need you fear the spite of the envious; but if you limp, if you fall — Diable! you must take care — then it is that the wolf will attack you. But you see I was right; there is a noise in the antechamber; it is the portfolio which they are bringing you, no doubt. The little countess must have exerted herself for you.”

The usher entered.

“Messieurs the commissioners of the parliament!” said he, uneasily.

“Ha!” exclaimed Richelieu.

“The commissioners of the parliament here? What do they want with me?” replied the duke, not at all reassured by his uncle's smile.

“In the king's name!” cried a sonorous voice at the end of the antechamber.

“Oh, ho!” cried Richelieu.

M. d'Aiguillon turned very pale; he rose, however, and advanced to the threshold of the apartment to introduce the two commissioners, behind whom were stationed two motionless ushers, and in the distance a host of alarmed footmen.

“What is your errand here?” asked the duke, in a trembling voice.

“Have we the honor of speaking to the Duke d'Aiguillon?” said one of the commissioners.

“I am the Duke d'Aiguillon, gentlemen.”

The commissioner, bowing profoundly, drew from his belt the act in proper form, and read it in a loud and distinct voice.

It was the decree, detailed, complete, and circumstantial, which declared d'Aiguillon gravely arraigned and prejudiced by suspicions even regarding matters which affected his honor, and suspended him from his functions as peer of the realm.

The duke listened to the reading like a man thunderstruck. He stood motionless as a statue on its pedestal, and did not even hold out his hand to take the copy of the decree which the commissioners of the parliament offered him.

It was the marshal who, also standing, but alert and nimble, took the paper, read it, and returned the bow of messieurs the commissioners. They were already at; some distance from the mansion, before the Duke d'Aiguillon recovered from his stupor.

“This is a severe blow,” said Richelieu; “you are no longer a peer of France; it is humiliating.”

The duke turned to his uncle as if he had only at that moment recovered the power of life and thought.

“You did not expect it?” asked Richelieu, in the same tone.

“And you, uncle?” rejoined d'Aiguillon.

“How do you imagine any one could suspect that the parliament would strike so cold a blow at the favored courtier of the king and his favorite; these people will ruin themselves.”

The duke sat down, and leaned his burning cheek on his hand.

“But if,” continued the old marshal, forcing the dagger deeper into the wound, “if the parliament degrades you from the peerage because you are nominated to the command of the light horse, they will decree you a prisoner and condemn you to the stake when you are appointed minister. These people hate you, d'Aiguillon; do not trust them.”

The duke bore this cruel irony with the fortitude of a hero; his misfortune raised and strengthened his mind. Richelieu thought this fortitude was only insensibility, or want of comprehension perhaps, and that the wound had not been deep enough.

“Being no longer a peer,” said he, “you will be less exposed to the hatred of these lawyers. Take refuge in a few years of obscurity. Besides, look you, this obscurity, which will be your safeguard, will come without your seeking it. Deprived of your functions of peer, you will have more difficulty in reaching the ministry, and may perhaps escape the business altogether. But if you will struggle, my dear fellow, why, you have Madame Dubarry on your side; she loves you, and she is a powerful support.”

M. d'Aiguillon rose. He did not even cast an angry look upon the marshal in return for all the suffering the old man had inflicted upon him.

“You are right, uncle,” he replied calmly, “and your wisdom is shown in this last advice. The Countess Dubarry, to whom you had the goodness to present me, and to whom you spoke so favorably of me and with so much zeal, that every one at Luciennes can bear witness to it, Madame Dubarry will defend me. Thanks to Heaven, she likes me; she is brave, and exerts an all-powerful influence over the mind of the king. Thanks, uncle, for your advice; I fly thither as to a haven of safety. My horses! Bourgignon — to Luciennes!”

The marshal remained in the middle of an unfinished smile. M. d'Aiguillon bowed respectfully to his uncle and quitted the apartment, leaving the marshal very much perplexed, and above all very much confused, at the eagerness with which he had attacked this noble and feeling victim.

There was some consolation for the old marshal in the mad joy of the Parisians when they read in the evening the ten thousand copies of the decree, which was scrambled for in the streets. But he could not help sighing when Rafte asked for an account of the evening. Nevertheless, he told it without concealing anything.

“Then the blow is parried?” said the secretary.

“Yes and no, Rafte; but the wound is not mortal, and we have at Trianon something better, which I reproach myself for not having made my sole care. We have started two mares, Rafte; it was very foolish.”

“Why — if you seize the best?” replied Rafte.

“Oh, my friend, remember that the best is always the one we have not taken, and we would invariably give the one we hold for the one which has escaped.”

Rafte shrugged his shoulders, and yet M. de Richelieu was in the right.

“You think,” said he, “that M. d'Aiguillon will escape?”

“Do you think the king will, simpleton?”

“Oh! the king finds an opening everywhere; but this matter does not concern the king, that I know of.”

“Where the king can pass, Madame Dubarry will pass, as she holds fast by his skirts; where Madame Dubarry has passed. d'Aiguillon will pass also — but you understand nothing of politics, Rafte.”

“My lord. M. Flageot is not of your opinion.”

“Well, what does this M. Flageot say? But first of all, tell me what he is.”

“He is a procureur, sir.”

“Well?”

“Well! M. Flageot thinks that the king cannot get out of this matter.”

“Oh! ho! — and who will stop the lion?”

“Faith, sir, the rat!”

“And you believe him?”

“I always believe a procureur who promises to do evil.”

“We shall see what means M. Flageot intends to employ, Rafte.”

“That is what I say, my lord.”

“Come to supper then, that I may get to bed. It has quite upset me to see that my poor nephew is no longer peer of France, and will not be minister. I am an uncle, Rafte, after all!”

M. de Richelieu sighed, and then commenced to laugh.

“You have every quality, however, requisite for a minister,” replied Rafte.

CHAPTER XCVI.

M. D'Aiguillon Takes His Revenge.

THE MORNING SUCCEEDING the day on which the terrible decree had thrown Paris and Versailles into an uproar, when every one was anxiously awaiting the result of this decree, the Duke de Richelieu, who had returned to Versailles and had resumed his regularly irregular life, saw Rafte enter his apartment with a letter in his hand. The secretary scrutinized and weighed this letter with such an appearance of anxiety that his emotion quickly communicated itself to his master.

“What is the matter now?” asked the marshal.

“Something not very agreeable, I presume, my lord, and which is inclosed in this letter.”

“Why do you imagine so?”

“Because the letter is from the Duke d'Aiguillon.”

“Ha!” said the duke, “from nephew?”

“Yes, my lord marshal; after the king's council broke up, an usher of the chamber called on me and handed me this paper for you. I have been turning it over and over for the last ten minutes, and I cannot help suspecting that it contains some evil tidings.”

The duke held out his hand.

“Give it me,” said he, “I am brave.”

“I warn you,” interrupted Rafte, “that when the usher gave me the paper, he chuckled outrageously.”

“Diable! that bodes ill,” replied the marshal; “but give it me, nevertheless.”

“And he added; 'M. d'Aiguillon wishes the marshal to have this immediately.'”

“Pain! thou shalt not make me say that thou art an evil,” said the marshal, breaking the seal with a firm hand. And he read it.

“Ha! you change countenance,” said Rafte, standing with his hands crossed behind him, in an attitude of observation.

“Is it possible!” exclaimed Richelieu, continuing to read.

“It seems, then, that it is serious?”

“You look quite delighted.”

“Of course — I see that I was not mistaken.”

The marshal read on.

“The king is good,” said he, after a moment's pause.

“He appoints M. d'Aiguillon minister?”

“Better than that.”

“Oh! What then?”

“Read and ponder.”

Rafte in his turn read the note. It was in the handwriting of d'Aiguillon, and was couched in the following terms:

“MY DEAR UNCLE — Your good advice has borne its fruit; I confided my wrongs to that excellent friend of our house, the Countess Dubarry, who has deigned to lay them at his majesty's feet. The king is indignant at the violence with which the gentlemen of the parliament pursue me, and in consideration of the services I have so faithfully rendered him, his majesty, in this morning's council, has annulled the decree of parliament, and has commanded me to continue my functions as peer of France.

“Knowing the pleasure this news will cause you, my dear uncle, I send you the tenor of the decision, which his majesty in council came to to-day. I have had it copied by a secretary, and you have the announcement before any one else.

“Deign to believe in my affectionate respect, my dear uncle, and continue to bestow on me your good will and advice.

“(Signed) — DUKE D'AIGUILLON.”

“He mocks at me into the bargain!” cried Richelieu.

“Faith, I think so, my lord.”

“The king throws himself into the hornet's nest!”

“You would not believe me yesterday, when I told you so.”

“I did not say he would not throw himself into it, Rafte; I said he would contrive to get out of it. Now, you see, he does get out of it.”

“The fact is, the parliament is beaten.”

“And I also.”

“For the present, yes.”

“Forever! Yesterday I foresaw it, and you consoled me so well, that some misfortune could not fail to ensue.”

“My lord, you despair a little too soon, I think.”

“Master Rafte, you are a fool. I am beaten, and I must pay the stake. You do not fully comprehend, perhaps, how disagreeable it is to me to be the laughingstock of Luciennes; at this moment, 1 he duke is mocking me in company with Madame Dubarry; Mademoiselle Chon, and Monsieur Jean are roaring themselves hoarse at my expense, while the little negro ceases to stuff himself with sweetmeats to make game of me. Parbleu! I have a tolerably good temper, but all this makes me furious.”

“Furious, my lord?”

“I have said it — furious!”

“Then you have done what you should not have done,” said Rafte, philosophically.

“You urged me on. Master Secretary.”

“I?”

“ Yes, you.”

“Why, what is it to me whether M. d'Aiguillon is a peer of France or not — I ask you, my lord? Your nephew does me no injury, I think.”

“Master Rafte, you are impertinent.”

“You have been telling me so for the last forty-nine years, my lord.”

“Well, I shall repeat it again.”

“Not for forty-nine years more, that is one comfort.”

“Rafte, if this is the way you care for my interests — ”

“The interests of your little passions? No, my lord duke, never! Man of genius as you are, you sometimes commit follies which I could not forgive even in an understrapper like myself.”

“Explain yourself, Rafte, and if I am wrong. I will confess it.”

“Yesterday you thirsted for vengeance, did you not? You wished to behold the humiliation of your nephew; you wished, as it were, to be the bearer of the decree of parliament, and gloat over the tremblings and palpitations of your victim, as M. Crebillon the younger says. Well! my lord marshal, such sights as these must be well paid for; such pleasures cost dear. You are rich — pay, pay, my lord marshal!”

“What would you have done in my place, then, O most skillful of tacticians? Come, let me see.”

“Nothing! I would have waited without giving any sign of life. But you itched to oppose the parliament to the Dubarry, from the moment she found that M. d'Aiguillon was a younger man than yourself.”

A groan was the marshal's only reply.

"Well!" continued Rafte, "the parliament was tolerably well prompted by you before it did what it has done. The decree once passed, you should have offered your services to your nephew, who would have suspected nothing."

"That is all well and good, and I admit that I did wrong, but you should have warned me."

"I hinder any evil! You take me for some one else, my lord marshal; you repeat to every one that comes that I am your creature, that you have trained me, and yet you would have me not in — lighted when I see a folly committed, or a misfortune approaching! Fie! fie!"

"Then a misfortune will happen. Master Sorcerer?" — — "Certainly."

"What misfortune?"

"You will quarrel, and M. d'Aiguillon will become the link between the parliament and Madame Dubarry; then he will be minister, and you exiled, or at the Bastille."

The marshal in his anger upset the contents of his snuff-box upon the carpet.

"In the Bastille!" said he, shrugging his shoulders; "is Louis XV., think you, Louis XIV.?"

"No, but Madame Dubarry, supported by M. d'Aiguillon, is quite equal to Madame de Maintenon. Take care; I do not know any princess in the present day who would bring you bonbons and eggs."

"These are melancholy prognostics," replied the marshal, after a long silence. "You read the future; but what of the present, if you please?"

"My lord marshal is too wise for me to give him advice."

"Come, master witty-pate, are you too not mocking me?"

"I beg you to remark, my lord marshal, that you confound dates; a man is never called a witty-pate after forty; now, I am sixty-seven."

"No matter, assist me out of this scrape — and quickly too — quickly!"

"By an advice?"

"By anything you please."

"The time has not come yet."

"Now you are certainly jesting."

"Would to Heaven I were! When I jest, the subject shall be a jesting matter — and unfortunately this is not."

"What do you mean by saying that it is not yet time?"

“No, my lord, it is not time. If the announcement of the king's decree were known in Paris beforehand. I would not say. Shall we send a courier to the President d'Aligre?”

“That they may laugh at us all the sooner?”

“What a ridiculous self-love, my lord marshal! You would make a saint lose patience. Stay, let me finish my plan of a descent on England, and you can finish drowning yourself in your portfolio intrigue, since the business is already half done.”

The marshal was accustomed to these sullen humors of his secretary. He knew that when his melancholy had once declared itself he was dangerous to touch with ungloved fingers.

“Come,” said he, “do not pout at me, and if I do not understand, explain yourself.”

“Then my lord wishes me to trace out a line of conduct for him?”

“Certainly, since you think I cannot conduct myself.”

“Well then, listen.”

“I am all attention.”

“You must send by a trusty messenger to M. d'Aligre,” said Rafte, abruptly, “the Duke d'Aiguillon's letter, and also the decree of the king in council. You must then wait till the parliament has met and deliberated upon it, which will take place immediately; whereupon you must order your carriage, and pay a visit to your little procureur, M. Flageot.”

“Eli!” said Richelieu, whom this name made start as it had done on the previous day; “M. Flageot again! What the deuce has M. Flageot to do with all this, and what am I to do at his house?”

“I have had the honor to tell you, my lord, that M. Flageot is your procureur.”

“Well! what then?”

“Well, if he is your procureur, he has certain bags of yours — certain lawsuits on hand; you must go and ask him about them.”

“To-morrow?”

“Yes, my lord marshal, to-morrow.”

“But all this is your affair, M. Rafte.”

“By no means! by no means! When M. Flageot was a simple scribbling drudge, then I could treat with him as an equal; but as, dating from to-morrow, M. Flageot is an Attila, a scourge of kings — neither more nor less

— it is not asking too much of a duke, a peer, a marshal of France, to converse with this all-powerful man.”

“Is this serious, or are we acting a farce?”

“You will see to-morrow if it is serious, my lord.”

“But tell me what will be the result of my visit to your M. Flageot.”

“I should be very sorry to do so; you would endeavor to prove to me to-morrow that you had guessed it beforehand. Good-night, my lord marshal. Remember; a courier to M. d'Aligre immediately — a visit to M. Flageot to-morrow. Oh! the address? — The coachman knows it; he has driven me there frequently during the last week.”

CHAPTER XCVII.

In Which the Reader Will Once More Meet an Old Acquaintance Whom He Thought Lost, and Whom Perhaps He Did Not Regret.

THE READER will no doubt ask why M. Flageot, who is about to play so majestic a part in our story, was called procureur instead of avocat; and as the reader is quite right, we shall satisfy his curiosity.

The vacations had, for some time, been frequent in parliament, and the lawyers spoke so seldom that their speeches were not worth speaking of. Master Flageot, foreseeing the time when there would be no pleading at all, made certain arrangements with Master Guildou, the procureur, in virtue of which the latter yielded him up office and clients on consideration of the sum of twenty-five thousand livres paid down. That is how Master Flageot became a procureur. But if we are asked how he managed to pay the twenty-five thousand livres, we reply, by marrying Madame Marguerite, to whom this sum was left as an inheritance about the end of the year 1770 — three months before M. de Choiseul's exile.

Master Flageot had been long distinguished for his persevering adherence to the opposition party. Once a procureur, he redoubled his violence, and by this violence succeeded in gaining some celebrity. It was this celebrity, together with the publication of an incendiary pamphlet on the subject of the conflict between M. d'Aiguillon and M. de la Chalotais, which attracted the attention of M. Rafte, who had occasion to keep himself well informed concerning the affairs of parliament.

But, notwithstanding his new dignity and his increasing importance, Master Flageot did not leave the Rue du Petit-Lion-Saint-Sauveur. It would have been too cruel a blow for Madame Marguerite not to have heard the neighbors call her Madame Flageot, and not to have inspired respect in the breasts of M. Guildoirs' clerks, who had entered the service of the new procureur.

The reader may readily imagine what M. de Richelieu suffered in traversing Paris — the filthy Paris of that region — to reach the disgusting hole which the Parisian magistrature dignified with the name of street.

In front of M. Flageot's door, M. de Richelieu's carriage was stopped by another carriage which pulled up at the same moment. The marshal perceived a woman's headdress protruding from the window of this carriage; and as his sixty-five years of age had not quenched the ardor of his gallantry, he hastily jumped out on the muddy pavement, and proceeded to offer his hand to the lady, who was unaccompanied.

But this day the marshal's evil star was in the ascendant. A long, withered leg which was stretched out to reach the step betrayed the old woman. A wrinkled face, adorned with a dark streak of rouge, proved further that the old woman was not only old but decrepit.

Nevertheless there was no room for retreat; the marshal had made the movement, and the movement had been seen. Besides, M. de Richelieu himself was no longer young. In the meantime, the litigant — for what woman with a carriage would have entered that street had she not been a litigant? — the litigant, we say, did not imitate the duke's hesitation; with a ghastly smile she placed her hand in Richelieu's.

“I have seen that face somewhere before,” thought Richelieu; then he added:

“Does madame also intend to visit M. Flageot?”

“Yes, duke,” replied the old lady.

“Oh, I have the honor to be known to you, madame!” exclaimed the duke, disagreeably surprised, and stopping on the threshold of the dark passage.

“Who does not know the Duke de Richelieu?” was the reply. “I should not be a woman if I did not.”

“This she-ape thinks she is a woman!” murmured the conqueror of Mahon, and he made a most graceful bow.

“If I may venture to ask the question,” added he, “to whom have I the honor of speaking?”

“I am the Countess de Bearn, at your service,” replied the old lady, curtseying with courtly reverence upon the dirty floor of the passage, and about three inches from the open trap-door of a cellar, into which the marshal wickedly awaited her disappearance at the third bend.

“I am delighted, madame — enchanted,” said he, “and I return a thousand thanks to fate. You also have lawsuits on hand, countess?”

“Oh! duke, I have only one; but what a lawsuit! Is it possible that you have never heard of it?”

“Oh, frequently, frequently — that great lawsuit. True; I entreat your pardon. How the deuce could I have forgotten That?”

“Against the Saluces!”

“Against the Saluces, yes, countess; the lawsuit about which the song was written.”

“A song?” said the old lady, piqued, “what song?”

“Take care, madame, there is a trapdoor here,” said the duke, who saw that the old woman was decided not to throw herself into the cellar; “take hold of the balustrade — I mean the cord.”

The old lady mounted the first steps. The duke followed her.

“Yes, a very humorous song,” said he.

“A humorous song on my lawsuit!”

“Dame! I shall leave you to judge — but perhaps you know it?”

“Not at all.”

“It is to the tune of the Bourbonnaise; it runs so:

“Embarrassed, countess, as I stand,
Give me, I pray, a helping hand,
And I am quite at your command.'
It is Madame Dubarry who speaks, you must understand.”

“That is very impertinent toward her.”

“Oh! what can you expect? — the ballad-mongers respect no one. Heavens! how greasy this cord is! Then you reply as follows:

“I'm very old and stubborn, too; I'm forced at law my rights to sue; Ah, who can help me? tell me who!”

“Oh! sir, it is frightful!” cried the countess; “a woman of quality is not to be insulted in this manner.”

“Madame, excuse me if I have sung out of tune; these stairs heat me so. Ah! here we are at last. Allow me to pull the bell.”

The old lady, grumbling all the time, made way for the duke to pass.

The marshal rang, and Madame Flageot, who in becoming a procureur's wife had not ceased to fill the functions of portress and cook, opened the door. The two litigants were ushered into M. Flageot's study, where they found that worthy in a state of furious excitement, and with a pen in his mouth, hard at work dictating a terrible plea to his head clerk.

"Good heavens, Master Flageot! what is the matter?" cried the countess, at whose voice the attorney turned round.

"Ah! madame, your most humble servant — a chair here for the Countess de Bearn. This gentleman is a friend of yours, madame, I presume. But surely — oil! I cannot be mistaken — the Duke de Richelieu in my house! Another chair. Bernardet — another chair."

"Master Flageot," said the countess, "how does my lawsuit get on, pray?"

"Ah, madame! I was just now working for you."

"Very good, Master Flageot, very good."

" And after a fashion, my lady, which will make some noise, I hope."

"Hum! Take care!"

"Oh! madame, there is no longer any occasion for caution."

"Then if you are busy about my affair, you can give an audience to the duke."

"Excuse me, my lord duke," said Master Flageot; "but you are too gallant not to understand — "

"I understand. Master Flageot; I understand."

"But now I can attend to you exclusively."

"Don't be uneasy; I shall not abuse your good-nature; you are aware what brings me here?"

"The bags which M. Rafte gave me the other day."

"Some papers relative to my lawsuit of — my suit about — deuce take it! You must know what suit I mean, Master Flageot?"

"Your lawsuit about the lands of Chapenal."

"Very probably; and will you gain it for me? That would be very kind on your part."

"My lord, it is postponed indefinitely."

"Postponed! And why?"

"It will not be brought forward in less than a year, at the earliest."

"For what reason, may I ask?"

"Circumstances, my lord, circumstances; you have heard of his majesty's decree?"

"I think so; but which one? His majesty publishes so many."

"The one which annuls ours."

"Very well; and what then?"

"Well! my lord duke, we shall reply by burning our ships."

“Burning your ships, my dear friend? — you will burn the ships of the parliament? I do not quite comprehend you; I was not aware that the parliament had ships.”

“The first chamber refuses to register, perhaps?” inquired the Countess de Bearn, whom Richelieu's lawsuit in no way prevented from thinking of her own.

“Better than that.”

“The second one also?”

“That would be a mere nothing. Both chambers have resolved not to give any judgments until the king shall have dismissed M. d'Aiguillon.”

“Bah!” exclaimed the marshal, rubbing his hands.

“Not adjudicate! on what?” asked the countess, alarmed.

“On the lawsuits, madame.”

“They will not adjudicate on my lawsuit,” exclaimed the Countess de Bearn, with a dismay which she did not even attempt to conceal.

“Neither on yours, madame, nor the duke's.”

“It is iniquitous! It is rebellion against his majesty's orders, that!

“Madame,” replied the procureur majestically, “the king has forgotten himself; we shall forget also.”

“Monsieur Flageot, you will be sent to the Bastille; remember, I warn you.”

“I shall go singing, madame, and if I am sent thither, all my fellow-members of parliament will follow me, carrying palms in their hands.”

“He is mad!” said the countess to Richelieu.

“We are all the same,” replied the procureur.

“Oh, oh!” said the marshal, “that is becoming rather curious.”

“But, sir, you said just now that you were working for me,” replied Madame de Bearn.

“I said so, and it is quite true. You, madame, are the first example I cite in my narration; here is the paragraph which relates to you.”

He snatched the draft from his clerk's hand, fixed his spectacles upon his nose, and read with emphasis:

“Their position ruined, their fortune compromised, their duties trampled under foot! His majesty will understand how much they must have suffered. Thus the petitioner had intrusted to his care a very important suit, upon which the fortune of one of the first families in the kingdom depends; by his zeal, his industry, and, he ventures to say, his talents, this suit was progressing favorably, and the rights of the most noble and most powerful lady, Angelique Charlotte Veronique, Countess de Bearn, were on the point of being recognized, proclaimed, when the breath of discord — engulfing — ”

“I had just got so far, madame,” said the procureur, drawing himself up; “"but I think the simile is not amiss.”

“M. Flageot,” said the countess, “it is forty years ago since I first employed your father, who proved most worthy of my patronage; I continued that patronage to you; you have gained ten or twelve thousand livres by my suit, and you would probably have gained as many more.”

“Write down all that,” said M. Flageot eagerly to his clerk; “it is a testimony, a proof. It shall be inserted in the confirmation.”

“But now,” interrupted the countess, “I take back all my papers from your charge; from this moment you have lost my confidence.”

Master Flageot, thunderstruck with this disgrace, remained for a moment almost stupefied; but, all at once, rising under the blow like a martyr who dies for his religion:

“Be it so,” said he. “Bernadet, give the papers back to madame; and you will insert this fact,” added he, “that the petitioner preferred his conscience to his fortune.”

“I beg your pardon, countess,” whispered the marshal in the countess's ear, “but it seems to me that you have acted without reflection.”

“In what respect, my lord duke?”

“You take back your papers from this honest procureur, but for what purpose?”

“To take them to another procureur, to another avocat!” exclaimed the countess.

Master Flageot raised his eyes to heaven, with a mournful smile of self-denial and stoic resignation.

“But,” continued the marshal, still whispering in the countess's ear, “if it has been decided that the chambers will not adjudicate, my dear madame, another procureur can do no more than Master Flageot.”

“It is a league, then?”

“Pardieu! do you think Master Flageot fool enough to protest alone, to lose his practice alone, if his fellow lawyers were not agreed to do the same, and consequently support him?”

“But you, my lord duke, what will you do?”

"For my part, I declare that I think Master Flageot a very honest procureur, and that my papers are as safe in his possession as in my own. Consequently I shall leave them with him, of course paying him as if my suit were going on."

"It is well said, my lord marshal, that you are a generous, liberal-minded man!" exclaimed Master Flageot; "I shall spread your fame far and wide, my lord."

"You absolutely overwhelm me, my dear procureur." replied Richelieu, bowing.

"Bernadet," cried the enthusiastic procureur to his clerk, "you will insert in the peroration a eulogy on the Marshal de Richelieu."

"No, no! by no means, Master Flageot! I beg you will do nothing of the kind," replied the marshal hastily. "Diable! that would be a pretty action! I love secrecy in what it is customary to call good actions. Do not disoblige me, Master Flageot — I shall deny it, look you — I shall positively contradict it — my modesty is susceptible. Well, countess, what say you?"

"I say my suit shall be judged. I must have a judgment, and I will."

"And I say, madame, that if your suit is judged, the king must first send the Swiss guards, the light horse, and twenty pieces of cannon into the great hall," replied Master Flageot with a belligerent air, which completed the consternation of the litigant.

"Then you do not think his majesty can get out of this scrape." said Richelieu in a low voice to Flageot.

"Impossible, my lord marshal. It is an unheard-of case. No more justice in France! It is as if you were to say no more bread!"

"Do you think so?"

"You will see."

"But the king will be angry."

"We are resolved to brave everything."

"Even exile?"

"Even death, my lord marshal! We have a heart, although we wear the gown."

And M. Flageot struck his breast vigorously.

"In fact, madame," said Richelieu to his companion, "I believe that this is an unfortunate step for the ministry."

"Oh, yes!" replied the old countess, after a pause; "it is very unfortunate for me, who never meddle in anything that passes, to be dragged into this conflict.”

“I think, madame,” said the marshal, “there is some one who could help you in this affair — a very powerful person. But would that person do it?”

“Is it displaying; too much curiosity, duke, to ask the name of this powerful person?”

“Your goddaughter!” said the duke.

“Oh! Madame Dubarry!”

“The same.”

“In fact, that is true; I am obliged to you for the hint.”

The duke bit his lips.

“Then you will go to Luciennes?” asked he.

“Without hesitation.”

“But the Countess Dubarry cannot overcome the opposition of parliament.”

“I will tell her I must have my suit judged, and as she can refuse me nothing, after the service I have rendered her, she will tell the king she wishes it. His majesty will speak to the chancellor, and the chancellor has a long arm, duke. Master Flageot, be kind enough, to continue to study my case well; it may come on sooner than you think. Mark nay words.” Master Flageot turned away his head with an air of incredulity which did not shake the countess in the least. In the meantime the duke had been reflecting.

“Well, madame, since you are going to Luciennes, will you have the goodness to present my most humble respects?”

“Most willingly, duke.”

“We are companions in misfortune; your suit is in abeyance, and mine also. In supplicating for yourself you will do so for me too. Moreover, you may express yonder the sort of pleasure these stubborn-headed parliament men cause me; and you will add that it was I who advised you to have recourse to the divinity of Luciennes.”

“I will not fail to do so, duke. Adieu, gentlemen.”

“Allow me the honor of conducting you to your carriage.”

“Once more, adieu, Monsieur Flageot; I leave you to your occupations.” The marshal handed the countess to her carriage.

“Rafte was right.” said he, “the Flageots will cause a revolution. Thank Heaven! I am supported on both sides — I am of the court, and of the parliament. Madame Dubarry will meddle with politics and fall, alone; if she resists, I have my little pretty-face at Trianon. Decidedly Rafte is of my school, and when I am minister he shall be my chief secretary.”

CHAPTER XCVIII.

The Confusion Increases.

MADAME DE BEARN followed Richelieu's advice literally. Two hours and a half after the duke had left her, she was waiting in the antechamber at Luciennes, in the company of M. Zamore.

It was some time since she had been seen at Madame Dubarry's, and her presence therefore excited a feeling of curiosity in the countess's boudoir when her name was announced.

M. d'Aiguillon had not lost any time either, and he was plotting with the favorite when Chon entered to request an audience for Madame de Bearn. The duke made a movement to retire, but the countess detained him.

“I would rather you would remain,” said she. “In case my old alms-giver comes to ask a loan, you would be most useful to me, for she will ask less.”

The duke remained. Madame de Bearn, with a face composed for the occasion, took the chair opposite the countess, which the latter offered to her, and after the first civilities were exchanged:

“May I ask to what fortunate chance I am indebted for your presence, madame?” said Madame Dubarry.

“Ah! madame,” said the old litigant, “a great misfortune.”

“What! madame — a misfortune?”

“A piece of news which will deeply afflict his majesty.”

“I am all impatience, madame — ”

“The parliament —

“Oh, ho!” grumbled the Duke d'Aiguillon.

“The Duke d'Aiguillon,” said the countess, hastily introducing her guest to her lady visitor, for fear of some unpleasant contretemps. But the old countess was as cunning as all the other courtiers put together, and never caused a misunderstanding, except wittingly, and when the misunderstanding seemed likely to benefit her.

“I know,” said she, “all the baseness of these lawyers, and their want of respect for merit of high birth.”

This compliment, aimed directly at the duke, drew a most graceful bow from him, which the litigant returned with an equally graceful curtsey.

“But,” continued she, “it is not the duke alone who is now concerned, but the entire population; the parliament refuse to act.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed Madame Dubarry, throwing herself back upon the sofa; “there will be no more justice in France! Well! What change will that produce?”

The duke smiled. As for Madame de Bearn, instead of taking the affair pleasantly, her morose features darkened still more. “It is a great calamity, madame,” said she.

“Ah! indeed?” replied the favorite.

“It is evident, madame, that you are happy enough to have no lawsuits.”

“Hem!” said d'Aiguillon, to recall the attention of Madame Dubarry, who at last comprehended the insinuation of the litigant.

“Alas! madame,” said she, “it is true; you remind me that if I have no lawsuit, you have a very important one.”

“Ah, yes! madame, and delay will be ruinous to me.”

“Poor lady!”

“Unless, countess, the king takes some decided step.”

“Oh! madame, the king is right well inclined to do so. He will exile messieurs the councilors, and all will be right.”

“But, madame, that would be an indefinite adjournment.”

“Do you see any remedy, then? Will you be kind enough to point it out to us?”

The litigant concealed her face beneath her hood, like Caesar expiring under his toga.

“There is one remedy, certainly,” said d'Aiguillon; “but perhaps his majesty might shrink from employing it.”

“What is it?” asked the plaintiff, with anxiety.

“The ordinary resource of royalty in France, when it is rather embarrassed. It is to hold a bed of justice, and to say, 'I will!' when all the opponents say, 'I will not.'”

“An excellent idea!” exclaimed Madame de Bearn, with enthusiasm.

“But which must not be divulged.” replied d'Aiguillon, diplomatically, and with a gesture which Madame de Bearn fully comprehended.

“Oh! madame!” said she instantly, “you who have so much influence with the king, persuade him to say, 'I will have the suit of Madame de Bearn judged.' Besides, you know, it was promised long ago."

M. d'Aiguillon bit his lips, glanced an adieu to Madame Dubarry, and left the boudoir. He had heard the sound of the king's carriage in the courtyard.

"Here is the king!" said Madame Dubarry, rising to dismiss her visitor.

"Oh! madame, why will you not permit me to throw myself at his majesty's feet?"

"To ask him for a bed of justice?" replied the countess, quickly. "Most willingly! Remain here madame, since such is your desire."

Scarcely had Madame de Bearn adjusted her head-dress when the king entered.

"Ah!" said he, "you have visitors, countess!"

"Madame de Bearn, sire."

"Sire, justice!" exclaimed the old lady, making a most profound reverence.

"Oh!" said Louis XV. in a bantering tone, imperceptible to those who did not know him; "has any one offended you, madame?"

"Sire, I ask for justice."

"Against whom?"

"Against the parliament."

"Ah! good," said the king, rubbing his hands; "you complain of my parliament. Well! do me the pleasure to bring them to reason. I too have to complain of them, and I beg you to grant me justice also," added he, imitating the curtseys of the old countess.

"But, sire, you are the king — — the master."

"The king — yes; the master — not always." — — "Sire, proclaim your will."

"I do that every evening, madame; and they proclaim theirs every morning. Now, as these two wills are diametrically opposed to each other it is with us as with the earth and the moon, which are ever running after each other without meeting."

"Sire, your voice is powerful enough to drown all the bawlings of these fellows."

"There you are mistaken. I am not a lawyer, as they are. If I say yes, they say no; it is impossible for us to come to any arrangement. If, when I have said yes, you can find any means to prevent their saying no, I will make an alliance with you."

"Sire, I have the means."

“Let me hear it quickly.”

“I will, sire. Hold a bed of justice.”

“That is another embarrassment,” said the king; “a bed of justice — remember, madam — is almost a revolution.”

“It is simply telling these rebellious subjects that you are the master. You know, sire, that when the king proclaims his will in this manner, he alone has a right to speak; no one answers. You say to them, I will, and they bow their assent.”

“The fact is,” said the Countess Dubarry, “the idea is a magnificent one.”

“Magnificent it may be, but not good,” replied Louis.

“But what a noble spectacle!” resumed Madame Dubarry, with warmth; “the procession, the nobles, the peers, the entire military staff of the king! Then the immense crowd of people; then the bed of justice, composed of five cushions embroidered with golden fleurs-de-lis — it would be a splendid ceremony!”

“You think so?” said the king, rather shaken in his resolution.

“Then the king's magnificent dress — the cloak lined with ermine, the diamonds in the crown, the golden scepter — all the splendor which so well suits an august and noble countenance! Oh! how handsome you would look, sire!”

“It is a long time since we had a bed of justice,” said Louis, with affected carelessness.

“Not since your childhood, sire,” said Madame de Bearn. “The remembrance of your brilliant beauty on that occasion has remained engraven on the hearts of all.”

“And then,” added Madame Dubarry, “there would be an excellent opportunity for the chancellor to display his keen and concise eloquence — to crush these people with his truth, dignity, and power.”

“I must wait for the parliament's next misdeed,” said Louis; “then I shall see.”

“What can you wait for, sire, more outrageous than what they have just committed?”

“Why, what have they done?”

“Do you not know?”

“They have teased M. d'Aiguillon a little, but that is not a hanging offense; although,” said the king, looking at Madame Dubarry, “although this dear duke is a friend of mine. Besides, if the parliament has teased the duke a little, I have punished them for their ill-nature by my decree of yesterday or the day before — I do not remember which. We are now even."

"Well, sire," said Madame Dubarry, with warmth, "Madame de Bearn has just informed us that this morning these black-gowned gentlemen have taken the start of you."

"How so?" said the king, frowning.

"Speak, madame, the king permits it," said the favorite.

"Sire, the councilors have determined not to hold a court of parliament until your majesty yields to their wishes."

"What say you?" said the king. "You mistake, madame; that would be an act of rebellion, and my parliament dares not revolt, I hope."

"Sire, I assure you — "

"Oh! Madame, it is a mere rumor."

"Will your majesty deign to hear me?"

"Speak, countess."

"Well, my procureur has this morning returned me all the papers relating to my lawsuit. He can no longer plead, since they will no longer judge."

"Mere reports, I tell you — attempts at intimidation."

But while he spoke, the king paced up and down the boudoir in agitation.

"Sire, will your majesty believe M. de Richelieu, if you will not believe me? In my presence his papers were returned to him also, and the duke left the house in a rage."

"Some one is tapping at the door," said the king, to change the conversation.

"It is Zamore, sire."

Zamore entered.

"A letter, mistress," said he.

"With your permission, sire," said the countess. "Ah! good heavens!" exclaimed she, suddenly.

"What is the matter?"

"From the chancellor, sire. M. de Maupeou, knowing that your majesty has deigned to pay me a visit, solicits my intervention to obtain an audience for him."

"What is in the wind now?"

"Show the chancellor in," said Madame Dubarry. The Countess de Bearn rose to take her leave.

“You need not go, madame,” said the king. “Good-day, M. de Maupeou. What news?”

“Sire,” said the chancellor, bowing, “the parliament embarrassed you; you have no longer a parliament.”

“How so? Are they all dead? Have they taken arsenic?”

“Would to Heaven they had! No, sire, they live; but they will not sit any longer, and have sent in their resignations. I have just received them in a mass.”

“The counselors?”

“No, sire, the resignations.”

“I told you, sire, that it was a serious matter,” said the countess, in a low voice.

“Most serious,” replied Louis, impatiently. “Well, chancellor, what have you done?”

“Sire, I have come to receive your majesty's orders.”

“We shall exile these people, Maupeou.”

“Sire, they will not judge any better in exile.”

“We shall command them to judge. Bah! injunctions are out of date — letters-of-order likewise — ”

“Ah! sire, this time you must be determined.”

“Yes, you are right.”

“Courage!” said Madame de Bearn aside to the countess.

“And act the master, after having too often acted only the father,” said the countess.

“Chancellor,” said the king, slowly. “I know only one remedy; it is serious, but efficacious. I will hold a bed of justice; these people must be made to tremble once for all.”

“Ah! sire.” exclaimed the chancellor, “that is well spoken; they must bend or break!”

“Madame,” added the king, addressing Madame de Bearn, “if your suit be not judged, you see it will not be my fault.”

“Sire, you are the greatest monarch in the world!”

“Oh! yes,” echoed the countess, Chon, find the chancellor.

“The world does not say so, however,” murmured the king.

CHAPTER XCIX.

The Bed of Justice.

THIS FAMOUS BED of justice took place with all the ceremonies which royal pride, on the one hand, and the intrigues which drove the master to this step, on the other, demanded.

The household of the king was placed under arms; an abundance of short-robed archers, soldiers of the watch, and police officers were commissioned to protect the lord chancellor, who, like a general upon the decisive day, would have to expose his sacred person to secure the success of the enterprise.

The chancellor was execrated. Of this he was well aware, and if his vanity made him fear assassination, those better versed in the sentiments of the public toward him could without exaggerating have predicted some downright insults, or at least hootings, as likely to fall to his share. The same perquisites were promised to M. d'Aiguillon, who was equally obnoxious to the popular instincts, improved perhaps by parliamentary debates. The king affected serenity, yet he was not easy. But he donned with great satisfaction his magnificent robes, and straightway came to the conclusion that nothing protects so surely as majesty. He might have added, “and the love of the people.” But this phrase had been so frequently repeated to him at Metz during his illness, that he imagined he could not repeat it now without being guilty of plagiarism.

The dauphiness, for whom the sight was a new one, and who at heart perhaps wished to see it, assumed her plaintive look, and wore it during the whole way to the ceremony — which disposed public opinion very favorably toward her.

Madame Dubarry was brave. She possessed that confidence which is given by youth and beauty. Besides, had not everything been said that could be said of her? What could be added now? She appeared radiant with beauty, as if the splendor of her august lover had been reflected upon her.

The Duke d'Aiguillon marched boldly among the peers who preceded the king. His noble and impressive countenance betrayed no symptoms of grief or discontent, nor did he bear himself triumphantly. To see him walking thus, none would have guessed that the struggle of the king with his parliament was on his account.

The crowd pointed him out in the crowd, terrible glances were darted at him from the parliament, and that was all. The great hall of the Palais was crammed to overflowing; actors and spectators together made a total of more than three thousand persons.

Outside the Palais the crowd, kept in order by the staves of the officers, and the batons and maces of the archers, gave token of its presence only by that indescribable hum which is not a voice, which articulates nothing, but which nevertheless makes itself heard, and which may justly be called the sound of the popular flood.

The same silence reigned in the great hall, when, the sound of footsteps having ceased, and every one having taken his place, the king, majestic and gloomy, had commanded his chancellor to begin the proceedings.

The parliament knew beforehand what the bed of justice held in reserve for them. They fully understood why they had been convoked. They were to hear the unmitigated expression of the royal will; but they knew the patience, not to say the timidity, of the king, and if they feared, it was rather for the consequences of the bed of justice than for the sit ting itself.

The chancellor commenced his address. He was an excellent orator; his exordium was clever, and the amateurs of a demonstrative style found ample scope for study in it. As it proceeded, however, the speech degenerated into a tirade so severe, that all the nobility had a smile on their lips, while the parliament felt very ill at ease.

The king, by the mouth of his chancellor, ordered them to cut short the affairs of Brittany, of which he had had enough. He commanded them to be reconciled to the Duke d'Aiguillon, whose services pleased him; and not to interrupt the service of justice, by which means everything should go on as in that happy period of the golden age, when the flowing streams murmured judicial or argumentative discourses, when the trees were loaded with bags of law papers, placed within reach of the lawyers and attorneys, who had the right to pluck them as fruit belonging to them.

These flippancies did not reconcile the parliament to the lord chancellor, nor to the Duke d'Aiguillon. But the speech had been made, and all reply was impossible.

The members of the parliament, although scarcely able to contain their vexation, assumed, with that admirable unity which gives so much strength to constituted bodies, a calm and indifferent demeanor, which highly displeased his majesty and the aristocratic world upon the platform.

The dauphiness turned pale with anger. For the first time she found herself in the presence of popular resistance, and she coldly calculated its power. She had come to this bed of justice with the intention of opposing, at least by her look, the resolution which was about to be adopted there, but gradually she felt herself drawn to make common cause with those of her own caste and race, so that in proportion as the chancellor attacked the parliament more severely, this proud young creature was indignant to find his words so weak. She fancied she could have found words which would have made this assembly start like a troop of oxen under the goad. In short, she found the chancellor too feeble and the parliament too strong.

Louis XV. was a physiognomist, as all selfish people would be if they were not sometimes idle as well as selfish. He cast a glance around to observe the effect of his will, expressed in words which he thought tolerably eloquent. The paleness and the compressed lips of the dauphiness showed him what was passing in her mind. As a counterpoise, he turned to look at Madame Dubarry; but instead of the victorious smile he hoped to find there, he only saw an anxious desire to attract the king's looks, as if to judge what he thought.

Nothing intimidates weak minds so much as being forestalled by the wills and minds of others. If they find themselves observed by those who have already taken a resolution, they conclude that they have not done enough — that they are about to be, or have been, ridiculous — that people had a right to expect more than they have done.

Then they pass to extremes; the timid man becomes furious, and a sudden manifestation betrays the effect of this reaction produced by fear upon a fear less powerful than itself.

The king had no need to add a single word to those his chancellor had already spoken; it was not according to etiquette — it was not even necessary. But on this occasion he was possessed of the babbling demon, and, making a sign with his hand, he signified that he intended to speak.

Immediately attention was changed to stupor.

The heads of the members of parliament were all seen to wheel round toward the bed of justice, with the precision of a file of soldiers upon drill. The princes, peers, and military felt uneasy. It was not impossible that after so many excellent things had been said, his Most Christian Majesty might add something which, to say the least, would be quite useless. Their respect prevented them from giving any other title to the words which might fall from the royal lips.

M. de Richelieu, who had affected to keep aloof from his nephew, was now seen to approach the most stubborn of the parliamentarians, and exchange a glance of mysterious intelligence. But his glances, which were becoming rebellious, met the penetrating eye of Madame Dubarry. Richelieu possessed, as no one else did, the precious power of transition; he passed easily from the satirical to the admiring tone, and chose the beautiful countess as the point of intersection between these two extremes. He sent a smile of gallantry and congratulation, therefore, to Madame Dubarry in passing, but the latter was not duped by it; the more so that the old marshal, who had commenced a correspondence with the parliament and the opposing princes, was obliged to continue it, that he might not appear what he really was.

What sights there are in a drop of water — that ocean for an observer! What centuries in a second — that indescribable eternity! All we have related took place while Louis was preparing to speak, and was opening his lips.

“You have heard,” said he, in a firm voice, “what my chancellor has told you of my wishes. Prepare, therefore, to execute them, for such are my intentions, and I shall never change them!”

Louis XV. uttered these last words with the noise and force of a thunderbolt. The whole assembly was literally thunderstruck.

A shudder passed over the parliament, and was quickly communicated like an electric spark to the crowd. A like thrill was felt by the partisans of the king. Surprise and admiration were on every face and in every heart.

The dauphiness involuntarily thanked the king by a lightning glance from her beautiful eyes. Madame Dubarry, electrified, could not refrain from rising, and would have clapped her hands but for the very natural fear of being stoned as she left the house, or of receiving hundreds of couplets the next morning, each more odious than the other.

Louis could from this moment enjoy his triumph. The parliament bent low, still with the same unanimity. The king rose from his embroidered cushions. Instantly the captain of the guards, the commandant of the household, and all the gentlemen of the king's suite, rose. Drums beat and trumpets sounded outside. The almost silent stir of the people on the arrival was now changed into a deep murmur, which died away in the distance, repressed by the soldiers and archers.

The king proudly crossed the hall, without seeing anything on his way but humbled foreheads. The Duke d'Aiguillon still preceded his majesty, without abusing his triumph.

The chancellor, having reached the door of the hall, saw the immense crowd of people extending on all sides, and heard their execrations, which reached his ears notwithstanding the distance. He trembled, and said to the archers:

“Close around me.”

M. de Richelieu bowed low to the Duke d'Aiguillon as he passed, and whispered:

“These heads are very low, duke, some day or other they will rise devilish high. Take care!”

Madame Dubarry was passing at the moment, accompanied by her brother, the Marchioness de Mirepoix, and several ladies. She heard the marshal's words, and as she was more inclined to repartee than malice, she said:

“Oh, there is nothing to fear, marshal; did you not hear his majesty's words? The king, I think, said he would never change.”

“Terrible words, indeed, madame,” replied the duke with a smile; “but happily for us, these poor parliament men did not remark that while saying he would never change, the king looked at you.”

And he finished this compliment with one of those inimitable bows which are no longer seen, even upon the stage.

Madame Dubarry was a woman, and by no means a politician. She only saw the compliment, where d'Aiguillon detected plainly the epigram and the threat. Therefore she replied with a smile, while her ally turned pale and bit his lips with vexation, to see the marshal's anger endure so long.

The effect of the bed of justice was for the moment favorable to the royal cause. But it frequently happens that a great blow only stuns, and it is remarked that after the stunning effect has passed away the blood circulates with more vigor and purity than before. Such at least were the reflections made by a little group of plainly-dressed persons, who were stationed as spectators at the corner of the Quai aux Fleurs and the Rue de la Barillerie, on seeing the king attended by his brilliant cortege leave the hall.

They were three in number. Chance had brought them together at this corner, and from thence they seemed to study with interest the impressions of the crowd; and, without knowing each other, after once exchanging a few words, they had discussed the sitting even before it was over.

“These passions are well ripened,” said one of them, an old man with bright eyes, and a mild and honest expression. “A bed of justice is a great work.”

“Yes,” replied a young man, smiling bitterly; “yes, if the work realize the title.”

“Sir,” replied the old man, turning round, “I think I should know you — I fancy I have seen you before?”

“On the night of the 31st May. You are not mistaken. Monsieur Rousseau.”

“Oh! you are that young surgeon — my countryman, Monsieur Marat!”

“Yes, sir; at your service.”

The two men exchanged salutations. The third had not yet spoken. He was also young, eminently handsome, and aristocratic in his appearance, and during the whole ceremony had unceasingly observed the crowd. The young surgeon moved away the first, and plunged into the densest masses of the people, who, less grateful than Rousseau, had already forgotten him, but whose memory he calculated upon refreshing one day or other.

The other young man waited until he was gone, and then, addressing Rousseau:

“Sir,” said he, “you do not go!”

“Oh! I am too old to venture among such a mob.”

“In that case,” said the unknown, lowering his voice, “I will see you again this evening in the Rue Platriere. Monsieur Rousseau — do not fail.”

The philosopher started as if a phantom had risen before him. His complexion, always pale, became livid. He made an effort to reply to this strange appeal, but the man had already disappeared.

CHAPTER C.

The Influence of the Words of the Unknown Upon J. J. Rousseau.

ON HEARING these singular words spoken by a man whom he did not know, Rousseau, trembling and unhappy, plunged into the crowd; and without remembering that he was old and naturally timid, elbowed his way through it. He soon reached the bridge of Notre-Dame; then, still plunged in his reverie, and muttering to himself, he crossed the quarter of La Greve, which was the shortest way to his own dwelling.

“So,” said he to himself, “this secret, which the initiated guard at the peril of their lives, is in possession of the first comer. This is what mysterious associations gam by passing through the popular sieve. A man recognizes me, who knows that I shall be his associate, perhaps his accomplice, yonder. Such a state of things is absurd and intolerable.”

And, while he spoke, Rousseau walked forward quickly — he, usually so cautious, especially since his accident in the Rue Menil-Montant.

“Thus,” continued the philosopher, “I must wish, forsooth, to sound to the bottom these plans of human regeneration which some spirits who boast of the title of 'illuminati' propose to carry out. I was foolish enough to imagine that any good ideas could come from Germany — that land of beer and fog — and may have compromised my name by joining it to those of fools or plotters, whom it will serve as a cloak to shelter their folly. Oh, no! it shall not be thus. No; a flash of lightning has shown me the abyss, and I will not cheerfully throw myself ml o it.”

And Rousseau paused to take breath, resting upon his cane, and standing motionless for a moment.

“Yet it was a beautiful chimera,” pursued the philosopher. “Liberty in the midst of slavery — the future conquered without noise and struggle — the snare mysteriously woven while earth's tyrants slept. It was too beautiful! I was a fool to believe it! I will not be the sport of fears, of suspicions, of shadows, which are unworthy of a free spirit and an independent body.”

He had got thus far, and was continuing his progress, when the sight of some of M. de Sartines' agents gazing round with their ubiquitous eyes frightened the free spirit, and gave such an impulse to the independent body, that it plunged into the deepest shadows of the pillars under which it was walking.

From these pillars it was not far to the Rue Platriere. Rousseau accomplished the distance with the speed of lightning, ascended the stairs to his domicile — breathing like a stag pursued by the hunters — and sank upon a chair, unable to utter a word in answer to all Therese's questions.

At last he recovered sufficiently to account for his emotion; it was the walk, the heat, the news of the king's angry remarks at the bed of justice, the commotion caused by the popular terror — a sort of panic, in short, which had spread among all who witnessed what had happened.

Therese grumblingly replied that all that was no reason for allowing the dinner to cool; and, moreover, that a man ought not to be such a soft chickenhearted wretch as to be frightened at the least noise.

Rousseau could make no reply to this last argument, which he himself had so frequently stated in other terms.

Therese added, that these philosophers, these imaginative people, were all the same; that they always talked very grandly in their writings; they said that they feared nothing; that God and man were very little to them; but, at the slightest barking of the smallest poodle, they cried, “Help!” — at the least feverishness they exclaimed, “Oh, heavens! I am dead.”

This was one of Therese's favorite themes, that which most excited her eloquence, and to which Rousseau, who was naturally timid, found it most difficult to reply. Rousseau, therefore, pursued his own thoughts to the sound of this discordant music — thoughts which were certainly well worth Therese's, notwithstanding the abuse the latter showered so plentifully on him.

“Happiness,” said he, “is composed of perfume and music; now, noise and odor are conventional things. Who can prove that the onion smells less sweet than the rose, or the peacock sings less melodiously than the nightingale?”

After which axiom, which might pass for an excellent paradox, they sat down to table.

After dinner, Rousseau did not, as usual, sit down to his harpsichord. He paced up and down the apartment, and stopped a hundred times to look out of the window, apparently studying the physiognomy of the Rue Platriere. Therese was forthwith seized with one of those fits of jealousy which peevish people — that is to say, the least really jealous people in the world — often indulge in for the sake of opposition. For if there is a disagreeable affectation in the world, it is the affectation of a fault, the affectation of virtue may be tolerated.

Therese, who held Rousseau's age, complexion, mind, and manners in the utmost contempt — who thought him old, sickly, and ugly — did not fear that any one should run off with her husband; she never dreamed that other women might look upon him with different eyes from herself. But as the torture of jealousy is woman's most dainty punishment, Therese sometimes indulged herself in this treat. Seeing Rousseau, therefore, approach the window so frequently, and observing his dreaming and restless air, she said:

“Very good! I understand your agitation — you have just left some one.”

Rousseau turned to her with a startled look which served as an additional proof of the truth of her suspicions.

“Some one you wish to see again.” she continued.

“What do you say?” asked Rousseau.

“Yes, we make assignations, it seems!”

“Oh!” said Rousseau, comprehending that Therese was jealous; “an assignation! You are mad, Therese!”

“I know perfectly well that it would be madness in you,” said she; “but you are capable of any folly. Go — go, with your papier-mache complexion, your palpitations, and your coughs — go, and make conquests. It is one way of getting on in the world!”

“But, Therese, you know there is not a word of truth in what you are saying,” said Rousseau, angrily; “let me think in peace.”

“You are a libertine,” said Therese, with the utmost seriousness.

Rousseau reddened as if she had hit the truth, or as if he had received a compliment.

Therese forthwith thought herself justified in putting on a terrible countenance, turning the whole household upside down, slamming the doors violently, and playing with Rousseau's tranquillity, as children with those metal rings which they shut up in a box and shake to make a noise. Rousseau took refuge in his closet; this uproar had rather confused his ideas.

He reflected that there would doubtless be some danger in not being present at the mysterious ceremony of which the stranger had spoken at the corner of the Quai.

"If there are punishments for traitors, there will also be punishments for the lukewarm or careless," thought he. "Now I have always remarked that great dangers mean in reality nothing, just like loud threats. The cases in which either are productive of any result are extremely rare; but petty revenges, underhand attacks, mystifications, and other such small coin — these we must be on our guard against. Some day the masonic brothers may repay my contempt by stretching a string across my staircase; I shall stumble over it and break a leg or the six or eight teeth I have left. Or else they will have a stone ready to fall upon my head when I am passing under a scaffolding; or, better still, there may be some pamphleteer belonging to the fraternity, living quite near me, upon the same floor perhaps, looking from his windows into my room. That is not impossible, since the reunions take place even in the Rue Platriere. Well, this wretch will write stupid lampoons on me, which will make me ridiculous all over Paris. Have I not enemies every where?"

A moment afterward, Rousseau's thoughts took a different turn.

"Well," said he to himself, "but where is courage? where is honor? Shall I be afraid of myself! Shall I see in my glass only the face of a coward — a, slave? No, it shall not be so. If the whole world should combine to ruin me — if the very street should fall upon me — I will go. What pitiable reasoning does fear produce! Since I met this man, I have been continually turning in a circle of absurdities. I doubt every one, and even myself! That is not logical — I know myself, I am not an enthusiast; if I thought I saw wonders in this projected association, it is because there are wonders in it.

Who will say I may not be the regenerator of the human race, I, who am sought after. I, whom on the faith of my writings the mysterious agents of an unlimited power have eagerly consulted? Shall I retreat when the time has come to follow up my work, to substitute practice for theory?"

Rousseau became animated.

"What can be more beautiful! Ages roll on; the people rise out of their brutishness; step follows step into the darkness, hand follows hand into the shadows; the immense pyramid is raised, upon the summit of which, as its crowning glory, future ages shall place the bust of Rousseau, citizen of

Geneva, who risked his liberty, his life, that he might act as he had spoken — that he might be faithful to his motto; 'Vitam impendere vero.'"

Thereupon Rousseau, in a fit of enthusiasm, seated himself at his harpsichord, and exalted his imagination by the loudest, the most sonorous, and the most warlike melodies he could call forth from its sounding cavity.

Night closed in. Therese, wearied with her vain endeavors to torment her captive, had fallen asleep upon her chair. Rousseau, with beating heart, took his new coat, as if to go out on a pleasure excursion, glanced for a moment in the glass at the play of his black eyes, and was charmed to find that they were sparkling and expressive.

He grasped his knotted stick in his hand, and slipped out of the room without awakening Therese. But when he arrived at the foot of the stairs, and had drawn back the bolt of the street-door, Rousseau paused and looked out, to assure himself as to the state of the locality.

No carriage was passing; the street, as usual, was full of idlers gazing at each other, as they do at this day, while many stopped at the shop windows to ogle the pretty girls. A new-comer would therefore be quite unnoticed in such a crowd. Rousseau plunged into it; he had not far to go. A ballad-singer, with a cracked violin, was stationed before the door which had been pointed out to him. This music, to which every true Parisian's ear is extremely sensitive, filled the street with echoes which repeated the last bars of the air sung by the violin or by the singer himself. Nothing could be more unfavorable, therefore, to the free passage along the street than the crowd gathered at this spot, and the passers-by were obliged to turn either to the right or left of the group. Those who turned to the left took the center of the street, those to the right brushed along the side of the house indicated, and vice versa.

Rousseau remarked that several of these passers-by disappeared on the way as if they had fallen into some trap. He concluded that these people had come with the same purpose as himself, and determined to imitate their maneuver. It was not difficult to accomplish. Having stationed himself in the rear of the assembly of listeners, as if to join their number, he watched the first person whom he saw entering the open alloy, more timid than they, probably because he had more to risk, he waited until a particularly favorable opportunity should present itself.

He did not wait long. A cabriolet which drove along the street divided the circle, and caused the two hemispheres to fall back upon the houses on either side. Rousseau thus found himself driven to the very entrance of the passage; he had only to walk on. Our philosopher observed that all the idlers were looking at the cabriolet and had turned their backs on the house; he took advantage of this circumstance, and disappeared in the dark passage.

After advancing a few steps he perceived a lamp, beneath which a man was seated quietly, like a stall-keeper after the day's business was over, and read, or seemed to read, a newspaper. At the sound of Rousseau's footsteps this man raised his head and visibly placed his finger upon his breast, upon which the lamp threw a strong light. Rousseau replied to this symbolic gesture by raising his finger to his lips.

The man then immediately rose, and, pushing open a door at his right hand, which door was so artificially concealed in the wooden panel of which it formed a part as to be wholly invisible, he showed Rousseau a very steep staircase, winch descended underground. Rousseau entered, and the door closed quickly but noiselessly after him.

The philosopher descended the steps slowly, assisted by his cane. He thought it rather disrespectful that the brothers should cause him, at this, his first interview, to run the risk of breaking his neck or his legs. But the stair, if steep, was not long. Rousseau counted seventeen steps, and then felt as if suddenly plunged into a highly-heated atmosphere.

This moist heat proceeded from the breath of a considerable number of men who were assembled in the low hall. Rousseau remarked that the walls were tapestried with red and white drapery, on which figures of various implements of labor, rather symbolic doubtless than real, were depicted. A single lamp hung from the vaulted ceiling, and threw a gloomy light upon the faces of those present, who were conversing with each other on the wooden benches, and who wore the appearance of honest and respectable citizens.

The floor was neither polished nor carpeted, but was covered with a thick mat of plaited rushes, which deadened the sound of the footsteps. Rousseau's entrance, therefore, produced no sensation. No one seemed to have remarked it.

Five minutes previously Rousseau had longed for nothing so much as such an entrance; and yet, when he had entered, he felt annoyed that he had succeeded so well. He saw an unoccupied place on one of the back benches, and installed himself as modestly as possible on this seat, behind all the others.

He counted thirty-three heads in the assembly. A desk, placed upon a platform, seemed to wait for a president.

CHAPTER CI.

The House in the Rue Platriere.

ROUSSEAU REMARKED that the conversation of those present was very cautious and reserved. Many did not open their lips; and scarcely three or four couples exchanged a few words.

Those who did not speak endeavored even to conceal their faces, which was not difficult — thanks to the great body of shadow cast by the platform of the expected president. The refuge of these last, who seemed to be the timid individuals of the assembly, was behind this platform. But, in return, two or three members of this corporation gave themselves a great deal of trouble to recognize their colleagues. They came and went, talked among themselves, and frequently disappeared through a door before which was drawn a black curtain, ornamented with red flames.

In a short time a bell was rung. A man immediately rose from the end of the bench upon which he was seated, and where he was previously confounded with the other freemasons, and took his place upon the platform.

After making some signs with the hands and fingers, which were repeated by all those present, and adding a last sign more explicit than the others, he declared the sitting commenced.

This man was entirely unknown to Rousseau. Beneath the exterior of a working man in easy circumstances, he concealed great presence of mind, aided by an elocution as flowing as could have been wished for in an orator.

His speech was brief, and to the point. He declared that the lodge had been assembled to proceed to the election of a new brother.

“You will not be surprised,” said he, “that we have assembled you in a place where the usual trials cannot be attempted. These trials have seemed useless to the chiefs; the brother whom we are to receive to-day is one of the lights of contemporary philosophy — a thoughtful spirit who will be devoted to us from conviction, not from fear. One who has discovered all the mysteries of nature and of the human heart cannot be treated in the same manner as the simple mortal from whom we demand the help of his arm, his will, and his gold. In order to have the co-operation of his distinguished mind, of his honest and energetic character, his promise and his assent are sufficient."

The speaker, when he had concluded, looked round to mark the effect of his words.

Upon Rousseau the effect had been magical; the Genevese philosopher was acquainted with the preparatory mysteries of freemasonry, and looked upon them with the repugnance natural to enlightened minds. The concessions, absurd because they were useless, which the chiefs required from the candidates, this simulating fear when every one knew there was nothing to fear, seemed to him to be the acme of puerility and senseless superstition.

Besides this, the timid philosopher, an enemy to all personal exhibitions and manifestations, would have felt most unhappy had he been obliged to serve as a spectacle for people whom he did not know, and who would have certainly mystified him more or less.

To dispense with these trials in his case was therefore more than a satisfaction to him. He knew the strictness with which equality was enforced by the masonic principles, therefore an exception in his favor constituted a triumph.

He was preparing to say some words in reply to the gracious address of the president, when a voice was heard among the audience.

"At least," said this voice, which was sharp and discordant, "since you think yourself obliged to treat in this princely fashion a man like ourselves, since you dispense in his case with physical pains, as if the pursuit of liberty through bodily suffering were not one of our symbols, we hope you will not confer a precious title upon an unknown person without having questioned him according to the usual ritual, and without having received his profession of faith."

Rousseau turned round to discover the features of the aggressive person who so rudely jostled his triumphant car, and with the greatest surprise recognized the young surgeon whom he had that morning met upon the Quai-aux-Fleurs. A conviction of his own honesty of purpose, perhaps also a feeling of disdain for the precious title, prevented him from replying.

"You have heard?" said the president, addressing Rousseau.

"Perfectly," replied the philosopher, who trembled slightly at the sound of his voice as it echoed through the vaulted roof of the dark hall, "and I am the more surprised at the interpolation when I see from whom it proceeds. What! A man whose profession it is to combat what is called physical suffering, and to assist his brethren, who are common men as well as freemasons, preaches the utility of physical suffering. He chooses a singular path through which to lead the creature to happiness, the sick to health."

"We do not here speak of this or that person." replied the young man warmly; "I am supposed to be unknown to the candidate, and he to me. I am merely the utterer of an abstract truth, and I assert that the chief has done wrong in making an exception in favor of any one. I do not recognize in him," pointing to Rousseau, "the philosopher, and he must not recognize the surgeon in me. We shall perhaps walk side by side through life, without a look or gesture betraying our intimacy, which nevertheless, thanks to the laws of the association, is more binding than all vulgar friendships. I repeat, therefore, that if it has been thought well to spare this candidate the usual trials, he ought at least to have the usual questions put to him."

Rousseau made no reply. The president saw depicted on his features disgust at this discussion, and regret at having engaged in the enterprise.

"Brother," said he authoritatively to the young man, "you will please be silent when the chief speaks, and do not venture on light grounds to blame his actions, which are sovereign here."

"I have a right to speak," replied the young man, more gently.

"To speak, yes; but not to blame. The brother who is about to enter our association is so well known that we have no wish to add to our masonic relations a ridiculous and useless mystery. All the brothers here present know his name, and his name itself, is a perfect guarantee. But as he himself, I am certain, loves equality, I request him to answer the question which I shall put to him merely for form:

"What do you seek in this association?"

Rousseau made two steps forward in advance of the crowd, and his dreamy and melancholy eye wandered over the assembly.

"I seek," said he, "that which I do not find — truths, not sophisms. Why should you surround me with poniards which do not wound, with poisons which are only clear water, and with traps under which mattresses are spread? I know the extent of human endurance. I know the vigor of my physical frame. If you were to destroy it, it would not be worth your while to elect me a brother, for when dead I could be of no use to you. Therefore you do not wish to kill me, still less to wound me; and all the doctors in the world would not make me approve of an initiation in the course of which my limbs had been broken. I have served a longer apprenticeship to pain than any of you; I have sounded the body, and probed even to the soul. If I consented to come among you when I was solicited" — and he laid particular emphasis on the word — "it was because I thought I might be useful. I give, therefore; I do not receive. Alas! before you could do anything to defend me, before you could restore me to liberty were I imprisoned — before you could give me bread if I were starving, or consolation if I were afflicted — before, I repeat, you could do anything — the brother whom you admit to-day, if this gentleman," turning to Marat, "permits it — this brother will have paid the last tribute of nature; for progress is halting, light is slow, and from the grave into which he will be thrown, none of you can raise him."

"You are mistaken, illustrious brother," said a mild and penetrating voice which charmed Rousseau's ear; "there is more than you think in the association into which you are about to enter; there is the whole future destiny of the world. The future, you are aware, is hope — is science; the future is God, who will give His light to the world, since He has promised to give it, and God cannot lie."

Astonished at this elevated language, Rousseau looked around and recognized the young man who had made the appointment with him in the morning at the bed of justice. This man, who was dressed in black with great neatness, and, above all, with a marked air of distinction in his appearance, was leaning against the side of the platform, and his face, illumined by the lamp, shone in all its beauty, grace and expressiveness.

"Ah!" said Rousseau, "science — the bottomless abyss! You speak to me of science, consolation, futurity, hope; another speaks of matter, of rigor, and of violence; whom shall I believe? Shall it be, then, in this assembly of brothers, as it is among the devouring wolves of the world which stirs above us! Wolves and sheep! Listen to my profession of faith, since you have not read it in my books."

"Your books!" exclaimed Marat. "They are sublime — I confess it — but they are Utopias. You are useful in the same point of view as Pythagoras, Solon, and Cicero the sophist. You point out the good, but it is an artificial, unsubstantial, unattainable good. You are like one who would feed a hungry crowd with air bubbles, more or less illumined by the sun."

"Have you ever seen," said Rousseau, frowning, "great commotions of nature take place without preparation? Have you seen the birth of a man — that common and yet sublime event? Have you not seen him collect substance and life in the womb of his mother for nine months? Ah! you wish me to regenerate the world with actions. That is not to regenerate, sir; it is to revolutionize!"

"Then," retorted the young surgeon, violently, "you do not wish for independence; you do not wish for liberty!"

"On the contrary," replied Rousseau, "independence is my idol — liberty is my goddess. But I wish for a mild and radiant liberty — a liberty which warms and vivifies. I wish for an equality which will connect men by ties of friendship, not by fear. I wish for education, for the instruction of each element of the social body, as the mechanic wishes for harmonious movement — as the cabinet-maker wishes for the perfect exactness, for the closest fitting, in each piece of his work. I repeat it, I wish for that which I have written — progress, concord, devotion."

A smile of disdain flitted over Marat's lips.

"Yes," he said, "rivulets of milk and honey, Elysian fields like Virgil's poetic dreams, which philosophy would make a reality."

Rousseau made no reply. It seemed to him too hard that he should have to defend his moderation — he, whom all Europe called a violent innovator.

He took his seat in silence, after having satisfied his ingenuous and timid mind by appealing for and obtaining the tacit approbation of the person who had just before defended him.

The president rose.

"You have all heard?" said he.

"Yes," replied the entire assembly.

"Does the candidate appear to you worthy of entering the association, and does he comprehend its duties?"

"Yes," replied the assembly again; but this time with a reserve which did not evince much unanimity.

"Take the oath," said the president to Rousseau.

"It would be disagreeable to me." said the philosopher, with some pride, "to displease any members of this association; and I must repeat the words I made use of just now, as they are the expression of my earnest conviction.

If I were an orator, I would put them in a more eloquent manner; but my organ of speech is rebellious, and always betrays my thoughts when I ask it for an immediate translation. I wish to say that I can do more for the world and for you out of this assembly, than I could were I strictly to follow your usages. Leave me, therefore, to my work, to my weakness, to my loneliness. I have told you I am descending to the grave; grief, infirmity, and want hurry me on. You cannot delay this great work of nature. Abandon me; I am not made for the society of men; I hate and fly them. Nevertheless, I serve them, because I am a man myself; and in serving them I fancy them better than they are. Now you have my whole thoughts; I shall not say another word."

"Then you refuse to take the oath?" said Marat, with some emotion.

"I refuse positively; I do not wish to join the association. I see too many convincing proofs to assure me that I should be useless to it."

"Brother," said the unknown personage with the conciliatory voice, "allow me to call you so, for we are brothers, independently of all combinations of the human mind — brother! do not give way to a very natural feeling of irritation; sacrifice your legitimate pride; do for us what is repulsive to yourself. Your advice, your ideas, your presence, are light to our paths. Do not plunge us in the twofold darkness of your absence and your refusal."

"You are in error," said Rousseau; "I take nothing from you, since I should never have given you more than I have given to the whole world — to the first chance reader — to the first consulter of the journals. If you wish for the name and essence of Rousseau —

"We do wish for them!" said several voices, politely.

"Then make a collection of my books; place them upon the table of your president; and when you are taking the opinions of the meeting, and my turn to give one comes, open my books — you will find my counsel and my vote there."

Rousseau made a step toward the door.

"Stop one moment," said the surgeon; "mind is free, and that of the illustrious philosopher more than any other; but it would not be regular to have allowed a stranger even to enter our sanctuary, who, not being bound by any tacit agreement, might, without dishonesty, reveal our mysteries."

Rousseau smiled compassionately.

"You want an oath of secrecy?" said he.

“You have said it.”

“I am ready.”

“Be good enough to read the formula, venerable brother,” said Marat.

The venerable brother read the following form of oath:

“I swear, in the presence of the Eternal God, the Architect of the Universe, and before my superiors, and the respectable assembly which surrounds me, never to reveal, or to make known, or write anything which has happened in my presence, under penalty, in case of indiscretion, of being punished according to the laws of the Great Founder, of my superiors, and the anger of my fathers.”

Rousseau had already raised his hand to swear, when the unknown, who had followed the progress of the debate with a sort of authority which no one seemed to dispute, although he was not distinguished from the crowd, approached the president, and whispered some words in his ear.

“True,” said the venerable chief, and he added; “You are a man, not a brother; you are a man of honor, placed toward us only in the position of a fellow-man. We here abjure, therefore, our distinguishing peculiarity, and ask from you merely your word of honor to forget what has passed between us.”

“Like a dream of the morning — I swear it upon my honor.” said Rousseau, with emotion.

With these words he retired, and many of the members followed him.

CHAPTER CII.

The Report.

WHEN THE MEMBERS of the second and third orders had gone, seven associates remained in the lodge. They were the seven chiefs. They recognized each other by means of signs which proved their initiation to a superior degree.

Their first care was to close the doors. Then their president made himself known by displaying a ring, on which were engraved the mysterious letters, L. P. D.”

This president was charged with the most important correspondence of the order. He was in communication with the six other chiefs, who dwelt in Switzerland. Russia, America, Sweden, Spain, and Italy.

He brought with him some of the most important documents he had received from his colleagues, in order to communicate their contents to the superior circles of initiated brothers, who were above the others but beneath him.

We have already recognized this chief; it was Balsamo.

The most important of the letters contained a threatening advice. It was from Sweden, and written by Swedenborg.

“Watch the south, brothers,” he said; “under its burning rays has been hatched a traitor who will ruin you.

“Watch in Paris, brothers — the traitor dwells there; he possesses the secrets of the order, a feeling of hatred urges him on.

“A murmuring voice, a rustling flight, whispers the denunciation in my ear. I see a terrible vengeance coming, but perhaps it will be too late. In the meantime, brothers, watch! watch! A traitorous tongue, even though it be uninstructed, is sometimes sufficient to overthrow our most skillfully constructed plans.”

The brothers looked at each other in mute surprise. The language of the fierce old sage, his prescience, which had acquired an imposing authority from many striking examples, contributed in no small degree to cast a gloom over the meeting at which Balsamo presided. Balsamo himself, who placed implicit faith in Swedenborg's second sight, could not resist the saddening influence which this letter had on the assembly.

“Brothers,” said he, “the inspired prophet is, rarely deceived. Watch, then, as he bids you. You know now, as I do, that the struggle commences. Let us not be conquered by these ridiculous enemies, whose power we sap in the utmost security. You must not forget that they have mercenary swords at their command. It is a powerful weapon in this world, among those who do not see beyond the limits of our terrestrial life. Brothers, let us distrust these hired traitors.”

“These fears seem to me puerile,” a voice; “we gather strength daily, and we are directed by brilliant genius and powerful hands.”

Balsamo bowed his thanks for the flattering eulogy.

“Yes, but as our illustrious president has said, treason creeps everywhere,” replied a brother, who was no other than the surgeon Marat, promoted, notwithstanding his youth, to a superior grade, in virtue of which he now sat for the first time on a consulting committee. “Remember, brothers, that by doubling the bait, you make a more important capture. If M. de Sartines with a bag of crownpieces can purchase the revelations of one of our obscurer brothers, the minister, with a million, or with holding out the hope of advancement, may buy over one of our superiors. Now, with us the obscurer brother knows nothing. At the most he is cognizant of the names of some of his colleagues, and these names signify nothing. Ours is an excellent constitution, but it is an eminently aristocratic one; the inferiors know nothing, can do nothing. They are called together to say or to hear trifles, and yet they contribute their time and their money to increase the solidity of our edifice. Reflect that the workman brings only the stone and the mortar, but without stone and mortar could you build the house? Now, the workman receives a very small salary, but I consider him equal to the architect who plans, creates, and superintends the whole work; and I consider him equal because he is a man, and in the eyes of a philosopher, one man is worth as much as another, seeing that he bears his misfortunes and his fate equally, and because, even more than another man, he is exposed to the fall of a stone or the breaking of a scaffold.”

“I must interrupt you, brother,” said Balsamo. “You diverge from the question which alone ought to occupy our thoughts. Your failing, brother, is that you are over zealous, and apt to generalize discussions. Our business on the present occasion is not to decide whether our constitution be good or bad, but to uphold the integrity of that constitution in all its strength. If I wished, however, to discuss the point with you, I would answer, no; the instrument which receives the impulse is not equal to the architect; the brain is not the equal of the arm!”

“Suppose M. de Sartines should seize one of our least important brethren!” cried Marat warmly, “would he not send him to rot in the Bastille equally with you or me?”

“Granted; but the misfortune in that case is for the individual only, not for the order, which is with us the all-important point. If, on the contrary, the chief were imprisoned, the whole conspiracy is at an end. When the general is absent, the army loses the battle. Therefore, brother, watch over the safety of the chiefs!”

“Yes, but let them in return watch over ours.”

“That is their duty.”

“And let their faults be doubly punished.”

“Again, brother, you wander from the constitution of the order. Have you forgotten that the oath which binds all the members of the associations is the same, and threatens all with the same punishment?”

“The great ones always escape!”

“That is not the opinion of the great themselves, brother. Listen to the conclusion of the letter which one of the greatest among us, our prophet Swedenborg, has written. This is what he adds:

“The blow will come from one of the mighty ones, one of the mightiest of the order; or, if it comes not directly from him, the fault will be traceable to him. Remember that fire and water may be accomplices; one gives light, the other revelation.

“Watch, brothers, over all and over each, watch!”

“Then,” said Marat, seizing upon those points in Balsamo's speech and Swedenborg's letter which suited his purpose, “let us repeat the oath which binds us together, and let us pledge ourselves to maintain it in its utmost vigor, whosoever he may be who shall betray us, or be the cause of our betrayal.”

Balsamo paused for a moment, and then, rising from his seat, he pronounced the consecrated words, with which our readers are already acquainted, in a slow, solemn, terrible voice:

"In the name of the crucified Son, I swear to break all the bonds of nature which unite me to father, mother, brother, sister, wife, relation, friend,, mistress, king, benefactor, and to any being whatsoever to whom I have promised faith, obedience, gratitude, or service.

"I swear to reveal to the chief, whom I acknowledge according to the statutes of the order, all that I have seen or done, read or guessed, and even to search out and penetrate that which may not of itself be openly present to my eyes.

"I will honor poison, steel, and fire, as a means of ridding the world, by death or idiocy, of the enemies of truth and liberty.

"I subscribe to the law of silence. I consent to die, as if struck by lightning, on the day when I shall have merited this punishment, and I await, without murmuring, the knife which will reach me in whatsoever part of the world I may be."

Then, the seven men who composed this solemn assembly repeated the oath, word for word, standing, and with uncovered heads.

When the words of the oath had been repeated by all:

"We are now guaranteed against treachery," said Balsamo; "let us no longer mingle extraneous matter with our discussion. I have to make my report to the committee of the principal events of the year.

"My summary of the affairs of France may have interest for enlightened and zealous minds like yours; I will commence with it.

"France is situated in the center of Europe, as the heart in the center of the body; it lives and radiates life. It is in its palpitations that we must look for the cause of all the disorder in the general organization.

"I came to France, therefore, and approached Paris as a physician approaches the heart. I listened, I felt, I experimented. When I entered it a year ago, the monarchy harassed it; to-day, vices kill it. I required to hasten the effect of these fatal debauches, and therefore I assisted them.

"An obstacle was in my way; this obstacle was a man, not only the first, but the most powerful man in the state, next to the king.

"He was gifted with some of those qualities which please other men. He was too proud, it is true, but his pride was applied to his works. He knew how to lighten the hardships of the people by making them believe and even feel sometimes that they were a portion of the state; and by sometimes consulting them on their grievances, he raised a standard around which the mass will always rally — the spirit of nationality.

“He hated the English, the natural enemies of the French; he hated the favorite, the natural enemy of the working classes. Now, if this man had been a usurper — if he had been one of us — if he would have trodden in our path, acted for our ends — I would have assisted him, I would have kept him in power, I would have upheld him by the resources I am able to create for my proteges; for, instead of patching up decayed royalty, he would have assisted us in overthrowing it on the appointed day. But he belonged to the aristocracy; he was born with a feeling of respect for that first rank to which he could not aspire, for the monarchy, which he dared not attack; he served royalty while despising the king; he did worse — he acted as a shield to this royalty against which our blows were directed. The parliament and the people, full of respect for this living dyke which opposed itself to any encroachment on the royal prerogative, limited themselves to a moderate resistance, certain as they were of having in him a powerful assistant when the moment should arrive.

“I understood the position — I undertook M. de Choiseul's fall.

“This laborious task, at which for ten years so much hatred and interest had labored in vain, I commenced and terminated in a few months, by means which it would be useless to reveal to you. By a secret, which constitutes one of my powers — a power the greater, because it will remain eternally hidden from the eyes of all, and will manifest itself only by its effects — I overthrew and banished M. de Choiseul, and attached to his overthrow a long train of regret, disappointment, lamentation, and anger.

“You see now that my labor bears its fruit; all France asks for Choiseul, and rises to demand him back, as orphans turn to heaven when God has taken away their earthly parents.

“The parliament employs the only right it possesses — inertia; it has ceased to act. In a well-organized body, as a state of the first rank ought to be, the paralysis of any essential organ is fatal. Now, the parliament in the social is what the stomach is in the human body. When the parliament ceases to act, the people — the intestines of the state — can work no longer; and, consequently, must cease to pay, and the gold — that is, the blood — will be wanting.

“There will be a struggle, no doubt; but who can combat against the people? Not the army — that daughter of the people — which eats the bread of the laborer, and drinks the wine of the vine-grower. There remain then the king's household, the privileged classes, the guards, the Swiss, the musketeers — in all, scarce five or six thousand men. What can this handful of pigmies do when the nation shall rise like a giant?"

"Let them rise, then — let them rise!" cried several voices.

"Yes, yes! to the work!" exclaimed Marat.

"Young man, I have not yet consulted you!" said Balsamo, coldly. "This sedition of the masses," continued he, "this revolt of the weak, become strong by their number, against the powerful single-handed — less thoughtful, less ripened, less experienced minds would stimulate immediately, and would succeed with a facility which terrifies me; but I have reflected and studied — I have mixed with the people, and, under their dress, with their perseverance, even their coarseness, I have viewed them so closely, that I have made myself, as it were, one of themselves. I know them now; I cannot be deceived in them. They are strong, but ignorant; irritable, but not revengeful. In a word, they are not yet ripe for sedition such as I mean and wish for. They want the instruction which will make them see events in the double light of example and utility; they want the memory of their past experience.

"They resemble those daring young men whom I have seen in Germany, at the public festivals, eagerly climb a vessel's mast, at the top of which hung a ham and a silver cup. They started at first burning with eagerness, and mounted with surprising rapidity; but when they had almost reached the goal — when they had only to extend the arm to seize their prize — their strength abandoned them, and they slipped to the bottom amid the hootings of the crowd.

"The first time it happened as I told you; the second time they husbanded their strength and their breath; but, taking more time, they failed by their slowness as they had before failed from too great haste. At last — the third time — they took a middle course between precipitation and delay, and this time they succeeded. This is the plan I propose; efforts — never ceasing efforts — which gradually approach the goal, until the day arrives when infallible success will crown our attempts."

Balsamo ceased and looked around upon his audience, among whom the passions of youth and inexperience were boiling over.

"Speak, brother," said he to Marat, who was more agitated than the others.

"I will be brief," said he. "Efforts soothe the people when they do not discourage them. Efforts! that is the theory of M. Rousseau, citizen of

Geneva, a great poet, but a slow and timid genius — a useless citizen, whom Plato would have driven from his republic! Wait! Ever wait! Since the emancipation of the commons, since the revolt of the muillotins — for seven centuries we have waited! Count the generations which have died in the meantime, and then dare to pronounce the fatal word wait! as your motto of the future! M. Rousseau speaks to us of opposition, as it was practiced in the reign of the Grand Monarque — as Moliere practiced it in his comedies, Boileau in his satires, and La Fontaine in his fables — whispering it in the ears of marchionesses, and prostrating it at the feet of kings. Poor and feeble opposition, which has not advanced the cause of humanity one jot! Lisping children recite these hidden theories without understanding them, and go to sleep while they recite. Rabelais also was a politician in your sense of the word; but at such politics people laugh, and correct nothing. Have you seen one single abuse redressed for the last three hundred years? Enough of poets and theoreticians! Let us have deeds, not words. We have given France up to the care of physicians for three hundred years, and it is time now that surgery should enter in its turn, scalpel and saw in hand. Society is gangrened; let us stop the gangrene with the steel. He may wait who rises from his table to recline upon a couch of roses, from which the ruffled leaves are blown by the breath of his slaves; for the satisfied stomach exhales grateful vapors which mount into the brain, and recreate and vivify it. But hunger, misery, despair, are not satiated nor consoled with verses, with sentences and fables. They cry out loudly in their sufferings; deaf, indeed, must he be who does not hear their lamentations — accursed he who does not reply to them! A revolt, even should it be crushed, will enlighten the minds more than a thousand years of precepts, more than three centuries of examples. It will enlighten the kings, if it do not overthrow them. That is much! — that is enough!”

A murmur of admiration rose from several lips.

“Where are our enemies?” pursued Marat. “Above us! Above us! They guard the doors of the palaces, they surround the steps of the throne. Upon this throne is their palladium, which they guard with more care and with more fear than the Trojans did theirs. This palladium, which makes them all-powerful, rich and insolent, is royalty. This royalty cannot be reached, save by passing over the bodies of those who guard it, as one can only reach the general by overthrowing the battalion by which he is surrounded. Well! History tells us of many battalions which have been captured — many generals who have been overthrown — from Darius to King John, from Regulus down to Duguesclin.

"If we overthrow the guard, we reach the idol. Let us begin by striking down the sentinels — we can afterward strike down the chief. Let the first attack be on the courtiers, the nobility, the aristocracy; the last will be upon the kings. Count the privileged heads; there are scarcely two hundred thousand. Walk through this beautiful garden called France, with a sharp switch in your hand, and cut down these two hundred thousand heads as Tarquin did the poppies of Latium, and all will be done. There will then be only two powers opposed to each other, the people and the kingship. Then let this kingship, the emblem, try to struggle with the people, this giant — and you will see! Where dwarfs wish to overthrow a colossus, they commence with the pedestal. When the woodmen wish to cut down the oak, they attack it at the foot. Woodmen! woodmen! seize the hatchet — attack the oak at its roots — and the ancient tree with its proud branches will soon bite the dust!"

"And will crush you like pigmies in its fall, unfortunate wretches that you are!" exclaimed Balsamo, in a voice of thunder. "Ah! you rail against the poets, and you speak in metaphors even more poetical and more imaginative than theirs! Brother! brother!" continued he, addressing Marat, "I tell you, you have quoted these sentences from some romance which you are composing in your garret!" Marat reddened.

"Do you know what a revolution is?" continued Balsamo; "I have seen two hundred, and can tell you. I have seen that of ancient Egypt, that of Assyria, those of Rome and Greece, and that of the Netherlands. I have seen those of the Middle Ages, when the nations rushed one against the other — East against West, West against East — and murdered without knowing why. From the Shepherd Kings to our own time there have been perhaps a hundred revolutions, and yet now you complain of being slaves. Revolutions, then, have done no good. And why? Because those who caused the revolution were all struck with the same vertigo — they were too hasty. Does God, who presides over the revolutions of the world, as genius presides over the revolutions of men — does He hasten?

"'Cut down the oak!' you cry. And you do not calculate that the oak, which needs but a second to fall, covers as much ground when it falls as a horse at a gallop would cross in thirty seconds. Now, those who throw down the oak, not having time to avoid the unforeseen fall, would be lost, crushed, killed, beneath its immense trunk. That is what you want, is it not? You will never get that from me. I shall be patient. I carry my fate — yours — the world's — in the hollow of this hand. No one can make me open this hand, full of overwhelming truth, unless I wish to open it. There is thunder in it, I know. Well! the thunderbolt shall remain in it, as if hidden in the murky cloud. Brethren! brethren! descend from these sublime heights, and let us once more walk upon the earth.

“Sirs, I tell you plainly, and from my inmost soul, that the time has not yet come. The king who is on the throne is the last reflection of the great monarch whom the people still venerate; and in this fading monarchy there is yet something dazzling enough to outweigh the lightning shafts of your petty anger. This man was born a king and will die a king. His race is insolent but pure. You can read his origin on his brow, in his gestures, in his words — he will always be king. Overthrow him, and the same will happen to him as happened to Charles the First — his executioners will kneel before him, and the courtiers who accompanied him in his misfortune, like Lord Capel, will kiss the ax which struck off the head of their master.

“Now, sirs, you all know that England was too hasty. King Charles the First died upon the scaffold, indeed; but King Charles the Second, his son, died upon the throne.

“Wait, wait, brethren! for the time will soon be propitious. You wish to destroy the lilies. That is our motto — 'Lilia pedibus destrue.' But not a single root must leave the flower of Saint Louis the hope of blooming again. You wish to destroy royalty! to destroy royalty forever! You must first weaken her prestige as well as her essence. You wish to destroy royalty! Wait till royalty is no longer a sacred office, but merely a trade — till it is practiced in a shop, not in a temple. Now, what is most sacred in royalty — viz., the legitimate transmission of the throne, authorized for centuries by God and the people — is about to be lost forever. Listen, listen! This invincible, this impervious barrier between us nothings and these quasi-divine creatures — this limit which the people have never dared to cross, and which is called legitimacy — this word, brilliant as a lighted watch-tower, and which until now has saved the royal family from shipwreck — this word will be extinguished by the breath of a mysterious fatality!

“The dauphiness — called to France to perpetuate the race of kings by the admixture of imperial blood — the dauphiness, married now for a year to the heir of the French crown — approach, brethren, for I fear to let the sound of my words pass beyond your circle — ”

“Well?” asked the six chiefs, with anxiety.

“Well, brethren, the dauphiness will never have an heir, or if one be born to her, he will die early!”

A sinister murmur, which would have frozen the monarchs of the world with terror had they heard it — such deep hatred, such revengeful joy, did it breathe — escaped like a deadly vapor from the little circle of six heads, which almost touched each other, Balsamo's being bent over them from his rostrum.

“Now, gentlemen, you know this year's work; you see the progress of our mines. Be assured that we shall only succeed by the genius and the courage of some, who will serve as the eyes and the brain — by the perseverance and labor of others, who will represent the arms — by the faith and the devotion of others again, who will be the heart.

“Above all, remember the necessity of a blind submission, which ordains that even your chief must sacrifice himself to the will of the statutes of the order, whenever those statutes require it.

“After this, gentlemen and beloved brothers, I would dissolve the meeting, if there were not still a good act to perform, an evil to point out.

“The great writer who came among us this evening, and who would have been one of us but for the stormy zeal of one of our brothers who alarmed his timid soul — this great author proved himself in the right before our assembly, and I deplore it as a misfortune that a stranger should be victorious before a majority of brothers who are imperfectly acquainted with our rules, and utterly ignorant of our aim.

“Rousseau, triumphing over the truths of our association with the sophisms of his books, represents a fundamental vice which I would extirpate by steel and fire, if I had not the hope of curing it by persuasion. The self-love of one of our brothers has developed itself most unfortunately. He has given us the worst in the discussion. No similar fact, I trust, will again present itself, or else I shall have recourse to the laws of discipline.

“In the meantime, gentlemen, propagate the faith by gentleness and persuasion. Insinuate it, do not impose it — do not force it into rebellious minds with wedges and blows, as the inquisitors tortured their victims. Remember that we cannot be great until after we have been acknowledged good; and that we cannot be acknowledged good but by appearing better than those who surround us. Remember, too, that among us the great, the good, the best, are nothing without science, art, and faith; nothing, in short, compared with those whom God has marked with a peculiar stamp, as if giving them an authority to govern over men and rule empires.

"Gentlemen, the meeting is dissolved." After pronouncing these words. Balsamo put on his hat and folded himself in his cloak.

Each of the initiated left in his turn, alone and silently, in order not to awaken suspicion.

CHAPTER CIII.

The Body and the Soul.

THE LAST WHO remained beside the master was Marat, the surgeon. He was very pale, and humbly approached the terrible orator, whose power was unlimited.

“Master,” said he, “have I indeed committed a fault?”

“A great one, sir,” said Balsamo; “and, what is worse, you do not believe that you have committed one.”

“Well! yes, I confess that not only do I not believe that I committed a fault, but I think that I spoke as I ought to have done.”

“Pride, pride!” muttered Balsamo; “pride — destructive demon! Men combat the fever in the blood of the patient — they dispel the plague from the water and the air — but they let pride strike such deep roots in their hearts that they cannot exterminate it.”

“Oh, master!” said Marat, “you have a very despicable opinion of me. Am I indeed so worthless that I cannot count for anything among my fellows? Have I gathered the fruits of my labor so ill that I cannot utter a word without being taxed with ignorance? Am I such a lukewarm adept that my earnestness is suspected? If I had no other good quality, at least I exist through my devotion to the holy cause of the people.”

“Sir,” replied Balsamo, “it is because the principle of good yet struggles in you against the principle of evil, which appears to me likely to carry you away one day, that I will try to correct these defects in you. If I can succeed — if pride has not yet subdued every other sentiment in your breast — I shall succeed in one hour.”

“In one hour?” said Marat.

“Yes; will you grant me that time?”

“Certainly.”

“Where shall I see you?”

“Master, it is my place to seek you in any place you may choose to point out to your servant.”

“Well!” said Balsamo, “I will come to your house.”

“Mark the promise you are making, master. I live in an attic in the Rue des Cordeliers. An attic, remember!” said Marat, with an affectation of proud simplicity, with a boasting display of poverty, which did not escape Balsamo; “while you — ”

“Well! while I?”

“While you, it is said, inhabit a palace.”

Balsamo shrugged his shoulders, as a giant who looks down with contempt on the anger of a dwarf.

“Well, even so, sir,” he replied; “I will come to see you in your garret.”

“And when, sir?” — "To-morrow.”

“At what time?”

“In the morning.”

“At daybreak I go to my lecture-room, and from thence to the hospital.”

“That is precisely what I want. I would have asked you to take me with you, had you not proposed it.”

“But early, remember,” said Marat; “I sleep little.”

“And I do not sleep at all,” replied Balsamo. “At daybreak, then.”

“I shall expect you.”

Thereupon they separated, for they had reached the door opening on the street, now as dark and solitary as it had been noisy and populous when they entered. Balsamo turned to the left, and rapidly disappeared, Marat followed his example, striding toward the right with his long meager limbs.

Balsamo was punctual; the next morning, at six o'clock, he knocked at Marat's door, which was the center one of six, opening on a long corridor which formed the top most story of an old house in the Rue des Cordeliers.

It was evident that Marat had made great preparations to receive his illustrious guest. The small bed of walnut-tree, and the wooden chest of drawers beside it, shone bright beneath the sturdy arm of the charwoman, who was busily engaged scrubbing the decayed furniture.

Marat himself lent a helping hand to the old woman, and was refreshing the withered flowers which were arranged in a blue delft pot, and which formed the principal ornament of the attic. He still held a duster underneath his arm, which showed that he had not touched the flowers until after having given a rub to the furniture.

As the key was in the door, and as Balsamo had entered without knocking, he interrupted Marat in his occupation. Marat, at the sight of the master, blushed much more deeply than was becoming in a true stoic.

"You see, master," said he, stealthily throwing the tell-tale cloth behind a curtain, "I am a domestic man, and assist this good woman. It is from preference that I choose this task, which is, perhaps, not quite plebeian, but it is still less aristocratic."

"It is that of a poor young man who loves cleanliness," said Balsamo, coldly, "nothing more. Are you ready, sir? You know my moments are precious."

"I have only to slip on my coat, sir. Dame Grivette, my coat! She is my portress, sir — my footman, my cook, my housekeeper, and she costs me one crown a month."

"Economy is praiseworthy," said Balsamo; "it is the wealth of the poor, and the wisdom of the rich."

"My hat and cane!" said Marat.

"Stretch out your hand," said Balsamo; "there is your hat, and no doubt this cane which, hangs beside your hat is yours."

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir; I am quite confused."

"Are you ready?"

"Yes, sir. My watch. Dame Grivette!"

Dame Grivette bustled about the room as if in search of something, but did not reply.

"You have no occasion for a watch, sir, to go to the amphitheater and the hospital; it will perhaps not be easily found, and that would cause some delay."

"But, sir, I attach great value to my watch, which is an excellent one, and which I bought with my savings."

"In your absence, Dame Grivette will look for it," replied Balsamo with a smile; "and if she searches carefully, it will be found when you return."

"Oh, certainly," said Dame Grivette. "It will be found unless monsieur has left it somewhere else. Nothing is lost here."

"You see," said Balsamo. "Come, sir, come!"

Harat did not venture to persist, and followed Balsamo, grumbling.

When they reached the door. Balsamo said:

"Where shall we go first?"

"To the lecture-room, if you please, master; I have marked a subject which must have died last night of acute meningitis. I want to make some observations on the brain, and I do not wish my colleagues to take it from me.”

“Then let us go to the amphitheater, Monsieur Marat.”

“Moreover, it is only a few yards from here; the amphitheater is close to the hospital, and I shall only have to go in for a moment; you may even wait for me at the door.”

“On the contrary, I wish to accompany you inside, and hear your opinion of this subject.”

“When it was alive, sir?”

“No, since it has become a corpse.”

“Take care,” said Marat, smiling; “I may gain a point over you, for I am well acquainted with this part of my profession and am said to be a skillful anatomist.”

“Pride! pride! ever pride!” murmured Balsamo.

“What do you say?” asked Marat.

“I say that we shall see, sir,” replied Balsamo. “Let us enter.”

Marat preceded Balsamo in the narrow alley lending to the amphitheater, which was situated at the extremity of the Rue Hautefeuille. Balsamo followed him unhesitatingly until they reached a long narrow room, where two corpses, a male and a female, lay stretched upon a marble table.

The woman had died young; the man was old and bald. A soiled sheet was thrown over their bodies, leaving their faces half uncovered.

They were lying side by side upon this cold bed; they who had perhaps never met before in the world, and whose souls, then voyaging in eternity, must, could they have looked down on earth, have been struck with wonderment at the proximity of their mortal remains.

Marat, with a single movement, raised and threw aside the coarse linen which covered the two bodies, whom death had thus made equal before the anatomist's scalpel.

“Is not the sight of the dead repugnant to your feelings?” asked Marat in his usual boasting manner.

“It makes me sad.” replied Balsamo.

“Want of custom,” said Marat. “I, who see this sight daily, feel neither sadness nor disgust. We practitioners live with the dead, and do not interrupt any of the functions of our existence on their account.”

“It is a sad privilege of your profession, sir.”

“Besides,” added Marat, “why should I be sad, or feel disgust? In the first case, reflection forbids it; in the second, custom.”

“Explain your ideas,” said Balsamo; “I do not understand you clearly. Reflection first.”

“Well, why should I be afraid? Why should I fear an inert mass — a statue of flesh instead of stone, marble, or granite?”

“In short, you think there is nothing in a corpse.”

“Nothing — absolutely nothing.”

“Do you believe that?”

“I am sure of it.”

“But in the living body.”

“There is motion,” said Marat, proudly.

“And the soul? — you do not speak of it, sir.”

“I have never found it in the bodies which I have dissected.”

“Because you have only dissected corpses.”

“Oh no, sir! I have frequently operated upon living bodies.”

“And you have found nothing more in them than in the corpses?”

“Yes, I have found pain. Do you call pain the soul?”

“Then you do not believe in it?”

“In what?”

“In the soul?”

“I believe in it, because I am at liberty to call it motion if I wish.”

“That is well. You believe in the soul; that is all I asked; I am glad you believe in it.”

“One moment, master. Let us understand each other, and above all, let us not exaggerate,” said Marat, with his serpent smile. “We practitioners are rather disposed to materialism.”

“These bodies are very cold,” said Balsamo, dreamily, “and this woman was very beautiful.”

“Why, yes.”

“A lovely soul would have been suitable in this lovely body.”

“Ah! there is the mistake in Him who created her. A beautiful scabbard, but a vile sword. This corpse, master, is that of a wretched woman who had just left Saint Lazarus, when she died of cerebral inflammation in the Hotel Dieu. Her history is long, and tolerably scandalous. If you call the motive power which impelled this creature soul you wrong our souls, which must be of the same essence, since they are derived from the same source.”

“Her soul should have been cured,” said Balsamo; “it was lost for want of the only Physician who is indispensable — the Physician of the Soul.”

“Alas, master, that is another of your theories. Medicine is only for the body,” replied Marat, with a bitter smile. “Now you have a word on your lips which Moliere has often employed in his comedies, and it is this word which makes you smile.”

“No.” said Balsamo, “you mistake; you cannot guess why I smile. What we concluded just now was, that these corpses are void, was it not?”

“And insensible,” added Marat, raising the young woman's head, and letting it fall noisily upon the marble, while the body neither moved nor shuddered.

“Very well,” said Balsamo; “let us now go, to the hospital.”

“Wait one moment, master. I entreat you, until I have separated from the trunk this head, which I am most anxious to have, as it was the seat of a very curious disease. Will you allow me?”

“Do you ask?” said Balsamo.

Marat opened his case, took from it a bistoury, and picked up in a corner a large wooden mallet stained with blood. Then with a practiced hand he made a circular incision which separated all the flesh and the muscles of the neck, and having thus reached the bone, he slipped his bistoury between the juncture of the vertebral column, and struck a sharp blow upon it with the mallet.

The head rolled upon the table, and from the table upon the floor; Marat was obliged to seize it with his damp hands. Balsamo turned away, not to give too much joy to the triumphant operator.

“One day.” said Marat, who thought he had hit the master in a weak point — ” one day some philanthropist will occupy himself with the details of death as others do of life, and will invent a machine which shall sever a head at a single blow, and cause instantaneous annihilation, which no other instrument of death does. The wheel, quartering, and hanging, are punishments suitable for savages, but not for civilized people. An enlightened nation, as France is, should punish, but not revenge. Those who condemn to the wheel, who hang or quarter, revenge themselves upon the criminal by inflicting pain before punishing him by death, which, in my opinion, is too much by half.”

“And in mine also, sir. But what kind of an instrument do you mean?”

"I can fancy a machine cold and impassible as the law itself. The man who is charged with fulfilling the last office is moved at the sight of his fellow man, and sometimes strikes badly, as it happened to the Duke of Monmouth and to Chalais. This could not be the case with a machine — with two arms of oak wielding a cutlass, for instance."

" And do you believe, sir, that because the knife would pass with the rapidity of lightning between the base of the occiput and the trapezoid muscles, that death would be instantaneous, and the pain momentary?"

"Certainly; death would be instantaneous, for the iron would sever the nerves which cause motion at a blow. The pain would be momentary, for the blade would separate the brain, which is the seat of the feelings, from the heart, which is the center of life."

"Sir," said Balsamo, "the punishment of decapitation exists in Germany."

"Yes, but by the sword; and, as I said before, a man's hand may tremble."

"Such a machine exists in Italy; an arm of oak wields it. It is called the mannaja."

"'Well?"

"Well, sir. I have seen criminals, decapitated by the executioner, raise their headless bodies from the bench on which they were seated, and stagger five or six paces off where they fell. I have picked up heads which had rolled to the foot of the mannaja, as that head you are holding by the hair has just rolled from the marble table, and on pronouncing in their ears the name by which those persons had been called, I have seen the eyes open again and turn in their orbit, in their endeavors to see who had called them back again to earth."

"A nervous movement — nothing else."

"Are the nerves not the organs of sensibility?"

"What do you conclude from that, sir?"

"I conclude that it would be better, instead of inventing a machine which kills to punish, that man should seek a means of punishing without killing. The society which will invent this means will assuredly be the best and the most enlightened of societies."

"Utopias again! always Utopias!" said Marat.

"Perhaps you are right," said Balsamo; "time will show. But did you not speak of the hospital? Let us go!"

"Come, then," said Marat; and he tied the woman's head in his pocket-handkerchief, carefully knotting the four corners. "Now I am sure, at least," said he, as he left the hall, “that my comrades will only have my leavings.”

They took the way to the Hotel Dieu — the dreamer and the practician, side by side.

“You have cub off this head very coolly and very skillfully, sir,” said Balsamo; “do you feel less emotion when you operate upon the living than the dead? Does the sight of suffering affect you more than that of immobility? Have you more pity for living bodies than for corpses?”

“No; that would be as great a fault as for the executioner to be moved. You may kill a man by cutting his thigh unskillfully, just as well as by severing the head from the body. A good surgeon operates with his hand, not with his heart; though he knows well at the same time, in his heart, that for one moment of suffering he gives years of life and health. That is the fair side of our profession, master.”

“Yes, sir; but in the living bodies you meet with the soul, I hope.”

“Yes, if you will agree with me that the soul is motion, or sensibility. Yes, certainly, I meet with it; and it is very troublesome, too; for it kills far more patients than any scalpel.”

They had by this time arrived at the threshold of the Hotel Dieu, and now entered the hospital. Guided by Marat, who still carried his ominous burden, Balsamo penetrated to the hall where the operations were performed, in which the head-surgeon and the students in surgery were assembled. The attendant had just brought in a young man who had been run over the preceding week by a heavy carriage, the wheel of which had crushed his foot. A hasty operation, performed upon the limb when benumbed by pain, had not been sufficient; the inflammation had rapidly extended, and the amputation of the leg had now become urgent.

The unfortunate man, stretched upon his bed of anguish, looked with a horror which would have melted tigers at the band of eager students who were watching for the moment of his martyrdom, perhaps of his death, that they might study the science of life — that marvelous phenomenon behind which lies the gloomy phenomenon of death.

He seemed to implore a pitying look, a smile, a word of encouragement from each of the students and attendants, but the beatings of his heart were responded to only by indifference, his beseeching looks with glances of iron. A surviving emotion of pride kept him silent. He reserved all his strength for the cries which pain would soon ring from him. But when he felt the heavy hand of the attendant upon his shoulder, when the arms of the assistants twined around him like the serpents of Laocoon, when he heard the operator's voice cry, “Courage!” the unfortunate man ventured to break the silence, and asked in a plaintive voice:

“Shall I suffer much?”

“Oh, no, make your mind easy,” replied Marat, with a, hypocritical smile, which was affectionate to the patient, but ironical to Balsamo.

Marat saw that Balsamo had understood him; he approached and whispered:

“It is a dreadful operation. The bone is full of cracks and fearfully sensitive. He will die, not of the wound, but of the pain. That is what the soul does for this poor man.”

“Then why do you operate? why do you not let him die in peace?”

“Because it is the surgeon's duty to attempt a cure, even when the cure seems impossible.”

“And you say he will suffer?”

“Fearfully.””

“And that his soul is the cause?”

“His soul, which has too much sympathy with the body.”

“Then, why not operate upon the soul? Perhaps the tranquillity of the one would cause the cure of the other.”

“I have done so,” said Marat, while the attendants continued to bind the patient.

“You have prepared his soul?”

“Yes.”

“How so?”

“As one always does, by words. I spoke to his soul, his intelligence, his sensibility — to that organ which caused the Greek philosopher to exclaim, 'Pain, thou art no evil' — the language suitable for it. I said to him; 'You will not suffer.' That is the only remedy hitherto known, as regards the soul — falsehood! Why is this she-devil of a soul connected with the body? When I cut off this head just now, the body said nothing, yet the operation was a serious one. But motion had ceased, sensibility was extinguished, the soul had fled, as you spiritualists say. This is the reason why the head I severed said nothing, why the body which I mutilated allowed me to do so; while this body which is yet inhabited by a soul — for a short time indeed, but still inhabited — will cry out fearfully. Stop your ears well, master, you who are moved by this union of body and soul, which will always destroy your theory until you succeed in isolating the body from the soul.”

“And you believe we shall never arrive at this isolation?”

“Try,” said Marat, “this is an excellent opportunity.”

“Well, yes, you are right,” said Balsamo; “the opportunity is a good one, and I will make the attempt.”

“Yes, try.”

“I will.”

“How so?”

“This young man interests me; he shall not suffer.”

“You are an illustrious chief,” said Marat, “but you are not the Almighty, and you cannot prevent this wretch from suffering.”

“If he were not to feel the pain, do you think he would recover?”

“His recovery would be more probable, but not certain.”

Balsamo cast an inexpressible look of triumph upon Marat, and placing himself before the young patient, whose frightened eyes, already dilated with the anguish of terror, met his;

“Sleep,” said he, not alone with his lips, but with his look, with his will — with all the heat of his blood, all the vital energy of his body.

The head surgeon was just commencing to feel the injured leg, and to point out the aggravated nature of the case to his students; but, at Balsamo's command, the young man, who had raised himself upon his seat, oscillated for a moment in the arms of his attendants, his head drooped, and his eyes closed.

“He is ill.” said Marat.

“No, sir.”

“But do you not see that he loses consciousness?”

“He is sleeping.”

“What! he sleeps?”

“Yes.”

Every one turned to look at the strange physician, whom they took for a madman. An incredulous smile hovered on Marat's lips.

“Is it usual for people to talk while in a swoon?” asked Balsamo.

“No.”

“Well! question him — he will reply.”

“Hallo! young man!” cried Marat.

“You need not speak so loud,” said Balsamo; “speak in your usual voice.”

“Tell us what is the matter with you.”

“I was ordered to sleep, and I do sleep,” replied the patient.

His voice was perfectly calm, and formed a strange contrast to that they had heard a few moments before.

All the attendants looked at each other.

“Now,” said Balsamo, “release him.”

“That is impossible.” said the head surgeon; “the slightest movement will spoil the operation.”

“He will not stir.”

“Who can assure me of that?”

“I and he also — ask him.”

“Can you be left untied, my friend?”

“Yes.”

“And will you promise not to move?”

“I will promise it, if you command me.”

“I command it.”

“Faith! sir, you speak so positively that I am tempted to make the trial.”

“Do so, sir; and fear nothing.”

“Untie him.”

The assistants obeyed.

Balsamo advanced to the bedside.

“From this moment,” said he, “do not stir until I order you.”

A carved statue upon a tombstone could not have been more motionless than the patient, upon this injunction.

“Now operate, sir,” said Balsamo; “the patient is quite ready.”

The surgeon took his bistoury; but, when upon the point of using it, he hesitated.

“Cut, sir! cut!” said Balsamo, with the air of an inspired prophet.

And the surgeon, yielding — like Marat, like the patient, like every one present — to the irresistible influence of Balsamo's words, raised the knife. The sound of the knife passing through the flesh was heard, but the patient never stirred, nor even uttered a sigh.

“From what country do you come, my friend?” asked Balsamo.

“I am a Breton, sir.” replied the patient, smiling.

“And you love your country?”

“Oh! sir, it is so beautiful!”

In the meantime the surgeon was making the circular incisions in the flesh, by means of which, in amputations, the bone is laid bare.

“You quitted it when young?” asked Balsamo. — — “At ten years of age, sir.”

The incisions were made — the surgeon placed the saw on the bone.

“My friend,” said Balsamo, “sing me that song which the salt-makers of Batz chant as they return to their homes after the day's work is over. I can only remember the first line; “'My salt covered o'er with its mantle of foam.'”

The saw was now severing the bone; but at Balsamo's command the patient smiled, and commenced, in a low, melodious, ecstatic voice, like a lover or like a poet, the following verses:

“'My salt covered o'er with its mantle of foam,
The lake of pure azure that mirrors my home,
My stove where the peats ever cheerfully burn,
And the honeyed wheat-cake which awaits my return. —

“'The wife of my bosom — my silver-haired sire —
My urchins who sport round the clear evening fire —
And there, where the wild flowers, in brightest of bloom.
Their fragrance diffuse round my loved mother's tomb. —

“'Blest, blest be ye all! — Now the day's task is o'er,
And I stand once again at my own cottage door;
And richly will love my brief absence repay.
And the calm joys of eve the rude toils of the day.'”

The leg fell upon the bed while the patient was singing.

CHAPTER CIV.

Body and Soul.

EVERY ONE looked with astonishment at the patient — with admiration at the surgeon. Some said that both were mad. Marat communicated this opinion to Balsamo in a whisper.

“Terror has made the poor devil lose his senses,” said he; “that is why he feels no pain.”

“I think not,” replied Balsamo; “and far from having lost his senses, I am sure that if I asked him he could tell us the day of his death, if he is to die, or the period of his convalescence, if he is to recover.”

Marat was almost inclined to adopt the general opinion — that Balsamo was as mad as his patient. In the meantime, however, the surgeon was tying up the arteries, from which spouted streams of blood.

Balsamo drew a small phial from his pocket, poured a few drops of the liquid it contained upon a little ball of lint, and begged the chief surgeon to apply the lint to the arteries. The latter obeyed with a certain feeling of curiosity. He was one of the most celebrated practitioners of that period — a man truly enamored of his profession, who repudiated none of its mysteries, and for whom chance was but the makeshift of doubt.

He applied the lint to the artery, which quivered, bubbled, and then only allowed the blood to escape drop by drop. He could now tie up the artery with the greatest facility.

This time Balsamo obtained an undoubted triumph, and all present asked him where he had studied, and of what school he was.

“I am a German physician of the school of Gottingen,” replied he, “and I have made this discovery you have just witnessed. However, gentlemen and fellow practitioners, I wish this discovery to remain a secret for the present, as I have a wholesome terror of the stake, and the parliament of Paris might perhaps resume their functions once more for the pleasure of condemning a sorcerer.”

The chief surgeon was still plunged in a reverie. Marat also seemed thoughtful, but he was the first to break the silence.

“You said just now,” said he, “that if you were to question this man about the result of this operation he would reply truly, though the result is still veiled in futurity.”

“I assert it again,” replied Balsamo.

“Well, let us have the proof.”

“What is this poor fellow's name?”

“Havard,” replied Marat.

Balsamo turned to the patient, whose lips were yet murmuring the last words of the plaintive air.

“Well, my friend,” asked he, “what do you augur from the state of this poor Havard?”

“What do I augur from his state?” replied the patient; “stay, I must return from Brittany, where I was, to the Hotel Dieu, where be is.”

“Just so; eater, look at him and tell me the truth respecting him.”

“Oh! he is very ill; his leg has been cut off.”

“Indeed?” said Balsamo. “And has the operation been successful?”

“Exceedingly so; but —

The patient's face darkened.

“But what?” asked Balsamo.

“But,” resumed the patient, “he has a terrible trial to pass through. The fever — ”

“When will it commence?”

“At seven o'clock this evening.”

All the spectators looked at each other.

“And this fever?” asked Balsamo.

“Oh! it will make him very ill; but he will recover from the first attack.”

“Are you sure?”

“Oh, yes!”

“Then, after this first attack, will he be saved?”

“Alas! no,” said the wounded man, sighing.

“Will the fever return, then?”

“Oh, yes! and more severely than before. Poor Havard! poor Havard!” he continued, “he has a wife and several children.” And his eyes filled with tears.

“Must his wife be a widow, then, and his children orphans?” asked Balsamo.

“Wait! wait!”

He clasped his hands.

“No, no,” he exclaimed, his features lighting up with an expression of sublime faith; “no, his wife and children have prayed, and their prayers have found favor in the sight of God!”

“Then he will recover?”

“Yes.”

“You hear, gentlemen.” said Balsamo, “he will recover.”

“Ask him in how many days.” said Marat.

“In how many days, do you say?”

“Yes; you said he could indicate the phases, and the duration of his convalescence.”

“I ask nothing better than to question him on the subject.”

“Well, then, question him now.”

“And when do you think Havard will recover?” said Balsamo.

“Oh! his cure will take a long time — a month, six weeks, two months. He entered this hospital five days ago, and he will leave it two months and fourteen days after having entered.”

“And he will leave it cured?”

“Yes.”

“But,” said Marat, “unable to work, and consequently to maintain his wife and children.”

Havard again clasped his hands.

“Oh! God is good; God will provide for him!”

“ And how will God provide for him?” asked Marat. “As I am in the way of hearing something new to-day, I might as well hear that.” “God has sent to his bedside a charitable man who has taken pity upon him, and who has said to himself, 'Poor Havard shall not want.'”

The spectators were amazed; Balsamo smiled.

“Ha! this is in truth a strange scene,” said the chief surgeon, at the same time taking the patient's hand, feeling his chest and forehead; “this man is dreaming.”

“Do you think so?” said Balsamo.

Then, darting upon the sick man a look of authority and energy:

“Awake, Havard!” said he.

The young man opened his eyes with some difficulty, and gazed with profound surprise upon all these spectators, who had so soon laid aside their threatening character, and assumed an inoffensive one toward him.

"Well," said he sadly, "have you not operated yet? Are you going to make me suffer still more?"

Balsamo replied hastily. He feared the invalid's emotion. But there was no need for such haste; the surprise of all the spectators was so great that none would have anticipated him.

"My friend," said he, "be calm. The head-surgeon has operated upon your leg in such a manner as to satisfy all the requirements of your position. It seems, my poor fellow, that you are not very strong-minded, for you fainted at the first incision."

"Oh! so much the better," said the Breton smilingly; "I felt nothing, and my sleep was even sweet and refreshing. What happiness — my leg will not be cut off!"

But just at that moment the poor man looked down, and saw the bed full of blood, and his amputated leg lying near him. He uttered a scream, and this time fainted in reality.

"Now question him," said Balsamo coldly to Marat; "you will see if he replies."

Then, taking the head-surgeon aside, while the nurses carried the poor young man back to his bed:

"Sir," said Balsamo, "you heard what your poor patient said?"

"Yes, sir, that he would recover."

"He said something else; he said that God would take pity upon him, and would send him wherewithal to support his wife and children."

"Well?"

"Well, sir, he told the truth on this point, as on the others. Only you must undertake to be the charitable medium of affording him this assistance. Here is a diamond, worth about twenty thousand livres; when the poor man is cured, sell it and give him the proceeds. In the meantime, since the soul, as your pupil M. Marat said very truly, has a great influence upon the body, tell Havard as soon as he is restored to consciousness that his future comfort and that of his children is secured."

"But, sir," said the surgeon, hesitating to take the ring which Balsamo offered him, "if he should not recover?"

"He will recover."

“Then allow me at least to give you a receipt.” — "Sir!”

“That is the only condition upon which I can receive a jewel of such value.”

“Do as you think right, sir.”

“Your name, if you please?”

“The Count de Fenix.”

The surgeon passed into the adjoining apartment, while Marat, overwhelmed, confounded, but still struggling against the evidence of his senses, approached Balsamo.

In five minutes the surgeon returned, holding in his hand the following receipt, which he gave Balsamo:

“I have received from the Count de Fenix a diamond, which he affirms to be worth twenty thousand livres, the price of which is to be given to the man Havard when he leaves the Hotel Dieu.

“This 15th of September, 1771.

“GUILLOTIN. M.D.”

Balsamo bowed to the doctor, took the receipt, and left the room, followed by Marat.

“You are forgetting your head.” said Balsamo, for whom the wandering of the young student's thoughts was a great triumph. — “Ah! true,” said he.

And he again picked up his dismal burden. When they emerged into the street, both walked forward very quickly without uttering a word; then, having reached the Rue des Cordeliers, they ascended the steep stairs which led to the attic.

Marat, who had not forgotten the disappearance of his watch, stopped before the lodge of the portress, if the den which she inhabited deserved that name, and asked for Dame Grivette.

A thin, stunted, miserable-looking child, of about seven years old, replied in a whining voice:

“Mamma is gone out; she said that when you came home I was to give you this letter.”

“No, no, my little friend,” said Marat; “tell her to bring it me herself.”

“Yes, sir.”

And Marat and Balsamo proceeded on their way.

“Ah!” said Marat, pointing out a chair to Balsamo, and falling upon a stool himself, “I see the master has some noble secrets.”

“Perhaps I have penetrated farther than most men into the confidence of nature and into the works of God,” replied Balsamo.

“Oh!” said Marat, “how science proves man's omnipotence, and makes us proud to be a man!”

“True; and a physician, you should have added.”

“Therefore, I am proud of you, master.” said Marat.

“And yet,” replied Balsamo, smiling, “I am but a poor physician of souls.”

“Oh! do not speak of that, sir — you, who stopped the patient's bleeding by material means.”

“I thought my best cure was that of having prevented him from suffering. True, you assured me he was mad.”

“He was so for a moment, certainly.”

“What do you call madness? Is it not an abstraction of the soul?”

“Or of the mind,” said Marat.

“We will not discuss the point. The soul serves me as a term for what I mean. When the object is found, it matters little how you call it.”

“There is where we differ, sir; you pretend you have found the thing and seek only the name; I maintain that you seek both the object and the name.”

“We shall return to that immediately. You said, then, that madness was a temporary abstraction of the mind?”

“Certainly.”

“Involuntary, is it not?”

“Yes; I have seen a madman at Bicetre, who bit the iron bars of his cell, crying out all the time, 'Cook, your pheasants are very tender, but they are badly dressed.'”

“But you admit, at least, that this madness passes over the mind like a cloud, and that when it has passed, the mind resumes its former brightness?”

“That scarcely ever happens.”

“Yet you saw our patient recover his senses perfectly after his insane dream.”

“I saw it, but I did not understand what I saw. It is an exceptional case — one of those strange events which the Israelites called miracles.”

“No, sir,” said Balsamo; “it is simply the abstraction of the soul — the twofold isolation of spirit and matter. Matter — that inert thing — dust — which will return to dust; and soul, the divine spark which was inclosed for a short period in that dark lantern called the body, and which, being the child of heaven, will return to heaven after the body has sunk to earth.”

“Then you abstracted the soul momentarily from the body?”

“Yes, sir; I commanded it to quit the miserable abode which it occupied. I raised it from the abyss of suffering in which pain had bound it, and transported it into pure and heavenly regions. What, then, remained for the surgeon? The same that remained for your dissecting knife, when you severed that head you are carrying from the dead body — nothing but inert flesh, matter, clay.”

“And in whose name did you command the soul?”

“In His name who created all the souls by His breath — the souls of the world, of men — in the name of God.”

“Then.” said Marat, “you deny free will?”

“I!” said Balsamo; “on the contrary, what am I doing at this moment? I show you, on the one hand, free will; on the other, abstraction. I show you a dying man a prey to excruciating pain; this man has a stoical soul, he anticipates the operation, he asks for it, he bears it, but he suffers. That is free will. But when I approach the dying man — I, the ambassador of God, the prophet, the apostle — and taking pity upon this man who is my fellow-creature, I abstract, by the powers which the Lord has given me, the soul from the suffering body, this blind, inert, insensible body becomes a spectacle which the soul contemplates with a pitying eye from the height of its celestial sphere. Did you not hear Havard, when speaking of himself, say, 'This poor Havard'? He did not say 'myself.' It was because this soul had in truth no longer any connection with the body — it was already winging its way to heaven.”

“But, by this way of reckoning, man is nothing,” said Marat, “and I can no longer say to the tyrant, 'You have power over my body, but none over my soul.'”

“Ah! now you pass from truth to sophism; I have already told you, sir, it is your failing. God lends the soul to the body, it is true; but it is no less true that during the time the soul animates this body, there is a union between the two — an influence of one over the other — a supremacy of matter over mind, or mind over matter, according as, for some purpose hidden from us, God permits either the body or the soul to be the ruling power. But it is no less true that the soul which animates the beggar is as pure as that which reigns in the bosom of the king. That is the dogma which you, an apostle of equality, ought to preach. Prove the equality of the spiritual essences in these two cases, since you can establish it by the aid of all that is most sacred in the eyes of men, by holy books and traditions, by science and faith. Of what importance is the equality of matter? With physical equality you are only men; but spiritual equality makes you gods. Just now, this poor wounded man, this ignorant child of the people, told you things concerning his illness which none among the doctors would have ventured to pronounce. How was that? It was because his soul, temporarily freed from earthly ties, floated above this world, and saw from on high a mystery which our opaqueness of vision hides from us."

Marat turned his dead head back and forward upon the table, seeking a reply which he could not find. "Yes," muttered he at last; "yes; there is something supernatural in all this."

"Perfectly natural, on the contrary, sir. Cease to call supernatural what has its origin in the functions and destiny of the soul. These functions are natural, although perhaps not known."

"But though unknown to us, master, these functions cannot surely be a mystery to you. The horse, unknown to the Peruvians, was yet perfectly familiar to the Spaniards, who had tamed him."

"It would be presumptuous in me to say 'I know.' I am more humble, sir; I say, 'I believe.'"

"Well! what do you believe?"

"I believe that the first, the most powerful, of all laws is the law of progress. I believe that God has created nothing without having a beneficent design in view; only, as the duration of this world is uncalculated and incalculable, the progress is slow. Our planet, according to the Scriptures, was sixty centuries old, when printing came like some vast lighthouse to illuminate the past and the future. With the advent of printing, obscurity and forgetfulness vanished. Printing is the memory of the world. Well! Guttenberg invented printing, and my confidence returned."

"Ah!" said Marat, ironically, "you will, perhaps, be able at last to read men's hearts."

"Why not?"

"Then you will open that little window in men's breasts which the ancients so much desired to see?"

"There is no need for that, sir. I shall separate the soul from the body; and the soul — the pure, immaculate daughter of God — will reveal to me all the turpitudes of the mortal covering it is condemned to animate.”

“Can you reveal material secrets?”

“Why not?”

“Can you tell me, for instance, who has stolen my watch?”

“You lower science to a base level, sir. But, no matter. God's greatness is proved as much by a grain of sand as by the mountain — by the flesh-worm as by the elephant. Yes. I will tell you who has stolen your watch.”

Just then a timid knock was heard at the door. It was Marat's servant who had returned, and who came, according to the young surgeon's order, to bring; the letter.

CHAPTER CV.

Marat's Portress.

THE DOOR opened and Dame Grivette entered. This woman, whom we have not before taken the trouble to sketch, because she was one of those characters whom the painter keeps in the background, so long as he has no occasion for them — this woman now advances in the moving picture of this history, and demands her place in the immense picture we have undertaken to enroll before the eyes of our readers, in which, if our genius equaled our good will, we would introduce all classes of men, from the beggar to the king, from Caliban to Ariel.

We shall now therefore attempt to delineate Dame Grivette, who steps forth out of the shade, and advances toward us.

She was a tall withered creature, of from thirty to five-and-thirty years of age, with dark, sallow complexion, and blue eyes encircled with black rings — the fearful type of that decline, that wasting away, which is produced in densely-populated towns by poverty, bad air, and every sort of degradation, mental as well as bodily, among those creatures whom God created so beautiful, and who would otherwise have become magnificent in their perfect development, as all living denizens of earth, air, and sky are when man has not made their life one long punishment — when he has not tortured their limbs with chains and their stomachs with hunger, or with food almost as fatal.

Thus Marat's portress would have been a beautiful woman, if, from her fifteenth year, she had not dwelt in a den without air or light — if the fire of her natural instincts, fed by this oven-like heat, or by the icy cold, had not ceaselessly burned. She had long, thin hands, which the needle of the seamstress had furrowed with little cuts, which the suds of the wash-house had cracked and softened — which the burning coals of the kitchen had roasted and tanned — but in spite of all, hands which, by their form, that indelible trace of the divine mold, would have been called royal, if, instead of being blistered by the broom, they had wielded the scepter. So true is it that this poor human body is only the outward sign of our profession.

But in this woman, the mind, which rose superior to the body, and which consequently had resisted external circumstances better, kept watch like a lamp; it illumined, as it were, the body by a reflected light, and at times a ray of beauty, youth, intelligence, and love was seen to glance from her dulled and stupid eyes — a ray of all the finest feelings of the human heart.

Balsamo gazed attentively at the woman, or rather at this singular nature, which had from the first struck his observing eye.

The portress entered holding the letter in her hand, and in a soft insinuating voice, like that of an old woman — for women condemned to poverty are old at thirty — said:

“M. Marat, here is the letter you asked for.”

“It was not the letter I wanted,” said Marat; “I wished to see you.”

“Well! here I am at your service. Monsieur Marat,” (Dame Grivette made a curtsey), “what do you want with me?”

“You know very well what I want. I wish to know something about my watch.”

“Ah, dame! I can't tell what has become of it. I saw it all day yesterday hanging from the nail over the mantelpiece.”

“You mistake; all day yesterday it was in my fob; but when I went out at six o'clock in the evening I put it under the candlestick, because I was going among a crowd, and I feared it might be stolen.”

“If you put it under the candlestick, it must be there yet.”

And with feigned simplicity, which she was far from suspecting to be so transparent, she raised the very candlestick, of the pair which ornamented the mantelpiece, under which Marat had concealed his watch.

“Yes, that is the candlestick, sure enough,” said the young man; “but where is the watch?”

“No; I see it is no longer there. Perhaps you did not put it there, M. Marat.”

“But when I tell you I did.”

“Look for it carefully.”

“Oh. I have looked carefully enough,” said Marat, with an angry glance.

“Then you have lost it.”

“But I tell you that yesterday I put it under that candlestick myself.”

"Then some one must have entered," said Dame Grivette; "you see so many people, so many strangers."

"All an excuse!" cried Marat, more and more enraged. "You know very well that no one has been here since yesterday. No, no; my watch is gone where the silver top of my last cane went, where the little silver spoon you know of is gone to, and my knife with the six blades. I am robbed, Dame Grivette! I have borne much, but I shall not tolerate this; so take notice."

"But, sir," said Dame Grivette, "do you mean to accuse me?"

"You ought to take care of my effects."

"I have not even the key."

"You are the portress."

"You give me a crown a month, and you expect to be as well served as if you had ten domestics."

"I do not care about being badly served; but I do care whether I am robbed or not."

"Sir, I am an honest woman."

"Yes, an honest woman whom I shall give in charge to the police, if my watch is not found in an hour."

"To the police?"

"Yes."

"To the police — an honest woman like me?"

"An honest woman do you say? Honest! that's good."

"Yes; and of whom nothing bad can be said! do you hear that?"

"Come, come! enough of this. Dame Grivette."

"Ah! I thought that you suspected me, when you went out."

"I have suspected you ever since the top of my cane disappeared."

"Well! M. Marat, I will tell you something, in my turn."

"What will you tell me?"

"While you were away I have consulted my neighbors."

"Your neighbors! — for what purpose?"

"Respecting your suspicions."

"I had said nothing of them to you at the time."

"But I saw them plainly."

"And the neighbors? I am curious to know what they said."

"They said that if you suspect me, and have even gone so far as to impart your suspicions to another, you must pursue the affair to the end."

"Well!"

“That is to say, you must prove that the watch has been taken.”

“It has been taken, since it was there and is now gone.”

“Yes, but taken by me — taken by me; do you understand? Oh! justice requires proofs; your word will not be sufficient. M. Marat; you are no more than one of ourselves, M. Marat.”

Balsamo, calm as ever, looked on during this scene. He saw that though Marat's conviction was not altered, he had, nevertheless, lowered his tone.

“Therefore,” continued the portress, “if you do not render justice to my probity — if you do not make some reparation to my character — it is I who will send for the police, as our landlord just now advised me to do.”

Marat bit his lips. He knew there was a real danger in this. The landlord was an old, rich, retired merchant. He lived on the third story; and the scandal-mongers of the quarter did not hesitate to assert that, some ten years before, he had not been indifferent to the charms of the portress, who was then kitchen-maid to his wife.

Now, Marat attended mysterious meetings. Marat was a young man of not very settled habits, besides being addicted to concealment and suspected by the police; and, for all these reasons, he was not anxious to have an affair with the commissary, seeing that it might tend to place him in the hands of M. de Sartines, who liked much to read the papers of young men such as Marat, and to send the authors of such noble writings to houses of meditation, such as Vincennes, the Bastille, Charenton, and Bicetre.

Marat, therefore, lowered his tone; but, in proportion as he did so, the portress raised hers. The result was that this nervous and hysterical woman raged like a flame which suddenly meets with a current of fresh air.

Oaths, cries, tears — she employed all in turn; it was a regular tempest.

Then Balsamo judged that the time had come for him to interfere. He advanced toward the woman, and looking at her with an ominous and fiery glance, he stretched two fingers toward her, uttering, not so much with his lips as with his eyes, his thought, his whole will, a word which Marat could not hear.

Immediately Dame Grivette became silent, tottered, and, losing her equilibrium, staggered backward, her eyes fearfully dilated, and fell upon the bed without uttering a word.

After a short interval her eyes closed and opened again, but this time the pupil could not be seen; her tongue moved convulsively, but her body was perfectly motionless, and yet her hands trembled as if shaken by fever.

"Ha!" said Marat; "like the wounded man in the hospital!"

"Yes."

"Then she is asleep?"

"Silence!" said Balsamo.

Then addressing Marat:

"Sir," said he, "the moment has now come when all your incredulity must cease. Pick up that letter which this woman was bringing you, and which she dropped when she fell."

Marat obeyed.

"Well?" he asked.

"Wait!"

And taking the letter from Marat's hands:

"You know from whom this letter comes?" asked Balsamo of the somnambulist.

"No, sir," she replied.

Balsamo held the sealed letter close to the woman. "Read it to M. Marat, who wishes to know the contents."

"She cannot read," said Marat.

"Yes, but you can read?"

"Of course."

"Well, read it, and she will read it after you in proportion as the words are engraven upon your mind."

Marat broke the seal of the letter and read it, while Dame Grivette, standing, and trembling beneath the all-powerful will of Balsamo, repeated word for word, as Marat read them to himself, the following words:

"MY DEAR HIPPOCRATES — Apellas has just finished his portrait; he has sold it for fifty francs, and these fifty francs are to be eaten to-day at the tavern in the Rue Saint Jacques. Will you come?

"P. S. — It is understood that part is to be drunk. — Your friend,

"L. DAVID."

It was word for word what was written.

Marat let the paper fall from his hand.

"Well," said Balsamo, "you see that Dame Grivette also has a soul, and that this soul wakes while she sleeps."

"And a strange soul," said Marat; "a soul which can read when the body cannot."

“Because the soul knows everything — because the soul can reproduce by reflection. Try to make her read this when she is awake — that is to say, when the body has wrapped the soul in its shadow — and you will see.”

Marat was dumb; his whole material philosophy rebelled within him, but he could not find a reply.

“Now,” continued Balsamo, “we shall pass on to what interests you most; that is to say, as to what has become of your watch. Dame Grivette,” said he, turning to her, “who has taken M. Marat's watch?”

The somnambulist made a violent gesture of denial.

“I do not know,” said she.

“You know perfectly well,” persisted Balsamo, “and you shall tell me.”

Then, with a more decided exertion of his will:

“Who has taken M. Marat's watch? — speak! Dame Grivette has not stolen M. Marat's watch. Why does M. Marat believe she has?”

“If it is not she who has taken it, tell me who has?”

“I do not know.”

“You see,” said Marat, “conscience is an impenetrable refuge.”

“Well, since you have only this last doubt,” said Balsamo, “you shall be convinced.”

Then, turning again to the portress:

“Tell me who took the watch; I insist upon it.”

“Come, come,” said Marat, “do not ask an impossibility!

“You heard?” said Balsamo; “I have said you must tell me.”

Then, beneath the pressure of this imperious command, the unhappy woman began to wring her hands and arms as if she were mad; a shudder like that of an epileptic fit ran through her whole body; her mouth was distorted with a hideous expression of terror and weakness; she threw herself back, rigid as if she were in a painful convulsion, and fell upon the bed.

“No, no,” said she; “I would rather die!”

“Well,” said Balsamo, with a burst of anger which made the fire flash from his eyes, “you shall die if necessary, but you shall speak. Your silence and your obstinacy are sufficient indications for me; but for an incredulous person we must have irrefragable proofs. Speak! — I will it; who has taken the watch?”

The nervous excitement was at its height; all the strength and power of the somnambulist struggled against Balsamo's will, inarticulate cries escaped from her lips, which were stained with a reddish foam.

“She will fall into an epileptic fit,” said Marat.

“Fear nothing; it is the demon of falsehood who is in her, and who refuses to come out.”

Then, turning toward the woman, and throwing in her face as much fluid as his hands could contain:

“Speak,” said he; “who has taken the watch?”

“Dame Grivette,” replied the somnabulis in an almost inaudible voice.

“When did she take it?”

“Yesterday evening.”

“Where was it?”

“Underneath the candlestick.”

“What has she done with it?”

“She has taken it to the Rue Saint Jacques.”

“Where in the Rue Saint Jacques?”

“To No, 29.”

“Which story?”

“The fifth.”

“To whom did she give it?”

“To a shoemaker's apprentice.”

“What is his name?”

“Simon.”

“What is this man to her?”

The woman was silent.

“What is this man to her?”

The somnambulist was again silent.

“What is this man to her?” repeated Balsamo.

The same silence.

Balsamo extended toward her his hand, impregnated with the fluid, and the unfortunate woman, overwhelmed by this terrible attack, had only strength to murmur:

“Her lover!”

Marat uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

“Silence!” said Balsamo; “allow conscience to speak.”

Then, continuing to address the woman, who was trembling all over, and bathed in perspiration:

“And who advised Dame Grivette to steal the watch?” asked he.

“No one. She raised the candlestick by accident, she saw the watch, and the demon tempted her.”

“Did she do it from want?”

“No; for she did not sell the watch.”

“She gave it away, then?”

“Yes.” — "To Simon?”

The somnambulist made a violent effort.

“To Simon,” said she.

Then she covered her face with her hands, and burst into a flood of tears.

Balsamo glanced at Marat, who, with gaping mouth, disordered hair, and dilated eyes, was gazing at the fearful spectacle.

“Well, sir!” said he; “you see, at last, the struggle between the body and the soul. You see conscience forced to yield, even in a redoubt which it had believed impregnable. Do you confess now that God has forgotten nothing in this world, and that He is in everything. Then deny no longer that there is a conscience — deny no longer that there is a soul — deny no longer the unknown, young man! Above all, do not deny faith, which is power supreme; and since you are ambitious, M. Marat, study; speak little, think much, and do not judge your superiors lightly. Adieu; my words have opened a vast field before you; cultivate this field, which contains hidden treasures. Adieu! Happy will you be if you can conquer the demon of incredulity which is in you, as I have conquered the demon of falsehood which was in this woman.”

And with these words, which caused the blush of shame to tinge the young man's cheeks, he left the room.

Marat did not even think of taking leave of him. But after his first stupor was over, he perceived that Dame Grivette was still sleeping. This sleep struck terror to his soul. Marat would rather have seen a corpse upon his bed, even if M. de Sartines should interpret the fact after his own fashion.

He gazed on this lifeless form, these turned-up eyes, these palpitations, and he felt afraid. His fear increased when the living corpse rose, advanced toward him, took his hand, and said:

“Come with me, M. Marat.”

“Where to?”

“To the Rue St. Jacques.”

“Why?”

“Come, come; he commands me to take you.”

Marat, who had fallen upon a chair, rose.

Then Dame Grivette, still asleep, opened the door, and descended the stairs with the stealthy pace of a cat, scarcely touching the steps.

Marat followed, fearing every moment that she would fall, and in falling break her neck.

Having reached the foot of the stairs, she crossed the threshold, and entered the street, still followed by the young man, whom she led in this manner to the house and the garret she had pointed out.

She knocked at the door; Marat felt his heart beat so violently that he thought it must be audible.

A man was in the garret; he opened the door. In this man Marat recognized a workman of from five-and-twenty to thirty years of age, whom he had several times seen in the porter's lodge.

Seeing Dame Grivette followed by Marat, he started back.

But the somnambulist walked straight to the bed, and putting her hand under the thin bolster, she drew out the watch, which she gave to Marat, while the shoemaker Simon, pale with terror, dared not utter a word, and watched with alarmed gaze the least movements of this woman, whom he believed to be mad.

Scarcely had her hand touched Marat's, in returning him the watch, than she gave a deep sigh and murmured:

“He awakes me! He awakes me!” Her nerves relaxed like a cable freed from the capstan, the vital spark again animated her eyes, and finding herself face to face with Marat, her hand in his, and still holding the watch — that is to say, the irrefragable proof of her crime — she fell upon the floor of the garret in a deep swoon.

“Does conscience really exist, then?” asked Marat of himself, as he left the room, doubt in his heart and reverie in his eyes.

CHAPTER CVI.

The Max and His Works.

WHILE MARAT was employing his time so profitably in philosophizing on conscience and a dual existence, another philosopher in the Rue Platriere was also busy in reconstructing, piece by piece, every part of the preceding evening's adventures, and asking himself if he were or were not a very wicked man. Rousseau, with his elbows leaning upon the table, and his head drooping heavily on his left shoulder, was deep in thought.

His philosophical and political works, “Emilius” and the “Social Contract,” were lying open before him.

From time to time, when his reflections required it, he stooped down to turn over the leaves of these books, which he knew by heart.

“Ah! good heavens!” said he, reading a paragraph from “Emilius” upon liberty of conscience, “what incendiary expressions! What philosophy! Just Heaven! was there ever in the world a firebrand like me?

“What!” added he, clasping his hands above his head, “have I written such violent outbursts against the throne — the altar of society? I can no longer be surprised if some dark and brooding minds have outstripped my sophisms, and have gone astray in the paths which I have strewed for them with all the flowers of rhetoric. I have acted as the disturber of society!”

He rose from his chair, and paced the room in great agitation.

“I have,” continued he, “abused those men in power who exercise tyranny over authors. Fool! barbarian that I was! Those people are right — a thousand times right! What am I, if not a man dangerous to the state? My words, written to enlighten the masses — at least, such was the pretext I gave myself — have become a torch which will set the world on fire. I have sown discourses on the inequality of ranks, projects of universal fraternity, plans of education — and now I reap a harvest of passions so ferocious that they would overturn the whole framework of society, of intestine wars capable of depopulating the world, and of manners so barbarous that they would roll back the civilization of ten centuries! — Oh! I am a great criminal!

He read once more a page of his “Savoyard Vicar.”

“Yes, that is it! Let us unite to form plans for our happiness.

“I have written it! Let us give our virtues the force which others give their vices. I have written that also.”

And Rousseau became still more agitated and unhappy than before.

“Thus, by my fault.” said he, “brothers are united to brothers, and one day or other some of these concealed places of meeting will be invaded by the police; the whole nest of these men, who have sworn to eat one another in case of treachery, will be arrested, and one bolder than the others will take my book from his pocket and will say — 'What do you complain of? We are disciples of M. Rousseau; we are going through a course of philosophy!' Oh! how Voltaire will laugh at that! There is no fear of that courtier's ever getting into such a wasp's nest!”

The idea that Voltaire would ridicule him put the Genevese philosopher into a violent rage.

“La conspirator!” muttered he; “I must be in my dotage, certainly! Am I not, in truth, a famous conspirator?”

He was at this point when Therese entered with the breakfast, but he did not see her. She perceived that he was attentively reading a passage in the “Reveries of a Recluse.”

“Very good,” said she, placing the hot milk noisily upon the very book; “my peacock is looking at himself in the glass! Monsieur reads his books! M. Rousseau admires himself!”

“Come, Therese,” said the philosopher, “patience — leave me; I am in no humor for laughing.”

“Oh yes, it is magnificent! is it not?” said she, mockingly. “You are delighted with yourself. What vanity authors have! — and how angry they are to see it in us poor women! — If I only happen to look in my little mirror, monsieur grumbles and calls me a coquette.”

She proceeded in this strain, making him the most unhappy man in the world, as if Rousseau had not been richly enough endowed by nature in this respect. He drank his milk without steeping his bread. He reflected.

“Very good,” said she; “there you are, thinking again. You are going to write another book full of horrible things.”

Rousseau shuddered.

"You dream," continued Therese, "of your ideal women, and you write books which young girls ought not to read, or else profane works which will be burned by the hands of the common executioner."

The martyr shuddered again. Therese had touched him to the quick.

"No," replied he; "I will write nothing more which can cause an evil thought. On the contrary, I wish to write a book which all honest people will read with transports of joy."

"Oh! oh!" said Therese, taking away the cup; "that is impossible; your mind is full of obscene thoughts. Only the other day I heard you read some passage or other, and in it you spoke of women whom you adored. You are a satyr! a magus!"

This word "magus" was one of the most abusive in Therese's vocabulary; it always made Rousseau shudder.

"There, there now!" said he; "my dear woman, you will find that you shall be satisfied. I intend to write that I have found the means of regenerating the world without causing pain to a single individual by the changes which will be effected. Yes, yes; I will mature this project. No revolutions! Great heavens! my good Therese, no revolutions!"

"Well, we shall see," said the housekeeper.

"Stay! some one rings."

Therese went out and returned almost immediately with a handsome young man, whom she requested to wait in the outer apartment. Then, rejoining Rousseau, who was already taking notes with his pencil:

"Be quick," said she, "and lock all these infamous things fast. There is some one who wishes to see you."

"Who is it?"

"A nobleman of the court."

"Did he not tell you his name?"

"A good idea! as if I would receive a stranger!"

"Tell it me, then."

"M de Coigny."

"M. de Coigny!"exclaimed Rousseau; "M. de Coigny, gentleman-in-waiting to the dauphin?"

"It must be the same; a charming youth, a most amiable young man."

"I will go, Therese."

Rousseau gave a glance at himself in the mirror, dusted his coat, wiped his slippers, which were only old shoes, trodden down in the heels by long wear, and entered the dining-room, where the gentleman was waiting.

The latter had not sat down. He was looking, with a sort of curiosity, at the dried plants pasted by Rousseau upon paper, and inclosed in frames of black wood. At the noise Rousseau made in entering, he turned, and bowing most courteously:

“Have I the honor,” said he “of speaking to M. Rousseau?”

“Yes, sir,” replied the philosopher, in a morose voice, not unmingled however with a kind of admiration for the remarkable beauty and unaffected elegance of the person before him.

M. de Coigny was, in fact, one of the handsomest and most accomplished gentlemen in France. It must have been for him, and such as him, that the costume of that period was invented. It displayed to the greatest advantage the symmetry and beauty of his well-turned leg, his broad shoulders and deep chest; it gave a majestic air to his exquisitely-formed head, and added to the ivory whiteness of his aristocratic hands.

His examination satisfied Rousseau, who, like a true artist, admired the beautiful wherever he met with it.

“Sir,” said he, “what can I do for you?”

“You have been perhaps informed, sir,” replied the young nobleman, “that I am the Count de Coigny. I may add that I come from her royal highness the dauphiness.”

Rousseau reddened and bowed. Therese, who was standing in a corner of the dining-room, with her hands in her pockets, gazed with complacent eyes at the handsome messenger of the greatest princess in France.

“Her royal highness wants me — for what purpose?” asked Rousseau. “But take a chair, if you please, sir.”

Rousseau sat down, and M. de Coigny drew forward a straw-bottomed chair, and followed his example.

“Monsieur, here is the fact. The other day, when his majesty dined at Trianon, he expressed a good deal of admiration for your music, which is indeed charming. His majesty sang your prettiest airs, and the dauphiness, who is always anxious to please his majesty in every respect, thought that it might give him pleasure to see one of your comic operas performed in the theater at Trianon.”

Rousseau bowed low.

“I come, therefore, to ask you, from the dauphiness — ”

“Oh, sir,” interrupted Rousseau, “my permission has nothing to do in the matter. My pieces, and the airs belonging to them, are the property of the theater where they are represented. The permission must therefore be sought from the comedians, and her royal highness will, I am assured, find no obstacles in that quarter. The actors will be too happy to play and sing before his majesty and the court.”

“That is not precisely what I am commissioned to request, sir,” said M. de Coigny. “Her royal highness the dauphiness wishes to give a more complete and more recherche entertainment to his majesty. He knows all your operas, sir.”

Another bow from Rousseau.

“And sings them charmingly.”

Rousseau bit his lips.

“It is too much honor,” stammered he.

“Now,” pursued M. de Coigny, “as several ladies of the court are excellent musicians, and sing delightfully, and as several gentlemen also have studied music with some success, whichever of your operas the dauphiness may choose shall be performed by this company of ladies and gentlemen, the principal actors being their royal highnesses.”

Rousseau bounded in his chair.

“I assure you, sir.” said he, “that this is a signal honor conferred upon me, and I beg you will offer my most humble thanks to the dauphiness.”

“Oh! that is not all.” said M. de Coigny, with a smile.

“Ah!”

“The troupe thus composed is more illustrious, certainly, than that usually employed, but also more inexperienced. The superintendence and the advice of a master are therefore indispensable. The performance ought to be worthy of the august spectator who will occupy the royal box, and also of the illustrious author.”

Rousseau rose to bow again. This time the compliment had touched him, and he saluted M. de Coigny most graciously.

“For this purpose, sir,” continued the gentleman-in-waiting, “her royal highness requests your company at Trianon, to superintend the general rehearsal of the work.”

“Oh.” said Rousseau, “her royal highness cannot surely think of such a thing. I at Trianon?”

“Well!” said M. de Coigny, with the most natural air possible.

“Oh! Sir, you are a man of taste and judgment, you have more tact than the majority of men; answer me, on your conscience, is not the idea of Rousseau, the philosopher, the outlaw, the misanthrope, attending at court, enough to make the whole cabal split their sides with laughter?”

“I do not see,” replied M. de Coigny, coldly, “how the laughter and the remarks of that foolish set which persecutes you should disturb the repose of a gallant man, and an author who may lay claim to be the first in the kingdom. If you have this weakness, M. Rousseau, conceal it carefully; it alone would be sufficient to raise a laugh at your expense. As to what remarks may be made, you will confess that those making them had better be careful on that point, when the pleasure and the wishes of her royal highness the dauphiness, presumptive heiress of the French kingdom, are in question.”

“Certainly,” said Rousseau; “certainly.”

“Can it be, possibly, a lingering feeling of false shame?” said M. de Coigny, smiling. “Because you have been severe upon kings, do you fear to humanize yourself? Ah! Monsieur Rousseau, you have given valuable lessons to the human race, but I hope you do not hate them. And, besides, you certainly except the ladies of the blood-royal.”

“Sir, you are very kind to press me so much; but think of my position — I live retired, alone, unhappy.”

Therese made a grimace.

“Unhappy!” said she; “he is hard to please!”

“Whatever effort I may make, there will always be something in my features and manner unpleasing to the eyes of the king and the princesses, who seek only joy and happiness. What should I do there — what should I say?”

“ One would think you distrusted yourself. But, sir, do you not think that he who has written the 'Nouvelle Heloise' and the 'Confessions,' must have more talent for speaking and acting than all of us others put together, no matter what position we occupy?”

“I assure you, sir, it is impossible.”

“That word, sir, is not known to princes.”

“And for that very reason, sir, I shall remain at home.”

“Sir, you would not inflict the dreadful disappointment of returning vanquished and disgraced to Versailles on me, the venturous messenger who undertook to satisfy her royal highness? It would be such a blow to me, that I should immediately retire into voluntary exile. Come, my dear M. Rousseau, grant to me, a man full of the deepest sympathy for your works, this favor — a favor which you would refuse to supplicating kings.”

“Sir, your kindness gains my heart; your eloquence is irresistible; and your voice touches me more than I can express.”

“Will you allow yourself to be persuaded?

“No. I cannot — no, decidedly; my health forbids such a journey.”

“A journey! oh, Monsieur Rousseau, what are you thinking of? An hour and a quarter in a carriage!”

“Yes; for you and your prancing horses.”

“But all the equipages of the court are at your disposal, M. Rousseau. The dauphiness charged me to tell you that there is an apartment prepared for you at Trianon; for she is unwilling that you should have to return so late to Paris. The dauphin, who knows all your works by heart, said, before the whole court, that he would be proud to show the room in his palace where M. Rousseau had slept.”

Therese uttered a cry of admiration, not for Rousseau, but for the good prince.

Rousseau could not withstand this last mark of good-will.

“I must surrender,” said he, “for never have I been so well attacked.”

“Your heart only is vanquished, sir,” replied De Coigny; “your mind is impregnable.”

“I shall go, then, sir, in obedience to the wishes of her royal highness.”

“Oh! sir, receive my personal thanks. As regards the dauphiness's, permit me to abstain. She would feel annoyed at being forestalled, as she means to pay them to you in person this evening. Besides, you know, it is the man's part to thank a young and adorable lady who is good enough to make advances to him.”

“True, sir,” replied Rousseau, smiling; “but old men have the privilege of pretty women — they are sought after.”

“If you will name your hour, M. Rousseau, I shall send my carriage for you; or, rather, I will come myself to take you up.”

“No, thank you, sir. I must positively refuse your kind offer. I will go to Trianon, but let me go in whatever manner I may choose. From this moment leave me to myself. I shall come, that is all. Tell me the hour.”

“What, sir! you will not allow me to introduce you? I know I am not worthy of the honor, and that a name like yours needs no announcement —

“Sir, I am aware that you are more at court than I am anywhere in the world. I do not refuse your offer, therefore, from my motives personal to yourself; but I love my liberty. I wish to go as if I were merely taking a walk, and — in short, that is my ultimatum.”

“Sir, I bow to your decision, and should be most unwilling to displease you in any particular. The rehearsal commences at six o'clock.”

“Very well. At a quarter before six I shall be at Trianon.”

“But by what conveyance?”

“That is my affair; these are my horses.”

He pointed to his legs, which were still well formed, and displayed with some pretension.

“Five leagues!” said M. de Coigny, alarmed, “you will be knocked up — take care, it will be a fatiguing evening!”

“In that case, I have my carriage and my horses also — a fraternal carriage — the popular vehicle — which belongs to my neighbor as well as to myself, and which costs only fifteen sous.”

“Oh! good heavens! The stagecoach! You make me shudder.”

“Its benches, which seem to you so hard, are to me like the Sybarite's couch.

To me they seem stuffed with down or strewn with rose-leaves. Adieu, sir, till this evening.”

M. de Coigny, seeing himself thus dismissed, took his leave after a multitude of thanks, indications more or less precise, and expressions of gratitude for his services. He descended the dark staircase, accompanied by Rousseau to the landing, and by Therese half way down the stairs.

M. de Coigny entered his carriage, which was waiting in the street, and drove back to Versailles, smiling to himself.

Therese returned to the apartment, slamming the door with angry violence, which foretold a storm for Rousseau.

CHAPTER CVII.

Rousseau's Toilet.

WHEN M. DE COIGNY was gone, Rousseau, whose ideas this visit had entirely changed, threw himself into a little armchair, with a deep sigh, and said in a sleepy tone:

“Oh! how tiresome this is! How these people weary me with their persecutions!”

Therese caught the last words as she entered, and placing herself before Rousseau:

“How proud we are!” said she.

“I?” asked Rousseau, surprised.

“Yes; you are a vain fellow — a hypocrite!”

“I?”

“Yes, you! you are enchanted to go to court, and you conceal your joy under this false indifference.”

“Oh! good heavens!” replied Rousseau, shrugging his shoulders, and humiliated at being so truly described.

“Do you not wish to make me believe that it is not a great honor for you to perform for the king the airs you thump here upon your spinet, like a good-for-nothing as you are?”

Rousseau looked angrily at his wife.

“You are a simpleton,” said he; “it is no honor for a man such as I am to appear before a king. To what does this man owe that he is on the throne? To a caprice of nature, which gave him a queen as his mother; but I am worthy of being called before the king to minister to his recreation. It is to my works I owe it, and to the fame acquired by my works.”

Therese was not a woman to be so easily conquered.

“I wish M. de Sartines heard you talking in this style; he would give you a lodging in Bicetre, or a cell at Charenton.”

“Because this M. de Sartines is a tyrant in the pay of another tyrant, and because man is defenseless against tyrants with the aid of his genius alone.

But if M. de Sartines were to persecute me — ”

“Well, what then?” asked Therese.

“Ah! yes,” sighed Rousseau; “yes, I know that would delight my enemies.”

“Why have you enemies?” continued Therese. “Because you are ill-natured, and because you have attacked every one. Ah, M. de Voltaire knows how to make friends, he does!”

“True,” said Rousseau, with an angelic smile.

“But, dame! M. de Voltaire is a gentleman — he is the intimate friend of the king of Prussia — he has horses, he is rich, and lives in his chateau at Ferney. And all that he owes to his merit. Therefore, when he goes to court, he does not act the disdainful man — he is quite at home.”

“And do you think,” said Rousseau, “that I shall not be at home there? Think you that I do not know where all the money that is spent there comes from, or that I am duped by the respect which is paid to the master? Oh! my good woman, who judgest everything falsely, remember, if I act the disdainful, it is because I really feel contempt — remember that if I despise the pomp of these courtiers, it is because they have stolen their riches.”

“Stolen!” said Therese, with inexpressible indignation.

“Yes, stolen from you — from me — from every one. All the gold they have upon their fine clothes should be restored to the poor wretches who want bread. That is the reason why I, who know all these things, go so reluctantly to court.”

“I do not say that the people are happy — but the king is always the king.”

“Well, I obey him; what more does he want?”

“Ah! you obey because you are afraid. You must not say in my hearing that you go against your will, or that you are a brave man, for if so, I shall reply that you are a hypocrite, and that you are very glad to go.”

“I do not fear anything,” said Rousseau, superbly.

“Good! Just go and say to the king one quarter of what you have been telling me the last half hour.”

“I shall assuredly do so, if my feelings prompt me.”

“You?”

“Yes. Have I ever recoiled?”

“Bah! You dare not take a bone from a cat when she is gnawing it, for fear she should scratch you! What would you be if surrounded by guards and swordsmen? Look you, I know you as well as if I were your mother. You will just now go and shave yourself afresh, oil your hair, and make yourself beautiful; you will display your leg to the utmost advantage; you will put on your interesting little winking expression, because your eyes are small and round, and if you opened them naturally that would be seen, while, when you wink, you make people believe that they are as large as carriage entrances. You will ask me for your silk stockings, you will put on your chocolate-colored coat with steel buttons and your beautiful new wig; you will order a coach, and my philosopher will go and be adored by the ladies! And to-morrow — ah! — to-morrow, there will be such ecstatic reveries, such interesting languor! You will come back amorous, you will sigh and write verses, and you will dilute your coffee with your tears. Oh! how well I know you!”

“You are wrong, my dear,” Rousseau replied. “I tell you I am reluctantly obliged to go to court. I go because, after all, I four to cause scandal, as every honest citizen should do. Moreover, I am not one of those who refuse to acknowledge the supremacy of one citizen in a republic; but as to making advances, as to brushing my new coat against the gold spangles of these gentlemen of the Oeil-de-Boeuf — no, no — I shall do nothing of the sort, and if you catch me doing so, laugh at me as much as you please.”

“Then you will not dress?” said Therese, sarcastically.

“No.”

“You will not put on your new wig?”

“No.”

“You will not wink with your little eyes?”

“I tell you I shall go like a free man, without affectation and without fear. I shall go to court as if I were going to the theater, and let the actors like me or not, I care not for them.”

“Oh! you will at least trim your beard,” said Therese; “it is half a foot long!”

“I tell you I shall make no change.”

Therese burst into so loud and prolonged a laugh that Rousseau was obliged to take refuge in the next room. But the housekeeper had not finished her persecutions; she had them of all colors and kinds.

She opened the cupboard and took out his best coat, his clean linen, and beautifully polished shoes. She spread all these articles out upon the bed and over the chairs in the apartment; but Rousseau did not seem to pay the least attention.

At last Therese said:

“Come, it is time you should dress. A court toilet is tedious. You will have barely time to reach Versailles at the appointed hour.”

“I have told you, Therese, that I shall do very well as I am. It is the same dress in which I present myself every day among my fellow-citizens. A king is but a citizen like myself.”

“Come, come!” said Therese, trying to tempt him and bring him to her purpose by artful insinuation; “do not pout, Jacques, and don't be foolish. Here are your clothes. Your razor is ready; I have sent for the barber, in case you have your nervousness to-day.”

“Thank you, my dear,” replied Rousseau; “I shall only just give myself a brush, and take my shoes because I cannot go out in slippers.”

“Is he going to be firm. I wonder?;' thought Therese.

She tried to coax him, sometimes by coquetry, sometimes by persuasion, and sometimes by the violence of her raillery. But Rousseau knew her, and saw the snare. He felt that the moment he should give way, he would be unmercifully disgraced and ridiculed by his butter-half. He determined, therefore, not to give way, and abstained from looking at the fine clothes, which set off what he termed his natural advantages.

Therese watched him. She had only one resource left; this was the glance which Rousseau never failed to give in the glass before he went out; for the philosopher was neat to an extreme, if there can be an extreme in neatness.

But Rousseau continued to be on his guard, and as he had caught Therese's anxious look, he turned his back to the looking-glass. The hour arrived; the philosopher had filled Ins head with all the disagreeable remarks he could think of to say to the king.

He repeated some scraps of them to himself while he buckled his shoes, then tucked his hat under his arm, seized his cane, and taking advantage of a moment when Therese could not see him, he pulled down his coat and his waistcoat with both hands, to smooth the creases.

Therese now returned, handed him a handkerchief, which he plunged into his huge pocket, and then accompanied him to the landing-place, saying:

“Come, Jacques, be reasonable; you look quite frightful; you have the air of some false moneyer.”

“Adieu!” said Rousseau.

“You look like a thief, sir,” said Therese; “take care!”

“Take care of fire,” said Rousseau, “and do not touch my papers.”

“You have just the air of a spy, I assure you!” said Therese in despair.

Rousseau made no reply; he descended the steps singing, and favored by the obscurity, he gave his hat a brush with his sleeve, smoothed his shirt-frill with his left hand, and touched up his toilet with a rapid but skillful movement.

Arrived at the foot of the stairs, he boldly confronted the mud of the Rue Platriere, walking upon tiptoe, and reached the Champs-Elysees, where those honest vehicles which some rather affectedly call pataches were stationed, and which, so late as ten years ago, still carried, or rather bundled, from Paris to Versailles, those travelers who were obliged to use economy.

CHAPTER CVIII.

The Side Scenes of Trianon.

THE ADVENTURES OF the journey are of no importance. A Swiss, an assistant clerk, a citizen, and an abbe, were of course among his traveling companions.

He arrived at half-past five. The court was already assembled at Trianon, and the performers were going over their parts while waiting for the king; for as to the author, no one thought of him. Some were aware that M. Rousseau of Geneva was to come to direct the rehearsal; but they took no greater interest in seeing it. Rousseau than M. Rameau, or M. Marmontel, or any other of those singular animals, to a sight of which the courtiers sometimes treated themselves in their drawing-rooms or country-houses.

Rousseau was received by the usher-in-waiting, who had been ordered by it. de Coigny to inform him as soon as the philosopher should arrive.

This young nobleman hastened with his usual courtesy, and received Rousseau with the most amiable empressement. But scarcely had he cast his eyes over his person, than he stared with astonishment, and could not prevent himself from recommencing the examination.

Rousseau was dusty, pale, and disheveled, and his paleness rendered conspicuous such a beard as no master of the ceremonies had ever seen reflected in the mirrors of Versailles.

Rousseau felt deeply embarrassed under M. de Coigny's scrutiny, but more embarrassed still when, approaching the hall of the theater, he saw the profusion of splendid dresses, valuable lace, diamonds, and blue ribbons, which, with the gilding of the hall, produced the effect of a bouquet of flowers in an immense basket.

Rousseau felt ill at ease also when he breathed this perfumed atmosphere, so intoxicating for plebeian nerves. Yet he was obliged to proceed and put a bold face on the matter. Multitudes of eyes were fixed upon him who thus formed a stain, as it were, on the polish of the assembly. M. de Coigny, still preceding him, led him to the orchestra, where the musicians were awaiting him.

When there, he felt rather relieved, and while his music was being performed, he seriously reflected that the worst danger was past, that the step was taken, and that all the reasoning in the world could now be of no avail.

Already the dauphiness was on the stage, in her costume as Colette; she waited for Colin.

M. de Coigny was changing his dress in his box.

All at once the king entered, surrounded by a crowd of bending heads. Louis smiled, and seemed to be in the best humor possible.

The dauphin seated himself at his right hand, and the Count de Provence, arriving soon after, took his place on the left. On a sign from the king, the fifty persons who composed the assembly, private as it was, took their seats. “Well, why do you not begin?” asked Louis.

“Sire,” said the dauphiness, “the shepherds and shepherdesses are not yet dressed; we are waiting for them.”

“They can perform in their evening dresses,” said the king.

“No, sire,” replied the dauphiness, “for we wish to try the dresses and costumes by candle-light, to be certain of the effect.”

“You are right, madame,” said the king; “then let us take a stroll.”

And Louis rose to make the circuit of the corridor and the stage. Besides, he was rather uneasy at not seeing Madame Dubarry.

When the king had left the box, Rousseau gazed in a melancholy mood and with an aching heart at the empty hall and his own solitary position; it was a singular contrast to the reception he had anticipated.

He had pictured to himself that on his entrance all the groups would separate before him; that the curiosity of the courtiers would be even more importunate and more significative than that of the Parisians; he had feared questions and presentations; and, lo! no one paid any attention to him!

He thought that his long beard was not yet long enough, that rags would not have been more remarked than his old clothes, and he applauded himself for not having been so ridiculous as to aim at elegance. But in the bottom of his heart he felt humiliated at being thus reduced to the simple post of leader of the orchestra. Suddenly an officer approached and asked him if he was not M. Rousseau?

“Yes, sir,” replied he.

“Her royal highness the dauphiness wishes to speak to you, sir,” said the officer.

Rousseau rose, much agitated.

The dauphiness was waiting for him. She held in her hand the air of Colette:

“My happiness is gone.” The moment she saw Rousseau, she advanced toward him. The philosopher bowed very humbly, saying to himself, “that his bow was for the woman, not for the princess.”

The dauphiness, on the contrary, was as gracious toward the savage philosopher as she would have been to the most finished gentleman in Europe.

She requested his advice about the inflection she ought to give to the third strophe —

“Colin leaves me.” Rousseau forthwith commenced to develop a theory of declamation and melody, which, learned as it was, was interrupted by the noisy arrival of the king and several courtiers.

Louis entered the room in which the dauphiness was taking her lesson from the philosopher. The first impulse of the king's, when he saw this carelessly dressed person, was the same that M. de Coigny had manifested, only M. de Coigny knew Rousseau, and the king did not.

He stared, therefore, long and steadily, at our freeman, while still receiving the thanks and compliments of the dauphiness.

This look, stamped with royal authority — this look, not accustomed to be lowered before any one — produced a powerful effect upon Rousseau, whose quick eye was timid and unsteady.

The dauphiness waited until the king had finished his scrutiny, then, advancing toward Rousseau, she said:

“Will your majesty allow me to present, our author to you?”

“Your author?” said the king, seeming to consult memory.

During this short dialogue Rousseau was upon burning coals. The king's eye had successively rested upon and burned up — like the sun's rays under a powerful lens, the long beard, the dubious shirt frill, the dusty garb, and the old wig of the greatest writer in his kingdom.

The dauphiness took pity on the latter.

“M. Jean Jacques Rousseau, sire,” said she, “the author of the charming opera we are going to execute before your majesty.”

The king raised his head.

“Ah!” said he, coldly, “M. Rousseau, I greet you.”

And he continued to look at him in such a manner as to point out all the imperfections of his dress.

Rousseau asked himself how he ought to salute the king of France, without being a courtier, but also without impoliteness, for he confessed that he was in the prince's house.

But while he was making these reflections, the king addressed him with that graceful ease of princes who have said everything when they have uttered an agreeable or a disagreeable remark to the person before them. Rousseau, petrified, had at first stood speechless. All the phrases he had prepared for the tyrant were forgotten.

“Monsieur Rousseau,” said the king, still looking at his coat and wig, “you have composed some charming music, which has caused me to pass several very pleasant moments.”

Then the king, in a voice which was diametrically opposed to all diapason and melody, commenced singing:

“Had I turned a willing; ear,
The gallants of the town to hear,
Ah! I had found with ease
Other lovers then to please.”

“It is charming!” said the king, when he had finished.

Rousseau bowed.

“I do not know if I shall sing it well,” said the dauphiness.

Rousseau turned toward the dauphiness to make some remark in reply; but the king had commenced again, and was singing the romance of Colin:

“From my hut, obscure and cold,
Care is absent never;
Whether storm, or sun, or cold,
Suffering, toil, forever.”

His majesty sang frightfully for a musician. Rousseau, half flattered by the monarch's good memory, half-wounded by his detestable execution, looked like a monkey nibbling an onion — crying on one side of his face and laughing on the other.

The dauphiness preserved her composure with that imperturbable self-possession which is only found at court.

The king, without the least embarrassment, continued:

“If thou'lt come to cast thy lot

In thy Colin's humble cot.
My sweet shepherdess Colette,
I'd bid adieu to all regret.”

Rousseau felt the color rising to his face.

“Tell me, M. Rousseau,” said the king, “is it true that you sometimes dress in the costume of an Armenian?”

Rousseau blushed more deeply than before, and his tongue was so glued to his throat that not for a kingdom could he have pronounced a word at this moment.

The king continued to sing, without waiting for a reply:

“Ah! but little, as times go.
Doth love know
What he'd let, or what he'd hinder.”

“You live in the Rue Platriere, I believe, M. Rousseau?” said the king.

Rousseau made a gesture in the affirmative with his head, but that was the ultima thule of his strength. Never had he called up so much to his support. The king hummed:

“She is a child,
She is a child.”

“It is said you are on bad terms with Voltaire, M. Rousseau?”

At this blow Rousseau lost the little presence of mind he had remaining, and was totally put out of countenance. The king did not seem to have much pity for him, and, continuing his ferocious melomania, he moved off, singing:

“Come, dance with me beneath the elms;
Young maidens, come, be merry,”

with orchestral accompaniments which would have killed Apollo, as the latter killed Marsyas.

Rousseau remained alone in the center of the room. The dauphiness had quitted it to finish her toilet.

Rousseau, trembling and confused, regained the corridor; but on his way he stumbled against a couple dazzling with diamonds, flowers, and lace, who filled up the entire width of the corridor, although the young man squeezed his lovely companion tenderly to his side.

The young woman, with her fluttering laces, her towering head-dress, her fan, and her perfumes, was radiant as a star. It was she against whom Rousseau brushed in passing.

The young man, slender, elegant, and charming, with his blue ribbon rustling against his English shirt-frill, every now and then burst into a laugh of most engaging frankness, and then suddenly interrupted it with little confidential whispers, which made the lady laugh in her turn, and showed that they were on excellent terms.

Rousseau recognized the Countess Dubarry in this beautiful lady, this seducing creature; and the moment he perceived her, true to his habit of absorbing his whole thoughts on a single object, he no longer saw her companion.

The young man with the blue ribbon was no other than the Count d'Artois, who was merrily toying with his grandfather's favorite.

When Madame Dubarry perceived Rousseau's dark figure, she exclaimed:

“Ah, good heavens!”

“What!” said the Count d'Artois, also looking at the philosopher; and already he had stretched out his hand to make way for his companion.

“M. Rousseau!” exclaimed Madame Dubarry.

“Rousseau of Geneva?” said the Count d'Artois, in the tone of a schoolboy in the holidays.

“Yes, my lord,” replied the countess.

“Ah! good-day, M. Rousseau,” said the young fop, seeing Rousseau making a despairing effort to force a passage — “good-day; we are going to hear your music.”

“My lord!” — stammered Rousseau, seeing the blue ribbon.

“Ah! most charming music!” exclaimed the countess; “and completely in harmony with the heart and mind of the author.”

Rousseau raised his head, and his eyes met the burning gaze of the countess.

“Madame!” said he, ill-humoredly.

“I will play Colin, madame,” cried the Count d'Artois, “and I entreat that you, Madame la Comtesse, will play Colette.”

“With all my heart, my lord; but I would never dare — I, who am not an artist — to profane the music of a master.”

Rousseau would have given his life to look again at her; but the voice, the tone, the flattery, the beauty, had each planted a baited hook in his heart. He tried to escape.

“Monsieur Rousseau,” said the prince, blocking up the passage, “I wish you would teach me the part of Colin.”

“I dare not ask Monsieur Rousseau to give me his advice respecting Colette,” said the countess, feigning timidity, and thus completing the overthrow of the philosopher.

But yet his eyes inquired why.

“Monsieur Rousseau hates me,” said she to the prince, with her enchanting voice.

“You are jesting!” exclaimed the Count d'Artois. “Who could hate you, madame?”

“You see it plainly,” replied she.

“M. Rousseau is too great a man, and has written too many noble works, to fly from such a charming woman,” said the Count d'Artois.

Rousseau heaved a sigh as if he were ready to give up the ghost, and made his escape through a narrow loophole which the Count d'Artois had imprudently left between himself and the wall. But Rousseau was not in luck this evening. He had scarcely proceeded four steps when he met another group, composed of two men, one old, the other young. The young one wore the blue ribbon; the other, who might be about fifty years of age, was dressed in red, and looked austere and pale. These two men overheard the merry laugh of the Count d'Artois, who exclaimed loudly:

“Ah! Monsieur Rousseau, Monsieur Rousseau! I shall say that the countess put you to flight; and, in truth, no one would believe it.”

“Rousseau!” murmured the two men.

“Stop him, brother!” said the prince, still laughing; “stop him, M. de Vauguyon!”

Rousseau now comprehended on what rock his evil star had shipwrecked him. The Count de Provence and the governor of the royal youths were before him.

The Count de Provence also barred the way.

“Good-day, sir,” said he, with his dry pedantic voice.

Rousseau, almost at his wits' end, bowed, muttering to himself:

“I shall never get away!”

“Ah! I am delighted to have met you!” said the prince, with the air of a schoolmaster who finds a pupil in fault.

“More absurd compliments!” thought Rousseau. “How insipid these great people are!”

“I have read your translation of Tacitus, sir.”

“Ah! true,” thought Rousseau; “this one is a pedant, a scholar.”

“Do you know that, it is very difficult to translate Tacitus?”

“My lord, I said so in a short preface.”

“Yes, I know, I know; you said in it that you had only a slight knowledge of Latin.”

“It is true, my lord.”

“Then. M. Rousseau, why translate Tacitus?”

“My lord, it improves one's style.”

“Ah! M. Rousseau, it was wrong to translate 'imperatoria brevitate' by a grave and concise discourse.”

Rousseau, uneasy, consulted his memory.

“Yes,” said the young prince, with the confidence of an old savant who discovers a fault in Saumaise; “yes, you translated it so. It is in the paragraph where Tacitus relates that Pison harangued his soldiers.”

“Well, my lord?”

“Well, M. Rousseau, 'imperatoria brevitate' means, with the conciseness of a general, or of a man accustomed to command. With the brevity of command; that is the expression, is it not, Monsieur de la Vauguyon?”

“Yes, my lord,” replied the governor.

Rousseau made no reply. The prince added:

“That is an evident mistake, Monsieur Rousseau. Oh! I will find you another.”

Rousseau turned pale.

“Stay. Monsieur Rousseau, there is one in the paragraph relating to Cecina. It commences thus; 'At in superiore Germania.' You know he is describing Cecina, and Tacitus says, 'Cito sermone':

“I remember it perfectly, my lord.”

“You translated that by speaking well.”

“Yes, my lord, and I thought — ”

“'Cito sermone' means speaking quickly, that is to say easily.”

“I said speaking well.”

“Then it should have been 'decoro,' or 'ornato,' or 'eleganti sermone;' 'cito' is a picturesque epithet, Monsieur Rousseau. Just as, in portraying the change in Otho's conduct, Tacitus says — 'Delata voluptate, dissimulata luxuria, cuncta que ad imperii decorem composita.”

“I have translated that — Dismissing luxury and effeminacy to other times, he surprised the world by industriously applying himself to re-establish the glory of the empire.”

“Wrong, M. Rousseau, wrong! In the first place, you have run the three little phrases into one, which obliges you to translate 'dissimulata luxuria' badly. Then you made a blunder in the last portion of the phrase. Tacitus did not mean that the emperor Otho applied himself to reestablishing the glory of the empire; he meant to say that, no longer gratifying his passions, and dissimulating his luxurious habits, Otho accommodated all, made all turn — all, you understand, M. Rousseau — that is to say, even his passions and his vices — to the glory of the empire. That is the sense — it is rather complex; yours, however, is too restricted, is it not, Monsieur de la Vauguyon?”

“Yes, my lord.”

Rousseau perspired and panted under this pitiless infliction.

The prince allowed him a moment's breathing time, and then continued:

“You are much more in your element in philosophy, sir.”

Rousseau bowed.

“But your 'Emilius' is a dangerous book.”

“Dangerous, my lord?”

“Yes, from the quantity of false ideas it will put into the small citizens' heads!”

“ My lord, as soon as a man is a father, he can enter into the spirit of my book, whether he be the first or the last in the kingdom. To be a father — is — is — " “Tell me, Monsieur Rousseau,” asked the satirical prince, all at once, “your 'Confessions' form a very amusing book. How many children have you had?”

Rousseau turned pale, staggered, and raised an angry and stupefied glance to his young tormentor's face, the expression of which only increased the malicious humor of the Count de Provence.

It was only malice, for, without waiting for a reply, the prince moved away arm-in-arm with his preceptor, continuing his commentaries on the works of the man whom he had so cruelly crushed.

Rousseau, left alone, was gradually recovering from his stupefaction, when he heard the first bars of his overture executed by the orchestra.

He proceeded in that direction with a faltering step, and when he had reached his seat, he said to himself:

“Fool! coward! stupid ass that I am! Now only do I find the answer I should have made the cruel little pedant. 'My lord,' I should have said, 'it is not charitable in a young person to torment a poor old man!”

He had just reached this point, quite content with his phrase, when the dauphiness and M. de Coigny commenced their duet. The pre-occupation of the philosopher was disturbed by the suffering of the musician — the ear was to be tortured after the heart.

CHAPTER CIX.

The Rehearsal.

THE REHEARSAL, once fair commenced, and the general attention drawn to the stage, Rousseau was no longer remarked, and it was he, on the contrary, who became the observer. He heard court lords who sang completely out of tune in their shepherd's dresses, and saw ladies arrayed in their court dresses coquetting like shepherdesses.

The dauphiness sang correctly, but she was a bad actress, and her voice, moreover, was so weak that she could scarcely be heard. The king, not to intimidate any one, had retired to an obscure box, win-re he chatted with the ladies. The dauphin prompted the words of the opera, which went off royalty badly.

Rousseau determined not to listen, but he felt it very difficult to avoid overhearing what passed. He had one consolation, however, for he had just perceived a charming face among the illustrious figurantes, and the village maiden who was the possessor of this charming face had incomparably the most delightful voice of the entire company.

Rousseau's attention became at once completely riveted, and from his position behind his desk, he gazed with his whole soul at the charming figurante, and listened with all his ears to drink in the enchanting melody of her voice.

When the dauphiness saw the author so deeply attentive, she felt persuaded, from his smile and his sentimental air, that he was pleased with the execution of his work, and, eager for a compliment — for she was a woman — she leaned forward to the desk, saying —

“Is our performance very bad. Monsieur Rousseau?”

But Rousseau, with lips apart and absent air, did not reply.

“Oh! we have made some blunders,” said the dauphiness, “and M. Rousseau dares not tell us! Pray do. Monsieur Rousseau!”

Rousseau's gaze never left the beautiful personage, who on her side did not perceive in the least the attention which she excited.

“Ah!” said the dauphiness, following the direction of our philosopher's eyes, “it is Mademoiselle Taverney who has been in fault!”

Andree blushed; she saw all eyes directed toward her.

“No! no!” exclaimed Rousseau; “it was not mademoiselle, for mademoiselle sings like an angel!”

Madame Dubarry darted at the philosopher a look keener than a javelin.

The Baron de Taverney, on the contrary, felt his heart bound with joy, and greeted Rousseau with a most enchanting smile.

“Do you think that young girl sings well?” said Madame Dubarry to the king, who was evidently struck by Rousseau's words.

“In a chorus I cannot hear distinctly,” said Louis XV.; “it requires a musician to be able to distinguish.”

Meanwhile Rousseau was busy in the orchestra directing the chorus:

“Colin revient a sa bergere

Celebrons un retour si beau.”

As he turned to resume his seat, he saw M. de Jussieu bowing to him graciously.

It was no slight pleasure for the Genevese to be seen thus giving laws to the court by a courtier who had wounded him a little by his superiority. He returned his bow most ceremoniously, and continued to gaze at Andree, who looked even more lovely for the praises she had received.

As the rehearsal proceeded, Madame Dubarry became furious; twice had she surprised Louis XV.'s attention wandering, distracted by the spectacle before him from the sweet speeches she whispered.

The spectacle in the eyes of the jealous favorite meant Andree alone, but this did not prevent the dauphiness from receiving many compliments and being in charmingly gay spirits. M. de Richelieu fluttered around her with the agility of a young man, and succeeded in forming at the extremity of the stage, a circle of laughers, of which the dauphiness was the center, and which rendered the Dubarry party extremely uneasy.

“It appears.” said he aloud, “that Mademoiselle de Taverney has a sweet voice.”

“Charming!” said the dauphiness; “and had I not been too selfish, I should have allowed her to play Colette; but as it is for my amusement that I undertook the character, I will give it up to no one.”

“Oh! Mademoiselle de Taverney would not sing it better than your royal highness,” said Richelieu, “and —

“Mademoiselle is an excellent musician,” said Rousseau, with enthusiasm.

“Excellent!” responded the dauphiness; “and, to confess the truth, it is she who teaches me my part; besides, she dances enchanting, and I dance very badly.”

The effect of this conversation upon the king, upon Madame Dubarry, and the whole crowd of curious newsmongers and intriguers, may be imagined. All either tasted the pleasure of inflicting a wound, or received the blow with shame and grief. There were no indifferent spectators, except perhaps Andree herself.

The dauphiness, incited by Richelieu, ended by making Andree sing the air:

“I have lost my love — Colin leaves me.”

The king's head was seen to mark the time with such evident tokens of pleasure, that Madame Dubarry's rouge fell off from her agitation, in little flakes, as paintings fall to pieces from damp.

Richelieu, more malicious than a woman, enjoyed his revenge. He had drawn near the elder Taverney, and the two old men formed a tableau which might have been taken for Hypocrisy and Corruption sealing a project of union.

Their joy increased the more as Madame Dubarry's features grew by degrees darker and darker. She added the finishing stroke to it by rising angrily, which was contrary to all etiquette, as the king was still seated.

The courtiers, like ants, felt the storm approach, and hastened to seek shelter with the strongest. The dauphiness was more closely surrounded by her own friends, Madame Dubarry was more courted by hers.

By degrees the interest of the rehearsal was diverted from its natural course, and was turned in quite a different direction. Colin and Colette were no more thought of, and many spectators thought it would soon be Madame Dubarry's turn to sing:

“I have lost my love — Colin leaves me.”

“Do you mark,” whispered Richelieu to Taverney, “your daughter's immense success?”

And he drew him into the corridor, pushing open a glass door, and causing a looker-on, who had been clinging to the framework in order to see into the hall, to fall backward.

“Plague take the wretch!” grumbled Richelieu, dusting his sleeve, which the rebound of the door had brushed against, and seeming still more angry when he saw that the looker-on was dressed like a workman of the chateau.

It was, in fact, a workman with a basket of flowers under his arm, who had succeeded in climbing up behind the glass, from which position he commanded a view of the entire salon.

He was pushed back into the corridor, and almost overturned; but, although he himself escaped falling, his basket was upset.

“Ah! I know the rascal,” said Taverney, angrily.

“Who is it?” asked the duke.

“What are you doing here, scoundrel?” said Taverney.

Gilbert — for the reader has doubtless already recognized him — replied haughtily:

“You see — I am looking.”

“Instead of being at your work?” said Richelieu.

“My work is done,” said Gilbert, humbly addressing the duke, without deigning to look at Taverney.

“Am I fated to meet this lazy rascal everywhere?” said Taverney.

“Gently, sir,” interrupted a voice; “gently. My little Gilbert is a good workman and an industrious botanist.”

Taverney turned, and saw M. de Jussieu, who was patting Gilbert on the head. The baron reddened with anger and moved off.

“Valets here!” muttered he.

“Hush!” said Richelieu, “there is Nicole! — look — up there, at the corner of the door. The little buxom witch! she is not making bad use of her eyes either.”

The marshal was correct. Partially concealed behind a score of the domestics of Trianon, Nicole raised her charming head above all the others, and her eyes, dilated with surprise and admiration, seemed to devour everything she saw.

Gilbert perceived her, and turned another way.

“Come, come!” said the duke to Taverney; “I fancy the king wishes to speak to you. He is looking this way.”

And the two friends disappeared in the direction of the royal box.

Madame Dubarry was standing behind the king, and interchanging signs with M. d'Aiguillon, who was also standing, and who did not lose one of his uncle's movements.

Rousseau, now left alone, admired Audree; he was endeavoring, if we may use the expression, to fall in love with her.

The illustrious actors proceeded to disrobe in their boxes, which Gilbert had decorated with fresh flowers.

Taverney, left alone in the passage by M. de Richelieu, who had gone to rejoin the king, felt his heart alternately chilled and elated. At last the duke returned and placed his finger upon his lips. Taverney turned pale with joy and advanced to meet his friend, who drew him beneath the royal box. There they overheard the following conversation, which was quite inaudible to the rest of the company. Madame Dubarry was saying to the king:

“May I expect your majesty to supper this evening?”

And the king replied:

“I feel fatigued, countess; excuse me.”

At the same moment, the dauphin entered, treading almost on Madame Dubarry's toes, without seeming to see her.

“Sire,” said he, “will your majesty do us the honor of supping with us at Trianon?”

“No, my son; I was just this moment saying to the countess that I feel fatigued. Our young people have made me giddy; I shall sup alone.”

The dauphin bowed and retired. Madame Dubarry curtseyed almost to the ground, and, trembling with rage, left the box. When she was gone, the king made a sign to the Duke de Richelieu.

“Duke.” said he, “I wish to speak to you about an affair which concerns you.”

“Sire — ”

“I am not satisfied. I wish you to explain — stay, I shall sup alone; you will keep me company.”

And the king looked at Taverney.

“You know this gentleman, I think, duke?”

“Monsieur de Taverney? Yes, sire.”

“All! the father of the charming singer?”

“Yes, sire.”

“Listen, duke!”

And the king stooped to whisper in Richelieu's ears. Taverney clenched his hands till the nails entered the flesh, to avoid showing any emotion. Immediately afterward Richelieu brushed past Taverney, and said:

“Follow me without making any remark.”

“Whither?” asked Taverney, in the same tone.

“No matter; follow me.”

The duke moved away. Taverney followed him at a little distance to the king's apartment. The duke entered; Taverney waited in the anteroom.

CHAPTER CX.

The Casket.

M. DE TAVERNEY had not to wait long. Richelieu, having asked the king's valet for something his majesty had left upon his dressing-table, soon returned, carrying something the nature of winch the baron could not distinguish, on account of the covering of silk which enveloped it.

But the marshal soon relieved his friend from all anxiety. Drawing him into a corner of the gallery;

“Baron,” said he, as soon as he saw that they were alone, “you have at times seemed to doubt my friendship for you?”

“Never since our reconciliation,” replied Taverney.

“At least, you doubted your own good fortune and that of your children?”

“Oh! as for that — yes.”

“Well, you were wrong! Your children's fortune and your own is made with a rapidity which might make you giddy.”

“Bah!” said Taverney, who suspected part of the truth, but who, as he was not quite certain, took care to guard against mistakes, “what do you mean?”

“M. Philip is already a captain, with a company paid for by the king.”

“It is true — I owe that to you.”

“By no means. Then we shall have Mademoiselle de Taverney a marchioness, perhaps!”

“Come, come!” exclaimed Taverney; “how! — my daughter!”

“Listen, Taverney! the king has great taste; and beauty, grace, and virtue, when accompanied by talent, delight his majesty. Now Mademoiselle de Taverney unites all these qualities in a very high degree. The king is therefore delighted with Mademoiselle de Taverney.”

“Duke,” replied Taverney, assuming an air of dignity at which the marshal could scarcely repress a smile; “duke, what do you mean by 'delighted'?”

Richelieu did not like airs, and replied dryly:

“Baron, I am not a great linguist. I am not even well versed in orthography. I have always thought that 'delighted' signified 'content beyond measure.' If you are grieved beyond measure to see the king pleased with the beauty, the talent, the merit of your children, you have only to say so. I am about to return to his majesty.”

And Richelieu turned on his heel;ind made a pirouette with truly juvenile grace.

“You misunderstand me, duke.” exclaimed the baron, stopping him. “Ventre bleu! how hasty you are!”

“Why did you say that you were not satisfied?”

“I did not say so.”

“You asked for explanations of the king's pleasure — plague take the fool!”

“But, duke, I did not breathe a syllable of that. I am most certainly content.”

“Ah! you — well, who will be displeased? Your daughter?”

“Oh! oh!”

“My dear friend, you have brought up your daughter like a savage, as you are.”

“My dear friend, the young lady educated herself; you may easily imagine that I could not possibly trouble myself with any such matter. I had enough to do to support life in your den at Taverney. Virtue in her has sprung up spontaneously.”

“And yet people say that country folks know how to pull up weeds! — In short, your daughter is a prude.”

“You mistake; she is a dove.”

Richelieu made a grimace. “Well,” said he, “the poor child must only look out for a good husband, for opportunities of making a fortune happen rarely with this defect.”

Taverney looked uneasily at the duke.

“Fortunately for her,” continued he, “the king is so desperately in love with the Dubarry that he will never think seriously of another.”

Taverney's alarm was changed to anguish.

“Therefore,” continued Richelieu, “you and your daughter may make your minds easy. I will state the necessary objections to his majesty, and the king will never bestow another thought on the matter.”

“But objections to what? — good heavens!” exclaimed Taverney, turning pale, and holding his friend's arm.

“To his making a little present to Mademoiselle Andree, my dear baron.”

“A little present! — What is it?” asked the baron, brimful of hope and avarice.

“Oh! a mere trifle,” said Richelieu, carelessly, and he took a casket from its silken covering. — — “A casket!”

“A mere trifle — a necklace worth a few millions of livres, which his majesty, flattered at hearing her sing his favorite air, wished to present to the fair singer. It is the usual custom. But if your daughter is proud, we will say no more about it.”

“Duke, you must not think of it — that would be to offend the king!”

“Of course it would; but is it not the attribute of virtue always to offend some person, or some thing?”

“But, duke, consider — the child is not so unreasonable.”

“That is to say it is you, and not your child, who speaks?”

“Oh! I know so well what she will do and say.”

“The Chinese are a very fortunate nation,” said Richelieu.

“Why?” asked Taverney, astonished.

“Because they have so many rivers and canals in the county.”

“Duke, you turn the conversation — do not drive me to despair; speak to me.”

“I am speaking to you, baron, and am not changing the conversation at all.”

“Then why do you speak of China? — what have its rivers to do with my daughter?”

“A great deal. The Chinese, I repeat, have the happiness of being able to drown their daughters when they are too virtuous, and no one can forbid it.”

“Come, duke, you must be just. Suppose you had a daughter yourself.”

“Pardieu! I have one; and if anyone were to tell me that she is too virtuous, it would be very ill-natured of him — that's all.”

“In short, you would like her better otherwise, would you not?”

“Oh! for my part, I don't meddle with my children after they are eight years old.”

“Listen to me, at least. If the king were to commission me to offer a necklace to your daughter, and if j-our daughter were to complain to you?”

“Oh, my dear sir, there is no comparison. I have always lived at court, you have lived like a North American Indian; there is no similarity. What you call virtue, I think folly. Remember, for the future, that nothing is more ill-bred than to say to people — 'What would you do in this or that case?' And besides, your comparisons are erroneous, my friend. It is not true that I am about to present a necklace to your daughter.”

“You said so.”

“I said nothing of the sort. I said that the king had directed me to bring him a casket for Mademoiselle de Taverney, whose voice had pleased him; but I did not say that his majesty had charged me to give it to her.”

“Then, in truth,” said the baron, in despair, “I know not what to think. I do not understand a single word — you speak in enigmas. Why give this necklace, if it is not to be given? Why do you take charge of it, if not to deliver it?”

Richelieu uttered an exclamation as if he had seen a spider.

“Ah!” said he; “pouah! — pouah! the Huron — the ugly animal.'”

“Who?”

“You, my good friend — you, my trusty comrade — you seem as if you had fallen from the clouds, baron!”

“I am at my wits' end.”

“No, you never had any. When a king makes a lady a present, and when he charges M. de Richelieu with the commission, the present is noble and the commission well executed — remember that. I do not deliver caskets, my dear sir — that was M. Lebel's office. Did you know M. Lebel?”

“What is your office, then?”

“My friend,” said Richelieu, tapping Taverney on the shoulder, and accompanying this amicable gesture by a sardonic smile, “when I have to do with such paragons of virtue as Mademoiselle Andree, I am the most moral man in the world. When I approach a dove, as you call your daughter, I do not display the talons of the hawk. When I am deputed to wait on a young lady, I speak to her father. I speak to you, therefore, Taverney, and give you the casket to present to your daughter. Well! are you willing?” — And he offered the casket. “Or do you decline?” — And he drew it back.

“Oh! say at once,” exclaimed the baron, “say at once that I am commissioned by his majesty to deliver the present! If so, it assumes quite a correct and paternal character — it is, so to speak, purified from —

“Purified! Why, you must have suspected his majesty of evil intentions!” said Richelieu, seriously. “Now, you cannot have dared to do that?”

“Heaven forbid! But the world — that is to say, my daughter — ”

Richelieu shrugged his shoulders.

“Will you take it? — yes, or no?” asked he.

Taverney rapidly held out his hand.

“You are certain it is moral?” said he to the duke, with a smile, the counterpart of that which the duke had just addressed to him.

“Do you not think it pure morality, baron,” said the marshal, “to make the father, who, as you have just said, purifies everything, an intermediate party between the king's delight and your daughter's charms? Let M. Rousseau, of Geneva, who was hovering about here just now, be the judge; he would say that Cato of happy memory was impure compared to me.”

Richelieu pronounced these few words with a calmness — an abrupt haughtiness — a precision — which silenced Taverney's objections, and assisted to make him believe that he ought to be convinced. He seized his illustrious friend's hand, therefore, and pressing it:

“Thanks to your delicacy,” said he, “my daughter can accept this present.”

“The source and origin of the good fortune to which I alluded at the commencement of our tiresome discussion on virtue.”

“Thanks, dear duke; most hearty thanks!”

“One word more. Conceal this favor carefully from the Dubarrys. It might make Madame Dubarry leave the king and take flight.”

“And the king would be displeased?”

“I don't know, but the countess would not thank us. As for me, I should be lost! Be discreet, therefore — ”

“Do not fear. But at least present my most humble thanks to the king.”

“And your daughter's — I shall not fail. But you have not yet reached the limits of the favors bestowed upon you. It is you who are to thank the king, my dear sir; his majesty invites you to sup with him this evening.”

“Me?”

“You, Taverney. We shall be a select party. His majesty, you, and myself. We will talk of your daughter's virtue. Adieu, Taverney, I see Dubarry with Monsieur d'Aiguillon. We must not be perceived together.”

And, agile as a page, he disappeared at the further end of the gallery, leaving Taverney gazing at his casket, like a Saxon child who awakens and finds the Christmas gifts which have been placed in his hands while he slept.

CHAPTER CXI.

King Louis XV.'s Petit Souper.

THE MARSHAL found the king in the little salon whither several of the courtiers had followed him, preferring rather to lose their supper than to allow the wandering glance of their sovereign to fall on any others than themselves. But Louis XV. seemed to have something else to do this evening than to look at these gentlemen. He dismissed every one, saying that he did not intend to sup, or that, if he did, it would be alone. All the guests having thus received their dismissal, and fearing to displease the dauphin if they were not present at the fete which he was to give at the close of the rehearsal, instantly flew off like a cloud of parasite pigeons, and winged their way to him whom they were permitted to see, ready to assert that they had deserted his majesty's drawing-room for him.

Louis XV. whom they left so rapidly, was far from bestowing a thought on them. At another time, the littleness of all this swarm of courtiers would have excited a smile, but on this occasion it awoke no sentiment in the monarch's breast — a monarch so sarcastic that he spared neither bodily nor mental defect in his best friends, always supposing that Louis XV. ever had a friend.

No; at that moment Louis XV. concentrated his entire attention on a carriage which was drawn up opposite the door of the offices of Trianon, the coachman seeming to wait only for the step which should announce the owner's presence in the gilded vehicle to urge on his horses. The carriage was Madame Dubarry's, and was lighted by torches. Zamore, seated beside the coachman, was swinging his legs backward and forward like a child at play.

At last, Madame Dubarry, who had no doubt delayed in the corridors in the hope of receiving some message from the king, appeared, supported on M. d'Aiguillon's arm. Her anger, or at least her disappointment, was apparent in the rapidity of her gait. She affected too much resolution not to have lost her presence of mind.

After Madame Dubarry followed Jean, looking gloomy in the extreme, and absently crushing his hat beneath his arm. He had not been present at the representation, the dauphin having forgotten to invite him; but he had stolen into the anteroom somewhat after the fashion of a lackey, and stood pensive as Hippolytus, with his shirt-frill falling over his vest embroidered with silver and red flowers, and not even looking at his tattered ruffles, which seemed in harmony with his sad thoughts. Jean had seen his sister look pale and alarmed, and had concluded from this that the danger was great. Jean was brave in diplomacy only when opposed to flesh and blood, never when opposed to phantoms.

Concealed behind the window-curtain, the king watched this funereal procession defile before him and engulf themselves in the countess's carriage like a troop of phantoms. Then, when the door was closed, and the footman had mounted behind the carriage, the coachman shook the reins, and the horses started forward at a gallop.

“Oh!” said the king, “without making an attempt to see me — to speak to me? the countess is furious!”

And he repeated aloud:

“Yes, the countess is furious!”

Richelieu, who had just glided into the room like an expected visitor, caught these last words:

“Furious, sire! and for what? Because your majesty is amused for a moment? Oh! that is not amiable of the countess.”

“Duke,” replied Louis XV.. “I am not amused; on the contrary, I am wearied and wish for repose. Music enervates me. If I had listened to the countess, I ought to have supped at Luciennes; I ought to have eaten, and, above all, to have drunk. The countess's wines are too strong; I do not know from what vineyards they come, but they overpower me.”

“S'death! I prefer to take my ease here.”

“And your majesty is perfectly in the right,” said the duke.

“Besides, the countess will find amusement elsewhere. Am I such an amiable companion? She may say so as much as she likes, but I do not believe her.”

“Ah! this time your majesty is in the wrong!” exclaimed the marshal.

“No, duke; no, in truth. I count my years, and I reflect.”

“Sire, the countess is well aware that she could not possibly have better company, and it is that which makes her furious.”

"In truth, duke. I do not know how you manage. You still lead the women as if you were twenty. At that age it is for a man to choose; but at mine, duke — "

"Well, sire?"

"It is for the woman to make her calculations."

The marshal burst into a laugh.

"Well, sire," said he, "that is only an additional reason; if your majesty thinks the countess is amused, let us console ourselves as well as we can."

"I do not say she is amused, duke; I only say that she will, in the end, be driven to seek amusement."

"Ah! sire, I dare not assert that such things have never happened."

The king rose, much agitated.

"Who waits outside?" inquired he.

"All your suite, sire."

The king reflected for a moment.

"But have you any one there?"

"I have Rafte."

"Very good."

"What shall he do, sire?"

"He must find out if the countess really returned to Luciennes."

"The countess is already gone, I fancy, sire."

"Yes, ostensibly."

"But whither does your majesty think she is gone?"

"Who can tell? Jealousy makes her frantic, duke."

"Sire, is it not rather your majesty — ?"

"How? — what?"

"Whom jealousy — "

"Duke!"

"In truth, it would be very humiliating for us all, sire."

"I jealous?" said Louis, with a forced laugh; "are you speaking seriously, duke?"

Richelieu did not in truth believe it. It must even be confessed that he was very near the truth in thinking that, on the contrary, the king only wished to know if Madame Dubarry was really at Luciennes, in order to be sure that she would not return to Trianon.

"Then, sire," said he aloud, "it is understood that I am to send Rafte on a voyage of discovery?"

“Send him, duke.”

“In the meantime, what will your majesty do before supper?”

“Nothing; we shall sup instantly. Have you spoken to the person in question?”

“Yes, he is in your majesty's antechamber.”

“What did he say?”

“He expressed his deep thanks.”

“And the daughter?”

“She has not been spoken to vet.”

“Duke. Madame Dubarry is jealous, and might readily return.”

“Ah! sire, that would be in very bad taste. I think the countess would be incapable of committing such an enormity.”

“Duke, she is capable of anything in such moods, especially when hatred is combined with jealousy. She execrates you; I don't know if you were aware of that?”

Richelieu bowed.

“I know she does me that honor, sire.”

“She execrates M. de Taverney also.”

“If your majesty would be good enough to reckon, I am sure there is a third person whom she hates even more than me — even more than the baron.”

“Whom?”

“Mademoiselle Andree.”

“Ah!” said the king. “I think that is natural enough.”

“Then — ”

“Yes, but that does not prevent its being necessary to watch that Madame Dubarry does not cause some scandal this evening.”

“On the contrary, it proves the necessity of such a measure.”

“Here is the maitre-d'hotel; hush! give your orders to Rafte and join me in the dining-room with — you know whom!”

Louis rose and passed into the dining room, while Richelieu made his exit by the opposite door. Five minutes afterward, he rejoined the king, accompanied by the baron.

The king in the most gracious manner bade Taverney good-evening. The baron was a man of talent, and replied in that peculiar manner which betokens a person accustomed to good society, and which puts kings and princes instantly at their ease. They sat down to table. Louis XV. was a bad king, but a delightful companion; when he pleased, his conversation was full of attraction for boon companions, talkers, and voluptuaries. The king, in short, had studied life carefully, and from its most agreeable side.

He ate heartily, made his guests drink, and turned the conversation on music.

Richelieu caught the ball at the rebound.

“Sire,” says he, “if music makes men agree, as our ballet-master says, and as your majesty seems to think, will you say as much of women?”

“Oh, duke!” replied the king, “let us not speak of women. From the Trojan war to the present time, women have always exercised an influence the contrary of music. You, especially, have too many quarrels to compound with them, to bring such a subject on the tapis. Among others, there is one, and that not the least dangerous, with whom you are at daggers drawn.”

“The countess, sire! Is that my fault?”

“Of course it is.”

“Ah! indeed! Your majesty, I trust, will explain.”

“In two words, and with the greatest pleasure,” said the king, slyly.

“I am all ears, sire.”

“What! she offers you the portfolio of I don't know which department, and you refuse, because, you say, she is not very popular!”

“I?” exclaimed Richelieu, a good deal embarrassed by the turn the conversation was taking.

“Dame! the report is quite public,” said the king, with that feigned off-hand good-nature which was peculiar to him. “I forget now who told it to me — most probably the gazette.”

“Well, sire!” said Richelieu, taking advantage of the freedom which the unusual gayety of the august host afforded his guests, “I must confess that on this occasion rumors and even the gazettes have reported something not quite so absurd as usual.”

“What!” exclaimed Louis XV., “then you have really refused a portfolio, my dear duke?”

Richelieu, it may easily be imagined, was in an awkward position. The king well knew that he had refused nothing; but it was necessary that Taverney should continue to believe what Richelieu had told him. The duke had therefore to frame his reply so as to avoid furnishing matter for amusement to the king, without at the same time incurring the reproach of falsehood, which was already hovering on the baron's lips, and twinkling in his smile.

“Sire,” said Richelieu, “pray let us not speak of effects, but of the cause. Whether I have, or have not refused a portfolio, is a state secret which your majesty is not bound to divulge over the bottle; but the cause for which I should have refused the portfolio had it been offered to me is the important point.”

“Oh! oh! duke,” said the monarch, laughing; “and this cause is not a state secret?”

“No, sire, and certainly not for your majesty, who is at this moment, I beg pardon of the divinity, the most amiable earthly Amphytrion in the universe for my friend the Baron de Taverney and myself. I have no secrets, therefore, from my king. I give my whole soul up to him, for I do not wish it to be said that the king of France has not one servant who would tell him the entire truth.”

“Let us hear the truth, then, duke,” said the king, while Taverney, fearing that Richelieu might go too far, pinched up his lips and composed his countenance scrupulously after the king's.

“Sire, in your dominions there are two powers which a minister must obey; the first is, your will; the second, that of your majesty's most intimate friends. The first power is irresistible; none dare to rebel against it; the second is yet more sacred, for it imposes duties of the heart on whosoever serves you. It is termed “your confidence.” To obey it, a minister must have the most devoted regard for the favorite of the king.”

Louis XV. laughed.

“Duke,” said he, “that is a very good maxim, and one I am delighted to hear from your lips; but I dare you to proclaim it aloud by sound of trumpet upon the Pont Neuf.”

“Oh, I know, sire,” said Richelieu, “that the philosophers would be up in arms; but I do not think that their objurgations would matter much to your majesty or to me. The chief point is that the two preponderating influences in the kingdom be satisfied. Well! the will of a certain person — I will confess it openly to your majesty, even should my disgrace, that is my death, be the consequence — Madame Dubarry's will I could not conform to.”

Louis was silent.

“It occurred to me the other day.” continued Richelieu, “to look around among your majesty's court, and in truth I saw so many noble girls, so many women of dazzling beauty, that had I been king of France I should have found it almost impossible to choose.”

Louis turned to Taverney, who, seeing things take such a favorable turn for him, sat trembling with hope and fear, aiding the marshal's eloquence with eyes and breath, as if he would waft forward the vessel loaded with his fortunes to a safe harbor.

“Come, baron, what is your opinion?” said the king.

“Sire,” replied Taverney, with swelling heart, “the duke, as it seems to me, has been discoursing most eloquently, and at the same time with profound discernment, to your majesty for the last few minutes.”

“Then you are of his opinion, in what he says of lovely girls?”

“In fact, sire, I think there are indeed very lovely girls at the French court.”

“Then you are of his opinion?”

“Yes, sire.”

“And, like him, you advise me to choose among the beauties of the court?”

“I would venture to confess that I am of the marshal's opinion, if I dared to believe that it was also your majesty's.”

There was a short silence, during which the king looked complaisantly at Taverney.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “no doubt I would follow your advice, if I were only thirty years of age. I should have a very natural predilection for it, but I find myself at present rather too old to be credulous.”

“Credulous I pray, sire, explain the meaning of the word.”

“To be credulous, my dear duke, means to believe. Now, nothing will make me believe certain things.”

“What are they?”

“That at my age it would be possible to inspire love.”

“Ah, sire,” exclaimed Richelieu, “until this moment I thought your majesty was the most polite gentleman in your dominions, but with deep regret I see that I have been mistaken.”

“How so?” asked the king, laughing.

“Because, in that case, I must be old as Methuselah, as I was born in '94. Remember, sire, I am sixteen years older than your majesty.”

This was an adroit piece of flattery on the duke's part. Louis XV. had always admired this man's age, who had outlived so many younger men in his service; for, having this example before him, he might hope to reach the same advanced period.

“Granted.” said Louis; “but I hope you no longer have the pretension to be loved for yourself, duke?”

“If I thought so, sire, I would instantly quarrel with two ladies who told me the contrary only this very morning.”

“Well! duke,” said Louis, “we shall see; M. de Taverney, we shall see! youth is certainly catching, that is very true.”

“Yes, yes, sire; and we must not forget that a powerful constitution like your majesty's always gains and never loses.”

“Yet I remember,” said Louis, “that my predecessor, when he became old, thought not of such toys as woman's love, but became exceedingly devout.”

“Come, come, sire!” said Richelieu; “your majesty knows my great respect for the deceased king, who twice sent me to the Bastille, but that ought not to prevent me from saying that there is a vast difference between the ripe age of Louis XV. and that of Louis XIV. Diable! your Most Christian Majesty, although honoring fully your title of eldest son of the Church, need not carry asceticism so far as to forget your humanity.”

“Faith, no!” said Louis. “I may confess it, since neither my doctor nor confessor is present.”

“Well, sire! the king, your grandfather, frequently astonished Madame de Maintenon, who was even older than he, by his excess of religious zeal and his innumerable penances. I repeat it, sire, can there be any comparison made between your two majesties?”

The king this evening was in a good humor. Richelieu's words acted upon him like so many drops of water from the fountain of youth.

Richelieu thought the time had come; he touched Taverney's knee with his.

“Sire,” said the latter, “will your majesty deign to accept my thanks for the magnificent present you have made my daughter?”

“You need not thank me for that, baron,” said the king. “Mademoiselle de Taverney pleased me by her modest and ingenuous grace. I wish my daughters had still their households to form; certainly, Mademoiselle Andree — that is her name, is it not — ?”

“Yes, sire,” said Taverney, delighted that the king knew his daughter's Christian name.

“A very pretty name — certainly Mademoiselle Andree should have been the first upon the list; but every post in my house is filled up. In the meantime, baron, you may reckon upon my protection for your daughter. I think I have heard she has not a rich dowry?”

“Alas! no, sire.”

“Well, I will make her marriage my especial care.”

Taverney bowed to the ground.

“Then your majesty must be good enough,” said he, “to select a husband; for I confess that, in our confined circumstances — our almost poverty — ”

“Yes, yes; rest easy on that point,” said Louis; “but she seems very young — there is no haste.”

“The less, sire, that I am aware your majesty dislikes marriage.”

“Ha!” said Louis, rubbing his hands and looking at Richelieu. “Well! at all events, M. de Taverney, command me whenever you are at all embarrassed.”

Then, rising, the king beckoned the duke, who approached.

“Was the little one satisfied?” asked he.

“With what?”

“With the casket.”

“Your majesty must excuse my speaking low, but the father is listening, and he must not overhear what I have to tell you.”

“Bah!”

“No, I assure you, sire.”

“Well, speak!”

“Sire, the little one has indeed a horror of marriage; but of one thing I am certain — viz., that she has not a horror of your majesty.”

Uttering these words in a tone of familiarity which pleased the king from its very frankness, the marshal, with his little pattering steps, hastened to rejoin Taverney, who, from respect, had moved away to the doorway of the gallery.

Both retired by the gardens. It was a lovely evening. Two servants walked before them, holding torches in one hand, and with the other pulling aside the branches of the flowering shrubs. The windows of Trianon were blazing with light, and, flitting across them, could be discerned a crowd of joyous figures, the honored guests of the dauphiness.

His majesty's band gave life and animation to the minuet, for dancing had commenced after supper, and was still kept up with undiminished spirit.

Concealed in a dense thicket of lilac and snowball shrubs, Gilbert, kneeling upon the ground, was gazing at the movements of the shadows through the transparent curtains. A thunderbolt cleaving the earth at Ins feet would scarcely have distracted the attention of the gazer, so much was he entranced by the lovely forms he was following with his eyes through all the mazes of the dance. Nevertheless, when Richelieu and Taverney passed, and brushed against the thicket in which this night-bird was concealed, the sound of their voices, and, above all, a certain word, made Gilbert raise his head; for this word was an all-important one for him.

The marshal, leaning upon his friend's arm, and bending down to his ear, was saying:

“Everything well-weighed and considered, baron — it is a hard thing to tell you — but, you must at once send your daughter to a convent.”

“Why so?” asked the baron.

“Because I would wager,” replied the marshal, “that the king is madly in love with Mademoiselle de Taverney.”

At these words Gilbert started and turned paler than the flaky snow-berries which, at his abrupt movement, showered down upon his head and shoulders.

CHAPTER CXII.

Presentiments'.

THE NEXT DAY, as the clock at Trianon was striking twelve. Nicole's voice was heard calling Andree, who had not yet left her apartment;

“Mademoiselle, mademoiselle, here is M. Philip!”

The exclamation came from the bottom of the stairs.

Andree, at once surprised and delighted, drew her muslin robe closely over her neck and shoulders, and hastened to meet the young man, who was in fact dismounting in the courtyard of Trianon, and inquiring from the servants at what time he could see his sister.

Andree therefore opened the door in person, and found herself face to face with Philip, whom the officious Nicole had ran to summon from the courtyard, and was accompanying up the stairs.

The young girl threw her arms round her brother's neck, and they entered Andree's apartments together, followed by Nicole.

It was then that Andree for the first time remarked that Philip was more serious than usual — that his smile was not free from sadness — that he wore his elegant uniform with the most scrupulous neatness, and that he held a traveling-cloak over his arm.

“What is the matter, Philip?” asked she, with the instinct of tender affection, of which a look is a sufficient revelation.

“My sister,” said Philip, “this morning I received an order to join my regiment.”

“ And you are going?”

“I must.”

“Oh!” said Andree; and with this plaintive exclamation all her courage, and almost all her strength, seemed to desert her.

And although this departure was a very natural occurrence, and one which she might have foreseen, yet she felt so overpowered by the announcement that she was obliged to lean for support on her brother's arm.

“Good heavens!” asked Philip, astonished, “does this departure afflict you so much, Andree? You know, in a soldier's life, it is a most commonplace event.”

“Yes, yes; it is in truth common,” murmured the young girl. “And whither do you go, brother?”

“My garrison is at Rheinis. You see. I have not a very long journey to undertake. But it is probable that from thence the regiment will return to Strasbourg.”

“Alas!” said Andree; “and when do you set out?

“The order commands me to start immediately.”

“You have come to bid me good-by, then?”

“Yes, sister.”

“A farewell!”

“Have you anything particular to say to me, Andree?” asked Philip, fearing that this extreme dejection might have some other cause than his departure.

Andree understood that these words were meant to call her attention to Nicole, who, astonished at Andree's extreme grief, was gazing at this scene with much surprise; for, in fact, the departure of an officer to his garrison was not a catastrophe to cause such a flood of tears.

Andree, therefore, saw at the same instant Philip's feelings and Nicole's surprise. She took up a mantle, threw it over her shoulders, and, leading her brother to the staircase:

“Come,” said she, “as far as the park, gates, Philip. I will accompany you through the covered alley. I have, in truth, many things to tell you, brother.”

These words were equivalent to a dismissal for Nicole, who returned to her mistress's chamber, while the latter descended the staircase with Philip.

Andree led the way to the passage which still, even at the present day, opens from the chapel into the garden; but although Philip's look anxiously questioned her, she remained for a longtime silent, leaning upon his arm, and supporting her head upon his shoulder.

But at last her heart was too full; her features were overspread with a deathlike paleness, a deep sigh escaped her lips, and tears rushed from her eyes.

“My dear sister — my sweet Andree!” exclaimed Philip, “in the name of Heaven, what is the matter?”

“My friend — my only friend!” said Andree, “you depart — you leave me alone in this great world, which I entered but yesterday, and yet you ask me why I weep? Ah! remember, Philip, I lost my mother at my birth; it is dreadful to acknowledge it, but I have never had a father. All my little griefs — all my little secrets — I could confide to you alone. Who smiled upon me? Who caressed me? Who rocked me in my cradle? It was you. Who has protected me since I grew up? You. Who taught me that God's creatures were not cast into the world only to suffer? You, Philip — you alone. For, since the hour of my birth, I have loved no one in the world but you, and no one but you has loved me in return. Oh! Philip, Philip,” continued Andree, sadly, “you turn away your head, and I can read your thoughts. You think I am young — that I am beautiful — and that I am wrong not to trust to the future and to love. And yet you see, alas! Philip, it is not enough to be young and handsome, for no one thinks of me.

“You will say the dauphiness is kind, and she is so. She is all perfection; at least, she seems so in my eyes, and I look upon her as a divinity. But it is exactly because she holds this exalted situation that I can feel only respect for her, and nut affection. Yet, Philip, affection is necessary for my heart, which if always thrust back on itself must at last break. My father — I tell you nothing new, Philip — my father is not only no protector or friend, but I cannot even look at him without feeling terror. Yes, yes, I fear him. Philip, and still more now, since you are leaving me.

“You will ask, why should I fear him? I know not. Do not the birds of the air and the flocks of the field feel and dread the approaching storm? You will say they are endowed with instinct; but why will you deny the instinct of misfortune to our immortal souls? For some time past everything has prospered with our family; I know it well. You are a captain; I am in the household, and almost in the intimacy, of the dauphiness; my father, it is said, supped last night almost tete-a-tete with the king. Well! Philip, I repeat it, even should you think me mad, all this alarms me more than our peaceful poverty and obscurity at Taverney.”

“And yet, dear sister,” said Philip sadly, “you were alone there also; I was not with you there to console you.”

“Yes, but at least I was alone — alone with the memories of childhood. It seemed to me as if the house where my mother lived and breathed her last owed me, if I may so speak, a protecting care. All there was peaceful, gentle, affectionate. I could see you depart with calmness, and welcome you back with joy. But whether you departed or returned, *my* heart was not all with you; it was attached also to that dear house, to my gardens, to my flowers, to the whole scene of which formerly you were but a part. Now you are all to me, Philip, and when you leave me I am indeed alone."

"And yet, Andree, you have now a protector far more powerful than I am."

"True."

"A happy future before you."

"Who can tell?"

""Why do you doubt it?"

"I do not know."

"This is ingratitude toward God, my sister."

"Oh! no, thank Heaven, I am not ungrateful to God. Morning and evening I offer up thanks to Him; but it seems to me as if, instead of receiving my prayers with grace, every time I bend the knee, a voice from on high whispers to my heart; 'Take care, young girl, take care!'

"But against what are you to guard? Answer me. I will admit that a danger threatens you. Have you any presentiment of the nature of this misfortune? Do you know how to act so as best to confront it, or how to avoid it?"

"I know nothing, Philip, except that my life seems to hang by a thread, that nothing will look bright to me from the moment of your departure. In a word, it seems as if during my sleep I had been placed on the declivity of a precipice too steep to allow me to arrest *my* progress when roused to a sense of my danger; that I see the abyss, and yet am dragged down; and that, you being far away, and your helping hand no longer ready to support me, I shall be dashed down and crushed in the fall."

"Dear sister! my sweet Andree!" said Philip, agitated in spite of himself by the expression of deep and unaffected terror in her voice and manner, you exaggerate the extent of an affection for which I feel deeply grateful. Yes, you will lose your friend, but only for a time; I shall not be so far distant but that you can send for me if necessity should arise. Besides, remember that except chimerical fears, nothing threatens you."

Andree placed herself in her brother's way.

"Then, Philip," said she, "how does it happen that you, who are a man, and gifted with so much more strength, are at this moment as sad as I am? Tell me, my brother, how do you explain that?"

“Easily, dear sister,” said Philip, arresting Andree's steps, for she had again moved forward on ceasing to speak. “We are not only brother and sister *by* blood, but in heart and affection; therefore we have lived in an intimate communion of thoughts and feelings, which, especially since our arrival in Paris, has become to me a delightful necessity. I break this chain, my sweet love, or rather it is broken by others, and I feel the blow in my inmost heart. I am sad, but only for the moment, Andree. I can look beyond our separation; I do not believe in any misfortune, except in that of not seeing you for some months, perhaps for a year. I am resigned, and do not say, 'farewell,' but rather, “we shall soon meet again.”

In spite of these consolatory words. Andree could only reply by sobs and tears.

“Dearest sister,” exclaimed Philip, grieved at this dejection, which seemed so incomprehensible to him, “dearest sister, you have not told me all — you hide something from me. In Heaven's name, speak!”

And he took her in his arms, pressing her to his heart, and gazing earnestly in her eyes.

“I!” said she. “No, no, Philip, I assure you solemnly. You know all the most secret recesses of my heart are open before you.”

“Well, then, Andree, for pity's sake, take courage; do not grieve me so.”

“You are right,” said she, “and I am mad. Listen; I never had a strong mind, as you, Philip, know better than any one; I have always been a timid, dreaming, melancholy creature. But I have no right to make so tenderly beloved a brother a sharer in my fears, above all when he labors to give me courage, and proves to me that I am wrong to be alarmed. You are right, Philip; it is true, everything here is conducive to my happiness. Forgive me, Philip! You see, I dry my tears — I weep no longer — I smile, Philip — I do not say 'adieu,' but rather, 'we shall soon meet again.'”

And the young maiden tenderly embraced her brother, hiding her head on his shoulder to conceal from his view a tear which still dimmed her eye, and which dropped like a pearl upon the golden epaulet of the young officer.

Philip gazed upon her with that infinite tenderness which partakes at the same time of a father's and a brother's affection.

“Andree,” said he, “I love to see you bear yourself thus bravely. Be of good courage; I must go, but the courier shall bring you a letter every week. And every week let me receive one from you in return.”

“Yes, Philip,” said Andree; “yes, it will be my only happiness. But you have informed my father, have you not?”

“Of what?”

“Of your departure.”

“Dear sister, it was the baron himself who brought me the minister's order this morning. M. de Taverney is not like you, Andree, and it seems will easily part with me. He appeared pleased at the thought of my departure, and in fact he was right. Here I can never get forward, while there many occasions may present themselves.”

“My father is glad to see you go?” murmured Andree. “Are you not mistaken, Philip?”

“He has you,” replied Philip, eluding the question; “that is a consolation for him, sister.”

“Do you think so, Philip? He never sees me.”

“My sister, he bade me tell you that this very day, after my departure, he would come to Trianon. Believe me, he loves you; only it is after his own fashion.”

“What is the matter now, Philip? you seem embarrassed.”

“Dearest Andree, I heard the clock strike — what hour is it?”

“A quarter to one.”

“Well, dear sister, I seem embarrassed because I ought to have been on the road an hour ago, and here we are at the gate where my horse is waiting. Therefore — ”

Andree assumed a calm demeanor, and taking her brother's hand:

“Therefore,” said she, in a voice too firm to be entirely natural, “therefore, brother, adieu!”

Philip gave her one last embrace.

“To meet soon again,” said he; “remember your promise.”

“What promise?”

“One letter a week, at least.”

“Oh! do you think it necessary to ask it?”

She required a violent effort to pronounce these last words. The poor girl's voice was scarcely audible.

Philip waved his hand in token of adieu, and walked quickly toward the gate. Andree followed his retreating form with her eyes, holding in her breath in the endeavor to repress her sighs. Philip bounded lightly on horseback, shouted a last farewell from the other side of the gate, and was gone. Andree remained standing motionless till he was out of sight, then she turned, darted, like a wounded fawn among the shady trees, perceived a bench, and had only strength sufficient to reach it, and to sink on it powerless and almost lifeless. Then, heaving a deep and heartrending sigh, she exclaimed:

“Oh, my God! do not leave me quite alone upon earth.”

She buried her face in her hands, while the big tears she did not seek to restrain made their way through her slender fingers. At this instant a slight rustling was heard amid the shrubs behind her. Andree thought she heard a sigh. She turned, alarmed; a melancholy form stood before her.

It was Gilbert.

CHAPTER CXIII.

Gilbert's Romance.

AS PALE, as despairing as Andree, Gilbert stood downcast before her. At the sight of a man, and of a stranger, for such he seemed at first sight through the thick veil of tears which obscured her gaze, Andree hastily dried her eyes, as if the proud young girl would have blushed to be seen weeping. She made an effort to compose herself, and restored calmness to her marble features, only an instant before agitated with the shudder of despair. Gilbert was much longer in regaining his calmness, and his features still wore an expression of grief when Mademoiselle de Taverney, looking up, at last recognized him.

"Oh! Monsieur Gilbert again!" said Andree with that trifling tone which she affected to assume whenever chance brought her in contact with the young man.

Gilbert made no reply; his feelings were still too deeply moved. The grief which had shaken Andree's frame to the center had violently agitated his own. It was Andree, therefore, who again broke the silence, wishing to have the last word with this apparition.

"But what is the matter, Monsieur Gilbert?" inquired she. "Why do you gaze at me in that woebegone manner? Something must grieve you. May I ask what it is?"

"Do you wish to know?" asked Gilbert, mournfully, for he felt the irony concealed beneath this appearance of interest.

"Yes."

"Well, what grieves me, mademoiselle, is to see you suffer," replied Gilbert.

"And who told you that I am suffering?"

"I see it."

"You mistake, sir; I am not suffering," said Andree, passing her handkerchief over her face.

Gilbert felt the storm rising, but he resolved to turn it aside by humility.

“I entreat your pardon, mademoiselle,” said he, “but the reason I spoke was that I heard your sobs.”

“Ah! you were listening; better and better!”

“Mademoiselle, it was by accident!” stammered Gilbert, for he felt that he was telling a falsehood.

“Accident! I regret exceedingly, Monsieur Gilbert, that chance should have brought you here. But even so, may I ask in what manner these sobs which you heard me utter grieved you? Pray inform me.”

“I cannot bear to see a woman weep,” said Gilbert, in a tone which highly displeased Andree.

“Am I then a woman in M. Gilbert's eyes?” replied the haughty young girl. “I sue for no one's sympathy, but M. Gilbert's still less than any other's.”

“Mademoiselle,” said Gilbert, sadly, “you do wrong to taunt me thus. I saw you sad, and I felt grieved. I heard you say, that now M. Philip was gone, you would be alone in the world. Never, mademoiselle! for I am beside you, and never did a heart beat more devoted to you. I repeat it, Mademoiselle de Taverney cannot be alone in the world while my head can think, my heart beat, or my arm retains its strength.”

While he spoke these words, Gilbert was indeed a model of manly elegance and beauty, although he pronounced them with all the humility which the most sincere respect commanded.

But it was fated that everything which the young man did should displease Andree, should offend her, and urge her to offensive retorts — as if his very respect were an insult, and his prayers a provocation. At first she attempted to rise, that she might second her harsh words with as harsh gestures; but a nervous shudder retained her on her seat. Besides, she reflected that if she were standing, she could be seen from a distance, and seen talking to Gilbert. She therefore remained seated; for she was determined, once for all, to crush the importunate insect before her under foot, and replied:

“I thought I had already informed you. Monsieur Gilbert, that you are highly displeasing to me, that your voice annoys me, that your philosophical speeches disgust me. Then why, when you know this, do you still persist in addressing me?”

“Mademoiselle,” replied Gilbert, pale, but self-possessed, “an honest-hearted woman is never disgusted by sympathy. An honest man is the equal of every human being; and I, whom you maltreat so cruelly, deserve, more than any other, perhaps, the sympathy which I regret to perceive you do not feel for me.”

At this word sympathy, thus twice repeated, Andree opened her large eyes to their utmost extent, and fixed them impertinently upon Gilbert.

“Sympathy!” said she; “sympathy between you and me, Monsieur Gilbert! In truth I was deceived in my opinion of you. I took you for insolent, and I find you are even less than that — you are only a madman.”

“I am neither insolent nor mad,” said Gilbert with an apparent calm which it must have caused his proud disposition much to assume. “No, mademoiselle; nature has made me your equal, and chance has made you my debtor.”

“Chance again!” said Andree, sarcastically.

“Perhaps I should have said Providence. I never intended to have spoken to you of this, but your insults refresh my memory.”

“I your debtor, sir? Your debtor. I think you said? Explain yourself.” “I should be ashamed to find you ungrateful, mademoiselle; God, who has made you so beautiful, has given you, to compensate for your beauty, sufficient defects without that.” This time Andree rose. “Stay! pardon me!” said Gilbert; “at times you irritate me too much also, and then I forget for a moment the interest with which you inspire me.”

Andree burst into a fit of laughter so prolonged that it was calculated to rouse Gilbert's anger to the utmost; but to her great surprise Gilbert did not take fire. He folded his arms on his breast, retained the same hostile and determined expression in his fiery glance, and patiently awaited the end of this insulting laugh.

When she had finished:

“Mademoiselle,” said Gilbert coldly, “will you condescend to answer one question? Do you respect your father?”

“You take the liberty of catechising me, it seems, Monsieur Gilbert?” replied the young girl with sovereign hauteur.

“Yes, you respect your father,” continued Gilbert; “and it is not on account of his good qualities or his virtues, but simply because he gave you life. A father, unfortunately — and you must know it, mademoiselle — a father is respected only in one relation, but still it gives him a claim. Even more; for this sole benefit” — and Gilbert, in his turn, felt himself animated by an emotion of scornful pity — ” you are bound to love your benefactor.

Well, mademoiselle, this being established as a principle, why do you insult me? why do you scorn me? why do you hate him who did not indeed give you life; but who saved it?"

"You!" exclaimed Andree; "you saved my life?"

"Ah! you did not even dream of that." said Gilbert, "or rather you have forgotten it. That is very natural; it occurred nearly a year ago. Well, mademoiselle, I must only therefore inform you of it, or recall it to your memory. Yes, I saved your life at the risk of my own."

"At least. Monsieur Gilbert," said Andree, deadly pale, "you will do me the favor of telling me when and where."

"The day, mademoiselle, when a hundred thousand persons, crushed one against the other, fleeing from the fiery horses, and the sabers which thinned the crowd, left a long train of dead and dying upon the Place Louis XV."

"Ah! the 31st of May?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

Andree seated herself, and her features again assumed a pitiless smile.

"And on that day, you say you sacrificed your life to save mine, Monsieur Gilbert?"

"I have already told you so."

"Then you are the Baron Balsamo; I beg your pardon. I was not aware of the fact."

"No, I am not the Baron Balsamo," replied Gilbert, with flashing eye and quivering lip; "I am the poor child of the people — Gilbert, who has the folly, the madness, the misfortune to love you; who, because he loved you like a madman, like a fool, like a sot, followed you into the crowd; who, separated from you for a moment, recognized you by the piercing shriek you uttered when you lost your footing; who, forcing his way to you, shielded you with his arms until twenty thousand arms, pressing against his, broke their strength; who threw himself upon the stone wall against which you were about to be crushed, to afford you the softer repose of his corpse; and, perceiving among the crowd that strange man who seemed to govern his fellowmen, and whose name you have just pronounced, collected all his strength, all his energy, and raised you in his exhausted arms that this man might see you, seize hold of you, and save you! — Gilbert, who in yielding you up to a more fortunate protector than himself, retained nothing but a shred of your dress, which he pressed to his lips! And it was time, for already the blood was rushing to Ins heart, to his temples, to his brain. The rolling tide of executioners and victims swept over him, and buried him beneath its waves, while you ascended aloft from its abyss to a haven of safety!”

Gilbert in these hurried words had shown himself as he was — uncultivated, simple, almost sublime, in his resolution as in his love. Notwithstanding her contempt. Andree could not refrain from gazing at him with astonishment. For a moment he believed that his narrative had been as irresistible as truth — as love. But poor Gilbert did not take into his calculations incredulity, that demon prompted by hatred. Andree, who hated Gilbert, did not allow herself to be moved by any of the forcible arguments of her despised lover.

She did not reply immediately, but looked at Gilbert, while something like a struggle took place in her mind. The young man, therefore, ill at ease during this freezing silence, felt himself obliged to add, as a sort of peroration:

“And now, mademoiselle, do not detest me as you did formerly, for now it would not only be injustice, but ingratitude, to do so. I said so before, and I now repeat it.”

At these words Andree raised her haughty brow, and in a most indifferent and cutting tone, she asked:

“How long, Monsieur Gilbert, did you remain under M. Rousseau's tutelage?”

“Mademoiselle,” said Gilbert, ingenuously, “I think about three months, without reckoning the few days of my illness, which was caused by the accident on the 31st of May.”

“You misunderstand me,” said she; “I did not ask you whether you had been ill or not, or what accidents you may have received. They add an artistic finish to your story, but otherwise they are of no importance to me. I merely wished to tell you that, having resided only three months with the illustrious author, you have profited well by his lessons, and that the pupil at his first essay composes romances almost worthy of his master.”

Gilbert had listened with calmness, believing that Andree was about to reply seriously to his impassioned narration; but at this stroke of cutting irony, he fell from the summit of his buoyant hopes to the dust.

“A romance!” murmured he, indignantly; “you treat what I have told you as a romance!”

“Yes, sir,” said Andree, “a romance — I repeat the word; only you did not force me to read it — for that I have to thank you. I deeply regret that, unfortunately, I am not able to repay its full value; but I should make the attempt in vain — the romance is invaluable.”

“And this is your reply?” stammered Gilbert, a pang darting through his heart, and his eyes becoming dim from emotion.

“I do not reply at all, sir,” said Andree, pushing him aside to allow her room to pass on. The fact was, that Nicole had at that moment made her appearance at the end of the alley, calling her mistress while still a considerable distance off, in order not to interrupt this interview too suddenly, ignorant as she was as to whom Andree's companion might be, for she had not recognized Gilbert through the foliage. But as she approached she saw the young man, recognized him, and stood astounded. She then repented not having made a detour in order to overhear what Gilbert had to say to Mademoiselle de Taverney. The latter addressed her in a softened voice, as if to mark more strongly to Gilbert the haughtiness with which she had spoken to him.

“Well, child,” said she, “what is the matter?”

“The Baron de Taverney and the Duke de Richelieu have come to present their respects to mademoiselle,” replied Nicole.

“Where are they?”

“In mademoiselle's apartments.”

“Come, then.”

And Andree moved away. Nicole followed, not without throwing, as she passed, a sarcastic glance back at Gilbert, who, livid with agitation, and almost frantic with rage, shook his clenched hand in the direction of his departing enemy, and, grinding his teeth, muttered:

“Oh! creature without heart, without soul! I saved your life, I concentrated all my affection on you, I extinguished every feeling which might offend your purity, for in my madness I looked upon you as some superior being — the inhabitant of a higher sphere! Now that I have seen you more nearly, I find you are no more than a woman — and I am a man! But one day or other, Andree de Taverney, I shall be revenged!”

He rushed from the spot, bounding through the thickest of the shrubs like a young wolf wounded by the hunter, who turns and shows his sharp teeth and his bloodshot eyeballs.

CHAPTER CXIV.

Father and Daughter.

WHEN SHE REACHED the opposite extremity of the alley, Andree saw her father and the marshal walking up and down before the vestibule, waiting for her. The two friends seemed in high spirits, and, as they stood with their arms interlaced, presented the most perfect representation of Orestes and Pylades the court had ever witnessed. As Andree approached, the two old men seemed still more joyous, and remarked to each other on her radiant beauty, heightened by her walk and by the emotion she had previously undergone.

The marshal saluted Andree as he would have done a declared Madame Pompadour. This distinction did not escape Taverney, who was delighted at it, but it surprised Andree, from its mixture of respect and gallantry; for the cunning courtier could express as many shades of meaning in a bow as Covielle could French phrases by a single Turkish word.

Andree returned the marshal's salutation, made one equally ceremonious to her father, and then, with fascinating grace, she invited both to follow her to her apartment.

The marshal admired the exquisite neatness which was the only ornament of the furniture and architecture of this retreat. With a few flowers and a little white muslin, Andree had made her rather gloomy chamber, not a palace indeed, but a temple.

The duke seated himself upon an armchair covered with green chintz, beneath a Chinese cornucopia from which drooped bunches of perfumed acacia and maple, mingled with iris and Bengal roses.

Taverney occupied a similar chair; and Andree sank upon a folding stool, her arm resting on a harpsichord also ornamented with flowers, arranged in a large Dresden vase.

“Mademoiselle,” said the marshal, “I come as the bearer, on the part of his majesty, of the compliments which your charming voice and your musical talents drew from every auditor of yesterday's rehearsal. His majesty feared to arouse jealousy by praising you too openly at the time, and he therefore charged me to express to you the pleasure you have caused him.”

Andree blushed, and her blush made her so lovely that the marshal proceeded as if speaking on his own account.

“The king has assured me.” said he, “that he never saw any one at his court who united to such a high degree the gifts of mind and the charms of personal beauty.”

“You forget those of the heart!” said Taverney, with a gush of affection; “Andree is the best of daughters.”

The marshal thought, for a moment, that his old friend was about to weep. Admiring deeply this display of paternal sensibility, he exclaimed:

“The heart! alas, my dear friend! you alone can judge of the tenderness of which mademoiselle's heart is capable. Were I only five-and-twenty years of age, I would lay my life and my fortune at her feet!”

Andree did not know how to receive coolly the full fire of a courtier's homage. She could only murmur some almost inaudible words.

“Mademoiselle,” continued he, “the king requests you will accept a slight testimony of his satisfaction, and he has charged the baron, your father, to transmit it to you. What reply shall I make to his majesty from you?”

“Sir,” replied Andree, animated by no feeling but that respect which is due to a monarch from all his subjects, “assure his majesty of my deep gratitude; tell him that he honors me too highly by deigning to think of me, and that I am not worthy the attention of so powerful a monarch.”

Richelieu seemed in raptures at this reply, which Andree pronounced with a firm voice, and without hesitation. He took her hand, kissed it respectfully, and devouring her with his eyes:

“A royal hand.” said he, “a fairy foot — mind, purity, resolution! — ah! baron, what a treasure! It is not a daughter whom you have — it is a queen!”

With these words he retired, leaving Taverney alone with Andree, his heart swelling with pride and hope.

Whoever had seen this advocate of antiquated theories, this skeptic, this scoffer, inhaling with delight the air of favoritism in its most disreputable channel, would have said that God had blinded at the same moment both his intellect and heart. Taverney alone might have replied, with reference to this change:

“It is not I who have changed — it is the times.”

He remained, then, seated beside Andree, and could not help feeling somewhat embarrassed; for the young girl, with her air of unconquerable serenity, and her clear, limpid, unfathomable look, seemed as if she would penetrate his most secret thoughts.

“Did not M. de Richelieu, sir, say that his majesty had intrusted you with a testimony of his satisfaction? May I ask what it is?”

“Ah!” thought Taverney, “she is curious — so much the better! I could not have expected it. So much the better!”

He drew the casket, which the marshal had given him the evening before, slowly from his pocket, just as a kind papa produces a paper of sweetmeats or a toy, which the children have devoured with their eyes before their hands can reach them.

“Here it is.” said he.

“Ah! jewels!” said Andree.

“Are they to your taste?”

It was a set of pearls of great value. Twelve immense diamonds connected together the rows of pearls, while a diamond clasp, earrings, and a tiara of the same precious material, made the present worth at least thirty thousand crowns.

“Good heavens, father!” exclaimed Andree.

“Well?”

“It is too handsome. The king has made some mistake. I should be ashamed to wear that. I have no dresses suitable to the splendor of these diamonds.”

“Oh! complain of it. I beg!” said Taverney, ironically.

“You do not understand me, sir. I regret that I cannot wear these jewels, because they are too beautiful.”

“The king, who gives the casket, mademoiselle, is generous enough to add the dresses.”

“But, sir, this is goodness on the king's part —

“Do you not think I have deserved it by my services?”

“Ah! pardon me, sir; that is true,” said Andree, drooping her head, but not quite convinced.

After a moment's reflection, she closed the casket.

“I shall not wear these diamonds,” said she.

“And why not?” said Taverney, uneasily.

“Because, my dear father, you and my brother are in want of necessaries, and this superfluity offends my eyes when 1 think of your embarrassments.”

Taverney smiled and pressed her hand.

“Oh!” said he, “do not think of that, my daughter. The king has done more for rue than for you. We are in favor, my dear child. It would neither be respectful as a subject, nor grateful as a woman, to appear before his majesty without the present he has made you.”

“I shall obey, sir.”

“Yes, but you must obey as if it gave you pleasure to do so. These ornaments seem not to be to your taste.”

“I am no judge of diamonds, sir.”

“Learn, then, that the pearls alone are worth fifty thousand livres.”

Andree clasped her hands.

“Sir,” said she, “it is most strange that his majesty should make me such a present; reflect!”

“I do not understand you, mademoiselle,” replied Taverney, dryly.

“If I wear these jewels, I assure you, sir, every one will be greatly surprised.”

“Why?” asked Taverney, in the same tone, and with a cold and imperious glance which made Andree lower her eyes.

“I feel a scruple.”

“Mademoiselle, you must confess that it is strange you should entertain scruples, when even I, your father, feel none. Give me your young modest girls for seeing evil and finding it out, however closely hidden it is, and when none other had remarked it! None like maidenly and simple girls for making old grenadiers like myself blush!”

Andree hid her blushing face in her lovely white hands.

“Oh! my brother,” she murmured to herself, “why are you already so far from me?”

Did Taverney hear these words, or did he guess their purport with that wonderful perspicacity which we know he possessed? We cannot tell, but he immediately changed his tone, and, taking Andree's hand in his:

“Come, my child,” said he, “is not your father your friend?”

A heavenly smile chased the shadow from Andree's brow.

“Shall I not be here to love you — to advise you? Are you not proud to contribute to my happiness and that of your brother?”

“Oh, yes!” said Andree.

The baron fixed a caressing look upon his daughter.

“Well!” said he, “you shall be, as M. de Richelieu said just now, the queen of Taverney. The king has distinguished you, and the dauphiness also.” added he, hastily. “In your intimacy with these two august personages, you will found our future fortunes by making them happy. The friend of the dauphiness, and — of the king! What a glorious career! You have superior talents and unrivaled beauty, a pure and healthy mind untainted by avarice and ambition. Oh! my child, what a part you might play! Do you remember the maiden who soothed the last moments of Charles VI.? Her name is cherished in France. Do you remember Agnes Sorel, who restored the honor of the French crown? All good Frenchmen respect her memory. Andree, you will be the support of the old age of our glorious monarch. He will cherish you as his daughter, and you will reign in France by the divine right of beauty, courage, and fidelity!”

Andree opened her eyes wide with astonishment. The baron resumed, without giving her time to reflect.

“With a single look you will drive away these wretched creatures who dishonor the throne; your presence will purify the court. To your generous influence the nobility of the kingdom will owe the return of pure morals, politeness, and real gallantry. My daughter, you may be, you must be, the regenerating star of your country, and a crown of glory to your name.”

“But,” said Andree, all bewildered, “what must I do to effect all this?”

The baron reflected for a moment.

“Andree,” said he, “I have often told you that in this world you must force men to be virtuous by making them love virtue. Sullen, melancholy, sermonizing virtue makes even those fly who wish most to approach her. Lend to your virtue all the allurements of coquetry — I had almost said of vice. It is an easy task for a talented and high-minded girl such as you are. Make yourself so lovely that the court shall talk only of you; make yourself so agreeable to the king that he cannot do without you. Be so reserved and discreet toward all, except his majesty, that people will soon attribute to you all that power which you cannot fail ultimately to obtain.”

“I do not exactly understand your last advice,” said Andree.

“Trust yourself to my guidance — you will fulfill my wishes without understanding them; the best plan for such a wise and generous creature as you are. But, by-the-by, to enable you to put in practice my first counsel, I must furnish your purse. Take these hundred louis-d'ors and dress in a manner worthy of the rank to which you belong, since his majesty has distinguished you.”

Taverney gave the hundred louis to his daughter, kissed her hand, and left her.

He returned with rapid steps along the alley by which be had come, so much engrossed in his reflections that he did not perceive Nicole in eager conference with a nobleman at the extremity of the Bosquet ties Amours.

CHAPTER CXV.

What Althotas Wanted to Complete His Elixir.

THE DAY SUBSEQUENT to this conversation, about four o'clock in the afternoon. Balsamo was seated in his cabinet, in the Rue Saint Claude, occupied in reading a letter which Fritz had just brought him. The letter was without signature. He turned it over and over in his hands.

“I know this writing,” said he; “large, irregular, slightly tremulous, and full of faults in orthography.”

And he read it once more. It ran as follows:

“MY LORD COUNT — A person who consulted you some time before the fall of the late ministry, and who had consulted you a long time previously, will wait upon you to-day, in order to have another consultation. Will your numerous occupations permit you to grant this person a quarter of an hour between four and five this evening?”

After reading this for the second or third time. Balsamo fell back into his train of reflection.

“It is not worth while to consult Lorenza for such a trifle,” said he; “besides, can I no longer guess myself? The writing is large — a sign of aristocracy; irregular and trembling — a sign of age; full of faults in orthography — it must be a courtier. — Ah! stupid creature that I am! it is the Duke de Richelieu! Most certainly I shall have a half hour at your service, my lord duke — an hour did I say? — a day! Make my time your own. Are you not, without knowing it, one of my mysterious agents, one of my familiar demons? Do we not both pursue the same task? Do we not both shake the monarchy at the same time — you by making yourself its presiding genius, I by declaring myself its enemy? Come, then, duke, I am ready!”

And Balsamo consulted his watch to see how long he must yet wait for the duke. At that moment a bell sounded in the cornice of the ceiling.

“What can be the matter?” said Balsamo, starting; “Lorenza calls me — she wishes to see me. Can anything unpleasant have happened to her? or is it a return of those fits of passion which I have so often witnessed, and of which I have been at times the victim? Yesterday she was thoughtful, gentle, resigned; she was as I loved to see her. Poor child! I must go to her.”

He arranged his dress, glanced at the mirror to see if his hair was not too much in disorder, and proceeded toward the stairs, after having replied to Lorenza's request by a ring similar to her own.

But, according to his invariable custom, Balsamo paused in the apartment adjoining that occupied by the young girl, and turning, with his arms crossed, toward the direction where he supposed her to be, he commanded her to sleep, with that powerful will which recognized no obstacles. Then, as if doubting his own power, or as if he thought it necessary to redouble his precautions, he looked into the apartment through an almost imperceptible crevice in the wood-work.

Lorenza was sleeping upon a couch, to which she had, no doubt, tottered under the influence of her master's will, and had sought a support for her sinking limbs. A painter could not have suggested a more poetic attitude. Panting and subdued beneath the power of the subtle fluid which Balsamo had poured upon her, Lorenza seemed like one of those beautiful Ariadnes of Vanloo, with heaving breasts and features expressive of fatigue or despair.

Balsamo entered by his usual passage, and stopped for a moment before her to contemplate her sleeping countenance. He then awoke her.

As she opened her eyes, a piercing glance escaped from between the half-closed lids; then, as if to collect her scattered thoughts, she smoothed back her long hair with her hands, dried her lips, moist with slumber, and seemed to reflect anxiously.

Balsamo looked at her with some anxiety. He had been long accustomed to the sudden transition from winning love to outbursts of anger and hatred; but this appearance, to which he was entirely unused — the calmness with which Lorenza on this occasion received him, instead of giving way to a burst of hatred — announced something more serious, perhaps, than be had yet witnessed.

Lorenza sat up on the couch, and fixing her deep soft eyes upon Balsamo, she said:

“Pray be good enough to take a seat beside me.” Balsamo started at the sound of her voice, expressing as it did such unusual mildness.

“Beside you!” said he. “You know, my Lorenza, that I have but one wish — to pass my life at your feet.”

“Sir,” replied Lorenza, in the same tone, “I pray you to be seated, although, indeed, I have not much to say to you; but, short as it is, I shall say it better. I think, if you are seated.”

“Now, as ever, my beloved Lorenza, I shall do as you wish.”

And he took a chair near Lorenza, who was still seated upon the couch.

“Sir,” said she, fixing her heavenly eyes upon Balsamo, “I have summoned you to request from you a favor.”

“Oh! my Lorenza,” exclaimed Balsamo, more and more delighted, “anything you wish! speak — you shall have everything!”

“I wish for only one; but I warn you that I wish for this one most ardently.”

“Speak, Lorenza, speak! — should it cost my fortune, or half my life.”

“It will cost you nothing, sir, but a moment of your time,” replied the young girl.

Balsamo, enchanted with the turn the conversation was taking, was already tasking his fertile imagination to supply a list of those wishes which Lorenza was likely to form, and, above all, those which he could satisfy. “She will perhaps,” thought he, “ask for a servant or a companion. Well! even this immense sacrifice — for it would compromise my secret and my friends — I will make, for the poor child is in truth very unhappy in her solitude.”

“Speak quickly, my Lorenza,” said he aloud, with a smile full of love.

“Sir,” said she, “you are aware that I am pining away with melancholy and weariness.”

Balsamo sighed, and bent his head in token of assent.

“My youth,” continued Lorenza, “is wasted; my days are one long sigh — my nights a continual terror. I am growing old in solitude and anguish.”

“Your life is what you have made it, Lorenza.” said Balsamo; “it is not my fault that this life which you have made so sad is not one to make a queen envious.”

“Be it so. Therefore it is I, you see, who have recourse to you in my distress.”

“Thanks, Lorenza.”

“You are a good Christian, you have sometimes told me, although — ”

“Although you think me lost to heaven, you would say. I complete your thought, Lorenza.”

“Suppose nothing except what I tell you, sir; and pray do not conjecture thus groundlessly.”

“Proceed, then.”

“Well! instead of leaving me plunged in this despair and wrath, grant me, since I am of no service to you —

She stopped to glance at Balsamo, but he had regained his command over himself, and she only saw a cold look and contracted brow bent upon her.

She became animated as she met his almost threatening eye.

“Grant me,” continued she, “not liberty — for I know that some mysterious secret, or rather your will, which seems all-powerful to me, condemns me to perpetual captivity — but at least to see human faces, to hear other voices than yours — permit me, in short, to go out, to walk, to take exercise.”

“I had foreseen this request, Lorenza,” said Balsamo, taking her hand; “and you know that long since your wish has been also my own.”

“Well, then!” exclaimed Lorenza.

“But,” resumed Balsamo, “you have yourself prevented it. Like a madman that I was — and every man who loves is such — I allowed you to penetrate into some of my secrets, both of science and politics. You know that Althotas has discovered the philosopher's stone, and seeks the elixir of life. You know that I and my companions conspire against the monarchies of this world. The first of these secrets would cause me to be burned as a sorcerer — the other would be sufficient to condemn me to be broken on the wheel for high treason. Besides, you have threatened me. Lorenza — you have told me that you would try every means to regain your liberty; and, this liberty once regained, that the first use you would make of it would be to denounce me to M. de Sartines. Did you not say so?”

“What can you expect? At times I lash myself to fury, and then I am half mad.”

“Are you calm and sensible now, Lorenza? — and can we converse quietly together?”

“I hope so.”

“If I grant you the liberty you desire, shall I find in you a devoted and submissive wife — a faithful and gentle companion? You know, Lorenza, this is my most ardent wish.”

The young girl was silent.

"In one word — will you love me?" asked Balsamo, with a sigh.

"I am unwilling to promise what I cannot perform," said Lorenza; "neither love nor hatred depends upon ourselves. I hope that God, in return for your good actions, will permit my hatred toward you to take flight, and love to return."

"Unfortunately, Lorenza, such a promise is not a sufficient guarantee that I may trust you. I require a positive, sacred oath, to break which would be a sacrilege — an oath which binds you in this world as in the next — which would bring with it your death in this world and your damnation in that which is to come."

Lorenza was silent.

"Will you take this oath?"

Lorenza hid her face in her hands, and her breast heaved under the influence of contending emotions.

"Take this oath, Lorenza, as I shall dictate it in the solemn terms in which I shall clothe it, and you shall be free."

"What must I swear, sir?"

"Swear that you will never, under any pretext, betray what has come to your knowledge relative to the secrets of Althotas."

"Yes, I will swear it."

"Swear that you will never divulge what you know of our political meetings."

"I will swear that also."

"With the oath and in the form which I shall dictate?"

"Yes. Is that all?"

"No; swear — and this is the principal one, Lorenza; for the other matters would only endanger my life, while upon the one I am about to name depends my entire happiness — swear that you will never, either at the instigation of another's will or in obedience to your own, leave me, Lorenza. Swear this, and you are free."

The young girl started as if cold steel had pierced her heart.

"And in what form must the oath be taken?"

"We will enter a church together, and communicate at the same altar. You will swear on the host never to betray anything relating to Althotas or my companions. You will swear never to leave me. We will then divide the host in two, and each will take the half, you swearing before God that you will never betray me, and I that I will ever do my utmost to make you happy.”

“No!” said Lorenza; “such an oath is a sacrilege.”

“An oath, Lorenza, is never a sacrilege,” replied Balsamo sadly, “but when you make it with the intention of not keeping it.”

“I will not take this oath,” said Lorenza; “I should fear to peril my soul.”

“It is not — I repeat it — in taking an oath that you peril your soul; it is in breaking it.”

“I cannot do it.”

“Then learn patience, Lorenza,” said Balsamo, without anger, but with the deepest sadness.

Lorenza's brow darkened like an overshadowed plain when a cloud passes between it and the sun.

“Ah! you refuse?” said she.

“Not so, Lorenza; it is you who refuse.”

A nervous movement indicated all the impatience the young girl felt at these words.

“Listen, Lorenza!” said Balsamo. “This is what I will do for you, and, believe me, it is much.”

“Speak!” said the young girl, with a bitter smile. “Let me see how far your generosity will extend.”

“God, chance, or fate — call it what you will, Lorenza, has united us in an indissoluble bond; do not attempt to break this bond in this life, for death alone can accomplish that.”

“Proceed; I know that,” said Lorenza impatiently.

“Well, in one week, Lorenza — whatever it may cost me, and however great the sacrifice I make — in eight days you shall have a companion.”

“Where?” asked she.

“Here.”

“Here!” she exclaimed, “behind these bars — behind these inexorable doors, these iron doors — a fellow-prisoner! Oh, you cannot mean it, sir; that is not what I ask.”

“Lorenza, it is all that I can grant.”

The young girl made a more vehement gesture of impatience.

“My sweetest girl,” resumed Balsamo mildly, “reflect a little; with a companion you will more easily support the weight of this necessary misfortune.”

“You mistake, sir. Until now I have grieved only for myself, not for others. This trial only was wanting, and I see that you wish to make me undergo it. Yes, you will immure beside me a victim like myself; I shall see her grow thinner and paler, and pine away with grief, even as I do. I shall see her dash herself, as I do, against these walls — that hateful door — which I examine twenty times each day to see where it opens to give you egress; and when my companion, your victim, has, like me, wounded her hands against the marble blocks in her endeavors to disjoin them; when, like me, she has worn out her eyelids with her tears; when she is dead as I am, in soul and mind, and you have two corpses in place of one, you will say, in your hateful benevolence; 'These two young creatures amuse themselves — they keep each other company — they are happy!' Oh! no, no, no! — a thousand times no!”

And she passionately stamped her foot upon the ground, while Balsamo endeavored in vain to calm her.

“Come. Lorenza,” said he, “I entreat you to show a little more mildness and calmness. Let us reason on the matter.”

“He asks me to be calm, to be gentle, to reason! The executioner tells the victim whom he is torturing to be gentle, and the innocent martyr to be calm!”

“Yes, Lorenza; I ask you to be gentle and calm, for your anger cannot change our destiny; it only embitters it. Accept what I offer you, Lorenza; I will give you a companion who will hug her chains, since they have procured for her your friendship. You shall not see a sad and tearful face, such as you fear, but smiles and gayety which will smooth your brow. Come, dearest Lorenza, accept what I offer; for I swear to you that I cannot offer you more.”

“That means that you will place near me a hireling, to whom you will say; 'I give you in charge of a poor insane creature, who imagines herself ill and about to die; soothe her, share her confinement, attend to her comforts, and I will recompense you when she is no more.'

“Oh, Lorenza! Lorenza!”

“No, that is not it; I am mistaken,” continued Lorenza, with bitter irony; “I guess badly. But what can you expect? I am so ignorant, I know so little of the world. You will say to the woman; 'Watch over the madwoman, she is dangerous; report all her actions, all her thoughts, to me. Watch over her waking and sleeping.' And you will give her as much gold as she requires, for gold costs you nothing — you make it!”

“Lorenza, you wander; in the name of Heaven, Lorenza, read my heart better! In giving you a companion, my beloved, I compromise such mighty interests that you would tremble for me if you did not hate me. In giving you a companion, I endanger my safety, my liberty, my very life, and, notwithstanding, I risk all to save you a little weariness.”

“Weariness!” exclaimed Lorenza, with a wild and frantic laugh which made Balsamo shudder. “He calls it weariness!”

“Well! suffering. Yes, you are right. Lorenza; they are poignant sufferings. I repeat, Lorenza, have patience; a day will come when all your sufferings will cease — a day will come when you shall be free and happy.”

“Will you permit me to retire to a convent and take the vows!”

“To a convent?”

“I will pray — first for you and then for myself. I shall be closely confined indeed, but I shall at least have a garden, air, space. I shall have a cemetery to walk in, and can seek beforehand among the tombs for the place of my repose. I shall have companions who grieve for their own sorrows, and not for mine. Permit me to retire to a convent, and I will take any vows you wish. A convent, Balsamo! I implore you on my knees to grant this request.”

“Lorenza! Lorenza! we cannot part. Mark me well — we are indissolubly connected in this world! Ask for nothing which exceeds the limits of this house.”

Balsamo pronounced these last words in so calm and determined a tone, that Lorenza did not even repeat the request.

“Then you refuse me?” said she, dejectedly.

“I cannot grant it.”

“Is what you say irrevocable?”

“It is.”

“Well, I have something else then to ask,” said she, with a smile.

“Oh! my good Lorenza, ever smile thus — only smile upon me, and you will compel me to do all you wish!”

“Oh, yes. I shall make you do all that I wish, provided I do everything that pleases you. Well! be it so; I will be as reasonable as possible.”

“Speak, Lorenza, speak!”

“Just now you said; 'One day, Lorenza, your sufferings shall cease — one day you shall be free and happy.'”

“Oh, yes, I said so, and I swear before Heaven that I await that day as impatiently as yourself.”

“Well, this day may arrive immediately, Balsamo,” said the young Italian, with a caressing smile, which her husband had hitherto only seen in her sleep. “I am weary, very weary — you can understand my feelings; I am so young, and have already suffered so much! Well, my friend — for you say you are my friend — listen to me; grant me this happy day immediately.”

“I hear you,” said Balsamo, inexpressibly agitated.

“I end my appeal by the request I should have made at the commencement. Acharat.”

The young girl shuddered. “Speak, my beloved!”

“Well! I have often remarked, when you made experiments on some unfortunate animal, and when you told me that these experiments were necessary to the cause of humanity — I have often remarked that you possessed the secret of inflicting death, sometimes by a drop of poison, sometimes by an opened vein; that this death was calm, rapid as lightning, and that these unfortunate and innocent creatures, condemned as I am to the miseries of captivity, were instantly liberated by death, the first blessing they had received since their birth. Well — She stopped and turned pale.

“Well, my Lorenza?” repeated Balsamo.

“Well, what you sometimes do to these unfortunate animals for the interest of science, do now to me in the name of humanity. Do it for a friend, who will bless you with her whole heart, who will kiss your hands with the deepest gratitude, if you grant her what she asks. Do it, Balsamo, for me, who kneel here at your feet, who promise you with my last sigh more love and happiness than you caused me during my whole life! — for me, Balsamo, who promise you a frank and beaming smile as I quit this earth. By the soul of your mother! by the sufferings of our blessed Lord! by all that is holy and solemn and sacred in the world of the living and of the dead! I implore you, kill me! kill me!”

“Lorenza!” exclaimed Balsamo, taking her in his arms as she rose after uttering these last words; “Lorenza, you are delirious. Kill you! You I my love! my life!”

Lorenza disengaged herself by a violent effort from Balsamo's grasp, and fell on her knees.

“I will never rise,” said she, “until you have granted my request. Kill me without a shock, without violence, without pain; grant me this favor, since you say you love me — send me to sleep as you have often done — only take away the awaking — it is despair!”

“Lorenza, my beloved!” said Balsamo. “Oh, God! do you not see how you torture my heart? What! you are really so unhappy, then? Come, my Lorenza, rise; do not give way to despair. Alas! do you hate me then so very much?”'

“I hate slavery, constraint, solitude; and as you make me a slave, unhappy and solitary — well, yes! I hate you!”

“But I love you too dearly to see you die, Lorenza. You shall not die, therefore; I will effect the most difficult cure I have yet undertaken, my Lorenza — I will make you love life.”

“No, no, that is impossible; you have made me long for death.”

“Lorenza, for pity's sake! — I promise that soon — ”

“ Life or death!” exclaimed the young woman, becoming more and more excited. “This is the decisive day — will you give me life, that is to say liberty? — will you give me death, that is to say repose?”

“Life, my Lorenza! life!”

“Then that is liberty.”

Balsamo was silent.

“If not, death — a gentle death — by a draught, a needle's point — death during sleep! Repose! repose! repose!”

“Life and patience, Lorenza!”

Lorenza burst into a terrible laugh, and making a spring backward, drew from her bosom a knife, with a blade so fine and sharp that it glittered in her hand like a flash of lightning.

Balsamo uttered a cry, but it was too late. When he rushed forward and reached the hand, the weapon had already fulfilled its task, and had fallen on Lorenza's bleeding breast. Balsamo had been dazzled by the flash — — he was blinded by the sight of blood.

In his turn he uttered a terrible cry, and seized Lorenza round the waist, meeting in midway her arm raised to deal a second blow, and receiving the weapon in his undefended hand. Lorenza with a mighty effort drew the weapon away, and the sharp blade elided through Balsamo's fingers. The blood streamed from his mutilated hand.

Then, instead of continuing the struggle. Balsamo extended his bleeding hand toward the young woman, and said with a voice of irresistible command; “Sleep, Lorenza, sleep! — I will it.”

But on this occasion the irritation was such that the obedience was not as prompt as usual.

“No, no,” murmured Lorenza, tottering and attempting to strike again. “No, I will not sleep.”

“Sleep, I tell you!” said Balsamo a second time, advancing a step toward her; “sleep, I command it!”

This time the power of Balsamo's will was so great that all resistance was in vain. Lorenza heaved a sigh, let the knife fall from her hand, and sank back upon the cushions.

Her eyes still remained open, but their threatening glare gradually died away, and finally they closed; her stiffened neck drooped; her head fell upon her shoulder like that of a wounded bird; a nervous shudder passed through her frame — Lorenza was asleep.

Balsamo hastily opened her robe, and examined the wound, which seemed slight, although the blood flowed from it in abundance.

He then pressed the lion's eye, the spring started, and the back of the fireplace opened; then, unfastening the counter-poise which made the trap-door of Althotas's chamber descend, he leaped upon it and mounted to the old man's laboratory.

“Ah! it is you, Acharat,” said the latter, who was still seated in his armchair; “you are aware that in a week I shall be a hundred years old. You are aware that before that time I must have the blood of a child or of an unmarried female.”

But Balsamo heard him not. He hastened to the cupboard in which the magic balsams were kept, seized one of the phials of which he had often proved the efficacy, again mounted upon the trap, stamped his foot, and descended to the lower apartment.

Althotas rolled his armchair to the mouth of the trap with the intention of seizing him by his dress.

“Do you hear, wretch?” said he; “do you hear? If in a week I have not a child or an unmarried woman to complete my elixir, I am a dead man!”

Balsamo turned; the old man's eyes seemed to glare in the midst of his unearthly and motionless features, as if they alone were alive.

“Yes, yes,” replied Balsamo; “yes, be calm; you shall have what you want.”

Then, letting go the spring, the trap mounted again, fitting like an ornament in the ceiling of the room.

After which he rushed into Lorenza's apartment, which he had just reached when Fritz's bell rang.

“M. do Richelieu!” muttered Balsamo; “oh! duke and peer as he is, he must wait.”

CHAPTER CXVI.

M. De Richelieu's Two Drops of Water.

M. DE RICHELIEU left the house in the Rue Saint Claude at half-past four. What his errand with Balsamo was will explain itself in the sequel.

M. de Taverney had dined with his daughter, as the dauphiness had given her leave to absent herself on this day in order that she might receive her father.

They were at dessert, when M. de Richelieu, ever the bearer of good news, made his appearance to announce to his friend that the king would not give merely a company to Philip, but a regiment. Taverney was exuberant in his expressions of joy, and Andree warmly thanked the marshal.

The conversation took a turn which may be easily imagined after what had passed; Richelieu spoke of nothing but the king, Andree of nothing but her brother, and Taverney of nothing but Andree. The latter announced in the course of conversation that she was set at liberty from her attendance on the dauphiness; that her royal highness was receiving a visit from two German princes, her relations; and that in order to pass a few hours of liberty with them which might remind her of the court of Vienna, Marie Antoinette had dismissed all her attendants, even her lady of honor; which had so deeply shocked Madame de Noailles that she had gone to lay her grievances at the king's feet.

Taverney was, he said, delighted at this, since he had thus an opportunity of conversing with Andree about many things relating to their fortune and name. This observation made Richelieu propose to retire, in order to leave the father and daughter quite alone; but Mademoiselle de Taverney would not permit it, so he remained.

Richelieu was in a vein of moralizing; he painted most eloquently the degradation into which the French nobility had fallen, forced as they were to submit to the ignominious yoke of these favorites of chance, these contraband queens, instead of the favorites of the olden times, who were almost as noble as their august lovers — women who reigned over the sovereign by their beauty and their love, and over his subjects by their birth, their strength of mind, and their loyal and pure patriotism.

Andree was surprised at the close analogy between Richelieu's words and those she had heard from the Baron de Taverney a few days previously.

Richelieu then launched into a theory of virtue so spiritual, so pagan, so French, that Andree was obliged to confess that she was not at all virtuous according to M. de Richelieu's theories, and that true virtue, as the marshal understood it, was the virtue of Madame Chateauroux, Mademoiselle de la Valliere, and Mademoiselle Fosseuse.

From argument to argument, from proof to proof, Richelieu at last became so clear that Andree no longer understood a word of what he said. On this fooling the conversation continued until about seven o'clock in the evening, when the marshal rose, being obliged, as he said, to pay his court to the king at Versailles.

In passing through the apartment to take his hat, he met Nicole, who had always something to do wherever M. de Richelieu was.

“My girl,” said he, tapping her on the shoulder, “you shall see me out. I want you to carry a bouquet which Madame de Noailles cut for me in her garden, and which she commissioned me to present to the Countess d'Egmont.”

Nicole curtseyed like the peasant girls in M. Rousseau's comic operas, whereupon the marshal took leave of father and daughter, exchanged a significant glance with Taverney, made a youthful bow to Andree, and retired.

“With the reader's permission, we will leave the baron and Andree conversing about the fresh mark of favor conferred on Philip, and follow the marshal. By this means we shall know what was his errand at the Rue Saint Claude, where he arrived at such a fearful moment.

Richelieu descended the stairs, resting on Nicole's shoulder, and as soon as they were in the garden he stopped, and looking her in the face said:

“Ah! little one, so we have a lover.”

“I! my lord marshal!” exclaimed Nicole, blushing crimson, and retreating a step backward.

“Oh; perhaps you are not called Nicole Legay?”

“Yes, my lord marshal.”

“Well, Nicole Legay has a lover.”

“Oh! indeed!”

“Yes, faith, a certain well-looking rascal, whom she used to meet in the Rue Coq-Heron, and who has followed her to Versailles.”

“My lord duke, I swear — ”

“A sort of exempt, called — shall I tell you, child, how Mademoiselle Legay's lover is called?”

Nicole's last hope was that the marshal was ignorant of the name of the happy mortal.

“Oh! yes, my lord marshal, tell me, since you have made a beginning!”

“Who is called M. Beausire,” repeated the marshal, “and who in truth does not belie his name.”

Nicole clasped her hands with an affectation of prudery which did not in the least impose on Richelieu.

“It seems,” said he, “we make appointments with him at Trianon. Peste! in a royal chateau! that is a serious matter. One may be discharged for these freaks, my sweet one, and M. de Sartines sends all young ladies who are discharged from the royal chateau to the Salpetriere.”

Nicole began to be uneasy.

“My lord,” said she, “I swear to you that if M. Beausire boasts of being my lover, he is a fool and a villain, for indeed I am innocent.”

“I shall not contradict you,” said Richelieu; “but have you made appointments with him or not?”

“My lord duke, a rendezvous is no proof of — ”

“Have you or have you not? Answer me.”

“My lord —

“You have. Very well; I do not blame you, my dear child. Besides, I like pretty girls who display their claims, and I have always assisted them in so doing to the utmost of my power. Only, as your friend and protector, I warn you.”

“But have I been seen then?” asked Nicole.

“It seems so, since I am aware of it.”

“My lord,” said Nicole resolutely, “I have not been seen; it is impossible!”

“As to that, I know nothing; but the report is very prevalent, and must tend to fasten attention on your mistress. Now, you must be aware that being more the friend of the Taverneys than of the Legays, it is my duty to give the baron a hint.”

“Oh! my lord!” exclaimed Nicole, terrified at the turn the conversation was taking, “you will ruin me. Although innocent, I shall be discharged on the mere suspicion.”

“In that case, my poor child, you shall be discharged at all events; for even now some evil-minded person or other, having taken offense at these rendezvous, innocent though they be, has informed Madame de Noailles of them.”

“Madame de Noailles! good heavens!”

“Yes; you see the danger is urgent.”

Nicole clasped her hands in despair.

“It is unfortunate, I am aware,” said Richelieu; “but what the deuce can you do?”

“And you, who said just now you were my protector — you, who have proved yourself to be such — can you no longer protect me?” asked Nicole, with a wheedling cunning worthy of a woman of thirty.

“Yes, pardieu! I can protect you.”

“Well, my lord?”

“Yes, but I will not.”

“Oh! my lord duke.”

“Yes; you are pretty, I know that, and your beautiful eyes are telling me all sorts of things; but I have lately become rather blind, my poor Nicole, and I no longer understand the language of lovely eyes. Once I would have offered you an asylum in my pavilion of Hanover, but those days are over.”

“Yet you once before received me there,” said Nicole, angrily.

“Ah! that is ungrateful in you, Nicole, to reproach me with having taken you there, when I did so to render you a service; for confess that without M. Rafte's assistance, who made you a charming brunette, you would never have entered Trianon, which, after all, perhaps, would have been better than to be dismissed from it now. But why the devil did you give a rendezvous to M. Beausire, and at the very gate of the stables, too?”

“So you know that also?” said Nicole, who saw that she must change her tactics, and place herself at the marshal's discretion.

“Parbleu! you see I know it; and Madame de Noailles too. This very evening you have another appointment.”

“That is true, my lord; but on my faith I shall not go.”

“Of course, you are warned; but M. Beausire is not warned, and he will be seized. Then, as he will not like of course to be taken for a thief and be hanged, or for a spy and be whipped, he will prefer to say — especially as there is no disgrace in confessing; it — 'Unhand me! I am the lover of the pretty Nicole.'"

"My lord duke, I will send to warn him."

"Impossible, my poor child! by whom could you send? By him who betrayed you, perhaps?"

"Alas! that is true," said Nicole, feigning despair.

"What a becoming thing remorse is!" exclaimed Richelieu.

Nicole covered her face with her hands, taking care, however, to leave space enough between her fingers to allow her to observe every look and gesture of Richelieu.

"You are really adorable!" said the duke, whom none of these little tricks could escape; "why am I not fifty years younger? No matter. Parbleu! Nicole, I will bring you out of the scrape."

"Oh, my lord! if you do that, my gratitude — "

"I don't want it, Nicole. On the contrary. I shall give you most disinterested assistance."

"Oh! how good of you, my lord; I thank you from the bottom of my heart."

"Do not thank me yet; as yet you know nothing. Diable! wait till you hear more."

"I will submit to anything, provided Mademoiselle Andree does not dismiss me."

"Ah! then you are very fond of Trianon?"

"Very, my lord."

"Well. Nicole, in the very first place, get rid of this feeling."

"But why so, if I am not discovered, my lord?"

"Whether you are discovered or not, you must leave Trianon."

"Oh! why?"

"I shall tell you; because if Madame de Noailles has found you out, no one, not even the king, could save you."

"Ah! if I could only see the king."

"In the second place, even if you are not found out, I myself should be the means of dismissing you."

"You?"

"Immediately."

"In truth, my lord marshal, I do not understand you."

"It is as I have had the honor of telling you."

"And that is your protection, is it?"

"If you do not wish for it, there is yet time; you have only to say the word. Nicole."

"Oh, yes! my lord, on the contrary I do wish for it."

"And I will grant it."

"Well?"

"Well, this is what I will do for you. Hark ye!"

"Speak, my lord."

"Instead of getting you discharged, and perhaps imprisoned. I will make you rich and free."

"Rich and free?"

"Yes."

"And what must I do in order to be rich and free?"

"Almost nothing."

"But what — ?"

"What I am about to tell you."

"Is it difficult?"

"Mere child's play."

"Then," said Nicole, "there is something to do?"

"Ah, dame! you know the motto of this world of ours, Nicole — nothing for nothing!"

"And that which I have to do, is it for myself or for you?"

The duke looked at Nicole.

"Adieu!" said he, "the little masker, how cunning she is!"

"Well, finish, my lord duke."

"Well! it is for yourself," replied he, boldly.

"Ah!" said Nicole, who, perceiving that the marshal had need of her services, already feared him no longer, while her ingenious brain was busily endeavoring to discover the truth amid the windings which, from habit, her companion always used; "what shall I have to do for myself, my lord duke?"

"This; M. Beausire comes at half-past seven, does he not?"

"Yes, my lord marshal, that is his hour."

"It is now ten minutes past seven."

"" That is also true."

"If I say the word he will be arrested."

“” Yes, but you will not say it.”

“No. You will go to him, and tell him — but in the first place, Nicole, do you love this young man?”

“Why. I have given him a rendezvous.”

“That is no reason you may wish to marry him. Women take such strange caprices.”

Nicole burst into a loud laugh.

“Marry him!” said she. “Ha! ha! ha!”

Richelieu was astounded; he had not, even at court, met many women of this stamp.

“Well,” said he, “so be it. You do not wish to marry him; but in that case you love him. So much the better.”

“Agreed! I love M. Beausire. Let us take that for granted, my lord, and proceed!”

“Peste! what strides you make!”

“Of course. You may readily imagine that I am anxious to know what remains for me to do.”

“In the first place, since you love him, you must fly with him.”

“Dame! if you wish it particularly, I suppose I must.”

“Oh! I wish nothing about it — not so fast, little one.”

Nicole saw that she was going too far, and that as yet she had neither the secret nor the money of her cunning opponent. She stooped, therefore, only to rise again afterward.

“My lord,” said she. “I await your orders.”

“Well! you must go to M. Beausire and say to him; 'We are discovered; but I have a protector who will save you from Saint Lazarus, and me from the Salpetriere. Let us fly.”

Nicole looked at Richelieu.

“Fly?” repeated she.

Richelieu understood her cunning and expressive look.

“Parbleu!” said he, “of course, I shall pay the expenses.”

Nicole asked for no further explanation. It was plain that she must know all, since she was to be paid.

The marshal saw what an important point Nicole had gained, and hastened to say all he had to say, just as a gambler is eager to pay when he has lost, in order to have the disagreeable task of paying over.

“Do you know what you are thinking of, Nicole?” said he.

"Faith, no," replied the girl; "but I suppose you, my lord marshal, who know so many things, can guess it."

"Nicole," he replied, "you were reflecting that if you fled, your mistress might require you during the night, and not finding you, might give the alarm, which would expose you to the risk of being overtaken and seized."

"No," said Nicole, "I was not thinking of that, because, after all, my lord, I think I would prefer remaining here."

"But if M. Beausire is taken?"

"Well, I cannot help it."

"But if he confess?"

"Let him confess."

"Ah!" said Richelieu, beginning to be uneasy, "but in that case you are lost."

"No; for Mademoiselle Andree is kindness itself, and as she loves me at heart, she will speak to the king for me; so, even if M. de Beausire is punished, I shall not share his punishment."

The marshal bit his lip.

"Nicole," said he, "I tell you you are a fool. Mademoiselle Andree is not on such good terms with the king, and I will have you arrested immediately if you do not listen to me as I wish. Do you hear, you little viper?"

"Oh! my lord, my ears do not serve me so ill. I hear you, but I form my own conclusions."

"Good. Then you will go at once and arrange your plan of flight with M. Beausire."

"But how? Do you imagine, my lord marshal, that I shall expose myself to the risk of flight, when you tell me yourself that mademoiselle might awake, might ask for me, give the alarm, and a great deal more which I know not, but which you, my lord, who are a man of experience, must have foreseen?"

Richelieu bit his lip again, but this time more deeply than he had done before.

"Well, minion, if I have thought of these consequences, I have also thought of how to avoid them."

"And how will you manage to prevent mademoiselle from calling me?"

"By preventing her awaking."

"Bah! she awakes ten times during the night."

"Then she has the same malady that I have?" said Richelieu, calmly.

“The same that you have?” said Nicole, laughing.

“Yes. I also awake ten times every night, only I have a remedy for this sleeplessness. She must use the same remedy, or if not, you will do it for her.”

“What do you mean, my lord?”

“What does your mistress take in the evening before she goes to bed?”

“What does she take?”

“Yes, it is the fashion now to drink something in the evening. Some take orangeade or lemonade, others take eau-de-Melisse, others — ”

“Mademoiselle drinks only a glass of pure water in the evening before going to bed; sometimes sweetened and flavored with orange-water, if her nerves are weak.”

“Ah! excellent!” said Richelieu.” just as I do myself. My remedy will suit her admirably.”

“ How so?”

“I pour one drop of a certain liquid in my beverage, and I then never wake all night.”

Nicole tasked her brain to discover to what end the marshal's diplomacy tended.

“You do not answer?” said he.

“I was just thinking that mademoiselle has not your cordial.”

“I will give you some.”

“Ah!” thought Nicole, seeing at last a ray of light through the darkness.

“You must put two drops of it in your mistress's glass — neither more nor less, remember — and she will sleep soundly, so that she will not call you, and consequently you will gain time.”

“Oh! if that is all, it is very simple.”

“You will give her the two drops?”

“Certainly.”

“You promise me?”

“I presume it is for my own interest to do so; besides, I will lock the door so carefully — ”

“By no means.” said Richelieu hastily. “That is exactly what you must not do; on the contrary, you must leave her room door open.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Nicole, with suppressed joy. She now understood all. Richelieu saw it plainly. “Is that all?” inquired she.

"Absolutely all. Now you may go and tell your exempt to pack up his trunks."

"Unfortunately, sir, it would be useless to tell him to fill his purse."

"You know that is my affair."

"Yes, I remember your lordship was kind enough to say — "

"Come, Nicole, how much do you want?"

"For what?"

"For pouring in the two drops of water."

"For that, nothing, my lord, since you assure me I do so for my own interest; it would not be just that you should pay me for attending to my own interest. But for leaving mademoiselle's door open — ah! for that I warn you I must have a good round sum."

"At one word, how much?"

"I must have twenty thousand francs, my lord."

Richelieu started.

"Nicole." said he, with a sigh, "you will make some figure in the world."

"I ought to do so, my lord, for I begin to believe now that I shall attract attention. But with your twenty thousand francs we shall smooth difficulties."

"Go and warn M. Beausire, Nicole; and when you return I will give you the money."

"My lord, M. Beausire is very incredulous, and he will not believe what I tell him unless I can give him proofs."

Richelieu pulled out a handful of banknotes from his pocket.

"Here is something on account," said he; "in this purse there are a hundred double louis."

"Your lordship will settle the account in full and give me the balance then, when I have spoken to M. Beausire?"

"No, pardieu! I will settle it on the spot. You are a careful girl, Nicole; it will bring you luck."

And Richelieu handed her the promised sum, partly in bank-notes, and partly in louis-d'ors and half-louis.

"There!" said he, "is that right?"

"I think so," said Nicole; "and now, my lord, I want only the principal thing."

"The cordial?"

"Yes; of course your lordship has a bottle?"

"I have my own, which I always carry about with me."

Nicole smiled.

"And then," said she, "Trianon is locked every night, and I have not a key."

"But I have one, as first gentleman of the chamber."

"Ah! indeed!"

"Here it is."

"How fortunate all this is!" said Nicole; "it is one succession of miracles! And now, my lord duke, adieu!"

"How! adieu?"

"Certainly. I shall not see your lordship again, as I shall go as soon as mademoiselle is asleep."

"Quite right. Adieu then, Nicole!"

And Nicole, laughing in her sleeve, disappeared in the increasing darkness.

"I shall still succeed," said Richelieu. "But in truth it would seem that I am getting old, and fortune is turning against me. I have been outwitted by this little one. But what matters it, if I return the blow?"

CHAPTER CXVII.

The Flight.

NICOLE WAS a conscientious girl. She had received M. de Richelieu's money, and received it in advance too, and she felt anxious to prove herself worthy of this confidence by earning her pay. She ran therefore as quickly as possible to the gate, where she arrived at forty minutes past seven, instead of at half-past. Now, M. Beausire, who, being accustomed to military discipline, was a punctual man, had been waiting there for ten minutes. About ten minutes before, too, M. de Taverney had left his daughter, and Andree was consequently alone. Now, being alone, the young girl had closed the blinds.

Gilbert, as usual, was gazing eagerly at Andree from his attic, but it would have been difficult to say if his eyes sparkled with love or hatred. When the blinds were closed Gilbert could see nothing. Consequently he looked in another direction, and, while looking, he perceived M. Beausire's plume, and recognized the exempt, who was walking up and down, whistling an air to kill time while he was waiting.

In about ten minutes, that is to say, at forty minutes past seven, Nicole made her appearance. She exchanged a few words with M. Beausire, who made a gesture with his head as a sign that he understood her perfectly, and disappeared by the shady alley leading to the Little Trianon. Nicole, light as a bird, returned in the direction she had come.

“Oh, oh!” thought Gilbert. “Monsieur the exempt and mademoiselle the femme-de-chambre have something to do or to say which they fear to have witnessed! Very good!”

Gilbert no longer felt any curiosity with respect to Nicole's movements, but actuated by the idea that the young girl was his natural enemy, he merely sought to collect a mass of proofs against her morality, with which proofs he might successfully repulse any attack, should she attempt one against him. And as he knew the campaign might begin at any moment, like a prudent soldier he collected his munitions of war.

A rendezvous with a man, in the very grounds of Trianon, was one of the weapons which a cunning enemy such as Gilbert could not neglect, especially when it was imprudently placed under his very eyes. Gilbert consequently wished to have the testimony of his ears as well as that of his eyes, and to catch some fatally compromising phrase which would completely floor Nicole at the first onset. He quickly descended from his attic, therefore, hastened along the lobby, and gained the garden by the chapel stairs. Once in the garden, he had nothing to fear, for he knew all its hiding-places, as a fox knows his cover. He glided beneath the linden-trees, then along the espalier, until he reached a small thicket situated about twenty paces from the spot where he calculated upon seeing Nicole.

As he had foreseen, Nicole was there. Scarcely had he installed himself in the thicket when a strange noise reached his ears. It was the chink of gold upon stone — that metallic sound of which nothing, except the reality, can give a correct idea.

Like a serpent, Gilbert glided along to a raised terrace, out-topped by a hedge of lilacs, which at that season (early in May), diffused their perfume around, and showered down their flowers upon the passers who took the shady alley on their way from the Great to the Little Trianon.

Having reached this retreat, Gilbert, whose eyes were accustomed to pierce the darkness, saw Nicole emptying the purse which M. de Richelieu had given her, upon a stone on the inner side of the gate, and prudently placed out of M. Beausire's reach.

The large louis-d'ors showered from it in bright profusion, while M. Beausire, with sparkling eye and trembling hand, looked at Nicole and her louis-d'ors as if he could not comprehend how the one should possess the other.

Nicole spoke first.

“You have more than once, my dear M. Beausire,” said she, “proposed to elope with me.”

“And to marry you,” exclaimed the enthusiastic exempt.

“Oh! my dear sir, that is a matter of course; just now, flight is the most important point. Can we fly in two hours?”

“In ten minutes, if you like.”

“No; I have something to do first, which will occupy me two hours.”

“In two hours, as in ten minutes, I shall be at your orders, dearest.”

“Very well. Take these fifty louis.”

Nicole counted the fifty louis, and handed them through the gate to M. Beausire, who, without counting them, stuffed them into his waistcoat pocket.

“And in an hour and a half,” continued she, “be here with a carriage.”

“But — ” objected Beausire.

“Oh! if you do not wish, forget what has passed between us, and give me back my fifty louis.”

“I do not shrink, dearest Nicole; but I fear the result.”

“For whom?”

“For you.”

“For me?”

“Yes; the fifty louis — once vanished, and vanished they will soon be — you will complain — you will regret Trianon — you will — ”

“Oh! how thoughtful you are, M. Beausire! But fear nothing; I am not one of those women who are easily made miserable. Have no scruples on that score; when the fifty louis are gone, we shall see.”

And she shook the purse which contained the other fifty. Beausire's eyes were absolutely phosphorescent.

“I would charge through a blazing furnace for your sake!” exclaimed he.

“Oh! content you — I shall not require so much from you, sir. Then it is agreed you will be here with the chaise in an hour and a half, and in two hours we shall fly?”

“Agreed!” exclaimed Beausire, seizing Nicole's hand, and drawing it through the gate to kiss it.

“Hush!” said Nicole, “are you mad?”

“No; I am in love.”

“Hum!” muttered Nicole.

“Do you not believe me, sweetheart?”

“Yes, yes, I believe you — above all, be sure to have good horses.”

“Oh! yes.”

And they separated.

But a moment afterward. Beausire returned quite alarmed.

“Hist!” whispered he.

“Well, what is it?” asked Nicole, already some distance off, and putting her hand to her mouth, so as to convey her voice farther.

“And the gate?” asked Beausire, “will you creep under it?”

“How stupid he is!” murmured Nicole, who at this moment was not ten paces distant from Gilbert. Then she added in a louder tone:

“I have the key.”

Beausire uttered a prolonged “Oh!” of admiration, and this time took to his heels for good and all. Nicole hastened back with drooping head and nimble step to her mistress.

Gilbert, now left sole master of the field, put the following four questions to himself:

“Why does Nicole fly with Beausire, when she does not love him?

“How does Nicole come to possess such a large sum of money?

“Why has Nicole the key of the gate?

“Why does Nicole return to Andree, when she might go at once?”

Gilbert found an answer to the second question, but to the others he could find none.

Thus checked at the commencement, his natural curiosity and his acquired distrust were so much excited that he determined to remain in the cold, beneath the dew-covered trees, to await the end of this scene, of which he had witnessed the commencement.

Andree had conveyed her father to the barriers of the Great Trianon, and was returning alone and pensive, when Nicole appeared issuing from the alley leading to the famous gate where she had been concerting her measures with M. Beausire.

Nicole stopped on perceiving her mistress, and upon a sign which Andree made to her, she followed her to her apartment.

It was now about half-past eight in the evening. The night had closed in earlier than usual; for a huge cloud, sweeping from south to north, had overspread the whole sky, and all around, as far as the eye could reach over the lofty forest of Versailles, the gloomy shroud was gradually enveloping in its folds the stars, a short time before sparkling in the azure dome. A light breeze swept along the ground, breathing warmly on the drooping flowers, which bent their heads, as if imploring Heaven to send them rain or dew.

The threatening aspect of the sky did not hasten Andree's steps; on the contrary, melancholy and thoughtful, the young girl seemed to ascend each step leading to her room with regret, and she paused at every window as she passed to gaze at the sky, so much in harmony with her saddened mood, and thus to delay her return to her own little retreat.

Nicole, impatient, angry, fearing that some whim might detain her mistress beyond the usual hour, grumbled and muttered, as servants never fail to do when their masters are imprudent enough to satisfy their own caprices at the expense of those of their domestics.

At last, Andree reached the door of her chamber, and sank rather than seated herself upon a couch, gently ordering Nicole to leave the window, which looked upon the court, half open. Nicole obeyed; then, returning to her mistress with that affectionate air which the flatterer could so easily assume, she said:

"I fear mademoiselle feels ill this evening; her eyes are red and swollen, yet bright. I think that mademoiselle is in great need of repose."

"Do you think so?" asked Andree, who had scarcely listened.

And she carelessly placed her feet upon a cushion of tapestry work.

Nicole took this as an order to undress her mistress, and commenced to unfasten the ribbons and flowers of her headdress — a species of edifice which the most skillful could not unbuild in less than a quarter of an hour. While she was thus employed, Andree did not utter a word, and Nicole, thus left to follow her own wishes, hastened the business, without disturbing Andree, whose pre-occupation was so great that she permitted Nicole to pull out her hair with impunity.

When the night toilet was finished, Andree gave her orders for the morrow.

In the morning some books were to be fetched from Versailles which Philip had left there for his sister, and the tuner was to be ordered to attend to put the harpsichord in proper order.

Nicole replied, that if she were not called during the night, she would rise early, and would have both these commissions executed before her young lady was awake.

"To-morrow also I will write to Philip," said Andree, speaking to herself; "that will console me a little."

"Come what will," thought Nicole, "I shall not carry the letter."

And at this reflection the girl, who was not quite lost yet, began to think, in saddened mood, that she was about for the first time to leave that excellent mistress under whose care her mind and heart had been awakened. The thought of Andree was linked in her mind with so many other recollections, that to touch it was to stir the whole chain which carried her back to the first days of infancy.

While these two young creatures, so different in their character and their condition, were thus reflecting beside each other, without any connection existing between their thoughts, time was rapidly flying, and Andree's little timepiece, which was always in advance of the great clock of Trianon, struck nine.

Beausire would be at the appointed place, and Nicole had but half an hour to join her lover.

She finished her task as quickly as possible, not without uttering some sighs which Andree did not even notice. She folded a night-shawl around her mistress, and as Andree still sat immovable, with her eyes fixed on the ceiling, she drew Richelieu's phial from her bosom, put two pieces of sugar into a goblet, added the water necessary to melt it, and without hesitation, and by the resolute force of her will, so strong in one so young, she poured two drops of the fluid from the phial into the water, which immediately became turbid, then changed to a slight opal tint, which soon died away.

“Mademoiselle,” said Nicole, “your glass of water is prepared, your clothes are folded, the night-lamp is lighted. You know I must rise very early to-morrow morning; may I go to bed now?”

“Yes,” replied Andree, absently.

Nicole curtseyed, heaved a last sigh, which, like the others, was unnoticed, and closed behind her the glass door leading to the anteroom. But instead of retiring into her little cell adjoining the corridor and lighted from Andree's anteroom, she softly took to flight, leaving the door of the corridor ajar, so that Richelieu's instructions were scrupulously followed.

Then, not to arouse the attention of the neighbors, she descended the stairs on tiptoe, bounded down the outer steps, and ran quickly to join M. Beausire at the gate.

Gilbert had not quitted his post. He had heard Nicole say that she would return in two hours, and he waited. But as it was now ten minutes past the hour, he began to fear that she would not return.

All at once, he saw her running as if some one were pursuing her.

Nicole approached the gate, passed the key through the bars to Beausire, who opened it, rushed out, and the gate closed with a dull, grating noise. The key was then thrown among the grass in the ditch, near the spot where Gilbert was stationed. He heard it fall with a dead sound, and marked the place where it had dropped.

Nicole and Beausire in the meantime gained ground; Gilbert heard them move away, and soon he could distinguish, not the noise of a carriage, as Nicole had required, but the pawing of a horse, which, after some moment's delay — occupied doubtless by Nicole in recrimination, who had wished to depart, like a duchess, in her carriage — changed to the clattering of his iron-shod feet on the pavement, and at last died away in the distance.

Gilbert breathed freely; he was free, free from Nicole — that is to say, from his enemy. Andree was henceforth alone.

He took the contrary direction from the one Nicole was pursuing, and hurried toward the offices of Trianon.

CHAPTER CXVIII.

Double Sight.

WHEN ANDREE was alone, she gradually recovered from the mental torpor into which she had fallen, and while Nicole was flying en croupe behind M. Beausire, she knelt down and offered up a fervent prayer for Philip, the only being in the world she loved with a true and deep attachment; and while she prayed, her trust in God assumed new strength and inspired her with fresh courage.

The prayers which Andree offered were not composed of a succession of words strung one to the other; they were a kind of heavenly ecstasy, during which her soul rose to her God and mingled with his spirit.

In these impassioned supplications of the mind, freed from earthly concerns, there was no alloy of self. Andree in some degree abandoned all thoughts of herself, like a shipwrecked mariner who has lost hope, and who prays only for his wife and his children, soon to become orphans. This inward grief had sprung up in Andree's bosom since her brother's departure, but it was not entirely without another cause. Like her prayer, it was composed of two distinct elements, one of which was quite inexplicable to her.

It was, as it were, a presentiment, the perceptible approach of some impending misfortune. It was a sensation resembling that of the shooting of a cicatrized wound. The acute pain is over, but the remembrance survives, and reminds the sufferer of the calamity, as the wound itself had previously done. She did not even attempt to explain her feelings to herself. Devoted heart and soul to Philip, she centered in her beloved brother every thought and every affection of her heart.

Then she rose, took a book from her modestly furnished library, placed the light within reach of her hand, and stretched herself on a couch. The book she had chosen, or rather upon which she had accidentally placed her hand, was a dictionary of botany. It may readily be imagined that this book was not calculated to absorb her attention, but rather to lull it to rest.

Gradually, drowsiness weighed down her eyelids, and a filmy veil obscured her vision. For a moment the young girl struggled against sleep; twice or thrice she collected her scattered thoughts, which soon escaped again from her control; then, raising her head to blow out the candle, she perceived the glass of water prepared by Nicole, stretched out her hand and took the glass, stirred the sugar with the spoon, and, already half asleep, she approached the glass to her lips.

All at once, just as her lips were already touching the beverage, a strange emotion made her hand tremble, a moist and burning weight fell on her brow, and Andree recognized with terror, by the current of the fluid which rushed through her nerves, that supernatural attack of mysterious sensations which had several times already triumphed over her strength and overpowered her mind. She had only time to place the glass upon the plate, when instantly, without a murmur, but with a sigh which escaped from her half-open lips, she lost the use of voice, sight, and reason, and, seized with a death-like torpor, fell back as if struck by lightning upon her bed. But this sort of annihilation was but the momentary transition to another state of existence. For an instant she seemed perfectly lifeless, and her eyes closed in the slumber of death; but all at once she rose, opened her eyes, which stared with a fearful fixity of gaze, and like a marble statue descending from its tomb, she once more stood upon the floor. There was no longer room for doubt. Andree was sunk in that marvelous sleep which had several times already suspended her vital functions.

She crossed the chamber, opened the glass door, and entered the corridor, with the fixed and rigid attitude of breathing marble. She reached the stairs, descended step by step without hesitation and without haste, and emerged upon the portico. Just as Andree placed her foot upon the topmost step to descend, Gilbert reached the lowest on his way to his attic. Seeing this white and solemn figure advancing as if to meet him, he recoiled before her, and, still retreating as she advanced, he concealed himself in a clump of shrubs. It was thus, he recollected, that he had already seen Andree de Taverney at the chateau of Taverney.

Andree passed close by him, even touched him, but saw him not. The young man, thunderstruck, speechless with surprise, sank to the ground on one knee. His limbs refused to support him — he was afraid.

Not knowing to what cause to attribute this strange excursion, he followed her with his eyes; but his reason was confounded, his blood beat impetuously against his temples, and he was in a state more closely bordering on madness than the coolness and circumspection necessary for an observer.

He remained therefore crouching on the grass among the leaves, watching as he had never ceased to do since this fatal attachment had entered his heart. All at once the mystery was explained; Andree was neither mad nor bewildered, as he had for a moment supposed — Andree was, with this sepulchral step, going to a rendezvous. A gleam of lightning now furrowed the sky, and by its blue and livid light Gilbert saw a man concealed beneath the somber avenue of linden trees, and, notwithstanding the rapidity of the flash, he had recognized the pale face and disordered garments of the man, relieved against the dark background.

Andree advanced toward this man, whose arm was extended as if to draw her toward him.

A sensation like the branding of a red-hot iron rushed through Gilbert's heart; he raised himself upon his knees to see more clearly. At that moment another flash of lightning illumined the sky.

Gilbert recognized Balsamo, covered with dust and perspiration; Balsamo, who, by some mysterious means, had succeeded in entering Trianon, and thus drew Andree toward him as invincibly, as fatally, as the serpent fascinates its prey.

When two paces from him, Andree stopped. Balsamo took her hand; her whole frame shuddered.

“Do you see?” he asked.

“Yes,” replied Andree; “but in summoning me so suddenly you have nearly killed me.”

“Pardon, pardon!” replied Balsamo; “but my brain reels — I am beside myself — I am nearly mad — I shall kill myself.”

“You are indeed suffering,” said Andree, conscious of Balsamo's feelings by the contact of his hand.

“Yes, yes,” replied Balsamo, “I suffer, and I come to you for consolation. You alone can save me.”

“Question me.”

“Once more, do you see?”

“Oh! perfectly.”

“Will you follow me to my house? Can you do so?”

“I can if you will conduct me there in thought.”

"Come!"

"Ah!" said Andree, "we are entering Paris — we follow the boulevard, we plunge into a street lighted by a single lamp."

"Yes, that is it. Enter! enter!"

"We are in an antechamber. There is a staircase to the right, but you draw me toward the wall — the wall opens — steps appear —

"Ascend!" exclaimed Balsamo, "that is our way."

"All! we are in a sleeping-chamber; there are lions' skins, arms — Stay, the back of the fireplace opens."

"Pass through; where are you?"

"In a strange sort of room, without any outlet, and the windows of which are barred. Oh! how disordered everything in the room appears!"

"But empty — it is empty, is it not?

"Yes, empty."

"Can you see the person who inhabited it?"

"Yes, if you give me something which has touched her, which comes from her, or which belongs to her."

"Hold! there is some hair."

Andree took the hair and placed it on her heart.

"Oh! I recognize her." said she; "I have already seen this woman. She was flying toward Paris."

"Yes, yes; can you tell me what she has been doing during the last two hours, and how she escaped?"

"Wait a moment; yes; she is reclining upon a sofa; her breast is half bared, and she has a wound on one side."

"Look, Andree, look! do not lose sight of her."

"She was asleep — she awakes — she looks around — she takes a handkerchief and climbs upon a chair. She ties the handkerchief to the bars of the window — oh! God!"

"Is she really determined to die?"

"Oh, yes! she is resolute. But this sort of death terrifies her. She leaves the handkerchief tied to the bars — she descends — ah! poor woman!"

"What?"

"Oh! how she weeps, how she suffers, and wrings her hands! She searches for a corner of the wall against which to dash her head!"

"Oh! my God! my God!" murmured Balsamo.

“She rushes toward the chimney-piece! It represents two marble lions; she will dash out her brains against the lions!”

“What then? look Andree, look — it is my will!”

“She stops.”

Balsamo breathed again.

“She looks —

“What does she look at?” asked Balsamo.

“She has perceived some blood upon the lion's eye.”

“Oh, heavens!”

“Yes, blood, and yet she did not strike herself against it. Oh! strange! the blood is not hers, it is yours.”

“Mine?” asked Balsamo, frantic with excitement.

“Yes, yours. You had cut your finger with a knife — with a poniard — and had touched the lion's eye with your bleeding hand. I see you.”

“True, true. But how does she escape?”

“Stay, I see her examining the blood; she reflects; then she places her finger where you had placed yours. Ah! the lion's eye gives way — a spring acts — the chimney board flies open!”

“Oh! imprudent, wretched fool that I am! I have betrayed myself!”

Andree was silent.

“And she leaves the room?” asked Balsamo; “she escapes?”

“Oh! you must forgive the poor woman — she was very miserable.”

“Where is she? whither does she fly? Follow her, Andree — it is my will.”

“She stops for a moment in the chamber of furs and armor; a cupboard is open; a casket, usually locked in this cupboard, is upon the table; she recognizes the box; she takes it.”

“What does the box contain?”

“Your papers, I think.”

“Describe it.”

“It is covered with blue velvet, and studded with brass nails; has clasps of silver, and a golden lock.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Balsamo, stamping with anger; “it is she, then, who has taken the casket!”

“Yes. She descends the stairs leading into the anteroom, opens the door, draws back the chain of the street door, and goes out.”

“Is it late?”

“It must be late, for it is dark.”

“So much the better; she must have fled shortly before my return, and I shall perhaps have time to overtake her. Follow her, Andree! follow her!”

“Once outside the house, she runs as if she were mad! she reaches the boulevard — she hastens on without pausing.”

“In which direction?”

“Toward the Bastille.”

“You see her yet?”

“Yes; she looks like a mad-woman; she jostles against the passers-by; she stops — she endeavors to discover where she is; she inquires.”

“What does she say? Listen, Andree, listen; in Heaven's name do not lose a syllable! You said she inquired?”

“Yes, from a man dressed in black.”

“What does she ask?”

“She wishes to know the address of the lieutenant of police.”

“Oh! then it was not a vain threat. Does the person give it her?”

“Yes.”

“What does she do?”

“She retraces her steps and turns down a winding street. She crosses a large square.”

“The Place Royale — it is the direct way. Can you read her intention?”

“Follow her quickly! — hasten! — she goes to betray you! If she arrives before you and sees M. de Sartines, you are lost!”

Balsamo uttered a terrible cry, plunged into the thicket, rushed through a little door, which a shadowy apparition opened and closed after him, and leaped with one bound on his faithful Djerid, who was pawing the ground at the little gate. Urged on at once by voice and spur, he darted like an arrow toward Paris, and soon nothing was heard but the cluttering of his hoofs on the paved causeway.

As for Andree, she remained standing there, cold, mute, and pale. Then, as if Balsamo had borne away with him life and strength, she tottered, drooped, and fell. Balsamo, in his eagerness to follow Lorenza, had forgotten to awaken her.

Andree did not sink, as we have said, all at once, but gradually in the manner we will attempt to describe.

Alone, abandoned, overpowered with that deathlike coldness which succeeds any violent nervous shock, Andree began to tremble and totter like one suffering from the commencement of an epileptic fit.

Gilbert had never moved — rigid, immovable, leaning forward and devouring her with his gaze. But, as it may readily be imagined, Gilbert, entirely ignorant of magnetic phenomena, dreamed neither of sleep, nor of suffered violence. He had heard nothing, or almost nothing, of her dialogue with Balsamo. But for the second time, at Trianon as at Taverney, Andree had appeared to obey the summons of this man, who had acquired such a strange and terrible power over her. To Gilbert, therefore, everything resolved itself in this; Mademoiselle Andree has, if not a lover, at least a man whom she loves, and to whom she grants a rendezvous at night.

The dialogue which had taken place between Andree and Balsamo, although sustained in a low voice, had all the appearance of a quarrel. Balsamo, excited, flying, frantic, seemed like a lover in despair; Andree, left alone, mute and motionless, like the fair one he had abandoned.

It was at this moment that he saw the young girl totter, wring her hands, and sink slowly to the ground. Then she uttered twice or thrice a groan so deep that her oppressed heart seemed torn by the effort. She endeavored, or rather nature endeavored, to throw back the overpowering mass of fluid which, during the magnetic sleep, had endowed her with that double sight which we have seen, in the preceding pages, produce such strange phenomena.

But nature was overpowered; Andree could not succeed in throwing off the remains of that mysterious will which Balsamo had forgotten to withdraw. She could not loose the marvelous, inexplicable ties which had bound her hand and foot; and by dint of struggling, she fell into those convulsions which in the olden time the Pythoness suffered upon her triped, before the crowd of religious questioners who swarmed around the peristyle of the temple. Andree lost her equilibrium, and uttering a heartrending groan, fell to the ground as if she had been struck by the flash which at that moment furrowed the vault of heaven.

But she had not yet touched the earth when Gilbert, strong and agile as a panther, darted toward her, seized her in his arms, and without being conscious that he carried a burden, bore her back into the chamber which she had left to obey Balsamo's summons, and in which the candle was yet burning beside the disarranged couch.

Gilbert found all the doors open as Andree had left them. As he entered, he stumbled against the sofa, and placed on it the cold and inanimate form of the young girl. The most pressing matter was to recall the beautiful statue to life. He looked round for the carafe, in order to sprinkle some drops of water in Andree's face.

But just as his trembling hand was stretched forth to grasp the thin neck of the crystal ewer, it seemed to him that a firm but light step sounded on the stairs leading to Andree's chamber.

It could not be Nicole, for Nicole had fled with M. Beausire; it could not be Balsamo, for Balsamo was spurring with lightning haste to Paris. It could therefore only be a stranger.

Gilbert, if discovered, was lost; Andree was to him like one of those princesses of Spain, whom a subject may not touch, even to save their life.

All these ideas rushed like a whirlwind through Gilbert's mind in less time than we can relate them. He could not calculate the exact distance of the footstep, which every moment approached still nearer, for the storm which raged without dulled every other sound, but, gifted with extraordinary coolness and foresight, the young man felt that that was no place for him, and that the most important matter was to conceal himself from sight.

He hastily blew out the candle which illumined the apartment, and entered the closet which served as Nicole's sleeping chamber. From this hiding-place he could see through the glass door into Andree's apartment, and also into the antechamber.

In this antechamber a night-lamp was burning upon a little console-table. Gilbert had at first thought of extinguishing it, as he had done the candle, but he had not time; the step echoed upon the corridor, a repressed breathing was heard, the figure of a man appeared upon the threshold, glided timidly into the antechamber, and closed the door.

Gilbert had only time to hasten into Nicole's closet, and to draw the glass door after him.

He held his breath, pressed his face against the stained glass panes, and listened eagerly.

The storm still howled wildly outside, large rain-drops beat against the windows of Andree's apartment and those of the corridor, where a casement, accidentally left open, creaked upon its hinges, and every now and then, dashed back by the wind which rushed into the corridor, struck noisily against its frame.

But the war of the elements, terrible as it was, produced no effect on Gilbert. His whole soul was concentrated in his gaze, which was riveted upon this man. He crossed the antechamber, passed not two paces distant from Gilbert, and unhesitatingly entered the principal apartment.

As he advanced, he jostled with his arm against the candle upon the table. The candle fell, and Gilbert heard the crystal socket break in falling on the marble table. Then the man called twice in a subdued voice:

“Nicole! Nicole!”

“What! Nicole!” thought Gilbert in his hiding-place. “Why does this man call Nicole instead of Andree?”

But as no voice replied to his, the man lifted the candle from the floor, and proceeded on tiptoe to light it at the nightlamp in the antechamber. It was then that Gilbert riveted his whole attention upon this strange nocturnal visitor; he gazed as if his vision could have pierced the wall. All at once he trembled, and, even in his hiding-place, recoiled a step backward.

By the light of these two flames combined, Gilbert, trembling and half dead with affright, recognized, in this man who held the candle in his hands — the king!

Then all was explained; Nicole's flight, the money she had given Beausire, the door left open, the interviews between Richelieu and Taverney, and the whole of that dark and mysterious intrigue of which the young girl was the center.

He would have cried out, but fear — that unreflecting, capricious, irresistible feeling — the fear he felt for this man, whose name had still a charm — the king of France — tied Gilbert's tongue. He slipped stealthily from the closet, gained the antechamber, and fled as if the avenger were behind him.

In the meantime Louis entered the room, candle in hand, and perceived Andree reclining on the couch, wrapped in a long muslin dressing-gown, her head drooping on her shoulder.

He murmured some words in a caressing voice, and putting his light upon the table, he knelt beside the young girl and kissed her hand. It was icy cold. Alarmed, he started up, hastily put aside her dressing-gown, and placed his trembling hand upon her heart. Her heart was cold and motionless!

Just then fearful peal of thunder made every article of furniture in the room shake, even to the couch before which Louis was standing. A livid and sulphureous flash of lightning threw so dazzling a light over Andree's countenance, that Louis, alarmed at her paleness, her motionless attitude, and her silence, started back, murmuring:

“This girl is surely dead!”

At the same instant, the idea of having a corpse before him sent an icy chill through the king's veins. He seized the candle, held it close to Andrea's face, and hastily examined her features by the light of the trembling flame. Beholding her livid lips, her swollen and discolored eyes, her disheveled hair, her chest which no breath stirred, he uttered a cry, let the light fall, staggered back, and reeled like a drunken man into the anteroom, against the walls of which he stumbled in his alarm.

Then his hasty step sounded upon the stairs, then on the gravel walks of the garden, and was soon lost in the howling storm which raged through the long alleys and shady groves of Trianon.

CHAPTER CXIX.

The Will.

WE HAVE seen Balsamo depart. Djerid bore him on with the speed of lightning, while the rider, pale with terror and impatience, bent forward over the flowing mane, breathing with half-opened lips the air which the crest of the noble steed cleft as the rapid prow of the vessel cuts the waves.

Behind him, houses and trees disappeared like fantastic visions. He scarcely perceived, as he passed, the clumsy wagon groaning on its axle-tree, while its five huge horses started with affright at the approach of this living meteor, which they could not imagine to belong to the same race as themselves.

Balsamo proceeded at this rate for a league, with whirling brain, sparkling eyes, and panting breath. Horse and rider had traversed Versailles in a few seconds. The startled inhabitants who happened to be in the streets had seen a long train of sparks flash past them — nothing more. A second league was passed in like manner. Djerid had accomplished the distance in little more than a quarter of an hour, and yet this quarter of an hour had seemed to his rider a century. All at once a thought darted through his brain. He pulled up suddenly, throwing the noble courser back upon his haunches, while his fore-feet plowed the ground.

Horse and rider breathed for a moment. Drawing a long breath, Balsamo raised his head. Then, wiping the perspiration from his forehead, while his nostrils dilated in the breeze of night, he murmured:

“Oh! madman that you are, neither the rapidity of your steed nor the ardor of your desire will ever equal the instantaneous effect of thunder or the rapidity of the electric flash, and yet it is that which you require to avert the danger impending over you! You require the rapid effect, the instantaneous, the all-powerful shock, which will paralyze the feet whose activity you fear, the tongue whose speech destroys you. You require, at this distance, the victorious sleep which restores to you the possession of the slave who has broken her chain. Oh! if she should ever again be in my power!”

And Balsamo ground his teeth with a despairing gesture.

“Oh! you do well to wish, Balsamo, you do well to fly!” exclaimed he; “Lorenza has already arrived, she is about to speak — she has perhaps already spoken. Oh! wretched woman! no punishment can be terrible enough for you.

“Let me try,” continued Balsamo, frowning, his eyes fixed, and his chin resting on his hand, “let me try. Either science is a dream or a fact — it is either impotent or powerful; let me try. 'Lorenza! Lorenza! it is my will that you sleep, wheresoever you may be, Lorenza, sleep — sleep, it is my will! I reckon upon your obedience!'”

“Oh! no, no!” murmured he, despairingly; “no, I utter a falsehood; I do not believe — I dare not reckon upon it — and yet the will is all. Oh! I will it with my whole soul, with all the strength of my being. Cleave the air, my potent will; traverse all the current of opposing or indifferent wills; pass through walls in thy course like a bullet from a gun; follow her wherever she is; go — strike — destroy! Lorenza! Lorenza! it is my will that you sleep! — be dumb at my command.”

And for some moments he concentrated his thoughts upon this aim, imprinting it on his brain as if to lend it more speed in its flight toward Paris. Then after this mysterious operation — to which doubtless all the divine atoms animated by God, the master and lord of all things, assisted — Balsamo, once more setting his teeth hard and clenching his hands, gave the reins to Djerid, but this time without using either the knee or the spurs. It seemed as if Balsamo wished to convince himself.

The noble steed paced gently onward in obedience to the tacit permission of his master, placing his hoof gentry upon the pavement with that light and noiseless step peculiar to his race. During this brief interval, which to a superficial observer would have seemed entirely lost. Balsamo was arranging a complete plan of defense. He concluded it just as Djerid entered the streets of Sevres. Arrived opposite the park gates, he stopped and looked round as if expecting some one. Almost immediately a man emerged from beneath a carriage entrance and advanced toward him.

“Is that you, Fritz?” asked Balsamo.

“Yes, master.”

“Have you made inquiries?”

“Yes.”

“Is Madame Dubarry in Paris or at Luciennes?”

“She is in Paris.”

Balsamo raised his eyes to heaven with a triumphant look.

“How did you come?”

“On Sultan.”

“Where is he?”

“In the courtyard of this inn.”

“Ready saddled?”

“Quite ready.”

“Very well, be prepared to follow me.”

Fritz hastened to bring out Sultan. He was a horse of that strong, willing German race, who grumble a little at forced marches, but who, nevertheless, go as long as they have breath in their lungs, or while there is a spur at their master's heel. Fritz returned to Balsamo, who was writing by the light of a street lantern.

“Return to Paris,” said he, “and manage by some means to give this note to Madame Dubarry in person. You have half an hour for this purpose. After which you will return to the Rue Saint Claude, where you will wait for Madame Lorenza, who cannot fail to return soon. You will let her pass without any observation and without offering any opposition. Go, and remember, above all, that in half an hour your commission must be executed.”

“It is well,” said Fritz, “it shall be done.”

As he gave this confident reply to Balsamo, he attacked Sultan with whip and spur, and the good steed started off, astonished at this unusual aggression, and neighing piteously.

Balsamo by degrees resumed his composure, and took the road to Paris, which he entered three-quarters of an hour afterward, his features almost unruffled and his look calm but pensive.

Balsamo was right. However swift Djerid, the neighing son of the desert, might be, his speed was powerless, and thought alone could hope to overtake Lorenza in her flight from prison.

From the Rue Saint Claude she had gained the boulevard, and turning to the right, she soon saw the walls of the Bastille rise before her. But Lorenza, constantly a prisoner, was entirely ignorant of Paris. Moreover, her first aim was to escape from that accursed house in which she saw only a dungeon; vengeance was a secondary consideration.

She had just entered the Faubourg Saint Antoine, hastening onward with bewildered steps, when she was accosted by a young man who had been following her for some moments with astonishment.

In fact, Lorenza, an Italian girl from the neighborhood of Rome, having almost always lived a secluded life, far from all knowledge of the fashions and customs of the age, was dressed more like an Oriental than a European lady; that is, in flowing and sumptuous robes, very unlike the charming dolls of that time, confined, like wasps, in long tight waists, rustling with silk and muslin, under which it was almost useless to seek a body, their utmost ambition being to appear immaterial.

Lorenza had only adopted, from the French costume of that period, the shoes with heels two inches high — that strange-looking invention which stiffened the foot, displayed the beauty of the ankle, and which rendered it impossible for the Arethusas of that rather mythological age to fly from the pursuit of their Alpheuses.

The Alpheus who pursued our Arethusa easily overtook her, therefore. He had seen her lovely ankles peeping from beneath her petticoats of satin and lace, her unpowdered hair, and her dark eyes sparkling with a strange fire from under a mantilla thrown over her head and neck, and he imagined he saw in Lorenza a lady disguised for a masquerade, or for a rendezvous, and proceeding on foot, for want of a coach, to some little house of the faubourg.

He approached her, therefore, and walking beside her, hat in hand:

“Good heavens! madame,” said he, “you cannot go far in this costume, and with these shoes which retard your progress. Will you accept my arm until we find a coach, and allow me the honor of accompanying you to your destination?”

Lorenza turned her head abruptly, gazed with her dark expressive eyes at the man who thus made her an offer which to many ladies would have appeared an impertinent one, and, stopping:

“Yes,” said she, “most willingly.”

The young man gallantly offered his arm.

“Whither are you going, madame?” asked he.

“To the hotel of the lieutenant of police.”

The young man started.

“To M. de Sartines?” he inquired.

“I do not know if his name be M. de Sartines or not; I wish to speak to whoever is lieutenant of police.”

The young man began to reflect. A young and handsome woman wandering alone in the streets of Paris at eight o'clock in the evening, in a strange costume, holding a box under her arm, and inquiring for the hotel of the lieutenant of police, while she was going in the contrary direction, seemed suspicious.

“Ah! diable,” said he, “the hotel of the lieutenant of police is not in this direction at all.”

“Where is it, then?”

“In the Faubourg St. Germain.”

“And how must I go to the Faubourg St. Germain?”

“This way, madame,” replied the young man, calm but always polite; “and if you wish, we can take the first coach we meet — ”

“Oh, yes, a coach; you are right.”

The young man conducted Lorenza back to the boulevard, and having met a hackney-coach, he hailed it. The coachman answered his summons.

“Where to, madame?” asked he.

“To the hotel of M. de Sartines,” said the young man.

And with a last effort of politeness, or rather of astonishment, having opened the coach-door, he bowed to Lorenza, and, after assisting her to get in, gazed at her departing form as we do in a dream or vision.

The coachman, full of respect for the dreadful name, gave his horse the whip and drove rapidly in the direction indicated.

It was while Lorenza was thus crossing the Place Royale that Andree in her magnetic sleep had seen and heard her, and denounced her to Balsamo. In twenty minutes Lorenza was at the door of the hotel.

“Must I wait for you, my fair lady?” asked the coachman.

“Yes,” replied Lorenza, mechanically.

And stepping lightly from the coach, she disappeared beneath the portal of the splendid hotel.

CHAPTER CXX.

The Hotel of II. De Sartines.

THE MOMENT Lorenza entered the courtyard, she found herself surrounded by a crowd of soldiers and officers. She addressed the garde-francaise who stood nearest to her, and begged him to conduct her to the lieutenant of police. The guardsman handed her over to the porter, who, seeing a beautiful stranger, richly dressed, and holding a magnificent coffer under her arm, thought that the visit might prove not to be an unimportant one, and preceded her up the grand staircase to an antechamber, where every comer could, after the sagacious scrutiny of the porter, be admitted to present an explanation, an accusation, or a request, to M. de Sartines, at any hour of the day or night.

It is needless to say that the two first classes of visitors were more favorably received than the latter.

Lorenza, when questioned by the usher, only replied:

“Are you M. de Sartines?”

The usher was profoundly astonished that any one could mistake his black dress and steel chain for the embroidered coat and flowing wig of the lieutenant of police; but as no lieutenant is ever angry at being called captain, as he marked the foreign accent of the lady, and as her firm and steady gaze was not that of a lunatic, he felt convinced that the fair visitor had something important in the coffer which she held so carefully and so securely under her arm.

But as M. de Sartines was a prudent and suspicious man, as traps had been laid for him with baits not less enticing than that of the beautiful Italian, there was good watch kept around him, and Lorenza had to undergo the investigation, the questioning, and the suspicions, of half a dozen secretaries and valets. The result of all these questions and replies was, that M. de Sartines had not yet returned, and that Lorenza must wait.

Then the young woman sunk into a moody silence, and her eyes wandered over the bare walls of the vast antechamber.

At last the ringing of a bell was heard; a carriage rolled into the courtyard, and a second usher entered and announced to Lorenza that M. de Sartines was waiting for her.

Lorenza rose, and crossed two halls full of people with suspicious-looking faces, and dresses still more strange than her own. At last she was introduced into a large cabinet of an octagon form, lighted by a number of wax candles.

A man of from fifty to fifty-five years of age, enveloped in a dressing-gown, his head surmounted by a wig profusely powdered and curled, was seated at work before a lofty piece of furniture, the upper part of which, somewhat resembling in form a cupboard, was closed with two doors of looking-glass, in which the person seated could, without moving, see any one who entered the room, and could examine their features before they had time to compose them in harmony with his own.

The lower part of this article of furniture formed a secretaire. A number of rosewood drawers composed the front, each of which closed by the combination of some letters of the alphabet. M. de Sartines kept in them his papers, and the ciphers which no one in his lifetime could read, since the drawers opened for him alone, and which none could have deciphered after his death, unless in some drawer, still more secret than the others, he had found the key to the cipher.

This secretaire, or rather this cupboard, contained, behind the glasses of the upper part, twelve drawers, also closed by an invisible mechanism. This piece of furniture, constructed expressly by the regent to contain his chemical or political secrets, had been given by that prince to Dubois, and left by Dubois to M. Dombreval, lieutenant of police. It was from the latter that M. de Sartines had inherited the press and the secret. However, M. de Sartines had not consented to use it until after the death of the donor, and even then he had had all the arrangements of the locks altered.

This piece of furniture had some reputation in the world, and shut too closely, people said, for M. de Sartines only to keep his wigs in it.

The grumblers, and their name was legion at this period, said that if it were possible to read through the panels of this secretaire, there would most certainly have been discovered, in one of its drawers, the famous treaty by virtue of which Louis XV. speculated in grain, through the intervention of his devoted agent, M. de Sartines.

The lieutenant of police therefore saw, reflected in the glass, the pale, serious face of Lorenza, as she advanced toward him with the coffer still beneath her arm. In the center of the apartment the young girl stopped. Her costume, her figure, and the strangeness of her proceedings, struck the lieutenant.

“Who are you?” asked he, without turning round, but looking at her in the glass. “What do you want with me?”

“Am I in the presence of M. de Sartines, lieutenant of police?” replied Lorenza.

“Yes,” replied he, abruptly.

“Who will assure me of that?”

M. de Sartines turned round.

“Will it be a proof that I am the man you seek,” said he, “if I send you to prison?”

Lorenza made no reply. She merely looked round the room with that indescribable dignity peculiar to the women of Italy, and seemed to seek the chair which M. de Sartines did not offer her.

He was vanquished by this look, for Monsieur the Count d'Alby de Sartines was a remarkably well-bred man.

“Be seated,” said he, sharply.

Lorenza drew a chair forward and sat down.

“Speak quickly,” said the magistrate. “Come! let me know what you want.”

“Sir,” said Lorenza, “I come to place myself under your protection.”

M. de Sartines looked at her with the sarcastic look peculiar to him.

“Ah! ah!” said he.

“Sir,” continued Lorenza, “I have been carried off from my family, and have, by a false marriage, fallen into the power of a man who for the last three years has oppressed me and made my life miserable.”

M. de Sartines looked with admiration upon this noble countenance, and felt touched and charmed by this voice, so soft that it seemed more like a strain of music.

“From what country do you come?” he asked.

“I am a Roman.”

“What is your name?” — "Lorenza.”

“Lorenza what?”

“Lorenza Feliciani.”

"I do not know that family. Are you a demoiselle?"

Demoiselle at this period meant a lady of quality. In our days a lady thinks herself noble enough when she is married, and only wishes thenceforth to be called madame.

"I am a demoiselle," replied Lorenza.

"Well? What do you demand?"

"I demand justice against this man who has stolen and incarcerated me."

"That is no affair of mine," said the lieutenant of police; "are you his wife?"

"He says so, at least."

"How! — says!"

"Yes, but I do not remember anything of it, as the marriage was contracted while I slept."

"Peste! you sleep soundly."

"What do you say?"

"I say that it is not in my province. Apply to a procureur and commence an action; I do not like to meddle in family matters."

Upon which M. de Sartines waved his hand with a gesture which meant, "Be-gone!" Lorenza did not move.

"Well?" asked M. de Sartines, astonished.

"I have not done yet." said she; "and if I come to you, you must understand that it is not to complain of a trifling matter, but to revenge myself. I have told you that the women of my country revenge themselves, but never complain."

"That is another affair," said M. de Sartines; "but speak quickly, fair lady, for my time is precious."

"I told you that I came to you to ask for your protection; shall I have it?"

"Protection against whom?"

"Against the man upon whom I wish to revenge myself."

"Is he powerful?"

"More powerful than a king."

"Come, explain, my dear madame. Why should I protect you against a man who is, in your opinion, more powerful than a king, an act which is perhaps a crime? If you wish to be revenged on this man, revenge yourself. That is nothing to me; only, if you commit a crime, I shall have to arrest you, after which we shall see — that is the routine."

“No, sir,” said Lorenza, “no, you will not have me arrested, for my vengeance is of the greatest utility to you, to the king, and to France. I shall revenge myself by revealing this man's secrets.”

“Oh, ho! he has secrets?” said M. de Sartines, beginning to feel interested in spite of himself.

“Mighty secrets, sir.”

“Of what kind?”

“Political ones.”

“Mention them.”

“But in that case, will you protect me?”

“What sort of protection do you require?” said the magistrate, with a cold smile; “gold, or affection?”

“I only ask permission, sir, to retire to a convent and to live there concealed and unknown. I ask that this convent may become my tomb, but that this tomb may never be violated by any one in the world.”

“Ah!” said the magistrate, “that is not a very exacting demand. You shall have the convent — speak.”

“Then I have your word, sir?”

“I think I said so.”

“Then,” said Lorenza, “take this coffer; it contains mysteries which will make you tremble for the safety of the king and his dominions.”

“Then you know these mysteries?”

“Only partially — but I know they exist.” — "And that they are important?”

“That they are terrible.”

“Political secrets, you say?”

“Have you never heard that there existed a secret society?”

“Ah! the freemasons?”

“The invisibles.”

“Yes, but I do not believe it.”

“When you have opened this coffer you will believe.”

“Ah!” said M. de Sartines, eagerly, “let me see.”

And he took the coffer from Lorenza's hands. But suddenly, after a moment's reflection, he placed it upon the desk.

“No,” said he, with an air of suspicion; “open the coffer yourself.”

“But I have not the key.”

"How! — you have not the key? You bring me a coffer which contains the safety of a kingdom, and you forget the key?"

"Is it so very difficult, then, to open a lock?"

"No, not when one knows it." Then, after a moment's pause, he added; "We have in this place keys for all kinds of locks; you shall have a bunch" (and he looked fixedly at Lorenza), "and you shall open it yourself."

"Give it me," said Lorenza, without the slightest hesitation.

M. de Sartines held out a bunch of little keys of all kinds to the young girl. She took them; M. de Sartines touched her hand — it was cold as marble.

"But why," said he, "did you not bring the key of the coffer?"

"Because the master of the coffer never lets it out of his possession."

"And who is the master of the coffer — this man who is more powerful than a king?"

"What he is, no one can say. The Almighty alone knows how long he has lived; the deeds he accomplishes none see but God."

"But his name — his name?"

"I have known him change it ten times."

"Well, that by which you generally address him?"

"Acharat."

"And he lives —

"Rue Saint —

Suddenly Lorenza started, shuddered, and let the coffer, which she held in the one hand, and the keys which she held in the other, fall to the ground. She made an effort to reply, her lips were distorted convulsively; she raised her hands to her throat, as if the words she was about to utter had suffocated her; then, tossing her trembling arms aloft, she fell her whole length upon the carpet of the study, unable to utter a single word.

"Poor girl!" murmured M. de Sartines, "what the deuce is the matter with her? She is really very pretty. Ah! there is some jealousy at work in this project of revenge."

He rang the bell hastily, and in the meantime raised the young girl in his arms, who, with staring eyes and motionless lips, seemed already dead, and disconnected with this lower world. Two valets entered.

"Carry this young lady carefully into the adjoining apartment," said he; "endeavor to revive her, but above all use no violence. Go."

The valets obeyed, and carried Lorenza out.

CHAPTER CXXI.

The Coffer.

WHEN HE WAS alone, M. de Sartines turned the coffer round and round with the air of a man who can appreciate the value of a discovery. Then he stretched out his hands and picked up the bundle of keys which had fallen from Lorenza's hands.

He tried them, all; none would fit.

He took several similar bunches from his drawer.

These bunches contained keys of all dimensions; keys of all sorts of articles, coffers included; common keys, and microscopic keys. M. de Sartines might be said to possess a pattern of every key known.

He tried twenty, fifty, a hundred; not one would even turn round. The magistrate concluded, therefore, that the lock was only a feigned one, and that consequently his keys were only counterfeit keys.

He then took a small chisel and a little hammer from the same drawer, and with his white hand, buried in an ample frill of Mechlin lace, he burst open the lock, the faithful guardian of the coffer.

A bundle of papers appeared, instead of the destructive machine he had feared to find there, or instead of poisons which should diffuse a fatal odor around, and deprive France of its most useful magistrate.

The first words which met the magistrate's eye were the following, written in a handwriting which was evidently feigned:

“Master, it is time to abandon the name of Balsamo.”

There was no signature, but merely the three letters — L. P. D.

“Ha!” said he, twitching the curls of his wig, “if I do not know the writing, I think I know the name. Balsamo — let me see — I must search the Bs.”

He opened one of his twenty-four drawers, and took from it a list, arranged in alphabetical order, written in a fine handwriting full of abbreviations, and containing three or four hundred names, preceded, followed, and accompanied by flaming notes.

“Oh! ho!” said he, “there is a long article on this Balsamo.”

And he read the whole page with unequivocal signs of dissatisfaction. Then he replaced the list in the drawer, and continued the examination of the coffer.

He had not proceeded far before his brow assumed a darker hue, and soon he came to a note full of names and ciphers.

This paper seemed important; it was much worn at the edges, and filled with pencil-marks. M. de Sartines rang the bell; a servant appeared.

“The assistance of the chancery clerk,” said he, “immediately. Let him come through the reception-rooms from the office to save time.”

The valet retired. Two minutes afterward, a clerk with a pen in his hand, his hat under one arm, a large register under the other, and wearing sleeves of black serge over his coat sleeves, appeared on the threshold of the study. M. de Sartines perceived his entrance in the mirror before him, and handed him the paper over his shoulder.

“Decipher this,” said he.

“Yes, my lord.” replied the clerk.

This decipherer of riddles was a little thin man, with pinched lips, eyebrows contracted by study, pale features, and head pointed both at top and bottom, a narrow chin, a receding forehead, projecting cheek-bones, hollow and dull eyes, which often sparkled with intelligence.

M. de Sartines called him La Fouine.

“Sit down,” said the magistrate to him, on seeing him rather embarrassed by his note-book, his code of ciphers, his paper and his pen.

La Fouine modestly took his seat upon the corner of a stool, approached his knees together, and began to write upon them, turning over his dictionary and searching his memory, with an impassible countenance. In five minutes, he had written:

“An order to assemble three thousand brothers in Paris.

§

“An order to form three circles and six lodges.

§

“An order to form a guard for the Grand Copt, and to contrive four dwellings for him, one in a royal household.

§

“An order to place five hundred thousand francs at his disposal for a police.

§

“An order to enroll the flower of literature and philosophy moving in the first Parisian circles.

§

“An order to hire or to gain over the magistracy, and particularly to make sure of the lieutenant of police, by corruption, violence, or cunning.”

Here La Fouine stopped for a moment, not that the poor man was reflecting — he took care not to do that, it would have been a crime — but because his page was filled, and the ink yet wet, so he was obliged to wait for its drying before he could proceed.

M. de Saltines, becoming impatient, snatched the paper from his hands and read it.

At the last paragraph, such an expression of fear was painted on his face, that he turned a deeper pale at seeing himself change color in the mirror of his cupboard.

He did not return the paper to his clerk, but handed him a fresh sheet. The clerk once more commenced to write in proportion as he deciphered, which he did with a facility terrifying for all writers in cipher.

This time M. de Sartines read over his shoulder;

§

“To drop the name of Balsamo, which is already too well known in Paris, and to take that of the Count de Fe — ”

A large blot of ink concealed the rest of the word.

While M. de Sartines was endeavoring to make out the last syllable which would complete the name, a bell was rung outside, and a valet entering, announced:

“The Count de Fenix.”

M. de Sartines uttered a cry, and at the risk of demolishing the harmonious edifice of his wig, he clasped his hands above his head, and hastened to dismiss his clerk by a secret door.

Then, resuming his place before the desk, he said to the valet:

“Introduce him.”

A few seconds afterward, M. de Sartines perceived in his glass the marked profile of the count, which he had already seen at court, on the day of Madame Dubarry's presentation.

Balsamo entered without any hesitation whatever.

M. de Sartines rose, bowed coldly to the count, and crossing one leg over the other, he seated himself ceremoniously in his armchair.

At the first glance the magistrate had divined the cause and the aim of this visit.

At the first glance also Balsamo had perceived the opened box, half emptied upon M. de Sartine's desk. His look, however hasty, at the coffer, did not escape the lieutenant of police.

“To what chance do I owe the honor of your presence, my lord count?” asked M. de Sartines.

“Sir,” replied Balsamo, with a most affable smile, “I have had the honor of being presented to all the sovereigns, ministers, and ambassadors of Europe, but I have not found any one to present me to you; I have therefore come to introduce myself.”

“In truth, sir,” replied the lieutenant of police, “you arrive most opportunely, for I feel convinced that had you not come of yourself, I should have had the honor of sending for you.”

“Ah! indeed!” said Balsamo. “What a coincidence!”

M. de Sartines inclined his head with a sarcastic smile.

“Shall I be so fortunate as to be of any use to you?” asked Balsamo.

And these words were uttered without a shadow of emotion or of uneasiness clouding his smiling features.

“You have traveled much, my lord count?” asked the lieutenant of police.

“A great deal, sir.”

“Ah!”

“You wish for some geographical information, perhaps? A man of your capacity does not confine his observations to France alone — he surveys Europe — the world.”

“Geographical is not exactly the word, count. Moral would be-more correct.”

“Have no scruples, I beg; one is as welcome as the other. I am wholly at your service.”

“Well, count, picture to yourself that I am in search of a most dangerous man — a man who, on my word, is a complete atheist.”

“Oh!”

“A conspirator.”

“Oh!”

“A forger.”

“Oh!”

“A debauchee, a false coiner, a quack, a charlatan, the chief of a society — a man whose history I have in my books, in this box that you see here — everywhere, indeed.”

“Ah! yes, I comprehend,” said Balsamo; “you have the history but not the man.”

“No.”

“Diable! The latter seems to me the most important point.”

“Of course; but you shall see we are not far from having him. Certainly Proteus had not more forms, nor Jupiter more names, than this mysterious traveler. Acharat in Egypt — Balsamo in Italy — Somini in Sardinia — the Marquis Danna in Malta — the Marquis Pellegrini in Corsica — and lastly, the Count de — ?”

“Count de — ?” added Balsamo.

“The last name I could not decipher perfectly, sir. But I am sure you will be able to assist me, will you not? For there is no doubt you must have met this man during your travels in each of the countries I have just now named.”

“Enlighten me a little, I entreat,” said Balsamo, quietly.

“Ah! I understand; you wish for a description of his person, do you not, count?”

“Yes, sir, if you please.”

“Well!” said M. de Sartines, fixing a glance which he intended to be inquisitorial upon Balsamo, “he is a man of your age, of your size, of your figure. He is sometimes a great lord, scattering money on all sides — sometimes a charlatan, searching into the secrets of nature — sometimes a gloomy member of some mysterious brotherhood which meets by night, and swears 'Death to kings and the overthrow of all thrones.'”

“Oh!” said Balsamo, “that is very vague.”

“How, vague?”

“If you knew how many men I have seen who resemble this description.”

“Indeed!”

“Of course; and you must be a little more precise if you wish me to assist you. In the first place, do you know in which country he prefers to live?”

“He dwells in all.”

“But at present, for instance?”

“At present he is in France.”

“And what is his errand in France?”

“He directs an immense conspiracy.”

“Ah! that is indeed some clew; and if you know what conspiracy he directs, you probably hold the thread by which to catch your man.”

“I am just of your opinion.”

“Well! if you think so, why in that case do you ask my advice? It is useless.”

“Ah! but I am not yet decided.”

“On what point?”

“Whether I shall arrest him or not.”

“I do not understand the not, M. Lieutenant of Police, for if he conspires — " “Yes; but if he is partially defended by some name or some title!”

“Ah! I understand. But what name? — what title? You must tell me that before I can assist you in your search, sir.”

“Wiry, sir, I have told you that I know the name under which he conceals himself, but — ”

“But do you not know the one which he openly uses — is that it?”

“Yes, otherwise — ”

“Otherwise you would arrest him.”

“Instantly.”

“Well, my dear M. de Sartines, it is very fortunate, as you said just now, that I arrived at this moment, for I will do you the service you require.”

“You?”

“Yes.”

“You will tell me his name?”

“Yes.”

“His public name?”

“Yes.”

“Then you know him?”

“Perfectly well.”

“And what is his name?” asked M. de Sartines, expecting; some falsehood.

“The Count de Fenix.”

“What! the name by which you were announced?”

“The same.”

“Your name?”

“My name.”

“Then this Acharat — this Somini — this Marquis Danna — this Marquis Pellegrini — this Joseph Balsamo — is you?”

“Yes,” said Balsamo, quietly; “is myself.”

It was a minute before M. de Sartines could recover from the vertigo which this frank avowal caused him.

“You see I had guessed as much,” said he. “I knew you. I knew that Joseph Balsamo and the Count de Fenix were the same.”

“Ah!” said Balsamo, “you are a great minister — I confess it.”

“And you are most imprudent,” said the magistrate, advancing toward the bell.

“Imprudent? — why?”

“Because I am going to have you arrested.”

“What say you?” replied Balsamo, stepping between the magistrate and the bell. “You are going to arrest me?”

“Pardieu! what can you do to prevent me, may I ask?”

“You ask me?”

“Yes.”

“My dear lieutenant of police, I will blow your brains out.”

And Balsamo drew from his pocket a charming little pistol, mounted in silver gilt — which, from its appearance, might have been chased by Benvenuto Cellini — and calmly leveled it at the forehead of M. de Sartines, who turned pale and sunk into an armchair.

“There,” said Balsamo, drawing another chair close to that occupied by the lieutenant of police, and sitting down; “now that we are comfortably seated, we can chat a little.”

CHAPTER CXXII.

Conversation.

M. DE SARTINES took a moment or two to recover from his rather severe alarm. He had seen the threatening muzzle of the pistol presented before his very eye; he had even felt the cold metal of the barrel upon his forehead. At last he recovered.

“Sir,” said he; “you have an advantage over me. Knowing what sort of a man I had to deal with, I did not take the precautions usually adopted against common malefactors.”

“Oh! sir,” replied Balsamo, “now you are getting angry and use injurious expressions. Do you not see how unjust you are? I come to do you a service.”

M. de Sartines moved uneasily.

“Yes, sir, to serve you,” resumed Balsamo, “and therefore you misunderstand my intentions; you speak to me of conspirators at the very time when I come to denounce a conspiracy to you.”

But Balsamo talked in vain. M. de Sartines did not at that moment pay any great attention to the words of his dangerous visitor, and the word conspiracy, which on other occasions would have been sufficient to make him bound from his seat, scarcely caused him to prick up his ears.

“Since you know so well who I am, sir, you are aware of my mission in France. Sent by his majesty the great Frederick, I am more or less secretly the ambassador of his Prussian Majesty. Now, by ambassador is understood an inquirer; in my quality of inquirer I am ignorant of nothing that happens, and a subject upon which I am particularly well informed is the monopoly of grain.”

However unpretendingly Balsamo uttered these last words, they nevertheless produced more effect upon the lieutenant of police than all the others, for they made him attentive. He slowly raised his head.

“What is this affair about corn?” said he, affecting as much assurance as Balsamo himself had displayed at the commencement of the interview. “Be good enough, in your turn, to instruct me, sir."

"Willingly, sir," said Balsamo. "This is the whole matter — "

"I am all attention."

"Oh! you do not need to tell me that. Some very clever speculators have persuaded his majesty the king of France that he ought to construct granaries for his people in case of scarcity. These granaries therefore have been constructed. While they were doing it, they thought it as well to make them large. Nothing was spared, neither stone nor brick, and they were made very large."

"Well?"

"Well, they had then to be filled. Empty granaries were useless, therefore they were filled."

"Well! sir," said M. de Sartines, not seeing very clearly as yet what Balsamo was driving at.

"Well! you may readily conceive that to fill these very large granaries, a great quantity of grain was required. Is that not evident?"

"Yes."

"To continue, then. A large quantity of grain withdrawn from circulation is one way of starving the people; for, mark this; any amount taken from the circulation is equivalent to a failure in the production. A thousand sacks of corn more in the granary are a thousand sacks of corn less in the market-place. If you only multiply these thousand sacks by ten, the corn will rise considerably."

M. de Sartines was seized with an irritating cough. Balsamo paused, and waited quietly till the cough was gone.

"You see, then," continued he, as soon as the lieutenant of police would permit him, "you see that the speculator in these granaries is enriched by the amount of the rise in value. Is that clear to you?"

"Perfectly clear, sir," said M. de Sartines; "but, as far as I can understand, it seems that you have the presumption to denounce to me a conspiracy or a crime of which his majesty is the author?"

"Exactly," said Balsamo; "you understand me perfectly."

"That is a bold step, sir; and I confess that I am rather curious to see how his majesty will take your accusation; I fear much the result will be precisely the same that I proposed to myself on looking over the papers in this box before your arrival. Take care, sir; your destination in either case will be the Bastille."

“Ah! now you do not understand me at all.”

“How so?”

“God heavens! how incorrect an opinion you form of me, and how deeply you wrong me, sir, in taking me for a fool! What! you imagine I intend to attack the king — I, an ambassador, an inquirer! Why, that would be the work of a simpleton! Listen to the end, pray.”

M. de Sartines bowed.

“The persons who have discovered this conspiracy against the French people — (forgive me for taking up your valuable time, sir, but you will see directly that it is not lost) — they who have discovered this conspiracy against the French people are economists — laborious and minute men, who by their careful investigation of this underhand game have discovered that the king does not play alone. They know well that his majesty keeps an exact register of the rate of corn in the different markets; they know that his majesty rubs his hands with glee when the rise has produced him eight or ten thousand crowns; but they know also that beside his majesty there stands a man whose position facilitates the sales, a man who naturally, thanks to certain functions (he is a functionary, you must know), superintends the purchases, the arrivals, the packing — a man, in short, who manages for the king. Now these economists — these microscopic observers, as I call them — will not attack the king, for of course they are not mad, but they will attack, my dear sir, the man, the functionary, the agent, who thus haggles for his majesty.”

M. de Sartines endeavored in vain to restore the equilibrium of his wig.

“Now,” continued Balsamo, “I am coming to the point. Just as you, who have a police, knew that I was the Count de Fenix, so I know that you are M. de Sartines.”

“Well, what then?” said the embarrassed magistrate. “Yes, I am M. de Sartines. What a discovery!”

“Ah! but cannot you understand that this M. de Sartines is precisely the man of the price list, of the underhand dealings, of the stowing away — he who, either with or without the king's cognizance, traffics with the food of twenty-seven millions of French people, whom his office requires him to feed on the best possible terms. Now just imagine the effect of such a discovery. You are not much beloved by the people; the king is not a very considerate man; as soon as the cries of the famishing millions demand your head, the king — to avert all suspicion of connivance with you, if there is connivance, or if there is no connivance, to do justice — will cause you to be hanged upon a gibbet, like Enguerrand de Marigny. Do you recollect Enguerrand?”

“Imperfectly,” said M. de Sartines, turning very pale; “and it is a proof of very bad taste, I think, sir, to talk of gibbets to a man of my rank.”

“Oh! if I alluded to it,” replied Balsamo, “it was because I think I see poor Enguerrand still before me. I assure you he was a perfect gentleman, from Normandy, of a very ancient family and a noble descent. He was chamberlain of France, captain of the Louvre, comptroller of finance and of buildings; he was Count of Longueville, which county is more considerable than yours of Alby! Well, sir, I saw him hanged upon the gallows of Montfaucon, which he had himself constructed! Thank God, it was not a crime to have said to him before the catastrophe, 'Enguerrand, my dear Enguerrand! take care — you are dipping into the finances to an extent that Charles of Valois will never pardon.' He would not listen to me, sir, and unfortunately he perished. Alas! if you knew how many prefects of police I have seen, from Pontius Pilate down to M. Berlin de Belille, Count de Bourdeilhes, Lord of Brantome, your predecessor, who first introduced the lantern and prohibited the scales.”

M. de Sartines rose, and endeavored in vain to conceal the agitation which preyed upon him.

“Well,” said he, “you can accuse me if you like. Of what importance is the testimony of a man such as you, who has no influence or connections?”

“Take care, sir,” said Balsamo; “frequently those who seem to have no connections are connected far and wide; and when I shall write the history of these corn speculations to my correspondent Frederick, who you know is a philosopher — when Frederick shall hasten to communicate the affair, with his comments upon it, to M. Arouet de Voltaire — when the latter, with his pen, whose reputation at least I hope you know, shall have metamorphosed it into a little comic tale in the style of 'L'homme aux quarante Ecus' — when M. d'Alembert, that excellent geometrician, shall have calculated that the corn withdrawn from the public consumption by you might have fed a hundred millions of men for two or three years — when Helvetius shall have shown that the price of this corn, converted into crowns of six livres and piled up, would touch the moon, or, into bank-notes fastened together, would reach to Saint Petersburg — when this calculation shall have inspired M. de la Harpe to write a bad drama, Diderot a family conversation, and M. Jean Jacques Rousseau, of Geneva, who has a tolerably sharp bite when he chooses, a terrible paraphrase of this conversation, with his own commentaries — when M. Caron de Beaumarchais — may Heaven preserve you from treading on his toes! — shall have written a memoir, M. Grimm a little letter, M. de Holbach a thundering attack, M. de Marmontel an amiable moral tale in which he will kill you by defending you badly — when you shall be spoken of in the Cafe de la Regence, the Palais Royal, at Audinet's, at the king's dancers (kept up, as you know, by M. Nicolet) — ah! Count d'Alby, you will be in a much worse case than poor Enguerrand de Marigny (whom you would not hear me mention) when he stood under the gallows, for he asserted his innocence, and that with so much earnestness that, on my word of honor, I believed him when he told me so."

At these words, M. de Sartines, no longer paying any heed to decorum, took off his wig and wiped his bald pate, which was bathed in perspiration.

"Well," said he, "so be it! But all that will not prevent me in the least. Ruin me if you can; you have your proofs, I have mine. Keep your secret. I shall keep the coffer."

"Oh! sir," said Balsamo, "that is another error into which I am surprised that a man of your talents should fall; this coffer —

"Well! what of it?"

"You will not keep."

"Oh!" exclaimed M. de Sartines, with a sarcastic smile, "true; I had forgotten that the Count de Fenix is a gentleman of the highway, who rifles travelers with the strong hand. I forgot your pistol, because you have replaced it in your pocket. Excuse me, my lord ambassador."

"But, good heavens! why speak of pistols, M. de Sartines? You surely do not believe that I mean to carry off the coffer by main force; that when on the stairs I may hear your bell ring and your voice cry, 'Stop thief!' Oh, no! When I say that you will not keep this coffer, I mean that you will restore it to me willingly and without restraint."

"What! I!" exclaimed the magistrate, placing his clenched hand upon the disputed object with so much weight that he nearly broke it.

"Yes, you."

"Oh! very well, sir, mock away; but as to taking this coffer, I tell you you shall only have it with my life. And have I not risked my life a thousand times? Do I not owe it, to the last drop, to the service of his majesty? Kill me — you can do so! but the noise will summon my avengers, and I shall have voice enough left to convict you of all your crimes. Ah! give you back this coffer!” added he, with a bitter smile, “all hell should not wrest it from me!”

“And, therefore, I shall not employ the intervention of the subterranean powers. I shall be satisfied with that of the person who is just now knocking at the gate of your courtyard.”

And in fact, just at that moment, three blows struck with an air of command were heard outside.

“And whose carriage,” continued Balsamo, “is just now entering the court.”

“It seems, then, that it is some friend of yours who is coming to honor me with a visit!”

“As you say — a friend of mine.”

“And I shall hand this coffer to him.”

“Yes, my dear M. de Sartines, you will give it to him.”

The lieutenant of police had not finished his gesture of lofty disdain, when a valet opened the door hastily, and announced that Madame Dubarry wished for an interview.

M. de Sartines started, and looked in stupefied amazement at Balsamo, who required all his self-command to avoid laughing in the face of the honorable magistrate.

Close behind the valet appeared a lady who seemed to have no need of permission to enter. It was the beautiful countess, whose flowing and perfumed skirts gently rustled as they brushed past the doorway of the cabinet.

“You, madame! you!” exclaimed M. de Sartines, who, in the instinct of terror, had seized the open coffer in both hands, and clasped it to his breast.

“Good-day, Sartines,” said the countess, with her gayest smile; then, turning to Balsamo, “Good-day, dear count,” added she, and she gave her hand to the latter, who familiarly bent over the white fingers, and pressed his lips where the royal lips had so often rested.

In this movement Balsamo managed to whisper a few words aside to the countess, which Sartines could not hear.

“Ah! precisely,” exclaimed the countess, “there is my coffer.”

“Your coffer!” stammered M. de Sartines.

“Of course, my coffer — oh! you have opened it; I see — you do not observe much ceremony!”

“But, madame — ”

“Oh! it is delightful! The idea occurred to me at once that some one had stolen this coffer, and then I said to myself. 'I must go to Sartines, he will find it for me.' You did not wait till I asked you; you found it beforehand — a thousand thanks!”

“And as you see,” said Balsamo, “monsieur has even opened it.”

“Yes, really! who could have thought it? It is odious conduct of you, Sartines!”

“Madame, notwithstanding all the respect I have for you,” said the lieutenant of police, “I fear that you are imposed upon.”

“Imposed, sir!” said Balsamo; “do you perchance mean that word for me?”

“I know what I know,” replied M. de Sartines.

“And I know nothing,” whispered Madame Dubarry in a low voice to Balsamo. “Come, tell me what is the matter, my dear count! You have claimed the fulfillment of the promise I made you, to grant the first favor you should ask. I keep my word like a woman of honor, and here I am. Tell me what must I do for you?”

“Madame,” replied Balsamo aloud, “you confided the care of this coffer and everything it contains to me, a few days ago.”

“Of course,” answered Madame Dubarry, replying by a look to the count's appealing glance.

“Of course!” exclaimed M. de Sartines; “you say of course, madame?”

“Yes; madame pronounced the words loud enough for you to hear them, I should think.”

“A box which contains perhaps ten conspiracies!”

“Ah! M. de Sartines, you are aware that that word is rather an unfortunate one for you; do not repeat it. Madame asks for her box again; give it her — that is all.”

“Do you ask me for it, madame?” said M. de Sartines, trembling with anger. — "Yes, my dear magistrate.”

“But learn, at least — ”

Balsamo looked at the countess.

“You can tell me nothing I do not know,” said Madame Dubarry; “give me the coffer; you may believe I did not come for nothing!”

“But in the name of Heaven, madame! — in the name of his majesty's safety! — ”

Balsamo made an impatient gesture.

“The coffer, sir!” said the countess abruptly; “the coffer — yes or no! Reflect well before you refuse.”

“As you please, madame!” said M. de Sartines humbly.

And he handed the coffer, in which Balsamo had already replaced all the papers scattered over the desk, to the countess.

Madame Dubarry turned toward the latter with a charming smile.

“Count,” said she, “will you carry this coffer to my carriage for me, and give me your hand through all these antechambers, thronged with villainous-looking faces which I do not like to confront alone. Thanks, Sartines.”

And Balsamo was already advancing toward the door with his protectress, when he saw M. de Sartines moving toward the bell.

“Countess,” said Balsamo, stopping his enemy with a look, “be good enough to tell M. de Sartines, who is quite enraged with me for having claimed this box — be good enough to tell him how much grieved you would be if any misfortune were to happen to me through the agency of the lieutenant of police, and how displeased you would be with him.” The countess smiled on Balsamo.

“You hear what the count says, my dear Sartines? — well! it is the simple truth. The count is an excellent friend of mine, and I should be dreadfully angry with you if you displeased him in any way whatsoever. Adieu, Sartines!” And placing her hand in Balsamo's, who carried the coffer, Madame Dubarry left the study of the lieutenant of police.

M. de Sartines saw them depart without displaying that fury which Balsamo expected him to manifest.

“Go!” said the conquered magistrate; “go — you have the box, but I have the woman!”

And to compensate himself for his disappointment, he rang loud enough to break all the bells in the house.

CHAPTER CXXIII.

Sartines Begins to Think Balsamo a Sorcerer.

AT THE VIOLENT RINGING of M. de Sartines' bell, an usher entered. “Well!” asked the magistrate; “this woman?”

“What woman, my lord?”

“The woman who fainted here just now, and whom I confided to your care.”

“My lord, she is quite well,” replied the usher.

“Very good; bring her to me.”

“Where shall I find her, my lord?”

“What do you mean? In that room, of course.”

“But she is not there, my lord.”

“Not there! Then where is she?”

“I do not know.”

“She is gone?” — "Yes.”

“Alone?”

“Yes.”

“But she could not stand.”

“My lord, it is true that for some moments she remained in a swoon; but five minutes after the Count de Fenix entered my lord's study, she awoke from this strange fit, which neither essences nor salts affected in the least. Then she opened her eyes, rose, and breathed, seemingly with an air of satisfaction.”

“Well, what then?”

“She proceeded toward the door; and, as my lord had not ordered that she should be detained, she was allowed to depart.”

“Gone!” cried M. de Sartines. “Ah! wretch that you are! I shall send you all to rot at Bicetre! Quick! quick! send me my head clerk!”

The usher retired hastily to obey the order he had received.

“The wretch is a sorcerer!” muttered the unfortunate magistrate. “I am lieutenant of police to the king, but he is lieutenant of police to the devil!”

The reader has, no doubt, understood what M. de Sartines could not explain to himself. Immediately after the incident of the pistol, and while the lieutenant of police was endeavoring to regain his equanimity, Balsamo, profiting by the momentary respite, had turned successively to the four cardinal points, quite sure of finding Lorenza in one of them, and had ordered her to rise, to go out, and to return by the way she had come, to the Rue Saint Claude.

The moment this wish had been formed in Balsamo's mind, a magnetic current was established between him and the young woman, and the latter, obeying the order she had received by intuition, rose and retired, without any one opposing her departure.

M. de Sartines that same evening took to his bed and caused himself to be bled. The revulsion had been too strong for him to bear with impunity; and the doctor assured him that a quarter of an hour more would have brought on an attack of apoplexy.

Meanwhile, Balsamo had accompanied the countess to her carriage, and had attempted to take his leave of her; but she was not a woman to let him go thus, without knowing, or at least without endeavoring to discover, the solution of the strange event which had taken place before her. She begged the count to enter her carriage. The count obeyed, and a groom led Djerid behind.

“You see now, count,” said she, “whether I am true or not, and whether, when I have called a man my friend, I spoke with the lips merely, or my heart. I was just setting out for Luciennes, where the king had said he would pay me a visit to-morrow morning; but your letter arrived, and I left everything for you. Many would have been frightened at the words conspiracies and conspirators which M. de Sartines threw in your teeth; but I looked at your countenance before I acted, and did as you wished me.”

“Madame,” replied Balsamo, “you have amply repaid the slight service I was able to render you; but with me nothing is lost — you will find that I can be grateful. Do not imagine, however, that I am a criminal — a conspirator, as M. de Sartines said. That worthy magistrate had received, from some person who betrayed me, this coffer, containing some chemical and hermetical secrets — which I shall share with you, that you may preserve your immortal, your splendid beauty, and your dazzling youth. Now, seeing the ciphers of my receipt, this excellent M. de Sartines called the chancery clerk to assist him, who, in order not to be found wanting, interpreted them after his own fashion. I think I have already told you, madame, that the profession is not yet entirely freed from the dangers which were attendant on it in the middle ages. Only young and intelligent minds like yours favor it. In short, madame, you have saved me from a great embarrassment; I thank you for it, and shall prove my gratitude."

"But what would he have done with you if I had not come to your assistance?"

"To annoy King Frederick, whom his majesty hates, he would have imprisoned me in Vincennes or the Bastille. I should have escaped from it, I know — thanks to my receipt for melting stone with a breath — but I should have lost my coffer, which contains, as I have had the honor of telling you, many curious and invaluable secrets, wrested by a lucky chance from eternal darkness."

"Ah, count! you at once delight and reassure me. Then you promise me a philter to make me young again?"

"Yes."

"And when will you give it me?"

"Oh! you need be in no hurry. You may ask for it twenty years hence, beautiful countess. In the meantime, I think you do not wish to become quite a child again."

"You are, in truth, a charming man. One question more and I will let you go, for you seem in haste."

"Speak, countess."

"You said that some one had betrayed you. Is it a man or a woman?"

"A woman."

"Ah! ah I count! love affairs."

"Alas! yes; prompted by an almost frantic jealousy, which has produced the pleasant effect you have seen. It is a woman who, not daring to stab me with a knife, because she knows I cannot be killed, wanted to imprison and ruin me."

"What! ruin you?"

"She endeavored to do so, at least."

"Count, I will stop here," said the countess, laughing. "Is it the liquid silver which courses through your veins that gives you that immortality which makes people betray you instead of killing you? Shall I set you down here, or drive you to your own house? Come, choose!"

“No, madame, I cannot allow you to inconvenience yourself on my account. I have my horse, Djerid.”

“Ah! that wonderful animal which, it is said, outstrips the wind?”

“He seems to please you, madame.”

“He is, in truth, a magnificent steed.”

“Allow me to offer him to you, on the condition that you alone ride him.”

“Oh! no, thank you; I do not ride on horseback; or, at least, I am a very timid horsewoman. I am as much obliged to you, however, as if I accepted your offer. Adieu! My dear count; do not forget my philter. In ten years.”

“I said twenty.”

“Count, you know the proverb; 'a bird in the hand — ' and if you could even give it me in five years, there is no knowing what may happen.”

“Whenever you please, countess; are you not aware that I am entirely at your command?”

“Only one word more, count.”

“I am all attention, madame.”

“It proves that I have great confidence in you to speak of it.”

Balsamo, who had already alighted from the carriage, suppressed his impatience, and approached the countess.

“It is reported everywhere,” continued Madame Dubarry, “that the king is rather taken with this little Taverney.”

“Ah! madame,” said Balsamo, “is it possible?”

“A very great partiality, it is said. You must tell me if it is true. Count, do not deceive me; I beseech you to treat me as a friend. Tell me the truth, count.”

“Madame,” replied Balsamo, “I will do more; I will promise you that Mademoiselle Andree shall never be anything to the king.”

“And why not?” cried Madame Dubarry.

“Because I will it so,” said Balsamo.

“Oh!” said Madame Dubarry, incredulously.

“You doubt.”

“Is it not allowed?”

“Never doubt the truths of science, madame. You have believed me when I said yes; believe me when I say no.”

“But, in short, have you the means — ?”

“Well?”

“Means capable of annihilating the king's will, or conquering his whims?”

Balsamo smiled.

“I create sympathies,” said he.

“Yes, I know that.”

“You believe it, even.”

“I believe it.”

“Well, I can create aversions also, and if needful, impossibilities. Therefore, countess, make your mind easy — I am on the watch.”

Balsamo uttered all these fragments of sentences with an absence of mind which Madame Dubarry would not have taken as she did for inspiration, had she known the feverish anxiety which Balsamo felt to be with Lorenza as quickly as possible.

“Well, count,” said she, “assuredly you are not only my prophet of happiness, but also my guardian angel. Count, mark my words; defend me and I will defend you. Alliance! union!”

“Agreed, madame,” replied Balsamo, kissing the countess's hand.

Then closing the door of the carriage, which the countess had stopped upon the Champs-Elysees, he mounted his horse, who neighed joyously, and was soon lost to view in the shadows of night.

“To Luciennes!” said the countess, consoled.

This time Balsamo whistled softly, and gently pressed his knees against Djerid's side, who started off at a gallop.

Five minutes afterward he was in the vestibule of the Rue Saint Claude, looking at Fritz.

“Well?” asked he, anxiously.

“Yes, master,” replied the domestic, who was accustomed to read his looks.

“She has returned?”

“She is upstairs.”

“In which room?”

“In the chamber of furs.”

“In what state is she?”

“Oh! very much exhausted. She ran so quickly that although I saw her coming, for I was watching for her, I had scarcely time to hasten to meet her.”

“Indeed!”

“Oh! I was quite alarmed. She swept on like a tempest; rushed upstairs without taking breath; and when she entered the room, she fell upon the large black lion's skin. You will find her there.”

Balsamo hastily ascended, and found Lorenza where Fritz had said. She was struggling in vain against the first convulsions of a nervous crisis. The fluid had weighed upon her too long already, and forced her to violent efforts. She was in pain, and groaned deeply; it seemed as if a mountain weighed upon her breast, and that she endeavored with both hands to remove it.

Balsamo looked at her with an eye sparkling with anger, and taking her in his arms, he carried her into her apartment, the mysterious door of which closed behind him.

CHAPTER CXXIV.

The Elixir of Life.

BALSAMO HAD just entered Lorenza's apartment, and was preparing to awake her and overwhelm her with all the reproaches which his gloomy anger prompted, fully determined to punish her according to the dictates of that anger, when a triple knock upon the ceiling announced that Althotas had watched for his return and wished to speak to him.

Nevertheless Balsamo waited; he was hoping either that he had been mistaken or that the signal had been accidental, when the impatient old man repeated his blows. Balsamo, therefore — fearing, no doubt, to see him descend, as he had already done before, or that Lorenza, awakened by an influence opposed to his own, might acquire the knowledge of some other particulars no less dangerous for him than his political secrets — Balsamo therefore, after having, if we may so express it, charged Lorenza with a fresh stratum of the electric fluid, left the room to rejoin Althotas.

It was high time; the trap-door was already half way from the ceiling. Althotas had left his wheeled armchair and was seen squatting down upon the movable part of the ceiling which rose and fell. He saw Balsamo leave Lorenza's room.

Squatting down thus, the old man was at once hideous and terrible to behold.

His white face, in those parts which still seemed as if they belonged to a living being, was purple with the violence of his rage. His meager and bony hands, like those of a human skeleton, trembled and shook; his hollow eyes seemed to vacillate in their deep caverns; and, in a language unknown even to his disciple, he was loading him with the most violent invectives.

Having left his armchair to touch the spring, he seemed to live and move only by the aid of his long arms, lean and angular as those of a spider; and issuing, as we have said, from his chamber, inaccessible to all but Balsamo, he was about to descend to the lower apartment. To induce this feeble old man, indolent as he was, to leave his armchair (that cleverly constructed machine which spared him all fatigue), and consent to perform one of the actions of common life — to induce him to undergo the care and fatigue of such a change in his usual habits, it must have required no ordinary excitement thus to withdraw him from the ideal life in which he existed, and plunge him into the everyday world.

Balsamo, taken as it were in the fact, seemed at first astonished, then uneasy.

“Ah!” exclaimed Althotas, “there you are, you good-for-nothing — you ingrate! There you are, coward, who desert your master!”

Balsamo called all his patience to his aid, as he invariably did when he spoke to the old man.

“But,” replied he quietly, “I think, my friend, you have only just called me.”

“Your friend?” exclaimed Althotas; “your friend? you vile human creature! You dare to speak the language of your equals to me! I have been a friend to you — more than a friend — a father — a father who has educated, instructed, and enriched you. But you my friend? Oh, no! for you abandon me — you assassinate me!”

“Come, master, you disturb your bile; you irritate your blood; you will make yourself ill.”

“Ill? — absurdity! Have I ever been ill, except when you made me a sharer, in spite of myself, in some of the miseries of your impure humankind? Ill! have you forgotten that it is I who heal others?”

“Well, master,” replied Balsamo, coldly. “I am here. Let us not lose time in vain.”

“Yes, I advise you to remind me of that. Time! time! which you oblige me to economize — me, for whom this element, circumscribed to all the world, should be endless, unlimited! Yes, my time flies — yes, my time is lost — my time, like the time of other people, falls minute by minute into the gulf of eternity, when, for me it ought to be eternity itself!”

“Come, master,” said Balsamo, with unalterable patience, lowering the trap to the ground as he spoke, placing himself upon it, and causing it to rise again to its place in the room; “come, what is it you want? You say I starve you, but are you not in your forty days of regimen?”

“Yes, yes, doubtless; the work of regeneration commenced thirty-two days ago.”

“Then tell me, of what do you complain? I see two or three bottles of rainwater, the only kind you drink, still remaining.”

“Of course; but do you imagine I am a silkworm, that I can complete the grand work of renovation of youth and of transformation alone? Do you imagine that, powerless as I am, I can compose alone the elixir of life? Or think you that, reclined on my side, and enervated by cooling drinks, my sole nourishment, I could have presence of mind enough, when left to my own resources and without your assistance, to complete the minute work of my regeneration, in which, as you, ungrateful wretch, well know. I must be aided and supported by a friend?”

“I am here, master — I am here. Answer me now,” said Balsamo, replacing the old man in his chair almost in spite of himself, as he would have done a hideous infant; “answer me — you have not been in want of distilled water, for, as I said before, there are three bottles still remaining. This water, as you know, was all collected in the month of May; there are your biscuits of barley and of sesamum, and I myself administered to you the white drops you prescribed.”

“Yes, but the elixir! The elixir is not made! You do not remember it, for you were not there — it was your father, your father, who was far more faithful than you are — but at the last fiftieth I had the elixir ready a month beforehand. I had my retreat on Mount Ararat. A Jew provided me with a Christian child, still at its mother's breast, for its weight in gold; I bled it according to the rule; I took the last three drops of its arterial blood, and in an hour my elixir, which only wanted this ingredient was composed. Therefore, my first regeneration succeeded wonderfully well. My hair and teeth fell out during the convulsions which succeeded the absorption of that wondrous elixir, but they grew again — the latter badly enough, I know, because I neglected the precaution of letting the elixir flow into my throat through a golden conduit. But my hair and my nails grew again in this second youth, and I began again to live as if I were only fifteen. Now I am old again — I am bordering on the extreme limit — and, if the elixir is not ready, if it is not safely inclosed in this bottle, if I do not bestow all possible care upon this work, the science of a century will be annihilated with me, and the admirable, the sublime secret I possess will be lost for man, who, in me and through me, approaches the divinity! Oh! if I fail — if I am mistaken, if I miss it, Acharat — it will be your fault; and take care, for my anger will be terrible — terrible!”

And as he uttered these last words, a livid glare shot from bib dying eyeball, and the old man fell into a brief convulsion, which ended in a violent fit of coughing.

Balsamo instantly lavished the most eager attentions on him, and the old man recovered. His complexion had become death-like instead of pale. This feeble attack had weakened his strength so much that one would have thought he was dying.

“Come, master,” said Balsamo, “tell me plainly what you want.”

“What I want!” said he, looking fixedly at Balsamo.

“Yes.”

“What I want is this — ”

“Speak; I hear you, and I will obey, if what you ask is possible.”

“Possible! possible!” muttered the old man contemptuously. “You know that everything is possible.”

“Yes, with time and science.”

“Science I have, and I am on the point of conquering time. My dose has succeeded. My strength has almost entirely left me. The white drops have caused the expulsion of all the remaining portion of my former nature. Youth, like the sap of the trees in May, rises under the old bark, and buds, so to speak, under the old wood. You may remark, Acharat, that the symptoms are excellent; my voice is weak, my sight is three-quarters gone; sometimes I feel my mind wander; I have become insensible to the transition from heat to cold. I must therefore hasten to finish my elixir, in order that, on the appointed term of my second fifty years, I may at once pass from a hundred to twenty. The ingredients for the elixir are all made, the conduit is ready; I want nothing but the three drops of blood I told you of.”

Balsamo made a gesture of repugnance.

“Very well,” said Althotas, “let us abandon the child, since it is so difficult, and since you prefer to shut yourself up the whole day with your mistress, to seeking it for me.”

“You know, master, that Lorenza is not my mistress,” replied Balsamo.

“Oh! oh! oh!” exclaimed Althotas; “you say that! You think to impose on me as on the mass; you would make me believe in an immaculate creature, and yet you are a man!”

“I swear to you, master, that Lorenza is as pure as an angel; I swear to you, that love, earthly felicity, domestic happiness — I have sacrificed all to my project. For I also have my regenerating; work; only, instead of applying it to myself alone, I shall apply it to all the world.”

“Fool! poor fool!” cried Althotas; “I verily believe he is going to speak to me of his cataclysm of fleshworms, his revolution of ant-hills, when I speak to him of life and eternal youth!”

“Which can only be acquired at the price of a fearful crime — and besides — ”

“You doubt, I see you doubt — miserable wretch!”

“No, master; but since you give up the child, tell me what do you want?”

“I must have the first unmarried woman you meet. A woman is the best — I have discovered that, on account of the affinity of the sexes. Find me that, and quickly, for I have only eight days longer.” — "Very well, master, I will see — I will search.”

Another lightning flash, more terrible than the first, sparkled in the old man's eyes.

“You will see! you will search!” he cried. “Oh, is that your reply? I expected it, and I don't know why I am surprised. And since when, thou worm of the earth! was the creature entitled to speak thus to its master? Ah! you see me powerless, disabled, supplicating, and you are fool enough to think me at your mercy! Yes, or no, Acharat? And answer me without embarrassment or falsehood, for I can see and read your heart; for I can judge you, and shall punish you.”

“Master,” replied Balsamo, “take care; your anger will do you an injury.”

“Answer me — answer!”

“I can only say the truth to my master; I will see if I can procure what you desire without injuring ourselves. I will endeavor to find a man who will sell you what you want; but I will not take the crime upon myself. That is all I can say.”

“You are very fastidious!” said Althotas, with a bitter smile.

“It is so, master,” said Balsamo.

Althotas made so violent an effort, that with the help of his two arms resting on the arms of the chair he raised himself to his feet.

“Yes, or no?” said he.

“Master, yes, if I find it; no, if I do not.”

“Then you will expose me to death, wretch! you will economize three drops of the blood of an insignificant, worthless creature such as I require, and let a perfect creature such as I am fall into the eternal gulf! Listen, Acharat!” said the old man, with a smile fearful to behold,. “I no longer ask you for anything; I ask absolutely nothing. I shall wait, but if you do not obey, I must serve myself; if you desert me, I must help myself! You have heard me — have you not? Now go!”

Balsamo, without replying to this threat, prepared everything the old man might want. He placed the drinks and the food within his reach, and performed all the services a watchful servant would perform for his master, a devoted son for his father; then, absorbed lay a thought very different from that which tormented Althotas, he lowered the trap to descend, without remarking that the old man followed him with a sardonic and ominous grin.

Althotas was still grinning like an evil genius when Balsamo stood before the still sleeping Lorenza.

CHAPTER CXXV.

The Struggle.

BALSAMO STOOD before her, his heart swelling with mournful thoughts, for the violent ones had vanished.

The scene which had just taken place between himself and Althotas had led him to reflect on the nothingness of all human affairs, and had chased anger from his heart. He remembered the practice of the Greek philosopher who repeated the entire alphabet before listening to the voice of that black divinity, the counselor of Achilles. After a moment of mute and cold contemplation before the couch on which Lorenza was lying:

“I am sad,” said he to himself, “but resolved, and I can look my situation full in the face. Lorenza hates me; Lorenza has threatened to betray me, and has betrayed me. My secret is no longer my own; I have given it into this woman's power, and she casts it to the winds. I am like the fox who has withdrawn from the steel-trap only the bone of his leg, but who has left behind his flesh and his skin, so that the huntsman can say on the morrow, 'The fox has been taken here; I shall know him, again, living or dead.'

“And this dreadful misfortune which Althotas cannot comprehend, and which therefore I have not even mentioned to him — this misfortune which destroys all my hopes in this country — and consequently in this world, of which France is the soul, I owe to the creature sleeping before me — to this beautiful statue, with her entrancing smile. To this tempting angel I owe dishonor and ruin, and shall owe to her captivity, exile, and death.

“Therefore,” continued he, becoming more animated, “the sum of evil has exceeded that of good, and Lorenza is dangerous. Oh! serpent, with thy graceful folds which nevertheless strangle, with thy golden throat which is nevertheless full of venom — sleep on, for when thou awakest I shall be obliged to kill thee!”

And with a gloomy smile Balsamo slowly approached the young woman, whose languid eyes were turned toward him as he approached, as the sunflower and volubilis open to the first rays of the rising sun.

“Oh!” said Balsamo, and yet I must forever close those eyes which now beam so tenderly on me, those beautiful eyes which are filled with lightning when they no longer sparkle with love.”

Lorenza smiled sweetly, and, smiling, she displayed the double row of her pearly teeth.

“But if I kill her who hates me,” said Balsamo, wringing his hands, “I shall also kill her who loves me.”

And his heart was filled with the deepest grief, strangely mingled with a vague desire.

“No, no,” murmured he; “I have sworn in vain; I have threatened in vain; no, I shall never have the courage to kill her. She shall live, but she shall live without being awakened. She shall live this factitious life, which is happiness for her, while the other is despair. Would that I could make her happy! What matters to me the rest? — she shall only have one existence, the one I create, the one during which she loves me, that which she lives at this moment.”

And he returned Lorenza's tender look by a look as tender as her own, placing his hand as he did so gently on her head. Lorenza, who seemed to read Balsamo's thoughts as if they were an open book, gave a long sigh, rose gradually with the graceful languor of sleep, and placed her two white arms upon Balsamo's shoulders, who felt her perfumed breath upon his cheek.

“Oh! no, no!” exclaimed Balsamo, passing his hand over his burning forehead and his dazzled eyes; “no, this intoxicating life will make me mad; and, with this siren, glory, power, immortality, will all vanish from my thoughts. No, no; she must awake. I must do it.

“Oh!” continued he, “if I awake her, the struggle will begin again. If I awake her, she will kill herself, or she will kill me, or force me to destroy her. Oh, what an abyss!

“Yes, this woman's destiny is written; it stands before me in letters of fire — love! death! — Lorenza, Lorenza! thou art doomed to love and to die! Lorenza, Lorenza! I hold thy life and thy love in my hands!”

Instead of a reply, the enchantress rose, advanced toward Balsamo, fell at his feet, and gazed into his eyes with a tender smile. Then she took one of his hands and placed it on her heart.

“Death!” said she in a low voice which whispered from her lips, brilliant as coral when it issues from the caverns of the deep; “death, but love!”

“Oh!” said Balsamo, “it is too much; I have struggled as long as a human being could struggle. Demon, or angel of futurity, whichever thou art! thou must be content. I have long enough sacrificed all the generous passions in my heart to egotism and pride. Oh! no, no — I have no right thus to rebel against the only human feeling which still remains lurking in my heart. I love this woman, I love her, and this passionate love injures her more than the most terrible hatred could do. This love kills her! Oh, coward! oh, ferocious fool that I am! I cannot even compromise with my desires. What! when I breathe my last sigh; when I prepare to appear before God — I, the deceiver, the false prophet — when I throw off my mantle of hypocrisy and artifice before the Sovereign Judge — shall I have not one generous action to confess, not the recollection of a single happiness to console me in the midst of my eternal suffering?

“Oh! no, no, Lorenza; I know that in loving thee I lose the future; I know that my revealing angel will wing its flight to Heaven if I thus change your entire existence and overturn the natural laws of your being. But, Lorenza, you wish it, do you not?”

“My beloved!” she sighed.

“Then you accept the factitious instead of the real life?”

“I ask for it on my knees — I pray for it — I implore it. This life is love and happiness.”

“And will it suffice; for you when you are my wife, for I love you passionately?”

“Oh! I know it, I can read your heart.”

“You will never regret your wings, poor dove; for know, that you will never again roam through radiant space for me to seek the ray of light Jehovah once deigned to bestow upon his prophets. When I would know the future, when I would command men, alas! alas! the voice will not reply. I have had in thee the beloved woman and the helping spirit, I shall only have one of the two now; and yet — ”

“Ah! you doubt, you doubt,” cried Lorenza; “I see doubt like a dark stain upon your heart.”

“You will always love me, Lorenza?”

“Always! always!”

Balsamo passed his hand over his forehead.

“Well! it shall be so,” said he.

And raising Lorenza, he folded her in his arms and pressed a kiss upon her forehead — the seal of his promise to love and cherish her till death.

CHAPTER CXXVI.

Love.

FOR Balsamo another life had commenced, a life hitherto unknown in his active, troubled, multiplied existence. For three days there had been for him no more anger, no more apprehension, no more jealousy; for three days he had not heard the subject of politics, conspirators, or conspiracies, as much as whispered. By Lorenza's side, and he had not left her for an instant, he had forgotten the whole world. This strange inexplicable love, which, as it were, soared above humanity, this intoxicating and mysterious attachment, this love of a shadow, for he could not conceal from himself that with a word he could change his gentle bride into an implacable enemy — this love snatched from hatred, thanks to an inexplicable caprice of nature or of science, plunged Balsamo into happiness which bordered on madness.

More than once, during these three days, rousing himself from the opiate torpor of love, Balsamo looked at his ever smiling, ever ecstatic companion — for from thenceforth, in the existence he had created for her, she reposed from her factitious life in a sort of ecstasy equally factitious — and when he saw her calm, gentle, happy, when she called him by the most affectionate names, and dreamed aloud her mysterious love, he more than once asked himself if some ruthless demon had not inspired Lorenza with the idea of deceiving him with a falsehood in order to lull his vigilance, and when it was lulled, to escape and only appear again as the Avenging Eumenides.

In such moments Balsamo doubted of the truth of a science received by tradition from antiquity, but of which he had no evidence but examples. But soon the ever-springing fountain of her affection reassured him.

“If Lorenza was feigning,” argued he with himself, “if she intended to fly from me, she would seek opportunities for sending me away, she would invent excuses for occasional solitude; but, far from that, her gentle voice ever whispers, 'Stay!'”

Then Balsamo's confidence in himself and in science returned. Why, indeed, should the magic secret to which alone he owned his power have become all at once, and without any transition, a chimera, fit only to throw to the winds as a vanished recollection, as the smoke of an extinguished fire? Never with relation to him had Lorenza been more lucid, more clear-sighted. All the thoughts which sprang up in his mind, all the feelings which made his heart bound, were instantly reproduced in hers. It remained to be seen if this lucidity were not sympathy; if, beyond himself and the young girl, beyond the circle which their love had traced, and which their love illuminated with its light — the eyes of her soul, so clear-sighted before this new era of continued sleep, could yet pierce the surrounding darkness.

Balsamo dared not make the decisive trial; he hoped still, and this hope was the resplendent crown of his happiness.

Sometimes Lorenza said to him, with gentle melancholy:

“Acharat, you think of another than me, of a northern woman, with fair hair and blue eyes. Acharat! Acharat! this woman always moves beside me in your thoughts.”

Balsamo looked tenderly at Lorenza.

“You see that in me?” said he.

“Oh! yes; as clearly as I read the surface of a mirror.”

“Then you know it is not love which makes me think of that woman,” replied Balsamo. “Read in my heart, dearest Lorenza!”

“No,” replied she, bending her head; “no, I know it well. But yet your thoughts are divided between us two, as in the days when Lorenza Feliciani tormented you — the naughty Lorenza, who sleeps, and whom you will not again awake.”

“No, my love, no,” exclaimed Balsamo; “I think only of thee, at least with the heart. Have I not forgotten all, neglected even-thing — study, politics, work — since our happiness?”

“And you are wrong,” said Lorenza, “for I could help you in your work.”

“How?”

“Yes; did you not once spend whole hours in your laboratory?”

“Certainly. But I renounce all these vain endeavors. They would be so many hours taken from my life — for during that time I should not see you.”

“And why should I not follow you in your labors as in your love? Why should I not make you powerful as I make you happy?”

“Because my Lorenza, it is true, is beautiful, but she has not studied. God gives beauty and love, but study alone gives science.”

“The soul knows everything.”

“Then you can really see with the eyes of your soul?”

“Yes.”

“And you can guide me in the grand search after the philosopher's stone?”

“I think so.”

“Come, then.”

And Balsamo, encircling her waist with his arm, led her into his laboratory. The gigantic furnace, which no one had replenished for four days, was extinguished, and the crucibles had grown cold upon their chafing-dishes.

Lorenza looked around on all these strange instruments — the last combinations of expiring alchemy — without surprise. She seemed to know the purpose which each was intended to fulfill.

“You are attempting to make gold?” said she, smiling.

“Yes.”

“All these crucibles contain preparations in different stages of progress?”

“All stopped — all lost; but I do not regret it.”

“You are right, for your gold would never be anything but colored mercury; you can render it solid, perhaps, but you cannot transform it.”

“But gold can be made?”

“No.”

“And yet Daniel of Transylvania sold the receipt for the transmutation of metals to Cosmo, the First for twenty-thousand ducats.”

“Daniel of Transylvania deceived Cosmo the First.”

“And yet the Saxon Payken, who was condemned to death by Charles the Second, ransomed his life by changing a leaden ingot into a golden one, from which forty ducats were coined, besides taking as much from the ingot as made a medal, which was struck in honor of the clever alchemist.”

“The clever alchemist was nothing but a clever juggler. He merely substituted the golden ingot for the leaden one; nothing more. Your surest way of making gold, Acharat, is to melt into ingots, as you do already, the riches which your slaves bring you from the four quarters of the world.”

Balsamo remained pensive.

“Then the transmutation of metals is impossible?” said he.

“Impossible.”

“And the diamond — is it, too, impossible to create?”

“Oh! the diamond is another matter,” said Lorenza.

“The diamond can be made, then?”

“Yes; for, to make the diamond, you have not to transmute one body into another; to make the diamond is merely to attempt the simple modification of a known element.”

“Then you know the element of which the diamond is formed?”

“To be sure; the diamond is pure carbon crystalized.”

Balsamo was almost stunned; a dazzling, unexpected, unheard-of light flashed before his eyes; he covered them with both hands, as if the flame had blinded him.

“Oh, bountiful Creator!” said he, “you give me too much — some danger threatens me! What precious ring must I throw into the sea to appease the jealousy of my fate? Enough, Lorenza, for to-day!”

“Am I not yours? Order, command me!”

“Yes, you are mine. Come, come!”

And he drew her out of the laboratory, crossed the chamber of furs, and, without paying any attention to a light creaking noise he heard overhead, he once more entered the barred room with Lorenza.

“So you are pleased with your Lorenza, my beloved Balsamo?”

“Oh!” exclaimed he.

“What did you fear, then? Speak — tell me all.”

Balsamo clasped his hands, and looked at Lorenza with an expression of such terror that a spectator ignorant of what was passing in his heart would have been totally at a loss to account for it.

“Oh!” murmured he, “and I was near killing this angel — I was near expiring of despair before resolving the problem of being at once powerful and happy! I forgot that the limits of the possible always exceed the horizon traced Toy the present state of science, and that the majority of truths which have become facts have always in their infancy been looked upon as dreams! I thought I knew everything, and I knew nothing!”

The young Italian smiled divinely.

“Lorenza, Lorenza!” continued Balsamo, “the mysterious design of the Creator is, then, accomplished which makes woman to be born of the substance of the man, and which commands them to have only one heart in common! Eve is revived for me — an Eve who will not have a thought that is not mine, and whose life hangs by the thread which I hold. It is too much, my God, for a creature to possess! I sink under the weight of Thy gift!”

And he fell upon his knees, gazing with adoration upon the gentle beauty, who smiled on him as no earthly creature can smile.

“Oh, no!” he continued; “no, you shall never leave me more! I shall live in all safety under your look, which can pierce into the future. You will assist me in those laborious researches which you alone, as you have said, can complete, and which one word from you will render easy and successful. You will point me out, since I cannot make gold, gold being a homogeneous substance, a primitive element — you will point me out in what corner of the world the Creator has concealed it; you will tell me where the rich treasures lie which have been swallowed up in the vast depths of the ocean. With your eyes I shall see the pearl grow in the veined shell, and man's thoughts spring up under their gross earthly covering. With your ears I shall hear the dull sound of the worm beneath the ground, and the footsteps of mine enemy as he approaches!”

And Lorenza still smiled upon him, and as she smiled she replied to his words by affectionate caresses.

“And yet,” whispered she, as if she could see each thought which whirled through his restless brain, “and yet you doubt still, Acharat, as you have said, if I can cross the circle of our love — you doubt if I can see into the distance; but you console yourself by thinking that if I cannot see, she can.”

“She! Who?”

“The fair-haired beauty. Shall I tell you her name?”

“Yes.”

“Stay — Andree!”

“Ah, yes; you can read my thoughts! Yet a last expiring fear still troubles me. Can you still see through space, though material obstacles intervene?”

“Try me.”

“Give me your hand, Lorenza.”

The young girl passionately seized Balsamo's hand.

“Can you follow me?”

“Anywhere!”

“Come!”

And Balsamo, leaving in thought the Rue Saint Claude, drew Lorenza's thoughts along with him.

“Where are we?” asked he.

“We are upon a hill,” replied the young Italian.

“Yes, you are right,” said Balsamo, trembling; with delight. “But what do you see?”

“Before me, to the right, or to the left?”

“Before you.”

“I see a long alley, with a wood on one side, a town on the other, and a river which separates them and loses itself in the horizon, after flowing under the walls of a large chateau.”

“That is right, Lorenza. The forest is that of Vesinet; the town St. Germain; the chateau is the Chateau de Maisons. Let us enter the pavilion behind us. What do you see there?”

“Ah! in the first place, in the antechamber, a little negro, fantastically dressed, and employed in eating sugarplums.”

“Yes, Zamore. Proceed, proceed.”

“An empty salon, splendidly furnished; the spaces above the doors painted with goddesses and cupids.”

“The salon is empty, you say?”

“Yes.”

“Let us go still further.”

“Ah! we are in a splendid boudoir, lined with blue satin embroidered with flowers of natural colors.”

“Is that empty also?”

“No; a lady is reclining upon a sofa.”

“What lady? Do you not remember to have seen her before?”

“Yes; it is the Countess Dubarry.”

“Right, Lorenza! I shall go frantic with delight! What does the lady do?”

“She is thinking of you, Balsamo.”

“Of me?”

“Yes.”

“Then you can read her thoughts?”

“Yes, for I repeat she is thinking of you.”

“For what purpose?”

“You have made her a promise.”

“Yes.”

“You promised her that water of beauty which Venus, to revenge herself on Sappho, gave to Phaon.”

“Yes, yes, you are right again! And what does she do while thinking?”

“She comes to a decision.”

“What decision?”

“She reaches out her hand toward the bell; she rings; another young lady enters.”

“Dark or light-haired?”

“Dark.”

“Tall or short?”

“Little.”

“Her sister. Listen to what she says to her.”

“She orders the horses to be put to her carriage.”

“Where does she wish to go?”

“To come here.”

“Are you sure?”

“She is giving the order. Stay — she is obeyed. I see the horses and the carriage. In two hours she will be here.”

Balsamo fell upon his knees.

“Oh!” exclaimed he, “if in two hours she should really be here, I shall have nothing left to ask for on earth!”

“My poor Balsamo! then you still feared?”

“Yes, yes!”

“And why did you fear? Love, which completes the material existence, increases also our mental powers. Love, like even generous emotion, brings us nearer to God, and all wisdom comes from God.”

“Lorenza, Lorenza, you will drive me mad with joy!”

Balsamo now only waited for another proof to be completely happy. This proof was the arrival of Madame Dubarry.

The two hours of suspense were short. All measure of time had completely ceased for Balsamo.

Suddenly the young girl started and took Balsamo's hand.

“You are doubting yet,” said she, “or you wish to know where she is at this moment.”

“Yes,” said Balsamo, “you are right.”

“Well,” replied Lorenza, “she is thundering along the boulevards at the full speed of her horses; she approaches; she turns into the Rue Saint Claude; she stops before the door and knocks.”

The apartment in which they were was so retired and so quiet that the noise of the iron knocker could not penetrate its recesses; but Balsamo, raised upon one knee, was anxiously listening.

At this moment two knocks struck by Fritz made him bound to his feet, for the reader will remember that two knocks were the signal of an important visit.

"Oh!" said he, "then it is true!"

"Go and convince yourself, Balsamo; but return quickly."

Balsamo advanced toward the fireplace.

"Let me accompany you," said Lorenza, "as far as the door of the staircase."

"Come!"

And they both passed together into the chamber of furs.

"You will not leave this room?"

"No; I will await you here. Oh, do not fear; you know the Lorenza who loves you is not the Lorenza whom you fear. Besides —

She stopped and smiled.

"What?" asked Balsamo.

"Can you not read in my soul as I read yours?"

"Alas! no."

"Besides, you can command me to sleep until you return. Command me to remain immovable upon this sofa, and I shall sleep and be motionless."

"Well, my Lorenza, it shall be so. Sleep, and await my return here!"

Lorenza, already struggling with sleep, fell back upon the sofa, murmuring:

"You will return soon, my Balsamo, will you not?"

Balsamo waved his hand; Lorenza was already asleep; but so beautiful, so pure, with her long flowing hair, the feverish glow upon her cheeks, her half-opened and swimming eyes, so little like a mortal, that Balsamo turned again, took her hand and kissed it, but dared not kiss her lips.

Two knocks were heard a second time. The lady was becoming impatient, or Fritz feared that his master had not heard him. Balsamo hastened to the door, but as he closed it behind him, he fancied he heard a second creaking noise like the former one. He opened the door again, looked round, and saw nothing but Lorenza sleeping, and her breast heaving beneath the magnetic sleep.

Balsamo closed the door and hastened toward the salon, without uneasiness, without fear, without foreboding — all heaven in his heart! But he was mistaken; it was not sleep alone which oppressed Lorenza's bosom and made her breathe so heavily. It was a kind of dream which seemed to belong to the lethargy in which she was plunged — a lethargy which so nearly resembled death.

Lorenza dreamed, and in the hideous mirror of her gloomy dreams she fancied she saw, through the darkness which commenced to close around her, the oaken ceiling open, and something like a large circular platform descend slowly with a regular, slow, measured movement, accompanied by a disagreeable hissing noise. It seemed to her as if she breathed with difficulty, as if she were almost suffocated by the pressure of this moving circle.

It seemed to her as if upon this moving trap something moved — some misshapen being like Caliban in “The Tempest” — a monster with a human face — an old man whose eyes and arms alone were living, and who looked at her with his frightful eyes, and stretched his fleshless arms toward her.

And she — she, poor child! — she writhed in vain, without power to escape, without dreaming of the danger which threatened her. She felt nothing but the grasp of two living flesh-hooks seizing upon her white dress, lifting her from her sofa and placing her upon the trap, which reascended slowly toward the ceiling, with the grating noise of iron scraping against iron, and amid a hideous mocking laugh from the monster with the human face who was raising her aloft without shock and without pain.

CHAPTER CXXVII.

The Philter.

AS LORENZA had foretold, it was Madame Dubarry who had just knocked at the gate.

The beautiful countess had been ushered into the salon. While awaiting Balsamo's arrival, she was looking over that curious Book of Death engraved at Mayence, the plates of which, designed with marvelous skill, show death presiding; over all the acts of man's life, waiting for him at the door of the ballroom after he has pressed the hand of the woman he loves, dragging him to the bottom of the water in which he is bathing, or hiding in the barrel of the gun he carries to the chase. Madame Dubarry was at the plate which represents a beautiful woman daubing her face with rouge and looking at herself in the glass, when Balsamo opened the door and bowed to her, with the smile of happiness still beaming upon his face.

“ Excuse me, madame, for having made you wait; but I had not well calculated the distance, or was ignorant of the speed of your horses. I thought you still at the Place Louis XV.”

“What do you mean?” asked the countess. “You knew I was coming, then?”

“Yes, madame; it is about two hours ago since I saw you in your boudoir lined with blue satin, giving orders for your horses to be put to the carriage.”

“And you say I was in my blue satin boudoir?”

“Embroidered with flowers colored after nature. Yes, countess, you were reclining upon a sofa; a pleasing thought passed through your mind; you said to yourself, 'I will go and visit the Count de Fenix,' then you rang the bell.”

“And who entered?”

“Your sister, countess — am I right? You requested her to transmit your orders, which were instantly executed.”

“Truly, count, you are a sorcerer. You really alarm me.”

“Oh! have no fear, countess; my sorcery is very harmless,”

“And you saw that I was thinking of you?”

“Yes; and even that you thought of me with benevolent intentions.”

“Ah! you are right, my dear count; I have the best possible intentions toward you, but confess that you deserve more than intentions — you, who are so kind and so useful, and who seem destined to play in my life the part of tutor, which is the most difficult part I know.”

“In truth, madame, you make me very happy. Then I have been of use to you?”

“What! you are a sorcerer, and cannot guess?”

“Allow me, at least, the merit of being modest.”

“As you please, my dear count; then I will first speak of what I have done for you.”

“I cannot permit it, madame; on the contrary, speak of yourself, I beseech you.”

“Well, my dear count, in the first place, give me that talisman which renders one invisible; for on my journey here, rapid as it was, I fancied I recognized one of M. de Richelieu's grays.”

“And this gray?”

“Followed my carriage, carrying on his back a courier.”

“What do you think of this circumstance, and for what purpose could the duke have caused you to be followed?”

“With the intention of playing me some scurvy trick. Modest as you are, my dear Count de Fenix, you must be aware that Nature has gifted you with personal advantages enough to make a king jealous of my visits to you, or of yours to me.”

“M. de Richelieu cannot be dangerous to you in any way, madame,” replied Balsamo.

“But he was so, my dear count; he was dangerous before this last event.”

Balsamo comprehended that there was a secret concealed beneath these words which Lorenza had not yet revealed to him. He did not therefore venture on the unknown ground, and replied merely by a smile.

“He was indeed,” repeated the countess; “and I was nearly falling a victim to a most skillfully constructed plot — a plot in which you also had some share, count.”

“I! engaged in a plot against you? Never, madame!”

“Was it not you who gave the Duke de Richelieu the philter?”

“What philter?”

“A draught which causes the most ardent love.”

“No, madame; M. de Richelieu composes those draughts himself, for he has long known the receipt; I merely gave him a simple narcotic.”

“Ah! indeed?”

“Upon my honor!”

“And on what day did M. de Richelieu ask for this narcotic? Remember the date, count; it is of importance.”

“Madame, it was last Saturday — the day previous to that on which I had the honor of sending you through Fritz, the note requesting you to meet me at M. de Sartines'.”

“The eve of that day!” exclaimed the countess. “The eve of the day on which the king was seen going to the Little Trianon! Oh! now everything is explained.”

“Then, if all is explained, you see I only gave the narcotic.”

“Yes, the narcotic saved us all.”

This time Balsamo waited; he was profoundly ignorant of the subject.

“I am delighted, madame,” replied he, “to have been useful to you, even unintentionally.”

“Oh! you are always kindness itself. But you can do more for me than you have ever yet done. Oh, doctor! I have been very ill, practically speaking, and even now I can yet scarcely believe in my recovery.”

“Madame,” said Balsamo, “the doctor, since there is a doctor in the case, always requires the details of the illness he is to cure. Will you give me the exact particulars of what you have experienced? — and if possible, do not forget a single symptom.”

“Nothing can be more simple, my dear doctor', or dear sorcerer — whichever you prefer. The eve of the day on which this narcotic was used, his majesty refused to accompany me to Luciennes. He remained, like a deceiver as he is, at Trianon, pretending fatigue, and yet, as I have since learned, he supped at Trianon with the Duke de Richelieu and the Baron de Taverney.”

“Ha!”

“Now you understand. At supper the love-draught was given to the king.”

“Well, what happened?”

“Oh! that is difficult to discover. The king was seen going in the direction of the offices of Trianon; and all I can tell you is, that his majesty returned to Trianon through a fearful storm, pale, trembling, and feverish — almost on the verge of delirium.”

“And you think,” said Balsamo, smiling, “that it was not the storm alone which alarmed his majesty?”

“No, for the valet heard him cry several times, 'Dead, dead, dead!'”

“Oh!” said Balsamo.

“It was the narcotic,” continued Madame Dubarry. “Nothing alarms the king so much as death, and next to death its semblance. He had found Mademoiselle de Taverney sleeping a strange sleep, and must have thought her dead.”

“Yes, yes; dead indeed,” said Balsamo, who remembered having fled without awakening Andree; “dead, or at least presenting all the appearance of death. Yes, yes — it must be so. Well, madame, and what then?”

“No one knows what happened during the night. The king, on his return, was attacked by a violent fever and a nervous trembling, which did not leave him until the morning, when it occurred to the dauphiness to open the shutters and show his majesty a lovely morning, with the sun shining upon merry faces. Then all these unknown visions disappeared with the night which had produced them. At noon the king was better, took some broth, and ate a partridge's wing; and in the evening —

“And in the evening — ?” repeated Balsamo.

“In the evening,” continued Madame Dubarry, “his majesty, who no doubt would not stay at Trianon after his fright, came to see me at Luciennes.”

The triumphant countenance and graceful but roguish look of the countess reassured Balsamo as to the power the favorite yet exercised over the king.

“Then you are satisfied with me, madame?” inquired he.

“Delighted, count! and when you spoke of impossibilities you could create, you told the exact truth.” And in token of thanks she gave him her soft, white, perfumed hand, which was not fresh as Lorenza's, but almost as beautiful.

“And now, count, let us speak of yourself!”

Balsamo bowed like a man ready to listen.

“If you have preserved me from a great danger.” continued Madame Dubarry, “I think I have also saved you from no inconsiderable peril.”

“Me!” said Balsamo, concealing his emotion. “I do not require that to feel grateful to you; but yet, be good enough to inform me what — ”

“Yes. The coffer in question — ”

“Well, madame?

“Contained a multitude of secret ciphers, which M. de Sartines caused all his clerks to translate. All signed their several translations, executed apart, and all gave the same result. In consequence of this, M. de Sartines arrived at Versailles this morning while I was there, bringing with him all these translations and the dictionary of diplomatic ciphers.”

“Ha! — and what did the king say?”

“The king seemed surprised at first, then alarmed. His majesty easily listens to those who speak to him of danger. Since the stab of Damien's penknife, there is one word which is ever eagerly hearkened to by Louis XV.; it is — Take care!”

“Then M. de Sartines accused me of plotting?”

“At first M. de Sartines endeavored to make me leave the room; but I refused, declaring that as no one was more attached to his majesty than myself, no one had a right to make me leave him when danger was in question. M. de Sartines insisted, but I resisted, and the king, looking at me in a manner I know well, said:

“ Let her remain, Sartines; I can refuse her nothing to-day.”

“Then you understand, count, that as I was present, M. de Sartines, remembering our adieu, so clearly expressed, feared to displease me by attacking you. He therefore spoke of the evil designs of the king of Prussia toward France; of the disposition prevalent to facilitate the march of rebellion by supernatural means. In a word, he accused a great many people, proving always by the papers he held that these persons were guilty.”

“Guilty of what?”

“Of what! Count, dare I disclose secrets of state?”

“Which are our secrets, madame. Oh! you risk nothing. I think it is my interest not to speak.”

“Yes, count, I know that M. de Sartines wished to prove that a numerous and powerful sect, composed of bold, skillful, resolute agents, were silently undermining the respect due to the king, by spreading certain reports concerning his majesty.”

“What rumors?”

“Saying, for instance, that his majesty was accused of starving his people.”

“To which the king replied — ?”

“As the king always replies, by a joke.”

Balsamo breathed again.

“And what was the joke?” he asked.

“'Since I am accused of starving the people,' said he, 'there is only one reply to make to the accusation — let us feed them.'

“'How so, sire?' said M. de Sartines.

“'I will take the charge of feeding all those who spread this report, and, moreover, will give them safe lodging in my chateau of the Bastille.'”

A slight shudder passed through Balsamo's limbs, but he retained his smiling countenance.

“What followed?” asked he.

“Then the king seemed to consult me by a smile. 'Sire,' said I, 'I can never believe that those little black characters which M. de Sartines has brought to you mean that you are a bad king.'”

“Then the lieutenant of police exclaimed loudly.

“'Any more,' I added, 'than they prove that our clerks can read.'”

“And what did the king say, countess?” asked Balsamo.

“That I might be right, but that M. de Sartines was not wrong.”

“Well, and then?”

“Then a great many lettres-de-cachet were made out, and I saw that M. de Sartines tried to slip among them one for you; but I stood firm, and arrested him by a single word.

“'Sir,' I said aloud, and before the king, 'arrest all Paris, if you like — that is your business; but you had better reflect a little before you lay a finger on one of my friends — if not —

“'Oh, ho!' said the king, 'she is getting angry; take care, Sartines.'

“'But, sire, the interest of the kingdom — '

“'Oh! you are not a Sully,' said I, crimson with rage, 'and I am not a Gabrielle.'

“'Madame, they intend to assassinate the king, as Henry IV. was assassinated.'

“For the first time, the king turned pale, trembled, and put his hand to his head.

“I feared I was vanquished.

“'Sire,' said I, 'you must let M. de Sartines have his own way; for his clerks have, no doubt, read in these ciphers that I also am conspiring against you.'

“And I left the room.

“But, dame! my dear count, the king preferred my company to that of M. de Sartines, and ran after me.

“'Ah! for pity's sake, my dear countess,' said he, 'pray do not get angry.'

“'Then send away that horrid man, sire; he smells of dungeons.”

“'Go, Sartines — be off with you!' said the king, shrugging his shoulders.

“'And, for the future, I forbid you not only to visit me, but even to bow to me,' added I.

“At this blow our magistrate became alarmed; he approached me, and humbly kissed my hand.

“'Well,' said he, 'so be it; let us speak no more of it, fair lady. But you will ruin the state. Since you absolutely insist upon it, your portege shall be respected by my agents.'”

Balsamo seemed plunged in a deep reverie.

“Well,” said the countess, “so you do not even thank me for having saved you from the pleasure of lodging in the Bastille, which perhaps might have been unjust, but assuredly no less disagreeable on that account?”

Balsamo made no reply. He drew a small phial, filled with n fluid red as blood, from his pocket.

“Hold, madame!” said he; “for the liberty you have procured for me I give you twenty years' additional youth!”

The countess slipped the phial into her bosom, and took her leave joyous and triumphant.

Balsamo still remained thinking.

“They might perhaps have been saved,” said he, “but for the coquetry of a woman. This courtesan's little foot dashes them down into the depths of the abyss. Decidedly, God is with us!”

CHAPTER CXXVIII.

Blood.

THE DOOR had no sooner closed upon Madame Dubarry than Balsamo ascended the secret staircase and entered the chamber of furs. This conversation with the countess had been long, and his impatience had two causes.

The first was the desire to see Lorenza; the second the fear that she might be fatigued, for in the new life he had given her there was no room for weariness of mind. She might be fatigued, inasmuch as she might pass, as she sometimes did, from the magnetic sleep to ecstasy; and to this ecstatic state always succeeded those nervous crises which prostrated Lorenza's strength, if the intervention of the restoring fluid did not restore the necessary equilibrium between the various functions of her being.

Balsamo, therefore, having entered and closed the door, immediately glanced at the couch where he had left Lorenza.

She was no longer there!

Only the fine shawl of cashmere embroidered with golden flowers, which had enveloped her like a scarf, was still lying upon the cushions, as an evidence that she had been in the room and had been reclining on them.

Balsamo stood motionless, gazing at the empty sofa. Perhaps Lorenza had felt herself incommoded by a strange odor which seemed to have filled the room since he left it; perhaps, by a mechanical movement, she had usurped some of the functions of actual life, and instinctively changed her place.

Balsamo's first idea was that Lorenza had returned to the laboratory, whither she had accompanied him a short lime previously.

He entered the laboratory. At the first glance it seemed empty; but in the shadow of the gigantic furnace, or behind the Oriental tapestry, a woman could easily conceal herself.

He raised the tapestry, therefore — he made the circuit of the furnace; nowhere could he discover even a trace of Lorenza.

There remained only the young girl's chamber, to which she had no doubt, returned; for this chamber was a prison to her only in her waking state.

He hastened to the chamber, and found the secret door closed. This was no proof that Lorenza had not entered. Nothing was more probable, in fact, than that Lorenza, in her lucid sleep, had remembered the mechanism, and, remembering it, had obeyed the hallucination of a dream barely effaced from her mind. Balsamo pressed the spring.

The chamber was empty, like the laboratory; it did not appear as if Lorenza had even entered it.

Then a heart-rending thought — a thought which, it will be remembered, had already stung his heart — chased away all the suppositions, all the hopes of the happy lover.

Lorenza had been playing a part; she must have feigned to sleep in order to banish all distrust, all uneasiness, all watchfulness from her husband's mind; and at the first opportunity had fled again, this time with surer precautions, warned as she had been by a first, or rather by two former experiences.

At this idea Balsamo started up and rang for Fritz.

Then, as Fritz, to his impatient mind, seemed to delay, he hastened to meet him, and found him on the secret staircase.

“The signora?” said he.

“Well, master?” said Fritz, seeing by Balsamo's agitation that something extraordinary had taken place.

“Have you seen her?”

“No, master.”

“She has not gone?”

“From where?”

“From this house, to be sure!”

“No one has left the house but the countess, behind whom I have just closed the gate.”

Balsamo rushed up the stairs again like a madman. Then he fancied that the giddy young creature, so different in her sleep from what she was when waking, had concealed herself in a moment of childish playfulness; that from the corner where she was hid she was now reading his heart, and amusing herself by terrifying him, in order to reassure him afterward. Then he recommenced a minute search.

Not a nook was omitted, not a cupboard forgotten, not a screen left in its proper place. There was something in this search of Balsamo's like the frantic efforts of a man blinded by passion, alternating with the feeble and tottering gait of a drunkard. He could then only stretch out his arms and cry, “Lorenza. Lorenza!” hoping that the adored creature would rush forth suddenly, and throw herself into his arms with an exclamation of joy.

But silence alone, a gloomy and uninterrupted silence, replied to his extravagant thoughts and mad appeals.

In running wildly about, dashing aside the furniture, shouting to the naked walls, calling Lorenza, staring without seeing any object or forming a single coherent thought, Balsamo passed three minutes — that is to say, three centuries — of agony.

He recovered by degrees from this half insane hallucination, dipped his hand in a vase of iced water, moistened his temples, and pressing one hand in the other, as if to force himself to be cool, he chased back by his iron will the blood which was beating wildly against his brain, with that fatal, incessant, monotonous movement which indicates life when there is merely motion and silence, but which is a sign of death or madness when it becomes tumultuous and perceptible.

“Come!”' said he, “let me reason. Lorenza is not here — no more false pretenses with myself. Lorenza is not here; she must be gone — yes, gone, quite gone!”

And he looked around once more, and once more shouted her name.

“Gone!” continued he. “In vain Fritz asserts that he has not seen her. She is gone — gone!”

“Two cases present themselves:

“Either he has not seen Lorenza — and, after all, that is possible, for man is liable to error — or he has seen her, and has been bribed by her.

“Fritz bribed!

“Why not? In vain does his past fidelity plead against this supposition. If Lorenza, if love, if science, could so deeply deceive and lie, why should the frail nature of a fallible human being not deceive also?

“Oh, I will know all — I will know all! Is there not Mademoiselle de Taverney left? Yes, through her I shall know if Fritz has betrayed me, if Lorenza is false! And this time — oh! this time, as love has proved false, as science has proved an error, as fidelity has become a snare — oh! this time

Balsamo will punish without pity, without sparing, like a strong man who revenges himself, who chases pity from his heart, and keeps only pride.

“Let me see; the first step is to leave this as quickly as possible, not to let Fritz suspect anything, and to fly to Trianon!”

And Balsamo, seizing his hat, which had rolled on the ground, rushed toward the door.

But all at once he stopped.

“Oh!” said he, “before anything else — my God! poor old man, I had forgotten him — I must see Althotas. During my delirium, during this spasm of forced and unnatural love, I have neglected the unfortunate old man, I have been ungrateful and inhuman!”

And, with the feverishness which now animated all his movements, Balsamo approached the spring which put in motion the trap in the ceiling, and the movable scaffold quickly descended.

Balsamo placed himself upon it, and, aided by the counterpoise, mounted again, still overwhelmed by the anguish of his mind and heart, and without thinking of anything but Lorenza. Scarcely had he attained the level of the floor, when the voice of Althotas struck upon his ear, and roused him from his gloomy reverie.

But, to Balsamo's great astonishment, the old man's first words were not reproaches, as he had expected; he was received with an outburst of simple and natural gayety.

The pupil looked with an astonished gaze upon his master.

The old man was reclining upon his spring-chair. He breathed noisily and with delight, as if at each inspiration he added a day to his life; his eyes, full of a gloomy fire, but the expression of which was enlivened by the smile upon his lips, were fixed eagerly upon his visitor.

Balsamo summoned up all his strength and collected his ideas, in order to conceal his grief from his master, who had so little indulgence for human weaknesses.

During this moment of reflection, Balsamo felt a strange oppression weigh upon his breast. No doubt the air was vitiated by being too constantly breathed, for a heavy, dull, close, nauseous odor, like the one he had already felt below, but there in a slighter degree, floated in the air, and, like the vapors which rise from lakes and marshes in autumn at sunrise and sunset, had taken a shape and rested on the windows.

In this dense and acrid atmosphere Balsamo's heart throbbed, his head felt confused, a vertigo seized upon him, and he felt that respiration and strength were fast failing him.

“Master,” said he, seeking some object on which to support himself, and endeavoring to dilate his lungs; “master, you cannot live here; there is no air.”

“You think so?”

“Oh!”

“Nevertheless, I breathe very well in it,” replied Althotas gayly, “and I live, as you see!”

“Master, master,” replied Balsamo, growing more and more giddy, “let me open a window! See! it rises from the floor like an exhalation of blood!”

“Of blood! Ah! you think so? Of blood?” cried Althotas, bursting into a laugh.

“Oh, yes, yes; I feel the miasma which is exhaled from a newly-killed body. I could weigh it, so heavily does it press upon my brain and heart.”

“That is it,” said Althotas, with his sardonic laugh; “that is it; I also perceived it. You have a tender heart and a weak brain, Acharat.”

“Master,” said Balsamo, pointing with his finger at the old man, “master, you have blood upon your hands; master, there is blood upon this table; there is blood everywhere, even in your eyes, which shine like two torches; master, the smell which I breathe, and which makes me giddy, which is suffocating me, is the smell of blood!”

“Well, what then?” said Althotas, quickly; “is this the first time in your life that you have smelled it?”

“No.””

“Have you never seen me make experiments? Have you never made any yourself?”

“But human blood!” said Balsamo, pressing his hand upon his burning forehead.

“Ah! you have a subtle sense of smell,” said Althotas. “Well, I did not think human blood could be distinguished from that of any other animal.”

“Human blood!” muttered Balsamo.

And as he reeled backward and felt for some projecting point to support him, he perceived with horror a vast copper basin, the shining sides of which reflected the purple color of the freshly-spilled blood.

The enormous vase was half filled.

Balsamo started back, terrified.

“Oh, this blood!” exclaimed he; “from whence comes this blood?”

Althotas made no reply, but his watchful glance lost none of the feverish fluctuations and wild terror of Balsamo. Suddenly the latter uttered a fearful groan.

Then, stooping like some wild beast darting upon its prey, he rushed to a corner of the room and picked up from the floor a silken ribbon embroidered with silver, to which was hanging a long tress of black hair.

After this wild, mournful, terrible cry, a deathlike silence reigned for a moment in the old man's apartment. Balsamo slowly raised the ribbon, shuddered as he examined the tresses which a golden pin fastened to the silk at one end, while, cut off sharply at the other, they seemed like a fringe the extremity of which had been dipped in a wave of blood, the red and sparkling drops of which were still apparent on the margin.

In proportion as Balsamo raised his hand, it trembled still more.

As he looked more intently at the ribbon, his cheeks grew a deeper livid.

“From whence does this come?” murmured he in a hollow voice, loud enough, however, for another to hear and to reply to his question.

“That?” asked Althotas.

“Yes, that.”

“Well! it is a silken ribbon tying some hair.”

“But the hair — in what is it steeped?”

“You can see — in blood.”

“In what blood?”

“Parbleu! in the blood I wanted for my elixir — in the blood which you refused me, and which, therefore, I was forced to procure for myself.”

“But this hair, these tresses, this ribbon — from whom did you take them? This is not a child's hair.”

“And who told you it was a child I had killed?” asked Althotas, quietly.

“Did you not want the blood of a child for your elixir?” said Balsamo. “Did you not tell me so?”

“Or of an unmarried female, Acharat — or of an unmarried female.”

And Althotas stretched his long bony hand from the chair, and took a phial, the contents of which he tasted with delight.

Then, in his most natural tone and with his most affectionate smile:

“I have to thank you, Acharat,” said he; “you were wise and farsighted in placing that woman beneath my trap, almost within reach of my hand.

Humanity has no cause for complaint. The law has nothing to lay hold upon. He! He! — it was not you who gave me the young creature without whom I should have perished. No! I took her. He! He! — thanks, my dear pupil! thanks, my dear Acharat!”

And he once more put the phial to his lips.

Balsamo let fall the tress of hair which he held; a dreadful light flashed across his mind.

Opposite to him was the old man's table — a large marble slab always heaped with plants, books, and phials. This table was covered with a long cloth of white damask with dark flowers, on which the lamp of Althotas shed a reddish light, and which displayed an ominous outline which Balsamo had not before remarked.

He seized a corner of the cloth and hastily pulled it away.

But instantly his hair stood on end — his gaping mouth could not utter the horrible cry which almost suffocated him.

Under this shroud he had perceived Lorenza's corpse stretched upon this table, her face livid and yet smiling, and her head hanging backward as if dragged down by the weight of her long hair.

A large wound gaped underneath the collar-bone, from which not a single drop of blood escaped. Her hands were rigid, and her eyes closed beneath their purple eyelids.

“Yes, blood! — the last three drops of an unmarried woman's blood; that is what I wanted,” said the old man, putting the phial to his lips for the third time.

“Wretch!” thundered Balsamo, whose cry of despair at last burst from each pore, “die, then! for she was my wife — my wedded wife! You have murdered her in vain!. Die in your sin!”

The eyes of Althotas quivered at these words as if an electric shock had made them dance in their orbits; his pupils were fearfully dilated, his toothless gums chattered, the phial fell from his hand upon the floor and broke into a thousand pieces, while he — stupefied, annihilated, struck at once in heart and brain — fell back heavily upon his chair.

Balsamo bent with a sob over Lorenza's body, and pressing his lips to her bloodstained hair, sank senseless on the ground.

CHAPTER CXXIX.

Despair.

THE HOURS, those mysterious sisters, who cleave the air hand-in-hand with a flight so slow for the wretched, so rapid for the happy, paused in their onward motion, folding their heavy wings over this chamber loaded with sighs and groans.

Death on one side, agony on the other, and between them despair — grievous as agony, deep as death.

Balsamo had not uttered a word since the terrible cry which had been wrung from his breast.

Since the terrible revelation which had cast down the ferocious joy of Althotas, Balsamo had not moved.

As for the hideous old man, thus violently thrown back into life such as God grants to man, he seemed as much bewildered in this new element as the bird struck by a leaden bullet and fallen from the skies into a lake, on whose surface it flutters, unable to employ its wings.

The horror expressed in his pale and agonized features revealed the immeasurable extent of his disappointment.

In fact, Althotas no longer even took the trouble to think, since he had seen the goal at which his spirit aimed, and which it thought firm as a rock, vanish like empty vapor.

His deep and silent despair seemed almost like insensibility. To a mind unaccustomed to measure his, it might have seemed an indication of reflection; to Balsamo's, who, however, did not even look upon him, it marked the death-agony of power, of reason, and of life.

Althotas never took his eyes from the broken phial, the image of the nothingness of his hopes. One would have said ho counted the thousand scattered fragments, which, in falling, had diminished his life by so many days. One would have said he wished to drink in with his look the precious fluid which was spilled upon the floor, and which, for a moment, he had believed to be immortality.

At times, also, as if the grief of this disenchantment was too poignant, the old man raised his dull eyes to Balsamo, then from Balsamo his glance wandered to Lorenza's corpse.

He resembled, at these moments, one of those savage animals which the huntsman finds in the morning caught in the trap by the leg, and which he stirs for a long time with his foot without making them turn their heads, but who, when he pricks them with his hunting-knife, or with the bayonet of his fowling-piece, obliquely raise their bloodshot eyes, throwing on him a look of hatred, vengeance, reproach, and surprise.

“Is it possible,” said this look, so expressive even in its agony, “is it credible that so many misfortunes, so many shocks, should overwhelm me, caused by such an insignificant being as the man I see kneeling there a few yards from me, at the feet of such a vulgar object as that dead woman? Is it not a reversion of nature, an overturning of science, a cataclysm of reason, that the gross student should have deceived the skillful master? Is it not monstrous that the grain of sand should have arrested the wheel of the superb chariot, so rapid in its almost unlimited power, in its immortal flight?”

As for Balsamo — stunned, heartbroken, without voice or motion, almost without life — no human thought had yet dawned amid the dark vapors of his brain.

Lorenza! his Lorenza! His wife, his idol, doubly precious to him as his revealing angel and his love — Lorenza, his delight and his glory, the present and the future, his strength and faith — Lorenza, all he loved, all he wished for, all he desired in this world — Lorenza was lost to him forever!

He did not weep, he did not groan, he did not even sigh.

He was scarcely surprised at the dreadful misfortune which had befallen him. He was like one of those poor wretches whom an inundation surprises in their bed in the midst of darkness. They dream that the water gains upon them, they awake, they open their eyes and see a roaring billow breaking over their head, while they have not even time to utter a cry in their passage from life to death.

During three hours Balsamo felt himself buried in the deepest abyss of the tomb. In his overwhelming grief, he looked upon what had happened to him as one of the dark dreams which torment the dead in the eternal silent night of the sepulcher.

For him there no longer existed Althotas, and with him all hatred and revenge had vanished. For him there no longer existed Lorenza, and with her all life, all love had fled. All was sleep, night, nothingness! Thus the hours glided past, gloomily, silently, heavily, in this chamber were the blood congealed and the lifeless form grew rigid.

Suddenly amid the deathlike silence a bell sounded thrice.

Fritz, doubtless, was aware that his master was with Althotas, for the bell sounded in the room itself.

But although it sounded three times with an insolently strange noise, the sound died away in space.

Balsamo did not raise his head.

In a few moments, the same tinkling, only louder this time, sounded again; but, like the first, it could not rouse Balsamo from his torpor.

Then, at a measured interval, but not so far from the second as it had been from the first, the angry bell a third time made the room resound with multiplied echoes of its wailing and impatient sounds.

Balsamo did not start, but slowly raised his head and interrogated the empty space before him with the cold solemnity of a corpse rising from the tomb.

The bell never ceased ringing.

At last his increasing energy awoke him to partial consciousness. The unfortunate husband took his hand from the hand of the corpse. All the heat had left his body without passing into his lifeless bride's.

“Some important news or some great danger,” muttered Balsamo to himself. “May it prove a great danger!” And he rose to his feet. “But why should I reply to this summons?” continued he, aloud, without heeding the gloomy sound of his words echoing beneath the somber vault of this funereal chamber; “can anything in this world henceforth interest or alarm me?” Then, as if in reply, the bell struck its iron tongue so rudely against its brazen sides, that the clapper broke and fell upon a glass retort, which flew in pieces with a metallic sound, and scattered the fragments upon the floor.

Balsamo resisted no longer; besides, it was important that, none, not even Fritz, should come to seek him where he was.

He walked, therefore, with steady step to the spring, pressed it, and placed himself upon the trap, which descended slowly and deposited him in the chamber of furs.

As he passed the sofa, he brushed against the scarf which had fallen from Lorenza's shoulders when the pitiless old man, impassible as death itself, had carried her off in his arms.

This contact, more living seemingly than Lorenza herself, sent an icy shudder through Balsamo's veins. He took the scarf and kissed it, using it to stifle the cries which burst from his heaving breast.

Then he proceeded to open the door of the staircase.

Death of Althotas.

On the topmost steps stood Fritz, all pale and breathless, holding a torch in one hand, and in the other the cord of the bell, which, in his terror and impatience, he continued to pull convulsively. On seeing his master, he uttered a cry of satisfaction, followed by one of surprise and fear. But Balsamo, ignorant of the cause of this double cry, replied only by a mute interrogation.

Fritz did not speak, but he ventured — he, usually so respectful — to take his master's hand, and lead him to the large Venetian mirror that ornamented the mantelpiece at the back of which was the passage into Lorenza's apartment.

“Oh! look, your excellency,” said he, showing him his own image in the glass.

Balsamo shuddered. Then a smile — one of those deadly smiles which spring from infinite and incurable grief — flitted over his lips. He had understood the cause of Fritz's alarm.

Balsamo had grown twenty years older in an hour. There was no more brightness in his eyes, no more color in his cheek; an expression of dullness and stupefaction overspread his features; a bloody foam fringed his lips; a large spot of blood stained the whiteness of his cambric shirt.

Balsamo looked at himself in the glass for a moment without being able to recognize himself, then he determinedly fixed his eyes upon the strange person reflected in the mirror.

“Yes, Fritz,” said he, “you are right.”

Then, remarking the anxious look of his faithful servant:

“But why did you call me?” inquired he.

“Uh! master, for them.”

“For them?”

“Yes.”

“Whom do you mean by them?“'

“Excellency,” whispered Fritz, putting his mouth close to his master's ear, “the FIVE MASTERS.”

Balsamo shuddered.

“All?” asked he.

“Yes, all.”

“And they are here?”

“Here.”

“Alone?”

“No; each has an armed servant waiting in the courtyard.”

“They came together?”

“Yes, master, together, and they were getting impatient; that is why I rang so many times and so violently.”

Balsamo, without even concealing the spot of blood beneath the folds of his frill, without attempting to repair the disorder of his dress, began to descend the stairs, after having asked Fritz if his guests had installed themselves in the salon or in the large study.

“In the salon, excellency,” replied Fritz, following his master.

Then at the foot of the stairs, venturing to stop Balsamo, he asked:

“Has your excellency no orders to give me?”

“None, Fritz.”

“Excellency — ” stammered Fritz.

“Well?” asked Balsamo, with infinite gentleness.

“Will your excellency go unarmed?”

“Unarmed? yes.”

“Even without your sword?”

“And why should I take my sword, Fritz?”

“I do not know,” said the faithful servant, casting down his eyes, “but I thought — I believed — I feared — ”

“It is well, Fritz — you may go.”

Fritz moved away a few steps in obedience to the order he had received, but returned.

“Did you not hear?” asked Balsamo.

“Excellency, I merely wished to tell you that your double-barreled pistols are in the ebony case upon the gilt stand.”

“Go, I tell you!” replied Balsamo.

And he entered the salon.

CHAPTER CXXX.

The Judgment.

FRITZ WAS quite right; Balsamo's guests had not entered the Rue Saint Claude with a pacific display nor with a benevolent exterior.

Five horsemen escorted the traveling carriage in which the masters had come; five men with a haughty and somber mien, armed to the teeth, had closed the outer gate and were guarding it while appearing to await their masters' return.

A coachman and two footmen on the carriage seat concealed under their overcoats each a small hanger and a musket. It had much more the air of a warlike expedition than a peaceful visit, these peoples' appearance in the Rue Saint Claude.

It was for this reason that the nocturnal invasion of these terrible men, the forcible taking possession of the hotel, had inspired the German with an unspeakable terror. He had at first attempted to refuse entrance to the whole party, when he had seen the escort through the wicket, and had suspected them to be armed; but the all-powerful signals they had used — that irresistible testimony of the right of the new-comers — had left him no option. Scarcely were they masters of the place, than the strangers, like skillful generals, posted themselves at each outlet of the house, taking no pains to dissemble their hostile intentions.

The pretended valets in the courtyard and in the passages, the pretended masters in the salon, seemed to Fritz to bode no good; therefore he had broken the bell.

Balsamo, without displaying any astonishment, without making any preparation, entered the room, which Fritz had lighted up in honor of these, as it was his duty to do toward all guests who visited the house.

His five visitors were seated upon chairs around the room, but not one rose when he appeared.

He, as master of the house, having looked at them, bowed politely; then only did they rise and gravely return his salute.

Balsamo took a chair in front of them, without noticing or seeming to notice the strange order of their position. In fact, the five armchairs formed a semicircle like to those of the ancient tribunals, with a president, supported by two assessors, and with Balsamo's chair placed in front of that of the president, and occupying the place accorded to the accused in a council or praetorium.

Balsamo did not speak first, as in other circumstances he would have done; he looked around without seeing any object clearly — still affected by a kind of painful drowsiness, which had remained after the shock.

“It seems, brother, that you have understood our errand,” said the president, or rather he who occupied the center seat; “yet you delayed to come, and we were already deliberating if we should send to seek you.”

“I do not understand your errand,” said Balsamo calmly. “I should not have imagined so, from seeing you take the position and attitude of an accused before us.”

“An accused?” stammered Balsamo vacantly, shrugging his shoulders. “I do not understand you!”

“We will soon make you understand us. Not a difficult task, if I may believe your pale cheeks, your vacant eyes, and trembling voice. One would think you did not hear!”

“Oh, yes, I hear,” replied Balsamo, shaking his head, as if to banish the thoughts which oppressed it.

“Do you remember, brother,” continued the president, “that in its last communication the superior committee warned you against a treasonable attempt meditated by one of the great ones of the order?”

“Perhaps so — yes — I do not deny it.”

“You reply as a disordered and troubled conscience might be expected to do; but rouse yourself — be not cast down — reply with that clearness and precision which your terrible position requires. Reply to my questions with the certainty that we are open to conviction, for we have neither prejudice nor hatred in this matter. We are the law; it does not pronounce a verdict until the evidence is heard.” Balsamo made no reply.

“I repeat it, Balsamo, and my warning once given, let it be to you like the warning which combatants give to each other before commencing their struggle. I will attack you with just but powerful weapons; defend yourself!”

The assistants, seeing Balsamo's indifference and imperturbable demeanor, looked at each other with astonishment, and then again turned their eyes upon the president.

“You have heard me, Balsamo, have you not?” repeated the latter.

Balsamo made a sign of the head in the affirmative.

“Like a well-meaning and loyal brother. I have warned you, and given you a hint of the aim of my questionings. You are warned, guard yourself; I am about to commence again.

“After this announcement,” continued the president, “the association appointed five of its members to watch in Paris the proceedings of the man who was pointed out to us as a traitor. Now, our revelations are not subject to error. We gather them, as you yourself know, either from devoted agents, from the aspect of events, or from infallible symptoms and signs among the mysterious combinations which nature has as yet revealed to us alone. Now one of us had a vision respecting you; we know that he has never been deceived, we were upon our guard, and watched you.”

Balsamo listened without giving the least sign of impatience or even of intelligence. The president continued:

“It was not an easy task to watch a man such as you. You enter everywhere; your mission is to have a footing wherever our enemies have a residence or any power whatever. You have at your disposal all your natural resources — which are immense — and which the association intrusts to you to make its cause triumphant. For a long time we hovered in a sea of doubt when we saw enemies visit you, such as a Richelieu, a Dubarry, a Rohan. Moreover, at the last assembly in the Rue Platriere, you made a long speech full of clever paradoxes, which led us to imagine that you were playing a part in flattering and associating with this incorrigible race, which it is our duty to exterminate from the face of the earth. For a long time we respected the mystery of your behavior, hoping for a happy result; but at last the illusion was dispelled.”

Balsamo never stirred, and his features were fixed and motionless, insomuch that the president became impatient.

“Three days ago,” continued he, “five lettres-de-cachet were issued. They had been demanded from the king by M. de Sartines; they were filled as soon as signed; and the same day were presented to five of our principal agents, our most faithful and devoted brothers, residing in Paris. All five were arrested: two were taken to the Bastille, where they are kept in the most profound secrecy; two are at Vincennes, in the oubliette; one in the most noisome cell in Bicetre. Did you know this circumstance?”

“No,” said Balsamo.

“That is strange, after what we know of your relations with the lofty ones of the kingdom; but there is something stranger still.” Balsamo listened.

“To enable M. de Sartines to arrest these five faithful friends, he must have had the only paper which contains the names of the victims in his possession. This paper was sent, to you by the supreme council in 1709; and to you it was assigned to receive the new members, and immediately invest them with the rank which the supreme council assigned them.”

Balsamo expressed by a gesture that he did not recollect the circumstance.

“I shall assist your memory. The five persons in question were represented by five Arabic characters; and these characters, in the paper you received, corresponded with the names and initials of the new brothers.”

“Be it so,” said Balsamo.

“You acknowledge it?”

“I acknowledge whatever you please.”

The president looked at his assessors, as if to order them to take a note of this confession.

“Well,” continued he, “on this paper — the only one, remember, which could have compromised the brothers — there was a sixth name. Do you remember it?”

Balsamo made no reply.

“The name was — the Count de Fenix.”'

“Agreed,” said Balsamo.

“Then why — if the names of the five brothers figured in five lettres-de-cachet — why was yours respected, caressed, and favorably received at court and in the antechambers of ministers? If our brothers merited prison, you merited it also. What have you to reply?”

“Nothing.”

“Ah! I can guess your objection. You may say that the police had by private means discovered the names of the obscurer brethren, but that it was obliged to respect yours as an ambassador and a powerful man. You may even say that they did not suspect this name.”

“I shall say nothing.”

"Your pride outlives your honor. These names the police could only have discovered by reading the confidential note which the supreme council had sent you; and this is the way it was seen. You kept it in a coffer. Is that true?"

"It is."

"One day a woman left your house carrying the coffer under her arm. She was seen by our agents, and followed to the hotel of the lieutenant of police, in the Faubourg St. Germain. We might have arrested the evil at its source; for if we had stopped the woman and taken the coffer from her, everything would have been safe and sure. But we obeyed the rules of our constitution, which command us to respect the secret means by which some members serve the cause, even when these means have the appearance of treason or imprudence."

Balsamo seemed to approve of this assertion, but with a gesture so little marked, that, had it not been for his previous immobility, it would have been unnoticed.

"This woman reached the lieutenant of police," said the president; "she gave him the coffer, and all was discovered. Is this true?"

"Perfectly true."

The president rose.

"Who was this woman?" he exclaimed — "beautiful, impassioned, devotedly attached to you body and soul, tenderly loved by you — as spiritual as subtle — as cunning as one of the angels of darkness who assist man to commit evil! Lorenza Feliciani is the woman, Balsamo!"

Balsamo uttered a groan of despair.

"You are convicted," said the president.

"Have it so." replied Balsamo.

"I have not yet finished. A quarter of an hour after she had entered the hotel of the lieutenant of police, you arrived. She had sown the treason — you came to reap the reward. The obedient servant had taken upon herself the perpetration of the crime — you came to add the finishing stroke to the infamous work. Lorenza departed alone. You renounced her, doubtless, and would not compromise yourself by accompanying her: you left triumphantly along with Madame Dubarry, summoned there to receive from your own lips the information you sold her. You entered her carriage, as the boatman entered the boat with the sinner, Mary the Egyptian. You left behind the papers which ruined us with M. de Sartines, but you brought away the coffer which might have ruined you with us. Fortunately we saw you — God's light is with us when we need it most."

Balsamo bowed without speaking.

"I now conclude," added the president. "Two criminals have been pointed out to the order; a woman, your accomplice, who may be innocent perhaps, but who, in point of fact, has injured our cause by revealing one of our secrets; and you, the master, the Great Copt, the enlightened mind, who have had the cowardice to shelter yourself behind this woman, that your treason may be less clearly seen."

Balsamo raised his head, and fixed a look upon the commissioners, burning with all the rage which had smoldered in his breast since the commencement of the interrogation.

"Why do you accuse this woman?" asked he.

"Ah! we know that you will endeavor to defend her; we know that you love her almost to idolatry — that you prefer her to everything in the world. We know that she is your treasure of science, of happiness, and of fortune; we know that she is more precious to you than all the world beside."

"You know all this?" said Balsamo.

"Yes, we know it: and we shall punish you through her more than through yourself."

"Finish!" The president rose.

"This is the sentence:

"Joseph Balsamo is a traitor — he has broken his oath; but his knowledge is immense, and he is useful to the order. Balsamo must live for the cause he has betrayed. He belongs to his brothers, though he has cast them off."

"Ha!" said Balsamo gloomily, almost savagely.

"A perpetual prison will protect the association against any renewal of his treachery, at the same time that it will permit the brothers to gather the knowledge from him which it has a right to expect from all its members.

"As to Lorenza Feliciani, a terrible punishment —

"Hold!" said Balsamo, with perfect calmness in his voice, "you forget that I did not defend myself — the accused must be heard in his own justification. A word, a single proof will suffice; wait one moment, and I will bring you the proof I have promised."

The commissaries seemed to deliberate for a moment.

"Ah! you fear lest I should kill myself," said Balsamo, with a bitter smile. "If that had been my wish, it would have been already done. There is that in this ring which would kill you all five times over had I opened it. You fear I should escape; let me be guarded if you wish it."

"Go!" said the president.

Balsamo disappeared for about a moment. Then he was heard heavily descending the staircase. He entered, bearing the cold, rigid, and discolored body of Lorenza upon his shoulder, her white hand hanging to the ground.

"Here is the woman I adored, who was my treasure, my only happiness, my life! — the woman who, as you say, has betrayed you — here, take her! God did not wait for you to punish, gentlemen!"

And with a movement quick as lightning, he let the corpse glide from his arms, and sent it rolling on the carpet to the feet of the judges, whom her cold hair and the dead and motionless hands touched, to their great horror, while by the light of the lamps they saw the wide gash gaping in her neck, white as a swan's.

"Now pronounce the sentence," added Balsamo.

The horrified judges uttered a cry, and seized with maddening terror, fled in indescribable confusion. Soon their horses were heard neighing and trampling in the courtyard; the outer gate grated on its hinges; and then silence, the solemn silence of the tomb, returned to seat itself beside despair and death.

CHAPTER CXXXI.

Doom.

WHILE THE TERRIBLE scene which we have just described was taking place between Balsamo and the Five Masters, nothing apparently had changed in the rest of the house. The old man had seen Balsamo enter his apartment and bear away Lorenza's corpse, and this new demonstration had recalled him to what was passing around him.

But when he saw Balsamo take up the dead body and descend with it into the lower rooms, he fancied it was the last and eternal adieu of this man whose heart he had broken, and fear descended on his soul with an overwhelming force, which, for him who had done all to avoid death, doubled the horror of the grave.

Not knowing for what purpose Balsamo had left him, nor whither he was going, he began to call out:

“Acharat! Acharat!”

It was the name his pupil had borne in childhood, and he hoped it would have retained its influence over the man.

But Balsamo continued to descend. Having touched the ground, he even forgot to make the trap reascend, and disappeared in the corridor.

“Ah!” cried Althotas, “see what man is — a blind, ungrateful animal! Return, Acharat, return! Ah! you prefer the ridiculous object called a woman to the perfection of humanity which I represent! You prefer a fragment of life to immortality!

“But no!” he exclaimed after a moment's pause; “the wretch has deceived his master — he has betrayed my confidence like a vile robber; he feared that I should live because I surpass him so much in science; he wanted to inherit the laborious work I had nearly concluded; he laid a trap for me, his master and benefactor! Oh, Acharat!”

And gradually the old man's anger was aroused, his cheeks were dyed with a hectic tinge, his half-closed eyes seemed to glow with the gloomy brightness of those phosphorescent lights which sacrilegious children place in the cavities of a human skull. Then he cried:

“Return, Acharat, return! Look to yourself! You know that I have conjurations which evoke fire and raise up supernatural spirits! I have evoked Satan — him whom the magi called Phegor, in the mountains of Gad — and Satan was forced to leave his bottomless pit and appear before me! I have conferred with the seven angels who ministered to God's anger upon the same mountain where Moses received the ten commandments! By my will alone I have kindled the great tripod with its seven flames which Trajan stole from the Jews! Take care, Acharat, take care!”'

But there was no reply.

Then his brain became more and more clouded.

“Do you not see, wretch,” said he, in a choking voice, “that death is about to seize me as it would the meanest mortal? Listen, Acharat! you may return; I will do you no harm. Return; I renounce the fire; you need not fear the evil spirit, nor the seven avenging angels. I renounce vengeance, and yet I could strike you with such terror that you would become an idiot and cold as marble, for I can stop the circulation of the blood. Come back, then, Acharat; I will do you no harm, but, on the contrary, I can do you much good. Acharat, instead of abandoning me, watch over my life, and you shall have all my treasures and all my secrets. Let me live, Acharat, that I may teach them to you. See, see!”

And with gleaming eyes and trembling fingers he pointed to the numerous objects, papers, and rolls scattered through the vast apartment. Then he waited, collecting all his fast-failing faculties to listen.

“Ah, you come not!” he cried. “You think I shall die thus, and by this murder — for you are murdering me — everything will belong to you! Madman! were you even capable of reading the manuscripts which I alone am able to decipher — were the spirit even to grant you my wisdom for a lifetime of one, two, or three centuries, to make use of the materials I have gathered — you shall not inherit them! No, no, a thousand times no! Return, Acharat, return for a moment, were it only to behold the ruin of this whole house — were it only to contemplate the beautiful spectacle I am preparing for you! Acharat! Acharat! Acharat!”

There was no answer, for Balsamo was during this time replying to the accusation of the Five Masters by showing them the mutilated body of Lorenza. The cries of the deserted old man grew louder and louder; despair redoubled his strength, and his hoarse yellings, reverberating in the long corridors, spread terror afar, like the roaring of a tiger who has broken his chain or forced the bars of his cage.

“Ah, you do not come!” shrieked Althotas; “you despise me! you calculate upon my weakness! Well, you shall see! Fire! fire! fire!”

He articulated these cries with such vehemence that Balsamo, now freed from his terrified visitors, was roused by them from the depth of his despair. He took Lorenza's corpse in his arms, reascended the staircase, laid the dead body upon the sofa where two hours previously it had reposed in sleep, and, mounting upon the trap, he suddenly appeared before Althotas.

“Ah! at last!” cried the old man, with savage joy. “You were afraid! you saw I could revenge myself, and you came! You did well to come, for in another moment I should have set this chamber on fire!”

Balsamo looked at him, shrugged his shoulders slightly, but did not deign to reply.

“I am athirst!” cried Althotas, “I am athirst! Give me drink, Acharat!”

Balsamo made no reply; he did not move; he looked at the dying man as if he would not lose an atom of his agony.

“ Do you hear me?” howled Althotas; “do you hear me?”

The same silence, the same immobility on the part of the gloomy spectator.

“Do you hear me, Acharat?” vociferated the old man, almost tearing his throat in his efforts to give emphasis to this last burst of rage; “water! give me water!”

Althotas's features were rapidly decomposing.

There was no longer fire in his looks, but only an unearthly glare; the blood no longer coursed beneath his sunken and cadaverous cheek; motion and life were almost dead within him. His long sinewy arms, in which he had carried Lorenza like a child, were raised, but inert and powerless as the membranes of a polypus. His fury had worn out the feeble spark which despair had for a moment revived in him.

“Ah!” said he, “ah! you think I do not die quickly enough! You mean to make me die of thirst! You gloat over my treasures and my manuscripts with longing eyes! Ah! you think you have them already! Wait, wait!”

And, with an expiring effort, Althotas took a small bottle from beneath the cushions of the arm chair and uncorked it. At the contact with the air, a liquid flame burst from the glass vessel, and Althotas, like some potent magician, shook this flame around him.

Instantly the manuscripts piled round the old man's armchair, the books scattered over the room, the rolls of paper disinterred with so much trouble from the pyramids of Cheops and the subterranean depths of Herculaneum, took fire with the rapidity of gunpowder. A sheet of flame overspread the marble slab, and seemed to Balsamo's eyes like one of those flaming circles of hell of which Dante sings.

Althotas no doubt expected that Balsamo would rush amid the flames to save this valuable inheritance which the old man was annihilating along with himself, but he was mistaken. Balsamo did not stir, but stood calm and isolated upon the trap-door, so that the fire could not reach him.

The flames wrapped Althotas in their embrace, but, instead of terrifying him, it seemed as it the old man found himself once more in his proper element, and that, like the salamanders sculptured on our ancient castles, the fire caressed instead of consuming him.

Balsamo still stood gazing at him. The fire had reached the woodwork, and completely surrounded the old man; it roared around the feet of the massive oaken chair on which he was seated, and, what was most strange, though it was already consuming the lower part of his body, he did not seem to feel it.

On the contrary, at the contact with the seemingly purifying element, the dying man's muscles seemed gradually to distend, and an indescribable serenity overspread his features like a mask. Isolated from his body at this last hour, the old prophet on his car of fire seemed ready to wing his way aloft. The mind, all-powerful in its last moments, forgot its attendant matter, and, sure of having nothing more to expect below, it stretched ardently upward to those higher spheres to which the fire seemed to bear it.

At this instant Althotas's eyes, which at the first reflection of the flames seemed to have been re-endowed with life, gazed vaguely and abstractedly at some point in space which was neither heaven nor earth. They looked as if they would pierce the horizon, calm and resigned, analyzing all sensation, listening to all pain, while, with his last breath on earth, the old magician muttered, in a hollow voice, his adieux to power, life, and hope.

“Ah!” said he, “I die without regret. I have possessed everything on earth, and have known all; I have had all power which is granted to a human creature; I had almost reached immortality!”

Balsamo uttered a sardonic laugh whose gloomy echo arrested the old man's attention. Through the flames, which surrounded him as with a veil, he cast a look of savage majesty upon his pupil.

“You are right,” said he; “one thing I had not foreseen — God!”

Then, as if this mighty word had uprooted his whole soul, Althotas fell back upon his chair. He had given up to God the last breath, which he had hoped to wrest from him.

Balsamo heaved a sigh, and, without endeavoring to save anything from the precious pile upon which this second Zoroaster had stretched himself to die, he again descended to Lorenza, and touched the spring of the trap, which readjusted itself in the ceiling, veiling from his sight the immense furnace, which roared like the crater of a volcano.

During the whole night the fire roared above Balsamo's head like a whirlwind, without his making an effort either to extinguish it or to fly. Stretched beside Lorenza's body he was insensible to all danger; but, contrary to his expectations, when the fire had devoured all, and laid bare the vaulted walls of stone, annihilating all the valuable contents, it extinguished itself, and Balsamo heard its last howlings, which, like those of Althotas, gradually died away in plaints and sighs.

[After the spirit-stirring scenes just narrated, in which the principal personages of the tale vanish from the stage, we have thought it better to hurry over the succeeding chapters, in which the book is brought to an end, merely giving the reader the following succinct account of their contents, as the effect of them when read at full length has been on ourselves, and we doubt not would be on the public, to detract from and weaken the interest which was wound up to so high a pitch by the preceding portion of the narrative. — Editor.]

From the deathlike lethargy into which Andree had been plunged by Balsamo's neglect to arouse her from the magnetic sleep, she at length recovered, but so utterly prostrate both in mind and body, as to be wholly unfit for the performance of her duties at court. She therefore asked for, and obtained from the dauphiness, permission to retire into a convent, and the kind ness of her royal mistress procured for her admission among the Carmelite sisters of St. Denis, presided over by Madame Louise of France, whom we have already met in these pages.

This, it may readily be imagined, gave a deathblow both to the unrighteous hopes of the Baron de Taverney, her father, and to the noble aspirations of her brother Philip. Frowned upon by the kings and the scoff of the sycophantic courtiers, among the foremost of whom was his old friend, the Duke de Richelieu, Taverney — after a stormy interview with his son, whom he disowned and cast off to seek his fortunes where he best might — slunk back, despair and every evil passion boiling within his breast, to his patrimonial den, where, it is to be presumed, he found amid his misfortunes such consolation from his exalted philosophy as it was well calculated to afford.

Philip, heartbroken by his sister's sufferings and the malicious whispers of the corrupt court, decided upon sailing for America, at that time the land of promise for ardent admirers and followers of liberty. His example was imitated by Gilbert, who had now also nothing to detain him in France, where his high-flown and romantic hopes were for ever blasted, and they both took shipping in the same vessel from Havre.

Of Balsamo little more is said, and that little does not enlighten us as to his future fate. Weakened both in bodily health and in his influence over the secret brotherhood, he vegetated rather than lived in his mansion of the Rue St. Claude, to reappear, it is presumed, amid the stormy scenes of the French revolution.

Having thus given a rapid resume of the intermediate events, we come at once to the

EPILOGUE.

THE NINTH OF MAY.

ON THE NINTH OF May, 1774, at eight o'clock in the evening, Versailles presented a most curious and interesting spectacle.

From the first day of the month the king, Louis XV., attacked with a malady the serious nature of which his physicians at first dared not confess to him, kept his couch, and now began anxiously to consult the countenances of those who surrounded him, to discover in them some reflection of the truth or some ray of hope.

The physician Bordeu had pronounced the king suffering from an attack of smallpox of the most malignant nature, and the physician La Martiniere, who had agreed with his colleague as to the nature of the king's complaint, gave it as his opinion that his majesty should be informed of the real state of the case, in order that, both spiritually and temporally, as a king and as a Christian, he should take measures for his own safety and that of his kingdom.”

“His Most Christian Majesty,” said he, “should have extreme unction administered to him.”

La Martiniere represented the party of the dauphin — the opposition. Bordeu asserted that the bare mention of the serious nature of the disease would kill the king, and said that for his part he would not be a party to such regicide.

Bordeu represented Madame Dubarry's party.

In fact, to call in the aid of the Church to the king was to expel the favorite. When religion enters at one door, it is full time for Satan to make his exit by the other.

In the meantime, during all these intestine divisions of the faculty, of the royal family, and of the different parties of the court, the disease took quiet possession of the aged, corrupt, and worn-out frame of the king, and set up such a strong position, that neither remedies nor prescriptions could dislodge it.

From the first symptoms of the attack. Louis beheld his couch surrounded by his two daughters, the favorite, and the courtiers whom he especially delighted to honor. They still laughed and stood firm by each other.

All at once the austere and ominous countenance of Madame Louise of France appeared at Versailles. She had quitted her cell to give to her father, in her turn, the cares and consolations he so much required.

She entered, pale and stern as a statue of Fate. She was no longer a daughter to a father, a sister to her fellow-sisters; she rather resembled those ancient prophetesses who in the evil day of adversity poured in the startled ears of kings the boding cry, “Woe! Woe! Woe!”

She fell upon Versailles like a thundershock at the very hour when it was Madame Dubarry's custom to visit the king, who kissed her white hands, and pressed them like some healing medicament to his aching brow and burning cheeks.

At her sight all fled. The sisters, trembling, sought refuge in a neighboring apartment. Madame Dubarry bent the knee, and hastened to those which she occupied; the privileged courtiers retreated in disorder to the antechambers; the two physicians alone remained standing by the fireside.

“My daughter!” murmured the king, opening his eyes, heavy with pain and fever.

“Yes, sire,” said the princess, “your daughter.”

“And you come — ”

“To remind you of God!”

The king raised himself in an upright posture and attempted to smile.

“For you have forgotten God,” resumed Madame Louise.

“I!”

“And I wish to recall Him to your thoughts.”

“My daughter! I am not so near death, I trust, that your exhortations need be so very urgent. My illness is very slight — a slow fever, attended with some inflammation.”

“Your malady, sire,” interrupted the princess, “is that which, according to etiquette, should summon around your majesty's couch all the great prelates of the kingdom. When a member of the royal family is attacked with small-pox, the rites of the Church should be administered without loss of time.”

“Madame!” exclaimed the king, greatly agitated, and becoming deadly pale, “what is that you say?”

“Madame!” broke in the terrified physicians.

“I repeat,” continued the princess, “that your majesty is attacked with the small-pox.”

The king uttered a cry.

“The physicians did not tell me so,” replied he.

“They had not the courage. But I look forward to another kingdom for your majesty than the kingdom of France. Draw near to God, sire, and solemnly review your past life.”

“The small-pox!” muttered Louis; “a fatal disease! — Bordeu! La Martiniere! — can it be true?”

The two practitioners hung their heads.

“Then I am lost!” said the king, more and more terrified.

“All diseases can be cured, sire,” said Bordeu, taking the initiative, “especially when the patient preserves his composure of mind.”

“God gives peace to the mind and health to the body,” replied the princess.

“Madame!” said Bordeu, boldly, although in a low voice, “you are killing the king!”

The princess deigned no reply. She approached the sick monarch, and taking his hand, which she covered with kisses:

“Break with the past, sire,” said she, “and give an example to your people. No one warned you; you ran the risk of perishing eternally. Promise solemnly to live a Christian life if you are spared — die like a Christian, if God calls you hence!”

As she concluded, she imprinted a second kiss on the royal hand, and, with slow step, took her way through the antechambers. There she let her long black veil fall over her face, descended the staircase with a grave and majestic air, and entered her carriage, leaving behind her a stupefaction and terror which cannot be described.

The king could not rouse his spirits, except by dint of questioning his physicians, who replied in terms of courtly flattery.

“I do not wish,” said he, “that the scene of Metz with the Duchesse de Chateauroux should be re-enacted here. Send for Madame d'Aiguillon, and request her to take Madame Dubarry with her to Rueil.”

This order was equivalent to an expulsion. Bordeu attempted to remonstrate, but the king ordered him to be silent. Bordeu, moreover, saw his colleague ready to report all that passed to the dauphin, and, well aware what would be the issue of the king's malady, he did not persist, but, quitting the royal chamber, he proceeded to acquaint Madame Dubarry with the blow which had just fallen on her fortunes.

The countess, terrified at the ominous and insulting expression which she saw already pictured on every face around her, hastened to withdraw. In an hour she was without the walls of Versailles, seated beside the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, who, like a trustworthy and grateful friend, was taking the disgraced favorite to her chateau of Rueil, which had descended to her from the great Richelieu.

Bordeu, on his side, shut the door of the king's chamber against all the royal family, under , pretext of contagion. Louis's apartment was thenceforward walled up; no one might enter but Religion and Death.

The king had the last rites of the church administered to him that same day, and this news soon spread through Paris, where the disgrace of the favorite was already known, and circulated from mouth to mouth.

All the court hastened to pay their respects to the dauphin, who closed his doors and refused to see any one.

But the following day the king was better, and sent the Duke d'Aiguillon to carry his compliments to Madame Dubarry. This day was the 9th May, 1774.

The court deserted the pavilion occupied by the dauphin, and flocked in such crowds to Rueil, where the favorite was residing, that since the banishment of M. de Choiseul to Chanteloup such a string of carriages had never been witnessed.

Things were in this position, therefore; would the king live, and Madame Dubarry still remain queen? — or would the king die, and Madame Dubarry sink to the condition of an infamous and execrable courtesan?”

This was why Versailles, on the evening of the 9th May, in the year 1774, presented such a curious and interesting spectacle.

On the Place d'Armes, before the palace, several groups had formed in front of the railing, who, with sympathetic air, seemed most anxious to hear the news.

They were citizens of Versailles or Paris, and every now and then, with all the politeness imaginable, they questioned the gardes-du-corps, who were pacing slowly up and down the Court of Honor with their hands behind their backs, respecting the king's health.

Gradually these groups dispersed. The inhabitants of Paris took their seats in the pataches or stage-coaches to return peaceably to their own homes; while those of Versailles, sure of having the earliest news from the fountain-head, also retired to their several dwellings.

No one was to be seen in the streets but the patrols of the watch, who performed their duty a little more quietly than usual, and that gigantic world called the Palace of Versailles became by degrees shrouded in darkness and silence, like that greater world which contained it.

At the angle of the street bordered with trees which extends in front of the palace, a man advanced in years was seated on a stone bench overshadowed by the already leafy boughs of the horse chestnuts, with his expressive and poetic features turned toward the chateau, leaning with both hands on his cane, and supporting his chin on his hands.

He was nevertheless an old man, bent by age and ill-health, but his eye still sparkled with something of its youthful fire, and his thoughts glowed even more brightly than his eyes.

He was absorbed in melancholy contemplation, and did not perceive a second personage who, after peeping curiously through the iron railing and questioning the gardes-du-corps, crossed the esplanade in a diagonal direction, and advanced straight toward the bench, with the intention of seating himself upon it.

This personage was a young man with projecting cheekbones, low forehead, aquiline nose slightly bent to one side, and a sardonic smile.

While advancing toward the stone bench he chuckled sneeringly, although alone, seeming to reply by this manifestation to some secret thought.

When within three paces of the bench, he perceived the old man and paused, scanning him with his oblique and stealthy glance, although evidently fearing to let his purpose be seen.

“You are enjoying the fresh air, I presume, sir?” said he, approaching him with an abrupt movement. The old man raised his head. “Ha!” exclaimed the new-comer, “it is my illustrious master!”

“And you are my young practitioner?” said the old man.

“Will you permit me to take a seat beside you, sir?”

“Most willingly.” And the old man made room on the bench beside him.

“It appears that the king is doing better?” said the young man. “The people rejoice.” And he burst a second time into his sneering laugh. The old man made no reply. “The whole day long the carriages have been rolling from Paris to Rueil, and from Rueil to Versailles. The Countess Dubarry will marry the king as soon as his health is re-established!” And he burst into a louder laugh than before.

Again the old man made no reply. “Pardon me if I laugh at fate,” continued the young man, with a gesture of nervous impatience, “but every good Frenchman, look you, loves his king, and my king is better to-day.”

“Do not jest thus on such a subject, sir,” said the old man gently. “The death of a man is always a misfortune for some one, and the death of a king is frequently a great misfortune for all.”

“Even the death of Louis XV.?” interrupted the young man, in a tone of irony. “Oh, my dear master, a distinguished philosopher like you to sustain such a proposition! I know all the energy and skill of your paradoxes, but I cannot compliment you on this one.” The old man shook his head. “And, besides,” added the new-comer, “why think of the king's death? Who speaks of such an event? The king has the small-pox; well, we all know that complaint. The king has beside him Bordeu and La Martiniere, who are skillful men. Oh, I will wager a trifle, my dear master, that Louis the Well-Beloved will escape this turn! Only this time the French people do not suffocate themselves in churches putting up vows for him, as on the occasion of his former illness. Mark me, everything grows antiquated and is abandoned!”

“Silence!” said the old man, shuddering; “silence! for I tell you you are speaking of a man over whom at this moment the destroying angel of God hovers.”

His young companion, surprised at this strange language, looked at the speaker, whose eyes had never quitted the facade of the chateau.

“Then you have more positive intelligence?” inquired he.

“Look!” said the old man, pointing with his finger to one of the windows of the palace; “what do you behold yonder?”

“A window lighted up — is that what you mean?”

“Yes; but lighted in what manner?”

“By a wax candle placed in a little lantern.”

“Precisely.”

“Well?””

“Well, young man, do you know what the flame of that wax-light represents?”

“No, sir.”

“It represents the life of the king.” The young man looked more fixedly at his aged companion, as if to be certain that he was in his perfect senses.

“A friend of mine, M. de Jussieu,” continued the old man, “has placed that waxlight there, which will burn as long as the king is alive.”

“It is a signal, then?”

“A signal which Louis XV.'s successor devours with his eyes from behind some neighboring curtain. This signal, which shall warn the ambitious of the dawn of a new reign, informs a poor philosopher like myself of the instant when the breath of the Almighty sweeps away, at the same moment, an age and a human existence.”

The young man shuddered in his turn, and moved closer to his companion.

“Oh,” said the aged philosopher, “mark well this night, young man! Behold what clouds and tempests it bears in its murky bosom! The morning which will succeed it I shall witness no doubt, for I am not yet old enough to abandon hope of seeing the morrow; but a reign will commence on that morrow which you will see to its close, and which contains mysteries which I cannot hope to be a spectator of. It is not, therefore, without interest that I watch yonder trembling flame, whose signification I have just explained to you.”'

“True, my master,” murmured the young man, “most true.”

“Louis XIV. reigned seventy-three years,” continued the old man. “How many will Louis XVI. reign?”

“Ah!” exclaimed the younger of the two, pointing to the window, which had just become shrouded in darkness.

“The king is dead!” said the old man, rising with a sort of terror.

And both kept silence for some minutes.

Suddenly a chariot, drawn by eight fiery horses, started at full gallop from the courtyard of the palace. Two outriders preceded it, each holding a torch in his hand.

In the chariot were the dauphin, Marie Antoinette, and Madame Elizabeth, the sister of the king. The flame of the torches threw a gloomy light on their pale features. The carriage passed close to the two men, within ten paces of the bench from which they had risen.

“Long live King Louis XVI.! Long live the queen!” shouted the young man in a loud, harsh voice, as if he meant to insult this new-born ma jest v instead of saluting it.

The dauphin bowed; the queen showed her face at the window, sad and severe. The carriage dashed on and disappeared.

“My dear M. Rousseau,” said the younger of the two spectators, “then is our friend Mademoiselle Dubarry a widow.”

“To-morrow she will be exiled,” said his aged companion. “Adieu. M. Marat!”

THE END

THE FORTY-FIVE GUARDSMEN

Anonymous translation, 1862

This novel was first published in 1847 and is the last of a trilogy devoted to Valois. The action is set between 1585 and 1586, thirteen years after the massacre of St. Bartholomew. Having succeeded his brother Charles IX, Henry III has reined for ten years without having managed to calm political and religious unrest, dividing the Kingdom into the factions. The forty-five guardsmen of the title are Gascons engaged by the Duke of Épernon, favourite of the King, to accept a secret mission.

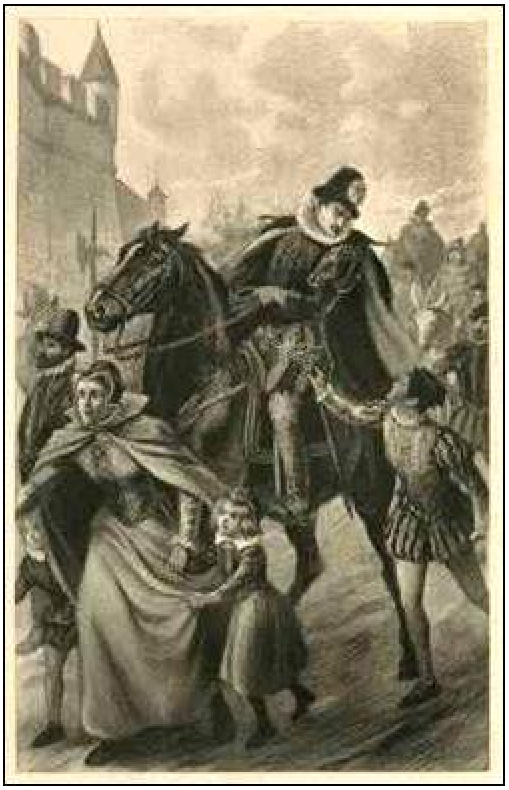

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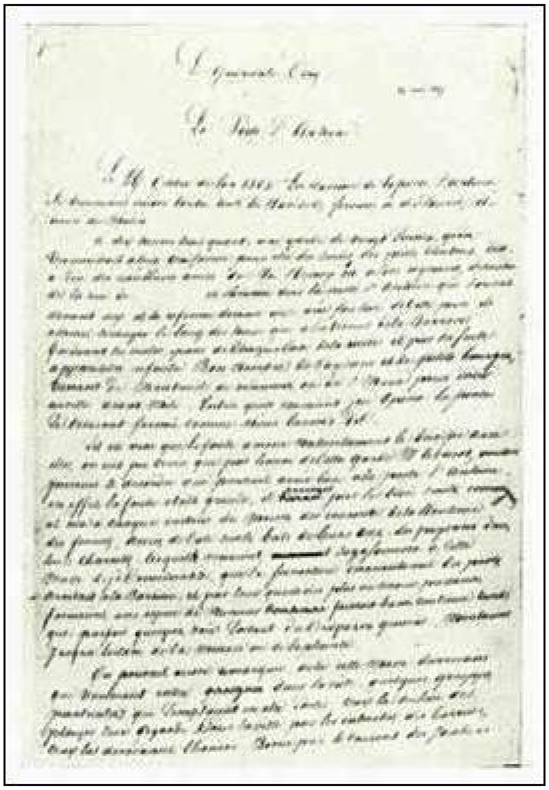

An original manuscript page of the novel

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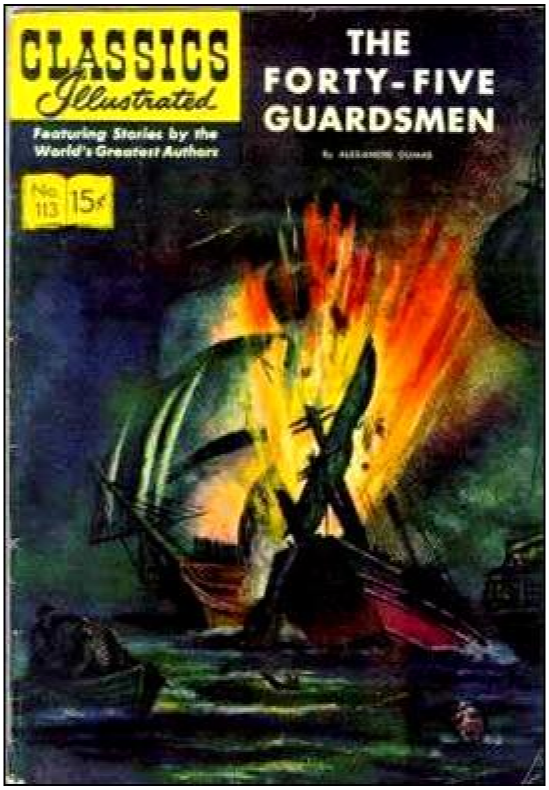
CLASSICS
Illustrated
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THE
FORTY-FIVE
GUARDSMEN

An American comic version of the novel

CHAPTER I.

THE PORTE ST. ANTOINE.

On the 26th of October, 1585, the barriers of the Porte St. Antoine were, contrary to custom, still closed at half-past ten in the morning. A quarter of an hour after, a guard of twenty Swiss, the favorite troops of Henri III., then king, passed through these barriers, which were again closed behind them. Once through, they arranged themselves along the hedges, which, outside the barrier, bordered each side of the road.

There was a great crowd collected there, for numbers of peasants and other people had been stopped at the gates on their way into Paris. They were arriving by three different roads — from Montreuil, from Vincennes, and from St. Maur; and the crowd was growing more dense every moment. Monks from the convent in the neighborhood, women seated on pack-saddles, and peasants in their carts, and all, by their questions more or less pressing, formed a continual murmur, while some voices were raised above the others in shriller tones of anger or complaint.

There were, besides this mass of arrivals, some groups who seemed to have come from the city. These, instead of looking at the gate, fastened their gaze on the horizon, bounded by the Convent of the Jacobins, the Priory of Vincennes, and the Croix Faubin, as though they were expecting to see some one arrive. These groups consisted chiefly of bourgeois, warmly wrapped up, for the weather was cold, and the piercing northeast wind seemed trying to tear from the trees all the few remaining leaves which clung sadly to them.

Three of these bourgeois were talking together — that is to say, two talked and one listened, or rather seemed to listen, so occupied was he in looking toward Vincennes. Let us turn our attention to this last. He was a man who must be tall when he stood upright, but at this moment his long legs were bent under him, and his arms, not less long in proportion, were crossed over his breast. He was leaning against the hedge, which almost hid his face, before which he also held up his hand as if for further concealment. By his side a little man, mounted on a hillock, was talking to another tall man who was constantly slipping off the summit of the same hillock, and at each slip catching at the button of his neighbor’s doublet.

“Yes, Maitre Miton,” said the little man to the tall one, “yes, I tell you that there will be 100,000 people around the scaffold of Salcede — 100,000 at least. See, without counting those already on the Place de Greve, or who came there from different parts of Paris, the number of people here; and this is but one gate out of sixteen.”

“One hundred thousand! that is much, Friard,” replied M. Miton. “Be sure many people will follow my example, and not go to see this unlucky man quartered, for fear of an uproar.”

“M. Miton, there will be none, I answer for it. Do you not think so, monsieur?” continued he, turning to the long-armed man. — ”What?” said the other, as though he had not heard.

“They say there will be nothing on the Place de Greve to-day.”

“I think you are wrong, and that there will be the execution of Salcede.”

“Yes, doubtless: but I mean that there will be no noise about it.”

“There will be the noise of the blows of the whip, which they will give to the horses.”

“You do not understand: by noise I mean tumult. If there were likely to be any, the king would not have had a stand prepared for him and the two queens at the Hotel de Ville.”

“Do kings ever know when a tumult will take place?” replied the other, shrugging his shoulders with an air of pity.

“Oh, oh!” said M. Miton; “this man talks in a singular way. Do you know who he is, compere?”

“No.”

“Then why do you speak to him? You are wrong. I do not think he likes to talk.”

“And yet it seems to me,” replied Friard, loud enough to be heard by the stranger, “that one of the greatest pleasures in life is to exchange thoughts.”

“Yes, with those whom we know well,” answered M. Miton.

“Are not all men brothers, as the priests say?”

“They were primitively; but in times like ours the relationship is singularly loosened. Talk low, if you must talk, and leave the stranger alone.”

“But I know you so well, I know what you will reply, while the stranger may have something new to tell me.”

“Hush! he is listening.”

“So much the better; perhaps he will answer. Then you think, monsieur,” continued he, turning again toward him, “that there will be a tumult?”

“I did not say so.”

“No; but I believe you think so.”

“And on what do you found your surmise, M. Friard?”

“Why, he knows me!”

“Have I not named you two or three times?” said Miton.

“Ah! true. Well, since he knows me, perhaps he will answer. Now, monsieur, I believe you agree with me, or else would be there, while, on the contrary, you are here.”

“But you, M. Friard, since you think the contrary of what you think I think, why are you not at the Place de Greve? I thought the spectacle would have been a joyful one to all friends of the king. Perhaps you will reply that you are not friends of the king; but of MM. de Guise, and that you are waiting here for the Lorraines, who they say are about to enter Paris in order to deliver M. de Salcede.”

“No, monsieur,” replied the little man, visibly frightened at this suggestion; “I wait for my wife, Nicole Friard, who has gone to take twenty-four tablecloths to the priory of the Jacobins, having the honor to be washerwoman to Dom. Modeste Gorenflot, the abbe.”

“Look, compere,” cried Miton, “at what is passing.”

M. Friard, following the direction of his friend’s finger, saw them closing yet another door, while a party of Swiss placed themselves before it. “How! more barriers!” cried he.

“What did I tell you?” said Miton.

At the sight of this new precaution, a long murmur of astonishment and some cries of discontent proceeded from the crowd.

“Clear the road! Back!” cried an officer.

This maneuver was not executed without difficulty; the people in carts and on horseback tried to go back, and nearly crushed the crowd behind them. Women cried and men swore, while those who could escape, did, overturning the others.

“The Lorraines! the Lorraines!” cried a voice in the midst of this tumult.

“Oh!” cried Miton, trembling, “let us fly.”

“Fly! and where?” said Friard.

"Into this inclosure," answered Miton tearing his hands by seizing the thorns of the hedge.

"Into that inclosure, it is not so easy. I see no opening, and you cannot climb a hedge that is higher than I am."

"I will try," returned Miton, making new efforts.

"Oh! take care, my good woman," cried Friard, in a tone of distress; "your ass is on my feet. Oh, monsieur, take care, your horse is going to kick."

While M. Miton was vainly trying to climb the hedge, and M. Friard to find an opening through which to push himself, their neighbor quietly opened his long legs and strode over the hedge with as much ease as one might have leaped it on horseback. M. Miton imitated him at last after much detriment to his hands and clothes; but poor Friard could not succeed, in spite of all his efforts, till the stranger, stretching out his long arms, and seizing him by the collar of his doublet, lifted him over.

"Ah! monsieur," said he, when he felt himself on the ground, "on the word of Jean Friard, you are a real Hercules; your name, monsieur? the name of my deliverer?"

"I am called Briquet — Robert Briquet, monsieur."

"You have saved me, M. Briquet — my wife will bless you. But apropos; mon Dieu! she will be stifled in this crowd. Ah! cursed Swiss, only good to crush people!"

As he spoke, he felt a heavy hand on his shoulder, and, looking round and seeing that it was a Swiss, he took to flight, followed by Miton. The other man laughed quietly, then turning to the Swiss, said:

"Are the Lorraines coming?"

"No."

"Then why do they close the door. I do not understand it."

"There is no need that you should," replied the Swiss, laughing at his own wit.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT PASSED OUTSIDE THE PORTE ST. ANTOINE.

One of the groups was formed of a considerable number of citizens. They surrounded four or five of a martial appearance, whom the closing of the doors annoyed very much, as it seemed, for they cried with all their might, “The door! the door!”

Robert Briquet advanced toward this group, and began to cry also, “The door! the door!”

One of the cavaliers, charmed at this, turned toward him and said, “Is it not shameful, monsieur, that they should close the gates in open day, as though the Spaniards or the English were besieging Paris?”

Robert Briquet looked attentively at the speaker, who seemed to be about forty-five years of age, and the principal personage in the group. “Yes, monsieur,” replied he, “you are right: but may I venture to ask what you think their motive is for these precautions?”

“Pardieu! the fear they have lest some one should eat their Salcede.”

“Diable!” said a voice, “a sad meal.”

Robert Briquet turned toward the speaker, whose voice had a strong Gascon accent, and saw a young man from twenty to twenty-five, resting his hand on the crupper of the horse of the first speaker. His head was bare; he had probably lost his hat in the melée.

“But as they say,” replied Briquet, “that this Salcede belongs to M. de Guise — ”

“Bah! they say that!”

“Then you do not believe it, monsieur?”

“Certainly not,” replied the cavalier, “doubtless, if he had, the duke would not have let him be taken, or at all events would not have allowed him to have been carried from Brussels to Paris bound hand and foot, without even trying to rescue him.”

“An attempt to rescue him,” replied Briquet, “would have been very dangerous, because, whether it failed or succeeded, it would have been an avowal, on the duke’s part, that he had conspired against the Duc d’Anjou.”

“M. de Guise would not, I am sure, have been restrained by such considerations; therefore, as he has not defended Salcede, it is certain that he is not one of his men.”

“Excuse me, monsieur, if I insist, but it is not I who invent, for it appears that Salcede has confessed.”

“Where? before the judges?”

“No, monsieur; at the torture.”

“They asserted that he did, but they do not repeat what he said.”

“Excuse me again, monsieur, but they do.”

“And what did he say?” cried the cavalier impatiently. “As you seem so well informed, what were his words?”

“I cannot certify that they were his words,” replied Briquet, who seemed to take a pleasure in teazing the cavalier.

“Well, then, those they attribute to him.”

“They assert that he has confessed that he conspired for M. de Guise.”

“Against the king, of course?”

“No; against the Duc d’Anjou.”

“If he confessed that — ”

“Well?”

“Well, he is a poltroon!” said the cavalier, frowning.

“Ah! monsieur, the boot and the thumb-screw make a man confess many things.”

“Alas! that is true, monsieur.”

“Bah!” interrupted the Gascon, “the boot and the thumb-screw, nonsense: if Salcede confessed that, he was a knave, and his patron another.”

“You speak loudly, monsieur,” said the cavalier.

“I speak as I please; so much the worse for those who dislike it.”

“More calmly,” said a voice at once soft and imperative, of which Briquet vainly sought the owner.

The cavalier seemed to make an effort over himself, and then said quietly to the Gascon, “Do you know him of whom you speak?”

“Salcede?” — ”Yes.”

“Not in the least.”

“And the Duc de Guise?”

“Still less.”

“Well, then, Salcede is a brave man.”

“So much the better: he will die bravely.”

“And know that, when the Duc de Guise wishes to conspire, he conspires for himself.”

“What do I care?”

“What!”

“Mayneville! Mayneville!” murmured the same voice.

“Yes, mordieu! what do I care?” continued the Gascon, “I came to Paris on business, and find the gates closed on account of this execution — that is all I care for.”

At this moment there was a sound of trumpets. The Swiss had cleared the middle of the road, along which a crier proceeded, dressed in a flowered tunic, and bearing on his breast a scutcheon on which was embroidered the arms of Paris. He read from a paper in his hand the following proclamation:

“This is to make known to our good people of Paris and its environs, that its gates will be closed for one hour, and that none can enter during that time; and this by the will of the king and the mayor of Paris.”

The crowd gave vent to their discontent in a long hoot, to which, however, the crier seemed indifferent. The officer commanded silence, and when it was obtained, the crier continued:

“All who are the bearers of a sign of recognition, or are summoned by letter or mandate, are exempt from this rule. Given at the hotel of the provost of Paris, 26th of October, 1585.”

Scarcely had the crier ceased to speak, when the crowd began to undulate like a serpent behind the line of soldiers.

“What is the meaning of this?” cried all.

“Oh! it is to keep us out of Paris,” said the cavalier, who had been speaking in a low voice to his companions. “These guards, this crier, these bars, and these trumpets are all for us; we ought to be proud of them.”

“Room!” cried the officer in command; “make room for those who have the right to pass!”

“Cap de Bious! I know who will pass, whoever is kept out!” said the Gascon, leaping into the cleared space. He walked straight up to the officer who had spoken, and who looked at him for some moments in silence, and then said:

“You have lost your hat, it appears, monsieur?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Is it in the crowd?”

“No. I had just received a letter from my sweetheart, and was reading it, cap de Bious! near the river, about a mile from here, when a gust of wind carried away both my letter and my hat. I ran after the letter, although the button of my hat was a single diamond; I caught my letter, but my hat was carried by the wind into the middle of the river. It will make the fortune of the poor devil who finds it.” — ”So that you have none?”

“Oh, there are plenty in Paris, cap de Bious! I will buy a more magnificent one, and put in it a still larger diamond.”

The officer shrugged his shoulders slightly, and said, “Have you a card?”

“Certainly I have one — or rather two.”

“One is enough, if it be the right one.”

“But it cannot be wrong — oh, no, cap de Bious! Is it to M. de Loignac that I have the honor of speaking?”

“It is possible,” said the officer coldly, and evidently not much charmed at the recognition.

“M. de Loignac, my compatriot?”

“I do not say no.”

“My cousin!”

“Good! Your card?”

“Here it is;” and the Gascon drew out the half of a card, carefully cut.

“Follow me,” said De Loignac, without looking at it, “and your companions, if you have any. We will verify the admissions.”

The Gascon obeyed, and five other gentlemen followed him. The first was adorned with a magnificent cuirass, so marvelous in its work that it seemed as if it had come out of the hands of Benvenuto Cellini. However, as the make of this cuirass was somewhat old-fashioned, its magnificence attracted more laughter than admiration; and it is true that no other part of the costume of the individual in question corresponded with this magnificence. The second, who was lame, was followed by a gray-headed lackey, who looked like the precursor of Sancho Panza, as his master did of Don Quixote. The third carried a child of ten months old in his arms, and was followed by a woman, who kept a tight grasp of his leathern belt, while two other children, one four and the other five years old, held by her dress.

The fourth was attached to an enormous sword, and the fifth, who closed the troop, was a handsome young man, mounted on a black horse. He looked like a king by the side of the others. Forced to regulate his pace by those who preceded him, he was advancing slowly, when he felt a sudden pull at the scabbard of his sword; he turned round, and saw that it had been done by a slight and graceful young man with black hair and sparkling eyes.

"What do you desire, monsieur?" said the cavalier.

"A favor, monsieur."

"Speak; but quickly, I pray you, for I am waited for."

"I desire to enter into the city, monsieur; an imperious necessity demands my presence there. You, on your part, are alone, and want a page to do justice to your appearance."

"Well?"

"Take me in, and I will be your page."

"Thank you; but I do not wish to be served by any one."

"Not even by me," said the young man, with such a strange glance, that the cavalier felt the icy reserve in which he had tried to close his heart melting away.

"I meant to say that I could be served by no one," said he.

"Yes, I know you are not rich, M. Ernanton de Carmainges," said the young page. The cavalier started, but the lad went on, "therefore I do not speak of wages; it is you, on the contrary, who, if you grant what I ask, shall be paid a hundred-fold for the service you will render me; let me enter with you, then, I beg, remembering that he who now begs, has often commanded." Then, turning to the group of which we have already spoken, the lad said, "I shall pass; that is the most important thing; but you, Mayneville, try to do so also if possible."

"It is not everything that you should pass," replied Mayneville; "it is necessary that he should see you."

"Make yourself easy; once I am through, he shall see me."

"Do not forget the sign agreed upon."

"Two fingers on the mouth, is it not?"

"Yes; success attend you."

"Well, monsieur page," said the man on the black horse, "are you ready?"

"Here I am," replied he, jumping lightly on the horse, behind the cavalier, who immediately joined his friends who were occupied in exhibiting their cards and proving their right to enter.

"Ventre de Biche!" said Robert Briquet; "what an arrival of Gascons!"

CHAPTER III.

THE EXAMINATION.

The process of examination consisted in comparing the half card with another half in the possession of the officer.

The Gascon with the bare head advanced first.

“Your name?” said De Loignac.

“It is on the card.”

“Never mind; tell it to me.”

“Well, I am called Perducas de Pincornay.”

Then, throwing his eyes on the card. M. de Loignac read. “Perducas de Pincornay, 26 October, 1585, at noon precisely. Porte St. Antoine.”

“Very good; it is all right,” said he, “enter. Now for you,” said he to the second.

The man with the cuirass advanced.

“Your card?” said De Loignac.

“What! M. de Loignac, do you not know the son of your old friend, whom you have danced twenty times on your knee?” — ”No.”

“I am Pertinax de Montcrabeau,” replied the young man, with astonishment. “Do you not know me now?”

“When I am on service, I know no one. Your card, monsieur?”

He held it out. “All right! pass,” said De Loignac.

The third now approached, whose card was demanded in the same terms. The man plunged his hand into a little goatskin pouch which he wore, but in vain; he was so embarrassed by the child in his arms, that he could not find it.

“What the devil are you doing with that child?” asked De Loignac.

“He is my son, monsieur.”

“Well; put your son down. You are married, then?” — -”Yes, monsieur.”

“At twenty?”

“They marry young among us; you ought to know that, M. de Loignac, who were married at eighteen.”

“Oh!” thought De Loignac, “here is another who knows me.”

“And why should he not be married?” cried the woman advancing. “Yes, monsieur, he is married, and here are two other children who call him father, besides this great lad behind. Advance, Militor, and bow to M. de Loignac.”

A lad of sixteen, vigorous and agile, with an incipient mustache, stepped forward.

“They are my wife’s sons, monsieur.”

“In Heaven’s name, your card!” cried De Loignac.

“Lardille!” cried the Gascon to his wife, “come and help me.”

Lardille searched the pouch and pockets of her husband, but uselessly. “We must have lost it!” she cried.

“Then I arrest you.”

The man turned pale, but said, “I am Eustache de Miradoux, and M. de St. Maline is my patron.”

“Oh!” said De Loignac, a little mollified at this name, “well, search again.”

They turned to their pockets again, and began to re-examine them.

“Why, what do I see there, on the sleeve of that blockhead?” said De Loignac.

“Yes, yes!” cried the father. “I remember, now, Lardille sewed it on.”

“That you might carry something, I suppose, you great lazy fellow.”

The card was looked at and found all right, and the family passed on in the same order as before.

The fourth man advanced and gave his name as Chalabre. It was found correct, and he also entered.

Then came M. de Carmainges. He got off his horse and presented his card, while the page hid his face by pretending to adjust the saddle.

“The page belongs to you?” asked De Loignac.

“You see, he is attending to my horse.”

“Pass, then.”

“Quick, my master,” said the page.

Behind these men the door was closed, much to the discontent of the crowd. Robert Briquet, meanwhile, had drawn near to the porter’s lodge, which had two windows, one looking toward Paris and the other into the country. From this post he saw a man, who, coming from Paris at full gallop, entered the lodge and said, “Here I am, M. de Loignac.”

“Good. Where do you come from?”

“From the Porte St. Victor.”

“Your number?” — ”Five.”

“The cards?”

“Here they are.”

De Loignac took them, examined them, and wrote on a slate the number five. The messenger left, and two others appeared, almost immediately. One came from the Porte Bourdelle, and brought the number four, the other from the Porte du Temple, and announced six. Then came four others. The first from the Porte St. Denis, with the number five; the next from the Porte St. Jacques, with the number three; the third from the Porte St. Honore, with the number eight; and the fourth from the Porte Montmartre, with the number four. Lastly came a messenger, from the Porte Bussy, who announced four. De Loignac wrote all these down, added them to those who had entered the Porte St. Antoine, and found the total number to be forty-five.

“Good!” said he. “Now open the gates, and all may enter.”

The gates were thrown open, and then horses, mules, and carts, men, women, and children, pressed into Paris, at the risk of suffocating each other, and in a quarter of an hour all the crowd had vanished.

Robert Briquet remained until the last. “I have seen enough,” said he: “would it be very advantageous to me to see M. Salcede torn in four pieces? No, pardieu! Besides, I have renounced politics; I will go and dine.”

CHAPTER IV.

HIS MAJESTY HENRI THE THIRD.

M. Friard was right when he talked of 100,000 persons as the number of spectators who would meet on the Place de Greve and its environs, to witness the execution of Salcede. All Paris appeared to have a rendezvous at the Hotel de Ville; and Paris is very exact, and never misses a fete; and the death of a man is a fete, especially when he has raised so many passions that some curse and others bless him.

The spectators who succeeded in reaching the Place saw the archers and a large number of Swiss and light horse surrounding a little scaffold raised about four feet from the ground. It was so low as to be visible only to those immediately surrounding it, or to those who had windows overlooking the Place. Four vigorous white horses beat the ground impatiently with their hoofs, to the great terror of the women, who had either chosen this place willingly, or had been forcibly pushed there.

These horses were unused, and had never done more work than to support, by some chance, on their broad backs the chubby children of the peasants. After the scaffold and the horses, what next attracted all looks was the principal window of the Hotel de Ville, which was hung with red velvet and gold, and ornamented with the royal arms. This was for the king. Half-past one had just struck when this window was filled. First came Henri III., pale, almost bald, although he was at that time only thirty-five, and with a somber expression, always a mystery to his subjects, who, when they saw him appear, never knew whether to say “Vive le Roi!” or to pray for his soul. He was dressed in black, without jewels or orders, and a single diamond shone in his cap, serving as a fastening to three short plumes. He carried in his hand a little black dog that his sister-in-law Marie Stuart had sent him from her prison, and on which his fingers looked as white as alabaster.

Behind the king came Catherine de Medicis, almost bowed by age, for she might be sixty-six or sixty-seven, but still carrying her head firm and erect, and darting bitter glances from under her thick eyebrows. At her side appeared the melancholy but sweet face of the queen, Louise de Torraine. Catherine came as a triumph, she as a punishment. Behind them came two handsome young men, brothers, the eldest of whom smiled with wonderful beauty, and the younger with great melancholy. The one was Anne, duc de Joyeuse, and the other Henri de Joyeuse, comte de Bouchage. The people had for these favorites of the king none of the hatred which they had felt toward Maugiron, Quelus, and Schomberg.

Henri saluted the people gravely; then, turning to the young men, he said, "Anne, lean against the tapestry; it may last a long time."

"I hope so," said Catherine.

"You think, then, that Salcede will speak, mother?"

"God will, I trust, give this confusion to our enemies."

Henri looked doubtful.

"My son," said Catherine, "do I not see some tumult yonder?"

"What clear sight you have! I believe you are right. I have such bad eyes, and yet I am not old. Yes, here comes Salcede."

"He fears," said Catherine; "he will speak."

"If he has strength," said the king. "See, his head falls about like that of a corpse."

"He is frightful," said Joyeuse.

"How should a man be handsome whose thoughts are so ugly? Have I not explained to you, Anne, the secret connection of the physical and the moral, as Hippocrates and Galen understood and expounded them?"

"I admit it, sire, but I am not a good pupil. I have sometimes seen very ugly men very good soldiers. Have you not, Henri?" said he, turning to his brother: but he looked without seeing, and heard without understanding, so the king answered for him.

"Eh, mon Dieu! my dear Anne, who says this man is not brave? He is brave, pardieu, like a wolf, a bear, or a serpent. He burned in his house a Norman gentleman, his enemy; he has fought ten duels, and killed three of his adversaries. He has now been taken in the act of coining, for which he has been condemned to death."

"That is a well-filled existence, but which will soon finish."

"On the contrary," said Catherine, "I trust it will finish as slowly as possible."

“Madame,” said Joyeuse, “I see those four stout horses, who appear to me so impatient of their state of inactivity that I do not believe in a long resistance of the muscles, tendons, and cartilages of M. de Salcede.”

“Yes, but my son is merciful,” replied she, with the smile peculiar to herself, “and he will tell the men to go gently.”

“But, madame,” said the queen timidly, “I heard you say this morning that there were only to be two draws?”

“Yes, if he conducts himself well; in that case all will be finished as soon as possible, and, as you interest yourself so much in him, you had better let him know as much, my daughter.”

“Madame,” said the queen, “I have not your strength when looking at suffering.”

“Do not look, then.”

The king heard nothing; he was all eyes. They were lifting Salcede from the car on to the scaffold, round which the archers had cleared a large space, so that it was distinctly visible to all eyes.

Salcede was about thirty-five years of age, strong and vigorous; and his pale features, on which stood drops of blood, were animated alternately by hope and anguish. He was no vulgar assassin; he was of good birth, and even distantly related to the queen, and had been a captain of some renown. Those bound hands had valiantly borne the sword, and that livid head, on which were depicted the terrors of death, had conceived great designs. Therefore, to many of the spectators, he was a hero; to others, a victim; some looked on him as an assassin; but the crowd seldom despises those very great criminals who are registered in the book of history as well as in that of justice. Thus they told, in the crowd, that Salcede was of a race of warriors; that his father had fought against the Cardinal de Lorraine, but that the son had joined with the Guises to destroy in Flanders the rising power of the Duc d’Anjou, so hated by the French.

He had been arrested and conducted to France, and had hoped to be rescued by the way; but unfortunately for him, M. de Bellièvre had kept such good watch, that neither Spaniards nor Lorraines, nor leaguers, had been able to approach. In the prison Salcede hoped; during the torture, on the car, even on the scaffold, he still hoped. He wanted neither courage nor resignation; but he was one of those who defend themselves to their last breath. He darted curious glances toward the crowd, but constantly turned away, with a look of disappointment.

At this moment, an usher, raising the tapestry of the royal tent, announced that the president Brisson and four councilors desired the honor of an instant’s conversation with the king on the subject of the execution.

“Good,” said the king. “Mother, you will be satisfied.”

“Sire, a favor,” said Joyeuse.

“Speak, Joyeuse; and provided it be not the pardon of the criminal — ”

“Sire, permit my brother and me to retire.”

“What! you take so little interest in my affairs that you wish to retire at such a moment!”

“Do not say so, sire; all that concerns your majesty profoundly interests me; but I am of a miserable organization, and the weakest woman is stronger than I am on this point. I cannot see an execution without being ill for a week; and as I am the only person who ever laughs at the Louvre, since my brother — I know not why — has given it up, think what would become of the Louvre — so sad already — if I were sad also.”

“You wish to leave me then, Anne.”

“Peste! sire, you are exacting; an execution is a spectacle of which, unlike me, you are fond. Is not that enough for you, or must you also enjoy the weakness of your friends?”

“If you will remain, Joyeuse, you will see that it is interesting.”

“I do not doubt it, sire; I only think that the interest will be carried to a point that I cannot bear;” and he turned toward the door.

“Go, then,” said Henri, sighing; “my destiny is to live alone.”

“Quick! Du Bouchage,” said Anne to his brother. “The king says yes now; but in five minutes he will say no.”

“Thanks, my brother,” said Bouchage; “I was as anxious as you to get away.”

CHAPTER V.

THE EXECUTION.

The councilors entered.

"Well, gentlemen," said the king, "is there anything new?"

"Sire," replied the president, "we come to beg your majesty to promise life to the criminal; he has revelations to make, which, on this promise, we shall obtain."

"But have we not obtained them?"

"Yes, in part; is that enough for your majesty?"

"No," said Catherine; "and the king has determined to postpone the execution, if the culprit will sign a confession substantiating his depositions before the judge."

"Yes," said Henri, "and you can let the prisoner know this."

"Your majesty has nothing to add?"

"Only that there must be no variation in the confessions, or I withdraw my promise; they must be complete."

"Yes, sire; with the names of the compromised parties."

"With all the names."

"Even if they are of high rank?"

"If they were those of my nearest relations."

"It shall be as your majesty wishes."

"No misunderstanding, M. Brisson. Writing materials shall be brought to the prisoner, and he will write his confessions; after that we shall see."

"But I may promise?"

"Oh! yes, promise."

M. Brisson and the councilors withdrew.

"He will speak, sire," said the queen; "and your majesty will pardon him. See the foam on his lips."

"No," said Catherine; "he is seeking something. What is it?"

"Parbleu!" said Henri; "he seeks M. le Duc de Guise, M. le Duc de Parma, and my brother, the very Catholic king. Yes, seek, wait; do you believe that there is more chance of rescue on the Place de Greve than on the route from Flanders?"

Salcede had seen the archers sent off for the horses, and he understood that the order for punishment was about to be given, and it was then that he bit his lips till they were covered with blood, as the queen had remarked.

"No one," murmured he; "not one of those who had promised me help. Cowards! cowards!"

The horses were now seen making their way through the crowd, and creating everywhere an opening which closed immediately behind them. As they passed the corner of the Rue St. Vannerie, a handsome young man, whom we have seen before, was pushed forward impatiently by a young lad, apparently about seventeen. It was the Vicomte Ernanton de Carmainges and the mysterious page.

"Quick!" cried the page; "throw yourself into the opening, there is not a moment to lose."

"But we shall be stifled; you are mad, my little friend."

"I must be near," cried the page, imperiously. "Keep close to the horses, or we shall never arrive there."

"But before we get there, you will be torn to pieces."

"Never mind me, only go on."

"The horses will kick."

"Take hold of the tail of the last; a horse never kicks when you hold him so."

Ernanton gave way in spite of himself to the mysterious influence of this lad, and seized the tail of the horse, while the page clung to him. And thus, through the crowd, waving like the sea, leaving here a piece of a cloak, and there a fragment of a doublet, they arrived with the horses at a few steps from the scaffold.

"Have we arrived?" asked the young man, panting.

"Yes, happily!" answered Ernanton, "for I am exhausted."

"I cannot see."

"Come before me."

"Oh, no! not yet. What are they doing?"

"Making slip knots at the ends of the cords."

"And he — what is he doing?"

"Who?"

"The condemned."

“His eyes turn incessantly from side to side.”

The horses were near enough to enable the executioner to tie the feet and hands of the criminal to the harness. Salcede uttered a cry when he felt the cord in contact with his flesh.

“Monsieur,” said the Lieutenant Tanchon to him politely, “will it please you to address the people?” and added in a whisper, “a confession will save your life.”

Salcede looked earnestly at him, as though to read the truth in his eyes.

“You see,” continued Tanchon, “they abandon you. There is no other hope in the world but what I offer you.”

“Well!” said Salcede, with a sigh, “I am ready to speak.”

“It is a written and signed confession that the king exacts.”

“Then untie my hands, and give me a pen and I will write it.”

They loosened the cords from his wrists, and an usher who stood near with writing materials placed them before him on the scaffold. “Now,” said Tanchon, “state everything.”

“Do not fear; I will not forget those who have forgotten me;” but as he spoke, he cast another glance around.

While this was passing, the page, seizing the hand of Ernanton, cried, “Monsieur, take me in your arms, I beg you, and raise me above the heads of the people who prevent me from seeing.”

“Ah! you are insatiable, young man.”

“This one more service; I must see the condemned, indeed I must.”

Then, as Ernanton still hesitated, he cried, “For pity’s sake, monsieur, I entreat you.”

Ernanton raised him in his arms at this last appeal, and was somewhat astonished at the delicacy of the body he held. Just as Salcede had taken the pen, and looked round as we have said, he saw this young lad above the crowd, with two fingers placed on his lips. An indescribable joy spread itself instantaneously over the face of the condemned man, for he recognized the signal so impatiently waited for, and which announced that aid was near. After a moment’s hesitation, however, he took the paper and began to write.

“He writes!” cried the crowd.

“He writes!” exclaimed Catherine.

“He writes!” cried the king, “and I will pardon him.”

Suddenly Salcede stopped and looked again at the lad, who repeated the signal. He wrote on, then stopped to look once more; the signal was again repeated.

“Have you finished?” asked Tanchon.

“Yes.” — ”Then sign.”

Salcede signed, with his eyes still fixed on the young man. “For the king alone,” said he, and he gave the paper to the usher, though with hesitation.

“If you have disclosed all,” said Tanchon, “you are safe.”

A strange smile strayed over the lips of Salcede. Ernanton, who was fatigued, wished now to put down the page, who made no opposition. With him disappeared all that had sustained the unfortunate man; he looked round wildly and cried: “Well, come!”

No one answered.

“Quick! quick! the king holds the paper; he is reading!”

Still there was no response.

The king unfolded the paper.

“Thousand devils!” cried Salcede, “if they have deceived me! Yet it was she — it was really she!”

No sooner had the king read the first lines, than he called out indignantly, “Oh! the wretch!”

“What is it, my son?”

“He retracts all — he pretends that he confessed nothing; and he declares that the Guises are innocent of any plot!”

“But,” said Catherine, “if it be true?”

“He lies!” cried the king.

“How do you know, my son? Perhaps the Guises have been calumniated: the judges, in their zeal, may have put false interpretation on the depositions.”

“Oh! no, madame; I heard them myself!” cried Henri.

“You, my son?”

“Yes, I?”

“How so?”

“When the criminal was questioned, I was behind a curtain and heard all he said.”

“Well, then, if he will have it, order the horses to pull.”

Henri, in anger, gave the sign. It was repeated, the cords were refastened, four men jumped on the horses, which, urged by violent blows, started off in opposite directions. A horrible cracking, and a terrible cry was heard. The blood was seen to spout from the limbs of the unhappy man, whose face was no longer that of a man but of a demon.

“Ah, heaven!” he cried; “I will speak, I will tell all. Ah! cursed duch — ”

The voice had been heard above everything, but suddenly it ceased.

“Stop, stop,” cried Catherine, “let him speak.”

But it was too late; the head of Salcede fell helplessly on one side, he glanced once more to where he had seen the page, and then expired. Tanchon gave some rapid orders to his archers, who plunged into the crowd in the direction indicated by Salcede’s glance.

“I am discovered!” said the page to Ernanton. “For pity’s sake, aid me! they come, they come!”

“What do you want?”

“To fly! Do you not see that it is me they want?”

“But who are you, then?”

“A woman. Oh, save me! protect me!”

Ernanton turned pale; but generosity triumphed over fear. He placed his protégée before him, opened a path with blows, and pushed her toward the corner of the Rue du Mouton, toward an open door. Into this door she entered; and she seemed to have been expected, for it closed behind her. Ernanton had not even time to ask her name, or where he should find her again; but in disappearing she had made a sign full of promise.

Meanwhile, Catherine was standing up in her place, full of rage.

“My son,” said she, at last, “you would do well to change your executioner; he is a leaguer.”

“What do you mean, mother?”

“Salcede suffered only one draw, and he is dead.”

“Because he was too sensible to pain.”

“No; but because he has been strangled with a fine cord underneath the scaffold, just as he was about to accuse those who let him die. Let a doctor examine him, and I am certain that he will find round his neck the circle that the cord has left.”

“You are right!” cried Henri, with flashing eyes; “my cousin of Guise is better served than I am!”

“Hush, my son — no éclat; we shall only be laughed at, for once more we have missed our aim.”

"Joyeuse did well to go and amuse himself elsewhere," said the king; "one can reckon on nothing in this world — not even on punishments. Come, ladies, let us go."

CHAPTER VI.

THE BROTHERS.

MM. De Joyeuse had, as we have seen, left this scene, and were walking side by side in the streets generally so populous but now deserted, for every one was in the Place de Greve. Henri seemed preoccupied and sad, and Anne was unquiet on account of his brother. He was the first to speak.

“Well, Henri,” said he, “where are you taking me?”

“I take you nowhere, brother; I was only walking before you. Do you wish to go anywhere?”

“Do you?”

“Oh! I do not care where I go.”

“Yet you go somewhere every evening, for you always go out at the same hour and return late at night.”

“Are you questioning me, brother?” said Henri, with gentleness.

“Certainly not; let each keep his own secrets if he wishes to do so.”

“If you wish it, brother, I will have no secrets from you.”

“Will you not, Henri?”

“No; are you not my elder brother and friend?”

“Oh! I thought you had secrets from me, who am only a poor layman. I thought you confessed to our learned brother, that pillar of theology, that light of the Church, who will be a cardinal some day, and that you obtained absolution from him, and perhaps, at the same time, advice.”

Henri took his brother’s hand affectionately. “You are more than a confessor to me, my dear Anne — more than a father; you are my friend.”

“Then, my friend, why, from so gay as you used to be, have I seen you become sad? and why, instead of going out by day, do you only go out at night?”

“My brother, I am not sad.”

“What, then?”

“In love.”

“Good! And this preoccupation?”

“Is because I am always thinking of my love.”

“And you sigh in saying that?”

“Yes.”

“You sigh? — you, Henri, comte de Bouchage? — you, the brother of Joyeuse? — you, whom some people call the third king in France? You know M. de Guise is the second, if not the first; but you, rich and handsome, who will be peer and duke on the first occasion, are in love, and you sigh! — you, whose device is ‘hilariter.’“

“My dear Anne, I have never reckoned the gifts of fortune, past and to come, as things to constitute happiness; I have no ambitions.”

“That is to say, you have not at present.”

“At all events, not for the things you speak of.”

“Not just now, perhaps, but later you will return to them.”

“Never, brother; I desire nothing — I want nothing.”

“You are wrong. When one is called ‘Joyeuse,’ one of the best names in France, when one has a brother a king’s favorite, one desires everything, and has everything.”

Henri hung his blond head sadly.

“Come,” continued Anne, “we are quite alone here; have you anything to tell me?”

“Nothing, but that I love.”

“Diable! that is not a very serious affair; I also am in love.”

“Not like me, brother.”

“I, also, think sometimes of my mistress.”

“Yes, but not always.”

“I, also, have annoyances.”

“Yes; but you also have joys, for you are loved.”

“True; but I have obstacles. They exact from me so much mystery.”

“They exact! If your mistress exacts, she loves you.”

“Yes, she loves me and M. de Mayenne — or rather only me, for she would give up Mayenne at once if she was not afraid he would kill her; it is his habit to kill women, you know. I am obliged to be constantly on my guard, but I do not grow sad on that account; I continue to laugh — at least, sometimes. Tell me, Henri, is your lady beautiful?”

“Alas! she is not mine.”

“Is she beautiful? Her name?”

“I do not know it.”

“Come, now.”

“On my honor.”

“My friend, I begin to think it is more dangerous than I thought; it is not sadness, but madness.”

“She never spoke but once before me, and since then I have not heard the sound of her voice.”

“And you have not inquired about her?”

“Of whom?”

“Why, of the neighbors.”

“She lives in her own house, and no one knows her.”

“Ah! *ça!* then she is a ghost!”

“She is a woman, tall and beautiful as a nymph, serious and grave as the angel Gabriel!”

“When did you meet her?”

“One day I followed a young girl to the church of La Gypecienne, and I entered a little garden close to it, where there is a stone seat under some trees. Do you know this garden, Anne?”

“No; but never mind — go on.”

“It began to grow dark; I had lost sight of the young girl, and in seeking her I arrived at this seat. I saw a woman’s dress, and held out my hands. ‘Pardon, monsieur,’ said the voice of a man whom I had not noticed, and he gently but firmly pushed me away.”

“He dared to touch you, Henri?”

“Listen; he had his face hidden in a sort of frock, and I took him for a monk. Besides, he impressed me also by the polite manner of his warning; for, as he spoke, he pointed out to me the woman, whose white dress had attracted me, and who was kneeling before the seat as though it were an altar. It was toward the beginning of September that this happened; the air was warm, the flowers planted by friends around the tombs scattered their delicate perfume, and the moon, rising above the white clouds, began to shed her silver light over all. Whether it were the place, or her own dignity, I know not, but this woman seemed to me like a marble statue, and impressed me with a strange respect. I looked at her earnestly. She bent over the seat, enveloping it in her arms, placed her lips to it, and soon I saw her shoulders heave with such sobs as you never heard, my brother. As she wept she kissed the stone with ardor; her tears had troubled me, but her kisses maddened me.”

"But, by the pope, it is she who is mad, to kiss a stone and sob for nothing."

"Oh! it was a great grief that made her sob, a profound love which made her kiss the stone. Only whom did she love? whom did she weep for? whom did she pray for? I know not."

"Did you not question this man?"

"Yes."

"What did he reply?

"That she had lost her husband."

"Bah! as if people weep like that for a husband. Were you content with such an answer?"

"I was obliged to be content, for he would give me no other."

"But the man — what is he?"

"A sort of servant who lives with her." — "His name?"

"He would not tell me."

"Young or old?"

"He might be about thirty."

"Well, afterward? She did not stop all night praying and weeping, did she?"

"No; when she had exhausted her tears she rose, and there was so much mystery and sadness about her that, instead of advancing to her as I might have done to another, I drew back; but she turned toward me, though she did not see me, and the moon shone on her face, which was calm and sad, and the traces of her tears were still on her cheeks; she moved slowly, and the servant went to support her. But, oh! my brother, what dreadful, what superhuman beauty. I have never seen anything like it on earth, only sometimes in my dreams."

"Well, Henri?" said Anne, interested, in spite of himself, at a recital at which he had determined to laugh.

"Oh! it is nearly finished, brother. Her servant whispered something to her, and she lowered her veil; doubtless he told her I was there, but she did not glance toward me. I saw her no more, and it seemed to me, when the veil concealed her face, as if the sky had become suddenly overshadowed — that it was no longer a living thing, but a shade escaped from the tomb, which was gliding silently before me. She went out of the garden, and I followed her; from time to time the man turned and saw me, for I did not hide myself; I had still the old habits in my mind — the old leaven in my heart."

"What do you mean, Henri?"

The young man smiled. "I mean, brother," said he, "that I have often thought I loved before, and that all women, until now, have been for me — women to whom I might offer my love."

"Oh! and what is this one?" said Anne, trying to recover his gayety, which, in spite of himself, had been a little disturbed by his brother's confidence.

"My brother," said Henri, seizing his hand in a fervent grasp, "as truly as I live, I know not if she be a creature of this world or not."

"Holy Fathers! you would make me afraid, if a Joyeuse could know fear. However, as she walks, weeps, and gives kisses, it seems to me to augur well. But finish."

"There is little more. I followed her, and she did not try to escape or lead me astray; she never seemed to think of it."

"Well, and where does she live?"

"By the side of the Bastille, Rue de Lesdiguieres. At the door, the servant turned and saw me."

"You asked to speak to him?"

"You will think it ridiculous, but I dared not."

"You entered the house, then?"

"No, brother."

"Really, Henri, I am tempted to disown you this evening. But you returned the next day?"

"Yes, but uselessly, and equally so to La Gypecienne."

"She had disappeared?"

"Like a shadow."

"But you inquired?"

"The street has few inhabitants, and no one knew her. I watched for the servant, but he also had disappeared; however, a light which shone every evening through the Venetian blinds consoled me by the knowledge that she was still there. At last this disappeared; she had quitted the Rue de Lesdiguieres, and no one knew where she had gone."

"But you found her again?"

"Chance did it. Listen: it is really strange. I was going along the Rue de Bussy, a fortnight ago, about midnight; you know how strict the regulations are about fire; well, I saw, not only light in the windows of a house, but a real fire, which had broken out in the second story. I knocked at the door, and a man appeared at the window. ‘You have fire in your house!’ I cried. ‘Silence! I beg; I am occupied in putting it out.’ ‘Shall I call the watch?’ I asked. ‘No! in Heaven’s name, call no one!’ ‘But can I help you?’ ‘Will you? I shall be very grateful,’ and he threw me the key out of the window.

“I mounted the stairs rapidly, and entered the room where the fire was burning; it was used as a chemist’s laboratory, and in making I know not what experiments, an inflammable liquid had been spilled, which had ignited the floor. When I entered, the fire was almost got under. I looked at the man; a dreadful scar disfigured his cheek, and another his forehead; the rest of his face was hidden by a thick beard. ‘I thank you, monsieur,’ said he; ‘but you see all is finished now; if you are as gallant a man as you seem, have the goodness to retire, for my mistress may return at any moment, and will be angry if she sees a stranger here.’

“The sound of his voice struck me instantly. I was about to cry, ‘You are the man of La Gypecienne — of the Rue de Lesdiguieres!’ for you remember that I had not seen his face before, but only heard his voice, when suddenly a door opened, and a woman entered. ‘What is the matter, Remy, and why this noise?’ she asked. Oh! my brother, it was she! more beautiful than ever, by the dying light of the fire. It was she! — the woman whose memory had ever lived in my heart. At the cry which I uttered the servant looked narrowly at me. ‘Thanks, monsieur,’ said he, again; ‘you see the fire is out; go, I beg of you.’

“‘My friend,’ said I, ‘you dismiss me very rudely.’ ‘Madame,’ said he, ‘it is he.’ ‘Who?’ ‘The young man we met in the garden, and who followed us home.’ She turned toward me and said, ‘Monsieur, I beg of you to go.’ I hesitated; I wished to speak, but my words failed me. I remained motionless and mute, gazing at her. ‘Take care, monsieur,’ said the servant, sadly; ‘you will force her to fly again.’ ‘Heaven forbid!’ cried I; ‘but how do I offend you, madame?’ She did not reply; insensible, mute, and cold, as though she had not heard me, she turned, and I saw her disappear gradually in the shade.”

“And is that all?”

“All; the servant led me to the door, saying, ‘Forget, monsieur, I beg of you.’ I fled, bewildered and half crazy, and since then I have gone every evening to this street, and, concealed in the angle of the opposite house, under the shade of a little balcony, I see, once in ten times, a light in her room: that is my life, my happiness."

"What happiness!"

"Alas! I should lose this, if I tried for more."

"But in acting thus, you lose all the amusements of the world."

"My brother," said Henri, with a sad smile, "I am happy thus."

"Not so, mordieu! One monk in a family is enough."

"No railleries, brother."

"But let me say one thing!"

"What is it?"

"That you have been taken in like a schoolboy."

"I am not taken in; I only gave way to a power stronger than mine. When a current carries you away, you cannot fight against it."

"But if it lead to an abyss?"

"You must be swallowed up!"

"Do you think so?"

"Yes!"

"I do not: and in your place — "

"What would you have done?"

"Enough, certainly, to have learned her name and — "

"Anne, you don't know her."

"No, but I know you, Henri. You had 50,000 crowns that I gave you out of the last 100,000 the king gave to me."

"They are still in my chest, Anne; I have not touched one of them."

"Mordieu! If they were not there, you would be in a different position."

"Oh! my brother!"

"Certainly. An ordinary servant may be bought for ten crowns, a good one for 100, an excellent one for 1,000, and a marvel for 3,000. Let us see, then. Suppose this man to be the phoenix of all servants — the beau ideal of fidelity, yet, by the pope! for 20,000 crowns you will buy him. There would then remain 30,000 crowns for the phoenix of women, and all would be settled."

"Anne!" sighed Henri, "there are people who cannot be bought; there are hearts that the king is not rich enough to purchase."

"Well! perhaps so; but hearts are sometimes given. What have you done to win that of the beautiful statue?"

"I believe, Anne, that I have done all I could."

“Really, Comte du Bouchage, you are mad. You see a woman, sad, solitary, and melancholy, and you become more sad, more recluse, and more melancholy than she. She is alone — keep her company; she is sad — be gay; she regrets — console her, and replace him she regrets.”

“Impossible! brother.”

“Have you tried? Are you in love, or are you not?”

“I have no words to express how much!”

“Well! I see no reason to despair.”

“I have no hope.”

“At what time do you see her?”

“I have told you that I do not see her.” — ”Never?” — ”Never!”

“Not even at her window?”

“Not even at her window!”

“We must put an end to that. Do you think she has a lover?”

“I have never seen any one enter her house, except the Remy of whom I spoke to you.”

“Take the house opposite.”

“It may not be to let.”

“Bah! offer double the rent!”

“But if she sees me there, she will disappear as before.”

“You shall see her this evening.”

“I!”

“Yes! Be under her balcony at eight o’clock.”

“I am always there.”

“Well, give me the address.”

“Between the Porte Bussy and the Hotel St. Denis, near the corner of the Rue des Augustins, and a few steps from a large inn, having for a sign, ‘The Sword of the Brave Chevalier.’“

“Very well, then; this evening at eight o’clock.”

“But what do you intend to do?”

“You shall see: meanwhile, go home; put on your richest dress, and use your finest perfume, and I hope that you will enter the house to-night.”

“May you be a true prophet, brother!”

“Well! I leave you for the present, for my lady-love waits for me: and I confess, that after your account, I prefer her to yours. Adieu! Henri, till the evening.”

The brothers then pressed each other’s hands, and separated.

CHAPTER VII.

“THE SWORD OF THE BRAVE CHEVALIER.”

During the conversation we have just related, night had begun to fall, enveloping the city with its damp mantle of fog.

Salcede dead, all the spectators were ready to leave the Place de Greve, and the streets were filled with people, hurrying toward their homes. Near the Porte Bussy, where we must now transport our readers, to follow some of their acquaintances, and to make new ones, a hum, like that in a bee-hive at sunset, was heard proceeding from a house tinted rose color, and ornamented with blue and white pointings, which was known by the sign of “The Sword of the Brave Chevalier,” and which was an immense inn, recently built in this new quarter. This house was decorated to suit all tastes. On the entablature was painted a representation of a combat between an archangel and a dragon breathing flame and smoke, and in which the artist, animated by sentiments at once heroic and pious, had depicted in the hands of “the brave chevalier,” not a sword, but an immense cross, with which he hacked in pieces the unlucky dragon, of which the bleeding pieces were seen lying on the ground. At the bottom of the picture crowds of spectators were represented raising their arms to heaven, while from above, angels were extending over the chevalier laurels and palms. Then, as if to prove that he could paint in every style, the artist had grouped around gourds, grapes, a snail on a rose, and two rabbits, one white and the other gray.

Assuredly the proprietor must have been difficult to please, if he were not satisfied, for the artist had filled every inch of space — there was scarcely room to have added a caterpillar. In spite, however, of this attractive exterior, the hotel did not prosper — it was never more than half full, though it was large and comfortable. Unfortunately, from its proximity to the Pre-aux-Clercs, it was frequented by so many persons either going or ready to fight, that those more peaceably disposed avoided it. Indeed, the cupids with which the interior was decorated had been ornamented with mustaches in charcoal by the habitues; and Dame Fournichon, the landlady, always affirmed that the sign had brought them ill-luck, and that had her wishes been attended to, and the painting represented more pleasing things, such as the rose-tree of love surrounded by flaming hearts, all tender couples would have flocked to them.

M. Fournichon, however, stuck to his sign, and replied that he preferred fighting men, and that one of them drank as much as six lovers.

About a month before the execution of Salcede, the host and hostess, all of whose rooms were then empty, were looking out of the window, sadly, and were watching the exercises of some soldiery on the Pre-aux-Clercs, when they saw an officer, followed by a single soldier, advancing toward their hotel. He was about to pass, when the host called out loudly — ”Oh! wife, what a beautiful horse!”

Madame Fournichon replied in an equally audible voice, “And what a handsome cavalier!”

The officer, who did not appear insensible to flattery, raised his head and looked first at the host and hostess and then at the hotel. Fournichon ran rapidly downstairs and appeared at the door.

“Is the house empty?” asked the officer.

“Yes, monsieur; just at present,” replied the host, humiliated; “but it is not usually so.”

However, Dame Fournichon, like most women, was more clear-sighted than her husband, and called out, “If monsieur desires solitude, he will find it here.”

“Yes, my good woman, that is what I desire, at present,” said the officer, who dismounted, threw the bridle to the soldier, and entered the hotel.

He was a man of about thirty-five years of age, but he did not look more than twenty-eight, so carefully was he dressed. He was tall, with a fine countenance and a distinguished air.

“Ah! good!” said he, “a large room and not a single guest. But there must be something,” he added, “either in your house or conduct that keeps people away.”

“Neither, monsieur,” replied Madame Fournichon; “only the place is new, and we choose our customers.”

“Oh! very well.”

“For example,” continued she, “for a person like your lordship, we would send away a dozen.”

“Thanks, my kind hostess.”

"Will monsieur taste the wine?" asked M. Fournichon.

"Will monsieur visit the rooms?" added his wife.

"Both, if you please."

Fournichon descended to the cellar.

"How many people can you lodge here?" asked the captain of the hostess.

"Thirty."

"That is not enough."

"Why so, monsieur?"

"I had a project — but we will speak of it no more."

"Ah! monsieur, you will find nothing larger, except the Louvre itself."

"Well; you can lodge thirty people?"

"Yes, doubtless."

"But for a day?"

"Oh! for a day, forty, or even forty-five."

"Without making a commotion outside?" — "We have often eighty soldiers here, on Sundays."

"And no crowd before the house — no spying by the neighbors?"

"Mon Dieu! no! our nearest neighbors are a worthy bourgeois, who meddles with no one, and a lady who lives so retired, that although she has been here for three weeks, I have not seen her."

"That will do excellently."

"So much the better."

"And in a month from to-day — "

"That will be the 26th of October."

"Precisely. Well, on that day I hire your inn." — "The whole of it?"

"Yes, the whole. I wish to give a surprise to some countrymen, officers — or at least — soldiers: they will be told to come here."

"But if it be a surprise — "

"Oh! if you are curious, or indiscreet — "

"No, no, monsieur," cried she.

M. Fournichon, who had heard what had passed, added, "Monsieur, you shall be master here; and all your friends will be welcome."

"I did not say my friends, I said countrymen," replied the officer, haughtily.

"Yes, monsieur, it was my mistake."

"You will give them supper."

"Certainly."

"If necessary, they will sleep here."

"Yes, monsieur."

"In a word, give them all they want, and ask no questions."

"Very well, monsieur."

"Here are thirty livres in advance."

"Well, monsieur, these gentlemen shall be treated like princes; will you assure yourself by tasting the wine?"

"Thank you, I never drink."

"But, monsieur, how shall I know these gentlemen?"

"That is true; parfandious! I forgot. Give me paper, light, and wax."

When they were brought, the captain made a seal on the paper with a ring he had on his finger. "Do you see this figure?" said he.

"A beautiful woman."

"Yes; a Cleopatra. Well, each of these men will present a similar one, on which you will receive him. You will have further orders afterward."

The captain then descended the stall's and rode off, leaving the Fournichons delighted with their thirty livres in advance.

"Decidedly," said the host, "the sign has brought us good fortune."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GASCON.

We dare not affirm that Dame Fournichon was as discreet as she had promised to be, for she interrogated the first soldier whom she saw pass as to the name of the captain who had conducted the review. The soldier, more cautious than she, asked her why she wished to know.

“Because he has just been here,” she replied, “and one likes to know to whom one has been talking.”

The soldier laughed. “The captain who conducted the review would not have entered this hotel,” said he.

“Why not; is he too great for that?”

“Perhaps so.”

“Well, but it is not for himself that he wanted the hotel.”

“For whom then?”

“For his friends.”

“He would not lodge his friends here, I am sure.”

“Peste! why, who can he be, then?”

“Well, my good woman, he who conducted the review is simply Monsieur le Duc Nogaret de Lavalette d’Epernon, peer of France, and colonel-general of infantry. What do you say to that?”

“That if it was he, he did me great honor.”

“Did you hear him say ‘parfandious’?”

“Oh! yes.”

We may now judge if the 26th of October was impatiently expected. On the evening of the 25th a man entered, bearing a heavy bag, which he placed on Fournichon’s table.

“It is the price of the repast ordered for to-morrow,” said he.

“At how much a head?”

“At six livres.”

“Will they have only one meal here?”

“That is all.”

“Has the captain found them a lodging, then?”

“It appears so,” said the messenger, who went, and declined to answer any more questions.

At last the much-desired day arrived; half-past twelve had just struck when some cavaliers stopped at the door of the hotel. One, who appeared to be their chief, came with two well-mounted lackeys. Each of them produced the seal of Cleopatra’s head, and were received with all sorts of courtesies, especially the young man with the lackeys. Nevertheless, excepting this young man, they all seemed timid and preoccupied. Most of them dispersed, however, until supper-time, either to swell the crowd at the execution of Salcede, or to see Paris.

About two o’clock, others began to arrive. One man came in alone, without a hat, a cane in his hand, and swearing at Paris, where he said the thieves were so adroit that they had stolen his hat as he had passed through a crowd, without his being able to see who had taken it. However, he said, it was his own fault, for wearing a hat ornamented with such a superb diamond. At four o’clock, forty people had arrived.

“Is it not strange,” said Fournichon to his wife, “they are all Gascons?”

“Well, what of that? The captain said they were all countrymen, and he is a Gascon. M. d’Epernon is from Toulouse.”

“Then you still believe it was M. d’Epernon?”

“Did he not say three times the famous ‘parfandious’?”

Very soon the five other Gascons arrived; the number of guests was complete. Never was such surprise painted on so many faces; for an hour nothing was heard but “saudioux,” “mordioux!” and “cap de Bious!” and such noisy joy, that it seemed to the Fournichons that all Poitou and Languedoc were collected in their room. Some knew, and greeted each other.

“Is it not singular to find so many Gascons here?” asked one.

“No,” replied Perducas de Pincornay, “the sign is tempting for men of honor.”

“Ah! is it you?” said St. Maline, the gentleman with the lackeys, “you have not yet explained to me what you were about to do, when the crowd separated us.”

“What was that?” asked Pincornay, reddening.

“How it happens that I met you on the road between Angoulême and Angers without a hat, as you are now?”

"It seems to interest you, monsieur?"

"Ma foi! yes. Poitiers is far from Paris, and you came from beyond Poitiers."

"Yes, from St. Andre de Cubsac."

"And without a hat?"

"Oh! it is very simple. My father has two magnificent horses, and he is quite capable of disinheriting me for the accident that has happened to one of them."

"What is that?"

"I was riding one of them when it took fright at the report of a gun that was fired close to me, and ran away; it made for the bank of the Dordogne and plunged in."

"With you?"

"No; luckily I had time to slip off, or I should have been drowned with him."

"Ah! then the poor beast was drowned?"

"Pardioux! you know the Dordogne — half a league across."

"And then?"

"Then I resolved not to return home, but to go away as far as possible from my father's anger."

"But your hat?"

"Diable! my hat had fallen."

"Like you."

"I did not fall; I slipped off."

"But your hat?"

"Ah! my hat had fallen. I sought for it, being my only resource, as I had come out without money."

"But how could your hat be a resource?"

"Saudioux! it was a great one, for I must tell you that the plume of this hat was fastened by a diamond clasp, that his majesty the emperor Charles V. gave to my grandfather, when, on his way from Spain to Flanders, he stopped at our castle."

"Ah! ah! and you have sold the clasp, and the hat with it. Then, my dear friend, you ought to be the richest of us all, and you should have bought another glove; your hands are not alike; one is as white as a woman's, and the other as black as a negro's."

"But listen; as I turned to seek my hat I saw an enormous crow seize hold of it."

"Of your hat!"

"Or rather of the clasp; attracted by the glitter, and in spite of my cries, he flew away with it, and I saw it no more. So that, overwhelmed by this double loss, I did not dare to return home, but came to seek my fortune in Paris."

"Good!" cried a third, "the wind has changed into a crow. I heard you tell M. de Loignac that the wind had carried it away while you were reading a letter from your mistress."

"Now," cried St. Maline, "I have the honor of knowing M. d'Aubigne, who, though a brave soldier, writes well, and I recommend you to tell him the history of your hat; he will make a charming story of it."

Several stifled laughs were heard.

"Ah! gentlemen," cried the Gascon, "do you laugh at me?"

They turned away to laugh again.

Perducas threw a glance around him, and saw a young man near the fireplace hiding his face in his hands. He thought it was to laugh, and, going up to him, struck him on the shoulder, saying —

"Eh! monsieur, if you laugh, at all events show your face."

The young man looked up; it was our friend Ernanton de Carmainges.

"I beg you will leave me alone," said he, "I was not thinking of you."

Pincornay turned away, grumbling; but at this moment an officer entered.

"M. de Loignac!" cried twenty voices.

At this name, known through all Gascony, every one rose and kept silence.

CHAPTER IX.

M. DE LOIGNAC.

“Supper!” cried M. de Loignac; “and from this moment let all be friends, and love each other like brothers.”

“Hum!” said St. Maline.

“That would be difficult,” added Ernanton.

“See,” cried Pincornay, “they laugh at me because I have no hat, and they say nothing to M. Montcrabeau, who is going to supper in a cuirass of the time of the Emperor Pertinax, from whom it probably came. See what it is to have defensive arms.”

“Gentlemen,” cried Montcrabeau, “I take it off; so much the worse for those who prefer seeing me with offensive instead of defensive arms;” and he gave his cuirass to his lackey, a man about fifty years of age.

“Peace! peace!” cried De Loignac, “and let us go to table.”

Meanwhile the lackey whispered to Pertinax, “And am I not to sup? Let me have something, Pertinax. I am dying of hunger.”

Pertinax, instead of being offended at this familiar address, replied, “I will try, but you had better see for something for yourself.”

“Hum! that is not reassuring.”

“Have you no money?”

“We spent our last crown at Sens.”

“Diable! then try to sell something.”

A few minutes after a cry was heard in the street of “Old iron! who wants to sell old iron?”

Madame Fournichon ran to the door, while M. Fournichon placed the supper on the table, and to judge by its reception it must have been exquisite. As his wife did not return, however, the host asked a servant what she was doing.

“Oh, master,” he replied, “she is selling all your old iron for new money.”

“I hope not my cuirass and arms,” said he, running to the door.

“No,” said De Loignac, “it is forbidden to buy arms.”

Madame Fournichon entered triumphantly.

"You have not been selling my arms?" cried her husband.

"Yes, I have."

"I will not have them sold."

"Bah! in time of peace; and I have got ten crowns instead of an old cuirass."

"Ten crowns! Samuel, do you hear?" said Pertinax, looking for his valet, but he was not to be seen.

"It seems to me that this man carries on a dangerous trade. But what does he do with them?"

"Sells them again by weight."

"By weight! and you say he gave you ten crowns — for what?"

"A cuirass and a helmet."

"Why, even if they weighed twenty pounds, that is half-a-crown a pound. This hides some mystery."

Voices rose, and the mirth grew loud with all, except Carmainges, who still thought of the mysterious page. He sat by M. de Loignac, who said to him:

"Here are a number of joyful people, and they do not know what for."

"Nor I, neither; but at least I am an exception."

"You are wrong, for you are one of those to whom Paris is a paradise."

"Do not laugh at me, M. de Loignac."

"I do not; I distinguished you at once, and that other young man also who looks so grave."

"Who?"

"M. de St. Maline."

"And why this distinction, if this question be not too curious?"

"I know you, that is all."

"Me! you know me?"

"You, and he, and all here."

"It is strange."

"Yes, but necessary."

"Why?"

"Because a chief should know his soldiers."

"And all these men — "

"Will be my soldiers to-morrow."

"But I thought that M. d'Epernon — "

“Hush! do not pronounce that name here.”

Then rising, M. de Loignac said, “Gentlemen, since chance unites here forty-five compatriots, let us empty a glass of wine to the prosperity of all.”

This proposal gave rise to frantic applause. “They are almost all half drunk,” said De Loignac; “it would be a good opportunity to make them repeat their histories, only time does not permit of it.” Then he added aloud, “Hola! M. Fournichon, dismiss from the room all women, children and lackeys.”

Lardille retired grumbling, but Militor did not move. “Did you not hear, M. Militor,” said De Loignac; “to the kitchen!”

There remained only forty-five men, and M. de Loignac then said, “Now, gentlemen, each knows who called him to Paris. Good! that will do; do not call out his name. You know also that you have come to obey him.”

A murmur of assent came from all, mingled with astonishment, for each one knew only what concerned himself, and was ignorant that his neighbor had been moved by the same influence.

“Well, then!” continued De Loignac, “you will have time to become acquainted with each other afterward. You agree that you have come here to obey him?”

“Yes, yes,” they cried.

“Then, to begin; go quietly out of this hotel to the lodgings prepared for you.”

“For all?” asked St. Maline.

“Yes, for all.”

“We are all equal here,” cried Perducas, whose limbs felt rather doubtful under him.

“Yes,” replied De Loignac; “all are equal before the will of the master.”

“Oh!” cried Carmainges, coloring; “I do not know that M. d’Epernon would be called my master.”

“Wait!”

“I did not expect that.”

“Wait, hot head! I did not tell you who was to be your master.”

“No; but you said we should have one.”

“Every one has a master; and if you are too proud to acknowledge him we spoke of, you may look higher; I authorize you.”

“The king!” murmured Carmainges.

“Silence!” said De Loignac. “But first will you do me the favor to read aloud this parchment.”

Ernanton took it and read these words:

“Order to M. de Loignac to take the command of the forty-five gentlemen whom I have sent for to Paris with the consent of his majesty.

“NOGARET DE LAVALETTE.

“Duc d’Epernon.”

They all bowed at this.

“Thus,” continued De Loignac, “you have to follow me at once; your equipages and servants will remain here, M. Fournichon will take care of them: we will send for them; but now, be quick! the boats are ready.”

“The boats!” cried they.

“Certainly; to go to the Louvre, we must go by water.”

“To the Louvre!” cried they, joyfully. “Cap de Bious! we are going to the Louvre.”

De Loignac made them all pass before him, counting them as they went, and then conducted them to the place where three large boats were waiting for them.

CHAPTER X.

THE PURCHASE OF CUIRASSES.

As soon as the valet of Pertinax heard the words of Madame Fournichon, he ran after the dealer, but as it was night and he was doubtless in a hurry, he had gone some little way and Samuel was obliged to call to him. He appeared to hesitate at first, but seeing that Samuel was laden with merchandise, he stopped.

“What do you want, my friend?” said he.

“Pardieu! I want to do a little business with you.” — ”Well, be quick!”

“Are you in a hurry?”

“Yes.”

“When you have seen what I bring you, you will be willing to wait.”

“What is it?”

“A magnificent piece, of which the work — but you do not listen.”

“Yes; but I am also looking round.”

“Why?”

“Do you not know that it is forbidden to buy arms?”

Samuel thought it best to feign ignorance, and said, “I know nothing; I have just arrived from Mont-de-Marsan.”

“Oh! that is another thing; but how did you know that I bought arms?”

“I was at the door of ‘The Brave Chevalier.’“

“Well, come under that portico; it is too public here. Now, let me see this cuirass,” said he, when they were there.

“It is so heavy.”

“It is old and out of date.”

“A work of art.”

“I will give you six crowns.”

“What! six crowns! and you gave ten just now for an old thing — ”

“Six, or none.”

“But look at the chasing.”

“Of what use is the chasing, when I sell by weight?”

“The gilding alone is worth ten crowns — ”

“Well, I will give you seven.”

“You bargain here, and at the inn you gave anything; you go against the law and then endeavor to cheat honest people.” — ”Do not call out so loud.”

“Oh! I am not afraid.”

“Come, then, take ten crowns and begone.”

“I told you the gold was worth more. Ah! you want to escape; I will call the guard,” and he raised his voice.

At the noise, a window opposite was opened.

“Come,” said the dealer; “I see I must give you what you want. Here are fifteen crowns; now go.”

“That will do,” said Samuel; “only these are for my master: I want something for myself.”

The dealer half drew his dagger.

“Yes, yes, I see your dagger,” said Samuel; “but I also see the figure in that balcony, watching you.”

The dealer, white with terror, looked up, and saw a man who had witnessed the whole scene. “Oh!” said he, affecting to laugh; “you get all you want out of me: here is another crown. And may the devil take you,” he added to himself.

“Thanks, my good friend,” said Samuel, and he made off.

The dealer began to take up his wares and was also going, when the bourgeois opposite cried out:

“It seems, monsieur, that you buy armor.”

“No, monsieur,” replied the unlucky dealer; “this was a mere chance.”

“A chance that suits me.”

“In what respect, monsieur?”

“I have a heap of old things that I want to get rid of.”

“I have as much as I can carry.”

“But let me show them to you.”

“It is useless; I have no more money.”

“Never mind, I will give you credit; you look like an honest man.”

“Thank you; but I cannot wait.”

“It is odd how I seem to know you.”

“Know me!” cried the dealer, trembling.

“Look at this helmet,” said the bourgeois, showing it from the window.

“You say you know me?” asked the dealer.

“I thought so. Are you not — ” he seemed seeking for the name. “Are you not Nicholas — ”

The dealer looked frightened.

“Nicholas Trouchon, ironmonger, Rue de la Cossonnerie?”

“No, no!” cried the man, breathing more freely again.

“Never mind; will you buy all my armor, cuirass, sword, and all?”

“It is a forbidden commerce.”

“I know that; he whom you dealt with just now called it out loud enough.”

“You heard!”

“Yes, all; and you were liberal. But be easy, I will not be hard upon you; I have been a trader myself.”

“What did you sell?”

“Never mind; I have made my fortune.” — ”I congratulate you.”

“Well, will you buy all my armor?”

“No, I only want the cuirass.”

“Do you only buy cuirasses?”

“Yes.”

“That is odd, for if you buy and sell by weight, one sort of iron is as good as another.”

“That is true, but I have preferences.”

“Well, then, buy only the cuirass, or rather — now I think again — buy nothing at all.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that in these times every one wants his arms.”

“What! in perfect peace?”

“My good friend, if we were in perfect peace, you would not buy so many cuirasses, and so secretly, too. But really, the longer I look at you, the more I think I know your face. You are not Nicholas Trouchon, but still I know you.”

“Silence!”

“And if you buy cuirasses — ”

“Well!”

“I am sure it is for a work agreeable to God.”

“Hold your tongue!”

"You enchant me!" cried the bourgeois, stretching out a long arm over the balcony and seizing the hand of the dealer.

"Then who the devil are you?" cried he, who felt his hand held as if in a vise.

"I am Robert Briquet, the terror of schismatics, the friend of the Union, and a fierce Catholic; and you are not Nicholas Gimbelot, the currier."

"No, no! good-by."

"What! are you going?"

"Yes!" and he ran off.

But Robert Briquet was not a man to be foiled; he jumped from his balcony and ran after him.

"You are mad!" said he. "If I were your enemy, I have but to cry out, and the watch is in the next street; but you are my friend, and now I know your name. You are Nicholas Poulain, lieutenant to the provost of Paris. I knew it was Nicholas something."

"I am lost!" murmured the man.

"No; you are saved. I will do more for the good cause than ever you would; you have found a brother. Take one cuirass, and I will take another; I give you my gloves and the rest of my armor for nothing. Come on, and Vive l'Union!"

"You accompany me?"

"I will help you to carry these cuirasses which are to conquer the Philistines. Go on, I follow."

A spark of suspicion lingered in the soul of the lieutenant, but he thought; "If he wished me ill, he would not have acknowledged he knew me. Come on then!" he added aloud, "if you will."

"To life or death!" cried Briquet, and he continued to talk in this strain till they arrived near the Hotel Guise, where Nicholas Poulain stopped.

"I fancied it would be here," thought Briquet.

"Now," said Nicholas, with a tragic air, "there is still time to retire before entering the lion's den."

"Bah! I have entered many. *Et non intermuit medulla mea!*" exclaimed Briquet; "but pardon me, perhaps you do not understand Latin?"

"Do you?" — "As you see."

"What a catch?" thought Poulain, "learned, strong, bold, and rich!" Then he added aloud, "Well! let us enter," and he conducted Briquet to the door of the hotel. The court was full of guards and men wrapped in cloaks, and eight horses, saddled and bridled, waited in a corner; but there was not a light to be seen. Poulain whispered his name to the porter, and added, “I bring a good companion.” — ”Pass on.”

“Take these to the magazine,” said Poulain, handing the cuirasses to a soldier. “Now I will present you,” said he to Briquet.

“No, I am very timid. When I have done some work, I will present myself.”

“As you please. Then wait here for me.” — ”What are we waiting for?” asked a voice.

“For the master,” replied another.

At this moment, a tall man entered. “Gentlemen,” said he, “I come in his name.”

“Ah! it is M. de Mayneville,” said Poulain.

“Ah, really!” said Briquet, making a hideous grimace, which quite altered him.

“Let us go, gentlemen,” said M. de Mayneville, and he descended a staircase leading to a vault. All the others followed, and Briquet brought up the rear, murmuring: “But the page! where the devil is the page?”

CHAPTER XI

STILL THE LEAGUE.

At the moment when Robert Briquet was about to enter, he saw Poulain waiting for him.

“Pardon,” said he, “but my friends do not know you, and decline to admit you to their councils till they know more of you.”

“It is just, and I retire, happy to have seen so many brave defenders of the Holy Union.”

“Shall I re-conduct you?”

“No, I thank you, I will not trouble you.”

“But perhaps they will not open for you; yet I am wanted.”

“Have you not a password?”

“Yes.”

“Then give it to me. I am a friend, you know.”

“True. It is ‘Parma and Lorraine!’“

“And they will open?”

“Yes.”

“Thanks; now return to your friends.”

Briquet took some steps as if to go out, and then stopped to explore the locality. The result of his observations was, that the vault ran parallel to the exterior wall, and terminated in a hall destined for the mysterious council from which he had been excluded. What confirmed him in this supposition was that he saw a light at a barred window, pierced in the wall, and guarded by a sort of wooden pipe, such as they placed at the windows of convents and prisons to intercept the view from without, while the air was still admitted. Briquet imagined this to be the window of the hall, and thought that if he could gain this place he could see all. He looked round him; the court had many soldiers and servants in it, but it was large, and the night was dark; besides, they were not looking his way, and the porter was busy, preparing his bed for the night.

Briquet rapidly climbed on to the cornice which ran toward the window in question, and ran along the wall like a monkey, holding on with his hands and feet to the ornaments of the sculpture. Had the soldiers seen in the dark this figure gliding along the wall without apparent support, they would not have failed to cry, “Magic!” but they did not see him. In four bounds he reached the window, and established himself between the bars and the pipe, so that from the inside he was concealed by the one, and from the outside by the other.

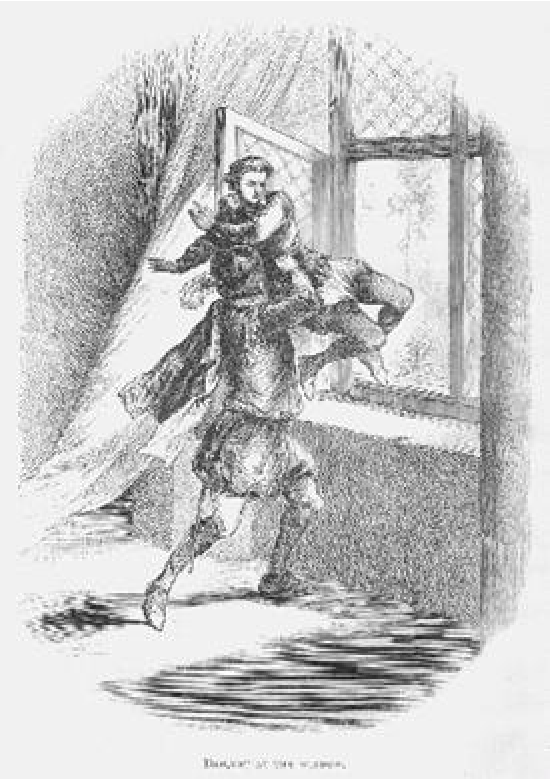

He then saw a great hall, lighted by a torch, and filled with armor of all sorts. There were enough pikes, swords, halberds, and muskets to arm four regiments. He gave less attention, however, to the arms than to the people engaged in distributing them, and his piercing eyes sought eagerly to distinguish their faces.

“Oh! oh!” thought he, “there is M. Cruce, little Brigard and Leclerc, who dares to call himself Bussy. Peste! the bourgeoisie is grandly represented; but the nobility — ah! M. de Mayneville presses the hand of Nicholas Poulain; what a touching fraternity! An orator, too!” continued he, as M. de Mayneville prepared to harangue the assembly.

Briquet could not hear a word, but he thought that he did not make much impression on his audience, for one shrugged his shoulders, and another turned his back. But at last they approached, seized his hand, and threw up their hats in the air. But though Briquet could not hear, we must inform our readers of what passed.

First, Cruce, Marteau, and Bussy had complained of the inaction of the Duc de Guise.

Marteau was spokesman, and said, “M. de Mayneville, you come on the part of M. le Duc de Guise, and we accept you as his ambassador; but the presence of the duke himself is indispensable. After the death of his glorious father, he, when only eighteen years of age, made all good Frenchmen join this project of the Union, and enrolled us under this banner. We have risked our lives, and sacrificed our fortunes, for the triumph of this sacred cause, according to our oaths, and yet, in spite of our sacrifices, nothing progresses — nothing is decided. Take care, M. de Mayneville, Paris will grow tired, and then what will you do?”

This speech was applauded by all the leaguers.

M. de Mayneville replied, “Gentlemen, if nothing is decided, it is because nothing is ripe. Consider our situation; M. le Duc and his brother the cardinal are at Nancy — the one is organizing an army to keep in check the Huguenots of Flanders, whom M. d’Anjou wishes to oppose to us, the other is expediting courier after courier to the clergy of France and to the pope, to induce them to adopt the Union. The Duc de Gruise knows, what you do not, that the old alliance between the Duc d’Anjou and the Béarnais is ready to be renewed, and he wishes, before coming to Paris, to be in a position to crush both heresy and usurpation.”

“They are everywhere where they are not wanted,” said Bussy. “Where is Madame de Montpensier, for instance?”

“She entered Paris this morning.”

“No one has seen her.”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Who was it?”

“Salcede.”

“Oh! oh!” cried all.

“But where is she?” cried Bussy. “Has she disappeared? how did you know she was here?”

“Because I accompanied her to the Porte St. Antoine.”

“I heard that they had shut the gates.”

“Yes, they had.”

“Then, how did she pass.”

“In her own fashion. Something took place at the gates of Paris this morning, gentlemen, of which you appear to be ignorant. The orders were to open only to those who brought a card of admission — signed by whom I know not. Immediately before us five or six men, some of whom were poorly clothed, passed with these cards, before our eyes. Now, who were those men? What were the cards? Reply, gentlemen of Paris, who promised to learn everything concerning your city.”

Thus Mayneville, from the accused, became the accuser, which is the great art of an orator.

“Cards and exceptional admissions!” cried Nicholas Poulain, “what can that mean?”

“If you do not know, who live here, how should I know, who live in Lorraine?”

“How did these people come?”

“Some on foot, some on horseback; some alone, and some with lackeys.”

“Were they soldiers?”

“There were but two swords among the six; I think they were Gascons. This concerns you, M. Poulain, to find out. But to return to the League. Salcede, who had betrayed us, and would have done so again, not only did not speak, but retracted on the scaffold — thanks to the duchess, who, in the suite of one of these card-bearers, had the courage to penetrate the crowd even to the place of execution, and made herself known to Salcede, at the risk of being pointed out. At this sight Salcede stopped his confession, and an instant after, the executioner stopped his repentance. Thus, gentlemen, you have nothing to fear as to our enterprise in Flanders; this secret is buried in the tomb.”

It was this last speech which had so pleased all the conspirators. Their joy seemed to annoy Briquet; he slipped down from his place, and returning to the court, said to the porter, “Parma and Lorraine.” The gate was opened, and he left.

History tells us what passed afterward. M. de Mayneville brought from the Guises the plan of an insurrection which consisted of nothing less than to murder all the principal people of the city who were known to be in favor with the king, and then to go through the streets crying, “Vive la Messe! death to our enemies!” In fact, to enact a second St. Bartholomew; in which, however, all hostile Catholics were to be confounded with the Protestants.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CHAMBER OF HIS MAJESTY HENRI III.

In a great room at the Louvre sat Henri, pale and unquiet. Since his favorites, Schomberg, Quelus and Maugiron had been killed in a duel, St. Megrin had been assassinated by M. de Mayenne, and the wounds left by their deaths were still fresh and bleeding. The affection he bore his new favorites was very different from what he had felt for the old. He had overwhelmed D’Epernon with benefits, but he only loved him by fits and starts, and at certain times he even hated him, and accused him of cowardice and avarice.

D’Epernon knew how to hide his ambition, which was indeed vague in its aspirations; but his cupidity governed him completely. When he was rich, he was laughing and good-tempered; but when he was in want of money, he used to shut himself up in one of his castles, where, frowning and sad, he bemoaned his fate, until he had drawn from the weakness of the king some new gift.

Joyeuse was very different. He loved the king, who, in turn, had for him almost a fatherly affection. Young and impulsive, he was, perhaps, somewhat egotistical, and cared for little but to be happy. Handsome, brave and rich, Nature had done so much for him that Henri often regretted that she had left so little for him to add. The king knew his men well, for he was remarkably clear-sighted: and though often betrayed, was never deceived. But ennui was the curse of his life; he was ennuyé now, and was wondering if any one would come and amuse him, when M. le Duc d’Epernon was announced. Henri was delighted.

“Ah! good-evening, duke; I am enchanted to see you. Why were you not present at the execution of Salcede? — I told you there would be room in my box.”

“Sire, I was unable to avail myself of your majesty’s kindness.”

“Unable?”

“Yes, sire; I was busy.”

“One would think that you were my minister, coming to announce, with a long face, that some subsidy had not been paid.”

“Ma foi! your majesty is right; the subsidy has not been paid, and I am penniless. But it was not that which occupied me.”

“What then?”

“Your majesty knows what passed at the execution of Salcede?”

“Parbleu! I was there.”

“They tried to carry off the criminal.”

“I did not see that.”

“It is the rumor all through the city, however.”

“A groundless one.”

“I believe your majesty is wrong.”

“On what do you found your belief?”

“Because Salcede denied before the people what he had confessed to the judges.”

“Ah! you know that, already.”

“I try to know all that interests your majesty.”

“Thanks; but what do you conclude from all this?”

“That a man who dies like Salcede was a good servant, sire.”

“Well?”

“And the master who has such followers is fortunate.”

“You mean to say that I have none such; or, rather, that I no longer have them. You are right, if that be what you mean.”

“I did not mean that; your majesty would find, I am sure, were there occasion, followers as devoted as Salcede.”

“Well, duke, do not look gloomy; I am sad enough already. Do be gay.”

“Gayety cannot be forced, sire.”

The king struck the table angrily. “You are a bad friend,” said he; “I lost all, when I lost my former ones.”

“May I dare to say to your majesty that you hardly encourage the new ones.”

The king looked at him with an expression which he well understood.

“Ah! your majesty reproaches me with your benefits,” said he, “but I do not reproach you with my devotion.”

“Lavalette,” cried Henri, “you make me sad; you who are so clever, and could so easily make me joyful. It is not your nature to fight continually, like my old favorites; but you are facetious and amusing, and give good counsel. You know all my affairs, like that other more humble friend, with whom I never experienced a moment’s ennui.”

“Of whom does your majesty speak?”

“Of my poor jester, Chicot. Alas! where is he?”

D’Epernon rose, piqued. “Your majesty’s souvenirs, to-day, are not very amusing for other people,” said he.

“Why so?”

“Your majesty, without intending it, perhaps, compared me to Chicot, which is not very flattering.”

“You are wrong, D’Epernon; I could only compare to Chicot a man who loves me, and whom I love.”

“It was not to resemble Chicot, I suppose, that your majesty made me a duke?”

“Chicot loved me, and I miss him; that is all I can say. Oh! when I think that in the same place where you now are have been all those young men, handsome, brave, and faithful — that there, on that very chair on which you have placed your hat, Chicot has slept more than a hundred times — ”

“Perhaps that was very amusing,” interrupted the duke, “but certainly not very respectful.”

“Alas! he has now neither mind nor body.” — ”What became of him?”

“He died, like all who loved me.”

“Well, sire, I think he did well to die; he was growing old, and I have heard that sobriety was not one of his virtues. Of what did he die — indigestion?”

“Of grief.”

“Oh! he told you so, to make you laugh once more.”

“You are wrong; he would not sadden me with the news of his illness. He knew how I regretted my friends — he, who had so often seen me weep for them.”

“Then it was his shade that came to tell you?”

“No; I did not even see his shade. It was his friend, the worthy prior Gorenflot, who wrote me this sad news.”

“I see that if he lived your majesty would make him chancellor.”

“I beg, duke, that you will not laugh at those who loved me, and whom I loved.”

“Oh! sire, I do not desire to laugh, but just now you reproached me with want of gayety, parfandious!”

“Well, now I am in the mood to hear bad news, if you have any to tell. Luckily I have strength to bear it, or I should be dead ten times a day.”

“Which would not displease certain people of our acquaintance.”

“Oh! against them I have the arms of my Swiss.”

“I could find you a better guard than that.”

“You?” — ”Yes, sire.”

“What is it?”

“Will your majesty be so good as to accompany me to the old buildings of the Louvre?”

“On the site of the Rue de l’Astruce?”

“Precisely.”

“What shall I see there?”

“Oh! come first.”

“It is a long way, duke.”

“We can go in five minutes through the galleries.”

“D’Epernon — ”

“Well, sire?”

“If what you are about to show me be not worth seeing, take care.”

“I answer for it, sire.”

“Come, then,” said the king, rising.

The duke took his cloak, presented the king’s sword to him, then, taking a light, preceded his majesty.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DORMITORY.

In less than five minutes they arrived at their destination. The duke took out a key, and, after crossing a court, opened an arched door, the bottom of which was overgrown with long grass. They went along a dark corridor, and then up a staircase to a room, of which D'Epernon had also the key. He opened the door, and showed the king forty-five beds, and in each of them a sleeper.

The king looked at all this with a troubled curiosity. “Well,” said he, “who are these people?”

“People who sleep to-night, but will not do so to-morrow night.”

“Why not?”

“That your majesty may sleep in peace.”

“Explain yourself. Are these your friends?”

“Chosen by me, sire; intrepid guards, who will not quit your majesty, and who, gentlemen all, will be able to go whereever your majesty goes, and will let no one approach you.”

“And you thought of this, D'Epernon?”

“I, alone, sire.”

“We shall be laughed at.”

“No, we shall be feared.”

“But they will ruin me?”

“How can a king be ruined?”

“I cannot pay my Swiss!”

“Look at these men, sire; do you think they would be very expensive to keep?”

“But they could not always live like this, they would be stifled. And look at their doublets!”

“Oh! I confess they are not all very sumptuously clothed, but if they had been born dukes and peers — ”

“Yes, I understand; they would have cost me more?” — ”Just so.”

“Well, how much will they cost? That will, perhaps, decide me, for, in truth, D’Epernon, they do not look very inviting.”

“Sire, I know they are rather thin and burned by our southern sun, but I was so when I came to Paris. They will fatten and whiten like me.”

“How they snore!”

“Sire, you must not judge them to-night; they have supped well.”

“Stay, there is one speaking in his sleep; let us listen.”

Indeed, one of the gentlemen called out, “If you are a woman, fly!”

The king approached him softly. “Ah! ah!” said he, “he is a gallant.”

“What do you think of him, sire?”

“His face pleases me, and he has white hands and a well-kept beard.”

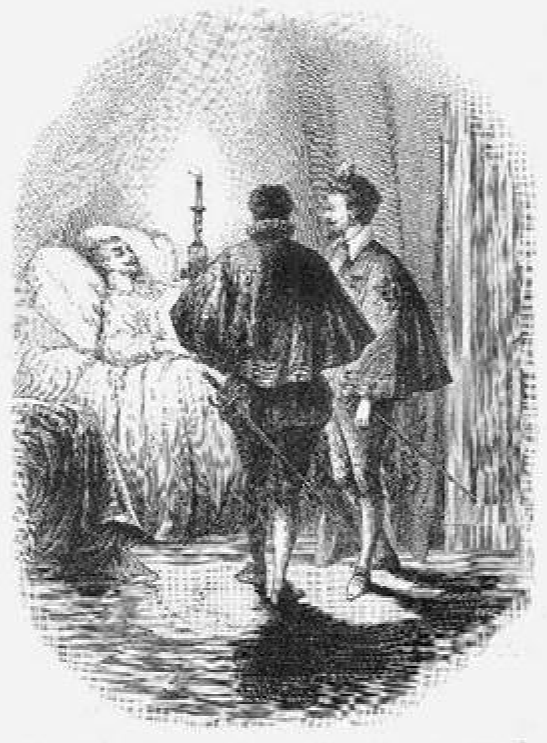

“His face pleases me, and he has white hands and a well-kept beard.”—Page [illegible]

“It is Ernanton de Carmainges, a fine fellow, who is capable of much.”

“He has left behind him some love, I suppose, poor fellow. But what a queer figure his next neighbor is.”

“Ah! that is M. de Chalabre. If he ruins your majesty, it will not be without enriching himself, I answer for it.”

“And that one, with such a somber air; he does not seem as though he dreamed of love.”

“What number, sire?”

“Number 12.”

"M. de St. Maline, a brave fellow, with a heart of bronze."

"Well, Lavalette, you have had a good idea."

"I should think so. Imagine the effect that will be produced by these new watch-dogs, who will follow you like your shadow."

"Yes, yes; but they cannot follow me in this guise."

"Now we return to the money. But about this, also, I have an idea."

"D'Epernon!"

"My zeal for your majesty doubles my imagination."

"Well, let us hear it."

"If it depended upon me, each of these gentlemen should find by his bed a purse containing 1,000 crowns, as payment for the first six months."

"One thousand crowns for six months! 6,000 livres a year! You are mad, duke; an entire regiment would not cost that."

"You forget, sire, that it is necessary they should be well dressed. Each will have to take from his 1,000 crowns enough for arms and equipments. Set down 1,500 livres to effect this in a manner to do you honor, and there would remain 4,500 livres for the first year. Then for subsequent years you could give 3,000 livres."

"That is more reasonable."

"Then your majesty accepts?"

"There is only one difficulty, duke."

"What is it?"

"Want of money."

"Sire, I have found a method. Six months ago a tax was levied on shooting and fishing."

"Well?"

"The first payment produced 65,000 crowns, which have not yet been disposed of."

"I destined it for the war, duke."

"The first interest of the kingdom is the safety of the king."

"Well; there still would remain 20,000 crowns for the army."

"Pardon, sire, but I had disposed of them, also."

"Ah!"

"Yes, sire; your majesty had promised me money."

"Ah! and you give me a guard to obtain it."

"Oh! sire. But look at them; will they not have a good effect?"

"Yes, when dressed, they will not look bad. Well, so be it."

“Well, then, sire, I have a favor to ask.”

“I should be astonished if you had not.”

“Your majesty is bitter to-day.”

“Oh! I only mean, that having rendered me a service, you have the right to ask for a return.”

“Well, sire, it is an appointment.”

“Why, you are already colonel-general of infantry, more would crush you.”

“In your majesty’s service, I am a Samson.”

“What is it, then?”

“I desire the command of these forty-five gentlemen.”

“What! you wish to march at their head?”

“No; I should have a deputy; only I desire that they should know me as their head.”

“Well, you shall have it. But who is to be your deputy?”

“M. de Loignac, sire.”

“Ah! that is well.”

“He pleases your majesty?”

“Perfectly.”

“Then it is decided?”

“Yes; let it be as you wish.”

“Then I will go at once to the treasurer, and get my forty-five purses.”

“To-night?”

“They are to find them to-morrow, when they wake.”

“Good; then I will return.”

“Content, sire?”

“Tolerably.”

“Well guarded, at all events.”

“By men who sleep.”

“They will not sleep to-morrow, sire.”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SHADE OF CHICOT.

The king, as we have said, was never deceived as to the character of his friends; he knew perfectly well that D’Epernon was working for his own advantage, but as he expected to have had to give and receive nothing in return, whereas he had got forty-five guards, he had thought it a good idea. Besides, it was a novelty, which was a thing that a poor king of France could not always get, and especially Henri III., who, when he had gone through his processions, counted his dogs, and uttered his usual number of sighs, had nothing left to do. Therefore he became more and more pleased with the idea as he returned to his room.

“These men are doubtless brave, and will be perhaps very devoted,” thought he; “and forty-five swords always ready to leap from their scabbards are a grand thing.”

This thought brought to his mind the other devoted swords that he regretted so bitterly. He became sad again, and inquired for Joyeuse. They replied that he had not returned.

“Then call my valets-de-chambre.”

When he was in bed, they asked if his reader should attend, for Henri was subject to long fits of wakefulness, and was often read to sleep.

“No,” replied the king, “I want no one; only if M. de Joyeuse returns, bring him to me.”

“If he returns late, sire?”

“Alas! he is always late; but whatever be the hour, bring him here.”

The servants extinguished the candles and lighted a lamp of essences, which gave a pale blue flame, that the king liked. Henri was tired, and soon slept, but not for long; he awoke, thinking he heard a noise in the room.

“Joyeuse,” he asked; “is it you?”

No one replied. The light burned dim, and only threw faint circles on the ceiling of carved oak.

"Alone, still!" murmured the king. "Mon Dieu! I am alone all my life, as I shall be after death."

"'Alone after death'; that is not certain," said a powerful voice near the bed.

The king started up and looked round him in terror. "I know that voice," cried he.

"Ah! that is lucky," replied the voice.

"It is like the voice of Chicot."

"You burn, Henri: you burn."

Then the king, getting half out of bed, saw a man sitting in the very chair which he had pointed out to D'Epernon.

"Heaven protect me!" cried he; "it is the shade of Chicot."

"Ah! my poor Henriquet, are you still so foolish?"

"What do you mean?"

"That shades cannot speak, having no body, and consequently no tongue."

"Then you are Chicot, himself?" cried the king, joyfully.

"Do not be too sure."

"Then you are not dead, my poor Chicot?"

"On the contrary; I am dead."

"Chicot, my only friend."

"You, at least, are not changed."

"But you, Chicot, are you changed?"

"I hope so."

"Chicot, my friend, why did you leave me?"

"Because I am dead."

"You said just now that you were not dead."

"Dead to some — alive to others."

"And to me?" — "Dead."

"Why dead to me?"

"It is easy to comprehend that you are not the master here."

"How?"

"You can do nothing for those who serve you."

"Chicot!"

"Do not be angry, or I shall be so, also."

"Speak then, my friend," said the king, fearful that Chicot would vanish.

"Well, I had a little affair to settle with M. de Mayenne, you remember?"

“Perfectly.”

“I settled it; I beat this valiant captain without mercy. He sought for me to hang me; and you, whom I thought would protect me, abandoned me, and made peace with him. Then I declared myself dead and buried by the aid of my friend Gorenflot, so that M. de Mayenne has ceased to search for me.”

“What a frightful courage you had, Chicot; did you not know the grief your death would cause me?”

“I have never lived so tranquilly as since the world thought me dead.”

“Chicot, my head turns; you frighten me — I know not what to think.”

“Well! settle something.”

“I think that you are dead and — ”

“Then I lie; you are polite.”

“You commence by concealing some things from me; but presently, like the orators of antiquity, you will tell me terrible truths.”

“Oh! as to that, I do not say no. Prepare, poor king!”

“If you are not a shade, how could you come unnoticed into my room, through the guarded corridors?” And Henri, abandoning himself to new terrors, threw himself down in the bed and covered up his head.

“Come, come,” cried Chicot; “you have only to touch me to be convinced.”

“But how did you come?”

“Why, I have still the key that you gave me, and which I hung round my neck to enrage your gentlemen, and with this I entered.”

“By the secret door, then?”

“Certainly.”

“And why to-day more than yesterday?”

“Ah! that you shall hear.”

Henri, sitting up again, said like a child, “Do not tell me anything disagreeable, Chicot; I am so glad to see you again.”

“I will tell the truth; so much the worse if it be disagreeable.”

“But your fear of Mayenne is not serious?”

“Very serious, on the contrary. You understand that M. de Mayenne gave me fifty blows with a stirrup leather, in return for which I gave him one hundred with the sheath of my sword. No doubt he thinks, therefore, that he still owes me fifty, so that I should not have come to you now, however great your need, had I not known him to be at Soissons.”

“Well, Chicot, I take you now under my protection, and I wish that you should be resuscitated and appear openly.”

“What folly!”

“I will protect you, on my royal word.”

“Bah! I have better than that.”

“What?”

“My hole, where I remain.”

“I forbid it,” cried the king, jumping out of bed.

“Henri, you will catch cold; go back to bed, I pray.”

“You are right, but you exasperated me. How, when I have enough guards, Swiss, Scotch, and French, for my own defense, should I not have enough for yours?”

“Let us see: you have the Swiss — ”

“Yes, commanded by Tocquenot.”

“Good! then you have the Scotch — ”

“Commanded by Larchant.”

“Very well! and you have the French guards — ”

“Commanded by Crillon. And then — but I do not know if I ought to tell you — ”

“I did not ask you.”

“A novelty, Chicot!”

“A novelty?”

“Yes; imagine forty-five brave gentlemen.”

“Forty-five? What do you mean?”

“Forty-five gentlemen.”

“Where did you find them? Not in Paris, I suppose?”

“No, but they arrived here yesterday.”

“Oh!” cried Chicot, with a sudden illumination, “I know these gentlemen.”

“Really!”

“Forty-five beggars, who only want the wallet; figures to make one die with laughter.”

“Chicot, there are splendid men among them.”

“Gascons, like your colonel-general of infantry.”

“And like you, Chicot. However, I have forty-five formidable swords at command.”

“Commanded by the 46th, whom they call D’Epernon.”

“Not exactly.”

“By whom, then?”

“De Loignac.”

“And it is with them you think to defend yourself?”

“Yes, mordieu! yes.”

“Well, I have more troops than you.”

“You have troops?”

“Why not?”

“What are they?”

“You shall hear. First, all the army that MM. de Guise are raising in Lorraine.”

“Are you mad?”

“No; a real army — at least six thousand men.”

“But how can you, who fear M. de Mayenne so much, be defended by the soldiers of M. de Guise?”

“Because I am dead.”

“Again this joke!”

“No; I have changed my name and position.”

“What are you, then?”

“I am Robert Briquet, merchant and leaguer.”

“You a leaguer?”

“A devoted one, so that I keep away from M. de Mayenne. I have, then, for me, first, the army of Lorraine — six thousand men; remember that number.”

“I listen.”

“Then, at least one hundred thousand Parisians.”

“Famous soldiers!”

“Sufficiently so to annoy you much: 6,000 and 100,000 are 106,000; then there is the pope, the Spaniards, M. de Bourbon, the Flemings, Henry of Navarre, the Duc d’Anjou — ”

“Have you done?” interrupted Henri, impatiently.

“There still remain three classes of people.”

“What are they?”

“First the Catholics, who hate you because you only three parts exterminated the Huguenots: then the Huguenots, who hate you because you have three parts exterminated them; and the third party is that which desires neither you, nor your brother, nor M. de Guise, but your brother-in-law, Henri of Navarre."

"Provided that he abjure. But these people of whom you speak are all France."

"Just so. These are my troops as a leaguer; now add, and compare."

"You are joking, are you not, Chicot?"

"Is it a time to joke, when you are alone, against all the world?"

Henri assumed an air of royal dignity. "Alone I am," said he, "but at the same time I alone command. You show me an army, but where is the chief? You will say, M. de Guise; but do I not keep him at Nancy? M. de Mayenne, you say yourself, is at Soissons, the Duc d'Anjou is at Brussels, and the king of Navarre at Pau; so that if I am alone, I am free. I am like a hunter in the midst of a plain, waiting to see his prey come within his reach."

"On the contrary; you are the game whom the hunters track to his lair."

"Chicot!"

"Well! let me hear whom you have seen come."

"No one."

"Yet some one has come."

"Of those whom I named?"

"Not exactly, but nearly."

"Who?"

"A woman."

"My sister Margot?"

"No; the Duchesse de Montpensier."

"She! at Paris?"

"Mon Dieu! yes."

"Well, if she be; I do not fear women."

"True; but she comes as the avant courier to announce the arrival of her brother."

"Of M. de Guise?"

"Yes."

"And do you think that embarrasses me? Give me ink and paper."

"What for? To sign an order for M. de Guise to remain at Nancy?"

"Exactly; the idea must be good, since you had it also."

"Execrable, on the contrary."

"Why?"

"As soon as he receives it he will know he is wanted at Paris, and he will come."

The king grew angry. "If you only returned to talk like this," said he, "you had better have stayed away."

"What would you have? Phantoms never flatter. But be reasonable; why do you think M. de Guise remains at Nancy?"

"To organize an army."

"Well; and for what purpose does he destine this army?"

"Ah, Chicot! you fatigue me with all these questions."

"You will sleep better after it. He destines this army — "

"To attack the Huguenots in the north — "

"Or rather, to thwart your brother of Anjou, who has called himself Duke of Brabant, and wishes to build himself a throne in Flanders, for which he solicits your aid — "

"Which I never sent."

"To the great joy of the Duc de Guise. Well, if you were to feign to send this aid — if they only went half way — "

"Ah! yes, I understand; M. de Guise would not leave the frontier."

"And the promise of Madame de Montpensier that her brother would be here in a week — "

"Would be broken."

"You see, then?"

"So far, good; but in the south — "

"Ah, yes; the Béarnais — "

"Do you know what he is at?"

"No."

"He claims the towns which were his wife's dowry," said the king.

"Insolent! to claim what belongs to him."

"Cahors, for example; as if it would be good policy to give up such a town to an enemy."

"No; but it would be like an honest man."

"But to return to Flanders. I will send some one to my brother — but whom can I trust? Oh! now I think of it, you shall go, Chicot."

"I, a dead man?"

"No; you shall go as Robert Briquet."

"As a bagman?"

"Do you refuse?" — "Certainly."

"You disobey me!"

"I owe you no obedience — "

Henri was about to reply, when the door opened and the Duc de Joyeuse was announced.

"Ah! there is your man," said Chicot; "who could make a better ambassador?"

Chicot then buried himself in the great chair, so as to be quite invisible in the dim light. M. de Joyeuse did not see him. The king uttered a cry of joy on seeing his favorite, and held out his hand.

"Sit down, Joyeuse, my child," said he; "how late you are."

"Your majesty is very good," answered Joyeuse, approaching the bed, on which he sat down.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DIFFICULTY OF FINDING A GOOD AMBASSADOR.

Chicot was hidden in his great chair, and Joyeuse was half lying on the foot of the bed in which the king was bolstered up, when the conversation commenced.

“Well, Joyeuse,” said Henri, “have you well wandered about the town?”

“Yes, sire,” replied the duke, carelessly.

“How quickly you disappeared from the Place de Greve.”

“Sire, to speak frankly, I do not like to see men suffer.”

“Tender heart.”

“No; egotistical heart, rather; then sufferings act on my nerves.”

“You know what passed?”

“Ma foi! no.”

“Salcede denied all.”

“Ah!”

“You bear it very indifferently, Joyeuse.”

“I confess I do not attach much importance to it; besides, I was certain he would deny everything.”

“But since he confessed before the judges — ”

“All the more reason that he should deny it afterward. The confession put the Guises on their guard, and they were at work while your majesty remained quiet.”

“What! you foresee such things, and do not warn me?”

“I am not a minister, to talk politics.”

“Well, Joyeuse, I want your brother.”

“He, like myself, is at your majesty’s service.”

“Then I may count on him?”

“Doubtless.”

“I wish to send him on a little mission.”

“Out of Paris?”

“Yes.”

“In that case, it is impossible.”

“How so?”

“Du Bouchage cannot go away just now.”

The king looked astonished. “What do you mean?” said he.

“Sire,” said Joyeuse quietly, “it is the simplest thing possible. Du Bouchage is in love, but he had carried on his negotiations badly, and everything was going wrong; the poor boy was growing thinner and thinner.”

“Indeed,” said the king, “I have remarked it.”

“And he had become sad, mordieu! as if he had lived in your majesty’s court.”

A kind of grunt, proceeding from the corner of the room interrupted Joyeuse, who looked round astonished.

“It is nothing, Joyeuse,” said the king, laughing, “only a dog asleep on the footstool. You say, then, that Du Bouchage grew sad? — ”

“Sad as death, sire. It seems he has met with some woman of an extraordinary disposition. However, one sometimes succeeds as well with this sort of women as with others, if you only set the right way to work.”

“You would not have been embarrassed, libertine!”

“You understand, sire, that no sooner had he made me his confidant, than I undertook to save him.”

“So that — ”

“So that already the cure commences.”

“What, is he less in love?”

“No; but he has more hope of making her so. For the future, instead of sighing with the lady, we mean to amuse her in every possible way. To-night I stationed thirty Italian musicians under her balcony.”

“Ah! ma foi! music would not have amused me when I was in love with Madame de Conde.”

“No; but you were in love, sire; and she is as cold as an icicle.”

“And you think music will melt her?”

“Diable! I do not say that she will come at once and throw herself into the arms of Du Bouchage, but she will be pleased at all this being done for herself alone. If she do not care for this, we shall have plays, enchantments, poetry — in fact, all the pleasures of the earth, so that, even if we do not bring gayety back to her, I hope we shall to Du Bouchage.”

"Well, I hope so; but since it would be so trying to him to leave Paris, I hope you are not also, like him, the slave of some passion?"

"I never was more free, sire."

"Oh! I thought you were in love with a beautiful lady?"

"Yes, sire, so I was; but imagine that this evening, after having given my lesson to Du Bouchage, I went to see her, with my head full of his love story, and, believing myself almost as much in love as he, I found a trembling frightened woman, and thinking I had disturbed her somehow, I tried to reassure her, but it was useless. I interrogated her, but she did not reply. I tried to embrace her, and she turned her head away. I grew angry, and we quarreled: and she told me she should never be at home to me any more."'

"Poor Joyeuse; what did you do?"

"Pardieu, sire! I took my hat and cloak, bowed, and went out, without once looking back."

"Bravo, Joyeuse; it was courageous."

"The more so, sire, that I thought I heard her sigh."

"But you will return?"

"No, I am proud."

"Well, my friend, this rupture is for your good."

"Perhaps so, sire; but I shall probably be horribly ennuyé for a week, having nothing to do. It may perhaps amuse me, however, as it is something new, and I think it distingué."

"Certainly it is, I have made it so," said the king. "However, I will occupy you with something."

"Something lazy, I hope?"

A second noise came from the chair; one might have thought the dog was laughing at the words of Joyeuse.

"What am I to do, sire?" continued Joyeuse.

"Get on your boots."

"Oh! that is against all my ideas."

"Get on horseback."

"On horseback! impossible."

"And why?"

"Because I am an admiral, and admirals have nothing to do with horses."

"Well, then, admiral, if it be not your place to mount a horse, it is so at all events to go on board ship. So you will start at once for Rouen, where you will find your admiral’s ship, and make ready to sail immediately for Antwerp.”

“For Antwerp!” cried Joyeuse, in a tone as despairing as though he had received an order for Canton or Valparaiso.

“I said so,” replied the king, in a cold and haughty tone, “and there is no need to repeat it.”

Joyeuse, without making the least further resistance, fastened his cloak and took his hat.

“What a trouble I have to make myself obeyed,” continued Henri. “Ventrebleu! if I forget sometimes that I am the master, others might remember it.”

Joyeuse bowed stifly, and said, “Your orders, sire?”

The king began to melt. “Go,” said he, “to Rouen, where I wish you to embark, unless you prefer going by land to Brussels.”

Joyeuse did not answer, but only bowed.

“Do you prefer the land route, duke?” asked Henri.

“I have no preference when I have an order to execute, sire.”

“There, now you are sulky. Ah! kings have no friends.”

“Those who give orders can only expect to find servants.”

“Monsieur,” replied the king, angry again, “you will go then to Rouen; you will go on board your ship, and will take the garrisons of Caudebec, Harfleur, and Dieppe, which I will replace afterward. You will put them on board six transports, and place them at the service of my brother, who expects aid from me.”

“My commission, if you please, sire.”

“And since when have you been unable to act by virtue of your rank as admiral?”

“I only obey, sire; and, as much as possible, avoid responsibility.”

“Well, then, M. le Duc, you will receive the commission at your hotel before you depart.”

“And when will that be?”

“In an hour.”

Joyeuse bowed and turned to the door. The king’s heart misgave him. “What!” cried he, “not even the courtesy of an adieu? You are not polite, but that is a common reproach to naval people.”

“Pardon me, sire, but I am a still worse courtier than I am a seaman;” and shutting the door violently, he went out.

"See how those love me, for whom I have done so much," cried the king; "ungrateful Joyeuse!"

"Well, are you going to recall him?" said Chicot, advancing. "Because, for once in your life, you have been firm, you repent it."

"Ah! so you think it very agreeable to go to sea in the month of October? I should like to see you do it."

"You are quite welcome to do so; my greatest desire just now is to travel."

"Then if I wish to send you somewhere you will not object to go?"

"Not only I do not object, but I request it."

"On a mission?"

"Yes."

"Will you go to Navarre?"

"I would go to the devil."

"You are joking."

"No; since my death I joke no more."

"But you refused just now to quit Paris."

"I was wrong, and I repent. I will go to Navarre, if you will send me."

"Doubtless; I wish it."

"I wait your orders, gracious prince," said Chicot, assuming the same attitude as Joyeuse.

"But you do not know if the mission will suit you. I have certain projects of embroiling Margot with her husband."

"Divide to reign was the A B C of politics one hundred years ago."

"Then you have no repugnance?"

"It does not concern me; do as you wish. I am ambassador, that is all; and as long as I am inviolable, that is all I care for."

"But now you must know what to say to my brother-in-law."

"I say anything! Certainly not."

"Not?"

"I will go where you like, but I will say nothing."

"Then you refuse?"

"I refuse to give a message, but I will take a letter."

"Well, I will give you a letter."

"Give it me, then."

"What! you do not think such a letter can be written at once. It must be well weighed and considered."

"Well, then, think over it. I will come or send for it early to-morrow."

"Why not sleep here?"

"Here?"

"Yes, in your chair."

"I sleep no more at the Louvre."

"But you must know my intentions concerning Margot and her husband. My letter will make a noise, and they will question you; you must be able to reply."

"Mon Dieu!" said Chicot, shrugging his shoulders, "how obtuse you are, great king. Do you think I am going to carry a letter a hundred and fifty leagues without knowing what is in it? Be easy, the first halt I make I shall open your letter and read it. What! have you sent ambassadors for ten years to all parts of the world, and know no better than that? Come, rest in peace, and I will return to my solitude."

"Where is it?"

"In the cemetery of the Grands-Innocens, great prince."

Henri looked at him in astonishment again.

"Ah! you did not expect that," said Chicot. "Well, till to-morrow, when I or my messenger will come — "

"How shall I know your messenger when he arrives?"

"He will say he comes from the shade." And Chicot disappeared so rapidly as almost to reawaken the king's fears as to whether he were a shade or not.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SERENADE.

From the Louvre Chicot had not far to go to his home. He went to the bank of the Seine and got into a little boat which he had left there.

"It is strange," thought he, as he rowed and looked at the still-lighted window of the king's room, "that after so many years, Henri is still the same. Others have risen or fallen, while he has gained some wrinkles, and that is all. He has the same weak, yet elevated mind — still fantastical and poetical — still the same egotistical being, always asking for more than one has to give him, friendship from the indifferent, love from the friendly, devotion from the loving, and more sad than any one in his kingdom. By-the-by, he did not speak of giving me any money for my journey; that proves at least that he thinks me a friend." And he laughed quietly.

He soon arrived at the opposite bank, where he fastened his boat. On entering the Rue des Augustins, he was struck by the sound of instruments and voices in the street at that late hour.

"Is there a wedding here?" thought he, "I have not long to sleep, and now this will keep me awake."

As he advanced, he saw a dozen flambeaux carried by pages, while thirty musicians were playing on different instruments. The band was stationed before a house, that Chicot, with surprise, recognized as his own. He remained for an instant stupefied, and then said to himself, "There must be some mistake; all this noise cannot be for me. Unless, indeed, some unknown princess has suddenly fallen in love with me."

This supposition, flattering as it was, did not appear to convince Chicot, and he turned toward the house facing his, but it showed no signs of life.

"They must sleep soundly, there," said he; "such a noise is enough to wake the dead."

"Pardon me, my friend," said he, addressing himself to a torch-bearer, "but can you tell me, if you please, who all this music is for?"

“For the bourgeois who lives there.” replied he, pointing out to Chicot his own house.

“Decidedly it is for me!” thought he. “Whom do you belong to?” he asked.

“To the bourgeois who lives there.”

“Ah! they not only come for me, but they belong to me — still better. Well! we shall see,” and piercing through the crowd, he opened his door, went upstairs, and appeared at his balcony, in which he placed a chair and sat down.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “are you sure there is no mistake? is all this really for me?”

“Are you M. Robert Briquet?”

“Himself.”

“Then we are at your service, monsieur,” said the leader of the band, giving the sign to recommence.

“Certainly it is unintelligible,” thought Chicot. He looked around; all the inhabitants of the street were at their windows, excepting those of the opposite house, which, as we have said, remained dark and quiet. But on glancing downward, he saw a man wrapped in a dark cloak, and who wore a black hat with a red feather, leaning against the portico of his own door, and looking earnestly at the opposite house.

The leader of the band just then quitted his post and spoke softly to this man, and Chicot instantly guessed that here lay all the interest of the scene. Soon after, a gentleman on horseback, followed by two squires, appeared at the corner of the street, and pushed his way through the crowd, while the music stopped.

“M. de Joyeuse,” murmured Chicot, who recognized him at once.

The cavalier approached the gentleman under the balcony.

“Well! Henri,” said he, “what news?”

“Nothing, brother.” — ”Nothing?”

“No; she has not even appeared.”

“They have not made noise enough.”

“They have roused all the neighborhood.”

“They did not cry as I told them, that it was all in honor of this bourgeois.”

“They cried it so loud, that there he is, sitting in his balcony, listening.”

“And she has not appeared?”

"Neither she, nor any one."

"The idea was ingenious, however, for she might, like the rest of the people, have profited by the music given to her neighbor."

"Ah! you do not know her, brother."

"Yes, I do; or at all events I know women, and as she is but a woman, we will not despair."

"Ah! you say that in a discouraged tone, brother."

"Not at all; only give the bourgeois his serenade every night."

"But she will go away."

"Not if you do not speak to her, or seem to be doing it on her account, and remain concealed. Has the bourgeois spoken?"

"Yes, and he is now speaking again."

"Hold your tongue up there and go in," cried Joyeuse, out of humor. "Diable! you have had your serenade, so keep quiet."

"My serenade! that is just what I want to know the meaning of; to whom is it addressed?"

"To your daughter."

"I have none." — "To your wife, then."

"Thank God, I am not married."

"Then to yourself, and if you do not go in — " cried Joyeuse, advancing with a menacing air.

"Ventre de biche! but if the music be for me — "

"Old fool!" growled Joyeuse. "If you do not go in and hide your ugly face they shall break their instruments over your head."

"Let the man alone, brother," said Henri, "the fact is, he must be very much astonished."

"Oh! but if we get up a quarrel, perhaps she will look to see what is the matter; we will burn his house down, if necessary."

"No, for pity's sake, brother, do not let us force her attention; we are beaten, and must submit."

Chicot, who heard all, was mentally preparing the means of defense, but Joyeuse yielded to his brother's request, and dismissed the pages and musicians.

Then he said to his brother, "I am in despair; all conspires against us."

"What do you mean?"

"I have no longer time to aid you."

"I see now that you are in traveling dress; I did not remark it before."

"I set off to-night for Antwerp, by desire of the king."

"When did he give you the order?"

"This evening."

"Mon Dieu!"

"Come with me, I entreat."

"Do you order me, brother?" said Henri, turning pale at the thought.

"No; I only beg you."

"Thank you, brother. If I were forced to give up passing my nights under this window."

"Well?"

"I should die."

"You are mad."

"My heart is here, brother; my life is here."

Joyeuse crossed his arms with a mixture of anger and pity. "If our father," he said, "begged you to let yourself be attended by Miron, who is at once a philosopher and a doctor?"

"I should reply to my father that I am well and that my brain is sound, and that Miron cannot cure love sickness."

"Well, then, Henri, I must make the best of it. She is but a woman, and at my return I hope to see you more joyous than myself."

"Yes, yes, my good brother, I shall be cured — I shall be happy, thanks to your friendship, which is my most precious possession."

"After your love."

"Before my life."

Joyeuse, much touched, interrupted him.

"Let us go, brother," said he.

"Yes, brother, I follow you," said Du Bouchage, sighing.

"Yes, I understand; the last adieux to the window; but you have also one for me, brother."

Henri passed his arms round the neck of his brother, who leaned down to embrace him.

"No!" cried he. "I will accompany you to the gates," and with a last look toward the window, he followed his brother.

Chicot continued to watch. Gradually every one disappeared, and the street was deserted. Then one of the windows of the opposite house was opened, and a man looked out.

“There is no longer any one, madame,” said he; “you may leave your hiding-place and go down to your own room,” and lighting a lamp, he gave it into a hand stretched out to receive it.

Chicot looked earnestly, but as he caught sight of her pale but sublime face, he shuddered and sat down, entirely subjugated, in his turn, by the melancholy influence of the house.

CHAPTER XVII.

CHICOT’S PURSE.

Chicot passed the remainder of the night dreaming in his armchair, for the face of that woman brought before him a number of illustrious shades connected with many happy or terrible souvenirs, and he who had regretted his sleep on first arriving, now thought no more of it.

When morning dawned he got up, threw a cloak over his shoulders, and with the firmness of a sage, examined the bottom of his purse and his shoes. Chicot, a man of lively imagination, had made in the principal beam which ran through his house a cavity, a foot and a half long and six inches wide, which he used as a strong box, to contain 1,000 crowns in gold. He had made the following calculation: “I spend the twentieth part of one of these crowns every day; therefore I have enough to last me for 20,000 days. I cannot live so long as that, but I may live half as long, and as I grow older my wants and expenses will increase, and this will give me twenty-five or thirty good years to live, and that is enough.” He was therefore tranquil as to the future.

This morning on opening his store, “Ventre de biche!” he cried, “times are hard, and I need not be delicate with Henri. This money did not come from him, but from an old uncle. If it were still night, I would go and get 100 crowns from the king; but now I have no resource but in myself or in Gorenflot.”

This idea of drawing money from Gorenflot made him smile. “It would be odd,” thought he, “if Gorenflot should refuse 100 crowns to the friend through whom he was appointed prior to the Jacobins. But this letter of the king’s. I must go and fetch it. But these Joyeuses are in truth capable of burning my house down some night, to attract the lady to her window: and my 1,000 crowns! really, I think it would be better to hide them in the ground. However, if they burn my house the king shall pay me for it.”

Thus reassured, he left the house, and at that moment saw at the window of the opposite house the servant of the unknown lady. This man, as we have said, was completely disfigured by a scar extending from the left temple to the cheek; but although bald and with a gray beard, he had a quick, active appearance, and a fresh and young-looking complexion. On seeing Chicot, he drew his hood over his head, and was going in, but Chicot called out to him:

“Neighbor! the noise here last night quite disgusted me, and I am going for some weeks to my farm; will you be so obliging as to look after my house a little?”

“Willingly, monsieur.”

“And if you see robbers?”

“Be easy, monsieur, I have a good arquebuse.”

“I have still one more favor to ask.”

“What is it?”

“I hardly like to call it out.”

“I will come down to you.”

He came down accordingly, with his hood drawn closely round his face, saying, as a sort of apology, “It is very cold this morning.”

“Yes,” said Chicot, “there is a bitter wind. Well, monsieur, I am going away.”

“You told me that before!”

“Yes, I know; but I leave a good deal of money behind me.”

“So much the worse; why not take it with you?”

“I cannot; but I leave it well hidden — so well, that I have nothing to fear but fire. If that should happen, will you try and look after that great beam you see on the right.”

“Really, monsieur, you embarrass me. This confidence would have been far better made to a friend than to a stranger of whom you know nothing.”

“It is true, monsieur, that I do not know you; but I believe in faces, and I think yours that of an honest man.”

“But, monsieur, it is possible that this music may annoy my mistress also, and then she might move.”

“Well, that cannot be helped, and I must take my chance.”

“Thanks, monsieur, for your confidence in a poor unknown; I will try to be worthy of it;” and bowing, he went into the house.

Chicot murmured to himself, “Poor young man, what a wreck, and I have seen him so gay and so handsome.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PRIORY OF THE JACOBINS.

The priory which the king had bestowed upon Gorenflot was situated near the Porte St. Antoine. This was at that time a very favorite quarter, for the king frequently visited the Chateau of Vincennes, and different noblemen had built charming residences in its neighborhood.

The priory was built on four sides of an immense court, planted with trees; it had a kitchen-garden behind, and a number of out-houses, which made it look like a small village. Two hundred monks occupied the dormitories situated at the end of the courtyard, while in the front, four large windows, with a balcony before them, gave to these apartments air and light.

It was maintained on its own resources and dependencies; its pasture land fed a troop of fifty oxen and ninety-nine sheep, for by some traditional law, no religious order was allowed to possess one hundred of anything, while certain outbuildings sheltered ninety-nine pigs of a particular breed, which were most carefully reared and fattened. The espaliers of the priory, which were exposed to the mid-day sun, furnished peaches, apricots, and grapes, while preserves of these fruits were skillfully made by a certain Brother Eusebius, who was the architect of the famous rock constructed of sweetmeats which had been presented to the two queens by the Hotel de Ville of Paris at the last state banquet which had taken place there.

In the interior of this paradise for gourmands and sluggards, in a sumptuous apartment, we shall find Gorenflot, ornamented with an additional chin, and characterized by that sort of venerable gravity which the constant habit of repose and good living gives to the most vulgar faces. Half-past seven in the morning had just struck. The prior had profited by the rule which gave to him an hour’s more sleep than to the other monks, and now, although he had risen, he was quietly continuing his sleep in a large armchair as soft as eider down. The furniture of the room was more mundane than religious; a carved table, covered with a rich cloth, books of religious gallantry — that singular mixture of love and devotion, which we only meet with at that epoch of art — expensive vases, and curtains of rich damask, were some of the luxuries of which Dom Modeste Gorenflot had become possessed by the grace of God, of the king, and of Chicot.

Gorenflot slept, as we have said, in his chair, when the door opened softly, and two men entered. The first was about thirty-five years of age, thin and pale, and with a look which commanded, even before he spoke; lightnings seemed to dart from his eyes when they were open, although the expression was generally softened by a careful lowering of the white eyelids. This was Brother Borromée, who had been for the last three weeks treasurer of the convent. The other was a young man about seventeen or eighteen, with piercing black eyes, a bold look, and whose turned-up sleeves displayed two strong arms quick in gesticulation.

“The prior sleeps still, Father Borromée,” said he: “shall we wake him?”

“On no account, Brother Jacques.”

“Really, it is a pity to have a prior who sleeps so long, for we might have tried the arms this morning. Did you notice what beautiful cuirasses and arquebuses there were among them?”

“Silence! brother; you will be heard.”

“How unlucky,” cried the young man, impatiently, stamping his feet, “it is so fine to-day, and the court is so dry.”

“We must wait, my child,” replied Borromée, with a submission his glance belied.

“But why do you not order them to distribute the arms?”

“I, order!”

“Yes, you.”

“You know that I am not the master here; there is the master.”

“Yes, asleep, when every one else is awake,” replied Jacques, impatiently.

“Let us respect his sleep,” said Borromée, overturning a chair, however, as he spoke.

At the sound, Gorenflot looked up and said, sleepily, “Who is there?”

“Pardon us,” said Borromée, “if we interrupt your pious meditations, but I have come to take your orders.”

“Ah! good-morning, Brother Borromée; what orders do you want?”

“About the arms.”

“What arms?”

“Those which your reverence ordered to be brought here.”

“I, and when?”

“About a week ago.”

“I ordered arms?”

“Without doubt,” replied Borromée, firmly.

“And what for?”

“Your reverence said to me, ‘Brother Borromée, it would be wise to procure arms for the use of the brethren; gymnastic exercises develop the bodily forces, as pious exhortations do those of the soul.’“

“I said that?”

“Yes, reverend prior; and I, an unworthy but obedient brother, hastened to obey.”

“It is strange, but I remember nothing about it.”

“You even added this text, ‘*Militat spiritu, militat gladio.*’“

“What!” cried Gorenflot, “I added that text!”

“I have a faithful memory,” said Borromée, lowering his eyes.

“Well, if I said so, of course I had my reasons for it. Indeed, that has always been my opinion.”

“Then I will finish executing your orders, reverend prior,” said Borromée, retiring with Jacques.

“Go,” said Gorenflot, majestically.

“Ah!” said Borromée, “I had forgotten; there is a friend in the parlor who asks to see your reverence.”

“What is his name?”

“M. Robert Briquet.”

“Oh! he is not a friend; only an acquaintance.”

“Then your reverence will not see him?”

“Oh, yes! let him come up; he amuses me.”

CHAPTER XIX.

THE TWO FRIENDS.

When Chicot entered, the prior did not rise, but merely bent his head.

“Good-morning,” said Chicot.

“Ah! there you are; you appear to have come to life again.”

“Did you think me dead?”

“Diable! I never saw you.”

“I was busy.”

“Ah!”

Chicot knew that before being warmed by two or three bottles of old Burgundy, Gorenflot was sparing of his words; and so, considering the time of the morning, it was probable that he was still fasting, Chicot sat down to wait.

“Will you breakfast with me, M. Briquet?” asked Gorenflot.

“Perhaps.”

“You must not be angry with me, if it has become impossible for me to give you as much time as I could wish.”

“And who the devil asked you for your time? I did not even ask you for breakfast; you offered it.”

“Certainly I offered it; but — ”

“But you thought I should not accept.”

“Oh! no, is that my habit?”

“Ah! a superior man like you can adopt any habits, M. le Prior.”

Gorenflot looked at Chicot; he could not tell whether he was laughing at him or speaking seriously. Chicot rose.

“Why do you rise, M. Briquet?” asked Gorenflot.

“Because I am going away.”

“And why are you going away, when you said you would breakfast with me?”

“I did not say I would; I said, perhaps.”

“You are angry.”

Chicot laughed. “I angry!” said he, “at what? Because you are impudent, ignorant, and rude? Oh! my dear monsieur, I have known you too long to be angry at these little imperfections.”

Gorenflot remained stupefied.

“Adieu,” said Chicot.

“Oh! do not go.”

“My journey will not wait.”

“You travel?”

“I have a mission.”

“From whom?”

“From the king.”

“A mission from the king! then you have seen him again?”

“Certainly.”

“And how did he receive you?”

“With enthusiasm; he has a memory, king as he is.”

“A mission from the king!” stammered Gorenflot.

“Adieu,” repeated Chicot.

Gorenflot rose, and seized him by the hand. “Come! let us explain ourselves,” said he.

“On what?”

“On your susceptibility to-day.”

“I! I am the same to-day as on all other days.”

“No.”

“A simple mirror of the people I am with. You laugh, and I laugh; you are rude, so am I.”

“Well! I confess I was preoccupied.”

“Really!”

“Can you not be indulgent to a man who has so much work on his shoulders? Governing this priory is like governing a province: remember, I command two hundred men.”

“Ah! it is too much indeed for a servant of God.”

“Ah! you are ironical, M. Briquet. Have you lost all your Christian charity? I think you are envious, really.”

“Envious! of whom?”

“Why, you say to yourself, Dom Modeste Gorenflot is rising — he is on the ascending scale.”

“While I am on the descending one, I suppose?”

“It is the fault of your false position, M. Briquet.”

“M. Gorenflot, do you remember the text, ‘He who humbles himself, shall be exalted?’“

“Nonsense!” cried Gorenflot.

“Ah! now he doubts the Holy Writ; the heretic!”

“Heretic, indeed! But what do you mean, M. Briquet?”

“Nothing, but that I set out on a journey, and that I have come to make you my adieux; so, good-by.”

“You shall not leave me thus.”

“I must.”

“A friend!”

“In grandeur one has no friends.”

“Chicot!”

“I am no longer Chicot; you reproached me with my false position just now.”

“But you must not go without eating; it is not wholesome.”

“Oh! you live too badly here.”

“Badly, here!” murmured the prior, in astonishment.

“I think so.”

“You had to complain of your last dinner here?”

“I should think so.”

“Diable! and of what?”

“The pork cutlets were burned.”

“Oh!”

“The stuffed ears did not crack under your teeth.”

“Ah!”

“The capon was soft.”

“Good heavens!”

“The soup was greasy.”

“Misericorde!”

“And then you have no time to give me.”

“I!”

“You said so, did you not? It only remains for you to become a liar.”

“Oh! I can put off my business: it was only a lady who asks me to see her.”

“See her, then.”

“No, no! dear M. Chicot, although she has sent me a hundred bottles of Sicilian wine.”

“A hundred bottles!”

“I will not receive her, although she is probably some great lady. I will receive only you.”

“You will do this?”

“To breakfast with you, dear M. Chicot — to repair my wrongs toward you.”

“Which came from your pride.”

“I will humble myself.”

“From your idleness.”

“Well! from to-morrow I will join my monks in their exercises.”

“What exercises?”

“Of arms.”

“Arms!”

“Yes; but it will be fatiguing to command.”

“Who had this idea?”

“I, it seems.”

“You! impossible!”

“No. I gave the order to Brother Borromée.”

“Who is he?”

“The new treasurer.”

“Where does he come from?”

“M. le Cardinal de Guise recommended him.”

“In person?”

“No, by letter.”

“And it is with him you decided on this?”

“Yes, my friend.”

“That is to say, he proposed it and you agreed.”

“No, my dear M. Chicot; the idea was entirely mine.”

“And for what end?”

“To arm them.”

“Oh! pride, pride! Confess that the idea was his.”

“Oh! I do not know. And yet it must have been mine, for it seems that I pronounced a very good Latin text on the occasion.”

“You! Latin! Do you remember it?”

“Militat spiritu — ”

"Militat gladio."

"Yes, yes: that was it."

"Well, you have excused yourself so well that I pardon you. You are still my true friend."

Gorenflot wiped away a tear.

"Now let us breakfast, and I promise to be indulgent."

"Listen! I will tell the cook that if the fare be not regal, he shall be placed in confinement; and we will try some of the wine of my penitent."

"I will aid you with my judgment."'

CHAPTER XX.

THE BREAKFAST.

Gorenflot was not long in giving his orders. The cook was summoned.

"Brother Eusebius," said Gorenflot, in a severe voice, "listen to what my friend M. Briquet is about to tell you. It seems that you are negligent, and I hear of grave faults in your last soup, and a fatal mistake in the cooking of your ears. Take care, brother, take care; a single step in a wrong direction may be irremediable."

The monk grew red and pale by turns, and stammered out an excuse.

"Enough," said Gorenflot, "what can we have for breakfast to-day?"

"Eggs fried with cock's combs."

"After?"

"Mushrooms."

"Well?"

"Crabs cooked with Madeira."

"Those are all trifles; tell us of something solid."

"A ham boiled with pistachios."

Chicot looked contemptuous.

"Pardon!" cried Eusebius, "it is cooked in sherry wine."

Gorenflot hazarded an approving glance toward Chicot.

"Good! is it not, M. Briquet?" said he.

Chicot made a gesture of half-satisfaction.

"And what have you besides?"

"You can have some eels."

"Oh! we will dispense with the eels," said Chicot.

"I think, M. Briquet," replied the cook, "that you would regret it if you had not tasted my eels."

"What! are they rarities?"

"I nourish them in a particular manner."

"Oh, oh!"

"Yes," added Gorenflot; "it appears that the Romans or the Greeks — I forget which — nourished their lampreys as Eusebius does his eels. He read of it in an old author called Suetonius."

"Yes, monsieur, I mince the intestines and livers of fowls and game with a little pork, and make a kind of sausage meat, which I throw to my eels, and they are kept in soft water, often renewed, in which they become large and fat. The one which I shall offer you to-day weighs nine pounds."

"It must be a serpent!" said Chicot.

"It swallowed a chicken at a meal."

"And how will it be dressed?"

"Skinned and fried in anchovy paste, and done with bread crumbs; and I shall have the honor of serving it up with a sauce flavored with garlic and allspice, lemons and mustard."

"Perfect!" cried Chicot.

Brother Eusebius breathed again.

"Then we shall want sweets," said Gorenflot.

"I will invent something that shall please you."

"Well, then, I trust to you; be worthy of my confidence."

Eusebius bowed and retired. Ten minutes after, they sat down, and the programme was faithfully carried out. They began like famished men, drank Rhine wine, Burgundy and Hermitage, and then attacked that of the fair lady.

"What do you think of it?" asked Gorenflot.

"Good, but light. What is your fair petitioner's name?"

"I do not know; she sent an ambassador."

They ate as long as they could, and then sat drinking and talking, when suddenly a great noise was heard.

"What is that?" asked Chicot.

"It is the exercise which commences."

"Without the chief? Your soldiers are badly disciplined, I fear."

"Without me! never!" cried Gorenflot, who had become excited with wine. "That cannot be, since it is I who command — I who instruct — and stay, here is Brother Borromée, who comes to take my orders."

Indeed, as he spoke, Borromée entered, throwing on Chicot a sharp and oblique glance.

"Reverend prior," said he, "we only wait for you to examine the arms and cuirasses."

“Cuirasses!” thought Chicot, “I must see this,” and he rose quietly.

“You will be present at our maneuvers?” said Gorenflot, rising in his turn, like a block of marble on legs. “Your arm, my friend; you shall see some good instruction.”

CHAPTER XXI.

BROTHER BORROMÉE.

When Chicot, sustaining the reverend prior, arrived in the courtyard, he found there two bands of one hundred men each, waiting for their commander. About fifty among the strongest and most zealous had helmets on their heads and long swords hanging to belts from their waists. Others displayed with pride bucklers, on which they loved to rattle an iron gauntlet.

Brother Borromée took a helmet from the hands of a novice, and placed it on his head. While he did so, Chicot looked at it and smiled.

“You have a handsome helmet there, Brother Borromée,” said he; “where did you buy it, my dear prior?”

Gorenflot could not reply, for at that moment they were fastening a magnificent cuirass upon him, which, although spacious enough to have covered Hercules, Farnese constrained wofully the undulations of the flesh of the worthy prior, who was crying:

“Not so tight! I shall stifle; stop!”

But Borromée replied, “It made part of a lot of armor that the reverend prior bought yesterday to arm the convent.”

“I!” said Gorenflot.

“Yes; do you not remember that they brought several cuirasses and casques here, according to your reverence’s orders?”

“It is true,” said Gorenflot.

“Ventre de biche!” thought Chicot; “my helmet is much attached to me, for, after having taken it myself to the Hotel Guise, it comes here to meet me again.”

At a sign from Borromée, the monks now formed into lines, while Chicot sat down on a bench to look on.

Gorenflot stood up. “Attention,” whispered Borromée to him.

Gorenflot drew a gigantic sword from the scabbard, and waving it in the air, cried in the voice of a stentor, “Attention!”

“Your reverence will fatigue yourself, perhaps, in giving the orders,” said Borromée, softly; “if it please you to spare your precious health, I will command to-day.”

“I should wish it, I am stifling.”

Borromée bowed and placed himself at the head of the troop.

“What a complaisant servant,” said Chicot.

“He is charming, I told you so.”

“I am sure he does the same for you every day.”

“Oh! every day. He is as submissive as a slave.”

“So that you have really nothing to do here — Brother Borromée acts for you?”

“Oh! mon Dieu, yes.”

It was wonderful to see Borromée with his arms in his hands, his eye dilated, and his vigorous arm wielding his sword in so skillful a manner that one would have thought him a trained soldier. Each time that Borromée gave an order, Gorenflot repeated it, adding:

“Brother Borromée is right; but I told you all that yesterday. Pass the pike from one hand to the other! Raise it to the level of the eye!”

“You are a skillful instructor,” said Chicot.

“Yes, I understand it well.”

“And Borromée an apt pupil.”

“Oh, yes! he is very intelligent.”

While the monks went through their exercises, Gorenflot said, “You shall see my little Jacques.”

“Who is Jacques?”

“A nice lad, calm-looking, but strong, and quick as lightning. Look, there he is with a musket in his hand, about to fire.”

“And he fires well.”

“That he does.”

“But stay — ”

“Do you know him?”

“No; I thought I did, but I was wrong.”

While they spoke, Jacques loaded a heavy musket, and placing himself at one hundred yards from the mark, fired, and the ball lodged in the center, amid the applause of the monks.

“That was well done!” cried Chicot.

"Thank you, monsieur," said Jacques, whose cheeks colored with pleasure.

"You manage your arms well," added Chicot.

"I study, monsieur."

"But he is best at the sword," said Gorenflot; "those who understand it, say so, and he is practicing from morning till night."

"Ah! let us see," said Chicot.

"No one here, except perhaps myself, is capable of fencing with him; but will you try him yourself, monsieur?" said Borromée.

"I am but a poor bourgeois," said Chicot; "formerly I have used my sword like others, but now my legs tremble and my arm is weak."

"But you practice still?"

"A little," replied Chicot, with a smile. "However, you, Brother Borromée, who are all muscle and tendon, give a lesson to Brother Jacques, I beg, if the prior will permit it."

"I shall be delighted," cried Gorenflot.

The two combatants prepared for the trial. Borromée had the advantage in height and experience. The blood mounted to the cheeks of Jacques and animated them with a feverish color. Borromée gradually dropped all appearance of a monk, and was completely the maitre d'armes: he accompanied each thrust with a counsel or a reproach, but often the vigor and quickness of Jacques triumphed over the skill of his teacher, who was several times touched.

When they paused, Chicot said, "Jacques touched six times and Borromée nine; that is well for the scholar, but not so well for the master."

The flash of Borromée's eyes showed Chicot that he was proud.

"Monsieur," replied he, in a tone which he endeavored to render calm, "the exercise of arms is a difficult one, especially for poor monks."

"Nevertheless," said Chicot, "the master ought to be at least half as good again as his pupil, and if Jacques were calmer, I am certain he would fence as well as you."

"I do not think so," replied Borromée, biting his lips with anger.

"Well! I am sure of it."

"M. Briquet, who is so clever, had better try Jacques himself," replied Borromée, in a bitter tone.

"Oh! I am old."

"Yes, but learned."

"Ah! you mock," thought Chicot, "but wait." Then he said, "I am certain, however, that Brother Borromée, like a wise master, often let Jacques touch him out of complaisance."

"Ah!" cried Jacques, frowning in his turn.

"No," replied Borromée, "I love Jacques, certainly, but I do not spoil him in that manner. But try yourself, M. Briquet."

"Oh, no."

"Come, only one pass."

"Try," said Gorenflot.

"I will not hurt you, monsieur," said Jacques, "I have a very light hand."

"Dear child," murmured Chicot, with a strange glance. "Well!" said he, "since every one wishes it, I will try," and he rose slowly, and prepared himself with about the agility of a tortoise.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LESSON.

Fencing was not at that time the science that it is now. The swords, sharp on each side, made them strike as often with the edge as with the point; besides, the left hand, armed with a dagger, was at the same time offensive and defensive, and hence resulted a number of slight wounds, which, in a real combat, kept up a continual excitement. Fencing, then in its infancy, consisted in a crowd of evolutions, in which the actor moved continually, and which, on a ground chosen by chance, might be continually impeded by its nature.

It was common to see the fencer throw himself forward, draw back again, or jump to the right or left, so that agility, not only of the hand, but of the whole body, was necessary. Chicot did not appear to have learned in this school, but seemed to have forestalled the modern style, of which the superiority and grace is in the agility of the hands and immovability of the body. He stood erect and firm, with a wrist at once strong and supple, and with a sword which seemed a flexible reed from the point to the middle of the blade, and an inflexible steel from thence to the guard.

At the very first commencement, Jacques, seeing before him this man of bronze, whose wrist alone seemed alive, gave some impatient passes, which merely made Chicot extend his arm, and at every opening left by the young man, strike him full on the chest. Jacques, red with anger and emulation as this was repeated, bounded back, and for ten minutes displayed all the resources of his wonderful agility — he flew like a tiger, twisted like a serpent, and bounded from right to left; but Chicot, with his calm air and his long arm, seized his time, and putting aside his adversary's sword, still sent his own to the same place, while Borromée grew pale with anger. At last, Jacques rushed a last time on Chicot, who, parrying his thrust with force, threw the poor fellow off his equilibrium, and he fell, while Chicot himself remained firm as a rock.

“You did not tell us you were a pillar,” said Borromée, biting his nails with vexation.

“I, a poor bourgeois!” said Chicot.

“But, monsieur, to manage a sword as you do, you must have practiced enormously.”

“Oh! mon Dieu! yes, monsieur, I have often held the sword, and have always found one thing.” — ”What is that?”

“That for him who holds it, pride is a bad counselor and anger a bad assistant. Now, listen, Jacques,” added he: “you have a good wrist, but neither legs nor head; you are quick, but you do not reason. There are three essential things in arms — first the head, then the hands and legs: with the one you can defend yourself, with the others you may conquer, but with all three you can always conquer.”

“Ah! monsieur,” said Jacques, “try Brother Borromée; I should like to see it.”

“No,” said the treasurer, “I should be beaten, and I would rather confess it than prove it.”

“How modest and amiable he is!” said Gorenflot.

“On the contrary,” whispered Chicot, “he is stupid with vanity. At his age I would have given anything for such a lesson,” and he sat down again.

Jacques approached him, and admiration triumphing over the shame of defeat:

“Will you give me some lessons, M. Briquet?” said he; “the prior will permit it, will you not, your reverence?”

“With pleasure, my child.”

“I do not wish to interfere with your master,” said Chicot, bowing to Borromée.

“Oh! I am not his only master,” said he. “Neither all the honor nor the defeat are wholly due to me.”

“Who is the other, then?”

“Oh! no one!” cried Borromée, fearing he had committed an imprudence.

“Who is he, Jacques?” asked Chicot.

“I remember,” said Gorenflot; “he is a little fat man who comes here sometimes and drinks well.”

“I forget his name,” said Borromée.

“I know it,” said a monk who was standing by. “It is Bussy Leclerc.”

“Ah! a good sword,” said Chicot.

Jacques reiterated his request.

“I cannot teach you,” said Chicot. “I taught myself by reflection and practice; and I advise you to do the same.”

Gorenflot and Chicot now returned to the house.

“I hope,” said Gorenflot, with pride, “that this is a house worth something, and well managed.”

“Wonderful! my friend; and when I return from my mission — ”

“Ah! true, dear M. Chicot; let us speak of your mission.”

“So much the more willingly, that I have a message to send to the king before I go.”

“To the king, my dear friend! You correspond with the king?”

“Directly.”

“And you want a messenger?”

“Yes.”

“Will you have one of our monks? It would be an honor to the priory.”

“Willingly.”

“Then you are restored to favor?”

“More than ever.”

“Then,” said Gorenflot, “you can tell the king all that we are doing here in his favor.”

“I shall not fail to do so.”

“Ah! my dear Chicot,” cried Gorenflot, who already believed himself a bishop.

“But first I have two requests to make.”

“Speak.”

“First, money, which the king will restore to you.”

“Money! I have my coffers full.”

“Ma foi! you are lucky.”

“Will you have 1,000 crowns?”

“No, that is far too much; I am modest in my tastes, humble in my desires, and my title of ambassador does not make me proud; therefore 100 crowns will suffice.”

“Here they are; and the second thing?”

“An attendant!”

“An attendant?”

“Yes, to accompany me; I love society.”

“Ah! my friend, if I were but free, as formerly.”

"But you are not."

"Greatness enslaves me," murmured Gorenflot.

"Alas!" said Chicot, "one cannot do everything at once. But not being able to have your honorable company, my dear prior, I will content myself with that of the little Jacques; he pleases me."

"You are right, Chicot, he is a rare lad."

"I am going to take him 250 leagues, if you will permit it."

"He is yours, my friend."

The prior struck a bell, and when the servant appeared said, "Let Brother Jacques come here, and also our messenger."

Ten minutes after both appeared at the door.

"Jacques," said Gorenflot, "I give you a special mission."

"Me!" cried the young man, astonished.

"Yes, you are to accompany M. Robert Briquet on a long journey."

"Oh!" cried he, enthusiastically, "that will be delightful. We shall fight every day — shall we not, monsieur?"

"Yes, my child."

"And I may take my arquebuse?"

"Certainly."

Jacques bounded joyfully from the room.

"As to the message, I beg you to give your orders. Advance, Brother Panurge."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PENITENT.

Panurge advanced. He looked intelligent, but like a fox.

“Do you know the Louvre?” said Chicot.

“Yes, monsieur.”

“And in the Louvre a certain Henri de Valois?”

“The king?”

“People generally call him so.”

“Is it to him that I am to go?”

“Just so. You will ask to speak to him.”

“Will they let me?”

“Yes, till you come to his valet-de-chambre. Your frock is a passport, for the king is very religious.”

“And what shall I say to the valet-de-chambre?”

“Say you are sent by the shade.”

“What shade?”

“Curiosity is a vice, my brother.”

“Pardon!”

“Say then that you want the letter.”

“What letter?”

“Again!”

“Ah! true.”

“You will add that the shade will wait for it, going slowly along the road to Charenton.”

“It is on that road, then, that I am to join you?”

“Exactly.”

As Panurge went out, Chicot thought he saw some one listening at the door, but could not be sure. He fancied it was Borromée.

“Where do you go?” asked Gorenflot.

“Toward Spain.”

“How do you travel?”

“Oh! anyhow; on foot, on horseback, in a carriage — just as it happens.”

“Jacques will be good company for you.”

“Thanks, my good friend, I have now, I think, only to make my adieux.”

“Adieu; I will give you my benediction.”

“Bah! it is useless between us.”

“You are right; but it does for strangers,” and they embraced.

“Jacques!” called the prior, “Jacques!”

Borromée appeared.

“Brother Jacques,” repeated the prior.

“Jacques is gone.”

“What! gone,” cried Chicot.

“Did you not wish some one to go to the Louvre?”

“Yes; but it was Panurge.”

“Oh! stupid that I am,” cried Borromée, “I understood it to be Jacques.”

Chicot frowned, but Borromée appeared so sorry that it was impossible to say much.

“I will wait, then,” said he, “till Jacques returns.”

Borromée bowed, frowning in his turn. “Apropos,” said he, “I forgot to announce to your reverence that the unknown lady has arrived and desires to speak to you.”

“Is she alone?” asked Gorenflot.

“No; she has a squire with her.”

“Is she young?”

Borromée lowered his eyes. “She seems so,” said he.

“I will leave you,” said Chicot, “and wait in a neighboring room.”

“It is far from here to the Louvre, monsieur, and Jacques may be long, or they may hesitate to confide an important letter to a child.”

“You make these reflections rather late,” replied Chicot, “however, I will go on the road to Charenton and you can send him after me.” And he turned to the staircase.

“Not that way, if you please,” said Borromée, “the lady is coming up, and she does not wish to meet any one.”

“You are right,” said Chicot, smiling, “I will take the little staircase.”

“Do you know the way?”

“Perfectly.” And Chicot went out through a cabinet which led to another room, from which led the secret staircase. The room was full of armor, swords, muskets, and pistols.

“They hide Jacques from me,” thought Chicot, “and they hide the lady, therefore of course I ought to do exactly the opposite of what they want me to do. I will wait for the return of Jacques, and I will watch the mysterious lady. Oh! here is a fine shirt of mail thrown into a corner; it is much too small for the prior, and would fit me admirably. I will borrow it from Gorenflot, and give it to him again when I return.” And he quietly put it on under his doublet. He had just finished when Borromée entered.

Chicot pretended to be admiring the arms.

“Is monsieur seeking some arms to suit him?” asked Borromée.

“I! mon Dieu! what do I want with arms?”

“You use them so well.”

“Theory, all theory; I may use my arms well, but the heart of a soldier is always wanting in a poor bourgeois like me. But time passes, and Jacques cannot be long; I will go and wait for him at the Croix Faubin.”

“I think that will be best.”

“Then you will tell him as soon as he comes?”

“Yes.”

“And send him after me?”

“I will not fail.”

“Thanks, Brother Borromée; I am enchanted to have made your acquaintance.”

He went out by the little staircase, and Borromée locked the door behind him.

“I must see the lady,” thought Chicot.

He went out of the priory and went on the road he had named; then, when out of sight, he turned back, crept along a ditch and gained, unseen, a thick hedge which extended before the priory. Here he waited to see Jacques return or the lady go out.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE AMBUSH.

Chicot made a slight opening through the hedge, that he might see those who came and went. The road was almost deserted as far as he could see; there was no one but a man poorly clothed measuring the ground with a long, pointed stick. Chicot had nothing to do, and therefore was preparing to watch this man, when a more important object attracted his attention.

The window of Gorenflot’s room opened with folding-doors on to a balcony, and Chicot saw them open, and Gorenflot come out, with his most gallant manner and winning smile, leading a lady almost hidden under a mantle of velvet and fur.

“Oh!” thought Chicot, “here is the penitent. She looks young; it is very odd, but I find resemblances in every one I see. And here comes the squire; as for him, there is no mistake; I know him, and if he be Mayneville — ventre de biche! — why should not the lady be Madame de Montpensier? And, morbleu! that woman *is* the duchess!”

After a moment, he saw the pale head of Borromée behind them.

“What are they about?” thought Chicot; “does the duchess want to board with Gorenflot?”

At this moment Chicot saw M. de Mayneville make a sign to some one outside. Chicot looked round, but there was no one to be seen but the man measuring. It was to him, however, that the sign was addressed, for he had ceased measuring, and was looking toward the balcony. Borromée began also to gesticulate behind Mayneville, in a manner unintelligible to Chicot, but apparently clear to this man, for he went further off, and stationed himself in another place, where he stopped at a fresh sign. Then he began to run quickly toward the gate of the priory, while M. de Mayneville held his watch in his hand.

“Diable!” said Chicot, “this is all very odd.”

As the man passed him, he recognized Nicholas Poulain, the man to whom he had sold his armor the day before. Shortly after, they all re-entered the room and shut the window, and then the duchess and her squire came out of the priory and went toward the litter which waited for them. Gorenflot accompanied them to the door, exhausting himself in bows and salutations. The curtains of the litter were still open, when a monk, in whom Chicot recognized Jacques, advanced from the Porte St. Antoine, approached, and looked earnestly into it. The duchess then went away, and Nicholas Poulain was following, when Chicot called out from his hiding place —

"Come here, if you please."

Poulain started, and turned his head.

"Do not seem to notice, M. Nicholas Poulain," said Chicot.

The lieutenant started again. "Who are you, and what do you want?" asked he.

"I am a friend, new, but intimate; what I want will take long to explain; come here to me."

"To you?"

"Yes; here in the ditch."

"What for?"

"You shall know when you come."

"But — "

"Come and sit down here, without appearing to notice me."

"Monsieur?"

"Oh! M. Robert Briquet has the right to be exacting."

"Robert Briquet!" cried Poulain, doing as he was desired.

"That is right; it seems you were taking measures in the road."

"I!"

"Yes; there is nothing surprising that you should be a surveyor, especially as you acted under the eyes of such great people."

"Great people! I do not understand."

"What! you did not know?"

"What do you mean?"

"You did not know who that lady and gentlemen on the balcony were?"

"I declare — "

"Oh! how fortunate I am to be able to enlighten you. Only imagine, M. Poulain; you had for admirers Madame de Montpensier and M. de Mayneville. Do not go away. If a still more illustrious person — the king — saw you — "

"Ah! M. Briquet — "

"Never mind; I am only anxious for your good."

"But what harm have I done to the king, or to you, or anybody?"

"Dear M. Poulain, my ideas may be wrong, but it seems to me that the king would not approve of his lieutenant of the Provostry acting as surveyor for M. de Mayneville; and that he might also take it ill that you should omit in your daily report the entrance of Madame de Montpensier and M. de Mayneville, yesterday, into his good city of Paris."

"M. Briquet, an omission is not an offense, and his majesty is too good — "

"M. Poulain, I see clearer than you, and I see — "

"What?"

"A gallows."

"M. Briquet!"

"And more — a new cord, four soldiers at the four cardinal points, a number of Parisians around, and a certain lieutenant of my acquaintance at the end of the cord."

Nicholas Poulain trembled so that he shook the hedge. "Monsieur!" cried he, clasping his hands.

"But I am your friend, dear M. Poulain, and I will give you a counsel."

"A counsel?"

"Yes; and very easy to follow. Go at once, you understand, to — "

"Whom?"

"Let me think. To M. d'Epernon."

"M. d'Epernon, the king's friend?"

"Take him aside, and tell him all about this."

"This is folly."

"No, it is wisdom. It is clear that if I denounce you as the man of the cuirasses and measures, they will hang you; but if, on the contrary, you disclose all, with a good grace, they will reward you. You do not appear convinced, however. Well! that will give me the trouble of returning to the Louvre, but I do not mind doing that for you," and he began to rise.

"No, no; stay here, I will go."

"Good! But you understand, no subterfuges, or to-morrow I shall send a little note to the king, whose intimate friend I have the honor to be, so that if you are not hanged till the day after to-morrow, you will only be hanged the higher."

“I will go; but you abuse your position.”

“Oh! M. Poulain, you were a traitor five minutes ago, and I make you the savior of your country. Now, go quickly, for I am in a hurry. The Hotel d’Epernon — do not forget.”

Nicholas Poulain ran off, with a despairing look.

“Ah! it was time,” said Chicot, “for some one is leaving the priory. But it is not Jacques; that fellow is half as tall again.”

Chicot then hastened to the Croix Faubin, where he had given the rendezvous. The monk, who was there to meet him, was a giant in height; his monk’s robe, hastily thrown on, did not hide his muscular limbs, and his face bore anything but a religious expression. His arms were as long as Chicot’s own, and he had a knife in his belt.

As Chicot approached, he turned and said, “Are you M. Robert Briquet?”

“I am.”

“Then I have a letter for you from the reverend prior.”

Chicot took the letter, and read as follows:

“My dear friend, I have reflected since we parted; it is impossible for me to let the lamb confided to me go among the wolves of the world. I mean, you understand, our little Jacques, who has fulfilled your message to the king. Instead of him, who is too young, I send you a good and worthy brother of our order; his manners are good, and his humor innocent, and I am sure you will like him. I send you my benediction. Adieu, dear friend.”

“What fine writing,” said Chicot; “I will wager it is the treasurer’s.”

“It was Brother Borromée who wrote it,” said the Goliath.

“In that case you will return to the priory, my friend.” — ”I?”

“Yes; and tell his reverence that I have changed my mind, and intend to travel alone.”

“What! you will not take me, monsieur?” said the man, with astonishment, mixed with menace.

“No, my friend.”

“And why, if you please?”

“Because I must be economical, and you would eat too much.”

“Jacques eats as much as I do.”

“Yes, but Jacques was a monk.”

“And what am I?”

“You, my friend, are a gendarme, or a foot soldier.”

“What do you mean? Do you not see my monk’s robe?”

“The dress does not make the monk, my friend; tell Brother Borromée that, if you please.”

The giant disappeared, grumbling, like a beaten hound.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE GUISES.

On the evening of the same day on which Chicot set off for Navarre, we shall find again, in a large room at the Hotel Guise, the person who, disguised as a page, had entered Paris behind Carmainges, and who was also, as we know, the penitent of Gorenflot. On this occasion her sex was disclosed, and, elegantly dressed, with her hair glittering with precious stones, she was waiting impatiently for some one.

At last a horse's step was heard, and the usher almost immediately announced M. le Duc de Mayenne. Madame de Montpensier ran to her brother so hastily that she forgot to proceed on the point of the right foot, as was her habit, in order to conceal her lameness.

"Are you alone, brother?" asked she.

"Yes, my sister."

"But Henri; where is Henri? Do you know that every one expects him here?"

"Henri has nothing to do here, and plenty to do in Flanders and Picardy. We have work to do there, and why should we leave it to come here, where our work is done?"

"But where it will be quickly undone, if you do not hasten."

"Bah!"

"Bah! if you like. I tell you the citizens will be put off no longer; they insist upon seeing their Duke Henri."

"They shall see him at the right time. And Salcede — ?"

"Is dead."

"Without speaking?"

"Without uttering a word."

"Good! and the arming?"

"Finished."

"And Paris?"

"Is divided into sixteen quarters."

"And each quarter has the chief pointed out?"

"Yes."

"Then let us live in peace, and so I shall say to our good bourgeoisie."

"They will not listen to you."

"Bah!"

"I tell you they are furious."

"My sister, you judge others by your own impatience. What Henri says must be done; and he says we are to remain quiet."

"What is to be done, then?" asked the duchess impatiently.

"What do you wish to do?"

"Firstly, to take the king."

"That is your fixed idea; I do not say it is bad, if it could be done, but think how often we have failed already."

"Times are changed, the king has no longer defenders."

"No; except the Swiss, Scotch, and French guards."

"My brother, when you wish it, I will show you the king on the road with only two lackeys."

"I have heard that a hundred times, and never seen it once."

"You will see it if you stay here only three days."

"Another project: tell me what it is."

"You will laugh at a woman's idea."

At this moment, M. de Mayneville was announced. "My accomplice," said she: "let him enter."

"One word, monseigneur," said he to M. de Mayenne as he entered; "they suspect your arrival at the Louvre."

"How so?"

"I was conversing with the captain of the guards at St. Germain l'Auxerrois, when two Gascons passed — "

"Do you know them?"

"No; they were quite newly dressed. 'Cap de Bious!' said one, 'you have a magnificent doublet, but it will not render you so much service as your cuirass of yesterday.' 'Bah!' said the other; 'however heavy the sword of M. de Mayenne may be, it will do no more harm to this satin than to my cuirass,' and then he went on in a series of bravadoes, which showed that they knew you were near."

"And to whom did these men belong?"

“I do not know; they talked so loudly that some passers-by approached, and asked if you were really coming. They were about to reply, when a man approached, whom I think was De Loignac, and touched them on the shoulder. He said some words in a low voice, and they looked submissive, and accompanied him, so that I know no more; but be on your guard.”

“You did not follow them?”

“Yes, but from afar. They went toward the Louvre, and disappeared behind the Hotel des Meubles.”

“I have a very simple method of reply,” said the duke.

“What?”

“To go and pay my respects to the king to-night.”

“To the king?”

“Certainly; I have come to Paris — he can have nothing to say against that.”

“The idea is good,” said Mayneville.

“It is imprudent,” said the duchess.

“It is indispensable, sister, if they indeed suspect my arrival. Besides, it was the advice of Henri to go at once and present to the king the respects of the family; that once done, I am free, and can receive whom I please.”

“The members of the committee, for example, who expect you.”

“I will receive them at the Hotel St. Denis on my return from the Louvre. You will wait for us, if you please, my sister.” — ”Here?”

“No; at the Hotel St. Denis, where I have left my equipages. I shall be there in two hours.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE LOUVRE.

That same day, about noon, the king came out of his cabinet and called for M. d’Epernon. The duke, when he came, found the king attentively examining a young monk.

The king took D’Epernon aside, “Look, what an odd-looking monk,” said he.

“Does your majesty think so? — I think him very ordinary.”

“Really!” Then to the monk, the king said, “What is your name?”

“Brother Jacques, sire.”

“Your family name?”

“Clement.”

“Good. You have performed your commission very well.”

“What commission, sire?” said the duke, with his wonted familiarity.

“Nothing!” said Henri. “It is a little secret between me and some one you do not know.”

“How strangely you look at the lad, sire! you embarrass him.”

“It is true; I know not why, but it seems to me that I have seen him before; perhaps it was in a dream. Go, my child; I will send the letter to him who asks for it; be easy. D’Epernon, give him ten crowns.”

“Thanks, sire,” said the monk.

“You did not say that as if you meant it,” said D’Epernon, who did not understand a monk despising ten crowns.

“I would rather have one of those beautiful Spanish knives on the wall,” said Jacques.

“What! you do not prefer money?”

“I have made a vow of poverty.”

“Give him a knife, then, and let him go, Lavalette,” said the king.

The duke chose one of the least rich and gave it to him. Jacques took it, quite joyful to possess such a beautiful weapon. When he was gone, the king said to D’Epernon, “Duke, have you among your Forty-five two or three men who can ride?”

“Twelve, at least, sire; and in a month all will be good horsemen.”

“Then choose two, and let them come to me at once.”

The duke went out, and calling De Loignac, said to him, “Choose me two good horsemen, to execute a commission for his majesty.”

De Loignac went to the gallery where they were lodged, and called M. de Carmainges and M. de St. Maline. They soon appeared, and were conducted to the duke, who presented them to the king, who dismissed the duke.

“You are of my Forty-five, then?” said he to the young men.

“I have that honor, sire,” said St. Maline.

“And you, monsieur?”

“And I, also, sire,” replied Carmainges; “and I am devoted to your majesty’s service, as much as any one in the world.”

“Good! Then mount your horses, and take the road to Tours — do you know it?”

“We will inquire.”

“Go by Charenton.”

“Yes, sire.”

“And proceed till you overtake a man traveling alone.”

“Will your majesty describe him?” said St. Maline.

“He has long arms and legs, and has a large sword by his side.”

“May we know his name, sire?” asked Carmainges.

“He is called ‘the Shade.’“

“We will ask the name of every traveler we see, sire.”

“And we will search the hotels.”

“When you find him, give him this letter.”

Both the young men held out their hands.

The king was embarrassed. “What is your name?” said he.

“Ernanton de Carmainges, sire.”

“And yours?”

“Rene de St. Maline.”

“M. de Carmainges, you shall carry the letter, and you, M. de St. Maline, shall deliver it.”

Ernanton took the precious deposit, and was going to place it in his doublet, when St. Maline stopped him, kissed the letter, and then returned it to Ernanton.

This made Henri smile. “Come, gentlemen,” said he, “I see I shall be well served.” — ”Is this all, sire?”

“Yes, gentlemen; only our last recommendation. This letter is more precious than the life of a man — for your heads, do not lose it; give it secretly to the Shade, who will give you a receipt for it, which you will bring back to me; and, above all, travel as though it were on your own affairs. Go.”

The two young men went out — Ernanton full of joy, and St. Maline filled with jealousy. M. d’Epernon waited for them, and wished to question them, but Ernanton replied: “M. le Duc, the king did not authorize us to speak.”

They went to the stables, when the king’s huntsman gave them two strong horses. M. d’Epernon would have followed them, but at that moment he was told that a man much wished to speak to him at once. “Who is he?” he asked.

“The lieutenant of the provost of the Ile de France.”

“Parfandious! am I sheriff or provost?”

“No, monsieur; but you are a friend of the king, and, as such, I beg you to hear me,” said a humble voice at his side.

The duke turned. Near him was a man, bowing perpetually.

“Who are you?” asked the duke.

“Nicholas Poulain, monsieur.”

“And you wish to speak to me?”

“I beg for that favor.”

“I have no time.”

“Not even to hear a secret?”

“I hear a hundred every day.”

“But this concerns the life of his majesty,” said Poulain, in a low voice.

“Oh! oh! then come into my cabinet.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE REVELATION.

M. D'Epernon, in traversing the antechamber, addressed himself to one of the gentlemen who stood there.

"What is your name, monsieur?" said he.

"Pertinax de Montcrabeau, monsieur."

"Well, M. de Montcrabeau, place yourself at that door, and let no one enter."

"Yes, M. le Duc;" and M. Pertinax, who was sumptuously dressed, with a blue satin doublet and orange stockings, obeyed. Nicholas Poulain followed the duke into his cabinet.

"Now let us hear your conspiracy," said the duke.

"Oh! M. le Duc, it concerns the most frightful crimes."

"They wish to kill me, I suppose."

"It does not concern you, monsieur; it is the king. They wish to carry him off."

"Oh! again that old story," replied the duke, disdainfully.

"This time the thing is serious, M. le Duc."

"On what day do they intend to do it?"

"The first time that his majesty goes to Vincennes in his litter."

"How will they do it?"

"By killing his two attendants."

"And who will do it?"

"Madame de Montpensier."

D'Epernon began to laugh. "That poor duchess; what things are attributed to her!"

"Less than she projects, monsieur."

"And she occupies herself with that at Soissons?"

"No; she is in Paris."

"In Paris!"

"I can answer for it."

"Have you seen her?"

"Yes."

"You thought you did?"

"I have had the honor of speaking to her."

"The honor."

"I am wrong; the misfortune."

"But, my dear lieutenant, the duchess cannot carry off the king."

"With her associates, of course."

"And where will she be when this takes place?"

"At a window of the Jacobin Priory, which is, as you know, on the road to Vincennes."

"What the devil do you tell me?"

"The truth, monsieur: all is prepared to stop the litter at the gate of the priory."

"And who made the preparations?"

"Alas! — "

"Finish quickly."

"I did, monsieur."

D'Epernon started back. "You, who denounce them!"

"Monsieur, a good servant should risk all in the service of the king."

"Mordieu! you risk hanging."

"I prefer death to infamy, or to the death of the king, therefore I came; and I thought, M. le Duc, that you, the friend of the king, would not betray me, and would turn my news to good account."

The duke looked fixedly at Poulain. "There must be more in it," said he; "resolute as the duchess is, she would not attempt such an enterprise alone."

"She expects her brother."

"The Duke Henri?"

"No, monsieur; only the Duc de Mayenne."

"Ah! good," said d'Epernon; "now I must set to work to counteract these fine projects."

"Doubtless, monsieur; it was for that I came."

"If you have spoken the truth you shall be rewarded."

"Why should I lie, monsieur; where is my interest — I, who eat the king's bread? If you do not believe me, I will go to the king himself."

"No, parfandious, you shall not go to the king: you shall have to deal with me, alone."

"I only said it because you seemed to hesitate."

"No, I do not hesitate; and, first, here are a thousand crowns for you, and you shall keep this secret between you and me."

"I have a family, monsieur."

"Well! a thousand crowns, parfandious."

"If they knew in Lorraine that I had spoken, each word would cost me a pint of blood; and in case of any misfortune, my family must be able to live, therefore I accept the thousand crowns."

The duke approached a coffer. Poulain thought it was for the money, and held out his hand, but he only drew out a little book and wrote, "Three thousand livres to M. Nicholas Poulain."

"It is as if you had them," said he.

Nicholas bowed, and looked puzzled.

"Then it is agreed?" said the duke.

"What, monsieur?"

"That you will continue to instruct me?"

Nicholas hesitated.

"What! has your noble devotion vanished already?"

"No, monsieur."

"Then I may count on you?"

"You may."

"And I alone know this?"

"You alone."

"Now you may go, my friend; and, parfandious, let M. de Mayenne look to himself."

When D'Epernon returned to the king he found him playing at cup and ball. D'Epernon assumed a thoughtful air, but the king did not remark it. However, as the duke remained perfectly silent, the king raised his head and said, "Well, Lavalette, what is the matter, are you dead?"

"I wish I were," replied D'Epernon, "and I should not see what I do see."

"What, my cup and ball?"

"Sire, in a time of great peril the subject may be alarmed for the safety of his master."

"What! again perils; devil take you, duke."

"Then you are ignorant of what is passing?"

"Ma foi, perhaps."

"Your most cruel enemies surround you at this moment."

“Bah! who are they?”

“First, the Duchesse de Montpensier.”

“Yes, that is true; she came to see Salcede; but what is that to me?”

“You knew it, then?”

“You see I did.”

“But that M. de Mayenne was here?”

“Yes, since yesterday evening.”

“What! this secret?” cried D’Epernon, with a disagreeable surprise.

“Are there, then, any secrets from the king? You are zealous, dear Lavalette, but you are slow. This news would have been good at four o’clock yesterday, but to-day — ”

“Well, sire, to-day?”

“It comes too late, you will agree?”

“Still too soon, sire, it seems, since you will not listen to me.”

“I have been listening for half-an-hour.”

“You are menaced — they lay ambushes for you.”

“Well, yesterday you gave me a guard, and assured me that my immortality was secured. Are your Forty-five no longer worth anything?”

“Your majesty shall see.”

“I should not be sorry, duke; when shall I see?”

“Sooner perhaps than you think.”

“Ah! you want to frighten me.”

“You shall see, sire. Apropos, when do you go to Vincennes?”

“On Saturday.”

“That is enough, sire.” D’Epernon bowed and withdrew.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TWO FRIENDS.

We will now follow the two young men sent by the king. Scarcely on horseback, Ernanton and St. Maline, determined that one should not get before the other, nearly crushed each other in the gateway. The face of St. Maline became purple, and that of Ernanton pale.

"You hurt me, monsieur," cried the former; "do you wish to crush me?"

"You also hurt me, only I did not complain."

"You wish to give me a lesson, I believe?"

"I wish to give you nothing."

"Ah!" cried St. Maline, "pray repeat that."

"You are seeking a quarrel, are you not?" replied Ernanton, quietly; "so much the worse for you."

"And why should I wish to quarrel? I do not know you," replied St. Maline, disdainfully.

"You know me perfectly, monsieur, because at home my house is but two leagues from yours, and I am well known there, being of an old family; but you are furious at seeing me in Paris, when you thought that you alone were sent for; also, because the king gave me the letter to carry."

"Well," said St. Maline, "it may be true, but there is one result."

"What is it?"

"That I do not like to be near you."

"Go away, then; pardieu, I do not want to keep you. On the contrary, I understand perfectly; you would like to take the letter from me and carry it yourself; but unfortunately you must kill me first."

"And who tells you that I do not wish to do that?"

"To desire and to do are two different things."

"Descend with me to the banks of the water, and you will see that with me they are the same."

"My dear monsieur, when the king gives me a letter to carry, I carry it."

"I will tear it from you by force."

“You will not force me, I hope, to shoot you like a dog.”

“You!”

“Yes; I have a pistol, and you have not.”

“You shall pay for this.”

“I trust so, after my commission is over; but, meanwhile, I beg you to observe that as we belong to the king, it is setting a bad example to quarrel.”

St. Maline was furious, he bit his fingers with rage. As they crossed the Rue St. Antoine, Ernanton saw a litter with a lady in it. “My page!” cried he, and he rode toward it; but she did not seem to recognize him, and passed on.

The young men now rode on without speaking. St. Maline soon discovered, to his chagrin, that his horse was not as good as Ernanton’s, and could hardly keep pace with him. This annoyed him so much that he began to quarrel with his horse, and to fret him so perpetually with the spur, that at last the animal started off and made for the river Bievre, where he got rid of his rider by throwing him in. One might have heard half a mile off the imprecations of St. Maline, although he was half stifled by the water. By the time he scrambled out his horse had got some little way off. He himself was wet and muddy, and his face bleeding with scratches, and he felt sure that it was useless to try and catch it; and to complete his vexation, he saw Ernanton going down a cross-road which he judged to be a short cut.

He climbed up the banks of the river, but now could see neither Ernanton nor his own horse. But while he stood there, full of sinister thoughts toward Ernanton, he saw him reappear from the cross-road, leading the runaway horse, which he had made a detour to catch. At this sight St. Maline was full of joy and even of gratitude; but gradually his face clouded again as he thought of the superiority of Ernanton over himself, for he knew that in the same situation he should not even have thought of acting in a similar manner.

He stammered out thanks, to which Ernanton paid no attention, then furiously seized the reins of his horse and mounted again. They rode on silently till about half-past two, when they saw a man walking with a dog by his side. Ernanton passed him; but St. Maline, hoping to be more clever, rode up to him and said, “Traveler, do you expect something?”

The man looked at him. Certainly his aspect was not agreeable. His face still bore marks of anger, and the mud half dried on his clothes and the blood on his cheeks, and his hand extended more in menace than interrogation, all seemed very sinister to the traveler.

“If I expect something,” said he, “it is not some one; and if I expect some one, it is not you.”

“You are impolite,” said St. Maline, giving way to the anger that he had restrained so long; and as he spoke he raised his hand armed with a cane to strike the traveler, but he, with his stick, struck St. Maline on the shoulder, while the dog rushed at him, tearing his clothes, as well as his horse’s legs.

The horse, irritated by the pain, rushed furiously on. St. Maline could not stop him for some time, but he kept his seat. They passed thus before Ernanton, who took no notice. At last St. Maline succeeded in quieting his horse, and they rode on again in silence till Ernanton said: “There is he whom we seek waiting for us.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

ST. MALINE.

Ernanton was not deceived; the man he saw was really Chicot. He on his side had seen the cavaliers coming, and suspecting that it was for him that they came, waited for them.

Ernanton and St. Maline looked at each other.

“Speak, monsieur, if you wish,” said Ernanton to his adversary.

St. Maline was suffocated by this courtesy, he could not speak, he could only bend his head; then Ernanton, advancing said, to Chicot —

“Monsieur, would it be indiscreet to inquire your name?”

“I am called ‘the Shade.’“

“Do you expect anything?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Will you be good enough to tell us what?”

“A letter.”

“From where?”

“From the Louvre.”

“Sealed with what seal?”

“The royal seal.”

Ernanton put his hand into the breast of his doublet and drew out a letter.

“That is it,” said Chicot, “and for greater certainty, I was to give you something in exchange, was I not?”

“A receipt.” — ”Yes.”

“Monsieur,” continued Ernanton, “I was told to carry it, but this gentleman was to deliver it.” And he handed the letter to St. Maline, who gave it to Chicot.

“You see,” said Ernanton, “that we have faithfully fulfilled our mission. There is no one here, and no one has seen us give you the letter.”

“It is true, gentlemen; but to whom am I to give the receipt?”

“The king did not say,” said St. Maline, with a meaning air.

"Write two, monsieur, and give one to each of us. It is far from this to the Louvre, and some misfortune may happen to one of us on the road," and as he spoke, Ernanton's eyes flashed in their turn.

"You are wise," said Chicot, drawing his tablets from his pocket, from which he tore out two pages and wrote on each, "Received from the hands of St. Maline the letter brought by M. Ernanton de Carmainges. — THE SHADE."

"Adieu, monsieur," said St. Maline, taking his.

"Adieu, monsieur, and a pleasant journey to you," added Ernanton. "Have you anything else to send to the Louvre?"

"Nothing, I thank you."

Then the young men set off toward Paris, and Chicot in the opposite direction. When he was out of sight —

"Now, monsieur," said Ernanton to St. Maline, "dismount, if you please."

"And why so?"

"Our task is accomplished; we have now to converse, and this place appears excellent for an explanation of this sort."

"As you please, monsieur;" and they got off their horses.

Then Ernanton said, "You know, monsieur, that without any cause on my part, you have during the whole journey insulted me grievously. You wished to make me fight at an inopportune time, and I refused; but now the time is good and I am your man."

But St. Maline was angry no longer, and did not wish to fight.

"Monsieur," replied he, "when I insulted you, you responded by rendering me a service. I can no longer hold the language I did just now."

"No; but you think the same."

"How do you know?"

"Because your words were dictated by hatred and envy, and they cannot already be extinct in your heart."

St. Maline colored, but did not reply.

Ernanton continued, "If the king preferred me to you, it was because I pleased him best. If I was not thrown into the Bievre like you, it was because I ride better; if I did not accept your challenge before, it was because I was wiser than you; if I was not bitten by the dog, it was because I had more sagacity; if I now summon you to draw your sword, it is because I have more honor; and if you hesitate, I shall say more courage."

St. Maline looked like a demon, and drew his sword furiously.

"I have fought eleven times," said he, "and two of my adversaries are dead. Are you aware of that, monsieur?"

"And I, monsieur, have never fought, for I have never had occasion, and I did not seek it now. I wait your pleasure, monsieur."

"Oh!" said St. Maline, "we are compatriots, and we are both in the king's service; do not let us quarrel. You are a brave man, and I would give you my hand if I could. What would you have? I am envious — it is my nature. M. de Chalabre, or M. de Montcrabeau, would not have made me angry; it was your superior merit. Console yourself, therefore, for I can do nothing against you, and unluckily your merit remains. I should not like any one to know the cause of our quarrel."

"No one will know it, monsieur."

"No one?"

"No; for if we fight I should kill you, or you would kill me. I do not despise life; on the contrary, I cling to it, for I am only twenty-three years of age, have a good name and am not poor, and I shall defend myself like a lion."

"Well, I, on the contrary, am thirty, and am disgusted with life; but still I would rather not fight with you."

"Then you will apologize?"

"No, I have said enough. If you are not content, so much the better, for you are not superior to me."

"But, monsieur, one cannot end a quarrel thus, without the risk of being laughed at." — "I know it."

"Then you refuse to fight?"

"With you."

"After having provoked me?"

"I confess it."

"But if my patience fail, and I attack you?"

"I will throw my sword away; but I shall then have reason to hate you, and the first time I find you in the wrong, I will kill you."

Ernanton sheathed his sword. "You are a strange man," said he, "and I pity you."

"You pity me!"

"Yes, for you must suffer."

"Horribly."

"Do you never love?"

"Never."

"Have you no passions?"

"One alone, jealousy; but that includes all others to a frightful degree. I adore a woman, as soon as she loves another; I love gold, when another possesses it; — yes, you are right, I am unhappy."

"Have you never tried to become good?"

"Yes, and failed. What does the venomous plant? What do the bear and bird of prey? They destroy, but certain people use them for the chase. So shall I be in the hands of MM. d'Epernon and Loignac, till the day when they shall say, 'This plant is hurtful, let us tear it up; this beast is furious, let us kill him.'"

Ernanton was calmed; St. Maline was no longer an object of anger but of pity.

"Good fortune should cure you," said he; "when you succeed, you should hate less."

"However high I should rise, others would be higher."

They rode on silently for some time. At last Ernanton held out his hand to St. Maline, and said, "Shall I try to cure you?"

"No, do not try that; you would fail. Hate me, on the contrary, and I shall admire you."

An hour after they entered the Louvre; the king had gone out, and would not return until evening.

CHAPTER XXX.

DE LOIGNAC’S INTERVIEW WITH THE FORTY-FIVE.

Each of the young men placed himself at a window to watch for the return of the king. Ernanton, however, soon forgot his present situation, and became abstracted in thinking who the woman could be who had entered Paris as his page, and whom he had since seen in such a splendid litter; and with a heart more disposed to love adventure than to make ambitious calculations, he forgot why he was sitting there, till, suddenly raising his head, he saw that St. Maline was no longer there. He understood at once that he had seen the king arrive, and had gone to him. He rose quickly, traversed the gallery, and arrived at the king’s room just as St. Maline was coming out.

“Look!” cried he joyfully, “what the king has given me,” and he showed a gold chain.

“I congratulate you, monsieur,” said Ernanton, quietly, and he entered in his turn.

St. Maline waited impatiently until he came out again, which he did in about ten minutes, although it appeared an hour to St. Maline.

When Ernanton came out, he looked all over him, and seeing nothing, he cried joyfully, “And you, monsieur, what has he given to you?”

“His hand to kiss,” replied Ernanton.

St. Maline crushed his chain impatiently in his hands, and they both returned in silence. As they entered the hall, the trumpet sounded, and at this signal all the Forty-five came out of their rooms, wondering what was the matter; while they profited by this reunion to examine each other. Most of them were richly dressed, though generally in bad taste. They all had a military tournour, and long swords, boots and gloves of buckskin or buffalo, all well gilded or well greased, were almost universal.

The most discreet might be known by their quiet colors, the most economical by the substantial character of their equipments, and the most gay by their white or rose-colored satins. Perducas de Pincornay had bought from some Jew a gold chain as thick as a cable; Pertinax de Montcrabeau was all bows and embroidery: he had bought his costume from a merchant who had purchased it of a gentleman who had been wounded by robbers. It was rather stained with blood and dirt, it was true, but he had managed to clean it tolerably. There remained two holes made by the daggers of the robbers, but Pertinax had had them embroidered in gold.

Eustache de Miradoux did not shine; he had had to clothe Lardille, Militor, and the two children. All the gentlemen were there admiring each other, when M. de Loignac entered frowning, and placed himself in front of them, with a countenance anything but agreeable.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “are you all here?”

“All!” they replied.

“Gentlemen, you have been summoned to Paris as a special guard to the king; it is an honorable title, but it engages you to much. Some of you seem not to have understood your duties; I will, therefore, recall them to you. If you do not assist at the deliberations of the council, you will constantly be called upon to execute the resolutions passed there; therefore, the responsibility of those secrets rests upon you. Suppose now that one of the officers on whom the safety of the state and the tranquillity of the crown reposes, betray the secrets of the council, or a soldier charged with a commission does not execute it, his life is the forfeit; you know that?”

“Doubtless,” replied many voices.

“Well, gentlemen, this very day a measure of his majesty’s has been betrayed, and a step which he wished to take rendered, perhaps, impossible.”

Terror began to replace pride in the minds of the Forty-five, and they looked at each other with suspicion and disquietude.

“Two of you, gentlemen,” continued De Loignac, “have been heard in the open street chattering like a couple of old women, and that about grave things.”

St. Maline advanced. “Monsieur,” said he, “pray explain at once, that suspicion may not rest on us all.”

“That is easy. The king heard to-day that one of his enemies — precisely one of those whom we have been enrolled to guard him against — had arrived in Paris to conspire against him. This name was pronounced quietly, but was overheard by a soldier on guard, that is to say, by a man who should be regarded as a wall — deaf, dumb, and immovable. However, that man repeated this name in the street with a noise and boasting which attracted the attention of the passers-by and raised quite an emotion; I know it, for I was there, and heard and saw all, and had I not placed my hand on his shoulder to stop him, he would have compromised such grave interests, that, had he not been quiet at my touch, I should have been compelled to poniard him on the spot."

Pertinax de Montcrabeau and Perducas de Pincornay turned deadly pale, and Montcrabeau tried to stammer out some excuses. All eyes were turned toward them.

"Nothing can excuse you," said De Loignac; "even if you were drunk you should be punished for that; and you shall be punished."

A terrible silence ensued. Then Pertinax said, "Pardon, monsieur! we are provincials, new to the court, and unaccustomed to politics."

"You should not have accepted your posts without weighing their duties."

"For the future we will be as mute as sepulchers, we swear to you."

"Good; but can you repair the evil you have done to-day?"

"We will try."

"It is impossible, I tell you."

"Then, for this time, pardon us."

"You live," continued De Loignac, "with a sort of license which I must repress. Those who find the terms too hard will return; I can easily replace them; but I warn you that justice will be done among us, secretly and expeditiously. Traitors will be punished with death on the spot."

Montcrabeau nearly fainted, and Pertinax grew paler than ever.

"I shall have," De Loignac continued, "for smaller offenses lighter punishments, as imprisonment, for instance. For this time, I spare the lives of M. de Montcrabeau and M. de Pincornay, because they probably acted in ignorance, and shall only enforce against them my third method of punishment — a fine. You have received one thousand livres apiece, gentlemen; you will each return one hundred."

"One hundred!" cried Pincornay; "Cap de Bious! I have not got them; I have spent them on my equipment."

"Sell your chain, then. But I have something else to add; I have remarked many signs of irritation between different members of your body, and each time a difference arises I wish the matter referred to me, and I alone shall have the power of allowing a duel to take place. Dueling is much in fashion now, but I do not wish, that, to follow the fashion, my company be constantly left imperfect. The first duel, therefore, that takes place without my permission will be punished with a rigorous imprisonment and a heavy fine. Now fifteen of you will place yourselves this evening at the foot of the staircase when his majesty receives, fifteen will keep without, and fifteen remain at home. Also, as you should have some chief, and I cannot be everywhere, I will each day name a chief for the fifteen, so that all shall learn to obey and command. At present I do not know the capacities of any one, but I shall watch and learn. Now, go, gentlemen; and M. de Montcrabeau and M. de Pincornay, you will remember that I expect your fines to be paid to-morrow."

They all retired except Ernanton, who lingered behind.

"Do you wish anything?" asked De Loignac.

"Yes, monsieur," said Ernanton, bowing; "it seems to me that you have forgotten to point out to us our duties. To be in the king's service has a glorious sound, doubtless, but I should wish to know in what this service consists?"

"That, monsieur, is a question to which I cannot reply."

"May I ask why, monsieur?"

"Because I, myself, am often ignorant in the morning of what I shall have to do in the evening."

"Monsieur, you are placed in such a high position that you must know much of which we are ignorant."

"You love the king, I suppose?"

"I do; and I ought to do so, as a subject and a gentleman."

"Well! that is the cardinal point by which to regulate your conduct."

"Very well, monsieur; but there is one point which disquiets me."

"What is it?"

"Passive obedience."

"It is an essential condition."

"So I understand; but it is sometimes difficult for persons who are delicate on points of honor."

"That does not concern me, M. de Carmainges."

"But, monsieur, when an order displeases you — "

"I read the signature of M. d'Epernon, and that consoles me."

"And M. d'Epernon?"

"He reads the signature of his majesty, and consoles himself as I do."

“You are right, monsieur, and I am your humble servant;” and Ernanton was about to retire, when De Loignac stopped him.

“I will say to you,” said he, “what I have not said to the others, for no one else has had the courage to speak to me thus.”

Ernanton bowed.

“Perhaps,” continued De Loignac, “a great personage will come to the Louvre this evening; if so, do not lose sight of him, and follow him when he leaves.”

“Pardon me, monsieur; but that seems the work of a spy.”

“Do you think so? It is possible; but look here” — and he drew out a paper which he presented to Ernanton, who read —

“‘Have M. de Mayenne followed this evening, if he presents himself at the Louvre. — D’EPERNON.’“

“Well, monsieur?”

“I will follow M. de Mayenne,” said Ernanton, bowing.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BOURGEOIS OF PARIS.

M. de Mayenne, with whom they were so much occupied at the Louvre, set out from the Hotel Guise, booted and on horseback, as though he had just arrived. He was received by the king affectionately.

“Well, cousin,” said he, “you have, then, come to visit Paris?”

“Yes, sire; I come in my brother’s name and my own, to recall to your majesty that you have no more faithful subjects than ourselves.”

“Mordieu!” said the king, “that is so well known that you might have spared yourself this trouble. You must have had some other motive.”

“Sire, I feared that your regard for us might be shaken by the reports which our enemies circulate about us.”

“What reports?” asked Henri.

“What!” cried Mayenne, rather disconcerted; “has not your majesty heard any reports unfavorable to us?”

“My cousin, know once for all that I allow no one to speak ill in my presence of the Guises.”

“Well, sire, I do not regret my visit, since I have had the pleasure of finding my king so well disposed toward us; but I will allow that it was needless.”

“Oh! there is always something to do in Paris.”

“Yes, sire; but we have our business at Soissons.”

“What business, duke?”

“Your majesty’s, sire.”

“Ah! true; continue, Mayenne, to do as you have done; I know how to appreciate the conduct of my subjects.”

The duke retired, smiling. The king rubbed his hands, and De Loignac made a sign to Ernanton, who spoke to his valet, and then followed M. de Mayenne. There was no fear of missing him, for the news of his arrival had spread, and some hundred leaguers had assembled to greet him.

As the duke reached his hotel, Ernanton saw a litter pierce through the crowd. De Mayenne approached it, and the curtains were opened, and Ernanton thought he recognized his former page. The litter disappeared under the gateway, and Mayenne followed; an instant after, M. de Mayneville appeared on the balcony, and thanked the Parisians in the duke’s name, but begged them to disperse and go home.

All went away accordingly, except ten men, who had entered after the duke. These were the deputies of the League, who were sent to thank M. de Mayenne for his visit, and to beg that his brothers would come also. They had a number of plans, which only wanted the sanction and support of the chiefs. Bussy Leclerc came to announce that he had instructed the monks of three monasteries in the use of arms, and had enrolled 500 bourgeois in a regiment.

Lachapelle-Marteau had worked on the magistrates and had 200 black robes ready for councilors. Brigard had gained the merchants of the Rue Lombards and the Rue St. Denis. Cruce could answer for the University of Paris, and Delbar promised for all the sailors in the port, a dangerous body of 500 men. Each of the others had something to offer, even Nicholas Poulain, the friend of Chicot.

When Mayenne had heard them all, he said, “I admire your strength, but I do not see the end you propose to yourselves.”

Bussy Leclerc answered, “We want a change, and as we are the strongest — ”

“But how will you arrive at this change?”

“It seems to me,” replied Bussy, boldly, “that as the idea of the Union came from our chiefs, it is for them to point out its aim.”

“You are perfectly right,” said Mayenne, “but it is also for them to judge of the proper time for action. The troops of M. de Guise may be ready, but he does not give the signal until he thinks fit.”

“But, monseigneur, we are impatient.”

“For what?”

“To arrive at our end. We also have our plan.”

“Ah! that is different; if you have your own plan, I say no more.”

“Yes, monseigneur; but may we count on your aid?”

“Doubtless, if this plan be approved by my brother and myself.”

“We believe it will.”

“Let me hear it, then.”

The leaguers looked at each other, then Marteau advanced.

"Monseigneur," said he, "we think the success of our plan certain. There are particular points where all the strength of the city lies — the great and the little Chatelet, the Hotel de Ville, the arsenal and the Louvre."

"It is true."

"All these are guarded, but could easily be surprised."

"I admit this also."

"The town itself, however, is defended outside, firstly, by the chevalier of the watch with his archers. We thought of seizing him in his house, which could be easily done, as it is a lonely place."

Mayenne shook his head. "However lonely," said he, "you cannot force a door and fire twenty shots without attracting attention."

"We have foreseen this objection, but one of the archers of the watch is on our side. In the middle of the night, two or three of us will go and knock at the door; the archer will open, and tell his chief that the king wishes to speak to him, which would not appear strange, as he is often sent for in this manner. Once the door is open, we will introduce ten men — sailors who lodge near — who will soon finish him."

"Murder him?"

"Yes, monseigneur. At the same time we will force the doors of the other functionaries who might take his place, such as M. d'O, M. de Chiverny, and M. le Procureur Laguesle. St. Bartholomew has taught us how to manage."

"This is all well, gentlemen; but you have not told me if you mean, at the same time, to force the doors of the Louvre — that strong and well-guarded fortress. Believe me, the king is not so easily taken as the chevalier of the watch."

"We have chosen four thousand men, who hate the king, for this undertaking."

"And you think that enough?"

"Doubtless; we shall be ten to one."

"Why, the Swiss are four thousand strong."

"Yes, but they are at Lagny, and that is eight leagues from Paris, and supposing they were to send for them, it would take two hours for the messenger to go on horseback, and eight for them to return on foot, so that they would just arrive in time to be stopped at the gates, and in a few hours we should be masters of Paris."

"Very good; but supposing all this accomplished, the watch disarmed, the authorities disappeared, and all obstacles removed, what do you mean to do?"

"Form a new government of honest people. As for ourselves, so long as our commerce is successful, and we have enough for our wives and children, we care for little else. Some among us might desire a command, and they should have it. We are not difficult to satisfy."

"I know you are all honest, and would not suffer a mixture in your ranks."

"No, no!" cried several voices.

"Now, M. Poulain," said the duke, "are there many idlers and bad people in the Ile de France?"

Nicholas Poulain, who had hitherto kept in the background, was now forced to advance. "Certainly, monseigneur, there are a great many," he replied.

"Could you guess at their number?"

"About four thousand thieves, three thousand or more beggars, and four or five hundred assassins."

"Well, there are at least eight thousand good-for-nothings; of what religion are they?"

Poulain laughed. "Of all, monseigneur; or, rather, of none; gold is their god, and blood their prophet."

"Yes; but their politics? Are they Valois, Leaguers, Navarrais, or what?"

"Robbers only."

"Monseigneur," said Cruce, "do not suppose that we mean to take these people for allies!"

"No, I do not suppose so; and that is what disturbs me."

"And why so, monseigneur?" they asked with surprise.

"Because as soon as there are no longer magistrates in Paris, as soon as there is no longer royalty, or public force, or anything to restrain them, they will begin to pillage your shops while you fight, and your houses while you occupy the Louvre. Sometimes they will join the Swiss against you, and sometimes you against the Swiss, so that they will always be the strongest."

"Diable!" cried the deputies, looking at each other.

"I think this is a question for grave consideration, gentlemen," said the duke. "I will think it over, and endeavor to find the means of overcoming the difficulty; your interests, before our own, has ever been our maxim."

The deputies gave a murmur of approbation.

“Now, gentlemen, permit a man who has traveled twenty-four leagues on horseback in forty-eight hours to seek a little sleep.”

“We humbly take our leave, monseigneur,” said Brigard; “what day shall you fix for our next meeting?”

“As soon as possible, gentlemen; to-morrow, or the day after. Au revoir.”

No sooner had he disappeared than a door opened, and a woman rushed in.

“The duchesse!” they cried.

“Yes, gentlemen; who comes to save you from your embarrassments. What the Hebrews could not do, Judith did; hope, then, gentlemen, for I also have my plan;” and she disappeared through the same door as her brother.

“Tudieu!” cried Bussy Leclerc; “I believe that is the man of the family.”

“Oh!” murmured Nicholas Poulain, “I wish I were out of all this.”

CHAPTER XXXII.

BROTHER BORROMÉE.

It was about ten o'clock in the evening when the deputies returned home. Nicholas Poulain remained behind the others, reflecting on the perplexing situation in which he found himself, and considering whether he should report all that he had heard to M. d'Epernon, when, in the middle of the Rue de la Pierre-au-Réal, he ran right against a Jacobin monk. They both began to swear, but, looking up, recognized each other.

"Brother Borromée!" cried Poulain.

"Nicholas Poulain!" exclaimed the monk.

"How are you?" asked Nicholas cautiously. "Where in the world were you running to in such a hurry at this time of night? Is the priory on fire?"

"No; I was going to the Duchesse de Montpensier's hotel, to speak to M. de Mayneville."

"And what for?"

"Oh! it is very simple," said Borromée, seeking for a specious answer; "the reverend prior was solicited by the duchesse to become her confessor; he accepted at the time, but since then he has had scruples, and has sent me to tell her not to rely upon him."

"Very good; but you are going away from the Hotel Guise."

"Exactly so; for I hear she is at the Hotel St. Denis, with her brother."

"Quite true; but why do you deceive me? It is not the treasurer who is sent with these sort of messages."

"But to a princess! Now do not detain me, or I shall miss her."

"She will return, you might have waited for her."

"True; but I shall not be sorry to see M. le Duc also."

"Oh! that is more like the truth, so go on. There is something new going on," thought Nicholas; "but why should I try to discover what it is?"

Meanwhile the brother and sister had been conversing together, and had settled that the king had no suspicions, and was therefore easy to attack. They also agreed that the first thing to be done was to organize the League more generally in the provinces, while the king abandoned his brother, who was the only enemy they had to fear, so long as Henri of Navarre occupied himself only with love affairs.

“Paris is all ready, but must wait,” said Mayenne.

At this moment M. de Mayneville entered, and announced Borromée.

“Borromée! who is he?” cried the duke.

“The man whom you sent me from Nancy, when I asked for a man of action and mind.”

“I remember; I told you he was both. But he was called Borroville.”

“Yes, monseigneur; but now he is a monk, and Borromée.”

“Borroville a monk! and why so?”

“That is our secret, monseigneur; you shall know hereafter, but now let us see him, for his visit disquiets me.”

“Why, Borroville,” cried the duke, laughing, as he entered; “what a disguise!”

“Yes, monseigneur, I am not much at my ease in this devil of a dress, I confess; but, as it is worn in the service of her highness, I do not complain.”

“And what do you want so late?”

“I could not come sooner; I have all the priory on my hands.”

“Well! now speak.”

“M. le Duc, the king is sending succors to the Duc d’Anjou.”

“Bah! we have heard that the last three years.”

“Yes; but this time it is certain. At two o’clock this morning, M. de Joyeuse set out for Rouen; he is to take ship to Dieppe, and convey three thousand men to Antwerp.”

“Oh! who told you that, Borroville?”

“I heard it from a man who is going to Navarre.”

“To Navarre! to Henri?”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“And who sends him?”

“The king, with a letter.”

“What is his name?”

“Robert Briquet; he is a great friend of Gorenflot’s.”

“And an ambassador of the king’s?”

“Yes; I am sure of it; for he sent one of our monks to the Louvre to fetch the letter.”

“And he did not show you the letter?”

"The king did not give it to him; he sent it by his own messenger."

"We must have this letter."

"Certainly," said the duchess.

"How was it that this did not occur to you?" said Mayneville.

"I did think of it, and wished to send one of my men, who is a perfect Hercules, with M. Briquet, but he suspected, and dismissed him."

"You must go yourself."

"Impossible!"

"And why?"

"Because he knows me."

"As a monk, but not as captain, I hope."

"Ma foi! I do not know; he seems to know everything."

"What is he like?"

"He is tall — all nerves, muscles and bones; silent, but mocking."

"Ah! ah! and clever with his sword?"

"Marvelously."

"A long face?"

"Yes."

"And an old friend of the prior's?"

"Yes."

"Oh! I have a suspicion which I must have cleared up. Borroville, you must go to Soissons, to my brother — "

"But the priory?"

"Oh! you can invent some excuse to Gorenflot; he believes all you say," said Mayneville.

"You will tell my brother all you know about the mission of M. de Joyeuse."

"Yes, monseigneur."

"And Navarre — " said the duchess.

"Oh! I charge myself with that," said Mayenne. "Let them saddle me a fresh horse, Mayneville." Then he murmured to himself, "Can he be still alive?"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CHICOT, LATINIST.

After the departure of the young men, Chicot went on quietly; but as soon as they had disappeared in the valley, he stopped at the top of a hill and looked all round him; then, seeing no one, he seated himself, and commenced an examination. He had now two purses, for he perceived that the packet he had received contained money, besides the letter. It was quite a royal purse, embroidered with an “H” at each end.

“It is pretty,” said Chicot, “no one could be more generous or more stupid. Decidedly I shall never make anything of the king. All that astonishes me is that he did not have the letter embroidered outside also. Now let me see how much money he has sent. One hundred crowns; just the sum I borrowed from Gorenflot. Ah! pardon, Henri, this is good. But the purse annoys me; if I were to keep it I should feel as if the very birds, as they flew over my head, would denounce me as a royal messenger.”

So saying, he drew from his pocket Gorenflot’s bag, emptied the king’s money into it, then placed a stone in the purse, and threw it into the Orge, which flowed under the bridge at his feet.

“So much for myself — now for Henri,” said Chicot; and he took up the letter, broke the seal with the utmost tranquillity, and sent the envelope into the river after the purse. “Now,” said he, “let us read.

“‘Dear brother, the deep love which you felt for our late dear brother and king, Charles IX., still clings to the Louvre and to my heart; it grieves me, therefore, to have to write to you about vexatious things. You are strong, however, against ill fortune, so that I do not hesitate to communicate these things to you — things which can only be told to a tried friend. Besides, I have an interest in warning you — the honor of my name and of your own, my brother. We resemble each other in one thing, that we are each surrounded with enemies. Chicot will explain to you.

“‘M. de Turenne, your servant, causes daily scandal at your court; God forbid that I should interfere in your affairs, except where your honor is concerned; but your wife, whom to my regret I call my sister, should be more careful than she is of your honor. I advise you, therefore, to watch the communications of Margot with Turenne, that she does not bring shame on the house of Bourbon. Act as soon as you shall be sure of the fact, into which I pray you to inquire as soon as Chicot shall have explained to you my letter.

"'Those whom as brother and king I denounce to you, generally meet at a little chateau called Loignac, the pretext being generally the chase. This chateau is, besides, the focus for intrigues to which the Guises are not strangers, and you know the strange love with which my sister pursued Henri de Guise. I embrace you, and am ever ready to aid you in all, and for all; meanwhile aid yourself by the advice of Chicot, whom I send to you. Your affectionate,' etc.

"*Age auctore Chicot*," said Chicot, "here am I, installed counselor of the king of Navarre! This seems to me a bad commission, and in flying one ill, I have fallen into a worse one. Really, I should almost prefer Mayenne. But the letter is clever, and if Henriot be like other husbands, it will embroil him at once with his wife, Turenne, the Guises, and even with Spain. But if Henri de Valois is so well informed of all that passes in Navarre, he must have some spy there.

"Then, again," continued he, "this letter will lead me into mischief if I meet a Spaniard, a Lorraine, a Béarnais, or a Fleming curious enough to wish to know what brings me here, and I should be very foolish not to remember that there is a chance of that. M. Borromée, above all, I suspect may play me some trick. Besides, what did I seek in asking the king for this mission? Tranquillity. And now I am going to embroil the king of Navarre with his wife. However, that is not my affair, except that I shall make mortal enemies, who will prevent me from ever reaching the happy age of eighty.

"Ma foi! but that is not much, for it is only worth living when you are young. But then I might as well have waited for the knife of M. de Mayenne. However, I will take precautions, and will translate this fine letter into Latin, and engrave it on my memory; then I will buy a horse, because from Juvisy to Pau I should have too often to put the right foot before the left if I walked — but first I will destroy this letter."

This he proceeded to do; tearing it into an infinite number of little pieces, sending some into the river, others into the air, and burying the rest in holes in the ground.

“Now let me think of my Latin theme,” said he; and this study occupied him until he arrived at Corbeil, where he bestowed a glance at the cathedral, but fixed an earnest look at a traiteur’s, whence came an appetizing smell of dinner. We will not describe either the dinner he made or the horse he bought; suffice it to say that the dinner was long and the horse was bad.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE FOUR WINDS.

Chicot, with his little horse, which ought to have been a big one to have carried him, after having slept at Fontainebleau, made a detour to the right, and proceeded toward the little village of Orgeval. He would have gone further that day, but his horse failed him. He put up, therefore, at a good hotel, and went through the rooms to select one where the doors closed well, and chose an apartment which had just been repaired, and the door of which was furnished with a formidable lock.

Before going to bed, although the hotel had appeared almost empty, he locked the door and placed a heavy table and a chest of drawers against it. He then put his purse under his pillow, and repeated to himself three times over the translation of the king’s letter. There was an extremely high wind blowing, and as it howled in the neighboring trees, it was with a feeling of great satisfaction that Chicot plunged into a very comfortable bed.

He had a lamp by his bedside, and he occupied himself for some time in reading a book which he had brought with him; but, although he liked the book, in reading the third chapter he fell asleep. The wind moaned about the house, sometimes like a child crying, and sometimes like a husband scolding his wife; and as Chicot slept, it seemed to him, in his dreams, that the tempest came nearer and nearer. All at once a sudden squall of invincible force broke locks and bolts — pushed the chest of drawers, which fell on the lamp, which it extinguished, and on the table, which it smashed.

Chicot had the faculty of waking quickly, and with all his senses about him, so he jumped out of bed and got hold in an instant of his purse and his sword. It was quite dark, but it seemed to him that the whole room was being torn to pieces by the four winds of heaven; for the chairs were falling, and the table breaking more and more under the weight of the drawers. As he could do nothing against the gods of Olympus, he contented himself with standing in one corner, with his sword held out before him, so that if any of these mythological personages approached, they would spit themselves upon it.

At last he profited by a momentary cessation in the uproar to cry loudly, “Help! help!”

He made so much noise that it seemed to quiet the elements, as if Neptune had pronounced the famous *Quos ego*, and, after six or seven minutes, during which Eurus, Notus, Boreas and Aquilo seemed to beat a retreat, the host appeared with a lantern and enlightened the scene, which looked deplorably like a field of battle. The great chest of drawers was overturned on the broken table; the door was held only by one of its hinges, and the bolts were broken; three or four chairs were on the floor with their legs in the air, and, to crown all, the crockery, which had been on the table, lay in bits on the floor.

“This is a regular pandemonium,” cried Chicot, recognizing his host.

“Oh! monsieur,” cried the host, clasping his hands, “what has happened?”

“Are there demons lodging here?” asked Chicot.

“Oh! what weather,” replied the host pathetically.

“But the bolts do not hold; this house must be made of card-board. I would rather go away; — I prefer the road.”

“Oh! my poor furniture,” sighed the host.

“But my clothes! where are they? They were on this chair.”

“If they were there, they ought to be there still,” replied the host.

“What! ‘if they were there.’ Do you think I came here yesterday in this costume?”

“Mon Dieu! monsieur,” answered the host, with embarrassment, “I know you were clothed.”

“It is lucky you confess it.”

“But — ”

“But what?”

“The wind has dispersed everything.”

“Ah! that is a reason.”

“You see.”

“But, my friend, when the wind comes in it comes from outside, and it must have come in here if it made this destruction.”

“Certainly, monsieur.”

“Well, the wind in coming in here should have brought with it the clothes of others, instead of carrying mine out.”

"So it should, and yet the contrary seems to have happened."

"But what is this? The wind must have walked in the mud, for here are footmarks on the floor." And Chicot pointed out the traces left by a muddy boot, on seeing which the host turned pale.

"Now, my friend," said Chicot, "I advise you to keep a watch over these winds which enter hotels, penetrate rooms by breaking doors, and retire, carrying away the clothes of the guests."

The host drew back toward the door. "You call me thief!" said he.

"You are responsible for my clothes, and they are gone — you will not deny that?"

"You insult me."

Chicot made a menacing gesture.

"Hola!" cried the host; "hola! help!"

Four men armed with sticks immediately appeared.

"Ah! here are the four winds," cried Chicot, making a thrust with his sword at one of them; but they all rapidly disappeared, not, however, before one of them had whispered something to the host.

"Your clothes shall be found," growled he.

"Well! that is all I ask."

They soon made their appearance, but visibly deteriorated.

"Ah! there are nails in your staircase; what a devil of a wind it was," said Chicot.

"Now you will go to bed again?" said the host.

"No, I thank you, I have slept enough; leave me your lantern and I will read."

Chicot replaced the chest of drawers against the door, dressed himself, got into bed again, and read till daybreak, when he asked for his horse, paid his bill, and went away, saying to himself —

"We shall see, to-night."

CHAPTER XXXV.

HOW CHICOT CONTINUED HIS JOURNEY, AND WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM.

Chicot passed his morning in congratulating himself on the sang-froid and patience he had displayed through his night of trials.

"But," thought he, "they never take an old wolf twice in the same snare; therefore, it is nearly certain that they will invent some new devilry to practice on me to-day, so I must be on my guard."

The result of this reasoning was, that Chicot made a march that day worthy of being immortalized by Xenophon. Every tree, rising ground, or wall, served him for a point of observation. He also concluded on the road alliances, if not offensive, at least defensive. Four grocers from Paris, who were going to Orleans to order preserves, and to Limoges for dried fruits, allowed Chicot, who called himself a hosier from Bordeaux, returning home, to join their company, which was rendered more formidable by four clerks, who were following their masters. It was quite a little army, and scarcely less formidable in mind than in number, so warlike a spirit had the League introduced among the Parisian shopkeepers. At all events, three cowards together have less fear than one brave man alone. At last they reached Etampes, the town fixed on for supper and sleeping. They supped, and then each went to his room.

Chicot, who had not been sparing during the repast, either of his fun, which amused his companions, or of the Muscat and Burgundy, went to bed, after having settled to travel again with the grocers on the morrow. Chicot, therefore, thought himself guarded like a prince by the four travelers, whose rooms were in the same corridor and close to his own. Indeed, at this epoch, the roads being far from safe, travelers were in the habit of promising each other mutual aid in case of need. Chicot then, after bolting his door and striking the walls, which returned everywhere a satisfactory sound, went to bed and to sleep.

But there arrived, during his first sleep, an event which the Sphynx himself, the diviner par excellence, could not have foreseen; but the devil was mixing himself up with Chicot’s affairs, and he is more cunning than all the Sphynxes in the world.

About half-past nine a blow was struck on the door of the room where the clerks all slept. One of them opened in a very bad humor, and found himself face to face with the host.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “I see with pleasure that you are sleeping all ready dressed, for I wish to render you a great service. Your masters grew very warm over politics at supper-time, and it seems that a sheriff of the town heard them and reported it. Now, as we are very loyal here, the mayor sent down the watch, and they have arrested your masters and carried them off. The prison is near the Hotel de Ville; go, my lads, your mules are ready for you, your masters will join you on the road.”

The four clerks shook like hares, ran downstairs, jumped on their mules, and took the road back to Paris, telling the host to let their masters know, if they should return to the hotel.

Having seen them disappear, the host went to knock very gently at one of the doors in the corridor.

One of the merchants cried out in a loud voice, “Who is there?”

“Silence!” replied the host, “and come quietly to the door.”

The merchant obeyed, but before opening, he said again — ”Who are you?”

“Your host; do you not recognize my voice?”

“Mon Dieu! what is the matter?”

“Why, it seems you talked rather too freely at table, and the mayor has been informed by some spy, and has sent to arrest you. Luckily, I thought of showing them your clerks’ room instead of yours, so that they are busy upstairs arresting them.”

“Can this be true?”

“Pure and simple truth. Make haste, and escape while you can.”

“But my companions?”

“Oh! I will tell them.”

And while the merchant dressed, the host awakened the others, and very soon they all disappeared, walking on the points of their toes, that they might not be heard.

"That poor hosier!" said they; "it will all fall on him; but it is true he said the most."

Of course Chicot had received no warning. While the merchants were flying, he was sleeping peacefully.

The host now descended into the hall, where stood six armed men, one of whom seemed to command the others.

"Well?" said this one.

"I have obeyed your orders, monsieur."

"Your inn is deserted?"

"Absolutely."

"The person is not awakened?"

"No."

"You know in whose name we act, and what cause we serve: for you serve the same."

"Yes, certainly; therefore, I have sacrificed, to keep my oath, the money that these men would have spent at my house; for it is said in the oath, 'I will sacrifice my goods to the defense of the Catholic religion.'"

"'And my life,' you forget that," replied the officer.

"Oh! I have a wife and children."

"You must obey blindly what is ordered you."

"Oh! I will obey."

"Then go to bed, shut the doors, and whatever you see or hear, do not come out, even if your house is burning."

"Oh! I am ruined!"

"I am instructed to indemnify you; here are thirty crowns."

"My house estimated at thirty crowns!" cried the inn-keeper, piteously.

"We shall not break even a window; complainer that you are."

"Oh! what a champion of the Holy League."

The host went away and did as he was told. Then the officer ordered two men to place themselves under Chicot's window, while he himself, with the three others, mounted to his room.

"You know the order," said the officer. "If he opens and lets us search, and we find what we seek, we will not do him the least harm; but if the contrary happens, a good blow with a dagger; no pistol, you understand — besides, it is useless, being four against one."

The officer knocked.

"Who is there?" cried Chicot.

“Your friends the grocers, who have something important to tell you.”

“Oh!” cried Chicot; “how last night’s wine has strengthened your voice.”

The officer lowered his voice, and said in an insinuating tone, “Open quickly, dear companion.”

“Ventre de biche! I do not smell the grocery.”

“Ah! you will not open?” cried the officer, impatiently. “Break open the door.”

Chicot ran to the window, but saw below two naked swords shining.

“I am caught,” said he.

“Ah! ah!” cried the officer, who had heard the noise of the window opening; “you fear the perilous leap, and you are right. Come, open!”

“Ma foi! no; the door is solid, and I shall get help when you make a noise.” And he began to call for the merchants.

The officer laughed. “Fool!” cried he. “Do you think we have left you their help? Undeceive yourself; you are alone, so make up your mind to it. Go on, soldiers.”

Chicot heard three blows struck on the door.

“They have three muskets,” said he; “and below there are only two swords, and only fifteen feet to jump; I prefer the swords to the muskets.”

And tying his bag to his belt, he got on the window-sill with his drawn sword. The two men below stood ready with their drawn swords, but, as Chicot guessed, on seeing him jump sword in hand, they drew back, intending to strike him as he came to the ground. Chicot alighted on his feet, and one of the men gave him a thrust immediately. Thanks, however, to Gorenflot’s coat of mail, the blade broke like glass.

“He has armor!” cried the soldier.

“Pardieu!” said Chicot, cutting open his head with a blow of his sword.

The other began to cry out, thinking now only of defending himself, but, at the second pass, Chicot laid him by his comrade; so that when the door was burst open, the officer saw through the window his two sentinels lying in their blood, and Chicot running quietly away.

“He is a demon; he is steel proof!” cried he.

“Yes; but not ball-proof!” cried the soldiers.

“No firing; no noise; you will wake the city. We shall catch him to-morrow.”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE THIRD DAY OF THE JOURNEY.

Chicot knew he was safe in the city of Etampes, where he was under the protection of magistrates who would have arrested the officer immediately on his complaint. It was the knowledge of this which had induced the officer to stop his men from firing, and to abstain from pursuit. Therefore he retired with his soldiers, leaving the two dead men on the ground after laying their swords by them, that it might seem as though they had killed each other.

Chicot vainly searched for his former companions, and then determined to stay for a time in the city; and even, after watching the officer and his men leave the town, had the audacity to return to the inn. There he found the host, who had not recovered from his terror, and who watched him saddling his horse as though he had been a phantom, and never even asked him for his money.

Then he went and finished his night in the public room at another inn, among all the drinkers, who were far from thinking that this tall unknown, who looked so smiling and gracious, had just killed two men.

At break of day he started again, but a prey to anxiety, for although two attempts had failed, the third might be successful. He determined when he reached Orleans to send to the king to ask for an escort.

But as the road to Orleans was passed without accident, Chicot began to think again that it was needless, and that the king would lose his good opinion of him, and also that an escort would be a great trouble. He went on, therefore, but his fears began to return as evening advanced. All at once he heard behind him the galloping of horses, and turning round he counted seven cavaliers, of whom four had muskets on their shoulders. They gained rapidly on Chicot, who, seeing flight was hopeless, contented himself with making his horse move in zig-zags, so as to escape the balls which he expected every moment. He was right, for when they came about fifty feet from him, they fired, but thanks to his maneuver, all the balls missed him.

He immediately abandoned the reins and let himself slip to the ground, taking the precaution to have his sword in one hand and a dagger in the other.

He came to the ground in such a position that his head was protected by the breast of his horse.

A cry of joy came from the troop, who, seeing him fall, believed him dead.

"I told you so," said a man, riding up, with a mask on his face; "you failed because you did not follow my orders. This time, here he is; search him, and if he moves, finish him."

Chicot was not a pious man, but at such a moment he remembered his God and murmured a fervent prayer.

Two men approached him sword in hand, and as he did not stir, came fearlessly forward; but instantly Chicot's dagger was in the throat of one, and his sword half buried in the side of the other.

"Ah! treason!" cried the chief, "he is not dead; charge your muskets."

"No, I am not dead," cried Chicot, attacking the speaker.

But two soldiers came to the rescue; Chicot turned and wounded one in the thigh.

"The muskets!" cried the chief.

"Before they are ready, you will be pierced through the heart," cried Chicot.

"Be firm, and I will aid you," cried a voice, which seemed to Chicot to come from heaven.

It was that of a fine young man, on a black horse. He had a pistol in each hand, and cried again to Chicot, "Stoop! morbleu, stoop!"

Chicot obeyed.

One pistol was fired, and a man rolled at Chicot's feet; then the second, and another man fell.

"Now we are two to two," cried Chicot; "generous young man, you take one, here is mine," and he rushed on the masked man, who defended himself as if used to arms.

The young man seized his opponent by the body, threw him down, and bound him with his belt. Chicot soon wounded his adversary, who was very corpulent, between the ribs; he fell, and Chicot, putting his foot on his sword to prevent him from using it, cut the strings of his mask.

"M. de Mayenne! ventre de biche, I thought so," said he.

The duke did not reply; he had fainted from the loss of blood and the weight of his fall. Chicot drew his dagger, and was about coolly to cut off his head, when his arm was seized by a grasp of iron, and a voice said:

"Stay! monsieur; one does not kill a fallen enemy."

"Young man," replied Chicot, "you have saved my life, and I thank you with all my heart; but accept a little lesson very useful in the time of moral degradation in which we live. When a man has been attacked three times in three days — when he has been each time in danger of death — when his enemies have, without provocation, fired four musket balls at him from behind — as they might have done to a mad dog — then, young man, he may do what I am about to do." And Chicot returned to his work.

But the young man stopped him again.

"You shall not do it, while I am here. You shall not shed more of that blood which is now issuing from the wound you hare already inflicted."

"Bah! do you know this wretch?"

"That wretch is M. le Duc de Mayenne, a prince equal in rank to many kings."

"All the more reason. And who are you?"

"He who has saved your life, monsieur."

"And who, if I do not deceive myself, brought me a letter from the king three days ago."

"Precisely."

"Then you are in the king's service?"

"I have that honor."

"And yet you save M. de Mayenne? Permit me to tell you, monsieur, that that is not being a good servant."

"I think differently."

"Well, perhaps you are right. What is your name?"

"Ernanton de Carmainges."

"Well, M. Ernanton, what are we to do with this great carcase?"

"I will watch over M. de Mayenne, monsieur."

"And his follower, who is listening there?"

"The poor devil hears nothing; I have bound him too tightly, and he has fainted."

"M. de Carmainges, you have saved my life to-day, but you endanger it furiously for the future."

"I do my duty to-day; God will provide for the future."

“As you please, then, and I confess I dislike killing a defenseless man. Adieu, monsieur. But first, I will choose one of these horses.”

“Take mine; I know what it can do.”

“Oh! that is too generous.”

“I have not so much need as you have to go quickly.”

Chicot made no more compliments, but got on Ernanton’s horse and disappeared.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ERNANTON DE CARMAINGES.

Ernanton remained on the field of battle, much embarrassed what to do with the two men, who would shortly open their eyes. As he deliberated, he saw a wagon coming along, drawn by two oxen, and driven by a peasant. Ernanton went to the man and told him that a combat had taken place between the Huguenots and Catholics, that four had been killed, but that two were still living. The peasant, although desperately frightened, aided Ernanton to place first M. de Mayenne and then the soldier in the wagon. The four bodies remained.

"Monsieur," said the peasant, "were they Catholics or Huguenots?"

"Huguenots," said Ernanton, who had seen the peasant cross himself in his first terror.

"In that case there will be no harm in my searching them, will there?"

"None," replied Ernanton, who thought it as well that the peasant should do it, as the first passer-by. The man did not wait to be told twice, but turned out their pockets. It seemed that he was far from disappointed, for his face looked smiling when he had finished the operation, and he drove on his oxen at their quickest pace, in order to reach his home with his treasure.

It was in the stable of this excellent Catholic, on a bed of straw, that M. de Mayenne recovered his consciousness. He opened his eyes, and looked at the men and the things surrounding him with a surprise easy to imagine. Ernanton immediately dismissed the peasant.

"Who are you, monsieur?" asked Mayenne.

Ernanton smiled.

"Do you not recognize me?" said he.

"Yes, I do now; you are he who came to the assistance of my enemy."

"Yes, but I am he who prevented your enemy from killing you."

"That must be true, since I live; unless, indeed, he thought me dead."

"He went away knowing you to be alive."

"Then he thought my wound mortal."

"I do not know; but had I not opposed him, he would have given you one which certainly would have been so."

"But then, monsieur, why did you aid him in killing my men?"

"Nothing more simple, monsieur; and I am astonished that a gentleman, as you seem to be, does not understand my conduct. Chance brought me on your road, and I saw several men attacking one; I defended the one, but when this brave man — for whoever he may be, he is brave — when he remained alone with you, and would have decided the victory by your death, then I interfered to save you."

"You know me, then?" said Mayenne, with a scrutinizing glance.

"I had no need to know you, monsieur; you were a wounded man, that was enough."

"Be frank; you knew me?"

"It is strange, monsieur, that you will not understand me. It seems to me that it is equally ignoble to kill a defenseless man, as six men to attack one."

"There may be reasons for all things."

Ernanton bowed, but did not reply.

"Did you not see," continued Mayenne, "that I fought sword to sword with that man?"

"It is true."

"Besides, he is my most mortal enemy."

"I believe it, for he said the same thing of you."

"Do you think me dangerously wounded?"

"I have examined your wound, monsieur, and I think that, although it is serious, you are in no danger of death. I believe the sword slipped along the ribs, and did not penetrate the breast. Breathe, and I think you will find no pain in the lungs."

"It is true; but my men?"

"Are dead, all but one."

"Are they left on the road?"

"Yes."

"Have they been searched?"

"The peasant whom you must have seen on opening your eyes, and who is your host, searched them."

"What did he find?"

"Some money."

"Any papers?"

“I think not.”

“Ah!” said Mayenne, with evident satisfaction. “But the living man; where is he?”

“In the barn, close by.”

“Bring him to me, monsieur; and if you are a man of honor, promise me to ask him no questions.”

“I am not curious, monsieur; and I wish to know no more of this affair than I know already.”

The duke looked at him uneasily.

“Monsieur,” said Ernanton, “will you charge some one else with the commission you have just given me?”

“I was wrong, monsieur, I acknowledge it; have the kindness to render me the service I ask of you.”

Five minutes after, the soldier entered the stable. He uttered a cry on seeing the duke; but he put his finger on his lip, and the man was silent.

“Monsieur,” said Mayenne to Ernanton, “my gratitude to you will be eternal; and, doubtless, some day we shall meet under more favorable circumstances. May I ask to whom I have the honor of speaking?”

“I am the Vicomte Ernanton de Carmainges, monsieur.”

“You were going to Beaugency?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Then I have delayed you, and you cannot go on to-night.”

“On the contrary, monsieur, I am about to start at once.” — ”For Beaugency?”

“No, for Paris,” said Ernanton; “somewhat unwillingly.”

The duke appeared astonished.

“Pardon,” said he; “but it is strange that going to Beaugency, and being stopped by an unforeseen circumstance, you should return without fulfilling the end of your journey.”

“Nothing is more simple, monsieur; I was going to a rendezvous for a particular time, which I have lost by coming here with you; therefore I return.”

“Oh! monsieur, will you not stay here with me for two or three days? I will send this soldier to Paris for a surgeon, and I cannot remain here alone with these peasants, who are strangers to me.”

“Then let the soldier remain with you, and I will send you a doctor.”

“Do you know the name of my enemy?”

“No, monsieur.”

“What! you saved his life, and he did not tell you his name?”

“I did not ask him.”

“You did not ask him?”

“I have saved your life also, monsieur; have I asked you your name? But, in exchange, you both know mine.”

“I see, monsieur, there is nothing to be learned from you; you are as discreet as brave.”

“I observe that you say that in a reproachful manner; but, on the contrary, you ought to be reassured, for a man who is discreet with one person will be so with another.”

“You are right! your hand, M. de Carmainges.”

Ernanton did quietly as he was asked.

“You have blamed my conduct, monsieur,” said Mayenne; “but I cannot justify myself without revealing important secrets.”

“You defend yourself, monsieur, when I do not accuse.”

“Well! I will only say that I am a gentleman of good rank, and able to be of use to you.”

“Say no more, monsieur; thanks to the master whom I serve, I have no need of assistance from any one.”

“Your master, who is he?”

“I have asked no questions, monsieur.”

“It is true.”

“Besides, your wound begins to inflame; I advise you to talk less.”

“You are right; but I want my surgeon.”

“I am returning to Paris, as I told you: give me his address.”

“M. de Carmainges, give me your word of honor that if I intrust you with a letter it shall be given to the person to whom it is addressed.”

“I give it, monsieur.”

“I believe you; I am sure I may trust you. I must tell you a part of my secret. I belong to the guards of Madame de Montpensier.”

“Oh! I did not know she had guards.”

“In these troublous times, monsieur, every one guards himself as well as he can, and the house of Guise being a princely one — ”

“I asked for no explanation, monsieur.”

“Well, I had a mission to Amboise; when on the road I saw my enemy; you know the rest.” — ”Yes.”

"Stopped by this wound, I must report to the duchesse the reason of my delay."

"Well?"

"Will you therefore put into her own hands the letter I am about to write?"

"I will seek for ink and paper."

"It is needless, my soldier will get my tablets."

He instructed the soldier to take them from his pocket, opened them by a spring, wrote some lines in pencil, and shut them again. It was impossible for any one who did not know the secret to open them without breaking them.

"Monsieur," said Ernanton, "in three days these tablets shall be delivered."

"Into her own hands?"

"Yes, monsieur."

The duke, exhausted by talking, and by the effort of writing the letter, sank back on his straw.

"Monsieur," said the soldier, in a tone little in harmony with his dress, "you bound me very tight, it is true, but I shall regard my chains as bonds of friendship, and will prove it to you some day."

And he held out a hand whose whiteness Ernanton had already remarked.

"So be it," said he, smiling; "it seems I have gained two friends."

"Do not despise them; one has never too many."

"That is true," said Ernanton; and he left them.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE STABLE-YARD.

Ernanton arrived at Paris on the third day. At three in the afternoon he entered the Louvre, among his comrades. The Gascons called out in surprise at seeing him, and M. de Loignac looked gloomy, and signed to him to enter a little room, where he always gave his private audiences.

"This is nice behavior, monsieur," said he; "five days and nights absent; and you whom I thought so well of."

"Monsieur, I did what I was told to do."

"What were you told to do?"

"To follow M. de Mayenne, and I have followed him."

"For five days and nights?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Then he has left Paris?"

"He left that same evening, and that seemed to me suspicious."

"You are right, monsieur, go on."

Ernanton related clearly and energetically all that had taken place. When Ernanton mentioned the letter:

"You have it, monsieur?" asked De Loignac.

"Yes, monsieur."

"Diable! that deserves attention; come with me, I beg of you."

Ernanton followed De Loignac to the courtyard of the Louvre. All was preparing for the king's going out, and M. d'Epernon was seeing two new horses tried, which had been sent from England, as a present from Elizabeth to Henri, and which were that day to be harnessed to the king's carriage for the first time.

De Loignac approached D'Epernon.

"Great news, M. le Duc," said he.

"What is it?" said D'Epernon, drawing to one side.

"M. de Carmainges has seen M. de Mayenne lying wounded in a village beyond Orleans."

“Wounded!”

“Yes, and more, he has written a letter to Madame de Montpensier, which M. de Carmainges has in his pocket.”

“Oh! oh! send M. de Carmainges to me.”

“Here he is,” said De Loignac, signing to Ernanton to advance.

“Well, monsieur, it seems you have a letter from M. de Mayenne.”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Addressed to Madame de Montpensier?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Give it to me,” and the duke extended his hand.

“Pardon, monsieur, but did you ask me for the duke’s letter?”

“Certainly.”

“You do not know that this letter was confided to me.”

“What matters that?”

“It matters much, monsieur; I passed my word to the duke to give it to Madame la Duchesse herself.”

“Do you belong to the king, or M. de Mayenne?”

“To the king.”

“Well! the king wishes to see the letter.”

“Monsieur, you are not the king.”

“I think you forget to whom you speak, M. de Carmainges.”

“I remember perfectly, monsieur, and that is why I refuse.”

“You refuse?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“M. de Carmainges, you forget your oath of fidelity.”

“Monsieur, I have sworn fidelity only to one person, and that is the king; if he asks me for the letter, he must have it, but he is not here.”

“M. de Carmainges,” said the duke, growing very angry, “you are like the rest of the Gascons; blind in prosperity, your good fortune dazzles you, and the possession of a state secret is a weight too heavy for you to carry.”

“The only thing I find heavy, monsieur, is the disgrace into which I seem likely to fall; not my fortune, which my refusal to obey you renders, I know, very precarious; but, no matter; I do what I ought to do, and no one, excepting the king, shall see this letter, but the person to whom it is addressed.”

“De Loignac,” cried D’Epernon, “place M. de Carmainges in arrest at once.”

"It is certain that will prevent me from delivering the letter for a time, but once I come out — "

"If you never do come out?"

"I shall come out, monsieur; unless you have me assassinated. Yes, I shall come out, the walls are less strong than my will, and then — "

"Well?"

"I will speak to the king."

"To prison with him, and take away the letter," cried D'Epernon, beside himself with rage.

"No one shall touch it," cried Ernanton, starting back and drawing from his breast the tablet of M. de Mayenne, "for I will break it to pieces, since I can save it in no other way; M. de Mayenne will approve my conduct, and the king will pardon me."

The young man was about to execute his threat, when a touch arrested his arm. He turned and saw the king, who, coming down the staircase behind them, had heard the end of the discussion.

"What is the matter, gentlemen?" said he.

"Sire," cried D'Epernon, furiously, "this man, one of your Forty-five Guardsmen, of which he shall soon cease to form part, being sent by me to watch M. de Mayenne, in Paris, followed him to Orleans, and received from him a letter for Madame de Montpensier."

"You have received this letter?" asked the king of Ernanton.

"Yes, sire, but M. d'Epernon does not tell you under what circumstances."

"Well, where is this letter?"

"That is just the cause of the quarrel, sire. M. de Carmainges resolutely refuses to give it to me, and determines to carry it to its address."

Carmainges bent one knee before the king. "Sire," said he, "I am a poor gentleman, but a man of honor. I saved the life of your messenger, who was about to be assassinated by M. de Mayenne and six of his followers, for I arrived just in time to turn the fortune of the combat."

"And M. de Mayenne?"

"Was dangerously wounded."

"Well, after?"

"Your messenger, sire, who seemed to have a particular hatred of M. de Mayenne — "

The king smiled.

“Wished to kill his enemy; perhaps he had the right, but I thought that in my presence, whose sword belongs to your majesty, this vengeance became a political assassination, and — ”

“Go on, monsieur.”

“I saved the life of M. de Mayenne, as I had saved that of your messenger.”

D’Epernon shrugged his shoulders with a scornful smile.

“Go on,” said the king.

“M. de Mayenne, reduced to one companion, for the four others were killed, did not wish to separate from him, and, ignorant that I belonged to your majesty, confided to me a letter to his sister. I have this letter, sire, and here it is; I offer it to your majesty who has the right to dispose of it and of me. My honor is dear to me, sire, but I place it fearlessly in your hands.”

Ernanton, so saying, held out the tablets to the king, who gently put them back.

“What did you say, D’Epernon?” said he; “M. de Carmainges is an honest man and a faithful servant?”

“What did I say, sire.”

“Yes; I heard you pronounce the word ‘prison.’ Mordieu! on the contrary, when one meets a man like M. de Carmainges, it is reward we should speak of. A letter, duke, belongs only to the bearer and to the person to whom it is sent. You will deliver your letter, M. de Carmainges.”

“But, sire,” said D’Epernon, “think of what that letter may contain. Do not play at delicacy, when, perhaps, your majesty’s life is concerned.”

“You will deliver your letter, M. de Carmainges,” said the king.

“Thanks, sire,” said Carmainges, beginning to retire.

“Where do you take it?”

“To Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier, I believed I had had the honor of telling your majesty.”

“I mean, to the Hotel Guise, St. Denis, or where?”

“I had no instructions on that subject, sire. I shall take the letter to the Hotel Guise, and there I shall learn where Madame de Montpensier is.”

“And when you have found her?”

“I will deliver my letter.”

“Just so. M. de Carmainges, have you promised anything else to M. de Mayenne than to deliver that letter to his sister?”

“No, sire.”

“No secrecy as to the place where you find her?” — ”No, sire.”

“Then I will impose only one condition on you.”

“I am your majesty’s servant.”

“Deliver your letter, and then come to me at Vincennes, where I shall be this evening.”

“Yes, sire.”

“And you will tell me where you found the duchesse?”

“I will, sire.”

“I ask no other confidences; remember.”

“Sire, I promise.”

“What imprudence, sire!” cried D’Epernon.

“There are men you cannot understand, duke. This one is loyal to Mayenne, he will be loyal to me.”

“Toward you, sire, I shall be more than loyal — I shall be devoted,” cried Ernanton.

“Now, D’Epernon, no more quarrels,” said the king; “and you must at once pardon in this brave fellow what you looked upon as a want of loyalty, but which I regard as a proof of honesty.”

“Sire,” said Ernanton, “M. le Duc is too superior a man not to have discovered, through my disobedience (for which I confess my regret), my respect for him; only, before all things, I must do what I believe to be my duty.”

“Parfandious!” said the duke, changing his expression like a mask, “this trial has done you honor, my dear Carmainges, and you are really a fine fellow — is he not, De Loignac? However, we gave him a good fright;” and the duke burst out laughing.

De Loignac did not answer; he could not lie like his illustrious chief.

“If it was a trial, so much the better,” said the king, doubtfully; “but I counsel you not to try these experiments often; too many people would give way under them. Now, let us go, duke; you accompany me?”

“It was your majesty’s order that I should ride by the door?”

“Yes; and who goes the other side?”

“A devoted servant of your majesty’s, M. de St. Maline,” said D’Epernon, glancing at Ernanton to see the effect of his words: but Ernanton remained unmoved.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE SEVEN SINS OF MAGDALENE.

The king, however, on seeing his horses, did not wish to be alone in the carriage, but desired D’Epernon to sit by him. De Loignac and St. Maline rode on each side, and an outrider in front. The king was, as usual, surrounded by dogs, and there was also a table in the carriage, covered with illuminated pictures, which the king cut out with wonderful skill, in spite of the movement of the carriage. He was just then occupied with the life of Magdalene, the sinner. The different pictures were labeled “Magdalene gives way to the sin of anger” — ”Magdalene gives way to the sin of gluttony,” and so on through the seven cardinal sins. The one that the king was occupied with, as they passed through the Porte St. Antoine, represented Magdalene giving way to anger.

The beautiful sinner, half-lying on cushions, and with no other covering than the magnificent hair with which she was afterward to wipe the feet of Jesus, was having a slave, who had broken a precious vase, thrown into a pond filled with lampreys, whose eager heads were protruding from the water: while on the other side, a woman, even less dressed than her mistress, as her hair was bound up, was being flogged, because she had, while dressing her mistress’s head, pulled out some of those magnificent hairs, whose profusion might have rendered her more indulgent to such a fault. In the background were visible some dogs being whipped for having allowed beggars to pass quietly, and some cocks being murdered for having crowed too loudly in the morning.

On arriving at the Croix-Faubin, the king had finished this figure, and was passing to “Magdalene giving way to the sin of gluttony.”

This represented a beautiful woman lying on one of those beds of purple and gold on which the ancients used to take their repasts; all that the Romans had most recherche in meat, in fish, and in fruit, dormice in honey, red mullets, lobsters from Stromboli, and pomegranates from Sicily, ornamented the table, while on the ground some dogs were disputing for a pheasant, while the air was full of birds, which had carried off from the table, figs, strawberries, and cherries. Magdalene held in her hand, filled with white liquor, one of those singularly-shaped glasses which Petronius has described in his feasts.

Fully occupied with this important work, the king merely raised his eyes as they passed by the convent of the Jacobins, from which vespers was sounding on every bell, and of which every window and door was closed.

But a hundred steps further on, an attentive observer would have seen him throw a more curious glance on a fine-looking house on his left, which, built in the midst of a charming garden, opened on the road. This house was called Bel-Esbat, and, unlike the convent, had every window open with the exception of one, before which hung a blind. As the king passed, this blind moved perceptibly; Henri smiled at D'Epernon, and then fell to work on another picture. This was the sin of luxury. The artist had represented this in such glowing colors, and had painted the sin with so much courage and minuteness, that we can only describe a small part of it, viz.: — that Magdalene's guardian angel was flying back to heaven affrighted, and hiding his face in his hands. All this occupied the king so much, that he never noticed an image of vanity who rode by his carriage. It was a pity; for St. Maline was very happy and proud on his horse, as he rode so near that he could hear the king say to his dog, "Gently, M. Love, you get in my way;" or to M. le Duc d'Epernon, "Duke, I believe these horses will break my neck." From time to time, however, St. Maline glanced at De Loignac, who was too much accustomed to these honors not to be indifferent to them; and he could not but feel the superiority of his calm and modest demeanor, and even would try to imitate, for a few minutes, until the thought would recur again, "I am seen and looked at, and people say, 'Who is that happy gentleman who accompanies the king?'" St. Maline's happiness seemed likely to last for a long time, for the horses, covered with harness heavy with gold and embroidery, and imprisoned in shafts like those of David's ark, did not advance rapidly. But as he was growing too proud, something peculiarly annoying to him came to temper it down; he heard the king pronounce the name of Ernanton, and not once, but two or three times. St. Maline strained his attention to hear more, but some noise or movement always prevented him. Either the king uttered some exclamation of regret at an unlucky cut of the scissors, or one of the dogs began to bark. So that between Paris and Vincennes, the name of Ernanton had been pronounced six times by the king, and four times by D'Epernon, without St. Maline's knowing the reason. He persuaded himself that the king was merely inquiring the cause of Ernanton's disappearance, and that D'Epernon was explaining it. At last they arrived at Vincennes, and as the king had still three sins to cut out, he went at once to his own room to finish them. It was a bitterly cold day, therefore St. Maline sat down in a chimney corner to warm himself, and was nearly falling asleep, when De Loignac put his hand on his shoulder.

"You must work to-day," said he; "you shall sleep some other day; so get up, M. de St. Maline."

"I will not sleep for a fortnight, if necessary, monsieur."

"Oh! we shall not be so exacting as that." — "What must I do, monsieur?"

"Get on your horse and return to Paris."

"I am ready; my horse is standing saddled."

"Good; go then straight to the room of the Forty-five, and awaken every one; but excepting three, whom I will name to you, no one must know where he is going, nor what he is about to do."

"I will obey these instructions implicitly."

"Here then are some more; leave fourteen of these gentlemen at the Porte St. Antoine, fifteen others half way, and bring the rest here."

"Yes, monsieur; but at what hour must we leave Paris?"

"When night falls."

"On horseback or on foot?"

"On horseback."

"Armed?"

"Fully; with daggers, pistols, and swords."

"With armor?"

"Yes."

"What else?"

"Here are three letters; one for M. de Chalabre, one for M. de Biron, and one for yourself. M. de Chalabre will command the first party, M. de Biron the second, and yourself the third."

"Good, monsieur."

"These letters are only to be opened at six o'clock. M. de Chalabre will open his at the Porte St. Antoine, M. de Biron his at the Croix Faubin, and you yours on your return."

“Must we come quickly?”

“As quickly as possible, without creating suspicion. Let each troop come out of Paris by a different gate; M. de Chalabre by the Porte Bourdelle; M. de Biron by the Porte du Temple, and you through the Porte St. Antoine. All other instructions are in the letters. Go quickly from here to the Croix Faubin, but then slowly; you have still two hours before dark, which is more than necessary. Now do you well understand your orders?”

“Perfectly, monsieur.”

“Fourteen in the first troop, fifteen in the second, and fifteen in the third; it is evident they do not count Ernanton, and that he no longer forms part of the Forty-five,” said St. Maline to himself when De Loignac was gone.

He fulfilled all his directions punctually. When he arrived among the Forty-five, the greater number of them were already preparing for their supper. Thus the noble Lardille de Chavantrade had prepared a dish of mutton stewed with carrots and spices, after the method of Gascony, to which Militor had occasionally aided by trying the pieces of meat and vegetable with a fork.

Pertinax de Montcrabeau, and the singular servant who spoke to him so familiarly, were preparing supper for themselves and six companions, who had each contributed six sous toward it; each one, in fact, was disposing according to his fancy of the money of his majesty Henri III. One might judge of the character of each man by the aspect of his little lodging. Some loved flowers, and displayed on their window-sills some fading rose or geranium; others had, like the king, a taste for pictures; others had introduced a niece or housekeeper; and M. d’Epernon had told M. de Loignac privately to shut his eyes on these things. At eight o’clock in winter, and ten in summer, they went to bed; but always leaving fifteen on guard. As, however, it was but half-past five when St. Maline entered, he found every one about, and, as we said, gastronomically inclined. But with one word he put an end to all this: “To horse, gentlemen,” said he; and leaving them without another word, went to explain his orders to MM. de Biron and Chalabre. Some, while buckling on their belts and grasping their cuirasses, ate great mouthfuls, washed down by a draught of wine; and others, whose supper was less advanced, armed themselves with resignation. They called over the names, and only forty-four, including St. Maline, answered.

“M. Ernanton de Carmainges is missing,” said De Chalabre, whose turn it was to exercise these functions. A profound joy filled the heart of St. Maline, and a smile played on his lips, a rare thing with this somber and envious man.

The forty-four therefore set off on their different routes.

CHAPTER XL.

BEL-ESBAT.

It is needless to say that Ernanton, whom St. Maline thought ruined, was, on the contrary, pursuing the course of his unexpected and ascending fortunes. He had, of course, gone first to the Hotel Guise. There, after having knocked at the great door and had it opened, he was only laughed at when he asked for an interview with the duchess. Then, as he insisted, they told him that he ought to know that her highness lived at Soissons and not at Paris. Ernanton was prepared for this reception, so it did not discourage him.

"I am grieved at her highness's absence," said he, "for I had a communication of great importance to deliver to her from the Duc de Mayenne."

"From the Duc de Mayenne! Who charged you to deliver it?"

"The duke himself."

"The duke! and where, pray? for he is not at Paris either!"

"I know that, as I met him on the road to Blois."

"On the road to Blois?" said the porter, a little more attentive.

"Yes, and he there charged me with a message for Madame de Montpensier."

"A message?"

"A letter." — "Where is it?"

"Here," said Ernanton, striking his doublet.

"Will you let me see it?"

"Willingly." And Ernanton drew out the letter.

"What singular ink!" said the man.

"It is blood," said Ernanton, calmly.

The porter grew pale at these words, and at the idea that this blood belonged to M. de Mayenne. At this time, when there was great dearth of ink and abundance of blood spilled, it was not uncommon for lovers to write to their mistresses, or absent relations to their families, in this liquid.

"Monsieur," said the servant, "I do not know if you will find Madame de Montpensier in Paris or its environs; but go to a house in the Faubourg St. Antoine, called Bel-Esbat, which belongs to the duchesse; it is the first on the left hand going to Vincennes, after the convent of the Jacobins. You will be sure to find some one there in the service of the duchesse sufficiently in her confidence to be able to tell you where Madame la Duchesse is just now."

"Thank you," said Ernanton, who saw that the man either could or would say no more.

He found Bel-Esbat easily, and without more inquiries, rang, and the door opened.

"Enter," said a man, who then seemed to wait for some password, but as Ernanton did not give any, he asked him what he wanted.

"I wish to speak to Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier."

"And why do you come here for her?"

"Because the porter at the Hotel Guise sent me here."

"Madame la Duchesse is not here."

"That is unlucky, as it will prevent me from fulfilling the mission with which M. de Mayenne charged me."

"For Madame la Duchesse?"

"Yes."

"From M. le Duc de Mayenne?"

"Yes."

The valet reflected a moment. "Monsieur," said he, "I cannot answer; there is some one else whom I must consult. Please to wait."

"These people are well served," thought Ernanton. "Certainly, they must be dangerous people who think it necessary to hide themselves in this manner. One cannot enter a house of the Guises as you can the Louvre. I begin to think that it is not the true king of France whom I serve."

He looked round him; the courtyard was deserted, but all the doors of the stables were open, as if they expected some troop to enter and take up their quarters. He was interrupted by the return of the valet, followed by another.

"Leave me your horse, monsieur," said he, "and follow my comrade; you will find some one who can answer you much better than I can."

Ernanton followed the valet, and was shown into a little room, where a simply though elegantly dressed lady was seated at an embroidery frame.

"Here is the gentleman from M. de Mayenne, madame," said the servant.

She turned, and Ernanton uttered a cry of surprise.

"You, madame!" cried he, recognizing at once his page and the lady of the litter.

"You!" cried the lady in her turn, letting her work drop, and looking at Ernanton.

"Leave us," said she to the valet.

"You are of the household of Madame de Montpensier, madame?" said Ernanton.

"Yes; but you, monsieur, how do you bring here a message from the Duc de Mayenne?"

"Through unforeseen circumstances, which it would take too long to repeat," replied Ernanton, cautiously.

"Oh! you are discreet, monsieur," said the lady, smiling.

"Yes, madame, whenever it is right to be so."

"But I see no occasion for your discretion here; for, if you really bring a message from the person you say — Oh! do not look angry; if you really do, I say, it interests me sufficiently that, in remembrance of our acquaintance, short though it was, you should tell it to me."

The lady threw into these words all the caressing and seductive grace that a pretty woman can.

"Madame," replied Ernanton, "you cannot make me tell what I do not know."

"And still less what you will not tell."

"Madame, all my mission consists in delivering a letter to her highness."

"Well, then, give me the letter," said the lady, holding out her hand.

"Madame, I believed I had had the honor of telling you that this letter was addressed to the duchesse."

"But, as the duchesse is absent, and I represent her here, you may — "

"I cannot, madame."

"You distrust me, monsieur?"

"I ought to do so, madame; but," said the young man, with an expression there was no mistaking, "in spite of the mystery of your conduct, you have inspired me, I confess, with very different sentiments."

"Really," said the lady, coloring a little under Ernanton's ardent gaze.

Ernanton bowed.

"Take care, monsieur," said she, laughing, "you are making a declaration of love."

“Yes, madame; I do not know if I may ever see you again, and the opportunity is too precious for me to let it slip.”

“Then, monsieur, I understand.”

“That I love you, madame; that is easy to understand.”

“No, but how you came here.”

“Ah, pardon, madame, but now it is I who do not understand.”

“I think that, wishing to see me again, you invented a pretext to get in.”

“I, madame! you judge me ill. I was ignorant if I should ever see you again, and I hoped only from chance, which already had twice thrown me in your way; but invent a pretext I could never do. I am strange, perhaps; I do not think like all the world.”

“Oh! you say you are in love, and you have scruples as to the manner of introducing yourself again to her you love. It is very fine, monsieur, but I partly guessed it.”

“How, madame, if you please?”

“The other day you met me; I was in a litter, you recognized me, and you did not follow me.”

“Madame, you are confessing you paid some attention to me.”

“And why not? Surely the way in which we first met justified my putting my head out of my litter to look after you when you passed. But you galloped away, after uttering an ‘Ah!’ which made me tremble in my litter.”

“I was forced to go away, madame.”

“By your scruples?”

“No, madame, by my duty.”

“Well!” said the lady, laughing, “I see that you are a reasonable, circumspect lover, who, above all things, fears to compromise himself.”

“If you had inspired me with certain fears, there would be nothing astonishing in it. Is it customary that a woman should dress as a man, force the barriers, and come to see an unfortunate wretch drawn to pieces, using meanwhile all sorts of gesticulations perfectly incomprehensible?”

The lady grew rather pale, although she tried to smile.

Ernanton went on. “Is it natural also that this lady, after this strange announcement, fearful of being arrested, should fly as though she were a thief, although she is in the service of Madame de Montpensier, a powerful princess, although not much in favor at court?”

This time the lady smiled again, but ironically.

"You are not clear-sighted, monsieur, in spite of your pretension to be an observer: for, with a little sense, all that seems obscure to you would have been explained. Was it not very natural that Madame de Montpensier should be interested in the fate of M. de Salcede, in what he might be tempted to say, what true or false revelations he might utter to compromise the house of Lorraine? And if that was natural, monsieur, was it not also so, that this princess should send some one, some safe, intimate friend, to be present at the execution, and bring her all the details? Well, monsieur, this person was I. Now, do you think I could go in my woman's dress? Do you think I could remain indifferent to what was going on?"

"You are right, madame; and now I admire as much your logic and talent as I did before your beauty."

"Thank you, monsieur. And now that we know each other, and that everything is explained, give me the letter, since it does exist."

"Impossible, madame."

The unknown seemed trying not to grow angry. "Impossible?" repeated she.

"Yes, impossible; for I swore to M. de Mayenne to deliver it only to the duchesse herself."

"Say, rather," cried the lady, giving way to her irritation, "that you have no letter; that, in spite of your pretended scruples, it was a mere pretext for getting in here; that you wished to see me again, and that was all. Well, monsieur, you are satisfied; not only you have effected your entrance, but you have seen me, and have told me you adore me."

"In that, as in all the rest, I have told you truth, madame."

"Well, so be it, you adore me; you wished to see me, and you have seen me. I have procured you a pleasure in return for a service. We are quits. Adieu!"

"I will obey you, madame; since you send me away, I will go."

"Yes," cried she, now really angry, "but if you know me, I do not know you. You have too much advantage over me. Ah! you think you can enter, on some pretext, into the house of a princess, and go away and say, 'I succeeded in my perfidy.' Ah! monsieur, that is not the behavior of a gallant man."

"It seems to me, madame, that you are very hard on what would have been, after all, only a trick of love, if it had not been, as I have already told you, an affair of the greatest importance. I put aside all your injurious expressions, and I will forget all I might have said, affectionate or tender, since you are so badly disposed toward me. But I will not go out from here under the weight of your unworthy suspicions. I have a letter from the duke for Madame de Montpensier, and here it is; you can see the handwriting and the address."

Ernanton held out the letter to the lady, but without leaving go of it.

She cast her eyes on it, and cried, "His writing! Blood!"

Without replying, Ernanton put the letter back in his pocket, bowed low, and, very pale and bitterly hurt, turned to go. But she ran after him, and caught him by the skirt of his cloak.

"What is it, madame?" said he.

"For pity's sake, pardon me; has any accident happened to the duke?"

"You ask me to pardon you, only that you may read this letter, and I have already told you that no one shall read it but the duchesse."

"Ah! obstinate and stupid that you are," cried the duchess, with a fury mingled with majesty; "do you not recognize me? — or rather, could you not divine that I was the mistress? — and are these the eyes of a servant? I am the Duchesse de Montpensier; give me the letter."

"You are the duchesse!" cried Ernanton, starting back.

"Yes, I am. Give it to me; I want to know what has happened to my brother."

But instead of obeying, as the duchess expected, the young man, recovering from his first surprise, crossed his arms.

"How can I believe you, when you have already lied to me twice?"

The duchess's eyes shot forth fire at these words, but Ernanton stood firm.

"Ah! you doubt still — you want proofs!" cried she, tearing her lace ruffles with rage.

"Yes, madame."

She darted toward the bell, and rang it furiously; a valet appeared.

"What does madame want?" said he.

She stamped her foot with rage. "Mayneville!" cried she, "I want Mayneville. Is he not here?"

"Yes, madame."

"Let him come here."

The valet went, and, a minute after, Mayneville entered.

"Did you send for me, madame?" said he.

“Madame! And since when am I simply madame?” cried she angrily.

“Your highness!” said Mayneville, in surprise.

“Good!” said Ernanton, “I have now a gentleman before me, and if he has lied, I shall know what to do.”

“You believe then, at last?” said the duchess.

“Yes, madame, I believe, and here is the letter;” and, bowing, the young man gave to Madame de Montpensier the letter so long disputed.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE LETTER OF M. DE MAYENNE.

The duchess seized the letter, opened it, and read it eagerly, while various expressions passed over her face, like clouds over the sky. When she had finished, she gave it to Mayneville to read. It was as follows:

"MY SISTER — I tried to do myself the work I should have left to others, and I have been punished for it. I have received a sword wound from the fellow whom you know. The worst of it is, that he has killed five of my men, and among them Boularon and Desnoises, who are my best, after which he fled. I must tell you that he was aided by the bearer of this letter, a charming young man, as you may see. I recommend him to you; he is discretion itself.

"One merit which he will have, I presume, in your eyes, my dear sister, is having prevented my conqueror from killing me, as he much wished, having pulled off my mask when I had fainted, and recognized me.

"I recommend you, sister, to discover the name and profession of this discreet cavalier; for I suspect him, while he interests me. To my offers of service, he replied that the master whom he served let him want for nothing.

"I can tell you no more about him, but that he pretends not to know me. I suffer much, but believe my life is not in danger. Send me my surgeon at once; I am lying like a horse upon straw, the bearer will tell you where.

"Your affectionate brother,

"MAYENNE."

When they had finished reading, the duchess and Mayneville looked at each other in astonishment. The duchess broke the silence first.

"To whom," said she, "do we owe the signal service that you have rendered us, monsieur?"

"To a man who, whenever he can, helps the weak against the strong."

"Will you give me some details, monsieur?"

Ernanton told all he had seen, and named the duke's place of retreat.

Madame de Montpensier and Mayneville listened with interest. When he had finished, the duchess said:

“May I hope, monsieur, that you will continue the work so well begun, and attach yourself to our house?”

These words, said in the gracious tone that the duchess knew so well how to use, were very flattering to Ernanton, after the avowal which he had made; but the young man, putting vanity aside, attributed them to simple curiosity.

He knew well that the king, in making it a condition that he should reveal the duchess’s place of abode, had some object in view. Two interests contended within him — his love, *that* he might sacrifice; and his honor, which he could not. The temptation was all the stronger, that by avowing his position near the king, he should gain an enormous importance in the eyes of the duchess; and it was not a light consideration for a young man to be important in the eyes of the Duchesse de Montpensier. St. Maline would not have resisted a minute. All these thoughts rushed through Ernanton’s mind, but ended by making him stronger than before.

“Madame,” said he, “I have already had the honor of telling M. de Mayenne that I serve a good master, who treats me too well for me to desire to seek another.”

“My brother tells me in his letter, monsieur, that you seemed not to recognize him. How, if, you did not know him, then, did you use his name to penetrate to me?”

“M. de Mayenne seemed to wish to preserve his incognito, madame; and I, therefore, did not think I ought to recognize him; and it might have been disagreeable for the peasants to know what an illustrious guest they were entertaining. Here there was no reason for secrecy; on the contrary, the name of M. de Mayenne opened the way to you; so I thought that here, as there, I acted rightly.”

The duchess smiled, and said, “No one could extricate himself better from an embarrassing question: and you are, I must confess, a clever man.”

“I see no cleverness in what I have had the honor of telling you, madame.”

“Well, monsieur,” said the duchess, impatiently, “I see clearly that you will tell nothing. You do not reflect that gratitude is a heavy burden for one of my house to bear; that you have twice rendered me a service, and that if I wished to know your name, or rather who you are — ”

"I know, madame, you would learn it easily; but you would learn it from some one else, and I should have told nothing."

"He is always right," cried the duchess, with a look which gave Ernanton more pleasure than ever a look had done before. Therefore he asked no more, but like the gourmand who leaves the table when he thinks he has had the best bit, he bowed, and prepared to take leave.

"Then, monsieur, that is all you have to tell me?" asked the duchess.

"I have executed my commission, and it only remains for me to present my humble respects to your highness."

The duchess let him go, but when the door shut behind him, she stamped her foot impatiently.

"Mayneville," said she, "have that young man followed."

"Impossible, madame; all our household are out, I myself am waiting for the event. It is a bad day on which to do anything else than what we have decided to do."

"You are right, Mayneville; but afterward — "

"Oh! afterward, if you please, madame."

"Yes; for I suspect him, as my brother does."

"He is a brave fellow, at all events; and really we are lucky, a stranger coming to render us such a service."

"Nevertheless, Mayneville, have him watched. But night is falling, and Valois must be returning from Vincennes."

"Oh! we have time before us; it is not eight o'clock, and our men have not arrived."

"All have the word, have they not?"

"All." — "They are trustworthy?"

"Tried, madame."

"How many do you expect?"

"Fifty; it is more than necessary, for besides them we have two hundred monks, as good as soldiers, if not better."

"As soon as our men have arrived, range your monks on the road."

"They are all ready, madame; they will intercept the way, our men will push the carriage toward them, the gates of the convent will be open, and will have but to close behind the carriage."

"Let us sup, then, Mayneville, it will pass the time. I am so impatient, I should like to push the hands of the clock."

"The hour will come; be easy."

“But our men?”

“They will be here; it is hardly eight.”

“Mayneville, my poor brother asks for his surgeon; the best surgeon, the best cure for his wound, will be a lock of the Valois’s shaved head, and the man who should carry him that present, Mayneville, would be sure to be welcome.”

“In two hours, madame, that man shall set out to find our dear duke in his retreat; he who went out of Paris as a fugitive shall return triumphantly.”

“One word more, Mayneville; are our friends in Paris warned?”

“What friends?” — ”The leaguers.”

“Heaven forbid, madame; to tell a bourgeois is to tell all Paris. Once the deed is done, and the prisoner safe in the cloister, we can defend ourselves against an army. Then we should risk nothing by crying from the roof of the convent, ‘We have the Valois!’“

“You are both skillful and prudent, Mayneville. Do you know, though, that my responsibility is great, and that no woman will ever have conceived and executed such a project?”

“I know it, madame; therefore I counsel you in trembling.”

“The monks will be armed under their robes?”

“Yes.”

“Mind you kill those two fellows whom we saw pass, riding at the sides of the carriage, then we can describe what passes as pleases us best.”

“Kill those poor devils, madame! do you think that necessary?”

“De Loignac! would he be a great loss?”

“He is a brave soldier.”

“A parvenu, like that other ill-looking fellow who pranced on the left, with his fiery eyes and his black skin.”

“Oh! that one I do not care so much about; I do not know him, and I agree with your highness in disliking his looks.”

“Then you abandon him to me?” laughed the duchess.

“Oh! yes, madame. What I said was only for your renown, and the morality of the party that we represent.”

“Good; Mayneville, I know you are a virtuous man, and I will sign you a certificate of it if you like. You need have nothing to do with it; they will defend the Valois and get killed. To you I recommend that young man.”

“Who?”

“He who just left us; see if he be really gone, and if he be not some spy sent by our enemies.”

Mayneville opened the window, and tried to look out.

“Oh! what a dark night,” said he.

“An excellent night: the darker the better. Therefore, good courage, my captain.”

“Yes, but we shall see nothing.”

“God, whom we fight for, will see for us.”

Mayneville, who did not seem quite so sure of the intervention of Providence in affairs of this nature, remained at the window looking out.

“Do you see any one?” asked the duchess.

“No, but I hear the tramp of horses.”

“It is they; all goes well.” And the duchess touched the famous pair of golden scissors at her side.

CHAPTER XLII.

HOW DOM GORENFLOT BLESSED THE KING AS HE PASSED BEFORE THE PRIORY OF THE JACOBINS.

Ernanton went away with a full heart but a quiet conscience; he had had the singular good fortune to declare his love to a princess, and to get over the awkwardness which might have resulted from it by the important conversation which followed. He had neither betrayed the king, M. de Mayenne, nor himself. Therefore he was content, but he still wished for many things, and, among others, a quick return to Vincennes, where the king expected him; then to go to bed and dream. He set off at full gallop as soon as he left Bel-Esbat, but he had scarcely gone a hundred yards when he came on a body of cavaliers who stretched right across the road. He was surrounded in a minute, and half a dozen swords and pistols presented at him.

“Oh!” said Ernanton, “robbers on the road, a league from Paris — ”

“Silence, if you please,” said a voice that Ernanton thought he recognized. “Your sword, your arms; quick.”

And one man seized the bridle of the horse, while another stripped him of his arms.

“Peste! what clever thieves!” said Ernanton. “At least, gentlemen, do me the favor to tell me — ”

“Why it is M. de Carmainges!” said the man who had seized his sword.

“M. de Pincornay!” cried Ernanton. “Oh, fie; what a bad trade you have taken up.”

“I said silence,” cried the voice of the chief; “and take this man to the depot.”

“But, M. de St. Maline, it is our companion, Ernanton de Carmainges.”

“Ernanton here!” cried St. Maline, angrily; “what is he doing here?”

“Good-evening, gentlemen,” said Carmainges; “I did not, I confess, expect to find so much good company.”

“Diable!” growled St. Maline; “this is unforeseen.”

"By me also, I assure you," said Ernanton, laughing.

"It is embarrassing; what were you doing here?"

"If I asked you that question, would you answer?"

"No."

"Then let me act as you would."

"Then you will not tell me?"

"No."

"Nor where you were going?"

Ernanton did not answer.

"Then, monsieur, since you do not explain, I must treat you like any other man."

"Do what you please, monsieur; only I warn you, you will have to answer for it."

"To M. de Loignac?"

"Higher than that."

"M. d'Epernon?"

"Higher still."

"Well, I have my orders, and I shall send you to Vincennes."

"That is capital; it is just where I was going."

"It is lucky that this little journey pleases you so much."

Ernanton was then conducted by his companions to the courtyard of Vincennes. Here he found fifty disarmed cavaliers, who, looking pale and dispirited, and surrounded by fifty light horse, were deploring their bad fortune, and anticipating a disastrous ending to an enterprise so well planned. The Forty-five had taken all these men, either by force or cunning, as they had, for precaution, come to the rendezvous either singly, or two or three together at most. Now all this would have rejoiced Ernanton had he understood it, but he saw without understanding.

"Monsieur," said he to St. Maline, "I see that you were told of the importance of my mission, and that, fearing some accident for me, you were good enough to take the trouble to escort me here: now I will tell you that you were right; the king expects me, and I have important things to say to him. I will tell the king what you have done for his service."

St. Maline grew red and then pale; but he understood, being clever when not blinded by passion, that Ernanton spoke the truth, and that he was expected. There was no joking with MM. de Loignac and d'Epernon;

therefore he said, “You are free, M. Ernanton; I am delighted to have been agreeable to you.”

Ernanton waited for no more, but began to mount the staircase which led to the king’s room. St. Maline followed him with his eyes, and saw De Loignac meet him on the stairs, and sign to him to come on. De Loignac then descended to see the captives with his own eyes, and pronounced the road perfectly safe and free for the king’s return. He knew nothing of the Jacobin convent, and the artillery and musketry of the fathers. But D’Epernon did, being perfectly informed by Nicholas Poulain. Therefore, when De Loignac came and said to his chief, “Monsieur, the roads are free,” D’Epernon replied:

“Very well, the king orders that the Forty-five guards form themselves into three compact bodies, one to go before and one on each side of the carriage, so that if there be any firing it may not reach the carriage.”

“Very good!” said De Loignac, “only I do not see where firing is to come from.”

“At the priory of the Jacobins, monsieur, they must draw close.”

This dialogue was interrupted by the king, who descended the staircase, followed by several gentlemen, among whom St. Maline, with rage in his heart, recognized Ernanton.

“Gentlemen,” said the king, “are my brave Forty-five all here?”

“Yes, sire,” said D’Epernon, showing them.

“Have the orders been given?”

“Yes, sire, and will be followed.”

“Let us go, then!”

The light horse were left in charge of the prisoners, and forbidden to address a word to them. The king got into his carriage with his naked sword by his side, and, as nine o’clock struck, they set off.

M. de Mayneville was still at his window, only he was infinitely less tranquil and hopeful, for none of his soldiers had appeared, and the only sound heard along the silent black road was now and then horses’ feet on the road to Vincennes. When this occurred, Mayneville and the duchess vainly tried to see what was going on. At last Mayneville became so anxious that he sent off a man on horseback, telling him to inquire of the first body of cavaliers he met. The messenger did not return, so the duchess sent another, but neither reappeared.

"Our officer," said the duchess, always hopeful, "must have been afraid of not having sufficient force, and must have kept our men to help him; it is prudent, but it makes one anxious."

"Yes, very anxious," said Mayneville, whose eyes never quitted the horizon.

"Mayneville, what can have happened?"

"I will go myself, madame, and find out."

"Oh, no! I forbid that. Who would stay with me, who would know our friends, when the time comes? No, no, stay, Mayneville; one is naturally apprehensive when a secret of this importance is concerned, but, really, the plan was too well combined, and, above all, too secret, not to succeed."

"Nine o'clock!" replied Mayneville, rather to himself than to the duchess. "Well! here are the Jacobins coming-out of their convent, and ranging themselves along the walls."

"Listen!" cried the duchess. They began to hear from afar a noise like thunder.

"It is cavalry!" cried the duchess; "they are bringing him, we have him at last;" and she clapped her hands in the wildest joy.

"Yes," said Mayneville, "I hear a carriage and the gallop of horses."

And he cried out loudly, "Outside the walls, my brothers, outside!"

Immediately the gates of the priory opened, and a hundred armed monks marched out, with Borromée at their head, and they heard Gorenflot's voice crying, "Wait for me, wait for me; I must be at the head to receive his majesty."

"Go to the balcony, prior," cried Borromée, "and overlook us all."

"Ah! true; I forgot that I had chosen that place, but luckily you are here to remind me."

Borromée dispatched four monks to stand behind the prior, on the pretense of doing him honor.

Soon the road was illumined by a number of torches, thanks to which the duchess and Mayneville could see cuirasses and swords shining. Incapable of moderation, she cried — "Go down, Mayneville, and bring him to me."

"Yes, madame, but one thing disquiets me."

"What is it?"

"I do not hear the signal agreed on."

"What use is the signal, since they have him?"

"But they were to arrest him only here, before the priory."

"They must have found a good opportunity earlier."

"I do not see our officer."

"I do."

"Where?"

"See that red plume."

"Ventrebleu! that red plume — "

"Well?"

"It is M. d'Epernon, sword in hand."

"They have left him his sword."

"Mordieu! he commands."

"Our people! There has been treason."

"Oh! madame; they are not our people."

"You are mad, Mayneville!"

But at that moment De Loignac, at the head of the first body of guards, cried, brandishing his large sword, "Vive le Roi!"

"Vive le Roi!" replied enthusiastically all the Forty-five, with their Gascon accent. The duchess grew pale and sank down almost fainting. Mayneville, somber, but resolute, drew his sword, not knowing but what the house was to be attacked. The cortege advanced, and had reached Bel-Esbat. Borromée came a little forward, and as De Loignac rode straight up to him, he immediately saw that all was lost, and determined on his part.

"Room for the king!" cried De Loignac. Gorenflot, delighted with the scene, extended his powerful arm and blessed the king from his balcony. Henri saw him, and bowed smilingly, and at this mark of favor Gorenflot gave out a "Vive le Roi!" with his stentorian voice. The rest, however, remained mute: they expected a different result from their two months' training. But Borromée, feeling certain from the absence of the duchess's troops of the fate of the enterprise, knew that to hesitate a moment was to be ruined, and he answered with a "Vive le Roi!" almost as sonorous as Gorenflot's. Then all the rest took it up.

"Thanks, reverend father, thanks," cried Henri; and then he passed the convent, where his course was to have terminated, like a whirlwind of fire, noise, and glory, leaving behind him Bel-Esbat in obscurity.

From her balcony, hidden by the golden scutcheon, behind which she was kneeling, the duchess saw and examined each face on which the light of the torches fell.

“Oh!” cried she, “look, Mayneville! That young man, my brother’s messenger, is in the king’s service! We are lost!”

“We must fly immediately, madame, now the Valois is conqueror.”

“We have been betrayed; it must have been by that young man, he must have known all.”

The king had already, with all his escort, entered the Porte St. Antoine, which had opened before him and shut behind him.

CHAPTER XLIII.

HOW CHICOT BLESSED KING LOUIS II. FOR HAVING INVENTED POSTING, AND RESOLVED TO PROFIT BY IT.

Chicot, to whom our readers will now permit us to return, after his last adventure, went on as rapidly as possible. Between the duke and him would now exist a mortal struggle, which would end only with life. Mayenne, wounded in his body, and still more grievously in his self-love, would never forgive him. Skillful in all mimicry, Chicot now pretended to be a great lord, as he had before imitated a good bourgeois, and thus never prince was served with more zeal than M. Chicot, when he had sold Ernanton's horse and had talked for a quarter of an hour with the postmaster. Chicot, once in the saddle, was determined not to stop until he reached a place of safety, and he went as quickly as constant fresh relays of horses could manage. He himself seemed made of iron, and, at the end of sixty leagues, accomplished in twenty hours, to feel no fatigue. When, thanks to this rapidity, in three days he reached Bordeaux, he thought he might take breath. A man can think while he gallops, and Chicot thought much. What kind of prince was he about to find in that strange Henri, whom some thought a fool, others a coward, and all a renegade without firmness. But Chicot's opinion was rather different to that of the rest of the world; and he was clever at divining what lay below the surface. Henri of Navarre was to him an enigma, although an unsolved one. But to know that he was an enigma was to have found out much. Chicot knew more than others, by knowing, like the old Grecian sage, that he knew nothing. Therefore, where most people would have gone to speak freely, and with their hearts on their lips, Chicot felt that he must proceed cautiously and with carefully-guarded words. All this was impressed on his mind by his natural penetration, and also by the aspect of the country through which he was passing. Once within the limits of the little principality of Navarre, a country whose poverty was proverbial in France, Chicot, to his great astonishment, ceased to see the impress of that misery which showed itself in every house and on every face in the finest provinces of that fertile France which he had just left. The woodcutter who passed along, with his arm leaning on the yoke of his favorite ox, the girl with short petticoats and quiet steps, carrying water on her head, the old man humming a song of his youthful days, the tame bird who warbled in his cage, or pecked at his plentiful supply of food, the brown, thin, but healthy children playing about the roads, all said in a language clear and intelligible to Chicot, "See, we are happy here."

Often he heard the sound of heavy wheels, and then saw coming along the wagon of the vintages, full of casks and of children with red faces. Sometimes an arquebuse from behind a hedge, or vines, or fig-trees, made him tremble for fear of an ambush, but it always turned out to be a hunter, followed by his great dogs, traversing the plain, plentiful in hares, to reach the mountain, equally full of partridges and heathcocks. Although the season was advanced, and Chicot had left Paris full of fog and hoar-frost, it was here warm and fine. The great trees, which had not yet entirely lost their leaves, which, indeed, in the south they never lose entirely, threw deep shadows from their reddening tops.

The Béarnais peasants, their caps over one ear, rode about on the little cheap horses of the country, which seem indefatigable, go twenty leagues at a stretch, and, never combed, never covered, give themselves a shake at the end of their journey, and go to graze on the first tuft of heath, their only and sufficing repast.

"Ventre de biche!" said Chicot; "I have never seen Gascony so rich. I confess the letter weighs on my mind, although I have translated it into Latin. However, I have never heard that Henriot, as Charles IX. called him, knew Latin; so I will give him a free French translation."

Chicot inquired, and was told that the king was at Nerac. He turned to the left to reach this place, and found the road full of people returning from the market at Condom. He learned, for Chicot, careful in answering the questions of others, was a great questioner himself, that the king of Navarre led a very joyous life, and was always changing from one love to another.

He formed the acquaintance of a young Catholic priest, a sheep-owner, and an officer, who had joined company on the road, and were traveling together. This chance association seemed to him to represent Navarre, learned, commercial, and military.

The officer recounted to him several sonnets which had been made on the loves of the king and the beautiful La Fosseuse, daughter of Rene de

Montmorency, baron de Fosseux.

“Oh!” said Chicot; “in Paris, we believe that the king is mad about Mlle. de Rebours.”

“Oh! that is at Pau.”

“What! has the king a mistress in every town?”

“Very likely; I know that he was the lover of Mlle. de Dayelle, while I was in garrison at Castelnaudry.”

“Oh! Mlle. Dayelle, a Greek, was she not?”

“Yes,” said the priest; “a Cyprian.”

“I am from Agen,” said the merchant; “and I know that when the king was there he made love to Mlle. de Tignonville.”

“Ventre de biche!” said Chicot; “he is a universal lover. But to return to Mlle. Dayelle; I knew her family.”

“She was jealous and was always threatening; she had a pretty little poniard, which she used to keep on her work-table, and one day, the king went away and carried the poniard with him, saying that he did not wish any misfortune to happen to his successor.”

“And Mlle. de Rebours?”

“Oh! they quarreled.”

“Then La Fosseuse is the last?”

“Oh! mon Dieu! yes; the king is mad about her.”

“But what does the queen say?”

“She carries her griefs to the foot of the crucifix,” said the priest.

“Besides,” said the officer, “she is ignorant of all these things.”

“That is not possible,” said Chicot.

“Why so?”

“Because Nerac is not so large that it is easy to hide things there.”

“As for that, there is a park there containing avenues more than 3,000 feet long of cypresses, plane trees, and magnificent sycamores, and the shade is so thick it is almost dark in broad daylight. Think what it must be at night.”

“And then the queen is much occupied.”

“Occupied?”

“Yes.”

“With whom, pray?”

“With God, monsieur,” said the priest.

“With God?”

“Yes, the queen is religious.”

"Religious! But there is no mass at the palace, is there?"

"No mass; do you take us for heathens? Learn, monsieur, that the king goes to church with his gentlemen, and the queen hears mass in her private chapel."

"The queen?"

"Yes."

"Queen Marguerite?"

"Yes; and I, unworthy as I am, received two crowns for officiating there; I even preached a very good sermon on the text, 'God has separated the wheat from the chaff.' It is in the Bible, 'God will separate,' but as it is a long time since that was written, I supposed that the thing was done."

"And the king?"

"He heard it, and applauded."

"I must add," said the officer, "that they do something else than hear mass at the palace; they give good dinners — and the promenades! I do not believe in any place in France there are more mustaches shown than in the promenades at Nerac."

Chicot knew Queen Marguerite well, and he knew that if she was blind to these love affairs, it was when she had some motive for placing a bandage over her eyes.

"Ventre de biche!" said he, "these alleys of cypresses, and 3,000 feet of shade, make me feel uncomfortable. I am coming from Paris to tell the truth at Nerac, where they have such deep shade, that women do not see their husbands walking with other women. Corbiou! they will be ready to kill me for troubling so many charming promenades. Happily I know the king is a philosopher, and I trust in that. Besides, I am an ambassador, and sacred."

Chicot entered Nerac in the evening, just at the time of the promenades which occupied the king so much. Chicot could see the simplicity of the royal manners by the ease with which he obtained an audience. A valet opened the door of a rustic-looking apartment bordered with flowers, above which was the king's antechamber and sitting-room. An officer or page ran to find the king, wherever he might be when any one wished for an audience, and he always came at the first invitation. Chicot was pleased with this; he judged the king to be open and candid, and he thought so still more when he saw the king coming up a winding walk bordered with laurels and roses, an old hat on his head, and dressed in a dark green doublet and gray boots, and with a cup and ball in his hand. He looked gay and happy, as though care never came near him.

"Who wants me?" said he to the page.

"A man who looks to me half courtier, half soldier."

Chicot heard these words, and advanced.

"It is I, sire."

"What! M. Chicot in Navarre! Ventre St. Gris! welcome, dear M. Chicot!"

"A thousand thanks, sire."

"Quite well? Ah, parbleu! we will drink together, I am quite delighted. Chicot, sit down there." And he pointed to a grass bank.

"Oh no, sire!"

"Have you come 200 leagues for me to leave you standing? No, no; sit down; one cannot talk standing."

"But, sire, respect — "

"Respect! here in Navarre! You are mad, my poor Chicot."

"No, sire, I am not mad, but I am an ambassador."

A slight frown contracted Henri's brow, but disappeared at once.

"Ambassador, from whom?"

"From Henri III. I come from Paris and the Louvre, sire."

"Oh! that is different. Come with me," said the king, rising, with a sigh.

"Page, take wine up to my room. Come, Chicot, I will conduct you."

Chicot followed the king, thinking, "How disagreeable! to come and trouble this honest man in his peace and his ignorance. Bah! he will be philosophical."

CHAPTER XLIV.

HOW THE KING OF NAVARRE GUESSES THAT “TURENNIUS” MEANS TURENNE, AND “MARGOTA” MARGOT.

The king of Navarre’s room was not very sumptuous, for he was not rich, and did not waste the little he had. It was large, and, with his bedroom, occupied all the right wing of the castle. It was well, though not royally furnished, and had a magnificent view over meadows and rivers. Great trees, willows, and planes hid the course of the stream every here and there, which glanced between, golden in the sunlight, or silver by that of the moon. This beautiful panorama was terminated by a range of hills, which looked violet in the evening light. The windows on the other side looked on to the court of the castle.

All these natural beauties interested Chicot less than the arrangements of the room, which was the ordinary sitting-room of Henri.

The king seated himself, with his constant smile, in a great armchair of leather with gilt nails, and Chicot, at his command, sat down on a stool similar in material. Henri looked at him smilingly, but with curiosity.

“You will think I am very curious, dear M. Chicot,” began the king, “but I cannot help it. I have so long looked on you as dead, that in spite of the pleasure your resurrection causes me, I can hardly realize the idea. Why did you so suddenly disappear from this world?”

“Oh, sire!” said Chicot, with his usual freedom, “you disappeared from Vincennes. Every one eclipses himself according to his need.”

“I recognize by your ready wit that it is not to your ghost I am speaking.” Then, more seriously, “But now we must leave wit and speak of business.”

“If it does not too much fatigue your majesty, I am ready.”

Henri’s eyes kindled.

“Fatigue me! It is true I grow rusty here. I have to-day exercised my body much, but my mind little.”

“Sire, I am glad of that; for, ambassador from a king, your relation and friend, I have a delicate commission to execute with your majesty.”

“Speak quickly — you pique my curiosity.”

“Sire — ”

“First, your letters of credit. I know it is needless, since you are the ambassador: but I must do my duty as king.”

“Sire, I ask your majesty’s pardon; but all the letters of credit that I had I have drowned in rivers, or scattered in the air.”

“And why so?”

“Because one cannot travel charged with an embassy to Navarre as if you were going to buy cloth at Lyons; and if one has the dangerous honor of carrying royal letters, one runs a risk of carrying them only to the tomb.”

“It is true,” said Henri, “the roads are not very safe, and in Navarre we are reduced, for want of money, to trust to the honesty of the people; but they do not steal much.”

“Oh, no, sire; they behave like lambs or angels, but that is only in Navarre; out of it one meets wolves and vultures around every prey. I was a prey, sire; so I had both.”

“At all events, I am glad to see they did not eat you.”

“Ventre de biche! sire, it was not their faults; they did their best, but they found me too tough, and could not get through my skin. But to return to my letter.”

“Since you have none, dear M. Chicot, it seems to me useless to return to it.”

“But I had one, sire, but I was forced to destroy it, for M. de Mayenne ran after me to steal it from me.”

“Mayenne?”

“In person.”

“Luckily he does not run fast. Is he still getting fatter?”

“Ventre de biche! not just now, I should think.”

“Why not?”

“Because, you understand, sire, he had the misfortune to catch me, and unfortunately got a sword wound.”

“And the letter?”

“He had not a glimpse of it, thanks to my precautions.”

“Bravo! your journey is interesting; you must tell me the details. But one thing disquiets me — if the letter was destroyed for M. de Mayenne, it is also destroyed for me. How, then, shall I know what my brother Henri wrote?”

“Sire, it exists in my memory.”

“How so?”

“Sire, before destroying it I learned it by heart.”

“An excellent idea, M. Chicot. You will recite it to me, will you not?”

“Willingly, sire.”

“Word for word.”

“Yes, sire, although I do not know the language, I have a good memory.”

“What language?”

“Latin.”

“I do not understand you; was my brother Henri’s letter written in Latin?”

“Yes, sire.”

“And why?”

“Ah! sire, doubtless because Latin is an audacious language — a language which may say anything, and in which Persius and Juvenal have immortalized the follies and errors of kings.”

“Kings?”

“And of queens, sire.”

The king began to frown.

“I mean emperors and empresses,” continued Chicot.

“You know Latin, M. Chicot?”

“Yes and no, sire.”

“You are lucky if it is ‘yes,’ for you have an immense advantage over me, who do not know it, but you — ”

“They taught me to read it, sire, as well as Greek and Hebrew.”

“You are a living book, M. Chicot.”

“Your majesty has found the exact word — ’a book.’ They print something on my memory, they send me where they like, I arrive, I am read and understood.”

“Or not understood.”

“How so, sire?”

“Why, if one does not know the language in which you are printed.”

“Oh, sire, kings know everything.”

“That is what we tell the people, and what flatterers tell us.”

“Then, sire, it is useless for me to recite to your majesty the letter which I learned by heart, since neither of us would understand it.”

“Is Latin not very much like Italian?”

“So they say, sire.”

"And Spanish?"

"I believe so."

"Then let us try. I know a little Italian, and my Gascon patois is something like Spanish: perhaps I may understand Latin without ever having learned it."

"Your majesty orders me to repeat it, then?"

"I beg you, dear M. Chicot."

Chicot began.

"Frater carissime,

"Sincerus amo quo te prosequebatur germanus noster Carolus Nonus, functus nuper, colet usque regiam nostram et pectori meo pertinaciter adhoeret."

"If I am not mistaken," said Henri, interrupting, "they speak in this phrase of love, obstinacy, and of my brother, Charles IX."

"Very likely," said Chicot; "Latin is such a beautiful language, that all that might go in one sentence."

"Go on," said the king.

Chicot began again, and Henri listened with the utmost calm to all the passages about Turenne and his wife, only at the word "Turennius," he said:

"Does not 'Turennius' mean Turenne?"

"I think so, sire."

"And 'Margota' must be the pet name which my brothers gave to their sister Marguerite, my beloved wife."

"It is possible," said Chicot; and he continued his letter to the end without the king's face changing in the least.

"Is it finished?" asked Henri, when he stopped.

"Yes, sire."

"It ought to be superb."

"I think so, also, sire."

"How unlucky that I only understood two words, 'Turennius' and 'Margota.'"

"An irreparable misfortune, sire, unless your majesty decides on having it translated by some one."

"Oh! no; you yourself, M. Chicot, who were so discreet in destroying the autograph, you would not counsel me to make this letter public?"

"But I think that the king's letter to you, recommended to me so carefully, and sent to your majesty by a private hand, must contain something important for your majesty to know."

"Yes, but to confide these important things to any one, I must have great confidence in him."

"Certainly."

"Well, I have an idea. Go and find my wife. She is learned, and will understand it if you recite it to her; then she can explain it to me."

"That is an excellent plan."

"Is it not? Go."

"I will, sire."

"Mind not to alter a word of the letter."

"That would be impossible, sire. To do that I must know Latin."

"Go, then, my friend."

Chicot took leave and went, more puzzled with the king than ever.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE AVENUE THREE THOUSAND FEET LONG.

The queen inhabited the other wing of the castle. The famous avenue began at her very window, and her eyes rested only on grass and flowers. A native poet (Marguerite, in the provinces as in Paris, was always the star of the poets) had composed a sonnet about her.

“She wishes,” said he, “by all these agreeable sights to chase away painful souvenirs.”

Daughter, sister, and wife of a king as she was, she had indeed suffered much. Her philosophy, although more boasted of than that of the king, was less solid; for it was due only to study, while his was natural. Therefore, stoical as she tried to be, time and grief had already begun to leave their marks on her countenance. Still she was remarkably beautiful. With her joyous yet sweet smile, her brilliant and yet soft eyes, Marguerite was still an adorable creature. She was idolized at Nerac, where she brought elegance, joy, and life. She, a Parisian princess, supported patiently a provincial life, and this alone was a virtue in the eyes of the inhabitants. Every one loved her, both as queen and as woman.

Full of hatred for her enemies, but patient that she might avenge herself better — feeling instinctively that under the mask of carelessness and long-suffering worn by Henri of Navarre he had a bad feeling toward her — she had accustomed herself to replace by poetry, and by the semblance of love, relations, husband, and friends.

No one, excepting Catherine de Medicis, Chicot, or some melancholy ghosts returned from the realms of death, could have told why Marguerite’s cheeks were often so pale, why her eyes often filled with tears, or why her heart often betrayed its melancholy void. Marguerite had no more confidantes; she had been betrayed too often.

However, the bad feeling which she believed Henri to have for her was only an instinct, and came rather from the consciousness of her own faults than from his behavior. He treated her like a daughter of France, always spoke to her with respectful politeness, or grateful kindness, and was always the husband and friend.

When Chicot arrived at the place indicated to him by Henri, he found no one; Marguerite, they said, was at the end of the famous avenue. When he had gone about two-thirds down it, he saw at the end, in an arbor covered with jasmine, clematis, and broom, a group covered with ribbons, feathers, velvets, and swords. Perhaps all this finery was slightly old-fashioned, but for Nerac it was brilliant, and even Chicot, coming straight from Paris, was satisfied with the coup d'oeil. A page preceded Chicot.

"What do you want, D' Aubiac?" asked the queen, when she saw him.

"Madame, a gentleman from Paris, an envoy from the Louvre to the king of Navarre, and sent by his majesty to you, desires to speak to your majesty."

A sudden flush passed over Marguerite's face, and she turned quickly. Chicot was standing near; Marguerite quitted the circle, and waving an adieu to the company, advanced toward the Gascon.

"M. Chicot!" cried she in astonishment.

"Here I am at your majesty's feet," said he, "and find you ever good and beautiful, and queen here, as at the Louvre."

"It is a miracle to see you here, monsieur; they said you were dead."

"I pretended to be so."

"And what do you want with us, M. Chicot? Am I happy enough to be still remembered in France?"

"Oh, madame," said Chicot, smiling, "we do not forget queens of your age and your beauty. The king of France even writes on this subject to the king of Navarre."

Marguerite colored. "He writes?"

"Yes, madame."

"And you have brought the letter?"

"I have not brought it, madame, for reasons that the king of Navarre will explain to you, but learned it by heart and repeated it."

"I understand. This letter was important, and you feared to lose it, or have it stolen."

"That is the truth, madame; but the letter was written in Latin."

"Oh, very well; you know I know Latin."

"And the king of Navarre, does he know it?"

"Dear M. Chicot, it is very difficult to find out what he does or does not know. If one can believe appearances, he knows very little of it, for he never seems to understand when I speak to any one in that language. Then you told him the purport of the letter?"

"It was to him it was addressed."

"And did he seem to understand?"

"Only two words."

"What were they?"

"Turennius et Margota."

"Turennius et Margota?"

"Yes; those two words were in the letter."

"Then what did he do?"

"He sent me to you, madame."

"To me?"

"Yes, saying that the letter contained things of too much importance to be confided to a stranger, and that it was better to take it to you, who were the most beautiful of learned ladies, and the most learned of beautiful ones."

"I will listen to you, M. Chicot, since such are the king's orders."

"Thank you, madame; where would you please it to be?"

"Come to my room."

Marguerite looked earnestly at Chicot, who, through pity for her, had let her have a glimpse of the truth. Perhaps she felt the need of a support, for she turned toward a gentleman in the group, and said: "M. de Turenne, your arm to the castle. Precede us, M. Chicot."

CHAPTER XLVI.

MARGUERITE’S ROOM.

Marguerite’s room was fashionably furnished; and tapestries, enamels, china, books and manuscripts in Greek, Latin and French covered all the tables; while birds in their cages, dogs on the carpet, formed a living world round Marguerite.

The queen was a woman to understand Epicurus, not in Greek only, but she occupied her life so well that from a thousand griefs she drew forth a pleasure.

Chicot was invited to sit down in a beautiful armchair of tapestry, representing a Cupid scattering a cloud of flowers; and a page, handsome and richly dressed, offered to him refreshment. He did not accept it, but as soon as the Vicomte de Turenne had left them, began to recite his letter. We already know this letter, having read it in French with Chicot, and therefore think it useless to follow the Latin translation. Chicot spoke with the worst accent possible, but Marguerite understood it perfectly, and could not hide her rage and indignation. She knew her brother’s dislike to her, and her mind was divided between anger and fear. But as he concluded, she decided on her part.

“By the Holy Communion,” said she, when Chicot had finished, “my brother writes well in Latin! What vehemence! what style! I should never have believed him capable of it. But do you not understand it, M. Chicot? I thought you were a good Latin scholar.”

“Madame, I have forgotten it; all that I remember is that Latin has no article, that it has a vocative, and that the head belongs to the neuter gender.”

“Really!” said some one, entering noiselessly and merrily. It was the king of Navarre. “The head is of the neuter gender, M. Chicot? Why is it not masculine?”

“Ah, sire, I do not know; it astonishes me as much as it does your majesty.”

“It must be because it is sometimes the man, sometimes the woman that rules, according to their temperaments.”

“That is an excellent reason, sire.”

“I am glad to be a more profound philosopher than I thought — but to return to the letter. Madame, I burn to hear news from the court of France, and M. Chicot brings them to me in an unknown tongue.”

“Do you not fear, sire, that the Latin is a bad prognostic?” said Chicot.

“M. Chicot is right, sire,” said the queen.

“What!” said Henri, “does the letter contain anything disagreeable, and from your brother, who is so clever and polite?”

“Even when he had me insulted in my litter, as happened near Sens, when I left Paris to rejoin you, sire.”

“When one has a brother whose own conduct is irreproachable,” said Henri, in an indefinable tone between jest and earnest, “a brother a king, and very punctilious — ”

“He ought to care for the true honor of his sister and of his house. I do not suppose, sire, that if your sister, Catherine d’Albret, occasioned some scandal, you would have it published by a captain of the guards.”

“Oh! I am like a good-natured bourgeois, and not a king; but the letter, the letter; since it was addressed to me, I wish to know what it contains.”

“It is a perfidious letter, sire.”

“Bah!”

“Oh! yes, and which contains more calumnies than are necessary to embroil a husband with his wife, and a friend with his friends.”

“Oh! oh! embroil a husband with his wife; you and me then?”

“Yes, sire.”

Chicot was on thorns; he would have given much, hungry as he was, to be in bed without supper.

“The storm is about to burst,” thought he.

“Sire,” said Marguerite, “I much regret that your majesty has forgotten your Latin.”

“Madame, of all the Latin I learned, I remember but one phrase — ’Deus et virtus oeterna’ — a singular assemblage of masculine, feminine, and neuter.”

“Because, sire, if you did understand, you would see in the letter many compliments to me.”

"But how could compliments embroil us, madame? For as long as your brother pays you compliments, I shall agree with him; if he speaks ill of you, I shall understand his policy."

"Ah! if he spoke ill of me, you would understand it?"

"Yes; he has reasons for embroiling us, which I know well."

"Well, then, sire, these compliments are only an insinuating prelude to calumnious accusations against your friends and mine."

"Come, ma mie, you have understood badly; let me hear if all this be in the letter."

Marguerite looked defiant.

"Do you want your followers or not, sire?" said she.

"Do I want them? what a question! What should I do without them, and reduced to my own resources?"

"Well, sire, the king wishes to detach your best servants from you."

"I defy him."

"Bravo, sire!" said Chicot.

"Yes," said Henri, with that apparent candor, with which to the end of his life he deceived people, "for my followers are attached to me through love, and not through interest; I have nothing to give them."

"You give them all your heart and your faith, sire; it is the best return a king can make his friends."

"Yes, ma mie, I shall not fail to do so till I find that they do not merit it."

"Well, sire, they wish to make you believe that they do not."

"Ah! but how?"

"I cannot tell you, sire, without compromising — " and she glanced at Chicot.

"Dear M. Chicot," said Henri, "pray wait for me in my room, the queen has something particular to say to me."

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE EXPLANATION.

To get rid of a witness whom Marguerite believed to know more of Latin than he allowed was already a triumph, or at least a pledge of security for her; for alone with her husband she could give whatever translation of the Latin that she pleased.

Henri and his wife were then left tete-à-tete. He had on his face no appearance of disquietude or menace; decidedly he could not understand Latin.

“Monsieur,” said Marguerite, “I wait for you to interrogate me.”

“This letter preoccupies you much, ma mie; do not alarm yourself thus.”

“Sire, because a king does not send a special messenger to another without some reason that he believes important.”

“Well ma mie, let us leave it for the present; have you not something like a ball this evening?”

“Yes, sire,” said Marguerite, astonished, “but that is not extraordinary; you know we dance nearly every evening.”

“I have a great chase for to-morrow.”

“Each our pleasure, sire; you love the chase, I the dance.”

“Yes, ma mie, and there is no harm in that,” said Henri, sighing.

“Certainly not; but your majesty sighed as you said it.”

“Listen to me, madame; I am uneasy.”

“About what, sire?”

“About a current report.”

“A report; your majesty uneasy about a report?”

“What more simple; when this report may annoy you.”

“Me?” — ”Yes, you.”

“Sire, I do not understand you.”

“Have you heard nothing?”

Marguerite began to tremble. “I am the least curious woman in the world,” said she, “I hear nothing but what is cried in my very ears. Besides, I think so little of reports, that I should not listen to them if I heard them."

"It is then your opinion, madame, that one should despise reports?"

"Absolutely, sire; particularly kings and queens."

"Why so, madame?"

"Because, as every one talks of us, we should have enough to do to listen to them all."

"Well, I believe you are right, ma mie, and I am about to furnish you with an excellent opportunity of exercising your philosophy."

Marguerite believed that the decisive moment had come, and rallied all her courage.

"So be it, sire," said she.

Henri began in the tone of a penitent who has some great sin to acknowledge.

"You know the great interest I take in Fosseuse?"

"Ah!" cried Marguerite, triumphantly, seeing he was not about to accuse her; "yes, yes; the little Fosseuse, your friend."

"Yes, madame."

"My lady in waiting." — "Yes."

"Your passion — your love."

"Ah! you speak now just like one of the reports you were abusing just now."

"It is true, sire, and I ask your pardon," said Marguerite, smiling.

"Ma mie, you are right, public report often lies, and we sovereigns have great reason to establish this theory;" and he laughed ironically.

"Well; and Fosseuse?" said Marguerite.

"She is ill, ma mie, and the doctors do not understand her malady."

"That is strange, sire. Fosseuse, who you say is a pearl of purity, ought to allow the doctors to penetrate into the secret of her illness."

"Alas! it is not so."

"What!" cried the queen; "is she not a pearl of purity?"

"I mean that she persists in hiding the cause of her illness from the doctors."

"But to you, sire, her confidant, her father."

"I know nothing, or at least wish to know nothing."

"Then, sire," said Marguerite, who now believed that she had to confer instead of asking a pardon; "then, sire, I do not know what you want; and wait for you to explain."

"Well, then, ma mie, I will tell you. I wish you — but it is asking a great deal."

"Speak on, sire."

"To have the goodness to go to Fosseuse."

"I go to visit this girl whom every one says has the honor of being your mistress; a thing which you do not deny."

"Gently, gently, ma mie. On my word you will make a scandal with your exclamations; and really I believe that will rejoice the court of France, for in the letter from my brother-in-law that Chicot repeated to me, there was these words, 'Quotidie scandalurn,' which must mean 'daily scandal.' It is not necessary to know Latin to understand that: it is almost French."

"But, sire, to whom did these words apply?"

"Ah! that is what I want to know, but you, who know Latin, can help me to find out."

Marguerite colored up to her ears.

"Well, monsieur," said she, "you wish me to take a humiliating step for the sake of peace, and therefore I will comply."

"Thanks, ma mie, thanks."

"But what is the object of this visit?"

"It is very simple, madame."

"Still, you must tell me, for I am not clever enough to guess it."

"Well! you will find Fosseuse among the ladies of honor, sleeping in their room; and they, you know, are so curious and indiscreet that one cannot tell to what extremity Fosseuse may be reduced."

"But then she fears something," cried Marguerite, with a burst of anger and hatred; "she wishes to hide herself."

"I do not know; all I do know is, that she wishes to quit the room of the maids of honor."

"If she wishes to hide, let her not count on me. I may shut my eyes to certain things, but I will never be an accomplice," said Marguerite.

Henri seemed not to have heard, but he stood for a minute in a thoughtful attitude, and then said, "Margota cum Turennio. Ah! those were the names, madame — 'Margota cum Turennio.'"

Marguerite grew crimson.

"Calumnies, sire!" cried she.

"What calumnies?" replied he, with the most natural air possible. "Do you find any calumny in it? It is a passage from my brother's letter —

’Margota cum Turennio conveniunt in castello nomine Loignac!’ — Decidedly I must get this letter translated.”

“Leave this comedy, sire,” said Marguerite, tremblingly, “and tell me at once what you want from me.”

“Well, I wish, ma mie, that you should separate Fosseuse from the other girls, and send her a discreet doctor; your own, for example.”

“Ah! I see what it is,” cried the queen, “Fosseuse, the paragon, is near her accouchement.”

“I do not say so, ma mie; it is you who affirm it.”

“It is so, monsieur; your insinuating tone, your false humility, prove it to me. But there are sacrifices that no man should ask of his wife. Take care of Fosseuse yourself, sire; it is your business, and let the trouble fall on the guilty, not on the innocent.”

“The guilty! Ah! that makes me think of the letter again.”

“How so?”

“Guilty is ‘nocens,’ is it not?”

“Yes.”

“Well, there was that word in the letter — ’Margota cum Turennio, ambo nocentes, conveniunt in castello nomine Loignac.’ Mon Dieu! how I regret that my knowledge is not as great as my memory is good.”

“Ambo nocentes,” repeated Marguerite, in a low voice, and turning very pale, “he understood it all.”

“Margota cum Turennio, ambo nocentes,” repeated Henri. “What the devil could my brother mean by ‘ambo!’ Ventre St. Gris, ma mie, it is astonishing that you who know Latin so well have not yet explained it to me. Ah! pardieu! there is ‘Turennius’ walking under your windows, and looking up as if he expected you. I will call to him to come up; he is very learned, and he will explain it to me.”

“Sire, sire, be superior to all the calumniators of France.”

“Oh! ma mie, it seems to me that people are not more indulgent in Navarre than in France; you, yourself, were very severe about poor Fosseuse just now.”

“I severe?”

“Yes; and yet we ought to be indulgent here, we lead such a happy life, you with your balls, and I with my chase.”

“Yes, yes, sire; you are right; let us be indulgent.”

“Oh! I was sure of your heart, ma mie.”

“You know me well, sire.”

“Yes. Then you will go and see Fosseuse?”

“Yes, sire.”

“And separate her from the others?”

“Yes, sire.”

“And send her your doctor?”

“Yes, sire.”

“And if, unluckily, what you say were true, and she had been weak, for women are frail — ”

“Well, sire, I am a woman, and know the indulgence due to my sex.”

“All! you know all things, ma mie; you are in truth a model of perfection, and I kiss your hands.”

“But believe, sire, that it is for the love of you alone that I make this sacrifice.”

“Oh! yes, ma mie, I know you well, madame, and my brother of France also, he who speaks so well of you in this letter, and adds, ‘Fiat sanum exemplum statim, atque res certior eveniet.’ Doubtless, ma mie, it is you who give this good example.”

And Henri kissed the cold hand of Marguerite. Then, turning on the threshold of the door, he said:

“Say everything kind from me to Fosseuse, and do for her as you have promised me. I set off for the chase; perhaps I shall not see you till my return, perhaps never — these wolves are wicked beasts. Come, and let me embrace you, ma mie.”

Then he embraced Marguerite, almost affectionately, and went out, leaving her stupefied with all she had heard.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE SPANISH AMBASSADOR.

The king rejoined Chicot, who was still agitated with fears as to the explanation.

“Well, Chicot,” said Henri, “do you know what the queen says?”

“No.”

“She pretends that your cursed Latin will disturb our peace.”

“Oh! sire, forget it, and all will be at an end. It is not with a piece of spoken Latin as though it were written; the wind carries away the one, fire cannot sometimes destroy the other.”

“I! I think of it no more.”

“That is right.”

“I have something else to do.”

“Your majesty prefers amusing yourself.”

“Oh! mon cher, here we do everything openly; love, war, and politics.”

“The first more than the two last; do you not, sire?”

“Ma foi! yes; I confess it, my dear friend. This country is so fine, and its women so beautiful.”

“Oh! sire, you forget the queen; can the Navarrese women be more pleasing and beautiful than she is? If they are, I compliment them.”

“Ventre St. Gris, you are right, Chicot; and I, who forgot that you are an ambassador, and represent King Henri III., and that he is the brother of Marguerite, and that consequently, before you, I ought to place her before every one — but you must excuse my imprudence, I am not accustomed to ambassadors.”

At this moment the door of the room opened, and D’Aubiac announced, “The ambassador from Spain.”

Chicot gave a start which made the king smile.

“Ma foi!” said Henri, “that is a contradiction that I did not expect. And what the devil can he want here?”

“Yes,” said Chicot, “what the devil does he want here?”

“We shall soon know; perhaps our Spanish neighbor has some frontier dispute to settle with us.”

“I will retire,” said Chicot. “This is doubtless a real ambassador from his majesty Philippe II., while I — ”

“Open that library door, Chicot, and go in there.”

“But from there I shall hear all, in spite of myself.”

“Oh! Never mind; I have nothing to hide. Apropos; have you nothing more to say to me from your king?”

“Nothing at all, sire.”

“Very well, then, you have nothing to do but to see and hear, like all other ambassadors, and the library will do excellently for that purpose. Look with all your eyes, and listen with all your ears, my dear Chicot. D’Aubiac, let the ambassador enter.”

Chicot hastened to his place of concealment, and drew the tapestry close.

When the first preliminaries of etiquette were over, the ambassador said:

“Can I speak freely to your majesty?”

“You may, monsieur.”

“Sire, I bring the answer from his Catholic majesty.”

“An answer,” thought Chicot; “then there was a question.”

“An answer to what?” said Henri.

“To your proposals of last month.”

“Ma foi! I am very forgetful! please to recall to me what they were.”

“About the invasions of the Lorraine princes.”

“Yes, I remember, particularly those of M. de Guise; go on, monsieur.”

“Sire, the king, my master, although much begged to sign a treaty of alliance with Lorraine, prefers one with Navarre. I know my master’s intentions with regard to you.”

“May I also know them?”

“Sire, my master will refuse nothing to Navarre.”

Chicot bit his fingers to convince himself that he was not dreaming.

“What can I ask then?” said Henri.

“Whatever your majesty pleases.”

“Diable!”

“If your majesty will speak openly and frankly?”

“Ventre St. Gris, it is embarrassing.”

“Shall I tell you his majesty the king of Spain’s proposal?”

“I listen.”

"The king of France treats the queen of Navarre as an enemy, he repudiates her as a sister, and covers her with opprobrium. All this, but I beg your majesty's pardon for touching on so delicate a subject — "

"Go on."

"All this, then, is public."

"Well! monsieur, and what of all this?"

"It is consequently easy for your majesty to repudiate as a wife her whom her brother disclaims as a sister. This once done, the alliance between the king of Navarre and the king of Spain is concluded, and the king of Spain will give the infanta, his daughter, to your majesty, and he himself will marry Madame Catherine de Navarre, your majesty's sister."

A movement of pride shook Henri, while Chicot shuddered with terror. The one saw his star rising, radiant like the morning sun; the other saw the scepter of the Valois ready to decline and fall.

For an instant there was profound silence, and then Henri said:

"The proposal, monsieur, is magnificent, and crowns me with honor."

"His majesty," said the negotiator, who already calculated on an enthusiastic acceptance, "proposes only one condition."

"Ah! a condition! that is but just; let me hear it."

"In aiding your majesty against the Lorraine princes, that is to say, in opening to your majesty a way to the throne, my master desires to facilitate by your alliance the safety of Flanders, which the Duc d'Anjou is already attacking; your majesty will understand that it is pure preference on my master's part for you over the Lorraine princes, since MM. de Guise, his natural allies, as Catholic princes, make of themselves a party against the Duc d'Anjou in Flanders. Now, this is the only condition, which you must think reasonable. His majesty the king of Spain, allied to you by a double marriage, will help you to — " the ambassador seemed to seek for the right word, "to succeed to the king of France, and you will guarantee Flanders to him. I may then, now, knowing your majesty's wisdom, regard the negotiation as happily terminated."

Henri took two or three turns up and down the room.

"This, then," said he at last, "is the answer you were charged to bring me?"

"Yes, sire."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing else, sire."

"Well! I refuse the offer of the king of Spain."

"You refuse the hand of the infanta!" cried the Spaniard, with a start, as though he had received a sudden wound.

"It would be a great honor, but I cannot think it a greater one than that of having married a daughter of France."

"No; but that alliance brought you nearly to the tomb, and this will bring you to the throne."

"An incomparable piece of good fortune, monsieur, I know; but I will never buy it with the blood and honor of my future subjects. What! monsieur. I draw the sword against the king of France, my brother-in-law, for the Spaniards; I arrest the standard of France in its career of glory; I kill brothers by brothers' hands; I bring the stranger into my country! No, monsieur; I asked the king of Spain for aid against the Guises, who wish to rob me of my inheritance, but not against the Duc d'Anjou, my brother-in-law; not against Henri III., my friend; not against my wife, sister of my king. You will aid the Guises, you will say, and lend them your support. Do so, and I will let loose on you and on them all the Protestants of Germany and France. The king of Spain wishes to reconquer Flanders, which is slipping from him; let him do what his father, Charles V., did, and ask a free passage to go and claim his title of first bourgeois of Ghent, and Henri III., I am certain, will grant it to him, as Francois I. did. I wish for the throne of France, says his Catholic majesty; it is possible, but I do not need him to aid me in getting it; I will do that for myself, once it is vacant, in spite of all the kings in the world. Adieu, then, monsieur. Tell my brother Philippe that I am grateful for his offers, but cannot believe for a moment that he thought me capable of accepting them. Adieu, monsieur."

"Take care, sire," said the ambassador; "the good understanding between two neighbors may be destroyed by a hasty word."

"Monsieur, my crown is so light that I should scarcely feel the difference if it slipped off; besides, I believe I can guard it. Therefore, once more adieu, monsieur, and tell the king your master that I have greater ambitions than he dreams of." And the Béarnais, becoming once more, not himself, but what he generally seemed to be, conducted the ambassador, with a courteous smile, to the door.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE POOR OF HENRI OF NAVARRE.

Chicot remained plunged in profound surprise. Henri lifted the tapestry, and, striking him on the shoulder, said:

“Well, M. Chicot, how do you think I managed?”

“Wonderfully, sire; and really, for a king who is not accustomed to ambassadors — ”

“It is my brother Henri who sends me such ambassadors.”

“How so, sire?”

“If he did not incessantly persecute his poor sister, others would not dream of it. Do you believe that if the king of Spain had not heard of the public insult offered to the queen, when a captain of the guards searched her litter, that he would have proposed to me to repudiate her?”

“I see with pleasure, sire,” replied Chicot, “that all attempts will be useless, and that nothing can interrupt the harmony that exists between the queen and yourself.”

“Oh, my friend, the interest they have in making us quarrel is too clear.”

“I confess to you, sire, that I am not so penetrating as you are.”

“Doubtless Henri would be delighted if I repudiated his sister.”

“How so? Pray explain to me.”

“You know they forgot to pay me my wife’s dowry.”

“I guessed as much, sire.”

“This dowry was to consist of 300,000 golden crowns and some towns; among others, Cahors.”

“A pretty town, mordieu!”

“I have claimed, not the money, but Cahors.”

“Ventre de biche! sire, in your place, I should have done the same.”

“And that is why — do you understand now?”

“No, indeed, sire.”

“Why they wish me to quarrel with my wife and repudiate her. No wife, no dowry, no more 300,000 crowns, no Cahors. It is one way of eluding a promise, and Henri is clever in laying snares."

"You would much like to hold Cahors, sire?"

"Doubtless; for after all, what is my principality of Béarn? A poor little place, clipped by the avarice of my mother-in-law and brother-in-law."

"While Cahors — "

"Cahors would be my rampart, the safeguard of my religion."

"Well, sire, go into mourning for Cahors; for, whether you break with Madame Marguerite or not, the king of France will never give it to you, and unless you take it — "

"Oh, I would soon take it, if it was not so strong, and, above all, if I did not hate war."

"Cahors is impregnable, sire."

"Oh! impregnable! But if I had an army, which I have not — "

"Listen, sire. We are not here to flatter each other. To take Cahors, which is held by M. de Vesin, one must be a Hannibal or a Cæsar; and your majesty — "

"Well?" said Henri, with a smile.

"Has just said, you do not like war."

Henri sighed, and his eyes flashed for a minute; then he said:

"It is true I have never drawn the sword, and perhaps never shall. I am a king of straw, a man of peace; but, by a singular contrast, I love to think of warlike things — that is in my blood. St. Louis, my ancestor, pious by education and gentle by nature, became on occasion a brave soldier and a skillful swordsman. Let us talk, if you please, of M. Vesin, who is a Cæsar and a Hannibal."

"Sire, pardon me if I have wounded or annoyed you. I spoke only of M. de Vesin to extinguish all hope in your heart. Cahors, you see, is so well guarded because it is the key of the south."

"Alas! I know it well. I wished so much to possess Cahors, that I told my poor mother to make it a sine quâ non of our marriage. See, I am speaking Latin now. Cahors, then, was my wife's dowry; they owe it to me — "

"Sire, to owe and pay — "

"Are two different things, I know. So your opinion is, that they will never pay me?"

"I fear not."

"Diable!"

"And frankly — "

“Well?”

“They will be right, sire.”

“Why so?”

“Because you did not know your part of king; you should have got it at once.”

“Do you not, then, remember the tocsin of St. Germain l’Auxerrois?” said Henri, bitterly. “It seems to me that a husband whom they try to murder on the night of his marriage might think less of his dowry than of his life.”

“Yes; but since then, sire, we have had peace; and excuse me, sire, you should have profited by it, and, instead of making love, have negotiated. It is less amusing, I know, but more profitable. I speak, sire, as much for my king as for you. If Henri of France had a strong ally in Henri of Navarre, he would be stronger than any one; and if the Protestants and Catholics of France and Navarre would unite in a common political interest, they would make the rest of the world tremble.”

“Oh, I do not pretend to make others tremble, so long as I do not tremble myself. But if I cannot get Cahors, then, and you think I cannot — ”

“I think so, sire, for three reasons.”

“Tell them to me, Chicot.”

“Willingly. The first is that Cahors is a town of good produce, which Henri III. will like to keep for himself.”

“That is not very honest.”

“It is very royal, sire.”

“Ah! it is royal to take what you like.”

“Yes; that is called taking the lion’s share, and the lion is the king of animals.”

“I shall remember your lesson, Chicot. Now, your second reason.”

“Madame Catherine — ”

“Oh! does my good mother still mix in politics?”

“Always; and she would rather see her daughter at Paris than at Nerac — near her than near you.”

“You think so? Yet she does not love her daughter to distraction.”

“No; but Madame Marguerite serves you as a hostage, sire.”

“You are cunning, Chicot. Devil take me, if I thought of that! But you may be right; a daughter of France would be a hostage in case of need. Well, the third?”

“Between the Duc d’Anjou, who seeks to make a throne for himself in Flanders, between MM. de Guise, who wish for a crown, and shake that of France, and his majesty the king of Spain, who wishes for universal monarchy, you hold the balance and maintain a certain equilibrium.”

“I, without weight?”

“Just so. If you became powerful, that is to say, heavy, you would turn the scale, and would be no longer a counterpoise, but a weight.”

“Ah! I like that reason, and it is admirably argued. This is the explanation of my situation?”

“Complete.”

“And I, who did not see all this, and went on hoping.”

“Well, sire, I counsel you to cease to hope.”

“Then I must do for this debt what I do for those of my farmers who cannot pay their rent; I put a P against their names.”

“Which means paid.”

“Just so.”

“Put two P’s, sire, and give a sigh.”

“So be it, Chicot; you see I can live in Béarn, even without Cahors.”

“I see that, and also that you are a wise and philosophical king. But what is that noise?”

“Noise, where?”

“In the courtyard, I think.”

“Look out of the window.”

“Sire, there are below a dozen of poorly-clothed people.”

“Ah! they are my poor,” said the king, rising.

“Your majesty has poor?”

“Doubtless; does not God recommend charity? If I am not a Catholic, Chicot, I am a Christian.”

“Bravo, sire!”

“Come, Chicot, we will give alms together, and then go to supper.”

“Sire, I follow you.”

“Take that purse lying on the table, near my sword — do you see?”

They went down, but Henri seemed thoughtful and preoccupied. Chicot looked at him, and thought, “What the devil made me talk politics to this brave prince, and make him sad? Fool that I was!”

Once in the court, Henri approached the group of mendicants. There were a dozen men in different costumes. Henri took the purse from the hands of

Chicot and made a sign, and then each man came forward and saluted Henri with an air of humility, which did not preclude a glance full of intelligence at the king. Henri replied by a motion of the head; then, putting his fingers into the purse, which Chicot held open, he took out a piece.

"Do you know that it is gold, sire?" said Chicot.

"Yes, my friend, I know."

"Peste! you are rich."

"Do you not see that each of these pieces serves for two? On the contrary, I am so poor that I am forced to cut my gold in two."

"It is true," said Chicot, with surprise: "they are half-pieces, with fantastic designs."

"Oh, I am like my brother Henri, who amuses himself in cutting out images: I amuse myself with clipping my ducats."

"Nevertheless, sire, it is an odd method of giving charity," said Chicot, who divined some hidden mystery.

"What would you do?"

"Instead of cutting the gold, I would give one piece between two."

"They would fight, and I should do harm instead of good."‘

Henry then took one of the pieces, and, placing himself before the first beggar, looked at him inquiringly.

"Agen," said the man.

"How many?" asked Henri.

"Five hundred."

"Cahors;" and he gave him the piece and took a second.

The man bowed and withdrew.

The next advanced and said, "Auch."

"How many?"

"Three hundred and fifty."

"Cahors;" and he gave him his piece.

"Narbonne," said the third.

"How many?"

"Eight hundred."

"Cahors;" and he gave him his piece.

"Montauban," said the fourth.

"How many?"

"Six hundred." — ”Cahors."

Each one in this way pronounced a name and a number, and received a piece of gold, and to each Henri replied, “Cahors.”

This over, there were no pieces left in the purse.

“That is all, sire,” said Chicot.

“Yes; I have finished.”

“Sire, am I permitted to be curious?”

“Why not? Curiosity is natural.”

“What did these beggars say, and what did you reply?”

Henri smiled.

“Indeed,” continued Chicot, “all is mysterious here.”

“Do you think so?”

“Yes; I have never seen alms given in that way.”

“It is the custom at Nerac.”

“A singular one, sire.”

“No, nothing is more simple; each of those men came from a different city.”

“Well, sire?”

“Well, that I may not always give to the same, they each tell me the name of their town, so that I can distribute my benefits equally among all the unfortunates in my kingdom.”

“Yes, sire; but why did you answer ‘Cahors’?”

“Ah!” cried Henri, with a most natural air of surprise, “did I say ‘Cahors’?”

“Yes, sire.”

“You think so?”

“I am sure of it.”

“It must have been because we had been talking so much about it. I wish for it so much that I must have spoken of it without meaning to do so.”

“Hum!” said Chicot, suspiciously, “and then there was something else.”

“What! something else?”

“A number that each one pronounced, and which, added together, made more than eight thousand.”

“Ah! as to that, Chicot, I did not understand it myself; unless, as the beggars are divided into corporations, they each named the number of members, which seems to me probable.”

“Sire, sire!”

“Come and sup, my friend, nothing enlightens the mind like eating and drinking. Let us go to table, and you shall see that if my pistoles are cut, my bottles are full.”

Then, passing his arm familiarly through Chicot’s, the king went back to his room, where supper was served. Passing by the queen’s room, he glanced at it, and saw no light.

“Page,” said he, “is not her majesty at home?”

“Her majesty is gone to see Mademoiselle de Montmorency, who is ill.”

“Ah! poor Fosseuse!” said Henri: “it is true, the queen has such a good heart. Come to supper, Chicot.”

CHAPTER L.

THE TRUE MISTRESS OF THE KING OF NAVARRE.

The repast was joyous. Henri seemed no longer to have any weight either on his heart or his mind, and he was an excellent companion. As for Chicot, he dissembled the uneasiness he had felt since the coming of the Spanish ambassador and the scene with the mendicants. He endeavored to drink little and keep cool, to observe everything; but this Henri would not allow. However, Chicot had a head of iron, and as for Henri, he said he could drink these wines of the country like milk.

"I envy you," said Chicot to the king; "your court is delightful, and your life pleasant."

"If my wife were here, Chicot, I would not say what I am about to say, but in her absence I will tell you that the best part of my life is that which you do not see."

"Ah! sire, they tell, indeed, fine tales of you."

Henri leaned back in his chair to laugh. "They say I reign more over my female than my male subjects, do they not?" said he.

"Yes, sire, and it astonishes me."

"Why so?"

"Because, sire, you have much of that restless spirit which makes great kings."

"Ah, Chicot! you are wrong; I am lazy, and the proof of it is in my life. If I have a love to choose, I take the nearest; if a wine, the bottle close to my hand. To your health, Chicot."

"Sire, you do me honor," said Chicot, emptying his glass.

"Thus," continued the king, "what quarrels in my household!"

"Yes, I understand; all the ladies-in-waiting adore you, sire."

"They are my neighbors, Chicot."

"Then, sire, it might result from this, that if you lived at St. Denis instead of Nerac, the king might not live very tranquilly."

"The king! what do you say, Chicot? Do you think I am a Guise? I wish for Cahors, it is true, because it is near to me."

"Ventre de biche, sire, this ambition for things within the reach of your hand resembles much that of Cæsar Borgia, who gathered together a kingdom, city by city; saying that Italy was an artichoke to be eaten leaf by leaf."

"This Cæsar Borgia was not a bad politician, it seems to me, compere."

"No, but he was a very dangerous neighbor and a bad brother."

"Ah! would you compare me to the son of a pope — I, a Huguenot chief?"

"Sire, I compare you to no one."

"Why not?"

"I believe he would be wrong who should liken you to any other than yourself. You are ambitious, sire."

"Here is a man determined to make me want something," cried Henri.

"God forbid, sire; I desire with all my heart, on the contrary, that your majesty should want nothing."

"Nothing calls you back to Paris, does it, Chicot?"

"No, sire."

"Then you will pass some days with me?"

"If your majesty does me the honor to wish for my company, I ask no better than to give you a week."

"So be it; in a week you will know me like a brother. Drink, Chicot."

"Sire, I am no longer thirsty," said Chicot, who had given up all hopes of seeing the king take too much.

"Then, I will leave you; a man should not stay at table when he does nothing. Drink, I tell you."

"Why, sire?"

"To sleep better. Do you like the chase, Chicot?"

"Not much, sire; and you?"

"Passionately; since I lived at the court of Charles IX."

"Why did your majesty do me the honor to ask me?"

"Because I hunt to-morrow, and thought to take you with me."

"Sire, it would be a great honor, but — "

"Oh! this chase will rejoice all eyes; besides, I am a good hunter, and I wish you to see me to advantage."

"Sire, I am at your orders."

“Good! then it is settled. Ah! here is a page to disturb us.”

“Some important business, sire?”

“Business at table! You think you are still at the court of France, my dear Chicot. Learn one thing; at Nerac, when we have supped, we go to bed.”

“But this page?”

“Well, cannot he come for anything but business?”

“Ah! I understand: and I will go to bed.”

Chicot rose; the king did the same, and took his arm. This haste to send him away appeared suspicious to Chicot, and he determined not to leave the room if he could help it.

“Oh! oh!” said he, tottering, “it is astonishing, sire.”

The king smiled. “What is astonishing?”

“Ventre de biche! my head turns; while I sat still, it was all very well, but when I rise — ”

“Bah!” said Henri, “we only tasted the wine.”

“You call that tasting, sire? You are a drinker, and I do you homage, as to my superior.”

“Chicot, my friend,” said Henri, endeavoring to make out by one of his keen glances if Chicot were really drunk or pretending, “the best thing you can do is to go to bed.”

“Yes, sire; good-night.”

“Good-evening, Chicot.”

“Yes, sire, you are right; the best thing Chicot can do is to go to bed.” And he lay down on the floor.

Henri glanced toward the door, and then, approaching him, said, “You are so drunk, my poor Chicot, that you have taken my floor for your bed.”

“Chicot does not mind little things.”

“But I expect some one.”

“For supper; yes, let us sup — ” And Chicot made a fruitless effort to rise.

“Ventre St. Gris! how quickly you get drunk. But go along, mordieu! she is getting impatient.”

“She, who?”

“The lady I expect.”

“A lady; why did you not say, Henriquet? Ah! pardon, I thought I was speaking — to the king of France. He has spoiled me, that good Henriquet. Ah! I will go.”

“You are a gentleman, Chicot. Now go quickly.”

“Adieu, sire; a good night to you.”

“Adieu! and sleep well. You will find the page in the gallery, who will show you your room.”

Chicot went out; but, after taking a few steps, returned just in time to see Henri let in — not a woman, but a man. Chicot put his eye to the large keyhole.

The man took off his hat, and Chicot saw the noble but severe face of Duplessis-Mornay, the rigid and vigilant counselor of Henri of Navarre.

“Ah!” thought Chicot, “this will annoy our lover more than I did.”

But Henri’s face showed only joy; and after locking the door, he sat down eagerly to examine some maps, plans, and letters, which his minister had brought him. The king then began to write and to mark the maps.

“Oh! this is the way Henri of Navarre makes love,” thought Chicot.

At this moment he heard steps behind him, and fearful of being surprised, he turned hastily away, and, seeing the page, asked for his room.

“Come with me, if you please, monsieur,” said D’Aubiac, “and I will conduct you.”

Chicot began to understand the king of Navarre. Therefore, instead of going to sleep, he sat somber and thoughtful on his bed, while the moon shed its silver light over stream and meadows.

“Henri is a real king, and he conspires,” thought Chicot. “All this palace, park, town — the whole province — is a focus of conspiracy. All the women make love, but it is political love; and all the men live in the hope of a future. Henri is clever, his talent borders on genius, and he is in communication with Spain, the land of deceit. Who knows if even his noble answer to the ambassador was not a farce, and if he did not warn the ambassador of it by some sign unknown to me? Henri has spies; those beggars were nothing more nor less than gentlemen in disguise. Those pieces of gold, so artistically cut, were pledges of recognition — rallying signs.

“Henri feigns to care for nothing but love and pleasure, and then passes his time working with Mornay, who never seems to sleep, and does not know what love means. Queen Marguerite has lovers, and the king knows it, and tolerates them, because he has need of them, or of her — perhaps of both. Happily, God, in giving him the genius for intrigue, did not add to it that of war; for they say he is afraid of the noise of musketry, and that when he was taken, when quite young, to battle, he could not stay more than a quarter of an hour in the saddle. It is lucky, for if he had the arm, as well as the head, this man might do anything.

“There is certainly the Duc de Guise, who has both, but he has the disadvantage of being known as brave and skillful, so that every one is on their guard against him, while no one fears the Béarnais. I alone have seen through him. Well, having seen through him, I have no more to do here; so while he works or sleeps, I will go quietly out of the city. There are not many ambassadors, I think, who can boast of having fulfilled their mission in one day, as I have. So I will leave Nerac, and gallop till I am in France.” And he began to put on his spurs.

CHAPTER LI.

CHICOT'S ASTONISHMENT AT FINDING HIMSELF SO POPULAR IN NERAC.

Chicot, having taken his resolution, began to prepare his little packet. "How much time will it take me," thought he, as he did so, "to carry to the king the news of what I have seen and fear? Two days to arrive at a city whence the governor can send couriers; Cahors, for example, of which Henri of Navarre thinks so much. Once there, I can rest, for after all a man must rest some time. Come, then, Chicot, speed and sang froid. You thought you had accomplished your mission, and you are but half-way through it."

Chicot now extinguished the light, opened his door softly, and began to creep downstairs on tip-toe.

He went into an antechamber, but he had hardly gone four steps before he kicked against something. This something was D'Aubiac lying on a mat.

"Ah! good-evening, M. d'Aubiac," said Chicot, "but get out of the way a little, I beg; I want to go for a walk."

"Ah! but it is forbidden to walk by night near this castle."

"Why so?"

"Because the king fears robbers, and the queen lovers."

"Diable!"

"None but robbers or lovers want to walk at night, when they ought to be sleeping."

"However, dear M. d'Aubiac," said Chicot, with his most charming smile, "I am neither the one nor the other, but an ambassador, very tired from having talked Latin with the queen and supped with the king; let me go out then, my friend, for I want a walk."

"In the city, M. Chicot?"

"Oh no! in the gardens."

"Peste! that is still more forbidden than in the city."

"My little friend, you are very vigilant for your age. Have you nothing to occupy yourself with?"

“No.”

“You neither gamble nor fall in love.”

“To gamble one must have money, M. Chicot, and to be in love, one must find a lady.”

“Assuredly,” said Chicot, and feeling in his pocket he drew out ten pistoles and slipped them into the page’s hand, saying, “Seek well in your memory, and I bet you will find some charming woman, to whom I beg you to make some presents with this.”

“Oh, M. Chicot!” said the page, “it is easy to see that you come from the court of France; you have manners to which one can refuse nothing: go then, but make no noise.”

Chicot went on; glided like a shadow into the corridor, and down the staircase, but at the bottom he found an officer sleeping on a chair, placed right against the door, so that it was impossible to pass.

“Ah! little wretch of a page,” murmured Chicot, “you knew this.”

Chicot looked round him to see if he could find no other way by which he could escape with the assistance of his long legs. At last he saw what he wanted: it was an arched window, of which the glass was broken. Chicot climbed up the wall with his accustomed skill, and without making more noise than a dry leaf in the autumn wind; but unluckily, the opening was not big enough, so when he had got his head and one shoulder through, and had taken away his foot from its resting place on the wall, he found himself hanging between heaven and earth, without being able either to advance or retreat.

He began then a series of efforts, of which the first result was to tear his doublet and scratch his skin. What rendered his position more difficult was his sword, of which the handle would not pass, making a hook by which Chicot hung on to the sash. He exerted all his strength, patience and industry, to unfasten the clasp of his shoulder-belt; but it was just on this clasp that his body leaned, therefore he was obliged to change his maneuver, and at last he succeeded in drawing his sword from its sheath and pushing it through one of the interstices; the sword therefore fell first on the flagstones, and Chicot now managed to get through after it. All this, however, was not done without noise, therefore Chicot, on rising, found himself face to face with a soldier.

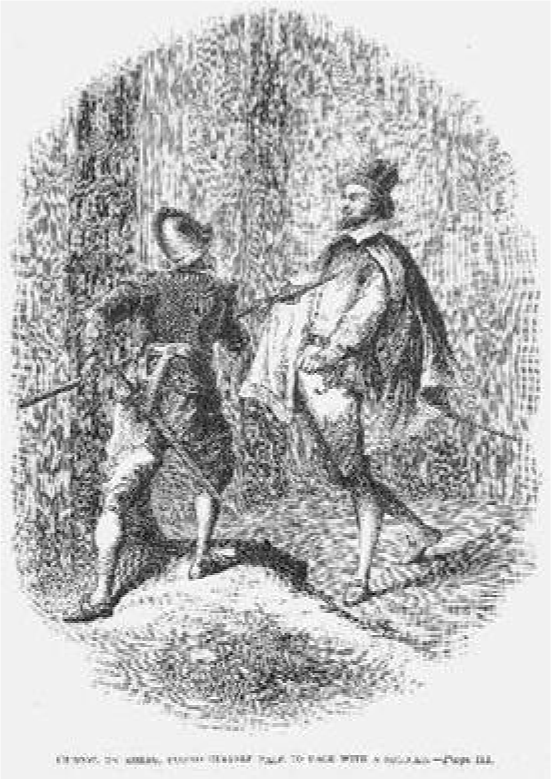

“Ah! mon Dieu! have you hurt yourself, M. Chicot?” said he.

Chicot was surprised, but said, “No, my friend, not at all.”

“That is very lucky; there are not many people who could do such a thing.”

“But how the devil did you know my name?”

“I saw you to-day at the palace, and asked who was the gentleman that was talking with the king.”

“Well! I am in a hurry; allow me to pass.”

“But no one goes out of the palace by night; those are my orders.”

“But you see they do come out, since I am here.”

“Yes, but — ”

“But what?”

“You must go back, M. Chicot.”

“Oh! no.” — ”How! no?”

“Not by that way, at all events; it is too troublesome.”

“If I were an officer instead of a soldier, I would ask you why you come out so; but that is not my business, which is only that you should go back again. Go in, therefore, M. Chicot, I beg you.”

And the soldier said this in such a persuasive tone, that Chicot was touched. Consequently he put his hand in his pocket and drew out another ten pistoles.

"You must understand, my friend," said he, "that as I have torn my clothes in passing through once, I should make them still worse by going back again, and should have to go naked, which would be very indecent in a court where there are so many young and pretty women; let me go then to my tailor." And he put the money in his hand.

"Go quickly then, M. Chicot," said the man.

Chicot was in the street at last. The night was not favorable for flight, being bright and cloudless, and he regretted the foggy nights of Paris, where people might pass close to each other unseen. The unfortunate fugitive had no sooner turned the corner of the street than he met a patrol. He stopped of himself, thinking it would look suspicious to try and pass unseen.

"Oh, good-evening, M. Chicot!" said the chief; "shall we reconduct you to the palace? You seem as though you had lost your way."

"It is very strange," murmured Chicot, "every one knows me here." Then aloud, and as carelessly as he could, "No, cornet, I am not going to the palace."

"You are wrong, M. Chicot," replied the officer, gravely.

"Why so, monsieur?"

"Because a very severe edict forbids the inhabitants of Nerac to go out at night without permission and without a lantern."

"Excuse me, monsieur, but this edict cannot apply to me, who do not belong to Nerac."

"But you are at Nerac. Inhabitant means living at; now you cannot deny that you live at Nerac, since I see you here."

"You are logical, monsieur. Unluckily, I am in a hurry; make an exception to your rule, and let me pass, I beg."

"You will lose yourself, M. Chicot; Nerac is a strange town. Allow three of my men to conduct you to the palace."

"But I am not going there, I tell you."

"Where are you going, then?"

"I cannot sleep well at night, and then I always walk. Nerac is a charming city, and I wish to see it."

"My men shall conduct you where you please."

"Oh, monsieur, I would rather go alone."

"You will be assassinated."

"I have my sword."

"Ah, true; then you will be arrested for bearing arms."

Chicot, driven to despair, drew the officer aside, and said:

"Come, monsieur, you are young; you know what love is — an imperious tyrant."

"Doubtless, M. Chicot."

"Well, cornet, I have a certain lady to visit."

"Where?"

"In a certain place."

"Young?"

"Twenty-three years old."

"Beautiful?"

"As the graces."

"I felicitate you, M. Chicot."

"Then you will let me pass?"

"It seems I must."

"And alone; I cannot compromise — "

"Of course not; pass on, M. Chicot."

"You are a gallant man, cornet. But how did you know me?"

"I saw you at the palace with the king. Apropos, which way are you going?"

"Toward the Porte of Agen. Am I not in the right road?"

"Yes, go straight on; I wish you success."

"Thank you;" and Chicot went on. But before he had taken a hundred steps he met the watch.

"Peste! this town is well guarded," thought Chicot.

"You cannot pass!" cried the provost, in a voice of thunder.

"But, monsieur, I want — "

"Ah, M. Chicot, is it you? In the streets in this cold?" asked the officer.

"Ah, decidedly! It must be a bet," thought Chicot; and, bowing, he tried to pass on.

"M. Chicot, take care!" said the provost.

"Take care of what?"

"You are going wrong; you are going toward the gates."

"Just so."

"Then I arrest you!"

"Not so, monsieur; you would be very wrong."

"However — "

"Approach, monsieur, that your soldiers may not hear."

The man approached.

"The king has given me a commission for the lieutenant of the Porte of Agen."

"Ah!"

"That astonishes you?"

"Yes."

"It ought not, since you know me."

"I know you from having seen you at the palace with the king."

Chicot stamped his foot impatiently. "That should prove to you that I possess the king's confidence."

"Doubtless; go on, M. Chicot, and execute your commission."

"Come," thought Chicot, "I advance slowly, but I do advance. Ventre de biche! here is a gate; it must be that of Agen; in five minutes I shall be out."

He arrived at the gate, which was guarded by a sentinel walking up and down, his musket on his shoulder.

"My friend, will you open the gate for me?" said Chicot.

"I cannot, M. Chicot," replied the man, "being only a private soldier."

"You also know me?" cried Chicot in a rage.

"I have that honor; I was on guard at the palace this morning, and saw you talking with the king."

"Well! my friend, the king has given me a very urgent message to convey to Agen; open the postern for me."

"I would with pleasure, but I have not the keys."

"And who has them?"

"The officer for the night."

Chicot sighed.

"And where is he?"

The soldier rang a bell to wake his officer.

"What is it?" said he, passing his head through a window.

"Lieutenant, it is a gentleman who wants the gate opened."

"Ah! M. Chicot," cried the officer, "I will be down in a moment."

"What! does every one know me?" cried Chicot. "Nerac seems a lantern, and I the candle."

"Excuse me, monsieur," said the officer, approaching, "but I was asleep."

"Oh! monsieur, that is what night is made for; will you be good enough to open the door. Unluckily, I cannot sleep, for the king, whom you doubtless also saw me talking to — ”

“Yes, I did, monsieur.”

“Of course!” growled Chicot. “Well! the king has sent me on a commission to Agen; this is the right gate, is it not?”

“Yes, M. Chicot.”

“Will you please to have it opened?”

“Of course. Anthenas, open the gate quickly for M. Chicot.”

Chicot began to breathe; the door creaked on its hinges, and opened, and Chicot saw liberty through it.

“Adieu! monsieur,” said he, advancing.

“Adieu! M. Chicot, a pleasant journey. — But stay, one moment; I have forgotten to ask for your pass,” cried he, seizing Chicot by the sleeve to stop him.

“How! my pass?”

“Certainly, M. Chicot; you know what a pass is? You understand that no one can leave a town like Nerac without a pass, particularly when the king is in it.”

“And who must sign this pass?”

“The king himself; so if he sent you he cannot have forgotten to give you a pass.”

“Ah! you doubt that the king sent me?” cried Chicot, with flashing eyes, for he saw himself on the point of failing, and had a great mind to kill the officer and sentinel, and rush through the gate.

“I doubt nothing you tell me, but reflect that if the king gave you this commission — ”

“In person, monsieur.”

“All the more reason, then: if he knows you are going out, I shall have to give up your pass to-morrow morning to the governor.” — ”And who is he?”

“M. de Mornay, who does not jest with disobedience, M. Chicot.”

Chicot put his hand to his sword, but another look showed him that the outside of the gate was defended by a guard who would have prevented his passing if he had killed the officer and sentinel.

“Well!” said Chicot to himself, with a sigh; “I have lost my game,” and he turned back.

“Shall I give you an escort, M. Chicot?” said the officer.

“No, thank you.”

Chicot retraced his steps, but he was not at the end of his griefs. He met the chief of the watch, who said, “What! have you finished your commission already, M. Chicot? Peste! how quick you are!”

A little further on the cornet cried to him, “Well, M. Chicot, what of the lady; are you content with Nerac?”

Finally, the soldier in the courtyard said, “Cordieu! M. Chicot, the tailor has not done his work well; you seem more torn than when you went out.”

Chicot did not feel inclined to climb back through the window: but by chance, or rather by charity, the door was opened, and he returned into the palace. Here he saw the page, who said, “Dear M. Chicot, shall I give you the key to all this?”

“Yes, serpent,” murmured Chicot.

“Well! the king loves you so much, he did not wish to lose you.”

“And you knew, and never told me?”

“Oh! M. Chicot, impossible! It was a state secret.”

“But I paid you, knave.”

“Oh! dear M. Chicot, the secret was worth more than ten pistoles.”

Chicot returned to his room in a rage.

CHAPTER LII.

HOW THEY HUNTED THE WOLF IN NAVARRE.

When Marguerite left the king, she went at once to the apartments of the maids of honor, and performed her promise with regard to Fosseuse. When she returned, the king thanked her warmly, and then went up to Chicot's room, where he found him still asleep. Henri shook him to wake him. "Come, compere," said he, "get up, it is two in the morning."

"Ah! you make me a prisoner," cried Chicot; "I, an ambassador. Sire, you violate the rights of nations."

Henri began to laugh, and Chicot could not help joining him.

"You are mad," said Henri. "Why the devil did you want to go away from here, have you not been well treated?"

"Too well, ventre de biche! too well. It seems to me as if I were like a goose being fattened. Every one says to me, 'Pretty little Chicot, how gentle he is!' but they clip my wings, and shut the doors on me."

"Oh! reassure yourself, Chicot; you are not fat enough for my table."

"Sire, you seem very gay this morning; what is it?"

"I am always gay when I am setting off for the chase. Come, out of bed, compere."

"You want me, sire?"

"Yes; you shall be my historian."

"To count the shots?"

"Just so."

Chicot dressed murmuringly, while the king remained in the antechamber.

"My horse," cried Henri; "and tell M. de Mornay that I am ready."

"What! is M. de Mornay chief huntsman?" asked Chicot.

"M. de Mornay is everything here," replied Henri. "I am so poor, than I can afford but one man."

"Yes; but he is a good one."

Chicot found the preparations much less sumptuous than those of Henri III. A dozen or fifteen gentlemen only, among whom he recognized the Vicomte de Turenne, formed the whole suite. And as they were none of them rich, they all wore, instead of the usual hunting dress, their helmets and cuirasses, which made Chicot ask if the wolves in Gascony used muskets and artillery.

"No," said Henri; "but they are fierce beasts, who have claws and teeth, and draw hunters into places where they are likely to tear their clothes on the thorns, if they wear silk and velvet, or even cloth and buff, but not if they wear cuirasses."

"That is a reason, but not a good one, sire."

"What would you have? I have no other."

"Then I must be content with this."

"You had better."

"So be it."

"You are angry at being disturbed for this chase."

"Ma foi! yes."

"So you find fault?"

"Is it forbidden?"

"Oh no."

"You understand, sire, I am no hunter, and have nothing to do, so I must amuse myself, while you are thinking of all the wolves that a dozen men are going to kill."

"Ah, yes, laugh away, Chicot; first it was the clothes, now the number of wolves."

"Oh, sire!"

"But I must say you are not indulgent, for Béarn is not as large as France; so the king goes there with two hundred huntsmen, I with a dozen, as you see."

"Yes, sire."

"But," said Henri, "sometimes the country gentlemen, hearing I am going, quit their chateaux and join me, which sometimes makes up a good escort for me."

When they had ridden about half an hour —

"Look," said Henri to Chicot, "are not those cavaliers that I see there?"

Chicot looked and said, "Yes, sire, cavaliers, but not huntsmen."

"Why not?"

“Because they are armed like Amadis or Rolando,” replied Chicot.

“Ah! what matters the dress, my dear Chicot? you see we are not particular as to that.”

“But I see at least two hundred men there.”

“Ah! that is a good number.”

Chicot began to feel very curious. He had really named too low a number, for the group before them consisted of two hundred men, who came silently and joined their party; each man was well armed and mounted, and they were led by a gentleman who came and kissed Henri’s hand with much devotion.

They passed the river Gers, and then came on a second troop of one hundred men; the chief approached, and seemed to be making excuses for not bringing more men. Henri gave him his hand. They went on till they came to the Garonne; this they also passed, and about half a league on the other side, three hundred cavaliers, hidden in a pine forest, suddenly came in sight.

“Oh! monseigneur,” said Chicot, “are not these enemies who have heard of your chase, and wish to oppose it?”

“No, my son, you are wrong; they are friends from Puzmirol.”

“Mordieu! sire, you will have more men in your escort than trees in your forest.”

“Chicot, I really believe the news of your arrival must have spread through the country, and all these people have come to welcome the ambassador from France.”

Chicot saw he was being laughed at, and felt rather offended.

The day finished at Muroy, where the gentlemen of the country gave a grand supper to the king, of which Chicot took his part enthusiastically, as it had not been deemed necessary to stop on the road for anything so unimportant as dinner, and he had eaten nothing since he had left Nerac.

Henri had the best house in the town, half the troop slept within doors, the other half in the street where the king was.

“When are we to begin the hunt?” asked Chicot of Henri, as he was undressing.

“We are not yet in the territory of the wolves, my dear Chicot.”

“And when shall we be?”

“Curious!”

“Not so, sire; but you understand, one likes to know where one is going.”

"You will know to-morrow; meanwhile, lie down there on those cushions on my left; here is Mornay snoring already at my right."

"Peste!" said Chicot, "he makes more noise asleep than awake."

"It is true he is not very talkative; but see him at the chase."

Day had partly appeared, when a great noise of horses awoke Chicot. They dressed, drank some spiced wine, and took other refreshment, and then Henri cried:

"To horse! gentlemen, we have a long day's work before us."

Chicot saw with astonishment that five hundred cavaliers had swelled the train during the night.

"Sire!" cried he, "you have an army."

"Wait!" replied Henri.

At Lauzerte, six hundred more men came and ranged themselves behind the cavaliers.

"Foot soldiers!" cried Chicot.

"Nothing but beaters," said the king.

Chicot frowned and spoke no more.

Twenty times his eyes turned toward the country, and the idea of flight presented itself to him. But Chicot had his guard of honor, doubtless as ambassador of the king of France, and so well was he recommended to this guard, that he could not make a movement that was not repeated by ten men.

This annoyed him, and he said so to the king.

"Diable!" said Henri, "it is your own fault; you tried to run away from Nerac, and I am afraid you will try it again."

"Sire, if I give my word as a gentleman not to do so?"

"That will do."

"Besides, I should be wrong to do so."

"How so?"

"Yes; for if I stay, I believe I shall see curious things."

"I am of your opinion, my dear Chicot."

At this moment they were going through the town of Montcuq, and four field-pieces took their place in the army.

"I return to my first idea," said Chicot, "that the wolves in this country are different from others, and are differently treated; with artillery, for instance."

“Ah!” said Henri, “it is a mania of the people of Montcuq. Since I gave them these four pieces they take them about everywhere.”

“Well, sire, shall we arrive to-day?”

“No, to-morrow.”

“To-morrow morning or evening?”

“Morning.”

“Then,” said Chicot, “it is at Cahors we are to hunt, is it not, sire?”

“On that side,” replied Henri.

“But, sire, you who have infantry, cavalry, and artillery to hunt wolves with, should also have taken the royal standard, and then the honor to the wolves would have been complete.”

“We have not forgotten it, Chicot, ventre St. Gris! only it is left in the case for fear of dirtying it. But if you wish to see it, and know under whose banner you march, you shall see it.”

“No, no, it is useless; leave it where it is.”

“Well, be easy, you will see it before long.”

They passed the second night at Catus. Troops kept arriving all night.

“It is lucky we are not going on to Paris,” said Chicot, “we should arrive with 100,000 men.”

The next morning, by eight o’clock, they were before Cahors, with 1,000 foot soldiers and 2,000 horse.

They found the city in a state of defense, M. de Vezin having heard rumors of the advance.

“Ah!” said the king, “he is warned; that is very annoying.”

“We must lay siege in due form, sire,” said Mornay; “we expect still about 2,000 men, and that is enough.”

“Let us assemble the council and begin the trenches.”

Chicot listened to all this in amazement. The pensive air of Henri alone reassured him, for it confirmed his suspicions that he was no warrior. He let every one speak, and said nothing. All at once he raised his head, and said in a commanding tone:

“Gentlemen, this is what we must do. We have 3,000 men, and you say you expect 2,000 more, Mornay?”

“Yes, sire.”

“That will make 5,000. In a regular siege we should lose 1,000 or 1,500 men in two months, their death would discourage the others, and we should lose 1,000 more in retreating. Let us sacrifice 500 men at once, and take Cahors by assault."

"What do you mean, sire?" asked Mornay.

"My dear friend, we will go straight to the nearest gate. We shall find a fosse in our way, which we will cover with fascines; we may leave two hundred men on the road, but we shall reach the gate."

"After, sire?"

"Then we will break it down with petards and go in. It will not be difficult."

Chicot looked at Henri, astonished.

"Oh!" growled he, "perhaps he is a coward and a boaster."

"Let us not lose time, gentlemen," cried Henri. "Forward, and let all who love me follow."

Chicot approached Mornay.

"Well! M. le Comte," said he, "do you all want to be cut to pieces?"

"Oh! we take our chance."

"But the king will get killed."

"Bah! he has a good cuirass."

"But he will not be foolish enough to fight himself, I suppose?"

Mornay shrugged his shoulders and turned on his heel.

"After all, I like him better asleep than awake; he is more polite snoring than speaking," said Chicot.

CHAPTER LIII.

HOW HENRI OF NAVARRE BEHAVED IN BATTLE.

The little army advanced near the town, then they breakfasted. The repast over, two hours were given for the officers and men to rest. Henri was very pale, and his hands trembled visibly, when at three o'clock in the afternoon the officers appeared under his tent.

"Gentlemen," said he, "we are here to take Cahors; therefore we must take it — by force. Do you understand? M. de Biron, who has sworn to hang every Huguenot, is only forty-five leagues from here, and doubtless a messenger is already dispatched to him by M. de Vezin. In four or five days he will be on us, and as he has 10,000 men with him, we should be taken between the city and him. Let us, then, take Cahors before he comes, that we may receive him well. Come, gentlemen, I will put myself at your head, and let the blows fall as thick as hail."

The men replied to this speech by enthusiastic cries.

"Well said," said Chicot to himself. "It was lucky he had not to speak with his hands, though, or he would have stammered finely. Let us see him at the work."

As they were setting off, the king said to Chicot:

"Pardon me, friend Chicot, I deceived you by talking of wolves, hunting, and such things, but you see Henri will not pay me his sister's dowry, and Margot cries out for her dear Cahors. One must do what one's wife wants, for peace' sake; therefore I am going to try and take Cahors."

"Why did she not ask you for the moon, sire, as you are such a complaisant husband?"

"I would have tried for it, Chicot, I love my dear Margot so much!"

"You will have quite enough to do with Cahors, and we shall see how you will get out of it."

"Ah! yes, the moment is critical and very disagreeable. Ah! I am not brave, and my nature revolts at every cannonade. Chicot, my friend, do not laugh too much at the poor Béarnais, your compatriot and friend. If I am afraid and you find it out, tell no one."

"If you are afraid?"

"Yes."

"Are you, then, afraid of being afraid?"

"I am."

"But then, ventre de biche, why the devil do you undertake such a thing?"

"I must."

"M. de Vezin is a terrible person."

"I know it well."

"Who gives quarter to no one."

"You think so, Chicot?"

"I am sure of it; red plume or white, he will not care, but cry, Fire!"

"You say that for my white feather, Chicot."

"Yes, sire, and as you are the only one who wears that color — "

"Well!"

"I would take it off."

"But I put it on that I might be recognized."

"Then you will keep it?"

"Yes, decidedly." And Henri trembled again as he said it.

"Come, sire," said Chicot, who did not understand this difference between words and gestures, "there is still time; do not commit a folly; you cannot mount on horseback in that state."

"Am I, then, very pale, Chicot?"

"As pale as death, sire."

"Good."

"How good?"

At this moment the noise of cannon and a furious fire of musketry was heard; it was M. de Vezin's reply to the summons to surrender given by Mornay.

"Hem!" said Chicot, "what do you think of this music, sire?"

"It makes me cold in the marrow of my bones," replied Henri. "Here, my horse! my horse!" cried he.

Chicot looked and listened, unable to understand him. Henry mounted, and then said —

"Come, Chicot, get on horseback too; you are not a warrior, either, are you?"

"No, sire."

"Well, come, we will be afraid together; come and see, my friend. A good horse here, for M. Chicot."

Henri set off at full gallop, and Chicot followed him. On arriving in front of his little army, Henri raised his visor, and cried:

"Out with the banner! out with the new banner!"

They drew forth the banner, which had the double scutcheon of Navarre and Bourbon; it was white, and had chains of gold on one side, and fleur-de-lis on the other.

Again the cannon from Cahors were fired, and the balls tore through a file of infantry near the king.

"Ventre St. Gris! did you see, Chicot?" said the king, whose teeth chattered.

"He will be ill," thought Chicot.

"Cursed body," murmured Henri, "ah! you fear, you tremble; wait till you have something to tremble for." And striking his spurs into his horse, he rushed onward before cavalry, infantry, and artillery, and arrived at a hundred feet from the place, red with the fire of the batteries which thundered from above. There, he kept his horse immovable for ten minutes, his face turned toward the gate of the city, and crying, "The fascines! ventre St. Gris! the fascines!"

Mornay had followed him, sword in hand, and then came Chicot; behind them the young Huguenot gentlemen, crying, "Vive Navarre!" and each with a fascine, which he threw in, and the fosse was soon filled. Then came the artillery, and with the loss of thirty men succeeded in placing their petards under the gate. The shot whistled like a whirlwind of iron round Henri's head, and twenty men fell in an instant before his eyes. "Forward!" cried he, and rushed on through the midst of the fire, and arrived just as the soldiers had fired the first petard. The gate was broken in two places; the second petard was lighted, and a new opening was made in the wood; but twenty arquebuses immediately passed through, vomiting balls on the soldiers and officers, and the men fell like mowed grass.

"Sire," cried Chicot, "in Heaven's name retire!"

Mornay said nothing; he was proud of his pupil, but from time to time he tried to place himself before him. Once Henri felt the damp on his brow, and a cloud pass over his eyes.

“Ah, cursed nature,” cried he, “you shall not conquer me!” Then, jumping off his horse, “An ax!” cried he, and with a vigorous arm he struck down wood and iron. At last a beam gave way, and a part of the gate and a portion of the wall fell, and one hundred men rushed to the breach, crying, “Navarre! Navarre! Cahors is ours!”

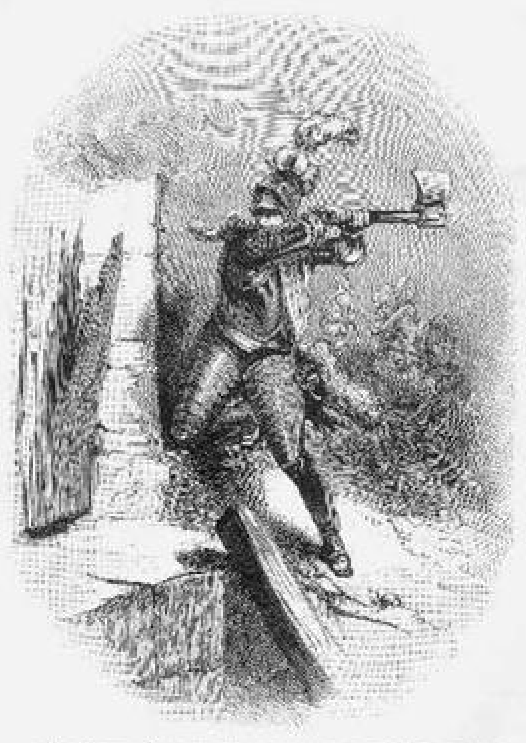

Chicot had not quitted the king; he was with him under the gate when he entered, one of the first, but at each discharge he saw him shudder and lower his head.

“Ventre St. Gris! did you ever see such a coward, Chicot?” said he.

“No, sire, I have never seen a coward like you.”

The soldiers of M. de Vezin now tried to dislodge Henri and his advanced guards, who received them sword in hand; but the besieged were the strongest, and succeeded in forcing Henri and his troops back beyond the fosse.

“Ventre St. Gris!” cried the king, “I believe my flag retreats; I must carry it myself.” And snatching it from the hands of those who held it, he was the first to rush forward again, half enveloped in its folds. The balls whistled round him, and pierced the flag with a hollow sound. A long hand-to-hand fight ensued, above all the uproar of which M. de Vezin’s voice was heard crying, “Barricade the streets! let trenches be dug! and the houses garrisoned!”

“Oh!” cried M. de Turenne, “the siege of the city is over, Vezin.” And as he spoke he fired at him and wounded him in the arm.

“You are wrong, Turenne,” cried M. de Vezin, “there are twenty sieges in Cahors; so if one is over, there are nineteen to come.”

M. de Vezin defended himself during five days and nights from street to street and from house to house. Luckily for the rising fortunes of Henri of Navarre, he had counted too much on the walls and garrison of Cahors, and had neglected to send to M. de Biron.

During these five days and nights, Henri commanded like a captain and fought like a soldier, slept with his head on a stone, and awoke sword in hand. Each day they conquered a street or a square, which each night the garrison tried to retake. On the fourth night the enemy seemed willing to give some rest to the Protestant army. Then it was Henri who attacked in his turn. He forced an intrenched position, but it cost him seven hundred men. M. de Turenne and nearly all the officers were wounded, but the king remained untouched. To the fear that he had felt at first, and which he had so heroically vanquished, succeeded a feverish restlessness, a rash audacity. All the fastenings of his armor were broken, as much by his own efforts as by the blows of the enemy. He struck so vigorously that he always killed his man. When this last post was forced, the king entered into the inclosure, followed by the eternal Chicot, who, silent and sad, had for five days seen growing at his sides the phantom of a monarchy destined to destroy that of the Valois.

“Well, Chicot, of what are you thinking?” said Henri to him.

“Sire, that you are a real king.”

“And I, sire, that you are too imprudent,” said Mornay, “to put up your vizor when they are firing at you from all sides.”

As he spoke a dozen arquebuses were fired at them; one ball struck off a plume from Henri’s helmet, his horse was killed by another, and Mornay’s had his leg broken. The king fell, and there might have finished his career; but Chicot, whirling his sword round to keep off the nearest, helped Henri up and gave him his own horse, saying, “Sire, you will testify to the king of France that, if I drew the sword against him, I killed no one.” — ”Ventre St. Gris! you must be mine, Chicot!” cried Henri. “You shall live and die with me.”

“Sire, I have but one service to follow — that of my king. His star diminishes, but I shall be faithful to his adverse fortunes. Let me serve and love him as long as I live, sire. I shall soon be alone with him; do not envy him his last servant.”

“Chicot, you will be always dear to me, and, after Henri of France, you will have Henri of Navarre for a friend.”

“Yes, sire,” said Chicot simple, kissing his hand.

The siege was soon over after this. M. de Vezin was taken, and the garrison surrendered.

Then Henri dictated to Mornay a letter, which Chicot was to carry to the king of France. It was written in bad Latin, and finished with these words:

“Quod mihi dixisti profuit multum. Cognosco meos devotos; nosce tuos. Chicotos cætera expedit.”

Which means, “What you told me was very useful. I know my faithful followers; know yours. Chicot will tell you the rest.”

“And now, friend Chicot,” said Henri, “embrace me; but take care not to soil yourself, for, mordieu, I am as bloody as a butcher. Take my ring, and adieu, Chicot; I keep you no longer, gallop to France, and tell all you have seen.”

CHAPTER LIV.

WHAT WAS PASSING AT THE LOUVRE ABOUT THE TIME CHICOT ENTERED NÉRAC.

The necessity of following Chicot to the end of his mission has kept us a long time away from the Louvre. The king, after having passed so bravely through his adventurous return from Vincennes, experienced that retrospective emotion which sometimes is felt by the bravest heart after the danger is over. He entered the Louvre without saying anything, made his prayers longer than usual, forgetting to thank the officers and guards who had served him so well. Then he went to bed, astonishing his valets by the rapidity of his toilet; and D'Epernon, who remained in his room to the last, expecting thanks at least, went away in a very bad humor.

At two o'clock every one slept in the Louvre. The next day, Henri took four bouillons in bed instead of two, and then sent for MM. de Villeguie and D'O to come to his room, to speak about a new financial edict. The queen received the order to dine alone, but it was added that in the evening the king would receive. All day he played with Love, saying, every time that the animal showed his white teeth, "Ah, rebel! you want to bite me also; you attack your king also; but you are conquered, M. Love — conquered, wretched leaguer — conquered." His secretaries of state were somewhat astonished at all this, particularly as he said nothing else, and signed everything without looking at it. At three o'clock in the afternoon he asked for D'Epernon. They replied that he was reviewing the light horse; then he inquired for De Loignac, but he also was absent. He asked for lunch, and, while he ate, had an edifying discourse read to him, which he interrupted by saying to the reader, "Was it not Plutarch who wrote the life of Sylla?"

"Yes, sire," said the reader, much astonished at being interrupted in his pious reading by this profane question.

"Do you remember that passage where the historian recounts how the dictator avoided death?"

The reader hesitated.

“Not precisely, sire; it is a long time since I read Plutarch.”

At this moment, the Cardinal de Joyeuse was announced.

“Ah! here is a learned man, he will tell me at once!” cried the king.

“Sire,” said the cardinal, “am I lucky enough to arrive apropos — it is a rare thing in this world.”

“Ma foi! yes; you heard my question?”

“Your majesty asked, I think, in what manner, and when, Sylla narrowly escaped death?”

“Just so — can you answer me, cardinal?”

“Nothing more easy, sire.”

“So much the better.”

“Sylla, who had killed so many men, never risked his life but in combats; did your majesty mean in one of those?”

“Yes; in one in which I think I recollect he was very near death. Open a Plutarch, cardinal; there should be one there translated by Amyot, and read me the passage where he escaped the javelins of his enemies, thanks to the swiftness of his white horse.”

“Sire, there is no need of opening Plutarch; the event took place in the combat with Telescrius the Samnite, and Lamponius the Lucanian.”

“You are so learned, my dear cardinal.”

“Your majesty is too good.”

“Now explain to me how this Roman lion, who was so cruel, was never annoyed by his enemies.”

“Sire, I will reply to your majesty in the words of this same Plutarch.”

“Go on, Joyeuse.”

“Carbon, the enemy of Sylla, said often, ‘I have to fight at once a lion and a fox who inhabit the soul of Sylla, but it is the fox who gives me most trouble.’“

“Ah! it was the fox?”

“Plutarch says so, sire.”

“And he is right, cardinal. But apropos of combats, have you any news of your brother?”

“Of which brother, sire? I have two.”

“Of the Duc d’Arques, my friend.”

“Not yet, sire.”

"If M. d'Anjou, who always plays the fox, will only play the lion a little for once."

The cardinal did not reply, so Henri, signing to him to remain, dressed himself sumptuously, and passed into the room where the court waited for him. He entered, looking full of good humor, kissed the hands of his wife and mother, paid all sorts of compliments to the ladies, and even offered them sweetmeats.

"We were unquiet about your health, my son," said Catherine.

"You were wrong, madame; I have never been better."

"And to what happy influence do you owe this amelioration, my son?"

"To having laughed much, madame."

Every one looked astonished.

"Laughed! you can laugh much, my son; then you are very happy?"

"It is true, madame."

"And about what were you so much amused?"

"I must tell you, mother, that yesterday I went to Vincennes."

"I knew it."

"Oh! you knew it; well, my people told me, before my return, of an enemy's army whose muskets shone on the road."

"An enemy's army on the road to Vincennes?"

"Yes, mother."

"And where?"

"In front of the Jacobins, near the house of our good cousin."

"Near Madame de Montpensier's?"

"Precisely so, near Bel-Esbat. I approached, bravely to give battle, and I perceived — "

"What, sire?" cried the queen, in alarm.

"Reassure yourself, madame, I perceived an entire priory of good monks, who presented arms to me with acclamations."

Every one laughed, and the king continued:

"Yes, you are right to laugh; I have in France more than ten thousand monks, of whom I can make, if necessary, ten thousand musketeers; then I will create a Grand-Master of the Tonsured Musketeers, and give the place to you, cardinal."

"Sire, I accept."

The ladies now, according to etiquette, rose, and, bowing to the king, retired. The queen followed with her ladies of honor. The queen-mother remained: the king’s gayety was a mystery that she wished to fathom.

“Cardinal,” said the king, “what has become of your brother, Du Bouchage?”

“I do not know, sire.”

“How! you do not know?”

“No; I never see him, now.”

A grave, sad voice from the end of the room said, “Here I am, sire.”

“Ah! it is he,” cried Henri. “Approach, comte; approach.”

The young man obeyed.

“Mon Dieu!” cried the king, “he is no longer a man, but a shade.”

“Sire, he works hard,” said the cardinal, stupefied himself at the change in his brother during the last week. He was as pale as wax, and looked thin and wan.

“Come here, young man,” said the king. “Thanks, cardinal, for your quotation from Plutarch; in a similar case I shall apply to you again.”

The cardinal saw that Henri wished to be left alone with his brother, and took his leave.

There only remained the queen-mother, D’Epernon, and Du Bouchage. The king beckoned to the latter, and said:

“Why do you hide thus behind the ladies; do you not know it gives me pleasure to see you?”

“Your kind words do me honor, sire,” said the young man, bowing.

“Then how is it that we never see you here now?”

“If your majesty has not seen me, it is because you have not deigned to cast an eye on the corner of the room. I am here every day regularly; I never have failed, and never will, as long as I can stand upright: it is a sacred duty to me.”

“And is it that that makes you so sad?”

“Oh! your majesty cannot think so?”

“No, for you and your brother love me, and I love you. Apropos, do you know that poor Anne has written to me from Dieppe?”

“I did not, sire.”

“Yes; but you know he did not like going?”

“He confided to me his regrets at leaving Paris.”

“Yes; but do you know what he said? That there existed a man who would have regretted Paris much more; and that if I gave you this order you would die.”

"Perhaps, sire."

"He said yet more, for your brother talks fast when he is not sulky; he said that if I had given such an order you would have disobeyed it."

"Your majesty was right to place my death before my disobedience; it would have been a greater grief to me to disobey than to die, and yet I should have disobeyed."

"You are a little mad, I think, my poor comte," said Henri.

"I am quite so, I believe."

"Then the case is serious."

Joyeuse sighed.

"What is it? tell me."

Joyeuse tried to smile. "A great king like you, sire, would not care for such confidences."

"Yes, Henri, yes; tell me. It will amuse me," said the king.

"Sire, you deceive yourself; there is nothing in my grief that could amuse a noble heart like yours."

The king took the young man's hand.

"Do not be angry, Du Bouchage," said he; "you know that your king also has known the griefs of an unrequited love."

"I know it, sire, formerly."

"Therefore, I feel for your sufferings."

"Your majesty is too good."

"Not so; but when I suffered what you suffer, no one could aid me, because no one was more powerful than myself, whereas I can aid you."

"Sire?"

"And, consequently, hope soon for an end of your sorrows."

The young man shook his head.

"Du Bouchage, you shall be happy, or I am no longer king of France!" cried Henri.

"Happy! alas, sire, it is impossible," said the young man with a bitter smile.

"And why so?"

"Because my happiness is not of this world."

"Henri, your brother, when he went, recommended you to my friendship. I wish, since you consult neither the experience of your father, nor the wisdom of your brother the cardinal, to be an elder brother to you. Come, be confiding, and tell me all. I assure you, Du Bouchage, that for everything except death my power and love shall find you a remedy."

"Sire," replied the young man, falling at the king's feet, "do not confound me by the expression of a goodness to which I cannot reply. My misfortune is without remedy, for it is that which makes my only happiness."

"Du Bouchage, you are mad; you will kill yourself with fancies."

"I know it well, sire."

"But," cried the king, impatiently, "is it a marriage you wish for?"

"Sire, my wish is to inspire love. You see that the whole world is powerless to aid me in this; I alone can obtain it for myself." — "Then why despair?"

"Because I feel that I shall never inspire it."

"Try, try, my child; you are young and rich. Where is the woman that can resist at once beauty, youth and wealth? There are none, Du Bouchage."

"Sire, your goodness is great."

"If you wish to be discreet, and tell me nothing, do so; I will find out, and then act. You know what I have done for your brother, I will do as much for you; a hundred thousand crowns shall not stop me."

Du Bouchage seized the king's hand, and pressed his lips to it.

"May your majesty ask one day for my blood, and I will shed it to the last drop to show you how grateful I am for the protection that I refuse!"

Henri III. turned on his heel angrily.

"Really," said he, "these Joyeuses are more obstinate than a Valois. Here is one who will bring me every day his long face and eyes circled with black; that will be delightful."

"Oh! sire, I will smile so, when I am here, that every one shall think me the happiest of men."

"Yes, but I shall know the contrary, and that will sadden me."

"Does your majesty permit me to retire?" asked Du Bouchage.

"Go, my child, and try to be a man."

When he was gone the king approached D'Epernon, and said:

"Lavalette, have money distributed this evening to the Forty-five, and give them holiday for a night and a day to amuse themselves. By the mass! they saved me like Sylla's white horse."

"Saved?" said Catherine.

"Yes, mother."

"From what?"

“Ah! ask D’Epernon.”

“I ask you, my son.”

“Well, madame, our dear cousin, the sister of your good friend M. de Guise — oh! do not deny it; you, know he is your good friend — laid an ambush for me.”

“An ambush!”

“Yes, madame, and I narrowly escaped imprisonment or assassination.”

“By M. de Guise?”

“You do not believe it?”

“I confess I do not.”

“D’Epernon, my friend, relate the adventure to my mother. If I go on speaking, and she goes on shrugging her shoulders, I shall get angry, and that does not suit my health. Adieu, madame; cherish M. de Guise as much as you please, but I would advise them not to forget Salcede.”

CHAPTER LV.

RED PLUME AND WHITE PLUME.

It was eight in the evening, and the house of Robert Briquet, solitary and sad-looking, formed a worthy companion to that mysterious house of which we have already spoken to our readers. One might have thought that these two houses were yawning in each other’s face. Not far from there the noise of brass was heard, mingled with confused voices, vague murmurs, and squeaks.

It was probably this noise that attracted a young and handsome cavalier, with a violet cap, red plume, and gray mantle, who, after stopping for some minutes to hear this noise, went on slowly and pensively toward the house of Robert Briquet. Now this noise of brass was that of saucepans; these vague murmurs, those of pots boiling on fires and spits turned by dogs; those cries, those of M. Fournichon, host of the “Brave Chevalier,” and of Madame Fournichon, who was preparing her rooms. When the young man with the violet hat had well looked at the fire, inhaled the smell of the fowls, and peeped through the curtains, he went away, then returned to recommence his examinations. He continued to walk up and down, but never passed Robert Briquet’s house, which seemed to be the limit of his walk. Each time that he arrived at this limit he found there, like a sentinel, a young man about his own age, with a black cap, a white plume, and a violet cloak, who, with frowning brow and his hand on his sword, seemed to say, “Thou shalt go no further.” But the other took twenty turns without observing this, so preoccupied was he. Certainly he saw a man walking up and down like himself: but, as he was too well dressed to be a robber, he never thought of disquieting himself about him. But the other, on the contrary, looked more and more black at each return of the red plume, till at last it attracted his attention, and he began to think that his presence there must be annoying to the other; and wondering for what reason, he looked first at Briquet’s house, then at the one opposite, and seeing nothing, turned round and recommenced his walk from west to east. This continued for about five minutes, until, as they once again came face to face, the young man in the white plume walked straight up against the other, who, taken unawares, with difficulty saved himself from falling.

"Monsieur," cried he, "are you mad, or do you mean to insult me?"

"Monsieur, I wish to make you understand that you annoy me much. It seems to me that you might have seen that without my telling you."

"Not at all, monsieur; I never see what I do not wish to see."

"There are, however, certain things which would attract your attention, I hope, if they shone before your eyes;" and he drew his sword as he spoke, which glittered in the moonlight.

The red plume said quietly, "One would think, monsieur, that you had never drawn a sword before, you are in such a hurry to attack one who does not attack you."

"But who will defend himself, I hope."

"Why so?" replied the other smiling. "And what right have you to prevent me from walking in the street?"

"Why do you walk in this street?"

"Parbleu! because it pleases me."

"Ah! it pleases you."

"Doubtless; are you not also walking here? Have you a license from the king to keep to yourself the Rue de Bussy?"

"What is that to you?"

"A great deal, for I am a faithful subject of the king's, and would not disobey him."

"Ah! you laugh!"

"And you threaten."

"Heaven and earth! I tell you, you annoy me, monsieur, and that if you do not go away willingly I will make you."

"Oh! oh! we shall see that."

"Yes, we shall see."

"Monsieur, I have particular business here. Now, if you will have it, I will cross swords with you, but I will not go away."

"Monsieur, I am Comte Henri du Bouchage, brother of the Duc de Joyeuse. Once more, will you yield me the place, and go away?"

"Monsieur," replied the other, "I am the Vicomte Ernanton de Carmainges. You do not annoy me at all, and I do not ask you to go away."

Du Bouchage reflected a moment, and then put his sword back in its sheath.

“Excuse me, monsieur,” said he; “I am half mad, being in love.”

“And I also am in love, but I do not think myself mad for that.”

Henri grew pale.

“You are in love!” said he.

“Yes, monsieur.”

“And you confess it?”

“Is it a crime?”

“But with some one in this street?”

“Yes, for the present.”

“In Heaven’s name tell me who it is!”

“Ah! M. du Bouchage, you have not reflected on what you are asking me; you know a gentleman cannot reveal a secret, of which only half belongs to him.”

“It is true; pardon, M. de Carmainges; but, in truth, there is no one so unhappy as I am under heaven.”

There was so much real grief and eloquent despair in these words, that Ernanton was profoundly touched.

“Oh! mon Dieu! I understand,” said he; “you fear that we are rivals.”

“I do.”

“Well; monsieur, I will be frank.”

Joyeuse grew pale again.

“I,” continued Ernanton, “have a rendezvous.”

“A rendezvous?”

“Yes.”

“In this street?”

“Yes.”

“Written?”

“Yes; in very good writing.”

“A woman’s?”

“No; a man’s.”

“What do you mean?”

“What I say. I have an invitation to a rendezvous with a woman, written by a man; it seems she has a secretary.”

“Ah! go on, monsieur.”

“I cannot refuse you, monsieur. I will tell you the tenor of the note.”

"I listen."

"You will see if it is like yours."

"Oh! monsieur, I have no rendezvous — no note."

Ernanton then drew out a little paper. "Here is the note, monsieur," said he; "it would be difficult to read it to you by this obscure light: but it is short, and I know it by heart, if you will trust to me."

"Oh! entirely."

"This is it, then: 'M. Ernanton, my secretary is charged by me to tell you that I have a great desire to talk with you for an hour; your merit has touched me.' I pass over another phrase still more flattering."

"Then you are waited for?"

"No; I wait, as you see."

"Are they to open the door to you?"

"No; to whistle three times from the window."

Henri, trembling all over, placed one hand on Ernanton's arm and with the other pointed to the opposite house.

"From there?" said he.

"Oh! no; from there," said Ernanton, pointing to the "Brave Chevalier."

Henri uttered a cry of joy. "Oh! a thousand thanks, monsieur," said he; "pardon my incivility — my folly. Alas! you know, for a man who really loves, there exists but one woman, and, seeing you always return to this house, I believed that it was here you were waited for."

"I have nothing to pardon, monsieur; for really I half-thought you had come on the same errand as myself."

"And you had the incredible patience to say nothing! Ah! you do not love, you do not love."

"Ma foi! I have no great rights as yet; and these great ladies are so capricious, and would, perhaps, enjoy playing me a trick."

"Oh! M. de Carmainges, you do not love as I do; and yet — "

"Yet what?"

"You are more happy."

"Ah! are they cruel in that house?"

"M. de Carmainges, for three months I have loved like a madman her who lives there, and I have not yet had the happiness of hearing the sound of her voice."

"Diable! you are not far advanced. But stay."

"What is it?"

“Did not some one whistle?”

“Indeed, I think I heard something.”

A second whistle was now distinctly heard.

“M. le Comte,” said Ernanton, “you will excuse me for taking leave, but I believe that is my signal.”

A third whistle sounded.

“Go, monsieur,” said Joyeuse; “and good luck to you.”

Ernanton made off quickly, while Joyeuse began to walk back more gloomily than ever.

“Now for my accustomed task,” said he; “let me knock as usual at this cursed door which never opens to me.”

CHAPTER LVI.

THE DOOR OPENS.

On arriving at the door of the house, poor Henri was seized by his usual hesitation.

“Courage!” said he to himself.

But before knocking, he looked once more behind him, and saw the bright light shining through the windows of the hotel.

“There,” said he, “enter for love and joy, people who are invited almost without desiring; why have I not a tranquil and careless heart? Perhaps I might enter there also, instead of vainly trying here.”

Ten o’clock struck. Henri lifted the knocker and struck once, then again.

“There,” said he, listening, “there is the inner door opening, the stairs creaking, the sound of steps approaching, always the same thing.”

And he knocked again.

“There,” said he, “he peeps through the trellis-work, sees my pale face, and goes away, always without opening. Adieu, cruel house, until to-morrow.”

And he turned to go; but scarcely had he taken two steps, when the key turned in the lock, and, to his profound surprise, the door opened, and a man stood bowing on the threshold. It was the same whom he had seen before.

“Good-evening, monsieur,” said he, in a harsh voice, but whose sound appeared to Du Bouchage sweeter than the song of birds.

Henri joined his hands and trembled so that the servant put out a hand to save him from falling, with a visible expression of respectful pity.

“Come, monsieur,” said he, “here I am: explain to me, I beg, what you want.”

“I have loved so much,” replied the young man; “my heart has beat so fast, that I hardly know if it still beats.”

“Will it please you, monsieur, to sit down and talk to me?”

“Oh, yes!”

"Speak, then, monsieur, and tell me what you desire."

"My friend, you already know. Many times, you know, I have waited for you and surprised you at the turn of a street, and have offered you gold enough to enrich you, had you been the greediest of men; at other times I have threatened you, but you have never listened to me, and have always seen me suffer without seeming to pity me. To-day you tell me to speak — to express my wishes; what then has happened, mon Dieu?"

The servant sighed. He had evidently a pitying heart under a rough covering. Henry heard this sigh, and it encouraged him.

"You know," continued he, "that I love, and how I love; you have seen me pursue a woman and discover her, in spite of her efforts to fly me: but never in my greatest grief has a bitter word escaped me, or have I given heed to those violent thoughts which are born of despair and the fire of youth."

"It is true, monsieur; and in this my mistress renders you full justice."

"Could I not," continued Henri, "when you refused me admittance, have forced the door, as is done every day by some lad, tipsy, or in love? Then, if but for a minute, I should have seen this inexorable woman, and have spoken to her."

"It is true."

"And," continued the young count, sadly, "I am something in this world; my name is great as well as my fortune, the king himself protects me; just now he begged me to confide to him my griefs and to apply to him for aid."

"Ah!" said the servant, anxiously.

"I would not do it," continued Joyeuse; "no, no, I refused all, to come and pray at this door with clasped hands — a door which never yet opened to me."

"M. le Comte, you have indeed a noble heart, and worthy to be loved."

"Well, then, he whom you call worthy, to what do you condemn him? Every morning my page brings a letter; it is refused. Every evening I knock myself at the door, and I am disregarded. You let me suffer, despair, die in the street, without having the compassion for me that you would have for a dog that howled. Ah! this woman has no woman's heart, she does not love me. Well! one can no more tell one's heart to love than not to love. But you may pity the unfortunate who suffers, and give him a word of consolation — reach out your hand to save him from falling; but no, this woman cares not for my sufferings. Why does she not kill me, either with a refusal from her mouth, or some blow from a poniard? Dead, I should suffer no more."

"M. le Comte," replied the man, "the lady whom you accuse is, believe me, far from having the hard, insensible heart you think; she has seen you, and understood what you suffer, and feels for you the warmest sympathy."

"Oh! compassion, compassion!" cried the young man; "but may that heart of which you boast some day know love — love such as I feel, and may they offer her compassion in exchange; I shall be well avenged."

"M. le Comte, not to reply to love is no reason for never having loved. This woman has perhaps felt the passion more than ever you will — has perhaps loved as you can never love."

"When one loves like that, one loves forever," cried Henri, raising his eyes to heaven.

"Did I tell you that she loved no more?"

Henri uttered a doleful cry.

"She loves!" cried he. "Ah! mon Dieu!"

"Yes, she loves; but be not jealous of the man she loves, M. le Comte, for he is no more of this world. My mistress is a widow."

These words restored hope and life to the young man.

"Oh!" cried he, "she is a widow, and recently; the source of her tears will dry up in time. She is a widow, then she loves no one, or only a shadow — a name. Ah! she will love me. Oh! mon Dieu, all great griefs are calmed by time. When the widow of Mausole, who had sworn an eternal grief at her husband's tomb, had exhausted her tears, she was cured. Regrets are a malady, from which every one who survives comes out as strong as before."

The servant shook his head.

"This lady, M. le Comte, has also sworn eternal fidelity to death; but I know her, and she will keep her word better than the forgetful woman of whom you speak."

"I will wait ten years, if necessary; since she lives, I may hope."

"Oh! young man, do not reckon thus. She has lived, you say; yes, so she has, not a month, or a year, but seven years. You hope that she will console herself; never, M. le Comte, never. I swear it to you — I, who was but the servant of him who is dead, and yet I shall never be consoled."

"This man so much regretted, this husband — "

"It was not her husband, it was her lover, M. le Comte, and a woman like her whom you unluckily love has but one lover in her life."

“My friend,” cried Joyeuse, “intercede for me.”

“I! Listen, M. le Comte. Had I believed you capable of using violence toward my mistress, I would have killed you long ago with my own hand. If, on the contrary, I could have believed that she would love you, I think I should have killed her. Now, M. le Comte, I have said what I wished to say; do not seek to make me say more, for, on my honor — and although not a nobleman, my honor is worth something — I have told you all I can.”

Henri rose.

“I thank you,” said he, “for having had compassion on my misfortunes; now I have decided.”

“Then you will be calmer for the future. M. le Comte, you will go away, and leave us to ourselves?”

“Yes, be easy; I will go away, and forever.”

“You mean to die?”

“Why not? I cannot live without her.”

“M. le Comte, believe me, it is bad to die by your own hand.”

“Therefore I shall not choose that death; but there is, for a young man like me, a death which has always been reckoned the best — that received in defending your king and country.”

“If you suffer beyond your strength, if you owe nothing to those who survive you, if death on the field of battle is offered to you, die, M. le Comte; I should have done so long ago, had I not been condemned to live.”

“Adieu, and thank you,” replied Joyeuse.

“Au revoir in another world.”

And he went away rapidly, throwing a heavy purse of gold at the feet of the servant.

CHAPTER LVII.

HOW A GREAT LADY LOVED IN THE YEAR 1586.

The whistles which Ernanton had heard were really his signal. Thus, when the young man reached the door, he found Dame Fournichon on the threshold waiting for her customers with a smile, which made her resemble a mythological goddess painted by a Flemish painter, and in her large white hands she held a golden crown, which another hand, whiter and more delicate, had slipped in, in passing.

She stood before the door, so as to bar Ernanton's passage.

"What do you want?" said she to him.

"Were not three whistles given from one of those windows just now?"

"Yes."

"Well, they were to summon me."

"You?"

"Yes."

"On your honor?"

"As a gentleman, Dame Fournichon."

"Enter, then, monsieur, enter."

And happy at having a client after her own heart, fit for the "Rose-tree of love," the hostess conducted Ernanton up the stairs herself. A little door, vulgarly painted, gave access to a sort of antechamber, which led to a room, furnished, decorated, and carpeted with rather more luxury than might have been expected in this remote corner of Paris; but this was Madame Fournichon's favorite room and she had exerted all her taste to embellish it.

When the young man entered the antechamber, he smelled a strong aromatic odor, the work, doubtless, of some susceptible person, who had thus tried to overcome the smell of cooking exhaled from the kitchen.

Ernanton, after opening the door, stopped for an instant to contemplate one of those elegant female figures which must always command attention, if not love. Reposing on cushions, enveloped in silk and velvet, this lady was occupied in burning in the candle the end of a little stick of aloes, over which she bent so as to inhale the full perfume. By the manner in which she threw the branch in the fire, and pulled her hood over her masked face, Ernanton perceived that she had heard him enter, but she did not turn.

"Madame," said the young man, "you sent for your humble servant — here he is."

"Ah! very well," said the lady; "sit down, I beg, M. Ernanton."

"Pardon, madame, but before anything I must thank you for the honor that you do me."

"Ah! that is civil, and you are right; but I presume you do not know whom you are thanking, M. de Carmainges."

"Madame, you have your face hidden by a mask and your hands by gloves; I cannot then recognize you — I can but guess."

"And you guess who I am?"

"Her whom my heart desires, whom my imagination paints, young, beautiful, powerful, and rich; too rich and too powerful for me to be able to believe that what has happened to me is real, and that I am not dreaming."

"Had you any trouble to enter here?" asked the lady, without replying directly to the words which had escaped from the full heart of Ernanton.

"No, madame; the admittance was easier than I could have thought."

"Yes, all is easy for a man; it is so different for a woman. What were you saying before, monsieur?" added she, carelessly, and pulling off her glove to show a beautiful hand, at once plump and taper.

"I said, madame, that without having seen your face, I know who you are, and without fear of making a mistake, may say that I love you."

"Then you are sure that I am her whom you expected to find here?"

"My heart tells me so."

"Then you know me?"

"Yes."

"Really! you, a provincial, only just-arrived, you already know the women of Paris?"

"In all Paris, madame, I know but one."

"And that is me?"

"I believe so."

"By what do you recognize me?"

"By your voice, your grace, and your beauty."

"My voice, perhaps; I cannot disguise it. My grace; I may appropriate the compliment; but as for my beauty, it is veiled."

"It was less so, madame, on the day when, to bring you into Paris, I held you so near to me that your breast touched my shoulders, and I felt your breath on my neck."

"Then, on the receipt of my letter, you guessed that it came from me?"

"Oh! no, madame, not for a moment; I believed I was the subject of some joke, or the victim of some error, and it is only during the last few minutes that, seeing you, touching you — " and he tried to take her hand, but she withdrew it.

"Enough!" said the lady; "the fact is, that I have committed a great folly."

"In what, madame?"

"In what? You say that you know me, and then ask."

"Oh! it is true, madame, that I am very insignificant and obscure near your highness."

"Mon Dieu! monsieur, pray be silent. Have you no sense?"

"What have I done?" cried Ernanton, frightened.

"You see me in a mask, and if I wear one, it is for disguise, and yet you call me your highness."

"Ah, pardon me, madame," said Ernanton, "but I believed in the discretion of these walls."

"It appears you are credulous."

"Alas! madame, I am in love."

"And you are convinced that I reciprocate this love?"

Ernanton rose piqued.

"No, madame," replied he.

"Then what do you believe?"

"I believe that you have something important to say to me, and that, not wishing to receive me at your hotel, or at Bel-Esbat, you preferred this isolated spot."

"You thought that?" — "Yes."

"And what do you think I could have to say to you?" asked the lady, rather anxiously.

"How can I tell? Perhaps something about M. de Mayenne."

"Had you not already told me all you knew of him?"

"Perhaps, then, some question about last night's event."

"What event? of what do you speak?" asked the lady, visibly agitated.

"Of the panic experienced by M. d'Epernon and the arrest of the Lorraine gentlemen."

"They arrested them?"

"Yes, those who were found on the road to Vincennes."

"Which is also the road to Soissons, where M. de Guise holds his garrison. Ah! M. Ernanton, you, who belong to the court, can tell me why they arrested these gentlemen."

"I belong to the court?"

"Certainly."

"You know that, madame?"

"Ah! to find out your address, we were forced to make inquiries. But what resulted from all this?"

"Nothing, madame, to my knowledge."

"Then why did you think I should wish to speak of it?"

"I am wrong again, madame."

"From what place are you, monsieur?"

"From Agen."

"What, you are a Gascon! and yet are not vain enough to suppose that when I saw you at the Porte St. Antoine, on the day of Salcede's execution, I liked your looks."

Ernanton reddened, and looked confused.

The lady went on. "That I met you in the street, and found you handsome."

Ernanton grew scarlet.

"That afterward, when you brought me a message from my brother, I liked you."

"Madame, I never thought so, I protest."

"Then you were wrong," said the lady, turning on him two eyes which flashed through her mask.

Ernanton clasped his hands.

"Madame, are you mocking me?" cried he.

"Ma foi! no. The truth is, that you pleased me."

"Mon Dieu!"

"But you yourself dared to declare your love to me."

"But then I did not know who you were, madame; and now that I do know, I humbly ask your pardon."

"Oh!" cried the lady, "say all you think, or I shall regret having come."

Ernanton fell on his knees.

"Speak, madame, speak, that I may be sure this is not all a dream, and perhaps I shall dare to answer."

"So be it. Here are my projects for you," said the lady, gently pushing Ernanton back, while she arranged the folds of her dress; "I fancy you, but I do not yet know you. I am not in the habit of resisting my fancies; but I never commit follies. Had we been equals, I should have received you at my house, and studied you before I hinted at my feelings; but as that was impossible, I was driven to this interview; now you know what to do; be worthy of me, it is all I ask."

Ernanton exhausted himself in protestations.

"Oh! less warmth, M. de Carmainges, I beg; it is not worth while," replied she, carelessly. "Perhaps it was only your name that pleased me; perhaps it is a caprice, and will pass away. However, do not think yourself too far from perfection, and begin to despair. I hate perfect people, but I adore devoted ones; remember that."

Ernanton was beside himself. This haughty language and proud superiority, yet this frank declaration and abandon, terrified and yet delighted him. He seated himself near the proud and beautiful lady, and then tried to pass his arm behind the cushions on which she reclined.

"Monsieur," said she, "it appears you have heard, but not understood me. No familiarity, if you please; let us each remain in our places. Some day I shall give you the right to call me yours; but this right you have not yet."

Ernanton rose, pale and angry.

"Excuse me, madame," said he, "it seems I commit nothing but follies here; I am not yet accustomed to the habits of Paris. Among us in the provinces, 200 leagues off, when a woman says 'I love,' she loves, and does not hold herself aloof, or take pretexts for humiliating the man at her feet. It is your custom as a Parisian, and your right as a princess. I accept it, therefore, only I have not been accustomed to it. The habit, doubtless, will come in time."

"Ah! you are angry, I believe," said the duchess, haughtily.

"I am, madame, but it is against myself; for I have for you, madame, not a passing caprice, but a real love. It is your heart I seek to obtain, and therefore I am angry with myself for having compromised the respect that I owe you, and which I will only change into love when you command me. From this moment, madame, I await your orders."

“Come, come, do not exaggerate, M. de Carmainges; now you are all ice, after being all flame.”

“It seems to me, however, madame — ”

“A truce to politeness; I do not wish to play the princess. Here is my hand, take it; it is that of a simple woman.”

Ernanton took this beautiful hand respectfully.

“Well, you do not kiss it!” cried the duchess; “are you mad, or have you sworn to put me in a passion?”

“But just now — ”

“Just now I drew it away, while now I give it to you.”

Ernanton kissed the hand, which was then withdrawn.

“Another lesson,” said he. “Assuredly you will end by killing my passion. I may adore you on my knees; but I should have neither love nor confidence for you.”

“Oh! I do not wish that, for you would be a sad lover, and it is not so that I like them. No, remain natural, be yourself, M. Ernanton, and nothing else. I have caprices. Oh! mon Dieu, you told me I was beautiful, and all beautiful women have them. Do not fear me; and when I say to the too impetuous Ernanton, ‘Calm yourself,’ let him consult my eyes and not my voice.”

At these words she rose.

It was time, for the young man seized her in his arms, and his lips touched her mask; but through this mask her eyes darted such a flaming glance that he drew back.

“Well,” said she, “we shall meet again. Decidedly you please me, M. de Carmainges.” Ernanton bowed.

“When are you free?” asked she.

“Alas! very rarely, madame.”

“Ah! your service is fatiguing, is it not?”

“What service?”

“That which you perform near the king. Are you not some kind of guard to his majesty?”

“I form part of a body of gentlemen, madame.”

“That is what I mean. They are all Gascons, are they not?”

“Yes, madame.”

“How many are there? I forget.”

“Forty-five.”

"What a singular number!"

"I believe it was chance."

"And these forty-five gentlemen never quit the king, you say?"

"I did not say so, madame."

"Ah! I thought you did; at least, you said you had very little liberty."

"It is true, I have very little; because by day we are on service near the king, and at night we stay at the Louvre."

"In the evening?"

"Yes."

"Every evening?"

"Nearly."

"What would have happened then this evening, if your duty had kept you? I, who waited for you, and should have been ignorant of the cause of your absence, should have thought my advances despised."

"Ah! madame, to see you I will risk all, I swear to you."

"It would be useless and absurd; I do not wish it."

"But then — "

"Do your duty; I will arrange, who am free and mistress of my time."

"What goodness, madame!"

"But you have not explained to me," said the duchess, with her insinuating smile, "how you happened to be free this evening, and how you came."

"This evening, madame, I was thinking of asking permission of De Loignac, our captain, who is very kind to me, when the order came to give a night's holiday to the Forty-five."

"And on what account was this leave given?"

"As recompense, I believe, madame, for a somewhat fatiguing service yesterday at Vincennes."

"Ah! very well."

"Therefore to this circumstance I owe the pleasure of seeing you to-night at my ease."

"Well! listen, Carmainges," said the duchess, with a gentle familiarity which filled the heart of the young man with joy; "this is what you must do, whenever you think you shall be at liberty — send a note here to the hostess, and every day I will send a man to inquire."

"Oh! mon Dieu! madame, you are too good!"

"What is that noise?" said the duchess, laying her hand on his arm.

Indeed, a noise of spurs, of voices, of doors shutting, and joyous exclamations, came from the room below, like the echo of an invasion. Ernanton looked out.

“It is my companions,” said he, “who have come here to spend their holiday.”

“But by what chance? just where we are.”

“Because it is just here, madame, that we each had a rendezvous on our arrival, and on the happy day of their entry in Paris my friends conceived an affection for the wine and the cooking of M. Fournichon. But you, how did you come to choose this place?”

“I chose, and you will easily understand that, the most deserted part of Paris, a place near the river, where no one was likely to recognize me, or suspect that I could come; but, mon Dieu! how noisy your companions are.”

Indeed, the noise was becoming a perfect storm, but all at once they heard a sound of footsteps on the little staircase which led to their room, and Madame Fournichon’s voice, crying, from below, “M. de St. Maline, M. de St. Maline!”

“Well!” replied the young man.

“Do not go up there, I beg!”

“And why not, dear Madame Fournichon? is not all the house ours to-night?” — ”Not the turrets.”

“Bah! they are part of the house,” cried five or six voices.

“No, they are not; they are private; do not disturb my lodgers.”

“Do not disturb me, Madame Fournichon,” replied St. Maline.

“For pity’s sake!” cried Madame Fournichon.

“Madame,” replied he, “it is midnight, and at nine all fires ought to be extinguished; there is a fire now in your turret, and I must see what disobedient subject is transgressing the king’s edicts.”

And St. Maline continued to advance, followed by several others.

“Mon Dieu! M. de Carmainges,” cried the duchess, “will those people dare to enter here?”

“I am here, madame; have no fear.”

“Oh! they are forcing the doors,” cried she.

Indeed, St. Maline rushed so furiously against the door, that, being very slight, it was at once broken open.

CHAPTER LVIII.

HOW ST. MALINE ENTERED INTO THE TURRET, AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

Ernanton's first thought when he saw the door of the antechamber fly open was to blow out the light.

"M. de St. Maline," cried the hostess, "I warn you that the persons whom you are troubling are your friends."

"Well! all the more reason to present our compliments to them," cried Perducas de Pincornay, in a tipsy voice.

"And what friends are they? We will see!" cried St. Maline.

The good hostess, hoping to prevent a collision, glided among them, and whispered Ernanton's name in St. Maline's ear.

"Ernanton!" cried St. Maline, aloud, for whom this revelation was oil instead of water thrown on the fire, "that is not possible." — "And why so?"

"Oh! because Ernanton is a model of chastity and a melange of all the virtues. No, you must be wrong, Madame Fournichon; it cannot be Ernanton who is shut in there."

And he approached the second door, to treat it as he had done the first, when it was opened, and Ernanton appeared on the threshold, with a face which did not announce that patience was one of the virtues which, according to St. Maline, he possessed.

"By what right has M. de St. Maline broken down one door, and intends to break a second?" said he.

"Ah! it is he, really; it is Ernanton!" cried St. Maline. "I recognize his voice; but as to his person, devil take me if I can see it in this darkness."

"You do not reply to my question, monsieur," said Ernanton.

St. Maline began to laugh noisily, which reassured some of his comrades, who were thinking of retiring.

"I spoke; did you not hear me, M. de St. Maline?" said Ernanton.

"Yes, monsieur, perfectly."

"Then what have you to say?"

"We wished to know, my dear friend, if it was you up here."

"Well, monsieur, now you know it, leave me in peace."

"Cap de Bious! have you become a hermit?"

"As for that, monsieur, permit me to leave you in doubt."

"Ah! bah!" cried St. Maline, trying to enter, "are you really alone? you have no light."

"Gentlemen!" said Ernanton, "I know that you are half drunk, and I forgive you; but there is a limit even to the patience that one owes to men beside themselves; your joke is over, do me the favor to retire."

"Oh! oh! retire! how you speak!" said St. Maline.

"I speak so as you may not be deceived in my wishes, and I repeat, gentlemen, retire, I beg."

"Not before we have been admitted to the honor of saluting the person for whom you desert our company. M. de Montcrabeau," continued he, "go down and come back with a light."

"M. de Montcrabeau," cried Ernanton, "if you do that, remember it will be a personal offense to me."

Montcrabeau hesitated.

"Good," replied St. Maline, "we have our oath, and M. de Carmainges is so strict that he will not infringe discipline; we cannot draw our swords against each other; therefore, a light, Montcrabeau, a light!"

Montcrabeau descended, and in five minutes returned with a light, which he offered to St. Maline.

"No, no," said he; "keep it; I may, perhaps, want both hands."

And he made a step forward.

"I take you all to witness," cried Ernanton, "that I am insulted without reason, and that in consequence" — and he drew his sword — "I will bury this sword in the breast of the first man who advances."

St. Maline, furious, was about to draw his sword also; but before he had time to do so, the point of Ernanton's was on his breast, and as he advanced a step, without Ernanton's moving his arm, St. Maline felt the iron on his flesh, and drew back furious, but Ernanton followed him, keeping the sword against his breast. St. Maline grew pale; if Ernanton had wished it, he could have pinned him to the wall, but he slowly withdrew his sword.

"You merit two deaths for your insolence," said he, "but the oath of which you spoke restrains me, and I will touch you no more; let me pass.

Come, madame, I answer for your free passage.”

Then appeared a woman, whose head was covered by a hood, and her face by a mask, and who took Ernanton’s arm, tremblingly. St. Maline stood by, stifling with rage at his merited punishment. He drew his dagger as Ernanton passed by him. Did he mean to strike Ernanton, or only to do what he did? No one knew, but as they passed, his dagger cut through the silken hood of the duchess and severed the string of her mask, which fell to the ground. This movement was so rapid that in the half light no one saw or could prevent it. The duchess uttered a cry; St. Maline picked up the mask and returned it to her, looking now full in her uncovered face.

“Ah!” cried he, in an insolent tone, “it is the beautiful lady of the litter. Ernanton, you get on fast.”

Ernanton stopped and half-drew his sword again; but the duchess drew him on, saying, “Come on, I beg you, M. Ernanton.”

“We shall meet again, M. de St. Maline,” said Ernanton, “and you shall pay for this, with the rest.”

And he went on without meeting with any further opposition, and conducted the duchess to her litter, which was guarded by two servants. Arrived there and feeling herself in safety, she pressed Ernanton’s hand, and said, “M. Ernanton, after what has just passed, after the insult which, in spite of your courage, you could not defend me from, and which might probably be renewed, we can come here no more; seek, I beg of you, some house in the neighborhood to sell or to let; before long you shall hear from me.”

“Must I now take leave of you, madame?” said Ernanton, bowing in token of obedience to the flattering orders he had just received.

“Not yet, M. de Carmainges; follow my litter as far as the new bridge, lest that wretch who recognized in me the lady of the litter, but did not know me for what I am, should follow to find out my residence.”

Ernanton obeyed, but no one watched them. When they arrived at the Pont Neuf, which then merited the name, as it was scarcely seven years since Ducerceau had built it, the duchess gave her hand to Ernanton, saying, “Now go, monsieur.”

“May I dare to ask when I shall see you again, madame?”

“That depends on the length of time which you take in executing my commission, and your haste will be a proof to me of your desire to see me again.”

"Oh, madame, I shall not be idle."

"Well, then, go, Ernanton."

"It is strange," thought the young man, as he retraced his steps; "I cannot doubt that she likes me, and yet she does not seem the least anxious as to whether or not I get killed by that brute of a St. Maline. But, poor woman, she was in great trouble, and the fear of being compromised is, particularly with princesses, the strongest of all sentiments."

Ernanton, however, could not forget the insult he had received, and he returned straight to the hotel. He was naturally decided to infringe all orders and oaths, and to finish with St. Maline; he felt in the humor to fight ten men, if necessary. This resolution sparkled in his eyes when he reached the door of the "Brave Chevalier." Madame Fournichon, who expected his return with anxiety, was standing trembling in the doorway. At the sight of Ernanton she wiped her eyes, as if she had been crying, and throwing her arms round the young man's neck, begged for his pardon, in spite of her husband's representations that, as she had done no wrong, she had nothing to be pardoned for. Ernanton assured her that he did not blame her at all — that it was only her wine that was in fault.

While this passed at the door, all the rest were at table, where they were warmly discussing the previous quarrel. Many frankly blamed St. Maline; others abstained, seeing the frowning brow of their comrade. They did not attack with any less enthusiasm the supper of M. Fournichon, but they discussed as they ate.

"As for me," said Hector de Bizan, "I know that M. de St. Maline was wrong, and that had I been Ernanton de Carmainges, M. de St. Maline would be at this moment stretched on the ground instead of sitting here."

St. Maline looked at him furiously.

"Oh, I mean what I say," continued he; "and stay, there is some one at the door who appears to agree with me."

All turned at this, and saw Ernanton standing in the doorway, looking very pale. He descended from the step, as the statue of the commander from his pedestal, and walked straight up to St. Maline, firmly, but quietly.

At this sight, several voices cried, "Come here, Ernanton; come this side, Carmainges; there is room here."

"Thank you," replied the young man; "but it is near M. de St. Maline that I wish to sit." St. Maline rose, and all eyes were fixed on him. But as he rose, his face changed its expression.

“I will make room for you, monsieur,” said he, gently; “and in doing so address to you my frank and sincere apologies for my stupid aggression just now; I was drunk; forgive me.”

This declaration did not satisfy Ernanton; but the cries of joy that proceeded from all the rest decided him to say no more, although a glance at St. Maline showed him that he was not to be trusted. St. Maline’s glass was full, and he filled Ernanton’s.

“Peace! peace!” cried all the voices.

Carmainges profited by the noise, and leaning toward St. Maline, with a smile on his lips, so that no one might suspect the sense of what he was saying, whispered:

“M. de St. Maline, this is the second time that you have insulted me without giving me satisfaction; take care, for at the third offense I will kill you like a dog.”

And the two mortal enemies touched glasses as though they had been the best friends.

CHAPTER LIX.

WHAT WAS PASSING IN THE MYSTERIOUS HOUSE.

While the hotel of the “Brave Chevalier,” the abode, apparently, of the most perfect concord, with closed doors and open cellars, showed through the openings of the shutters the light of its candles and the mirth of its guests, an unaccustomed movement took place in that mysterious house of which our readers have as yet only seen the outside.

The servant was going from one room to another, carrying packages which he placed in a trunk. These preparations over, he loaded a pistol, examined his poniard, then suspended it, by the aid of a ring, to the chain which served him for a belt, to which he attached besides a bunch of keys and a book of prayers bound in black leather.

While he was thus occupied, a step, light as that of a shadow, came up the staircase, and a woman, pale and phantom-like under the folds of her white veil, appeared at the door, and a voice, sad and sweet as the song of a bird in the wood, said: “Remy, are you ready?”

“Yes, madame, I only wait for your box.”

“Do you think these boxes will go easily on our horses?”

“Oh! yes, madame, but if you have any fear, I can leave mine; I have all I want there.”

“No, no, Remy, take all that you want for the journey. Oh! Remy! I long to be with my father; I have sad presentiments, and it seems an age since I saw him.”

“And yet, madame, it is but three months; not a longer interval than usual.”

“Remy, you are such a good doctor, and you yourself told me, the last time we quitted him, that he had not long to live.”

“Yes, doubtless; but it was only a dread, not a prediction. Sometimes death seems to forget old men, and they live on as though by the habit of living; and often, besides, an old man is like a child, ill to-day and well to-morrow.”

“Alas! Remy, like the child also, he is often well to-day and dead to-morrow.”

Remy did not reply, for he had nothing really reassuring to say, and silence succeeded for some minutes.

“At what hour have you ordered the horses?” said the lady, at last.

“At two o’clock.”

“And one has just struck.”

“Yes, madame.”

“No one is watching outside?”

“No one.”

“Not even that unhappy young man?”

“Not even he.”

And Remy sighed.

“You say that in a strange manner, Remy.”

“Because he also has made a resolution.”

“What is it?”

“To see us no more; at least, not to try to see us any more.”

“And where is he going?”

“Where we are all going — to rest.”.

“God give it him eternally,” said the lady, in a cold voice, “and yet — ”

“Yet what, madame?”

“Had he nothing to do here?”

“He had to love if he had been loved.”

“A man of his name, rank, and age, should think of his future.”

“You, madame, are of an age, rank, and name little inferior to his, and you do not look forward to a future.”

“Yes, Remy, I do,” cried she, with a sudden flashing of the eyes; “but listen! is that not the trot of a horse that I hear?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“Can it be ours?”

“It is possible; but it is an hour too soon.”

“It stops at the door, Remy.”

Remy ran down and arrived just as three hurried blows were struck on the door.

“Who is there?” said he.

“I!” replied a trembling voice, “I, Grandchamp, the baron’s valet.”

"Ah! mon Dieu! Grandchamp, you at Paris! speak low! Whence do you come?"

"From Meridor. Alas, dear M. Remy!"

"Well," cried the lady from the top of the stairs, "are they our horses, Remy?"

"No, madame, it is not them. What is it, Grandchamp?"

"You do not guess?"

"Alas! I do; what will she do, poor lady."

"Remy," cried she again, "you are talking to some one?"

"Yes, madame."

"I thought I knew the voice."

"Indeed, madame."

She now descended, saying:

"Who is there? Grandchamp?"

"Yes, madame, it is I," replied the old man sadly, uncovering his white head.

"Grandchamp! you! oh! mon Dieu! my presentiments were right; my father is dead?"

"Indeed, madame, Meridor has no longer a master."

Pale, but motionless and firmly, the lady listened; Remy went to her and took her hand softly.

"How did he die; tell me, my friend?" said she.

"Madame, M. le Baron, who could no longer leave his armchair, was struck a week ago by an attack of apoplexy. He muttered your name for the last time, then ceased to speak, and soon was no more."

Diana went up again without another word. Her room was on the first story, and looked only into a courtyard. The furniture was somber, but rich, the hangings, in Arras tapestry, represented the death of our Saviour, a prie-Dieu and stool in carved oak, a bed with twisted columns, and tapestries like the walls, were the sole ornaments of the room. Not a flower, no gilding, but in a frame of black was contained a portrait of a man, before which the lady now knelt down, with dry eyes, but a sad heart. She fixed on this picture a long look of indescribable love. It represented a young man about twenty-eight, lying half naked on a bed; from his wounded breast the blood still flowed, his right hand hung mutilated, and yet it still held a broken sword. His eyes were closed as though he were about to die, paleness and suffering gave to his face that divine character which the faces of mortals assume only at the moment of quitting life for eternity. Under the portrait, in letters red as blood, was written, “Aut Cæsar aut nihil.” The lady extended her arm, and spoke as though it could hear her.

“I had begged thee to wait, although thy soul must have thirsted for vengeance; and as the dead see all, thou hast seen, my love, that I lived only not to kill my father, else I would have died after you; and then, you know, on your bleeding corpse I uttered a vow to give death for death, blood for blood, but I would not do it while the old man called me his innocent child. Thou hast waited, beloved, and now I am free: the last tie which bound me to earth is broken. I am all yours, and now I am free to come to you.”

She rose on one knee, kissed the hand, and then went on: “I can weep no more — my tears have dried up in weeping over your tomb. In a few months I shall rejoin you, and you then will reply to me, dear shade, to whom I have spoken so often without reply.” Diana then rose, and seating herself in her chair, muttered, “Poor father!” and then fell into a profound reverie. At last she called Remy.

The faithful servant soon appeared.

“Here I am, madame.”

“My worthy friend, my brother — you, the last person who knows me on this earth — say adieu to me.”

“Why so, madame?”

“Because the time has come for us to separate.”

“Separate!” cried the young man. “What do you mean, madame?”

“Yes, Remy. My project of vengeance seemed to me noble and pure while there remained an obstacle between me and it, and I only contemplated it from afar off; but now that I approach the execution of it — now that the obstacle has disappeared — I do not draw back, but I do not wish to drag with me into crime a generous and pure soul like yours; therefore you must quit me, my friend.”

Remy listened to the words of Diana with a somber look.

“Madame,” replied he, “do you think you are speaking to a trembling old man? Madame, I am but twenty-six; and snatched as I was from the tomb, if I still live, it is for the accomplishment of some terrible action — to play an active part in the work of Providence. Never, then, separate your thoughts from mine, since we both have the same thoughts, sinister as they may be. Where you go, I will go; what you do I will aid in; or if, in spite of my prayers, you persist in dismissing me — ”

“Oh!” murmured she, “dismiss you! What a word, Remy!”

“If you persist in that resolution,” continued the young man, “I know what I have to do, and all for me will end with two blows from a poniard — one in the heart of him whom you know, and the other in your own.”

“Remy! Remy!” cried Diana, “do not say that. The life of him you threaten does not belong to you — it is mine — I have paid for it dearly enough. I swear to you, Remy, that on the day on which I knelt beside the dead body of him” — and she pointed to the portrait — ”on that day I approached my lips to that open wound, and the trembling lips seemed to say to me, ‘Avenge me, Diana! — avenge me!’“

“Madame — ”

“Therefore, I repeat, vengeance is for me, and not for you; besides, for whom and through whom did he die? By me and through me.”

“I must obey you, madame, for I also was left for dead. Who carried me away from the middle of the corpses with which that room was filled? — You. Who cured me of my wounds? — You. Who concealed me? — You always. Order, then, and I will obey, provided that you do not order me to leave you.”

“So be it, Remy; you are right; nothing ought to separate us more.”

Remy pointed to the portrait.

“Now, madame,” said he, “he was killed by treason — it is by treason that he must be revenged. Ah! you do not know one thing — the hand of God is with us, for to-night I have found the secret of the ‘Aqua tofana,’ that poison of the Medicis and of Rene the Florentine.”

“Really?”

“Come and see, madame.”

“But where is Grandchamp?”

“The poor old man has come sixty leagues on horseback; he is tired out, and has fallen asleep on my bed.”

“Come, then,” said Diana; and she followed Remy.

CHAPTER LX.

THE LABORATORY.

Remy led the lady into a neighboring room; and pushing a spring which was hidden under a board in the floor, and which, opening, disclosed a straight dark staircase, gave his hand to Diana to help her to descend. Twenty steps of this staircase, or rather ladder, led into a dark and circular cave, whose only furniture was a stove with an immense hearth, a square table, two rush chairs, and a quantity of phials and iron boxes. In the stove a dying fire still gleamed, while a thick black smoke escaped through a pipe fastened into the wall. From a still placed on the hearth a few drops of a liquid, yellow as gold, was dropping into a thick white phial. Diana looked round her without astonishment or terror; the ordinary feelings of life seemed to be unknown to her who lived only in the tomb. Remy lighted a lamp, and then approached a well hollowed out in the cave, attached a bucket to a long cord, let it down into the well, and then drew it up full of a water as cold as ice and as clear as crystal.

“Approach, madame,” said he.

Diana drew near. In the bucket he let fall a single drop of the liquid contained in the phial, and the entire mass of the water became instantaneously yellow; then the color evaporated, and the water in ten minutes became as clear as before.

Remy looked at her.

“Well?” said she.

“Well, madame,” said he, “now dip in that water, which has neither smell nor color, a glove or a handkerchief; soak it in scented soap, pour some of it into the basin where you are about to wash your hands or face, and you will see, as was seen at the court of Charles IX., the flower kill by its perfume, the glove poison by its contact, the soap kill by its introduction into the pores of the skin. Pour a single drop of this pure oil on the wick of a lamp or candle, and for an hour the candle or lamp will exhale death, and burn at the same time like any other.”

“You are sure of what you say, Remy?”

“All this I have tried. See these birds who can now neither drink nor eat; they have drunk of water like this. See this goat who has browsed on grass watered with this same water; he moves and totters; vainly now should we restore him to life and liberty; his life is forfeited, unless, indeed, nature should reveal to his instinct some of those antidotes to poison which animals know, although men do not.” — ”Can I see this phial, Remy?”

“Yes, madame, presently.”

Remy then separated it from the still with infinite care, then corked it with soft wax, tied the top up in cloth, and then presented it to Diana.

She took it, held it up to the light, and, after looking at it, said:

“It will do; when the time arrives we will choose gloves, lamp, soap, or flowers, as convenient. Will the liquor keep in metal?” — ”It eats it away.”

“But then, perhaps, the bottle will break?”

“I think not — see the thickness of the crystal; besides, we can shut it up in a covering of gold.”

“Listen, Remy! I hear horses; I think ours have arrived.”

“Probably, madame, it is about the time; but I will go and send them away.”

“Why so?”

“Are they not useless?”

“Instead of going to Meridor, we will go into Flanders. Keep the horses.”

“Ah! I understand!” and Remy’s eyes gave forth a flash of sinister joy.

“But Grandchamp; what can we do with him?” said he.

“He has need of repose. He shall remain here, and sell this house, which we require no longer. But restore to liberty that unhappy animal, whom you were forced to torture. As you say, God may care for its recovery.”

“This furnace, and these stills?”

“Leave them here.”

“But these powders, essences, and acids?”

“Throw them in the fire, Remy.”

“Go away, then, or put on this glass mask.”

Then, taking similar precautions for himself, he blew up the fire again, poured in the powder, which went off in brilliant sparks, some green and some yellow; and the essences, which, instead of being consumed, mounted like serpents of fire into the pipe, with a noise like distant thunder.

"Now," said Remy, "if any one now discovers this cave, he will only think that an alchemist has been here, and though they still burn sorcerers, they respect alchemists."

"And besides," said the lady, "if they do burn us, provided I have only finished my task, I should not mind that sort of death more than any other."

At this moment they heard knocking.

"Here are our horses, madame," said Remy; "go up quickly, and I will close the trap-door."

Diana obeyed, and found Grandchamp, whom the noise had awakened, at the door.

The old man was not a little surprised to hear of his mistress's intended departure, who informed him of it without telling him where she was going.

"Grandchamp, my friend," said she, "Remy and I are going to accomplish a pilgrimage on which we have long determined; speak of this journey to none, and do not mention my name to any one."

"Oh! I promise you, madame," replied the old servant; "but we shall see you again?"

"Doubtless, Grandchamp; if not in this world, in the next. But, apropos, Grandchamp, this house is now useless to us."

Diana drew from a drawer a bundle of papers.

"Here are the title-deeds; let or sell this house; but if, in the course of a month, you do not find a purchaser, abandon it and return to Meridor."

"But if I find some one, how much am I to ask?"

"What you please, Grandchamp."

"Shall I take the money to Meridor?"

"Keep it for yourself, my good Grandchamp."

"What, madame, such a sum?"

"Yes, I owe it to you for your services; and I have my father's debts to pay as well as my own. Now, adieu!"

Then Diana went upstairs, cut the picture from the frame, rolled it up, and placed it in her trunk.

When Remy had tied the two trunks with leather thongs, and had glanced into the street to see that there were no lookers-on, he aided his mistress to mount.

"I believe, madame," said he, "that this is the last house in which we shall live so long."

"The last but one, Remy."

“And what will be the other?”

“The tomb, Remy.”

CHAPTER LXI.

WHAT MONSEIGNEUR FRANCOIS, DUC D’ANJOU, DUC DE BRABANT AND COMTE DE FLANDERS, WAS DOING IN FLANDERS.

Our readers must now permit us to leave the king at the Louvre, Henri of Navarre at Cahors, Chicot on the road, and Diana in the street, to go to Flanders to find M. le Duc d’Anjou, recently named Duc de Brabant, and to whose aid we have sent the great admiral of France — Anne, duc de Joyeuse.

At eighty leagues from Paris, toward the north, the sound of French voices was heard, and the French banner floated over a French camp on the banks of the Scheldt. It was night; the fires, disposed in an immense circle, bordered the stream, and were reflected in its deep waters.

From the top of the ramparts of the town the sentinels saw shining, by the bivouac fires, the muskets of the French army. This army was that of the Duc d’Anjou. What he had come to do there we must tell our readers; and although it may not be very amusing, yet we hope they will pardon it in consideration of the warning; so many people are dull without announcing it.

Those of our readers who have read “Chicot,” already know the Duc d’Anjou, that jealous, egotistical, ambitious prince, and who, born so near to the throne, had never been able to wait with resignation until death offered him a free passage to it. Thus he had desired the throne of Navarre under Charles IX., then that of Charles IX. himself, then that of his brother Henri III. For a time he had turned his eyes toward England, then governed by a woman, and to possess this throne he was ready to have married this woman, although she was Elizabeth, and was twenty years older than himself. In this plan destiny was beginning to smile on him, and he saw himself in the favor of a great queen, until then inaccessible to all human affections. Besides this, a crown was offered to him in Flanders.

He had seen his brother Henri embarrassed in his quarrel with the Guises, but had soon discovered that they had no other aim than that of substituting themselves for the Valois. He had then separated himself from them, although not without danger; besides, Henri III. had at last opened his eyes, and the duke exiled, or something like it, had retired to Amboise.

It was then that the Flemings opened their arms to him. Tired of Spanish rule, decimated by the Duc d'Alva, deceived by the false peace of John of Austria, who had profited by it to retake Namur and Charlemont, the Flemings had called in William of Nassau, prince of Orange, and had made him governor-general of Brabant. A few words about this man, who held so great a place in history, but who will only be named here.

William of Nassau was then about fifty. He was the son of William called the Old, and of Julienne de Stolberg, cousin of that Rene of Nassau killed at the siege of Dizier. He had from his youth been brought up in principles of reform, and had a full consciousness of the greatness of his mission. This mission, which he believed he had received from Heaven, and for which he died like a martyr, was to found the Republic of Holland, in which he was successful. When very young he had been called by Charles V. to his court. Charles was a good judge of men, and often the old emperor, who supported the heaviest burden ever borne by an imperial hand, consulted the child on the most delicate matters connected with the politics of Holland. The young man was scarcely twenty-four when Charles confided to him, in the absence of the famous Philibert Emanuel of Savoy, the command of the army in Flanders. William showed himself worthy of this high confidence: he held in check the Duc de Nevers and Coligny, two of the greatest captains of the time, and under their eyes fortified Philipville and Charlemont. On the day when Charles V. abdicated, it was on William of Nassau that he leaned to descend the steps of the throne, and he it was who was charged to carry to Ferdinand the imperial throne which Charles had resigned.

Then came Philippe II., and in spite of his father's recommendations to him to regard William as a brother, the latter soon found a great difference. This strengthened in his mind the great idea of freeing Holland and Flanders, which he might never have endeavored to carry into effect if the old emperor, his friend, had remained on the throne.

Holland, by his advice, demanded the dismissal of the foreign troops, and then began the bloody struggle of the Spaniards to retain the prey which was escaping from them, and then passed over this unhappy people the vice-royalty of Marguerite of Austria and the bloody consulship of the Duc d'Alva, and then was organized that struggle, at once political and religious, which began with the protest of the Hotel Culembourg, which demanded the abolition of the Inquisition in Holland, and when four hundred gentlemen, walking in pairs, carried to the foot of Marguerite's throne the general desire of the people, as summed up in that protest. At the sight of these gentlemen, so simply clothed, Barlaimont, one of the councilors of the duchess, uttered the word "Gueux," which, taken up by the Flemish gentlemen, so long designated the patriot party. From this time William began to play the part which made him one of the greatest political actors of the world. Constantly beaten by the overwhelming power of Philippe II., he constantly rose again, always stronger after his defeats — always organizing a new army to replace the scattered one, and always hailed as a liberator.

In the midst of these alternate moral triumphs and physical defeats, William learned at Mons the news of the massacre of St. Bartholomew. It was a terrible wound for Holland, and the Calvinist portion of Flanders lost by it their natural allies, the Huguenots of France.

William retreated from Mons to the Rhine, and waited for events. Some of the Gueux was driven by a contrary wind into the port of Brille: and seeing no escape, and pushed by despair, took the city which was preparing to hang them.

This done, they chased away the Spanish garrison, and sent for the Prince of Orange. He came; and as he wished to strike a decisive blow, he published an ordonnance forbidding the Catholic religion in Holland, as the Protestant faith was forbidden in France.

At this manifesto war recommenced. The Duc d'Alva sent his own son Frederic against the revolters, who took from them Zutphen, Nardem, and Haarlem; but this check, far from discouraging them, seemed to give them new strength. All took up arms, from the Zuyderzee to the Scheldt. Spain began to tremble, recalled the Duc d'Alva, and sent as his successor Louis de Requesens, one of the conquerors at Lepanto.

Then began for William a new series of misfortunes — Ludovic and Henri of Nassau, who were bringing him aid, were surprised by one of the officers of Don Louis near Nimegue, defeated and killed; the Spaniards penetrated into Holland, besieged Leyden, and pillaged Antwerp.

All seemed desperate, when Heaven came once more to the aid of the infant Republic. Requesens died at Brussels.

Then all the provinces, united by a common interest, drew up and signed, on the 8th November, 1576, that is to say four days after the sack of Antwerp, the treaty known under the name of the Treaty of Ghent, by which they engaged to aid each other in delivering their country from the yoke of the Spaniards and other foreigners.

Don John reappeared, and with him the woes of Holland; for in less than two months Namur and Charlemont were taken. The Flemings replied, however, to these two checks by naming the Prince of Orange governor-general of Brabant.

Don John died in his turn, and Alexander Farnese succeeded him. He was a clever prince, charming in his manners, which were at once gentle and firm; a skillful politician, and a good general. Flanders trembled at hearing that soft Italian voice call her friend, instead of treating her as a rebel. William knew that Farnese would do more for Spain with his promises than the Duc d'Alva with his punishments. On the 29th January, 1579, he made the provinces sign the Treaty of Utrecht, which was the fundamental base of the rights of Holland. It was then that, fearing he should never be able to accomplish alone the freedom for which he had been fighting for fifteen years, he offered to the Duc d'Anjou the sovereignty of the country, on condition that he should respect their privileges and their liberty of conscience. This was a terrible blow to Philippe II., and he replied to it by putting a price of 25,000 crowns on the head of William. The States-General assembled at the Hague, then declared Philippe deposed from the sovereignty of Holland, and ordered that henceforth the oath of fidelity should be taken to them.

The Duc d'Anjou now entered Belgium, and was well received. Philippe's promise, however, bore its fruits; for in the midst of a fete, a pistol shot was heard; William fell, and was believed dead; but he recovered. The shot had been fired by Jean Jaureguy.

The Flemings then, on William's advice, elected Francois, duc of Brabant, sovereign prince of Flanders. Elizabeth of England saw in this a method of reuniting the Calvinists of Flanders and France to those of England — perhaps she dreamed of a triple crown. William, however, took care to hold the Duc d'Anjou in check, and to counteract the execution of any design which would have given him too much power in Flanders.

Philippe II. called the Duc de Guise to his aid, on the strength of a treaty which had been entered into by him with Don John of Austria. Henri of Guise consented, and it was then that Lorraine and Spain sent Salcede to the Duc d’Anjou to assassinate him, which would have suited the views of both; but Salcede, as we know, was arrested and executed without having carried his project into execution.

Francois advanced but slowly, however, in Flanders, for the people were more than half afraid of him; he grew impatient, and determined to lay siege to Antwerp, which had invited his aid against Farnese, but when he wished to enter had turned its guns against him. This was the position of the Duc d’Anjou at the time when our story rejoins him, on the day after the arrival of Joyeuse and his fleet.

CHAPTER LXII.

PREPARATIONS FOR BATTLE.

The camp of the new Duke of Brabant was situated on the banks of the Scheldt, and the army, although well disciplined, was agitated by a spirit easy to understand.

Indeed, many Calvinists assisted the duke, not from sympathy for him, but in order to be as disagreeable as possible to Spain and to the Catholics of France and England; they fought rather from self-love than from conviction or devotion, and it was certain that, the campaign once over, they would abandon their leader or impose conditions on him. With regard to these conditions, the duke always gave them to understand that when the time came he should be ready, and was constantly saying, “Henri of Navarre made himself a Catholic, why should not I become a Huguenot?” On the opposite side, on the contrary, there existed a perfect unity of feeling. Antwerp had intended to give entrance to him, at her own time and on her own conditions.

All at once they saw a fleet appear at the mouth of the Scheldt, and they learned that this fleet was brought by the high admiral of France, to aid the Duc d’Anjou, whom they now began to look upon as their enemy. The Calvinists of the duke were little better pleased than the Flemings at the sight. They were very brave, but very jealous: and they did not wish others to come and clip their laurels, particularly swords which had slain so many Huguenots on the day of the St. Bartholomew. From this proceeded many quarrels, which began on the very evening of their arrival, and continued all the next day.

From their ramparts, the Antwerpians had every day the spectacle of a dozen duels between Catholics and Protestants; and they threw into the river as many dead as a combat might have cost the French. If the siege of Antwerp, like that of Troy, had lasted nine years, the besieged need have done nothing but look at the assailants, who would certainly have destroyed themselves. Francois acted the part of mediator, but not without great difficulty; he had made promises to the Huguenots, and could not offend them without offending at the same time all Flanders. On the other hand, to offend the Catholics sent by the king to aid him would be most impolitic. The arrival of this re-enforcement, on which the duke himself had not reckoned, filled the Spaniards and the Guises with rage. However, all these different opinions interfered sadly with the discipline of the duke’s army. Joyeuse, who we know had never liked the mission, was annoyed to find among these men such antagonistic opinions, and felt instinctively that the time for success was past, and both as an idle courtier and as a captain, grumbled at having come so far only to meet with defeat. He declared loudly that the Duc d’Anjou had been wrong in laying siege to Antwerp, and argued that to possess a great city with its own consent was a real advantage; but that to take by assault the second capital of his future states was to expose himself to the dislike of the Flemings; and Joyeuse knew the Flemings too well not to feel sure that if the duke did take Antwerp, sooner or later they would revenge themselves with usury. This opinion Joyeuse did not hesitate to declare in the duke’s tent.

While the council was held among his captains, the duke was lying on a couch and listening, not to the advice of the admiral, but to the whispers of Aurilly. This man, by his cowardly compliances, his base flatteries, and his continual assiduities, had secured the favor of the prince. With his lute, his love messages, and his exact information about all the persons and all the intrigues of the court — with his skillful maneuvers for drawing into the prince’s net whatever prey he might wish for, he had made a large fortune, while he remained to all appearance the poor luteplayer. His influence was immense, because it was secret.

Joyeuse, seeing the duke talking to Aurilly, stopped short. The duke, who had, after all, been paying more attention than he seemed to do, asked him what was the matter. “Nothing, monseigneur; I am only waiting until your highness is at liberty to listen to me.”

“Oh! but I do listen, M. de Joyeuse. Do you think I cannot listen to two people at once, when Cæsar dictated seven letters at a time?”

“Monseigneur,” said Joyeuse, with a glance at the musician, “I am no singer to need an accompaniment when I speak.”

“Very good, duke; be quiet, Aurilly. Then you disapprove of a coup de main on Antwerp?” — ”Yes, monseigneur.”

“I adopted this plan in council, however.”

“Therefore, monseigneur, I speak with much hesitation, after so many distinguished captains.”

And Joyeuse, courtier-like, bowed to all. Many voices were instantly raised to agree with the admiral.

“Comte de St. Aignan,” said the prince to one of his bravest colonels, “you are not of the opinion of M. de Joyeuse?”

“Yes, monseigneur, I am.”

“Oh! I thought as you made a grimace — ”

Every one laughed but Joyeuse, who said, “If M. de St. Aignan generally gives his advice in that manner, it is not very polite, that is all.”

“M. de Joyeuse,” replied St. Aignan, “his highness is wrong to reproach me with an infirmity contracted in his service. At the taking of Cateau-Cambresis I received a blow on the head, and since that time my face is subject to nervous contractions, which occasion those grimaces of which his highness complains. This is not an excuse that I give you, M. de Joyeuse; it is an explanation,” said the count, proudly.

“No, monsieur,” said Joyeuse, “it is a reproach that you make, and you are right.”

The blood mounted to the face of Duc Francois.

“And to whom is this reproach addressed?” said he.

“To me, probably, monseigneur.”

“Why should St. Aignan reproach you, whom he does not know?”

“Because I believed for a moment that M. de St. Aignan cared so little for your highness as to counsel you to assault Antwerp.”

“But,” cried the prince, “I must settle my position in the country. I am Duke of Brabant and Count of Flanders, in name, and I must be so in reality. This William, who is gone I know not where, spoke to me of a kingdom. Where is this kingdom? — in Antwerp. Where is he? — probably in Antwerp also; therefore we must take Antwerp, and we shall know how we stand.”

“Oh! monseigneur, you know it now, or you are, in truth, a worse politician than I thought you. Who counseled you to take Antwerp? — the Prince of Orange. Who disappeared at the moment of taking the field? — the Prince of Orange. Who, while he made your highness Duke of Brabant, reserved for himself the lieutenant-generalship of the duchy? — the Prince of Orange. Whose interest is it to ruin the Spaniards by you, and you by the Spaniards? — the Prince of Orange. Who will replace you, who will succeed, if he does not do so already? — the Prince of Orange? Oh! monseigneur, in following his counsels you have but annoyed the Flemings. Let a reverse come, and all those who do not dare to look you now in the face will run after you like those timid dogs who run after those who fly.”

“What! you imagine that I can be beaten by wool-merchants and beer-drinkers?”

“These wool-merchants and these beer-drinkers have given plenty to do to Philippe de Valois, the Emperor Charles V., and Philippe II., who were three princes placed sufficiently high, monseigneur, for the comparison not to be disagreeable to you.”

“Then you fear a repulse?”

“Yes, monseigneur, I do.”

“You will not be there, M. de Joyeuse.”

“Why not?”

“Because you can hardly have such doubts of your own bravery as already to see yourself flying before the Flemings. In any case, reassure yourself, these prudent merchants have the habit, when they march to battle, of cumbering themselves with such heavy armor that they would never catch you if you did run.”

“Monseigneur, I do not doubt my own courage. I shall be in the front, but I shall be beaten there, as the others who are behind will be.”

“But your reasoning is not logical, M. de Joyeuse; you approve of my taking the lesser places.”

“I approve of your taking those that do not defend themselves.”

“And then I am to draw back from the great city because she talks of defending herself?”

“Better than to march on to destruction.”

“Well, I will not retreat.”

“Your highness must do as you like; and we are here to obey.”

“Prove to me that I am wrong.”

“Monseigneur, see the army of the Prince of Orange. It was yours, was it not? Well, instead of sitting down before Antwerp with you, it is in Antwerp, which is very different. William, you say, was your friend and counselor; and now you not only do not know where he is, but you believe him to be changed into an enemy. See the Flemings — when you arrived they were pleased to see you; now they shut their gates at your sight, and prepare their cannon at your approach, not less than if you were the Duc d’Alva. Well! I tell you, Flemings and Dutch, Antwerp and Orange, only wait for an opportunity to unite against you, and that opportunity will be when you order your artillery to fire.”

“Well, we will fight at once Flemings and Dutch, Antwerp and Orange.”

“No, monseigneur, we have but just men enough to attack Antwerp, supposing we have only the inhabitants to deal with; and while we are engaged in the assault, William will fall on us with his eternal eight or ten thousand men, always destroyed and always reappearing by the aid of which be has kept in check during ten or twelve years the Duc d’Alva, Requesens, and the Duc de Parma.”

“Then you persist in thinking that we shall be beaten?”

“I do.”

“Well, it is easy for you to avoid it, M. de Joyeuse,” said the prince angrily; “my brother sent you here to aid me, but I may dismiss you, saying that I do not need aid.”

“Your highness may say so, but I would not retire on the eve of a battle.”

“Well, my dear admiral,” said the duke, trying to conciliate, “I may have been too jealous of the honor of my name, and wished too much to prove the superiority of the French army, and I may have been wrong. But the evil is done; we are before armed men — before men who now refuse what they themselves offered. Am I to yield to them? To-morrow they would begin to retake, bit by bit, what I have already conquered. No! the sword is drawn; let us strike, or they will strike first. That is my opinion.”

“When your highness speaks thus,” said Joyeuse, “I will say no more. I am here to obey you, and will do so with all my heart, whether you lead me to death or victory; and yet — but I will say no more.” — ”Speak.”

“No, I have said enough.”

“No, I wish to hear.”

“In private then, if it please your highness.”

All rose and retired to the other end of the spacious tent.

“Speak,” said Francois.

“Monseigneur may care little for a check from Spain, a check which will render triumphant those drinkers of Flemish beer, or this double-faced Prince of Orange; but will you bear so patiently the laughter of M. de Guise?”

Francois frowned.

“What has M. de Guise to do with it?” said he.

"M. de Guise tried to have you assassinated, monseigneur; Salcede confessed it at the torture, and, if I mistake not, he plays a great part in all this, and he will be delighted to see you receive a check before Antwerp, or even perhaps to obtain, for nothing, that death of a son of France, for which he had promised to pay so dearly to Salcede. Read the history of Flanders, monseigneur, and you will see that the Flemings are in the habit of enriching their soil with the blood of princes, and of the best French warriors."

The duke shook his head.

"Well, Joyeuse," said he, "I will give, if it must be, the cursed joy to the Lorraines of seeing me dead, but not that of seeing me flying. I thirst for glory, Joyeuse; for alone of all my name, I have still my battles to win."

"You forget Cateau Cambresis, monseigneur."

"Compare that with Jarnac and Montcontour, Joyeuse." Then, turning to the others, who were standing far off, he said, "Gentlemen, the assault is still resolved on; the rain has ceased, the ground is good, we will make the attack this night." Joyeuse bowed.

"Will your highness give full directions? we wait for them," said he.

"You have eight vessels, without counting the admiral's ship, have you not, M. de Joyeuse?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"You will force the line; the thing will be easy, the Antwerpians have only merchant vessels in the port; then you will bring them to bear upon the fort. Then, if the quay is defended, you will attempt a landing with your 1,500 men. Of the rest of the army I will make two columns: one commanded by M. de St. Aignan, the other by myself. Both will attempt an escalade by surprise, at the moment when the first cannon-shot is fired.

"The cavalry will remain in position, in case of a repulse, to protect the retreating columns. Of these three attacks, one must surely succeed. The first column which gains the ramparts will fire a rocket to let the others know."

"But one must think of everything, monseigneur," said Joyeuse; "and supposing all three attacks should fail?"

"Then we must gain the vessels under the protection of our batteries."

All bowed.

"Now, gentlemen, silence," said the duke; "wake the sleeping troops, and embark; but let not a shot reveal our design. You will be in the port, admiral, before the Antwerpians suspect your intention. We shall go along the left bank, and shall arrive at the same time as yourself. Go, gentlemen, and good courage; our former good luck will not fail to follow us over the Scheldt."

The captains quitted the prince's tent, and gave their orders with the indicated precautions.

CHAPTER LXIII.

MONSEIGNEUR.

However, the Antwerpians did not quietly see the hostile preparations of the Duc d’Anjou, and Joyeuse was not wrong in attributing to them all the enmity possible. Antwerp was like a beehive at night, calm on the exterior, but within full of movement and murmur.

The Flemings in arms patroled the streets, barricaded their houses, and fraternized with the battalions of the Prince of Orange, of whom part were already in garrison there, while the other part entered the city in fractions.

When all was ready for a vigorous defense, the Prince of Orange, on a dark and moonless night, entered the city quietly, and went to the Hotel de Ville, where his confidants had everything ready for his reception. There he received all the deputies of the bourgeoisie, passed in review the officers of the paid troops, and communicated his plans to them, the chief of which was to profit by this movement of the Duc d’Anjou to break with him. The duke had done just what William wished to bring him to, and he saw with pleasure this new competitor for the sovereignty ruin himself, like so many others.

William would have taken the offensive, but the governor objected, and determined to wait for the arrival of monseigneur.

Nine o’clock in the evening sounded, and the uncertainty became real anxiety, some scouts having protested that they had seen a movement in the French camp. A little flat boat had been sent on the Scheldt to reconnoiter, for the Antwerpians were less unquiet as to what would occur by land than by sea; but the bark had not returned. William became more and more impatient, when the door of the hall opened, and a valet appeared and announced “Monseigneur.” As he spoke, a man, tall and imperious-looking, wearing with supreme grace the cloak which entirely enveloped him, entered the hall, and saluted courteously those who were there. But at the first glance, his eye, proud and piercing, sought out the prince in the midst of his officers.

He went straight up to him and offered him his hand, which the prince pressed with affection, and almost with respect.

They called each other “Monseigneur.” After this the unknown took off his cloak. He was dressed in a buff doublet, and had high leather boots; he was armed with a long sword, which seemed to make part of himself, so easily it hung, and with a little dagger, which was passed through his belt. His boots were covered with mud and dust, and his spurs were red with the blood of his horse. He took his place at the table.

“Well, where are we?” asked he.

“Monseigneur,” replied William, “you must have seen, in coming here, that the streets were barricaded.”

“I saw that.”

“And the houses loopholed?”

“I did not see that; but it is a good plan.”

“And the sentries doubled?”

“Does not monseigneur approve of these preparations for defense?” said a voice, in a tone of anxious disappointment.

“Yes; but, however, I do not believe that in our circumstances it will be useful; it fatigues the soldier and disquiets the bourgeois. You have a plan of attack and defense, I suppose?”

“We waited to communicate them to monseigneur,” said the burgomaster.

“Speak then.”

“Monseigneur arrived rather late, and I was obliged to act meanwhile,” said William.

“And you did right, monseigneur; besides, whatever you do, you do well. But I have not lost my time on the road, either.”

“We know by our spies,” said the burgomaster, “that a movement is preparing in the French camp; they are making ready for an attack, but as we do not know on which side it will come, we have disposed the guns so that they may be equally distributed over the whole rampart.”

“That is wise,” replied the unknown, with a slight smile to William, who held his tongue, and let the bourgeois speak of war.

“We have done the same with our civic guards; they are spread over the whole wall, and have orders to run at once to the point of attack. However, it is the opinion of the greater number of our members that it is impossible that the French meditate anything but a feigned attack.”

“And what purpose would that serve?”

“To intimidate us, and induce us to admit them amicably.”

The stranger looked again at the Prince of Orange, who listened to all this in the most careless manner, which almost amounted to disdain.

“However,” said another voice, “some fancied they could distinguish preparations for attack in the camp this evening.”

“Mere suspicions,” said the burgomaster; “I examined the camp myself with an excellent spy-glass. The men were preparing for sleep, and the duke was dining in his tent.”

The unknown threw a new glance at the prince, and fancied that this time he gave a slight smile.

“Gentlemen,” said the unknown, “you are in error; a regular assault is preparing against you, and your plans, however good, are incomplete.”

“But, monseigneur — ”

“Incomplete in this, that you expect an attack, and have prepared to meet it.”

“Certainly.”

“Well, it is you who will make the attack, not wait for it, if you will trust to me.” — ”Ah!” cried William, “that is something like speaking.”

“At this moment,” said the stranger, who saw that he might reckon on the prince’s support, “the ships of M. de Joyeuse are getting ready.”

“How do you know that, monseigneur?” cried many voices together.

“I know it,” replied he.

A murmur of doubt was half uttered, but the stranger caught it.

“Do you doubt it?” asked he, in the tone of a man accustomed to control all fears, prejudices, and self-loves.

“We do not doubt it if your highness says it; but if you will permit us to observe — ”

“Speak.”

“That if it were so we should have had tidings of it.”

“How so?” — ”By our spies.”

CHAPTER LXIV.

MONSEIGNEUR.

At this moment another man entered the hall, and came forward respectfully.

“Ah! it is you, my friend,” said the burgomaster.

“Myself, monsieur,” replied the man.

“Monseigneur,” said the burgomaster, “it is the man whom we sent to reconnoiter.”

At the word “monseigneur,” addressed not to the Prince of Orange, the new comer made a movement of surprise and joy, and advanced quickly to see better who was designated by this title. He was one of those Flemish sailors, of whom the type is so recognizable, being marked, a square head, blue eyes, short neck, and broad shoulders; he crushed in his large hands his woolen cap, and as he advanced he left behind him a line of wet, for his clothes were dripping with water.

“Oh! here is a brave man who has swum back,” said monseigneur, looking at the man with his accustomed air of authority.

“Yes, monseigneur, yes; and the Scheldt is broad and rapid,” said the sailor, eagerly.

“Speak, Goes, speak,” said monseigneur, knowing how a sailor would prize being thus called by his name.

Thus from that minute Goes addressed himself to the unknown exclusively; although, having been sent by another, it was to him that he should have given an account of his mission.

“Monseigneur,” said he, “I set out in my smallest bark and passed, by giving the word, through all our ships, and reached those cursed French. Ah! pardon, monseigneur.”

The stranger smiled and said, “Never mind, I am but half French, so should be but half cursed.”

“Then monseigneur pardons me?”

He nodded, and Goes went on.

"While I rowed in the dark with my oars wrapped in cloth, I heard a voice crying, 'Hola! bark, what do you want?' I thought it was to me that the question was addressed, and was about to reply something or other, when I heard some one cry behind me, 'Admiral's boat.'"

Monseigneur looked at the council.

"At the same moment," continued Gues, "I felt a shock; my bark was swamped, and I fell into the water, but the waves of the Scheldt knew me for an old acquaintance, and threw me up again. It was the admiral's boat taking M. de Joyeuse on board, and which had passed over me; God only knows how I was not crushed or drowned."

"Thanks, brave Goes, thanks," said the Prince of Orange, putting a purse into his hand. However, the sailor seemed to wait for his dismissal from the stranger, who gave him a friendly nod, which he valued more than the prince's present.

"Well," said monseigneur to the burgomaster, "what do you say of this report? Do you still doubt that the French are preparing, and do you believe that it was to pass the night on board that M. de Joyeuse was leaving the camp for his ship?"

"But you are a diviner, then, monseigneur," cried the bourgeois.

"Not more than Monseigneur the Prince of Orange, who is in all things of my opinion, I am sure. But I, like him, was well informed, and know well those on the other side, so that I should have been much astonished had they not attacked to-night. Then be ready, gentlemen, for if you give them time, the attack will be serious."

"These gentlemen will do me the justice to own," said the prince, "that before your arrival I held exactly the same language to them that you now do."

"But," said the burgomaster, "why does monseigneur believe that the attack is about to commence?"

"Here are the probabilities. The infantry is Catholic; it will fight alone; that is, on one side. The cavalry is Calvinist; they will fight alone on another side. The navy is under M. de Joyeuse, from Paris, who will take his share of the combat and the glory. That is three sides."

"Then let us form three corps," said the burgomaster.

"Make only one, gentlemen, with all your best soldiers, and leave any of whom you may be doubtful in close fight to guard your walls. Then with this body make a vigorous sally when Francois least expects it. They mean to attack; let them be forestalled, and attacked themselves. If you wait for their assault you are lost, for no one equals the French at an attack, as you, gentlemen, have no equals at defending your towns."

The Flemings looked radiant.

"What did I say, gentlemen?" said William.

"It is a great honor," said the unknown, "to have been, without knowing it, of the same opinion as the greatest captain of the age."

Both bowed courteously.

"Then," continued the unknown, "it is settled: you will make a furious sortie on the infantry and cavalry. I trust that your officers will so conduct it as to defeat your enemies."

"But their vessels?" cried the burgomaster. "The wind is northeast, and they will be in our city in two hours."

"You have yourselves six old ships and thirty boats at St. Marie; that is a mile off, is it not? That is your maritime barricade across the Scheldt."

"Yes, monseigneur, that is so. How do you know all these details?"

Monseigneur smiled.

"I know them, as you see; it is there that lies the fate of the battle."

"Then," said the burgomaster, "we must send aid to our brave seamen."

"On the contrary, you may dispose otherwise of the 400 men who are there; twenty brave, intelligent, and devoted men will suffice." The Antwerpians opened their eyes in surprise.

"Will you," continued monseigneur, "destroy the French fleet at the expense of your six old vessels and thirty boats?"

"Hum!" said the Antwerpians, looking at each other, "our ships are not so old."

"Well, price them," said the stranger, "and I will pay you their value."

"See," said William softly to him, "the men against whom I have to contend every day. Were it not for that, I should have conquered long ago."

"Come, gentlemen," continued the stranger, "name your price, but name it quickly. I will pay you in bills on yourselves, which I trust you will find good."

"Monseigneur," said the burgomaster, after a few minutes' deliberation with the others, "we are merchants, and not soldiers; therefore, you must pardon some hesitation, for our souls are not in our bodies, but in our counting-houses. However, there are circumstances in which, for the general good, we know how to make sacrifices. Dispose, then, of our ships as you like."

"Ma foi, monseigneur," said William, "you have done wonders. It would have taken me six months to obtain what you have done in ten minutes."

"This, then, is my plan, gentlemen," said monseigneur. "The French, with the admiral's galley at their head, will try to force a passage. Make your line long enough, and from all your boats let the men throw grappling-irons; and then, having made fast the enemy's ships, set fire to all your own boats, having previously filled them with combustible materials, and let your men escape in one reserved for the purpose."

"Oh!" cried William, "I see the whole French fleet burning."

"Yes, the whole; then no more retreat by sea and none by land, for at the same time you must open the sluices of Malines, Berchem, Lier, Duffel, and Antwerp. Repulsed by you, pursued by your open dykes, enveloped on all sides by these waters unexpectedly and rapidly rising, by this sea, which will have a flow, but no ebb, the French will be drowned — overwhelmed — destroyed."

The officers uttered a cry of joy.

"There is but one drawback," said the prince.

"What is it, monseigneur?"

"That it would take a day to send our orders to the different towns, and we have but an hour."

"And an hour is enough."

"But who will instruct the fleet?"

"It is done."

"By whom?"

"By me. If these gentlemen had refused to give it to me, I should have bought it."

"But Malines, Lier, Duffel?"

"I passed through Malines and Lier, and sent a sure agent to Duffel. At eleven o'clock the French will be beaten; at one they will be in full retreat; at two Malines will open its dykes, Lier and Duffel their sluices, and the whole plain will become a furious ocean, which will drown houses, fields, woods, and villages, it is true, but at the same time will destroy the French so utterly, that not one will return to France."

A silence of admiration and terror followed these words; then all at once the Flemings burst into applause. William stepped forward, and, holding out his hand, said: “Then, monseigneur, all is ready on our side?”

“All; and, stay — I believe on the side of the French also.”

And he pointed to an officer who was entering.

“Gentlemen,” cried the officer, “we have just heard that the French are marching toward the city.”

“To arms!” cried the burgomaster.

“To arms!” cried all.

“One moment, gentlemen,” cried monseigneur; “I have to give one direction more important than all the rest.”

“Speak!” cried all.

“The French will be surprised; it will not be a combat, nor even a retreat, but a flight. To pursue them you must be lightly armed. No cuirasses, morbleu! It is your cuirasses, in which you cannot move, which have made you lose all the battles you have lost. No cuirasses, gentlemen. We will meet again in the combat. Meanwhile, go to the place of the Hotel de Ville, where you will find all your men in battle array.”

“Thanks, monseigneur,” said William; “you have saved Belgium and Holland.”

“Prince, you overwhelm me.”

“Will your highness consent to draw the sword against the French?” asked the prince.

“I will arrange as to fight against the Huguenots,” replied the unknown, with a smile which his more somber companion might have envied.

CHAPTER LXV.

FRENCH AND FLEMINGS.

At the moment when the members of the council left the Hotel de Ville, the officers went to put themselves at the head of their troops, and execute the orders they had received. At the same time the artillery sounded. This artillery surprised the French in their nocturnal march, by which they had hoped to surprise the town; but instead of stopping their advance, it only hastened it. If they could not take the city by surprise, they might, as we have seen the king of Navarre do at Cahors, fill up the moats with fascines and burst open the gates with petards.

The cannon from the ramparts continued to fire, but in the darkness took scarcely any effect, and after having replied to the cries of their adversaries, the French advanced silently toward the ramparts with that fiery intrepidity which they always show in attack.

But all at once, doors and posterns opened, and from all sides poured out armed men, if not with the fierce impetuosity of the French, with a firmness which rendered them massive as a rolling wall.

It was the Flemings, who advanced in close ranks, and compact masses, above which the cannon continued to thunder, although with more noise than effect. Then the combat began hand to hand, foot to foot, sword to sword, and the flash of pistols lighted up faces red with blood.

But not a cry — not a murmur — not a complaint was heard, and the Flemings and French fought with equal rage. The Flemings were furious at having to fight, for fighting was neither their profession nor their pleasure; and the French were furious at being attacked when they meant to have taken the initiative.

While the combat was raging furiously, explosions were heard near St. Marie, and a light rose over the city, like a crest of flames. It was Joyeuse attacking and trying to force the barrier across the Scheldt, and who would soon penetrate into the city, at least, so the French hoped.

But it was not so; Joyeuse had weighed anchor and sailed, and was making rapid progress, favored by the west wind. All was ready for action; the sailors, armed with their boarding cutlasses, were eager for the combat; the gunners stood ready with lighted matches; while some picked men, hatchet in hand, stood ready to jump on the hostile ships and destroy the chains and cords.

The seven ships advanced in silence, disposed in the form of a wedge, of which the admiral's galley formed the point. Joyeuse himself had taken his first lieutenant's place, and was leaning over the bowsprit, trying to pierce the fogs of the river and the darkness of the night. Soon, through this double obscurity, he saw the pier extending itself darkly across the stream; it appeared deserted, but, in that land of ambushes, there seemed something terrifying in this desertion.

However, they continued to advance, and soon were within sight of the barrier, scarcely ten cable lengths off; they approached nearer and nearer, and yet not a single "qui vive!" struck on their ears.

The sailors only saw in this silence a carelessness which rejoiced them; but their young admiral, more far-seeing, feared some ruse. At last the prow of the admiral's ship touched the two ships which formed the center of the barrier, and made the whole line, which was fastened together by chains, tremble.

Suddenly, as the bearers of the hatchets received the order to board and cut the chains, a crowd of grappling irons, thrown by invisible hands, seized hold of the French vessels. The Flemings had forestalled the intended movement of the French. Joyeuse believed that his enemies were offering him a mortal combat, and he accepted it with alacrity. He also threw grappling irons, and the two lines of ships were firmly bound together. Then, seizing a hatchet, he was the first to jump on a ship, crying, "Board them! board them!" All his crew followed him, officers and men, uttering the same cry; but no cry replied to them, no force opposed their advance.

Only they saw three boats full of men gliding silently over the water, like three sea-birds.

The assailants rested motionless on the ships which they had conquered without a struggle.

All at once Joyeuse heard under his feet a crackling sound, and a smell of sulphur filled the air. A thought crossed his mind, and he ran and opened a hatchway; the vessel was burning. A cry of, "To our ships!" sounded through all the line. Each climbed back again more quickly than he had come in; but Joyeuse, this time, was the last. Just as he reached his galley, the flames burst out over the whole bridge of boats, like twenty volcanoes, of which each ship or boat was the crater; the order was instantly given to cut the ropes and break the chains and grappling-irons, and the sailors worked with the rapidity of men who knew that their safety depended on their exertions. But the work was immense; perhaps they might have detached those thrown by the enemy on their ships, but they had also to detach those which they themselves had thrown.

All at once twenty explosions were heard, and each of the French ships trembled to its center. It was the cannons that defended the port, and which, fully charged and then abandoned by the Antwerpians, exploded as the fire gained on them, breaking everything within their reach.

The flames mounted like gigantic serpents along the masts, rolled themselves round the yards, then, with their forked tongues, came to lick the sides of the French vessels.

Joyeuse, with his magnificent armor covered with gold, giving calmly, and in an imperious voice, his orders in the midst of the flames, looked like a fabulous salamander covered with scales, and at every movement threw off a shower of sparks. But the explosions became louder than ever; the gun-room had taken fire, and the vessels were flying in pieces.

Joyeuse had done his best to free himself, but in vain; the flames had reached the French ships, and showers of fire fell about him. The Flemish barrier was broken, and the French burning ships drifted to the shore. Joyeuse saw that he could not save his ships, and he gave orders to lower the boats, and land on the left bank. This was quickly done, and all the sailors were embarked to a man before Joyeuse quitted his galley. His sang-froid kept every one in order, and each man landed with a sword or an ax in his hand. Before he had reached the shore, the fire reached the magazine of his ship, which blew up, lighting the whole horizon.

Meanwhile, the artillery from the ramparts had ceased, not that the combat had abated, but that it was so close it was impossible to fire on enemies without firing on friends also.

The Calvinist cavalry had charged, and done wonders. Before the swords of its cavaliers a pathway opened, but the wounded Flemings pierced the horses with their large cutlasses, and in spite of this brilliant charge, a little confusion showed itself in the French columns, and they only kept their ground instead of advancing, while from the gates of the city new troops continually poured out. All at once, almost under the walls of the city, a cry of “Anjou! France!” was heard behind the mass of the Antwerpians. This was Joyeuse and his 1,500 sailors, armed with hatchets and cutlasses. They had to revenge their fleet in flames and two hundred of their companions burned or drowned.

No one could manage his long sword better than Joyeuse: every blow cut open a head, every thrust took effect. The group of Flemings on which he fell were destroyed like a field of corn by a legion of locusts. Delighted with their first success, they continued to push on; but the Calvinist cavalry, surrounded by troops, began to lose ground. M. de St. Aignan’s infantry, however, kept their place.

The prince had seen the burning of the fleet, and heard the reports of the cannon and the explosions, without suspecting anything but a fierce combat, which must terminate in victory for Joyeuse; for how could a few Flemish ships fight against the French fleet? He expected, then, every minute a diversion on the part of Joyeuse, when the news was brought to him that the fleet was destroyed, and Joyeuse and his men fighting in the midst of the Flemings. He now began to feel very anxious, the fleet being the means of retreat, and consequently the safety of the army. He sent orders to the Calvinist cavalry to try a fresh charge, and men and horses, almost exhausted, rallied to attack the Antwerpians afresh. The voice of Joyeuse was heard in the midst of the melée crying, “Hold firm, M. de St. Aignan. France! France!” and, like a reaper cutting a field of corn, his sword flew round, and cut down its harvest of men; the delicate favorite — the Sybarite — seemed to have put on with his cuirass the strength of a Hercules; and the infantry, hearing his voice above all the noise, and seeing his sword flashing, took fresh courage, and, like the cavalry, made a new effort, and returned to the combat.

But now the person that had been called monseigneur came out of the city on a beautiful black horse. He wore black armor, and was followed by three hundred well-mounted cavaliers, whom the Prince of Orange had placed at his disposal.

By a parallel gate came out William himself, with a picked body of infantry who had not yet appeared.

Monseigneur hastened where he was most wanted, that is to say, where Joyeuse was fighting with his sailors.

The Flemings recognized him, and opened their ranks, crying, joyfully, “Monseigneur! monseigneur!” Joyeuse and his men saw the movement, heard the cries, and all at once found themselves opposed to a new troop. Joyeuse pushed his horse toward the black knight, and their swords met. Joyeuse was confident in his armor and his science, but all his thrusts were skillfully parried, and one of those of his adversary touched him, and in spite of his armor, drew some drops of blood from his shoulder.

“Ah!” cried the young admiral, “this man is a Frenchman, and what is more, he has studied fencing under the same master as I have.”

At these words the unknown turned away, and tried to find a new antagonist.

“If you are French,” cried Joyeuse, “you are a traitor, for you fight against your king, your country, and your flag.”

The unknown only replied by attacking Joyeuse with fresh fury; but now Joyeuse was on his guard, and knew with what a skillful swordsman he had to deal. He parried two or three thrusts with as much skill as fury, and it was now the stranger who made a step back.

“See!” cried Joyeuse, “what one can do fighting for one’s country! A pure heart and a loyal arm suffice to defend a head without a helmet, a face without a vizor;” and he threw his helmet far from him, displaying his noble and beautiful head, with eyes sparkling with pride, youth and anger.

His antagonist forebore answer, uttered a cry, and struck at his bare head.

“Ah!” cried Joyeuse, parrying the blow, “I said you were a traitor, and as a traitor you shall die. I will kill you, and carry off this helmet which hides and defends you, and hang you to the first tree that I see.”

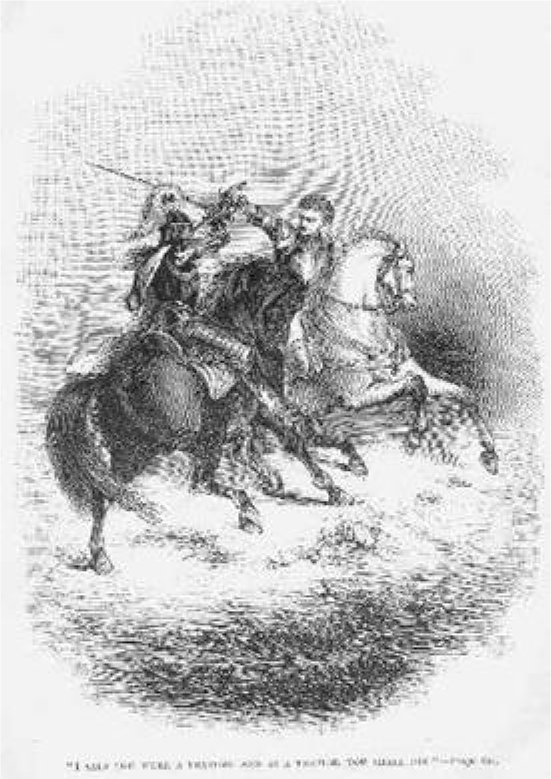

But at this moment a cavalier cried:

“Monseigneur, no more skirmishing; your presence is wanted over there.”

Glancing toward the point indicated, the unknown saw the Flemings giving way before the Calvinist cavalry.

“Yes,” cried he, “those are the men I wanted.”

At this moment so many cavaliers pressed on the sailors, that they made their first step in retreat.

The black cavalier profited by this movement to disappear in the melée.

A quarter of an hour after the French began to give way. M. de St. Aignan tried to retreat in good order, but a last troop of 2,000 infantry and 500 horse came out fresh from the city, and fell on this harassed and already retreating army. It was the old band of the Prince of Orange, which had fought in turns against the Duc d’Alva, Don John, Requesens, and Alexander Farnese. In spite of the coolness of the chiefs and the bravery of many, a frightful rout commenced.

At this moment the unknown fell again on the fugitives, and once more met Joyeuse with his now diminished band. The young admiral was mounted on his third horse, two having been killed under him; his sword was broken, and he had taken from a sailor one of their heavy hatchets, which he whirled round his head with the greatest apparent ease. From time to time he turned and faced his enemy, like the wild boar who cannot make up his mind to fly, and turns desperately on his hunter. The Flemings, who by monseigneur's advice had fought without cuirasses, were active in the pursuit, and gave no rest to the Angevin army. Something like remorse seized the unknown at the sight of this disaster.

"Enough, gentlemen," cried he, in French, "to-night they are driven from Antwerp, and in a week will be driven from Flanders; ask no more of the God of battles."

"Ah! he is French," cried Joyeuse; "I guessed it, traitor. Ah! be cursed, and may you die the death of a traitor."

This furious imprecation seemed to disconcert the unknown more than a thousand swords raised against him; he turned, and conqueror as he was, fled as rapidly as the conquered. But this retreat of a single man changed nothing in the state of affairs. Fear is contagious, it seized the entire army, and the soldiers began to fly like madmen. The horses went fast, in spite of fatigue, for they also felt the influence of fear; the men dispersed to seek a shelter, and in some hours the army, as an army, existed no longer. This was the time when the dykes were to be opened. From Lier to Termonde, from Haesdouk to Malines — each little river, swollen by its tributaries — each canal overflowed, and spread over the flat country its contingent of furious water.

Thus, when the fugitive French began to stop, having tired out the Antwerpians, whom they had seen return to the town, followed by the soldiers of the Prince of Orange — when those who had escaped from the carnage of the night believed themselves saved, and stopped to breathe for an instant, some with a prayer, and others with a curse, then a new enemy, blind and pitiless, was preparing for them. Joyeuse had commanded his sailors, now reduced to eight hundred, to make a halt; they were the only persons who had preserved some order, the Comte de St. Aignan having vainly tried to rally his foot soldiers.

The Duc d'Anjou, at the head of the fugitives, mounted on an excellent horse, and accompanied by a single servant, pushed forward without appearing to think of anything.

"He has no heart," cried some.

"His sang-froid is magnificent," said others.

Some hours of repose, from two to six in the morning, restored to the infantry the strength to continue their retreat; but provisions were wanting.

As for the horses, they seemed more fatigued than the men, and could scarcely move, for they had eaten nothing since the day before.

The fugitives hoped to gain Brussels, where the duke had many partisans, although they were not free from anxiety as to their reception. At Brussels, which was about eight leagues off, they would find food for the famishing troops, and a place of security from whence to recommence the campaign at a more favorable time. M. d'Anjou breakfasted in a peasant's hut, between Heboken and Heckhout. It was empty, but a fire still burned in the grate.

The soldiers and officers wished to imitate their chief, and spread themselves about the village, but found with a surprise mingled with terror that every house was deserted and empty.

M. de St. Aignan, who had aided them in their search, now called to the officers:

"March on, gentlemen."

"But we are tired and dying with hunger, colonel."

"Yes, but you are alive; and if you remain here another hour you will be dead. Perhaps it is already too late."

M. de St. Aignan knew nothing; but he suspected some great danger. They went on; but two or three thousand men straggled from the main body, or, worn out with fatigue, lay down on the grass, or at the foot of a tree, wearied, desolate, and despairing. Scarcely three thousand able men remained to the Duc d'Anjou.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE TRAVELERS.

While these disasters, the forerunners of a still greater one, were taking place, two travelers, mounted on excellent horses, left Brussels on a fine night, and rode toward Mechlin. They rode side by side, without any apparent arms but a large Flemish knife, of which the handle appeared in the belt of one of them. They rode on, each occupied with thoughts perhaps the same, without speaking a word. They looked like those commercial travelers who at that time carried on an extensive trade between France and Flanders. Whoever had met them trotting so peaceably along the road would have taken them for honest men, anxious to find a bed after their day's work. However, it was only necessary to overhear a few sentences of their conversation to lose any such opinion suggested by their appearance. They were about half a league from Brussels, when the tallest of them said:

"Madame, you were quite right to set off to-night; we shall gain seven leagues by it, and shall probably arrive at Mechlin by the time the result of the attack on Antwerp is known. In two days of short marches, and you must take easy stages, we shall reach Antwerp."

The person who was called madame, in spite of her male costume, replied in a voice calm, grave, and sweet:

"My friend, believe me, God will tire of protecting this wicked prince, and will strike him cruelly; let us hasten to put our projects into execution, for I am not one of those who believe in fatality, and I think that men have perfect freedom in will and deed. If we leave his punishment to God, and do not act ourselves, it was not worth while living so unhappily until now."

At this moment a blast of north wind, cold and biting, swept across the plain.

"You shiver, madame," said the other traveler; "take your cloak."

"No, thank you, Remy; I no longer feel pain of body or mind."

Remy rode on silently, only now and then stopping and looking back.

"You see no one behind us?" asked she, after one of these halts.

"No one, madame."

"That cavalier whom we met at Valenciennes, and who inquired about us, after looking at us so curiously?"

"He is not here, madame."

"But I fancied I saw him again near Mons."

"And I, madame, am sure I saw him just before we entered Brussels."

"Brussels?"

"Yes; but he must have stopped there."

"Remy," said Diana, drawing near him, as if even on that lonely road she feared to be overheard, "did he not seem to you like (in figure, at least, for I did not see his face) that unhappy young man?"

"Oh! no, madame, not at all; and besides, how could he have guessed that we had left Paris, and were traveling along this road?"

"But he found us out when we changed our house in Paris."

"No, madame, I am sure he did not follow us; and, indeed, I believe he had resolved on a desperate course as regards himself."

"Alas! Remy, every one has his own share of suffering. I trust God will console this poor youth."

Remy replied with a sigh, and they went on with no other sound than that of their horses' feet on the hard road. Two hours passed thus. Just as they were about to enter Vilvoide, Remy turned his head, for he heard the sound of horses' feet behind them. He stopped and listened, but could see nothing. His eyes uselessly tried to pierce through the darkness of the night, and as he no longer heard any sounds, they rode on and entered the town.

"Madame," said he, "if you will take my advice, you will stay here; daylight will soon appear, the horses are tired, and you yourself need repose."

"Remy, you are anxious about something."

"Yes, about your health, madame. Believe me, a woman cannot support so much fatigue; I can scarcely do so myself."

"As you please, Remy."

"Well, then, enter that narrow street. I see a light at the end of it, which must proceed from an inn. Be quick, I beg you."

"You have heard something?"

"I thought I heard a horse's feet. I am not sure, but I will stay behind a minute to find out."

The lady, without replying, went on, and Remy got off his horse and let him follow her, while he hid himself behind an immense post and waited. The lady knocked at the door of the inn, behind which, according to the hospitable custom of the country, watched, or rather slept, a maid servant. The girl woke up and received the traveler with perfect good-humor, and then opened the stable-door for the two horses.

"I am waiting for my companion," said Diana; "let me sit by the fire; I shall not go to bed until he comes."

The servant threw some straw to the horses, shut the stable door, then returned to the kitchen, put a chair by the fire, snuffed the candle with her fingers, and went to sleep again.

Meanwhile Remy was watching for the arrival of the traveler whose horse he had heard. He saw him enter the town and go on slowly, and seeming to listen; then, seeing the inn, he appeared to hesitate whether to go there or to continue his journey. He stopped close to Remy, who laid his hand on his knife.

"It is he again," thought Remy, "and he is following us. What can he want?"

After a minute the traveler murmured in a low voice, "They must have gone on, and so will I," and he rode forward.

"To-morrow we will change our route," thought Remy.

And he rejoined Diana, who was waiting impatiently for him.

"Well," said she softly, "are we followed?"

"There is no one, I was wrong; you may sleep in perfect safety, madame."

"I am not sleepy, Remy."

"At least have supper, madame; you have scarcely eaten anything."

"Willingly, Remy."

They reawakened the poor servant, who got up as good-humoredly as before, and hearing what they wanted, took from the cupboard a piece of salt pork, a cold leveret, and some sweets, which she set before them, together with a frothing jug of Louvain beer.

Remy sat down with Diana, who drank half a glass of beer, and ate a piece of bread. Remy did the same, and then they both rose.

"Are you not going to eat any more?" asked the girl.

"No, thank you, we have done."

"Will you not eat any meat? it is very nice."

“I am sure it is excellent, but we are not hungry.”

The girl clasped her hands in astonishment at this strange abstinence; it was not thus she was used to see travelers eat.

Remy threw a piece of money on the table.

“Oh!” said the girl, “I cannot change all that; six farthings would be all your bill.”

“Keep it all, my girl,” said Diana; “it is true my brother and I eat little, but we pay the same as others.”

The servant became red with joy.

“Tell me, my girl,” said Remy, “is there any cross-road from here to Mechlin?”

“Yes, monsieur, but it is very bad, while the regular road is a very fine one.”

“Yes, my child, I know that, but we wish to travel by the other.”

“Oh! I told you, monsieur, because, as your companion is a lady, the road would not do for her.”

“Why not?”

“Because to-night a great number of people will cross the country to go to Brussels.” — ”To Brussels?”

“Yes; it is a temporary emigration.”

“For what reason?”

“I do not know; they had orders.”

“From whom — the Prince of Orange?”

“No; from monseigneur.”

“Who is he?”

“I do not know, monsieur.”

“And who are the emigrants?”

“The inhabitants of the country and of the villages which have no dykes or ramparts.”

“It is strange.”

“We ourselves,” said the girl, “are to set out at daybreak, as well as all the other people in the town. Yesterday, at eleven o’clock, all the cattle were sent to Brussels by canals and cross-roads; therefore on the road of which you speak there must be great numbers of horses, carts, and people.”

“I should have thought the great road better for all that.”

“I do not know; it was the order.”

“But we can go on to Mechlin, I suppose?”

“I should think so, unless you will do like every one else, and go to Brussels.”

“No, no, we will go on at once to Mechlin,” said Diana, rising; “open the stable, if you please, my good girl.”

“Danger every way,” thought Remy; “however, the young man is before us.” And as the horses had not been unsaddled, they mounted again, and the rising sun found them on the banks of the Dyle.

CHAPTER LXVII.

EXPLANATION.

The danger that Remy braved was a real one, for the traveler, after having passed the village and gone on for a quarter of a league, and seeing no one before him, made up his mind that those whom he sought had remained behind in the village. He would not retrace his steps, but lay down in a field of clover; having made his horse descend into one of those deep ditches which in Flanders serve as divisions between the properties, he was therefore able to see without being seen. This young man, as Remy knew, and Diana suspected, was Henri du Bouchage, whom a strange fatality threw once more into the presence of the woman he had determined to fly. After his conversation with Remy, on the threshold of the mysterious house, that is to say, after the loss of all his hopes, he had returned to the Hotel Joyeuse, quite decided to put an end to a life which he felt to be so miserable, and as a gentleman, and one who had his name to keep untarnished, he decided on the glorious suicide of the field of battle.

Therefore, as they were fighting in Flanders, and his brother had a command there, Henri, on the following day, left his hotel twenty hours after the departure of Diana and Remy.

Letters from Flanders announced the intended coup de main on Antwerp, and Henri hoped to arrive in time for it. He pleased himself with the idea that he should die sword in hand, in his brother's arms, under a French flag, and that his death would be talked about until the sound even reached the solitude in which the mysterious lady lived. Noble follies! glorious, yet sad dreams!

Just as — full of these thoughts — he came in sight of Valenciennes, from whose church tower eight o'clock was sounding, he perceived that they were about to close the gates. He pushed on, and nearly overturned, on the drawbridge, a man who was fastening the girths of his horse. Henri stopped to make excuses to the man, who turned at the sound of his voice, and then quickly turned away again. Henri started, but immediately thought, "I must be mad; Remy here, whom I left four days ago in the Rue de Bussy; here now, without his mistress. Really, grief must be turning my brain and making me see everything in the form of my own fancies." And he continued his way, convinced that his idea had been pure fancy. At the first hotel that he came to he stopped, gave his horse to a servant, and sat down on a bench before the door, while they prepared his bed and supper. But as he sat there he saw two travelers approaching, and this time he saw more clearly.

"Now," murmured he, "I do not dream, and still I think I see Remy. I cannot remain in this uncertainty; I must clear up my doubts."

He got up and ran down the road after them, but they had disappeared. Then he went to all the hotels and questioned the servants, and after much search discovered that two cavaliers had been seen going toward a small inn in the Rue de Beffroi. The landlord was just shutting the doors when Henri entered. While the man offered him rooms and refreshment, he looked round, and saw on the top of the staircase Remy going up, lighted by a servant; of his companion he saw nothing. Du Bouchage had no longer any doubts, and he asked himself, with a dreadful sinking of the heart, why Remy had left his mistress and was traveling without her; for Henri had been so occupied in identifying Remy, that he had scarcely looked at his companion. The next morning when he rose, he was much surprised to learn that the two travelers had obtained from the governor permission to go out; and that, contrary to all custom, the gates had been opened for them. Thus, as they had set out at one o'clock, they had six hours' start of him. Henri put his horse to the gallop and passed the travelers at Mons. He saw Remy; but Remy must have been a sorcerer to know him, for he had on a soldier's great coat and rode another horse. Nevertheless, Remy's companion, at a word from him, turned away his head before Henri could see his face. But the young man did not lose courage; he watched them to their hotel, and then questioning, with the aid of an irresistible auxiliary, learned that Remy's companion was a very handsome, but very silent and sad looking young man. Henri trembled. "Can it be a woman?" asked he.

"It is possible," replied the host: "many women travel thus disguised just now, to go and rejoin their lovers in Flanders; but it is our business to see nothing, and we never do."

Henri felt heart-broken at this explanation. Was Remy, indeed, accompanying his mistress dressed as a cavalier; and was she, as the host suggested, going to rejoin her lover in Flanders? Had Remy lied when he spoke of an eternal regret? was this fable of a past love, which had clothed his mistress forever in mourning, only his invention to get rid of an importunate watcher?

“If it be so,” cried Henri, “the time will come when I shall have courage to address this woman and reproach her with all the subterfuges which lower her whom I had placed so high above all ordinary mortals; and seeing nearer this brilliant envelope of a common mind, perhaps I shall fall of myself from the height of my illusions and my love.”

And the young man tore his hair in despair at the thought of losing the love which was killing him; for a dead heart is better than an empty one. So he continued to follow them, and to wonder at the cause which took to Flanders, at the same time as himself, these two beings so indispensable to his existence.

At Brussels he gathered information as to the Duc d’Anjou’s intended campaign. The Flemings were too hostile to the duke to receive well a Frenchman of distinction, and were too proud of their position to refrain from humiliating a little this gentleman who came from France and questioned them in a pure Parisian accent, which always seemed ridiculous to the Belgians. Henri began to conceive serious fears with reference to this expedition, in which his brother was to bear so prominent a part, and he resolved in consequence to push on rapidly to Antwerp. It was a constant surprise to him to see Remy and his companion, in spite of their desire not to be seen, continue to follow the same road as himself.

Henri, now hidden in the clover field, felt certain of seeing the face of the young man who accompanied Remy, and thus putting an end to all his doubts. As they passed, unsuspicious of his vicinity, Diana was occupied in braiding up her hair, which she had not dared to untie at the inn.

Henri recognized her, and nearly fainted. The travelers passed on, and then anger took, in Henri’s mind, the place of the goodness and patience he had exercised, while he believed Remy and the lady sincere toward him. But after the protestations of Remy, this journey seemed to him a species of treason.

When he had recovered a little from the blow, he rose, shook back his beautiful light hair, and mounted his horse, determined no longer to take those precautions that respect had made him hitherto observe, and he began to follow the travelers openly, and with his face uncovered. No more cloak nor hood, no more stops and hesitation; the road belonged to him as to them, and he rode on, regulating the pace of his horse by that of theirs. He did not mean to speak to them, but only to let them see him. Remy soon perceived him, and, seeing him thus openly advance without any further attempt at concealment, grew troubled; Diana noticed it and turned also.

"Is it not that young man following us?"

Remy, still trying to reassure her, said, "I do not think so, madame. As well as I can judge by the dress, it is some young Walloon soldier going probably to Amsterdam, and passing by the theater of war to seek adventures."

"I feel uneasy about him, Remy."

"Reassure yourself, madame, had he been really the Comte du Bouchage, he would have spoken to us; you know how persevering he was."

"I know also that he was respectful, Remy, or I should never have troubled myself about him, but simply told you to get rid of him."

"Well, madame, if he be so respectful, you would have no more to fear from him on this road than in the Rue de Bussy."

"Nevertheless, Remy, let us change our horses here at Mechlin, in order to get on faster to Antwerp."

"On the contrary, madame, I should say, do not let us enter Mechlin at all; our horses are good, let us push on to that little village which is, I think, called Villebrock; in that manner we shall avoid the town, with its questioners and curious gazers."

"Go on, then, Remy."

They turned to the left, taking a road hardly made, but which visibly led to Villebrock; Henri also quitted the road, and turned down the lane, still keeping his distance from them.

Remy's disquietude showed itself in his constantly turning to look behind him. At last they arrived at Villebrock. Of 200 houses which this village contained, not one was inhabited; some forgotten dogs and lost cats ran wildly about the solitude, the former calling for their masters by long howls. Remy knocked at twenty doors, but found no one. Henri on his side, who seemed the shadow of the travelers, knocked at the first house as uselessly as they had done, then, divining that the war was the cause of this desertion, waited to continue his journey until the travelers should have decided what to do.

They fed their horses with some corn which they found in an inn, and then Remy said —

"Madame, we are no longer in a friendly country, nor in an ordinary situation; we must not expose ourselves uselessly. We shall certainly fall in with some French, Spanish, or Flemish band, for in the present state of Flanders, adventures of all kinds must be rife. If you were a man I should speak differently; but you are a young and beautiful woman, and would run a double risk for life and honor."

"My life is nothing," said she.

"On the contrary, madame, it is everything. You live for a purpose."

"Well, then, what do you propose? Think and act for me, Remy."

"Then, madame, let us remain here. I see many houses which would afford us a sure shelter. I have arms, and we will defend or hide ourselves, as we shall be strong or weak."

"No, Remy, no, I must go on; nothing must stop me; and if I had fears, they would be for you."

"We will go on then."

They rode on, therefore, without another word, and Henri du Bouchage followed.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE WATER.

As the travelers advanced, the country took an equally strange aspect, for it was utterly deserted, as well as the towns and villages. Nowhere were the calves to be seen grazing in the meadows, nor the goat perched on the top of the mountain, or nibbling the green shoots of the brier or young vine; nowhere the shepherd with his flock; nowhere the cart with its driver; no foreign merchant passing from one country to another with his pack on his back; no plowman singing his harsh song or cracking his long whip. As far as the eye could see over the magnificent plains, the little hills and the woods, not a human figure was to be seen, not a voice to be heard. It seemed like the earth before the creation of animals or men. The only people who animated this dreary solitude were Remy and his companion, and Henri following behind and preserving ever the same distance. The night came on dark and cold, and the northeast wind whistled in the air, and filled the solitude with its menacing sound.

Remy stopped his companion, and putting his hand on the bridle of her horse, said —

“Madame, you know how inaccessible I am to fear; you know I would not turn my back to save my life; but this evening some strange feeling possesses me, and forbids me to go further. Madame, call it terror, timidity, panic, what you will, I confess that for the first time in my life I am afraid.”

The lady turned.

“Is he still there?” she said.

“Oh! I was not thinking of him; think no more of him, madame, I beg of you; we need not fear a single man. No, the danger that I fear or rather feel, or divine with a sort of instinct, is unknown to me, and therefore I dread it. Look, madame, do you see those willows bending in the wind?”

“Yes.”

“By their side I see a little house; I beg you, let us go there. If it is inhabited, we will ask for hospitality; and if not, we will take possession of it. I beg you to consent, madame.”

Remy’s emotion and troubled voice decided Diana to yield, so she turned her horse in the direction indicated by him. Some minutes after, they knocked at the door. A stream (which ran into the Nethe, a little river about a mile off), bordered with reeds and grassy banks, bathed the feet of the willows with its murmuring waters. Behind the house, which was built of bricks, and covered with tiles, was a little garden, encircled by a quickset hedge.

All was empty, solitary, and deserted, and no one replied to the blows struck by the travelers. Remy did not hesitate; he drew his knife, cut a branch of willow, with which he pushed back the bolt and opened the door. The lock, the clumsy work of a neighboring blacksmith, yielded almost without resistance. Remy entered quickly, followed by Diana, then, closing the door again, he drew a massive bolt, and thus intrenched, seemed to breathe more freely. Feeling about, he found a bed, a chair, and a table in an upper room. Here he installed his mistress, and then, returning to the lower room, placed himself at the window, to watch the movements of Du Bouchage.

His reflections were as somber as those of Remy. “Certainly,” said he to himself, “some danger unknown to us, but of which the inhabitants are not ignorant, is about to fall on the country. War ravages the land; perhaps the French have taken, or are about to assault Antwerp, and the peasants, seized with terror, have gone to take refuge in the towns.”

But this reasoning, however plausible, did not quite satisfy him. Then he thought, “But what are Remy and his mistress doing here? What imperious necessity drags them toward this danger? Oh, I will know; the time has come to speak to this woman, and to clear away all my doubts. Never shall I find a better opportunity.”

He approached the house, and then suddenly stopped, with a hesitation common to hearts in love.

“No,” said he, “no, I will be a martyr to the end. Besides, is she not mistress of her own actions? And, perhaps, she does not even know what fable was invented by Remy. Oh, it is he alone that I hate; he who assured me that she loved no one. But still let me be just. Ought this man for me, whom he did not know, to have betrayed his mistress’s secrets? No, no. All that remains for me now is to follow this woman to the camp, to see her hang her arms round some one’s neck and hear her say, ‘See what I have suffered, and how I love you.’ Well, I will follow her there, see what I dread to see, and die of it; it will be trouble saved for the musket or cannon. Alas! I did not seek this; I went calmly to meet a glorious death, and I wished to die with her name on my lips. It is not so to be; I am destined to a death full of bitterness and torture. Well, I accept it.”

Then, recalling his days of waiting, and his nights of anguish before the inexorable house, he found that he was less to be pitied here than at Paris, and he went on.

“I will stay here, and take these trees for a shelter, and then I can hear her voice when she speaks, and see her shadow on the window.”

He lay down, then, under the willows, listening, with a melancholy impossible to describe, to the murmur of the water that flowed at his side. All at once he started; the noise of cannon was brought distinctly to him by the wind.

“Ah!” said he, “I shall arrive too late; they are attacking Antwerp.”

His first idea was to rise, mount his horse, and ride on as quickly as possible; but to do this he must quit the lady, and die in doubt, so he remained.

During two hours he lay there, listening to the reports. He did not guess that what he heard was his brother’s ships blowing up. At last, about two o’clock, all grew quiet.

“Now,” thought Henri, “Antwerp is taken, and my brother is a conqueror; but after Antwerp will come Ghent, and then Bruges; I shall not want an occasion for a glorious death. But before I die I must know what this woman wants in the French camp.”

He lay still, and had just fallen asleep, when his horse, which was grazing quietly near him, pricked up his ears and neighed loudly.

Henri opened his eyes. The animal had his head turned to the breeze, which had changed to the southeast, as if listening.

“What is it, my good horse?” said the young man; “have you seen some animal which frightened you, or do you regret the shelter of your stable?”

The animal stood still, looking toward Lier, with his eyes fixed and his nostrils distended, and listening.

“Ah!” said Henri, “it is more serious; perhaps some troops of wolves following the army to devour the corpses.”

The horse neighed and began to run forward to the west, but his master caught the bridle and jumped on his back, and then was able to keep him quiet. But after a minute, Henri himself began to hear what the horse had heard. A long murmur, like the wind, but more solemn, which seemed to come from different points of the compass, from south to north.

“What is it?” said Henri; “can it be the wind? No, it is the wind which brings this sound, and I hear the two distinctly. An army in march, perhaps? But no; I should hear the sound of voices and of regular marching. Is it the crackling of a fire? No, there is no light in the horizon; the heaven seems even to grow darker.”

The noise redoubled and became distinct; it was an incessant growling and rolling, as if thousands of cannon were being dragged over a paved road. Henri thought of this. “But no,” said he, “there is no paved road near.”

The noise continued to increase, and Henri put his horse to the gallop and gained an eminence.

“What do I see?” cried he, as he attained the summit. What he saw his horse had seen before him; for he had only been able to make him advance by furious spurring, and when they arrived at the top of the hill he reared so as nearly to fall backward. They saw in the horizon an infinite body rolling over the plain, and visibly and rapidly approaching. The young man looked in wonder at this strange phenomenon, when, looking back to the place he had come from, he saw the plain beginning to be covered with water, and that the little river had overflowed, and was beginning to cover the reeds which a quarter of an hour before had stood up stiffly on its banks.

“Fool that I am,” cried he, “I never thought of it. The water! the water! The Flemings have broken their dykes!”

Henri flew to the house, and knocked furiously at the door.

“Open! open!” cried he.

No one replied.

“Open, Remy!” cried he, furious with terror; “it is I, Henri du Bouchage.”

“Oh! you need not name yourself, M. le Comte,” answered Remy from within, “I recognized you long ago; but I warn you, that if you break in the door you will find me behind it, with a pistol in each hand.”

“But you do not understand,” cried Henri; “the water; it is the water!”

“No fables, no pretexts or dishonorable ruses, M. le Comte; I tell you that you will only enter over my body.”

“Then I will pass over it, but I will enter. In Heaven’s name, in the name of your own safety and your mistress’s, will you open?” — ”No.”

Henri looked round him, and perceived an immense stone. He raised it and threw it against the door, which flew open. A ball passed over Henri’s head, but without touching him; he jumped toward Remy, and seizing his other arm, cried, “Do you not see that I have no arms? do not defend yourself against a man who does not attack. Look! only look!” and he drew him to the window.

“Well,” said he, “do you see now?” and he pointed to the horizon.

“The water!” cried Remy.

“Yes, the water! it invades us; see, at our feet, the river overflows, and in five minutes we shall be surrounded.”

“Madame! madame!” cried Remy.

“Do not frighten her, Remy; get ready the horses at once.”

Remy ran to the stable, and Henri flew up the staircase. At Remy’s cry Diana had opened her door; Henri seized her in his arms and carried her away as he would have done a child. But she, believing in treason or violence, struggled, and clung to the staircase with all her might.

“Tell her that I am saving her, Remy!” cried Henri.

Remy heard the appeal, and cried:

“Yes, yes, madame, he is saving you, or rather he will save you. Come, for Heaven’s sake!”

CHAPTER LXIX.

FLIGHT.

Henri, without losing time in reasoning with Diana, carried her out of the house, and wished to place her before him on his horse; but she, with a movement of invincible repugnance, glided from his arms, and was received by Remy, who placed her on her own horse.

"Ah, madame!" cried Henri, "how little you understand my heart. It was not, believe me, for the pleasure of holding you in my arms, or pressing you to my heart, although for that favor I would sacrifice my life, but that we ought to fly as quickly as the birds, and look at them, how they fly!"

Indeed, in the scarcely dawning light were seen large numbers of curlews and pigeons, traversing the air with a quick and frightened flight, which, in the night, usually abandoned to the silent bat, looked strange to the eye, and sounded sinister to the ear.

Diana did not reply, but rode on without turning her head. Her horse, however, as well as that of Remy, was fatigued with their long journey, and Henri, as he turned back each moment, saw that they could not keep up with him.

"See, madame!" said he, "how my horse outstrips yours, and yet I am holding him in with all my strength; for Heaven's sake, madame, while there is yet time, if you will not ride with me, take my horse and leave me yours."

"No, thank you, monsieur," replied she, in her usual calm voice.

"But, madame," cried Henri, in despair, "the water gains on us; do you hear! do you hear?"

Indeed, a horrible crashing was now heard; it was the dyke of a neighboring village giving way, to swell the inundation. Boards and props had given way, a double row of stakes broke with a noise like thunder, and the water, rushing over the ruins, began to invade an oak wood, of which they saw the tops trembling, and heard the branches cracking as though a flight of demons were passing under the leaves.

The uprooted trees knocking against the stakes, the wood of ruined houses floating on the waters, the distant neighings and cries of horses and men carried away by the inundation, formed a concert of sounds so strange and gloomy that the terror which agitated Henri began to seize also upon Diana. She spurred her horse, and he, as if he understood the danger, redoubled his efforts. But the water gained on them, and before ten minutes it was evident that it would reach them. Every instant Henri turned and cried, “Quicker, madame! for pity’s sake; the water comes; here it is!”

It came, indeed, foaming and turbulent, carrying away like a feather the house in which they had taken shelter; and majestic, immense, rolling like a serpent, it arrived like a wall behind the horses of Remy and Diana. Henri uttered a cry of terror, and turned on the water, as though he would have fought it.

“You see you are lost!” screamed he. “Come, madame, perhaps there is still time; come with me.”

“No, monsieur,” said she.

“In a minute it will be too late; look!” cried he.

Diana turned; the water was within fifty feet of her.

“Let my fate be accomplished,” said she; “you, monsieur, fly.”

Remy’s horse, exhausted, fell, and could not rise again, despite the efforts of his rider.

“Save her in spite of herself,” cried Remy.

And at the same moment, as he disengaged himself from the stirrups, the water passed over the head of the faithful servant. His mistress, at this sight, uttered a terrible cry, and tried to jump off her horse to perish with him. But Henri, seeing her intention, seized her round the waist, and placing her before him, set off like an arrow.

“Remy! Remy!” cried she, extending her arms. A cry was the only answer. Remy had come up to the surface, and, with the indomitable hope which accompanies the dying man to the last, was swimming, sustained by a beam. By his side came his horse, beating the water desperately with his feet, while the water gained on Diana’s horse, and some twenty feet in front Henri and Diana flew on the third horse, which was half mad with terror.

Remy scarcely regretted life, since he hoped that his loved mistress would be saved.

“Adieu, madame!” cried he. “I go first to him who waits for us, to tell him that you live for — ”

He could not finish; a mountain of water rolled over his head.

"Remy! Remy!" cried the lady, "I wish to die with you. I will! monsieur, I will go to him; in the name of God, I will!"

She pronounced these words with so much energy and angry authority, that the young man unfolded his arms and let her slip to the ground, saying —

"Well, madame, we will all three die here together; it is a joy I had not hoped for."

As he said these words he stopped his horse, and the water reached them almost immediately; but, by a last effort of love, the young man kept hold of Diana's arm as she stood on the ground. The flood rolled over them. It was a sublime spectacle to see the sang-froid of the young man, whose entire bust was raised above the water, while he sustained Diana with one arm, and with the other guided the last efforts of his expiring horse.

There was a moment of terrible struggle, during which the lady, upheld by Henri, kept her head above water, while with his left hand he kept off the floating wood and the corpses which would have struck against them.

One of the bodies floating past sighed out, "Adieu, madame!"

"Heavens!" cried Henri, "it is Remy!" And without calculating the danger of the additional weight, he seized him by his sleeve, drew him up, and enabled him to breath freely. But the exhausted horse now sank in the water to its neck, then to its eyes, and finally disappeared altogether.

"We must die," murmured Henri. "Madame, my life and soul belonged to you."

As he spoke, he felt Remy slip from him, and he no longer tried to retain him — it was useless. His only care was to sustain Diana above the water, that she at least, might die the last, and that he might be able to say to himself, in his last moments, that he had done his utmost to save her. All at once, a joyful cry sounded at his side; he turned, and saw Remy, who had found a boat, which had belonged to the little house where they had taken shelter, and which the water had carried away. Remy, who had regained his strength, thanks to Henri's assistance, had seized it as it floated past. The oars were tied to it, and an iron hook lay in the bottom. He held out the hook to Henri, who seized it, and drawing Diana with him, raised her over his shoulders, and passed her to Remy, and then climbed in himself. The first rays of the rising sun showed them the plains inundated, and the boat swimming like an atom on that ocean covered with wrecks. Toward the left rose a little hill, completely surrounded by water, looking like an island in the midst of the sea. Henri took the oars and rowed toward it, while Remy, with the boat-hook, occupied himself in keeping off the beams and wrecks which might have struck against them. Thanks to Henri's strength and Remy's skill, they reached, or, rather, were thrown against, the hill. Remy jumped out, and, seizing the chain, drew the boat toward him; Diana, rising alone, followed him, and then Henri, who drew up the boat and seated himself a little way from them. They were saved from the most menacing danger, for the inundation, however strong, could never reach to the summit of the hill. Below them they could see that great angry waste of waters, which seemed inferior in power only to God himself; and, by the increasing light, they perceived that it was covered with the corpses of French soldiers.

Remy had a wound in his shoulder, where a floating beam had struck against him; but Diana, thanks to Henri's protection, was free from all injury, although she was cold and wet. At last they noticed in the horizon, on the eastern side, something like fires burning on a height which the water could not reach. As well as they could judge, they were about a league off. Remy advanced to the point of the hill, and said that he believed he saw a jetty advancing in a direct line toward the fires. But they could see nothing clearly, and knew not well where they were, for though day was dawning, it came cloudily and full of fog; had it been clear and under a pure sky, they might have seen the town of Mechlin, from which they were not more than two leagues distant.

"Well, M. le Comte," said Remy, "what do you think of those fires?"

"Those fires, which seem to you to announce a hospitable shelter, appear to me to be full of danger."

"And why so?"

"Remy," said Henri, lowering his voice, "look at these corpses; they are all French — there is not one Fleming; they announce to us a great disaster. The dykes have been broken to finish the destruction of the French army, if it has been conquered — to nullify the victory, if they have been victors. Those fires are as likely to have been lighted by enemies as by friends, and may be simply a ruse to draw fugitives to destruction."

"Nevertheless, we cannot stay here; my mistress will die of cold and hunger."

"You are right, Remy; remain here with madame, and I will go to the jetty, and return to you with news."

“No, monsieur,” said Diana, “you shall not expose yourself alone; we have been saved together; we will live or die together. Remy, your arm. I am ready.”

Each word which she pronounced had so irresistible an accent of authority that no one thought of disputing it. Henri bowed, and walked first.

It was more calm; the jetty formed, with the hill, a kind of bay, where the water slept. All three got into the little boat, which was once more launched among the wrecks and floating bodies. A quarter of an hour after, they touched the jetty. They tied the chain of the boat to a tree, landed once more, walked along the jetty for nearly an hour, and then arrived at a number of Flemish huts, among which, in a place planted with lime trees, were two or three hundred soldiers sitting round a fire, above whom floated the French flag. Suddenly a sentinel, placed about one hundred feet from the bivouac, cried, “Qui vive?”

“France,” replied Du Bouchage. Then, turning to Diana, he said, “Now, madame, you are saved. I recognize the standard of the gendarmes of Aunis, a corps in which I have many friends.”

At the cry of the sentinel and the answer of the comte several gendarmes ran to meet the new comers, doubly welcome, in the midst of this terrible disaster, as survivors and compatriots. Henri was soon recognized; he was eagerly questioned, and recounted the miraculous manner in which he and his companions had escaped death. Remy and Diana had sat down silently in a corner; but Henri fetched them and made them come to the fire, for both were still dripping with water.

“Madame,” said he, “you will be respected here as in your own house. I have taken the liberty of calling you one of my relations.”

And without waiting for the thanks of those whose lives he had saved, he went away to rejoin the officers.

The gendarmes of Aunis, of whom our fugitives were claiming hospitality, had retired in good order after the defeat and the sauve qui peut of the chiefs. Whereever there is similarity of position and sentiment, and the habit of living together, it is common to find unanimity in execution as well as in thought. It had been so that night with the gendarmes of Aunis; for seeing their chiefs abandon them, they agreed together to draw their ranks closer, instead of breaking them. They therefore put their horses to the gallop, and, under the conduct of one of the ensigns, whom they loved for his bravery and respected for his birth, they took the road to Brussels.

Like all the actors in this terrible scene, they saw the progress of the inundation, and were pursued by the furious waters; but by good luck found in this spot a position strong both against men and water. The inhabitants, knowing themselves in safety, had not quitted their homes, and had only sent off their women, children, and old men to Brussels; therefore the gendarmes met with resistance when they arrived; but death howled behind them, and they attacked like desperate men, triumphed over all obstacles, lost ten men, but established the others, and turned out the Flemings.

Such was the recital which Henri received from them.

“And the rest of the army?” asked he.

“Look,” replied the ensign; “the corpses which pass each moment answer your question.”

“But — my brother,” said Henri, in a choking voice.

“Alas! M. le Comte, we do not know. He fought like a lion, but he survived the battle; as to the inundation I cannot say.”

Henri shook his head sadly; then, after a minute’s pause, said, “And the duke?”

“Comte, the duke fled one of the first. He was mounted on a white horse, with no spot but a black star on the forehead. Well, just now we saw the horse pass among a mass of wrecks, the foot of a rider was caught in the stirrup and was floating on the water.”

“Great God!”

“Good heavens!” echoed Remy, who had drawn near and heard the tale.

“One of my men ventured down into the water and seized the reins of the floating horse, and drew it up sufficiently to enable us to see the white boot and gold spur that the duke wore. But the waters were rushing past, and the man was forced to let go to save himself, and we saw no more. We shall not even have the consolation of giving a Christian burial to our prince.”

“Dead! he also? the heir to the crown! What a misfortune!”

Remy turned to his mistress, and with an expression impossible to describe, said,

“He is dead, madame, you see.”

“I praise the Lord, who has spared us a crime,” said she, raising her eyes to heaven.

“Yes, but it prevents our vengeance.”

“Vengeance only belongs to a man when God forgets.”

“But you, yourself, comte,” said the ensign to Henri, “what are you about to do?”

The comte started. “I?” said he.

“Yes.”

“I will wait here till my brother’s body passes,” replied he, gloomily, “then I will try to draw him to land. You may be sure that if once I hold him, I shall not let go.”

Remy looked pityingly at the young man; but Diana heard nothing — she was praying.

CHAPTER LXX.

TRANSFIGURATION.

After her prayer Diana rose so beautiful and radiant that the comte uttered a cry of surprise and admiration. She appeared to be waking out of a long sleep, of which the dreams had fatigued her and weighed upon her mind; or rather, she was like the daughter of Jairus, called from death and rising from her funeral couch, already purified and ready for heaven. Awakening from her lethargy, she cast around her a glance so sweet and gentle, that Henri began to believe he should see her feel for his pain, and yield to a sentiment of gratitude and pity. While the gendarmes, after their frugal repast, slept about among the ruins, while Remy himself yielded to it, Henri came and sat down close to Diana, and in a voice so low and sweet that it seemed a murmur of the breeze, said:

“Madame, you live. Oh! let me tell you all the joy which overflows my heart when I see you here in safety, after having seen you on the threshold of the tomb.”

“It is true, monsieur,” replied she; “I live through you, and I wish I could say I was grateful.”

“But, madame,” replied Henri, with an immense effort, “if it is only that you are restored to those you love?”

“What do you mean?”

“To those you are going to rejoin through so many perils.”

“Monsieur, those I loved are dead! those I am going to rejoin are so also.”

“Oh, madame!” cried Henri, falling on his knees, “throw your eyes on me — on me, who have suffered so much and loved so much. Oh, do not turn away; you are young, and beautiful as the angels in heaven; read my heart, which I open to you, and you will see that it contains not an atom of that love that most men feel. You do not believe me? Examine the past hours; which of them has given me joy, or even hope? yet I have persevered. You made me weep; I devoured my tears. You made me suffer; I hid my sufferings. You drove me to seek death, and I went to meet it without a complaint. Even at this moment, when you turn away your head, when each of my words, burning as they are, seems a drop of iced water falling on your heart, my soul is full of you, and I live only because you live. Just now, was I not ready to die with you? What have I asked for? Nothing. Have I touched your hand? Never, but to draw you from a mortal peril. I held you in my arms to draw you from the waves — nothing more. All in me has been purified by the devouring fire of my love."

"Oh, monsieur! for pity's sake do not speak thus to me."

"Oh, in pity do not condemn me. He told me you loved no one; oh! repeat to me this assurance; it is a singular favor for a man in love to ask to be told that he is not loved, but I prefer to know that you are insensible to all. Oh, madame, you who are the only adoration of my life, reply to me."

In spite of Henri's prayers, a sigh was the only answer.

"You say nothing," continued the comte; "Remy at least had more pity for me, for he tried to console him. Oh! I see you will not reply, because you do not wish to tell me that you came to Flanders to rejoin some one happier than I, and yet I am young, and am ready to die at your feet."

"M. le Comte," replied Diana, with majestic solemnity, "do not say to me things fit only to be said to a woman; I belong to another world, and do not live for this. Had I seen you less noble — less good — less generous, had I not for you in the bottom of my heart the tender feeling of a sister for a brother, I should say, 'Rise, comte, and do not importune with love my ears, which hold it in horror.' But I do not say so, comte, because I suffer in seeing you suffer. I say more; now that I know you, I will take your hand and place it on my heart, and I will say to you willingly, 'See, my heart beats no more; live near me, if you like, and assist day by day, if such be your pleasure, at this painful execution of a body which is being killed by the tortures of the soul;' but this sacrifice, which you may accept as happiness — "

"Oh, yes!" cried Henri, eagerly.

"Well, this sacrifice I ought to forbid. This very day a change has taken place in my life; I have no longer the right to lean on any human arm — not even on the arm of that generous friend, that noble creature, who lies there, and for a time finds the happiness of forgetfulness. Alas! poor Remy," continued she, with the first change of tone that Henri remarked in her voice, "your waking will also be sad; you do not know the progress of my thought; you cannot read in my eyes that you will soon be alone, and that alone I must go to God.”

“What do you mean, madame? do you also wish to die?”

Remy, awakened by the cry of the young count, began to listen.

“You saw me pray, did you not?” said Diana.

“Yes,” answered Henri.

“This prayer was my adieu to earth; the joy that you remarked on my face — the joy that fills me even now, is the same you would see in me if the angel of death were to come and say to me, ‘Rise, Diana, and follow me.’“

“Diana! Diana! now I know your name; Diana, cherished name!” murmured the young man.

“Oh, silence!” cried she, “forget this name which escaped me; no living person has the right to pierce my heart by pronouncing it.”

“Oh! madame, do not tell me you are going to die.”

“I do not say that,” replied she in her grave voice; “I say that I am about to quit this world of tears — of hatreds — of bad passions — of vile interests and desires. I say that I have nothing left to do among the creatures whom God created my fellow mortals; I have no more tears, no more blood in my heart; no more thoughts — they are dead. I am a worthless offering, for in renouncing the world I sacrifice nothing, neither desires nor hopes; but such as I am I offer myself to my God, and he will accept me — he who has made me suffer so much, and yet kept me from sinking under it.”

Remy, who had heard this, rose slowly, and said, “You abandon me?”

“For God,” said Diana, raising her thin white hand to heaven.

“It is true,” said Remy, sadly; and seizing her hand he pressed it to his breast.

“Oh! what am I by these two hearts?” said Henri.

“You are,” replied Diana, “the only human creature, except Remy, on whom I have looked twice for years.”

Henri knelt. “Thanks, madame,” said he, “I bow to my destiny. You belong to God; I cannot be jealous.”

As he rose, they heard the sound of trumpets on the plain, from which the water was rapidly disappearing. The gendarmes seized their arms and were on horseback at once.

Henri listened. “Gentlemen,” cried he, “those are the admiral’s trumpets; I know them. Oh, God! may they announce my brother!”

“You see that you still wish something, and still love something; why, then, should you choose despair, like those who desire nothing — like those who love no one?”

“A horse!” cried Henri; “who will lend me a horse?”

“But the water is still all around us,” said the ensign.

“But you see that the plain is practicable; they must be advancing, since we hear their trumpets.”

“Mount to the top of the bank, M. le Comte, the sky is clear, perhaps you will see.”

Henri climbed up; the trumpets continued to sound at intervals, but were seemingly stationary.

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE TWO BROTHERS.

A quarter of an hour after, Henri returned; he had seen a considerable detachment of French troops intrenched on a hill at some distance. Excepting a large ditch, which surrounded the place occupied by the gendarmes of Aunis, the water had begun to disappear from the plain, the natural slope of the ground in the immediate neighborhood making the waters run toward the sea, and several points of earth, higher than the rest, began to reappear. The slimy mud brought by the rolling waters had covered the whole country, and it was a sad spectacle to see, as the wind cleared the mist, a number of cavaliers stuck in the mud, and trying vainly to reach either of the hills. From the other hill, on which the flag of France waved, their cries of distress had been heard, and that was why the trumpets had sounded. The gendarmes now sounded their cornets, and were answered by guns in joyful recognition. About eleven o'clock the sun appeared over this scene of desolation, drying some parts of the plain, and rendering practicable a kind of road. Henri, who tried it first, found that it led by a detour from where they were to the opposite hill, and he believed that though his horse might sink to a certain extent, he would not sink altogether. He therefore determined to try it, and recommending Diana and Remy to the care of the ensign, set off on his perilous way. At the same time as he started, they could see a cavalier leave the opposite hill, and, like Henry, try the road. All the soldiers seemed trying to stop him by their supplications. The two men pursued their way courageously, and soon perceived that their task was less difficult than had been feared. A small stream of water, escaped from a broken aqueduct, washed over the path, and little by little was clearing away the mud. The cavaliers were within two hundred feet of each other.

"France!" cried the one who came from the opposite hill, at the same time raising his hat, which had a white plume in it.

"Oh! it is you!" cried Henri, with a burst of joy.

"You, Henri! you, my brother!" cried the other.

And they set off as quickly as their horses could manage to go, and soon, among the frantic acclamations of the spectators on each side, embraced long and tenderly. Soon, all — gendarmes and light horse — Huguenots and Catholics — rushed along the road, pioneered by the two brothers. Soon the two camps were joined, and there, where they had thought to find death, nearly 3,000 Frenchmen cried, "Thank God!" and "Vive la France!"

"Gentlemen," said a Huguenot officer, "it is 'Long live the admiral,' you should cry, for it is to M. de Joyeuse alone that we now owe the happiness of embracing our countrymen."

Immense acclamations followed this speech. The two brothers talked for some time, and then Joyeuse asked Henri if he had heard news of the duke.

"It appears he is dead," replied Henri.

"Is that certain?"

"The gendarmes saw his horse drowned, and a rider, whose head was under water, dragged by the stirrup."

"It has been a sad day for France," said Joyeuse. Then turning to his men he said, "Come, gentlemen, let us not lose time. Once the waters have retired we shall probably be attacked. Let us intrench ourselves until the arrival of news and food."

"But, monseigneur," said a voice, "the horses have eaten nothing since four o'clock yesterday, and are dying with hunger."

"We have corn in our encampment," said the ensign, "but what shall we do for the men?"

"Oh!" said Joyeuse, "if there be corn, that is all I ask; the men must live like the horses."

"Brother," said Henri, "I want a little conversation with you."

"Go back to your place; choose a lodging for me, and wait for me there."

Henri went back.

"We are now in the midst of an army," said he to Remy; "hide yourselves in the lodging I will show you, and do not let madame be seen by any one."

Remy installed himself with Diana in the lodging pointed out. About two o'clock the Duc de Joyeuse entered with his trumpets blowing, lodged his troops, and gave strict injunctions to prevent disorder. He distributed barley to the men, and hay to the horses, and to the wounded some wine and beer, which had been found in the cellars, and himself, in sight of all, dined on a piece of black bread and a glass of water. Everywhere he was received as a deliverer with cries of gratitude.

"Now," said he to his brother, when they were alone, "let the Flemings come, and I will beat them, and even, if this goes on, eat them, for in truth I am very hungry, and this is miserable stuff," added he, throwing into a corner the piece of bread, which in public he had eaten so enthusiastically.

"But now, Henri, tell me how it happens that I find you in Flanders when I thought you in Paris."

"My brother," said Henri, "life became insupportable to me at Paris, and I set out to join you in Flanders."

"All from love?" asked Joyeuse.

"No, from despair. Now, Anne, I am no longer in love; my passion is sadness."

"My brother, permit me to tell you that you have chosen a miserable woman. Virtue that cares not for the sufferings of others is barbarous — is an absence of Christian charity."

"Oh! my brother, do not calumniate virtue."

"I do not calumniate virtue, Henri; I accuse vice, that is all. I repeat that this is a miserable woman, and not worth all the torments she makes you suffer. Oh! mon Dieu! in such a case you should use all your strength and all your power, Henri. In your place, I should have taken her house by assault, and then herself; and when she was conquered, and came to throw her arms round your neck and say, 'Henri, I adore you,' I should have repulsed her, and said, 'You do well, madame; it is your turn — I have suffered enough for you — to suffer also.'"

Henri seized his brother's hand. "You do not mean a word of what you say," said he.

"Yes, on my honor."

"You, so good — so generous!"

"Generosity with heartless people is folly."

"Oh! Joyeuse, Joyeuse, you do not know this woman."

"No, I do not wish to know her."

"Why not?"

"Because she would make me commit what others would call a crime, but which I should call an act of justice."

"Oh! my good brother, how lucky you are not to be in love. But, if you please, let us leave my foolish love, and talk of other things."

"So be it; I do not like to talk of your folly."

"You see we want provisions."

"Yes, and I have thought of a method of getting them."

"What is it?"

"I cannot leave here until I have certain news of the army — for the position is good, and I could defend myself against five times our number: but I may send out a body of scouts, and they will bring news and provisions also, for Flanders is a fine country."

"Not very, brother."

"I speak of it as God made it, and not men, who eternally spoil the works of God. Do you know, Henri, what folly this prince committed — what this unlucky Francois has lost through pride and precipitation? His soul is gone to God, so let us be silent; but in truth he might have acquired immortal glory and one of the most beautiful kingdoms in Europe, while he has, on the contrary, aided no one but William of Orange. But do you know, Henri, that the Antwerpians fought well?"

"And you also; so they say, brother."

"Yes, it was one of my good days; and besides there was something that excited me."

"What was it?"

"I met on the field of battle a sword that I knew."

"French?"

"Yes, French."

"In the ranks of the Flemings?"

"At their head, Henri; this is a secret which forms a sequel to Salcede's business."

"However, dear brother, here you are, safe and sound, to my great joy; I, who have done nothing yet, must do something, also."

"And what will you do?"

"Give me the command of your scouts, I beg."

"No, it is too dangerous, Henri; I would not say so before strangers, but I do not wish you to die an obscure death. The scouts may meet with some of those horrid Flemings who fight with flails and scythes; you kill one thousand of them, and the last cuts you in two or disfigures you. No, Henri; if you will die, let it be a more glorious death than that."

"My brother, grant me what I ask, I beg; I promise you to be prudent, and to return here."

"Well, I understand."

"What?"

"You wish to try if the fame of a brave action will not soften the heart of this ferocious tigress. Confess that that is what makes you insist on it."

"I will confess it if you wish, brother."

"Well, you are right. Women who resist a great love sometimes yield to fame."

"I do not hope that."

"If you do it without this hope you are mad. Henri, seek no more reasons for this woman's refusal than that she has neither eyes nor heart."

"You give me the command, brother?"

"I must, if you will have it so."

"Can I go to-night?"

"You must, Henri; you understand we cannot wait long."

"How many men do you give me?"

"A hundred; not more. I cannot weaken my force here, you know, Henri."

"Less, if you like, brother."

"No, I would wish to give you double. Only promise me, on your honor, that if you meet with more than three hundred men, you will retreat and not get killed."

"My brother," said Henri, smiling, "you sell your glory very dear."

"Then I will neither sell nor give it to you; and another officer shall command."

"My brother, give your orders and I will execute them."

"You will only engage with equal, double, or triple forces, but not with more?"

"I swear it."

"Very well; now, what men would you like to take?"

"Let me take one hundred of the gendarmes of Aunis; I have plenty of friends there, and can choose whom I like."

"That will do."

"When shall I set out?"

"At once. Take one day's rations for the men and two for the horses. Remember, I want speedy and certain news."

"I go, brother; are there any other orders?"

"Do not spread the news of the duke's death; let it be believed he is here. Exaggerate my strength, and if you find the duke's body, although he was a bad man and a poor general, yet, as he belonged to the royal house of France, have it put in an oak coffin and brought back by your men, that he may be buried at St. Denis."

"Good, brother; now, is this all?"

"All! but promise me once more, Henri, you are not deceiving me — you will not seek death?"

"No, brother; I had that thought when I came to join you, but I have it no longer."

"And when did it leave you?"

"Three hours ago."

"On what occasion?"

"Excuse me, brother."

"Of course, Henri, your secrets are your own."

"Oh! how good you are, brother!"

And the young men, once more embracing each other, separated with smiles.

CHAPTER LXXII.

THE EXPEDITION.

Henri, full of joy, hastened to Diana and Romy.

“Get ready; in a quarter of an hour we set out,” said he. “You will find two horses saddled at the door of the little wooden staircase leading to this corridor: join my suite and say nothing.”

Then, going out on the balcony, he cried:

“Trumpet of the gendarmes, sound the call.”

The call was quickly heard, and all the gendarmes ranged themselves round the house.

“Gendarmes,” said Henri, “my brother has given me, for the time, the command of your company, and has ordered me to set out to-night to obtain provisions and information as to the movements of the enemy, and one hundred of you are to accompany me; the mission is dangerous, but necessary for the safety of all. Who are willing to go?” The whole three hundred offered themselves.

“Gentlemen,” said Henri, “I thank you all; you have rightly been called the example to the army, but I can but take one hundred; and as I do not wish to choose, let chance decide. Monsieur,” continued he, to the ensign, “draw lots, if you please.”

While this was being done, Joyeuse gave his last instructions to his brother.

“Listen, Henri,” said he; “the country is drying, and there is a communication between Courteig and Rupelmonde; you will march between a river and a stream — the Scheldt and the Rupel. I trust that there will be no necessity for you to go as far as Rupelmonde to find provisions. My men took three peasants prisoners; I give one of them to you for a guide — but no false pity! at the least appearance of treason shoot him without mercy.”

He then tenderly embraced his brother, and gave the order for departure. The one hundred men drawn by lots were ready, and the guide was placed between two, with pistols in their hands, while Remy and his companion mixed with the rest. Henri gave no directions about them, thinking that curiosity was already quite sufficiently aroused about them, without augmenting it by precautions more dangerous than salutary. He himself did not stay by them, but rode at the head of his company. Their march was slow, for often the ground nearly gave way under them, and they sank in the mud. Sometimes figures were seen flying over the plain; they were peasants who had been rather too quick in returning to their homes, and who fled at the sight of the enemy. Sometimes, however, they were unlucky Frenchmen, half dead with cold and hunger, and who in their uncertainty of meeting with friends or enemies, preferred waiting for daylight to continue their painful journey.

They traversed two leagues in three hours, which brought the adventurous band to the banks of the Rupel, along which a stony road ran; but here danger succeeded to difficulty, and two or three horses lost their footing on the slimy stones, and rolled with their riders into the still rapid waters of the river. More than once also, from some boat on the opposite bank, shots were fired, and one man was killed at Diana’s side. She manifested regret for the man, but no fear for herself. Henri, in these different circumstances, showed himself to be a worthy captain and true friend; he rode first, telling all the men to follow in his steps, trusting less to his own sagacity than to that of the horse his brother had given him. Three leagues from Rupelmonde the gendarmes came upon six French soldiers sitting by a turf fire; the unfortunates were cooking some horse-flesh, the only food they had had for two days. The approach of the gendarmes caused great trouble among the guests at this sad feast; two or three rose to fly, but the others stopped them, saying, “If they are enemies they can but kill us, and all will be over.”

“France! France!” cried Henri.

On recognizing their countrymen they ran to them, and were given cloaks to wrap round them and something to drink, and were allowed to mount en croup behind the valets, and in this manner they accompanied the detachment. Half a league further on they met four men of the 4th Light Horse, with, however, only one horse between them; they were also welcomed. At last they arrived on the banks of the Scheldt; the night was dark, and the gendarmes found two men who were trying, in bad Flemish, to obtain from a boatman a passage to the other side, which he refused. The ensign, who understood Dutch, advanced softly, and heard the boatman say, “You are French, and shall die here; you shall not cross.”

“It is you who shall die, if you do not take us over at once,” replied one of the men, drawing his dagger.

“Keep firm, monsieur,” cried the ensign, “we will come to your aid.”

But as the two men turned at these words, the boatman loosened the rope, and pushed rapidly from the shore. One of the gendarmes, however, knowing how useful this boat would be, went into the stream on his horse and fired at the boatman, who fell. The boat was left without a guide, but the current brought it back again toward the bank. The two strangers seized it at once and got in. This astonished the ensign.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “who are you, if you please?”

“Gentlemen, we are marine officers, and you are gendarmes of Aunis, apparently.”

“Yes, gentlemen, and very happy to have served you; will you not accompany us?”

“Willingly.”

“Get into the wagons, then, if you are too tired to ride.”

“May we ask where are you going?” said one.

“Monsieur, our orders are to push on to Rupelmonde.”

“Take care,” answered he. “We did not pass the stream sooner, because this morning a detachment of Spaniards passed, coming from Antwerp. At sunset we thought we might venture, for two men inspire no disquietude; but you, a whole troop — ”

“It is true; I will call our chief.”

Henri approached, and asked what was the matter.

“These gentlemen met this morning a detachment of Spaniards following the same road as ourselves.”

“How many were they?”

“About fifty.”

“And does that stop you?”

“No, but I think it would be well to secure the boat, in case we should wish to pass the stream; it will hold twenty men.”

“Good! let us keep the boat. There should be some houses at the junction of the Scheldt and Rupel?”

“There is a village,” said a voice.

"Then let two men descend the stream with the boat, while we go along the bank."

"We will bring the boat if you will let us," said one of the officers.

"If you wish it, gentlemen; but do not lose sight of us, and come to us in the village."

"But if we abandon the boat some one will take it?"

"You will find ten men waiting, to whom you can deliver it."

"It is well," said one, and they pushed off from the shore.

"It is singular," said Henri, "but I fancy I know that voice."

An hour after they arrived at the village, which was occupied by the fifty Spaniards, but they, taken by surprise when they least expected it, made little resistance. Henri had them disarmed and shut up in the strongest house in the village, and left ten men to guard them. Ten more were sent to guard the boat, and ten others placed as sentinels, with the promise of being relieved in an hour. Twenty of the others then sat down in the house opposite to that in which the prisoners were, to the supper which had been prepared for them. Henri chose a separate room for Remy and Diana; he then placed the ensign at table with the others, telling him to invite the two naval officers when they arrived. He next went out to look for accommodation for the rest of the men, and when he returned in half-an-hour he found them waiting supper for him. Some had fallen asleep on their chairs, but his entrance roused them. The table, covered with cheese, pork, and bread, with a pot of beer by each man, looked almost tempting. Henri sat down and told them to begin.

"Apropos!" said he, "have the strangers arrived?"

"Yes, there they are at the end of the table."

Henri looked and saw them in the darkest corner of the room.

"Gentlemen," said he, "you are badly placed, and I think you are not eating."

"Thanks, M. le Comte," said one, "we are very tired, and more in need of rest than food; we told your officers so, but they insisted, saying that it was your orders that we should sup with you. We feel the honor, but if, nevertheless, instead of keeping us longer you would give us a room — "

"Is that also the wish of your companion?" said Henri, and he looked at this companion, whose hat was pushed down over his eyes, and who had not yet spoken.

"Yes, comte," replied he, in a scarcely audible voice.

Henri rose, walked straight to the end of the table, while every one watched his movements and astonished look.

"Monsieur," said he, to the one who had spoken first, "do me a favor?"

"What is it, M. le Comte?"

"Tell me if you are not Aurilly's brother, or Aurilly himself?"

"Aurilly!" cried all.

"And let your companion," continued Henri, "raise his hat a little and let me see his face, or else I shall call him monseigneur, and bow before him." And as he spoke he bowed respectfully, hat in hand. The officer took off his hat.

"Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou!" cried all. "The duke, living!"

"Ma foi, gentlemen," replied he, "since you will recognize your conquered and fugitive prince, I shall not deny myself to you any longer. I am the Duc d'Anjou."

"Vive, monseigneur!" cried all.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

PAUL-EMILE.

“Oh! silence, gentlemen,” said, the prince, “do not be more content than I am at my good fortune. I am enchanted not to be dead, you may well believe; and yet, if you had not recognized me, I should not have been the first to boast of being alive.”

“What! monseigneur,” cried Henri, “you recognized me — you found yourself among a troop of Frenchmen, and would have left us to mourn your loss, without undeceiving us?”

“Gentlemen, besides a number of reasons which made me wish to preserve my incognito, I confess that I should not have been sorry, since I was believed to be dead, to hear what funeral oration would have been pronounced over me.”

“Monseigneur!”

“Yes; I am like Alexander of Macedon; I make war like an artist, and have as much self-love; and I believe I have committed a fault.”

“Monseigneur,” said Henri, lowering his eyes, “do not say such things.”

“Why not? The pope only is infallible, and ever since Boniface VIII. that has been disputed.”

“See to what you exposed us, monseigneur, if any of us had given his opinion on this expedition, and it had been blamed.”

“Well, why not? do you think I have not blamed myself, not for having given battle, but for having lost it.”

“Monseigneur, this goodness frightens me; and will your highness permit me to say that this gayety is not natural. I trust your highness is not suffering.”

A terrible cloud passed over the prince’s face, making it as black as night.

“No,” said he, “I was never better, thank God, than now, and I am glad to be among you all.”

The officers bowed.

“How many men have you, Du Bouchage?” asked he.

"One hundred, monseigneur."

"Ah! a hundred out of ten thousand; that is like the defeat at Cannes. Gentlemen, they will send a bushel of your rings to Antwerp, but I doubt if the Flemish beauties could wear them, unless they had their fingers pared by their husbands' knives, which, I must say, cut well."

"Monseigneur," replied Henri, "if our battle was like the battle of Cannes, at least we are more lucky than the Romans, for we have preserved our Paulus-Emilius!"

"On my life, gentlemen, the Paulus-Emilius of Antwerp was Joyeuse; and doubtless, to preserve the resemblance with his heroic model to the end, your brother is dead, is he not, Du Bouchage?"

Henri felt wounded at this cold question.

"No, monseigneur, he lives," replied he.

"Ah! so much the better," said the duke, with his icy smile. "What! our brave Joyeuse lives! Where is he, that I may embrace him?"

"He is not here, monseigneur."

"Ah! wounded?"

"No, monseigneur, he is safe and sound."

"But a fugitive like me, wandering, famished, and ashamed. Alas! the proverb is right — 'For glory, the sword; after the sword, blood; after blood, tears.'"

"Monseigneur, I am happy to tell your highness that my brother has been happy enough to save three thousand men, with whom he occupies a large village about seven leagues from here, and I am acting as scout for him."

The duke grew pale.

"Three thousand men! he has saved three thousand men! he is a perfect Xenophon, and it is very lucky for me that my brother sent him to me. It is not the Valois who can take for their motto 'Hilariter.'"

"Oh! monseigneur," said Henri, sadly, seeing that this gayety hid a somber jealousy.

"It is true, is it not, Aurilly?" continued the duke; "I return to France like Francois after the battle of Pavia; all is lost but honor. Ah! ah!"

A sad silence received these laughs, more terrible than sobs.

"Monseigneur," said Henri, "tell me how the tutelary genius of France saved your highness."

"Oh! dear comte, the tutelary genius of France was occupied with something else, and I had to save myself."

“And how, monseigneur?”

“By my legs.”

No smile welcomed this joke, which the duke would certainly have punished with death if made by another.

“Yes, yes,” he continued; “how we ran! did we not, my brave Aurilly?”

“Every one,” said Henri, “knows the calm bravery and military genius of your highness, and we beg you not to distress us by attributing to yourself faults which you have not. The best general is not invincible, and Hannibal himself was conquered at Zama.”

“Yes, but Hannibal had won the battles of Trebia, Thrasymene, and Cannes, while I have only won that of Cateau-Cambresis; it is not enough to sustain the comparison.”

“But monseigneur jests when he says he ran away.”

“No, I do not. Pardieu! do you see anything to jest about, Du Bouchage?”

“Could any one have done otherwise?” said Aurilly.

“Hold your tongue, Aurilly, or ask the shade of St. Aignan what could have been done.”

Aurilly hung his head.

“Ah! you do not know the history of St. Aignan. I will tell it to you. Imagine, then, that when the battle was declared to be lost, he assembled 500 horse, and, instead of flying like the rest, came to me and said. ‘We must attack them, monseigneur.’ ‘What! attack?’ said I; ‘they are 100 to one.’ ‘Were they 1,000 to one, I would attack them,’ replied he, with a hideous grimace. ‘Attack if you please,’ said I; ‘I do not.’ ‘Give me your horse, and take mine,’ said he: ‘mine is fresh — yours is not; and as I do not mean to fly, any horse is good for me.’ And then he took my white horse and gave me his black one, saying, ‘Prince, that horse will go twenty leagues in four hours if you like.’ Then, turning to his men, he cried, ‘Come, gentlemen, follow me — all those who will not turn their backs;’ and he rode toward the enemy with a second grimace, more frightful than the first. He thought he should have met men, but he met water instead, and St. Aignan and his paladins were lost. Had he listened to me, instead of performing that act of useless foolhardiness, we should have had him at this table, and he would not have been making, as he probably now is, a grimace still uglier than the first.”

A thrill of horror ran through the assembly.

“This wretch has no heart,” thought Henri. “Oh! why does his misfortune and his birth protect him from the words I long to say to him?”

“Gentlemen,” said Aurilly, in a low voice — for he felt the effect these words had produced — ”you see how monseigneur is affected; do not heed what he says, for since his misfortune I think he has really moments of delirium.”

“And so,” continued the duke, emptying his glass, “that is how St. Aignan is dead and I alive. However, in dying he did me a last service, for it was believed, as he rode my horse, that it was me, and this belief spread not only among the French, but among the Flemings, who consequently ceased their pursuit; but reassure yourselves, gentlemen, we shall have our revenge, and I am mentally organizing the most formidable army that ever existed.”

“Meanwhile, monseigneur,” said Henri, “will your highness take the command of my men? It is not fit that I should continue to do so when you are here.”

“So be it; and, first, I order every one to sup, particularly you, Du Bouchage — you have eaten nothing.”

“Monseigneur, I am not hungry.”

“In that case return to visit the posts. Tell the chiefs that I live, but beg them not to rejoice too openly until we gain a better citadel, or rejoin the army of our invincible Joyeuse, for I confess I do not wish to be taken now, after having escaped from fire and water.”

“Monseigneur, you shall be strictly obeyed, and no one shall know excepting ourselves that we have the honor of your company among us.”

“And these gentlemen will keep the secret?” said the duke, looking round.

All bowed, and Du Bouchage went out.

It only required an hour for this fugitive, this conquered runaway, to become again proud, careless, and imperious. To command 100 men or 100,000 men, was still to command.

While Du Bouchage executed his orders with the best grace he could, Francois asked questions. He was astonished that a man of the rank of Du Bouchage had consented to take the command of this handful of men, and of such a perilous expedition. The duke was always suspicious, and asked, therefore, and learned that the admiral had only yielded to his brother’s earnest request. It was the ensign who gave this information — he who had been superseded in his command by Henri himself, as Henri had been by the duke.

The prince fancied he detected a slight irritation in this man’s mind against Du Bouchage; therefore he continued to interrogate him.

“But,” said he, “what was the comte’s reason for soliciting so earnestly such a poor command?”

“First, zeal for the service, no doubt.”

“First! — what else?”

“Ah! monseigneur, I do not know.”

“You deceive me — you do know.”

“Monseigneur, I can give only, even to your highness, public reasons.”

“You see,” said the duke, turning to the others, “I was quite right to hide myself, gentlemen, since there are in my army secrets from which I am excluded.”

“Ah! monseigneur,” said the ensign, “you misunderstand me; there are no secrets but those which concern M. du Bouchage. Might it not be, for example, that, while serving the general interests, he might have wished to render a service to some friend or relation by escorting him?”

“Who here is a friend or relation of the comte? Tell me, that, I may embrace him.”

“Monseigneur,” said Aurilly, mixing in the conversation, “I have discovered a part of the secret. This relation whom M. du Bouchage wished to escort is — a lady.”

“Ah! ah! why did they not tell me so frankly. That dear Henri — it is quite natural. Let us shut our eyes to the relation, and speak of her no more.”

“You had better not, monseigneur, for there seems a great mystery.”

“How so?”

“Yes, the lady, like the celebrated Bradamante, about whom I have so often sung to your highness, disguises herself in the dress of a man.”

“Oh! monseigneur,” cried the ensign, “M. du Bouchage seems to me to have a great respect for this lady, and probably would be very angry at any indiscretion.’“

“Doubtless, monsieur; we will be mute as sepulchers — as mute as poor St. Aignan; only, if we see the lady, we will try not to make grimaces at her. Where is this lady, Aurilly?” — ”Upstairs.”

“Upstairs! what, in this house?”

"Yes, monseigneur; but hush! here is M. du Bouchage."

"Hush!" said the prince, laughing.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

ONE OF THE SOUVENIRS OF THE DUC D’ANJOU.

Henri, as he entered, could hear the hateful laugh of the prince, but he had not lived enough with him to know the danger that always lurked in his laugh. Besides, he could not suspect the subject of conversation, and no one dared to tell him in the duke’s presence. Besides, the duke, who had already settled his plan, kept Henri near him until all the other officers were gone. He then changed the distribution of the posts. Henri had established his quarters in that house, and had intended to send the ensign to a post near the river, but the duke now took Henri’s place, and sent him where the ensign was to have been. Henri was not astonished, for the river was an important point. Before going, however, he wished to speak to the ensign, and recommend to his care the two people under his protection, and whom he was forced for the time to abandon. But at the first word that Henri began to speak to him the duke interposed. “Secrets?” said he, with his peculiar smile.

The ensign had understood, when too late, the fault he had been guilty of.

“No, monseigneur,” replied he, “M. le Comte was only asking me how much powder we had left fit to use.”

The answer had two aims; the first to turn away the duke’s suspicions, if he had any; and the second to let Du Bouchage know that he could count on a friend in him.

“Ah!” said the duke, forced to seem to believe what he was told. And as he turned to the door the ensign whispered to Henri, “The prince knows you are escorting some one.”

Henri started, but it was too late. The duke remarked the start, and, as if to assure himself that his orders were executed, proposed to Henri to accompany him to his post, which he was forced to accede to.

Henri wished to warn Remy to be on his guard, but it was impossible; all he could do was to say to the ensign:

“Watch well over the powder; watch it as I would myself, will you not?”

“Yes, M. le Comte,” replied the young man.

On the way the duke said to Du Bouchage, “Where is this powder that you speak of?”

“In the house we have just left, your highness.”

“Oh! be easy, then, Du Bouchage; I know too well the importance of such an article, in our situation, to neglect it. I will watch over it myself.”

They said no more until they arrived, when the duke, after giving Henri many charges not to quit his post, returned. He found Aurilly wrapped in an officer’s cloak, sleeping on one of the seats in the dining-room. The duke woke him. “Come,” said he.

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“Do you know what I mean?”

“Yes! the unknown lady — the relation of M. du Bouchage.”

“Good; I see that the faro of Brussels and the beer of Louvain have not clouded your intellects.”

“Oh! no, monseigneur, I am more ingenious than ever.”

“Then call up all your imagination, and guess.”

“Well! I guess that your highness is envious.”

“Ah! parbleu, I always am; but what is it about just now?”

“You wish to know who is the brave creature who has followed the MM. de Joyeuse through fire and water?”

“You have just hit it, ‘per mille pericula Martis!’ as Margot would say. Apropos, have you written to her, Aurilly?”

“To whom, monseigneur?”

“To my sister Margot.”

“Had I to write to her?”

“Certainly.”

“About what?”

“To tell her that we are beaten — ruined, and that she must look out for herself; for that Spain, disembarrassed of me in the north, will fall on her in the south.”

“Ah! true.”

“You have not written?”

“No, monseigneur.”

“You slept?”

“Yes, I confess it; but even if I had thought of it, with what could I have written? I have here neither pen, paper, nor ink.”

“Well, seek. ‘Quare et invenies,’ as it is written.”

"How in the devil's name am I to find it in the hut of a peasant, who probably did not know how to write?"

"Seek, stupid! if you do not find that, you will find — "

"What?"

"Something else."

"Oh! fool that I was," cried Aurilly. "Your highness is right: I am stupid; but I am very sleepy, you see."

"Well, keep awake for a little while, and, since you have not written, I will write; only go and seek what is necessary. Go, Aurilly, and do not come back till you have found it; I will remain here."

"I go, monseigneur."

"And if, in your researches, you discover that the house is picturesque — you know how I admire Flemish interiors, Aurilly."

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Well! call me."

"Immediately, monseigneur; be easy."

Aurilly rose, and, with a step light as a bird, went up the staircase. In five minutes he returned to his master.

"Well?" asked he.

"Well, monseigneur, if I may believe appearances, the house is devilishly picturesque."

"How so?"

"Peste! monseigneur; because one cannot get in to look."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that it is guarded by a dragon."

"What foolish joke is this?"

"Oh! monseigneur, it is unluckily not a foolish joke, but a sad truth. The treasure is on the first floor, in a room in which I can see light through the door."

"Well?"

"Well! before this door lies a man, wrapped in a gray cloak."

"Oh, oh! M. du Bouchage puts a gendarme at the door of his mistress."

"It is not a gendarme, monseigneur, but some attendant of the lady's or of the count's." — "What kind of a man?"

"Monseigneur, it was impossible to see his face; but I could perfectly see a large Flemish knife in his belt, and his hand, on it."

"It is amusing; go and waken the fellow."

“Oh, no, monseigneur.”

“Why not?”

“Why, without counting the knife, I do not wish to amuse myself with making a mortal enemy of MM. de Joyeuse, who stand so well at court. If you had been king of this country, it might have passed; but now you must be gracious, above all with those who saved you, and Joyeuse did save you. They will say so, whether you do or not.” — ”You are right, Aurilly, and yet — and yet — ”

“I understand. Your highness has not seen a woman’s face for fifteen mortal days. I do not speak of the kind of animals who live here; they are males and females, but do not deserve to be called men and women.”

“I must see this lady, Aurilly.”

“Well, monseigneur, you may see her; but not through the door.”

“So be it; then I will see her through the window.”

“Ah! that is a good idea, and I will go and look for a ladder for you.”

Aurilly glided into the courtyard, and under a shed found what he wanted. He maneuvered it among horses and men so skillfully as to wake no one, and placed it in the street against the outer wall. It was necessary to be a prince, and sovereignly disdainful of vulgar scruples, to dare, in the presence of the sentinel, who walked up and down before the door, to accomplish an action so audaciously insulting to Du Bouchage. Aurilly felt this, and pointed out the sentinel, who, now observing, called out, “Qui vive!”

Francois shrugged his shoulders and walked up to him.

“My friend,” said he, “this place is the most elevated spot in the village, is it not?”

“Yes, monseigneur,” said the man, recognizing him, “and were it not for those lime trees, we could see over a great part of the country.”

“I thought so; and therefore I have brought a ladder,” said the duke. “Go up, Aurilly, or rather, let me go up; I will see for myself.”

“Where shall I place it?” said the hypocritical follower.

“Oh, anywhere; against that wall, for instance.”

The sentinel walked off, and the duke mounted the ladder, Aurilly standing at the foot.

The room in which Henri had placed Diana was matted, and had a large oaken bed with serge curtains, a table, and a few chairs.

Diana, whose heart seemed relieved from an enormous weight since she had heard the false news of the duke's death, had, almost for the first time since her father's death, eaten something more substantial than bread, and drunk a little wine. After this she grew sleepy, and Remy had left her, and was sleeping outside her door, not from any suspicion, but because such had been his habit ever since they had left Paris.

Diana herself slept with her elbow on the table and her head leaning on her hand. A little lamp burned on the table, and all looked peaceful here, where such tempestuous emotions had raged and would soon again. In the glass sparkled the Rhine wine, scarcely touched by Diana. She, with her eyes closed, her eyelids veined with azure, her mouth slightly opened, her hair thrown back, looked like a sublime vision to the eyes that were violating the sanctity of her retreat. The duke, on perceiving her, could hardly repress his admiration, and leaned over to examine every detail of her ideal beauty. But all at once he frowned, and came down two or three steps with a kind of nervous precipitation, and leaning back against the wall, crossed his arms and appeared to reflect. Aurilly watched him as he stood there, with a dreamy air, like a man trying to recall some old souvenir. After a few minutes he remounted and looked in again, but Aurilly called out, "Quick! quick! monseigneur, come down; I hear steps."

The duke came down, but slowly.

"It was time," said Aurilly.

"Whence comes the sound?"

"From there," said Aurilly, pointing to a dark street. "But the sound has ceased; it must have been some spy watching us."

"Remove the ladder."

Aurilly obeyed; however, no one appeared, and they heard no more noise.

"Well, monseigneur, is she beautiful?" said Aurilly.

"Very beautiful," said the prince, abstractedly.

"What makes you sad then? Did she see you?"

"No, she was asleep."

"Then what is the matter?"

"Aurilly, it is strange, but I have seen that woman somewhere."

"You recognized her, then?"

"No, I could not think of her name; but her face gave me a fearful shock. I cannot tell how it is; but I believe I did wrong to look."

"However, just on account of the impression she has made on you, we must find out who she is."

"Certainly we must."

"Seek well in your memory, monseigneur; is it at court you have seen her?"

"No, I think not."

"In France, Navarre, Flanders?"

"No."

"A Spaniard perhaps."

"I do not think so."

"An English lady, one of Queen Elizabeth's?"

"No, I seem to know her more intimately, and that she appeared to me in some terrible scene."

"Then you would have recognized her at once; you have not seen many such scenes."

"Do you think so?" said the duke, with a gloomy smile. "Now," continued he, "that I am sufficiently master of myself to analyze my sensations, I feel that this woman is beautiful, but with the beauty of death; beautiful as a shade, as a figure in a dream; and I have had two or three frightful dreams in my life, which left me cold at the heart. Well, now I am sure that it was in one of those dreams that I saw that woman."

"Your highness is not generally so susceptible, and but that I believe that we are watched from that street, I would mount in my turn and look."

"Ma foi! you are right, Aurilly; what does it matter whether we are watched or not? Go up and look."

Aurilly made a move forward to obey, when a hasty step was heard, and Henri's voice, crying, "Monseigneur!"

"You here!" said the duke, while Aurilly bounded back to his side; "you here, comte? — on what pretext have you quitted your post?"

"Monseigneur," replied Henri, firmly, "your highness can punish me, if you think proper: meanwhile, my duty was to come here, and I came."

The duke glanced toward the window. "Your duty, comte? Explain that to me," said he.

"Monseigneur, horsemen have been seen on the Spanish side of the river, and we do not know if they are friends or enemies."

"Numerous?" asked the duke anxiously.

"Very numerous, monseigneur."

“Well, comte, no false bravery: you will do well to return. Awake the gendarmes and let us decamp; it will be the most prudent plan.”

“Doubtless, monseigneur; but it will be urgent, I think, to warn my brother.”

“Two men will do.”

“Then I will go with a gendarme.”

“No, no, Du Bouchage; you must come with us. Peste! it is not at such a moment that I can separate from a defender like you.”

“When does your highness set out?” said Henri, bowing.

“At once, comte.”

“Hola! some one,” cried Henri.

The young ensign came out immediately from the dark street. Henri gave his orders, and soon the place was filled with gendarmes preparing for departure. Among them the duke talked with his officers.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “the Prince of Orange is pursuing me, it seems; but it is not proper that a son of France should be taken prisoner. Let us, therefore, yield to numbers, and fall back upon Brussels. I shall be sure of life and liberty while I remain among you.”

Then, turning to Aurilly, “You remain,” said he. “This woman cannot follow us. Joyeuse will not dare to bring her with him in my presence. Besides, we are not going to a ball, and the race we shall run would fatigue a lady.”

“Where are you going, monseigneur?”

“To France. I think my business is over here.”

“But to what part of France. Does monseigneur think it prudent to return to court?”

“No; I shall stop at one of my castles, Chateau-Thierry, for example.”

“Has your highness decided on that?”

“Yes; Chateau-Thierry suits me in all respects; it is a good distance from Paris, about twenty-eight leagues, and I can watch from thence MM. de Guise, who are half the year at Soissons. So bring the beautiful unknown to Chateau-Thierry.”

“But, monsieur, perhaps she will not be brought.”

“Nonsense; since Du Bouchage accompanies me, and she follows him, it will be quite natural.”

“But she may wish to go somewhere else, if she sees that I wish to bring her to you.”

“But I repeat that it is not to me that you are to bring her, but to the comte. Really, one would think it was the first time you had aided me in such circumstances. Have you money?”

“I have the two rouleaux of gold that you gave me when you left the camp.”

“Well, by any and every method, bring me the lady to Chateau-Thierry; perhaps when I see her nearer I shall recognize her.”

“And the man also?”

“Yes; if he is not troublesome.”

“But if he is?”

“Do with him what you would do with a stone which is in your way — throw it away.”

“Good, monseigneur.”

While the two conspirators formed their plans, Henri went up and woke Remy. He knocked at the door in a peculiar fashion, and it was almost immediately opened by Diana. Behind Remy she perceived Henri.

“Good-evening, monsieur,” said she, with a smile which had long been foreign to her face.

“Oh! pardon me, madame,” said Henri, “for intruding on you; but I come to make my adieux.”

“Your adieux, comte; you are going?”

“To France, madame.”

“And you leave us?”

“I am forced to do so; my duty is to obey the prince.”

“The prince; is there a prince here?” asked Remy.

“Yes, M. le Duc d’Anjou, who was believed dead, and who has been miraculously saved, has joined us.”

Diana uttered a terrible cry, and Remy turned as pale as though he had been suddenly struck with death.

“The Duc d’Anjou living!” cried Diana. “The Duc d’Anjou here?”

“Had he not been here, madame, and ordered me to follow him, I should have accompanied you to the convent into which you tell me you are about to retire.”

“Yes, yes,” said Remy; “the convent;” and he put his finger on his lip.

“I would have accompanied you the more willingly, madame.” said Henri; “because I fear that you may be annoyed by the prince’s people.” — ”How so?”

"Yes; I believe that he knows there is a lady here, and he thinks that she is a friend of mine."

"And what makes you think so?"

"Our young ensign saw him place a ladder against this window and look in."

"Oh!" cried Diana; "mon Dieu! mon Dieu!"

"Reassure yourself, madame! he heard him say that he did not know you. Besides, the duke is going to set off at once — in a quarter of an hour you will be alone and free. Permit me to salute you with respect, and to tell you once more, that till my last sigh, my heart will beat for you and with you. Adieu, madame, adieu." And the comte, bowing, took two steps back.

"No, no!" cried Diana, wildly, "no, God cannot have done this! He cannot have brought this man to life again; no, monsieur, you must be wrong, he is dead."

At this moment, as if in reply, the duke's voice was heard calling from below:

"Comte, we are waiting for you."

"You hear him, madame," said Henri. "For the last time, adieu."

And pressing Remy's hand, he flew down the staircase. Diana approached the window trembling, and with a convulsive shudder, like the bird fascinated by the serpent of the Antilles. She saw the duke on horseback, and the light of the torches held by the gendarmes fell on his face.

"Oh! he lives! the demon lives!" murmured she; "and we must live also. He is setting out for France; so be it, Remy, we also must go to France."

CHAPTER LXXV.

HOW AURILLY EXECUTED THE COMMISSION OF THE DUC D'ANJOU.

To the confusion occasioned by the departure of the troops a profound silence succeeded. When Remy believed the house to be empty, he went down to prepare for his departure and that of Diana; but on opening the door of the room below, he was much surprised to see a man sitting by the fire, evidently watching him, although he pretended to look careless. Remy approached, according to his custom, with a slow, halting step, and uncovering his head, bald like that of an old man. He could not, however, see the features of the man by the fire.

"Pardon, monsieur," said he, "I thought myself alone here."

"I also thought so," replied the man, "but I see with pleasure that I shall have companions."

"Oh! very sad companions, monsieur; for except an invalid young man whom I am taking back to France — "

"Ah!" said Aurilly, "I know whom you mean."

"Really."

"Yes; you mean the young lady."

"What young lady?"

"Oh! do not be angry, my good friend; I am the steward of the house of Joyeuse, and I rejoined my young master by his brother's order, and at his departure the comte recommended to my good offices a young lady and an old servant, who were returning to France."

As he thus spoke, he approached Remy with a smiling and affectionate look. But Remy stepped back, and a look of horror was painted for an instant on his face.

"You do not reply; one would say you were afraid of me," said Aurilly, with his most smiling face.

"Monsieur," replied Remy, "pardon a poor old man, whom his misfortunes and his wounds have rendered timid and suspicious."

“All the more reason, my friend, for accepting the help and support of an honest companion; besides, as I told you just now, I speak on the part of a master who must inspire you with confidence.”

“Assuredly, monsieur,” replied Remy, who, however, still moved back.

“You quit me,” said Aurilly.

“I must consult my mistress; I can decide nothing, you understand.”

“Oh! that is natural; but permit me to present myself. I will explain my directions in all their details.”

“No, no, thank you: madame is perhaps asleep, and her sleep is sacred to me.”

“As you wish. Besides, I have told you what my master told me to say.”

“To me?”

“To you and the young lady.”

“Your master, M. le Comte du Bouchage, you mean?”

“Yes.”

“Thank you, monsieur.”

When he had shut the door, all the appearances of age vanished, except the bald head, and Remy mounted the staircase with an agility more like a young man of twenty-five, than the old man he had appeared to be a few minutes before.

“Madame! madame!” cried he, in an agitated voice.

“Well, what is it, Remy; is not the duke gone?”

“Yes, madame, but there is a worse demon here; a demon on whom, during six years, I have daily called down Heaven’s vengeance, as you have on his master.”

“Aurilly?”

“Yes, Aurilly; the wretch is below, forgotten by his infernal accomplice.”

“Forgotten, do you say, Remy? Oh! you are wrong; you, who know the duke, know that he never leaves to chance any evil deed, if he can do it himself. No, no, Remy; Aurilly is not forgotten, but left here for some bad design, believe me!”

“Oh! about him, madame, I can believe anything.”

“Does he know me?”

“I do not think so.”

“And did he recognize you?”

“Oh! madame,” said Remy, with a sad smile, “no one recognizes me.”

“Perhaps he guesses who I am?”

"No, for he asked to see you."

"I am sure he must have suspicions."

"In that case nothing is more easy, and I thank God for pointing out our path so plainly. The village is deserted, the wretch is alone. I saw a poniard in his belt, but I have a knife in mine."

"One moment, Remy; I do not ask the life of that wretch of you, but before you kill him, let us find out what he wants of us; perhaps we may make his evil intentions useful. How did he represent himself to you, Remy?"

"As the steward of M. du Bouchage, madame."

"You see he lies; therefore, he has some reason for lying. Let us find out his intentions, and conceal our own."

"I will act as you wish, madame."

"What does he ask now?"

"To accompany us."

"In what character?"

"As the count's steward."

"Tell him I accept."

"Oh! madame."

"Add that I am thinking of going to England, where I have relations, but have not quite decided; lie like him, Remy; to conquer we must fight with equal arms."

"But he will see you?"

"I will wear my mask. Besides, I suspect he knows me."

"Then, if he knows you, there must be a snare."

"Let us pretend to fall into it."

"But — "

"What do you fear, we can but die? Are you not ready to die for the accomplishment of our vow?"

"Yes, but not to die without vengeance."

"Remy," cried Diana, her eyes sparkling with wild excitement, "be easy, we will be revenged; you on the servant, and I on the master."

"Well, madame, then, so be it."

And Remy went down, but still hesitating.

The brave young man had, at the sight of Aurilly, felt, in spite of himself, that nervous shudder that one feels at the sight of a reptile; he wished to kill him because he feared him. But as he went down, his resolution returned, and he determined, in spite of Diana’s opinion, to interrogate Aurilly — to confound him, and if he discovered that he had any evil intentions, to kill him on the spot.

Aurilly waited for him impatiently. Remy advanced armed with an unshakable resolution, but his words were quiet and calm.

“Monsieur,” said he, “my mistress cannot accept your proposal.”

“And why not?”

“Because you are not the steward of M. du Bouchage.”

Aurilly grew pale. “Who told you so?” said he.

“No one; but M. du Bouchage, when he left, recommended to my care the person whom I accompany, and never spoke of you.”

“He only saw me after he left you.”

“Falsehoods, monsieur; falsehoods.”

Aurilly drew himself up — Remy looked like an old man.

“You speak in a singular tone, my good man,” said he, frowning; “take care, you are old, and I am young; you are feeble, and I am strong.”

Remy smiled, but did not reply.

“If I wished ill to you or your mistress,” continued Aurilly. “I have but to raise my hand.”

“Oh!” said Remy, “perhaps I was wrong, and you wish to do her good.”

“Certainly I do.”

“Explain to me then what you desire.”

“My friend, I will make your fortune at once, if you will serve me.”

“And if not?”

“In that case, as you speak frankly, I will reply as frankly, that I will kill you; I have full power to do so.”

“Kill me!” said Remy. “But if I am to serve you, I must know your projects.”

“Well, you have guessed rightly, my good man; I do not belong to the Comte du Bouchage.”

“Ah! and to whom do you belong?”

“To a more powerful lord.”

“Take care; you are lying again.”

“Why so?”

“There are not many people above the house of Joyeuse.”

“Not that of France?”

“Oh! oh!”

"And see how they pay." said Aurilly, sliding into Remy's hand one of the rouleaux of gold.

Remy shuddered and took a step back, but controlling himself, said:

"You serve the king?"

"No, but his brother, the Duc d'Anjou."

"Oh! very well! I am the duke's most humble servant."

"That is excellent."

"But what does monseigneur want?"

"Monseigneur," said Aurilly, trying again to slip the gold into Remy's hand, "is in love with your mistress."

"He knows her, then?"

"He has seen her."

"Seen her! when?"

"This evening."

"Impossible; she has not left her room."

"No, but the prince, by his conduct, has shown that he is really in love."

"Why, what did he do?"

"Took a ladder and climbed to the balcony." — "Ah! he did that?"

"Yes, and it seems she is very beautiful."

"Then you have not seen her?"

"No; but from what he said I much wish to do so, if only to judge of the exaggeration of his love. Thus, then, it is agreed; you will aid me?" and he again offered him the gold.

"Certainly I will, but I must know what part I am to play," said Remy, repulsing his hand.

"First tell me is the lady the mistress of M. du Bouchage, or of his brother?"

The blood mounted to Remy's face.

"Of neither," said he: "the lady upstairs has no lover."

"No lover! But then she is a wonder; morbleu! a woman who has no lover! we have found the philosopher's stone."

"Then," said Remy, "what does M. le Duc d'Anjou want my mistress to do?"

"He wants her to come to Chateau-Thierry, where he is going at his utmost speed."

"This is, upon my word, a passion very quickly conceived."

"That is like monseigneur."

“I only see one difficulty,” said Remy.

“What is that?”

“That my mistress is about to embark for England.”

“Diable! this, then, is where you must try to aid me.” — ”How?”

“By persuading her to go in an opposite direction.”

“You do not know my mistress, monsieur; she is not easily persuaded. Besides, even if she were persuaded to go to Chateau-Thierry instead of England, do you think she would yield to the prince?”

“Why not?”

“She does not love the duke.”

“Bah! not love a prince of the blood.”

“But if Monseigneur the Duc d’Anjou suspects my mistress of loving M. du Bouchage, or M. de Joyeuse, how did he come to think of carrying her off from him she loved?”

“My good man,” said Aurilly, “you have trivial ideas, and I fear we shall never understand each other; I have preferred kindness to violence, but if you force me to change my plans, well! I will change them.”

“What will you do?”

“I told you I had full powers from the duke to kill you and carry off the lady.”

“And you believe you could do it with impunity?”

“I believe all my master tells me to believe. Come, will you persuade your mistress to come to France?”

“I will try, but I can answer for nothing.”

“And when shall I have the answer?”

“I will go up at once and see what I can do.”

“Well, go up; I will wait. But one last word; you know that your fortune and life hang on your answer.”

“I know it.”

“That will do; I will go and get the horses ready.”

“Do not be in too great a hurry.”

“Bah! I am sure of the answer; no one is cruel to a prince.”

“I fancied that happened sometimes.”

“Yes, but very rarely.”

While Remy went up, Aurilly proceeded to the stables without feeling any doubt as to the result.

“Well!” said Diana, on seeing Remy.

"Well, madame, the duke has seen you."

"And — "

"And he says he loves you."

"Loves me! but you are mad, Remy."

"No; I tell you that he — that man — that wretch, Aurilly, told me so."

"But, then, he recognized me?"

"If he had, do you think that Aurilly would have dared to present himself and talk to you of love in the prince's name? No, he did not recognize you."

"Yes, you must be right, Remy. So many things have passed during six years through that infernal brain, that he has forgotten me. Let us follow this man."

"But this man will recognize you."

"Why should his memory be better than his master's?"

"Oh! it is his business to remember, while it is the duke's to forget. How could he live if he did not forget? But Aurilly will not have forgotten; he will recognize you, and will denounce you as an avenging shade."

"Remy, I thought I told you I had a mask, and that you told me you had a knife."

"It is true, madame; and I begin to think that God is assisting us to punish the wicked." Then, calling Aurilly from the top of the staircase, "Monsieur," said he.

"Well!" replied Aurilly.

"My mistress thanks M. du Bouchage for having provided thus for her safety, and accepts with gratitude your obliging offer."

"It is well," said Aurilly, "the horses are ready."

"Come, madame, come," said Remy, offering his arm to Diana.

Aurilly waited at the bottom of the staircase, lantern in hand, all anxiety to see the lady.

"Diable!" murmured he, "she has a mask. But between this and Chateau-Thierry the silk cords will be worn out or cut."

CHAPTER LXXVI.

THE JOURNEY.

They set off. Aurilly affected the most perfect equality with Remy, and showed to Diana the greatest respect. But this respect was very interested. Indeed, to hold the stirrup of a woman when she mounts or dismounts, to watch each of her movements with solicitude, to let slip no occasion of picking up her glove, is the role either of a lover, a servant, or a spy. In touching Diana's glove Aurilly saw her hand, in clasping her cloak he peeped under her mask, and always did his utmost to see that face which the duke had not been able to recognize, but which he doubted not he should be able to. But Aurilly had to deal with one as skillful as himself; Remy claimed to perform his ordinary services to Diana, and seemed jealous of Aurilly, while Diana herself, without appearing to have any suspicions, begged Aurilly not to interfere with the services which her old attendant was accustomed to render to her. Aurilly was then reduced to hoping for rain or sun to make her remove her mask; but neither rain nor sun had any effect, and whenever they stopped Diana took her meals in her own room. Aurilly tried to look through the keyholes, but Diana always sat with her back to the door. He tried to peep through the windows, but there were always thick curtains drawn, or if none were there, cloaks were hung up to supply their place. Neither questions, nor attempts at corruption, succeeded with Remy, who always declared that his mistress's will was his.

"But these precautions are, then, taken only on my account?" said Aurilly.

"No, for everybody."

"But M. d'Anjou saw her; she was not hidden then."

"Pure chance; but it is just because he did see her that she is more careful than ever."

Days passed on, and they were nearing their destination, but Aurilly's curiosity had not been gratified. Already Picardy appeared to the eyes of the travelers.

Aurilly began to lose patience, and the bad passions of his nature to gain the ascendant. He began to suspect some secret under all this mystery. One day he remained a little behind with Remy, and renewed his attempts at seduction, which Remy repulsed as usual.

"But," said Aurilly, "some day or other I must see your mistress."

"Doubtless," said Remy; "but that will be when she likes, and not when you like."

"But if I employ force."

"Try," said Remy, while a lightning glance, which he could not repress, shot from his eyes.

Aurilly tried to laugh. "What a fool I am!" said he; "what does it matter to me who she is? She is the same person whom the duke saw."

"Certainly."

"And whom he told me to bring to Chateau-Thierry."

"Yes."

"Well! that is all that is necessary. It is not I who am in love with her, it is monseigneur; and provided that you do not seek to escape or fly — "

"Do we appear to wish to do so?"

"No."

"And she so little desires to do so, that were you not here we should continue our way to Chateau-Thierry; if the duke wishes to see us, we wish also to see him."

"That is capital," said Aurilly. "Would your mistress like to rest here a little while?" continued he, pointing to a hotel on the road.

"You know," said Remy, "that my mistress never stops but in towns."

"Well, I, who have made no such vow, will stop here a moment; ride on, and I will follow."

Remy rejoined Diana.

"What was he saying?" asked she.

"He expressed his constant desire — "

"To see me?"

"Yes."

Diana smiled.

"He is furious," continued Remy.

"He shall not see me; of that I am determined."

"But once we are at Chateau-Thierry, must he not see your face?"

"What matter, if the discovery come too late? Besides, the duke did not recognize me."

"No, but his follower will. All these mysteries which have so annoyed Aurilly for eight days had not existed for the prince; they had not excited his curiosity or awakened his souvenirs, while for a week Aurilly has been seeking, imagining, suspecting. Your face will strike on a memory fully awakened, and he will know you at once."

At this moment they were interrupted by Aurilly, who had taken a cross-road and come suddenly upon them, in the hope of surprising some words of their conversation. The sudden silence which followed his arrival proved to him that he was in the way, and he therefore rode behind them.

He instinctively feared something, as Remy had said, but his floating conjectures never for an instant approached the truth. From this moment his plans were fixed, and in order to execute them the better he changed his conduct, and showed himself the most accommodating and joyous companion possible during the rest of the day.

Remy remarked this change not without anxiety.

The next day they started early, and at noon were forced to stop to rest the horses. At two o'clock they set off again, and went on without stopping until four. A great forest, that of La Fere, was visible in the distance; it had the somber and mysterious aspect of our northern forests, so imposing: to southern natures, to whom, beyond all things, heat and sunshine are necessary; but it was nothing to Remy and Diana, who were accustomed to the thick woods of Anjou and Sologne. It might have been about six o'clock in the evening when they entered the forest, and after half an hour's journey the sun began to go down. A high wind whirled about the leaves and carried them toward a lake, along the shore of which the travelers were journeying. Diana rode in the middle, Aurilly on the right, and Remy on the left. No other human being was visible under the somber arches of the trees.

From the long extent of the road, one might have thought it one of those enchanted forests, under whose shade nothing can live, had it not been for the hoarse howling of the wolves waking up at the approach of night. All at once Diana felt that her saddle, which had been put on by Aurilly, was slipping. She called Remy, who jumped down, and began to tighten the girths. At this moment Aurilly approached Diana, and while she was occupied, cut the strings of silk which fastened her mask. Before she had divined the movement, or had time to put up her hand, Aurilly seized the mask and looked full at her. The eyes of these two people met with a look so terrible, that no one could have said which looked most pale and menacing. Aurilly let the mask and his dagger fall, and clasping his hands, cried, “Heavens and earth! Madame de Monsoreau!”

“It is a name which you shall repeat no more,” cried Remy, seizing him by the girdle and dragging him from his horse. Both rolled on the ground together, and Aurilly stretched out his hand to reach his dagger.

“No, Aurilly, no,” said Remy, placing his knee on his breast.

“Le Haudoin!” cried Aurilly; “oh, I am a dead man!”

“That is not yet true, but will be in a moment,” cried Remy; and drawing his knife, he plunged the whole blade into the throat of the musician.

Diana, with haggard eyes, half turned on her saddle, and leaning on the pommel, shuddering, but pitiless, had not turned her head away from this terrible spectacle. However, when she saw the blood spurt out from the wound, she fell from her horse as though she were dead.

Remy did not occupy himself with her at that terrible moment, but searched Aurilly, took from him the two rouleaux of gold, then tied a stone to the neck of the corpse, and threw it into the lake. He then washed his hands in the water, took in his arms Diana, who was still unconscious, and placed her again on her horse. That of Aurilly, frightened by the howling of the wolves, which began to draw nearer, had fled into the woods.

When Diana recovered herself, she and Remy, without exchanging a single word, continued their route toward Chateau-Thierry.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

HOW KING HENRI III. DID NOT INVITE CRILLON TO BREAKFAST, AND HOW CHICOT INVITED HIMSELF.

The day after the events that we have just related had taken place in the forest of La Fere, the king of France left his bath at about nine in the morning. His valet-de-chambre, after having rolled him in a blanket of fine wool, and sponged him with that thick Persian wadding which looks like the fleece of a sheep, had given him over to the barbers and dressers, who in their turn gave place to the perfumers and courtiers. When these last were gone, the king sent for his maitre d'hotel, and ordered something more than his ordinary bouillon, as he felt hungry that morning. This good news spread joy throughout the Louvre, and the smell of the viands was already beginning to be perceptible, when Crillon, colonel of the French guards, entered to take his majesty's orders.

"Ma foi, my good Crillon," said the king, "watch as you please over my safety, but do not force me to play the king. I am quite joyful and gay this morning, and feel as if I weighed but an ounce, and could fly away. I am hungry, Crillon; do you understand that, my friend?"

"I understand it very well, sire, for I am very hungry myself."

"Oh! you, Crillon," said the king, laughing, "are always hungry."

"Not always, sire; your majesty exaggerates — only three times a day."

"And I about once a year, when I receive good news."

"Harnibleu! it appears that you have received good news, sire? So much the better, for they become every day more rare."

"Not at all, Crillon; but you know the proverb."

"Ah! yes — 'no news are good news.' I do not trust to proverbs, and above all to that one. You have no news from Navarre, then?"

"None — a proof that there is nothing to tell."

"And from Flanders?"

"Nothing."

"A proof that they are fighting. And from Paris?"

"Nothing."

"A proof that they are plotting."

"But, Crillon, I believe I am going to have a child, for the queen dreamed so last night."

"Well! I am happy to hear that your majesty is hungry this morning. Adieu, sire."

"Go, my good Crillon."

"Harnibleu! sire, since your majesty is so hungry, you ought to invite me to breakfast with you."

"Why so, Crillon?"

"Because they say your majesty lives on air, and the air of the times is very bad. Now I should have been happy to be able to say, 'These are all pure calumnies; the king eats like every one else.'"

"No, Crillon, no; let me believe as they do. I do not wish to eat like a simple mortal. Remember this, Crillon — a king ought always to remain poetical, and only show himself in a noble position. Thus, for example, do you remember Alexander?"

"What Alexander?"

"Alexander Magnus. Ah! you do not know Latin, I remember. Well, King Alexander loved to bathe before his soldiers, because he was so well made, handsome and plump that they compared him to Apollo and even to Antinous."

"Oh! oh! sire, you would be devilishly in the wrong to bathe before yours, for you are very thin, my poor king."

"Brave Crillon, go," said Henry, striking him on the shoulder; "you are an excellent fellow, and do not flatter me; you are no courtier, my old friend."

"That is why you do not invite me to breakfast," replied Crillon, laughing good-humoredly, and taking his leave quite contentedly, for the tap on the shoulder consoled him for not getting the breakfast.

When he was gone, the breakfast was laid at once. The maitre d'hotel had surpassed himself.

A certain partridge soup, with a purée of truffles and chestnuts, attracted the king's attention, after he had eaten some fine oysters. Thus the ordinary broth, that faithful old friend of the king's, implored vainly from its golden basin; it attracted no attention. The king began to attack the partridge soup, and was at his fourth mouthful, when a light step near him made the floor creak, and a well-known voice behind him said sharply, “A plate!”

The king turned. “Chicot!” cried he.

“Himself.”

And Chicot, falling at once into his old habits, sat down in a chair, took a plate and a fork, and began on the oysters, picking out the finest, without saying a word.

“You here! you returned!” cried Henri.

“Hush!” said Chicot, with his mouth full; and he drew the soup toward him.

“Stop, Chicot! that is my dish.”

Chicot divided it equally, and gave the king back half. Then he poured himself out some wine, passed from the soup to a pâté made of tunny fish, then to stuffed crab, swallowed as a finish the royal broth, then, with a great sigh, said:

“I can eat no more.”

“Par la mordieu! I hope not, Chicot.”

“Ah! good-morning, my king. How are you? You seem to me very gay this morning.”

“Am I not, Chicot?”

“You have quite a color; is it your own?”

“Parbleu!”

“I compliment you on it.”

“The fact is, I feel very well this morning.”

“I am very glad of it. But have you no little tit-bits left for breakfast?”

“Here are cherries preserved by the ladies of Montmartre.”

“They are too sweet.”

“Nuts stuffed with raisins.”

“Bah! they have left the stones in the raisins.”

“You are not content with anything.”

“Well! really, on my word, everything degenerates, even cooking, and you begin to live very badly at your court.”

“Do they live better at that of the king of Navarre?”

“Well! — I do not say no.”

“Then there must be great changes.”

“Ah! you do not know how right you are.”

“Tell me about your journey! that will amuse me.”

“Willingly; that is what I came for. Where shall I begin?”

“At the beginning. How did you make your journey?”

“Oh! delightfully.”

“And met with no disagreeable adventures — no bad company?”

“Oh! who would dream of annoying an ambassador of his Most Christian Majesty? You calumniate your subjects, my son.”

“I asked,” said the king, flattered by the tranquillity that reigned in his kingdom, “because you had no official character, and might have run some risk.”

“I tell you, Henriquet, that you have the most charming kingdom in the world. Travelers are nourished gratis; they are sheltered for the love of God; they walk on flowers; and as for the wheel ruts, they are carpeted with velvet and fringed with gold. It is incredible, but true.”

“Then you are content?”

“Enchanted.”

“Yes, yes; my police is well organized.”

“Marvelously; I must do them justice.”

“And the road is safe?”

“As that of Paradise.”

“Chicot, we are returning to Virgil.”

“To what part?”

“To the Bucolics. ‘O fortunatos nimium!’“

“Ah! very well; but why this exception in favor of plowmen?”

“Alas! because it is not the same in towns.”

“The fact is, Henri, that the towns are the centers of corruption.”

“Judge of it. You go 500 leagues without accident, while I go only to Vincennes, three-fourths of a league, and narrowly escape assassination by the way.”

“Oh! bah!”

“I will tell you about it, my friend; I am having it written. Without my Forty-five guardsmen I should have been a dead man.”

“Truly! where did it take place?”

“You mean, where was it to have taken place?”

“Yes.”

“At Bel-Esbat.”

“Near the convent of our friend Gorenflot?”

“Just so.”

“And how did he behave under the circumstances?”

“Wonderfully, as usual. Chicot, I do not know if he had heard any rumor; but instead of snoring in bed, he was up in his balcony, while all his convent kept the road.”

“And he did nothing else?”

“Who?”

“Dom Modeste.”

“He blessed me with a majesty peculiar to himself, Chicot.”

“And his monks?”

“They cried ‘Vive le Roi!’ tremendously.”

“And were they not armed?”

“They were completely armed, which was a wonderful piece of thoughtfulness on the part of the worthy prior; and yet this man has said nothing, and asked for nothing. He did not come the next day, like D’Epernon, to search my pockets, crying, ‘Sire, something for having saved the king.’“

“Oh! as for that, he is incapable of it; besides, his hands would not go into your pockets.”

“Chicot, no jests about Dom Modeste; he is one of the greatest men of my reign; and I declare that on the first opportunity I will give him a bishopric.”

“And you will do well, my king.”

“Remark one thing, Chicot, that a great man from the ranks of the people is complete; we gentlemen, you see, inherit in our blood certain vices and virtues. Thus, the Valois are cunning and subtle, brave, but idle; the Lorraines are ambitious, greedy, and intriguing; the Bourbons are sensual, without ideas, force, or will. Look at Henri: when Nature, on the contrary, draws a great man from among the people, like Gorenflot, he is complete.”

“You think so?”

“Yes; learned, modest, cunning, and brave, you could make of him what you liked — minister, general, or pope.”

“Pray stop, sire. If the brave man heard you he would burst his skin, for, in spite of what you say, Dom Modeste is very vain.”

“You are jealous, Chicot.”

“I! Heaven forbid! Jealous!”

“I am but just; noble blood does not blind me. ‘Stemmata quid faciunt?’“

“Bravo! and you say, then, Henri, that you were nearly assassinated?”

“Yes.”

"By whom?"

"By the League, mordieu!"

"How does the League get on?"

"Just the same."

"Which means that it grows daily."

"Oh! political bodies never live which grow big too young. They are like children, Chicot."

"Then you are content, my son?"

"Nearly so."

"You are happy?"

"Yes, Chicot, and I am very glad to see you return."

"'Habemus consulem facetum,' as Cato said."

"You bring good news, do you not?"

"I should think so."

"You keep me in suspense."

"Where shall I begin?"

"I have already said, from the beginning; but you always wander from the point. You say that the journey was good?"

"You see I have returned whole."

"Yes; then let me hear of your arrival in Navarre. What was Henri doing when you arrived?"

"Making love."

"To Margot?"

"Oh! no."

"It would have astonished me had it been so; he is always unfaithful to his wife — the rascal! Unfaithful to a daughter of France! Luckily, she pays him back. And when you arrived, what was the name of Margot's rival?"

"Fosseuse."

"A Montmorency. Come, that is not so bad for a bear of Béarn. They spoke here of a peasant, a gardener's daughter."

"Oh! that is very old."

"Then he is faithless to Margot?"

"As much as possible."

"And she is furious?"

"Enraged."

"And she revenges herself?"

"I believe so."

Henri rubbed his hands joyfully.

"What will she do?" cried he. "Will she move heaven and earth — bring Spain on Navarre — Artois and Flanders on Spain? Will she call in her little brother Henriquet against her husband Henri?"

"It is possible."

"You saw her?"

"Yes."

"Then they execrate each other?"

"I believe that in their hearts they do not adore each other."

"But in appearance?"

"They are the best friends in the world."

"Yes, but some fine morning some new love will embroil them completely."

"Well! this new love has come."

"Bah!"

"Yes, on my honor; but shall I tell you what I fear?"

"Yes."

"That this new love, instead of embroiling, will reconcile them."

"Then there is a new love, really?"

"Oh! mon Dieu! yes."

"Of Henri's?"

"Of Henri's."

"For whom?"

"You wish to know all, do you not?"

"Yes, Chicot; tell me all about it."

"Well, my son, then I must go back to the beginning."

"Go back, but be quick."

"You wrote a letter to the Béarnais?"

"Well?"

"And I read it."

"What do you think of it?"

"That if it was not delicate, at least it was cunning."

"It ought to have embroiled them?"

"Yes, if Henri and Margot had been an ordinary, commonplace couple."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Henri is no fool."

"Oh!"

“And that he guessed.”

“Guessed what?”

“That you wished to make him quarrel with his wife.”

“That was clear.”

“Yes; but what was less clear was your object in doing so.”

“Ah! diable! the object — ”

“Yes, this Béarnais thought your aim was to make him quarrel with his wife, that you might not have to pay her dowry.”

“Oh!”

“Mon Dieu, yes; that is what got into the head of that devil of a Béarnais.”

“Go on, Chicot,” said the king, beginning to look annoyed.

“Well! scarcely had he guessed that, than he became what you look now, sad and melancholy; so much so, that he hardly thought of Fosseuse.”

“Bah!”

“Yes, really, and then he conceived that other love I told you of.”

“But this man is a Turk — a Pagan. And what did Margot say?”

“This time, my son, you will be astonished. Margot was delighted.”

“But what is the name of this new mistress?”

“Oh! she is a beautiful and strong person, capable of defending herself if she is attacked.”

“And did she defend herself?”

“Oh, yes!”

“So that Henri was repulsed?”

“At first.”

“And afterward?”

“Oh! Henri is persevering, and he returned to the charge.”

“So that?”

“So that he won her.”

“How?”

“By petards.”

“What the devil are you talking about?”

“The truth.”

“Petards! Who is this belle that is taken with petards?”

“It is Mademoiselle Cahors.”

“Mademoiselle Cahors!”

"Yes, a large and beautiful girl, who has one foot on the Got, and the other on the hills, and whose guardian is, or rather was, M. de Vesin, a brave gentleman of my acquaintance."

"Mordieu!" cried Henri, furiously, "my city! he has taken my city."

"Why, you see, Henri, you would not give it to him, and he was obliged to take it. But, apropos, here is a letter that he asked me to deliver into your own hand."

And Chicot, drawing out a letter, gave it to the king. It was the one Henri had written after taking Cahors, and it finished with these words: "Quod mihi dixisti profuit multum, cognosco meos devotos; nosce tuos; Chicotus cætera expediet."

Which meant, "What you told me was very useful; I know my friends; know yours. Chicot will tell you the rest."

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

HOW, AFTER RECEIVING NEWS FROM THE SOUTH, HENRI RECEIVED NEWS FROM THE NORTH.

The king, highly exasperated, could hardly read the letter which Chicot gave to him. While he deciphered the Latin with every sign of impatience, Chicot, before a great Venetian mirror, which hung over a gilt table, was admiring the infinite grace of his own person under his military dress.

“Oh! I am betrayed,” cried Henri, when he had finished the letter; “the Béarnais had a plan, and I never suspected it.”

“My son,” said Chicot, “you know the proverb, ‘Still waters run deepest’?”

“Go to the devil with your proverbs.”

Chicot went to the door as if to obey.

“No, remain.”

Chicot stopped.

“Cahors taken!” continued Henri.

“Yes, and very well done, too.”

“Then he has generals and engineers?”

“No, he is too poor for that; he could not pay them; he does it all himself.”

“He fight!” said Henri, disdainfully.

“I do not say that he rushes into it with enthusiasm; no, he resembles those people who try the water before they bathe; he just dips the ends of his fingers with a little shudder, which augurs badly, then his breast; all this takes him about ten minutes, and then he rushes into action, and through fire, like a salamander.”

“Diable!”

“And I assure you, Henri, the fire was hot there.”

The king rose and walked up and down the room.

“Here is a misfortune for me,” cried he; “they will laugh at it: they will sing about it. Mordieu! it is lucky I thought of sending the promised aid to

Antwerp; Antwerp will compensate for Cahors; the north will blot out the south.”

“Amen!” said Chicot, plunging his hands into the king’s sweetmeat-box to finish his desert.

At this moment the door opened, and the usher announced “M. le Comte du Bouchage.”

“Ah!” cried Henri, “I told you so; here are news. Enter, comte, enter.”

The usher opened the door, and Henri du Bouchage entered slowly and bent a knee to the king.

“Still pale and sad,” said the king. “Come, friend, take a holiday air for a little while, and do not tell me good news with a doleful face: speak quickly, Du Bouchage, for I want to hear. You come from Flanders?”

“Yes, sire.”

“And quickly?”

“As quickly, sire, as a man can ride.”

“You are welcome. And now, what of Antwerp?”

“Antwerp belongs to the Prince of Orange.”

“To the Prince of Orange!”

“Yes, to William.”

“But did not my brother attack Antwerp?”

“Yes, sire; but now he is traveling to Chateau-Thierry.”

“He has left the army?”

“Sire, there is no longer an army.”

“Oh!” cried the king, sinking back in his armchair, “but Joyeuse — ”

“Sire, my brother, after having done wonders with his sailors, after having conducted the whole of the retreat, rallied the few men who escaped the disaster, and sent me home with an escort for M. le Duc d’Anjou.”

“A defeat!” murmured the king.

But all at once, with a strange look.

“Then Flanders is lost to my brother?”

“Absolutely, sire.”

“Without hope?”

“I fear so, sire.”

The clouds gradually cleared from the king’s brow.

“That poor Francois,” said he, smiling; “he is unlucky in his search for a crown. He missed that of Navarre, he has stretched out his hand for that of England, and has touched that of Flanders; I would wager, Du Bouchage, that he will never reign, although he desires it so much. And how many prisoners were taken?"

"About two thousand."

"How many killed?"

"At least as many; and among them M. de St. Aignan."

"What! poor St. Aignan dead!"

"Drowned."

"Drowned! Did you throw yourselves into the Scheldt?"

"No, the Scheldt threw itself upon us."

The comte then gave the king a description of the battle, and of the inundations. Henri listened silently. When the recital was over, he rose, and kneeling down on his prie-Dieu, said some prayers, and then returned with a perfectly calm face.

"Well," said he, "I trust I bear things like a king; and you, comte, since your brother is saved, like mine, thank God, and smile a little."

"Sire, I am at your orders."

"What do you ask as payment for your services, Du Bouchage?"

"Sire, I have rendered no service."

"I dispute that; but at least your brother has." — "Immense, sire."

"He has saved the army, you say, or rather, its remnants?"

"There is not a man left who does not say that he owes his life to my brother."

"Well! Du Bouchage, my will is to extend my benefits to both, and I only imitate in that Him who made you both rich, brave, and handsome; besides, I should imitate those great politicians who always rewarded the bearers of bad news."

"Oh!" said Chicot, "I have known men hung for bringing bad news."

"That is possible," said the king; "but remember the senate that thanked Varron."

"You cite republicans, Valois; misfortune makes you humble."

"Come, Du Bouchage, what will you have — what would you like?"

"Since your majesty does me the honor to speak to me so kindly, I will dare to profit by your goodness. I am tired of life, sire, and yet have a repugnance to shortening it myself, for God forbids it, and all the subterfuges that a man of honor employs in such a case are mortal sins. To get one's self killed in battle or to let one's self die of hunger are only different forms of suicide. I renounce the idea, therefore, of dying before the term which God has fixed for my life, and yet the world fatigues me, and I must leave it."

"My friend!" said the king.

Chicot looked with interest at the young man, so beautiful, so brave, so rich, and yet speaking in this desponding tone.

"Sire," continued the comte, "everything that has happened to me for some time has strengthened my resolution. I wish to throw myself into the arms of God, who is the sovereign consoler of the afflicted, as he is of the happy. Deign then, sire, to facilitate my entrance into a religious life, for my heart is sad unto death."

The king was moved at this doleful request.

"Ah! I understand," said he; "you wish to become a monk, but you fear the probation."

"I do not fear the austerities, sire, but the time they leave one in indecision. It is not to soften my life, nor to spare my body any physical suffering, or my mind any moral privation, but it is to pass at once from this world to the grating which separates me from it, and which one generally attains so slowly."

"Poor boy!" said the king. "I think he will make a good preacher; will he not, Chicot?"

Chicot did not reply. Du Bouchage continued:

"You see, sire, that it is with my own family that the struggle will take place, and with my relations that I shall meet with the greatest opposition. My brother, the cardinal, at once so good and so worldly, will find a thousand reasons to persuade me against it. At Rome your majesty is all-powerful; you have asked me what I wish for, and promised to grant it; my wish is this, obtain from Rome an authority that my novitiate be dispensed with."

The king rose smiling, and taking the comte's hand, said —

"I will do what you ask, my son. You wish to serve God, and you are right; he is a better master than I am. You have my promise, dear comte."

"Your majesty overwhelms me with joy," cried the young man, kissing Henri's hand as though he had made him duke, peer, or marshal of France. "Then it is settled?"

"On my word as a king and a gentleman."

Something like a smile passed over the lips of Du Bouchage; he bowed respectfully to the king and took leave.

“What a happy young man,” said Henri.

“Oh!” said Chicot, “you need not envy him; he is not more doleful than yourself.”

“But, Chicot, he is going to give himself up to religion.”

“And who the devil prevents you from doing the same? I know a cardinal who will give all necessary aid, and he has more interest at Rome than you have; do you not know him? I mean the Cardinal de Guise.”

“Chicot!”

“And if the tonsure disquiets you, for it is rather a delicate operation, the prettiest hands and the prettiest scissors — golden scissors, ma foi! — will give you this precious symbol, which would raise to three the number of the crowns you have worn, and will justify the device, ‘Manet ultima coelo.’“

“Pretty hands, do you say?”

“Yes, do you mean to abuse the hands of Madame de Montpensier? How severe you are upon your subjects.”

The king frowned, and passed over his eyes a hand as white as those spoken of, but more trembling.

“Well!” said Chicot, “let us leave that, for I see that the conversation does not please you, and let us return to subjects that interest me personally.”

The king made a gesture, half indifferent, half approving.

“Have you heard, Henri,” continued Chicot, “whether those Joyeuses carried off any woman?”

“Not that I know of.”

“Have they burned anything?”

“What?”

“How should I know what a great lord burns to amuse himself; the house of some poor devil, perhaps.”

“Are you mad, Chicot? Burn a house for amusement in my city of Paris!”

“Oh! why not?”

“Chicot!”

“Then they have done nothing that you know of?”

“Ma foi, no.”

“Oh! so much the better,” said Chicot, drawing a long breath like a man much relieved.

“Do you know one thing, Chicot?” said Henri.

“No, I do not.”

“It is that you have become wicked.”

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"My sojourn in the tomb had sweetened me, but your presence, great king, has destroyed the effect."

"You become insupportable, Chicot; and I now attribute to you ambitious projects and intrigues of which I formerly believed you incapable."

"Projects of ambition! I ambitious! Henriquet, my son, you used to be only foolish, now you are mad; you have progressed."

"And I tell you, M. Chicot, that you wish to separate from me all my old friends, by attributing to them intentions which they have not, and crimes of which they never thought; in fact, you wish to monopolize me."

"I monopolize you! what for? God forbid! you are too tiresome, without counting the difficulty of pleasing you with your food. Oh! no, indeed! Explain to me whence comes this strange idea."

"You began by listening coldly to my praises of your old friend, Dom Modeste, to whom you owe much."

"I owe much to Dom Modeste! Good."

"Then you tried to calumniate the Joyeuses, my true friends."

"I do not say no."

"Then you launched a shaft at the Guises."

"Ah! you love them now; you love all the world to-day, it seems."

"No, I do not love them; but, as just now they keep themselves close and quiet, and do not do me the least harm, I do not fear them, and I cling to all old and well-known faces. All these Guises, with their fierce looks and great swords, have never done me any harm, after all, and they resemble — shall I tell you what?"

"Do, Henri; I know how clever you are at comparisons."

"They resemble those perch that they let loose in the ponds to chase the great fish and prevent them growing too fat; but suppose that the great fish are not afraid?"

"Well!"

"Then the teeth of the perch are not strong enough to get through their scales."

"Oh! Henri! my friend, how clever you are!"

"While your Béarnais — "

"Well, have you a comparison for him also?"

"While your Béarnais, who mews like a cat, bites like a tiger."

"Well, my son, I will tell you what to do; divorce the queen and marry Madame de Montpensier; was she not once in love with you?"

"Yes, and that is the source of all her menaces, Chicot; she has a woman's spite against me, and she provokes me now and then, but luckily I am a man, and can laugh at it."

As Henri finished these words, the usher cried at the door, "A messenger from M. le Duc de Guise for his majesty."

"Is it a courier or a gentleman?" asked the king.

"It is a captain, sire."

"Let him enter; he is welcome."

CHAPTER LXXIX.

THE TWO COMPANIONS.

Chicot, at this announcement, sat down and turned his back to the door; but the first words pronounced by the duke’s messenger made him start. He opened his eyes. The messenger could see nothing but the eye of Chicot peering from behind the chair, while Chicot could see him altogether.

“You come from Lorraine?” asked the king of the new comer, who had a fine and warlike appearance.

“Not so, sire; I come from Soissons, where M. le Duc, who has been a month in that city, gave me this letter to deliver to your majesty.”

The messenger then opened his buff coat, which was fastened by silver clasps, and drew from a leather pouch lined with silk not one letter, but two; for they had stuck together by the wax, and as the captain advanced to give the king one letter, the other fell on the carpet. Chicot’s eyes followed the messenger, and saw the color spread over his cheeks as he stooped to pick up the letter he had let fall. But Henri saw nothing, he opened his own letter and read, while the messenger watched him closely.

“Ah! M. Borromée,” thought Chicot, “so you are a captain, are you?”

“Good,” said the king, after reading the duke’s letter with evident satisfaction. “Go, captain, and tell M. de Guise that I am grateful for his offer.”

“Your majesty will not honor me with a written answer?”

“No, I shall see the duke in a month or six weeks, and can thank him myself.”

The captain bowed and went out.

“You see, Chicot,” then said the king, “that M. de Guise is free from all machinations. This brave duke has learned the Navarre business, and he fears that the Huguenots will raise up their heads, for he has also ascertained that the Germans are about to send re-enforcements to Henri. Now, guess what he is about to do.”

As Chicot did not reply, Henri went on.

“Well! he offers me the army that he has just raised in Lorraine to watch Flanders, and says that in six weeks it will be at my command, with its general. What do you say to that, Chicot?”

No answer.

“Really, my dear Chicot,” continued the king, “you are as absurdly obstinate as a Spanish mule; and if I happen to convince you of some error, you sulk; yes, sulk.”

Not a sound came to contradict Henri in this frank opinion of his friend. Now silence displeased Henri more than contradiction.

“I believe,” said he, “that the fellow has had the impertinence to go to sleep. Chicot!” continued he, advancing to the armchair; “reply when your king speaks.”

But Chicot did not reply, for he was not there; and Henri found the armchair empty.

He looked all round the room, but Chicot was not to be seen. The king gave a superstitious shudder; it sometimes came into his mind that Chicot was a supernatural being — a diabolic incarnation, of a good kind, it was true, but still diabolical.

He called Nambu the usher, and questioned him, and he assured his majesty that he had seen Chicot go out five minutes before the duke’s messenger left.

“Decidedly,” thought Henri, “Chicot was vexed at being in the wrong. How ill-natured men are, even the best of them.”

Nambu was right; Chicot had traversed the antechambers silently, but still he was not able to keep his spurs from sounding, which made several people turn, and bow when they saw who it was.

The captain came out five minutes after Chicot, went down the steps across the court proudly and with a satisfied air; proud of his person, and pleased that the king had received him so well, and without any suspicions of M. de Guise. As he crossed the drawbridge, he heard behind him steps which seemed to be the echo of his own. He turned, thinking that the king had sent some message to him, and great was his stupefaction to see behind him the demure face of Robert Briquet. It may be remembered that the first feeling of these two men about one another had not been exactly sympathetical.

Borromée opened his mouth, and paused; and in an instant was joined by Chicot.

“Corboeuf!” said Borromée.

“Ventre de biche!” cried Chicot.

“The bourgeois!”

“The reverend father!”

“With that helmet!”

“With that buff coat!”

“I am surprised to see you.”

“I am delighted to meet you again.”

And they looked fiercely at each other, but Borromée, quickly assuming an air of amiable urbanity, said, “Vive Dieu, you are cunning, M. Robert Briquet.”

“I, reverend father; and why do you say so?”

“When you were at the convent of the Jacobins, you made me believe you were only a simple bourgeois.”

“Ah!” replied Chicot, “and what must we say of you, M. Borromée?”

“Of me?”

“Yes, of you.”

“And why?”

“For making me believe you were only a monk. You must be more cunning than the pope himself; but you took me in the snare.”

“The snare?”

“Yes, doubtless; a brave captain like you does not change his cuirass for a frock without grave reasons.”

“With a soldier like you, I will have no secrets. It is true that I have certain personal interests in the convent of the Jacobins; but you?”

“And I, also.”

“Let us chat about it.”

“I am quite ready.”

“Do you like wine?”

“Yes, when it is good.”

“Well! I know a little inn, which I think has no rival in Paris.”

“And I know one also; what is yours called?”

“The ‘Corne d’Abondance.’“

“Ah!”

“Well, what is it?”

“Nothing.”

“Do you know anything against this house?”

“Not at all.”

“You know it?”

“No; and that astonishes me.”

“Shall we go there, compère?”

“Oh! yes, at once.”

“Come, then.”

“Where is it?”

“Near the Porte Bourdelle. The host appreciates well the difference between palates like yours and mine, and those of every thirsty passer-by.”

“Can we talk there?”

“Perfectly at our ease.”

“Oh! I see you are well known there.”

“Ma foi, no; this time you are wrong. M. Bonhomet sells me wine when I want it, and I pay when I can; that is all.”

“Bonhomet! that is a name that promises well.”

“And keeps its promise. Come, compère.”

“Oh! oh!” said Chicot to himself; “now I must choose among my best grimaces; for if Bonhomet recognizes me at once, it is all over.”

CHAPTER LXXX.

THE CORNE D’ABONDANCE.

The way along which Borromée led Chicot, never suspecting that he knew it as well as himself, recalled to our Gascon the happy days of his youth. How many times had he in those days, under the rays of the winter sun, or in the cool shade in summer, sought out this house, toward which a stranger was now conducting him. Then a few pieces of gold, or even of silver, jingling in his purse, made him happier than a king; and he gave himself up to the delightful pleasures of laziness, having no wife nor children starving, or scolding and suspicious, at home. Then Chicot used to sit down carelessly on the wooden bench, waiting for Gorenflot, who, however, was always exact to the time fixed for dinner; and then he used to study, with intelligent curiosity, Gorenflot in all his different shades of drunkenness.

Soon the great street of St. Jacques appeared to his eyes, the cloister of St. Benoit, and nearly in front of that the hotel of the Corne d’Abondance, rather dirty, and rather dilapidated, but still shaded by its planes and chestnuts, and embellished inside by its pots of shining copper, and brilliant saucepans, looking like imitations of gold and silver, and bringing real gold and silver into the pockets of the innkeeper. Chicot bent his back until he seemed to lose five or six inches of his height, and making a most hideous grimace, prepared to meet his old friend Bonhomet. However, as Borromée walked first, it was to him that Bonhomet spoke, and he scarcely looked at Chicot, who stood behind. Time had left its traces on the face of Bonhomet, as well as on his house. Besides the wrinkles which seem to correspond on the human face to the cracks made by time on the front of buildings, M. Bonhomet had assumed airs of great importance since Chicot had seen him last. These, however, he never showed much to men of a warlike appearance, for whom he had always a great respect.

It seemed to Chicot that nothing was changed excepting the tint of the ceiling, which from gray had turned to black.

"Come, friend," said Borromée, "I know a little nook where two men may talk at their ease while they drink. Is it empty?" continued he, turning to Bonhomet.

Bonhomet answered that it was, and Borromée then led Chicot to the little room already so well known to all readers of "Chicot, the Jester."

"Now," said Borromée, "wait here for me while I avail myself of a privilege granted to the habitués of this house."

"What is that?"

"To go to the cellar and fetch one's own wine."

"Ah! a jolly privilege. Go, then."

Borromée went out. Chicot watched him disappear, and then went to the wall and raised a picture, representing Credit killed by bad paymasters, behind which was a hole, through which you could see into the public room. Chicot knew this hole well, for it was his own making.

On looking through, he perceived Borromée, after placing his finger on his lips, as a sign of caution, say something to Bonhomet, who seemed to acquiesce by a nod of the head, after which Borromée took a light, which was always kept burning in readiness, and descended to the cellar. Then Chicot knocked on the wall in a peculiar manner. On hearing this knock, which seemed to recall to him some souvenir deeply rooted in his heart, Bonhomet started, and looked round him. Chicot knocked again impatiently, like a man angry at his first call not being answered. Bonhomet ran to the little room, and found Chicot standing there upright. At this sight Bonhomet, who, like the rest of the world, had believed Chicot dead, uttered a cry, for he believed he saw a ghost.

"Since when," said Chicot, "has a person like me been obliged to call twice?"

"Oh! dear M. Chicot, is it you or your shade?" cried Bonhomet.

"Whichever it be, since you recognize me, I hope you will obey me."

"Oh! certainly, dear M. Chicot."

"Then whatever noise you hear in this room, and whatever takes place here, do not come until I call you."

"Your directions will be the easier to obey, since they are exactly the same as your companion has just given to me."

"Yes, but if he calls, do not come — wait until I call." — "I will, M. Chicot."

"Good! now send away every one else from your inn, and in ten minutes let us be as free and as solitary here as if we came to fast on Good Friday."

"In ten minutes, M. Chicot, there shall not be a soul in the hotel excepting your humble servant."

"Go, Bonhomet; you are not changed, I see."

"Oh! mon Dieu! mon Dieu!" said Bonhomet, as he retired, "what is about to take place in my poor house?"

As he went, he met Borromée returning from the cellar with his bottles.

We do not know how Bonhomet managed, but when the ten minutes had expired, the last customer was crossing the threshold of the door, muttering:

"Oh! oh! the weather is stormy here to-day; we must avoid the storm."

CHAPTER LXXXI.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE LITTLE ROOM.

When the captain re-entered the room with a basket in his hand containing a dozen bottles, he was received by Chicot with smiles. Borromée was in haste to uncork his bottles, but his haste was nothing to Chicot's; thus the preparations did not take long, and the two companions began to drink. At first, as though their occupation was too important to be interrupted, they drank in silence. Chicot uttered only these words:

"Par ma foi! this is good Burgundy."

They drank two bottles in this way; at the third, Chicot raised his eyes to heaven, and said:

"Really, we are drinking as though we wished to intoxicate ourselves."

"It is so good," replied Borromée.

"Ah! it pleases you. Go on, friend; I have a strong head."

And each of them swallowed another bottle. The wine produced on each of them an opposite effect — it unloosened Chicot's tongue, and tied that of Borromée.

"Ah!" murmured Chicot, "you are silent; then you doubt yourself."

"Ah!" said Borromée to himself, "you chatter; then you are getting tipsy." Then he asked Chicot, "How many bottles does it take you?"

"For what?"

"To get lively."

"About four."

"And to get tipsy?"

"About six."

"And dead drunk?"

"Double."

"Boaster!" thought Borromée, "he stammers already, and has only drunk four. Come, then, we can go on," said he, and he drew out a fifth for Chicot and one for himself.

But Chicot remarked that of the five bottles ranged beside Borromée some were half full, and others two-thirds; none were empty. This confirmed him in his suspicions that the captain had bad intentions with regard to him. He rose as if to fetch his fifth bottle, and staggered as he did so.

"Oh!" said he, "did you feel?"

"What?"

"The earth trembling."

"Bah!"

"Yes, ventre de biche! Luckily the hotel of the Corne d'Abondance is solid, although it is built on a pivot."

"What! built on a pivot?"

"Doubtless, since it turns."

"True," said Borromée, "I felt the effects, but did not guess the cause."

"Because you are not a Latin scholar, and have not read the 'De Natura Rerum.' If you had, you would know that there is no effect without a cause."

"Well, my dear captain, for you are a captain like me, are you not?"

"Yes, from the points of my toes to the roots of my hair."

"Well, then, my dear captain, tell me, since there is no effect without a cause, as you say, what was the cause of your disguise?"

"What disguise?"

"That which you wore when you came to visit Dom Modeste."

"How was I disguised?"

"As a bourgeois."

"Ah! true."

"Will you tell me?"

"Willingly, if you will tell me why you were disguised as a monk. Confidence for confidence."

"Agreed," said Borromée.

"You wish to know, then, why I was disguised," said Chicot, with an utterance which seemed to grow thicker and thicker.

"Yes, it puzzles me."

"And then you will tell me?"

"Yes, that was agreed."

"Ah! true; I forgot. Well, the thing is very simple; I was a spy for the king."

"A spy?"

"Yes."

"Is that, then, your profession?"

"No, I am an amateur."

"What were you spying there?"

"Every one. Dom Modeste himself, then Brother Borromée, little Jacques, and the whole convent."

"And what did you discover, my friend?"

"First, that Dom Modeste is a great fool."

"It does not need to be very clever to find that out."

"Pardon me; his majesty Henri the Third, who is no fool, regards him as one of the lights of the Church, and is about to make a bishop of him."

"So be it; I have nothing to say against that promotion; on the contrary, it will give me a good laugh. But what else did you discover?"

"I discovered that Brother Borromée was not a monk but a captain."

"Ah! you discovered that?"

"At once."

"Anything else?"

"I discovered that Jacques was practicing with the foils before he began with the sword."

"Ah! you discovered that also. Anything else."

"Give me more to drink, or I shall remember nothing."

"Remember that you are beginning your sixth bottle," said Borromée laughing.

"Did we not come here to drink?"

"Certainly we did."

"Let us drink then."

"Well," said Borromée, "now do you remember?"

"What?"

"What else you saw in the convent."

"Well, I saw that the monks were really soldiers, and instead of obeying Dom Modeste, obeyed you."

"Ah, truly: but doubtless that was not all?"

"No; but more to drink, or my memory will fail me."

And as his bottle was empty, he held out his glass for more.

"Well, now do you remember?"

"Oh, yes, I should think so."

“Well, what else?”

“I saw that there was a plot.”

“A plot!” cried Borromée, turning pale.

“Yes, a plot.”

“Against whom?”

“Against the king.”

“Of what nature?”

“To try and carry him off.”

“When?”

“When he was returning from Vincennes.”

“Sacre!”

“What did you say?”

“Nothing. And you found out that?”

“Yes.”

“And warned the king?”

“Parbleu! that was what I came for.”

“Then you were the cause of the attempt failing?”

“Yes, I.”

“Hang him!” murmured Borromée.

“What did you say?”

“I said that you have good eyes, my friend.”

“Bah! I have seen more than that; pass me one of your bottles, and I will tell you what I have seen.”

Borromée hastened to comply with Chicot’s desire.

“Let me hear,” said he.

“Firstly, I have seen M. de Mayenne wounded.”

“Bah!”

“No wonder, he was on my route. And then I have seen the taking of Cahors.”

“How? the taking of Cahors?”

“Certainly. Ah! captain, it was a grand thing to see, and a brave man like you would have been delighted.”

“I do not doubt it. You were, then, near the king of Navarre?”

“Side by side, my friend, as we are now.”

“And you left him?”

“To announce this news to the king of France.”

“Then you have been at the Louvre?”

“Yes, just before you.”

“Then, as we have not quitted each other since, I need not ask you what you have done.”

“On the contrary, ask; for that is the most curious of all.”

“Tell me, then.”

“Tell! oh, it is very easy to say tell.”

“Try.”

“One more glass of wine, then, to loosen my tongue. Quite full; that will do. Well, I saw, comrade, that when you gave the king the Duc de Guise’s letter, you let another fall.”

“Another!” cried Borromée, starting up. “Yes, it is there.”

And having tried two or three times, with an unsteady hand, he put his finger on the buff doublet of Borromée, just where the letter was. Borromée started, as though Chicot’s finger had been a hot iron, and had touched his skin instead of his doublet.

“Oh, oh!” said he, “there is but one thing wanting.”

“What is that?”

“That you should know to whom the letter is addressed.”

“Oh, I know quite well; it is addressed to the Duchesse de Montpensier.”

“Good heavens! I hope you have not told that to the king.”

“No; but I will tell him.”

“When?”

“When I have had a nap.” And he let his arms fall on the table, and his head on them.

“Then as soon as you can walk you will go to the Louvre?”

“I will.”

“You will denounce me.”

“I will denounce you.”

“Is it not a joke?”

“What?”

“That you will tell the king after your nap.”

“Not at all. You see, my dear friend,” said Chicot, half raising his head, “you are a conspirator, and I am a spy; you have a plot, and I denounce you; we each follow our business.”

And Chicot laid his head down again, so that his face was completely hidden by his hands, while the back of his head was protected by his helmet.

“Ah!” cried Borromée, “you will denounce me when you wake!” and, rising, he made a furious blow with his dagger on the back of his companion, thinking to pierce him through and nail him to the table. But he had not reckoned on the shirt of mail which Chicot had carried away from the priory. The dagger broke upon it like glass, and for the second time Chicot owed his life to it.

Before Borromée had time to recover from his astonishment, Chicot’s right fist struck him a heavy blow in the face, and sent him bleeding and stunned against the wall.

In a minute, however, he was up, and sword in hand; but this minute had sufficed for Chicot to draw his sword also, and prepare himself. He seemed to shake off, as if by enchantment, all the fumes of the wine, and stood with a steady hand to receive his adversary. The table, like a field of battle, covered with empty bottles, lay between them, but the blood flowing down his face infuriated Borromée, who lunged at his adversary as fiercely as the intervening table permitted.

“Dolt!” cried Chicot, “you see that it is decidedly you who are drunk, for you cannot reach me across the table, while my arm is six inches longer than yours, and my sword as much longer than your sword; and here is the proof.”

As he spoke, he stretched out his arm and wounded Borromée in the forehead. Borromée uttered a cry, still more of rage than of pain, and as he was brave enough, attacked with double fury.

Chicot, however, still on the other side of the table, took a chair and sat down, saying, “Mon Dieu! how stupid these soldiers are; they pretend to know how to manage their swords, and any bourgeois, if he liked, could kill them like flies. Ah! now you want to put out my eye. And now you mount on the table; but, ventre de biche! take care, donkey.” And he pricked him with his sword in the stomach, as he had already done in the forehead.

Borromée roared with anger and leaped from the table to the floor.

“That is as it should, be,” said Chicot; “now we are on the same level, and we can talk while we are fencing. Ah! captain, captain, and so we sometimes try our hand a little at assassination in our spare moments, do we?”

“I do for my cause what you do for yours,” said Borromée, now brought back to the seriousness of his position, and terrified, in spite of himself, at the smothered fire which seemed gleaming in Chicot’s eyes.

“So much for talking,” said Chicot; “and yet, my friend, it is with no little pleasure I find that I am a better hand than you are. Ah! that was not bad.”

Borromée had just made a lunge at Chicot, which had slightly touched his breast.

“Not bad, but I know the thrust — it is the very same you showed little Jacques. I was just saying, then, that I have the advantage of you, for I did not begin this quarrel, however anxiously disposed I might have been to do so. More than that, even, I have allowed you to carry out your project by giving you every latitude you required, and yet at this very moment even, I have only been acting on the defensive, and this, because I have something to propose to you.”

“Nothing,” cried Borromée, exasperated at Chicot’s imperturbability, “nothing.”

And he gave a thrust which would have run the Gascon completely through the body, if the latter had not, with his long legs, sprung back a step, which placed him out of his adversary’s reach.

“I am going to tell you what this arrangement is, all the same, so that I shall have nothing left to reproach myself for.”

“Hold your tongue,” said Borromée; “hold your tongue; it will be useless.”

“Listen,” said Chicot; “it is to satisfy my own conscience. I have no wish to shed your blood, you understand, and I don’t want to kill you until I am driven to extremes.”

“Kill me, kill me, I say, if you can!” exclaimed Borromée, exasperated.

“No, no; I have already once in my life killed another such swordsman as you are; I will even say a better swordsman than you. Pardieu! you know him; he, too, was one of De Guise’s retainers — a lawyer, too.”

“Ah! Nicolas David!” said Borromée, terrified at the incident, and again placing himself on the defensive.

“Exactly so.”

“It was you who killed him?”

“Oh! yes, with a pretty little thrust which I will presently show you, if you decline the arrangement I propose.”

“Well, let me hear what the arrangement is.”

“You will pass from the Duc de Guise’s service to that of the king, without, however, quitting that of the duc.”

“In other words, that I should become a spy like yourself?”

“No, for there will be a difference; I am not paid, but you will be. You will begin by showing me the Duc de Guise’s letter to Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier; you will let me take a copy of it, and I will leave you quiet until another occasion. Well, am I not considerate?” — ”Here,” said Borromée, “is my answer.”

Borromée’s reply was “un coupé sur les armes,” so rapidly dealt that the point of his sword slightly touched Chicot’s shoulder.

“Well, well,” said Chicot, “I see I must positively show you Nicolas David’s thrust. It is very simple and pretty.”

And Chicot, who had up to that moment been acting on the defensive, made one step forward and attacked in his turn.

“This is the thrust,” said Chicot; “I make a feint in quartrebasse.”

And he did so; Borromée parried by giving way; but, after this first step backward he was obliged to stop, as he found that he was close to the partition.

“Good! precisely so; you parry in a circle; that’s wrong, for my wrist is stronger than yours. I catch your sword in mine, thus. I return to the attack by a tierce haute, I fall upon you, so, and you are hit, or, rather, you are a dead man!”

In fact, the thrust had followed, or rather had accompanied, the demonstration, and the slender rapier, penetrating Borromée’s chest, had glided like a needle completely through him, penetrating deeply, and with a dull, heavy sound, the wooden partition behind him.

Borromée flung out his arms, letting his sword fall to the ground; his eyes became fixed and injected with blood, his mouth opened wide, his lips were stained with a red-colored foam, his head fell on his shoulder with a sigh, which sounded like a death-rattle; then his limbs refused their support, and his body as it sunk forward enlarged the aperture of the wound, but could not free itself from the partition, supported as it was by Chicot’s terrible wrist, so that the miserable wretch, like a gigantic insect, remained fastened to the wall, which his feet kicked convulsively.

Chicot, cold and impassible as he always was in positions of great difficulty, especially when he had a conviction at the bottom of his heart that he had done everything his conscience could require of him — Chicot, we say, took his hand from his sword, which remained in a horizontal position, unfastened the captain’s belt, searched his doublet, took the letter, and read the address:

“Duchesse de Montpensier.”

All this time the blood was welling copiously from the wound, and the agony of death was depicted on the features of the wounded man.

“I am dying, I am dying!” he murmured. “O Heaven! have pity on me.”

This last appeal to the divine mercy, made by a man who had most probably rarely thought of it until this moment of his direst need, touched Chicot’s feeling.

“Let us be charitable,” he said; “and since this man must die, let him at least die as quietly as possible.”

He then advanced toward the partition, and by an effort withdrew his sword from the wall, and supporting Borromée’s body, he prevented it from falling heavily to the ground.

This last precaution, however, was useless; the approach of death had been rapid and certain, and had already paralyzed the dying man’s limbs. His legs gave way beneath him, he fell into Chicot’s arms, and then rolled heavily on the floor.

The shock of his fall made a stream of blood flow from his wound, with which the last remains of life ebbed away.

Chicot then went and opened the door of communication, and called Bonhomet.

He had no occasion to call twice, for the innkeeper had been listening at the door, and had successively heard the noise of tables and stools, the clashing of swords, and the fall of a heavy body; besides, the worthy M. Bonhomet had particularly, after the confidence which had been reposed in him, too extensive an experience of the character of gentlemen of the sword in general, and of that of Chicot in particular, not to have guessed, step by step, what had taken place.

The only thing of which he was ignorant was, which of the two adversaries had fallen.

It must, however, be said in praise of Maître Bonhomet that his face assumed an expression of real satisfaction when he heard Chicot’s voice, and when he saw that it was the Gascon who, safe and sound, opened the door.

Chicot, whom nothing escaped, remarked the expression of his countenance, and was inwardly pleased at it.

Bonhomet, tremblingly, entered the apartment.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, as he saw the captain's body bathed in blood.

"Yes, my poor Bonhomet," said Chicot; "this is what we have come to; our dear captain here is very ill, as you see."

"Oh! my good Monsieur Chicot, my good Monsieur Chicot!" exclaimed Bonhomet, ready to faint.

"Well, what?" inquired Chicot.

"It is very unkind of you to have chosen my inn for this execution; such a handsome captain, too!"

"Would you sooner have seen Chicot lying there, and Borromée alive?"

"No, oh no!" cried the host, from the very bottom of his heart.

"Well, that would have happened, however, had it not been for a miracle of Providence." — "Really?"

"Upon the word of Chicot, just look at my back, for it pains me a good deal, my dear friend."

And he stooped down before the innkeeper, so that both his shoulders might be on a level with the host's eye.

Between the two shoulders the doublet was pierced through, and a spot of blood as large and round as a silver crown piece reddened the edges of the hole.

"Blood!" cried Bonhomet, "blood! Ah, you are wounded!"

"Wait, wait."

And Chicot unfastened his doublet and his shirt. "Now look!" he said.

"Oh! you wore a cuirass! What a fortunate thing, dear Monsieur Chicot; and you were saying that the ruffian wished to assassinate you."

"Diable! it hardly seems likely I should have taken any pleasure in giving myself a dagger thrust between my own shoulders. Now, what do you see?"

"A link broken."

"That dear captain was in good earnest then; is there much blood?"

"Yes, a good deal under the links."

"I must take off the cuirass, then," said Chicot.

Chicot took off his cuirass, and bared the upper part of his body, which seemed to be composed of nothing else but bones, of muscles spread over the bones, and of skin merely covering the muscles.

"Ah! Monsieur Chicot," exclaimed Bonhomet, "you have a wound as large as a plate."

"Yes, I suppose the blood has spread; there is what doctors call ecchymosis; give me some clean linen, pour into a glass equal parts of good olive oil and wine dregs, and wash that stain for me."

"But, dear M. Chicot, what am I to do with this body?"

"That is not your affair."

"What! not my affair?"

"No. Give me some ink, a pen, and a sheet of paper."

"Immediately, dear Monsieur Chicot," said Bonhomet, as he darted out of the room.

Meanwhile Chicot, who probably had no time to lose, heated at the lamp the point of a small dagger, and cut in the middle of the wax the seal of the letter. This being done, and as there was nothing else to retain the dispatch, Chicot drew it from its envelope, and read it with the liveliest marks of satisfaction.

Just as he had finished reading it, Maître Bonhomet returned with the oil, the wine, the paper, and the pen.

Chicot arranged the pen, ink, and paper before him, sat himself down at the table, and turned his back with stoical indifference toward Bonhomet for him to operate upon. The latter understood the pantomime, and began to rub it.

However, as if, instead of irritating a painful wound, some one had been tickling him in the most delightful manner, Chicot, during the operation, copied the letter from the Duc de Guise to his sister, and made his comments thereon at every word.

"DEAR SISTER — The expedition from Anvers has succeeded for everybody, but has failed as far as we are concerned. You will be told that the Duc d'Anjou is dead; do not believe it — he is alive.

"*He lives*, you understand, and that is the whole question.

"There is a complete dynasty in those words; those two words separate the house of Lorraine from the throne of France better than the deepest abyss could do.

"Do not, however, make yourself too uneasy about that. I have discovered that two persons whom I thought were dead are still living, and there is a great chance of death for the prince while those two persons are alive.

"Think then only of Paris; it will be time enough for the League to act six weeks hence. Let our Leaguers know that the moment is approaching, and let them hold themselves in readiness.

"The army is on foot; we number twelve thousand sure men, all well equipped; I shall enter France with it, under the pretext of engaging the German Huguenots, who are going to assist Henri de Navarre. I shall defeat the Huguenots, and having entered France as a friend, I shall act as a master."

"Oh, oh!" cried Chicot.

"Did I hurt you, dear Monsieur Chicot?" said Bonhomet, discontinuing his frictions.

"Yes, my good fellow."

"I will rub more softly; don't be afraid."

Chicot continued:

"P.S. — I entirely approve of your plan with regard to the Forty-five; only allow me to say, dear sister, that you will be conferring a greater honor on those fellows than they deserve."

"Ah! diable!" murmured Chicot, "this is getting obscure."

And he read it again.

"I entirely approve of your plan with regard to the Forty-five."

"What plan?" Chicot asked himself.

"Only allow me to say, dear sister, that you will be conferring a greater honor on those fellows than they deserve."

"What honor?"

Chicot resumed: —

"Than they deserve.

"Your affectionate brother.

"H. DE LORRAINE."

"At all events," said Chicot, "everything is clear, except the postscript. Very good, We will look after the postscript, then."

"Dear Monsieur Chicot," Bonhomet ventured to observe, seeing that Chicot had finished writing, if not thinking, "Dear Monsieur Chicot, you have not told me what I am to do with this corpse." — "That is a very simple affair."

"For you, who are full of imagination, it may be, but for me?"

"Well! suppose, for instance, that that unfortunate captain had been quarreling with the Swiss guards or the Reiters, and he had been brought to your house wounded, would you have refused to receive him?"

"No, certainly, unless indeed you had forbidden me, dear M. Chicot."

“Suppose that, having been placed in that corner, he had, notwithstanding the care and attention you had bestowed upon him, departed this life while in your charge, it would have been a great misfortune, and nothing more, I suppose?”

“Certainly.”

“And, instead of incurring any blame, you would deserve to be commended for your humanity. Suppose, again, that while he was dying this poor captain had mentioned the name, which you know very well, of the prior of Les Jacobins Saint Antoine?”

“Of Dom Modeste Gorenflot?” exclaimed Bonhomet, in astonishment.

“Yes, of Dom Modeste Gorenflot. Very good! You will go and inform Dom Modeste of it; Dom Modeste will hasten here with all speed, and, as the dead man’s purse is found in one of his pockets — you understand it is important that the purse should be found; I mention this merely by way of advice — and as the dead man’s purse is found in one of his pockets, and this letter in the other, no suspicion whatever can be entertained.”

“I understand, dear Monsieur Chicot.”

“In addition to which you will receive a reward, instead of being punished.”

“You are a great man, dear Monsieur Chicot; I will run at once to the Priory of St. Antoine.”

“Wait a minute! did I not say there was the purse and the letter?”

“Oh! yes, and you have the letter in your hand.” — ”Precisely.”

“I must not say that it has been read and copied?”

“Pardieu! it is precisely on account of this letter reaching its destination intact that you will receive a recompense.”

“The letter contains a secret, then?”

“In such times as the present there are secrets in everything, my dear Bonhomet.”

And Chicot, with this sententious reply, again fastened the silk under the wax of the seal by making use of the same means as he had done before; he then fastened the wax so artistically that the most experienced eye would not have been able to have detected the slightest crack.

He then replaced the letter in the pocket of the dead man, had the linen, which had been steeped in the oil and wine, applied to his wound by way of a cataplasm, put on again the safety coat of mail next to his skin, his shirt over his coat of mail, picked up his sword, wiped it, thrust it into the scabbard, and withdrew.

He returned again, however, saying:

“If, after all, the story which I have invented does not seem satisfactory to you, you can accuse the captain of having thrust his own sword through his body.”

“A suicide?”

“Well, that don’t compromise any one, you understand.”

“But they won’t bury this ill-starred fellow in holy ground.”

“Pooh,” said Chicot, “will that be giving him much pleasure?”

“Why, yes, I should think so.”

“In that case, do as you like, my dear Bonhomet; adieu.”

Then, returning a second time, he said:

“By-the-by, I pay, since he is no more.” And Chicot threw three golden crowns on the table, and then, placing his fore-finger on his lips, in token of silence, he departed.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

THE HUSBAND AND THE LOVER.

It was with no inconsiderable emotion that Chicot again recognized La Rue des Augustins, so quiet and deserted, the angle formed by the block of houses which preceded his own, and lastly, his own dear house itself, with its triangular roof, its worm-eaten balcony, and its gutters ornamented with waterspouts.

He had been so terribly afraid that he should find nothing but an empty space in the place of the house, and had so strongly suspected that he should see the street blackened by the smoke of a conflagration, that the street and the house appeared to him miracles of neatness, loveliness, and splendor.

Chicot had concealed the key of his beloved house in the hollow of a stone which served as the base of one of the columns by which his balcony was supported. At the period we are now writing about, any kind of key belonging to a chest or piece of furniture equaled in weight and size the very largest keys of our houses of the present day; the door keys, therefore, following the natural proportions, were equal in size to the keys of our modern cities.

Chicot had consequently calculated the difficulty which his pocket would have in accommodating the heavy key, and he accordingly determined to hide it in the spot we have indicated.

Chicot, therefore, it must be confessed, felt a slight shudder creeping over him as he plunged his fingers in the hollow of the stone; this shudder was succeeded by a feeling of the most unmixed delight when the cold of the iron met his hand, for the key was really and truly in the spot where he had left it.

It was precisely the same with regard to the furniture in the first room he came to; the same, too, with the small board which he had nailed to the joist; and lastly, the same with the thousand crowns, which were still slumbering in their oaken hiding-place.

Chicot was not a miser; quite the contrary, indeed: he had very frequently thrown gold about broadcast, thereby allowing the ideal to triumph over the material, which is the philosophy of every man who is of any value; but no sooner had the mind momentarily ceased to exercise its influence over matter — in other words, whenever money was no longer needed, nor sacrifice requisite — whenever, in a word, the senses temporarily regained their influence over Chicot's mind, and whenever his mind allowed the body to live and to take enjoyment, gold, that principal, that unceasing, that eternal source of animal delights, reassumed its value in our philosopher's eyes, and no one knew better than he did into how many delicious particles that inestimable totality which people call a crown is subdivided.

"Ventre de biche!" murmured Chicot, sitting down in the middle of his room, after he had removed the flagstone, and with the small piece of board by his side, and his treasure under his eyes, "ventre de biche! that excellent young man is a most invaluable neighbor, for he has made others respect my money, and has himself respected it too; in sober truth, such an action is wonderful in such times as the present. Mordieux! I owe some thanks to that excellent young fellow, and he shall have them this evening."

Thereupon Chicot replaced the plank over the joist, the flagstone over the plank, approached the window, and looked toward the opposite side of the street.

The house still retained that gray and somber aspect which the imagination bestows as their natural color upon buildings whose character it seems to know.

"It cannot yet be their time for retiring to rest," said Chicot; "and besides, those fellows, I am sure, are not very sound sleepers; so let us see."

He descended his staircase, crossed the road — forming, as he did so, his features into their most amiable and gracious expression — and knocked at his neighbor's door.

He remarked the creaking of the staircase, the sound of a hurried footstep, and yet he waited long enough to feel warranted in knocking again.

At this fresh summons the door opened, and the outline of a man appeared in the gloom.

"Thank you, and good-evening," said Chicot, holding out his hand; "here I am back again, and I am come to return you my thanks, my dear neighbor."

“I beg your pardon,” inquiringly observed a voice, in a tone of disappointment, the accent of which greatly surprised Chicot.

At the same moment the man who had opened the door drew back a step or two.

“Stay, I have made a mistake,” said Chicot, “you were not my neighbor when I left, and yet I know who you are.”

“And I know you too,” said the young man.

“You are Monsieur le Vicomte Ernanton de Carmainges.”

“And you are ‘The Shade.’“

“Really,” said Chicot, “I am quite bewildered.”

“Well, and what do you want, monsieur?” inquired the young man, somewhat churlishly.

“Excuse me, but I am interrupting you, perhaps, my dear monsieur?”

“No, only you will allow me to ask you what you may want.”

“Nothing, except that I wished to speak to the master of this house.”

“Speak, then.”

“What do you mean?”

“I am the master of the house, that is all.”

“You? since when, allow me to ask?”

“Diable! since the last three days.”

“Good! the house was for sale then?”

“So it would seem, since I have bought it.”

“But the former proprietor?”

“No longer lives here, as you see.”

“Where is he?”

“I don’t know.”

“Come, come, let us understand each other,” said Chicot.

“There is nothing I should like better,” replied Ernanton, with visible impatience, “only let us do so without losing any time.”

“The former proprietor was a man between five-and-twenty and thirty years of age, but who looked as if he were forty.”

“No; he was a man of about sixty-five or sixty-six years old, who looked his age quite.”

“Bald?”

“No, on the contrary, a perfect forest of white hair.”

“With an enormous scar on the left side of the head, had he not?”

“I did not observe the scar, but I did a good number of furrows.”

“I cannot understand it at all,” said Chicot.

“Well,” resumed Ernanton, after a moment’s silence, “what did you want with that man, my dear Monsieur l’Ombre?”

Chicot was on the point of acknowledging what had just happened; suddenly, however, the mystery of the surprise which Ernanton had exhibited, reminded him of a certain proverb very dear to all discreet people.

“I wished to pay him a neighborly visit,” he said, “that is all.”

In this way, Chicot did not tell a falsehood, and yet admitted nothing.

“My dear monsieur,” said Ernanton politely, but reducing considerably the opening of the door which he held half-closed, “I regret I am unable to give you more precise information.”

“Thank you, monsieur,” said Chicot, “I must look elsewhere, then.”

“But,” continued Ernanton, as he gradually closed the door, “that does not interfere with my congratulating myself upon the chance which has brought me again into personal communication with you.”

“You would like to see me at the devil, I believe,” murmured Chicot, as he returned bow for bow.

However, as, notwithstanding this mental reply, Chicot, in his preoccupation, forgot to withdraw, Ernanton, shutting his face between the door and the doorway, said to him:

“I wish you a very good-evening, monsieur.” — ”One moment, Monsieur de Carmainges,” said Chicot.

“Monsieur, I exceedingly regret I am unable to wait,” replied Ernanton, “but the fact is, I am expecting some one who will come and knock at this very door, and this person will be angry with me if I do not show the greatest possible discretion in receiving him.”

“That is quite sufficient, monsieur, I understand,” said Chicot; “I am sorry to have been so importunate, and I now retire.” — ”Adieu, dear Monsieur l’Ombre.”

“Adieu, excellent Monsieur Ernanton.”

And as Chicot drew back a step, he saw the door quietly shut in his face.

He listened to satisfy himself if the suspicious young man was watching his departure, but he heard Ernanton’s footsteps as he ascended the staircase; Chicot could therefore return to his own house without uneasiness, and shut himself up in it, thoroughly determined not to interfere with his new neighbor's habits, but, in accordance with his usual custom, equally resolved not to lose sight of him altogether.

In fact, Chicot was not a man to slumber on a circumstance which, in his opinion, seemed to be important, without having handled and dissected it, with the patience of a first-rate anatomist; in spite of all he could do (and it was a privilege or defect of his organization), every material impression that his mind received presented itself for analysis, by its most prominent features, in such a manner that poor Chicot's brain suffered considerably on account of such peculiarity, called upon as it was for an immediate investigation of its master's thought.

Chicot, whose mind up to that moment had been occupied with that phrase of the Duc de Guise's letter, namely, "I entirely approve of your plan with regard to the Forty-five," consequently abandoned that phrase, the examination of which he promised himself to return to at a later period, in order that he might forthwith thoroughly exhaust this fresh subject of preoccupation, which had just taken the place of the older one.

Chicot reflected, that nothing could possibly be more singular than the fact of Ernanton installing himself, as if he were its master, in that mysterious house whose inhabitants had suddenly disappeared.

And the more so, since to these original inhabitants a phrase of the Duc de Guise's letter relative to the Duc d'Anjou might possibly have some reference.

That was a chance which deserved attentive consideration, and Chicot was in the habit of believing in providential chances.

He developed, even, whenever he was begged to do so, some very ingenious theories on the subject.

The basis of these theories was an idea, which, in our opinion, was quite as good as any other; it was as follows:

Chance is a kind of reserve held in bond by the Deity. Heaven never communicates that reserve except in momentous circumstances, particularly since He has observed that men are sagacious enough to study and foresee the chances which may befall them in accordance with natural causes and regularly organized principles of existence.

Moreover, Heaven likes to counteract the combinations of those proud members of the human race whose pride in by-gone times He has already punished by drowning them, and whose future pride He surely will punish in destroying them by fire.

Heaven, therefore we say, or Chicot said, Heaven is pleased to counteract the combinations of those proud and haughty human beings by means with which they are unacquainted, and whose intervention they cannot foresee.

This theory, as may be perceived, includes some very specious arguments, and might possibly furnish some very brilliant theses; but the reader, anxious, as Chicot was, to know what Carmainges' object was in that house, will feel obliged to us by tracing the development of them.

Chicot, accordingly, began to think, that it was strange to see Ernanton in the very house where he bad seen Remy.

He considered it was strange for two reasons; the first, because of the perfect ignorance in which the two men lived with respect to each other, which led to the supposition that there must have been an intermediary between them unknown to Chicot; and the second reason, because the house must have been sold to Ernanton, who possessed no means of purchasing it.

"It is true," said Chicot, as he installed himself as comfortably as he could on his gutter, which was his usual place of observation; "it is true that the young man pretends he is expecting a visit, and that the visit is from a lady; in these days, ladies are wealthy, and allow themselves an indulgence in fancies of all kinds. Ernanton is handsome, young, and graceful; Ernanton has taken some one's fancy, a rendezvous has been arranged, and he has been directed to purchase this house; he has bought the house, and she has accepted the rendezvous.

"Ernanton," continued Chicot, "lives at court; it must be some lady belonging to the court, then, with whom he has this affair. Poor fellow, will he love her? Heaven preserve him from such a thing! he is going to fall headlong into that gulf of perdition. Very good! ought I not to read him a moral lecture thereupon?

"A moral lecture, which would be both useless and absurd, doubly so the former, and tenfold the latter.

"Useless, because he won't understand it, and, even if he did understand it, would refuse to listen to it.

"Absurd, because I should be doing far better to go to bed, and to think a little about that poor Borromée.

"On this latter subject," continued Chicot, who had suddenly become thoughtful, "I perceive one thing; namely, that remorse does not exist, and is only a relative feeling; the fact is, I do not feel any remorse at all for having killed Borromée, since the manner in which Monsieur de Carmainges' affair occupies my mind makes me forget that I have killed the man; and if he, on his side, had nailed me to the table as I nailed him to the wainscot, he would certainly have had no more remorse than I have about it myself, at the present moment."

Chicot had reached so far in his reasonings, his inductions, and his philosophy, which had consumed a good hour and a half altogether, when he was drawn from his train of thought by the arrival of a litter proceeding from the direction of the inn of the "Brave Chevalier."

This litter stopped at the threshold of the mysterious house.

A veiled lady alighted from it, and disappeared within the door which Ernanton held half open.

"Poor fellow!" murmured Chicot, "I was not mistaken; and it was indeed a lady he was waiting for, and so now I shall go to bed."

Whereupon Chicot rose, but remained motionless, although standing up.

"I am mistaken," he said, "I shall not be able to go to sleep; but I maintain what I was saying, that if I don't sleep it will not be remorse which will prevent me, it will be curiosity; and that is so true what I say in that respect, that if I remain here in my observatory, my mind will only be occupied about one thing, and that is to learn which of our noble ladies honors the handsome Ernanton with her affection.

"Far better, then, to remain where I am; since, if I went to bed, I should certainly get up again to return here."

And thereupon Chicot resumed his seat.

An hour had nearly passed away without our being able to state whether Chicot was engaged in thinking of the unknown lady or Borromée, or whether he was occupied by curiosity or tormented by feelings of remorse, when he fancied he heard the gallop of a horse at the end of the street.

Such was indeed the case, for soon after a cavalier, wrapped in his cloak, made his appearance.

The cavalier drew up in the middle of the street, and seemed to be looking about him to see where he was.

The cavalier then perceived the group which was formed by the litter and its bearers.

He drove his horse against them. He was armed, for the rattling of his sword against his spurs could be distinctly heard.

The bearers of the litter seemed desirous of barring his passage, but he addressed a few words to them in a low tone of voice, and not only did they withdraw with every mark of respect, but one of them, as he sprang to the ground from his horse, even received the bridle from his hand. The unknown advanced toward the door and knocked loudly.

"Well," said Chicot, "I was right in remaining, after all; my presentiments, which told me that something was going to take place, have not deceived me. Here is the husband, poor Ernanton; we shall presently be witness of something serious.

"If, however, it be the husband he is very kind to announce his return in so riotous a manner."

Notwithstanding the magisterial manner in which the unknown thundered at the door, some hesitation seemed to be shown in opening it.

"Open!" cried he who was knocking.

"Open! open!" repeated the bearers.

"There is no doubt it is the husband," resumed Chicot; "he has threatened the men that he will have them whipped or hanged, and they have declared themselves on his side.

"Poor Ernanton, he will be flayed alive.

"Oh! oh! I shall not suffer such a thing, however," added Chicot.

"For in fact," he resumed, "he assisted me; and consequently, when an opportunity presents itself, I ought to help him. And it seems to me that the opportunity has now arrived, or it never will do so."

Chicot was resolute and generous, and curious into the bargain; he unfastened his long sword, placed it under his arm, and hurriedly ran down the staircase.

He could open his door noiselessly, which is an indispensable piece of knowledge for any one who may wish to listen with advantage.

Chicot glided under the balcony, then behind a pillar, and waited.

Hardly had he installed himself there, when the door opposite was opened immediately the unknown had whispered a word through the keyhole, and yet he did not venture beyond the threshold.

A moment afterward the lady appeared within the doorway.

She took hold of the cavalier's arm, who led her to the litter, closed the door of it, and then mounted his horse.

"There is no doubt on the subject," said Chicot, "it is the husband, a good-natured fellow of a husband after all, since he does not think it worth his while to explore the house in order to be revenged on my friend Carmainges."

The litter then moved off, the cavalier walking his horse beside the door of it.

"Pardieu!" said Chicot, "I must follow those people and learn who they are, and where they are going; I shall at all events draw some solid counsel from my discovery for my friend Carmainges."

Chicot accordingly followed the cortege, observing the precaution, however, of keeping in the shadow of the walls, and taking care that the noise made by the footsteps of the men and of the horses should render the sound of his own inaudible.

Chicot's surprise was by no means slight when he saw the litter stop at the door of the "Brave Chevalier."

Almost immediately afterward, as if some one had been on the watch, the door was opened.

The lady, still veiled, alighted; entered and mounted to the turret, the window of the first story of which was lighted.

The husband followed her, both being respectfully preceded by Dame Fournichon, who carried a flambeau in her hand.

"Decidedly," said Chicot, crossing his arms on his chest, "I cannot understand a single thing of the whole affair."

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

SHOWING HOW CHICOT BEGAN TO UNDERSTAND THE PURPORT OF MONSIEUR DE GUISE’S LETTER.

Chicot fancied that he had already certainly seen, somewhere or another, the figure of this courteous cavalier; but his memory, having become a little confused during his journey from Navarre, where he had met with so many different figures, did not, with its usual facility, furnish him with the cavalier’s name on the present occasion.

While, concealed in the shade, he was interrogating himself, with his eyes fixed upon the lighted window, as to the object of this lady and gentleman’s tete-à-tete at the “Brave Chevalier,” our worthy Gascon, forgetting Ernanton in the mysterious house, observed the door of the hostelry open, and in the stream of light which escaped through the opening, he perceived something resembling the dark outline of a monk’s figure.

The outline in question paused for a moment to look up at the same window at which Chicot had been gazing.

“Oh! oh!” he murmured; “if I am not mistaken, that is the frock of a Jacobin friar. Is Maitre Gorenflot so lax, then, in his discipline as to allow his sheep to go strolling about at such an hour of the night as this, and at such a distance from the priory?”

Chicot kept his eye upon the Jacobin, who was making his way along the Rue des Augustins, and something seemed instinctively to assure him that he should, through this monk, discover the solution of the problem which he had up to that moment been vainly endeavoring to ascertain.

Moreover, in the same way that Chicot had fancied he had recognized the figure of the cavalier, he now fancied he could recognize in the monk a certain movement of the shoulder, and a peculiar military movement of the hips, which only belong to persons in the habit of frequenting fencing-rooms and gymnastic establishments.

"May the devil seize me," he murmured, "if that frock yonder does not cover the body of that little miscreant whom I wished them to give me for a traveling companion, and who handles his arquebuse and sword so cleverly."

Hardly had the idea occurred to Chicot, when, to convince himself of its value, he stretched out his long legs, and in a dozen strides rejoined the little fellow, who was walking along holding up his frock above his thin and sinewy legs in order to be able to get along all the faster.

This was not very difficult, however, inasmuch as the monk paused every now and then to glance behind him, as if he was going away with great difficulty and with feelings of profound regret.

His glance was invariably directed toward the brilliantly-lighted windows of the hostelry.

Chicot had not gone many steps before he felt sure that he had not been mistaken in his conjectures.

"Hallo! my little master," he said; "hallo! my little Jacquot; hallo! my little Clement. Halt!"

And he pronounced this last word in so thoroughly military a tone, that the monk started at it.

"Who calls me?" inquired the young man rudely, with something rather antagonistic than cordial in his tone of voice.

"I!" replied Chicot, drawing himself up in front of the monk; "I! don't you recognize me?"

"Oh! Monsieur Robert Briquet!" exclaimed the monk.

"Myself, my little man. And where are you going like that, so late, darling child?"

"To the priory, Monsieur Briquet."

"Very good; but where do you come from?"

"I?"

"Of course, little libertine."

The young man started.

"I don't know what you are saying, Monsieur Briquet," he replied; "on the contrary, I have been sent with a very important commission by Dom Modeste, who will himself assure you that such is the case, if there be any occasion for it."

"Gently, gently, my little Saint Jerome; we take fire like a match, it seems."

“And not without reason, too, when one hears such things said as you were saying just now.”

“Diable! when one sees a frock like yours leaving a tavern at such an hour — ”

“A tavern, I!”

“Oh! of course not; the house you left just now was not the ‘Brave Chevalier,’ I suppose? Ah! you see I have caught you!”

“You were right in saying that I left that house, but it was not a tavern I was leaving.”

“What!” said Chicot; “is not the hostelry of the sign of the ‘Brave Chevalier’ a tavern?”

“A tavern is a house where people drink, and as I have not been drinking in that house, that house is not a tavern for me.”

“Diable! that is a subtle distinction, and I am very much mistaken if you will not some day become a very forcible theologian; but, at all events, if you did not go into that house to drink there, what did you go there for?”

Clement made no reply, and Chicot could read in his face, notwithstanding the darkness of the night, a resolute determination not to say another word.

This resolution annoyed our friend extremely, for it had almost grown a habit with him to become acquainted with everything.

It must not be supposed that Clement showed any ill-feeling in his silence; for, on the contrary, he had appeared delighted to meet, in so unexpected a manner, his learned fencing-master, Maitre Robert Briquet, and had given him the warmest reception that could be expected from the close and rugged character of the youth.

The conversation had completely ceased. Chicot, for the purpose of starting it again, was on the point of pronouncing the name of Frere Borromée; but, although Chicot did not feel any remorse, or fancied he did not feel any, he could not summon up courage to pronounce that name.

His young companion, still preserving the same unbroken silence, seemed as if he were awaiting something; it seemed, too, as if he considered it a happiness to remain as long as possible in the neighborhood of the hostelry of the “Brave Chevalier.”

Robert Briquet tried to speak to him about the journey which the boy had for a moment entertained the hope of making with him.

Jacques Clement’s eyes glistened at the words space and liberty.

Robert Briquet told him that in the countries through which he had just been traveling, the art of fencing was held greatly in honor; he added, with an appearance of indifference, that he had even brought away with him several wonderful passes and thrusts.

This was placing Jacques upon slippery ground. He wished to know what these passes were; and Chicot, with his long arm, indicated a few of them upon the little monk’s arm.

But all these delicacies and refinements on Chicot’s part in no way affected little Clement’s obstinate determination; and while he endeavored to parry these unknown passes, which his friend Maitre Robert Briquet was showing him, he preserved an obstinate silence with respect to what had brought him into that quarter.

Thoroughly annoyed, but keeping a strong control over himself, Chicot resolved to try the effect of injustice; injustice is one of the most powerful provocatives ever invented to make women, children, and inferiors speak, whatever their nature or disposition may be.

“It does not matter,” he said, as if he returned to his original idea; “it does not matter, you are a delightful little monk; but that you visit hostelries is certain, and what hostelries too! Those where beautiful ladies are to be found, and you stop outside in a state of ecstasy before the window, where you can see their shadow. Oh! little one, little one, I shall tell Dom Modeste all about it.”

The bolt hit its mark, more truly so even than Chicot had supposed; for when he began, he did not suspect that the wound had been so deep.

Jacques turned round like a serpent that had been trodden on.

“That is not true,” he cried, crimson with shame and anger, “I don’t look at women.”

“Yes, yes,” pursued Chicot; “on the contrary, there was an exceedingly pretty woman at the ‘Brave Chevalier’ when you left it, and you turned round to look at her again; and I know that you were waiting for her in the turret, and I know, too, that you spoke to her.”

Chicot proceeded by the inductive process.

Jacques could not contain himself any longer.

“I certainty have spoken to her!” he exclaimed; “is it a sin to speak to women?”

“No, when one does not speak to them of one’s own accord, and yielding to the temptation of Satan.”

"Satan has nothing whatever to do with the matter; it was absolutely necessary that I should speak to that lady, since I was desired to hand her a letter."

"Desired by Dom Modeste!" cried Chicot.

"Yes, go and complain to him now, if you like."

Chicot, bewildered, and feeling his way as it were in the dark, perceived, at these words, a gleam of light traversing the obscurity of his brain.

"Ah!" he said, "I knew it perfectly well."

"What did you know?"

"What you did not wish to tell me."

"I do not tell my own secrets, and, for a greater reason, the secrets of others."

"Yes, but to me."

"Why should I to you?"

"You should tell them to me because I am a friend of Dom Modeste, and, for another reason, you should tell them to me because — "

"Well?"

"Because I know beforehand all you could possibly have to tell me."

Jacques looked at Chicot and shook his head with an incredulous smile.

"Very good!" said Chicot, "would you like me to tell you what you do not wish to tell me?"

"I should indeed."

Chicot made an effort.

"In the first place," he said, "that poor Borromée — "

A dark expression passed across Jacques' face.

"Oh!" said the boy, "if I had been there — "

"Well! if you had been there?"

"The affair would not have turned out as it did."

"Would you have defended him against the Swiss with whom he got into a quarrel?"

"I would have defended him against every one."

"So that he would not have been killed?"

"Either that, or I should have got myself killed along with him."

"At all events, you were not there, so that the poor devil breathed his last in an obscure tavern, and in doing so pronounced Dom Modeste's name; is not that so?"

"Yes."

"Whereupon the people there informed Dom Modeste of it?"

"A man, seemingly scared out of his wits, who threw the whole convent into consternation."

"And Dom Modeste sent for his litter, and hastened to 'La Corne d'Abondance.'"

"How do you know that?"

"Oh! you don't know me yet, my boy; I am somewhat of a sorcerer, I can tell you."

Jacques drew back a couple of steps.

"That is not all," continued Chicot, who, as he spoke, began to see clearer by the light of his own words; "a letter was found in the dead man's pocket."

"A letter — yes, precisely so."

"And Dom Modeste charged his little Jacques to carry that letter to its address."

"Yes."

"And the little Jacques ran immediately to the Hotel de Guise."

"Oh!"

"Where he found no one."

"Bon Dieu!"

"But Monsieur de Mayneville."

"Good gracious!"

"And which same Monsieur de Mayneville conducted Jacques to the hostelry of the 'Brave Chevalier.'"

"Monsieur Briquet! Monsieur Briquet!" cried Jacques, "if you know that — "

"Eh! ventre de biche! you see very well that I do know it," exclaimed Chicot, feeling triumphant at having disentangled this secret, which was of such importance for him to learn, from the provoking intricacies in which it had been at first involved.

"In that case," returned Jacques, "you see very well, Monsieur Briquet, that I am not guilty."

"No," said Chicot, "you are not guilty in act, nor in omission, but you are guilty in thought."

"I!"

"I suppose there is no doubt you think the duchesse very beautiful?"

"I!!"

"And you turned round to look at her again through the window."

"I!!!"

The young monk colored and stammered out: "Well, it is true, she is exactly like a Virgin Mary which was placed over the head of my mother's bed."

"Oh!" muttered Chicot, "how much those people lose who are not curious!"

And thereupon he made little Clement, whom from this moment he held in his power, tell him all he had himself just told him, but this time with the details, which he could not possibly otherwise have known.

"You see," said Chicot, when he had finished, "what a poor fencing-master you had in Frere Borromée."

"Monsieur Briquet," said little Jacques, "one ought not to speak ill of the dead."

"No; but confess one thing."

"What?"

"That Borromée did not make such good use of his sword as the man who killed him." — "True."

"And now that is all I had to say to you. Good-night, Jacques; we shall meet again soon, and if you like — "

"What, Monsieur Briquet?"

"Why, I will give you lessons in fencing for the future."

"Oh! I shall be most thankful."

"And now off with you, my boy, for they are waiting for you impatiently at the priory."

"True, true. Thank you, Monsieur Briquet, for having reminded me of it."

And the little monk disappeared, running as fast as he could.

Chicot had a reason for dismissing his companion. He had extracted from him all he wished to know, and, on the other hand, there still remained something further for him to learn. He returned, therefore, as fast as he could to his own house. The litter, the bearers, and the horse were still at the door of the "Brave Chevalier."

He regained his gutter without making a noise.

The house opposite to his own was still lighted up, and from that moment all his attention was directed toward it.

In the first place, he observed, by a rent in the curtain, Ernanton walking up and down, apparently waiting with great impatience.

He then saw the litter return, saw Mayneville leave, and, lastly, he saw the duchess enter the room in which Ernanton, palpitating, and throbbing rather than breathing, impatiently awaited her return.

Ernanton kneeled before the duchess, who gave him her white hand to kiss. She then raised the young man from the ground, and made him sit down before her at a table which was most elegantly served.

“This is very singular,” said Chicot; “It began like a conspiracy, and finishes by a rendezvous.

“Yes,” continued Chicot, “but who appointed this rendezvous?

“Madame de Montpensier.”

And then, as a fresh light flashed through his brain, he murmured, “I entirely approve of your plan with regard to the Forty-five; only allow me to say, dear sister, that you will be conferring a greater honor on those fellows than they deserve.”

“Ventre de biche!” exclaimed Chicot, “I return to my original idea, — it is not a love affair, but a conspiracy.

“Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier is in love with Monsieur Ernanton de Carmainges; let us watch over this love affair of Madame la Duchesse.”

And Chicot watched until midnight had long passed, when Ernanton hastened away, his cloak concealing his face, while Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier returned to her litter.

“Now,” murmured Chicot, as he descended his own staircase, “what is that chance of death which is to deliver the Duc de Guise from the presumptive heir of the crown? who are those defunct persons who were thought to be dead, but are still living?

“Mordioux! I shall trace them before long.”

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

LE CARDINAL DE JOYEUSE.

Youth has its obstinate resolutions, both as regards good and evil in the world, which are by no means inferior to the inflexibility of purpose of maturer years.

When directed toward good purposes, instances of this dogged obstinacy of character produce what are termed the great actions of life, and impress on the man who enters life an impulse which bears him onward, by a natural course, toward a heroism of character of some kind or another.

In this way Bayard and Du Gueselin became great captains, from having been the most ill-tempered and most intractable children that ever existed; in the same way, too, the swineherd, whom nature had made the herdsman of Montalte, and whose genius had converted him into Sexte-Quinte, became a great pope, because he had persisted in performing his duties as a swineherd in an indifferent manner.

Again, in the same way were the worst Spartan natures displayed in a heroic sense, after they had commenced life by a persistence in dissimulation and cruelty.

All we have now to sketch is the portrait of a man of an ordinary stamp; and yet, more than one biographer would have found in Henri du Bouchage, at twenty years of age, the materials for a great man.

Henri obstinately persisted in his affection and in his seclusion from the world; as his brother had begged and as the king had required him to do, he remained for some days closeted alone with his one enduring thought; and then, when that thought had become more and more fixed and unchangeable in its nature, he one morning decided to pay a visit to his brother the cardinal, an important personage, who, at the age of twenty-six, had already for two years past been a cardinal, and who, from the archbishopric of Narbonne, had passed to the highest degrees of ecclesiastical dignity, a position to which he was indebted as much to his noble descent as to his powerful intellect.

Francois de Joyeuse, whom we have already introduced with the object of enlightening Henri de Valois respecting the doubt he had entertained with regard to Sylla — Francois de Joyeuse, young and worldly-minded, handsome and witty, was one of the most remarkable men of the period. Ambitious by nature, but circumspect by calculation and position, Francois de Joyeuse could assume as his device, “Nothing is too much,” and justify his device.

The only one, perhaps, of all those who belonged to the court — and Francois de Joyeuse was attached to the court in a very especial manner — he had been able to create for himself two means of support out of the religious and lay thrones to which he in some measure approximated as a French gentleman, and as a prince of the church; Sixtus protected him against Henri III., Henri III. protected him against Sixtus. He was an Italian at Paris, a Parisian at Rome, magnificent and able everywhere.

The sword alone of Joyeuse, the high admiral, gave the latter more weight in the balance; but it might be noticed from certain smiles of the cardinal, that if those temporal arms failed him, which the hand of his brother, refined and admired as he was, wielded so successfully, he himself knew not only how to use, but also how to abuse, the spiritual weapons which had been intrusted to him by the sovereign head of the Church.

The Cardinal Francois de Joyeuse had very rapidly become a wealthy man, wealthy in the first place from his own patrimony, and then from his different benefices. At that period the Church was richly endowed — very richly endowed even, and when its treasures were exhausted, it knew the sources, which at the present day are exhausted, where and whence to renew them.

Francois de Joyeuse, therefore, lived in the most magnificent manner. Leaving to his brother all the pageantry and glitter of a military household, he crowded his salons with priests, bishops and archbishops; he gratified his own individual peculiar fancies. On his attaining the dignity of cardinal, as he was a prince of the church, and consequently superior to his brother, he had added to his household pages according to the Italian fashion, and guards according to that which prevailed at the French court. But these guards and pages were used by him as a still greater means of enjoying liberty of action. He frequently ranged his guards and pages round a huge litter, through the curtains of which his secretary passed his gloved hand, while he himself on horseback, his sword by his side, rode through the town disguised with a wig, an enormous ruff round his neck, and horseman's boots, the sound of which delighted him beyond measure.

The cardinal lived, therefore, in the enjoyment of the greatest consideration, for, at certain elevated positions in life, human fortunes are absorbing in their nature, and, as if they were composed of nothing else but of adhesive particles, oblige all other fortunes to attend on and follow them like satellites; and on that account, therefore, the recent and marvelous successes of his brother Anne reflected on him all the brilliancy of those achievements. Moreover, as he had scrupulously followed the precept of concealing his mode of life, and of dispensing and diffusing his mental wealth, he was only known by the better sides of his character, and in his own family was accounted a very great man, a happiness which many sovereigns, laden with glory and crowned with the acclamations of a whole nation, have not enjoyed.

It was to this prelate that the Comte du Bouchage betook himself after his explanation with his brother, and after his conversation with the king of France; but, as we have already observed, he allowed a few days to elapse in token of obedience to the injunction which had been imposed on him by his elder brother, as well as by the king.

Francois resided in a beautiful mansion in that part of Paris called La Cité. The immense courtyard was never quite free from cavaliers and litters; but the prelate, whose garden was immediately contiguous to the bank of the river, allowed his courtyards and his antechambers to become crowded with courtiers; and as he had a mode of egress toward the river-bank, and a boat close thereto, which conveyed him without any disturbance as far and as quietly as he chose, it not unfrequently happened that the courtiers uselessly waited to see the prelate, who availed himself of the pretext of a serious indisposition, or a rigid penance, to postpone his reception for the day. For him it was a realization of Italy in the bosom of the capital of the king of France, it was Venice embraced by the two arms of the Seine.

Francois was proud, but by no means vain; he loved his friends as brothers, and his brothers nearly as much as his friends. Five years older than Du Bouchage, he withheld from him neither good nor evil counsel, neither his purse nor his smile.

But as he wore his cardinal's costume with wonderful effect, Du Bouchage thought him handsome, noble, almost formidable, and accordingly respected him more, perhaps, than he did the elder of them both. Henri, with his beautiful cuirass, and the glittering accessories of his military costume, tremblingly confided his love affairs to Anne, while he would not have dared to confess himself to Francois.

However, when he proceeded to the cardinal's hotel, his resolution was taken, and he accosted, frankly enough, the confessor first, and the friend afterward.

He entered the courtyard, which several gentlemen were at that moment quitting, wearied at having solicited without having obtained the favor of an audience.

He passed through the antechambers, salons, and then the more private apartments. He had been told, as others had, that his brother was engaged in conference; but the idea of closing any of the doors before Du Bouchage never occurred to any of the attendants.

Du Bouchage, therefore, passed through all the apartments until he reached the garden, a true garden of a Roman prelate, luxurious in its shade, coolness, and perfume, such as, at the present day, may be found at the Villa Pamphile or the Palais Borghese.

Henri paused under a group of trees: at this moment the gate close to the river side rolled on its hinges, and a man shrouded in a large brown cloak passed through, followed by a person in a page's costume. The man, perceiving Henri, who was too absorbed in his reverie to think of him, glided through the trees, avoiding the observation either of Du Bouchage or of any one else.

Henri paid no attention to this mysterious entry; and it was only as he turned round that he saw the man entering the apartments.

After he had waited about ten minutes, and as he was about to enter the house, for the purpose of interrogating one of the attendants with the view of ascertaining at what hour precisely his brother would be visible, a servant, who seemed to be in search of him, observed his approach, and advancing in his direction, begged him to have the goodness to pass into the library, where the cardinal awaited him.

Henri complied with this invitation, but not very readily, as he conjectured that a fresh contest would result from it; he found his brother the cardinal engaged, with the assistance of a valet-de-chambre, in trying on a prelate's costume, a little worldly-looking, perhaps, in its shape and fashion, but elegant and becoming in its style.

"Good-morning, comte," said the cardinal; "what news have you?"

“Excellent news, as far as our family is concerned,” said Henri. “Anne, you know, has covered himself with glory in that retreat from Anvers, and is alive.”

“Heaven be praised! and are you too, Henri, safe and sound?”

“Yes, my brother.”

“You see,” said the cardinal, “that Heaven holds us in its keeping.”

“I am so full of gratitude to Heaven, my brother, that I have formed the project of dedicating myself to its service. I am come to talk seriously to you upon this project, which is now well matured, and about which I have already spoken to you.”

“Do you still keep to that idea, Du Bouchage?” said the cardinal, allowing a slight exclamation to escape him, which was indicative that Joyeuse would have a struggle to encounter.

“I do.”

“But it is impossible, Henri,” returned the cardinal; “have you not been told so already?”

“I have not listened to what others have said to me, my brother, because a voice stronger than mine, which speaks within me, prevents me from listening to anything which would turn me aside from my purpose.”

“You cannot be so ignorant of the things of this world, Henri,” said the cardinal, in his most serious tone of voice, “to believe that the voice you allude to was really that of Heaven; on the contrary — I assert it positively, too — it is altogether a feeling of a worldly nature which addresses you. Heaven has nothing to do in this affair; do not abuse that holy name, therefore, and, above all, do not confound the voice of Heaven with, that of earth.”

“I do not confound, my brother; I only mean to say that something irresistible in its nature hurries me toward retreat and solitude.”

“So far, so good, Henri; we are now making use of proper expressions. Well, my dear brother, I will tell you what is to be done. Taking what you say for granted, I am going to render you the happiest of men.”

“Thank you, oh! thank you, my brother.”

“Listen to me, Henri. You must take money, a couple of attendants, and travel through the whole of Europe, in a manner befitting a son of the house to which we belong. You will see foreign countries; Tartary, Russia, even the Laplanders, those fabulous nations whom the sun never visits; you will become absorbed in your thoughts, until the devouring germ which is at work in you becomes either extinct or satiated; and, after that, you will return to us again.”

Henri, who had been seated, now rose, more serious than his brother had been.

“You have not understood me, monseigneur,” he said.

“I beg your pardon, Henri; you made use of the words ‘retreat and solitude.’“

“Yes, I did so; but by retreat and solitude, I meant a cloister, and not traveling; to travel is to enjoy life still. I wish almost to suffer death, and if I do not suffer it, at least to feel it.”

“That is an absurd thought, allow me to say, Henri; for whoever, in point of fact, wishes to isolate himself, is alone everywhere. But the cloister, let it be. Well, then, I understand that you have come to talk to me about this project. I know of some very learned Benedictines, and some very clever Augustines, whose houses are cheerful, adorned with flowers, attractive, and agreeable in every respect. Amid the works of science and art you will pass a delightful year, in excellent society, which is of no slight importance, for one should avoid lowering one’s self in this world; and if at the end of the year you persist in your project, well, then, my dear Henri, I will not oppose you any further, and will myself open the door which will peacefully conduct you to everlasting rest.”

“Most certainly you still misunderstand me, my brother,” replied Du Bouchage, shaking his head, “or I should rather say your generous intelligence will not comprehend me. I do not wish for a cheerful residence or a delightful retreat, but a rigorously strict seclusion, as gloomy as the grave itself. I intend to pronounce my vows, vows which will leave me no other thought or occupation than a grave to dig for myself, or constant prayer.”

The cardinal frowned, and rose from his seat.

“Yes,” he said, “I did perfectly understand you; and I endeavored by opposition, without set phrases or discussion, to combat the folly of your resolutions, but you oblige me to do so; and now listen to me.”

“Ah!” said Henri, despondently, “do not try to convince me; it is impossible.”

“Brother, I will speak to you in the name of Heaven, in the first place; of Heaven, which you offend in saying that this wild resolution is of its inspiration. Heaven does not accept sacrifices hastily made. You are weak, since you allow yourself to be conquered by a first disappointment; how can Heaven be pleased to accept a victim as unworthy as that you offer?”

Henri started at his brother’s remark.

“Oh! I shall no longer spare you. Henri, you, who never consider any of us,” returned the cardinal; “you, who forget the grief which you will cause our elder brother, and will cause me too — ”

“Forgive me,” interrupted Henri, whose cheeks were dyed with crimson, “forgive me, monseigneur; but is the service of Heaven then so gloomy and so dishonorable a career that all the members of a family are to be thrown into distress by it? You, for instance, my brother, whose portrait I observe suspended in this room, with all this gold, and diamonds, and purple around you, are you not both the delight and honor of our house, although you have chosen the service of Heaven, as my eldest brother has chosen that of the kings of the earth?”

“Boy, boy!” exclaimed the cardinal impatiently, “you will make me believe your brain is turned. What! will you venture to compare my residence to a cloister? my hundred attendants, my outriders, the gentlemen of my suite, and my guards, to a cell and a broom, which are the only arms and the sole wealth of a cloister? Are you mad? Did you not just now say that you repudiate these superfluities — these pictures, precious vases, pomp and distinction, which I cannot do without? Have you, as I have, the desire and hope of placing on your brow the tiara of St. Peter? That, indeed, is a career, Henri; one presses onward toward it, struggles for it, lives in it. But as for you! it is the miner’s pick, the trappist’s spade, the gravedigger’s tomb, that you desire; utter abandonment of life, of pleasure, of hope; and all that — I blush with shame for you, a man — all that, I say, because you love a woman who loves you not. You do foul injustice to your race, Henri, most truly.”

“Brother!” exclaimed the young man, pale as death, while his eyes blazed with kindling fire, “would you sooner have me blow out my brains, or plunge in my heart the sword I have the honor to wear by my side? Pardieu, monseigneur, if you, who are cardinal and prince besides, will give me absolution for so mortal a sin, the affair will be so quickly done that you shall have no time to complete your odious and unworthy thought that I am capable of dishonoring my race, which, Heaven be praised, a Joyeuse will never do.”

“Come, come, Henri,” said the cardinal, drawing his brother toward him, and pressing him in his arms; “come, forget what has passed, and think of those who love you. I have personal motives for entreating you. Listen to me; a rare occurrence in this world of ours, we are all happy, some from feelings of gratified ambition, the others from blessings of every kind with which Heaven has bedecked our existence. Do not, I implore you, Henri, cast the mortal poison of the retreat you speak of upon our family happiness; think how our father would be grieved at it; think, too, how all of us would bear on our countenances the dark reflection of the bitter mortification you are about to inflict upon us. I beseech yon, Henri, to allow yourself to be persuaded; the cloister will not benefit you.

“I do not say that you will die there, for, misguided man, your answer will be a smile, which alas, would be only too intelligible for me. No, believe me that the cloister is more fatal to you than the tomb. The tomb annihilates but life itself, the cloister annihilates intelligence; the cloister bows the head, instead of raising it to heaven; the cold, humid atmosphere of the vaults passes by degrees into the blood, and penetrates the very marrow of the bones, changing the cloistered recluse into another granite statue in the convent. My brother, my dear brother, take heed; our time here below is but brief; youth visits us but once in our lives. The bright years of our earlier days will pass away too, for you are under the influence of a deep-seated grief; but at thirty years of age you will have become a man, the vigor of maturity will have then arrived; it will hurry away with it all that remains of your wornout sorrow, and then you will wish to live over again; but it will be too late. Then, too, you will have grown melancholy in thought, plain in person, suffering in feeling; passion will have been extinguished in your heart, the bright light of your eye will have become quenched. They whose society you seek will flee you as a whited sepulcher, whose darksome depths repel every glance. Henri, I speak as a friend, seriously, wisely; listen to me.”

The young man remained unmoved and silent. The cardinal hoped that he had touched his feelings, and had shaken his resolution.

“Try some other resource, Henri. Carry this poisoned shaft, which rankles in your bosom, about with you wherever you may go, in the turmoil of life; cherish its companionship at our fetes and banquets; imitate the wounded deer, which flees through the thickets and brakes and forests, in its efforts to draw out from its body the arrow which is rankling in the wound; sometimes the arrow falls."

"For pity's sake," said Henri, "do not persist any more; what I solicit is not the caprice of a moment, or the reflection of an hour; it is the result of a laborious and painful determination. In Heaven's name, therefore, my brother, I adjure you to accord me the favor I solicit."

"And what is the favor you ask?"

"A dispensation, monseigneur."

"For what purpose?"

"To shorten my noviciate."

"Ah! I knew it, Du Bouchage. You are worldly-minded even in your rigorousness, my poor boy. Oh! I know very well what reason you are going to give me. Yes, you are, indeed, a man of the world; you resemble those young men who offer themselves as volunteers, and are eagerly desirous for fire, balls, and blows, but care not for working in the trenches, or for sweeping out the tents. There is some resource left yet, Henri; so much the better, so much the better."

"Give me the dispensation I ask; I entreat you on my knees."

"I promise it to you; I will write to Rome for it. It will be a month before the answer arrives; but, in exchange, promise me one thing."

"Name it."

"That you will not, during this month's postponement, reject any pleasure or amusement which may be offered to you; and if, in a month hence, you still entertain the same projects, Henri, I will give you this dispensation with my own hand. Are you satisfied now, and have you nothing further to ask me?"

"No. I thank you; but a month is a long time, and the delay will kill me."

"In the meantime, and in order to change your thoughts, will you object to breakfast with me? I have some agreeable companions this morning."

And the prelate smiled in a manner which the most worldly disposed favorites of Henri III. would have envied.

"Brother," said De Bouchage, resisting.

"I will not accept any excuse; you have no one but myself here, since you have just arrived from Flanders, and your own house cannot be in order just yet."

With these words the cardinal rose, and drawing aside a *portière*, which hung before a large cabinet sumptuously furnished, he said:

“Come, comtesse, let us persuade Monsieur le Comte du Bouchage to stay with us.”

At the very moment, however, when the count drew aside the *portière*, Henri had observed, half reclining upon the cushions, the page who had with the gentleman entered the gate adjoining the banks of the river, and in this page, before even the prelate had announced her sex, he had recognized a woman.

An indefinable sensation, like a sudden terror, or an overwhelming feeling of dread, seized him, and while the worldly cardinal advanced to take the beautiful page by the hand, Henri du Bouchage darted from the apartment, and so quickly, too, that when Francois returned with the lady, smiling with the hope of winning a heart back again to the world, the room was perfectly empty.

Francois frowned; then, seating himself before a table covered with papers and letters, he hurriedly wrote a few lines.

“May I trouble you to ring, dear countess,” he said, “since you have your hand near the bell.”

And as the page obeyed, a valet-de-chambre in the confidence of the cardinal appeared.

“Let a courier start on horseback, without a moment’s loss of time,” said Francois, “and take this letter to Monsieur le Grand-amiral à Chateau-Thierry.”

CHAPTER LXXXV.

NEWS FROM AURILLY.

On the following day the king was working at the Louvre with the superintendent of finances, when an attendant entered to inform his majesty that Monsieur de Joyeuse, the eldest son of that family, had just arrived, and was waiting for him in the large audience chamber, having come from Chateau-Thierry, with a message from Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou.

The king precipitately left the business which occupied him, and ran to meet a friend whom he regarded with so much affection.

A large number of officers and courtiers crowded the cabinet; the queen-mother had arrived that evening, escorted by her maids of honor, and these light-hearted girls were, like suns, always attended by their satellites.

The king gave Joyeuse his hand to kiss, and glanced with a satisfied expression around the assembly.

In the angle of the entrance door, in his usual place, stood Henry du Bouchage, rigorously discharging his service and the duties which were imposed on him.

The king thanked him, and saluted him with a friendly recognition, to which Henri replied by a profound reverence.

This good intelligence which prevailed between them made Joyeuse turn his head and smilingly look at his brother, without, however, saluting him in too marked a manner, from the fear of violating etiquette.

"Sire," said Joyeuse, "I am sent to your majesty by Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou, recently returned from the expedition to Flanders."

"Is my brother well, Monsieur l'Amiral?" inquired the king.

"As well, sire, as the state of his mind will permit; however, I will not conceal from your majesty that he appears to be suffering greatly."

"He must need something to change the current of his thoughts after his misfortune," said the king, delighted at the opportunity of proclaiming the check which his brother had met with, while appearing to pity him.

"I believe he does, sire."

"We have been informed that the disaster had been most severe."

"Sire — "

"But that, thanks to you, a great portion of the army had been saved; thanks, Monsieur l'Amiral, thanks. Does poor Monsieur d'Anjou wish to see us?"

"Most anxiously so, sire."

"In that case we will see him. Are not you of that opinion, madame?" said Henri, turning toward Catherine, whose heart was wrung with feelings, the expression of which her face determinedly concealed.

"Sire," she replied, "I should have gone alone to meet my son; but since your majesty condescends to join with me in this mark of kind consideration, the journey will be a party of pleasure for me."

"You will accompany us, messieurs," said the king to the courtiers; "we will set off to-morrow, and I shall sleep at Meaux."

"Shall I at once announce this excellent news to monseigneur, sire?"

"Not so; what! leave me so soon, Monsieur l'Amiral? not so, indeed. I can well understand that a Joyeuse must be loved and sought after by my brother, but we have two of the same family, thank Heaven. Du Bouchage, you will start for Chateau-Thierry, if you please."

"Sire," said Henri, "may I be permitted, after having announced your majesty's arrival to Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou, to return to Paris?"

"You may do as you please, Du Bouchage," said the king.

Henri bowed and advanced toward the door. Fortunately Joyeuse was watching him narrowly.

"Will you allow me to say one word to my brother?" he inquired.

"Do so; but what is it?" said the king in an undertone.

"The fact is, that he wishes to use the utmost speed to execute the commission, and to return again immediately, which happens to interfere with my projects, sire, and with those of the cardinal."

"Away with you, then, and rate this love-sick swain most roundly."

Anne hurried after his brother, and overtook him in the antechambers.

"Well!" said Joyeuse; "you are setting off very eagerly, Henri."

"Of course, my brother!"

"Because you wish to return here soon again?"

"That is quite true."

"You do not intend, then, to stay any time at Chateau-Thierry?"

"As little as possible."

“Why so?”

“Where others are amusing themselves is not my place.”

“On the contrary, Henri, it is precisely because Monseigneur le Duc d’Anjou is about to give some fetes that you should remain at Chateau-Thierry.”

“It is impossible.”

“Because of your wish for retirement, and of the austere projects you have in view?” — ”Yes.”

“You have been to the king to solicit a dispensation?”

“Who told you so?”

“I know it to be the case.”

“It is true, then, for I have been to him.”

“You will not obtain it.”

“Why so, my brother?”

“Because the king has no interest in depriving himself of such a devoted servant as you are.”

“My brother, the cardinal, will therefore do what his majesty will be disinclined to do.”

“And all that for a woman?”

“Anne, I entreat you, do not persist any further.”

“Ah! do not fear that I shall begin over again; but, once for all, let us to the point. You set off for Chateau-Thierry; well, instead of returning as hurriedly as you seem disposed to do, I wish you to wait for me in my apartments there; it is a long time since we have lived together. I particularly wish to be with you again, you understand.”

“You are going to Chateau-Thierry to amuse yourself, Anne, and if I were to remain there I should poison all your pleasures.”

“Oh! far from that, I do not care for them; I am of a happy temperament, and quite fitted to drive away all your fits of melancholy.”

“Brother — ”

“Permit me, comte,” said the admiral, with an imperious air of command, “I am the representative of our father here, and I enjoin you to wait for me at Chateau-Thierry. You will find out my apartment, which will be your own also; it is on the ground floor, looking out on the park.”

“If you command me to do so, my brother,” said Henri, with a resigned air.

"Call it by what name you please, comte, desire or command; but await my arrival."

"I will obey you, my brother."

"And I am persuaded that you will not be angry with me for it," added Joyeuse, pressing the young man in his arms.

The latter withdrew from the fraternal embrace, somewhat ungraciously, perhaps, ordered his horses, and immediately set off for Chateau-Thierry. He hurried thither with the anger of a vexed and disappointed man; that is to say, he pressed his horses to the top of their speed.

The same evening, he was slowly ascending, before nightfall, the hill on which Chateau-Thierry is situated, with the river Marne flowing at its feet.

At his name, the doors of the chateau flew open before him, but, as far as an audience was concerned, he was more than an hour before he could obtain it.

The prince, some told him, was in his apartments; others said he was asleep; he was practicing music, the valet-de-chambre supposed. No one, however, among the attendants could give a positive reply.

Henri persisted, in order that he might no longer have to think of his service on the king, so that he might abandon himself from that moment to his melancholy thoughts unrestrained.

Won over by his perseverance, it being well known too that he and his brother were on the most intimate terms with the duke, Henri was ushered into one of the salons on the first floor, where the prince at last consented to receive him.

Half an hour passed away, and the shades of evening insensibly closed in.

The heavy and measured footsteps of the Duc d'Anjou resounded in the gallery, and Henri, on recognizing them, prepared to discharge his mission with the accustomed formal ceremonies. But the prince, who seemed very much pressed, quickly dispensed with these formalities on the part of his ambassador, by taking him by the hand and embracing him.

"Good-day, comte," he said; "why should they have given you the trouble to come and see a poor defeated general?"

"The king has sent me, monseigneur, to inform you that he is exceedingly desirous of seeing your highness, and that in order to enable you to recover from your fatigue, his majesty will himself come and pay a visit to Chateau-Thierry, to-morrow at the latest."

"The king will be here to-morrow!" exclaimed Francois, with a gesture of impatience, but recovering himself immediately afterward.

"To-morrow, to-morrow," he resumed; "why, the truth is, that nothing will be in readiness, either here or in the town, to receive his majesty."

Henri bowed, as one whose duty it had been to transmit an order, but whose province it was not to comment upon it.

"The extreme haste which their majesties have to see your royal highness has not allowed them to think of the embarrassment they may be the means of occasioning."

"Well, well," said the prince, hurriedly, "it is for me to make the best use of the time I have at my disposal. I leave you, therefore, Henri; thanks for the alacrity you have shown, for you have traveled fast, I perceive. Go and take some rest."

"Your highness has no other orders to communicate to me?" Henri inquired, respectfully.

"None. Go and lie down. You shall dine in your own apartment. I hold no reception this evening; I am suffering and ill at ease; I have lost my appetite, and cannot sleep, which makes my life a sad, dreary one, and which, you understand, I do not choose to inflict upon any one else. By-the-by, you have heard the news?"

"No, monseigneur; what news?"

"Aurilly has been eaten up by the wolves — "

"Aurilly!" exclaimed Henri, with surprise.

"Yes, yes — devoured! It is singular how every one who comes near me dies a violent death. Good-night, count; may you sleep well!"

And the prince hurried away rapidly.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

DOUBT.

Henri descended the staircase, and as he passed through the antechambers, observed many officers of his acquaintance, who ran forward to meet him, and, with many marks of friendship, offered to show him the way to his brother's apartments, which were situated at one of the angles of the chateau. It was the library that the duke had given Joyeuse to reside in during his residence at Chateau-Thierry.

Two salons, furnished in the style of Francois the First, communicated with each other, and terminated in the library, the latter apartment looking out on the gardens.

His bed had been put up in the library. Joyeuse was of an indolent, yet of a cultivated turn of mind. If he stretched out his arm he laid his hand on science; if he opened the windows he could enjoy the beauties of nature. Finer and superior organizations require more satisfying enjoyments; and the morning breeze, the song of birds, or the perfumes of flowers, added fresh delight to the triplets of Clement Marot, or to the odes of Rousard.

Henri determined to leave everything as it was, not because he was influenced by the poetic sybaritism of his brother, but, on the contrary, from indifference, and because it mattered little to him whether he was there or elsewhere.

But as the count, in whatever frame of mind he might be, had been brought up never to neglect his duty or respect toward the king or the princes of the royal family of France, he inquired particularly in what part of the chateau the prince had resided since his return.

By mere accident, in this respect, Henri met with an excellent cicerone in the person of the young ensign, who, by some act of indiscretion or another, had, in the little village in Flanders where we represented the personages in this tale as having halted for a moment, communicated the count's secret to the prince. This ensign had not quitted the prince's side since his return, and could inform Henri very accurately on the subject.

On his arrival at Chateau-Thierry, the prince had at first entered upon a course of reckless dissipation. At that time he occupied the state apartments of the chateau, had receptions morning and evening, and was engaged during the day stag-hunting in the forest; but since the intelligence of Aurilly’s death, which had reached the prince without its being known from what source, the prince had retired to a pavilion situated in the middle of the park. This pavilion, which was an almost inaccessible retreat except to the intimate associates of the prince, was hidden from view by the dense foliage of the surrounding trees, and could hardly be perceived above their lofty summits, or through the thick foliage of the hedges.

It was to this pavilion that the prince had retired during the last few days. Those who did not know him well said that it was Aurilly’s death which had made him betake himself to this solitude; while those who were well acquainted with his character pretended that he was carrying out in this pavilion some base or infamous plot, which some day or another would be revealed to light.

A circumstance which rendered either of these suppositions much more probable was, that the prince seemed greatly annoyed whenever a matter of business or a visit summoned him to the chateau; and so decidedly was this the case, that no sooner had the visit been received, or the matter of business been dispatched, than he returned to his solitude, where he was waited upon only by the two old valets-de-chambre who had been present at his birth.

“Since this is the case,” observed Henri, “the fetes will not be very gay if the prince continue in this humor.”

“Certainly,” replied the ensign, “for every one will know how to sympathize with the prince’s grief, whose pride as well as whose affections had been so smitten.”

Henri continued his interrogatories without intending it, and took a strange interest in doing so. The circumstance of Aurilly’s death, whom he had known at the court, and whom he had again met in Flanders; the kind of indifference with which the prince had announced the loss he had met with; the strict seclusion in which it was said the prince had lived since his death — all this seemed to him, without his being able to assign a reason for his belief, as part of that mysterious and darkened web wherein, for some time past, the events of his life had been woven.

“And,” inquired he of the ensign, “it is not known, you say, how the prince became acquainted with the news of the death of Aurilly?”

“No.”

“But surely,” he insisted, “people must talk about it?”

“Oh! of course,” said the ensign; “true or false, you know, people always will talk.”

“Well, then, tell me what it is.”

“It is said that the prince was hunting under the willows close beside the river, and that he had wandered away from the others who were hunting also, for everything he does is by fits and starts, and he becomes as excited in the field as at play, or under fire, or under the influence of grief, when suddenly he was seen returning with a face scared and as pale as death.

“The courtiers questioned him, thinking that it was nothing more than a mere incident of the hunting-field.

“He held two rouleaux of gold in his hand.

“‘Can you understand this, messieurs?’ he said, in a hard dry voice; ‘Aurilly is dead; Aurilly has been eaten by the wolves.’

“Every one immediately exclaimed.

“‘Nay, indeed,’ said the prince; ‘may the foul fiend take me if it be not so; the poor lute-player had always been a far better musician than a horseman. It seems that his horse ran away with him, and that he fell into a pit, where he was killed; the next day a couple of travelers who were passing close to the pit discovered his body half eaten by the wolves; and a proof that the affair actually did happen, as I have related it, and that robbers have nothing whatever to do with the whole matter is, that here are two rouleaux of gold which he had about him, and which have been faithfully restored.’

“However, as no one had been seen to bring these two rouleaux of gold back,” continued the ensign, “it is supposed that they had been handed to the prince by the two travelers who, having met and recognized his highness on the banks of the river, had announced the intelligence of Aurilly’s death.”

“It is very strange,” murmured Henri.

“And what is more strange still,” continued the ensign, “is, that it is said — can it be true, or is it merely an invention? — it is said, I repeat, that the prince was seen to open the little gate of the park close to the chestnut trees, and that something like two shadows passed through that same gate. The prince then introduced two persons into the park — probably the two travelers; it is since that occasion that the prince has retired into his pavilion, and we have only been able to see him by stealth."

"And has no one seen these two travelers?" asked Henri.

"As I was proceeding to ask the prince the password for the night, for the sentinels on duty at the chateau, I met a man who did not seem to me to belong to his highness's household, but I was unable to observe his face, the man having turned aside as soon as he perceived me, and having let down the hood of his cloak over his eyes."

"The hood of his cloak, do you say?"

"Yes; the man looked like a Flemish peasant, and reminded me, I hardly know why, of the person by whom you were accompanied when we met out yonder."

Henri started; the observation seemed to him in some way connected with the profound and absorbing interest with which the story inspired him; to him, too, who had seen Diana and her companion confided to Aurilly, the idea occurred that the two travelers who had announced to the prince the death of the unfortunate lute-player were acquaintances of his own.

Henri looked attentively at the ensign.

"And when you fancied you recognized this man, what was the idea that occurred to you, monsieur?" he inquired.

"I will tell you what my impression was," replied the ensign; "however, I will not pretend to assert anything positively; the prince has not, in all probability, abandoned all idea with regard to Flanders; he therefore maintains spies in his employ. The man with the woolen overcoat is a spy, who, on his way here, may possibly have learned the accident which had happened to the musician, and may thus have been the bearer of two pieces of intelligence at the same time."

"That is not improbable," said Henri, thoughtfully; "but what was this man doing when you saw him?"

"He was walking beside the hedge which borders the parterre — you can see the hedge from your windows — and was making toward the conservatories."

"You say, then, that the two travelers, for I believe you stated there were two — "

"Others say that two persons were seen to enter, but I only saw one, the man in the overcoat."

"In that case, then, you have reason to believe that the man in the overcoat, as you describe him, is living in the conservatories."

"It is not unlikely."

"And have these conservatories a means of exit?"

"Yes, count, toward the town."

Henri remained silent for some time; his heart was throbbing most violently, for these details, which were apparently matters of indifference to him, who seemed throughout the whole of this mystery as if he were gifted with the power of prevision, were, in reality, full of the deepest interest for him.

Night had in the meantime closed in, and the two young men were conversing together without any light in Joyeuse's apartment.

Fatigued by his journey, oppressed by the strange events which had just been related to him, unable to struggle against the emotions which they had aroused in his breast, the count had thrown himself on his brother's bed, and mechanically directed his gaze toward the deep blue heavens above him, which seemed set as with diamonds.

The young ensign was seated on the ledge of the window, and voluntarily abandoned himself to that listlessness of thought, to that poetic reverie of youth, to that absorbing languor of feeling, which the balmy freshness of evening inspires.

A deep silence reigned throughout the park and the town; the gates were closed, the lights were kindled by degrees, the dogs in the distance were barking in their kennels at the servants, on whom devolved the duty of shutting up the stables in the evening.

Suddenly the ensign rose to his feet, made a sign of attention with his head, leaned out of the window, and then, calling in a quick, low tone to the count, who was reclining on the bed, said:

"Come, come!"

"What is the matter?" Henri inquired, arousing himself by a strong effort from his reverie.

"The man! the man!"

"What man?"

"The man in the overcoat, the spy!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Henri, springing from the bed to the window, and leaning on the ensign.

“Stay,” continued the ensign; “do you see him yonder? He is creeping along the hedge; wait a moment, he will show himself again. Now look toward that spot which is illuminated by the moon’s rays, there he is; there he is.”

“Yes.”

“Do you not think he is a sinister-looking fellow?”

“Sinister is the very word,” replied Du Bouchage, in a gloomy voice.

“Do you believe he is a spy?”

“I believe nothing, and yet I believe everything.”

“See, he is going from the prince’s pavilion to the conservatories.”

“The prince’s pavilion is in that direction, then?” inquired Du Bouchage, indicating with his finger the direction from which the stranger appeared to be proceeding.

“Do you see that light whose rays are trembling through the leaves of the trees.” — ”Well?”

“That is the dining-room.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Henri, “see, he makes his appearance again.”

“Yes, he is no doubt going to the conservatories to join his companion? Did you hear that?”

“What?”

“The sound of a key turning in the lock.”

“It is singular,” said Du Bouchage; “there is nothing unusual in all this, and yet — ”

“And yet you are trembling, you were going to say?”

“Yes,” said the count; “but what is that?”

The sound of a bell was heard.

“It is the signal for the supper of the prince’s household; are you going to join us at supper, count?”

“No, I thank you, I do not require anything; and, if I should feel hungry, I will call for what I may need.”

“Do not wait for that, monsieur; but come and amuse yourself in our society.”

“Nay, nay, it is impossible.”

“Why so?”

“His royal highness almost directed me to have what I should need served to me in my own apartment; but do not let me delay you.”

“Thank you, count, good-evening; do not lose sight of our phantom.”

“Oh! rely upon me for that; unless,” added Henri, who feared he might have said too much, “unless, indeed, I should be overtaken by sleep, which seems more than probable, and a far more healthy occupation than that of watching shadows and spies.”

“Certainly,” said the ensign, laughingly, as he took leave of Henri du Bouchage.

Hardly had he quitted the library than Henri darted into the garden.

“Oh!” he murmured, “it is Remy! it is Remy! I should know him again in the darkness of hell itself.”

And the young man, as he felt his knees tremble beneath him, buried his burning forehead in his cold damp hands.

“Great Heaven!” he cried, “is not this rather a phantasy of my poor fevered brain, and is it not written that in my slumbering and in my waking moments, day and night, I should ever see those two figures who have made so deep and dark a furrow in my life?

“Why,” he continued, like a man aware of the need that exists of convincing himself, “why, indeed, should Remy be here in this chateau, while the Duc d’Anjou is here? What is his motive in coming here? What can the Duc d’Anjou possibly have to do with Remy? And why should he have quitted Diana — he, who is her eternal companion? No; it is not he.”

Then, again, a moment afterward, a conviction, thorough, profound, almost instinctive in its nature, seemed to overcome all the doubts he had entertained.

“It is he! it is he!” he murmured, in utter despair, and leaning against the wall to save himself from falling. As he finished giving utterance to this overpowering, overwhelming thought, which seemed to crush all others in his mind, the sharp sound of the lock was again heard, and, although the sound was almost imperceptible, his overexcited senses detected it instantly. An indefinable shudder ran through the young man’s whole frame; again he listened with eager attention. So profound a silence reigned around him on every side that he could hear the throbbings of his own heart. A few minutes passed away without anything he expected making its appearance. In default of his eyes, however, his ears told him that some one was approaching, for he heard the sound of the gravel under the advancing footsteps. Suddenly the straight black line of the hedge seemed broken; he imagined he saw upon this dark background a group still darker moving along.

“It is he returning again,” murmured Henri. “Is he alone, or is some one with him?”

The objects advanced from the side where the silver light of the moon had illuminated a space of open ground. It was at the very moment when, advancing in the opposite direction, the man in the overcoat crossed this open space, that Henri fancied he recognized Remy. This time Henri observed two shadows very distinctly; it was impossible he could be mistaken. A death-like chill struck to his heart, and seemed to have turned it to marble.

The two shadows walked quickly along, although with a firm step; the former was dressed in a woolen overcoat, and at the appearance of the second apparition, as at that of the first, the count fancied he recognized Remy.

The second, who was completely enveloped in a large man’s cloak, seemed to defy every attempt at recognition.

And yet, beneath that cloak, Henri fancied he could detect what no human eye could have possibly seen.

He could not control a deep bitter groan of despair, and no sooner had the two mysterious personages disappeared behind the hedge than the young man darted after them, and stealthily glided from one group of trees to another, in the wake of those whom he was so anxious to discover.

“Oh!” he murmured, as he stole along, “do I not indeed deceive myself? Oh! Heaven, can it really be possible?”

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

CERTAINTY.

Henri glided along the hedge on the side which was thrown into deep shade, taking care to make no noise either on the gravel or against the trees.

Obliged to walk carefully, and while walking to watch carefully over every movement he made, he could not perceive anything. And yet, by his style, his dress, his walk, he still fancied he recognized Remy in the man who wore the overcoat.

Mere conjectures, more terrifying for him than realities, arose in his mind with regard to this man's companion.

The road which they were following, and which was bounded by a row of elms, terminated in a high hawthorn hedge, which separated from the rest of the park the pavilion of the Duc d'Anjou, and enveloped it as with a curtain of verdure, in the midst of which, as has been already observed, it entirely disappeared in a remote corner of the grounds of the chateau. There were several beautiful sheets of water, dark underwood, through which winding paths had been cut, and venerable trees, over the summits of which the moon was shedding its streams of silver light, while underneath the gloom was thick, dark, and impenetrable.

As he approached this hedge, Henri felt that his heart was on the point of failing him. In fact, to transgress so boldly the prince's orders, and to abandon himself to a course of conduct as indiscreet as it was rash, was the act, not of a loyal and honorable man, but of a mean and cowardly spy, or of a jealous man driven to extremities. But as, while opening the gate, which separated the greater from the smaller park, the man he followed moved in such a way that his features were revealed, and as he perceived that these features were indeed those of Remy, the count's scruples vanished, and he resolutely advanced at all hazards. Henri found the gate again closed; he leaped over the railings, and then continued his pursuit of the prince's two strange visitors, who still seemed to be hurrying onward. Another cause of terror was soon added; for the duke, on hearing the footsteps of Remy and his companion upon the gravel walk, made his appearance from the pavilion. Henri threw himself behind the largest of the trees, and waited.

He could not see anything, except that he observed that Remy made a very low salutation, that Remy's companion courtesied like a woman, instead of bowing like a man, and that the duke, seemingly transported with delight, offered his arm to the latter, in the same way as he would have done to a woman. Then all three advanced toward the pavilion, disappeared under the vestibule, and the door closed behind them.

"This must end," said Henri, "and I must seek a more convenient place, where I can see everything that may pass without being seen."

He decided in favor of a clump of trees situated between the pavilion and the wall, from the center of which the waters of a fountain gushed forth, thus forming an impenetrable place of concealment; for it was not likely that in the night-time, with the freshness and humidity which would naturally be found near this fountain, the prince would seek the vicinity of the water and the thickets. Hidden behind the statue with which the fountain was ornamented, and standing at his full height behind the pedestal, Henri was enabled to see what was taking place in the pavilion, the principal window of which was quite open before him.

As no one could, or rather, as no one would, venture to penetrate so far, no precautions had been taken.

A table was laid, sumptuously served with the richest viands, and with rare wines in bottles of costly Venetian glass.

Two seats only at this table seemed to be awaiting two guests.

The duke approached one of the chairs; then, leaving the arm of Remy's companion, and pointing to the other seat, he seemed to request that the cloak might be thrown aside, as, although it might be very serviceable for an evening stroll, it became very inconvenient when the object of the stroll was attained, and when that object was a supper.

Thereupon the individual to whom the invitation had been addressed threw the cloak upon a chair, and the dazzling blaze of the flambeaux lighted up, without a shadow on their loveliness, the pale and majestically-beautiful features of a woman whom the terrified eyes of Henri immediately recognized. It was the lady of the mysterious house in the Rue des Augustins, the wanderer in Flanders; in one word, it was that Diana whose gaze was as mortal as the thrust of a dagger. On this occasion she wore the apparel of her own sex, and was richly dressed in brocaded silk; diamonds blazed on her neck, in her hair, and on her wrists, and thereby made the extreme pallor of her face more remarkable than ever, and in the light which shone from her eyes, it almost seemed as if the duke had, by the employment of some magical means, evoked the ghost of this woman, rather than the woman herself. Had it not been for the support afforded by the statue round which he had thrown his arms, colder even than the marble itself, Henri would have fallen backward headlong into the basin of the fountain.

The duke seemed intoxicated with delight; he fixed his passionate gaze upon this beautiful creature, who had seated herself opposite to him, and who hardly touched the dishes which had been placed before her. From time to time Francois leaned across the table to kiss one of the hands of his silent guest, who, as pale as death, seemed as insensible to his kisses as if her hand had been sculptured in alabaster, which, for transparency and perfect whiteness, it so much resembled. From time to time Henri started, raised his hand to his forehead, and with it wiped away the death-like sweat which rose on it, and asked himself: “Is she alive, or dead?”

The duke tried his utmost efforts and displayed all his powers of eloquence to unbend the rigid beauty of her face.

Remy, the only attendant, for the duke had sent every one away, waited on them both, and, occasionally, lightly touching his mistress with his elbow as he passed behind her chair, seemed to revive her by the contact, and to recall her to life, or rather to the position in which she was placed.

Thereupon, a bright flush spread over her whole face, her eyes sparkled, she smiled as if some magician had touched a spring unknown to this automaton-like figure, seemingly endowed with intelligence, and the mechanism of which had drawn the lightning glance from her eyes, the glowing flush on her cheek, and the sparkling smile to her lips. The moment after, she again subsided into her calm and statue-like stillness. The prince, however, approached her, and by the passionate tone of his conversation, seemed as if he had succeeded in warming into animation his new conquest. Thereupon Diana, who occasionally glanced at the face of a magnificent clock suspended over the prince’s head, against the opposite side of the wall to where she was seated, seemed to make an effort over herself, and with her lips bedecked with smiles took a more active part in the conversation.

Henri, concealed in his leafy covert, wrung his hands in despair, and cursed the whole creation in the utter wretchedness of his sore distress. It seemed to him monstrous, almost iniquitous, that this woman, so pure and rigidly inflexible, should yield herself so unresistingly to the prince, because he was a prince, and abandon herself to love because it was offered within the precincts of a palace. His horror at Remy was so extreme that he could have slain him without remorse, in order to see whether so great a monster had the blood and heart of a man in him. In such paroxysms of rage and contempt did Henri pass the time during the supper, which to the Duc d'Anjou was so full of rapture and delight.

Diana sang. The prince, inflamed by wine, and by his passionate discourse, rose from the table for the purpose of embracing Diana. Every drop of blood seemed to curdle in Henri's veins. He put his hand to his side to see if his sword were there, and then thrust it into his breast in search of a dagger. Diana, with a strange smile, which most assuredly had never, until that moment, had its counterpart on any face, stopped the duke as he was approaching her.

"Will you allow me, monseigneur," she said, "before I rise from the table, to share with your royal highness one of those tempting-looking peaches."

And with these words she stretched out her hand toward a basket of gold filagree work, in which twenty peaches were tastefully arranged, and took one.

Then, taking from her girdle a beautiful little dagger, with a silver blade and a handle of malachite, she divided the peach into two portions, and offered one of them to the prince, who seized it and carried it eagerly to his lips, as though he would thus have kissed Diana's.

This impassioned action produced so deep an impression on himself, that a cloud seemed to obscure his sight at the very moment he bit into the fruit. Diana looked at him with her clear steady gaze, and her fixed immovable smile.

Remy, leaning his back against a pillar of carved wood, also looked on with a gloomy expression of countenance.

The prince passed one of his hands across his forehead, wiped away the perspiration which had gathered there, and swallowed the piece that he had bitten.

This perspiration was most probably the symptom of a sudden indisposition; for while Diana ate the other half of the peach, the prince let fall on his plate what remained of the portion he had taken, and with difficulty rising from his seat, seemed to invite his beautiful companion to accompany him into the garden in order to enjoy the cool night air.

Diana rose, and without pronouncing a single word, took the duke’s arm, which he offered her.

Remy gazed after them, particularly after the prince, whom the air seemed completely to revive.

As she walked along, Diana wiped the small blade of her knife on a handkerchief embroidered with gold, and restored it to its shagreen sheath.

In this manner they approached the clump of trees where Henri was concealed.

The prince, with a passionate gesture, pressed his companion’s arm against his heart.

“I feel better,” he said, “and yet I hardly know what heavy weight seems to press down on my brain; I love too deeply, madame, I perceive.”

Diana plucked several sprigs of jasmine and of clematis, and two beautiful roses which bordered the whole of one side of the pedestal of the statue behind which Henri was shrinking terrified.

“What are you doing, madame?” inquired the prince.

“I have always understood, monseigneur,” she said, “that the perfume of flowers was the best remedy for attacks of giddiness; I am gathering a bouquet with the hope that this bouquet, if presented by me, will have the magical influence which I wish it to possess.”

But, while she was arranging the flowers, she let a rose fall from her hand, which the prince eagerly hastened to pick up.

The movement that Francois made was rapid, but not so rapid, however, but that it gave Diana sufficient time to pour upon the other rose a few drops of a liquid contained in a small gold bottle which she drew from her bosom.

She then took from his hand the rose which the prince had picked up, and placing it in her girdle, said —

“That one is for me, let us change.”

And in exchange for the rose which she received from the prince’s hand, she held out the bouquet to him.

The prince seized it eagerly, inhaled its perfume with delight, and passed his arm around Diana’s waist. But this latter action, in all probability, completely overwhelmed the already troubled senses of the prince, for his knees trembled under him, and he was obliged to seat himself on a bank of green turf, beside which he happened to be standing.

Henri did not lose sight of these two persons, and yet he had a look for Remy also, who in the pavilion awaited the termination of this scene, or rather seemed to devour every minute incident of it.

When he saw the prince totter, he advanced toward the threshold of the pavilion. Diana, on her side, perceiving Francois stagger, sat herself down beside him on the bank.

The giddiness from which Francois suffered continued on this occasion longer than on the former; the prince's head was resting on his chest. He seemed to have lost all connection in his ideas, and almost the perception of his own existence; and yet the convulsive movement of his fingers on Diana's hand seemed to indicate that he was instinctively pursuing his wild dream of love. At last he slowly raised his head, and his lips being almost on a level with Diana's face, he made an effort to touch those of his lovely guest, but as if unobservant of the movement, she rose from her seat.

"You are suffering, monseigneur," she said; "it would be better if we were to go in."

"Oh! yes, let us go in," exclaimed the prince in a transport of joy.

And he arose, staggering, to his feet; then, instead of Diana leaning on his arm, it was he who leaned on Diana's arm; and thanks to this support, walking with less difficulty, he seemed to forget fever and giddiness too, for suddenly drawing himself up, he, in an unexpected manner, pressed his lips on her neck. She started as if, instead of a kiss, she had received the impression of a red hot iron.

"Remy!" she exclaimed, "a flambeau, a flambeau!"

Remy immediately returned to the salle-a-manger, and lighted, by the candle on the table, a flambeau which he took from a small round table, and then, hurrying to the entrance to the pavilion, and holding the torch in his hand, he cried out:

"Here is one, madame."

"Where is your highness going to?" inquired Diana, seizing hold of the flambeau and turning her head aside.

"Oh! we will return to my own room, and you will lead me, I venture to hope, madame?" replied the prince, in a frenzy of passion.

"Willingly, monseigneur," replied Diana, and she raised the torch in the air, and walked before the prince.

Remy opened, at the end of the pavilion, a window through which the fresh air rushed inward, in such a manner that the flame and smoke of the flambeau, which Diana held, were carried back toward Francois' face, which happened to be in the very current of the air. The two lovers, as Henri considered them to be, proceeded in this manner, first crossing a gallery to the duke's own room, and disappeared behind the fleur-de-lized hangings, which served the purpose of a portière.

Henri had observed everything that had passed with increasing fury, and yet this fury was such that it almost deprived him of life. It seemed as if he had no strength left except to curse the fate which had imposed so cruel a trial upon him. He had quitted his place of concealment, and in utter despair, his arms hanging by his side, and with a haggard gaze, he was on the point of returning, with life ebbing fast, to his apartment in the chateau, when suddenly the hangings behind which he had seen Diana and the prince disappear were thrown aside, and Diana herself rushed into the supper-room, and seized hold of Remy, who, standing motionless and erect, seemed only to be waiting her return.

"Quick! quick!" she said to him; "all is finished."

And they both darted into the garden as if they had been drunk, or mad, or raging with passion.

No sooner did Henri observe them, however, than he seemed to have recovered all his strength; he hastened to place himself in their way, and they came upon him suddenly in the middle of the path, standing erect, his arms crossed, and more terrible in his silence than any one could ever have been in his loudest menaces. Henri's feelings had indeed arrived at such a pitch of exasperation, that he would readily have slain any man who would have ventured to maintain that women were not monsters sent from hell to corrupt the world. He seized Diana by the arm, and stopped her suddenly, notwithstanding the cry of terror which she uttered, and notwithstanding the dagger which Remy put to his breast, and which even grazed his flesh.

"Oh! doubtless you do not recognize me," he said furiously, gnashing his teeth; "I am that simple-hearted young man who loved you, and whose love you would not return, because for you there was no future, but merely the past. Ah! beautiful hypocrite that you are, and you, foul liar, I know you at last — I know and curse you. To the one I say, I despise and contemn you: to the other, I shrink from you with horror."

"Make way!" cried Remy, in a strangled voice; "make way, young fool, or if not — "

"Be it so," replied Henri; "finish your work, and slay my body, wretch, since you have already destroyed my soul."

"Silence!" muttered Remy, furiously, pressing the blade of his dagger more and more against Henri's breast.

Diana, however, violently pushed Remy aside, and seizing Du Bouchage by the arm, she drew him straight before her. She was lividly pale; her beautiful hair streamed over her shoulders; the contact of the hand on Henri's wrist seemed to the latter cold and damp as the dews of death.

"Monsieur," she said, "do not rashly judge of matters of which Heaven alone can judge. I am Diana de Meridor, the mistress of Monsieur de Bussy, whom the Duc d'Anjou miserably allowed to perish when he could have saved him. Eight days since Remy slew Aurilly, the duke's accomplice, and the prince himself I have just poisoned with a peach, a bouquet, and a torch. Move aside, monsieur — move aside, I say, for Diana de Meridor, who is on her way to the Convent des Hospitalieres."

With these words, and letting Henri's arm fall, she took hold of that of Remy, as he waited by her side.

Henri fell on his knees, following the retreating figures of the two assassins, who disappeared behind the thick copse, as though it had been a vision from hell. It was not till fully an hour afterward that Du Bouchage, overpowered with fatigue and overwhelmed with terror, with his brain on fire, was able to summon sufficient strength to drag himself to his apartment, nor was it until after he had made the attempt nearly a dozen times that he succeeded in escalading the window. He walked to and fro in his room several times, and then staggered toward the bed, on which he threw himself. Every one was sleeping quietly in the chateau.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

FATALITY.

The next morning, about nine o’clock, the beautiful rays of the sun were glistening like gold on the graveled walks of Chateau-Thierry. Numerous gangs of workmen, who had the previous evening been directed to be in attendance, had been actively at work from daybreak upon the preparations in the park, as well as in the decoration of the apartments destined to receive the king, whose arrival was momentarily expected. As yet nothing was stirring in the pavilion where the duke reposed, for he had on the previous evening forbidden his two old servants to awaken him. They were to wait until he summoned them. Toward half-past nine two couriers rode at full speed into the town, announcing his majesty’s near arrival. The civic authorities, the governor, and the garrison formed themselves in ranks on either side of the road, leaving a passage for the royal procession. At ten o’clock the king appeared at the foot of the hill; he had mounted his horse when they had taken their last relays. He never neglected an opportunity of doing so, especially when entering towns, as he rode admirably. The queen-mother followed him in a litter; fifty gentlemen belonging to the court, richly clad and admirably mounted, followed in their suite. A company of the guards, followed by Crillon himself, a hundred and twenty of the Swiss, and as many of the Scotch guards, commanded by Larchant, and all the members of the royal household who accompanied the king in his excursions, mules, coffers, and domestic servants, formed a numerous army, the files of which followed the windings of the road leading from the river to the summit of the hill. Lastly, the cortege entered the town amid the ringing of the church bells, the roar of cannon, and bursts of music. The acclamations of the inhabitants were enthusiastic; for a visit from the king was of such rare occurrence at that time that, seen thus closely, he seemed to be a living embodiment of divine right. The king, as he progressed through the crowd, looked on all sides for his brother, but in vain. He only found Henri du Bouchage waiting for him at the gate of the chateau.

When once within the chateau, Henri III. inquired after the health of the Duc d’Anjou from the officer who had assumed the high distinction of receiving the king.

“Sire,” replied the latter, “his highness, during the last few days, has been residing in the pavilion in the park, and we have not yet seen him this morning. It is most probable, however, that as he was well yesterday, he is well also to-day.”

“This pavilion is in a very retired part of the park, it seems,” said Henri, in a tone of displeasure, “since the sound of the cannon does not seem to have been heard.”

“Sire,” one of the duke’s two aged attendants ventured to remark, “his highness did not, perhaps, expect your majesty so soon.”

“Old fool,” growled Henri, “do you think, then, that a king presents himself in this way at other people’s residences without informing them of it? Monsieur le Duc d’Anjou has been aware of my intended arrival since yesterday.”

And then, afraid of casting a gloom over those around him by a grave or sullen countenance, Henri, who wished to appear gentle and amiable at the expense of his brother Francois, exclaimed, “Well, then, since he has not come to meet us, we will go to meet him.”

“Show us the way there,” said Catherine, from the litter.

All the escort followed the road leading to the old park.

At the very moment that the guards, who were in advance, approached the hedge, a shrill and piercing cry rent the air.

“What is that?” said the king, turning toward his mother.

“Great Heaven!” murmured Catherine, endeavoring to read the faces of those around her, “it sounded like a cry of distress or despair.”

“My prince! my poor master!” cried Francois’ other aged attendant, appearing at the window, and exhibiting signs of the most passionate grief.

Every one hastened toward the pavilion, the king himself being hurried along with the others. He arrived at the very moment when they were raising from the floor the Duc d’Anjou’s body, which his valet-de-chambre, having entered without authority, in order to announce the king’s arrival, had just perceived lying on the carpet of the bedroom. The prince was cold, stiff, and perfectly inanimate, and it was only by a strange movement of the eyelids and a nervous contraction of the lips that it could be observed he was still alive. The king paused at the threshold of the door, and those behind him followed his example.

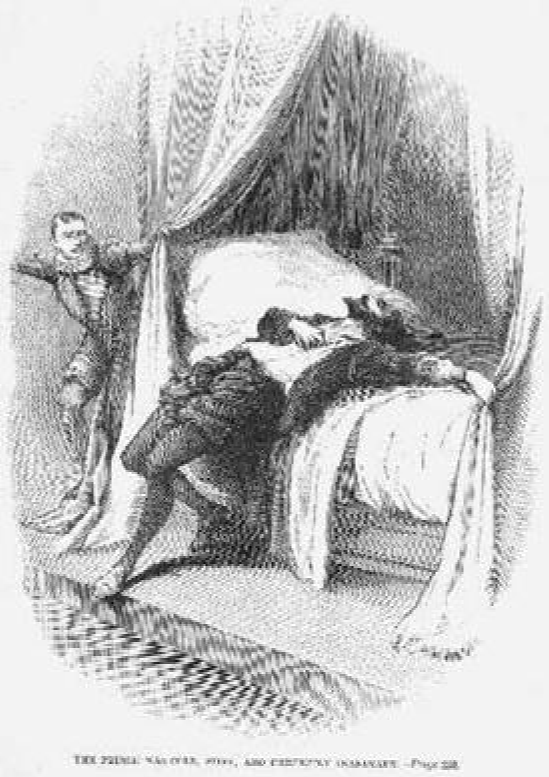

“This is an ugly omen,” he murmured.

“Do not enter, my son, I implore you,” said Catherine to him.

“Poor Francois!” said Henri, delighted at being sent away, and thus being spared the spectacle of this agonizing scene.

The crowd, too, followed the king as he withdrew.

“Strange! strange!” murmured Catherine, kneeling down by the side of the prince, or rather of the corpse, no one being in the room, with her but the two old servants; and while the messengers were dispatched in every quarter of the town to find the prince’s physician, and while a courier galloped off to Paris in order to hasten the attendance of the king’s physicians, who had remained at Meaux with the queen, Catherine, with less knowledge, very probably, but not with less perspicacity than Miron himself could possibly have shown, examined the diagnostics of that singular malady which had struck down her son so suddenly.

Her experience was by no means indifferent; in the first place, therefore, she interrogated calmly, and without confusing them, the two attendants, who were tearing their hair and wringing their hands in the wildest despair.

Both of them replied that the prince had returned on the previous evening about nightfall, after having been disturbed at an inconvenient hour by Monsieur du Bouchage, who had arrived with a message from the king.

They then added that when the audience had terminated, which had been held in the chateau itself, the prince had ordered supper to be prepared, and had desired that no one should venture to approach the pavilion without being summoned; and lastly, that he had given the strictest injunctions not to be awakened in the morning, and that no one should enter without a positive summons.

“He probably expected a visit from a lady?” observed the queen-mother, inquiringly.

“We think so, madame,” replied the valet respectfully, “but we could not discreetly assure ourselves of the fact.”

“But in removing the things from the table, you must have seen whether my son had supped alone?”

“We have not yet removed the things, madame, since the orders of monseigneur were that no one should enter the pavilion.”

“Very good,” said Catherine; “no one, therefore, has been here?”

“No one, madame.”

“You may go.”

And Catherine was now left quite alone in the room. Leaving the prince lying on the bed where he had been placed, she immediately commenced the minutest investigation of each symptom or of each of the traces to which her attention was directed, as the result of her suspicions or apprehensions.

She had remarked that Francois’ forehead was stained or dyed of a bister color, his eyes were bloodshot and encircled with blue lines, his lips marked with furrows, like the impression which burning sulphur leaves on living flesh.

She observed the same sign upon his nostrils and upon the sides of the nose.

“Now let me look carefully,” she said, gazing about her on every side.

The first thing she remarked was the candlestick in which the flambeau which Remy had lighted the previous evening had burned away.

“This candle has burned for a length of time,” she said, “and shows that Francois was a long time in this room. Ah! here is a bouquet lying on the carpet.”

Catherine picked it up eagerly, and then, remarking that all its flowers were still fresh, with the exception of a rose, which was blackened and dried up:

“What does this mean?” she said; “what has been poured on the leaves of this flower? If I am not mistaken, I know a liquid which withers roses in this manner.” She threw aside the bouquet, shuddering as she did so.

“That explains to me the state of the nostrils and the manner in which the flesh of the face is affected; but the lips?”

Catherine ran to the dining-room. The valets had spoken the truth, for there was nothing to indicate that anything on the table had been touched since the previous evening’s repast had been finished.

Upon the edge of the table lay the half of a peach, in which the impression of a row of teeth was still visible. Catherine’s attention was drawn to this in a particular manner, for the fruit, usually of a rich crimson near the core, had become as black as the rose, and was discolored by violet and brown spots. The corrosive action was more especially visible upon the part which had been cut, and particularly so where the knife must have passed.

“This explains the state of the lips,” she said; “but Francois had only bitten one piece out of this peach. He did not keep the bouquet long in his hand, for the flowers are still fresh; the evil may yet be repaired, for the poison cannot have penetrated very deeply.

“And yet, if the evil be merely superficial, why should this paralysis of the senses be so complete, and why indeed should the decomposition of the flesh have made so much progress? There must be more that I have not seen.”

And as she spoke Catherine again looked all round her, and observed, hanging by a silver chain to its pole, the red and blue parrot to which Francois was so attached.

The bird was dead, stiff, and the feathers of its wings rough and erect.

Catherine again looked closely and attentively at the torch which she had once before already narrowly inspected, to satisfy herself that, by its having burned out completely, the prince had returned early in the evening.

“The smoke,” said Catherine to herself; “the smoke! the wick of that torch was poisoned; my son is a dead man.”

She called out immediately, and the chamber was in a minute filled with attendants and officers of the household.

"Miron, Miron!" cried some of them.

"A priest!" exclaimed the others.

But Catherine had, in the meantime, placed to the lips of Francois one of the small bottles which she always carried in her alms-bag, and narrowly watched her son's features to observe the effect of the antidote she applied.

The duke immediately opened his eyes and mouth, but no glance of intelligence gleamed in his eyes, no voice or sound escaped from his lips.

Catherine, in sad and gloomy silence, quitted the apartment, beckoning to the two attendants to follow her, before they had as yet had an opportunity of communicating with any one.

She then led them into another chamber, where she sat down, fixing her eyes closely and watchfully on their faces.

"Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou," she said, "has been poisoned some time during his supper last evening; and it was you who served the supper."

At these words the two men turned as pale as death.

"Torture us, kill us, if you will," they said; "but do not accuse us."

"Fools that you are; do you suppose that if I suspected you, that would have already been done? You have not yourselves, I know, assassinated your master, but others have killed him; and I must know who the murderers are. Who has entered the pavilion?"

"An old man, wretchedly clothed, whom monseigneur has seen during the last two days."

"But the woman — "

"We have not seen her — what woman does your majesty mean?"

"A woman has been here, who made a bouquet — "

The two attendants looked at each other with an expression of such simple surprise that Catherine perceived, by this glance alone, how perfectly innocent they were.

"Let the governor of the town and the governor of the chateau be sent for," she said. The two valets hurried to the door.

"One moment!" exclaimed Catherine, fixing them in their places by this single word as they approached the threshold. "You only and myself are aware of what I have just told you; I shall not breathe a word about it; if any one learns it, therefore, it will be from or through one of you; on that very day both your lives shall be forfeited. Now, go!"

Catherine interrogated the two governors with more reserve. She told them that the duke had received from some person or persons a distressing intelligence which had deeply affected him; that that alone was the cause of his illness, and that if the duke had an opportunity of putting a few further questions to the persons again, he would in all probability soon recover from the alarm into which he had been thrown.

The governors instituted the minutest search in the town, the park, the environs, but no one knew what had become of Remy and Diana.

Henri alone knew the secret, and there was no danger of his betraying it.

Throughout the whole day, the terrible news, commented upon, exaggerated, and mutilated, circulated through Chateau-Thierry and the province; every one explained, according to his own individual character and disposition, the accident which had befallen the duke.

But no one, except Catherine and Du Bouchage, ventured to acknowledge that the chance of saving the duke's life was hopeless.

The unhappy prince did not recover either his voice or his senses, or rather, he ceased to give any sign of intelligence.

The king, who was immediately beset with the gloomiest fancies, which he dreaded more than anything, would very willingly have returned to Paris; but the queen-mother opposed his departure, and the court was obliged to remain at the chateau.

Physicians arrived in crowds; Miron alone guessed the cause of the illness, and formed an opinion upon its serious nature and extent; but he was too good a courtier to confess the truth, especially after he had consulted Catherine's looks.

He was questioned on all sides, and he replied that Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou must certainly have suffered from some seriously-disturbing cause, and had been subjected to some violent mental shock.

In this way he avoided compromising himself, therefore, which is a very difficult matter in such a case.

When Henri III. required him to answer affirmatively or negatively to his question, "Whether the duke would live?" he replied,

"I will answer your majesty in three days."

"And when will you tell me?" said Catherine, in a low voice.

"You, madame, are very different; I answer you unhesitatingly." — "Well?"

"Your majesty has but to interrogate me."

"On what day will my son die, Miron?"

"To-morrow evening, madame."

“So soon?”

“Ah! madame,” murmured the physician, “the dose was by no means a slight one.”

Catherine placed one of her fingers on her lips, looked at the dying man, and repeated in an undertone this sinister word, “Fatality!”

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

LES HOSPITALIERES.

The count had passed a terrible night, in a state bordering on delirium and verging on death.

Faithful, however, to his duty, as soon as he had heard the king's arrival announced, he rose and received him at the gate, as we have described; but no sooner had he presented his homage to his majesty, saluted respectfully the queen-mother, and pressed the admiral's hand, than he shut himself up in his own room, not to die, but to carry determinedly into execution his long cherished project, which nothing could any longer interfere with.

Toward eleven o'clock in the morning, therefore — that is to say, as soon as, immediately after the terrible news had circulated that the Duc d'Anjou's life was in imminent danger, every one had dispersed, leaving the king completely bewildered by this fresh event — Henri went and knocked at his brother's door, who, having passed a part of the previous night traveling, had just retired to his own room.

"Ah! is that you?" asked Joyeuse, half asleep; "what is the matter?"

"I have come to bid you farewell, my brother," replied Henri.

"Farewell! What do you mean? Are you going away?"

"Yes, I am going away, brother, and nothing need keep me here any longer, I presume."

"Why nothing?"

"Of course, since the fetes at which you wished me to be present will not take place, I may now consider myself as freed from my promise."

"You are mistaken, Henri," replied the grand-admiral; "I have no greater reason for permitting you to leave to-day than I had yesterday."

"I regret that it is so; but in that case, for the first time in my life, I shall have the misfortune to disobey your orders, and to fail in the respect I owe you; for from this very moment I declare to you, Anne, that nothing shall restrain me any longer from taking religious vows."

"But the dispensation which is expected from Rome?"

“I can await it in a convent.”

“You must positively be mad to think of such a thing.” exclaimed Joyeuse, as he rose, with stupefaction depicted on his countenance.

“On the contrary, my dear and honored brother, I am the wisest of you all, for I alone know what I am about.”‘

“Henri, you promised us a month.”

“Impossible.”

“A week, then, longer.”

“Not an hour.”

“You are suffering so much, then, poor boy?”

“On the contrary, I have ceased to suffer, and that is why the evil is without a remedy.”

“But, at all events, this woman is not made of bronze; her feelings can be worked upon; I will undertake to persuade her.”

“You cannot do impossibilities, Anne; besides, even were she to allow herself to be persuaded now, it is I who could no longer consent to love her.”

“Well, that is quite another matter.”

“Such is the case, however, my brother.”

“What! if she were now willing, would you be indifferent? Why, this is sheer madness.”

“Oh! no! no!” exclaimed Henri, with a shudder of horror, “nothing can any longer exist between that woman and myself.”

“What does this mean?” inquired Joyeuse, with marked surprise; “and who can this woman really be? Come, tell me, Henri; you know very well that we have never had any secrets from each other.”

Henri trembled lest he had said too much, and that, in yielding to the feeling which he had just exhibited, he had opened a channel by means of which his brother would be able to penetrate the terrible secret which he kept imprisoned in his breast. He therefore fell into an opposite extreme; and, as it happens in such cases, and in order to recall the imprudent words which had escaped him, he pronounced others which were more imprudent still.

“Do not press me further,” he said; “this woman will never be mine, since she belongs to Heaven.”

“Folly! — mere idle tales! This woman a nun! She has deceived you.”

“No, no, this woman has not spoken falsely; she is now an Hospitaliere. Do not let us speak any further of her, but rather let us respect those who throw themselves at the feet of Heaven.”

Anne had sufficient power over himself not to show the delight this revelation gave him.

He continued: “This is something new, for you have never spoken to me about it.”

“It is indeed quite new, for she has only recently taken the veil; but I am sure that her resolution, like my own, is irrevocable. Do not therefore seek to detain me any longer, but embrace me, as you love me. Permit me to thank you for all your kindness, for all your patience, and for your unceasing affection for a poor heart-broken man, and farewell!”

Joyeuse looked his brother full and steadily in the face; he looked at him like one whose feelings had overcome him, and who relied upon a display of feeling to work upon the feelings of others. But Henri remained unmoved at this exhibition of emotion on his brother’s part, and replied in no other way but by the same mournful smile.

Joyeuse embraced his brother, and allowed him to depart.

“Go,” he said to himself, “all is not yet finished, and, however great your hurry may be, I shall not be long before I shall have overtaken you.”

He went to the king, who was taking his breakfast in bed, with Chicot sitting by his side.

“Good-day! good-day!” said the king to Joyeuse. “I am very glad to see you, Anne; I was afraid you would lie in bed all day, you indolent fellow. How is my brother?”

“Alas! sire, I do not know; I am come to speak to you about mine.”

“Which one?” — ”Henri.”

“Does he still wish to become a monk?”

“More so than ever.”

“And will he take the vows?”

“Yes, sire.”

“He is quite right, too.”

“How so, sire?”

“Because men go straight to heaven that way.”

“Oh!” said Chicot to the king, “men go much faster still by the way your brother is taking.”

“Will your majesty permit me to ask a question?”

“Twenty, Joyeuse, twenty. I am as melancholy as I can possibly be at Chateau-Thierry, and your questions will distract my attention a little.”

“You know all the religious houses in the kingdom, sire, I believe?”

“As well as I do a coat of arms.”

“Is there one which goes by the name of Les Hospitalières, sire?”

“It is a very small, highly distinguished, excessively strict, and severe order, composed of twenty ladies, canonesses of Saint Joseph.”

“Do they take the vows there?”

“Yes, as a matter of favor, and upon a presentation from the queen.”

“Should I be indiscreet if I were to ask your majesty where this order is situated?”

“Not at all; it is situated in the Rue de Chevet Saint-Laudry, in the Cité, behind Le Cloitre Notre-Dame.”

“At Paris?” — ”Yes.”

“Thank you, sire.”

“But what the devil do you ask me that for? Has your brother changed his mind, and, instead of turning a Capuchin friar, does he now wish to become one of the Hospitalieres?”

“No, sire, I should not think he would be so mad, after what your majesty has done me the honor to tell me; but I suspect he has had his head turned by some one belonging to that order, and I should consequently like to discover who this person is, and speak to her.”

“Par la mordieu!” said the king, with a self-satisfied expression, “some seven years ago I knew the superior of that convent, who was an exceedingly beautiful woman.”

“Well, sire, it may perhaps be the very one.”

“I cannot say; since that time, I too, Joyeuse, have assumed religious vows myself, or nearly so, indeed.”

“Sire,” said Joyeuse, “I entreat you to give me, at any rate, a letter to this lady, and my leave of absence for a couple of days.”

“You are going to leave me!” exclaimed the king; “to leave me all alone here?” — ”Oh! ungrateful king,” said Chicot, shrugging his shoulders, “am I not here?”

“My letter, if you please, sire,” said Joyeuse. The king sighed, but wrote it notwithstanding.

“But you cannot have anything to do at Paris?” said Henri, handing the note to Joyeuse.

“I beg your pardon, sire, I ought to escort, or at least, to watch over, my brothers.”

“You are right; away with you, but return as quickly as you can.”

Joyeuse did not wait for this permission to be repeated; he quietly ordered his horses, and having satisfied himself that Henri had already set off, galloped all the way until he reached his destination.

Without even changing his dress, the young man went straight to the Rue de Chevet Saint-Laudry. At the end of this street was the Rue d’Enfer, and parallel with it the Rue des Marmouzets.

A dark and venerable-looking house, behind whose walls the lofty summits of a few trees could be distinguished, the windows of which were few, bad, barred, and a wicket at the side, completed the exterior appearance of the Convent des Hospitalières.

Upon the keystone of the arch of the porch an artisan had rudely engraved these Latin words with a chisel: —

MATRONÆ HOSPITES.

Time had partially destroyed both the inscription and the stone.

Joyeuse knocked at the wicket, and had his horses led away to the Rue des Marmouzets, fearing that their presence in the street might attract too much attention.

Then, knocking at the entrance gate, he said, “Will you be good enough to go and inform Madame la Supérieure that Monsieur le Duc de Joyeuse, Grand Amiral de France, is desirous of speaking to her on behalf of the king.”

The face of the nun who had made her appearance behind the gate blushed beneath her veil, and she shut the gate.

Five minutes afterward a door was opened, and Joyeuse entered a room, set apart for the reception of visitors. A beautiful woman, of lofty stature, made Joyeuse a profound reverence, which the admiral returned gracefully and respectfully.

“Madame,” said he, “the king is aware that you are about to admit, or that you have already admitted, among the number of the inmates here, a person with whom I require to speak. Will you be good enough to place me in communication with that person?”

“Will you tell me the name of the lady you wish to see, monsieur?”

“I am not aware of it.”

“In that case, then, how can I possibly accede to your request?”

"Nothing is easier. Whom have you admitted during the last month?"

"You either tell me too precisely, or with not sufficient precision, who this person is," said the superior, "and I am unable to comply with your wish."

"Why so?"

"Because, during the last month I have received no one here until this morning."

"This morning?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Duc, and you can understand that your own arrival, two hours after hers, has too much the appearance of a pursuit to enable me to grant you permission to speak to her."

"I implore you, madame."

"Impossible, monsieur."

"Will you merely let me see this lady?"

"Impossible, I repeat. Although your name was sufficient for the doors of this house to be thrown open before you, yet in order to speak to any one here, except indeed to myself, a written order from the king is necessary."

"Here is the order you require, madame," replied Joyeuse, producing the letter that Henri had signed.

The superior read it and bowed.

"His majesty's will shall be obeyed," she said, "even when it is contrary to the will of Heaven."

And she advanced toward the courtyard of the convent.

"You now perceive, madame," said Joyeuse, courteously stopping her, "that I have right on my side; but I fear I may be under a mistake, and therefore may be abusing the permission I have received from the king. Perhaps the lady may not be the one I am in search of; will you be kind enough to tell me how she came here, why she came, and by whom she was accompanied?"

"All that is useless, Monsieur le Duc," replied the superior, "you are under no misapprehension for the lady, who arrived only this morning, after having been expected for the last fifteen days; this lady, I say, who was recommended by one who possesses the greatest authority over me, is indeed the very person with whom Monsieur le Duc de Joyeuse must wish to speak."

With these words the superior made another low courtesy to the duke and disappeared.

Ten minutes afterward she returned, accompanied by an hospitaliere, whose veil completely covered her face. It was Diana, who had already assumed the dress of the order.

The duke thanked the superior, offered a chair to her companion, himself sat down, and the superior quitted the room, closing with her own hands the doors of the deserted and gloomy-looking apartment.

“Madame,” said Joyeuse, without any preface, “you are the lady of the Rue des Augustins; that mysterious person with whom my brother, Monsieur le Comte du Bouchage, is so passionately and madly in love.”

The hospitaliere bowed her head in reply, but did not open her lips.

This affectation appeared to Joyeuse almost like an act of rudeness; he was already very indifferently disposed to his companion, and continued:

“You cannot have supposed, madame, that it is sufficient to be beautiful, or to appear beautiful; to have no heart lying hidden beneath that beauty, to inspire a wretched and despairing passion in the heart and mind of a young man of my name, and then one day calmly to tell him, ‘So much the worse for you if you possess a heart. I have none; nor do I wish for any.’“

“That was not my reply, monsieur, and you have been incorrectly informed,” said the hospitalière, in so noble and touching a tone of voice that Joyeuse’s anger was in a moment subdued.

“The actual words are immaterial, madame, when their sense has been conveyed. You have rejected my brother, and have reduced him to despair.”

“Innocently, monsieur: for I have always endeavored to keep Monsieur du Bouchage at a distance.”

“That is termed the art of coquetry, madame; and the result proves the fault.”

“No one has the right to accuse me, monsieur; I am guilty of nothing. Your feelings of irritation are aroused against me; I shall say no more.”

“Oh, oh!” said Joyeuse, gradually working himself into a passion, “you have been the ruin of my brother, and you fancy you can justify yourself with this irritating majesty of demeanor. No, no! the steps I have taken must show you what my intentions are. I am serious, I assure you, and you see by the trembling of my hands and lips that you will need some good arguments to move me.”

The hospitaliere rose.

“If you come here to insult a woman,” she said, with the same calm self-possession, “insult me, monsieur; if, however, you have come to induce me to change my opinion, you are wasting your time, and can withdraw."

"Ah! you are no human creature!" exclaimed Joyeuse, exasperated. "You are possessed by an evil spirit."

"I have answered already; I will reply no further. Since that is not sufficient, I shall withdraw." And the hospitaliere advanced toward the door.

Joyeuse stopped her.

"One moment! I have sought you for too long a period to allow you to leave me in this manner; and, since I have succeeded in meeting with you — since your insensibility has confirmed me in the idea which had already occurred to me, that you are possessed by the foul fiend himself, sent hither by the enemy of mankind to destroy my brother — I wish to see that face whereon the bottomless pit has written its blackest traces; I wish to behold the fire of that fatal gaze which bewilders men's minds. Avaunt thee, Satan!"

And Joyeuse, making the sign of the cross with one hand, as if he were exorcising her, with the other tore aside the veil which covered the face of the hospitalière; the latter, silent and impassible, free from anger or ill-feeling, fixed her sweet and gentle gaze upon him who had so cruelly outraged her, and said: "Oh! Monsieur le Duc, what you have just done is unworthy a gentleman."

Joyeuse's heart was smitten by her reply.

"Oh! madame," he murmured after a long silence, "you are indeed beautiful, and truly must Henri have loved you. Surely Heaven can only have bestowed upon you loveliness such as you possess to cast it like perfume upon an existence devoted to your own."

"Monsieur, have you not conversed with your brother? or, if you have done so, he cannot have thought it expedient to make you his confidant; had not that been the case, he would have told you that I have done what you say — I have loved; I shall never love again; I have lived and must die."

Joyeuse had never taken his eyes from Diana's face, and the soft and gentle expression of her gaze penetrated the inmost recesses of his being.

Her look had destroyed all the baser material in the admiral's heart: the pure metal was alone left, and his heart seemed rent asunder, like a crucible which had been riven by the fusion of metal.

"Yes, yes," he repeated, in a still lower voice, and continuing to fix upon her a gaze from which the fire of his fierce anger had disappeared — "yes,

yes, Henri must have loved you. Oh! madame, for pity’s sake, on my knees I implore you to love my brother.”

Diana remained cold and silent.

“Do not reduce a family to despair, do not sacrifice the future prospects of our race; be not the cause of the death of one from despair, of the others from regret.”

Diana, still silent, continued to look sorrowfully on the suppliant bending before her.

“Oh!” exclaimed Joyeuse, madly pressing his hand against his heart, “have mercy on my brother, have mercy on me!”

He sprung to his feet like a man bereft of his senses, unfastened, or rather tore open the door of the room where they had been conversing, and, bewildered and almost beside himself, fled from the house toward his attendants, who were awaiting him at the corner of the Rue d’Enfer.

CHAPTER XC.

HIS HIGHNESS MONSEIGNEUR LE DUC DE GUISE.

On Sunday the 10th of June, toward eleven o’clock in the day, the whole court were assembled in the apartment leading to the cabinet in which, since his meeting with Diana de Meridor, the Duc d’Anjou was dying by slow but sure degrees. Neither the science of the physicians, nor his mother’s despair, nor the prayers which the king had desired to be offered up, had been successful in averting the fatal termination. Miron, on the morning of this same 10th of June, assured the king that all chance of recovery was hopeless, and that Francois d’Anjou would not outlive the day. The king pretended to display extreme grief, and turning toward those who were present, said, “This will fill my enemies full of hope.”

To which remark the queen-mother replied: “Our destiny is in the hands of Heaven, my son.”

Whereupon Chicot, who was standing humbly and reverently near Henri III., added in a low voice:

“Let us help Heaven when we can, sire.”

Nevertheless, the dying man, toward half-past eleven, lost both color and sight; his mouth, which, up to that moment, had remained open, became closed; the flow of blood which for several days past had terrified all who were near him, as the bloody sweat of Charles IX. had similarly done at an earlier period, had suddenly ceased, and hands and feet became icy cold. Henri was sitting beside the head of the couch whereon his brother was extended. Catherine was standing in the recess in which the bed was placed, holding her dying son’s hand in hers.

The bishop of Chateau-Thierry and the Cardinal de Joyeuse repeated the prayers for the dying, which were joined in by all who were present, kneeling, and with their hands clasped reverently together. Toward mid-day, the dying man opened his eyes; the sun’s rays broke through a cloud and inundated the bed with a flood of light. Francois, who, up to that moment, had been unable to move a single finger, and whose mind had been obscured like the sun which had just re-appeared, raised one of his arms toward heaven with a horror-stricken gesture.

He looked all round the room, heard the murmuring of the prayers, grew conscious of his illness as well as of his weakness, became aware of his critical position, perhaps because he already caught a glimpse of that unseen and terrible future, the abode of certain souls after they have quitted their earthly prison.

He thereupon uttered a loud and piercing cry, and struck his forehead with a force which made every one tremble.

Then, knitting his brows, as if one of the mysterious incidents of his life had just recurred to him, he murmured:

“Bussy! Diana!”

This latter name had been overheard by none but Catherine, so weakened had the dying man’s voice become before pronouncing it.

With the last syllable of that name Francois d’Anjou breathed his last sigh.

At this very moment, by a singular coincidence, the sun, which had gilded with its rays the royal arms of France, and the golden fleurs-de-lis, was again obscured: so that the fleurs-de-lis which had been so brilliantly illumined but a moment before, became as dark and gloomy as the azure ground which they had but recently studded with constellations almost as resplendent as those whereon the eye of the dreamer rests in his upward gaze toward heaven.

Catherine let her son’s hand fall.

Henri III. shuddered, and leaned tremblingly on Chicot’s shoulder, who shuddered too, but from a feeling of awe which every Christian feels in the presence of the dead.

Miron placed a golden spatula on Francois’ lips; after a few seconds, he looked at it carefully and said:

“Monseigneur is dead.”

Whereupon a deep prolonged groan arose from the antechamber, like an accompaniment to the psalm which the cardinal murmured: “Cedant iniquitates meæ ad vocem deprecationis meæ.”

“Dead,” repeated the king, making the sign of the cross as he sat in his fauteuil; “my brother, my brother!”

“The sole heir of the throne of France,” murmured Catherine, who, having quitted the bed whereon the corpse was lying, had placed herself beside the only son who now remained to her.

“Oh!” said Henri, “this throne of France is indeed large for a king without issue; the crown is indeed large for a single head. No children! no heirs! Who will succeed me?”

Hardly had he pronounced these words when a loud noise was heard on the staircase and in the apartments.

Nambu hurriedly entered the death chamber, and announced — ”His Highness Monseigneur le Duc de Guise.”

Struck by this reply to the question which he had addressed to himself, the king turned pale, rose, and looked at his mother. Catherine was paler than her son. At the announcement of the horrible misfortune which mere chance had foretold to his race, she grasped the king’s hand, and pressed it, as if to say —

“There lies the danger; but fear nothing, I am near you.”

The son and mother, under the influence of the same terror and the same menace, had comprehended each other.

The duke entered, followed by his officers. He entered, holding his head loftily erect, although his eyes ranged from the king to the death-bed of his brother with a glance not free from a certain embarrassment.

Henri III. stood up, and with that supreme majesty of carriage which, on certain occasions, his singularly poetic nature enabled him to assume, checked the duke’s further progress by a kingly gesture, and pointed to the royal corpse upon the bed, the covering of which was in disorder from his brother’s dying agonies. The duke bowed his head, and slowly fell on his knees. All around him, too, bowed their heads and bent their knees. Henri III., together with his mother, alone remained standing, and bent a last look, full of pride, upon those around him. Chicot observed this look, and murmured in a low tone of voice, “Dejiciet potentes de sede et exaltabit humiles” — ”He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek.”

POSTSCRIPT.

A few words with reference to the principal characters in the novel of the “Forty-five Guardsmen” are necessary to complete the story.

Diana de Monsoreau, having taken the vows at the Convent des Hospitalières, survived the Duc d’Anjou only two years. Of Remy, her faithful companion, we hear no more: he disappeared without leaving a trace behind him.

History, however, informs us more fully as to the others. The Duc de Guise, having at last broken into open rebellion against Henri III., was so far successful, that with the aid of the League he compelled the king to fly from Paris. A hollow reconciliation was, however, patched up between them, the Duc de Guise stipulating that he should be appointed lieutenant-general of the kingdom; but no sooner had the king returned to the Louvre than he determined on the assassination of the duke. He sounded Crillon, the leader of the “Forty-five,” on the subject, but this noble soldier refused to have anything to do with it, offering, however, to challenge him to single combat. De Loignac was less scrupulous, and we know the result; the Duc de Guise and his brother the cardinal were both murdered. Ten days after this event, Catherine de Medicis, the queen-mother, died, regretted by none.

The Parisians, exasperated by the murder of the Duc de Guise, declared his brother, the Duc de Mayenne, the head of the League, and rose against the king, who was again obliged to fly. He begged the king of Navarre for aid, who promptly responded to the call, and they were shortly before Paris with a united army of Catholics and Huguenots. Henri III. was, however, pursued by the relentless hate of the clever and unscrupulous Duchesse de Montpensier. She worked so skillfully on the fanatical mind of the young Jacobin friar, Jacques Clement, that he undertook the death of the king. He entered the camp with letters for Henri, whom he stabbed while reading them. The king died on the 2d August, 1589, after having declared Henri of Navarre his successor.

Of the subsequent life and adventures of Chicot, unfortunately nothing authentic is known. TRANSLATOR.

THE END

THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE

Anonymous translation, 1852

This novel is the third and last of the d’Artagnan Romances, following *The Three Musketeers* and *Twenty Years After*. Appearing first in serial format between 1847 and 1850, it is a huge novel, comprised of 268 chapters, which are usually divided into three or four parts in English translations, including the famous titles *Louise de la Vallière* and *The Man in the Iron Mask*.

Though there are many digressions, the protagonists of the novel are once more d’Artagnan and the original musketeer characters, who continue their daredevil adventures, immersed in political intrigue and hilarious comedy. The action takes place between 1660 and 1667 and concerns the transformation of Louis XIV from a weak boy king, dominated by his ministers and mother, to the Sun King in complete control of the French state.

D’Artagnan played by Douglas Fairbanks in 1929

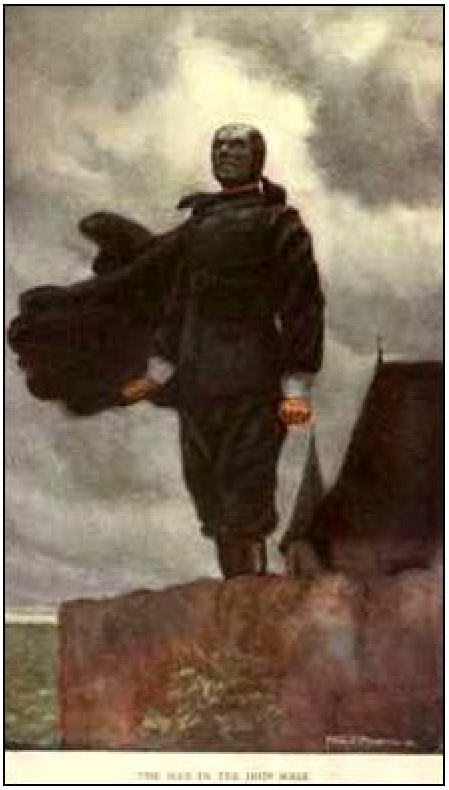
THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

An illustration of the man in the iron mask

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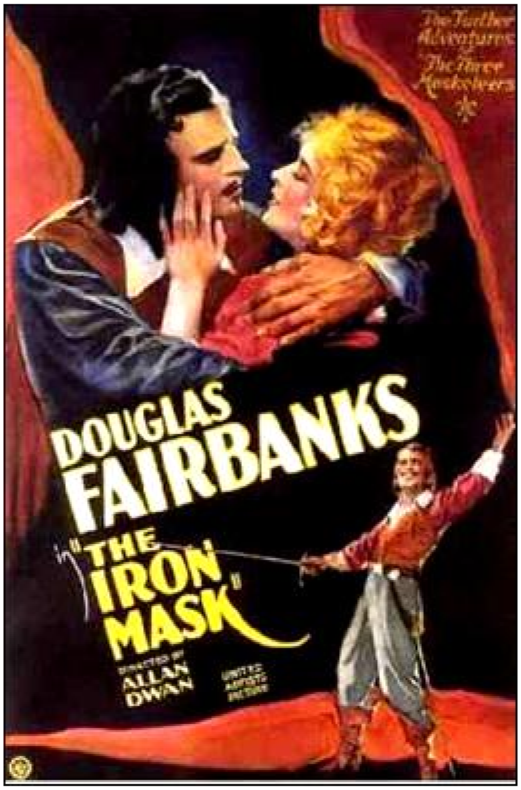
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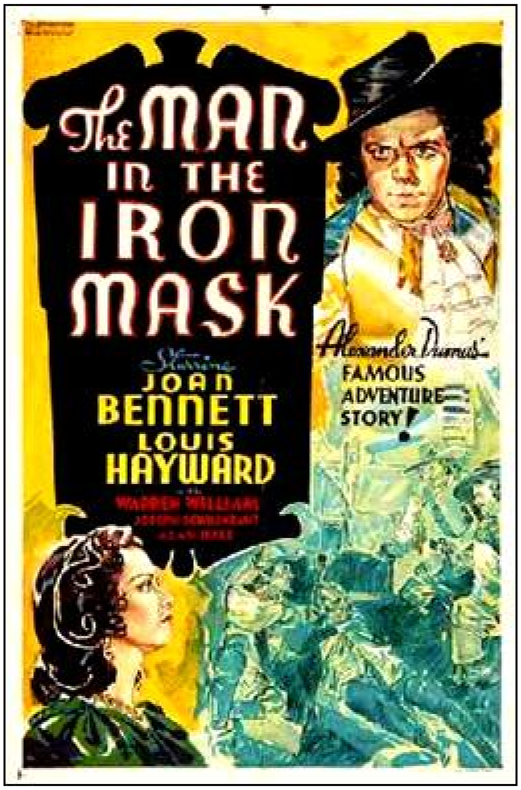
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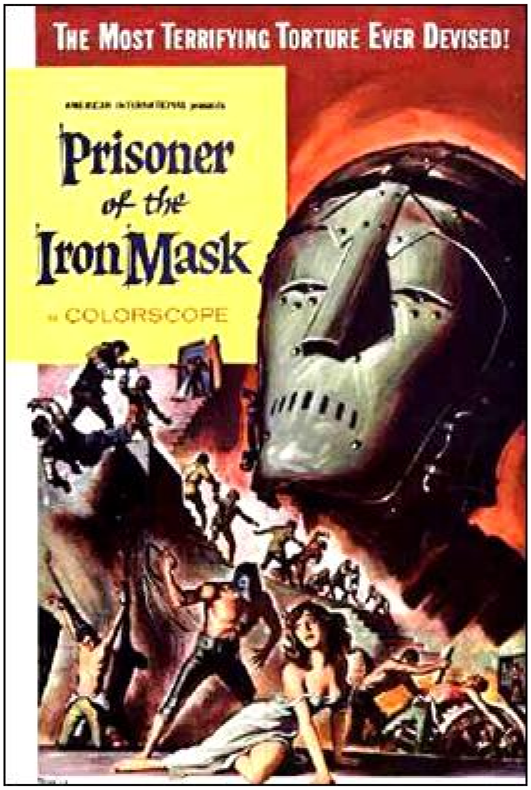
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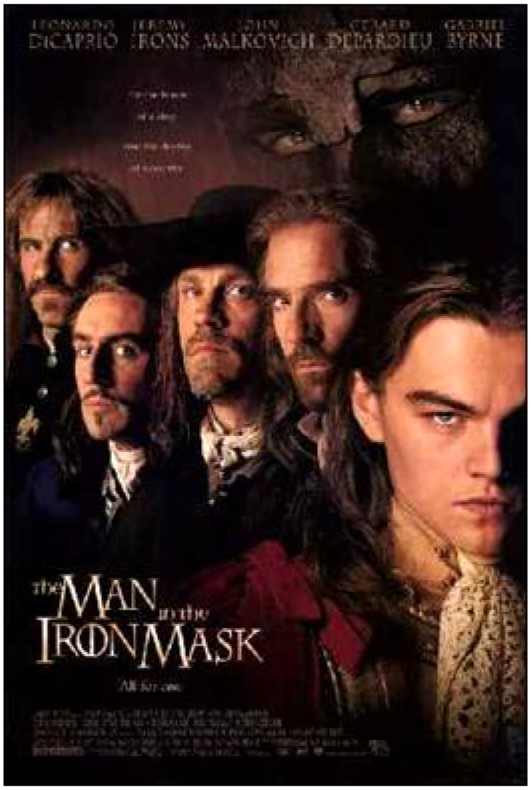
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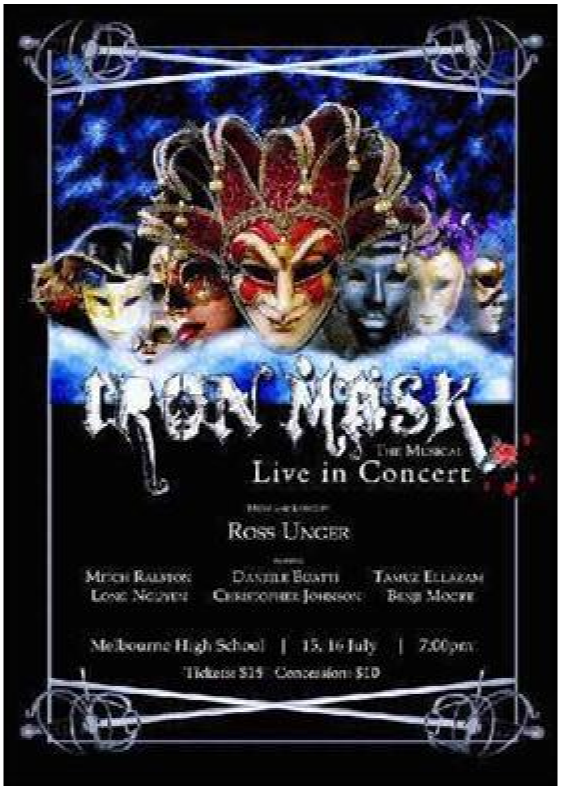
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VOLUME I: THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE

CHAPTER I.

The Letter.

Towards the middle of the month of May, in the year 1660, at nine o’clock in the morning, when the sun, already high in the heavens, was fast absorbing the dew from the ramparts of the castle of Blois, a little cavalcade, composed of three men and two pages, re-entered the city by the bridge, without producing any other effect upon the passengers of the quay beyond a first movement of the hand to the head, as a salute, and a second movement of the tongue to express, in the purest French then spoken in France: “There is Monsieur returning from hunting.” And that was all.

Whilst, however, the horses were climbing the steep acclivity which leads from the river to the castle, several shop-boys approached the last horse, from whose saddle-bow a number of birds were suspended by the beak.

On seeing this, the inquisitive youths manifested with rustic freedom their contempt for such paltry sport, and, after a dissertation among themselves upon the disadvantages of hawking, they returned to their occupations; one only of the curious party, a stout, stubby, cheerful lad, having demanded how it was that Monsieur, who, from his great revenues, had it in his power to amuse himself so much better, could be satisfied with such mean diversions.

“Do you not know,” one of the standers-by replied, “that Monsieur’s principal amusement is to weary himself?”

The light-hearted boy shrugged his shoulders with a gesture which said as clear as day: “In that case I would rather be plain Jack than a prince.” And all resumed their labors.

In the meanwhile, Monsieur continued his route with an air at once so melancholy and so majestic, that he certainly would have attracted the attention of spectators, if spectators there had been; but the good citizens of Blois could not pardon Monsieur for having chosen their gay city for an abode in which to indulge melancholy at his ease, and as often as they caught a glimpse of the illustrious ennuye, they stole away gaping, or drew back their heads into the interior of their dwellings, to escape the soporific influence of that long pale face, of those watery eyes, and that languid address; so that the worthy prince was almost certain to find the streets deserted whenever he chanced to pass through them.

Now, on the part of the citizens of Blois this was a culpable piece of disrespect, for Monsieur was, after the king--nay, even perhaps, before the king--the greatest noble of the kingdom. In fact, God, who had granted to Louis XIV., then reigning, the honor of being son of Louis XIII., had granted to Monsieur the honor of being son of Henry IV. It was not then, or, at least, it ought not to have been, a trifling source of pride for the city of Blois, that Gaston of Orleans had chosen it as his residence, and held his court in the ancient Castle of the States.

But it was the destiny of this great prince to excite the attention and admiration of the public in a very modified degree wherever he might be. Monsieur had fallen into this situation by habit.

It was not, perhaps, this which gave him that air of listlessness. Monsieur had already been tolerably busy in the course of his life. A man cannot allow the heads of a dozen of his best friends to be cut off without feeling a little excitement; and as, since the accession of Mazarin to power, no heads had been cut off, Monsieur's occupation was gone, and his morale suffered from it.

The life of the poor prince was then very dull. After his little morning hawking-party on the banks of the Beuvron, or in the woods of Cheverny, Monsieur crossed the Loire, went to breakfast at Chambord, with or without an appetite, and the city of Blois heard no more of its sovereign lord and master till the next hawking-day.

So much for the ennui extra muros; of the ennui of the interior we will give the reader an idea if he will with us follow the cavalcade to the majestic porch of the Castle of the States.

Monsieur rode a little steady-paced horse, equipped with a large saddle of red Flemish velvet, with stirrups in the shape of buskins; the horse was of a bay color; Monsieur's pourpoint of crimson velvet corresponded with the cloak of the same shade and the horse's equipment, and it was only by this red appearance of the whole that the prince could be known from his two companions, the one dressed in violet, the other in green. He on the left, in violet, was his equerry; he on the right, in green, was the grand veneur.

One of the pages carried two gerfalcons upon a perch, the other a hunting-horn, which he blew with a careless note at twenty paces from the castle. Every one about this listless prince did what he had to listlessly.

At this signal, eight guards, who were lounging in the sun in the square court, ran to their halberts, and Monsieur made his solemn entry into the castle.

When he had disappeared under the shades of the porch, three or four idlers, who had followed the cavalcade to the castle, after pointing out the suspended birds to each other, dispersed with comments upon what they saw: and, when they were gone, the street, the palace, and the court, all remained deserted alike.

Monsieur dismounted without speaking a word, went straight to his apartments, where his valet changed his dress, and as Madame had not yet sent orders respecting breakfast, Monsieur stretched himself upon a chaise longue, and was soon as fast asleep as if it had been eleven o'clock at night.

The eight guards, who concluded their service for the day was over, laid themselves down very comfortably in the sun upon some stone benches; the grooms disappeared with their horses into the stables, and, with the exception of a few joyous birds, startling each other with their sharp chirping in the tufted shrubberies, it might have been thought that the whole castle was as soundly asleep as Monsieur was.

All at once, in the midst of this delicious silence, there resounded a clear ringing laugh, which caused several of the halberdiers in the enjoyment of their siesta to open at least one eye.

This burst of laughter proceeded from a window of the castle, visited at this moment by the sun, that embraced it in one of those large angles which the profiles of the chimneys mark out upon the walls before mid-day.

The little balcony of wrought iron which advanced in front of this window was furnished with a pot of red gilliflowers, another pot of primroses, and an early rose-tree, the foliage of which, beautifully green, was variegated with numerous red specks announcing future roses.

In the chamber lighted by this window, was a square table, covered with an old large-flowered Haarlem tapestry; in the center of this table was a long-necked stone bottle, in which were irises and lilies of the valley; at each end of this table was a young girl.

The position of these two young people was singular; they might have been taken for two boarders escaped from a convent. One of them, with both elbows on the table, and a pen in her hand, was tracing characters upon a sheet of fine Dutch paper; the other, kneeling upon a chair, which allowed her to advance her head and bust over the back of it to the middle of the table, was watching her companion as she wrote, or rather hesitated to write.

Thence the thousand cries, the thousand railleries, the thousand laughs, one of which, more brilliant than the rest, had startled the birds in the gardens, and disturbed the slumbers of Monsieur's guards.

We are taking portraits now; we shall be allowed, therefore, we hope, to sketch the two last of this chapter.

The one who was leaning in the chair--that is to say, the joyous, laughing one--was a beautiful girl of from eighteen to twenty, with brown complexion and brown hair, splendid, from eyes which sparkled beneath strongly-marked brows, and particularly from her teeth, which seemed to shine like pearls between her red coral lips. Her every movement seemed the accent of a sunny nature; she did not walk--she bounded.

The other, she who was writing, looked at her turbulent companion with an eye as limpid, as pure, and as blue as the azure of the day. Her hair, of a shaded fairness, arranged with exquisite taste, fell in silky curls over her lovely mantling cheeks; she passed across the paper a delicate hand, whose thinness announced her extreme youth. At each burst of laughter that proceeded from her friend, she raised, as if annoyed, her white shoulders in a poetical and mild manner, but they were wanting in that richfulness of mold that was likewise to be wished in her arms and hands.

"Montalais! Montalais!" said she at length, in a voice soft and caressing as a melody, "you laugh too loud--you laugh like a man! You will not only draw the attention of messieurs the guards, but you will not hear Madame's bell when Madame rings."

This admonition neither made the young girl called Montalais cease to laugh nor gesticulate. She only replied: "Louise, you do not speak as you think, my dear; you know that messieurs the guards, as you call them, have only just commenced their sleep, and that a cannon would not waken them; you know that Madame's bell can be heard at the bridge of Blois, and that consequently I shall hear it when my services are required by Madame. What annoys you, my child, is that I laugh while you are writing; and what you are afraid of is that Madame de Saint-Remy, your mother, should come up here, as she does sometimes when we laugh too loud, that she should surprise us, and that she should see that enormous sheet of paper upon which, in a quarter of an hour, you have only traced the words Monsieur

Raoul. Now, you are right, my dear Louise, because after these words, ‘Monsieur Raoul’, others may be put so significant and incendiary as to cause Madame Saint-Remy to burst out into fire and flames! Hein! is not that true now?--say.”

And Montalais redoubled her laughter and noisy provocations.

The fair girl at length became quite angry; she tore the sheet of paper on which, in fact, the words “Monsieur Raoul” were written in good characters; and crushing the paper in her trembling hands, she threw it out of the window.

“There! there!” said Mademoiselle de Montalais; “there is our little lamb, our gentle dove, angry! Don’t be afraid, Louise--Madame de Saint-Remy will not come; and if she should, you know I have a quick ear. Besides, what can be more permissible than to write to an old friend of twelve years’ standing, particularly when the letter begins with the words ‘Monsieur Raoul’?”

“It is all very well--I will not write to him at all,” said the young girl.

“Ah, ah! in good sooth, Montalais is properly punished,” cried the jeering brunette, still laughing. “Come, come! let us try another sheet of paper, and finish our dispatch off-hand. Good! there is the bell ringing now. By my faith, so much the worse! Madame must wait, or else do without her first maid of honor this morning.”

A bell, in fact, did ring; it announced that Madame had finished her toilette, and waited for Monsieur to give her his hand, and conduct her from the salon to the refectory.

This formality being accomplished with great ceremony, the husband and wife breakfasted, and then separated till the hour of dinner, invariably fixed at two o’clock.

The sound of this bell caused a door to be opened in the offices on the left hand of the court, from which filed two maitres d’hotel followed by eight scullions bearing a kind of hand-barrow loaded with dishes under silver covers.

One of the maitres d’hotel, the first in rank, touched one of the guards, who was snoring on his bench, slightly with his wand; he even carried his kindness so far as to place the halbert which stood against the wall in the hands of the man stupid with sleep, after which the soldier, without explanation, escorted the viande of Monsieur to the refectory, preceded by a page and the two maitres d’hotel.

Wherever the viande passed, the soldiers ported arms.

Mademoiselle de Montalais and her companion had watched from their window the details of this ceremony, to which, by the bye, they must have been pretty well accustomed. But they did not look so much from curiosity as to be assured they should not be disturbed. So, guards, scullions, maitres d'hotel, and pages having passed, they resumed their places at the table; and the sun, which, through the window-frame, had for an instant fallen upon those two charming countenances, now only shed its light upon the gilliflowers, primroses, and rose-tree.

"Bah!" said Mademoiselle de Montalais, taking her place again; "Madame will breakfast very well without me!"

"Oh! Montalais, you will be punished!" replied the other girl, sitting down quietly in hers.

"Punished, indeed!--that is to say, deprived of a ride! That is just the way in which I wish to be punished. To go out in the grand coach, perched upon a doorstep; to turn to the left, twist round to the right, over roads full of ruts, where we cannot exceed a league in two hours; and then to come back straight towards the wing of the castle in which is the window of Mary de Medici, so that Madame never fails to say: 'Could one believe it possible that Mary de Medici should have escaped from that window--forty-seven feet high? The mother of two princes and three princesses!' If you call that relaxation, Louise, all I ask is to be punished every day; particularly when my punishment is to remain with you and write such interesting letters as we write!"

"Montalais! Montalais! there are duties to be performed."

"You talk of them very much at your ease, dear child!--you, who are left quite free amidst this tedious court. You are the only person that reaps the advantages of them without incurring the trouble,--you, who are really more one of Madame's maids of honor than I am, because Madame makes her affection for your father-in-law glance off upon you; so that you enter this dull house as the birds fly into yonder court, inhaling the air, pecking the flowers, picking up the grain, without having the least service to perform, or the least annoyance to undergo. And you talk to me of duties to be performed! In sooth, my pretty idler, what are your own proper duties, unless to write to the handsome Raoul? And even that you don't do; so that it looks to me as if you likewise were rather negligent of your duties!"

Louise assumed a serious air, leant her chin upon her hand, and, in a tone full of candid remonstrance, “And do you reproach me with my good fortune?” said she. “Can you have the heart to do it? You have a future; you will belong to the court; the king, if he should marry, will require Monsieur to be near his person; you will see splendid fetes, you will see the king, who they say is so handsome, so agreeable!”

“Ay, and still more, I shall see Raoul, who attends upon M. le Prince,” added Montalais, maliciously.

“Poor Raoul!” sighed Louise.

“Now is the time to write to him, my pretty dear! Come, begin again, with that famous ‘Monsieur Raoul’ which figures at the top of the poor torn sheet.”

She then held the pen toward her, and with a charming smile encouraged her hand, which quickly traced the words she named.

“What next?” asked the younger of the two girls.

“Why, now write what you think, Louise,” replied Montalais.

“Are you quite sure I think of anything?”

“You think of somebody, and that amounts to the same thing, or rather even more.”

“Do you think so, Montalais?”

“Louise, Louise, your blue eyes are as deep as the sea I saw at Boulogne last year! No, no, I mistake--the sea is perfidious: your eyes are as deep as the azure yonder--look!--over our heads!”

“Well, since you can read so well in my eyes, tell me what I am thinking about, Montalais.”

“In the first place, you don’t think, Monsieur Raoul; you think, My dear Raoul.”

“Oh!--”

“Never blush for such a trifle as that! ‘My dear Raoul,’ we will say--’You implore me to write you at Paris, where you are detained by your attendance on M. le Prince. As you must be very dull there, to seek for amusement in the remembrance of a provinciale--’“

Louise rose up suddenly. “No, Montalais,” said she, with a smile; “I don’t think a word of that. Look, this is what I think;” and she seized the pen boldly, and traced, with a firm hand, the following words:

“I should have been very unhappy if your entreaties to obtain a remembrance of me had been less warm. Everything here reminds me of our early days, which so quickly passed away, which so delightfully flew by, that no others will ever replace the charm of them in my heart.”

Montalais, who watched the flying pen, and read, the wrong way upwards, as fast as her friend wrote, here interrupted by clapping her hands. “Capital!” cried she; “there is frankness--there is heart--there is style! Show these Parisians, my dear, that Blois is the city for fine language!”

“He knows very well that Blois was a Paradise to me,” replied the girl.

“That is exactly what you mean to say; and you speak like an angel.”

“I will finish, Montalais,” and she continued as follows: “You often think of me, you say, Monsieur Raoul: I thank you; but that does not surprise me, when I recollect how often our hearts have beaten close to each other.”

“Oh! oh!” said Montalais. “Beware, my lamb! You are scattering your wool, and there are wolves about.”

Louise was about to reply, when the gallop of a horse resounded under the porch of the castle.

“What is that?” said Montalais, approaching the window. “A handsome cavalier, by my faith!”

“Oh!--Raoul!” exclaimed Louise, who had made the same movement as her friend, and, becoming pale as death, sunk back beside her unfinished letter.

“Now, he is a clever lover, upon my word!” cried Montalais; “he arrives just at the proper moment.”

“Come in, come in, I implore you!” murmured Louise.

“Bah! he does not know me. Let me see what he has come here for.”

CHAPTER II.

The Messenger.

Mademoiselle de Montalais was right; the young cavalier was goodly to look upon.

He was a young man of from twenty-four to twenty-five years of age, tall and slender, wearing gracefully the picturesque military costume of the period. His large boots contained a foot which Mademoiselle de Montalais might not have disowned if she had been transformed into a man. With one of his delicate but nervous hands he checked his horse in the middle of the court, and with the other raised his hat, whose long plumes shaded his at once serious and ingenuous countenance.

The guards, roused by the steps of the horse, awoke, and were on foot in a minute. The young man waited till one of them was close to his saddle-bow: then, stooping towards him, in a clear, distinct voice, which was perfectly audible at the window where the two girls were concealed, “A message for his royal highness,” he said.

“Ah, ah!” cried the soldier. “Officer, a messenger!”

But this brave guard knew very well that no officer would appear, seeing that the only one who could have appeared dwelt at the other side of the castle, in an apartment looking into the gardens. So he hastened to add: “The officer, monsieur, is on his rounds; but, in his absence, M. de Saint-Remy, the maitre d’hotel, shall be informed.”

“M. de Saint-Remy?” repeated the cavalier, slightly blushing.

“Do you know him?”

“Why, yes; but request him, if you please, that my visit be announced to his royal highness as soon as possible.”

“It appears to be pressing,” said the guard, as if speaking to himself, but really in the hope of obtaining an answer.

The messenger made an affirmative sign with his head.

“In that case,” said the guard, “I will go and seek the maitre d’hotel myself.”

The young man, in the meantime, dismounted; and whilst the others were making their remarks upon the fine horse the cavalier rode, the soldier returned.

"Your pardon, young gentleman; but your name, if you please?"

"The Vicomte de Bragelonne, on the part of his highness M. le Prince de Conde."

The soldier made a profound bow, and, as if the name of the conqueror of Rocroi and Lens had given him wings, he stepped lightly up the steps leading to the ante-chamber.

M de Bragelonne had not had time to fasten his horse to the iron bars of the perron, when M. de Saint-Remy came running, out of breath, supporting his capacious body with one hand, whilst with the other he cut the air as a fisherman cleaves the waves with his oar.

"Ah, Monsieur le Vicomte! You at Blois!" cried he. "Well, that is a wonder. Good-day to you--good-day, Monsieur Raoul."

"I offer you a thousand respects, M. de Saint-Remy."

"How Madame de la Vall--I mean, how delighted Madame de Saint-Remy will be to see you! But come in. His royal highness is at breakfast--must he be interrupted? Is the matter serious?"

"Yes, and no, Monsieur de Saint-Remy. A moment's delay, however, would be disagreeable to his royal highness."

"If that is the case, we will force the consigne, Monsieur le Vicomte. Come in. Besides, Monsieur is in an excellent humor to-day. And then you bring news, do you not?"

"Great news, Monsieur de Saint-Remy.

"And good, I presume?"

"Excellent."

"Come quickly, come quickly then!" cried the worthy man, putting his dress to rights as he went along.

Raoul followed him, hat in hand, and a little disconcerted at the noise made by his spurs in these immense salons.

As soon as he had disappeared in the interior of the palace, the window of the court was repeopled, and an animated whispering betrayed the emotion of the two girls. They soon appeared to have formed a resolution, for one of the two faces disappeared from the window. This was the brunette; the other remained behind the balcony, concealed by the flowers, watching attentively through the branches the perron by which M. de Bragelonne had entered the castle.

In the meantime the object of so much laudable curiosity continued his route, following the steps of the maitre d’hotel. The noise of quick steps, an odor of wine and viands, a clinking of crystal and plates, warned them that they were coming to the end of their course.

The pages, valets and officers, assembled in the office which led up to the refectory, welcomed the newcomer with the proverbial politeness of the country; some of them were acquainted with Raoul, and all knew that he came from Paris. It might be said that his arrival for a moment suspended the service. In fact, a page, who was pouring out wine for his royal highness, on hearing the jingling of spurs in the next chamber, turned round like a child, without perceiving that he was continuing to pour out, not into the glass, but upon the tablecloth.

Madame, who was not so preoccupied as her glorious spouse was, remarked this distraction of the page.

“Well?” exclaimed she.

“Well!” repeated Monsieur; “what is going on then?”

M de Saint-Remy, who had just introduced his head through the doorway, took advantage of the moment.

“Why am I to be disturbed?” said Gaston, helping himself to a thick slice of one of the largest salmon that had ever ascended the Loire to be captured between Paimboeuf and Saint-Nazaire.

“There is a messenger from Paris. Oh! but after monseigneur has breakfasted will do; there is plenty of time.”

“From Paris!” cried the prince, letting his fork fall. “A messenger from Paris, do you say? And on whose part does this messenger come?”

“On the part of M. le Prince,” said the maitre d’hotel promptly.

Every one knows that the Prince de Conde was so called.

“A messenger from M. le Prince!” said Gaston, with an inquietude that escaped none of the assistants, and consequently redoubled the general curiosity.

Monsieur, perhaps, fancied himself brought back again to the happy times when the opening of a door gave him an emotion, in which every letter might contain a state secret,--in which every message was connected with a dark and complicated intrigue. Perhaps, likewise, that great name of

M. le Prince expanded itself, beneath the roofs of Blois, to the proportions of a phantom.

Monsieur pushed away his plate.

“Shall I tell the envoy to wait?” asked M. de Saint-Remy.

A glance from Madame emboldened Gaston, who replied: “No, no! let him come in at once, on the contrary. A propos, who is he?”

“A gentleman of this country, M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne.”

“Ah, very well! Introduce him, Saint-Remy--introduce him.”

And when he had let fall these words, with his accustomed gravity, Monsieur turned his eyes, in a certain manner, upon the people of his suite, so that all, pages, officers, and equerries, quitted the service, knives and goblets, and made towards the second chamber door a retreat as rapid as it was disorderly.

This little army had dispersed in two files when Raoul de Bragelonne, preceded by M. de Saint-Remy, entered the refectory.

The short interval of solitude which this retreat had left him, permitted Monsieur the time to assume a diplomatic countenance. He did not turn round, but waited till the maitre d’hotel should bring the messenger face to face with him.

Raoul stopped even with the lower end of the table, so as to be exactly between Monsieur and Madame. From this place he made a profound bow to Monsieur, and a very humble one to Madame; then, drawing himself up into military pose, he waited for Monsieur to address him.

On his part the prince waited till the doors were hermetically closed; he would not turn round to ascertain the fact, as that would have been derogatory to his dignity, but he listened with all his ears for the noise of the lock, which would promise him at least an appearance of secrecy.

The doors being closed, Monsieur raised his eyes towards the vicomte, and said, “It appears that you come from Paris, monsieur?”

“This minute, monseigneur.”

“How is the king?”

“His majesty is in perfect health, monseigneur.”

“And my sister-in-law?”

“Her majesty the queen-mother still suffers from the complaint in her chest, but for the last month she has been rather better.”

“Somebody told me you came on the part of M. le Prince. They must have been mistaken, surely?”

"No, monseigneur; M. le Prince has charged me to convey this letter to your royal highness, and I am to wait for an answer to it."

Raoul had been a little annoyed by this cold and cautious reception, and his voice insensibly sank to a low key.

The prince forgot that he was the cause of this apparent mystery, and his fears returned.

He received the letter from the Prince de Conde with a haggard look, unsealed it as he would have unsealed a suspicious packet, and in order to read it so that no one should remark the effects of it upon his countenance, he turned round.

Madame followed, with an anxiety almost equal to that of the prince, every maneuver of her august husband.

Raoul, impassible, and a little disengaged by the attention of his hosts, looked from his place through the open window at the gardens and the statues which peopled them.

"Well!" cried Monsieur, all at once, with a cheerful smile; "here is an agreeable surprise, and a charming letter from M. le Prince. Look, Madame!"

The table was too large to allow the arm of the prince to reach the hand of Madame; Raoul sprang forward to be their intermediary, and did it with so good a grace as to procure a flattering acknowledgement from the princess.

"You know the contents of this letter, no doubt?" said Gaston to Raoul.

"Yes, monseigneur; M. le Prince at first gave me the message verbally, but upon reflection his highness took up his pen."

"It is beautiful writing," said Madame, "but I cannot read it."

"Will you read it to Madame, M. de Bragelonne?" said the duke.

"Yes; read it, if you please, monsieur."

Raoul began to read, Monsieur giving again all his attention. The letter was conceived in these terms:

"MONSEIGNEUR--The king is about to set out for the frontiers. You are aware the marriage of his majesty is concluded upon. The king has done me the honor to appoint me his marechal-des-logis for this journey, and as I knew with what joy his majesty would pass a day at Blois, I venture to ask your royal highness's permission to mark the house you inhabit as our quarters. If, however, the suddenness of this request should create to your royal highness any embarrassment, I entreat you to say so by the messenger I send, a gentleman of my suite, M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne. My itinerary will depend on your royal highness's determination, and instead of passing through Blois, we shall come through Vendome or Romorantin. I venture to hope that your royal highness will be pleased with my arrangement, it being the expression of my boundless desire to make myself agreeable to you."

"Nothing can be more gracious toward us," said Madame, who had more than once consulted the looks of her husband during the reading of the letter. "The king here!" exclaimed she, in a rather louder tone than would have been necessary to preserve secrecy.

"Monsieur," said his royal highness in his turn, "you will offer my thanks to M. de Conde, and express to him my gratitude for the honor he has done me." Raoul bowed.

"On what day will his majesty arrive?" continued the prince.

"The king, monseigneur, will in all probability arrive this evening."

"But how, then, could he have known my reply if it had been in the negative?"

"I was desired, monseigneur, to return in all haste to Beaugency, to give counter-orders to the courier, who was himself to go back immediately with counter-orders to M. le Prince."

"His majesty is at Orleans, then?"

"Much nearer, monseigneur; his majesty must by this time have arrived at Meung."

"Does the court accompany him?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"A propos, I forgot to ask you after M. le Cardinal."

"His eminence appears to enjoy good health, monseigneur."

"His nieces accompany him, no doubt?"

"No, monseigneur; his eminence has ordered the Mesdemoiselles de Mancini to set out for Brouage. They will follow the left bank of the Loire, while the court will come by the right.

"What! Mademoiselle Mary de Mancini quit the court in that manner?" asked Monsieur, his reserve beginning to diminish.

"Mademoiselle Mary de Mancini in particular," replied Raoul discreetly.

A fugitive smile, an imperceptible vestige of his ancient spirit of intrigue, shot across the pale face of the prince.

"Thanks, M. de Bragelonne," then said Monsieur. "You would, perhaps, not be willing to carry M. le Prince the commission with which I would charge you, and that is, that his messenger has been very agreeable to me; but I will tell him so myself."

Raoul bowed his thanks to Monsieur for the honor he had done him.

Monsieur made a sign to Madame, who struck a bell which was placed at her right hand; M. de Saint-Remy entered, and the room was soon filled with people.

"Messieurs," said the prince, "his majesty is about to pay me the honor of passing a day at Blois; I depend on the king, my nephew, not having to repent of the favor he does my house."

"Vive le Roi!" cried all the officers of the household with frantic enthusiasm, and M. de Saint-Remy louder than the rest.

Gaston hung down his head with evident chagrin. He had all his life been obliged to hear, or rather to undergo, this cry of "Vive le Roi!" which passed over him. For a long time, being unaccustomed to hear it, his ear had had rest, and now a younger, more vivacious, and more brilliant royalty rose up before him, like a new and more painful provocation.

Madame perfectly understood the sufferings of that timid, gloomy heart; she rose from the table, Monsieur imitated her mechanically, and all the domestics, with a buzzing like that of several bee-hives, surrounded Raoul for the purpose of questioning him.

Madame saw this movement, and called M. de Saint-Remy.

"This is not the time for gossiping, but working," said she, with the tone of an angry housekeeper.

M de Saint-Remy hastened to break the circle formed by the officers round Raoul, so that the latter was able to gain the ante-chamber.

"Care will be taken of that gentleman, I hope," added Madame, addressing M. de Saint-Remy.

The worthy man immediately hastened after Raoul. "Madame desires refreshments to be offered to you," said he; "and there is, besides, a lodging for you in the castle."

"Thanks, M. de Saint-Remy," replied Raoul; "but you know how anxious I must be to pay my duty to M. le Comte, my father."

"That is true, that is true, Monsieur Raoul; present him, at the same time, my humble respects, if you please."

Raoul thus once more got rid of the old gentleman, and pursued his way. As he was passing under the porch, leading his horse by the bridle, a soft voice called him from the depths of an obscure path.

“Monsieur Raoul!” said the voice.

The young man turned round, surprised, and saw a dark complexioned girl, who, with a finger on her lip, held out her other hand to him. This young lady was an utter stranger.

CHAPTER III.

The Interview.

Raoul made one step towards the girl who thus called him.

"But my horse, madame?" said he.

"Oh! you are terribly embarrassed! Go yonder way--there is a shed in the outer court: fasten your horse, and return quickly!"

"I obey, madame."

Raoul was not four minutes in performing what he had been directed to do; he returned to the little door, where, in the gloom, he found his mysterious conductress waiting for him, on the first steps of a winding staircase.

"Are you brave enough to follow me, monsieur knight errant?" asked the girl, laughing at the momentary hesitation Raoul had manifested.

The latter replied by springing up the dark staircase after her. They thus climbed up three stories, he behind her, touching with his hands, when he felt for the banister, a silk dress which rubbed against each side of the staircase. At every false step made by Raoul, his conductress cried, "Hush!" and held out to him a soft perfumed hand.

"One would mount thus to the belfry of the castle without being conscious of fatigue," said Raoul.

"All of which means, monsieur, that you are very much perplexed, very tired, and very uneasy. But be of good cheer, monsieur; here we are, at our destination."

The girl threw open a door, which immediately, without any transition, filled with a flood of light the landing of the staircase, at the top of which Raoul appeared, holding fast by the balustrade.

The girl continued to walk on--he followed her; she entered a chamber--he did the same.

As soon as he was fairly in the net he heard a loud cry, and, turning round, saw at two paces from him, with her hands clasped and her eyes closed, that beautiful fair girl with blue eyes and white shoulders, who, recognizing him, called him Raoul.

He saw her, and divined at once so much love and so much joy in the expression of her countenance, the he sank on his knees in the middle of the chamber, murmuring, on his part, the name of Louise.

“Ah! Montalais!--Montalais!” she sighed, “it is very wicked to deceive me so.”

“Who, I? I have deceived you?”

“Yes; you told me you would go down to inquire the news, and you have brought up monsieur!”

“Well, I was obliged to do so--how else could he have received the letter you wrote him?” And she pointed with her finger to the letter which was still upon the table.

Raoul made a step to take it; Louise, more rapid, although she had sprung forward with a sufficiently remarkable physical hesitation, reached out her hand to stop him. Raoul came in contact with that trembling hand, took it within his own, and carried it so respectfully to his lips, that he might have been said to have deposited a sigh upon it rather than a kiss.

In the meantime, Mademoiselle de Montalais had taken the letter, folded it carefully, as women do, in three folds, and slipped it into her bosom.

“Don’t be afraid, Louise,” said she; “monsieur will no more venture to take it hence than the defunct king Louis XIII. ventured to take billets from the corsage of Mademoiselle de Hautefort.”

Raoul blushed at seeing the smile of the two girls; and he did not remark that the hand of Louise remained in his.

“There!” said Montalais, “you have pardoned me, Louise, for having brought monsieur to you; and you, monsieur, bear me no malice for having followed me to see mademoiselle. Now, then, peace being made, let us chat like old friends. Present me, Louise, to M. de Bragelonne.”

“Monsieur le Vicomte,” said Louise, with her quiet grace and ingenuous smile, “I have the honor to present to you Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais, maid of honor to her royal highness MADAME, and moreover my friend--my excellent friend.”

Raoul bowed ceremoniously.

“And me, Louise,” said he--”will you not present me also to mademoiselle?”

“Oh, she knows you--she knows all!”

This unguarded expression made Montalais laugh and Raoul sigh with happiness, for he interpreted it thus: “She knows all our love.”

“The ceremonies being over, Monsieur le Vicomte,” said Montalais, “take a chair, and tell us quickly the news you bring flying thus.”

“Mademoiselle, it is no longer a secret; the king, on his way to Poitiers, will stop at Blois, to visit his royal highness.”

“The king here!” exclaimed Montalais, clapping her hands. “What! are we going to see the court? Only think, Louise--the real court from Paris! Oh, good heavens! But when will this happen, monsieur?”

“Perhaps this evening, mademoiselle; at latest, to-morrow.”

Montalais lifted her shoulders in a sigh of vexation.

“No time to get ready! No time to prepare a single dress! We are as far behind the fashions as the Poles. We shall look like portraits from the time of Henry IV. Ah, monsieur! this is sad news you bring us!”

“But, mesdemoiselles, you will be still beautiful!”

“That’s no news! Yes, we shall always be beautiful, because nature has made us passable; but we shall be ridiculous, because the fashion will have forgotten us. Alas! ridiculous! I shall be thought ridiculous--I!”

“And by whom?” said Louise, innocently.

“By whom? You are a strange girl, my dear. Is that a question to put to me? I mean everybody; I mean the courtiers, the nobles; I mean the king.”

“Pardon me, my good friend; but as here every one is accustomed to see us as we are--”

“Granted; but that is about to change, and we shall be ridiculous, even for Blois; for close to us will be seen the fashions from Paris, and they will perceive that we are in the fashion of Blois! It is enough to make one despair!”

“Console yourself, mademoiselle.”

“Well, so let it be! After all, so much the worse for those who do not find me to their taste!” said Montalais, philosophically.

“They would be very difficult to please,” replied Raoul, faithful to his regular system of gallantry.

“Thank you, Monsieur le Vicomte. We were saying, then, that the king is coming to Blois?”

“With all the court.”

“Mesdemoiselles de Mancini, will they be with them?”

“No, certainly not.”

“But as the king, it is said, cannot do without Mademoiselle Mary?”

“Mademoiselle, the king must do without her. M. le Cardinal will have it so. He has exiled his nieces to Brouage.”

“He!--the hypocrite!”

“Hush!” said Louise, pressing a finger on her friend’s rosy lips.

“Bah! nobody can hear me. I say that old Mazarino Mazarini is a hypocrite, who burns impatiently to make his niece Queen of France.”

“That cannot be, mademoiselle, since M. le Cardinal, on the contrary, had brought about the marriage of his majesty with the Infanta Maria Theresa.”

Montalais looked Raoul full in the face, and said, “And do you Parisians believe in these tales? Well! we are a little more knowing than you, at Blois.”

“Mademoiselle, if the king goes beyond Poitiers and sets out for Spain; if the articles of the marriage contract are agreed upon by Don Luis de Haro and his eminence, you must plainly perceive that it is not child’s play.”

“All very fine! but the king is king, I suppose?”

“No doubt, mademoiselle; but the cardinal is the cardinal.”

“The king is not a man, then! And he does not love Mary Mancini?”

“He adores her.”

“Well, he will marry her then. We shall have war with Spain. M. Mazarin will spend a few of the millions he has put away; our gentlemen will perform prodigies of valor in their encounters with the proud Castilians, and many of them will return crowned with laurels, to be recrowned by us with myrtles. Now, that is my view of politics.”

“Montalais, you are wild!” said Louise, “and every exaggeration attracts you as light does a moth.”

“Louise, you are so extremely reasonable, that you will never know how to love.”

“Oh!” said Louise, in a tone of tender reproach, “don’t you see, Montalais? The queen-mother desires to marry her son to the Infanta; would you wish him to disobey his mother? Is it for a royal heart like his to set such a bad example? When parents forbid love, love must be banished.”

And Louise sighed: Raoul cast down his eyes, with an expression of constraint. Montalais, on her part, laughed aloud.

“Well, I have no parents!” said she.

“You are acquainted, without doubt, with the state of health of M. le Comte de la Fere?” said Louise, after breathing that sigh which had revealed so many griefs in its eloquent utterance.

"No, mademoiselle," replied Raoul, "I have not let paid my respects to my father; I was going to his house when Mademoiselle de Montalais so kindly stopped me. I hope the comte is well. You have heard nothing to the contrary, have you?"

"No, M. Raoul--nothing, thank God!"

Here, for several instants, ensued a silence, during which two spirits, which followed the same idea, communicated perfectly, without even the assistance of a single glance.

"Oh, heavens!" exclaimed Montalais in a fright; "there is somebody coming up."

"Who can it be?" said Louise, rising in great agitation.

"Mesdemoiselles, I inconvenience you very much. I have, without doubt, been very indiscreet," stammered Raoul, very ill at ease.

"It is a heavy step," said Louise.

"Ah! if it is only M. Malicorne," added Montalais, "do not disturb yourselves."

Louise and Raoul looked at each other to inquire who M. Malicorne could be.

"There is no occasion to mind him," continued Montalais; "he is not jealous."

"But, mademoiselle--" said Raoul.

"Yes, I understand. Well, he is discreet as I am."

"Good heavens!" cried Louise, who had applied her ear to the door, which had been left ajar; "it is my mother's step!"

"Madame de Saint-Remy! Where shall I hide myself?" exclaimed Raoul, catching at the dress of Montalais, who looked quite bewildered.

"Yes," said she; "yes, I know the clicking of those pattens! It is our excellent mother. M. le Vicomte, what a pity it is the window looks upon a stone pavement, and that fifty paces below it."

Raoul glanced at the balcony in despair. Louise seized his arm and held it tight.

"Oh, how silly I am!" said Montalais; "have I not the robe-of-ceremony closet? It looks as if it were made on purpose."

It was quite time to act; Madame de Saint-Remy was coming up at a quicker pace than usual. She gained the landing at the moment when Montalais, as in all scenes of surprises, shut the closet by leaning with her back against the door.

"Ah!" cried Madame de Saint-Remy, "you are here, are you, Louise?"

"Yes, madame," replied she, more pale than if she had committed a great crime.

"Well, well!"

"Pray be seated, madame," said Montalais, offering her a chair, which she placed so that the back was towards the closet.

"Thank you, Mademoiselle Aure--thank you. Come, my child, be quick."

"Where do you wish me to go, madame?"

"Why, home, to be sure; have you not to prepare your toilette?"

"What did you say?" cried Montalais, hastening to affect surprise, so fearful was she that Louise would in some way commit herself.

"You don't know the news, then?" said Madame de Saint-Remy.

"What news, madame, is it possible for two girls to learn up in this dove-cote?"

"What! have you seen nobody?"

"Madame, you talk in enigmas, and you torment us at a slow fire!" cried Montalais, who, terrified at seeing Louise become paler and paler, did not know to what saint to put up her vows.

At length she caught an eloquent look of her companion's, one of those looks which would convey intelligence to a brick wall. Louise directed her attention to a hat--Raoul's unlucky hat, which was set out in all its feathery splendor upon the table.

Montalais sprang towards it, and, seizing it with her left hand, passed it behind her into the right, concealing it as she was speaking.

"Well," said Madame de Saint-Remy, "a courier has arrived, announcing the approach of the king. There, mesdemoiselles; there is something to make you put on your best looks."

"Quick, quick!" cried Montalais. "Follow Madame your mother, Louise; and leave me to get ready my dress of ceremony."

Louise arose; her mother took her by the hand, and led her out on to the landing.

"Come along," said she; then adding in a low voice, "When I forbid you to come the apartment of Montalais, why do you do so?"

"Madame, she is my friend. Besides, I had but just come."

"Did you see nobody concealed while you were there?"

"Madame!"

"I saw a man's hat, I tell you--the hat of that fellow, that good-for-nothing!"

"Madame!" repeated Louise.

"Of that do-nothing Malicorne! A maid of honor to have such company--fie! fie!" and their voices were lost in the depths of the narrow staircase.

Montalais had not missed a word of this conversation, which echo conveyed to her as if through a tunnel. She shrugged her shoulders on seeing Raoul, who had listened likewise, issue from the closet.

"Poor Montalais!" said she, "the victim of friendship! Poor Malicorne, the victim of love!"

She stopped on viewing the tragic-comic face of Raoul, who was vexed at having, in one day, surprised so many secrets.

"Oh, mademoiselle!" said he; "how can we repay your kindness?"

"Oh, we will balance accounts some day," said she. "For the present, begone, M. de Bragelonne, for Madame de Saint-Remy is not over indulgent; and any indiscretion on her part might bring hither a domiciliary visit, which would be disagreeable to all parties."

"But Louise--how shall I know--"

"Begone! begone! King Louis XI. knew very well what he was about when he invented the post."

"Alas!" sighed Raoul.

"And am I not here--I, who am worth all the posts in the kingdom? Quick, I say, to horse! so that if Madame de Saint-Remy should return for the purpose of preaching me a lesson on morality, she may not find you here."

"She would tell my father, would she not?" murmured Raoul.

"And you would be scolded. Ah, vicomte, it is very plain you come from court; you are as timid as the king. Peste! at Blois we contrive better than that, to do without papa's consent. Ask Malicorne else!"

And at these words the girl pushed Raoul out of the room by the shoulders. He glided swiftly down to the porch, regained his horse, mounted, and set off as if he had had Monsieur's guards at his heels.

CHAPTER IV.

Father and Son.

Raoul followed the well-known road, so dear to his memory, which led from Blois to the residence of the Comte de la Fere.

The reader will dispense with a second description of that habitation: he, perhaps, has been with us there before, and knows it. Only, since our last journey thither, the walls had taken on a grayer tint, and the brick-work assumed a more harmonious copper tone; the trees had grown, and many that then only stretched their slender branches along the tops of the hedges, now, bushy, strong, and luxuriant, cast around, beneath boughs swollen with sap, great shadows of blossoms or fruit for the benefit of the traveler.

Raoul perceived, from a distance, the two little turrets, the dove-cote in the elms, and the flights of pigeons, which wheeled incessantly around that brick cone, seemingly without power to quit it, like the sweet memories which hover round a spirit at peace.

As he approached, he heard the noise of the pulleys which grated under the weight of the heavy pails; he also fancied he heard the melancholy moaning of the water which falls back again into the wells--a sad, funereal, solemn sound, which strikes the ear of the child and the poet--both dreamers--which the English call splash; Arabian poets gasgachau; and which we Frenchmen, who would be poets, can only translate by a paraphrase--the noise of water falling into water.

It was more than a year since Raoul had been to visit his father. He had passed the whole time in the household of M. le Prince. In fact, after all the commotions of the Fronde, of the early period of which we formerly attempted to give a sketch, Louis de Conde had made a public, solemn and frank reconciliation with the court. During all the time that the rupture between the king and the prince had lasted, the prince, who had long entertained a great regard for Bragelonne, had in vain offered him advantages of the most dazzling kind for a young man. The Comte de la Fere, still faithful to his principles of loyalty, and royalty, one day developed before his son in the vaults of Saint Denis,--the Comte de la

Fere, in the name of his son, had always declined them. Moreover, instead of following M. de Conde in his rebellion, the vicomte had followed M. de Turenne, fighting for the king. Then when M. de Turenne, in his turn, had appeared to abandon the royal cause, he had quitted M. de Turenne, as he had quitted M. de Conde. It resulted from this invariable line of conduct, that, as Conde and Turenne had never been conquerors of each other but under the standard of the king, Raoul, however young, had ten victories inscribed on his list of services, and not one defeat from which his bravery or conscience had to suffer.

Raoul, therefore, had, in compliance with the wish of his father, served obstinately and passively the fortunes of Louis XIV., in spite of the tergiversations which were endemic, and, it might be said, inevitable, at that period.

de Conde; on being restored to favor, had at once availed himself of all the privileges of the amnesty to ask for many things back again which had been granted to him before, and among others, Raoul. M. de la Fere, with his invariable good sense, had immediately sent him again to the prince.

A year, then, had passed away since the separation of the father and son; a few letters had softened, but not removed, the pain of absence. We have seen that Raoul had left at Blois another love in addition to filial love. But let us do him this justice--if it had not been for chance and Mademoiselle de Montalais, two great temptations, Raoul, after delivering his message, would have galloped off towards his father's house, turning his head round, perhaps, but without stopping for a single instant, even if Louise had held out her arms to him.

So the first part of the journey was given by Raoul to regretting the past which he had been forced to quit so quickly, that is to say, his lady-love; and the other part to the friend he was about to join, so much too slowly for his wishes.

Raoul found the garden-gate open, and rode straight in, without regarding the long arms, raised in anger, of an old man dressed in a jacket of violet-colored wool, and a large cap of faded velvet.

The old man, who was weeding with his hands a bed of dwarf roses and arguerites, was indignant at seeing a horse thus traversing his sanded and nicely-raked walks. He even ventured a vigorous "Humph!" which made the cavalier turn round. Then there was a change of scene; for no sooner had he caught sight of Raoul's face, than the old man sprang up and set off in the direction of the house, amidst interrupted growlings, which appeared to be paroxysms of wild delight.

When arrived at the stables, Raoul gave his horse to a little lackey, and sprang up the perron with an ardor that would have delighted the heart of his father.

He crossed the ante-chamber, the dining-room, and the salon, without meeting any one; at length, on reaching the door of M. de la Fere's apartment, he rapped impatiently, and entered almost without waiting for the word "Enter!" which was vouchsafed him by a voice at once sweet and serious. The comte was seated at a table covered with papers and books; he was still the noble, handsome gentleman of former days, but time had given to this nobleness and beauty a more solemn and distinct character. A brow white and void of wrinkles, beneath his long hair, now more white than black; an eye piercing and mild, under the lids of a young man; his mustache, fine but slightly grizzled, waved over lips of a pure and delicate model, as if they had never been curled by mortal passions; a form straight and supple; an irreproachable but thin hand--this was what remained of the illustrious gentleman whom so many illustrious mouths had praised under the name of Athos. He was engaged in correcting the pages of a manuscript book, entirely filled by his own hand.

Raoul seized his father by the shoulders, by the neck, as he could, and embraced him so tenderly and so rapidly, that the comte had neither strength nor time to disengage himself, or to overcome his paternal emotions.

"What! you here, Raoul--you! Is it possible?" said he.

"Oh, monsieur, monsieur, what joy to see you once again!"

"But you don't answer me, vicomte. Have you leave of absence, or has some misfortune happened at Paris?

"Thank God, monsieur," replied Raoul, calming himself by degrees, "nothing has happened but what is fortunate. The king is going to be married, as I had the honor of informing you in my last letter, and, on his way to Spain, he will pass through Blois."

"To pay a visit to Monsieur?"

"Yes, monsieur le comte. So, fearing to find him unprepared, or wishing to be particularly polite to him, monsieur le prince sent me forward to have the lodgings ready."

"You have seen Monsieur?" asked the comte, eagerly.

"I have had that honor."

"At the castle?"

"Yes, monsieur," replied Raoul, casting down his eyes, because, no doubt, he had felt there was something more than curiosity in the comte's inquiries.

"Ah, indeed, vicomte? Accept my compliments thereupon."

Raoul bowed.

"But you have seen some one else at Blois?"

"Monsieur, I saw her royal highness, Madame."

"That's very well: but it is not Madame that I mean."

Raoul colored deeply, but made no reply.

"You do not appear to understand me, monsieur le vicomte," persisted M. de la Fere, without accenting his words more strongly, but with a rather severer look.

"I understand you quite plainly, monsieur," replied Raoul, "and if I hesitate a little in my reply, you are well assured I am not seeking for a falsehood."

"No, you cannot tell a lie; and that makes me so astonished you should be so long in saying yes or no."

"I cannot answer you without understanding you very well; and if I have understood you, you will take my first words in ill part. You will displeased, no doubt, monsieur le comte, because I have seen--"

"Mademoiselle de la Valliere--have you not?"

"It was of her you meant to speak, I know very well, monsieur," said Raoul, with inexpressible sweetness.

"And I asked you if you have seen her."

"Monsieur, I was ignorant, when I entered the castle, that Mademoiselle de la Valliere was there; it was only on my return, after I had performed my mission, that chance brought us together. I have had the honor of paying my respects to her."

"But what do you call the chance that led you into the presence of Mademoiselle de la Valliere?"

"Mademoiselle de Montalais, monsieur."

"And who is Mademoiselle de Montalais?"

"A young lady I did not know before, whom I had never seen. She is maid of honor to Madame."

"Monsieur le vicomte, I will push my interrogatory no further, and reproach myself with having carried it so far. I had desired you to avoid Mademoiselle de la Valliere, and not to see her without my permission. Oh, I am quite sure you have told me the truth, and that you took no measures to approach her. Chance has done me this injury; I do not accuse you of it. I will be content, then, with what I formerly said to you concerning this young lady. I do not reproach her with anything--God is my witness! only it is not my intention or wish that you should frequent her place of residence. I beg you once more, my dear Raoul, to understand that."

It was plain the limpid eyes of Raoul were troubled at this speech.

"Now, my friend," said the comte, with his soft smile, and in his customary tone, "let us talk of other matters. You are returning, perhaps, to your duty?"

"No, monsieur, I have no duty for to-day, except the pleasure of remaining with you. The prince kindly appointed me no other: which was so much in accord with my wish."

"Is the king well?"

"Perfectly."

"And monsieur le prince also?"

"As usual, monsieur."

The comte forgot to inquire after Mazarin; that was an old habit.

"Well, Raoul, since you are entirely mine, I will give up my whole day to you. Embrace me--again, again! You are at home, vicomte! Ah, there is our old Grimaud! Come in, Grimaud: monsieur le vicomte is desirous of embracing you likewise."

The good old man did not require to be twice told; he rushed in with open arms, Raoul meeting him half-way.

"Now, if you please, we will go into the garden, Raoul. I will show you the new lodging I have had prepared for you during your leave of absence; and whilst examining the last winter's plantations, and two saddle-horses I have just acquired, you will give me all the news of our friends in Paris."

The comte closed his manuscript, took the young man's arm, and went out into the gardens with him.

Grimaud looked at Raoul with a melancholy air as the young man passed out; observing that his head nearly touched the traverse of the doorway, stroking his white royale, he slowly murmured:--"How he has grown!"

CHAPTER V.

In which Something will be said of Cropoli.

Whilst the Comte de la Fere with Raoul visits the new buildings he has erected, and the new horses he has bought, with the reader's permission we will lead him back to the city of Blois, and make him a witness of the unaccustomed activity which pervades that city.

It was in the hotels that the surprise of the news brought by Raoul was most sensibly felt.

In fact, the king and the court at Blois, that is to say, a hundred horsemen, ten carriages, two hundred horses, as many lackeys as masters--where was this crowd to be housed? Where were to be lodged all the gentry of the neighborhood, who would gather in two or three hours after the news had enlarged the circle of its report, like the increasing circumferences produced by a stone thrown into a placid lake?

Blois, as peaceful in the morning, as we have seen, as the calmest lake in the world, at the announcement of the royal arrival, was suddenly filled with the tumult and buzzing of a swarm of bees.

All the servants of the castle, under the inspection of the officers, were sent into the city in quest of provisions, and ten horsemen were dispatched to the preserves of Chambord to seek for game, to the fisheries of Beuvron for fish, and to the gardens of Cheverny for fruits and flowers.

Precious tapestries, and lusters with great gilt chains, were drawn from the cupboards; an army of the poor were engaged in sweeping the courts and washing the stone fronts, whilst their wives went in droves to the meadows beyond the Loire, to gather green boughs and field-flowers. The whole city, not to be behind in this luxury of cleanliness, assumed its best toilette with the help of brushes, brooms, and water. The gutters of the upper town, swollen by these continued ablutions, became rivers at the bottom of the city, and the pavement, generally very muddy, it must be allowed, took a clean face, and absolutely shone in the friendly rays of the sun.

Next the music was to be provided; drawers were emptied; the shop-keepers did a glorious trade in wax, ribbons, and sword-knots; housekeepers laid in stores of bread, meat, and spices. Already numbers of the citizens whose houses were furnished as if for a siege, having nothing more to do, donned their festive clothes, and directed their course towards the city gate, in order to be the first to signal or see the cortege. They knew very well that the king would not arrive before night, perhaps not before the next morning. Yet what is expectation but a kind of folly, and what is that folly but an excess of hope?

In the lower city, at scarcely a hundred paces from the Castle of the States, between the mall and the castle, in a sufficiently handsome street, then called the Rue Vieille, and which must, in fact, have been very old, stood a venerable edifice, with pointed gables, of squat but large dimensions, ornamented with three windows looking into the street on the first floor, with two in the second, and with a little oeil de boeuf in the third.

On the sides of this triangle had recently been constructed a parallelogram of considerable size, which encroached upon the street remorselessly, according to the familiar uses of the building of that period. The street was narrowed by a quarter by it, but then the house was enlarged by a half; and was not that a sufficient compensation?

Tradition said that this house with the pointed gables was inhabited, in the time of Henry III., by a councilor of state whom Queen Catherine came, some say to visit, and others to strangle. However that may be, the good lady must have stepped with a circumspect foot over the threshold of this building.

After the councilor had died--whether by strangulation or naturally is of no consequence--the house had been sold, then abandoned, and lastly isolated from the other houses of the street. Towards the middle of the reign of Louis XIII. only, an Italian named Cropoli, escaped from the kitchens of the Marechal d’Ancre, came and took possession of this house. There he established a little hostelry, in which was fabricated a macaroni so delicious that people came from miles round to fetch it or eat it.

So famous had the house become for it, that when Mary de Medici was a prisoner, as we know, in the castle of Blois, she once sent for some.

It was precisely on the day she had escaped by the famous window. The dish of macaroni was left upon the table, only just tasted by the royal mouth.

This double favor, of a strangulation and a macaroni, conferred upon the triangular house, gave poor Cropoli a fancy to grace his hostelry with a pompous title. But his quality of an Italian was no recommendation in these times, and his small, well-concealed fortune forbade attracting too much attention.

When he found himself about to die, which happened in 1643, just after the death of Louis XIII., he called to him his son, a young cook of great promise, and with tears in his eyes, he recommended him to preserve carefully the secret of the macaroni, to Frenchify his name, and at length, when the political horizon should be cleared from the clouds which obscured it--this was practiced then as in our day, to order of the nearest smith a handsome sign, upon which a famous painter, whom he named, should design two queens' portraits, with these words as a legend: "TO THE MEDICI."

The worthy Cropoli, after these recommendations, had only sufficient time to point out to his young successor a chimney, under the slab of which he had hidden a thousand ten-franc pieces, and then expired.

Cropoli the younger, like a man of good heart, supported the loss with resignation, and the gain without insolence. He began by accustoming the public to sound the final i of his name so little, that by the aid of general complaisance, he was soon called nothing but M. Cropole, which is quite a French name. He then married, having had in his eye a little French girl, from whose parents he extorted a reasonable dowry by showing them what there was beneath the slab of the chimney.

These two points accomplished, he went in search of the painter who was to paint the sign; and he was soon found. He was an old Italian, a rival of the Raphaels and the Caracci, but an unfortunate rival. He said he was of the Venetian school, doubtless from his fondness for color. His works, of which he had never sold one, attracted the eye at a distance of a hundred paces; but they so formidably displeased the citizens, that he had finished by painting no more.

He boasted of having painted a bath-room for Madame la Marechale d'Ancre, and mourned over this chamber having been burnt at the time of the marechal's disaster.

Cropoli, in his character of a compatriot, was indulgent towards Pittrino, which was the name of the artist. Perhaps he had seen the famous pictures of the bath-room. Be this as it may, he held in such esteem, we may say in such friendship, the famous Pittrino, that he took him in his own house.

Pittrino, grateful, and fed with macaroni, set about propagating the reputation of this national dish, and from the time of its founder, he had rendered, with his indefatigable tongue, signal services to the house of Cropoli.

As he grew old he attached himself to the son as he had done to the father, and by degrees became a kind of over-looker of a house in which his remarkable integrity, his acknowledged sobriety, and a thousand other virtues useless to enumerate, gave him an eternal place by the fireside, with a right of inspection over the domestics. Besides this, it was he who tasted the macaroni, to maintain the pure flavor of the ancient tradition; and it must be allowed that he never permitted a grain of pepper too much, or an atom of parmesan too little. His joy was at its height on that day when called upon to share the secret of Cropoli the younger, and to paint the famous sign.

He was seen at once rummaging with ardor in an old box, in which he found some brushes, a little gnawed by the rats, but still passable; some linseed-oil in a bottle, and a palette which had formerly belonged to Bronzino, that dieu de la pittoure, as the ultramontane artist, in his ever young enthusiasm, always called him.

Pittrino was puffed up with all the joy of a rehabilitation.

He did as Raphael had done--he changed his style, and painted, in the fashion of Albani, two goddesses rather than two queens. These illustrious ladies appeared so lovely on the sign,--they presented to the astonished eyes such an assemblage of lilies and roses, the enchanting result of the changes of style in Pittrino--they assumed the poses of sirens so Anacreontically--that the principal echevin, when admitted to view this capital piece in the salle of Cropole, at once declared that these ladies were too handsome, of too animated a beauty, to figure as a sign in the eyes of passers-by.

To Pittrino he added, “His royal highness, Monsieur, who often comes into our city, will not be much pleased to see his illustrious mother so slightly clothed, and he will send you to the oubliettes of the state; for, remember, the heart of that glorious prince is not always tender. You must efface either the two sirens or the legend, without which I forbid the exhibition of the sign. I say this for your sake, Master Cropole, as well for yours, Signor Pittrino.”

What answer could be made to this? It was necessary to thank the echevin for his kindness, which Cropole did. But Pittrino remained downcast and said he felt assured of what was about to happen.

The visitor was scarcely gone when Cropole, crossing his arms, said: “Well, master, what is to be done?”

“We must efface the legend,” said Pittrino, in a melancholy tone. “I have some excellent ivory-black; it will be done in a moment, and we will replace the Medici by the nymphs or the sirens, whichever you prefer.”

“No,” said Cropole, “the will of my father must be carried out. My father considered--”

“He considered the figures of the most importance,” said Pittrino.

“He thought most of the legend,” said Cropole.

“The proof of the importance in which he held the figures,” said Pittrino, “is that he desired they should be likenesses, and they are so.”

“Yes; but if they had not been so, who would have recognized them without the legend? At the present day even, when the memory of the Blaisois begins to be faint with regard to these two celebrated persons, who would recognize Catherine and Mary without the words ‘To the Medici’?”

“But the figures?” said Pittrino, in despair; for he felt that young Cropole was right. “I should not like to lose the fruit of my labor.”

“And I should not wish you to be thrown into prison, and myself into the oubliettes.”

“Let us efface ‘Medici’,” said Pittrino, supplicatingly.

“No,” replied Cropole, firmly. “I have got an idea, a sublime idea--your picture shall appear, and my legend likewise. Does not ‘Medici’ mean doctor, or physician, in Italian?”

“Yes, in the plural.”

“Well, then, you shall order another sign-frame of the smith; you shall paint six physicians, and write underneath ‘Aux Medici’ which makes a very pretty play upon words.”

“Six physicians! impossible! And the composition?” cried Pittrino.

“That is your business--but so it shall be--I insist upon it--it must be so--my macaroni is burning.”

This reasoning was peremptory--Pittrino obeyed. He composed the sign of six physicians, with the legend; the echevin applauded and authorized it.

The sign produced an extravagant success in the city, which proves that poetry has always been in the wrong, before citizens, as Pittrino said.

Cropole, to make amends to his painter-in-ordinary, hung up the nymphs of the preceding sign in his bedroom, which made Madame Cropole blush every time she looked at it, when she was undressing at night.

This is the way in which the pointed-gable house got a sign; and this is how the hostelry of the Medici, making a fortune, was found to be enlarged by a quarter, as we have described. And this is how there was at Blois a hostelry of that name, and had for a painter-in-ordinary Master Pittrino.

CHAPTER VI.

The Unknown.

Thus founded and recommended by its sign, the hostelry of Master Cropole held its way steadily on towards a solid prosperity.

It was not an immense fortune that Cropole had in perspective; but he might hope to double the thousand louis d'or left by his father, to make another thousand louis by the sale of his house and stock, and at length to live happily like a retired citizen.

Cropole was anxious for gain, and was half-crazy with joy at the news of the arrival of Louis XIV.

Himself, his wife, Pittrino, and two cooks, immediately laid hands upon all the inhabitants of the dove-cote, the poultry-yard, and the rabbit-hutches; so that as many lamentations and cries resounded in the yards of the hostelry of the Medici as were formerly heard in Rama.

Cropole had, at the time, but one single traveler in his house.

This was a man of scarcely thirty years of age, handsome, tall, austere, or rather melancholy, in all his gestures and looks.

He was dressed in black velvet with jet trimmings; a white collar, as plain as that of the severest Puritan, set off the whiteness of his youthful neck; a small dark-colored mustache scarcely covered his curled, disdainful lip.

He spoke to people looking them full in the face, without affectation, it is true, but without scruple; so that the brilliancy of his black eyes became so insupportable, that more than one look had sunk beneath his, like the weaker sword in a single combat.

At this time, in which men, all created equal by God, were divided, thanks to prejudices, into two distinct castes, the gentlemen and the commoner, as they are really divided into two races, the black and the white,--at this time, we say, he whose portrait we have just sketched could not fail of being taken for a gentleman, and of the best class. To ascertain this, there was no necessity to consult anything but his hands, long, slender, and white, of which every muscle, every vein, became apparent through the skin at the least movement, and eloquently spoke of good descent.

This gentleman, then, had arrived alone at Cropole's house. He had taken, without hesitation, without reflection even, the principal apartment which the hotelier had pointed out to him with a rapacious aim, very praiseworthy, some will say, very reprehensible will say others, if they admit that Cropole was a physiognomist, and judged people at first sight.

This apartment was that which composed the whole front of the ancient triangular house; a large salon, lighted by two windows on the first stage, a small chamber by the side of it, and another above it.

Now, from the time he had arrived, this gentleman had scarcely touched any repast that had been served up to him in his chamber. He had spoken but two words to the host, to warn him that a traveler of the name of Parry would arrive, and to desire that, when he did, he should be shown up to him immediately.

He afterwards preserved so profound a silence, that Cropole was almost offended, so much did he prefer people who were good company.

This gentleman had risen early the morning of the day on which this history begins, and had placed himself at the window of his salon, seated upon the ledge, and leaning upon the rail of the balcony, gazing sadly but persistently on both sides of the street, watching, no doubt, for the arrival of the traveler he had mentioned to the host.

In this way he had seen the little cortege of Monsieur return from hunting, then had again partaken of the profound tranquillity of the street, absorbed in his own expectations.

All at once the movement of the crowd going to the meadows, couriers setting out, washers of pavement, purveyors of the royal household, gabbling, scampering shop-boys, chariots in motion, hair-dressers on the run, and pages toiling along, this tumult and bustle had surprised him, but without losing any of that impassible and supreme majesty which gives to the eagle and the lion that serene and contemptuous glance amidst the hurrahs and shouts of hunters or the curious.

Soon the cries of the victims slaughtered in the poultry-yard, the hasty steps of Madame Cropole up that little wooden staircase, so narrow and so echoing; the bounding pace of Pittrino, who only that morning was smoking at the door with all the phlegm of a Dutchman; all this communicated something like surprise and agitation to the traveler.

As he was rising to make inquiries, the door of his chamber opened. The unknown concluded they were about to introduce the impatiently expected traveler, and made three precipitate steps to meet him.

But, instead of the person he expected, it was Master Cropole who appeared, and behind him, in the half-dark staircase, the pleasant face of Madame Cropole, rendered trivial by curiosity. She only gave one furtive glance at the handsome gentleman, and disappeared.

Cropole advanced, cap in hand, rather bent than bowing.

A gesture of the unknown interrogated him, without a word being pronounced.

“Monsieur,” said Cropole, “I come to ask how--what ought I to say: your lordship, monsieur le comte, or monsieur le marquis?”

“Say monsieur, and speak quickly,” replied the unknown, with that haughty accent which admits of neither discussion nor reply.

“I came, then, to inquire how monsieur had passed the night, and if monsieur intended to keep this apartment?”

“Yes.”

“Monsieur, something has happened upon which we could not reckon.”

“What?”

“His majesty Louis XIV. will enter our city to-day, and will remain here one day, perhaps two.”

Great astonishment was painted on the countenance of the unknown.

“The King of France is coming to Blois?”

“He is on the road, monsieur.”

“Then there is the stronger reason for my remaining,” said the unknown.

“Very well; but will monsieur keep all the apartments?”

“I do not understand you. Why should I require less to-day than yesterday?”

“Because, monsieur, your lordship will permit me to say, yesterday I did not think proper, when you chose your lodging, to fix any price that might have made your lordship believe that I prejudged your resources; whilst to-day--”

The unknown colored; the idea at once struck him that he was supposed to be poor, and was being insulted.

“Whilst to-day,” replied he, coldly, “you do not prejudge.”

“Monsieur, I am a well-meaning man, thank God! and simple hotelier as I am, there is in me the blood of a gentleman. My father was a servant and officer of the late Marechal d’Ancre. God rest his soul!”

"I do not contest that point with you; I only wish to know, and that quickly, to what your questions tend?"

"You are too reasonable, monsieur, not to comprehend that our city is small, that the court is about to invade it, that the houses will be overflowing with inhabitants, and that lodgings will consequently obtain considerable prices."

Again the unknown colored. "Name your terms," said he.

"I name them with scruple, monsieur, because I seek an honest gain, and that I wish to carry on my business without being uncivil or extravagant in my demands. Now the room you occupy is considerable, and you are alone."

"That is my business."

"Oh! certainly. I do not mean to turn monsieur out."

The blood rushed to the temples of the unknown; he darted at poor Cropole, the descendant of one of the officers of the Marechal d'Ancre, a glance that would have crushed him down to beneath that famous chimney-slab, if Cropole had not been nailed to the spot by the question of his own proper interests.

"Do you desire me to go?" said he. "Explain yourself--but quickly."

"Monsieur, monsieur, you do not understand me. It is very critical--I know--that which I am doing. I express myself badly, or perhaps, as monsieur is a foreigner, which I perceive by his accent--"

In fact, the unknown spoke with that impetuosity which is the principal character of English accentuation, even among men who speak the French language with the greatest purity.

"As monsieur is a foreigner, I say, it is perhaps he who does not catch my exact meaning. I wish for monsieur to give up one or two of the apartments he occupies, which would diminish his expenses and ease my conscience. Indeed, it is hard to increase unreasonably the price of the chambers, when one has had the honor to let them at a reasonable price."

"How much does the hire amount to since yesterday?"

"Monsieur, to one louis, with refreshments and the charge for the horse."

"Very well; and that of to-day?"

"Ah! there is the difficulty. This is the day of the king's arrival; if the court comes to sleep here, the charge of the day is reckoned. From that it results that three chambers, at two louis each, make six louis. Two louis, monsieur, are not much; but six louis make a great deal."

The unknown, from red, as we have seen him, became very pale.

He drew from his pocket, with heroic bravery, a purse embroidered with a coat-of-arms, which he carefully concealed in the hollow of his hand. This purse was of a thinness, a flabbiness, a hollowness, which did not escape the eye of Cropole.

The unknown emptied the purse into his hand. It contained three double louis, which amounted to the six louis demanded by the host.

But it was seven that Cropole had required.

He looked, therefore, at the unknown, as much as to say, “And then?”

“There remains one louis, does there not, master hotelier?”

“Yes, monsieur, but--”

The unknown plunged his hand into the pocket of his haut-de-chausses, and emptied it. It contained a small pocket-book, a gold key, and some silver. With this change, he made up a louis.

“Thank you, monsieur,” said Cropole. “It now only remains for me to ask whether monsieur intends to occupy his apartments to-morrow, in which case I will reserve them for him; whereas, if monsieur does not mean to do so, I will promise them to some of the king’s people who are coming.”

“That is but right,” said the unknown, after a long silence; “but as I have no more money, as you have seen, and as I yet must retain the apartments, you must either sell this diamond in the city, or hold it in pledge.”

Cropole looked at the diamond so long, that the unknown said, hastily:

“I prefer your selling it, monsieur; for it is worth three hundred pistoles. A Jew--are there any Jews in Blois?--would give you two hundred or a hundred and fifty for it--take whatever may be offered for it, if it be no more than the price of your lodging. Begone!”

“Oh! monsieur,” replied Cropole, ashamed of the sudden inferiority which the unknown reflected upon him by this noble and disinterested confidence, as well as by the unalterable patience opposed to so many suspicions and evasions. “Oh, monsieur, I hope people are not so dishonest at Blois as you seem to think; and that the diamond, being worth what you say--”

The unknown here again darted at Cropole one of his withering glances.

“I really do not understand diamonds, monsieur, I assure you,” cried he.

“But the jewelers do: ask them,” said the unknown. “Now I believe our accounts are settled, are they not, monsieur l’hote?”

"Yes, monsieur, and to my profound regret; for I fear I have offended monsieur."

"Not at all!" replied the unknown, with ineffable majesty.

"Or have appeared to be extortionate with a noble traveler. Consider, monsieur, the peculiarity of the case."

"Say no more about it, I desire; and leave me to myself."

Cropole bowed profoundly, and left the room with a stupefied air, which announced that he had a good heart, and felt genuine remorse.

The unknown himself shut the door after him, and, when left alone, looked mournfully at the bottom of the purse, from which he had taken a small silken bag containing the diamond, his last resource.

He dwelt likewise upon the emptiness of his pockets, turned over the papers in his pocket-book, and convinced himself of the state of absolute destitution in which he was about to be plunged.

He raised his eyes towards heaven, with a sublime emotion of despairing calmness, brushed off with his hand some drops of sweat which trickled over his noble brow, and then cast down upon the earth a look which just before had been impressed with almost divine majesty.

That the storm had passed far from him, perhaps he had prayed in the bottom of his soul.

He drew near to the window, resumed his place in the balcony, and remained there, motionless, annihilated, dead, till the moment when, the heavens beginning to darken, the first flambeaux traversed the enlivened street, and gave the signal for illumination to all the windows of the city.

CHAPTER VII.

Parry.

Whilst the unknown was viewing these lights with interest, and lending an ear to the various noises, Master Cropole entered his apartment, followed by two attendants, who laid the cloth for his meal.

The stranger did not pay them the least attention; but Cropole approaching him respectfully, whispered, “Monsieur, the diamond has been valued.”

“Ah!” said the traveler. “Well?”

“Well, monsieur, the jeweler of S. A. R. gives two hundred and eighty pistoles for it.”

“Have you them?”

“I thought it best to take them, monsieur; nevertheless, I made it a condition of the bargain, that if monsieur wished to keep his diamond, it should be held till monsieur was again in funds.”

“Oh, no, not at all: I told you to sell it.”

“Then I have obeyed, or nearly so, since, without having definitely sold it, I have touched the money.”

“Pay yourself,” added the unknown.

“I will do so, monsieur, since you so positively require it.”

A sad smile passed over the lips of the gentleman.

“Place the money on that trunk,” said he, turning round and pointing to the piece of furniture.

Cropole deposited a tolerably large bag as directed, after having taken from it the amount of his reckoning.

“Now,” said he, “I hope monsieur will not give me the pain of not taking any supper. Dinner has already been refused; this is affronting to the house of les Medici. Look, monsieur, the supper is on the table, and I venture to say that it is not a bad one.”

The unknown asked for a glass of wine, broke off a morsel of bread, and did not stir from the window whilst he ate and drank.

Shortly after was heard a loud flourish of trumpets; cries arose in the distance, a confused buzzing filled the lower part of the city, and the first distinct sound that struck the ears of the stranger was the tramp of advancing horses.

“The king! the king!” repeated a noisy and eager crowd.

“The king!” cried Cropole, abandoning his guest and his ideas of delicacy, to satisfy his curiosity.

With Cropole were mingled, and jostled, on the staircase, Madame Cropole, Pittrino, and the waiters and scullions.

The cortege advanced slowly, lighted by a thousand flambeaux, in the streets and from the windows.

After a company of musketeers, a closely ranked troop of gentlemen, came the litter of monsieur le cardinal, drawn like a carriage by four black horses. The pages and people of the cardinal marched behind.

Next came the carriage of the queen-mother, with her maids of honor at the doors, her gentlemen on horseback at both sides.

The king then appeared, mounted upon a splendid horse of Saxon breed, with a flowing mane. The young prince exhibited, when bowing to some windows from which issued the most animated acclamations, a noble and handsome countenance, illuminated by the flambeaux of his pages.

By the side of the king, though a little in the rear, the Prince de Conde, M. Dangeau, and twenty other courtiers, followed by their people and their baggage, closed this veritably triumphant march. The pomp was of a military character.

Some of the courtiers--the elder ones, for instance--wore traveling dresses; but all the rest were clothed in warlike panoply. Many wore the gorget and buff coat of the times of Henry IV. and Louis XIII.

When the king passed before him, the unknown, who had leant forward over the balcony to obtain a better view, and who had concealed his face by leaning on his arm, felt his heart swell and overflow with a bitter jealousy.

The noise of the trumpets excited him--the popular acclamations deafened him: for a moment he allowed his reason to be absorbed in this flood of lights, tumult, and brilliant images.

“He is a king!” murmured he, in an accent of despair.

Then, before he had recovered from his sombre reverie, all the noise, all the splendor, had passed away. At the angle of the street there remained nothing beneath the stranger but a few hoarse, discordant voices, shouting at intervals “Vive le Roi!”

There remained likewise the six candles held by the inhabitants of the hostelry des Medici; that is to say, two for Cropole, two for Pittrino, and one for each scullion. Cropole never ceased repeating, “How good-looking the king is! How strongly he resembles his illustrious father!”

“A handsome likeness!” said Pittrino.

“And what a lofty carriage he has!” added Madame Cropole, already in promiscuous commentary with her neighbors of both sexes.

Cropole was feeding their gossip with his own personal remarks, without observing that an old man on foot, but leading a small Irish horse by the bridle, was endeavoring to penetrate the crowd of men and women which blocked up the entrance to the Medici. But at that moment the voice of the stranger was heard from the window.

“Make way, monsieur l’hotelier, to the entrance of your house!”

Cropole turned around, and, on seeing the old man, cleared a passage for him.

The window was instantly closed.

Pittrino pointed out the way to the newly-arrived guest, who entered without uttering a word.

The stranger waited for him on the landing; he opened his arms to the old man, and led him to a seat.

“Oh, no, no, my lord!” said he. “Sit down in your presence?--never!”

“Parry,” cried the gentleman, “I beg you will; you come from England--you come so far. Ah! it is not for your age to undergo the fatigues my service requires. Rest yourself.”

“I have my reply to give your lordship, in the first place.”

“Parry, I conjure you to tell me nothing; for if your news had been good, you would not have begun in such a manner; you go about, which proves that the news is bad.”

“My lord,” said the old man, “do not hasten to alarm yourself; all is not lost, I hope. You must employ energy, but more particularly resignation.”

“Parry,” said the young man, “I have reached this place through a thousand snares and after a thousand difficulties; can you doubt my energy? I have meditated this journey ten years, in spite of all counsels and all obstacles--have you faith in my perseverance? I have this evening sold the last of my father’s diamonds; for I had nothing wherewith to pay for my lodgings and my host was about to turn me out.”

Parry made a gesture of indignation, to which the young man replied by a pressure of the hand and a smile.

“I have still two hundred and seventy-four pistoles left and I feel myself rich. I do not despair, Parry; have you faith in my resignation?”

The old man raised his trembling hands towards heaven.

“Let me know,” said the stranger,--”disguise nothing from me--what has happened?”

“My recital will be short, my lord; but in the name of Heaven do not tremble so.”

“It is impatience, Parry. Come, what did the general say to you?”

“At first the general would not receive me.”

“He took you for a spy?”

“Yes, my lord; but I wrote him a letter.”

“Well?”

“He read it, and received me, my lord.”

“Did that letter thoroughly explain my position and my views?”

“Oh, yes!” said Parry, with a sad smile; “it painted your very thoughts faithfully.”

“Well--then, Parry.”

“Then the general sent me back the letter by an aide-de-camp, informing me that if I were found the next day within the circumscription of his command, he would have me arrested.”

“Arrested!” murmured the young man. “What! arrest you, my most faithful servant?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“And notwithstanding you had signed the name Parry?”

“To all my letters, my lord; and the aide-de-camp had known me at St. James’s and at Whitehall, too,” added the old man with a sigh.

The young man leaned forward, thoughtful and sad.

“Ay, that’s what he did before his people,” said he, endeavoring to cheat himself with hopes. “But, privately--between you and him--what did he do? Answer!”

“Alas! my lord, he sent to me four cavaliers, who gave me the horse with which you just now saw me come back. These cavaliers conducted me, in great haste, to the little port of Tenby, threw me, rather than embarked me, into a little fishing-boat, about to sail for Brittany, and here I am."

"Oh!" sighed the young man, clasping his neck convulsively with his hand, and with a sob. "Parry, is that all?--is that all?"

"Yes, my lord; that is all."

After this brief reply ensued a long interval of silence, broken only by the convulsive beating of the heel of the young man on the floor.

The old man endeavored to change the conversation; it was leading to thoughts much too sinister.

"My lord," said he, "what is the meaning of all the noise which preceded me? What are these people crying 'Vive le Roi!' for? What king do they mean? and what are all these lights for?"

"Ah! Parry," replied the young man ironically, "don't you know that this is the King of France visiting his good city of Blois? All these trumpets are his, all those gilded housings are his, all those gentlemen wear swords that are his. His mother precedes him in a carriage magnificently encrusted with silver and gold. Happy mother! His minister heaps up millions, and conducts him to a rich bride. Then all these people rejoice; they love their king, they hail him with their acclamations, and they cry, 'Vive le Roi! Vive le Roi!'"

"Well, well, my lord," said Parry, more uneasy at the turn the conversation had taken than at the other.

"You know," resumed the unknown, "that my mother and my sister, whilst all this is going on in honor of the King of France, have neither money nor bread; you know that I myself shall be poor and degraded within a fortnight, when all Europe will become acquainted with what you have told me. Parry, are there not examples in which a man of my condition should himself--"

"My lord, in the name of Heaven--"

"You are right, Parry; I am a coward, and if I do nothing for myself, what will God do? No, no; I have two arms, Parry, and I have a sword." And he struck his arm violently with his hand, and took down his sword, which hung against the wall.

"What are you going to do, my lord?"

"What am I going to do, Parry? What every one in my family does. My mother lives on public charity, my sister begs for my mother; I have, somewhere or other, brothers who equally beg for themselves; and I, the eldest, will go and do as all the rest do--I will go and ask charity!"

And with these words, which he finished sharply with a nervous and terrible laugh, the young man girded on his sword, took his hat from the trunk, fastened to his shoulder a black cloak, which he had worn all during his journey, and pressing the two hands of the old man, who watched his proceedings with a look of anxiety,--

"My good Parry," said he, "order a fire, drink, eat, sleep, and be happy; let us both be happy, my faithful friend, my only friend. We are rich, as rich as kings!"

He struck the bag of pistoles with his clenched hand as he spoke, and it fell heavily to the ground. He resumed that dismal laugh that had so alarmed Parry; and whilst the whole household was screaming, singing, and preparing to install the travelers who had been preceded by their lackeys, he glided out by the principal entrance into the street, where the old man, who had gone to the window, lost sight of him in a moment.

CHAPTER VIII.

What his Majesty King Louis XIV. was at the Age of Twenty-Two.

It has been seen, by the account we have endeavored to give of it, that the entree of King Louis XIV. into the city of Blois had been noisy and brilliant; his young majesty had therefore appeared perfectly satisfied with it.

On arriving beneath the porch of the Castle of the States, the king met, surrounded by his guards and gentlemen, with S. A. R. the duke, Gaston of Orleans, whose physiognomy, naturally rather majestic, had borrowed on this solemn occasion a fresh luster and a fresh dignity. On her part, Madame, dressed in her robes of ceremony, awaited, in the interior balcony, the entrance of her nephew. All the windows of the old castle, so deserted and dismal on ordinary days, were resplendent with ladies and lights.

It was then to the sound of drums, trumpets, and vivats, that the young king crossed the threshold of that castle in which, seventy-two years before, Henry III. had called in the aid of assassination and treachery to keep upon his head and in his house a crown which was already slipping from his brow, to fall into another family.

All eyes, after having admired the young king, so handsome and so agreeable, sought for that other king of France, much otherwise king than the former, and so old, so pale, so bent, that people called the Cardinal Mazarin.

Louis was at this time endowed with all the natural gifts which make the perfect gentleman; his eye was brilliant, mild, and of a clear azure blue. But the most skillful physiognomists, those divers into the soul, on fixing their looks upon it, if it had been possible for a subject to sustain the glance of the king,--the most skillful physiognomists, we say, would never have been able to fathom the depths of that abyss of mildness. It was with the eyes of the king as with the immense depths of the azure heavens, or with those more terrific, and almost as sublime, which the Mediterranean reveals under the keels of its ships in a clear summer day, a gigantic mirror in which heaven delights to reflect sometimes its stars, sometimes its storms.

The king was short of stature--he was scarcely five feet two inches: but his youth made up for this defect, set off likewise by great nobleness in all his movements, and by considerable address in all bodily exercises.

Certes, he was already quite a king, and it was a great thing to be a king in that period of traditional devotedness and respect; but as, up to that time, he had been but seldom and always poorly shown to the people, as they to whom he was shown saw him by the side of his mother, a tall woman, and monsieur le cardinal, a man of commanding presence, many found him so little of a king as to say,--

“Why, the king is not so tall as monsieur le cardinal!”

Whatever may be thought of these physical observations, which were principally made in the capital, the young king was welcomed as a god by the inhabitants of Blois, and almost like a king by his uncle and aunt, Monsieur and Madame, the inhabitants of the castle.

It must, however, be allowed, that when he saw, in the hall of reception, chairs of equal height for himself, his mother, the cardinal, and his uncle and aunt, a disposition artfully concealed by the semi-circular form of the assembly, Louis XIV. became red with anger, and looked around him to ascertain by the countenances of those that were present, if this humiliation had been prepared for him. But as he saw nothing upon the impassible visage of the cardinal, nothing on that of his mother, nothing on those of the assembly, he resigned himself, and sat down, taking care to be seated before anybody else.

The gentlemen and ladies were presented to their majesties and monsieur le cardinal.

The king remarked that his mother and he scarcely knew the names of any of the persons who were presented to them; whilst the cardinal, on the contrary, never failed, with an admirable memory and presence of mind, to talk to every one about his estates, his ancestors, or his children, some of whom he named, which enchanted those worthy country gentlemen, and confirmed them in the idea that he alone is truly king who knows his subjects, from the same reason that the sun has no rival, because the sun alone warms and lightens.

The study of the young king, which had begun a long time before, without anybody suspecting it, was continued then, and he looked around him attentively to endeavor to make out something in the physiognomies which had at first appeared the most insignificant and trivial.

A collation was served. The king, without daring to call upon the hospitality of his uncle, had waited for it impatiently. This time, therefore, he had all the honors due, if not to his rank, at least to his appetite.

As to the cardinal, he contented himself with touching with his withered lips a bouillon, served in a golden cup. The all-powerful minister, who had taken her regency from the queen, and his royalty from the king, had not been able to take a good stomach from nature.

Anne of Austria, already suffering from the cancer which six or eight years after caused her death, ate very little more than the cardinal.

For Monsieur, already puffed up with the great event which had taken place in his provincial life, he ate nothing whatever.

Madame alone, like a true Lorrainer, kept pace with his majesty; so that Louis XIV., who, without this partner, might have eaten nearly alone, was at first much pleased with his aunt, and afterwards with M. de Saint-Remy, her maitre d'hotel, who had really distinguished himself.

The collation over, at a sign of approbation from M. de Mazarin, the king arose, and, at the invitation of his aunt, walked about among the ranks of the assembly.

The ladies then observed--there are certain things for which women are as good observers at Blois as at Paris--the ladies then observed that Louis XIV. had a prompt and bold look, which premised a distinguished appreciator of beauty. The men, on their part, observed that the prince was proud and haughty, that he loved to look down those who fixed their eyes upon him too long or too earnestly, which gave presage of a master.

Louis XIV. had accomplished about a third of his review when his ears were struck with a word which his eminence pronounced whilst conversing with Monsieur.

This word was the name of a woman.

Scarcely had Louis XIV. heard this word than he heard, or rather listening to nothing else; and neglecting the arc of the circle which awaited his visit, his object seemed to be to come as quickly as possible to the extremity of the curve.

Monsieur, like a good courtier, was inquiring of monsieur le cardinal after the health of his nieces; he regretted, he said, not having the pleasure of receiving them at the same time with their uncle; they must certainly have grown in stature, beauty and grace, as they had promised to do the last time Monsieur had seen them.

What had first struck the king was a certain constraint in the voices of the two interlocutors. The voice of Monsieur was calm and natural when he spoke thus; while that of M. de Mazarin jumped by a note and a half to reply above the diapason of his usual voice. It might have been said that he wished that voice to strike, at the end of the salon, any ear that was too distant.

"Monseigneur," replied he, "Mesdemoiselles de Mazarin have still to finish their education: they have duties to fulfill, and a position to make. An abode in a young and brilliant court would dissipate them a little."

Louis, at this last sentence, smiled sadly. The court was young, it was true, but the avarice of the cardinal had taken good care that it should not be brilliant.

"You have nevertheless no intention," replied Monsieur, "to cloister them or make them borgeoises?"

"Not at all," replied the cardinal, forcing his Italian pronunciation in such a manner that, from soft and velvety as it was, it became sharp and vibrating; "not at all: I have a full and fixed intention to marry them, and that as well as I shall be able."

"Parties will not be wanting, monsieur le cardinal," replied Monsieur, with a bonhomie worthy of one tradesman congratulating another.

"I hope not, monseigneur, and with reason, as God has been pleased to give them grace, intelligence, and beauty."

During this conversation, Louis XIV., conducted by Madame, accomplished, as we have described, the circle of presentations.

"Mademoiselle Auricule," said the princess, presenting to his majesty a fat, fair girl of two-and-twenty, who at a village fete might have been taken for a peasant in Sunday finery,--"the daughter of my music-mistress."

The king smiled. Madame had never been able to extract four correct notes from either viol or harpsichord.

"Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais," continued Madame; "a young lady of rank, and my good attendant."

This time it was not the king that smiled; it was the young lady presented, because, for the first time in her life, she heard, given to her by Madame, who generally showed no tendency to spoil her, such an honorable qualification.

Our old acquaintance Montalais, therefore, made his majesty a profound courtesy, the more respectful from the necessity she was under of concealing certain contractions of her laughing lips, which the king might not have attributed to their real cause.

It was just at this moment that the king caught the word which startled him.

“And the name of the third?” asked Monsieur.

“Mary, monseigneur,” replied the cardinal.

There was doubtless some magical influence in that word, for, as we have said, the king started in hearing it, and drew Madame towards the middle of the circle, as if he wished to put some confidential question to her, but, in reality, for the sake of getting nearer to the cardinal.

“Madame, my aunt,” said he, laughing, and in a suppressed voice, “my geography-master did not teach me that Blois was at such an immense distance from Paris.”

“What do you mean, nephew?” asked Madame.

“Why, because it would appear that it requires several years, as regards fashion, to travel the distance!--Look at those young ladies!”

“Well; I know them all.”

“Some of them are pretty.”

“Don’t say that too loud, monsieur my nephew; you will drive them wild.”

“Stop a bit, stop a bit, dear aunt!” said the king, smiling; “for the second part of my sentence will serve as a corrective to the first. Well, my dear aunt, some of them appear old and others ugly, thanks to their ten-year-old fashions.”

“But, sire, Blois is only five days’ journey from Paris.”

“Yes, that is it,” said the king: “two years behind for each day.”

“Indeed! do you really think so? Well, that is strange! It never struck me.”

“Now, look, aunt,” said Louis XIV., drawing still nearer to Mazarin, under the pretext of gaining a better point of view, “look at that simple white dress by the side of those antiquated specimens of finery, and those pretentious coiffures. She is probably one of my mother’s maids of honor, though I don’t know her.”

“Ah! ah! my dear nephew!” replied Madame, laughing; “permit me to tell you that your divinatory science is at fault for once. The young lady you honor with your praise is not a Parisian, but a Blaisoise.”

“Oh, aunt!” replied the king with a look of doubt.

“Come here, Louise,” said Madame.

And the fair girl, already known to you under that name, approached them, timid, blushing, and almost bent beneath the royal glance.

“Mademoiselle Louise Francoise de la Beaume le Blanc, the daughter of the Marquise de la Valliere,” said Madame, ceremoniously.

The young girl bowed with so much grace, mingled with the profound timidity inspired by the presence of the king, that the latter lost, while looking at her, a few words of the conversation of Monsieur and the cardinal.

“Daughter-in-law,” continued Madame, “of M. de Saint-Remy, my maitre d’hotel, who presided over the confection of that excellent daube truffee which your majesty seemed so much to appreciate.”

No grace, no youth, no beauty, could stand out against such a presentation. The king smiled. Whether the words of Madame were a pleasantry, or uttered in all innocency, they proved the pitiless immolation of everything that Louis had found charming or poetic in the young girl. Mademoiselle de la Valliere, for Madame and, by rebound, for the king, was, for a moment, no more than the daughter of a man of a superior talent over dindes truffees.

But princes are thus constituted. The gods, too, were just like this in Olympus. Diana and Venus, no doubt, abused the beautiful Alcmena and poor Io, when they condescended for distraction’s sake, to speak, amidst nectar and ambrosia, of mortal beauties, at the table of Jupiter.

Fortunately, Louise was so bent in her reverential salute, that she did not catch either Madame’s words or the king’s smile. In fact, if the poor child, who had so much good taste as alone to have chosen to dress herself in white amidst all her companions--if that dove’s heart, so easily accessible to painful emotions, had been touched by the cruel words of Madame, or the egotistical cold smile of the king, it would have annihilated her.

And Montalais herself, the girl of ingenious ideas, would not have attempted to recall her to life; for ridicule kills beauty even.

But fortunately, as we have said, Louise, whose ears were buzzing, and her eyes veiled by timidity,--Louise saw nothing and heard nothing; and the king, who had still his attention directed to the conversation of the cardinal and his uncle, hastened to return to them.

He came up just at the moment Mazarin terminated by saying: “Mary, as well as her sisters, has just set off for Brouage. I make them follow the opposite bank of the Loire to that along which we have traveled; and if I calculate their progress correctly, according to the orders I have given, they will to-morrow be opposite Blois.”

These words were pronounced with that tact--that measure, that distinctness of tone, of intention, and reach--which made del Signor Giulio Mazarini the first comedian in the world.

It resulted that they went straight to the heart of Louis XIV., and the cardinal, on turning round at the simple noise of the approaching footsteps of his majesty, saw the immediate effect of them upon the countenance of his pupil, an effect betrayed to the keen eyes of his eminence by a slight increase of color. But what was the ventilation of such a secret to him whose craft had for twenty years deceived all the diplomatists of Europe?

From the moment the young king heard these last words, he appeared as if he had received a poisoned arrow in his heart. He could not remain quiet in a place, but cast around an uncertain, dead, and aimless look over the assembly. He with his eyes interrogated his mother more than twenty times: but she, given up to the pleasure of conversing with her sister-in-law, and likewise constrained by the glance of Mazarin, did not appear to comprehend any of the supplications conveyed by the looks of her son.

From this moment, music, lights, flowers, beauties, all became odious and insipid to Louis XIV. After he had a hundred times bitten his lips, stretched his legs and his arms like a well-brought-up child, who, without daring to gape, exhausts all the modes of evincing his weariness--after having uselessly again implored his mother and the minister, he turned a despairing look towards the door, that is to say, towards liberty.

At this door, in the embrasure of which he was leaning, he saw, standing out strongly, a figure with a brown and lofty countenance, an aquiline nose, a stern but brilliant eye, gray and long hair, a black mustache, the true type of military beauty, whose gorget, more sparkling than a mirror, broke all the reflected lights which concentrated upon it, and sent them back as lightning. This officer wore his gray hat with its long red plumes upon his head, a proof that he was called there by his duty, and not by his pleasure. If he had been brought thither by his pleasure--if he had been a courtier instead of a soldier, as pleasure must always be paid for at the same price--he would have held his hat in his hand.

That which proved still better that this officer was upon duty, and was accomplishing a task to which he was accustomed, was, that he watched, with folded arms, remarkable indifference, and supreme apathy, the joys and ennuis of this fete. Above all, he appeared, like a philosopher, and all old soldiers are philosophers,--he appeared above all to comprehend the ennuis infinitely better than the joys; but in the one he took his part, knowing very well how to do without the other.

Now, he was leaning, as we have said, against the carved door-frame when the melancholy, weary eyes of the king, by chance, met his.

It was not the first time, as it appeared, that the eyes of the officer had met those eyes, and he was perfectly acquainted with the expression of them; for, as soon as he had cast his own look upon the countenance of Louis XIV., and had read by it what was passing in his heart--that is to say, all the ennui that oppressed him--all the timid desire to go out which agitated him,--he perceived he must render the king a service without his commanding it,--almost in spite of himself. Boldly, therefore, as if he had given the word of command to cavalry in battle, “On the king’s service!” cried he, in a clear, sonorous voice.

At these words, which produced the effect of a peal of thunder, prevailing over the orchestra, the singing and the buzz of the promenaders, the cardinal and the queen-mother looked at each other with surprise.

Louis XIV., pale, but resolved, supported as he was by that intuition of his own thought which he had found in the mind of the officer of musketeers, and which he had just manifested by the order given, arose from his chair, and took a step towards the door.

“Are you going, my son?” said the queen, whilst Mazarin satisfied himself with interrogating by a look which might have appeared mild if it had not been so piercing.

“Yes, madame,” replied the king; “I am fatigued, and, besides, wish to write this evening.”

A smile stole over the lips of the minister, who appeared, by a bend of the head, to give the king permission.

Monsieur and Madame hastened to give orders to the officers who presented themselves.

The king bowed, crossed the hall, and gained the door, where a hedge of twenty musketeers awaited him. At the extremity of this hedge stood the officer, impassible, with his drawn sword in his hand. The king passed, and all the crowd stood on tip-toe, to have one more look at him.

Ten musketeers, opening the crowd of the ante-chambers and the steps, made way for his majesty. The other ten surrounded the king and Monsieur, who had insisted upon accompanying his majesty. The domestics walked behind. This little cortege escorted the king to the chamber destined for him. The apartment was the same that had been occupied by Henry III. during his sojourn in the States.

Monsieur had given his orders. The musketeers, led by their officer, took possession of the little passage by which one wing of the castle communicates with the other. This passage was commenced by a small square ante-chamber, dark even in the finest days. Monsieur stopped Louis XIV.

“You are passing now, sire,” said he, “the very spot where the Duc de Guise received the first stab of the poniard.”

The king was ignorant of all historical matters; he had heard of the fact, but he knew nothing of the localities or the details.

“Ah!” said he with a shudder.

And he stopped. The rest, both behind and before him, stopped likewise.

“The duc, sire,” continued Gaston, “was nearly were I stand: he was walking in the same direction as your majesty; M. de Loignac was exactly where your lieutenant of musketeers is; M. de Saint-Maline and his majesty’s ordinaries were behind him and around him. It was here that he was struck.”

The king turned towards his officer, and saw something like a cloud pass over his martial and daring countenance.

“Yes, from behind!” murmured the lieutenant, with a gesture of supreme disdain. And he endeavored to resume the march, as if ill at ease at being between walls formerly defiled by treachery.

But the king, who appeared to wish to be informed, was disposed to give another look at this dismal spot.

Gaston perceived his nephew’s desire.

“Look, sire,” said he, taking a flambeaux from the hands of M. de Saint-Remy, “this is where he fell. There was a bed there, the curtains of which he tore with catching at them.”

“Why does the floor seem hollowed out at this spot?” asked Louis.

“Because it was here the blood flowed,” replied Gaston; “the blood penetrated deeply into the oak, and it was only by cutting it out that they succeeded in making it disappear. And even then,” added Gaston, pointing the flambeaux to the spot, “even then this red stain resisted all the attempts made to destroy it.”

Louis XIV. raised his head. Perhaps he was thinking of that bloody trace that had once been shown him at the Louvre, and which, as a pendant to that of Blois, had been made there one day by the king his father with the blood of Concini.

“Let us go on,” said he.

The march was resumed promptly; for emotion, no doubt, had given to the voice of the young prince a tone of command which was not customary with him. When he arrived at the apartment destined for the king, which communicated not only with the little passage we have passed through, but further with the great staircase leading to the court,--

“Will your majesty,” said Gaston, “condescend to occupy this apartment, all unworthy as it is to receive you?”

“Uncle,” replied the young king, “I render you my thanks for your cordial hospitality.”

Gaston bowed to his nephew, embraced him, and then went out.

Of the twenty musketeers who had accompanied the king, ten reconducted Monsieur to the reception-rooms, which were not yet empty, notwithstanding the king had retired.

The ten others were posted by their officer, who himself explored, in five minutes, all the localities, with that cold and certain glance which not even habit gives unless that glance belongs to genius.

Then, when all were placed, he chose as his headquarters the antechamber, in which he found a large fauteuil, a lamp, some wine, some water, and some dry bread.

He refreshed his lamp, drank half a glass of wine, curled his lip with a smile full of expression, installed himself in his large armchair, and made preparations for sleeping.

CHAPTER IX.

In which the Unknown of the Hostelry of Les Medici loses his Incognito.

This officer, who was sleeping, or preparing to sleep, was, notwithstanding his careless air, charged with a serious responsibility.

Lieutenant of the king's musketeers, he commanded all the company which came from Paris, and that company consisted of a hundred and twenty men; but, with the exception of the twenty of whom we have spoken, the other hundred were engaged in guarding the queen-mother, and more particularly the cardinal.

Monsignor Giulio Mazarini economized the traveling expenses of his guards; he consequently used the king's, and that largely, since he took fifty of them for himself--a peculiarity which would not have failed to strike any one unacquainted with the usages of that court.

That which would still further have appeared, if not inconvenient, at least extraordinary, to a stranger, was, that the side of the castle destined for monsieur le cardinal was brilliant, light and cheerful. The musketeers there mounted guard before every door, and allowed no one to enter, except the couriers, who, even while he was traveling, followed the cardinal for the carrying on of his correspondence.

Twenty men were on duty with the queen-mother; thirty rested, in order to relieve their companions the next day.

On the king's side, on the contrary, were darkness, silence, and solitude. When once the doors were closed, there was no longer an appearance of royalty. All the servitors had by degrees retired. Monsieur le Prince had sent to know if his majesty required his attendance; and on the customary "No" of the lieutenant of musketeers, who was habituated to the question and the reply, all appeared to sink into the arms of sleep, as if in the dwelling of a good citizen.

And yet it was possible to hear from the side of the house occupied by the young king the music of the banquet, and to see the windows of the great hall richly illuminated.

Ten minutes after his installation in his apartment, Louis XIV. had been able to learn, by movement much more distinguished than marked his own leaving, the departure of the cardinal, who, in his turn, sought his bedroom, accompanied by a large escort of ladies and gentlemen.

Besides, to perceive this movement, he had nothing to do but look out at his window, the shutters of which had not been closed.

His eminence crossed the court, conducted by Monsieur, who himself held a flambeau; then followed the queen-mother, to whom Madame familiarly gave her arm; and both walked chatting away, like two old friends.

Behind these two couples filed nobles, ladies, pages and officers; the flambeaux gleamed over the whole court, like the moving reflections of a conflagration. Then the noise of steps and voices became lost in the upper floors of the castle.

No one was then thinking of the king, who, leaning on his elbow at his window, had sadly seen pass away all that light, and heard that noise die off--no, not one, if it was not that unknown of the hostelry des Medici, whom we have seen go out, enveloped in his cloak.

He had come straight up to the castle, and had, with his melancholy countenance, wandered round and round the palace, from which the people had not yet departed; and finding that on one guarded the great entrance, or the porch, seeing that the soldiers of Monsieur were fraternizing with the royal soldiers--that is to say, swallowing Beaugency at discretion, or rather indiscretion--the unknown penetrated through the crowd, then ascended to the court, and came to the landing of the staircase leading to the cardinal’s apartment.

What, according to all probability, induced him to direct his steps that way, was the splendor of the flambeaux, and the busy air of the pages and domestics. But he was stopped short by a presented musket and the cry of the sentinel.

“Where are you going, my friend?” asked the soldier.

“I am going to the king’s apartment,” replied the unknown, haughtily, but tranquilly.

The soldier called one of his eminence’s officers, who, in the tone in which a youth in office directs a solicitor to a minister, let fall these words: “The other staircase, in front.”

And the officer, without further notice of the unknown, resumed his interrupted conversation.

The stranger, without reply, directed his steps towards the staircase pointed out to him. On this side there was no noise, there were no more flambeaux.

Obscurity, through which a sentinel glided like a shadow; silence, which permitted him to hear the sound of his own footsteps, accompanied with the jingling of his spurs upon the stone slabs.

This guard was one of the twenty musketeers appointed for attendance upon the king, and who mounted guard with the stiffness and consciousness of a statue.

“Who goes there?” said the guard.

“A friend,” replied the unknown.

“What do you want?”

“To speak to the king.”

“Do you, my dear monsieur? That’s not very likely.”

“Why not?”

“Because the king has gone to bed.”

“Gone to bed already?”

“Yes.”

“No matter: I must speak to him.”

“And I tell you that is impossible.”

“And yet--”

“Go back!”

“Do you require the word?”

“I have no account to render to you. Stand back!”

And this time the soldier accompanied his word with a threatening gesture; but the unknown stirred no more than if his feet had taken root.

“Monsieur le mousquetaire,” said he, “are you a gentleman?”

“I have that honor.”

“Very well! I also am one; and between gentlemen some consideration ought to be observed.”

The soldier lowered his arms, overcome by the dignity with which these words were pronounced.

“Speak, monsieur,” said he; “and if you ask me anything in my power--”

“Thank you. You have an officer, have you not?”

“Our lieutenant? Yes, monsieur.”

"Well, I wish to speak to him."

"Oh, that's a different thing. Come up, monsieur."

The unknown saluted the soldier in a lofty fashion, and ascended the staircase; whilst a cry, "Lieutenant, a visit!" transmitted from sentinel to sentinel, preceded the unknown, and disturbed the slumbers of the officer.

Dragging on his boot, rubbing his eyes, and hooking his cloak, the lieutenant made three steps towards the stranger.

"What can I do to serve you, monsieur?" asked he.

"You are the officer on duty, lieutenant of the musketeers, are you?"

"I have that honor," replied the officer.

"Monsieur, I must absolutely speak to the king."

The lieutenant looked attentively at the unknown, and in that look, he saw all he wished to see--that is to say, a person of high distinction in an ordinary dress.

"I do not suppose you to be mad," replied he; "and yet you seem to me to be in a condition to know, monsieur, that people do not enter a king's apartments in this manner without his consent."

"He will consent."

"Monsieur, permit me to doubt that. The king has retired this quarter of an hour; he must be now undressing. Besides, the word is given."

"When he knows who I am, he will recall the word."

The officer was more and more surprised, more and more subdued.

"If I consent to announce you, may I at least know whom to announce, monsieur?"

"You will announce His Majesty Charles II., King of England, Scotland, and Ireland."

The officer uttered a cry of astonishment, drew back, and there might be seen upon his pallid countenance one of the most poignant emotions that ever an energetic man endeavored to drive back to his heart.

"Oh, yes, sire; in fact," said he, "I ought to have recognized you."

"You have seen my portrait, then?"

"No, sire."

"Or else you have seen me formerly at court, before I was driven from France?"

"No, sire, it is not even that."

"How then could you have recognized me, if you have never seen my portrait or my person?"

"Sire, I saw his majesty your father at a terrible moment."

"The day--"

"Yes."

A dark cloud passed over the brow of the prince; then, dashing his hand across it, "Do you see any difficulty in announcing me?" said he.

"Sire, pardon me," replied the officer, "but I could not imagine a king under so simple an exterior; and yet I had the honor to tell your majesty just now that I had seen Charles I. But pardon me, monsieur; I will go and inform the king."

But returning after going a few steps, "Your majesty is desirous, without doubt, that this interview should be a secret?" said he.

"I do not require it; but if it were possible to preserve it--"

"It is possible, sire, for I can dispense with informing the first gentleman on duty; but, for that, your majesty must please to consent to give up your sword."

"True, true; I had forgotten that no one armed is permitted to enter the chamber of a king of France."

"Your majesty will form an exception, if you wish it; but then I shall avoid my responsibility by informing the king's attendant."

"Here is my sword, monsieur. Will you now please to announce me to his majesty?"

"Instantly, sire." And the officer immediately went and knocked at the door of communication, which the valet opened to him.

"His Majesty the King of England!" said the officer.

"His Majesty the King of England!" replied the valet de chambre.

At these words a gentleman opened the folding-doors of the king's apartment, and Louis XIV. was seen, without hat or sword, and his pourpoint open, advancing with signs of the greatest surprise.

"You, my brother--you at Blois!" cried Louis XIV., dismissing with a gesture both the gentlemen and the valet de chambre, who passed out into the next apartment.

"Sire," replied Charles II., "I was going to Paris, in the hope of seeing your majesty, when report informed me of your approaching arrival in this city. I therefore prolonged my abode here, having something very particular to communicate to you."

"Will this closet suit you, my brother?"

"Perfectly well, sire; for I think no one can hear us here."

“I have dismissed my gentleman and my watcher; they are in the next chamber. There, behind that partition, is a solitary closet, looking into the ante-chamber, and in that ante-chamber you found nobody but a solitary officer, did you?”

“No, sire.”

“Well, then, speak, my brother; I listen to you.”

“Sire, I commence, and entreat your majesty to have pity on the misfortunes of our house.”

The king of France colored, and drew his chair closer to that of the king of England.

“Sire,” said Charles II., “I have no need to ask if your majesty is acquainted with the details of my deplorable history.”

Louis XIV. blushed, this time more strongly than before; then, stretching forth his hand to that of the king of England, “My brother,” said he, “I am ashamed to say so, but the cardinal scarcely ever speaks of political affairs before me. Still more, formerly I used to get Laporte, my valet de chambre, to read historical subjects to me; but he put a stop to these readings, and took away Laporte from me. So that I beg my brother Charles to tell me all those matters as to a man who knows nothing.”

“Well, sire, I think that by taking things from the beginning I shall have a better chance of touching the heart of your majesty.”

“Speak on, my brother--speak on.”

“You know, sire, that being called in 1650 to Edinburgh, during Cromwell’s expedition into Ireland, I was crowned at Scone. A year after, wounded in one of the provinces he had usurped, Cromwell returned upon us. To meet him was my object; to leave Scotland was my wish.”

“And yet,” interrupted the young king, “Scotland is almost your native country, is it not, my brother?”

“Yes, but the Scots were cruel compatriots for me, sire; they had forced me to forsake the religion of my fathers; they had hung Lord Montrose, the most devoted of my servants, because he was not a Covenanter; and as the poor martyr, to whom they had offered a favor when dying, had asked that his body might be cut into as many pieces as there are cities in Scotland, in order that evidence of his fidelity might be met with everywhere, I could not leave one city, or go into another, without passing under some fragments of a body which had acted, fought, and breathed for me.

"By a bold, almost desperate march, I passed through Cromwell's army, and entered England. The Protector set out in pursuit of this strange flight, which had a crown for its object. If I had been able to reach London before him, without doubt the prize of the race would have been mine; but he overtook me at Worcester.

"The genius of England was no longer with us, but with him. On the 3rd of September, 1651, sire, the anniversary of the other battle of Dunbar, so fatal to the Scots, I was conquered. Two thousand men fell around me before I thought of retreating a step. At length I was obliged to fly.

"From that moment my history became a romance. Pursued with persistent inveteracy, I cut off my hair, I disguised myself as a woodman. One day spent amidst the branches of an oak gave to that tree the name of the royal oak, which it bears to this day. My adventures in the county of Stafford, whence I escaped with the daughter of my host on a pillion behind me, still fill the tales of the country firesides, and would furnish matter for ballads. I will some day write all this, sire, for the instruction of my brother kings.

"I will first tell how, on arriving at the residence of Mr. Norton, I met with a court chaplain, who was looking on at a party playing at skittles, and an old servant who named me, bursting into tears, and who was as near and as certainly killing me by his fidelity as another might have been by treachery. Then I will tell of my terrors--yes, sire, of my terrors--when, at the house of Colonel Windham, a farrier who came to shoe our horses declared they had been shod in the north."

"How strange!" murmured Louis XIV. "I never heard anything of all that; I was only told of your embarkation at Brighelmstone and your landing in Normandy."*

** The correct name of the city is Brighthelmstone. The mistake is Dumas's.*

"Oh!" exclaimed Charles, "if Heaven permits kings to be thus ignorant of the histories of each other, how can they render assistance to their brothers who need it?"

"But tell me," continued Louis XIV., "how, after being so roughly received in England, you can still hope for anything from that unhappy country and that rebellious people?"

"Oh, sire! since the battle of Worcester, everything is changed there. Cromwell is dead, after having signed a treaty with France, in which his name is placed above yours. He died on the 3rd of September, 1658, a fresh anniversary of the battles of Dunbar and Worcester."

"His son has succeeded him."

"But certain men have a family, sire, and no heir. The inheritance of Oliver was too heavy for Richard. Richard was neither a republican nor a royalist; Richard allowed his guards to eat his dinner, and his generals to govern the republic; Richard abdicated the protectorate on the 22nd of April, 1659, more than a year ago, sire.

"From that time England is nothing but a tennis-court, in which the players throw dice for the crown of my father. The two most eager players are Lambert and Monk. Well, sire, I, in my turn, wish to take part in this game, where the stakes are thrown upon my royal mantle. Sire, it only requires a million to corrupt one of these players and make an ally of him, or two hundred of your gentlemen to drive them out of my palace at Whitehall, as Christ drove the money-changers from the temple."

"You come, then," replied Louis XIV., "to ask me--"

"For your assistance; that is to say, not only for that which kings owe to each other, but that which simple Christians owe to each other--your assistance, sire, either in money or men. Your assistance, sire, and within a month, whether I oppose Lambert to Monk, or Monk to Lambert, I shall have reconquered my paternal inheritance, without having cost my country a guinea, or my subjects a drop of blood, for they are now all drunk with revolutions, protectorates, and republics, and ask nothing better than to fall staggering to sleep in the arms of royalty. Your assistance, sire, and I shall owe you more than I owe my father,--my poor father, who bought at so dear a rate the ruin of our house! You may judge, sire, whether I am unhappy, whether I am in despair, for I accuse my own father!"

And the blood mounted to the pale face of Charles II., who remained for an instant with his head between his hands, and as if blinded by that blood which appeared to revolt against the filial blasphemy.

The young king was not less affected than his elder brother; he threw himself about in his fauteuil, and could not find a single word of reply.

Charles II., to whom ten years in age gave a superior strength to master his emotions, recovered his speech the first.

"Sire," said he, "your reply? I wait for it as a criminal waits for his sentence. Must I die?"

"My brother," replied the French prince, "you ask of me for a million--me, who was never possessed of a quarter of that sum! I possess nothing. I am no more king of France than you are king of England. I am a name, a cipher dressed in fleur-de-lised velvet,--that is all. I am upon a visible throne; that is my only advantage over your majesty. I have nothing--I can do nothing."

"Can it be so?" exclaimed Charles II.

"My brother," said Louis, sinking his voice, "I have undergone miseries with which my poorest gentlemen are unacquainted. If my poor Laporte were here, he would tell you that I have slept in ragged sheets, through the holes of which my legs have passed; he would tell you that afterwards, when I asked for carriages, they brought me conveyances half-destroyed by the rats of the coach-houses; he would tell you that when I asked for my dinner, the servants went to the cardinal's kitchen to inquire if there were any dinner for the king. And look! to-day, this very day even, when I am twenty-two years of age,--to-day, when I have attained the grade of the majority of kings,--to-day, when I ought to have the key of the treasury, the direction of the policy, the supremacy in peace and war,--cast your eyes around me, see how I am left! Look at this abandonment--this disdain--this silence!--Whilst yonder--look yonder! View the bustle, the lights, the homage! There!--there you see the real king of France, my brother!"

"In the cardinal's apartments?"

"Yes, in the cardinal's apartments."

"Then I am condemned, sire?"

Louis XIV. made no reply.

"Condemned is the word; for I will never solicit him who left my mother and sister to die with cold and hunger--the daughter and grand-daughter of Henry IV.--as surely they would have if M. de Retz and the parliament had not sent them wood and bread."

"To die?" murmured Louis XIV.

"Well!" continued the king of England, "poor Charles II., grandson of Henry IV., as you are, sire having neither parliament nor Cardinal de Retz to apply to, will die of hunger, as his mother and sister had nearly done."

Louis knitted his brow, and twisted violently the lace of his ruffles.

This prostration, this immobility, serving as a mark to an emotion so visible, struck Charles II., and he took the young man's hand.

"Thanks!" said he, "my brother. You pity me, and that is all I can require of you in your present situation."

"Sire," said Louis XIV., with a sudden impulse, and raising his head, "it is a million you require, or two hundred gentlemen, I think you say?"

"Sire, a million would be quite sufficient."

"That is very little."

"Offered to a single man it is a great deal. Convictions have been purchased at a much lower price; and I should have nothing to do but with venalities."

"Two hundred gentlemen! Reflect!--that is little more than a single company."

"Sire, there is in our family a tradition, and that is, that four men, four French gentlemen, devoted to my father, were near saving my father, though condemned by a parliament, guarded by an army and surrounded by a nation."

"Then if I can procure you a million, or two hundred gentlemen, you will be satisfied; and you will consider me your well-affectioned brother?"

"I shall consider you as my saviour; and if I recover the throne of my father, England will be, as long as I reign it, a sister to France, as you will have been a brother to me."

"Well, my brother," said Louis, rising, "what you hesitate to ask for, I will myself demand; that which I have never done on my own account, I will do on yours. I will go and find the king of France--the other--the rich, the powerful one, I mean. I will myself solicit this million, or these two hundred gentlemen; and--we will see."

"Oh!" cried Charles; "you are a noble friend, sire--a heart created by God! You save me, my brother; and if you should ever stand in need of the life you restored me, demand it."

"Silence, my brother,--silence!" said Louis, in a suppressed voice. "Take care that no one hears you! We have not obtained our end yet. To ask money of Mazarin--that is worse than traversing the enchanted forest, each tree of which inclosed a demon. It is more than setting out to conquer a world."

"But yet, sire, when you ask it--"

"I have already told you that I never asked," replied Louis with a haughtiness that made the king of England turn pale.

And the latter, like a wounded man, made a retreating movement--”Pardon me, my brother,” replied he. “I have neither a mother nor a sister who are suffering. My throne is hard and naked, but I am firmly seated on my throne. Pardon me that expression, my brother; it was that of an egotist. I will retract it, therefore, by a sacrifice,--I will go to monsieur le cardinal. Wait for me, if you please--I will return.”

CHAPTER X.

The Arithmetic of M. de Mazarin.

Whilst the king was directing his course rapidly towards the wing of the castle occupied by the cardinal, taking nobody with him but his valet de chambre, the officer of musketeers came out, breathing like a man who has for a long time been forced to hold his breath, from the little cabinet of which we have already spoken, and which the king believed to be quite solitary. This little cabinet had formerly been part of the chamber, from which it was only separated by a thin partition. It resulted that this partition, which was only for the eye, permitted the ear the least indiscreet to hear every word spoken in the chamber.

There was no doubt, then, that this lieutenant of musketeers had heard all that passed in his majesty's apartment.

Warned by the last words of the young king, he came out just in time to salute him on his passage, and to follow him with his eyes till he had disappeared in the corridor.

Then as soon as he had disappeared, he shook his head after a fashion peculiarly his own, and in a voice which forty years' absence from Gascony had not deprived of its Gascon accent, "A melancholy service," said he, "and a melancholy master!"

These words pronounced, the lieutenant resumed his place in his fauteuil, stretched his legs and closed his eyes, like a man who either sleeps or meditates.

During this short monologue and the mise en scene that had accompanied it, whilst the king, through the long corridors of the old castle, proceeded to the apartment of M. de Mazarin, a scene of another sort was being enacted in those apartments.

Mazarin was in bed, suffering a little from the gout. But as he was a man of order, who utilized even pain, he forced his wakefulness to be the humble servant of his labor. He had consequently ordered Bernouin, his valet de chambre, to bring him a little traveling-desk, so that he might write in bed.

But the gout is not an adversary that allows itself to be conquered so easily; therefore, at each movement he made, the pain from dull became sharp.

“Is Brienne there?” asked he of Bernouin.

“No, monseigneur,” replied the valet de chambre; “M. de Brienne, with your permission, is gone to bed. But if it is the wish of your eminence, he can speedily be called.”

“No, it is not worth while. Let us see, however. Cursed ciphers!”

And the cardinal began to think, counting on his fingers the while.

“Oh, ciphers is it?” said Bernouin. “Very well! if your eminence attempts calculations, I will promise you a pretty headache to-morrow! And with that please to remember M. Guenaud is not here.”

“You are right, Bernouin. You must take Brienne’s place, my friend. Indeed, I ought to have brought M. Colbert with me. That young man goes on very well, Bernouin, very well; a very orderly youth.”

“I do not know,” sad the valet de chambre, “but I don’t like the countenance of your young man who goes on so well.”

“Well, well, Bernouin! We don’t stand in need of your advice. Place yourself there: take the pen and write.”

“I am ready, monseigneur; what am I to write?”

“There, that’s the place: after the two lines already traced.”

“I am there.”

“Write seven hundred and sixty thousand livres.”

“That is written.”

“Upon Lyons--” The cardinal appeared to hesitate.

“Upon Lyons,” repeated Bernouin.

“Three millions nine hundred thousand livres.”

“Well, monseigneur?”

“Upon Bordeaux, seven millions.”

“Seven?” repeated Bernouin.

“Yes,” said the cardinal, pettishly, “seven.” Then, recollecting himself, “You understand, Bernouin,” added he, “that all this money is to be spent?”

“Eh! monseigneur; whether it be spent or put away is of very little consequence to me, since none of these millions are mine.”

“These millions are the king’s; it is the king’s money I am reckoning. Well, what were we saying? You always interrupt me!”

“Seven millions upon Bordeaux.”

“Ah! yes; that’s right. Upon Madrid four millions. I give you to understand plainly to whom this money belongs, Bernouin, seeing that everybody has the stupidity to believe me rich in millions. I repel the silly idea. A minister, besides, has nothing of his own. Come, go on. Rentrees generales, seven millions; properties, nine millions. Have you written that, Bernouin?”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“Bourse, six hundred thousand livres; various property, two millions. Ah! I forgot--the furniture of the different chateaux--”

“Must I put of the crown?” asked Bernouin.

“No, no; it is of no use doing that--that is understood. Have you written that, Bernouin?”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“And the ciphers?”

“Stand straight under one another.”

“Cast them up, Bernouin.”

“Thirty-nine millions two hundred and sixty thousand livres, monseigneur.”

“Ah!” cried the cardinal, in a tone of vexation; “there are not yet forty millions!”

Bernouin recommenced the addition.

“No, monseigneur; there want seven hundred and forty thousand livres.”

Mazarin asked for the account, and revised it carefully.

“Yes, but,” said Bernouin, “thirty-nine millions two hundred and sixty thousand livres make a good round sum.”

“Ah, Bernouin; I wish the king had it.”

“Your eminence told me that this money was his majesty’s.”

“Doubtless, as clear, as transparent as possible. These thirty-nine millions are bespoken, and much more.”

Bernouin smiled after his own fashion--that is, like a man who believes no more than he is willing to believe--whilst preparing the cardinal’s night draught, and putting his pillow to rights.

“Oh!” said Mazarin, when the valet had gone out; “not yet forty millions! I must, however, attain that sum, which I had set down for myself. But who knows whether I shall have time? I sink, I am going, I shall never reach it! And yet, who knows that I may not find two or three millions in the pockets of my good friends the Spaniards? They discovered Peru, those people did, and--what the devil! they must have something left."

As he was speaking thus, entirely occupied with his ciphers, and thinking no more of his gout, repelled by a preoccupation which, with the cardinal, was the most powerful of all preoccupations, Bernouin rushed into the chamber, quite in a fright.

"Well!" asked the cardinal, "what is the matter now?"

"The king, monseigneur,--the king!"

"How?--the king!" said Mazarin, quickly concealing his paper. "The king here! the king at this hour! I thought he was in bed long ago. What is the matter, then?"

The king could hear these last words, and see the terrified gesture of the cardinal rising up in his bed, for he entered the chamber at that moment.

"It is nothing, monsieur le cardinal, or at least nothing which can alarm you. It is an important communication which I wish to make to your eminence to-night,--that is all."

Mazarin immediately thought of that marked attention which the king had given to his words concerning Mademoiselle de Mancini, and the communication appeared to him probably to refer to this source. He recovered his serenity then instantly, and assumed his most agreeable air, a change of countenance which inspired the king with the greatest joy; and when Louis was seated,--

"Sire," said the cardinal, "I ought certainly to listen to your majesty standing, but the violence of my complaint--"

"No ceremony between us, my dear monsieur le cardinal," said Louis kindly: "I am your pupil, and not the king, you know very well, and this evening in particular, as I come to you as a petitioner, as a solicitor, and one very humble, and desirous to be kindly received, too."

Mazarin, seeing the heightened color of the king, was confirmed in his first idea; that is to say, that love thoughts were hidden under all these fine words. This time, political cunning, as keen as it was, made a mistake; this color was not caused by the bashfulness of a juvenile passion, but only by the painful contraction of the royal pride.

Like a good uncle, Mazarin felt disposed to facilitate the confidence.

"Speak, sire," said he, "and since your majesty is willing for an instant to forget that I am your subject, and call me your master and instructor, I promise your majesty my most devoted and tender consideration."

“Thanks, monsieur le cardinal,” answered the king; “that which I have to ask of your eminence has but little to do with myself.”

“So much the worse!” replied the cardinal; “so much the worse! Sire, I should wish your majesty to ask of me something of importance, even a sacrifice; but whatever it may be that you ask me, I am ready to set your heart at rest by granting it, my dear sire.”

“Well, this is what brings me here,” said the king, with a beating of the heart that had no equal except the beating of the heart of the minister; “I have just received a visit from my brother, the king of England.”

Mazarin bounded in his bed as if he had been put in relation with a Leyden jar or a voltaic pile, at the same time that a surprise, or rather a manifest disappointment, inflamed his features with such a blaze of anger, that Louis XIV., little diplomatist as he was, saw that the minister had hoped to hear something else.

“Charles II.?” exclaimed Mazarin, with a hoarse voice and a disdainful movement of his lips. “You have received a visit from Charles II.?”

“From King Charles II.,” replied Louis, according in a marked manner to the grandson of Henry IV. the title which Mazarin had forgotten to give him. “Yes, monsieur le cardinal, that unhappy prince has touched my heart with the relation of his misfortunes. His distress is great, monsieur le cardinal, and it has appeared painful to me, who have seen my own throne disputed, who have been forced in times of commotion to quit my capital,--to me, in short, who am acquainted with misfortune,--to leave a deposed and fugitive brother without assistance.”

“Eh!” said the cardinal, sharply; “why had he not, as you have, a Jules Mazarin by his side? His crown would then have remained intact.”

“I know all that my house owes to your eminence,” replied the king, haughtily, “and you may well believe that I, on my part, shall never forget it. It is precisely because my brother, the king of England has not about him the powerful genius who has saved me, it is for that, I say, that I wish to conciliate the aid of that same genius, and beg you to extend your arm over his head, well assured, monsieur le cardinal, that your hand, by touching him only, would know how to replace upon his brow the crown which fell at the foot of his father’s scaffold.”

“Sire,” replied Mazarin, “I thank you for your good opinion with regard to myself, but we have nothing to do yonder: they are a set of madmen who deny God, and cut off the heads of their kings. They are dangerous, observe, sire, and filthy to the touch after having wallowed in royal blood and covenantal murder. That policy has never suited me,--I scorn it and reject it."

"Therefore you ought to assist in establishing a better."

"What is that?"

"The restoration of Charles II., for example."

"Good heavens!" cried Mazarin, "does the poor prince flatter himself with that chimera?"

"Yes, he does," replied the young king, terrified at the difficulties opposed to this project, which he fancied he could perceive in the infallible eye of his minister; "he only asks for a million to carry out his purpose."

"Is that all--a little million, if you please!" said the cardinal, ironically, with an effort to conquer his Italian accent. "A little million, if you please, brother! Bah! a family of mendicants!"

"Cardinal," said Louis, raising his head, "that family of mendicants is a branch of my family."

"Are you rich enough to give millions to other people, sire? Have you millions to throw away?"

"Oh!" replied Louis XIV., with great pain, which he, however, by a strong effort, prevented from appearing on his countenance;--"oh! yes, monsieur le cardinal, I am well aware I am poor, and yet the crown of France is worth a million, and to perform a good action I would pledge my crown if it were necessary. I could find Jews who would be willing to lend me a million."

"So, sire, you say you want a million?" said Mazarin.

"Yes, monsieur, I say so."

"You are mistaken, greatly mistaken, sire; you want much more than that,--Bernouin!--you shall see, sire, how much you really want."

"What, cardinal!" said the king, "are you going to consult a lackey about my affairs?"

"Bernouin!" cried the cardinal again, without appearing to remark the humiliation of the young prince. "Come here, Bernouin, and tell me the figures I gave you just now."

"Cardinal, cardinal! did you not hear me?" said Louis, turning pale with anger.

"Do not be angry, sire; I deal openly with the affairs of your majesty. Every one in France knows that; my books are as open as day. What did I tell you to do just now, Bernouin?”

“Your eminence commanded me to cast up an account.”

“You did it, did you not?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“To verify the amount of which his majesty, at this moment, stands in need. Did I not tell you so? Be frank, my friend.”

“Your eminence said so.”

“Well, what sum did I say I wanted?”

“Forty-five millions, I think.”

“And what sum could we find, after collecting all our resources?”

“Thirty-nine millions two hundred and sixty thousand.”

“That is correct, Bernouin; that is all I wanted to know. Leave us now,” said the cardinal, fixing his brilliant eye upon the young king, who sat mute with stupefaction.

“However--” stammered the king.

“What, do you still doubt, sire?” said the cardinal. “Well, here is a proof of what I said.”

And Mazarin drew from under his bolster the paper covered with figures, which he presented to the king, who turned away his eyes, his vexation was so deep.

“Therefore, as it is a million you want, sire, and that million is not set down here, it is forty-six millions your majesty stands in need of. Well, I don’t think that any Jews in the world would lend such a sum, even upon the crown of France.”

The king, clenching his hands beneath his ruffles, pushed away his chair.

“So it must be then!” said he; “my brother the king of England will die of hunger.”

“Sire,” replied Mazarin, in the same tone, “remember this proverb, which I give you as the expression of the soundest policy: ‘Rejoice at being poor when your neighbor is poor likewise.’“

Louis meditated this for a few moments, with an inquisitive glance directed to the paper, one end of which remained under the bolster.

“Then,” said he, “it is impossible to comply with my demand for money, my lord cardinal, is it?”

“Absolutely, sire.”

“Remember, this will secure me a future enemy, if he succeed in recovering his crown without my assistance.”

“If your majesty only fears that, you may be quite at ease,” replied Mazarin, eagerly.

“Very well, I say no more about it,” exclaimed Louis XIV.

“Have I at least convinced you, sire?” placing his hand upon that of the young king.

“Perfectly.”

“If there be anything else, ask it, sire; I shall most happy to grant it to you, having refused this.”

“Anything else, my lord?”

“Why yes; am I not devoted body and soul to your majesty? Hola! Bernouin!--lights and guards for his majesty! His majesty is returning to his own chamber.”

“Not yet, monsieur: since you place your good-will at my disposal, I will take advantage of it.”

“For yourself, sire?” asked the cardinal, hoping that his niece was at length about to be named.

“No, monsieur, not for myself,” replied Louis, “but still for my brother Charles.”

The brow of Mazarin again became clouded, and he grumbled a few words that the king could not catch.

CHAPTER XI.

Mazarin’s Policy.

Instead of the hesitation with which he had accosted the cardinal a quarter of an hour before, there might be read in the eyes of the young king that will against which a struggle might be maintained, and which might be crushed by its own impotence, but which, at least, would preserve, like a wound in the depth of the heart, the remembrance of its defeat.

“This time, my lord cardinal, we have to deal with something more easily found than a million.”

“Do you think so, sire?” said Mazarin, looking at the king with that penetrating eye which was accustomed to read to the bottom of hearts.

“Yes, I think so; and when you know the object of my request--”

“And do you think I do not know it, sire?”

“You know what remains for me to say to you?”

“Listen, sire; these are King Charles’s own words--”

“Oh, impossible!”

“Listen. ‘And if that miserly, beggarly Italian,’ said he--”

“My lord cardinal!”

“That is the sense, if not the words. Eh! Good heavens! I wish him no ill on that account; one is biased by his passions. He said to you: ‘If that vile Italian refuses the million we ask of him, sire,--if we are forced, for want of money, to renounce diplomacy, well, then, we will ask him to grant us five hundred gentlemen.’“

The king started, for the cardinal was only mistaken in the number.

“Is not that it, sire?” cried the minister, with a triumphant accent. “And then he added some fine words: he said, ‘I have friends on the other side of the channel, and these friends only want a leader and a banner. When they see me, when they behold the banner of France, they will rally around me, for they will comprehend that I have your support. The colors of the French uniform will be worth as much to me as the million M. de Mazarin refuses us,’--for he was pretty well assured I should refuse him that million.--’I shall conquer with these five hundred gentlemen, sire, and all the honor will be yours.’ Now, that is what he said, or to that purpose, was it not?--turning those plain words into brilliant metaphors and pompous images, for they are fine talkers in that family! The father talked even on the scaffold.”

The perspiration of shame stood on the brow of Louis. He felt that it was inconsistent with his dignity to hear his brother thus insulted, but he did not yet know how to act with him to whom every one yielded, even his mother. At last he made an effort.

“But,” said he, “my lord cardinal, it is not five hundred men, it is only two hundred.”

“Well, but you see I guessed what he wanted.”

“I never denied that you had a penetrating eye, and that was why I thought you would not refuse my brother Charles a thing so simple and so easy to grant him as what I ask of you in his name, my lord cardinal, or rather in my own.”

“Sire,” said Mazarin, “I have studied policy thirty years; first, under the auspices of M. le Cardinal Richelieu; and then alone. This policy has not always been over-honest, it must be allowed, but it has never been unskillful. Now that which is proposed to your majesty is dishonest and unskillful at the same time.”

“Dishonest, monsieur!”

“Sire, you entered into a treaty with Cromwell.”

“Yes, and in that very treaty Cromwell signed his name above mine.”

“Why did you sign yours so lo down, sire? Cromwell found a good place, and he took it; that was his custom. I return, then, to M. Cromwell. You have a treaty with him, that is to say, with England, since when you signed that treaty M. Cromwell was England.”

“M. Cromwell is dead.”

“Do you think so, sire?”

“No doubt he is, since his son Richard has succeeded him, and has abdicated.”

“Yes, that is it exactly. Richard inherited after the death of his father, and England at the abdication of Richard. The treaty formed part of the inheritance, whether in the hands of M. Richard or in the hands of England. The treaty is, then, still as good, as valid as ever. Why should you evade it, sire? What is changed? Charles wants to-day what we were not willing to grant him ten years ago; but that was foreseen and provided against. You are the ally of England, sire, and not of Charles II. It was doubtless wrong, from a family point of view, to sign a treaty with a man who had cut off the head of the king your father’s brother-in-law, and to contract an alliance with a parliament which they call yonder the Rump Parliament; it was unbecoming, I acknowledge, but it was not unskillful from a political point of view, since, thanks to that treaty, I saved your majesty, then a minor, the trouble and danger of a foreign war, which the Fronde--you remember the Fronde, sire?”--the young king hung his head--”which the Fronde might have fatally complicated. And thus I prove to your majesty that to change our plan now, without warning our allies, would be at once unskillful and dishonest. We should make war with the aggression on our side; we should make it, deserving to have it made against us; and we should have the appearance of fearing it whilst provoking it, for a permission granted to five hundred men, to two hundred men, to fifty men, to ten men, is still a permission. One Frenchman, that is the nation; one uniform, that is the army. Suppose, sire, for example, that you should have war with Holland, which, sooner or later, will certainly happen; or with Spain, which will perhaps ensue if your marriage fails” (Mazarin stole a furtive glance at the king), “and there are a thousand causes that might yet make your marriage fail,--well, would you approve of England’s sending to the United Provinces or to Spain a regiment, a company, a squadron even, of English gentlemen? Would you think that they kept within the limits of their treaty of alliance?”

Louis listened; it seemed so strange to him that Mazarin should invoke good faith, and he the author of so many political tricks, called Mazarinades. “And yet,” said the king, “without manifest of my authorization, I cannot prevent gentlemen of my states from passing over into England, if such should be their good pleasure.”

“You should compel them to return, sire, or at least protest against their presence as enemies in a allied country.”

“But come, my lord cardinal, you who are so profound a genius, try if you cannot find a means to assist this poor king, without compromising ourselves.”

“And that is exactly what I am not willing to do, my dear sire,” said Mazarin. “If England were to act exactly according to my wishes, she could not act better than she does; if I directed the policy of England from this place, I should not direct it otherwise. Governed as she is governed, England is an eternal nest of contention for all Europe. Holland protects

Charles II., let Holland do so; they will quarrel, they will fight. Let them destroy each other's navies, we can construct ours with the wrecks of their vessels; when we shall save our money to buy nails."

"Oh, how paltry and mean is all this that you are telling me, monsieur le cardinal!"

"Yes, but nevertheless it is true, sire; you must confess that. Sill further. Suppose I admit, for a moment, the possibility of breaking your word, and evading the treaty--such a thing as sometimes happens, but that is when some great interest is to be promoted by it, or when the treaty is found to be too troublesome--well, you will authorize the engagement asked of you: France--her banner, which is the same thing--will cross the Straits and will fight; France will be conquered."

"Why so?"

"Ma foi! we have a pretty general to fight under--this Charles II.! Worcester gave us proofs of that."

"But he will no longer have to deal with Cromwell, monsieur."

"But he will have to deal with Monk, who is quite as dangerous. The brave brewer of whom we are speaking, was a visionary; he had moments of exaltation, of inflation, during which he ran over like an over-filled cask; and from the chinks there always escaped some drops of his thoughts, and by the sample the whole of his thought was to be made out. Cromwell has thus allowed us more than ten times to penetrate into his very soul, when one would have conceived that soul to be enveloped in triple brass, as Horace had it. But Monk! Oh, sire, God defend you from ever having anything to transact politically with Monk. It is he who has given me, in one year, all the gray hairs I have. Monk is no fanatic; unfortunately he is a politician; he does not overflow, he keeps close together. For ten years he has had his eyes fixed upon one object, and nobody has yet been able to ascertain what. Every morning, as Louis XI. advised, he burns his nightcap. Therefore, on the day when this plan, slowly and solitarily ripened, shall break forth, it will break forth with all the conditions of success which always accompany an unforeseen event. That is Monk, sire, of whom, perhaps, you have never even heard--of whom, perhaps, you did not even know the name, before your brother, Charles II., who knows what he is, pronounced it before you. He is a marvel of depth and tenacity, the two only things against which intelligence and ardor are blunted. Sire, I had ardor when I was young; I always was intelligent. I may safely boast of it, because I am reproached with it. I have done very well with these two qualities, since, from the son of a fisherman of Piscina, I have become prime minister to the king of France; and in that position your majesty will perhaps acknowledge I have rendered some service to the throne of your majesty. Well, sire, if I had met with Monk on my way, instead of Monsieur de Beaufort, Monsieur de Retz, or Monsieur le Prince--well, we should have been ruined. If you engage yourself rashly, sire, you will fall into the talons of this politic soldier. The casque of Monk, sire, is an iron coffer, and no one has the key of it. Therefore, near him, or rather before him, I bow, sire, for I have nothing but a velvet cap."

"What do you think Monk wishes to do, then?"

"Eh! sire, if I knew that, I would not tell you to mistrust him, for I should be stronger than he; but with him, I am afraid to guess--to guess!--you understand my word?--for if I thought I had guessed, I should stop at an idea, and, in spite of myself, should pursue that idea. Since that man has been in power yonder, I am like one of the damned in Dante whose neck Satan has twisted, and who walk forward looking around behind them. I am traveling towards Madrid, but I never lose sight of London. To guess, with that devil of a man, is to deceive one's self and to deceive one's self is to ruin one's self. God keep me from ever seeking to guess what he aims at; I confine myself to watching what he does, and that is well enough. Now I believe--you observe the meaning of the word I believe?--I believe, with respect to Monk, ties one to nothing--I believe that he has a strong inclination to succeed Cromwell. Your Charles II. has already caused proposals to be made to him by ten persons; he has satisfied himself with driving these ten meddlers from his presence, without saying anything to them but, 'Begone, or I will have you hung.' That man is a sepulcher! At this moment Monk is affecting devotion to the Rump Parliament; of this devotion, I am not the dupe. Monk has no wish to be assassinated,--an assassination would stop him in the middle of his operations; and his work must be accomplished;--so I believe--but do not believe what I believe, sire: for as I say I believe from habit--I believe that Monk is keeping on friendly terms with the parliament till the day comes for dispersing it. You are asked for swords, but they are to fight against Monk. God preserve you from fighting against Monk, sire; for Monk would beat us, and I should never console myself after being beaten by Monk. I should say to myself, Monk has foreseen that victory ten years. For God's sake, sire, out of friendship for you, if not out of consideration for himself, let Charles II. keep quiet. Your majesty will give him a little income here; give him one of your chateaux. Yes, yes--wait awhile. But I forget the treaty--that famous treaty of which we were just now speaking. Your majesty has not even the right to give him a chateau."

"How is that?"

"Yes, yes; your majesty is bound not to grant hospitality to King Charles, and to compel him to leave France even. It was on this account we forced him to quit you, and yet here he is again. Sire, I hope you will give your brother to understand that he cannot remain with us; that it is impossible he should be allowed to compromise us; or I myself--"

"Enough, my lord," said Louis XIV., rising. "In refusing me a million, perhaps you may be right; your millions are your own. In refusing me two hundred gentlemen, you are still further in the right; for you are prime minister, and you have, in the eyes of France, the responsibility of peace and war. But that you should pretend to prevent me, who am king, from extending my hospitality to the grandson of Henry IV., to my cousin-german, to the companion of my childhood--there your power stops, and there begins my will."

"Sire," said Mazarin, delighted at being let off so cheaply, and who had, besides, only fought so earnestly to arrive at that,--"sire, I shall always bend before the will of my king. Let my king, then, keep near him, or in one of his chateaux, the king of England; let Mazarin know it, but let not the minister know it."

"Good-night, my lord," said Louis XIV., "I go away in despair."

"But convinced, and that is all I desire, sire," replied Mazarin.

The king made no answer, and retired quite pensive, convinced, not of all Mazarin had told him, but of one thing which he took care not to mention to him; and that was, that it was necessary for him to study seriously both his own affairs and those of Europe, for he found them very difficult and very obscure. Louis found the king of England seated in the same place where he had left him. On perceiving him, the English prince arose; but at the first glance he saw discouragement written in dark letters upon his cousin's brow. Then, speaking first, as if to facilitate the painful avowal that Louis had to make to him,--

"Whatever it may be," said he, "I shall never forget all the kindness, all the friendship you have exhibited towards me."

“Alas!” replied Louis, in a melancholy tone, “only barren good-will, my brother.”

Charles II. became extremely pale; he passed his cold hand over his brow, and struggled for a few instants against a faintness that made him tremble. “I understand,” said he at last; “no more hope!”

Louis seized the hand of Charles II. “Wait, my brother,” said he; “precipitate nothing; everything may change; hasty resolutions ruin all causes; add another year of trial, I implore you, to the years you have already undergone. You have, to induce you to act now rather than at another time, neither occasion nor opportunity. Come with me, my brother; I will give you one of my residences, whichever you prefer, to inhabit. I, with you, will keep my eyes upon events; we will prepare. Come, then, my brother, have courage!”

Charles II. withdrew his hand from that of the king, and drawing back, to salute him with more ceremony, “With all my heart, thanks!” replied he, “sire; but I have prayed without success to the greatest king on earth; now I will go and ask a miracle of God.” And he went out without being willing to hear any more, his head carried loftily, his hand trembling, with a painful contraction of his noble countenance, and that profound gloom which, finding no more hope in the world of men, appeared to go beyond it, and ask it in worlds unknown. The officer of musketeers, on seeing him pass by thus pale, bowed almost to his knees as he saluted him. He then took a flambeau, called two musketeers, and descended the deserted staircase with the unfortunate king, holding in his left hand his hat, the plume of which swept the steps. Arrived at the door, the musketeer asked the king which way he was going, that he might direct the musketeers.

“Monsieur,” replied Charles II., in a subdued voice, “you who have known my father, say, did you ever pray for him? If you have done so, do not forget me in your prayers. Now, I am going alone, and beg of you not to accompany me, or have me accompanied any further.”

The officer bowed and sent away the musketeers into the interior of the palace. But he himself remained an instant under the porch watching the departing Charles II., till he was lost in the turn of the next street. “To him as to his father formerly,” murmured he, “Athos, if he were here, would say with reason,--’Salute fallen majesty!’“ Then, reascending the staircase: “Oh! the vile service that I follow!” said he at every step. “Oh! my pitiful master! Life thus carried on is no longer tolerable, and it is at length time that I should do something! No more generosity, no more energy! The master has succeeded, the pupil is starved forever. Mordioux! I will not resist. Come, you men," continued he, entering the ante-chamber, "why are you all looking at me so? Extinguish these torches and return to your posts. Ah! you were guarding me? Yes, you watch over me, do you not, worthy fellows? Brave fools! I am not the Duc de Guise. Begone! They will not assassinate me in the little passage. Besides," added he, in a low voice, "that would be a resolution, and no resolutions have been formed since Monsieur le Cardinal Richelieu died. Now, with all his faults, that was a man! It is settled: to-morrow I will throw my cassock to the nettles."

Then, reflecting: "No," said he, "not yet! I have one great trial to make and I will make it; but that, and I swear it, shall be the last, Mordioux!"

He had not finished speaking when a voice issued from the king's chamber. "Monsieur le lieutenant!" said this voice.

"Here I am," replied he.

"The king desires to speak to you."

"Humph!" said the lieutenant; "perhaps of what I was thinking about." And he went into the king's apartment.

CHAPTER XII.

The King and the Lieutenant.

As soon as the king saw the officer enter, he dismissed his valet de chambre and his gentleman.

“Who is on duty to-morrow, monsieur?” asked he.

The lieutenant bowed his head with military politeness, and replied, “I am, sire.”

“What! still you?”

“Always I, sire.”

“How can that be, monsieur?”

“Sire, when traveling, the musketeers supply all the posts of your majesty’s household; that is to say, yours, her majesty the queen’s, and monsieur le cardinal’s, the latter of whom borrows of the king the best part, or rather the numerous part, of the royal guard.”

“But in the interims?”

“There are no interims, sire, but for twenty or thirty men who rest out of a hundred and twenty. At the Louvre it is very different, and if I were at the Louvre I should rely upon my brigadier; but, when traveling, sire, no one knows what may happen, and I prefer doing my duty myself.”

“Then you are on guard every day?”

“And every night. Yes, sire.”

“Monsieur, I cannot allow that--I will have you rest.”

“That is very kind, sire; but I will not.”

“What do you say?” said the king, who did not at first comprehend the full meaning of this reply.

“I say, sire, that I will not expose myself to the chance of a fault. If the devil had a trick to play on me, you understand, sire, as he knows the man with whom he has to deal, he would chose the moment when I should not be there. My duty and the peace of my conscience before everything, sire.”

“But such duty will kill you, monsieur.”

“Eh! sire, I have performed it for thirty years, and in all France and Navarre there is not a man in better health than I am. Moreover, I entreat you, sire, not to trouble yourself about me. That would appear very strange to me, seeing that I am not accustomed to it.”

The king cut short the conversation by a fresh question. “Shall you be here, then, to-morrow morning?”

“As at present? yes, sire.”

The king walked several times up and down his chamber; it was very plain that he burned with a desire to speak, but that he was restrained by some fear or other. The lieutenant, standing motionless, hat in hand, watched him making these evolutions, and, whilst looking at him, grumbled to himself, biting his mustache:

“He has not half a crown worth of resolution! Parole d’honneur! I would lay a wager he does not speak at all!”

The king continued to walk about, casting from time to time a side glance at the lieutenant. “He is the very image of his father,” continued the latter, in is secret soliloquy, “he is at once proud, avaricious, and timid. The devil take his master, say I.”

The king stopped. “Lieutenant,” said he.

“I am here, sire.”

“Why did you cry out this evening, down below in the salons--’The king’s service! His majesty’s musketeers!’“

“Because you gave me the order, sire.”

“I?” “Yourself.”

“Indeed, I did not say a word, monsieur.”

“Sire, an order is given by a sign, by a gesture, by a glance, as intelligibly, as freely, and as clearly as by word of mouth. A servant who has nothing but ears is not half a good servant.”

“Your eyes are very penetrating, then, monsieur.”

“How is that, sire?”

“Because they see what is not.”

“My eyes are good, though, sire, although they have served their master long and much: when they have anything to see, they seldom miss the opportunity. Now, this evening, they saw that your majesty colored with endeavoring to conceal the inclination to yawn, that your majesty looked with eloquent supplications, first to his eminence, and then at her majesty, the queen-mother, and at length to the entrance door, and they so thoroughly remarked all I have said, that they saw your majesty’s lips articulate these words: ‘Who will get me out of this?’“

"Monsieur!"

"Or something to this effect, sire--'My musketeers!' I could then no longer hesitate. That look was for me. I cried out instantly, 'His majesty's musketeers!' And, besides, that was shown to be true, sire, not only by your majesty's not saying I was wrong, but proving I was right by going out at once."

The king turned away to smile; then, after a few seconds, he again fixed his limpid eye upon that countenance, so intelligent, so bold, and so firm, that it might have been said to be the proud and energetic profile of the eagle facing the sun. "That is all very well," said he, after a short silence, during which he endeavored, in vain, to make his officer lower his eyes.

But seeing the king said no more, the latter pirouetted on his heels, and took three steps towards the door, muttering, "He will not speak! Mordioux! he will not speak!"

"Thank you, monsieur," said the king at last.

"Humph!" continued the lieutenant; "there was only wanting that. Blamed for having been less of a fool than another might have been." And he went to the door, allowing his spurs to jingle in true military style. But when he was on the threshold, feeling the king's desire drew him back, he returned.

"Has your majesty told me all?" asked he, in a tone we cannot describe, but which, without appearing to solicit the royal confidence, contained so much persuasive frankness, that the king immediately replied:

"Yes; but draw near, monsieur."

"Now then," murmured the officer, "he is coming to it at last."

"Listen to me."

"I shall not lose a word, sire."

"You will mount on horseback to-morrow, at about half-past four in the morning, and you will have a horse saddled for me."

"From your majesty's stables?"

"No; one of your musketeers' horses."

"Very well, sire. Is that all?"

"And you will accompany me."

"Alone?"

"Alone."

"Shall I come to seek your majesty, or shall I wait?"

"You will wait for me."

"Where, sire?"

"At the little park-gate."

The lieutenant bowed, understanding that the king had told him all he had to say. In fact, the king dismissed him with a gracious wave of the hand. The officer left the chamber of the king, and returned to place himself philosophically in his fauteuil, where, far from sleeping, as might have been expected, considering how late it was, he began to reflect more deeply than he had ever reflected before. The result of these reflections was not so melancholy as the preceding ones had been.

"Come, he has begun," said he. "Love urges him on, and he goes forward--he goes forward! The king is nobody in his own palace; but the man perhaps may prove to be worth something. Well, we shall see to-morrow morning. Oh! oh!" cried he, all at once starting up, "that is a gigantic idea, mordioux! and perhaps my fortune depends, at least, upon that idea!" After this exclamation, the officer arose and marched, with his hands in the pockets of his justaucorps, about the immense ante-chamber that served him as an apartment. The wax-light flamed furiously under the effects of a fresh breeze, which stole in through the chinks of the door and the window, and cut the salle diagonally. It threw out a reddish, unequal light, sometimes brilliant, sometimes dull, and the tall shadow of the lieutenant was seen marching on the wall, in profile, like a figure by Callot, with his long sword and feathered hat.

"Certainly!" said he, "I am mistaken if Mazarin is not laying a snare for this amorous boy. Mazarin, this evening, gave an address, and made an appointment as complacently as M. Daangeau himself could have done--I heard him, and I know the meaning of his words. 'To-morrow morning,' said he, 'they will pass opposite the bridge of Blois.' Mordioux! that is clear enough, and particularly for a lover. That is the cause of this embarrassment; that is the cause of this hesitation; that is the cause of this order--'Monsieur the lieutenant of my musketeers, be on horseback to-morrow at four o'clock in the morning.' Which is as clear as if he had said,--'Monsieur the lieutenant of my musketeers, to-morrow, at four, at the bridge of Blois,--do you understand?' Here is a state secret, then, which I, humble as I am, have in my possession, while it is in action. And how do I get it? Because I have good eyes, as his majesty just now said. They say he loves this little Italian doll furiously. They say he threw himself at his mother's feet, to beg her to allow him to marry her. They say the queen went so far as to consult the court of Rome, whether such a marriage, contracted against her will, would be valid. Oh, if I were but twenty-five! If I had by my side those I no longer have! If I did not despise the whole world most profoundly, I would embroil Mazarin with the queen-mother, France with Spain, and I would make a queen after my own fashion. But let that pass." And the lieutenant snapped his fingers in disdain.

"This miserable Italian--this poor creature--this sordid wretch--who has just refused the king of England a million, would not perhaps give me a thousand pistoles for the news I would carry him. Mordioux! I am falling into second childhood--I am becoming stupid indeed! The idea of Mazarin giving anything! ha! ha! ha!" and he laughed in a subdued voice.

"Well, let us go to sleep--let us go to sleep; and the sooner the better. My mind is wearied with my evening's work, and will see things to-morrow more clearly than to-day."

And upon this recommendation, made to himself, he folded his cloak around him, looking with contempt upon his royal neighbor. Five minutes after this he was asleep, with his hands clenched and his lips apart, giving escape, not to his secret, but to a sonorous sound, which rose and spread freely beneath the majestic roof of the ante-chamber.

CHAPTER XIII.

Mary de Mancini.

The sun had scarcely shed its first beams on the majestic trees of the park and the lofty turrets of the castle, when the young king, who had been awake more than two hours, possessed by the sleeplessness of love, opened his shutters himself, and cast an inquiring look into the courts of the sleeping palace. He saw that it was the hour agreed upon: the great court clock pointed to a quarter past four. He did not disturb his valet de chambre, who was sleeping soundly at some distance; he dressed himself, and the valet, in a great fright, sprang up, thinking he had been deficient in his duty; but the king sent him back again, commanding him to preserve the most absolute silence. He then descended the little staircase, went out at a lateral door, and perceived at the end of the wall a mounted horseman, holding another horse by the bridle. This horseman could not be recognized in his cloak and slouched hat. As to the horse, saddled like that of a rich citizen, it offered nothing remarkable to the most experienced eye. Louis took the bridle: the officer held the stirrup without dismounting, and asked his majesty's orders in a low voice.

"Follow me," replied the king.

The officer put his horse to the trot, behind that of his master, and they descended the hill towards the bridge. When they reached the other side of the Loire,--

"Monsieur," said the king, "you will please to ride on till you see a carriage coming; then return and inform me. I will wait here."

"Will your majesty deign to give me some description of the carriage I am charged to discover?"

"A carriage in which you will see two ladies, and probably their attendants likewise."

"Sire, I should not wish to make a mistake; is there no other sign by which I may know this carriage?"

"It will bear, in all probability, the arms of monsieur le cardinal."

“That is sufficient, sire,” replied the officer, fully instructed in the object of his search. He put his horse to the trot, and rode sharply on in the direction pointed out by the king. But he had scarcely gone five hundred paces when he saw four mules, and then a carriage, loom up from behind a little hill. Behind this carriage came another. It required only one glance to assure him that these were the equipages he was in search of; he therefore turned his bridle, and rode back to the king.

“Sire,” said he, “here are the carriages. The first, as you said, contains two ladies with their femmes de chambre; the second contains the footmen, provisions, and necessaries.”

“That is well,” replied the king in an agitated voice. “Please to go and tell those ladies that a cavalier of the court wishes to pay his respects to them alone.”

The officer set off at a gallop. “Mordioux!” said he, as he rode on, “here is a new and honorable employment, I hope! I complained of being nobody. I am the king’s confidant: that is enough to make a musketeer burst with pride.”

He approached the carriage, and delivered his message gallantly and intelligently. There were two ladies in the carriage: one of great beauty, although rather thin; the other less favored by nature, but lively, graceful, and uniting in the delicate lines of her brow all the signs of a strong will. Her eyes, animated and piercing, in particular, spoke more eloquently than all the amorous phrases in fashion in those days of gallantry. It was to her D’Artagnan addressed himself, without fear of being mistaken, although the other was, as we have said, the more handsome of the two.

“Madame,” said he, “I am the lieutenant of the musketeers, and there is on the road a horseman who awaits you, and is desirous of paying his respects to you.”

At these words, the effect of which he watched closely, the lady with the black eyes uttered a cry of joy, leant out of the carriage window, and seeing the cavalier approaching, held out her arms, exclaiming:

“Ah, my dear sire!” and the tears gushed from her eyes.

The coachman stopped his team; the women rose in confusion from the back of the carriage, and the second lady made a slight curtsey, terminated by the most ironical smile that jealousy ever imparted to the lips of woman.

“Marie, dear Marie,” cried the king, taking the hand of the black-eyed lady in both his. And opening the heavy door himself, he drew her out of the carriage with so much ardor, that she was in his arms before she touched the ground. The lieutenant, posted on the other side of the carriage, saw and heard all without being observed.

The king offered his arm to Mademoiselle de Mancini, and made a sign to the coachman and lackeys to proceed. It was nearly six o’clock; the road was fresh and pleasant; tall trees with their foliage still inclosed in the golden down of their buds, let the dew of morning filter from their trembling branches, like liquid diamonds; the grass was bursting at the foot of the hedges; the swallows having returned only a few days since, described their graceful curves between the heavens and the water; a breeze, laden with the perfumes of the blossoming woods, sighed along the road, and wrinkled the surface of the waters of the river; all these beauties of the day, all these perfumes of the plants, all these aspirations of the earth towards heaven, intoxicated the two lovers, walking side by side, leaning upon each other, eyes fixed upon eyes, hand clasping hand, and who, lingering as by a common desire, did not dare to speak, they had so much to say.

The officer saw that the king’s horse, in wandering this way and that, annoyed Mademoiselle de Mancini. He took advantage of the pretext of securing the horse to draw near them, and dismounting, walked between the two horses he led; he did not lose a single word or gesture of the lovers. It was Mademoiselle de Mancini who at length began.

“Ah, my dear sire!” said she, “you do not abandon me, then?”

“No, Marie,” replied the king; “you see I do not.”

“I had so often been told, though, that as soon as we should be separated you would no longer think of me.”

“Dear Marie, is it then to-day only that you have discovered we are surrounded by people interested in deceiving us?”

“But then, sire, this journey, this alliance with Spain? They are going to marry you off!”

Louis hung his head. At the same time the officer could see the eyes of Marie de Mancini shine in the sun with the brilliancy of a dagger starting from its sheath. “And you have done nothing in favor of our love?” asked the girl, after a silence of a moment.

“Ah! mademoiselle, how could you believe that? I threw myself at the feet of my mother; I begged her, I implored her; I told her all my hopes of happiness were in you; I even threatened--”

“Well?” asked Marie, eagerly.

“Well, the queen-mother wrote to the court of Rome, and received as answer, that a marriage between us would have no validity, and would be dissolved by the holy father. At length, finding there was no hope for us, I requested to have my marriage with the infanta at least delayed.”

“And yet that does not prevent your being on the road to meet her?”

“How can I help it? To my prayers, to my supplications, to my tears, I received no answer but reasons of state.”

“Well, well?”

“Well, what is to be done, mademoiselle, when so many wills are leagued against me?”

It was now Marie’s turn to hang her head. “Then I must bid you adieu forever,” said she. “You know that I am being exiled; you know that I am going to be buried alive; you know still more that they want to marry me off, too.”

Louis became very pale, and placed his hand upon his heart.

“If I had thought that my life only had been at stake, I have been so persecuted that I might have yielded; but I thought yours was concerned, my dear sire, and I stood out for the sake of preserving your happiness.”

“Oh, yes! my happiness, my treasure!” murmured the king, more gallantly than passionately, perhaps.

“The cardinal might have yielded,” said Marie, “if you had addressed yourself to him, if you had pressed him. For the cardinal to call the king of France his nephew! do you not perceive, sire? He would have made war even for that honor; the cardinal, assured of governing alone, under the double pretext of having brought up the king and given his niece to him in marriage--the cardinal would have fought all antagonists, overcome all obstacles. Oh, sire! I can answer for that. I am a woman, and I see clearly into everything where love is concerned.”

These words produced a strange effect upon the king. Instead of heightening his passion, they cooled it. He stopped, and said hastily,--

“What is to be said, mademoiselle? Everything has failed.”

“Except your will, I trust, my dear sire?”

“Alas!” said the king, coloring, “have I a will?”

“Oh!” said Mademoiselle de Mancini mournfully, wounded by that expression.

“The king has no will but that which policy dictates, but that which reasons of state impose upon him.”

“Oh! it is because you have no love,” cried Mary; “if you loved, sire, you would have a will.”

On pronouncing these words, Mary raised her eyes to her lover, whom she saw more pale and more cast down than an exile who is about to quit his native land forever. “Accuse me,” murmured the king, “but do not say I do not love you.”

A long silence followed these words, which the young king had pronounced with a perfectly true and profound feeling. “I am unable to think that to-morrow, and after to-morrow, I shall see you no more; I cannot think that I am going to end my sad days at a distance from Paris; that the lips of an old man, of an unknown, should touch that hand which you hold within yours; no, in truth, I cannot think of all that, my dear sire, without having my poor heart burst with despair.”

And Marie de Mancini did shed floods of tears. On his part, the king, much affected, carried his handkerchief to his mouth, and stifled a sob.

“See,” said she, “the carriages have stopped, my sister waits for me, the time is come; what you are about to decide upon will be decided for life. Oh, sire! you are willing, then, that I should lose you? You are willing, then, Louis, that she to whom you have said ‘I love you,’ should belong to another than to her king, to her master, to her lover? Oh! courage, Louis! courage! One word, a single word! Say ‘I will!’ and all my life is enchained to yours, and all my heart is yours forever.”

The king made no reply. Mary then looked at him as Dido looked at Aeneas in the Elysian fields, fierce and disdainful.

“Farewell, then,” said she; “farewell life! love! heaven!”

And she took a step away. The king detained her, seizing her hand, which he pressed to his lips, and despair prevailing over the resolution he appeared to have inwardly formed, he let fall upon that beautiful hand a burning tear of regret, which made Mary start, so really had that tear burnt her. She saw the humid eyes of the king, his pale brow, his convulsed lips, and cried, with an accent that cannot be described,--

“Oh, sire! you are a king, you weep, and yet I depart!”

As his sole reply, the king hid his face in his handkerchief. The officer uttered something so like a roar that it frightened the horses. Mademoiselle de Mancini, quite indignant, quitted the king’s arm, hastily entered the carriage, crying to the coachman, “Go on, go on, and quick!”

The coachman obeyed, flogging his mules, and the heavy carriage rocked upon its creaking axle, whilst the king of France, alone, cast down, annihilated, did not dare to look either behind or before him.

CHAPTER XIV.

In which the King and the Lieutenant each give Proofs of Memory.

When the king, like all the people in the world who are in love, had long and attentively watched disappear in the distance the carriage which bore away his mistress; when he had turned and turned again a hundred times to the same side and had at length succeeded in somewhat calming the agitation of his heart and thoughts, he recollected that he was not alone. The officer still held the horse by the bridle, and had not lost all hope of seeing the king recover his resolution. He had still the resource of mounting and riding after the carriage; they would have lost nothing by waiting a little. But the imagination of the lieutenant of the musketeers was too rich and too brilliant; it left far behind it that of the king, who took care not to allow himself to be carried away to such excess. He contented himself with approaching the officer, and in a doleful voice, “Come,” said he, “let us be gone; all is ended. To horse!”

The officer imitated this carriage, this slowness, this sadness, and leisurely mounted his horse. The king pushed on sharply, the lieutenant followed him. At the bridge Louis turned around for the last time. The lieutenant, patient as a god who has eternity behind and before him, still hoped for a return of energy. But it was groundless, nothing appeared. Louis gained the street which led to the castle, and entered as seven was striking. When the king had returned, and the musketeer, who saw everything, had seen a corner of the tapestry over the cardinal’s window lifted up, he breathed a profound sigh, like a man unloosed from the tightest bonds, and said in a low voice:

“Now then, my officer, I hope that it is over.”

The king summoned his gentleman. “Please to understand I shall receive nobody before two o’clock,” said he.

“Sire,” replied the gentleman, “there is, however, some one who requests admittance.”

“Who is that?”

“Your lieutenant of musketeers.”

"He who accompanied me?"

"Yes, sire."

"Ah," said the king, "let him come in."

The officer entered. The king made a sign, and the gentleman and the valet retired. Louis followed them with his eyes until they had shut the door, and when the tapestries had fallen behind them,--"You remind me by your presence, monsieur, of something I had forgotten to recommend to you, that is to say, the most absolute discretion."

"Oh! sire, why does your majesty give yourself the trouble of making me such a recommendation? It is plain you do not know me."

"Yes, monsieur, that is true. I know that you are discreet; but as I had prescribed nothing--"

The officer bowed. "Has your majesty nothing else to say to me?"

"No, monsieur; you may retire."

"Shall I obtain permission not to do so till I have spoken to the king, sire?"

"What do you have to say to me? Explain yourself, monsieur."

"Sire, a thing without importance to you, but which interests me greatly. Pardon me, then, for speaking of it. Without urgency, without necessity, I never would have done it, and I would have disappeared, mute and insignificant as I always have been."

"How! Disappeared! I do not understand you, monsieur."

"Sire, in a word," said the officer, "I am come to ask for my discharge from your majesty's service."

The king made a movement of surprise, but the officer remained as motionless as a statue.

"Your discharge--yours, monsieur? and for how long a time, I pray?"

"Why, forever, sire."

"What, you are desirous of quitting my service, monsieur?" said Louis, with an expression that revealed something more than surprise.

"Sire, I regret to say that I am."

"Impossible!"

"It is so, however, sire. I am getting old; I have worn harness now thirty-five years; my poor shoulders are tired; I feel that I must give place to the young. I don't belong to this age; I have still one foot in the old one; it results that everything is strange in my eyes, everything astonishes and bewilders me. In short, I have the honor to ask your majesty for my discharge."

"Monsieur," said the king, looking at the officer, who wore his uniform with an ease that would have caused envy in a young man, "you are stronger and more vigorous than I am."

"Oh!" replied the officer, with an air of false modesty, "your majesty says so because I still have a good eye and a tolerably firm foot--because I can still ride a horse, and my mustache is black; but, sire, vanity of vanities all that--illusions all that--appearance, smoke, sire! I have still a youthful air, it is true, but I feel old, and within six months I am certain I shall be broken down, gouty, impotent. Therefore, then, sire--"

"Monsieur," interrupted the king, "remember your words of yesterday. You said to me in this very place where you now are, that you were endowed with the best health of any man in France; that fatigue was unknown to you! that you did not mind spending whole days and nights at your post. Did you tell me that, monsieur, or not? Try and recall, monsieur."

The officer sighed. "Sire," said he, "old age is boastful; and it is pardonable for old men to praise themselves when others no longer do it. It is very possible I said that; but the fact is, sire, I am very much fatigued, an request permission to retire."

"Monsieur," said the king, advancing towards the officer with a gesture full of majesty, "you are not assigning me the true reason. You wish to quit my service, it may be true, but you disguise from me the motive of your retreat."

"Sire, believe that--"

"I believe what I see, monsieur; I see a vigorous, energetic man, full of presence of mind, the best soldier in France, perhaps; and this personage cannot persuade me the least in the world that he stands in need of rest."

"Ah! sire," said the lieutenant, with bitterness, "what praise! Indeed, your majesty confounds me! Energetic, vigorous, brave, intelligent, the best soldier in the army! But, sire, your majesty exaggerates my small portion of merit to such a point, that however good an opinion I may have of myself, I do not recognize myself; in truth I do not. If I were vain enough to believe only half of your majesty's words, I should consider myself a valuable, indispensable man. I should say that a servant possessed of such brilliant qualities was a treasure beyond all price. Now, sire, I have been all my life--I feel bound to say it--except at the present time, appreciated, in my opinion, much below my value. I therefore repeat, your majesty exaggerates."

The king knitted his brow, for he saw a bitter raillery beneath the words of the officer. "Come, monsieur," said he, "let us meet the question frankly. Are you dissatisfied with my service, say? No evasions; speak boldly, frankly--I command you to do so."

The officer, who had been twisting his hat about in his hands, with an embarrassed air, for several minutes, raised his head at these words. "Oh! sire," said he, "that puts me a little more at my ease. To a question put so frankly, I will reply frankly. To tell the truth is a good thing, as much from the pleasure one feels in relieving one's heart, as on account of the rarity of the fact. I will speak the truth, then, to my king, at the same time imploring him to excuse the frankness of an old soldier."

Louis looked at his officer with anxiety, which he manifested by the agitation of his gesture. "Well, then, speak," said he, "for I am impatient to hear the truths you have to tell me."

The officer threw his hat upon a table, and his countenance, always so intelligent and martial, assumed, all at once, a strange character of grandeur and solemnity. "Sire," said he, "I quit the king's service because I am dissatisfied. The valet, in these times, can approach his master as respectfully as I do, can give him an account of his labor, bring back his tools, return the funds that have been intrusted to him, and say 'Master, my day's work is done. Pay me, if you please, and let us part.'"

"Monsieur! monsieur!" exclaimed the king, crimson with rage.

"Ah! sire," replied the officer, bending his knee for a moment, "never was servant more respectful than I am before your majesty; only you commanded me to tell the truth. Now I have begun to tell it, it must come out, even if you command me to hold my tongue."

There was so much resolution expressed in the deep-sunk muscles of the officer's countenance, that Louis XIV. had no occasion to tell him to continue; he continued, therefore, whilst the king looked at him with a curiosity mingled with admiration.

"Sire, I have, as I have said, now served the house of France thirty-five years; few people have worn out so many swords in that service as I have, and the swords I speak of were good swords, too, sire. I was a boy, ignorant of everything except courage, when the king your father guessed that there was a man in me. I was a man, sire, when the Cardinal de Richelieu, who was a judge of manhood, discovered an enemy in me. Sire, the history of that enmity between the ant and the lion may be read from the first to the last line, in the secret archives of your family. If ever you feel an inclination to know it, do so, sire; the history is worth the trouble--it is I who tell you so. You will there read that the lion, fatigued, harassed, out of breath, at length cried for quarter, and the justice must be rendered him to say, that he gave as much as he required. Oh! those were glorious times, sire, strewed over with battles like one of Tasso's or Ariosto's epics. The wonders of those times, to which the people of ours would refuse belief, were every-day occurrences. For five years together, I was a hero every day; at least, so I was told by persons of judgment; and that is a long period for heroism, trust me, sire, a period of five years. Nevertheless, I have faith in what these people told me, for the were good judges. They were named M. de Richelieu, M. de Buckingham, M. de Beaufort, M. de Retz, a mighty genius himself in street warfare,--in short, the king, Louis XIII., and even the queen, your noble mother, who one day condescended to say, 'Thank you.' I don't know what service I had had the good fortune to render her. Pardon me, sire, for speaking so boldly; but what I relate to you, as I have already had the honor to tell your majesty, is history." The king bit his lips, and threw himself violently on a chair.

"I appear importunate to your majesty," said the lieutenant. "Eh! sire, that is the fate of truth; she is a stern companion; she bristles all over with steel; she wounds those whom she attacks, and sometimes him who speaks her."

"No, monsieur," replied the king: "I bade you speak--speak then."

"After the service of the king and the cardinal, came the service of the regency, sire; I fought pretty well in the Fronde--much less, though, than the first time. The men began to diminish in stature. I have, nevertheless, led your majesty's musketeers on some perilous occasions, which stand upon the orders of the day of the company. Mine was a beautiful luck at that time. I was the favorite of M. de Mazarin. Lieutenant here! lieutenant there! lieutenant to the right! lieutenant to the left! There was not a buffet dealt in France, of which your humble servant did not have the dealing; but soon France was not enough. The cardinal sent me to England on Cromwell's account; another gentleman who was not over gentle, I assure you, sire. I had the honor of knowing him, and I was well able to appreciate him. A great deal was promised me on account of that mission. So, as I did much more than I had been bidden to do, I was generously paid, for I was at length appointed captain of the musketeers; that is to say, the most envied position in court, which takes precedence over the marshals of France, and justly; for who says captain of the musketeers says the flower of chivalry and king of the brave."

"Captain, monsieur!" interrupted the king; "you make a mistake. Lieutenant, you mean."

"Not at all, sire--I make no mistake; your majesty may rely upon me in that respect. Monsieur le cardinal gave me the commission himself."

"Well!"

"But M. de Mazarin, as you know better than anybody, does not often give, and sometimes takes back what he has given; he took it back again as soon as peace was made and he was no longer in want of me. Certainly I was not worthy to replace M. de Treville, of illustrious memory; but they had promised me, and they had given me; they ought to have stopped there."

"Is that what dissatisfies you monsieur? Well, I shall make inquiries. I love justice; and your claim, though made in military fashion, does not displease me."

"Oh, sire!" said the officer, "your majesty has ill understood me; I no longer claim anything now."

"Excess of delicacy, monsieur; but I will keep my eye upon your affairs, and later--"

"Oh, sire! what a word!--later! Thirty years have I lived upon that promising word, which has been pronounced by so many great personages, and which your mouth has, in its turn, just pronounced. Later--that is how I have received a score of wounds, and how I have reached fifty-four years of age without ever having had a louis in my purse, and without ever having met with a protector on my way,--I who have protected so many people! So I change my formula, sire; and when any one says to me 'Later,' I reply 'Now.' It is rest that I solicit, sire. That may be easily granted me. That will cost nobody anything."

"I did not look for this language, monsieur, particularly from a man who has always lived among the great. You forget you are speaking to the king, to a gentleman who is, I suppose, as of good a house as yourself; and when I say later, I mean a certainty."

"I do not at all doubt it, sire; but this is the end of the terrible truth I had to tell you. If I were to see upon that table a marshal's stick, the sword of constable, the crown of Poland, instead of later, I swear to you, sire, that I should still say Now! Oh, excuse me, sire! I am from the country of your grandfather, Henry IV. I do not speak often: but when I do speak, I speak all.”

“The future of my reign has little temptation for you, monsieur, it appears,” said Louis, haughtily.

“Forgetfulness, forgetfulness everywhere!” cried the officer, with a noble air; “the master has forgotten the servant, so the servant is reduced to forget his master. I live in unfortunate times, sire. I see youth full of discouragement and fear, I see it timid and despoiled, when it ought to be rich and powerful. I yesterday evening, for example, open the door to a king of England, whose father, humble as I am, I was near saving, if God had not been against me--God, who inspired His elect, Cromwell! I open, I said, the door, that is to say, the palace of one brother to another brother, and I see--stop, sire, that is a load on my heart!--I see the minister of that king drive away the proscribed prince, and humiliate his master by condemning to want another king, his equal. Then I see my prince, who is young, handsome and brave, who has courage in his heart and lightening in his eye,--I see him tremble before a priest, who laughs at him behind the curtain of his alcove, where he digests all the gold of France, which he afterwards stuffs into secret coffers. Yes--I understand your looks, sire. I am bold to madness; but what is to be said? I am an old man, and I tell you here, sire, to you, my king, things which I would cram down the throat of any one who should dare to pronounce them before me. You have commanded me, to pour out the bottom of my heart before you, sire, and I cast at the feet of your majesty the pent-up indignation of thirty years, as I would pour out all my blood, if your majesty commanded me to do so.”

The king, without speaking a word, wiped the drops of cold and abundant perspiration which trickled from his temples. The moment of silence which followed this vehement outbreak represented for him who had spoken, and for him who had listened, ages of suffering.

“Monsieur,” said the king at length, “you spoke the word forgetfulness. I have heard nothing but that word; I will reply, then, to it alone. Others have perhaps been able to forget, but I have not, and the proof is, that I remember that one day of riot, that one day when the furious people, raging and roaring as the sea, invaded the royal palace; that one day when I feigned sleep in my bed, one man alone, naked sword in hand, concealed behind my curtain, watched over my life, ready to risk his own for me, as he had before risked it twenty times for the lives of my family. Was not the gentleman, whose name I then demanded, called M. d'Artagnan? say, monsieur."

"Your majesty has a good memory," replied the officer, coldly.

"You see, then," continued the king, "if I have such remembrances of my childhood, what an amount I may gather in the age of reason."

"Your majesty has been richly endowed by God," said the officer, in the same tone.

"Come, Monsieur d'Artagnan," continued Louis, with feverish agitation, "ought you not to be patient as I am? Ought you not to do as I do? Come!"

"And what do you do, sire?"

"I wait."

"Your majesty may do so, because you are young; but I, sire, have not time to wait; old age is at my door, and death is behind it, looking into the very depths of my house. Your majesty is beginning life, its future is full of hope and fortune; but I, sire, I am on the other side of the horizon, and we are so far from each other, that I should never have time to wait till your majesty came up to me."

Louis made another turn in his apartment, still wiping the moisture from his brow, in a manner that would have terrified his physicians, if his physicians had witnessed the state his majesty was in.

"It is very well, monsieur," said Louis XIV., in a sharp voice; "you are desirous of having your discharge, and you shall have it. You offer me your resignation of the rank of lieutenant of the musketeers?"

"I deposit it humbly at your majesty's feet, sire."

"That is sufficient. I will order your pension."

"I shall have a thousand obligations to your majesty."

"Monsieur," said the king, with a violent effort, "I think you are losing a good master."

"And I am sure of it, sire."

"Shall you ever find such another?"

"Oh, sire! I know that your majesty is alone in the world; therefore will I never again take service with any other king upon earth, and will never again have other master than myself."

"You say so?"

"I swear so, your majesty."

“I shall remember that word, monsieur.”

D’Artagnan bowed.

“And you know I have a good memory,” said the king.

“Yes, sire; and yet I should desire that that memory should fail your majesty in this instance, in order that you might forget all the miseries I have been forced to spread before your eyes. Your majesty is so much above the poor and the mean, that I hope--”

“My majesty, monsieur, will act like the sun, which looks upon all, great and small, rich and poor, giving luster to some, warmth to others, and life to all. Adieu, Monsieur d’Artagnan--adieu: you are free.”

And the king, with a hoarse sob, which was lost in his throat, passed quickly into the next room. D’Artagnan took up his hat from the table on which he had thrown in, and went out.

CHAPTER XV.

The Proscribed.

D'Artagnan had not reached the bottom of the staircase, when the king called his gentleman. "I have a commission to give you, monsieur," said he.

"I am at your majesty's commands."

"Wait, then." And the young king began to write the following letter, which cost him more than one sigh, although, at the same time, something like a feeling of triumph glittered in his eyes:

"MY LORD CARDINAL,--Thanks to your good counsels, and, above all, thanks to your firmness, I have succeeded in overcoming a weakness unworthy of a king. You have too ably arranged my destiny to allow gratitude not to stop me at the moment when I was about to destroy your work. I felt I was wrong to wish to make my life turn from the course you had marked out for it. Certainly it would have been a misfortune to France and my family if a misunderstanding had taken place between me and my minister. This, however, would certainly have happened if I had made your niece my wife. I am perfectly aware of this, and will henceforth oppose nothing to the accomplishment of my destiny. I am prepared, then, to wed the infanta, Maria Theresa. You may at once open the conference.--Your affectionate LOUIS."

The king, after reperusing the letter, sealed it himself.

"This letter for my lord cardinal," said he.

The gentleman took it. At Mazarin's door he found Bernouin waiting with anxiety.

"Well?" asked the minister's valet de chambre.

"Monsieur," said the gentleman, "here is a letter for his eminence."

"A letter! Ah! we expected one after the little journey of the morning."

"Oh! you know, then, that his majesty--"

"As first minister, it belongs to the duties of our charge to know everything. And his majesty prays and implores, I presume."

"I don't know, but he sighed frequently whilst he was writing."

“Yes, yes, yes; we understand all that; people sigh sometimes from happiness as well as from grief, monsieur.”

“And yet the king did not look very happy when he returned, monsieur.”

“You did not see clearly. Besides, you only saw his majesty on his return, for he was only accompanied by the lieutenant of the guards. But I had his eminence’s telescope; I looked through it when he was tired, and I am sure they both wept.”

“Well! was it for happiness they wept?”

“No, but for love, and they vowed to each other a thousand tendernesses, which the king asks no better to keep. Now this letter is a beginning of the execution.”

“And what does his eminence think of this love, which is, by the bye, no secret to anybody?”

Bernouin took the gentleman by the arm, and whilst ascending the staircase,--”In confidence,” said he, in a low voice, “his eminence looks for success in the affair. I know very well we shall have war with Spain; but, bah! war will please the nobles. My lord cardinal, besides, can endow his niece royally, nay, more than royally. There will be money, festivities, and fire-works--everybody will be delighted.”

“Well, for my part,” replied the gentleman, shaking his head, “it appears to me that this letter is very light to contain all that.”

“My friend,” replied Bernouin, “I am certain of what I tell you. M. d’Artagnan related all that passed to me.”

“Ay, ay! and what did he tell you? Let us hear.”

“I accosted him by asking him, on the part of the cardinal, if there were any news, without discovering my designs, observe, for M. d’Artagnan is a cunning hand. ‘My dear Monsieur Bernouin,’ he replied, ‘the king is madly in love with Mademoiselle de Mancini, that is all I have to tell you.’ And then I asked him: ‘Do you think, to such a degree that it will urge him to act contrary to the designs of his eminence?’ ‘Ah! don’t ask me,’ said he; ‘I think the king capable of anything; he has a will of iron, and what he wills he wills in earnest. If he takes it into his head to marry Mademoiselle de Mancini, he will marry her, depend upon it.’ And thereupon he left me and went straight to the stables, took a horse, saddled it himself, jumped upon its back, and set off as if the devil were at his heels.”

“So that you believe, then--”

"I believe that monsieur the lieutenant of the guards knew more than he was willing to say."

"In you opinion, then, M. d'Artagnan--"

"Is gone, according to all probability, after the exiles, to carry out all that can facilitate the success of the king's love."

Chatting thus, the two confidants arrived at the door of his eminence's apartment. His eminence's gout had left him; he was walking about his chamber in a state of great anxiety, listening at doors and looking out of windows. Bernouin entered, followed by the gentleman, who had orders from the king to place the letter in the hands of the cardinal himself. Mazarin took the letter, but before opening it, he got up a ready smile, a smile of circumstance, able to throw a veil over emotions of whatever sort they might be. So prepared, whatever was the impression received from the letter, no reflection of that impression was allowed to transpire upon his countenance.

"Well," said he, when he had read and reread the letter, "very well, monsieur. Inform the king that I thank him for his obedience to the wishes of the queen-mother, and that I will do everything for the accomplishment of his will."

The gentleman left the room. The door had scarcely closed before the cardinal, who had no mask for Bernouin, took off that which had so recently covered his face, and with a most dismal expression,--"Call M. de Brienne," said he. Five minutes afterward the secretary entered.

"Monsieur," said Mazarin, "I have just rendered a great service to the monarchy, the greatest I have ever rendered it. You will carry this letter, which proves it, to her majesty the queen-mother, and when she shall have returned it to you, you will lodge it in portfolio B., which is filed with documents and papers relative to my ministry."

Brienne went as desired, and, as the letter was unsealed, did not fail to read it on his way. There is likewise no doubt that Bernouin, who was on good terms with everybody, approached so near to the secretary as to be able to read the letter over his shoulder; so that the news spread with such activity through the castle, that Mazarin might have feared it would reach the ears of the queen-mother before M. de Brienne could convey Louis XIV.'s letter to her. A moment after orders were given for departure, and M. de Conde having been to pay his respects to the king on his pretended rising, inscribed the city of Poitiers upon his tablets, as the place of sojourn and rest for their majesties.

Thus in a few instants was unraveled an intrigue which had covertly occupied all the diplomacies of Europe. It had nothing, however, very clear as a result, but to make a poor lieutenant of musketeers lose his commission and his fortune. It is true, that in exchange he gained his liberty. We shall soon know how M. d’Artagnan profited by this. For the moment, if the reader will permit us, we shall return to the hostelry of les Medici, of which one of the windows opened at the very moment the orders were given for the departure of the king.

The window that opened was that of one of the rooms of Charles II. The unfortunate prince had passed the night in bitter reflections, his head resting on his hands, and his elbows on the table, whilst Parry, infirm and old, wearied in body and in mind, had fallen asleep in a corner. A singular fortune was that of this faithful servant, who saw beginning for the second generation the fearful series of misfortunes which had weighed so heavily on the first. When Charles II. had well thought over the fresh defeat he had experienced, when he perfectly comprehended the complete isolation into which he had just fallen, on seeing his fresh hope left behind him, he was seized as with a vertigo, and sank back into the large armchair in which he was seated. Then God took pity on the unhappy prince, and sent to console him sleep, the innocent brother of death. He did not wake till half-past six, that is to say, till the sun shone brightly into his chamber, and Parry, motionless with fear of waking him, was observing with profound grief the eyes of the young man already red with wakefulness, and his cheeks pale with suffering and privations.

At length the noise of some heavy carts descending towards the Loire awakened Charles. He arose, looked around him like a man who has forgotten everything, perceived Parry, shook him by the hand, and commanded him to settle the reckoning with Master Cropole. Master Cropole, being called upon to settle his account with Parry, acquitted himself, it must be allowed, like an honest man; he only made his customary remark, that the two travelers had eaten nothing, which had the double disadvantage of being humiliating for his kitchen, and of forcing him to ask payment for a repast not consumed, but not the less lost. Parry had nothing to say to the contrary, and paid.

"I hope," said the king, "it has not been the same with the horses. I don't see that they have eaten at your expense, and it would be a misfortune for travelers like us, who have a long journey to make, to have our horses fail us."

But Cropole, at this doubt, assumed his majestic air, and replied that the stables of les Medici were not less hospitable than its refectory.

The king mounted his horse; his old servant did the same, and both set out towards Paris, without meeting a single person on their road, in the streets or the faubourgs of the city. For the prince the blow was the more severe, as it was a fresh exile. The unfortunates cling to the smallest hopes, as the happy do to the greatest good; and when they are obliged to quit the place where that hope has soothed their hearts, they experience the mortal regret which the banished man feels when he places his foot upon the vessel which is to bear him into exile. It appears that the heart already wounded so many times suffers from the least scratch; it appears that it considers as a good the momentary absence of evil, which is nothing but the absence of pain; and that God, into the most terrible misfortunes, has thrown hope as the drop of water which the rich sinner in hell entreated of Lazarus.

For one instant even the hope of Charles II. had been more than a fugitive joy;--that was when he found himself so kindly welcomed by his brother king; then it had taken a form that had become a reality; then, all at once, the refusal of Mazarin had reduced the fictitious reality to the state of a dream. This promise of Louis XIV., so soon retracted, had been nothing but a mockery; a mockery like his crown--like his scepter--like his friends--like all that had surrounded his royal childhood, and which had abandoned his proscribed youth. Mockery! everything was a mockery for Charles II. except the cold, black repose promised by death.

Such were the ideas of the unfortunate prince while sitting listlessly upon his horse, to which he abandoned the reins: he rode slowly along beneath the warm May sun, in which the somber misanthropy of the exile perceived a last insult to his grief.

CHAPTER XVI.

“Remember!”

A horseman going rapidly along the road leading towards Blois, which he had left nearly half an hour before, passed the two travelers, and, though apparently in haste, raised his hat as he passed them. The king scarcely observed this young man, who was about twenty-five years of age, and who, turning round several times, made friendly signals to a man standing before the gate of a handsome white-and-red house; that is to say, built of brick and stone, with a slated roof, situated on the left hand of the road the prince was traveling.

This man, old, tall, and thin, with white hair,--we speak of the one standing by the gate;--this man replied to the farewell signals of the young one by signs of parting as tender as could have been made by a father. The young man disappeared at the first turn of the road, bordered by fine trees, and the old man was preparing to return to the house, when the two travelers, arriving in front of the gate, attracted his attention.

The king, as we have said, was riding with his head cast down, his arms inert, leaving his horse to go what pace he liked, whilst Parry, behind him, the better to imbibe the genial influence of the sun, had taken off his hat, and was looking about right and left. His eyes encountered those of the old man leaning against the gate; the latter, as if struck by some strange spectacle, uttered an exclamation, and made one step towards the two travelers. From Parry his eyes immediately turned towards the king, upon whom they rested for an instant. This examination, however rapid, was instantly reflected in a visible manner upon the features of the tall old man. For scarcely had he recognized the younger of the travelers--and we said recognized, for nothing but a perfect recognition could have explained such an act--scarcely, we say, had he recognized the younger of the two travelers, than he clapped his hands together, with respectful surprise, and, raising his hat from his head, bowed so profoundly that it might have been said he was kneeling. This demonstration, however absent, or rather, however absorbed was the king in his reflections, attracted his attention instantly; and checking his horse and turning towards Parry, he exclaimed, “Good God, Parry, who is that man who salutes me in such a marked manner? Can he know me, think you?”

Parry, much agitated and very pale, had already turned his horse towards the gate. “Ah, sire!” said he, stopping suddenly at five or six paces’ distance from the still bending old man: “sire, I am seized with astonishment, for I think I recognize that brave man. Yes, it must be he! Will your majesty permit me to speak to him?”

“Certainly.”

“Can it be you, Monsieur Grimaud?” asked Parry.

“Yes, it is I,” replied the tall old man, drawing himself up, but without losing his respectful demeanor.

“Sire,” then said Parry, “I was not deceived. This good man is the servant of the Comte de la Fere, and the Comte de la Fere, if you remember, is the worthy gentleman of whom I have so often spoken to your majesty that the remembrance of him must remain, not only in your mind, but in your heart.”

“He who assisted my father at his last moments?” asked Charles, evidently affected at the remembrance.

“The same, sire.”

“Alas!” said Charles; and then addressing Grimaud, whose penetrating and intelligent eyes seemed to search and divine his thoughts.--”My friend,” said he, “does your master, Monsieur le Comte de la Fere, live in this neighborhood?”

“There,” replied Grimaud, pointing with his outstretched arm to the white-and-red house behind the gate.

“And is Monsieur le Comte de la Fere at home at present?”

“At the back, under the chestnut trees.”

“Parry,” said the king, “I will not miss this opportunity, so precious for me, to thank the gentleman to whom our house is indebted for such a noble example of devotedness and generosity. Hold my horse, my friend, if you please.” And, throwing the bridle to Grimaud, the king entered the abode of Athos, quite alone, as one equal enters the dwelling of another. Charles had been informed by the concise explanation of Grimaud,--”At the back, under the chestnut trees;” he left, therefore, the house on the left, and went straight down the path indicated. The thing was easy; the tops of those noble trees, already covered with leaves and flowers, rose above all the rest.

On arriving under the lozenges, by turns luminous and dark, which checkered the ground of this path according as the trees were more or less in leaf, the young prince perceived a gentleman walking with his arms behind him, apparently plunged in a deep meditation. Without doubt, he had often had this gentleman described to himself, for, without hesitating, Charles II. walked straight up to him. At the sound of his footsteps, the Comte de la Fere raised his head, and seeing an unknown man of noble and elegant carriage coming towards him, he raised his hat and waited. At some paces from him, Charles II. likewise took off his hat. Then, as if in reply to the comte's mute interrogation,--

"Monsieur le Comte," said he, "I come to discharge a debt towards you. I have, for a long time, had the expression of a profound gratitude to bring you. I am Charles II., son of Charles Stuart, who reigned in England, and died on the scaffold."

On hearing this illustrious name, Athos felt a kind of shudder creep through his veins, but at the sight of the young prince standing uncovered before him, and stretching out his hand towards him, two tears, for an instant, dimmed his brilliant eyes. He bent respectfully, but the prince took him by the hand.

"See how unfortunate I am, my lord count; it is only due to chance that I have met with you. Alas! I ought to have people around me whom I love and honor, whereas I am reduced to preserve their services in my heart, and their names in my memory: so that if your servant had not recognized mine, I should have passed by your door as by that of a stranger."

"It is but too true," said Athos, replying with his voice to the first part of the king's speech, and with a bow to the second; "it is but too true, indeed, that your majesty has seen many evil days."

"And the worst, alas!" replied Charles, "are perhaps still to come."

"Sire, let us hope."

"Count, count," continued Charles, shaking his head, "I entertained hope till last night, and that of a good Christian, I swear."

Athos looked at the king as if to interrogate him.

"Oh, the history is soon related," said Charles. "Proscribed, despoiled, disdained, I resolved, in spite of all my repugnance, to tempt fortune one last time. Is it not written above, that, for our family, all good fortune and all bad fortune shall eternally come from France? You know something of that, monsieur,--you, who are one of the Frenchmen whom my unfortunate father found at the foot of his scaffold, on the day of his death, after having found them at his right hand on the day of battle."

"Sire," said Athos modestly, "I was not alone. My companions and I did, under the circumstances, our duty as gentlemen, and that was all. Your majesty was about to do me the honor to relate--"

"That is true, I had the protection,--pardon my hesitation, count, but, for a Stuart, you, who understand everything, you will comprehend that the word is hard to pronounce;--I had, I say, the protection of my cousin the stadtholder of Holland; but without the intervention, or at least without the authorization of France, the stadtholder would not take the initiative. I came, then, to ask this authorization of the king of France, who has refused me."

"The king has refused you, sire!"

"Oh, not he; all justice must be rendered to my younger brother Louis; but Monsieur de Mazarin--"

Athos bit his lips.

"You perhaps think I should have expected this refusal?" said the king, who had noticed the movement.

"That was, in truth, my thought, sire," replied Athos, respectfully; "I know that Italian of old."

"Then I determined to come to the test, and know at once the last word of my destiny. I told my brother Louis, that, not to compromise either France or Holland, I would tempt fortune myself in person, as I had already done, with two hundred gentlemen, if he would give them to me; and a million, if he would lend it me."

"Well, sire?"

"Well, monsieur, I am suffering at this moment something strange, and that is, the satisfaction of despair. There is in certain souls,--and I have just discovered that mine is of the number,--a real satisfaction in the assurance that all is lost, and the time is come to yield."

"Oh, I hope," said Athos, "that your majesty is not come to that extremity."

"To say so, my lord count, to endeavor to revive hope in my heart, you must have ill understood what I have just told you. I came to Blois to ask of my brother Louis the alms of a million, with which I had the hopes of re-establishing my affairs; and my brother Louis has refused me. You see, then, plainly, that all is lost."

"Will your majesty permit me to express a contrary opinion?"

"How is that, count? Do you think my heart of so low an order that I do not know how to face my position?"

"Sire, I have always seen that it was in desperate positions that suddenly the great turns of fortune have taken place."

"Thank you, count: it is some comfort to meet with a heart like yours; that is to say, sufficiently trustful in God and in monarchy, never to despair of a royal fortune, however low it may be fallen. Unfortunately, my dear count, your words are like those remedies they call 'sovereign,' and which, though able to cure curable wounds or diseases, fail against death. Thank you for your perseverance in consoling me, count, thanks for your devoted remembrance, but I know in what I must trust--nothing will save me now. And see, my friend, I was so convinced, that I was taking the route of exile, with my old Parry; I was returning to devour my poignant griefs in the little hermitage offered me by Holland. There, believe me, count, all will soon be over, and death will come quickly; it is called so often by this body, eaten up by its soul, and by this soul, which aspires to heaven."

"Your majesty has a mother, a sister, and brothers; your majesty is the head of the family, and ought, therefore, to ask a long life of God, instead of imploring Him for a prompt death. Your majesty is an exile, a fugitive, but you have right on your side; you ought to aspire to combats, dangers, business, and not to rest in heavens."

"Count," said Charles II., with a smile of indescribable sadness, "have you ever heard of a king who reconquered his kingdom with one servant the age of Parry, and with three hundred crowns which that servant carried in his purse?"

"No, sire; but I have heard--and that more than once--that a dethroned king has recovered his kingdom with a firm will, perseverance, some friends, and a million skillfully employed."

"But you cannot have understood me. The million I asked of my brother Louis was refused me."

"Sire," said Athos, "will your majesty grant me a few minutes, and listen attentively to what remains for me to say to you?"

Charles II. looked earnestly at Athos. "Willingly, monsieur," said he.

"Then I will show your majesty the way," resumed the count, directing his steps towards the house. He then conducted the king to his study, and begged him to be seated. "Sire," said he, "your majesty just now told me that, in the present state of England, a million would suffice for the recovery of your kingdom."

"To attempt it at least, monsieur; and to die as a king if I should not succeed."

"Well, then, sire, let your majesty, according to the promise you have made me, have the goodness to listen to what I have to say." Charles made an affirmative sign with his head. Athos walked straight up to the door, the bolts of which he drew, after looking to see if anybody was near, and then returned. "Sire," said he, "your majesty has kindly remembered that I lent assistance to the very noble and very unfortunate Charles I., when his executioners conducted him from St. James's to Whitehall."

"Yes, certainly I do remember it, and always shall remember it."

"Sire, it is a dismal history to be heard by a son who no doubt has had it related to him many times; and yet I ought to repeat it to your majesty without omitting one detail."

"Speak on, monsieur."

"When the king your father ascended the scaffold, or rather when he passed from his chamber to the scaffold, on a level with his window, everything was prepared for his escape. The executioner was got out of the way; a hole contrived under the floor of his apartment; I myself was beneath the funeral vault, which I heard all at once creak beneath his feet."

"Parry has related to me all these terrible details, monsieur."

Athos bowed and resumed. "But here is something he had not related to you, sire, for what follows passed between God, your father, and myself; and never has the revelation of it been made even to my dearest friends. 'Go a little further off,' said the august prisoner to the executioner; 'it is but for an instant, and I know that I belong to you; but remember not to strike till I give the signal. I wish to offer up my prayers in freedom."

"Pardon me," said Charles II., turning very pale, "but you, count, who know so many details of this melancholy event,--details which, as you said just now, have never been revealed to any one,--do you know the name of that infernal executioner, of that base wretch who concealed his face that he might assassinate a king with impunity?"

Athos became slightly pale. "His name?" said he, "yes, I know it, but cannot tell it."

"And what is become of him, for nobody in England knows his destiny?"

"He is dead."

“But he did not die in his bed; he did not die a calm and peaceful death; he did not die the death of the good?”

“He died a violent death, in a terrible night, rendered so by the passions of man and a tempest from God. His body, pierced by a dagger, sank to the depths of the ocean. God pardon his murderer!”

“Proceed, then,” said Charles II., seeing that the count was unwilling to say more.

“The king of England, after having, as I have said, spoken thus to the masked executioner, added,--’Observe, you will not strike till I shall stretch out my arms, saying--REMEMBER!’“

“I was aware,” said Charles, in an agitated voice, “that that was the last word pronounced by my unfortunate father. But why and for whom?”

“For the French gentleman placed beneath his scaffold.”

“For you, then, monsieur?”

“Yes, sire; and every one of the words which he spoke to me, through the planks of the scaffold covered with a black cloth, still sounds in my ears. The king knelt down on one knee: ‘Comte de la Fere,’ said he, ‘are you there?’ ‘Yes, sire,’ replied I. Then the king stooped towards the boards.”

Charles II., also palpitating with interest, burning with grief, stooped towards Athos, to catch, one by one, every word that escaped from him. His head touched that of the comte.

“Then,” continued Athos, “the king stooped. ‘Comte de la Fere,’ said he, ‘I could not be saved by you: it was not to be. Now, even though I commit a sacrilege, I must speak to you. Yes, I have spoken to men--yes, I have spoken to God, and I speak to you the last. To sustain a cause which I thought sacred, I have lost the throne of my fathers and the heritage of my children.’“

Charles II. concealed his face in his hands, and a bitter tear glided between his white and slender fingers.

“‘I have still a million in gold,’ continued the king. ‘I buried it in the vaults of the castle of Newcastle, a moment before I left that city.’“ Charles raised his head with an expression of such painful joy that it would have drawn tears from any one acquainted with his misfortunes.

“A million!” murmured he, “Oh, count!”

“‘You alone know that this money exists: employ it when you think it can be of the greatest service to my eldest son. And now, Comte de la Fere, bid me adieu!’

"'Adieu, adieu, sire!' cried I."

Charles arose, and went and leant his burning brow against the window.

"It was then," continued Athos, "that the king pronounced the word 'REMEMBER!' addressed to me. You see, sire, that I have remembered."

The king could not resist or conceal his emotion. Athos beheld the movement of his shoulders, which undulated convulsively; he heard the sobs which burst from his over-charged breast. He was silent himself, suffocated by the flood of bitter remembrances he had just poured upon that royal head. Charles II., with a violent effort, left the window, devoured his tears, and came and sat by Athos. "Sire," said the latter, "I thought till to-day that the time had not yet arrived for the employment of that last resource; but, with my eyes fixed upon England, I felt it was approaching. To-morrow I meant to go and inquire in what part of the world your majesty was, and then I purposed going to you. You come to me, sire; that is an indication that God is with us."

"My lord," said Charles, in a voice choked by emotion, "you are, for me, what an angel sent from heaven would be,--you are a preserver sent to me from the tomb of my father himself; but, believe me, for ten years' civil war has passed over my country, striking down men, tearing up soil, it is no more probable that gold should remain in the entrails of the earth, than love in the hearts of my subjects."

"Sire, the spot in which his majesty buried the million is well known to me, and no one, I am sure, has been able to discover it. Besides, is the castle of Newcastle quite destroyed? Have they demolished it stone by stone, and uprooted the soil to the last tree?"

"No, it is still standing: but at this moment General Monk occupies it and is encamped there. The only spot from which I could look for succor, where I possess a single resource, you see, is invaded by my enemies."

"General Monk, sire, cannot have discovered the treasure which I speak of."

"Yes, but can I go and deliver myself up to Monk, in order to recover this treasure? Ah! count, you see plainly I must yield to destiny, since it strikes me to the earth every time I rise. What can I do with Parry as my only servant, with Parry, whom Monk has already driven from his presence? No, no, no, count, we must yield to this last blow."

"But what your majesty cannot do, and what Parry can no more attempt, do you not believe that I could succeed in accomplishing?"

"You--you, count--you would go?"

"If it please your majesty," said Athos, bowing to the king, "yes, I will go, sire."

"What! you so happy here, count?"

"I am never happy when I have a duty left to accomplish, and it is an imperative duty which the king your father left me to watch over your fortunes, and make a royal use of his money. So, if your majesty honors me with a sign, I will go with you."

"Ah, monsieur!" said the king, forgetting all royal etiquette and throwing his arms around the neck of Athos, "you prove to me that there is a God in heaven, and that this God sometimes sends messengers to the unfortunate who groan on the earth."

Athos, exceedingly moved by this burst of feeling of the young man, thanked him with profound respect, and approached the window. "Grimaud!" cried he, "bring out my horses."

"What, now--immediately!" said the king. "Ah, monsieur, you are indeed a wonderful man!"

"Sire," said Athos, "I know nothing more pressing than your majesty's service. Besides," added he, smiling, "it is a habit contracted long since, in the service of the queen your aunt, and of the king your father. How is it possible for me to lose it at the moment your majesty's service calls for it?"

"What a man!" murmured the king.

Then, after a moment's reflection,--"But no, count, I cannot expose you to such privations. I have no means of rewarding such services."

"Bah!" said Athos, laughing. "Your majesty is joking; have you not a million? Ah! why am I not possessed of half such a sum! I would already have raised a regiment. But, thank God! I have still a few rolls of gold and some family diamonds left. Your majesty will, I hope, deign to share with a devoted servant."

"With a friend--yes, count, but on condition that, in his turn, that friend will share with me hereafter!"

"Sire!" said Athos, opening a casket, form which he drew both gold and jewels, "you see, sire, we are too rich. Fortunately, there are four of us, in the event of our meeting with thieves."

Joy made the blood rush to the pale cheeks of Charles II., as he saw Athos's two horses, led by Grimaud, already booted for the journey, advance towards the porch.

“Blaisois, this letter for the Vicomte de Bragelonne. For everybody else I am gone to Paris. I confide the house to you, Blaisois.” Blaisois bowed, shook hands with Grimaud, and shut the gate.

CHAPTER XVII.

In which Aramis is sought, and only Bazin is found.

Two hours had scarcely elapsed since the departure of the master of the house, who, in Blaisois’s sight, had taken the road to Paris, when a horseman, mounted on a good pied horse, stopped before the gate, and with a sonorous “hola!” called the stable-boys, who, with the gardeners, had formed a circle round Blaisois, the historian-in-ordinary to the household of the chateau. This “hola,” doubtless well known to Master Blaisois, made him turn his head and exclaim--”Monsieur d’Artagnan! run quickly, you chaps, and open the gate.”

A swarm of eight brisk lads flew to the gate, which was opened as if it had been made of feathers; and every one loaded him with attentions, for they knew the welcome this friend was accustomed to receive from their master; and for such remarks the eye of the valet may always be depended upon.

“Ah!” said M. d’Artagnan, with an agreeable smile, balancing himself upon his stirrup to jump to the ground, “where is that dear count?”

“Ah! how unfortunate you are, monsieur!” said Blaisois: “and how unfortunate will monsieur le comte, our master, think himself when he hears of your coming! As ill luck will have it, monsieur le comte left home two hours ago.”

D’Artagnan did not trouble himself about such trifles. “Very good!” said he. “You always speak the best French in the world; you shall give me a lesson in grammar and correct language, whilst I wait the return of your master.”

“That is impossible, monsieur,” said Blaisois; “you would have to wait too long.”

“Will he not come back to-day, then?”

“No, nor to-morrow, nor the day after to-morrow. Monsieur le comte has gone on a journey.”

“A journey!” said D’Artagnan, surprised; “that’s a fable, Master Blaisois.”

“Monsieur, it is no more than the truth. Monsieur has done me the honor to give me the house in charge; and he added, with his voice so full of authority and kindness--that is all one to me: ‘You will say I have gone to Paris.’“

“Well!” cried D’Artagnan, “since he is gone towards Paris, that is all I wanted to know! you should have told me so at first, booby! He is then two hours in advance?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“I shall soon overtake him. Is he alone?”

“No, monsieur.”

“Who is with him, then?”

“A gentleman whom I don’t know, an old man, and M. Grimaud.”

“Such a party cannot travel as fast as I can--I will start.”

“Will monsieur listen to me an instant?” said Blaisois, laying his hand gently on the reins of the horse.

“Yes, if you don’t favor me with fine speeches, and make haste.”

“Well, then, monsieur, that word Paris appears to me to be only an excuse.”

“Oh, oh!” said D’Artagnan, seriously, “an excuse, eh?”

“Yes, monsieur: and monsieur le comte is not going to Paris, I will swear.”

“What makes you think so?”

“This,--M. Grimaud always knows where our master is going; and he had promised me that the first time he went to Paris, he would take a little money for me to my wife.”

“What, have you a wife, then?”

“I had one--she was of this country; but monsieur thought her a noisy scold, and I sent her to Paris; it is sometimes inconvenient, but very agreeable at others.”

“I understand; but go on. You do not believe the count gone to Paris?”

“No, monsieur; for then M. Grimaud would have broken his word; he would have perjured himself, and that is impossible.”

“That is impossible,” repeated D’Artagnan, quite in a study, because he was quite convinced. “Well, my brave Blaisois, many thanks to you.”

Blaisois bowed.

“Come, you know I am not curious--I have serious business with your master. Could you not, by a little bit of a word--you who speak so well--

give me to understand--one syllable only--I will guess the rest."

"Upon my word, monsieur, I cannot. I am quite ignorant where monsieur le comte is gone. As to listening at doors, that is contrary to my nature; and besides, it is forbidden here."

"My dear fellow," said D'Artagnan, "this is a very bad beginning for me. Never mind; you know when monsieur le comte will return, at least?"

"As little, monsieur, as the place of his destination."

"Come, Blaisois, come, search."

"Monsieur doubts my sincerity? Ah, monsieur, that grieves me much."

"The devil take his gilded tongue!" grumbled D'Artagnan. "A clown with a word would be worth a dozen of him. Adieu!"

"Monsieur, I have the honor to present you my respects."

"Cuistre!" said D'Artagnan to himself, "the fellow is unbearable." He gave another look up to the house, turned his horse's head, and set off like a man who has nothing either annoying or embarrassing in his mind. When he was at the end of the wall, and out of sight,--"Well, now, I wonder," said he, breathing quickly, "whether Athos was at home. No; all those idlers, standing with their arms crossed, would have been at work if the eye of the master was near. Athos gone on a journey?--that is incomprehensible. Bah! it is all devilish mysterious! And then--no--he is not the man I want. I want one of a cunning, patient mind. My business is at Melun, in a certain presbytery I am acquainted with. Forty-five leagues--four days and a half! Well, it is fine weather, and I am free. Never mind the distance!"

And he put his horse into a trot, directing his course towards Paris. On the fourth day he alighted at Melun, as he had intended.

D'Artagnan was never in the habit of asking any one on the road for any common information. For these sorts of details, unless in very serious circumstances, he confided in his perspicacity, which was so seldom at fault, in his experience of thirty years, and in a great habit of reading the physiognomies of houses, as well as those of men. At Melun, D'Artagnan immediately found the presbytery--a charming house, plastered over red brick, with vines climbing along the gutters, and a cross, in carved stone, surmounting the ridge of the roof. From the ground-floor of this house came a noise, or rather a confusion of voices, like the chirping of young birds when the brood is just hatched under the down. One of these voices was spelling the alphabet distinctly. A voice thick, yet pleasant, at the same time scolded the talkers and corrected the faults of the reader. D'Artagnan recognized that voice, and as the window of the ground-floor was open, he leant down from his horse under the branches and red fibers of the vine and cried, “Bazin, my dear Bazin! good-day to you.”

A short, fat man, with a flat face, a cranium ornamented with a crown of gray hairs, cut short, in imitation of a tonsure, and covered with an old black velvet cap, arose as soon as he heard D’Artagnan--we ought not to say arose, but bounded up. In fact, Bazin bounded up, carrying with him his little low chair, which the children tried to take away, with battles more fierce than those of the Greeks endeavoring to recover the body of Patroclus from the hands of the Trojans. Bazin did more than bound; he let fall both his alphabet and his ferule. “You!” said he; “you, Monsieur D’Artagnan?”

“Yes, myself! Where is Aramis--no, M. le Chevalier d’Herblay--no, I am still mistaken--Monsieur le Vicaire-General?”

“Ah, monsieur,” said Bazin, with dignity, “monseigneur is at his diocese.”

“What did you say?” said D’Artagnan. Bazin repeated the sentence.

“Ah, ah! but has Aramis a diocese?”

“Yes, monsieur. Why not?”

“Is he a bishop, then?”

“Why, where can you come from,” said Bazin, rather irreverently, “that you don’t know that?”

“My dear Bazin, we pagans, we men of the sword, know very well when a man is made a colonel, or maitre-de-camp, or marshal of France; but if he be made a bishop, arch-bishop, or pope--devil take me if the news reaches us before the three quarters of the earth have had the advantage of it!”

“Hush! hush!” said Bazin, opening his eyes: “do not spoil these poor children, in whom I am endeavoring to inculcate such good principles.” In fact, the children had surrounded D’Artagnan, whose horse, long sword, spurs, and martial air they very much admired. But above all, they admired his strong voice; so that, when he uttered his oath, the whole school cried out, “The devil take me!” with fearful bursts of laughter, shouts, and bounds, which delighted the musketeer, and bewildered the old pedagogue.

“There!” said he, “hold your tongues, you brats! You have come, M. d’Artagnan, and all my good principles fly away. With you, as usual, comes disorder. Babel is revived. Ah! Good Lord! Ah! the wild little wretches!” And the worthy Bazin distributed right and left blows which increased the cries of his scholars by changing the nature of them.

"At least," said he, "you will no longer decoy any one here."

"Do you think so?" said D'Artagnan, with a smile which made a shudder creep over the shoulders of Bazin.

"He is capable of it," murmured he.

"Where is your master's diocese?"

"Monseigneur Rene is bishop of Vannes."

"Who had him nominated?"

"Why, monsieur le surintendant, our neighbor."

"What! Monsieur Fouquet?"

"To be sure he did."

"Is Aramis on good terms with him, then?"

"Monseigneur preached every Sunday at the house of monsieur le surintendant at Vaux; then they hunted together."

"Ah!"

"And monseigneur composed his homilies--no, I mean his sermons--with monsieur le surintendant."

"Bah! he preached in verse, then, this worthy bishop?"

"Monsieur, for the love of heaven, do not jest with sacred things."

"There, Bazin, there! So, then, Aramis is at Vannes?"

"At Vannes, in Bretagne."

"You are a deceitful old hunks, Bazin; that is not true."

"See, monsieur, if you please; the apartments of the presbytery are empty."

"He is right there," said D'Artagnan, looking attentively at the house, the aspect of which announced solitude.

"But monseigneur must have written you an account of his promotion."

"When did it take place?"

"A month back."

"Oh! then there is no time lost. Aramis cannot yet have wanted me. But how is it, Bazin, you do not follow your master?"

"Monsieur, I cannot; I have occupations."

"Your alphabet?"

"And my penitents."

"What, do you confess, then? Are you a priest?"

"The same as one. I have such a call."

"But the orders?"

“Oh,” said Bazin, without hesitation, “now that monseigneur is a bishop, I shall soon have my orders, or at least my dispensations.” And he rubbed his hands.

“Decidedly,” said D’Artagnan to himself, “there will be no means of uprooting these people. Get me some supper, Bazin.”

“With pleasure, monsieur.”

“A fowl, a bouillon, and a bottle of wine.”

“This is Saturday night, monsieur--it is a day of abstinence.”

“I have a dispensation,” said D’Artagnan.

Bazin looked at him suspiciously.

“Ah, ah, master hypocrite!” said the musketeer, “for whom do you take me? If you, who are the valet, hope for dispensation to commit a crime, shall not I, the friend of your bishop, have dispensation for eating meat at the call of my stomach? Make yourself agreeable with me, Bazin, or by heavens! I will complain to the king, and you shall never confess. Now you know that the nomination of bishops rests with the king,--I have the king, I am the stronger.”

Bazin smiled hypocritically. “Ah, but we have monsieur le surintendant,” said he.

“And you laugh at the king, then?”

Bazin made no reply; his smile was sufficiently eloquent.

“My supper,” said D’Artagnan, “it is getting towards seven o’clock.”

Bazin turned round and ordered the eldest of the pupils to inform the cook. In the meantime, D’Artagnan surveyed the presbytery.

“Phew!” said he, disdainfully, “monseigneur lodged his grandeur very meanly here.”

“We have the Chateau de Vaux,” said Bazin.

“Which is perhaps equal to the Louvre?” said D’Artagnan, jeeringly.

“Which is better,” replied Bazin, with the greatest coolness imaginable.

“Ah, ah!” said D’Artagnan.

He would perhaps have prolonged the discussion, and maintained the superiority of the Louvre, but the lieutenant perceived that his horse remained fastened to the bars of a gate.

“The devil!” said he. “Get my horse looked after; your master the bishop has none like him in his stables.”

Bazin cast a sidelong glance at the horse, and replied, “Monsieur le surintendant gave him four from his own stables; and each of the four is worth four of yours.”

The blood mounted to the face of D’Artagnan. His hand itched and his eye glanced over the head of Bazin, to select the place upon which he should discharge his anger. But it passed away; reflection came, and D’Artagnan contented himself with saying,--

“The devil! the devil! I have done well to quit the service of the king. Tell me, worthy Master Bazin,” added he, “how many musketeers does monsieur le surintendant retain in his service?”

“He could have all there are in the kingdom with his money,” replied Bazin, closing his book, and dismissing the boys with some kindly blows of his cane.

“The devil! the devil!” repeated D’Artagnan, once more, as if to annoy the pedagogue. But as supper was now announced, he followed the cook, who introduced him into the refectory, where it awaited him. D’Artagnan placed himself at the table, and began a hearty attack upon his fowl.

“It appears to me,” said D’Artagnan, biting with all his might at the tough fowl they had served up to him, and which they had evidently forgotten to fatten,--”it appears that I have done wrong in not seeking service with that master yonder. A powerful noble this intendant, seemingly! In good truth, we poor fellows know nothing at the court, and the rays of the sun prevent our seeing the large stars, which are also suns, at a little greater distance from our earth,--that is all.”

As D’Artagnan delighted, both from pleasure and system, in making people talk about things which interested him, he fenced in his best style with Master Bazin, but it was pure loss of time; beyond the tiresome and hyperbolical praises of monsieur le surintendant of the finances, Bazin, who, on his side, was on his guard, afforded nothing but platitudes to the curiosity of D’Artagnan, so that our musketeer, in a tolerably bad humor, desired to go to bed as soon as he had supped. D’Artagnan was introduced by Bazin into a mean chamber, in which there was a poor bed; but D’Artagnan was not fastidious in that respect. He had been told that Aramis had taken away the key of his own private apartment, and as he knew Aramis was a very particular man, and had generally many things to conceal in his apartment, he had not been surprised. He, therefore, although it seemed comparatively even harder, attacked the bed as bravely as he had done the fowl; and, as he had as good an inclination to sleep as he had had to eat, he took scarcely longer time to be snoring harmoniously than he had employed in picking the last bones of the bird.

Since he was no longer in the service of any one, D'Artagnan had promised himself to indulge in sleeping as soundly as he had formerly slept lightly; but with whatever good faith D'Artagnan had made himself this promise, and whatever desire he might have to keep it religiously, he was awakened in the middle of the night by a loud noise of carriages, and servants on horseback. A sudden illumination flashed over the walls of his chamber; he jumped out of bed and ran to the window in his shirt. "Can the king be coming this way?" he thought, rubbing his eyes; "in truth, such a suite can only be attached to royalty."

"Vive le monsieur le surintendant!" cried, or rather vociferated, from a window on the ground-floor, a voice which he recognized as Bazin's, who at the same time waved a handkerchief with one hand, and held a large candle in the other. D'Artagnan then saw something like a brilliant human form leaning out of the principal carriage; at the same time loud bursts of laughter, caused, no doubt, by the strange figure of Bazin, and issuing from the same carriage, left, as it were, a train of joy upon the passage of the rapid cortege.

"I might easily see it was not the king," said D'Artagnan; "people don't laugh so heartily when the king passes. Hola, Bazin!" cried he to his neighbor, three-quarters of whose body still hung out of the window, to follow the carriage with his eyes as long as he could. "What is all that about?"

"It is M. Fouquet," said Bazin, in a patronizing tone.

"And all those people?"

"That is the court of M. Fouquet."

"Oh, oh!" said D'Artagnan; "what would M. de Mazarin say to that if he heard it?" And he returned to his bed, asking himself how Aramis always contrived to be protected by the most powerful personages in the kingdom. "Is it that he has more luck than I, or that I am a greater fool than he? Bah!" That was the concluding word by the aid of which D'Artagnan, having become wise, now terminated every thought and every period of his style. Formerly he said, "Mordioux!" which was a prick of the spur, but now he had become older, and he murmured that philosophical "Bah!" which served as a bridle to all the passions.

CHAPTER XVIII.

In which D’Artagnan seeks Porthos, and only finds Mousqueton.

When D’Artagnan had perfectly convinced himself that the absence of the Vicar-General d’Herblay was real, and that his friend was not to be found at Melun or in its vicinity, he left Bazin without regret, cast an ill-natured glance at the magnificent Chateau de Vaux, which was beginning to shine with that splendor which brought on its ruin, and, compressing his lips like a man full of mistrust and suspicion, he put spurs to his pied horse, saying, “Well, well! I have still Pierrefonds left, and there I shall find the best man and the best filled coffer. And that is all I want, for I have an idea of my own.”

We will spare our readers the prosaic incidents of D’Artagnan’s journey, which terminated on the morning of the third day within sight of Pierrefonds. D’Artagnan came by the way of Nanteuil-le-Haudouin and Crepy. At a distance he perceived the Castle of Louis of Orleans, which, having become part of the crown domain, was kept by an old concierge. This was one of those marvelous manors of the middle ages, with walls twenty feet in thickness, and a hundred in height.

D’Artagnan rode slowly past its walls, measured its towers with his eye and descended into the valley. From afar he looked down upon the chateau of Porthos, situated on the shores of a small lake, and contiguous to a magnificent forest. It was the same place we have already had the honor of describing to our readers; we shall therefore satisfy ourselves with naming it. The first thing D’Artagnan perceived after the fine trees, the May sun gilding the sides of the green hills, the long rows of feather-topped trees which stretched out towards Compiegne, was a large rolling box, pushed forward by two servants and dragged by two others. In this box there was an enormous green-and-gold thing, which went along the smiling glades of the park, thus dragged and pushed. This thing, at a distance, could not be distinguished, and signified absolutely nothing; nearer, it was a hogshead muffled in gold-bound green cloth; when close, it was a man, or rather a poussa, the inferior extremity of whom, spreading over the interior of the box, entirely filled it; when still closer, the man was Mousqueton--Mousqueton, with gray hair and a face as red as Punchinello's.

"Pardieu!" cried D'Artagnan; "why, that's my dear Monsieur Mousqueton!"

"Ah!" cried the fat man--"ah! what happiness! what joy! There's M. d'Artagnan. Stop, you rascals!" These last words were addressed to the lackeys who pushed and dragged him. The box stopped, and the four lackeys, with a precision quite military, took off their laced hats and ranged themselves behind it.

"Oh, Monsieur d'Artagnan!" said Mousqueton, "why can I not embrace your knees? But I have become impotent, as you see."

"Dame! my dear Mousqueton, it is age."

"No, monsieur, it is not age; it is infirmities--troubles."

"Troubles! you, Mousqueton?" said D'Artagnan, making the tour of the box; "are you out of your mind, my dear friend? Thank God! you are as hearty as a three-hundred-year-old oak."

"Ah! but my legs, monsieur, my legs!" groaned the faithful servant.

"What's the matter with your legs?"

"Oh, they will no longer bear me!"

"Ah, the ungrateful things! And yet you feed them well, Mousqueton, apparently."

"Alas, yes! They can reproach me with nothing in that respect," said Mousqueton, with a sigh; "I have always done what I could for my poor body; I am not selfish." And Mousqueton sighed afresh.

"I wonder whether Mousqueton wants to be a baron, too, as he sighs after that fashion?" thought D'Artagnan.

"Mon Dieu, monsieur!" said Mousqueton, as if rousing himself from a painful reverie; "how happy monseigneur will be that you have thought of him!"

"Kind Porthos!" cried D'Artagnan, "I am anxious to embrace him."

"Oh!" said Mousqueton, much affected, "I shall certainly write to him."

"What!" cried D'Artagnan, "you will write to him?"

"This very day; I shall not delay it an hour."

"Is he not here, then?"

"No, monsieur."

"But is he near at hand?--is he far off?"

"Oh, can I tell, monsieur, can I tell?"

“Mordioux!” cried the musketeer, stamping with his foot, “I am unfortunate. Porthos is such a stay-at-home!”

“Monsieur, there is not a more sedentary man that monseigneur, but--”

“But what?”

“When a friend presses you--”

“A friend?”

“Doubtless--the worthy M. d’Herblay.”

“What, has Aramis pressed Porthos?”

“This is how the thing happened, Monsieur d’Artagnan. M. d’Herblay wrote to monseigneur--”

“Indeed!”

“A letter, monsieur, such a pressing letter that it threw us all into a bustle.”

“Tell me all about it, my dear friend,” said D’Artagnan; “but remove these people a little further off first.”

Mousqueton shouted, “Fall back, you fellows,” with such powerful lungs that the breath, without the words, would have been sufficient to disperse the four lackeys. D’Artagnan seated himself on the shaft of the box and opened his ears. “Monsieur,” said Mousqueton, “monseigneur, then, received a letter from M. le Vicaire-General d’Herblay, eight or nine days ago; it was the day of the rustic pleasures, yes, it must have been Wednesday.”

“What do you mean?” said D’Artagnan. “The day of rustic pleasures?”

“Yes, monsieur; we have so many pleasures to take in this delightful country, that we were encumbered by them; so much so, that we have been forced to regulate the distribution of them.”

“How easily do I recognize Porthos’s love of order in that! Now, that idea would never have occurred to me; but then I am not encumbered with pleasures.”

“We were, though,” said Mousqueton.

“And how did you regulate the matter, let me know?” said D’Artagnan.

“It is rather long, monsieur.”

“Never mind, we have plenty of time; and you speak so well, my dear Mousqueton, that it is really a pleasure to hear you.”

“It is true,” said Mousqueton, with a sigh of satisfaction, which emanated evidently from the justice which had been rendered him, “it is true I have made great progress in the company of monseigneur.”

"I am waiting for the distribution of the pleasures, Mousqueton, and with impatience. I want to know if I have arrived on a lucky day."

"Oh, Monsieur d'Artagnan," said Mousqueton in a melancholy tone, "since monseigneur's departure all the pleasures have gone too!"

"Well, my dear Mousqueton, refresh your memory."

"With what day shall I begin?"

"Eh, pardieux! begin with Sunday; that is the Lord's day."

"Sunday, monsieur?"

"Yes."

"Sunday pleasures are religious: monseigneur goes to mass, makes the bread-offering, and has discourses and instructions made to him by his almoner-in-ordinary. That is not very amusing, but we expect a Carmelite from Paris who will do the duty of our almonry, and who, we are assured, speaks very well, which will keep us awake, whereas our present almoner always sends us to sleep. These are Sunday religious pleasures. On Monday, worldly pleasures."

"Ah, ah!" said D'Artagnan, "what do you mean by that? Let us have a glimpse at your worldly pleasures."

"Monsieur, on Monday we go into the world; we pay and receive visits, we play on the lute, we dance, we make verses, and burn a little incense in honor of the ladies."

"Peste! that is the height of gallantry," said the musketeer, who was obliged to call to his aid all the strength of his facial muscles to suppress an enormous inclination to laugh.

"Tuesday, learned pleasures."

"Good!" cried D'Artagnan. "What are they? Detail them, my dear Mousqueton."

"Monseigneur has bought a sphere or globe, which I shall show you; it fills all the perimeter of the great tower, except a gallery which he has had built over the sphere: there are little strings and brass wires to which the sun and moon are hooked. It all turns; and that is very beautiful. Monseigneur points out to me the seas and distant countries. We don't intend to visit them, but it is very interesting."

"Interesting! yes, that's the word," repeated D'Artagnan. "And Wednesday?"

"Rustic pleasures, as I have had the honor to tell you, monsieur le chevalier. We look over monseigneur's sheep and goats; we make the shepherds dance to pipes and reeds, as is written in a book monseigneur has in his library, which is called ‘Bergeries.’ The author died about a month ago.”

“Monsieur Racan, perhaps,” said D’Artagnan.

“Yes, that was his name--M. Racan. But that is not all: we angle in the little canal, after which we dine, crowned with flowers. That is Wednesday.”

“Peste!” said D’Artagnan; “you don’t divide your pleasures badly. And Thursday?--what can be left for poor Thursday?”

“It is not very unfortunate, monsieur,” said Mousqueton, smiling. “Thursday, Olympian pleasures. Ah, monsieur, that is superb! We get together all monseigneur’s young vassals, and we make them throw the disc, wrestle, and run races. Monseigneur can’t run now, no more can I; but monseigneur throws the disc as nobody else can throw it. And when he does deal a blow, oh, that proves a misfortune!”

“How so?”

“Yes, monsieur, we were obliged to renounce the cestus. He cracked heads; he broke jaws--beat in ribs. It was charming sport; but nobody was willing to play with him.”

“Then his wrist--”

“Oh, monsieur, firmer than ever. Monseigneur gets a trifle weaker in his legs,--he confesses that himself; but his strength has all taken refuge in his arms, so that--”

“So that he can knock down bullocks, as he used to formerly.”

“Monsieur, better than that--he beats in walls. Lately, after having supped with one of our farmers--you know how popular and kind monseigneur is--after supper, as a joke, he struck the wall a blow. The wall crumbled away beneath his hand, the roof fell in, and three men and an old woman were stifled.”

“Good God, Mousqueton! And your master?”

“Oh, monseigneur, a little skin was rubbed off his head. We bathed the wounds with some water which the monks gave us. But there was nothing the matter with his hand.”

“Nothing?”

“No, nothing, monsieur.”

“Deuce take the Olympic pleasures! They must cost your master too dear; for widows and orphans--”

“They all had pensions, monsieur; a tenth of monseigneur’s revenue was spent in that way.”

“Then pass on to Friday,” said D’Artagnan.

“Friday, noble and warlike pleasures. We hunt, we fence, we dress falcons and break horses. Then, Saturday is the day for intellectual pleasures: we adorn our minds; we look at monseigneur’s pictures and statues; we write, even, and trace plans: and then we fire monseigneur’s cannon.”

“You draw plans, and fire cannon?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Why, my friend,” said D’Artagnan, “M. du Vallon, in truth, possesses the most subtle and amiable mind that I know. But there is one kind of pleasure you have forgotten, it appears to me.”

“What is that, monsieur?” asked Mousqueton, with anxiety.

“The material pleasures.”

Mousqueton colored. “What do you mean by that, monsieur?” said he, casting down his eyes.

“I mean the table--good wine--evenings occupied in passing the bottle.”

“Ah, monsieur, we don’t reckon those pleasures,--we practice them every day.”

“My brave Mousqueton,” resumed D’Artagnan, “pardon me, but I was so absorbed in your charming recital that I have forgotten the principal object of our conversation, which was to learn what M. le Vicaire-General d’Herblay could have to write to your master about.”

“That is true, monsieur,” said Mousqueton; “the pleasures have misled us. Well, monsieur, this is the whole affair.”

“I am all attention, Mousqueton.”

“On Wednesday--”

“The day of the rustic pleasures?”

“Yes--a letter arrived; he received it from my hands. I had recognized the writing.”

“Well?”

Monseigneur read it and cried out, “Quick, my horses! my arms!’“

“Oh, good Lord! then it was for some duel?” said D’Artagnan.

“No, monsieur, there were only these words: ‘Dear Porthos, set out, if you would wish to arrive before the Equinox. I expect you.’“

“Mordioux!” said D’Artagnan, thoughtfully, “that was pressing, apparently.”

“I think so; therefore,” continued Mousqueton, “monseigneur set out the very same day with his secretary, in order to endeavor to arrive in time.”

“And did he arrive in time?”

“I hope so. Monseigneur, who is hasty, as you know, monsieur, repeated incessantly, ‘Tonne Dieu! What can this mean? The Equinox? Never mind, a fellow must be well mounted to arrive before I do.’“

“And you think Porthos will have arrived first, do you?” asked D’Artagnan.

“I am sure of it. This Equinox, however rich he may be, has certainly no horses so good as monseigneur’s.”

D’Artagnan repressed his inclination to laugh, because the brevity of Aramis’s letter gave rise to reflection. He followed Mousqueton, or rather Mousqueton’s chariot, to the castle. He sat down to a sumptuous table, of which they did him the honors as to a king. But he could draw nothing from Mousqueton,--the faithful servant seemed to shed tears at will, but that was all.

D’Artagnan, after a night passed in an excellent bed, reflected much upon the meaning of Aramis’s letter; puzzled himself as to the relation of the Equinox with the affairs of Porthos; and being unable to make anything out unless it concerned some amour of the bishop’s, for which it was necessary that the days and nights should be equal, D’Artagnan left Pierrefonds as he had left Melun, as he had left the chateau of the Comte de la Fere. It was not, however, without a melancholy, which might in good sooth pass for one of the most dismal of D’Artagnan’s moods. His head cast down, his eyes fixed, he suffered his legs to hang on each side of his horse, and said to himself, in that vague sort of reverie which ascends sometimes to the sublimest eloquence:

“No more friends! no more future! no more anything! My energies are broken like the bonds of our ancient friendship. Oh, old age is coming, cold and inexorable; it envelopes in its funeral crepe all that was brilliant, all that was embalming in my youth; then it throws that sweet burthen on its shoulders and carries it away with the rest into the fathomless gulf of death.”

A shudder crept through the heart of the Gascon, so brave and so strong against all the misfortunes of life; and during some moments the clouds appeared black to him, the earth slippery and full of pits as that of cemeteries.

“Whither am I going?” said he to himself. “What am I going to do! Alone, quite alone--without family, without friends! Bah!” cried he all at once. And he clapped spurs to his horse, who, having found nothing melancholy in the heavy oats of Pierrefonds, profited by this permission to show his gayety in a gallop which absorbed two leagues. “To Paris!” said D’Artagnan to himself. And on the morrow he alighted in Paris. He had devoted ten days to this journey.

CHAPTER XIX.

What D'Artagnan went to Paris for.

The lieutenant dismounted before a shop in the Rue des Lombards, at the sign of the Pilon d'Or. A man of good appearance, wearing a white apron, and stroking his gray mustache with a large hand, uttered a cry of joy on perceiving the pied horse. "Monsieur le chevalier," said he, "ah, is that you?"

"Bon jour, Planchet," replied D'Artagnan, stooping to enter the shop.

"Quick, somebody," cried Planchet, "to look after Monsieur d'Artagnan's horse,--somebody to get ready his room,--somebody to prepare his supper."

"Thanks, Planchet. Good-day, my children!" said D'Artagnan to the eager boys.

"Allow me to send off this coffee, this treacle, and these raisins," said Planchet; "they are for the store-room of monsieur le surintendant."

"Send them off, send them off!"

"That is only the affair of a moment, then we shall sup."

"Arrange it that we may sup alone; I want to speak to you."

Planchet looked at his old master in a significant manner.

"Oh, don't be uneasy, it is nothing unpleasant," said D'Artagnan.

"So much the better--so much the better!" And Planchet breathed freely again, whilst D'Artagnan seated himself quietly down in the shop, upon a bale of corks, and made a survey of the premises. The shop was well stocked; there was a mingled perfume of ginger, cinnamon, and ground pepper, which made D'Artagnan sneeze. The shop-boy, proud of being in company with so renowned a warrior, of a lieutenant of musketeers, who approached the person of the king, began to work with an enthusiasm which was something like delirium, and to serve the customers with a disdainful haste that was noticed by several.

Planchet put away his money, and made up his accounts, amidst civilities addressed to his former master. Planchet had with his equals the short speech and haughty familiarity of the rich shopkeeper who serves everybody and waits for nobody. D'Artagnan observed this habit with a pleasure which we shall analyze presently. He saw night come on by degrees, and at length Planchet conducted him to a chamber on the first story, where, amidst bales and chests, a table very nicely set out awaited the two guests.

D'Artagnan took advantage of a moment's pause to examine the countenance of Planchet, whom he had not seen for a year. The shrewd Planchet had acquired a slight protuberance in front, but his countenance was not puffed. His keen eye still played with facility in its deep-sunk orbit; and fat, which levels all the characteristic saliences of the human face, had not yet touched either his high cheek-bones, the sign of cunning and cupidity, or his pointed chin, the sign of acuteness and perseverance. Planchet reigned with as much majesty in his dining-room as in his shop. He set before his master a frugal, but perfectly Parisian repast: roast meat, cooked at the baker's, with vegetables, salad, and a dessert borrowed from the shop itself. D'Artagnan was pleased that the grocer had drawn from behind the fagots a bottle of that Anjou wine which during all his life had been D'Artagnan's favorite wine.

"Formerly, monsieur," said Planchet, with a smile full of bonhomie, "it was I who drank your wine; now you do me the honor to drink mine."

"And, thank God, friend Planchet, I shall drink it for a long time to come, I hope; for at present I am free."

"Free? You have a leave of absence, monsieur?"

"Unlimited."

"You are leaving the service?" said Planchet, stupefied.

"Yes, I am resting."

"And the king?" cried Planchet, who could not suppose it possible that the king could do without the services of such a man as D'Artagnan.

"The king will try his fortune elsewhere. But we have supped well, you are disposed to enjoy yourself; you invite me to confide in you. Open your ears, then."

"They are open." And Planchet, with a laugh more frank than cunning, opened a bottle of white wine.

"Leave me my reason, at least."

"Oh, as to you losing your head--you, monsieur!"

"Now my head is my own, and I mean to take better care of it than ever. In the first place we shall talk business. How fares our money-box?"

"Wonderfully well, monsieur. The twenty thousand livres I had of you are still employed in my trade, in which they bring me nine per cent. I give you seven, so I gain two by you."

"And you are still satisfied?"

"Delighted. Have you brought me any more?"

"Better than that. But do you want any?"

"Oh! not at all. Every one is willing to trust me now. I am extending my business."

"That was your intention."

"I play the banker a little. I buy goods of my needy brethren; I lend money to those who are not ready for their payments."

"Without usury?"

"Oh! monsieur, in the course of the last week I have had two meetings on the boulevards, on account of the word you have just pronounced."

"What?"

"You shall see: it concerned a loan. The borrower gives me in pledge some raw sugars, on condition that I should sell if repayment were not made within a fixed period. I lend a thousand livres. He does not pay me, and I sell the sugars for thirteen hundred livres. He learns this and claims a hundred crowns. Ma foi! I refused, pretending that I could not sell them for more than nine hundred livres. He accused me of usury. I begged him to repeat that word to me behind the boulevards. He was an old guard, and he came: and I passed your sword through his left thigh."

"Tu dieu! what a pretty sort of banker you make!" said D'Artagnan.

"For above thirteen per cent I fight," replied Planchet; "that is my character."

"Take only twelve," said D'Artagnan, "and call the rest premium and brokerage."

"You are right, monsieur; but to your business."

"Ah! Planchet, it is very long and very hard to speak."

"Do speak it, nevertheless."

D'Artagnan twisted his mustache like a man embarrassed with the confidence he is about to make and mistrustful of his confidant.

"Is it an investment?" asked Planchet.

"Why, yes."

"At good profit?"

"A capital profit,--four hundred per cent, Planchet."

Planchet gave such a blow with his fist upon the table, that the bottles bounded as if they had been frightened.

"Good heavens! is that possible?"

"I think it will be more," replied D'Artagnan coolly; "but I like to lay it at the lowest!"

"The devil!" said Planchet, drawing nearer. "Why, monsieur, that is magnificent! Can one put much money in it?"

"Twenty thousand livres each, Planchet."

"Why, that is all you have, monsieur. For how long a time?"

"For a month."

"And that will give us--"

"Fifty thousand livres each, profit."

"It is monstrous! It is worth while to fight for such interest as that!"

"In fact, I believe it will be necessary to fight not a little," said D'Artagnan, with the same tranquillity; "but this time there are two of us, Planchet, and I shall take all the blows to myself."

"Oh! monsieur, I will not allow that."

"Planchet, you cannot be concerned in it; you would be obliged to leave your business and your family."

"The affair is not in Paris, then."

"No."

"Abroad?"

"In England."

"A speculative country, that is true," said Planchet,--"a country that I know well. What sort of an affair, monsieur, without too much curiosity?"

"Planchet, it is a restoration."

"Of monuments?"

"Yes, of monuments; we shall restore Whitehall."

"That is important. And in a month, you think?"

"I shall undertake it."

"That concerns you, monsieur, and when once you are engaged--"

"Yes, that concerns me. I know what I am about; nevertheless, I will freely consult with you."

"You do me great honor; but I know very little about architecture."

"Planchet, you are wrong; you are an excellent architect, quite as good as I am, for the case in question."

"Thanks, monsieur. But your old friends of the musketeers?"

“I have been, I confess, tempted to speak of the thing to those gentlemen, but they are all absent from their houses. It is vexatious, for I know none more bold or able.”

“Ah! then it appears there will be an opposition, and the enterprise will be disputed?”

“Oh, yes, Planchet, yes.”

“I burn to know the details, monsieur.”

“Here they are, Planchet--close all the doors tight.”

“Yes, monsieur.” And Planchet double-locked them.

“That is well; now draw near.” Planchet obeyed.

“And open the window, because the noise of the passers-by and the carts will deafen all who might hear us.” Planchet opened the window as desired, and the gust of tumult which filled the chamber with cries, wheels, barkings, and steps deafened D’Artagnan himself, as he had wished. He then swallowed a glass of white wine, and began in these terms: “Planchet, I have an idea.”

“Ah! monsieur, I recognize you so well in that!” replied Planchet, panting with emotion.

CHAPTER XX.

Of the Society which was formed in the Rue des Lombards.

After a moment's silence, in which D'Artagnan appeared to be collecting, not one idea but all his ideas,--"It cannot be, my dear Planchet," said he, "that you have not heard of his majesty Charles I. of England?"

"Alas! yes, monsieur, since you left France in order to assist him, and that, in spite of that assistance, he fell, and was near dragging you down in his fall."

"Exactly so; I see you have a good memory, Planchet."

"Peste! the astonishing thing would be, if I could have lost that memory, however bad it might have been. When one has heard Grimaud, who, you know, is not given to talking, relate how the head of King Charles fell, how you sailed the half of a night in a scuttled vessel, and saw floating on the water that good M. Mordaunt with a certain gold-hafted dagger buried in his breast, one is not very likely to forget such things."

"And yet there are people who forget them, Planchet."

"Yes, such as have not seen them, or have not heard Grimaud relate them."

"Well, it is all the better that you recollect all that; I shall only have to remind you of one thing, and that is that Charles I. had a son."

"Without contradicting you, monsieur, he had two," said Planchet; "for I saw the second one in Paris, M. le Duke of York, one day, as he was going to the Palais Royal, and I was told that he was not the eldest son of Charles I. As to the eldest, I have the honor of knowing him by name, but not personally."

"That is exactly the point, Planchet, we must come to: it is to this eldest son, formerly called the Prince of Wales, and who is now styled Charles II., king of England."

"A king without a kingdom, monsieur," replied Planchet, sententiously.

"Yes, Planchet, and you may add an unfortunate prince, more unfortunate than the poorest man of the people lost in the worst quarter of Paris."

Planchet made a gesture full of that sort of compassion which we grant to strangers with whom we think we can never possibly find ourselves in contact. Besides, he did not see in this politico-sentimental operation any sign of the commercial idea of M. d'Artagnan, and it was in this idea that D'Artagnan, who was, from habit, pretty well acquainted with men and things, had principally interested Planchet.

"I am come to our business. This young Prince of Wales, a king without a kingdom, as you have so well said, Planchet, has interested me. I, D'Artagnan, have seen him begging assistance of Mazarin, who is a miser, and the aid of Louis, who is a child, and it appeared to me, who am acquainted with such things, that in the intelligent eye of the fallen king, in the nobility of his whole person, a nobility apparent above all his miseries, I could discern the stuff of a man and the heart of a king."

Planchet tacitly approved of all this; but it did not at all, in his eyes at least, throw any light upon D'Artagnan's idea. The latter continued: "This, then, is the reasoning which I made with myself. Listen attentively, Planchet, for we are coming to the conclusion."

"I am listening."

"Kings are not so thickly sown upon the earth, that people can find them whenever they want them. Now, this king without a kingdom is, in my opinion, a grain of seed which will blossom in some season or other, provided a skillful, discreet, and vigorous hand sow it duly and truly, selecting soil, sky, and time."

Planchet still approved by a nod of his head, which showed that he did not perfectly comprehend all that was said.

"'Poor little seed of a king,' said I to myself, and really I was affected, Planchet, which leads me to think I am entering upon a foolish business. And that is why I wished to consult you, my friend."

Planchet colored with pleasure and pride.

"'Poor little seed of a king! I will pick you up and cast you into good ground.'"

"Good God!" said Planchet, looking earnestly at his old master, as if in doubt as to the state of his reason.

"Well, what is it?" said D'Artagnan; "who hurts you?"

"Me! nothing, monsieur."

"You said, 'Good God!'"

"Did I?"

"I am sure you did. Can you already understand?"

"I confess, M. d'Artagnan, that I am afraid--"

"To understand?"

"Yes."

"To understand that I wish to replace upon his throne this King Charles II., who has no throne? Is that it?"

Planchet made a prodigious bound in his chair. "Ah, ah!" said he, in evident terror, "that is what you call a restoration!"

"Yes, Planchet; is it not the proper term for it?"

"Oh, no doubt, no doubt! But have you reflected seriously?"

"Upon what?"

"Upon what is going on yonder."

"Where?"

"In England."

"And what is that? Let us see, Planchet."

"In the first place, monsieur, I ask you pardon for meddling in these things, which have nothing to do with my trade; but since it is an affair that you propose to me--for you are proposing an affair, are you not?--"

"A superb one, Planchet."

"But as it is business you propose to me, I have the right to discuss it."

"Discuss it, Planchet; out of discussion is born light."

"Well, then, since I have monsieur's permission, I will tell him that there is yonder, in the first place, the parliament."

"Well, next?"

"And then the army."

"Good! Do you see anything else?"

"Why, then the nation."

"Is that all?"

"The nation which consented to the overthrow and death of the late king, the father of this one, and which will not be willing to belie its acts."

"Planchet," said D'Artagnan, "you argue like a cheese! The nation--the nation is tired of these gentlemen who give themselves such barbarous names, and who sing songs to it. Chanting for chanting, my dear Planchet; I have remarked that nations prefer singing a merry chant to the plain chant. Remember the Fronde; what did they sing in those times? Well, those were good times."

"Not too good, not too good! I was near being hung in those times."

“Well, but you were not.”

“No.”

“And you laid the foundations of your fortune in the midst of all those songs?”

“That is true.”

“Then you have nothing to say against them.”

“Well, I return, then, to the army and parliament.”

“I say that I borrow twenty thousand livres of M. Planchet, and that I put twenty thousand livres of my own to it; and with these forty thousand livres I raise an army.”

Planchet clasped his hands; he saw that D’Artagnan was in earnest, and, in good truth, he believed his master had lost his senses.

“An army!--ah, monsieur,” said he, with his most agreeable smile, for fear of irritating the madman, and rendering him furious,--”an army!--how many?”

“Of forty men,” said D’Artagnan.

“Forty against forty thousand! that is not enough. I know very well that you, M. d’Artagnan, alone, are equal to a thousand men; but where are we to find thirty-nine men equal to you? Or, if we could find them, who would furnish you with money to pay them?”

“Not bad, Planchet. Ah, the devil! you play the courtier.”

“No, monsieur, I speak what I think, and that is exactly why I say that, in the first pitched battle you fight with your forty men, I am very much afraid--”

“Therefore I shall fight no pitched battles, my dear Planchet,” said the Gascon, laughing. “We have very fine examples in antiquity of skillful retreats and marches, which consisted in avoiding the enemy instead of attacking them. You should know that, Planchet, you who commanded the Parisians the day on which they ought to have fought against the musketeers, and who so well calculated marches and countermarches, that you never left the Palais Royal.”

Planchet could not help laughing. “It is plain,” replied he, “that if your forty men conceal themselves, and are not unskillful, they may hope not to be beaten: but you propose obtaining some result, do you not?”

“No doubt. This, then, in my opinion, is the plan to be proceeded upon in order quickly to replace his majesty Charles II. on his throne.”

"Good!" said Planchet, increasing his attention; "let us see your plan. But in the first place it seems to me we are forgetting something."

"What is that?"

"We have set aside the nation, which prefers singing merry songs to psalms, and the army, which we will not fight; but the parliament remains, and that seldom sings."

"Nor does it fight. How is it, Planchet, that an intelligent man like yourself should take any heed of a set of brawlers who call themselves Rumps and Barebones? The parliament does not trouble me at all, Planchet."

"As soon as it ceases to trouble you, monsieur, let us pass on."

"Yes, and arrive at the result. You remember Cromwell, Planchet?"

"I have heard a great deal of talk about him.

"He was a rough soldier."

"And a terrible eater, moreover."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Why, at one gulp he swallowed all England."

"Well, Planchet, the evening before the day on which he swallowed England, if any one had swallowed M. Cromwell?"

"Oh, monsieur, it is one of the axioms of mathematics that the container must be greater than the contained."

"Very well! That is our affair, Planchet."

"But M. Cromwell is dead, and his container is now the tomb."

"My dear Planchet, I see with pleasure that you have not only become a mathematician, but a philosopher."

"Monsieur, in my grocery business I use much printed paper, and that instructs me."

"Bravo! You know then, in that case--for you have not learnt mathematics and philosophy without a little history--that after this Cromwell so great, there came one who was very little."

"Yes; he was named Richard, and he as done as you have, M. d'Artagnan--he has tendered his resignation."

"Very well said--very well! After the great man who is dead, after the little one who tendered his resignation, there came a third. This one is named Monk; he is an able general, considering he has never fought a battle; he is a skillful diplomatist, considering that he never speaks in public, and that having to say 'good-day' to a man, he meditates twelve hours, and ends by saying ‘good night;’ which makes people exclaim ‘miracle!’ seeing that it falls out correctly.”

“That is rather strong,” said Planchet; “but I know another political man who resembles him very much.”

“M. Mazarin you mean?”

“Himself.”

“You are right, Planchet; only M. Mazarin does not aspire to the throne of France; and that changes everything. Do you see? Well, this M. Monk, who has England ready-roasted in his plate, and who is already opening his mouth to swallow it--this M. Monk, who says to the people of Charles II., and to Charles II. himself, ‘Nescio vos’--”

“I don’t understand English,” said Planchet.

“Yes, but I understand it,” said D’Artagnan. “‘Nescio vos’ means ‘I do not know you.’ This M. Monk, the most important man in England, when he shall have swallowed it--”

“Well?” asked Planchet.

“Well, my friend, I shall go over yonder, and with my forty men I shall carry him off, pack him up, and bring him into France, where two modes of proceeding present themselves to my dazzled eyes.”

“Oh! and to mine too,” cried Planchet, transported with enthusiasm. “We will put him in a cage and show him for money.”

“Well, Planchet, that is a third plan, of which I had not thought.”

“Do you think it a good one?”

“Yes, certainly, but I think mine better.”

“Let us see yours, then.”

“In the first place, I shall set a ransom on him.”

“Of how much?”

“Peste! a fellow like that must be well worth a hundred thousand crowns.”

“Yes, yes!”

“You see, then--in the first place, a ransom of a hundred thousand crowns.”

“Or else--”

“Or else, what is much better, I deliver him up to King Charles, who, having no longer either a general or an army to fear, nor a diplomatist to trick him, will restore himself, and when once restored, will pay down to me the hundred thousand crowns in question. That is the idea I have formed; what do you say to it, Planchet?”

“Magnificent, monsieur!” cried Planchet, trembling with emotion. “How did you conceive that idea?”

“It came to me one morning on the banks of the Loire, whilst our beloved king, Louis XIV., was pretending to weep upon the hand of Mademoiselle de Mancini.”

“Monsieur, I declare the idea is sublime. But--”

“Ah! is there a but?”

“Permit me! But this is a little like the skin of that fine bear--you know--that they were about to sell, but which it was necessary to take from the back of the living bear. Now, to take M. Monk, there will be a bit of a scuffle, I should think.”

“No doubt; but as I shall raise an army to--”

“Yes, yes--I understand, parbleu!--a coup-de-main. Yes, then, monsieur, you will triumph, for no one equals you in such sorts of encounters.”

“I certainly am lucky in them,” said D’Artagnan, with a proud simplicity. “You know that if for this affair I had my dear Athos, my brave Porthos, and my cunning Aramis, the business would be settled; but they are all lost, as it appears, and nobody knows where to find them. I will do it, then, alone. Now, do you find the business good, and the investment advantageous?”

“Too much so--too much so.”

“How can that be?”

“Because fine things never reach the expected point.”

“This is infallible, Planchet, and the proof is that I undertake it. It will be for you a tolerably pretty gain, and for me a very interesting stroke. It will be said, ‘Such was the old age of M. d’Artagnan,’ and I shall hold a place in tales and even in history itself, Planchet. I am greedy of honor.”

“Monsieur,” cried Planchet, “when I think that it is here, in my home, in the midst of my sugar, my prunes, and my cinnamon, that this gigantic project is ripened, my shop seems a palace to me.”

“Beware, beware, Planchet! If the least report of this escapes, there is the Bastile for both of us. Beware, my friend, for this is a plot we are hatching. M. Monk is the ally of M. Mazarin--beware!”

“Monsieur, when a man has had the honor to belong to you, he knows nothing of fear; and when he has had the advantage of being bound up in interests with you, he holds his tongue.”

“Very well; that is more your affair than mine, seeing that in a week I shall be in England.”

“Depart, monsieur, depart--the sooner the better.”

“Is the money, then, ready?”

“It will be to-morrow; to-morrow you shall receive it from my own hands. Will you have gold or silver?”

“Gold; that is most convenient. But how are we going to arrange this? Let us see.”

“Oh, good Lord! in the simplest way possible. You shall give me a receipt, that is all.”

“No, no,” said D’Artagnan, warmly; “we must preserve order in all things.”

“That is likewise my opinion; but with you, M. d’Artagnan--”

“And if I should die yonder--if I should be killed by a musket-ball--if I should burst from drinking beer?”

“Monsieur, I beg you to believe that in that case I should be so much afflicted at your death, that I should not think about the money.”

“Thank you, Planchet; but no matter. We shall, like two lawyers’ clerks, draw up together an agreement, a sort of act, which may be called a deed of company.”

“Willingly, monsieur.”

“I know it is difficult to draw such a thing up, but we can try.”

“Let us try, then.” And Planchet went in search of pens, ink, and paper. D’Artagnan took the pen and wrote:--”Between Messire d’Artagnan, ex-lieutenant of the king’s musketeers, at present residing in the Rue Tiquetonne, Hotel de la Chevrette; and the Sieur Planchet, grocer, residing in the Rue des Lombards, at the sign of the Pilon d’Or, it has been agreed as follows:--A company, with a capital of forty thousand livres, and formed for the purpose of carrying out an idea conceived by M. d’Artagnan, and the said Planchet approving of it in all points, will place twenty thousand livres in the hands of M. d’Artagnan. He will require neither repayment nor interest before the return of M. d’Artagnan from a journey he is about to take into England. On his part, M. d’Artagnan undertakes it to find twenty thousand livres, which he will join to the twenty thousand already laid down by the Sieur Planchet. He will employ the said sum of forty thousand livres according to his judgment in an undertaking which is described below. On the day when M. d’Artagnan shall have re-established, by whatever means, his majesty King Charles II. upon the throne of England, he will pay into the hands of M. Planchet the sum of--”

“The sum of a hundred and fifty thousand livres,” said Planchet, innocently, perceiving that D’Artagnan hesitated.

“Oh, the devil, no!” said D’Artagnan, “the division cannot be made by half; that would not be just.”

“And yet, monsieur, we each lay down half,” objected Planchet, timidly.

“Yes; but listen to this clause, my dear Planchet, and if you do not find if equitable in every respect when it is written, well, we can scratch it out again:--’Nevertheless, as M. d’Artagnan brings to the association, besides his capital of twenty thousand livres, his time, his idea, his industry, and his skin,--things which he appreciates strongly, particularly the last,--M. d’Artagnan will keep, of the three hundred thousand livres, two hundred thousand livres for himself, which will make his share two-thirds.”

“Very well,” said Planchet.

“Is it just?” asked D’Artagnan.

“Perfectly just, monsieur.”

“And you will be contented with a hundred thousand livres?”

“Peste! I think so. A hundred thousand for twenty thousand!”

“And in a month, understand.”

“How, in a month?”

“Yes, I only ask one month.”

“Monsieur,” said Planchet, generously, “I give you six weeks.”

“Thank you,” replied the musketeer, politely; after which the two partners reperused their deed.

“That is perfect, monsieur,” said Planchet; “and the late M. Coquenard, the first husband of Madame la Baronne du Vallon, could not have done it better.”

“Do you find it so? Let us sign it then.” And both affixed their signatures.

“In this fashion,” said D’Artagnan, “I shall be under obligations to no one.”

“But I shall be under obligations to you,” said Planchet.

“No; for whatever store I set by it, Planchet, I may lose my skin yonder, and you will lose all. A propos--peste!--that makes me think of the principal, an indispensable clause. I shall write it:--’In case of M. d’Artagnan dying in this enterprise, liquidation will be considered made, and the Sieur Planchet will give quittance from that moment to the shade of Messire d'Artagnan for the twenty thousand livres paid by him into the hands of the said company.'"

This last clause made Planchet knit his brows a little, but when he saw the brilliant eye, the muscular hand, the supple and strong back of his associate, he regained his courage, and, without regret, he at once added another stroke to his signature. D'Artagnan did the same. Thus was drawn the first known company contract; perhaps such things have been abused a little since, both in form and principle.

"Now," said Planchet, pouring out the last glass of Anjou wine for D'Artagnan,--"now go to sleep, my dear master."

"No," replied D'Artagnan; "for the most difficult part now remains to be done, and I will think over that difficult part."

"Bah!" said Planchet; "I have such great confidence in you, M. d'Artagnan, that I would not give my hundred thousand livres for ninety thousand livres down."

"And devil take me if I don't think you are right!" Upon which D'Artagnan took a candle and went up to his bedroom.

CHAPTER XXI.

In which D’Artagnan prepares to travel.

D’Artagnan reflected to such good purpose during the night that his plan was settled by morning. “This is it,” said he, sitting up in bed, supporting his elbow on his knee, and his chin in his hand;--”this is it. I shall seek out forty steady, firm men, recruited among people a little compromised, but having habits of discipline. I shall promise them five hundred livres for a month if they return; nothing if they do not return, or half for their kindred. As to food and lodging, that concerns the English, who have cattle in their pastures, bacon in their bacon-racks, fowls in their poultry-yards, and corn in their barns. I will present myself to General Monk with my little body of troops. He will receive me. I shall win his confidence, and take advantage of it, as soon as possible.”

But without going further, D’Artagnan shook his head and interrupted himself. “No,” said he; “I should not dare to relate this to Athos; the way is therefore not honorable. I must use violence,” continued he,--”very certainly I must, but without compromising my loyalty. With forty men I will traverse the country as a partisan. But if I fall in with, not forty thousand English, as Planchet said, but purely and simply with four hundred, I shall be beaten. Supposing that among my forty warriors there should be found at least ten stupid ones--ten who will allow themselves to be killed one after the other, from mere folly? No; it is, in fact, impossible to find forty men to be depended upon--they do not exist. I must learn how to be contented with thirty. With ten men less I should have the right of avoiding any armed encounter, on account of the small number of my people; and if the encounter should take place, my chance is better with thirty men than forty. Besides, I should save five thousand francs; that is to say, the eighth of my capital; that is worth the trial. This being so, I should have thirty men. I shall divide them into three bands,--we will spread ourselves about over the country, with an injunction to reunite at a given moment; in this fashion, ten by ten, we should excite no suspicion--we should pass unperceived. Yes, yes, thirty--that is a magic number. There are three tens--three, that divine number! And then, truly, a company of thirty men, when all together, will look rather imposing. Ah! stupid wretch that I am!" continued D'Artagnan, "I want thirty horses. That is ruinous. Where the devil was my head when I forgot the horses? We cannot, however, think of striking such a blow without horses. Well, so be it, that sacrifice must be made; we can get the horses in the country--they are not bad, besides. But I forgot--peste! Three bands--that necessitates three leaders; there is the difficulty. Of the three commanders I have already one--that is myself;--yes, but the two others will of themselves cost almost as much money as all the rest of the troop. No; positively I must have but one lieutenant. In that case, then, I should reduce my troop to twenty men. I know very well that twenty men is but very little; but since with thirty I was determined not to seek to come to blows, I should do so more carefully still with twenty. Twenty--that is a round number; that, besides, reduces the number of the horses by ten, which is a consideration; and then, with a good lieutenant--Mordioux! what things patience and calculation are! Was I not going to embark with forty men, and I have now reduced them to twenty for an equal success? Ten thousand livres saved at one stroke, and more safety; that is well! Now, then, let us see; we have nothing to do but to find this lieutenant--let him be found, then; and after--That is not so easy; he must be brave and good, a second myself. Yes, but a lieutenant must have my secret, and as that secret is worth a million, and I shall only pay my man a thousand livres, fifteen hundred at the most, my man will sell the secret to Monk. Mordioux! no lieutenant. Besides, this man, were he as mute as a disciple of Pythagoras,--this man would be sure to have in the troop some favorite soldier, whom he would make his sergeant; the sergeant would penetrate the secret of the lieutenant, in case the latter should be honest and unwilling to sell it. Then the sergeant, less honest and less ambitious, will give up the whole for fifty thousand livres. Come, come! that is impossible. The lieutenant is impossible. But then I must have no fractions; I cannot divide my troop in two, and act upon two points, at once, without another self, who--But what is the use of acting upon two points, as we have only one man to take? What can be the use of weakening a corps by placing the right here, and the left there? A single corps--Mordioux! a single one, and that commanded by D'Artagnan. Very well. But twenty men marching in one band are suspected by everybody; twenty horsemen must not be seen marching together, or a company will be detached against them and the password will be required; the which company, upon seeing them embarrassed to give it, would shoot M. d’Artagnan and his men like so many rabbits. I reduce myself then to ten men; in this fashion I shall act simply and with unity; I shall be forced to be prudent, which is half the success in an affair of the kind I am undertaking; a greater number might, perhaps, have drawn me into some folly. Ten horses are not many, either, to buy or take. A capital idea; what tranquillity it infuses into my mind! no more suspicions--no passwords--no more dangers! Ten men, they are valets or clerks. Ten men, leading ten horses laden with merchandise of whatever kind, are tolerated, well received everywhere. Ten men travel on account of the house of Planchet & Co., of France,--nothing can be said against that. These ten men, clothed like manufacturers, have a good cutlass or a good musket at their saddle-bow, and a good pistol in the holster. They never allow themselves to be uneasy, because they have no evil designs. They are, perhaps, in truth, a little disposed to be smugglers, but what harm is in that? Smuggling is not, like polygamy, a hanging offense. The worst that can happen to us is the confiscation of our merchandise. Our merchandise confiscated--a fine affair that! Come, come! it is a superb plan. Ten men only--ten men, whom I will engage for my service; ten men who shall be as resolute as forty, who would cost me four times as much, and to whom, for greater security, I will never open my mouth as to my designs, and to whom I shall only say ‘My friends, there is a blow to be struck.’ Things being after this fashion, Satan will be very malicious if he plays me one of his tricks. Fifteen thousand livres saved--that’s superb--out of twenty!”

Thus fortified by his laborious calculations, D’Artagnan stopped at this plan, and determined to change nothing in it. He had already on a list furnished by his inexhaustible memory, ten men illustrious amongst the seekers of adventure, ill-treated by fortune, and not on good terms with justice. Upon this D’Artagnan rose, and instantly set off on the search, telling Planchet not to expect him to breakfast, and perhaps not to dinner. A day and a half spent in rummaging amongst certain dens of Paris sufficed for his recruiting; and, without allowing his adventurers to communicate with each other, he had picked up and got together, in less than thirty hours, a charming collection of ill-looking faces, speaking a French less pure than the English they were about to attempt. These men were, for the most part, guards, whose merit D’Artagnan had had an opportunity of appreciating in various encounters, whom drunkenness, unlucky sword-thrusts, unexpected winnings at play, or the economical reforms of Mazarin, had forced to seek shade and solitude, those two great consolers of irritated and chafing spirits. They bore upon their countenances and in their vestments the traces of the heartaches they had undergone. Some had their visages scarred,--all had their clothes in rags. D'Artagnan comforted the most needy of these brotherly miseries by a prudent distribution of the crowns of the company; then, having taken care that these crowns should be employed in the physical improvement of the troop, he appointed a trysting place in the north of France, between Bergues and Saint Omer. Six days were allowed as the utmost term, and D'Artagnan was sufficiently acquainted with the good-will, the good-humor, and the relative probity of these illustrious recruits, to be certain that not one of them would fail in his appointment. These orders given, this rendezvous fixed, he went to bid farewell to Planchet, who asked news of his army. D'Artagnan did not think it proper to inform him of the reduction he had made in his personnel. He feared that the confidence of his associate would be abated by such an avowal. Planchet was delighted to learn that the army was levied, and that he (Planchet) found himself a kind of half king, who from his throne-counter kept in pay a body of troops destined to make war against perfidious Albion, that enemy of all true French hearts. Planchet paid down in double louis, twenty thousand livres to D'Artagnan, on the part of himself (Planchet), and twenty thousand livres, still in double louis, in account with D'Artagnan. D'Artagnan placed each of the twenty thousand francs in a bag, and weighing a bag in each hand,--"This money is very embarrassing, my dear Planchet," said he. "Do you know this weighs thirty pounds?"

"Bah! your horse will carry that like a feather."

D'Artagnan shook his head. "Don't tell me such things, Planchet: a horse overloaded with thirty pounds, in addition to the rider and his portmanteau, cannot cross a river so easily--cannot leap over a wall or ditch so lightly; and the horse failing, the horseman fails. It is true that you, Planchet, who have served in the infantry, may not be aware of all that."

"Then what is to be done, monsieur?" said Planchet, greatly embarrassed.

"Listen to me," said D'Artagnan. "I will pay my army on its return home. Keep my half of twenty thousand livres, which you can use during that time."

"And my half?" said Planchet.

"I shall take that with me."

“Your confidence does me honor,” said Planchet: “but supposing you should not return?”

“That is possible, though not very probable. Then, Planchet, in case I should not return--give me a pen; I will make my will.” D’Artagnan took a pen and some paper, and wrote upon a plain sheet,--”I, D’Artagnan, possess twenty thousand livres, laid up cent per cent during thirty years that I have been in the service of his majesty the king of France. I leave five thousand to Athos, five thousand to Porthos, and five thousand to Aramis, that they may give the said sums in my name and their own to my young friend Raoul, Vicomte de Bragelonne. I give the remaining five thousand to Planchet, that he may distribute the fifteen thousand with less regret among my friends. With which purpose I sign these presents.--D’ARTAGNAN.”

Planchet appeared very curious to know what D’Artagnan had written.

“Here,” said the musketeer, “read it.”

On reading the last lines the tears came into Planchet’s eyes. “You think, then, that I would not have given the money without that? Then I will have none of your five thousand francs.”

D’Artagnan smiled. “Accept it, accept it, Planchet; and in that way you will only lose fifteen thousand francs instead of twenty thousand, and you will not be tempted to disregard the signature of your master and friend, by losing nothing at all.”

How well that dear Monsieur d’Artagnan knew the hearts of men and grocers! They who have pronounced Don Quixote mad because he rode out to the conquest of an empire with nobody but Sancho his squire, and they who have pronounced Sancho mad because he accompanied his master in his attempt to conquer the said empire,--they certainly will have no hesitation in extending the same judgment to D’Artagnan and Planchet. And yet the first passed for one of the most subtle spirits among the astute spirits of the court of France. As to the second, he had acquired by good right the reputation of having one of the longest heads among the grocers of the Rue des Lombards; consequently of Paris, and consequently of France. Now, to consider these two men from the point of view from which you would consider other men, and the means by the aid of which they contemplated to restore a monarch to his throne, compared with other means, the shallowest brains of the country where brains are most shallow must have revolted against the presumptuous madness of the lieutenant and the stupidity of his associate. Fortunately, D’Artagnan was not a man to listen to the idle talk of those around him, or to the comments that were made on himself. He had adopted the motto, “Act well, and let people talk.” Planchet, on his part had adopted this, “Act and say nothing.” It resulted from this, that, according to the custom of all superior geniuses, these two men flattered themselves, intra pectus, with being in the right against all who found fault with them.

As a beginning, D’Artagnan set out in the finest of possible weather, without a cloud in the heavens--without a cloud on his mind, joyous and strong, calm and decided, great in his resolution, and consequently carrying with him a tenfold dose of that potent fluid which the shocks of mind cause to spring from the nerves, and which procure for the human machine a force and an influence of which future ages will render, according to all probability, a more arithmetical account than we can possibly do at present. He was again, as in times past, on that same road of adventures which had led him to Boulogne, and which he was now traveling for the fourth time. It appeared to him that he could almost recognize the trace of his own steps upon the road, and that of his fist upon the doors of the hostelries;--his memory, always active and present, brought back that youth which neither thirty years later his great heart nor his wrist of steel would have belied. What a rich nature was that of this man! He had all the passions, all the defects, all the weaknesses, and the spirit of contradiction familiar to his understanding changed all these imperfections into corresponding qualities. D’Artagnan, thanks to his ever active imagination, was afraid of a shadow, and ashamed of being afraid, he marched straight up to that shadow, and then became extravagant in his bravery, if the danger proved to be real. Thus everything in him was emotion, and therefore enjoyment. He loved the society of others, but never became tired of his own; and more than once, if he could have been heard when he was alone, he might have been seen laughing at the jokes he related to himself or the tricks his imagination created just five minutes before ennui might have been looked for. D’Artagnan was not perhaps so gay this time as he would have been with the prospect of finding some good friends at Calais, instead of joining the ten scamps there; melancholy, however, did not visit him more than once a day, and it was about five visits that he received from that somber deity before he got sight of the sea at Boulogne, and then these visits were indeed but short. But when once D’Artagnan found himself near the field of action, all other feelings but that of confidence disappeared never to return. From

Boulogne he followed the coast to Calais. Calais was the place of general rendezvous, and at Calais he had named to each of his recruits the hostelry of “Le Grande Monarque,” where living was not extravagant, where sailors messed, and where men of the sword, with sheath of leather, be it understood, found lodging, table, food, and all the comforts of life, for thirty sous per diem. D’Artagnan proposed to himself to take them by surprise in flagrante delicto of wandering life, and to judge by the first appearance if he could count on them as trusty companions.

He arrived at Calais at half past four in the afternoon.

CHAPTER XXII.

D’Artagnan travels for the House of Planchet and Company.

The hostelry of “Le Grand Monarque” was situated in a little street parallel to the port without looking out upon the port itself. Some lanes cut--as steps cut the two parallels of the ladder--the two great straight lines of the port and the street. By these lanes passengers came suddenly from the port into the street, or from the street on to the port. D’Artagnan, arrived at the port, took one of these lanes, and came out in front of the hostelry of “Le Grand Monarque.” The moment was well chosen and might remind D’Artagnan of his start in life at the hostelry of the “Franc-Meunier” at Meung. Some sailors who had been playing at dice had started a quarrel, and were threatening each other furiously. The host, hostess, and two lads were watching with anxiety the circle of these angry gamblers, from the midst of which war seemed ready to break forth, bristling with knives and hatchets. The play, nevertheless, was continued. A stone bench was occupied by two men, who appeared thence to watch the door; four tables, placed at the back of the common chamber, were occupied by eight other individuals. Neither the men at the door, nor those at the tables took any part in the play or the quarrel. D’Artagnan recognized his ten men in these cold, indifferent spectators. The quarrel went on increasing. Every passion has, like the sea, its tide which ascends and descends. Reaching the climax of passion, one sailor overturned the table and the money which was upon it. The table fell, and the money rolled about. In an instant all belonging to the hostelry threw themselves upon the stakes, and many a piece of silver was picked up by people who stole away whilst the sailors were scuffling with each other.

The two men on the bench and the eight at the tables, although they seemed perfect strangers to each other, these ten men alone, we say, appeared to have agreed to remain impassible amidst the cries of fury and the chinking of money. Two only contented themselves with pushing with their feet combatants who came under their table. Two others, rather than take part in this disturbance, buried their hands in their pockets; and another two jumped upon the table they occupied, as people do to avoid being submerged by overflowing water.

"Come, come," said D'Artagnan to himself, not having lost one of the details we have related, "this is a very fair gathering--circumspect, calm, accustomed to disturbance, acquainted with blows! Peste! I have been lucky."

All at once his attention was called to a particular part of the room. The two men who had pushed the strugglers with their feet, were assailed with abuse by the sailors, who had become reconciled. One of them, half drunk with passion, and quite drunk with beer, came, in a menacing manner, to demand of the shorter of these two sages by what right he had touched with his foot creatures of the good God, who were not dogs. And whilst putting this question, in order to make it more direct, he applied his great fist to the nose of D'Artagnan's recruit.

This man became pale, without its being to be discerned whether his pallor arose from anger or fear; seeing which, the sailor concluded it was from fear, and raised his fist with the manifest intention of letting it fall upon the head of the stranger. But though the threatened man did not appear to move, he dealt the sailor such a severe blow in the stomach that he sent him rolling and howling to the other side of the room. At the same instant, rallied by the espirit de corps, all the comrades of the conquered man fell upon the conqueror.

The latter, with the same coolness of which he had given proof, without committing the imprudence of touching his weapons, took up a beer-pot with a pewter-lid, and knocked down two or three of his assailants; then, as he was about to yield to numbers, the seven other silent men at the tables, who had not yet stirred, perceived that their cause was at stake, and came to the rescue. At the same time, the two indifferent spectators at the door turned round with frowning bows, indicating their evident intention of taking the enemy in the rear, if the enemy did not cease their aggressions.

The host, his helpers, and two watchmen who were passing, and who from the curiosity had penetrated too far into the room, were mixed up in the tumult and showered with blows. The Parisians hit like Cyclops, with an ensemble and a tactic delightful to behold. At length, obliged to beat a retreat before superior numbers, they formed an intrenchment behind the large table, which they raised by main force; whilst the two others, arming themselves each with a trestle, and using it like a great sledge-hammer, knocked down at a blow eight sailors upon whose heads they had brought their monstrous catapult in play. The floor was already strewn with wounded, and the room filled with cries and dust, when D’Artagnan, satisfied with the test, advanced, sword in hand, and striking with the pommel every head that came in his way, he uttered a vigorous hola! which put an instantaneous end to the conflict. A great back-flood directly took place from the center to the sides of the room, so that D’Artagnan found himself isolated and dominator.

“What is this all about?” then demanded he of the assembly, with the majestic tone of Neptune pronouncing the Quos ego.

At the very instant, at the first sound of his voice, to carry on the Virgilian metaphor, D’Artagnan’s recruits, recognizing each his sovereign lord, discontinued their plank-fighting and trestle blows. On their side, the sailors, seeing that long naked sword, that martial air, and the agile arm which came to the rescue of their enemies, in the person of a man who seemed accustomed to command, the sailors picked up their wounded and their pitchers. The Parisians wiped their brows, and viewed their leader with respect. D’Artagnan was loaded with thanks by the host of “Le Grand Monarque.” He received them like a man who knows that nothing is being offered that does not belong to him, and then said he would go and walk upon the port till supper was ready. Immediately each of the recruits, who understood the summons, took his hat, brushed the dust off his clothes, and followed D’Artagnan. But D’Artagnan, whilst walking and observing, took care not to stop; he directed his course towards the downs, and the ten men--surprised at finding themselves going in the track of each other, uneasy at seeing on their right, on their left, and behind them, companions upon whom they had not reckoned--followed him, casting furtive glances at each other. It was not till he had arrived at the hollow part of the deepest down that D’Artagnan, smiling to see them outdone, turned towards them, making a friendly sign with his hand.

“Eh! come, come, gentlemen,” said he, “let us not devour each other; you are made to live together, to understand each other in all respects, and not to devour one another.”

Instantly all hesitation ceased; the men breathed as if they had been taken out of a coffin, and examined each other complacently. After this examination they turned their eyes towards their leader, who had long been acquainted with the art of speaking to men of that class, and who improvised the following little speech, pronounced with an energy truly Gascon:

“Gentlemen, you all know who I am. I have engaged you from knowing you to be brave, and willing to associate you with me in a glorious enterprise. Imagine that in laboring for me you labor for the king. I only warn you that if you allow anything of this supposition to appear, I shall be forced to crack your skulls immediately, in the manner most convenient to me. You are not ignorant, gentlemen, that state secrets are like a mortal poison: as long as that poison is in its box and the box is closed, it is not injurious; out of the box, it kills. Now draw near, and you shall know as much of this secret as I am able to tell you.” All drew close to him with an expression of curiosity. “Approach,” continued D’Artagnan, “and let not the bird which passes over our heads, the rabbit which sports on the downs, the fish which bounds from the waters, hear us. Our business is to learn and to report to monsieur le surintendant of the finances to what extent English smuggling is injurious to the French merchants. I shall enter every place, and see everything. We are poor Picard fishermen, thrown upon the coast by a storm. It is certain that we must sell fish, neither more nor less, like true fishermen. Only people might guess who we are, and might molest us; it is therefore necessary that we should be in a condition to defend ourselves. And this is why I have selected men of spirit and courage. We shall lead a steady life, and not incur much danger, seeing that we have behind us a powerful protector, thanks to whom no embarrassment is possible. One thing alone puzzles me; but I hope that after a short explanation, you will relieve me from that difficulty. The thing which puzzles me is taking with me a crew of stupid fishermen, which crew will annoy me immensely, whilst if, by chance, there were among you any who have seen the sea--”

“Oh! don’t let that trouble you,” said one of the recruits; “I was a prisoner among the pirates of Tunis three years, and can maneuver a boat like an admiral.”

“See,” said D’Artagnan, “what an admirable thing chance is!” D’Artagnan pronounced these words with an indefinable tone of feigned bonhomie, for he knew very well that the victim of the pirates was an old corsair, and had engaged him in consequence of that knowledge. But D’Artagnan never said more than there was need to say, in order to leave people in doubt. He paid himself with the explanation, and welcomed the effect, without appearing to be preoccupied with the cause.

“And I,” said a second, “I, by chance, had an uncle who directed the works of the port of La Rochelle. When quite a child, I played about the boats, and I know how to handle an oar or a sail as well as the best Ponantais sailor.” The latter did not lie much more than the first, for he had rowed on board his majesty’s galleys six years, at Ciotat. Two others were more frank: they confessed honestly that they had served on board a vessel as soldiers as punishment, and did not blush for it. D’Artagnan found himself, then, the leader of ten men of war and four sailors, having at once an land army and a sea force, which would have carried the pride of Planchet to its height, if Planchet had known the details.

Nothing was now left but arranging the general orders, and D’Artagnan gave them with precision. He enjoined his men to be ready to set out for the Hague, some following the coast which leads to Breskens, others the road to Antwerp. The rendezvous was given, by calculating each day’s march, a fortnight from that time, upon the chief place at the Hague. D’Artagnan recommended his men to go in couples, as they liked best, from sympathy. He himself selected from among those with the least disreputable look, two guards whom he had formerly known, and whose only faults were being drunkards and gamblers. These men had not entirely lost all ideas of civilization, and under proper garments their hearts would beat again. D’Artagnan, not to create any jealousy with the others, made the rest go forward. He kept his two selected ones, clothed them from his own wardrobe, and set out with them.

It was to these two, whom he seemed to honor with an absolute confidence, that D’Artagnan imparted a false secret, destined to secure the success of the expedition. He confessed to them that the object was not to learn to what extent French merchants were injured by English smuggling, but to learn how far French smuggling could annoy English trade. These men appeared convinced; they were effectively so. D’Artagnan was quite sure that at the first debauch, when thoroughly drunk, one of the two would divulge the secret to the whole band. His game appeared infallible.

A fortnight after all we have said had taken place at Calais, the whole troop assembled at the Hague.

Then D’Artagnan perceived that all his men, with remarkable intelligence, had already travestied themselves into sailors, more or less ill-treated by the sea. D’Artagnan left them to sleep in a den in Newkerke street, whilst he lodged comfortably upon the Grand Canal. He learned that the king of England had come back to his old ally, William II. of Nassau, stadtholder of Holland. He learned also that the refusal of Louis XIV. had a little cooled the protection afforded him up to that time, and in consequence he had gone to reside in a little village house at Scheveningen, situated in the downs, on the sea-shore, about a league from the Hague.

There, it was said, the unfortunate banished king consoled himself in his exile, by looking, with the melancholy peculiar to the princes of his race, at that immense North Sea, which separated him from his England, as it had formerly separated Mary Stuart from France. There, behind the trees of the beautiful wood of Scheveningen, on the fine sand upon which grows the golden broom of the down, Charles II. vegetated as it did, more unfortunate, for he had life and thought, and he hoped and despaired by turns.

D'Artagnan went once as far as Scheveningen, in order to be certain that all was true that was said of the king. He beheld Charles II., pensive and alone, coming out of a little door opening into the wood, and walking on the beach in the setting sun, without even attracting the attention of the fishermen, who, on their return in the evening, drew, like the ancient mariners of the Archipelago, their barks up upon the sand of the shore.

D'Artagnan recognized the king; he saw him fix his melancholy look upon the immense extent of the waters, and absorb upon his pale countenance the red rays of the sun already cut by the black line of the horizon. Then Charles returned to his isolated abode, always alone, slow and sad, amusing himself with making the friable and moving sand creak beneath his feet.

That very evening D'Artagnan hired for a thousand livres a fishing-boat worth four thousand. He paid a thousand livres down, and deposited the three thousand with a Burgomaster, after which he brought on board, without their being seen, the six men who formed his land army; and with the rising tide, at three o'clock in the morning, he got into the open sea, maneuvering ostensibly with the four others, and depending upon the science of his galley slave as upon that of the first pilot of the port.

CHAPTER XXIII.

In which the Author is forced to write a Little History.

While kings and men were thus occupied with England, which governed itself quite alone, and which, it must be said in its praise, had never been so badly governed, a man upon whom God had fixed his eye, and placed his finger, a man predestined to write his name in brilliant letters upon the page of history, was pursuing in the face of the world a work full of mystery and audacity. He went on, and no one knew whither he meant to go, although not only England, but France, and Europe, watched him marching with a firm step and head held high. All that was known of this man we are about to tell.

Monk had just declared himself in favor of the liberty of the Rump Parliament, a parliament which General Lambert, imitating Cromwell, whose lieutenant he had been, had just blocked up so closely, in order to bring it to his will, that no member, during all the blockade, was able to go out, and only one, Peter Wentworth, had been able to get in.

Lambert and Monk--everything was summed up in these two men; the first representing military despotism, the second pure republicanism. These men were the two sole political representatives of that revolution in which Charles I. had first lost his crown, and afterwards his head. As regarded Lambert, he did not dissemble his views; he sought to establish a military government, and to be himself the head of that government.

Monk, a rigid republican, some said, wished to maintain the Rump Parliament, that visible though degenerated representative of the republic. Monk, artful and ambitious, said others, wished simply to make of this parliament, which he affected to protect, a solid step by which to mount the throne which Cromwell had left empty, but upon which he had never dared to take his seat.

Thus Lambert by persecuting the parliament, and Monk by declaring for it, had mutually proclaimed themselves enemies of each other. Monk and Lambert, therefore, had at first thought of creating an army each for himself: Monk in Scotland, where were the Presbyterians and the royalists, that is to say, the malcontents; Lambert in London, where was found, as is always the case, the strongest opposition to the existing power which it had beneath its eyes.

Monk had pacified Scotland, he had there formed for himself an army, and found an asylum. The one watched the other. Monk knew that the day was not yet come, the day marked by the Lord for a great change; his sword, therefore, appeared glued to the sheath. Inexpugnable in his wild and mountainous Scotland, an absolute general, king of an army of eleven thousand old soldiers, whom he had more than once led on to victory; as well informed, nay, even better, of the affairs of London, than Lambert, who held garrison in the city,--such was the position of Monk, when, at a hundred leagues from London, he declared himself for the parliament. Lambert, on the contrary, as we have said, lived in the capital. That was the center of all his operations, and he there collected all around him all his friends, and all the people of the lower class, eternally inclined to cherish the enemies of constituted power.

It was then in London that Lambert learnt the support that, from the frontiers of Scotland, Monk lent to the parliament. He judged there was no time to be lost, and that the Tweed was not so far distant from the Thames that an army could not march from one river to the other, particularly when it was well commanded. He knew, besides, that as fast as the soldiers of Monk penetrated into England, they would form on their route that ball of snow, the emblem of the globe of fortune, which is for the ambitious nothing but a step growing unceasingly higher to conduct him to his object. He got together, therefore, his army, formidable at the same time for its composition and its numbers, and hastened to meet Monk, who, on his part, like a prudent navigator sailing amidst rocks, advanced by very short marches, listening to the reports which came from London.

The two armies came in sight of each other near Newcastle; Lambert, arriving first, encamped in the city itself. Monk, always circumspect, stopped where he was, and placed his general quarters at Coldstream, on the Tweed. The sight of Lambert spread joy through Monk's army, whilst, on the contrary, the sight of Monk threw disorder into Lambert's army. It might have been thought that these intrepid warriors, who had made such a noise in the streets of London, had set out with the hopes of meeting no one, and that now seeing that they had met an army, and that that army hoisted before them not only a standard, but still further, a cause and a principle,--it might have been believed, we say, that these intrepid warriors had begun to reflect that they were less good republicans than the soldiers of Monk, since the latter supported the parliament; whilst Lambert supported nothing, not even himself.

As to Monk, if he had had to reflect, or if he did reflect, it must have been after a sad fashion, for history relates--and that modest dame, it is well known, never lies--history relates, that the day of his arrival at Coldstream search was made in vain throughout the place for a single sheep.

If Monk had commanded an English army, that was enough to have brought about a general desertion. But it is not with the Scots as it is with the English, to whom that fluid flesh which is called blood is a paramount necessity; the Scots, a poor and sober race, live upon a little barley crushed between two stones, diluted with the water of the fountain, and cooked upon another stone, heated.

The Scots, their distribution of barley being made, cared very little whether there was or was not any meat in Coldstream. Monk, little accustomed to barley-cakes, was hungry, and his staff, at least as hungry as himself, looked with anxiety right and left, to know what was being prepared for supper.

Monk ordered search to be made; his scouts had on arriving in the place found it deserted and the cupboards empty; upon butchers and bakers it was of no use depending in Coldstream. The smallest morsel of bread, then, could not be found for the general’s table.

As accounts succeeded each other, all equally unsatisfactory, Monk, seeing terror and discouragement upon every face, declared that he was not hungry; besides, they should eat on the morrow, since Lambert was there probably with the intention of giving battle, and consequently would give up his provisions, if he were forced from Newcastle, or forever to relieve Monk’s soldiers from hunger if he conquered.

This consolation was only efficacious upon a very small number; but of what importance was it to Monk? for Monk was very absolute, under the appearance of the most perfect mildness. Every one, therefore, was obliged to be satisfied, or at least to appear so. Monk, quite as hungry as his people, but affecting perfect indifference for the absent mutton, cut a fragment of tobacco, half an inch long, from the carotte of a sergeant who formed part of his suite, and began to masticate the said fragment, assuring his lieutenant that hunger was a chimera, and that, besides, people were never hungry when they had anything to chew.

This joke satisfied some of those who had resisted Monk’s first deduction drawn from the neighborhood of Lambert’s army; the number of the dissentients diminished greatly; the guard took their posts, the patrols began, and the general continued his frugal repast beneath his open tent.

Between his camp and that of the enemy stood an old abbey, of which, at the present day, there only remain some ruins, but which then was in existence, and was called Newcastle Abbey. It was built upon a vast site, independent at once of the plain and of the river, because it was almost a marsh fed by springs and kept up by rains. Nevertheless, in the midst of these pools of water, covered with long grass, rushes, and reeds, were seen solid spots of ground, formerly used as the kitchen-garden, the park, the pleasure-gardens, and other dependencies of the abbey, looking like one of those great sea-spiders, whose body is round, whilst the claws go diverging round from this circumference.

The kitchen-garden, one of the longest claws of the abbey, extended to Monk’s camp. Unfortunately it was, as we have said, early in June, and the kitchen-garden, being abandoned, offered no resources.

Monk had ordered this spot to be guarded, as most subject to surprises. The fires of the enemy’s general were plainly to be perceived on the other side of the abbey. But between these fires and the abbey extended the Tweed, unfolding its luminous scales beneath the thick shade of tall green oaks. Monk was perfectly well acquainted with this position, Newcastle and its environs having already more than once been his headquarters. He knew that by this day his enemy might without doubt throw a few scouts into these ruins and promote a skirmish, but that by night he would take care to abstain from such a risk. He felt himself, therefore, in security.

Thus his soldiers saw him, after what he boastingly called his supper--that is to say, after the exercise of mastication reported by us at the commencement of this chapter--like Napoleon on the eve of Austerlitz, seated asleep in his rush chair, half beneath the light of his lamp, half beneath the reflection of the moon, commencing its ascent in the heavens, which denoted that it was nearly half past nine in the evening. All at once Monk was roused from his half sleep, fictitious perhaps, by a troop of soldiers, who came with joyous cries, and kicked the poles of his tent with a humming noise as if on purpose to wake him. There was no need of so much noise; the general opened his eyes quickly.

"Well, my children, what is going on now?" asked the general.

"General!" replied several voices at once, "General! you shall have some supper."

"I have had my supper, gentlemen," replied he quietly, "and was comfortably digesting it, as you see. But come in, and tell me what brings you hither."

"Good news, general."

"Bah! Has Lambert sent us word that he will fight to-morrow?"

"No; but we have just captured a fishing-boat conveying fish to Newcastle."

"And you have done very wrong, my friends. These gentlemen from London are delicate, must have their first course; you will put them sadly out of humor this evening, and to-morrow they will be pitiless. It would really be in good taste to send back to Lambert both his fish and his fishermen, unless--" and the general reflected an instant.

"Tell me," continued he, "what are these fishermen, if you please?"

"Some Picard seamen who were fishing on the coasts of France or Holland, and who have been thrown upon ours by a gale of wind."

"Do any among them speak our language?"

"The leader spoke some few words of English."

The mistrust of the general was awakened in proportion as fresh information reached him. "That is well," said he. "I wish to see these men; bring them to me."

An officer immediately went to fetch them.

"How many are there of them?" continued Monk; "and what is their vessel?"

"There are ten or twelve of them, general, and they were aboard of a kind of chasse-maree, as it is called--Dutch-built, apparently."

"And you say they were carrying fish to Lambert's camp?"

"Yes, general, and they seem to have had good luck in their fishing."

"Humph! We shall see that," said Monk.

At this moment the officer returned, bringing the leader of the fishermen with him. He was a man from fifty to fifty-five years old, but good-looking for his age. He was of middle height, and wore a justaucorps of coarse wool, a cap pulled down over his eyes, a cutlass hung from his belt, and he walked with the hesitation peculiar to sailors, who, never knowing, thanks to the movement of the vessel, whether their foot will be placed upon the plank or upon nothing, give to every one of their steps a fall as firm as if they were driving a pile. Monk, with an acute and penetrating look, examined the fisherman for some time, while the latter smiled, with that smile, half cunning, half silly, peculiar to French peasants.

“Do you speak English?” asked Monk, in excellent French.

“Ah! but badly, my lord,” replied the fisherman.

This reply was made much more with the lively and sharp accentuation of the people beyond the Loire, than with the slightly-drawling accent of the countries of the west and north of France.

“But you do speak it?” persisted Monk, in order to examine his accent once more.

“Eh! we men of the sea,” replied the fisherman, “speak a little of all languages.”

“Then you are a sea fisherman?”

“I am at present, my lord--a fisherman, and a famous fisherman, too. I have taken a barbel that weighs at least thirty pounds, and more than fifty mullets; I have also some little whitings that will fry beautifully.”

“You appear to me to have fished more frequently in the Gulf of Gascony than in the Channel,” said Monk, smiling.

“Well, I am from the south; but does that prevent me from being a good fisherman, my lord?”

“Oh! not at all; I shall buy your fish. And now speak frankly; for whom did you destine them?”

“My lord, I will conceal nothing from you. I was going to Newcastle, following the coast, when a party of horsemen who were passing along in an opposite direction made a sign to my bark to turn back to your honor’s camp, under penalty of a discharge of musketry. As I was not armed for fighting,” added the fisherman, smiling, “I was forced to submit.”

“And why did you go to Lambert’s camp in preference to mine?”

“My lord, I will be frank; will your lordship permit me?”

“Yes, and even if need be shall command you to be so.”

“Well, my lord, I was going to M. Lambert’s camp because those gentlemen from the city pay well--whilst your Scotchmen, Puritans, Presbyterians, Covenanters, or whatever you chose to call them, eat but little, and pay for nothing.”

Monk shrugged his shoulders, without, however, being able to refrain from smiling at the same time. “How is it that, being from the south, you come to fish on our coasts?”

“Because I have been fool enough to marry in Picardy.”

“Yes; but even Picardy is not England.”

“My lord, man shoves his boat into the sea, but God and the wind do the rest, and drive the boat where they please.”

“You had, then, no intention of landing on our coasts?”

“Never.”

“And what route were you steering?”

“We were returning from Ostend, where some mackerel had already been seen, when a sharp wind from the south drove us from our course; then, seeing that it was useless to struggle against it, we let it drive us. It then became necessary, not to lose our fish, which were good, to go and sell them at the nearest English port, and that was Newcastle. We were told the opportunity was good, as there was an increase of population in the camp, an increase of population in the city; both, we were told, were full of gentlemen, very rich and very hungry. So we steered our course towards Newcastle.”

“And your companions, where are they?”

“Oh, my companions have remained on board; they are sailors without the least instruction.”

“Whilst you--” said Monk.

“Who, I?” said the patron, laughing; “I have sailed about with my father; and I know what is called a sou, a crown, a pistole, a louis, and a double louis, in all the languages of Europe; my crew, therefore, listen to me as they would to an oracle, and obey me as if I were an admiral.”

“Then it was you who preferred M. Lambert as the best customer?”

“Yes, certainly. And, to be frank, my lord, was I wrong?”

“You will see that by and by.”

“At all events, my lord, if there is a fault, the fault is mine; and my comrades should not be dealt hardly with on that account.”

“This is decidedly an intelligent, sharp fellow,” thought Monk. Then, after a few minutes’ silence employed in scrutinizing the fisherman,--”You come from Ostend, did you not say?” asked the general.

“Yes, my lord, in a straight line.”

"You have then heard of the affairs of the day; for I have no doubt that both in France and Holland they excite interest. What is he doing who calls himself king of England?"

"Oh, my lord!" cried the fisherman, with loud and expansive frankness, "that is a lucky question, and you could not put it to anybody better than to me, for in truth I can make you a famous reply. Imagine, my lord, that when putting into Ostend to sell the few mackerel we had caught, I saw the ex-king walking on the downs waiting for his horses, which were to take him to the Hague. He is a rather tall, pale man, with black hair, and somewhat hard-featured. He looks ill, and I don't think the air of Holland agrees with him."

Monk followed with the greatest attention the rapid, heightened, and diffuse conversation of the fisherman, in a language which was not his own, but which, as we have said, he spoke with great facility. The fisherman, on his part, employed sometimes a French word, sometimes an English word, and sometimes a word which appeared not to belong to any language, but was, in truth, pure Gascon. Fortunately his eyes spoke for him, and that so eloquently, that it was possible to lose a word from his mouth, but not a single intention from his eyes. The general appeared more and more satisfied with his examination. "You must have heard that this ex-king, as you call him, was going to the Hague for some purpose?"

"Oh, yes," said the fisherman, "I heard that."

"And what was his purpose?"

"Always the same," said the fisherman. "Must he not always entertain the fixed idea of returning to England?"

"That is true," said Monk, pensively.

"Without reckoning," added the fisherman, "that the stadtholder--you know, my lord, William II.?--"

"Well?"

"He will assist him with all his power."

"Ah! did you hear that said?"

"No, but I think so."

"You are quite a politician, apparently," said Monk.

"Why, we sailors, my lord, who are accustomed to study the water and the air--that is to say, the two most changeable things in the world--are seldom deceived as to the rest."

"Now, then," said Monk, changing the conversation, "I am told you are going to provision us."

"I shall do my best, my lord."

"How much do you ask for your fish in the first place?"

"Not such a fool as to name a price, my lord."

"Why not?"

"Because my fish is yours."

"By what right?"

"By that of the strongest."

"But my intention is to pay you for it."

"That is very generous of you, my lord."

"And the worth of it--"

"My lord, I fix no price."

"What do you ask, then?"

"I only ask to be permitted to go away."

"Where?--to General Lambert's camp?"

"I!" cried the fisherman; "what should I go to Newcastle for, now I have no longer any fish?"

"At all events, listen to me."

"I do, my lord."

"I shall give you some advice."

"How, my lord!--pay me and give me good advice likewise! You overwhelm me, my lord."

Monk looked more earnestly than ever at the fisherman, about whom he still appeared to entertain some suspicion. "Yes, I shall pay you, and give you a piece of advice; for the two things are connected. If you return, then, to General Lambert--"

The fisherman made a movement of his head and shoulders, which signified, "If he persists in it, I won't contradict him."

"Do not cross the marsh," continued Monk: "you will have money in your pocket, and there are in the marsh some Scottish ambuscaders I have placed there. Those people are very intractable; they understand but very little of the language which you speak, although it appears to me to be composed of three languages. They might take from you what I have given you, and, on your return to your country, you would not fail to say that General Monk has two hands, the one Scottish, and the other English; and that he takes back with the Scottish hand what he has given with the English hand.”

“Oh! general, I shall go where you like, be sure of that,” said the fisherman, with a fear too expressive not to be exaggerated. “I only wish to remain here, if you will allow me to remain.”

“I readily believe you,” said Monk, with an imperceptible smile, “but I cannot, nevertheless, keep you in my tent.”

“I have no such wish, my lord, and desire only that your lordship should point out where you will have me posted. Do not trouble yourself about us--with us a night soon passes away.”

“You shall be conducted to your bark.”

“As your lordship pleases. Only, if your lordship would allow me to be taken back by a carpenter, I should be extremely grateful.”

“Why so?”

“Because the gentlemen of your army, in dragging my boat up the river with a cable pulled by their horses, have battered it a little upon the rocks of the shore, so that I have at least two feet of water in my hold, my lord.”

“The greater reason why you should watch your boat, I think.”

“My lord, I am quite at your orders,” said the fisherman; “I shall empty my baskets where you wish; then you will pay me, if you please to do so; and you will send me away, if it appears right to you. You see I am very easily managed and pleased, my lord.”

“Come, come, you are a very good sort of fellow,” said Monk, whose scrutinizing glance had not been able to find a single shade in the clear eye of the fisherman. “Holloa, Digby!” An aid-de-camp appeared. “You will conduct this good fellow and his companions to the little tents of the canteens, in front of the marshes, so that they will be near their bark, and yet will not sleep on board to-night. What is the matter, Spithead?”

Spithead was the sergeant from whom Monk had borrowed a piece of tobacco for his supper. Spithead having entered the general’s tent without being sent for, had drawn this question from Monk.

“My lord,” said he, “a French gentleman has just presented himself at the outposts and wishes to speak to your honor.”

All this was said, be it understood, in English; but, notwithstanding, it produced a slight emotion in the fisherman, which Monk, occupied with his sergeant, did not remark.

“Who is the gentleman?” asked Monk.

“My lord,” replied Spithead, “he told it me; but those devils of French names are so difficult to pronounce for a Scottish throat, that I could not retain it. I believe, however, from what the guards say, that it is the same gentleman who presented himself yesterday at the halt, and whom your honor would not receive.”

“That is true; I was holding a council of officers.”

“Will your honor give any orders respecting this gentleman?”

“Yes, let him be brought here.”

“Must we take any precautions?”

“Such as what?”

“Blinding his eyes, for instance?”

“To what purpose? He can only see what I desire should be seen; that is to say, that I have around me eleven thousand brave men, who ask no better than to have their throats cut in honor of the parliament of Scotland and England.”

“And this man, my lord?” said Spithead, pointing to the fisherman, who, during this conversation, had remained standing and motionless, like a man who sees but does not understand.

“Ah, that is true,” said Monk. Then turning towards the fisherman,--”I shall see you again, my brave fellow,” said he; “I have selected a lodging for you. Digby, take him to it. Fear nothing; your money shall be sent to you presently.”

“Thank you, my lord,” said the fisherman, and after having bowed, he left the tent, accompanied by Digby. Before he had gone a hundred paces he found his companions, who were whispering with a volubility which did not appear exempt from uneasiness, but he made them a sign which seemed to reassure them. “Hola, you fellows!” said the patron, “come this way. His lordship, General Monk, has the generosity to pay us for our fish, and the goodness to give us hospitality for to-night.”

The fishermen gathered round their leader, and, conducted by Digby, the little troop proceeded towards the canteens, the post, as may be remembered, which had been assigned them. As they went along in the dark, the fishermen passed close to the guards who were conducting the French gentleman to General Monk. This gentleman was on horseback and enveloped in a large cloak, which prevented the patron from seeing him, however great his curiosity might be. As to the gentleman, ignorant that he was elbowing compatriots, he did not pay any attention to the little troop.

The aid-de-camp settled his guests in a tolerably comfortable tent, from which was dislodged an Irish canteen woman, who went, with her six children, to sleep where she could. A large fire was burning in front of this tent, and threw its purple light over the grassy pools of the marsh, rippled by a fresh breeze. The arrangements made, the aid-de-camp wished the fishermen good-night, calling to their notice that they might see from the door of the tent the masts of their bark, which was tossing gently on the Tweed, a proof that it had not yet sunk. The sight of this appeared to delight the leader of the fishermen infinitely.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Treasure.

The French gentleman whom Spithead had announced to Monk, and who, closely wrapped in his cloak, had passed by the fishermen who left the general’s tent five minutes before he entered it,--the French gentleman went through the various posts without even casting his eyes around him, for fear of appearing indiscreet. As the order had been given, he was conducted to the tent of the general. The gentleman was left alone in the sort of ante-chamber in front of the principal body of the tent, where he awaited Monk, who only delayed till he had heard the report of his people, and observed through the opening of the canvas the countenance of the person who solicited an audience.

Without doubt, the report of those who had accompanied the French gentleman established the discretion with which he had behaved, for the first impression the stranger received of the welcome made him by the general was more favorable than he could have expected at such a moment, and on the part of so suspicious a man. Nevertheless, according to his custom, when Monk found himself in the presence of a stranger, he fixed upon him his penetrating eyes, which scrutiny, the stranger, on his part, sustained without embarrassment or notice. At the end of a few seconds, the general made a gesture with his hand and head in sign of attention.

“My lord,” said the gentleman, in excellent English, “I have requested an interview with your honor, for an affair of importance.”

“Monsieur,” replied Monk, in French, “you speak our language well for a son of the continent. I ask your pardon--for doubtless the question is indiscreet--do you speak French with the same purity?”

“There is nothing surprising, my lord, in my speaking English tolerably; I resided for some time in England in my youth, and since then I have made two voyages to this country.” These words were spoken in French, and with a purity of accent that bespoke not only a Frenchman, but a Frenchman from the vicinity of Tours.

“And what part of England have you resided in, monsieur?”

"In my youth, London, my lord; then, about 1635, I made a pleasure trip to Scotland; and lastly, in 1648, I lived for some time at Newcastle, particularly in the convent, the gardens of which are now occupied by your army."

"Excuse me, monsieur; but you must comprehend that these questions are necessary on my part--do you not?"

"It would astonish me, my lord, if they were not asked."

"Now, then, monsieur, what can I do to serve you? What do you wish?"

"This, my lord;--but, in the first place, are we alone?"

"Perfectly so, monsieur, except, of course, the post which guards us." So saying, Monk pulled open the canvas with his hand, and pointed to the soldier placed at ten paces from the tent, and who, at the first call, could have rendered assistance in a second.

"In that case, my lord," said the gentleman, in as calm a tone as if he had been for a length of time in habits of intimacy with his interlocutor, "I have made up my mind to address myself to you, because I believe you to be an honest man. Indeed, the communication I am about to make to you will prove to you the esteem in which I hold you."

Monk, astonished at this language, which established between him and the French gentleman equality at least, raised his piercing eye to the stranger's face, and with a sensible irony conveyed by the inflection of his voice alone, for not a muscle of his face moved,--"I thank you, monsieur," said he; "but, in the first place, to whom have I the honor of speaking?"

"I sent you my name by your sergeant, my lord."

"Excuse him, monsieur, he is a Scotsman,--he could not retain it."

"I am called the Comte de la Fere, monsieur," said Athos, bowing.

"The Comte de la Fere?" said Monk, endeavoring to recollect the name. "Pardon me, monsieur, but this appears to be the first time I have ever heard that name. Do you fill any post at the court of France?"

"None; I am a simple gentleman."

"What dignity?"

"King Charles I. made me a knight of the Garter, and Queen Anne of Austria has given me the cordon of the Holy Ghost. These are my only dignities."

"The Garter! the Holy Ghost! Are you a knight of those two orders, monsieur?"

"Yes."

“And on what occasions have such favors been bestowed upon you?”

“For services rendered to their majesties.”

Monk looked with astonishment at this man, who appeared to him so simple and so great at the same time. Then, as if he had renounced endeavoring to penetrate this mystery of a simplicity and grandeur upon which the stranger did not seem disposed to give him any other information than that which he had already received,--”Did you present yourself yesterday at our advanced posts?”

“And was sent back? Yes, my lord.”

“Many officers, monsieur, would permit no one to enter their camp, particularly on the eve of a probable battle. But I differ from my colleagues, and like to leave nothing behind me. Every advice is good to me; all danger is sent to me by God, and I weigh it in my hand with the energy He has given me. So, yesterday, you were only sent back on account of the council I was holding. To-day I am at liberty,--speak.”

“My lord, you have done much better in receiving me, for what I have to say has nothing to do with the battle you are about to fight with General Lambert, or with your camp; and the proof is, that I turned away my head that I might not see your men, and closed my eyes that I might not count your tents. No, I came to speak to you, my lord, on my own account.”

“Speak then, monsieur,” said Monk.

“Just now,” continued Athos, “I had the honor of telling your lordship that for a long time I lived in Newcastle; it was in the time of Charles I., and when the king was given up to Cromwell by the Scots.”

“I know,” said Monk, coldly.

“I had at that time a large sum in gold, and on the eve of the battle, from a presentiment perhaps of the turn which things would take on the morrow, I concealed it in the principal vault of the covenant of Newcastle, in the tower whose summit you now see silvered by the moonbeams. My treasure has then remained interred there, and I have come to entreat your honor to permit me to withdraw it before, perhaps, the battle turning that way, a mine or some other war engine has destroyed the building and scattered my gold, or rendered it so apparent that the soldiers will take possession of it.”

Monk was well acquainted with mankind; he saw in the physiognomy of this gentleman all the energy, all the reason, all the circumspection possible; he could therefore only attribute to a magnanimous confidence the revelation the Frenchman had made him, and he showed himself profoundly touched by it.

“Monsieur,” said he, “you have augured well of me. But is the sum worth the trouble to which you expose yourself? Do you even believe that it can be in the same place where you left it?”

“It is there monsieur, I do not doubt.”

“That is a reply to one question; but to the other. I asked you if the sum was so large as to warrant your exposing yourself thus.”

“It is really large; yes, my lord, for it is a million I inclosed in two barrels.”

“A million!” cried Monk, at whom this time, in turn, Athos looked earnestly and long. Monk perceived this, and his mistrust returned.

“Here is a man,” said he to himself, “who is laying a snare for me. So you wish to withdraw this money, monsieur,” replied he, “as I understand?”

“If you please, my lord.”

“To-day?”

“This very evening, and that on account of the circumstances I have named.”

“But, monsieur,” objected Monk, “General Lambert is as near the abbey where you have to act as I am. Why, then, have you not addressed yourself to him?”

“Because, my lord, when one acts in important matters, it is best to consult one’s instinct before everything. Well, General Lambert does not inspire with me so much confidence as you do.”

“Be it so, monsieur. I shall assist you in recovering your money, if, however, it can still be there; for that is far from likely. Since 1648 twelve years have rolled away, and many events have taken place.” Monk dwelt upon this point to see if the French gentleman would seize the evasions that were open to him, but Athos did not hesitate.

“I assure you, my lord,” he said firmly, “that my conviction is, that the two barrels have neither changed place nor master.” This reply had removed one suspicion from the mind of Monk, but it had suggested another. Without doubt this Frenchman was some emissary sent to entice into error the protector of the parliament; the gold was nothing but a lure; and by the help of this lure they thought to excite the cupidity of the general. This gold might not exist. It was Monk’s business, then, to seize the Frenchman in the act of falsehood and trick, and to draw from the false step itself in which his enemies wished to entrap him, a triumph for his renown. When Monk was determined how to act,--

“Monsieur,” said he to Athos, “without doubt you will do me the honor to share my supper this evening?”

“Yes, my lord,” replied Athos, bowing; “for you do me an honor of which I feel myself worthy, by the inclination which drew me towards you.”

“It is so much the more gracious on your part to accept my invitation with such frankness, as my cooks are but few and inexperienced, and my providers have returned this evening empty-handed; so that if it had not been for a fisherman of your nation who strayed into our camp, General Monk would have gone to bed without his supper to-day; I have, then, some fresh fish to offer you, as the vendor assures me.”

“My lord, it is principally for the sake of having the honor to pass an hour with you.”

After this exchange of civilities, during which Monk had lost nothing of his circumspection, the supper, or what was to serve for one, had been laid upon a deal table. Monk invited the Comte de la Fere to be seated at this table, and took his place opposite to him. A single dish of boiled fish, set before the two illustrious guests, was more tempting to hungry stomachs than to delicate palates.

Whilst supping, that is, while eating the fish, washed down with bad ale, Monk got Athos to relate to him the last events of the Fronde, the reconciliation of M. de Conde with the king, and the probable marriage of the infanta of Spain; but he avoided, as Athos himself avoided it, all allusion to the political interests which united, or rather which disunited at this time, England, France and Holland.

Monk, in this conversation, convinced himself of one thing, which he must have remarked after the first words exchanged: that was, that he had to deal with a man of high distinction. He could not be an assassin, and it was repugnant to Monk to believe him to be a spy; but there was sufficient finesse and at the same time firmness in Athos to lead Monk to fancy he was a conspirator. When they had quitted the table, “You still believe in your treasure, then, monsieur?” asked Monk.

“Yes, my lord.”

“Quite seriously?”

“Seriously.”

“And you think you can find the place again where it was buried?”

“At the first inspection.”

“Well, monsieur, from curiosity I shall accompany you. And it is so much the more necessary that I should accompany you, that you would find great difficulties in passing through the camp without me or one of my lieutenants.”

“General, I would not suffer you to inconvenience yourself if I did not, in fact, stand in need of your company; but as I recognize that this company is not only honorable, but necessary, I accept it.”

“Do you desire we should take any people with us?” asked Monk.

“General, I believe that would be useless, if you yourself do not see the necessity for it. Two men and a horse will suffice to transport the two casks on board the felucca which brought me hither.”

“But it will be necessary to pick, dig, and remove the earth, and split stones; you don’t intend doing this work yourself, monsieur, do you?”

“General, there is no picking or digging required. The treasure is buried in the sepulchral vault of the convent, under a stone in which is fixed a large iron ring, and under which there are four steps leading down. The two casks are there, placed end to end, covered with a coat of plaster in the form of a bier. There is, besides, an inscription, which will enable me to recognize the stone; and as I am not willing, in an affair of delicacy and confidence, to keep the secret from your honor, here is the inscription:--’Hic jacet venerabilis, Petrus Gulielmus Scott, Canon Honorab. Conventus Novi Castelli. Obiit quarta et decima Feb. ann. Dom. MCCVIII. Requiescat in pace.’“

Monk did not lose a single word. He was astonished either at the marvelous duplicity of this man and the superior style in which he played his part, or at the good loyal faith with which he presented his request, in a situation in which concerning a million of money, risked against the blow from a dagger, amidst an army that would have looked upon the theft as a restitution.

“Very well,” said he; “I shall accompany you; and the adventure appears to me so wonderful, that I shall carry the torch myself.” And saying these words, he girded on a short sword, placed a pistol in his belt, disclosing in this movement, which opened his doublet a little, the fine rings of a coat of mail, destined to protect him from the first dagger-thrust of an assassin. After which he took a Scottish dirk in his left hand, and then turning to Athos, “Are you ready, monsieur?” said he.

"I am."

Athos, as if in opposition to what Monk had done, unfastened his poniard, which he placed upon the table; unhooked his sword-belt, which he laid close to his poniard; and, without affectation, opening his doublet as if to look for his handkerchief, showed beneath his fine cambric shirt his naked breast, without weapons either offensive or defensive.

"This is truly a singular man," said Monk; "he is without any arms; he has an ambuscade placed somewhere yonder."

"General," said he, as if he had divined Monk's thought, "you wish we should be alone; that is very right, but a great captain ought never to expose himself with temerity. It is night, the passage of the marsh may present dangers; be accompanied."

"You are right," replied he, calling Digby. The aid-de-camp appeared. "Fifty men with swords and muskets," said he, looking at Athos.

"That is too few if there is danger, too many if there is not."

"I will go alone," said Monk; "I want nobody. Come, monsieur."

CHAPTER XXV.

The Marsh.

Athos and Monk passed over, in going from the camp towards the Tweed, that part of the ground which Digby had traversed with the fishermen coming from the Tweed to the camp. The aspect of this place, the aspect of the changes man had wrought in it, was of a nature to produce a great effect upon a lively and delicate imagination like that of Athos. Athos looked at nothing but these desolate spots; Monk looked at nothing but Athos--at Athos, who, with his eyes sometimes directed towards heaven, and sometimes towards the earth, sought, thought, and sighed.

Digby, whom the last orders of the general, and particularly the accent with which he had given them, had at first a little excited, Digby followed the pair at about twenty paces, but the general having turned round as if astonished to find his orders had not been obeyed, the aid-de-camp perceived his indiscretion, and returned to his tent.

He supposed that the general wished to make, incognito, one of those reviews of vigilance which every experienced captain never fails to make on the eve of a decisive engagement: he explained to himself the presence of Athos in this case as an inferior explains all that is mysterious on the part of his leader. Athos might be, and, indeed, in the eyes of Digby, must be, a spy, whose information was to enlighten the general.

At the end of a walk of about ten minutes among the tents and posts, which were closer together near the headquarters, Monk entered upon a little causeway which diverged into three branches. That on the left led to the river, that in the middle to Newcastle Abbey on the marsh, that on the right crossed the first lines of Monk’s camp; that is to say, the lines nearest to Lambert’s army. Beyond the river was an advanced post, belonging to Monk’s army, which watched the enemy; it was composed of one hundred and fifty Scots. They had swum across the Tweed, and, in case of attack, were to recross it in the same manner, giving the alarm; but as there was no post at that spot, and as Lambert’s soldiers were not so prompt at taking to the water as Monk’s were, the latter appeared not to have as much uneasiness on that side. On this side of the river, at about five hundred paces from the old abbey, the fishermen had taken up their abode amidst a crowd of small tents raised by soldiers of the neighboring clans, who had with them their wives and children. All this confusion, seen by the moon's light, presented a striking coup d'oeil; the half shadow enlarged every detail, and the light, that flatterer which only attaches itself to the polished side of things, courted upon each rusty musket the point still left intact, and upon every rag of canvas the whitest and least sullied part.

Monk arrived then with Athos, crossing this spot, illumined with a double light, the silver splendor of the moon, and the red blaze of the fires at the meeting of these three causeways; there he stopped, and addressing his companion,--"Monsieur," said he, "do you know your road?"

"General, if I am not mistaken, the middle causeway leads straight to the abbey."

"That is right; but we shall want lights to guide us in the vaults." Monk turned round.

"Ah! I thought Digby was following us!" said he. "So much the better; he will procure us what we want."

"Yes, general, there is a man yonder who has been walking behind us for some time."

"Digby!" cried Monk. "Digby! come here, if you please."

But instead of obeying, the shadow made a motion of surprise, and, retreating instead of advancing, it bent down and disappeared along the jetty on the left, directing its course towards the lodging of the fishermen.

"It appears not to be Digby," said Monk.

Both had followed the shadow which had vanished. But it was not so rare a thing for a man to be wandering about at eleven o'clock at night, in a camp in which are reposing ten or eleven thousand men, as to give Monk and Athos any alarm at his disappearance.

"As it is so," said Monk, "and we must have a light, a lantern, a torch, or something by which we may see where to see our feet; let us seek this light."

"General, the first soldier we meet will light us."

"No," said Monk, in order to discover if there were not any connivance between the Comte de la Fere and the fisherman. "No, I should prefer one of these French sailors who came this evening to sell me their fish. They leave to-morrow, and the secret will be better kept by them; whereas, if a report should be spread in the Scottish army, that treasures are to be found in the abbey of Newcastle, my Highlanders will believe there is a million concealed beneath every slab, and they will not leave stone upon stone in the building."

"Do as you think best, general," replied Athos, in a natural tone of voice, making evident that soldier or fisherman was the same to him, and that he had no preference.

Monk approached the causeway behind which had disappeared the person he had taken for Digby, and met a patrol who, making the tour of the tents, was going towards headquarters; he was stopped with his companion, gave the password, and went on. A soldier, roused by the noise, unrolled his plaid, and looked up to see what was going forward. "Ask him," said Monk to Athos, "where the fishermen are; if I were to speak to him, he would know me."

Athos went up to the soldier, who pointed out the tent to him; immediately Monk and Athos turned towards it. It appeared to the general that at the moment they came up, a shadow like that they had already seen, glided into this tent; but on drawing nearer he perceived he must have been mistaken, for all of them were asleep pele mele, and nothing was seen but arms and legs joined, crossed, and mixed. Athos, fearing lest he should be suspected of connivance with some of his compatriots, remained outside the tent.

"Hola!" said Monk, in French, "wake up here." Two or three of the sleepers got up.

"I want a man to light me," continued Monk.

"Your honor may depend on us," said a voice which made Athos start. "Where do you wish us to go?"

"You shall see. A light! come, quickly!"

"Yes, your honor. Does it please your honor that I should accompany you?"

"You or another; it is of very little consequence, provided I have a light."

"It is strange!" thought Athos; "what a singular voice that man has!"

"Some fire, you fellows!" cried the fisherman; "come, make haste!"

Then addressing his companion nearest to him in a low voice:--"Get ready a light, Menneville," said he, "and hold yourself ready for anything."

One of the fishermen struck light from a stone, set fire to some tinder, and by the aid of a match lit a lantern. The light immediately spread all over the tent.

“Are you ready, monsieur?” said Monk to Athos, who had turned away, not to expose his face to the light.

“Yes, general,” replied he.

“Ah! the French gentleman!” said the leader of the fishermen to himself. “Peste! I have a great mind to charge you with the commission, Menneville; he may know me. Light! light!” This dialogue was pronounced at the back of the tent, and in so low a voice that Monk could not hear a syllable of it; he was, besides, talking with Athos. Menneville got himself ready in the meantime, or rather received the orders of his leader.

“Well?” said Monk.

“I am ready, general,” said the fisherman.

Monk, Athos, and the fisherman left the tent.

“It is impossible!” thought Athos. “What dream could put that into my head?”

“Go forward; follow the middle causeway, and stretch out your legs,” said Monk to the fisherman.

They were not twenty paces on their way when the same shadow that had appeared to enter the tent came out of it again, crawled along as far as the piles, and, protected by that sort of parapet placed along the causeway, carefully observed the march of the general. All three disappeared in the night haze. They were walking towards Newcastle, the white stones of which appeared to them like sepulchers. After standing for a few seconds under the porch, they penetrated into the interior. The door had been broken open by hatchets. A post of four men slept in safety in a corner, so certain were they that the attack would not take place on that side.

“Will not these men be in your way?” said Monk to Athos.

“On the contrary, monsieur, they will assist in rolling out the barrels, if your honor will permit them.”

“You are right.”

The post, though fast asleep, roused up at the first steps of the three visitors amongst the briars and grass that invaded the porch. Monk gave the password, and penetrated into the interior of the convent, preceded by the light. He walked last, watching the least movement of Athos, his naked dirk in his sleeve, and ready to plunge it into the back of the gentleman at the first suspicious gesture he should see him make. But Athos, with a firm and sure step, crossed the chambers and courts.

Not a door, not a window was left in the building. The doors had been burnt, some on the spot, and the charcoal of them was still jagged with the action of the fire, which had gone out of itself, powerless, no doubt, to get to the heart of those massive joints of oak fastened together with iron nails. As to the windows, all the panes having been broken, night birds, alarmed by the torch, flew away through their holes. At the same time, gigantic bats began to trace their vast, silent circles around the intruders, whilst the light of the torch made their shadows tremble on the high stone walls. Monk concluded that there could be no man in the convent, since wild beasts and birds were there still, and fled away at his approach.

After having passed the rubbish, and torn away more than one branch of ivy that had made itself a guardian of the solitude, Athos arrived at the vaults situated beneath the great hall, but the entrance of which was from the chapel. There he stopped. “Here we are, general,” said he.

“This, then, is the slab?”

“Yes.”

“Ay, and here is the ring--but the ring is sealed into the stone.”

“We must have a lever.”

“That’s a very easy thing to find.”

Whilst looking around them, Athos and Monk perceived a little ash of about three inches in diameter, which had shot up in an angle of the wall, reaching a window, concealed by its branches.

“Have you a knife?” said Monk to the fisherman.

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Cut down this tree, then.”

The fisherman obeyed, but not without notching his cutlass. When the ash was cut and fashioned into the shape of a lever, the three men penetrated into the vault.

“Stop where you are,” said Monk to the fisherman. “We are going to dig up some powder; your light may be dangerous.”

The man drew back in a sort of terror, and faithfully kept to the post assigned him, whilst Monk and Athos turned behind a column at the foot of which, penetrating through a crack, was a moonbeam, reflected exactly on the stone which the Comte de la Fere had come so far in search.

“This is it,” said Athos, pointing out to the general the Latin inscription.

“Yes,” said Monk.

Then, as if still willing to leave the Frenchman one means of evasion,--

“Do you not observe that this vault has already been broken into,” continued he, “and that several statues have already been knocked down?”

“My lord, you have, without doubt, heard that the religious respect of your Scots loves to confide to the statues of the dead the valuable objects they have possessed during their lives. Therefore, the soldiers had reason to think that under the pedestals of the statues which ornament most of these tombs, a treasure was hidden. They have consequently broken down pedestal and statue: but the tomb of the venerable cannon, with which we have to do, is not distinguished by any monument. It is simple, therefore it has been protected by the superstitious fear which your Puritans have always had of sacrilege. Not a morsel of the masonry of this tomb has been chipped off.”

“That is true,” said Monk.

Athos seized the lever.

“Shall I help you?” said Monk.

“Thank you, my lord; but I am not willing that your honor should lend your hand to a work of which, perhaps, you would not take the responsibility if you knew the probable consequences of it.”

Monk raised his head.

“What do you mean by that, monsieur?”

“I mean--but that man--”

“Stop,” said Monk; “I perceive what you are afraid of. I shall make a trial.” Monk turned towards the fisherman, the whole of whose profile was thrown upon the wall.

“Come here, friend!” said he in English, and in a tone of command.

The fisherman did not stir.

“That is well,” continued he: “he does not know English. Speak to me, then, in English, if you please, monsieur.”

“My lord,” replied Athos, “I have frequently seen men in certain circumstances have sufficient command over themselves not to reply to a question put to them in a language they understood. The fisherman is perhaps more learned than we believe him to be. Send him away, my lord, I beg you.”

“Decidedly,” said Monk, “he wishes to have me alone in this vault. Never mind, we shall go through with it; one man is as good as another man; and we are alone. My friend,” said Monk to the fisherman, “go back up the stairs we have just descended, and watch that nobody comes to disturb us.”

The fisherman made a sign of obedience. “Leave your torch,” said Monk; “it would betray your presence, and might procure you a musket-ball.”

The fisherman appeared to appreciate the counsel; he laid down the light, and disappeared under the vault of the stairs. Monk took up the torch, and brought it to the foot of the column.

“Ah, ah!” said he; “money, then, is concealed under this tomb?”

“Yes, my lord; and in five minutes you will no longer doubt it.”

At the same time Athos struck a violent blow upon the plaster, which split, presenting a chink for the point of the lever. Athos introduced the bar into this crack, and soon large pieces of plaster yielded, rising up like rounded slabs. Then the Comte de la Fere seized the stones and threw them away with a force that hands so delicate as his might not have been supposed capable of having.

“My lord,” said Athos, “this is plainly the masonry of which I told your honor.”

“Yes; but I do not yet see the casks,” said Monk.

“If I had a dagger,” said Athos, looking round him, “you should soon see them, monsieur. Unfortunately, I left mine in your tent.”

“I would willingly offer you mine,” said Monk, “but the blade is too thin for such work.”

Athos appeared to look around him for a thing of some kind that might serve as a substitute for the weapon he desired. Monk did not lose one of the movements of his hands, or one of the expressions of his eyes. “Why do you not ask the fisherman for his cutlass?” said Monk; “he has a cutlass.”

“Ah! that is true,” said Athos; “for he cut the tree down with it.” And he advanced towards the stairs.

“Friend,” said he to the fisherman, “throw me down your cutlass, if you please; I want it.”

The noise of the falling weapon sounded on the steps.

“Take it,” said Monk; “it is a solid instrument, as I have seen, and a strong hand might make good use of it.”

Athos appeared only to give to the words of Monk the natural and simple sense under which they were to be heard and understood. Nor did he remark, or at least appear to remark, that when he returned with the weapon, Monk drew back, placing his left hand on the stock of his pistol; in the right he already held his dirk. He went to work then, turning his back to Monk, placing his life in his hands, without possible defense. He then struck, during several seconds, so skillfully and sharply upon the intermediary plaster, that it separated into two parts, and Monk was able to discern two barrels placed end to end, and which their weight maintained motionless in their chalky envelope.

“My lord,” said Athos, “you see that my presentiments have not been disappointed.”

“Yes, monsieur,” said Monk, “and I have good reason to believe you are satisfied; are you not?”

“Doubtless I am; the loss of this money would have been inexpressibly great to me: but I was certain that God, who protects the good cause, would not have permitted this gold, which should procure its triumph, to be diverted to baser purposes.

“You are, upon my honor, as mysterious in your words as in your actions, monsieur,” said Monk. “Just now as I did not perfectly understand you when you said that you were not willing to throw upon me the responsibility of the work we were accomplishing.”

“I had reason to say so, my lord.”

“And now you speak to me of the good cause. What do you mean by the words ‘the good cause?’ We are defending at this moment, in England, five or six causes, which does not prevent every one from considering his own not only as the good cause, but as the best. What is yours, monsieur? Speak boldly, that we may see if, upon this point, to which you appear to attach a great importance, we are of the same opinion.”

Athos fixed upon Monk one of those penetrating looks which seemed to convey to him to whom they are directed a challenge to conceal a single one of his thoughts; then, taking off his hat, he began in a solemn voice, while his interlocutor, with one hand upon his visage, allowed that long and nervous hand to compress his mustache and beard, while his vague and melancholy eye wandered about the recesses of the vaults.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Heart and Mind.

My lord," said the Comte de la Fere, "you are an noble Englishman, you are a loyal man; you are speaking to a noble Frenchman, to a man of heart. The gold contained in these two casks before us, I have told you was mine. I was wrong--it is the first lie I have pronounced in my life, a temporary lie, it is true. This gold is the property of King Charles II., exiled from his country, driven from his palaces, the orphan at once of his father and his throne, and deprived of everything, even of the melancholy happiness of kissing on his knees the stone upon which the hands of his murderers have written that simple epitaph which will eternally cry out for vengeance upon them:--'HERE LIES CHARLES I.'"

Monk grew slightly pale, and an imperceptible shudder crept over his skin and raised his gray mustache.

"I," continued Athos, "I, Comte de la Fere, the last, only faithful friend the poor abandoned prince has left, I have offered him to come hither to find the man upon whom now depends the fate of royalty and of England; and I have come, and placed myself under the eye of this man, and have placed myself naked and unarmed in his hands, saying:--'My lord, here are the last resources of a prince whom God made your master, whom his birth made your king; upon you, and you alone, depend his life and future. Will you employ this money in consoling England for the evils it must have suffered from anarchy; that is to say, will you aid, and if not aid, will you allow King Charles II. to act? You are master, you are king, all-powerful master and king, for chance sometimes defeats the work of time and God. I am here alone with you, my lord: if divided success alarms you, if my complicity annoys you, you are armed, my lord, and here is a grave ready dug; if, on the contrary, the enthusiasm of your cause carries you away, if you are what you appear to be, if your hand in what it undertakes obeys your mind, and your mind your heart, here are the means of ruining forever the cause of your enemy, Charles Stuart. Kill, then, the man you have before you, for that man will never return to him who has sent him without bearing with him the deposit which Charles I., his father, confided to him, and keep the gold which may assist in carrying on the civil war. Alas! my lord, it is the fate of this unfortunate prince. He must either corrupt or kill, for everything resists him, everything repulses him, everything is hostile to him; and yet he is marked with divine seal, and he must, not to belie his blood, reascend the throne, or die upon the sacred soil of his country.'

"My lord, you have heard me. To any other but the illustrious man who listens to me, I would have said: 'My lord, you are poor; my lord, the king offers you this million as an earnest of an immense bargain; take it, and serve Charles II. as I served Charles I., and I feel assured that God, who listens to us, who sees us, who alone reads in your heart, shut up from all human eyes,--I am assured God will give you a happy eternal life after death.' But to General Monk, to the illustrious man of whose standard I believe I have taken measure, I say: 'My lord, there is for you in the history of peoples and kings a brilliant place, an immortal, imperishable glory, if alone, without any other interest but the good of your country and the interests of justice, you become the supporter of your king. Many others have been conquerors and glorious usurpers; you, my lord, you will be content with being the most virtuous, the most honest, and the most incorruptible of men: you will have held a crown in your hand, and instead of placing it upon your own brow, you will have deposited it upon the head of him for whom it was made. Oh, my lord, act thus, and you will leave to posterity the most enviable of names, in which no human creature can rival you.'"

Athos stopped. During the whole time that the noble gentleman was speaking, Monk had not given one sign of either approbation or disapprobation; scarcely even, during this vehement appeal, had his eyes been animated with that fire which bespeaks intelligence. The Comte de la Fere looked at him sorrowfully, and on seeing that melancholy countenance, felt discouragement penetrate to his very heart. At length Monk appeared to recover, and broke the silence.

"Monsieur," said he, in a mild, calm tone, "in reply to you, I will make use of your own words. To any other but yourself I would reply by expulsion, imprisonment, or still worse, for, in fact, you tempt me and you force me at the same time. But you are one of those men, monsieur, to whom it is impossible to refuse the attention and respect they merit; you are a brave gentleman, monsieur--I say so, and I am a judge. You just now spoke of a deposit which the late king transmitted through you to his son--are you, then, one of those Frenchmen who, as I have heard, endeavored to carry off Charles I. from Whitehall?”

“Yes, my lord; it was I who was beneath the scaffold during the execution; I, who had not been able to redeem it, received upon my brow the blood of the martyred king. I received, at the same time, the last word of Charles I.; it was to me he said, ‘REMEMBER!’ and in saying, ‘Remember!’ he alluded to the money at your feet, my lord.”

“I have heard much of you, monsieur,” said Monk, “but I am happy to have, in the first place, appreciated you by my own observations, and not by my remembrances. I will give you, then, explanations that I have given to no other, and you will appreciate what a distinction I make between you and the persons who have hitherto been sent to me.”

Athos bowed and prepared to absorb greedily the words which fell, one by one, from the mouth of Monk,--those words rare and precious as the dew in the desert.

“You spoke to me,” said Monk, “of Charles II.; but pray, monsieur, of what consequence to me is that phantom of a king? I have grown old in a war and in a policy which are nowadays so closely linked together, that every man of the sword must fight in virtue of his rights or his ambition with a personal interest, and not blindly behind an officer, as in ordinary wars. For myself, I perhaps desire nothing, but I fear much. In the war of to-day rests the liberty of England, and, perhaps, that of every Englishman. How can you expect that I, free in the position I have made for myself, should go willingly and hold out my hands to the shackles of a stranger? That is all Charles is to me. He has fought battles here which he has lost, he is therefore a bad captain; he has succeeded in no negotiation, he is therefore a bad diplomatist; he has paraded his wants and his miseries in all the courts of Europe, he has therefore a weak and pusillanimous heart. Nothing noble, nothing great, nothing strong has hitherto emanated from that genius which aspires to govern one of the greatest kingdoms of the earth. I know this Charles, then, under none but bad aspects, and you would wish me, a man of good sense, to go and make myself gratuitously the slave of a creature who is inferior to me in military capacity, in politics, and in dignity! No, monsieur. When some great and noble action shall have taught me to value Charles, I shall perhaps recognize his rights to a throne from which we cast the father because he wanted the virtues which his son has hitherto lacked, but, in fact of rights, I only recognize my own; the revolution made me a general, my sword will make me protector, if I wish it. Let Charles show himself, let him present himself, let him enter the competition open to genius, and, above all, let him remember that he is of a race from whom more will be expected than from any other. Therefore, monsieur, say no more about him. I neither refuse nor accept: I reserve myself--I wait."

Athos knew Monk to be too well informed of all concerning Charles to venture to urge the discussion further; it was neither the time nor the place. "My lord," then said he, "I have nothing to do but thank you."

"And why, monsieur? Because you have formed a correct opinion of me, or because I have acted according to your judgment? Is that, in truth, worthy of thanks? This gold which you are about to carry to Charles will serve me as a test for him, by seeing the use he will make of it. I shall have an opinion which now I have not."

"And yet does not your honor fear to compromise yourself by allowing such a sum to be carried away for the service of your enemy?"

"My enemy, say you? Eh, monsieur, I have no enemies. I am in the service of the parliament, which orders me to fight General Lambert and Charles Stuart--its enemies, and not mine. I fight them. If the parliament, on the contrary, ordered me to unfurl my standards on the port of London, and to assemble my soldiers on the banks to receive Charles II.--"

"You would obey?" cried Athos, joyfully.

"Pardon me," said Monk, smiling, "I was going on--I, a gray-headed man--in truth, how could I forget myself? was going to speak like a foolish young man."

"Then you would not obey?" said Athos.

"I do not say that either, monsieur. The welfare of my country before everything. God, who has given me the power, has, no doubt, willed that I should have that power for the good of all, and He has given me, at the same time, discernment. If the parliament were to order such a thing, I should reflect."

The brow of Athos became clouded. "Then I may positively say that your honor is not inclined to favor King Charles II.?"

"You continue to question me, monsieur le comte; allow me to do so in turn, if you please."

“Do, monsieur; and may God inspire you with the idea of replying to me as frankly as I shall reply to you.”

“When you shall have taken this money back to your prince, what advice will you give him?”

Athos fixed upon Monk a proud and resolute look.

“My lord,” said he, “with this million, which others would perhaps employ in negotiating, I would advise the king to rise two regiments, to enter Scotland, which you have just pacified: to give to the people the franchises which the revolution promised them, and in which it has not, in all cases, kept its word. I should advise him to command in person this little army, which would, believe me, increase, and to die, standard in hand, and sword in sheath, saying, ‘Englishmen! I am the third king of my race you have killed; beware of the justice of God!’“

Monk hung down his head, and mused for an instant. “If he succeeded,” said he, “which is very improbable, but not impossible--for everything is possible in this world--what would you advise him to do?”

“To think that by the will of God he lost his crown, by the good will of men he recovered it.”

An ironical smile passed over the lips of Monk.

“Unfortunately, monsieur,” said he, “kings do not know how to follow good advice.”

“Ah, my lord, Charles II. is not a king,” replied Athos, smiling in his turn, but with a very different expression from Monk.

“Let us terminate this, monsieur le comte,--that is your desire, is it not?”

Athos bowed.

“I shall give orders to have these two casks transported whither you please. Where are you lodging, monsieur?”

“In a little hamlet at the mouth of the river, your honor.”

“Oh, I know the hamlet; it consists of five or six houses, does it not?”

“Exactly. Well, I inhabit the first,--two net-makers occupy it with me; it is their bark which brought me ashore.”

“But your own vessel, monsieur?”

“My vessel is at anchor, a quarter of a mile at sea, and waits for me.”

“You do not think, however, of setting out immediately?”

“My lord, I shall try once more to convince your honor.”

“You will not succeed,” replied Monk; “but it is of consequence that you should depart from Newcastle without leaving of your passage the least suspicion that might prove injurious to me or you. To-morrow my officers think Lambert will attack me. I, on the contrary, am convinced he will not stir; it is in my opinion impossible. Lambert leads an army devoid of homogeneous principles, and there is no possible army with such elements. I have taught my soldiers to consider my authority subordinate to another, therefore, after me, round me, and beneath me, they still look for something. It would result that if I were dead, whatever might happen, my army would not be demoralized all at once; it results, that if I choose to absent myself, for instance, as it does please me to do sometimes, there would not be in the camp the shadow of uneasiness or disorder. I am the magnet--the sympathetic and natural strength of the English. All those scattered irons that will be sent against me I shall attract to myself. Lambert, at this moment, commands eighteen thousand deserters; but I have never mentioned that to my officers, you may easily suppose. Nothing is more useful to an army than the expectation of a coming battle; everybody is awake--everybody is on guard. I tell you this that you may live in perfect security. Do not be in a hurry, then, to cross the seas; within a week there will be something fresh, either a battle or an accommodation. Then, as you have judged me to be an honorable man, and confided your secret to me, I have to thank you for this confidence, and I shall come and pay you a visit or send for you. Do not go before I send word. I repeat the request."

"I promise you, general," cried Athos, with a joy so great, that in spite of all his circumspection, he could not prevent its sparkling in his eyes.

Monk surprised this flash, and immediately extinguished it by one of those silent smiles which always caused his interlocutors to know they had made no inroad on his mind.

"Then, my lord, it is a week that you desire me to wait?"

"A week? yes, monsieur."

"And during those days what shall I do?"

"If there should be a battle, keep at a distance from it, I beseech you. I know the French delight in such amusements;--you might take a fancy to see how we fight, and you might receive some chance shot. Our Scotsmen are very bad marksmen, and I do not wish that a worthy gentleman like you should return to France wounded. Nor should I like to be obliged, myself, to send to your prince his million left here by you; for then it would be said, and with some reason, that I paid the Pretender to enable him to make war against the parliament. Go, then, monsieur, and let it be done as has been agreed upon."

"Ah, my lord," said Athos, "what joy it would give me to be the first that penetrated to the noble heart which beats beneath that cloak!"

"You think, then, that I have secrets," said Monk, without changing the half cheerful expression of his countenance. "Why, monsieur, what secret can you expect to find in the hollow head of a soldier? But it is getting late, and our torch is almost out; let us call our man."

"Hola!" cried Monk in French, approaching the stairs; "hola! fisherman!"

The fisherman, benumbed by the cold night air, replied in a hoarse voice, asking what they wanted of him.

"Go to the post," said Monk, "and order a sergeant, in the name of General Monk, to come here immediately."

This was a commission easily performed; for the sergeant, uneasy at the general's being in that desolate abbey, had drawn nearer by degrees, and was not much further off than the fisherman. The general's order was therefore heard by him, and he hastened to obey it.

"Get a horse and two men," said Monk.

"A horse and two men?" repeated the sergeant.

"Yes," replied Monk. "Have you got any means of getting a horse with a pack-saddle or two panniers?"

"No doubt, at a hundred paces off, in the Scottish camp."

"Very well."

"What shall I do with the horse, general."

"Look here."

The sergeant descended the three steps which separated him from Monk, and came into the vault.

"You see," said Monk, "that gentleman yonder?"

"Yes, general."

"And you see these two casks?"

"Perfectly."

"They are two casks, one containing powder, and the other balls; I wish these casks to be transported to the little hamlet at the mouth of the river, and which I intend to occupy to-morrow with two hundred muskets. You understand that the commission is a secret one, for it is a movement that may decide the fate of the battle."

"Oh, general!" murmured the sergeant.

"Mind, then! Let these casks be fastened on to the horse, and let them be escorted by two men and you to the residence of this gentleman, who is my friend. But take care that nobody knows it."

"I would go by the marsh if I knew the road," said the sergeant.

"I know one myself," said Athos; "it is not wide, but it is solid, having been made upon piles; and with care we shall get over safely enough."

"Do everything this gentleman shall order you to do."

"Oh! oh! the casks are heavy," said the sergeant, trying to lift one.

"They weigh four hundred pounds each, if they contain what they ought to contain, do they not, monsieur."

"Thereabouts," said Athos.

The sergeant went in search of the two men and the horse. Monk, left alone with Athos, affected to speak to him on nothing but indifferent subjects while examining the vault in a cursory manner. Then, hearing the horse's steps,--

"I leave you with your men, monsieur," said he, "and return to the camp. You are perfectly safe."

"I shall see you again, then, my lord?" asked Athos.

"That is agreed upon, monsieur, and with much pleasure."

Monk held out his hand to Athos.

"Ah! my lord, if you would!" murmured Athos.

"Hush! monsieur, it is agreed that we shall speak no more of that." And bowing to Athos, he went up the stairs, meeting about half-way his men, who were coming down. He had not gone twenty paces, when a faint but prolonged whistle was heard at a distance. Monk listened, but seeing nothing and hearing nothing, he continued his route. Then he remembered the fisherman, and looked about for him; but the fisherman had disappeared. If he had, however, looked with more attention, he might have seen that man, bent double, gliding like a serpent along the stones and losing himself in the mist that floated over the surface of the marsh. He might equally have seen, had he attempted to pierce that mist, a spectacle that might have attracted his attention; and that was the rigging of the vessel, which had changed place, and was now nearer the shore. But Monk saw nothing; and thinking he had nothing to fear, he entered the deserted causeway which led to his camp. It was then that the disappearance of the fisherman appeared strange, and that a real suspicion began to take possession of his mind. He had just placed at the orders of Athos the only post that could protect him. He had a mile of causeway to traverse before he could regain his camp. The fog increased with such intensity that he could scarcely distinguish objects at ten paces' distance. Monk then thought he heard the sound of an oar over the marsh on the right. "Who goes there?" said he.

But nobody answered; then he cocked his pistol, took his sword in his hand, and quickened his pace, without, however, being willing to call anybody. Such a summons, for which there was no absolute necessity, appeared unworthy of him.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The Next Day.

It was seven o’clock in the morning, the first rays of day lightened the pools of the marsh, in which the sun was reflected like a red ball, when Athos, awakening and opening the window of his bed-chamber, which looked out upon the banks of the river, perceived, at fifteen paces’ distance from him, the sergeant and the men who had accompanied him the evening before, and who, after having deposited the casks at his house, had returned to the camp by the causeway on the right.

Why had these men come back after having returned to the camp? That was the question which first presented itself to Athos. The sergeant, with his head raised, appeared to be watching the moment when the gentleman should appear to address him. Athos, surprised to see these men, whom he had seen depart the night before, could not refrain from expressing his astonishment to them.

“There is nothing surprising in that, monsieur,” said the sergeant; “for yesterday the general commanded me to watch over your safety, and I thought it right to obey that order.”

“Is the general at the camp?” asked Athos.

“No doubt he is, monsieur; as when he left you he was going back.”

“Well, wait for me a moment; I am going thither to render an account of the fidelity with which you fulfilled your duty, and to get my sword, which I left upon the table in the tent.”

“This happens very well,” said the sergeant, “for we were about to request you to do so.”

Athos fancied he could detect an air of equivocal bonhomie upon the countenance of the sergeant; but the adventure of the vault might have excited the curiosity of the man, and it was not surprising that he allowed some of the feelings which agitated his mind to appear in his face. Athos closed the doors carefully, confiding the keys to Grimaud, who had chosen his domicile beneath the shed itself, which led to the cellar where the casks had been deposited. The sergeant escorted the Comte de la Fere to the camp. There a fresh guard awaited him, and relieved the four men who had conducted Athos.

This fresh guard was commanded by the aid-de-camp Digby, who, on their way, fixed upon Athos looks so little encouraging, that the Frenchman asked himself whence arose, with regard to him, this vigilance and this severity, when the evening before he had been left perfectly free. He nevertheless continued his way to the headquarters, keeping to himself the observations which men and things forced him to make. He found in the general's tent, to which he had been introduced the evening before, three superior officers: these were Monk's lieutenant and two colonels. Athos perceived his sword; it was still on the table where he left it. Neither of the officers had seen Athos, consequently neither of them knew him. Monk's lieutenant asked, at the appearance of Athos, if that were the same gentleman with whom the general had left the tent.

"Yes, your honor," said the sergeant; "it is the same."

"But," said Athos, haughtily, "I do not deny it, I think; and now, gentlemen, in turn, permit me to ask you to what purpose these questions are asked, and particularly some explanations upon the tone in which you ask them?"

"Monsieur," said the lieutenant, "if we address these questions to you, it is because we have a right to do so, and if we make them in a particular tone, it is because that tone, believe me, agrees with the circumstances."

"Gentlemen," said Athos, "you do not know who I am; but I must tell you that I acknowledge no one here but General Monk as my equal. Where is he? Let me be conducted to him, and if he has any questions to put to me, I will answer him and to his satisfaction, I hope. I repeat, gentlemen, where is the general?"

"Eh! good God! you know better than we do where he is," said the lieutenant.

"I?" "Yes, you."

"Monsieur," said Athos; "I do not understand you."

"You will understand me--and, in the first place, do not speak so loudly."

Athos smiled disdainfully.

"We don't ask you to smile," said one of the colonels warmly; "we require you to answer."

"And I, gentlemen, declare to you that I will not reply until I am in the presence of the general."

“But,” replied the same colonel who had already spoken, “you know very well that is impossible.”

“This is the second time I have received this strange reply to the wish I express,” said Athos. “Is the general absent?”

This question was made with such apparent good faith, and the gentleman wore an air of such natural surprise, that the three officers exchanged a meaning look. The lieutenant, by a tacit convention with the other two, was spokesman.

“Monsieur, the general left you last night on the borders of the monastery.”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“And you went--”

“It is not for me to answer you, but for those who have accompanied me. They were your soldiers, ask them.”

“But if we please to question you?”

“Then it will please me to reply, monsieur, that I do not recognize any one here, that I know no one here but the general, and that it is to him alone I will reply.”

“So be it, monsieur; but as we are the masters, we constitute ourselves a council of war, and when you are before judges you must reply.”

The countenance of Athos expressed nothing but astonishment and disdain, instead of the terror the officers expected to read in it at this threat.

“Scottish or English judges upon me, a subject of the king of France; upon me, placed under the safeguard of British honor! You are mad, gentlemen!” said Athos, shrugging his shoulders.

The officers looked at each other. “Then, monsieur,” said one of them, “do you pretend not to know where the general is?”

“To that, monsieur, I have already replied.”

“Yes, but you have already replied an incredible thing.”

“It is true, nevertheless, gentlemen. Men of my rank are not generally liars. I am a gentleman, I have told you, and when I have at my side the sword which, by an excess of delicacy, I left last night upon the table whereon it still lies, believe me, no man says that to me which I am unwilling to hear. I am at this moment disarmed; if you pretend to be my judges, try me; if you are but my executioners, kill me.”

“But, monsieur--” asked the lieutenant, in a more courteous voice, struck with the lofty coolness of Athos.

“Sir, I came to speak confidentially with your general about affairs of importance. It was not an ordinary welcome that he gave me. The accounts your soldiers can give you may convince you of that. If, then, the general received me in that manner, he knew my titles to his esteem. Now, you do not suspect, I should think, that I should reveal my secrets to you, and still less his.”

“But these casks, what do they contain?”

“Have you not put that question to your soldiers? What was their reply?”

“That they contained powder and ball.”

“From whom had they that information? They must have told you that.”

“From the general; but we are not dupes.”

“Beware, gentlemen; it is not to me you are now giving the lie, it is to your leader.”

The officers again looked at each other. Athos continued: “Before your soldiers the general told me to wait a week, and at the expiration of that week he would give me the answer he had to make me. Have I fled away? No; I wait.”

“He told you to wait a week!” cried the lieutenant.

“He told me that so clearly, sir, that I have a sloop at the mouth of the river, which I could with ease have joined yesterday, and embarked. Now, if I have remained, it was only in compliance with the desire of your general; his honor having requested me not to depart without a last audience, which he fixed at a week hence. I repeat to you, then, I am waiting.”

The lieutenant turned towards the other officers, and said, in a low voice: “If this gentleman speaks truth, there may still be some hope. The general may be carrying out some negotiations so secret, that he thought it imprudent to inform even us. Then the time limited for his absence would be a week.” Then, turning towards Athos: “Monsieur,” said he, “your declaration is of the most serious importance; are you willing to repeat it under the seal of an oath?”

“Sir,” replied Athos, “I have always lived in a world where my simple word was regarded as the most sacred of oaths.”

“This time, however, monsieur, the circumstance is more grave than any you may have been placed in. The safety of the whole army is at stake. Reflect; the general has disappeared, and our search for him has been in vain. Is this disappearance natural? Has a crime been committed? Are we not bound to carry our investigations to extremity? Have we any right to wait with patience? At this moment, everything, monsieur, depends upon the words you are about to pronounce."

"Thus questioned, gentlemen, I no longer hesitate," said Athos. "Yes, I came hither to converse confidentially with General Monk, and ask him for an answer regarding certain interests; yes, the general being, doubtless, unable to pronounce before the expected battle, begged me to remain a week in the house I inhabit, promising me that in a week I should see him again. Yes, all this is true, and I swear it by God who is the absolute master of my life and yours." Athos pronounced these words with so much grandeur and solemnity, that the three officers were almost convinced. Nevertheless, one of the colonels made a last attempt.

"Monsieur," said he, "although we may now be persuaded of the truth of what you say, there is yet a strange mystery in all this. The general is too prudent a man to have thus abandoned his army on the eve of a battle without having at least given notice of it to one of us. As for myself, I cannot believe but some strange event has been the cause of this disappearance. Yesterday some foreign fishermen came to sell their fish here; they were lodged yonder among the Scots; that is to say, on the road the general took with this gentleman, to go to the abbey, and to return from it. It was one of these fishermen that accompanied the general with a light. And this morning, bark and fishermen have all disappeared, carried away by the night's tide."

"For my part," said the lieutenant, "I see nothing in that that is not quite natural, for these people were not prisoners."

"No; but I repeat it was one of them who lighted the general and this gentleman to the abbey, and Digby assures us that the general had strong suspicions concerning those people. Now, who can say whether these people were not connected with this gentleman; and that, the blow being struck, the gentleman, who is evidently brave, did not remain to reassure us by his presence, and to prevent our researches being made in a right direction?"

This speech made an impression upon the other two officers.

"Sir," said Athos, "permit me to tell you, that your reasoning, though specious in appearance, nevertheless wants consistency, as regards me. I have remained, you say, to divert suspicion. Well! on the contrary, suspicions arise in me as well as in you; and I say, it is impossible, gentlemen, that the general, on the eve of a battle, should leave his army without saying anything to at least one of his officers. Yes, there is some strange event connected with this; instead of being idle and waiting, you must display all the activity and all the vigilance possible. I am your prisoner, gentlemen, upon parole or otherwise. My honor is concerned in ascertaining what has become of General Monk, and to such a point, that if you were to say to me, ‘Depart!’ I should reply: ‘No, I will remain!’ And if you were to ask my opinion, I should add: ‘Yes, the general is the victim of some conspiracy, for, if he had intended to leave the camp he would have told me so.’ Seek, then, search the land, search the sea; the general has not gone of his own good will.”

The lieutenant made a sign to the two other officers.

“No, monsieur,” said he, “no; in your turn you go too far. The general has nothing to suffer from these events, and, no doubt, has directed them. What Monk is now doing he has often done before. We are wrong in alarming ourselves; his absence will, doubtless, be of short duration; therefore, let us beware, lest by a pusillanimity which the general would consider a crime, of making his absence public, and by that means demoralize the army. The general gives a striking proof of his confidence in us; let us show ourselves worthy of it. Gentlemen, let the most profound silence cover all this with an impenetrable veil; we will detain this gentleman, not from mistrust of him with regard to the crime, but to assure more effectively the secret of the general’s absence by keeping among ourselves; therefore, until fresh orders, the gentleman will remain at headquarters.”

“Gentlemen,” said Athos, “you forget that last night the general confided to me a deposit over which I am bound to watch. Give me whatever guard you like, chain me if you like, but leave me the house I inhabit for my prison. The general, on his return, would reproach you, I swear on the honor of a gentleman, for having displeased him in this.”

“So be it, monsieur,” said the lieutenant; “return to your abode.”

Then they placed over Athos a guard of fifty men, who surrounded his house, without losing sight of him for a minute.

The secret remained secure, but hours, days passed away without the general’s returning, or without anything being heard of him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Smuggling.

Two days after the events we have just related, and while General Monk was expected every minute in the camp to which he did not return, a little Dutch felucca, manned by eleven men, cast anchor upon the coast of Scheveningen, nearly within cannon-shot of the port. It was night, the darkness was great, the tide rose in the darkness; it was a capital time to land passengers and merchandise.

The road of Scheveningen forms a vast crescent; it is not very deep and not very safe; therefore, nothing is seen stationed there but large Flemish hoys, or some of those Dutch barks which fishermen draw up on the sand on rollers, as the ancients did, according to Virgil. When the tide is rising, and advancing on land, it is not prudent to bring the vessels too close in shore, for, if the wind is fresh, the prows are buried in the sand; and the sand of that coast is spongy; it receives easily, but does not yield so well. It was on this account, no doubt, that a boat was detached from the bark, as soon as the latter had cast anchor, and came with eight sailors, amidst whom was to be seen an object of an oblong form, a sort of large pannier or bale.

The shore was deserted; the few fishermen inhabiting the down were gone to bed. The only sentinel that guarded the coast (a coast very badly guarded, seeing that a landing from large ships was impossible), without having been able to follow the example of the fishermen, who were gone to bed, imitated them so far, that he slept at the back of his watch-box as soundly as they slept in their beds. The only noise to be heard, then, was the whistling of the night breeze among the bushes and the brambles of the downs. But the people who were approaching were doubtless mistrustful people, for this real silence and apparent solitude did not satisfy them. Their boat, therefore, scarcely as visible as a dark speck upon the ocean, gilded along noiselessly, avoiding the use of their oars for fear of being heard, and gained the nearest land.

Scarcely had it touched the ground when a single man jumped out of the boat, after having given a brief order, in a manner which denoted the habit of commanding. In consequence of this order, several muskets immediately glittered in the feeble light reflected from that mirror of the heavens, the sea; and the oblong bale of which we spoke, containing no doubt some contraband object, was transported to land, with infinite precautions. Immediately after that, the man who had landed first, set off at a rapid pace diagonally towards the village of Scheveningen, directing his course to the nearest point of the wood. When there, he sought for that house already described as the temporary residence--and a very humble residence--of him who was styled by courtesy king of England.

All were asleep there, as everywhere else, only a large dog, of the race of those which the fishermen of Scheveningen harness to little carts to carry fish to the Hague, began to bark formidably as soon as the stranger's steps were audible beneath the windows. But the watchfulness, instead of alarming the newly-landed man, appeared, on the contrary, to give him great joy, for his voice might perhaps have proved insufficient to rouse the people of the house, whilst, with an auxiliary of that sort, his voice became almost useless. The stranger waited, then, till these reiterated and sonorous barkings should, according to all probability, have produced their effect, and then he ventured a summons. On hearing his voice, the dog began to roar with such violence that another voice was soon heard from the interior, quieting the dog. With that the dog was quieted.

"What do you want?" asked that voice, at the same time weak, broken, and civil.

"I want his majesty King Charles II., king of England," said the stranger.

"What do you want with him?"

"I want to speak with him."

"Who are you?"

"Ah! Mordioux! you ask too much; I don't like talking through doors."

"Only tell me your name."

"I don't like to declare my name in the open air, either; besides, you may be sure I shall not eat your dog, and I hope to God he will be as reserved with respect to me."

"You bring news, perhaps, monsieur, do you not?" replied the voice, patient and querulous as that of an old man.

"I will answer for it, I bring you news you little expect. Open the door, then, if you please, hein!"

“Monsieur,” persisted the old man, “do you believe, upon your soul and conscience, that your news is worth waking the king?”

“For God’s sake, my dear monsieur, draw your bolts; you will not be sorry, I swear, for the trouble it will give you. I am worth my weight in gold, parole d’honneur!”

“Monsieur, I cannot open the door till you have told me your name.”

“Must I, then?”

“It is by the order of my master, monsieur.”

“Well, my name is--but, I warn you, my name will tell you absolutely nothing.”

“Never mind, tell it, notwithstanding.”

“Well, I am the Chevalier d’Artagnan.”

The voice uttered an exclamation.

“Oh! good heavens!” said a voice on the other side of the door. “Monsieur d’Artagnan. What happiness! I could not help thinking I knew that voice.”

“Humph!” said D’Artagnan. “My voice is known here! That’s flattering.”

“Oh! yes, we know it,” said the old man, drawing the bolts; “and here is the proof.” And at these words he let in D’Artagnan, who, by the light of the lantern he carried in his hand, recognized his obstinate interlocutor.

“Ah! Mordioux!” cried he: “why, it is Parry! I ought to have known that.”

“Parry, yes, my dear Monsieur d’Artagnan, it is I. What joy to see you once again!”

“You are right there, what joy!” said D’Artagnan, pressing the old man’s hand. “There, now you’ll go and inform the king, will you not?”

“But the king is asleep, my dear monsieur.”

“Mordioux! then wake him. He won’t scold you for having disturbed him, I will promise you.”

“You come on the part of the count, do you not?”

“The Comte de la Fere?”

“From Athos?”

“Ma foi! no; I come on my own part. Come, Parry, quick! The king--I want the king.”

Parry did not think it his duty to resist any longer; he knew D’Artagnan of old; he knew that, although a Gascon, his words never promised more than they could stand to. He crossed a court and a little garden, appeased the dog, that seemed most anxious to taste of the musketeer’s flesh, and went to knock at the window of a chamber forming the ground-floor of a little pavilion. Immediately a little dog inhabiting that chamber replied to the great dog inhabiting the court.

"Poor king!" said D'Artagnan to himself, "these are his body-guards. It is true he is not the worse guarded on that account."

"What is wanted with me?" asked the king, from the back of the chamber.

"Sire, it is M. le Chevalier d'Artagnan, who brings you some news."

A noise was immediately heard in the chamber, a door was opened, and a flood of light inundated the corridor and the garden. The king was working by the light of a lamp. Papers were lying about upon his desk, and he had commenced the first copy of a letter which showed, by the numerous erasures, the trouble he had had in writing it.

"Come in, monsieur le chevalier," said he, turning around. Then perceiving the fisherman, "What do you mean, Parry? Where is M. le Chevalier d'Artagnan?" asked Charles.

"He is before you, sire," said M. d'Artagnan.

"What, in that costume?"

"Yes; look at me, sire; do you not remember having seen me at Blois, in the ante-chamber of King Louis XIV.?"

"Yes, monsieur, and I remember I was much pleased with you."

D'Artagnan bowed. "It was my duty to behave as I did, the moment I knew that I had the honor of being near your majesty."

"You bring me news, do you say?"

"Yes, sire."

"From the king of France?"

"Ma foi! no, sire," replied D'Artagnan. "Your majesty must have seen yonder that the king of France is only occupied with his own majesty."

Charles raised his eyes towards heaven.

"No, sire, no," continued D'Artagnan. "I bring news entirely composed of personal facts. Nevertheless, I hope that your majesty will listen to the facts and news with some favor."

"Speak, monsieur."

"If I am not mistaken, sire, your majesty spoke a great deal at Blois, of the embarrassed state in which the affairs of England are."

Charles colored. "Monsieur," said he, "it was to the king of France I related--"

“Oh! your majesty is mistaken,” said the musketeer, coolly; “I know how to speak to kings in misfortune. It is only when they are in misfortune that they speak to me; once fortunate, they look upon me no more. I have, then, for your majesty, not only the greatest respect, but, still more, the most absolute devotion; and that, believe me, with me, sire, means something. Now, hearing your majesty complain of fate, I found that you were noble and generous, and bore misfortune well.”

“In truth!” said Charles, much astonished, “I do not know which I ought to prefer, your freedoms or your respects.”

“You will choose presently, sire,” said D’Artagnan. “Then your majesty complained to your brother, Louis XIV., of the difficulty you experienced in returning to England and regaining your throne for want of men and money.”

Charles allowed a movement of impatience to escape him.

“And the principal object your majesty found in your way,” continued D’Artagnan, “was a certain general commanding the armies of the parliament, and who was playing yonder the part of another Cromwell. Did not your majesty say so?”

“Yes; but I repeat to you, monsieur, those words were for the king’s ears alone.”

“And you will see, sire, that it is very fortunate that they fell into those of his lieutenant of musketeers. That man so troublesome to your majesty was one General Monk, I believe; did I not hear his name correctly, sire?”

“Yes, monsieur, but once more, to what purpose are all these questions.”

“Oh! I know very well, sire, that etiquette will not allow kings to be questioned. I hope, however, presently you will pardon my want of etiquette. Your majesty added that, notwithstanding, if you could see him, confer with him, and meet him face to face, you would triumph, either by force or persuasion, over that obstacle--the only serious one, the only insurmountable one, the only real one you met with on your road.”

“All that is true, monsieur: my destiny, my future, my obscurity, or my glory depend upon that man; but what do you draw from that?”

“One thing alone, that if this General Monk is troublesome to the point your majesty describes, it would be expedient to get rid of him or make an ally of him.”

“Monsieur, a king who has neither army nor money, as you have heard my conversation with my brother Louis, has no means of acting against a man like Monk."

"Yes, sire, that was your opinion, I know very well: but, fortunately for you, it was not mine."

"What do you mean by that?"

"That, without an army and without a million, I have done--I, myself--what your majesty thought could alone be done with an army and a million."

"How! What do you say? What have you done?"

"What have I done? Eh! well, sire, I went yonder to take this man who is so troublesome to your majesty."

"In England?"

"Exactly, sire."

"You went to take Monk in England?"

"Should I by chance have done wrong, sire?"

"In truth, you are mad, monsieur!"

"Not the least in the world, sire."

"You have taken Monk?"

"Yes, sire."

"Where?"

"In the midst of his camp."

The king trembled with impatience.

"And having taken him on the causeway of Newcastle, I bring him to your majesty," said D'Artagnan, simply.

"You bring him to me!" cried the king, almost indignant at what he considered a mystification.

"Yes, sire," replied D'Artagnan, in the same tone, "I bring him to you; he is down below yonder, in a large chest pierced with holes, so as to allow him to breathe."

"Good God!"

"Oh! don't be uneasy, sire, we have taken the greatest possible care of him. He comes in good state, and in perfect condition. Would your majesty please to see him, to talk with him, or to have him thrown into the sea?"

"Oh, heavens!" repeated Charles, "oh, heavens! do you speak the truth, monsieur? Are you not insulting me with some unworthy joke? You have accomplished this unheard-of act of audacity and genius--impossible!"

"Will your majesty permit me to open the window?" said D'Artagnan, opening it.

The king had not time to reply yes or no. D’Artagnan gave a shrill and prolonged whistle, which he repeated three times through the silence of the night.

“There!” said he, “he will be brought to your majesty.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

Fear he has placed his Money and that of Planchet in the Sinking Fund.

The king could not overcome his surprise, and looked sometimes at the smiling face of the musketeer, and sometimes at the dark window which opened into the night. But before he had fixed his ideas, eight of D’Artagnan’s men, for two had remained to take care of the bark, brought to the house, where Parry received him, that object of an oblong form, which, for the moment, inclosed the destinies of England. Before he left Calais, D’Artagnan had had made in that city a sort of coffin, large and deep enough for a man to turn in it at his ease. The bottom and sides, properly upholstered, formed a bed sufficiently soft to prevent the rolling of the ship turning this kind of cage into a rat-trap. The little grating, of which D’Artagnan had spoken to the king, like the visor of the helmet, was placed opposite to the man’s face. It was so constructed that, at the least cry, a sudden pressure would stifle that cry, and, if necessary, him who had uttered that cry.

D’Artagnan was so well acquainted with his crew and his prisoner, that during the whole voyage he had been in dread of two things: either that the general would prefer death to this sort of imprisonment, and would smother himself by endeavoring to speak, or that his guards would allow themselves to be tempted by the offers of the prisoner, and put him, D’Artagnan, into the box instead of Monk.

D’Artagnan, therefore, had passed the two days and the two nights of the voyage close to the coffin, alone with the general, offering him wine and food, which the latter had refused, and constantly endeavoring to reassure him upon the destiny which awaited him at the end of this singular captivity. Two pistols on the table and his naked sword made D’Artagnan easy with regard to indiscretions from without.

When once at Scheveningen he had felt completely reassured. His men greatly dreaded any conflict with the lords of the soil. He had, besides, interested in his cause him who had morally served him as lieutenant, and whom we have seen reply to the name of Menneville. The latter, not being a vulgar spirit, had more to risk than the others, because he had more conscience. He believed in a future in the service of D’Artagnan, and consequently would have allowed himself to be cut to pieces, rather than violate the order given by his leader. Thus it was that, once landed, it was to him that D’Artagnan had confided the care of the chest and the general’s breathing. It was he, too, he had ordered to have the chest brought by the seven men as soon as he should hear the triple whistle. We have seen that the lieutenant obeyed. The coffer once in the house, D’Artagnan dismissed his men with a gracious smile, saying, “Messieurs, you have rendered a great service to King Charles II., who in less than six weeks will be king of England. Your gratification will then be doubled. Return to the boat and wait for me.” Upon which they departed with such shouts of joy as terrified even the dog himself.

D’Artagnan had caused the coffer to be brought as far as the king’s ante-chamber. He then, with great care, closed the door of this ante-chamber, after which he opened the coffer, and said to the general:

“General, I have a thousand excuses to make to you; my manner of acting has not been worthy of such a man as you, I know very well; but I wished you to take me for the captain of a bark. And then England is a very inconvenient country for transports. I hope, therefore, you will take all that into consideration. But now, general, you are at liberty to get up and walk.” This said, he cut the bonds which fastened the arms and hands of the general. The latter got up, and then sat down with the countenance of a man who expects death. D’Artagnan opened the door of Charles’s study, and said, “Sire, here is your enemy, M. Monk; I promised myself to perform this service for your majesty. It is done; now order as you please. M. Monk,” added he, turning towards the prisoner, “you are in the presence of his majesty Charles II., sovereign lord of Great Britain.”

Monk raised towards the prince his coldly stoical look, and replied: “I know no king of Great Britain; I recognize even here no one worthy of bearing the name of gentleman: for it is in the name of King Charles II. that an emissary, whom I took for an honest man, came and laid an infamous snare for me. I have fallen into that snare; so much the worse for me. Now, you the tempter,” said he to the king; “you the executor,” said he to D’Artagnan; “remember what I am about to say to you: you have my body, you may kill it, and I advise you to do so, for you shall never have my mind or my will. And now, ask me not a single word, as from this moment I will not open my mouth even to cry out. I have said."

And he pronounced these words with the savage, invincible resolution of the most mortified Puritan. D'Artagnan looked at his prisoner like a man who knows the value of every word, and who fixes that value according to the accent with which it has been pronounced.

"The fact is," said he, in a whisper to the king, "the general is an obstinate man; he would not take a mouthful of bread, nor swallow a drop of wine, during the two days of our voyage. But as from this moment it is your majesty who must decide his fate, I wash my hands of him."

Monk, erect, pale, and resigned, waited with his eyes fixed and his arms folded. D'Artagnan turned towards him. "You will please to understand perfectly," said he, "that your speech, otherwise very fine, does not suit anybody, not even yourself. His majesty wished to speak to you, you refused an interview; why, now that you are face to face, that you are here by a force independent of your will, why do you confine yourself to the rigors which I consider useless and absurd? Speak! what the devil! speak, if only to say 'No.'"

Monk did not unclose his lips; Monk did not turn his eyes; Monk stroked his mustache with a thoughtful air, which announced that matters were going on badly.

During all this time Charles II. had fallen into a profound reverie. For the first time he found himself face to face with Monk; with the man he had so much desired to see; and, with that peculiar glance which God has given to eagles and kings, he had fathomed the abyss of his heart. He beheld Monk, then, resolved positively to die rather than speak, which was not to be wondered at in so considerable a man, the wound in whose mind must at the moment have been cruel. Charles II. formed, on the instant, one of those resolutions upon which an ordinary man risks his life, a general his fortune, and a king his kingdom. "Monsieur," said he to Monk, "you are perfectly right upon certain points; I do not, therefore, ask you to answer me, but to listen to me."

There was a moment's silence, during which the king looked at Monk, who remained impassible.

"You have made me just now a painful reproach, monsieur," continued the king; "you said that one of my emissaries had been to Newcastle to lay a snare for you, and that, parenthetically, cannot be understood by M.

d’Artagnan here, and to whom, before everything, I owe sincere thanks for his generous, his heroic devotion.”

D’Artagnan bowed with respect; Monk took no notice.

“For M. d’Artagnan--and observe, M. Monk, I do not say this to excuse myself--for M. d’Artagnan,” continued the king, “went to England of his free will, without interest, without orders, without hope, like a true gentleman as he is, to render a service to an unfortunate king, and to add to the illustrious actions of an existence, already so well filled, one glorious deed more.”

D’Artagnan colored a little, and coughed to keep his countenance. Monk did not stir.

“You do not believe what I tell you, M. Monk,” continued the king. “I can understand that,--such proofs of devotion are so rare, that their reality may well be put in doubt.”

“Monsieur would do wrong not to believe you, sire,” cried D’Artagnan: “for that which your majesty has said is the exact truth, and the truth so exact that it seems, in going to fetch the general, I have done something which sets everything wrong. In truth, if it be so, I am in despair.”

“Monsieur d’Artagnan,” said the king, pressing the hand of the musketeer, “you have obliged me as much as if you had promoted the success of my cause, for you have revealed to me an unknown friend, to whom I shall ever be grateful, and whom I shall always love.” And the king pressed his hand cordially. “And,” continued he, bowing to Monk, “an enemy whom I shall henceforth esteem at his proper value.”

The eyes of the Puritan flashed, but only once, and his countenance, for an instant, illuminated by that flash, resumed its somber impassibility.

“Then, Monsieur d’Artagnan,” continued Charles, “this is what was about to happen: M. le Comte de la Fere, who you know, I believe, has set out for Newcastle.”

“What, Athos!” exclaimed D’Artagnan.

“Yes, that was his nom de guerre, I believe. The Comte de la Fere had then set out for Newcastle, and was going, perhaps, to bring the general to hold a conference with me or with those of my party, when you violently, as it appears, interfered with the negotiation.”

“Mordioux!” replied D’Artagnan, “he entered the camp the very evening in which I succeeded in getting into it with my fishermen--”

An almost imperceptible frown on the brow of Monk told D'Artagnan that he had surmised rightly.

"Yes, yes," muttered he; "I thought I knew his person; I even fancied I knew his voice. Unlucky wretch that I am! Oh! sire, pardon me! I thought I had so successfully steered my bark."

"There is nothing ill in it, sir," said the king, "except that the general accuses me of having laid a snare for him, which is not the case. No, general, those are not the arms which I contemplated employing with you, as you will soon see. In the meanwhile, when I give you my word upon the honor of a gentleman, believe me, sir, believe me! Now, Monsieur d'Artagnan, a word with you, if you please."

"I listen on my knees, sire."

"You are truly at my service, are you not?"

"Your majesty has seen that I am, too much so."

"That is well; from a man like you one word suffices. In addition to that word you bring actions. General, have the goodness to follow me. Come with us, M. d'Artagnan."

D'Artagnan, considerably surprised, prepared to obey. Charles II. went out, Monk followed him, D'Artagnan followed Monk. Charles took the path by which D'Artagnan had come to his abode; the fresh sea breezes soon caressed the faces of the three nocturnal travelers, and, at fifty paces from the little gate which Charles opened, they found themselves upon the down in the face of the ocean, which, having ceased to rise, reposed upon the shore like a wearied monster. Charles II. walked pensively along, his head hanging down and his hand beneath his cloak. Monk followed him, with crossed arms and an uneasy look. D'Artagnan came last, with his hand on the hilt of his sword.

"Where is the boat in which you came, gentlemen?" said Charles to the musketeer.

"Yonder, sire; I have seven men and an officer waiting me in that little bark which is lighted by a fire."

"Yes, I see; the boat is drawn upon the sand; but you certainly did not come from Newcastle in that frail bark?"

"No, sire; I freighted a felucca, at my own expense, which is at anchor within cannon-shot of the downs. It was in that felucca we made the voyage."

"Sir," said the king to Monk, "you are free."

However firm his will, Monk could not suppress an exclamation. The king added an affirmative motion of his head, and continued: “We shall waken a fisherman of the village, who will put his boat to sea immediately, and will take you back to any place you may command him. M. d’Artagnan here will escort your honor. I place M. d’Artagnan under the safeguard of your loyalty, M. Monk.”

Monk allowed a murmur of surprise to escape him, and D’Artagnan a profound sigh. The king, without appearing to notice either, knocked against the deal trellis which inclosed the cabin of the principal fisherman inhabiting the down.

“Hey! Keyser!” cried he, “awake!”

“Who calls me?” asked the fisherman.

“I, Charles the king.”

“Ah, my lord!” cried Keyser, rising ready dressed from the sail in which he slept, as people sleep in a hammock. “What can I do to serve you?”

“Captain Keyser,” said Charles, “you must set sail immediately. Here is a traveler who wishes to freight your bark, and will pay you well; serve him well.” And the king drew back a few steps to allow Monk to speak to the fisherman.

“I wish to cross over into England,” said Monk, who spoke Dutch enough to make himself understood.

“This minute,” said the patron, “this very minute, if you wish it.”

“But will that be long?” said Monk.

“Not half an hour, your honor. My eldest son is at this moment preparing the boat, as we were going out fishing at three o’clock in the morning.”

“Well, is all arranged?” asked the king, drawing near.

“All but the price,” said the fisherman; “yes, sire.”

“That is my affair,” said Charles, “the gentleman is my friend.”

Monk started and looked at Charles on hearing this word.

“Very well, my lord,” replied Keyser. And at that moment they heard Keyser’s son, signaling form the shore with the blast of a bull’s horn.

“Now, gentlemen,” said the king, “depart.”

“Sire,” said D’Artagnan, “will it please your majesty to grant me a few minutes? I have engaged men, and I am going without them; I must give them notice.”

“Whistle to them,” said Charles, smiling.

D’Artagnan, accordingly, whistled, whilst the patron Keyser replied to his son; and four men, led by Menneville, attended the first summons.

“Here is some money in account,” said D’Artagnan, putting into their hands a purse containing two thousand five hundred livres in gold. “Go and wait for me at Calais, you know where.” And D’Artagnan heaved a profound sigh, as he let the purse fall into the hands of Menneville.

“What, are you leaving us?” cried the men.

“For a short time,” said D’Artagnan, “or for a long time, who knows? But with 2,500 livres, and the 2,500 you have already received, you are paid according to our agreement. We are quits, then, my friend.”

“But the boat?”

“Do not trouble yourself about that.”

“Our things are on board the felucca.”

“Go and seek them, and then set off immediately.”

“Yes, captain.”

D’Artagnan returned to Monk, saying,--”Monsieur, I await your orders, for I understand we are to go together, unless my company be disagreeable to you.”

“On the contrary, monsieur,” said Monk.

“Come, gentlemen, on board,” cried Keyser’s son.

Charles bowed to the general with grace and dignity, saying,--”You will pardon me this unfortunate accident, and the violence to which you have been subjected, when you are convinced that I was not the cause of them.”

Monk bowed profoundly without replying. On his side, Charles affected not to say a word to D’Artagnan in private, but aloud,--”Once more, thanks, monsieur le chevalier,” said he, “thanks for your services. They will be repaid you by the Lord God, who, I hope, reserves trials and troubles for me alone.”

Monk followed Keyser and his son embarked with them. D’Artagnan came after, muttering to himself,--”Poor Planchet! poor Planchet! I am very much afraid we have made a bad speculation.”

CHAPTER XXX.

The Shares of Planchet and Company rise again to Par.

During the passage, Monk only spoke to D’Artagnan in cases of urgent necessity. Thus, when the Frenchman hesitated to come and take his meals, poor meals, composed of salt fish, biscuit, and Hollands gin, Monk called him, saying,--”To table, monsieur, to table!”

This was all. D’Artagnan, from being himself on all great occasions, extremely concise, did not draw from the general’s conciseness a favorable augury of the result of his mission. Now, as D’Artagnan had plenty of time for reflection, he battered his brains during this time in endeavoring to find out how Athos had seen King Charles, how he had conspired his departure with him, and lastly, how he had entered Monk’s camp; and the poor lieutenant of musketeers plucked a hair from his mustache every time that he reflected that the horseman who accompanied Monk on the night of the famous abduction must have been Athos.

At length, after a passage of two nights and two days, the patron Keyser touched at the point where Monk, who had given all the orders during the voyage, had commanded they should land. It was exactly at the mouth of the little river, near where Athos had chosen his abode.

Daylight was waning, a splendid sun, like a red steel buckler, was plunging the lower extremity of its disc beneath the blue line of the sea. The felucca was making fair way up the river, tolerably wide in that part, but Monk, in his impatience, desired to be landed, and Keyser’s boat set him and D’Artagnan upon the muddy bank, amidst the reeds. D’Artagnan, resigned to obedience, followed Monk exactly as a chained bear follows his master; but the position humiliated him not a little, and he grumbled to himself that the service of kings was a bitter one, and that the best of them was good for nothing. Monk walked with long and hasty strides; it might be thought that he did not yet feel certain of having reached English land. They had already begun to perceive distinctly a few of the cottages of the sailors and fishermen spread over the little quay of this humble port, when, all at once, D’Artagnan cried out,--”God pardon me, there is a house on fire!”

Monk raised his eyes, and perceived there was, in fact, a house which the flames were beginning to devour. It had begun at a little shed belonging to the house, the roof of which had caught. The fresh evening breeze agitated the fire. The two travelers quickened their steps, hearing loud cries, and seeing, as they drew nearer, soldiers with their glittering arms pointed towards the house on fire. It was doubtless this menacing occupation which had made them neglect to signal the felucca. Monk stopped short for an instant, and, for the first time, formulated his thoughts into words. “Eh! but,” said he, “perhaps they are not my soldiers but Lambert’s.”

These words contained at once a sorrow, and apprehension, and a reproach perfectly intelligible to D’Artagnan. In fact, during the general’s absence, Lambert might have given battle, conquered, and dispersed the parliament’s army, and taken with his own the place of Monk’s army, deprived of its strongest support. At this doubt, which passed from the mind of Monk to his own, D’Artagnan reasoned in this manner:--”One of two things is going to happen; either Monk has spoken correctly, and there are no longer any but Lambertists in the country--that is to say, enemies, who would receive me wonderfully well, since it is to me they owe their victory; or nothing is changed, and Monk, transported with joy at finding his camp still in the same place, will not prove too severe in his settlement with me.” Whilst thinking thus, the two travelers advanced, and began to mingle with a little knot of sailors, who looked on with sorrow at the burning house, but did not dare to say anything on account of the threats of the soldiers. Monk addressed one of these sailors:--”What is going on here?” asked he.

“Sir,” replied the man, not recognizing Monk as an officer, under the thick cloak which enveloped him, “that house was inhabited by a foreign gentleman, and this foreigner became suspected by the soldiers. They wanted to get into his house under pretense of taking him to the camp; but he, without being frightened by their number, threatened death to the first who should cross the threshold of his door; and as there was one who did venture, the Frenchman stretched him on the earth with a pistol-shot.”

“Ah! he is a Frenchman, is he?” said D’Artagnan, rubbing his hands. “Good!”

“How good?” replied the fisherman.

“No, I don’t mean that.--What then--my tongue slipped.”

“What then, sir?--why, the other men became as enraged as so many lions: they fired more than a hundred shots at the house; but the Frenchman was sheltered by the wall, and every time they tried to enter by the door they met with a shot from his lackey, whose aim is deadly, d'ye see? Every time they threatened the window, they met with a pistol-shot from the master. Look and count--there are seven men down."

"Ah! my brave countryman," cried D'Artagnan, "wait a little, wait a little. I will be with you; and we will settle with this rabble."

"One instant, sir," said Monk, "wait."

"Long?"

"No; only the time to ask a question." Then, turning towards the sailor, "My friend," asked he, with an emotion which, in spite of all his self-command, he could not conceal, "whose soldiers are these, pray tell me?"

"Whose should they be but that madman, Monk's?"

"There has been no battle, then?"

"A battle, ah, yes! for what purpose? Lambert's army is melting away like snow in April. All come to Monk, officers and soldiers. In a week Lambert won't have fifty men left."

The fisherman was interrupted by a fresh discharge directed against the house, and by another pistol-shot which replied to the discharge and struck down the most daring of the aggressors. The rage of soldiers was at its height. The fire still continued to increase, and a crest of flame and smoke whirled and spread over the roof of the house. D'Artagnan could no longer contain himself. "Mordioux!" said he to Monk, glancing at him sideways: "you are a general, and allow your men to burn houses and assassinate people, while you look on and warm your hands at the blaze of the conflagration? Mordioux! you are not a man."

"Patience, sir, patience!" said Monk, smiling.

"Patience! yes, until that brave gentleman is roasted--is that what you mean?" And D'Artagnan rushed forward.

"Remain where you are, sir," said Monk, in a tone of command. And he advanced towards the house, just as an officer had approached it, saying to the besieged: "The house is burning, you will be roasted within an hour! There is still time--come, tell us what you know of General Monk, and we will spare your life. Reply, or by Saint Patrick--"

The besieged made no answer; he was no doubt reloading his pistol.

"A reinforcement is expected," continued the officer; "in a quarter of an hour there will be a hundred men around your house."

"I reply to you," said the Frenchman. "Let your men be sent away; I will come out freely and repair to the camp alone, or else I will be killed here!"

"Mille tonnerres!" shouted D'Artagnan; "why, that's the voice of Athos! Ah canailles!" and the sword of D'Artagnan flashed from its sheath. Monk stopped him and advanced himself, exclaiming, in a sonorous voice: "Hola! what is going on here? Digby, whence this fire? why these cries?"

"The general!" cried Digby, letting the point of his sword fall.

"The general!" repeated the soldiers.

"Well, what is there so astonishing in that?" said Monk, in a calm tone. Then, silence being re-established,--"Now," said he, "who lit this fire?"

The soldiers hung their heads.

"What! do I ask a question, and nobody answers me?" said Monk. "What! do I find a fault, and nobody repairs it? The fire is still burning, I believe."

Immediately the twenty men rushed forward, seizing pails, buckets, jars, barrels, and extinguishing the fire with as much ardor as they had, an instant before, employed in promoting it. But already, and before all the rest, D'Artagnan had applied a ladder to the house, crying, "Athos! it is I, D'Artagnan! Do not kill me, my dearest friend!" And in a moment the count was clasped in his arms. In the meantime, Grimaud, preserving his calmness, dismantled the fortification of the ground-floor, and after having opened the door, stood, with his arms folded, quietly on the sill. Only, on hearing the voice of D'Artagnan, he uttered an exclamation of surprise. The fire being extinguished, the soldiers presented themselves, Digby at their head.

"General," said he, "excuse us; what we have done was for love of your honor, whom we thought lost."

"You are mad, gentlemen. Lost! Is a man like me to be lost? Am I not permitted to be absent, according to my pleasure, without giving formal notice? Do you, by chance, take me for a citizen from the city? Is a gentleman, my friend, my guest, to be besieged, entrapped, and threatened with death, because he is suspected? What signifies the word, suspected? Curse me if I don't have every one of you shot like dogs, that the brave gentleman has left alive!

"General," said Digby, piteously, "there were twenty-eight of us, and see, there are eight on the ground."

"I authorize M. le Comte de la Fere to send the twenty to join the eight," said Monk, stretching out his hand to Athos. "Let them return to camp. Mr. Digby, you will consider yourself under arrest for a month."

"General--"

"That is to teach you, sir, not to act, another time, without orders."

"I had those of the lieutenant, general."

"The lieutenant had no such orders to give you, and he shall be placed under arrest, instead of you, if he has really commanded you to burn this gentleman."

"He did not command that, general; he commanded us to bring him to the camp; but the count was not willing to follow us."

"I was not willing that they should enter and plunder my house," said Athos to Monk, with a significant look.

"And you were quite right. To the camp, I say." The soldiers departed with dejected looks. "Now we are alone," said Monk to Athos, "have the goodness to tell me, monsieur, why you persisted in remaining here, whilst you had your felucca--"

"I waited for you, general," said Athos. "Had not your honor appointed to meet me in a week?"

An eloquent look from D'Artagnan made it clear to Monk that these two men, so brave and so loyal, had not acted in concert for his abduction. He knew already it could not be so.

"Monsieur," said he to D'Artagnan, "you were perfectly right. Have the kindness to allow me a moment's conversation with M. le Comte de la Fere?"

D'Artagnan took advantage of this to go and ask Grimaud how he was. Monk requested Athos to conduct him to the chamber he lived in.

This chamber was still full of smoke and rubbish. More than fifty balls had passed through the windows and mutilated the walls. They found a table, inkstand, and materials for writing. Monk took up a pen, wrote a single line, signed it, folded the paper, sealed the letter with the seal of his ring, and handed over the missive to Athos, saying, "Monsieur, carry, if you please, this letter to King Charles II., and set out immediately, if nothing detains you here any longer."

"And the casks?" said Athos.

"The fisherman who brought me hither will assist you in transporting them on board. Depart, if possible, within an hour."

“Yes, general,” said Athos.

“Monsieur D’Artagnan!” cried Monk, from the window. D’Artagnan ran up precipitately.

“Embrace your friend and bid him adieu, sir; he is returning to Holland.”

“To Holland!” cried D’Artagnan; “and I?”

“You are at liberty to follow him, monsieur; but I request you to remain,” said Monk. “Will you refuse me?”

“Oh, no, general; I am at your orders.”

D’Artagnan embraced Athos, and only had time to bid him adieu. Monk watched them both. Then he took upon himself the preparations for the departure, the transportation of the casks on board, and the embarking of Athos; then, taking D’Artagnan by the arm, who was quite amazed and agitated, he led him towards Newcastle. Whilst going along, the general leaning on his arm, D’Artagnan could not help murmuring to himself,--”Come, come, it seems to me that the shares of the firm of Planchet and Company are rising.”

CHAPTER XXXI.

Monk reveals Himself.

D’Artagnan, although he flattered himself with better success, had, nevertheless, not too well comprehended his situation. It was a strange and grave subject for him to reflect upon--this voyage of Athos into England; this league of the king with Athos, and that extraordinary combination of his design with that of the Comte de la Fere. The best way was to let things follow their own train. An imprudence had been committed, and, whilst having succeeded, as he had promised, D’Artagnan found that he had gained no advantage by his success. Since everything was lost, he could risk no more.

D’Artagnan followed Monk through his camp. The return of the general had produced a marvelous effect, for his people had thought him lost. But Monk, with his austere look and icy demeanor, appeared to ask of his eager lieutenants and delighted soldiers the cause of all this joy. Therefore, to the lieutenants who had come to meet him, and who expressed the uneasiness with which they had learnt his departure,--

“Why is all this?” said he; “am I obliged to give you an account of myself?”

“But your honor, the sheep may well tremble without the shepherd.”

“Tremble!” replied Monk, in his calm and powerful voice; “ah, monsieur, what a word! Curse me, if my sheep have not both teeth and claws; I renounce being their shepherd. Ah, you tremble, gentlemen, do you?”

“Yes, general, for you.”

“Oh! pray meddle with your own concerns. If I have not the wit God gave to Oliver Cromwell, I have that which He has sent to me: I am satisfied with it, however little it may be.”

The officer made no reply; and Monk, having imposed silence on his people, all remained persuaded that he had accomplished some important work or made some important trial. This was forming a very poor conception of his patience and scrupulous genius. Monk, if he had the good faith of the Puritans, his allies, must have returned fervent thanks to the patron saint who had taken him from the box of M. d’Artagnan. Whilst these things were going on, our musketeer could not help constantly repeating,--

“God grant that M. Monk may not have as much pride as I have; for I declare that if any one had put me into a coffer with that grating over my mouth, and carried me packed up, like a calf, across the seas, I should cherish such a memory of my piteous looks in that coffer, and such an ugly animosity against him who had inclosed me in it, I should dread so greatly to see a sarcastic smile blooming upon the face of the malicious wretch, or in his attitude any grotesque imitation of my position in the box, that, Mordioux! I should plunge a good dagger into his throat in compensation for the grating, and would nail him down in a veritable bier, in remembrance of the false coffin in which I had been left in to grow moldy for two days.”

And D’Artagnan spoke honestly when he spoke thus; for the skin of our Gascon was a very thin one. Monk, fortunately, entertained other ideas. He never opened his mouth to his timid conqueror concerning the past; but he admitted him very near to his person in his labors, took him with him to several reconnoiterings, in such a way as to obtain that which he evidently warmly desired,--a rehabilitation in the mind of D’Artagnan. The latter conducted himself like a past-master in the art of flattery: he admired all Monk’s tactics, and the ordering of his camp; he joked very pleasantly upon the circumvallations of Lambert’s camp, who had, he said, very uselessly given himself the trouble to inclose a camp for twenty thousand men, whilst an acre of ground would have been quite sufficient for the corporal and fifty guards who would perhaps remain faithful to him.

Monk, immediately after his arrival, had accepted the proposition made by Lambert the evening before, for an interview, and which Monk’s lieutenants had refused under the pretext that the general was indisposed. This interview was neither long nor interesting: Lambert demanded a profession of faith from his rival. The latter declared he had no other opinion than that of the majority. Lambert asked if it would not be more expedient to terminate the quarrel by an alliance than by a battle. Monk hereupon demanded a week for consideration. Now, Lambert could not refuse this: and Lambert, nevertheless, had come saying that he should devour Monk’s army. Therefore, at the end of the interview, which Lambert’s party watched with impatience, nothing was decided--neither treaty nor battle--the rebel army, as M. d'Artagnan had foreseen, began to prefer the good cause to the bad one, and the parliament, rumpish as it was, to the pompous nothings of Lambert's designs.

They remembered, likewise, the good feasts of London--the profusion of ale and sherry with which the citizens of London paid their friends the soldiers;--they looked with terror at the black war bread, at the troubled waters of the Tweed,--too salt for the glass, not enough so for the pot; and they said to themselves, "Are not the roast meats kept warm for Monk in London?" From that time nothing was heard of but desertion in Lambert's army. The soldiers allowed themselves to be drawn away by the force of principles, which are, like discipline, the obligatory tie in everybody constituted for any purpose. Monk defended the parliament--Lambert attacked it. Monk had no more inclination to support parliament than Lambert, but he had it inscribed on his standards, so that all those of the contrary party were reduced to write upon theirs, "Rebellion," which sounded ill to puritan ears. They flocked, then, from Lambert to Monk, as sinners flock from Baal to God.

Monk made his calculations; at a thousand desertions a day Lambert had men enough to last twenty days; but there is in sinking things such a growth of weight and swiftness, which combine with each other, that a hundred left the first day, five hundred the second, a thousand the third. Monk thought he had obtained his rate. But from one thousand the deserters increased to two thousand, then to four thousand, and, a week after, Lambert, perceiving that he had no longer the possibility of accepting battle, if it were offered to him, took the wise resolution of decamping during the night, returning to London, and being beforehand with Monk in constructing a power with the wreck of the military party.

But Monk, free and without uneasiness, marched towards London as a conqueror, augmenting his army with all the floating parties on the way. He encamped at Barnet, that is to say, within four leagues of the capital, cherished by the parliament, which thought it beheld in him a protector, and awaited by the people, who were anxious to see him reveal himself, that they might judge him. D'Artagnan himself had not been able to fathom his tactics; he observed--he admired. Monk could not enter London with a settled determination without bringing about civil war. He temporized for a short time.

Suddenly, when least expected, Monk drove the military party out of London, and installed himself in the city amidst the citizens, by order of the parliament; then, at the moment when the citizens were crying out against Monk--at the moment when the soldiers themselves were accusing their leader--Monk, finding himself certain of a majority, declared to the Rump Parliament that it must abdicate--be dissolved--and yield its place to a government which would not be a joke. Monk pronounced this declaration, supported by fifty thousand swords, to which, that same evening, were united, with shouts of delirious joy, the five thousand inhabitants of the good city of London. At length, at the moment when the people, after their triumphs and festive repasts in the open streets, were looking about for a master, it was affirmed that a vessel had left the Hague, bearing King Charles II. and his fortunes.

"Gentlemen," said Monk to his officers, "I am going to meet the legitimate king. He who loves me will follow me." A burst of acclamations welcomed these words, which D'Artagnan did not hear without the greatest delight.

"Mordioux!" said he to Monk, "that is bold, monsieur."

"You will accompany me, will you not?" said Monk.

"Pardieu! general. But tell me, I beg, what you wrote by Athos, that is to say, the Comte de la Fere--you know--the day of our arrival?"

"I have no secrets from you now," replied Monk. "I wrote these words: 'Sire, I expect your majesty in six weeks at Dover.'"

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, "I no longer say it is bold; I say it is well played; it is a fine stroke!"

"You are something of a judge in such matters," replied Monk.

And this was the only time the general had ever made an allusion to his voyage to Holland.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Athos and D'Artagnan meet once more at the Hostelry of the Corne du Cerf.

The king of England made his entree into Dover with great pomp, as he afterwards did in London. He had sent for his brothers; he had brought over his mother and sister. England had been for so long a time given up to herself--that is to say, to tyranny, mediocrity and nonsense--that this return of Charles II., whom the English only knew as the son of the man whose head they had cut off, was a festival for three kingdoms. Consequently, all the good wishes, all the acclamations which accompanied his return, struck the young king so forcibly that he stooped and whispered in the ear of James of York, his younger brother, "In truth, James, it seems to have been our own fault that we were so long absent from a country where we are so much beloved!" The pageant was magnificent. Beautiful weather favored the solemnity. Charles had regained all his youth, all his good humor; he appeared to be transfigured; hearts seemed to smile on him like the sun. Amongst this noisy crowd of courtiers and worshipers, who did not appear to remember they had conducted to the scaffold at Whitehall the father of the new king, a man, in the garb of a lieutenant of musketeers, looked, with a smile upon his thin, intellectual lips, sometimes at the people vociferating their blessings, and sometimes at the prince, who pretended emotion, and who bowed most particularly to the women, whose bouquets fell beneath his horse's feet.

"What a fine trade is that of king!" said this man, so completely absorbed in contemplation that he stopped in the middle of the road, leaving the cortege to file past. "Now, there is, in good truth, a prince all bespangled over with gold and diamonds, enamelled with flowers like a spring meadow; he is about to plunge his empty hands into the immense coffer in which his now faithful--but so lately unfaithful--subjects have amassed one or two cartloads of ingots of gold. They cast bouquets enough upon him to smother him; and yet, if he had presented himself to them two months ago, they would have sent as many bullets and balls at him as they now throw flowers. Decidedly it is worth something to be born in a certain sphere, with due respect to the lowly, who pretend that it is of very little advantage to them to be born lowly." The cortege continued to file on, and, with the king, the acclamations began to die away in the direction of the palace, which, however, did not prevent our officer from being pushed about.

"Mordioux!" continued the reasoner, "these people tread upon my toes and look upon me as of very little consequence, or rather of none at all, seeing that they are Englishmen and I am a Frenchman. If all these people were asked,--'Who is M. d'Artagnan?' they would reply, 'Nescio vos.' But let any one say to them, 'There is the king going by,' 'There is M. Monk going by,' they would run away, shouting,--'Vive le roi!' 'Vive M. Monk!' till their lungs were exhausted. And yet," continued he, surveying, with that look sometimes so keen and sometimes so proud, the diminishing crowd,--"and yet, reflect a little, my good people, on what your king has done, on what M. Monk has done, and then think what has been done by this poor unknown, who is called M. d'Artagnan! It is true you do not know him, since he is here unknown, and that prevents your thinking about the matter! But, bah! what matters it! All that does not prevent Charles II. from being a great king, although he has been exiled twelve years, or M. Monk from being a great captain, although he did make a voyage to Holland in a box. Well, then, since it is admitted that one is a great king and the other a great captain,--'Hurrah for King Charles II.!--Hurrah for General Monk!'" And his voice mingled with the voices of the hundreds of spectators, over which it sounded for a moment. Then, the better to play the devoted man, he took off his hat and waved it in the air. Some one seized his arm in the very height of his expansive loyalism. (In 1660 that was so termed which we now call royalism.)

"Athos!" cried D'Artagnan, "you here!" And the two friends seized each other's hands.

"You here!--and being here," continued the musketeer, "you are not in the midst of all these courtiers, my dear comte! What! you, the hero of the fete, you are not prancing on the left hand of the king, as M. Monk is prancing on the right? In truth, I cannot comprehend your character, nor that of the prince who owes you so much!"

"Always scornful, my dear D'Artagnan!" said Athos. "Will you never correct yourself of that vile habit?"

"But you do not form part of the pageant?"

“I do not, because I was not willing to do so.”

“And why were you not willing?”

“Because I am neither envoy nor ambassador, nor representative of the king of France; and it does not become me to exhibit myself thus near the person of another king than the one God has given me for a master.”

“Mordioux! you came very near to the person of the king, his father.”

“That was another thing, my friend; he was about to die.”

“And yet that which you did for him--”

“I did it because it was my duty to do it. But you know I hate all ostentation. Let King Charles II., then, who no longer stands in need of me, leave me to my rest, and the shadow; that is all I claim of him.”

D’Artagnan sighed.

“What is the matter with you?” said Athos. “One would say that this happy return of the king to London saddens you, my friend; you who have done at least as much for his majesty as I have.”

“Have I not,” replied D’Artagnan, with his Gascon laugh, “have I not done much for his majesty, without any one suspecting it?”

“Yes, yes, but the king is well aware of it, my friend,” cried Athos.

“He is aware of it!” said the musketeer bitterly. “By my faith! I did not suspect so, and I was even a moment ago trying to forget it myself.”

“But he, my friend, will not forget it, I will answer for him.”

“You tell me that to console me a little, Athos.”

“For what?”

“Mordioux! for all the expense I incurred. I have ruined myself, my friend, ruined myself for the restoration of this young prince who has just passed, cantering on his isabelle colored horse.”

“The king does not know you have ruined yourself, my friend; but he knows he owes you much.”

“And say, Athos, does that advance me in any respect? for, to do you justice, you have labored nobly. But I--I who in appearance marred your combinations, it was I who really made them succeed. Follow my calculations closely; you might not have, by persuasions or mildness, convinced General Monk, whilst I so roughly treated this dear general, that I furnished your prince with an opportunity of showing himself generous: this generosity was inspired in him by the fact of my fortunate mistake, and Charles is paid by the restoration which Monk has brought about.”

“All that, my dear friend, is strikingly true,” replied Athos.

"Well, strikingly true as it may be, it is not less true, my friend, that I shall return--greatly beloved by M. Monk, who calls me dear captain all day long, although I am neither dear to him nor a captain;--and much appreciated by the king, who has already forgotten my name;--it is not less true, I say, that I shall return to my beautiful country, cursed by the soldiers I had raised with the hopes of large pay, cursed by the brave Planchet, of who I have borrowed a part of his fortune."

"How is that? What the devil had Planchet to do in all this?"

"Ah, yes, my friend; but this king, so spruce, so smiling, so adored, M. Monk fancies he has recalled him, you fancy you have supported him, I fancy I have brought him back, the people fancy they have reconquered him, he himself fancies he has negotiated his restoration; and yet nothing of all this is true, for Charles II., king of England, Scotland, and Ireland, has been replaced upon the throne by a French grocer, who lives in the Rue des Lombards, and is named Planchet. And such is grandeur! 'Vanity!' says the Scripture: vanity, all is vanity.'"

Athos could not help laughing at this whimsical outbreak of his friend.

"My dear D'Artagnan," said he, pressing his hand affectionately, "should you not exercise a little more philosophy? Is it not some further satisfaction to you to have saved my life as you did by arriving so fortunately with Monk, when those damned parliamentarians wanted to burn me alive?"

"Well, but you, in some degree, deserved a little burning, my friend."

"How so? What, for having saved King Charles's million?"

"What million?"

"Ah, that is true! you never knew that, my friend; but you must not be angry, for it was my secret. That word 'REMEMBER' which the king pronounced upon the scaffold."

"And which means 'souviens-toi!'"

"Exactly. That was signified. 'Remember there is a million buried in the vaults of Newcastle Abbey, and that that million belongs to my son.'"

"Ah! very well, I understand. But what I understand likewise, and what is very frightful, is, that every time his majesty Charles II. will think of me, he will say to himself: 'There is the man who came very near to making me lose my crown. Fortunately I was generous, great, full of presence of mind.' That will be said by the young gentleman in a shabby black doublet, who came to the chateau of Blois, hat in hand, to ask me if I would give him access to the king of France."

"D'Artagnan! D'Artagnan!" said Athos, laying his hand on the shoulder of the musketeer, "you are unjust."

"I have a right to be so."

"No--for you are ignorant of the future."

D'Artagnan looked his friend full in the face, and began to laugh. "In truth, my dear Athos," said he, "you have some sayings so superb, that they only belong to you and M. le Cardinal Mazarin."

Athos frowned slightly.

"I beg your pardon," continued D'Artagnan, laughing, "I beg your pardon if I have offended you. The future! Nein! what pretty words are words that promise, and how well they fill the mouth in default of other things! Mordioux! After having met with so many who promised, when shall I find one who will give? But, let that pass!" continued D'Artagnan. "What are you doing here, my dear Athos? Are you the king's treasurer?"

"How--why the king's treasurer?"

"Well, since the king possess a million, he must want a treasurer. The king of France, although he is not worth a sou, has still a superintendent of finance, M. Fouquet. It is true, that, in exchange, M. Fouquet, they say, has a good number of millions of his own."

"Oh! our million was spent long ago," said Athos, laughing in his turn.

"I understand; it was frittered away in satin, precious stones, velvet, and feathers of all sorts and colors. All these princes and princesses stood in great need of tailors and dressmakers. Eh! Athos, do you remember what we fellows spent in equipping ourselves for the campaign of La Rochelle, and to make our appearance on horseback? Two or three thousand livres, by my faith! But a king's robe is the more ample; it would require a million to purchase the stuff. At least, Athos, if you are not treasurer, you are on good footing at court."

"By the faith of a gentleman, I know nothing about it," said Athos, simply.

"What! you know nothing about it?"

"No! I have not seen the king since we left Dover."

"Then he has forgotten you, too! Mordioux! That is shameful!"

"His majesty has had so much business to transact."

"Oh!" cried D'Artagnan, with one of those intelligent grimaces which he alone knew how to make, "that is enough to make me recover my love for

Monseigneur Giulio Mazarini. What, Athos! the king has not seen you since then?”

“No.”

“And you are not furious?”

“I! why should I be? Do you imagine, my dear D’Artagnan, that it was on the king’s account I acted as I have done? I did not know the young man. I defended the father, who represented a principle--sacred in my eyes, and I allowed myself to be drawn towards the son from sympathy for this same principle. Besides, he was a worthy knight, a noble creature, that father; do you remember him?”

“Yes; that is true; he was a brave, an excellent man, who led a sad life, but made a fine end.”

“Well, my dear D’Artagnan, understand this; to that king, to that man of heart, to that friend of my thoughts, if I durst venture to say so, I swore at the last hour to preserve faithfully the secret of a deposit which was to be transmitted to his son, to assist him in his hour of need. This young man came to me; he described his destitution; he was ignorant that he was anything to me save a living memory of his father. I have accomplished towards Charles II. what I promised Charles I.; that is all! Of what consequence is it to me, then, whether he be grateful or not? It is to myself I have rendered a service, by relieving myself of this responsibility, and not to him.”

“Well, I have always said,” replied D’Artagnan, with a sigh, “that disinterestedness was the finest thing in the world.”

“Well, and you, my friend,” resumed Athos, “are you not in the same situation as myself? If I have properly understood your words, you allowed yourself to be affected by the misfortunes of this young man; that, on your part, was much greater than it was upon mine, for I had a duty to fulfill; whilst you were under no obligation to the son of the martyr. You had not, on your part, to pay him the price of that precious drop of blood which he let fall upon my brow, through the floor of the scaffold. That which made you act was heart alone--the noble and good heart which you possess beneath your apparent skepticism and sarcastic irony; you have engaged the fortune of a servitor, and your own, I suspect, my benevolent miser! and your sacrifice is not acknowledged! Of what consequence is it? You wish to repay Planchet his money. I can comprehend that, my friend: for it is not becoming in a gentleman to borrow from his inferior, without returning to him principal and interest. Well, I will sell La Fere if necessary, and if not, some little farm. You shall pay Planchet, and there will be enough, believe me, of corn left in my granaries for us two and Raoul. In this way, my friend, you will be under obligations to nobody but yourself; and, if I know you well, it will not be a small satisfaction to your mind to be able to say, ‘I have made a king!’ Am I right?”

“Athos! Athos!” murmured D’Artagnan, thoughtfully, “I have told you more than once that the day on which you will preach I shall attend the sermon; the day on which you will tell me there is a hell--Mordioux! I shall be afraid of the gridiron and the pitch-forks. You are better than I, or rather, better than anybody, and I only acknowledge the possession of one quality, and that is, of not being jealous. Except that defect, damme, as the English say, if I have not all the rest.”

“I know no one equal to D’Artagnan,” replied Athos; “but here we are, having quietly reached the house I inhabit. Will you come in, my friend?”

“Eh! why this is the tavern of the Corne du Cerf, I think,” said D’Artagnan.

“I confess I chose it on purpose. I like old acquaintances; I like to sit down on that place, whereon I sank, overcome by fatigue, overwhelmed by despair, when you returned on the 31st of January.”

“After having discovered the abode of the masked executioner? Yes, that was a terrible day!”

“Come in, then,” said Athos, interrupting him.

They entered the large apartment, formerly the common one. The tavern, in general, and this room in particular, had undergone great changes; the ancient host of the musketeers, having become tolerably rich for an innkeeper, had closed his shop, and make of this room of which we were speaking, a store-room for colonial provisions. As for the rest of the house, he let it ready furnished to strangers. It was with unspeakable emotion D’Artagnan recognized all the furniture of the chamber of the first story; the wainscoting, the tapestries, and even that geographical chart which Porthos had so fondly studied in his moments of leisure.

“It is eleven years ago,” cried D’Artagnan. “Mordioux! it appears to me a century!”

“And to me but a day,” said Athos. “Imagine the joy I experience, my friend, in seeing you there, in pressing your hand, in casting from me sword and dagger, and tasting without mistrust this glass of sherry. And, oh! what still further joy it would be, if our two friends were there, at the two corners of the table, and Raoul, my beloved Raoul, on the threshold, looking at us with his large eyes, at once so brilliant and so soft!"

"Yes, yes," said D'Artagnan, much affected, "that is true. I approve particularly of the first part of your thought; it is very pleasant to smile there where we have so legitimately shuddered in thinking that from one moment to another M. Mordaunt might appear upon the landing."

At this moment the door opened, and D'Artagnan, brave as he was, could not restrain a slight movement of fright. Athos understood him, and, smiling,--

"It is our host," said he, "bringing me a letter."

"Yes, my lord," said the good man; "here is a letter for your honor."

"Thank you," said Athos, taking the letter without looking at it. "Tell me, my dear host, if you do not remember this gentleman?"

The old man raised his head, and looked attentively at D'Artagnan.

"No," said he.

"It is," said Athos, "one of those friends of whom I have spoken to you, and who lodged here with me eleven years ago."

"Oh! but," said the old man, "so many strangers have lodged here!"

"But we lodged here on the 30th of January, 1649," added Athos, believing he should stimulate the lazy memory of the host by this remark.

"That is very possible," replied he, smiling; "but it is so long ago!" and he bowed, and went out.

"Thank you," said D'Artagnan--"perform exploits, accomplish revolutions, endeavor to engrave your name in stone or bronze with strong swords! there is something more rebellious, more hard, more forgetful than iron, bronze, or stone, and that is, the brain of a lodging-house keeper who has grown rich in the trade;--he does not know me! Well, I should have known him, though."

Athos, smiling at his friend's philosophy, unsealed his letter.

"Ah!" said he, "a letter from Parry."

"Oh! oh!" said D'Artagnan; "read it, my friend, read it! No doubt it contains news."

Athos shook his head, and read:

"MONSIEUR LE COMTE.--The king has experienced much regret at not seeing you to-day beside him, at his entrance. His majesty commands me to say so, and to recall him to your memory. His majesty will expect you this evening, at the palace of St. James, between nine and ten o’clock.

“I am, respectfully, monsieur le comte, your honor’s very humble and very obedient servant,--PARRY.”

“You see, my dear D’Artagnan,” said Athos, “we must not despair of the hearts of kings.”

“Not despair! you are right to say so!” replied D’Artagnan.

“Oh! my dear, very dear friend,” resumed Athos, whom the almost imperceptible bitterness of D’Artagnan had not escaped. “Pardon me! can I have unintentionally wounded my best comrade?”

“You are mad, Athos, and to prove it, I shall conduct you to the palace; to the very gate, I mean; the walk will do me good.”

“You shall go in with me, my friend; I will speak to his majesty.”

“No, no!” replied D’Artagnan, with true pride, free from all mixture; “if there is anything worse than begging yourself, it is making others beg for you. Come, let us go, my friend, the walk will be charming; on the way I shall show you the house of M. Monk, who has detained me with him. A beautiful house, by my faith. Being a general in England is better than being a marechal in France, please to know.”

Athos allowed himself to be led along, quite saddened by D’Artagnan’s forced attempts at gayety. The whole city was in a state of joy; the two friends were jostled at every moment by enthusiasts who required them, in their intoxication, to cry out, “Long live good King Charles!” D’Artagnan replied by a grunt, and Athos by a smile. They arrived thus in front of Monk’s house, before which, as we have said, they had to pass on their way to St. James’s.

Athos and D’Artagnan said but little on the road, for the simple reason that they would have had so many things to talk about if they had spoken. Athos thought that by speaking he should evince satisfaction, and that might wound D’Artagnan. The latter feared that in speaking he should allow some little bitterness to steal into his words which would render his company unpleasant to his friend. It was a singular emulation of silence between contentment and ill-humor. D’Artagnan gave way first to that itching at the tip of his tongue which he so habitually experienced.

“Do you remember, Athos,” said he, “the passage of the ‘Memoires de D’Aubigny,’ in which that devoted servant, a Gascon like myself, poor as myself, and, I was going to add, brave as myself, relates instances of the meanness of Henry IV.? My father always told me, I remember, that D'Aubigny was a liar. But, nevertheless, examine how all the princes, the issue of the great Henry, keep up the character of the race."

"Nonsense!" said Athos, "the kings of France misers? You are mad, my friend."

"Oh! you are so perfect yourself, you never agree to the faults of others. But, in reality, Henry IV. was covetous, Louis XIII., his son, was so likewise; we know something of that, don't we? Gaston carried this vice to exaggeration, and has made himself, in this respect, hated by all who surround him. Henriette, poor woman, might well be avaricious, she who did not eat every day, and could not warm herself every winter; and that is an example she has given to her son Charles II., grandson of the great Henry IV., who is as covetous as his mother and his grandfather. See if I have well traced the genealogy of the misers?"

"D'Artagnan, my friend," cried Athos, "you are very rude towards that eagle race called the Bourbons."

"Eh! and I have forgotten the best instance of all--the other grandson of the Bernais, Louis XIV., my ex-master. Well, I hope he is miserly enough, he who would not lend a million to his brother Charles! Good! I see you are beginning to be angry. Here we are, by good luck, close to my house, or rather that of my friend, M. Monk."

"My dear D'Artagnan, you do not make me angry, you make me sad; it is cruel, in fact, to see a man of your deserts out of the position his services ought to have acquired; it appears to me, my dear friend, that your name is as radiant as the greatest names in war and diplomacy. Tell me if the Luynes, the Ballegardes, and the Bassompierres have merited, as we have, fortunes and honors? You are right, my friend, a hundred times right."

D'Artagnan sighed, and preceded his friend under the porch of he mansion Monk inhabited, at the extremity of the city. "Permit me," said he, "to leave my purse at home; for if in the crowd those clever pickpockets of London, who are much boasted of, even in Paris, were to steal from me the remainder of my poor crowns, I should not be able to return to France. Now, content I left France, and wild with joy I should return to it, seeing that all my prejudices of former days against England have returned, accompanied by many others."

Athos made no reply.

“So, then, my dear friend, one second, and I will follow you,” said D’Artagnan. “I know you are in a hurry to go yonder to receive your reward, but, believe me, I am not less eager to partake of your joy, although from a distance. Wait for me.” And D’Artagnan was already passing through the vestibule, when a man, half servant, half soldier, who filled in Monk’s establishment the double function of porter and guard, stopped our musketeer, saying to him in English:

“I beg your pardon, my Lord d’Artagnan!”

“Well,” replied the latter: “what is it? Is the general going to dismiss me? I only needed to be expelled by him.”

These words, spoken in French, made no impression upon the person to whom they were addressed, and who himself only spoke an English mixed with the rudest Scots. But Athos was grieved at them, for he began to think D’Artagnan was not wrong.

The Englishman showed D’Artagnan a letter: “From the general,” said he.

“Aye! that’s it, my dismissal!” replied the Gascon. “Must I read it, Athos?”

“You must be deceived,” said Athos, “or I know no more honest people in the world but you and myself.”

D’Artagnan shrugged his shoulders and unsealed the letter, while the impassible Englishman held for him a large lantern, by the light of which he was enabled to read it.

“Well, what is the matter?” said Athos, seeing the countenance of the reader change.

“Read it yourself,” said the musketeer.

Athos took the paper and read:

“MONSIEUR D’ARTAGNAN.--The king regrets very much you did not come to St. Paul’s with his cortege. He missed you, as I also have missed you, my dear captain. There is but one means of repairing all this. His majesty expects me at nine o’clock at the palace of St. James’s: will you be there at the same time with me? His gracious majesty appoints that hour for an audience he grants you.”

This letter was from Monk.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

The Audience.

Well?" cried Athos with a mild look of reproach, when D'Artagnan had read the letter addressed to him by Monk.

"Well!" said D'Artagnan, red with pleasure, and a little with shame, at having so hastily accused the king and Monk. "This is a politeness,--which leads to nothing, it is true, but yet it is a politeness."

"I had great difficulty in believing the young prince ungrateful," said Athos.

"The fact is, that his present is still too near his past," replied D'Artagnan; "after all, everything to the present moment proved me right."

"I acknowledge it, my dear friend, I acknowledge it. Ah! there is your cheerful look returned. You cannot think how delighted I am."

"Thus you see," said D'Artagnan, "Charles II. receives M. Monk at nine o'clock; he will receive me at ten; it is a grand audience, of the sort which at the Louvre are called 'distributions of court holy water.' Come, let us go and place ourselves under the spout, my dear friend! Come along."

Athos replied nothing; and both directed their steps, at a quick pace, towards the palace of St. James's, which the crowd still surrounded, to catch, through the windows, the shadows of the courtiers, and the reflection of the royal person. Eight o'clock was striking when the two friends took their places in the gallery filled with courtiers and politicians. Every one looked at these simply-dressed men in foreign costumes, at these two noble heads so full of character and meaning. On their side, Athos and D'Artagnan, having with two glances taken the measure of the whole assembly, resumed their chat.

A great noise was suddenly heard at the extremity of the gallery,--it was General Monk, who entered, followed by more than twenty officers, all eager for a smile, as only the evening before he was master of all England, and a glorious to-morrow was looked to, for the restorer of the Stuart family.

"Gentlemen," said Monk, turning round, "henceforward I beg you to remember that I am no longer anything. Lately I commanded the principal army of the republic; now that army is the king's, into whose hands I am about to surrender, at his command, my power of yesterday."

Great surprise was painted on all the countenances, and the circle of adulators and suppliants which surrounded Monk an instant before, was enlarged by degrees, and ended by being lost in the large undulations of the crowd. Monk was going into the ante-chamber as others did. D'Artagnan could not help remarking this to the Comte de la Fere, who frowned on beholding it. Suddenly the door of the royal apartment opened, and the young king appeared, preceded by two officers of his household.

"Good evening, gentlemen," said he. "Is General Monk here?"

"I am here, sire," replied the old general.

Charles stepped hastily towards him, and seized his hand with the warmest demonstration of friendship. "General," said the king, aloud, "I have just signed your patent,--you are Duke of Albemarle; and my intention is that no one shall equal you in power and fortune in this kingdom, where--the noble Montrose excepted--no one has equaled you in loyalty, courage, and talent. Gentlemen, the duke is commander of our armies of land and sea; pay him your respects, if you please, in that character."

Whilst every one was pressing round the general, who received all this homage without losing his impassibility for an instant, D'Artagnan said to Athos: "When one thinks that this duchy, this commander of the land and sea forces, all these grandeurs, in a word, have been shut up in a box six feet long and three feet wide--"

"My friend," replied Athos, "much more imposing grandeurs are confined in boxes still smaller,--and remain there forever."

All at once Monk perceived the two gentlemen, who held themselves aside until the crowd had diminished; he made himself a passage towards them, so that he surprised them in the midst of their philosophical reflections. "Were you speaking of me?" sad he, with a smile.

"My lord," replied Athos, "we were speaking likewise of God."

Monk reflected for a moment, and then replied gayly: "Gentlemen, let us speak a little of the king likewise, if you please; for you have, I believe, an audience of his majesty."

"At nine o'clock," said Athos.

"At ten o'clock," said D'Artagnan.

"Let us go into this closet at once," replied Monk, making a sign to his two companions to precede him; but to that neither would consent.

The king, during this discussion so characteristic of the French, had returned to the center of the gallery.

"Oh! my Frenchmen!" said he, in that tone of careless gayety which, in spite of so much grief and so many crosses, he had never lost. "My Frenchmen! my consolation!" Athos and D'Artagnan bowed.

"Duke, conduct these gentlemen into my study. I am at your service, messieurs," added he in French. And he promptly expedited his court, to return to his Frenchmen, as he called them. "Monsieur d'Artagnan," said he, as he entered his closet, "I am glad to see you again."

"Sire, my joy is at its height, at having the honor to salute your majesty in your own palace of St. James's."

"Monsieur, you have been willing to render me a great service, and I owe you my gratitude for it. If I did not fear to intrude upon the rights of our command general, I would offer you some post worthy of you near our person."

"Sire," replied D'Artagnan, "I have quitted the service of the king of France, making a promise to my prince not to serve any other king."

"Humph!" said Charles, "I am sorry to hear that; I should like to do much for you; I like you very much."

"Sire--"

"But, let us see," said Charles with a smile, "if we cannot make you break your word. Duke, assist me. If you were offered, that is to say, if I offered you the chief command of my musketeers?" D'Artagnan bowed lower than before.

"I should have the regret to refuse what your gracious majesty would offer me," said he; "a gentleman has but his word, and that word, as I have had the honor to tell your majesty, is engaged to the king of France."

"We shall say no more about it, then," said the king, turning towards Athos, and leaving D'Artagnan plunged in the deepest pangs of disappointment.

"Ah! I said so!" muttered the musketeer. "Words! words! Court holy water! Kings have always a marvelous talent for offering us that which they know we will not accept, and in appearing generous without risk. So be it!--triple fool that I was to have hoped for a moment!"

During this time, Charles took the hand of Athos. “Comte,” said he, “you have been to me a second father; the services you have rendered to me are above all price. I have, nevertheless, thought of a recompense. You were created by my father a Knight of the Garter--that is an order which all the kings of Europe cannot bear; by the queen regent, Knight of the Holy Ghost--which is an order not less illustrious; I join to it that of the Golden Fleece sent me by the king of France, to whom the king of Spain, his father-in-law, gave two on the occasion of his marriage; but in return, I have a service to ask of you.”

“Sire,” said Athos, with confusion, “the Golden Fleece for me! when the king of France is the only person in my country who enjoys that distinction?”

“I wish you to be in your country and all others the equal of all those whom sovereigns have honored with their favor,” said Charles, drawing the chain from his neck; “and I am sure, comte, my father smiles on me from his grave.”

“It is unaccountably strange,” said D’Artagnan to himself, whilst his friend, on his knees, received the eminent order which the king conferred on him--”it is almost incredible that I have always seen showers of prosperity fall upon all who surrounded me, and that not a drop ever reached me! If I were a jealous man, it would be enough to make one tear one’s hair, parole d’honneur!”

Athos rose from his knees, and Charles embraced him tenderly. “General!” said he to Monk--then stopping, with a smile, “pardon me, duke, I mean. No wonder if I make a mistake; the word duke is too short for me, I always seek some title to lengthen it. I should wish to see you so near my throne, that I might say to you, as to Louis XIV., my brother! Oh! I have it; and you will almost be my brother, for I make you viceroy of Ireland and Scotland, my dear duke. So, after that fashion, henceforward I shall not make a mistake.”

The duke seized the hand of the king, but without enthusiasm, without joy, as he did everything. His heart, however, had been moved by this last favor. Charles, by skillfully husbanding his generosity, had given the duke time to wish, although he might not have wished for so much as was given him.

“Mordioux!” grumbled D’Artagnan, “there is the shower beginning again! Oh! it is enough to turn one’s brain!” and he turned away with an air so sorrowful and so comically piteous, that the king, who caught it, could not restrain a smile. Monk was preparing to leave the room, to take leave of Charles.

"What! my trusty and well-beloved!" said the king to the duke, "are you going?"

"With your majesty's permission, for in truth I am weary. The emotions of the day have worn me out; I stand in need of rest."

"But," said the king, "you are not going without M. d'Artagnan, I hope."

"Why not, sire?" said the old warrior.

"Well! you know very well why," said the king.

Monk looked at Charles with astonishment.

"Oh! it may be possible; but if you forget, you, M. d'Artagnan, do not."

Astonishment was painted on the face of the musketeer.

"Well, then, duke," said the king, "do you not lodge with M. d'Artagnan?"

"I had the honor of offering M. d'Artagnan a lodging; yes, sire."

"That idea is your own, and yours solely?"

"Mine and mine only; yes, sire."

"Well! but it could not be otherwise--the prisoner always lodges with his conqueror."

Monk colored in his turn. "Ah! that is true," said he; "I am M. d'Artagnan's prisoner."

"Without doubt, duke, since you are not yet ransomed; but have no care of that; it was I who took you out of M. d'Artagnan's hands, and it is I who will pay your ransom."

The eyes of D'Artagnan regained their gayety and their brilliancy. The Gascon began to understand. Charles advanced towards him.

"The general," said he, "is not rich, and cannot pay you what he is worth. I am richer, certainly; but now that he is a duke, and if not a king, almost a king, he is worth a sum I could not perhaps pay. Come, M. d'Artagnan, be moderate with me; how much do I owe you?"

D'Artagnan, delighted at the turn things were taking, but not for a moment losing his self-possession, replied,--"Sire, your majesty has no occasion to be alarmed. When I had the good fortune to take his grace, M. Monk was only a general; it is therefore only a general's ransom that is due to me. But if the general will have the kindness to deliver me his sword, I shall consider myself paid; for there is nothing in the world but the general's sword which is worth as much as himself."

"Odds fish! as my father said," cried Charles. "That is a gallant proposal, and a gallant man, is he not, duke?"

"Upon my honor, yes, sire," and he drew his sword. "Monsieur," said he to D'Artagnan, "here is what you demand. Many have handled a better blade; but however modest mine may be, I have never surrendered it to any one."

D'Artagnan received with pride the sword which had just made a king.

"Oh! oh!" cried Charles II.; "what a sword that has restored me to my throne--to go out of the kingdom--and not, one day, to figure among the crown jewels! No, on my soul! that shall not be! Captain d'Artagnan, I will give you two hundred thousand livres for your sword! If that is too little, say so."

"It is too little, sire," replied D'Artagnan, with inimitable seriousness. "In the first place, I do not at all wish to sell it; but your majesty desires me to do so, and that is an order. I obey, then, but the respect I owe to the illustrious warrior who hears me, commands me to estimate a third more the reward of my victory. I ask then three hundred thousand livres for the sword, or I shall give it to your majesty for nothing." And taking it by the point he presented it to the king. Charles broke into hilarious laughter.

"A gallant man, and a merry companion! Odds fish! is he not, duke? is he not, comte? He pleases me! I like him! Here, Chevalier d'Artagnan, take this." And going to the table, he took a pen and wrote an order upon his treasurer for three hundred thousand livres.

D'Artagnan took it, and turning gravely towards Monk: "I have still asked too little, I know," said he, "but believe me, your grace, I would rather have died that allow myself to be governed by avarice."

The king began to laugh again, like the happiest cockney of his kingdom.

"You will come and see me again before you go, chevalier?" said he; "I shall want to lay in a stock of gayety now my Frenchmen are leaving me."

"Ah! sire, it will not be with the gayety as with the duke's sword; I will give it to your majesty gratis," replied D'Artagnan, whose feet scarcely seemed to touch the ground.

"And you, comte," added Charles, turning towards Athos, "come again, also; I have an important message to confide to you. Your hand, duke." Monk pressed the hand of the king.

“Adieu! gentlemen,” said Charles, holding out each of his hands to the two Frenchmen, who carried them to their lips.

“Well,” said Athos, when they were out of the palace, “are you satisfied?”

“Hush!” said D’Artagnan, wild with joy, “I have not yet returned from the treasurer’s--a shutter may fall upon my head.”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Of the Embarrassment of Riches.

D’Artagnan lost no time, and as soon as the thing was suitable and opportune, he paid a visit to the lord treasurer of his majesty. He had then the satisfaction to exchange a piece of paper, covered with very ugly writing, for a prodigious number of crowns, recently stamped with the effigies of his very gracious majesty Charles II.

D’Artagnan easily controlled himself: and yet, on this occasion, he could not help evincing a joy which the reader will perhaps comprehend, if he deigns to have some indulgence for a man who, since his birth, had never seen so many pieces and rolls of pieces juxta-placed in an order truly agreeable to the eye. The treasurer placed all the rolls in bags, and closed each bag with a stamp sealed with the arms of England, a favor which treasurers do not grant to everybody. Then, impassible, and just as polite as he ought to be towards a man honored with the friendship of the king, he said to D’Artagnan:

“Take away your money, sir.” Your money! These words made a thousand chords vibrate in the heart of D’Artagnan, which he had never felt before. He had the bags packed in a small cart, and returned home meditating deeply. A man who possessed three hundred thousand livres can no longer expect to wear a smooth brow; a wrinkle for every hundred thousand livres is not too much.

D’Artagnan shut himself up, ate no dinner, closed his door to everybody, and, with a lighted lamp, and a loaded pistol on the table, he watched all night, ruminating upon the means of preventing these lovely crowns, which from the coffers of the king had passed into his coffers, from passing from his coffers into the pockets of any thief whatever. The best means discovered by the Gascon was to inclose his treasure, for the present, under locks so solid that no wrist could break them, and so complicated that no master-key could open them. D’Artagnan remembered that the English are masters in mechanics and conservative industry; and he determined to go in the morning in search of a mechanic who would sell him a strong box. He did not go far; Master Will Jobson, dwelling in Piccadilly, listened to his propositions, comprehended his wishes, and promised to make him a safety lock that should relieve him from all future fear.

"I will give you," said he, "a piece of mechanism entirely new. At the first serious attempt upon your lock, an invisible plate will open of itself and vomit forth a pretty copper bullet the weight of a mark--which will knock down the intruder, and not with a loud report. What do you think of it?"

"I think it very ingenuous," cried D'Artagnan; "the little copper bullet pleases me mightily. So now, sir mechanic, the terms?"

"A fortnight for the execution, and fifteen hundred livres payable on delivery," replied the artisan.

D'Artagnan's brow darkened. A fortnight was delay enough to allow the thieves of London time to remove all occasion for the strong box. As to the fifteen hundred livres--that would be paying too dear for what a little vigilance would procure him for nothing.

"I will think of it," said he; "thank you, sir." And he returned home at full speed; nobody had yet touched his treasure. That same day Athos paid a visit to his friend and found him so thoughtful that he could not help expressing his surprise.

"How is this?" said he, "you are rich and not gay--you, who were so anxious for wealth!"

"My friend, the pleasures to which we are not accustomed oppress us more than the griefs with which we are familiar. Give me your opinion, if you please. I can ask you, who have always had money: when we have money, what do we do with it?"

"That depends."

"What have you done with yours, seeing that it has not made you a miser or a prodigal? For avarice dries up the heart, and prodigality drowns it--is that not so?"

"Fabricius could not have spoken more justly. But in truth, my money has never been a burden to me."

"How so? Do you place it out at interest?"

"No; you know I have a tolerably handsome house; and that house composes the better part of my property."

"I know it does."

"So that you can be as rich as I am, and, indeed, more rich, whenever you like, by the same means."

"But your rents,--do you lay them by?"

"No."

"What do you think of a chest concealed in a wall?"

"I never made use of such a thing."

"Then you must have some confidant, some safe man of business who pays you interest at a fair rate."

"Not at all."

"Good heavens! what do you do with it, then?"

"I spend all I have, and I only have what I spend, my dear D'Artagnan."

"Ah! that may be. But you are something of a prince; fifteen or sixteen thousand livres melt away between your fingers; and then you have expenses and appearances--"

"Well, I don't see why you should be less of a noble than I am, my friend; your money would be quite sufficient."

"Three hundred thousand livres! Two-thirds too much!"

"I beg your pardon--did you not tell me?--I thought I heard you say--I fancied you had a partner--"

"Ah! Mordioux! that's true," cried D'Artagnan, coloring; "there is Planchet. I had forgotten Planchet, upon my life! Well! there are my three hundred thousand livres broken into. That's a pity! it was a round sum, and sounded well. That is true, Athos; I am no longer rich. What a memory you have!"

"Tolerably good; yes, thank God!"

"The worthy Planchet!" grumbled D'Artagnan; "his was not a bad dream! What a speculation! Peste! Well! what is said is said."

"How much are you to give him?"

"Oh!" said D'Artagnan, "he is not a bad fellow; I shall arrange matters with him. I have had a great deal of trouble, you see, and expenses; all that must be taken into account."

"My dear friend, I can depend on you, and have no fear for the worthy Planchet; his interests are better in your hands than in his own. But now that you have nothing more to do here, we shall depart, if you please. You can go and thank his majesty, ask if he has any commands, and in six days we may be able to get sight of the towers of Notre Dame."

"My friend, I am most anxious to be off, and will go at once and pay my respects to the king."

"I," said Athos, "am going to call upon some friends in the city, and shall then be at your service."

"Will you lend me Grimaud?"

"With all my heart. What do you want to do with him?"

"Something very simple, and which will not fatigue him; I shall only beg him to take charge of my pistols, which lie there on the table near that coffer."

"Very well!" replied Athos, imperturbably.

"And he will not stir, will he?"

"Not more than the pistols themselves."

"Then I shall go and take leave of his majesty. Au revoir!"

D'Artagnan arrived at St. James's, where Charles II., who was busy writing, kept him in the ante-chamber a full hour. Whilst walking about in the gallery, from the door to the window, from the window to the door, he thought he saw a cloak like Athos's cross the vestibule; but at the moment he was going to ascertain if it were he, the usher summoned him to his majesty's presence. Charles II. rubbed his hands while receiving the thanks of our friend.

"Chevalier," said he, "you are wrong to express gratitude to me; I have not paid you a quarter of the value of the history of the box into which you put the brave general--the excellent Duke of Albemarle, I mean." And the king laughed heartily.

D'Artagnan did not think it proper to interrupt his majesty, and he bowed with much modesty.

"A propos," continued Charles, "do you think my dear Monk has really pardoned you?"

"Pardoned me! yes, I hope so, sire!"

"Eh!--but it was a cruel trick! Odds fish! to pack up the first personage of the English revolution like a herring. In your place I would not trust him, chevalier."

"But, sire--"

"Yes, I know very well Monk calls you his friend, but he has too penetrating an eye not to have a memory, and too lofty a brow not to be very proud, you know, grande supercilium."

"I shall certainly learn Latin," said D'Artagnan to himself.

“But stop,” cried the merry monarch, “I must manage your reconciliation; I know how to set about it; so--”

D’Artagnan bit his mustache. “Will your majesty permit me to tell you the truth?”

“Speak, chevalier, speak.”

“Well, sire, you alarm me greatly. If your majesty undertakes the affair, as you seem inclined to do, I am a lost man; the duke will have me assassinated.”

The king burst into a fresh roar of laughter, which changed D’Artagnan’s alarm into downright terror.

“Sire, I beg you to allow me to settle this matter myself, and if your majesty has no further need of my services--”

“No, chevalier. What, do you want to leave us?” replied Charles, with a hilarity that grew more and more alarming.

“If your majesty has no more commands for me.”

Charles became more serious.

“One single thing. See my sister, the Lady Henrietta. Do you know her?”

“No, sire, but--an old soldier like me is not an agreeable spectacle for a young and gay princess.”

“Ah! but my sister must know you; she must in case of need have you to depend upon.”

“Sire, every one that is dear to your majesty will be sacred to me.”

“Very well!--Parry! Come here, Parry!”

The side door opened and Parry entered, his face beaming with pleasure as soon as he saw D’Artagnan.

“What is Rochester doing?” said the king.

“He is on the canal with the ladies,” replied Parry.

“And Buckingham?”

“He is there also.”

“That is well. You will conduct the chevalier to Villiers; that is the Duke of Buckingham, chevalier; and beg the duke to introduce M. d’Artagnan to the Princess Henrietta.”

Parry bowed and smiled to D’Artagnan.

“Chevalier,” continued the king, “this is your parting audience; you can afterwards set out as soon as you please.”

“Sire, I thank you.”

“But be sure you make your peace with Monk!”

"Oh, sire--"

"You know there is one of my vessels at your disposal?"

"Sire, you overpower me; I cannot think of putting your majesty's officers to inconvenience on my account."

The king slapped D'Artagnan upon the shoulder.

"Nobody will be inconvenienced on your account, chevalier, but for that of an ambassador I am about sending to France, and to whom you will willingly serve as a companion, I fancy, for you know him."

D'Artagnan appeared astonished.

"He is a certain Comte de la Fere,--whom you call Athos," added the king; terminating the conversation, as he had begun it, by a joyous burst of laughter. "Adieu, chevalier, adieu. Love me as I love you." And thereupon, making a sign to Parry to ask if there were any one waiting for him in the adjoining closet, the king disappeared into that closet, leaving the chevalier perfectly astonished by this singular audience. The old man took his arm in a friendly way, and led him towards the garden.

CHAPTER XXXV.

On the Canal.

Upon the green waters of the canal bordered with marble, upon which time had already scattered black spots and tufts of mossy grass, there glided majestically a long, flat bark adorned with the arms of England, surmounted by a dais, and carpeted with long damasked stuffs, which trailed their fringes in the water. Eight rowers, leaning lazily to their oars, made it move upon the canal with the graceful slowness of the swans, which, disturbed in their ancient possessions by the approach of the bark, looked from a distance at this splendid and noisy pageant. We say noisy--for the bark contained four guitar and lute players, two singers, and several courtiers, all sparkling with gold and precious stones, and showing their white teeth in emulation of each other, to please the Lady Henrietta Stuart, grand-daughter of Henry IV., daughter of Charles I., and sister of Charles II., who occupied the seat of honor under the dais of the bark. We know this young princess, we have seen her at the Louvre with her mother, wanting wood, wanting bread, and fed by the coadjuteur and the parliament. She had, therefore, like her brothers, passed through an uneasy youth; then, all at once, she had just awakened from a long and horrible dream, seated on the steps of a throne, surrounded by courtiers and flatterers. Like Mary Stuart on leaving prison, she aspired not only to life and liberty, but to power and wealth.

The Lady Henrietta, in growing, had attained remarkable beauty, which the recent restoration had rendered celebrated. Misfortune had taken from her the luster of pride, but prosperity had restored it to her. She was resplendent, then, in her joy and her happiness,--like those hot-house flowers which, forgotten during a frosty autumn night, have hung their heads, but which on the morrow, warmed once more by the atmosphere in which they were born, rise again with greater splendor than ever. Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, son of him who played so conspicuous a part in the early chapters of this history,--Villiers of Buckingham, a handsome cavalier, melancholy with women, a jester with men,--and Wilmot, Lord Rochester, a jester with both sexes, were standing at this moment before the Lady

Henrietta, disputing the privilege of making her smile. As to that young and beautiful princess, reclining upon a cushion of velvet bordered with gold, her hands hanging listlessly so as to dip in the water, she listened carelessly to the musicians without hearing them, and heard the two courtiers without appearing to listen to them.

This Lady Henrietta--this charming creature--this woman who joined the graces of France to the beauties of England, not having yet loved, was cruel in her coquetry. The smile, then,--that innocent favor of young girls,--did not even lighten her countenance; and if, at times, she did raise her eyes, it was to fasten them upon one or other of the cavaliers with such a fixity, that their gallantry, bold as it generally was, took the alarm, and became timid.

In the meanwhile the boat continued its course, the musicians made a great noise, and the courtiers began, like them, to be out of breath. Besides, the excursion became doubtless monotonous to the princess, for all at once, shaking her head with an air of impatience,--"Come gentlemen,--enough of this;--let us land."

"Ah, madam," said Buckingham, "we are very unfortunate! We have not succeeded in making the excursion agreeable to your royal highness."

"My mother expects me," replied the princess; "and I must frankly admit, gentlemen, I am bored." And whilst uttering this cruel word, Henrietta endeavored to console by a look each of the two young men, who appeared terrified at such frankness. The look produced its effect--the two faces brightened; but immediately, as if the royal coquette thought she had done too much for simple mortals, she made a movement, turned her back on both her adorers, and appeared plunged in a reverie in which it was evident they had no part.

Buckingham bit his lips with anger, for he was truly in love with the Lady Henrietta, and, in that case, took everything in a serious light. Rochester bit his lips likewise; but his wit always dominated over his heart, it was purely and simply to repress a malicious smile. The princess was then allowing the eyes she turned from the young nobles to wander over the green and flowery turf of the park, when she perceived Parry and D'Artagnan at a distance.

"Who is coming yonder?" said she.

The two young men turned round with the rapidity of lightning.

"Parry," replied Buckingham; "nobody but Parry."

"I beg your pardon," said Rochester, "but I think he has a companion."

“Yes,” said the princess, at first with languor, but then,--”What mean those words, ‘Nobody but Parry;’ say, my lord?”

“Because, madam,” replied Buckingham, piqued, “because the faithful Parry, the wandering Parry, the eternal Parry, is not, I believe, of much consequence.”

“You are mistaken, duke. Parry--the wandering Parry, as you call him--has always wandered in the service of my family, and the sight of that old man always gives me satisfaction.”

The Lady Henrietta followed the usual progress of pretty women, particularly coquettish women; she passed from caprice to contradiction;--the gallant had undergone the caprice, the courtier must bend beneath the contradictory humor. Buckingham bowed, but made no reply.

“It is true, madam,” said Rochester, bowing in his turn, “that Parry is the model of servants; but, madam, he is no longer young, and we laugh only when we see cheerful objects. Is an old man a gay object?”

“Enough, my lord,” said the princess, coolly; “the subject of conversation is unpleasant to me.”

Then, as if speaking to herself, “It is really unaccountable,” said she, “how little regard my brother’s friends have for his servants.”

“Ah, madam,” cried Buckingham, “your royal highness pierces my heart with a dagger forged by your own hands.”

“What is the meaning of that speech, which is turned so like a French madrigal, duke? I do not understand it.”

“It means, madam, that you yourself, so good, so charming, so sensible, you have laughed sometimes--smiled, I should say--at the idle prattle of that good Parry, for whom your royal highness to-day entertains such a marvelous susceptibility.”

“Well, my lord, if I have forgotten myself so far,” said Henrietta, “you do wrong to remind me of it.” And she made a sign of impatience. “The good Parry wants to speak to me, I believe: please order them to row to the shore, my Lord Rochester.”

Rochester hastened to repeat the princess’s command; and a moment later the boat touched the bank.

“Let us land, gentlemen,” said Henrietta, taking the arm which Rochester offered her, although Buckingham was nearer to her, and had presented his. Then Rochester, with an ill-dissembled pride, which pierced the heart of the unhappy Buckingham through and through, led the princess across the little bridge which the rowers had cast from the royal boat to the shore.

"Which way will your highness go?" asked Rochester.

"You see, my lord, towards that good Parry, who is wandering, as my lord of Buckingham says, and seeking me with eyes weakened by the tears he has shed over our misfortunes."

"Good heavens!" said Rochester, "how sad your royal highness is to-day; in truth we seem ridiculous fools to you, madam."

"Speak for yourself, my lord," interrupted Buckingham with vexation; "for my part, I displease her royal highness to such a degree, that I appear absolutely nothing to her."

Neither Rochester nor the princess made any reply; Henrietta only urged her companion more quickly on. Buckingham remained behind, and took advantage of this isolation to give himself up to his anger; he bit his handkerchief so furiously that it was soon in shreds.

"Parry, my good Parry," said the princess, with her gentle voice, "come hither. I see you are seeking me, and I am waiting for you."

"Ah, madam," said Rochester, coming charitably to the help of his companion, who had remained, as we have said, behind, "if Parry cannot see your royal highness, the man who follows him is a sufficient guide, even for a blind man; for he has eyes of flame. That man is a double-lamped lantern."

"Lighting a very handsome martial countenance," said the princess, determined to be as ill-natured as possible. Rochester bowed. "One of those vigorous soldiers' heads seen nowhere but in France," added the princess, with the perseverance of a woman sure of impunity.

Rochester and Buckingham looked at each other, as much as to say,--"What can be the matter with her?"

"See, my lord of Buckingham, what Parry wants," said Henrietta. "Go!"

The young man, who considered this order as a favor, resumed his courage, and hastened to meet Parry, who, followed by D'Artagnan, advanced slowly on account of his age. D'Artagnan walked slowly but nobly, as D'Artagnan, doubled by the third of a million, ought to walk, that is to say, without conceit or swagger, but without timidity. When Buckingham, very eager to comply with the desire of the princess, who had seated herself on a marble bench, as if fatigued with the few steps she had gone,--when Buckingham, we say, was at a distance of only a few paces from Parry, the latter recognized him.

"Ah! my lord!" cried he, quite out of breath, "will your grace obey the king?"

"In what, Mr. Parry?" said the young man, with a kind of coolness tempered by a desire to make himself agreeable to the princess.

"Well, his majesty begs your grace to present this gentleman to her royal highness the Princess Henrietta."

"In the first place, what is the gentleman's name?" said the duke, haughtily.

D'Artagnan, as we know, was easily affronted, and the Duke of Buckingham's tone displeased him. He surveyed the courtier from head to foot, and two flashes beamed from beneath his bent brows. But, after a struggle,--"Monsieur le Chevalier d'Artagnan, my lord," replied he, quietly.

"Pardon me, sir, that teaches me your name, but nothing more."

"You mean--"

"I mean I do not know you."

"I am more fortunate than you, sir," replied D'Artagnan, "for I have had the honor of knowing your family, and particularly my lord Duke of Buckingham, your illustrious father."

"My father?" said Buckingham. "Well, I think I now remember. Monsieur le Chevalier d'Artagnan, do you say?"

D'Artagnan bowed. "In person," said he.

"Pardon me, but are you one of those Frenchmen who had secret relations with my father?"

"Exactly, my lord duke, I am one of those Frenchmen."

"Then, sir, permit me to say that it was strange my father never heard of you during his lifetime."

"No, monsieur, but he heard of me at the moment of his death: it was I who sent to him, through the hands of the valet de chambre of Anne of Austria, notice of the dangers which threatened him; unfortunately, it came too late."

"Never mind, monsieur," said Buckingham. "I understand now, that, having had the intention of rendering a service to the father, you have come to claim the protection of the son."

"In the first place, my lord," replied D'Artagnan, phlegmatically, "I claim the protection of no man. His majesty, Charles II., to whom I have had the honor of rendering some services--I may tell you, my lord, my life has been passed in such occupations--King Charles II., then, who wishes to honor me with some kindness, desires me to be presented to her royal highness the Princess Henrietta, his sister, to whom I shall, perhaps, have the good fortune to be of service hereafter. Now, the king knew that you at this moment were with her royal highness, and sent me to you. There is no other mystery, I ask absolutely nothing of you; and if you will not present me to her royal highness, I shall be compelled to do without you, and present myself."

"At least, sir," said Buckingham, determined to have the last word, "you will not refuse me an explanation provoked by yourself."

"I never refuse, my lord," said D'Artagnan.

"As you have had relations with my father, you must be acquainted with some private details?"

"These relations are already far removed from us, my lord--for you were not then born--and for some unfortunate diamond studs, which I received from his hands and carried back to France, it is really not worth while awakening so many remembrances."

"Ah! sir," said Buckingham, warmly, going up to D'Artagnan, and holding out his hand to him, "it is you, then--you whom my father sought everywhere and who had a right to expect so much from us."

"To expect, my lord, in truth, that is my forte; all my life I have expected."

At this moment, the princess, who was tired of not seeing the stranger approach her, arose and came towards them.

"At least, sir," said Buckingham, "you shall not wait for the presentation you claim of me."

Then turning towards the princess and bowing: "Madam," said the young man, "the king, your brother, desires me to have the honor of presenting to your royal highness, Monsieur le Chevalier d'Artagnan."

"In order that your royal highness may have, in case of need, a firm support and a sure friend," added Parry. D'Artagnan bowed.

"You have still something to say, Parry," replied Henrietta, smiling upon D'Artagnan, while addressing the old servant.

"Yes, madam, the king desires you to preserve religiously in your memory the name and merit of M. d'Artagnan, to whom his majesty owes, he says, the recovery of his kingdom.” Buckingham, the princess, and Rochester looked at each other.

“That,” said D’Artagnan, “is another little secret, of which, in all probability, I shall not boast to his majesty’s son, as I have done to you with respect to the diamond studs.”

“Madam,” said Buckingham, “monsieur has just, for the second time, recalled to my memory an event which excites my curiosity to such a degree, that I shall venture to ask your permission to take him to one side for a moment, to converse in private.”

“Do, my lord,” said the princess; “but restore to the sister, as quickly as possible, this friend so devoted to the brother.” And she took the arm of Rochester, whilst Buckingham took that of D’Artagnan.

“Oh! tell me, chevalier,” said Buckingham, “all that affair of the diamonds, which nobody knows in England, not even the son of him who was the hero of it.”

“My lord, one person alone had a right to relate all that affair, as you call it, and that was your father; he thought it proper to be silent, I must beg you to allow me to be so likewise.” And D’Artagnan bowed like a man upon whom it was evident no entreaties could prevail.

“Since it is so, sir,” said Buckingham, “pardon my indiscretion, I beg you; and if, at any time, I should go into France--” and he turned round to take a last look at the princess, who took but little notice of him, totally occupied as she was, or appeared to be, with Rochester. Buckingham sighed.

“Well?” said D’Artagnan.

“I was saying that if, any day, I were to go to France--”

“You will go, my lord,” said D’Artagnan, “I shall answer for that.”

“And how so?”

“Oh, I have strange powers of prediction; if I do predict anything I am seldom mistaken. If, then, you do come to France?”

“Well, then, monsieur, you, of whom kings ask that valuable friendship which restores crowns to them, I will venture to beg of you a little of that great interest you took in my father.”

“My lord,” replied D’Artagnan, “believe me, I shall deem myself highly honored if, in France, you remember having seen me here. And now permit--”

Then, turning towards the princess: “Madam,” said he, “your royal highness is a daughter of France; and in that quality I hope to see you again in Paris. One of my happy days will be on that on which your royal highness shall give me any command whatever, thus proving to me that you have not forgotten the recommendations of your august brother.” And he bowed respectfully to the young princess, who gave him her hand to kiss with a right royal grace.

“Ah! madam,” said Buckingham, in a subdued voice, “what can a man do to obtain a similar favor from your royal highness?”

“Dame! my lord,” replied Henrietta, “ask Monsieur d’Artagnan; he will tell you.”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

How D’Artagnan drew a Country-Seat from a Deal Box.

The king’s words regarding the wounded pride of Monk had inspired D’Artagnan with no small portion of apprehension. The lieutenant had had, all his life, the great art of choosing his enemies; and when he had found them implacable and invincible, it was when he had not been able, under any pretense, to make them otherwise. But points of view change greatly in the course of a life. It is a magic lantern, of which the eye of man every year changes the aspects. It results that from the last day of a year on which we saw white, to the first day of the year on which we shall see black, there is the interval of but a single night.

Now, D’Artagnan, when he left Calais with his ten scamps, would have hesitated as little in attacking a Goliath, a Nebuchadnezzar, or a Holofernes, as he would in crossing swords with a recruit or caviling with a land-lady. Then he resembled the sparrow-hawk, which, when fasting, will attack a ram. Hunger is blind. But D’Artagnan satisfied--D’Artagnan rich--D’Artagnan a conqueror--D’Artagnan proud of so difficult a triumph--D’Artagnan had too much to lose not to reckon, figure by figure, with probable misfortune.

His thoughts were employed, therefore, all the way on the road from his presentation, with one thing, and that was, how he should conciliate a man like Monk, a man whom Charles himself, king as he was, conciliated with difficulty; for, scarcely established, the protected might again stand in need of the protector, and would, consequently, not refuse him, such being the case, the petty satisfaction of transporting M. d’Artagnan, or of confining him in one of the Middlesex prisons, or drowning him a little on his passage from Dover to Boulogne. Such sorts of satisfaction kings are accustomed to render to viceroys without disagreeable consequences.

It would not be at all necessary for the king to be active in that contrepartie of the play in which Monk should take his revenge. The part of the king would be confined to simply pardoning the viceroy of Ireland all he should undertake against D’Artagnan. Nothing more was necessary to place the conscience of the Duke of Albemarle at rest than a te absolvo said with a laugh, or the scrawl of “Charles the King,” traced at the foot of a parchment; and with these two words pronounced, and these two words written, poor D’Artagnan was forever crushed beneath the ruins of his imagination.

And then, a thing sufficiently disquieting for a man with such foresight as our musketeer, he found himself alone; and even the friendship of Athos could not restore his confidence. Certainly if the affair had only concerned a free distribution of sword-thrusts, the musketeer would have counted upon his companion; but in delicate dealings with a king, when the perhaps of an unlucky chance should arise in justification of Monk or of Charles of England, D’Artagnan knew Athos well enough to be sure he would give the best possible coloring to the loyalty of the survivor, and would content himself with shedding floods of tears on the tomb of the dead, supposing the dead to be his friend, and afterwards composing his epitaph in the most pompous superlatives.

“Decidedly,” thought the Gascon; and this thought was the result of the reflections which he had just whispered to himself and which we have repeated aloud--”decidedly, I must be reconciled with M. Monk, and acquire proof of his perfect indifference for the past. If, and God forbid it should be so! he is still sulky and reserved in the expression of this sentiment, I shall give my money to Athos to take away with him, and remain in England just long enough to unmask him, then, as I have a quick eye and a light foot, I shall notice the first hostile sign; to decamp or conceal myself at the residence of my lord Buckingham, who seems a good sort of devil at the bottom, and to whom, in return for his hospitality, I shall relate all that history of the diamonds, which can now compromise nobody but an old queen, who need not be ashamed, after being the wife of a miserly creature like Mazarin, of having formerly been the mistress of a handsome nobleman like Buckingham. Mordioux! that is the thing, and this Monk shall not get the better of me. Eh? and besides I have an idea!”

We know that, in general, D’Artagnan was not wanting in ideas; and during this soliloquy, D’Artagnan buttoned his vest up to the chin, and nothing excited his imagination like this preparation for a combat of any kind, called accinction by the Romans. He was quite heated when he reached the mansion of the Duke of Albemarle. He was introduced to the viceroy with a promptitude which proved that he was considered as one of the household. Monk was in his business-closet.

“My lord,” said D’Artagnan, with that expression of frankness which the Gascon knew so well how to assume, “my lord, I have come to ask your grace’s advice!”

Monk, as closely buttoned up morally as his antagonist was physically, replied: “Ask, my friend;” and his countenance presented an expression not less open than that of D’Artagnan.

“My lord, in the first place, promise me secrecy and indulgence.”

“I promise you all you wish. What is the matter? Speak!”

“It is, my lord, that I am not quite pleased with the king.”

“Indeed! And on what account, my dear lieutenant?”

“Because his majesty gives way sometimes to jests very compromising for his servants; and jesting, my lord, is a weapon that seriously wounds men of the sword, as we are.”

Monk did all in his power not to betray his thought, but D’Artagnan watched him with too close attention not to detect an almost imperceptible flush upon his face. “Well, now, for my part,” said he, with the most natural air possible, “I am not an enemy of jesting, my dear Monsieur d’Artagnan; my soldiers will tell you that even many times in camp, I listened very indifferently, and with a certain pleasure, to the satirical songs which the army of Lambert passed into mine, and which, certainly, would have caused the ears of a general more susceptible than I am to tingle.”

“Oh, my lord,” said D’Artagnan, “I know you are a complete man; I know you have been, for a long time, placed above human miseries; but there are jests and jests of a certain kind, which have the power of irritating me beyond expression.”

“May I inquire what kind, my friend?”

“Such as are directed against my friends or against people I respect, my lord!”

Monk made a slight movement, which D’Artagnan perceived. “Eh! and in what,” asked Monk, “in what can the stroke of a pin which scratches another tickle your skin? Answer me that.”

“My lord, I can explain it to you in a single sentence; it concerns you.”

Monk advanced a single step towards D’Artagnan. “Concerns me?” said he.

"Yes, and this is what I cannot explain; but that arises, perhaps, from my want of knowledge of his character. How can the king have the heart to jest about a man who has rendered him so many and such great services? How can one understand that he should amuse himself in setting by the ears a lion like you with a gnat like me?"

"I cannot conceive that in any way," said Monk.

"But so it is. The king, who owed me a reward, might have rewarded me as a soldier, without contriving that history of the ransom, which affects you, my lord."

"No," said Monk, laughing: "it does not affect me in any way, I can assure you."

"Not as regards me, I can understand; you know me, my lord, I am so discreet that the grave would appear a babbler compared to me; but--do you understand, my lord?"

"No," replied Monk, with persistent obstinacy.

"If another knew the secret which I know--"

"What secret?"

"Eh! my lord, why, that unfortunate secret of Newcastle."

"Oh! the million of the Comte de la Fere?"

"No, my lord, no; the enterprise made upon your grace's person."

"It was well played, chevalier, that is all, and no more is to be said about it: you are a soldier, both brave and cunning, which proves that you unite the qualities of Fabius and Hannibal. You employed your means, force and cunning: there is nothing to be said against that: I ought to have been on guard."

"Ah! yes; I know, my lord, and I expected nothing less from your partiality; so that if it were only the abduction in itself, Mordioux! that would be nothing; but there are--"

"What?"

"The circumstances of that abduction."

"What circumstances?"

"Oh! you know very well what I mean, my lord."

"No, curse me if I do."

"There is--in truth, it is difficult to speak it."

"There is?"

"Well, there is that devil of a box!"

Monk colored visibly. "Well, I have forgotten it."

“Deal box,” continued D’Artagnan, “with holes for the nose and mouth. In truth, my lord, all the rest was well; but the box, the box! that was really a coarse joke.” Monk fidgeted about in his chair. “And, notwithstanding my having done that,” resumed D’Artagnan, “I, a soldier of fortune, it was quite simple, because by the side of that action, a little inconsiderate I admit, which I committed, but which the gravity of the case may excuse, I am circumspect and reserved.”

“Oh!” said Monk, “believe me, I know you well, Monsieur d’Artagnan, and I appreciate you.”

D’Artagnan never took his eyes off Monk; studying all which passed in the mind of the general, as he prosecuted his idea. “But it does not concern me,” resumed he.

“Well, then, who does it concern?” said Monk, who began to grow a little impatient.

“It relates to the king, who will never restrain his tongue.”

“Well! and suppose he should say all he knows?” said Monk, with a degree of hesitation.

“My lord,” replied D’Artagnan, “do not dissemble, I implore you, with a man who speaks so frankly as I do. You have a right to feel your susceptibility excited, however benignant it may be. What, the devil! it is not the place for a man like you, a man who plays with crowns and scepters as a Bohemian plays with his balls; it is not the place of a serious man, I said, to be shut up in a box like some freak of natural history; for you must understand it would make all your enemies ready to burst with laughter, and you are so great, so noble, so generous, that you must have many enemies. This secret is enough to set half the human race laughing, if you were represented in that box. It is not decent to have the second personage in the kingdom laughed at.”

Monk was quite out of countenance at the idea of seeing himself represented in this box. Ridicule, as D’Artagnan had judiciously foreseen, acted upon him in a manner which neither the chances of war, the aspirations of ambition, nor the fear of death had been able to do.

“Good,” thought the Gascon, “he is frightened: I am safe.”

“Oh! as to the king,” said Monk, “fear nothing, my dear Monsieur d’Artagnan; the king will not jest with Monk, I assure you!”

The momentary flash of his eye was noticed by D’Artagnan. Monk lowered his tone immediately: “The king,” continued he, “is of too noble a nature, the king’s heart is too high to allow him to wish ill to those who do him good.”

“Oh! certainly,” cried D’Artagnan. “I am entirely of your grace’s opinion with regard to his heart, but not as to his head--it is good, but it is trifling.”

“The king will not trifle with Monk, be assured.”

“Then you are quite at ease, my lord?”

“On that side, at least! yes, perfectly!”

“Oh! I understand you; you are at ease as far as the king is concerned?”

“I have told you I was.”

“But you are not so much so on my account?”

“I thought I had told you that I had faith in your loyalty and discretion.”

“No doubt, no doubt, but you must remember one thing--”

“What is that?”

“That I was not alone, that I had companions; and what companions!”

“Oh! yes, I know them.”

“And, unfortunately, my lord, they know you, too!”

“Well?”

“Well; they are yonder, at Boulogne, waiting for me.”

“And you fear--”

“Yes, I fear that in my absence--Parbleu! If I were near them, I could answer for their silence.”

“Was I not right in saying that the danger, if there was any danger, would not come from his majesty, however disposed he may be to jest, but from your companions, as you say? To be laughed at by a king may be tolerable, but by the horse-boys and scamps of the army! Damn it!”

“Yes, I understand, that would be unbearable; that is why, my lord, I came to say,--do you not think it would be better for me to set out for France as soon as possible?”

“Certainly, if you think your presence--”

“Would impose silence upon those scoundrels? Oh! I am sure of that, my lord.”

“Your presence will not prevent the report from spreading, if the tale has already transpired.”

“Oh! it has not transpired, my lord, I will wager. At all events, be assured that I am determined upon one thing.”

“What is that?”

"To blow out the brains of the first who shall have propagated that report, and of the first who has heard it. After which I shall return to England to seek an asylum, and perhaps employment with your grace."

"Oh, come back! come back!"

"Unfortunately, my lord, I am acquainted with nobody here but your grace, and if I should no longer find you, or if you should have forgotten me in your greatness?"

"Listen to me, Monsieur d'Artagnan," replied Monk; "you are a superior man, full of intelligence and courage; you deserve all the good fortune this world can bring you; come with me into Scotland, and, I swear to you, I shall arrange for you a fate which all may envy."

"Oh! my lord, that is impossible. At present I have a sacred duty to perform; I have to watch over your glory, I have to prevent a low jester from tarnishing in the eyes of our contemporaries--who knows? in the eyes of posterity--the splendor of your name."

"Of posterity, Monsieur d'Artagnan?"

"Doubtless. It is necessary, as regards posterity, that all the details of that history should remain a mystery; for, admit that this unfortunate history of the deal box should spread, and it should be asserted that you had not re-established the king loyally, and of your own free will, but in consequence of a compromise entered into at Scheveningen between you two. It would be vain for me to declare how the thing came about, for though I know I should not be believed, it would be said that I had received my part of the cake, and was eating it."

Monk knitted his brow.--"Glory, honor, probity!" said he, "you are but empty words."

"Mist!" replied D'Artagnan; "nothing but mist, through which nobody can see clearly."

"Well, then, go to France, my dear Monsieur d'Artagnan," said Monk; "go, and to render England more attractive and agreeable to you, accept a remembrance of me."

"What now?" thought D'Artagnan.

"I have on the banks of the Clyde," continued Monk, "a little house in a grove, cottage as it is called here. To this house are attached a hundred acres of land. Accept it as a souvenir."

"Oh, my lord!--"

“Faith! you will be there in your own home, and that will be the place of refuge you spoke of just now.”

“For me to be obliged to your lordship to such an extent! Really, your grace, I am ashamed.”

“Not at all, not at all, monsieur,” replied Monk, with an arch smile; “it is I who shall be obliged to you. And,” pressing the hand of the musketeer, “I shall go and draw up the deed of gift,”--and he left the room.

D’Artagnan looked at him as he went out with something of a pensive and even an agitated air.

“After all,” said he, “he is a brave man. It is only a sad reflection that it is from fear of me, and not affection that he acts thus. Well, I shall endeavor that affection may follow.” Then, after an instant’s deeper reflection,--”Bah!” said he, “to what purpose? He is an Englishman.” And he in turn went out, a little confused after the combat.

“So,” said he, “I am a land-owner! But how the devil am I to share the cottage with Planchet? Unless I give him the land, and I take the chateau, or the he takes the house and I--nonsense! M. Monk will never allow me to share a house he has inhabited, with a grocer. He is too proud for that. Besides, why should I say anything about it to him? It was not with the money of the company I have acquired that property, it was with my mother-wit alone; it is all mine, then. So, now I will go and find Athos.” And he directed his steps towards the dwelling of the Comte de la Fere.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

How D'Artagnan regulated the "Assets" of the Company."

Decidedly," said D'Artagnan to himself, "I have struck a good vein. That star which shines once in the life of every man, which shone for Job and Iris, the most unfortunate of the Jews and the poorest of the Greeks, is come at last to shine on me. I will commit no folly, I will take advantage of it; it comes quite late enough to find me reasonable."

He supped that evening, in very good humor, with his friend Athos; he said nothing to him about the expected donation, but he could not forbear questioning his friend, while eating, about country produce, sowing, and planting. Athos replied complacently, as he always did. His idea was that D'Artagnan wished to become a land-owner, only he could not help regretting, more than once, the absence of the lively humor and amusing sallies of the cheerful companion of former days. In fact, D'Artagnan was so absorbed, that, with his knife, he took advantage of the grease left at the bottom of his plate, to trace ciphers and make additions of surprising rotundity.

The order, or rather license, for their embarkation, arrived at Athos's lodgings that evening. While this paper was remitted to the comte, another messenger brought to D'Artagnan a little bundle of parchments, adorned with all the seals employed in setting off property deeds in England. Athos surprised him turning over the leaves of these different acts which established the transmission of property. The prudent Monk--others would say the generous Monk--had commuted the donation into a sale, and acknowledged the receipt of the sum of fifteen thousand crowns as the price of the property ceded. The messenger was gone. D'Artagnan still continued reading, Athos watched him with a smile. D'Artagnan, surprising one of those smiles over his shoulder, put the bundle in its wrapper.

"I beg your pardon," said Athos.

"Oh! not at all, my friend," replied the lieutenant, "I shall tell you--"

"No, don't tell me anything, I beg you; orders are things so sacred, that to one's brother, one's father, the person charged with such orders should never open his mouth. Thus I, who speak to you, and love you more tenderly than brother, father, or all the world--"

"Except your Raoul?"

"I shall love Raoul still better when he shall be a man, and I shall have seen him develop himself in all the phases of his character and his actions--as I have seen you, my friend."

"You said, then, that you had an order likewise, and that you would not communicate it to me."

"Yes, my dear D'Artagnan."

The Gascon sighed. "There was a time," said he, "when you would have placed that order open upon the table, saying, 'D'Artagnan, read this scrawl to Porthos, Aramis, and to me.'"

"That is true. Oh! that was the time of youth, confidence, the generous season when the blood commands, when it is warmed by feeling!"

"Well! Athos, will you allow me to tell you?"

"Speak, my friend!"

"That delightful time, that generous season, that ruling by warm blood, were all very fine things, no doubt: but I do not regret them at all. It is absolutely like the period of studies. I have constantly met with fools who would boast of the days of pensums, ferules, and crusts of dry bread. It is singular, but I never loved all that; for my part, however active and sober I might be (you know if I was so, Athos), however simple I might appear in my clothes, I would not the less have preferred the braveries and embroideries of Porthos to my little perforated cassock, which gave passage to the wind in winter and the sun in summer. I should always, my friend, mistrust him who would pretend to prefer evil to good. Now, in times past all went wrong with me, and every month found a fresh hole in my cassock and in my skin, a gold crown less in my poor purse; of that execrable time of small beer and see-saw, I regret absolutely nothing, nothing, nothing save our friendship; for within me I have a heart, and it is a miracle that heart has not been dried up by the wind of poverty which passed through all the holes of my cloak, or pierced by the swords of all shapes which passed through the holes in my poor flesh."

"Do not regret our friendship," said Athos, "that will only die with ourselves. Friendship is composed, above all things, of memories and habits, and if you have just now made a little satire upon mine, because I hesitate to tell you the nature of my mission into France--"

"Who! I?--Oh! heavens! if you knew, my dear friend, how indifferent all the missions of the world will henceforth become to me!" And he laid his hand upon the parchment in his vest pocket.

Athos rose from the table and called the host in order to pay the reckoning.

"Since I have known you, my friend," said D'Artagnan, "I have never discharged the reckoning. Porthos often did, Aramis sometimes, and you, you almost always drew out your purse with the dessert. I am now rich, and should like to try if it is heroic to pay."

"Do so," said Athos, returning his purse to his pocket.

The two friends then directed their steps towards the port, not, however, without D'Artagnan's frequently turning round to watch the transportation of his dear crowns. Night had just spread her thick veil over the yellow waters of the Thames; they heard those noises of casks and pulleys, the preliminaries of preparing to sail which had so many times made the hearts of the musketeers beat when the dangers of the sea were the least of those they were going to face. This time they were to embark on board a large vessel which awaited them at Gravesend, and Charles II., always delicate in small affairs, had sent one of his yachts, with twelve men of his Scots guard, to do honor to the ambassador he was sending to France. At midnight the yacht had deposited its passengers on board the vessel, and at eight o'clock in the morning, the vessel landed the ambassador and his friend on the wharf at Boulogne. Whilst the comte, with Grimaud, was busy procuring horses to go straight to Paris, D'Artagnan hastened to the hostelry where, according to his orders, his little army was to wait for him. These gentlemen were at breakfast upon oysters, fish, and spiced brandy, when D'Artagnan appeared. They were all very gay, but not one of them had yet exceeded the bounds of reason. A hurrah of joy welcomed the general. "Here I am," said D'Artagnan, "the campaign is ended. I am come to bring each his supplement of pay, as agreed upon." Their eyes sparkled. "I will lay a wager there are not, at this moment, a hundred crowns remaining in the purse of the richest among you."

"That is true!" cried they in chorus.

"Gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, "then, this is the last order. The treaty of commerce has been concluded, thanks to our coup-de-main which made us masters of the most skillful financier of England, for now I am at liberty to confess to you that the man we had to carry off was the treasurer of General Monk.”

This word treasurer produced a certain effect on his army. D’Artagnan observed that the eyes of Menneville alone did not evince perfect faith. “This treasurer,” he continued, “I conveyed to a neutral territory, Holland; I forced him to sign the treaty; I have even reconducted him to Newcastle, and he was obliged to be satisfied with our proceedings towards him--the deal coffer being always carried without jolting, and being lined softly, I asked a gratification for you. Here it is.” He threw a respectable-looking purse upon the cloth; and all involuntarily stretched out their hands. “One moment, my lambs,” said D’Artagnan; “if there are profits, there are also charges.”

“Oh! oh!” murmured they.

“We are about to find ourselves, my friends, in a position which would not be tenable for people without brains. I speak plainly; we are between the gallows and the Bastile.”

“Oh! Oh!” said the chorus.

“That is easily understood. It was necessary to explain to General Monk the disappearance of his treasurer. I waited, for that purpose, till the unhoped-for moment of the restoration of King Charles II., who is one of my friends.”

This army exchanged a glance of satisfaction in reply to the sufficiently proud look of D’Artagnan. “The king being restored, I restored to Monk his man of business, a little plucked, it is true, but, in short, I restored him. Now, General Monk, when he pardoned me, for he has pardoned me, could not help repeating these words to me, which I charge every one of you to engrave deeply there, between the eyes, under the vault of the cranium:--’Monsieur, the joke has been a good one, but I don’t naturally like jokes; if ever a word of what you have done’ (you understand me, Menneville) ‘escapes from your lips, or the lips of your companions, I have, in my government of Scotland and Ireland, seven hundred and forty-one wooden gibbets, of strong oak, clamped with iron, and freshly greased every week. I will make a present of one of these gibbets to each of you, and observe well, M. d’Artagnan,’ added he (observe it also, M. Menneville), ‘I shall still have seven hundred and thirty left for my private pleasure. And still further--’“

“Ah! ah!” said the auxiliaries, “is there still more?”

“A mere trifle. ‘Monsieur d’Artagnan, I send to the king of France the treaty in question, with a request that he will cast into the Bastile provisionally, and then send to me, all who have taken part in this expedition; and that is a prayer with which the king will certainly comply.’“

A cry of terror broke from all corners of the table.

“There! there! there!” said D’Artagnan, “this brave M. Monk has forgotten one thing, and that is he does not know the name of any one of you; I alone know you, and it is not I, you well may believe, who will betray you. Why should I? As for you--I cannot suppose you will be silly enough to denounce yourselves, for then the king, to spare himself the expense of feeding and lodging you, will send you off to Scotland, where the seven hundred and forty-one gibbets are to be found. That is all, messieurs; I have not another word to add to what I have had the honor to tell you. I am sure you have understood me perfectly well, have you not, M. Menneville?”

“Perfectly,” replied the latter.

“Now the crowns!” said D’Artagnan. “Shut the doors,” he cried, and opened the bag upon the table, from which rolled several fine gold crowns. Every one made a movement towards the floor.

“Gently!” cried D’Artagnan. “Let no one stoop, and then I shall not be out in my reckoning.” He found it all right, gave fifty of those splendid crowns to each man, and received as many benedictions as he bestowed pieces. “Now,” said he, “if it were possible for you to reform a little, if you could become good and honest citizens--”

“That is rather difficult,” said one of the troop.

“What then, captain?” said another.

“Because I might be able to find you again, and, who knows what other good fortune?” He made a sign to Menneville, who listened to all he said with a composed air. “Menneville,” said he, “come with me. Adieu, my brave fellows! I need not warn you to be discreet.”

Menneville followed him, whilst the salutations of the auxiliaries were mingled with the sweet sound of the money clinking in their pockets.

“Menneville,” said D’Artagnan, when they were once in the street, “you were not my dupe; beware of being so. You did not appear to have any fear of the gibbets of Monk, or the Bastile of his majesty, King Louis XIV., but you will do me the favor of being afraid of me. Then listen; at the smallest word that shall escape you, I will kill you as I would a fowl. I have absolution from our holy father, the pope, in my pocket."

"I assure you I know absolutely nothing, my dear M. d'Artagnan, and that your words have all been to me so many articles of faith."

"I was quite sure you were an intelligent fellow," said the musketeer; "I have tried you for a length of time. These fifty crowns which I give you above the rest will prove the esteem I have for you. Take them."

"Thanks, Monsieur d'Artagnan," said Menneville.

"With that sum you can really become an honest man," replied D'Artagnan, in the most serious tone possible. "It would be disgraceful for a mind like yours, and a name you no longer dare to bear, to sink forever under the rust of an evil life. Become a gallant man, Menneville, and live for a year upon those hundred gold crowns: it is a good provision; twice the pay of a high officer. In a year come to me, and, Mordioux! I will make something of you."

Menneville swore, as his comrades had sworn, that he would be as silent as the grave. And yet some one must have spoken; and as, certainly, it was not one of the nine companions, and quite as certainly, it was not Menneville, it must have been D'Artagnan, who, in his quality of a Gascon, had his tongue very near to his lips. For, in short, if it were not he, who could it be? And how can it be explained that the secret of the deal coffer pierced with holes should come to our knowledge, and in so complete a fashion that we have, as has been seen, related the history of it in all its most minute details; details which, besides, throw a light as new as unexpected upon all that portion of the history of England which has been left, up to the present day, completely in darkness by the historian of our neighbors?

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

the French Grocer had already been established in the Seventeenth Century.

His accounts once settled, and his recommendations made, D’Artagnan thought of nothing but returning to Paris as soon as possible. Athos, on his part, was anxious to reach home and to rest a little. However whole the character and the man may remain after the fatigues of a voyage, the traveler perceives with pleasure, at the close of the day--even though the day has been a fine one--that night is approaching, and will bring a little sleep with it. So, from Boulogne to Paris, jogging on, side by side, the two friends, in some degree absorbed each in his individual thoughts, conversed of nothing sufficiently interesting for us to repeat to our readers. Each of them given up to his personal reflections, and constructing his future after his own fashion, was, above all, anxious to abridge the distance by speed. Athos and D’Artagnan arrived at the gates of Paris on the evening of the fourth day after leaving Boulogne.

“Where are you going, my friend?” asked Athos. “I shall direct my course straight to my hotel.”

“And I straight to my partner’s.”

“To Planchet’s?”

“Yes; at the Pilon d’Or.”

“Well, but shall we not meet again?”

“If you remain in Paris, yes; for I shall stay here.”

“No: after having embraced Raoul, with whom I have appointed a meeting at my hotel, I shall set out immediately for La Fere.”

“Well, adieu, then, dear and true friend.”

“Au revoir! I should rather say, for why can you not come and live with me at Blois? You are free, you are rich, I shall purchase for you, if you like, a handsome estate in the vicinity of Cheverny or of Bracieux. On the one side you will have the finest woods in the world, which join those of Chambord; on the other, admirable marshes. You who love sporting, and who, whether you admit it or not, are a poet, my dear friend, you will find pheasants, rail and teal, without counting sunsets and excursions on the water, to make you fancy yourself Nimrod and Apollo themselves. While awaiting the purchase, you can live at La Fere, and we shall go together to fly our hawks among the vines, as Louis XIII. used to do. That is a quiet amusement for old fellows like us."

D'Artagnan took the hands of Athos in his own. "Dear count," said he, "I shall say neither 'Yes' nor 'No.' Let me pass in Paris the time necessary for the regulation of my affairs, and accustom myself, by degrees, to the heavy and glittering idea which is beating in my brain and dazzles me. I am rich, you see, and from this moment until the time when I shall have acquired the habit of being rich, I know myself, and I shall be an insupportable animal. Now, I am not enough of a fool to wish to appear to have lost my wits before a friend like you, Athos. The cloak is handsome, the cloak is richly gilded, but it is new, and does not seem to fit me."

Athos smiled. "So be it," said he. "But a propos of this cloak, dear D'Artagnan, will you allow me to offer you a little advice?"

"Yes, willingly."

"You will not be angry?"

"Proceed."

"When wealth comes to a man late in life or all at once, that man, in order not to change, must most likely become a miser--that is to say, not spend much more money than he had done before; or else become a prodigal, and contract so many debts as to become poor again."

"Oh! but what you say looks very much like a sophism, my dear philosophic friend."

"I do not think so. Will you become a miser?"

"No, pardieu! I was one already, having nothing. Let us change."

"Then be prodigal."

"Still less, Mordioux! Debts terrify me. Creditors appear to me, by anticipation, like those devils who turn the damned upon the gridirons, and as patience is not my dominant virtue, I am always tempted to thrash those devils."

"You are the wisest man I know, and stand in no need of advice from any one. Great fools must they be who think they have anything to teach you. But are we not at the Rue Saint Honore?"

"Yes, dear Athos."

"Look yonder, on the left, that small, long white house is the hotel where I lodge. You may observe that it has but two stories; I occupy the first; the other is let to an officer whose duties oblige him to be absent eight or nine months in the year,--so I am in that house as in my own home, without the expense."

"Oh! how well you manage, Athos! What order and what liberality! They are what I wish to unite! But, of what use trying! that comes from birth, and cannot be acquired."

"You are a flatterer! Well! adieu, dear friend. A propos, remember me to Master Planchet; he always was a bright fellow."

"And a man of heart, too, Athos. Adieu."

And the separated. During all this conversation, D'Artagnan had not for a moment lost sight of a certain pack-horse, in whose panniers, under some hay, were spread the sacoches (messenger's bags) with the portmanteau. Nine o'clock was striking at Saint-Merri. Planchet's helps were shutting up his shop. D'Artagnan stopped the postilion who rode the pack-horse, at the corner of the Rue des Lombards, under a pent-house, and calling one of Planchet's boys, he desired him not only to take care of the two horses, but to watch the postilion; after which he entered the shop of the grocer, who had just finished supper, and who, in his little private room, was, with a degree of anxiety, consulting the calendar, on which, every evening, he scratched out the day that was past. At the moment when Planchet, according to his daily custom, with the back of his pen, erased another day, D'Artagnan kicked the door with his foot, and the blow made his steel spur jingle. "Oh! good Lord!" cried Planchet. The worthy grocer could say no more; he had just perceived his partner. D'Artagnan entered with a bent back and a dull eye: the Gascon had an idea with regard to Planchet.

"Good God!" thought the grocer, looking earnestly at the traveler, "he looks sad!" The musketeer sat down.

"My dear Monsieur d'Artagnan!" said Planchet, with a horrible palpitation of the heart. "Here you are! and your health?"

"Tolerably good, Planchet, tolerably good!" said D'Artagnan, with a profound sigh.

"You have not been wounded, I hope?"

"Phew!"

"Ah, I see," continued Planchet, more and more alarmed, "the expedition has been a trying one?"

"Yes," said D'Artagnan. A shudder ran down Planchet's back. "I should like to have something to drink," said the musketeer, raising his head piteously.

Planchet ran to the cupboard, and poured out to D'Artagnan some wine in a large glass. D'Artagnan examined the bottle.

"What wine is that?" asked he.

"Alas! that which you prefer, monsieur," said Planchet; "that good old Anjou wine, which was one day nearly costing us all so dear."

"Ah!" replied D'Artagnan, with a melancholy smile, "Ah! my poor Planchet, ought I still to drink good wine?"

"Come! my dear master," said Planchet, making a super-human effort, whilst all his contracted muscles, his pallor and his trembling betrayed the most acute anguish. "Come! I have been a soldier and consequently have some courage; do not make me linger, dear Monsieur d'Artagnan; our money is lost, is it not?"

Before he answered, D'Artagnan took his time, and that appeared an age to the poor grocer. Nevertheless he did nothing but turn about on his chair.

"And if that were the case," said he, slowly, moving his head up and down, "if that were the case, what would you say, my dear friend?"

Planchet, from being pale, turned yellow. It might have been thought he was going to swallow his tongue, so full became his throat, so red were his eyes!

"Twenty thousand livres!" murmured he. "Twenty thousand livres, and yet--"

D'Artagnan, with his neck elongated, his legs stretched out, and his hands hanging listlessly, looked like a statue of discouragement. Planchet drew up a sigh from the deepest cavities of his breast.

"Well," said he, "I see how it is. Let us be men! It is all over, is it not? The principal thing is, monsieur, that your life is safe."

"Doubtless! doubtless!--life is something--but I am ruined!"

"Cordieu! monsieur!" said Planchet, "If it is so, we must not despair for that; you shall become a grocer with me; I shall take you for my partner, we will share the profits, and if there should be no more profits, well, why then we shall share the almonds, raisins and prunes, and we will nibble together the last quarter of Dutch cheese."

D'Artagnan could hold out no longer. "Mordioux!" cried he, with great emotion, "thou art a brave fellow, on my honor, Planchet. You have not been playing a part, have you? You have not seen the pack-horse with the bags under the shed yonder?"

"What horse? What bags?" said Planchet, whose trembling heart began to suggest that D'Artagnan was mad.

"Why, the English bags, Mordioux!" said D'Artagnan, all radiant, quite transfigured.

"Ah! good God!" articulated Planchet, drawing back before the dazzling fire of his looks.

"Imbecile!" cried D'Artagnan, "you think me mad! Mordioux! On the contrary, never was my head more clear, or my heart more joyous. To the bags, Planchet, to the bags!"

"But to what bags, good heavens!"

D'Artagnan pushed Planchet towards the window.

"Under that shed yonder, don't you see a horse?"

"Yes."

"Don't you see how his back is laden?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Don't you see your lad talking with the postilion?"

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"Well, you know the name of that lad, because he is your own. Call him."

"Abdon! Abdon!" vociferated Planchet, from the window.

"Bring the horse!" shouted D'Artagnan.

"Bring the horse!" screamed Planchet.

"Now give ten livres to the postilion," said D'Artagnan, in the tone he would have employed in commanding a maneuver; "two lads to bring up the first two bags, two to bring up the two last,--and move, Mordioux! be lively!"

Planchet rushed down the stairs, as if the devil had been at his heels. A moment later the lads ascended the stairs, bending beneath their burden. D'Artagnan sent them off to their garrets, carefully closed the door, and addressing Planchet, who, in his turn, looked a little wild,--

"Now, we are by ourselves," said he; and he spread upon the floor a large cover, and emptied the first bag into it. Planchet did the same with the second; then D'Artagnan, all in a tremble, let out the precious bowels of the third with a knife. When Planchet heard the provoking sound of the silver and gold--when he saw bubbling out of the bags the shining crowns, which glittered like fish from the sweep-net--when he felt himself plunging his hands up to the elbows in that still rising tide of yellow and white coins, a giddiness seized him, and like a man struck by lightning, he sank heavily down upon the enormous heap, which his weight caused to roll away in all directions. Planchet, suffocated with joy, had lost his senses. D'Artagnan threw a glass of white wine in his face, which incontinently recalled him to life.

"Ah! good heavens! good heavens! good heavens!" said Planchet, wiping his mustache and beard.

At that time, as they do now, grocers wore the cavalier mustache and the lansquenet beard, only the money baths, already rare in those days, have become almost unknown now.

"Mordioux!" said D'Artagnan, "there are a hundred thousand livres for you, partner. Draw your share, if you please, and I will draw mine."

"Oh! the lovely sum! Monsieur d'Artagnan, the lovely sum!"

"I confess that half an hour ago I regretted that I had to give you so much; but now I no longer regret it; thou art a brave grocer, Planchet. There, let us close our accounts, for, as they say, short reckonings make long friends."

"Oh! rather, in the first place, tell me the whole history," said Planchet; "that must be better than the money."

"Ma foi!" said D'Artagnan, stroking his mustache, "I can't say no; and if ever the historian turns to me for information, he will be able to say he has not dipped his bucket into a dry spring. Listen, then, Planchet, I will tell you all about it."

"And I shall build piles of crowns," said Planchet. "Begin, my dear master."

"Well, this is it," said D'Artagnan, drawing his breath.

"And that is it," said Planchet, picking up his first handful of crowns.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Mazarin's Gaming Party.

In a large chamber of the Palais Royal, hung with a dark colored velvet, which threw into strong relief the gilded frames of a great number of magnificent pictures, on the evening of the arrival of the two Frenchmen, the whole court was assembled before the alcove of M. le Cardinal de Mazarin, who gave a card party to the king and queen.

A small screen separated three prepared tables. At one of these tables the king and the two queens were seated. Louis XIV., placed opposite to the young queen, his wife, smiled upon her with an expression of real happiness. Anne of Austria held the cards against the cardinal, and her daughter-in-law assisted her in the game, when she was not engaged in smiling at her husband. As for the cardinal, who was lying on his bed with a weary and careworn face, his cards were held by the Comtesse de Soissons, and he watched them with an incessant look of interest and cupidity.

The cardinal's face had been painted by Bernouin; but the rouge, which glowed only on his cheeks, threw into stronger contrast the sickly pallor of his countenance and the shining yellow of his brow. His eyes alone acquired a more brilliant luster from this auxiliary, and upon those sick man's eyes were, from time to time, turned the uneasy looks of the king, the queen, and the courtiers. The fact is, that the two eyes of the Signor Mazarin were the stars more or less brilliant in which the France of the seventeenth century read its destiny every evening and every morning.

Monseigneur neither won nor lost; he was, therefore, neither gay nor sad. It was a stagnation in which, full of pity for him, Anne of Austria would not have willingly left him; but in order to attract the attention of the sick man by some brilliant stroke, she must have either won or lost. To win would have been dangerous, because Mazarin would have changed his indifference into an ugly grimace; to lose would likewise have been dangerous, because she must have cheated, and the infanta, who watched her game, would, doubtless, have exclaimed against her partiality for Mazarin. Profiting by this calm, the courtiers were chatting. When not in a bad humor, M. de Mazarin was a very debonnaire prince, and he, who prevented nobody from singing, provided they paid, was not tyrant enough to prevent people from talking, provided they made up their minds to lose.

They were therefore chatting. At the first table, the king's younger brother, Philip, Duc d'Anjou, was admiring his handsome face in the glass of a box. His favorite, the Chevalier de Lorraine, leaning over the back of the prince's chair, was listening, with secret envy, to the Comte de Guiche, another of Philip's favorites, who was relating in choice terms the various vicissitudes of fortune of the royal adventurer Charles II. He told, as so many fabulous events, all the history of his perigrinations in Scotland, and his terrors when the enemy's party was so closely on his track; of nights spent in trees, and days spent in hunger and combats. By degrees, the fate of the unfortunate king interested his auditors so greatly, that the play languished even at the royal table, and the young king, with a pensive look and downcast eye, followed, without appearing to give any attention to it, the smallest details of this Odyssey, very picturesquely related by the Comte de Guiche.

The Comtesse de Soissons interrupted the narrator: "Confess, count, you are inventing."

"Madame, I am repeating like a parrot all the stories related to me by different Englishmen. To my shame I am compelled to say, I am as exact as a copy."

"Charles II. would have died before he could have endured all that."

Louis XIV. raised his intelligent and proud head. "Madame," said he, in a grave tone, still partaking something of the timid child, "monsieur le cardinal will tell you that during my minority the affairs of France were in jeopardy,--and that if I had been older, and obliged to take sword in hand, it would sometimes have been for the purpose of procuring the evening meal."

"Thanks to God," said the cardinal, who spoke for the first time, "your majesty exaggerates, and your supper has always been ready with that of your servants."

The king colored.

"Oh!" cried Philip, inconsiderately, from his place, and without ceasing to admire himself,--"I recollect once, at Melun, the supper was laid for nobody, and that the king ate two-thirds of a slice of bread, and abandoned to me the other third."

The whole assembly, seeing Mazarin smile, began to laugh. Courtiers flatter kings with the remembrance of past distresses, as with the hopes of future good fortune.

“It is not to be denied that the crown of France has always remained firm upon the heads of its kings,” Anne of Austria hastened to say, “and that it has fallen off of that of the king of England; and when by chance that crown oscillated a little,--for there are throne-quakes as well as earthquakes,--every time, I say, that rebellion threatened it, a good victory restored tranquillity.”

“With a few gems added to the crown,” said Mazarin.

The Comte de Guiche was silent: the king composed his countenance, and Mazarin exchanged looks with Anne of Austria, as if to thank her for her intervention.

“It is of no consequence,” said Philip, smoothing his hair; “my cousin Charles is not handsome, but he is very brave, and fought like a landsknecht; and if he continues to fight thus, no doubt he will finish by gaining a battle, like Rocroi--”

“He has no soldiers,” interrupted the Chevalier de Lorraine.

“The king of Holland, his ally, will give him some. I would willingly have given him some if I had been king of France.”

Louis XIV. blushed excessively. Mazarin affected to be more attentive to his game than ever.

“By this time,” resumed the Comte de Guiche, “the fortune of this unhappy prince is decided. If he has been deceived by Monk, he is ruined. Imprisonment, perhaps death, will finish what exiles, battles, and privations have commenced.”

Mazarin’s brow became clouded.

“It is certain,” said Louis XIV., “that his majesty Charles II., has quitted the Hague?”

“Quite certain, your majesty,” replied the young man; “my father has received a letter containing all the details; it is even known that the king has landed at Dover; some fishermen saw him entering the port; the rest is still a mystery.”

“I should like to know the rest,” said Philip, impetuously. “You know,--you, my brother.”

Louis XIV. colored again. That was the third time within an hour. “Ask my lord cardinal,” replied he, in a tone which made Mazarin, Anne of

Austria, and everybody else open their eyes.

“That means, my son,” said Anne of Austria, laughing, “that the king does not like affairs of state to be talked of out of the council.”

Philip received the reprimand with good grace, and bowed, first smiling at his brother, and then at his mother. But Mazarin saw from the corner of his eye that a group was about to be formed in the corner of the room, and that the Duc d’Anjou, with the Comte de Guiche, and the Chevalier de Lorraine, prevented from talking aloud, might say, in a whisper, what it was not convenient should be said. He was beginning, then, to dart at them glances full of mistrust and uneasiness, inviting Anne of Austria to throw perturbation in the midst of the unlawful assembly, when, suddenly, Bernouin, entering from behind the tapestry of the bedroom, whispered in the ear of Mazarin, “Monseigneur, an envoy from his majesty, the king of England.”

Mazarin could not help exhibiting a slight emotion, which was perceived by the king. To avoid being indiscreet, rather than to appear useless, Louis XIV. rose immediately, and approaching his eminence, wished him good-night. All the assembly had risen with a great noise of rolling of chairs and tables being pushed away.

“Let everybody depart by degrees,” said Mazarin in a whisper to Louis XIV., “and be so good as to excuse me a few minutes. I am going to dispatch an affair about which I wish to converse with your majesty this very evening.”

“And the queens?” asked Louis XIV.

“And M. le Duc d’Anjou,” said his eminence.

At the same time he turned round in his ruelle, the curtains of which, in falling, concealed the bed. The cardinal, nevertheless, did not lose sight of the conspirators.

“M. le Comte de Guiche,” said he, in a fretful voice, whilst putting on, behind the curtain, his dressing-gown, with the assistance of Bernouin.

“I am here, my lord,” said the young man, as he approached.

“Take my cards, you are lucky. Win a little money for me of these gentlemen.”

“Yes, my lord.”

The young man sat down at the table from which the king withdrew to talk with the two queens. A serious game was commenced between the comte and several rich courtiers. In the meantime Philip was discussing the questions of dress with the Chevalier de Lorraine, and they had ceased to hear the rustling of the cardinal’s silk robe from behind the curtain. His eminence had followed Bernouin into the closet adjoining the bedroom.

CHAPTER XL.

An Affair of State.

The cardinal, on passing into his cabinet, found the Comte de la Fere, who was waiting for him, engaged in admiring a very fine Raphael placed over a sideboard covered with a plate. His eminence came in softly, lightly, and as silently as a shadow, and surprised the countenance of the comte, as he was accustomed to do, pretending to divine by the simple expression of the face of his interlocutor what would be the result of the conversation.

But this time Mazarin was foiled in his expectation: he read nothing upon the face of Athos, not even the respect he was accustomed to see on all faces. Athos was dressed in black, with a simple lacing of silver. He wore the Holy Ghost, the Garter, and the Golden Fleece, three orders of such importance, that a king alone, or else a player, could wear them at once.

Mazarin rummaged a long time in his somewhat troubled memory to recall the name he ought to give to this icy figure, but he did not succeed. “I am told,” said he, at length, “you have a message from England for me.”

And he sat down, dismissing Bernouin, who, in his quality of secretary, was getting his pen ready.

“On the part of his majesty, the king of England, yes, your eminence.”

“You speak very good French for an Englishman, monsieur,” said Mazarin, graciously, looking through his fingers at the Holy Ghost, Garter, and Golden Fleece, but more particularly at the face of the messenger.

“I am not an Englishman, but a Frenchman, monsieur le cardinal,” replied Athos.

“It is remarkable that the king of England should choose a Frenchman for his ambassador; it is an excellent augury. Your name, monsieur, if you please.”

“Comte de la Fere,” replied Athos, bowing more slightly than the ceremonial and pride of the all-powerful minister required.

Mazarin bent his shoulders, as if to say:--

“I do not know that name.”

Athos did not alter his carriage.

"And you come, monsieur," continued Mazarin, "to tell me--"

"I come on the part of his majesty the king of Great Britain to announce to the king of France"--Mazarin frowned--"to announce to the king of France," continued Athos, imperturbably, "the happy restoration of his majesty Charles II. to the throne of his ancestors."

This shade did not escape his cunning eminence. Mazarin was too much accustomed to mankind, not to see in the cold and almost haughty politeness of Athos, an index of hostility, which was not of the temperature of that hot-house called a court.

"You have powers, I suppose?" asked Mazarin, in a short, querulous tone.

"Yes, monseigneur." And the word "monseigneur" came so painfully from the lips of Athos that it might be said it skinned them.

Athos took from an embroidered velvet bag which he carried under his doublet a dispatch. The cardinal held out his hand for it. "Your pardon, monseigneur," said Athos. "My dispatch is for the king."

"Since you are a Frenchman, monsieur, you ought to know the position of a prime minister at the court of France."

"There was a time," replied Athos, "when I occupied myself with the importance of prime ministers; but I have formed, long ago, a resolution to treat no longer with any but the king."

"Then, monsieur," said Mazarin, who began to be irritated, "you will neither see the minister nor the king."

Mazarin rose. Athos replaced his dispatch in its bag, bowed gravely, and made several steps towards the door. This coolness exasperated Mazarin. "What strange diplomatic proceedings are these!" cried he. "Have we returned to the times when Cromwell sent us bullies in the guise of charges d'affaires? You want nothing, monsieur, but the steel cap on your head, and a Bible at your girdle."

"Monsieur," said Athos, dryly, "I have never had, as you have, the advantage of treating with Cromwell; and I have only seen his charges d'affaires sword in hand; I am therefore ignorant of how he treated with prime ministers. As for the king of England, Charles II., I know that when he writes to his majesty King Louis XIV., he does not write to his eminence the Cardinal Mazarin. I see no diplomacy in that distinction."

"Ah!" cried Mazarin, raising his attenuated hand, and striking his head, "I remember now!" Athos looked at him in astonishment. "Yes, that is it!" said the cardinal, continuing to look at his interlocutor; “yes, that is certainly it. I know you now, monsieur. Ah! diavolo! I am no longer astonished.”

“In fact, I was astonished that, with your eminence’s excellent memory,” replied Athos, smiling, “you had not recognized me before.”

“Always refractory and grumbling--monsieur--monsieur--What do they call you? Stop--a name of a river--Potamos; no--the name of an island--Naxos; no, per Giove!--the name of a mountain--Athos! now I have it. Delighted to see you again, and to be no longer at Rueil, where you and your damned companions made me pay ransom. Fronde! still Fronde! accursed Fronde! Oh, what grudges! Why, monsieur, have your antipathies survived mine? If any one has cause to complain, I think it could not be you, who got out of the affair not only in a sound skin, but with the cordon of the Holy Ghost around your neck.”

“My lord cardinal,” replied Athos, “permit me not to enter into considerations of that kind. I have a mission to fulfill. Will you facilitate the means of my fulfilling that mission, or will you not?”

“I am astonished,” said Mazarin,--quite delighted at having recovered his memory, and bristling with malice,--”I am astonished, Monsieur--Athos--that a Frondeur like you should have accepted a mission for the Perfidious Mazarin, as used to be said in the good old times--” And Mazarin began to laugh, in spite of a painful cough, which cut short his sentences, converting them into sobs.

“I have only accepted the mission near the king of France, monsieur le cardinal,” retorted the comte, though with less asperity, for he thought he had sufficiently the advantage to show himself moderate.

“And yet, Monsieur le Frondeur,” said Mazarin, gayly, “the affair which you have taken in charge must, from the king--”

“With which I have been given in charge, monseigneur. I do not run after affairs.”

“Be it so. I say that this negotiation must pass through my hands. Let us lose no precious time, then. Tell me the conditions.”

“I have had the honor of assuring your eminence that only the letter of his majesty King Charles II. contains the revelation of his wishes.”

“Pooh! you are ridiculous with your obstinacy, Monsieur Athos. It is plain you have kept company with the Puritans yonder. As to your secret, I know it better than you do; and you have done wrongly, perhaps, in not having shown some respect for a very old and suffering man, who has labored much during his life, and kept the field for his ideas as bravely as you have for yours. You will not communicate your letter to me? You will say nothing to me? Very well! Come with me into my chamber; you shall speak to the king--and before the king.--Now, then, one last word: who gave you the Fleece? I remember you passed for having the Garter; but as to the Fleece, I do not know--”

“Recently, my lord, Spain, on the occasion of the marriage of his majesty Louis XIV., sent King Charles II. a brevet of the Fleece in blank; Charles II. immediately transmitted it to me, filling up the blank with my name.”

Mazarin arose, and leaning on the arm of Bernouin, he returned to his ruelle at the moment the name of M. le Prince was being announced. The Prince de Conde, the first prince of the blood, the conqueror of Rocroi, Lens, and Nordlingen, was, in fact, entering the apartment of Monseigneur de Mazarin, followed by his gentlemen, and had already saluted the king, when the prime minister raised his curtain. Athos had time to see Raoul pressing the hand of the Comte de Guiche, and send him a smile in return for his respectful bow. He had time, likewise, to see the radiant countenance of the cardinal, when he perceived before him, upon the table, an enormous heap of gold, which the Comte de Guiche had won in a run of luck, after his eminence had confided his cards to him. So forgetting ambassador, embassy and prince, his first thought was of the gold. “What!” cried the old man--”all that--won?”

“Some fifty thousand crowns; yes, monseigneur,” replied the Comte de Guiche, rising. “Must I give up my place to your eminence, or shall I continue?”

“Give up! give up! you are mad. You would lose all you have won. Peste!”

“My lord!” said the Prince de Conde, bowing.

“Good-evening, monsieur le prince,” said the minister, in a careless tone; “it is very kind of you to visit an old sick friend.”

“A friend!” murmured the Comte de la Fere, at witnessing with stupor this monstrous alliance of words;--”friends! when the parties are Conde and Mazarin!”

Mazarin seemed to divine the thoughts of the Frondeur, for he smiled upon him with triumph, and immediately,--”Sire,” said he to the king, “I have the honor of presenting to your majesty, Monsieur le Comte de la Fere, ambassador from his Britannic majesty. An affair of state, gentlemen,” added he, waving his hand to all who filled the chamber, and who, the Prince de Conde at their head, all disappeared at the simple gesture. Raoul, after a last look cast at the comte, followed M. de Conde. Philip of Anjou and the queen appeared to be consulting about departing.

"A family affair," said Mazarin, suddenly, detaining them in their seats. "This gentleman is the bearer of a letter in which King Charles II., completely restored to his throne, demands an alliance between Monsieur, the brother of the king, and Mademoiselle Henrietta, grand-daughter of Henry IV. Will you remit your letter of credit to the king, monsieur le comte?"

Athos remained for a minute stupefied. How could the minister possibly know the contents of the letter, which had never been out of his keeping for a single instant? Nevertheless, always master of himself, he held out the dispatch to the young king, Louis XIV., who took it with a blush. A solemn silence reigned in the cardinal's chamber. It was only troubled by the dull sound of the gold, which Mazarin, with his yellow, dry hand, piled up in a casket, whilst the king was reading.

CHAPTER XLI.

The Recital.

The maliciousness of the cardinal did not leave much for the ambassador to say; nevertheless, the word “restoration” had struck the king, who, addressing the comte, upon whom his eyes had been fixed since his entrance,--”Monsieur,” said he, “will you have the kindness to give us some details concerning the affairs of England. You come from that country, you are a Frenchman, and the orders which I see glittering upon your person announce you to be a man of merit as well as a man of quality.”

“Monsieur,” said the cardinal, turning towards the queen-mother, “is an ancient servant of your majesty’s, Monsieur le Comte de la Fere.”

Anne of Austria was as oblivious as a queen whose life had been mingled with fine and stormy days. She looked at Mazarin, whose evil smile promised her something disagreeable; then she solicited from Athos, by another look, an explanation.

“Monsieur,” continued the cardinal, “was a Treville musketeer, in the service of the late king. Monsieur is well acquainted with England, whither he has made several voyages at various periods; he is a subject of the highest merit.”

These words made allusion to all the memories which Anne of Austria trembled to evoke. England, that was her hatred of Richelieu and her love for Buckingham; a Treville musketeer, that was the whole Odyssey of the triumphs which had made the heart of the young woman throb, and of the dangers which had been so near overturning the throne of the young queen. These words had much power, for they rendered mute and attentive all the royal personages, who, with very various sentiments, set about recomposing at the same time the mysteries which the young had not seen, and which the old had believed to be forever effaced.

“Speak, monsieur,” said Louis XIV., the first to escape from troubles, suspicions, and remembrances.

“Yes, speak,” added Mazarin, to whom the little malicious thrust directed against Anne of Austria had restored energy and gayety.

“Sire,” said the comte, “a sort of miracle has changed the whole destiny of Charles II. That which men, till that time, had been unable to do, God resolved to accomplish.”

Mazarin coughed while tossing about in his bed.

“King Charles II.,” continued Athos, “left the Hague neither as a fugitive nor a conqueror, but as an absolute king, who, after a distant voyage from his kingdom, returns amidst universal benedictions.”

“A great miracle, indeed,” said Mazarin; “for, if the news was true, King Charles II., who has just returned amidst benedictions, went away amidst musket-shots.”

The king remained impassible. Philip, younger and more frivolous, could not repress a smile, which flattered Mazarin as an applause of his pleasantry.

“It is plain,” said the king, “there is a miracle; but God, who does so much for kings, monsieur le comte, nevertheless employs the hand of man to bring about the triumph of His designs. To what men does Charles II. principally owe his re-establishment?”

“Why,” interrupted Mazarin, without any regard for the king’s pride--”does not your majesty know that it is to M. Monk?”

“I ought to know it,” replied Louis XIV., resolutely; “and yet I ask my lord ambassador, the causes of the change in this General Monk?”

“And your majesty touches precisely the question,” replied Athos; “for without the miracle of which I have had the honor to speak, General Monk would probably have remained an implacable enemy of Charles II. God willed that a strange, bold, and ingenious idea should enter into the mind of a certain man, whilst a devoted and courageous idea took possession of the mind of another man. The combinations of these two ideas brought about such a change in the position of M. Monk, that, from an inveterate enemy, he became a friend to the deposed king.”

“These are exactly the details I asked for,” said the king. “Who and what are the two men of whom you speak?”

“Two Frenchmen, sire.”

“Indeed! I am glad of that.”

“And the two ideas,” said Mazarin;--”I am more curious about ideas than about men, for my part.”

“Yes,” murmured the king.

"The second idea, the devoted, reasonable idea--the least important, sir--was to go and dig up a million in gold, buried by King Charles I. at Newcastle, and to purchase with that gold the adherence of Monk."

"Oh, oh!" said Mazarin, reanimated by the word million. "But Newcastle was at the time occupied by Monk."

"Yes, monsieur le cardinal, and that is why I venture to call the idea courageous as well as devoted. It was necessary, if Monk refused the offers of the negotiator, to reinstate King Charles II. in possession of this million, which was to be torn, as it were, from the loyalty and not the loyalism of General Monk. This was effected in spite of many difficulties: the general proved to be loyal, and allowed the money to be taken away."

"It seems to me," said the timid, thoughtful king, "that Charles II. could not have known of this million whilst he was in Paris."

"It seems to me," rejoined the cardinal, maliciously, "that his majesty the king of Great Britain knew perfectly well of this million, but that he preferred having two millions to having one."

"Sire," said Athos, firmly, "the king of England, whilst in France, was so poor that he had not even money to take the post; so destitute of hope that he frequently thought of dying. He was so entirely ignorant of the existence of the million at Newcastle, that but for a gentleman--one of your majesty's subjects--the moral depositary of the million, who revealed the secret to King Charles II., that prince would still be vegetating in the most cruel forgetfulness."

"Let us pass on to the strange, bold and ingenious idea," interrupted Mazarin, whose sagacity foresaw a check. "What was that idea?"

"This--M. Monk formed the only obstacle to the re-establishment of the fallen king. A Frenchman imagined the idea of suppressing this obstacle."

"Oh! oh! but he is a scoundrel, that Frenchman," said Mazarin; "and the idea is not so ingenious as to prevent its author being tied up by the neck at the Place de Greve, by decree of the parliament."

"Your eminence is mistaken," replied Athos, dryly; "I did not say that the Frenchman in question had resolved to assassinate M. Monk, but only to suppress him. The words of the French language have a value which the gentlemen of France know perfectly. Besides, this is an affair of war; and when men serve kings against their enemies they are not to be condemned by a parliament--God is their judge. This French gentleman, then, formed the idea of gaining possession of the person of Monk, and he executed his plan."

The king became animated at the recital of great actions. The king's younger brother struck the table with his hand, exclaiming, "Ah! that is fine!"

"He carried off Monk?" said the king. "Why, Monk was in his camp."

"And the gentleman was alone, sire."

"That is marvelous!" said Philip.

"Marvelous, indeed!" cried the king.

"Good! There are the two little lions unchained," murmured the cardinal. And with an air of spite, which he did not dissemble: "I am unacquainted with these details, will you guarantee their authenticity, monsieur?"

"All the more easily, my lord cardinal, from having seen the events."

"You have?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

The king had involuntarily drawn close to the count, the Duc d'Anjou had turned sharply round, and pressed Athos on the other side.

"What next? monsieur, what next?" cried they both at the same time.

"Sire, M. Monk, being taken by the Frenchman, was brought to King Charles II., at the Hague. The king gave back his freedom to Monk, and the grateful general, in return, gave Charles II. the throne of Great Britain, for which so many valiant men had fought in vain."

Philip clapped his hands with enthusiasm, Louis XIV., more reflective, turned towards the Comte de la Fere.

"Is this true," said he, "in all its details?"

"Absolutely true, sire."

"That one of my gentlemen knew the secret of the million, and kept it?"

"Yes, sire."

"The name of that gentleman?"

"It was your humble servant," said Athos, simply, and bowing.

A murmur of admiration made the heart of Athos swell with pleasure. He had reason to be proud, at least. Mazarin, himself, had raised his arms towards heaven.

"Monsieur," said the king, "I shall seek and find means to reward you." Athos made a movement. "Oh, not for your honesty, to be paid for that would humiliate you; but I owe you a reward for having participated in the restoration of my brother, King Charles II."

"Certainly," said Mazarin.

"It is the triumph of a good cause which fills the whole house of France with joy," said Anne of Austria.

"I continue," said Louis XIV.: "Is it also true that a single man penetrated to Monk, in his camp, and carried him off?"

"That man had ten auxiliaries, taken from a very inferior rank."

"And nothing more but them?"

"Nothing more."

"And he is named?"

"Monsieur d'Artagnan, formerly lieutenant of the musketeers of your majesty."

Anne of Austria colored; Mazarin became yellow with shame; Louis XIV. was deeply thoughtful, and a drop of moisture fell from his pale brow. "What men!" murmured he. And, involuntarily, he darted a glance at the minister which would have terrified him, if Mazarin, at the moment, had not concealed his head under his pillow.

"Monsieur," said the young Duc d'Anjou, placing his hand, delicate and white as that of a woman, upon the arm of Athos, "tell that brave man, I beg you, that Monsieur, brother of the king, will to-morrow drink his health before five hundred of the best gentlemen of France." And, on finishing those words, the young man, perceiving that his enthusiasm had deranged one of his ruffles, set to work to put it to rights with the greatest care imaginable.

"Let us resume business, sire," interrupted Mazarin, who never was enthusiastic, and who wore no ruffles.

"Yes, monsieur," replied Louis XIV. "Pursue your communication, monsieur le comte," added he, turning towards Athos.

Athos immediately began and offered in due form the hand of the Princess Henrietta Stuart to the young prince, the king's brother. The conference lasted an hour; after which the doors of the chamber were thrown open to the courtiers, who resumed their places as if nothing had been kept from them in the occupations of that evening. Athos then found himself again with Raoul, and the father and son were able to clasp each other's hands.

CHAPTER XLII.

In which Mazarin becomes Prodigal.

Whilst Mazarin was endeavoring to recover from the serious alarm he had just experienced, Athos and Raoul were exchanging a few words in a corner of the apartment. “Well, here you are at Paris, then, Raoul?” said the comte.

“Yes, monsieur, since the return of M. le Prince.”

“I cannot converse freely with you here, because we are observed; but I shall return home presently, and shall expect you as soon as your duty permits.”

Raoul bowed, and, at that moment, M. le Prince came up to them. The prince had that clear and keen look which distinguishes birds of prey of the noble species; his physiognomy itself presented several distinct traits of this resemblance. It is known that in the Prince de Conde, the aquiline nose rose out sharply and incisively from a brow slightly retreating, rather low than high, and according to the railers of the court,--a pitiless race without mercy even for genius,--constituted rather an eagle’s beak than a human nose, in the heir of the illustrious princes of the house of Conde. This penetrating look, this imperious expression of the whole countenance, generally disturbed those to whom the prince spoke, more than either majesty or regular beauty could have done in the conqueror of Rocroi. Besides this, the fire mounted so suddenly to his projecting eyes, that with the prince every sort of animation resembled passion. Now, on account of his rank, everybody at the court respected M. le Prince, and many even, seeing only the man, carried their respect as far as terror.

Louis de Conde then advanced towards the Comte de la Fere and Raoul, with the marked intention of being saluted by the one, and of speaking with the other. No man bowed with more reserved grace than the Comte de la Fere. He disdained to put into a salutation all the shades which a courtier ordinarily borrows from the same color--the desire to please. Athos knew his own personal value, and bowed to the prince like a man, correcting by something sympathetic and undefinable that which might have appeared offensive to the pride of the highest rank in the inflexibility of his attitude. The prince was about to speak to Raoul. Athos forestalled him. “If M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne,” said he, “were not one of the humble servants of your royal highness, I would beg him to pronounce my name before you--mon prince.”

“I have the honor to address Monsieur le Comte de la Fere,” said Conde, instantly.

“My protector,” added Raoul, blushing.

“One of the most honorable men in the kingdom,” continued the prince; “one of the first gentlemen of France, and of whom I have heard so much that I have frequently desired to number him among my friends.”

“An honor of which I should be unworthy,” replied Athos, “but for the respect and admiration I entertain for your royal highness.”

“Monsieur de Bragelonne,” said the prince, “is a good officer, and it is plainly seen that he has been to a good school. Ah, monsieur le comte, in your time, generals had soldiers!”

“That is true, my lord, but nowadays soldiers have generals.”

This compliment, which savored so little of flattery, gave a thrill of joy to the man whom already Europe considered a hero; and who might be thought to be satiated with praise.

“I regret very much,” continued the prince, “that you should have retired from the service, monsieur le comte; for it is more than probable that the king will soon have a war with Holland or England, and opportunities for distinguishing himself would not be wanting for a man who, like you, knows Great Britain as well as you do France.”

“I believe I may say, monseigneur, that I have acted wisely in retiring from the service,” said Athos, smiling. “France and Great Britain will henceforward live like two sisters, if I can trust my presentiments.”

“Your presentiments?”

“Stop, monseigneur, listen to what is being said yonder, at the table of my lord the cardinal.”

“Where they are playing?”

“Yes, my lord.”

The cardinal had just raised himself on one elbow, and made a sign to the king’s brother, who went to him.

“My lord,” said the cardinal, “pick up, if you please, all those gold crowns.” And he pointed to the enormous pile of yellow and glittering pieces which the Comte de Guiche had raised by degrees before him by a surprising run of luck at play.

“For me?” cried the Duc d’Anjou.

“Those fifty thousand crowns; yes, monseigneur, they are yours.”

“Do you give them to me?”

“I have been playing on your account, monseigneur,” replied the cardinal, getting weaker and weaker, as if this effort of giving money had exhausted all his physical and moral faculties.

“Oh, good heavens!” exclaimed Philip, wild with joy, “what a fortunate day!” And he himself, making a rake of his fingers, drew a part of the sum into his pockets, which he filled, and still full a third remained on the table.

“Chevalier,” said Philip to his favorite, the Chevalier de Lorraine, “come hither, chevalier.” The favorite quickly obeyed. “Pocket the rest,” said the young prince.

This singular scene was considered by the persons present only as a touching kind of family fete. The cardinal assumed the airs of a father with the sons of France, and the two princes had grown up under his wing. No one then imputed to pride, or even impertinence, as would be done nowadays, this liberality on the part of the first minister. The courtiers were satisfied with envying the prince.--The king turned away his head.

“I never had so much money before,” said the young prince, joyously, as he crossed the chamber with his favorite to go to his carriage. “No, never! What a weight these crowns are!”

“But why has monsieur le cardinal given away all this money at once?” asked M. le Prince of the Comte de la Fere. “He must be very ill, the dear cardinal!”

“Yes, my lord, very ill, without doubt; he looks very ill, as your royal highness may perceive.”

“But surely he will die of it. A hundred and fifty thousand livres! Oh, it is incredible! But, comte, tell me a reason for it?”

“Patience, monseigneur, I beg of you. Here comes M. le Duc d’Anjou, talking with the Chevalier de Lorraine; I should not be surprised if they spared us the trouble of being indiscreet. Listen to them.”

In fact the chevalier said to the prince in a low voice, “My lord, it is not natural for M. Mazarin to give you so much money. Take care! you will let some of the pieces fall, my lord. What design has the cardinal upon you to make him so generous?”

“As I said,” whispered Athos in the prince’s ear; “that, perhaps, is the best reply to your question.”

“Tell me, my lord,” repeated the chevalier impatiently, as he was calculating, by weighing them in his pocket, the quota of the sum which had fallen to his share by rebound.

“My dear chevalier, a wedding present.”

“How a wedding present?”

“Eh! yes, I am going to be married,” replied the Duc d’Anjou, without perceiving, at the moment, he was passing the prince and Athos, who both bowed respectfully.

The chevalier darted at the young duke a glance so strange, and so malicious, that the Comte de la Fere quite started on beholding it.

“You! you to be married!” repeated he; “oh! that’s impossible. You would not commit such a folly!”

“Bah! I don’t do it myself; I am made to do it,” replied the Duc d’Anjou. “But come, quick! let us get rid of our money.” Thereupon he disappeared with his companion, laughing and talking, whilst all heads were bowed on his passage.

“Then,” whispered the prince to Athos, “that is the secret.”

“It was not I who told you so, my lord.”

“He is to marry the sister of Charles II.?”

“I believe so.”

The prince reflected for a moment, and his eye shot forth one of its not infrequent flashes. “Humph!” said he slowly, as if speaking to himself; “our swords are once more to be hung on the wall--for a long time!” and he sighed.

All that sigh contained of ambition silently stifled, of extinguished illusions and disappointed hopes, Athos alone divined, for he alone heard that sigh. Immediately after, the prince took leave and the king left the apartment. Athos, by a sign made to Bragelonne, renewed the desire he had expressed at the beginning of the scene. By degrees the chamber was deserted, and Mazarin was left alone, a prey to suffering which he could no longer dissemble. “Bernouin! Bernouin!” cried he in a broken voice.

“What does monseigneur want?”

“Guenaud--let Guenaud be sent for,” said his eminence. “I think I’m dying.”

Bernouin, in great terror, rushed into the cabinet to give the order, and the piqueur, who hastened to fetch the physician, passed the king’s carriage in the Rue Saint Honore.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Guenaud.

The cardinal’s order was pressing; Guenaud quickly obeyed it. He found his patient stretched on his bed, his legs swelled, his face livid, and his stomach collapsed. Mazarin had a severe attack of gout. He suffered tortures with the impatience of a man who has not been accustomed to resistances. On seeing Guenaud: “Ah!” said he; “now I am saved!”

Guenaud was a very learned and circumspect man, who stood in no need of the critiques of Boileau to obtain a reputation. When facing a disease, if it were personified in a king, he treated the patient as a Turk treats a Moor. He did not, therefore, reply to Mazarin as the minister expected: “Here is the doctor; good-bye disease!” On the contrary, on examining his patient, with a very serious air:

“Oh! oh!” said he.

“Eh! what! Guenaud! How you look at me!”

“I look as I should on seeing your complaint, my lord; it is a very dangerous one.”

“The gout--oh! yes, the gout.”

“With complications, my lord.”

Mazarin raised himself upon his elbow, and, questioning by look and gesture: “What do you mean by that? Am I worse than I believe myself to be?”

“My lord,” said Guenaud, seating himself beside the bed; “your eminence has worked very hard during your life; your eminence has suffered much.”

“But I am not old, I fancy. The late M. de Richelieu was but seventeen months younger than I am when he died, and died of a mortal disease. I am young, Guenaud: remember, I am scarcely fifty-two.”

“Oh! my lord, you are much more than that. How long did the Fronde last?”

“For what purpose do you put such a question to me?”

“For a medical calculation, monseigneur.”

“Well, some ten years--off and on.”

"Very well; be kind enough to reckon every year of the Fronde as three years--that makes thirty; now twenty and fifty-two makes seventy-two years. You are seventy-two, my lord; and that is a great age."

Whilst saying this, he felt the pulse of his patient. This pulse was full of such fatal indications, that the physician continued, notwithstanding the interruptions of the patient: "Put down the years of the Fronde at four each, and you have lived eighty-two years."

"Are you speaking seriously, Guenaud?"

"Alas! yes, monseigneur."

"You take a roundabout way, then, to inform me that I am very ill?"

"Ma foi! yes, my lord, and with a man of the mind and courage of your eminence, it ought not to be necessary to do so."

The cardinal breathed with such difficulty that he inspired pity even in a pitiless physician. "There are diseases and diseases," resumed Mazarin. "From some of them people escape."

"That is true, my lord."

"Is it not?" cried Mazarin, almost joyously; "for, in short, what else would be the use of power, of strength of will? What would the use of genius be--your genius, Guenaud? What would be the use of science and art, if the patient, who disposes of all that, cannot be saved from peril?"

Guenaud was about to open his mouth, but Mazarin continued:

"Remember," said he, "I am the most confiding of your patients; remember I obey you blindly, and that consequently--"

"I know all that," said Guenaud.

"I shall be cured, then?"

"Monseigneur, there is neither strength of will, nor power, nor genius, nor science that can resist a disease which God doubtless sends, or which He cast upon the earth at the creation, with full power to destroy and kill mankind. When the disease is mortal, and nothing can--"

"Is--my--disease--mortal?" asked Mazarin.

"Yes, my lord."

His eminence sank down for a moment, like an unfortunate wretch who is crushed by a falling column. But the spirit of Mazarin was a strong one, or rather his mind was a firm one. "Guenaud," said he, recovering from his first shock, "you will permit me to appeal from your judgment. I will call together the most learned men of Europe: I will consult them. I will live, in short, by the virtue of I care not what remedy."

“My lord must not suppose,” said Guenaud, “that I have the presumption to pronounce alone upon an existence so valuable as yours. I have already assembled all the good physicians and practitioners of France and Europe. There were twelve of them.”

“And they said--”

“They said that your eminence was suffering from a mortal disease; I have the consultation signed in my portfolio. If your eminence will please to see it, you will find the names of all the incurable diseases we have met with. There is first--”

“No, no!” cried Mazarin, pushing away the paper. “No, no, Guenaud, I yield! I yield!” And a profound silence, during which the cardinal resumed his senses and recovered his strength, succeeded to the agitation of this scene. “There is another thing,” murmured Mazarin; “there are empirics and charlatans. In my country, those whom physicians abandon run the chance of a quack, who kills them ten times but saves them a hundred times.”

“Has not your eminence observed, that during the last month I have changed my remedies ten times?”

“Yes. Well?”

“Well, I have spent fifty thousand crowns in purchasing the secrets of all these fellows: the list is exhausted, and so is my purse. You are not cured: and, but for my art, you would be dead.”

“That ends it!” murmured the cardinal; “that ends it.” And he threw a melancholy look upon the riches which surrounded him. “And must I quit all that?” sighed he. “I am dying, Guenaud! I am dying!”

“Oh! not yet, my lord,” said the physician.

Mazarin seized his hand. “In what time?” asked he, fixing his two large eyes upon the impassible countenance of the physician.

“My lord, we never tell that.”

“To ordinary men, perhaps not;--but to me--to me, whose every minute is worth a treasure. Tell me, Guenaud, tell me!”

“No, no, my lord.”

“I insist upon it, I tell you. Oh! give me a month, and for every one of those thirty days I will pay you a hundred thousand crowns.”

“My lord,” replied Guenaud, in a firm voice, “it is God who can give you days of grace, and not I. God only allows you a fortnight.”

The cardinal breathed a painful sigh, and sank back down upon his pillow, murmuring, “Thank you, Guenaud, thank you!”

The physician was about to depart; the dying man, raising himself up: “Silence!” said he, with flaming eyes, “silence!”

“My lord, I have known this secret two months; you see that I have kept it faithfully.”

“Go, Guenaud; I will take care of your fortunes; go, and tell Brienne to send me a clerk called M. Colbert. Go!”

CHAPTER XLIV.

Colbert.

Colbert was not far off. During the whole evening he had remained in one of the corridors, chatting with Bernouin and Brienne, and commenting, with the ordinary skill of people of court, upon the news which developed like air-bubbles upon the water, on the surface of each event. It is doubtless time to trace, in a few words, one of the most interesting portraits of the age, and to trace it with as much truth, perhaps, as contemporary painters have been able to do. Colbert was a man in whom the historian and the moralist have an equal right.

He was thirteen years older than Louis XIV., his future master. Of middle height, rather lean than otherwise, he had deep-set eyes, a mean appearance, his hair was coarse, black and thin, which, say the biographers of his time, made him take early to the skull-cap. A look of severity, of harshness even, a sort of stiffness, which, with inferiors, was pride, with superiors an affectation of superior virtue; a surly cast of countenance upon all occasions, even when looking at himself in a glass alone--such is the exterior of his personage. As to the moral part of his character, the depth of his talent for accounts, and his ingenuity in making sterility itself productive, were much boasted of. Colbert had formed the idea of forcing governors of frontier places to feed the garrisons without pay, with what they drew from contributions. Such a valuable quality made Mazarin think of replacing Joubert, his intendant, who had recently died, by M. Colbert, who had such skill in nibbling down allowances. Colbert by degrees crept into court, notwithstanding his lowly birth, for he was the son of a man who sold wine as his father had done, but who afterwards sold cloth, and then silk stuffs. Colbert, destined for trade, had been clerk in Lyons to a merchant, whom he had quitted to come to Paris in the office of a Chatlet procureur named Biterne. It was here he learned the art of drawing up an account, and the much more valuable one of complicating it.

This stiffness of manner in Colbert had been of great service to him; it is so true that Fortune, when she has a caprice, resembles those women of antiquity, who, when they had a fancy, were disgusted by no physical or moral defects in either men or things. Colbert, placed with Michel Letellier, secretary of state in 1648, by his cousin Colbert, Seigneur de Saint-Penange, who protected him, received one day from the minister a commission for Cardinal Mazarin. His eminence was then in the enjoyment of flourishing health, and the bad years of the Fronde had not yet counted triple and quadruple for him. He was at Sedan, very much annoyed at a court intrigue in which Anne of Austria seemed inclined to desert his cause.

Of this intrigue Letellier held the thread. He had just received a letter from Anne of Austria, a letter very valuable to him, and strongly compromising Mazarin; but, as he already played the double part which served him so well, and by which he always managed two enemies so as to draw advantage from both, either by embroiling them more and more or by reconciling them, Michel Letellier wished to send Anne of Austria's letter to Mazarin, in order that he might be acquainted with it, and consequently pleased with his having so willingly rendered him a service. To send the letter was an easy matter; to recover it again, after having communicated it, that was the difficulty. Letellier cast his eyes around him, and seeing the black and meager clerk with the scowling brow, scribbling away in his office, he preferred him to the best gendarme for the execution of this design.

Colbert was commanded to set out for Sedan, with positive orders to carry the letter to Mazarin, and bring it back to Letellier. He listened to his orders with scrupulous attention, required the instructions to be repeated twice, and was particular in learning whether the bringing back was as necessary as the communicating, and Letellier replied sternly, "More necessary." Then he set out, traveled like a courier, without any care for his body, and placed in the hands of Mazarin, first a letter from Letellier, which announced to the cardinal the sending of the precious letter, and then that letter itself. Mazarin colored greatly whilst reading Anne of Austria's letter, gave Colbert a gracious smile and dismissed him.

"When shall I have the answer, monseigneur?"

"To-morrow."

"To-morrow morning?"

"Yes, monsieur."

The clerk turned upon his heel, after making his very best bow. The next day he was at his post at seven o'clock. Mazarin made him wait till ten. He remained patiently in the ante-chamber; his turn having come, he entered; Mazarin gave him a sealed packet. On the envelope of this packet were these words:--Monsieur Michel Letellier, etc. Colbert looked at the packet with much attention; the cardinal put on a pleasant countenance and pushed him towards the door.

“And the letter of the queen-mother, my lord?” asked Colbert.

“It is in with the rest, in the packet,” said Mazarin.

“Oh! very well,” replied Colbert; and placing his hat between his knees, he began to unseal the packet.

Mazarin uttered a cry. “What are you doing?” said he, angrily.

“I am unsealing the packet, my lord.”

“You mistrust me, then, master pedant, do you? Did any one ever see such impertinence?”

“Oh! my lord, do not be angry with me! It is certainly not your eminence’s word I place in doubt, God forbid!”

“What then?”

“It is the carefulness of your chancery, my lord. What is a letter? A rag. May not a rag be forgotten? And look, my lord, look if I was not right. Your clerks have forgotten the rag; the letter is not in the packet.”

“You are an insolent fellow, and you have not looked,” cried Mazarin, very angrily; “begone and wait my pleasure.” Whilst saying these words, with perfectly Italian subtlety he snatched the packet from the hands of Colbert, and re-entered his apartments.

But this anger could not last so long as to be replaced in time by reason. Mazarin, every morning, on opening his closet door, found the figure of Colbert like a sentinel behind the bench, and this disagreeable figure never failed to ask him humbly, but with tenacity, for the queen-mother’s letter. Mazarin could hold out no longer, and was obliged to give it up. He accompanied this restitution with a most severe reprimand, during which Colbert contented himself with examining, feeling, even smelling, as it were, the paper, the characters, and the signature, neither more nor less than if he had to deal with the greatest forger in the kingdom. Mazarin behaved still more rudely to him, but Colbert, still impassible, having obtained a certainty that the letter was the true one, went off as if he had been deaf. This conduct obtained for him afterwards the post of Joubert; for Mazarin, instead of bearing malice, admired him, and was desirous of attaching so much fidelity to himself.

It may be judged by this single anecdote, what the character of Colbert was. Events, developing themselves, by degrees allowed all the powers of his mind to act freely. Colbert was not long in insinuating himself to the good graces of the cardinal: he became even indispensable to him. The clerk was acquainted with all his accounts without the cardinal's ever having spoken to him about them. This secret between them was a powerful tie, and this was why, when about to appear before the Master of another world, Mazarin was desirous of taking good counsel in disposing the wealth he was so unwillingly obliged to leave in this world. After the visit of Guenaud, he therefore sent for Colbert, desired him to sit down, and said to him: "Let us converse, Monsieur Colbert, and seriously, for I am very ill, and I may chance to die."

"Man is mortal," replied Colbert.

"I have always remembered that, M. Colbert, and I have worked with that end in view. You know that I have amassed a little wealth."

"I know you have, monseigneur."

"At how much do you estimate, as near as you can, the amount of this wealth, M. Colbert?"

"At forty millions, five hundred and sixty thousand, two hundred livres, nine cents, eight farthings," replied Colbert.

The cardinal heaved a deep sigh, and looked at Colbert with wonder, but he allowed a smile to steal across his lips.

"Known money," added Colbert, in reply to that smile.

The cardinal gave quite a start in bed. "What do you mean by that?" said he.

"I mean," said Colbert, "that besides those forty millions, five hundred and sixty thousand, two hundred livres, nine cents, eight farthings, there are thirteen millions that are not known."

"Ouf!" sighed Mazarin, "what a man!"

At this moment, the head of Bernouin appeared through the embrasure of the door.

"What is it?" asked Mazarin, "and why do you disturb me?"

"The Theatin father, your eminence's director, was sent for this evening; and he cannot come again to my lord till after to-morrow."

Mazarin looked a Colbert, who rose and took his hat, saying: "I shall come again, my lord."

Mazarin hesitated. “No, no,” said he; “I have as much business to transact with you as with him. Besides, you are my other confessor--and what I have to say to one the other may hear. Remain where you are, Colbert.”

“But my lord, if there be no secret of penitence, will the director consent to my being here?”

“Do not trouble yourself about that; come into the ruelle.”

“I can wait outside, monseigneur.”

“No, no, it will do you good to hear the confession of a rich man.”

Colbert bowed and went into the ruelle.

“Introduce the Theatin father,” said Mazarin, closing the curtains.

CHAPTER XLV.

Confession of a Man of Wealth.

The Theatin entered deliberately, without being too much astonished at the noise and agitation which anxiety for the cardinal’s health had raised in his household. “Come in, my reverend father,” said Mazarin, after a last look at the ruelle, “come in and console me.”

“That is my duty, my lord,” replied the Theatin.

“Begin by sitting down, and making yourself comfortable, for I am going to begin with a general confession; you will afterwards give me a good absolution, and I shall believe myself more tranquil.”

“My lord,” said the father, “you are not so ill as to make a general confession urgent--and it will be very fatiguing--take care.”

“You suspect, then, that it may be long, father?”

“How can I think it otherwise, when a man has lived so completely as your eminence has done?”

“Ah! that is true!--yes--the recital may be long.”

“The mercy of God is great,” snuffled the Theatin.

“Stop,” said Mazarin; “there I begin to terrify myself with having allowed so many things to pass which the Lord might reprove.”

“Is that not always so?” said the Theatin naively, removing further from the lamp his thin pointed face, like that of a mole. “Sinners are so forgetful beforehand, and scrupulous when it is too late.”

“Sinners?” replied Mazarin. “Do you use that word ironically, and to reproach me with all the genealogies I have allowed to be made on my account--I--the son of a fisherman, in fact?”

[This is quite untranslatable--it being a play upon the words pecheur (with a grave over the first e), a sinner, and pecheur (with an accent circumflex over the first e), a fisherman. It is in very bad taste.--TRANS.]

“Hum!” said the Theatin.

“That is a first sin, father; for I have allowed myself made to descend from two old Roman consuls, S. Geganius Macerinus 1st, Macerinus 2d, and Proculus Macerinus 3d, of whom the Chronicle of Haolander speaks.

From Macerinus to Mazarin the proximity was tempting. Macerinus, a diminutive, means leanish, poorish, out of case. Oh! reverend father! Mazarini may now be carried to the augmentative Maigre, thin as Lazarus. Look!”--and he showed his fleshless arms.

“In your having been born of a family of fishermen I see nothing injurious to you; for--St. Peter was a fisherman; and if you are a prince of the church, my lord, he was the supreme head of it. Pass on, if you please.”

“So much the more for my having threatened with the Bastile a certain Bounet, a priest of Avignon, who wanted to publish a genealogy of the Casa Mazarini much too marvelous.”

“To be probable?” replied the Theatin.

“Oh! if I had acted up to his idea, father, that would have been the vice of pride--another sin.”

“It was an excess of wit, and a person is not to be reproached with such sorts of abuses. Pass on, pass on!”

“I was all pride. Look you, father, I will endeavor to divide that into capital sins.”

“I like divisions, when well made.”

“I am glad of that. You must know that in 1630--alas! that is thirty-one years ago--”

“You were then twenty-nine years old, monseigneur.”

“A hot-headed age. I was then something of a soldier, and I threw myself at Casal into the arquebusades, to show that I rode on horseback as well as an officer. It is true, I restored peace between the French and the Spaniards. That redeems my sin a little.”

“I see no sin in being able to ride well on horseback,” said the Theatin; “that is in perfect good taste, and does honor to our gown. As a Christian, I approve of your having prevented the effusion of blood; as a monk, I am proud of the bravery a monk has exhibited.”

Mazarin bowed his head humbly. “Yes,” said he, “but the consequences?”

“What consequences?”

“Eh! that damned sin of pride has roots without end. From the time that I threw myself in that manner between two armies, that I had smelt powder and faced lines of soldiers, I have held generals a little in contempt.”

“Ah!” said the father.

“There is the evil; so that I have not found one endurable since that time.”

“The fact is,” said the Theatin, “that the generals we have had have not been remarkable.”

“Oh!” cried Mazarin, “there was Monsieur le Prince. I have tormented him thoroughly!”

“He is not much to be pitied: he has acquired sufficient glory, and sufficient wealth.”

“That may be, for Monsieur le Prince; but M. Beaufort, for example--whom I held suffering so long in the dungeon of Vincennes?”

“Ah! but he was a rebel, and the safety of the state required that you should make a sacrifice. Pass on!”

“I believe I have exhausted pride. There is another sin which I am afraid to qualify.”

“I can qualify it myself. Tell it.”

“A great sin, reverend father!”

“We shall judge, monseigneur.”

“You cannot fail to have heard of certain relations which I have had--with her majesty the queen-mother;--the malevolent--”

“The malevolent, my lord, are fools. Was it not necessary for the good of the state and the interests of the young king, that you should live in good intelligence with the queen? Pass on, pass on!”

“I assure you,” said Mazarin, “you remove a terrible weight from my breast.”

“These are all trifles!--look for something serious.”

“I have had much ambition, father.”

“That is the march of great minds and things, my lord.”

“Even the longing for the tiara?”

“To be pope is to be the first of Christians. Why should you not desire that?”

“It has been printed that, to gain that object, I had sold Cambria to the Spaniards.”

“You have, perhaps, yourself written pamphlets without severely persecuting pamphleteers.”

“Then, reverend father, I have truly a clean breast. I feel nothing remaining but slight peccadilloes.”

“What are they?”

“Play.”

"That is rather worldly: but you were obliged by the duties of greatness to keep a good house."

"I like to win."

"No player plays to lose."

"I cheated a little."

"You took your advantage. Pass on."

"Well! reverend father, I feel nothing else upon my conscience. Give me absolution, and my soul will be able, when God shall please to call it, to mount without obstacle to the throne--"

The Theatin moved neither his arms nor his lips. "What are you waiting for, father?" said Mazarin.

"I am waiting for the end."

"The end of what?"

"Of the confession, monsieur."

"But I have ended."

"Oh, no; your eminence is mistaken."

"Not that I know of."

"Search diligently."

"I have searched as well as possible."

"Then I shall assist your memory."

"Do."

The Theatin coughed several times. "You have said nothing of avarice, another capital sin, nor of those millions," said he.

"What millions, father?"

"Why, those you possess, my lord."

"Father, that money is mine, why should I speak to you about that?"

"Because, you see, our opinions differ. You say that money is yours, whilst I--I believe it is rather the property of others."

Mazarin lifted his cold hand to his brow, which was beaded with perspiration. "How so?" stammered he.

"This way. Your excellency had gained much wealth--in the service of the king."

"Hum! much--that is, not too much."

"Whatever it may be, whence came that wealth?"

"From the state."

"The state; that is the king."

“But what do you conclude from that, father?” said Mazarin, who began to tremble.

“I cannot conclude without seeing a list of the riches you possess. Let us reckon a little, if you please. You have the bishopric of Metz?”

“Yes.”

“The abbeys of St. Clement, St. Arnould, and St. Vincent, all at Metz?”

“Yes.”

“You have the abbey of St. Denis, in France, magnificent property?”

“Yes, father.”

“You have the abbey of Cluny, which is rich?”

“I have.”

“That of St. Medard at Soissons, with a revenue of one hundred thousand livres?”

“I cannot deny it.”

“That of St. Victor, at Marseilles,--one of the best in the south?”

“Yes father.”

“A good million a year. With the emoluments of the cardinalship and the ministry, I say too little when I say two millions a year.”

“Eh!”

“In ten years that is twenty millions--and twenty millions put out at fifty per cent. give, by progression, twenty-three millions in ten years.”

“How well you reckon for a Theatin!”

“Since your eminence placed our order in the convent we occupy, near St. Germain des Pres, in 1644, I have kept the accounts of the society.”

“And mine likewise, apparently, father.”

“One ought to know a little of everything, my lord.”

“Very well. Conclude, at present.”

“I conclude that your baggage is too heavy to allow you to pass through the gates of Paradise.”

“Shall I be damned?”

“If you do not make restitution, yes.”

Mazarin uttered a piteous cry. “Restitution!--but to whom, good God?”

“To the owner of that money,--to the king.”

“But the king did not give it all to me.”

“One moment,--does not the king sign the ordonances?”

Mazarin passed from sighs to groans. “Absolution! absolution!” cried he.

“Impossible, my lord. Restitution! restitution!” replied the Theatin.

"But you absolve me from all other sins, why not from that?"

"Because," replied the father, "to absolve you for that motive would be a sin for which the king would never absolve me, my lord."

Thereupon the confessor quitted his penitent with an air full of compunction. He then went out in the same manner he had entered.

"Oh, good God!" groaned the cardinal. "Come here, Colbert, I am very, very ill indeed, my friend."

CHAPTER XLVI.

The Donation.

Colbert reappeared beneath the curtains.

“Have you heard?” said Mazarin.

“Alas! yes, my lord.”

“Can he be right? Can all this money be badly acquired?”

“A Theatin, monseigneur, is a bad judge in matters of finance,” replied Colbert, coolly. “And yet it is very possible that, according to his theological views, your eminence has been, in a certain degree, in the wrong. People generally find they have been so,--when they die.”

“In the first place, they commit the wrong of dying, Colbert.”

“That is true, my lord. Against whom, however, did the Theatin make out that you had committed these wrongs? Against the king?”

Mazarin shrugged his shoulders. “As if I had not saved both his state and his finances.”

“That admits of no contradiction, my lord.”

“Does it? Then I have received a merely legitimate salary, in spite of the opinion of my confessor?”

“That is beyond doubt.”

“And I might fairly keep for my own family, which is so needy, a good fortune,--the whole, even, of which I have earned?”

“I see no impediment to that, monseigneur.”

“I felt assured that in consulting you, Colbert, I should have good advice,” replied Mazarin, greatly delighted.

Colbert resumed his pedantic look. “My lord,” interrupted he, “I think it would be quite as well to examine whether what the Theatin said is not a snare.”

“Oh! no; a snare? What for? The Theatin is an honest man.”

“He believed your eminence to be at death’s door, because your eminence consulted him. Did I not hear him say--’Distinguish that which the king has given you from that which you have given yourself.’ Recollect, my lord, if he did not say something a little like that to you?--that is quite a theatrical speech."

"That is possible."

"In which case, my lord, I should consider you as required by the Theatin to--"

"To make restitution!" cried Mazarin, with great warmth.

"Eh! I do not say no."

"What, of all! You do not dream of such a thing! You speak just as the confessor did."

"To make restitution of a part,--that is to say, his majesty's part; and that, monseigneur, may have its dangers. Your eminence is too skillful a politician not to know that, at this moment, the king does not possess a hundred and fifty thousand livres clear in his coffers."

"That is not my affair," said Mazarin, triumphantly; "that belongs to M. le Surintendant Fouquet, whose accounts I gave you to verify some months ago."

Colbert bit his lips at the name of Fouquet. "His majesty," said he, between his teeth, "has no money but that which M. Fouquet collects: your money, monseigneur, would afford him a delicious banquet."

"Well, but I am not the superintendent of his majesty's finances--I have my purse--surely I would do much for his majesty's welfare--some legacy--but I cannot disappoint my family."

"The legacy of a part would dishonor you and offend the king. Leaving a part to his majesty, is to avow that that part has inspired you with doubts as to the lawfulness of the means of acquisition."

"Monsieur Colbert!"

"I thought your eminence did me the honor to ask my advice?"

"Yes, but you are ignorant of the principal details of the question."

"I am ignorant of nothing, my lord; during ten years, all the columns of figures which are found in France, have passed into review before me; and if I have painfully nailed them into my brain, they are there now so well riveted, that, from the office of M. Letellier, who is sober, to the little secret largesses of M. Fouquet, who is prodigal, I could recite, figure by figure, all the money that is spent in France from Marseilles to Cherbourg."

"Then, you would have me throw all my money into the coffers of the king!" cried Mazarin, ironically; and from whom, at the same time the gout forced painful moans. "Surely the king would reproach me with nothing, but he would laugh at me, while squandering my millions, and with good reason."

"Your eminence has misunderstood me. I did not, the least in the world, pretend that his majesty ought to spend your money."

"You said so, clearly, it seems to me, when you advised me to give it to him."

"Ah," replied Colbert, "that is because your eminence, absorbed as you are by your disease, entirely loses sight of the character of Louis XIV."

"How so?"

"That character, if I may venture to express myself thus, resembles that which my lord confessed just now to the Theatin."

"Go on--that is?"

"Pride! Pardon me, my lord, haughtiness, nobleness; kings have no pride, that is a human passion."

"Pride,--yes, you are right. Next?"

"Well, my lord, if I have divined rightly, your eminence has but to give all your money to the king, and that immediately."

"But for what?" said Mazarin, quite bewildered.

"Because the king will not accept of the whole."

"What, and he a young man, and devoured by ambition?"

"Just so."

"A young man who is anxious for my death--"

"My lord!"

"To inherit, yes, Colbert, yes; he is anxious for my death, in order to inherit. Triple fool that I am! I would prevent him!"

"Exactly: if the donation were made in a certain form he would refuse it."

"Well; but how?"

"That is plain enough. A young man who has yet done nothing--who burns to distinguish himself--who burns to reign alone, will never take anything ready built, he will construct for himself. This prince, monseigneur, will never be content with the Palais Royal, which M. de Richelieu left him, nor with the Palais Mazarin, which you have had so superbly constructed, nor with the Louvre, which his ancestors inhabited; nor with St. Germain, where he was born. All that does not proceed from himself, I predict, he will disdain."

"And you will guarantee, that if I give my forty millions to the king--"

"Saying certain things to him at the same time, I guarantee he will refuse them."

"But those things--what are they?"

"I will write them, if my lord will have the goodness to dictate them."

"Well, but, after all, what advantage will that be to me?"

"An enormous one. Nobody will afterwards be able to accuse your eminence of that unjust avarice with which pamphleteers have reproached the most brilliant mind of the present age."

"You are right, Colbert, you are right; go, and seek the king, on my part, and take him my will."

"Your donation, my lord."

"But, if he should accept it; if he should even think of accepting it!"

"Then there would remain thirteen millions for your family, and that is a good round sum."

"But then you would be either a fool or a traitor."

"And I am neither the one nor the other, my lord. You appear to be much afraid that the king will accept; you have a deal more reason to fear that he will not accept."

"But, see you, if he does not accept, I should like to guarantee my thirteen reserved millions to him--yes, I will do so--yes. But my pains are returning, I shall faint. I am very, very ill, Colbert; I am near my end!"

Colbert started. The cardinal was indeed very ill; large drops of sweat flowed down upon his bed of agony, and the frightful pallor of a face streaming with water was a spectacle which the most hardened practitioner could not have beheld without much compassion. Colbert was, without doubt, very much affected, for he quitted the chamber, calling Bernouin to attend to the dying man, and went into the corridor. There, walking about with a meditative expression, which almost gave nobility to his vulgar head, his shoulders thrown up, his neck stretched out, his lips half open, to give vent to unconnected fragments of incoherent thoughts, he lashed up his courage to the pitch of the undertaking contemplated, whilst within ten paces of him, separated only by a wall, his master was being stifled by anguish which drew from him lamentable cries, thinking no more of the treasures of the earth, or of the joys of Paradise, but much of all the horrors of hell. Whilst burning-hot napkins, physic, revulsives, and Guenaud, who was recalled, were performing their functions with increased activity, Colbert, holding his great head in both his hands, to compress within it the fever of the projects engendered by the brain, was meditating the tenor of the donation he would make Mazarin write, at the first hour of respite his disease should afford him. It would appear as if all the cries of the cardinal, and all the attacks of death upon this representative of the past, were stimulants for the genius of this thinker with the bushy eyebrows, who was turning already towards the rising sun of a regenerated society. Colbert resumed his place at Mazarin's pillow at the first interval of pain, and persuaded him to dictate a donation thus conceived.

"About to appear before God, the Master of mankind, I beg the king, who was my master on earth, to resume the wealth which his bounty has bestowed upon me, and which my family would be happy to see pass into such illustrious hands. The particulars of my property will be found--they are drawn up--at the first requisition of his majesty, or at the last sigh of his most devoted servant,

"JULES, Cardinal de Mazarin."

The cardinal sighed heavily as he signed this; Colbert sealed the packet, and carried it immediately to the Louvre, whither the king had returned.

He then went back to his own home, rubbing his hands with the confidence of workman who has done a good day's work.

CHAPTER XLVII.

How Anne of Austria gave one Piece of Advice to Louis XIV.

The news of the extreme illness of the cardinal had already spread, and attracted at least as much attention among the people of the Louvre as the news of the marriage of Monsieur, the king's brother, which had already been announced as an official fact. Scarcely had Louis XIV. returned home, with his thoughts fully occupied with the various things he had seen and heard in the course of the evening, when an usher announced that the same crowd of courtiers who, in the morning, had thronged his lever, presented themselves again at his coucher, a remarkable piece of respect which, during the reign of the cardinal, the court, not very discreet in its performance, had accorded to the minister, without caring about displeasing the king.

But the minister had had, as we have said, an alarming attack of gout, and the tide of flattery was mounting towards the throne. Courtiers have a marvelous instinct in scenting the turn of events; courtiers possess a supreme kind of science; they are diplomatists in throwing light upon the unraveling of complicated intrigues, captains in divining the issue of battles, and physicians in curing the sick. Louis XIV., to whom his mother had taught this axiom, together with many others, understood at once that the cardinal must be very ill.

Scarcely had Anne of Austria conducted the young queen to her apartments and taken from her brow the head-dress of ceremony, when she went to see her son in his cabinet, where, alone, melancholy, and depressed, he was indulging, as if to exercise his will, in one of those terrible inward passions--king's passions--which create events when they break out, and with Louis XIV., thanks to his astonishing command over himself, became such benign tempests, that his most violent, his only passion, that which Saint Simon mentions with astonishment, was that famous fit of anger which he exhibited fifty years later, on the occasion of a little concealment of the Duc de Maine's, and which had for result a shower of blows inflicted with a cane upon the back of a poor valet who had stolen a biscuit. The young king then was, as we have seen, a prey to a double excitement; and he said to himself as he looked in a glass, “O king!--king by name, and not in fact;--phantom, vain phantom art thou!--inert statue, which has no other power than that of provoking salutations from courtiers, when wilt thou be able to raise thy velvet arm, or clench thy silken hand? when wilt thou be able to open, for any purpose but to sigh, or smile, lips condemned to the motionless stupidity of the marbles in thy gallery?”

Then, passing his hand over his brow, and feeling the want of air, he approached a window, and looking down, saw below some horsemen talking together, and groups of timid observers. These horsemen were a fraction of the watch: the groups were busy portions of the people, to whom a king is always a curious thing, the same as a rhinoceros, a crocodile, or a serpent. He struck his brow with his open hand, crying,--”King of France! what a title! People of France! what a heap of creatures! I have just returned to my Louvre; my horses, just unharnessed, are still smoking, and I have created interest enough to induce scarcely twenty persons to look at me as I passed. Twenty! what do I say? no; there were not twenty anxious to see the king of France. There are not even ten archers to guard my palace of residence: archers, people, guards, all are at the Palais Royal! Why, my good God! have not I, the king, the right to ask of you all that?”

“Because,” said a voice, replying to his, and which sounded from the other side of the door of the cabinet, “because at the Palais Royal lies all the gold,--that is to say, all the power of him who desires to reign.”

Louis turned round sharply. The voice which had pronounced these words was that of Anne of Austria. The king started, and advanced towards her. “I hope,” said he, “your majesty has paid no attention to the vain declamations which the solitude and disgust familiar to kings suggest to the happiest dispositions?”

“I only paid attention to one thing, my son, and that was, that you were complaining.”

“Who! I? Not at all,” said Louis XIV.; “no, in truth, you err, madame.”

“What were you doing, then?”

“I thought I was under the ferule of my professor, and developing a subject of amplification.”

“My son,” replied Anne of Austria, shaking her head, “you are wrong not to trust my word; you are wrong not to grant me your confidence. A day will come, and perhaps quickly, wherein you will have occasion to remember that axiom:--'Gold is universal power; and they alone are kings who are all-powerful.'"

"Your intention," continued the king, "was not, however, to cast blame upon the rich men of this age, was it?"

"No," said the queen, warmly; "no, sire; they who are rich in this age, under your reign, are rich because you have been willing they should be so, and I entertain against them neither malice nor envy; they have, without doubt, served your majesty sufficiently well for your majesty to have permitted them to reward themselves. That is what I mean to say by the words for which you reproach me."

"God forbid, madame, that I should ever reproach my mother with anything!"

"Besides," continued Anne of Austria, "the Lord never gives the goods of this world but for a season; the Lord--as correctives to honor and riches--the Lord has placed sufferings, sickness, and death; and no one," added she, with a melancholy smile, which proved she made the application of the funeral precept to herself, "no man can take his wealth or greatness with him to the grave. It results, therefore, that the young gather the abundant harvest prepared for them by the old."

Louis listened with increased attention to the words which Anne of Austria, no doubt, pronounced with a view to console him. "Madame," said he, looking earnestly at his mother, "one would almost say in truth that you had something else to announce to me."

"I have absolutely nothing, my son; only you cannot have failed to remark that his eminence the cardinal is very ill."

Louis looked at his mother, expecting some emotion in her voice, some sorrow in her countenance. The face of Anne of Austria appeared a little changed, but that was from sufferings of quite a personal character. Perhaps the alteration was caused by the cancer which had begun to consume her breast. "Yes, madame," said the king; "yes, M. de Mazarin is very ill."

"And it would be a great loss to the kingdom if God were to summon his eminence away. Is not that your opinion as well as mine, my son?" said the queen.

"Yes, madame; yes, certainly, it would be a great loss for the kingdom," said Louis, coloring; "but the peril does not seem to me to be so great; besides, the cardinal is still young." The king had scarcely ceased speaking when an usher lifted the tapestry, and stood with a paper in his hand, waiting for the king to speak to him.

"What have you there?" asked the king.

"A message from M. de Mazarin," replied the usher.

"Give it to me," said the king; and he took the paper. But at the moment he was about to open it, there was a great noise in the gallery, the ante-chamber, and the court.

"Ah, ah," said Louis XIV., who doubtless knew the meaning of that triple noise. "How could I say there was but one king in France! I was mistaken, there are two."

As he spoke or thought thus, the door opened, and the superintendent of finances, Fouquet, appeared before his nominal master. It was he who made the noise in the ante-chamber, it was his horse that made the noise in the courtyard. In addition to all this, a loud murmur was heard along his passage, which did not die away till some time after he had passed. It was this murmur which Louis XIV. regretted so deeply not hearing as he passed, and dying away behind him.

"He is not precisely a king, as you fancy," said Anne of Austria to her son; "he is only a man who is much too rich--that is all."

Whilst saying these words, a bitter feeling gave to these words of the queen a most hateful expression; whereas the brow of the king, calm and self-possessed, on the contrary, was without the slightest wrinkle. He nodded, therefore, familiarly to Fouquet, whilst he continued to unfold the paper given to him by the usher. Fouquet perceived this movement, and with a politeness at once easy and respectful, advanced towards the queen, so as not to disturb the king. Louis had opened the paper, and yet he did not read it. He listened to Fouquet paying the most charming compliments to the queen upon her hand and arm. Anne of Austria's frown relaxed a little, she even almost smiled. Fouquet perceived that the king, instead of reading, was looking at him; he turned half round, therefore, and while continuing his conversation with the queen, faced the king.

"You know, Monsieur Fouquet," said Louis, "how ill M. Mazarin is?"

"Yes, sire, I know that," said Fouquet; "in fact, he is very ill. I was at my country-house of Vaux when the news reached me; and the affair seemed so pressing that I left at once."

"You left Vaux this evening, monsieur?"

“An hour and a half ago, yes, your majesty,” said Fouquet, consulting a watch, richly ornamented with diamonds.

“An hour and a half!” said the king, still able to restrain his anger, but not to conceal his astonishment.

“I understand you, sire. Your majesty doubts my word, and you have reason to do so; but I have really come in that time, though it is wonderful! I received from England three pairs of very fast horses, as I had been assured. They were placed at distances of four leagues apart, and I tried them this evening. They really brought me from Vaux to the Louvre in an hour and a half, so your majesty sees I have not been cheated.” The queen-mother smiled with something like secret envy. But Fouquet caught her thought. “Thus, madame,” he promptly said, “such horses are made for kings, not for subjects; for kings ought never to yield to any one in anything.”

The king looked up.

“And yet,” interrupted Anne of Austria, “you are not a king, that I know of, M. Fouquet.”

“Truly not, madame; therefore the horses only await the orders of his majesty to enter the royal stables; and if I allowed myself to try them, it was only for fear of offering to the king anything that was not positively wonderful.”

The king became quite red.

“You know, Monsieur Fouquet,” said the queen, “that at the court of France it is not the custom for a subject to offer anything to his king.”

Louis started.

“I hoped, madame,” said Fouquet, much agitated, “that my love for his majesty, my incessant desire to please him, would serve to compensate the want of etiquette. It was not so much a present that I permitted myself to offer, as the tribute I paid.”

“Thank you, Monsieur Fouquet,” said the king politely, “and I am gratified by your intention, for I love good horses; but you know I am not very rich; you, who are my superintendent of finances, know it better than any one else. I am not able, then, however willing I may be, to purchase such a valuable set of horses.”

Fouquet darted a haughty glance at the queen-mother, who appeared to triumph at the false position in which the minister had placed himself, and replied:--

“Luxury is the virtue of kings, sire: it is luxury which makes them resemble God; it is by luxury they are more than other men. With luxury a king nourishes his subjects, and honors them. Under the mild heat of this luxury of kings springs the luxury of individuals, a source of riches for the people. His majesty, by accepting the gift of these six incomparable horses, would stimulate the pride of his own breeders, of Limousin, Perche, and Normandy; and this emulation would have been beneficial to all. But the king is silent, and consequently I am condemned.”

During this speech, Louis was, unconsciously, folding and unfolding Mazarin’s paper, upon which he had not cast his eyes. At length he glanced upon it, and uttered a faint cry at reading the first line.

“What is the matter, my son?” asked the queen, anxiously, and going towards the king.

“From the cardinal,” replied the king, continuing to read; “yes, yes, it is really from him.”

“Is he worse, then?”

“Read!” said the king, passing the parchment to his mother, as if he thought that nothing less than reading would convince Anne of Austria of a thing so astonishing as was conveyed in that paper.

Anne of Austria read in turn, and as she read, her eyes sparkled with joy all the greater from her useless endeavor to hide it, which attracted the attention of Fouquet.

“Oh! a regularly drawn up deed of gift,” said she.

“A gift?” repeated Fouquet.

“Yes,” said the king, replying pointedly to the superintendent of finances, “yes, at the point of death, monsieur le cardinal makes me a donation of all his wealth.”

“Forty millions,” cried the queen. “Oh, my son! this is very noble on the part of his eminence, and will silence all malicious rumors; forty millions scraped together slowly, coming back all in one heap to the treasury! It is the act of a faithful subject and a good Christian.” And having once more cast her eyes over the act, she restored it to Louis XIV., whom the announcement of the sum greatly agitated. Fouquet had taken some steps backwards and remained silent. The king looked at him, and held the paper out to him, in turn. The superintendent only bestowed a haughty look of a second upon it; then bowing,--”Yes, sire,” said he, “a donation, I see.”

"You must reply to it, my son," said Anne of Austria; "you must reply to it, and immediately."

"But how, madame?"

"By a visit to the cardinal."

"Why, it is but an hour since I left his eminence," said the king.

"Write, then, sire."

"Write!" said the young king, with evident repugnance.

"Well!" replied Anne of Austria, "it seems to me, my son, that a man who has just made such a present, has a good right to expect to be thanked for it with some degree of promptitude." Then turning towards Fouquet: "Is not that likewise your opinion, monsieur?"

"That the present is worth the trouble? Yes, madame," said Fouquet, with a lofty air that did not escape the king.

"Accept, then, and thank him," insisted Anne of Austria.

"What says M. Fouquet?" asked Louis XIV.

"Does your majesty wish to know my opinion?"

"Yes."

"Thank him, sire--"

"Ah!" said the queen.

"But do not accept," continued Fouquet.

"And why not?" asked the queen.

"You have yourself said why, madame," replied Fouquet; "because kings cannot and ought not to receive presents from their subjects."

The king remained silent between these two contrary opinions.

"But forty millions!" said Anne of Austria, in the same tone as that in which, at a later period, poor Marie Antoinette replied, "You will tell me as much!"

"I know," said Fouquet, laughing, "forty millions makes a good round sum,--such a sum as could almost tempt a royal conscience."

"But, monsieur," said Anne of Austria, "instead of persuading the king not to receive this present, recall to his majesty's mind, you, whose duty it is, that these forty millions are a fortune to him."

"It is precisely, madame, because these forty millions would be a fortune that I will say to the king, 'Sire, if it be not decent for a king to accept from a subject six horses, worth twenty thousand livres, it would be disgraceful for him to owe a fortune to another subject, more or less scrupulous in the choice of the materials which contributed to the building up of that fortune.'“

“It ill becomes you, monsieur, to give your king a lesson,” said Anne of Austria; “better procure for him forty millions to replace those you make him lose.”

“The king shall have them whenever he wishes,” said the superintendent of finances, bowing.

“Yes, by oppressing the people,” said the queen.

“And were they not oppressed, madame,” replied Fouquet, “when they were made to sweat the forty millions given by this deed? Furthermore, his majesty has asked my opinion, I have given it; if his majesty ask my concurrence, it will be the same.”

“Nonsense! accept, my son, accept,” said Anne of Austria. “You are above reports and interpretations.”

“Refuse, sire,” said Fouquet. “As long as a king lives, he has no other measure but his conscience,--no other judge than his own desires; but when dead, he has posterity, which applauds or accuses.”

“Thank you, mother,” replied Louis, bowing respectfully to the queen. “Thank you Monsieur, Fouquet,” said he, dismissing the superintendent civilly.

“Do you accept?” asked Anne of Austria, once more.

“I shall consider of it,” replied he, looking at Fouquet.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Agony.

The day that the deed of gift had been sent to the king, the cardinal caused himself to be transported to Vincennes. The king and the court followed him thither. The last flashes of this torch still cast splendor enough around to absorb all other lights in its rays. Besides, as it has been seen, the faithful satellite of his minister, young Louis XIV., marched to the last minute in accordance with his gravitation. The disease, as Guenaud had predicted, had become worse; it was no longer an attack of gout, it was an attack of death; then there was another thing which made that agony more agonizing still,--and that was the agitation brought into his mind by the donation he had sent to the king, and which, according to Colbert, the king ought to send back unaccepted to the cardinal. The cardinal had, as we have said, great faith in the predictions of his secretary; but the sum was a large one, and whatever might be the genius of Colbert, from time to time the cardinal thought to himself that the Theatin also might possibly have been mistaken, and there was at least as much chance of his not being damned, as there was of Louis XIV. sending back his millions.

Besides, the longer the donation was in coming back, the more Mazarin thought that forty millions were worth a little risk, particularly of so hypothetic a thing as the soul. Mazarin, in his character of cardinal and prime minister, was almost an atheist, and quite a materialist. Every time that the door opened, he turned sharply round towards that door, expecting to see the return of his unfortunate donation; then, deceived in his hope, he fell back again with a sigh, and found his pains so much the greater for having forgotten them for an instant.

Anne of Austria had also followed the cardinal; her heart, though age had made it selfish, could not help evincing towards the dying man a sorrow which she owed him as a wife, according to some; and as a sovereign, according to others. She had, in some sort, put on a mourning countenance beforehand, and all the court wore it as she did.

Louis, in order not to show on his face what was passing at the bottom of his heart, persisted in remaining in his own apartments, where his nurse alone kept him company; the more he saw the approach of the time when all constraint would be at an end, the more humble and patient he was, falling back upon himself, as all strong men do when they form great designs, in order to gain more spring at the decisive moment. Extreme unction had been administered to the cardinal, who, faithful to his habits of dissimulation, struggled against appearances, and even against reality, receiving company in his bed, as if he only suffered from a temporary complaint.

Guenaud, on his part, preserved profound secrecy; wearied with visits and questions, he answered nothing but "his eminence is still full of youth and strength, but God wills that which He wills, and when He has decided that man is to be laid low, he will be laid low." These words, which he scattered with a sort of discretion, reserve, and preference, were commented upon earnestly by two persons,--the king and the cardinal. Mazarin, notwithstanding the prophecy of Guenaud, still lured himself with a hope, or rather played his part so well, that the most cunning, when saying that he lured himself, proved that they were his dupes.

Louis, absent from the cardinal for two days; Louis, with his eyes fixed upon that same donation which so constantly preoccupied the cardinal; Louis did not exactly know how to make out Mazarin's conduct. The son of Louis XIII., following the paternal traditions, had, up to that time, been so little of a king that, whilst ardently desiring royalty, he desired it with that terror which always accompanies the unknown. Thus, having formed his resolution, which, besides, he communicated to nobody, he determined to have an interview with Mazarin. It was Anne of Austria, who, constant in her attendance upon the cardinal, first heard this proposition of the king's, and transmitted it to the dying man, whom it greatly agitated. For what purpose could Louis wish for an interview? Was it to return the deed, as Colbert had said he would? Was it to keep it, after thanking him, as Mazarin thought he would? Nevertheless, as the dying man felt that the uncertainty increased his torments, he did not hesitate an instant.

"His majesty will be welcome,--yes, very welcome," cried he, making a sign to Colbert, who was seated at the foot of the bed, and which the latter understood perfectly. "Madame," continued Mazarin, "will your majesty be good enough to assure the king yourself of the truth of what I have just said?”

Anne of Austria rose; she herself was anxious to have the question of the forty millions settled--the question which seemed to lie heavy on the mind of everyone. Anne of Austria went out; Mazarin made a great effort, and, raising himself up towards Colbert: “Well, Colbert,” said he, “two days have passed away--two mortal days--and, you see, nothing has been returned from yonder.”

“Patience, my lord,” said Colbert.

“Are you mad, you wretch? You advise me to have patience! Oh, in sad truth, Colbert, you are laughing at me. I am dying and you call out to me to wait!”

“My lord,” said Colbert, with his habitual coolness, “it is impossible that things should not come out as I have said. His majesty is coming to see you, and no doubt he brings back the deed himself.”

“Do you think so? Well, I, on the contrary, am sure that his majesty is coming to thank me.”

At this moment Anne of Austria returned. On her way to the apartments of her son she had met with a new empiric. This was a powder which was said to have power to save the cardinal; and she brought a portion of this powder with her. But this was not what Mazarin expected; therefore he would not even look at it, declaring that life was not worth the pains that were taken to preserve it. But, whilst professing this philosophical axiom, his long-confined secret escaped him at last.

“That, madame,” said he, “that is not the interesting part of my situation. I made, two days ago, a little donation to the king; up to this time, from delicacy, no doubt, his majesty has not condescended to say anything about it; but the time for explanation is come, and I implore your majesty to tell me if the king has made up his mind on that matter.”

Anne of Austria was about to reply, when Mazarin stopped her.

“The truth, madame,” said he--”in the name of Heaven, the truth! Do not flatter a dying man with a hope that may prove vain.” There he stopped, a look from Colbert telling him he was on the wrong track.

“I know,” said Anne of Austria, taking the cardinal’s hand, “I know that you have generously made, not a little donation, as you modestly call it, but a magnificent gift. I know how painful it would be to you if the king--”

Mazarin listened, dying as he was, as ten living men could not have listened.

"If the king--" replied he.

"If the king," continued Anne of Austria, "should not freely accept what you offer so nobly."

Mazarin allowed himself to sink back upon his pillow like Pantaloon; that is to say, with all the despair of a man who bows before the tempest; but he still preserved sufficient strength and presence of mind to cast upon Colbert one of those looks which are well worth ten sonnets, which is to say, ten long poems.

"Should you not," added the queen, "have considered the refusal of the king as a sort of insult?" Mazarin rolled his head about upon his pillow, without articulating a syllable. The queen was deceived, or feigned to be deceived, by this demonstration.

"Therefore," resumed she, "I have circumvented him with good counsels; and as certain minds, jealous, no doubt, of the glory you are about to acquire by this generosity, have endeavored to prove to the king that he ought not to accept this donation, I have struggled in your favor, and so well I have struggled, that you will not have, I hope, that distress to undergo."

"Ah!" murmured Mazarin, with languishing eyes, "ah! that is a service I shall never forget for a single minute of the few hours I still have to live."

"I must admit," continued the queen, "that it was not without trouble I rendered it to your eminence."

"Ah, peste! I believe that. Oh! oh!"

"Good God! what is the matter?"

"I am burning!"

"Do you suffer much?"

"As much as one of the damned."

Colbert would have liked to sink through the floor.

"So, then," resumed Mazarin, "your majesty thinks that the king--" he stopped several seconds--"that the king is coming here to offer me some small thanks?"

"I think so," said queen. Mazarin annihilated Colbert with his last look.

At that moment the ushers announced that the king was in the antechambers, which were filled with people. This announcement produced a stir of which Colbert took advantage to escape by the door of the ruelle. Anne of Austria arose, and awaited her son, standing. Louis XIV. appeared at the threshold of the door, with his eyes fixed upon the dying man, who did not even think it worth while to notice that majesty from whom he thought he had nothing more to expect. An usher placed an armchair close to the bed. Louis bowed to his mother, then to the cardinal, and sat down. The queen took a seat in her turn.

Then, as the king looked behind him, the usher understood that look, and made a sign to the courtiers who filled up the doorway to go out, which they instantly did. Silence fell upon the chamber with the velvet curtains. The king, still very young, and very timid in the presence of him who had been his master from his birth, still respected him much, particularly now, in the supreme majesty of death. He did not dare, therefore, to begin the conversation, feeling that every word must have its weight not only upon things of this world, but of the next. As to the cardinal, at that moment he had but one thought--his donation. It was not physical pain which gave him that air of despondency, and that lugubrious look; it was the expectation of the thanks that were about to issue from the king's mouth, and cut off all hope of restitution. Mazarin was the first to break the silence. "Is your majesty come to make any stay at Vincennes?" said he.

Louis made an affirmative sign with his head.

"That is a gracious favor," continued Mazarin, "granted to a dying man, and which will render death less painful to him."

"I hope," replied the king, "I am come to visit, not a dying man, but a sick man, susceptible of cure."

Mazarin replied by a movement of the head.

"Your majesty is very kind; but I know more than you on that subject. The last visit, sire," said he, "the last visit."

"If it were so, monsieur le cardinal," said Louis, "I would come a last time to ask the counsels of a guide to whom I owe everything."

Anne of Austria was a woman; she could not restrain her tears. Louis showed himself much affected, and Mazarin still more than his two guests, but from very different motives. Here the silence returned. The queen wiped her eyes, and the king resumed his firmness.

"I was saying," continued the king, "that I owed much to your eminence." The eyes of the cardinal had devoured the king, for he felt the great moment had come. "And," continued Louis, "the principal object of my visit was to offer you very sincere thanks for the last evidence of friendship you have kindly sent me."

The cheeks of the cardinal became sunken, his lips partially opened, and the most lamentable sigh he had ever uttered was about to issue from his chest.

“Sire,” said he, “I shall have despoiled my poor family; I shall have ruined all who belong to me, which may be imputed to me as an error; but, at least, it shall not be said of me that I have refused to sacrifice everything to my king.”

Anne of Austria’s tears flowed afresh.

“My dear Monsieur Mazarin,” said the king, in a more serious tone than might have been expected from his youth, “you have misunderstood me, apparently.”

Mazarin raised himself upon his elbow.

“I have no purpose to despoil your dear family, nor to ruin your servants. Oh, no, that must never be!”

“Humph!” thought Mazarin, “he is going to restore me some scraps; let us get the largest piece we can.”

“The king is going to be foolishly affected and play generous,” thought the queen; “he must not be allowed to impoverish himself; such an opportunity for getting a fortune will never occur again.”

“Sire,” said the cardinal, aloud, “my family is very numerous, and my nieces will be destitute when I am gone.”

“Oh,” interrupted the queen, eagerly, “have no uneasiness with respect to your family, dear Monsieur Mazarin; we have no friends dearer than your friends; your nieces shall be my children, the sisters of his majesty; and if a favor be distributed in France, it shall be to those you love.”

“Smoke!” thought Mazarin, who knew better than any one the faith that can be put in the promises of kings. Louis read the dying man’s thought in his face.

“Be comforted, my dear Monsieur Mazarin,” said he, with a half-smile, sad beneath its irony; “the Mesdemoiselles de Mancini will lose, in losing you, their most precious good; but they shall none the less be the richest heiresses of France; and since you have been kind enough to give me their dowry”--the cardinal was panting--”I restore it to them,” continued Louis, drawing from his breast and holding towards the cardinal’s bed the parchment which contained the donation that, during two days, had kept alive such tempests in the mind of Mazarin.

“What did I tell you, my lord?” murmured in the alcove a voice which passed away like a breath.

“Your majesty returns my donation!” cried Mazarin, so disturbed by joy as to forget his character of a benefactor.

“Your majesty rejects the forty millions!” cried Anne of Austria, so stupefied as to forget her character of an afflicted wife, or queen.

“Yes, my lord cardinal; yes, madame,” replied Louis XIV., tearing the parchment which Mazarin had not yet ventured to clutch; “yes, I annihilate this deed, which despoiled a whole family. The wealth acquired by his eminence in my service is his own wealth and not mine.”

“But, sire, does your majesty reflect,” said Anne of Austria, “that you have not ten thousand crowns in your coffers?”

“Madame, I have just performed my first royal action, and I hope it will worthily inaugurate my reign.”

“Ah! sire, you are right!” cried Mazarin; “that is truly great--that is truly generous which you have just done.” And he looked, one after the other, at the pieces of the act spread over his bed, to assure himself that it was the original and not a copy that had been torn. At length his eyes fell upon the fragment which bore his signature, and recognizing it, he sunk back on his bolster in a swoon. Anne of Austria, without strength to conceal her regret, raised her hands and eyes towards heaven.

“Oh! sire,” cried Mazarin, “may you be blessed! My God! May you be beloved by all my family. Per Baccho! If ever any of those belonging to me should cause your displeasure, sire, only frown, and I will rise from my tomb!”

This pantalonnade did not produce all the effect Mazarin had counted upon. Louis had already passed to considerations of a higher nature, and as to Anne of Austria, unable to bear, without abandoning herself to the anger she felt burning within her, the magnanimity of her son and the hypocrisy of the cardinal, she arose and left the chamber, heedless of thus betraying the extent of her grief. Mazarin saw all this, and fearing that Louis XIV. might repent his decision, in order to draw attention another way he began to cry out, as, at a later period, Scapin was to cry out, in that sublime piece of pleasantry with which the morose and grumbling Boileau dared to reproach Moliere. His cries, however, by degrees, became fainter; and when Anne of Austria left the apartment, they ceased altogether.

“Monsieur le cardinal,” said the king, “have you any recommendations to make me?”

“Sire,” replied Mazarin, “you are already wisdom itself, prudence personified; of your generosity I shall not venture to speak; that which you have just done exceeds all that the most generous men of antiquity or of modern times have ever done.”

The king received this praise coldly.

“So you confine yourself,” said he, “to your thanks--and your experience, much more extensive than my wisdom, my prudence, or my generosity, does not furnish you with a single piece of friendly advice to guide my future.” Mazarin reflected for a moment. “You have just done much for me, sire,” said he, “that is, for my family.”

“Say no more about that,” said the king.

“Well!” continued Mazarin, “I shall give you something in exchange for these forty millions you have refused so royally.”

Louis XIV. indicated by a movement that these flatteries were displeasing to him. “I shall give you a piece of advice,” continued Mazarin; “yes, a piece of advice--advice more precious than the forty millions.”

“My lord cardinal!” interrupted Louis.

“Sire, listen to this advice.”

“I am listening.”

“Come nearer, sire, for I am weak!--nearer, sire, nearer!”

The king bent over the dying man. “Sire,” said Mazarin, in so low a tone that the breath of his words arrived only like a recommendation from the tomb in the attentive ears of the king--”Sire, never have a prime minister.”

Louis drew back astonished. The advice was a confession--a treasure, in fact, was that sincere confession of Mazarin. The legacy of the cardinal to the young king was composed of six words only, but those six words, as Mazarin had said, were worth forty millions. Louis remained for an instant bewildered. As for Mazarin, he appeared only to have said something quite natural. A little scratching was heard along the curtains of the alcove. Mazarin understood: “Yes, yes!” cried he, warmly, “yes, sire, I recommend to you a wise man, an honest man, and a clever man.”

“Tell me his name, my lord.”

“His name is yet almost unknown, sire; it is M. Colbert, my attendant. Oh! try him,” added Mazarin, in an earnest voice; “all that he has predicted has come to pass; he has a safe glance, he is never mistaken either in things or in men--which is more surprising still. Sire, I owe you much, but I think I acquit myself of all towards you in giving you M. Colbert.”

“So be it,” said Louis, faintly, for, as Mazarin had said, the name of Colbert was quite unknown to him, and he thought the enthusiasm of the cardinal partook of the delirium of a dying man. The cardinal sank back on his pillows.

“For the present, adieu, sire! adieu,” murmured Mazarin. “I am tired, and I have yet a rough journey to take before I present myself to my new Master. Adieu, sire!”

The young king felt the tears rise to his eyes; he bent over the dying man, already half a corpse, and then hastily retired.

CHAPTER XLIX.

The First Appearance of Colbert.

The whole night was passed in anguish, common to the dying man and to the king: the dying man expected his deliverance, the king awaited his liberty. Louis did not go to bed. An hour after leaving the chamber of the cardinal, he learned that the dying man, recovering a little strength, had insisted upon being dressed, adorned and painted, and seeing the ambassadors. Like Augustus, he no doubt considered the world a great stage, and was desirous of playing out the last act of the comedy. Anne of Austria reappeared no more in the cardinal's apartments; she had nothing more to do there. Propriety was the pretext for her absence. On his part, the cardinal did not ask for her: the advice the queen had giver her son rankled in his heart.

Towards midnight, while still painted, Mazarin's mortal agony came on. He had revised his will, and as this will was the exact expression of his wishes, and as he feared that some interested influence might take advantage of his weakness to make him change something in it, he had given orders to Colbert, who walked up and down the corridor which led to the cardinal's bed-chamber, like the most vigilant of sentinels. The king, shut up in his own apartment, dispatched his nurse every hour to Mazarin's chamber, with orders to bring him back an exact bulletin of the cardinal's state. After having heard that Mazarin was dressed, painted, and had seen the ambassadors, Louis herd that the prayers for the dying were being read for the cardinal. At one o'clock in the morning, Guenaud had administered the last remedy. This was a relic of the old customs of that fencing time, which was about to disappear to give place to another time, to believe that death could be kept off by some good secret thrust. Mazarin, after having taken the remedy, respired freely for nearly ten minutes. He immediately gave orders that the news should be spread everywhere of a fortunate crisis. The king, on learning this, felt as if a cold sweat were passing over his brow;--he had had a glimpse of the light of liberty; slavery appeared to him more dark and less acceptable than ever. But the bulletin which followed entirely changed the face of things. Mazarin could no longer breathe at all, and could scarcely follow the prayers which the cure of Saint-Nicholas-des-Champs recited near him. The king resumed his agitated walk about his chamber, and consulted, as he walked, several papers drawn from a casket of which he alone had the key. A third time the nurse returned. M. de Mazarin had just uttered a joke, and had ordered his "Flora," by Titian, to be revarnished. At length, towards two o'clock in the morning, the king could no longer resist his weariness: he had not slept for twenty-four hours. Sleep, so powerful at his age, overcame him for about an hour. But he did not go to bed for that hour; he slept in a fauteuil. About four o'clock his nurse awoke him by entering the room.

"Well?" asked the king.

"Well, my dear sire," said the nurse, clasping her hands with an air of commiseration. "Well; he is dead!"

The king arose at a bound, as if a steel spring had been applied to his legs. "Dead!" cried he.

"Alas! yes."

"Is it quite certain?"

"Yes."

"Official?"

"Yes."

"Has the news been made public?"

"Not yet."

"Who told you, then, that the cardinal was dead?"

"M. Colbert."

"M. Colbert?"

"Yes."

"And he was sure of what he said?"

"He came out of the chamber, and had held a glass for some minutes before the cardinal's lips."

"Ah!" said the king. "And what is become of M. Colbert?"

"He has just left his eminence's chamber."

"Where is he?"

"He followed me."

"So that he is--"

"Sire, waiting at your door, till it shall be your good pleasure to receive him."

Louis ran to the door, opened it himself, and perceived Colbert standing waiting in the passage. The king started at sight of this statue, all clothed in black. Colbert, bowing with profound respect, advanced two steps towards his majesty. Louis re-entered his chamber, making Colbert a sign to follow. Colbert entered; Louis dismissed the nurse, who closed the door as she went out. Colbert remained modestly standing near that door.

"What do you come to announce to me, monsieur?" said Louis, very much troubled at being thus surprised in his private thoughts, which he could not completely conceal.

"That monsieur le cardinal has just expired, sire; and that I bring your majesty his last adieu."

The king remained pensive for a minute; and during that minute he looked attentively at Colbert;--it was evident that the cardinal's last words were in his mind. "Are you, then, M. Colbert?" asked he.

"Yes, sire."

"His faithful servant, as his eminence himself told me?"

"Yes, sire."

"The depositary of many of his secrets?"

"Of all of them."

"The friends and servants of his eminence will be dear to me, monsieur, and I shall take care that you are well placed in my employment."

Colbert bowed.

"You are a financier, monsieur, I believe?"

"Yes, sire."

"And did monsieur le cardinal employ you in his stewardship?"

"I had that honor, sire."

"You never did anything personally for my household, I believe?"

"Pardon me, sire, it was I who had the honor of giving monsieur le cardinal the idea of an economy which puts three hundred thousand francs a year into your majesty's coffers."

"What economy was that, monsieur?" asked Louis XIV.

"Your majesty knows that the hundred Swiss have silver lace on each side of their ribbons?"

"Doubtless."

"Well, sire, it was I who proposed that imitation silver lace should be placed upon these ribbons; it could not be detected, and a hundred thousand crowns serve to feed a regiment during six months; and is the price of ten thousand good muskets or the value of a vessel of ten guns, ready for sea."

"That is true," said Louis XIV., considering more attentively, "and, ma foi! that was a well placed economy; besides, it was ridiculous for soldiers to wear the same lace as noblemen."

"I am happy to be approved of by your majesty."

"Is that the only appointment you held about the cardinal?" asked the king.

"It was I who was appointed to examine the accounts of the superintendent, sire."

"Ah!" said Louis, who was about to dismiss Colbert, but whom that word stopped; "ah! it was you whom his eminence had charged to control M. Fouquet, was it? And the result of that examination?"

"Is that there is a deficit, sire; but if your majesty will permit me--"

"Speak, M. Colbert."

"I ought to give your majesty some explanations."

"Not at all, monsieur, it is you who have controlled these accounts; give me the result."

"That is very easily done, sire: emptiness everywhere, money nowhere."

"Beware, monsieur; you are roughly attacking the administration of M. Fouquet, who, nevertheless, I have heard say, is an able man."

Colbert colored, and then became pale, for he felt that from that minute he entered upon a struggle with a man whose power almost equaled the sway of him who had just died. "Yes, sire, a very able man," repeated Colbert, bowing.

"But if M. Fouquet is an able man, and, in spite of that ability, if money be wanting, whose fault is it?"

"I do not accuse, sire, I verify."

"That is well; make out your accounts, and present them to me. There is a deficit, you say? A deficit may be temporary; credit returns and funds are restored."

"No, sire."

"Upon this year, perhaps, I understand that; but upon next year?"

"Next year is eaten as bare as the current year."

"But the year after, then?"

"Will be just like next year."

"What do you tell me, Monsieur Colbert?"

“I say there are four years engaged beforehand.”

“They must have a loan, then.”

“They must have three, sire.”

“I will create offices to make them resign, and the salary of the posts shall be paid into the treasury.”

“Impossible, sire, for there have already been creations upon creations of offices, the provisions of which are given in blank, so that the purchasers enjoy them without filling them. That is why your majesty cannot make them resign. Further, upon each agreement M. Fouquet has made an abatement of a third, so that the people have been plundered, without your majesty profiting by it.”

The king started. “Explain me that, M. Colbert,” he said.

“Let your majesty set down clearly your thought, and tell me what you wish me to explain.”

“You are right, clearness is what you wish, is it not?”

“Yes, sire, clearness. God is God above all things, because He made light.”

“Well, for example,” resumed Louis XIV., “if to-day, the cardinal being dead, and I being king, suppose I wanted money?”

“Your majesty would not have any.”

“Oh! that is strange, monsieur! How! my superintendent would not find me any money?”

Colbert shook his large head.

“How is that?” said the king; “is the income of the state so much in debt that there is no longer any revenue?”

“Yes, sire.”

The king frowned and said, “If it be so, I will get together the ordonnances to obtain a discharge from the holders, a liquidation at a cheap rate.”

“Impossible, for the ordonnances have been converted into bills, which bills, for the convenience of return and facility of transaction, are divided into so many parts that the originals can no longer be recognized.”

Louis, very much agitated, walked about, still frowning. “But, if this is as you say, Monsieur Colbert,” said he, stopping all at once, “I shall be ruined before I begin to reign.”

“You are, in fact, sire,” said the impassible caster-up of figures.

“Well, but yet, monsieur, the money is somewhere?”

"Yes, sire, and even as a beginning, I bring your majesty a note of funds which M. le Cardinal Mazarin was not willing to set down in his testament, neither in any act whatever, but which he confided to me."

"To you?"

"Yes, sire, with an injunction to remit it to your majesty."

"What! besides the forty millions of the testament?"

"Yes, sire."

"M. de Mazarin had still other funds?"

Colbert bowed.

"Why, that man was a gulf!" murmured the king. "M. de Mazarin on one side, M. Fouquet on the other,--more than a hundred millions perhaps between them! No wonder my coffers should be empty!" Colbert waited without stirring.

"And is the sum you bring me worth the trouble?" asked the king.

"Yes, sire, it is a round sum."

"Amounting to how much?"

"To thirteen millions of livres, sire."

"Thirteen millions!" cried Louis, trembling with joy; "do you say thirteen millions, Monsieur Colbert?"

"I said thirteen millions, yes, your majesty."

"Of which everybody is ignorant?"

"Of which everybody is ignorant."

"Which are in your hands?"

"In my hands, yes, sire."

"And which I can have?"

"Within two hours, sire."

"But where are they, then?"

"In the cellar of a house which the cardinal possessed in the city, and which he was so kind as to leave me by a particular clause of his will."

"You are acquainted with the cardinal's will, then?"

"I have a duplicate of it, signed by his hand."

"A duplicate?"

"Yes, sire, and here it is." Colbert drew the deed quietly from his pocket, and showed it to the king. The king read the article relative to the donation of the house.

"But," said he, "there is no question here but of the house; there is nothing said of the money."

“Your pardon, sire, it is in my conscience.”

“And Monsieur Mazarin has intrusted it to you?”

“Why not, sire?”

“He! a man mistrustful of everybody?”

“He was not so of me, sire, as your majesty may perceive.”

Louis fixed his eyes with admiration upon that vulgar but expressive face. “You are an honest man, M. Colbert,” said the king.

“That is not a virtue, it is a duty,” replied Colbert, coolly.

“But,” added Louis, “does not the money belong to the family?”

“If this money belonged to the family it would be disposed of in the testament, as the rest of the fortune is. If this money belonged to the family, I, who drew up the deed of donation in favor of your majesty, should have added the sum of thirteen millions to that of forty millions which was offered to you.”

“How!” exclaimed Louis XIV., “was it you who drew up the deed of donation?”

“Yes, sire.”

“And yet the cardinal was attached to you?” added the king, ingenuously.

“I had assured his eminence you would by no means accept the gift,” said Colbert, in that same quiet manner we have described, and which, even in the common habits of life, had something solemn in it.

Louis passed his hand over his brow: “Oh! how young I am,” murmured he, “to have command of men.”

Colbert waited the end of this monologue. He saw Louis raise his head. “At what hour shall I send the money to your majesty?” asked he.

“To-night, at eleven o’clock; I desire that no one may know that I possess this money.”

Colbert made no more reply than if the thing had not been said to him.

“Is the amount in ingots, or coined gold?”

“In coined gold, sire.”

“That is well.”

“Where shall I send it?”

“To the Louvre. Thank you, M. Colbert.”

Colbert bowed and retired. “Thirteen millions!” exclaimed Louis, as soon as he was alone. “This must be a dream!” Then he allowed his head to sink between his hands, as if he were really asleep. But, at the end of a moment, he arose, and opening the window violently, he bathed his burning brow in the keen morning air, which brought to his senses the scent of the trees, and the perfume of the flowers. A splendid dawn was gilding the horizon, and the first rays of the sun bathed in flame the young king’s brow. “This is the dawn of my reign,” murmured Louis XIV. “It’s a presage sent by the Almighty.”

CHAPTER L.

The First Day of the Royalty of Louis XIV.

In the morning, the news of the death of the cardinal was spread through the castle, and thence speedily reached the city. The ministers Fouquet, Lyonne, and Letellier entered la salle des seances, to hold a council. The king sent for them immediately. “Messieurs,” said he, “as long as monsieur le cardinal lived, I allowed him to govern my affairs; but now I mean to govern them myself. You will give me your advice when I ask it. You may go.”

The ministers looked at each other with surprise. If they concealed a smile it was with a great effort, for they knew that the prince, brought up in absolute ignorance of business, by this took upon himself a burden much too heavy for his strength. Fouquet took leave of his colleagues upon the stairs, saying:--”Messieurs! there will be so much the less labor for us.”

And he gayly climbed into his carriage. The others, a little uneasy at the turn things had taken, went back to Paris together. Towards ten o’clock the king repaired to the apartment of his mother, with whom he had a long and private conversation. After dinner, he got into his carriage, and went straight to the Louvre. There he received much company, and took a degree of pleasure in remarking the hesitation of each, and the curiosity of all. Towards evening he ordered the doors of the Louvre to be closed, with the exception of only one, which opened on the quay. He placed on duty at this point two hundred Swiss, who did not speak a word of French, with orders to admit all who carried packages, but no others; and by no means to allow any one to go out. At eleven o’clock precisely, he heard the rolling of a heavy carriage under the arch, then of another, then of a third; after which the gate grated upon its hinges to be closed. Soon after, somebody scratched with his nail at the door of the cabinet. The king opened it himself, and beheld Colbert, whose first word was this:--”The money is in your majesty’s cellar.”

The king then descended and went himself to see the barrels of specie, in gold and silver, which, under the direction of Colbert, four men had just rolled into a cellar of which the king had given Colbert the key in the morning. This review completed, Louis returned to his apartments, followed by Colbert, who had not apparently warmed with one ray of personal satisfaction.

"Monsieur," said the king, "what do you wish that I should give you, as a recompense for this devotedness and probity?"

"Absolutely nothing, sire."

"How! nothing? Not even an opportunity of serving me?"

"If your majesty were not to furnish me with that opportunity, I should not the less serve you. It is impossible for me not to be the best servant of the king."

"You shall be intendant of the finances, M. Colbert."

"But there is already a superintendent, sire."

"I know that."

"Sire, the superintendent of the finances is the most powerful man in the kingdom."

"Ah!" cried Louis, coloring, "do you think so?"

"He will crush me in a week, sire. Your majesty gives me a controle for which strength is indispensable. An intendant under a superintendent,--that is inferiority."

"You want support--you do not reckon upon me?"

"I had the honor of telling your majesty, that during the lifetime of M. de Mazarin, M. Fouquet was the second man in the kingdom; now M. de Mazarin is dead, M. Fouquet is become the first."

"Monsieur, I agree to what you told me of all things up to to-day; but to-morrow, please to remember, I shall no longer suffer it."

"Then I shall be of no use to your majesty?"

"You are already, since you fear to compromise yourself in serving me."

"I only fear to be placed so that I cannot serve your majesty."

"What do you wish, then?"

"I wish your majesty to allow me assistance in the labors of the office of intendant."

"That post would lose its value."

"It would gain in security."

"Choose your colleagues."

"Messieurs Breteuil, Marin, Hervart."

"To-morrow the ordonnance shall appear."

"Sire, I thank you."

"Is that all you ask?"

"No, sire, one thing more."

"What is that?"

"Allow me to compose a chamber of justice."

"What would this chamber of justice do?"

"Try the farmers-general and contractors, who, during ten years, have been robbing the state."

"Well, but what would you do with them?"

"Hang two or three, and that would make the rest disgorge."

"I cannot commence my reign with executions, Monsieur Colbert."

"On the contrary, sire, you had better, in order not to have to end with them."

The king made no reply. "Does your majesty consent?" said Colbert.

"I will reflect upon it, monsieur."

"It will be too late when reflection may be made."

"Why?"

"Because you have to deal with people stronger than ourselves, if they are warned."

"Compose that chamber of justice, monsieur."

"I will, sire."

"Is that all?"

"No, sire; there is still another important affair. What rights does your majesty attach to this office of intendant?"

"Well--I do not know--the customary ones."

"Sire, I desire that this office be invested with the right of reading the correspondence with England."

"Impossible, monsieur, for that correspondence is kept from the council; monsieur le cardinal himself carried it on."

"I thought your majesty had this morning declared that there should no longer be a council?"

"Yes, I said so."

"Let your majesty then have the goodness to read all the letters yourself, particularly those from England; I hold strongly to this article."

"Monsieur, you shall have that correspondence, and render me an account of it."

"Now, sire, what shall I do with respect to the finances?"

"Everything M. Fouquet has not done."

"That is all I ask of your majesty. Thanks, sire, I depart in peace;" and at these words he took his leave. Louis watched his departure. Colbert was not yet a hundred paces from the Louvre when the king received a courier from England. After having looked at and examined the envelope, the king broke the seal precipitately, and found a letter from Charles II. The following is what the English prince wrote to his royal brother:--

"Your majesty must be rendered very uneasy by the illness of M. le Cardinal Mazarin; but the excess of danger can only prove of service to you. The cardinal is given over by his physician. I thank you for the gracious reply you have made to my communication touching the Princess Henrietta, my sister, and, in a week, the princess and her court will set out for Paris. It is gratifying to me to acknowledge the fraternal friendship you have evinced towards me, and to call you, more justly than ever, my brother. It is gratifying to me, above everything, to prove to your majesty how much I am interested in all that may please you. You are wrong in having Belle-Ile-en-Mer secretly fortified. That is wrong. We shall never be at war against each other. That measure does not make me uneasy, it makes me sad. You are spending useless millions; tell your ministers so; and rest assured that I am well informed; render me the same service, my brother, if occasion offers."

The king rang his bell violently, and his valet de chambre appeared. "Monsieur Colbert is just gone; he cannot be far off. Let him be called back!" exclaimed he.

The valet was about to execute the order, when the king stopped him.

"No," said he, "no; I see the whole scheme of that man. Belle-Isle belongs to M. Fouquet; Belle-Isle is being fortified: that is a conspiracy on the part of M. Fouquet. The discovery of that conspiracy is the ruin of the superintendent, and that discovery is the result of the correspondence with England: this is why Colbert wished to have that correspondence. Oh! but I cannot place all my dependence upon that man; he has a good head, but I must have an arm!" Louis, all at once, uttered a joyful cry. "I had," said he, "a lieutenant of musketeers!"

"Yes, sire--Monsieur d'Artagnan."

“He quitted the service for a time.”

“Yes, sire.”

“Let him be found, and be here to-morrow the first thing in the morning.”

The valet de chambre bowed and went out.

“Thirteen millions in my cellar,” said the king; “Colbert carrying my purse and D’Artagnan my sword--I am king.”

CHAPTER LI.

A Passion.

The day of his arrival, on returning from the Palais Royal, Athos, as we have seen, went straight to his hotel in the Rue Saint-Honore. He there found the Vicomte de Bragelonne waiting for him in his chamber, chatting with Grimaud. It was not an easy thing to talk with this old servant. Two men only possessed the secret, Athos and D'Artagnan. The first succeeded, because Grimaud sought to make him speak himself; D'Artagnan, on the contrary, because he knew how to make Grimaud talk. Raoul was occupied in making him describe the voyage to England, and Grimaud had related it in all its details, with a limited number of gestures and eight words, neither more nor less. He had, at first, indicated by an undulating movement of his hand, that his master and he had crossed the sea. "Upon some expedition?" Raoul had asked.

Grimaud by bending down his head had answered, "Yes."

"When monsieur le comte incurred much danger?" asked Raoul.

"Neither too much nor too little," was replied by a shrug of the shoulders.

"But still, what sort of danger?" insisted Raoul.

Grimaud pointed to the sword; he pointed to the fire and to a musket that was hanging on the wall.

"Monsieur le comte had an enemy there, then?" cried Raoul.

"Monk," replied Grimaud.

"It is strange," continued Raoul, "that monsieur le comte persists in considering me a novice, and not allowing me to partake the honor and danger of his adventure."

Grimaud smiled. It was at this moment Athos came in. The host was lighting him up the stairs, and Grimaud, recognizing the step of his master, hastened to meet him, which cut short the conversation. But Raoul was launched on the sea of interrogatories, and did not stop. Taking both hands of the comte, with warm, but respectful tenderness,--"How is it, monsieur," said he, "that you have set out upon a dangerous voyage without bidding me adieu, without commanding the aid of my sword, of myself, who ought to be your support, now I have the strength; whom you have brought up like a man? Ah! monsieur, can you expose me to the cruel trial of never seeing you again?”

“Who told you, Raoul,” said the comte, placing his cloak and hat in the hands of Grimaud, who had unbuckled his sword, “who told you that my voyage was a dangerous one?”

“I,” said Grimaud.

“And why did you do so?” said Athos, sternly.

Grimaud was embarrassed; Raoul came to his assistance, by answering for him. “It is natural, monsieur, that our good Grimaud should tell me the truth in what concerns you. By whom should you be loved an supported, if not by me?”

Athos did not reply. He made a friendly motion to Grimaud, which sent him out of the room; he then seated himself in a fauteuil, whilst Raoul remained standing before him.

“But it is true,” continued Raoul, “that your voyage was an expedition, and that steel and fire threatened you?”

“Say no more about that, vicomte,” said Athos, mildly. “I set out hastily, it is true: but the service of King Charles II. required a prompt departure. As to your anxiety, I thank you for it, and I know that I can depend on you. You have not wanted for anything, vicomte, in my absence, have you?”

“No, monsieur, thank you.”

“I left orders with Blaisois to pay you a hundred pistoles, if you should stand in need of money.”

“Monsieur, I have not seen Blaisois.”

“You have been without money, then?”

“Monsieur, I had thirty pistoles left from the sale of the horses I took in my last campaign, and M. le Prince had the kindness to allow me to win two hundred pistoles at his play-table three months ago.”

“Do you play? I don’t like that, Raoul.”

“I never play, monsieur; it was M. le Prince who ordered me to hold his cards at Chantilly--one night when a courier came to him from the king. I won, and M. le Prince commanded me to take the stakes.”

“Is that a practice in the household, Raoul?” asked Athos with a frown.

“Yes, monsieur; every week M. le Prince affords, upon one occasion or another, a similar advantage to one of his gentlemen. There are fifty gentlemen in his highness’s household; it was my turn.”

“Very well! You went into Spain, then?”

“Yes, monsieur, I made a very delightful and interesting journey.”

“You have been back a month, have you not?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“And in the course of that month?”

“In that month--”

“What have you done?”

“My duty, monsieur.”

“Have you not been home, to La Fere?”

Raoul colored. Athos looked at him with a fixed but tranquil expression.

“You would be wrong not to believe me,” said Raoul. “I feel that I colored, and in spite of myself. The question you did me the honor to ask me is of a nature to raise in me much emotion. I color, then, because I am agitated, not because I meditate a falsehood.”

“I know, Raoul, you never lie.”

“No, monsieur.”

“Besides, my young friend, you would be wrong; what I wanted to say--”

“I know quite well, monsieur. You would ask me if I have not been to Blois?”

“Exactly so.”

“I have not been there; I have not even seen the person to whom you allude.”

Raoul’s voice trembled as he pronounced these words. Athos, a sovereign judge in all matters of delicacy, immediately added, “Raoul, you answer me with a painful feeling; you are unhappy.”

“Very, monsieur; you have forbidden me to go to Blois, or to see Mademoiselle de la Valliere again.” Here the young man stopped. That dear name, so delightful to pronounce, made his heart bleed, although so sweet upon his lips.

“And I have acted rightly, Raoul.” Athos hastened to reply. “I am neither an unjust nor a barbarous father; I respect true love; but I look forward for you to a future--an immense future. A new reign is about to break upon us like a fresh dawn. War calls upon a young king full of chivalric spirit. What is wanting to assist this heroic ardor is a battalion of young and free lieutenants who would rush to the fight with enthusiasm, and fall, crying: ‘Vive le Roi!’ instead of ‘Adieu, my dear wife.’ You understand that, Raoul. However brutal my reasoning may appear, I conjure you, then, to believe me, and to turn away your thoughts from those early days of youth in which you took up this habit of love--days of effeminate carelessness, which soften the heart and render it incapable of consuming those strong bitter draughts called glory and adversity. Therefore, Raoul, I repeat to you, you should see in my counsel only the desire of being useful to you, only the ambition of seeing you prosper. I believe you capable of becoming a remarkable man. March alone, and you will march better, and more quickly."

"You have commanded, monsieur," replied Raoul, "and I obey."

"Commanded!" cried Athos. "Is it thus you reply to me? I have commanded you! Oh! you distort my words as you misconceive my intentions. I do not command you; I request you."

"No, monsieur, you have commanded," said Raoul, persistently; "had you requested me, your request is even more effective than your order. I have not seen Mademoiselle de la Valliere again."

"But you are unhappy! you are unhappy!" insisted Athos.

Raoul made no reply.

"I find you pale; I find you dull. The sentiment is strong, then?"

"It is a passion," replied Raoul.

"No--a habit."

"Monsieur, you know I have traveled much, that I have passed two years far away from her. A habit would yield to an absence of two years, I believe; whereas, on my return, I loved not more, that was impossible, but as much. Mademoiselle de la Valliere is for me the one lady above all others; but you are for me a god upon earth--to you I sacrifice everything."

"You are wrong," said Athos; "I have no longer any right over you. Age has emancipated you; you no longer even stand in need of my consent. Besides, I will not refuse my consent after what you have told me. Marry Mademoiselle de la Valliere, if you like."

Raoul was startled, but suddenly: "You are very kind, monsieur," said he; "and your concession excites my warmest gratitude, but I will not accept it."

"Then you now refuse?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"I will not oppose you in anything, Raoul."

"But you have at the bottom of your heart an idea against this marriage: it is not your choice."

"That is true."

"That is sufficient to make me resist: I will wait."

"Beware, Raoul! What you are now saying is serious."

"I know it is, monsieur; as I said, I will wait."

"Until I die?" said Athos, much agitated.

"Oh! monsieur," cried Raoul, with tears in his eyes, "is it possible that you should wound my heart thus? I have never given you cause of complaint!"

"Dear boy, that is true," murmured Athos, pressing his lips violently together to conceal the emotion of which he was no longer master. "No, I will no longer afflict you; only I do not comprehend what you mean by waiting. Will you wait till you love no longer?"

"Ah! for that!--no, monsieur. I will wait till you change your opinion."

"I should wish to put the matter to a test, Raoul; I should like to see if Mademoiselle de la Valliere will wait as you do."

"I hope so, monsieur."

"But, take care, Raoul! suppose she did not wait? Ah, you are young, so confiding, so loyal! Women are changeable."

"You have never spoken ill to me of women, monsieur; you have never had to complain of them; why should you doubt of Mademoiselle de la Valliere?"

"That is true," said Athos, casting down his eyes; "I have never spoken ill to you of women; I have never had to complain of them; Mademoiselle de la Valliere never gave birth to a suspicion; but when we are looking forward, we must go even to exceptions, even to improbabilities! If, I say, Mademoiselle de la Valliere should not wait for you?"

"How, monsieur?"

"If she turned her eyes another way."

"If she looked favorably upon another, do you mean, monsieur?" said Raoul, pale with agony.

"Exactly."

"Well, monsieur, I would kill him," said Raoul, simply, "and all the men whom Mademoiselle de la Valliere should choose, until one of them had killed me, or Mademoiselle de la Valliere had restored me her heart."

Athos started. "I thought," resumed he, in an agitated voice, "that you called my just now your god, your law in this world."

"Oh!" said Raoul, trembling, "you would forbid me the duel?"

“Suppose I did forbid it, Raoul?”

“You would not forbid me to hope, monsieur; consequently you would not forbid me to die.”

Athos raised his eyes toward the vicomte. He had pronounced these words with the most melancholy look. “Enough,” said Athos, after a long silence, “enough of this subject, upon which we both go too far. Live as well as you are able, Raoul, perform your duties, love Mademoiselle de la Valliere; in a word, act like a man, since you have attained the age of a man; only do not forget that I love you tenderly, and that you profess to love me.”

“Ah! monsieur le comte!” cried Raoul, pressing the hand of Athos to his heart.

“Enough, dear boy, leave me; I want rest. A propos, M. d’Artagnan has returned from England with me; you owe him a visit.”

“I will pay it, monsieur, with great pleasure. I love Monsieur d’Artagnan exceedingly.”

“You are right in doing so; he is a worthy man and a brave cavalier.”

“Who loves you dearly.”

“I am sure of that. Do you know his address?”

“At the Louvre, I suppose, or wherever the king is. Does he not command the musketeers?”

“No; at present M. d’Artagnan is absent on leave; he is resting for awhile. Do not, therefore, seek him at the posts of his service. You will hear of him at the house of a certain Planchet.”

“His former lackey?”

“Exactly; turned grocer.”

“I know; Rue des Lombards?”

“Somewhere thereabouts, or Rue des Arcis.”

“I will find it, monsieur--I will find it.”

“You will say a thousand kind things to him, on my part, and ask him to come and dine with me before I set out for La Fere.”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Good-might, Raoul!”

“Monsieur, I see you wear an order I never saw you wear before; accept my compliments.”

“The Fleece!--that is true. A bauble, my boy, which no longer amuses an old child like myself. Good-night, Raoul!”

CHAPTER LII.

D’Artagnan’s Lesson.

Raoul did not meet with D’Artagnan the next day, as he had hoped. He only met with Planchet, whose joy was great at seeing the young man again, and who contrived to pay him two or three little soldierly compliments, savoring very little of the grocer’s shop. But as Raoul was returning the next day from Vincennes at the head of fifty dragoons confided to him by Monsieur le Prince, he perceived, in La Place Baudoyer, a man with his nose in the air, examining a house as we examine a horse we have a fancy to buy. This man, dressed in a citizen costume buttoned up like a military pourpoint, a very small hat on his head, but a long shagreen-mounted sword by his side, turned his head as soon as he heard the steps of the horses, and left off looking at the house to look at the dragoons. It was simply M. d’Artagnan; D’Artagnan on foot; D’Artagnan with his hands behind him, passing a little review upon the dragoons, after having reviewed the buildings. Not a man, not a tag, not a horse’s hoof escaped his inspection. Raoul rode at the side of his troop; D’Artagnan perceived him the last. “Eh!” said he, “Eh! Mordioux!”

“I was not mistaken!” cried Raoul, turning his horse towards him.

“Mistaken--no! Good-day to you,” replied the ex-musketeer; whilst Raoul eagerly pressed the hand of his old friend. “Take care, Raoul,” said D’Artagnan, “the second horse of the fifth rank will lose a shoe before he gets to the Pont Marie; he has only two nails left in his off fore-foot.”

“Wait a minute, I will come back,” said Raoul.

“Can you quit your detachment?”

“The cornet is there to take my place.”

“Then you will come and dine with me?”

“Most willingly, Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

“Be quick, then; leave your horse, or make them give me one.”

“I prefer coming back on foot with you.”

Raoul hastened to give notice to the cornet, who took his post; he then dismounted, gave his horse to one of the dragoons, and with great delight seized the arm of M. d’Artagnan, who had watched him during all these little evolutions with the satisfaction of a connoisseur.

“What, do you come from Vincennes?” said he.

“Yes, monsieur le chevalier.”

“And the cardinal?”

“Is very ill; it is even reported he is dead.”

“Are you on good terms with M. Fouquet?” asked D’Artagnan, with a disdainful movement of the shoulders, proving that the death of Mazarin did not affect him beyond measure.

“With M. Fouquet?” said Raoul; “I do not know him.”

“So much the worse! so much the worse! for a new king always seeks to get good men in his employment.”

“Oh! the king means no harm,” replied the young man.

“I say nothing about the crown,” cried D’Artagnan; “I am speaking of the king--the king, that is M. Fouquet, if the cardinal is dead. You must contrive to stand well with M. Fouquet, if you do not wish to molder away all your life as I have moldered. It is true you have, fortunately, other protectors.”

“M. le Prince, for instance.”

“Worn out! worn out!”

“M. le Comte de la Fere?”

“Athos! Oh! that’s different; yes, Athos--and if you have any wish to make your way in England, you cannot apply to a better person; I can even say, without too much vanity, that I myself have some credit at the court of Charles II. There is a king--God speed him!”

“Ah!” cried Raoul, with the natural curiosity of well-born young people, while listening to experience and courage.

“Yes, a king who amuses himself, it is true, but who has had a sword in his hand, and can appreciate useful men. Athos is on good terms with Charles II. Take service there, and leave these scoundrels of contractors and farmers-general, who steal as well with French hands as others have done with Italian hands; leave the little snivelling king, who is going to give us another reign of Francis II. Do you know anything of history, Raoul?”

“Yes, monsieur le chevalier.”

“Do you know, then, that Francis II. had always the earache?”

“No, I did not know that.”

“That Charles IV. had always the headache?”

“Indeed!”

"And Henry III. had always the stomach-ache?"

Raoul began to laugh.

"Well, my dear friend, Louis XIV. always has the heart-ache; it is deplorable to see a king sighing from morning till night without saying once in the course of the day, ventre-saint-gris! corboef! or anything to rouse one."

"Was that the reason why you quitted the service, monsieur le chevalier?"

"Yes."

"But you yourself, M. d'Artagnan, are throwing the handle after the axe; you will not make a fortune."

"Who? I?" replied D'Artagnan, in a careless tone; "I am settled--I had some family property."

Raoul looked at him. The poverty of D'Artagnan was proverbial. A Gascon, he exceeded in ill-luck all the gasconnades of France and Navarre; Raoul had a hundred times heard Job and D'Artagnan named together, as the twins Romulus and Remus. D'Artagnan caught Raoul's look of astonishment.

"And has not your father told you I have been in England?"

"Yes, monsieur le chevalier."

"And that I there met with a very lucky chance?"

"No, monsieur, I did not know that."

"Yes, a very worthy friend of mine, a great nobleman, the viceroy of Scotland and Ireland, has endowed me with an inheritance."

"An inheritance?"

"And a good one, too."

"Then you are rich?"

"Bah!"

"Receive my sincere congratulation."

"Thank you! Look, that is my house."

"Place de Greve?"

"Yes; don't you like this quarter?"

"On the contrary, the look-out over the water is pleasant. Oh! what a pretty old house!"

"The sign Notre Dame; it is an old cabaret, which I have transformed into a private house in two days."

"But the cabaret is still open?"

"Pardieu!"

“And where do you lodge, then?”

“I? I lodge with Planchet.”

“You said, just now, ‘This is my house.’“

“I said so, because, in fact, it is my house. I have bought it.”

“Ah!” said Raoul.

“At ten years’ purchase, my dear Raoul; a superb affair; I bought the house for thirty thousand livres; it has a garden which opens to the Rue de la Mortillerie; the cabaret lets for a thousand livres, with the first story; the garret, or second floor, for five hundred livres.”

“Indeed!”

“Yes, indeed.”

“Five hundred livres for a garret? Why, it is not habitable.”

“Therefore no one inhabits it; only, you see, this garret has two windows which look out upon the Place.”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Well, then, every time anybody is broken on the wheel or hung, quartered, or burnt, these two windows let for twenty pistoles.”

“Oh!” said Raoul, with horror.

“It is disgusting, is it not?” said D’Artagnan.

“Oh!” repeated Raoul.

“It is disgusting, but so it is. These Parisian cockneys are sometimes real anthropophagi. I cannot conceive how men, Christians, can make such speculation.

“That is true.”

“As for myself,” continued D’Artagnan, “if I inhabited that house, on days of execution I would shut it up to the very keyholes; but I do not inhabit it.”

“And you let the garret for five hundred livres?”

“To the ferocious cabaretier, who sub-lets it. I said, then, fifteen hundred livres.”

“The natural interest of money,” said Raoul,--”five per cent.”

“Exactly so. I then have left the side of the house at the back, store-rooms, and cellars, inundated every winter, two hundred livres; and the garden, which is very fine, well planted, well shaded under the walls and the portal of Saint-Gervais-Saint-Protais, thirteen hundred livres.”

“Thirteen hundred livres! why, that is royal!”

"This is the whole history. I strongly suspect some canon of the parish (these canons are all rich as Croesus)--I suspect some canon of having hired the garden to take his pleasure in. The tenant has given the name of M. Godard. That is either a false name or a real name; if true, he is a canon; if false, he is some unknown; but of what consequence is it to me? he always pays in advance. I had also an idea just now, when I met you, of buying a house in the Place Baudoyer, the back premises of which join my garden, and would make a magnificent property. Your dragoons interrupted my calculations. But come, let us take the Rue de la Vannerie: that will lead us straight to M. Planchet's." D'Artagnan mended his pace, and conducted Raoul to Planchet's dwelling, a chamber of which the grocer had given up to his old master. Planchet was out, but the dinner was ready. There was a remains of military regularity and punctuality preserved in the grocer's household. D'Artagnan returned to the subject of Raoul's future.

"Your father brings you up rather strictly?" said he.

"Justly, monsieur le chevalier."

"Oh, yes, I know Athos is just; but close, perhaps?"

"A royal hand, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"Well, never want, my boy! If ever you stand in need of a few pistoles, the old musketeer is at hand."

"My dear Monsieur d'Artagnan!"

"Do you play a little?"

"Never."

"Successful with the ladies, then?--Oh! my little Aramis! That, my dear friend, costs even more than play. It is true we fight when we lose; that is a compensation. Bah! that little sniveller, the king, makes winners give him his revenge. What a reign! my poor Raoul, what a reign! When we think that, in my time, the musketeers were besieged in their houses like Hector and Priam in the city of Troy; and the women wept, and then the walls laughed, and then five hundred beggarly fellows clapped their hands and cried, 'Kill! kill!' when not one musketeer was hurt. Mordioux! you will never see anything like that."

"You are very hard upon the king, my dear Monsieur d'Artagnan and yet you scarcely know him."

"I! Listen, Raoul. Day by day, hour by hour,--take note of my words,--I will predict what he will do. The cardinal being dead, he will fret; very well, that is the least silly thing he will do, particularly if he does not shed a tear.”

“And then?”

“Why, then he will get M. Fouquet to allow him a pension, and will go and compose verses at Fontainebleau, upon some Mancini or other, whose eyes the queen will scratch out. She is a Spaniard, you see,--this queen of ours; and she has, for mother-in-law, Madame Anne of Austria. I know something of the Spaniards of the house of Austria.”

“And next?”

“Well, after having torn the silver lace from the uniforms of his Swiss, because lace is too expensive, he will dismount his musketeers, because oats and hay of a horse cost five sols a day.”

“Oh! do not say that.”

“Of what consequence is it to me? I am no longer a musketeer, am I? Let them be on horseback, let them be on foot, let them carry a larding-pin, a spit, a sword, or nothing--what is it to me?”

“My dear Monsieur d’Artagnan, I beseech you speak no more ill of the king. I am almost in his service, and my father would be very angry with me for having heard, even from your mouth, words injurious to his majesty.”

“Your father, eh! He is a knight in every bad cause. Pardieu! yes, your father is a brave man, a Caesar, it is true--but a man without perception.”

“Now, my dear chevalier,” exclaimed Raoul, laughing, “are you going to speak ill of my father, of him you call the great Athos? Truly you are in a bad vein to-day; riches render you as sour as poverty renders other people.”

“Pardieu! you are right. I am a rascal and in my dotage; I am an unhappy wretch grown old; a tent-cord untwisted, a pierced cuirass, a boot without a sole, a spur without a rowel;--but do me the pleasure to add one thing.”

“What is that, my dear Monsieur d’Artagnan?”

“Simply say: ‘Mazarin was a pitiful wretch.’“

“Perhaps he is dead.”

“More the reason--I say was; if I did not hope that he was dead, I would entreat you to say: ‘Mazarin is a pitiful wretch.’ Come, say so, say so, for love of me.”

“Well, I will.”

“Say it!”

"Mazarin was a pitiful wretch," said Raoul, smiling at the musketeer, who roared with laughter, as in his best days.

"A moment," said the latter; "you have spoken my first proposition, here is the conclusion of it,--repeat, Raoul, repeat: 'But I regret Mazarin.'"

"Chevalier!"

"You will not say it? Well, then, I will say it twice for you."

"But you would regret Mazarin?"

And they were still laughing and discussing this profession of principles, when one of the shop-boys entered. "A letter, monsieur," said he, "for M. d'Artagnan."

"Thank you; give it me," cried the musketeer.

"The handwriting of monsieur le comte," said Raoul.

"Yes, yes." And D'Artagnan broke the seal.

"Dear friend," said Athos, "a person has just been here to beg me to seek for you, on the part of the king."

"Seek me!" said D'Artagnan, letting the paper fall upon the table. Raoul picked it up, and continued to read aloud:--

"Make haste. His majesty is very anxious to speak to you, and expects you at the Louvre."

"Expects me?" again repeated the musketeer.

"He, he, he!" laughed Raoul.

"Oh, oh!" replied D'Artagnan. "What the devil can this mean?"

CHAPTER LIII.

The King.

The first moment of surprise over, D’Artagnan reperused Athos’s note. “It is strange,” said he, “that the king should send for me.”

“Why so?” said Raoul; “do you not think, monsieur, that the king must regret such a servant as you?”

“Oh, oh!” cried the officer, laughing with all his might; “you are poking fun at me, Master Raoul. If the king had regretted me, he would not have let me leave him. No, no; I see in it something better, or worse, if you like.”

“Worse! What can that be, monsieur le chevalier?”

“You are young, you are a boy, you are admirable. Oh, how I should like to be as you are! To be but twenty-four, with an unfortunate brow, under which the brain is void of everything but women, love, and good intentions. Oh, Raoul, as long as you have not received the smiles of kings, the confidence of queens; as long as you have not had two cardinals killed under you, the one a tiger, the other a fox; as long as you have not--But what is the good of all this trifling? We must part, Raoul.”

“How you say the word! What a serious face!”

“Eh! but the occasion is worthy of it. Listen to me. I have a very good recommendation to tender you.”

“I am all attention, Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

“You will go and inform your father of my departure.”

“Your departure?”

“Pardieu! You will tell him I am gone into England; and that I am living in my little country-house.”

“In England, you!--And the king’s orders?”

“You get more and more silly: do you imagine that I am going to the Louvre, to place myself at the disposal of that little crowned wolf-cub?”

“The king a wolf-cub? Why, monsieur le chevalier, you are mad!”

“On the contrary, I never was so sane. You do not know what he wants to do with me, this worthy son of Louis le Juste!--But, mordioux! that is policy. He wishes to ensconce me snugly in the Bastile--purely and simply, look you!”

“What for?” cried Raoul, terrified at what he heard.

“On account of what I told him one day at Blois. I was warm; he remembers it.”

“You told him what?”

“That he was mean, cowardly, and silly.”

“Good God!” cried Raoul, “is it possible that such words should have issued from your mouth?”

“Perhaps I don’t give the letter of my speech, but I give the sense of it.”

“But did not the king have you arrested immediately?”

“By whom? It was I who commanded the musketeers; he must have commanded me to convey myself to prison; I would never have consented: I would have resisted myself. And then I went into England--no more D’Artagnan. Now, the cardinal is dead, or nearly so, they learn that I am in Paris, and they lay their hands on me.”

“The cardinal was your protector?”

“The cardinal knew me; he knew certain particularities of me; I also knew some of his; we appreciated each other mutually. And then, on rendering his soul to the devil, he would recommend Anne of Austria to make me the inhabitant of a safe place. Go, then, and find your father, relate the fact to him--and adieu!”

“My dear Monsieur d’Artagnan,” said Raoul, very much agitated, after having looked out the window, “you cannot even fly!”

“Why not?”

“Because there is below an officer of the Swiss guards waiting for you.”

“Well?”

“Well, he will arrest you.”

D’Artagnan broke into a Homeric laugh.

“Oh! I know very well that you will resist, that you will fight, even; I know very well that you will prove the conqueror; but that amounts to rebellion, and you are an officer yourself, knowing what discipline is.”

“Devil of a boy, how logical that is!” grumbled D’Artagnan.

“You approve of it, do you not?”

“Yes, instead of passing into the street, where that idiot is waiting for me, I will slip quietly out at the back. I have a horse in the stable, and a good one. I will ride him to death; my means permit me to do so, and by killing one horse after another, I shall arrive at Boulogne in eleven hours; I know the road. Only tell your father one thing.”

“What is that?”

“That is--that the thing he knows about is placed at Planchet’s house, except a fifth, and that--”

“But, my dear D’Artagnan, rest assured that if you fly, two things will be said of you.”

“What are they, my dear friend?”

“The first, that you have been afraid.”

“Ah! and who will dare to say that?”

“The king first.”

“Well! but he will tell the truth,--I am afraid.”

“The second, that you knew yourself guilty.”

“Guilty of what?”

“Why, of the crimes they wish to impute to you.”

“That is true again. So, then, you advise me to go and get myself made a prisoner in the Bastile?”

“M. le Comte de la Fere would advise you just as I do.”

“Pardieu! I know he would,” said D’Artagnan thoughtfully. “You are right, I shall not escape. But if they cast me into the Bastile?”

“We will get you out again,” said Raoul, with a quiet, calm air.

“Mordioux! You said that after a brave fashion, Raoul,” said D’Artagnan, seizing his hand; “that savors of Athos, distinctly. Well, I will go, then. Do not forget my last word.”

“Except a fifth,” said Raoul.

“Yes, you are a fine boy! and I wish you to add one thing to that last word.”

“Speak, chevalier!”

“It is that if you cannot get me out of the Bastile, and I remain there--Oh! that will be so, and I shall be a detestable prisoner; I, who have been a passable man,--in that case, I give three-fifths to you, and the fourth to your father.”

“Chevalier!”

“Mordioux! If you will have some masses said for me, you are welcome.”

That being said, D’Artagnan took his belt from the hook, girded on his sword, took a hat the feather of which was fresh, and held his hand out to

Raoul, who threw himself into his arms. When in the shop, he cast a quick glance at the shop-lads, who looked upon the scene with a pride mingled with some inquietude; then plunging his hands into a chest of currants, he went straight to the officer who was waiting for him at the door.

“Those features! Can it be you, Monsieur de Friedisch?” cried D’Artagnan, gayly. “Eh! eh! what, do we arrest our friends?”

“Arrest!” whispered the lads among themselves.

“Ja, it is I, Monsieur d’Artagnan! Good-day to you!” said the Swiss, in his mountain patois.

“Must I give you up my sword? I warn you that it is long and heavy; you had better let me wear if to the Louvre: I feel quite lost in the streets without a sword, and you would be more at a loss that I should, with two.”

“The king has given me no orders about it,” replied the Swiss, “so keep your sword.”

“Well, that is very polite on the part of the king. Let us go, at once.”

Monsieur Friedisch was not a talker, and D’Artagnan had too many things to think about to say much. From Planchet’s shop to the Louvre was not far,--they arrived in ten minutes. It was a dark night. M. de Friedisch wanted to enter by the wicket. “No,” said D’Artagnan, “you would lose time by that; take the little staircase.”

The Swiss did as D’Artagnan advised, and conducted him to the vestibule of the king’s cabinet. When arrived there, he bowed to his prisoner, and, without saying anything, returned to his post. D’Artagnan had not had time to ask why his sword was not taken from him, when the door of the cabinet opened, and a valet de chambre called, “M. d’Artagnan!” The musketeer assumed his parade carriage, and entered, with his large eyes wide open, his brow calm, his moustache stiff. The king was seated at a table writing. He did not disturb himself when the step of the musketeer resounded on the floor; he did not even turn his head. D’Artagnan advanced as far as the middle of the room, and seeing that the king paid no attention to him, and suspecting, besides, that this was nothing but affectation, a sort of tormenting preamble to the explanation that was preparing, he turned his back on the prince, and began to examine the frescoes on the cornices, and the cracks in the ceiling. This maneuver was accompanied by a little tacit monologue. “Ah! you want to humble me, do you?--you, whom I have seen so young--you, whom I have saved as I would my own child,--you, whom I have served as I would a God--that is to say, for nothing. Wait awhile! wait awhile! you shall see what a man can do who has suffered the air of the fire of the Huguenots, under the beard of monsieur le cardinal--the true cardinal.” At this moment Louis turned round.

“Ah! are you there, Monsieur d’Artagnan?” said he.

D’Artagnan saw the movement and imitated it. “Yes, sire,” said he.

“Very well; have the goodness to wait till I have cast this up.”

D’Artagnan made no reply; he only bowed. “That is polite enough,” thought he; “I have nothing to say.”

Louis made a violent dash with his pen, and threw it angrily away.

“Ah! go on, work yourself up!” thought the musketeer; “you will put me at my ease. You shall find I did not empty the bag, the other day, at Blois.”

Louis rose from his seat, passed his hand over his brow, then, stopping opposite to D’Artagnan, he looked at him with an air at once imperious and kind, “What the devil does he want with me? I wish he would begin!” thought the musketeer.

“Monsieur,” said the king, “you know, without doubt, that monsieur le cardinal is dead?”

“I suspected so, sire.”

“You know that, consequently, I am master in my own kingdom?”

“That is not a thing that dates from the death of monsieur le cardinal, sire; a man is always master in his own house, when he wishes to be so.”

“Yes; but do you not remember all you said to me at Blois?”

“Now we come to it,” thought D’Artagnan; “I was not deceived. Well, so much the better, it is a sign that my scent is tolerably keen yet.”

“You do not answer me,” said Louis.

“Sire, I think I recollect.”

“You only think?”

“It is so long ago.”

“If you do not remember, I do. You said to me,--listen with attention.”

“Ah! I shall listen with all my ears, sire; for it is very likely the conversation will turn in a fashion very interesting to me.”

Louis once more looked at the musketeer. The latter smoothed the feather of his hat, then his mustache, and waited bravely. Louis XIV. continued: “You quitted my service, monsieur, after having told me the whole truth?”

“Yes, sire.”

“That is, after having declared to me all you thought to be true, with regard to my mode of thinking and acting. That is always a merit. You began by telling me that you had served my family thirty years, and were fatigued."

"I said so; yes, sire."

"And you afterwards admitted that that fatigue was a pretext, and that discontent was the real cause."

"I was discontented, in fact; but that discontent has never betrayed itself, that I know of, and if, like a man of heart, I have spoken out before your majesty, I have not even thought of the matter before anybody else."

"Do not excuse yourself, D'Artagnan, but continue to listen to me. When making me the reproach that you were discontented, you received in reply a promise:--'Wait.'--Is that not true?"

"Yes, sire, as true as what I told you."

"You answered me, 'Hereafter! No, now, immediately.' Do not excuse yourself, I tell you. It was natural, but you had no charity for your poor prince, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"Sire!--charity for a king, on the part of a poor soldier!"

"You understand me very well; you knew that I stood in need of it; you knew very well that I was not master; you knew very well that my hope was in the future. Now, you answered me when I spoke of the future, 'My discharge,--and that directly.'"

"That is true," murmured D'Artagnan, biting his mustache.

"You did not flatter me when I was in distress," added Louis.

"But," said D'Artagnan, raising his head nobly, "if I did not flatter your majesty when poor, neither did I betray you. I have shed my blood for nothing; I have watched like a dog at a door, knowing full well that neither bread nor bone would be thrown to me. I, although poor likewise, asked nothing of your majesty but the discharge you speak of."

"I know you are a brave man, but I was a young man, and you ought to have had some indulgence for me. What had you to reproach the king with? --that he left King Charles II. without assistance?--let us say further--that he did not marry Mademoiselle de Mancini?" When saying these words, the king fixed upon the musketeer a searching look.

"Ah! ah!" thought the latter, "he is doing far more than remembering, he divines. The devil!"

"Your sentence," continued Louis, "fell upon the king and fell upon the man. But, Monsieur d'Artagnan, that weakness, for you considered it a weakness?"--D'Artagnan made no reply--"you reproached me also with regard to monsieur, the defunct cardinal. Now, monsieur le cardinal, did he not bring me up, did he not support me?--elevating himself and supporting himself at the same time, I admit; but the benefit was discharged. As an ingrate or an egotist, would you, then, have better loved or served me?"

"Sire!"

"We will say no more about it, monsieur; it would only create in you too many regrets, and me too much pain."

D'Artagnan was not convinced. The young king, in adopting a tone of hauteur with him, did not forward his purpose.

"You have since reflected?" resumed Louis.

"Upon what, sire?" asked D'Artagnan, politely.

"Why, upon all that I have said to you, monsieur."

"Yes, sire, no doubt--"

"And you have only waited for an opportunity of retracting your words?"

"Sire!"

"You hesitate, it seems."

"I do not understand what your majesty did me the honor to say to me."

Louis's brow became cloudy.

"Have the goodness to excuse me, sire; my understanding is particularly thick; things do not penetrate it without difficulty; but it is true, once they get in, they remain there."

"Yes, yes; you appear to have a memory."

"Almost as good a one as your majesty's."

"Then give me quickly one solution. My time is valuable. What have you been doing since your discharge?"

"Making my fortune, sire."

"The expression is crude, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"Your majesty takes it in bad part, certainly. I entertain nothing but the profoundest respect for the king; and if I have been impolite, which might be excused by my long sojourn in camps and barracks, your majesty is too much above me to be offended at a word that innocently escapes from a soldier."

"In fact, I know you performed a brilliant action in England, monsieur. I only regret that you have broken your promise."

"I!" cried D'Artagnan.

"Doubtless. You engaged your word not to serve any other prince on quitting my service. Now it was for King Charles II. that you undertook the marvelous carrying off of M. Monk.”

“Pardon me, sire; it was for myself.”

“And did you succeed?”

“Like the captains of the fifteenth century, coups-de-main and adventures.”

“What do you call succeeding?--a fortune?”

“A hundred thousand crowns, sire, which I now possess--that is, in one week three times as much money as I ever had in fifty years.”

“It is a handsome sum. But you are ambitious, I perceive.”

“I, sire? The quarter of that would be a treasure; and I swear to you I have no thought of augmenting it.”

“What! you contemplate remaining idle?”

“Yes, sire.”

“You mean to drop the sword?”

“That I have already done.”

“Impossible, Monsieur d’Artagnan,” said Louis, firmly.

“But, sire--”

“Well?”

“And why, sire?”

“Because it is my wish you should not!” said the young prince, in a voice so stern and imperious that D’Artagnan evinced surprise and even uneasiness.

“Will your majesty allow me one word of reply?” said he.

“Speak.”

“I formed that resolution when I was poor and destitute.”

“So be it. Go on.”

“Now, when by my energy I have acquired a comfortable means of subsistence, would your majesty despoil me of my liberty? Your majesty would condemn me to the lowest, when I have gained the highest?”

“Who gave you permission, monsieur, to fathom my designs, or to reckon with me?” replied Louis, in a voice almost angry; “who told you what I shall do or what you will yourself do?”

“Sire,” said the musketeer, quietly, “as far as I see, freedom is not the order of the conversation, as it was on the day we came to an explanation at Blois.”

“No, monsieur; everything is changed.”

“I tender your majesty my sincere compliments upon that, but--”

"But you don't believe it?"

"I am not a great statesman, and yet I have my eye upon affairs; it seldom fails; now, I do not see exactly as your majesty does, sire. The reign of Mazarin is over, but that of the financiers is begun. They have the money; your majesty will not often see much of it. To live under the paw of these hungry wolves is hard for a man who reckoned upon independence."

At this moment someone scratched at the door of the cabinet; the king raised his head proudly. "Your pardon, Monsieur d'Artagnan," said he; "it is M. Colbert, who comes to make me a report. Come in, M. Colbert."

D'Artagnan drew back. Colbert entered with papers in his hand, and went up to the king. There can be little doubt that the Gascon did not lose the opportunity of applying his keen, quick glance to the new figure which presented itself.

"Is the inquiry made?"

"Yes, sire."

"And the opinion of the inquisitors?"

"Is that the accused merit confiscation and death."

"Ah! ah!" said the king, without changing countenance, and casting an oblique look at D'Artagnan. "And your own opinion, M. Colbert?" said he.

Colbert looked at D'Artagnan is his turn. That imposing countenance checked the words upon his lips. Louis perceived this. "Do not disturb yourself," said he; "it is M. d'Artagnan,--do you not know M. d'Artagnan again?"

These two men looked at each other--D'Artagnan, with eyes open and bright as the day--Colbert, with his half closed, and dim. The frank intrepidity of the financier annoyed the other; the circumspection of the financier disgusted the soldier. "Ah! ah! this is the gentleman who made that brilliant stroke in England," said Colbert. And he bowed slightly to D'Artagnan.

"Ah! ah!" said the Gascon, "this is the gentleman who clipped off the lace from the uniform of the Swiss! A praiseworthy piece of economy."

The financier thought to pierce the musketeer; but the musketeer ran the financier through.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," resumed the king, who had not remarked all the shades of which Mazarin would have missed not one, "this concerns the farmers of the revenue who have robbed me, whom I am hanging, and whose death-warrants I am about to sign."

"Oh! oh!" said D'Artagnan, starting.

"What did you say?"

"Oh! nothing, sire. This is no business of mine."

The king had already taken up the pen, and was applying it to the paper. "Sire," said Colbert in a subdued voice, "I beg to warn your majesty, that if an example be necessary, there will be difficulty in the execution of your orders."

"What do you say?" said Louis.

"You must not conceal from yourself," continued Colbert quietly, "that attacking the farmers-general is attacking the superintendence. The two unfortunate guilty men in question are the particular friends of a powerful personage, and the punishment, which otherwise might be comfortably confined to the Chatlet, will doubtless be a signal for disturbances!"

Louis colored and turned towards D'Artagnan, who took a slight bite at his mustache, not without a smile of pity for the financier, and for the king who had to listen to him so long. But Louis seized the pen, and with a movement so rapid that his hand shook, he affixed his signature at the bottom of the two papers presented by Colbert,--then looking the latter in the face,--"Monsieur Colbert," said he, "when you speak to me on business, exclude more frequently the word difficulty from your reasonings and opinions; as to the word impossibility, never pronounce it."

Colbert bowed, much humiliated at having to undergo such a lesson before the musketeer; he was about to go out, but, jealous to repair his check: "I forgot to announce to your majesty," said he, "that the confiscations amount to the sum of five millions of livres."

"That's pretty well!" thought D'Artagnan.

"Which makes in my coffers?" said the king.

"Eighteen millions of livres, sire," replied Colbert, bowing.

"Mordioux!" growled D'Artagnan, "that's glorious!"

"Monsieur Colbert," added the king, "you will, if you please, go through the gallery where M. Lyonne is waiting, and will tell him to bring hither what he has drawn up--by my order."

"Directly, sire; if your majesty wants me no more this evening?"

"No, monsieur: good-night!" And Colbert went out.

"Now, let us return to our affair, M. d'Artagnan," said the king, as if nothing had happened. "You see that, with respect to money, there is already a notable change."

"Something to the tune of from zero to eighteen millions," replied the musketeer gayly. "Ah! that was what your majesty wanted the day King Charles II. came to Blois. The two states would not have been embroiled to-day; for I must say, that there also I see another stumbling-block."

"Well, in the first place," replied Louis, "you are unjust, monsieur; for, if Providence had made me able to give my brother the million that day, you would not have quitted my service, and, consequently, you would not have made your fortune, as you told me just now you have done. But, in addition to this, I have had another piece of good fortune; and my difference with Great Britain need not alarm you."

A valet de chambre interrupted the king by announcing M. Lyonne. "Come in, monsieur," said the king; "you are punctual; that is like a good servant. Let us see your letter to my brother Charles II."

D'Artagnan pricked up his ears. "A moment, monsieur," said Louis carelessly to the Gascon; "I must expedite to London my consent to the marriage of my brother, M. le Duc d'Anjou, with the Princess Henrietta Stuart."

"He is knocking me about, it seems," murmured D'Artagnan, whilst the king signed the letter, and dismissed M. de Lyonne; "but ma foi! the more he knocks me about in this manner, the better I like it."

The king followed M. de Lyonne with his eyes, till the door was closed behind him; he even made three steps, as if he would follow the minister; but, after these three steps, stopping, passing, and coming back to the musketeer,--"Now, monsieur," said he, "let us hasten to terminate our affair. You told me the other day, at Blois, that you were not rich?"

"But I am now, sire."

"Yes, but that does not concern me; you have your own money, not mine; that does not enter into my account."

"I do not well understand what your majesty means."

"Then, instead of leaving you to draw out words, speak spontaneously. Should you be satisfied with twenty thousand livres a year as a fixed income?"

"But, sire" said D'Artagnan, opening his eyes to the utmost.

"Would you be satisfied with four horses furnished and kept, and with a supplement of funds such as you might require, according to occasions and needs, or would you prefer a fixed sum which would be, for example, forty thousand livres? Answer."

“Sire, your majesty--”

“Yes, you are surprised; that is natural, and I expected it. Answer me, come! or I shall think you have no longer that rapidity of judgment I have so much admired in you.”

“It is certain, sire, that twenty thousand livres a year make a handsome sum; but--”

“No buts! Yes or no, is it an honorable indemnity?”

“Oh! very certainly.”

“You will be satisfied with it? That is well. It will be better to reckon the extra expenses separately; you can arrange that with Colbert. Now let us pass to something more important.”

“But, sire, I told your majesty--”

“That you wanted rest, I know you did: only I replied that I would not allow it--I am master, I suppose?”

“Yes, sire.”

“That is well. You were formerly in the way of becoming captain of the musketeers?”

“Yes, sire.”

“Well, here is your commission signed. I place it in this drawer. The day on which you return from a certain expedition which I have to confide to you, on that day you may yourself take the commission from the drawer.” D’Artagnan still hesitated, and hung down his head. “Come, monsieur,” said the king, “one would believe, to look at you, that you did not know that at the court of the most Christian king, the captain-general of the musketeers takes precedence of the marechals of France.”

“Sire, I know he does.”

“Then, am I to think you do put no faith in my word?”

“Oh! sire, never--never dream of such a thing.”

“I have wished to prove to you, that you, so good a servant, had lost a good master; am I anything like the master that will suit you?”

“I begin to think you are, sire.”

“Then, monsieur, you will resume your functions. Your company is quite disorganized since your departure, and the men go about drinking and rioting in the cabarets, where they fight, in spite of my edicts, and those of my father. You will reorganize the service as soon as possible.”

“Yes, sire.”

“You will not again quit my person.”

"Very well, sire."

"You will march with me to the army, you will encamp round my tent."

"Then, sire," said D'Artagnan, "if it is only to impose upon me a service like that, your majesty need not give me twenty thousand livres a year. I shall not earn them."

"I desire that you shall keep open house; I desire that you should keep a liberal table; I desire that my captain of musketeers should be a personage."

"And I," said D'Artagnan, bluntly; "I do not like easily found money; I like money won! Your majesty gives me an idle trade, which the first comer would perform for four thousand livres."

Louis XIV. began to laugh. "You are a true Gascon, Monsieur d'Artagnan; you will draw my heart's secret from me."

"Bah! has your majesty a secret, then?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Well! then I accept the twenty thousand livres, for I will keep that secret, and discretion is above all price, in these times. Will your majesty speak now?"

"Boot yourself, Monsieur d'Artagnan, and to horse!"

"Directly, sire."

"Within two days."

"That is well, sire: for I have my affairs to settle before I set out; particularly if it is likely there should be any blows stirring."

"That may happen."

"We can receive them! But, sire, you have addressed yourself to avarice, to ambition; you have addressed yourself to the heart of M. d'Artagnan, but you have forgotten one thing."

"What is that?"

"You have said nothing to his vanity; when shall I be a knight of the king's orders?"

"Does that interest you?"

"Why, yes, sire. My friend Athos is quite covered with orders, and that dazzles me."

"You shall be a knight of my order a month after you have taken your commission of captain."

"Ah! ah!" said the officer, thoughtfully, "after the expedition."

"Precisely."

"Where is your majesty going to send me?"

“Are you acquainted with Bretagne?”

“No, sire.”

“Have you any friends there?”

“In Bretagne? No, ma foi!”

“So much the better. Do you know anything about fortifications?”

“I believe I do, sire,” said D’Artagnan, smiling.

“That is to say you can readily distinguish a fortress from a simple fortification, such as is allowed to chatelains or vassals?”

“I distinguish a fort from a rampart as I distinguish a cuirass from a raised pie-crust, sire. Is that sufficient?”

“Yes, monsieur. You will set out, then.”

“For Bretagne?”

“Yes.”

“Alone?”

“Absolutely alone. That is to say, you must not even take a lackey with you.”

“May I ask your majesty for what reason?”

“Because, monsieur, it will be necessary to disguise yourself sometimes, as the servant of a good family. Your face is very well known in France, M. d’Artagnan.”

“And then, sire?”

“And then you will travel slowly through Bretagne, and will examine the fortifications of that country.”

“The coasts?”

“Yes, and the isles; commencing by Belle-Ile-en-Mer.”

“Ah! which belongs to M. Fouquet!” said D’Artagnan, in a serious tone, raising his intelligent eye to Louis XIV.

“I fancy you are right, monsieur, and that Bell-Isle does belong to M. Fouquet, in fact.”

“Then your majesty wishes me to ascertain if Belle-Isle is a strong place?”

“Yes.”

“If the fortifications of it are new or old?”

“Precisely.”

“And if the vassals of M. Fouquet are sufficiently numerous to form a garrison?”

"That is what I want to know; you have placed your finger on the question."

"And if they are not fortifying, sire?"

"You will travel about Bretagne, listening and judging."

"Then I am a king's spy?" said D'Artagnan, bluntly, twisting his mustache.

"No, monsieur."

"Your pardon sire; I spy on your majesty's account."

"You start on a voyage of discovery, monsieur. Would you march at the head of your musketeers, with your sword in your hand, to observe any spot whatever, or an enemy's position?"

At this word D'Artagnan started.

"Do you," continued the king, "imagine yourself to be a spy?"

"No, no," said D'Artagnan, but pensively; "the thing changes its face when one observes an enemy: one is but a soldier. And if they are fortifying Belle-Isle?" added he, quickly.

"You will take an exact plan of the fortifications."

"Will they permit me to enter?"

"That does not concern me; that is your affair. Did you not understand that I reserved for you a supplement of twenty thousand livres per annum, if you wished it?"

"Yes, sire; but if they are not fortifying?"

"You will return quietly, without fatiguing your horse."

"Sire, I am ready."

"You will begin to-morrow by going to monsieur le surintendant's to take the first quarter of the pension I give you. Do you know M. Fouquet?"

"Very little, sire; but I beg your majesty to observe that I don't think it immediately necessary that I should know him."

"Your pardon, monsieur; for he will refuse you the money I wish you to take; and it is that refusal I look for."

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan. "Then, sire?"

"The money being refused, you will go and seek it at M. Colbert's. A propos, have you a good horse?"

"An excellent one, sire."

"How much did it cost you?"

"A hundred and fifty pistoles."

"I will buy it of you. Here is a note for two hundred pistoles."

"But I want a horse for my journey, sire."

"Well!"

"Well, and you take mine from me."

"Not at all. On the contrary, I give it you. Only as it is now mine and not yours, I am sure you will not spare it."

"Your majesty is in a hurry, then?"

"A great hurry."

"Then what compels me to wait two days?"

"Reasons known to myself."

"That's a different affair. The horse may make up the two days, in the eight he has to travel; and then there is the post."

"No, no, the post compromises, Monsieur d'Artagnan. Begone and do not forget you are my servant."

"Sire, it is not my duty to forget it! At what hour to-morrow shall I take my leave of your majesty?"

"Whence do you lodge?"

"I must henceforward lodge at the Louvre."

"That must not be now--keep your lodgings in the city: I will pay for them. As to your departure, it must take place at night; you must set out without being seen by any one, or, if you are seen, it must not be known that you belong to me. Keep your mouth shut, monsieur."

"Your majesty spoils all you have said by that single word."

"I asked where you lodged, for I cannot always send to M. le Comte de la Fere to seek you."

"I lodge with M. Planchet, a grocer, Rue des Lombards, at the sign of the Pilon d'Or."

"Go out but little, show yourself less, and await my orders."

"And yet, sire, I must go for the money."

"That is true, but when going to the superintendence, where so many people are constantly going, you must mingle with the crowd."

"I want the notes, sire, for the money."

"Here they are." The king signed them, and D'Artagnan looked on, to assure himself of their regularity.

"Adieu! Monsieur d'Artagnan," added the king; "I think you have perfectly understood me."

"I? I understand that your majesty sends me to Belle-Ile-en-Mer, that is all."

“To learn?”

“To learn how M. Fouquet’s works are going on; that is all.”

“Very well: I admit you may be taken.”

“And I do not admit it,” replied the Gascon, boldly.

“I admit you may be killed,” continued the king.

“That is not probable, sire.”

“In the first case, you must not speak; in the second there must be no papers found upon you.”

D’Artagnan shrugged his shoulders without ceremony, and took leave of the king, saying to himself:--”The English shower continues--let us remain under the spout!”

CHAPTER LIV.

The Houses of M. Fouquet.

Whilst D’Artagnan was returning to Planchet’s house, his head aching and bewildered with all that had happened to him, there was passing a scene of quite a different character, and which, nevertheless, is not foreign to the conversation our musketeer had just had with the king; only this scene took place out of Paris, in a house possessed by the superintendent Fouquet in the village of Saint-Mande. The minister had just arrived at this country-house, followed by his principal clerk, who carried an enormous portfolio full of papers to be examined, and others waiting for signature. As it might be about five o’clock in the afternoon, the masters had dined: supper was being prepared for twenty subaltern guests. The superintendent did not stop: on alighting from his carriage, he, at the same bound, sprang through the doorway, traversed the apartments and gained his cabinet, where he declared he would shut himself up to work, commanding that he should not be disturbed for anything but an order from the king. As soon as this order was given, Fouquet shut himself up, and two footmen were placed as sentinels at his door. Then Fouquet pushed a bolt which displaced a panel that walled up the entrance, and prevented everything that passed in this apartment from being either seen or heard. But, against all probability, it was only for the sake of shutting himself up that Fouquet shut himself up thus, for he went straight to a bureau, seated himself at it, opened the portfolio, and began to make a choice amongst the enormous mass of papers it contained. It was not more than ten minutes after he had entered, and taken all the precautions we have described, when the repeated noise of several slight equal knocks struck his ear, and appeared to fix his utmost attention. Fouquet raised his head, turned his ear, and listened.

The strokes continued. Then the worker arose with a slight movement of impatience and walked straight up to a glass behind which the blows were struck by a hand, or by some invisible mechanism. It was a large glass let into a panel. Three other glasses, exactly similar to it, completed the symmetry of the apartment. Nothing distinguished that one from the others.

Without doubt, these reiterated knocks were a signal; for, at the moment Fouquet approached the glass listening, the same noise was renewed, and in the same measure. “Oh! oh!” murmured the intendant, with surprise, “who is yonder? I did not expect anybody to-day.” And without doubt, to respond to the signal, he pulled out a gilded nail near the glass, and shook it thrice. Then returning to his place, and seating himself again, “Ma foi! let them wait,” said he. And plunging again into the ocean of papers unrolled before him, he appeared to think of nothing now but work. In fact, with incredible rapidity and marvelous lucidity, Fouquet deciphered the largest papers and most complicated writings, correcting them, annotating them with a pen moved as if by a fever, and the work melting under his hands, signatures, figures, references, became multiplied as if ten clerks--that is to say, a hundred fingers and ten brains had performed the duties, instead of the five fingers and single brain of this man. From time to time, only, Fouquet, absorbed by his work, raised his head to cast a furtive glance upon a clock placed before him. The reason of this was, Fouquet set himself a task, and when this task was once set, in one hour’s work he, by himself, did what another would not have accomplished in a day; always certain, consequently, provided he was not disturbed, of arriving at the close in the time his devouring activity had fixed. But in the midst of his ardent labor, the soft strokes upon the little bell placed behind the glass sounded again, hasty, and, consequently, more urgent.

“The lady appears to be impatient,” said Fouquet. “Humph! a calm! That must be the comtesse; but, no, the comtesse is gone to Rambouillet for three days. The presidente, then? Oh! no, the presidente would not assume such grand airs; she would ring very humbly, then she would wait my good pleasure. The greatest certainty is, that I do not know who it can be, but that I know who it cannot be. And since it is not you, marquise, since it cannot be you, deuce take the rest!” And he went on with his work in spite of the reiterated appeals of the bell. At the end of a quarter of an hour, however, impatience prevailed over Fouquet in his turn: he might be said to consume, rather than to complete the rest of his work; he thrust his papers into his portfolio, and giving a glance at the mirror, whilst the taps continued faster than ever: “Oh! oh!” said he, “whence comes all this racket? What has happened, and who can the Ariadne be who expects me so impatiently. Let us see!”

He then applied the tip of his finger to the nail parallel to the one he had drawn. Immediately the glass moved like a folding-door and discovered a secret closet, rather deep, into which the superintendent disappeared as if going into a vast box. When there, he touched another spring, which opened, not a board, but a block of the wall, and he went out by that opening, leaving the door to shut of itself. Then Fouquet descended about a score of steps which sank, winding, underground, and came to a long, subterranean passage, lighted by imperceptible loopholes. The walls of this vault were covered with slabs or tiles, and the floor with carpeting. This passage was under the street itself, which separated Fouquet’s house from the Park of Vincennes. At the end of the passage ascended a winding staircase parallel with that by which Fouquet had entered. He mounted these other stairs, entered by means of a spring placed in a closet similar to that in his cabinet, and from this closet an untenanted chamber furnished with the utmost elegance. As soon as he entered, he examined carefully whether the glass closed without leaving any trace, and, doubtless satisfied with his observation, he opened by means of a small gold key the triple fastenings of a door in front of him. This time the door opened upon a handsome cabinet, sumptuously furnished, in which was seated upon cushions a lady of surpassing beauty, who at the sound of the lock sprang towards Fouquet. “Ah! good heavens!” cried the latter, starting back with astonishment. “Madame la Marquise de Belliere, you here?”

“Yes,” murmured la marquise. “Yes; it is I, monsieur.”

“Marquise! dear marquise!” added Fouquet, ready to prostrate himself. “Ah! my God! how did you come here? And I, to keep you waiting!”

“A long time, monsieur; yes, a very long time!”

“I am happy in thinking this waiting has appeared long to you, marquise!”

“Oh! an eternity, monsieur; oh! I rang more than twenty times. Did you not hear me?”

“Marquise, you are pale, you tremble.”

“Did you not hear, then, that you were summoned?”

“Oh, yes; I heard plainly enough, madame; but I could not come. After your rigors and your refusals, how could I dream it was you? If I could have had any suspicion of the happiness that awaited me, believe me, madame, I would have quitted everything to fall at your feet, as I do at this moment.”

"Are we quite alone, monsieur?" asked the marquise, looking round the room.

"Oh, yes, madame, I can assure you of that."

"Really?" said the marquise, in a melancholy tone.

"You sigh!" said Fouquet.

"What mysteries! what precautions!" said the marquise, with a slight bitterness of expression; "and how evident it is that you fear the least suspicion of your amours to escape."

"Would you prefer their being made public?"

"Oh, no; you act like a delicate man," said the marquise, smiling.

"Come, dear marquise, punish me not with reproaches, I implore you."

"Reproaches! Have I a right to make you any?"

"No, unfortunately, no; but tell me, you, who during a year I have loved without return or hope--"

"You are mistaken--without hope it is true, but not without return."

"What! for me, of my love! there is but one proof, and that proof I still want."

"I am here to bring it, monsieur."

Fouquet wished to clasp her in his arms, but she disengaged herself with a gesture.

"You persist in deceiving yourself, monsieur, and will never accept of me the only thing I am willing to give you--devotion."

"Ah, then, you do not love me? Devotion is but a virtue, love is a passion."

"Listen to me, I implore you: I should not have come hither without a serious motive: you are well assured of that, are you not?"

"The motive is of very little consequence, so that you are but here--so that I see you--so that I speak to you!"

"You are right; the principal thing is that I am here without any one having seen me, and that I can speak to you."--Fouquet sank on his knees before her. "Speak! speak, madame!" said he, "I listen to you."

The marquise looked at Fouquet, on his knees at her feet, and there was in the looks of the woman a strange mixture of love and melancholy. "Oh!" at length murmured she, "would that I were she who has the right of seeing you every minute, of speaking to you every instant! would that I were she who might watch over you, she who would have no need of mysterious springs to summon and cause to appear, like a sylph, the man she loves, to look at him for an hour, and then see him disappear in the darkness of a mystery, still more strange at his going out than at his coming in. Oh! that would be to live like a happy woman!"

"Do you happen, marquise," said Fouquet, smiling, "to be speaking of my wife?"

"Yes, certainly, of her I spoke."

"Well, you need not envy her lot, marquise; of all the women with whom I have had any relations, Madame Fouquet is the one I see the least of, and who has the least intercourse with me."

"At least, monsieur, she is not reduced to place, as I have done, her hand upon the ornament of a glass to call you to her; at least you do not reply to her by the mysterious, alarming sound of a bell, the spring of which comes from I don't know where; at least you have not forbidden her to endeavor to discover the secret of these communications under pain of breaking off forever your connections with her, as you have forbidden all who come here before me, and who will come after me."

"Dear marquise, how unjust you are, and how little do you know what you are doing in thus exclaiming against mystery; it is with mystery alone we can love without trouble; it is with love without trouble alone that we can be happy. But let us return to ourselves, to that devotion of which you were speaking, or rather let me labor under a pleasing delusion, and believe this devotion is love."

"Just now," repeated the marquise, passing over her eyes a hand that might have been a model for the graceful contours of antiquity; "just now I was prepared to speak, my ideas were clear and bold; now I am quite confused, quite troubled; I fear I bring you bad news."

"If it is to that bad news I owe your presence, marquise, welcome be even that bad news! or rather, marquise, since you allow that I am not quite indifferent to you, let me hear nothing of the bad news, but speak of yourself."

"No, no, on the contrary, demand it of me; require me to tell it to you instantly, and not to allow myself to be turned aside by any feeling whatever. Fouquet, my friend! it is of immense importance."

"You astonish me, marquise; I will even say you almost frighten me. You, so serious, so collected; you who know the world we live in so well. Is it, then, important?"

"Oh! very important."

"In the first place, how did you come here?"

"You shall know that presently; but first to something of more consequence."

"Speak, marquise, speak! I implore you, have pity on my impatience."

"Do you know that Colbert is made intendant of the finances?"

"Bah! Colbert, little Colbert."

"Yes, Colbert, little Colbert."

"Mazarin's factotum?"

"The same."

"Well! what do you see so terrific in that, dear marquise? little Colbert is intendant; that is astonishing I confess, but is not terrible."

"Do you think the king has given, without pressing motive, such a place to one you call a little cuistre?"

"In the first place, is it positively true that the king has given it to him?"

"It is so said."

"Ay, but who says so?"

"Everybody."

"Everybody, that's nobody; mention some one likely to be well informed who says so."

"Madame Vanel."

"Ah! now you begin to frighten me in earnest," said Fouquet, laughing; "if any one is well informed, or ought to be well informed, it is the person you name."

"Do not speak ill of poor Marguerite, Monsieur Fouquet, for she still loves you."

"Bah! indeed? That is scarcely credible. I thought little Colbert, as you said just now, had passed over that love, and left the impression upon it of a spot of ink or a stain of grease."

"Fouquet! Fouquet! Is this the way you always treat the poor creatures you desert?"

"Why, you surely are not going to undertake the defense of Madame Vanel?"

"Yes, I will undertake it; for, I repeat, she loves you still, and the proof is she saves you."

"But your interposition, marquise; that is very cunning on her part. No angel could be more agreeable to me, or could lead me more certainly to salvation. But, let me ask you, do you know Marguerite?"

"She was my convent friend."

"And you say that she has informed you that Monsieur Colbert was named intendant?"

"Yes, she did."

"Well, enlighten me, marquise; granted Monsieur Colbert is intendant--so be it. In what can an intendant, that is to say my subordinate, my clerk, give me umbrage or injure me, even if he is Monsieur Colbert?"

"You do not reflect, monsieur, apparently," replied the marquise.

"Upon what?"

"This: that Monsieur Colbert hates you."

"Hates me?" cried Fouquet. "Good heavens! marquise, whence do you come? where can you live? Hates me! why all the world hates me, he, of course, as others do."

"He more than others."

"More than others--let him."

"He is ambitious."

"Who is not, marquise."

"Yes, but with him ambition has no bounds."

"I am quite aware of that, since he made it a point to succeed me with Madame Vanel."

"And obtained his end; look at that."

"Do you mean to say he has the presumption to pass from intendant to superintendent?"

"Have you not yourself already had the same fear?"

"Oh! oh!" said Fouquet, "to succeed with Madame Vanel is one thing, to succeed me with the king is another. France is not to be purchased so easily as the wife of a maitre des comptes."

"Eh! monsieur, everything is to be bought; if not by gold, by intrigue."

"Nobody knows to the contrary better than you, madame, you to whom I have offered millions."

"Instead of millions, Fouquet, you should have offered me a true, only and boundless love: I might have accepted that. So you see, still, everything is to be bought, if not in one way, by another."

"So, Colbert, in your opinion, is in a fair way of bargaining for my place of superintendent. Make yourself easy on that head, my dear marquise; he is not yet rich enough to purchase it."

"But if he should rob you of it?"

"Ah! that is another thing. Unfortunately, before he can reach me, that is to say, the body of the place, he must destroy, must make a breach in the advanced works, and I am devilishly well fortified, marquise."

"What you call your advanced works are your creatures, are they not--your friends?"

"Exactly so."

"And is M. d'Eymeris one of your creatures?"

"Yes, he is."

"Is M. Lyodot one of your friends?"

"Certainly."

"M. de Vanin?"

"M. de Vanin! ah! they may do what they like with him, but--"

"But--"

"But they must not touch the others!"

"Well, if you are anxious they should not touch MM. d'Eymeris and Lyodot, it is time to look about you."

"Who threatens them?"

"Will you listen to me now?"

"Attentively, marquise."

"Without interrupting me?"

"Speak."

"Well, this morning Marguerite sent for me."

"And what did she want with you?"

"'I dare not see M. Fouquet myself,' said she."

"Bah! why should she think I would reproach her? Poor woman, she vastly deceives herself."

"'See him yourself,' said she, 'and tell him to beware of M. Colbert.'"

"What! she warned me to beware of her lover?"

"I have told you she still loves you."

"Go on, marquise."

"'M. Colbert,' she added, 'came to me two hours ago, to inform me he was appointed intendant.'"

"I have already told you, marquise, that M. Colbert would only be the more in my power for that."

"Yes, but that is not all: Marguerite is intimate, as you know, with Madame d'Eymeris and Madame Lyodot."

"I know it."

“Well, M. Colbert put many questions to her, relative to the fortunes of these two gentlemen, and as to the devotion they had for you.”

“Oh, as to those two, I can answer for them; they must be killed before they will cease to be mine.”

“Then, as Madame Vanel was obliged to quit M. Colbert for an instant to receive a visitor, and as M. Colbert is industrious, scarcely was the new intendant left alone, before he took a pencil from his pocket, and, there was paper on the table, began to make notes.”

“Notes concerning d’Eymeris and Lyodot?”

“Exactly.”

“I should like to know what those notes were about.”

“And that is just what I have brought you.”

“Madame Vanel has taken Colbert’s notes and sent them to me?”

“No; but by a chance which resembles a miracle, she has a duplicate of those notes.”

“How could she get that?”

“Listen; I told you that Colbert found paper on the table.”

“Yes.”

“That he took a pencil from his pocket.”

“Yes.”

“And wrote upon that paper.”

“Yes.”

“Well, this pencil was a lead-pencil, consequently hard; so, it marked in black upon the first sheet, and in white upon the second.”

“Go on.”

“Colbert, when tearing off the first sheet, took no notice of the second.”

“Well?”

“Well, on the second was to be read what had been written on the first; Madame Vanel read it, and sent for me.”

“Yes, yes.”

“Then, when she was assured I was your devoted friend, she gave me the paper, and told me the secret of this house.”

“And this paper?” said Fouquet, in some degree of agitation.

“Here it is, monsieur--read it,” said the marquise.

Fouquet read:

“Names of the farmers of revenue to be condemned by the Chamber of Justice: D’Eymeris, friend of M. F.; Lyodot, friend of M. F.; De Vanin, indif.”

“D’Eymeris and Lyodot!” cried Fouquet, reading the paper eagerly again.

“Friends of M. F.,” pointed the marquise with her finger.

“But what is the meaning of these words: ‘To be condemned by the Chamber of Justice’?”

“Dame!” said the marquise, “that is clear enough, I think. Besides, that is not all. Read on, read on;” and Fouquet continued,--”The two first to death, the third to be dismissed, with MM. d’Hautemont and de la Vallette, who will only have their property confiscated.”

“Great God!” cried Fouquet, “to death, to death! Lyodot and D’Eymeris. But even if the Chamber of Justice should condemn them to death, the king will never ratify their condemnation, and they cannot be executed without the king’s signature.”

“The king has made M. Colbert intendant.”

“Oh!” cried Fouquet, as if he caught a glimpse of the abyss that yawned beneath his feet, “impossible! impossible! But who passed a pencil over the marks made by Colbert?”

“I did. I was afraid the first would be effaced.”

“Oh! I will know all.”

“You will know nothing, monsieur; you despise your enemy too much for that.”

“Pardon me, my dear marquise; excuse me; yes, M. Colbert is my enemy, I believe him to be so; yes, M. Colbert is a man to be dreaded, I admit. But I! I have time, and as you are here, as you have assured me of your devotion, as you have allowed me to hope for your love, as we are alone--”

“I came here to save you, Monsieur Fouquet, and not to ruin myself,” said the marquise, rising--”therefore, beware!--”

“Marquise, in truth you terrify yourself too much at least, unless this terror is but a pretext--”

“He is very deep, very deep; this M. Colbert: beware!”

Fouquet, in his turn, drew himself up. “And I?” asked he.

“And you, you have only a noble heart. Beware! beware!”

“So?”

“I have done what was right, my friend, at the risk of my reputation. Adieu!”

“Not adieu, au revoir!”

“Perhaps,” said the marquise, giving her hand to Fouquet to kiss, and walking towards the door with so firm a step, that he did not dare to bar her passage. As to Fouquet, he retook, with his head hanging down and a fixed cloud on his brow, the path of the subterranean passage along which ran the metal wires that communicated from one house to the other, transmitting, through two glasses, the wishes and signals of hidden correspondents.

CHAPTER LV.

The Abbe Fouquet.

Fouquet hastened back to his apartment by the subterranean passage, and immediately closed the mirror with the spring. He was scarcely in his well-known voice crying:--”Open the door, monseigneur, I entreat you, open the door!” Fouquet quickly restored a little order to everything that might have revealed either his absence or his agitation: he spread his papers over the desk, took up a pen, and, to gain time, said, through the closed door,--”Who is there?”

“What, monseigneur, do you not know me?” replied the voice.

“Yes, yes,” said Fouquet to himself, “yes, my friend, I know you well enough.” And then, aloud: “Is it not Gourville?”

“Why, yes, monseigneur.”

Fouquet arose, cast a look at one of his glasses, went to the door, pushed back the bolt, and Gourville entered. “Ah! monseigneur! monseigneur!” cried he, “what cruelty!”

“In what?”

“I have been a quarter of an hour imploring you to open the door, and you would not even answer me.”

“Once and for all, you know that I will not be disturbed when I am busy. Now, although I might make you an exception, Gourville, I insist upon my orders being respected by others.”

“Monseigneur, at this moment, orders, doors, bolts, locks, and walls I could have broken, forced and overthrown!”

“Ah! ah! it relates to some great event, then?” asked Fouquet.

“Oh! I assure you it does, monseigneur,” replied Gourville.

“And what is this event?” said Fouquet, a little troubled by the evident agitation of his most intimate confidant.

“There is a secret chamber of justice instituted, monseigneur.”

“I know there is, but do the members meet, Gourville?”

“They not only meet, but they have passed a sentence, monseigneur.”

“A sentence?” said the superintendent, with a shudder and pallor he could not conceal. “A sentence!--and on whom?”

“Two of your best friends.”

“Lyodot and D’Eymeris, do you mean? But what sort of a sentence?”

“Sentence of death.”

“Passed? Oh! you must be mistaken, Gourville; that is impossible.”

“Here is a copy of the sentence which the king is to sign to-day, if he has not already signed it.”

Fouquet seized the paper eagerly, read it, and returned it to Gourville. “The king will never sign that,” said he.

Gourville shook his head.

“Monseigneur, M. Colbert is a bold councilor: do not be too confident!”

“Monsieur Colbert again!” cried Fouquet. “How is it that that name rises upon all occasions to torment my ears, during the last two or three days? You make so trifling a subject of too much importance, Gourville. Let M. Colbert appear, I will face him; let him raise his head, I will crush him; but you understand, there must be an outline upon which my look may fall, there must be a surface upon which my feet may be placed.”

“Patience, monseigneur; for you do not know what Colbert is--study him quickly; it is with this dark financier as it is with meteors, which the eye never sees completely before their disastrous invasion; when we feel them we are dead.”

“Oh! Gourville, this is going too far,” replied Fouquet, smiling; “allow me, my friend, not to be so easily frightened; M. Colbert a meteor! Corbleu, we confront the meteor. Let us see acts, and not words. What has he done?”

“He has ordered two gibbets of the executioner of Paris,” answered Gourville.

Fouquet raised his head, and a flash gleamed from his eyes. “Are you sure of what you say?” cried he.

“Here is the proof, monseigneur.” And Gourville held out to the superintendent a note communicated by a certain secretary of the Hotel de Ville, who was one of Fouquet’s creatures.

“Yes, that is true,” murmured the minister; “the scaffold may be prepared, but the king has not signed; Gourville, the king will not sign.”

“I shall soon know,” said Gourville.

“How?”

"If the king has signed, the gibbets will be sent this evening to the Hotel de Ville, in order to be got up and ready by to-morrow morning."

"Oh! no, no!" cried the superintendent, once again; "you are all deceived, and deceive me in my turn; Lyodot came to see me only the day before yesterday; only three days ago I received a present of some Syracuse wine from poor D'Eymeris."

"What does that prove?" replied Gourville, "except that the chamber of justice has been secretly assembled, has deliberated in the absence of the accused, and that the whole proceeding was complete when they were arrested."

"What! are they, then, arrested?"

"No doubt they are."

"But where, when, and how have they been arrested?"

"Lyodot, yesterday at daybreak; D'Eymeris, the day before yesterday, in the evening, as he was returning from the house of his mistress; their disappearances had disturbed nobody; but at length M. Colbert all at once raised the mask, and caused the affair to be published; it is being cried by sound of trumpet, at this moment in Paris, and, in truth, monseigneur, there is scarcely anybody but yourself ignorant of the event."

Fouquet began to walk about in his chamber with an uneasiness that became more and more serious.

"What do you decide upon, monseigneur?" said Gourville.

"If it were really as easy as you say, I would go to the king," cried Fouquet. "But as I go to the Louvre, I will pass by the Hotel de Ville. We shall see if the sentence is signed."

"Incredulity! thou art the pest of all great minds," said Gourville, shrugging his shoulders.

"Gourville!"

"Yes," continued he, "and incredulity! thou ruinest, as contagion destroys the most robust health; that is to say, in an instant."

"Let us go," cried Fouquet; "desire the door to be opened, Gourville."

"Be cautious," said the latter, "the Abbe Fouquet is there."

"Ah! my brother," replied Fouquet, in a tone of annoyance; "he is there, is he? he knows all the ill news, then, and is rejoiced to bring it to me, as usual. The devil! if my brother is there, my affairs are bad, Gourville; why did you not tell me that sooner: I should have been the more readily convinced."

“Monseigneur calumniates him,” said Gourville, laughing; “if he is come, it is not with a bad intention.”

“What, do you excuse him?” cried Fouquet; “a fellow without a heart, without ideas; a devourer of wealth.”

“He knows you are rich.”

“And would ruin me.”

“No, but he would have your purse. That is all.”

“Enough! enough! A hundred thousand crowns per month, during two years. Corbleu! it is I that pay, Gourville, and I know my figures.” Gourville laughed in a silent, sly manner. “Yes, yes, you mean to say it is the king pays,” said the superintendent. “Ah, Gourville, that is a vile joke; this is not the place.”

“Monseigneur, do not be angry.”

“Well, then, send away the Abbe Fouquet; I have not a sou.” Gourville made a step towards the door. “He has been a month without seeing me,” continued Fouquet, “why could he not be two months?”

“Because he repents of living in bad company,” said Gourville, “and prefers you to all his bandits.”

“Thanks for the preference! You make a strange advocate, Gourville, to-day--the advocate of the Abbe Fouquet!”

“Eh! but everything and every man has a good side--their useful side, monseigneur.”

“The bandits whom the abbe keeps in pay and drink have their useful side, have they? Prove that, if you please.”

“Let the circumstance arise, monseigneur, and you will be very glad to have these bandits under your hand.”

“You advise me, then, to be reconciled to the abbe?” said Fouquet, ironically.

“I advise you, monseigneur, not to quarrel with a hundred or a hundred and twenty loose fellows, who, by putting their rapiers end to end, would form a cordon of steel capable of surrounding three thousand men.”

Fouquet darted a searching glance at Gourville, and passing before him,--”That is all very well; let M. l’Abbe Fouquet be introduced,” said he to the footman. “You are right, Gourville.”

Two minutes after, the Abbe Fouquet appeared in the doorway, with profound reverence. He was a man of from forty to forty-five years of age, half churchman, half soldier,--a spadassin grafted upon an abbe; upon seeing that he had not a sword by his side, you might be sure he had pistols. Fouquet saluted him more as elder brother than as a minister.

"What can I do to serve you, monsieur l'abbe?" said he.

"Oh! oh! how coldly you speak to me, brother!"

"I speak like a man who is in a hurry, monsieur."

The abbe looked maliciously at Gourville, and anxiously at Fouquet, and said, "I have three hundred pistoles to pay to M. de Bregi this evening. A play debt, a sacred debt."

"What next?" said Fouquet bravely, for he comprehended that the Abbe Fouquet would not have disturbed him for such a want.

"A thousand to my butcher, who will supply no more meat."

"Next?"

"Twelve hundred to my tailor," continued the abbe; "the fellow has made me take back seven suits of my people's, which compromises my liveries, and my mistress talks of replacing me by a farmer of the revenue, which would be a humiliation for the church."

"What else?" said Fouquet.

"You will please to remark," said the abbe, humbly, "that I have asked nothing for myself."

"That is delicate, monsieur," replied Fouquet; "so, as you see, I wait."

"And I ask nothing, oh! no,--it is not for want of need, though, I assure you."

The minister reflected for a minute. "Twelve hundred pistoles to the tailor; that seems a great deal for clothes," said he.

"I maintain a hundred men," said the abbe, proudly; "that is a charge, I believe."

"Why a hundred men?" said Fouquet. "Are you a Richelieu or a Mazarin, to require a hundred men as a guard? What use do you make of these men?--speak."

"And do you ask me that?" cried the Abbe Fouquet; "ah! how can you put such a question,--why I maintain a hundred men? Ah!"

"Why, yes, I do put that question to you. What have you to do with a hundred men?--answer."

"Ingrate!" continued the abbe, more and more affected.

"Explain yourself."

"Why, monsieur the superintendent, I only want one valet de chambre, for my part, and even if I were alone, could help myself very well; but you,

you who have so many enemies--a hundred men are not enough for me to defend you with. A hundred men!--you ought to have ten thousand. I maintain, then, these men in order that in public places, in assemblies, no voice may be raised against you; and without them, monsieur, you would be loaded with imprecations, you would be torn to pieces, you would not last a week; no, not a week, do you understand?"

"Ah! I did not know you were my champion to such an extent, monsieur le abbe."

"You doubt it!" cried the abbe. "Listen, then, to what happened, no longer ago than yesterday, in the Rue de la Hochette. A man was cheapening a fowl."

"Well, how could that injure me, abbe?"

"This way. The fowl was not fat. The purchaser refused to give eighteen sous for it, saying that he could not afford eighteen sous for the skin of a fowl from which M. Fouquet had sucked all the fat."

"Go on."

"The joke caused a deal of laughter," continued the abbe; "laughter at your expense, death to the devils! and the canaille were delighted. The joker added, 'Give me a fowl fed by M. Colbert, if you like! and I will pay all you ask.' And immediately there was a clapping of hands. A frightful scandal! you understand; a scandal which forces a brother to hide his face."

Fouquet colored. "And you veiled it?" said the superintendent.

"No, for so it happened I had one of my men in the crowd; a new recruit from the provinces, one M. Menneville, whom I like very much. He made his way through the press, saying to the joker: 'Mille barbes! Monsieur the false joker, here's a thrust for Colbert!' 'And one for Fouquet,' replied the joker. Upon which they drew in front of the cook's shop, with a hedge of the curious round them, and five hundred as curious at the windows."

"Well?" said Fouquet.

"Well, monsieur, my Menneville spitted the joker, to the great astonishment of the spectators, and said to the cook:--'Take this goose, my friend, for it is fatter than your fowl.' That is the way, monsieur," ended the abbe, triumphantly, "in which I spend my revenues; I maintain the honor of the family, monsieur." Fouquet hung his head. "And I have a hundred as good as he," continued the abbe.

"Very well," said Fouquet, "give the account to Gourville, and remain here this evening."

“Shall we have supper?”

“Yes, there will be supper.”

“But the chest is closed.”

“Gourville will open it for you. Leave us, monsieur l’abbe, leave us.”

“Then we are friends?” said the abbe, with a bow.

“Oh, yes, friends. Come, Gourville.”

“Are you going out? You will not stay to supper, then?”

“I shall be back in an hour; rest easy, abbe.” Then aside to Gourville,--”Let them put to my English horses,” said he, “and direct the coachman to stop at the Hotel de Ville de Paris.”

CHAPTER LVI.

M. de la Fontaine’s Wine.

Carriages were already bringing the guests of Fouquet to Saint-Mande; already the whole house was getting warm with the preparations for supper, when the superintendent launched his fleet horses upon the roads to Paris, and going by the quays, in order to meet fewer people on the way, soon reached the Hotel de Ville. It wanted a quarter to eight. Fouquet alighted at the corner of the Rue de Long-Pont, and, on foot, directed his course towards the Place de Greve, accompanied by Gourville. At the turning of the Place they saw a man dressed in black and violet, of dignified mien, who was preparing to stop at Vincennes. He had before him a large hamper filled with bottles, which he had just purchased at the cabaret with the sign of “L’Image-de-Notre-Dame.”

“Eh, but! that is Vatel! my maitre d’hotel!” said Fouquet to Gourville.

“Yes, monseigneur,” replied the latter.

“What can he have been doing at the sign of L’Image-de-Notre-Dame?”

“Buying wine, no doubt.”

“What! buy wine for me, at a cabaret?” said Fouquet. “My cellar, then, must be in a miserable condition!” and he advanced towards the maitre d’hotel, who was arranging his bottles in the carriage with the most minute care.

“Hola! Vatel,” said he, in the voice of a master.

“Take care, monseigneur!” said Gourville, “you will be recognized.”

“Very well! Of what consequence?--Vatel!”

The man dressed in black and violet turned round. He had a good and mild countenance, without expression--a mathematician minus the pride. A certain fire sparkled in the eyes of this personage, a rather sly smile played round his lips; but the observer might soon have remarked that this fire and this smile applied to nothing, enlightened nothing. Vatel laughed like an absent man, and amused himself like a child. At the sound of his master’s voice he turned round, exclaiming: “Oh! monseigneur!”

"Yes, it is I. What the devil are you doing here, Vatel? Wine! You are buying wine at a cabaret in the Place de Greve!"

"But, monseigneur," said Vatel, quietly after having darted a hostile glance at Gourville, "why am I interfered with here? Is my cellar kept in bad order?"

"No, certes, Vatel, no; but--"

"But what?" replied Vatel. Gourville touched Fouquet's elbow.

"Don't be angry, Vatel; I thought my cellar--your cellar--sufficiently well stocked for us to be able to dispense with recourse to the cellar of L'Image-de-Notre-Dame."

"Eh, monsieur," said Vatel, shrinking from monseigneur to monsieur with a degree of disdain: "your cellar is so well stocked that when certain of your guests dine with you they have nothing to drink."

Fouquet, in great surprise, looked at Gourville. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that your butler had not wine for all tastes, monsieur; and that M. de la Fontaine, M. Pelisson, and M. Conrart, do not drink when they come to the house--these gentlemen do not like strong wine. What is to be done, then?"

"Well, and therefore?"

"Well, then, I have found here a vin de Joigny, which they like. I know they come here once a week to drink at the Image-de-Notre-Dame. That is the reason I am making this provision."

Fouquet had no more to say; he was convinced. Vatel, on his part, had much more to say, without doubt, and it was plain he was getting warm. "It is just as if you would reproach me, monseigneur, for going to the Rue Planche Milbray, to fetch, myself, the cider M. Loret drinks when he comes to dine at your house."

"Loret drinks cider at my house!" cried Fouquet, laughing.

"Certainly he does, monsieur, and that is the reason why he dines there with pleasure."

"Vatel," cried Fouquet, pressing the hand of his maitre d'hotel, "you are a man! I thank you, Vatel, for having understood that at my house M. de la Fontaine, M. Conrart, and M. Loret are as great as dukes and peers, as great as princes, greater than myself. Vatel, you are a good servant, and I double your salary."

Vatel did not even thank his master, he merely shrugged his shoulders a little, murmuring this superb sentiment: “To be thanked for having done one’s duty is humiliating.”

“He is right,” said Gourville, as he drew Fouquet’s attention, by a gesture, to another point. He showed him a low-built tumbrel, drawn by two horses, upon which rocked two strong gibbets, bound together, back to back, by chains, whilst an archer, seated upon the cross-beam, suffered, as well as he could, with his head cast down, the comments of a hundred vagabonds, who guessed the destination of the gibbets, and were escorting them to the Hotel de Ville. Fouquet started. “It is decided, you see,” said Gourville.

“But it is not done,” replied Fouquet.

“Oh, do not flatter yourself, monseigneur; if they have thus lulled your friendship and suspicions--if things have gone so far, you will be able to undo nothing.”

“But I have not given my sanction.”

“M. de Lyonne has ratified for you.”

“I will go to the Louvre.”

“Oh, no, you will not.”

“Would you advise such baseness?” cried Fouquet, “would you advise me to abandon my friends? would you advise me, whilst able to fight, to throw the arms I hold in my hand to the ground?”

“I do not advise you to do anything of the kind, monseigneur. Are you in a position to quit the post of superintendent at this moment?”

“No.”

“Well, if the king wishes to displace you--”

“He will displace me absent as well as present.”

“Yes, but you will not have insulted him.”

“Yes, but I shall have been base; now I am not willing that my friends should die; and they shall not die!”

“For that it is necessary you should go to the Louvre, is it not?”

“Gourville!”

“Beware! once at the Louvre, you will be forced to defend your friends openly, that is to say, to make a profession of faith; or you will be forced to abandon them irrevocably.”

“Never!”

"Pardon me;--the king will propose the alternative to you, rigorously, or else you will propose it to him yourself."

"That is true."

"That is the reason why conflict must be avoided. Let us return to Saint-Mande, monseigneur."

"Gourville, I will not stir from this place, where the crime is to be carried out, where my disgrace is to be accomplished; I will not stir, I say, till I have found some means of combating my enemies."

"Monseigneur," replied Gourville, "you would excite my pity, if I did not know you for one of the great spirits of this world. You possess a hundred and fifty millions, you are equal to the king in position, and a hundred and fifty millions his superior in money. M. Colbert has not even had the wit to have the will of Mazarin accepted. Now, when a man is the richest person in a kingdom, and will take the trouble to spend the money, if things are done he does not like, it is because he is a poor man. Let us return to Saint-Mande, I say."

"To consult with Pelisson?--we will."

"No, monseigneur, to count your money."

"So be it," said Fouquet, with angry eyes;--"yes, yes, to Saint-Mande!" He got into his carriage again, and Gourville with him. Upon their road, at the end of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, they overtook the humble equipage of Vatel, who was quietly conveying home his vin de Joigny. The black horses, going at a swift pace, alarmed, as they passed, the timid hack of the maitre d'hotel, who, putting his head out at the window, cried, in a fright, "Take care of my bottles!"*

** In the five-volume edition, Volume 1 ends here.*

CHAPTER LVII.

The Gallery of Saint-Mande.

Fifty persons were waiting for the superintendent. He did not even take the time to place himself in the hands of his valet de chambre for a minute, but from the perron went straight into the premier salon. There his friends were assembled in full chat. The intendant was about to order supper to be served, but, above all, the Abbe Fouquet watched for the return of his brother, and was endeavoring to do the honors of the house in his absence. Upon the arrival of the superintendent, a murmur of joy and affection was heard; Fouquet, full of affability, good humor, and munificence, was beloved by his poets, his artists, and his men of business. His brow, upon which his little court read, as upon that of a god, all the movements of his soul, and thence drew rules of conduct,--his brow, upon which affairs of state never impressed a wrinkle, was this evening paler than usual, and more than one friendly eye remarked that pallor. Fouquet placed himself at the head of the table, and presided gayly during supper. He recounted Vatel's expedition to La Fontaine, he related the history of Menneville and the skinny fowl to Pelisson, in such a manner that all the table heard it. A tempest of laughter and jokes ensued, which was only checked by a serious and even sad gesture from Pelisson. The Abbe Fouquet, not being able to comprehend why his brother should have led the conversation in that direction, listened with all his ears, and sought in the countenance of Gourville, or in that of his brother, an explanation which nothing afforded him. Pelisson took up the matter:--"Did they mention M. Colbert, then?" said he.

"Why not?" replied Fouquet; "if true, as it is said to be, that the king has made him his intendant?" Scarcely had Fouquet uttered these words, with a marked intention, than an explosion broke forth among the guests.

"The miser!" said one.

"The mean, pitiful fellow!" said another.

"The hypocrite!" said a third.

Pelisson exchanged a meaning look with Fouquet. “Messieurs,” said he, “in truth we are abusing a man whom no one knows: it is neither charitable nor reasonable; and here is monsieur le surintendant, who, I am sure, agrees with me.”

“Entirely,” replied Fouquet. “Let the fat fowls of M. Colbert alone; our business to-day is with the faisans truffes of M. Vatel.” This speech stopped the dark cloud which was beginning to throw its shade over the guests. Gourville succeeded so well in animating the poets with the vin de Joigny; the abbe, intelligent as a man who stands in need of his host’s money, so enlivened the financiers and the men of the sword, that, amidst the vapors of this joy and the noise of conversation, inquietudes disappeared completely. The will of Cardinal Mazarin was the text of the conversation at the second course and dessert; then Fouquet ordered bowls of sweetmeats and fountains of liquor to be carried into the salon adjoining the gallery. He led the way thither, conducting by the hand a lady, the queen, by his preference, of the evening. The musicians then supped, and the promenades in the gallery and the gardens commenced, beneath a spring sky, mild and flower-scented. Pelisson then approached the superintendent, and said: “Something troubles monseigneur?”

“Greatly,” replied the minister; “ask Gourville to tell you what it is.” Pelisson, on turning round, found La Fontaine treading upon his heels. He was obliged to listen to a Latin verse, which the poet had composed upon Vatel. La Fontaine had, for an hour, been scanning this verse in all corners, seeking some one to pour it out upon advantageously. He thought he had caught Pelisson, but the latter escaped him; he turned towards Sorel, who had, himself, just composed a quatrain in honor of the supper, and the Amphytrion. La Fontaine in vain endeavored to gain attention to his verses; Sorel wanted to obtain a hearing for his quatrain. He was obliged to retreat before M. le Comte de Charost, whose arm Fouquet had just taken. L’Abbe Fouquet perceived that the poet, absent-minded, as usual, was about to follow the two talkers; and he interposed. La Fontaine seized upon him, and recited his verses. The abbe, who was quite innocent of Latin, nodded his head, in cadence, at every roll which La Fontaine impressed upon his body, according to the undulations of the dactyls and spondees. While this was going on, behind the confiture-basins, Fouquet related the event of the day to his son-in-law, M. de Charost. “We will send the idle and useless to look at the fireworks,” said Pelisson to Gourville, “whilst we converse here.”

“So be it,” said Gourville, addressing four words to Vatel. The latter then led towards the gardens the major part of the beaux, the ladies and the chatterers, whilst the men walked in the gallery, lighted by three hundred wax-lights, in the sight of all; the admirers of fireworks all ran away towards the garden. Gourville approached Fouquet, and said: “Monsieur, we are here.”

“All?” said Fouquet.

“Yes,--count.” The superintendent counted; there were eight persons. Pelisson and Gourville walked arm in arm, as if conversing upon vague and frivolous subjects. Sorel and two officers imitated them, and in an opposite direction. The Abbe Fouquet walked alone. Fouquet, with M. de Charost, walked as if entirely absorbed in the conversation of his son-in-law. “Messieurs,” said he, “let no one of you raise his head as he walks, or appear to pay attention to me; continue walking, we are alone, listen to me.”

A perfect silence ensued, disturbed only by the distant cries of the joyous guests, from the groves whence they beheld the fireworks. It was a whimsical spectacle this, of these men walking in groups, as if each one was occupied about something, whilst lending attention really only to one amongst them, who, himself, seemed to be speaking only to his companion. “Messieurs,” said Fouquet, “you have, without doubt, remarked the absence of two of my friends this evening, who were with us on Wednesday. For God’s sake, abbe, do not stop,--it is not necessary to enable you to listen; walk on, carrying your head in a natural way, and as you have excellent sight, place yourself at the window, and if any one returns towards the gallery, give us notice by coughing.”

The abbe obeyed.

“I have not observed their absence,” said Pelisson, who, at this moment, was turning his back to Fouquet, and walking the other way.

“I do not see M. Lyodot,” said Sorel, “who pays me my pension.”

“And I,” said the abbe, at the window, “do not see M. d’Eymeris, who owes me eleven hundred livres from our last game of brelan.”

“Sorel,” continued Fouquet, walking bent, and gloomily, “you will never receive your pension any more from M. Lyodot; and you, abbe, will never be paid you eleven hundred livres by M. d’Eymeris; for both are doomed to die.”

“To die!” exclaimed the whole assembly, arrested, in spite of themselves, in the comedy they were playing, by that terrible word.

“Recover yourselves, messieurs,” said Fouquet, “for perhaps we are watched--I said: to die!”

“To die!” repeated Pelisson; “what, the men I saw six days ago, full of health, gayety, and the spirit of the future! What then is man, good God! that disease should thus bring him down all at once!”

“It is not a disease,” said Fouquet.

“Then there is a remedy,” said Sorel.

“No remedy. Messieurs de Lyodot and D’Eymeris are on the eve of their last day.”

“Of what are these gentlemen dying, then?” asked an officer.

“Ask of him who kills them,” replied Fouquet.

“Who kills them? Are they being killed, then?” cried the terrified chorus.

“They do better still; the are hanging them,” murmured Fouquet, in a sinister voice, which sounded like a funeral knell in that rich gallery, splendid with pictures, flowers, velvet, and gold. Involuntarily every one stopped; the abbe quitted his window; the first fuses of the fireworks began to mount above the trees. A prolonged cry from the gardens attracted the superintendent to enjoy the spectacle. He drew near to a window, and his friends placed themselves behind him, attentive to his least wish.

“Messieurs,” said he, “M. Colbert has caused to be arrested, tried and will execute my two friends; what does it become me to do?”

“Mordieu!” exclaimed the abbe, the first one to speak, “run M. Colbert through the body.”

“Monseigneur,” said Pelisson, “you must speak to his majesty.”

“The king, my dear Pelisson, himself signed the order for the execution.”

“Well!” said the Comte de Charost, “the execution must not take place, then; that is all.”

“Impossible,” said Gourville, “unless we could corrupt the jailers.”

“Or the governor,” said Fouquet.

“This night the prisoners might be allowed to escape.”

“Which of you will take charge of the transaction?”

“I,” said the abbe, “will carry the money.”

“And I,” said Pelisson, “will be the bearer of the words.”

“Words and money,” said Fouquet, “five hundred thousand livres to the governor of the conciergerie that is sufficient; nevertheless, it shall be a million, if necessary.”

“A million!” cried the abbe; “why, for less than half, I would have half Paris sacked.”

“There must be no disorder,” said Pelisson. “The governor being gained, the two prisoners escape; once clear of the fangs of the law, they will call together the enemies of Colbert, and prove to the king that his young justice, like all other monstrosities, is not infallible.”

“Go to Paris, then, Pelisson,” said Fouquet, “and bring hither the two victims; to-morrow we shall see.”

Gourville gave Pelisson the five hundred thousand livres. “Take care the wind does not carry you away,” said the abbe; “what a responsibility. Peste! Let me help you a little.”

“Silence!” said Fouquet, “somebody is coming. Ah! the fireworks are producing a magical effect.” At this moment a shower of sparks fell rustling among the branches of the neighboring trees. Pelisson and Gourville went out together by the door of the gallery; Fouquet descended to the garden with the five last plotters.

CHAPTER LVIII.

Epicureans.

As Fouquet was giving, or appearing to give, all his attention to the brilliant illuminations, the languishing music of the violins and hautboys, the sparkling sheaves of the artificial fires, which, inflaming the heavens with glowing reflections, marked behind the trees the dark profile of the donjon of Vincennes; as, we say, the superintendent was smiling on the ladies and the poets, the fete was every whit as gay as usual; and Vatel, whose restless, even jealous look, earnestly consulted the aspect of Fouquet, did not appear dissatisfied with the welcome given to the ordering of the evening's entertainment. The fireworks over, the company dispersed about the gardens and beneath the marble porticoes with the delightful liberty which reveals in the master of the house so much forgetfulness of greatness, so much courteous hospitality, so much magnificent carelessness. The poets wandered about, arm in arm, through the groves; some reclined upon beds of moss, to the great damage of velvet clothes and curled heads, into which little dried leaves and blades of grass insinuated themselves. The ladies, in small numbers, listened to the songs of the singers and the verses of the poets; others listened to the prose, spoken with much art, by men who were neither actors nor poets, but to whom youth and solitude gave an unaccustomed eloquence, which appeared to them better than everything else in the world. "Why," said La Fontaine, "does not our master Epicurus descend into the garden? Epicurus never abandoned his pupils; the master is wrong."

"Monsieur," said Conrart, "you yourself are in the wrong persisting in decorating yourself with the name of an Epicurean; indeed, nothing here reminds me of the doctrine of the philosopher of Gargetta."

"Bah!" said La Fontaine, "is it not written that Epicurus purchased a large garden and lived in it tranquilly with his friends?"

"That is true."

"Well, has not M. Fouquet purchased a large garden at Saint-Mande, and do we not live here very tranquilly with him and his friends?"

“Yes, without doubt; unfortunately it is neither the garden nor the friends which constitute the resemblance. Now, what likeness is there between the doctrine of Epicurus and that of M. Fouquet?”

“This--pleasure gives happiness.”

“Next?”

“Well, I do not think we ought to consider ourselves unfortunate, for my part, at least. A good repast--vin de Joigny, which they have the delicacy to go and fetch for me from my favorite cabaret--not one impertinence heard during a supper an hour long, in spite of the presence of ten millionaires and twenty poets.”

“I stop you there. You mentioned vin de Joigny, and a good repast; do you persist in that?”

“I persist,--anteco, as they say at Port Royal.”

“Then please to recollect that the great Epicurus lived, and made his pupils live, upon bread, vegetables, and water.”

“That is not certain,” said La Fontaine; “and you appear to me to be confounding Epicurus with Pythagoras, my dear Conrart.”

“Remember, likewise, that the ancient philosopher was rather a bad friend of the gods and the magistrates.”

“Oh! that is what I will not admit,” replied La Fontaine. “Epicurus was like M. Fouquet.”

“Do not compare him to monsieur le surintendant,” said Conrart, in an agitated voice, “or you would accredit the reports which are circulating concerning him and us.”

“What reports?”

“That we are bad Frenchmen, lukewarm with regard to the king, deaf to the law.”

“I return, then, to my text,” said La Fontaine. “Listen, Conrart, this is the morality of Epicurus, whom, besides, I consider, if I must tell you so, as a myth. Antiquity is mostly mythical. Jupiter, if we give a little attention to it, is life. Alcides is strength. The words are there to bear me out; Zeus, that is, zen, to live. Alcides, that is, alce, vigor. Well, Epicurus, that is mild watchfulness, that is protection; now who watches better over the state, or who protects individuals better than M. Fouquet does?”

“You talk etymology and not morality; I say that we modern Epicureans are indifferent citizens.”

“Oh!” cried La Fontaine, “if we become bad citizens, it is not through following the maxims of our master. Listen to one of his principal aphorisms.”

“I--will.”

“Pray for good leaders.”

“Well?”

“Well! what does M. Fouquet say to us every day? ‘When shall we be governed?’ Does he say so? Come, Conrart, be frank.”

“He says so, that is true.”

“Well, that is a doctrine of Epicurus.”

“Yes; but that is a little seditious, observe.”

“What! seditious to wish to be governed by good heads or leaders?”

“Certainly, when those who govern are bad.”

“Patience, I have a reply for all.”

“Even for what I have just said to you?”

“Listen! would you submit to those who govern ill? Oh! it is written: Cacos politeuousi. You grant me the text?”

“Pardieu! I think so. Do you know, you speak Greek as well as Aesop did, my dear La Fontaine.”

“Is there any wickedness in that, my dear Conrart?”

“God forbid I should say so.”

“Then let us return to M. Fouquet. What did he repeat to us all the day? Was it not this? ‘What a cuistre is that Mazarin! what an ass! what a leech! We must, however, submit to that fellow.’ Now, Conrart, did he say so, or did he not?”

“I confess that he said it, and even perhaps too often.”

“Like Epicurus, my friend, still like Epicurus; I repeat, we are Epicureans, and that is very amusing.”

“Yes; but I am afraid there will rise up, by the side of us, a sect like that of Epictetus; you know him well; the philosopher of Hierapolis, he who called bread luxury, vegetables prodigality, and clear water drunkenness; he who, being beaten by his master, said to him, grumbling a little it is true, but without being angry, ‘I will lay a wager you have broken my leg!’--and who won his wager.”

“He was a goose, that fellow Epictetus.”

“Granted, but he might easily become the fashion by only changing his name into that of Colbert.”

“Bah!” replied La Fontaine, “that is impossible. Never will you find Colbert in Epictetus.”

“You are right, I shall find--Coluber there, at the most.”

“Ah! you are beaten, Conrart; you are reduced to a play upon words. M. Arnaud pretends that I have no logic; I have more than M. Nicole.”

“Yes,” replied Conrart, “you have logic, but you are a Jansenist.”

This peroration was hailed with a boisterous shout of laughter; by degrees the promenaders had been attracted by the exclamations of the two disputants around the arbor under which they were arguing. The discussion had been religiously listened to, and Fouquet himself, scarcely able to suppress his laughter, had given an example of moderation. But with the denouement of the scene he threw off all restraint, and laughed aloud. Everybody laughed as he did, and the two philosophers were saluted with unanimous felicitations. La Fontaine, however, was declared conqueror, on account of his profound erudition and his irrefragable logic. Conrart obtained the compensation due to an unsuccessful combatant; he was praised for the loyalty of his intentions, and the purity of his conscience.

At the moment when this jollity was manifesting itself by the most lively demonstrations, when the ladies were reproaching the two adversaries with not having admitted women into the system of Epicurean happiness, Gourville was seen hastening from the other end of the garden, approaching Fouquet, and detaching him, by his presence alone, from the group. The superintendent preserved on his face the smile and character of carelessness; but scarcely was he out of sight than he threw off the mask.

“Well!” said he, eagerly, “where is Pelisson! What is he doing?”

“Pelisson has returned from Paris.”

“Has he brought back the prisoners?”

“He has not even seen the concierge of the prison.”

“What! did he not tell him he came from me?”

“He told him so, but the concierge sent him this reply: ‘If any one came to me from M. Fouquet, he would have a letter from M. Fouquet.’“

“Oh!” cried the latter, “if a letter is all he wants--”

“It is useless, monsieur!” said Pelisson, showing himself at the corner of the little wood, “useless! Go yourself, and speak in your own name.”

“You are right. I will go in, as if to work; let the horses remain harnessed, Pelisson. Entertain my friends, Gourville.”

“One last word of advice, monseigneur,” replied the latter.

“Speak, Gourville.”

“Do not go to the concierge save at the last minute; it is brave, but it is not wise. Excuse me, Monsieur Pelisson, if I am not of the same opinion as you; but take my advice, monseigneur, send again a message to this concierge,--he is a worthy man, but do not carry it yourself.”

“I will think of it,” said Fouquet; “besides, we have all the night before us.”

“Do not reckon too much on time; were the hours we have twice as many as they are, they would not be too much,” replied Pelisson; “it is never a fault to arrive too soon.”

“Adieu!” said the superintendent; “come with me, Pelisson. Gourville, I commend my guests to your care.” And he set off. The Epicureans did not perceive that the head of the school had left them; the violins continued playing all night long.

CHAPTER LIX.

A Quarter of an Hour’s Delay.

Fouquet, on leaving his house for the second time that day, felt himself less heavy and less disturbed than might have been expected. He turned towards Pelisson, who was meditating in the corner of the carriage some good arguments against the violent proceedings of Colbert.

“My dear Pelisson,” said Fouquet, “it is a great pity you are not a woman.”

“I think, on the contrary, it is very fortunate,” replied Pelisson, “for, monseigneur, I am excessively ugly.”

“Pelisson! Pelisson!” said the superintendent, laughing: “You repeat too often, you are ‘ugly’, not to leave people to believe that it gives you much pain.”

“In fact it does, monseigneur, much pain; there is no man more unfortunate than I: I was handsome, the small-pox rendered me hideous; I am deprived of a great means of attraction; now, I am your principal clerk, or something of that sort; I take great interest in your affairs, and if, at this moment, I were a pretty woman, I could render you an important service.”

“What?”

“I would go and find the concierge of the Palais. I would seduce him, for he is a gallant man, extravagantly partial to women; then I would get away our two prisoners.”

“I hope to be able to do so myself, although I am not a pretty woman,” replied Fouquet.

“Granted, monseigneur; but you are compromising yourself very much.”

“Oh!” cried Fouquet, suddenly, with one of those secret transports which the generous blood of youth, or the remembrance of some sweet emotion, infuses into the heart. “Oh! I know a woman who will enact the personage we stand in need of, with the lieutenant-governor of the concierge.”

“And, on my part, I know fifty, monseigneur; fifty trumpets, which will inform the universe of your generosity, of your devotion to your friends, and, consequently, will ruin you sooner or later in ruining themselves.”

"I do not speak of such women, Pelisson; I speak of a noble and beautiful creature who joins to the intelligence and wit of her sex the valor and coolness of ours; I speak of a woman, handsome enough to make the walls of a prison bow down to salute her, discreet enough to let no one suspect by whom she has been sent."

"A treasure!" said Pelisson; "you would make a famous present to monsieur the governor of the concierge! Peste! monseigneur, he might have his head cut off; but he would, before dying, have had such happiness as no man had enjoyed before him."

"And I add," said Fouquet, "that the concierge of the Palais would not have his head cut off, for he would receive of me my horses, to effect his escape, and five hundred thousand livres wherewith to live comfortably in England: I add, that this lady, my friend, would give him nothing but the horses and the money. Let us go and seek her, Pelisson."

The superintendent reached forth his hand towards the golden and silken cord placed in the interior of his carriage, but Pelisson stopped him. "Monseigneur," said he, "you are going to lose as much time in seeking this lady as Columbus took to discover the new world. Now, we have but two hours in which we can possibly succeed; the concierge once gone to bed, how shall we get at him without making a disturbance? When daylight dawns, how can we conceal our proceedings? Go, go yourself, monseigneur, and do not seek either woman or angel to-night."

"But, my dear Pelisson, here we are before her door."

"What! before the angel's door?"

"Why, yes."

"This is the hotel of Madame de Belliere!"

"Hush!"

"Ah! Good Lord!" exclaimed Pelisson.

"What have you to say against her?"

"Nothing, alas! and it is that which causes my despair. Nothing, absolutely nothing. Why can I not, on the contrary, say ill enough of her to prevent your going to her?"

But Fouquet had already given orders to stop, and the carriage was motionless. "Prevent me!" cried Fouquet; "why, no power on earth should prevent my going to pay my compliments to Madame de Plessis-Belliere; besides, who knows that we shall not stand in need of her!"

"No, monseigneur, no!"

“But I do not wish you to wait for me, Pelisson,” replied Fouquet, sincerely courteous.

“The more reason I should, monseigneur; knowing that you are keeping me waiting, you will, perhaps, stay a shorter time. Take care! You see there is a carriage in the courtyard: she has some one with her.” Fouquet leaned towards the steps of the carriage. “One word more,” cried Pelisson; “do not go to this lady till you have been to the concierge, for Heaven’s sake!”

“Eh! five minutes, Pelisson,” replied Fouquet, alighting at the steps of the hotel, leaving Pelisson in the carriage, in a very ill-humor. Fouquet ran upstairs, told his name to the footman, which excited an eagerness and a respect that showed the habit the mistress of the house had of honoring that name in her family. “Monsieur le surintendant,” cried the marquise, advancing, very pale, to meet him; “what an honor! what an unexpected pleasure!” said she. Then, in a low voice, “Take care!” added the marquise, “Marguerite Vanel is here!”

“Madame,” replied Fouquet, rather agitated, “I came on business. One single word, and quickly, if you please!” And he entered the salon. Madame Vanel had risen, paler, more livid, than Envy herself. Fouquet in vain addressed her, with the most agreeable, most pacific salutation; she only replied by a terrible glance darted at the marquise and Fouquet. This keen glance of a jealous woman is a stiletto which pierces every cuirass; Marguerite Vanel plunged it straight into the hearts of the two confidants. She made a courtesy to her friend, a more profound one to Fouquet, and took leave, under pretense of having a number of visits to make, without the marquise trying to prevent her, or Fouquet, a prey to anxiety, thinking further about her. She was scarcely out of the room, and Fouquet left alone with the marquise, before he threw himself on his knees, without saying a word. “I expected you,” said the marquise, with a tender sigh.

“Oh! no,” cried he, “or you would have sent away that woman.”

“She has been here little more than half an hour, and I had no expectation she would come this evening.”

“You love me just a little, then, marquise?”

“That is not the question now; it is of your danger; how are your affairs going on?”

“I am going this evening to get my friends out of the prisons of the Palais.”

“How will you do that?”

"By buying and bribing the governor."

"He is a friend of mine; can I assist you, without injuring you?"

"Oh! marquise, it would be a signal service; but how can you be employed without your being compromised? Now, never shall my life, my power, or even my liberty, be purchased at the expense of a single tear from your eyes, or of one frown of pain upon your brow."

"Monseigneur, no more such words, they bewilder me; I have been culpable in trying to serve you, without calculating the extent of what I was doing. I love you in reality, as a tender friend; and as a friend, I am grateful for your delicate attentions--but, alas!--alas! you will never find a mistress in me."

"Marquise!" cried Fouquet, in a tone of despair; "why not?"

"Because you are too much beloved," said the young woman, in a low voice; "because you are too much beloved by too many people--because the splendor of glory and fortune wound my eyes, whilst the darkness of sorrow attracts them; because, in short, I, who have repulsed you in your proud magnificence; I who scarcely looked at you in your splendor, I came, like a mad woman, to throw myself, as it were, into your arms, when I saw a misfortune hovering over your head. You understand me now, monseigneur? Become happy again, that I may remain chaste in heart and in thought: your misfortune entails my ruin."

"Oh! madame," said Fouquet, with an emotion he had never before felt; "were I to fall to the lowest degree of human misery, and hear from your mouth that word which you now refuse me, that day, madame, you will be mistaken in your noble egotism; that day you will fancy you are consoling the most unfortunate of men, and you will have said, I love you, to the most illustrious, the most delighted, the most triumphant of the happy beings of this world."

He was still at her feet, kissing her hand, when Pelisson entered precipitately, crying, in very ill-humor, "Monseigneur! madame! for Heaven's sake! excuse me. Monseigneur, you have been here half an hour. Oh! do not both look at me so reproachfully. Madame, pray who is that lady who left your house soon after monseigneur came in?"

"Madame Vanel," said Fouquet.

"Ha!" cried Pelisson, "I was sure of that."

"Well! what then?"

"Why, she got into her carriage, looking deadly pale."

“What consequence is that to me?”

“Yes, but what she said to her coachman is of consequence to you.”

“Kind heaven!” cried the marquise, “what was that?”

“To M. Colbert’s!” said Pelisson, in a hoarse voice.

“Bon Dieu!--begone, begone, monseigneur!” replied the marquise, pushing Fouquet out of the salon, whilst Pelisson dragged him by the hand.

“Am I, then, indeed,” said the superintendent, “become a child, to be frightened by a shadow?”

“You are a giant,” said the marquise, “whom a viper is trying to bite in the heel.”

Pelisson continued to drag Fouquet to the carriage. “To the Palais at full speed!” cried Pelisson to the coachman. The horses set off like lightening; no obstacle relaxed their pace for an instant. Only, at the arcade Saint-Jean, as they were coming out upon the Place de Greve, a long file of horsemen, barring the narrow passage, stopped the carriage of the superintendent. There was no means of forcing this barrier; it was necessary to wait till the mounted archers of the watch, for it was they who stopped the way, had passed with the heavy carriage they were escorting, and which ascended rapidly towards the Place Baudoyer. Fouquet and Pelisson took no further account of this circumstance beyond deploring the minute’s delay they had thus to submit to. They entered the habitation of the concierge du Palais five minutes after. That officer was still walking about in the front court. At the name of Fouquet, whispered in his ear by Pelisson, the governor eagerly approached the carriage, and, hat in hand, was profuse in his attentions. “What an honor for me, monseigneur,” said he.

“One word, monsieur le governeur, will you take the trouble to get into my carriage?” The officer placed himself opposite Fouquet in the coach.

“Monsieur,” said Fouquet, “I have a service to ask of you.”

“Speak, monseigneur.”

“A service that will be compromising for you, monsieur, but which will assure to you forever my protection and my friendship.”

“Were it to cast myself into the fire for you, monseigneur, I would do it.”

“That is well,” said Fouquet; “what I require is much more simple.”

“That being so, monseigneur, what is it?”

“To conduct me to the chamber of Messieurs Lyodot and D’Eymeris.”

“Will monseigneur have the kindness to say for what purpose?”

"I will tell you that in their presence, monsieur; at the same time that I will give you ample means of palliating this escape."

"Escape! Why, then, monseigneur does not know?"

"What?"

"That Messieurs Lyodot and D'Eymeris are no longer here."

"Since when?" cried Fouquet, in great agitation.

"About a quarter of an hour."

"Whither have they gone, then?"

"To Vincennes--to the donjon."

"Who took them from here?"

"An order from the king."

"Oh! woe! woe!" exclaimed Fouquet, striking his forehead. "Woe!" and without saying a single word more to the governor, he threw himself back into his carriage, despair in his heart, and death on his countenance.

"Well!" said Pelisson, with great anxiety.

"Our friends are lost. Colbert is conveying them to the donjon. They crossed our path under the arcade Saint-Jean."

Pelisson, struck as by a thunderbolt, made no reply. With a single reproach he would have killed his master. "Where is monseigneur going?" said the footman.

"Home--to Paris. You, Pelisson, return to Saint-Mande, and bring the Abbe Fouquet to me within an hour. Begone!"

CHAPTER LX.

Plan of Battle.

The night was already far advanced when the Abbe Fouquet joined his brother. Gourville had accompanied him. These three men, pale with dread of future events, resembled less three powers of the day than three conspirators, united by one single thought of violence. Fouquet walked for a long time, with his eyes fixed upon the floor, striking his hands one against the other. At length, taking courage, in the midst of a deep sigh: “Abbe,” said he, “you were speaking to me only to-day of certain people you maintain.”

“Yes, monsieur,” replied the abbe.

“Tell me precisely who are these people.” The abbe hesitated.

“Come! no fear, I am not threatening; no romancing, for I am not joking.”

“Since you demand the truth, monseigneur, here it is:--I have a hundred and twenty friends or companions of pleasure, who are sworn to me as the thief is to the gallows.”

“And you think you can depend on them?”

“Entirely.”

“And you will not compromise yourself?”

“I will not even make my appearance.”

“Are they men of resolution?”

“They would burn Paris, if I promised them they should not be burnt in turn.”

“The thing I ask of you, abbe,” said Fouquet, wiping the sweat which fell from his brow, “is to throw your hundred and twenty men upon the people I will point out to you, at a certain moment given--is it possible?”

“It will not be the first time such a thing has happened to them, monseigneur.”

“That is well: but would these bandits attack an armed force?”

“They are used to that.”

“Then get your hundred and twenty men together, abbe.”

“Directly. But where?”

"On the road to Vincennes, to-morrow, at two o'clock precisely."

"To carry off Lyodot and D'Eymeris? There will be blows to be got!"

"A number, no doubt; are you afraid?"

"Not for myself, but for you."

"Your men will know, then, what they have to do?"

"They are too intelligent not to guess it. Now, a minister who gets up a riot against his king--exposes himself--"

"Of what importance is that to you, I pray? Besides, if I fall, you fall with me."

"It would then be more prudent, monsieur, not to stir in the affair, and leave the king to take this little satisfaction."

"Think well of this, abbe, Lyodot and D'Eymeris at Vincennes are a prelude of ruin for my house. I repeat it--I arrested, you will be imprisoned--I imprisoned, you will be exiled."

"Monsieur, I am at your orders; have you any to give me?"

"What I told you--I wish that, to-morrow, the two financiers of whom they mean to make victims, whilst there remain so many criminals unpunished, should be snatched from the fury of my enemies. Take your measures accordingly. Is it possible?"

"It is possible."

"Describe your plan."

"It is of rich simplicity. The ordinary guard at executions consists of twelve archers."

"There will be a hundred to-morrow."

"I reckon so. I even say more--there will be two hundred."

"Then your hundred and twenty men will not be enough."

"Pardon me. In every crowd composed of a hundred thousand spectators, there are ten thousand bandits or cut-purses--only they dare not take the initiative."

"Well?"

"There will then be, to-morrow, on the Place de Greve, which I choose as my battle-field, ten thousand auxiliaries to my hundred and twenty men. The attack commenced by the latter, the others will finish it."

"That all appears feasible. But what will be done with regard to the prisoners upon the Place de Greve?"

"This: they must be thrust into some house--that will make a siege necessary to get them out again. And stop! here is another idea, more sublime still: certain houses have two issues--one upon the Place, and the other into the Rue de la Mortellerie, or la Vannerie, or la Tixeranderie. The prisoners entering by one door will go out at another."

"Yes; but fix upon something positive."

"I am seeking to do so."

"And I," cried Fouquet, "I have found it. Listen to what has occurred to me at this moment."

"I am listening."

Fouquet made a sign to Gourville, who appeared to understand. "One of my friends lends me sometimes the keys of a house which he rents, Rue Baudoyer, the spacious gardens of which extend behind a certain house on the Place de Greve."

"That is the place for us," said the abbe. "What house?"

"A cabaret, pretty well frequented, whose sign represents the image of Notre Dame."

"I know it," said the abbe.

"This cabaret has windows opening upon the Place, a place of exit into the court, which must abut upon the gardens of my friend by a door of communication."

"Good!" said the abbe.

"Enter by the cabaret, take the prisoners in; defend the door while you enable them to fly by the garden and the Place Baudoyer."

"That is all plain. Monsieur, you would make an excellent general, like monsieur le prince."

"Have you understood me?"

"Perfectly well."

"How much will it amount to, to make your bandits all drunk with wine, and to satisfy them with gold?"

"Oh, monsieur, what an expression! Oh! monsieur, if they heard you! some of them are very susceptible."

"I mean to say they must be brought to the point where they cannot tell the heavens from the earth; for I shall to-morrow contend with the king; and when I fight I mean to conquer--please to understand."

"It shall be done, monsieur. Give me your other ideas."

"That is your business."

"Then give me your purse."

"Gourville, count a hundred thousand livres for the abbe."

"Good! and spare nothing, did you not say?"

"Nothing."

"That is well."

"Monseigneur," objected Gourville, "if this should be known, we should lose our heads."

"Eh! Gourville," replied Fouquet, purple with anger, "you excite my pity. Speak for yourself, if you please. My head does not shake in that manner upon my shoulders. Now, abbe, is everything arranged?"

"Everything."

"At two o'clock to-morrow."

"At twelve, because it will be necessary to prepare our auxiliaries in a secret manner."

"That is true; do not spare the wine of the cabaretier."

"I will spare neither his wine nor his house," replied the abbe, with a sneering laugh. "I have my plan, I tell you; leave me to set it in operation, and you shall see."

"Where shall you be yourself?"

"Everywhere; nowhere."

"And how shall I receive information?"

"By a courier whose horse shall be kept in the very same garden of your friend. A propos, the name of your friend?"

Fouquet looked again at Gourville. The latter came to the succor of his master, saying, ["The name is of no importance."

Fouquet continued, "Accompany] monsieur l'abbe, for several reasons, but the house is easily to be known--the 'Image-de-Notre-Dame' in the front, a garden, the only one in the quarter, behind."

** [The text in the print copy is corrupt at this point.*

The suggested reading, in brackets, is by John Bursey.]

"Good, good! I will go and give notice to my soldiers."

"Accompany him, Gourville," said Fouquet, "and count him down the money. One moment, abbe--one moment, Gourville--what name will be given to this carrying off?"

"A very natural one, monsieur--the Riot."

"The riot on account of what? For, if ever the people of Paris are disposed to pay their court to the king, it is when he hangs financiers."

"I will manage that," said the abbe.

"Yes; but you may manage it badly, and people will guess."

“Not at all,--not at all. I have another idea.”

“What is that?”

“My men shall cry out, ‘Colbert, vive Colbert!’ and shall throw themselves upon the prisoners as if they would tear them in pieces, and shall force them from the gibbets, as too mild a punishment.”

“Ah! that is an idea,” said Gourville. “Peste! monsieur l’abbe, what an imagination you have!”

“Monsieur, we are worthy of our family,” replied the abbe, proudly.

“Strange fellow,” murmured Fouquet. Then he added, “That is ingenious. Carry it out, but shed no blood.”

Gourville and the abbe set off together, with their heads full of the meditated riot. The superintendent laid himself down upon some cushions, half valiant with respect to the sinister projects of the morrow, half dreaming of love.

CHAPTER LXI.

The Cabaret of the Image-de-Notre-Dame.

At two o’clock the next day fifty thousand spectators had taken their position upon the Place, around the two gibbets which had been elevated between the Quai de la Greve and the Quai Pelletier; one close to the other, with their backs to the embankment of the river. In the morning also, all the sworn criers of the good city of Paris had traversed the quarters of the city, particularly the halles and the faubourgs, announcing with their hoarse and indefatigable voices the great justice done by the king upon two speculators, two thieves, devourers of the people. And these people, whose interests were so warmly looked after, in order not to fail in respect for their king, quitted shops, stalls, and atliers, to go and evince a little gratitude to Louis XIV., absolutely like invited guests, who feared to commit an impoliteness in not repairing to the house of him who had invited them. According to the tenor of the sentence, which the criers read aloud and incorrectly, two farmers of the revenues, monopolists of money, dilapidators of the royal provisions, extortioners, and forgers, were about to undergo capital punishment on the Place de Greve, with their names blazoned over their heads, according to their sentence. As to those names, the sentence made no mention of them. The curiosity of the Parisians was at its height, and, as we have said, an immense crowd waited with feverish impatience the hour fixed for the execution. The news had already spread that the prisoners, transferred to the Chateau of Vincennes, would be conducted from that prison to the Place de Greve. Consequently, the faubourg and the Rue Saint Antoine were crowded; for the population of Paris in those days of great executions was divided into two categories: those who came to see the condemned pass--these were of timid and mild hearts, but philosophically curious--and those who wished to see the condemned die--these had hearts that hungered for sensation. On this day M. d’Artagnan received his last instructions from the king, and made his adieus to his friends, the number of whom was, at the moment, reduced to Planchet, then he traced the plan of his day, as every busy man whose moments are counted ought to do, because he appreciates their importance.

"My departure is to be," said he, "at break of day, three o'clock in the morning; I have then fifteen hours before me. Take from them the six hours of sleep which are indispensable for me--six; one hour for repasts--seven; one hour for a farewell visit to Athos--eight; two hours for chance circumstances--total, ten. There are then five hours left. One hour to get my money,--that is, to have payment refused by M. Fouquet; another hour to go and receive my money of M. Colbert, together with his questions and grimaces; one hour to look over my clothes and arms, and get my boots cleaned. I still have two hours left. Mordioux! how rich I am." And so saying, D'Artagnan felt a strange joy, a joy of youth, a perfume of those great and happy years of former times mount into his brain and intoxicate him. "During these two hours I will go," said the musketeer, "and take my quarter's rent of the Image-de-Notre-Dame. That will be pleasant. Three hundred and seventy-five livres! Mordioux! but that is astonishing! If the poor man who has but one livre in his pocket, found a livre and twelve deniers, that would be justice, that would be excellent; but never does such a godsend fall to the lot of the poor man. The rich man, on the contrary, makes himself revenue with his money, which he does not even touch. Here are three hundred and seventy-five livres which fall to me from heaven. I will go then to the Image-de-Notre-Dame, and drink a glass of Spanish wine with my tenant, which he cannot fail to offer me. But order must be observed, Monsieur d'Artagnan, order must be observed! Let us organize our time, then, and distribute the employment of it! Art. 1st, Athos; Art. 2d, the Image-de-Notre-Dame; Art. 3rd, M. Fouquet; Art. 4th, M. Colbert; Art. 5th, supper; Art. 6th, clothes, boots, horse, portmanteau; Art. 7th and last, sleep."

In consequence of this arrangement, D'Artagnan went straight to the Comte de la Fere, to whom, modestly and ingenuously, he related a part of his fortunate adventures. Athos had not been without uneasiness on the subject of D'Artagnan's visit to the king; but few words sufficed for an explanation of that. Athos divined that Louis had charged D'Artagnan with some important mission, and did not even make an effort to draw the secret from him. He only recommended him to take care of himself, and offered discreetly to accompany him if that were desirable.

"But, my dear friend," said D'Artagnan, "I am going nowhere."

"What! you come and bid me adieu, and are going nowhere?"

"Oh! yes, yes," replied D'Artagnan, coloring a little, "I am going to make an acquisition."

"That is quite another thing. Then I change my formula. Instead of 'Do not get yourself killed,' I will say,--'Do not get yourself robbed.'"

"My friend, I will inform you if I set eyes on any property that pleases me, and shall expect you will favor me with your opinion."

"Yes, yes," said Athos, too delicate to permit himself even the consolation of a smile. Raoul imitated the paternal reserve. But D'Artagnan thought it would appear too mysterious to leave his friends under a pretense, without even telling them the route he was about to take.

"I have chosen Le Mans," said he to Athos. "It is a good country?"

"Excellent, my friend," replied the count, without making him observe that Le Mans was in the same directions as La Touraine, and that by waiting two days, at most, he might travel with a friend. But D'Artagnan, more embarrassed than the count, dug, at every explanation, deeper into the mud, into which he sank by degrees. "I shall set out to-morrow at daybreak," said he at last. "Till that time, will you come with me, Raoul?"

"Yes, monsieur le chevalier," said the young man, "if monsieur le comte does not want me."

"No, Raoul; I am to have an audience to-day of Monsieur, the king's brother; that is all I have to do."

Raoul asked Grimaud for his sword, which the old man brought him immediately. "Now then," added D'Artagnan, opening his arms to Athos, "adieu, my dear friend!" Athos held him in a long embrace, and the musketeer, who knew his discretion so well, murmured in his ear--"An affair of state," to which Athos only replied by a pressure of the hand, still more significant. They then separated. Raoul took the arm of his old friend, who led him along the Rue Saint-Honore. "I an conducting you to the abode of the god Plutus," said D'Artagnan to the young man; "prepare yourself. The whole day you will witness the piling up of crowns. Heavens! how I am changed!"

"Oh! what numbers of people there are in the street!" said Raoul.

"Is there a procession to-day?" asked D'Artagnan of a passer-by.

"Monsieur, it is a hanging," replied the man.

"What! a hanging at the Greve?" said D'Artagnan.

"Yes, monsieur."

“The devil take the rogue who gets himself hung the day I want to go and take my rent!” cried D’Artagnan. “Raoul, did you ever see anybody hung?”

“Never, monsieur--thank God!”

“Oh! how young that sounds! If you were on guard in the trenches, as I was, and a spy! But, pardon me, Raoul, I am doting--you are quite right, it is a hideous sight to see a person hung! At what hour do they hang them, monsieur, if you please?”

“Monsieur,” replied the stranger respectfully, delighted at joining conversation with two men of the sword, “it will take place at about three o’clock.”

“Aha! it is now only half-past one; let us step out, we shall be there in time to touch my three hundred and seventy-five livres, and get away before the arrival of the malefactor.”

“Malefactors, monsieur,” continued the bourgeois; “there are two of them.”

“Monsieur, I return to you many thanks,” said D’Artagnan, who as he grew older, had become polite to a degree. Drawing Raoul along, he directed his course rapidly in the direction of La Greve. Without that great experience musketeers have of a crowd, to which were joined an irresistible strength of wrist, and an uncommon suppleness of shoulders, our two travelers would not have arrived at their place of destination. They followed the line of the Quai, which they had gained on quitting the Rue Saint-Honore, where they left Athos. D’Artagnan went first; his elbow, his wrist, his shoulder formed three wedges which he knew how to insinuate with skill into the groups, to make them split and separate like firewood. He made use sometimes of the hilt of his sword as an additional help: introducing it between ribs that were too rebellious, making it take the part of a lever or crowbar, to separate husband from wife, uncle from nephew, and brother from brother. And all that was done so naturally, and with such gracious smiles, that people must have had ribs of bronze not to cry thank you when the wrist made its play, or hearts of diamond not to be enchanted when such a bland smile enlivened the lips of the musketeer. Raoul, following his friend, cajoled the women who admired his beauty, pushed back the men who felt the rigidity of his muscles, and both opened, thanks to these maneuvers, the compact and muddy tide of the populace. They arrived in sight of the two gibbets, from which Raoul turned away his eyes in disgust. As for D’Artagnan, he did not even see them; his house with its gabled roof, its windows crowded with the curious, attracted and even absorbed all the attention he was capable of. He distinguished in the Place and around the houses a good number of musketeers on leave, who, some with women, others with friends, awaited the crowning ceremony. What rejoiced him above all was to see that his tenant, the cabaretier, was so busy he hardly knew which way to turn. Three lads could not supply the drinkers. They filled the shop, the chambers, and the court, even. D'Artagnan called Raoul's attention to this concourse, adding: "The fellow will have no excuse for not paying his rent. Look at those drinkers, Raoul, one would say they were jolly companions. Mordioux! why, there is no room anywhere!" D'Artagnan, however, contrived to catch hold of the master by the corner of his apron, and to make himself known to him.

"Ah, monsieur le chevalier," said the cabaretier, half distracted, "one minute if you please. I have here a hundred mad devils turning my cellar upside down."

"The cellar, if you like, but not the money-box."

"Oh, monsieur, your thirty-seven and a half pistoles are all counted out ready for you, upstairs in my chamber; but there are in that chamber thirty customers, who are sucking the staves of a little barrel of Oporto which I tapped for them this very morning. Give me a minute,--only a minute?"

"So be it; so be it."

"I will go," said Raoul, in a low voice, to D'Artagnan; "this hilarity is vile!"

"Monsieur," replied D'Artagnan, sternly, "you will please to remain where you are. The soldier ought to familiarize himself with all kinds of spectacles. There are in the eye, when it is young, fibers which we must learn how to harden; and we are not truly generous and good save from the moment when the eye has become hardened, and the heart remains tender. Besides, my little Raoul, would you leave me alone here? That would be very wrong of you. Look, there is yonder in the lower court a tree, and under the shade of that tree we shall breathe more freely than in this hot atmosphere of spilt wine."

From the spot on which they had placed themselves the two new guests of the Image-de-Notre-Dame heard the ever-increasing hubbub of the tide of people, and lost neither a cry nor a gesture of the drinkers, at tables in the cabaret, or disseminated in the chambers. If D'Artagnan had wished to place himself as a vidette for an expedition, he could not have succeeded better. The tree under which he and Raoul were seated covered them with its already thick foliage; it was a low, thick chestnut-tree, with inclined branches, that cast their shade over a table so dilapidated the drinkers had abandoned it. We said that from this post D'Artagnan saw everything. He observed the goings and comings of the waiters; the arrival of fresh drinkers; the welcome, sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile, given to the newcomers by others already installed. He observed all this to amuse himself, for the thirty-seven and a half pistoles were a long time coming. Raoul recalled his attention to it. "Monsieur," said he, "you do not hurry your tenant, and the condemned will soon be here. There will then be such a press we shall not be able to get out."

"You are right," said the musketeer; "Hola! oh! somebody there! Mordioux!" But it was in vain he cried and knocked upon the wreck of the old table, which fell to pieces beneath his fist; nobody came. D'Artagnan was preparing to go and seek the cabaretier himself, to force him to a definite explanation, when the door of the court in which he was with Raoul, a door which communicated with the garden situated at the back, opened, and a man dressed as a cavalier, with his sword in the sheath, but not at his belt, crossed the court without closing the door; and having cast an oblique glance at D'Artagnan and his companion, directed his course towards the cabaret itself, looking about in all directions with his eyes capable of piercing walls of consciences. "Humph!" said D'Artagnan, "my tenants are communicating. That, no doubt, now, is some amateur in hanging matters." At the same moment the cries and disturbance in the upper chambers ceased. Silence, under such circumstances, surprises more than a twofold increase of noise. D'Artagnan wished to see what was the cause of this sudden silence. He then perceived that this man, dressed as a cavalier, had just entered the principal chamber, and was haranguing the tipplers, who all listened to him with the greatest attention. D'Artagnan would perhaps have heard his speech but for the dominant noise of the popular clamors, which made a formidable accompaniment to the harangue of the orator. But it was soon finished, and all the people the cabaret contained came out, one after the other, in little groups, so that there only remained six in the chamber; one of these six, the man with the sword, took the cabaretier aside, engaging him in discourse more or less serious, whilst the others lit a great fire in the chimney-place--a circumstance rendered strange by the fine weather and the heat.

"It is very singular," said D'Artagnan to Raoul, "but I think I know those faces yonder."

"Don't you think you can smell the smoke here?" said Raoul.

"I rather think I can smell a conspiracy," replied D'Artagnan.

He had not finished speaking, when four of these men came down into the court, and without the appearance of any bad design, mounted guard at the door of communication, casting, at intervals, glances at D'Artagnan, which signified many things.

"Mordioux!" said D'Artagnan, in a low voice, "there is something going on. Are you curious, Raoul?"

"According to the subject, chevalier."

"Well, I am as curious as an old woman. Come a little more in front; we shall get a better view of the place. I would lay a wager that view will be something curious."

"But you know, monsieur le chevalier, that I am not willing to become a passive and indifferent spectator of the death of the two poor devils."

"And I, then--do you think I am a savage? We will go in again, when it is time to do so. Come along!" And they made their way towards the front of the house, and placed themselves near the window which, still more strangely than the rest, remained unoccupied. The two last drinkers, instead of looking out at this window, kept up the fire. On seeing D'Artagnan and his friend enter:--"Ah! ah! a reinforcement," murmured they.

D'Artagnan jogged Raoul's elbow. "Yes, my braves, a reinforcement," said he; "cordieu! there is a famous fire. Whom are you going to cook?"

The two men uttered a shout of jovial laughter, and, instead of answering, threw on more wood. D'Artagnan could not take his eyes off them.

"I suppose," said one of the fire-makers, "they sent you to tell us the time--did not they?"

"Without doubt they have," said D'Artagnan, anxious to know what was going on; "why should I be here else, if it were not for that?"

"Then place yourself at the window, if you please, and observe." D'Artagnan smiled in his mustache, made a sign to Raoul, and placed himself at the window.

CHAPTER LXII.

Vive Colbert!

The spectacle which the Greve now presented was a frightful one. The heads, leveled by the perspective, extended afar, thick and agitated as the ears of corn in a vast plain. From time to time a fresh report, or a distant rumor, made the heads oscillate and thousands of eyes flash. Now and then there were great movements. All those ears of corn bent, and became waves more agitated than those of the ocean, which rolled from the extremities to the center, and beat, like the tides, against the hedge of archers who surrounded the gibbets. Then the handles of the halberds were let fall upon the heads and shoulders of the rash invaders; at times, also, it was the steel as well as the wood, and, in that case, a large empty circle was formed around the guard; a space conquered upon the extremities, which underwent, in their turn the oppression of the sudden movement, which drove them against the parapets of the Seine. From the window, that commanded a view of the whole Place, D’Artagnan saw, with interior satisfaction, that such of the musketeers and guards as found themselves involved in the crowd, were able, with blows of their fists and the hilts of theirs swords, to keep room. He even remarked that they had succeeded, by that esprit de corps which doubles the strength of the soldier, in getting together in one group to the amount of about fifty men; and that, with the exception of a dozen stragglers whom he still saw rolling here and there, the nucleus was complete, and within reach of his voice. But it was not the musketeers and guards that drew the attention of D’Artagnan. Around the gibbets, and particularly at the entrances to the arcade of Saint-Jean, moved a noisy mass, a busy mass; daring faces, resolute demeanors were to be seen here and there, mingled with silly faces and indifferent demeanors; signals were exchanged, hands given and taken. D’Artagnan remarked among the groups, and those groups the most animated, the face of the cavalier whom he had seen enter by the door of communication from his garden, and who had gone upstairs to harangue the drinkers. That man was organizing troops and giving orders.

“Mordioux!” said D’Artagnan to himself, “I was not deceived; I know that man,--it is Menneville. What the devil is he doing here?”

A distant murmur, which became more distinct by degrees, stopped this reflection, and drew his attention another way. This murmur was occasioned by the arrival of the culprits; a strong picket of archers preceded them, and appeared at the angle of the arcade. The entire crowd now joined as if in one cry; all the cries united formed one immense howl. D’Artagnan saw Raoul was becoming pale, and he slapped him roughly on the shoulder. The fire-keepers turned round on hearing the great cry, and asked what was going on. “The condemned are arrived,” said D’Artagnan. “That’s well,” replied they, again replenishing the fire. D’Artagnan looked at them with much uneasiness; it was evident that these men who were making such a fire for no apparent purpose had some strange intentions. The condemned appeared upon the Place. They were walking, the executioner before them, whilst fifty archers formed a hedge on their right and their left. Both were dressed in black; they appeared pale, but firm. They looked impatiently over the people’s heads, standing on tip-toe at every step. D’Artagnan remarked this. “Mordioux!” cried he, “they are in a great hurry to get a sight of the gibbet!” Raoul drew back, without, however, having the power to leave the window. Terror even has its attractions.

“To the death! to the death!” cried fifty thousand voices.

“Yes; to the death!” howled a hundred frantic others, as if the great mass had given them the reply.

“To the halter! to the halter!” cried the great whole; “Vive le roi!”

“Well,” said D’Artagnan, “this is droll; I should have thought it was M. Colbert who had caused them to be hung.”

There was, at this moment, a great rolling movement in the crowd, which stopped for a moment the march of the condemned. The people of a bold and resolute mien, whom D’Artagnan had observed, by dint of pressing, pushing, and lifting themselves up, had succeeded in almost touching the hedge of archers. The cortege resumed its march. All at once, to cries of “Vive Colbert!” those men, of whom D’Artagnan never lost sight, fell upon the escort, which in vain endeavored to stand against them. Behind these men was the crowd. Then commenced, amidst a frightful tumult, as frightful a confusion. This time there was something more than cries of expectation or cries of joy, there were cries of pain. Halberds struck men down, swords ran through them, muskets were discharged at them. The confusion became then so great that D’Artagnan could no longer distinguish anything. Then, from this chaos, suddenly surged something like a visible intention, like a will pronounced. The condemned had been torn from the hands of the guards, and were being dragged towards the house of L’Image-de-Notre-Dame. Those who dragged them shouted, “Vive Colbert!” The people hesitated, not knowing which they ought to fall upon, the archers or the aggressors. What stopped the people was, that those who cried “Vive Colbert!” began to cry, at the same time, “No halter! no halter! to the fire! to the fire! burn the thieves! burn the extortioners!” This cry, shouted with an ensemble, obtained enthusiastic success. The populace had come to witness an execution, and here was an opportunity offered them of performing one themselves. It was this that must be most agreeable to the populace: therefore, they ranged themselves immediately on the party of the aggressors against the archers, crying with the minority, which had become, thanks to them, the most compact majority: “Yes, yes: to the fire with the thieves! Vive Colbert!”

“Mordioux!” exclaimed D’Artagnan, “this begins to look serious.”

One of the men who remained near the chimney approached the window, a firebrand in his hand. “Ah, ah!” said he, “it gets warm.” Then, turning to his companion: “There is the signal,” added he; and he immediately applied the burning brand to the wainscoting. Now, this cabaret of the Image-de-Notre-Dame was not a very newly built house, and therefore, did not require much entreating to take fire. In a second the boards began to crackle, and the flames arose sparkling to the ceiling. A howling from without replied to the shouts of the incendiaries. D’Artagnan, who had not seen what passed, from being engaged at the window, felt, at the same time, the smoke which choked him and the fire that scorched him. “Hola!” cried he, turning round, “is the fire here? Are you drunk or mad, my masters?”

The two men looked at each other with an air of astonishment. “In what?” asked they of D’Artagnan; “was it not a thing agreed upon?”

“A thing agreed upon that you should burn my house!” vociferated D’Artagnan, snatching the brand from the hand of the incendiary, and striking him with it across the face. The second wanted to assist his comrade, but Raoul, seizing him by the middle, threw him out of the window, whilst D’Artagnan pushed his man down the stairs. Raoul, first disengaged, tore the burning wainscoting down, and threw it flaming into the chamber. At a glance D’Artagnan saw there was nothing to be feared from the fire, and sprang to the window. The disorder was at its height. The air was filled with simultaneous cries of “To the fire!” “To the death!” “To the halter!” “To the stake!” “Vive Colbert!” “Vive le roi!” The group which had forced the culprits from the hands of the archers had drawn close to the house, which appeared to be the goal towards which they dragged them. Menneville was at the head of this group, shouting louder than all the others, “To the fire! to the fire! Vive Colbert!” D’Artagnan began to comprehend what was meant. They wanted to burn the condemned, and his house was to serve as a funeral pile.

“Halt, there!” cried he, sword in hand, and one foot upon the window. “Menneville, what do you want to do?”

“Monsieur d’Artagnan,” cried the latter; “give way, give way!”

“To the fire! to the fire with the thieves! Vive Colbert!”

These cries exasperated D’Artagnan. “Mordioux!” said he. “What! burn the poor devils who are only condemned to be hung? that is infamous!”

Before the door, however, the mass of anxious spectators, rolled back against the walls, had become more thick, and closed up the way. Menneville and his men, who were dragging along the culprits, were within ten paces of the door.

Menneville made a last effort. “Passage! passage!” cried he, pistol in hand.

“Burn them! burn them!” repeated the crowd. “The Image-de-Notre-Dame is on fire! Burn the thieves! burn the monopolists in the Image-de-Notre-Dame!”

There now remained no doubt, it was plainly D’Artagnan’s house that was their object. D’Artagnan remembered the old cry, always so effective from his mouth: “A moi! mousquetaires!” shouted he, with the voice of a giant, with one of those voices which dominate over cannon, the sea, the tempest. “A moi! mousquetaires!” And suspending himself by the arm from the balcony, he allowed himself to drop amidst the crowd, which began to draw back form a house that rained men. Raoul was on the ground as soon as he, both sword in hand. All the musketeers on the Place heard that challenging cry--all turned round at that cry, and recognized D’Artagnan. “To the captain, to the captain!” cried they, in their turn. And the crowd opened before them as though before the prow of a vessel. At that moment D’Artagnan and Menneville found themselves face to face. “Passage,

passage!” cried Menneville, seeing that he was within an arm’s length from the door.

“No one passes here,” said D’Artagnan.

“Take that, then!” said Menneville, firing his pistol almost within an arm’s length. But before the cock fell, D’Artagnan had struck up Menneville’s arm with the hilt of his sword and passed the blade through his body.

“I told you plainly to keep yourself quiet,” said D’Artagnan to Menneville, who rolled at his feet.

“Passage! passage!” cried the companions of Menneville, at first terrified, but soon recovering, when they found they had only to do with two men. But those two men were hundred-armed giants; the swords flew about in their hands like the burning glaive of the archangel. They pierce with its point, strike with the flat, cut with the edge; every stroke brings down a man. “For the king!” cried D’Artagnan, to every man he struck at, that is to say, to every man that fell. This cry became the charging word for the musketeers, who, guided by it, joined D’Artagnan. During this time the archers, recovering from the panic they had undergone, charge the aggressors in the rear, and regular as mill strokes, overturn or knock down all that opposed them. The crowd, which sees swords gleaming, and drops of blood flying in the air--the crowd falls back and crushes itself. At length cries for mercy and of despair resound; that is, the farewell of the vanquished. The two condemned are again in the hands of the archers. D’Artagnan approaches them, seeing them pale and sinking: “Console yourselves, poor men,” said he, “you will not undergo the frightful torture with which these wretches threatened you. The king has condemned you to be hung: you shall only be hung. Go on, hang them, and it will be over.”

There is no longer anything going on at the Image-de-Notre-Dame. The fire has been extinguished with two tuns of wine in default of water. The conspirators have fled by the garden. The archers are dragging the culprits to the gibbets. From this moment the affair did not occupy much time. The executioner, heedless about operating according to the rules of the art, made such haste that he dispatched the condemned in a couple of minutes. In the meantime the people gathered around D’Artagnan,--they felicitated, they cheered him. He wiped his brow, streaming with sweat, and his sword, streaming with blood. He shrugged his shoulders at seeing Menneville writhing at his feet in the last convulsions. And, while Raoul turned away his eyes in compassion, he pointed to the musketeers the gibbets laden with their melancholy fruit. “Poor devils!” said he, “I hope they died blessing me, for I saved them with great difficulty.” These words caught the ear of Menneville at the moment when he himself was breathing his last sigh. A dark, ironical smile flitted across his lips; he wished to reply, but the effort hastened the snapping of the chord of life--he expired.

“Oh! all this is very frightful!” murmured Raoul: “let us begone, monsieur le chevalier.”

“You are not wounded?” asked D’Artagnan.

“Not at all; thank you.”

“That’s well! Thou art a brave fellow, mordioux! The head of the father, and the arm of Porthos. Ah! if he had been here, good Porthos, you would have seen something worth looking at.” Then as if by way of remembrance--

“But where the devil can that brave Porthos be?” murmured D’Artagnan.

“Come, chevalier, pray come away,” urged Raoul.

“One minute, my friend; let me take my thirty-seven and a half pistols, and I am at your service. The house is a good property,” added D’Artagnan, as he entered the Image-de-Notre-Dame, “but decidedly, even if it were less profitable, I should prefer its being in another quarter.”

CHAPTER LXIII.

How M. d’Eymeris’s Diamond passed into the Hands of M. d’Artagnan.

Whilst this violent, noisy, and bloody scene was passing on the Greve, several men, barricaded behind the gate of communication with the garden, replaced their swords in their sheaths, assisted one among them to mount a ready saddled horse which was waiting in the garden, and like a flock of startled birds, fled in all directions, some climbing the walls, others rushing out at the gates with all the fury of a panic. He who mounted the horse, and gave him the spur so sharply that the animal was near leaping the wall, this cavalier, we say, crossed the Place Baudoyer, passed like lightening before the crowd in the streets, riding against, running over and knocking down all that came in his way, and, ten minutes after, arrived at the gates of the superintendent, more out of breath than his horse. The Abbe Fouquet, at the clatter of hoofs on the pavement, appeared at a window of the court, and before even the cavalier had set foot to the ground, “Well! Danicamp?” cried he, leaning half out of the window.

“Well, it is all over,” replied the cavalier.

“All over!” cried the abbe. “Then they are saved?”

“No, monsieur,” replied the cavalier, “they are hung.”

“Hung!” repeated the abbe, turning pale. A lateral door suddenly opened, and Fouquet appeared in the chamber, pale, distracted, with lips half opened, breathing a cry of grief and anger. He stopped upon the threshold to listen to what was addressed from the court to the window.

“Miserable wretches!” said the abbe, “you did not fight, then?”

“Like lions.”

“Say like cowards.”

“Monsieur!”

“A hundred men accustomed to war, sword in hand, are worth ten thousand archers in a surprise. Where is Menneville, that boaster, that braggart, who was to come back either dead or a conqueror?”

“Well, monsieur, he kept his word. He is dead!”

“Dead! Who killed him?”

“A demon disguised as a man, a giant armed with ten flaming swords--a madman, who at one blow extinguished the fire, put down the riot, and caused a hundred musketeers to rise up out of the pavement of the Greve.”

Fouquet raised his brow, streaming with sweat, murmuring, “Oh! Lyodot and D’Eymeris! dead! dead! dead! and I dishonored.”

The abbe turned round, and perceiving his brother, despairing and livid, “Come, come,” said he, “it is a blow of fate, monsieur; we must not lament thus. Our attempt has failed because God--”

“Be silent, abbe! be silent!” cried Fouquet; “your excuses are blasphemies. Order that man up here, and let him relate the details of this terrible event.”

“But, brother--”

“Obey, monsieur!”

The abbe made a sign, and in half a minute the man’s step was heard upon the stairs. At the same time Gourville appeared behind Fouquet, like the guardian angel of the superintendent, pressing one finger on his lips to enjoin observation even amidst the bursts of his grief. The minister resumed all the serenity that human strength left at the disposal of a heart half broken with sorrow. Danicamp appeared. “Make your report,” said Gourville.

“Monsieur,” replied the messenger, “we received orders to carry off the prisoners, and to cry ‘Vive Colbert!’ whilst carrying them off.”

“To burn them alive, was it not, abbe?” interrupted Gourville.

“Yes, yes, the order was given to Menneville. Menneville knew what was to be done, and Menneville is dead.”

This news appeared rather to reassure Gourville than to sadden him.

“Yes, certainly to burn them alive,” said the abbe, eagerly.

“Granted, monsieur, granted,” said the man, looking into the eyes and the faces of the two interlocutors, to ascertain what there was profitable or disadvantageous to himself in telling the truth.

“Now, proceed,” said Gourville.

“The prisoners,” cried Danicamp, “were brought to the Greve, and the people, in a fury, insisted upon their being burnt instead of being hung.”

“And the people were right,” said the abbe. “Go on.”

“But,” resumed the man, “at the moment the archers were broken, at the moment the fire was set to one of the houses of the Place destined to serve as a funeral-pile for the guilty, this fury, this demon, this giant of whom I told you, and who, we had been informed, was the proprietor of the house in question, aided by a young man who accompanied him, threw out of the window those who kept the fire, called to his assistance the musketeers who were in the crowd, leaped himself from the window of the first story into the Place, and plied his sword so desperately that the victory was restored to the archers, the prisoners were retaken, and Menneville killed. When once recaptured, the condemned were executed in three minutes.” Fouquet, in spite of his self-command, could not prevent a deep groan escaping him.

“And this man, the proprietor of the house, what is his name?” said the abbe.

“I cannot tell you, not having even been able to get sight of him; my post had been appointed in the garden, and I remained at my post: only the affair was related to me as I repeat it. I was ordered, when once the affair was at an end, to come at best speed and announce to you the manner in which it finished. According to this order, I set out, full gallop, and here I am.”

“Very well, monsieur, we have nothing else to ask of you,” said the abbe, more and more dejected, in proportion as the moment approached for finding himself alone with his brother.

“Have you been paid?” asked Gourville.

“Partly, monsieur,” replied Danicamp.

“Here are twenty pistols. Begone, monsieur, and never forget to defend, as this time has been done, the true interests of the king.”

“Yes, monsieur,” said the man, bowing and pocketing the money. After which he went out. Scarcely had the door closed after him when Fouquet, who had remained motionless, advanced with a rapid step and stood between the abbe and Gourville. Both of them at the same time opened their mouths to speak to him. “No excuses,” said he, “no recriminations against anybody. If I had not been a false friend I should not have confided to any one the care of delivering Lyodot and D’Eymeris. I alone am guilty; to me alone are reproaches and remorse due. Leave me, abbe.”

“And yet, monsieur, you will not prevent me,” replied the latter, “from endeavoring to find out the miserable fellow who has intervened to the advantage of M. Colbert in this so well-arranged affair; for, if it is good policy to love our friends dearly, I do not believe that is bad which consists in obstinately pursuing our enemies.”

“A truce to policy, abbe; begone, I beg of you, and do not let me hear any more of you till I send for you; what we most need is circumspection and silence. You have a terrible example before you, gentlemen: no reprisals, I forbid them."

"There are no orders," grumbled the abbe, "which will prevent me from avenging a family affront upon the guilty person."

"And I," cried Fouquet, in that imperative tone to which one feels there is nothing to reply, "if you entertain one thought, one single thought, which is not the absolute expression of my will, I will have you cast into the Bastile two hours after that thought has manifested itself. Regulate your conduct accordingly, abbe."

The abbe colored and bowed. Fouquet made a sign to Gourville to follow him, and was already directing his steps towards his cabinet, when the usher announced with a loud voice: "Monsieur le Chevalier d'Artagnan."

"Who is he?" said Fouquet, negligently, to Gourville.

"An ex-lieutenant of his majesty's musketeers," replied Gourville, in the same tone. Fouquet did not even take the trouble to reflect, and resumed his walk. "I beg your pardon, monseigneur!" said Gourville, "but I have remembered; this brave man has quitted the king's service, and probably comes to receive an installment of some pension or other."

"Devil take him!" said Fouquet, "why does he choose his opportunity so ill?"

"Permit me then, monseigneur, to announce your refusal to him; for he is one of my acquaintance, and is a man whom, in our present circumstances, it would be better to have as a friend than an enemy."

"Answer him as you please," said Fouquet.

"Eh! good Lord!" said the abbe, still full of malice, like an egotistical man; "tell him there is no money, particularly for musketeers."

But scarcely had the abbe uttered this imprudent speech, when the partly open door was thrown back, and D'Artagnan appeared.

"Eh! Monsieur Fouquet," said he, "I was well aware there was no money for musketeers here. Therefore I did not come to obtain any, but to have it refused. That being done, receive my thanks. I give you good-day, and will go and seek it at M. Colbert's." And he went out, making an easy bow.

"Gourville," said Fouquet, "run after that man and bring him back." Gourville obeyed, and overtook D'Artagnan on the stairs.

D'Artagnan, hearing steps behind him, turned round and perceived Gourville. "Mordioux! my dear monsieur," said he, "there are sad lessons which you gentlemen of finance teach us; I come to M. Fouquet to receive a sum accorded by his majesty, and I am received like a mendicant who comes to ask charity, or a thief who comes to steal a piece of plate.”

“But you pronounced the name of M. Colbert, my dear M. d’Artagnan; you said you were going to M. Colbert’s?”

“I certainly am going there, were it only to ask satisfaction of the people who try to burn houses, crying ‘Vive Colbert!’“

Gourville pricked up his ears. “Oh, oh!” said he, “you allude to what has just happened at the Greve?”

“Yes, certainly.”

“And in what did that which has taken place concern you?”

“What! do you ask me whether it concerns me or does not concern me, if M. Colbert pleases to make a funeral-pile of my house?”

“So, ho, your house--was it your house they wanted to burn?”

“Pardieu! was it!”

“Is the cabaret of the Image-de-Notre-Dame yours, then?”

“It has been this week.”

“Well, then, are you the brave captain, are you the valiant blade who dispersed those who wished to burn the condemned?”

“My dear Monsieur Gourville, put yourself in my place. I was an agent of the public force and a landlord, too. As a captain, it is my duty to have the orders of the king accomplished. As a proprietor, it is to my interest my house should not be burnt. I have at the same time attended to the laws of interest and duty in replacing Messieurs Lyodot and D’Eymeris in the hands of the archers.”

“Then it was you who threw the man out of the window?”

“It was I, myself,” replied D’Artagnan, modestly.

“And you who killed Menneville?”

“I had that misfortune,” said D’Artagnan, bowing like a man who is being congratulated.

“It was you, then, in short, who caused the two condemned persons to be hung?”

“Instead of being burnt, yes, monsieur, and I am proud of it. I saved the poor devils from horrible tortures. Understand, my dear Monsieur de Gourville, that they wanted to burn them alive. It exceeds imagination!”

“Go, my dear Monsieur d’Artagnan, go,” said Gourville, anxious to spare Fouquet the sight of the man who had just caused him such profound grief.

“No,” said Fouquet, who had heard all from the door of the ante-chamber; “not so; on the contrary, Monsieur d’Artagnan, come in.”

D’Artagnan wiped from the hilt of his sword a last bloody trace, which had escaped his notice, and returned. He then found himself face to face with these three men, whose countenances wore very different expressions. With the abbe it was anger, with Gourville stupor, with Fouquet it was dejection.

“I beg your pardon, monsieur le ministre,” said D’Artagnan, “but my time is short; I have to go to the office of the intendant, to have an explanation with Monsieur Colbert, and to receive my quarter’s pension.”

“But, monsieur,” said Fouquet, “there is money here.” D’Artagnan looked at the superintendent with astonishment. “You have been answered inconsiderately, monsieur, I know, because I heard it,” said the minister; “a man of your merit ought to be known by everybody.” D’Artagnan bowed. “Have you an order?” added Fouquet.

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Give it me, I will pay you myself; come with me.” He made a sign to Gourville and the abbe, who remained in the chamber where they were. He led D’Artagnan into his cabinet. As soon as the door was shut,--”how much is due to you, monsieur?”

“Why, something like five thousand livres, monseigneur.”

“For arrears of pay?”

“For a quarter’s pay.”

“A quarter consisting of five thousand livres!” said Fouquet, fixing upon the musketeer a searching look. “Does the king, then, give you twenty thousand livres a year?”

“Yes, monseigneur, twenty thousand livres a year. Do you think it is too much?”

“I?” cried Fouquet, and he smiled bitterly. “If I had any knowledge of mankind, if I were--instead of being a frivolous, inconsequent, and vain spirit--of a prudent and reflective spirit; if, in a word, I had, as certain persons have known how, regulated my life, you would not receive twenty thousand livres a year, but a hundred thousand, and you would belong not to the king but to me.”

D’Artagnan colored slightly. There is sometimes in the manner in which a eulogium is given, in the voice, in the affectionate tone, a poison so sweet, that the strongest mind is intoxicated by it. The superintendent terminated his speech by opening a drawer, and taking from it four rouleaux, which he placed before D’Artagnan. The Gascon opened one. “Gold!” said he.

“It will be less burdensome, monsieur.”

“But, then, monsieur, these make twenty thousand livres.”

“No doubt they do.”

“But only five are due to me.”

“I wish to spare you the trouble of coming four times to my office.”

“You overwhelm me, monsieur.”

“I do only what I ought to do, monsieur le chevalier; and I hope you will not bear me any malice on account of the rude reception my brother gave you. He is of a sour, capricious disposition.”

“Monsieur,” said D’Artagnan, “believe me, nothing would grieve me more than an excuse from you.”

“Therefore I will make no more, and will content myself with asking you a favor.”

“Oh, monsieur.”

Fouquet drew from his finger a ring worth about three thousand pistoles. “Monsieur,” said he, “this stone was given me by a friend of my childhood, by a man to whom you have rendered a great service.”

“A service--I?” said the musketeer; “I have rendered a service to one of your friends?”

“You cannot have forgotten it, monsieur, for it dates this very day.”

“And that friend’s name was--”

“M. d’Eymeris.”

“One of the condemned?”

“Yes, one of the victims. Well! Monsieur d’Artagnan, in return for the service you have rendered him, I beg you to accept this diamond. Do so for my sake.”

“Monsieur! you--”

“Accept it, I say. To-day is with me a day of mourning; hereafter you will, perhaps, learn why; to-day I have lost one friend; well, I will try to get another.”

“But, Monsieur Fouquet--”

“Adieu! Monsieur d’Artagnan, adieu!” cried Fouquet, with much emotion; “or rather, au revoir.” And the minister quitted the cabinet, leaving in the hands of the musketeer the ring and the twenty thousand livres.

“Oh!” said D’Artagnan, after a moment’s dark reflection. “How on earth am I to understand what this means? Mordioux! I can understand this much, only: he is a gallant man! I will go and explain matters to M. Colbert.” And he went out.

CHAPTER LXIV.

Difference D’Artagnan finds between the Intendant and the Superintendent.

M Colbert resided in the Rue Neuve des Petits-Champs, in a house which had belonged to Beautru. D’Artagnan’s legs cleared the distance in a short quarter of an hour. When he arrived at the residence of the new favorite, the court was full of archers and police, who came to congratulate him, or to excuse themselves, according to whether he should choose to praise or blame. The sentiment of flattery is instinctive with people of abject condition; they have the sense of it, as the wild animal has that of hearing and smell. These people, or their leader, understood that there was a pleasure to offer to M. Colbert, in rendering him an account of the fashion in which his name had been pronounced during the rash enterprise of the morning. D’Artagnan made his appearance just as the chief of the watch was giving his report. He stood close to the door, behind the archers. That officer took Colbert on one side, in spite of his resistance and the contradiction of his bushy eyebrows. “In case,” said he, “you really desired, monsieur, that the people should do justice on the two traitors, it would have been wise to warn us of it; for, indeed, monsieur, in spite of our regret at displeasing you, or thwarting your views, we had our orders to execute.”

“Triple fool!” replied Colbert, furiously shaking his hair, thick and black as a mane; “what are you telling me? What! that I could have had an idea of a riot! Are you mad or drunk?”

“But, monsieur, they cried ‘Vive Colbert!’“ replied the trembling watch.

“A handful of conspirators--”

“No, no; a mass of people.”

“Ah! indeed,” said Colbert, expanding. “A mass of people cried ‘Vive Colbert!’ Are you certain of what you say, monsieur?”

“We had nothing to do but open our ears, or rather to close them, so terrible were the cries.”

“And this was from the people, the real people?”

“Certainly, monsieur; only these real people beat us.”

“Oh! very well,” continued Colbert, thoughtfully. “Then you suppose it was the people alone who wished to burn the condemned?”

“Oh! yes, monsieur.”

“That is quite another thing. You strongly resisted, then?”

“We had three of our men crushed to death, monsieur!”

“But you killed nobody yourselves?”

“Monsieur, a few of the rioters were left upon the square, and one among them who was not a common man.”

“Who was he?”

“A certain Menneville, upon whom the police have a long time had an eye.”

“Menneville!” cried Colbert, “what, he who killed Rue de la Huchette, a worthy man who wanted a fat fowl?”

“Yes, monsieur; the same.”

“And did this Menneville also cry, ‘Vive Colbert’?”

“Louder than all the rest; like a madman.”

Colbert’s brow grew dark and wrinkled. A kind of ambitious glory which had lighted his face was extinguished, like the light of glow-worms we crush beneath the grass. “Then you say,” resumed the deceived intendant, “that the initiative came from the people? Menneville was my enemy; I would have had him hung, and he knew it well. Menneville belonged to the Abbe Fouquet--the affair originated with Fouquet; does not everybody know that the condemned were his friends from childhood?”

“That is true,” thought D’Artagnan, “and thus are all my doubts cleared up. I repeat it, Monsieur Fouquet may be called what they please, but he is a very gentlemanly man.”

“And,” continued Colbert, “are you quite sure Menneville is dead?”

D’Artagnan thought the time was come for him to make his appearance. “Perfectly, monsieur;” replied he, advancing suddenly.

“Oh! is that you, monsieur?” said Colbert.

“In person,” replied the musketeer with his deliberate tone; “it appears that you had in Menneville a pretty enemy.”

“It was not I, monsieur, who had an enemy,” replied Colbert; “it was the king.”

“Double brute!” thought D’Artagnan, “to think to play the great man and the hypocrite with me. Well,” continued he to Colbert, “I am very happy to have rendered so good a service to the king; will you take upon you to tell his majesty, monsieur l’intendant?”

“What commission is this you give me, and what do you charge me to tell his majesty, monsieur? Be precise, if you please,” said Colbert, in a sharp voice, tuned beforehand to hostility.

“I give you no commission,” replied D’Artagnan, with that calmness which never abandons the banterer; “I thought it would be easy for you to announce to his majesty that it was I who, being there by chance, did justice upon Menneville and restored order to things.”

Colbert opened his eyes and interrogated the chief of the watch with a look--”Ah! it is very true,” said the latter, “that this gentleman saved us.”

“Why did you not tell me, monsieur, that you came to relate me this?” said Colbert with envy; “everything is explained, and more favorably for you than for anybody else.”

“You are in error, monsieur l’intendant, I did not at all come for the purpose of relating that to you.”

“It is an exploit, nevertheless.”

“Oh!” said the musketeer carelessly, “constant habit blunts the mind.”

“To what do I owe the honor of your visit, then?”

“Simply to this: the king ordered me to come to you.”

“Ah!” said Colbert, recovering himself when he saw D’Artagnan draw a paper from his pocket; “it is to demand some money of me?”

“Precisely, monsieur.”

“Have the goodness to wait, if you please, monsieur, till I have dispatched the report of the watch.”

D’Artagnan turned upon his heel, insolently enough, and finding himself face to face with Colbert, after his first turn, he bowed to him as a harlequin would have done; then, after a second evolution, he directed his steps towards the door in quick time. Colbert was struck with this pointed rudeness, to which he was not accustomed. In general, men of the sword, when they came to his office, had such a want of money, that though their feet seemed to take root in the marble, they hardly lost their patience. Was D’Artagnan going straight to the king? Would he go and describe his rough reception, or recount his exploit? This was a matter for grave consideration. At all events, the moment was badly chosen to send D’Artagnan away, whether he came from the king, or on his own account. The musketeer had rendered too great a service, and that too recently, for it to be already forgotten. Therefore Colbert thought it would be better to shake off his arrogance and call D'Artagnan back. "Ho! Monsieur d'Artagnan," cried Colbert, "what! are you leaving me thus?"

D'Artagnan turned round: "Why not?" said he, quietly, "we have no more to say to each other, have we?"

"You have, at least, money to receive, as you have an order?"

"Who, I? Oh! not at all, my dear Monsieur Colbert."

"But, monsieur, you have an order. And, in the same manner as you give a sword-thrust, when you are required, I, on my part, pay when an order is presented to me. Present yours."

"It is useless, my dear Monsieur Colbert," said D'Artagnan, who inwardly enjoyed this confusion in the ideas of Colbert; "my order is paid."

"Paid, by whom?"

"By monsieur le surintendant."

Colbert grew pale.

"Explain yourself," said he, in a stifled voice--"if you are paid why do you show me that paper?"

"In consequence of the word of order of which you spoke to me so ingeniously just now, dear M. Colbert; the king told me to take a quarter of the pension he is pleased to make me."

"Of me?" said Colbert.

"Not exactly. The king said to me: 'Go to M. Fouquet; the superintendent will, perhaps, have no money, then you will go and draw it of M. Colbert.'"

The countenance of M. Colbert brightened for a moment; but it was with his unfortunate physiognomy as with a stormy sky, sometimes radiant, sometimes dark as night, according as the lightening gleams or the cloud passes. "Eh! and was there any money in the superintendent's coffers?" asked he.

"Why, yes, he could not be badly off for money," replied D'Artagnan--"it may be believed, since M. Fouquet, instead of paying me a quarter or five thousand livres--"

"A quarter or five thousand livres!" cried Colbert, struck, as Fouquet had been, with the generosity of the sum for a soldier's pension, "why, that would be a pension of twenty thousand livres?"

"Exactly, M. Colbert. Peste! you reckon like old Pythagoras; yes, twenty thousand livres."

“Ten times the appointment of an intendant of the finances. I beg to offer you my compliments,” said Colbert, with a vicious smile.

“Oh!” said D’Artagnan, “the king apologized for giving me so little; but he promised to make it more hereafter, when he should be rich; but I must be gone, having much to do--”

“So, then, notwithstanding the expectation of the king, the superintendent paid you, did he?”

“In the same manner, as, in opposition to the king’s expectation, you refused to pay me.”

“I did not refuse, monsieur, I only begged you to wait. And you say that M. Fouquet paid you your five thousand livres?”

“Yes, as you might have done; but he did even better than that, M. Colbert.”

“And what did he do?”

“He politely counted me down the sum-total, saying, that for the king, his coffers were always full.”

“The sum-total! M. Fouquet has given you twenty thousand livres instead of five thousand?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“And what for?”

“In order to spare me three visits to the money-chest of the superintendent, so that I have the twenty thousand livres in my pocket in good new coin. You see, then, that I am able to go away without standing in need of you, having come here only for form’s sake.” And D’Artagnan slapped his hand upon his pocket, with a laugh which disclosed to Colbert thirty-two magnificent teeth, as white as teeth of twenty-five years old, and which seemed to say in their language: “Serve up to us thirty-two little Colberts, and we will chew them willingly.” The serpent is as brave as the lion, the hawk as courageous as the eagle, that cannot be contested. It can only be said of animals that are decidedly cowardly, and are so called, that they will be brave only when they have to defend themselves. Colbert was not frightened at the thirty-two teeth of D’Artagnan. He recovered, and suddenly,--”Monsieur,” said he, “monsieur le surintendant has done what he had no right to do.”

“What do you mean by that?” replied D’Artagnan.

“I mean that your note--will you let me see your note, if you please?”

“Very willingly; here it is.”

Colbert seized the paper with an eagerness which the musketeer did not remark without uneasiness, and particularly without a certain degree of regret at having trusted him with it. “Well, monsieur, the royal order says thus:--’At sight, I command that there be paid to M. d’Artagnan the sum of five thousand livres, forming a quarter of the pension I have made him.’“

“So, in fact, it is written,” said D’Artagnan, affecting calmness.

“Very well; the king only owed you five thousand livres; why has more been given to you?”

“Because there was more; and M. Fouquet was willing to give me more; that does not concern anybody.”

“It is natural,” said Colbert with a proud ease, “that you should be ignorant of the usages of state-finance; but, monsieur, when you have a thousand livres to pay, what do you do?”

“I never have a thousand livres to pay,” replied D’Artagnan.

“Once more,” said Colbert, irritated--”once more, if you had any sum to pay, would you not pay what you ought?”

“That only proves one thing,” said D’Artagnan; “and that is, that you have your own particular customs in finance, and M. Fouquet has his own.”

“Mine, monsieur, are the correct ones.”

“I do not say that they are not.”

“And you have accepted what was not due to you.”

D’Artagnan’s eyes flashed. “What is not due to me yet, you meant to say, M. Colbert; for if I have received what was not due to me at all, I should have committed a theft.”

Colbert made no reply to this subtlety. “You then owe fifteen thousand livres to the public chest,” said he, carried away by his jealous ardor.

“Then you must give me credit for them,” replied D’Artagnan, with his imperceptible irony.

“Not at all, monsieur.”

“Well! what will you do, then? You will not take my rouleaux from me, will you?”

“You must return them to my chest.”

“I! Oh! Monsieur Colbert, don’t reckon upon that.”

“The king wants his money, monsieur.”

“And I, monsieur, I want the king’s money.”

“That may be so; but you must return this.”

“Not a sou. I have always understood that in matters of comptabilite, as you call it, a good cashier never gives back or takes back.”

“Then, monsieur, we shall see what the king will say about it. I will show him this note, which proves that M. Fouquet not only pays what he does not owe, but that he does not even take care of vouchers for the sums that he has paid.”

“Ah! now I understand why you have taken that paper, M. Colbert!”

Colbert did not perceive all that there was of a threatening character in his name pronounced in a certain manner. “You shall see hereafter what use I will make of it,” said he, holding up the paper in his fingers.

“Oh!” said D’Artagnan, snatching the paper from him with a rapid movement; “I understand perfectly well, M. Colbert; I have no occasion to wait for that.” And he crumpled up the paper he had so cleverly seized.

“Monsieur, monsieur!” cried Colbert, “this is violence!”

“Nonsense! You must not be particular about a soldier’s manners!” replied D’Artagnan. “I kiss your hands, my dear M. Colbert.” And he went out, laughing in the face of the future minister.

“That man, now,” muttered he, “was about to grow quite friendly; it is a great pity I was obliged to cut his company so soon.”

CHAPTER LXV.

Philosophy of the Heart and Mind.

For a man who had seen so many much more dangerous ones, the position of D’Artagnan with respect to M. Colbert was only comic. D’Artagnan, therefore, did not deny himself the satisfaction of laughing at the expense of monsieur l’intendant, from the Rue des Petits-Champs to the Rue des Lombards. It was a great while since D’Artagnan had laughed so long together. He was still laughing when Planchet appeared, laughing likewise, at the door of his house; for Planchet, since the return of his patron, since the entrance of the English guineas, passed the greater part of his life in doing what D’Artagnan had only done from the Rue Neuve des Petits-Champs to the Rue des Lombards.

“You are home, then, my dear master?” said Planchet.

“No, my friend,” replied the musketeer; “I am off, and that quickly. I will sup with you, go to bed, sleep five hours, and at break of day leap into my saddle. Has my horse had an extra feed?”

“Eh! my dear master,” replied Planchet, “you know very well that your horse is the jewel of the family; that my lads are caressing it all day, and cramming it with sugar, nuts, and biscuits. You ask me if he has had an extra feed of oats; you should ask if he has not had enough to burst him.”

“Very well, Planchet, that is all right. Now, then, I pass to what concerns me--my supper?”

“Ready. A smoking roast joint, white wine, crayfish, and fresh-gathered cherries. All ready, my master.”

“You are a capital fellow, Planchet; come on, then, let us sup, and I will go to bed.”

During supper D’Artagnan observed that Planchet kept rubbing his forehead, as if to facilitate the issue of some idea closely pent within his brain. He looked with an air of kindness at this worthy companion of former adventures and misadventures, and, clinking glass against glass, “Come, Planchet,” said he, “let us see what it is that gives you so much trouble to bring forth. Mordioux! Speak freely, and quickly.”

“Well, this is it,” replied Planchet: “you appear to me to be going on some expedition or another.”

“I don’t say that I am not.”

“Then you have some new idea?”

“That is possible, too, Planchet.”

“Then there will be fresh capital to be ventured? I will lay down fifty thousand livres upon the idea you are about to carry out.” And so saying, Planchet rubbed his hands one against the other with a rapidity evincing great delight.

“Planchet,” said D’Artagnan, “there is but one misfortune in it.”

“And what is that?”

“That the idea is not mine. I can risk nothing upon it.”

These words drew a deep sigh from the heart of Planchet. That Avarice is an ardent counselor; she carries away her man, as Satan did Jesus, to the mountain, and when once she has shown to an unfortunate all the kingdoms of the earth, she is able to repose herself, knowing full well that she has left her companion, Envy, to gnaw at his heart. Planchet had tasted of riches easily acquired, and was never afterwards likely to stop in his desires; but, as he had a good heart in spite of his covetousness, as he adored D’Artagnan, he could not refrain from making him a thousand recommendations, each more affectionate than the others. He would not have been sorry, nevertheless, to have caught a little hint of the secret his master concealed so well; tricks, turns, counsels, and traps were all useless, D’Artagnan let nothing confidential escape him. The evening passed thus. After supper the portmanteau occupied D’Artagnan, he took a turn to the stable, patted his horse, and examined his shoes and legs; then, having counted over his money, he went to bed, sleeping as if only twenty, because he had neither inquietude nor remorse; he closed his eyes five minutes after he had blown out his lamp. Many events might, however, have kept him awake. Thought boiled in his brain, conjectures abounded, and D’Artagnan was a great drawer of horoscopes; but, with that imperturbable phlegm which does more than genius for the fortune and happiness of men of action, he put off reflection till the next day, for fear, he said, not to be fresh when he wanted to be so.

The day came. The Rue des Lombards had its share of the caresses of Aurora with the rosy fingers, and D’Artagnan arose like Aurora. He did not awaken anybody, he placed his portmanteau under his arm, descended the stairs without making one of them creak, and without disturbing one of the sonorous snorings in every story from the garret to the cellar, then, having saddled his horse, shut the stable and house doors, he set off, at a foot-pace, on his expedition to Bretagne. He had done quite right not to trouble himself with all the political and diplomatic affairs which solicited his attention; for, in the morning, in freshness and mild twilight, his ideas developed themselves in purity and abundance. In the first place, he passed before the house of Fouquet, and threw in a large gaping box the fortunate order which, the evening before, he had had so much trouble to recover from the hooked fingers of the intendant. Placed in an envelope, and addressed to Fouquet, it had not even been divined by Planchet, who in divination was equal to Calchas or the Pythian Apollo. D'Artagnan thus sent back the order to Fouquet, without compromising himself, and without having thenceforward any reproaches to make himself. When he had effected this proper restitution, "Now," he said to himself, "let us inhale much maternal air, much freedom from cares, much health, let us allow the horse Zephyr, whose flanks puff as if he had to respire an atmosphere, to breathe, and let us be very ingenious in our little calculations. It is time," said D'Artagnan, "to form a plan of the campaign, and, according to the method of M. Turenne, who has a large head full of all sorts of good counsels, before the plan of the campaign it is advisable to draw a striking portrait of the generals to whom we are opposed. In the first place, M. Fouquet presents himself. What is M. Fouquet? M. Fouquet," replied D'Artagnan to himself, "is a handsome man, very much beloved by the women, a generous man very much beloved by the poets; a man of wit, much execrated by pretenders. Well, now I am neither woman, poet, nor pretender: I neither love not hate monsieur le surintendant. I find myself, therefore, in the same position in which M. Turenne found himself when opposed to the Prince de Conde at Jargeau, Gien and the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. He did not execrate monsieur le prince, it is true, but he obeyed the king. Monsieur le prince is an agreeable man, but the king is king. Turenne heaved a deep sigh, called Conde 'My cousin,' and swept away his army. Now what does the king wish? That does not concern me. Now, what does M. Colbert wish? Oh, that's another thing. M. Colbert wishes all that M. Fouquet does not wish. Then what does M. Fouquet wish? Oh, that is serious. M. Fouquet wishes precisely for all the king wishes."

This monologue ended, D’Artagnan began to laugh, whilst making his whip whistle in the air. He was already on the high road, frightening the birds in the hedges, listening to the livres chinking and dancing in his leather pocket, at every step; and, let us confess it, every time that D’Artagnan found himself in such conditions, tenderness was not his dominant vice. “Come,” said he, “I cannot think the expedition a very dangerous one; and it will fall out with my voyage as with that piece M. Monk took me to see in London, which was called, I think, ‘Much Ado about Nothing.’“

CHAPTER LXVI.

The Journey.

It was perhaps the fiftieth time since the day on which we open this history, that this man, with a heart of bronze and muscles of steel, had left house and friends, everything, in short, to go in search of fortune and death. The one--that is to say, death--had constantly retreated before him, as if afraid of him; the other--that is to say, fortune--for only a month past had really made an alliance with him. Although he was not a great philosopher, after the fashion of either Epicurus or Socrates, he was a powerful spirit, having knowledge of life, and endowed with thought. No one is as brave, as adventurous, or as skillful as D'Artagnan, without at the same time being inclined to be a dreamer. He had picked up, here and there, some scraps of M. de la Rochefoucault, worthy of being translated into Latin by MM. de Port Royal; and he had made a collection, en passant, in the society of Athos and Aramis, of many morsels of Seneca and Cicero, translated by them, and applied to the uses of common life. That contempt of riches which our Gascon had observed as an article of faith during the thirty-five first years of his life, had for a long time been considered by him as the first article of the code of bravery. "Article first," said he, "A man is brave because he has nothing. A man has nothing because he despises riches." Therefore, with these principles, which, as we have said, had regulated the thirty-five first years of his life, D'Artagnan was no sooner possessed of riches, than he felt it necessary to ask himself if, in spite of his riches, he were still brave. To this, for any other but D'Artagnan, the events of the Place de Greve might have served as a reply. Many consciences would have been satisfied with them, but D'Artagnan was brave enough to ask himself sincerely and conscientiously if he were brave. Therefore to this:--

"But it appears to me that I drew promptly enough, and cut and thrust pretty freely on the Place de Greve, to be satisfied of my bravery," D'Artagnan had himself replied. "Gently, captain, that is not an answer. I was brave that day, because they were burning my house, and there are a hundred, and even a thousand, to speak against one, that if those gentlemen of the riots had not formed that unlucky idea, their plan of attack would have succeeded, or, at least, it would not have been I who would have opposed myself to it. Now, what will be brought against me? I have no house to be burnt in Bretagne; I have no treasure there that can be taken from me.--No; but I have my skin; that precious skin of M. d'Artagnan, which to him is worth more than all the houses and all the treasures of the world. That skin to which I cling above everything, because it is, everything considered, the binding of a body which encloses a heart very warm and ready to fight, and, consequently, to live. Then, I do desire to live: and, in reality, I live much better, more completely, since I have become rich. Who the devil ever said that money spoiled life? Upon my soul, it is no such thing, on the contrary, it seems as if I absorbed a double quantity of air and sun. Mordioux! what will it be then, if I double that fortune; and if, instead of the switch I now hold in my hand, I should ever carry the baton of a marechal? Then I really don't know if there will be, from that moment, enough of air and sun for me. In fact, this is not a dream, who the devil would oppose it, if the king made me a marechal, as his father, King Louis XIII., made a duke and constable of Albert de Luynes? Am I not as brave, and much more intelligent, than that imbecile De Vitry? Ah! that's exactly what will prevent my advancement: I have too much wit. Luckily, if there is any justice in this world, fortune owes me many compensations. She owes me certainly a recompense for all I did for Anne of Austria, and an indemnification for all she has not done for me. Then, at the present, I am very well with a king, and with a king who has the appearance of determining to reign. May God keep him in that illustrious road! For, if he is resolved to reign, he will want me; and if he wants me, he will give me what he has promised me--warmth and light; so that I march, comparatively, now, as I marched formerly,--from nothing to everything. Only the nothing of to-day is the all of former days; there has only this little change taken place in my life. And now let us see! let us take the part of the heart, as I just now was speaking of it. But in truth, I only spoke of it from memory." And the Gascon applied his hand to his breast, as if he were actually seeking the place where his heart was.

"Ah! wretch!" murmured he, smiling with bitterness. "Ah! poor mortal species! You hoped, for an instant, that you had not a heart, and now you find you have one--bad courtier as thou art,--and even one of the most seditious. You have a heart which speaks to you in favor of M. Fouquet.

And what is M. Fouquet, when the king is in question?--A conspirator, a real conspirator, who did not even give himself the trouble to conceal his being a conspirator; therefore, what a weapon would you not have against him, if his good grace, and his intelligence had not made a scabbard for that weapon. An armed revolt!--for, in fact, M. Fouquet has been guilty of an armed revolt. Thus, while the king vaguely suspects M. Fouquet of rebellion, I know it--I could prove that M. Fouquet had caused the shedding of the blood of his majesty's subjects. Now, then, let us see. Knowing all that, and holding my tongue, what further would this heart wish in return for a kind action of M. Fouquet's, for an advance of fifteen thousand livres, for a diamond worth a thousand pistoles, for a smile in which there was as much bitterness as kindness?--I save his life."

"Now, then, I hope," continued the musketeer, "that this imbecile of a heart is going to preserve silence, and so be fairly quits with M. Fouquet. Now, then, the king becomes my sun, and as my heart is quits with M. Fouquet, let him beware who places himself between me and my sun! Forward, for his majesty Louis XIV.!--Forward!"

These reflections were the only impediments which were able to retard the progress of D'Artagnan. These reflections once made, he increased the speed of his horse. But, however perfect his horse Zephyr might be, it could not hold out at such a pace forever. The day after his departure from Paris, his mount was left at Chartres, at the house of an old friend D'Artagnan had met with in an hotelier of that city. From that moment the musketeer travelled on post-horses. Thanks to this mode of locomotion, he traversed the space separating Chartres from Chateaubriand. In the last of these two cities, far enough from the coast to prevent any one guessing that D'Artagnan wished to reach the sea--far enough from Paris to prevent all suspicion of his being a messenger from Louis XIV., whom D'Artagnan had called his sun, without suspecting that he who was only at present a rather poor star in the heaven of royalty, would, one day, make that star his emblem; the messenger of Louis XIV., we say, quitted his post and purchased a bidet of the meanest appearance,--one of those animals which an officer of the cavalry would never choose, for fear of being disgraced. Excepting the color, this new acquisition recalled to the mind of D'Artagnan the famous orange-colored horse, with which, or rather upon which, he had made his first appearance in the world. Truth to say, from the moment he crossed this new steed, it was no longer D'Artagnan who was travelling,--it was a good man clothed in an iron-gray justaucorps, brown haut-de-chausses, holding the medium between a priest and a layman; that which brought him nearest to the churchman was, that D'Artagnan had placed on his head a calotte of threadbare velvet, and over the calotte, a large black hat; no more sword, a stick hung by a cord to his wrist, but to which, he promised himself, as an unexpected auxiliary, to join, upon occasion, a good dagger, ten inches long, concealed under his cloak. The bidet purchased at Chateaubriand completed the metamorphosis; it was called, or rather D'Artagnan called if, Furet (ferret).

"If I have changed Zephyr into Furet," said D'Artagnan, "I must make some diminutive or other of my own name. So, instead of D'Artagnan, I will be Agnan, short; that is a concession which I naturally owe to my gray coat, my round hat, and my rusty calotte."

Monsieur d'Artagnan traveled, then, pretty easily upon Furet, who ambled like a true butter-woman's pad, and who, with his amble, managed cheerfully about twelve leagues a day, upon four spindle-shanks, of which the practiced eye of D'Artagnan had appreciated the strength and safety beneath the thick mass of hair which covered them. Jogging along, the traveler took notes, studied the country, which he traversed reserved and silent, ever seeking the most plausible pretext for reaching Belle-Ile-en-Mer, and for seeing everything without arousing suspicion. In this manner, he was enabled to convince himself of the importance the event assumed in proportion as he drew near to it. In this remote country, in this ancient duchy of Bretagne, which was not France at that period, and is not so even now, the people knew nothing of the king of France. They not only did not know him, but were unwilling to know him. One face--a single one--floated visibly for them upon the political current. Their ancient dukes no longer ruled them; government was a void--nothing more. In place of the sovereign duke, the seigneurs of parishes reigned without control; and, above these seigneurs, God, who has never been forgotten in Bretagne. Among these suzerains of chateaux and belfries, the most powerful, the richest, the most popular, was M. Fouquet, seigneur of Belle-Isle. Even in the country, even within sight of that mysterious isle, legends and traditions consecrate its wonders. Every one might not penetrate it: the isle, of an extent of six leagues in length, and six in breadth, was a seignorial property, which the people had for a long time respected, covered as it was with the name of Retz, so redoubtable in the country. Shortly after the erection of this seignory into a marquistate, Belle-Isle passed to M. Fouquet. The celebrity of the isle did not date from yesterday; its name, or rather its qualification, is traced back to the remotest antiquity. The ancients called it Kalonese, from two Greek words, signifying beautiful isle. Thus, at a distance of eighteen hundred years, it had borne, in another idiom, the same name it still bears. There was, then, something in itself in this property of M. Fouquet's, besides its position of six leagues off the coast of France; a position which makes it a sovereign in its maritime solitude, like a majestic ship which disdains roads, and proudly casts anchor in mid-ocean.

D'Artagnan learnt all this without appearing the least in the world astonished. He also learnt the best way to get intelligence was to go to La Roche-Bernard, a tolerably important city at the mouth of the Vilaine. Perhaps there he could embark; if not, crossing the salt marshes, he would repair to Guerande or Le Croisic, to wait for an opportunity to cross over to Belle-Isle. He had discovered, besides, since his departure from Chateaubriand, that nothing would be impossible for Furet under the impulsion of M. Agnan, and nothing to M. Agnan through the initiative of Furet. He prepared, then, to sup off a teal and a torteau, in a hotel of La Roche-Bernard, and ordered to be brought from the cellar, to wash down these two Breton dishes, some cider, which, the moment it touched his lips, he perceived to be more Breton still.

CHAPTER LXVII.

How D’Artagnan became Acquainted with a Poet.

Before taking his place at table, D’Artagnan acquired, as was his custom, all the information he could; but it is an axiom of curiosity, that every man who wishes to question well and fruitfully ought in the first place to lay himself open to questions. D’Artagnan sought, then, with his usual skill, a promising questioner in the hostelry of La Roche-Bernard. At the moment, there were in the house, on the first story, two travelers either preparing for supper, or at supper itself. D’Artagnan had seen their nags in the stable, and their equipages in the salle. One traveled with a lackey, undoubtedly a person of consideration;--two Perche mares, sleek, sound beasts, were suitable means of locomotion. The other, a little fellow, a traveler of meagre appearance, wearing a dusty surtout, dirty linen, and boots more worn by the pavement than the stirrup, had come from Nantes with a cart drawn by a horse so like Furet in color, that D’Artagnan might have gone a hundred miles without finding a better match. This cart contained divers large packets wrapped in pieces of old stuff.

“That traveler yonder,” said D’Artagnan to himself, “is the man for my money. He will do, he suits me; I ought to do for him and suit him; M. Agnan, with the gray doublet and the rusty calotte, is not unworthy of supping with the gentleman of the old boots and still older horse.”

This said, D’Artagnan called the host, and desired him to send his teal, tourteau, and cider up to the chamber of the gentleman of modest exterior. He himself climbed, a plate in his hand, the wooden staircase which led to the chamber, and began to knock at the door.

“Come in!” said the unknown. D’Artagnan entered, with a simper on his lips, his plate under his arm, his hat in one hand, his candle in the other.

“Excuse me, monsieur,” said he, “I am as you are, a traveler; I know no one in the hotel, and I have the bad habit of losing my spirits when I eat alone; so that my repast appears a bad one to me, and does not nourish me. Your face, which I saw just now, when you came down to have some oysters opened,--your face pleased me much. Besides, I have observed you have a horse just like mine, and that the host, no doubt on account of that resemblance, has placed them side by side in the stable, where they appear to agree amazingly well together. I therefore, monsieur, do not see any reason why the masters should be separated when the horses are united. Accordingly, I am come to request the pleasure of being admitted to your table. My name is Agnan, at your service, monsieur, the unworthy steward of a rich seigneur, who wishes to purchase some salt-mines in this country, and sends me to examine his future acquisitions. In truth, monsieur, I should be well pleased if my countenance were as agreeable to you as yours is to me; for, upon my honor, I am quite at your service."

The stranger, whom D'Artagnan saw for the first time,--for before he had only caught a glimpse of him,--the stranger had black and brilliant eyes, a yellow complexion, a brow a little wrinkled by the weight of fifty years, bonhomie in his features collectively, but some cunning in his look.

"One would say," thought D'Artagnan, "that this merry fellow has never exercised more than the upper part of his head, his eyes, and his brain. He must be a man of science: his mouth, nose, and chin signify absolutely nothing."

"Monsieur," replied the latter, with whose mind and person we have been making so free, "you do me much honor; not that I am ever ennuye, for I have," added he, smiling, "a company which amuses me always: but, never mind that, I am happy to receive you." But when saying this, the man with the worn boots cast an uneasy look at his table, from which the oysters had disappeared, and upon which there was nothing left but a morsel of salt bacon.

"Monsieur," D'Artagnan hastened to say, "the host is bringing me up a pretty piece of roasted poultry and a superb tourteau." D'Artagnan had read in the look of his companion, however rapidly it disappeared, the fear of an attack by a parasite: he divined justly. At this opening, the features of the man of modest exterior relaxed; and, as if he had watched the moment for his entrance, as D'Artagnan spoke, the host appeared, bearing the announced dishes. The tourteau and the teal were added to the morsel of broiled bacon; D'Artagnan and his guest bowed, sat down opposite to each other, and, like two brothers, shared the bacon and the other dishes.

"Monsieur," said D'Artagnan, "you must confess that association is a wonderful thing."

"How so?" replied the stranger, with his mouth full.

“Well, I will tell you,” replied D’Artagnan.

The stranger gave a short truce to the movement of his jaws, in order to hear the better.

“In the first place,” continued D’Artagnan, “instead of one candle, which each of us had, we have two.”

“That is true!” said the stranger, struck with the extreme lucidity of the observation.

“Then I see that you eat my tourteau in preference, whilst I, in preference, eat your bacon.”

“That is true again.”

“And then, in addition to being better lighted and eating what we prefer, I place the pleasure of your company.”

“Truly, monsieur, you are very jovial,” said the unknown, cheerfully.

“Yes, monsieur; jovial, as all people are who carry nothing on their minds, or, for that matter, in their heads. Oh! I can see it is quite another sort of thing with you,” continued D’Artagnan; “I can read in your eyes all sorts of genius.”

“Oh, monsieur!”

“Come, confess one thing.”

“What is that?”

“That you are a learned man.”

“Ma foi! monsieur.”

“Hein?”

“Almost.”

“Come, then!”

“I am an author.”

“There!” cried D’Artagnan, clapping his hands, “I knew I could not be deceived! It is a miracle!”

“Monsieur--”

“What, shall I have the honor of passing the evening in the society of an author, of a celebrated author, perhaps?”

“Oh!” said the unknown, blushing, “celebrated, monsieur, celebrated is not the word.”

“Modest!” cried D’Artagnan, transported, “he is modest!” Then, turning towards the stranger, with a character of blunt bonhomie: “But tell me at least the name of your works, monsieur; for you will please to observe you have not told me your name, and I have been forced to divine your genius.”

“My name is Jupenet, monsieur,” said the author.

“A fine name! a grand name! upon my honor; and I do not know why--pardon me the mistake, if it be one--but surely I have heard that name somewhere.”

“I have made verses,” said the poet, modestly.

“Ah! that is it, then; I have heard them read.”

“A tragedy.”

“I must have seen it played.”

The poet blushed again, and said: “I do not think that can be the case, for my verses have never been printed.”

“Well, then, it must have been the tragedy which informed me of your name.”

“You are again mistaken, for MM. the comedians of the Hotel de Bourgogne, would have nothing to do with it,” said the poet, with a smile, the receipt for which certain sorts of pride alone knew the secret. D’Artagnan bit his lips. “Thus, then, you see, monsieur,” continued the poet, “you are in error on my account, and that not being at all known to you, you have never heard tell of me.”

“Ah! that confounds me. That name, Jupenet, appears to me, nevertheless, a fine name, and quite as worthy of being known as those of MM. Corneille, or Rotrou, or Garnier. I hope, monsieur, you will have the goodness to repeat to me a part of your tragedy presently, by way of dessert, for instance. That will be sugared roast meat,--mordioux! Ah! pardon me, monsieur, that was a little oath which escaped me, because it is a habit with my lord and master. I sometimes allow myself to usurp that little oath, as it seems in pretty good taste. I take this liberty only in his absence, please to observe, for you may understand that in his presence--but, in truth, monsieur, this cider is abominable; do you not think so? And besides, the pot is of such an irregular shape it will not stand on the table.”

“Suppose we were to make it level?”

“To be sure; but with what?”

“With this knife.”

“And the teal, with what shall we cut that up? Do you not, by chance, mean to touch the teal?”

“Certainly.”

“Well, then--”

“Wait.”

And the poet rummaged in his pocket, and drew out a piece of brass, oblong, quadrangular, about a line in thickness, and an inch and a half in length. But scarcely had this little piece of brass seen the light, than the poet appeared to have committed an imprudence, and made a movement to put it back again in his pocket. D'Artagnan perceived this, for he was a man that nothing escaped. He stretched forth his hand towards the piece of brass: "Humph! that which you hold in your hand is pretty; will you allow me to look at it?"

"Certainly," said the poet, who appeared to have yielded too soon to a first impulse. "Certainly, you may look at it: but it will be in vain for you to look at it," added he, with a satisfied air; "if I were not to tell you its use, you would never guess it."

D'Artagnan had seized as an avowal the hesitation of the poet, and his eagerness to conceal the piece of brass which a first movement had induced him to take out of his pocket. His attention, therefore, once awakened on this point, he surrounded himself with a circumspection which gave him a superiority on all occasions. Besides, whatever M. Jupenet might say about it, by a simple inspection of the object, he perfectly well knew what it was. It was a character in printing.

"Can you guess, now, what this is?" continued the poet.

"No," said D'Artagnan, "no, ma foi!"

"Well, monsieur," said M. Jupenet, "this little piece of metal is a printing letter."

"Bah!"

"A capital."

"Stop, stop, stop," said D'Artagnan, opening his eyes very innocently.

"Yes, monsieur, a capital; the first letter of my name."

"And this is a letter, is it?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Well, I will confess one thing to you."

"And what is that?"

"No, I will not, I was going to say something stupid."

"No, no," said Master Jupenet, with a patronizing air.

"Well, then, I cannot comprehend, if that is a letter, how you can make a word."

"A word?"

"Yes, a printed word."

“Oh, that’s very easy.”

“Let me see.”

“Does it interest you?”

“Enormously.”

“Well, I will explain the thing to you. Attend.”

“I am attending.”

“This is it.”

“Good.”

“Look attentively.”

“I am looking.” D’Artagnan, in fact, appeared absorbed in observations. Jupenet drew from his pocket seven or eight other pieces of brass smaller than the first.

“Ah, ah,” said D’Artagnan.

“What!”

“You have, then, a whole printing-office in your pocket. Peste! that is curious, indeed.”

“Is it not?”

“Good God, what a number of things we learn by traveling.”

“To your health!” said Jupenet, quite enchanted.

“To yours, mordioux, to yours. But--an instant--not in this cider. It is an abominable drink, unworthy of a man who quenches his thirst at the Hippocrene fountain--is not it so you call your fountain, you poets?”

“Yes, monsieur, our fountain is so called. That comes from two Greek words--hippos, which means a horse, and--”

“Monsieur,” interrupted D’Artagnan, “you shall drink of a liquor which comes from one single French word, and is none the worse for that--from the word grape; this cider gives me the heartburn. Allow me to inquire of your host if there is not a good bottle of Beaugency, or of the Ceran growth, at the back of the large bins in his cellar.”

The host, being sent for, immediately attended.

“Monsieur,” interrupted the poet, “take care, we shall not have time to drink the wine, unless we make great haste, for I must take advantage of the tide to secure the boat.”

“What boat?” asked D’Artagnan.

“Why the boat which sets out for Belle-Isle.”

“Ah--for Belle-Isle,” said the musketeer, “that is good.”

"Bah! you will have plenty of time, monsieur," replied the hotelier, uncorking the bottle, "the boat will not leave this hour."

"But who will give me notice?" said the poet.

"Your fellow-traveler," replied the host.

"But I scarcely know him."

"When you hear him departing, it will be time for you to go."

"Is he going to Belle-Isle, likewise, then?"

"Yes."

"The traveler who has a lackey?" asked D'Artagnan. "He is some gentleman, no doubt?"

"I know nothing of him."

"What!--know nothing of him?"

"No, all I know is, that he is drinking the same wine as you."

"Peste!--that is a great honor for us," said D'Artagnan, filling his companion's glass, whilst the host went out.

"So," resumed the poet, returning to his dominant ideas, "you never saw any printing done?"

"Never."

"Well, then, take the letters thus, which compose the word, you see: A B; ma foi! here is an R, two E E, then a G." And he assembled the letters with a swiftness and skill which did not escape the eye of D'Artagnan.

"Abrege," said he, as he ended.

"Good!" said D'Artagnan; "here are plenty of letters got together; but how are they kept so?" And he poured out a second glass for the poet. M. Jupenet smiled like a man who has an answer for everything; then he pulled out--still from his pocket--a little metal ruler, composed of two parts, like a carpenter's rule, against which he put together, and in a line, the characters, holding them under his left thumb.

"And what do you call that little metal ruler?" said D'Artagnan, "for, I suppose, all these things have names."

"This is called a composing-stick," said Jupenet; "it is by the aid of this stick that the lines are formed."

"Come, then, I was not mistaken in what I said; you have a press in your pocket," said D'Artagnan, laughing with an air of simplicity so stupid, that the poet was completely his dupe.

"No," replied he; "but I am too lazy to write, and when I have a verse in my head, I print it immediately. That is a labor spared."

“Mordioux!” thought D’Artagnan to himself, “this must be cleared up.” And under a pretext, which did not embarrass the musketeer, who was fertile in expedients, he left the table, went downstairs, ran to the shed under which stood the poet’s little cart, and poked the point of his poniard into the stuff which enveloped one of the packages, which he found full of types, like those which the poet had in his pocket.

“Humph!” said D’Artagnan, “I do not yet know whether M. Fouquet wishes to fortify Belle-Isle; but, at all events, here are some spiritual munitions for the castle.” Then, enchanted with his rich discovery, he ran upstairs again, and resumed his place at the table.

D’Artagnan had learnt what he wished to know. He, however, remained, none the less, face to face with his partner, to the moment when they heard from the next room symptoms of a person’s being about to go out. The printer was immediately on foot; he had given orders for his horse to be got ready. His carriage was waiting at the door. The second traveler got into his saddle, in the courtyard, with his lackey. D’Artagnan followed Jupenet to the door; he embarked his cart and horse on board the boat. As to the opulent traveler, he did the same with his two horses and servant. But all the wit D’Artagnan employed in endeavoring to find out his name was lost--he could learn nothing. Only he took such notice of his countenance, that it was impressed upon his mind forever. D’Artagnan had a great inclination to embark with the two travelers, but an interest more powerful than curiosity--that of success--repelled him from the shore, and brought him back again to the hostelry. He entered with a sigh, and went to bed directly in order to be ready early in the morning with fresh ideas and the sage counsel of sufficing sleep.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

D’Artagnan continues his Investigations.

At daybreak D’Artagnan saddled Furet, who had fared sumptuously all night, devouring the remainder of the oats and hay left by his companions. The musketeer sifted all he possibly could out of the host, who he found cunning, mistrustful, and devoted, body and soul, to M. Fouquet. In order not to awaken the suspicions of this man, he carried on his fable of being a probable purchaser of some salt-mines. To have embarked for Belle-Isle at Roche-Bernard, would have been to expose himself still further to comments which had, perhaps, been already made, and would be carried to the castle. Moreover, it was singular that this traveler and his lackey should have remained a mystery to D’Artagnan, in spite of all the questions addressed by him to the host, who appeared to know him perfectly well. The musketeer then made some inquiries concerning the salt-mines, and took the road to the marshes, leaving the sea on his right, and penetrating into that vast and desolate plain which resembles a sea of mud, of which, here and there, a few crests of salt silver the undulations. Furet walked admirably, with his little nervous legs, along the foot-wide causeways which separate the salt-mines. D’Artagnan, aware of the consequences of a fall, which would result in a cold bath, allowed him to go as he liked, contenting himself with looking at, on the horizon, three rocks, that rose up like lance-blades from the bosom of the plain, destitute of verdure. Piriac, the bourgs of Batz and Le Croisic, exactly resembling each other, attracted and suspended his attention. If the traveler turned round, the better to make his observations, he saw on the other side an horizon of three other steeples, Guerande, Le Pouliguen, and Saint-Joachim, which, in their circumference, represented a set of skittles, of which he and Furet were but the wandering ball. Piriac was the first little port on his right. He went thither, with the names of the principal salters on his lips. At the moment he reached the little port of Piriac, five large barges, laden with stone, were leaving it. It appeared strange to D’Artagnan, that stones should be leaving a country where none are found. He had recourse to all the amenity of M. Agnan to learn from the people of the port the cause of this singular arrangement. An old fisherman replied to M. Agnan, that the stones very certainly did not come from Piriac or the marshes.

“Where do they come from, then?” asked the musketeer.

“Monsieur, they come from Nantes and Paimboeuf.”

“Where are they going, then?”

“Monsieur, to Belle-Isle.”

“Ah! ah!” said D’Artagnan, in the same tone he had assumed to tell the printer that his character interested him; “are they building at Belle-Isle, then?”

“Why, yes, monsieur, M. Fouquet has the walls of the castle repaired every year.”

“It is in ruins, then?”

“It is old.”

“Thank you.”

“The fact is,” said D’Artagnan to himself, “nothing is more natural; every proprietor has a right to repair his own property. It would be like telling me I was fortifying the Image-de-Notre-Dame, when I was simply obliged to make repairs. In good truth, I believe false reports have been made to his majesty, and he is very likely to be in the wrong.”

“You must confess,” continued he then, aloud, and addressing the fisherman--for his part of a suspicious man was imposed upon him by the object even of his mission--”you must confess, my dear monsieur, that these stones travel in a very curious fashion.”

“How so?” said the fisherman.

“They come from Nantes or Paimboeuf by the Loire, do they not?”

“With the tide.”

“That is convenient,--I don’t say it is not; but why do they not go straight from Saint-Nazaire to Belle-Isle?”

“Eh! because the chalands (barges) are fresh-water boats, and take the sea badly,” replied the fisherman.

“That is not sufficient reason.”

“Pardon me, monsieur, one may see that you have never been a sailor,” added the fisherman, not without a sort of disdain.

“Explain to me, if you please, my good man. It appears to me that to come from Paimboeuf to Piriac, and go from Piriac to Belle-Isle, is as if we went from Roche-Bernard to Nantes, and from Nantes to Piriac.”

“By water that would be the nearest way,” replied the fisherman imperturbably.

“But there is an elbow?”

The fisherman shook his head.

“The shortest road from one place to another is a straight line,” continued D’Artagnan.

“You forget the tide, monsieur.”

“Well! take the tide.”

“And the wind.”

“Well, and the wind.”

“Without doubt; the current of the Loire carries barks almost as far as Croisic. If they want to lie by a little, or to refresh the crew, they come to Piriac along the coast; from Piriac they find another inverse current, which carries them to the Isle-Dumal, two leagues and a half.”

“Granted.”

“There the current of the Vilaine throws them upon another isle, the Isle of Hoedic.”

“I agree with that.”

“Well, monsieur, from that isle to Belle-Isle the way is quite straight. The sea, broken both above and below, passes like a canal--like a mirror between the two isles; the chalands glide along upon it like ducks upon the Loire; that’s how it is.”

“It does not signify,” said the obstinate M. Agnan; “it is a long way round.”

“Ah! yes; but M. Fouquet will have it so,” replied, as conclusive, the fisherman, taking off his woolen cap at the enunciation of that respected name.

A look from D’Artagnan, a look as keen and piercing as a sword-blade, found nothing in the heart of the old man but a simple confidence--on his features, nothing but satisfaction and indifference. He said, “M. Fouquet will have it so,” as he would have said, “God has willed it.”

D’Artagnan had already advanced too far in this direction; besides, the chalands being gone, there remained nothing at Piriac but a single bark--that of the old man, and it did not look fit for sea without great preparation. D’Artagnan therefore patted Furet, who, as a new proof of his charming character, resumed his march with his feet in the salt-mines, and his nose to the dry wind, which bends the furze and the broom of this country. They reached Le Croisic about five o’clock.

If D’Artagnan had been a poet, it was a beautiful spectacle: the immense strand of a league or more, the sea covers at high tide, and which, at the reflux, appears gray and desolate, strewed with polypi and seaweed, with pebbles sparse and white, like bones in some vast old cemetery. But the soldier, the politician, and the ambitious man, had no longer the sweet consolation of looking towards heaven to read there a hope or a warning. A red sky signifies nothing to such people but wind and disturbance. White and fleecy clouds upon the azure only say that the sea will be smooth and peaceful. D’Artagnan found the sky blue, the breeze embalmed with saline perfumes, and he said: “I will embark with the first tide, if it be but in a nutshell.”

At Le Croisic as at Piriac, he had remarked enormous heaps of stone lying along the shore. These gigantic walls, diminished every tide by the barges for Belle-Isle, were, in the eyes of the musketeer, the consequence and the proof of what he had well divined at Piriac. Was it a wall that M. Fouquet was constructing? Was it a fortification that he was erecting? To ascertain that, he must make fuller observations. D’Artagnan put Furet into a stable; supped, went to bed, and on the morrow took a walk upon the port or rather upon the shingle. Le Croisic has a port of fifty feet; it has a look-out which resembles an enormous brioche (a kind of cake) elevated on a dish. The flat strand is the dish. Hundreds of barrowsful of earth amalgamated with pebbles, and rounded into cones, with sinuous passages between, are look-outs and brioches at the same time. It is so now, and it was so two hundred years ago, only the brioche was not so large, and probably there were to be seen to trellises of lath around the brioche, which constitute an ornament, planted like gardes-fous along the passages that wind towards the little terrace. Upon the shingle lounged three or four fishermen talking about sardines and shrimps. D’Artagnan, with his eyes animated by a rough gayety, and a smile upon his lips, approached these fishermen.

“Any fishing going on to-day?” said he.

“Yes, monsieur,” replied one of them, “we are only waiting for the tide.”

“Where do you fish, my friends?”

“Upon the coasts, monsieur.”

“Which are the best coasts?”

“Ah, that is all according. The tour of the isles, for example?”

“Yes, but they are a long way off, those isles, are they not?”

“Not very; four leagues.”

“Four leagues! That is a voyage.”

The fishermen laughed in M. Agnan’s face.

“Hear me, then,” said the latter with an air of simple stupidity; “four leagues off you lose sight of land, do you not?”

“Why, not always.”

“Ah, it is a long way--too long, or else I would have asked you to take me aboard, and to show me what I have never seen.”

“What is that?”

“A live sea-fish.”

“Monsieur comes from the province?” said a fisherman.

“Yes, I come from Paris.”

The Breton shrugged his shoulders; then:

“Have you ever seen M. Fouquet in Paris?” asked he.

“Often,” replied D’Artagnan.

“Often!” repeated the fishermen, closing their circle round the Parisian. “Do you know him?”

“A little; he is the intimate friend of my master.”

“Ah!” said the fishermen, in astonishment.

“And,” said D’Artagnan, “I have seen all his chateaux of Saint Mande, of Vaux, and his hotel in Paris.”

“Is that a fine place?”

“Superb.”

“It is not so fine a place as Belle-Isle,” said the fisherman.

“Bah!” cried M. d’Artagnan, breaking into a laugh so loud that he angered all his auditors.

“It is very plain that you have never seen Belle-Isle,” said the most curious of the fishermen. “Do you know that there are six leagues of it, and that there are such trees on it as cannot be equaled even at Nates-sur-le-Fosse?”

“Trees in the sea!” cried D’Artagnan; “well, I should like to see them.”

“That can be easily done; we are fishing at the Isle de Hoedic--come with us. From that place you will see, as a Paradise, the black trees of Belle-Isle against the sky; you will see the white line of the castle, which cuts the horizon of the sea like a blade.”

"Oh," said D'Artagnan, "that must be very beautiful. But do you know there are a hundred belfries at M. Fouquet's chateau of Vaux?"

The Breton raised his head in profound admiration, but he was not convinced. "A hundred belfries! Ah, that may be; but Belle-Isle is finer than that. Should you like to see Belle-Isle?"

"Is that possible?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Yes, with permission of the governor."

"But I do not know the governor."

"As you know M. Fouquet, you can tell your name."

"Oh, my friends, I am not a gentleman."

"Everybody enters Belle-Isle," continued the fisherman in his strong, pure language, "provided he means no harm to Belle-Isle or its master."

A slight shudder crept over the body of the musketeer. "That is true," thought he. Then recovering himself, "If I were sure," said he, "not to be sea-sick."

"What, upon her?" said the fisherman, pointing with pride to his pretty round-bottomed bark.

"Well, you almost persuade me," cried M. Agnan; "I will go and see Belle-Isle, but they will not admit me."

"We shall enter, safe enough."

"You! What for?"

"Why, dame! to sell fish to the corsairs."

"Ha! Corsairs--what do you mean?"

"Well, I mean that M. Fouquet is having two corsairs built to chase the Dutch and the English, and we sell our fish to the crews of those little vessels."

"Come, come!" said D'Artagnan to himself--"better and better. A printing-press, bastions, and corsairs! Well, M. Fouquet is not an enemy to be despised, as I presumed to fancy. He is worth the trouble of travelling to see him nearer."

"We set out at half-past five," said the fisherman gravely.

"I am quite ready, and I will not leave you now." So D'Artagnan saw the fishermen haul their barks to meet the tide with a windlass. The sea rose; M. Agnan allowed himself to be hoisted on board, not without sporting a little fear and awkwardness, to the amusement of the young beach-urchins who watched him with their large intelligent eyes. He laid himself down upon a folded sail, not interfering with anything whilst the bark prepared for sea; and, with its large square sail, it was fairly out within two hours. The fishermen, who prosecuted their occupation as they proceeded, did not perceive that their passenger had not become pale, neither groaned nor suffered; that in spite of that horrible tossing and rolling of the bark, to which no hand imparted direction, the novice passenger had preserved his presence of mind and his appetite. They fished, and their fishing was sufficiently fortunate. To lines bated with prawn, soles came, with numerous gambols, to bite. Two nets had already been broken by the immense weight of congers and haddocks; three sea-eels plowed the hold with their slimy folds and their dying contortions. D'Artagnan brought them good luck; they told him so. The soldier found the occupation so pleasant, that he put his hand to the work--that is to say, to the lines--and uttered roars of joy, and mordioux enough to have astonished his musketeers themselves, every time that a shock given to his line by the captured fish required the play of the muscles of his arm, and the employment of his best dexterity. The party of pleasure had made him forget his diplomatic mission. He was struggling with a very large conger, and holding fast with one hand to the side of the vessel, in order to seize with the other the gaping jowl of his antagonist, when the master said to him, "Take care they don't see you from Belle-Isle!"

These words produced the same effect upon D'Artagnan as the hissing of the first bullet on a day of battle; he let go of both line and conger, which, dragging each other, returned again to the water. D'Artagnan perceived, within half a league at most, the blue and marked profile of the rocks of Belle-Isle, dominated by the majestic whiteness of the castle. In the distance, the land with its forests and verdant plains; cattle on the grass. This was what first attracted the attention of the musketeer. The sun darted its rays of gold upon the sea, raising a shining mist round this enchanted isle. Little could be seen of it, owing to this dazzling light, but the salient points; every shadow was strongly marked, and cut with bands of darkness the luminous fields and walls. "Eh! eh!" said D'Artagnan, at the aspect of those masses of black rocks, "these are fortifications which do not stand in need of any engineer to render a landing difficult. How the devil can a landing be effected on that isle which God has defended so completely?"

"This way," replied the patron of the bark, changing the sail, and impressing upon the rudder a twist which turned the boat in the direction of a pretty little port, quite coquettish, round, and newly battlemented.

“What the devil do I see yonder?” said D’Artagnan.

“You see Locmaria,” replied the fisherman.

“Well, but there?”

“That is Bangor.”

“And further on?”

“Sauzon, and then Le Palais.”

“Mordioux! It is a world. Ah! there are some soldiers.”

“There are seventeen hundred men in Belle-Isle, monsieur,” replied the fisherman, proudly. “Do you know that the least garrison is of twenty companies of infantry?”

“Mordioux!” cried D’Artagnan, stamping with his foot. “His majesty was right enough.”

They landed.

CHAPTER LXIX.

D’Artagnan was to meet an Old Acquaintance.

There is always something in a landing, if it be only from the smallest sea-boat--a trouble and a confusion which do not leave the mind the liberty of which it stands in need in order to study at the first glance the new locality presented to it. The moveable bridges, the agitated sailors, the noise of the water on the pebbles, the cries and importunities of those who wait upon the shores, are multiplied details of that sensation which is summed up in one single result--hesitation. It was not, then, till after standing several minutes on the shore that D’Artagnan saw upon the port, but more particularly in the interior of the isle, an immense number of workmen in motion. At his feet D’Artagnan recognized the five chalands laden with rough stone he had seen leave the port of Piriac. The smaller stones were transported to the shore by means of a chain formed by twenty-five or thirty peasants. The large stones were loaded on trollies which conveyed them in the same direction as the others, that is to say, towards the works, of which D’Artagnan could as yet appreciate neither the strength nor the extent. Everywhere was to be seen an activity equal to that which Telemachus observed on his landing at Salentum. D’Artagnan felt a strong inclination to penetrate into the interior; but he could not, under the penalty of exciting mistrust, exhibit too much curiosity. He advanced then little by little, scarcely going beyond the line formed by the fishermen on the beach, observing everything, saying nothing, and meeting all suspicion that might have been excited with a half-silly question or a polite bow. And yet, whilst his companions carried on their trade, giving or selling their fish to the workmen or the inhabitants of the city, D’Artagnan had gained by degrees, and, reassured by the little attention paid to him, he began to cast an intelligent and confident look upon the men and things that appeared before his eyes. And his very first glance fell on certain movements of earth about which the eye of a soldier could not be mistaken. At the two extremities of the port, in order that their fires should converge upon the great axis of the ellipse formed by the basin, in the first place, two batteries had been raised, evidently destined to receive flank pieces, for D’Artagnan saw the workmen finishing the platform and making ready the demi-circumference in wood upon which the wheels of the pieces might turn to embrace every direction over the epaulement. By the side of each of these batteries other workmen were strengthening gabions filled with earth, the lining of another battery. The latter had embrasures, and the overseer of the works called successively men who, with cords, tied the saucissons and cut the lozenges and right angles of turfs destined to retain the matting of the embrasures. By the activity displayed in these works, already so far advanced, they might be considered as finished: they were not yet furnished with their cannons, but the platforms had their gites and their madriers all prepared; the earth, beaten carefully, was consolidated; and supposing the artillery to be on the island, in less than two or three days the port might be completely armed. That which astonished D’Artagnan, when he turned his eyes from the coast batteries to the fortifications of the city, was to see that Belle-Isle was defended by an entirely new system, of which he had often heard the Comte de la Fere speak as a wonderful advance, but of which he had as yet never seen the application. These fortifications belonged neither to the Dutch method of Marollais, nor to the French method of the Chevalier Antoine de Ville, but to the system of Manesson Mallet, a skillful engineer, who about six or eight years previously had quitted the service of Portugal to enter that of France. The works had this peculiarity, that instead of rising above the earth, as did the ancient ramparts destined to defend a city from escalades, they, on the contrary, sank into it; and what created the height of the walls was the depth of the ditches. It did not take long to make D’Artagnan perceive the superiority of such a system, which gives no advantage to cannon. Besides, as the fosses were lower than, or on a level with, the sea, these fosses could be instantly inundated by means of subterranean sluices. Otherwise, the works were almost complete, and a group of workmen, receiving orders from a man who appeared to be conductor of the works, were occupied in placing the last stones. A bridge of planks thrown over the fosses for the greater convenience of the maneuvers connected with the barrows, joined the interior to the exterior. With an air of simple curiosity D’Artagnan asked if he might be permitted to cross the bridge, and he was told that no order prevented it. Consequently he crossed the bridge, and advanced towards the group.

This group was superintended by the man whom D’Artagnan had already remarked, and who appeared to be the engineer-in-chief. A plan was lying open before him upon a large stone forming a table, and at some paces from him a crane was in action. This engineer, who by his evident importance first attracted the attention of D’Artagnan, wore a justaucorps, which, from its sumptuousness, was scarcely in harmony with the work he was employed in, that rather necessitated the costume of a master-mason than of a noble. He was a man of immense stature and great square shoulders, and wore a hat covered with feathers. He gesticulated in the most majestic manner, and appeared, for D’Artagnan only saw his back, to be scolding the workmen for their idleness and want of strength.

D’Artagnan continued to draw nearer. At that moment the man with the feathers ceased to gesticulate, and, with his hands placed upon his knees, was following, half-bent, the effort of six workmen to raise a block of hewn stone to the top of a piece of timber destined to support that stone, so that the cord of the crane might be passed under it. The six men, all on one side of the stone, united their efforts to raise it to eight or ten inches from the ground, sweating and blowing, whilst a seventh got ready for when there should be daylight enough beneath it to slide in the roller that was to support it. But the stone had already twice escaped from their hands before gaining a sufficient height for the roller to be introduced. There can be no doubt that every time the stone escaped them, they bounded quickly backwards, to keep their feet from being crushed by the refalling stone. Every time, the stone, abandoned by them, sunk deeper into the damp earth, which rendered the operation more and more difficult. A third effort was followed by no better success, but with progressive discouragement. And yet, when the six men were bent towards the stone, the man with the feathers had himself, with a powerful voice, given the word of command, “Ferme!” which regulates maneuvers of strength. Then he drew himself up.

“Oh! oh!” said he, “what is this all about? Have I to do with men of straw? Corne de boeuf! stand on one side, and you shall see how this is to be done.”

“Peste!” said D’Artagnan, “will he pretend to raise that rock? that would be a sight worth looking at.”

The workmen, as commanded by the engineer, drew back with their ears down, and shaking their heads, with the exception of the one who held the plank, who prepared to perform the office. The man with the feathers went up to the stone, stooped, slipped his hands under the face lying upon the ground, stiffened his Herculean muscles, and without a strain, with a slow motion, like that of a machine, lifted the end of the rock a foot from the ground. The workman who held the plank profited by the space thus given him, and slipped the roller under the stone.

“That’s the way,” said the giant, not letting the rock fall again, but placing it upon its support.

“Mordioux!” cried D’Artagnan, “I know but one man capable of such a feat of strength.”

“Hein!” cried the colossus, turning round.

“Porthos!” murmured D’Artagnan, seized with stupor, “Porthos at Belle-Isle!”

On his part, the man with the feathers fixed his eyes upon the disguised lieutenant, and, in spite of his metamorphosis, recognized him. “D’Artagnan!” cried he; and the color mounted to his face. “Hush!” said he to D’Artagnan.

“Hush!” in his turn, said the musketeer. In fact, if Porthos had just been discovered by D’Artagnan, D’Artagnan had just been discovered by Porthos. The interest of the particular secret of each struck them both at the same instant. Nevertheless the first movement of the two men was to throw their arms around each other. What they wished to conceal from the bystanders, was not their friendship, but their names. But, after the embrace, came reflection.

“What the devil brings Porthos to Belle-Isle, lifting stones?” said D’Artagnan; only D’Artagnan uttered that question in a low voice. Less strong in diplomacy than his friend, Porthos thought aloud.

“How the devil did you come to Belle-Isle?” asked he of D’Artagnan; “and what do you want to do here?” It was necessary to reply without hesitation. To hesitate in answer to Porthos would have been a check, for which the self-love of D’Artagnan would never have consoled itself.

“Pardieu! my friend, I am at Belle-Isle because you are here.”

“Ah, bah!” said Porthos, visibly stupefied with the argument and seeking to account for it to himself, with the felicity of deduction we know to be particular to him.

“Without doubt,” continued D’Artagnan, unwilling to give his friend time to recollect himself, “I have been to see you at Pierrefonds.”

“Indeed!”

"Yes."

"And you did not find me there?"

"No, but I found Mouston."

"Is he well?"

"Peste!"

"Well, but Mouston did not tell you I was here."

"Why should he not? Have I, perchance, deserved to lose his confidence?"

"No; but he did not know it."

"Well; that is a reason at least that does not offend my self-love."

"Then how did you manage to find me?"

"My dear friend, a great noble like you always leaves traced behind him on his passage; and I should think but poorly of myself, if I were not sharp enough to follow the traces of my friends." This explanation, flattering as it was, did not entirely satisfy Porthos.

"But I left no traces behind me, for I came here disguised," said Porthos.

"Ah! You came disguised did you?" said D'Artagnan.

"Yes."

"And how?"

"As a miller."

"And do you think a great noble, like you, Porthos, can affect common manners so as to deceive people?"

"Well, I swear to you my friend, that I played my part so well that everybody was deceived."

"Indeed! so well, that I have not discovered and joined you?"

"Yes; but how did you discover and join me?"

"Stop a bit. I was going to tell you how. Do you imagine Mouston--"

"Ah! it was that fellow, Mouston," said Porthos, gathering up those two triumphant arches which served him for eyebrows.

"But stop, I tell you--it was no fault of Mouston's because he was ignorant of where you were."

"I know he was; and that is why I am in such haste to understand--"

"Oh! how impatient you are, Porthos."

"When I do not comprehend, I am terrible."

"Well, you will understand. Aramis wrote to you at Pierrefonds, did he not?"

"Yes."

“And he told you to come before the equinox.”

“That is true.”

“Well! that is it,” said D’Artagnan, hoping that this reason would mystify Porthos. Porthos appeared to give himself up to a violent mental labor.

“Yes, yes,” said he, “I understand. As Aramis told me to come before the equinox, you have understood that that was to join him. You then inquired where Aramis was, saying to yourself, ‘Where Aramis is, there Porthos will be.’ You have learnt that Aramis was in Bretagne, and you said to yourself, ‘Porthos is in Bretagne.’“

“Exactly. In good truth, Porthos, I cannot tell why you have not turned conjuror. So you understand that, arriving at Roche-Bernard, I heard of the splendid fortifications going on at Belle-Isle. The account raised my curiosity, I embarked in a fishing boat, without dreaming that you were here: I came, and I saw a monstrous fine fellow lifting a stone Ajax could not have stirred. I cried out, ‘Nobody but the Baron de Bracieux could have performed such a feat of strength.’ You heard me, you turned round, you recognized me, we embraced; and, ma foi! if you like, my dear friend, we will embrace again.”

“Ah! now all is explained,” said Porthos; and he embraced D’Artagnan with so much friendship as to deprive the musketeer of his breath for five minutes.

“Why, you are stronger than ever,” said D’Artagnan, “and still, happily, in your arms.” Porthos saluted D’Artagnan with a gracious smile. During the five minutes D’Artagnan was recovering his breath, he reflected that he had a very difficult part to play. It was necessary that he always should question and never reply. By the time his respiration returned, he had fixed his plans for the campaign.

CHAPTER LXX.

Wherein the Ideas of D’Artagnan begin to clear up a little.

D’Artagnan immediately took the offensive. “Now that I have told you all, dear friend, or rather you have guessed all, tell me what you are doing here, covered with dust and mud?”

Porthos wiped his brow, and looked around him with pride. “Why, it appears,” said he, “that you may see what I am doing here.”

“No doubt, no doubt, you lift great stones.”

“Oh! to show these idle fellows what a man is,” said Porthos, with contempt. “But you understand--”

“Yes, that is not your place to lift stones, although there are many whose place it is, who cannot lift them as you do. It was that which made me ask you, just now. What are you doing here, baron?”

“I am studying topography, chevalier.”

“You are studying topography?”

“Yes; but you--what are you doing in that common dress?”

D’Artagnan perceived he had committed a fault in giving expression to his astonishment. Porthos had taken advantage of it, to retort with a question. “Why,” said he, “you know I am a bourgeois, in fact; my dress, then, has nothing astonishing in it, since it conforms with my condition.”

“Nonsense! you are a musketeer.”

“You are wrong, my friend; I have given in my resignation.”

“Bah!”

“Oh, mon Dieu! yes.”

“And you have abandoned the service?”

“I have quitted it.”

“You have abandoned the king?”

“Quite.”

Porthos raised his arms towards heaven, like a man who has heard extraordinary news. “Well, that does confound me,” said he.

“It is nevertheless true.”

“And what led you to form such a resolution.”

“The king displeased me. Mazarin had disgusted me for a long time, as you know; so I threw my cassock to the nettles.”

“But Mazarin is dead.”

“I know that well enough, parbleu! Only, at the period of his death, my resignation had been given in and accepted two months. Then, feeling myself free, I set off for Pierrefonds, to see my friend Porthos. I had heard talk of the happy division you had made of your time, and I wished, for a fortnight, to divide mine after your fashion.”

“My friend, you know that it is not for a fortnight my house is open to you; it is for a year--for ten years--for life.”

“Thank you, Porthos.”

“Ah! but perhaps you want money--do you?” said Porthos, making something like fifty louis chink in his pocket. “In that case, you know--”

“No, thank you; I am not in want of anything. I placed my savings with Planchet, who pays me the interest of them.”

“Your savings?”

“Yes, to be sure,” said D’Artagnan: “why should I not put by my savings, as well as another, Porthos?”

“Oh, there is no reason why; on the contrary, I always suspected you--that is to say, Aramis always suspected you to have savings. For my own part, d’ye see, I take no concern about the management of my household; but I presume the savings of a musketeer must be small.”

“No doubt, relative to yourself, Porthos, who are a millionaire; but you shall judge. I had laid by twenty-five thousand livres.”

“That’s pretty well,” said Porthos, with an affable air.

“And,” continued D’Artagnan, “on the twenty-eighth of last month I added to it two hundred thousand livres more.”

Porthos opened his large eyes, which eloquently demanded of the musketeer, “Where the devil did you steal such a sum as that, my dear friend?” “Two hundred thousand livres!” cried he, at length.

“Yes; which, with the twenty-five I had, and twenty thousand I have about me, complete the sum of two hundred and forty-five thousand livres.”

“But tell me, whence comes this fortune?”

“I will tell you all about it presently, dear friend; but as you have, in the first place, many things to tell me yourself, let us have my recital in its proper order.”

“Bravo!” said Porthos; “then we are both rich. But what can I have to relate to you?”

“You have to relate to me how Aramis came to be named--”

“Ah! bishop of Vannes.”

“That’s it,” said D’Artagnan, “bishop of Vannes. Dear Aramis! do you know how he succeeded so well?”

“Yes, yes; without reckoning that he does not mean to stop there.”

“What! do you mean he will not be contented with violet stockings, and that he wants a red hat?”

“Hush! that is promised him.”

“Bah! by the king?”

“By somebody more powerful than the king.”

“Ah! the devil! Porthos: what incredible things you tell me, my friend!”

“Why incredible? Is there not always somebody in France more powerful than the king?”

“Oh, yes; in the time of King Louis XIII. it was Cardinal Richelieu; in the time of the regency it was Cardinal Mazarin. In the time of Louis XIV. it is M--”

“Go on.”

“It is M. Fouquet.”

“Jove! you have hit it the first time.”

“So, then, I suppose it is M. Fouquet who has promised Aramis the red hat.”

Porthos assumed an air of reserve. “Dear friend,” said he, “God preserve me from meddling with the affairs of others, above all from revealing secrets it may be to their interest to keep. When you see Aramis, he will tell you all he thinks he ought to tell you.”

“You are right, Porthos; and you are quite a padlock for safety. But, to revert to yourself?”

“Yes,” said Porthos.

“You said just now you came hither to study topography?”

“I did so.”

“Tudieu! my friend, what fine things you will do!”

“How do you mean?”

“Why, these fortifications are admirable.”

“Is that your opinion?”

“Decidedly it is. In truth, to anything but a regular siege, Belle-Isle is absolutely impregnable.”

Porthos rubbed his hands. “That is my opinion,” said he.

“But who the devil has fortified this paltry little place in this manner?”

Porthos drew himself up proudly: “Did I not tell you who?”

“No.”

“Do you not suspect?”

“No; all I can say is that he is a man who has studied all the systems, and who appears to me to have stopped at the best.”

“Hush!” said Porthos; “consider my modesty, my dear D’Artagnan.”

“In truth,” replied the musketeer, “can it be you--who--oh!”

“Pray--my dear friend--”

“You who have imagined, traced, and combined between these bastions, these redans, these curtains, these half-moons; and are preparing that covered way?”

“I beg you--”

“You who have built that lunette with its retiring angles and its salient edges?”

“My friend--”

“You who have given that inclination to the openings of your embrasures, by means of which you so effectively protect the men who serve the guns?”

“Eh! mon Dieu! yes.”

“Oh! Porthos, Porthos! I must bow down before you--I must admire you! But you have always concealed from us this superb, this incomparable genius. I hope, my dear friend, you will show me all this in detail.”

“Nothing more easy. Here lies my original sketch, my plan.”

“Show it me.” Porthos led D’Artagnan towards the stone that served him for a table, and upon which the plan was spread. At the foot of the plan was written, in the formidable writing of Porthos, writing of which we have already had occasion to speak:--

“Instead of making use of the square or rectangle, as has been done to this time, you will suppose your place inclosed in a regular hexagon, this polygon having the advantage of offering more angles than the quadrilateral one. Every side of your hexagon, of which you will determine the length in proportion to the dimensions taken upon the place, will be divided into two parts, and upon the middle point you will elevate a perpendicular towards the center of the polygon, which will equal in length the sixth part of the side. By the extremities of each side of the polygon, you will trace two diagonals, which will cut the perpendicular. These will form the precise lines of your defense."

"The devil!" said D'Artagnan, stopping at this point of the demonstration; "why, this is a complete system, Porthos."

"Entirely," said Porthos. "Continue."

"No; I have read enough of it; but, since it is you, my dear Porthos, who direct the works, what need have you of setting down your system so formally in writing?"

"Oh! my dear friend, death!"

"How! death?"

"Why, we are all mortal, are we not?"

"That is true," said D'Artagnan; "you have a reply for everything, my friend." And he replaced the plan upon the stone.

But however short the time he had the plan in his hands, D'Artagnan had been able to distinguish, under the enormous writing of Porthos, a much more delicate hand, which reminded him of certain letters to Marie Michon, with which he had been acquainted in his youth. Only the India-rubber had passed and repassed so often over this writing that it might have escaped a less practiced eye than that of our musketeer.

"Bravo! my friend, bravo!" said D'Artagnan.

"And now you know all that you want to know, do you not?" said Porthos, wheeling about.

"Mordioux! yes, only do me one last favor, dear friend!"

"Speak, I am master here."

"Do me the pleasure to tell me the name of that gentleman who is walking yonder."

"Where, there?"

"Behind the soldiers."

"Followed by a lackey?"

"Exactly."

"In company with a mean sort of fellow, dressed in black?"

"Yes, I mean him."

"That is M. Getard."

"And who is Getard, my friend?"

"He is the architect of the house."

"Of what house?"

"Of M. Fouquet's house."

"Ah! ah!" cried D'Artagnan, "you are of the household of M. Fouquet, then, Porthos?"

"I! what do you mean by that?" said the topographer, blushing to the top of his ears.

"Why, you say the house, when speaking of Belle-Isle, as if you were speaking of the chateau of Pierrefonds."

Porthos bit his lip. "Belle-Isle, my friend," said he, "belongs to M. Fouquet, does it not?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"As Pierrefonds belongs to me?"

"I told you I believed so; there are no two words to that."

"Did you ever see a man there who is accustomed to walk about with a ruler in his hand?"

"No; but I might have seen him there, if he really walked there."

"Well, that gentleman is M. Boulingrin."

"Who is M. Boulingrin?"

"Now we are coming to it. If, when this gentleman is walking with a ruler in his hand, any one should ask me,--'who is M. Boulingrin?' I should reply: 'He is the architect of the house.' Well! M. Getard is the Boulingrin of M. Fouquet. But he has nothing to do with the fortifications, which are my department alone; do you understand? mine, absolutely mine."

"Ah! Porthos," cried D'Artagnan, letting his arms fall as a conquered man gives up his sword; "ah! my friend, you are not only a Herculean topographer, you are, still further, a dialectician of the first water."

"Is it not powerfully reasoned?" said Porthos: and he puffed and blew like the conger which D'Artagnan had let slip from his hand.

"And now," said D'Artagnan, "that shabby-looking man, who accompanies M. Getard, is he also of the household of M. Fouquet?"

"Oh! yes," said Porthos, with contempt; "it is one M. Jupenet, or Juponet, a sort of poet."

"Who is come to establish himself here?"

"I believe so."

"I thought M. Fouquet had poets enough, yonder--Scudery, Loret, Pelisson, La Fontaine? If I must tell you the truth, Porthos, that poet disgraces you."

"Eh!--my friend; but what saves us is that he is not here as a poet."

“As what, then, is he?”

“As printer. And you make me remember, I have a word to say to the cuistre.”

“Say it, then.”

Porthos made a sign to Jupenet, who perfectly recollected D’Artagnan, and did not care to come nearer; which naturally produced another sign from Porthos. This was so imperative, he was obliged to obey. As he approached, “Come hither!” said Porthos. “You only landed yesterday and you have begun your tricks already.”

“How so, monsieur le baron?” asked Jupenet, trembling.

“Your press was groaning all night, monsieur,” said Porthos, “and you prevented my sleeping, corne de boeuf!”

“Monsieur--” objected Jupenet, timidly.

“You have nothing yet to print: therefore you have no occasion to set your press going. What did you print last night?”

“Monsieur, a light poem of my own composition.”

“Light! no, no, monsieur; the press groaned pitifully beneath it. Let it not happen again. Do you understand?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“You promise me?”

“I do, monsieur!”

“Very well; this time I pardon you. Adieu!”

The poet retreated as humbly as he had approached.

“Well, now we have combed that fellow’s head, let us breakfast.”

“Yes,” replied D’Artagnan, “let us breakfast.”

“Only,” said Porthos, “I beg you to observe, my friend, that we only have two hours for our repast.”

“What would you have? We will try to make two hours suffice. But why have you only two hours?”

“Because it is high tide at one o’clock, and, with the tide, I am going to Vannes. But, as I shall return to-morrow, my dear friend, you can stay here; you shall be master; I have a good cook and a good cellar.”

“No,” interrupted D’Artagnan, “better than that.”

“What?”

“You are going to Vannes, you say?”

“To a certainty.”

“To see Aramis?”

“Yes.”

“Well! I came from Paris on purpose to see Aramis.”

“That’s true.”

“I will go with you then.”

“Do; that’s the thing.”

“Only, I ought to have seen Aramis first, and you after. But man proposes, and God disposes. I have begun with you, and will finish with Aramis.”

“Very well!”

“And in how many hours can you go from here to Vannes?”

“Oh! pardieu! in six hours. Three hours by sea to Sarzeau, three hours by road from Sarzeau to Vannes.”

“How convenient that is! Being so near to the bishopric; do you often go to Vannes?”

“Yes; once a week. But, stop till I get my plan.”

Porthos picked up his plan, folded it carefully, and engulfed it in his large pocket.

“Good!” said D’Artagnan aside; “I think I now know the real engineer who is fortifying Belle-Isle.”

Two hours after, at high tide, Porthos and D’Artagnan set out for Sarzeau.

CHAPTER LXXI.

A Procession at Vannes.

The passage from Belle-Isle to Sarzeau was made rapidly enough, thanks to one of those little corsairs of which D’Artagnan had been told during his voyage, and which, shaped for fast sailing and destined for the chase, were sheltered at that time in the roadstead of Locmaria, where one of them, with a quarter of its war-crew, performed duty between Belle-Isle and the continent. D’Artagnan had an opportunity of convincing himself that Porthos, though engineer and topographer, was not deeply versed in affairs of state. His perfect ignorance, with any other, might have passed for well-informed dissimulation. But D’Artagnan knew too well all the folds and refolds of his Porthos, not to find a secret if there were one there; like those regular, minute old bachelors, who know how to find, with their eyes shut, each book on the shelves of their library and each piece of linen in their wardrobe. So if he had found nothing, our cunning D’Artagnan, in rolling and unrolling his Porthos, it was because, in truth, there was nothing to be found.

“Be it so,” said D’Artagnan; “I shall get to know more at Vannes in half an hour than Porthos has discovered at Belle-Isle in two months. Only, in order that I may know something, it is important that Porthos should not make use of the only stratagem I leave at his disposal. He must not warn Aramis of my arrival.” All the care of the musketeer was then, for the moment, confined to the watching of Porthos. And let us hasten to say, Porthos did not deserve all this mistrust. Porthos thought of no evil. Perhaps, on first seeing him, D’Artagnan had inspired him with a little suspicion; but almost immediately D’Artagnan had reconquered in that good and brave heart the place he had always occupied, and not the least cloud darkened the large eye of Porthos, fixed from time to time with tenderness on his friend.

On landing, Porthos inquired if his horses were waiting and soon perceived them at the crossing of the road that winds round Sarzeau, and which, without passing through that little city, leads towards Vannes. These horses were two in number, one for M. de Vallon, and one for his equerry; for Porthos had an equerry since Mouston was only able to use a carriage as a means of locomotion. D'Artagnan expected that Porthos would propose to send forward his equerry upon one horse to bring back another, and he--D'Artagnan--had made up his mind to oppose this proposition. But nothing D'Artagnan had expected happened. Porthos simply told the equerry to dismount and await his return at Sarzeau, whilst D'Artagnan would ride his horse; which was arranged.

"Eh! but you are quite a man of precaution, my dear Porthos," said D'Artagnan to his friend, when he found himself in the saddle, upon the equerry's horse.

"Yes; but this is a kindness on the part of Aramis. I have not my stud here, and Aramis has placed his stables at my disposal."

"Good horses for bishop's horses, mordioux!" said D'Artagnan. "It is true, Aramis is a bishop of a peculiar kind."

"He is a holy man!" replied Porthos, in a tone almost nasal, and with his eyes raised towards heaven.

"Then he is much changed," said D'Artagnan; "you and I have known him passably profane."

"Grace has touched him," said Porthos.

"Bravo," said D'Artagnan, "that redoubles my desire to see my dear old friend." And he spurred his horse, which sprang off into a more rapid pace.

"Peste!" said Porthos, "if we go on at this rate, we shall only take one hour instead of two."

"To go how far, do you say, Porthos?"

"Four leagues and a half."

"That will be a good pace."

"I could have embarked you on the canal, but the devil take rowers and boat-horses! The first are like tortoises; the second like snails; and when a man is able to put a good horse between his knees, that horse is better than rowers or any other means."

"You are right; you above all, Porthos, who always look magnificent on horseback."

"Rather heavy, my friend; I was weighed the other day."

"And what do you weigh?"

"Three hundred-weight!" said Porthos, proudly.

"Bravo!"

“So that you must perceive, I am forced to choose horses whose loins are straight and wide, otherwise I break them down in two hours.”

“Yes, giant’s horses you must have, must you not?”

“You are very polite, my friend,” replied the engineer, with affectionate majesty.

“As a case in point,” replied D’Artagnan, “your horse seems to sweat already.”

“Dame! It is hot! Ah, ah! do you see Vannes now?”

“Yes, perfectly. It is a handsome city, apparently.”

“Charming, according to Aramis, at least; but I think it black; but black seems to be considered handsome by artists: I am sorry for it.”

“Why so, Porthos?”

“Because I have lately had my chateau of Pierrefonds, which was gray with age, plastered white.”

“Humph!” said D’Artagnan, “and white is more cheerful.”

“Yes, but it is less august, as Aramis tells me. Fortunately there are dealers in black as well as white. I will have Pierrefonds replastered in black; that’s all there is about it. If gray is handsome, you understand, my friend, black must be superb.”

“Dame!” said D’Artagnan, “that appears logical.”

“Were you never at Vannes, D’Artagnan?”

“Never.”

“Then you know nothing of the city?”

“Nothing.”

“Well, look!” said Porthos, raising himself in his stirrups, which made the fore-quarters of his horse bend sadly,--”do you see that corner, in the sun, yonder?”

“Yes, I see it plainly.”

“Well, that is the cathedral.”

“Which is called?”

“Saint-Pierre. Now look again--in the faubourg on the left, do you see another cross?”

“Perfectly well.”

“That is Saint-Patern, the parish preferred by Aramis.”

“Indeed!”

“Without doubt. Saint-Patern, you see, passes for having been the first bishop of Vannes. It is true that Aramis pretends he was not. But he is so learned that that may be only a paro--a para--"

"A paradox," said D'Artagnan.

"Precisely; thank you! my tongue trips, I am so hot."

"My friend," said D'Artagnan, "continue your interesting description, I beg. What is that large white building with many windows?"

"Oh! that is the college of the Jesuits. Pardieu! you have an apt hand. Do you see, close to the college, a large house with steeples, turrets, built in a handsome Gothic style, as that fool, M. Getard, says?"

"Yes, that is plainly to be seen. Well?"

"Well, that is where Aramis resides."

"What! does he not reside at the episcopal palace?"

"No; that is in ruins. The palace likewise is in the city, and Aramis prefers the faubourgs. That is why, as I told you, he is partial to Saint-Patern; Saint-Patern is in the faubourg. Besides, there are in this faubourg a mall, a tennis-court, and a house of Dominicans. Look, that where the handsome steeple rises to the heavens."

"Well?"

"Next, you see the faubourg is like a separate city, it has its walls, its towers, its ditches; the quay is upon it likewise, and the boats land at the quay. If our little corsair did not draw eight feet of water, we could have come full sail up to Aramis's windows."

"Porthos, Porthos," cried D'Artagnan, "you are a well of knowledge, a spring of ingenious and profound reflections. Porthos, you no longer surprise me, you confound me."

"Here we are," said Porthos, turning the conversation with his usual modesty.

"And high time we were," thought D'Artagnan, "for Aramis's horse is melting away like a steed of ice."

They entered almost at the same instant the faubourg; but scarcely had they gone a hundred paces when they were surprised to find the streets strewed with leaves and flowers. Against the old walls of Vannes, hung the oldest and the strangest tapestries of France. From over balconies fell long white sheets stuck all over with bouquets. The streets were deserted; it was plain the entire population was assembled on one point. The blinds were closed, and the breeze penetrated into the houses under the hangings, which cast long, black shades between their places of issue and the walls. Suddenly, at the turning of a street, chants struck the ears of the newly arrived travelers. A crowd in holiday garb appeared through the vapors of incense which mounted to the heavens in blue fleeces, and clouds of rose-leaves fluttered as high as the first stories. Above all heads were to be seen the cross and banners, the sacred symbols of religion. Then, beneath these crosses and banners, as if protected by them, walked a whole world of young girls clothed in white, crowned with corn-flowers. At the two sides of the street, inclosing the cortege, marched the guards of the garrison, carrying bouquets in the barrels of their muskets and on the points of their lances. This was the procession.

Whilst D'Artagnan and Porthos were looking on with critical glances, which disguised an extreme impatience to get forward, a magnificent dais approached preceded by a hundred Jesuits and a hundred Dominicans, and escorted by two archdeacons, a treasurer, a penitent and twelve canons. A singer with a thundering voice--a man certainly picked out from all the voices of France, as was the drum-major of the imperial guard from all the giants of the empire--escorted by four other chanters, who appeared to be there only to serve him as an accompaniment, made the air resound, and the windows of the houses vibrate. Under the dais appeared a pale and noble countenance with black eyes, black hair streaked with threads of white, a delicate, compressed mouth, a prominent and angular chin. His head, full of graceful majesty, was covered with the episcopal mitre, a headdress which gave it, in addition to the character of sovereignty, that of asceticism and evangelic meditation.

"Aramis!" cried the musketeer, involuntarily, as this lofty countenance passed before him. The prelate started at the sound of the voice. He raised his large black eyes, with their long lashes, and turned them without hesitation towards the spot whence the exclamation proceeded. At a glance, he saw Porthos and D'Artagnan close to him. On his part, D'Artagnan, thanks to the keenness of his sight, had seen all, seized all. The full portrait of the prelate had entered his memory, never to leave it. One thing had particularly struck D'Artagnan. On perceiving him, Aramis had colored, then he had concentrated under his eyelids the fire of the look of the master, and the indefinable affection of the friend. It was evident that Aramis had asked himself this question:--"Why is D'Artagnan with Porthos, and what does he want at Vannes?" Aramis comprehended all that was passing in the mind of D'Artagnan, on turning his look upon him again, and seeing that he had not lowered his eyes. He knew the acuteness and intelligence of his friend; he feared to let him divine the secret of his blush and his astonishment. He was still the same Aramis, always having a secret to conceal. Therefore, to put an end to his look of an inquisitor, which it was necessary to get rid of at all events, as, at any price, a general extinguishes a battery which annoys him, Aramis stretched forth his beautiful white hand, upon which sparkled the amethyst of the pastoral ring; he cut the air with sign of the cross, and poured out his benediction upon his two friends. Perhaps thoughtful and absent, D'Artagnan, impious in spite of himself, might not have bent beneath this holy benediction; but Porthos saw his distraction, and laying his friendly hand upon the back of his companion, he crushed him down towards the earth. D'Artagnan was forced to give way; indeed, he was little short of being flat on the ground. In the meantime Aramis had passed. D'Artagnan, like Antaeus, had only touched the ground, and he turned towards Porthos, almost angry. But there was no mistaking the intention of the brave Hercules; it was a feeling of religious propriety that had influenced him. Besides, speech with Porthos, instead of disguising his thought, always completed it.

"It is very polite of him," said he, "to have given his benediction to us alone. Decidedly, he is a holy man, and a brave man." Less convinced than Porthos, D'Artagnan made no reply.

"Observe my friend," continued Porthos, "he has seen us; and, instead of continuing to walk on at the simple pace of the procession, as he did just now,--see, what a hurry he is in; do you see how the cortege is increasing its speed? He is eager to join us and embrace us, is that dear Aramis."

"That is true," replied D'Artagnan, aloud.--Then to himself:--"It is equally true he has seen me, the fox, and will have time to prepare himself to receive me."

But the procession had passed; the road was free. D'Artagnan and Porthos walked straight up to the episcopal palace, which was surrounded by a numerous crowd anxious to see the prelate return. D'Artagnan remarked that this crowd was composed principally of citizens and military men. He recognized in the nature of these partisans the address of his friend. Aramis was not the man to seek for a useless popularity. He cared very little for being beloved by people who could be of no service to him. Women, children, and old men, that is to say, the cortege of ordinary pastors; was not the cortege for him.

Ten minutes after the two friends had passed the threshold of the palace, Aramis returned like a triumphant conqueror; the soldiers presented arms to him as to a superior; the citizens bowed to him as to a friend and a patron, rather than as a head of the Church. There was something in Aramis resembling those Roman senators who had their doors always surrounded by clients. At the foot of the steps, he had a conference of half a minute with a Jesuit, who, in order to speak to him more secretly, passed his head under the dais. He then re-entered his palace; the doors closed slowly, and the crowd melted away, whilst chants and prayers were still resounding abroad. It was a magnificent day. Earthly perfumes were mingled with the perfumes of the air and the sea. The city breathed happiness, joy, and strength. D'Artagnan felt something like the presence of an invisible hand which had, all-powerfully, created this strength, this joy, this happiness, and spread everywhere these perfumes.

"Oh! oh!" said he, "Porthos has got fat; but Aramis is grown taller."

CHAPTER LXXII.

The Grandeur of the Bishop of Vannes.

Porthos and D’Artagnan had entered the bishop’s residence by a private door, as his personal friends. Of course, Porthos served D’Artagnan as guide. The worthy baron comported himself everywhere rather as if he were at home. Nevertheless, whether it was a tacit acknowledgement of the sanctity of the personage of Aramis and his character, or the habit of respecting him who imposed upon him morally, a worthy habit which had always made Porthos a model soldier and an excellent companion; for all these reasons, say we, Porthos preserved in the palace of His Greatness the Bishop of Vannes a sort of reserve which D’Artagnan remarked at once, in the attitude he took with respect to the valets and officers. And yet this reserve did not go so far as to prevent his asking questions. Porthos questioned. They learned that His Greatness had just returned to his apartment and was preparing to appear in familiar intimacy, less majestic than he had appeared with his flock. After a quarter of an hour, which D’Artagnan and Porthos passed in looking mutually at each other with the white of their eyes, and turning their thumbs in all the different evolutions which go from north to south, a door of the chamber opened and His Greatness appeared, dressed in the undress, complete, of a prelate. Aramis carried his head high, like a man accustomed to command: his violet robe was tucked up on one side, and his white hand was on his hip. He had retained the fine mustache, and the lengthened royale of the time of Louis XIII. He exhaled, on entering, that delicate perfume which, among elegant men and women of high fashion, never changes, and appears to be incorporated in the person, of whom it has become the natural emanation. In this case only, the perfume had retained something of the religious sublimity of incense. It no longer intoxicated, it penetrated; it no longer inspired desire, it inspired respect. Aramis, on entering the chamber, did not hesitate an instant; and without pronouncing one word, which, whatever it might be, would have been cold on such an occasion, he went straight up to the musketeer, so well disguised under the costume of M. Agnan, and pressed him in his arms with a tenderness which the most distrustful could not have suspected of coldness or affectation.

D’Artagnan, on his part, embraced him with equal ardor. Porthos pressed the delicate hand of Aramis in his immense hands, and D’Artagnan remarked that His Greatness gave him his left hand, probably from habit, seeing that Porthos already ten times had been near injuring his fingers covered with rings, by pounding his flesh in the vise of his fist. Warned by the pain, Aramis was cautious, and only presented flesh to be bruised, and not fingers to be crushed, against the gold or the angles of diamonds.

Between two embraces, Aramis looked D’Artagnan in the face, offered him a chair, sitting down himself in the shade, observing that the light fell full upon the face of his interlocutor. This maneuver, familiar to diplomatists and women, resembles much the advantage of the guard which, according to their skill or habit, combatants endeavor to take on the ground at a duel. D’Artagnan was not the dupe of this maneuver; but he did not appear to perceive it. He felt himself caught; but, precisely because he was caught he felt himself on the road to discovery, and it little imported to him, old condottiere as he was, to be beaten in appearance, provided he drew from his pretended defeat the advantages of victory. Aramis began the conversation.

“Ah! dear friend! my good D’Artagnan,” said he, “what an excellent chance!”

“It is a chance, my reverend companion,” said D’Artagnan, “that I will call friendship. I seek you, as I always have sought you, when I had any grand enterprise to propose to you, or some hours of liberty to give you.”

“Ah! indeed,” said Aramis, without explosion, “you have been seeking me?”

“Eh! yes, he has been seeking you, Aramis,” said Porthos, “and the proof is that he has unharbored me at Belle-Isle. That is amiable, is it not?”

“Ah! yes,” said Aramis, “at Belle-Isle! certainly!”

“Good!” said D’Artagnan; “there is my booby Porthos, without thinking of it, has fired the first cannon of attack.”

“At Belle-Isle!” said Aramis, “in that hole, in that desert! That is kind, indeed!”

“And it was I who told him you were at Vannes,” continued Porthos, in the same tone.

D’Artagnan armed his mouth with a finesse almost ironical.

"Yes, I knew, but I was willing to see," replied he.

"To see what?"

"If our old friendship still held out; if, on seeing each other, our hearts, hardened as they are by age, would still let the old cry of joy escape, which salutes the coming of a friend."

"Well, and you must have been satisfied," said Aramis.

"So, so."

"How is that?"

"Yes, Porthos said hush! and you--"

"Well! and I?"

"And you gave me your benediction."

"What would you have, my friend?" said Aramis, smiling; "that is the most precious thing that a poor prelate, like me, has to give."

"Indeed, my dear friend!"

"Doubtless."

"And yet they say at Paris that the bishopric of Vannes is one of the best in France."

"Ah! you are now speaking of temporal wealth," said Aramis, with a careless air.

"To be sure, I wish to speak of that; I hold by it, on my part."

"In that case, let me speak of it," said Aramis, with a smile.

"You own yourself to be one of the richest prelates in France?"

"My friend, since you ask me to give you an account, I will tell you that the bishopric of Vannes is worth about twenty thousand livres a year, neither more nor less. It is a diocese which contains a hundred and sixty parishes."

"That is very pretty," said D'Artagnan.

"It is superb!" said Porthos.

"And yet," resumed D'Artagnan, throwing his eyes over Aramis, "you don't mean to bury yourself here forever?"

"Pardon me. Only I do not admit the word bury."

"But it seems to me, that at this distance from Paris a man is buried, or nearly so."

"My friend, I am getting old," said Aramis; "the noise and bustle of a city no longer suit me. At fifty-seven we ought to seek calm and meditation. I have found them here. What is there more beautiful, and stern at the same time, than this old Armorica. I find here, dear D'Artagnan, all that is opposite to what I formerly loved, and that is what must happen at the end of life, which is opposite to the beginning. A little of my old pleasure of former times still comes to salute me here, now and then, without diverting me from the road of salvation. I am still of this world, and yet every step that I take brings me nearer to God."

"Eloquent, wise and discreet; you are an accomplished prelate, Aramis, and I offer you my congratulations."

"But," said Aramis smiling, "you did not come here only for the purpose of paying me compliments. Speak; what brings you hither? May it be that, in some fashion or other, you want me?"

"Thank God, no, my friend," said D'Artagnan, "it is nothing of that kind.--I am rich and free."

"Rich!" exclaimed Aramis.

"Yes, rich for me; not for you or Porthos, understand. I have an income of about fifteen thousand livres."

Aramis looked at him suspiciously. He could not believe--particularly on seeing his friend in such humble guise--that he had made so fine a fortune. Then D'Artagnan, seeing that the hour of explanations was come, related the history of his English adventures. During the recital he saw, ten times, the eyes of the prelate sparkle, and his slender fingers work convulsively. As to Porthos, it was not admiration he manifested for D'Artagnan; it was enthusiasm, it was delirium. When D'Artagnan had finished, "Well!" said Aramis.

"Well!" said D'Artagnan, "you see, then, I have in England friends and property, in France a treasure. If your heart tells you so, I offer them to you. That is what I came here for."

However firm was his look, he could not this time support the look of Aramis. He allowed, therefore, his eye to stray upon Porthos--like the sword which yields to too powerful a pressure, and seeks another road.

"At all events," said the bishop, "you have assumed a singular traveling costume, old friend."

"Frightful! I know it is. You may understand why I would not travel as a cavalier or a noble; since I became rich, I am miserly."

"And you say, then, you came to Belle-Isle?" said Aramis, without transition.

"Yes," replied D'Artagnan; "I knew I should find you and Porthos there."

“Find me!” cried Aramis. “Me! for the last year past I have not once crossed the sea.”

“Oh,” said D’Artagnan, “I should never have supposed you such a housekeeper.”

“Ah, dear friend, I must tell you that I am no longer the Aramis of former times. Riding on horseback is unpleasant to me; the sea fatigues me. I am a poor, ailing priest, always complaining, always grumbling, and inclined to the austerities which appear to accord with old age,--preliminary parleyings with death. I linger, my dear D’Artagnan, I linger.”

“Well, that is all the better, my friend, for we shall probably be neighbors soon.”

“Bah!” said Aramis with a degree of surprise he did not even seek to dissemble. “You my neighbor!”

“Mordioux! yes.”

“How so?”

“I am about to purchase some very profitable salt-mines, which are situated between Piriac and Le Croisic. Imagine, my dear friend, a clear profit of twelve per cent. Never any deficiency, never any idle expenses; the ocean, faithful and regular, brings every twelve hours its contingency to my coffers. I am the first Parisian who has dreamt of such a speculation. Do not say anything about it, I beg of you, and in a short time we will communicate on the matter. I am to have three leagues of country for thirty thousand livres.”

Aramis darted a look at Porthos, as if to ask if all this were true, if some snare were not concealed beneath this outward indifference. But soon, as if ashamed of having consulted this poor auxiliary, he collected all his forces for a fresh assault and new defense. “I heard that you had had some difference with the court, but that you had come out of it as you know how to get through everything, D’Artagnan, with the honors of war.”

“I!” said the musketeer, with a burst of laughter that did not conceal his embarrassment: for, from those words, Aramis was not unlikely to be acquainted with his last relations with the king. “I! Oh, tell me all about that, pray, Aramis?”

“Yes, it was related to me, a poor bishop, lost in the middle of the Landes, that the king had taken you as the confidant of his amours.”

“With whom?”

“With Mademoiselle de Mancini.”

D'Artagnan breathed freely again. "Ah! I don't say no to that," replied he.

"It appears that the king took you one morning, over the bridge of Blois to talk with his lady-love."

"That's true," said D'Artagnan. "And you know that, do you? Well, then, you must know that the same day I gave in my resignation!"

"What, sincerely?"

"Nothing more so."

"It was after that, then, that you went to the Comte de la Fere's?"

"Yes."

"Afterwards to me?"

"Yes."

"And then Porthos?"

"Yes."

"Was it in order to pay us a simple visit?"

"No, I did no know you were engaged, and I wished to take you with me into England."

"Yes, I understand; and then you executed alone, wonderful man as you are, what you wanted to propose to us all four. I suspected you had something to do with that famous restoration, when I learned that you had been seen at King Charles's receptions, and that he appeared to treat you like a friend, or rather like a person to whom he was under an obligation."

"But how the devil did you learn all that?" asked D'Artagnan, who began to fear that the investigation of Aramis had extended further than he wished.

"Dear D'Artagnan," said the prelate, "my friendship resembles, in a degree, the solicitude of that night watch whom we have in the little tower of the mole, at the extremity of the quay. That brave man, every night, lights a lantern to direct the barks that come from sea. He is concealed in his sentry-box, and the fishermen do not see him; but he follows them with interest; he divines them; he calls them; he attracts them into the way to the port. I resemble this watcher; from time to time some news reaches me, and recalls to my remembrance all those I loved. Then I follow the friends of old days over the stormy ocean of the world, I, a poor watcher, to whom God has kindly given the shelter of a sentry-box."

"Well, what did I do when I came from England?"

"Ah! there," replied Aramis, "you get beyond my depth. I know nothing of you since your return. D'Artagnan, my eyes are dim. I regretted you did not think of me. I wept over your forgetfulness. I was wrong. I see you again, and it is a festival, a great festival, I assure you, solemnly! How is Athos?"

"Very well, thank you."

"And our young pupil, Raoul?"

"He seems to have inherited the skill of his father, Athos, and the strength of his tutor, Porthos."

"And on what occasion have you been able to judge of that?"

"Eh! mon Dieu! on the eve of my departure from Paris."

"Indeed! tell me all about it!"

"Yes; there was an execution at the Greve, and in consequence of that execution, a riot. We happened, by accident, to be in the riot; and in this riot we were obliged to have recourse to our swords. And he did wonders."

"Bah! what did he do?"

"Why, in the first place, he threw a man out of the window, as he would have flung a sack full of flock."

"Come, that's pretty well," said Porthos.

"Then he drew, and cut and thrust away, as we fellows used to do in the good old times."

"And what was the cause of this riot?" said Porthos.

D'Artagnan remarked upon the face of Aramis a complete indifference to this question of Porthos. "Why," said he, fixing his eyes upon Aramis, "on account of the two farmers of the revenue, friends of M. Fouquet, whom the king forced to disgorge their plunder, and then hanged them."

A scarcely perceptible contraction of the prelate's brow showed that he had heard D'Artagnan's reply. "Oh, oh!" said Porthos; "and what were the names of these friends of M. Fouquet?"

"MM. d'Eymeris and Lyodot," said D'Artagnan. "Do you know these names, Aramis?"

"No," said the prelate, disdainfully; "they sound like the names of financiers."

"Exactly; so they were."

"Oh! M. Fouquet allows his friends to be hanged, then," said Porthos.

"And why not?" said Aramis.

"Why, it seems to me--"

"If these culprits were hanged, it was by order of the king. Now M. Fouquet, although superintendent of the finances, has not, I believe, the right of life and death.”

“That may be,” said Porthos; “but in the place of M. Fouquet--”

Aramis was afraid Porthos was about to say something awkward, so interrupted him. “Come, D’Artagnan,” said he; “this is quite enough about other people, let us talk a little about you.”

“Of me you know all that I can tell you. On the contrary let me hear a little about you, Aramis.”

“I have told you, my friend. There is nothing of Aramis left in me.”

“Nor of the Abbe d’Herblay even?”

“No, not even of him. You see a man whom Providence has taken by the hand, whom he has conducted to a position that he could never have dared even to hope for.”

“Providence?” asked D’Artagnan.

“Yes.”

“Well, that is strange! I was told it was M. Fouquet.”

“Who told you that?” cried Aramis, without being able, with all the power of his will, to prevent the color rising to his cheeks.

“Ma foi! why, Bazin!”

“The fool!”

“I do not say he is a man of genius, it is true; but he told me so; and after him, I repeat it to you.”

“I have never even seen M. Fouquet,” replied Aramis with a look as pure and calm as that of a virgin who has never told a lie.

“Well, but if you had seen him and known him, there is no harm in that,” replied D’Artagnan. “M. Fouquet is a very good sort of a man.”

“Humph!”

“A great politician.” Aramis made a gesture of indifference.

“An all-powerful minister.”

“I only hold to the king and the pope.”

“Dame! listen then,” said D’Artagnan, in the most natural tone imaginable. “I said that because everybody here swears by M. Fouquet. The plain is M. Fouquet’s; the salt-mines I am about to buy are M. Fouquet’s; the island in which Porthos studies topography is M. Fouquet’s; the garrison is M. Fouquet’s; the galleys are M. Fouquet’s. I confess, then, that nothing would have surprised me in your enfeoffment, or rather in that of your diocese, to M. Fouquet. He is a different master from the king, that is all; but quite as powerful as Louis.”

“Thank God! I am not vassal to anybody; I belong to nobody, and am entirely my own master,” replied Aramis, who, during this conversation, followed with his eye every gesture of D’Artagnan, every glance of Porthos. But D’Artagnan was impassible and Porthos motionless; the thrusts aimed so skillfully were parried by an able adversary; not one hit the mark. Nevertheless, both began to feel the fatigue of such a contest, and the announcement of supper was well received by everybody. Supper changed the course of conversation. Besides, they felt that, upon their guard as each one had been, they could neither of them boast of having the advantage. Porthos had understood nothing of what had been meant. He had held himself motionless, because Aramis had made him a sign not to stir. Supper, for him, was nothing but supper; but that was quite enough for Porthos. The supper, then, went off very well. D’Artagnan was in high spirits. Aramis exceeded himself in kind affability. Porthos ate like old Pelops. Their talk was of war, finance, the arts, and love. Aramis played astonishment at every word of politics D’Artagnan risked. This long series of surprises increased the mistrust of D’Artagnan, as the eternal indifference of D’Artagnan provoked the suspicions of Aramis. At length D’Artagnan, designedly, uttered the name of Colbert: he had reserved that stroke for the last.

“Who is this Colbert?” asked the bishop.

“Oh! come,” said D’Artagnan to himself, “that is too strong! We must be careful, mordioux! we must be careful.”

And he then gave Aramis all the information respecting M. Colbert he could desire. The supper, or rather, the conversation, was prolonged till one o’clock in the morning between D’Artagnan and Aramis. At ten o’clock precisely, Porthos had fallen asleep in his chair and snored like an organ. At midnight he woke up and they sent him to bed. “Hum!” said he, “I was near falling asleep; but that was all very interesting you were talking about.”

At one o’clock Aramis conducted D’Artagnan to the chamber destined for him, which was the best in the episcopal residence. Two servants were placed at his command. “To-morrow, at eight o’clock,” said he, taking leave of D’Artagnan, “we will take, if agreeable to you, a ride on horseback with Porthos.”

“At eight o’clock!” said D’Artagnan; “so late?”

“You know that I require seven hours’ sleep,” said Aramis.

“That is true.”

“Good-night, dear friend!” And he embraced the musketeer cordially.

D’Artagnan allowed him to depart; then, as soon as the door closed, “Good!” cried he, “at five o’clock I will be on foot.”

This determination being made, he went to bed and quietly, “put two and two together,” as people say.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

In which Porthos begins to be sorry for having come with D'Artagnan.

Scarcely had D'Artagnan extinguished his taper, when Aramis, who had watched through his curtains the last glimmer of light in his friend's apartment, traversed the corridor on tiptoe, and went to Porthos's room. The giant who had been in bed nearly an hour and a half, lay grandly stretched out on the down bed. He was in that happy calm of the first sleep, which, with Porthos, resisted the noise of bells or the report of cannon: his head swam in that soft oscillation which reminds us of the soothing movement of a ship. In a moment Porthos would have begun to dream. The door of the chamber opened softly under the delicate pressure of the hand of Aramis. The bishop approached the sleeper. A thick carpet deadened his steps, besides which Porthos snored in a manner to drown all noise. He laid one hand on his shoulder--"Rouse," said he, "wake up, my dear Porthos." The voice of Aramis was soft and kind, but it conveyed more than a notice,--it conveyed an order. His hand was light, but it indicated danger. Porthos heard the voice and felt the hand of Aramis, even in the depth of sleep. He started up. "Who goes there?" cried he, in his giant's voice.

"Hush! hush! It is I," said Aramis.

"You, my friend? And what the devil do you wake me for?"

"To tell you that you must set off directly."

"Set off?"

"Yes."

"Where for?"

"For Paris."

Porthos bounded up in his bed, and then sank back down again, fixing his great eyes in agitation upon Aramis.

"For Paris?"

"Yes."

"A hundred leagues?" said he.

"A hundred and four," replied the bishop.

“Oh! mon Dieu!” sighed Porthos, lying down again, like children who contend with their bonne to gain an hour or two more sleep.

“Thirty hours’ riding,” said Aramis, firmly. “You know there are good relays.”

Porthos pushed out one leg, allowing a groan to escape him.

“Come, come! my friend,” insisted the prelate with a sort of impatience.

Porthos drew the other leg out of the bed. “And is it absolutely necessary that I should go, at once?”

“Urgently necessary.”

Porthos got upon his feet, and began to shake both walls and floors with his steps of a marble statue.

“Hush! hush! for the love of Heaven, my dear Porthos!” said Aramis, “you will wake somebody.”

“Ah! that’s true,” replied Porthos, in a voice of thunder, “I forgot that; but be satisfied, I am on guard.” And so saying, he let fall a belt loaded with his sword and pistols, and a purse, from which the crowns escaped with a vibrating and prolonged noise. This noise made the blood of Aramis boil, whilst it drew from Porthos a formidable burst of laughter. “How droll that is!” said he, in the same voice.

“Not so loud, Porthos, not so loud.”

“True, true!” and he lowered his voice a half-note.

“I was going to say,” continued Porthos, “that it is droll that we are never so slow as when we are in a hurry, and never make so much noise as when we wish to be silent.”

“Yes, that is true; but let us give the proverb the lie, Porthos; let us make haste, and hold our tongue.”

“You see I am doing my best,” said Porthos, putting on his haut de chausses.

“Very well.”

“This is something in haste?”

“It is more than that, it is serious, Porthos.”

“Oh, oh!”

“D’Artagnan has questioned you, has he not?”

“Questioned me?”

“Yes, at Belle-Isle?”

“Not the least in the world.”

“Are you sure of that, Porthos?”

"Parbleu!"

"It is impossible. Recollect yourself." "He asked me what I was doing, and I told him--studying topography. I would have made use of another word which you employed one day."

"'Castrametation'?"

"Yes, that's it; but I never could recollect it."

"All the better. What more did he ask you?"

"Who M. Getard was."

"Next?"

"Who M. Jupenet was."

"He did not happen to see our plan of fortifications, did he?"

"Yes."

"The devil he did!"

"But don't be alarmed, I had rubbed out your writing with India-rubber. It was impossible for him to suppose you had given me any advice in those works."

"Ay; but our friend has phenomenally keen eyes."

"What are you afraid of?"

"I fear that everything is discovered, Porthos; the matter is, then, to prevent a great misfortune. I have given orders to my people to close all the gates and doors. D'Artagnan will not be able to get out before daybreak. Your horse is ready saddled; you will gain the first relay; by five o'clock in the morning you will have traversed fifteen leagues. Come!"

Aramis then assisted Porthos to dress, piece by piece, with as much celerity as the most skillful valet de chambre could have done. Porthos, half stupefied, let him do as he liked, and confounded himself in excuses. When he was ready, Aramis took him by the hand, and led him, making him place his foot with precaution on every step of the stairs, preventing him running against door-frames, turning him this way and that, as if Aramis had been the giant and Porthos the dwarf. Soul set fire to and animated matter. A horse was waiting, ready saddled, in the courtyard. Porthos mounted. Then Aramis himself took the horse by the bridle, and led him over some dung spread in the yard, with the evident intention of suppressing noise. He, at the same time, held tight the horse's nose, to prevent him neighing. When arrived at the outward gate, drawing Porthos towards him, who was going off without even asking him what for: "Now, friend Porthos, now; without drawing bridle, till you get to Paris," whispered he in his ears; "eat on horseback, drink on horseback, but lose not a minute."

"That's enough; I will not stop."

"This letter to M. Fouquet; cost what it may, he must have it to-morrow before mid-day."

"He shall."

"And do not forget one thing, my friend."

"What is that?"

"That you are riding out on a hunt for your brevet of duc and peer."

"Oh! oh!" said Porthos, with his eyes sparkling; "I will do it in twenty-four hours, in that case."

"Try."

"Then let go the bridle--and forward, Goliath!"

Aramis did let go, not the bridle, but the horse's nose. Porthos released his hand, clapped spurs to his horse, which set off at a gallop. As long as he could distinguish Porthos through the darkness, Aramis followed him with his eyes: when he was completely out of sight, he re-entered the yard. Nothing had stirred in D'Artagnan's apartment. The valet placed on watch at the door had neither seen any light, nor heard any noise. Aramis closed his door carefully, sent the lackey to bed, and quickly sought his own. D'Artagnan really suspected nothing, therefore thought he had gained everything, when he awoke in the morning, about half-past four. He ran to the window in his shirt. The window looked out upon the court. Day was dawning. The court was deserted; the fowls, even, had not left their roosts. Not a servant appeared. Every door was closed.

"Good! all is still," said D'Artagnan to himself. "Never mind: I am up first in the house. Let us dress; that will be so much done." And D'Artagnan dressed himself. But, this time, he endeavored not to give to the costume of M. Agnan that bourgeoise and almost ecclesiastical rigidity he had affected before; he managed, by drawing his belt tighter, by buttoning his clothes in a different fashion, and by putting on his hat a little on one side, to restore to his person a little of that military character, the absence of which had surprised Aramis. This being done, he made free, or affected to make free with his host, and entered his chamber without ceremony. Aramis was asleep or feigned to be so. A large book lay open upon his night-desk, a wax-light was still burning in its silver sconce. This was more than enough to prove to D'Artagnan the quiescence of the prelate's night, and the good intentions of his waking. The musketeer did to the bishop precisely as the bishop had done to Porthos--he tapped him on the shoulder. Evidently Aramis pretended to sleep; for, instead of waking suddenly, he who slept so lightly required a repetition of the summons.

"Ah! ah! is that you?" said he, stretching his arms. "What an agreeable surprise! Ma foi! Sleep had made me forget I had the happiness to possess you. What o'clock is it?"

"I do not know," said D'Artagnan, a little embarrassed. "Early, I believe. But, you know, that devil of a habit of waking with the day, sticks to me still."

"Do you wish that we should go out so soon?" asked Aramis. "It appears to me to be very early."

"Just as you like."

"I thought we had agreed not to get on horseback before eight."

"Possibly; but I had so great a wish to see you, that I said to myself, the sooner the better."

"And my seven hours' sleep!" said Aramis: "Take care; I had reckoned upon them, and what I lose of them I must make up."

"But it seems to me that, formerly, you were less of a sleeper than that, dear friend; your blood was alive, and you were never to be found in bed."

"And it is exactly on account of what you tell me, that I am so fond of being there now."

"Then you confess, that it is not for the sake of sleeping, that you have put me off till eight o'clock."

"I have been afraid you would laugh at me, if I told you the truth."

"Tell me, notwithstanding."

"Well, from six to eight, I am accustomed to perform my devotions."

"Your devotions?"

"Yes."

"I did not believe a bishop's exercises were so severe."

"A bishop, my friend, must sacrifice more to appearance than a simple cleric."

"Mordioux! Aramis, that is a word which reconciles me with your greatness. To appearances! That is a musketeer's word, in good truth! Vivent les apparences, Aramis!"

"Instead of felicitating me upon it, pardon me, D'Artagnan. It is a very mundane word which I had allowed to escape me."

“Must I leave you, then?”

“I want time to collect my thoughts, my friend, and for my usual prayers.”

“Well, I leave you to them; but on account of that poor pagan, D’Artagnan, abridge them for once, I beg; I thirst for speech with you.”

“Well, D’Artagnan, I promise you that within an hour and a half--”

“An hour and a half of devotions! Ah! my friend, be as reasonable with me as you can. Let me have the best bargain possible.”

Aramis began to laugh.

“Still agreeable, still young, still gay,” said he. “You have come into my diocese to set me quarreling with grace.”

“Bah!”

“And you know well that I was never able to resist your seductions; you will cost me my salvation, D’Artagnan.”

D’Artagnan bit his lips.

“Well,” said he, “I will take the sin on my own head, favor me with one simple Christian sign of the cross, favor me with one prayer, and we will part.”

“Hush!” said Aramis, “we are already no longer alone, I hear strangers coming up.”

“Well, dismiss them.”

“Impossible; I made an appointment with them yesterday; it is the principal of the college of the Jesuits, and the superior of the Dominicans.”

“Your staff? Well, so be it.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I will go and wake Porthos, and remain in his company till you have finished the conference.”

Aramis did not stir, his brow remained unbent, he betrayed himself by no gesture or word; “Go,” said he, as D’Artagnan advanced to the door. “A propos, do you know where Porthos sleeps?”

“No, but I will inquire.”

“Take the corridor, and open the second door on the left.”

“Thank you! au revoir.” And D’Artagnan departed in the direction pointed out by Aramis.

Ten minutes had not passed away when he came back. He found Aramis seated between the superior of the Dominicans and the principal of the college of the Jesuits, exactly in the same situation as he had found him formerly in the auberge at Crevecoeur. This company did not at all terrify the musketeer.

“What is it?” said Aramis, quietly. “You have apparently something to say to me, my friend.”

“It is,” replied D’Artagnan, fixing his eyes upon Aramis, “it is that Porthos is not in his apartment.”

“Indeed,” said Aramis calmly; “are you sure?”

“Pardieu! I came from his chamber.”

“Where can he be, then?”

“That is what I am asking you.”

“And have you not inquired?”

“Yes, I have.”

“And what answer did you get?”

“That Porthos, often walking out in a morning, without saying anything, had probably gone out.”

“What did you do, then?”

“I went to the stables,” replied D’Artagnan, carelessly.

“What to do?”

“To see if Porthos had departed on horseback.”

“And?” interrogated the bishop.

“Well, there is a horse missing, stall No. 3, Goliath.”

All this dialogue, it may be easily understood, was not exempt from a certain affectation on the part of the musketeer, and a perfect complaisance on the part of Aramis.

“Oh! I guess how it is,” said Aramis, after having considered for a moment, “Porthos is gone out to give us a surprise.”

“A surprise?”

“Yes; the canal which goes from Vannes to the sea abounds in teal and snipes; that is Porthos’s favorite sport, and he will bring us back a dozen for breakfast.”

“Do you think so?” said D’Artagnan.

“I am sure of it. Where else can he be? I would lay a wager he took a gun with him.”

“Well, that is possible,” said D’Artagnan.

“Do one thing, my friend. Get on horseback, and join him.”

“You are right,” said D’Artagnan, “I will.”

“Shall I go with you?”

"No, thank you; Porthos is a rather remarkable man: I will inquire as I go along."

"Will you take an arquebus?"

"Thank you."

"Order what horse you like to be saddled."

"The one I rode yesterday, on coming from Belle-Isle."

"So be it: use the horse as your own."

Aramis rang, and gave orders to have the horse M. d'Artagnan had chosen saddled.

D'Artagnan followed the servant charged with the execution of this order. When arrived at the door, the servant drew on one side to allow M. d'Artagnan to pass; and at that moment he caught the eye of his master. A knitting of the brow gave the intelligent spy to understand that all should be given to D'Artagnan he wished. D'Artagnan got into the saddle, and Aramis heard the steps of his horse on the pavement. An instant after, the servant returned.

"Well?" asked the bishop.

"Monseigneur, he has followed the course of the canal, and is going towards the sea," said the servant.

"Very well!" said Aramis.

In fact, D'Artagnan, dismissing all suspicion, hastened towards the ocean, constantly hoping to see in the Landes, or on the beach, the colossal profile of Porthos. He persisted in fancying he could trace a horse's steps in every puddle. Sometimes he imagined he heard the report of a gun. This illusion lasted three hours; during two of which he went forward in search of his friend--in the last he returned to the house.

"We must have crossed," said he, "and I shall find them waiting for me at table."

D'Artagnan was mistaken. He no more found Porthos at the palace than he had found him on the sea-shore. Aramis was waiting for him at the top of the stairs, looking very much concerned.

"Did my people not find you, my dear D'Artagnan?" cried he, as soon as he caught sight of the musketeer.

"No; did you send any one after me?"

"I am deeply concerned, my friend, deeply, to have induced you to make such a useless search; but, about seven o'clock, the almoner of Saint-Patern came here. He had met Du Vallon, who was going away, and who, being unwilling to disturb anybody at the palace, had charged him to tell me that, fearing M. Getard would play him some ill turn in his absence, he was going to take advantage of the morning tide to make a tour of Belle-Isle."

"But tell me, Goliath has not crossed the four leagues of sea, I should think."

"There are full six," said Aramis.

"That makes it less probable still."

"Therefore, my friend," said Aramis, with one of his blandest smiles, "Goliath is in the stable, well pleased, I will answer for it, that Porthos is no longer on his back." In fact, the horse had been brought back from the relay by the direction of the prelate, from whom no detail escaped. D'Artagnan appeared as well satisfied with as possible with the explanation. He entered upon a part of dissimulation which agreed perfectly with the suspicions that arose more strongly in his mind. He breakfasted between the Jesuit and Aramis, having the Dominican in front of him, and smiling particularly at the Dominican, whose jolly, fat face pleased him much. The repast was long and sumptuous; excellent Spanish wine, fine Morbihan oysters, exquisite fish from the mouth of the Loire, enormous prawns from Paimboeuf, and delicious game from the moors, constituted the principal part of it. D'Artagnan ate much, and drank but little. Aramis drank nothing, unless it was water. After the repast,--

"You offered me an arquebus," said D'Artagnan.

"I did."

"Lend it me, then."

"Are you going shooting?"

"Whilst waiting for Porthos, it is the best thing I can do, I think."

"Take which you like from the trophy."

"Will you not come with me?"

"I would with great pleasure; but, alas! my friend, sporting is forbidden to bishops."

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, "I did not know that."

"Besides," continued Aramis, "I shall be busy till mid-day."

"I shall go alone, then?" said D'Artagnan.

"I am sorry to say you must; but come back to dinner."

"Pardieu! the eating at your house is too good to make me think of not coming back." And thereupon D'Artagnan quitted his host, bowed to the guests, and took his arquebus; but instead of shooting, went straight to the little port of Vannes. He looked in vain to observe if anybody saw him; he could discern neither thing nor person. He engaged a little fishing boat for twenty-five livres, and set off at half-past eleven, convinced that he had not been followed; and that was true, he had not been followed; only a Jesuit brother, placed in the top of the steeple of his church, had not, since the morning, by the help of an excellent glass, lost sight of one of his steps. At three quarters past eleven, Aramis was informed that D’Artagnan was sailing towards Belle-Isle. The voyage was rapid; a good north north-east wind drove him towards the isle. As he approached, his eyes were constantly fixed upon the coast. He looked to see if, upon the shore or upon the fortifications the brilliant dress and vast stature of Porthos should stand out against a slightly clouded sky; but his search was in vain. He landed without having seen anything; and learnt from the first soldier interrogated by him, that M. du Vallon had not yet returned from Vannes. Then, without losing an instant, D’Artagnan ordered his little bark to put its head towards Sarzeau. We know that the wind changes with the different hours of the day. The breeze had veered from the north north-east to the south-east; the wind, then, was almost as good for the return to Sarzeau, as it had been for the voyage to Belle-Isle. In three hours D’Artagnan had touched the continent; two hours more sufficed for his ride to Vannes. In spite of the rapidity of his passage, what D’Artagnan endured of impatience and anger during that short passage, the deck alone of the vessel, upon which he stamped backwards and forwards for three hours, could testify. He made but one bound from the quay whereon he landed to the episcopal palace. He thought to terrify Aramis by the promptitude of his return; he wished to reproach him with his duplicity, and yet with reserve; but with sufficient spirit, nevertheless, to make him feel all the consequences of it, and force from him a part of his secret. He hoped, in short--thanks to that heat of expression which is to secrets what the charge with the bayonet is to redoubts--to bring the mysterious Aramis to some manifestation or other. But he found, in the vestibule of the palace, the valet de chambre, who closed his passage, while smiling upon him with a stupid air.

“Monseigneur?” cried D’Artagnan, endeavoring to put him aside with his hand. Moved for an instant the valet resumed his station.

“Monseigneur?” said he.

“Yes, to be sure; do you not know me, imbecile?”

“Yes; you are the Chevalier d’Artagnan.”

"Then let me pass."

"It is of no use."

"Why of no use?"

"Because His Greatness is not at home."

"What! His Greatness is not at home? where is he, then?"

"Gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes."

"Whither?"

"I don't know; but perhaps he tells monsieur le chevalier."

"And how? where? in what fashion?"

"In this letter, which he gave me for monsieur le chevalier." And the valet de chambre drew a letter form his pocket.

"Give it me, then, you rascal," said D'Artagnan, snatching it from his hand. "Oh, yes," continued he, at the first line, "yes, I understand;" and he read:--

"Dear Friend,--An affair of the most urgent nature calls me to a distant parish of my diocese. I hoped to see you again before I set out; but I lose that hope in thinking that you are going, no doubt, to remain two or three days at Belle-Isle, with our dear Porthos. Amuse yourself as well as you can; but do not attempt to hold out against him at table. This is a counsel I might have given even to Athos, in his most brilliant and best days. Adieu, dear friend; believe that I regret greatly not having better, and for a longer time, profited by your excellent company."

"Mordioux!" cried D'Artagnan. "I am tricked. Ah! blockhead, brute, triple fool that I am! But those laugh best who laugh last. Oh, duped, duped like a monkey, cheated with an empty nutshell!" And with a hearty blow bestowed upon the nose of the smirking valet de chambre, he made all haste out of the episcopal palace. Furet, however good a trotter, was not equal to present circumstances. D'Artagnan therefore took the post, and chose a horse which he soon caused to demonstrate, with good spurs and a light hand, that deer are not the swiftest animals in nature.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

D’Artagnan makes all Speed, Porthos snores, and Aramis counsels.

From thirty to thirty-five hours after the events we have just related, as M. Fouquet, according to his custom, having interdicted his door, was working in the cabinet of his house at Saint-Mande, with which we are already acquainted, a carriage, drawn by four horses steaming with sweat, entered the court at full gallop. This carriage was, probably, expected; for three or four lackeys hastened to the door, which they opened. Whilst M. Fouquet rose from his bureau and ran to the window, a man got painfully out of the carriage, descending with difficulty the three steps of the door, leaning upon the shoulders of the lackeys. He had scarcely uttered his name, when the valet upon whom he was not leaning, sprang up to the perron, and disappeared in the vestibule. This man went to inform his master; but he had no occasion to knock at the door: Fouquet was standing on the threshold.

“Monseigneur, the Bishop of Vannes,” said he.

“Very well!” replied his master.

Then, leaning over the banister of the staircase, of which Aramis was beginning to ascend the first steps,--

“Ah, dear friend!” said he, “you, so soon!”

“Yes; I, myself, monsieur! but bruised, battered, as you see.”

“Oh! my poor friend,” said Fouquet, presenting him his arm, on which Aramis leant, whilst the servants drew back respectfully.

“Bah!” replied Aramis, “it is nothing, since I am here; the principal thing was that I should get here, and here I am.”

“Speak quickly,” said Fouquet, closing the door of the cabinet behind Aramis and himself.

“Are we alone?”

“Yes, perfectly.”

“No one observes us?--no one can hear us?”

“Be satisfied; nobody.”

“Is M. du Vallon arrived?”

“Yes.”

“And you have received my letter?”

“Yes. The affair is serious, apparently, since it necessitates your attendance in Paris, at a moment when your presence was so urgent elsewhere.”

“You are right, it could not be more serious.”

“Thank you! thank you! What is it about? But, for God’s sake! before anything else, take time to breathe, dear friend. You are so pale, you frighten me.”

“I am really in great pain. But, for Heaven’s sake, think nothing about me. Did M. du Vallon tell you nothing, when he delivered the letter to you?”

“No; I heard a great noise; I went to the window; I saw at the foot of the perron a sort of horseman of marble; I went down, he held the letter out to me, and his horse fell down dead.”

“But he?”

“He fell with the horse; he was lifted, and carried to an apartment. Having read the letter, I went up to him, in hopes of obtaining more ample information; but he was asleep, and, after such a fashion, that it was impossible to wake him. I took pity on him; I gave orders that his boots should be cut from off his legs, and that he should be left quite undisturbed.”

“So far well; now, this is the question in hand, monseigneur. You have seen M. d’Artagnan in Paris, have you not?”

“Certes, and think him a man of intelligence, and even a man of heart; although he did bring about the death of our dear friends, Lyodot and D’Eymeris.”

“Alas! yes, I heard of that. At Tours I met the courier who was bringing the letter from Gourville, and the dispatches from Pelisson. Have you seriously reflected on that event, monsieur?”

“Yes.”

“And in it you perceived a direct attack upon your sovereignty?”

“And do you believe it to be so?”

“Oh, yes, I think so.”

“Well, I must confess, that sad idea occurred to me likewise.”

“Do not blind yourself, monsieur, in the name of Heaven! Listen attentively to me,--I return to D’Artagnan.”

“I am all attention.”

“Under what circumstances did you see him?”

“He came here for money.”

“With what kind of order?”

“With an order from the king.”

“Direct?”

“Signed by his majesty.”

“There, then! Well, D’Artagnan has been to Belle-Isle; he was disguised; he came in the character of some sort of an intendant, charged by his master to purchase salt-mines. Now, D’Artagnan has no other master but the king: he came, then, sent by the king. He saw Porthos.”

“Who is Porthos?”

“I beg your pardon, I made a mistake. He saw M. du Vallon at Belle-Isle; and he knows, as well as you and I do, that Belle-Isle is fortified.”

“And you think that the king sent him there?” said Fouquet, pensively.

“I certainly do.”

“And D’Artagnan, in the hands of the king, is a dangerous instrument?”

“The most dangerous imaginable.”

“Then I formed a correct opinion of him at the first glance.”

“How so?”

“I wished to attach him to myself.”

“If you judged him to be the bravest, the most acute, and the most adroit man in France, you judged correctly.”

“He must be had then, at any price.”

“D’Artagnan?”

“Is that not your opinion?”

“It may be my opinion, but you will never get him.”

“Why?”

“Because we have allowed the time to go by. He was dissatisfied with the court, we should have profited by that; since that, he has passed into England; there he powerfully assisted in the restoration, there he gained a fortune, and, after all, he returned to the service of the king. Well, if he has returned to the service of the king, it is because he is well paid in that service.”

“We will pay him even better, that is all.”

“Oh! monsieur, excuse me; D’Artagnan has a high respect for his word, and where that is once engaged he keeps it.”

"What do you conclude, then?" said Fouquet, with great inquietude.

"At present, the principal thing is to parry a dangerous blow."

"And how is it to be parried?"

"Listen."

"But D'Artagnan will come and render an account to the king of his mission."

"Oh, we have time enough to think about that."

"How so? You are much in advance of him, I presume?"

"Nearly ten hours."

"Well, in ten hours--"

Aramis shook his pale head. "Look at these clouds which flit across the heavens; at these swallows which cut the air. D'Artagnan moves more quickly than the clouds or the birds; D'Artagnan is the wind which carries them."

"A strange man!"

"I tell you, he is superhuman, monsieur. He is of my own age, and I have known him these five-and-thirty years."

"Well?"

"Well, listen to my calculation, monsieur. I send M. du Vallon off to you two hours after midnight. M. du Vallon was eight hours in advance of me; when did M. du Vallon arrive?"

"About four hours ago."

"You see, then, that I gained four upon him; and yet Porthos is a staunch horseman, and he has left on the road eight dead horses, whose bodies I came to successively. I rode post fifty leagues; but I have the gout, the gravel, and what else I know not; so that fatigue kills me. I was obliged to dismount at Tours; since that, rolling along in a carriage, half dead, sometimes overturned, drawn upon the sides, and sometimes on the back of the carriage, always with four spirited horses at full gallop, I have arrived--arrived, gaining four hours upon Porthos; but, see you, D'Artagnan does not weigh three hundred-weight, as Porthos does; D'Artagnan has not the gout and gravel, as I have; he is not a horseman, he is a centaur. D'Artagnan, look you, set out for Belle-Isle when I set out for Paris; and D'Artagnan, notwithstanding my ten hours' advance, D'Artagnan will arrive within two hours after me."

"But, then, accidents?"

"He never meets with accidents."

"Horses may fail him."

"He will run as fast as a horse."

"Good God! what a man!"

"Yes, he is a man whom I love and admire. I love him because he is good, great, and loyal; I admire him because he represents in my eyes the culminating point of human power; but, whilst loving and admiring him, I fear him, and am on my guard against him. Now then, I resume, monsieur; in two hours D'Artagnan will be here; be beforehand with him. Go to the Louvre, and see the king, before he sees D'Artagnan."

"What shall I say to the king?"

"Nothing; give him Belle-Isle."

"Oh! Monsieur d'Herblay! Monsieur d'Herblay," cried Fouquet, "what projects crushed all at once!"

"After one project that has failed, there is always another project that may lead to fortune; we should never despair. Go, monsieur, and go at once."

"But that garrison, so carefully chosen, the king will change it directly."

"That garrison, monsieur, was the king's when it entered Belle-Isle; it is yours now; it is the same with all garrisons after a fortnight's occupation. Let things go on, monsieur. Do you see any inconvenience in having an army at the end of a year, instead of two regiments? Do you not see that your garrison of to-day will make you partisans at La Rochelle, Nantes, Bordeaux, Toulouse--in short, wherever they may be sent to? Go to the king, monsieur; go; time flies, and D'Artagnan, while we are losing time, is flying, like an arrow, along the high-road."

"Monsieur d'Herblay, you know that each word from you is a germ which fructifies in my thoughts. I will go to the Louvre."

"Instantly, will you not?"

"I only ask time to change my dress."

"Remember that D'Artagnan has no need to pass through Saint-Mande; but will go straight to the Louvre; that is cutting off an hour from the advantage that yet remains to us."

"D'Artagnan may have everything except my English horses. I shall be at the Louvre in twenty-five minutes." And, without losing a second, Fouquet gave orders for his departure.

Aramis had only time to say to him, "Return as quickly as you go; for I shall await you impatiently."

Five minutes after, the superintendent was flying along the road to Paris. During this time, Aramis desired to be shown the chamber in which Porthos was sleeping. At the door of Fouquet’s cabinet he was folded in the arms of Pelisson, who had just heard of his arrival, and had left his office to see him. Aramis received, with that friendly dignity which he knew so well how to assume, these caresses, respectful as earnest; but all at once stopping on the landing-place, “What is that I hear up yonder?”

There was, in fact, a hoarse, growling kind of noise, like the roar of a hungry tiger, or an impatient lion. “Oh, that is nothing,” said Pelisson, smiling.

“Well; but--”

“It is M. du Vallon snoring.”

“Ah! true,” said Aramis: “I had forgotten. No one but he is capable of making such a noise. Allow me, Pelisson, to inquire if he wants anything.”

“And you will permit me to accompany you?”

“Oh, certainly;” and both entered the chamber. Porthos was stretched upon the bed; his face was violet rather than red; his eyes were swelled; his mouth was wide open. The roaring which escaped from the deep cavities of his chest made the glass of the windows vibrate. To those developed and clearly defined muscles starting from his face, to his hair matted with sweat, to the energetic heaving of his chin and shoulders, it was impossible to refuse a certain degree of admiration. Strength carried to this point is semi-divine. The Herculean legs and feet of Porthos had, by swelling, burst his stockings; all the strength of his huge body was converted into the rigidity of stone. Porthos moved no more than does the giant of granite which reclines upon the plains of Agrigentum. According to Pelisson’s orders, his boots had been cut off, for no human power could have pulled them off. Four lackeys had tried in vain, pulling at them as they would have pulled capstans; and yet all this did not awaken him. They had hacked off his boots in fragments, and his legs had fallen back upon the bed. They then cut off the rest of his clothes, carried him to a bath, in which they let him soak a considerable time. They then put on him clean linen, and placed him in a well-warmed bed--the whole with efforts and pains which might have roused a dead man, but which did not make Porthos open an eye, or interrupt for a second the formidable diapason of his snoring. Aramis wished on his part, with his nervous nature, armed with extraordinary courage, to outbrave fatigue, and employ himself with Gourville and

Pelisson, but he fainted in the chair in which he had persisted sitting. He was carried into the adjoining room, where the repose of bed soon soothed his failing brain.

CHAPTER LXXV.

In which Monsieur Fouquet Acts.

In the meantime Fouquet was hastening to the Louvre, at the best speed of his English horses. The king was at work with Colbert. All at once the king became thoughtful. The two sentences of death he had signed on mounting his throne sometimes recurred to his memory; they were two black spots which he saw with his eyes open; two spots of blood which he saw when his eyes were closed. “Monsieur,” said he rather sharply, to the intendant; “it sometimes seems to me that those two men you made me condemn were not very great culprits.”

“Sire, they were picked out from the herd of the farmers of the financiers, which wanted decimating.”

“Picked out by whom?”

“By necessity, sire,” replied Colbert, coldly.

“Necessity!--a great word,” murmured the young king.

“A great goddess, sire.”

“They were devoted friends of the superintendent, were they not?”

“Yes, sire; friends who would have given up their lives for Monsieur Fouquet.”

“They have given them, monsieur,” said the king.

“That is true;--but uselessly, by good luck,--which was not their intention.”

“How much money had these men fraudulently obtained?”

“Ten millions, perhaps; of which six have been confiscated.”

“And is that money in my coffers?” said the king with a certain air of repugnance.

“It is there, sire; but this confiscation, whilst threatening M. Fouquet, has not touched him.”

“You conclude, then, M. Colbert--”

“That if M. Fouquet has raised against your majesty a troop of factious rioters to extricate his friends from punishment, he will raise an army when he has in turn to extricate himself from punishment.”

The king darted at his confidant one of those looks which resemble the livid fire of a flash of lightning, one of those looks which illuminate the darkness of the basest consciences. “I am astonished,” said he, “that, thinking such things of M. Fouquet, you did not come to give me your counsels thereupon.”

“Counsels upon what, sire?”

“Tell me, in the first place, clearly and precisely, what you think, M. Colbert.”

“Upon what subject, sire?”

“Upon the conduct of M. Fouquet.”

“I think, sire, that M. Fouquet, not satisfied with attracting all the money to himself, as M. Mazarin did, and by that means depriving your majesty of one part of your power, still wishes to attract to himself all the friends of easy life and pleasure--of what idlers call poetry, and politicians, corruption. I think that, by holding the subjects of your majesty in pay, he trespasses upon the royal prerogative, and cannot, if this continues so, be long in placing your majesty among the weak and the obscure.”

“How would you qualify all these projects, M. Colbert?”

“The projects of M. Fouquet, sire?”

“Yes.”

“They are called crimes of lese majeste.”

“And what is done to criminals guilty of lese majeste?”

“They are arrested, tried, and punished.”

“You are quite certain that M. Fouquet has conceived the idea of the crime you impute to him?”

“I can say more, sire; there is even a commencement of the execution of it.”

“Well, then, I return to that which I was saying, M. Colbert.”

“And you were saying, sire?”

“Give me counsel.”

“Pardon me, sire; but in the first place, I have something to add.”

“Say--what?”

“An evident, palpable, material proof of treason.”

“And what is that?”

“I have just learnt that M. Fouquet is fortifying Belle-Isle.”

“Ah, indeed!”

“Yes, sire.”

"Are you sure?"

"Perfectly. Do you know, sire, what soldiers there are in Belle-Isle?"

"No, ma foi! Do you?"

"I am ignorant, likewise, sire; I should therefore propose to your majesty to send somebody to Belle-Isle?"

"Who?"

"Me, for instance."

"And what would you do at Belle-Isle?"

"Inform myself whether, after the example of the ancient feudal lords, M. Fouquet was battlementing his walls."

"And with what purpose could he do that?"

"With the purpose of defending himself someday against his king."

"But, if it be thus, M. Colbert," said Louis, "we must immediately do as you say; M. Fouquet must be arrested."

"That is impossible."

"I thought I had already told you, monsieur, that I suppressed that word in my service."

"The service of your majesty cannot prevent M. Fouquet from being surintendant-general."

"Well?"

"That, in consequence of holding that post, he has for him all the parliament, as he has all the army by his largesses, literature by his favors, and the noblesse by his presents."

"That is to say, then, that I can do nothing against M. Fouquet?"

"Absolutely nothing,--at least at present, sire."

"You are a sterile counselor, M. Colbert."

"Oh, no, sire; for I will not confine myself to pointing out the peril to your majesty."

"Come, then, where shall we begin to undermine this Colossus; let us see;" and his majesty began to laugh bitterly.

"He has grown great by money; kill him by money, sire."

"If I were to deprive him of his charge?"

"A bad means, sire."

"The good--the good, then?"

"Ruin him, sire, that is the way."

"But how?"

"Occasions will not be wanting; take advantage of all occasions."

“Point them out to me.”

“Here is one at once. His royal highness Monsieur is about to be married; his nuptials must be magnificent. That is a good occasion for your majesty to demand a million of M. Fouquet. M. Fouquet, who pays twenty thousand livres down when he need not pay more than five thousand, will easily find that million when your majesty demands it.”

“That is all very well; I will demand it,” said Louis.

“If your majesty will sign the ordonnance I will have the money got together myself.” And Colbert pushed a paper before the king, and presented a pen to him.

At that moment the usher opened the door and announced monsieur le surintendant. Louis turned pale. Colbert let the pen fall, and drew back from the king, over whom he extended his black wings like an evil spirit. The superintendent made his entrance like a man of the court, to whom a single glance was sufficient to make him appreciate the situation. That situation was not very encouraging for Fouquet, whatever might be his consciousness of strength. The small black eye of Colbert, dilated by envy, and the limpid eye of Louis XIV. inflamed by anger, signalled some pressing danger. Courtiers are, with regard to court rumors, like old soldiers, who distinguish through the blasts of wind and bluster of leaves the sound of the distant steps of an armed troop. They can, after having listened, tell pretty nearly how many men are marching, how many arms resound, how many cannons roll. Fouquet had then only to interrogate the silence which his arrival had produced; he found it big with menacing revelations. The king allowed him time enough to advance as far as the middle of the chamber. His adolescent modesty commanded this forbearance of the moment. Fouquet boldly seized the opportunity.

“Sire,” said he, “I was impatient to see your majesty.”

“What for?” asked Louis.

“To announce some good news to you.”

Colbert, minus grandeur of person, less largeness of heart, resembled Fouquet in many points. He had the same penetration, the same knowledge of men; moreover, that great power of self-compression which gives to hypocrites time to reflect, and gather themselves up to take a spring. He guessed that Fouquet was going to meet the blow he was about to deal him. His eyes glittered ominously.

“What news?” asked the king. Fouquet placed a roll of papers on the table.

“Let your majesty have the goodness to cast your eyes over this work,” said he. The king slowly unfolded the paper.

“Plans?” said he.

“Yes, sire.”

“And what are these plans?”

“A new fortification, sire.”

“Ah, ah!” said the king, “you amuse yourself with tactics and strategies then, M. Fouquet?”

“I occupy myself with everything that may be useful to the reign of your majesty,” replied Fouquet.

“Beautiful descriptions!” said the king, looking at the design.

“Your majesty comprehends, without doubt,” said Fouquet, bending over the paper; “here is the circle of the walls, here are the forts, there the advanced works.”

“And what do I see here, monsieur?”

“The sea.”

“The sea all round?”

“Yes, sire.”

“And what is, then, the name of this place of which you show me the plan?”

“Sire, it is Belle-Ile-en-Mer,” replied Fouquet with simplicity.

At this word, at this name, Colbert made so marked a movement, that the king turned round to enforce the necessity for reserve. Fouquet did not appear to be the least in the world concerned by the movement of Colbert, or the king’s signal.

“Monsieur,” continued Louis, “you have then fortified Belle-Isle?”

“Yes, sire; and I have brought the plan and the accounts to your majesty,” replied Fouquet; “I have expended sixteen hundred livres in this operation.”

“What to do?” replied Louis, coldly, having taken the initiative from a malicious look of the intendant.

“For an aim very easy to seize,” replied Fouquet. “Your majesty was on cool terms with Great Britain.”

“Yes; but since the restoration of King Charles II. I have formed an alliance with him.”

“A month since, sire, your majesty has truly said; but it is more than six months since the fortifications of Belle-Isle were begun.”

“Then they have become useless.”

“Sire, fortifications are never useless. I fortified Belle-Isle against MM. Monk and Lambert and all those London citizens who were playing at soldiers. Belle-Isle will be ready fortified against the Dutch, against whom either England or your majesty cannot fail to make war.”

The king was again silent, and looked askant at Colbert. “Belle-Isle, I believe,” added Louis, “is yours, M. Fouquet?”

“No, sire.”

“Whose then?”

“Your majesty’s.”

Colbert was seized with as much terror as if a gulf had opened beneath his feet. Louis started with admiration, either at the genius or the devotion of Fouquet.

“Explain yourself, monsieur,” said he.

“Nothing more easy, sire; Belle-Isle is one of my estates; I have fortified it at my own expense. But as nothing in the world can oppose a subject making an humble present to his king, I offer your majesty the proprietorship of the estate, of which you will leave me the usufruct. Belle-Isle, as a place of war, ought to be occupied by the king. Your majesty will be able, henceforth, to keep a safe garrison there.”

Colbert felt almost sinking down upon the floor. To keep himself from falling, he was obliged to hold by the columns of the wainscoting.

“This is a piece of great skill in the art of war that you have exhibited here, monsieur,” said Louis.

“Sire, the initiative did not come from me,” replied Fouquet; “many officers have inspired me with it. The plans themselves have been made by one of the most distinguished engineers.”

“His name?”

“M. du Vallon.”

“M. du Vallon?” resumed Louis; “I do not know him. It is much to be lamented, M. Colbert,” continued he, “that I do not know the names of the men of talent who do honor to my reign.” And while saying these words he turned towards Colbert. The latter felt himself crushed, the sweat flowed from his brow, no word presented itself to his lips, he suffered an inexpressible martyrdom. “You will recollect that name,” added Louis XIV.

Colbert bowed, but was paler than his ruffles of Flemish lace. Fouquet continued:

"The masonries are of Roman concrete; the architects amalgamated it for me after the best accounts of antiquity."

"And the cannon?" asked Louis.

"Oh! sire, that concerns your majesty; it did not become me to place cannon in my own house, unless your majesty had told me it was yours."

Louis began to float, undetermined between the hatred which this so powerful man inspired him with, and the pity he felt for the other, so cast down, who seemed to him the counterfeit of the former. But the consciousness of his kingly duty prevailed over the feelings of the man, and he stretched out his finger to the paper.

"It must have cost you a great deal of money to carry these plans into execution," said he.

"I believe I had the honor of telling your majesty the amount."

"Repeat it if you please, I have forgotten it."

"Sixteen hundred thousand livres."

"Sixteen hundred thousand livres! you are enormously rich, monsieur."

"It is your majesty who is rich, since Belle-Isle is yours."

"Yes, thank you; but however rich I may be, M. Fouquet--" The king stopped.

"Well, sire?" asked the superintendent.

"I foresee the moment when I shall want money."

"You, sire? And at what moment then?"

"To-morrow, for example."

"Will your majesty do me the honor to explain yourself?"

"My brother is going to marry the English Princess."

"Well, sire?"

"Well, I ought to give the bride a reception worthy of the granddaughter of Henry IV."

"That is but just, sire."

"Then I shall want money."

"No doubt."

"I shall want--" Louis hesitated. The sum he was going to demand was the same that he had been obliged to refuse Charles II. He turned towards Colbert, that he might give the blow.

"I shall want, to-morrow--" repeated he, looking at Colbert.

“A million,” said the latter, bluntly; delighted to take his revenge.

Fouquet turned his back upon the intendant to listen to the king. He did not turn round, but waited till the king repeated, or rather murmured, “A million.”

“Oh! sire,” replied Fouquet disdainfully, “a million! what will your majesty do with a million?”

“It appears to me, nevertheless--” said Louis XIV.

“That is not more than is spent at the nuptials of one of the most petty princes of Germany.”

“Monsieur!”

“Your majesty must have two millions at least. The horses alone would run away with five hundred thousand livres. I shall have the honor of sending your majesty sixteen hundred thousand livres this evening.”

“How,” said the king, “sixteen hundred thousand livres?”

“Look, sire,” replied Fouquet, without even turning towards Colbert, “I know that wants four hundred thousand livres of the two millions. But this monsieur of l’intendance” (pointing over his shoulder to Colbert, who if possible, became paler, behind him) “has in his coffers nine hundred thousand livres of mine.”

The king turned round to look at Colbert.

“But--” said the latter.

“Monsieur,” continued Fouquet, still speaking indirectly to Colbert, “monsieur has received, a week ago, sixteen hundred thousand livres; he has paid a hundred thousand livres to the guards, sixty-four thousand livres to the hospitals, twenty-five thousand to the Swiss, an hundred and thirty thousand for provisions, a thousand for arms, ten thousand for accidental expenses; I do not err, then, in reckoning upon nine hundred thousand livres that are left.” Then turning towards Colbert, like a disdainful head of office towards his inferior, “Take care, monsieur,” said he, “that those nine hundred thousand livres be remitted to his majesty this evening, in gold.”

“But,” said the king, “that will make two millions five hundred thousand livres.”

“Sire, the five hundred thousand livres over will serve as pocket money for his royal highness. You understand, Monsieur Colbert, this evening before eight o’clock.”

And with these words, bowing respectfully to the king, the superintendent made his exit backwards, without honoring with a single look the envious man, whose head he had just half shaved.

Colbert tore his ruffles to pieces in his rage, and bit his lips till they bled.

Fouquet had not passed the door of the cabinet, when an usher pushing by him, exclaimed: “A courier from Bretagne for his majesty.”

“M. d’Herblay was right,” murmured Fouquet, pulling out his watch; “an hour and fifty-five minutes. It was quite true.”

VOLUME II: TEN YEARS LATER

INTRODUCTION.

In the months of March-July in 1844, in the magazine Le Siecle, the first portion of a story appeared, penned by the celebrated playwright Alexandre Dumas. It was based, he claimed, on some manuscripts he had found a year earlier in the Bibliotheque Nationale while researching a history he planned to write on Louis XIV. They chronicled the adventures of a young man named D'Artagnan who, upon entering Paris, became almost immediately embroiled in court intrigues, international politics, and ill-fated affairs between royal lovers. Over the next six years, readers would enjoy the adventures of this youth and his three famous friends, Porthos, Athos, and Aramis, as their exploits unraveled behind the scenes of some of the most momentous events in French and even English history.

Eventually these serialized adventures were published in novel form, and became the three D'Artagnan Romances known today. Here is a brief summary of the first two novels:

The Three Musketeers (serialized March-July, 1844): The year is 1625. The young D'Artagnan arrives in Paris at the tender age of 18, and almost immediately offends three musketeers, Porthos, Aramis, and Athos. Instead of dueling, the four are attacked by five of the Cardinal's guards, and the courage of the youth is made apparent during the battle. The four become fast friends, and, when asked by D'Artagnan's landlord to find his missing wife, embark upon an adventure that takes them across both France and England in order to thwart the plans of the Cardinal Richelieu. Along the way, they encounter a beautiful young spy, named simply Milady, who will stop at nothing to disgrace Queen Anne of Austria before her husband, Louis XIII, and take her revenge upon the four friends.

Twenty Years After (serialized January-August, 1845): The year is now 1648, twenty years since the close of the last story. Louis XIII has died, as has Cardinal Richelieu, and while the crown of France may sit upon the head of Anne of Austria as Regent for the young Louis XIV, the real power resides with the Cardinal Mazarin, her secret husband. D'Artagnan is now a lieutenant of musketeers, and his three friends have retired to private life. Athos turned out to be a nobleman, the Comte de la Fere, and has retired to his home with his son, Raoul de Bragelonne. Aramis, whose real name is

D’Herblay, has followed his intention of shedding the musketeer’s cassock for the priest’s robes, and Porthos has married a wealthy woman, who left him her fortune upon her death. But trouble is stirring in both France and England. Cromwell menaces the institution of royalty itself while marching against Charles I, and at home the Fronde is threatening to tear France apart. D’Artagnan brings his friends out of retirement to save the threatened English monarch, but Mordaunt, the son of Milady, who seeks to avenge his mother’s death at the musketeers’ hands, thwarts their valiant efforts. Undaunted, our heroes return to France just in time to help save the young Louis XIV, quiet the Fronde, and tweak the nose of Cardinal Mazarin.

The third novel, The Vicomte de Bragelonne (serialized October, 1847 — January, 1850), has enjoyed a strange history in its English translation. It has been split into three, four, or five volumes at various points in its history. The five-volume edition generally does not give titles to the smaller portions, but the others do. In the three-volume edition, the novels are entitled The Vicomte de Bragelonne, Louise de la Valliere, and The Man in the Iron Mask. For the purposes of this etext, I have chosen to split the novel as the four-volume edition does, with these titles: The Vicomte de Bragelonne, Ten Years Later, Louise de la Valliere, and The Man in the Iron Mask. In the last etext:

The Vicomte de Bragelonne (Etext 2609): It is the year 1660, and D’Artagnan, after thirty-five years of loyal service, has become disgusted with serving King Louis XIV while the real power resides with the Cardinal Mazarin, and has tendered his resignation. He embarks on his own project, that of restoring Charles II to the throne of England, and, with the help of Athos, succeeds, earning himself quite a fortune in the process. D’Artagnan returns to Paris to live the life of a rich citizen, and Athos, after negotiating the marriage of Philip, the king’s brother, to Princess Henrietta of England, likewise retires to his own estate, La Fere. Meanwhile, Mazarin has finally died, and left Louis to assume the reigns of power, with the assistance of M. Colbert, formerly Mazarin’s trusted clerk. Colbert has an intense hatred for M. Fouquet, the king’s superintendent of finances, and has resolved to use any means necessary to bring about his fall. With the new rank of intendant bestowed on him by Louis, Colbert succeeds in having two of Fouquet’s loyal friends tried and executed. He then brings to the king’s attention that Fouquet is fortifying the island of Belle-Ile-en-Mer, and could possibly be planning to use it as a base for some military operation against the king.

Louis calls D’Artagnan out of retirement and sends him to investigate the island, promising him a tremendous salary and his long-promised promotion to captain of the musketeers upon his return. At Belle-Isle, D’Artagnan discovers that the engineer of the fortifications is, in fact, Porthos, now the Baron du Vallon, and that’s not all. The blueprints for the island, although in Porthos’s handwriting, show evidence of another script that has been erased, that of Aramis. D’Artagnan later discovers that Aramis has become the bishop of Vannes, which is, coincidentally, a parish belonging to M. Fouquet. Suspecting that D’Artagnan has arrived on the king’s behalf to investigate, Aramis tricks D’Artagnan into wandering around Vannes in search of Porthos, and sends Porthos on an heroic ride back to Paris to warn Fouquet of the danger. Fouquet rushes to the king, and gives him Belle-Isle as a present, thus allaying any suspicion, and at the same time humiliating Colbert, just minutes before the usher announces someone else seeking an audience with the king.

And now, the second etext of The Vicomte de Bragelonne. Enjoy!

John Bursey Mordaunt

There is one French custom that may cause confusion. The Duc d’Orleans is traditionally called “Monsieur” and his wife “Madame.” Gaston, the king’s uncle, currently holds that title. Upon the event of his death, it will be conferred upon the king’s brother, Philip, who is currently the Duc d’Anjou. The customary title of “Monsieur” will go to him as well, and upon his future wife, Henrietta of England, that of “Madame.” Gaston’s widow will be referred to as the “Dowager Madame.” — JB

CHAPTER I.

In which D’Artagnan finishes by at Length placing his Hand upon his Captain’s Commission.

The reader guesses beforehand whom the usher preceded in announcing the courier from Bretagne. This messenger was easily recognized. It was D’Artagnan, his clothes dusty, his face inflamed, his hair dripping with sweat, his legs stiff; he lifted his feet painfully at every step, on which resounded the clink of his blood-stained spurs. He perceived in the doorway he was passing through, the superintendent coming out. Fouquet bowed with a smile to him who, an hour before, was bringing him ruin and death. D’Artagnan found in his goodness of heart, and in his inexhaustible vigor of body, enough presence of mind to remember the kind reception of this man; he bowed then, also, much more from benevolence and compassion, than from respect. He felt upon his lips the word which had so many times been repeated to the Duc de Guise: “Fly.” But to pronounce that word would have been to betray his cause; to speak that word in the cabinet of the king, and before an usher, would have been to ruin himself gratuitously, and could save nobody. D’Artagnan then, contented himself with bowing to Fouquet and entered. At this moment the king floated between the joy the last words of Fouquet had given him, and his pleasure at the return of D’Artagnan. Without being a courtier, D’Artagnan had a glance as sure and as rapid as if he had been one. He read, on his entrance, devouring humiliation on the countenance of Colbert. He even heard the king say these words to him: —

“Ah! Monsieur Colbert; you have then nine hundred thousand livres at the intendance?” Colbert, suffocated, bowed but made no reply. All this scene entered into the mind of D’Artagnan, by the eyes and ears, at once.

The first word of Louis to his musketeer, as if he wished it to contrast with what he was saying at the moment, was a kind “good day.” His second was to send away Colbert. The latter left the king’s cabinet, pallid and tottering, whilst D’Artagnan twisted up the ends of his mustache.

"I love to see one of my servants in this disorder," said the king, admiring the martial stains upon the clothes of his envoy.

"I thought, sire, my presence at the Louvre was sufficiently urgent to excuse my presenting myself thus before you."

"You bring me great news, then, monsieur?"

"Sire, the thing is this, in two words: Belle-Isle is fortified, admirably fortified; Belle-Isle has a double *enceinte*, a citadel, two detached forts; its ports contain three corsairs; and the side batteries only await their cannon."

"I know all that, monsieur," replied the king.

"What! your majesty knows all that?" replied the musketeer, stupefied.

"I have the plan of the fortifications of Belle-Isle," said the king.

"Your majesty has the plan?"

"Here it is."

"It is really correct, sire: I saw a similar one on the spot."

D'Artagnan's brow became clouded.

"Ah! I understand all. Your majesty did not trust to me alone, but sent some other person," said he in a reproachful tone.

"Of what importance is the manner, monsieur, in which I have learnt what I know, so that I know it?"

"Sire, sire," said the musketeer, without seeking even to conceal his dissatisfaction; "but I must be permitted to say to your majesty, that it is not worth while to make me use such speed, to risk twenty times the breaking of my neck, to salute me on my arrival with such intelligence. Sire, when people are not trusted, or are deemed insufficient, they should scarcely be employed." And D'Artagnan, with a movement perfectly military, stamped with his foot, and left upon the floor dust stained with blood. The king looked at him, inwardly enjoying his first triumph.

"Monsieur," said he, at the expiration of a minute, "not only is Belle-Isle known to me, but, still further, Belle-Isle is mine."

"That is well! that is well, sire, I ask but one thing more," replied D'Artagnan. — "My discharge."

"What! your discharge?"

"Without doubt I am too proud to eat the bread of the king without earning it, or rather by gaining it badly. — My discharge, sire!"

"Oh, oh!"

"I ask for my discharge, or I will take it."

"You are angry, monsieur?"

“I have reason, *mordioux!* Thirty-two hours in the saddle, I ride day and night, I perform prodigies of speed, I arrive stiff as the corpse of a man who has been hung — and another arrives before me! Come, sire, I am a fool! — My discharge, sire!”

“Monsieur d’Artagnan,” said Louis, leaning his white hand upon the dusty arm of the musketeer, “what I tell you will not at all affect that which I promised you. A king’s word given must be kept.” And the king going straight to his table, opened a drawer, and took out a folded paper. “Here is your commission of captain of musketeers; you have won it, Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

D’Artagnan opened the paper eagerly, and scanned it twice. He could scarcely believe his eyes.

“And this commission is given you,” continued the king, “not only on account of your journey to Belle-Isle but, moreover, for your brave intervention at the Place de Greve. There, likewise, you served me valiantly.”

“Ah, ah!” said D’Artagnan, without his self-command being able to prevent a blush from mounting to his eyes — ”you know that also, sire?”

“Yes, I know it.”

The king possessed a piercing glance and an infallible judgment when it was his object to read men’s minds. “You have something to say,” said he to the musketeer, “something to say which you do not say. Come, speak freely, monsieur; you know that I told you, once and for all, that you are to be always quite frank with me.”

“Well, sire! what I have to say is this, that I would prefer being made captain of the musketeers for having charged a battery at the head of my company, or taken a city, than for causing two wretches to be hung.”

“Is this quite true you tell me?”

“And why should your majesty suspect me of dissimulation, I ask?”

“Because I have known you well, monsieur; you cannot repent of having drawn your sword for me.”

“Well, in that your majesty is deceived, and greatly; yes, I do repent of having drawn my sword on account of the results that action produced; the poor men who were hung, sire, were neither your enemies nor mine; and they could not defend themselves.”

The king preserved silence for a moment. “And your companion, M. d’Artagnan, does he partake of your repentance?”

“My companion?”

“Yes, you were not alone, I have been told.”

“Alone, where?”

“At the Place de Greve.”

“No, sire, no,” said D’Artagnan, blushing at the idea that the king might have a suspicion that he, D’Artagnan, had wished to engross to himself all the glory that belonged to Raoul; “no, *mordioux!* and as your majesty says, I had a companion, and a good companion, too.”

“A young man?”

“Yes, sire; a young man. Oh! your majesty must accept my compliments, you are as well informed of things out of doors as things within. It is M. Colbert who makes all these fine reports to the king.”

“M. Colbert has said nothing but good of you, M. d’Artagnan, and he would have met with a bad reception if he had come to tell me anything else.”

“That is fortunate!”

“But he also said much good of that young man.”

“And with justice,” said the musketeer.

“In short, it appears that this young man is a fire-eater,” said Louis, in order to sharpen the sentiment which he mistook for envy.

“A fire-eater! Yes, sire,” repeated D’Artagnan, delighted on his part to direct the king’s attention to Raoul.

“Do you not know his name?”

“Well, I think — ”

“You know him then?”

“I have known him nearly five-and-twenty years, sire.”

“Why, he is scarcely twenty-five years old!” cried the king.

“Well, sire! I have known him ever since he was born, that is all.”

“Do you affirm that?”

“Sire,” said D’Artagnan, “your majesty questions me with a mistrust in which I recognize another character than your own. M. Colbert, who has so well informed you, has he not forgotten to tell you that this young man is the son of my most intimate friend?”

“The Vicomte de Bragelonne?”

“Certainly, sire. The father of the Vicomte de Bragelonne is M. le Comte de la Fere, who so powerfully assisted in the restoration of King Charles II. Bragelonne comes of a valiant race, sire.”

"Then he is the son of that nobleman who came to me, or rather to M. Mazarin, on the part of King Charles II., to offer me his alliance?"

"Exactly, sire."

"And the Comte de la Fere is a great soldier, say you?"

"Sire, he is a man who has drawn his sword more times for the king, your father, than there are, at present, months in the happy life of your majesty."

It was Louis XIV. who now bit his lip.

"That is well, M. d'Artagnan, very well! And M. le Comte de la Fere is your friend, say you?"

"For about forty years; yes, sire. Your majesty may see that I do not speak to you of yesterday."

"Should you be glad to see this young man, M. d'Artagnan?"

"Delighted, sire."

The king touched his bell, and an usher appeared. "Call M. de Bragelonne," said the king.

"Ah! ah! he is here?" said D'Artagnan.

"He is on guard to-day, at the Louvre, with the company of the gentlemen of monsieur le prince."

The king had scarcely ceased speaking, when Raoul presented himself, and, on seeing D'Artagnan, smiled on him with that charming smile which is only found upon the lips of youth.

"Come, come," said D'Artagnan, familiarly, to Raoul, "the king will allow you to embrace me; only tell his majesty you thank him."

Raoul bowed so gracefully, that Louis, to whom all superior qualities were pleasing when they did not overshadow his own, admired his beauty, strength, and modesty.

"Monsieur," said the king, addressing Raoul, "I have asked monsieur le prince to be kind enough to give you up to me; I have received his reply, and you belong to me from this morning. Monsieur le prince was a good master, but I hope you will not lose by the exchange."

"Yes, yes, Raoul, be satisfied; the king has some good in him," said D'Artagnan, who had fathomed the character of Louis, and who played with his self-love, within certain limits; always observing, be it understood, the proprieties and flattering, even when he appeared to be bantering.

"Sire," said Bragelonne, with voice soft and musical, and with the natural and easy elocution he inherited from his father; "Sire, it is not from to-day that I belong to your majesty."

“Oh! no, I know,” said the king, “you mean your enterprise of the Greve. That day, you were truly mine, monsieur.”

“Sire, it is not of that day I would speak; it would not become me to refer to so paltry a service in the presence of such a man as M. d’Artagnan. I would speak of a circumstance which created an epoch in my life, and which consecrated me, from the age of sixteen, to the devoted service of your majesty.”

“Ah! ah!” said the king, “what was that circumstance? Tell me, monsieur.”

“This is it, sire. — When I was setting out on my first campaign, that is to say, to join the army of monsieur le prince, M. le Comte de la Fere came to conduct me as far as Saint-Denis, where the remains of King Louis XIII. wait, upon the lowest steps of the funeral *basilique*, a successor, whom God will not send him, I hope, for many years. Then he made me swear upon the ashes of our masters, to serve royalty, represented by you — incarnate in you, sire — to serve it in word, in thought, and in action. I swore, and God and the dead were witnesses to my oath. During ten years, sire, I have not so often as I desired had occasion to keep it. I am a soldier of your majesty, and nothing else; and, on calling me nearer to you, I do not change my master, I only change my garrison.”

Raoul was silent and bowed. Louis still listened after he had done speaking.

“*Mordioux!*” cried D’Artagnan, “that was well spoken! was it not, your majesty? A good race! a noble race!”

“Yes,” murmured the king, without, however daring to manifest his emotion, for it had no other cause than contact with a nature intrinsically noble. “Yes, monsieur, you say truly: — wherever you were, you were the king’s. But in changing your garrison, believe me you will find an advancement of which you are worthy.”

Raoul saw that this ended what the king had to say to him. And with the perfect tact which characterized his refined nature, he bowed and retired.

“Is there anything else, monsieur, of which you have to inform me?” said the king, when he found himself again alone with D’Artagnan.

“Yes, sire, and I kept that news for the last, for it is sad, and will clothe European royalty in mourning.”

“What do you tell me?”

"Sire, in passing through Blois, a word, a sad word, echoed from the palace, struck my ear."

"In truth, you terrify me, M. d'Artagnan."

"Sire, this word was pronounced to me by a *piqueur*, who wore crape on his arm."

"My uncle, Gaston of Orleans, perhaps."

"Sire, he has rendered his last sigh."

"And I was not warned of it!" cried the king, whose royal susceptibility saw an insult in the absence of this intelligence.

"Oh! do not be angry, sire," said D'Artagnan; "neither the couriers of Paris, nor the couriers of the whole world, can travel with your servant; the courier from Blois will not be here these two hours, and he rides well, I assure you, seeing that I only passed him on the thither side of Orleans."

"My uncle Gaston," murmured Louis, pressing his hand to his brow, and comprising in those three words all that his memory recalled of that symbol of opposing sentiments.

"Eh! yes, sire, it is thus," said D'Artagnan, philosophically replying to the royal thought, "it is thus the past flies away."

"That is true, monsieur, that is true; but there remains for us, thank God! the future; and we will try to make it not too dark."

"I feel confidence in your majesty on that head," said D'Artagnan, bowing, "and now — "

"You are right, monsieur; I had forgotten the hundred leagues you have just ridden. Go, monsieur, take care of one of the best of soldiers, and when you have reposed a little, come and place yourself at my disposal."

"Sire, absent or present, I am always yours."

D'Artagnan bowed and retired. Then, as if he had only come from Fontainebleau, he quickly traversed the Louvre to rejoin Bragelonne.

CHAPTER II.

A Lover and His Mistress.

Whilst the wax-lights were burning in the castle of Blois, around the inanimate body of Gaston of Orleans, that last representative of the past; whilst the *bourgeois* of the city were thinking out his epitaph, which was far from being a panegyric; whilst madame the dowager, no longer remembering that in her young days she had loved that senseless corpse to such a degree as to fly the paternal palace for his sake, was making, within twenty paces of the funeral apartment, her little calculations of interest and her little sacrifices of pride; other interests and other prides were in agitation in all the parts of the castle into which a living soul could penetrate. Neither the lugubrious sounds of the bells, nor the voices of the chanters, nor the splendor of the wax-lights through the windows, nor the preparations for the funeral, had power to divert the attention of two persons, placed at a window of the interior court — a window that we are acquainted with, and which lighted a chamber forming part of what were called the little apartments. For the rest, a joyous beam of the sun, for the sun appeared to care little for the loss France had just suffered; a sunbeam, we say, descended upon them, drawing perfumes from the neighboring flowers, and animating the walls themselves. These two persons, so occupied, not by the death of the duke, but by the conversation which was the consequence of that death, were a young woman and a young man. The latter personage, a man of from twenty-five to twenty-six years of age, with a mien sometimes lively and sometimes dull, making good use of two large eyes, shaded with long eye-lashes, was short of stature and swart of skin; he smiled with an enormous, but well-furnished mouth, and his pointed chin, which appeared to enjoy a mobility nature does not ordinarily grant to that portion of the countenance, leant from time to time very lovingly towards his interlocutrix, who, we must say, did not always draw back so rapidly as strict propriety had a right to require. The young girl — we know her, for we have already seen her, at that very same window, by the light of that same sun — the young girl presented a singular mixture of shyness and reflection; she was charming when she laughed, beautiful when she became serious; but, let us hasten to say, she was more frequently charming than beautiful. These two appeared to have attained the culminating point of a discussion — half-bantering, half-serious.

"Now, Monsieur Malicorne," said the young girl, "does it, at length, please you that we should talk reasonably?"

"You believe that that is very easy, Mademoiselle Aure," replied the young man. "To do what we like, when we can only do what we are able — "

"Good! there he is bewildered in his phrases."

"Who, I?"

"Yes, you; quit that lawyer's logic, my dear."

"Another impossibility. Clerk I am, Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"Demoiselle I am, Monsieur Malicorne."

"Alas, I know it well, and you overwhelm me by your rank; so I will say no more to you."

"Well, no, I don't overwhelm you; say what you have to tell me — say it, I insist upon it."

"Well, I obey you."

"That is truly fortunate."

"Monsieur is dead."

"Ah, *peste!* that's news! And where do you come from, to be able to tell us that?"

"I come from Orleans, mademoiselle."

"And is that all the news you bring?"

"Ah, no; I am come to tell you that Madame Henrietta of England is coming to marry the king's brother."

"Indeed, Malicorne, you are insupportable with your news of the last century. Now, mind, if you persist in this bad habit of laughing at people, I will have you turned out."

"Oh!"

"Yes, for really you exasperate me."

"There, there. Patience, mademoiselle."

"You want to make yourself of consequence; I know well enough why. Go!"

"Tell me, and I will answer you frankly, yes, if the thing be true."

"You know that I am anxious to have that commission of lady of honor, which I have been foolish enough to ask of you, and you do not use your credit."

"Who, I?" Malicorne cast down his eyes, joined his hands, and assumed his sullen air. "And what credit can the poor clerk of a procurer have, pray?"

"Your father has not twenty thousand livres a year for nothing, M. Malicorne."

"A provincial fortune, Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"Your father is not in the secrets of monsieur le prince for nothing."

"An advantage which is confined to lending monseigneur money."

"In a word, you are not the most cunning young fellow in the province for nothing."

"You flatter me!"

"Who, I?"

"Yes, you."

"How so?"

"Since I maintain that I have no credit, and you maintain I have."

"Well, then, — my commission?"

"Well, — your commission?"

"Shall I have it, or shall I not?"

"You shall have it."

"Ay, but when?"

"When you like."

"Where is it, then?"

"In my pocket."

"How — in your pocket?"

"Yes."

And, with a smile, Malicorne drew from his pocket a letter, upon which mademoiselle seized as a prey, and which she read eagerly. As she read, her face brightened.

"Malicorne," cried she after having read it, "In truth, you are a good lad."

"What for, mademoiselle?"

"Because you might have been paid for this commission, and you have not." And she burst into a loud laugh, thinking to put the clerk out of countenance; but Malicorne sustained the attack bravely.

"I do not understand you," said he. It was now Montalais who was disconcerted in her turn. "I have declared my sentiments to you," continued Malicorne. "You have told me three times, laughing all the while, that you did not love me; you have embraced me once without laughing, and that is all I want."

"All?" said the proud and coquettish Montalais, in a tone through which the wounded pride was visible.

"Absolutely all, mademoiselle," replied Malicorne.

"Ah!" — And this monosyllable indicated as much anger as the young man might have expected gratitude. He shook his head quietly.

"Listen, Montalais," said he, without heeding whether that familiarity pleased his mistress or not; "let us not dispute about it."

"And why not?"

"Because during the year which I have known you, you might have had me turned out of doors twenty times if I did not please you."

"Indeed; and on what account should I have had you turned out?"

"Because I have been sufficiently impertinent for that."

"Oh, that, — yes, that's true."

"You see plainly that you are forced to avow it," said Malicorne.

"Monsieur Malicorne!"

"Don't let us be angry; if you have retained me, then it has not been without cause."

"It is not, at least, because I love you," cried Montalais.

"Granted. I will even say, at this moment, I am certain that you hate me."

"Oh, you have never spoken so truly."

"Well, on my part, I detest you."

"Ah! I take the act."

"Take it. You find me brutal and foolish; on my part I find you have a harsh voice, and your face is too often distorted with anger. At this moment you would allow yourself to be thrown out of that window rather than allow me to kiss the tip of your finger; I would precipitate myself from the top of the balcony rather than touch the hem of your robe. But, in five minutes, you will love me, and I shall adore you. Oh, it is just so."

"I doubt it."

"And I swear it."

"Coxcomb!"

"And then, that is not the true reason. You stand in need of me, Aure, and I of you. When it pleases you to be gay, I make you laugh; when it suits me to be loving, I look at you. I have given you a commission of lady of honor which you wished for; you will give me, presently, something I wish for."

"I will?"

"Yes, you will; but, at this moment, my dear Aure, I declare to you that I wish for absolutely nothing, so be at ease."

"You are a frightful man, Malicorne; I was going to rejoice at getting this commission, and thus you quench my joy."

"Good; there is no time lost, — you will rejoice when I am gone."

"Go, then; and after — "

"So be it; but in the first place, a piece of advice."

"What is it?"

"Resume your good-humor, — you are ugly when you pout."

"Coarse!"

"Come, let us tell the truth to each other, while we are about it."

"Oh, Malicorne! Bad-hearted man!"

"Oh, Montalais! Ungrateful girl!"

The young man leant with his elbow upon the window-frame; Montalais took a book and opened it. Malicorne stood up, brushed his hat with his sleeve, smoothed down his black doublet; — Montalais, though pretending to read, looked at him out of the corner of her eye.

"Good!" cried she, furious; "he has assumed his respectful air — and he will pout for a week."

"A fortnight, mademoiselle," said Malicorne, bowing.

Montalais lifted up her little doubled fist. "Monster!" said she; "oh! that I were a man!"

"What would you do to me?"

"I would strangle you."

"Ah! very well, then," said Malicorne; "I believe I begin to desire something."

"And what do you desire, Monsieur Demon? That I should lose my soul from anger?"

Malicorne was rolling his hat respectfully between his fingers; but, all at once, he let fall his hat, seized the young girl by the shoulders, pulled her towards him, and sealed her mouth with two lips that were very warm, for a man pretending to so much indifference. Aure would have cried out, but the cry was stifled in his kiss. Nervous and, apparently, angry, the young girl pushed Malicorne against the wall.

“Good!” said Malicorne, philosophically, “that’s enough for six weeks. Adieu, mademoiselle, accept my very humble salutation.” And he made three steps towards the door.

“Well! no, — you shall not go!” cried Montalais, stamping with her little foot. “Stay where you are! I order you!”

“You order me?”

“Yes; am I not mistress?”

“Of my heart and soul, without doubt.”

“A pretty property! *ma foi!* The soul is silly and the heart dry.”

“Beware, Montalais, I know you,” said Malicorne; “you are going to fall in love with your humble servant.”

“Well, yes!” said she, hanging round his neck with childish indolence, rather than with loving abandonment. “Well, yes! for I must thank you at least.”

“And for what?”

“For the commission; is it not my whole future?”

“And mine.”

Montalais looked at him.

“It is frightful,” said she, “that one can never guess whether you are speaking seriously or not.”

“I cannot speak more seriously. I was going to Paris, — you are going there, — we are going there.”

“And so it was for that motive only you have served me; selfish fellow!”

“What would you have me say, Aure? I cannot live without you.”

“Well! in truth, it is just so with me; you are, nevertheless, it must be confessed, a very bad-hearted young man.”

“Aure, my dear Aure, take care! if you take to calling me names again, you know the effect they produce upon me, and I shall adore you.” And so saying, Malicorne drew the young girl a second time towards him. But at that instant a step resounded on the staircase. The young people were so close, that they would have been surprised in the arms of each other, if Montalais had not violently pushed Malicorne, with his back against the door, just then opening. A loud cry, followed by angry reproaches, immediately resounded. It was Madame de Saint-Remy who uttered the cry and the angry words. The unlucky Malicorne almost crushed her between the wall and the door she was coming in at.

“It is again that good-for-nothing!” cried the old lady. “Always here!”

“Ah, madame!” replied Malicorne, in a respectful tone; “it is eight long days since I was here.”

CHAPTER III.

In Which We at Length See the True Heroine of this History

Appear.

Behind Madame de Saint-Remy stood Mademoiselle de la Valliere. She heard the explosion of maternal anger, and as she divined the cause of it, she entered the chamber trembling, and perceived the unlucky Malicorne, whose woeful countenance might have softened or set laughing whoever observed it coolly. He had promptly intrenched himself behind a large chair, as if to avoid the first attacks of Madame de Saint-Remy; he had no hopes of prevailing with words, for she spoke louder than he, and without stopping; but he reckoned upon the eloquence of his gestures. The old lady would neither listen to nor see anything; Malicorne had long been one of her antipathies. But her anger was too great not to overflow from Malicorne on his accomplice. Montalais had her turn.

“And you, mademoiselle; you may be certain I shall inform madame of what is going on in the apartment of one of her ladies of honor?”

“Oh, dear mother!” cried Mademoiselle de la Valliere, “for mercy’s sake, spare — ”

“Hold your tongue, mademoiselle, and do not uselessly trouble yourself to intercede for unworthy people; that a young maid of honor like you should be subjected to a bad example is, certes, a misfortune great enough; but that you should sanction it by your indulgence is what I will not allow.”

“But in truth,” said Montalais, rebelling again, “I do not know under what pretense you treat me thus. I am doing no harm, I suppose?”

“And that great good-for-nothing, mademoiselle,” resumed Madame de Saint-Remy, pointing to Malicorne, “is he here to do any good, I ask you?”

“He is neither here for good nor harm, madame; he comes to see me, that is all.”

“It is all very well! all very well!” said the old lady. “Her royal highness shall be informed of it, and she will judge.”

“At all events, I do not see why,” replied Montalais, “it should be forbidden M. Malicorne to have intentions towards me, if his intentions are honorable.”

“Honorable intentions with such a face!” cried Madame de Saint-Remy.

“I thank you in the name of my face, madame,” said Malicorne.

“Come, my daughter, come,” continued Madame de Saint-Remy; “we will go and inform madame that at the very moment she is weeping for her husband, at the moment when we are all weeping for a master in this old castle of Blois, the abode of grief, there are people who amuse themselves with flirtations!”

“Oh!” cried both the accused, with one voice.

“A maid of honor! a maid of honor!” cried the old lady, lifting her hands towards heaven.

“Well! it is there you are mistaken, madame,” said Montalais, highly exasperated; “I am no longer a maid of honor, of madame’s at least.”

“Have you given in your resignation, mademoiselle? That is well! I cannot but applaud such a determination, and I do applaud it.”

“I do not give in my resignation, madame; I take another service, — that is all.”

“In the *bourgeoisie* or in the *robe?*” asked Madame de Saint-Remy, disdainfully.

“Please to learn, madame, that I am not a girl to serve either *bourgeoises* or *robines*; and that instead of the miserable court at which you vegetate, I am going to reside in a court almost royal.”

“Ha, ha! a royal court,” said Madame de Saint-Remy, forcing a laugh; “a royal court! What do you think of that, my daughter?”

And she turned towards Mademoiselle de la Valliere, whom she would by main force have dragged away from Montalais, and who instead of obeying the impulse of Madame de Saint-Remy, looked first at her mother and then at Montalais with her beautiful conciliatory eyes.

“I did not say a royal court, madame,” replied Montalais; “because Madame Henrietta of England, who is about to become the wife of S. A. R. Monsieur, is not a queen. I said almost royal, and I spoke correctly, since she will be sister-in-law to the king.”

A thunderbolt falling upon the castle of Blois would not have astonished Madame de Saint-Remy more than the last sentence of Montalais.

“What do you say? of Son Altesse Royale Madame Henrietta?” stammered out the old lady.

"I say I am going to belong to her household, as maid of honor; that is what I say."

"As maid of honor!" cried, at the same time, Madame de Saint-Remy with despair, and Mademoiselle de la Valliere with delight.

"Yes, madame, as maid of honor."

The old lady's head sank down as if the blow had been too severe for her. But, almost immediately recovering herself, she launched a last projectile at her adversary.

"Oh! oh!" said she; "I have heard of many of these sorts of promises beforehand, which often lead people to flatter themselves with wild hopes, and at the last moment, when the time comes to keep the promises, and have the hopes realized, they are surprised to see the great credit upon which they reckoned vanish like smoke."

"Oh! madame, the credit of my protector is incontestable and his promises are as good as deeds."

"And would it be indiscreet to ask you the name of this powerful protector?"

"Oh! *mon Dieu!* no! it is that gentleman there," said Montalais, pointing to Malicorne, who, during this scene, had preserved the most imperturbable coolness, and the most comic dignity.

"Monsieur!" cried Madame de Saint-Remy, with an explosion of hilarity, "monsieur is your protector! Is the man whose credit is so powerful, and whose promises are as good as deeds, Monsieur Malicorne!"

Malicorne bowed.

As to Montalais, as her sole reply, she drew the brevet from her pocket, and showed it to the old lady.

"Here is the *brevet*," said she.

At once all was over. As soon as she had cast a rapid glance over this fortunate *brevet*, the good lady clasped her hands, an unspeakable expression of envy and despair contracted her countenance, and she was obliged to sit down to avoid fainting. Montalais was not malicious enough to rejoice extravagantly at her victory, or to overwhelm the conquered enemy, particularly when that enemy was the mother of her friend; she used then, but did not abuse her triumph. Malicorne was less generous; he assumed noble *poses* in his *fauteuil* and stretched himself out with a familiarity which, two hours earlier, would have drawn upon him threats of a caning.

“Maid of honor to the young madame!” repeated Madame de Saint-Remy, still but half convinced.

“Yes, madame, and through the protection of M. Malicorne, moreover.”

“It is incredible!” repeated the old lady: “is it not incredible, Louise?” But Louise did not reply; she was sitting, thoughtfully, almost sad; passing one had over her beautiful brow, she sighed heavily.

“Well, but, monsieur,” said Madame de Saint-Remy, all at once, “how did you manage to obtain this post?”

“I asked for it, madame.”

“Of whom?”

“One of my friends.”

“And you have friends sufficiently powerful at court to give you such proofs of their credit?”

“It appears so.”

“And may one ask the name of these friends?”

“I did not say I had many friends, madame, I said I had one friend.”

“And that friend is called?”

“*Peste!* madame, you go too far! When one has a friend as powerful as mine, we do not publish his name in that fashion, in open day, in order that he may be stolen from us.”

“You are right, monsieur, to be silent as to that name; for I think it would be pretty difficult for you to tell it.”

“At all events,” said Montalais, “if the friend does not exist, the *brevet* does, and that cuts short the question.”

“Then, I conceive,” said Madame de Saint-Remy, with the gracious smile of the cat who is going to scratch, “when I found monsieur here just now — ”

“Well?”

“He brought you the *brevet*.”

“Exactly, madame; you have guessed rightly.”

“Well, then, nothing can be more moral or proper.”

“I think so, madame.”

“And I have been wrong, as it appears, in reproaching you, mademoiselle.”

“Very wrong, madame; but I am so accustomed to your reproaches, that I pardon you these.”

“In that case, let us begone, Louise; we have nothing to do but retire. Well!”

“Madame!” said La Valliere starting, “did you speak?”

“You do not appear to be listening, my child.”

“No, madame, I was thinking.”

“About what?”

“A thousand things.”

“You bear me no ill-will, at least, Louise?” cried Montalais, pressing her hand.

“And why should I, my dear Aure?” replied the girl in a voice soft as a flute.

“*Dame!*” resumed Madame de Saint-Remy; “if she did bear you a little ill-will, poor girl, she could not be much blamed.”

“And why should she bear me ill-will, good gracious?”

“It appears to me that she is of as good a family, and as pretty as you.”

“Mother! mother!” cried Louise.

“Prettier a hundred times, madame — not of a better family; but that does not tell me why Louise should bear me ill-will.”

“Do you think it will be very amusing for her to be buried alive at Blois, when you are going to shine at Paris?”

“But, madame, it is not I who prevent Louise following me thither; on the contrary, I should certainly be most happy if she came there.”

“But it appears that M. Malicorne, who is all-powerful at court — ”

“Ah! so much the worse, madame,” said Malicorne, “every one for himself in this poor world.”

“Malicorne! Malicorne!” said Montalais. Then stooping towards the young man: —

“Occupy Madame de Saint-Remy, either in disputing with her, or making it up with her; I must speak to Louise.” And, at the same time, a soft pressure of the hand recompensed Malicorne for his future obedience. Malicorne went grumbling towards Madame de Saint-Remy, whilst Montalais said to her friend, throwing one arm around her neck: —

“What is the matter? Tell *me*. Is it true that you would not love me if I were to shine, as your mother says?”

“Oh, no!” said the young girl, with difficulty restraining her tears; “on the contrary, I rejoice at your good fortune.”

“Rejoice! why, one would say you are ready to cry!”

"Do people never weep except from envy?"

"Oh! yes, I understand; I am going to Paris and that word Paris recalls to your mind a certain cavalier — "

"Aure!"

"A certain cavalier who formerly lived near Blois, and who now resides at Paris."

"In truth, I know not what ails me, but I feel stifled."

"Weep, then, weep, as you cannot give me a smile!"

Louise raised her sweet face, which the tears, rolling down one after the other, illumined like diamonds.

"Come, confess," said Montalais.

"What shall I confess?"

"What makes you weep; people don't weep without cause. I am your friend; whatever you would wish me to do, I will do. Malicorne is more powerful than you would think. Do you wish to go to Paris?"

"Alas!" sighed Louise.

"Do you wish to come to Paris?"

"To remain here alone, in this old castle, I who have enjoyed the delightful habit of listening to your songs, of pressing your hand, of running about the park with you. Oh! how I shall be *ennuyee!* how quickly I shall die!"

"Do you wish to come to Paris?"

Louise breathed another sigh.

"You do not answer me."

"What would you that I should reply?"

"Yes or no; that is not very difficult, I think."

"Oh! you are very fortunate, Montalais!"

"That is to say you would like to be in my place."

Louise was silent.

"Little obstinate thing!" said Montalais; "did ever any one keep her secrets from her friend thus? But, confess that you would like to come to Paris; confess that you are dying with the wish to see Raoul again."

"I cannot confess that."

"Then you are wrong."

"In what way?"

"Because — do you not see this *brevet?*"

"To be sure I do."

"Well, I would have got you a similar one."

"By whose means?"

"Malicorne's."

"Aure, are you telling the truth? Is that possible?"

"Malicorne is there; and what he has done for me, he surely can do for you."

Malicorne had heard his name pronounced twice; he was delighted at having an opportunity of coming to a conclusion with Madame de Saint-Remy, and he turned round: —

"What is the question, mademoiselle?"

"Come hither, Malicorne," said Montalais, with an imperious gesture. Malicorne obeyed.

"A *brevet* like this," said Montalais.

"How so?"

"A *brevet* like this; that is plain enough."

"But — "

"I want one — I must have one!"

"Oh! oh! you must have one!"

"Yes."

"It is impossible, is it not, M. Malicorne?" said Louise, with her sweet, soft voice.

"If it is for *you*, mademoiselle — "

"For me. Yes, Monsieur Malicorne, it *would* be for me."

"And if Mademoiselle de Montalais asks it at the same time — "

"Mademoiselle de Montalais does not ask it, she requires it."

"Well! we will endeavor to obey you, mademoiselle."

"And you will have her named?"

"We will try."

"No evasive answers, Louise de la Valliere shall be maid of honor to Madame Henrietta within a week."

"How you talk!"

"Within a week, or else — "

"Well! or else?"

"You may take back your *brevet,* Monsieur Malicorne; I will not leave my friend."

"Dear Montalais!"

"That is right. Keep your *brevet*; Mademoiselle de la Valliere shall be a maid of honor."

"Is that true?"

"Quite true."

"I may then hope to go to Paris?"

"Depend on it."

"Oh! Monsieur Malicorne, what joy!" cried Louise, clapping her hands, and bounding with pleasure.

"Little dissembler!" said Montalais, "try again to make me believe you are not in love with Raoul."

Louise blushed like a rose in June, but instead of replying, she ran and embraced her mother. "Madame," said she, "do you know that M. Malicorne is going to have me appointed maid of honor?"

"M. Malicorne is a prince in disguise," replied the old lady, "he is all-powerful, seemingly."

"Should you also like to be a maid of honor?" asked Malicorne of Madame de Saint-Remy. "Whilst I am about it, I might as well get everybody appointed."

And upon that he went away, leaving the poor lady quite disconcerted.

"Humph!" murmured Malicorne as he descended the stairs, — "Humph! there goes another note of a thousand livres! but I must get through as well as I can; my friend Manicamp does nothing for nothing."

CHAPTER IV.

Malicorne and Manicamp.

The introduction of these two new personages into this history and that mysterious affinity of names and sentiments, merit some attention on the part of both historian and reader. We will then enter into some details concerning Messieurs Malicorne and Manicamp. Malicorne, we know, had made the journey to Orleans in search of the *brevet* destined for Mademoiselle de Montalais, the arrival of which had produced such a strong feeling at the castle of Blois. At that moment, M. de Manicamp was at Orleans. A singular person was this M. de Manicamp; a very intelligent young fellow, always poor, always needy, although he dipped his hand freely into the purse of M. le Comte de Guiche, one of the best furnished purses of the period. M. le Comte de Guiche had had, as the companion of his boyhood, this De Manicamp, a poor gentleman, vassal-born, of the house of Gramont. M. de Manicamp, with his tact and talent had created himself a revenue in the opulent family of the celebrated marechal. From his infancy he had, with calculation beyond his age, lent his mane and complaisance to the follies of the Comte de Guiche. If his noble companion had stolen some fruit destined for Madame la Marechale, if he had broken a mirror, or put out a dog’s eye, Manicamp declared himself guilty of the crime committed, and received the punishment, which was not made the milder for falling on the innocent. But this was the way this system of abnegation was paid for: instead of wearing such mean habiliments as his paternal fortunes entitled him to, he was able to appear brilliant, superb, like a young noble of fifty thousand livres a year. It was not that he was mean in character or humble in spirit; no, he was a philosopher, or rather he had the indifference, the apathy, the obstinacy which banish from man every sentiment of the supernatural. His sole ambition was to spend money. But, in this respect, the worthy M. de Manicamp was a gulf. Three or four times every year he drained the Comte de Guiche, and when the Comte de Guiche was thoroughly drained, when he had turned out his pockets and his purse before him, when he declared that it would be at least a fortnight before paternal munificence would refill those pockets and that purse, Manicamp lost all his energy, he went to bed, remained there, ate nothing and sold his handsome clothes, under the pretense that, remaining in bed, he did not want them. During this prostration of mind and strength, the purse of the Comte de Guiche was getting full again, and when once filled, overflowed into that of De Manicamp, who bought new clothes, dressed himself again, and recommenced the same life he had followed before. The mania of selling his new clothes for a quarter of what they were worth, had rendered our hero sufficiently celebrated in Orleans, a city where, in general, we should be puzzled to say why he came to pass his days of penitence. Provincial *debauches, petits-maitres* of six hundred livres a year, shared the fragments of his opulence.

Among the admirers of these splendid toilettes, our friend Malicorne was conspicuous; he was the son of a syndic of the city, of whom M. de Conde, always needy as a De Conde, often borrowed money at enormous interest. M. Malicorne kept the paternal money-chest; that is to say, that in those times of easy morals, he had made for himself, by following the example of his father, and lending at high interest for short terms, a revenue of eighteen hundred livres, without reckoning six hundred livres furnished by the generosity of the syndic; so that Malicorne was the king of the gay youth of Orleans, having two thousand four hundred livres to scatter, squander, and waste on follies of every kind. But, quite contrary to Manicamp, Malicorne was terribly ambitious. He loved from ambition; he spent money out of ambition; and he would have ruined himself for ambition. Malicorne had determined to rise, at whatever price it might cost, and for this, whatever price it did cost, he had given himself a mistress and a friend. The mistress, Mademoiselle de Montalais, was cruel, as regarded love; but she was of a noble family, and that was sufficient for Malicorne. The friend had little or no friendship, but he was the favorite of the Comte de Guiche, himself the friend of Monsieur, the king's brother; and that was sufficient for Malicorne. Only, in the chapter of charges, Mademoiselle de Montalais cost *per annum*: — ribbons, gloves, and sweets, a thousand livres. De Manicamp cost — money lent, never returned — from twelve to fifteen hundred livres *per annum*. So that there was nothing left for Malicorne. Ah! yes, we are mistaken; there was left the paternal strong box. He employed a mode of proceeding, upon which he preserved the most profound secrecy, and which consisted in advancing to himself, from the coffers of the syndic, half a dozen year's profits, that is to say, fifteen thousand livres, swearing to himself — observe, quite to himself — to repay this deficiency as soon as an opportunity should present itself. The opportunity was expected to be the concession of a good post in the household of Monsieur, when that household would be established at the period of his marriage. This juncture had arrived, and the household was about to be established. A good post in the family of a prince of the blood, when it is given by the credit, and on the recommendation of a friend, like the Comte de Guiche, is worth at least twelve thousand livres *per annum*; and by the means which M. Malicorne had taken to make his revenues fructify, twelve thousand livres might rise to twenty thousand. Then, when once an incumbent of this post, he would marry Mademoiselle de Montalais. Mademoiselle de Montalais, of a half noble family, not only would be dowered, but would ennoble Malicorne. But, in order that Mademoiselle de Montalais, who had not a large patrimonial fortune, although an only daughter, should be suitably dowered, it was necessary that she should belong to some great princess, as prodigal as the dowager Madame was covetous. And in order that the wife should not be of one party whilst the husband belonged to the other, a situation which presents serious inconveniences, particularly with characters like those of the future consorts — Malicorne had imagined the idea of making the central point of union the household of Monsieur, the king's brother. Mademoiselle de Montalais would be maid of honor to Madame. M. Malicorne would be officer to Monsieur.

It is plain the plan was formed by a clear head; it is plain, also, that it had been bravely executed. Malicorne had asked Manicamp to ask a *brevet* of maid of honor of the Comte de Guiche; and the Comte de Guiche had asked this *brevet* of Monsieur, who had signed it without hesitation. The constructive plan of Malicorne — for we may well suppose that the combinations of a mind as active as his were not confined to the present, but extended to the future — the constructive plan of Malicorne, we say, was this: — To obtain entrance into the household of Madame Henrietta for a woman devoted to himself, who was intelligent, young, handsome, and intriguing; to learn, by means of this woman, all the feminine secrets of the young household; whilst he, Malicorne, and his friend Manicamp, should, between them, know all the male secrets of the young community. It was by these means that a rapid and splendid fortune might be acquired at one and the same time. Malicorne was a vile name; he who bore it had too much wit to conceal this truth from himself; but an estate might be purchased; and Malicorne of some place, or even De Malicorne itself, for short, would ring more nobly on the ear.

It was not improbable that a most aristocratic origin might be hunted up by the heralds for this name of Malicorne; might it not come from some estate where a bull with mortal horns had caused some great misfortune, and baptized the soil with the blood it had spilt? Certes, this plan presented itself bristling with difficulties: but the greatest of all was Mademoiselle de Montalais herself. Capricious, variable, close, giddy, free, prudish, a virgin armed with claws, Erigone stained with grapes, she sometimes overturned, with a single dash of her white fingers, or with a single puff from her laughing lips, the edifice which had exhausted Malicorne's patience for a month.

Love apart, Malicorne was happy; but this love, which he could not help feeling, he had the strength to conceal with care; persuaded that at the least relaxing of the ties by which he had bound his Protean female, the demon would overthrow and laugh at him. He humbled his mistress by disdaining her. Burning with desire, when she advanced to tempt him, he had the art to appear ice, persuaded that if he opened his arms, she would run away laughing at him. On her side, Montalais believed she did not love Malicorne; whilst, on the contrary, in reality she did. Malicorne repeated to her so often his protestation of indifference, that she finished, sometimes, by believing him; and then she believed she detested Malicorne. If she tried to bring him back by coquetry, Malicorne played the coquette better than she could. But what made Montalais hold to Malicorne in an indissoluble fashion, was that Malicorne always came cram full of fresh news from the court and the city; Malicorne always brought to Blois a fashion, a secret, or a perfume; that Malicorne never asked for a meeting, but, on the contrary, required to be supplicated to receive the favors he burned to obtain. On her side, Montalais was no miser with stories. By her means, Malicorne learnt all that passed at Blois, in the family of the dowager Madame; and he related to Manicamp tales that made him ready to die with laughing, which the latter, out of idleness, took ready-made to M. de Guiche, who carried them to Monsieur.

Such, in two words, was the woof of petty interests and petty conspiracies which united Blois with Orleans, and Orleans with Pairs; and which was about to bring into the last named city where she was to produce so great a revolution, the poor little La Valliere, who was far from suspecting, as she returned joyfully, leaning on the arm of her mother, for what a strange future she was reserved. As to the good man, Malicorne — we speak of the syndic of Orleans — he did not see more clearly into the present than others did into the future; and had no suspicion as he walked, every day, between three and five o'clock, after his dinner, upon the Place Sainte-Catherine, in his gray coat, cut after the fashion of Louis XIII. and his cloth shoes with great knots of ribbon, that it was he who was paying for all those bursts of laughter, all those stolen kisses, all those whisperings, all those little keepsakes, and all those bubble projects which formed a chain of forty-five leagues in length, from the palais of Blois to the Palais Royal.

CHAPTER V.

Manicamp and Malicorne.

Malicorne, then, left Blois, as we have said, and went to find his friend, Manicamp, then in temporary retreat in the city of Orleans. It was just at the moment when that young nobleman was employed in selling the last decent clothing he had left. He had, a fortnight before, extorted from the Comte de Guiche a hundred pistoles, all he had, to assist in equipping him properly to go and meet Madame, on her arrival at Le Havre. He had drawn from Malicorne, three days before, fifty pistoles, the price of the *brevet* obtained for Montalais. He had then no expectation of anything else, having exhausted all his resources, with the exception of selling a handsome suit of cloth and satin, embroidered and laced with gold, which had been the admiration of the court. But to be able to sell this suit, the last he had left, — as we have been forced to confess to the reader — Manicamp had been obliged to take to his bed. No more fire, no more pocket-money, no more walking-money, nothing but sleep to take the place of repasts, companies and balls. It has been said — ”He who sleeps, dines;” but it has never been affirmed — He who sleeps, plays — or, He who sleeps, dances. Manicamp, reduced to this extremity of neither playing nor dancing, for a week at least, was, consequently, very sad; he was expecting a usurer, and saw Malicorne enter. A cry of distress escaped him.

“Eh! what!” said he, in a tone which nothing can describe, “is that you again, dear friend?”

“Humph! you are very polite!” said Malicorne.

“Ay, but look you, I was expecting money, and, instead of money, I see *you*.”

“And suppose I brought you some money?”

“Oh! that would be quite another thing. You are very welcome, my dear friend!”

And he held out his hand, not for the hand of Malicorne, but for the purse. Malicorne pretended to be mistaken, and gave him his hand.

"And the money?" said Manicamp.

"My dear friend, if you wish to have it, earn it."

"What must be done for it?"

"Earn it, *parbleu!*"

"And after what fashion?"

"Oh! that is rather trying, I warn you."

"The devil!"

"You must get out of bed, and go immediately to M. le Comte de Guiche."

"I get up!" said Manicamp, stretching himself in his bed, complacently, "oh, no, thank you!"

"You have sold all your clothes?"

"No, I have one suit left, the handsomest even, but I expect a purchaser."

"And the *chausses?*"

"Well, if you look, you will see them on that chair."

"Very well! since you have some *chausses* and a *pourpoint* left, put your legs into the first and your back into the other; have a horse saddled, and set off."

"Not I."

"And why not?"

"*Morbleu!* don't you know, then, that M. de Guiche is at Etampes?"

"No, I thought he was at Paris. You will then only have fifteen leagues to go, instead of thirty."

"You are a wonderfully clever fellow! If I were to ride fifteen leagues in these clothes, they would never be fit to put on again; and, instead of selling them for thirty pistoles, I should be obliged to take fifteen."

"Sell them for whatever you like, but I must have a second commission of maid of honor."

"Good! for whom? Is Montalais doubled, then?"

"Vile fellow! — It is you who are doubled. You swallow up two fortunes — mine, and that of M. le Comte de Guiche."

"You should say, that of M. le Comte de Guiche and yours."

"That is true; honor where it is due; but I return to my *brevet*."

"And you are wrong."

"Prove me that."

“My friend, there will only be twelve maids of honor for madame; I have already obtained for you what twelve hundred women are trying for, and for that I was forced to employ all my diplomacy.”

“Oh! yes, I know you have been quite heroic, my dear friend.”

“We know what we are about,” said Manicamp.

“To whom do you tell that? When I am king, I promise you one thing.”

“What? To call yourself Malicorne the First?”

“No; to make you superintendent of my finances; but that is not the question now.”

“Unfortunately.”

“The present affair is to procure for me a second place of maid of honor.”

“My friend, if you were to promise me the price of heaven, I would decline to disturb myself at this moment.”

Malicorne chinked the money in his pocket.

“There are twenty pistoles here,” said Malicorne.

“And what would you do with twenty pistoles, *mon Dieu!*”

“Well!” said Malicorne, a little angry, “suppose I were to add them to the five hundred you already owe me?”

“You are right,” replied Manicamp, stretching out his hand again, “and from that point of view I can accept them. Give them to me.”

“An instant, what the devil! it is not only holding out your hand that will do; if I give you the twenty pistoles, shall I have my *brevet?*”

“To be sure you shall.”

“Soon?”

“To-day.”

“Oh! take care! Monsieur de Manicamp; you undertake much, and I do not ask that. Thirty leagues in a day is too much, you would kill yourself.”

“I think nothing impossible when obliging a friend.”

“You are quite heroic.”

“Where are the twenty pistoles?”

“Here they are,” said Malicorne, showing them.

“That’s well.”

“Yes, but my dear M. Manicamp, you would consume them in post-horses alone!”

“No, no, make yourself easy on that score.”

“Pardon me. Why, it is fifteen leagues from this place to Etampes?”

“Fourteen.”

“Well! fourteen be it; fourteen leagues makes seven posts; at twenty *sous* the post, seven *livres*; seven *livres* the courier, fourteen; as many for coming back, twenty-eight! as much for bed and supper, that makes sixty *livres* this complaisance would cost.”

Manicamp stretched himself like a serpent in his bed, and fixing his two great eyes upon Malicorne, “You are right,” said he; “I could not return before to-morrow;” and he took the twenty pistoles.

“Now, then, be off!”

“Well, as I cannot be back before to-morrow, we have time.”

“Time for what?”

“Time to play.”

“What do you wish to play with?”

“Your twenty pistoles, *pardieu!*”

“No; you always win.”

“I will wager them, then.”

“Against what?”

“Against twenty others.”

“And what shall be the object of the wager?”

“This. We have said it was fourteen leagues to Etampes.”

“Yes.”

“And fourteen leagues back?”

“Doubtless.”

“Well; for these twenty-eight leagues you cannot allow less than fourteen hours?”

“That is agreed.”

“One hour to find the Comte de Guiche.”

“Go on.”

“And an hour to persuade him to write a letter to Monsieur.”

“Just so.”

“Sixteen hours in all?”

“You reckon as well as M. Colbert.”

“It is now twelve o’clock.”

“Half-past.”

“*Hein!* — you have a handsome watch!”

“What were you saying?” said Malicorne, putting his watch quickly back into his fob.

“Ah! true; I was offering to lay you twenty pistoles against these you have lent me, that you will have the Comte de Guiche’s letter in — ”

“How soon?”

“In eight hours.”

“Have you a winged horse, then?”

“That is no matter. Will you bet?”

“I shall have the comte’s letter in eight hours?”

“Yes.”

“In hand?”

“In hand.”

“Well, be it so; I lay,” said Malicorne, curious enough to know how this seller of clothes would get through.

“Is it agreed?”

“It is.”

“Pass me the pen, ink, and paper.”

“Here they are.”

“Thank you.”

Manicamp raised himself with a sigh, and leaning on his left elbow, in his best hand, traced the following lines: —

“Good for an order for a place of maid of honor to Madame, which M. le Comte de Guiche will take upon him to obtain at sight. DE MANICAMP.”

This painful task accomplished, he laid himself down in bed again.

“Well!” asked Malicorne, “what does this mean?”

“That means that if you are in a hurry to have the letter from the Comte de Guiche for Monsieur, I have won my wager.”

“How the devil is that?”

“That is transparent enough, I think; you take that paper.”

“Well?”

“And you set out instead of me.”

“Ah!”

“You put your horses to their best speed.”

“Good!”

“In six hours you will be at Etampes; in seven hours you have the letter from the comte, and I shall have won my wager without stirring from my bed, which suits me and you too, at the same time, I am very sure.”

“Decidedly, Manicamp, you are a great man.”

“*Hein!* I know that.”

"I am to start then for Etampes?"

"Directly."

"I am to go to the Comte de Guiche with this order?"

"He will give you a similar one for Monsieur."

"Monsieur will approve?"

"Instantly."

"And I shall have my *brevet?*"

"You will."

"Ah!"

"Well, I hope I behave genteely?"

"Adorably."

"Thank you."

"You do as you please, then, with the Comte de Guiche, Manicamp?"

"Except making money of him — everything?"

"*Diable!* the exception is annoying; but then, if instead of asking him for money, you were to ask — "

"What?"

"Something important."

"What do you call important?"

"Well! suppose one of your friends asked you to render him a service?"

"I would not render it to him."

"Selfish fellow!"

"Or at least I would ask him what service he would render me in exchange."

"Ah! that, perhaps, is fair. Well, that friend speaks to you."

"What, you, Malicorne?"

"Yes; I."

"Ah! ah! you are rich, then?"

"I have still fifty pistoles left."

"Exactly the sum I want. Where are those fifty pistoles?"

"Here," said Malicorne, slapping his pocket.

"Then speak, my friend; what do you want?"

Malicorne took up the pen, ink, and paper again, and presented them all to Manicamp. "Write!" said he.

"Dictate!"

"An order for a place in the household of Monsieur."

"Oh!" said Manicamp, laying down the pen, "a place in the household of Monsieur for fifty pistoles?"

"You mistook me, my friend; you did not hear plainly."

"What did you say, then?"

"I said five hundred."

"And the five hundred?"

"Here they are."

Manicamp devoured the rouleau with his eyes; but this time Malicorne held it at a distance.

"Eh! what do you say to that? Five hundred pistoles."

"I say it is for nothing, my friend," said Manicamp, taking up the pen again, "and you exhaust my credit. Dictate."

Malicorne continued:

"Which my friend the Comte de Guiche will obtain for my friend Malicorne."

"That's it," said Manicamp.

"Pardon me, you have forgotten to sign."

"Ah! that is true. The five hundred pistoles?"

"Here are two hundred and fifty of them."

"And the other two hundred and fifty?"

"When I am in possession of my place."

Manicamp made a face.

"In that case give me the recommendation back again."

"What to do?"

"To add two words to it."

"Two words?"

"Yes; two words only."

"What are they?"

"In haste."

Malicorne returned the recommendation; Manicamp added the words.

"Good," said Malicorne, taking back the paper.

Manicamp began to count out the pistoles.

"There want twenty," said he.

"How so?"

"The twenty I have won."

"In what way?"

“By laying that you would have the letter from the Comte de Guiche in eight hours.”

“Ah! that’s fair,” and he gave him the twenty pistoles.

Manicamp began to scoop up his gold by handfuls, and pour it in cascades upon his bed.

“This second place,” murmured Malicorne, whilst drying his paper, “which, at first glance appears to cost me more than the first, but — ” He stopped, took up the pen in his turn, and wrote to Montalais: —

“MADEMOISELLE, — Announce to your friend that her commission will not be long before it arrives; I am setting out to get it signed: that will be twenty-eight leagues I shall have gone for the love of you.”

Then with his sardonic smile, taking up the interrupted sentence: — ”This place,” said he, “at first glance, appears to have cost more than the first; but — the benefit will be, I hope, in proportion with the expense, and Mademoiselle de la Valliere will bring me back more than Mademoiselle de Montalais, or else, — or else my name is not Malicorne. Farewell, Manicamp,” and he left the room.

CHAPTER VI.

The Courtyard of the Hotel Grammont.

On Malicorne's arrival at Orleans, he was informed that the Comte de Guiche had just set out for Paris. Malicorne rested himself for a couple of hours, and then prepared to continue his journey. He reached Paris during the night, and alighted at a small hotel, where, in his previous journeys to the capital, he had been accustomed to put up, and at eight o'clock the next morning presented himself at the Hotel Grammont. Malicorne arrived just in time, for the Comte de Guiche was on the point of taking leave of Monsieur before setting out for Le Havre, where the principal members of the French nobility had gone to await Madame's arrival from England. Malicorne pronounced the name of Manicamp, and was immediately admitted. He found the Comte de Guiche in the courtyard of the Hotel Grammont, inspecting his horses, which his trainers and equerries were passing in review before him. The count, in the presence of his tradespeople and of his servants, was engaged in praising or blaming, as the case seemed to deserve, the appointments, horses, and harness that were being submitted to him; when, in the midst of this important occupation, the name of Manicamp was announced.

"Manicamp!" he exclaimed; "let him enter by all means." And he advanced a few steps toward the door.

Malicorne slipped through the half-open door, and looking at the Comte de Guiche, who was surprised to see a face he did not recognize, instead of the one he expected, said: "Forgive me, monsieur le comte, but I believe a mistake has been made. M. Manicamp himself was announced to you, instead of which it is only an envoy from him."

"Ah!" exclaimed De Guiche, coldly; "and what do you bring me?"

"A letter, monsieur le comte." Malicorne handed him the first document, and narrowly watched the count's face, who, as he read it, began to laugh.

"What!" he exclaimed, "another maid of honor? Are all the maids of honor in France, then, under his protection?"

Malicorne bowed.

"Why does he not come himself?" he inquired.

"He is confined to his bed."

"The deuce! he has no money then, I suppose," said De Guiche, shrugging his shoulders. "What does he do with his money?"

Malicorne made a movement, to indicate that upon this subject he was as ignorant as the count himself. "Why does he not make use of his credit, then?" continued De Guiche.

"With regard to that, I think — "

"What?"

"That Manicamp has credit with no one but yourself, monsieur le comte!"

"He will not be at Le Havre, then?" Whereupon Malicorne made another movement.

"But every one will be there."

"I trust, monsieur le comte, that he will not neglect so excellent an opportunity."

"He should be at Paris by this time."

"He will take the direct road perhaps to make up for lost time."

"Where is he now?"

"At Orleans."

"Monsieur," said De Guiche, "you seem to me a man of very good taste."

Malicorne was wearing some of Manicamp's old-new clothes. He bowed in return, saying, "You do me a very great honor, monsieur le comte."

"Whom have I the pleasure of addressing?"

"My name is Malicorne, monsieur."

"M. de Malicorne, what do you think of these pistol-holsters?"

Malicorne was a man of great readiness and immediately understood the position of affairs. Besides, the "de" which had been prefixed to his name, raised him to the rank of the person with whom he was conversing. He looked at the holsters with the air of a connoisseur and said, without hesitation: "Somewhat heavy, monsieur."

"You see," said De Guiche to the saddler, "this gentleman, who understands these matters well, thinks the holsters heavy, a complaint I had already made." The saddler was full of excuses.

"What do you think," asked De Guiche, "of this horse, which I have just purchased?"

"To look at it, it seems perfect, monsieur le comte; but I must mount it before I give you my opinion."

"Do so, M. de Malicorne, and ride him round the court two or three times."

The courtyard of the hotel was so arranged, that whenever there was any occasion for it, it could be used as a riding-school. Malicorne, with perfect ease, arranged the bridle and snaffle-reins, placed his left hand on the horse's mane, and, with his foot in the stirrup, raised himself and seated himself in the saddle. At first, he made the horse walk the whole circuit of the court-yard at a foot-pace; next at a trot; lastly at a gallop. He then drew up close to the count, dismounted, and threw the bridle to a groom standing by. "Well," said the count, "what do you think of it, M. de Malicorne?"

"This horse, monsieur le comte, is of the Mecklenburg breed. In looking whether the bit suited his mouth, I saw that he was rising seven, the very age when the training of a horse intended for a charger should commence. The forehand is light. A horse which holds its head high, it is said, never tires his rider's hand. The withers are rather low. The drooping of the hind-quarters would almost make me doubt the purity of its German breed, and I think there is English blood in him. He stands well on his legs, but he trots high, and may cut himself, which requires attention to be paid to his shoeing. He is tractable; and as I made him turn round and change his feet, I found him quick and ready in doing so."

"Well said, M. de Malicorne," exclaimed the comte; "you are a judge of horses, I perceive;" then, turning towards him again, he continued, "you are most becomingly dressed, M. de Malicorne. That is not a provincial cut, I presume. Such a style of dress is not to be met with at Tours or Orleans."

"No, monsieur le comte; my clothes were made at Paris."

"There is no doubt about that. But let us resume our own affair. Manicamp wishes for the appointment of a second maid of honor."

"You perceive what he has written, monsieur le comte."

"For whom was the first appointment?"

Malicorne felt the color rise in his face as he answered hurriedly.

"A charming maid of honor, Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"Ah, ah! you are acquainted with her?"

"We are affianced, or nearly so."

"That is quite another thing, then; a thousand compliments," exclaimed De Guiche, upon whose lips a courtier's jest was already fitting, but to whom the word “affianced,” addressed by Malicorne with respect to Mademoiselle de Montalais, recalled the respect due to women.

“And for whom is the second appointment destined?” asked De Guiche; “is it for anyone to whom Manicamp may happen to be affianced? In that case I pity her, poor girl! for she will have a sad fellow for a husband.”

“No, monsieur le comte; the second appointment is for Mademoiselle de la Baume le Blanc de la Valliere.”

“Unknown,” said De Guiche.

“Unknown? yes, monsieur,” said Malicorne, smiling in his turn.

“Very good. I will speak to Monsieur about it. By the by, she is of gentle birth?”

“She belongs to a very good family and is maid of honor to Madame.”

“That’s well. Will you accompany me to Monsieur?”

“Most certainly, if I may be permitted the honor.”

“Have you your carriage?”

“No; I came here on horseback.”

“Dressed as you are?”

“No, monsieur; I posted from Orleans, and I changed my traveling suit for the one I have on, in order to present myself to you.”

“True, you already told me you had come from Orleans;” saying which he crumpled Manicamp’s letter in his hand, and thrust it in his pocket.

“I beg your pardon,” said Malicorne, timidly; “but I do not think you have read all.”

“Not read all, do you say?”

“No; there were two letters in the same envelope.”

“Oh! are you sure?”

“Quite sure.”

“Let us look, then,” said the count, as he opened the letter again.

“Ah! you are right,” he said opening the paper which he had not yet read.

“I suspected it,” he continued — ”another application for an appointment under Monsieur. This Manicamp is a regular vampire: — he is carrying on a trade in it.”

“No, monsieur le comte, he wishes to make a present of it.”

“To whom?”

“To myself, monsieur.”

“Why did you not say so at once, my dear M. Mauvaisecorne?”

“Malicorne, monsieur le comte.”

"Forgive me; it is that Latin that bothers me — that terrible mine of etymologies. Why the deuce are young men of family taught Latin? *Mala* and *mauvaise* — you understand it is the same thing. You will forgive me, I trust, M. de Malicorne."

"Your kindness affects me much, monsieur: but it is a reason why I should make you acquainted with one circumstance without any delay."

"What is it?"

"That I was not born a gentleman. I am not without courage, and not altogether deficient in ability; but my name is Malicorne simply."

"You appear to me, monsieur!" exclaimed the count, looking at the astute face of his companion, "to be a most agreeable man. Your face pleases me, M. Malicorne, and you must possess some indisputably excellent qualities to have pleased that egotistical Manicamp. Be candid and tell me whether you are not some saint descended upon the earth."

"Why so?"

"For the simple reason that he makes you a present of anything. Did you not say that he intended to make you a present of some appointment in the king's household?"

"I beg your pardon, count; but, if I succeed in obtaining the appointment, you, and not he, will have bestowed it on me."

"Besides he will not have given it to you for nothing, I suppose. Stay, I have it; — there is a Malicorne at Orleans who lends money to the prince."

"I think that must be my father, monsieur."

"Ah! the prince has the father, and that terrible dragon of a Manicamp has the son. Take care, monsieur, I know him. He will fleece you completely."

"The only difference is, that I lend without interest," said Malicorne, smiling.

"I was correct in saying you were either a saint or very much resembled one. M. Malicorne, you shall have the post you want, or I will forfeit my name."

"Ah! monsieur le comte, what a debt of gratitude shall I not owe you?" said Malicorne, transported.

"Let us go to the prince, my dear M. Malicorne." And De Guiche proceeded toward the door, desiring Malicorne to follow him. At the very moment they were about to cross the threshold, a young man appeared on the other side. He was from twenty-four to twenty-five years of age, of pale complexion, bright eyes and brown hair and eyebrows. “Good-day,” said he, suddenly, almost pushing De Guiche back into the courtyard again.

“Is that you, De Wardes? — What! and booted, spurred and whip in hand, too?”

“The most befitting costume for a man about to set off for Le Havre. There will be no one left in Paris to-morrow.” And hereupon he saluted Malicorne with great ceremony, whose handsome dress gave him the appearance of a prince.

“M. Malicorne,” said De Guiche to his friend. De Wardes bowed.

“M. de Wardes,” said Guiche to Malicorne, who bowed in return. “By the by, De Wardes,” continued De Guiche, “you who are so well acquainted with these matters, can you tell us, probably, what appointments are still vacant at the court; or rather in the prince’s household?”

“In the prince’s household,” said De Wardes looking up with an air of consideration, “let me see — the appointment of the master of the horse is vacant, I believe.”

“Oh,” said Malicorne, “there is no question of such a post as that, monsieur; my ambition is not nearly so exalted.”

De Wardes had a more penetrating observation than De Guiche, and fathomed Malicorne immediately. “The fact is,” he said, looking at him from head to foot, “a man must be either a duke or a peer to fill that post.”

“All I solicit,” said Malicorne, “is a very humble appointment; I am of little importance, and I do not rank myself above my position.”

“M. Malicorne, whom you see here,” said De Guiche to De Wardes, “is a very excellent fellow, whose only misfortune is that of not being of gentle birth. As far as I am concerned, you know, I attach little value to those who have but gentle birth to boast of.”

“Assuredly,” said De Wardes; “but will you allow me to remark, my dear count, that, without rank of some sort, one can hardly hope to belong to his royal highness’s household?”

“You are right,” said the count, “court etiquette is absolute. The devil! — we never so much as gave it a thought.”

“Alas! a sad misfortune for me, monsieur le comte,” said Malicorne, changing color.

“Yet not without remedy, I hope,” returned De Guiche.

“The remedy is found easily enough,” exclaimed De Wardes; “you can be created a gentleman. His Eminence, the Cardinal Mazarin, did nothing else from morning till night."

"Hush, hush, De Wardes," said the count; "no jests of that kind; it ill becomes us to turn such matters into ridicule. Letters of nobility, it is true, are purchasable; but that is a sufficient misfortune without the nobles themselves laughing at it."

"Upon my word, De Guiche, you're quite a Puritan, as the English say."

At this moment the Vicomte de Bragelonne was announced by one of the servants in the courtyard, in precisely the same manner as he would have done in a room.

"Come here, my dear Raoul. What! you, too, booted and spurred? You are setting off, then?"

Bragelonne approached the group of young men, and saluted them with that quiet and serious manner peculiar to him. His salutation was principally addressed to De Wardes, with whom he was unacquainted, and whose features, on his perceiving Raoul, had assumed a strange sternness of expression. "I have come, De Guiche," he said, "to ask your companionship. We set off for Le Havre, I presume."

"This is admirable — delightful. We shall have a most enjoyable journey. M. Malicorne, M. Bragelonne — ah! M. de Wardes, let me present you." The young men saluted each other in a restrained manner. Their very natures seemed, from the beginning, disposed to take exception to each other. De Wardes was pliant, subtle, full of dissimulation; Raoul was calm, grave, and upright. "Decide between us — between De Wardes and myself, Raoul."

"Upon what subject?"

"Upon the subject of noble birth."

"Who can be better informed on that subject than a De Gramont?"

"No compliments; it is your opinion I ask."

"At least, inform me of the subject under discussion."

"De Wardes asserts that the distribution of titles is abused; I, on the contrary, maintain that a title is useless to the man on whom it is bestowed."

"And you are correct," said Bragelonne, quietly.

"But, monsieur le vicomte," interrupted De Wardes, with a kind of obstinacy, "I affirm that it is I who am correct."

"What was your opinion, monsieur?"

"I was saying that everything is done in France at the present moment, to humiliate men of family."

“And by whom?”

“By the king himself. He surrounds himself with people who cannot show four quarterings.”

“Nonsense,” said De Guiche, “where could you possibly have seen that, De Wardes?”

“One example will suffice,” he returned, directing his look fully upon Raoul.

“State it then.”

“Do you know who has just been nominated captain-general of the musketeers? — an appointment more valuable than a peerage; for it gives precedence over all the marechals of France.”

Raoul’s color mounted in his face; for he saw the object De Wardes had in view. “No; who has been appointed? In any case it must have been very recently, for the appointment was vacant eight days ago; a proof of which is, that the king refused Monsieur, who solicited the post for one of his *proteges*.”

“Well, the king refused it to Monsieur’s *protege*, in order to bestow it upon the Chevalier d’Artagnan, a younger brother of some Gascon family, who has been trailing his sword in the ante-chambers during the last thirty years.”

“Forgive me if I interrupt you,” said Raoul, darting a glance full of severity at De Wardes; “but you give me the impression of being unacquainted with the gentleman of whom you are speaking.”

“I not acquainted with M. d’Artagnan? Can you tell me, monsieur, who does *not* know him?”

“Those who *do* know him, monsieur,” replied Raoul, with still greater calmness and sternness of manner, “are in the habit of saying, that if he is not as good a gentleman as the king — which is not his fault — he is the equal of all the kings of the earth in courage and loyalty. Such is my opinion, monsieur; and I thank heaven I have known M. d’Artagnan from my birth.”

De Wardes was about to reply, when De Guiche interrupted him.

CHAPTER VII.

The Portrait of Madame.

The discussion was becoming full of bitterness. De Guiche perfectly understood the whole matter, for there was in Bragelonne’s face a look instinctively hostile, while in that of De Wardes there was something like a determination to offend. Without inquiring into the different feelings which actuated his two friends, De Guiche resolved to ward off the blow which he felt was on the point of being dealt by one of them, and perhaps by both. “Gentlemen,” he said, “we must take our leave of each other, I must pay a visit to Monsieur. You, De Wardes, will accompany me to the Louvre, and you, Raoul, will remain here master of the house; and as all that is done here is under your advice, you will bestow the last glance upon my preparations for departure.”

Raoul, with the air of one who neither seeks nor fears a quarrel, bowed his head in token of assent, and seated himself upon a bench in the sun. “That is well,” said De Guiche, “remain where you are, Raoul, and tell them to show you the two horses I have just purchased; you will give me your opinion, for I only bought them on condition that you ratified the purchase. By the by, I have to beg your pardon for having omitted to inquire after the Comte de la Fere.” While pronouncing these latter words, he closely observed De Wardes, in order to perceive what effect the name of Raoul’s father would produce upon him. “I thank you,” answered the young man, “the count is very well.” A gleam of deep hatred passed into De Wardes’s eyes. De Guiche, who appeared not to notice the foreboding expression, went up to Raoul, and grasping him by the hand, said, — ”It is agreed, then, Bragelonne, is it not, that you will rejoin us in the courtyard of the Palais Royal?” He then signed to De Wardes to follow him, who had been engaged in balancing himself first on one foot, then on the other. “We are going,” said he, “come, M. Malicorne.” This name made Raoul start; for it seemed that he had already heard it pronounced before, but he could not remember on what occasion. While trying to recall it half-dreamily, yet half-irritated at his conversation with De Wardes, the three young men set out on their way towards the Palais Royal, where Monsieur was residing. Malicorne learned two things; the first, that the young men had something to say to each other; and the second, that he ought not to walk in the same line with them; and therefore he walked behind. “Are you mad?” said De Guiche to his companion, as soon as they had left the Hotel de Grammont; “you attack M. d’Artagnan, and that, too, before Raoul.”

“Well,” said De Wardes, “what then?”

“What do you mean by ‘what then?’“

“Certainly, is there any prohibition against attacking M. d’Artagnan?”

“But you know very well that M. d’Artagnan was one of those celebrated and terrible four men who were called the musketeers.”

“That they may be; but I do not perceive why, on that account, I should be forbidden to hate M. d’Artagnan.”

“What cause has he given you?”

“Me! personally, none.”

“Why hate him, therefore?”

“Ask my dead father that question.”

“Really, my dear De Wardes, you surprise me. M. d’Artagnan is not one to leave unsettled any *enmity* he may have to arrange, without completely clearing his account. Your father, I have heard, carried matters with a high hand. Moreover, there are no enmities so bitter that they cannot be washed away by blood, by a good sword-thrust loyally given.”

“Listen to me, my dear De Guiche, this inveterate dislike existed between my father and M. d’Artagnan, and when I was quite a child, he acquainted me with the reason for it, and, as forming part of my inheritance, I regard it as a particular legacy bestowed upon me.”

“And does this hatred concern M. d’Artagnan alone?”

“As for that, M. d’Artagnan was so intimately associated with his three friends, that some portion of the full measure of my hatred falls to their lot, and that hatred is of such a nature, whenever the opportunity occurs, they shall have no occasion to complain of their allowance.”

De Guiche had kept his eyes fixed on De Wardes, and shuddered at the bitter manner in which the young man smiled. Something like a presentiment flashed across his mind; he knew that the time had passed away for *grands coups entre gentilshommes*; but that the feeling of hatred treasured up in the mind, instead of being diffused abroad, was still hatred all the same; that a smile was sometimes as full of meaning as a threat; and, in a word, that to the fathers who had hated with their hearts and fought with their arms, would now succeed the sons, who would indeed hate with their hearts, but would no longer combat their enemies save by means of intrigue or treachery. As, therefore, it certainly was not Raoul whom he could suspect either of intrigue or treachery, it was on Raoul's account that De Guiche trembled. However, while these gloomy forebodings cast a shade of anxiety over De Guiche's countenance, De Wardes had resumed the entire mastery over himself.

"At all events," he observed, "I have no personal ill-will towards M. de Bragelonne; I do not know him even."

"In any case," said De Guiche, with a certain amount of severity in his tone of voice, "do not forget one circumstance, that Raoul is my most intimate friend;" a remark at which De Wardes bowed.

The conversation terminated there, although De Guiche tried his utmost to draw out his secret from him; but, doubtless, De Wardes had determined to say nothing further, and he remained impenetrable. De Guiche therefore promised himself a more satisfactory result with Raoul. In the meantime they had reached the Palais Royal, which was surrounded by a crowd of lookers-on. The household belonging to Monsieur awaited his command to mount their horses, in order to form part of the escort of the ambassadors, to whom had been intrusted the care of bringing the young princess to Paris. The brilliant display of horses, arms, and rich liveries, afforded some compensation in those times, thanks to the kindly feelings of the people, and to the traditions of deep devotion to their sovereigns, for the enormous expenses charged upon the taxes. Mazarin had said: "Let them sing, provided they pay;" while Louis XIV.'s remark was, "Let them look." Sight had replaced the voice; the people could still look but they were no longer allowed to sing. De Guiche left De Wardes and Malicorne at the bottom of the grand staircase, while he himself, who shared the favor and good graces of Monsieur with the Chevalier de Lorraine, who always smiled at him most affectionately, though he could not endure him, went straight to the prince's apartments, whom he found engaged in admiring himself in the glass, and rouging his face. In a corner of the cabinet, the Chevalier de Lorraine was extended full length upon some cushions, having just had his long hair curled, with which he was playing in the same manner a woman would have done. The prince turned round as the count entered, and perceiving who it was, said: “Ah! is that you, De Guiche; come here and tell me the truth.”

“You know, my lord, it is one of my defects to speak the truth.”

“You will hardly believe, De Guiche, how that wicked chevalier has annoyed me.”

The chevalier shrugged his shoulders.

“Why, he pretends,” continued the prince, “that Mademoiselle Henrietta is better looking as a woman than I am as a man.”

“Do not forget, my lord,” said De Guiche, frowning slightly, “you require me to speak the truth.”

“Certainly,” said the prince, tremblingly.

“Well, and I shall tell it you.”

“Do not be in a hurry, Guiche,” exclaimed the prince, “you have plenty of time; look at me attentively, and try to recollect Madame. Besides, her portrait is here. Look at it.” And he held out to him a miniature of the finest possible execution. De Guiche took it, and looked at it for a long time attentively.

“Upon my honor, my lord, this is indeed a most lovely face.”

“But look at me, count, look at me,” said the prince, endeavoring to direct upon himself the attention of the count, who was completely absorbed in contemplation of the portrait.

“It is wonderful,” murmured Guiche.

“Really one would imagine you had never seen the young lady before.”

“It is true, my lord, I have seen her but it was five years ago; there is a great difference between a child twelve years old, and a girl of seventeen.”

“Well, what is your opinion?”

“My opinion is that the portrait must be flattering, my lord.”

“Of that,” said the prince triumphantly, “there can be no doubt; but let us suppose that it is not, what would your opinion be?”

“My lord, that your highness is exceedingly happy to have so charming a bride.”

The Chevalier de Lorraine burst out laughing. The prince understood how severe towards himself this opinion of the Comte de Guiche was, and he looked somewhat displeased, saying, “My friends are not over indulgent.” De Guiche looked at the portrait again, and, after lengthened contemplation, returned it with apparent unwillingness, saying, “Most decidedly, my lord, I should rather prefer to look ten times at your highness, than to look at

Madame once again.” It seemed as if the chevalier had detected some mystery in these words, which were incomprehensible to the prince, for he exclaimed: “Very well, get married yourself.” Monsieur continued painting himself, and when he had finished, looked at the portrait again once more, turned to admire himself in the glass, and smiled, and no doubt was satisfied with the comparison. “You are very kind to have come,” he said to Guiche, “I feared you would leave without bidding me adieu.”

“Your highness knows me too well to believe me capable of so great a disrespect.”

“Besides, I suppose you have something to ask from me before leaving Paris?”

“Your highness has indeed guessed correctly, for I have a request to make.”

“Very good, what is it?”

The Chevalier de Lorraine immediately displayed the greatest attention, for he regarded every favor conferred upon another as a robbery committed against himself. And, as Guiche hesitated, the prince said: “If it be money, nothing could be more fortunate, for I am in funds; the superintendent of the finances has sent me 500,000 pistoles.”

“I thank your highness; but is not an affair of money.”

“What is it, then? Tell me.”

“The appointment of a maid of honor.”

“Oh! oh! Guiche, what a protector you have become of young ladies,” said the prince, “you never speak of any one else now.”

The Chevalier de Lorraine smiled, for he knew very well that nothing displeased the prince more than to show any interest in ladies. “My lord,” said the comte, “it is not I who am directly interested in the lady of whom I have just spoken; I am acting on behalf of one of my friends.”

“Ah! that is different; what is the name of the young lady in whom your friend is so interested?”

“Mlle. de la Baume le Blanc de la Valliere; she is already maid of honor to the dowager princess.”

“Why, she is lame,” said the Chevalier de Lorraine, stretching himself on his cushions.

“Lame,” repeated the prince, “and Madame to have her constantly before her eyes? Most certainly not; it may be dangerous for her when in an interesting condition.”

The Chevalier de Lorraine burst out laughing.

“Chevalier,” said Guiche, “your conduct is ungenerous; while I am soliciting a favor, you do me all the mischief you can.”

“Forgive me, comte,” said the Chevalier de Lorraine, somewhat uneasy at the tone in which Guiche had made his remark, “but I had no intention of doing so, and I begin to believe that I have mistaken one young lady for another.”

“There is no doubt of it, monsieur; and I do not hesitate to declare that such is the case.”

“Do you attach much importance to it, Guiche?” inquired the prince.

“I do, my lord.”

“Well, you shall have it; but ask me for no more appointments, for there are none to give away.”

“Ah!” exclaimed the chevalier, “midday already, that is the hour fixed for the departure.”

“You dismiss me, monsieur?” inquired Guiche.

“Really, count, you treat me very ill to-day,” replied the chevalier.

“For heaven’s sake, count, for heaven’s sake, chevalier,” said Monsieur, “do you not see how you are distressing me?”

“Your highness’s signature?” said Guiche.

“Take a blank appointment from that drawer, and give it to me.” Guiche handed the prince the document indicated, and at the same time presented him with a pen already dipped in ink; whereupon the prince signed. “Here,” he said, returning him the appointment, “but I give it on one condition.”

“Name it.”

“That you make friends with the chevalier.”

“Willingly,” said Guiche. And he held out his hand to the chevalier with an indifference amounting to contempt.

“Adieu, count,” said the chevalier, without seeming in any way to have noticed the count’s slight; “adieu, and bring us back a princess who will not talk with her own portrait too much.”

“Yes, set off and lose no time. By the by, who will accompany you?”

“Bragelonne and De Wardes.”

“Both excellent and fearless companions.”

“Too fearless,” said the chevalier; “endeavor to bring them both back, count.”

“A bad heart, bad!” murmured De Guiche; “he scents mischief everywhere, and sooner than anything else.” And taking leave of the prince, he quitted the apartment. As soon as he reached the vestibule, he waved in the air the paper which the prince had signed. Malicorne hurried forward, and received it, trembling with delight. When, however, he held in his hand, Guiche observed that he still awaited something further.

“Patience, monsieur,” he said; “the Chevalier de Lorraine was there, and I feared an utter failure if I asked too much at once. Wait until I return. Adieu.”

“Adieu, monsieur le comte; a thousand thanks,” said Malicorne.

“Send Manicamp to me. By the way, monsieur, is it true that Mlle. de la Valliere is lame?” As he said this, he noticed that Bragelonne, who had just at that moment entered the courtyard, turned suddenly pale. The poor lover had heard the remark, which, however, was not the case with Malicorne, for he was already beyond the reach of the count’s voice.

“Why is Louise’s name spoken of here,” said Raoul to himself; “oh! let not De Wardes, who stands smiling yonder, even say a word about her in my presence.”

“Now, gentlemen,” exclaimed the Comte de Guiche, “prepare to start.”

At this moment the prince, who had complete his toilette, appeared at the window, and was immediately saluted by the acclamations of all who composed the escort, and ten minutes afterwards, banners, scarfs, and feathers were fluttering and waving in the air, as the cavalcade galloped away.

CHAPTER VIII.

Le Havre.

This brilliant and animated company, the members of which were inspired by various feelings, arrived at Le Havre four days after their departure from Paris. It was about five o’clock in the afternoon, and no intelligence had yet been received of Madame. They were soon engaged in quest of apartments; but the greatest confusion immediately ensued among the masters, and violent quarrels among their attendants. In the midst of this disorder, the Comte de Guiche fancied he recognized Manicamp. It was, indeed, Manicamp himself; but as Malicorne had taken possession of his very best costume, he had not been able to get any other than a suit of violet velvet, trimmed with silver. Guiche recognized him as much by his dress as by his features, for he had very frequently seen Manicamp in his violet suit, which was his last resource. Manicamp presented himself to the count under an arch of torches, which set in a blaze, rather than illuminated, the gate by which Le Havre is entered, and which is situated close to the tower of Francis I. The count, remarking the woe-begone expression of Manicamp’s face, could not resist laughing. “Well, my poor Manicamp,” he exclaimed, “how violet you look; are you in mourning?”

“Yes,” replied Manicamp; “I am in mourning.”

“For whom, or for what?”

“For my blue-and-gold suit, which has disappeared, and in the place of which I could find nothing but this; and I was even obliged to economize from compulsion, in order to get possession of it.”

“Indeed?”

“It is singular you should be astonished at that, since you leave me without any money.”

“At all events, here you are, and that is the principal thing.”

“By the most horrible roads.”

“Where are you lodging?”

“Lodging?”

“Yes!”

“I am not lodging anywhere.”

De Guiche began to laugh. “Well,” said he, “where do you intend to lodge?”

“In the same place you do.”

“But I don’t know, myself.”

“What do you mean by saying you don’t know?”

“Certainly, how is it likely I should know where I should stay?”

“Have you not retained an hotel?”

“I?”

“Yes, you or the prince.”

“Neither of us has thought of it. Le Havre is of considerable size, I suppose; and provided I can get a stable for a dozen horses, and a suitable house in a good quarter — ”

“Certainly, there are some very excellent houses.”

“Well then — ”

“But not for us.”

“What do you mean by saying not for us? — for whom, then?”

“For the English, of course.”

“For the English?”

“Yes; the houses are all taken.”

“By whom?”

“By the Duke of Buckingham.”

“I beg your pardon?” said Guiche, whose attention this name had awakened.

“Yes, by the Duke of Buckingham. His Grace was preceded by a courier, who arrived here three days ago, and immediately retained all the houses fit for habitation the town possesses.”

“Come, come, Manicamp, let us understand each other.”

“Well, what I have told you is clear enough, it seems to me.”

“But surely Buckingham does not occupy the whole of Le Havre?”

“He certainly does not occupy it, since he has not yet arrived; but, once disembarked, he will occupy it.”

“Oh! oh!”

“It is quite clear you are not acquainted with the English; they have a perfect rage for monopolizing everything.”

“That may be; but a man who has the whole of one house, is satisfied with it, and does not require two.”

“Yes, but two men?”

“Be it so; for two men, two houses, or four or six, or ten, if you like; but there are a hundred houses at Le Havre.”

“Yes, and all the hundred are let.”

“Impossible!”

“What an obstinate fellow you are. I tell you Buckingham has hired all the houses surrounding the one which the queen dowager of England and the princess her daughter will inhabit.”

“He is singular enough, indeed,” said De Wardes, caressing his horse’s neck.

“Such is the case, however, monsieur.”

“You are quite sure of it, Monsieur de Manicamp?” and as he put this question, he looked slyly at De Guiche, as though to interrogate him upon the degree of confidence to be placed in his friend’s state of mind. During this discussion the night had closed in, and the torches, pages, attendants, squires, horses, and carriages, blocked up the gate and the open place; the torches were reflected in the channel, which the rising tide was gradually filling, while on the other side of the jetty might be noticed groups of curious lookers-on, consisting of sailors and townspeople, who seemed anxious to miss nothing of the spectacle. Amidst all this hesitation of purpose, Bragelonne, as though a perfect stranger to the scene, remained on his horse somewhat in the rear of Guiche, and watched the rays of light reflected on the water, inhaling with rapture the sea breezes, and listening to the waves which noisily broke upon the shore and on the beach, tossing the spray into the air with a noise that echoed in the distance. “But,” exclaimed De Guiche, “what is Buckingham’s motive for providing such a supply of lodgings?”

“Yes, yes,” said De Wardes; “what reason has he?”

“A very excellent one,” replied Manicamp.

“You know what it is, then?”

“I fancy I do.”

“Tell us, then.”

“Bend your head down towards me.”

“What! may it not be spoken except in private?”

“You shall judge of that yourself.”

“Very well.” De Guiche bent down.

“Love,” said Manicamp.

“I do not understand you at all.”

“Say rather, you cannot understand me yet.”

“Explain yourself.”

“Very well; it is quite certain, count, that his royal highness will be the most unfortunate of husbands.”

“What do you mean?”

“The Duke of Buckingham — ”

“It is a name of ill omen to the princes of the house of France.”

“And so the duke is madly in love with Madame, so the rumor runs, and will have no one approach her but himself.”

De Guiche colored. “Thank you, thank you,” said he to Manicamp, grasping his hand. Then, recovering himself, added, “Whatever you do, Manicamp, be careful that this project of Buckingham’s is not made known to any Frenchman here; for, if so, many a sword would be unsheathed in this country that does not fear English steel.”

“But after all,” said Manicamp, “I have had no satisfactory proof given me of the love in question, and it may be no more than an idle tale.”

“No, no,” said De Guiche, “it must be the truth;” and despite his command over himself, he clenched his teeth.

“Well,” said Manicamp, “after all, what does it matter to you? What does it matter to me whether the prince is to be what the late king was? Buckingham the father for the queen, Buckingham the son for the princess.”

“Manicamp! Manicamp!”

“It is a fact, or at least, everybody says so.”

“Silence!” cried the count.

“But why, silence?” said De Wardes; “it is a highly creditable circumstance for the French nation. Are not you of my opinion, Monsieur de Bragelonne?”

“To what circumstance do you allude?” inquired De Bragelonne with an abstracted air.

“That the English should render homage to the beauty of our queens and our princesses.”

“Forgive me, but I have not been paying attention to what has passed; will you oblige me by explaining.”

“There is no doubt it was necessary that Buckingham the father should come to Paris in order that his majesty, King Louis XIII., should perceive that his wife was one of the most beautiful women of the French court; and it seems necessary, at the present time, that Buckingham the son should consecrate, by the devotion of his worship, the beauty of a princess who has French blood in her veins. The fact of having inspired a passion on the other side of the Channel will henceforth confer a title to beauty on this.”

“Sir,” replied De Bragelonne, “I do not like to hear such matters treated so lightly. Gentlemen like ourselves should be careful guardians of the honor of our queens and our princesses. If we jest at them, what will our servants do?”

“How am I to understand that?” said De Wardes, whose ears tingled at the remark.

“In any way you chose, monsieur,” replied De Bragelonne, coldly.

“Bragelonne, Bragelonne,” murmured De Guiche.

“M. de Wardes,” exclaimed Manicamp, noticing that the young man had spurred his horse close to the side of Raoul.

“Gentlemen, gentlemen,” said De Guiche, “do not set such an example in public, in the street too. De Wardes, you are wrong.”

“Wrong; in what way, may I ask you?”

“You are wrong, monsieur, because you are always speaking ill of someone or something,” replied Raoul, with undisturbed composure.

“Be indulgent, Raoul,” said De Guiche, in an undertone.

“Pray do not think of fighting, gentlemen!” said Manicamp, “before you have rested yourselves; for in that case you will not be able to do much.”

“Come,” said De Guiche, “forward, gentlemen!” and breaking through the horses and attendants, he cleared the way for himself towards the center of the square, through the crowd, followed by the whole cavalcade. A large gateway looking out upon a courtyard was open; Guiche entered the courtyard, and Bragelonne, De Wardes, Manicamp, and three or four other gentlemen, followed him. A sort of council of war was held, and the means to be employed for saving the dignity of the embassy were deliberated upon. Bragelonne was of the opinion that the right of priority should be respected, while De Wardes suggested that the town should be sacked. This latter proposition appearing to Manicamp rather premature, he proposed instead that they should first rest themselves. This was the wisest thing to do, but, unhappily, to follow his advice, two things were wanting; namely, a house and beds. De Guiche reflected for awhile, and then said aloud, “Let him who loves me, follow me!”

“The attendants also?” inquired a page who had approached the group.

“Every one,” exclaimed the impetuous young man. “Manicamp, show us the way to the house destined for her royal highness’s residence.”

Without in any way divining the count’s project, his friends followed him, accompanied by a crowd of people, whose acclamations and delight seemed a happy omen for the success of that project with which they were yet unacquainted. The wind was blowing strongly from the harbor, and moaning in fitful gusts.

CHAPTER IX.

At Sea.

The following day was somewhat calmer, although the gale still continued. The sun had, however, risen through a bank of orange clouds, tingeing with its cheerful rays the crests of the black waves. Watch was impatiently kept from the different look-outs. Towards eleven o'clock in the morning a ship, with sails full set, was signalled as in view; two others followed at the distance of about half a knot. They approached like arrows shot from the bow of a skillful archer; and yet the sea ran so high that their speed was as nothing compared to the rolling of the billows in which the vessels were plunging first in one direction and then in another. The English fleet was soon recognized by the line of the ships, and by the color of their pennants; the one which had the princess on board and carried the admiral's flag preceded the others.

The rumor now spread that the princess was arriving. The whole French court ran to the harbor, while the quays and jetties were soon covered by crowds of people. Two hours afterwards, the other vessels had overtaken the flagship, and the three, not venturing perhaps to enter the narrow entrance of the harbor, cast anchor between Le Havre and La Heve. When the maneuver had been completed, the vessel which bore the admiral saluted France by twelve discharges of cannon, which were returned, discharge for discharge, from Fort Francis I. Immediately afterwards a hundred boats were launched; they were covered with the richest stuffs, and destined for the conveyance of the different members of the French nobility towards the vessels at anchor. But when it was observed that even inside the harbor the boats were tossed to and fro, and that beyond the jetty the waves rose mountains high, dashing upon the shore with a terrible uproar, it was readily believed that not one of those frail boats would be able with safety to reach a fourth part of the distance between the shore and the vessels at anchor. A pilot-boat, however, notwithstanding the wind and the sea, was getting ready to leave the harbor, for the purpose of placing itself at the admiral's disposal.

De Guiche, who had been looking among the different boats for one stronger than the others, which might offer a chance of reaching the English vessels, perceiving the pilot-boat getting ready to start, said to Raoul: “Do you not think, Raoul, that intelligent and vigorous men, as we are, ought to be ashamed to retreat before the brute strength of wind and waves?”

“That is precisely the very reflection I was silently making to myself,” replied Bragelonne.

“Shall we get into that boat, then, and push off? Will you come, De Wardes?”

“Take care, or you will get drowned,” said Manicamp.

“And for no purpose,” said De Wardes, “for with the wind in your teeth, as it will be, you will never reach the vessels.”

“You refuse, then?”

“Assuredly I do; I would willingly risk and lose my life in an encounter against men,” he said, glancing at Bragelonne, “but as to fighting with oars against waves, I have no taste for that.”

“And for myself,” said Manicamp, “even were I to succeed in reaching the ships, I should not be indifferent to the loss of the only good dress which I have left, — salt water would spoil it.”

“You, then, refuse also?” exclaimed De Guiche.

“Decidedly I do; I beg you to understand that most distinctly.”

“But,” exclaimed De Guiche, “look, De Wardes — look, Manicamp — look yonder, the princesses are looking at us from the poop of the admiral’s vessel.”

“An additional reason, my dear fellow, why we should not make ourselves ridiculous by being drowned while they are looking on.”

“Is that your last word, Manicamp?”

“Yes.”

“And then yours, De Wardes?”

“Yes.”

“Then I go alone.”

“Not so,” said Raoul, “for I shall accompany you; I thought it was understood I should do so.”

The fact is, that Raoul, uninfluenced by devotion, measuring the risk they run, saw how imminent the danger was, but he willingly allowed himself to accept a peril which De Wardes had declined.

The boat was about to set off when De Guiche called to the pilot. “Stay,” said he: “we want two places in your boat;” and wrapping five or six pistoles in paper, he threw them from the quay into the boat.

“It seems you are not afraid of salt water, young gentlemen.”

“We are afraid of nothing,” replied De Guiche.

“Come along, then.”

The pilot approached the side of the boat, and the two young men, one after the other, with equal vivacity, jumped into the boat. “Courage, my men,” said De Guiche; “I have twenty pistoles left in this purse, and as soon as we reach the admiral’s vessel they shall be yours.” The sailors bent themselves to their oars, and the boat bounded over the crest of the waves. The interest taken in this hazardous expedition was universal; the whole population of Le Havre hurried towards the jetties and every look was directed towards the little bark; at one moment it flew suspended on the crest of the foaming waves, then suddenly glided downwards towards the bottom of a raging abyss, where it seemed utterly lost. At the expiration of an hour’s struggling with the waves, it reached the spot where the admiral’s vessel was anchored, and from the side of which two boats had already been dispatched towards their aid. Upon the quarter-deck of the flagship, sheltered by a canopy of velvet and ermine, which was suspended by stout supports, Henriette, the queen dowager, and the young princess — with the admiral, the Duke of Norfolk, standing beside them — watched with alarm this slender bark, at one moment tossed to the heavens, and the next buried beneath the waves, and against whose dark sail the noble figures of the two French gentlemen stood forth in relief like two luminous apparitions. The crew, leaning against the bulwarks and clinging to the shrouds, cheered the courage of the two daring young men, the skill of the pilot, and the strength of the sailors. They were received at the side of the vessel by a shout of triumph. The Duke of Norfolk, a handsome young man, from twenty-six to twenty-eight years of age, advanced to meet them. De Guiche and Bragelonne lightly mounted the ladder on the starboard side, and, conducted by the Duke of Norfolk, who resumed his place near them, they approached to offer their homage to the princess. Respect, and yet more, a certain apprehension, for which he could not account, had hitherto restrained the Comte de Guiche from looking at Madame attentively, who, however, had observed him immediately, and had asked her mother, “Is not that Monsieur in the boat yonder?” Madame Henriette, who knew Monsieur better than her daughter did, smiled at the mistake her vanity had led her into, and had answered, “No; it is only M. de Guiche, his favorite.” The princess, at this reply, was constrained to check an instinctive tenderness of feeling which the courage displayed by the count had awakened. At the very moment the princess had put this question to her mother, De Guiche had, at last, summoned courage to raise his eyes towards her and could compare the original with the portrait he had so lately seen. No sooner had he remarked her pale face, her eyes so full of animation, her beautiful nut-brown hair, her expressive lips, and her every gesture, which, while betokening royal descent, seemed to thank and to encourage him at one and the same time, than he was, for a moment, so overcome, that, had it not been for Raoul, on whose arm he leant, he would have fallen. His friend’s amazed look, and the encouraging gesture of the queen, restored Guiche to his self-possession. In a few words he explained his mission, explained in what way he had become envoy of his royal highness; and saluted, according to their rank and the reception they gave him, the admiral and several of the English noblemen who were grouped around the princess.

Raoul was then presented, and was most graciously received; the share that the Comte de la Fere had had in the restoration of Charles II. was known to all; and, more than that, it was the comte who had been charged with the negotiation of the marriage, by means of which the granddaughter of Henry IV. was now returning to France. Raoul spoke English perfectly, and constituted himself his friend’s interpreter with the young English noblemen, who were indifferently acquainted with the French language. At this moment, a young man came forward, of extremely handsome features, and whose dress and arms were remarkable for their extravagance of material. He approached the princesses, who were engaged in conversation with the Duke of Norfolk, and, in a voice which ill concealed his impatience, said, “It is now time to disembark, your royal highness.” The younger of the princesses rose from her seat at this remark, and was about to take the hand which the young nobleman extended to her, with an eagerness which arose from a variety of motives, when the admiral intervened between them, observing: “A moment, if you please, my lord; it is not possible for ladies to disembark just now, the sea is too rough; it is probable the wind may abate before sunset, and the landing will not be effected, therefore, until this evening.”

“Allow me to observe, my lord,” said Buckingham, with an irritation of manner which he did not seek to disguise, “you detain these ladies, and you have no right to do so. One of them, unhappily, now belongs to France, and you perceive that France claims them by the voice of her ambassadors;” and at the same moment he indicated Raoul and Guiche, whom he saluted.

“I cannot suppose that these gentlemen intend to expose the lives of their royal highnesses,” replied the admiral.

“These gentlemen,” retorted Buckingham, “arrived here safely, notwithstanding the wind; allow me to believe that the danger will not be greater for their royal highnesses when the wind will be in their favor.”

“These envoys have shown how great their courage is,” said the admiral. “You may have observed that there was a great number of persons on shore who did *not* venture to accompany them. Moreover, the desire which they had to show their respect with the least possible delay to Madame and her illustrious mother, induced them to brave the sea, which is very tempestuous to-day, even for sailors. These gentlemen, however, whom I recommend as an example for my officers to follow, can hardly be so for these ladies.”

Madame glanced at the Comte de Guiche, and perceived that his face was burning with confusion. This look had escaped Buckingham, who had eyes for nothing but Norfolk, of whom he was evidently very jealous; he seemed anxious to remove the princesses from the deck of a vessel where the admiral reigned supreme. “In that case,” returned Buckingham, “I appeal to Madame herself.”

“And I, my lord,” retorted the admiral, “I appeal to my own conscience, and to my own sense of responsibility. I have undertaken to convey Madame safe and sound to France, and I shall keep my promise.”

“But, sir — ” continued Buckingham.

“My lord, permit me to remind you that I command here.”

“Are you aware what you are saying, my lord?” replied Buckingham, haughtily.

“Perfectly so; I therefore repeat it: I alone command here, all yield obedience to me; the sea and the winds, the ships and men too.” This remark was made in a dignified and authoritative manner. Raoul observed its effect upon Buckingham, who trembled with anger from head to foot, and leaned against one of the poles of the tent to prevent himself falling; his eyes became suffused with blood, and the hand which he did not need for his support wandered towards the hilt of his sword.

"My lord," said the queen, "permit me to observe that I agree in every particular with the Duke of Norfolk; if the heavens, instead of being clouded as they are at the present moment, were perfectly serene and propitious, we can still afford to bestow a few hours upon the officer who has conducted us so successfully, and with such extreme attention, to the French coast, where he is to take leave of us."

Buckingham, instead of replying, seemed to seek counsel from the expression of Madame's face. She, however, half-concealed beneath the thick curtains of the velvet and gold which sheltered her, had not listened to the discussion, having been occupied in watching the Comte de Guiche, who was conversing with Raoul. This was a fresh misfortune for Buckingham, who fancied he perceived in Madame Henrietta's look a deeper feeling than that of curiosity. He withdrew, almost tottering in his gait, and nearly stumbled against the mainmast of the ship.

"The duke has not acquired a steady footing yet," said the queen-mother, in French, "and that may possibly be his reason for wishing to find himself on firm land again."

The young man overheard this remark, turned suddenly pale, and, letting his hands fall in great discouragement by his side, drew aside, mingling in one sigh his old affection and his new hatreds. The admiral, however, without taking any further notice of the duke's ill-humor, led the princesses into the quarter-deck cabin, where dinner had been served with a magnificence worthy in every respect of his guests. The admiral seated himself at the right hand of the princess, and placed the Comte de Guiche on her left. This was the place Buckingham usually occupied; and when he entered the cabin, how profound was his unhappiness to see himself banished by etiquette from the presence of his sovereign, to a position inferior to that which, by rank, he was entitled to. De Guiche, on the other hand, paler still perhaps from happiness, than his rival was from anger, seated himself tremblingly next to the princess, whose silken robe, as it lightly touched him, caused a tremor of mingled regret and happiness to pass through his whole frame. The repast finished, Buckingham darted forward to hand Madame Henrietta from the table; but this time it was De Guiche's turn to give the duke a lesson. "Have the goodness, my lord, from this moment," said he, "not to interpose between her royal highness and myself. From this moment, indeed, her royal highness belongs to France, and when she deigns to honor me by touching my hand it is the hand of Monsieur, the brother of the king of France, she touches."

And saying this, he presented his hand to Madame Henrietta with such marked deference, and at the same time with a nobleness of mien so intrepid, that a murmur of admiration rose from the English, whilst a groan of despair escaped from Buckingham's lips. Raoul, who loved, comprehended it all. He fixed upon his friend one of those profound looks which a bosom friend or mother can alone extend, either as protector or guardian, over the one who is about to stray from the right path. Towards two o'clock in the afternoon the sun shone forth anew, the wind subsided, the sea became smooth as a crystal mirror, and the fog, which had shrouded the coast, disappeared like a veil withdrawn before it. The smiling hills of France appeared in full view, with their numerous white houses rendered more conspicuous by the bright green of the trees or the clear blue sky.

CHAPTER X.

The Tents.

The admiral, as we have seen, was determined to pay no further attention to Buckingham's threatening glances and fits of passion. In fact, from the moment they quitted England, he had gradually accustomed himself to his behavior. De Guiche had not yet in any way remarked the animosity which appeared to influence that young nobleman against him, but he felt, instinctively, that there could be no sympathy between himself and the favorite of Charles II. The queen-mother, with greater experience and calmer judgment, perceived the exact position of affairs, and, as she discerned its danger, was prepared to meet it, whenever the proper moment should arrive. Quiet had been everywhere restored, except in Buckingham's heart; he, in his impatience, addressed himself to the princess, in a low tone of voice: "For Heaven's sake, madame, I implore you to hasten your disembarkation. Do you not perceive how that insolent Duke of Norfolk is killing me with his attentions and devotions to you?"

Henrietta heard this remark; she smiled, and without turning her head towards him, but giving only to the tone of her voice that inflection of gentle reproach, and languid impertinence, which women and princesses so well know how to assume, she murmured, "I have already hinted, my lord, that you must have taken leave of your senses."

Not a single detail escaped Raoul's attention; he heard both Buckingham's entreaty and the princess's reply; he remarked Buckingham retire, heard his deep sigh, and saw him pass a hand over his face. He understood everything, and trembled as he reflected on the position of affairs, and the state of the minds of those about him. At last the admiral, with studied delay, gave the last orders for the departure of the boats. Buckingham heard the directions given with such an exhibition of delight that a stranger would really imagine the young man's reason was affected. As the Duke of Norfolk gave his commands, a large boat or barge, decked with flags, and capable of holding about twenty rowers and fifteen passengers, was slowly lowered from the side of the admiral's vessel. The barge was carpeted with velvet and decorated with coverings embroidered with the arms of England, and with garlands of flowers; for, at that time, ornamentation was by no means forgotten in these political pageants. No sooner was this really royal boat afloat, and the rowers with oars uplifted, awaiting, like soldiers presenting arms, the embarkation of the princess, than Buckingham ran forward to the ladder in order to take his place. His progress was, however, arrested by the queen. “My lord,” she said, “it is hardly becoming that you should allow my daughter and myself to land without having previously ascertained that our apartments are properly prepared. I beg your lordship to be good enough to precede us ashore, and to give directions that everything be in proper order on our arrival.”

This was a fresh disappointment for the duke, and, still more so, since it was so unexpected. He hesitated, colored violently, but could not reply. He had thought he might be able to keep near Madame during the passage to the shore, and, by this means, to enjoy to the very last moment the brief period fortune still reserved for him. The order, however, was explicit; and the admiral, who heard it given, immediately called out, “Launch the ship’s gig.” His directions were executed with that celerity which distinguishes every maneuver on board a man-of-war.

Buckingham, in utter hopelessness, cast a look of despair at the princess, of supplication towards the queen, and directed a glance full of anger towards the admiral. The princess pretended not to notice him, while the queen turned aside her head, and the admiral laughed outright, at the sound of which Buckingham seemed ready to spring upon him. The queen-mother rose, and with a tone of authority said, “Pray set off, sir.”

The young duke hesitated, looked around him, and with a last effort, half-choked by contending emotions, said, “And you, gentlemen, M. de Guiche and M. de Bragelonne, do not you accompany me?”

De Guiche bowed and said, “Both M. de Bragelonne and myself await her majesty’s orders; whatever the commands she imposes on us, we shall obey them.” Saying this, he looked towards the princess, who cast down her eyes.

“Your grace will remember,” said the queen, “that M. de Guiche is here to represent Monsieur; it is he who will do the honors of France, as you have done those of England; his presence cannot be dispensed with; besides, we owe him this slight favor for the courage he displayed in venturing to seek us in such a terrible stress of weather.”

Buckingham opened his lips, as if he were about to speak, but, whether thoughts or expressions failed him, not a syllable escaped them, and turning away, as though out of his mind, he leapt from the vessel into the boat. The sailors were just in time to catch hold of him to steady themselves; for his weight and the rebound had almost upset the boat.

"His grace cannot be in his senses," said the admiral aloud to Raoul.

"I am uneasy on the Duke's account," replied Bragelonne.

While the boat was advancing towards the shore, the duke kept his eyes immovably fixed on the admiral's ship, like a miser torn away from his coffers, or a mother separated from her child, about to be lead away to death. No one, however, acknowledged his signals, his frowns, or his pitiful gestures. In very anguish of mind, he sank down in the boat, burying his hands in his hair, whilst the boat, impelled by the exertions of the merry sailors, flew over the waves. On his arrival he was in such a state of apathy, that, had he not been received at the harbor by the messenger whom he had directed to precede him, he would hardly have had strength to ask his way. Having once, however, reached the house which had been set apart for him, he shut himself up, like Achilles in his tent. The barge bearing the princess quitted the admiral's vessel at the very moment Buckingham landed. It was followed by another boat filled with officers, courtiers, and zealous friends. Great numbers of the inhabitants of Le Havre, having embarked in fishing-cobles and boats of every description, set off to meet the royal barge. The cannon from the forts fired salutes, which were returned by the flagship and the two other vessels, and the flashes from the open mouths of the cannon floated in white fumes over the waves, and disappeared in the clear blue sky.

The princess landed at the decorated quay. Bands of gay music greeted her arrival, and accompanied her every step she took. During the time she was passing through the center of town, and treading beneath her delicate feet the richest carpets and the gayest flowers, which had been strewn upon the ground, De Guiche and Raoul, escaping from their English friends, hurried through the town and hastened rapidly towards the place intended for the residence of Madame.

"Let us hurry forward," said Raoul to De Guiche, "for if I read Buckingham's character aright, he will create some disturbance, when he learns the result of our deliberations of yesterday."

"Never fear," said De Guiche, "De Wardes is there, who is determination itself, while Manicamp is the very personification of the artless gentleness."

De Guiche was not, however, the less diligent on that account, and five minutes afterwards they were within sight of the Hotel de Ville. The first thing which struck them was the number of people assembled in the square. "Excellent," said De Guiche; "our apartments, I see, are prepared."

In fact, in front of the Hotel de Ville, upon the wide open space before it, eight tents had been raised, surmounted by the flags of France and England united. The hotel was surrounded by tents, as by a girdle of variegated colors; ten pages and a dozen mounted troopers, for an escort, mounted guard before the tents. It had a singularly curious effect, almost fairy-like in its appearance. These tents had been constructed during the night-time. Fitted up, within and without, with the richest materials that De Guiche had been able to procure in Le Havre, they completely encircled the Hotel de Ville. The only passage which led to the steps of the hotel, and which was not inclosed by the silken barricade, was guarded by two tents, resembling two pavilions, the doorways of both of which opened towards the entrance. These two tents were destined for De Guiche and Raoul; in whose absence they were intended to be occupied, that of De Guiche by De Wardes, and that of Raoul by Manicamp. Surrounding these two tents, and the six others, a hundred officers, gentlemen, and pages, dazzling in their display of silk and gold, thronged like bees buzzing about a hive. Every one of them, their swords by their sides, was ready to obey the slightest sign either of De Guiche or Bragelonne, the leaders of the embassy.

At the very moment the two young men appeared at the end of one of the streets leading to the square, they perceived, crossing the square at full gallop, a young man on horseback, whose costume was of surprising richness. He pushed hastily thorough the crowd of curious lookers-on, and, at the sight of these unexpected erections, uttered a cry of anger and dismay. It was Buckingham, who had awakened from his stupor, in order to adorn himself with a costume perfectly dazzling from its beauty, and to await the arrival of the princess and the queen-mother at the Hotel de Ville. At the entrance to the tents, the soldiers barred his passage, and his further progress was arrested. Buckingham, hopelessly infuriated, raised his whip; but his arm was seized by a couple of officers. Of the two guardians of the tent, only one was there. De Wardes was in the interior of the Hotel de Ville, engaging in attending to the execution of some orders by De Guiche.

At the noise made by Buckingham, Manicamp, who was indolently reclining upon the cushions at the doorway of one of the tents, rose with his usual indifference, and, perceiving that the disturbance continued, made his appearance from underneath the curtains. “What is the matter?” he said, in a gentle tone of voice, “and who is making this disturbance?”

It so happened, that, at the moment he began to speak, silence had just been restored, and, although his voice was very soft and gentle in its touch, every one heard his question. Buckingham turned round, and looked at the tall thin figure, and the listless expression of countenance of his questioner. Probably the personal appearance of Manicamp, who was dressed very plainly, did not inspire him with much respect, for he replied disdainfully, “Who may you be, monsieur?”

Manicamp, leaning on the arm of a gigantic trooper, as firm as the pillar of a cathedral, replied in his usual tranquil tone of voice, — ”And *you*, monsieur?”

“I, monsieur, am the Duke of Buckingham; I have hired all the houses which surround the Hotel de Ville, where I have business to transact; and as these houses are let, they belong to me, and, as I hired them in order to preserve the right of free access to the Hotel de Ville, you are not justified in preventing me passing to it.”

“But who prevents you passing, monsieur?” inquired Manicamp.

“Your sentinels.”

“Because you wish to pass on horseback, and orders have been given to let only persons on foot pass.”

“No one has any right to give orders here, except myself,” said Buckingham.

“On what grounds?” inquired Manicamp, with his soft tone. “Will you do me the favor to explain this enigma to me?”

“Because, as I have already told you, I have hired all the houses looking on the square.”

“We are very well aware of that, since nothing but the square itself has been left for us.”

“You are mistaken, monsieur; the square belongs to me, as well as the houses in it.”

“Forgive me, monsieur, but you are mistaken there. In *our* country, we say, the highway belongs to the king, therefore this square is his majesty’s;

and, consequently, as we are the king’s ambassadors, the square belongs to us.”

“I have already asked you who you are, monsieur,” exclaimed Buckingham, exasperated at the coolness of his interlocutor.

“My name is Manicamp,” replied the young man, in a voice whose tones were as harmonious and sweet as the notes of an Aeolian harp.

Buckingham shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, and said, “When I hired these houses which surround the Hotel de Ville, the square was unoccupied; these barracks obstruct my sight; I hereby order them to be removed.”

A hoarse and angry murmur ran through the crowd of listeners at these words. De Guiche arrived at this moment; he pushed through the crowd which separated him from Buckingham, and, followed by Raoul, arrived on the scene of action from one side, just as De Wardes came up from the other. “Pardon me, my lord; but if you have any complaint to make, have the goodness to address it to me, inasmuch as it was I who supplied the plans for the construction of these tents.”

“Moreover, I would beg you to observe, monsieur, that the term ‘barrack’ is a highly objectionable one!” added Manicamp, graciously.

“You were saying, monsieur — ” continued De Guiche.

“I was saying, monsieur le comte,” resumed Buckingham, in a tone of anger more marked than ever, although in some measure moderated by the presence of an equal, “I was saying that it is impossible these tents can remain where they are.”

“*Impossible!*” exclaimed De Guiche, “and why?”

“Because I object to them.”

A movement of impatience escaped De Guiche, but a warning glance from Raoul restrained him.

“You should the less object to them, monsieur, on account of the abuse of priority you have permitted yourself to exercise.”

“*Abuse!*”

“Most assuredly. You commission a messenger, who hires in your name the whole of the town of Le Havre, without considering the members of the French court, who would be sure to arrive here to meet Madame. Your Grace will admit that this is hardly friendly conduct in the representative of a friendly nation.”

“The right of possession belongs to him who is first on the ground.”

“Not in France, monsieur.”

“Why not in France?”

“Because France is a country where politeness is observed.”

“Which means?” exclaimed Buckingham, in so violent a manner that those who were present drew back, expecting an immediate collision.

“Which means, monsieur,” replied De Guiche, now rather pale, “that I caused these tents to be raised as habitations for myself and my friends, as a shelter for the ambassadors of France, as the only place of refuge which your exactions have left us in the town; and that I and those who are with me, shall remain in them, at least, until an authority more powerful, and more supreme, than your own shall dismiss me from them.”

“In other words, until we are ejected, as the lawyers say,” observed Manicamp, blandly.

“I know an authority, monsieur, which I trust is such as you will respect,” said Buckingham, placing his hand on his sword.

At this moment, and as the goddess of Discord, inflaming all minds, was about to direct their swords against each other, Raoul gently placed his hand on Buckingham’s shoulder. “One word, my lord,” he said.

“My right, my right, first of all,” exclaimed the fiery young man.

“It is precisely upon that point I wish to have the honor of addressing a word to you.”

“Very well, monsieur, but let your remarks be brief.”

“One question is all I ask; you can hardly expect me to be briefer.”

“Speak, monsieur, I am listening.”

“Are you, or is the Duke of Orleans, going to marry the granddaughter of Henry IV.?”

“What do you mean?” exclaimed Buckingham, retreating a few steps, bewildered.

“Have the goodness to answer me,” persisted Raoul tranquilly.

“Do you mean to ridicule me, monsieur?” inquired Buckingham.

“Your question is a sufficient answer for me. You admit, then, that it is not you who are going to marry the princess?”

“You know it perfectly well, monsieur, I should imagine.”

“I beg your pardon, but your conduct has been such as to leave it not altogether certain.”

“Proceed, monsieur, what do you mean to convey?”

Raoul approached the duke. “Are you aware, my lord,” he said, lowering his voice, “that your extravagances very much resemble the excesses of jealousy? These jealous fits, with respect to any woman, are not becoming in one who is neither her lover nor her husband; and I am sure you will admit that my remark applies with still greater force, when the lady in question is a princess of the blood royal!”

“Monsieur,” exclaimed Buckingham, “do you mean to insult Madame Henrietta?”

“Be careful, my lord,” replied Bragelonne, coldly, “for it is you who insult her. A little while since, when on board the admiral’s ship, you wearied the queen, and exhausted the admiral’s patience. I was observing, my lord; and, at first, I concluded you were not in possession of your senses, but I have since surmised the real significance of your madness.”

“Monsieur!” exclaimed Buckingham.

“One moment more, for I have yet another word to add. I trust I am the only one of my companions who has guessed it.”

“Are you aware, monsieur,” said Buckingham, trembling with mingled feelings of anger and uneasiness, “are you aware that you are holding language towards me which requires to be checked?”

“Weigh your words well, my lord,” said Raoul, haughtily; “my nature is not such that its vivacities need checking; whilst you, on the contrary, are descended from a race whose passions are suspected by all true Frenchmen; I repeat, therefore, for the second time, be careful!”

“Careful of what, may I ask? Do you presume to threaten me?”

“I am the son of the Comte de la Fere, my lord, and I never threaten, because I strike first. Therefore, understand me well, the threat that I hold out to you is this — ”

Buckingham clenched his hands, but Raoul continued, as though he had not observed the gesture. “At the very first word, beyond the respect and deference due to her royal highness, which you permit yourself to use towards her, — be patient my lord, for I am perfectly so.”

“You?”

“Undoubtedly. So long as Madame remained on English territory, I held my peace; but from the very moment she stepped on French ground, and now that we have received her in the name of the prince, I warn you, that at the first mark of disrespect which you, in your insane attachment, exhibit towards the royal house of France, I shall have one of two courses to follow; — either I declare, in the presence of every one, the madness with which you are now affected, and I get you ignominiously ordered back to England; or if you prefer it, I will run my dagger through your throat in the presence of all here. This second alternative seems to me the least disagreeable, and I think I shall hold to it.”

Buckingham had become paler than the lace collar around his neck. “M. de Bragelonne,” he said, “is it, indeed, a gentleman who is speaking to me?”

“Yes; only the gentleman is speaking to a madman. Get cured, my lord, and he will hold quite another language to you.”

“But, M. de Bragelonne,” murmured the duke, in a voice, half-choked, and putting his hand to his neck, — ”Do you not see I am choking?”

“If your death were to take place at this moment, my lord,” replied Raoul, with unruffled composure, “I should, indeed, regard it as a great happiness, for this circumstance would prevent all kinds of evil remarks; not alone about yourself, but also about those illustrious persons whom your devotion is compromising in so absurd a manner.”

“You are right, you are right,” said the young man, almost beside himself. “Yes, yes; better to die, than to suffer as I do at this moment.” And he grasped a beautiful dagger, the handle of which was inlaid with precious stones; and which he half drew from his breast.

Raoul thrust his hand aside. “Be careful what you do,” he said; “if you do not kill yourself, you commit a ridiculous action; and if you were to kill yourself, you sprinkle blood upon the nuptial robe of the princess of England.”

Buckingham remained a minute gasping for breath; during this interval, his lips quivered, his fingers worked convulsively, and his eyes wandered, as though in delirium. Then suddenly, he said, “M. de Bragelonne, I know nowhere a nobler mind than yours; you are, indeed, a worthy son of the most perfect gentleman that ever lived. Keep your tents.” And he threw his arms round Raoul’s neck. All who were present, astounded at this conduct, which was the very reverse of what was expected, considering the violence of the one adversary and the determination of the other, began immediately to clap their hands, and a thousand cheers and joyful shouts arose from all sides. De Guiche, in his turn, embraced Buckingham somewhat against his inclination; but, at all events, he did embrace him. This was the signal for French and English to do the same; and they who, until that moment, had looked at each other with restless uncertainty, fraternized on the spot. In the meantime, the procession of the princess arrived, and had it not been for Bragelonne, two armies would have been engaged together in conflict, and blood would have been shed upon the flowers with which the ground was covered. At the appearance, however, of the banners borne at the head of the procession, complete order was restored.

CHAPTER XI.

Night.

Concord returned to its place amidst the tents. English and French rivaled each other in their devotion and courteous attention to the illustrious travelers. The English forwarded to the French baskets of flowers, of which they had made a plentiful provision to greet the arrival of the young princess; the French in return invited the English to a supper, which was to be given the next day. Congratulations were poured in upon the princess everywhere during her journey. From the respect paid her on all sides, she seemed like a queen; and from the adoration with which she was treated by two or three; she appeared an object of worship. The queen-mother gave the French the most affectionate reception. France was her native country, and she had suffered too much unhappiness in England for England to have made her forget France. She taught her daughter, then, by her own affection for it, that love for a country where they had both been hospitably received, and where a brilliant future opened before them. After the public entry was over, and the spectators in the streets had partially dispersed, and the sound of the music and cheering of the crowd could be heard only in the distance; when the night had closed in, wrapping with its star-covered mantle the sea, the harbor, the town, and surrounding country, De Guiche, still excited by the great events of the day, returned to his tent, and seated himself upon one of the stools with so profound an expression of distress that Bragelonne kept his eyes fixed upon him, until he heard him sigh, and then he approached him. The count had thrown himself back on his seat, leaning his shoulders against the partition of the tent, and remained thus, his face buried in his hands, with heaving chest and restless limbs.

“You are suffering?” asked Raoul.

“Cruelly.”

“Bodily, I suppose?”

“Yes; bodily.”

“This has indeed been a harassing day,” continued the young man, his eyes fixed upon his friend.

"Yes; a night's rest will probably restore me."

"Shall I leave you?"

"No; I wish to talk to you."

"You shall not speak to me, Guiche, until you have first answered my questions."

"Proceed then."

"You will be frank with me?"

"I always am."

"Can you imagine why Buckingham has been so violent?"

"I suspect."

"Because he is in love with Madame, is it not?"

"One could almost swear to it, to observe him."

"You are mistaken; there is nothing of the kind."

"It is you who are mistaken, Raoul; I have read his distress in his eyes, in his every gesture and action the whole day."

"You are a poet, my dear count, and find subjects for your muse everywhere."

"I can perceive love clearly enough."

"Where it does not exist?"

"Nay, where it does exist."

"Do you not think you are deceiving yourself, Guiche?"

"I am convinced of what I say," said the count.

"Now, inform me, count," said Raoul, fixing a penetrating look upon him, "what happened to render you so clear-sighted."

Guiche hesitated for a moment, and then answered, "Self-love, I suppose."

"Self-love is a pedantic word, Guiche."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that, generally, you are less out of spirits than seems to be the case this evening."

"I am fatigued."

"Listen to me, Guiche; we have been campaigners together; we have been on horseback for eighteen hours at a time, and our horses dying from exhaustion, or hunger, have fallen beneath us, and yet we have laughed at our mishaps. Believe me, it is not fatigue that saddens you to-night."

"It is annoyance, then."

"What annoyance?"

“That of this evening.”

“The mad conduct of the Duke of Buckingham, do you mean?”

“Of course; is it not vexations for us, the representatives of our sovereign master, to witness the devotion of an Englishman to our future mistress, the second lady in point of rank in the kingdom?”

“Yes, you are right; but I do not think any danger is to be apprehended from Buckingham.”

“No; still he is intrusive. Did he not, on his arrival here, almost succeed in creating a disturbance between the English and ourselves; and, had it not been for you, for your admirable presence, for your singular decision of character, swords would have been drawn in the very streets of the town.”

“You observe, however, that he has changed his tactics.”

“Yes, certainly; but this is the very thing that amazes me so much. You spoke to him in a low tone of voice, what did you say to him? You think he loves her; you admit that such a passion does not give way readily. He does not love her, then!” De Guiche pronounced the latter with so marked an expression that Raoul raised his head. The noble character of the young man’s countenance expressed a displeasure which could easily be read.

“What I said to him, count,” replied Raoul, “I will repeat to you. Listen to me. I said, ‘You are regarding with wistful feelings, and most injurious desire, the sister of your prince, — her to whom you are not affianced, who is not, who can never be anything to you; you are outraging those who, like ourselves, have come to seek a young lady to escort her to her husband.’“

“You spoke to him in that manner?” asked Guiche, coloring.

“In those very terms; I even added more. ‘How would you regard us,’ I said, ‘if you were to perceive among us a man mad enough, disloyal enough, to entertain other than sentiments of the most perfect respect for a princess who is the destined wife of our master?’“

These words were so applicable to De Guiche that he turned pale, and, overcome by a sudden agitation, was barely able to stretch out one hand mechanically towards Raoul, as he covered his eyes and face with the other.

“But,” continued Raoul, not interrupted by this movement of his friend, “Heaven be praised, the French, who are pronounced to be thoughtless and indiscreet, reckless, even, are capable of bringing a calm and sound judgment to bear on matters of such high importance. I added even more, for I said, ‘Learn, my lord, that we gentlemen of France devote ourselves to our sovereigns by sacrificing them our affections, as well as our fortunes and our lives; and whenever it may chance to happen that the tempter suggests one of those vile thoughts that set the heart on fire, we extinguish the flame, even if it has to be done by shedding our blood for the purpose. Thus it is that the honor of three is saved: our country's, our master's, and our own. It is thus that we act, your Grace; it is thus that every man of honor ought to act.' In this manner, my dear Guiche," continued Bragelonne, "I addressed the Duke of Buckingham; and he admitted I was right, and resigned himself unresistingly to my arguments."

De Guiche, who had hitherto sat leaning forward while Raoul was speaking, drew himself up, his eyes glancing proudly; he seized Raoul's hand, his face, which had been as cold as ice, seemed on fire. "And you spoke magnificently," he said, in a half-choked voice; "you are indeed a friend, Raoul. But now, I entreat you, leave me to myself."

"Do you wish it?"

"Yes; I need repose. Many things have agitated me to-day, both in mind and body; when you return to-morrow I shall no longer be the same man."

"I leave you, then," said Raoul, as he withdrew. The count advanced a step towards his friend, and pressed him warmly in his arms. But in this friendly pressure Raoul could detect the nervous agitation of a great internal conflict.

The night was clear, starlit, and splendid; the tempest had passed away, and the sweet influences of the evening had restored life, peace and security everywhere. A few fleecy clouds were floating in the heavens, and indicated from their appearance a continuance of beautiful weather, tempered by a gentle breeze from the east. Upon the large square in front of the hotel, the shadows of the tents, intersected by the golden moonbeams, formed as it were a huge mosaic of jet and yellow flagstones. Soon, however, the entire town was wrapped in slumber; a feeble light still glimmered in Madame's apartment, which looked out upon the square, and the soft rays from the expiring lamp seemed to be the image of the calm sleep of a young girl, hardly yet sensible of life's anxieties, and in whom the flame of existence sinks placidly as sleep steals over the body.

Bragelonne quitted the tent with the slow and measured step of a man curious to observe, but anxious not to be seen. Sheltered behind the thick curtains of his own tent, embracing with a glance the whole square, he noticed that, after a few moments' pause, the curtains of De Guiche's tent were agitated, and then drawn partially aside. Behind them he could perceive the shadow of De Guiche, his eyes, glittering in the obscurity, fastened ardently upon the princess's sitting apartment, which was partially lighted by the lamp in the inner room. The soft light which illumined the windows was the count's star. The fervent aspirations of his nature could be read in his eyes. Raoul, concealed in the shadow, divined the many passionate thoughts that established, between the tent of the young ambassador and the balcony of the princess, a mysterious and magical bond of sympathy — a bond created by thoughts imprinted with so much strength and persistence of will, that they must have caused happy and loving dreams to alight upon the perfumed couch, which the count, with the eyes of his soul, devoured so eagerly.

But De Guiche and Raoul were not the only watchers. The window of one of the houses looking on the square was opened too, the casement of the house where Buckingham resided. By the aid of the rays of light which issued from this latter, the profile of the duke could be distinctly seen, as he indolently reclined upon the carved balcony with its velvet hangings; he also was breathing in the direction of the princess's apartment his prayers and the wild visions of his love.

Raoul could not resist smiling, as thinking of Madame, he said to himself, "Hers is, indeed, a heart well besieged;" and then added, compassionately, as he thought of Monsieur, "and he is a husband well threatened too; it is a good thing for him that he is a prince of such high rank, that he has an army to safeguard for him that which is his own." Bragelonne watched for some time the conduct of the two lovers, listened to the loud and uncivil slumbers of Manicamp, who snored as imperiously as though he was wearing his blue and gold, instead of his violet suit.

Then he turned towards the night breeze which bore towards him, he seemed to think, the distant song of the nightingale; and, after having laid in a due provision of melancholy, another nocturnal malady, he retired to rest thinking, with regard to his own love affair, that perhaps four or even a larger number of eyes, quite as ardent as those of De Guiche and Buckingham, were coveting his own idol in the chateau at Blois. "And Mademoiselle de Montalais is by no means a very conscientious garrison," said he to himself, sighing aloud.

CHAPTER XII.

From Le Havre to Paris.

The next day the *fetes* took place, accompanied by all the pomp and animation that the resources of the town and the cheerful disposition of men’s minds could supply. During the last few hours spent in Le Havre, every preparation for the departure had been made. After Madame had taken leave of the English fleet, and, once again, had saluted the country in saluting its flags, she entered her carriage, surrounded by a brilliant escort. De Guiche had hoped that the Duke of Buckingham would accompany the admiral to England; but Buckingham succeeded in demonstrating to the queen that there would be great impropriety in allowing Madame to proceed to Paris, almost unprotected. As soon as it had been settled that Buckingham was to accompany Madame, the young duke selected a corps of gentlemen and officers to form part of his own suite, so that it was almost an army that now set out towards Paris, scattering gold, and exciting the liveliest demonstrations as they passed through the different towns and villages on the route. The weather was very fine. France is a beautiful country, especially along the route by which the procession passed. Spring cast its flowers and its perfumed foliage on their path. Normandy, with its vast variety of vegetation, its blue skies and silver rivers, displayed itself in all the loveliness of a paradise to the new sister of the king. *Fetes* and brilliant displays received them everywhere along the line of march. De Guiche and Buckingham forgot everything; De Guiche in his anxiety to prevent any fresh attempts on the part of the duke, and Buckingham, in his desire to awaken in the heart of the princess a softer remembrance of the country to which the recollection of many happy days belonged. But, alas! the poor duke could perceive that the image of that country so cherished by himself became, from day to day, more and more effaced in Madame’s mind, in exact proportion as her affection for France became more deeply engraved on her heart. In fact, it was not difficult to perceive that his most devoted attention awakened no acknowledgement, and that the grace with which he rode one of his most fiery horses was thrown away, for it was only casually and by the merest accident that the princess's eyes were turned towards him. In vain did he try, in order to fix upon himself one of those looks, which were thrown carelessly around, or bestowed elsewhere, to produce in the animal he rode its greatest display of strength, speed, temper and address; in vain did he, by exciting his horse almost to madness, spur him, at the risk of dashing himself in pieces against the trees, or of rolling in the ditches, over the gates and barriers which they passed, or down the steep declivities of the hills. Madame, whose attention had been aroused by the noise, turned her head for a moment to observe the cause of it, and then, slightly smiling, again entered into conversation with her faithful guardians, Raoul and De Guiche, who were quietly riding at her carriage doors. Buckingham felt himself a prey to all the tortures of jealousy; an unknown, unheard of anguish glided through his veins, and laid siege to his heart; and then, as if to show that he knew the folly of his conduct, and that he wished to correct, by the humblest submission, his flights of absurdity, he mastered his horse, and compelled him, reeking with sweat and flecked with foam, to champ his bit close beside the carriage, amidst the crowd of courtiers. Occasionally he obtained a word from Madame as a recompense, and yet her speech seemed almost a reproach.

"That is well, my lord," she said, "now you are reasonable."

Or from Raoul, "Your Grace is killing your horse."

Buckingham listened patiently to Raoul's remarks, for he instinctively felt, without having had any proof that such was the case, that Raoul checked the display of De Guiche's feelings, and that, had it not been for Raoul, some mad act or proceeding, either of the count, or of Buckingham himself, would have brought about an open rupture, or a disturbance — perhaps even exile itself. From the moment of that excited conversation the two young men had held in front of the tents at Le Havre, when Raoul made the duke perceive the impropriety of his conduct, Buckingham felt himself attracted towards Raoul almost in spite of himself. He often entered into conversation with him, and it was nearly always to talk to him either of his father or of D'Artagnan, their mutual friend, in whose praise Buckingham was nearly as enthusiastic as Raoul. Raoul endeavored, as much as possible, to make the conversation turn upon this subject in De Wardes's presence, who had, during the whole journey, been exceedingly annoyed at the superior position taken by Bragelonne, and especially by his influence over De Guiche. De Wardes had that keen and merciless penetration most evil natures possess; he had immediately remarked De Guiche's melancholy, and divined the nature of his regard for the princess. Instead, however, of treating the subject with the same reserve which Raoul practiced; instead of regarding with that respect, which was their due, the obligations and duties of society, De Wardes resolutely attacked in the count the ever-sounding chord of juvenile audacity and pride. It happened one evening, during a halt at Mantes, that while De Guiche and De Wardes were leaning against a barrier, engaged in conversation, Buckingham and Raoul were also talking together as they walked up and down. Manicamp was engaged in devoted attendance on the princess, who already treated him without reserve, on account of his versatile fancy, his frank courtesy of manner, and conciliatory disposition.

"Confess," said De Wardes, "that you are really ill, and that your pedagogue of a friend has not succeeded in curing you."

"I do not understand you," said the count.

"And yet it is easy enough; you are dying of love."

"You are mad, De Wardes."

"Madness it would be, I admit, if Madame were really indifferent to your martyrdom; but she takes so much notice of it, observes it to such an extent, that she compromises herself, and I tremble lest, on our arrival at Paris, M. de Bragelonne may not denounce both of you."

"For shame, De Wardes, again attacking De Bragelonne."

"Come, come, a truce to child's play," replied the count's evil genius, in an undertone; "you know as well as I do what I mean. Besides, you must have observed how the princess's glance softens as she looks at you; — you can tell, by the very inflection of her voice, what pleasure she takes in listening to you, and can feel how thoroughly she appreciates the verses you recite to her. You cannot deny, too, that every morning she tells you how indifferently she slept the previous night."

"True, De Wardes, quite true; but what good is there in your telling me all that?"

"Is it not important to know the exact position of affairs?"

"No, no; not when I am a witness of things that are enough to drive one mad."

"Stay, stay," said De Wardes; "look, she calls you, — do you understand? Profit by the occasion, while your pedagogue is absent."

De Guiche could not resist; an invincible attraction drew him towards the princess. De Wardes smiled as he saw him withdraw.

"You are mistaken, monsieur," said Raoul, suddenly stepping across the barrier against which the previous moment the two friends had been leaning. "The pedagogue is here, and has overheard you."

De Wardes, at the sound of Raoul's voice, which he recognized without having occasion to look at him, half drew his sword.

"Put up your sword," said Raoul; "you know perfectly well that, until our journey is at an end, every demonstration of that nature is useless. Why do you distill into the heart of the man you term your friend all the bitterness that infects your own? As regards myself, you wish to arouse a feeling of deep dislike against a man of honor — my father's friend and my own; and as for the count you wish him to love one who is destined for your master. Really, monsieur, I should regard you as a coward, and a traitor too, if I did not, with greater justice, regard you as a madman."

"Monsieur," exclaimed De Wardes, exasperated, "I was deceived, I find, in terming you a pedagogue. The tone you assume, and the style which is peculiarly your own, is that of a Jesuit, and not of a gentleman. Discontinue, I beg, whenever I am present, this style I complain of, and the tone also. I hate M. d'Artagnan, because he was guilty of a cowardly act towards my father."

"You lie, monsieur," said Raoul, coolly.

"You give me the lie, monsieur?" exclaimed De Wardes.

"Why not, if what you assert is untrue?"

"You give me the lie, and will not draw your sword?"

"I have resolved, monsieur, not to kill you until Madame shall have been delivered safely into her husband's hands."

"Kill me! Believe me, monsieur, your schoolmaster's rod does not kill so easily."

"No," replied Raoul, sternly, "but M. d'Artagnan's sword kills; and, not only do I possess his sword, but he has himself taught me how to use it; and with that sword, when a befitting time arrives, I will avenge his name — a name you have dishonored."

"Take care, monsieur," exclaimed De Wardes; "if you do not immediately give me satisfaction, I will avail myself of every means to revenge myself."

"Indeed, monsieur," said Buckingham, suddenly, appearing upon the scene of action, "that is a threat which savors of assassination, and therefore, ill becomes a gentleman.”

“What did you say, my lord?” said De Wardes, turning round towards him.

“I said, monsieur, that the words you have just spoken are displeasing to my English ears.”

“Very well, monsieur, if what you say is true,” exclaimed De Wardes, thoroughly incensed, “I at least find in you one who will not escape me. Understand my words as you like.”

“I take them in the manner they cannot but be understood,” replied Buckingham, with that haughty tone which characterized him, and which, even in ordinary conversation, gave a tone of defiance to everything he said; “M. de Bragelonne is my friend, you insult M. de Bragelonne, and you shall give me satisfaction for that insult.”

De Wardes cast a look upon De Bragelonne, who, faithful to the character he had assumed, remained calm and unmoved, even after the duke’s defiance.

“It would seem that I did not insult M. de Bragelonne, since M. de Bragelonne, who carries a sword by his side, does not consider himself insulted.”

“At all events you insult someone.”

“Yes, I insulted M. d’Artagnan,” resumed De Wardes, who had observed that this was the only means of stinging Raoul, so as to awaken his anger.

“That, then,” said Buckingham, “is another matter.”

“Precisely so,” said De Wardes; “it is the province of M. d’Artagnan’s friends to defend him.”

“I am entirely of your opinion,” replied the duke, who had regained all his indifference of manner; “if M. de Bragelonne were offended, I could not reasonably be expected to espouse his quarrel, since he is himself here; but when you say that it is a quarrel of M. d’Artagnan — ”

“You will of course leave me to deal with the matter,” said De Wardes.

“Nay, on the contrary, for I draw my sword,” said Buckingham, unsheathing it as he spoke; “for if M. d’Artagnan injured your father, he rendered, or at least did all that he could to render, a great service to mine.”

De Wardes was thunderstruck.

“M. d’Artagnan,” continued Buckingham, “is the bravest gentleman I know. I shall be delighted, as I owe him many personal obligations, to settle them with you, by crossing my sword with yours.” At the same moment

Buckingham drew his sword from its scabbard, saluted Raoul, and put himself on guard.

De Wardes advanced a step to meet him.

“Stay, gentlemen,” said Raoul, advancing towards them, and placing his own drawn sword between the combatants, “the affair is hardly worth the trouble of blood being shed almost in the presence of the princess. M. de Wardes speaks ill of M. d’Artagnan, with whom he is not even acquainted.”

“What, monsieur,” said De Wardes, setting his teeth hard together, and resting the point of his sword on the toe of his boot, “do you assert that I do not know M. d’Artagnan?”

“Certainly not; you do not know him,” replied Raoul, coldly, “and you are even not aware where he is to be found.”

“Not know where he is?”

“Such must be the case, since you fix your quarrel with him upon strangers, instead of seeking M. d’Artagnan where he is to be found.” De Wardes turned pale. “Well, monsieur,” continued Raoul, “I will tell you where M. d’Artagnan is: he is now in Paris; when on duty he is to be met with at the Louvre, — when not on duty, in the Rue des Lombards. M. d’Artagnan can easily be discovered at either of those two places. Having, therefore, as you assert, so many causes of complaint against him, show your courage in seeking him out, and afford him an opportunity of giving you that satisfaction you seem to ask of every one but of himself.” De Wardes passed his hand across his forehead, which was covered with perspiration. “For shame, M. de Wardes! so quarrelsome a disposition is hardly becoming after the publication of the edicts against duels. Pray think of that; the king will be incensed at our disobedience, particularly at such a time, — and his majesty will be in the right.”

“Excuses,” murmured De Wardes; “mere pretexts.”

“Really, M. De Wardes,” resumed Raoul, “such remarks are the idlest bluster. You know very well that the Duke of Buckingham is a man of undoubted courage, who has already fought ten duels, and will probably fight eleven. His name alone is significant enough. As far as I am concerned, you are well aware that I can fight also. I fought at Lens, at Bleneau, at the Dunes in front of the artillery, a hundred paces in front of the line, while you — I say this parenthetically — were a hundred paces behind it. True it is, that on that occasion there was far too great a concourse of persons present for your courage to be observed, and on that account perhaps you did not reveal it; while here, it would be a display, and would excite remark — you wish that others should talk about you, in what manner you do not care. Do not depend upon me, M. de Wardes to assist you in your designs, for I shall certainly not afford you that pleasure."

"Sensibly observed," said Buckingham, putting up his sword, "and I ask your forgiveness, M. de Bragelonne, for having allowed myself to yield to a first impulse."

De Wardes, however, on the contrary, perfectly furious, bounded forward and raised his sword, threateningly, against Raoul, who had scarcely enough time to put himself in a posture of defense.

"Take care, monsieur," said Bragelonne, tranquilly, "or you will put out one of my eyes."

"You will not fight, then?" said De Wardes.

"Not at this moment; but this I promise to do; immediately on our arrival at Paris I will conduct you to M. d'Artagnan, to whom you shall detail all the causes of complaint you have against him. M d'Artagnan will solicit the king's permission to measure swords with you. The king will yield his consent, and when you shall have received the sword-thrust in due course, you will consider, in a calmer frame of mind, the precepts of the Gospel, which enjoin forgetfulness of injuries."

"Ah!" exclaimed De Wardes, furious at this imperturbable coolness, "one can clearly see you are half a bastard, M. de Bragelonne."

Raoul became as pale as death; his eyes flashed lightning, causing De Wardes involuntarily to fall back. Buckingham, also, who had perceived their expression, threw himself between the two adversaries, whom he had expected to see precipitate themselves on each other. De Wardes had reserved this injury for the last; he clasped his sword firmly in his hand, and awaited the encounter. "You are right, monsieur," said Raoul, mastering his emotion, "I am only acquainted with my father's name; but I know too well that the Comte de la Fere is too upright and honorable a man to allow me to fear for a single moment that there is, as you insinuate, any stain upon my birth. My ignorance, therefore, of my mother's name is a misfortune for me, and not a reproach. You are deficient in loyalty of conduct; you are wanting in courtesy, in reproaching me with misfortune. It matters little, however, the insult has been given, and I consider myself insulted accordingly. It is quite understood, then, that after you shall have received satisfaction from M. d'Artagnan, you will settle your quarrel with me."

"I admire your prudence, monsieur," replied De Wardes with a bitter smile; "a little while ago you promised me a sword-thrust from M. d'Artagnan, and now, after I shall have received his, you offer me one from yourself."

"Do not disturb yourself," replied Raoul, with concentrated anger; "in all affairs of that nature, M. d'Artagnan is exceedingly skillful, and I will beg him as a favor to treat you as he did your father; in other words, to spare your life at least, so as to leave me the pleasure, after your recovery, of killing you outright; for you have the heart of a viper, M. de Wardes, and in very truth, too many precautions cannot be taken against you."

"I shall take my precautions against you," said De Wardes, "be assured of it."

"Allow me, monsieur," said Buckingham, "to translate your remark by a piece of advice I am about to give M. de Bragelonne; M. de Bragelonne, wear a cuirass."

De Wardes clenched his hands. "Ah!" said he, "you two gentlemen intend to wait until you have taken that precaution before you measure your swords against mine."

"Very well, monsieur," said Raoul, "since you positively will have it so, let us settle the affair now." And, drawing his sword, he advanced towards De Wardes.

"What are you going to do?" said Buckingham.

"Be easy," said Raoul, "it will not be very long."

De Wardes placed himself on his guard; their swords crossed. De Wardes flew upon Raoul with such impetuosity, that at the first clashing of the steel blades Buckingham clearly saw that Raoul was only trifling with his adversary. Buckingham stepped aside, and watched the combat. Raoul was as calm as if he were handling a foil instead of a sword; having retreated a step, he parried three or four fierce thrusts which De Wardes made at him, caught the sword of the latter with within his own, and sent it flying twenty paces the other side of the barrier. Then as De Wardes stood disarmed and astounded at his defeat, Raoul sheathed his sword, seized him by the collar and the waist band, and hurled his adversary to the other end of the barrier, trembling, and mad with rage.

"We shall meet again," murmured De Wardes, rising from the ground and picking up his sword.

“I have done nothing for the last hour,” said Raoul, rising from the ground, “but say the same thing.” Then, turning towards the duke, he said, “I entreat you to be silent about this affair; I am ashamed to have gone so far, but my anger carried me away, and I ask your forgiveness for it; — forget it, too.”

“Dear viscount,” said the duke, pressing with his own the vigorous and valiant hand of his companion, “allow me, on the contrary, to remember it, and to look after your safety; that man is dangerous, — he will kill you.”

“My father,” replied Raoul, “lived for twenty years under the menace of a much more formidable enemy, and he still lives.”

“Your father had good friends, viscount.”

“Yes,” sighed Raoul, “such friends, indeed, that none are now left like them.”

“Do not say that, I beg, at the very moment I offer you my friendship;” and Buckingham opened his arms to embrace Raoul, who delightedly received the proffered alliance. “In my family,” added Buckingham, “you are aware, M. de Bragelonne, we die to save our friends.”

“I know it well, duke,” replied Raoul.

CHAPTER XIII.

An Account of what the Chevalier de Lorraine Thought of Madame.

Nothing further interrupted the journey. Under a pretext that was little remarked, M. de Wardes went forward in advance of the others. He took Manicamp with him, for his equable and dreamy disposition acted as a counterpoise to his own. It is a subject of remark, that quarrelsome and restless characters invariably seek the companionship of gentle, timorous dispositions, as if the former sought, in the contrast, a repose for their own ill-humor, and the latter a protection for their weakness. Buckingham and Bragelonne, admitting De Guiche into their friendship, in concert with him, sang the praises of the princess during the whole of the journey. Bragelonne, had, however, insisted that their three voices should be in concert, instead of singing in solo parts, as De Guiche and his rival seemed to have acquired a dangerous habit of doing. This style of harmony pleased the queen-mother exceedingly, but it was not perhaps so agreeable to the young princess, who was an incarnation of coquetry, and who, without any fear as far as her own voice was concerned, sought opportunities of so perilously distinguishing herself. She possessed one of those fearless and incautious dispositions that find gratification in an excess of sensitiveness of feeling, and for whom, also, danger has a certain fascination. And so her glances, her smiles, her toilette, an inexhaustible armory of weapons of offense, were showered on the three young men with overwhelming force; and, from her well-stored arsenal issued glances, kindly recognitions, and a thousand other little charming attentions which were intended to strike at long range the gentlemen who formed the escort, the townspeople, the officers of the different cities she passed through, pages, populace, and servants; it was wholesale slaughter, a general devastation. By the time Madame arrived at Paris, she had reduced to slavery about a hundred thousand lovers: and brought in her train to Paris half a dozen men who were almost mad about her, and two who were, indeed, literally out of their minds. Raoul was the only person who divined the power of this woman's attraction, and as his heart was already engaged, he arrived in the capital full of indifference and distrust. Occasionally during the journey he conversed with the queen of England respecting the power of fascination which Madame possessed, and the mother, whom so many misfortunes and deceptions had taught experience, replied: “Henrietta was sure to be illustrious in one way or another, whether born in a palace or born in obscurity; for she is a woman of great imagination, capricious and self-willed.” De Wardes and Manicamp, in their self-assumed character of courtiers, had announced the princess’s arrival. The procession was met at Nanterre by a brilliant escort of cavaliers and carriages. It was Monsieur himself, followed by the Chevalier de Lorraine and by his favorites, the latter being themselves followed by a portion of the king’s military household, who had arrived to meet his affianced bride. At St. Germain, the princess and her mother had changed their heavy traveling carriage, somewhat impaired by the journey, for a light, richly decorated chariot drawn by six horses with white and gold harness. Seated in this open carriage, as though upon a throne, and beneath a parasol of embroidered silk, fringed with feathers, sat the young and lovely princess, on whose beaming face were reflected the softened rose-tints which suited her delicate skin to perfection. Monsieur, on reaching the carriage, was struck by her beauty; he showed his admiration in so marked a manner that the Chevalier de Lorraine shrugged his shoulders as he listened to his compliments, while Buckingham and De Guiche were almost heart-broken. After the usual courtesies had been rendered, and the ceremony completed, the procession slowly resumed the road to Paris. The presentations had been carelessly made, and Buckingham, with the rest of the English gentlemen, had been introduced to Monsieur, from whom they had received but very indifferent attention. But, during their progress, as he observed that the duke devoted himself with his accustomed eagerness to the carriage-door, he asked the Chevalier de Lorraine, his inseparable companion, “Who is that cavalier?”

“He was presented to your highness a short while ago; it is the handsome Duke of Buckingham.”

“Ah, yes, I remember.”

“Madame’s knight,” added the favorite, with an inflection of the voice which envious minds can alone give to the simplest phrases.

“What do you say?” replied the prince.

“I said ‘Madame’s knight’.”

"Has she a recognized knight, then?"

"One would think you can judge of that for yourself; look, only, how they are laughing and flirting. All three of them."

"What do you mean by *all three?*"

"Do you not see that De Guiche is one of the party?"

"Yes, I see. But what does that prove?"

"That Madame has two admirers instead of one."

"You poison the simplest thing!"

"I poison nothing. Ah! your royal highness's mind is perverted. The honors of the kingdom of France are being paid to your wife and you are not satisfied."

The Duke of Orleans dreaded the satirical humor of the Chevalier de Lorraine whenever it reached a certain degree of bitterness, and he changed the conversation abruptly. "The princess is pretty," said he, very negligently, as if he were speaking of a stranger.

"Yes," replied the chevalier, in the same tone.

"You say 'yes' like a 'no'. She has very beautiful black eyes."

"Yes, but small."

"That is so, but they are brilliant. She is tall, and of a good figure."

"I fancy she stoops a little, my lord."

"I do not deny it. She has a noble appearance."

"Yes, but her face is thin."

"I thought her teeth beautiful."

"They can easily be seen, for her mouth is large enough. Decidedly, I was wrong, my lord; you are certainly handsomer than your wife."

"But do you think me as handsome as Buckingham?"

"Certainly, and he thinks so, too; for look, my lord, he is redoubling his attentions to Madame to prevent your effacing the impression he has made."

Monsieur made a movement of impatience, but as he noticed a smile of triumph pass across the chevalier's lips, he drew up his horse to a foot-pace. "Why," said he, "should I occupy myself any longer about my cousin? Do I not already know her? Were we not brought up together? Did I not see her at the Louvre when she was quite a child?"

"A great change has taken place in her since then, prince. At the period you allude to, she was somewhat less brilliant, and scarcely so proud, either. One evening, particularly, you may remember, my lord, the king refused to dance with her, because he thought her plain and badly dressed!"

These words made the Duke of Orleans frown. It was by no means flattering for him to marry a princess of whom, when young, the king had not thought much. He would probably have retorted, but at this moment De Guiche quitted the carriage to join the prince. He had remarked the prince and the chevalier together, and full of anxious attention he seemed to try and guess the nature of the remarks which they had just exchanged. The chevalier, whether he had some treacherous object in view, or from imprudence, did not take the trouble to dissimulate. “Count,” he said, “you’re a man of excellent taste.”

“Thank you for the compliment,” replied De Guiche; “but why do you say that?”

“Well I appeal to his highness.”

“No doubt of it,” said Monsieur; “and Guiche knows perfectly well that I regard him as a most finished cavalier.”

“Well, since that is decided, I resume. You have been in the princess’s society, count, for the last eight days, have you not?”

“Yes,” replied De Guiche, coloring in spite of himself.

“Well then, tell us frankly, what do you think of her personal appearance?”

“Of her personal appearance?” returned De Guiche, stupefied.

“Yes; of her appearance, of her mind, of herself, in fact.”

Astounded by this question, De Guiche hesitated answering.

“Come, come, De Guiche,” resumed the chevalier, laughingly, “tell us your opinion frankly; the prince commands it.”

“Yes, yes,” said the prince, “be frank.”

De Guiche stammered out a few unintelligible words.

“I am perfectly well aware,” returned Monsieur, “that the subject is a delicate one, but you know you can tell me everything. What do you think of her?”

In order to avoid betraying his real thoughts, De Guiche had recourse to the only defense which a man taken by surprise really has, and accordingly told an untruth. “I do not find Madame,” he said, “either good or bad looking, yet rather good than bad looking.”

“What! count,” exclaimed the chevalier, “you who went into such ecstasies and uttered so many exclamations at the sight of her portrait.”

De Guiche colored violently. Very fortunately, his horse, which was slightly restive, enabled him by a sudden plunge to conceal his agitation.

"What portrait?" he murmured, joining them again. The chevalier had not taken his eyes off him.

"Yes, the portrait. Was not the miniature a good likeness?"

"I do not remember. I had forgotten the portrait; it quite escaped my recollection."

"And yet it made a very marked impression upon you," said the chevalier.

"That is not unlikely."

"Is she witty, at all events?" inquired the duke.

"I believe so, my lord."

"Is M. de Buckingham witty, too?" said the chevalier.

"I do not know."

"My own opinion is that he must be," replied the chevalier, "for he makes Madame laugh, and she seems to take no little pleasure in his society, which never happens to a clever woman when in the company of a simpleton."

"Of course, then, he must be clever," said De Guiche, simply.

At this moment Raoul opportunely arrived, seeing how De Guiche was pressed by his dangerous questioner, to whom he addressed a remark, and in that way changed the conversation. The *entree* was brilliant and joyous.

The king, in honor of his brother, had directed that the festivities should be on a scale of the greatest possible magnificence. Madame and her mother alighted at the Louvre, where, during their exile they had so gloomily submitted to obscurity, misery, and privations of every description. That palace, which had been so inhospitable a residence for the unhappy daughter of Henry IV., the naked walls, the uneven floorings, the ceilings matted with cobwebs, the vast dilapidated chimney-places, the cold hearths on which the charity extended to them by parliament hardly permitted a fire to glow, was completely altered in appearance. The richest hangings and the thickest carpets, glistening flagstones, and pictures, with their richly gilded frames; in every direction could be seen candelabra, mirrors, and furniture and fittings of the most sumptuous character; in every direction, also, were guards of the proudest military bearing, with floating plumes, crowds of attendants and courtiers in the ante-chambers and upon the staircases. In the courtyards, where the grass had formerly been allowed to luxuriate, as if the ungrateful Mazarin had thought it a good idea to let the Parisians perceive the solitude and disorder were, with misery and despair, the fit accompaniments of fallen monarchy; the immense courtyards, formerly silent and desolate, were now thronged with courtiers whose horses were pacing and prancing to and fro. The carriages were filled with young and beautiful women, who awaited the opportunity of saluting, as she passed, the daughter of that daughter of France who, during her widowhood and exile, had sometimes gone without wood for her fire, and bread for her table, whom the meanest attendant at the chateau had treated with indifference and contempt. And so, the Madame Henriette once more returned to the Louvre, with her heart more swollen with bitter recollections than her daughter's, whose disposition was fickle and forgetful, with triumph and delight. She knew but too well this brilliant reception was paid to the happy mother of a king restored to his throne, a throne second to none in Europe, while the worse than indifferent reception she had before met with was paid to her, the daughter of Henry IV., as a punishment for having been unfortunate. After the princess had been installed in their apartments and had rested, the gentlemen who had formed their escort, having, in like manner, recovered from their fatigue, they resumed their accustomed habits and occupations. Raoul began by setting off to see his father, who had left for Blois. He then tried to see M. d'Artagnan, who, however, being engaged in the organization of a military household for the king, could not be found anywhere. Bragelonne next sought out De Guiche, but the count was occupied in a long conference with his tailors and with Manicamp, which consumed his whole time. With the Duke of Buckingham he fared still worse, for the duke was purchasing horses after horses, diamonds upon diamonds. He monopolized every embroiderer, jeweler, and tailor that Paris could boast of. Between De Guiche and himself a vigorous contest ensued, invariably a courteous one, in which, in order to insure success, the duke was ready to spend a million; while the Marechal de Gramont had only allowed his son sixty thousand francs. So Buckingham laughed and spent his money. Guiche groaned in despair, and would have shown it more violently, had it not been for the advice De Bragelonne gave him.

"A million!" repeated De Guiche daily; "I must submit. Why will not the marechal advance me a portion of my patrimony?"

"Because you would throw it away," said Raoul.

"What can that matter to him? If I am to die of it, I shall die of it, and then I shall need nothing further."

"But what need is there to die?" said Raoul.

“I do not wish to be conquered in elegance by an Englishman.”

“My dear count,” said Manicamp, “elegance is not a costly commodity, it is only a very difficult accomplishment.”

“Yes, but difficult things cost a good deal of money, and I have only got sixty thousand francs.”

“A very embarrassing state of things, truly,” said De Wardes; “even if you spent as much as Buckingham, there is only nine hundred and forty thousand francs difference.”

“Where am I to find them?”

“Get into debt.”

“I am in debt already.”

“A greater reason for getting further.”

Advice like this resulted in De Guiche becoming excited to such an extent that he committed extravagances where Buckingham only incurred expenses. The rumor of this extravagant profuseness delighted the hearts of all the shopkeepers in Paris; from the hotel of the Duke of Buckingham to that of the Comte de Gramont nothing but miracles was attempted. While all this was going on, Madame was resting herself, and Bragelonne was engaged in writing to Mademoiselle de la Valliere. He had already dispatched four letters, and not an answer to any one of them had been received, when, on the very morning fixed for the marriage ceremony, which was to take place in the chapel at the Palais Royal, Raoul, who was dressing, heard his valet announce M. de Malicorne. “What can this Malicorne want with me?” thought Raoul; and then said to his valet, “Let him wait.”

“It is a gentleman from Blois,” said the valet.

“Admit him at once,” said Raoul, eagerly.

Malicorne entered as brilliant as a star, and wearing a superb sword at his side. After having saluted Raoul most gracefully, he said: “M. de Bragelonne, I am the bearer of a thousand compliments from a lady to you.”

Raoul colored. “From a lady,” said he, “from a lady of Blois?”

“Yes, monsieur; from Mademoiselle de Montalais.”

“Thank you, monsieur; I recollect you now,” said Raoul. “And what does Mademoiselle de Montalais require of me.”

Malicorne drew four letters from his pocket, which he offered to Raoul.

“My own letters, is it possible?” he said, turning pale; “my letters, and the seals unbroken?”

“Monsieur, your letters did not find at Blois the person to whom they were addressed, and so they are now returned to you.”

“Mademoiselle de la Valliere has left Blois, then?” exclaimed Raoul.

“Eight days ago.”

“Where is she, then?”

“In Paris.”

“How is it known that these letters were from me?”

“Mademoiselle de Montalais recognized your handwriting and your seal,” said Malicorne.

Raoul colored and smiled. “Mademoiselle de Montalais is exceedingly amiable,” he said; “she is always kind and charming.”

“Always, monsieur.”

“Surely she could have given me some precise information about Mademoiselle de la Valliere. I never could find her in this immense city.”

Malicorne drew another packet from his pocket. “You may possibly find in this letter what you are anxious to learn.”

Raoul hurriedly broke the seal. The writing was that of Mademoiselle Aure, and inclosed were these words: — ”Paris, Palais Royal. The day of the nuptial blessing.”

“What does this mean?” inquired Raoul of Malicorne; “you probably know?”

“I do, monsieur.”

“For pity’s sake, tell me, then.”

“Impossible, monsieur.”

“Why so?”

“Because Mademoiselle Aure has forbidden me to do so.”

Raoul looked at his strange visitor, and remained silent; — ”At least, tell me whether it is fortunate or unfortunate.”

“That you will see.”

“You are very severe in your reservations.”

“Will you grant me one favor, monsieur?” said Malicorne.

“In exchange for that you refuse me?”

“Precisely.”

“What is it?”

“I have the greatest desire to see the ceremony, and I have no ticket to admit me, in spite of all the steps I have taken to secure one. Could you get me admitted?”

“Certainly.”

“Do me this kindness, then, I entreat.”

“Most willingly, monsieur; come with me.”

“I am exceedingly indebted to you, monsieur,” said Malicorne.

“I thought you were a friend of M. de Manicamp.”

“I am, monsieur; but this morning I was with him as he was dressing, and I let a bottle of blacking fall over his new dress, and he flew at me sword in hand, so that I was obliged to make my escape. That is the reason I could not ask him for a ticket. He wanted to kill me.”

“I can well believe it,” laughed Raoul. “I know Manicamp is capable of killing a man who has been unfortunate enough to commit the crime you have to reproach yourself with, but I will repair the mischief as far as you are concerned. I will but fasten my cloak, and shall then be ready to serve you, not only as a guide, but as your introducer, too.”

CHAPTER XIV.

A Surprise for Raoul.

Madame’s marriage was celebrated in the chapel of the Palais Royal, in the presence of a crowd of courtiers, who had been most scrupulously selected. However, notwithstanding the marked favor which an invitation indicated, Raoul, faithful to his promise to Malicorne, who was so anxious to witness the ceremony, obtained admission for him. After he had fulfilled this engagement, Raoul approached De Guiche, who, as if in contrast with his magnificent costume, exhibited a countenance so utterly dejected, that the Duke of Buckingham was the only one present who could contend with him as far as pallor and discomfiture were concerned.

“Take care, count,” said Raoul, approaching his friend, and preparing to support him at the moment the archbishop blessed the married couple. In fact, the Prince of Conde was attentively scrutinizing these two images of desolation, standing like caryatides on either side of the nave of the church. The count, after that, kept a more careful watch over himself.

At the termination of the ceremony, the king and queen passed onward towards the grand reception-room, where Madame and her suite were to be presented to them. It was remarked that the king, who had seemed more than surprised at his sister-in-law’s appearance, was most flattering in his compliments to her. Again, it was remarked that the queen-mother, fixing a long and thoughtful gaze upon Buckingham, leaned towards Madame de Motteville as though to ask her, “Do you not see how much he resembles his father?” and finally it was remarked that Monsieur watched everybody, and seemed quite discontented. After the reception of the princess and ambassadors, Monsieur solicited the king’s permission to present to him as well as to Madame the persons belonging to their new household.

“Are you aware, vicomte,” inquired the Prince de Conde of Raoul, “whether the household has been selected by a person of taste, and whether there are any faces worth looking at?”

“I have not the slightest idea, monseigneur,” replied Raoul.

“You affect ignorance, surely.”

“In what way, monseigneur?”

“You are a friend of De Guiche, who is one of the friends of the prince.”

“That may be so, monseigneur; but the matter having no interest whatever for me, I have never questioned De Guiche on the subject; and De Guiche, on his part, never having been questioned, did not communicate any particulars to me.”

“But Manicamp?”

“It is true I saw Manicamp at Le Havre, and during the journey here, but I was no more inquisitive with him than I had been towards De Guiche. Besides, is it likely that Manicamp should know anything of such matters? for he is a person of only secondary importance.”

“My dear vicomte, do you not know better than that?” said the prince; “why, it is these persons of secondary importance, who, on such occasions, have all the influence; and the truth is, that nearly everything has been done through Manicamp’s presentations to De Guiche, and through De Guiche to Monsieur.”

“I assure you, monseigneur, I was ignorant of that,” said Raoul, “and what your highness does me the honor to impart is perfectly new to me.”

“I will most readily believe you, although it seems incredible; besides we shall not have long to wait. See, the flying squadron is advancing, as good Queen Catherine used to say. Ah! ah! what pretty faces!”

A bevy of young girls at this moment entered the *salon*, conducted by Madame de Navailles, and to Manicamp’s credit be it said, if indeed he had taken that part in their selection which the Prince de Conde assigned him, it was a display calculated to dazzle those who, like the prince, could appreciate every character and style of beauty. A young, fair-complexioned girl, from twenty to one-and-twenty years of age, and whose large blue eyes flashed, as she opened them, in the most dazzling manner, walked at the head of the band and was the first presented.

“Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente,” said Madame de Navailles to Monsieur, who, as he saluted his wife, repeated “Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente.”

“Ah! ah!” said the Prince de Conde to Raoul, “she is presentable enough.”

“Yes,” said Raoul, “but has she not a somewhat haughty style?”

“Bah! we know these airs very well, vicomte; three months hence she will be tame enough. But look, there, indeed, is a pretty face.”

“Yes,” said Raoul, “and one I am acquainted with.”

“Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais,” said Madame de Navailles. The name and Christian name were carefully repeated by Monsieur.

“Great heavens!” exclaimed Raoul, fixing his bewildered gaze upon the entrance doorway.

“What’s the matter?” inquired the prince; “was it Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais who made you utter such a ‘Great heavens’?”

“No, monseigneur, no,” replied Raoul, pale and trembling.

“Well, then, if it be not Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais, it is that pretty *blonde* who follows her. What beautiful eyes! She is rather thin, but has fascinations without number.”

“Mademoiselle de la Baume le Blanc de la Valliere!” said Madame de Navailles; and, as this name resounded through his whole being, a cloud seemed to rise from his breast to his eyes, so that he neither saw nor heard anything more; and the prince, finding him nothing more than a mere echo which remained silent under his railleries, moved forward to inspect somewhat closer the beautiful girls whom his first glance had already particularized.

“Louise here! Louise a maid of honor to Madame!” murmured Raoul, and his eyes, which did not suffice to satisfy his reason, wandered from Louise to Montalais. The latter had already emancipated herself from her assumed timidity, which she only needed for the presentation and for her reverences.

Mademoiselle de Montalais, from the corner of the room to which she had retired, was looking with no slight confidence at the different persons present; and, having discovered Raoul, she amused herself with the profound astonishment which her own and her friend’s presence there caused the unhappy lover. Her waggish and malicious look, which Raoul tried to avoid meeting, and which yet he sought inquiringly from time to time, placed him on the rack. As for Louise, whether from natural timidity, or some other reason for which Raoul could not account, she kept her eyes constantly cast down; intimidated, dazzled, and with impeded respiration, she withdrew herself as much as possible aside, unaffected even by the nudges Montalais gave her with her elbow. The whole scene was a perfect enigma for Raoul, the key to which he would have given anything to obtain. But no one was there who could assist him, not even Malicorne; who, a little uneasy at finding himself in the presence of so many persons of good birth, and not a little discouraged by Montalais's bantering glances, had described a circle, and by degrees succeeded in getting a few paces from the prince, behind the group of maids of honor, and nearly within reach of Mademoiselle Aure's voice, she being the planet around which he, as her attendant satellite, seemed constrained to gravitate. As he recovered his self-possession, Raoul fancied he recognized voices on his right hand side that were familiar to him, and he perceived De Wardes, De Guiche, and the Chevalier de Lorraine conversing together. It is true they were talking in tones so low, that the sound of their words could hardly be heard in the vast apartment. To speak in that manner from any particular place without bending down, or turning round, or looking at the person with whom one may be engaged in conversation, is a talent that cannot be immediately acquired by newcomers. Long study is needed for such conversations, which, without a look, gesture, or movement of the head, seem like the conversation of a group of statues. In fact, the king's and queen's grand assemblies, while their majesties were speaking, and while every one present seemed to be listening in the midst of the most profound silence, some of these noiseless conversations took place, in which adulation was not the prevailing feature. But Raoul was one among others exceedingly clever in this art, so much a matter of etiquette, that from the movement of the lips, he was often able to guess the sense of the words.

"Who is that Montalais?" inquired De Wardes, "and that La Valliere? What country-town have we had sent here?"

"Montalais?" said the chevalier, — "oh, I know her; she is a good sort of girl, whom we shall find amusing enough. La Valliere is a charming girl, slightly lame."

"Ah! bah!" said De Wardes.

"Do not be absurd, De Wardes, there are some very characteristic and ingenious Latin axioms about lame ladies."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," said De Guiche, looking at Raoul with uneasiness, "be a little careful, I entreat you."

But the uneasiness of the count, in appearance at least, was not needed. Raoul had preserved the firmest and most indifferent countenance, although he had not lost a word that passed. He seemed to keep an account of the insolence and license of the two speakers in order to settle matters with them at the earliest opportunity.

De Wardes seemed to guess what was passing in his mind, and continued:

"Who are these young ladies' lovers?"

"Montalais's lover?" said the chevalier.

"Yes, Montalais first."

"You, I, or De Guiche, — whoever likes, in fact."

"And the other?"

"Mademoiselle de la Valliere?"

"Yes."

"Take care, gentlemen," exclaimed De Guiche, anxious to put a stop to the chevalier's reply; "take care, Madame is listening to us."

Raoul had thrust his hand up to the wrist into his *justaucorps* in great agitation. But the very malignity which he saw was excited against these poor girls made him take a serious resolution. "Poor Louise," he thought, "has come here only with an honorable object in view, and under honorable protection; and I must learn what that object is which she has in view, and who it is that protects her." And following Malicorne's maneuver, he made his way toward the group of the maids of honor. The presentations were soon over. The king, who had done nothing but look at and admire Madame, shortly afterwards left the reception-room, accompanied by the two queens. The Chevalier de Lorraine resumed his place beside Monsieur, and, as he accompanied him, insinuated a few drops of the venom he had collected during the last hour, while looking at some of the faces in the court, and suspecting that some of their hearts might be happy. A few of the persons present followed the king as he quitted the apartment; but such of the courtiers as assumed an independence of character, and professed a gallantry of disposition, began to approach the ladies of the court. The prince paid his compliments to Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, Buckingham devoted himself to Madame Chalais and Mademoiselle de Lafayette, whom Madame already distinguished by her notice, and whom she held in high regard. As for the Comte de Guiche, who had abandoned Monsieur as soon as he could approach Madame alone, he conversed, with great animation, with Madame de Valentinois, and with Mademoiselle de Crequy and de Chatillon.

Amid these varied political, and amorous interests, Malicorne was anxious to gain Montalais's attention; but the latter preferred talking with Raoul, even if it were only to amuse herself with his innumerable questions and his astonishment. Raoul had gone directly to Mademoiselle de la Valliere, and had saluted her with the profoundest respect, at which Louise blushed, and could not say a word. Montalais, however, hurried to her assistance.

"Well, monsieur le vicomte, here we are, you see."

"I do, indeed, see you," said Raoul smiling, "and it is exactly because you are here that I wish to ask for some explanation."

Malicorne approached the group with his most fascinating smile.

"Go away, Malicorne; really you are exceedingly indiscreet." At this remark Malicorne bit his lips and retired a few steps, without making any reply. His smile, however, changed its expression, and from its former frankness, became mocking in its expression.

"You wished for an explanation, M. Raoul?" inquired Montalais.

"It is surely worth one, I think; Mademoiselle de la Valliere is a maid of honor to Madame!"

"Why should she not be a maid of honor, as well as myself?" inquired Montalais.

"Pray accept my compliments, young ladies," said Raoul, who fancied he perceived they were not disposed to answer him in a direct manner.

"Your remark was not made in a very complimentary manner, vicomte."

"Mine?"

"Certainly; I appeal to Louise."

"M. de Bragelonne probably thinks the position is above my condition," said Louise, hesitatingly.

"Assuredly not," replied Raoul, eagerly, "you know very well that such is not my feeling; were you called upon to occupy a queen's throne, I should not be surprised; how much greater reason, then, such a position as this? The only circumstance that amazes me is, that I should have learned it only to-day, and that by the merest accident."

"That is true," replied Montalais, with her usual giddiness; "you know nothing about it, and there is no reason you should. M. de Bragelonne had written several letters to you, but your mother was the only person who remained behind at Blois, and it was necessary to prevent these letters from falling into her hands; I intercepted them, and returned them to M. Raoul, so that he believed you were still at Blois while you were here in Paris, and had no idea whatever, indeed, how high you had risen in rank."

"Did you not inform M. Raoul, as I begged you to do?"

"Why should I? to give him opportunity of making some of his severe remarks and moral reflections, and to undo what we have had so much trouble in effecting? Certainly not."

"Am I so very severe, then?" said Raoul, inquiringly.

"Besides," said Montalais, "it is sufficient to say that it suited me. I was about setting off for Paris — you were away; Louise was weeping her eyes out; interpret that as you please; I begged a friend, a protector of mine, who had obtained the appointment for me, to solicit one for Louise; the appointment arrived. Louise left in order to get her costume prepared; as I had my own ready, I remained behind; I received your letters, and returned them to you, adding a few words, promising you a surprise. Your surprise is before you, monsieur, and seems to be a fair one enough; you have nothing more to ask. Come, M. Malicorne, it is now time to leave these young people together: they have many things to talk about; give me your hand; I trust that you appreciate the honor conferred upon you, M. Malicorne."

"Forgive me," said Raoul, arresting the giddy girl, and giving to his voice an intonation, the gravity of which contrasted with that of Montalais; "forgive me, but may I inquire the name of the protector you speak of; for if protection be extended towards you, Mademoiselle de Montalais, — for which, indeed, so many reasons exist," added Raoul, bowing, "I do not see that the same reasons exist why Mademoiselle de la Valliere should be similarly cared for."

"But, M. Raoul," said Louise, innocently, "there is no difference in the matter, and I do not see why I should not tell it you myself; it was M. Malicorne who obtained it for me."

Raoul remained for a moment almost stupefied, asking himself if they were trifling with him; he then turned round to interrogate Malicorne, but he had been hurried away by Montalais, and was already at some distance from them. Mademoiselle de la Valliere attempted to follow her friend, but Raoul, with gentle authority, detained her.

"Louise, one word, I beg."

"But, M. Raoul," said Louise, blushing, "we are alone. Every one has left. They will become anxious, and will be looking for us."

"Fear nothing," said the young man, smiling, "we are neither of us of sufficient importance for our absence to be remarked."

"But I have my duty to perform, M. Raoul."

"Do not be alarmed, I am acquainted with these usages of the court; you will not be on duty until to-morrow; a few minutes are at your disposal, which will enable you to give me the information I am about to have the honor to ask you for."

"How serious you are, M. Raoul!" said Louise.

"Because the circumstances are serious. Are you listening?"

"I am listening; I would only repeat, monsieur, that we are quite alone."

"You are right," said Raoul, and, offering her his hand, he led the young girl into the gallery adjoining the reception-room, the windows of which looked out upon the courtyard. Every one hurried towards the middle window, which had a balcony outside, from which all the details of the slow and formal preparations for departure could be seen. Raoul opened one of the side windows, and then, being alone with Louise, said to her: "You know, Louise, that from my childhood I have regarded you as my sister, as one who has been the confidante of all my troubles, to whom I have entrusted all my hopes."

"Yes, M. Raoul," she answered softly; "yes, M. Raoul, I know that."

"You used, on your side, to show the same friendship towards me, and had the same confidence in me; why have you not, on this occasion, been my friend, — why have you shown suspicion of me?"

Mademoiselle de la Valliere did not answer. "I fondly thought you loved me," said Raoul, whose voice became more and more agitated; "I fondly thought you consented to all the plans we had, together, laid down for our own happiness, at the time when we wandered up and down the walks of Cour-Cheverny, under the avenue of poplar trees leading to Blois. You do not answer me, Louise. Is it possible," he inquired, breathing with difficulty, "that you no longer love me?"

"I did not say so," replied Louise, softly.

"Oh! tell me the truth, I implore you. All my hopes in life are centered in you. I chose you for your gentle and simple tastes. Do not suffer yourself to be dazzled, Louise, now that you are in the midst of a court where all that is pure too soon becomes corrupt — where all that is young too soon grows old. Louise, close your ears, so as not to hear what may be said; shut your eyes, so as not to see the examples before you; shut your lips, that you may not inhale the corrupting influences about you. Without falsehood or subterfuge, Louise, am I to believe what Mademoiselle de Montalais stated? Louise, did you come to Paris because I was no longer at Blois?"

La Valliere blushed and concealed her face in her hands.

"Yes, it was so, then!" exclaimed Raoul, delightedly; "that was, then, your reason for coming here. I love you as I never yet loved you. Thanks, Louise, for this devotion; but measures must be taken to place you beyond all insult, to shield you from every lure. Louise, a maid of honor, in the court of a young princess in these days of free manners and inconstant affections — a maid of honor is placed as an object of attack without having any means of defence afforded her; this state of things cannot continue; you must be married in order to be respected."

"Married?"

"Yes, here is my hand, Louise; will you place yours within it?"

"But your father?"

"My father leaves me perfectly free."

"Yet — "

"I understand your scruples, Louise; I will consult my father."

"Reflect, M. Raoul; wait."

"Wait! it is impossible. Reflect, Louise, when *you* are concerned! it would be insulting, — give me your hand, dear Louise; I am my own master. My father will consent, I know; give me your hand, do not keep me waiting thus. One word in answer, one word only; if not, I shall begin to think that, in order to change you forever, nothing more was needed than a single step in the palace, a single breath of favor, a smile from the queen, a look from the king."

Raoul had no sooner pronounced this latter word, than La Valliere became as pale as death, no doubt from fear at seeing the young man excite himself. With a movement as rapid as thought, she placed both her hands in those of Raoul, and then fled, without adding a syllable; disappearing without casting a look behind her. Raoul felt his whole frame tremble at the contact of her hand; he received the compact as a solemn bargain wrung by affection from her child-like timidity.

CHAPTER XV.

The Consent of Athos.

Raoul quitted the Palais Royal full of ideas that admitted no delay in execution. He mounted his horse in the courtyard, and followed the road to Blois, while the marriage festivities of Monsieur and the princess of England were being celebrated with exceeding animation by the courtiers, but to the despair of De Guiche and Buckingham. Raoul lost no time on the road, and in sixteen hours he arrived at Blois. As he traveled along, he marshaled his arguments in the most becoming manner. Fever is an argument that cannot be answered, and Raoul had an attack. Athos was in his study, making additions to his memoirs, when Raoul entered, accompanied by Grimaud. Keen-sighted and penetrating, a mere glance at his son told him that something extraordinary had befallen him.

“You seem to come on a matter of importance,” said he to Raoul, after he had embraced him, pointing to a seat.

“Yes, monsieur,” replied the young man; “and I entreat you to give me the same kind attention that has never yet failed me.”

“Speak, Raoul.”

“I present the case to you, monsieur, free from all preface, for that would be unworthy of you. Mademoiselle de la Valliere is in Paris as one of Madame’s maids of honor. I have pondered deeply on the matter; I love Mademoiselle de la Valliere above everything; and it is not proper to leave her in a position where her reputation, her virtue even, may be assailed. It is my wish, therefore, to marry her, monsieur, and I have come to solicit your consent to my marriage.”

While this communication was being made to him, Athos maintained the profoundest silence and reserve. Raoul, who had begun his address with an assumption of self-possession, finished it by allowing a manifest emotion to escape him at every word. Athos fixed upon Bragelonne a searching look, overshadowed indeed by a slight sadness.

“You have reflected well upon it?” he inquired.

“Yes, monsieur.”

"I believe you are already acquainted with my views respecting this alliance?"

"Yes, monsieur," replied Raoul, in a low tone of voice; "but you added, that if I persisted — "

"You do persist, then?"

Raoul stammered out an almost unintelligible assent.

"Your passion," continued Athos, tranquilly, "must indeed be very great, since, notwithstanding my dislike to this union, you persist in wanting it."

Raoul passed his hand trembling across his forehead to remove the perspiration that collected there. Athos looked at him, and his heart was touched by pity. He rose and said, —

"It is no matter. My own personal feelings are not to be taken into consideration since yours are concerned; I am ready to give it. Tell me what you want."

"Your kind indulgence, first of all, monsieur," said Raoul, taking hold of his hand.

"You have mistaken my feelings, Raoul, I have more than mere indulgence for you in my heart."

Raoul kissed as devotedly as a lover could have done the hand he held in his own.

"Come, come," said Athos, "I am quite ready; what do you wish me to sign?"

"Nothing whatever, monsieur, only it would be very kind if you would take the trouble to write to the king, to whom I belong, and solicit his majesty's permission for me to marry Mademoiselle de la Valliere."

"Well thought, Raoul! After, or rather before myself, you have a master to consult, that master being the king; it is loyal in you to submit yourself voluntarily to this double proof; I will grant your request without delay, Raoul."

The count approached the window, and leaning out, called to Grimaud, who showed his head from an arbor covered with jasmine, which he was occupied in trimming.

"My horses, Grimaud," continued the count.

"Why this order, monsieur?" inquired Raoul.

"We shall set off in a few hours."

"Whither?"

"For Paris."

"Paris, monsieur?"

"Is not the king at Paris?"

"Certainly."

"Well, ought we not to go there?"

"Yes, monsieur," said Raoul, almost alarmed by this kind condescension. "I do not ask you to put yourself to such inconvenience, and a letter merely — "

"You mistake my position, Raoul; it is not respectful that a simple gentleman, such as I am, should write to his sovereign. I wish to speak, I ought to speak, to the king, and I will do so. We will go together, Raoul."

"You overpower me with your kindness, monsieur."

"How do you think his majesty is affected?"

"Towards me, monsieur?"

"Yes."

"Excellently well disposed."

"You *know* that to be so?" continued the count.

"The king has himself told me so."

"On what occasion?"

"Upon the recommendation of M. d'Artagnan, I believe, and on account of an affair in the Place de Greve, when I had the honor to draw my sword in the king's service. I have reason to believe that, vanity apart, I stand well with his majesty."

"So much the better."

"But I entreat you, monsieur," pursued Raoul, "not to maintain towards me your present grave and serious manner. Do not make me bitterly regret having listened to a feeling stronger than anything else."

"That is the second time you have said so, Raoul; it was quite unnecessary; you require my formal consent, and you have it. We need talk no more on the subject, therefore. Come and see my new plantations, Raoul."

The young man knew very well, that, after the expression of his father's wish, no opportunity of discussion was left him. He bowed his head, and followed his father into the garden. Athos slowly pointed out to him the grafts, the cuttings, and the avenues he was planting. This perfect repose of manner disconcerted Raoul extremely; the affection with which his own heart was filled seemed so great that the whole world could hardly contain it. How, then, could his father's heart remain void, and closed to its influence? Bragelonne, therefore, collecting all his courage, suddenly exclaimed, —

“It is impossible, monsieur, you can have any reason to reject Mademoiselle de la Valliere! In Heaven’s name, she is so good, so gentle and pure, that your mind, so perfect in its penetration, ought to appreciate her accordingly. Does any secret repugnance, or any hereditary dislike, exist between you and her family?”

“Look, Raoul, at that beautiful lily of the valley,” said Athos; “observe how the shade and the damp situation suit it, particularly the shadow which that sycamore-tree casts over it, so that the warmth, and not the blazing heat of the sun, filters through its leaves.”

Raoul stopped, bit his lips, and then, with the blood mantling in his face, he said, courageously, — ”One word of explanation, I beg, monsieur. You cannot forget that your son is a man.”

“In that case,” replied Athos, drawing himself up with sternness, “prove to me that you are a man, for you do not show yourself a son. I begged you to wait the opportunity of forming an illustrious alliance. I would have obtained a wife for you from the first ranks of the rich nobility. I wish you to be distinguished by the splendor which glory and fortune confer, for nobility of descent you have already.”

“Monsieur,” exclaimed Raoul, carried away by a first impulse. “I was reproached the other day for not knowing who my mother was.”

Athos turned pale; then, knitting his brows like the greatest of all the heathen deities: — ”I am waiting to learn the reply you made,” he demanded, in an imperious manner.

“Forgive me! oh, forgive me,” murmured the young man, sinking at once from the lofty tone he had assumed.

“What was your reply, monsieur?” inquired the count, stamping his feet upon the ground.

“Monsieur, my sword was in my hand immediately, my adversary placed himself on guard, I struck his sword over the palisade, and threw him after it.”

“Why did you suffer him to live?”

“The king has prohibited duelling, and, at the moment, I was an ambassador of the king.”

“Very well,” said Athos, “but all the greater reason I should see his majesty.”

“What do you intend to ask him?”

“Authority to draw my sword against the man who has inflicted this injury upon me.”

“If I did not act as I ought to have done, I beg you to forgive me.”

“Did I reproach you, Raoul?”

“Still, the permission you are going to ask from the king?”

“I will implore his majesty to sign your marriage-contract, but on one condition.”

“Are conditions necessary with me, monsieur? Command, and you shall be obeyed.”

“On the condition, I repeat,” continued Athos; “that you tell me the name of the man who spoke of your mother in that way.”

“What need is there that you should know his name; the offense was directed against myself, and the permission once obtained from his majesty, to revenge it is my affair.”

“Tell me his name, monsieur.”

“I will not allow you to expose yourself.”

“Do you take me for a Don Diego? His name, I say.”

“You insist upon it?”

“I demand it.”

“The Vicomte de Wardes.”

“Very well,” said Athos, tranquilly, “I know him. But our horses are ready, I see; and, instead of delaying our departure for a couple of hours, we will set off at once. Come, monsieur.”

CHAPTER XVI.

Monsieur Becomes Jealous of the Duke of Buckingham.

While the Comte de la Fere was proceeding on his way to Pairs, accompanied by Raoul, the Palais Royal was the theatre wherein a scene of what Moliere would have called excellent comedy, was being performed. Four days had elapsed since his marriage, and Monsieur, having breakfasted very hurriedly, passed into his ante-chamber, frowning and out of temper. The repast had not been over-agreeable. Madame had had breakfast served in her own apartment, and Monsieur had breakfasted almost alone; the Chevalier de Lorraine and Manicamp were the only persons present at the meal, which lasted three-quarters of an hour without a single syllable having been uttered. Manicamp, who was less intimate with his royal highness than the Chevalier de Lorraine, vainly endeavored to detect, from the expression of the prince’s face, what had made him so ill-humored. The Chevalier de Lorraine, who had no occasion to speculate about anything, inasmuch as he knew all, ate his breakfast with that extraordinary appetite which the troubles of one’s friends but stimulates, and enjoyed at the same time both Monsieur’s ill-humor and the vexation of Manicamp. He seemed delighted, while he went on eating, to detain a prince, who was very impatient to move, still at table. Monsieur at times repented the ascendency which he had permitted the Chevalier de Lorraine to acquire over him, and which exempted the latter from any observance of etiquette towards him. Monsieur was now in one of those moods, but he dreaded as much as he liked the chevalier, and contented himself with nursing his anger without betraying it. Every now and then Monsieur raised his eyes to the ceiling, then lowered them towards the slices of *pate* which the chevalier was attacking, and finally, not caring to betray the resentment, he gesticulated in a manner which Harlequin might have envied. At last, however, Monsieur could control himself no longer, and at the dessert, rising from the table in excessive wrath, as we have related, he left the Chevalier de Lorraine to finish his breakfast as he pleased. Seeing Monsieur rise from the table, Manicamp, napkin in hand, rose also. Monsieur ran rather than walked, towards the ante-chamber, where, noticing an usher in attendance, he gave him some directions in a low tone of voice. Then, turning back again, but avoiding passing through the breakfast apartment, he crossed several rooms, with the intention of seeking the queen-mother in her oratory, where she usually remained.

It was about ten o'clock in the morning. Anne of Austria was engaged in writing as Monsieur entered. The queen-mother was extremely attached to her son, for he was handsome in person and amiable in disposition. He was, in fact, more affectionate, and it might be, more effeminate than the king. He pleased his mother by those trifling sympathizing attentions all women are glad to receive. Anne of Austria, who would have been rejoiced to have had a daughter, almost found in this, her favorite son, the attentions, solicitude, and playful manners of a child of twelve years of age. All the time he passed with his mother he employed in admiring her arms, in giving his opinion upon her cosmetics, and recipes for compounding essences, in which she was very particular; and then, too, he kissed her hands and cheeks in the most childlike and endearing manner, and had always some sweetmeats to offer her, or some new style of dress to recommend. Anne of Austria loved the king, or rather the regal power in her eldest son; Louis XIV. represented legitimacy by right divine. With the king, her character was that of the queen-mother, with Philip she was simply the mother. The latter knew that, of all places, a mother's heart is the most compassionate and surest. When quite a child he always fled there for refuge when he and his brother quarreled, often, after having struck him, which constituted the crime of high treason on his part, after certain engagements with hands and nails, in which the king and his rebellious subject indulged in their night-dresses respecting the right to a disputed bed, having their servant Laporte as umpire, — Philip, conqueror, but terrified at victory, used to flee to his mother to obtain reinforcements from her, or at least the assurance of forgiveness, which Louis XIV. granted with difficulty, and after an interval. Anne, from this habit of peaceable intervention, succeeded in arranging the disputes of her sons, and in sharing, at the same time, all their secrets. The king, somewhat jealous of that maternal solicitude which was bestowed particularly on his brother, felt disposed to show towards Anne of Austria more submission and attachment than his character really dictated. Anne of Austria had adopted this line of conduct especially towards the young queen. In this manner she ruled with almost despotic sway over the royal household, and she was already preparing her batteries to govern with the same absolute authority the household of her second son. Anne experienced almost a feeling of pride whenever she saw any one enter her apartment with woe-begone looks, pale cheeks, or red eyes, gathering from appearances that assistance was required either by the weakest or the most rebellious. She was writing, we have said, when Monsieur entered her oratory, not with red eyes or pale cheeks, but restless, out of temper, and annoyed. With an absent air he kissed his mother's hands, and sat himself down before receiving her permission to do so. Considering the strict rules of etiquette established at the court of Anne of Austria, this forgetfulness of customary civilities was a sign of preoccupation, especially on Philip's part, who, of his own accord, observed a respect towards her of a somewhat exaggerated character. If, therefore, he so notoriously failed in this regard, there must be a serious cause for it.

"What is the matter, Philip?" inquired Anne of Austria, turning towards her son.

"A good many things," murmured the prince, in a doleful tone of voice.

"You look like a man who has a great deal to do," said the queen, laying down her pen. Philip frowned, but did not reply. "Among the various subjects which occupy your mind," said Anne of Austria, "there must surely be one that absorbs it more than others."

"One has indeed occupied me more than any other."

"Well, what is it? I am listening."

Philip opened his mouth as if to express all the troubles his mind was filled with, and which he seemed to be waiting only for an opportunity of declaring. But he suddenly became silent, and a sigh alone expressed all that his heart was overflowing with.

"Come, Philip, show a little firmness," said the queen-mother. "When one has to complain of anything, it is generally an individual who is the cause of it. Am I not right?"

"I do not say no, madame."

"Whom do you wish to speak about? Come, take courage."

"In fact, madame, what I might possibly have to say must be kept a profound secret; for when a lady is in the case — "

"Ah! you are speaking of Madame, then?" inquired the queen-mother, with a feeling of the liveliest curiosity.

"Yes."

“Well, then, if you wish to speak of Madame, do not hesitate to do so. I am your mother, and she is no more than a stranger to me. Yet, as she is my daughter-in-law, rest assured I shall be interested, even were it for your own sake alone, in hearing all you may have to say about her.”

“Pray tell me, madame, in your turn, whether you have not remarked something?”

“‘Something’! Philip? Your words almost frighten me, from their want of meaning. What do you mean by ‘something?’“

“Madame is pretty, certainly.”

“No doubt of it.”

“Yet not altogether beautiful.”

“No, but as she grows older, she will probably become strikingly beautiful. You must have remarked the change which a few years have already made in her. Her beauty will improve more and more; she is now only sixteen years of age. At fifteen I was, myself, very thin; but even as she is at present, Madame is very pretty.”

“And consequently others have remarked it.”

“Undoubtedly, for a woman of ordinary rank is noticed — and with still greater reason a princess.”

“She has been well brought up, I suppose?”

“Madame Henriette, her mother, is a woman somewhat cold in manner, slightly pretentious, but full of noble thoughts. The princess’s education may have been neglected, but her principles, I believe, are good. Such at least was the opinion I formed of her when she resided in France; but she afterwards returned to England, and I am ignorant what may have occurred there.”

“What do you mean?”

“Simply that there are some heads naturally giddy, which are easily turned by prosperity.”

“That is the very word, madame. I think the princess rather giddy.”

“We must not exaggerate, Philip; she is clever and witty, and has a certain amount of coquetry very natural in a young woman; but this defect in persons of high rank and position, is a great advantage at a court. A princess who is tinged with coquetry usually forms a brilliant court; her smile stimulates luxury, arouses wit, and even courage; the nobles, too, fight better for a prince whose wife is beautiful.”

"Thank you extremely, madame," said Philip, with some temper; "you really have drawn some very alarming pictures for me."

"In what respect?" asked the queen, with pretended simplicity.

"You know, madame," said Philip, dolefully, "whether I had or had not a very great dislike to getting married."

"Now, indeed, you alarm me. You have some serious cause of complaint against Madame."

"I do not precisely say it is serious."

"In that case, then, throw aside your doleful looks. If you show yourself to others in your present state, people will take you for a very unhappy husband."

"The fact is," replied Philip, "I am not altogether satisfied as a husband, and I shall not be sorry if others know it."

"For shame, Philip."

"Well, then, madame, I will tell you frankly that I do not understand the life I am required to lead."

"Explain yourself."

"My wife does not seem to belong to me; she is always leaving me for some reason or another. In the mornings there are visits, correspondences, and toilettes; in the evenings, balls and concerts."

"You are jealous, Philip."

"I! Heaven forbid. Let others act the part of a jealous husband, not I. But I *am* annoyed."

"All these things you reproach your wife with are perfectly innocent, and, so long as you have nothing of greater importance — "

"Yet, listen; without being very blamable, a woman can excite a good deal of uneasiness. Certain visitors may be received, certain preferences shown, which expose young women to remark, and which are enough to drive out of their senses even those husbands who are least disposed to be jealous."

"Ah! now we are coming to the real point at last, and not without some difficulty. You speak of frequent visits, and certain preferences — very good; for the last hour we have been beating about the bush, and at last you have broached the true question."

"Well then, yes — "

"This is more serious than I thought. It is possible, then, that Madame can have given you grounds for these complaints against her?"

“Precisely so.”

“What, your wife, married only four days ago, prefers some other person to yourself? Take care, Philip, you exaggerate your grievances; in wishing to prove everything, you prove nothing.”

The prince, bewildered by his mother’s serious manner, wished to reply, but he could only stammer out some unintelligible words.

“You draw back, then?” said Anne of Austria. “I prefer that, as it is an acknowledgement of your mistake.”

“No!” exclaimed Philip, “I do not draw back, and I will prove all I asserted. I spoke of preference and of visits, did I not? Well, listen.”

Anne of Austria prepared herself to listen, with that love of gossip which the best woman living and the best mother, were she a queen even, always finds in being mixed up with the petty squabbles of a household.

“Well,” said Philip, “tell me one thing.”

“What is that?”

“Why does my wife retain an English court about her?” said Philip, as he crossed his arms and looked his mother steadily in the face, as if he were convinced that she could not answer the question.

“For a very simple reason,” returned Anne of Austria; “because the English are her countrymen, because they have expended large sums in order to accompany her to France, and because it would hardly be polite — not politic, certainly — to dismiss abruptly those members of the English nobility who have not shrunk from any devotion or sacrifice.”

“A wonderful sacrifice indeed,” returned Philip, “to desert a wretched country to come to a beautiful one, where a greater effect can be produced for a guinea that can be procured elsewhere for four! Extraordinary devotion, really, to travel a hundred leagues in company with a woman one is in love with!”

“In love, Philip! think what you are saying. Who is in love with Madame?”

“The Duke of Buckingham. Perhaps you will defend him, too?”

Anne of Austria blushed and smiled at the same time. The name of the Duke of Buckingham recalled certain recollections of a very tender and melancholy nature. “The Duke of Buckingham?” she murmured.

“Yes; one of those arm-chair soldiers — ”

“The Buckinghams are loyal and brave,” said Anne of Austria, courageously.

"This is too bad; my own mother takes the part of my wife's lover against me," exclaimed Philip, incensed to such an extent that his weak organization was affected almost to tears.

"Philip, my son," exclaimed Anne of Austria, "such an expression is unworthy of you. Your wife has no lover; and, had she one, it would not be the Duke of Buckingham. The members of that family, I repeat, are loyal and discreet, and the rights of hospitality are sure to be respected by them."

"The Duke of Buckingham is an Englishman, madame," said Philip, "and may I ask if the English so very religiously respect what belongs to princes of France?"

Anne blushed a second time, and turned aside under the pretext of taking her pen from her desk again, but in reality to conceal her confusion from her son. "Really, Philip," she said, "you seem to discover expressions for the purpose of embarrassing me, and your anger blinds you while it alarms me; reflect a little."

"There is no need for reflection, madame. I can see with my own eyes."

"Well, and what do you see?"

"That Buckingham never quits my wife. He presumes to make presents to her, and she ventures to accept them. Yesterday she was talking about *sauchets a la violette*; well, our French perfumers, you know very well, madame, for you have over and over again asked for it without success — our French perfumers, I say, have never been able to procure this scent. The duke, however, wore about him a *sachet a la violette*, and I am sure that the one my wife has came from him."

"Indeed, monsieur," said Anne of Austria, "you build your pyramids on needle points; be careful. What harm, I ask you, can there be in a man giving to his countrywoman a recipe for a new essence? These strange ideas, I protest, painfully recall your father to me; he who so frequently and so unjustly made me suffer."

"The Duke of Buckingham's father was probably more reserved and more respectful than his son," said Philip, thoughtlessly, not perceiving how deeply he had wounded his mother's feelings. The queen turned pale, and pressed her clenched hands upon her bosom; but, recovering herself immediately, she said, "You came here with some intention or another, I suppose?"

"Certainly."

"What was it?"

"I came, madame, intending to complain energetically, and to inform you that I will not submit to such behavior from the Duke of Buckingham."

"What do you intend to do, then?"

"I shall complain to the king."

"And what do you expect the king to reply?"

"Very well, then," said Monsieur, with an expression of stern determination on his countenance, which offered a singular contrast to its usual gentleness. "Very well. I will right myself!"

"What do you call righting yourself?" inquired Anne of Austria, in alarm.

"I will have the Duke of Buckingham quit the princess, I will have him quit France, and I will see that my wishes are intimated to him."

"You will intimate nothing of the kind, Philip," said the queen, "for if you act in that manner, and violate hospitality to that extent, I will invoke the severity of the king against you."

"Do you threaten me, madame?" exclaimed Philip, almost in tears; "do you threaten me in the midst of my complaints?"

"I do not threaten you; I do but place an obstacle in the path of your hasty anger. I maintain, that, to adopt towards the Duke of Buckingham, or any other Englishman, any rigorous measure — to take even a discourteous step towards him, would be to plunge France and England into the most disastrous disagreement. Can it be possible that a prince of the blood, the brother of the king of France, does not know how to hide an injury, even did it exist in reality, where political necessity requires it?" Philip made a movement. "Besides," continued the queen, "the injury is neither true nor possible, and it is merely a matter of silly jealousy."

"Madame, I know what I know."

"Whatever you may know, I can only advise you to be patient."

"I am not patient by disposition, madame."

The queen rose, full of severity, and with an icy ceremonious manner. "Explain what you really require, monsieur," she said.

"I do not require anything, madame; I simply express what I desire. If the Duke of Buckingham does not, of his own accord, discontinue his visits to my apartments I shall forbid him entrance."

"That is a point you will refer to the king," said Anne of Austria, her heart swelling as she spoke, and her voice trembling with emotion.

"But, madame," exclaimed Philip, striking his hands together, "act as my mother and not as the queen, since I speak to you as a son; it is simply a matter of a few minutes' conversation between the duke and myself."

"It is that very conversation I forbid," said the queen, resuming her authority, "because it is unworthy of you."

"Be it so; I will not appear in the matter, but I shall intimate my will to Madame."

"Oh!" said the queen-mother, with a melancholy arising from reflection, "never tyrannize over a wife — never behave too haughtily or imperiously towards your own. A woman unwillingly convinced, is unconvinced."

"What is to be done, then? — I will consult my friends about it."

"Yes, your double-dealing advisers, your Chevalier de Lorraine — your De Wardes. Intrust the conduct of this affair to me. You wish the Duke of Buckingham to leave, do you not?"

"As soon as possible, madame."

"Send the duke to me, then; smile upon your wife, behave to her, to the king, to every one, as usual. But follow no advice but mine. Alas! I too well know what any household comes to, that is troubled by advisers."

"You shall be obeyed, madame."

"And you will be satisfied at the result. Send the duke to me."

"That will not be difficult."

"Where do you suppose him to be?"

"At my wife's door, whose *levee* he is probably awaiting."

"Very well," said Anne of Austria, calmly. "Be good enough to tell the duke that I shall be charmed if he will pay me a visit."

Philip kissed his mother's hand, and started off to find the Duke of Buckingham.

CHAPTER XVII.

Forever!

The Duke of Buckingham, obedient to the queen-mother’s invitation, presented himself in her apartments half an hour after the departure of the Duc d’Orleans. When his name was announced by the gentleman-usher in attendance, the queen, who was sitting with her elbow resting on a table, and her head buried in her hands, rose, and smilingly received the graceful and respectful salutation which the duke addressed to her. Anne of Austria was still beautiful. It is well known that at her then somewhat advanced age, her long auburn hair, perfectly formed hands, and bright ruby lips, were still the admiration of all who saw her. On the present occasion, abandoned entirely to a remembrance which evoked all the past in her heart, she looked almost as beautiful as in the days of her youth, when her palace was open to the visits of the Duke of Buckingham’s father, then a young and impassioned man, as well as an unfortunate prince, who lived for her alone, and died with her name upon his lips. Anne of Austria fixed upon Buckingham a look so tender in its expression, that it denoted, not alone the indulgence of maternal affection, but a gentleness of expression like the coquetry of a woman who loves.

“Your majesty,” said Buckingham, respectfully, “desired to speak to me.”

“Yes, duke,” said the queen, in English; “will you be good enough to sit down?”

The favor which Anne of Austria thus extended to the young man, and the welcome sound of the language of a country from which the duke had been estranged since his stay in France, deeply affected him. He immediately conjectured that the queen had a request to make of him. After having abandoned the first few moments to the irrepressible emotions she experienced, the queen resumed the smiling air with which she had received him. “What do you think of France?” she said, in French.

“It is a lovely country, madame,” replied the duke.

“Had you ever seen it before?”

“Once only, madame.”

“But, like all true Englishmen, you prefer England?”

“I prefer my own native land to France,” replied the duke; “but if your majesty were to ask me which of the two cities, London or Pairs, I should prefer as a residence, I should be forced to answer Paris.”

Anne of Austria observed the ardent manner with which these words had been pronounced. “I am told, my lord, you have rich possessions in your own country, and that you live in a splendid and time-honored place.”

“It was my father’s residence,” replied Buckingham, casting down his eyes.

“Those are indeed great advantages and *souvenirs*,” replied the queen, alluding, in spite of herself, to recollections from which it is impossible voluntarily to detach one’s self.

“In fact,” said the duke, yielding to the melancholy influence of this opening conversation, “sensitive persons live as much in the past or the future, as in the present.”

“That is very true,” said the queen, in a low tone of voice. “It follows, then, my lord,” she added, “that you, who are a man of feeling, will soon quit France in order to shut yourself up with your wealth and your relics of the past.”

Buckingham raised his head and said, “I think not, madame.”

“What do you mean?”

“On the contrary, I think of leaving England in order to take up my residence in France.”

It was now Anne of Austria’s turn to exhibit surprise. “Why?” she said. “Are you not in favor with the new king?”

“Perfectly so, madame, for his majesty’s kindness to me is unbounded.”

“It cannot,” said the queen, “be because your fortune has diminished, for it is said to be enormous.”

“My income, madame, has never been so large.”

“There is some secret cause, then?”

“No, madame,” said Buckingham, eagerly, “there is nothing secret in my reason for this determination. I prefer residence in France; I like a court so distinguished by its refinement and courtesy; I like the amusements, somewhat serious in their nature, which are not the amusements of my own country, and which are met with in France.”

Anne of Austria smiled shrewdly. “Amusements of a serious nature?” she said. “Has your Grace well reflected on their seriousness?” The duke hesitated. “There is no amusement so serious,” continued the queen, “as to prevent a man of your rank — ”

“Your majesty seems to insist greatly on that point,” interrupted the duke.

“Do you think so, my lord?”

“If you will forgive me for saying so, it is the second time you have vaunted the attractions of England at the expense of the delight which all experience who live in France.”

Anne of Austria approached the young man, and placing her beautiful hand upon his shoulder, which trembled at the touch, said, “Believe me, monsieur, nothing can equal a residence in one’s own native country. I have very frequently had occasion to regret Spain. I have lived long, my lord, very long for a woman, and I confess to you, that not a year has passed I have not regretted Spain.”

“Not one year, madame?” said the young duke coldly. “Not one of those years when you reigned Queen of Beauty — as you still are, indeed?”

“A truce to flattery, duke, for I am old enough to be your mother.” She emphasized these latter words in a manner, and with a gentleness, which penetrated Buckingham’s heart. “Yes,” she said, “I am old enough to be your mother; and for this reason, I will give you a word of advice.”

“That advice being that I should return to London?” he exclaimed.

“Yes, my lord.”

The duke clasped his hands with a terrified gesture, which could not fail of its effect upon the queen, already disposed to softer feelings by the tenderness of her own recollections. “It must be so,” added the queen.

“What!” he again exclaimed, “am I seriously told that I must leave, — that I must exile myself, — that I am to flee at once?”

“Exile yourself, did you say? One would fancy France was your native country.”

“Madame, the country of those who love is the country of those whom they love.”

“Not another word, my lord; you forget whom you are addressing.”

Buckingham threw himself on his knees. “Madame, you are the source of intelligence, of goodness, and of compassion; you are the first person in this kingdom, not only by your rank, but the first person in the world on account of your angelic attributes. I have said nothing, madame. Have I, indeed, said anything you should answer with such a cruel remark? What have I betrayed?”

“You have betrayed yourself,” said the queen, in a low tone of voice.

“I have said nothing, — I know nothing.”

“You forget you have spoken and thought in the presence of a woman; and besides — ”

“Besides,” said the duke, “no one knows you are listening to me.”

“On the contrary, it is known; you have all the defects and all the qualities of youth.”

“I have been betrayed or denounced, then?”

“By whom?”

“By those who, at Le Havre, had, with infernal perspicacity, read my heart like an open book.”

“I do not know whom you mean.”

“M. de Bragelonne, for instance.”

“I know the name without being acquainted with the person to whom it belongs. M. de Bragelonne has said nothing.”

“Who can it be, then? If any one, madame, had had the boldness to notice in me that which I do not myself wish to behold — ”

“What would you do, duke?”

“There are secrets which kill those who discover them.”

“He, then, who has discovered your secret, madman that you are, still lives; and, what is more, you will not slay him, for he is armed on all sides, — he is a husband, a jealous man, — he is the second gentleman in France, — he is my son, the Duc du Orleans.”

The duke turned pale as death. “You are very cruel, madame,” he said.

“You see, Buckingham,” said Anne of Austria, sadly, “how you pass from one extreme to another, and fight with shadows, when it would seem so easy to remain at peace with yourself.”

“If we fight, madame, we die on the field of battle,” replied the young man, gently, abandoning himself to the most gloomy depression.

Anne ran towards him and took him by the hand. “Villiers,” she said, in English, with a vehemence of tone which nothing could resist, “what is it you ask? Do you ask a mother to sacrifice her son, — a queen to consent to the dishonor of her house? Child that you are, do not dream of it. What! in order to spare your tears am I to commit these crimes? Villiers! you speak of the dead; the dead, at least, were full of respect and submission; they resigned themselves to an order of exile; they carried their despair away with them in their hearts, like a priceless possession, because the despair was caused by the woman they loved, and because death, thus deceptive, was like a gift of a favor conferred upon them."

Buckingham rose, his features distorted, and his hands pressed against his heart. "You are right, madame," he said, "but those of whom you speak had received their order of exile from the lips of the one whom they loved; they were not driven away; they were entreated to leave, and were not laughed at."

"No," murmured Anne of Austria, "they were not forgotten. But who says you are driven away, or that you are exiled? Who says that your devotion will not be remembered? I do not speak on any one's behalf but my own, when I tell you to leave. Do me this kindness, — grant me this favor; let me, for this also, be indebted to one of your name."

"It is for your sake, then, madame?"

"For mine alone."

"No one whom I shall leave behind me will venture to mock, — no prince even who shall say, 'I required it.'"

"Listen to me, duke," and hereupon the dignified features of the queen assumed a solemn expression. "I swear to you that no one commands in this matter but myself. I swear to you that, not only shall no one either laugh or boast in any way, but no one even shall fail in the respect due to your rank. Rely upon me, duke, as I rely upon you."

"You do not explain yourself, madame; my heart is full of bitterness, and I am in utter despair; no consolation, however gentle and affectionate, can afford me relief."

"Do you remember your mother, duke?" replied the queen, with a winning smile.

"Very slightly, madame; yet I remember how she used to cover me with her caresses and her tears whenever I wept."

"Villiers," murmured the queen, passing her arm round the young man's neck, "look upon me as your mother, and believe that no one shall ever make my son weep."

"I thank you, madame," said the young man affected and almost suffocated by his emotion; "I feel there is still room in my heart for a gentler and nobler sentiment than love."

The queen-mother looked at him and pressed his hand. "Go," she said.

"When must I leave? Command me."

“At any time that may suit you, my lord,” resumed the queen; “you will choose your own day of departure. Instead, however, of setting off to-day, as you would doubtless wish to do, or to-morrow, as others may have expected, leave the day after to-morrow, in the evening; but announce to-day that it is your wish to leave.”

“My wish?” murmured the young duke.

“Yes, duke.”

“And shall I never return to France?”

Anne of Austria reflected for a moment, seemingly absorbed in sad and serious thought. “It would be a consolation for me,” she said, “if you were to return on the day when I shall be carried to my final resting-place at Saint-Dennis beside the king, my husband.”

“Madame, you are goodness itself; the tide of prosperity is setting in on you; your cup brims over with happiness, and many long years are yet before you.”

“In that case you will not come for some time, then,” said the queen, endeavoring to smile.

“I shall not return,” said Buckingham, “young as I am. Death does not reckon by years; it is impartial; some die young, some reach old age.”

“I will not harbor any sorrowful ideas, duke. Let me comfort you; return in two years. I perceive from your face that the very idea which saddens you so much now, will have disappeared before six months have passed, and will be not only dead but forgotten in the period of absence I have assigned you.”

“I think you judged me better a little while ago, madame,” replied the young man, “when you said that time is powerless against members of the family of Buckingham.”

“Silence,” said the queen, kissing the duke upon the forehead with an affection she could not restrain. “Go, go; spare me and forget yourself no longer. I am the queen; you are the subject of the king of England; King Charles awaits your return. Adieu, Villiers, — farewell.”

“Forever!” replied the young man, and he fled, endeavoring to master his emotions.

Anne leaned her head upon her hands, and then looking at herself in the glass, murmured, “It has been truly said, that a woman who has truly loved is always young, and that the bloom of the girl of twenty years ever lies concealed in some secret cloister of the heart.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

King Louis XIV. does not think Mademoiselle de la Valliere either rich enough or pretty enough for a Gentleman of the Rank of the Vicomte de Bragelonne.

Raoul and the Comte de la Fere reached Paris the evening of the same day on which Buckingham had held the conversation with the queen-mother. The count had scarcely arrived, when, through Raoul, he solicited an audience of the king. His majesty had passed a portion of the morning in looking over, with madame and the ladies of the court, various goods of Lyons manufacture, of which he had made his sister-in-law a present. A court dinner had succeeded, then cards, and afterwards, according to his usual custom, the king, leaving the card-tables at eight o'clock, passed into his cabinet in order to work with M. Colbert and M. Fouquet. Raoul entered the ante-chamber at the very moment the two ministers quitted it, and the king, perceiving him through the half-closed door, said, "What do you want, M. de Bragelonne?"

The young man approached: "An audience, sire," he replied, "for the Comte de la Fere, who has just arrived from Blois, and is most anxious to have an interview with your majesty."

"I have an hour to spare between cards and supper," said the king. "Is the Comte de la Fere at hand?"

"He is below, and awaits your majesty's permission."

"Let him come up at once," said the king, and five minutes afterwards Athos entered the presence of Louis XIV. He was received by the king with that gracious kindness of manner which Louis, with a tact beyond his years, reserved for the purpose of gaining those who were not to be conquered by ordinary favors. "Let me hope, comte," said the king, "that you have come to ask me for something."

"I will not conceal from your majesty," replied the comte, "that I am indeed come for that purpose."

"That is well," said the king, joyously.

"It is not for myself, sire."

"So much the worse; but, at least, I will do for your *protege* what you refuse to permit me to do for you."

"Your majesty encourages me. I have come to speak on behalf of the Vicomte de Bragelonne."

"It is the same as if you spoke on your own behalf, comte."

"Not altogether so, sire. I am desirous of obtaining from your majesty that which I cannot ask for myself. The vicomte thinks of marrying."

"He is still very young; but that does not matter. He is an eminently distinguished man; I will choose a wife for him."

"He has already chosen one, sire, and only awaits your consent."

"It is only a question, then, of signing the marriage-contract?" Athos bowed. "Has he chose a wife whose fortune and position accord with your own anticipation?"

Athos hesitated for a moment. "His affirmed wife is of good birth, but has no fortune."

"That is a misfortune we can remedy."

"You overwhelm me with gratitude, sire; but your majesty will permit me to offer a remark?"

"Do so, comte."

"Your majesty seems to intimate an intention of giving a marriage-portion to this young lady."

"Certainly."

"I should regret, sire, if the step I have taken towards your majesty should be attended by this result."

"No false delicacy, comte; what is the bride's name?"

"Mademoiselle de la Baume le Blanc de la Valliere," said Athos, coldly.

"I seem to know that name," said the king, as if reflecting; "there was a Marquis de la Valliere."

"Yes, sire, it is his daughter."

"But he died, and his widow married again M. de Saint-Remy, I think, steward of the dowager Madame's household."

"Your majesty is correctly informed."

"More than that, the young lady has lately become one of the princess's maids of honor."

"Your majesty is better acquainted with her history than am I."

The king again reflected, and glancing at the comte's anxious countenance, said: "The young lady does not seem to me to be very pretty, comte.”

“I am not quite sure,” replied Athos.

“I have seen her, but she hardly struck me as being so.”

“She seems to be a good and modest girl, but has little beauty, sire.”

“Beautiful fair hair, however.”

“I think so.”

“And her blue eyes are tolerably good.”

“Yes, sire.”

“With regard to her beauty, then, the match is but an ordinary one. Now for the money side of the question.”

“Fifteen to twenty thousand francs dowry at the very outset, sire; the lovers are disinterested enough; for myself, I care little for money.”

“For superfluity, you mean; but a needful amount is of importance. With fifteen thousand francs, without landed property, a woman cannot live at court. We will make up the deficiency; I will do it for De Bragelonne.” The king again remarked the coldness with which Athos received the remark.

“Let us pass from the question of money to that of rank,” said Louis XIV.; “the daughter of the Marquis de la Valliere, that is well enough; but there is that excellent Saint-Remy, who somewhat damages the credit of the family; and you, comte, are rather particular, I believe, about your own family.”

“Sire, I no longer hold to anything but my devotion to your majesty.”

The king again paused. “A moment, comte. You have surprised me in no little degree from the beginning of your conversation. You came to ask me to authorize a marriage, and you seem greatly disturbed in having to make the request. Nay, pardon me, comte, but I am rarely deceived, young as I am; for while with some persons I place my friendship at the disposal of my understanding, with others I call my distrust to my aid, by which my discernment is increased. I repeat, that you do not prefer your request as though you wished it success.”

“Well, sire, that is true.”

“I do not understand you, then; refuse.”

“Nay, sire; I love De Bragelonne with my whole heart; he is smitten with Mademoiselle de la Valliere, he weaves dreams of bliss for the future; I am not one who is willing to destroy the illusions of youth. This marriage is objectionable to me, but I implore your majesty to consent to it forthwith, and thus make Raoul happy.”

"Tell me, comte, is she in love with him?"

"If your majesty requires me to speak candidly, I do not believe in Mademoiselle de la Valliere's affection; the delight at being at court, the honor of being in the service of Madame, counteract in her head whatever affection she may happen to have in her heart; it is a marriage similar to many others which already exist at court; but De Bragelonne wishes it, and so let it be."

"And yet you do not resemble those easy-tempered fathers who volunteer as stepping-stones for their children," said the king.

"I am determined enough against the viciously disposed, but not so against men of upright character. Raoul is suffering; he is in great distress of mind; his disposition, naturally light and cheerful, has become gloomy and melancholy. I do not wish to deprive your majesty of the services he may be able to render."

"I understand you," said the king; "and what is more, I understand your heart, too, comte."

"There is no occasion, therefore," replied the comte, "to tell your majesty that my object is to make these children, or rather Raoul, happy."

"And I, too, as much as yourself, comte, wish to secure M. de Bragelonne's happiness."

"I only await your majesty's signature. Raoul will have the honor of presenting himself before your majesty to receive your consent."

"You are mistaken, comte," said the king, firmly; "I have just said that I desire to secure M. de Bragelonne's happiness, and from the present moment, therefore, I oppose his marriage."

"But, sire," exclaimed Athos, "your majesty has promised!"

"Not so, comte, I did not promise you, for it is opposed to my own views."

"I appreciate your majesty's considerate and generous intentions on my behalf; but I take the liberty of recalling to you that I undertook to approach you as an ambassador."

"An ambassador, comte, frequently asks, but does not always obtain what he asks."

"But, sire, it will be such a blow for De Bragelonne."

"My hand shall deal the blow; I will speak to the vicomte."

"Love, sire, is overwhelming in its might."

"Love can be resisted, comte. I myself can assure you of that."

“When one has the soul of a king, — your own, for instance, sire.”

“Do not make yourself uneasy on the subject. I have certain views for De Bragelonne. I do not say that he shall not marry Mademoiselle de la Valliere, but I do not wish him to marry so young; I do not wish him to marry her until she has acquired a fortune; and he, on his side, no less deserves favor, such as I wish to confer upon him. In a word, comte, I wish them to wait.”

“Yet once more, sire.”

“Comte, you told me you came here to request a favor.”

“Assuredly, sire.”

“Grant me one, then, instead; let us speak no longer upon this matter. It is probable that, before long, war may be declared. I require men about me who are unfettered. I should hesitate to send under fire a married man, or a father of a family. I should hesitate also, on De Bragelonne’s account, to endow with a fortune, without some sound reason for it, a young girl, a perfect stranger; such an act would sow jealousy amongst my nobility.” Athos bowed, and remained silent.

“Is that all you wished to ask me?” added Louis XIV.

“Absolutely all, sire; and I take my leave of your majesty. Is it, however, necessary that I should inform Raoul?”

“Spare yourself the trouble and annoyance. Tell the vicomte that at my *levee* to-morrow morning I will speak to him. I shall expect you this evening, comte, to join my card-table.”

“I am in traveling-costume, sire.”

“A day will come, I hope, when you will leave me no more. Before long, comte, the monarchy will be established in such a manner as to enable me to offer a worthy hospitality to men of your merit.”

“Provided, sire, a monarch reigns grandly in the hearts of his subjects, the palace he inhabits matters little, since he is worshipped in a temple.” With these words Athos left the cabinet, and found De Bragelonne, who was awaiting him anxiously.

“Well, monsieur?” said the young man.

“The king, Raoul, is well intentioned towards us both; not, perhaps, in the sense you suppose, but he is kind, and generously disposed to our house.”

“You have bad news to communicate to me, monsieur,” said the young man, turning very pale.

"The king himself will inform you to-morrow morning that it is not bad news."

"The king has not signed, however?"

"The king wishes himself to settle the terms of the contract, and he desires to make it so grand that he requires time for consideration. Throw the blame rather on your own impatience, than on the king's good feelings towards you."

Raoul, in utter consternation, on account of his knowledge of the count's frankness as well as his diplomacy, remained plunged in dull and gloomy stupor.

"Will you not go with me to my lodgings?" said Athos.

"I beg your pardon, monsieur; I will follow you," he stammered out, following Athos down the staircase.

"Since I am here," said Athos, suddenly, "cannot I see M. d'Artagnan?"

"Shall I show you his apartments?" said De Bragelonne.

"Do so."

"They are on the opposite staircase."

They altered their course, but on reaching the landing of the grand staircase, Raoul perceived a servant in the Comte de Guiche's livery, who ran towards him as soon as he heard his voice.

"What is it?" said Raoul.

"This note, monsieur. My master heard of your return and wrote to you without delay; I have been looking for you for the last half-hour."

Raoul approached Athos as he unsealed the letter, saying, "With your permission, monsieur."

"Certainly."

"Dear Raoul," wrote the Comte de Guiche, "I have an affair in hand which requires immediate attention; I know you have returned; come to me as soon as possible."

Hardly had he finished reading it, when a servant in the livery of the Duke of Buckingham, turning out of the gallery, recognized Raoul, and approached him respectfully, saying, "From his Grace, monsieur."

"Well, Raoul, as I see you are already as busy as a general of an army, I shall leave you, and will find M. d'Artagnan myself."

"You will excuse me, I trust," said Raoul.

"Yes, yes, I excuse you; adieu, Raoul; you will find me at my apartments until to-morrow; during the day I may set out for Blois, unless I have orders to the contrary."

"I shall present my respects to you to-morrow, monsieur."

As soon as Athos had left, Raoul opened Buckingham's letter.

"Monsieur de Bragelonne," it ran, "You are, of all the Frenchmen I have known, the one with whom I am most pleased; I am about to put your friendship to the proof. I have received a certain message, written in very good French. As I am an Englishman, I am afraid of not comprehending it very clearly. The letter has a good name attached to it, and that is all I can tell you. Will you be good enough to come and see me? for I am told you have arrived from Blois.

"Your devoted

"VILLIERS, Duke of Buckingham."

"I am going now to see your master," said Raoul to De Guiche's servant, as he dismissed him; "and I shall be with the Duke of Buckingham in an hour," he added, dismissing with these words the duke's messenger.

CHAPTER XIX.

Sword-Thrusts in the Water.

Raoul, on betaking himself to De Guiche, found him conversing with De Wardes and Manicamp. De Wardes, since the affair of the barricade, had treated Raoul as a stranger; they behaved as if they were not acquainted. As Raoul entered, De Guiche walked up to him; and Raoul, as he grasped his friend's hand, glanced rapidly at his two companions, hoping to be able to read on their faces what was passing in their minds. De Wardes was cold and impenetrable; Manicamp seemed absorbed in the contemplation of some trimming to his dress. De Guiche led Raoul to an adjoining cabinet, and made him sit down, saying, "How well you look!"

"That is singular," replied Raoul, "for I am far from being in good spirits."

"It is your case, then, Raoul, as it is my own, — our love affairs do not progress."

"So much the better, count, as far as *you* are concerned; the worst news would be good news."

"In that case do not distress yourself, for, not only am I very unhappy, but, what is more, I see others about me who are happy."

"Really, I do not understand you," replied Raoul; "explain yourself."

"You will soon learn. I have tried, but in vain, to overcome the feeling you saw dawn in me, increase, and take entire possession of me. I have summoned all your advice and my own strength to my aid. I have well weighed the unfortunate affair in which I have embarked; I have sounded its depths; that it is an abyss, I am aware, but it matters little for *I* shall pursue my own course."

"This is madness, De Guiche! you cannot advance another step without risking your own ruin to-day, perhaps your life to-morrow."

"Whatever may happen, I have done with reflections; listen."

"And you hope to succeed; you believe that Madame will love you?"

"Raoul, I believe nothing; I hope, because hope exists in man, and never abandons him until death."

"But, admitting that you obtain the happiness you covet, even then, you are more certainly lost than if you had failed in obtaining it."

"I beseech you, Raoul, not to interrupt me any more; you could never convince me, for I tell you beforehand, I do not wish to be convinced; I have gone so far I cannot recede; I have suffered so much, death itself would be a boon. I no longer love to madness, Raoul, I am being engulfed by a whirlpool of jealousy."

Raoul struck his hands together with an expression resembling anger. "Well?" said he.

"Well or ill matters little. This is what I claim from you, my friend, my almost brother. During the last three days Madame has been living in a perfect intoxication of gayety. On the first day, I dared not look at her; I hated her for not being as unhappy as myself. The next day I could not bear her out of my sight; and she, Raoul — at least I thought I remarked it — she looked at me, if not with pity, at least with gentleness. But between her looks and mine, a shadow intervened; another's smile invited hers. Beside her horse another's always gallops, which is not mine; in her ear another's caressing voice, not mine, unceasingly vibrates. Raoul, for three days past my brain has been on fire; flame, not blood, courses through my veins. That shadow must be driven away, that smile must be quenched; that voice must be silenced."

"You wish Monsieur's death," exclaimed Raoul.

"No, no, I am not jealous of the husband; I am jealous of the lover."

"Of the lover?" said Raoul.

"Have you not observed it, you who were formerly so keen-sighted?"

"Are you jealous of the Duke of Buckingham?"

"To the very death."

"Again jealous?"

"This time the affair will be easy to arrange between us; I have taken the initiative, and have sent him a letter."

"It was you, then, who wrote to him?"

"How do you know that?"

"I know it, because he told me so. Look at this;" and he handed De Guiche the letter he had received nearly at the same moment as his own. De Guiche read it eagerly, and said, "He is a brave man, and more than that, a gallant man."

"Most certainly the duke is a gallant man; I need not ask if you wrote to him in a similar style."

"He will show you my letter when you call on him on my behalf."

"But that is almost out of the question."

"What is?"

"That I shall call on him for that purpose."

"Why so?"

"The duke consults me as you do."

"I suppose you will give *me* the preference! Listen to me, Raoul, I wish you to tell his Grace — it is a very simple matter — that to-day, to-morrow, the following day, or any other day he may choose, I will meet him at Vincennes."

"Reflect, De Guiche."

"I thought I told you I have reflected."

"The duke is a stranger here; he is on a mission which renders his person inviolable.... Vincennes is close to the Bastile."

"The consequences concern *me*."

"But the motive for this meeting? What motive do you wish me to assign?"

"Be perfectly easy on that score, he will not ask any. The duke must be as sick of me as I am of him. I implore you, therefore, seek the duke, and if it is necessary to entreat him, to accept my offer, I will do so."

"That is useless. The duke has already informed me that he wishes to speak to me. The duke is now playing cards with the king. Let us both go there. I will draw him aside in the gallery; you will remain aloof. Two words will be sufficient."

"That is well arranged. I will take De Wardes to keep me in countenance."

"Why not Manicamp? De Wardes can join us at any time; we can leave him here."

"Yes, that is true."

"He knows nothing?"

"Positively nothing. You continue still on an unfriendly footing, then?"

"Has he not told you anything?"

"Nothing."

"I do not like the man, and, as I *never* liked him, the result is, that I am on no worse terms with him to-day than I was yesterday."

“Let us go, then.”

The four descended the stairs. De Guiche’s carriage was waiting at the door, and took them to the Palais Royal. As they were going along, Raoul was engaged in devising his scheme of action. The sole depositary of two secrets, he did not despair of concluding some arrangement between the two parties. He knew the influence he exercised over Buckingham, and the ascendency he had acquired over De Guiche, and affairs did not look utterly hopeless. On their arrival in the gallery, dazzling with the blaze of light, where the most beautiful and illustrious women of the court moved to and fro, like stars in their own atmosphere, Raoul could not prevent himself for a moment forgetting De Guiche in order to seek out Louise, who, amidst her companions, like a dove completely fascinated, gazed long and fixedly upon the royal circle, which glittered with jewels and gold. All its members were standing, the king alone being seated. Raoul perceived Buckingham, who was standing a few paces from Monsieur, in a group of French and English, who were admiring his aristocratic carriage and the incomparable magnificence of his costume. Some of the older courtiers remembered having seen his father, but their recollections were not prejudicial to the son.

Buckingham was conversing with Fouquet, who was talking with him aloud about Belle-Isle. “I cannot speak to him at present,” said Raoul.

“Wait, then, and choose your opportunity, but finish everything speedily. I am on thorns.”

“See, our deliverer approaches,” said Raoul, perceiving D’Artagnan, who, magnificently dressed in his new uniform of captain of the musketeers, had just made his entry in the gallery; and he advanced towards D’Artagnan.

“The Comte de la Fere has been looking for you, chevalier,” said Raoul.

“Yes,” replied D’Artagnan, “I have just left him.”

“I thought you would have passed a portion of the evening together.”

“We have arranged to meet again.”

As he answered Raoul, his absent looks were directed on all sides, as if seeking some one in the crowd or looking for something in the room. Suddenly his gaze became fixed, like that of an eagle on its prey. Raoul followed the direction of his glance, and noticed that De Guiche and D’Artagnan saluted each other, but he could not distinguish at whom the captain’s lingering and haughty glance was aimed.

"Chevalier," said Raoul, "there is no one here but yourself who can render me a service."

"What is it, my dear vicomte?"

"It is simply to go and interrupt the Duke of Buckingham, to whom I wish to say two words, and, as the duke is conversing with M. Fouquet, you understand that it would not do for *me* to throw myself into the middle of the conversation."

"Ah, ah, is M. Fouquet there?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"Do you not see him?"

"Yes, now I do. But do you think I have a greater right than you have?"

"You are a more important personage."

"Yes, you're right; I am captain of the musketeers; I have had the post promised me so long, and have enjoyed it for so brief a period, that I am always forgetting my dignity."

"You will do me this service, will you not?"

"M. Fouquet — the deuce!"

"Are you not on good terms with him?"

"It is rather he who may not be on good terms with me; however, since it must be done some day or another — "

"Stay; I think he is looking at you; or is it likely that it might be — "

"No, no; don't deceive yourself, it is indeed me for whom this honor is intended."

"The opportunity is a good one, then?"

"Do you think so?"

"Pray go."

"Well, I will."

De Guiche had not removed his eyes from Raoul, who made a sign to him that all was arranged. D'Artagnan walked straight up to the group, and civilly saluted M. Fouquet as well as the others.

"Good evening, M. d'Artagnan; we were speaking of Belle-Isle," said Fouquet, with that usage of society, and that perfect knowledge of the language of looks, which require half a lifetime thoroughly to acquire, and which some persons, notwithstanding all their study, never attain.

"Of Belle-Ile-en-Mer! Ah!" said D'Artagnan. "It belongs to you, I believe, M. Fouquet?"

"M. Fouquet has just told us that he had presented it to the king," said Buckingham.

“Do you know Belle-Isle, chevalier?” inquired Fouquet.

“I have only been there once,” replied D’Artagnan, with readiness and good-humor.

“Did you remain there long?”

“Scarcely a day.”

“Did you see much of it while you were there?”

“All that could be seen in a day.”

“A great deal can be seen with observation as keen as yours,” said Fouquet; at which D’Artagnan bowed.

During this Raoul made a sign to Buckingham. “M. Fouquet,” said Buckingham, “I leave the captain with you, he is more learned than I am in bastions, scarps, and counter-scarps, and I will join one of my friends, who has just beckoned me.” Saying this, Buckingham disengaged himself from the group, and advanced towards Raoul, stopping for a moment at the table where the queen-mother, the young queen, and the king were playing together.

“Now, Raoul,” said De Guiche, “there he is; be firm and quick.”

Buckingham, having made some complimentary remark to Madame, continued his way towards Raoul, who advanced to meet him, while De Guiche remained in his place, though he followed him with his eyes. The maneuver was so arranged that the young men met in an open space which was left vacant, between the groups of players and the gallery, where they walked, stopping now and then for the purpose of saying a few words to some of the graver courtiers who were walking there. At the moment when the two lines were about to unite, they were broken by a third. It was Monsieur who advanced towards the Duke of Buckingham. Monsieur had his most engaging smile on his red and perfumed lips.

“My dear duke,” said he, with the most affectionate politeness; “is it really true what I have just been told?”

Buckingham turned round; he had not noticed Monsieur approach; but had merely heard his voice. He started in spite of his command over himself, and a slight pallor overspread his face. “Monseigneur,” he asked, “what has been told you that surprises you so much?”

“That which throws me into despair, and will, in truth, be a real cause of mourning for the whole court.”

“Your highness is very kind, for I perceive that you allude to my departure.”

"Precisely."

Guiche had overheard the conversation from where he was standing, and started in his turn. "His departure," he murmured. "What does he say?"

Philip continued with the same gracious air, "I can easily conceive, monsieur, why the king of Great Britain recalls you; we all know that King Charles II., who appreciates true gentlemen, cannot dispense with you. But it cannot be supposed we can let you go without great regret; and I beg you to receive the expression of my own."

"Believe me, monseigneur," said the duke, "that if I quit the court of France — "

"Because you are recalled; but, if you suppose the expression of my own wish on the subject might possibly have any influence with the king, I will gladly volunteer to entreat his majesty Charles II. to leave you with us a little while longer."

"I am overwhelmed, monseigneur, by so much kindness," replied Buckingham; "but I have received positive commands. My residence in France was limited; I have prolonged it at the risk of displeasing my gracious sovereign. It is only this very day that I recollected I ought to have set off four days ago."

"Indeed," said Monsieur.

"Yes; but," added Buckingham, raising his voice in such a manner that the princess could hear him, — "but I resemble that dweller in the East, who turned mad, and remained so for several days, owing to a delightful dream that he had had, but who one day awoke, if not completely cured, in some respects rational at least. The court of France has its intoxicating properties, which are not unlike this dream, my lord; but at last I wake and leave it. I shall be unable, therefore, to prolong my residence, as your highness has so kindly invited me to do."

"When do you leave?" inquired Philip, with an expression full of interest.

"To-morrow, monseigneur. My carriages have been ready for three days."

The Duc d'Orleans made a movement of the head, which seemed to signify, "Since you are determined, duke, there is nothing to be said." Buckingham returned the gesture, concealing under a smile a contraction of his heart; and then Monsieur moved away in the same direction by which he had approached. At the same moment, however, De Guiche advanced from the opposite direction. Raoul feared that the impatient young man might possibly make the proposition himself, and hurried forth before him.

"No, no, Raoul, all is useless now," said Guiche, holding both his hands towards the duke, and leading him behind a column. "Forgive me, duke, for what I wrote to you, I was mad; give me back my letter."

"It is true," said the duke, "you cannot owe me a grudge any longer now."

"Forgive me, duke; my friendship, my lasting friendship is yours."

"There is certainly no reason why you should bear me any ill-will from the moment I leave her never to see her again."

Raoul heard these words, and comprehending that his presence was now useless between the young men, who had now only friendly words to exchange, withdrew a few paces; a movement which brought him closer to De Wardes, who was conversing with the Chevalier de Lorraine respecting the departure of Buckingham. "A strategic retreat," said De Wardes.

"Why so?"

"Because the dear duke saves a sword-thrust by it." At which reply both laughed.

Raoul, indignant, turned round frowningly, flushed with anger and his lip curling with disdain. The Chevalier de Lorraine turned on his heel, but De Wardes remained and waited.

"You will not break yourself of the habit," said Raoul to De Wardes, "of insulting the absent; yesterday it was M. d'Artagnan, to-day it is the Duke of Buckingham."

"You know very well, monsieur," returned De Wardes, "that I sometimes insult those who are present."

De Wardes was close to Raoul, their shoulders met, their faces approached, as if to mutually inflame each other by the fire of their looks and of their anger. It could be seen that the one was at the height of fury, the other at the end of his patience. Suddenly a voice was heard behind them full of grace and courtesy, saying, "I believe I heard my name pronounced."

They turned round and saw D'Artagnan, who, with a smiling eye and a cheerful face, had just placed his hand on De Wardes's shoulder. Raoul stepped back to make room for the musketeer. De Wardes trembled from head to foot, turned pale, but did not move. D'Artagnan, still with the same smile, took the place which Raoul had abandoned to him.

"Thank you, my dear Raoul," he said. "M. de Wardes, I wish to talk with you. Do not leave us, Raoul; every one can hear what I have to say to M. de Wardes." His smile immediately faded away, and his glace became cold and sharp as a sword.

"I am at your orders, monsieur," said De Wardes.

"For a very long time," resumed D'Artagnan, "I have sought an opportunity of conversing with you; to-day is the first time I have found it. The place is badly chosen, I admit, but you will perhaps have the goodness to accompany me to my apartments, which are on the staircase at the end of this gallery."

"I follow you, monsieur," said De Wardes.

"Are you alone here?" said D'Artagnan.

"No; I have M. Manicamp and M. de Guiche, two of my friends."

"That's well," said D'Artagnan; "but two persons are not sufficient; you will be able to find a few others, I trust."

"Certainly," said the young man, who did not know what object D'Artagnan had in view. "As many as you please."

"Are they friends?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Real friends?"

"No doubt of it."

"Very well, get a good supply, then. Do you come, too, Raoul; bring M. de Guiche and the Duke of Buckingham."

"What a disturbance," replied De Wardes, attempting to smile. The captain slightly signed to him with his hand, as though to recommend him to be patient, and then led the way to his apartments.

CHAPTER XX.

Sword-Thrusts in the Water (concluded).

D’Artagnan’s apartment was not unoccupied; for the Comte de la Fere, seated in the recess of a window, awaited him. “Well,” said he to D’Artagnan, as he saw him enter.

“Well,” said the latter, “M. de Wardes has done me the honor to pay me a visit, in company with some of his own friends, as well as of ours.” In fact, behind the musketeer appeared De Wardes and Manicamp, followed by De Guiche and Buckingham, who looked surprised, not knowing what was expected of them. Raoul was accompanied by two or three gentlemen; and, as he entered, glanced round the room, and perceiving the count, he went and placed himself by his side. D’Artagnan received his visitors with all the courtesy he was capable of; he preserved his unmoved and unconcerned look. All the persons present were men of distinction, occupying posts of honor and credit at the court. After he had apologized to each of them for any inconvenience he might have put them to, he turned towards De Wardes, who, in spite of his customary self-command, could not prevent his face betraying some surprise mingled with not a little uneasiness.

“Now, monsieur,” said D’Artagnan, “since we are no longer within the precincts of the king’s palace, and since we can speak out without failing in respect to propriety, I will inform you why I have taken the liberty to request you to visit me here, and why I have invited these gentlemen to be present at the same time. My friend, the Comte de la Fere, has acquainted me with the injurious reports you are spreading about myself. You have stated that you regard me as your mortal enemy, because I was, so you affirm, that of your father.”

“Perfectly true, monsieur, I have said so,” replied De Wardes, whose pallid face became slightly tinged with color.

“You accuse me, therefore, of a crime, or a fault, or of some mean and cowardly act. Have the goodness to state your charge against me in precise terms.”

“In the presence of witnesses?”

“Most certainly in the presence of witnesses; and you see I have selected them as being experienced in affairs of honor.”

“You do not appreciate my delicacy, monsieur. I have accused you, it is true; but I have kept the nature of the accusation a perfect secret. I entered into no details; but have rested satisfied by expressing my hatred in the presence of those on whom a duty was almost imposed to acquaint you with it. You have not taken the discreetness I have shown into consideration, although you were interested in remaining silent. I can hardly recognize your habitual prudence in that, M. d’Artagnan.”

D’Artagnan, who was quietly biting the corner of his moustache, said, “I have already had the honor to beg you to state the particulars of the grievances you say you have against me.”

“Aloud?”

“Certainly, aloud.”

“In that case, I will speak.”

“Speak, monsieur,” said D’Artagnan, bowing; “we are all listening to you.”

“Well, monsieur, it is not a question of a personal injury towards myself, but one towards my father.”

“That you have already stated.”

“Yes; but there are certain subjects which are only approached with hesitation.”

“If that hesitation, in your case, really does exist, I entreat you to overcome it.”

“Even if it refer to a disgraceful action?”

“Yes; in every and any case.”

Those who were present at this scene had, at first, looked at each other with a good deal of uneasiness. They were reassured, however, when they saw that D’Artagnan manifested no emotion whatever.

De Wardes still maintained the same unbroken silence. “Speak, monsieur,” said the musketeer; “you see you are keeping us waiting.”

“Listen, then: — My father loved a lady of noble birth, and this lady loved my father.” D’Artagnan and Athos exchanged looks. De Wardes continued: “M. d’Artagnan found some letters which indicated a rendezvous, substituted himself, under disguise, for the person who was expected, and took advantage of the darkness.”

“That is perfectly true,” said D’Artagnan.

A slight murmur was heard from those present. “Yes, I was guilty of that dishonorable action. You should have added, monsieur, since you are so impartial, that, at the period when the circumstance which you have just related happened, I was not one-and-twenty years of age.”

A renewed murmur was heard, but this time of astonishment, and almost of doubt.

“It was a most shameful deception, I admit,” said D’Artagnan, “and I have not waited for M. de Wardes’s reproaches to reproach myself for it, and very bitterly, too. Age has, however, made me more reasonable, and, above all, more upright; and this injury has been atoned for by a long and lasting regret. But I appeal to you, gentlemen; this affair took place in 1626, at a period, happily for yourselves, known to you by tradition only, at a period when love was not over-scrupulous, when consciences did not distill, as in the present day, poison and bitterness. We were young soldiers, always fighting, or being attacked, our swords always in our hands, or at least ready to be drawn from their sheaths. Death then always stared us in the face, war hardened us, and the cardinal pressed us sorely. I have repented of it, and more than that — I still repent it, M. de Wardes.”

“I can well understand that, monsieur, for the action itself needed repentance; but you were not the less the cause of that lady’s disgrace. She, of whom you have been speaking, covered with shame, borne down by the affront you brought upon her, fled, quitted France, and no one ever knew what became of her.”

“Stay,” said the Comte de la Fere, stretching his hand towards De Wardes, with a peculiar smile upon his face, “you are mistaken; she was seen; and there are persons even now present, who, having often heard her spoken of, will easily recognize her by the description I am about to give. She was about five-and-twenty years of age, slender in form, of a pale complexion, and fair-haired; she was married in England.”

“Married?” exclaimed De Wardes.

“So, you were not aware she was married? You see we are far better informed than yourself. Do you happen to know she was usually styled ‘My Lady,’ without the addition of any name to that description?”

“Yes, I know that.”

“Good Heavens!” murmured Buckingham.

“Very well, monsieur. That woman, who came from England, returned to England after having thrice attempted M. d’Artagnan’s life. That was but just, you will say, since M. d’Artagnan had insulted her. But that which was not just was, that, when in England, this woman, by her seductions, completely enslaved a young man in the service of Lord de Winter, by name Felton. You change color, my lord,” said Athos, turning to the Duke of Buckingham, “and your eyes kindle with anger and sorrow. Let your Grace finish the recital, then, and tell M. de Wardes who this woman was who placed the knife in the hand of your father’s murderer.”

A cry escaped from the lips of all present. The young duke passed his handkerchief across his forehead, which was covered with perspiration. A dead silence ensued among the spectators.

“You see, M. de Wardes,” said D’Artagnan, whom this recital had impressed more and more, as his own recollection revived as Athos spoke, “you see that my crime did not cause the destruction of any one’s soul, and that the soul in question may fairly be considered to have been altogether lost before my regret. It is, however, an act of conscience on my part. Now this matter is settled, therefore, it remains for me to ask, with the greatest humility, your forgiveness for this shameless action, as most certainly I should have asked it of your father, if he were still alive, and if I had met him after my return to France, subsequent to the death of King Charles I.”

“That is too much, M. d’Artagnan,” exclaimed many voices, with animation.

“No, gentlemen,” said the captain. “And now, M. de Wardes, I hope all is finished between us, and that you will have no further occasion to speak ill of me again. Do you consider it completely settled?”

De Wardes bowed, and muttered to himself inarticulately.

“I trust also,” said D’Artagnan, approaching the young man closely, “that you will no longer speak ill of any one, as it seems you have the unfortunate habit of doing; for a man so puritanically conscientious as you are, who can reproach an old soldier for a youthful freak five-and-thirty years after it happened, will allow me to ask whether you, who advocate such excessive purity of conscience, will undertake on your side to do nothing contrary either to conscience or the principle of honor. And now, listen attentively to what I am going to say, M. de Wardes, in conclusion. Take care that no tale, with which your name may be associated, reaches my ear.”

“Monsieur,” said De Wardes, “it is useless threatening to no purpose.”

“I have not yet finished, M. de Wardes, and you must listen to me still further.” The circle of listeners, full of eager curiosity, drew closer. “You spoke just now of the honor of a woman, and of the honor of your father. We were glad to hear you speak in that manner; for it is pleasing to think that such a sentiment of delicacy and rectitude, and which did not exist, it seems, in *our* minds, lives in our children; and it is delightful, too, to see a young man, at an age when men from habit become the destroyers of the honor of women, respect and defend it."

De Wardes bit his lip and clenched his hands, evidently much disturbed to learn how this discourse, the commencement of which was announced in so threatening a manner, would terminate.

"How did it happen, then, that you allowed yourself to say to M. de Bragelonne that he did not know who his mother was?"

Raoul's eyes flashed, as, darting forward, he exclaimed, — "Chevalier, this is a personal affair of my own!" At which exclamation, a smile, full of malice, passed across De Wardes's face.

D'Artagnan put Raoul aside, saying, — "Do not interrupt me, young man." And looking at De Wardes in an authoritative manner, he continued: — "I am now dealing with a matter which cannot be settled by means of the sword. I discuss it before men of honor, all of whom have more than once had their swords in their hands in affairs of honor. I selected them expressly. These gentlemen well know that every secret for which men fight ceases to be a secret. I again put my question to M. de Wardes. What was the subject of conversation when you offended this young man, in offending his father and mother at the same time?"

"It seems to me," returned De Wardes, "that liberty of speech is allowed, when it is supported by every means which a man of courage has at his disposal."

"Tell me what the means are by which a man of courage can sustain a slanderous expression."

"The sword."

"You fail, not only in logic, in your argument, but in religion and honor. You expose the lives of many others, without referring to your own, which seems to be full of hazard. Besides, fashions pass away, monsieur, and the fashion of duelling has passed away, without referring in any way to the edicts of his majesty which forbid it. Therefore, in order to be consistent with your own chivalrous notions, you will at once apologize to M. de Bragelonne; you will tell him how much you regret having spoken so lightly, and that the nobility and purity of his race are inscribed, not in his heart alone, but still more in every action of his life. You will do and say this, M. de Wardes, as I, an old officer, did and said just now to your boy's moustache."

"And if I refuse?" inquired De Wardes.

"In that case the result will be — "

"That which you think you will prevent," said De Wardes, laughing; "the result will be that your conciliatory address will end in a violation of the king's prohibition."

"Not so," said the captain, "you are quite mistaken."

"What will be the result, then?"

"The result will be that I shall go to the king, with whom I am on tolerably good terms, to whom I have been happy enough to render certain services, dating from a period when you were not born, and who, at my request, has just sent me an order in blank for M. Baisemeaux de Montlezun, governor of the Bastile; and I shall say to the king: 'Sire, a man has in a most cowardly way insulted M. de Bragelonne by insulting his mother; I have written this man's name upon the *lettre de cachet* which your majesty has been kind enough to give me, so that M. de Wardes is in the Bastile for three years." And D'Artagnan, drawing the order signed by the king from his pocket, held it towards De Wardes.

Remarking that the young man was not quite convinced, and received the warning as an idle threat, he shrugged his shoulders and walked leisurely towards the table, upon which lay a writing-case and a pen, the length of which would have terrified the topographical Porthos. De Wardes then saw that nothing could well be more seriously intended than the threat in question, for the Bastile, even at that period, was already held in dread. He advanced a step towards Raoul, and, in an almost unintelligible voice, said, — "I offer my apologies in the terms which M. d'Artagnan just now dictated, and which I am forced to make to you."

"One moment, monsieur," said the musketeer, with the greatest tranquillity, "you mistake the terms of the apology. I did not say, 'and which I am forced to make'; I said, 'and which my conscience induces me to make.' This latter expression, believe me, is better than the former; and it will be far preferable, since it will be the most truthful expression of your own sentiments."

"I subscribe to it," said De Wardes; "but submit, gentlemen, that a thrust of the sword through the body, as was the custom formerly, was far better than tyranny like this."

"No, monsieur," replied Buckingham; "for the sword-thrust, when received, was no indication that a particular person was right or wrong; it only showed that he was more or less skillful in the use of the weapon."

"Monsieur!" exclaimed De Wardes.

"There, now," interrupted D'Artagnan, "you are going to say something very rude, and I am rendering a service by stopping you in time."

"Is that all, monsieur?" inquired De Wardes.

"Absolutely everything," replied D'Artagnan; "and these gentlemen, as well as myself, are quite satisfied with you."

"Believe me, monsieur, that your reconciliations are not successful."

"In what way?"

"Because, as we are now about to separate, I would wager that M. de Bragelonne and myself are greater enemies than ever."

"You are deceived, monsieur, as far as I am concerned," returned Raoul; "for I do not retain the slightest animosity in my heart against you."

This last blow overwhelmed De Wardes. He cast his eyes around him like a man bewildered. D'Artagnan saluted most courteously the gentlemen who had been present at the explanation; and every one, on leaving the room, shook hands with him; but not one hand was held out towards De Wardes. "Oh!" exclaimed the young man, "can I not find some one on whom to wreak my vengeance?"

"You can, monsieur, for I am here," whispered a voice full of menace in his ear.

De Wardes turned round, and saw the Duke of Buckingham, who, having probably remained behind with that intention, had just approached him. "You, monsieur?" exclaimed De Wardes.

"Yes, I! I am no subject of the king of France; I am not going to remain on the territory, since I am about setting off for England. I have accumulated in my heart such a mass of despair and rage, that I, too, like yourself, need to revenge myself upon some one. I approve M. d'Artagnan's principles profoundly, but I am not bound to apply them to you. I am an Englishman, and, in my turn, I propose to you what you proposed to others to no purpose. Since you, therefore, are so terribly incensed, take me as a remedy. In thirty-four hours' time I shall be at Calais. Come with me; the journey will appear shorter if together, than if alone. We will fight, when we get there, upon the sands which are covered by the rising tide, and which form part of the French territory during six hours of the day, but belong to the territory of Heaven during the other six.”

“I accept willingly,” said De Wardes.

“I assure you,” said the duke, “that if you kill me, you will be rendering me an infinite service.”

“I will do my utmost to make myself agreeable to you, duke,” said De Wardes.

“It is agreed, then, that I carry you off with me?”

“I shall be at your commands. I needed some real danger and some mortal risk to run, to tranquilize me.”

“In that case, I think you have met with what you are looking for. Farewell, M. de Wardes; to-morrow morning, my valet will tell you the exact hour of our departure; we can travel together like two excellent friends. I generally travel as fast as I can. Adieu.”

Buckingham saluted De Wardes, and returned towards the king’s apartments; De Wardes, irritated beyond measure, left the Palais Royal, and hurried through the streets homeward to the house where he lodged.

CHAPTER XXI.

Baisemeaux de Montlezun.

After the austere lesson administered to De Wardes, Athos and D’Artagnan together descended the staircase which led to the courtyard of the Palais Royal. “You perceive,” said Athos to D’Artagnan, “that Raoul cannot, sooner or later, avoid a duel with De Wardes, for De Wardes is as brave as he is vicious and wicked.”

“I know such fellows well,” replied D’Artagnan; “I had an affair with the father. I assure you that, although at that time I had good muscles and a sort of brute courage — I assure you that the father did me some mischief. But you should have seen how I fought it out with him. Ah, Athos, such encounters never take place in these times! I had a hand which could never remain at rest, a hand like quicksilver, — you knew its quality, for you have seen me at work. My sword was no longer than a piece of steel; it was a serpent that assumed every form and every length, seeking where it might thrust its head; in other words, where it might fix its bite. I advanced half a dozen paces, then three, and then, body to body, I pressed my antagonist closely, then I darted back again ten paces. No human power could resist that ferocious ardor. Well, De Wardes the father, with the bravery of his race, with his dogged courage, occupied a good deal of my time; and my fingers, at the end of the engagement, were, I well remember, tired enough.”

“It is, then, as I said,” resumed Athos, “the son will always be looking out for Raoul, and will end by meeting him; and Raoul can easily be found when he is sought for.”

“Agreed; but Raoul calculates well; he bears no grudge against De Wardes, — he has said so; he will wait until he is provoked, and in that case his position is a good one. The king will not be able to get out of temper about the matter; besides we shall know how to pacify his majesty. But why so full of these fears and anxieties? You don’t easily get alarmed.”

“I will tell you what makes me anxious; Raoul is to see the king to-morrow, when his majesty will inform him of his wishes respecting a certain marriage. Raoul, loving as he does, will get out of temper, and once in an angry mood, if he were to meet De Wardes, the shell would explode.”

“We will prevent the explosion.”

“Not I,” said Athos, “for I must return to Blois. All this gilded elegance of the court, all these intrigues, sicken me. I am no longer a young man who can make terms with the meanness of the day. I have read in the Great Book many things too beautiful and too comprehensive to longer take any interest in the trifling phrases which these men whisper among themselves when they wish to deceive others. In one word, I am weary of Paris wherever and whenever you are not with me; and as I cannot have you with me always, I wish to return to Blois.”

“How wrong you are, Athos; how you gainsay your origin and the destiny of your noble nature. Men of your stamp are created to continue, to the very last moment, in full possession of their great faculties. Look at my sword, a Spanish blade, the one I wore at La Rochelle; it served me for thirty years without fail; one day in the winter it fell upon the marble floor on the Louvre and was broken. I had a hunting-knife made of it which will last a hundred years yet. You, Athos, with your loyalty, your frankness, your cool courage, and your sound information, are the very man kings need to warn and direct them. Remain here; Monsieur Fouquet will not last as long as my Spanish blade.”

“Is it possible,” said Athos, smiling, “that my friend, D’Artagnan, who, after having raised me to the skies, making me an object of worship, casts me down from the top of Olympus, and hurls me to the ground? I have more exalted ambition, D’Artagnan. To be a minister — to be a slave, — never! Am I not still greater? I am nothing. I remember having heard you occasionally call me ‘the great Athos’; I defy you, therefore, if I were minister, to continue to bestow that title upon me. No, no; I do not yield myself in this manner.”

“We will not speak of it any more, then; renounce everything, even the brotherly feeling which unites us.”

“It is almost cruel what you say.”

D’Artagnan pressed Athos’s hand warmly. “No, no; renounce everything without fear. Raoul can get on without you. I am at Paris.”

“In that case I shall return to Blois. We will take leave of each other to-night; to-morrow at daybreak I shall be on my horse again.”

“You cannot return to your hotel alone; why did you not bring Grimaud with you?”

“Grimaud takes his rest now; he goes to bed early, for my poor old servant gets easily fatigued. He came from Blois with me, and I compelled him to remain within doors; for if, in retracing the forty leagues which separate us from Blois, he needed to draw breath even, he would die without a murmur. But I don’t want to lose Grimaud.”

“You shall have one of my musketeers to carry a torch for you. *Hola!* some one there,” called out D’Artagnan, leaning over the gilded balustrade. The heads of seven or eight musketeers appeared. “I wish some gentleman, who is so disposed, to escort the Comte de la Fere,” cried D’Artagnan.

“Thank you for your readiness, gentlemen,” said Athos; “I regret to have occasion to trouble you in this manner.”

“I would willingly escort the Comte de la Fere,” said some one, “if I had not to speak to Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

“Who is that?” said D’Artagnan, looking into the darkness.

“I, Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

“Heaven forgive me, if that is not Monsieur Baisemeaux’s voice.”

“It is, monsieur.”

“What are you doing in the courtyard, my dear Baisemeaux?”

“I am waiting your orders, my dear Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

“Wretch that I am,” thought D’Artagnan; “true, you have been told, I suppose, that some one was to be arrested, and have come yourself, instead of sending an officer?”

“I came because I had occasion to speak to you.”

“You did not send to me?”

“I waited until you were disengaged,” said Monsieur Baisemeaux, timidly.

“I leave you, D’Artagnan,” said Athos.

“Not before I have present Monsieur Baisemeaux de Montlezun, the governor of the Bastile.”

Baisemeaux and Athos saluted each other.

“Surely you must know each other,” said D’Artagnan.

“I have an indistinct recollection of Monsieur Baisemeaux,” said Athos.

“You remember, my dear, Baisemeaux, the king’s guardsman with whom we used formerly to have such delightful meetings in the cardinal’s time?”

“Perfectly,” said Athos, taking leave of him with affability.

"Monsieur le Comte de la Fere, whose *nom de guerre* was Athos," whispered D'Artagnan to Baisemeaux.

"Yes, yes, a brave man, one of the celebrated four."

"Precisely so. But, my dear Baisemeaux, shall we talk now?"

"If you please."

"In the first place, as for the orders — there are none. The king does not intend to arrest the person in question.

"So much the worse," said Baisemeaux with a sigh.

"What do you mean by so much the worse?" exclaimed D'Artagnan, laughing.

"No doubt of it," returned the governor, "my prisoners are my income."

"I beg your pardon, I did not see it in that light."

"And so there are no orders," repeated Baisemeaux with a sigh. "What an admirable situation yours is, captain," he continued, after a pause; "captain-lieutenant of the musketeers."

"Oh, it is good enough; but I don't see why you should envy me; you, governor of the Bastile, the first castle in France."

"I am well aware of that," said Baisemeaux, in a sorrowful tone of voice.

"You say that like a man confessing his sins. I would willingly exchange my profits for yours."

"Don't speak of profits to me, if you wish to save me the bitterest anguish of mind."

"Why do you look first on one side and then on the other, as if you were afraid of being arrested yourself, you whose business it is to arrest others?"

"I was looking to see whether any one could see or listen to us; it would be safer to confer more in private, if you would grant me such a favor."

"Baisemeaux, you seem to forget we are acquaintances of five and thirty years' standing. Don't assume such sanctified airs; make yourself quite comfortable; I don't eat governors of the Bastile raw."

"Heaven be praised!"

"Come into the courtyard with me; it's a beautiful moonlit night; we will walk up and down, arm in arm, under the trees, while you tell me your pitiful tale." He drew the doleful governor into the courtyard, took him by the arm as he had said, and, in his rough, good-humored way, cried: "Out with it, rattle away, Baisemeaux; what have you got to say?"

"It's a long story."

“You prefer your own lamentations, then; my opinion is, it will be longer than ever. I’ll wager you are making fifty thousand francs out of your pigeons in the Bastile.”

“Would to heaven that were the case, M. d’Artagnan.”

“You surprise me, Baisemeaux; just look at you, acting the anchorite. I should like to show you your face in a glass, and you would see how plump and florid-looking you are, as fat and round as a cheese, with eyes like lighted coals; and if it were not for that ugly wrinkle you try to cultivate on your forehead, you would hardly look fifty years old, and you are sixty, if I am not mistaken.”

“All quite true.”

“Of course I knew it was true, as true as the fifty thousand francs profit you make;” at which remark Baisemeaux stamped on the ground.

“Well, well,” said D’Artagnan, “I will add up your accounts for you: you were captain of M. Mazarin’s guards; and twelve thousand francs a year would in twelve years amount to one hundred and forty thousand francs.”

“Twelve thousand francs! Are you mad?” cried Baisemeaux; “the old miser gave me no more than six thousand, and the expenses of the post amounted to six thousand five hundred francs. M. Colbert, who deducted the other six thousand francs, condescended to allow me to take fifty thousand francs as a gratification; so that, if it were not for my little estate at Montlezun, which brings me in twelve thousand francs a year, I could not have met my engagements.”

“Well, then, how about the fifty thousand francs from the Bastile? There, I trust, you are boarded and lodged, and get your six thousand francs salary besides.”

“Admitted!”

“Whether the year be good or bad, there are fifty prisoners, who, on the average, bring you in a thousand francs a year each.”

“I don’t deny it.”

“Well, there is at once an income of fifty thousand francs; you have held the post three years, and must have received in that time one hundred and fifty thousand francs.”

“You forget one circumstance, dear M. d’Artagnan.”

“What is that?”

“That while you received your appointment as captain from the king himself, I received mine as governor from Messieurs Tremblay and

Louviere.”

“Quite right, and Tremblay was not a man to let you have the post for nothing.”

“Nor Louviere either: the result was, that I gave seventy-five thousand francs to Tremblay as his share.”

“Very agreeable that! and to Louviere?”

“The very same.”

“Money down?”

“No: that would have been impossible. The king did not wish, or rather M. Mazarin did not wish, to have the appearance of removing those two gentlemen, who had sprung from the barricades; he permitted them, therefore, to make certain extravagant conditions for their retirement.”

“What were those conditions?”

“Tremble... three years’ income for the good-will.”

“The deuce! so that the one hundred and fifty thousand francs have passed into their hands.”

“Precisely so.”

“And beyond that?”

“A sum of one hundred and fifty thousand francs, or fifteen thousand pistoles, whichever you please, in three payments.”

“Exorbitant.”

“Yes, but that is not all.”

“What besides?”

“In default of the fulfillment by me of any one of those conditions, those gentlemen enter upon their functions again. The king has been induced to sign that.”

“It is monstrous, incredible!”

“Such is the fact, however.”

“I do indeed pity you, Baisemeaux. But why, in the name of fortune, did M. Mazarin grant you this pretended favor? It would have been far better to have refused you altogether.”

“Certainly, but he was strongly persuaded to do so by my protector.”

“Who is he?”

“One of your own friends, indeed; M. d’Herblay.”

“M. d’Herblay! Aramis!”

“Just so; he has been very kind towards me.”

“Kind! to make you enter into such a bargain!”

"Listen! I wished to leave the cardinal's service. M. d'Herblay spoke on my behalf to Louviere and Tremblay — they objected; I wished to have the appointment very much, for I knew what it could be made to produce; in my distress I confided in M. d'Herblay, and he offered to become my surety for the different payments."

"You astound me! Aramis became your surety?"

"Like a man of honor; he procured the signature; Tremblay and Louviere resigned their appointments; I have paid every year twenty-five thousand francs to these two gentlemen; on the thirty-first of May, every year, M. d'Herblay himself comes to the Bastile, and brings me five thousand pistoles to distribute between my crocodiles."

"You owe Aramis one hundred and fifty thousand francs, then?"

"That is the very thing which is the cause of my despair, for I only owe him one hundred thousand."

"I don't quite understand you."

"He came and settled with the vampires only two years. To-day, however, is the thirty-first of May, and he has not been yet, and to-morrow, at midday, the payment falls due; if, therefore, I don't pay to-morrow, those gentlemen can, by the terms of the contract, break off the bargain; I shall be stripped of everything; I shall have worked for three years, and given two hundred and fifty thousand francs for nothing, absolutely for nothing at all, dear M. d'Artagnan."

"This is very strange," murmured D'Artagnan.

"You can now imagine that I may well have wrinkles on my forehead, can you not?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"And you can imagine, too, that notwithstanding I may be as round as a cheese, with a complexion like an apple, and my eyes like coals on fire, I may almost be afraid that I shall not have a cheese or an apple left me to eat, and that my eyes will be left me only to weep with."

"It is really a very grievous affair."

"I have come to you, M. d'Artagnan, for you are the only man who can get me out of my trouble."

"In what way?"

"You are acquainted with the Abbe d'Herblay, and you know that he is a somewhat mysterious gentleman."

"Yes."

"Well, you can, perhaps, give me the address of his presbytery, for I have been to Noisy-le-Sec, and he is no longer there."

"I should think not, indeed. He is Bishop of Vannes."

"What! Vannes in Bretagne?"

"Yes."

The little man began to tear his hair, saying, "How can I get to Vannes from here by midday to-morrow? I am a lost man."

"Your despair quite distresses me."

"Vannes, Vannes!" cried Baisemeaux.

"But listen; a bishop is not always a resident. M. d'Herblay may not possibly be so far away as you fear."

"Pray tell me his address."

"I really don't know it."

"In that case I am lost. I will go and throw myself at the king's feet."

"But, Baisemeaux, I can hardly believe what you tell me; besides, since the Bastile is capable of producing fifty thousand francs a year, why have you not tried to screw one hundred thousand out of it?"

"Because I am an honest man, M. d'Artagnan, and because my prisoners are fed like ambassadors."

"Well, you're in a fair way to get out of your difficulties; give yourself a good attack of indigestion with your excellent living, and put yourself out of the way between this and midday to-morrow."

"How can you be hard-hearted enough to laugh?"

"Nay, you really afflict me. Come, Baisemeaux, if you can pledge me your word of honor, do so, that you will not open your lips to any one about what I am going to say to you."

"Never, never!"

"You wish to put your hands on Aramis?"

"At any cost!"

"Well, go and see where M. Fouquet is."

"Why, what connection can there be — "

"How stupid you are! Don't you know that Vannes is in the diocese of Belle-Isle, or Belle-Isle in the diocese of Vannes? Belle-Isle belongs to M. Fouquet, and M. Fouquet nominated M. d'Herblay to that bishopric!"

"I see, I see; you restore me to life again."

"So much the better. Go and tell M. Fouquet very simply that you wish to speak to M. d'Herblay."

“Of course, of course,” exclaimed Baisemeaux, delightedly.

“But,” said D’Artagnan, checking him by a severe look, “your word of honor?”

“I give you my sacred word of honor,” replied the little man, about to set off running.

“Where are you going?”

“To M. Fouquet’s house.”

“It is useless doing that; M. Fouquet is playing at cards with the king. All you can do is to pay M. Fouquet a visit early to-morrow morning.”

“I will do so. Thank you.”

“Good luck attend you,” said D’Artagnan.

“Thank you.”

“This is a strange affair,” murmured D’Artagnan, as he slowly ascended the staircase after he had left Baisemeaux. “What possible interest can Aramis have in obliging Baisemeaux in this manner? Well, I suppose we shall learn some day or another.”

CHAPTER XXII.

The King’s Card-Table.

Fouquet was present, as D’Artagnan had said, at the king’s card-table. It seemed as if Buckingham’s departure had shed a balm on the lacerated hearts of the previous evening. Monsieur, radiant with delight, made a thousand affectionate signs to his mother. The Count de Guiche could not separate himself from Buckingham, and while playing, conversed with him upon the circumstance of his projected voyage. Buckingham, thoughtful, and kind in his manner, like a man who has adopted a resolution, listened to the count, and from time to time cast a look full of regret and hopeless affection at Madame. The princess, in the midst of her elation of spirits, divided her attention between the king, who was playing with her, Monsieur, who quietly joked her about her enormous winnings, and De Guiche, who exhibited an extravagant delight. Of Buckingham she took but little notice; for her, this fugitive, this exile, was now simply a remembrance, no longer a man. Light hearts are thus constituted; while they themselves continue untouched, they roughly break off with every one who may possibly interfere with their little calculations of self comfort. Madame had received Buckingham’s smiles and attentions and sighs while he was present; but what was the good of sighing, smiling, and kneeling at a distance? Can one tell in what direction the winds in the Channel, which toss mighty vessels to and fro, carry such sighs as these? The duke could not fail to mark this change, and his heart was cruelly hurt. Of a sensitive character, proud and susceptible of deep attachment, he cursed the day on which such a passion had entered his heart. The looks he cast, from time to time at Madame, became colder by degrees at the chilling complexion of his thoughts. He could hardly yet despair, but he was strong enough to impose silence upon the tumultuous outcries of his heart. In exact proportion, however, as Madame suspected this change of feeling, she redoubled her activity to regain the ray of light she was about to lose; her timid and indecisive mind was displayed in brilliant flashes of wit and humor. At any cost she felt that she must be remarked above everything and every one, even above the king himself. And she was so, for the queens, notwithstanding their dignity, and the king, despite the respect which etiquette required, were all eclipsed by her. The queens, stately and ceremonious, were softened and could not restrain their laughter. Madame Henriette, the queen-mother, was dazzled by the brilliancy which cast distinction upon her family, thanks to the wit of the grand-daughter of Henry IV. The king, jealous, as a young man and as a monarch, of the superiority of those who surrounded him, could not resist admitting himself vanquished by a petulance so thoroughly French in its nature, whose energy more than ever increased by English humor. Like a child, he was captivated by her radiant beauty, which her wit made still more dazzling. Madame's eyes flashed like lightning. Wit and humor escaped from her scarlet lips like persuasion from the lips of Nestor of old. The whole court, subdued by her enchanting grace, noticed for the first time that laughter could be indulged in before the greatest monarch in the world, like people who merited their appellation of the wittiest and most polished people in Europe.

Madame, from that evening, achieved and enjoyed a success capable of bewildering all not born to those altitudes termed thrones; which, in spite of their elevation, are sheltered from such giddiness. From that very moment Louis XIV. acknowledged Madame as a person to be recognized. Buckingham regarded her as a coquette deserving the cruelest tortures, and De Guiche looked upon her as a divinity; the courtiers as a star whose light might some day become the focus of all favor and power. And yet Louis XIV., a few years previously, had not even condescended to offer his hand to that "ugly girl" for a ballet; and Buckingham had worshipped this coquette "on both knees." De Guiche had once looked upon this divinity as a mere woman; and the courtiers had not dared to extol this star in her upward progress, fearful to disgust the monarch whom such a dull star had formerly displeased.

Let us see what was taking place during this memorable evening at the king's card-table. The young queen, although Spanish by birth, and the niece of Anne of Austria, loved the king, and could not conceal her affection. Anne of Austria, a keen observer, like all women, and imperious, like every queen, was sensible of Madame's power, and acquiesced in it immediately, a circumstance which induced the young queen to raise the siege and retire to her apartments. The king hardly paid any attention to her departure, notwithstanding the pretended symptoms of indisposition by which it was accompanied. Encouraged by the rules of etiquette, which he had begun to introduce at the court as an element of every relation of life, Louis XIV. did not disturb himself; he offered his hand to Madame without looking at Monsieur his brother, and led the young princess to the door of her apartments. It was remarked, that at the threshold of the door, his majesty, freed from every restraint, or not equal to the situation, sighed very deeply. The ladies present — nothing escapes a woman's glance — Mademoiselle Montalais, for instance — did not fail to say to each other, "the king sighed," and "Madame sighed too." This had been indeed the case. Madame had sighed very noiselessly, but with an accompaniment very far more dangerous for the king's repose. Madame had sighed, first closing her beautiful black eyes, next opening them, and then, laden, as they were, with an indescribable mournfulness of expression, she had raised them towards the king, whose face at that moment visibly heightened in color. The consequence of these blushes, of those interchanged sighs, and of this royal agitation, was, that Montalais had committed an indiscretion which had certainly affected her companion, for Mademoiselle de la Valliere, less clear sighted, perhaps, turned pale when the king blushed; and her attendance being required upon Madame, she tremblingly followed the princess without thinking of taking the gloves, which court etiquette required her to do. True it is that the young country girl might allege as her excuse the agitation into which the king seemed to be thrown, for Mademoiselle de la Valliere, busily engaged in closing the door, had involuntarily fixed her eyes upon the king, who, as he retired backwards, had his face towards it. The king returned to the room where the card-tables were set out. He wished to speak to the different persons there, but it was easy to see that his mind was absent. He jumbled different accounts together, which was taken advantage of by some of the noblemen who had retained those habits since the time of Monsieur Mazarin — who had a poor memory, but was a good calculator. In this way, Monsieur Manicamp, with a thoughtless and absent air — for M. Manicamp was the honestest man in the world, appropriated twenty thousand francs, which were littering the table, and which did not seem to belong to any person in particular. In the same way, Monsieur de Wardes, whose head was doubtless a little bewildered by the occurrences of the evening, somehow forgot to leave behind him the sixty double louis which he had won for the Duke of Buckingham, and which the duke, incapable, like his father, of soiling his hands with coin of any sort, had left lying on the table before him. The king only recovered his attention in some degree at the moment that Monsieur Colbert, who had been narrowly observant for some minutes, approached, and, doubtless, with great respect, yet with much perseverance, whispered a counsel of some sort into the still tingling ears of the king. The king, at the suggestion, listened with renewed attention and immediately looking around him, said, "Is Monsieur Fouquet no longer here?"

"Yes, sire, I am here," replied the superintendent, till then engaged with Buckingham, and approached the king, who advanced a step towards him with a smiling yet negligent air. "Forgive me," said Louis, "if I interrupt your conversation; but I claim your attention wherever I may require your services."

"I am always at the king's service," replied Fouquet.

"And your cash-box, too," said the king, laughing with a false smile.

"My cash-box more than anything else," said Fouquet, coldly.

"The fact is, I wish to give a *fete* at Fontainebleau — to keep open house for fifteen days, and I shall require — " and he stopped, glancing at Colbert. Fouquet waited without showing discomposure; and the king resumed, answering Colbert's icy smile, "four million francs."

"Four million," repeated Fouquet, bowing profoundly. And his nails, buried in his bosom, were thrust into his flesh, but the tranquil expression of his face remained unaltered. "When will they be required, sire?"

"Take your time, — I mean — no, no; as soon as possible."

"A certain time will be necessary, sire."

"Time!" exclaimed Colbert, triumphantly.

"The time, monsieur," said the superintendent, with the haughtiest disdain, "simply to *count the money*; a million can only be drawn and weighed in a day."

"Four days, then," said Colbert.

"My clerks," replied Fouquet, addressing himself to the king, "will perform wonders on his majesty's service, and the sum shall be ready in three days."

It was for Colbert now to turn pale. Louis looked at him astonished. Fouquet withdrew without any parade or weakness, smiling at his numerous friends, in whose countenances alone he read the sincerity of their friendship — an interest partaking of compassion. Fouquet, however, should not be judged by his smile, for, in reality, he felt as if he had been stricken by death. Drops of blood beneath his coat stained the fine linen that clothed his chest. His dress concealed the blood, and his smile the rage which devoured him. His domestics perceived, by the manner in which he approached his carriage, that their master was not in the best of humors: the result of their discernment was, that his orders were executed with that exactitude of maneuver which is found on board a man-of-war, commanded during a storm by an ill-tempered captain. The carriage, therefore, did not simply roll along — it flew. Fouquet had hardly time to recover himself during the drive; on his arrival he went at once to Aramis, who had not yet retired for the night. As for Porthos, he had supped very agreeably off a roast leg of mutton, two pheasants, and a perfect heap of cray-fish; he then directed his body to be anointed with perfumed oils, in the manner of the wrestlers of old; and when this anointment was completed, he had himself wrapped in flannels and placed in a warm bed. Aramis, as we have already said, had not retired. Seated at his ease in a velvet dressing-gown, he wrote letter after letter in that fine and hurried handwriting, a page of which contained a quarter of a volume. The door was thrown hurriedly open, and the superintendent appeared, pale, agitated, anxious. Aramis looked up: “Good-evening,” said he; and his searching look detected his host’s sadness and disordered state of mind. “Was your play as good as his majesty’s?” asked Aramis, by way of beginning the conversation.

Fouquet threw himself upon a couch, and then pointed to the door to the servant who had followed him; when the servant had left he said, “Excellent.”

Aramis, who had followed every movement with his eyes, noticed that he stretched himself upon the cushions with a sort of feverish impatience. “You have lost as usual?” inquired Aramis, his pen still in his hand.

“Even more than usual,” replied Fouquet.

“You know how to support losses?”

“Sometimes.”

“What, Monsieur Fouquet a bad player!”

“There is play and play, Monsieur d’Herblay.”

“How much have you lost?” inquired Aramis, with a slight uneasiness.

Fouquet collected himself a moment, and then, without the slightest emotion, said, “The evening has cost me four millions,” and a bitter laugh drowned the last vibration of these words.

Aramis, who did not expect such an amount, dropped his pen. “Four millions,” he said; “you have lost four millions, — impossible!”

“Monsieur Colbert held my cards for me,” replied the superintendent, with a similar bitter laugh.

“Ah, now I understand; so, so, a new application for funds?”

“Yes, and from the king’s own lips. It was impossible to ruin a man with a more charming smile. What do you think of it?”

“It is clear that your destruction is the object in view.”

“That is your opinion?”

“Still. Besides, there is nothing in it which should astonish you, for we have foreseen it all along.”

“Yes; but I did not expect four millions.”

“No doubt the amount is serious, but, after all, four millions are not quite the death of a man, especially when the man in question is Monsieur Fouquet.”

“My dear D’Herblay, if you knew the contents of my coffers, you would be less easy.”

“And you promised?”

“What could I *do?*”

“That’s true.”

“The very day I refuse, Colbert will procure the money; whence I know not, but he *will* procure it: and I shall be lost.”

“There is no doubt of that. In how many days did you promise the four millions?”

“In three days. The king seemed exceedingly pressed.”

“*In three days?*”

“When I think,” resumed Fouquet, “that just now as I passed along the streets, the people cried out, ‘There is the rich Monsieur Fouquet,’ it is enough to turn my brain.”

“Stay, monsieur, the matter is not worth so much trouble,” said Aramis, calmly, sprinkling some sand over the letter he had just written.

“Suggest a remedy, then, for this evil without a remedy.”

“There is only one remedy for you, — pay.”

“But it is very uncertain whether I have the money. Everything must be exhausted; Belle-Isle is paid for; the pension has been paid; and money, since the investigation of the accounts of those who farm the revenue, is scarce. Besides, admitting that I pay this time, how can I do so on another occasion? When kings have tasted money, they are like tigers who have tasted flesh, they devour everything. The day will arrive — *must* arrive — when I shall have to say, ‘Impossible, sire,’ and on that very day I am a lost man.”

Aramis raised his shoulders slightly, saying:

“A man in your position, my lord, is only lost when he wishes to be so.”

“A man, whatever his position may be, cannot hope to struggle against a king.”

“Nonsense; when I was young I wrestled successfully with the Cardinal Richelieu, who was king of France, — nay more — cardinal.”

“Where are my armies, my troops, my treasures? I have not even Belle-Isle.”

“Bah! necessity is the mother of invention, and when you think all is lost, something will be discovered which will retrieve everything.”

“Who will discover this wonderful something?”

“Yourself.”

“I! I resign my office of inventor.”

“Then *I* will.”

“Be it so. But set to work without delay.”

“Oh! we have time enough!”

“You kill me, D’Herblay, with your calmness,” said the superintendent, passing his handkerchief over his face.

“Do you not remember that I one day told you not to make yourself uneasy, if you possessed courage? *Have* you any?”

“I believe so.”

“Then don’t make yourself uneasy.”

“It is decided then, that, at the last moment, you will come to my assistance.”

“It will only be the repayment of a debt I owe you.”

“It is the vocation of financiers to anticipate the wants of men such as yourself, D’Herblay.”

“If obligingness is the vocation of financiers, charity is the virtue of the clergy. Only, on this occasion, do you act, monsieur. You are not yet sufficiently reduced, and at the last moment we will see what is to be done.”

“We shall see, then, in a very short time.”

“Very well. However, permit me to tell you that, personally, I regret exceedingly that you are at present so short of money, because I myself was about to ask you for some."

"For yourself?"

"For myself, or some of my people, for mine or for ours."

"How much do you want?"

"Be easy on that score; a roundish sum, it is true, but not too exorbitant."

"Tell me the amount."

"Fifty thousand francs."

"Oh! a mere nothing. Of course one has always fifty thousand francs. Why the deuce cannot that knave Colbert be as easily satisfied as you are — and I should give myself far less trouble than I do. When do you need this sum?"

"To-morrow morning; but you wish to know its destination?"

"Nay, nay, chevalier, I need no explanation."

"To-morrow is the first of June."

"Well?"

"One of our bonds becomes due."

"I did not know we had any bonds."

"Certainly, to-morrow we pay our last third instalment."

"What third?"

"Of the one hundred and fifty thousand francs to Baisemeaux."

"Baisemeaux? Who is he?"

"The governor of the Bastile."

"Yes, I remember. On what grounds am I to pay one hundred and fifty thousand francs for that man."

"On account of the appointment which he, or rather we, purchased from Louviere and Tremblay."

"I have a very vague recollection of the matter."

"That is likely enough, for you have so many affairs to attend to. However, I do not believe you have any affair in the world of greater importance than this one."

"Tell me, then, why we purchased this appointment."

"Why, in order to render him a service in the first place, and afterwards ourselves."

"Ourselves? You are joking."

"Monseigneur, the time may come when the governor of the Bastile may prove a very excellent acquaintance."

"I have not the good fortune to understand you, D'Herblay."

“Monseigneur, we had our own poets, our own engineer, our own architect, our own musicians, our own printer, and our own painters; we needed our own governor of the Bastile.”

“Do you think so?”

“Let us not deceive ourselves, monseigneur; we are very much opposed to paying the Bastile a visit,” added the prelate, displaying, beneath his pale lips, teeth which were still the same beautiful teeth so much admired thirty years previously by Marie Michon.

“And you think it is not too much to pay one hundred and fifty thousand francs for that? I thought you generally put out money at better interest than that.”

“The day will come when you will admit your mistake.”

“My dear D’Herblay, the very day on which a man enters the Bastile, he is no longer protected by his past.”

“Yes, he is, if the bonds are perfectly regular; besides, that good fellow Baisemeaux has not a courtier’s heart. I am certain, my lord, that he will not remain ungrateful for that money, without taking into account, I repeat, that I retain the acknowledgements.”

“It is a strange affair! usury in a matter of benevolence.”

“Do not mix yourself up with it, monseigneur; if there be usury, it is I who practice it, and both of us reap the advantage from it — that is all.”

“Some intrigue, D’Herblay?”

“I do not deny it.”

“And Baisemeaux an accomplice in it?”

“Why not? — there are worse accomplices than he. May I depend, then, upon the five thousand pistoles to-morrow?”

“Do you want them this evening?”

“It would be better, for I wish to start early; poor Baisemeaux will not be able to imagine what has be become of me, and must be upon thorns.”

“You shall have the amount in an hour. Ah, D’Herblay, the interest of your one hundred and fifty thousand francs will never pay my four millions for me.”

“Why not, monseigneur?”

“Good-night, I have business to transact with my clerks before I retire.”

“A good night’s rest, monseigneur.”

“D’Herblay, you wish things that are impossible.”

“Shall I have my fifty thousand francs this evening?”

“Yes.”

“Go to sleep, then, in perfect safety — it is I who tell you to do so.”

Notwithstanding this assurance, and the tone in which it was given, Fouquet left the room shaking his head, and heaving a sigh.

CHAPTER XXIII.

M. Baisemeaux de Montlezun’s Accounts.

The clock of St. Paul was striking seven as Aramis, on horseback, dressed as a simple citizen, that is to say, in colored suit, with no distinctive mark about him, except a kind of hunting-knife by his side, passed before the Rue du Petit-Musc, and stopped opposite the Rue des Tournelles, at the gate of the Bastile. Two sentinels were on duty at the gate; they made no difficulty about admitting Aramis, who entered without dismounting, and they pointed out the way he was to go by a long passage with buildings on both sides. This passage led to the drawbridge, or, in other words, to the real entrance. The drawbridge was down, and the duty of the day was about being entered upon. The sentinel at the outer guardhouse stopped Aramis’s further progress, asking him, in a rough tone of voice, what had brought him there. Aramis explained, with his usual politeness, that a wish to speak to M. Baisemeaux de Montlezun had occasioned his visit. The first sentinel then summoned a second sentinel, stationed within an inner lodge, who showed his face at the grating, and inspected the new arrival most attentively. Aramis reiterated the expression of his wish to see the governor; whereupon the sentinel called to an officer of lower grade, who was walking about in a tolerably spacious courtyard and who, in turn, on being informed of his object, ran to seek one of the officers of the governor’s staff. The latter, after having listened to Aramis’s request, begged him to wait a moment, then went away a short distance, but returned to ask his name. “I cannot tell it you, monsieur,” said Aramis; “I need only mention that I have matters of such importance to communicate to the governor, that I can only rely beforehand upon one thing, that M. de Baisemeaux will be delighted to see me; nay, more than that, when you have told him that it is the person whom he expected on the first of June, I am convinced he will hasten here himself.” The officer could not possibly believe that a man of the governor’s importance should put himself out for a person of so little importance as the citizen-looking visitor on horseback. “It happens most fortunately, monsieur,” he said, “that the governor is just going out, and you can perceive his carriage with the horses already harnessed, in the courtyard yonder; there will be no occasion for him to come to meet you, as he will see you as he passes by." Aramis bowed to signify his assent; he did not wish to inspire others with too exalted an opinion of himself, and therefore waited patiently and in silence, leaning upon the saddle-bow of his horse. Ten minutes had hardly elapsed when the governor's carriage was observed to move. The governor appeared at the door, and got into the carriage, which immediately prepared to start. The same ceremony was observed for the governor himself as with a suspected stranger; the sentinel at the lodge advanced as the carriage was about to pass under the arch, and the governor opened the carriage-door, himself setting the example of obedience to orders; so that, in this way, the sentinel could convince himself that no one quitted the Bastile improperly. The carriage rolled along under the archway, but at the moment the iron-gate was opened, the officer approached the carriage, which had again been stopped, and said something to the governor, who immediately put his head out of the door-way, and perceived Aramis on horseback at the end of the drawbridge. He immediately uttered almost a shout of delight, and got out, or rather darted out of his carriage, running towards Aramis, whose hands he seized, making a thousand apologies. He almost embraced him. "What a difficult matter to enter the Bastile!" said Aramis. "Is it the same for those who are sent here against their wills, as for those who come of their own accord?"

"A thousand pardons, my lord. How delighted I am to see your Grace!"

"Hush! What are you thinking of, my dear M. Baisemeaux? What do you suppose would be thought of a bishop in my present costume?"

"Pray, excuse me, I had forgotten. Take this gentleman's horse to the stables," cried Baisemeaux.

"No, no," said Aramis; "I have five thousand pistoles in the saddle-bags."

The governor's countenance became so radiant, that if the prisoners had seen him they would have imagined some prince of the royal blood had arrived. "Yes, you are right, the horse shall be taken to the government house. Will you get into the carriage, my dear M. d'Herblay? and it shall take us back to my house."

"Get into a carriage to cross a courtyard! do you believe I am so great an invalid? No, no, we will go on foot."

Baisemeaux then offered his arm as a support, but the prelate did not accept it. They arrived in this manner at the government house, Baisemeaux rubbing his hands and glancing at the horse from time to time, while Aramis was looking at the bleak bare walls. A tolerably handsome vestibule and a staircase of white stone led to the governor's apartments, who crossed the ante-chamber, the dining-room, where breakfast was being prepared, opened a small side door, and closeted himself with his guest in a large cabinet, the windows of which opened obliquely upon the courtyard and the stables. Baisemeaux installed the prelate with that all-inclusive politeness of which a good man, or a grateful man, alone possesses the secret. An arm-chair, a footstool, a small table beside him, on which to rest his hand, everything was prepared by the governor himself. With his own hands, too, he placed upon the table, with much solicitude, the bag containing the gold, which one of the soldiers had brought up with the most respectful devotion; and the soldier having left the room, Baisemeaux himself closed the door after him, drew aside one of the window-curtains, and looked steadfastly at Aramis to see if the prelate required anything further.

"Well, my lord," he said, still standing up, "of all men of their word, you still continue to be the most punctual."

"In matters of business, dear M. de Baisemeaux, exactitude is not a virtue only, it is a duty as well."

"Yes, in matters of business, certainly; but what you have with me is not of that character; it is a service you are rendering me."

"Come, confess, dear M. de Baisemeaux, that, notwithstanding this exactitude, you have not been without a little uneasiness."

"About your health, I certainly have," stammered out Baisemeaux.

"I wished to come here yesterday, but I was not able, as I was too fatigued," continued Aramis. Baisemeaux anxiously slipped another cushion behind his guest's back. "But," continued Aramis, "I promised myself to come and pay you a visit to-day, early in the morning."

"You are really very kind, my lord."

"And it was a good thing for me I was punctual, I think."

"What do you mean?"

"Yes, you were going out." At which latter remark Baisemeaux colored and said, "It is true I was going out."

"Then I prevent you," said Aramis; whereupon the embarrassment of Baisemeaux became visibly greater. "I am putting you to inconvenience," he continued, fixing a keen glace upon the poor governor; "if I had known that, I should not have come."

“How can your lordship imagine that you could ever inconvenience me?”

“Confess you were going in search of money.”

“No,” stammered out Baisemeaux, “no! I assure you I was going to — ”

“Does the governor still intend to go to M. Fouquet?” suddenly called out the major from below. Baisemeaux ran to the window like a madman. “No, no,” he exclaimed in a state of desperation, “who the deuce is speaking of M. Fouquet? are you drunk below there? why am I interrupted when I am engaged on business?”

“You were going to M. Fouquet’s,” said Aramis, biting his lips, “to M. Fouquet, the abbe, or the superintendent?”

Baisemeaux almost made up his mind to tell an untruth, but he could not summon courage to do so. “To the superintendent,” he said.

“It is true, then, that you were in want of money, since you were going to a person who gives it away!”

“I assure you, my lord — ”

“You were afraid?”

“My dear lord, it was the uncertainty and ignorance in which I was as to where you were to be found.”

“You would have found the money you require at M. Fouquet’s, for he is a man whose hand is always open.”

“I swear that I should never have ventured to ask M. Fouquet for money. I only wished to ask him for your address.”

“To ask M. Fouquet for my address?” exclaimed Aramis, opening his eyes in real astonishment.

“Yes,” said Baisemeaux, greatly disturbed by the glance which the prelate fixed upon him, — ”at M. Fouquet’s certainly.”

“There is no harm in that, dear M. Baisemeaux, only I would ask, why ask my address of M. Fouquet?”

“That I might write to you.”

“I understand,” said Aramis smiling, “but that is not what I meant; I do not ask you what you required my address for: I only ask why you should go to M. Fouquet for it?”

“Oh!” said Baisemeaux, “as Belle-Isle is the property of M. Fouquet, and as Belle-Isle is in the diocese of Vannes, and as you are bishop of Vannes — ”

“But, my dear Baisemeaux, since you knew I was bishop of Vannes, you had no occasion to ask M. Fouquet for my address.”

“Well, monsieur,” said Baisemeaux, completely at bay, “if I have acted indiscreetly, I beg your pardon most sincerely.”

“Nonsense,” observed Aramis calmly: “how can you possibly have acted indiscreetly?” And while he composed his face, and continued to smile cheerfully on the governor, he was considering how Baisemeaux, who was not aware of his address, knew, however, that Vannes was his residence. “I shall clear all this up,” he said to himself; and then speaking aloud, added, — ”Well, my dear governor shall we now arrange our little accounts?”

“I am at your orders, my lord; but tell me beforehand, my lord, whether you will do me the honor to breakfast with me as usual?”

“Very willingly, indeed.”

“That’s well,” said Baisemeaux, as he struck the bell before him three times.

“What does that mean?” inquired Aramis.

“That I have some one to breakfast with me, and that preparations are to be made accordingly.”

“And you rang thrice. Really, my dear governor, I begin to think you are acting ceremoniously with me.”

“No, indeed. Besides, the least I can do is to receive you in the best way I can.”

“But why so?”

“Because not even a prince could have done what you have done for me.”

“Nonsense! nonsense!”

“Nay, I assure you — ”

“Let us speak of other matters,” said Aramis. “Or rather, tell me how your affairs here are getting on.”

“Not over well.”

“The deuce!”

“M. de Mazarin was not hard enough.”

“Yes, I see; you require a government full of suspicion — like that of the old cardinal, for instance.”

“Yes; matters went on better under him. The brother of his ‘gray eminence’ made his fortune here.”

“Believe me, my dear governor,” said Aramis, drawing closer to Baisemeaux, “a young king is well worth an old cardinal. Youth has its suspicions, its fits of anger, its prejudices, as old age has its hatreds, its precautions, and its fears. Have you paid your three years' profits to Louvidre and Tremblay?"

"Most certainly I have."

"So that you have nothing more to give them than the fifty thousand francs I have brought with me?"

"Nothing."

"Have you not saved anything, then?"

"My lord, in giving the fifty thousand francs of my own to these gentlemen, I assure you that I gave them everything I gain. I told M. d'Artagnan so yesterday evening."

"Ah!" said Aramis, whose eyes sparkled for a moment, but became immediately afterwards as unmoved as before; "so you have been to see my old friend D'Artagnan; how was he?"

"Wonderfully well."

"And what did you say to him, M. de Baisemeaux?"

"I told him," continued the governor, not perceiving his own thoughtlessness; "I told him that I fed my prisoners too well."

"How many have you?" inquired Aramis, in an indifferent tone of voice.

"Sixty."

"Well, that is a tolerably round number."

"In former times, my lord, there were, during certain years, as many as two hundred."

"Still a minimum of sixty is not to be grumbled at."

"Perhaps not; for, to anybody but myself, each prisoner would bring in two hundred and fifty pistoles; for instance, for a prince of the blood I have fifty francs a day."

"Only you have no prince of the blood; at least, I suppose so," said Aramis, with a slight tremor in his voice.

"No, thank heaven! — I mean, no, unfortunately."

"What do you mean by unfortunately?"

"Because my appointment would be improved by it. So fifty francs per day for a prince of the blood, thirty-six for a marechal of France — "

"But you have as many marechals of France, I suppose, as you have princes of the blood?"

"Alas! no more. It is true lieutenant-generals and brigadiers pay twenty-six francs, and I have two of them. After that, come councilors of parliament, who bring me fifteen francs, and I have six of them."

“I did not know,” said Aramis, “that councilors were so productive.”

“Yes; but from fifteen francs I sink at once to ten francs; namely, for an ordinary judge, and for an ecclesiastic.”

“And you have seven, you say; an excellent affair.”

“Nay, a bad one, and for this reason. How can I possibly treat these poor fellows, who are of some good, at all events, otherwise than as a councilor of parliament?”

“Yes, you are right; I do not see five francs difference between them.”

“You understand; if I have a fine fish, I pay four or five francs for it; if I get a fine fowl, it cost me a franc and a half. I fatten a good deal of poultry, but I have to buy grain, and you cannot imagine the army of rats that infest this place.”

“Why not get half a dozen cats to deal with them?”

“Cats, indeed; yes, they eat them, but I was obliged to give up the idea because of the way in which they treated my grain. I have been obliged to have some terrier dogs sent me from England to kill the rats. These dogs, unfortunately, have tremendous appetites; they eat as much as a prisoner of the fifth order, without taking into account the rabbits and fowls they kill.”

Was Aramis really listening or not? No one could have told; his downcast eyes showed the attentive man, but the restless hand betrayed the man absorbed in thought — Aramis was meditating.

“I was saying,” continued Baisemeaux, “that a good-sized fowl costs me a franc and a half, and that a fine fish costs me four or five francs. Three meals are served at the Bastile, and, as the prisoners, having nothing to do, are always eating, a ten-franc man costs me seven francs and a half.”

“But did you not say that you treated those at ten francs like those at fifteen?”

“Yes, certainly.”

“Very well! Then you gain seven francs and a half upon those who pay you fifteen francs.”

“I *must* compensate myself somehow,” said Baisemeaux, who saw how he had been snapped up.

“You are quite right, my dear governor; but have you no prisoners below ten francs?”

“Oh, yes! we have citizens and barristers at five francs.”

“And do they eat, too?”

“Not a doubt about it; only you understand that they do not get fish or poultry, nor rich wines at every meal; but at all events thrice a week they have a good dish at their dinner.”

“Really, you are quite a philanthropist, my dear governor, and you will ruin yourself.”

“No; understand me; when the fifteen-franc has not eaten his fowl, or the ten-franc has left his dish unfinished, I send it to the five-franc prisoner; it is a feast for the poor devil, and one must be charitable, you know.”

“And what do you make out of your five-franc prisoners?”

“A franc and a half.”

“Baisemeaux, you’re an honest fellow; in honest truth I say so.”

“Thank you, my lord. But I feel most for the small tradesmen and bailiffs’ clerks, who are rated at three francs. They do not often see Rhine carp or Channel sturgeon.”

“But do not the five-franc gentlemen sometimes leave some scraps?”

“Oh! my lord, do not believe I am so stingy as that; I delight the heart of some poor little tradesman or clerk by sending him a wing of a red partridge, a slice of venison, or a slice of a truffled pasty, dishes which he never tasted except in his dreams; these are the leavings of the twenty-four-franc prisoners; and as he eats and drinks, at dessert he cries ‘Long live the King,’ and blesses the Bastile; with a couple bottles of champagne, which cost me five sous, I make him tipsy every Sunday. That class of people call down blessings upon me, and are sorry to leave the prison. Do you know that I have remarked, and it does me infinite honor, that certain prisoners, who have been set at liberty, have, almost immediately afterwards, got imprisoned again? Why should this be the case, unless it be to enjoy the pleasures of my kitchen? It is really the fact.”

Aramis smiled with an expression of incredulity.

“You smile,” said Baisemeaux.

“I do,” returned Aramis.

“I tell you that we have names which have been inscribed on our books thrice in the space of two years.”

“I must see it before I believe it,” said Aramis.

“Well, I can show it to you, although it is prohibited to communicate the registers to strangers; and if you really wish to see it with your own eyes — ”

“I should be delighted, I confess.”

"Very well," said Baisemeaux, and he took out of a cupboard a large register. Aramis followed him most anxiously with his eyes, and Baisemeaux returned, placed the register upon the table, and turned over the leaves for a minute, and stayed at the letter M.

"Look here," said he, "Martinier, January, 1659; Martinier, June, 1660; Martinier, March, 1661. Mazarinades, etc.; you understand it was only a pretext; people were not sent to the Bastile for jokes against M. Mazarin; the fellow denounced himself in order to get imprisoned here."

"And what was his object?"

"None other than to return to my kitchen at three francs a day."

"Three francs — poor devil!"

"The poet, my lord, belongs to the lowest scale, the same style of board as the small tradesman and bailiff's clerk; but I repeat, it is to those people that I give these little surprises."

Aramis mechanically turned over the leaves of the register, continuing to read the names, but without appearing to take any interest in the names he read.

"In 1661, you perceive," said Baisemeaux, "eighty entries; and in 1659, eighty also."

"Ah!" said Aramis. "Seldon; I seem to know that name. Was it not you who spoke to me about a certain young man?"

"Yes, a poor devil of a student, who made — What do you call that where two Latin verses rhyme together?"

"A distich."

"Yes; that is it."

"Poor fellow; for a distich."

"Do you know that he made this distich against the Jesuits?"

"That makes no difference; the punishment seems very severe. Do not pity him; last year you seemed to interest yourself in him."

"Yes, I did so."

"Well, as your interest is all-powerful here, my lord, I have treated him since that time as a prisoner at fifteen francs."

"The same as this one, then," said Aramis, who had continued turning over the leaves, and who had stopped at one of the names which followed Martinier.

"Yes, the same as that one."

“Is that Marchiali an Italian?” said Aramis, pointing with his finger to the name which had attracted his attention.

“Hush!” said Baisemeaux.

“Why hush?” said Aramis, involuntarily clenching his white hand.

“I thought I had already spoken to you about that Marchiali.”

“No, it is the first time I ever heard his name pronounced.”

“That may be, but perhaps I have spoken to you about him without naming him.”

“Is he an old offender?” asked Aramis, attempting to smile.

“On the contrary, he is quite young.”

“Is his crime, then, very heinous?”

“Unpardonable.”

“Has he assassinated any one?”

“Bah!”

“An incendiary, then?”

“Bah!”

“Has he slandered any one?”

“No, no! It is he who — ” and Baisemeaux approached Aramis’s ear, making a sort of ear-trumpet of his hands, and whispered: “It is he who presumes to resemble the — ”

“Yes, yes,” said Aramis; “I now remember you already spoke about it last year to me; but the crime appeared to me so slight.”

“Slight, do you say?”

“Or rather, so involuntary.”

“My lord, it is not involuntarily that such a resemblance is detected.”

“Well, the fact is, I had forgotten it. But, my dear host,” said Aramis, closing the register, “if I am not mistaken, we are summoned.”

Baisemeaux took the register, hastily restored it to its place in the closet, which he locked, and put the key in his pocket. “Will it be agreeable to your lordship to breakfast now?” said he; “for you are right in supposing that breakfast was announced.”

“Assuredly, my dear governor,” and they passed into the dining-room.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Breakfast at Monsieur de Baisemeaux's.

Aramis was generally temperate; but on this occasion, while taking every care of his constitution, he did ample justice to Baisemeaux's breakfast, which, in all respects, was most excellent. The latter on his side, was animated with the wildest gayety; the sight of the five thousand pistoles, which he glanced at from time to time, seemed to open his heart. Every now and then he looked at Aramis with an expression of the deepest gratitude; while the latter, leaning back in his chair, took a few sips of wine from his glass, with the air of a connoisseur. "Let me never hear any ill words against the fare of the Bastile," said he, half closing his eyes; "happy are the prisoners who can get only half a bottle of such Burgundy every day."

"All those at fifteen francs drink it," said Baisemeaux. "It is very old Volnay."

"Does that poor student, Seldon, drink such good wine?"

"Oh, no!"

"I thought I heard you say he was boarded at fifteen francs."

"He! no, indeed; a man who makes districts — distichs I mean — at fifteen francs! No, no! it is his neighbor who is at fifteen francs."

"Which neighbor?"

"The other, second Bertaudiere."

"Excuse me, my dear governor; but you speak a language which requires quite an apprenticeship to understand."

"Very true," said the governor. "Allow me to explain: second Bertaudiere is the person who occupies the second floor of the tower of the Bertaudiere."

"So that Bertaudiere is the name of one of the towers of the Bastile? The fact is, I think I recollect hearing that each tower has a name of its own. Whereabouts is the one you are speaking of?"

"Look," said Baisemeaux, going to the window. "It is that tower to the left — the second one."

"Is the prisoner at fifteen francs there?"

"Yes."

"Since when?"

"Seven or eight years, nearly."

"What do you mean by nearly? Do you not know the dates more precisely?"

"It was not in my time, M. d'Herblay."

"But I should have thought that Louviere or Tremblay would have told you."

"The secrets of the Bastile are never handed over with the keys of the governorship."

"Indeed! Then the cause of his imprisonment is a mystery — a state secret."

"Oh, no! I do not suppose it is a state secret, but a secret — like everything that happens at the Bastile."

"But," said Aramis, "why do you speak more freely of Seldon than of second Bertaudiere?"

"Because, in my opinion, the crime of the man who writes a distich is not so great as that of the man who resembles — "

"Yes, yes; I understand you. Still, do not the turnkeys talk with your prisoners?"

"Of course."

"The prisoners, I suppose, tell them they are not guilty?"

"They are *always* telling them that; it is a matter of course; the same song over and over again."

"But does not the resemblance you were speaking about just now strike the turnkeys?"

"My dear M. d'Herblay, it is only for men attached to the court, as you are, to take trouble about such matters."

"You're right, you're right, my dear M. Baisemeaux. Let me give you another taste of this Volnay."

"Not a taste merely, a full glass; fill yours too."

"Nay, nay! You are a musketeer still, to the very tips of your fingers, while I have become a bishop. A taste for me; a glass for yourself."

"As you please." And Aramis and the governor nodded to each other, as they drank their wine. "But," said Aramis, looking with fixed attention at the ruby-colored wine he had raised to the level of his eyes, as if he wished to enjoy it with all his senses at the same moment, “but what you might call a resemblance, another would not, perhaps, take any notice of.”

“Most certainly he would, though, if it were any one who knew the person he resembles.”

“I really think, dear M. Baisemeaux, that it can be nothing more than a resemblance of your own creation.”

“Upon my honor, it is not so.”

“Stay,” continued Aramis. “I have seen many persons very like the one we are speaking of; but, out of respect, no one ever said anything about it.”

“Very likely; because there is resemblance and resemblance. This is a striking one, and, if you were to see him, you would admit it to be so.”

“If I were to see him, indeed,” said Aramis, in an indifferent tone; “but in all probability I never shall.”

“Why not?”

“Because if I were even to put my foot inside one of those horrible dungeons, I should fancy I was buried there forever.”

“No, no; the cells are very good places to live in.”

“I really do not, and cannot believe it, and that is a fact.”

“Pray do not speak ill of second Bertaudiere. It is really a good room, very nicely furnished and carpeted. The young fellow has by no means been unhappy there; the best lodging the Bastile affords has been his. There is a chance for you.”

“Nay, nay,” said Aramis, coldly; “you will never make me believe there are any good rooms in the Bastile; and, as for your carpets, they exist only in your imagination. I should find nothing but spiders, rats, and perhaps toads, too.”

“Toads?” cried Baisemeaux.

“Yes, in the dungeons.”

“Ah! I don’t say there are not toads in the dungeons,” replied Baisemeaux. “But — will you be convinced by your own eyes?” he continued, with a sudden impulse.

“No, certainly not.”

“Not even to satisfy yourself of the resemblance which you deny, as you do the carpets?”

“Some spectral-looking person, a mere shadow; an unhappy, dying man.”

“Nothing of the kind — as brisk and vigorous a young fellow as ever lived.”

“Melancholy and ill-tempered, then?”

“Not at all; very gay and lively.”

“Nonsense; you are joking.”

“Will you follow me?” said Baisemeaux.

“What for?”

“To go the round of the Bastile.”

“Why?”

“You will then see for yourself — see with your own eyes.”

“But the regulations?”

“Never mind them. To-day my major has leave of absence; the lieutenant is visiting the post on the bastions; we are sole masters of the situation.”

“No, no, my dear governor; why, the very idea of the sound of the bolts makes me shudder. You will only have to forget me in second or fourth Bertaudiere, and then — ”

“You are refusing an opportunity that may never present itself again. Do you know that, to obtain the favor I propose to you gratis, some of the princes of the blood have offered me as much as fifty thousand francs.”

“Really! he must be worth seeing, then?”

“Forbidden fruit, my lord; forbidden fruit. You who belong to the church ought to know that.”

“Well, if had any curiosity, it would be to see the poor author of the distich.”

“Very well, we will see him, too; but if I were at all curious, it would be about the beautiful carpeted room and its lodger.”

“Furniture is very commonplace; and a face with no expression in it offers little or no interest.”

“But a boarder at fifteen francs is always interesting.”

“By the by, I forgot to ask you about that. Why fifteen francs for him, and only three francs for poor Seldon?”

“The distinction made in that instance was a truly noble act, and one which displayed the king’s goodness of heart to great advantage.”

“The king’s, you say.”

“The cardinal’s, I mean. ‘This unhappy man,’ said M. Mazarin, ‘is destined to remain in prison forever.’“

“Why so?”

“Why, it seems that his crime is a lasting one; and, consequently, his punishment ought to be so, too.”

“Lasting?”

“No doubt of it, unless he is fortunate enough to catch the small-pox, and even that is difficult, for we never get any impure air here.”

“Nothing can be more ingenious than your train of reasoning, my dear M. Baisemeaux. Do you, however, mean to say that this unfortunate man must suffer without interruption or termination?”

“I did not say he was to suffer, my lord; a fifteen-franc boarder does not suffer.”

“He suffers imprisonment, at all events.”

“No doubt; there is no help for that, but this suffering is sweetened for him. You must admit that this young fellow was not born to eat all the good things he does eat; for instance, such things as we have on the table now; this pasty that has not been touched, these crawfish from the River Marne, of which we have hardly taken any, and which are almost as large as lobsters; all these things will at once be taken to second Bertaudiere, with a bottle of that Volnay which you think so excellent. After you have seen it you will believe it, I hope.”

“Yes, my dear governor, certainly; but all this time you are thinking only of your very happy fifteen-franc prisoner, and you forget poor Seldon, my *protege*.”

“Well, out of consideration for you, it shall be a gala day for him; he shall have some biscuits and preserves with this small bottle of port.”

“You are a good-hearted fellow; I have said so already, and I repeat it, my dear Baisemeaux.”

“Well, let us set off, then,” said the governor, a little bewildered, partly from the wine he had drunk, and partly from Aramis’s praises.

“Do not forget that I only go to oblige you,” said the prelate.

“Very well; but you will thank me when you get there.”

“Let us go, then.”

“Wait until I have summoned the jailer,” said Baisemeaux, as he struck the bell twice; at which summons a man appeared. “I am going to visit the towers,” said the governor. “No guards, no drums, no noise at all.”

“If I were not to leave my cloak here,” said Aramis, pretending to be alarmed, “I should really think I was going to prison on my own account.”

The jailer preceded the governor, Aramis walking on his right hand; some of the soldiers who happened to be in the courtyard drew themselves up in a line, as stiff as posts, as the governor passed along. Baisemeaux led the way down several steps which conducted to a sort of esplanade; thence they arrived at the drawbridge, where the sentinels on duty received the governor with the proper honors. The governor turned toward Aramis, and, speaking in such a tone that the sentinels could not lose a word, he observed, — ”I hope you have a good memory, monsieur?”

“Why?” inquired Aramis.

“On account of your plans and your measurements, for you know that no one is allowed, not architects even, to enter where the prisoners are, with paper, pens or pencil.”

“Good,” said Aramis to himself, “it seems I am an architect, then. It sounds like one of D’Artagnan’s jokes, who perceived in me the engineer of Belle-Isle.” Then he added aloud: “Be easy on that score, monsieur; in our profession, a mere glance and a good memory are quite sufficient.”

Baisemeaux did not change countenance, and the soldiers took Aramis for what he seemed to be. “Very well; we will first visit la Bertaudiere,” said Baisemeaux, still intending the sentinels to hear him. Then, turning to the jailer, he added: “You will take the opportunity of carrying to No. 2 the few dainties I pointed out.”

“Dear M. de Baisemeaux,” said Aramis, “you are always forgetting No. 3.”

“So I am,” said the governor; and upon that, they began to ascend. The number of bolts, gratings, and locks for this single courtyard would have sufficed for the safety of an entire city. Aramis was neither an imaginative nor a sensitive man; he had been somewhat of a poet in his youth, but his heart was hard and indifferent, as the heart of every man of fifty-five years of age is, who has been frequently and passionately attached to women in his lifetime, or rather who has been passionately loved by them. But when he placed his foot upon the worn stone steps, along which so many unhappy wretches had passed, when he felt himself impregnated, as it were, with the atmosphere of those gloomy dungeons, moistened with tears, there could be but little doubt he was overcome by his feelings, for his head was bowed and his eyes became dim, as he followed Baisemeaux without a syllable.

CHAPTER XXV.

The Second Floor of la Bertaudiere.

On the second flight of stairs, whether from fatigue or emotion, the breathing of the visitor began to fail him, and he leaned against the wall. “Will you begin with this one?” said Baisemeaux; “for since we are going to both, it matters very little whether we ascend from the second to the third story, or descend from the third to the second.”

“No, no,” exclaimed Aramis, eagerly, “higher, if you please; the one above is the more urgent.” They continued their ascent. “Ask the jailer for the keys,” whispered Aramis. Baisemeaux did so, took the keys, and, himself, opened the door of the third room. The jailer was the first to enter; he placed upon the table the provisions, which the kind-hearted governor called dainties, and then left the room. The prisoner had not stirred; Baisemeaux then entered, while Aramis remained at the threshold, from which place he saw a youth about eighteen years of age, who, raising his head at the unusual noise, jumped off the bed, as he perceived the governor, and clasping his hands together, began to cry out, “My mother, my mother,” in tones which betrayed such deep distress that Aramis, despite his command over himself, felt a shudder pass through his frame. “My dear boy,” said Baisemeaux, endeavoring to smile, “I have brought you a diversion and an extra, — the one for the mind, the other for the body; this gentleman has come to take your measure, and here are some preserves for your dessert.”

“Oh, monsieur!” exclaimed the young man, “keep me in solitude for a year, let me have nothing but bread and water for a year, but tell me that at the end of a year I shall leave this place, tell me that at the end of a year I shall see my mother again.”

“But I have heard you say that your mother was very poor, and that you were very badly lodged when you were living with her, while here — upon my word!”

“If she were poor, monsieur, the greater reason to restore her only means of support to her. Badly lodged with her! Oh, monsieur, every one is always well lodged when he is free.”

“At all events, since you yourself admit you have done nothing but write that unhappy distich — ”

“But without any intention, I swear. Let me be punished — cut off the hand which wrote it, I will work with the other — but restore my mother to me.”

“My boy,” said Baisemeaux, “you know very well that it does not depend upon me; all I can do for you is to increase your rations, give you a glass of port wine now and then, slip in a biscuit for you between a couple of plates.”

“Great heaven!” exclaimed the young man, falling backward and rolling on the ground.

Aramis, unable to bear this scene any longer, withdrew as far as the landing. “Unhappy, wretched man,” he murmured.

“Yes, monsieur, he is indeed very wretched,” said the jailer; “but it is his parents’ fault.”

“In what way?”

“No doubt. Why did they let him learn Latin? Too much knowledge, you see; it is that which does harm. Now I, for instance, can’t read or write, and therefore I am not in prison.” Aramis looked at the man, who seemed to think that being a jailer in the Bastile was not being in prison. As for Baisemeaux, noticing the little effect produced by his advice and his port wine, he left the dungeon quite upset. “You have forgotten to close the door,” said the jailer.

“So I have,” said Baisemeaux; “there are the keys, do you do it.”

“I will solicit the pardon of that poor boy,” said Aramis.

“And if you do not succeed,” said Baisemeaux, “at least beg that he may be transferred to the ten-franc list, by which both he and I shall be gainers.”

“If the other prisoner calls out for his mother in a similar manner,” said Aramis, “I prefer not to enter at all, but will take my measure from outside.”

“No fear of that, monsieur architect, the one we are now going to see is as gentle as a lamb; before he could call after his mother he must open his lips, and he never says a word.”

“Let us go in, then,” said Aramis, gloomily.

“Are you the architect of the prisons, monsieur?” said the jailer.

“I am.”

“It is odd, then, that you are not more accustomed to all this.”

Aramis perceived that, to avoid giving rise to any suspicions, he must summon all his strength of mind to his assistance. Baisemeaux, who carried the keys, opened the door. “Stay outside,” he said to the jailer, “and wait for us at the bottom of the steps.” The jailer obeyed and withdrew.

Baisemeaux entered first, and opened the second door himself. By the light which filtered through the iron-barred window, could be seen a handsome young man, short in stature, with closely cut hair, and a beard beginning to grow; he was sitting on a stool, his elbow resting on an armchair, and with all the upper part of his body reclining against it. His dress, thrown upon the bed, was of rich black velvet, and he inhaled the fresh air which blew in upon his breast through a shirt of the very finest cambric. As the governor entered, the young man turned his head with a look full of indifference; and on recognizing Baisemeaux, he arose and saluted him courteously. But when his eyes fell upon Aramis, who remained in the background, the latter trembled, turned pale, and his hat, which he held in his hand, fell upon the ground, as if all his muscles had become relaxed at once. Baisemeaux, habituated to the presence of his prisoner, did not seem to share any of the sensations which Aramis experienced, but, with all the zeal of a good servant, he busied himself in arranging on the table the pasty and crawfish he had brought with him. Occupied in this manner, he did not remark how disturbed his guest had become. When he had finished, however, he turned to the young prisoner and said: “You are looking very well, — are you so?”

“Quite well, I thank you, monsieur,” replied the young man.

The effect of the voice was such as almost to overpower Aramis, and notwithstanding his control over himself, he advanced a few steps towards him, with his eyes wide open and his lips trembling. The movement he made was so marked that Baisemeaux, notwithstanding his preoccupation, observed it. “This gentleman is an architect who has come to examine your chimney,” said Baisemeaux; “does it smoke?”

“Never, monsieur.”

“You were saying just now,” said the governor, rubbing his hands together, “that it was not possible for a man to be happy in prison; here, however, is one who is so. You have nothing to complain of, I hope?”

“Nothing.”

“Do you ever feel weary?” said Aramis.

“Never.”

"Ha, ha," said Baisemeaux, in a low tone of voice; "was I right?"

"Well, my dear governor, it is impossible not to yield to evidence. Is it allowed to put any question to him?"

"As many as you like."

"Very well; be good enough to ask him if he knows why he is here."

"This gentleman requests me to ask you," said Baisemeaux, "if you are aware of the cause of your imprisonment?"

"No, monsieur," said the young man, unaffectedly, "I am not."

"That is hardly possible," said Aramis, carried away by his feelings in spite of himself; "if you were really ignorant of the cause of your detention, you would be furious."

"I was so during the early days of my imprisonment."

"Why are you not so now?"

"Because I have reflected."

"That is strange," said Aramis.

"Is it not odd?" said Baisemeaux.

"May one venture to ask you, monsieur, on what you have reflected?"

"I felt that as I had committed no crime, Heaven could not punish me."

"What is a prison, then," inquired Aramis, "if it be not a punishment."

"Alas! I cannot tell," said the young man; "all that I can tell you now is the very opposite of what I felt seven years ago."

"To hear you converse, to witness your resignation, one might almost believe that you liked your imprisonment?"

"I endure it."

"In the certainty of recovering your freedom some day, I suppose?"

"I have no certainty; hope, I have, and that is all; and yet I acknowledge that this hope becomes less every day."

"Still, why should you not again be free, since you have already been so?"

"That is precisely the reason," replied the young man, "which prevents me from expecting liberty; why should I have been imprisoned at all if it had been intended to release me afterwards?"

"How old are you?"

"I do not know."

"What is your name?"

"I have forgotten the name by which I was called."

"Who are your parents?"

“I never knew them.”

“But those who brought you up?”

“They did not call me their son.”

“Did you ever love any one before coming here?”

“I loved my nurse, and my flowers.”

“Was that all?”

“I also loved my valet.”

“Do you regret your nurse and your valet?”

“I wept very much when they died.”

“Did they die since you have been here, or before you came?”

“They died the evening before I was carried off.”

“Both at the same time?”

“Yes, both at the same time.”

“In what manner were you carried off?”

“A man came for me, directed me to get into a carriage, which was closed and locked, and brought me here.”

“Would you be able to recognize that man again?”

“He was masked.”

“Is this not an extraordinary tale?” said Baisemeaux, in a low tone of voice, to Aramis, who could hardly breathe.

“It is indeed extraordinary,” he murmured.

“But what is still more extraordinary is, that he has never told me so much as he has just told you.”

“Perhaps the reason may be that you have never questioned him,” said Aramis.

“It’s possible,” replied Baisemeaux; “I have no curiosity. Have you looked at the room? it’s a fine one, is it not?”

“Very much so.”

“A carpet — ”

“Beautiful.”

“I’ll wager he had nothing like it before he came here.”

“I think so, too.” And then again turning towards the young man, he said, “Do you not remember to have been visited at some time or another by a strange lady or gentleman?”

“Yes, indeed; thrice by a woman, who each time came to the door in a carriage, and entered covered with a veil, which she raised when we were together and alone.”

“Do you remember that woman?”

“Yes.”

“What did she say to you?”

The young man smiled mournfully, and then replied, “She inquired, as you have just done, if I were happy, and if I were getting weary.”

“What did she do on arriving, and on leaving you?”

“She pressed me in her arms, held me in her embrace, and kissed me.”

“Do you remember her?”

“Perfectly.”

“Do you recall her features distinctly?”

“Yes.”

“You would recognize her, then, if accident brought her before you, or led you into her person?”

“Most certainly.”

A flush of fleeting satisfaction passed across Aramis’s face. At this moment Baisemeaux heard the jailer approaching. “Shall we leave?” he said, hastily, to Aramis.

Aramis, who probably had learnt all that he cared to know, replied, “When you like.”

The young man saw them prepare to leave, and saluted them politely. Baisemeaux replied merely by a nod of the head, while Aramis, with a respect, arising perhaps from the sight of such misfortune, saluted the prisoner profoundly. They left the room, Baisemeaux closing the door behind them.

“Well,” said Baisemeaux, as they descended the staircase, “what do you think of it all?”

“I have discovered the secret, my dear governor,” he said.

“Bah! what is the secret, then?”

“A murder was committed in that house.”

“Nonsense.”

“But attend; the valet and nurse died the same day.”

“Well.”

“And by poison. What do you think?”

“That is very likely to be true.”

“What! that that young man is an assassin?”

“Who said that? What makes you think that poor young fellow could be an assassin?”

“The very thing I was saying. A crime was committed in his house,” said Aramis, “and that was quite sufficient; perhaps he saw the criminals, and it was feared that he might say something.”

“The deuce! if I only thought that — ”

“Well?”

“I would redouble the surveillance.”

“Oh, he does not seem to wish to escape.”

“You do not know what prisoners are.”

“Has he any books?”

“None; they are strictly prohibited, and under M. de Mazarin’s own hand.”

“Have you the writing still?”

“Yes, my lord; would you like to look at it as you return to take your cloak?”

“I should, for I like to look at autographs.”

“Well, then, this one is of the most unquestionable authenticity; there is only one erasure.”

“Ah, ah! an erasure; and in what respect?”

“With respect to a figure. At first there was written: ‘To be boarded at fifty francs.’“

“As princes of the blood, in fact?”

“But the cardinal must have seen his mistake, you understand; for he canceled the zero, and has added a one before the five. But, by the by — ”

“What?”

“You do not speak of the resemblance.”

“I do not speak of it, dear M. de Baisemeaux, for a very simple reason — because it does not exist.”

“The deuce it doesn’t.”

“Or, if it does exist, it is only in your own imagination; but, supposing it were to exist elsewhere, I think it would be better for you not to speak of about it.”

“Really.”

“The king, Louis XIV. — you understand — would be excessively angry with you, if he were to learn that you contributed in any way to spread the report that one of his subjects has the effrontery to resemble him.”

“It is true, quite true,” said Baisemeaux, thoroughly alarmed; “but I have not spoken of the circumstance to any one but yourself, and you understand, monseigneur, that I perfectly rely on your discretion."

"Oh, be easy."

"Do you still wish to see the note?"

"Certainly."

While engaged in this manner in conversation, they had returned to the governor's apartments; Baisemeaux took from the cupboard a private register, like the one he had already shown Aramis, but fastened by a lock, the key which opened it being one of a small bunch which Baisemeaux always carried with him. Then placing the book upon the table, he opened it at the letter "M," and showed Aramis the following note in the column of observations: "No books at any time; all linen and clothes of the finest and best quality to be procured; no exercise; always the same jailer; no communications with any one. Musical instruments; every liberty and every indulgence which his welfare may require; to be boarded at fifteen francs. M. de Baisemeaux can claim more if the fifteen francs be not sufficient."

"Ah," said Baisemeaux, "now I think of it, I shall claim it."

Aramis shut the book. "Yes," he said, "it is indeed M. de Mazarin's handwriting; I recognize it well. Now, my dear governor," he continued, as if this last communication had exhausted his interest, "let us now turn over to our own little affairs."

"Well, what time for repayment do you wish me to take? Fix it yourself."

"There need not be any particular period fixed; give me a simple acknowledgement for one hundred and fifty thousand francs."

"When to be made payable?"

"When I require it; but, you understand, I shall only wish it when you yourself do."

"Oh, I am quite easy on that score," said Baisemeaux, smiling; "but I have already given you two receipts."

"Which I now destroy," said Aramis; and after having shown the two receipts to Baisemeaux, he destroyed them. Overcome by so great a mark of confidence, Baisemeaux unhesitatingly wrote out an acknowledgement of a debt of one hundred and fifty thousand francs, payable at the pleasure of the prelate. Aramis, who had, by glancing over the governor's shoulder, followed the pen as he wrote, put the acknowledgement into his pocket without seeming to have read it, which made Baisemeaux perfectly easy. "Now," said Aramis, "you will not be angry with me if I were to carry off one of your prisoners?"

“What do you mean?”

“By obtaining his pardon, of course. Have I not already told you that I took a great interest in poor Seldon?”

“Yes, quite true, you did so.”

“Well?”

“That is your affair; do as you think proper. I see you have an open hand, and an arm that can reach a great way.”

“Adieu, adieu.” And Aramis left, carrying with him the governor’s best wishes.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The Two Friends.

At the very time M. de Baisemeaux was showing Aramis the prisoners in the Bastile, a carriage drew up at Madame de Belliere's door, and, at that still early hour, a young woman alighted, her head muffled in a silk hood. When the servants announced Madame Vanel to Madame de Belliere, the latter was engaged, or rather was absorbed, in reading a letter, which she hurriedly concealed. She had hardly finished her morning toilette, her maid being still in the next room. At the name — at the footsteps of Marguerite Vanel, Madame de Belliere ran to meet her. She fancied she could detect in her friend's eyes a brightness which was neither that of health nor of pleasure. Marguerite embraced her, pressed her hands, and hardly allowed her time to speak. "Dearest," she said, "have you forgotten me? Have you quite given yourself up to the pleasures of the court?"

"I have not even seen the marriage *fetes*."

"What are you doing with yourself, then?"

"I am getting ready to leave for Belliere."

"For Belliere?"

"Yes."

"You are becoming rustic in your tastes, then; I delight to see you so disposed. But you are pale."

"No, I am perfectly well."

"So much the better; I was becoming uneasy about you. You do not know what I have been told."

"People say so many things."

"Yes, but this is very singular."

"How well you know how to excite curiosity, Marguerite."

"Well, I was afraid of vexing you."

"Never; you have yourself always admired me for my evenness of temper."

"Well, then, it is said that — no, I shall never be able to tell you."

“Do not let us talk about it, then,” said Madame de Belliere, who detected the ill-nature that was concealed by all these prefaces, yet felt the most anxious curiosity on the subject.

“Well, then, my dear marquise, it is said, for some time past, you no longer continue to regret Monsieur de Belliere as you used to.”

“It is an ill-natured report, Marguerite. I do regret, and shall always regret, my husband; but it is now two years since he died. I am only twenty-eight years old, and my grief at his loss ought not always to control every action and thought of my life. You, Marguerite, who are the model of a wife, would not believe me if I were to say so.”

“Why not? Your heart is so soft and yielding,” she said, spitefully.

“Yours is so, too, Marguerite, and yet I did not perceive that you allowed yourself to be overcome by grief when your heart was wounded.” These words were in direct allusion to Marguerite’s rupture with the superintendent, and were also a veiled but direct reproach made against her friend’s heart.

As if she only awaited this signal to discharge her shaft, Marguerite exclaimed, “Well, Elise, it is said you are in love.” And she looked fixedly at Madame de Belliere, who blushed against her will.

“Women can never escape slander,” replied the marquise, after a moment’s pause.

“No one slanders you, Elise.”

“What! — people say that I am in love, and yet they do not slander me!”

“In the first place, if it be true, it is no slander, but simply a scandal-loving report. In the next place — for you did not allow me to finish what I was saying — the public does not assert that you have abandoned yourself to this passion. It represents you, on the contrary, as a virtuous but loving woman, defending yourself with claws and teeth, shutting yourself up in your own house as in a fortress; in other respects, as impenetrable as that of Danae, notwithstanding Danae’s tower was made of brass.”

“You are witty, Marguerite,” said Madame de Belliere, angrily.

“You always flatter me, Elise. In short, however, you are reported to be incorruptible and unapproachable. You cannot decide whether the world is calumniating you or not; but what is it you are musing about while I am speaking to you?”

“I?”

“Yes; you are blushing and do not answer me.”

“I was trying,” said the marquise, raising her beautiful eyes brightened with an indication of growing temper, “I was trying to discover to what you could possibly have alluded, you who are so learned in mythological subjects, in comparing me to Danae.”

“You were trying to guess that?” said Marguerite, laughing.

“Yes; do you not remember that at the convent, when we were solving our problems in arithmetic — ah! what I have to tell you is learned also, but it is my turn — do you not remember, that if one of the terms were given, we were to find the other? Therefore do *you* guess now?”

“I cannot conjecture what you mean.”

“And yet nothing is more simple. You pretend that I am in love, do you not?”

“So it is said.”

“Very well; it is not said, I suppose, that I am in love with an abstraction. There must surely be a name mentioned in this report.”

“Certainly, a name is mentioned.”

“Very well; it is not surprising, then, that I should try to guess this name, since you do not tell it.”

“My dear marquise, when I saw you blush, I did not think you would have to spend much time in conjectures.”

“It was the word Danae which you used that surprised me. Danae means a shower of gold, does it not?”

“That is to say that the Jupiter of Danae changed himself into a shower of gold for her.”

“My lover, then, he whom you assign me — ”

“I beg your pardon; I am your friend, and assign you no one.”

“That may be; but those who are ill disposed towards me.”

“Do you wish to hear the name?”

“I have been waiting this half hour for it.”

“Well, then, you shall hear it. Do not be shocked; he is a man high in power.”

“Good,” said the marquise, as she clenched her hands like a patient at the approach of the knife.

“He is a very wealthy man,” continued Marguerite; “the wealthiest, it may be. In a word, it is — ”

The marquise closed her eyes for a moment.

“It is the Duke of Buckingham,” said Marguerite, bursting into laughter. This perfidy had been calculated with extreme ability; the name that was pronounced, instead of the name which the marquise awaited, had precisely the same effect upon her as the badly sharpened axes, that had hacked, without destroying, Messieurs de Chalais and de Thou upon the scaffold. She recovered herself, however, and said, “I was perfectly right in saying you were a witty woman, for you are making the time pass away most agreeably. This joke is a most amusing one, for I have never seen the Duke of Buckingham.”

“Never?” said Marguerite, restraining her laughter.

“I have never even left my own house since the duke has been at Paris.”

“Oh!” resumed Madame Vanel, stretching out her foot towards a paper which was lying on the carpet near the window; “it is not necessary for people to see each other, since they can write.” The marquise trembled, for this paper was the envelope of the letter she was reading as her friend had entered, and was sealed with the superintendent’s arms. As she leaned back on the sofa on which she was sitting, Madame de Belliere covered the paper with the thick folds of her large silk dress, and so concealed it.

“Come, Marguerite, tell me, is it to tell me all these foolish reports that you have come to see me so early in the day?”

“No; I came to see you, in the first place, and to remind you of those habits of our earlier days, so delightful to remember, when we used to wander about together at Vincennes, and, sitting beneath an oak, or in some sylvan shade, used to talk of those we loved, and who loved us.”

“Do you propose that we should go out together now?”

“My carriage is here, and I have three hours at my disposal.”

“I am not dressed yet, Marguerite; but if you wish that we should talk together, we can, without going to the woods of Vincennes, find in my own garden here, beautiful trees, shady groves, a green sward covered with daisies and violets, the perfume of which can be perceived from where we are sitting.”

“I regret your refusal, my dear marquise, for I wanted to pour out my whole heart into yours.”

“I repeat again, Marguerite, my heart is yours just as much in this room, or beneath the lime-trees in the garden here, as it would be under the oaks in the woods yonder.”

"It is not the same thing for me. In approaching Vincennes, marquise, my ardent aspirations approach nearer to that object towards which they have for some days past been directed." The marquise suddenly raised her head. "Are you surprised, then, that I am still thinking of Saint-Mande?"

"Of Saint-Mande?" exclaimed Madame de Belliere; and the looks of both women met each other like two resistless swords.

"You, so proud!" said the marquise, disdainfully.

"I, so proud!" replied Madame Vanel. "Such is my nature. I do not forgive neglect — I cannot endure infidelity. When I leave any one who weeps at my abandonment, I feel induced still to love him; but when others forsake me and laugh at their infidelity, I love distractedly."

Madame de Belliere could not restrain an involuntary movement.

"She is jealous," said Marguerite to herself.

"Then," continued the marquise, "you are quite enamored of the Duke of Buckingham — I mean of M. Fouquet?" Elise felt the allusion, and her blood seemed to congeal in her heart. "And you wished to go to Vincennes, — to Saint-Mande, even?"

"I hardly know what I wished: you would have advised me perhaps."

"In what respect?"

"You have often done so."

"Most certainly I should not have done so in the present instance, for I do not forgive as you do. I am less loving, perhaps; when my heart has been once wounded, it remains so always."

"But M. Fouquet has not wounded you," said Marguerite Vanel, with the most perfect simplicity.

"You perfectly understand what I mean. M. Fouquet has not wounded me; I do not know of either obligation or injury received at his hands, but you have reason to complain of him. You are my friend, and I am afraid I should not advise you as you would like."

"Ah! you are prejudging the case."

"The sighs you spoke of just now are more than indications."

"You overwhelm me," said the young woman suddenly, as if collecting her whole strength, like a wrestler preparing for a last struggle; "you take only my evil dispositions and my weaknesses into calculation, and do not speak of my pure and generous feelings. If, at this moment, I feel instinctively attracted towards the superintendent, if I even make an advance to him, which, I confess, is very probable, my motive for it is, that

M. Fouquet’s fate deeply affects me, and because he is, in my opinion, one of the most unfortunate men living.”

“Ah!” said the marquise, placing her hand upon her heart, “something new, then, has occurred?”

“Do you not know it?”

“I am utterly ignorant of everything about him,” said Madame de Belliere, with the poignant anguish that suspends thought and speech, and even life itself.

“In the first place, then, the king’s favor is entirely withdrawn from M. Fouquet, and conferred on M. Colbert.”

“So it is stated.”

“It is very clear, since the discovery of the plot of Belle-Isle.”

“I was told that the discovery of the fortifications there had turned out to M. Fouquet’s honor.”

Marguerite began to laugh in so cruel a manner that Madame de Belliere could at that moment have delightedly plunged a dagger in her bosom. “Dearest,” continued Marguerite, “there is no longer any question of M. Fouquet’s honor; his safety is concerned. Before three days are passed the ruin of the superintendent will be complete.”

“Stay,” said the marquise, in her turn smiling, “that is going a little fast.”

“I said three days, because I wish to deceive myself with a hope; but probably the catastrophe will be complete within twenty-four hours.”

“Why so?”

“For the simplest of all reasons, — that M. Fouquet has no more money.”

“In matters of finance, my dear Marguerite, some are without money to-day, who to-morrow can procure millions.”

“That might be M. Fouquet’s case when he had two wealthy and clever friends who amassed money for him, and wrung it from every possible or impossible source; but those friends are dead.”

“Money does not die, Marguerite; it may be concealed, but it can be looked for, bought and found.”

“You see things on the bright side, and so much the better for you. It is really very unfortunate that you are not the Egeria of M. Fouquet; you might now show him the source whence he could obtain the millions which the king asked him for yesterday.”

“Millions!” said the marquise, in terror.

“Four — an even number.”

"Infamous!" murmured Madame de Belliere, tortured by her friend's merciless delight.

"M. Fouquet, I should think, must certainly have four millions," she replied, courageously.

"If he has those which the king requires to-day," said Marguerite, "he will not, perhaps, possess those which the king will demand in a month or so."

"The king will exact money from him again, then?"

"No doubt; and that is my reason for saying that the ruin of poor M. Fouquet is inevitable. Pride will induce him to furnish the money, and when he has no more, he will fall."

"It is true," said the marquise, trembling; "the plan is a bold one; but tell me, does M. Colbert hate M. Fouquet so very much?"

"I think he does not like him. M. Colbert is powerful; he improves on close acquaintance; he has gigantic ideas, a strong will, and discretion; he will rise."

"He will be superintendent?"

"It is probable. Such is the reason, my dear marquise, why I felt myself impressed in favor of that poor man, who once loved, and even adored me; and why, when I see him so unfortunate, I forgive his infidelity, which I have reason to believe he also regrets; and why, moreover, I should not have been disinclined to afford him some consolation, or some good advice; he would have understood the step I had taken, and would have thought kindly of me for it. It is gratifying to be loved, you know. Men value love more highly when they are no longer blinded by its influence."

The marquise, bewildered and overcome by these cruel attacks, which had been calculated with the greatest nicety and precision, hardly knew what to answer in return; she even seemed to have lost all power of thought. Her perfidious friend's voice had assumed the most affectionate tone; she spoke as a woman, but concealed the instincts of a wolf.

"Well," said Madame de Belliere, who had a vague hope that Marguerite would cease to overwhelm a vanquished enemy, "why do you not go and see M. Fouquet?"

"Decidedly, marquise, you have made me reflect. No, it would be unbecoming for me to make the first advance. M. Fouquet no doubt loves me, but he is too proud. I cannot expose myself to an affront.... besides, I have my husband to consider. You tell me nothing? Very well, I shall consult M. Colbert on the subject." Marguerite rose smilingly, as though to take leave, but the marquise had not the strength to imitate her. Marguerite advanced a few paces, in order that she might continue to enjoy the humiliating grief in which her rival was plunged, and then said, suddenly, — ”You do not accompany me to the door, then?” The marquise rose, pale and almost lifeless, without thinking of the envelope, which had occupied her attention so greatly at the commencement of the conversation, and which was revealed at the first step she took. She then opened the door of her oratory, and without even turning her head towards Marguerite Vanel, entered it, closing the door after her. Marguerite said, or rather muttered a few words, which Madame de Belliere did not even hear. As soon, however, as the marquise had disappeared, her envious enemy, not being able to resist the desire to satisfy herself that her suspicions were well founded, advanced stealthily like a panther, and seized the envelope. “Ah!” she said, gnashing her teeth, “it was indeed a letter from M. Fouquet she was reading when I arrived,” and then darted out of the room. During this interval, the marquise, having arrived behind the rampart, as it were, of her door, felt that her strength was failing her; for a moment she remained rigid, pale and motionless as a statue, and then, like a statue shaken on its base by an earthquake, tottered and fell inanimate on the carpet. The noise of the fall resounded at the same moment as the rolling of Marguerite’s carriage leaving the hotel.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Madame de Belliere’s Plate.

The blow had been the more painful on account of its being unexpected. It was some time before the marquise recovered herself; but once recovered, she began to reflect upon the events so heartlessly announced to her. She therefore returned, at the risk even of losing her life in the way, to that train of ideas which her relentless friend had forced her to pursue. Treason, then — deep menaces, concealed under the semblance of public interest — such were Colbert’s maneuvers. A detestable delight at an approaching downfall, untiring efforts to attain this object, means of seduction no less wicked than the crime itself — such were the weapons Marguerite employed. The crooked atoms of Descartes triumphed; to the man without compassion was united a woman without heart. The marquise perceived, with sorrow rather than indignation, that the king was an accomplice in the plot which betrayed the duplicity of Louis XIII. in his advanced age, and the avarice of Mazarin at a period of life when he had not had the opportunity of gorging himself with French gold. The spirit of this courageous woman soon resumed its energy, no longer overwhelmed by indulgence in compassionate lamentations. The marquise was not one to weep when action was necessary, nor to waste time in bewailing a misfortune as long as means still existed of relieving it. For some minutes she buried her face in her cold fingers, and then, raising her head, rang for her attendants with a steady hand, and with a gesture betraying a fixed determination of purpose. Her resolution was taken.

“Is everything prepared for my departure?” she inquired of one of her female attendants who entered.

“Yes, madame; but it was not expected that your ladyship would leave for Belliere for the next few days.”

“All my jewels and articles of value, then, are packed up?”

“Yes, madame; but hitherto we have been in the habit of leaving them in Paris. Your ladyship does not generally take your jewels with you into the country.”

“But they are all in order, you say?”

“Yes, in your ladyship’s own room.”

“The gold plate?”

“In the chest.”

“And the silver plate?”

“In the great oak closet.”

The marquise remained silent for a few moments, and then said calmly, “Let my goldsmith be sent for.”

Her attendants quitted the room to execute the order. The marquise, however, had entered her own room, and was inspecting her casket of jewels with the greatest attention. Never, until now, had she bestowed such close attention upon riches in which women take so much pride; never, until now, had she looked at her jewels, except for the purpose of making a selection according to their settings or their colors. On this occasion, however, she admired the size of the rubies and the brilliancy of the diamonds; she grieved over every blemish and every defect; she thought the gold light, and the stones wretched. The goldsmith, as he entered, found her thus occupied. “M. Faucheux,” she said, “I believe you supplied me with my gold service?”

“I did, your ladyship.”

“I do not now remember the amount of the account.”

“Of the new service, madame, or of that which M. de Belliere presented to you on your marriage? for I have furnished both.”

“First of all, the new one.”

“The covers, the goblets, and the dishes, with their covers, the *eau-epergne*, the ice-pails, the dishes for the preserves, and the tea and coffee urns, cost your ladyship sixty thousand francs.”

“No more?”

“Your ladyship thought the account very high.”

“Yes, yes; I remember, in fact, that it was dear; but it was the workmanship, I suppose?”

“Yes, madame; the designs, the chasings — all new patterns.”

“What proportion of the cost does the workmanship form? Do not hesitate to tell me.”

“A third of its value, madame.”

“There is the other service, the old one, that which belonged to my husband?”

“Yes, madame; there is less workmanship in that than in the other. Its intrinsic value does not exceed thirty thousand francs.”

“Thirty thousand,” murmured the marquise. “But, M. Faucheux, there is also the service which belonged to my mother; all that massive plate which I did not wish to part with, on account of the associations connected with it.”

“Ah! madame, that would indeed be an excellent resource for those who, unlike your ladyship, might not be in position to keep their plate. In chasing that they worked in solid metal. But that service is no longer in fashion. Its weight is its only advantage.”

“That is all I care about. How much does it weigh?”

“Fifty thousand livres at the very least. I do not allude to the enormous vases for the buffet, which alone weigh five thousand livres, or ten thousand the pair.”

“One hundred and thirty,” murmured the marquise. “You are quite sure of your figures, M. Faucheux?”

“The amount is entered in my books. Your ladyship is extremely methodical, I am aware.”

“Let us now turn to another subject,” said Madame de Belliere; and she opened one of her jewel-boxes.

“I recognize these emeralds,” said M. Faucheux; “for it was I who had the setting of them. They are the most beautiful in the whole court. No, I am mistaken; Madame de Chatillon has the most beautiful set; she had them from Messieurs de Guise; but your set, madame, comes next.”

“What are they worth?”

“Mounted?”

“No; supposing I wished to sell them.”

“I know very well who would buy them,” exclaimed M. Faucheux.

“That is the very thing I ask. They could be sold, then?”

“All your jewels could be sold, madame. It is well known that you possess the most beautiful jewels in Paris. You are not changeable in your tastes; when you make a purchase it is of the very best; and what you purchase you do not part with.”

“What could these emeralds be sold for, then?”

“A hundred and thirty thousand francs.”

The marquise wrote down upon her tablets the amount which the jeweler mentioned. “The ruby necklace?” she said.

“Are they balas-rubies, madame?”

“Here they are.”

“They are beautiful — magnificent. I did not know your ladyship had these stones.”

“What is their value?”

“Two hundred thousand francs. The center one is alone worth a hundred thousand.”

“I thought so,” said the marquise. “As for diamonds, I have them in numbers; rings, necklaces, sprigs, ear-rings, clasps. Tell me their value, M. Faucheux.”

The jeweler took his magnifying-glass and scales, weighed and inspected them, and silently made his calculations. “These stones,” he said, “must have cost your ladyship an income of forty thousand francs.”

“You value them at eight hundred thousand francs?”

“Nearly so.”

“It is about what I imagined — but the settings are not included?”

“No, madame; but if I were called upon to sell or to buy, I should be satisfied with the gold of the settings alone as my profit upon the transaction. I should make a good twenty-five thousand francs.”

“An agreeable sum.”

“Very much so, madame.”

“Will you then accept that profit, then, on condition of converting the jewels into money?”

“But you do not intend to sell you diamonds, I suppose, madame?” exclaimed the bewildered jeweler.

“Silence, M. Faucheux, do not disturb yourself about that; give me an answer simply. You are an honorable man, with whom my family has dealt for thirty years; you knew my father and mother, whom your own father and mother served. I address you as a friend; will you accept the gold of the settings in return for a sum of ready money to be placed in my hands?”

“Eight hundred thousand francs! it is enormous.”

“I know it.”

“Impossible to find.”

“Not so.”

“But reflect, madame, upon the effect which will be produced by the sale of your jewels.”

"No one need know it. You can get sets of false jewels made for me, similar to the real. Do not answer a word; I insist upon it. Sell them separately, sell the stones only."

"In that way it is easy. Monsieur is looking out for some sets of jewels as well as single stones for Madame's toilette. There will be a competition for them. I can easily dispose of six hundred thousand francs' worth to Monsieur. I am certain yours are the most beautiful."

"When can you do so?"

"In less than three days' time."

"Very well, the remainder you will dispose of among private individuals. For the present, make me out a contract of sale, payment to be made in four days."

"I entreat you to reflect, madame; for if you force the sale, you will lose a hundred thousand francs."

"If necessary, I will lose two hundred; I wish everything to be settled this evening. Do you accept?"

"I do, your ladyship. I will not conceal from you that I shall make fifty thousand francs by the transaction."

"So much the better for you. In what way shall I have the money?"

"Either in gold, or in bills of the bank of Lyons, payable at M. Colbert's."

"I agree," said the marquise, eagerly; "return home and bring the sum in question in notes, as soon as possible."

"Yes, madame, but for Heaven's sake — "

"Not a word, M. Faucheux. By the by, I was forgetting the silver plate. What is the value of that which I have?"

"Fifty thousand francs, madame."

"That makes a million," said the marquise to herself. "M. Faucheux, you will take away with you both the gold and silver plate. I can assign, as a pretext, that I wish it remodeled on patters more in accordance with my own taste. Melt it down, and return me its value in money, at once."

"It shall be done, your ladyship."

"You will be good enough to place the money in a chest, and direct one of your clerks to accompany the chest, and without my servants seeing him; and order him to wait for me in a carriage."

"In Madame de Faucheux's carriage?" said the jeweler.

"If you will allow it, and I will call for it at your house."

"Certainly, your ladyship."

“I will direct some of my servants to convey the plate to your house.” The marquise rung. “Let the small van be placed at M. Faucheux’s disposal,” she said. The jeweler bowed and left the house, directing that the van should follow him closely, saying aloud, that the marquise was about to have her plate melted down in order to have other plate manufactured of a more modern style. Three hours afterwards she went to M. Faucheux’s house and received from him eight hundred francs in gold inclosed in a chest, which one of the clerks could hardly carry towards Madame Faucheux’s carriage — for Madame Faucheux kept her carriage. As the daughter of a president of accounts, she had brought a marriage portion of thirty thousand crowns to her husband, who was syndic of the goldsmiths. These thirty thousand crowns had become very fruitful during twenty years. The jeweler, though a *millionaire*, was a modest man. He had purchased a substantial carriage, built in 1648, ten years after the king’s birth. This carriage, or rather house upon wheels, excited the admiration of the whole quarter in which he resided — it was covered with allegorical paintings, and clouds scattered over with stars. The marquise entered this somewhat extraordinary vehicle, sitting opposite the clerk, who endeavored to put his knees out of the way, afraid even of touching the marquise’s dress. It was the clerk, too, who told the coachman, who was very proud of having a marquise to drive, to take the road to Saint-Mande.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The Dowry.

Monsieur Faucheux’s horses were serviceable animals, with thickset knees and legs that had some difficulty in moving. Like the carriage, they belonged to the earlier part of the century. They were not as fleet as the English horses of M. Fouquet, and consequently it took two hours to get to Saint-Mande. Their progress, it might be said, was majestic. Majesty, however, precludes hurry. The marquise stopped the carriage at the door so well known to her, although she had seen it only once, under circumstances, it will now be remembered, no less painful than those which brought her now to it again. She drew a key from her pocket, and inserted it into the lock, pushed open the door, which noiselessly yielded to her touch, and directed the clerk to carry the chest upstairs to the first floor. The weight of the chest was so great that the clerk was obliged to get the coachman to assist him with it. They placed it in a small cabinet, ante-room, or boudoir rather, adjoining the saloon where we once saw M. Fouquet at the marquise’s feet. Madame de Belliere gave the coachman a louis, smiled gracefully at the clerk, and dismissed them both. She closed the door after them, and waited in the room, alone and barricaded. There was no servant to be seen about the rooms, but everything was prepared as though some invisible genius had divined the wishes and desires of an expected guest. The fire was laid, candles in the candelabra, refreshments upon the table, books scattered about, fresh-cut flowers in the vases. One might almost have imagined it an enchanted house.

The marquise lighted the candles, inhaled the perfume of the flowers, sat down, and was soon plunged in profound thought. Her deep musings, melancholy though they were, were not untinged with a certain vague joy. Spread out before her was a treasure, a million wrung from her fortune as a gleaner plucks the blue corn-flower from her crown of flowers. She conjured up the sweetest dreams. Her principal thought, and one that took precedence of all others, was to devise means of leaving this money for M. Fouquet without his possibly learning from whom the gift had come. This idea, naturally enough, was the first to present itself to her mind. But although, on reflection, it appeared difficult to carry out, she did not despair of success. She would then ring to summon M. Fouquet and make her escape, happier than if, instead of having given a million, she had herself found one. But, being there, and having seen the boudoir so coquettishly decorated that it might almost be said the least particle of dust had but the moment before been removed by the servants; having observed the drawing-room, so perfectly arranged that it might almost be said her presence there had driven away the fairies who were its occupants, she asked herself if the glance or gaze of those whom she had displaced — whether spirits, fairies, elves, or human creatures — had not already recognized her. To secure success, it was necessary that some steps should be seriously taken, and it was necessary also that the superintendent should comprehend the serious position in which he was placed, in order to yield compliance with the generous fancies of a woman; all the fascinations of an eloquent friendship would be required to persuade him, and, should this be insufficient, the maddening influence of a devoted passion, which, in its resolute determination to carry conviction, would not be turned aside. Was not the superintendent, indeed, known for his delicacy and dignity of feeling? Would he allow himself to accept from any woman that of which she had stripped herself? No! He would resist, and if any voice in the world could overcome his resistance, it would be the voice of the woman he loved.

Another doubt, and that a cruel one, suggested itself to Madame de Belliere with a sharp, acute pain, like a dagger thrust. Did he really love her? Would that volatile mind, that inconstant heart, be likely to be fixed for a moment, even were it to gaze upon an angel? Was it not the same with Fouquet, notwithstanding his genius and his uprightness of conduct, as with those conquerors on the field of battle who shed tears when they have gained a victory? “I must learn if it be so, and must judge of that for myself,” said the marquise. “Who can tell whether that heart, so coveted, is not common in its impulses, and full of alloy? Who can tell if that mind, when the touchstone is applied to it, will not be found of a mean and vulgar character? Come, come,” she said, “this is doubting and hesitation too much — to the proof,” she said, looking at the timepiece. “It is now seven o’clock,” she said; “he must have arrived; it is the hour for signing his papers.” With a feverish impatience she rose and walked towards the mirror, in which she smiled with a resolute smile of devotedness; she touched the spring and drew out the handle of the bell. Then, as if exhausted beforehand by the struggle she had just undergone, she threw herself on her knees, in utter abandonment, before a large couch, in which she buried her face in her trembling hands. Ten minutes afterwards she heard the spring of the door sound. The door moved upon invisible hinges, and Fouquet appeared. He looked pale, and seemed bowed down by the weight of some bitter reflection. He did not hurry, but simply came at the summons. The preoccupation of his mind must indeed have been very great, that a man, so devoted to pleasure, for whom indeed pleasure meant everything, should obey such a summons so listlessly. The previous night, in fact, fertile in melancholy ideas, had sharpened his features, generally so noble in their indifference of expression, and had traced dark lines of anxiety around his eyes. Handsome and noble he still was, and the melancholy expression of his mouth, a rare expression with men, gave a new character to his features, by which his youth seemed to be renewed. Dressed in black, the lace in front of his chest much disarranged by his feverishly restless hand, the looks of the superintendent, full of dreamy reflection, were fixed upon the threshold of the room which he had so frequently approached in search of expected happiness. This gloomy gentleness of manner, this smiling sadness of expression, which had replaced his former excessive joy, produced an indescribable effect upon Madame de Belliere, who was regarding him at a distance.

A woman's eye can read the face of the man she loves, its every feeling of pride, its every expression of suffering; it might almost be said that Heaven has graciously granted to women, on account of their very weakness, more than it has accorded to other creatures. They can conceal their own feelings from a man, but from them no man can conceal his. The marquise divined in a single glace the whole weight of the unhappiness of the superintendent. She divined a night passed without sleep, a day passed in deceptions. From that moment she was firm in her own strength, and she felt that she loved Fouquet beyond everything else. She arose and approached him, saying, "You wrote to me this morning to say you were beginning to forget me, and that I, whom you had not seen lately, had no doubt ceased to think of you. I have come to undeceive you, monsieur, and the more completely so, because there is one thing I can read in your eyes."

"What is that, madame?" said Fouquet, astonished.

“That you have never loved me so much as at this moment; in the same manner you can read, in my present step towards you, that I have not forgotten you.”

“Oh! madame,” said Fouquet, whose face was for a moment lighted up by a sudden gleam of joy, “you are indeed an angel, and no man can suspect you. All he can do is to humble himself before you and entreat forgiveness.”

“Your forgiveness is granted, then,” said the marquise. Fouquet was about to throw himself upon his knees. “No, no,” she said, “sit here by my side. Ah! that is an evil thought which has just crossed your mind.”

“How do you detect it, madame?”

“By the smile that has just marred the expression of your countenance. Be candid, and tell me what your thought was — no secrets between friends.”

“Tell me, then, madame, why you have been so harsh these three or four months past?”

“Harsh?”

“Yes; did you not forbid me to visit you?”

“Alas!” said Madame de Belliere, sighing, “because your visit to me was the cause of your being visited with a great misfortune; because my house is watched; because the same eyes that have seen you already might see you again; because I think it less dangerous for you that I should come here than that you should come to my house; and, lastly, because I know you to be already unhappy enough not to wish to increase your unhappiness further.”

Fouquet started, for these words recalled all the anxieties connected with his office of superintendent — he who, for the last few minutes, had indulged in all the wild aspirations of the lover. “I unhappy?” he said, endeavoring to smile: “indeed, marquise, you will almost make me believe I am so, judging from your own sadness. Are your beautiful eyes raised upon me merely in pity? I was looking for another expression from them.”

“It is not I who am sad, monsieur; look in the mirror, there — it is yourself.”

“It is true I am somewhat pale, marquise; but it is from overwork; the king yesterday required a supply of money from me.”

“Yes, four millions; I am aware of it.”

“You know it?” exclaimed Fouquet, in a tone of surprise; “how can you have learnt it? It was after the departure of the queen, and in the presence of one person only, that the king — ”

“You perceive that I do know it; is that not sufficient? Well, go on, monsieur, the money the king has required you to supply — ”

“You understand, marquise, that I have been obliged to procure it, then to get it counted, afterwards registered — altogether a long affair. Since Monsieur de Mazarin’s death, financial affairs occasion some little fatigue and embarrassment. My administration is somewhat overtaxed, and this is the reason why I have not slept during the past night.”

“So you have the amount?” inquired the marquise, with some anxiety.

“It would indeed be strange, marquise,” replied Fouquet, cheerfully, “if a superintendent of finances were not to have a paltry four millions in his coffers.”

“Yes, yes, I believe you either have, or will have them.”

“What do you mean by saying I shall have them?”

“It is not very long since you were required to furnish two millions.”

“On the contrary, it seems almost an age; but do not let us talk of money matters any longer.”

“On the contrary, we will continue to speak of them, for that is my only reason for coming to see you.”

“I am at a loss to compass your meaning,” said the superintendent, whose eyes began to express an anxious curiosity.

“Tell me, monsieur, is the office of superintendent a permanent position?”

“You surprise me, marchioness, for you speak as if you had some motive or interest in putting the question.”

“My reason is simple enough; I am desirous of placing some money in your hands, and naturally I wish to know if you are certain of your post.”

“Really, marquise, I am at a loss what to reply; I cannot conceive your meaning.”

“Seriously, then, dear M. Fouquet, I have certain funds which somewhat embarrass me. I am tired of investing my money in lands, and am anxious to intrust it to some friend who will turn it to account.”

“Surely it does not press,” said M. Fouquet.

“On the contrary, it is very pressing.”

“Very well, we will talk of that by and by.”

“By and by will not do, for my money is there,” returned the marquise, pointing out the coffer to the superintendent, and showing him, as she opened it, the bundles of notes and heaps of gold. Fouquet, who had risen from his seat at the same moment as Madame de Belliere, remained for a moment plunged in thought; then suddenly starting back, he turned pale, and sank down in his chair, concealing his face in his hands. "Madame, madame," he murmured, "what opinion can you have of me, when you make me such an offer?"

"Of you!" returned the marquise. "Tell me, rather, what you yourself think of the step I have taken."

"You bring me this money for myself, and you bring it because you know me to be embarrassed. Nay, do not deny it, for I am sure of it. Can I not read your heart?"

"If you know my heart, then, can you not see that it is my heart I offer you?"

"I have guessed rightly, then," exclaimed Fouquet. "In truth, madame, I have never yet given you the right to insult me in this manner."

"Insult you," she said, turning pale, "what singular delicacy of feeling! You tell me you love me; in the name of that affection you wish me to sacrifice my reputation and my honor, yet, when I offer you money which is my own, you refuse me."

"Madame, you are at liberty to preserve what you term your reputation and your honor. Permit me to preserve mine. Leave me to my ruin, leave me to sink beneath the weight of the hatreds which surround me, beneath the faults I have committed, beneath the load, even, of my remorse, but, for Heaven's sake, madame, do not overwhelm me with this last infliction."

"A short time since, M. Fouquet, you were wanting in judgment; now you are wanting in feeling."

Fouquet pressed his clenched hand upon his breast, heaving with emotion, saying: "overwhelm me, madame, for I have nothing to reply."

"I offered you my friendship, M. Fouquet."

"Yes, madame, and you limited yourself to that."

"And what I am now doing is the act of a friend."

"No doubt it is."

"And you reject this mark of my friendship?"

"I do reject it."

"Monsieur Fouquet, look at me," said the marquise, with glistening eyes, "I now offer you my love."

"Oh, madame," exclaimed Fouquet.

“I have loved you for a long while past; women, like men, have a false delicacy at times. For a long time past I have loved you, but would not confess it. Well, then, you have implored this love on your knees, and I have refused you; I was blind, as you were a little while since; but as it was my love that you sought, it is my love I now offer you.”

“Oh! madame, you overwhelm me beneath a load of happiness.”

“Will you be happy, then, if I am yours — entirely?”

“It will be the supremest happiness for me.”

“Take me, then. If, however, for your sake I sacrifice a prejudice, do you, for mine, sacrifice a scruple.”

“Do not tempt me.”

“Do not refuse me.”

“Think seriously of what you are proposing.”

“Fouquet, but one word. Let it be ‘No,’ and I open this door,” and she pointed to the door which led into the streets, “and you will never see me again. Let that word be ‘Yes,’ and I am yours entirely.”

“Elise! Elise! But this coffer?”

“Contains my dowry.”

“It is your ruin,” exclaimed Fouquet, turning over the gold and papers; “there must be a million here.”

“Yes, my jewels, for which I care no longer if you do not love me, and for which, equally, I care no longer if you love me as I love you.”

“This is too much,” exclaimed Fouquet. “I yield, I yield, even were it only to consecrate so much devotion. I accept the dowry.”

“And take the woman with it,” said the marquise, throwing herself into his arms.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Le Terrain de Dieu.

During the progress of these events Buckingham and De Wardes traveled in excellent companionship, and made the journey from Paris to Calais in undisturbed harmony together. Buckingham had hurried his departure, so that the greater part of his *adieux* were very hastily made. His visit to Monsieur and Madame, to the young queen, and to the queen-dowager, had been paid collectively — a precaution on the part of the queen-mother which saved him the distress of any private conversation with Monsieur, and also the danger of seeing Madame again. The carriages containing the luggage had already been sent on beforehand, and in the evening he set off in his traveling carriage with his attendants.

De Wardes, irritated at finding himself dragged away in so abrupt a manner by this Englishman, had sought in his subtle mind for some means of escaping from his fetters; but no one having rendered him any assistance in this respect, he was absolutely obliged, therefore, to submit to the burden of his own evil thoughts and caustic spirit.

Such of his friends in whom he had been able to confide, had, in their character of wits, rallied him upon the duke’s superiority. Others, less brilliant, but more sensible, had reminded him of the king’s orders prohibiting dueling. Others, again, and they the larger number, who, in virtue of charity, or national vanity, might have rendered him assistance, did not care to run the risk of incurring disgrace, and would, at the best, have informed the ministers of a departure which might end in a massacre on a small scale. The result was, that, after having fully deliberated upon the matter, De Wardes packed up his luggage, took a couple of horses, and, followed only by one servant, made his way towards the barrier, where Buckingham’s carriage was to await him.

The duke received his adversary as he would have done an intimate acquaintance, made room beside him on the same seat with himself, offered him refreshments, and spread over his knees the sable cloak that had been thrown on the front seat. They then conversed of the court, without alluding to Madame; of Monsieur, without speaking of domestic affairs; of the king, without speaking of his brother's wife; of the queen-mother, without alluding to her daughter-in-law; of the king of England, without alluding to his sister; of the state of the affections of either of the travelers, without pronouncing any name that might be dangerous. In this way the journey, which was performed by short stages, was most agreeable, and Buckingham, almost a Frenchman from wit and education, was delighted at having so admirably selected his traveling companion. Elegant repasts were served, of which they partook but lightly; trials of horses made in the beautiful meadows that skirted the road; coursing indulged in, for Buckingham had his greyhounds with him; and in such ways did they pass away the pleasant time. The duke somewhat resembled the beautiful river Seine, which folds France a thousand times in its loving embrace, before deciding upon joining its waters with the ocean. In quitting France, it was her recently adopted daughter he had brought to Paris whom he chiefly regretted; his every thought was a remembrance of her — his every memory a regret. Therefore, whenever, now and then, despite his command over himself, he was lost in thought, De Wardes left him entirely to his musings. This delicacy might have touched Buckingham, and changed his feelings towards De Wardes, if the latter, while preserving silence, had shown a glance less full of malice, and a smile less false. Instinctive dislikes, however, are relentless; nothing appeases them; a few ashes may, sometimes, apparently, extinguish them; but beneath those ashes the smothered embers rage more furiously. Having exhausted every means of amusement the route offered, they arrived, as we have said, at Calais towards the end of the sixth day. The duke's attendants, since the previous evening, had traveled in advance, and now chartered a boat, for the purpose of joining the yacht, which had been tacking about in sight, or bore broadside on, whenever it felt its white wings wearied, within cannon-shot of the jetty.

The boat was destined for the transport of the duke's equipages from the shore to the yacht. The horses had been embarked, having been hoisted from the boat upon the deck in baskets, expressly made for the purpose, and wadded in such a manner that their limbs, even in the most violent fits of terror or impatience, were always protected by the soft support which the sides afforded, and their coats not even turned. Eight of these baskets, placed side by side, filled the ship's hold. It is well known that, in short voyages horses refuse to eat, but remain trembling all the while, with the best of food before them, such as they would have greatly coveted on land. By degrees, the duke's entire equipage was transported on board the yacht; he was then informed that everything was in readiness, and that they only waited for him, whenever he would be disposed to embark with the French gentleman; for no one could possibly imagine that the French gentleman would have any other accounts to settle with his Grace other than those of friendship. Buckingham desired the captain to be told to hold himself in readiness, but that, as the sea was beautiful, and as the day promised a splendid sunset, he did not intend to go on board until nightfall, and would avail himself of the evening to enjoy a walk on the strand. He added also, that, finding himself in such excellent company, he had not the least desire to hasten his embarkation.

As he said this he pointed out to those who surrounded him the magnificent spectacle which the sky presented, of deepest azure in the horizon, the amphitheatre of fleecy clouds ascending from the sun's disc to the zenith, assuming the appearance of a range of snowy mountains, whose summits were heaped one upon another. The dome of clouds was tinged at its base with, as it were, the foam of rubies, fading away into opal and pearly tints, in proportion as the gaze was carried from base to summit. The sea was gilded with the same reflection, and upon the crest of every sparkling wave danced a point of light, like a diamond by lamplight. The mildness of the evening, the sea breezes, so dear to contemplative minds, setting in from the east and blowing in delicious gusts; then, in the distance, the black outline of the yacht with its rigging traced upon the empurpled background of the sky — while, dotting the horizon, might be seen, here and there, vessels with their trimmed sails, like the wings of a seagull about to plunge; such a spectacle indeed well merited admiration. A crowd of curious idlers followed the richly dressed attendants, amongst whom they mistook the steward and the secretary for the master and his friend. As for Buckingham, who was dressed very simply, in a gray satin vest, and doublet of violet-colored velvet, wearing his hat thrust over his eyes, and without orders or embroidery, he was taken no more notice of than De Wardes, who was in black, like an attorney.

The duke’s attendants had received directions to have a boat in readiness at the jetty head, and to watch the embarkation of their master, without approaching him until either he or his friend should summon them, — ”whatever may happen,” he had added, laying a stress upon these words, so that they might not be misunderstood. Having walked a few paces upon the strand, Buckingham said to De Wardes, “I think it is now time to take leave of each other. The tide, you perceive, is rising; ten minutes hence it will have soaked the sands where we are now walking in such a manner that we shall not be able to keep our footing.”

“I await your orders, my lord, but — ”

“But, you mean, we are still upon soil which is part of the king’s territory.”

“Exactly.”

“Well, do you see yonder a kind of little island surrounded by a circle of water? The pool is increasing every minute, and the isle is gradually disappearing. This island, indeed, belongs to Heaven, for it is situated between two seas, and is not shown on the king’s charts. Do you observe it?”

“Yes; but we can hardly reach it now, without getting our feet wet.”

“Yes; but observe that it forms an eminence tolerably high, and that the tide rises up on every side, leaving the top free. We shall be admirably placed upon that little theatre. What do you think of it?”

“I shall be perfectly happy wherever I may have the honor of crossing my sword with your lordship’s.”

“Very well, then, I am distressed to be the cause of your wetting your feet, M. de Wardes, but it is most essential you should be able to say to the king: ‘Sire, I did not fight upon your majesty’s territory.’ Perhaps the distinction is somewhat subtle, but, since Port-Royal, your nation delights in subtleties of expression. Do not let us complain of this, however, for it makes your wit very brilliant, and of a style peculiarly your own. If you do not object, we will hurry ourselves, for the sea, I perceive, is rising fast, and night is setting in.”

“My reason for not walking faster was, that I did not wish to precede your Grace. Are you still on dry land, my lord?”

“Yes, at present I am. Look yonder! My servants are afraid we shall be drowned, and have converted the boat into a cruiser. Do you remark how curiously it dances upon the crests of the waves? But, as it makes me feel sea-sick, would you permit me to turn my back towards them?”

“You will observe, my lord, that in turning your back to them, you will have the sun full in your face.”

“Oh, its rays are very feeble at this hour and it will soon disappear; do not be uneasy on that score.”

“As you please, my lord; it was out of consideration for your lordship that I made the remark.”

“I am aware of that, M. de Wardes, and I fully appreciate your kindness. Shall we take off our doublets?”

“As you please, my lord.”

“Do not hesitate to tell me, M. de Wardes, if you do not feel comfortable upon the wet sand, or if you think yourself a little too close to French territory. We could fight in England, or even upon my yacht.”

“We are exceedingly well placed here, my lord; only I have the honor to remark that, as the sea is rising fast, we have hardly time — ”

Buckingham made a sign of assent, took off his doublet and threw it on the ground, a proceeding which De Wardes imitated. Both their bodies, which seemed like phantoms to those who were looking at them from the shore, were thrown strongly into relief by a dark red violet-colored shadow with which the sky became overspread.

“Upon my word, your Grace,” said De Wardes, “we shall hardly have time to begin. Do you not perceive how our feet are sinking into the sand?”

“I have sunk up to the ankles,” said Buckingham, “without reckoning that the water is even now breaking in upon us.”

“It has already reached me. As soon as you please, therefore, your Grace,” said De Wardes, who drew his sword, a movement imitated by the duke.

“M. de Wardes,” said Buckingham, “one final word. I am about to fight you because I do not like you, — because you have wounded me in ridiculing a certain devotional regard I have entertained, and one which I acknowledge that, at this moment, I still retain, and for which I would very willingly die. You are a bad and heartless man, M. de Wardes, and I will do my very utmost to take your life; for I feel assured that, if you survive this engagement, you will, in the future, work great mischief towards my friends. That is all I have to remark, M. de Wardes," concluded Buckingham as he saluted him.

"And I, my lord, have only this to reply to you: I have not disliked you hitherto, but, since you give me such a character, I hate you, and will do all I possibly can to kill you;" and De Wardes saluted Buckingham.

Their swords crossed at the same moment, like two flashes of lightning on a dark night. The swords seemed to seek each other, guessed their position, and met. Both were practiced swordsmen, and the earlier passes were without any result. The night was fast closing in, and it was so dark that they attacked and defended themselves almost instinctively. Suddenly De Wardes felt his word arrested, — he had just touched Buckingham's shoulder. The duke's sword sunk, as his arm was lowered.

"You are wounded, my lord," said De Wardes, drawing back a step or two.

"Yes, monsieur, but only slightly."

"Yet you quitted your guard."

"Only from the first effect of the cold steel, but I have recovered. Let us go on, if you please." And disengaging his sword with a sinister clashing of the blade, the duke wounded the marquis in the breast.

"A hit?" he said.

"No," cried De Wardes, not moving from his place.

"I beg your pardon, but observing that your shirt was stained — " said Buckingham.

"Well," said De Wardes furiously, "it is now your turn."

And with a terrible lunge, he pierced Buckingham's arm, the sword passing between the two bones. Buckingham feeling his right arm paralyzed, stretched out his left, seized his sword, which was about falling from his nerveless grasp, and before De Wardes could resume his guard, he thrust him through the breast. De Wardes tottered, his knees gave way beneath him, and leaving his sword still fixed in the duke's arm, he fell into the water, which was soon crimsoned with a more genuine reflection than that which it had borrowed from the clouds. De Wardes was not dead; he felt the terrible danger that menaced him, for the sea rose fast. The duke, too, perceived the danger. With an effort and an exclamation of pain he tore out the blade which remained in his arm, and turning towards De Wardes said, "Are you dead, marquis?"

"No," replied De Wardes, in a voice choked by the blood which rushed from his lungs to his throat, "but very near it."

"Well, what is to be done; can you walk?" said Buckingham, supporting him on his knee.

"Impossible," he replied. Then falling down again, said, "call to your people, or I shall be drowned."

"Halloa! boat there! quick, quick!"

The boat flew over the waves, but the sea rose faster than the boat could approach. Buckingham saw that De Wardes was on the point of being again covered by a wave; he passed his left arm, safe and unwounded, round his body and raised him up. The wave ascended to his waist, but did not move him. The duke immediately began to carry his late antagonist towards the shore. He had hardly gone ten paces, when a second wave, rushing onwards higher, more furious and menacing than the former, struck him at the height of his chest, threw him over and buried him beneath the water. At the reflux, however, the duke and De Wardes were discovered lying on the strand. De Wardes had fainted. At this moment four of the duke's sailors, who comprehended the danger, threw themselves into the sea, and in a moment were close beside him. Their terror was extreme when they observed how their master became covered with blood, in proportion to the water, with which it was impregnated, flowed towards his knees and feet; they wished to carry him.

"No, no," exclaimed the duke, "take the marquis on shore first."

"Death to the Frenchman!" cried the English sullenly.

"Wretched knaves!" exclaimed the duke, drawing himself up with a haughty gesture, which sprinkled them with blood, "obey directly! M. de Wardes on shore! M. de Wardes's safety to be looked to first, or I will have you all hanged!"

The boat had by this time reached them; the secretary and steward leaped into the sea, and approached the marquis, who no longer showed any sign of life.

"I commit him to your care, as you value your lives," said the duke. "Take M. de Wardes on shore." They took him in their arms, and carried him to the dry sand, where the tide never rose so high. A few idlers and five or six fishermen had gathered on the shore, attracted by the strange spectacle of two men fighting with the water up to their knees. The fishermen, observing a group of men approaching carrying a wounded man, entered the sea until the water was up to their waists. The English transferred the wounded man to them, at the very moment the latter began to open his eyes again. The salt water and the fine sand had got into his wounds, and caused him the acutest pain. The duke’s secretary drew out a purse filled with gold from his pocket, and handed it to the one among those present who appeared of most importance, saying: “From my master, his Grace the Duke of Buckingham, in order that every possible care may be taken of the Marquis de Wardes.”

Then, followed by those who had accompanied him, he returned to the boat, which Buckingham had been enabled to reach with the greatest difficulty, but only after he had seen De Wardes out of danger. By this time it was high tide; embroidered coats, and silk sashes were lost; many hats, too, had been carried away by the waves. The flow of the tide had borne the duke’s and De Wardes’s clothes to the shore, and De Wardes was wrapped in the duke’s doublet, under the belief that it was his own, when the fishermen carried him in their arms towards the town.

CHAPTER XXX.

Threefold Love.

As soon as Buckingham departed, Guiche imagined the coast would be perfectly clear for him without any interference. Monsieur, who no longer retained the slightest feeling of jealousy, and who, besides, permitted himself to be monopolized by the Chevalier de Lorraine, allowed as much liberty and freedom in his house as the most exacting could desire. The king, on his side, who had conceived a strong predilection for his sister-in-law's society, invented a variety of amusements, in quick succession to each other, in order to render her residence in Paris as cheerful as possible, so that in fact, not a day passed without a ball at the Palais Royal, or a reception in Monsieur's apartments. The king had directed that Fontainebleau should be prepared for the reception of the court, and every one was using his utmost interest to get invited. Madame led a life of incessant occupation; neither her voice nor her pen were idle for a moment. The conversations with De Guiche were gradually assuming a tone of interest which might unmistakably be recognized as the prelude of a deep-seated attachment. When eyes look languishingly while the subject under discussion happens to be colors of materials for dresses; when a whole hour is occupied in analyzing the merits and the perfume of a *sachet* or a flower; — there are words in this style of conversation which every one might listen to, but there are gestures and sighs that every one cannot perceive. After Madame had talked for some time with De Guiche, she conversed with the king, who paid her a visit regularly every day. They played, wrote verses, or selected mottoes or emblematical devices; this spring was not only the Maytide of nature, it was the youth of an entire people, of which those at court were the head. The king was handsome, young, and of unequaled gallantry. All women were passionately loved by him, even the queen, his wife. This mighty monarch was, however, more timid and more reserved than any other person in the kingdom, to such a degree, indeed, that he did not confess his sentiments even to himself. This timidity of bearing restrained him within the limits of ordinary politeness, and no woman could boast of having any preference shown her beyond that shown to others. It might be foretold that the day when his real character would be displayed would be the dawn of a new sovereignty; but as yet he had not declared himself. M. de Guiche took advantage of this, and constituted himself the sovereign prince of the whole laughter-loving court. It had been reported that he was on the best of terms with Mademoiselle de Montalais; that he had been assiduously attentive to Mademoiselle de Chatillon; but now he was not even barely civil to any of the court beauties. He had eyes and ears for one person alone. In this manner, and, as it were, without design, he devoted himself to Monsieur, who had a great regard for him, and kept him as much as possible in his own apartments. Unsociable from natural disposition, he had estranged himself too much previous to the arrival of Madame, but, after her arrival, he did not estrange himself sufficiently. This conduct, which every one had observed, had been particularly remarked by the evil genius of the house, the Chevalier de Lorraine, for whom Monsieur exhibited the warmest attachment because he was of a very cheerful disposition, even in his remarks most full of malice, and because he was never at a loss how to wile the time away. The Chevalier de Lorraine, therefore, having noticed that he was threatened with being supplanted by De Guiche, resorted to strong measures. He disappeared from the court, leaving Monsieur much embarrassed. The first day of his absence, Monsieur hardly inquired about him, for he had De Guiche with him, and, except that the time given to conversation with Madame, his days and nights were rigorously devoted to the prince. On the second day, however, Monsieur, finding no one near him, inquired where the chevalier was. He was told that no one knew.

De Guiche, after having spent the morning in selecting embroideries and fringes with Madame, went to console the prince. But after dinner, as there were some amethysts to be looked at, De Guiche returned to Madame’s cabinet. Monsieur was left quite to himself during the time devoted to dressing and decorating himself; he felt that he was the most miserable of men, and again inquired whether there was any news of the chevalier, in reply to which he was told that no one could tell where the chevalier was to be found. Monsieur, hardly knowing in what direction to inflict his weariness, went to Madame’s apartments dressed in his morning-gown. He found a large assemblage of people there, laughing and whispering in every part of the room; at one end, a group of women around one of the courtiers, talking together, amid smothered bursts of laughter; at the other end, Manicamp and Malicorne were being pillaged at cards by Montalais and Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, while two others were standing by, laughing. In another part were Madame, seated upon some cushions on the floor, and De Guiche, on his knees beside her, spreading out a handful of pearls and precious stones, while the princess, with her white and slender fingers pointed out such among them as pleased her the most. Again, in another corner of the room, a guitar player was playing some of the Spanish seguedillas, to which Madame had taken the greatest fancy ever since she had heard them sung by the young queen with a melancholy expression of voice. But the songs which the Spanish princess had sung with tears in her eyes, the young Englishwoman was humming with a smile that well displayed her beautiful teeth. The cabinet presented, in fact, the most perfect representation of unrestrained pleasure and amusement. As he entered, Monsieur was struck at beholding so many persons enjoying themselves without him. He was so jealous at the sight that he could not resist exclaiming, like a child, “What! you are amusing yourselves here, while I am sick and tired of being alone!”

The sound of his voice was like a clap of thunder coming to interrupt the warbling of birds under the leafy covert of the trees; a dead silence ensued. De Guiche was on his feet in a moment. Malicorne tried to hide himself behind Montalais. Manicamp stood bolt upright, and assumed a very ceremonious demeanor. The guitar player thrust his instrument under a table, covering it with a piece of carpet to conceal it from the prince’s observation. Madame was the only one who did not move, and smiling at her husband, said, “Is not this the hour you usually devote to your toilette?”

“An hour which others select, it seems, for amusing themselves,” replied the prince, grumblingly.

This untoward remark was the signal for a general rout; the women fled like a flock of terrified starlings; the guitar player vanished like a shadow; Malicorne, still protected by Montalais, who purposely widened out her dress, glided behind the hanging tapestry. As for Manicamp, he went to the assistance of De Guiche, who naturally remained near Madame, and both of them, with the princess herself, courageously sustained the attack. The count was too happy to bear malice against the husband; but Monsieur bore a grudge against his wife. Nothing was wanting but a quarrel; he sought it, and the hurried departure of the crowd, which had been so joyous before he arrived, and was so disturbed by his entrance, furnished him with a pretext.

"Why do they run away at the very sight of me?" he inquired, in a supercilious tone; to which remark Madame replied, that, "whenever the master of the house made his appearance, the family kept aloof out of respect." As she said this, she made so funny and so pretty a grimace, that De Guiche and Manicamp could not control themselves; they burst into a peal of laugher; Madame followed their example, and even Monsieur himself could not resist it, and he was obliged to sit down, as, for laughing, he could scarcely keep his equilibrium. However, he very soon left off, but his anger had increased. He was still more furious because he had permitted himself to laugh, than from having seen others laugh. He looked at Manicamp steadily, not venturing to show his anger towards De Guiche; but, at a sign which displayed no little amount of annoyance, Manicamp and De Guiche left the room, so that Madame, left alone, began sadly to pick up her pearls and amethysts, no longer smiling, and speaking still less.

"I am very happy," said the duke, "to find myself treated as a stranger here, Madame," and he left the room in a passion. On his way out, he met Montalais, who was in attendance in the ante-room. "It is very agreeable to pay you a visit here, but outside the door."

Montalais made a very low obeisance. "I do not quite understand what your royal highness does me the honor to say."

"I say that when you are all laughing together in Madame's apartment, he is an unwelcome visitor who does not remain outside."

"Your royal highness does not think, and does not speak so, of yourself?"

"On the contrary, it is on my own account that I do speak and think. I have no reason, certainly, to flatter myself about the reception I meet with here at any time. How is it that, on the very day there is music and a little society in Madame's apartments — in my own apartments, indeed, for they are mine — on the very day that I wish to amuse myself a little in my turn, every one runs away? Are they afraid to see me, that they all take wing as soon as I appear? Is there anything wrong, then, going on in my absence?"

"Yet nothing has been done to-day, monseigneur, which is not done every day."

"What! do they laugh like that every day?"

"Why, yes, monseigneur."

“The same group of people simpering and the same singing and strumming going on every day?”

“The guitar, monseigneur, was introduced to-day; but when we have no guitars, we have violins and flutes; ladies soon weary without music.”

“The deuce! — and the men?”

“What men, monseigneur?”

“M. de Guiche, M. de Manicamp, and the rest of them?”

“They all belong to your highness’s household.”

“Yes, yes, you are right,” said the prince, as he returned to his own apartments, full of thought. He threw himself into the largest of his arm-chairs, without looking at himself in the glass. “Where can the chevalier be?” said he. One of the prince’s attendants happened to be near him, overheard his remark, and replied, —

“No one knows, your highness.”

“Still the same answer. The first one who answers me again, ‘I do not know,’ I will discharge.” Every one at this remark hurried out of his apartments, in the same manner as the others had fled from Madame’s apartments. The prince then flew into the wildest rage. He kicked over a chiffonier, which tumbled on the carpet, broken into pieces. He next went into the galleries, and with the greatest coolness threw down, one after another, an enameled vase, a porphyry ewer, and a bronze candelabrum. The noise summoned every one to the various doors.

“What is your highness’s pleasure?” said the captain of the guards, timidly.

“I am treating myself to some music,” replied the prince, gnashing his teeth.

The captain of the guards desired his royal highness’s physician to be sent for. But before he came, Malicorne arrived, saying to the prince, “Monseigneur, the Chevalier de Lorraine is here.”

The duke looked at Malicorne, and smiled graciously at him, just as the chevalier entered.

CHAPTER XXXI.

M. de Lorraine’s Jealousy.

The Duc d’Orleans uttered a cry of delight on perceiving the Chevalier de Lorraine. “This is fortunate, indeed,” he said; “by what happy chance do I see you? Had you indeed disappeared, as every one assured me?”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“A caprice?”

“I to venture upon caprices with your highness! The respect — ”

“Put respect out of the way, for you fail in it every day. I absolve you; but why did you leave me?”

“Because I felt that I was of no further use to you.”

“Explain yourself.”

“Your highness has people about you who are far more amusing that *I* can ever be. I felt I was not strong enough to enter into contest with them, and I therefore withdrew.”

“This extreme diffidence shows a want of common sense. Who are those with whom you cannot contend? De Guiche?”

“I name no one.”

“This is absurd. Does De Guiche annoy you?”

“I do not say he does; do not force me to speak, however; you know very well that De Guiche is one of our best friends.”

“Who is it, then?”

“Excuse me, monseigneur, let us say no more about it.” The chevalier knew perfectly well that curiosity is excited in the same way as thirst — by removing that which quenches it; or in other words, by denying an explanation.

“No, no,” said the prince; “I wish to know why you went away.”

“In that case, monseigneur, I will tell you; but do not get angry. I remarked that my presence was disagreeable.”

“To whom?”

“To Madame.”

“What do you mean?” said the duke in astonishment.

“It is simple enough; Madame is very probably jealous of the regard you are good enough to testify for me.”

“Has she shown it to you?”

“Madame never addresses a syllable to me, particularly since a certain time.”

“Since *what* time?”

“Since the time when, M. de Guiche having made himself more agreeable to her than I could, she receives him at every and any hour.”

The duke colored. “At any hour, chevalier; what do you mean by that?”

“You see, your highness, I have already displeased you; I was quite sure I should.”

“I am not displeased; but what you say is rather startling. In what respect does Madame prefer De Guiche to you?”

“I shall say no more,” said the chevalier, saluting the prince ceremoniously.

“On the contrary, I require you to speak. If you withdraw on that account, you must indeed be very jealous.”

“One cannot help being jealous, monseigneur, when one loves. Is not your royal highness jealous of Madame? Would you not, if you saw some one always near Madame, and always treated with great favor, take umbrage at it? One’s friends are as one’s lovers. Your highness has sometimes conferred the distinguished honor upon me of calling me your friend.”

“Yes, yes,; but you used a phrase which has a very equivocal significance; you are unfortunate in your phrases.”

“What phrase, monseigneur?”

“You said, ‘treated with great favor.’ What do you mean by favor?”

“Nothing can be more simple,” said the chevalier, with an expression of great frankness; “for instance, whenever a husband remarks that his wife summons such and such a man near her; whenever this man is always to be found by her side, or in attendance at the door of her carriage; whenever the bouquet of the one is always the same color as the ribbons of the other; when music and supper parties are held in private apartments; whenever a dead silence takes place immediately the husband makes his appearance in his wife’s rooms; and when the husband suddenly finds that he has, as a companion, the most devoted and the kindest of men, who, a week before, was with him as little as possible; why, then — ”

“Well, finish.”

“Why, then, I say, monseigneur, one possibly may get jealous. But all these details hardly apply; for our conversation had nothing to do with them.”

The duke was evidently very much agitated, and seemed to struggle with himself a good deal. “You have not told me,” he then remarked, “why you absented yourself. A little while ago you said it was from a fear of intruding; you added, even, that you had observed a disposition on Madame’s part to encourage De Guiche.”

“Pardon me, monseigneur, I did not say that.”

“You did, indeed.”

“Well, if I did say so, I observed nothing but what was very inoffensive.”

“At all events, you remarked something.”

“You embarrass me, monseigneur.”

“What does that matter? Answer me. If you speak the truth, why should you feel embarrassed?”

“I always speak the truth, monseigneur; but I also always hesitate when it is a question of repeating what others say.”

“Ah! repeat? It appears that it is talked about, then?”

“I acknowledge that others have spoken to me on the subject.”

“Who?” said the prince.

The chevalier assumed almost an angry air, as he replied, “Monseigneur, you are subjecting me to cross-examination; you treat me as a criminal at the bar; the rumors which idly pass by a gentleman’s ears do not remain there. Your highness wishes me to magnify rumors until it attains the importance of an event.”

“However,” said the duke, in great displeasure, “the fact remains that you withdrew on account of this report.”

“To speak the truth, others have talked to me of the attentions of M. de Guiche to Madame, nothing more; perfectly harmless, I repeat, and more than that, allowable. But do not be unjust, monseigneur, and do not attach any undue importance to it. It does not concern you.”

“M. de Guiche’s attentions to Madame do not concern me?”

“No, monseigneur; and what I say to you I would say to De Guiche himself, so little do I think of the attentions he pays Madame. Nay, I would say it even to Madame herself. Only you understand what I am afraid of — I am afraid of being thought jealous of the favor shown, when I am only jealous as far as friendship is concerned. I know your disposition; I know that when you bestow your affections you become exclusively attached. You love Madame — and who, indeed, would *not* love her? Follow me attentively as I proceed: — Madame has noticed among your friends the handsomest and most fascinating of them all; she will begin to influence you on his behalf in such a way that you will neglect the others. Your indifference would kill me; it is already bad enough to have to support Madame's indifference. I have, therefore, made up my mind to give way to the favorite whose happiness I envy, even while I acknowledge my sincere friendship and sincere admiration for him. Well, monseigneur, do you see anything to object to in this reasoning? Is it not that of a man of honor? Is my conduct that of a sincere friend? Answer me, at least, after having so closely questioned me."

The duke had seated himself, with his head buried in his hands. After a silence long enough to enable the chevalier to judge the effect of this oratorical display, the duke arose, saying, "Come, be candid."

"As I always am."

"Very well. You know that we already observed something respecting that mad fellow, Buckingham."

"Do not say anything against Madame, monseigneur, or I shall take my leave. It is impossible you can be suspicious of Madame?"

"No, no, chevalier; I do not suspect Madame; but in fact, I observe — I compare — "

"Buckingham was a madman, monseigneur."

"A madman about whom, however, you opened my eyes thoroughly."

"No, no," said the chevalier, quickly; "it was not I who opened your eyes, it was De Guiche. Do not confound us, I beg." And he began to laugh in so harsh a manner that it sounded like the hiss of a serpent.

"Yes, yes; I remember. You said a few words, but De Guiche showed the most jealousy."

"I should think so," continued the chevalier, in the same tone. "He was fighting for home and altar."

"What did you say?" said the duke, haughtily, thoroughly roused by this insidious jest.

"Am I not right? for does not M. de Guiche hold the chief post of honor in your household?"

"Well," replied the duke, somewhat calmed, "had this passion of Buckingham been remarked?"

"Certainly."

"Very well. Do people say that M. de Guiche's is remarked as much?"

"Pardon me, monseigneur; you are again mistaken; no one says that M. de Guiche entertains anything of the sort."

"Very good."

"You see, monseigneur, that it would have been better, a hundred times better, to have left me in my retirement, than to have allowed you to conjure up, by aid of any scruples I may have had, suspicions which Madame will regard as crimes, and she would be in the right, too."

"What would you do?"

"Act reasonably."

"In what way?"

"I should not pay the slightest attention to the society of these new Epicurean philosophers; and, in that way, the rumors will cease."

"Well, I will see; I will think it over."

"Oh, you have time enough; the danger is not great; and then, besides, it is not a question of danger or of passion. It all arose from a fear I had to see your friendship for me decrease. From the very moment you restore it, with so kind an assurance of its existence, I have no longer any other idea in my head."

The duke shook his head as if he meant to say: "If you have no more ideas, I have, though." It being now the dinner hour, the prince sent to inform Madame of it; but she returned a message to the effect that she could not be present, but would dine in her own apartment.

"That is not my fault," said the duke. "This morning, having taken them by surprise in the midst of a musical party, I got jealous; and so they are in the sulks with me."

"We will dine alone," said the chevalier, with a sigh; "I regret De Guiche is not here."

"Oh! De Guiche will not remain long in the sulks; he is a very good-natured fellow."

"Monseigneur," said the chevalier, suddenly, "an excellent idea has struck me, in our conversation just now. I may have exasperated your highness, and caused you some dissatisfaction. It is but fitting that I should be the mediator. I will go and look for the count, and bring him back with me."

"Ah! chevalier, you are really a very good-natured fellow."

"You say that as if you were surprised."

"Well, you are not so tender-hearted every day."

"That may be; but confess that I know how to repair a wrong I may have done."

"I confess that."

"Will your highness do me the favor to wait here a few minutes?"

"Willingly; be off, and I will try on my Fontainebleau costume."

The chevalier left the room, called his different attendant with the greatest care, as if he were giving them different orders. All went off in various directions; but he retained his *valet de chambre*. "Ascertain, and immediately, too, of M. de Guiche is not in Madame's apartments. How can one learn it?"

"Very easily, monsieur. I will ask Malicorne, who will find out from Mlle. de Montalais. I may as well tell you, however, that the inquiry will be useless; for all M. de Guiche's attendants are gone, and he must have left with them."

"Ascertain, nevertheless."

Ten minutes had hardly passed, when the valet returned. He beckoned his master mysteriously towards the servants' staircase, and showed him into a small room with a window looking out upon the garden. "What is the matter?" said the chevalier; "why so many precautions?"

"Look, monsieur," said the valet, "look yonder, under the walnut-tree."

"Ah?" said the chevalier. "I see Manicamp there. What is he waiting for?"

"You will see in a moment, monsieur, if you wait patiently. There, do you see now?"

"I see one, two, four musicians with their instruments, and behind them, urging them on, De Guiche himself. What is he doing there, though?"

"He is waiting until the little door of the staircase, belonging to the ladies of honor, is opened; by that staircase he will ascend to Madame's apartments, where some new pieces of music are going to be performed during dinner."

"This is admirable news you tell me."

"Is it not, monsieur?"

"Was it M. de Malicorne who told you this?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"He likes you, then?"

"No, monsieur, it is Monsieur that he likes."

"Why?"

"Because he wishes to belong to his household."

"And most certainly he shall. How much did he give you for that?"

"The secret which I now dispose of to you, monsieur."

"And which I buy for a hundred pistoles. Take them."

"Thank you, monsieur. Look, look, the little door opens; a woman admits the musicians."

"It is Montalais."

"Hush, monseigneur; do not call out her name; whoever says Montalais says Malicorne. If you quarrel with the one, you will be on bad terms with the other."

"Very well; I have seen nothing."

"And I," said the valet, pocketing the purse, "have received nothing."

The chevalier, being now certain that Guiche had entered, returned to the prince, whom he found splendidly dressed and radiant with joy, as with good looks. "I am told," he exclaimed, "that the king has taken the sun as his device; really, monseigneur, it is you whom this device would best suit."

"Where is De Guiche?"

"He cannot be found. He has fled — has evaporated entirely. Your scolding of this morning terrified him. He could not be found in his apartments."

"Bah! the hair-brained fellow is capable of setting off post-haste to his own estates. Poor man! we will recall him. Come, let us dine now."

"Monseigneur, to-day is a very festival of ideas; I have another."

"What is it?"

"Madame is angry with you, and she has reason to be so. You owe her revenge; go and dine with her."

"Oh! that would be acting like a weak and whimsical husband."

"It is the duty of a good husband to do so. The princess is no doubt wearied enough; she will be weeping in her plate, and here eyes will get quite red. A husband who is the cause of his wife's eyes getting red is an odious creature. Come, monseigneur, come."

"I cannot; for I have directed dinner to be served here."

"Yet see, monseigneur, how dull we shall be; I shall be low-spirited because I know that Madame will be alone; you, hard and savage as you wish to appear, will be sighing all the while. Take me with you to Madame’s dinner, and that will be a delightful surprise. I am sure we shall be very merry; you were in the wrong this morning.”

“Well, perhaps I was.”

“There is no perhaps at all, for it is a fact you were so.”

“Chevalier, chevalier, your advice is not good.”

“Nay, my advice is good; all the advantages are on your own side. Your violet-colored suit, embroidered with gold, becomes you admirably. Madame will be as much vanquished by the man as by the action. Come, monseigneur.”

“You decide me; let us go.”

The duke left his room, accompanied by the chevalier and went towards Madame’s apartments. The chevalier hastily whispered to the valet, “Be sure there are some people before that little door, so that no one can escape in that direction. Run, run!” And he followed the duke towards the ante-chambers of Madame’s suite of apartments, and when the ushers were about to announce them, the chevalier said, laughing, “His highness wishes to surprise Madame.”

CHAPTER XXXII.

Monsieur is Jealous of Guiche.

Monsieur entered the room abruptly, as persons do who mean well and think they confer pleasure, or as those who hope to surprise some secret, the terrible reward of jealous people. Madame, almost out of her senses with joy at the first bars of music, was dancing in the most unrestrained manner, leaving the dinner, which had been already begun, unfinished. Her partner was M. de Guiche, who, with his arms raised, and his eyes half closed, was kneeling on one knee, like the Spanish dancers, with looks full of passion, and gestures of the most caressing character. The princess was dancing round him with a responsive smile, and the same air of alluring seductiveness. Montalais stood by admiringly; La Valliere, seated in a corner of the room, looked on thoughtfully. It is impossible to describe the effect which the presence of the prince produced upon this gleeful company, and it would be equally impossible to describe the effect which the sight of their happiness produced upon Philip. The Comte de Guiche had no power to move; Madame remained in the middle of one of the figures and of an attitude, unable to utter a word. The Chevalier de Lorraine, leaning his back against the doorway, smiled like a man in the very height of the frankest admiration. The pallor of the prince, and the convulsive twitching of his hands and limbs, were the first symptoms that struck those present. A dead silence succeeded the merry music of the dance. The Chevalier de Lorraine took advantage of this interval to salute Madame and De Guiche most respectfully, affecting to join them together in his reverences as though they were the master and mistress of the house. Monsieur then approached them, saying, in a hoarse tone of voice, “I am delighted; I came here expecting to find you ill and low-spirited, and I find you abandoning yourself to new amusements; really, it is most fortunate. My house is the pleasantest in the kingdom.” Then turning towards De Guiche, “Comte,” he said, “I did not know you were so good a dancer.” And, again addressing his wife, he said, “Show a little more consideration for me, Madame; whenever you intend to amuse yourselves here, invite me. I am a prince, unfortunately, very much neglected."

Guiche had now recovered his self-possession, and with the spirited boldness which was natural to him, and sat so well upon him, he said, "Your highness knows very well that my very life is at your service, and whenever there is a question of its being needed, I am ready; but to-day, as it is only a question of dancing to music, I dance."

"And you are perfectly right," said the prince, coldly. "But, Madame," he continued, "you do not remark that your ladies deprive me of my friends; M. de Guiche does not belong to you, Madame, but to me. If you wish to dine without me you have your ladies. When I dine alone I have my gentlemen; do not strip me of *everything*."

Madame felt the reproach and the lesson, and the color rushed to her face. "Monsieur," she replied, "I was not aware, when I came to the court of France, that princesses of my rank were to be regarded as the women in Turkey are. I was not aware that we were not allowed to be seen; but, since such is your desire, I will conform myself to it; pray do not hesitate, if you should wish it, to have my windows barred, even."

This repartee, which made Montalais and De Guiche smile, rekindled the prince's anger, no inconsiderable portion of which had already evaporated in words.

"Very well," he said, in a concentrated tone of voice, "this is the way in which I am respected in my own house."

"Monseigneur, monseigneur," murmured the chevalier in the duke's ear, in such a manner that every one could observe he was endeavoring to calm him.

"Come," replied the prince, as his only answer to the remark, hurrying him away, and turning round with so hasty a movement that he almost ran against Madame. The chevalier followed him to his own apartment, where the prince had no sooner seated himself than he gave free vent to his fury. The chevalier raised his eyes towards the ceiling, joined his hands together, and said not a word.

"Give me your opinion," exclaimed the prince.

"Upon what?"

"Upon what is taking place here."

"Oh, monseigneur, it is a very serious matter."

"It is abominable! I cannot live in this manner."

"How miserable all this is," said the chevalier. "We hoped to enjoy tranquillity after that madman Buckingham had left."

"And this is worse."

"I do not say that, monseigneur."

"Yes, but I say it; for Buckingham would never have ventured upon a fourth part of what we have just now seen."

"What do you mean?"

"To conceal oneself for the purposes of dancing, and to feign indisposition in order to dine *tete-a-tete*."

"No, no, monseigneur."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed the prince, exciting himself like a self-willed child; "but I will not endure it any longer, I must learn what is really going on."

"Oh, monseigneur, an exposure — "

"By Heaven, monsieur, *shall* I put myself out of the way, when people show so little consideration for me? Wait for me here, chevalier, wait for me here." The prince disappeared in the neighboring apartment and inquired of the gentleman in attendance if the queen-mother had returned from chapel.

Anne of Austria felt that her happiness was now complete; peace restored to her family, a nation delighted with the presence of a young monarch who had shown an aptitude for affairs of great importance; the revenues of the state increased; external peace assured; everything seemed to promise a tranquil future. Her thoughts recurred, now and then, to the poor young nobleman whom she had received as a mother, and had driven away as a hard-hearted step-mother, and she sighed as she thought of him.

Suddenly the Duc d'Orleans entered her room. "Dear mother," he exclaimed hurriedly, closing the door, "things cannot go on as they are now."

Anne of Austria raised her beautiful eyes towards him, and with an unmoved suavity of manner, said, "What do you allude to?"

"I wish to speak of Madame."

"Your wife?"

"Yes, madame."

"I suppose that silly fellow Buckingham has been writing a farewell letter to her."

"Oh! yes, madame; of course, it is a question of Buckingham."

"Of whom else could it be, then? for that poor fellow was, wrongly enough, the object of your jealousy, and I thought — "

"My wife, madame, has already replaced the Duke of Buckingham."

"Philip, what are you saying? You are speaking very heedlessly."

"No, no. Madame has so managed matters, that I am still jealous."

"Of whom, in Heaven's name?"

"Is it possible you have not remarked it? Have you not noticed that M. de Guiche is always in her apartments — always with her?"

The queen clapped her hands together, and began to laugh. "Philip," she said, "your jealousy is not merely a defect, it is a disease."

"Whether a defect or a disease, madame, I am the sufferer from it."

"And do you imagine that a complaint which exists only in your own imagination can be cured? You wish it to be said you are right in being jealous, when there is no ground whatever for your jealousy."

"Of course, you will begin to say for this gentleman what you already said on the behalf of the other."

"Because, Philip," said the queen dryly, "what you did for the other, you are going to do for this one."

The prince bowed, slightly annoyed. "If I give you facts," he said, "will you believe me?"

"If it regarded anything else but jealousy, I would believe you without your bringing facts forward; but as jealousy is the case, I promise nothing."

"It is just the same as if your majesty were to desire me to hold my tongue, and sent me away unheard."

"Far from it; you are my son, I owe you a mother's indulgence."

"Oh, say what you think; you owe me as much indulgence as a madman deserves."

"Do not exaggerate, Philip, and take care how you represent your wife to me as a woman of depraved mind — "

"But facts, mother, facts!"

"Well, I am listening."

"This morning at ten o'clock they were playing music in Madame's apartments."

"No harm in that, surely."

"M. de Guiche was talking with her alone — Ah! I forgot to tell you, that, during the last ten days, he has never left her side."

"If they were doing any harm they would hide themselves."

"Very good," exclaimed the duke, "I expected you to say that. Pray remember with precision the words you have just uttered. This morning I took them by surprise, and showed my dissatisfaction in a very marked manner."

"Rely upon it, that is quite sufficient; it was, perhaps, even a little too much. These young women easily take offense. To reproach them for an error they have not committed is, sometimes, almost equivalent to telling them they might be guilty of even worse."

"Very good, very good; but wait a minute. Do not forget what you have just this moment said, that this morning's lesson ought to have been sufficient, and that if they had been doing what was wrong, they would have hidden themselves."

"Yes, I said so."

"Well, just now, repenting of my hastiness of the morning, and imagining that Guiche was sulking in his own apartments, I went to pay Madame a visit. Can you guess what, or whom, I found there? Another set of musicians; more dancing, and Guiche himself — he was concealed there."

Anne of Austria frowned. "It was imprudent," she said. "What did Madame say?"

"Nothing."

"And Guiche?"

"As much — oh, no! he muttered some impertinent remark or another."

"Well, what is your opinion, Philip?"

"That I have been made a fool of; that Buckingham was only a pretext, and that Guiche is the one who is really to blame in the matter."

Anne shrugged her shoulders. "Well," she said, "what else?"

"I wish De Guiche to be dismissed from my household, as Buckingham was, and I shall ask the king, unless — "

"Unless what?"

"Unless you, my dear mother, who are so clever and so kind, will execute the commission yourself."

"I will not do it, Philip."

"What, madame?"

"Listen, Philip; I am not disposed to pay people ill compliments every day; I have some influence over young people, but I cannot take advantage of it without running the chances of losing it altogether. Besides, there is nothing to prove that M. de Guiche is guilty."

"He has displeased me."

"That is your own affair."

“Very well, I know what I shall do,” said the prince, impetuously.

Anne looked at him with some uneasiness. “What do you intend to do?” she said.

“I will have him drowned in my fish-pond the very next time I find him in my apartments again.” Having launched this terrible threat, the prince expected his mother would be frightened out of her senses; but the queen was unmoved.

“Do so,” she said.

Philip was as weak as a woman, and began to cry out, “Every one betrays me, — no one cares for me; my mother, even, joins my enemies.”

“Your mother, Philip, sees further in the matter than you do, and does not care about advising you, since you will not listen to her.”

“I will go to the king.”

“I was about to propose that to you. I am now expecting his majesty; it is the hour he usually pays me a visit; explain the matter to him yourself.”

She had hardly finished when Philip heard the door of the ante-room open with some noise. He began to feel nervous. At the sound of the king’s footsteps, which could be heard upon the carpet, the duke hurriedly made his escape. Anne of Austria could not resist laughing, and was laughing still when the king entered. He came very affectionately to inquire after the even now uncertain health of the queen-mother, and to announce to her that the preparations for the journey to Fontainebleau were complete. Seeing her laugh, his uneasiness on her account diminished, and he addressed her in a vivacious tone himself. Anne of Austria took him by the hand, and, in a voice full of playfulness, said, “Do you know, sire that I am proud of being a Spanish woman?”

“Why, madame?”

“Because Spanish women are worth more than English women at least.”

“Explain yourself.”

“Since your marriage you have not, I believe, had a single reproach to make against the queen.”

“Certainly not.”

“And you, too, have been married some time. Your brother, on the contrary, has been married but a fortnight.”

“Well?”

“He is now finding fault with Madame a second time.”

“What, Buckingham still?”

“No, another.”

“Who?”

“Guiche.”

“Really? Madame is a coquette, then?”

“I fear so.”

“My poor brother,” said the king, laughing.

“You don’t object to coquettes, it seems?”

“In Madame, certainly I do; but Madame is not a coquette at heart.”

“That may be, but your brother is excessively angry about it.”

“What does he want?”

“He wants to drown Guiche.”

“That is a violent measure to resort to.”

“Do not laugh; he is extremely irritated. Think of what can be done.”

“To save Guiche — certainly.”

“Of, if your brother heard you, he would conspire against you as your uncle did against your father.”

“No; Philip has too much affection for me for that, and I, on my side, have too great a regard for him; we shall live together on very good terms. But what is the substance of his request?”

“That you will prevent Madame from being a coquette and Guiche from being amiable.”

“Is that all? My brother has an exalted idea of sovereign power. To reform a man, not to speak about reforming a woman!”

“How will you set about it?”

“With a word to Guiche, who is a clever fellow, I will undertake to convince him.”

“But Madame?”

“That is more difficult; a word will not be enough. I will compose a homily and read it to her.”

“There is no time to be lost.”

“Oh, I will use the utmost diligence. There is a repetition of the ballet this afternoon.”

“You will read her a lecture while you are dancing?”

“Yes, madame.”

“You promise to convert her?”

“I will root out the heresy altogether, either by convincing her, or by extreme measures.”

“That is all right, then. Do not mix me up in the affair; Madame would never forgive me all her life, and as a mother-in-law, I ought to desire to live on good terms with my new-found daughter.”

“The king, madame, will take all upon himself. But let me reflect.”

“What about?”

“It would be better, perhaps, if I were to go and see Madame in her own apartment.”

“Would that not seem a somewhat serious step to take?”

“Yes; but seriousness is not unbecoming in preachers, and the music of the ballet would drown half my arguments. Besides, the object is to prevent any violent measures on my brother’s part, so that a little precipitation may be advisable. Is Madame in her own apartment?”

“I believe so.”

“What is my statement of grievances to consist of?”

“In a few words, of the following: music uninterruptedly; Guiche’s assiduity; suspicions of treasonable plots and practices.”

“And the proofs?”

“There *are* none.”

“Very well; I will go at once to see Madame.” The king turned to look in the mirrors at his costume, which was very rich, and his face, which was radiant as the morning. “I suppose my brother is kept a little at a distance,” said the king.

“Fire and water cannot be more opposite.”

“That will do. Permit me, madame, to kiss your hands, the most beautiful hands in France.”

“May you be successful, sire, as the family peacemaker.”

“I do not employ an ambassador,” said Louis, “which is as much as to say that I shall succeed.” He laughed as he left the room, and carelessly adjusted his ruffles as he went along.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

The Mediator.

When the king made his appearance in Madame’s apartments, the courtiers, whom the news of a conjugal misunderstanding had dispersed through the various apartments, began to entertain the most serious apprehensions. A storm was brewing in that direction, the elements of which the Chevalier de Lorraine, in the midst of the different groups, was analyzing with delight, contributing to the weaker, and acting, according to his own wicked designs, in such a manner with regard to the stronger, as to produce the most disastrous consequences possible. As Anne of Austria had herself said, the presence of the king gave a solemn and serious character to the event. Indeed, in the year 1662, the dissatisfaction of Monsieur with Madame, and the king’s intervention in the private affairs of Monsieur, was a matter of no inconsiderable moment.

The boldest, even, who had been the associates of the Comte de Guiche, had, from the first moment, held aloof from him, with a sort of nervous apprehension; and the comte himself, infected by the general panic, retired to his own room. The king entered Madame’s private apartments, acknowledging and returning the salutations, as he was always in the habit of doing. The ladies of honor were ranged in a line on his passage along the gallery. Although his majesty was very much preoccupied, he gave the glance of a master at the two rows of young and beautiful girls, who modestly cast down their eyes, blushing as they felt the king’s gaze fall upon them. One only of the number, whose long hair fell in silken masses upon the most beautiful skin imaginable, was pale, and could hardly sustain herself, notwithstanding the knocks which her companion gave her with her elbow. It was La Valliere whom Montalais supported in that manner by whispering some of that courage to her with which she herself was so abundantly provided. The king could not resist turning round to look at them again. Their faces, which had already been raised, were again lowered, but the only fair head among them remained motionless, as if all the strength and intelligence she had left had abandoned her. When he entered Madame’s room, Louis found his sister-in-law reclining upon the cushions of her cabinet. She rose and made a profound reverence, murmuring some words of thanks for the honor she was receiving. She then resumed her seat, overcome by a sudden weakness, which was no doubt assumed, for a delightful color animated her cheeks, and her eyes, still red from the tears she had recently shed, never had more fire in them. When the king was seated, as soon as he had remarked, with that accuracy of observation which characterized him, the disorder of the apartment, and the no less great disorder of Madame’s countenance, he assumed a playful manner, saying, “My dear sister, at what hour to-day would you wish the repetition of the ballet to take place?”

Madame, shaking her charming head, slowly and languishingly said: “Ah! sire, will you graciously excuse my appearance at the repetition? I was about to send to inform you that I could not attend to-day.”

“Indeed,” said the king, in apparent surprise; “are you not well?”

“No, sire.”

“I will summon your medical attendants, then.”

“No, for they can do nothing for my indisposition.”

“You alarm me.”

“Sire, I wish to ask your majesty’s permission to return to England.”

The king started. “Return to England,” he said; “do you really say what you mean?”

“I say it reluctantly, sire,” replied the grand-daughter of Henry IV., firmly, her beautiful black eyes flashing. “I regret to have to confide such matters to your majesty, but I feel myself too unhappy at your majesty’s court; and I wish to return to my own family.”

“Madame, madame,” exclaimed the king, as he approached her.

“Listen to me, sire,” continued the young woman, acquiring by degrees that ascendency over her interrogator which her beauty and her nervous nature conferred; “young as I am, I have already suffered humiliation, and have endured disdain here. Oh! do not contradict me, sire,” she said, with a smile. The king colored.

“Then,” she continued, “I had reasoned myself into the belief that Heaven called me into existence with that object — I, the daughter of a powerful monarch; that since my father had been deprived of life, Heaven could well smite my pride. I have suffered greatly; I have been the cause, too, of my mother suffering much; but I vowed that if Providence ever placed me in a position of independence, even were it that of a workman of the lower classes, who gains her bread by her labor, I would never suffer humiliation again. That day has now arrived; I have been restored to the fortune due to my rank and to my birth; I have even ascended again the steps of a throne, and I thought that, in allying myself with a French prince, I should find in him a relation, a friend, an equal; but I perceive I have found only a master, and I rebel. My mother shall know nothing of it; you whom I respect, and whom I — love — ”

The king started; never had any voice so gratified his ear.

“You, sire, who know all, since you have come here; you will, perhaps, understand me. If you had not come, I should have gone to you. I wish for permission to go away. I leave it to your delicacy of feeling to exculpate and to protect me.”

“My dear sister,” murmured the king, overpowered by this bold attack, “have you reflected upon the enormous difficulty of the project you have conceived?”

“Sire, I do not reflect, I feel. Attacked, I instinctively repel the attack, nothing more.”

“Come, tell me, what have they done to you?” said the king.

The princess, it will have been seen, by this peculiarly feminine maneuver, had escaped every reproach, and advanced on her side a far more serious one; from the accused she became the accuser. It is an infallible sign of guilt; but notwithstanding that, all women, even the least clever of the sex, invariably know how to derive some such means of turning the tables. The king had forgotten that he was paying her a visit in order to say to her, “What have you done to my brother?” and he was reduced to weakly asking her, “What have they done to you?”

“What have they done to me?” replied Madame. “One must be a woman to understand it, sire — they have made me shed tears;” and, with one of her fingers, whose slenderness and perfect whiteness were unequaled, she pointed to her brilliant eyes swimming with unshed drops, and again began to weep.

“I implore you, my dear sister!” said the king, advancing to take her warm and throbbing hand, which she abandoned to him.

“In the first place, sire, I was deprived of the presence of my brother’s friend. The Duke of Buckingham was an agreeable, cheerful visitor; my own countryman, who knew my habits; I will say almost a companion, so accustomed had we been to pass our days together, with our other friends, upon the beautiful piece of water at St. James's."

"But Villiers was in love with you."

"A pretext! What does it matter," she said, seriously, "whether the duke was in love with me or not? Is a man in love so very dangerous for me? Ah! sire, it is not sufficient for a man to love a woman." And she smiled so tenderly, and with so much archness, that the king felt his heart swell and throb in his breast.

"At all events, if my brother were jealous?" interrupted the king.

"Very well, I admit that is a reason; and the duke was sent away accordingly."

"No, not sent away."

"Driven away, dismissed, expelled, then, if you prefer it, sire. One of the first gentlemen of Europe obliged to leave the court of the King of France, of Louis XIV., like a beggar, on account of a glance or a bouquet. It was little worthy of a most gallant court; but forgive me, sire; I forgot, that, in speaking thus, I am attacking your sovereign power."

"I assure you, my dear sister, it was not I who dismissed the Duke of Buckingham; I was charmed with him."

"It was not you?" said Madame; "ah! so much the better;" and she emphasized the "so much the better," as if she had instead said, "so much the worse."

A few minutes' silence ensued. She then resumed: "The Duke of Buckingham having left — I now know why and by whose means — I thought I should have recovered my tranquillity; but not at all, for all at once Monsieur found another pretext; all at once — "

"All at once," said the king, playfully, "some one else presents himself. It is but natural; you are beautiful, and will always meet with men who will madly love you."

"In that case," exclaimed the princess, "I will create a solitude around me, which indeed seems to be what is wished, and what is being prepared for me. But no, I prefer to return to London. There I am known and appreciated. I shall have friends, without fearing they may be regarded as my lovers. Shame! it is a disgraceful suspicion, and unworthy a gentleman. Monsieur has lost everything in my estimation, since he has shown me he can be a tyrant to a woman."

"Nay, nay, my brother's only fault is that of loving you."

“Love me! Monsieur love me! Ah! sire,” and she burst out laughing. “Monsieur will never love any woman,” she said; “Monsieur loves himself too much; no, unhappily for me, Monsieur’s jealousy is of the worst kind — he is jealous without love.”

“Confess, however,” said the king, who began to be excited by this varied and animated conversation; “confess that Guiche loves you.”

“Ah! sire, I know nothing about that.”

“You must have perceived it. A man who loves readily betrays himself.”

“M. de Guiche has not betrayed himself.”

“My dear sister, you are defending M. de Guiche.”

“I, indeed! Ah, sire, I only needed a suspicion from yourself to crown my wretchedness.”

“No, madame, no,” returned the king, hurriedly; “do not distress yourself. Nay, you are weeping. I implore you to calm yourself.”

She wept, however, and large tears fell upon her hands; the king took one of her hands in his, and kissed the tears away. She looked at him so sadly and with so much tenderness that he felt his heart giving way under her gaze.

“You have no kind of feeling, then, for Guiche?” he said, more disturbed than became his character of mediator.

“None — absolutely none.”

“Then I can reassure my brother in that respect?”

“Nothing will satisfy him, sire. Do not believe he is jealous. Monsieur has been badly advised by some one, and he is of nervous disposition.”

“He may well be so when you are concerned,” said the king.

Madame cast down her eyes, and was silent; the king did so likewise, still holding her hand all the while. Their momentary silence seemed to last an age. Madame gently withdrew her hand, and from that moment, she felt her triumph was certain, and that the field of battle was her own.

“Monsieur complains,” said the king, “that you prefer the society of private individuals to his own conversation and society.”

“But Monsieur passes his life in looking at his face in the glass, and in plotting all sorts of spiteful things against women with the Chevalier de Lorraine.”

“Oh, you are going somewhat too far.”

“I only tell you what is true. Do you observe for yourself, sire, and you will see that I am right.”

“I will observe; but, in the meantime, what satisfaction can I give my brother?”

“My departure.”

“You repeat that word,” exclaimed the king, imprudently, as if, during the last ten minutes, such a change had been produced that Madame would have had all her ideas on the subject thoroughly changed.

“Sire, I cannot be happy here any longer,” she said. “M. de Guiche annoys Monsieur. Will he be sent away, too?”

“If it be necessary, why not?” replied the king, smiling.

“Well; and after M. de Guiche — whom, by the by, I shall regret — I warn you, sire.”

“Ah, you will regret him?”

“Certainly; he is amiable, he has a great friendship for me, and he amuses me.”

“If Monsieur were only to hear you,” said the king, slightly annoyed, “do you know I would not undertake to make it up again between you; nay, I would not even attempt it.”

“Sire, can you, even now, prevent Monsieur from being jealous of the first person who may approach? I know very well that M. de Guiche is not the first.”

“Again I warn you that as a good brother I shall take a dislike to De Guiche.”

“Ah, sire, do not, I entreat you, adopt either the sympathies or the dislikes of Monsieur. Remain king; better for yourself and for every one else.”

“You jest charmingly, madame; and I can well understand how the people you attack must adore you.”

“And is that the reason why you, sire, whom I had regarded as my defender, are about to join these who persecute me?” said Madame.

“I your persecutor! Heaven forbid!”

“Then,” she continued, languishingly, “grant me a favor.”

“Whatever you wish.”

“Let me return to England.”

“Never, never!” exclaimed Louis XIV.

“I am a prisoner, then?”

“In France — if France is a prison — yes.”

“What must I do, then?”

“I will tell you. Instead of devoting yourself to friendships which are somewhat unstable, instead of alarming us by your retirement, remain always in our society, do not leave us, let us live as a united family. M. de Guiche is certainly very amiable; but if, at least, we do not possess his wit — ”

“Ah, sire, you know very well you are pretending to be modest.”

“No, I swear to you. One may be a king, and yet feel that he possesses fewer chances of pleasing than many other gentlemen.”

“I am sure, sire, that you do not believe a single word you are saying.”

The king looked at Madame tenderly, and said, “Will you promise me one thing?”

“What is it?”

“That you will no longer waste upon strangers, in your own apartments, the time which you owe us. Shall we make an offensive and defensive alliance against the common enemy?”

“An alliance with you, sire?”

“Why not? Are you not a sovereign power?”

“But are you, sire, a reliable ally?”

“You shall see, madame.”

“And when shall this alliance commence?”

“This very day.”

“I will draw up the treaty, and you shall sign it.”

“Blindly.”

“Then, sire, I promise you wonders; you are the star of the court, and when you make your appearance, everything will be resplendent.”

“Oh, madame, madame,” said Louis XIV., “you know well that there is no brilliancy that does not proceed from yourself, and that if I assume the sun as my device, it is only an emblem.”

“Sire, you flatter your ally, and you wish to deceive her,” said Madame, threatening the king with her finger menacingly raised.

“What! you believe I am deceiving you, when I assure you of my affection?”

“Yes.”

“What makes you so suspicious?”

“One thing.”

“What is it? I shall indeed be unhappy if I do not overcome it.”

“That one thing in question, sire, is not in your power, not even in the power of Heaven.”

“Tell me what it is.”

“The past.”

“I do not understand, madame,” said the king, precisely because he had understood her but too well.

The princess took his hand in hers. “Sire,” she said, “I have had the misfortune to displease you for so long a period, that I have almost the right to ask myself to-day why you were able to accept me as a sister-in-law.”

“Displease me! You have displeased me?”

“Nay, do not deny it, for I remember it well.”

“Our alliance shall date from to-day,” exclaimed the king, with a warmth that was not assumed. “You will not think any more of the past, will you? I myself am resolved that I will not. I shall always remember the present; I have it before my eyes; look.” And he led the princess before a mirror, in which she saw herself reflected, blushing and beautiful enough to overcome a saint.

“It is all the same,” she murmured; “it will not be a very worthy alliance.”

“Must I swear?” inquired the king, intoxicated by the voluptuous turn the whole conversation had taken.

“Oh, I will not refuse to witness a resounding oath,” said Madame; “it has always the *semblance* of security.”

The king knelt upon a footstool and took Madame’s hand. She, with a smile that no painter could ever succeed in depicting, and which a poet might only imagine, gave him both her hands, in which he hid his burning face. Neither of them could utter a syllable. The king felt Madame withdraw her hands, caressing his face while she did so. He rose immediately and left the apartment. The courtiers remarked his heightened color, and concluded that the scene had been a stormy one. The Chevalier de Lorraine, however, hastened to say, “Nay, be comforted, gentlemen, his majesty is always pale when he is angry.”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

The Advisers.

The king left Madame in a state of agitation it would have been difficult even for himself to have explained. It is impossible, in fact, to depict the secret play of those strange sympathies which, suddenly and apparently without any cause, are excited, after many years passed in the greatest calmness and indifference, by two hearts destined to love each other. Why had Louis formerly disdained, almost hated, Madame? Why did he now find the same woman so beautiful, so captivating? And why, not only were his thoughts occupied about her, but still more, why were they so continuously occupied about her? Why, in fact, had Madame, whose eyes and mind were sought for in another direction, shown during the last week towards the king a semblance of favor which encouraged the belief of still greater regard. It must not be supposed that Louis proposed to himself any plan of seduction; the tie which united Madame to his brother was, or at least, seemed to him, an insuperable barrier; he was even too far removed from that barrier to perceive its existence. But on the downward path of those passions in which the heart rejoices, towards which youth impels us, no one can decide where to stop, not even the man who has in advance calculated all the chances of his own success or another's submission. As far as Madame was concerned, her regard for the king may easily be explained: she was young, a coquette, and ardently fond of admiration. Hers was one of those buoyant, impetuous natures, which upon a theatre would leap over the greatest obstacles to obtain an acknowledgement of applause from the spectators. It was not surprising, then, that, after having been adored by Buckingham, by De Guiche, who was superior to Buckingham, even if it were only from that negative merit, so much appreciated by women, that is to say, novelty — it was not surprising, we say, that the princess should raise her ambition to being admired by the king, who not only was the first person in the kingdom, but was one of the handsomest and cleverest men in Europe. As for the sudden passion with which Louis was inspired for his sister-in-law, physiology would perhaps supply an explanation by some hackneyed commonplace reasons, and nature by means of her mysterious affinity of characters. Madame had the most beautiful black eyes in the world; Louis, eyes as beautiful, but blue. Madame was laughter-loving and unreserved in her manners; Louis, melancholy and diffident. Summoned to meet each other for the first time upon the grounds of interest and common curiosity, these two opposite natures were mutually influenced by the mingling of their reciprocal contradictions of character. Louis, when he returned to his own rooms, acknowledged to himself that Madame was the most attractive woman of his court. Madame, left alone, delightedly thought that she had made a great impression on the king. This feeling with her must remain passive, whilst the king could not but act with all the natural vehemence of the heated fancies of a young man, and of a young man who has but to express a wish to see his wish fulfilled.

The first thing the king did was to announce to Monsieur that everything was quietly arranged; that Madame had the greatest respect, the sincerest affection for him; but that she was of a proud, impetuous character, and that her susceptibilities were so acute as to require very careful management.

Monsieur replied in the reticent tone of voice he generally adopted with his brother, that he could not very well understand the susceptibilities of a woman whose conduct might, in his opinion, expose her to censorious remarks, and that if any one had a right to feel wounded, it was he, Monsieur himself. To this the king replied in a quick tone of voice, which showed the interest he took in his sister-in-law, “Thank Heaven, Madame is above censure.”

“The censure of others, certainly, I admit,” said Monsieur; “but not above mine, I presume.”

“Well,” said the king, “all I have to say, Philip, is that Madame’s conduct does not deserve your censure. She certainly is heedless and singular, but professes the best feelings. The English character is not always well understood in France, and the liberty of English manners sometimes surprises those who do not know the extent to which this liberty is enriched by innocence.”

“Ah!” said Monsieur, more and more piqued, “from the very moment that your majesty absolves my wife, whom I accuse, my wife is not guilty, and I have nothing more to say.”

“Philip,” replied the king hastily, for he felt the voice of conscience murmuring softly in his heart, that Monsieur was not altogether wrong, “what I have done, and what I have said, has been only for your happiness. I was told that you complained of a want of confidence and attention on Madame’s part, and I did not wish your uneasiness to be prolonged. It is part of my duty to watch over your household, as over that of the humblest of my subjects. I have satisfied myself, therefore, with the sincerest pleasure, that your apprehensions have no foundation.”

“And,” continued Monsieur, in an interrogative tone of voice, and fixing his eyes upon his brother, “what your majesty has discovered for Madame — and I bow myself to your superior judgment — have you verified for those who have been the cause of the scandal of which I complain?”

“You are right, Philip,” said the king; “I will reserve that point for future consideration.”

These words comprised an order as well as a consolation; the prince felt it to be so, and withdrew.

As for Louis, he went to seek his mother, for he felt that he had need of a more complete absolution than that he had just received from his brother. Anne of Austria did not entertain for M. de Guiche the same reasons for indulgence she had had for Buckingham. She perceived, at the very first words he pronounced, that Louis was not disposed to be severe.

To appear in a contradictory humor was one of the stratagems of the good queen, in order to succeed in ascertaining the truth. But Louis was no longer in his apprenticeship; already for more than a year past he had been king, and during that year he had learned how to dissemble. Listening to Anne of Austria, in order to permit her to disclose her own thoughts, testifying his approval only by look and gesture, he became convinced, from certain piercing glances, and from certain skillful insinuations, that the queen, so clear-sighted in matters of gallantry, had, if not guessed, at least suspected, his weakness for Madame. Of all his auxiliaries, Anne of Austria would be the most important to secure; of all his enemies, Anne of Austria would prove most dangerous. Louis, therefore, changed his maneuvers. He complained of Madame, absolved Monsieur, listened to what his mother had to say of De Guiche, as he had previously listened to what she had to say of Buckingham, and then, when he saw that she thought she had gained a complete victory over him, he left her.

The whole of the court, that is to say, all the favorites and more intimate associates, and they were numerous, since there were already five masters, were assembled in the evening for the repetition of the ballet. This interval had been occupied by poor De Guiche in receiving visits; among the number was one which he hoped and feared nearly to an equal extent. It was that of the Chevalier de Lorraine. About three o'clock in the afternoon the chevalier entered De Guiche's rooms. His looks were of the most reassuring character. "Monsieur," said he to De Guiche, "was in an excellent humor, and no none could say that the slightest cloud had passed across the conjugal sky. Besides, Monsieur was not one to bear ill-feeling."

For a long time past, during his residence at the court, the Chevalier de Lorraine had decided, that of Louis XIII.'s two sons, Monsieur was the one who had inherited the father's character — an uncertain, irresolute character; impulsively good, indifferently disposed at bottom; but certainly a cipher for his friends. He especially cheered De Guiche, by pointing out to him that Madame would, before long, succeed in governing her husband, and that, consequently, that man would govern Monsieur who should succeed in influencing Madame.

To this, De Guiche full of mistrust and presence of mind, replied, "Yes, chevalier; but I believe Madame to be a very dangerous person."

"In what respect?"

"She has perceived that Monsieur is not very passionately inclined towards women."

"Quite true," said the Chevalier de Lorraine, laughing.

"In that case, Madame will choose the first one who approaches, in order to make him the object of her preference, and to bring back her husband by jealousy."

"Deep! deep!" exclaimed the chevalier.

"But true," replied De Guiche.

Neither the one nor the other expressed his real thought. De Guiche, at the very moment he thus attacked Madame's character, mentally asked her forgiveness from the bottom of his heart. The chevalier, while admiring De Guiche's penetration, was leading him, blindfolded, to the brink of the precipice. De Guiche then questioned him more directly upon the effect produced by the scene of the morning, and upon the still more serious effect produced by the scene at dinner.

"But I have already told you they are all laughing at it," replied the Chevalier de Lorraine, "and Monsieur himself at the head of them."

"Yet," hazarded De Guiche, "I have heard that the king paid Madame a visit."

"Yes, precisely so. Madame was the only one who did not laugh, and the king went to her in order to make her laugh, too."

"So that — "

"So that nothing is altered in the arrangements of the day," said the chevalier.

"And is there a repetition of the ballet this evening?"

"Certainly."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite," returned the chevalier.

At this moment of the conversation between the two young men, Raoul entered, looking full of anxiety. As soon as the chevalier, who had a secret dislike for him, as for every other noble character, perceived him enter, he rose from his seat.

"What do you advise me to do, then?" inquired De Guiche of the chevalier.

"I advise you to go to sleep in perfect tranquillity, my dear count."

"And my advice, De Guiche," said Raoul, "is the very opposite."

"What is that?"

"To mount your horse and set off at once for one of your estates; on your arrival, follow the chevalier's advice, if you like; and, what is more, you can sleep there as long and as tranquilly as you please."

"What! set off!" exclaimed the chevalier, feigning surprise; "why should De Guiche set off?"

"Because, and you cannot be ignorant of it — you particularly so — because every one is talking about the scene which has passed between Monsieur and De Guiche."

De Guiche turned pale.

"Not at all," replied the chevalier, "not at all; and you have been wrongly informed, M. de Bragelonne."

"I have been perfectly well informed, on the contrary, monsieur," replied Raoul, "and the advice I give De Guiche is that of a friend."

During this discussion, De Guiche, somewhat shaken, looked alternately first at one and then at the other of his advisers. He inwardly felt that a game, important in all its consequences for the rest of his life, was being played at that moment.

"Is it not fact," said the chevalier, putting the question to the count himself, "is it not fact, De Guiche, that the scene was not so tempestuous as the Vicomte de Bragelonne seems to think, and who, moreover, was not himself there?"

"Whether tempestuous or not," persisted Raoul, "it is not precisely of the scene itself that I am speaking, but of the consequences that may ensue. I know that Monsieur has threatened, I know that Madame has been in tears."

"Madame in tears!" exclaimed De Guiche, imprudently clasping his hands.

"Ah!" said the chevalier, laughing, "this is indeed a circumstance I was not acquainted with. You are decidedly better informed than I am, Monsieur de Bragelonne."

"And it is because I am better informed than yourself, chevalier, that I insist upon De Guiche leaving."

"No, no; I regret to differ from you, vicomte; but his departure is unnecessary. Why, indeed, should he leave? tell us why."

"The king!"

"The king!" exclaimed De Guiche.

"Yes; I tell you the king has taken up the affair."

"Bah!" said the chevalier, "the king likes De Guiche, and particularly his father; reflect, that, if the count were to leave, it would be an admission that he had done something which merited rebuke."

"Why so?"

"No doubt of it; when one runs away, it is either from guilt or fear."

"Sometimes, because a man is offended; often because he is wrongfully accused," said Bragelonne. "We will assign as a reason for his departure, that he feels hurt and injured — nothing will be easier; we will say that we both did our utmost to keep him, and you, at least, will not be speaking otherwise than the truth. Come, De Guiche, you are innocent, and, being so, the scene of to-day must have wounded you. So set off."

"No, De Guiche, remain where you are," said the chevalier; "precisely as M. de Bragelonne has put it, because you are innocent. Once more, forgive me, vicomte; but my opinion is the very opposite to your own."

"And you are at perfect liberty to maintain it, monsieur; but be assured that the exile which De Guiche will voluntarily impose upon himself will be of short duration. He can terminate it whenever he pleases, and returning from his voluntary exile, he will meet with smiles from all lips; while, on the contrary, the anger of the king may now draw down a storm upon his head, the end of which no one can foresee.”

The chevalier smiled, and muttered to himself, “That is the very thing I wish.” And at the same time he shrugged his shoulders, a movement which did not escape the count, who dreaded, if he quitted the court, to seem to yield to a feeling of fear.

“No, no; I have decided, Bragelonne; I stay.”

“I prophesy, then,” said Raoul, sadly, “that misfortune will befall you, De Guiche.”

“I, too, am a prophet, but not a prophet of evil; on the contrary, count, I say to you, ‘remain.’“

“Are you sure,” inquired De Guiche, “that the repetition of the ballet still takes place?”

“Quite sure.”

“Well, you see, Raoul,” continued De Guiche, endeavoring to smile, “you see, the court is not so very sorrowful, or so readily disposed for internal dissensions, when dancing is carried on with such assiduity. Come, acknowledge that,” said the count to Raoul, who shook his head, saying, “I have nothing to add.”

“But,” inquired the chevalier, curious to learn whence Raoul had obtained his information, the exactitude of which he was inwardly forced to admit, “since you say you are well informed, vicomte, how can you be better informed than myself, who am one of the prince’s most intimate companions?”

“To such a declaration I submit. You certainly ought to be perfectly well informed, I admit; and, as a man of honor is incapable of saying anything but what he knows to be true, or of speaking otherwise than what he thinks, I will say no more, but confess myself defeated, and leave you in possession of the field of battle.”

Whereupon Raoul, who now seemed only to care to be left quiet, threw himself upon a couch, whilst the count summoned his servants to aid him in dressing. The chevalier, finding that time was passing away, wished to leave; but he feared, too, that Raoul, left alone with De Guiche, might yet influence him to change his mind. He therefore made use of his last resource.

“Madame,” he said, “will be brilliant; she appears to-day in her costume of Pomona.”

“Yes, that is so,” exclaimed the count.

“And she has just given directions in consequence,” continued the chevalier. “You know, Monsieur de Bragelonne, that the king is to appear as Spring.”

“It will be admirable,” said De Guiche; “and that is a better reason for me to remain than any you have yet given, because I am to appear as Autumn, and shall have to dance with Madame. I cannot absent myself without the king’s orders, since my departure would interrupt the ballet.”

“I,” said the chevalier, “am to be only a simple *egypan*; true, it is, I am a bad dancer, and my legs are not well made. Gentlemen, adieu. Do not forget the basket of fruit, which you are to offer to Pomona, count.”

“Rest assured,” said De Guiche, delightedly, “I shall forget nothing.”

“I am now quite certain that he will remain,” murmured the Chevalier de Lorraine to himself.

Raoul, when the chevalier had left, did not even attempt to dissuade his friend, for he felt that it would be trouble thrown away; he merely observed to the comte, in his melancholy and melodious voice, “You are embarking in a most dangerous enterprise. I know you well; you go to extremes in everything, and the lady you love does so, too. Admitting for an instant that she should at last love you — ”

“Oh, never!” exclaimed De Guiche.

“Why do you say never?”

“Because it would be a great misfortune for both of us.”

“In that case, instead of regarding you simply imprudent, I cannot but consider you absolutely mad.”

“Why?”

“Are you perfectly sure — mind, answer me frankly — that you do not wish her whom you love to make any sacrifice for you?”

“Yes, yes; quite sure.”

“Love her, then, at a distance.”

“What! at a distance?”

“Certainly; what matters being present or absent, since you expect nothing from her? Love her portrait, a memento.”

“Raoul!”

“Love is a shadow, an illusion, a chimera; be devoted to the affection itself, in giving a name to your ideality.”

“Ah!”

“You turn away; your servants approach. I will say no more. In good or bad fortune, De Guiche, depend on me.”

“Indeed I shall do so.”

“Very well; that is all I had to say to you. Spare no pains in your person, De Guiche, and look your very best. Adieu.”

“You will not be present, then, at the ballet, vicomte?”

“No; I shall have a visit to pay in town. Farewell, De Guiche.”

The reception was to take place in the king’s apartments. In the first place, there were the queens, then Madame, and a few ladies of the court, who had been carefully selected. A great number of courtiers, also selected, occupied the time, before the dancing commenced, in conversing, as people knew how to converse in those times. None of the ladies who had received invitations appeared in the costumes of the *fete,* as the Chevalier de Lorraine had predicted, but many conversations took place about the rich and ingenious toilettes designed by different painters for the ballet of “The Demi-Gods,” for thus were termed the kings and queens of which Fontainebleau was about to become the Pantheon. Monsieur arrived, holding in his hand a drawing representing his character; he looked somewhat anxious; he bowed courteously to the young queen and his mother, but saluted Madame almost cavalierly. His notice of her and his coldness of manner were observed by all. M. de Guiche indemnified the princess by a look of passionate devotion, and it must be admitted that Madame, as she raised her eyes, returned it to him with interest. It is unquestionable that De Guiche had never looked so handsome, for Madame’s glance had its customary effect of lighting up the features of the son of the Marshal de Gramont. The king’s sister-in-law felt a storm mustering above her head; she felt, too, that during the whole of the day, so fruitful in future events, she had acted unjustly, if not treasonably, towards one who loved her with such a depth of devotion. In her eyes the moment seemed to have arrived for an acknowledgement to the poor victim of the injustice of the morning. Her heart spoke, and murmured the name of De Guiche; the count was sincerely pitied and accordingly gained the victory over all others. Neither Monsieur, nor the king, nor the Duke of Buckingham, was any longer thought of; De Guiche at that moment reigned without a rival. But although Monsieur also looked very handsome, still he could not be compared to the count. It is well known — indeed all women say so — that a wide difference invariably exists between the good looks of a lover and those of a husband. Besides, in the present case, after Monsieur had left, and after the courteous and affectionate recognition of the young queen and of the queen-mother, and the careless and indifferent notice of Madame, which all the courtiers had remarked; all these motives gave the lover the advantage over the husband. Monsieur was too great a personage to notice these details. Nothing is so certain as a well settled idea of superiority to prove the inferiority of the man who has that opinion of himself. The king arrived. Every one looked for what might possibly happen in the glance, which began to bestir the world, like the brow of Jupiter Tonans. Louis had none of his brother's gloominess, but was perfectly radiant. Having examined the greater part of the drawings which were displayed for his inspection on every side, he gave his opinion or made his remarks upon them, and in this manner rendered some happy and others wretched by a single word. Suddenly his glance, which was smilingly directed towards Madame, detected the slight correspondence established between the princess and the count. He bit his lips, but when he opened them again to utter a few commonplace remarks, he said, advancing towards the queens: —

"I have just been informed that everything is now prepared at Fontainebleau, in accordance with my directions." A murmur of satisfaction arose from the different groups, and the king perceived on every face the greatest anxiety to receive an invitation for the *fetes*. "I shall leave to-morrow," he added. Whereupon the profoundest silence immediately ensued. "And I invite," said the king, finishing, "all those who are now present to get ready to accompany me."

Smiling faces were now everywhere visible, with the exception of Monsieur, who seemed to retain his ill-humor. The different noblemen and ladies of the court thereupon defiled before the king, one after the other, in order to thank his majesty for the great honor which had been conferred upon them by the invitation. When it came to De Guiche's turn, the king said, "Ah! M. de Guiche, I did not see you."

The comte bowed, and Madame turned pale. De Guiche was about to open his lips to express his thanks, when the king said, "Comte, this is the season for farming purposes in the country; I am sure your tenants in Normandy will be glad to see you."

The king, after this pitiless attack, turned his back on the poor comte, whose turn it was now to become pale; he advanced a few steps towards the king, forgetting that the king is never spoken to except in reply to questions addressed.

"I have perhaps misunderstood your majesty," he stammered out.

The king turned his head slightly, and with a cold and stern glance, which plunged like a sword relentlessly into the hearts of those under disgrace, repeated, "I said retire to your estates," allowing every syllable to fall slowly one by one.

A cold perspiration bedewed the comte's face, his hands convulsively opened, and his hat, which he held between his trembling fingers, fell to the ground. Louis sought his mother's glance, as though to show her that he was master; he sought his brother's triumphant look, as if to ask him if he were satisfied with the vengeance taken; and lastly, his eyes fell upon Madame; but the princess was laughing and smiling with Madame de Noailles. She heard nothing, or rather had pretended not to hear at all. The Chevalier de Lorraine looked on also, with one of those looks of fixed hostility that seemed to give to a man's glance the power of a lever when it raises an obstacle, wrests it away, and casts it to a distance. M. de Guiche was left alone in the king's cabinet, the whole of the company having departed. Shadows seemed to dance before his eyes. He suddenly broke through the settled despair that overwhelmed him, and flew to hide himself in his own room, where Raoul awaited him, immovable in his own sad presentiments.

"Well?" he murmured, seeing his friend enter, bareheaded, with a wild gaze and tottering gait.

"Yes, yes, it is true," said De Guiche, unable to utter more, and falling exhausted upon the couch.

"And she?" inquired Raoul.

"She," exclaimed his unhappy friend, as he raised his hand clenched in anger, towards Heaven. "She! — "

"What did she say and do?"

"She said that her dress suited her admirably, and then she laughed."

A fit of hysteric laughter seemed to shatter his nerves, for he fell backwards, completely overcome.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Fontainebleau.

For four days, every kind of enchantment brought together in the magnificent gardens of Fontainebleau had converted this spot into a place of the most perfect enjoyment. M. Colbert seemed gifted with ubiquity. In the morning there were the accounts of the previous night’s expenses to settle; during the day, programmes, essays, enrolments, payments. M. Colbert had amassed four millions of francs, and dispersed them with sleepless economy. He was horrified at the expenses which mythology involved; not a wood nymph, nor a dryad, that cost less than a hundred francs a day! The dress alone amounted to three hundred francs. The expense of powder and sulphur for fireworks amounted, every night, to a hundred thousand francs. In addition to these, the illuminations on the borders of the sheet of water cost thirty thousand francs every evening. The *fetes* had been magnificent; and Colbert could not restrain his delight. From time to time, he noticed Madame and the king setting forth on hunting expeditions, or preparing for the reception of different fantastic personages, solemn ceremonials, which had been extemporized a fortnight before, and in which Madame’s sparkling wit and the king’s magnificence were equally well displayed.

For Madame, the heroine of the *fete*, replied to the addresses of the deputations from unknown races — Garamanths, Scythians, Hyperboreans, Caucasians, and Patagonians, who seemed to issue from the ground for the purpose of approaching her with their congratulations; and upon every representative of these races the king bestowed a diamond, or some other article of value. Then the deputies, in verses more or less amusing, compared the king to the sun, Madame to Phoebe, the sun’s sister, and the queen and Monsieur were no more spoken of than if the king had married Henrietta of England, and not Maria Theresa of Austria. The happy pair, hand in hand, imperceptibly pressing each other’s fingers, drank in deep draughts the sweet beverage of adulation, by which the attractions of youth, beauty, power and love are enhanced. Every one at Fontainebleau was amazed at the extent of the influence which Madame had so rapidly acquired over the king, and whispered among themselves that Madame was, in point of fact, the true queen; and in effect, the king himself proclaimed its truth by his every thought, word, and look. He formed his wishes, he drew his inspirations from Madame's eyes, and his delight was unbounded when Madame deigned to smile upon him. And was Madame, on her side, intoxicated with the power she wielded, as she beheld every one at her feet? This was a question she herself could hardly answer; but what she did know was, that she could frame no wish, and that she felt herself to be perfectly happy. The result of all these changes, the source of which emanated from the royal will, was that Monsieur, instead of being the second person in the kingdom, had, in reality, become the third. And it was now far worse than in the time when De Guiche's guitars were heard in Madame's apartments; for, then, at least, Monsieur had the satisfaction of frightening those who annoyed him. Since the departure, however, of the enemy, who had been driven away by means of his alliance with the king, Monsieur had to submit to a burden, heavier, but in a very different sense, to his former one. Every evening Madame returned home quite exhausted. Horse-riding, bathing in the Seine, spectacles, dinners under the leafy covert of the trees, balls on the banks of the grand canal, concerts, etc., etc.; all this would have been sufficient to have killed, not a slight and delicate woman, but the strongest porter in the *chateau*. It is perfectly true that, with regard to dancing, concerts, and promenades, and such matters, a woman is far stronger than the most robust of porters. But, however great a woman's strength may be, there is a limit to it, and she cannot hold out long under such a system. As for Monsieur, he had not even the satisfaction of witnessing Madame's abdication of her royalty in the evening, for she lived in the royal pavilion with the young queen and the queen-mother. As a matter of course, the Chevalier de Lorraine did not quit Monsieur, and did not fail to distil drops of gall into every wound the latter received. The result was, that Monsieur — who had at first been in the highest spirits, and completely restored since Guiche's departure — subsided into his melancholy state three days after the court was installed at Fontainebleau.

It happened, however, that, one day, about two o'clock in the afternoon, Monsieur, who had risen late, and had bestowed upon his toilet more than his usual attention, — it happened, we repeat, that Monsieur, who had not heard of any plans having been arranged for the day, formed the project of collecting his own court, and of carrying Madame off with him to Moret, where he possessed a charming country house. He accordingly went to the queen's pavilion, and was astonished, on entering, to find none of the royal servants in attendance. Quite alone, therefore, he entered the rooms, a door on the left opening to Madame's apartment, the one on the right to the young queen's. In his wife's apartment, Monsieur was informed, by a sempstress who was working there, that every one had left at eleven o'clock, for the purpose of bathing in the Seine, that a grand *fete* was to be made of the expedition, that all the carriages had been placed at the park gates, and that they had all set out more than an hour ago.

"Very good," said Monsieur, "the idea is a good one; the heat is very oppressive, and I have no objection to bathe, too."

He summoned his servants, but no one came. He summoned those in attendance on Madame, but everybody had gone out. He went to the stables, where he was informed by a groom that there were no carriages of any description. He desired that a couple of horses should be saddled, one for himself and the other for his valet. The groom told him that all the horses had been sent away. Monsieur, pale with anger, again descended towards the queen's apartments, and penetrated as far as Anne of Austria's oratory, where he perceived, through the half-opened tapestry-hangings, his young and beautiful sister on her knees before the queen-mother, who appeared weeping bitterly. He had not been either seen or heard. He cautiously approached the opening, and listened, the sight of so much grief having aroused his curiosity. Not only was the young queen weeping, but she was complaining also. "Yes," she said, "the king neglects me, the king devotes himself to pleasures and amusements only, in which I have no share."

"Patience, patience, my daughter," said Anne of Austria, in Spanish; and then, also in Spanish, added some words of advice, which Monsieur did not understand. The queen replied by accusations, mingled with sighs and sobs, among which Monsieur often distinguished the word *banos,* which Maria Theresa accentuated with spiteful anger.

"The baths," said Monsieur to himself; "it seems it is the baths that have put her out." And he endeavored to put together the disconnected phrases which he had been able to understand. It was easy to guess that the queen was complaining bitterly, and that, if Anne of Austria did not console her, she at least endeavored to do so. Monsieur was afraid to be detected listening at the door and he therefore made up his mind to cough; the two queens turned round at the sound and Monsieur entered. At sight of the prince, the young queen rose precipitately, and dried her tears. Monsieur, however, knew the people he had to deal with too well, and was naturally too polite to remain silent, and he accordingly saluted them. The queen-mother smiled pleasantly at him, saying, “What do you want, Philip?”

“I? — nothing,” stammered Monsieur. “I was looking for — ”

“Whom?”

“I was looking for Madame.”

“Madame is at the baths.”

“And the king?” said Monsieur, in a tone which made the queen tremble.

“The king also, the whole court as well,” replied Anne of Austria.

“Except you, madame,” said Monsieur.

“Oh! I,” said the young queen, “I seem to terrify all those who amuse themselves.”

“And so do I, — judging from appearances,” rejoined Monsieur.

Anne of Austria made a sigh to her daughter-in-law, who withdrew, weeping.

Monsieur’s brows contracted, as he remarked aloud, “What a cheerless house. What do you think of it, mother?”

“Why, no; everybody here is pleasure-hunting.”

“Yes, indeed, that is the very thing that makes those dull who do not care for pleasure.”

“In what a tone you say that, Philip.”

“Upon my word, madame, I speak as I think.”

“Explain yourself; what is the matter?”

“Ask my sister-in-law, rather, who, just now, was detailing all her grievances to you.”

“Her grievances, what — ”

“Yes, I was listening; accidentally, I confess, but still I listened — so that I heard only too well my sister complain of those famous baths of Madame — ”

“Ah! folly!”

“No, no, no; people are not always foolish when they weep. The queen said *banos*, which means baths.”

“I repeat, Philip,” said Anne of Austria, “that your sister is childishly jealous.”

“In that case, madame,” replied the prince, “I, too, must with great humility accuse myself of possessing the same defect.”

“You also, Philip?”

“Certainly.”

“Are you really jealous of these baths?”

“And why not, madame, when the king goes to the baths with my wife, and does not take the queen? Why not, when Madame goes to the baths with the king, and does not do me the honor to even invite me? And you enjoin my sister-in-law to be satisfied, and require me to be satisfied, too.”

“You are raving, my dear Philip,” said Anne of Austria; “you have driven the Duke of Buckingham away; you have been the cause of M. de Guiche’s exile; do you now wish to send the king away from Fontainebleau?”

“I do not pretend to anything of the kind, madame,” said Monsieur, bitterly; “but, at least, I can withdraw, and I shall do so.”

“Jealous of the king — jealous of your brother?”

“Yes, madame, I am jealous of the king — of my own brother, and remarkably jealous, too.”

“Really, Monsieur,” exclaimed Anne of Austria, affecting to be indignant, “I begin to believe you are mad, and a sworn enemy to my repose. I therefore abandon the place to you, for I have no means of defending myself against such monomanias.”

She arose and left Monsieur a prey to the most extravagant transport of passion. He remained for a moment completely bewildered; then, recovering himself, again went to the stables, found the groom, once more asked him for a carriage or a horse, and upon his reply that there was neither the one or the other, Monsieur snatched a long whip from the hand of a stable-boy, and began to pursue the poor devil of a groom all round the servants’ courtyard, whipping him the while, in spite of his cries and excuses; then, quite out of breath, covered with perspiration, and trembling in every limb, he returned to his own apartments, broke in pieces some beautiful specimens of porcelain, and then got into bed, booted and spurred as he was, crying out for some one to come to him.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

The Bath.

At Vulaines, beneath the impenetrable shade of flowering osiers and willows, which, as they bent down their green heads, dipped the extremities of their branches in the blue waters, a long and flat-bottomed boat, with ladders covered with long blue curtains, served as a refuge for the bathing Dianas, who, as they left the water, were watched by twenty plumed Acteons, who, eagerly, and full of admiration, galloped up and down the flowery banks of the river. But Diana herself, even the chaste Diana, clothed in her long chlamys, was less beautiful — less impenetrable, than Madame, as young and beautiful as that goddess herself. For, notwithstanding the fine tunic of the huntress, her round and delicate knee can be seen; and notwithstanding the sonorous quiver, her brown shoulders can be detected; whereas, in Madame's case, a long white veil enveloped her, wrapping her round and round a hundred times, as she resigned herself into the hands of her female attendants, and thus was rendered inaccessible to the most indiscreet, as well as to the most penetrating gaze. When she ascended the ladder, the poets were present — and all were poets when Madame was the subject of discussion — the twenty poets who were galloping about, stopped, and with one voice, exclaimed that pearls, and not drops of water, were falling from her person, to be lost again in the happy river. The king, the center of these effusions, and of this respectful homage, imposed silence upon those expatiators, for whom it seemed impossible to exhaust their raptures, and he rode away, for fear of offending, even through the silken curtains, the modesty of the woman and the dignity of the princess. A great blank thereupon ensued in the scene, and perfect silence in the boat. From the movements on board — from the flutterings and agitations of the curtains — the goings to and fro of the female attendants engaged in their duties, could be guessed.

The king smilingly listened to the conversation of the courtiers around him, but it could easily be perceived that he gave but little, if any, attention to their remarks. In fact, hardly had the sound of the rings drawn along the curtain-rods announced that Madame was dressed, and that the goddess was about to make her reappearance, than the king, returning to his former post immediately, and running quite close to the river-bank, gave the signal for all those to approach whose duty or pleasure summoned them to Madame's side. The pages hurried forward, conducting the led horses; the carriages, which had remained sheltered under the trees, advanced towards the tent, followed by a crowd of servants, bearers, and female attendants, who, while their masters had been bathing, had mutually exchanged their own observations, critical remarks, and the discussion of matters personal — the fugitive journal of that period, of which no one now remembers anything, not even by the waves, the witnesses of what went on that day — themselves now sublimed into immensity, as the actors have vanished into eternity.

A crowd of people swarming upon the banks of the river, without reckoning the groups of peasants drawn together by their anxiety to see the king and the princess, was, for many minutes, the most disorderly, but the most agreeable, mob imaginable. The king dismounted from his horse, a movement which was imitated by all the courtiers, and offered his hat to Madame, whose rich riding-habit displayed her fine figure, which was set off to great advantage by that garment, made of fine woolen cloth embroidered with silver. Her hair, still damp and blacker than jet, hung in heavy masses upon her white and delicate neck. Joy and health sparkled in her beautiful eyes; composed, yet full of energy, she inhaled the air in deep draughts, under a lace parasol, which was borne by one of her pages. Nothing could be more charming, more graceful, more poetical, than these two figures buried under the rose-colored shade of the parasol, the king, whose white teeth were displayed in continual smiles, and Madame, whose black eyes sparkled like carbuncles in the glittering reflection of the changing hues of the silk. When Madame approached her horse, a magnificent animal of Andalusian breed, of spotless white, somewhat heavy, perhaps, but with a spirited and splendid head, in which the mixture, happily combined, of Arabian and Spanish blood could be readily traced, and whose long tail swept the ground; and as the princess affected difficulty in mounting, the king took her in his arms in such a manner that Madame's arm was clasped like a circlet of alabaster around the king's neck. Louis, as he withdrew, involuntarily touched with his lips the arm, which was not withheld, and the princess having thanked her royal equerry, every one sprang to his saddle at the same moment. The king and Madame drew aside to allow the carriages, the outriders, and runners, to pass by. A fair proportion of the cavaliers, released from the restraint etiquette had imposed upon them, gave the rein to their horses, and darted after the carriages which bore the maids of honor, as blooming as so many virgin huntresses around Diana, and the human whirlwind, laughing, chattering, and noisy, passed onward.

The king and Madame, however, kept their horses in hand at a foot-pace. Behind his majesty and his sister-in-law, certain of the courtiers — those, at least, who were seriously disposed or were anxious to be within reach, or under the eyes, of the king — followed at a respectful distance, restraining their impatient horses, regulating their pace by that of the king and Madame, and abandoned themselves to all the delight and gratification which is to be found in the conversation of clever people, who can, with perfect courtesy, make a thousand atrocious, but laughable remarks about their neighbors. In their stifled laughter, and in the little reticences of their sardonic humor, Monsieur, the poor absentee, was not spared. But they pitied, and bewailed greatly, the fate of De Guiche, and it must be confessed that their compassion, as far as he was concerned, was not misplaced. The king and Madame having breathed the horses, and repeated a hundred times over such remarks as the courtiers, who supplied them with talk, suggested to them, set off at a hand gallop, and the leafy coverts of the forest resounded to the footfalls of the mounted party. To the conversations beneath the shade of the trees, — to remarks made in the shape of confidential communications, and observations, mysteriously exchanged, succeeded the noisiest bursts of laughter; — from the very outriders to royalty itself, merriment seemed to spread. Every one began to laugh and to cry out. The magpies and the jays fluttered away uttering their guttural cries, beneath the waving avenues of oaks; the cuckoo staid his monotonous cry in the recesses of the forest; the chaffinch and tomtit flew away in clouds; while the terrified deer bounded riverwards from the midst of the thickets. This crowd, spreading joy, confusion, and light wherever it passed, was heralded, it may be said, to the chateau by its own clamor. As the king and Madame entered the village, they were received by the acclamations of the crowd. Madame hastened to look for Monsieur, for she instinctively understood that he had been far too long kept from sharing in this joy. The king went to rejoin the queens; he knew he owed them — one especially —

a compensation for his long absence. But Madame was not admitted to Monsieur’s apartments, and she was informed that Monsieur was asleep. The king, instead of being met by Maria Theresa smiling, as was usual with her, found Anne of Austria in the gallery watching for his return, who advanced to meet him, and taking him by the hand, led him to her own apartment. No one ever knew what was the nature of the conversation which took place between them, or rather what it was that the queen-mother said to Louis XIV.; but the general tenor of the interview might certainly be guessed from the annoyed expression of the king’s face as he left her.

But we, whose mission it is to interpret all things, as it is also to communicate our interpretations to our readers, — we should fail in our duty, if we were to leave them in ignorance of the result of this interview. It will be found sufficiently detailed, at least we hope so, in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

The Butterfly-Chase.

The king, on retiring to his apartments to give some directions and to arrange his ideas, found on his toilette-glass a small note, the handwriting of which seemed disguised. He opened it and read — ”Come quickly, I have a thousand things to say to you.” The king and Madame had not been separated a sufficiently long time for these thousand things to be the result of the three thousand which they had been saying to each other during the route which separated Vulaines from Fontainebleau. The confused and hurried character of the note gave the king a great deal to reflect upon. He occupied himself but slightly with his toilette, and set off to pay his visit to Madame. The princess, who did not wish to have the appearance of expecting him, had gone into the gardens with the ladies of her suite. When the king was informed that Madame had left her apartments and had gone for a walk in the gardens, he collected all the gentlemen he could find, and invited them to follow him. He found Madame engaged in chasing butterflies, on a large lawn bordered with heliotrope and flowering broom. She was looking on as the most adventurous and youngest of her ladies ran to and fro, and with her back turned to a high hedge, very impatiently awaited the arrival of the king, with whom she had appointed the rendezvous. The sound of many feet upon the gravel walk made her turn round. Louis XIV. was hatless, he had struck down with his cane a peacock butterfly, which Monsieur de Saint-Aignan had picked up from the ground quite stunned.

“You see, Madame,” said the king, as he approached her, “that I, too, am hunting on your behalf!” and then, turning towards those who had accompanied him, said, “Gentlemen, see if each of you cannot obtain as much for these ladies,” a remark which was a signal for all to retire. And thereupon a curious spectacle might have been observed; old and corpulent courtiers were seen running after butterflies, losing their hats as they ran, and with their raised canes cutting down the myrtles and the furze, as they would have done the Spaniards.

The king offered Madame his arm, and they both selected, as the center of observation, a bench with a roof of boards and moss, a kind of hut roughly designed by the modest genius of one of the gardeners who had inaugurated the picturesque and fanciful amid the formal style of the gardening of that period. This sheltered retreat, covered with nasturtiums and climbing roses, screened the bench, so that the spectators, insulated in the middle of the lawn, saw and were seen on every side, but could not be heard, without perceiving those who might approach for the purpose of listening. Seated thus, the king made a sign of encouragement to those who were running about; and then, as if he were engaged with Madame in a dissertation upon the butterfly, which he had thrust through with a gold pin and fastened on his hat, said to her, “How admirably we are placed here for conversations.”

“Yes, sire, for I wished to be heard by you alone, and yet to be seen by every one.”

“And I also,” said Louis.

“My note surprised you?”

“Terrified me rather. But what I have to tell you is more important.”

“It cannot be, sire. Do you know that Monsieur refuses to see me?”

“Why so?”

“Can you not guess why?”

“Ah, Madame! in that case we have both the same thing to say to each other.”

“What has happened to you, then?”

“You wish me to begin?”

“Yes, for I have told you all.”

“Well, then, as soon as I returned, I found my mother waiting for me, and she led me away to her own apartments.”

“The queen-mother?” said Madame, with some anxiety, “the matter is serious then.”

“Indeed it is, for she told me... but, in the first place, allow me to preface what I have to say with one remark. Has Monsieur ever spoken to you about me?”

“Often.”

“Has he ever spoken to you about his jealousy?”

“More frequently still.”

“Of his jealousy of me?”

“No, but of the Duke of Buckingham and De Guiche.”

“Well, Madame, Monsieur’s present idea is a jealousy of myself.”

“Really,” replied the princess, smiling archly.

“And it really seems to me,” continued the king, “that we have never given any ground — ”

“Never! at least *I* have not. But who told you that Monsieur was jealous?”

“My mother represented to me that Monsieur entered her apartments like a madman, that he uttered a thousand complaints against you, and — forgive me for saying it — against your coquetry. It appears that Monsieur indulges in injustice, too.”

“You are very kind, sire.”

“My mother reassured him; but he pretended that people reassure him too often, and that he had had quite enough of it.”

“Would it not be better for him not to make himself uneasy in any way?”

“The very thing I said.”

“Confess, sire, that the world is very wicked. Is it possible that a brother and sister cannot converse together, or take pleasure in each other’s company, without giving rise to remarks and suspicions? For indeed, sire, we are doing no harm, and have no intention of doing any.” And she looked at the king with that proud yet provoking glance that kindles desire in the coldest and wisest of men.

“No!” sighed the king, “that is true.”

“You know very well, sire, that if it were to continue, I should be obliged to make a disturbance. Do you decide upon our conduct, and say whether it has, or has not, been perfectly correct.”

“Oh, certainly — perfectly correct.”

“Often alone together, — for we delight in the same things, — we might possibly be led away into error, but *have* we been? I regard you as a brother, and nothing more.”

The king frowned. She continued:

“Your hand, which often meets my own, does not excite in me that agitation and emotion which is the case with those who love each other, for instance — ”

“Enough,” said the king, “enough, I entreat you. You have no pity — you are killing me.”

“What is the matter?”

“In fact, then, you distinctly say you experience nothing when near me.”

“Oh, sire! I don’t say that — my affection — ”

“Enough, Henrietta, I again entreat you. If you believe me to be marble, as you are, undeceive yourself.”

“I do not understand you, sire.”

“Very well,” said the king, casting down his eyes. “And so our meetings, the pressure of each other’s hand, the looks we have exchanged — Yes, yes; you are right, and I understand your meaning,” and he buried his face in his hands.

“Take care, sire,” said Madame, hurriedly, “Monsieur de Saint-Aignan is looking at you.”

“Of course,” said Louis, angrily; “never even the shadow of liberty! never any sincerity in my intercourse with any one! I imagine I have found a friend, who is nothing but a spy; a dearer friend, who is only a — sister!”

Madame was silent, and cast down her eyes.

“My husband is jealous,” she murmured, in a tone of which nothing could equal its sweetness and charm.

“You are right,” exclaimed the king, suddenly.

“You see,” she said, looking at him in a manner that set his heart on fire, “you are free, you are not suspected, the peace of your house is not disturbed.”

“Alas,” said the king, “as yet you know nothing, for the queen is jealous.”

“Maria Theresa!”

“Stark mad with jealousy! Monsieur’s jealousy arises from hers; she was weeping and complaining to my mother, and was reproaching us for those bathing parties, which have made me so happy.”

“And me too,” answered Madame, by a look.

“When, suddenly,” continued the king, “Monsieur, who was listening, heard the word ‘*banos*,’ which the queen pronounced with some degree of bitterness, that awakened his attention; he entered the room, looking quite wild, broke into the conversation, and began to quarrel with my mother so bitterly that she was obliged to leave him; so that, while you have a jealous husband to deal with, I shall have perpetually present before me a specter of jealousy with swollen eyes, a cadaverous face, and sinister looks.”

“Poor king,” murmured Madame, as she lightly touched the king’s hand. He retained her hand in his, and in order to press it without exciting suspicion in the spectators, who were not so much taken up with the butterflies that they could not occupy themselves about other matters, and who perceived clearly enough that there was some mystery in the king’s and Madame’s conversation, Louis placed the dying butterfly before his sister-in-law, and bent over it as if to count the thousand eyes of its wings, or the particles of golden dust which covered it. Neither of them spoke; however, their hair mingled, their breaths united, and their hands feverishly throbbed in each other’s grasp. Five minutes passed in this manner.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

What Was Caught after the Butterflies.

The two young people remained for a moment with their heads bent down, bowed, as it were, beneath the double thought of the love which was springing up in their hearts, and which gives birth to so many happy fancies in the imaginations of twenty years of age. Henrietta gave a side glance, from time to time, at the king. Hers was one of those finely-organized natures capable of looking inwardly at itself, as well as at others at the same moment. She perceived Love lying at the bottom of Louis's heart, as a skillful diver sees a pearl at the bottom of the sea. She knew Louis was hesitating, if not in doubt, and that his indolent or timid heart required aid and encouragement. "And so?" she said, interrogatively, breaking the silence.

"What do you mean?" inquired Louis, after a moment's pause.

"I mean, that I shall be obliged to return to the resolution I had formed."

"To what resolution?"

"To that which I have already submitted to your majesty."

"When?"

"On the very day we had a certain explanation about Monsieur's jealousies."

"What did you say to me then?" inquired Louis, with some anxiety.

"Do you not remember, sire?"

"Alas! if it be another cause of unhappiness, I shall recollect it soon enough."

"A cause of unhappiness for myself alone, sire," replied Madame Henrietta; "but as it is necessary, I must submit to it."

"At least, tell me what it is," said the king.

"Absence."

"Still that unkind resolve?"

"Believe me, sire, I have not found it without a violent struggle with myself; it is absolutely necessary I should return to England."

"Never, never will I permit you to leave France," exclaimed the king.

"And yet, sire," said Madame, affecting a gentle yet sorrowful determination, "nothing is more urgently necessary; nay, more than that, I am persuaded it is your mother's desire I should do so."

"Desire!" exclaimed the king; "that is a very strange expression to use to me."

"Still," replied Madame Henrietta, smilingly, "are you not happy in submitting to the wishes of so good a mother?"

"Enough, I implore you; you rend my very soul."

"I?"

"Yes; for you speak of your departure with tranquillity."

"I was not born for happiness, sire," replied the princess, dejectedly; "and I acquired, in very early life, the habit of seeing my dearest wishes disappointed."

"Do you speak truly?" said the king. "Would your departure gainsay any one of your cherished thoughts?"

"If I were to say 'yes,' would you begin to take your misfortune patiently?"

"How cruel you are!"

"Take care, sire; some one is coming."

The king looked all round him, and said, "No, there is no one," and then continued: "Come, Henrietta, instead of trying to contend against Monsieur's jealousy by a departure which would kill me — "

Henrietta slightly shrugged her shoulders like a woman unconvinced. "Yes," repeated Louis, "which would kill me, I say. Instead of fixing your mind on this departure, does not your imagination — or rather does not your heart — suggest some expedient?"

"What is it you wish my heart to suggest?"

"Tell me, how can one prove to another that it is wrong to be jealous?"

"In the first place, sire, by giving no motive for jealousy; in other words, in loving no one but the person in question."

"Oh! I expected more than that."

"What did you expect?"

"That you would simply tell me that jealous people are pacified by concealing the affection which is entertained for the object of jealousy."

"Dissimulation is difficult, sire."

"Yet it is only be means of conquering difficulties that any happiness is attained. As far as I am concerned, I swear I will give the lie to those who are jealous of me by pretending to treat you like any other woman."

"A bad, as well as unsafe, means," said the young princess, shaking her pretty head.

"You seem to think everything bad, dear Henrietta," said Louis, discontentedly. "You negative everything I propose. Suggest, at least, something else in its stead. Come, try and think. I trust implicitly to a woman's invention. Do you invent in your turn?"

"Well, sire, I have hit upon something. Will you listen to it?"

"Can you ask me? You speak of a matter of life or death to me, and then ask if I will listen."

"Well, I judge of it by my own case. If my husband intended to put me on the wrong scent with regard to another woman, one thing would reassure me more than anything else."

"What would that be?"

"In the first place to see that he never took any notice of the woman in question."

"Exactly. That is precisely what I said just now."

"Very well; but in order to be perfectly reassured on the subject, I should like to see him occupy himself with some one else."

"Ah! I understand you," replied Louis, smiling. "But confess, dear Henrietta, if the means is at least ingenious, it is hardly charitable."

"Why so?"

"In curing the dread of a wound in a jealous person's mind, you inflict one upon the heart. His fear ceases, it is true; but the evil still exists; and that seems to me to be far worse."

"Agreed; but he does not detect, he does not suspect the real enemy; he does no prejudice to love itself; he concentrates all his strength on the side where his strength will do no injury to anything or any one. In a word, sire, my plan, which I confess I am surprised to find you dispute, is mischievous to jealous people, it is true; but to lovers it is full of advantage. Besides, let me ask, sire, who, except yourself, has ever thought of pitying jealous people? Are they not a melancholy crew of grumblers always equally unhappy, whether with or without a cause? You may remove that cause, but you never can remove their sufferings. It is a disease which lies in the imagination, and, like all imaginary disorders, it is incurable. By the by, I remember an aphorism upon this subject, of poor Dr. Dawley, a clever and amusing man, who, had it not been for my brother, who could not do without him, I should have with me now. He used to say, ‘Whenever you are likely to suffer from two affections, choose that which will give you the least trouble, and I will allow you to retain it; for it is positive,’ he said, ‘that that very ailment is of the greatest service to me, in order to enable me to get rid of the other.’“

“Well and judiciously remarked, Henrietta,” replied the king, smiling.

“Oh! we have some clever people in London, sire.”

“And those clever people produce adorable pupils. I will grant this Daley, Darley, Dawley, or whatever you call him, a pension for his aphorism; but I entreat you, Henrietta, to begin by choosing the least of your evils. You do not answer — you smile. I guess that the least of your bugbears is your stay in France. I will allow you to retain this information; and, in order to begin with the cure of the other, I will this very day begin to look out for a subject which shall divert the attention of the jealous members of either sex who persecute us both.”

“Hush! this time some one is really coming,” said Madame; and she stooped to gather a flower from the thick grass at her feet. Some one, in fact, was approaching; for, suddenly, a bevy of young girls ran down from the top of the hillock, following the cavaliers — the cause of this interruption being a magnificent hawk-moth, with wings like rose-leaves. The prey in question had fallen into the net of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, who displayed it with some pride to her less successful rivals. The queen of the chase had seated herself some twenty paces from the bank on which Louis and Madame Henrietta were reclining; and leaned her back against a magnificent oak-tree entwined with ivy, and stuck the butterfly on the long cane she carried in her hand. Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente was very beautiful, and the gentlemen, accordingly, deserted her companions, and under the pretext of complimenting her upon her success, pressed in a circle around her. The king and princess looked gloomily at this scene, as spectators of maturer age look on at the games of little children. “They seem to be amusing themselves there,” said the king.

“Greatly, sire; I have always found that people are amused wherever youth and beauty are to be found.”

“What do you think of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, Henrietta?” inquired the king.

“I think she has rather too much flax-yellow and lily-whiteness in her complexion,” replied Madame, fixing in a moment upon the only fault it was possible to find in the almost perfect beauty of the future Madame de Montespan."

"Rather too fair, yes; but beautiful, I think, in spite of that."

"Is that your opinion, sire?"

"Yes, really."

"Very well; and it is mine, too."

"And she seems to be much sought after."

"On, that is a matter of course. Lovers flutter from one to another. If we had hunted for lovers instead of butterflies, you can see, from those who surround her, what successful sport we should have had."

"Tell me, Henrietta, what would be said if the king were to make himself one of those lovers, and let his glance fall in that direction? Would some one else be jealous, in such a case?"

"Oh! sire, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente is a very efficacious remedy," said Madame, with a sigh. "She would cure a jealous man, certainly; but she might possibly make a woman jealous, too."

"Henrietta," exclaimed Louis, "you fill my heart with joy. Yes, yes; Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente is far too beautiful to serve as a cloak."

"A king's cloak," said Madame Henrietta, smiling, "ought to be beautiful."

"Do you advise me to do it, then?" inquired Louis.

"I! what should I say, sire, except that to give such an advice would be to supply arms against myself? It would be folly or pride to advise you to take, for the heroine of an assumed affection, a woman more beautiful than the one for whom you pretend to feel real regard."

The king tried to take Madame's hand in his own; his eyes sought hers; and then he murmured a few words so full of tenderness, but pronounced in so low a tone, that the historian, who ought to hear everything, could not hear them. Then, speaking aloud, he said, "Do you yourself choose for me the one who is to cure our jealous friend. To her, then, all my devotion, all my attention, all the time that I can spare from my occupations, shall be devoted. For her shall be the flower that I may pluck for you, the fond thoughts with which you have inspired me. Towards her I will direct the glance I dare not bestow upon you, and which ought to be able to rouse you from your indifference. But, be careful in your selection, lest, in offering her the rose which I may have plucked, I find myself conquered by you; and my looks, my hand, my lips, turn immediately towards you, even were the whole world to guess my secret.”

While these words escaped from the king’s lips, in a stream of wild affection, Madame blushed, breathless, happy, proud, almost intoxicated with delight. She could find nothing to say in reply; her pride and her thirst for homage were satisfied. “I shall fail,” she said, raising her beautiful black eyes, “but not as you beg me, for all this incense which you wish to burn on the altar of another divinity. Ah! sire, I too shall be jealous of it, and want restored to me; and would not that a particle of it should be lost in the way. Therefore, sire, with your royal permission, I will choose one who shall appear to me the least likely to distract your attention, and who will leave my image intact and unshadowed in your heart.”

“Happily for me,” said the king, “your heart is not hard and unfeeling. If it were so, I should be alarmed at the threat you hold out. Precautions were taken on this point, and around you, as around myself, it would be difficult to meet with a disagreeable-looking face.”

Whilst the king was speaking, Madame had risen from her seat, looked around the greensward, and after a careful and silent examination, she called the king to her side, and said, “See yonder, sire, upon the declivity of that little hill, near that group of Guelder roses, that beautiful girl walking alone, her head down, her arms hanging by her side, with her eyes fixed upon the flowers, which she crushes beneath her feet, like one who is lost in thought.”

“Mademoiselle de Valliere, do you mean?” remarked the king.

“Yes.”

“Oh!”

“Will she not suit you, sire?”

“Why, look how thin the poor child is. She has hardly any flesh upon her bones.”

“Nay: am I stout then?”

“She is so melancholy.”

“The greater contrast to myself, who am accused of being too lively.”

“She is lame.”

“Do you really think so?”

“No doubt of it. Look; she has allowed every one to pass by her, through fear of her defect being remarked.”

“Well, she will not run so fast as Daphne, and will not be as able to escape Apollo.”

“Henrietta,” said the king, out of temper; “of all your maids of honor, you have really selected for me the one most full of defects.”

“Still she is one of my maids of honor.”

“Of course; but what do you mean?”

“I mean that, in order to visit this new divinity, you will not be able to do so without paying a visit to my apartments, and that, as propriety will forbid your conversing with her in private, you will be compelled to see her in my circle, to speak, as it were, at me, while speaking to her. I mean, in fact, that those who may be jealous, will be wrong if they suppose you come to my apartments for my sake, since you will go there for Mademoiselle de la Valliere.”

“Who happens to be lame.”

“Hardly that.”

“Who never opens her lips.”

“But who, when she does open them, displays a beautiful set of teeth.”

“Who may serve as a model for an osteologist.”

“Your favor will change her appearance.”

“Henrietta!”

“At all events you allowed me to choose.”

“Alas! yes.”

“Well, my choice is made: I impose her upon you, and you must submit.”

“Oh! I would accept one of the furies, if you were to insist upon it.”

“La Valliere is as gentle as a lamb: do not fear she will ever contradict you when you tell her you love her,” said Madame, laughing.

“You are not afraid, are you, that I shall say too much to her?”

“It would be for my sake.”

“The treaty is agreed to, then?”

“Not only so, but signed. You will continue to show me the friendship of a brother, the attention of a brother, the gallantry of a monarch, will you not?”

“I will preserve for you intact a heart that has already become accustomed to beat only at your command.”

“Very well, do you not see that we have guaranteed the future by this means?”

“I hope so.”

“Will your mother cease to regard me as an enemy?”

“Yes.”

“Will Maria Theresa leave off speaking in Spanish before Monsieur, who has a horror of conversation held in foreign languages, because he always thinks he is being ill spoken of? and lastly,” continued the princess, “will people persist in attributing a wrongful affection to the king when the truth is, we can offer nothing to each other, except absolute sympathy, free from mental reservation?”

“Yes, yes,” said the king, hesitatingly. “But other things may still be said of us.”

“What can be said, sire? shall we never be left in tranquillity?”

“People will say I am deficient in taste; but what is my self-respect in comparison with your tranquillity?”

“In comparison with my honor, sire, and that of our family, you mean. Besides, I beg you to attend, do not be so hastily prejudiced against La Valliere. She is slightly lame, it is true, but she is not deficient in good sense. Moreover, all that the king touches is converted into gold.”

“Well, Madame, rest assured of one thing, namely, that I am still grateful to you: you might even yet make me pay dearer for your stay in France.”

“Sire, some one approaches.”

“Well!”

“One last word.”

“Say it.”

“You are prudent and judicious, sire; but in the present instance you will be obliged to summon to your aid all your prudence, and all your judgment.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Louis, laughing, “from this very day I shall begin to act my part, and you shall see whether I am not quite fit to represent the character of a tender swain. After luncheon, there will be a promenade in the forest, and then there is supper and the ballet at ten o’clock.”

“I know it.”

“The ardor of my passion shall blaze more brilliantly than the fireworks, shall shine more steadily than our friend Colbert’s lamps; it shall shine so dazzlingly that the queens and Monsieur will be almost blinded by it.”

“Take care, sire, take care.”

“In Heaven’s name, what have I done, then?”

“I shall begin to recall the compliments I paid you just now. You prudent! you wise! did I say? Why, you begin by the most reckless inconsistencies! Can a passion be kindled in this manner, like a torch, in a moment? Can a monarch, such as you are, without any preparation, fall at the feet of a girl like La Valliere?”

“Ah! Henrietta, now I understand you. We have not yet begun the campaign, and you are plundering me already.”

“No, I am only recalling you to common-sense ideas. Let your passion be kindled gradually, instead of allowing it to burst forth so suddenly. Jove’s thunders and lightnings are heard and seen before the palace is set on fire. Everything has its commencements. If you are so easily excited, no one will believe you are really captivated, and every one will think you out of your senses — if even, indeed, the truth itself not be guessed. The public is not so fatuous as they seem.”

The king was obliged to admit that Madame was an angel for sense, and the very reverse for cleverness. He bowed, and said: “Agreed, Madame, I will think over my plan of attack: great military men — my cousin De Conde for instance — grow pale in meditation upon their strategical plans, before they move one of the pawns, which people call armies; I therefore wish to draw up a complete plan of campaign; for you know that the tender passion is subdivided in a variety of ways. Well, then, I shall stop at the village of Little Attentions, at the hamlet of Love-Letters, before I follow the road of Visible Affection; the way is clear enough, you know, and poor Madame de Scudery would never forgive me for passing though a halting-place without stopping.”

“Oh! now we have returned to our proper senses, shall we say adieu, sire?”

“Alas! it must be so, for see, we are interrupted.”

“Yes, indeed,” said Henrietta, “they are bringing Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente and her sphinx butterfly in grand procession this way.”

“It is perfectly well understood, that this evening, during the promenade, I am to make my escape into the forest, and find La Valliere without you.”

“I will take care to send her away.”

“Very well! I will speak to her when she is with her companions, and I will then discharge my first arrow at her.”

“Be skillful,” said Madame, laughing, “and do not miss the heart.”

Then the princess took leave of the king, and went forward to meet the merry troop, which was advancing with much ceremony, and a great many pretended flourishes of trumpets, imitated with their mouths.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

The Ballet of the Seasons.

At the conclusion of the banquet, which was served at five o'clock, the king entered his cabinet, where his tailors were awaiting him for the purpose of trying on the celebrated costume representing Spring, which was the result of so much imagination, and had cost so many efforts of thought to the designers and ornament-workers of the court. As for the ballet itself, every person knew the part he had to take in it, and how to perform it. The king had resolved to make it surprise. Hardly, therefore, had he finished his conference, and entered his own apartment, than he desired his two masters of the ceremonies, Villeroy and Saint-Aignan, to be sent for. Both replied that they only awaited his orders, and that everything was ready to begin, but that it was necessary to be sure of fine weather and a favorable night before these orders could be carried out. The king opened his window; the pale-gold hues of the evening were visible on the horizon through the vistas of the wood, and the moon, white as snow, was already mounting the heavens. Not a ripple could be noticed on the surface of the green waters; the swans themselves, even, reposing with folded wings like ships at anchor, seemed inspirations of the warmth of the air, the freshness of the water, and the silence of the beautiful evening. The king, having observed all these things, and contemplated the magnificent picture before him, gave the order which De Villeroy and De Saint-Aignan awaited; but with a view of insuring the execution of this order in a royal manner, one last question was necessary, and Louis XIV. put it to the two gentlemen in the following manner: — "Have you any money?"

"Sire," replied Saint-Aignan, "we have arranged everything with M. Colbert."

"Ah! very well!"

"Yes, sire, and M. Colbert said he would wait upon your majesty, as soon as your majesty should manifest an intention of carrying out the *fetes*, of which he has furnished the programme."

“Let him come in, then,” said the king; and as if Colbert had been listening at the door for the purpose of keeping himself *au courant* with the conversation, he entered as soon as the king had pronounced his name to the two courtiers.

“Ah! M. Colbert,” said the king. “Gentlemen, to your posts,” whereupon Saint-Aignan and Villeroy took their leave. The king seated himself in an easy-chair near the window, saying: “The ballet will take place this evening, M. Colbert.”

“In that case, sire, I will pay all accounts to-morrow.”

“Why so?”

“I promised the tradespeople to pay their bills the day following that on which the ballet should take place.”

“Very well, M. Colbert, pay them, since you have promised to do so.”

“Certainly, sire; but I must have money to do that.”

“What! have not the four millions, which M. Fouquet promised, been sent? I forgot to ask you about it.”

“Sire, they were sent at the hour promised.”

“Well?”

“Well, sire, the colored lamps, the fireworks, the musicians, and the cooks, have swallowed up four millions in eight days.”

“Entirely?”

“To the last penny. Every time your majesty directed the banks of the grand canal to be illuminated, as much oil was consumed as there was water in the basins.”

“Well, well, M. Colbert; the fact is, then, you have no more money?”

“I have no more, sire, but M. Fouquet has,” Colbert replied, his face darkening with a sinister expression of pleasure.

“What do you mean?” inquired Louis.

“We have already made M. Fouquet advance six millions. He has given them with too much grace not to have others still to give, if they are required, which is the case at the present moment. It is necessary, therefore, that he should comply.”

The king frowned. “M. Colbert,” said he, accentuating the financier’s name, “that is not the way I understood the matter; I do not wish to make use, against any of my servants, of a means of pressure which may oppress him and fetter his services. In eight days M. Fouquet has furnished six millions; that is a good round sum.”

Colbert turned pale. “And yet,” he said, “your majesty did not use this language some time ago, when the news about Belle-Isle arrived, for instance.”

“You are right, M. Colbert.”

“Nothing, however, has changed since then; on the contrary, indeed.”

“In my thoughts, monsieur, everything has changed.”

“Does your majesty then no longer believe the disloyal attempt?”

“My affairs concern myself alone, monsieur; and I have already told you I transact them without interference.”

“Then, I perceive,” said Colbert, trembling with anger and fear, “that I have had the misfortune to fall into disgrace with your majesty.”

“Not at all; you are, on the contrary, most agreeable to me.”

“Yet, sire,” said the minister, with a certain affected bluntness, so successful when it was a question of flattering Louis’s self-esteem, “what use is there in being agreeable to your majesty, if one can no longer be of any use?”

“I reserve your services for a better occasion; and believe me, they will only be the better appreciated.”

“Your majesty’s plan, then, in this affair, is — ”

“You want money, M. Colbert?”

“Seven hundred thousand francs, sire.”

“You will take them from my private treasure.” Colbert bowed. “And,” added Louis, “as it seems a difficult matter for you, notwithstanding your economy, to defray, with so limited a sum, the expenses which I intend to incur, I will at once sign an order for three millions.”

The king took a pen and signed an order immediately, then handed it to Colbert. “Be satisfied, M. Colbert, the plan I have adopted is one worthy of a king,” said Louis XIV., who pronounced these words with all the majesty he knew how to assume in such circumstances; and dismissed Colbert for the purpose of giving an audience to his tailors.

The order issued by the king was known throughout the whole of Fontainebleau; it was already known, too, that the king was trying on his costume, and that the ballet would be danced in the evening. The news circulated with the rapidity of lightning; during its progress it kindled every variety of coquetry, desire, and wild ambition. At the same moment, as if by enchantment, every one who knew how to hold a needle, every one who could distinguish a coat from a pair of trousers, was summoned to the assistance of those who had received invitations. The king had completed his toilette by nine o’clock; he appeared in an open carriage decorated with branches of trees and flowers. The queens had taken their seats upon a magnificent dias or platform, erected upon the borders of the lake, in a theater of wonderful elegance of construction. In the space of five hours the carpenters had put together all the different parts connected with the building; the upholsterers had laid down the carpets, erected the seats; and, as if at the wave of an enchanter’s wand, a thousand arms, aiding, instead of interfering with each other, had constructed the building, amidst the sound of music; whilst, at the same time, other workmen illuminated the theater and the shores of the lake with an incalculable number of lamps. As the heavens, set with stars, were perfectly unclouded, as not even a breath of air could be heard in the woods, and as if Nature itself had yielded complacently to the king’s fancies, the back of the theater had been left open; so that, behind the foreground of the scenes, could be seen as a background the beautiful sky, glittering with stars; the sheet of water, illuminated by the lights which were reflected in it; and the bluish outline of the grand masses of woods, with their rounded tops. When the king made his appearance, the theater was full, and presented to the view one vast group, dazzling with gold and precious stones; in which, however, at the first glance, no single face could be distinguished. By degrees, as the sight became accustomed to so much brilliancy, the rarest beauties appeared to the view, as in the evening sky the stars appear one by one to him who closes his eyes and then opens them again.

The theater represented a grove of trees; a few fauns lifting up their cloven feet were jumping about; a dryad made her appearance on the scene, and was immediately pursued by them; others gathered round her for her defense, and they quarrelled as they danced. Suddenly, for the purpose of restoring peace and order, Spring, accompanied by his whole court, made his appearance. The Elements, subaltern powers of mythology, together with their attributes, hastened to follow their gracious sovereign. The Seasons, allies of Spring, followed him closely, to form a quadrille, which, after many words of more or less flattering import, was the commencement of the dance. The music, hautboys, flutes, and viols, was delightfully descriptive of rural delights. The king had already made his appearance, amid thunders of applause. He was dressed in a tunic of flowers, which set off his graceful and well-formed figure to advantage. His legs, the best-shaped at court, were displayed to great advantage in flesh-colored silken hose, of silk so fine and so transparent that it seemed almost like flesh itself. The most beautiful pale-lilac satin shoes, with bows of flowers and leaves, imprisoned his small feet. The bust of the figure was in harmonious keeping with the base; Louis's waving hair floated on his shoulders, the freshness of his complexion was enhanced by the brilliancy of his beautiful blue eyes, which softly kindled all hearts; a mouth with tempting lips, which deigned to open in smiles. Such was the prince of that period: justly that evening styled "The King of all the Loves." There was something in his carriage which resembled the buoyant movements of an immortal, and he did not dance so much as seem to soar along. His entrance produced, therefore, the most brilliant effect. Suddenly the Comte de Saint-Aignan was observed endeavoring to approach either the king or Madame.

The princess — who was robed in a long dress, diaphanous and light as the finest network tissue from the hands of skillful Mechlin workers, one knee occasionally revealed beneath the folds of the tunic, and her little feet encased in silken slippers decked with pearls — advanced radiant with beauty, accompanied by her *cortege* of Bacchantes, and had already reached the spot assigned to her in the dance. The applause continued so long that the comte had ample leisure to join the king.

"What is the matter, Saint-Aignan?" said Spring.

"Nothing whatever," replied the courtier, as pale as death; "but your majesty has not thought of Fruits."

"Yes; it is suppressed."

"Far from it, sire; your majesty having given no directions about it, the musicians have retained it."

"How excessively annoying," said the king. "This figure cannot be performed, since M. de Guiche is absent. It must be suppressed."

"Ah, sire, a quarter of an hour's music without any dancing will produce an effect so chilling as to ruin the success of the ballet."

"But, come, since — "

"Oh, sire, that is not the greatest misfortune; for, after all, the orchestra could still just as well cut it out, if it were necessary; but — "

"But what?"

"Why, M. de Guiche is here."

"Here?" replied the king, frowning, "here? Are you sure?"

"Yes, sire; and ready dressed for the ballet."

The king felt himself color deeply, and said, “You are probably mistaken.”

“So little is that the case, sire, that if your majesty will look to the right, you will see that the comte is in waiting.”

Louis turned hastily towards the side, and in fact, on his right, brilliant in his character of Autumn, De Guiche awaited until the king should look at him, in order that he might address him. To give an idea of the stupefaction of the king, and that of Monsieur, who was moving about restlessly in his box, — to describe also the agitated movement of the heads in the theater, and the strange emotion of Madame, at the sight of her partner, — is a task we must leave to abler hands. The king stood almost gaping with astonishment as he looked at the comte, who, bowing lowly, approached Louis with the profoundest respect.

“Sire,” he said, “your majesty’s most devoted servant approaches to perform a service on this occasion with similar zeal that he has already shown on the field of battle. Your majesty, in omitting the dance of the Fruits, would be losing the most beautiful scene in the ballet. I did not wish to be the substance of so dark a shadow to your majesty’s elegance, skill, and graceful invention; and I have left my tenants in order to place my services at your majesty’s commands.”

Every word fell distinctly, in perfect harmony and eloquence, upon Louis XIV.’s ears. Their flattery pleased, as much as De Guiche’s courage had astonished him, and he simply replied: “I did not tell you to return, comte.”

“Certainly not, sire; but your majesty did not tell me to remain.”

The king perceived that time was passing away, that if this strange scene were prolonged it would complicate everything, and that a single cloud upon the picture would eventually spoil the whole. Besides, the king’s heart was filled with two or three new ideas; he had just derived fresh inspiration from the eloquent glances of Madame. Her look had said to him: “Since they are jealous of you, divide their suspicions, for the man who distrusts two rivals does not object to either in particular.” So that Madame, by this clever diversion, decided him. The king smiled upon De Guiche, who did not comprehend a word of Madame’s dumb language, but he remarked that she pretended not to look at him, and he attributed the pardon which had been conferred upon him to the princess’s kindness of heart. The king seemed only pleased with every one present. Monsieur was the only one who did not understand anything about the matter. The ballet began; the effect was more than beautiful. When the music, by its bursts of melody, carried away these illustrious dancers, when the simple, untutored pantomime of that period, only the more natural on account of the very indifferent acting of the august actors, had reached its culminating point of triumph, the theater shook with tumultuous applause.

De Guiche shone like a sun, but like a courtly sun, that is resigned to fill a subordinate part. Disdainful of a success of which Madame showed no acknowledgement, he thought of nothing but boldly regaining the marked preference of the princess. She, however, did not bestow a single glance upon him. By degrees all his happiness, all his brilliancy, subsided into regret and uneasiness; so that his limbs lost their power, his arms hung heavily by his sides, and his head drooped as though he was stupefied. The king, who had from this moment become in reality the principal dancer in the quadrille, cast a look upon his vanquished rival. De Guiche soon ceased to sustain even the character of the courtier; without applause, he danced indifferently, and very soon could not dance at all, by which accident the triumph of the king and of Madame was assured.

CHAPTER XL.

The Nymphs of the Park of Fontainebleau.

The king remained for a moment to enjoy a triumph as complete as it could possibly be. He then turned towards Madame, for the purpose of admiring her also a little in her turn. Young persons love with more vivacity, perhaps with greater ardor and deeper passion, than others more advanced in years; but all the other feelings are at the same time developed in proportion to their youth and vigor: so that vanity being with them almost always the equivalent of love, the latter feeling, according to the laws of equipoise, never attains that degree of perfection which it acquires in men and women from thirty to five and thirty years of age. Louis thought of Madame, but only after he had studiously thought of himself; and Madame carefully thought of herself, without bestowing a single thought upon the king. The victim, however, of all these royal affections and affectations, was poor De Guiche. Every one could observe his agitation and prostration — a prostration which was, indeed, the more remarkable since people were not accustomed to see him with his arms hanging listlessly by his side, his head bewildered, and his eyes with all their bright intelligence bedimmed. It rarely happened that any uneasiness was excited on his account, whenever a question of elegance or taste was under discussion; and De Guiche's defeat was accordingly attributed by the greater number present to his courtier-like tact and ability. But there were others — keen-sighted observers are always to be met with at court — who remarked his paleness and his altered looks; which he could neither feign nor conceal, and their conclusion was that De Guiche was not acting the part of a flatterer. All these sufferings, successes, and remarks were blended, confounded, and lost in the uproar of applause. When, however, the queens expressed their satisfaction and the spectators their enthusiasm, when the king had retired to his dressing-room to change his costume, and whilst Monsieur, dressed as a woman, as he delighted to be, was in his turn dancing about, De Guiche, who had now recovered himself, approached Madame, who, seated at the back of the theater, was waiting for the second part, and had quitted the others for the purpose of creating a sort of solitude for herself in the midst of the crowd, to meditate, as it were, beforehand, upon chorographic effects; and it will be perfectly understood that, absorbed in deep meditation, she did not see, or rather pretended not to notice, anything that was passing around her. De Guiche, observing that she was alone, near a thicket constructed of painted cloth, approached her. Two of her maids of honor, dressed as hamadryads, seeing De Guiche advance, drew back out of respect., whereupon De Guiche proceeded towards the middle of the circle and saluted her royal highness; but, whether she did or did not observe his salutations, the princess did not even turn her head. A cold shiver passed through poor De Guiche; he was unprepared for such utter indifference, for he had neither seen nor been told of anything that had taken place, and consequently could guess nothing. Remarking, therefore, that his obeisance obtained him no acknowledgement, he advanced one step further, and in a voice which he tried, though vainly, to render calm, said: “I have the honor to present my most humble respects to your royal highness.”

Upon this Madame deigned to turn her eyes languishingly towards the comte, observing. “Ah! M. de Guiche, is that you? good day!”

The comte’s patience almost forsook him, as he continued, — ”Your royal highness danced just now most charmingly.”

“Do you think so?” she replied with indifference.

“Yes; the character which your royal highness assumed is in perfect harmony with your own.”

Madame again turned round, and, looking De Guiche full in the face with a bright and steady gaze, said, — ”Why so?”

“Oh! there can be no doubt of it.”

“Explain yourself?”

“You represented a divinity, beautiful, disdainful, inconstant.”

“You mean Pomona, comte?”

“I allude to the goddess.”

Madame remained silent for a moment, with her lips compressed, and then observed, — ”But, comte, you, too, are an excellent dancer.”

“Nay, Madame, I am only one of those who are never noticed, or who are soon forgotten if they ever happen to be noticed.”

With this remark, accompanied by one of those deep sighs which affect the remotest fibers of one’s being, his heart burdened with sorrow and throbbing fast, his head on fire, and his gaze wandering, he bowed breathlessly, and withdrew behind the thicket. The only reply Madame condescended to make was by slightly raising her shoulders, and, as her ladies of honor had discreetly retired while the conversation lasted, she recalled them by a look. The ladies were Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente and Mademoiselle de Montalais.

“Did you hear what the Comte de Guiche said?” the princess inquired.

“No.”

“It really is very singular,” she continued, in a compassionate tone, “how exile has affected poor M. de Guiche’s wit.” And then, in a louder voice, fearful lest her unhappy victim might lose a syllable, she said, — ”In the first place he danced badly, and afterwards his remarks were very silly.”

She then rose, humming the air to which she was presently going to dance. De Guiche had overheard everything. The arrow pierced his heart and wounded him mortally. Then, at the risk of interrupting the progress of the *fete* by his annoyance, he fled from the scene, tearing his beautiful costume of Autumn in pieces, and scattering, as he went along, the branches of vines, mulberry and almond trees, with all the other artificial attributes of his assumed divinity. A quarter of an hour afterwards he returned to the theater; but it will be readily believed that it was only a powerful effort of reason over his great excitement that enabled him to go back; or perhaps, for love is thus strangely constituted, he found it impossible even to remain much longer separated from the presence of one who had broken his heart. Madame was finishing her figure. She saw, but did not look at De Guiche, who, irritated and revengeful, turned his back upon her as she passed him, escorted by her nymphs, and followed by a hundred flatterers. During this time, at the other end of the theater, near the lake, a young woman was seated, with her eyes fixed upon one of the windows of the theater, from which were issuing streams of light — the window in question being that of the royal box. As De Guiche quitted the theater for the purpose of getting into the fresh air he so much needed, he passed close to this figure and saluted her. When she perceived the young man, she rose, like a woman surprised in the midst of ideas she was desirous of concealing from herself. De Guiche stopped as he recognized her, and said hurriedly, — ”Good evening, Mademoiselle de la Valliere; I am indeed fortunate in meeting you."

"I, also, M. de Guiche, am glad of this accidental meeting," said the young girl, as she was about to withdraw.

"Pray do not leave me," said De Guiche, stretching out his hand towards her, "for you would be contradicting the kind words you have just pronounced. Remain, I implore you: the evening is most lovely. You wish to escape from the merry tumult, and prefer your own society. Well, I can understand it; all women who are possessed of any feeling do, and one never finds them dull or lonely when removed from the giddy vortex of these exciting amusements. Oh! Heaven!" he exclaimed, suddenly.

"What is the matter, monsieur le comte?" inquired La Valliere, with some anxiety. "You seem agitated."

"I! oh, no!"

"Will you allow me, M. de Guiche, to return you the thanks I had proposed to offer you on the very first opportunity? It is to your recommendation, I am aware, that I owe my admission among the number of Madame's maids of honor."

"Indeed! Ah! I remember now, and I congratulate myself. Do you love any one?"

"I!" exclaimed La Valliere.

"Forgive me, I hardly know what I am saying; a thousand times forgive me; Madame was right, quite right, this brutal exile has completely turned my brain."

"And yet it seemed to me that the king received you with kindness."

"Do you think so? Received me with kindness — perhaps so — yes — "

"There cannot be a doubt he received you kindly, for, in fact, you returned without his permission."

"Quite true, and I believe you are right. But have you not seen M. de Bragelonne here?"

La Valliere started at the name. "Why do you ask?" she inquired.

"Have I offended you again?" said De Guiche. "In that case I am indeed unhappy, and greatly to be pitied."

"Yes, very unhappy, and very much to be pitied, Monsieur de Guiche, for you seem to be suffering terribly."

"Oh! mademoiselle, why have I not a devoted sister, or a true friend, such as yourself?"

“You have friends, Monsieur de Guiche, and the Vicomte de Bragelonne, of whom you spoke just now, is, I believe, one of the most devoted.”

“Yes, yes, you are right, he is one of my best friends. Farewell, Mademoiselle de la Valliere, farewell.” And he fled, like one possessed, along the banks of the lake. His dark shadow glided, lengthening as it disappeared, among the illumined yews and glittering undulations of the water. La Valliere looked after him, saying, — ”Yes, yes, he, too, is suffering, and I begin to understand why.”

She had hardly finished when her companions, Mademoiselle de Montalais and Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, ran forward. They were released from their attendance, and had changed their costumes of nymphs; delighted with the beautiful night, and the success of the evening, they returned to look after their companion.

“What, already here!” they said to her. “We thought we should be first at the rendezvous.”

“I have been here this quarter of an hour,” replied La Valliere.

“Did not the dancing amuse you?”

“No.”

“But surely the enchanting spectacle?”

“No more than the dancing. As far as beauty is concerned, I much prefer that which these dark woods present, in whose depths can be seen, now in one direction and again in another, a light passing by, as though it were an eye, in color like a midnight rainbow, sometimes open, at others closed.”

“La Valliere is quite a poetess,” said Tonnay-Charente.

“In other words,” said Montalais, “she is insupportable. Whenever there is a question of laughing a little or of amusing ourselves, La Valliere begins to cry; whenever we girls have reason to cry, because, perhaps, we have mislaid our dresses, or because our vanity as been wounded, or our costume fails to produce an effect, La Valliere laughs.”

“As far as I am concerned, that is not my character,” said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente. “I am a woman; and there are few like me; whoever loves me, flatters me; whoever flatters me, pleases me; and whoever pleases — ”

“Well!” said Montalais, “you do not finish.”

“It is too difficult,” replied Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, laughing loudly. “Do you, who are so clever, finish for me.”

“And you, Louise?” said Montalais, “does any one please you?”

"That is a matter that concerns no one but myself," replied the young girl, rising from the mossy bank on which she had been reclining during the whole time the ballet lasted. "Now, mesdemoiselles, we have agreed to amuse ourselves to-night without any one to overlook us, and without any escort. We are three in number, we like one another, and the night is lovely. Look yonder, do you not see the moon slowly rising, silvering the topmost branches of the chestnuts and the oaks. Oh, beautiful walk! sweet liberty! exquisite soft turf of the woods, the happiness which your friendship confers upon me! let us walk arm in arm towards those large trees. Out yonder all are at this moment seated at table and fully occupied, or preparing to adorn themselves for a set and formal promenade; horses are being saddled, or harnessed to the carriages — the queen's mules or Madame's four white ponies. As for ourselves, we shall soon reach some retired spot where no eyes can see us and no step follow ours. Do you not remember, Montalais, the woods of Cheverny and of Chambord, the innumerable rustling poplars of Blois, where we exchanged our mutual hopes?"

"And confidences too?"

"Yes."

"Well," said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, "I also think a good deal; but I take care — "

"To say nothing," said Montalais, "so that when Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente thinks, Athenais is the only one who knows it."

"Hush!" said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, "I hear steps approaching from this side."

"Quick, quick, then, among the high reed-grass," said Montalais; "stoop, Athenais, you are so tall."

Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente stooped as she was told, and, almost at the same moment, they saw two gentlemen approaching, their heads bent down, walking arm in arm, on the fine gravel walk running parallel with the bank. The young girls had, indeed, made themselves small — indeed invisible.

"It is Monsieur de Guiche," whispered Montalais in Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente's ear.

"It is Monsieur de Bragelonne," whispered the latter to La Valliere.

The two young men approached still closer, conversing in animated tones. "She was here just now," said the count. "If I had only seen her, I should have declared it to be a vision, but I spoke to her."

"You are positive, then?"

"Yes; but perhaps I frightened her."

"In what way?"

"Oh! I was still half crazy at you know what; so that she could hardly have understood what I was saying, and must have grown alarmed."

"Oh!" said Bragelonne, "do not make yourself uneasy: she is all kindness, and will excuse you; she is clear-sighted, and will understand."

"Yes, but if she should have understood, and understood too well, she may talk."

"You do not know Louise, count," said Raoul. "Louise possesses every virtue, and has not a single fault." And the two young men passed on, and, as they proceeded, their voices were soon lost in the distance.

"How is it, La Valliere," said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, "that the Vicomte de Bragelonne spoke of you as Louise?"

"We were brought up together," replied Louise, blushing; "M. de Bragelonne has honored me by asking my hand in marriage, but — "

"Well?"

"It seems the king will not consent to it."

"Eh! Why the king? and what has the king to do with it?" exclaimed Aure, sharply. "Good gracious! has the king any right to interfere in matters of that kind? Politics are politics, as M. de Mazarin used to say; but love is love. If, therefore, you love M. de Bragelonne, marry him. *I* give *my* consent."

Athenais began to laugh.

"Oh! I am speaking seriously," replied Montalais, "and my opinion in this case is quite as good as the king's, I suppose; is it not, Louise?"

"Come," said La Valliere, "these gentlemen have passed; let us take advantage of our being alone to cross the open ground and so take refuge in the woods."

"So much the better," said Athenais, "because I see the torches setting out from the chateau and the theater, and they seem as if they were preceding some person of distinction."

"Let us run, then," said all three. And, gracefully lifting up the long skirts of their silk dresses, they lightly ran across the open space between the lake and the thickest covert of the park. Montalais agile as a deer, Athenais eager as a young wolf, bounded through the dry grass, and, now and then, some bold Acteon might, by the aid of the faint light, have perceived their straight and well-formed limbs somewhat displayed beneath the heavy folds of their satin petticoats. La Valliere, more refined and more bashful, allowed her dress to flow around her; retarded also by the lameness of her foot, it was not long before she called out to her companions to halt, and, left behind, she obliged them both to wait for her. At this moment, a man, concealed in a dry ditch planted with young willow saplings, scrambled quickly up its shelving side, and ran off in the direction of the chateau. The three young girls, on their side, reached the outskirts of the park, every path of which they well knew. The ditches were bordered by high hedges full of flowers, which on that side protected the foot-passengers from being intruded upon by the horses and carriages. In fact, the sound of Madame's and the queen's carriages could be heard in the distance upon the hard dry ground of the roads, followed by the mounted cavaliers. Distant music reached them in response, and when the soft notes died away, the nightingale, with throat of pride, poured forth his melodious chants, and his most complicated, learned, and sweetest compositions to those who had met beneath the thick covert of the woods. Near the songster, in the dark background of the large trees, could be seen the glistening eyes of an owl, attracted by the harmony. In this way the *fete* of the whole court was a *fete* also for the mysterious inhabitants of the forest; for certainly the deer in the brake, the pheasant on the branch, the fox in its hole, were all listening. One could realize the life led by this nocturnal and invisible population from the restless movements that suddenly took place among the leaves. Our sylvan nymphs uttered a slight cry, but, reassured immediately afterwards, they laughed, and resumed their walk. In this manner they reached the royal oak, the venerable relic of a tree which in its prime has listened to the sighs of Henry II. for the beautiful Diana of Poitiers, and later still to those of Henry IV. for the lovely Gabrielle d'Estrees. Beneath this oak the gardeners had piled up the moss and turf in such a manner that never had a seat more luxuriously rested the wearied limbs of man or monarch. The trunk, somewhat rough to recline against, was sufficiently large to accommodate the three young girls, whose voices were lost among the branches, which stretched upwards to the sky.

CHAPTER XLI.

What Was Said under the Royal Oak.

The softness of the air, the stillness of the foliage, tacitly imposed upon these young girls an engagement to change immediately their giddy conversation for one of a more serious character. She, indeed, whose disposition was the most lively, — Montalais, for instance, — was the first to yield to the influence; and she began by heaving a deep sigh, and saying: — ”What happiness to be here alone, and at liberty, with every right to be frank, especially towards one another.”

“Yes,” said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; “for the court, however brilliant it may be, has always some falsehood concealed beneath the folds of its velvet robes, or the glitter of its diamonds.”

“I,” replied La Valliere, “I never tell a falsehood; when I cannot speak the truth, I remain silent.”

“You will not long remain in favor,” said Montalais; “it is not here as it was at Blois, where we told the dowager Madame all our little annoyances, and all our longings. There were certain days when Madame remembered that she herself had been young, and, on those days, whoever talked with her found in her a sincere friend. She related to us her flirtations with Monsieur, and we told her of the flirtations she had had with others, or, at least, the rumors of them that had spread abroad. Poor woman, so simple-minded! she laughed at them, as we did. Where is she now?”

“Ah, Montalais, — laughter-loving Montalais!” cried La Valliere; “you see you are sighing again; the woods inspire you, and you are almost reasonable this evening.”

“You ought not, either of you,” said Athenais, “to regret the court at Blois so much, unless you do not feel happy with us. A court is a place where men and women resort to talk of matters which mothers, guardians, and especially confessors, severely denounce.”

“Oh, Athenais!” said Louise, blushing.

“Athenais is frank to-night,” said Montalais; “let us avail ourselves of it.”

"Yes, let us take advantage of it, for this evening I could divulge the softest secrets of my heart."

"Ah, if M. Montespan were here!" said Montalais.

"Do you think that I care for M. de Montespan?" murmured the beautiful young girl.

"He is handsome, I believe?"

"Yes. And that is no small advantage in my eyes."

"There now, you see — "

"I will go further, and say, that of all the men whom one sees here, he is the handsomest, and the most — "

"What was that?" said La Valliere, starting suddenly from the mossy bank.

"A deer hurrying by, perhaps."

"I am only afraid of men," said Athenais.

"When they do not resemble M. de Montespan."

"A truce to raillery. M. de Montespan is attentive to me, but that does not commit me in any way. Is not M. de Guiche here, he who is so devoted to Madame?"

"Poor fellow!" said La Valliere.

"Why to be pitied? Madame is sufficiently beautiful, and of high enough rank, I suppose."

La Valliere shook her head sorrowfully, saying, "When one loves, it is neither beauty nor rank; — when one loves it should be the heart, or the eyes only, of him, or of her whom one loves."

Montalais began to laugh loudly. "Heart, eyes," she said; "oh, sugar-plums!"

"I speak for myself;" replied La Valliere.

"Noble sentiments," said Athenais, with an air of protection, but with indifference.

"Are they not your own?" asked Louise.

"Perfectly so; but to continue: how can one pity a man who bestows his attentions upon such a woman as Madame? If any disproportion exists, it is on the count's side."

"Oh! no, no," returned La Valliere; "it is on Madame's side."

"Explain yourself."

"I will. Madame has not even a wish to know what love is. She diverts herself with the feeling, as children do with fireworks, form which a spark might set a palace on fire. It makes a display, and that is all she cares about. Besides, pleasure forms the tissue of which she wishes her life to be woven. M. de Guiche loves this illustrious personage, but she will never love him."

Athenais laughed disdainfully. "Do people really ever love?" she said. "Where are the noble sentiments you just now uttered? Does not a woman's virtue consist in the uncompromising refusal of every intrigue that might compromise her? A properly regulated woman, endowed with a natural heart, ought to look at men, make herself loved — adored, even, by them, and say at the very utmost but once in her life, 'I begin to think that I ought not to have been what I am, — I should have detested this one less than others.'"

"Therefore," exclaimed La Valliere, "that is what M. de Montespan has to expect."

"Certainly; he, as well as every one else. What! have I not said that I admit he possesses a certain superiority, and would not that be enough? My dear child, a woman is a queen during the entire period nature permits her to enjoy sovereign power — from fifteen to thirty-five years of age. After that, we are free to have a heart, when we only have that left — "

"Oh, oh!" murmured La Valliere.

"Excellent," cried Montalais; "a very masterly woman; Athenais, you will make your way in the world."

"Do you not approve of what I say?"

"Completely," replied her laughing companion.

"You are not serious, Montalais?" said Louise.

"Yes, yes; I approve everything Athenais has just said; only — "

"Only *what?*"

"Well, I cannot carry it out. I have the firmest principles; I form resolutions beside which the laws of the Stadtholder and of the King of Spain are child's play; but when the moment arrives to put them into execution, nothing comes of them."

"Your courage fails?" said Athenais, scornfully.

"Miserably so."

"Great weakness of nature," returned Athenais. "But at least you make a choice."

"Why, no. It pleases fate to disappoint me in everything; I dream of emperors, and I find only — "

“Aure, Aure!” exclaimed La Valliere, “for pity’s sake, do not, for the pleasure of saying something witty, sacrifice those who love you with such devoted affection.”

“Oh, I do not trouble myself much about that; those who love me are sufficiently happy that I do not dismiss them altogether. So much the worse for myself if I have a weakness for any one, but so much the worse for others if I revenge myself upon them for it.”

“You are right,” said Athenais, “and, perhaps, you too will reach the goal. In other words, young ladies, that is termed being a coquette. Men, who are very silly in most things, are particularly so in confounding, under the term of coquetry, a woman’s pride, and love of changing her sentiments as she does her dress. I, for instance, am proud; that is to say, impregnable. I treat my admirers harshly, but without any pretention to retain them. Men call me a coquette, because they are vain enough to think I care for them. Other women — Montalais, for instance — have allowed themselves to be influenced by flattery; they would be lost were it not for that most fortunate principle of instinct which urges them to change suddenly, and punish the man whose devotion they so recently accepted.”

“A very learned dissertation,” said Montalais, in the tone of thorough enjoyment.

“It is odious!” murmured Louise.

“Thanks to that sort of coquetry, for, indeed, that is genuine coquetry,” continued Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; “the lover who, a little while since, was puffed up with pride, in a minute afterwards is suffering at every pore of his vanity and self-esteem. He was, perhaps, already beginning to assume the airs of a conqueror, but now he retreats defeated; he was about to assume an air of protection towards us, but he is obliged to prostrate himself once more. The result of all this is, that, instead of having a husband who is jealous and troublesome, free from restraint in his conduct towards us, we have a lover always trembling in our presence, always fascinated by our attractions, always submissive; and for this simple reason, that he finds the same woman never twice of the same mind. Be convinced, therefore, of the advantages of coquetry. Possessing that, one reigns a queen among women in cases where Providence has withheld that precious faculty of holding one’s heart and mind in check.”

“How clever you are,” said Montalais, “and how well you understand the duty women owe themselves!”

"I am only settling a case of individual happiness," said Athenais modestly; "and defending myself, like all weak, loving dispositions, against the oppressions of the stronger."

"La Valliere does not say a word."

"Does she not approve of what we are saying?"

"Nay; only I do not understand it," said Louise. "You talk like people not called upon to live in this world of ours."

"And very pretty your world is," said Montalais.

"A world," returned Athenais, "in which men worship a woman until she has fallen, — and insult her when she has fallen."

"Who spoke to you of falling?" said Louise.

"Yours is a new theory, then; will you tell us how you intend to resist yielding to temptation, if you allow yourself to be hurried away by feelings of affection?"

"Oh!" exclaimed the young girl, raising towards the dark heavens her beautiful large eyes filled with tears, "if you did but know what a heart is, I would explain, and convince you; a loving heart is stronger than all your coquetry, more powerful than all your pride. A woman is never truly loved, I believe; a man never loves with idolatry, unless he feels sure he is loved in return. Let old men, whom we read of in comedies, fancy themselves adored by coquettes. A young man is conscious of, and knows them; if he has a fancy, or a strong desire, and an absorbing passion, for a coquette, he cannot mistake her; a coquette may drive him out of his senses, but will never make him fall in love. Love, such as I conceive it to be, is an incessant, complete, and perfect sacrifice; but it is not the sacrifice of one only of the two persons thus united. It is the perfect abnegation of two who are desirous of blending their beings into one. If ever I love, I shall implore my lover to leave me free and pure; I will tell him, and he will understand, that my heart was torn by my refusal, and he, in his love for me, aware of the magnitude of my sacrifice, — he, in his turn, I say, will store his devotion for me, — will respect me, and will not seek my ruin, to insult me when I shall have fallen, as you said just now, whilst uttering your blasphemies against love, such as I understand it. That is my idea of love. And now you will tell me, perhaps, that my love will despise me; I defy him to do so, unless he be the vilest of men, and my heart assures me that it is not such a man I would choose. A look from me will repay him for the sacrifices he makes, or will inspire him with the virtues which he would never think he possessed.”

“But, Louise,” exclaimed Montalais, “you tell us this, and do not carry it into practice.”

“What do you mean?”

“You are adored by Raoul de Bragelonne, who worships you on both knees. The poor fellow is made the victim of your virtue, just as he would be — nay, more than he would be, even — of my coquetry, or Athenais’s pride.”

“All this is simply a different shade of coquetry,” said Athenais; “and Louise, I perceive, is a coquette without knowing it.”

“Oh!” said La Valliere.

“Yes, you may call it instinct, if you please, keenest sensibility, exquisite refinement of feeling, perpetual play of restrained outbreaks of affection, which end in smoke. It is very artful too, and very effective. I should even, now that I reflect upon it, have preferred this system of tactics to my own pride, for waging war on members of the other sex, because it offers the advantage sometimes of thoroughly convincing them; but, at the present moment, without utterly condemning myself, I declare it to be superior to the non-complex coquetry of Montalais.” And the two young girls began to laugh.

La Valliere alone preserved silence, and quietly shook her head. Then, a moment after, she added, “If you were to tell me, in the presence of a man, but a fourth part of what you have just said, or even if I were assured that you think it, I should die of shame and grief where I am now.”

“Very well; die, poor tender little darling,” replied Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; “for if there are no men here, there are at least two women, your own friends, who declare you to be attained and convicted of being a coquette from instinct; in other words, the most dangerous kind of coquette the world possesses.”

“Oh! mesdemoiselles,” replied La Valliere, blushing, and almost ready to weep. Her two companions again burst out laughing.

“Very well! I will ask Bragelonne to tell me.”

“Bragelonne?” said Athenais.

“Yes! Bragelonne, who is as courageous as Caesar, and as clever and witty as M. Fouquet. Poor fellow! for twelve years he has known you, loved you, and yet — one can hardly believe it — he has never even kissed the tips of your fingers.”

“Tell us the reason of this cruelty, you who are all heart,” said Athenais to La Valliere.

“Let me explain it by a single word — virtue. You will perhaps deny the existence of virtue?”

“Come, Louise, tell us the truth,” said Aure, taking her by the hand.

“What do you wish me to tell you?” cried La Valliere.

“Whatever you like; but it will be useless for you to say anything, for I persist in my opinion of you. A coquette from instinct; in other words, as I have already said, and I say it again, the most dangerous of all coquettes.”

“Oh! no, no; for pity’s sake do not believe that!”

“What! twelve years of extreme severity.”

“How can that be, since twelve years ago I was only five years old? The frivolity of the child cannot surely be placed to the young girl’s account.”

“Well! you are now seventeen; three years instead of twelve. During those three years you have remained constantly and unchangeably cruel. Against you are arrayed the silent shades of Blois, the meetings when you diligently conned the stars together, the evening wanderings beneath the plantain-trees, his impassioned twenty years speaking to your fourteen summers, the fire of his glances addressed to yourself.”

“Yes, yes; but so it is!”

“Impossible!”

“But why impossible?”

“Tell us something credible and we will believe you.”

“Yet, if you were to suppose one thing.”

“What is that?”

“Suppose that I thought I was in love, and that I am not.”

“What! not in love!”

“Well, then! if I have acted in a different manner to what others do when they are in love, it is because I do not love; and because my hour has not yet come.”

“Louise, Louise,” said Montalais, “take care or I will remind you of the remark you made just now. Raoul is not here; do not overwhelm him while he is absent; be charitable, and if, on closer inspection, you think you do not love him, tell him so, poor fellow!” and she began to laugh.

“Louise pitied M. de Guiche just now,” said Athenais; “would it be possible to detect an explanation of her indifference for the one in this compassion for the other?”

“Say what you please,” said La Valliere, sadly; “upbraid me as you like, since you do not understand me.”

“Oh! oh!” replied Montalais, “temper, sorrow, tears; we are jesting, Louise, and are not, I assure you, quite the monsters you suppose. Look at the proud Athenais, as she is called; she does not love M. de Montespan, it is true, but she would be in despair if M. de Montespan did not continue to love her. Look at me; I laugh at M. Malicorne, but the poor fellow whom I laugh at knows precisely when he will be permitted to press his lips upon my hand. And yet the eldest of us is not twenty yet. What a future before us!”

“Silly, silly girls!” murmured Louise.

“You are quite right,” said Montalais; “and you alone have spoken words of wisdom.”

“Certainly.”

“I do not dispute it,” replied Athenais. “And so it is clear you do not love poor M. de Bragelonne?”

“Perhaps she does,” said Montalais; “she is not yet quite certain of it. But, in any case, listen, Athenais; if M. de Bragelonne is ever free, I will give you a little friendly advice.”

“What is that?”

“To look at him well before you decide in favor of M. de Montespan.”

“Oh! in that way of considering the subject, M. de Bragelonne is not the only one whom one could look at with pleasure; M. de Guiche, for instance, has his value also.”

“He did not distinguish himself this evening,” said Montalais; “and I know from very good authority that Madame thought him insupportable.”

“M. de Saint-Aignan produced a most brilliant effect, and I am sure that more than one person who saw him dance this evening will not soon forget him. Do you not think so, La Valliere?”

“Why do you ask me? I did not see him, nor do I know him.”

“What! you did not see M. de Saint-Aignan? Don’t you know him?”

“No.”

“Come, come, do not affect a virtue more extravagantly excessive than our vanity! — you have eyes, I suppose?”

“Excellent.”

“Then you must have seen all those who danced this evening.”

“Yes, nearly all.”

“That is a very impertinent ‘nearly all’ for somebody.”

“You must take it for what it is worth.”

“Very well; now, among all those gentlemen whom you saw, which do you prefer?”

“Yes,” said Montalais, “is it M. de Saint-Aignan, or M. de Guiche, or M. — ”

“I prefer no one; I thought them all about the same.”

“Do you mean, then, that among that brilliant assembly, the first court in the world, no one pleased you?”

“I do not say that.”

“Tell us, then, who your ideal is?”

“It is not an ideal being.”

“He exists, then?”

“In very truth,” exclaimed La Valliere, aroused and excited; “I cannot understand you at all. What! you who have a heart as I have, eyes as I have, and yet you speak of M. de Guiche, of M. de Saint-Aignan, when the king was there.” These words, uttered in a precipitate manner, and in an agitated, fervid tone of voice, made her two companions, between whom she was seated, exclaim in a manner that terrified her, “*The king!*”

La Valliere buried her face in her hands. “Yes,” she murmured; “the king! the king! Have you ever seen any one to be compared to the king?”

“You were right just now in saying you had excellent eyes, Louise, for you see a great distance; too far, indeed. Alas! the king is not one upon whom our poor eyes have a right to hinge themselves.”

“That is too true,” cried La Valliere; “it is not the privilege of all eyes to gaze upon the sun; but I will look upon him, even were I to be blinded in doing so.” At this moment, and as though caused by the words which had just escaped La Valliere’s lips, a rustling of leaves, and of what sounded like some silken material, was heard behind the adjoining bushes. The young girls hastily rose, almost terrified out of their senses. They distinctly saw the leaves move, without being able to see what it was that stirred them.

“It is a wolf or a wild boar,” cried Montalais; “fly! fly!” The three girls, in the extremity of terror, fled by the first path that presented itself, and did not stop until they had reached the verge of the wood. There, breathless, leaning against each other, feeling their hearts throb wildly, they endeavored to collect their senses, but could only succeed in doing so after the lapse of some minutes. Perceiving at last the lights from the windows of the chateau, they decided to walk towards them. La Valliere was exhausted with fatigue, and Aure and Athenais were obliged to support her.

“We have escaped well,” said Montalais.

“I am greatly afraid,” said La Valliere, “that it was something worse than a wolf. For my part, and I speak as I think, I should have preferred to have run the risk of being devoured alive by some wild animal than to have been listened to and overheard. Fool, fool that I am! How could I have thought, how could I have said what I did?” And saying this her head bowed like the water tossed plume of a bulrush; she felt her limbs fail, and her strength abandoning her, and, gliding almost inanimate from the arms of her companions, sank down upon the turf.

CHAPTER XLII.

The King’s Uneasiness.

Let us leave poor La Valliere, who had fainted in the arms of her two companions, and return to the precincts of the royal oak. The young girls had hardly run twenty paces, when the sound which had so much alarmed them was renewed among the branches. A man’s figure might indistinctly be perceived, and putting the branches of the bushes aside, he appeared upon the verge of the wood, and perceiving that the place was empty, burst out into a peal of laughter. It is almost superfluous to add that the form in question was that of a young and handsome cavalier, who immediately made a sign to another, who thereupon made his appearance.

“What, sire,” said the second figure, advancing timidly, “has your majesty put our young sentimentalists to flight?”

“It seems so,” said the king, “and you can show yourself without fear.”

“Take care, sire, you will be recognized.”

“But I tell you they are flown.”

“This is a most fortunate meeting, sire; and, if I dared offer an opinion to your majesty, we ought to follow them.”

“They are far enough away by this time.”

“They would quickly allow themselves to be overtaken, especially if they knew who were following them.”

“What do you mean by that, coxcomb that you are?”

“Why, one of them seems to have taken a fancy to me, and another compared you to the sun.”

“The greater reason why we should not show ourselves, Saint-Aignan. The sun never shows itself in the night-time.”

“Upon my word, sire, your majesty seems to have very little curiosity. In your place, I should like to know who are the two nymphs, the two dryads, the two hamadryads, who have so good an opinion of us.”

“I shall know them again very well, I assure you, without running after them.”

“By what means?”

“By their voices, of course. They belong to the court, and the one who spoke of me had a remarkably sweet voice.”

“Ah! your majesty permits yourself to be influenced by flattery.”

“No one will ever say it is a means *you* make use of.”

“Forgive my stupidity, sire.”

“Come; let us go and look where I told you.”

“Is the passion, then, which your majesty confided to me, already forgotten?”

“Oh! no, indeed. How is it possible to forget such beautiful eyes as Mademoiselle de la Valliere has?”

“Yet the other one has a beautiful voice.”

“Which one?”

“The lady who has fallen in love with the sun.”

“M. de Saint-Aignan!”

“Forgive me, sire.”

“Well, I am not sorry you should believe me to be an admirer of sweet voices as well as of beautiful eyes. I know you to be a terrible talker, and to-morrow I shall have to pay for the confidence I have shown you.”

“What do you mean, sire?”

“That to-morrow every one will know that I have designs upon this little La Valliere; but be careful, Saint-Aignan, I have confided my secret to no one but you, and if any one should speak to me about it, I shall know who has betrayed my secret.”

“You are angry, sire.”

“No; but you understand I do not wish to compromise the poor girl.”

“Do not be afraid, sire.”

“You promise me, then?”

“I give you my word of honor.”

“Excellent,” thought the king, laughing to himself; “now every one will know to-morrow that I have been running about after La Valliere to-night.”

Then, endeavoring to see where he was, he said: “Why we have lost ourselves.”

“Not quite so bad as that, sire.”

“Where does that gate lead to?”

“To Rond-Point, sire.”

“Where were we going when we heard the sound of women’s voices?”

"Yes, sire, and the termination of a conversation in which I had the honor of hearing my own name pronounced by the side of your majesty's."

"You return to that subject too frequently, Saint-Aignan."

"Your majesty will forgive me, but I am delighted to know that a woman exists whose thoughts are occupied about me, without my knowledge, and without my having done anything to deserve it. Your majesty cannot comprehend this satisfaction, for your rank and merit attract attention, and compel regard."

"No, no, Saint-Aignan, believe me or not, as you like," said the king, leaning familiarly upon Saint-Aignan's arm and taking the path he thought would lead them to the chateau; "but this candid confession, this perfectly disinterested preference of one who will, perhaps, never attract my attention — in one word, the mystery of this adventure excites me, and the truth is, that if I were not so taken with La Valliere — "

"Do not let that interfere with your majesty's intentions: you have time enough before you."

"What do you mean?"

"La Valliere is said to be very strict in her ideas."

"You excite my curiosity and I am anxious to see her again. Come, let us walk on."

The king spoke untruly, for nothing, on the contrary, could make him less anxious, but he had a part to play, and so he walked on hurriedly. Saint-Aignan followed him at a short distance. Suddenly the king stopped; the courtier followed his example.

"Saint-Aignan," he said, "do you not hear some one moaning?"

"Yes, sire, and weeping, too, it seems."

"It is in this direction," said the king. "It sounds like the tears and sobs of a woman."

"Run," said the king; and, following a by-path, they ran across the grass. As they approached, the cries were more distinctly heard.

"Help, help," exclaimed two voices. The king and his companion redoubled their speed, and, as they approached nearer, the sighs they had heard were changed into loud sobs. The cry of "Help! help!" was again repeated; at the sound of which, the king and Saint-Aignan increased the rapidity of their pace. Suddenly at the other side of a ditch, under the branches of a willow, they perceived a woman on her knees, holding another in her arms who seemed to have fainted. A few paces from them, a third, standing in the middle of the path, was calling for assistance. Perceiving the two gentlemen, whose rank she could not tell, her cries for assistance were redoubled. The king, who was in advance of his companion, leaped across the ditch, and reached the group at the very moment when, from the end of the path which led to the chateau, a dozen persons were approaching, who had been drawn to the spot by the same cries that had attracted the attention of the king and M. de Saint-Aignan.

"What is the matter, young ladies?" said Louis.

"The king!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Montalais, in her astonishment, letting La Valliere's head fall upon the ground.

"Yes, it is the king; but that is no reason why you should abandon your companion. Who is she?"

"It is Mademoiselle de la Valliere, sire."

"Mademoiselle de la Valliere!"

"Yes, sire, she has just fainted."

"Poor child!" said the king. "Quick, quick, fetch a surgeon." But however great the anxiety with which the king had pronounced these words may have seemed to others, he had not so carefully schooled himself but that they appeared, as well as the gesture which accompanied them, somewhat cold to Saint-Aignan, to whom the king had confided the sudden love with which she had inspired him.

"Saint-Aignan," continued the king, "watch over Mademoiselle de la Valliere, I beg. Send for a surgeon. I will hasten forward and inform Madame of the accident which has befallen one of her maids of honor." And, in fact, while M. de Saint-Aignan was busily engaged in making preparations for carrying Mademoiselle de la Valliere to the chateau, the king hurried forward, happy to have an opportunity of approaching Madame, and of speaking to her under a colorable pretext. Fortunately, a carriage was passing; the coachman was told to stop, and the persons who were inside, having been informed of the accident, eagerly gave up their seats to Mademoiselle de la Valliere. The current of fresh air produced by the rapid motion of the carriage soon recalled her to her senses. Having reached the chateau, she was able, though very weak, to alight from the carriage, and, with the assistance of Athenais and of Montalais, to reach the inner apartments. They made her sit down in one of the rooms of the ground floor. After a while, as the accident had not produced much effect upon those who had been walking, the promenade was resumed. During this time, the king had found Madame beneath a tree with overhanging branches, and had seated himself by her side.

"Take care, sire," said Henrietta to him, in a low tone, "you do not show yourself as indifferent as you ought to be."

"Alas!" replied the king, in the same tone, "I much fear we have entered into an agreement above our strength to keep." He then added aloud, "You have heard of the accident, I suppose?"

"What accident?"

"Oh! in seeing you I forgot I hurried here expressly to tell you of it. I am, however, painfully affected by it; one of your maids of honor, Mademoiselle de la Valliere, has just fainted."

"Indeed! poor girl," said the princess, quietly, "what was the cause of it?"

She then added in an undertone, "You forget, sire, that you wish others to believe in your passion for this girl, and yet you remain here while she is almost dying, perhaps, elsewhere."

"Ah! Madame," said the king, sighing, "how much more perfect you are in your part than I am, and how actively you think of everything."

He then rose, saying loud enough for every one to hear him, "Permit me to leave you, Madame; my uneasiness is very great, and I wish to be quite certain, myself, that proper attention has been given to Mademoiselle de la Valliere." And the king left again to return to La Valliere, while those who had been present commented upon the king's remark: — "My uneasiness is very great."

CHAPTER XLIII.

The King’s Secret.

On his way Louis met the Comte de Saint-Aignan. “Well, Saint-Aignan,” he inquired, with affected interest, “how is the invalid.”

“Really, sire,” stammered Saint-Aignan, “to my shame, I confess I do not know.”

“What! you do not know?” said the king, pretending to take in a serious manner this want of attention for the object of his predilection.

“Will your majesty pardon me; but I have just met one of our three loquacious wood-nymphs, and I confess that my attention has been taken away from other matters.”

“Ah!” said the king, eagerly, “you have found, then — ”

“The one who deigned to speak of me in such advantageous terms; and, having found mine, I was searching for yours, sire, when I had the happiness to meet your majesty.”

“Very well; but Mademoiselle de la Valliere before everything else,” said the king, faithful to the character he had assumed.

“Oh! our charming invalid!” said Saint-Aignan; “how fortunately her fainting fit came on, since your majesty had already occupied yourself about her.”

“What is the name of your fair lady, Saint-Aignan? Is it a secret?”

“It ought to be a secret, and a very great one, even; but your majesty is well aware that no secret can possibly exist for you.”

“Well, what is her name?”

“Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente.”

“Is she pretty?”

“Exceedingly, sire; and I recognized the voice which pronounced my name in such tender accents. I accosted her, questioned her as well as I was able to do, in the midst of the crowd; and she told me, without suspecting anything, that a little while ago she was under the great oak, with her two friends, when the sound of a wolf or a robber had terrified them, and made them run away.”

"But," inquired the king, anxiously, "what are the names of these two friends?"

"Sire," said Saint-Aignan, "will your majesty send me forthwith to the Bastile?"

"What for?"

"Because I am an egotist and a fool. My surprise was so great at such a conquest, and at so fortunate a discovery, that I went no further in my inquiries. Besides, I did not think that your majesty would attach any very great importance to what you heard, knowing how much your attention was taken up by Mademoiselle de la Valliere; and then, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente left me precipitately, to return to Mademoiselle de la Valliere."

"Let us hope, then, that I shall be as fortunate as yourself. Come, Saint-Aignan."

"Your majesty is ambitions, I perceive, and does not wish to allow any conquest to escape you. Well, I assure you that I will conscientiously set about my inquiries; and, moreover, from one or the other of those Three Graces we shall learn the names of the rest, and by the names their secrets."

"I, too," said the king, "only require to hear her voice to know it again. Come, let us say no more about it, but show me where poor La Valliere is."

"Well," thought Saint-Aignan, "the king's regard is beginning to display itself, and for that girl too. It is extraordinary; I should never have believed it." And with this thought passing through his mind, he showed the king the room to which La Valliere had been carried; the king entered, followed by Saint-Aignan. In a low chamber, near a large window looking out upon the gardens, La Valliere, reclining in a large armchair, was inhaling deep draughts of the perfumed evening breeze. From the loosened body of her dress, the lace fell in tumbled folds, mingling with the tresses of her beautiful fair hair, which lay scattered upon her shoulders. Her languishing eyes were filled with tears; she seemed as lifeless as those beautiful visions of our dreams, that pass before the mental eye of the sleeper, half-opening their wings without moving them, unclosing their lips without a sound escaping them. The pearl-like pallor of La Valliere possessed a charm it would be impossible to describe. Mental and bodily suffering had produced upon her features a soft and noble expression of grief; from the perfect passiveness of her arms and bust, she more resembled one whose soul had passed away, than a living being; she seemed not to hear either of the whisperings which arose from the court. She seemed to be communing within herself; and her beautiful, delicate hands trembled from time to time as though at the contact of some invisible touch. She was so completely absorbed in her reverie, that the king entered without her perceiving him. At a distance he gazed upon her lovely face, upon which the moon shed its pure silvery light.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed, with a terror he could not control, "she is dead."

"No, sire," said Montalais, in a low voice; "on the contrary, she is better. Are you not better, Louise?"

But Louise did not answer. "Louise," continued Montalais, "the king has deigned to express his uneasiness on your account."

"The king!" exclaimed Louise, starting up abruptly, as if a stream of fire had started through her frame to her heart; "the king uneasy about me?"

"Yes," said Montalais.

"The king is here, then?" said La Valliere, not venturing to look round her.

"That voice! that voice!" whispered Louis, eagerly, to Saint-Aignan.

"Yes, it is so," replied Saint-Aignan; "your majesty is right; it is she who declared her love for the sun."

"Hush!" said the king. And then approaching La Valliere, he said, "You are not well, Mademoiselle de la Valliere? Just now, indeed, in the park, I saw that you had fainted. How were you attacked?"

"Sire," stammered out the poor child, pale and trembling, "I really do not know."

"You have been walking too far," said the king; "and fatigue, perhaps —"

"No, sire," said Montalais, eagerly, answering for her friend, "it could not be from fatigue, for we passed most of the evening seated beneath the royal oak."

"Under the royal oak?" returned the king, starting. "I was not deceived; it is as I thought." And he directed a look of intelligence at the comte.

"Yes," said Saint-Aignan, "under the royal oak, with Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente."

"How do you know that?" inquired Montalais.

"In a very simple way. Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente told me so."

"In that case, she probably told you the cause of Mademoiselle de la Valliere's fainting?"

"Why, yes; she told me something about a wolf or a robber. I forget precisely which." La Valliere listened, her eyes fixed, her bosom heaving, as if, gifted with an acuteness of perception, she foresaw a portion of the truth. Louis imagined this attitude and agitation to be the consequence of a terror only partially reassured. "Nay, fear nothing," he said, with a rising emotion which he could not conceal; "the wolf which terrified you so much was simply a wolf with two legs."

"It was a man, then!" said Louise; "it was a man who was listening?"

"Suppose it was so, mademoiselle, what great harm was there in his having listened? Is it likely that, even in your own opinion, you would have said anything which could not have been listened to?"

La Valliere wrung her hands, and hid her face in them, as if to hide her blushes. "In Heaven's name," she said, "who was concealed there? Who was listening?"

The king advanced towards her, to take hold of one of her hands. "It was I," he said, bowing with marked respect. "Is it likely I could have frightened you?" La Valliere uttered a loud cry; for the second time her strength forsook her; and moaning in utter despair, she again fell lifeless in her chair. The king had just time to hold out his arm; so that she was partially supported by him. Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente and Montalais, who stood a few paces from the king and La Valliere, motionless and almost petrified at the recollection of their conversation with La Valliere, did not even think of offering their assistance, feeling restrained by the presence of the king, who, with one knee on the ground, held La Valliere round the waist with his arm.

"You heard, sire!" murmured Athenais. But the king did not reply; he remained with his eyes fixed upon La Valliere's half-closed eyes, and held her quiescent hand in his own.

"Of course," replied Saint-Aignan, who, on his side, hoping that Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, too, would faint, advancing towards her, holding his arms extended, — "of course; we did not even lose a single word." But the haughty Athenais was not a woman to faint easily; she darted a terrible look at Saint-Aignan, and fled. Montalais, with more courage, advanced hurriedly towards Louise, and received her from the king's hands, who was already fast losing his presence of mind, as he felt his face covered by the perfumed tresses of the seemingly dying girl. “Excellent,” whispered Saint-Aignan. “This is indeed an adventure; and it will be my own fault if I am not the first to relate it.”

The king approached him, and, with a trembling voice and a passionate gesture, said, “Not a syllable, comte.”

The poor king forgot that, only an hour before, he had given him a similar recommendation, but with the very opposite intention; namely, that the comte should be indiscreet. It followed, as a matter of course, that he latter recommendation was quite as unnecessary as the former. Half an hour afterwards, everybody in Fontainebleau knew that Mademoiselle de la Valliere had had a conversation under the royal oak with Montalais and Tonnay-Charente, and that in this conversation she had confessed her affection for the king. It was known, also, that the king, after having manifested the uneasiness with which Mademoiselle de la Valliere’s health had inspired him, had turned pale, and trembled very much as he received the beautiful girl fainting into his arms; so that it was quite agreed among the courtiers, that the greatest event of the period had just been revealed; that his majesty loved Mademoiselle de la Valliere, and that, consequently, Monsieur could now sleep in perfect tranquillity. It was this, even, that the queen-mother, as surprised as the others by the sudden change, hastened to tell the young queen and Philip d’Orleans. Only she set to work in a different manner, by attacking them in the following way: — To her daughter-in-law she said, “See, now, Therese, how very wrong you were to accuse the king; now it is said he is devoted to some other person; why should there be any greater truth in the report of to-day than in that of yesterday, or in that of yesterday than in that of to-day?” To Monsieur, in relating to him the adventure of the royal oak, she said, “Are you not very absurd in your jealousies, my dear Philip? It is asserted that the king is madly in love with that little La Valliere. Say nothing of it to your wife; for the queen will know all about it very soon.” This latter confidential communication had an immediate result. Monsieur, who had regained his composure, went triumphantly to look after his wife, and it was not yet midnight and the *fete* was to continue until two in the morning, he offered her his hand for a promenade. At the end of a few paces, however, the first thing he did was to disobey his mother’s injunctions.

“Do not tell any one, the queen least of all,” he said mysteriously, “what people say about the king.”

“What do they say about him?” inquired Madame.

“That my brother has suddenly fallen in love.”

“With whom?”

“With Mademoiselle de la Valliere.”

As it was dark, Madame could smile at her ease.

“Ah!” she said, “and how long is it since this has been the case?”

“For some days, it seems. But that was nothing but nonsense; it is only this evening that he has revealed his passion.”

“The king shows his good taste,” said Madame; “in my opinion she is a very charming girl.”

“I verily believe you are jesting.”

“I! in what way?”

“In any case this passion will make some one very happy, even if it be only La Valliere herself.”

“Really,” continued the princess, “you speak as if you had read into the inmost recesses of La Valliere’s heart. Who has told you that she agrees to return the king’s affection?”

“And who has told you that she will not return it?”

“She loves the Vicomte de Bragelonne.”

“You think so?”

“She is even affianced to him.”

“She was so.”

“What do you mean?”

“When they went to ask the king’s permission to arrange the marriage, he refused his permission.”

“Refused?”

“Yes, although the request was preferred by the Comte de la Fere himself, for whom the king has the greatest regard, on account of the part he took in your royal brother’s restoration, and in other events, also, which happened a long time ago.”

“Well! the poor lovers must wait until the king is pleased to change his opinion; they are young, and there is time enough.”

“But, dear me,” said Philip, laughing, “I perceive you do not know the best part of the affair.”

“No!”

“That by which the king was most deeply touched.”

“The king, do you say, has been deeply touched?”

"To the very quick of his heart."

"But how? — in what manner? — tell me directly."

"By an adventure, the romance of which cannot be equalled."

"You know how I love to hear of such adventures, and yet you keep me waiting," said the princess, impatiently.

"Well, then — " and Monsieur paused.

"I am listening."

"Under the royal oak — you know where the royal oak is?"

"What can that matter? Under the royal oak, you were saying?"

"Well! Mademoiselle de la Valliere, fancying herself to be alone with her two friends, revealed to them her affection for the king."

"Ah!" said Madame, beginning to be uneasy, "her affection for the king?"

"Yes."

"When was this?"

"About an hour ago."

Madame started, and then said, "And no one knew of this affection?"

"No one."

"Not even his majesty?"

"Not even his majesty. The artful little puss kept her secret strictly to herself, when suddenly it proved stronger than herself, and so escaped her."

"And from whom did you get this absurd tale?"

"Why, as everybody else did, from La Valliere herself, who confessed her love to Montalais and Tonnay-Charente, who were her companions."

Madame stopped suddenly, and by a hasty movement let go her husband's hand.

"Did you say it was an hour ago she made this confession?" Madame inquired.

"About that time."

"Is the king aware of it?"

"Why, that is the very thing which constitutes the perfect romance of the affair, for the king was behind the royal oak with Saint-Aignan, and heard the whole of the interesting conversation without losing a single word of it."

Madame felt struck to the heart, saying incautiously, "But I have seen the king since, and he never told me a word about it."

"Of course," said Monsieur; "he took care not to speak of it to you himself, since he recommended every one not to say a word about it."

"What do you mean?" said Madame, growing angry.

“I mean that they wished to keep you in ignorance of the affair altogether.”

“But why should they wish to conceal it from me?”

“From the fear that your friendship for the young queen might induce you to say something about it to her, nothing more.”

Madame hung down her head; her feelings were grievously wounded. She could not enjoy a moment’s repose until she had met the king. As a king is, most naturally, the very last person in his kingdom who knows what is said about him, in the same way that a lover is the only one who is kept in ignorance of what is said about his mistress, therefore, when the king perceived Madame, who was looking for him, he approached her in some perturbation, but still gracious and attentive in his manner. Madame waited for him to speak about La Valliere first; but as he did not speak of her, she said, “And the poor girl?”

“What poor girl?” said the king.

“La Valliere. Did you not tell me, sire, that she had fainted?”

“She is still very ill,” said the king, affecting the greatest indifference.

“But surely that will prejudicially affect the rumor you were going to spread, sire?”

“What rumor?”

“That your attention was taken up by her.”

“Oh!” said the king, carelessly, “I trust it will be reported all the same.”

Madame still waited; she wished to know if the king would speak to her of the adventure of the royal oak. But the king did not say a word about it. Madame, on her side, did not open her lips about it; so that the king took leave of her without having reposed the slightest confidence in her. Hardly had she watched the king move away, than she set out in search of Saint-Aignan. Saint-Aignan was never very difficult to find; he was like the smaller vessels that always follow in the wake of, and as tenders to, the larger ships. Saint-Aignan was the very man whom Madame needed in her then state of mind. And as for him, he only looked for worthier ears than others he had found to have an opportunity of recounting the event in all its details. And so he did not spare Madame a single word of the whole affair. When he had finished, Madame said to him, “Confess, now, that is his all a charming invention.”

“Invention, no; a true story, yes.”

“Confess, whether invention or true story, that it was told to you as you have told it to me, but that you were not there.”

“Upon my honor, Madame, I was there.”

“And you think that these confessions may have made an impression on the king?”

“Certainly, as those of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente did upon me,” replied Saint-Aignan; “do not forget, Madame, that Mademoiselle de la Valliere compared the king to the sun; that was flattering enough.”

“The king does not permit himself to be influenced by such flatteries.”

“Madame, the king is just as much Adonis as Apollo; and I saw plain enough just now when La Valliere fell into his arms.”

“La Valliere fell into the king’s arms!”

“Oh! it was the most graceful picture possible; just imagine, La Valliere had fallen back fainting, and — ”

“Well! what did you see? — tell me — speak!”

“I saw what ten other people saw at the same time as myself; I saw that when La Valliere fell into his arms, the king almost fainted himself.”

Madame smothered a subdued cry, the only indication of her smothered anger.

“Thank you,” she said, laughing in a convulsive manner, “you relate stories delightfully, M. de Saint-Aignan.” And she hurried away, alone, and almost suffocated by painful emotion, towards the chateau.

CHAPTER XLIV.

Courses de Nuit.

Monsieur quitted the princess in the best possible humor, and feeling greatly fatigued, retired to his apartments, leaving every one to finish the night as he chose. When in his room, Monsieur began to dress for the night with careful attention, which displayed itself from time to time in paroxysms of satisfaction. While his attendants were engaged in curling his hair, he sang the principal airs of the ballet which the violins had played, and to which the king had danced. He then summoned his tailors, inspected his costumes for the next day, and, in token of his extreme satisfaction, distributed various presents among them. As, however, the Chevalier de Lorraine, who had seen the prince return to the chateau, entered the room, Monsieur overwhelmed him with kindness. The former, after having saluted the prince, remained silent for a moment, like a sharpshooter who deliberates before deciding in what direction he will renew his fire; then, seeming to make up his mind, he said, “Have you remarked a very singular coincidence, monseigneur?”

“No; what is it?”

“The bad reception which his majesty, in appearance, gave the Comte de Guiche.”

“In appearance?”

“Yes, certainly; since, in reality, he has restored him to favor.”

“I did not notice it,” said the prince.

“What, did you not remark, that, instead of ordering him to go away again into exile, as was natural, he encouraged him in his opposition by permitting him to resume his place in the ballet?”

“And you think the king was wrong, chevalier?” said the prince.

“Are you not of my opinion, prince?”

“Not altogether so, my dear chevalier; and I think the king was quite right not to have made a disturbance against a poor fellow whose want of judgment is more to be complained of than his intention.”

"Really," said the chevalier, "as far as I am concerned, I confess that this magnanimity astonishes me to the highest degree."

"Why so?" inquired Philip.

"Because I should have thought the king had been more jealous," replied the chevalier, spitefully. During the last few minutes Monsieur had felt there was something of an irritating nature concealed under his favorite's remarks; this last word, however, ignited the powder.

"Jealous!" exclaimed the prince. "Jealous! what do you mean? Jealous of what, if you please — or jealous of whom?"

The chevalier perceived that he had allowed an excessively mischievous remark to escape him, as he was in the habit of doing. He endeavored, therefore, apparently to recall it while it was still possible to do so. "Jealous of his authority," he said, with an assumed frankness; "of what else would you have the king jealous?"

"Ah!" said the prince, "that's very proper."

"Did your royal highness," continued the chevalier, "solicit dear De Guiche's pardon?"

"No, indeed," said Monsieur. "De Guiche is an excellent fellow, and full of courage; but as I do not approve of his conduct with Madame, I wish him neither harm nor good."

The chevalier had assumed a bitterness with regard to De Guiche, as he had attempted to do with regard to the king; but he thought he perceived that the time for indulgence, and even for the utmost indifference, had arrived, and that, in order to throw some light on the question, it might be necessary for him to put the lamp, as the saying is, beneath the husband's very nose.

"Very well, very well," said the chevalier to himself, "I must wait for De Wardes; he will do more in one day than I in a month; for I verily believe he is even more envious than I. Then, again, it is not De Wardes I require so much as that some event or another should happen; and in the whole of this affair I see none. That De Guiche returned after he had been sent away is certainly serious enough, but all its seriousness disappears when I learn that De Guiche has returned at the very moment Madame troubles herself no longer about him. Madame, in fact, is occupied with the king, that is clear; but she will not be so much longer if, as it is asserted, the king has ceased to trouble his head about her. The moral of the whole matter is, to remain perfectly neutral, and await the arrival of some new caprice and let that decide the whole affair.” And the chevalier thereupon settled himself resignedly in the armchair in which Monsieur permitted him to seat himself in his presence, and, having no more spiteful or malicious remarks to make, the consequence was that De Lorraine’s wit seemed to have deserted him. Most fortunately Monsieur was in high good-humor, and he had enough for two, until the time arrived for dismissing his servants and gentlemen of the chamber, and he passed into his sleeping-apartment. As he withdrew, he desired the chevalier to present his compliments to Madame, and say that, as the night was cool, Monsieur, who was afraid of the toothache, would not venture out again into the park during the remainder of the evening. The chevalier entered the princess’s apartments at the very moment she came in herself. He acquitted himself faithfully of the commission intrusted to him, and, in the first place, remarked all the indifference and annoyance with which Madame received her husband’s communication — a circumstance which appeared to him fraught with something fresh. If Madame had been about to leave her apartments with that strangeness of manner, he would have followed her; but she was returning to them; there was nothing to be done, therefore he turned upon his heel like an unemployed heron, appearing to question earth, air, and water about it; shook his head, and walked away mechanically in the direction of the gardens. He had hardly gone a hundred paces when he met two young men, walking arm in arm, with their heads bent down, and idly kicking the small stones out of their path as they walked on, plunged in thought. It was De Guiche and De Bragelonne, the sight of whom, as it always did, produced upon the chevalier, instinctively, a feeling of repugnance. He did not, however, the less, on that account, salute them with a very low bow, which they returned with interest. Then, observing that the park was nearly deserted, that the illuminations began to burn out, and that the morning breeze was setting in, he turned to the left, and entered the chateau again, by one of the smaller courtyards. The others turned aside to the right, and continued on their way towards the large park. As the chevalier was ascending the side staircase, which led to the private entrance, he saw a woman, followed by another, make her appearance under the arcade which led from the small to the large courtyard. The two women walked so fast that the rustling of their dresses could be distinguished through the silence of the night. The style of their mantles, their graceful figures, a mysterious yet haughty carriage which distinguished them both, especially the one who walked first, struck the chevalier.

"I certainly know those two," he said to himself, pausing upon the top step of the small staircase. Then, as with the instinct of a bloodhound he was about to follow them, one of the servants who had been running after him arrested his attention.

"Monsieur," he said, "the courier has arrived."

"Very well," said the chevalier, "there is time enough; to-morrow will do."

"There are some urgent letters which you would be glad to see, perhaps."

"Where from?" inquired the chevalier.

"One from England, and the other from Calais; the latter arrived by express, and seems of great importance."

"From Calais! Who the deuce can have to write to me from Calais?"

"I think I recognize the handwriting of Monsieur le Comte de Wardes."

"Oh!" cried the chevalier, forgetting his intention of acting the spy, "in that case I will come up at once." This he did, while the two unknown beings disappeared at the end of the court opposite to the one by which they had just entered. We shall now follow them, and leave the chevalier undisturbed to his correspondence. When they had arrived at the grove of trees, the foremost of the two halted, somewhat out of breath, and, cautiously raising her hood, said, "Are we still far from the tree?"

"Yes, Madame, more than five hundred paces; but pray rest awhile, you will not be able to walk much longer at this rate."

"You are right," said the princes, for it was she; and she leaned against a tree. "And now," she resumed, after having recovered her breath, "tell me the whole truth, and conceal nothing from me."

"Oh, Madame," cried the young girl, "you are already angry with me."

"No, my dear Athenais, reassure yourself, I am in no way angry with you. After all, these things do not concern me personally. You are anxious about what you may have said under the oak; you are afraid of having offended the king, and I wish to tranquillize you by ascertaining myself if it were possible you could have been overheard."

"Oh, yes, Madame, the king was close to us."

"Still, you were not speaking so loud that some of your remarks may not have been lost."

"We thought we were quite alone, Madame."

"There were three of you, you say?"

"Yes; La Valliere, Montalais, and myself."

"And *you*, individually, spoke in a light manner of the king?"

"I am afraid so. Should such be the case, will your highness have the kindness to make my peace with his majesty?"

"If there should be any occasion for it, I promise you I will do so. However, as I have already told you, it will be better not to anticipate evil. The night is now very dark, and the darkness is still greater under the trees. It is not likely you were recognized by the king. To inform him of it, by being the first to speak, is to denounce yourself."

"Oh, Madame, Madame! if Mademoiselle de la Valliere were recognized, I must have been recognized also. Besides, M. de Saint-Aignan left no doubt on the subject."

"Did you, then, say anything very disrespectful of the king?"

"Not at all; it was one of the others who made some very flattering speeches about the king; and my remarks must have been much in contrast with hers."

"Montalais is such a giddy girl," said Madame.

"It was not Montalais. Montalais said nothing; it was La Valliere."

Madame started as if she had not known it perfectly well already. "No, no," she said, "the king cannot have heard. Besides, we will now try the experiment for which we came out. Show me the oak. Do you know where it is?" she continued.

"Alas! Madame, yes."

"And you can find it again?"

"With my eyes shut."

"Very well; sit down on the bank where you were, where La Valliere was, and speak in the same tone and to the same effect as you did before; I will conceal myself in the thicket, and if I can hear you, I will tell you so."

"Yes, Madame."

"If, therefore, you really spoke loud enough for the king to have heard you, in that case — "

Athenais seemed to await the conclusion of the sentence with some anxiety.

"In that case," said Madame, in a suffocated voice, arising doubtless from her hurried progress, "in that case, I forbid you — " And Madame again increased her pace. Suddenly, however, she stopped. “An idea occurs to me,” she said.

“A good idea, no doubt, Madame,” replied Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente.

“Montalais must be as much embarrassed as La Valliere and yourself.”

“Less so, for she is less compromised, having said less.”

“That does not matter; she will help you, I dare say, by deviating a little from the exact truth.”

“Especially if she knows that your highness is kind enough to interest yourself about me.”

“Very well, I think I have discovered what it is best for you all to pretend.”

“How delightful.”

“You had better say that all three of you were perfectly well aware that the king was behind the tree, or behind the thicket, whichever it might have been; and that you knew M. de Saint-Aignan was there too.”

“Yes, Madame.”

“For you cannot disguise it from yourself, Athenais, Saint-Aignan takes advantage of some very flattering remarks you made about him.”

“Well, Madame, you see very clearly that one can be overheard,” cried Athenais, “since M. de Saint-Aignan overheard us.”

Madame bit her lips, for she had thoughtlessly committed herself. “Oh, you know Saint-Aignan’s character very well,” she said, “the favor the king shows him almost turns his brain, and he talks at random; not only so, he very often invents. That is not the question; the fact remains, did or did not the king overhear?”

“Oh, yes, Madame, he certainly did,” said Athenais, in despair.

“In that case, do what I said: maintain boldly that all three of you knew — mind, all three of you, for if there is a doubt about any one of you, there will be a doubt about all, — persist, I say, that you knew that the king and M. de Saint-Aignan were there, and that you wished to amuse yourself at the expense of those who were listening.”

“Oh, Madame, at the *king’s* expense; we shall never dare say that!”

“It is a simple jest; an innocent deception readily permitted in young girls whom men wish to take by surprise. In this manner everything explains itself. What Montalais said of Malicorne, a mere jest; what you said of M.

de Saint-Aignan, a mere jest too; and what La Valliere might have said of — ”

“And which she would have given anything to recall.”

“Are you sure of that?”

“Perfectly.”

“Very well, an additional reason. Say the whole affair was a mere joke. M. de Malicorne will have no occasion to get out of temper; M. de Saint-Aignan will be completely put out of countenance; *he* will be laughed at instead of you; and lastly, the king will be punished for a curiosity unworthy of his rank. Let people laugh a little at the king in this affair, and I do not think he will complain of it.”

“Oh, Madame, you are indeed an angel of goodness and sense!”

“It is to my own advantage.”

“In what way?”

“How can you ask me why it is to my advantage to spare my maids of honor the remarks, annoyances, perhaps even calumnies, that might follow? Alas! you well know that the court has no indulgence for this sort of peccadillo. But we have now been walking for some time, shall we be long before we reach it?”

“About fifty or sixty paces further; turn to the left, Madame, if you please.”

“And you are sure of Montalais?” said Madame.

“Oh, certainly.”

“Will she do what you ask her?”

“Everything. She will be delighted.”

“And La Valliere — ” ventured the princess.

“Ah, there will be some difficulty with her, Madame; she would scorn to tell a falsehood.”

“Yet, when it is in her interest to do so — ”

“I am afraid that that would not make the slightest difference in her ideas.”

“Yes, yes,” said Madame. “I have been already told that; she is one of those overnice and affectedly particular people who place heaven in the foreground in order to conceal themselves behind it. But if she refuses to tell a falsehood, — as she will expose herself to the jests of the whole court, as she will have annoyed the king by a confession as ridiculous as it was immodest, — Mademoiselle la Baume le Blanc de la Valliere will think it but proper I should send her back again to her pigeons in the country, in order that, in Touraine yonder, or in Le Blaisois, — I know not where it may be, — she may at her ease study sentiment and pastoral life combined."

These words were uttered with a vehemence and harshness that terrified Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; and the consequence was, that, as far as she was concerned, she promised to tell as many falsehoods as might be necessary. It was in this frame of mind that Madame and her companion reached the precincts of the royal oak.

"Here we are," said Tonnay-Charente.

"We shall soon learn if one can overhear," replied Madame.

"Hush!" whispered the young girl, holding Madame back with a hurried gesture, entirely forgetful of her companion's rank. Madame stopped.

"You see that you can hear," said Athenais.

"How?"

"Listen."

Madame held her breath; and, in fact, the following words pronounced by a gentle and melancholy voice, floated towards them:

"I tell you, vicomte, I tell you I love her madly; I tell you I love her to distraction."

Madame started at the voice; and, beneath her hood, a bright joyous smile illumined her features. It was she who now held back her companion, and with a light step leading her some twenty paces away, that is to say, out of the reach of the voice, she said, "Remain here, my dear Athenais, and let no one surprise us. I think it must be you they are conversing about."

"Me, Madame?"

"Yes, you — or rather your adventure. I will go and listen; if we were both there, we should be discovered. Or, stay! — go and fetch Montalais, and then return and wait for me with her at the entrance of the forest." And then, as Athenais hesitated, she again said "Go!" in a voice which did not admit of reply. Athenais thereupon arranged her dress so as to prevent its rustling being heard; and, by a path beyond the group of trees, she regained the flower-garden. As for Madame, she concealed herself in the thicket, leaning her back against a gigantic chestnut-tree, one of the branches of which had been cut in such a manner as to form a seat, and waited there, full of anxiety and apprehension. "Now," she said, "since one can hear from this place, let us listen to what M. de Bragelonne and that other madly-in-love fool, the Comte de Guiche, have to say about me.”

CHAPTER XLV.

In Which Madame Acquires a Proof that Listeners Hear What Is Said.

There was a moment's silence, as if the mysterious sounds of night were hushed to listen, at the same time as Madame, to the youthful passionate disclosures of De Guiche.

Raoul was about to speak. He leaned indolently against the trunk of the large oak, and replied in his sweet and musical voice, "Alas, my dear De Guiche, it is a great misfortune."

"Yes," cried the latter, "great indeed."

"You do not understand me, De Guiche. I say that it is a great misfortune for you, not merely loving, but not knowing how to conceal your love."

"What do you mean?" said De Guiche.

"Yes, you do not perceive one thing; namely, that it is no longer to the only friend you have, — in other words, — to a man who would rather die than betray you; you do not perceive, I say, that it is no longer to your only friend that you confide your passion, but to the first person that approaches you."

"Are you mad, Bragelonne," exclaimed De Guiche, "to say such a thing to me?"

"The fact stands thus, however."

"Impossible! How, in what manner can I have ever been indiscreet to such an extent?"

"I mean, that your eyes, your looks, your sighs, proclaim, in spite of yourself, that exaggerated feeling which leads and hurries a man beyond his own control. In such a case he ceases to be master of himself; he is a prey to a mad passion, that makes him confide his grief to the trees, or to the air, from the very moment he has no longer any living being in reach of his voice. Besides, remember this: it very rarely happens that there is not always some one present to hear, especially the very things which ought *not* to be heard." De Guiche uttered a deep sigh. "Nay," continued Bragelonne, "you distress me; since your return here, you have a thousand times, and in a thousand different ways, confessed your love for her; and yet, had you not said one word, your return alone would have been a terrible indiscretion. I persist, then, in drawing this conclusion; that if you do not place a better watch over yourself than you have hitherto done, one day or other something will happen that will cause an explosion. Who will save you then? Answer me. Who will save her? for, innocent as she will be of your affection, your affection will be an accusation against her in the hands of her enemies."

"Alas!" murmured De Guiche; and a deep sigh accompanied the exclamation.

"That is not answering me, De Guiche."

"Yes, yes."

"Well, what reply have you to make?"

"This, that when the day arrives I shall be no more a living being than I feel myself now."

"I do not understand you."

"So many vicissitudes have worn me out. At present, I am no more a thinking, acting being; at present, the most worthless of men is better than I am; my remaining strength is exhausted, my latest-formed resolutions have vanished, and I abandon myself to my fate. When a man is out campaigning, as we have been together, and he sets off alone and unaccompanied for a skirmish, it sometimes happens that he may meet with a party of five or six foragers, and although alone, he defends himself; afterwards, five or six others arrive unexpectedly, his anger is aroused and he persists; but if six, eight, or ten others should still be met with, he either sets spurs to his horse, if he should still happen to retain one, or lets himself be slain to save an ignominious flight. Such, indeed, is my own case: first, I had to struggle against myself; afterwards, against Buckingham; now, since the king is in the field, I will not contend against the king, nor even, I wish you to understand, will the king retire; nor even against the nature of that woman. Still I do not deceive myself; having devoted myself to the service of such a love, I will lose my life in it."

"It is not the lady you ought to reproach," replied Raoul; "it is yourself."

"Why so?"

"You know the princess's character, — somewhat giddy, easily captivated by novelty, susceptible to flattery, whether it come from a blind person or a child, and yet you allow your passion for her to eat your very life away. Look at her, — love her, if you will, — for no one whose heart is not engaged elsewhere can see her without loving her. Yet, while you love her, respect, in the first place, her husband's rank, then herself, and lastly, your own safety."

"Thanks, Raoul."

"What for?"

"Because, seeing how much I suffer through this woman, you endeavor to console me, because you tell me all the good of her you think, and perhaps even that which you do not think."

"Oh," said Raoul, "there you are wrong, comte; what I think I do not always say, but in that case I say nothing; but when I speak, I know not how to feign or to deceive; and whoever listens to me may believe me."

During this conversation, Madame, her head stretched forward with eager ear and dilated glance, endeavoring to penetrate the obscurity, thirstily drank in the faintest sound of their voices.

"Oh, I know her better than you do, then!" exclaimed Guiche. "She is not merely giddy, but frivolous; she is not only attracted by novelty, she is utterly oblivious, and is without faith; she is not simply susceptible to flattery, she is a practiced and cruel coquette. A thorough coquette! yes, yes, I am sure of it. Believe me, Bragelonne, I am suffering all the torments of hell; brave, passionately fond of danger, I meet a danger greater than my strength and my courage. But, believe me, Raoul, I reserve for myself a victory which shall cost her floods of tears."

"A victory," he asked, "and of what kind?"

"Of what kind, you ask?"

"Yes."

"One day I will accost her, and will address her thus: 'I was young — madly in love, I possessed, however, sufficient respect to throw myself at your feet, and to prostrate myself in the dust, if your looks had not raised me to your hand. I fancied I understood your looks, I rose, and then, without having done anything more towards you than love you yet more devotedly, if that were possible — you, a woman without heart, faith, or love, in very wantonness, dashed me down again from sheer caprice. You are unworthy, princess of the royal blood though you may be, of the love of a man of honor; I offer my life as a sacrifice for having loved you too tenderly, and I die despairing you.'"

"Oh!" cried Raoul, terrified at the accents of profound truth which De Guiche's words betrayed, "I was right in saying you were mad, Guiche."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed De Guiche, following out his own idea; "since there are no wars here now, I will flee yonder to the north, seek service in the Empire, where some Hungarian, or Croat, or Turk, will perhaps kindly put me out of my misery." De Guiche did not finish, or rather as he finished, a sound made him start, and at the same moment caused Raoul to leap to his feet. As for De Guiche, buried in his own thoughts, he remained seated, with his head tightly pressed between his hands. The branches of the tree were pushed aside, and a woman, pale and much agitated, appeared before the two young men. With one hand she held back the branches, which would have struck her face, and, with the other, she raised the hood of the mantle which covered her shoulders. By her clear and lustrous glance, by her lofty carriage, by her haughty attitude, and, more than all that, by the throbbing of his own heart, De Guiche recognized Madame, and, uttering a loud cry, he removed his hands from his temple, and covered his eyes with them. Raoul, trembling and out of countenance, merely muttered a few words of respect.

"Monsieur de Bragelonne," said the princess, "have the goodness, I beg, to see if my attendants are not somewhere yonder, either in the walks or in the groves; and you, M. de Guiche, remain here: I am tired, and you will perhaps give me your arm."

Had a thunderbolt fallen at the feet of the unhappy young man, he would have been less terrified than by her cold and severe tone. However, as he himself had just said, he was brave; and as in the depths of his own heart he had just decisively made up his mind, De Guiche arose, and, observing Bragelonne's hesitation, he turned towards him a glance full of resignation and grateful acknowledgement. Instead of immediately answering Madame, he even advanced a step towards the vicomte, and holding out the arm which the princess had just desired him to give her, he pressed his friend's hand in his own, with a sigh, in which he seemed to give to friendship all the life that was left in the depths of his heart. Madame, who in her pride had never known what it was to wait, now waited until this mute colloquy was at an end. Her royal hand remained suspended in the air, and, when Raoul had left, it sank without anger, but not without emotion, in that of De Guiche. They were alone in the depths of the dark and silent forest, and nothing could be heard but Raoul's hastily retreating footsteps along the obscure paths. Over their heads was extended the thick and fragrant vault of branches, through the occasional openings of which the stars could be seen glittering in their beauty. Madame softly drew De Guiche about a hundred paces away from that indiscreet tree which had heard, and had allowed so many things to be heard, during the evening, and, leading him to a neighboring glade, so that they could see a certain distance around them, she said in a trembling voice, “I have brought you here, because yonder where you were, everything can be overheard.”

“Everything can be overheard, did you say, Madame?” replied the young man, mechanically.

“Yes.”

“Which means — ” murmured De Guiche.

“Which means that I have heard every syllable you have said.”

“Oh, Heaven! this only was wanting to destroy me,” stammered De Guiche; and he bent down his head, like an exhausted swimmer beneath the wave which engulfs him.

“And so,” she said, “you judge me as you have said?” De Guiche grew pale, turned his head aside, and was silent. He felt almost on the point of fainting.

“I do not complain,” continued the princess, in a tone of voice full of gentleness; “I prefer a frankness that wounds me, to flattery, which would deceive me. And so, according to your opinion, M. de Guiche, I am a coquette, an a worthless creature.”

“Worthless,” cried the young man; “you worthless! Oh, no; most certainly I did not say, I could not have said, that that which was the most precious object in life for me could be worthless. No, no; I did not say that.”

“A woman who sees a man perish, consumed by the fire she has kindled, and who does not allay that fire, is, in my opinion, a worthless woman.”

“What can it matter to you what I said?” returned the comte. “What am I compared to you, and why should you even trouble yourself to know whether I exist or not?”

“Monsieur de Guiche, both you and I are human beings, and, knowing you as I do, I do not wish you to risk your life; with you I will change my conduct and character. I will be, not frank, for I am always so, but truthful. I implore you, therefore, to love me no more, and to forget utterly that I have ever addressed a word or a glance towards you.”

De Guiche turned around, bending a look full of passionate devotion upon her. “You,” he said; “*you* excuse yourself; *you* implore me?”

“Certainly; since I have done evil, I ought to repair the evil I have done. And so, comte, this is what we will agree to. You will forgive my frivolity and my coquetry. Nay, do not interrupt me. I will forgive you for having said I was frivolous and a coquette, or something worse, perhaps; and you will renounce your idea of dying, and will preserve for your family, for the king, and for our sex, a cavalier whom every one esteems, and whom many hold dear.” Madame pronounced this last word in such an accent of frankness, and even of tenderness, that poor De Guiche’s heart felt almost bursting.

“Oh! Madame, Madame!” he stammered out.

“Nay, listen further,” she continued. “When you shall have renounced all thought of me forever, from necessity in the first place, and, next, because you will yield to my entreaty, then you will judge me more favorably, and I am convinced you will replace this love — forgive the frivolity of the expression — by a sincere friendship, which you will be ready to offer me, and which, I promise you, shall be cordially accepted.”

De Guiche, his forehead bedewed with perspiration, a feeling of death in his heart, and a trembling agitation through his whole frame, bit his lip, stamped his foot on the ground, and, in a word, devoured the bitterness of his grief. “Madame,” he said, “what you offer is impossible, and I cannot accept such conditions.”

“What!” said Madame, “do you refuse my friendship, then?”

“No, no! I do not need your friendship, Madame. I prefer to die from love, than to live for friendship.”

“Comte!”

“Oh! Madame,” cried De Guiche, “the present is a moment for me, in which no other consideration and no other respect exist, than the consideration and respect of a man of honor towards the woman he worships. Drive me away, curse me, denounce me, you will be perfectly right. I have uttered complaints against you, but their bitterness has been owing to my passion for you; I have said I wish to die, and die I will. If I lived, you would forget me; but dead, you would never forget me, I am sure.”

Henrietta, who was standing buried in thought, and nearly as agitated as De Guiche himself, turned aside her head as but a minute before he had turned aside his. Then, after a moment’s pause, she said, “And you love me, then, very much?”

“Madly; madly enough to die from it, whether you drive me from you, or whether you listen to me still.”

“It is a hopeless case,” she said, in a playful manner; “a case which must be treated with soothing application. Give me your hand. It is as cold as ice.” De Guiche knelt down, and pressed to his lips, not one, but both of Madame’s hands.

“Love me, then,” said the princess, “since it cannot be otherwise.” And almost imperceptibly she pressed his fingers, raising him thus, partly in the manner of a queen, and partly as a fond and affectionate woman would have done. De Guiche trembled from head to foot, and Madame, who felt how passion coursed through every fiber of his being, knew that he indeed loved truly. “Give me your arm, comte,” she said, “and let us return.”

“Ah! Madame,” said the comte, trembling and bewildered; “you have discovered a third way of killing me.”

“But, happily, it is the slowest way, is it not?” she replied, as she led him towards the grove of trees they had so lately quitted.

CHAPTER XLVI.

Aramis's Correspondence.

When De Guiche's affairs, which had been suddenly set to right without his having been able to guess the cause of their improvement, assumed the unexpected aspect we have seen, Raoul, in obedience to the request of the princess, had withdrawn in order not to interrupt an explanation, the results of which he was far from guessing; and he soon after joined the ladies of honor who were walking about in the flower-gardens. During this time, the Chevalier de Lorraine, who had returned to his own room, read De Wardes's latter with surprise, for it informed him by the hand of his valet, of the sword-thrust received at Calais, and of all the details of the adventure, and invited him to inform De Guiche and Monsieur, whatever there might be in the affair likely to be most disagreeable to both of them. De Wardes particularly endeavored to prove to the chevalier the violence of Madame's affection for Buckingham, and he finished his letter by declaring that he thought this feeling was returned. The chevalier shrugged his shoulders at the last paragraph, and, in fact, De Wardes was out of date, as we have seen. De Wardes was still only at Buckingham's affair. The chevalier threw the letter over his shoulder upon an adjoining table, and said in a disdainful tone, "It is really incredible; and yet poor De Wardes is not deficient in ability; but the truth is, it is not very apparent, so easy is it to grow rusty in the country. The deuce take the simpleton, who ought to have written to me about matters of importance, and yet he writes such silly stuff as that. If it had not been for that miserable letter, which has no meaning at all in it, I should have detected in the grove yonder a charming little intrigue, which would have compromised a woman, would have perhaps have been as good as a sword-thrust for a man, and have diverted Monsieur for many days to come."

He looked at his watch. "It is now too late," he said. "One o'clock in the morning; every one must have returned to the king's apartments, where the night is to be finished; well, the scent is lost, and unless some extraordinary chance — " And thus saying, as if to appeal to his good star, the chevalier, greatly out of temper, approached the window, which looked out upon a somewhat solitary part of the garden. Immediately, and as if some evil genius was at his orders, he perceived returning towards the chateau, accompanied by a man, a silk mantle of a dark color, and recognized the figure which had struck his attention half an hour previously.

"Admirable!" he thought, striking his hands together, "this is my providential mysterious affair." And he started out precipitately, along the staircase, hoping to reach the courtyard in time to recognize the woman in the mantle, and her companion. But as he arrived at the door of the little court, he nearly knocked against Madame, whose radiant face seemed full of charming revelations beneath the mantle which protected without concealing her. Unfortunately, Madame was alone. The chevalier knew that since he had seen her, not five minutes before, with a gentleman, the gentleman in question could not be far off. Consequently, he hardly took time to salute the princess as he drew up to allow her to pass; then when she had advanced a few steps, with the rapidity of a woman who fears recognition, and when the chevalier perceived that she was too much occupied with her own thoughts to trouble herself about him, he darted into the garden, looked hastily round on every side, and embraced within his glance as much of the horizon as he possibly could. He was just in time; the gentleman who had accompanied Madame was still in sight; only he was hurrying towards one of the wings of the chateau, behind which he was on the point of disappearing. There was not an instant to lose; the chevalier darted in pursuit of him, prepared to slacken his pace as he approached the unknown; but in spite of the diligence he used, the unknown had disappeared behind the flight of steps before he approached.

It was evident, however, that as the man pursued was walking quietly, in a pensive manner, with his head bent down, either beneath the weight of grief or happiness, when once the angle was passed, unless, indeed, he were to enter by some door or another, the chevalier could not fail to overtake him. And this, certainly, would have happened, if, at the very moment he turned the angle, the chevalier had not run against two persons, who were themselves wheeling in the opposite direction. The chevalier was ready to seek a quarrel with these two troublesome intruders, when, looking up, he recognized the superintendent. Fouquet was accompanied by a person whom the chevalier now saw for the first time. This stranger was the bishop of Vannes. Checked by the important character of the individual, and obliged out of politeness to make his own excuses when he expected to receive them, the chevalier stepped back a few paces; and as Monsieur Fouquet possessed, if not the friendship, at least the respect of every one; as the king himself, although he was rather his enemy than his friend, treated M. Fouquet as a man of great consideration, the chevalier did what the king himself would have done, namely, he bowed to M. Fouquet, who returned his salutation with kindly politeness, perceiving that the gentleman had run against him by mistake and without any intention of being rude. Then, almost immediately afterwards, having recognized the Chevalier de Lorraine, he made a few civil remarks, to which the chevalier was obliged to reply. Brief as the conversation was, De Lorraine saw, with the most unfeigned displeasure, the figure of his unknown becoming dimmer in the distance, and fast disappearing in the darkness. The chevalier resigned himself, and, once resigned, gave his entire attention to Fouquet: — ”You arrive late, monsieur,” he said. “Your absence has occasioned great surprise, and I heard Monsieur express himself as much astonished that, having been invited by the king, you had not come.”

“It was impossible for me to do so; but I came as soon as I was free.”

“Is Paris quiet?”

“Perfectly so. Paris has received the last tax very well.”

“Ah! I understand you wished to assure yourself of this good feeling before you came to participate in our *fetes*.”

“I have arrived, however, somewhat late to enjoy them. I will ask you, therefore, to inform me if the king is in the chateau or not, if I am likely to be able to see him this evening, or if I shall have to wait until to-morrow.”

“We have lost sight of his majesty during the last half-hour nearly,” said the chevalier.

“Perhaps he is in Madame’s apartments?” inquired Fouquet.

“Not in Madame’s apartments, I should think, for I just now met Madame as she was entering by the small staircase; and unless the gentleman whom you a moment ago encountered was the king himself — ” and the chevalier paused, hoping that, in this manner, he might learn who it was he had been hurrying after. But Fouquet, whether he had or had not recognized De Guiche, simply replied, “No, monsieur, it was not the king.”

The chevalier, disappointed in his expectation, saluted them; but as he did so, casting a parting glance around him, and perceiving M. Colbert in the center of a group, he said to the superintendent: “Stay, monsieur; there is some one under the trees yonder, who will be able to inform you better than myself.”

“Who?” asked Fouquet, whose near-sightedness prevented him from seeing through the darkness.

“M. Colbert,” returned the chevalier.

“Indeed! That person, then, who is speaking yonder to those men with torches in their hands, is M. Colbert?”

“M. Colbert himself. He is giving orders personally to the workmen who are arranging the lamps for the illuminations.”

“Thank you,” said Fouquet, with an inclination of the head, which indicated that he had obtained all the information he wished. The chevalier, on his side, having, on the contrary, learned nothing at all, withdrew with a profound salutation.

He had scarcely left when Fouquet, knitting his brows, fell into a deep reverie. Aramis looked at him for a moment with a mingled feeling of compassion and silence.

“What!” he said to him, “the fellow’s name alone seemed to affect you. Is it possible that, full of triumph and delight as you were just now, the sight merely of that man is capable of dispiriting you? Tell me, have you faith in your good star?”

“No,” replied Fouquet, dejectedly.

“Why not?”

“Because I am too full of happiness at this present moment,” he replied, in a trembling voice. “You, my dear D’Herblay, who are so learned, will remember the history of a certain tyrant of Samos. What can I throw into the sea to avert approaching evil? Yes! I repeat it once more, I am too full of happiness! so happy that I wish for nothing beyond what I have... I have risen so high... You know my motto: ‘*Quo non ascendam?*’ I have risen so high that nothing is left me but to descend from my elevation. I cannot believe in the progress of a success already more than human.”

Aramis smiled as he fixed his kind and penetrating glance upon him. “If I were aware of the cause of your happiness,” he said, “I should probably fear for your grace; but you regard me in the light of a true friend; I mean, you turn to me in misfortune, nothing more. Even that is an immense and precious boon, I know; but the truth is, I have a just right to beg you to confide in me, from time to time, any fortunate circumstances that befall you, in which I should rejoice, you know, more than if they had befallen myself.”

“My dear prelate,” said Fouquet, laughing, “my secrets are of too profane a character to confide them to a bishop, however great a worldling he may be.”

“Bah! in confession.”

“Oh! I should blush too much if you were my confessor.” And Fouquet began to sigh. Aramis again looked at him without further betrayal of his thoughts than a placid smile.

“Well,” he said, “discretion is a great virtue.”

“Silence,” said Fouquet; “yonder venomous reptile has recognized us, and is crawling this way.”

“Colbert?”

“Yes; leave me, D’Herblay; I do not wish that fellow to see you with me, or he will take an aversion to *you*.”

Aramis pressed his hand, saying, “What need have I of his friendship, while you are here?”

“Yes, but I may not always be here,” replied Fouquet, dejectedly.

“On that day, then, if that day should ever dawn,” said Aramis, tranquilly, “we will think over a means of dispensing with the friendship, or of braving the dislike of M. Colbert. But tell me, my dear Fouquet, instead of conversing with this reptile, as you did him the honor of styling him, a conversation the need for which I do not perceive, why do you not pay a visit, if not to the king, at least to Madame?”

“To Madame,” said the superintendent, his mind occupied by his *souvenirs*. “Yes, certainly, to Madame.”

“You remember,” continued Aramis, “that we have been told that Madame stands high in favor during the last two or three days. It enters into your policy, and forms part of our plans, that you should assiduously devote yourself to his majesty’s friends. It is a means of counteracting the growing influence of M. Colbert. Present yourself, therefore, as soon as possible to Madame, and, for our sakes, treat this ally with consideration.”

“But,” said Fouquet, “are you quite sure that it is upon her that the king has his eyes fixed at the present moment?”

“If the needle has turned, it must be since the morning. You know I have my police.”

“Very well! I will go there at once, and, at all events, I shall have a means of introduction in the shape of a magnificent pair of antique cameos set with diamonds.”

“I have seen them, and nothing could be more costly and regal.”

At this moment they were interrupted by a servant followed by a courier. “For you, monseigneur,” said the courier aloud, presenting a letter to Fouquet.

“For your grace,” said the lackey in a low tone, handing Aramis a letter. And as the lackey carried a torch in his hand, he placed himself between the superintendent and the bishop of Vannes, so that both of them could read at the same time. As Fouquet looked at the fine and delicate writing on the envelope, he started with delight. Those who love, or who are beloved, will understand his anxiety in the first place, and his happiness in the next. He hastily tore open the letter, which, however, contained only these words: “It is but an hour since I quitted you, it is an age since I told you how much I love you.” And that was all. Madame de Belliere had, in fact, left Fouquet about an hour previously, after having passed two days with him; and apprehensive lest his remembrance of her might be effaced for too long a period from the heart she regretted, she dispatched a courier to him as the bearer of this important communication. Fouquet kissed the letter, and rewarded the bearer with a handful of gold. As for Aramis, he, on his side, was engaged in reading, but with more coolness and reflection, the following letter:

“The king has this evening been struck with a strange fancy; a woman loves him. He learned it accidentally, as he was listening to the conversation of this young girl with her companions; and his majesty has entirely abandoned himself to his new caprice. The girl’s name is Mademoiselle de la Valliere, and she is sufficiently pretty to warrant this caprice becoming a strong attachment. Beware of Mademoiselle de la Valliere.”

There was not a word about Madame. Aramis slowly folded the letter and put it in his pocket. Fouquet was still delightedly inhaling the perfume of his epistle.

“Monseigneur,” said Aramis, touching Fouquet’s arm.

“Yes, what is it?” he asked.

“An idea has just occurred to me. Are you acquainted with a young girl of the name of La Valliere?

“Not at all.”

“Reflect a little.”

“Ah! yes, I believe so; one of Madame’s maids of honor.”

“That must be the one.”

“Well, what then?”

“Well, monseigneur, it is to that young girl that you must pay your visit this evening.”

“Bah! why so?”

“Nay, more than that, it is to her you must present your cameos.”

“Nonsense.”

“You know, monseigneur, that my advice is not to be regarded lightly.”

“But this is unforeseen — ”

“That is my affair. Pay your court in due form, and without loss of time, to Mademoiselle de la Valliere. I will be your guarantee with Madame de Belliere that your devotion is altogether politic.”

“What do you mean, my dear D’Herblay, and whose name have you just pronounced?”

“A name which ought to convince you that, as I am so well informed about yourself, I may possibly be just as well informed about others. Pay your court, therefore, to La Valliere.”

“I will pay my court to whomsoever you like,” replied Fouquet, his heart filled with happiness.

“Come, come, descend again to the earth, traveler in the seventh heaven,” said Aramis; “M. Colbert is approaching. He has been recruiting while we were reading; see, how he is surrounded, praised, congratulated; he is decidedly becoming powerful.” In fact, Colbert was advancing, escorted by all the courtiers who remained in the gardens, every one of whom complimented him upon the arrangements of the *fete*: all of which so puffed him up that he could hardly contain himself.

“If La Fontaine were here,” said Fouquet, smiling, “what an admirable opportunity for him to recite his fable of ‘The Frog that wanted to make itself as big as the Ox.’“

Colbert arrived in the center of the circle blazing with light; Fouquet awaited his approach, unmoved and with a slightly mocking smile. Colbert smiled too; he had been observing his enemy during the last quarter of an hour, and had been approaching him gradually. Colbert’s smile was a presage of hostility.

“Oh, oh!” said Aramis, in a low tone of voice to the superintendent; “the scoundrel is going to ask you again for more millions to pay for his fireworks and his colored lamps.” Colbert was the first to salute them, and with an air which he endeavored to render respectful. Fouquet hardly moved his head.

“Well, monseigneur, what do your eyes say? Have we shown our good taste?”

“Perfect taste,” replied Fouquet, without permitting the slightest tone of raillery to be remarked in his words.

“Oh!” said Colbert, maliciously, “you are treating us with indulgence. We are poor, we servants of the king, and Fontainebleau is no way to be compared as a residence with Vaux.”

“Quite true,” replied Fouquet coolly.

“But what can we do, monseigneur?” continued Colbert, “we have done our best on slender resources.”

Fouquet made a gesture of assent.

“But,” pursued Colbert, “it would be only a proper display of your magnificence, monseigneur, if you were to offer to his majesty a *fete* in your wonderful gardens — in those gardens which have cost you sixty millions of francs.”

“Seventy-two,” said Fouquet.

“An additional reason,” returned Colbert; “it would, indeed, be truly magnificent.”

“But do you suppose, monsieur, that his majesty would deign to accept my invitation?”

“I have no doubt whatever of it,” cried Colbert, hastily; “I will guarantee that he does.”

“You are exceedingly kind,” said Fouquet. “I may depend on it, then?”

“Yes, monseigneur; yes, certainly.”

“Then I will consider the matter,” yawned Fouquet.

“Accept, accept,” whispered Aramis, eagerly.

“You will consider?” repeated Colbert.

“Yes,” replied Fouquet; “in order to know what day I shall submit my invitation to the king.”

“This very evening, monseigneur, this very evening.”

“Agreed,” said the superintendent. “Gentlemen, I should wish to issue my invitations; but you know that wherever the king goes, the king is in his own palace; it is by his majesty, therefore, that you must be invited." A murmur of delight immediately arose. Fouquet bowed and left.

"Proud and dauntless man," thought Colbert, "you accept, and yet you know it will cost you ten millions."

"You have ruined me," whispered Fouquet, in a low tone, to Aramis.

"I have saved you," replied the latter, whilst Fouquet ascended the flight of steps and inquired whether the king was still visible.

CHAPTER XLVII.

The Orderly Clerk.

The king, anxious to be again quite alone, in order to reflect well upon what was passing in his heart, had withdrawn to his own apartments, where M. de Saint-Aignan had, after his conversation with Madame, gone to meet him. This conversation has already been related. The favorite, vain of his twofold importance, and feeling that he had become, during the last two hours, the confidant of the king, began to treat the affairs of the court in a somewhat indifferent manner: and, from the position in which he had placed himself, or rather, where chance had placed him, he saw nothing but love and garlands of flowers around him. The king's love for Madame, that of Madame for the king, that of Guiche for Madame, that of La Valliere for the king, that of Malicorne for Montalais, that of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente for himself, was not all this, truly, more than enough to turn the head of any courtier? Besides, Saint-Aignan was the model of courtiers, past, present, and to come; and, moreover, showed himself such an excellent narrator, and so discerningly appreciative that the king listened to him with an appearance of great interest, particularly when he described the excited manner with which Madame had sought for him to converse about the affair of Mademoiselle de la Valliere. While the king no longer experienced for Madame any remains of the passion he had once felt for her, there was, in this same eagerness of Madame to procure information about him, great gratification for his vanity, from which he could not free himself. He experienced this pleasure then, but nothing more, and his heart was not, for a single moment, alarmed at what Madame might, or might not, think of his adventure. When, however, Saint-Aignan had finished, the king, while preparing to retire to rest, asked, "Now, Saint-Aignan, you know what Mademoiselle de la Valliere is, do you not?"

"Not only what she is, but what she will be."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that she is everything that woman can wish to be — that is to say, beloved by your majesty; I mean, that she will be everything your majesty may wish her to be."

"That is not what I am asking. I do not wish to know what she is to-day, or what she will be to-morrow; as you have remarked, that is my affair. But tell me what others say of her."

"They say she is well conducted."

"Oh!" said the king, smiling, "that is mere report."

"But rare enough, at court, sire, to believe when it is spread."

"Perhaps you are right. Is she well born?"

"Excellently; the daughter of the Marquis de la Valliere, and step-daughter of that good M. de Saint-Remy."

"Ah, yes! my aunt's major-domo; I remember; and I remember now that I saw her as I passed through Blois. She was presented to the queens. I have even to reproach myself that I did not on that occasion pay her the attention she deserved."

"Oh, sire! I trust that your majesty will now repair time lost."

"And the report — you tell me — is, that Mademoiselle de la Valliere never had a lover."

"In any case, I do not think your majesty would be much alarmed at the rivalry."

"Yet, stay," said the king, in a very serious tone of voice.

"Your majesty?"

"I remember."

"Ah!"

"If she has no lover, she has, at least, a betrothed."

"A betrothed!"

"What! Count, do you not know that?"

"No."

"You, the man who knows all the news?"

"Your majesty will excuse me. You know this betrothed, then?"

"Assuredly! his father came to ask me to sign the marriage contract: it is — " The king was about to pronounce the Vicomte de Bragelonne's name, when he stopped, and knitted his brows.

"It is — " repeated Saint-Aignan, inquiringly.

"I don't remember now," replied Louis XIV., endeavoring to conceal an annoyance he had some trouble to disguise.

"Can I put your majesty in the way?" inquired the Comte de Saint-Aignan.

“No; for I no longer remember to whom I intended to refer; indeed, I only remember very indistinctly, that one of the maids of honor was to marry — the name, however, has escaped me.”

“Was it Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente he was going to marry?” inquired Saint-Aignan.

“Very likely,” said the king.

“In that case, the intended was M. de Montespan; but Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente did not speak of it, it seemed to me, in such a manner as would frighten suitors away.”

“At all events,” said the king, “I know nothing, or almost nothing, about Mademoiselle de la Valliere. Saint-Aignan, I rely upon you to procure me every information about her.”

“Yes, sire, and when shall I have the honor of seeing your majesty again, to give you the latest news?”

“Whenever you have procured it.”

“I shall obtain it speedily, then, if the information can be as quickly obtained as my wish to see your majesty again.”

“Well said, count! By the by, has Madame displayed any ill-feeling against this poor girl?”

“None, sire.”

“Madame did not get angry, then?”

“I do not know; I only know that she laughed continually.”

“That’s well; but I think I hear voices in the ante-rooms — no doubt a courier has just arrived. Inquire, Saint-Aignan.” The count ran to the door and exchanged a few words with the usher; he returned to the king, saying, “Sire, it is M. Fouquet who has this moment arrived, by your majesty’s orders, he says. He presented himself, but, because of the lateness of the hour, he does not press for an audience this evening, and is satisfied to have his presence here formally announced.”

“M. Fouquet! I wrote to him at three o’clock, inviting him to be at Fontainebleau the following day, and he arrives at Fontainebleau at two o’clock in the morning! This is, indeed, zeal!” exclaimed the king, delighted to see himself so promptly obeyed. “On the contrary, M. Fouquet shall have his audience. I summoned him, and will receive him. Let him be introduced. As for you, count, pursue your inquiries, and be here to-morrow.”

The king placed his finger on his lips; and Saint-Aignan, his heart brimful of happiness, hastily withdrew, telling the usher to introduce M. Fouquet, who, thereupon, entered the king's apartment. Louis rose to receive him.

"Good evening, M. Fouquet," he said, smiling graciously; "I congratulate you on your punctuality; and yet my message must have reached you late?"

"At nine in the evening, sire."

"You have been working very hard lately, M. Fouquet, for I have been informed that you have not left your rooms at Saint-Mande during the last three or four days."

"It is perfectly true, your majesty, that I have kept myself shut up for the past three days," replied Fouquet.

"Do you know, M. Fouquet, that I had a great many things to say to you?" continued the king, with a most gracious air.

"Your majesty overwhelms me, and since you are so graciously disposed towards me, will you permit me to remind you of the promise made to grant an audience?"

"Ah, yes! some church dignitary, who thinks he has to thank me for something, is it not?"

"Precisely so, sire. The hour is, perhaps, badly chosen; but the time of the companion whom I have brought with me is valuable, and as Fontainebleau is on the way to his diocese — "

"Who is it, then?"

"The bishop of Vannes, whose appointment your majesty, at my recommendation, deigned, three months since, to sign."

"That is very possible," said the king, who had signed without reading; "and he is here?"

"Yes, sire; Vannes is an important diocese; the flock belonging to this pastor needed his religious consolation; they are savages, whom it is necessary to polish, at the same time that he instructs them, and M. d'Herblay is unequalled in such kind of missions."

"M. d'Herblay!" said the king, musingly, as if his name, heard long since, was not, however, unknown to him.

"Oh!" said Fouquet, promptly, "your majesty is not acquainted with the obscure name of one of your most faithful and valuable servants?"

"No, I confess I am not. And so he wishes to set off again?"

"He has this very day received letters which will, perhaps, compel him to leave, so that, before setting off for that unknown region called Bretagne, he is desirous of paying his respects to your majesty.”

“Is he waiting?”

“He is here, sire.”

“Let him enter.”

Fouquet made a sign to the usher in attendance, who was waiting behind the tapestry. The door opened, and Aramis entered. The king allowed him to finish the compliments which he addressed to him, and fixed a long look upon a countenance which no one could forget, after having once beheld it.

“Vannes!” he said: “you are bishop of Vannes, I believe?”

“Yes, sire.”

“Vannes is in Bretagne, I think?” Aramis bowed.

“Near the coast?” Aramis again bowed.

“A few leagues from Bell-Isle, is it not?”

“Yes, sire,” replied Aramis; “six leagues, I believe.”

“Six leagues; a mere step, then,” said Louis XIV.

“Not for us poor Bretons, sire,” replied Aramis: “six leagues, on the contrary, is a great distance, if it be six leagues on land; and an immense distance, if it be leagues on the sea. Besides, I have the honor to mention to your majesty that there are six leagues of sea from the river to Belle-Isle.”

“It is said that M. Fouquet has a very beautiful house there?” inquired the king.

“Yes, it is said so,” replied Aramis, looking quietly at Fouquet.

“What do you mean by ‘it is said so?’“ exclaimed the king.

“He has, sire.”

“Really, M. Fouquet, I must confess that one circumstance surprises me.”

“What may that be, sire?”

“That you should have at the head of the diocese a man like M. d’Herblay, and yet should not have shown him Belle-Isle.”

“Oh, sire,” replied the bishop, without giving Fouquet time to answer, “we poor Breton prelates seldom leave our residences.”

“M. de Vannes,” said the king, “I will punish M. Fouquet for his indifference.”

“In what way, sire?”

“I will change your bishopric.”

Fouquet bit his lips, but Aramis only smiled.

“What income does Vannes bring you in?” continued the king.

“Sixty thousand livres, sire,” said Aramis.

“So trifling an amount as that; but you possess other property, Monsieur de Vannes?”

“I have nothing else, sire; only M. Fouquet pays me one thousand two hundred livres a year for his pew in the church.”

“Well, M. d’Herblay, I promise you something better than that.”

“Sire — ”

“I will not forget you.”

Aramis bowed, and the king also bowed to him in a respectful manner, as he was accustomed to do towards women and members of the Church. Aramis gathered that his audience was at an end; he took his leave of the king in the simple, unpretending language of a country pastor, and disappeared.

“He is, indeed, a remarkable face,” said the king, following him with his eyes as long as he could see him, and even to a certain degree when he was no longer to be seen.

“Sire,” replied Fouquet, “if that bishop had been educated early in life, no prelate in the kingdom would deserve the highest distinctions better than he.”

“His learning is not extensive, then?”

“He changed the sword for the crucifix, and that rather late in life. But it matters little, if your majesty will permit me to speak of M. de Vannes again on another occasion — ”

“I beg you to do so. But before speaking of him, let us speak of yourself, M. Fouquet.”

“Of me, sire?”

“Yes, I have to pay you a thousand compliments.”

“I cannot express to your majesty the delight with which you overwhelm me.”

“I understand you, M. Fouquet. I confess, however, to have had certain prejudices against you.”

“In that case, I was indeed unhappy, sire.”

“But they exist no longer. Did you not perceive — ”

“I did, indeed, sire; but I awaited with resignation the day when the truth would prevail; and it seems that that day has now arrived.”

“Ah! you knew, then, you were in disgrace with me?”

“Alas! sire, I perceived it.”

“And do you know the reason?”

“Perfectly well; your majesty thought that I had been wastefully lavish in expenditure.”

“Not so; far from that.”

“Or, rather an indifferent administrator. In a word, you thought that, as the people had no money, there would be none for your majesty either.”

“Yes, I thought so; but I was deceived.”

Fouquet bowed.

“And no disturbances, no complaints?”

“And money enough,” said Fouquet.

“The fact is that you have been profuse with it during the last month.”

“I have more, not only for all your majesty’s requirements, but for all your caprices.”

“I thank you, Monsieur Fouquet,” replied the king, seriously. “I will not put you to the proof. For the next two months I do not intend to ask you for anything.”

“I will avail myself of the interval to amass five or six millions, which will be serviceable as money in hand in case of war.”

“Five or six millions!”

“For the expenses of your majesty’s household only, be it understood.”

“You think war probable, M. Fouquet?”

“I think that if Heaven has bestowed on the eagle a beak and claws, it is to enable him to show his royal character.”

The king blushed with pleasure.

“We have spent a great deal of money these few days past, Monsieur Fouquet; will you not scold me for it?”

“Sire, your majesty has still twenty years of youth to enjoy, and a thousand million francs to lavish in those twenty years.”

“That is a great deal of money, M. Fouquet,” said the king.

“I will economize, sire. Besides, your majesty as two valuable servants in M. Colbert and myself. The one will encourage you to be prodigal with your treasures — and this shall be myself, if my services should continue to be agreeable to your majesty; and the other will economize money for you, and this will be M. Colbert’s province.”

“M. Colbert?” returned the king, astonished.

“Certainly, sire; M. Colbert is an excellent accountant.”

At this commendation, bestowed by the traduced on the traducer, the king felt himself penetrated with confidence and admiration. There was not, moreover, either in Fouquet's voice or look, anything which injuriously affected a single syllable of the remark he had made; he did not pass one eulogium, as it were, in order to acquire the right of making two reproaches. The king comprehended him, and yielding to so much generosity and address, he said, "You praise M. Colbert, then?"

"Yes, sire, I praise him; for, besides being a man of merit, I believe him to be devoted to your majesty's interests."

"Is that because he has often interfered with your own views?" said the king, smiling.

"Exactly, sire."

"Explain yourself."

"It is simple enough. I am the man who is needed to make the money come in; he is the man who is needed to prevent it leaving."

"Nay, nay, monsieur le surintendant, you will presently say something which will correct this good opinion."

"Do you mean as far as administrative abilities are concerned, sire?"

"Yes."

"Not in the slightest."

"Really?"

"Upon my honor, sire, I do not know throughout France a better clerk than M. Colbert."

This word "clerk" did not possess, in 1661, the somewhat subservient signification attached to it in the present day; but, as spoken by Fouquet, whom the king had addressed as the superintendent, it seemed to acquire an insignificant and petty character, that at this juncture served admirably to restore Fouquet to his place, and Colbert to his own.

"And yet," said Louis XIV., "it was Colbert, however, that, notwithstanding his economy, had the arrangement of my *fetes* here at Fontainebleau; and I assure you, Monsieur Fouquet, that in now way has he checked the expenditure of money." Fouquet bowed, but did not reply.

"Is it not your opinion too?" said the king.

"I think, sire," he replied, "that M. Colbert has done what he had to do in an exceedingly orderly manner, and that he deserves, in this respect, all the praise your majesty may bestow upon him."

The word "orderly" was a proper accompaniment for the word "clerk." The king possessed that extreme sensitiveness of organization, that delicacy of perception, which pierced through and detected the regular order of feelings and sensations, before the actual sensations themselves, and he therefore comprehended that the clerk had, in Fouquet's opinion, been too full of method and order in his arrangements; in other words, that the magnificent *fetes* of Fontainebleau might have been rendered more magnificent still. The king consequently felt that there was something in the amusements he had provided with which some person or another might be able to find fault; he experienced a little of the annoyance felt by a person coming from the provinces to Paris, dressed out in the very best clothes which his wardrobe can furnish, only to find that the fashionably dressed man there looks at him either too much or not enough. This part of the conversation, which Fouquet had carried on with so much moderation, yet with extreme tact, inspired the king with the highest esteem for the character of the man and the capacity of the minister. Fouquet took his leave at a quarter to three in the morning, and the king went to bed a little uneasy and confused at the indirect lesson he had received; and a good hour was employed by him in going over again in memory the embroideries, the tapestries, the bills of fare of the various banquets, the architecture of the triumphal arches, the arrangements for the illuminations and fireworks, all the offspring of the "Clerk Colbert's" invention. The result was, the king passed in review before him everything that had taken place during the last eight days, and decided that faults could be found in his *fetes*. But Fouquet, by his politeness, his thoughtful consideration, and his generosity, had injured Colbert more deeply than the latter, by his artifice, his ill-will, and his persevering hatred, had ever yet succeeded in hurting Fouquet.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Fontainebleau at Two o'Clock in the Morning.

As we have seen, Saint-Aignan had quitted the king's apartment at the very moment the superintendent entered it. Saint-Aignan was charged with a mission that required dispatch, and he was going to do his utmost to turn his time to the best advantage. He whom we have introduced as the king's friend was indeed an uncommon personage; he was one of those valuable courtiers whose vigilance and acuteness of perception threw all other favorites into the shade, and counterbalanced, by his close attention, the servility of Dangeau, who was not the favorite, but the toady of the king. M. de Saint-Aignan began to think what was to be done in the present position of affairs. He reflected that his first information ought to come from De Guiche. He therefore set out in search of him, but De Guiche, whom we saw disappear behind one of the wings, and who seemed to have returned to his own apartments, had not entered the chateau. Saint-Aignan therefore went in quest of him, and after having turned, and twisted, and searched in every direction, he perceived something like a human form leaning against a tree. This figure was as motionless as a statue, and seemed deeply engaged in looking at a window, although its curtains were closely drawn. As this window happened to be Madame's, Saint-Aignan concluded that the form in question must be that of De Guiche. He advanced cautiously, and found he was not mistaken. De Guiche had, after his conversation with Madame, carried away such a weight of happiness, that all of his strength of mind was hardly sufficient to enable him to support it. On his side, Saint-Aignan knew that De Guiche had had something to do with La Valliere's introduction to Madame's household, for a courtier knows everything and forgets nothing; but he had never learned under what title or conditions De Guiche had conferred his protection upon La Valliere. But, as in asking a great many questions it is singular if a man does not learn something, Saint-Aignan reckoned upon learning much or little, as the case might be, if he questioned De Guiche with that extreme tact, and, at the same time, with that persistence in attaining an object, of which he was capable. Saint-

Aignan's plan was as follows: If the information obtained was satisfactory, he would inform the king, with alacrity, that he had lighted upon a pearl, and claim the privilege of setting the pearl in question in the royal crown. If the information were unsatisfactory, — which, after all, might be possible, — he would examine how far the king cared about La Valliere, and make use of his information in such a manner as to get rid of the girl altogether, and thereby obtain all the merit of her banishment with all the ladies of the court who might have the least pretensions to the king's heart, beginning with Madame and finishing with the queen. In case the king should show himself obstinate in his fancy, then he would not produce the damaging information he had obtained, but would let La Valliere know that this damaging information was carefully preserved in a secret drawer of her confidant's memory. In this manner, he would be able to air his generosity before the poor girl's eyes, and so keep her in constant suspense between gratitude and apprehension, to such an extent as to make her a friend at court, interested, as an accomplice, in trying to make his fortune, while she was making her own. As far as concerned the day when the bombshell of the past should burst, if ever there were any occasion, Saint-Aignan promised himself that he would by that time have taken all possible precautions, and would pretend an entire ignorance of the matter to the king; while, with regard to La Valliere, he would still have an opportunity of being considered the personification of generosity. It was with such ideas as these, which the fire of covetousness had caused to dawn in half an hour, that Saint-Aignan, the son of earth, as La Fontaine would have said, determined to get De Guiche into conversation: in other words, to trouble him in his happiness — a happiness of which Saint-Aignan was quite ignorant. It was long past one o'clock in the morning when Saint-Aignan perceived De Guiche, standing, motionless, leaning against the trunk of a tree, with his eyes fastened upon the lighted window, — the sleepiest hour of night-time, which painters crown with myrtles and budding poppies, the hour when eyes are heavy, hearts throb, and heads feel dull and languid — an hour which casts upon the day which has passed away a look of regret, while addressing a loving greeting to the dawning light. For De Guiche it was the dawn of unutterable happiness; he would have bestowed a treasure upon a beggar, had one stood before him, to secure him uninterrupted indulgence in his dreams. It was precisely at this hour that Saint-Aignan, badly advised, — selfishness always counsels badly, — came and struck him on the shoulder, at the very moment he was murmuring a word, or rather a name.

"Ah!" he cried loudly, "I was looking for you."

"For me?" said De Guiche, starting.

"Yes; and I find you seemingly moon-struck. Is it likely, my dear comte, you have been attacked by a poetical malady, and are making verses?"

The young man forced a smile upon his lips, while a thousand conflicting sensations were muttering defiance of Saint-Aignan in the deep recesses of his heart. "Perhaps," he said. "But by what happy chance — "

"Ah! your remark shows that you did not hear what I said."

"How so?"

"Why, I began by telling you I was looking for you."

"You were looking for me?"

"Yes: and I find you now in the very act."

"Of doing what, I should like to know?"

"Of singing the praises of Phyllis."

"Well, I do not deny it," said De Guiche, laughing. "Yes, my dear comte, I was celebrating Phyllis's praises."

"And you have acquired the right to do so."

"I?"

"You; no doubt of it. You; the intrepid protector of every beautiful and clever woman."

"In the name of goodness, what story have you got hold of now?"

"Acknowledged truths, I am well aware. But stay a moment; I am in love."

"You?"

"Yes."

"So much the better, my dear comte; tell me all about it." And De Guiche, afraid that Saint-Aignan might perhaps presently observe the window, where the light was still burning, took the comte's arm and endeavored to lead him away.

"Oh!" said the latter, resisting, "do not take me towards those dark woods, it is too damp there. Let us stay in the moonlight." And while he yielded to the pressure of De Guiche's arm, he remained in the flower-garden adjoining the chateau.

"Well," said De Guiche, resigning himself, "lead me where you like, and ask me what you please."

“It is impossible to be more agreeable than you are.” And then, after a moment’s silence, Saint-Aignan continued, “I wish you to tell me something about a certain person in who you have interested yourself.”

“And with whom you are in love?”

“I will neither admit nor deny it. You understand that a man does not very readily place his heart where there is no hope of return, and that it is most essential he should take measures of security in advance.”

“You are right,” said De Guiche with a sigh; “a man’s heart is a very precious gift.”

“Mine particularly is very tender, and in that light I present it to you.”

“Oh! you are well known, comte. Well?”

“It is simply a question of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente.”

“Why, my dear Saint-Aignan, you are losing your senses, I should think.”

“Why so?”

“I have never shown or taken any interest in Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente.”

“Bah!”

“Never.”

“Did you not obtain admission for Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente into Madame’s household?”

“Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente — and you ought to know it better than any one else, my dear comte — is of a sufficiently good family to make her presence here desirable, and her admittance very easy.”

“You are jesting.”

“No; and upon my honor I do not know what you mean.”

“And you had nothing, then, to do with her admission?”

“No.”

“You do not know her?”

“I saw her for the first time the day she was presented to Madame. Therefore, as I have never taken any interest in her, as I do not know her, I am not able to give you the information you require.” And De Guiche made a movement as though he were about to leave his questioner.

“Nay, nay, one moment, my dear comte,” said Saint-Aignan; “you shall not escape me in this manner.”

“Why, really, it seems to me that it is now time to return to our apartments.”

“And yet you were not going in when I — did not meet, but found you.”

"Therefore, my dear comte," said De Guiche, "as long as you have anything to say to me, I place myself entirely at your service."

"And you are quite right in doing so. What matters half an hour more or less? Will you swear that you have no injurious communications to make to me about her, and that any injurious communications you might possibly have to make are not the cause of your silence?"

"Oh! I believe the poor child to be as pure as crystal."

"You overwhelm me with joy. And yet I do not wish to have towards you the appearance of a man so badly informed as I seem. It is quite certain that you supplied the princess's household with the ladies of honor. Nay, a song has even been written about it."

"Oh! songs are written about everything."

"Do you know it?"

"No: sing it to me and I shall make its acquaintance."

"I cannot tell you how it begins; I only remember how it ends."

"Very well, at all events, that is something."

"When Maids of Honor happen to run short, Lo! — Guiche will furnish the entire Court."

"The idea is weak, and the rhyme poor," said De Guiche.

"What can you expect, my dear fellow? it is not Racine's or Moliere's, but La Feuillade's; and a great lord cannot rhyme like a beggarly poet."

"It is very unfortunate, though, that you only remember the termination."

"Stay, stay, I have just recollected the beginning of the second couplet."

"Why, there's the birdcage, with a pretty pair, The charming Montalais, and..."

"And La Valliere," exclaimed Guiche, impatiently, and completely ignorant besides of Saint-Aignan's object.

"Yes, yes, you have it. You have hit upon the word, 'La Valliere.'"

"A grand discovery indeed."

"Montalais and La Valliere, these, then, are the two young girls in whom you interest yourself," said Saint-Aignan, laughing.

"And so Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente's name is not to be met with in the song?"

"No, indeed."

"And are you satisfied, then?"

"Perfectly; but I find Montalais there," said Saint-Aignan, still laughing.

"Oh! you will find her everywhere. She is a singularly active young lady."

"You know her?"

"Indirectly. She was the *protegee* of a man named Malicorne, who is a *protegee* of Manicamp's; Manicamp asked me to get the situation of maid of honor for Montalais in Madame's household, and a situation for Malicorne as an officer in Monsieur's household. Well, I asked for the appointments, for you know very well that I have a weakness for that droll fellow Manicamp."

"And you obtained what you sought?"

"For Montalais, yes; for Malicorne, yes and no; for as yet he is only on trial. Do you wish to know anything else?"

"The last word of the couplet still remains, La Valliere," said Saint-Aignan, resuming the smile that so tormented Guiche.

"Well," said the latter, "it is true that I obtained admission for her in Madame's household."

"Ah!" said Saint-Aignan.

"But," continued Guiche, assuming a great coldness of manner, "you will oblige me, comte, not to jest about that name. Mademoiselle la Baume le Blanc de la Valliere is a young lady perfectly well-conducted."

"Perfectly well-conducted do you say?"

"Yes."

"Then you have not heard the last rumor?" exclaimed Saint-Aignan.

"No, and you will do me a service, my dear comte, in keeping this report to yourself and to those who circulate it."

"Ah! bah! you take the matter up very seriously."

"Yes; Mademoiselle de Valliere is beloved by one of my best friends."

Saint-Aignan started. "Aha!" he said.

"Yes, comte," continued Guiche; "and consequently, you, the most distinguished man in France for polished courtesy of manner, will understand that I cannot allow my friend to be placed in a ridiculous position."

Saint-Aignan began to bite his nails, partially from vexation, and partially from disappointed curiosity. Guiche made him a very profound bow.

"You send me away," said Saint-Aignan, who was dying to know the name of the friend.

"I do not send you away, my dear fellow. I am going to finish my lines to Phyllis."

"And those lines — "

"Are a *quatrain*. You understand, I trust, that a *quatrain* is a serious affair?"

"Of course."

"And as, of these four lines, of which it is composed, I have yet three and a half to make, I need my undivided attention."

"I quite understand. Adieu! comte. By the by — "

"What?"

"Are you quick at making verses?"

"Wonderfully so."

"Will you have quite finished the three lines and a half to-morrow morning?"

"I *hope* so."

"Adieu, then, until to-morrow."

"Adieu, adieu!"

Saint-Aignan was obliged to accept the notice to quit; he accordingly did so, and disappeared behind the hedge. Their conversation had led Guiche and Saint-Aignan a good distance from the chateau.

Every mathematician, every poet, and every dreamer has his own subjects of interest. Saint-Aignan, on leaving Guiche, found himself at the extremity of the grove, — at the very spot where the outbuildings of the servants begin, and where, behind the thickets of acacias and chestnut-trees interlacing their branches, which were hidden by masses of clematis and young vines, the wall which separated the woods from the courtyard was erected. Saint-Aignan, alone, took the path which led towards these buildings; De Guiche going off in the opposite direction. The one proceeded to the flower-garden, while the other bent his steps towards the walls. Saint-Aignan walked on between rows of mountain-ash, lilac, and hawthorn, which formed an almost impenetrable roof above his head; his feet were buried in the soft gravel and thick moss. He was deliberating a means of taking his revenge, which seemed difficult for him to carry out, and was vexed with himself for not having learned more about La Valliere, notwithstanding the ingenious measures he had resorted to in order to acquire more information about her, when suddenly the murmur of a human voice attracted his attention. He heard whispers, the complaining tones of a woman’s voice mingled with entreaties, smothered laughter, sighs, and half-stilted exclamations of surprise; but above them all, the woman’s voice prevailed. Saint-Aignan stopped to look about him; he perceived from the greatest surprise that the voices proceeded, not from the ground, but from the branches of the trees. As he glided along under the covered walk, he raised his head, and observed at the top of the wall a woman perched upon a ladder, in eager conversation with a man seated on a branch of a chestnut-tree, whose head alone could be seen, the rest of his body being concealed in the thick covert of the chestnut.

CHAPTER XLIX.

The Labyrinth.

Saint-Aignan, who had only been seeking for information, had met with an adventure. This was indeed a piece of good luck. Curious to learn why, and particularly what about, this man and woman were conversing at such an hour, and in such a singular position, Saint-Aignan made himself as small as he possibly could, and approached almost under the rounds of the ladder. And taking measures to make himself as comfortable as possible, he leaned his back against a tree and listened, and heard the following conversation. The woman was the first to speak.

"Really, Monsieur Manicamp," she said, in a voice which, notwithstanding the reproaches she addressed to him, preserved a marked tone of coquetry, "really your indiscretion is of a very dangerous character. We cannot talk long in this manner without being observed."

"That is very probable," said the man, in the calmest and coolest of tones.

"In that case, then, what would people say? Oh! if any one were to see me, I declare I should die of very shame."

"Oh! that would be very silly; I do not believe you would."

"It might have been different if there had been anything between us; but to injure myself gratuitously is really very foolish of me; so, adieu, Monsieur Manicamp."

"So far so good; I know the man, and now let me see who the woman is," said Saint-Aignan, watching the rounds of the ladder, on which were standing two pretty little feet covered with blue satin shoes.

"Nay, nay, for pity's sake, my dear Montalais," cried Manicamp, "deuce take it, do not go away; I have a great many things to say to you, of the greatest importance, still."

"Montalais," said Saint-Aignan to himself, "one of the three. Each of the three gossips had her adventure, only I imagined the hero of this one's adventure was Malicorne and not Manicamp."

At her companion's appeal, Montalais stopped in the middle of her descent, and Saint-Aignan could observe the unfortunate Manicamp climb from one branch of the chestnut-tree to another, either to improve his situation or to overcome the fatigue consequent upon his inconvenient position.

"Now, listen to me," said he; "you quite understand, I hope, that my intentions are perfectly innocent?"

"Of course. But why did you write me a letter stimulating my gratitude towards you? Why did you ask me for an interview at such an hour and in such a place as this?"

"I stimulated your gratitude in reminding you that it was I who had been the means of your becoming attached to Madame's household; because most anxiously desirous of obtaining the interview you have been kind enough to grant me, I employed the means which appeared to me most certain to insure it. And my reason for soliciting it, at such an hour and in such a locality, was, that the hour seemed to me to be the most prudent, and the locality the least open to observation. Moreover, I had occasion to speak to you upon certain subjects which require both prudence and solitude."

"Monsieur Manicamp!"

"But everything I wish to say is perfectly honorable, I assure you."

"I think, Monsieur Manicamp, it will be more becoming in me to take my leave."

"No, no! — listen to me, or I will jump from my perch here to yours; and be careful how you set me at defiance, for a branch of this chestnut-tree causes me a good deal of annoyance, and may provoke me to extreme measures. Do not follow the example of this branch, then, but listen to me."

"I am listening, and I agree to do so; but be as brief as possible, for if you have a branch of the chestnut-tree which annoys you, I wish you to understand that one of the rounds of the ladder is hurting the soles of my feet, and my shoes are being cut through."

"Do me the kindness to give me your hand."

"Why?"

"Will you have the goodness to do so?"

"There is my hand, then; but what are you going to do?"

"To draw you towards me."

"What for? You surely do not wish me to join you in the tree?"

"No; but I wish you to sit down upon the wall; there, that will do; there is quite room enough, and I would give a great deal to be allowed to sit down beside you."

“No, no; you are very well where you are; we should be seen.”

“Do you really think so?” said Manicamp, in an insinuating voice.

“I am sure of it.”

“Very well, I remain in my tree, then, although I cannot be worse placed.”

“Monsieur Manicamp, we are wandering away from the subject.”

“You are right, we are so.”

“You wrote me a letter?”

“I did.”

“Why did you write?”

“Fancy, at two o’clock to-day, De Guiche left.”

“What then?”

“Seeing him set off, I followed him, as I usually do.”

“Of course, I see that, since you are here now.”

“Don’t be in a hurry. You are aware, I suppose, that De Guiche is up to his very neck in disgrace?”

“Alas! yes.”

“It was the very height of imprudence on his part, then, to come to Fontainebleau to seek those who had at Paris sent him away into exile, and particularly those from whom he had been separated.”

“Monsieur Manicamp, you reason like Pythagoras.”

“Moreover, De Guiche is as obstinate as a man in love can be, and he refused to listen to any of my remonstrances. I begged, I implored him, but he would not listen to anything. Oh, the deuce!”

“What’s the matter?”

“I beg your pardon, Mademoiselle Montalais, but this confounded branch, about which I have already had the honor of speaking to you, has just torn a certain portion of my dress.”

“It is quite dark,” replied Montalais, laughing; “so, pray continue, M. Manicamp.”

“De Guiche set off on horseback as hard as he could, I following him, at a slower pace. You quite understand that to throw one’s self into the water, for instance, with a friend, at the same headlong rate as he himself would do it, would be the act either of a fool or a madman. I therefore allowed De Guiche to get in advance, and I proceeded on my way with a commendable slowness of pace, feeling quite sure that my unfortunate friend would not be received, or, if he had been, that he would ride off again at the very first cross, disagreeable answer; and that I should see him returning much faster than he went, without having, myself, gone much farther than Ris or Melun — and that even was a good distance you will admit, for it is eleven leagues to get there and as many to return."

Montalais shrugged her shoulders.

"Laugh as much as you like; but if, instead of being comfortably seated on the top of the wall as you are, you were sitting on this branch as if you were on horseback, you would, like Augustus, aspire to descend."

"Be patient, my dear M. Manicamp; a few minutes will soon pass away; you were saying, I think, that you had gone beyond Ris and Melun."

"Yes, I went through Ris and Melun, and I continued to go on, more and more surprised that I did not see him returning; and here I am at Fontainebleau; I look for and inquire after De Guiche everywhere, but no one has seen him, no one in the town has spoken to him; he arrived riding at full gallop, he entered the chateau; and there he has disappeared. I have been here at Fontainebleau since eight o'clock this evening inquiring for De Guiche in every direction, but no De Guiche can be found. I am dying with uneasiness. You understand that I have not been running my head into the lion's den, in entering the chateau, as my imprudent friend has done; I came at once to the servants' offices, and I succeeded in getting a letter conveyed to you; and now, for Heaven's sake, my dear young lady, relieve me from my anxiety."

"There will be no difficulty in that, my dear M. Manicamp; your friend De Guiche has been admirably received."

"Bah!"

"The king made quite a fuss over him."

"The king, who exiled him!"

"Madame smiled upon him, and Monsieur appears to like him better than ever."

"Ah! ah!" said Manicamp, "that explains to me, then, why and how he has remained. And did he not say anything about me?"

"Not a word."

"That is very unkind. What is he doing now?"

"In all probability he is asleep, or, if not asleep, dreaming."

"And what have they been doing all the evening?"

"Dancing."

"The famous ballet? How did De Guiche look?"

"Superb!"

"Dear fellow! And now, pray forgive me, Mademoiselle Montalais; but all I now have to do is pass from where I now am to your apartment."

"What do you mean?"

"I cannot suppose that the door of the chateau will be opened for me at this hour; and as for spending the night upon this branch, I possibly might not object to do so, but I declare it is impossible for any other animal than a boa-constrictor to do it."

"But, M. Manicamp, I cannot introduce a man over the wall in that manner."

"Two, if you please," said a second voice, but in so timid a tone that it seemed as if its owner felt the utter impropriety of such a request.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Montalais, "who is that speaking to me?"

"Malicorne, Mademoiselle Montalais."

And as Malicorne spoke, he raised himself from the ground to the lowest branches, and thence to the height of the wall.

"Monsieur Malicorne! why, you are both mad!"

"How do you do, Mademoiselle Montalais?" inquired Malicorne.

"I needed but this!" said Montalais, in despair.

"Oh! Mademoiselle Montalais," murmured Malicorne; "do not be so severe, I beseech you."

"In fact," said Manicamp, "we are your friends, and you cannot possibly wish your friends to lose their lives; and to leave us to pass the night on these branches is in fact condemning us to death."

"Oh!" said Montalais, "Monsieur Malicorne is so robust that a night passed in the open air with the beautiful stars above him will not do him any harm, and it will be a just punishment for the trick he has played me."

"Be it so, then; let Malicorne arrange matters with you in the best way he can; I pass over," said Manicamp. And bending down the famous branch against which he had directed such bitter complaints, he succeeded, by the assistance of his hands and feet, in seating himself side by side with Montalais, who tried to push him back, while he endeavored to maintain his position, and, moreover, he succeeded. Having taken possession of the ladder, he stepped on it, and then gallantly offered his hand to his fair antagonist. While this was going on, Malicorne had installed himself in the chestnut-tree, in the very place Manicamp had just left, determining within himself to succeed him in the one he now occupied. Manicamp and

Montalais descended a few rounds of the ladder, Manicamp insisting, and Montalais laughing and objecting.

Suddenly Malicorne’s voice was heard in tones of entreaty:

“I entreat you, Mademoiselle Montalais, not to leave me here. My position is very insecure, and some accident will be certain to befall me, if I attempt unaided to reach the other side of the wall; it does not matter if Manicamp tears his clothes, for he can make use of M. de Guiche’s wardrobe; but I shall not be able to use even those belonging to M. Manicamp, for they will be torn.”

“My opinion,” said Manicamp, without taking any notice of Malicorne’s lamentations, “is that the best thing to be done is to go and look for De Guiche without delay, for, by and by, perhaps, I may not be able to get to his apartments.”

“That is my own opinion, too,” replied Montalais; “so, go at once, Monsieur Manicamp.”

“A thousand thanks. Adieu Mademoiselle Montalais,” said Manicamp, jumping to the ground; “your condescension cannot be repaid.”

“Farewell, M. Manicamp; I am now going to get rid of M. Malicorne.”

Malicorne sighed. Manicamp went away a few paces, but returning to the foot of the ladder, he said, “By the by, how do I get to M. de Guiche’s apartments?”

“Nothing easier. You go along by the hedge until you reach a place where the paths cross.”

“Yes.”

“You will see four paths.”

“Exactly.”

“One of which you will take.”

“Which of them?”

“That to the right.”

“That to the right?”

“No, to the left.”

“The deuce!”

“No, no, wait a minute — ”

“You do not seem to be quite sure. Think again, I beg.”

“You take the middle path.”

“But there are *four*.”

“So there are. All I know is, that one of the four paths leads straight to Madame’s apartments; and that one I am well acquainted with.”

“But M. de Guiche is not in Madame’s apartments, I suppose?”

“No, indeed.”

“Well, then the path which leads to Madame’s apartments is of no use to me, and I would willingly exchange it for the one that leads to where M. de Guiche is lodging.”

“Of course, and I know that as well; but as for indicating it from where we are, it is quite impossible.”

“Well, let us suppose that I have succeeded in finding that fortunate path.”

“In that case, you are almost there, for you have nothing else to do but cross the labyrinth.”

“*Nothing* more than that? The deuce! so there is a labyrinth as well.”

“Yes, and complicated enough too; even in daylight one may sometimes be deceived, — there are turnings and windings without end: in the first place, you must turn three times to the right, then twice to the left, then turn once — stay, is it once or twice, though? at all events, when you get clear of the labyrinth, you will see an avenue of sycamores, and this avenue leads straight to the pavilion in which M. de Guiche is lodging.”

“Nothing could be more clearly indicated,” said Manicamp; “and I have not the slightest doubt in the world that if I were to follow your directions, I should lose my way immediately. I have, therefore, a slight service to ask of you.”

“What may that be?”

“That you will offer me your arm and guide me yourself, like another — like another — I used to know mythology, but other important matters have made me forget it; pray come with me, then?”

“And am I to be abandoned, then?” cried Malicorne.

“It is quite impossible, monsieur,” said Montalais to Manicamp; “if I were to be seen with you at such an hour, what would be said of me?”

“Your own conscience would acquit you,” said Manicamp, sententiously.

“Impossible, monsieur, impossible.”

“In that case, let me assist Malicorne to get down; he is a very intelligent fellow, and possesses a very keen scent; he will guide me, and if we lose ourselves, both of us will be lost, and the one will save the other. If we are together, and should be met by any one, we shall look as if we had some matter of business in hand; whilst alone I should have the appearance either of a lover or a robber. Come, Malicorne, here is the ladder.”

Malicorne had already stretched out one of his legs towards the top of the wall, when Manicamp said, in a whisper, “Hush!”

“What’s the matter?” inquired Montalais.

“I hear footsteps.”

“Good heavens!”

In fact the fancied footsteps soon became a reality; the foliage was pushed aside, and Saint-Aignan appeared, with a smile on his lips, and his hand stretched out towards them, taking every one by surprise; that is to say, Malicorne upon the tree with his head stretched out, Montalais upon the round of the ladder and clinging to it tightly, and Manicamp on the ground with his foot advanced ready to set off. “Good-evening, Manicamp,” said the comte, “I am glad to see you, my dear fellow; we missed you this evening, and a good many inquiries have been made about you. Mademoiselle de Montalais, your most obedient servant.”

Montalais blushed. “Good heavens!” she exclaimed, hiding her face in both her hands.

“Pray reassure yourself; I know how perfectly innocent you are, and I shall give a good account of you. Manicamp, do you follow me: the hedge, the cross-paths, and labyrinth, I am well acquainted with them all; I will be your Ariadne. There now, your mythological name is found at last.”

“Perfectly true, comte.”

“And take M. Malicorne away with you at the same time,” said Montalais.

“No, indeed,” said Malicorne; “M. Manicamp has conversed with you as long as he liked, and now it is my turn, if you please; I have a multitude of things to tell you about our future prospects.”

“You hear,” said the comte, laughing; “stay with him, Mademoiselle Montalais. This is, indeed, a night for secrets.” And, taking Manicamp’s arm, the comte led him rapidly away in the direction of the road Montalais knew so well, and indicated so badly. Montalais followed them with her eyes as long as she could perceive them.

CHAPTER L.

How Malicorne Had Been Turned Out of the Hotel of the Beau Paon.

While Montalais was engaged in looking after the comte and Manicamp, Malicorne had taken advantage of the young girl's attention being drawn away to render his position somewhat more tolerable, and when she turned round, she immediately noticed the change which had taken place; for he had seated himself, like a monkey, upon the wall, the foliage of the wild vine and honeysuckle curled around his head like a faun, while the twisted ivy branches represented tolerably enough his cloven feet. Montalais required nothing to make her resemblance to a dryad as complete as possible. "Well," she said, ascending another round of the ladder, "are you resolved to render me unhappy? have you not persecuted me enough, tyrant that you are?"

"I a tyrant?" said Malicorne.

"Yes, you are always compromising me, Monsieur Malicorne; you are a perfect monster of wickedness."

"I?"

"What have you to do with Fontainebleau? Is not Orleans your place of residence?"

"Do you ask me what I have to do here? I wanted to see you."

"Ah, great need of that."

"Not as far as concerns yourself, perhaps, but as far as I am concerned, Mademoiselle Montalais, you know very well that I have left my home, and that, for the future, I have no other place of residence than that which you may happen to have. As you, therefore, are staying at Fontainebleau at the present moment, I have come to Fontainebleau."

Montalais shrugged her shoulders. "You wished to see me, did you not?" she said.

"Of course."

"Very well, you have seen me, — you are satisfied; so now go away."

"Oh, no," said Malicorne; "I came to talk with you as well as to see you."

"Very well, we will talk by and by, and in another place than this."

"By and by! Heaven only knows if I shall meet you by and by in another place. We shall never find a more favorable one than this."

"But I cannot this evening, nor at the present moment."

"Why not?"

"Because a thousand things have happened to-night."

"Well, then, my affair will make a thousand and one."

"No, no; Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente is waiting for me in our room to communicate something of the very greatest importance."

"How long has she been waiting?"

"For an hour at least."

"In that case," said Malicorne, tranquilly, "she can wait a few minutes longer."

"Monsieur Malicorne," said Montalais, "you are forgetting yourself."

"You should rather say that it is you who are forgetting me, and that I am getting impatient at the part you make me play here indeed! For the last week I have been prowling about among the company, and you have not once deigned to notice my presence."

"Have you been prowling about here for a week, M. Malicorne?"

"Like a wolf; sometimes I have been burnt by the fireworks, which have singed two of my wigs; at others, I have been completely drenched in the osiers by the evening damps, or the spray from the fountains, — half-famished, fatigued to death, with the view of a wall always before me, and the prospect of having to scale it perhaps. Upon my word, this is not the sort of life for any one to lead who is neither a squirrel, a salamander, nor an otter; and since you drive your inhumanity so far as to wish to make me renounce my condition as a man, I declare it openly. A man I am, indeed, and a man I will remain, unless by superior orders."

"Well, then, tell me, what do you wish, — what do you require, — what do you insist upon?" said Montalais, in a submissive tone.

"Do you mean to tell me that you did not know I was at Fontainebleau?"

"I?"

"Nay, be frank."

"I suspected so."

"Well, then, could you not have contrived during the last week to have seen me once a day, at least?"

"I have always been prevented, M. Malicorne."

"Fiddlesticks!"

"Ask my companion, if you do not believe me."

"I shall ask no one to explain matters, I know better than any one."

"Compose yourself, M. Malicorne: things will change."

"They must indeed."

"You know that, whether I see you or not, I am thinking of you," said Montalais, in a coaxing tone of voice.

"Oh, you are thinking of me, are you? well, and is there anything new?"

"What about?"

"About my post in Monsieur's household."

"Ah, my dear Malicorne, no one has ventured lately to approach his royal highness."

"Well, but now?"

"Now it is quite a different thing; since yesterday he has left off being jealous."

"Bah! how has his jealousy subsided?"

"It has been diverted into another channel."

"Tell me all about it."

"A report was spread that the king had fallen in love with some one else, and Monsieur was tranquillized immediately."

"And who spread the report?"

Montalais lowered her voice. "Between ourselves," she said, "I think that Madame and the king have come to a secret understanding about it."

"Ah!" said Malicorne; "that was the only way to manage it. But what about poor M. de Guiche?"

"Oh, as for him, he is completely turned off."

"Have they been writing to each other?"

"No, certainly not; I have not seen a pen in either of their hands for the last week."

"On what terms are you with Madame?"

"The very best."

"And with the king?"

"The king always smiles at me whenever I pass him."

"Good. Now tell me whom have the two lovers selected to serve as their screen?"

"La Valliere."

“Oh, oh, poor girl! We must prevent that!”

“Why?”

“Because, if M. Raoul Bragelonne were to suspect it, he would either kill her or kill himself.”

“Raoul, poor fellow! do you think so?”

“Women pretend to have a knowledge of the state of people’s affections,” said Malicorne, “and they do not even know how to read the thoughts of their own minds and hearts. Well, I can tell you that M. de Bragelonne loves La Valliere to such a degree that, if she deceived him, he would, I repeat, either kill himself or kill her.”

“But the king is there to defend her,” said Montalais.

“The king!” exclaimed Malicorne; “Raoul would kill the king as he would a common thief.”

“Good heavens!” said Montalais; “you are mad, M. Malicorne.”

“Not in the least. Everything I have told you is, on the contrary, perfectly serious; and, for my own part, I know one thing.”

“What is that?”

“That I shall quietly tell Raoul of the trick.”

“Hush!” said Montalais, mounting another round of the ladder, so as to approach Malicorne more closely, “do not open your lips to poor Raoul.”

“Why not?”

“Because, as yet you know nothing at all.”

“What is the matter, then?”

“Why, this evening — but no one is listening, I hope?”

“No.”

“This evening, then, beneath the royal oak, La Valliere said aloud, and innocently enough, ‘I cannot conceive that when one has once seen the king, one can ever love another man.’“

Malicorne almost jumped off the wall. “Unhappy girl! did she really say that?”

“Word for word.”

“And she thinks so?”

“La Valliere always thinks what she says.”

“That positively cries aloud for vengeance. Why, women are the veriest serpents,” said Malicorne.

“Compose yourself, my dear Malicorne, compose yourself.”

"No, no; let us take the evil in time, on the contrary. There is time enough yet to tell Raoul of it."

"Blunderer, on the contrary, it is too late," replied Montalais.

"How so?"

"La Valliere's remark, which was intended for the king, reached its destination."

"The king knows it, then? The king was told of it, I suppose?"

"The king heard it."

"*Ahime!* as the cardinal used to say."

"The king was hidden in the thicket close to the royal oak."

"It follows, then," said Malicorne, "that for the future, the plan which the king and Madame have arranged, will go as easily as if it were on wheels, and will pass over poor Bragelonne's body."

"Precisely so."

"Well," said Malicorne, after a moment's reflection, "do not let us interpose our poor selves between a large oak-tree and a great king, for we should certainly be ground to pieces."

"The very thing I was going to say to you."

"Let us think of ourselves, then."

"My own idea."

"Open your beautiful eyes, then."

"And you your large ears."

"Approach your little mouth for a kiss."

"Here," said Montalais, who paid the debt immediately in ringing coin.

"Now let us consider. First, we have M. de Guiche, who is in love with Madame; then La Valliere, who is in love with the king; next, the king, who is in love both with Madame and La Valliere; lastly Monsieur, who loves no one but himself. Among all these loves, a noodle would make his fortune: a greater reason, therefore, for sensible people like ourselves to do so."

"There you are with your dreams again."

"Nay, rather with realities. Let me still lead you, darling. I do not think you have been very badly off hitherto?"

"No."

"Well, the future is guaranteed by the past. Only, since all here think of themselves before anything else, let us do so too."

"Perfectly right."

"But of ourselves only."

“Be it so.”

“An offensive and defensive alliance.”

“I am ready to swear it.”

“Put out your hand, then, and say, ‘All for Malicorne.’“

“All for Malicorne.”

“And I, ‘All for Montalais,’“ replied Malicorne, stretching out his hand in his turn.

“And now, what is to be done?”

“Keep your eyes and ears constantly open; collect every means of attack which may be serviceable against others; never let anything lie about which can be used against ourselves.”

“Agreed.”

“Decided.”

“Sworn to. And now the agreement entered into, good-bye.”

“What do you mean by ‘good-bye?’“

“Of course you can now return to your inn.”

“To my inn?”

“Yes; are you not lodging at the sign of the Beau Paon?”

“Montalais, Montalais, you now betray that you were aware of my being at Fontainebleau.”

“Well; and what does that prove, except that I occupy myself about you more than you deserve?”

“Hum!”

“Go back, then, to the Beau Paon.”

“That is now quite out of the question.”

“Have you not a room there?”

“I had, but have it no longer.”

“Who has taken it from you, then?”

“I will tell you. Some little time ago I was returning there, after I had been running about after you; and having reached my hotel quite out of breath, I perceived a litter, upon which four peasants were carrying a sick monk.”

“A monk?”

“Yes, an old gray-bearded Franciscan. As I was looking at the monk, they entered the hotel; and as they were carrying him up the staircase, I followed, and as I reached the top of the staircase I observed that they took him into my room.”

“Into your room?”

“Yes, into my own apartment. Supposing it to be a mistake, I summoned the landlord, who said that the room which had been let to me for the past eight days was let to the Franciscan for the ninth.”

“Oh, oh!”

“That was exactly what I said; nay, I did even more, for I was inclined to get out of temper. I went up-stairs again. I spoke to the Franciscan himself, and wished to prove to him the impropriety of the step; when this monk, dying though he seemed to be, raised himself upon his arm, fixed a pair of blazing eyes upon me, and, in a voice which was admirably suited for commanding a charge of cavalry, said, ‘Turn this fellow out of doors;’ which was done, immediately by the landlord and the four porters, who made me descend the staircase somewhat faster than was agreeable. This is how it happens, dearest, that I have no lodging.”

“Who can this Franciscan be?” said Montalais. “Is he a general?”

“That is exactly the very title that one of the bearers of the litter gave him as he spoke to him in a low tone.”

“So that — ” said Montalais.

“So that I have no room, no hotel, no lodging; and I am as determined as my friend Manicamp was just now, not to pass the night in the open air.”

“What is to be done, then?” said Montalais.

“Nothing easier,” said a third voice; whereupon Montalais and Malicorne uttered a simultaneous cry, and Saint-Aignan appeared. “Dear Monsieur Malicorne,” said Saint-Aignan, “a very lucky accident has brought me back to extricate you from your embarrassment. Come, I can offer you a room in my own apartments, which, I can assure you, no Franciscan will deprive you of. As for you, my dear lady, rest easy. I already knew Mademoiselle de la Valliere’s secret, and that of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; your own you have just been kind enough to confide to me; for which I thank you. I can keep three quite as well as one.” Malicorne and Montalais looked at each other, like children detected in a theft; but as Malicorne saw a great advantage in the proposition which had been made to him, he gave Montalais a sign of assent, which she returned. Malicorne then descended the ladder, round by round, reflecting at every step on the means of obtaining piecemeal from M. de Saint-Aignan all he might possibly know about the famous secret. Montalais had already darted away like a deer, and neither cross-road nor labyrinth was able to lead her wrong. As for Saint-

Aignan, he carried off Malicorne with him to his apartments, showing him a thousand attentions, enchanted to have so close at hand the very two men who, even supposing De Guiche were to remain silent, could give him the best information about the maids of honor.

CHAPTER LI.

What Actually Occurred at the Inn Called the Beau Paon.

In the first place, let us supply our readers with a few details about the inn called Beau Paon. It owed its name to its sign, which represented a peacock spreading its tail. But, in imitation of certain painters who bestowed the face of a handsome young man on the serpent which tempted Eve, the limner of the sign had conferred upon the peacock the features of a woman. This famous inn, an architectural epigram against that half of the human race which renders existence delightful, was situated at Fontainebleau, in the first turning on the left-hand side, which divides the road from Paris, the large artery that constitutes in itself alone the entire town of Fontainebleau. The side street in question was then known as the Rue de Lyon, doubtless because, geographically, it led in the direction of the second capital of the kingdom. The street itself was composed of two houses occupied by persons of the class of tradespeople, the houses being separated by two large gardens bordered with hedges running round them. Apparently, however, there were three houses in the street. Let us explain, notwithstanding appearances, how there were in fact only two. The inn of the Beau Paon had its principal front towards the main street; but upon the Rue de Lyon there were two ranges of buildings divided by courtyards, which comprised sets of apartments for the reception of all classes of travelers, whether on foot or on horseback, or even with their own carriages; and in which could be supplied, not only board and lodging, but also accommodation for exercise, or opportunities of solitude for even the wealthiest courtiers, whenever, after having received some check at the court, they wished to shut themselves up to their own society, either to devour an affront, or to brood on revenge. From the windows of this part of the building travelers could perceive, in the first place, the street with the grass growing between the stones, which were being gradually loosened by it; next the beautiful hedges of elder and thorn, which embraced, as though within two green and flowery arms, the house of which we have spoken; and then, in the spaces between those houses, forming the groundwork of the picture, and appearing an almost impassable barrier, a line of thick trees, the advanced sentinels of the vast forest which extends in front of Fontainebleau. It was therefore easy, provided one secured an apartment at the angle of the building, to obtain, by the main street from Paris, a view of, as well as to hear, the passers-by and the *fetes*; and, by the Rue de Lyon, to look upon and to enjoy the calm of the country. And this without reckoning that, in cases of urgent necessity, at the very moment people might be knocking at the principal door in the Rue de Paris, one could make one's escape by the little door in the Rue de Lyon, and, creeping along the gardens of the private houses, attain the outskirts of the forest. Malicorne, who, it will be remembered, was the first to speak about this inn, by way of deploring his being turned out of it, being then absorbed in his own affairs, had not told Montalais all that could be said about this curious inn; and we will try to repair the omission. With the exception of the few words he had said about the Franciscan friar, Malicorne had not given any particulars about the travelers who were staying in the inn. The manner in which they had arrived, the manner in which they had lived, the difficulty which existed for every one but certain privileged travelers, of entering the hotel without a password, or living there without certain preparatory precautions, must have struck Malicorne; and, we will venture to say, really did so. But Malicorne, as we have already said, had personal matters of his own to occupy his attention which prevented him from paying much attention to others. In fact, all the apartments of the hotel were engaged and retained by certain strangers, who never stirred out, who were incommunicative in their address, with countenances full of thoughtful preoccupation, and not one of whom was known to Malicorne. Every one of these travelers had reached the hotel after his own arrival there; each man had entered after having given a kind of password, which had at first attracted Malicorne's attention; but having inquired, in an indiscreet manner, about it, he had been informed that the host had given as a reason for this extreme vigilance, that, as the town was so full of wealthy noblemen, it must also be as full of clever and zealous pickpockets. The reputation of an honest inn like that of the Beau Paon was concerned in not allowing its visitors to be robbed. It occasionally happened that Malicorne asked himself, as he thought matters carefully over in his mind, and reflected upon his own position in the inn, how it was that they had allowed him to become an inmate of the hotel, when he had observed, since his residence there, admission refused to so many. He asked himself, too, how it was that Manicamp, who, in his opinion, must be a man to be looked upon with veneration by everybody, having wished to bait his horse at the Beau Paon, on arriving there, both horse and rider had been incontinently turned away with a *nescio vos* of the most positive character. All this for Malicorne, whose mind being fully occupied by his own love affair and personal ambition, was a problem he had not applied himself to solve. Had he wished to do so, we should hardly venture, notwithstanding the intelligence we have accorded as his due, to say he would have succeeded. A few words will prove to the reader that no one but Oedipus in person could have solved the enigma in question. During the week, seven travelers had taken up their abode in the inn, all of them having arrived there the day after the fortunate day on which Malicorne had fixed his choice on the Beau Paon. These seven persons, accompanied by a suitable retinue, were the following: —

First of all, a brigadier in the German army, his secretary, physician, three servants, and seven horses. The brigadier's name was the Comte de Wostpur. — A Spanish cardinal, with two nephews, two secretaries, an officer of his household, and twelve horses. The cardinal's name was Monseigneur Herrebia. — A rich merchant of Bremen, with his man-servant and two horses. This merchant's name was Meinheer Bonstett. — A Venetian senator with his wife and daughter, both extremely beautiful. The senator's name was Signor Marini. — A Scottish laird, with seven highlanders of his clan, all on foot. The laird's name was MacCumnor. — An Austrian from Vienna without title or coat of arms, who had arrived in a carriage; a good deal of the priest, and something of the soldier. He was called the Councilor. — And, finally, a Flemish lady, with a man-servant, a lady's maid, and a female companion, a large retinue of servants, great display, and immense horses. She was called the Flemish lady.

All these travelers had arrived on the same day, and yet their arrival had occasioned no confusion in the inn, no stoppage in the street; their apartments had been fixed upon beforehand, by their couriers or secretaries, who had arrived the previous evening or that very morning. Malicorne, who had arrived the previous day, riding an ill-conditioned horse, with a slender valise, had announced himself at the hotel of the Beau Paon as the friend of a nobleman desirous of witnessing the *fetes*, and who would himself arrive almost immediately. The landlord, on hearing these words, had smiled as if he were perfectly well acquainted either with Malicorne or his friend the nobleman, and had said to him, “Since you are the first arrival, monsieur, choose what apartment you please.” And this was said with that obsequiousness of manners, so full of meaning with landlords, which means, “Make yourself perfectly easy, monsieur: we know with whom we have to do, and you will be treated accordingly.” These words, and their accompanying gesture, Malicorne had thought very friendly, but rather obscure. However, as he did not wish to be very extravagant in his expenses, and as he thought that if he were to ask for a small apartment he would doubtless have been refused, on account of his want of consequence, he hastened to close at once with the innkeeper’s remark, and deceive him with a cunning equal to his own. So, smiling as a man would do for whom whatever might be done was but simply his due, he said, “My dear host, I shall take the best and the gayest room in the house.”

“With a stable?”

“Yes, with a stable.”

“And when will you take it?”

“Immediately if it be possible.”

“Quite so.”

“But,” said Malicorne, “I shall leave the large room unoccupied for the present.”

“Very good!” said the landlord, with an air of intelligence.

“Certain reasons, which you will understand by and by, oblige me to take, at my own cost, this small room only.”

“Yes, yes,” said the host.

“When my friend arrives, he will occupy the large apartment: and as a matter of course, as this larger apartment will be his own affair, he will settle for it himself.”

“Certainly,” said the landlord, “certainly; let it be understood in that manner.”

“It is agreed, then, that such shall be the terms?”

“Word for word.”

“It is extraordinary,” said Malicorne to himself. “You quite understand, then?”

“Yes.”

“There is nothing more to be said. Since you understand, — for you do clearly understand, do you not?”

“Perfectly.”

“Very well; and now show me to my room.”

The landlord, cap in hand, preceded Malicorne, who installed himself in his room, and became more and more surprised to observe that the landlord, at every ascent or descent, looked and winked at him in a manner which indicated the best possible intelligence between them.

“There is some mistake here,” said Malicorne to himself; “but until it is cleared up, I shall take advantage of it, which is the best thing I can possibly do.” And he darted out of his room, like a hunting-dog following a scent, in search of all the news and curiosities of the court, getting himself burnt in one place and drowned in another, as he had told Mademoiselle de Montalais. The day after he had been installed in his room, he had noticed the seven travelers arrive successively, who speedily filled the whole hotel. When he saw this perfect multitude of people, of carriages, and retinue, Malicorne rubbed his hands delightedly, thinking that, one day later, he should not have found a bed to lie upon after his return from his exploring expeditions. When all the travelers were lodged, the landlord entered Malicorne’s room, and with his accustomed courteousness, said to him, “You are aware, my dear monsieur, that the large room in the third detached building is still reserved for you?”

“Of course I am aware of it.”

“I am really making you a present of it.”

“Thank you.”

“So that when your friend comes — ”

“Well!”

“He will be satisfied with me, I hope: or, if he be not, he will be very difficult to please.”

“Excuse me, but will you allow me to say a few words about my friend?”

“Of course, for you have a perfect right to do so.”

“He intended to come, as you know.”

“And he does so still.”

“He may possibly have changed his opinion.”

“No.”

“You are quite sure, then?”

“Quite sure.”

“But in case you should have some doubt.”

“Well!”

“I can only say that I do not positively assure you that he will come.”

“Yet he told you — ”

“He certainly did tell me; but you know that man proposes and God disposes, — *verba volant, scripta manent*.”

“Which is as much to say — ”

“That what is spoken flies away, and what is written remains; and, as he did not write to me, but contented himself by saying to me, ‘I will authorize you, yet without specifically instructing you,’ you must feel that it places me in a very embarrassing position.”

“What do you authorize me to do, then?”

“Why, to let your rooms if you find a good tenant for them.”

“I?”

“Yes, you.”

“Never will I do such a thing, monsieur. If he has not written to you, he has written to me.”

“Ah! what does he say? Let us see if his letter agrees with his words.”

“These are almost his very words. ‘To the landlord of the Beau Paon Hotel, — You will have been informed of the meeting arranged to take place in your inn between some people of importance; I shall be one of those who will meet with the others at Fontainebleau. Keep for me, then, a small room for a friend who will arrive either before or after me — ’ and you are the friend, I suppose,” said the landlord, interrupting his reading of the letter. Malicorne bowed modestly. The landlord continued:

“‘And a large apartment for myself. The large apartment is my own affair, but I wish the price of the smaller room to be moderate, as it is destined for a fellow who is deucedly poor.’ It is still you he is speaking of, is he not?” said the host.

“Oh, certainly,” said Malicorne.

“Then we are agreed; your friend will settle for his apartment, and you for your own.”

“May I be broken alive on the wheel,” said Malicorne to himself, “if I understand anything at all about it,” and then he said aloud, “Well, then, are you satisfied with the name?”

“With what name?”

“With the name at the end of the letter. Does it give you the guarantee you require?”

“I was going to ask you the name.”

“What! was the letter not signed?”

“No,” said the landlord, opening his eyes very wide, full of mystery and curiosity.

“In that case,” said Malicorne, imitating his gesture and his mysterious look, “if he has not given you his name, you understand, he must have his reasons for it.”

“Oh, of course.”

“And, therefore, I, his friend, his confidant, must not betray him.”

“You are perfectly right, monsieur,” said the landlord, “and I do not insist upon it.”

“I appreciate your delicacy. As for myself, as my friend told you, my room is a separate affair, so let us come to terms about it. Short accounts make long friends. How much is it?”

“There is no hurry.”

“Never mind, let us reckon it all up all the same. Room, my own board, a place in the stable for my horse, and his feed. How much per day?”

“Four livres, monsieur.”

“Which will make twelve livres for the three days I have been here?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Here are your twelve livres, then.”

“But why settle now?”

“Because,” said Malicorne, lowering his voice, and resorting to his former air of mystery, because he saw that the mysterious had succeeded, “because if I had to set off suddenly, to decamp at any moment, my account would be settled.”

“You are right, monsieur.”

“I may consider myself at home, then?”

“Perfectly.”

“So far so well. Adieu!” And the landlord withdrew. Malicorne, left alone, reasoned with himself in the following manner: “No one but De Guiche or Manicamp could have written to this fellow; De Guiche, because he wishes to secure a lodging for himself beyond the precincts of the court, in the event of his success or failure, as the case might be; Manicamp, because De Guiche must have intrusted him with his commission. And De Guiche or Manicamp will have argued in this manner. The large apartment would serve for the reception, in a befitting manner, of a lady thickly veiled, reserving to the lady in question a double means of exit, either in a street somewhat deserted, or closely adjoining the forest. The smaller room might either shelter Manicamp for a time, who is De Guiche's confidant, and would be the vigilant keeper of the door, or De Guiche himself, acting, for greater safety, the part of a master and confidant at the same time. Yet," he continued, "how about this meeting which is to take place, and which has actually taken place, in this hotel? No doubt they are persons who are going to be presented to the king. And the 'poor devil,' for whom the smaller room is destined, is a trick, in order to better conceal De Guiche or Manicamp. If this be the case, as very likely it is, there is only half the mischief done, for there is simply the length of a purse string between Manicamp and Malicorne." After he had thus reasoned the matter out, Malicorne slept soundly, leaving the seven travelers to occupy, and in every sense of the word to walk up and down, their several lodgings in the hotel. Whenever there was nothing at court to put him out, when he had wearied himself with his excursions and investigations, tired of writing letters which he could never find an opportunity of delivering to the people they were intended for, he returned home to his comfortable little room, and leaning upon the balcony, which was filled with nasturtiums and white pinks, for whom Fontainebleau seemed to possess no attractions with all its illuminations, amusements, and *fetes*.

Things went on in this manner until the seventh day, a day of which we have given such full details, with its night also, in the preceding chapters. On that night Malicorne was enjoying the fresh air, seated at his window, toward one o'clock in the morning, when Manicamp appeared on horseback, with a thoughtful and listless air.

"Good!" said Malicorne to himself, recognizing him at the first glance; "there's my friend, who is come to take possession of his apartment, that is to say, of my room." And he called to Manicamp, who looked up and immediately recognized Malicorne.

"Ah! by Jove!" said the former, his countenance clearing up, "glad to see you, Malicorne. I have been wandering about Fontainebleau, looking for three things I cannot find: De Guiche, a room, and a stable."

"Of M. de Guiche I cannot give you either good or bad news, for I have not seen him; but as far as concerns your room and a stable, that's another matter, for they have been retained here for you."

"Retained — and by whom?"

"By yourself, I presume."

"By *me?*"

“Do you mean to say you did not take lodgings here?”

“By no means,” said Manicamp.

At this moment the landlord appeared on the threshold of the door.

“I want a room,” said Manicamp.

“Did you engage one, monsieur?”

“No.”

“Then I have no rooms to let.”

“In that case, I have engaged a room,” said Manicamp.

“A room simply, or lodgings?”

“Anything you please.”

“By letter?” inquired the landlord.

Malicorne nodded affirmatively to Manicamp.

“Of course by letter,” said Manicamp. “Did you not receive a letter from me?”

“What was the date of the letter?” inquired the host, in whom Manicamp’s hesitation had aroused some suspicion.

Manicamp rubbed his ear, and looked up at Malicorne’s window; but Malicorne had left his window and was coming down the stairs to his friend’s assistance. At the very same moment, a traveler, wrapped in a large Spanish cloak, appeared at the porch, near enough to hear the conversation.

“I ask you what was the date of the letter you wrote to me to retain apartments here?” repeated the landlord, pressing the question.

“Last Wednesday was the date,” said the mysterious stranger, in a soft and polished tone of voice, touching the landlord on the shoulder.

Manicamp drew back, and it was now Malicorne’s turn, who appeared on the threshold, to scratch his ear. The landlord saluted the new arrival as a man who recognizes his true guest.

“Monsieur,” he said to him, with civility, “your apartment is ready for you, and the stables too, only — ” He looked round him and inquired, “Your horses?”

“My horses may or may not arrive. That, however, matters but little to you, provided you are paid for what has been engaged.” The landlord bowed lower still.

“You have,” continued the unknown traveler, “kept for me in addition, the small room I asked for?”

“Oh!” said Malicorne, endeavoring to hide himself.

"Your friend has occupied it during the last week," said the landlord, pointing to Malicorne, who was trying to make himself as small as possible. The traveler, drawing his cloak round him so as to cover the lower part of his face, cast a rapid glance at Malicorne, and said, "This gentleman is no friend of mine."

The landlord started violently.

"I am not acquainted with this gentleman," continued the traveler.

"What!" exclaimed the host, turning to Malicorne, "are you not this gentleman's friend, then?"

"What does it matter whether I am or not, provided you are paid?" said Malicorne, parodying the stranger's remark in a very majestic manner.

"It matters so far as this," said the landlord, who began to perceive that one person had been taken for another, "that I beg you, monsieur, to leave the rooms, which had been engaged beforehand, and by some one else instead of you."

"Still," said Malicorne, "this gentleman cannot require at the same time a room on the first floor and an apartment on the second. If this gentleman will take the room, I will take the apartment: if he prefers the apartment, I will be satisfied with the room."

"I am exceedingly distressed, monsieur," said the traveler in his soft voice, "but I need both the room and the apartment."

"At least, tell me for whom?" inquired Malicorne.

"The apartment I require for myself."

"Very well; but the room?"

"Look," said the traveler, pointing towards a sort of procession which was approaching.

Malicorne looked in the direction indicated, and observed borne upon a litter, the arrival of the Franciscan, whose installation in his apartment he had, with a few details of his own, related to Montalais, and whom he had so uselessly endeavored to convert to humbler views. The result of the arrival of the stranger, and of the sick Franciscan, was Malicorne's expulsion, without any consideration for his feelings, from the inn, by the landlord and the peasants who had carried the Franciscan. The details have already been given of what followed this expulsion; of Manicamp's conversation with Montalais; how Manicamp, with greater cleverness than Malicorne had shown, had succeeded in obtaining news of De Guiche, of the subsequent conversation of Montalais with Malicorne, and, finally, of the billets with which the Comte de Saint-Aignan had furnished Manicamp and Malicorne. It remains for us to inform our readers who was the traveler in the cloak — the principal tenant of the double apartment, of which Malicorne had only occupied a portion — and the Franciscan, quite as mysterious a personage, whose arrival, together with that of the stranger, unfortunately upset the two friends’ plans.

CHAPTER LII.

A Jesuit of the Eleventh Year.

In the first place, in order not to weary the reader’s patience, we will hasten to answer the first question. The traveler with the cloak held over his face was Aramis, who, after he had left Fouquet, and taken from a portmanteau, which his servant had opened, a cavalier’s complete costume, quitted the chateau, and went to the hotel of the Beau Paon, where, by letters, seven or eight days previously, he had, as the landlord had stated, directed a room and an apartment to be retained for him. Immediately after Malicorne and Manicamp had been turned out, Aramis approached the Franciscan, and asked him whether he would prefer the apartment or the room. The Franciscan inquired where they were both situated. He was told that the room was on the first, and the apartment on the second floor.

“The room, then,” he said.

Aramis did not contradict him, but, with great submissiveness, said to the landlord: “The room.” And bowing with respect he withdrew into the apartment, and the Franciscan was accordingly carried at once into the room. Now, is it not extraordinary that this respect should be shown by a prelate of the Church for a simple monk, for one, too, belonging to a mendicant order; to whom was given up, without a request for it even, a room which so many travelers were desirous of obtaining? How, too, can one explain the unexpected arrival of Aramis at the hotel — he who had entered the chateau with M. Fouquet, and could have remained at the chateau with M. Fouquet if he had liked? The Franciscan supported his removal up the staircase without uttering a complaint, although it was evident he suffered very much, and that every time the litter knocked against the wall or the railing of the staircase, he experienced a terrible shock throughout his frame. And finally, when he had arrived in the room, he said to those who carried him: “Help me to place myself in that armchair.” The bearers of the litter placed it on the ground, and lifting the sick man up as gently as possible, carried him to the chair he had indicated, which was situated at the head of the bed. “Now,” he added, with a marked benignity of gesture and tone, “desire the landlord to come.”

They obeyed, and five minutes afterwards the landlord appeared at the door.

“Be kind enough,” said the Franciscan to him, “to send these excellent fellows away; they are vassals of the Vicomte de Melun. They found me when I had fainted on the road overcome by the heat, and without thinking of whether they would be paid for their trouble, they wished to carry me to their own home. But I know at what cost to themselves is the hospitality which the poor extend to a sick monk, and I preferred this hotel, where, moreover, I was expected.”

The landlord looked at the Franciscan in amazement, but the latter, with his thumb, made the sign of the cross in a peculiar manner upon his breast. The host replied by making a similar sign on his left shoulder. “Yes, indeed,” he said, “we did expect you, but we hoped that you would arrive in a better state of health.” And as the peasants were looking at the innkeeper, usually so supercilious, and saw how respectful he had become in the presence of a poor monk, the Franciscan drew from a deep pocket three or four pieces of gold which he held out.

“My friends,” said he, “here is something to repay you for the care you have taken of me. So make yourselves perfectly easy, and do not be afraid of leaving me here. The order to which I belong, and for which I am traveling, does not require me to beg; only, as the attention you have shown me deserves to be rewarded, take these two louis and depart in peace.”

The peasants did not dare to take them; the landlord took the two louis out of the monk’s hand and placed them in that of one of the peasants, all four of whom withdrew, opening their eyes wider than ever. The door was then closed; and, while the innkeeper stood respectfully near it, the Franciscan collected himself for a moment. He then passed across his sallow face a hand which seemed dried up by fever, and rubbed his nervous and agitated fingers across his beard. His large eyes, hollowed by sickness and inquietude, seemed to peruse in the vague distance a mournful and fixed idea.

“What physicians have you at Fontainebleau?” he inquired, after a long pause.

“We have three, holy father.”

“What are their names?”

“Luiniguet first.”

“The next one?”

“A brother of the Carmelite order, named Brother Hubert.”

“The next?”

“A secular member, named Grisart.”

“Ah! Grisart?” murmured the monk, “send for M. Grisart immediately.”

The landlord moved in prompt obedience to the direction.

“Tell me what priests are there here?”

“What priests?”

“Yes; belonging to what orders?”

“There are Jesuits, Augustines, and Cordeliers; but the Jesuits are the closest at hand. Shall I send for a confessor belonging to the order of Jesuits?”

“Yes, immediately.”

It will be imagined that, at the sign of the cross which they had exchanged, the landlord and the invalid monk had recognized each other as two affiliated members of the well-known Society of Jesus. Left to himself, the Franciscan drew from his pocket a bundle of papers, some of which he read over with the most careful attention. The violence of his disorder, however, overcame his courage; his eyes rolled in their sockets, a cold sweat poured down his face, and he nearly fainted, and lay with his head thrown backwards and his arms hanging down on both sides of his chair. For more than five minutes he remained without any movement, when the landlord returned, bringing with him the physician, whom he hardly allowed time to dress himself. The noise they made in entering the room, the current of air, which the opening of the door occasioned, restored the Franciscan to his senses. He hurriedly seized hold of the papers which were lying about, and with his long and bony hand concealed them under the cushions of the chair. The landlord went out of the room, leaving patient and physician together.

“Come here, Monsieur Grisart,” said the Franciscan to the doctor; “approach closer, for there is no time to lose. Try, by touch and sound, and consider and pronounce your sentence.”

“The landlord,” replied the doctor, “told me I had the honor of attending an affiliated brother.”

“Yes,” replied the Franciscan, “it is so. Tell me the truth, then; I feel very ill, and I think I am about to die.”

The physician took the monk’s hand, and felt his pulse. “Oh, oh,” he said, “a dangerous fever.”

“What do you call a dangerous fever?” inquired the Franciscan, with an imperious look.

“To an affiliated member of the first or second year,” replied the physician, looking inquiringly at the monk, “I should say — a fever that may be cured.”

“But to me?” said the Franciscan. The physician hesitated.

“Look at my grey hair, and my forehead, full of anxious thought,” he continued: “look at the lines in my face, by which I reckon up the trials I have undergone; I am a Jesuit of the eleventh year, Monsieur Grisart.” The physician started, for, in fact, a Jesuit of the eleventh year was one of those men who had been initiated in all the secrets of the order, one of those for whom science has no more secrets, the society no further barriers to present — temporal obedience, no more trammels.

“In that case,” said Grisart, saluting him with respect, “I am in the presence of a master?”

“Yes; act, therefore, accordingly.”

“And you wish to know?”

“My real state.”

“Well,” said the physician, “it is a brain fever, which has reached its highest degree of intensity.”

“There is no hope, then?” inquired the Franciscan, in a quick tone of voice.

“I do not say that,” replied the doctor; “yet, considering the disordered state of the brain, the hurried respiration, the rapidity of the pulse, and the burning nature of the fever which is devouring you — ”

“And which has thrice prostrated me since this morning,” said the monk.

“All things considered, I shall call it a terrible attack. But why did you not stop on your road?”

“I was expected here, and I was obliged to come.”

“Even at the risk of your life?”

“Yes, at the risk of dying on the way.”

“Very well. Considering all the symptoms of your case, I must tell you that your condition is almost desperate.”

The Franciscan smiled in a strange manner.

“What you have just told me is, perhaps, sufficient for what is due to an affiliated member, even of the eleventh year; but for what is due to me, Monsieur Grisart, it is too little, and I have a right to demand more. Come, then, let us be more candid still, and as frank as if you were making your own confession to Heaven. Besides, I have already sent for a confessor.”

“Oh! I have hopes, however,” murmured the doctor.

“Answer me,” said the sick man, displaying with a dignified gesture a golden ring, the stone of which had until that moment been turned inside, and which bore engraved thereon the distinguishing mark of the Society of Jesus.

Grisart uttered loud exclamation. “The general!” he cried.

“Silence,” said the Franciscan., “you can now understand that the whole truth is all important.”

“Monseigneur, monseigneur,” murmured Grisart, “send for the confessor, for in two hours, at the next seizure, you will be attacked by delirium, and will pass away in its course.”

“Very well,” said the patient, for a moment contracting his eyebrows, “I have still two hours to live then?”

“Yes; particularly if you take the potion I will send you presently.”

“And that will give me two hours of life?”

“Two hours.”

“I would take it, were it poison, for those two hours are necessary not only for myself, but for the glory of the order.”

“What a loss, what a catastrophe for us all!” murmured the physician.

“It is the loss of one man — nothing more,” replied the Franciscan, “for Heaven will enable the poor monk, who is about to leave you, to find a worthy successor. Adieu, Monsieur Grisart; already even, through the goodness of Heaven, I have met with you. A physician who had not been one of our holy order, would have left me in ignorance of my condition; and, confident that existence would be prolonged a few days further, I should not have taken the necessary precautions. You are a learned man, Monsieur Grisart, and that confers an honor upon us all; it would have been repugnant to my feelings to have found one of our order of little standing in his profession. Adieu, Monsieur Grisart; send me the cordial immediately.”

“Give me your blessing, at least, monseigneur.”

“In my mind, I do; go, go; in my mind, I do so, I tell you — *animo*, Maitre Grisart, *viribus impossibile*.” And he again fell back on the armchair, in an almost senseless state. M. Grisart hesitated, whether he should give him immediate assistance, or should run to prepare the cordial he had promised. He decided in favor of the cordial, for he darted out of the room and disappeared down the staircase.

CHAPTER LIII.

The State Secret.

A few moments after the doctor’s departure, the confessor arrived. He had hardly crossed the threshold of the door when the Franciscan fixed a penetrating look upon him, and, shaking his head, murmured — ”A weak mind, I see; may Heaven forgive me if I die without the help of this living piece of human infirmity.” The confessor, on his side, regarded the dying man with astonishment, almost with terror. He had never beheld eyes so burningly bright at the very moment they were about to close, nor looks so terrible at the moment they were about to be quenched in death. The Franciscan made a rapid and imperious movement of his hand. “Sit down, there, my father,” he said, “and listen to me.” The Jesuit confessor, a good priest, a recently initiated member of the order, who had merely seen the beginning of its mysteries, yielded to the superiority assumed by the penitent.

“There are several persons staying in this hotel,” continued the Franciscan.

“But,” inquired the Jesuit, “I thought I had been summoned to listen to a confession. Is your remark, then, a confession?”

“Why do you ask?”

“In order to know whether I am to keep your words secret.”

“My remarks are part of my confession; I confide them to you in your character of a confessor.”

“Very well,” said the priest, seating himself on the chair which the Franciscan had, with great difficulty, just left, to lie down on the bed.

The Franciscan continued, — ”I repeat, there are several persons staying in this inn.”

“So I have heard.”

“They ought to be eight in number.”

The Jesuit made a sign that he understood him. “The first to whom I wish to speak,” said the dying man, “is a German from Vienna, whose name is Baron de Wostpur. Be kind enough to go to him, and tell him the person he expected has arrived.” The confessor, astounded, looked at his penitent; the confession seemed a singular one.

“Obey,” said the Franciscan, in a tone of command impossible to resist. The good Jesuit, completely subdued, rose and left the room. As soon as he had gone, the Franciscan again took up the papers which a crisis of the fever had already, once before, obliged him to put aside.

“The Baron de Wostpur? Good!” he said; “ambitious, a fool, and straitened in means.”

He folded up the papers, which he thrust under his pillow. Rapid footsteps were heard at the end of the corridor. The confessor returned, followed by the Baron de Wostpur, who walked along with his head raised, as if he were discussing with himself the possibility of touching the ceiling with the feather in his hat. Therefore, at the appearance of the Franciscan, at his melancholy look, and seeing the plainness of the room, he stopped, and inquired, — ”Who has summoned me?”

“I,” said the Franciscan, who turned towards the confessor, saying, “My good father, leave us for a moment together; when this gentleman leaves, you will return here.” The Jesuit left the room, and, doubtless, availed himself of this momentary exile from the presence of the dying man to ask the host for some explanation about this strange penitent, who treated his confessor no better than he would a man servant. The baron approached the bed, and wished to speak, but the hand of the Franciscan imposed silence upon him.

“Every moment is precious,” said the latter, hurriedly. “You have come here for the competition, have you not?”

“Yes, my father.”

“You hope to be elected general of the order?”

“I hope so.”

“You know on what conditions only you can possibly attain this high position, which makes one man the master of monarchs, the equal of popes?”

“Who are you,” inquired the baron, “to subject me to these interrogations?”

“I am he whom you expected.”

“The elector-general?”

“I am the elected.”

“You are — ”

The Franciscan did not give him time to reply; he extended his shrunken hand, on which glittered the ring of the general of the order. The baron drew back in surprise; and then, immediately afterwards, bowing with the profoundest respect, he exclaimed, — ”Is it possible that you are here, monseigneur; you, in this wretched room; you, upon this miserable bed; you, in search of and selecting the future general, that is, your own successor?”

“Do not distress yourself about that, monsieur, but fulfil immediately the principal condition, of furnishing the order with a secret of importance, of such importance that one of the greatest courts of Europe will, by your instrumentality, forever be subjected to the order. Well! do you possess the secret which you promised, in your request, addressed to the grand council?”

“Monseigneur — ”

“Let us proceed, however, in due order,” said the monk. “You are the Baron de Wostpur?”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“And this letter is from you?”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

The general of the Jesuits drew a paper from his bundle, and presented it to the baron, who glanced at it, and made a sign in the affirmative, saying, “Yes, monseigneur, this letter is mine.”

“Can you show me the reply which the secretary of the grand council returned to you?”

“Here it is,” said the baron, holding towards the Franciscan a letter bearing simply the address, “To his excellency the Baron de Wostpur,” and containing only this phrase, “From the 15th to the 22nd May, Fontainebleau, the hotel of the Beau Paon. — A. M. D. G.”

“Right,” said the Franciscan, “and now speak.”

“I have a body of troops, composed of 50,000 men; all the officers are gained over. I am encamped on the Danube. I four days I can overthrow the emperor, who is, as you are aware, opposed to the progress of our order, and can replace him by whichever of the princes of his family the order may determine upon.” The Franciscan listened, unmoved.

“Is that all?” he said.

“A revolution throughout Europe is included in my plan,” said the baron.

"Very well, Monsieur de Wostpur, you will receive a reply; return to your room, and leave Fontainebleau within a quarter of an hour." The baron withdrew backwards, as obsequiously as if he were taking leave of the emperor he was ready to betray.

"There is no secret there," murmured the Franciscan, "it is a plot. Besides," he added, after a moment's reflection, "the future of Europe is no longer in the hands of the House of Austria."

And with a pencil he held in his hand, he struck the Baron de Wostpur's name from the list.

"Now for the cardinal," he said; "we ought to get something more serious from the side of Spain."

Raising his head, he perceived the confessor, who was awaiting his orders as respectfully as a school-boy.

"Ah, ah!" he said, noticing his submissive air, "you have been talking with the landlord."

"Yes, monseigneur; and to the physician."

"To Grisart?"

"Yes."

"He is here, then?"

"He is waiting with the potion he promised."

"Very well; if I require him, I will call; you now understand the great importance of my confession, do you not?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Then go and fetch me the Spanish Cardinal Herrebia. Make haste. Only, as you now understand the matter in hand, you will remain near me, for I begin to feel faint."

"Shall I summon the physician?"

"Not yet, not yet... the Spanish cardinal, no one else. Fly."

Five minutes afterwards, the cardinal, pale and disturbed, entered the little room.

"I am informed, monseigneur, — " stammered the cardinal.

"To the point," said the Franciscan, in a faint voice, showing the cardinal a letter which he had written to the grand council. "Is that your handwriting?"

"Yes, but — "

"And your summons?"

The cardinal hesitated to answer. His purple revolted against the mean garb of the poor Franciscan, who stretched out his hand and displayed the ring, which produced its effect, greater in proportion to the greatness of the person over whom the Franciscan exercised his influence.

"Quick, the secret, the secret!" said the dying man, leaning upon his confessor.

"*Coram isto?*" inquired the Spanish cardinal.

"Speak in Spanish," said the Franciscan, showing the liveliest attention.

"You are aware, monseigneur," said the cardinal, continuing the conversation in Castilian, "that the condition of the marriage of the Infanta with the king of France was the absolute renunciation of the rights of the said Infanta, as well as of King Louis XIV., to all claim to the crown of Spain." The Franciscan made a sign in the affirmative.

"The consequence is," continued the cardinal, "that the peace and alliance between the two kingdoms depend upon the observance of that clause of the contract." A similar sign from the Franciscan. "Not only France and Spain," continued the cardinal, "but the whole of Europe even, would be violently rent asunder by the faithlessness of either party." Another movement of the dying man's head.

"It further results," continued the speaker, "that the man who might be able to foresee events, and to render certain that which is no more than a vague idea floating in the mind of man, that is to say, the idea of a future good or evil, would preserve the world from a great catastrophe; and the event, which has no fixed certainty even in the brain of him who originated it, could be turned to the advantage of our order."

"*Pronto, pronto!*" murmured the Franciscan, in Spanish, who suddenly became paler, and leaned upon the priest. The cardinal approached the ear of the dying man, and said, "Well, monseigneur, I know that the king of France has determined that, at the very first pretext, a death for instance, either that of the king of Spain, or that of a brother of the Infanta, France will, arms in hand, claim the inheritance, and I have in my possession, already prepared, the plan of policy agreed upon by Louis XIV. for this occasion."

"And this plan?" said the Franciscan.

"Here it is," returned the cardinal.

"In whose handwriting is it?"

"My own."

“Have you anything further to say to me?”

“I think I have said a good deal, my lord,” replied the cardinal.

“Yes, you have rendered the order a great service. But how did you procure the details, by the aid of which you have constructed your plan?”

“I have the under-servants of the king of France in my pay, and I obtain from them all the waste papers, which have been saved from being burnt.”

“Very ingenious,” murmured the Franciscan, endeavoring to smile; “you will leave this hotel, cardinal, in a quarter of an hour, and a reply shall be sent you.” The cardinal withdrew.

“Call Grisart, and desire the Venetian Marini to come,” said the sick man.

While the confessor obeyed, the Franciscan, instead of striking out the cardinal’s name, as he had done the baron’s, made a cross at the side of it. Then, exhausted by the effort, he fell back on his bed, murmuring the name of Dr. Grisart. When he returned to his senses, he had drunk about half of the potion, of which the remainder was left in the glass, and he found himself supported by the physician, while the Venetian and the confessor were standing close to the door. The Venetian submitted to the same formalities as his two predecessors, hesitated as they had done at the sight of the two strangers, but his confidence restored by the order of the general, he revealed that the pope, terrified at the power of the order, was weaving a plot for the general expulsion of the Jesuits, and was tampering with the different courts of Europe in order to obtain their assistance. He described the pontiff’s auxiliaries, his means of action, and indicated the particular locality in the Archipelago where, by a sudden surprise, two cardinals, adepts of the eleventh year, and, consequently, high in authority, were to be transported, together with thirty-two of the principal affiliated members of Rome. The Franciscan thanked the Signor Marini. It was by no means a slight service he had rendered the society by denouncing this pontifical project. The Venetian thereupon received directions to set off in a quarter of an hour, and left as radiant as if he already possessed the ring, the sign of the supreme authority of the society. As, however, he was departing, the Franciscan murmured to himself: “All these men are either spies, or a sort of police, not one of them a general; they have all discovered a plot, but not one of them a secret. It is not by means of ruin, or war, or force, that the Society of Jesus is to be governed, but by that mysterious influence moral superiority alone confers. No, the man is not yet found, and to complete the misfortune, Heaven strikes me down, and I am dying. Oh! must the society indeed fall with me for want of a column to support it? Must death, which is waiting for me, swallow up with me the future of the order; that future which ten years more of my own life would have rendered eternal? for that future, with the reign of the new king, is opening radiant and full of splendor.” These words, which had been half-reflected, half-pronounced aloud, were listened to by the Jesuit confessor with a terror similar to that with which one listens to the wanderings of a person attacked by fever, whilst Grisart, with a mind of higher order, devoured them as the revelations of an unknown world, in which his looks were plunged without ability to comprehend. Suddenly the Franciscan recovered himself.

“Let us finish this,” he said; “death is approaching. Oh! just now I was dying resignedly, for I hoped... while now I sink in despair, unless those who remain... Grisart, Grisart, give me to live a single hour longer.”

Grisart approached the dying monk, and made him swallow a few drops, not of the potion which was still left in the glass, but of the contents of a small bottle he had upon his person.

“Call the Scotchman!” exclaimed the Franciscan; “call the Bremen merchant. Call, call quickly. I am dying. I am suffocated.”

The confessor darted forward to seek assistance, as if there had been any human strength which could hold back the hand of death, which was weighing down the sick man; but, at the threshold of the door, he found Aramis, who, with his finger on his lips, like the statue of Harpocrates, the god of silence, by a look motioned him back to the end of the apartment. The physician and the confessor, after having consulted each other by looks, made a movement as if to push Aramis aside, who, however, with two signs of the cross, each made in a different manner, transfixed them both in their places.

“A chief!” they both murmured.

Aramis slowly advanced into the room where the dying man was struggling against the first attack of the agony which had seized him. As for the Franciscan, whether owing to the effect of the elixir, or whether the appearance of Aramis had restored his strength, he made a movement, and his eyes glaring, his mouth half open, and his hair damp with sweat, sat up upon the bed. Aramis felt that the air of the room was stifling; the windows were closed; the fire was burning upon the hearth; a pair of candles of yellow wax were guttering down in the copper candlesticks, and still further increased, by their thick smoke, the temperature of the room. Aramis opened the window, and fixing upon the dying man a look full of intelligence and respect, said to him: “Monseigneur, pray forgive my coming in this manner, before you summoned me, but your state alarms me, and I thought you might possibly die before you had seen me, for I am but the sixth upon your list.”

The dying man started and looked at the list.

“You are, therefore, he who was formerly called Aramis, and since, the Chevalier d’Herblay? You are the bishop of Vannes?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“I know you, I have seen you.”

“At the last jubilee, we were with the Holy Father together.”

“Yes, yes, I remember; and you place yourself on the list of candidates?”

“Monseigneur, I have heard it said that the order required to become possessed of a great state secret, and knowing that from modesty you had in anticipation resigned your functions in favor of the person who should be the depositary of such a secret, I wrote to say that I was ready to compete, possessing alone a secret I believe to be important.”

“Speak,” said the Franciscan; “I am ready to listen to you, and to judge the importance of the secret.”

“A secret of the value of that which I have the honor to confide to you cannot be communicated by word of mouth. Any idea which, when once expressed, has thereby lost its safeguard, and has become vulgarized by any manifestation or communication of it whatever, no longer is the property of him who gave it birth. My words may be overheard by some listener, or perhaps by an enemy; one ought not, therefore, to speak at random, for, in such a case, the secret would cease to be one.”

“How do you propose, then, to convey your secret?” inquired the dying monk.

With one hand Aramis signed to the physician and the confessor to withdraw, and with the other he handed to the Franciscan a paper enclosed in a double envelope.

“Is not writing more dangerous still than language?”

“No, my lord,” said Aramis, “for you will find within this envelope characters which you and I alone can understand.” The Franciscan looked at Aramis with an astonishment which momentarily increased.

“It is a cipher,” continued the latter, “which you used in 1655, and which your secretary, Juan Jujan, who is dead, could alone decipher, if he were restored to life.”

“You knew this cipher, then?”

“It was I who taught it him,” said Aramis, bowing with a gracefulness full of respect, and advancing towards the door as if to leave the room: but a gesture of the Franciscan accompanied by a cry for him to remain, restrained him.

“*Ecce homo!*” he exclaimed; then reading the paper a second time, he called out, “Approach, approach quickly!”

Aramis returned to the side of the Franciscan, with the same calm countenance and the same respectful manner, unchanged. The Franciscan, extending his arm, burnt by the flame of the candle the paper which Aramis had handed him. Then, taking hold of Aramis’s hand, he drew him towards him, and inquired: “In what manner and by whose means could you possibly become acquainted with such a secret?”

“Through Madame de Chevreuse, the intimate friend and *confidante* of the queen.”

“And Madame de Chevreuse — ”

“Is dead.”

“Did any others know it?”

“A man and a woman only, and they of the lower classes.”

“Who are they?”

“Persons who had brought him up.”

“What has become of them?”

“Dead also. This secret burns like vitriol.”

“But you survive?”

“No one is aware that I know it.”

“And for what length of time have you possessed this secret?”

“For the last fifteen years.”

“And you have kept it?”

“I wished to live.”

“And you give it to the order without ambition, without acknowledgement?”

“I give it to the order with ambition and with a hope of return,” said Aramis; “for if you live, my lord, you will make of me, now you know me, what I can and ought to be.”

“And as I am dying,” exclaimed the Franciscan, “I constitute you my successor... Thus.” And drawing off the ring, he passed it on Aramis’s finger. Then, turning towards the two spectators of this scene, he said: “Be ye witnesses of this, and testify, if need be, that, sick in body, but sound in mind, I have freely and voluntarily bestowed this ring, the token of supreme authority, upon Monseigneur d’Herblay, bishop of Vannes, whom I nominate my successor, and before whom I, an humble sinner, about to appear before Heaven, prostrate myself, as an example for all to follow.” And the Franciscan bowed lowly and submissively, whilst the physician and the Jesuit fell on their knees. Aramis, even while he became paler than the dying man himself, bent his looks successively upon all the actors of this scene. Profoundly gratified ambition flowed with life-blood towards his heart.

“We must lose no time,” said the Franciscan; “what I had still to do on earth was urgent. I shall never succeed in carrying it out.”

“I will do it,” said Aramis.

“It is well,” said the Franciscan, and then turning towards the Jesuit and the doctor, he added, “Leave us alone,” a direction they instantly obeyed.

“With this sign,” he said, “you are the man needed to shake the world from one end to the other; with this sign you will overthrow; with this sign you will edify; *in hoc signo vinces!*”

“Close the door,” continued the Franciscan after a pause. Aramis shut and bolted the door, and returned to the side of the Franciscan.

“The pope is conspiring against the order,” said the monk; “the pope must die.”

“He shall die,” said Aramis, quietly.

“Seven hundred thousand livres are owing to a Bremen merchant of the name of Bonstett, who came here to get the guarantee of my signature.”

“He shall be paid,” said Aramis.

“Six knights of Malta, whose names are written here, have discovered, by the indiscretion of one of the affiliated of the eleventh year, the three mysteries; it must be ascertained what else these men have done with the secret, to get it back again and bury it.”

“It shall be done.”

“Three dangerous affiliated members must be sent away into Tibet, there to perish; they stand condemned. Here are their names.”

“I will see that the sentence be carried out.”

“Lastly, there is a lady at Anvers, grand-niece of Ravaillac; she holds certain papers in her hands that compromise the order. There has been payable to the family during the last fifty-one years a pension of fifty thousand livres. The pension is a heavy one, and the order is not wealthy. Redeem the papers, for a sum of money paid down, or, in case of refusal, stop the pension — but run no risk."

"I will quickly decide what is best to be done," said Aramis.

"A vessel chartered from Lima entered the port of Lisbon last week; ostensibly it is laden with chocolate, in reality with gold. Every ingot is concealed by a coating of chocolate. The vessel belongs to the order; it is worth seventeen millions of livres; you will see that it is claimed; here are the bills of landing."

"To what port shall I direct it to be taken?"

"To Bayonne."

"Before three weeks are over it shall be there, wind and weather permitting. Is that all?" The Franciscan made a sign in the affirmative, for he could no longer speak; the blood rushed to his throat and his head, and gushed from his mouth, his nostrils, and his eyes. The dying man had barely time to press Aramis's hand, when he fell in convulsions from his bed upon the floor. Aramis placed his hand upon the Franciscan's heart, but it had ceased to beat. As he stooped down, Aramis observed that a fragment of the paper he had given the Franciscan had escaped being burnt. He picked it up, and burnt it to the last atom. Then, summoning the confessor and the physician, he said to the former: "Your penitent is in heaven; he needs nothing more than prayers and the burial bestowed upon the pious dead. Go and prepare what is necessary for a simple interment, such as a poor monk only would require. Go."

The Jesuit left the room. Then, turning towards the physician, and observing his pale and anxious face, he said, in a low tone of voice: "Monsieur Grisart, empty and clean this glass; *there is too much left in it of what the grand council desired you to put in*."

Grisart, amazed, overcome, completely astounded, almost fell backwards in his extreme terror. Aramis shrugged his shoulders in sign of pity, took the glass, and poured out the contents among the ashes of the hearth. He then left the room, carrying the papers of the dead man with him.

CHAPTER LIV.

A Mission.

The next day, or rather the same day (for the events we have just described were concluded only at three o’clock in the morning), before breakfast was served, and as the king was preparing to go to mass with the two queens; as Monsieur, with the Chevalier de Lorraine, and a few other intimate companions, was mounting his horse to set off for the river, to take one of those celebrated baths with which the ladies of the court were so infatuated, as, in fact, no one remained in the chateau, with the exception of Madame who, under the pretext of indisposition, would not leave her room; Montalais was seen, or rather not was not seen, to glide stealthily out of the room appropriated to the maids of honor, leading La Valliere after her, who tried to conceal herself as much as possible, and both of them, hurrying secretly through the gardens, succeeded, looking round them at every step they took, in reaching the thicket. The weather was cloudy, a warm breeze bowed the flowers and the shrubs, the burning dust, swept along in clouds by the wind, was whirled in eddies towards the trees. Montalais, who, during their progress, had discharged the functions of a clever scout, advanced a few steps further, and turning round again, to be quite sure that no one was either listening or approaching, said to her companion, “Thank goodness, we are quite alone! Since yesterday every one spies on us here, and a circle seems to be drawn round us, as if we were plague-stricken.” La Valliere bent down her head and sighed. “It is positively unheard of,” continued Montalais; “from M. Malicorne to M. de Saint-Aignan, every one wishes to get hold of our secret. Come, Louise, let us take counsel, you and I, together, in order that I may know what to do.”

La Valliere lifted towards her companion her beautiful eyes, pure and deep as the azure of a spring sky, “And I,” she said, “will ask you why we have been summoned to Madame’s own room? Why have we slept close to her apartment, instead of sleeping as usual in our own? Why did you return so late, and whence are these measures of strict supervision which have been adopted since this morning, with respect to us both?”

“My dear Louise, you answer my question by another, or rather, by ten others, which is not answering me at all. I will tell you all you want to know later, and as it is of secondary importance, you can wait. What I ask you — for everything will depend upon that — is, whether there is or is not any secret?”

“I do not know if there is any secret,” said La Valliere; “but I do know, for my part at least, that there has been great imprudence committed. Since the foolish remark I made, and my still more silly fainting yesterday, every one here is making remarks about us.”

“Speak for yourself,” said Montalais, laughing, “speak for yourself and for Tonnay-Charente; for both of you made your declarations of love to the skies, which unfortunately were intercepted.”

La Valliere hung down her head. “Really you overwhelm me,” she said.

“I?”

“Yes, you torture me with your jests.”

“Listen to me, Louise. These are no jests, for nothing is more serious; on the contrary, I did not drag you out of the chateau; I did not miss attending mass; I did not pretend to have a cold, as Madame did, which she has no more than I have; and, lastly, I did not display ten times more diplomacy than M. Colbert inherited from M. de Mazarin, and makes use of with respect to M. Fouquet, in order to find means of confiding my perplexities to you, for the sole end and purpose that, when at last we were alone, with no one to listen to us, you should deal hypocritically with me. No, no; believe me, that when I ask you a question, it is not from curiosity alone, but really because the position is a critical one. What you said yesterday is now known, — it is a text on which every one is discoursing. Every one embellishes it to the utmost, and according to his own fancy; you had the honor last night, and you have it still to-day, of occupying the whole court, my dear Louise; and the number of tender and witty remarks which have been ascribed to you, would make Mademoiselle de Scudery and her brother burst from very spite, if they were faithfully reported.”

“But, dearest Montalais,” said the poor girl, “you know better than any one exactly what I said, since you were present when I said it.”

“Yes, I know. But that is not the question. I have not forgotten a single syllable you uttered, but did you think what you were saying?”

Louise became confused. “What,” she exclaimed, “more questions still! Oh, heavens! when I would give the world to forget what I did say, how does it happen that every one does all he possibly can to remind me of it? Oh, this is indeed terrible!"

"What is?"

"To have a friend who ought to spare me, who might advise me and help me to save myself, and yet who is undoing me — is killing me."

"There, there, that will do," said Montalais; "after having said too little, you now say too much. No one thinks of killing you, nor even of robbing you, even of your secret; I wish to have it voluntarily, and in no other way; for the question does not concern your own affairs only, but ours also; and Tonnay-Charente would tell you as I do, if she were here. For, the fact is, that last evening she wished to have some private conversation in our room, and I was going there after the Manicamp and Malicorne colloquies terminated, when I learned, on my return, rather late, it is true, that Madame had sequestered her maids of honor, and that we were to sleep in her apartments, instead of our own. Moreover, Madame has shut up her maids of honor in order that they should not have the time to concert any measures together, and this morning she was closeted with Tonnay-Charente with the same object. Tell me, then, to what extent Athenais and I can rely upon you, as we will tell you in what way you can rely upon us?"

"I do not clearly understand the question you have put," said Louise, much agitated.

"Hum! and yet, on the contrary, you seem to understand me very well. However, I will put my questions in a more precise manner, in order that you may not be able, in the slightest degree, to evade them. Listen to me: *Do you love M. de Bragelonne?* That is plain enough, is it not?"

At this question, which fell like the first bombshell of a besieging army into a doomed town, Louise started. "You ask me," she exclaimed, "if I love Raoul, the friend of my childhood, — my brother almost?"

"No, no, no! Again you evade me, or rather, you wish to escape me. I do not ask if you love Raoul, your childhood's friend, — your brother; but I ask if you love the Vicomte de Bragelonne, your affianced husband?"

"Good heavens! dear Montalais," said Louise, "how severe your tone is!"

"You deserve no indulgence, — I am neither more nor less severe than usual. I put a question to you, so answer it."

"You certainly do not," said Louise, in a choking voice, "speak to me like a friend; but I will answer you as a true friend."

"Well, do so."

“Very well; my heart is full of scruples and silly feelings of pride, with respect to everything that a woman ought to keep secret, and in this respect no one has ever read into the bottom of my soul.”

“That I know very well. If I had read it, I should not interrogate you as I have done; I should simply say, — ’My good Louise, you have the happiness of an acquaintance with M. de Bragelonne, who is an excellent young man, and an advantageous match for a girl without fortune. M. de la Fere will leave something like fifteen thousand livres a year to his son. At a future day, then, you, as this son’s wife, will have fifteen thousand livres a year; which is not bad. Turn, then, neither to the right hand nor to the left, but go frankly to M. de Bragelonne; that is to say, to the altar to which he will lead you. Afterwards, why — afterwards, according to his disposition, you will be emancipated or enslaved; in other words, you will have a right to commit any piece of folly people commit who have either too much liberty or too little.’ That is, my dear Louise, what I should have told you at first, if I had been able to read your heart.”

“And I should have thanked you,” stammered out Louise, “although the advice does not appear to me to be altogether sound.”

“Wait, wait. But immediately after having given you that advice, I should have added, — ’Louise, it is very dangerous to pass whole days with your head drooping, your hands unoccupied, your eyes restless and full of thought; it is dangerous to prefer the least frequented paths, and no longer be amused with such diversions as gladden young girls’ hearts; it is dangerous, Louise, to scrawl with the point of your foot, as you do, upon the gravel, certain letters it is useless for you to efface, but which appear again under your heel, particularly when those letters rather resemble the letter L than the letter B; and, lastly, it is dangerous to allow the mind to dwell on a thousand wild fancies, the fruits of solitude and heartache; these fancies, while they sink into a young girl’s mind, make her cheeks sink in also, so that it is not unusual, on such occasions, to find the most delightful persons in the world become the most disagreeable, and the wittiest to become the dullest.’“

“I thank you, dearest Aure,” replied La Valliere, gently; “it is like you to speak to me in this manner, and I thank you for it.”

“It was only for the benefit of wild dreamers, such as I have just described, that I spoke; do not take any of my words, then, to yourself, except such as you think you deserve. Stay, I hardly know what story recurs to my memory of some silly or melancholy girl, who was gradually pining away because she fancied that the prince, or the king, or the emperor, whoever it was — and it does not matter much which — had fallen in love with her; while on the contrary, the prince, or the king, or the emperor, whichever you please, was plainly in love with some one else, and — a singular circumstance, one, indeed, which she could not perceive, although every one around and about her perceived it clearly enough — made use of her as a screen for his own love affair. You laugh as I do, at this poor silly girl, do you not, Louise?"

"I? — oh! of course," stammered Louise, pale as death.

"And you are right, too, for the thing is amusing enough. The story, whether true or false, amused me, and so I remembered it and told it to you. Just imagine then, my good Louise, the mischief that such a melancholy would create in anybody's brain, — a melancholy, I mean, of that kind. For my own part, I resolved to tell you the story; for if such a thing were to happen to either of *us*, it would be most essential to be assured of its truth; to-day it is a snare, to-morrow it would become a jest and mockery, the next day it would mean death itself." La Valliere started again, and became, if possible, still paler.

"Whenever a king takes notice of us," continued Montalais, "he lets us see it easily enough, and, if we happen to be the object he covets, he knows very well how to gain his object. You see, then, Louise, that, in such circumstances, between young girls exposed to such a danger as the one in question, the most perfect confidence should exist, in order that those hearts which are not disposed towards melancholy may watch over those likely to become so."

"Silence, silence!" said La Valliere; "some one approaches."

"Some one is approaching fast, in fact," said Montalais; "but who can it possibly be? Everybody is away, either at mass with the king, or bathing with Monsieur."

At the end of the walk the young girls perceived almost immediately, beneath the arching trees, the graceful carriage and noble stature of a young man, who, with his sword under his arm and a cloak thrown across his shoulders, booted and spurred besides, saluted them from the distance with a gentle smile. "Raoul!" exclaimed Montalais.

"M. de Bragelonne!" murmured Louise.

“A very proper judge to decide upon our difference of opinion,” said Montalais.

“Oh! Montalais, Montalais, for pity’s sake,” exclaimed La Valliere, “after having been so cruel, show me a little mercy.” These words, uttered with all the fervor of a prayer, effaced all trace of irony, if not from Montalais’s heart, at least from her face.

“Why, you are as handsome as Amadis, Monsieur de Bragelonne,” she cried to Raoul, “and armed and booted like him.”

“A thousand compliments, young ladies,” replied Raoul, bowing.

“But why, I ask, are you booted in this manner?” repeated Montalais, whilst La Valliere, although she looked at Raoul with a surprise equal to that of her companion, nevertheless uttered not a word.

“Why?” inquired Raoul.

“Yes!” ventured Louise.

“Because I am about to set off,” said Bragelonne, looking at Louise.

The young girl seemed as though smitten by some superstitious feeling of terror, and tottered. “You are going away, Raoul!” she cried; “and where are you going?”

“Dearest Louise,” he replied, with that quiet, composed manner which was natural to him, “I am going to England.”

“What are you going to do in England?”

“The king has sent me there.”

“The king!” exclaimed Louise and Aure together, involuntarily exchanging glances, the conversation which had just been interrupted recurring to them both. Raoul intercepted the glance, but could not understand its meaning, and, naturally enough, attributed it to the interest both the young girls took in him.

“His majesty,” he said, “has been good enough to remember that the Comte de la Fere is high in favor with King Charles II. This morning, as he was on his way to attend mass, the king, seeing me as he passed, signed to me to approach, which I accordingly did. ‘Monsieur de Bragelonne,’ he said to me, ‘you will call upon M. Fouquet, who has received from me letters for the king of Great Britain; you will be the bearer of them.’ I bowed. ‘Ah!’ his majesty added, ‘before you leave, you will be good enough to take any commissions which Madame may have for the king her brother.’“

“Gracious heaven!” murmured Louise, much agitated, and yet full of thought at the same time.

“So quickly! You are desired to set off in such haste!” said Montalais, almost paralyzed by this unforeseen event.

“Properly to obey those whom we respect,” said Raoul, “it is necessary to obey quickly. Within ten minutes after I had received the order, I was ready. Madame, already informed, is writing the letter which she is good enough to do me the honor of intrusting to me. In the meantime, learning from Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente that it was likely you would be in this direction, I came here, and am happy to find you both.”

“And both of us very sad, as you see,” said Montalais, going to Louise’s assistance, whose countenance was visibly altered.

“Suffering?” responded Raoul, pressing Louise’s hand with a tender curiosity. “Your hand is like ice.”

“It is nothing.”

“This coldness does not reach your heart, Louise, does it?” inquired the young man, with a tender smile. Louise raised her head hastily, as if the question had been inspired by some suspicion, and had aroused a feeling of remorse.

“Oh! you know,” she said, with an effort, “that my heart will never be cold towards a friend like yourself, Monsieur de Bragelonne.”

“Thank you, Louise. I know both your heart and your mind; it is not by the touch of the hand that one can judge of an affection like yours. You know, Louise, how devotedly I love you, with what perfect and unreserved confidence I reserve my life for you; will you not forgive me, then, for speaking to you with something like the frankness of a child?”

“Speak, Monsieur Raoul,” said Louise, trembling painfully, “I am listening.”

“I cannot part from you, carrying away with me a thought that tortures me; absurd I know it to be, and yet one which rends my very heart.”

“Are you going away, then, for any length of time?” inquired La Valliere, with faltering utterance, while Montalais turned her head aside.

“No; probably I shall not be absent more than a fortnight.” La Valliere pressed her hand upon her heart, which felt as though it were breaking.

“It is strange,” pursued Raoul, looking at the young girl with a melancholy expression; “I have often left you when setting off on adventures fraught with danger. Then I started joyously enough — my heart free, my mind intoxicated by thoughts of happiness in store for me, hopes of which the future was full; and yet I was about to face the Spanish cannon, or the halberds of the Walloons. To-day, without the existence of any danger or uneasiness, and by the sunniest path in the world, I am going in search of a glorious recompense, which this mark of the king's favor seems to indicate, for I am, perhaps, going to win *you*, Louise. What other favor, more precious than yourself, could the king confer upon me? Yet, Louise, in very truth I know not how or why, but this happiness and this future seem to vanish before my very eyes like mist — like an idle dream; and I feel here, here at the very bottom of my heart, a deep-seated grief, a dejection I cannot overcome — something heavy, passionless, death-like, — resembling a corpse. Oh! Louise, too well do I know why; it is because I have never loved you so truly as now. God help me!"

At this last exclamation, which issued as it were from a broken heart, Louise burst into tears, and threw herself into Montalais's arms. The latter, although she was not easily moved, felt the tears rush to her eyes. Raoul noted only the tears Louise shed; his look, however, did not penetrate — nay, sought not to penetrate — beyond those tears. He bent his knee before her, and tenderly kissed her hand; and it was evident that in that kiss he poured out his whole heart.

"Rise, rise," said Montalais to him, ready to cry, "for Athenais is coming."

Raoul rose, brushed his knee with the back of his hand, smiled again upon Louise, whose eyes were fixed on the ground, and, having pressed Montalais's hand gratefully, he turned round to salute Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, the sound of whose silken robe was already heard upon the gravel walk. "Has Madame finished her letter?" he inquired, when the young girl came within reach of his voice.

"Yes, the letter is finished, sealed, and her royal highness is ready to receive you."

Raoul, at this remark, hardly gave himself time to salute Athenais, cast one look at Louise, bowed to Montalais, and withdrew in the direction of the chateau. As he withdrew he again turned round, but at last, at the end of the grand walk, it was useless to do so again, as he could no longer see them. The three young girls, on their side, had, with widely different feelings, watched him disappear.

“At last,” said Athenais, the first to interrupt the silence, “at last we are alone, free to talk of yesterday’s great affair, and to come to an understanding upon the conduct it is advisable for us to pursue. Besides, if you will listen to me,” she continued, looking round on all sides, “I will explain to you, as briefly as possible, in the first place, our own duty, such as I imagine it to be, and, if you do not understand a hint, what is Madame’s desire on the subject.” And Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente pronounced these words in such a tone as to leave no doubt, in her companion’s minds, upon the official character with which she was invested.

“Madame’s desire!” exclaimed Montalais and La Valliere together.

“Her *ultimatum,*” replied Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, diplomatically.

“But,” murmured La Valliere, “does Madame know, then — ”

“Madame knows more about the matter than we said, even,” said Athenais, in a formal, precise manner. “Therefore let us come to a proper understanding.”

“Yes, indeed,” said Montalais, “and I am listening in breathless attention.”

“Gracious heavens!” murmured Louise, trembling, “shall I ever survive this cruel evening?”

“Oh! do not frighten yourself in that manner,” said Athenais; “we have found a remedy.” So, seating herself between her two companions, and taking each of them by the hand, which she held in her own, she began. The first words were hardly spoke, when they heard a horse galloping away over the stones of the public high-road, outside the gates of the chateau.

CHAPTER LV.

Happy as a Prince.

At the very moment he was about entering the chateau, Bragelonne met De Guiche. But before having been met by Raoul, De Guiche had met Manicamp, who had met Malicorne. How was it that Malicorne had met Manicamp? Nothing more simple, for he had awaited his return from mass, where he had accompanied M. de Saint-Aignan. When they met, they congratulated each other upon their good fortune, and Manicamp availed himself of the circumstance to ask his friend if he had not a few crowns still remaining at the bottom of his pocket. The latter, without expressing any surprise at the question, which he perhaps expected, answered that every pocket which is always being drawn upon without anything ever being put in it, resembles those wells which supply water during the winter, but which gardeners render useless by exhausting during the summer; that his, Malicorne's, pocket certainly was deep, and that there would be a pleasure in drawing on it in times of plenty, but that, unhappily, abuse had produced barrenness. To this remark, Manicamp, deep in thought, had replied, "Quite true!"

"The question, then, is how to fill it?" Malicorne added.

"Of course; but in what way?"

"Nothing easier, my dear Monsieur Manicamp."

"So much the better. How?"

"A post in Monsieur's household, and the pocket is full again."

"You have the post?"

"That is, I have the promise of being nominated."

"Well!"

"Yes; but the promise of nomination, without the post itself, is like a purse with no money in it."

"Quite true," Manicamp replied a second time.

"Let us try for the post, then," the candidate had persisted.

"My dear fellow," sighed Manicamp, "an appointment in his royal highness's household is one of the gravest difficulties of our position."

“Oh! oh!”

“There is no question that, at the present moment, we cannot ask Monsieur for anything.”

“Why so?” “Because we are not on good terms with him.”

“A great absurdity, too,” said Malicorne, promptly.

“Bah! and if we were to show Madame any attention,” said Manicamp, “frankly speaking, do you think we should please Monsieur?”

“Precisely; if we show Madame any attention, and do it adroitly, Monsieur ought to adore us.”

“Hum!”

“Either that or we are great fools. Make haste, therefore, M. Manicamp, you who are so able a politician, and make M. de Guiche and his royal highness friendly again.”

“Tell me, what did M. de Saint-Aignan tell you, Malicorne?”

“Tell me? nothing; he asked me several questions, and that was all.”

“Well, was he less discreet, then, with me.”

“What did he tell you?”

“That the king is passionately in love with Mademoiselle de la Valliere.”

“We knew that already,” replied Malicorne, ironically; “and everybody talks about it loud enough for all to know it; but in the meantime, do what I advise you; speak to M. de Guiche, and endeavor to get him to make advances to Monsieur. Deuce take it! he owes his royal highness that, at least.”

“But we must see De Guiche, then?”

“There does not seem to be any great difficulty in that; try to see him in the same way I tried to see you; wait for him; you know that he is naturally very fond of walking.”

“Yes; but whereabouts does he walk?”

“What a question to ask! Do you not know that he is in love with Madame?”

“So it is said.”

“Very well; you will find him walking about on the side of the chateau where her apartments are.”

“Stay, my dear Malicorne, you were not mistaken, for here he is coming.”

“Why should I be mistaken? Have you ever noticed that I am in the habit of making a mistake? Come, we only need to understand each other. Are you in want of money?”

"Ah!" exclaimed Manicamp, mournfully.

"Well, I want my appointment. Let Malicorne have the appointment, and Manicamp shall have the money. There is no greater difficulty in the way than that."

"Very well; in that case make yourself easy. I will do my best."

"Do."

De Guiche approached, Malicorne stepped aside, and Manicamp caught hold of De Guiche, who was thoughtful and melancholy. "Tell me, my dear comte, what rhyme you were trying to find," said Manicamp. "I have an excellent one to match yours, particularly if yours ends in *ame*."

De Guiche shook his head, and recognizing a friend, he took him by the arm. "My dear Manicamp," he said, "I am in search of something very different from a rhyme."

"What is it you are looking for?"

"You will help me to find what I am in search of," continued the comte: "you who are such an idle fellow, in other words, a man with a mind full of ingenious devices."

"I am getting my ingenuity ready, then, my dear comte."

"This is the state of the case, then: I wish to approach a particular house, where I have some business."

"You must get near the house, then," said Manicamp.

"Very good; but in this house dwells a husband who happens to be jealous."

"Is he more jealous than the dog Cerberus?"

"Not more, but quite as much so."

"Has he three mouths, as that obdurate guardian of the infernal regions had? Do not shrug your shoulders, my dear comte: I put the question to you with an excellent reason, since poets pretend that, in order to soften Monsieur Cerberus, the visitor must take something enticing with him — a cake, for instance. Therefore, I, who view the matter in a prosaic light, that is to say in the light of reality, I say: one cake is very little for three mouths. If your jealous husband has three mouths, comte, get three cakes."

"Manicamp, I can get such advice as that from M. de Beautru."

"In order to get better advice," said Manicamp, with a comical seriousness of expression, "you will be obliged to adopt a more precise formula than you have used towards me."

"If Raoul were here," said De Guiche, "he would be sure to understand me."

"So I think, particularly if you said to him: 'I should very much like to see Madame a little nearer, but I fear Monsieur, because he is jealous.'"

"Manicamp!" cried the comte, angrily, and endeavoring to overwhelm his tormentor by a look, who did not, however, appear to be in the slightest degree disturbed by it.

"What is the matter now, my dear comte?" inquired Manicamp.

"What! is it thus you blaspheme the most sacred of names?"

"What names?"

"Monsieur! Madame! the highest names in the kingdom."

"You are very strangely mistaken, my dear comte. I never mentioned the highest names in the kingdom. I merely answered you in reference to the subject of a jealous husband, whose name you did not tell me, and who, as a matter of course, has a wife. I therefore replied to you, in order to see Madame, you must get a little more intimate with Monsieur."

"Double-dealer that you are," said the comte, smiling; "was that what you said?"

"Nothing else."

"Very good; what then?"

"Now," added Manicamp, "let the question be regarding the Duchess — or the Duke — ; very well, I shall say: Let us get into the house in some way or other, for that is a tactic which cannot in any case be unfavorable to your love affair."

"Ah! Manicamp, if you could but find me a pretext, a good pretext."

"A pretext; I can find you a hundred, nay, a thousand. If Malicorne were here, he would have already hit upon a thousand excellent pretexts."

"Who is Malicorne?" replied De Guiche, half-shutting his eyes, like a person reflecting, "I seem to know the name."

"Know him! I should think so: you owe his father thirty thousand crowns."

"Ah, indeed! so it's that worthy fellow from Orleans."

"Whom you promised an appointment in Monsieur's household; not the jealous husband, but the other."

"Well, then, since your friend Malicorne is such an inventive genius, let him find me a means of being adored by Monsieur, and a pretext to make my peace with him."

“Very good: I’ll talk to him about it.”

“But who is that coming?”

“The Vicomte de Bragelonne.”

“Raoul! yes, it is he,” said De Guiche, as he hastened forward to meet him. “You here, Raoul?” said De Guiche.

“Yes: I was looking for you to say farewell,” replied Raoul, warmly, pressing the comte’s hand. “How do you do, Monsieur Manicamp?”

“How is this, vicomte, you are leaving us?”

“Yes, a mission from the king.”

“Where are you going?”

“To London. On leaving you, I am going to Madame; she has a letter to give me for his majesty, Charles II.”

“You will find her alone, for Monsieur has gone out; gone to bathe, in fact.”

“In that case, you, who are one of Monsieur’s gentlemen in waiting, will undertake to make my excuses to him. I would have waited in order to receive any directions he might have to give me, if the desire for my immediate departure had not been intimated to me by M. Fouquet on behalf of his majesty.”

Manicamp touched De Guiche’s elbow, saying, “There’s a pretext for you.”

“What?”

“M. de Bragelonne’s excuses.”

“A weak pretext,” said De Guiche.

“An excellent one, if Monsieur is not angry with you; but a paltry one if he bears you ill-will.”

“You are right, Manicamp; a pretext, however poor it may be, is all I require. And so, a pleasant journey to you, Raoul!” And the two friends took a warm leave of each other.

Five minutes afterwards Raoul entered Madame’s apartments, as Mademoiselle de Montalais had begged him to do. Madame was still seated at the table where she had written her letter. Before her was still burning the rose-colored taper she had used to seal it. Only in her deep reflection, for Madame seemed to be buried in thought, she had forgotten to extinguish the light. Bragelonne was a very model of elegance in every way; it was impossible to see him once without always remembering him; and not only had Madame seen him once, but it will not be forgotten he was one of the very first who had gone to meet her, and had accompanied her from Le Havre to Paris. Madame preserved therefore an excellent recollection of him.

"Ah! M. de Bragelonne," she said to him, "you are going to see my brother, who will be delighted to pay to the son a portion of the debt of gratitude he contracted with the father."

"The Comte de la Fere, Madame, has been abundantly recompensed for the little service he had the happiness to render the king, by the kindness manifested towards him, and it is I who will have to convey to his majesty the assurance of the respect, devotion, and gratitude of both father and son."

"Do you know my brother?"

"No, your highness; I shall have the honor of seeing his majesty for the first time."

"You require no recommendation to him. At all events, however, if you have any doubt about your personal merit, take me unhesitatingly for your surety."

"Your royal highness overwhelms me with kindness."

"No! M. de Bragelonne, I well remember that we were fellow-travelers once, and that I remarked your extreme prudence in the midst of the extravagant absurdities committed, on both sides, by two of the greatest simpletons in the world, — M. de Guiche and the Duke of Buckingham. Let us not speak of them, however; but of yourself. Are you going to England to remain there permanently? Forgive my inquiry: it is not curiosity, but a desire to be of service to you in anything I can."

"No, Madame; I am going to England to fulfil a mission which his majesty has been kind enough to confide to me — nothing more."

"And you propose to return to France?"

"As soon as I have accomplished my mission; unless, indeed, his majesty, King Charles II., should have other orders for me."

"He well beg you, at the very least, I am sure, to remain near him as long as possible."

"In that case, as I shall not know how to refuse, I will now beforehand entreat your royal highness to have the goodness to remind the king of France that one of his devoted servants is far away from him."

"Take care that when you *are* recalled, you do not consider his command an abuse of power."

"I do not understand you, Madame."

“The court of France is not easily matched, I am aware, but yet we have some pretty women at the court of England also.”

Raoul smiled.

“Oh!” said Madame, “yours is a smile which portends no good to my countrywomen. It is as though you were telling them, Monsieur de Bragelonne: ‘I visit you, but I leave my heart on the other side of the Channel.’ Did not your smile indicate that?”

“Your highness is gifted with the power of reading the inmost depths of the soul, and you will understand, therefore, why, at present, any prolonged residence at the court of England would be a matter of the deepest regret.”

“And I need not inquire if so gallant a knight is recompensed in return?”

“I have been brought up, Madame, with her whom I love, and I believe our affection is mutual.”

“In that case, do not delay your departure, Monsieur de Bragelonne, and delay not your return, for on your return we shall see two persons happy; for I hope no obstacle exists to your felicity.”

“There is a great obstacle, Madame.”

“Indeed! what is it?”

“The king’s wishes on the subject.”

“The king opposes your marriage?”

“He postpones it, at least. I solicited his majesty’s consent through the Comte de la Fere, and, without absolutely refusing it, he positively said it must be deferred.”

“Is the young lady whom you love unworthy of you, then?”

“She is worthy of a king’s affection, Madame.”

“I mean, she is not, perhaps, of birth equal to your own.”

“Her family is excellent.”

“Is she young, beautiful?”

“She is seventeen, and, in my opinion, exceedingly beautiful.”

“Is she in the country, or at Paris?”

“She is here at Fontainebleau, Madame.”

“At the court?”

“Yes.”

“Do I know her?”

“She has the honor to form one of your highness’s household.”

“Her name?” inquired the princess, anxiously; “if indeed,” she added, hastily, “her name is not a secret.”

“No, Madame, my affection is too pure for me to make a secret of it to any one, and with still greater reason to your royal highness, whose kindness towards me has been so extreme. It is Mademoiselle Louise de la Valliere.”

Madame could not restrain an exclamation, in which a feeling stronger than surprise might have been detected. “Ah!” she said, “La Valliere — she who yesterday — ” she paused, and then continued, “she who was taken ill, I believe.”

“Yes, Madame; it was only this morning that I heard of the accident that had befallen her.”

“Did you see her before you came to me?”

“I had the honor of taking leave of her.”

“And you say,” resumed Madame, making a powerful effort over herself, “that the king has — deferred your marriage with this young girl.”

“Yes, Madame, deferred it.”

“Did he assign any reason for this postponement?”

“None.”

“How long is it since the Comte de la Fere preferred his request to the king?”

“More than a month, Madame.”

“It is very singular,” said the princess, as something like a film clouded her eyes.

“A month?” she repeated.

“About a month.”

“You are right, vicomte,” said the princess, with a smile, in which De Bragelonne might have remarked a kind of restraint; “my brother must not keep you too long in England; set off at once, and in the first letter I write to England, I will claim you in the king’s name.” And Madame rose to place her letter in Bragelonne’s hands. Raoul understood that his audience was at an end; he took the letter, bowed lowly to the princess, and left the room.

“A month!” murmured the princess; “could I have been blind, then, to so great an extent, and could he have loved her for this last month?” And as Madame had nothing to do, she sat down to begin a letter to her brother, the postscript of which was a summons for Bragelonne to return.

The Comte de Guiche, as we have seen, had yielded to the pressing persuasions of Manicamp, and allowed himself to be led to the stables, where they desired their horses to be got ready for them; then, by one of the side paths, a description of which has already been given, they advanced to meet Monsieur, who, having just finished bathing, was returning towards the chateau, wearing a woman’s veil to protect his face from getting burnt by the sun, which was shining very brightly. Monsieur was in one of those fits of good humor to which the admiration of his own good looks sometimes gave occasion. As he was bathing he had been able to compare the whiteness of his body with that of the courtiers, and, thanks to the care which his royal highness took of himself, no one, not even the Chevalier de Lorraine, was able to stand the comparison. Monsieur, moreover, had been tolerably successful in swimming, and his muscles having been exercised by the healthy immersion in the cool water, he was in a light and cheerful state of mind and body. So that, at the sight of Guiche, who advanced to meet him at a hand gallop, mounted upon a magnificent white horse, the prince could not restrain an exclamation of delight.

“I think matters look well,” said Manicamp, who fancied he could read this friendly disposition upon his royal highness’s countenance.

“Good day, De Guiche, good day,” exclaimed the prince.

“Long life to your royal highness!” replied De Guiche, encouraged by the tone of Philip’s voice; “health, joy, happiness, and prosperity to your highness.”

“Welcome, De Guiche, come on my right side, but keep your horse in hand, for I wish to return at a walking pace under the cool shade of these trees.”

“As you please, monseigneur,” said De Guiche, taking his place on the prince’s right as he had been invited to do.

“Now, my dear De Guiche,” said the prince, “give me a little news of that De Guiche whom I used to know formerly, and who used to pay attentions to my wife.”

Guiche blushed to the very whites of his eyes, while Monsieur burst out laughing, as though he had made the wittiest remark in the world. The few privileged courtiers who surrounded Monsieur thought it their duty to follow his example, although they had not heard the remark, and a noisy burst of laughter immediately followed, beginning with the first courtier, passing on through the whole company, and only terminating with the last. De Guiche, although blushing scarlet, put a good countenance on the matter; Manicamp looked at him.

"Ah! monseigneur," replied De Guiche, "show a little charity towards such a miserable fellow as I am: do not hold me up to the ridicule of the Chevalier de Lorraine."

"How do you mean?"

"If he hears you ridicule me, he will go beyond your highness, and will show no pity."

"About your passion and the princess, do you mean?"

"For mercy's sake, monseigneur."

"Come, come, De Guiche, confess that you *did* get a little sweet upon Madame."

"I will never confess such a thing, monseigneur."

"Out of respect for me, I suppose; but I release you from your respect, De Guiche. Confess, as if it were simply a question about Mademoiselle de Chalais or Mademoiselle de la Valliere."

Then breaking off, he said, beginning to laugh again, "Comte, that wasn't at all bad! — a remark like a sword, which cuts two ways at once. I hit you and my brother at the same time, Chalais and La Valliere, your affianced bride and his future lady love."

"Really, monseigneur," said the comte, "you are in a most brilliant humor to-day."

"The fact is, I feel well, and then I am pleased to see you again. But you were angry with me, were you not?"

"I, monseigneur? Why should I have been so?"

"Because I interfered with your sarabands and your other Spanish amusements. Nay, do not deny it. On that day you left the princess's apartments with your eyes full of fury; that brought you ill-luck, for you danced in the ballet yesterday in a most wretched manner. Now don't get sulky, De Guiche, for it does you no good, but makes you look like a tame bear. If the princess did not look at you attentively yesterday, I am quite sure of one thing."

"What is that, monseigneur? Your highness alarms me."

"She has quite forsworn you now," said the prince, with a burst of loud laughter.

"Decidedly," thought Manicamp, "rank has nothing to do with it, and all men are alike."

The prince continued: "At all events, you have now returned, and it is to be hoped that the chevalier will become amiable again."

“How so, monseigneur: and by what miracle can I exercise such an influence over M. de Lorraine?”

“The matter is very simple, he is jealous of you.”

“Bah! it is not possible.”

“It is the case, though.”

“He does me too much honor.”

“The fact is, that when you are here, he is full of kindness and attention, but when you are gone he makes me suffer a perfect martyrdom. I am like a see-saw. Besides, you do not know the idea that has struck me?”

“I do not even suspect it.”

“Well, then; when you were in exile — for you really were exiled, my poor De Guiche — ”

“I should think so, indeed; but whose fault was it?” said De Guiche, pretending to speak in an angry tone.

“Not mine, certainly, my dear comte,” replied his royal highness, “upon my honor, I did not ask for the king to exile you — ”

“No, not you, monseigneur, I am well aware; but — ”

“But Madame; well, as far as that goes, I do not say it was not the case. Why, what the deuce did you do or say to Madame?”

“Really, monseigneur — ”

“Women, I know, have their grudges, and my wife is not free from caprices of that nature. But if she were the cause of your being exiled I bear you no ill-will.”

“In that case, monseigneur,” said De Guiche. “I am not altogether unhappy.”

Manicamp, who was following closely behind De Guiche and who did not lose a word of what the prince was saying, bent down to his very shoulders over his horse’s neck, in order to conceal the laughter he could not repress.

“Besides, your exile started a project in my head.”

“Good.”

“When the chevalier — finding you were no longer here, and sure of reigning undisturbed — began to bully me, I, observing that my wife, in the most perfect contrast to him, was most kind and amiable towards me who had neglected her so much, the idea occurred to me of becoming a model husband — a rarity, a curiosity, at the court; and I had an idea of getting very fond of my wife.”

De Guiche looked at the prince with a stupefied expression of countenance, which was not assumed.

“Oh! monseigneur,” De Guiche stammered out; “surely, that never seriously occurred to you.”

“Indeed it did. I have some property that my brother gave me on my marriage; she has some money of her own, and not a little either, for she gets money from her brother and brother-in-law of England and France at the same time. Well! we should have left the court. I should have retired to my chateau at Villers-Cotterets, situated in the middle of a forest, in which we should have led a most sentimental life in the very same spot where my grandfather, Henry IV., sojourned with La Belle Gabrielle. What do you think of that idea, De Guiche?”

“Why, it is enough to make one shiver, monseigneur,” replied De Guiche, who shuddered in reality.

“Ah! I see you would never be able to endure being exiled a second time.”

“I, monseigneur?”

“I will not carry you off with us, as I had first intended.”

“What, with you, monseigneur?”

“Yes; if the idea should occur to me again of taking a dislike to the court.”

“Oh! do not let that make any difference, monseigneur; I would follow your highness to the end of the world.”

“Clumsy fellow that you are!” said Manicamp, grumblingly, pushing his horse towards De Guiche, so as almost to unseat him, and then, as he passed close to him, as if he had lost command over the horse, he whispered, “For goodness’ sake, think what you are saying.”

“Well, it is agreed, then,” said the prince; “since you are so devoted to me, I shall take you with me.”

“Anywhere, monseigneur,” replied De Guiche in a joyous tone, “whenever you like, and at once, too. Are you ready?”

And De Guiche, laughingly, gave his horse the rein, and galloped forward a few yards.

“One moment,” said the prince. “Let us go to the chateau first.”

“What for?”

“Why, to take my wife, of course.”

“What for?” asked De Guiche.

“Why, since I tell you that it is a project of conjugal affection, it is necessary I should take my wife with me.”

“In that case, monseigneur,” replied the comte, “I am greatly concerned, but no De Guiche for you.”

“Bah!”

“Yes. — Why do you take Madame with you?”

“Because I begin to fancy I love her,” said the prince.

De Guiche turned slightly pale, but endeavored to preserve his seeming cheerfulness.

“If you love Madame, monseigneur,” he said, “that ought to be quite enough for you, and you have no further need of your friends.”

“Not bad, not bad,” murmured Manicamp.

“There, your fear of Madame has begun again,” replied the prince.

“Why, monseigneur, I have experienced that to my cost; a woman who was the cause of my being exiled!”

“What a revengeful disposition you have, De Guiche, how virulently you bear malice.”

“I should like the case to be your own, monseigneur.”

“Decidedly, then, that was the reason why you danced so badly yesterday; you wished to revenge yourself, I suppose, by trying to make Madame make a mistake in her dancing; ah! that is very paltry, De Guiche, and I will tell Madame of it.”

“You may tell her whatever you please, monseigneur, for her highness cannot hate me more than she does.”

“Nonsense, you are exaggerating; and this because merely of the fortnight’s sojourn in the country she imposed on you.”

“Monseigneur, a fortnight is a fortnight; and when the time is passed in getting sick and tired of everything, a fortnight is an eternity.”

“So that you will not forgive her?”

“Never!”

“Come, come, De Guiche, be a better disposed fellow than that. I wish to make your peace with her; you will find, in conversing with her, that she has no malice or unkindness in her nature, and that she is very talented.”

“Monseigneur — ”

“You will see that she can receive her friends like a princess, and laugh like a citizen’s wife; you will see that, when she pleases, she can make the pleasant hours pass like minutes. Come, De Guiche, you must really make up your differences with my wife."

"Upon my word," said Manicamp to himself, "the prince is a husband whose wife's name will bring him ill-luck, and King Candaules, of old, was a tiger beside his royal highness."

"At all events," added the prince, "I am sure you will make it up with my wife: I guarantee you will do so. Only, I must show you the way now. There is nothing commonplace about her: it is not every one who takes her fancy."

"Monseigneur — "

"No resistance, De Guiche, or I shall get out of temper," replied the prince.

"Well, since he will have it so," murmured Manicamp, in Guiche's ear, "do as he wants you to do."

"Well, monseigneur," said the comte, "I obey."

"And to begin," resumed the prince, "there will be cards, this evening, in Madame's apartment; you will dine with me, and I will take you there with me."

"Oh! as for that, monseigneur," objected De Guiche, "you will allow me to object."

"What, again! this is positive rebellion."

"Madame received me too indifferently, yesterday, before the whole court."

"Really!" said the prince, laughing.

"Nay, so much so, indeed, that she did not even answer me when I addressed her; it may be a good thing to have no self-respect at all, but to have too little is not enough, as the saying is."

"Comte! after dinner, you will go to your own apartments and dress yourself, and then you will come to fetch me. I shall wait for you."

"Since your highness absolutely commands it."

"Positively."

"He will not lose his hold," said Manicamp; "these are the things to which husbands cling most obstinately. Ah! what a pity M. Moliere could not have heard this man; he would have turned him into verse if he had."

The prince and his court, chatting in this manner, returned to the coolest apartments of the chateau.

"By the by," said De Guiche, as they were standing by the door, "I had a commission for your royal highness."

“Execute it, then.”

“M. de Bragelonne has, by the king’s order, set off for London, and he charged me with his respects for you; monseigneur.”

“A pleasant journey to the vicomte, whom I like very much. Go and dress yourself, De Guiche, and come back for me. If you don’t come back — ”

“What will happen, monseigneur?”

“I will have you sent to the Bastile.”

“Well,” said De Guiche, laughing, “his royal highness, monseigneur, is decidedly the counterpart of her royal highness, Madame. Madame gets me sent into exile, because she does not care for me sufficiently; and monseigneur gets me imprisoned, because he cares for me too much. I thank monseigneur, and I thank Madame.”

“Come, come,” said the prince, “you are a delightful companion, and you know I cannot do without you. Return as soon as you can.”

“Very well; but I am in the humor to prove myself difficult to be pleased, in *my* turn, monseigneur.”

“Bah!”

“So, I will not return to your royal highness, except upon one condition.”

“Name it.”

“I want to oblige the friend of one of my friends.”

“What’s his name?”

“Malicorne.”

“An ugly name.”

“But very well borne, monseigneur.”

“That may be. Well?”

“Well, I owe M. Malicorne a place in your household, monseigneur.”

“What kind of a place?”

“Any kind of a place; a supervision of some sort or another, for instance.”

“That happens very fortunately, for yesterday I dismissed my chief usher of the apartments.”

“That will do admirably. What are his duties?”

“Nothing, except to look about and make his report.”

“A sort of interior police?”

“Exactly.”

“Ah, how excellently that will suit Malicorne,” Manicamp ventured to say.

“You know the person we are speaking of, M. Manicamp?” inquired the prince.

“Intimately, monseigneur. He is a friend of mine.”

“And your opinion is?”

“That your highness could never get a better usher of the apartments than he will make.”

“How much does the appointment bring in?” inquired the comte of the prince.

“I don’t know at all, only I have always been told that he could make as much as he pleased when he was thoroughly in earnest.”

“What do you call being thoroughly in earnest, prince?”

“It means, of course, when the functionary in question is a man who has his wits about him.”

“In that case I think your highness will be content, for Malicorne is as sharp as the devil himself.”

“Good! the appointment will be an expensive one for me, in that case,” replied the prince, laughing. “You are making me a positive present, comte.”

“I believe so, monseigneur.”

“Well, go and announce to your M. Melicorne — ”

“Malicorne, monseigneur.”

“I shall never get hold of that name.”

“You say Manicamp very well, monseigneur.”

“Oh, I ought to say Malicorne very well, too. The alliteration will help me.”

“Say what you like, monseigneur, I can promise you your inspector of apartments will not be annoyed; he has the very happiest disposition that can be met with.”

“Well, then, my dear De Guiche, inform him of his nomination. But, stay — ”

“What is it, monseigneur?”

“I wish to see him beforehand; if he be as ugly as his name, I retract every word I have said.”

“Your highness knows him, for you have already seen him at the Palais Royal; nay, indeed, it was I who presented him to you.”

“Ah, I remember now — not a bad-looking fellow.”

“I know you must have noticed him, monseigneur.”

“Yes, yes, yes. You see, De Guiche, I do not wish that either my wife or myself should have ugly faces before our eyes. My wife will have all her maids of honor pretty; I, all the gentlemen about me good-looking. In this way, De Guiche, you see, that any children we may have will run a good chance of being pretty, if my wife and myself have handsome models before us.”

“Most magnificently argued, monseigneur,” said Manicamp, showing his approval by look and voice at the same time.

As for De Guiche, he very probably did not find the argument so convincing, for he merely signified his opinion by a gesture, which, moreover, exhibited in a marked manner some indecision of mind on the subject. Manicamp went off to inform Malicorne of the good news he had just learned. De Guiche seemed very unwilling to take his departure for the purpose of dressing himself. Monsieur, singing, laughing, and admiring himself, passed away the time until the dinner-hour, in a frame of mind that justified the proverb of “Happy as a prince.”

CHAPTER LVI.

Story of a Dryad and a Naiad.

Every one had partaken of the banquet at the chateau, and afterwards assumed their full court dresses. The usual hour for the repast was five o'clock. If we say, then, that the repast occupied an hour, and the toilette two hours, everybody was ready about eight o'clock in the evening. Towards eight o'clock, then, the guests began to arrive at Madame's, for we have already intimated that it was Madame who "received" that evening. And at Madame's *soirees* no one failed to be present; for the evenings passed in her apartments always had that perfect charm about them which the queen, that pious and excellent princess, had not been able to confer upon her *reunions*. For, unfortunately, one of the advantages of goodness of disposition is that it is far less amusing than wit of an ill-natured character. And yet, let us hasten to add, that such a style of wit could not be assigned to Madame, for her disposition of mind, naturally of the very highest order, comprised too much true generosity, too many noble impulses and high-souled thoughts, to warrant her being termed ill-natured. But Madame was endowed with a spirit of resistance — a gift frequently fatal to its possessor, for it breaks where another disposition would have bent; the result was that blows did not become deadened upon her as upon what might be termed the cotton-wadded feelings of Maria Theresa. Her heart rebounded at each attack, and therefore, whenever she was attacked, even in a manner that almost stunned her, she returned blow for blow to any one imprudent enough to tilt against her.

Was this really maliciousness of disposition or simply waywardness of character? We regard those rich and powerful natures as like the tree of knowledge, producing good and evil at the same time; a double branch, always blooming and fruitful, of which those who wish to eat know how to detect the good fruit, and from which the worthless and frivolous die who have eaten of it — a circumstance which is by no means to be regarded as a great misfortune. Madame, therefore, who had a well-disguised plan in her mind of constituting herself the second, if not even the principal, queen of the court, rendered her receptions delightful to all, from the conversation, the opportunities of meeting, and the perfect liberty she allowed every one of making any remark he pleased, on the condition, however, that the remark was amusing or sensible. And it will hardly be believed, that, by that means, there was less talking among the society Madame assembled together than elsewhere. Madame hated people who talked much, and took a remarkably cruel revenge upon them, for she allowed them to talk. She disliked pretension, too, and never overlooked that defect, even in the king himself. It was more than a weakness of Monsieur, and the princess had undertaken the amazing task of curing him of it. As for the rest, poets, wits, beautiful women, all were received by her with the air of a mistress superior to her slaves. Sufficiently meditative in her liveliest humors to make even poets meditate; sufficiently pretty to dazzle by her attractions, even among the prettiest; sufficiently witty for the most distinguished persons who were present, to be listened to with pleasure — it will easily be believed that the *reunions* held in Madame's apartments must naturally have proved very attractive. All who were young flocked there, and when the king himself happens to be young, everybody at court is so too. And so, the older ladies of the court, the strong-minded women of the regency, or of the last reign, pouted and sulked at their ease; but others only laughed at the fits of sulkiness in which these venerable individuals indulged, who had carried the love of authority so far as even to take command of bodies of soldiers in the wars of the Fronde, in order, as Madame asserted, not to lose their influence over men altogether. As eight o'clock struck her royal highness entered the great drawing-room accompanied by her ladies in attendance, and found several gentlemen belonging to the court already there, having been waiting for some minutes. Among those who had arrived before the hour fixed for the reception she looked round for one who, she thought, ought to have been first in attendance, but he was not there. However, almost at the very moment she completed her investigation, Monsieur was announced. Monsieur looked splendid. All the precious stones and jewels of Cardinal Mazarin, which of course that minister could not do otherwise than leave; all the queen-mother's jewels as well as a few belonging to his wife — Monsieur wore them all, and he was as dazzling as the rising sun. Behind him followed De Guiche, with hesitating steps and an air of contrition admirably assumed; De Guiche wore a costume of French-gray velvet, embroidered with silver, and trimmed with blue ribbons: he wore also Mechlin lace as rare and beautiful in its own way as the jewels of Monsieur in theirs. The plume in his hat was red. Madame, too, wore several colors, and preferred red for embroidery, gray for dress, and blue for flowers. M. de Guiche, dressed as we have described, looked so handsome that he excited every one's observation. An interesting pallor of complexion, a languid expression of the eyes, his white hands seen through the masses of lace that covered them, the melancholy expression of his mouth — it was only necessary, indeed, to see M. de Guiche to admit that few men at the court of France could hope to equal him. The consequence was that Monsieur, who was pretentious enough to fancy he could eclipse a star even, if a star had adorned itself in a similar manner to himself, was, on the contrary, completely eclipsed in all imaginations, which are silent judges certainly, but very positive and firm in their convictions. Madame looked at De Guiche lightly, but light as her look had been, it brought a delightful color to his face. In fact, Madame found De Guiche so handsome and so admirably dressed, that she almost ceased regretting the royal conquest she felt she was on the point of escaping her. Her heart, therefore, sent the blood to her face. Monsieur approached her. He had not noticed the princess's blush, or if he had seen it, he was far from attributing it to its true cause.

"Madame," he said, kissing his wife's hand, "there is some one present here, who has fallen into disgrace, an unhappy exile whom I venture to recommend to your kindness. Do not forget, I beg, that he is one of my best friends, and that a gentle reception of him will please me greatly."

"What exile? what disgraced person are you speaking of?" inquired Madame, looking all round, and not permitting her glance to rest more on the count than on the others.

This was the moment to present De Guiche, and the prince drew aside and let De Guiche pass him, who, with a tolerably well-assumed awkwardness of manner, approached Madame and made his reverence to her.

"What!" exclaimed Madame, as if she were greatly surprised, "is M. de Guiche the disgraced individual you speak of, the exile in question?"

"Yes, certainly," returned the duke.

"Indeed," said Madame, "he seems almost the only person here!"

"You are unjust, Madame," said the prince.

"I?"

“Certainly. Come, forgive the poor fellow.”

“Forgive him what? What have I to forgive M. de Guiche?”

“Come, explain yourself, De Guiche. What do you wish to be forgiven?” inquired the prince.

“Alas! her royal highness knows very well what it is,” replied the latter, in a hypocritical tone.

“Come, come, give him your hand, Madame,” said Philip.

“If it will give you any pleasure, Monsieur,” and, with a movement of her eyes and shoulders, which it would be impossible to describe, Madame extended towards the young man her beautiful and perfumed hand, upon which he pressed his lips. It was evident that he did so for some little time, and that Madame did not withdraw her hand too quickly, for the duke added:

“De Guiche is not wickedly disposed, Madame; so do not be afraid, he will not bite you.”

A pretext was given in the gallery by the duke’s remark, which was not, perhaps, very laughable, for every one to laugh excessively. The situation was odd enough, and some kindly disposed persons had observed it. Monsieur was still enjoying the effect of his remark, when the king was announced. The appearance of the room at that moment was as follows: — in the center, before the fireplace, which was filled with flowers, Madame was standing up, with her maids of honor formed in two wings, on either side of her; around whom the butterflies of the court were fluttering. Several other groups were formed in the recesses of the windows, like soldiers stationed in their different towers who belong to the same garrison. From their respective places they could pick up the remarks which fell from the principal group. From one of these groups, the nearest to the fireplace, Malicorne, who had been at once raised to the dignity, through Manicamp and De Guiche, of the post of master of the apartments, and whose official costume had been ready for the last two months, was brilliant with gold lace, and shone upon Montalais, standing on Madame’s extreme left, with all the fire of his eyes and splendor of his velvet. Madame was conversing with Mademoiselle de Chatillon and Mademoiselle de Crequy, who were next to her, and addressed a few words to Monsieur, who drew aside as soon as the king was announced. Mademoiselle de la Valliere, like Montalais, was on Madame’s left hand, and the last but one on the line, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente being on her right. She was stationed as certain bodies of troops are, whose weakness is suspected, and who are placed between two experienced regiments. Guarded in this manner by the companions who had shared her adventure, La Valliere, whether from regret at Raoul's departure, or still suffering from the emotion caused by recent events, which had begun to render her name familiar on the lips of the courtiers, La Valliere, we repeat, hid her eyes, red with weeping, behind her fan, and seemed to give the greatest attention to the remarks which Montalais and Athenais, alternately, whispered to her from time to time. As soon as the king's name was announced a general movement took place in the apartment. Madame, in her character as hostess, rose to receive the royal visitor; but as she rose, notwithstanding her preoccupation of mind, she glanced hastily towards her right; her glance, which the presumptuous De Guiche regarded as intended for himself, rested, as it swept over the whole circle, upon La Valliere, whose warm blush and restless emotion it instantly perceived.

The king advanced to the middle of the group, which had now become a general one, by a movement which took place from the circumference to the center. Every head bowed low before his majesty, the ladies bending like frail, magnificent lilies before King Aquilo. There was nothing very severe, we will even say, nothing very royal that evening about the king, except youth and good looks. He wore an air of animated joyousness and good-humor which set all imaginations at work, and, thereupon, all present promised themselves a delightful evening, for no other reason than from having remarked the desire his majesty had to amuse himself in Madame's apartments. If there was any one in particular whose high spirits and good-humor equalled the king's, it was M. de Saint-Aignan, who was dressed in a rose-colored costume, with face and ribbons of the same color, and, in addition, particularly rose-colored in his ideas, for that evening M. de Saint-Aignan was prolific in jests. The circumstance which had given a new expansion to the numerous ideas germinating in his fertile brain was, that he had just perceived that Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente was, like himself, dressed in rose-color. We would not wish to say, however, that the wily courtier had not know beforehand that the beautiful Athenais was to wear that particular color; for he very well knew the art of unlocking the lips of a dress-maker or a lady's maid as to her mistress's intentions. He cast as many killing glances at Mademoiselle Athenais as he had bows of ribbons on his stockings and doublet; in other words he discharged a prodigious number. The king having paid Madame the customary compliments, and Madame having requested him to be seated, the circle was immediately formed. Louis inquired of Monsieur the particulars of the day's bathing; and stated, looking at the ladies present while he spoke, that certain poets were engaged turning into verse the enchanting diversion of the baths of Vulaines, and that one of them particularly, M. Loret, seemed to have been intrusted with the confidence of some water-nymph, as he had in his verses recounted many circumstances that were actually true — at which remark more than one lady present felt herself bound to blush. The king at this moment took the opportunity of looking round him at more leisure; Montalais was the only one who did not blush sufficiently to prevent her looking at the king, and she saw him fix his eyes devouringly on Mademoiselle de la Valliere. This undaunted maid of honor, Mademoiselle de Montalais, be it understood, forced the king to lower his gaze, and so saved Louise de la Valliere from a sympathetic warmth of feeling this gaze might possibly have conveyed. Louis was appropriated by Madame, who overwhelmed him with inquiries, and no one in the world knew how to ask questions better than she did. He tried, however, to render the conversation general, and, with the view of effecting this, he redoubled his attention and devotion to her. Madame coveted complimentary remarks, and, determined to procure them at any cost, she addressed herself to the king, saying:

"Sire, your majesty, who is aware of everything which occurs in your kingdom, ought to know beforehand the verses confided to M. Loret by this nymph; will your majesty kindly communicate them to us?"

"Madame," replied the king, with perfect grace of manner, "I dare not — you, personally, might be in no little degree confused at having to listen to certain details — but Saint-Aignan tells a story well, and has a perfect recollection of the verses. If he does not remember them, he will invent. I can certify he is almost a poet himself." Saint-Aignan, thus brought prominently forward, was compelled to introduce himself as advantageously as possible. Unfortunately, however, for Madame, he thought of his own personal affairs only; in other words, instead of paying Madame the compliments she so much desired and relished, his mind was fixed upon making as much display as possible of his own good fortune. Again glancing, therefore, for the hundredth time at the beautiful Athenais, who carried into practice her previous evening's theory of not even deigning to look at her adorer, he said: —

"Your majesty will perhaps pardon me for having too indifferently remembered the verses which the nymph dictated to Loret; but if the king has not retained any recollection of them, how could I possibly remember?"

Madame did not receive this shortcoming of the courtier very favorably.

"Ah! madame," added Saint-Aignan, "at present it is no longer a question what the water-nymphs have to say; and one would almost be tempted to believe that nothing of any interest now occurs in those liquid realms. It is upon earth, madame, important events happen. Ah! Madame, upon the earth, how many tales are there full of — "

"Well," said Madame, "and what is taking place upon the earth?"

"That question must be asked of the Dryads," replied the comte; "the Dryads inhabit the forest, as your royal highness is aware."

"I am aware also, that they are naturally very talkative, Monsieur de Saint-Aignan."

"Such is the case, Madame; but when they say such delightful things, it would be ungracious to accuse them of being too talkative."

"Do they talk so delightfully, then?" inquired the princess, indifferently. "Really, Monsieur de Saint-Aignan, you excite my curiosity; and, if I were the king, I would require you immediately to tell us what the delightful things are these Dryads have been saying, since you alone seem to understand their language."

"I am at his majesty's orders, Madame, in that respect," replied the comte, quickly.

"What a fortunate fellow this Saint-Aignan is to understand the language of the Dryads," said Monsieur.

"I understand it perfectly, monseigneur, as I do my own language."

"Tell us all about them, then," said Madame.

The king felt embarrassed, for his confidant was, in all probability, about to embark in a difficult matter. He felt that it would be so, from the general attention excited by Saint-Aignan's preamble, and aroused too by Madame's peculiar manner. The most reserved of those who were present seemed ready to devour every syllable the comte was about to pronounce. They coughed, drew closer together, looked curiously at some of the maids of honor, who, in order to support with greater propriety, or with more steadiness, the fixity of the inquisitorial looks bent upon them, adjusted their fans accordingly, and assumed the bearing of a duelist about to be exposed to his adversary's fire. At this epoch, the fashion of ingeniously constructed conversations, and hazardously dangerous recitals, so prevailed, that, where, in modern times, a whole company assembled in a drawing-room would begin to suspect some scandal, or disclosure, or tragic event, and would hurry away in dismay, Madame's guests quietly settled themselves in their places, in order not to lose a word or gesture of the comedy composed by Monsieur de Saint-Aignan for their benefit, and the termination of which, whatever the style and the plot might be, must, as a matter of course, be marked by the most perfect propriety. The comte as known as a man of extreme refinement, and an admirable narrator. He courageously began, then, amidst a profound silence, which would have been formidable to any one but himself: — "Madame, by the king's permission, I address myself, in the first place, to your royal highness, since you admit yourself to be the person present possessing the greatest curiosity. I have the honor, therefore, to inform your royal highness that the Dryad more particularly inhabits the hollows of oaks; and, as Dryads are mythological creatures of great beauty, they inhabit the most beautiful trees, in other words, the largest to be found."

At this exordium, which recalled, under a transparent veil, the celebrated story of the royal oak, which had played so important a part in the last evening, so many hearts began to beat, both from joy and uneasiness, that, if Saint-Aignan had not had a good and sonorous voice, their throbbings might have been heard above the sound of his voice.

"There must surely be Dryads at Fontainebleau, then," said Madame, in a perfectly calm voice; "for I have never, in all my life, seen finer oaks than in the royal park." And as she spoke, she directed towards De Guiche a look of which he had no reason to complain, as he had of the one that preceded it; which, as we have already mentioned, had reserved a certain amount of indefiniteness most painful for so loving a heart as his.

"Precisely, Madame, it is of Fontainebleau I was about to speak to your royal highness," said Saint-Aignan; "for the Dryad whose story is engaging our attention, lives in the park belonging to the chateau of his majesty."

The affair was fairly embarked on; the action was begun, and it was no longer possible for auditory or narrator to draw back.

"It will be worth listening to," said Madame; "for the story not only appears to me to have all the interest of a national incident, but still more, seems to be a circumstance of very recent occurrence.”

“I ought to begin at the beginning,” said the comte. “In the first place, then, there lived at Fontainebleau, in a cottage of modest and unassuming appearance, two shepherds. The one was the shepherd Tyrcis, the owner of extensive domains transmitted to him from his parents, by right of inheritance. Tyrcis was young and handsome, and, from his many qualifications, he might be pronounced to be the first and foremost among the shepherds in the whole country; one might even boldly say he was the king of shepherds.” A subdued murmur of approbation encouraged the narrator, who continued: — ”His strength equals his courage; no one displays greater address in hunting wild beasts, nor greater wisdom in matters where judgment is required. Whenever he mounts and exercises his horse in the beautiful plains of his inheritance, or whenever he joins with the shepherds who owe him allegiance, in different games of skill and strength, one might say that it is the god Mars hurling his lance on the plains of Thrace, or, even better, that it was Apollo himself, the god of day, radiant upon earth, bearing his flaming darts in his hand.” Every one understood that this allegorical portrait of the king was not the worst exordium the narrator could have chosen; and consequently it did not fail to produce its effect, either upon those who, from duty or inclination, applauded it to the very echo, or on the king himself, to whom flattery was very agreeable when delicately conveyed, and whom, indeed, it did not always displease, even when it was a little too broad. Saint-Aignan then continued: — ”It is not in games of glory only, ladies, that the shepherd Tyrcis had acquired that reputation by which he was regarded as the king of the shepherds.”

“Of the shepherds of Fontainebleau,” said the king, smilingly, to Madame.

“Oh!” exclaimed Madame, “Fontainebleau is selected arbitrarily by the poet; but I should say, of the shepherds of the whole world.” The king forgot his part of a passive auditor, and bowed.

“It is,” paused Saint-Aignan, amidst a flattering murmur of applause, “it is with ladies fair especially that the qualities of this king of the shepherds are most prominently displayed. He is a shepherd with a mind as refined as his heart is pure; he can pay a compliment with a charm of manner whose fascination it is impossible to resist; and in his attachments he is so discreet, that beautiful and happy conquests may regard their lot as more than enviable. Never a syllable of disclosure, never a moment’s forgetfulness. Whoever has seen and heard Tyrcis must love him; whoever loves and is beloved by him, has indeed found happiness.” Saint-Aignan here paused; he was enjoying the pleasure of all these compliments; and the portrait he had drawn, however grotesquely inflated it might be, had found favor in certain ears, in which the perfections of the shepherd did not seem to have been exaggerated. Madame begged the orator to continue. “Tyrcis,” said the comte, “had a faithful companion, or rather a devoted servant, whose name was — Amyntas.”

“Ah!” said Madame, archly, “now for the portrait of Amyntas; you are such an excellent painter, Monsieur de Saint-Aignan.”

“Madame — ”

“Oh! comte, do not, I entreat you, sacrifice poor Amyntas; I should never forgive you.”

“Madame, Amyntas is of too humble a position, particularly beside Tyrcis, for his person to be honored by a parallel. There are certain friends who resemble those followers of ancient times, who caused themselves to be buried alive at their masters’ feet. Amyntas’s place, too, is at the feet of Tyrcis; he cares for no other; and if, sometimes, the illustrious hero — ”

“Illustrious shepherd, you mean?” said Madame, pretending to correct M. de Saint-Aignan.

“Your royal highness is right; I was mistaken,” returned the courtier; “if, I say, the shepherd Tyrcis deigns occasionally to call Amyntas his friend, and to open his heart to him, it is an unparalleled favor, which the latter regards as the most unbounded felicity.”

“All that you say,” interrupted Madame, “establishes the extreme devotion of Amyntas to Tyrcis, but does not furnish us with the portrait of Amyntas. Comte, do not flatter him, if you like; but describe him to us. I will have Amyntas’s portrait.” Saint-Aignan obeyed, after having bowed profoundly to his majesty’s sister-in-law.

“Amyntas,” he said, “is somewhat older than Tyrcis; he is not an ill-favored shepherd; it is even said that the muses condescended to smile upon him at his birth, even as Hebe smiled upon youth. He is not ambitious of display, but he is ambitious of being loved; and he might not, perhaps, he found unworthy of it, if he were only sufficiently well-known.”

This latter paragraph, strengthened by a killing glance, was directed straight to Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, who received them both unmoved. But the modesty and tact of the allusion had produced a good effect; Amyntas reaped the benefit of it in the applause bestowed upon him: Tyrcis's head even gave the signal for it by a consenting bow, full of good feeling.

"One evening," continued Saint-Aignan, "Tyrcis and Amyntas were walking together in the forest, talking of their love disappointments. Do not forget, ladies, that the story of the Dryad is now beginning, otherwise it would be easy to tell you what Tyrcis and Amyntas, the two most discreet shepherds of the whole earth, were talking about. They reached the thickest part of the forest, for the purpose of being quite alone, and of confiding their troubles more freely to each other, when suddenly the sound of voices struck upon their ears."

"Ah, ah!" said those who surrounded the narrator. "Nothing can be more interesting."

At this point, Madame, like a vigilant general inspecting his army, glanced at Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, who could not help wincing as they drew themselves up.

"These harmonious voices," resumed Saint-Aignan, "were those of certain shepherdesses, who had been likewise desirous of enjoying the coolness of the shade, and who, knowing the isolated and almost unapproachable situation of the place, had betaken themselves there to interchange their ideas upon — " A loud burst of laughter occasioned by this remark of Saint-Aignan, and an imperceptible smile of the king, as he looked at Tonnay-Charente, followed this sally.

"The Dryad affirms positively," continued Saint-Aignan, "that the shepherdesses were three in number, and that all three were young and beautiful."

"What were their names?" said Madame, quickly.

"Their names?" said Saint-Aignan, who hesitated from fear of committing an indiscretion.

"Of course; you call your shepherds Tyrcis and Amyntas; give your shepherdesses names in a similar manner."

"Oh! Madame, I am not an inventor; I relate simply what took place as the Dryad related it to me."

"What did your Dryad, then, call these shepherdesses? You have a very treacherous memory, I fear. This Dryad must have fallen out with the goddess Mnemosyne."

“These shepherdesses, Madame? Pray remember that it is a crime to betray a woman’s name.”

“From which a woman absolves you, comte, on the condition that you will reveal the names of the shepherdesses.”

“Their names were Phyllis, Amaryllis, and Galatea.”

“Exceedingly well! — they have not lost by the delay,” said Madame, “and now we have three charming names. But now for their portraits.”

Saint-Aignan again made a slight movement.

“Nay, comte, let us proceed in due order,” returned Madame. “Ought we not, sire, to have the portraits of the shepherdesses?”

The king, who expected this determined perseverance, and who began to feel some uneasiness, did not think it safe to provoke so dangerous an interrogator. He thought, too, that Saint-Aignan, in drawing the portraits, would find a means of insinuating some flattering allusions which would be agreeable to the ears of one his majesty was interested in pleasing. It was with this hope and with this fear that Louis authorized Saint-Aignan to sketch the portraits of the shepherdesses, Phyllis, Amaryllis, and Galatea.

“Very well, then; be it so,” said Saint-Aignan, like a man who has made up his mind, and he began.

CHAPTER LVII.

Conclusion of the Story of a Naiad and of a Dryad.

“Phyllis,” said Saint-Aignan, with a glance of defiance at Montalais, such as a fencing-master would give who invites an antagonist worthy of him to place himself on guard, “Phyllis is neither fair nor dark, neither tall nor short, neither too grave nor too gay; though but a shepherdess, she is as witty as a princess, and as coquettish as the most finished flirt that ever lived. Nothing can equal her excellent vision. Her heart yearns for everything her gaze embraces. She is like a bird, which, always warbling, at one moment skims the ground, at the next rises fluttering in pursuit of a butterfly, then rests itself upon the topmost branch of a tree, where it defies the bird-catchers either to come and seize it or to entrap it in their nets.” The portrait bore such a strong resemblance to Montalais, that all eyes were directed towards her; she, however, with her head raised, and with a steady, unmoved look, listened to Saint-Aignan, as if he were speaking of an utter stranger.

“Is that all, Monsieur de Saint-Aignan?” inquired the princess.

“Oh! your royal highness, the portrait is but a mere sketch, and many more additions could be made, but I fear to weary your patience, or offend the modesty of the shepherdess, and I shall therefore pass on to her companion, Amaryllis.”

“Very well,” said Madame, “pass on to Amaryllis, Monsieur de Saint-Aignan, we are all attention.”

“Amaryllis is the eldest of the three, and yet,” Saint-Aignan hastened to add, “this advanced age does not reach twenty years.”

Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, who had slightly knitted her brows at the commencement of the description, unbent them with a smile.

“She is tall, with an astonishing abundance of beautiful hair, which she fastens in the manner of the Grecian statues; her walk is full of majesty, her attitude haughty; she has the air, therefore, rather of a goddess than a mere mortal, and among the goddesses, she most resembles Diana the huntress; with this sole difference, however, that the cruel shepherdess, having stolen the quiver of young love, while poor Cupid was sleeping in a thicket of roses, instead of directing her arrows against the inhabitants of the forest, discharges them pitilessly against all poor shepherds who pass within reach of her bow and of her eyes."

"Oh! what a wicked shepherdess!" said Madame. "She may some day wound herself with one of those arrows she discharges, as you say, so mercilessly on all sides."

"It is the hope of shepherds, one and all!" said Saint-Aignan.

"And that of the shepherd Amyntas in particular, I suppose?" said Madame.

"The shepherd Amyntas is so timid," said Saint-Aignan, with the most modest air he could assume, "that if he cherishes such a hope as that, no one has ever known anything about it, for he conceals it in the very depths of his heart." A flattering murmur of applause greeted this profession of faith on behalf of the shepherd.

"And Galatea?" inquired Madame. "I am impatient to see a hand so skillful as yours continue the portrait where Virgil left it, and finish it before our eyes."

"Madame," said Saint-Aignan, "I am indeed a poor dumb post beside the mighty Virgil. Still, encouraged by your desire, I will do my best."

Saint-Aignan extended his foot and hand, and thus began: — "White as milk, she casts upon the breeze the perfume of her fair hair tinged with golden hues, as are the ears of corn. One is tempted to inquire if she is not the beautiful Europa, who inspired Jupiter with a tender passion as she played with her companions in the flower-spangled meadows. From her exquisite eyes, blue as azure heaven on the clearest summer day, emanates a tender light, which reverie nurtures, and love dispenses. When she frowns, or bends her looks towards the ground, the sun is veiled in token of mourning. When she smiles, on the contrary, nature resumes her jollity, and the birds, for a brief moment silenced, recommence their songs amid the leafy covert of the trees. Galatea," said Saint-Aignan, in conclusion, "is worthy of the admiration of the whole world; and if she should ever bestow her heart upon another, happy will that man be to whom she consecrates her first affections."

Madame, who had attentively listened to the portrait Saint-Aignan had drawn, as, indeed, had all the others, contented herself with accentuating her approbation of the most poetic passage by occasional inclinations of her head; but it was impossible to say if these marks of assent were accorded to the ability of the narrator of the resemblance of the portrait. The consequence, therefore, was, that as Madame did not openly exhibit any approbation, no one felt authorized to applaud, not even Monsieur, who secretly thought that Saint-Aignan dwelt too much upon the portraits of the shepherdesses, and had somewhat slightingly passed over the portraits of the shepherds. The whole assembly seemed suddenly chilled. Saint-Aignan, who had exhausted his rhetorical skill and his palette of artistic tints in sketching the portrait of Galatea, and who, after the favor with which his other descriptions had been received, already imagined he could hear the loudest applause allotted to this last one, was himself more disappointed than the king and the rest of the company. A moment's silence followed, which was at last broken by Madame.

"Well, sir," she inquired, "What is your majesty's opinion of these three portraits?"

The king, who wished to relieve Saint-Aignan's embarrassment without compromising himself, replied, "Why, Amaryllis, in my opinion, is beautiful."

"For my part," said Monsieur, "I prefer Phyllis; she is a capital girl, or rather a good-sort-of-fellow of a nymph."

A gentle laugh followed, and this time the looks were so direct, that Montalais felt herself blushing almost scarlet.

"Well," resumed Madame, "what were those shepherdesses saying to each other?"

Saint-Aignan, however, whose vanity had been wounded, did not feel himself in a position to sustain an attack of new and refreshed troops, and merely said, "Madame, the shepherdesses were confiding to one another their little preferences."

"Nay, nay! Monsieur de Saint-Aignan, you are a perfect stream of pastoral poesy," said Madame, with an amiable smile, which somewhat comforted the narrator.

"They confessed that love is a mighty peril, but that the absence of love is the heart's sentence of death."

"What was the conclusion they came to?" inquired Madame.

"They came to the conclusion that love was necessary."

"Very good! Did they lay down any conditions?"

"That of choice, simply," said Saint-Aignan. "I ought even to add, — remember it is the Dryad who is speaking, — that one of the shepherdesses, Amaryllis, I believe, was completely opposed to the necessity of loving, and yet she did not positively deny that she had allowed the image of a certain shepherd to take refuge in her heart."

"Was it Amyntas or Tyrcis?"

"Amyntas, Madame," said Saint-Aignan, modestly. "But Galatea, the gentle and soft-eyed Galatea, immediately replied, that neither Amyntas, nor Alphesiboeus, nor Tityrus, nor indeed any of the handsomest shepherds of the country, were to be compared to Tyrcis; that Tyrcis was as superior to all other men, as the oak to all other trees, as the lily in its majesty to all other flowers. She drew even such a portrait of Tyrcis that Tyrcis himself, who was listening, must have felt truly flattered at it, notwithstanding his rank as a shepherd. Thus Tyrcis and Amyntas had been distinguished by Phyllis and Galatea; and thus had the secrets of two hearts revealed beneath the shades of evening, and amid the recesses of the woods. Such, Madame, is what the Dryad related to me; she who knows all that takes place in the hollows of oaks and grassy dells; she who knows the loves of the birds, and all they wish to convey by their songs; she who understands, in fact, the language of the wind among the branches, the humming of the insect with its gold and emerald wings in the corolla of the wild-flowers; it was she who related the particulars to me, and I have repeated them."

"And now you have finished, Monsieur de Saint-Aignan, have you not?" said Madame, with a smile that made the king tremble.

"Quite finished," replied Saint-Aignan, "and but too happy if I have been able to amuse your royal highness for a few moments."

"Moments which have been too brief," replied the princess; "for you have related most admirably all you know; but, my dear Monsieur de Saint-Aignan, you have been unfortunate enough to obtain your information from one Dryad only, I believe?"

"Yes, Madame, only from one, I confess."

"The fact was, that you passed by a little Naiad, who pretended to know nothing at all, and yet knew a great deal more than your Dryad, my dear comte."

"A Naiad!" repeated several voices, who began to suspect that the story had a continuation.

"Of course close beside the oak you are speaking of, which, if I am not mistaken, is called the royal oak — is it not so, Monsieur de Saint-Aignan?"

Saint-Aignan and the king exchanged glances.

"Yes, Madame," the former replied.

"Well, close beside the oak there is a pretty little spring, which runs murmuringly over the pebbles, between banks of forget-me-nots and daffodils."

"I believe you are correct," said the king, with some uneasiness, and listening with some anxiety to his sister-in-law's narrative.

"Oh! there is one, I can assure you," said Madame; "and the proof of it is, that the Naiad who resides in that little stream stopped me as I was about to come."

"Ah?" said Saint-Aignan.

"Yes, indeed," continued the princess, "and she did so in order to communicate to me many particulars Monsieur de Saint-Aignan has omitted in his recital."

"Pray relate them yourself, then," said Monsieur, "you can relate stories in such a charming manner." The princess bowed at the conjugal compliment paid her.

"I do not possess the poetical powers of the comte, nor his ability to bring to light the smallest details."

"You will not be listened to with less interest on that account," said the king, who already perceived that something hostile was intended in his sister-in-law's story.

"I speak, too," continued Madame, "in the name of that poor little Naiad, who is indeed the most charming creature I ever met. Moreover, she laughed so heartily while she was telling me her story, that, in pursuance of that medical axiom that laughter is the finest physic in the world, I ask permission to laugh a little myself when I recollect her words."

The king and Saint-Aignan, who noticed spreading over many of the faces present a distant and prophetic ripple of the laughter Madame announced, finished by looking at each other, as if asking themselves whether there was not some little conspiracy concealed beneath these words. But Madame was determined to turn the knife in the wound over and over again; she therefore resumed with the air of the most perfect candor, in other words, with the most dangerous of all her airs: "Well, then, I passed that way," she said, "and as I found beneath my steps many fresh flowers newly blown, no doubt Phyllis, Amaryllis, Galatea, and all your shepherdesses had passed the same way before me.”

The king bit his lips, for the recital was becoming more and more threatening. “My little Naiad,” continued Madame, “was cooing over her quaint song in the bed of the rivulet; as I perceived that she accosted me by touching the hem of my dress, I could not think of receiving her advances ungraciously, and more particularly so, since, after all, a divinity, even though she be of a second grade, is always of greater importance than a mortal, though a princess. I thereupon accosted the Naiad, and bursting into laughter, this is what she said to me:

“‘Fancy, princess...’ You understand, sire, it is the Naiad who is speaking?”

The king bowed assentingly; and Madame continued: — ”‘Fancy, princess, the banks of my little stream have just witnessed a most amusing scene. Two shepherds, full of curiosity, even indiscreetly so, have allowed themselves to be mystified in a most amusing manner by three nymphs, or three shepherdesses,’ — I beg your pardon, but I do not now remember if it was nymphs or shepherdesses she said; but it does not much matter, so we will continue.”

The king, at this opening, colored visibly, and Saint-Aignan, completely losing countenance, began to open his eyes in the greatest possible anxiety.

“‘The two shepherds,’ pursued my nymph, still laughing, ‘followed in the wake of the three young ladies,’ — no, I mean, of the three nymphs; forgive me, I ought to say, of the three shepherdesses. It is not always wise to do that, for it may be awkward for those who are followed. I appeal to all the ladies present, and not one of them, I am sure, will contradict me.”

The king, who was much disturbed by what he suspected was about to follow, signified his assent by a gesture.

“‘But,’ continued the Naiad, ‘the shepherdesses had noticed Tyrcis and Amyntas gliding into the wood, and, by the light of the moon, they had recognized them through the grove of the trees.’ Ah, you laugh!” interrupted Madame; “wait, wait, you are not yet at the end.”

The king turned pale; Saint-Aignan wiped his forehead, now dewed with perspiration. Among the groups of ladies present could be heard smothered laughter and stealthy whispers.

“‘The shepherdesses, I was saying, noticing how indiscreet the two shepherds were, proceeded to sit down at the foot of the royal oak; and, when they perceived that their over-curious listeners were sufficiently near, so that not a syllable of what they might say could be lost, they addressed towards them very innocently, in the most artless manner in the world indeed, a passionate declaration, which from the vanity natural to all men, and even to the most sentimental of shepherds, seemed to the two listeners as sweet as honey.'"

The king, at these words, which the assembly was unable to hear without laughing, could not restrain a flash of anger darting from his eyes. As for Saint-Aignan, he let his head fall upon his breast, and concealed, under a silly laugh, the extreme annoyance he felt.

"Oh," said the king, drawing himself up to his full height, "upon my word, that is a most amusing jest, certainly; but, really and truly, are you sure you quite understood the language of the Naiads?"

"The comte, sire, pretends to have perfectly understood that of the Dryads," retorted Madame, icily.

"No doubt," said the king; "but you know the comte has the weakness to aspire to become a member of the Academy, so that, with this object in view, he has learnt all sorts of things of which very happily you are ignorant; and it might possibly happen that the language of the Nymph of the Waters might be among the number of things you have not studied."

"Of course, sire," replied Madame, "for facts of that nature one does not altogether rely upon one's self alone; a woman's ear is not infallible, so says Saint Augustine; and I, therefore, wished to satisfy myself by other opinions beside my own, and as my Naiad, who, in her character of a goddess, is polyglot, — is not that the expression, M. de Saint-Aignan?"

"I believe so," said the latter, quite out of countenance.

"Well," continued the princess, "as my Naiad, who, in her character of a goddess, had, at first spoken to me in English, I feared, as you suggest, that I might have misunderstood her, and I requested Mesdemoiselles de Montalais, de Tonnay-Charente, and de la Valliere, to come to me, begging my Naiad to repeat to me in the French language, the recital she had already communicated to me in English."

"And did she do so?" inquired the king.

"Oh, she is the most polite divinity it is possible to imagine! Yes, sire, she did so; so that no doubt whatever remains on the subject. Is it not so, young ladies?" said the princess, turning towards the left of her army; "did not the Naiad say precisely what I have related, and have I, in any one particular, exceeded the truth, Phyllis? I beg your pardon, I mean Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais?”

“Precisely as you have stated, Madame,” articulated Mademoiselle de Montalais, very distinctly.

“Is it true, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente?”

“The perfect truth,” replied Athenais, in a voice quite as firm, but not yet so distinct.

“And you, La Valliere?” asked Madame.

The poor girl felt the king’s ardent look fixed upon her, — she dared not deny — she dared not tell a falsehood; she merely bowed her head; and everybody took it for a token of assent. Her head, however, was not raised again, chilled as she was by a coldness more bitter than that of death. This triple testimony overwhelmed the king. As for Saint-Aignan, he did not even attempt to dissemble his despair, and, hardly knowing what he said, he stammered out, “An excellent jest! admirably played!”

“A just punishment for curiosity,” said the king, in a hoarse voice. “Oh! who would think, after the chastisement that Tyrcis and Amyntas had suffered, of endeavoring to surprise what is passing in the heart of shepherdesses? Assuredly I shall not, for one; and, you, gentlemen?”

“Nor I! nor I!” repeated, in a chorus, the group of courtiers.

Madame was filled with triumph at the king’s annoyance; and was full of delight, thinking that her story had been, or was to be, the termination of the whole affair. As for Monsieur, who had laughed at the two stories without comprehending anything about them, he turned towards De Guiche, and said to him, “Well, comte, you say nothing; can you not find something to say? Do you pity M. Tyrcis and M. Amyntas, for instance?”

“I pity them with all my soul,” replied De Guiche; “for, in very truth, love is so sweet a fancy, that to lose it, fancy though it may be, is to lose more than life itself. If, therefore, these two shepherds thought themselves beloved, — if they were happy in that idea, and if, instead of that happiness, they meet not only that empty void which resembles death, but jeers and jests at love itself, which is worse than a thousand deaths, — in that case, I say that Tyrcis and Amyntas are the two most unhappy men I know.”

“And you are right, too, Monsieur de Guiche,” said the king; “for, in fact, the injury in question is a very hard return for a little harmless curiosity.”

“That is as much to say, then, that the story of my Naiad has displeased the king?” asked Madame, innocently.

"Nay, Madame, undeceive yourself," said Louis, taking the princess by the hand; "your Naiad, on the contrary, has pleased me, and the more so, because she was so truthful, and because her tale, I ought to add, is confirmed by the testimony of unimpeachable witnesses."

These words fell upon La Valliere, accompanied by a look that on one, from Socrates to Montaigne, could have exactly defined. The look and the king's remark succeeded in overpowering the unhappy girl, who, with her head upon Montalais's shoulder, seemed to have fainted away. The king rose, without remarking this circumstance, of which no one, moreover, took any notice, and, contrary to his usual custom, for generally he remained late in Madame's apartments, he took his leave, and retired to his own side of the palace. Saint-Aignan followed him, leaving the rooms in as much despair as he had entered them with delight. Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, less sensitive than La Valliere, was not much frightened, and did not faint. However, it may be that the last look of Saint-Aignan had hardly been so majestic as the king's.

CHAPTER LVIII.

Royal Psychology.

The king returned to his apartments with hurried steps. The reason he walked as fast as he did was probably to avoid tottering in his gait. He seemed to leave behind him as he went along a trace of a mysterious sorrow. That gayety of manner, which every one had remarked in him on his arrival, and which they had been delighted to perceive, had not perhaps been understood in its true sense: but his stormy departure, his disordered countenance, all knew, or at least thought they could tell the reason of. Madame's levity of manner, her somewhat bitter jests, — bitter for persons of a sensitive disposition, and particularly for one of the king's character; the great resemblance which naturally existed between the king and an ordinary mortal, were among the reasons assigned for the precipitate and unexpected departure of his majesty. Madame, keen-sighted enough in other respects, did not, however, at first see anything extraordinary in it. It was quite sufficient for her to have inflicted some slight wound upon the vanity or self-esteem of one who, so soon forgetting the engagements he had contracted, seemed to have undertaken to disdain, without cause, the noblest and highest prize in France. It was not an unimportant matter for Madame, in the present position of affairs, to let the king perceive the difference which existed between the bestowal of his affections on one in a high station, and the running after each passing fancy, like a youth fresh from the provinces. With regard to those higher placed affections, recognizing their dignity and their illimitable influence, acknowledging in them a certain etiquette and display — a monarch not only did not act in a manner derogatory to his high position, but found even repose, security, mystery, and general respect therein. On the contrary, in the debasement of a common or humble attachment, he would encounter, even among his meanest subjects, carping and sarcastic remarks; he would forfeit his character of infallibility and inviolability. Having descended to the region of petty human miseries, he would be subjected to paltry contentions. In one word, to convert the royal divinity into a mere mortal by striking at his heart, or rather even at his face, like the meanest of his subjects, was to inflict a terrible blow upon the pride of that generous nature. Louis was more easily captivated by vanity than affection. Madame had wisely calculated her vengeance, and it has been seen, also, in what manner she carried it out. Let it not be supposed, however, that Madame possessed such terrible passions as the heroines of the middle ages, or that she regarded things from a pessimistic point of view; on the contrary, Madame, young, amiable, of cultivated intellect, coquettish, loving in her nature, but rather from fancy, or imagination, or ambition, than from her heart — Madame, we say, on the contrary, inaugurated that epoch of light and fleeting amusements, which distinguished the hundred and twenty years that intervened between the middle of the seventeenth century, and the last quarter of the eighteenth. Madame saw, therefore, or rather fancied she saw, things under their true aspect; she knew that the king, her august brother-in-law, had been the first to ridicule the humble La Valliere, and that, in accordance with his usual custom, it was hardly probable he would ever love the person who had excited his laughter, even had it been only for a moment. Moreover, was not her vanity ever present, that evil influence which plays so important a part in that comedy of dramatic incidents called the life of a woman? Did not her vanity tell her, aloud, in a subdued voice, in a whisper, in every variety of tone, that she could not, in reality, she a princess, young, beautiful, and rich, be compared to the poor La Valliere, as youthful as herself it is true, but far less pretty, certainly, and utterly without money, protectors, or position? And surprise need not be excited with respect to Madame; for it is known that the greatest characters are those who flatter themselves the most in the comparisons they draw between themselves and others, between others and themselves. It may perhaps be asked what was Madame’s motive for an attack so skillfully conceived and executed. Why was there such a display of forces, if it were not seriously her intention to dislodge the king from a heart that had never been occupied before, in which he seemed disposed to take refuge? Was there any necessity, then, for Madame to attach so great an importance to La Valliere, if she did not fear her? Yet Madame did not fear La Valliere in that direction in which an historian, who knows everything, sees into the future, or rather, the past. Madame was neither a prophetess nor a sibyl; nor could she, any more than another, read what was written in that terrible and fatal book of the future, which records in its most secret pages the most serious events.

No, Madame desired simply to punish the king for having availed himself of secret means altogether feminine in their nature; she wished to prove to him that if he made use of offensive weapons of that nature, she, a woman of ready wit and high descent, would assuredly discover in the arsenal of her imagination defensive weapons proof even against the thrusts of a monarch. Moreover, she wished him to learn that, in a war of that description, kings are held of no account, or, at all events, that kings who fight on their own behalf, like ordinary individuals, may witness the fall of their crown in the first encounter; and that, in fact, if he had expected to be adored by all the ladies of the court from the very first, from a confident reliance on his mere appearance, it was a pretension which was most preposterous and insulting even, for certain persons who filled a higher position than others, and that a lesson taught in season to this royal personage, who assumed too high and haughty a carriage, would be rendering him a great service. Such, indeed, were Madame's reflections with respect to the king. The sequel itself was not thought of. And in this manner, it will be seen that she had exercised all her influence over the minds of her maids of honor, and with all its accompanying details, had arranged the comedy which had just been acted. The king was completely bewildered by it; for the first time since he had escaped from the trammels of M. de Mazarin, he found himself treated as a man. Similar severity from any of his subjects would have been at once resisted by him. Strength comes with battle. But to match one's self with women, to be attacked by them, to have been imposed upon by mere girls from the country, who had come from Blois expressly for that purpose; it was the depth of dishonor for a young sovereign full of the pride his personal advantages and royal power inspired him with. There was nothing he could do — neither reproaches, nor exile — nor could he even show the annoyance he felt. To manifest vexation would have been to admit that he had been touched, like Hamlet, by a sword from which the button had been removed — the sword of ridicule. To show animosity against women — humiliation! especially when the women in question have laughter on their side, as a means of vengeance. If, instead of leaving all the responsibility of the affair to these women, one of the courtiers had had anything to do with the intrigue, how delightedly would Louis have seized the opportunity of turning the Bastile to personal account. But there, again, the king's anger paused, checked by reason. To be the master of armies, of prisons, of an almost divine authority, and to exert such majesty and might in the service of a petty grudge, would be unworthy not only of a monarch, but even of a man. It was necessary, therefore, simply to swallow the affront in silence, and to wear his usual gentleness and graciousness of expression. It was essential to treat Madame as a friend. As a friend! — Well, and why not? Either Madame had been the instigator of the affair, or the affair itself had found her passive. If she had been the instigator of it, it certainly was a bold measure on her part, but, at all events, it was but natural in her. Who was it that had sought her in the earliest moments of her married life to whisper words of love in her ear? Who was it that had dared to calculate the possibility of committing a crime against the marriage vow — a crime, too, still more deplorable on account of the relationship between them? Who was it that, shielded behind his royal authority, had said to this young creature: be not afraid, love but the king of France, who is above all, and a movement of whose sceptered hand will protect you against all attacks, even from your own remorse? And she had listened to and obeyed the royal voice, had been influenced by his ensnaring tones; and when, morally speaking, she had sacrificed her honor in listening to him, she saw herself repaid for her sacrifice by an infidelity the more humiliating, since it was occasioned by a woman far beneath her in the world.

Had Madame, therefore, been the instigator of the revenge, she would have been right. If, on the contrary, she had remained passive in the whole affair, what grounds had the king to be angry with her on that account? Was it for her to restrain, or rather could she restrain, the chattering of a few country girls? and was it for her, by an excess of zeal that might have been misinterpreted, to check, at the risk of increasing it, the impertinence of their conduct? All these various reasonings were like so many actual stings to the king's pride; but when he had carefully, in his own mind, gone over all the various causes of complaint, Louis was surprised, upon due reflection — in other words, after the wound has been dressed — to find that there were other causes of suffering, secret, unendurable, and unrevealed. There was one circumstance he dared not confess, even to himself; namely, that the acute pain from which he was suffering had its seat in his heart. The fact is, he had permitted his heart to be gratified by La Valliere's innocent confusion. He had dreamed of a pure affection — of an affection for Louis the man, and not the sovereign — of an affection free from all self-interest; and his heart, simpler and more youthful than he had imagined it to be, had to meet that other heart that had revealed itself to him by its aspirations. The commonest thing in the complicated history of love, is the double inoculation of love to which any two hearts are subjected; the one loves nearly always before the other, in the same way that the latter finishes nearly always by loving after the other. In this way, the electric current is established, in proportion to the intensity of the passion which is first kindled. The more Mademoiselle de la Valliere showed her affection, the more the king's affection had increased. And it was precisely that which had annoyed his majesty. For it was now fairly demonstrated to him, that no sympathetic current had been the means of hurrying his heart away in its course, because there had been no confession of love in the case — because the confession was, in fact, an insult towards the man and towards the sovereign; and finally, because — and the word, too, burnt like a hot iron — because, in fact, it was nothing but a mystification after all. This girl, therefore, who, in strictness, could not lay claim to beauty, or birth, or great intelligence — who had been selected by Madame herself, on account of her unpretending position, had not only aroused the king's regard, but had, moreover, treated him with disdain — he, the king, a man who, like an eastern potentate, had but to bestow a glance, to indicate with his finger, to throw his handkerchief. And, since the previous evening, his mind had been so absorbed with this girl that he could think and dream of nothing else. Since the previous evening his imagination had been occupied by clothing her image with charms to which she could not lay claim. In very truth, he whom such vast interests summoned, and whom so many women smiled upon invitingly, had, since the previous evening, consecrated every moment of his time, every throb of his heart, to this sole dream. It was, indeed, either too much, or not sufficient. The indignation of the king, making him forget everything, and, among others, that Saint-Aignan was present, was poured out in the most violent imprecations. True it is, that Saint-Aignan had taken refuge in a corner of the room; and from his corner, regarded the tempest passing over. His own personal disappointment seemed contemptible, in comparison with the anger of the king. He compared with his own petty vanity the prodigious pride of offended majesty; and, being well read in the hearts of kings in general, and in those of powerful kings in particular, he began to ask himself if this weight of anger, as yet held in suspense, would not soon terminate by falling upon his own head, for the very reason that others were guilty, and he innocent. In point of fact, the king, all at once, did arrest his hurried pace; and, fixing a look full of anger upon Saint-Aignan, suddenly cried out: “And you, Saint-Aignan?”

Saint-Aignan made a sign which was intended to signify, “Well, sire?”

“Yes; you have been as silly as myself, I think.”

“Sire,” stammered out Saint-Aignan.

“You permitted us to be deceived by this shameless trick.”

“Sire,” said Saint-Aignan, whose agitation was such as to make him tremble in every limb, “let me entreat your majesty not to exasperate yourself. Women, you know, are characters full of imperfections, created for the misfortune of mankind: to expect anything good from them is to require them to perform impossibilities.”

The king, who had the greatest consideration for himself, and who had begun to acquire over his emotions that command which he preserved over them all his life, perceived that he was doing an outrage to his own dignity in displaying so much animosity about so trifling an object. “No,” he said, hastily; “you are mistaken, Saint-Aignan; I am not angry; I can only wonder that we should have been turned into ridicule so cleverly and with such audacity by these young girls. I am particularly surprised that, although we might have informed ourselves accurately on the subject, we were silly enough to leave the matter for our own hearts to decide.”

“The heart, sire, is an organ which requires positively to be reduced to its material functions, but which, for the sake of humanity’s peace of mind, should be deprived of all its metaphysical inclinations. For my own part, I confess, when I saw that your majesty’s heart was so taken up by this little — ”

“My heart taken up! I! My mind might, perhaps, have been so; but as for my heart, it was — ” Louis again perceived that, in order to fill one gulf, he was about to dig another. “Besides,” he added, “I have no fault to find with the girl. I was quite aware that she was in love with some one else.”

“The Vicomte de Bragelonne. I informed your majesty of the circumstance.”

“You did so: but you were not the first who told me. The Comte de la Fere had solicited from me Mademoiselle de la Valliere’s hand for his son. And, on his return from England, the marriage shall be celebrated, since they love each other.”

“I recognize your majesty’s great generosity of disposition in that act.”

“So, Saint-Aignan, we will cease to occupy ourselves with these matters any longer,” said Louis.

“Yes, we will digest the affront, sire,” replied the courtier, with resignation.

“Besides, it will be an easy matter to do so,” said the king, checking a sigh.

“And, by way of a beginning, I will set about the composition of an epigram upon all three of them. I will call it ‘The Naiad and Dryad,’ which will please Madame.”

“Do so, Saint-Aignan, do so,” said the king, indifferently. “You shall read me your verses; they will amuse me. Ah! it does not signify, Saint-Aignan,” added the king, like a man breathing with difficulty, “the blow requires more than human strength to support in a dignified manner.” As the king thus spoke, assuming an air of the most angelic patience, one of the servants in attendance knocked gently at the door. Saint-Aignan drew aside, out of respect.

“Come in,” said the king. The servant partially opened the door. “What is it?” inquired Louis.

The servant held out a letter of a triangular shape. “For your majesty,” he said.

“From whom?”

“I do not know. One of the officers on duty gave it to me.”

The valet, in obedience to a gesture of the king, handed him the letter. The king advanced towards the candles, opened the note, read the signature, and uttered a loud cry. Saint-Aignan was sufficiently respectful not to look on; but, without looking on, he saw and heard all, and ran towards the king, who with a gesture dismissed the servant. “Oh, heavens!” said the king, as he read the note.

“Is your majesty unwell?” inquired Saint-Aignan, stretching forward his arms.

“No, no, Saint-Aignan — read!” and he handed him the note.

Saint-Aignan’s eyes fell upon the signature. “La Valliere!” he exclaimed. “Oh, sire!”

“Read, *read!*”

And Saint-Aignan read:

“Forgive my importunity, sire; and forgive, also, the absence of the formalities which may be wanting in this letter. A note seems to be more speedy and more urgent than a dispatch. I venture, therefore, to address this note to your majesty. I have retired to my own room, overcome with grief and fatigue, sire; and I implore your majesty to grant me the favor of an audience, which will enable me to confess the *truth* to my sovereign.

"LOUISE de la VALLIERE."

"Well?" asked the king, taking the letter from Saint-Aignan's hands, who was completely bewildered by what he had just read.

"Well!" repeated Saint-Aignan.

"What do you think of it?"

"I hardly know."

"Still, what is your opinion?"

"Sire, the young lady must have heard the muttering of the thunder, and has got frightened."

"Frightened at what?" asked Louis with dignity.

"Why, your majesty has a thousand reasons to be angry with the author or authors of so hazardous a joke; and, if your majesty's memory were to be awakened in a disagreeable sense, it would be a perpetual menace hanging over the head of this imprudent girl."

"Saint-Aignan, I do not think as you do."

"Your majesty doubtless sees more clearly than myself."

"Well! I see affliction and restraint in these lines; more particularly since I recall some of the details of the scene which took place this evening in Madame's apartments — " The king suddenly stopped, leaving his meaning unexpressed.

"In fact," resumed Saint-Aignan, "your majesty will grant an audience; nothing is clearer than that."

"I will do better, Saint-Aignan."

"What is that, sire?"

"Put on your cloak."

"But, sire — "

"You know the suite of rooms where Madame's maids of honor are lodged?"

"Certainly."

"You know some means of obtaining an entrance there."

"As far as that is concerned, I do not."

"At all events, you must be acquainted with some one there."

"Really, your majesty is the source of every good idea."

“You do know some one, then. Who is it?”

“I know a certain gentleman, who is on very good terms with a certain young lady there.”

“One of the maids of honor?”

“Yes, sire.”

“With Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, I suppose?” said the king, laughing.

“Fortunately, no, sire; with Montalais.”

“What is his name?”

“Malicorne.”

“And you can depend on him?”

“I believe so, sire. He ought to have a key of some sort in his possession; and if he should happen to have one, as I have done him a service, why, he will let us have it.”

“Nothing could be better. Let us set off immediately.”

The king threw his cloak over Saint-Aignan’s shoulders, asked him for his, and both went out into the vestibule.

CHAPTER LIX.

Something That neither Naiad nor Dryad Foresaw.

Saint-Aignan stopped at the foot of the staircase leading to the *entresol*, where the maids of honor were lodged, and to the first floor, where Madame’s apartments were situated. Then, by means of one of the servants who was passing, he sent to apprise Malicorne, who was still with Monsieur. After having waited ten minutes, Malicorne arrived, full of self-importance. The king drew back towards the darkest part of the vestibule. Saint-Aignan, on the contrary, advanced to meet him, but at the first words, indicating his wish, Malicorne drew back abruptly.

“Oh, oh!” he said, “you want me to introduce you into the rooms of the maids of honor?”

“Yes.”

“You know very well that I cannot do anything of the kind, without being made acquainted with your object.”

“Unfortunately, my dear Monsieur Malicorne, it is quite impossible for me to give you any explanation; you must therefore confide in me as in a friend who got you out of a great difficulty yesterday, and who now begs you to draw him out of one to-day.”

“Yet I told you, monsieur, what my object was; which was, not to sleep out in the open air, and any man might express the same wish, whilst you, however, admit nothing.”

“Believe me, my dear Monsieur Malicorne,” Saint-Aignan persisted, “that if I were permitted to explain myself, I would do so.”

“In that case, my dear monsieur, it is impossible for me to allow you to enter Mademoiselle de Montalais’s apartment.”

“Why so?”

“You know why, better than any one else, since you caught me on the wall paying my addresses to Mademoiselle de Montalais; it would, therefore, be an excess of kindness on my part, you will admit, since I am paying my attentions to her, to open the door of her room to you.”

“But who told you it was on her account I asked you for the key?”

“For whom, then?”

“She does not lodge there alone, I suppose?”

“No, certainly; for Mademoiselle de la Valliere shares her rooms with her; but, really, you have nothing more to do with Mademoiselle de la Valliere than with Mademoiselle de Montalais, and there are only two men to whom I would give this key; to M. de Bragelonne, if he begged me to give it to him, and to the king, if he commanded me.”

“In that case, give me the key, monsieur: I order you to do so,” said the king, advancing from the obscurity, and partially opening his cloak. “Mademoiselle de Montalais will step down to talk with you, while we go up-stairs to Mademoiselle de la Valliere, for, in fact, it is she only whom we desire to see.”

“The king!” exclaimed Malicorne, bowing to the very ground.

“Yes, the king,” said Louis, smiling: “the king, who is as pleased with your resistance as with your capitulation. Rise, monsieur, and render us the service we request of you.”

“I obey, your majesty,” said Malicorne, leading the way up the staircase.

“Get Mademoiselle de Montalais to come down,” said the king, “and do not breathe a word to her of my visit.”

Malicorne bowed in token of obedience, and proceeded up the staircase. But the king, after a hasty reflection, followed him, and that, too, with such rapidity, that, although Malicorne was already more than half-way up the staircase, the king reached the room at the same moment. He then observed, by the door which remained half-opened behind Malicorne, La Valliere, sitting in an armchair with her head thrown back, and in the opposite corner Montalais, who, in her dressing-gown, was standing before a looking-glass, engaged in arranging her hair, and parleying the while with Malicorne. The king hurriedly opened the door and entered the room. Montalais called out at the noise made by the opening of the door, and, recognizing the king, made her escape. La Valliere rose from her seat, like a dead person galvanized, and then fell back in her armchair. The king advanced slowly towards her.

“You wished for an audience, I believe,” he said coldly. “I am ready to hear you. Speak.”

Saint-Aignan, faithful to his character of being deaf, blind, and dumb, had stationed himself in a corner of the door, upon a stool which by chance he found there. Concealed by the tapestry which covered the doorway, and leaning his back against the wall, he could thus listen without being seen; resigning himself to the post of a good watch-dog, who patiently waits and watches without ever getting in his master's way.

La Valliere, terror-stricken at the king's irritated aspect, rose a second time, and assuming a posture full of humility and entreaty, murmured, "Forgive me, sire."

"What need is there for my forgiveness?" asked Louis.

"Sire, I have been guilty of a great fault; nay, more than a great fault, a great crime."

"You?"

"Sire, I have offended your majesty."

"Not in the slightest degree in the world," replied Louis XIV.

"I implore you, sire, not to maintain towards me that terrible seriousness of manner which reveals your majesty's just anger. I feel I have offended you, sire; but I wish to explain to you how it was that I have not offended you of my own accord."

"In the first place," said the king, "in what way can you possibly have offended me? I cannot perceive how. Surely not on account of a young girl's harmless and very innocent jest? You turned the credulity of a young man into ridicule — it was very natural to do so: any other woman in your place would have done the same."

"Oh! your majesty overwhelms me by your remark."

"Why so?"

"Because, if I had been the author of the jest, it would not have been innocent."

"Well, is that all you had to say to me in soliciting an audience?" said the king, as though about to turn away.

Thereupon La Valliere, in an abrupt and a broken voice, her eyes dried up by the fire of her tears, made a step towards the king, and said, "Did your majesty hear everything?"

"Everything, what?"

"Everything I said beneath the royal oak."

"I did not lose a syllable."

"And now, after your majesty really heard all, are you able to think I abused your credibility?"

"Credulity; yes, indeed, you have selected the very word."

"And your majesty did not suppose that a poor girl like myself might possibly be compelled to submit to the will of others?"

"Forgive me," returned the king; "but I shall never be able to understand that she, who of her own free will could express herself so unreservedly beneath the royal oak, would allow herself to be influenced to such an extent by the direction of others."

"But the threat held out against me, sire."

"Threat! who threatened you — who dared to threaten you?"

"Those who have the right to do so, sire."

"I do not recognize any one as possessing the right to threaten the humblest of my subjects."

"Forgive me, sire, but near your majesty, even, there are persons sufficiently high in position to have, or to believe that they possess, the right of injuring a young girl, without fortune, and possessing only her reputation."

"In what way injure her?"

"In depriving her of her reputation, by disgracefully expelling her from the court."

"Oh! Mademoiselle de la Valliere," said the king bitterly, "I prefer those persons who exculpate themselves without incriminating others."

"Sire!"

"Yes; and I confess that I greatly regret to perceive, that an easy justification, as your own would have been, is now complicated in my presence by a tissue of reproaches and imputations against others."

"And which you do not believe?" exclaimed La Valliere. The king remained silent.

"Nay, but tell me!" repeated La Valliere, vehemently.

"I regret to confess it," repeated the king, bowing coldly.

The young girl uttered a deep groan, striking her hands together in despair. "You do not believe me, then," she said to the king, who still remained silent, while poor La Valliere's features became visibly changed at his continued silence. "Therefore, you believe," she said, "that I pre-arranged this ridiculous, this infamous plot, of trifling, in so shameless a manner, with your majesty."

"Nay," said the king, "it was neither ridiculous nor infamous; it was not even a plot; merely a jest, more or less amusing, and nothing more."

“Oh!” murmured the young girl, “the king does not, and will not believe me, then?”

“No, indeed, I will not believe you,” said the king. “Besides, in point of fact, what can be more natural? The king, you argue, follows me, listens to me, watches me; the king wishes perhaps to amuse himself at my expense, I will amuse myself at his, and as the king is very tender-hearted, I will take his heart by storm.”

La Valliere hid her face in her hands, as she stifled her sobs. The king continued pitilessly; he was revenging himself upon the poor victim before him for all he had himself suffered.

“Let us invent, then, this story of my loving him and preferring him to others. The king is so simple and so conceited that he will believe me; and then we can go and tell others how credulous the king is, and can enjoy a laugh at his expense.”

“Oh!” exclaimed La Valliere, “you think that, you believe that! — it is frightful.”

“And,” pursued the king, “that is not all; if this self-conceited prince take our jest seriously, if he should be imprudent enough to exhibit before others anything like delight at it, well, in that case, the king will be humiliated before the whole court; and what a delightful story it will be, too, for him to whom I am really attached, in fact part of my dowry for my husband, to have the adventure to relate of the monarch who was so amusingly deceived by a young girl.”

“Sire!” exclaimed La Valliere, her mind bewildered, almost wandering, indeed, “not another word, I implore you; do you not see that you are killing me?”

“A jest, nothing but a jest,” murmured the king, who, however, began to be somewhat affected.

La Valliere fell upon her knees, and that so violently, that the sound could be heard upon the hard floor. “Sire,” she said, “I prefer shame to disloyalty.”

“What do you mean?” inquired the king, without moving a step to raise the young girl from her knees.

“Sire, when I shall have sacrificed my honor and my reason both to you, you will perhaps believe in my loyalty. The tale which was related to you in Madame’s apartments, and by Madame herself, is utterly false; and that which I said beneath the great oak — ”

"Well!"

"That is the only truth."

"What!" exclaimed the king.

"Sire," exclaimed La Valliere, hurried away by the violence of her emotions, "were I to die of shame on the very spot where my knees are fixed, I would repeat it until my latest breath; I said that I loved you, and it is true; I do love you."

"You!"

"I have loved you, sire, from the very first day I ever saw you; from the moment when at Blois, where I was pining away my existence, your royal looks, full of light and life, were first bent upon me. I love you still, sire; it is a crime of high treason, I know, that a poor girl like myself should love her sovereign, and should presume to tell him so. Punish me for my audacity, despise me for my shameless immodesty; but do not ever say, do not ever think, that I have jested with or deceived you. I belong to a family whose loyalty has been proved, sire, and I, too, love my king."

Suddenly her strength, voice, and respiration ceased, and she fell forward, like the flower Virgil alludes to, which the scythe of the reaper severed in the midst of the grass. The king, at these words, at this vehement entreaty, no longer retained any ill-will or doubt in his mind: his whole heart seemed to expand at the glowing breath of an affection which proclaimed itself in such noble and courageous language. When, therefore, he heard the passionate confession, his strength seemed to fail him, and he hid his face in his hands. But when he felt La Valliere's hands clinging to his own, when their warm pressure fired his blood, he bent forward, and passing his arm round La Valliere's waist, he raised her from the ground and pressed her against his heart. But she, her drooping head fallen forward on her bosom, seemed to have ceased to live. The king, terrified, called out for Saint-Aignan. Saint-Aignan, who had carried his discretion so far as to remain without stirring in his corner, pretending to wipe away a tear, ran forward at the king's summons. He then assisted Louis to seat the young girl upon a couch, slapped her hands, sprinkled some Hungary water over her face, calling out all the while, "Come, come, it is all over; the king believes you, and forgives you. There, there now! take care, or you will agitate his majesty too much; his majesty is so sensitive, so tender-hearted. Now, really, Mademoiselle de la Valliere, you must pay attention, for the king is very pale."

The fact was, the king was visibly losing color. But La Valliere did not move.

"Do pray recover," continued Saint-Aignan. "I beg, I implore you; it is really time you should; think only of one thing, that if the king should become unwell, I should be obliged to summon his physician. What a state of things that would be! So do pray rouse yourself; make an effort, pray do, and do so at once, my dear."

It was difficult to display more persuasive eloquence than Saint-Aignan did, but something still more powerful, and of a more energetic nature than this eloquence, aroused La Valliere. The king, who was kneeling before her, covered the palms of her hands with those burning kisses which are to the hands what a kiss upon the lips is to the face. La Valliere's senses returned to her; she languidly opened her eyes and, with a dying look, murmured, "Oh! sire, has your majesty pardoned me, then?"

The king did not reply, for he was still too much overcome. Saint-Aignan thought it was his duty again to retire, for he observed the passionate devotion which was displayed in the king's gaze. La Valliere rose.

"And now, sire, that I have justified myself, at least I trust so, in your majesty's eyes, grant me leave to retire into a convent. I shall bless your majesty all my life, and I shall die thanking and loving Heaven for having granted me one hour of perfect happiness."

"No, no," replied the king, "you will live here blessing Heaven, on the contrary, but loving Louis, who will make your existence one of perfect felicity — Louis who loves you — Louis who swears it."

"Oh! sire, sire!"

And upon this doubt of La Valliere, the king's kisses became so warm that Saint-Aignan thought it was his duty to retire behind the tapestry. These kisses, however, which she had not the strength at first to resist, began to intimidate the young girl.

"Oh! sire," she exclaimed, "do not make me repeat my loyalty, for this would show me that your majesty despises me still."

"Mademoiselle de la Valliere," said the king, suddenly, drawing back with an air full of respect, "there is nothing in the world that I love and honor more than yourself, and nothing in my court, I call Heaven to witness, shall be so highly regarded as you shall be henceforward. I entreat your forgiveness for my transport; it arose from an excess of affection, but I can prove to you that I love you more than ever by respecting you as much as you can possibly desire or deserve.” Then, bending before her, and taking her by the hand, he said to her, “Will you honor me by accepting the kiss I press upon your hand?” And the king’s lips were pressed respectfully and lightly upon the young girl’s trembling hand. “Henceforth,” added Louis, rising and bending his glance upon La Valliere, “henceforth you are under my safeguard. Do not speak to any one of the injury I have done you, forgive others that which they may have attempted. For the future, you shall be so far above all those, that, far from inspiring you with fear, they shall be even beneath your pity.” And he bowed as reverently as though he were leaving a place of worship. Then calling to Saint-Aignan, who approached with great humility, he said, “I hope, comte, that Mademoiselle de la Valliere will kindly confer a little of her friendship upon you, in return for that which I have vowed to her eternally.”

Saint-Aignan bent his knee before La Valliere, saying, “How happy, indeed, would such an honor make me!”

“I will send your companion back to you,” said the king. “Farewell! or, rather, adieu till we meet again; do not forget me in your prayers, I entreat.”

“Oh!” cried La Valliere, “be assured that you and Heaven are in my heart together.”

These words of Louise elated the king, who, full of happiness, hurried Saint-Aignan down the stairs. Madame had not anticipated this *denouement*; and neither the Naiad nor the Dryad had breathed a word about it.

CHAPTER LX.

The New General of the Jesuits.

While La Valliere and the king were mingling, in their first confession of love, all the bitterness of the past, the happiness of the present, and hopes of the future, Fouquet had retired to the apartments which had been assigned to him in the chateau, and was conversing with Aramis precisely upon the very subjects which the king at that moment was forgetting.

“Now tell me,” said Fouquet, after having installed his guest in an armchair and seated himself by his side, “tell me, Monsieur d’Herblay, what is our position with regard to the Belle-Isle affair, and whether you have received any news about it.”

“Everything is going on in that direction as we wish,” replied Aramis; “the expenses have been paid, and nothing has transpired of our designs.”

“But what about the soldiers the king wished to send there?”

“I have received news this morning they arrived there fifteen days ago.”

“And how have they been treated?”

“In the best manner possible.”

“What has become of the former garrison?”

“The soldiers were landed at Sarzeau, and then transferred immediately to Quimper.”

“And the new garrison?”

“Belongs to us from this very moment.”

“Are you sure of what you say, my dear Monsieur de Vannes?”

“Quite sure, and, moreover, you will see by and by how matters have turned out.”

“Still you are very well aware, that, of all the garrison towns, Belle-Isle is precisely the very worst.”

“I know it, and have acted accordingly; no space to move about, no gayety, no cheerful society, no gambling permitted: well, it is a great pity,” added Aramis, with one of those smiles so peculiar to him, “to see how much young people at the present day seek amusement, and how much, consequently, they incline to the man who procures and pays for their favorite pastimes."

"But if they amuse themselves at Bell-Isle?"

"If they amuse themselves through the king's means, they will attach themselves to the king; but if they get bored to death through the king's means, and amuse themselves through M. Fouquet, they will attach themselves to M. Fouquet."

"And you informed my intendant, of course? — so that immediately on their arrival — "

"By no means; they were left alone a whole week, to weary themselves at their ease; but, at the end of the week, they cried out, saying that former officers amused themselves much better. Whereupon they were told that the old officers had been able to make a friend of M. Fouquet, and that M. Fouquet, knowing them to be friends of his, had from that moment done all he possibly could to prevent their getting wearied or bored upon his estates. Upon this they began to reflect. Immediately afterwards, however, the intendant added, that without anticipating M. Fouquet's orders, he knew his master sufficiently well to be aware that he took an interest in every gentleman in the king's service, and that, although he did not know the new-comers, he would do as much for them as he had done for the others."

"Excellent! and I trust that the promises were followed up; I desire, as you know, that no promise should ever be made in my name without being kept."

"Without a moment's loss of time, our two privateers, and your own horses, were placed at the disposal of the officers; the keys of the principal mansion were handed over to them, so that they made up hunting-parties, and walking excursions with such ladies as are to be found in Belle-Isle; and such other as they are enabled to enlist from the neighborhood, who have no fear of sea-sickness."

"And there is a fair sprinkling to be met with at Sarzeau and Vannes, I believe, your eminence?"

"Yes; in fact all along the coast," said Aramis, quietly.

"And now, how about the soldiers?"

"Everything precisely the same, in a relative degree, you understand; the soldiers have plenty of wine, excellent provisions, and good pay."

"Very good; so that — "

“So that this garrison can be depended upon, and it is a better one than the last.”

“Good.”

“The result is, if Fortune favors us, so that the garrisons are changed in this manner, only every two months, that, at the end of every three years, the whole army will, in its turn, have been there; and, therefore, instead of having one regiment in our favor, we shall have fifty thousand men.”

“Yes, yes; I knew perfectly well,” said Fouquet, “that no friend could be more incomparable and invaluable than yourself, my dear Monsieur d’Herblay; but,” he added, laughing, “all this time we are forgetting our friend, Du Vallon; what has become of him? During the three days I spent at Saint-Mande, I confess I have forgotten him completely.”

“I do not forget him, however,” returned Aramis. “Porthos is at Saint-Mande; his joints are kept well greased, the greatest care is being taken care of him with regard to the food he eats, and the wines he drinks; I advise him to take daily airings in the small park, which you have kept for your own use, and he makes us of it accordingly. He begins to walk again, he exercises his muscular powers by bending down young elm-trees, or making the old oaks fly into splinters, as Milo of Crotona used to do; and, as there are no lions in the park, it is not unlikely we shall find him alive. Porthos is a brave fellow.”

“Yes, but in the mean time he will get bored to death.”

“Oh, no; he never does that.”

“He will be asking questions?”

“He sees no one.”

“At all events, he is looking or hoping for something or another.”

“I have inspired in him a hope which we will realize some fine morning, and on that he subsists.”

“What is it?”

“That of being presented to the king.”

“Oh! in what character?”

“As the engineer of Belle-Isle, of course.”

“Is it possible?”

“Quite true.”

“Shall we not be obliged, then, to send him back to Belle-Isle?”

“Most certainly; I am even thinking of sending him as soon as possible. Porthos is very fond of display; he is man whose weakness D’Artagnan, Athos, and myself are alone acquainted with; he never commits himself in any way; he is dignity himself; to the officers there, he would seem like a Paladin of the time of the Crusades. He would make the whole staff drunk, without getting tipsy in the least himself, and every one will regard him with admiration and sympathy; if, therefore, it should happen that we have any orders requiring to be carried out, Porthos is an incarnation of the order itself, and whatever he chose to do others would find themselves obliged to submit to."

"Send him back, then."

"That is what I intend to do; but only in a few days; for I must not omit to tell you one thing."

"What is it?"

"I begin to mistrust D'Artagnan. He is not at Fontainebleau, as you may have noticed, and D'Artagnan is never absent, or apparently idle, without some object in view. And now that my own affairs are settled, I am going to try and ascertain what the affairs are in which D'Artagnan is engaged."

"Your own affairs are settled, you say?"

"Yes."

"You are very fortunate in that case, then, and I should like to be able to say the same."

"I hope you do not make yourself uneasy."

"Hum!"

"Nothing could be better than the king's reception of you."

"True."

"And Colbert leaves you in peace."

"Nearly so."

"In that case," said Aramis, with that connection of ideas which marked him, "in that case, then, we can bestow a thought upon the young girl I was speaking to you about yesterday."

"Whom do you mean?"

"What, have you forgotten already? I mean La Valliere."

"Ah! of course, of course."

"Do you object, then, to try and make a conquest of her?"

"In one respect only; my heart is engaged in another direction, and I positively do not care about the girl in the least."

"Oh, oh!" said Aramis, "your heart is engaged, you say. The deuce! we must take care of that."

"Why?"

"Because it is terrible to have the heart occupied, when others, besides yourself, have so much need of the head."

"You are right. So you see, at your first summons, I left everything. But to return to this girl. What good do you see in my troubling myself about her?"

"This. — The king, it is said, has taken a fancy to her; at least, so it is supposed."

"But you, who know everything, know very differently."

"I know that the king is greatly and suddenly changed; that the day before yesterday he was crazy over Madame; that a few days ago, Monsieur complained of it, even to the queen-mother; and that some conjugal misunderstandings and maternal scoldings were the consequence."

"How do you know all that?"

"I do know it; at all events, since these misunderstandings and scoldings, the king has not addressed a word, has not paid the slightest attention, to her royal highness."

"Well, what next?"

"Since then, he has been taken up with Mademoiselle de la Valliere. Now, Mademoiselle de la Valliere is one of Madame's maids of honor. You happen to know, I suppose, what is called a *chaperon* in matters of love. Well, then, Mademoiselle de la Valliere is Madame's *chaperon*. It is for you to take advantage of this state of things. You have no occasion for me to tell you that. But, at all events, wounded vanity will render the conquest an easier one; the girl will get hold of the king, and Madame's secret, and you can scarcely predict what a man of intelligence can do with a secret."

"But how to get at her?"

"Nay, you, of all men, to ask me such a question!" said Aramis.

"Very true. I shall not have any time to take any notice of her."

"She is poor and unassuming, you will create a position for her, and whether she tames the king as his lady confessor, or his sweetheart, you will have enlisted a new and valuable ally."

"Very good," said Fouquet. "What is to be done, then, with regard to this girl?"

"Whenever you have taken a fancy to any lady, Monsieur Fouquet, what course have you generally pursued?"

"I have written to her, protesting my devotion to her. I have added, how happy I should be to render her any service in my power, and have signed 'Fouquet,' at the end of the letter."

"And has any one offered resistance?"

"One person only," replied Fouquet. "But, four days ago, she yielded, as the others had done."

"Will you take the trouble to write?" said Aramis, holding a pen towards him, which Fouquet took, saying:

"I will write at your dictation. My head is so taken up in another direction, that I should not be able to write a couple lines."

"Very well," said Aramis, "write."

And he dictated, as follows: "Mademoiselle — I have seen you — and you will not be surprised to learn, I think you very beautiful. But, for want of the position you merit at court, your presence there is a waste of time. The devotion of a man of honor, should ambition of any kind inspire you, might possibly serve as a means of display for your talent and beauty. I place my devotion at your feet; but, as an affection, however reserved and unpresuming it may be, might possibly compromise the object of its worship, it would ill become a person of your merit running the risk of being compromised, without her future being assured. If you would deign to accept, and reply to my affection, my affection shall prove its gratitude to you in making you free and independent forever."

Having finished writing, Fouquet looked at Aramis.

"Sign it," said the latter.

"Is it absolutely necessary?"

"Your signature at the foot of that letter is worth a million; you forget that." Fouquet signed.

"Now, by whom do you intend to send this letter?" asked Aramis.

"By an excellent servant of mine."

"Can you rely on him?"

"He is a man who has been with me all my life."

"Very well. Besides, in this case, we are not playing for very heavy stakes."

"How so? For if what you say be true of the accommodating disposition of this girl for the king and Madame, the king will give her all the money she can ask for."

"The king has money, then?" asked Aramis.

“I suppose so, for he has not asked me for any more.”

“Be easy, he will ask for some, soon.”

“Nay, more than that, I had thought he would have spoken to me about the *fete* at Vaux, but he never said a word about it.”

“He will be sure to do so, though.”

“You must think the king’s disposition a very cruel one, Monsieur d’Herblay.”

“It is not he who is so.”

“He is young, and therefore his disposition is a kind one.”

“He is young, and either he is weak, or his passions are strong; and Monsieur Colbert holds his weakness and his passions in his villainous grasp.”

“You admit that you fear him?”

“I do not deny it.”

“I that case I am lost.”

“Why so?”

“My only influence with the king has been through the money I commanded, and now I am a ruined man.”

“Not so.”

“What do you mean by ‘not so?’ Do you know my affairs better than myself?”

“That is not unlikely.”

“If he were to request this *fete* to be given?”

“You would give it, of course.”

“But where is the money to come from?”

“Have you ever been in want of any?”

“Oh! if you only knew at what a cost I procured the last supply.”

“The next shall cost you nothing.”

“But who will give it me?”

“I will.”

“What, give me six millions?”

“Ten, if necessary.”

“Upon my word, D’Herblay,” said Fouquet, “your confidence alarms me more than the king’s displeasure. Who can you possibly be, after all?”

“You know me well enough, I should think.”

“Of course; but what is it you are aiming at?”

"I wish to see upon the throne of France a king devoted to Monsieur Fouquet, and I wish Monsieur Fouquet to be devoted to me."

"Oh!" exclaimed Fouquet, pressing his hand, — "as for being devoted to you, I am yours, entirely; but believe me, my dear D'Herblay, you are deceiving yourself."

"In what respect?"

"The king will never become devoted to me."

"I do not remember to have said that King Louis would ever become devoted to you."

"Why, on the contrary, you have this moment said so."

"I did not say *the* king; I said *a* king."

"Is it not all the same?"

"No, on the contrary, it is altogether different."

"I do not understand you."

"You will do so, shortly, then; suppose, for instance, the king in question were to be a very different person to Louis XIV."

"Another person."

"Yes, who is indebted for everything to you."

"Impossible."

"His very throne, even."

"You are mad, D'Herblay. There is no man living besides Louis XIV. who can sit on the throne of France. I know of none, not one."

"*But* I know one."

"Unless it be Monsieur," said Fouquet, looking at Aramis uneasily; "yet Monsieur — "

"It is *not* Monsieur."

"But how can it be, that a prince not of the royal line, that a prince without any right — "

"My king, or rather your king, will be everything that is necessary, be assured of that."

"Be careful, Monsieur d'Herblay, you make my blood run cold, and my head swim."

Aramis smiled. "There is but little occasion for that," he replied.

"Again, I repeat, you terrify me," said Fouquet. Aramis smiled.

"You laugh," said Fouquet.

"The day will come when you will laugh too; only at the present moment I must laugh alone."

"But explain yourself."

"When the proper time comes, I will explain all. Fear nothing. Have faith in me, and doubt nothing."

"The fact is, I cannot but doubt, because I do not see clearly, or even at all."

"That is because of your blindness; but a day will come when you will be enlightened."

"Oh!" said Fouquet, "how willingly would I believe."

"You, without belief! you, who, through my means, have ten times crossed the abyss yawning at your feet, and in which, had you been alone, you would have been irretrievably swallowed; you, without belief; you, who from procureur-general attained the rank of intendant, from the rank of intendant, that of the first minister of the crown, and who from the rank of first minister will pass to that of mayor of the palace. But no," he said, with the same unaltered smile, "no, no, you cannot see, and consequently cannot believe — what I tell you." And Aramis rose to withdraw.

"One word more," said Fouquet; "you have never yet spoken to me in this manner, you have never yet shown yourself so confident, I should rather say so daring."

"Because it is necessary, in order to speak confidently, to have the lips unfettered."

"And that is now your case?"

"Yes."

"Since a very short time, then?"

"Since yesterday, only."

"Oh! Monsieur d'Herblay, take care, your confidence is becoming audacity."

"One can well be audacious when one is powerful."

"And you are powerful?"

"I have already offered you ten millions; I repeat the offer."

Fouquet rose, profoundly agitated.

"Come," he said, "come; you spoke of overthrowing kings and replacing them by others. If, indeed, I am not really out of my senses, is or is not that what you said just now?"

"You are by no means out of your senses, for it is perfectly true I did say all that just now."

"And why did you say so?"

“Because it is easy to speak in this manner of thrones being cast down, and kings being raised up, when one is, one’s self, far above all kings and thrones, of this world at least.”

“Your power is infinite, then?” cried Fouquet.

“I have told you so already, and I repeat it,” replied Aramis, with glistening eyes and trembling lips.

Fouquet threw himself back in his chair, and buried his face in his hands. Aramis looked at him for a moment, as the angel of human destinies might have looked upon a simple mortal.

“Adieu,” he said to him, “sleep undisturbed, and send your letter to La Valliere. To-morrow we shall see each other again.”

“Yes, to-morrow,” said Fouquet, shaking his hands like a man returning to his senses. “But where shall we see each other?”

“At the king’s promenade, if you like.”

“Agreed.” And they separated.

CHAPTER LXI.

The Storm.

The dawn of the following day was dark and gloomy, and as every one knew that the promenade was down in the royal programme, every one's gaze, as his eyes were opened, was directed towards the sky. Just above the tops of the trees a thick, suffocating vapor seemed to remain suspended, with barely sufficient power to rise thirty feet above the ground under the influence of the sun's rays, which was scarcely visible as a faint spot of lesser darkness through the veil of heavy mist. No dew had fallen in the morning; the turf was dried up for want of moisture, the flowers withered. The birds sang less inspiringly than usual upon the boughs, which remained motionless as the limbs of corpses. The strange confused and animated murmurs, which seemed born and to exist in virtue of the sun, that respiration of nature which is unceasingly heard amidst all other sounds, could not be heard now, and never had the silence been so profound.

The king had noticed the cheerless aspect of the heavens as he approached the window immediately upon rising. But as all the necessary directions had been given respecting the promenade, and every preparation had been made accordingly, and as, which was far more imperious than anything else, Louis relied upon this promenade to satisfy the cravings of his imagination, and we will even already say, the clamorous desires of his heart — the king unhesitatingly decided that the appearance of the heavens had nothing whatever to do with the matter; that the promenade was arranged, and that, whatever the state of the weather, the promenade should take place. Besides, there are certain terrestrial sovereigns who seem to have accorded them privileged existences, and there are certain times when it might almost be supposed that the expressed wish of an earthly monarch has its influence over the Divine will. It was Virgil who observed of Augustus: *Nocte pluit tota redeunt spectacula mane*.

Louis attended mass as usual, but it was evident that his attention was somewhat distracted from the presence of the Creator by the remembrance of the creature. His mind was occupied during the service in reckoning more than once the number of minutes, then of seconds, which separated him from the blissful moment when the promenade would begin, that is to say, the moment when Madame would set out with her maids of honor. Besides, as a matter of course, everybody at the chateau was ignorant of the interview which had taken place between La Valliere and the king. Montalais, perhaps, with her usual chattering propensity, might have been disposed to talk about it; but Montalais on this occasion was held in check by Malicorne, who had securely fastened on her pretty lips the golden padlock of mutual interest. As for Louis XIV., his happiness was so extreme that he had forgiven Madame, or nearly so, her little piece of malice of the previous evening. In fact, he had occasion to congratulate himself rather than to complain of it. Had it not been for her ill-natured action, he would not have received the letter from La Valliere; had it not been for the letter, he would have had no interview; and had it not been for the interview he would have remained undecided. His heart was filled with too much happiness for any ill-feeling to remain in it, at that moment at least. Instead, therefore, of knitting his brows into a frown when he perceived his sister-in-law, Louis resolved to receive her in a more friendly and gracious manner than usual. But on one condition only, that she would be ready to set out early. Such was the nature of Louis's thoughts during mass; which made him, during the ceremony, forget matters which, in his character of Most Christian King and of the eldest son of the Church, ought to have occupied his attention. He returned to the chateau, and as the promenade was fixed for midday, and it was at present just ten o'clock, he set to work desperately with Colbert and Lyonne. But even while he worked Louis went from the table to the window, inasmuch as the window looked out upon Madame's pavilion: he could see M. Fouquet in the courtyard, to whom the courtiers, since the favor shown towards him on the previous evening, paid greater attention than ever. The king, instinctively, on noticing Fouquet, turned towards Colbert, who was smiling, and seemed full of benevolence and delight, a state of feeling which had arisen from the very moment one of his secretaries had entered and handed him a pocket-book, which he had put unopened into his pocket. But, as there was always something sinister at the bottom of any delight expressed by Colbert, Louis preferred, of the smiles of the two men, that of Fouquet. He beckoned to the superintendent to come up, and turning towards Lyonne and Colbert, he said: — "Finish this matter, place it on my desk, and I will read it at my leisure." And he left the room.

At the sign the king had made to him, Fouquet had hastened up the staircase, while Aramis, who was with the superintendent, quietly retired among the group of courtiers and disappeared without having been even observed by the king. The king and Fouquet met at the top of the staircase.

"Sire," said Fouquet, remarking the gracious manner in which Louis was about to receive him, "your majesty has overwhelmed me with kindness during the last few days. It is not a youthful monarch, but a being of higher order, who reigns over France, one whom pleasure, happiness, and love acknowledge as their master." The king colored. The compliment, although flattering, was not the less somewhat pointed. Louis conducted Fouquet to a small room that divided his study from his sleeping-apartment.

"Do you know why I summoned you?" said the king as he seated himself upon the edge of the window, so as not to lose anything that might be passing in the gardens which fronted the opposite entrance to Madame's pavilion.

"No, sire," replied Fouquet, "but I am sure for something agreeable, if I am to judge from your majesty's gracious smile."

"You are mistaken, then."

"I, sire?"

"For I summoned you, on the contrary, to pick a quarrel with you."

"With me, sire?"

"Yes: and that a serious one."

"Your majesty alarms me — and yet I was most confident in your justice and goodness."

"Do you know I am told, Monsieur Fouquet, that you are preparing a grand *fete* at Vaux."

Fouquet smiled, as a sick man would do at the first shiver of a fever which has left him but returns again.

"And that you have not invited me!" continued the king.

"Sire," replied Fouquet, "I have not even thought of the *fete* you speak of, and it was only yesterday evening that one of my *friends*," Fouquet laid a stress upon the word, "was kind enough to make me think of it."

"Yet I saw you yesterday evening, Monsieur Fouquet, and you said nothing to me about it."

"How dared I hope that your majesty would so greatly descend from your own exalted station as to honor my dwelling with your royal presence?"

“Excuse me, Monsieur Fouquet, you did not speak to me about your *fete*.”

“I did not allude to the *fete* to your majesty, I repeat, in the first place, because nothing had been decided with regard to it, and, secondly, because I feared a refusal.”

“And something made you fear a refusal, Monsieur Fouquet? You see I am determined to push you hard.”

“The profound wish I had that your majesty should accept my invitation — ”

“Well, Monsieur Fouquet, nothing is easier, I perceive, than our coming to an understanding. Your wish is to invite me to your *fete*, my own is to be present at it; invite me and I will go.”

“Is it possible that your majesty will deign to accept?” murmured the superintendent.

“Why, really, monsieur,” said the king, laughing, “I think I do more than accept; I rather fancy I am inviting myself.”

“Your majesty overwhelms me with honor and delight,” exclaimed Fouquet, “but I shall be obliged to repeat what M. Vieuville said to your ancestor, Henry IV., *Domine non sum dignus*.”

“To which I reply, Monsieur Fouquet, that if you give a *fete*, I will go, whether I am invited or not.”

“I thank your majesty deeply,” said Fouquet, as he raised his head beneath this favor, which he was convinced would be his ruin.

“But how could your majesty have been informed of it?”

“By a public rumor, Monsieur Fouquet, which says such wonderful things of yourself and the marvels of your house. Would you become proud, Monsieur Fouquet, if the king were to be jealous of you?”

“I should be the happiest man in the world, sire, since the very day on which your majesty were to be jealous of Vaux, I should possess something worthy of being offered to you.”

“Very well, Monsieur Fouquet, prepare your *fete*, and open the door of your house as wide as possible.”

“It is for your majesty to fix the day.”

“This day month, then.”

“Has your majesty any further commands?”

“Nothing, Monsieur Fouquet, except from the present moment until then to have you near me as much as possible.”

"I have the honor to form one of your majesty's party for the promenade."

"Very good; indeed, I am now setting out; for there are the ladies, I see, who are going to start."

With this remark, the king, with all the eagerness, not only of a young man, but of a young man in love, withdrew from the window, in order to take his gloves and cane, which his valet held ready for him. The neighing of the horses and the crunching of the wheels on the gravel of the courtyard could be distinctly heard. The king descended the stairs, and at the moment he appeared upon the flight of steps, every one stopped. The king walked straight up to the young queen. The queen-mother, who was still suffering more than ever from the illness with which she was afflicted, did not wish to go out. Maria Theresa accompanied Madame in her carriage, and asked the king in what direction he wished the promenade to drive. The king, who had just seen La Valliere, still pale from the event of the previous evening, get into a carriage with three of her companions, told the queen that he had no preference, and wherever she would like to go, there would he be with her. The queen then desired that the outriders should proceed in the direction of Apremont. The outriders set off accordingly before the others. The king rode on horseback, and for a few minutes accompanied the carriage of the queen and Madame. The weather had cleared up a little, but a kind of veil of dust, like a thick gauze, was still spread over the surface of the heavens, and the sun made every atom glisten within the circuit of its rays. The heat was stifling; but, as the king did not seem to pay any attention to the appearance of the heavens, no one made himself uneasy about it, and the promenade, in obedience to the orders given by the queen, took its course in the direction of Apremont. The courtiers who followed were in the very highest spirits; it was evident that every one tried to forget, and to make others forget, the bitter discussions of the previous evening. Madame, particularly, was delightful. In fact, seeing the king at the door of her carriage, as she did not suppose he would be there for the queen's sake, she hoped that her prince had returned to her. Hardly, however, had they proceeded a quarter of a mile on the road, when the king, with a gracious smile, saluted them and drew up his horse, leaving the queen's carriage to pass on, then that of the principal ladies of honor, and then all the others in succession, who, seeing the king stop, wished in their turn to stop too; but the king made a sign to them to continue their progress. When La Valliere's carriage passed, the king approached it, saluted the ladies who were inside, and was preparing to accompany the carriage containing the maids of honor, in the same way he had followed that in which Madame was, when suddenly the whole file of carriages stopped. It was probable that Madame, uneasy at the king having left her, had just given directions for the performance of this maneuver, the direction in which the promenade was to take place having been left to her. The king, having sent to inquire what her object was in stopping the cavalcade, was informed in reply, that she wished to walk. She most likely hoped that the king, who was following the carriages of the maids of honor on horseback, would not venture to follow the maids of honor themselves on foot. They had arrived in the middle of the forest.

The promenade, in fact, was not ill-timed, especially for those who were dreamers or lovers. From the little open space where the halt had taken place, three beautiful long walks, shady and undulating, stretched out before them. These walks were covered with moss or with leaves that formed a carpet from the loom of nature; and each walk had its horizon in the distance, consisting of about a hand-breadth of sky, apparent through the interlacing of the branches of the trees. At the end of almost every walk, evidently in great tribulation and uneasiness, the startled deer were seen hurrying to and fro, first stopping for a moment in the middle of the path, and then raising their heads they fled with the speed of an arrow or bounded into the depths of the forest, where they disappeared from view; now and then a rabbit, of philosophical mien, might be noticed quietly sitting upright, rubbing his muzzle with his fore paws, and looking about inquiringly, as though wondering whether all these people, who were approaching in his direction, and who had just disturbed him in his meditations and his meal, were not followed by their dogs, or had not their guns under their arms. All alighted from their carriages as soon as they observed that the queen was doing so. Maria Theresa took the arm of one of her ladies of honor, and, with a side glance towards the king, who did not perceive that he was in the slightest degree the object of the queen’s attention, entered the forest by the first path before her. Two of the outriders preceded her majesty with long poles, which they used for the purpose of putting the branches of the trees aside, or removing the bushes that might impede her progress. As soon as Madame alighted, she found the Comte de Guiche at her side, who bowed and placed himself at her disposal.

Monsieur, delighted with his bath of the two previous days, had announced his preference for the river, and, having given De Guiche leave of absence, remained at the chateau with the Chevalier de Lorraine and Manicamp. He was not in the slightest degree jealous. He had been looked for to no purpose among those present; but as Monsieur was a man who thought a great deal of himself, and usually added very little to the general pleasure, his absence was rather a subject of satisfaction than regret. Every one had followed the example which the queen and Madame had set, doing just as they pleased, according as chance or fancy influenced them. The king, we have already observed, remained near La Valliere, and, throwing himself off his horse at the moment the door of her carriage was opened, he offered her his hand to alight. Montalais and Tonnay-Charente immediately drew back and kept at a distance; the former from calculated, the latter from natural motives. There was this difference, however, between the two, that the one had withdrawn from a wish to please the king, the other for a very opposite reason. During the last half-hour the weather also had undergone a change; the veil which had been spread over the sky, as if driven by a blast of heated air, had become massed together in the western part of the heavens; and afterwards, as if driven by a current of air from the opposite direction, was now advancing slowly and heavily towards them. The approach of the storm could be felt, but as the king did not perceive it, no one thought it proper to do so. The promenade was therefore continued; some of the company, with minds ill at ease on the subject, raised their eyes from time to time towards the sky; others, even more timid still, walked about without wandering too far from the carriages, where they relied upon taking shelter in case the storm burst. The greater number of these, however, observing that the king fearlessly entered the wood with La Valliere, followed his majesty. The king, noticing this, took La Valliere’s hand, and led her to a lateral forest-alley; where no one this time ventured to follow him.

CHAPTER LXII.

The Shower of Rain.

At this moment, and in the same direction, too, that the king and La Valliere had taken, except that they were in the wood itself instead of following the path, two men were walking together, utterly indifferent to the appearance of the heavens. Their heads were bent down in the manner of people occupied with matters of great moment. They had not observed either De Guiche or Madame, the king or La Valliere. Suddenly something fell through the air like a colossal sheet of flame, followed by a loud but distant rumbling noise.

"Ah!" said one of them, raising his head, "here comes the storm. Let us reach our carriages, my dear D'Herblay."

Aramis looked inquiringly at the heavens. "There is no occasion to hurry yet," he said; and then resuming the conversation where it had doubtless been interrupted, he said, "You were observing that the letter we wrote last evening must by this time have reached its destination?"

"I was saying that she certainly has it."

"Whom did you send it by?"

"By my own servant, as I have already told you."

"Did he bring back an answer?"

"I have not seen him since; the young girl was probably in attendance on Madame, or was in her own room dressing, and he may have had to wait. Our time for leaving arrived, and we set off, of course; I cannot, therefore, know what is going on yonder."

"Did you see the king before leaving?"

"Yes."

"How did he seem?"

"Nothing could have passed off better, or worse; according as he be sincere or hypocritical."

"And the *fete?*"

"Will take place in a month."

"He invited himself, you say?"

"With a pertinacity in which I detected Colbert's influence. But has not last night removed your illusions?"

"What illusions?"

"With respect to the assistance you may be able to give me under these circumstances."

"No; I have passed the night writing, and all my orders are given."

"Do not conceal it from yourself, D'Herblay, but the *fete* will cost some millions."

"I will supply six; do you on your side get two or three."

"You are a wonderful man, my dear D'Herblay."

Aramis smiled.

"But," inquired Fouquet, with some remaining uneasiness, "how is it that while you are now squandering millions in this manner, a few days ago you did not pay the fifty thousand francs to Baisemeaux out of your own pocket?"

"Because a few days ago I was as poor as Job."

"And to-day?"

"To-day I am wealthier than the king himself."

"Very well," said Fouquet; "I understand men pretty well; I know you are incapable of forfeiting your word; I do not wish to wrest your secret from you, and so let us talk no more about it."

At this moment a dull, heavy rumbling was heard, which suddenly developed into a violent clap of thunder.

"Oh, oh!" said Fouquet, "I was quite right in what I said."

"Come," said Aramis, "let us rejoin the carriages."

"We shall not have time," said Fouquet, "for here comes the rain."

In fact, as he spoke, and as if the heavens were opened, a shower of large drops of rain was suddenly heard pattering on the leaves about them.

"We shall have time," said Aramis, "to reach the carriages before the foliage becomes saturated."

"It will be better," said Fouquet, "to take shelter somewhere — in a grotto, for instance."

"Yes, but where are we to find a grotto?" inquired Aramis.

"I know one," said Fouquet, smiling, "not ten paces from here." Then looking round him, he added: "Yes, we are quite right."

"You are very fortunate to have so good a memory," said Aramis, smiling in his turn, "but are you not afraid that your coachman, finding we do not return, will suppose we have taken another road back, and that he will not follow the carriages belonging to the court?"

"Oh, there is no fear of that," said Fouquet; "whenever I place my coachman and my carriage in any particular spot, nothing but an express order from the king could stir them; and more than that, too, it seems that we are not the only ones who have come so far, for I hear footsteps and the sound of voices."

As he spoke, Fouquet turned round, and opened with his cane a mass of foliage which hid the path from his view. Aramis's glance as well as his own plunged at the same moment through the aperture he had made.

"A woman," said Aramis.

"And a man," said Fouquet.

"It is La Valliere and the king," they both exclaimed together.

"Oh, oh!" said Aramis, "is his majesty aware of your cavern as well? I should not be astonished if he were, for he seems to be on very good terms with the dryads of Fontainebleau."

"Never mind," said Fouquet; "let us get there. If he is not aware of it, we shall see what he will do if he should know it, as it has two entrances, so that whilst he enters by one, we can leave by the other."

"Is it far?" asked Aramis, "for the rain is beginning to penetrate."

"We are there now," said Fouquet, as he pushed aside a few branches, and an excavation in the solid rock could be observed, hitherto concealed by heaths, ivy, and a thick covert of small shrubs.

Fouquet led the way, followed by Aramis; but as the latter entered the grotto, he turned round, saying: "Yes, they are entering the wood; and, see, they are bending their steps this way."

"Very well; let us make room for them," said Fouquet, smiling and pulling Aramis by his cloak; "but I do not think the king knows of my grotto."

"Yes," said Aramis, "they are looking about them, but it is only for a thicker tree."

Aramis was not mistaken, the king's looks were directed upward, and not around him. He held La Valliere's arm within his own, and held her hand in his. La Valliere's feet began to sleep on the damp grass. Louis again looked round him with greater attention than before, and perceiving an enormous oak with wide-spreading branches, he hurriedly drew La Valliere beneath its protecting shelter. The poor girl looked round her on all sides, and seemed half afraid, half desirous of being followed. The king made her lean back against the trunk of the tree, whose vast circumference, protected by the thickness of the foliage, was as dry as if at that moment the rain had not been falling in torrents. He himself remained standing before her with his head uncovered. After a few minutes, however, some drops of rain penetrated through the branches of the tree and fell on the king's forehead, who did not pay any attention to them.

"Oh, sire!" murmured La Valliere, pushing the king's hat towards him. But the king simply bowed, and determinedly refused to cover his head.

"Now or never is the time to offer your place," said Fouquet in Aramis's ear.

"Now or never is the time to listen, and not lose a syllable of what they may have to say to each other," replied Aramis in Fouquet's ear.

In fact they both remained perfectly silent, and the king's voice reached them where they were.

"Believe me," said the king, "I perceive, or rather I can imagine your uneasiness; believe me, I sincerely regret having isolated you from the rest of the company, and brought you, also, to a spot where you will be inconvenienced by the rain. You are wet already, and perhaps cold too?"

"No, sire."

"And yet you tremble?"

"I am afraid, sire, that my absence may be misinterpreted; at a moment, too, when all the others are reunited."

"I would not hesitate to propose returning to the carriages, Mademoiselle de la Valliere, but pray look and listen, and tell me if it be possible to attempt to make the slightest progress at present?"

In fact the thunder was still rolling, and the rain continued to fall in torrents.

"Besides," continued the king, "no possible interpretation can be made which would be to your discredit. Are you not with the king of France; in other words, with the first gentleman of the kingdom?"

"Certainly, sire," replied La Valliere, "and it is a very distinguished honor for me; it is not, therefore, for myself that I fear any interpretations that may be made."

"For whom, then?"

"For you, sire."

"For *me?*" said the king, smiling, "I do not understand you."

“Has your majesty already forgotten what took place yesterday evening in her royal highness’s apartments?”

“Oh! forget that, I beg, or allow me to remember it for no other purpose than to thank you once more for your letter, and — ”

“Sire,” interrupted La Valliere, “the rain is falling, and your majesty’s head is uncovered.”

“I entreat you not to think of anything but yourself.”

“Oh! I,” said La Valliere, smiling, “I am a country girl, accustomed to roaming through the meadows of the Loire and the gardens of Blois, whatever the weather may be. And, as for my clothes,” she added, looking at her simple muslin dress, “your majesty sees there is but little room for injury.”

“Indeed, I have already noticed, more than once, that you owed nearly everything to yourself and nothing to your toilette. Your freedom from coquetry is one of your greatest charms in my eyes.”

“Sire, do not make me out better than I am, and say merely, ‘You cannot possibly be a coquette.’“

“Why so?”

“Because,” said La Valliere, smiling, “I am not rich.”

“You admit, then,” said the king, quickly, “that you have a love for beautiful things?”

“Sire, I only regard those things as beautiful which are within my reach. Everything which is too highly placed for me — ”

“You are indifferent to?”

“Is foreign to me, as being prohibited.”

“And I,” said the king, “do not find that you are at my court on the footing you should be. The services of your family have not been sufficiently brought under my notice. The advancement of your family was cruelly neglected by my uncle.”

“On the contrary, sire. His royal highness, the Duke of Orleans, was always exceedingly kind towards M. de Saint-Remy, my step-father. The services rendered were humble, and, properly speaking, our services have been adequately recognized. It is not every one who is happy enough to find opportunities of serving his sovereign with distinction. I have no doubt at all, that, if ever opportunities had been met with, my family’s actions would have been as lofty as their loyalty was firm: but that happiness was never ours.”

"In that case, Mademoiselle de la Valliere, it belongs to kings to repair the want of opportunity, and most delightedly do I undertake to repair, in your instance, and with the least possible delay, the wrongs of fortune towards you."

"Nay, sire," cried La Valliere, eagerly; "leave things, I beg, as they are now."

"Is it possible! you refuse what I ought, and what I wish to do for you?"

"All I desired has been granted me, when the honor was conferred upon me of forming one of Madame's household."

"But if you refuse for yourself, at least accept for your family."

"Your generous intentions, sire, bewilder me and make me apprehensive, for, in doing for my family what your kindness urges you to do, your majesty will raise up enemies for us, and enemies for yourself, too. Leave me in the ranks of middle life, sire; of all the feelings and sentiments I experience, leave me to enjoy the pleasing instinct of disinterestedness."

"The sentiments you express," said the king, "are indeed admirable."

"Quite true," murmured Aramis in Fouquet's ear, "and he cannot be accustomed to them."

"But," replied Fouquet, "suppose she were to make a similar reply to my letter."

"True!" said Aramis, "let us not anticipate, but wait the conclusion."

"And then, dear Monsieur d'Herblay," added the superintendent, hardly able to appreciate the sentiments which La Valliere had just expressed, "it is very often sound calculation to seem disinterested with monarchs."

"Exactly what I was thinking this very minute," said Aramis. "Let us listen."

The king approached nearer to La Valliere, and as the rain dripped more and more through the foliage of the oak, he held his hat over the head of the young girl, who raised her beautiful blue eyes towards the royal hat which sheltered her, and shook her head, sighing deeply as she did so.

"What melancholy thought," said the king, "can possibly reach your heart when I place mine as a rampart before it?"

"I will tell you, sire. I had already once before broached this question, which is so difficult for a young girl of my age to discuss, but your majesty imposed silence on me. Your majesty belongs not to yourself alone: you are married; and every sentiment which would separate your majesty from the queen, in leading you to take notice of me, will be a source of profoundest sorrow for the queen.” The king endeavored to interrupt the young girl, but she continued with a suppliant gesture. “The Queen Maria, with an attachment which can be well understood, follows with her eyes every step of your majesty which separates you from her. Happy enough in having had her fate united to your own, she weepingly implores Heaven to preserve you to her, and is jealous of the faintest throb of your heart bestowed elsewhere.” The king again seemed anxious to speak, but again did La Valliere venture to prevent him. — ”Would it not, therefore, be a most blamable action,” she continued, “if your majesty, a witness of this anxious and disinterested affection, gave the queen any cause for jealousy? Forgive me, sire, for the expressions I have used. I well know it is impossible, or rather that it would be impossible, that the greatest queen of the whole world could be jealous of a poor girl like myself. But though a queen, she is still a woman, and her heart, like that of the rest of her sex, cannot close itself against the suspicions which such as are evilly disposed, insinuate. For Heaven’s sake, sire, think no more of me; I am unworthy of your regard.”

“Do you not know that in speaking as you have done, you change my esteem for you into the profoundest admiration?”

“Sire, you assume my words to be contrary to the truth; you suppose me to be better than I really am, and attach a greater merit to me than God ever intended should be the case. Spare me, sire; for, did I not know that your majesty was the most generous man in your kingdom, I should believe you were jesting.”

“You do not, I know, fear such a thing; I am quite sure of that,” exclaimed Louis.

“I shall be obliged to believe it, if your majesty continues to hold such language towards me.”

“I am most unhappy, then,” said the king, in a tone of regret which was not assumed; “I am the unhappiest prince in the Christian world, since I am powerless to induce belief in my words, in one whom I love the best in the wide world, and who almost breaks my heart by refusing to credit my regard for her.”

“Oh, sire!” said La Valliere, gently putting the king aside, who had approached nearer to her, “I think the storm has passed away now, and the rain has ceased.” At the very moment, however, as the poor girl, fleeing as it were from her own heart, which doubtless throbbed but too well in unison with the king’s, uttered these words, the storm undertook to contradict her. A dead-white flash of lightning illumined the forest with a weird glare, and a peal of thunder, like a discharge of artillery, burst over their heads, as if the height of the oak that sheltered them had attracted the storm. The young girl could not repress a cry of terror. The king with one hand drew her towards his heart, and stretched the other above her head, as though to shield her from the lightning. A moment’s silence ensued, as the group, delightful as everything young and loving is delightful, remained motionless, while Fouquet and Aramis contemplated it in attitudes as motionless as La Valliere and the king. “Oh, sire!” murmured La Valliere, “do you hear?” and her head fell upon his shoulder.

“Yes,” said the king. “You see, the storm has not passed away.”

“*It is a warning, sire*.” The king smiled. “Sire, it is the voice of Heaven in anger.”

“Be it so,” said the king. “I agree to accept that peal of thunder as a warning, and even as a menace, if, in five minutes from the present moment, it is renewed with equal violence; but if not, permit me to think that the storm is a storm simply, and nothing more.” And the king, at the same moment, raised his head, as if to interrogate the heavens. But, as if the remark had been heard and accepted, during the five minutes which elapsed after the burst of thunder which had alarmed them, no renewed peal was heard; and, when the thunder was again heard, it was passing as plainly as if, during those same five minutes, the storm, put to flight, had traversed the heavens with the wings of the wind. “Well, Louise,” said the king, in a low tone of voice, “do you still threaten me with the anger of Heaven? and, since you wished to regard the storm as a warning, do you still believe it bodes misfortune?”

The young girl looked up, and saw that while they had been talking, the rain had penetrated the foliage above them, and was trickling down the king’s face. “Oh, sire, sire!” she exclaimed, in accents of eager apprehensions, which greatly agitated the king. “Is it for me,” she murmured, “that the king remains thus uncovered, and exposed to the rain? What am I, then?”

“You are, you perceive,” said the king, “the divinity who dissipates the storm, and brings back fine weather.” In fact, even as the king spoke, a ray of sunlight streamed through the forest, and caused the rain-drops which rested upon the leaves, or fell vertically among the openings in the branches of the trees, to glisten like diamonds.

"Sire," said La Valliere, almost overcome, but making a powerful effort over herself, "think of the anxieties your majesty will have to submit to on my account. At this very moment, they are seeking you in every direction. The queen must be full of uneasiness; and Madame — oh, Madame!" the young girl exclaimed, with an expression almost resembling terror.

This name had a certain effect upon the king. He started, and disengaged himself from La Valliere, whom he had, till that moment, held pressed against his heart. He then advanced towards the path, in order to look round, and returned, somewhat thoughtfully, to La Valliere. "Madame, did you say?" he remarked.

"Yes, Madame; she, too, is jealous," said La Valliere, with a marked tone of voice; and her eyes, so timorous in their expression, and so modestly fugitive in their glance, for a moment, ventured to look inquiringly into the king's.

"Still," returned Louis, making an effort over himself, "it seems to me that Madame has no reason, no right to be jealous of me."

"Alas!" murmured La Valliere.

"Are you, too," said the king, almost in a tone of reproach, "are you among those who think the sister has a right to be jealous of the brother?"

"It is not for me, sire, to seek to penetrate your majesty's secrets."

"You *do* believe it, then?" exclaimed the king.

"I believe Madame is jealous, sire," La Valliere replied, firmly.

"Is it possible," said the king with some anxiety, "that you have perceived it, then, from her conduct towards you? Have her manners in any way been such towards you that you can attribute them to the jealousy you speak of?"

"Not at all, sire; I am of so little importance."

"Oh! if it were really the case — " exclaimed Louis, violently.

"Sire," interrupted the young girl, "it has ceased raining; some one is coming, I think." And, forgetful of all etiquette, she had seized the king by the arm.

"Well," replied the king, "let them come. Who is there who would venture to think I had done wrong in remaining alone with Mademoiselle de la Valliere?"

"For pity's sake, sire! they will think it strange to see you wet through, in this manner, and that you should have run such risk for me."

"I have simply done my duty as a gentleman," said Louis; "and woe to him who may fail in his, in criticising his sovereign's conduct." In fact, at this moment a few eager and curious faces were seen in the walk, as if engaged in a search. Catching glimpses at last of the king and La Valliere, they seemed to have found what they were seeking. They were some of the courtiers who had been sent by the queen and Madame, and uncovered themselves, in token of having perceived his majesty. But Louis, notwithstanding La Valliere's confusion, did not quit his respectful and tender attitude. Then, when all the courtiers were assembled in the walk — when every one had been able to perceive the extraordinary mark of deference with which he had treated the young girl, by remaining standing and bare-headed during the storm — he offered her his arm, led her towards the group who were waiting, recognized by an inclination of the head the respectful salutations which were paid him on all sides; and, still holding his hat in his hand, he conducted her to her carriage. And, as a few sparse drops of rain continued to fall — a last adieu of the vanishing storm — the other ladies, whom respect had prevented from getting into their carriages before the king, remained altogether unprotected by hood or cloak, exposed to the rain from which the king was protecting, as well as he was able, the humblest among them. The queen and Madame must, like the others, have witnessed this exaggerated courtesy of the king. Madame was so disconcerted at it, that she touched the queen with her elbow, saying at the same time, "Look there, look there."

The queen closed her eyes as if she had been suddenly seized with a fainting-spell. She lifted her hands to her face and entered her carriage, Madame following her. The king again mounted his horse, and without showing a preference for any particular carriage door, he returned to Fontainebleau, the reins hanging over his horse's neck, absorbed in thought. As soon as the crowd had disappeared, and the sound of the horses and carriages grew fainter in the distance, and when they were certain, in fact, that no one could see them, Aramis and Fouquet came out of their grotto, and both of them in silence passed slowly on towards the walk. Aramis looked most narrowly not only at the whole extent of the open space stretching out before and behind him, but even into the very depth of the wood.

"Monsieur Fouquet," he said, when he had quite satisfied himself that they were alone, "we must get back, at any cost, that letter you wrote to La

Valliere.”

“That will be easy enough,” said Fouquet, “if my servant has not given it to her.”

“In any case it must be had, do you understand?”

“Yes. The king is in love with the girl, you mean?”

“Deeply, and what is worse is, that on her side, the girl is passionately attached to him.”

“As much as to say that we must change our tactics, I suppose?”

“Not a doubt of it; you have no time to lose. You must see La Valliere, and, without thinking any more of becoming her lover, which is out of the question, must declare yourself her most devoted friend and her most humble servant.”

“I will do so,” replied Fouquet, “and without the slightest feeling of disinclination, for she seems a good-hearted girl.”

“Or a very clever one,” said Aramis; “but in that case, all the greater reason.” Then he added, after a moment’s pause, “If I am not mistaken, that girl will become the strongest passion of the king’s life. Let us return to our carriage, and, as fast as possible, to the chateau.”

CHAPTER LXIII.

Toby.

Two hours after the superintendent’s carriage had set off by Aramis’s directions, conveying them both towards Fontainebleau with the fleetness of the clouds the last breath of the tempest was hurrying across the face of heaven, La Valliere was closeted in her own apartment, with a simple muslin wrapper round her, having just finished a slight repast, which was placed upon a marble table. Suddenly the door was opened, and a servant entered to announce M. Fouquet, who had called to request permission to pay his respects to her. She made him repeat the message twice over, for the poor girl only knew M. Fouquet by name, and could not conceive what business she could possibly have with a superintendent of finances. However, as he might represent the king — and, after the conversation we have recorded, it was very likely — she glanced at her mirror, drew out still more the ringlets of her hair, and desired him to be admitted. La Valliere could not, however, refrain from a certain feeling of uneasiness. A visit from the superintendent was not an ordinary event in the life of any woman attached to the court. Fouquet, so notorious for his generosity, his gallantry, and his sensitive delicacy of feeling with regard to women generally, had received more invitations than he had requested audiences. In many houses, the presence of the superintendent had been significant of fortune; in many hearts, of love. Fouquet entered the apartment with a manner full of respect, presenting himself with that ease and gracefulness of manner which was the distinctive characteristic of the men of eminence of that period, and which at the present day seems no longer to be understood, even through the interpretation of the portraits of the period, in which the painter has endeavored to recall them to being. La Valliere acknowledged the ceremonious salutation which Fouquet addressed to her by a gentle inclination of the head, and motioned him to a seat. But Fouquet, with a bow, said, “I will not sit down until you have pardoned me.”

“I?” asked La Valliere, “pardon what?”

Fouquet fixed a most piercing look upon the young girl, and fancied he could perceive in her face nothing but the most unaffected surprise. “I observe,” he said, “that you have as much generosity as intelligence, and I read in your eyes the forgiveness I solicit. A pardon pronounced by your lips is insufficient for me, and I need the forgiveness of your heart and mind.”

“Upon my honor, monsieur,” said La Valliere, “I assure you most positively I do not understand your meaning.”

“Again, that is a delicacy on your part which charms me,” replied Fouquet, “and I see you do not wish me to blush before you.”

“Blush! blush before *me!* Why should you blush?”

“Can I have deceived myself,” said Fouquet; “and can I have been happy enough not to have offended you by my conduct towards you?”

“Really, monsieur,” said La Valliere, shrugging her shoulders, “you speak in enigmas, and I suppose I am too ignorant to understand you.”

“Be it so,” said Fouquet; “I will not insist. Tell me, only, I entreat you, that I may rely upon your full and complete forgiveness.”

“I have but one reply to make to you, monsieur,” said La Valliere, somewhat impatiently, “and I hope that will satisfy you. If I knew the wrong you have done me, I would forgive you, and I now do so with still greater reason since I am ignorant of the wrong you allude to.”

Fouquet bit his lips, as Aramis would have done. “In that case,” he said, “I may hope, that, notwithstanding what has happened, our good understanding will remain undisturbed, and that you will kindly confer the favor upon me of believing in my respectful friendship.”

La Valliere fancied that she now began to understand, and said to herself, “I should not have believed M. Fouquet so eager to seek the source of a favor so very recent,” and then added aloud, “Your friendship, monsieur! you offer me your friendship. The honor, on the contrary, is mine, and I feel overpowered by it.”

“I am aware,” replied Fouquet, “that the friendship of the master may appear more brilliant and desirable than that of the servant; but I assure you the latter will be quite as devoted, quite as faithful, and altogether disinterested.”

La Valliere bowed, for, in fact, the voice of the superintendent seemed to convey both conviction and real devotion in its tone, and she held out her hand to him, saying, “I believe you.”

Fouquet eagerly took hold of the young girl’s hand. “You see no difficulty, therefore,” he added, “in restoring me that unhappy letter.”

“What letter?” inquired La Valliere.

Fouquet interrogated her with his most searching gaze, as he had already done before, but the same ingenious expressions, the same transparently candid look met his. “I am obliged to confess,” he said, after this denial, “that your heart is the most delicate in the world, and I should not feel I was a man of honor and uprightness if I were to suspect anything from a woman so generous as yourself.”

“Really, Monsieur Fouquet,” replied La Valliere, “it is with profound regret I am obliged to repeat that I absolutely understand nothing of what you refer to.”

“In fact, then, upon your honor, mademoiselle, you have not received any letter from me?”

“Upon my honor, none,” replied La Valliere, firmly.

“Very well, that is quite sufficient; permit me, then, to renew the assurance of my utmost esteem and respect,” said Fouquet. Then, bowing, he left the room to seek Aramis, who was waiting for him in his own apartment, and leaving La Valliere to ask herself whether the superintendent had not lost his senses.

“Well!” inquired Aramis, who was impatiently waiting Fouquet’s return, “are you satisfied with the favorite?”

“Enchanted,” replied Fouquet; “she is a woman full of intelligence and fine feeling.”

“She did not get angry, then?”

“Far from that — she did not even seem to understand.”

“To understand what?”

“To understand that I had written to her.”

“She must, however, have understood you sufficiently to give the letter back to you, for I presume she returned it.”

“Not at all.”

“At least, you satisfied yourself that she had burnt it.”

“My dear Monsieur d’Herblay, I have been playing at cross-purposes for more than an hour, and, however amusing it may be, I begin to have had enough of this game. So understand me thoroughly: the girl pretended not to understand what I was saying to her; she denied having received any letter; therefore, having positively denied its receipt, she was unable either to return or burn it."

"Oh, oh!" said Aramis, with uneasiness, "what is this you tell me?"

"I say that she swore most positively she had not received any letter."

"That is too much. And did you not insist?"

"On the contrary, I did insist, almost impertinently even."

"And she persisted in her denial?"

"Unhesitatingly."

"And did she not contradict herself?"

"Not once."

"But, in that case, then, you have left our letter in her hands?"

"How could I do otherwise?"

"Oh! it was a great mistake."

"What the deuce would you have done in my place?"

"One could not force her, certainly, but it is very embarrassing; such a letter ought not to remain in existence against us."

"Oh! the young girl's disposition is generosity itself; I looked at her eyes, and I can read eyes well."

"You think she can be relied upon?"

"From my heart I do."

"Well, I think we are mistaken."

"In what way?"

"I think that, in point of fact, as she herself told you, she did not receive the letter."

"What! do you suppose — "

"I suppose that, from some motive, of which we know nothing, your man did not deliver the letter to her."

Fouquet rang the bell. A servant appeared. "Send Toby here," he said. A moment afterwards a man made his appearance, with an anxious, restless look, shrewd expression of the mouth, with short arms, and his back somewhat bent. Aramis fixed a penetrating look upon him.

"Will you allow me to interrogate him myself?" inquired Aramis.

"Do so," said Fouquet.

Aramis was about to say something to the lackey, when he paused. "No," he said; "he would see that we attach too much importance to his answer; therefore question him yourself; I will pretend to be writing." Aramis accordingly placed himself at a table, his back turned towards the old attendant, whose every gesture and look he watched in a looking-glass opposite to him.

“Come here, Toby,” said Fouquet to the valet, who approached with a tolerably firm step. “How did you execute my commission?” inquired Fouquet.

“In the usual way, monseigneur,” replied the man.

“But how, tell me?”

“I succeeded in penetrating as far as Mademoiselle de la Valliere’s apartment; but she was at mass, and so I placed the note on her toilette-table. Is not that what you told me to do?”

“Precisely; and is that all?”

“Absolutely all, monseigneur.”

“No one was there?”

“No one.”

“Did you conceal yourself as I told you?”

“Yes.”

“And she returned?”

“Ten minutes afterwards.”

“And no one could have taken the letter?”

“No one; for no one had entered the room.”

“From the outside, but from the interior?”

“From the place where I was secreted, I could see to the very end of the room.”

“Now listen to me,” said Fouquet, looking fixedly at the lackey; “if this letter did not reach its proper destination, confess it; for, if a mistake has been made, your head shall be the forfeit.”

Toby started, but immediately recovered himself. “Monseigneur,” he said, “I placed the letter on the very place I told you: and I ask only half an hour to prove to you that the letter is in Mademoiselle de la Valliere’s hand, or to bring you back the letter itself.”

Aramis looked at the valet scrutinizingly. Fouquet was ready in placing confidence in people, and for twenty years this man had served him faithfully. “Go,” he said; “but bring me the proof you speak of.” The lackey quitted the room.

“Well, what do you think of it?” inquired Fouquet of Aramis.

“I think that you must, by some means or another, assure yourself of the truth, either that the letter has, or has not, reached La Valliere; that, in the first case, La Valliere must return it to you, or satisfy you by burning it in your presence; that, in the second, you must have the letter back again, even were it to cost you a million. Come, is not that your opinion?"

"Yes; but still, my dear bishop, I believe you are exaggerating the importance of the affair."

"Blind, how blind you are!" murmured Aramis.

"La Valliere," returned Fouquet, "whom we assume to be a schemer of the first ability, is simply nothing more than a coquette, who hopes that I shall pay my court to her, because I have already done so, and who, now that she has received a confirmation of the king's regard, hopes to keep me in leading strings with the letter. It is natural enough."

Aramis shook his head.

"Is not that your opinion?" said Fouquet.

"She is not a coquette," he replied.

"Allow me to tell you — "

"Oh! I am well enough acquainted with women who are coquettes," said Aramis.

"My dear friend!"

"It is a long time ago since I finished my education, you mean. But women are the same, throughout the centuries."

"True; but men change, and you at the present day are far more suspicious than you formerly were." And then, beginning to laugh, he added, "Come, if La Valliere is willing to love me only to the extent of a third, and the king two-thirds, do you think the condition acceptable?"

Aramis rose impatiently. "La Valliere," he said, "has never loved, and never will love, any one but the king."

"At all events," said Fouquet, "what would you do?"

"Ask me rather what I would have done?"

"Well! what would you have done?"

"In the first place, I should not have allowed that man to depart."

"Toby?"

"Yes; Toby is a traitor. Nay, I am sure of it, and I would not have let him go until he had told me the truth."

"There is still time. I will recall him, and do you question him in your turn."

"Agreed."

“But I assure you it is useless. He has been with me for twenty years, and has never made the slightest mistake, and yet,” added Fouquet, laughing, “it would have been easy enough for him to have done so.”

“Still, call him back. This morning I fancy I saw that face, in earnest conversation with one of M. Colbert’s men.”

“Where was that?”

“Opposite the stables.”

“Bah! all my people are at daggers drawn with that fellow.”

“I saw him, I tell you, and his face, which should have been unknown to me when he entered just now, struck me as disagreeably familiar.”

“Why did you not say something, then, while he was here?”

“Because it is only at this very minute that my memory is clear upon the subject.”

“Really,” said Fouquet, “you alarm me.” And he again rang the bell.

“Provided that it is not already too late,” said Aramis.

Fouquet once more rang impatiently. The valet usually in attendance appeared. “Toby!” said Fouquet, “send Toby.” The valet again shut the door.

“You leave me at perfect liberty, I suppose?”

“Entirely so.”

“I may employ all means, then, to ascertain the truth.”

“All.”

“Intimidation, even?”

“I constitute you public prosecutor in my place.”

They waited ten minutes longer, but uselessly, and Fouquet, thoroughly out of patience, again rang loudly.

“Toby!” he exclaimed.

“Monseigneur,” said the valet, “they are looking for him.”

“He cannot be far distant, I have not given him any commission to execute.”

“I will go and see, monseigneur,” replied the valet, as he closed the door. Aramis, during the interview, walked impatiently, but without a syllable, up and down the cabinet. They waited a further ten minutes. Fouquet rang in a manner to alarm the very dead. The valet again presented himself, trembling in a way to induce a belief that he was the bearer of bad news.

“Monseigneur is mistaken,” he said, before even Fouquet could interrogate him, “you must have given Toby some commission, for he has been to the stables and taken your lordship’s swiftest horse, and saddled it himself.”

“Well?”

“And he has gone off.”

“Gone!” exclaimed Fouquet. “Let him be pursued, let him be captured.”

“Nay, nay,” whispered Aramis, taking him by the hand, “be calm, the evil is done.”

The valet quietly went out.

“The evil is done, you say?”

“No doubt; I was sure of it. And now, let us give no cause for suspicion; we must calculate the result of the blow, and ward it off, if possible.”

“After all,” said Fouquet, “the evil is not great.”

“You think so?” said Aramis.

“Of course. Surely a man is allowed to write a love-letter to a woman.”

“A man, certainly; a subject, no; especially, too, when the woman in question is one with whom the king is in love.”

“But the king was not in love with La Valliere a week ago! he was not in love with her yesterday, and the letter is dated yesterday; I could not guess the king was in love, when the king’s affection was not even yet in existence.”

“As you please,” replied Aramis; “but unfortunately the letter is not dated, and it is that circumstance particularly which annoys me. If it had only been dated yesterday, I should not have the slightest shadow of uneasiness on your account.”

Fouquet shrugged his shoulders.

“Am I not my own master,” he said, “and is the king, then, king of my brain and of my flesh?”

“You are right,” replied Aramis, “do not let us attach greater importance to matters than is necessary; and besides... Well! if we are menaced, we have means of defense.”

“Oh! menaced!” said Fouquet, “you do not place this gnat bite, as it were, among the number of menaces which may compromise my fortune and my life, do you?”

“Do not forget, Monsieur Fouquet, that the bit of an insect can kill a giant, if the insect be venomous.”

“But has this sovereign power you were speaking of, already vanished?”

“I am all-powerful, it is true, but I am not immortal.”

“Come, then, the most pressing matter is to find Toby again, I suppose. Is not that your opinion?”

“Oh! as for that, you will not find him again,” said Aramis, “and if he were of any great value to you, you must give him up for lost.”

“At all events he is somewhere or another in the world,” said Fouquet.

“You’re right, let me act,” replied Aramis.

CHAPTER LXIV.

Madame’s Four Chances.

Anne of Austria had begged the young queen to pay her a visit. For some time past suffering most acutely, and losing both her youth and beauty with that rapidity which signalizes the decline of women for whom life has been one long contest, Anne of Austria had, in addition to her physical sufferings, to experience the bitterness of being no longer held in any esteem, except as a surviving remembrance of the past, amidst the youthful beauties, wits, and influential forces of her court. Her physician’s opinions, her mirror also, grieved her far less than the inexorable warnings which the society of the courtiers afforded, who, like rats in a ship, abandon the hold into which on the very next voyage the water will infallibly penetrate, owing to the ravages of decay. Anne of Austria did not feel satisfied with the time her eldest son devoted to her. The king, a good son, more from affectation than from affection, had at first been in the habit of passing an hour in the morning and one in the evening with his mother; but, since he had himself undertaken the conduct of state affairs, the duration of the morning and evening’s visit had been reduced by one half; and then, by degrees, the morning visit had been suppressed altogether. They met at mass; the evening visit was replaced by a meeting, either at the king’s assembly or at Madame’s, which the queen attended obligingly enough, out of regard to her two sons.

The result of this was, that Madame gradually acquired an immense influence over the court, which made her apartments the true royal place of meeting. This, Anne of Austria perceived; knowing herself to be very ill, and condemned by her sufferings to frequent retirement, she was distressed at the idea that the greater part of her future days and evenings would pass away solitary, useless, and in despondency. She recalled with terror the isolation in which Cardinal Richelieu had formerly left her, those dreaded and insupportable evenings, during which, however, she had both youth and beauty, which are ever accompanied by hope, to console her. She next formed the project of transporting the court to her own apartments, and of attracting Madame, with her brilliant escort, to her gloomy and already sorrowful abode, where the widow of a king of France, and the mother of a king of France, was reduced to console, in her artificial widowhood, the weeping wife of a king of France.

Anne began to reflect. She had intrigued a good deal in her life. In the good times past, when her youthful mind nursed projects that were, ultimately, invariably successful, she had by her side, to stimulate her ambition and her love, a friend of her own sex, more eager, more ambitious than herself, — a friend who had loved her, a rare circumstance at courts, and whom some petty considerations had removed from her forever. But for many years past — except Madame de Motteville, and La Molena, her Spanish nurse, a confidante in her character of countrywoman and woman too — who could boast of having given good advice to the queen? Who, too, among all the youthful heads there, could recall the past for her, — that past in which alone she lived? Anne of Austria remembered Madame de Chevreuse, in the first place exiled rather by her wish than the king's, and then dying in exile, the wife of a gentleman of obscure birth and position. She asked herself what Madame de Chevreuse would have advised her to do in similar circumstances, in their mutual difficulties arising from their intrigues; and after serious reflection, it seemed as if the clever, subtle mind of her friend, full of experience and sound judgment, answered her in the well-remembered ironical tones: “All the insignificant young people are poor and greedy of gain. They require gold and incomes to supply means of amusement; it is by interest you must gain them over.” And Anne of Austria adopted this plan. Her purse was well filled, and she had at her disposal a considerable sum of money, which had been amassed by Mazarin for her, and lodged in a place of safety. She possessed the most magnificent jewels in France, and especially pearls of a size so large that they made the king sigh every time he saw them, because the pearls of his crown were like millet seed compared to them. Anne of Austria had neither beauty nor charms any longer at her disposal. She gave out, therefore, that her wealth was great, and as an inducement for others to visit her apartments she let it be known that there were good gold crowns to be won at play, or that handsome presents were likely to be made on days when all went well with her; or windfalls, in the shape of annuities which she had wrung from the king by entreaty, and thus she determined to maintain her credit. In the first place, she tried these means upon Madame; because to gain her consent was of more importance than anything else. Madame, notwithstanding the bold confidence which her wit and beauty inspired her, blindly ran head foremost into the net thus stretched out to catch her. Enriched by degrees by these presents and transfers of property, she took a fancy to inheritances by anticipation. Anne of Austria adopted the same means towards Monsieur, and even towards the king himself. She instituted lotteries in her apartments. The day on which the present chapter opens, invitations had been issued for a late supper in the queen-mother's apartments, as she intended that two beautiful diamond bracelets of exquisite workmanship should be put into a lottery. The medallions were antique cameos of the greatest value; the diamonds, in point of intrinsic value, did not represent a very considerable amount, but the originality and rarity of the workmanship were such, that every one at court not only wished to possess the bracelets, but even to see the queen herself wear them; for, on the days she wore them, it was considered as a favor to be admitted to admire them in kissing her hands. The courtiers had, even with regard to this subject, adopted various expressions of gallantry to establish the aphorism, that the bracelets would have been priceless in value if they had not been unfortunate enough to be placed in contact with arms as beautiful as the queen's. This compliment had been honored by a translation into all the languages of Europe, and numerous verses in Latin and French had been circulated on the subject. The day that Anne of Austria had selected for the lottery was a decisive moment; the king had not been near his mother for a couple of days; Madame, after the great scene of the Dryads and Naiads, was sulking by herself. It is true, the king's fit of resentment was over, but his mind was absorbingly occupied by a circumstance that raised him above the stormy disputes and giddy pleasures of the court.

Anne of Austria effected a diversion by the announcement of the famous lottery to take place in her apartments on the following evening. With this object in view, she saw the young queen, whom, as we have already seen, she had invited to pay her a visit in the morning. "I have good news to tell you," she said to her; "the king has been saying the most tender things about you. He is young, you know, and easily drawn away; but so long as you keep near me, he will not venture to keep away from you, to whom, besides, he is most warmly and affectionately attached. I intend to have a lottery this evening and shall expect to see you."

"I have heard," said the young queen, with a sort of timid reproach, "that your majesty intends to put in the lottery those lovely bracelets whose rarity is so great that we ought not to allow them to pass out of the custody of the crown, even were there no other reason than that they had once belonged to you."

"My daughter," said Anne of Austria, who read the young queen's thoughts, and wished to console her for not having received the bracelets as a present, "it is positively necessary that I should induce Madame to pass her time in my apartments."

"Madame!" said the young queen, blushing.

"Of course: would you not prefer to have a rival near you, whom you could watch and influence, to knowing the king is with her, always as ready to flirt as to be flirted with by her? The lottery I have proposed is my means of attraction for that purpose; do you blame me?"

"Oh, no!" returned Maria Theresa, clapping her hands with a childlike expression of delight.

"And you no longer regret, then, that I did not give you these bracelets, as I at first intended to do?"

"Oh, no, no!"

"Very well; make yourself look as beautiful as possible that our supper may be very brilliant; the gayer you seem, the more charming you appear, and you will eclipse all the ladies present as much by your brilliancy as by your rank."

Maria Theresa left full of delight. An hour afterwards, Anne of Austria received a visit from Madame, whom she covered with caresses, saying, "Excellent news! the king is charmed with my lottery."

"But I," replied Madame, "am not so greatly charmed: to see such beautiful bracelets on any one's arms but yours or mine, is what I cannot reconcile myself to."

"Well, well," said Anne of Austria, concealing by a smile a violent pang she had just experienced, "do not look at things in the worst light immediately."

"Ah, Madame, Fortune is blind, and I am told there are two hundred tickets."

"Quite as many as that; but you cannot surely forget that there can only be one winner."

"No doubt. But who will that be? Can you tell?" said Madame, in despair.

“You remind me that I had a dream last night; my dreams are always good, — I sleep so little.”

“What was your dream? — but are you suffering?”

“No,” said the queen, stifling with wonderful command the torture of a renewed attack of shooting pains in her bosom; “I dreamed that the king won the bracelets.”

“The king!”

“You are going to ask me, I think, what the king could possibly do with the bracelets?”

“Yes.”

“And you would not add, perhaps, that it would be very fortunate if the king were really to win, for he would be obliged to give the bracelets to some one else.”

“To restore them to you, for instance.”

“In which case I should immediately give them away; for you do not think, I suppose,” said the queen, laughing, “that I have put these bracelets up to a lottery from necessity. My object was to give them without arousing any one’s jealousy; but if Fortune will not get me out of my difficulty — well, I will teach Fortune a lesson — and I know very well to whom I intend to offer the bracelets.” These words were accompanied by so expressive a smile, that Madame could not resist paying her by a grateful kiss.

“But,” added Anne of Austria, “do you not know, as well as I do, that if the king were to win the bracelets, he would not restore them to me?”

“You mean he would give them to the queen?”

“No; and for the very same reason that he would not give them back again to me; since, if I had wished to make the queen a present of them, I had no need of him for that purpose.”

Madame cast a side glance upon the bracelets, which, in their casket, were dazzlingly exposed to view upon a table close beside her.

“How beautiful they are,” she said, sighing. “But stay,” Madame continued, “we are quite forgetting that your majesty’s dream was nothing but a dream.”

“I should be very much surprised,” returned Anne of Austria, “if my dream were to deceive me; that has happened to me very seldom.”

“We may look upon you as a prophetess, then.”

“I have already said, that I dream but very rarely; but the coincidence of my dream about this matter, with my own ideas, is extraordinary! it agrees so wonderfully with my own views and arrangements.”

“What arrangements do you allude to?”

“That you will get the bracelets, for instance.”

“In that case, it will not be the king.”

“Oh!” said Anne of Austria, “there is not such a very great distance between his majesty’s heart and your own; for, are you not his sister, for whom he has a great regard? There is not, I repeat, so very wide a distance, that my dream can be pronounced false on that account. Come, let us reckon up the chances in its favor.”

“I will count them.”

“In the first place, we will begin with the dream. If the king wins, he is sure to give you the bracelets.”

“I admit that is one.”

“If you win them, they are yours.”

“Naturally; that may be admitted also.”

“Lastly; — if Monsieur were to win them!”

“Oh!” said Madame, laughing heartily, “he would give them to the Chevalier de Lorraine.”

Anne of Austria laughed as heartily as her daughter-in-law; so much so, indeed, that her sufferings again returned, and made her turn suddenly pale in the very midst of her enjoyment.

“What is the matter?” inquired Madame, terrified.

“Nothing, nothing; a pain in my side. I have been laughing too much. We were at the fourth chance, I think.”

“I cannot see a fourth.”

“I beg your pardon; I am not excluded from the chance of winning, and if I be the winner, you are sure of me.”

“Oh! thank you, thank you!” exclaimed Madame.

“I hope that you look upon yourself as one whose chances are good, and that my dream now begins to assure the solid outlines of reality.”

“Yes, indeed: you give me both hope and confidence,” said Madame, “and the bracelets, won in this manner, will be a hundred times more precious to me.”

“Well! then, good-bye, until this evening.” And the two princesses separated. Anne of Austria, after her daughter-in-law had left her, said to herself, as she examined the bracelets, “They are, indeed, precious; since, by their means, this evening, I shall have won over a heart to my side, at the same time, fathomed an important secret.”

Then turning towards the deserted recess in her room, she said, addressing vacancy, — ”Is it not thus that you would have acted, my poor Chevreuse? Yes, yes; I know it is.”

And, like a perfume of other, fairer days, her youth, her imagination, and her happiness seemed to be wafted towards the echo of this invocation.

CHAPTER LXV.

The Lottery.

By eight o'clock in the evening, every one had assembled in the queen-mother's apartments. Anne of Austria, in full dress, beautiful still, from former loveliness, and from all the resources coquetry can command at the hands of clever assistants, concealed, or rather pretended to conceal, from the crowd of courtiers who surrounded her, and who still admired her, thanks to the combination of circumstances which we have indicated in the preceding chapter, the ravages, which were already visible, of the acute suffering to which she finally yielded a few years later. Madame, almost as great a coquette as Anne of Austria, and the queen, simple and natural as usual, were seated beside her, each contending for her good graces. The ladies of honor, united in a body, in order to resist with greater effect, and consequently with more success, the witty and lively conversations which the young men held about them, were enabled, like a battalion formed in a square, to offer each other the means of attack and defense which were thus at their command. Montalais, learned in that species of warfare which consists of sustained skirmishing, protected the whole line by a sort of rolling fire she directed against the enemy. Saint-Aignan, in utter despair at the rigor, which became almost insulting from the very fact of her persisting in it, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente displayed, tried to turn his back upon her; but, overcome by the irresistible brilliancy of her eyes, he, every moment, returned to consecrate his defeat by new submissions, to which Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente did not fail to reply by fresh acts of impertinence. Saint-Aignan did not know which way to turn. La Valliere had about her, not exactly a court, but sprinklings of courtiers. Saint-Aignan, hoping by this maneuver to attract Athenais's attention towards him, approached the young girl, and saluted her with a respect that induced some to believe that he wished to balance Athenais by Louise. But these were persons who had neither been witnesses of the scene during the shower, nor had heard it spoken of. As the majority was already informed, and well informed, too, on the matter, the acknowledged favor with which she was regarded had attracted to her side some of the most astute, as well as the least sensible, members of the court. The former, because they said with Montaigne, “How do I know?” and the latter, who said with Rabelais, “Perhaps.” The greatest number had followed in the wake of the latter, just as in hunting five or six of the best hounds alone follow the scent of the animal hunted, whilst the remainder of the pack follow only the scent of the hounds. The two queens and Madame examined with particular attention the toilettes of their ladies and maids of honor; and they condescended to forget they were queens in recollecting that they were women. In other words, they pitilessly picked to pieces every person present who wore a petticoat. The looks of both princesses simultaneously fell upon La Valliere, who, as we have just said, was completely surrounded at that moment. Madame knew not what pity was, and said to the queen-mother, as she turned towards her, “If Fortune were just, she would favor that poor La Valliere.”

“That is not possible,” said the queen-mother, smiling.

“Why not?”

“There are only two hundred tickets, so that it was not possible to inscribe every one’s name on the list.”

“And hers is not there, then?”

“No!”

“What a pity! she might have won them, and then sold them.”

“Sold them!” exclaimed the queen.

“Yes; it would have been a dowry for her, and she would not have been obliged to marry without her *trousseau*, as will probably be the case.”

“Really,” answered the queen-mother, “poor little thing: has she no dresses, then?”

And she pronounced these words like a woman who has never been able to understand the inconveniences of a slenderly filled purse.

“Stay, look at her. Heaven forgive me, if she is not wearing the very same petticoat this evening that she had on this morning during the promenade, and which she managed to keep clean, thanks to the care the king took of her, in sheltering her from the rain.”

At the very moment Madame uttered these words the king entered the room. The two queens would not perhaps have observed his arrival, so completely were they occupied in their ill-natured remarks, had not Madame noticed that, all at once, La Valliere, who was standing up facing the gallery, exhibited certain signs of confusion, and then said a few words to the courtiers who surrounded her, who immediately dispersed. This movement induced Madame to look towards the door, and at that moment, the captain of the guards announced the king. At this moment La Valliere, who had hitherto kept her eyes fixed upon the gallery, suddenly cast them down as the king entered. His majesty was dressed magnificently and in the most perfect taste; he was conversing with Monsieur and the Duc de Roquelaure, Monsieur on his right, and the Duc de Roquelaure on his left. The king advanced, in the first place, towards the queens, to whom he bowed with an air full of graceful respect. He took his mother's hand and kissed it, addressed a few compliments to Madame upon the beauty of her toilette, and then began to make the round of the assembly. La Valliere was saluted in the same manner as the others, but with neither more nor less attention. His majesty then returned to his mother and his wife. When the courtiers noticed that the king had only addressed some ordinary remark to the young girl who had been so particularly noticed in the morning, they immediately drew their own conclusion to account for this coldness of manner; this conclusion being, that although the king may have taken a sudden fancy to her, that fancy had already disappeared. One thing, however, must be remarked, that close beside La Valliere, among the number of the courtiers, M. Fouquet was to be seen; and his respectfully attentive manner served to sustain the young girl in the midst of the varied emotions that visibly agitated her.

M. Fouquet was just on the point, moreover, of speaking in a more friendly manner with Mademoiselle de la Valliere, when M. Colbert approached, and after having bowed to Fouquet with all the formality of respectful politeness, he seemed to take up a post beside La Valliere, for the purpose of entering into conversation with her. Fouquet immediately quitted his place. These proceedings were eagerly devoured by the eyes of Montalais and Malicorne, who mutually exchanged their observations on the subject. De Guiche, standing within the embrasure of one of the windows, saw no one but Madame. But as Madame, on her side, frequently glanced at La Valliere, De Guiche's eyes, following Madame's, were from time to time cast upon the young girl. La Valliere instinctively felt herself sinking beneath the weight of all these different looks, inspired, some by interest, others by envy. She had nothing to compensate her for her sufferings, not a kind word from her companions, nor a look of affection from the king. No one could possibly express the misery the poor girl was suffering. The queen-mother next directed the small table to be brought forward, on which the lottery-tickets were placed, two hundred in number, and begged Madame de Motteville to read the list of the names. It was a matter of course that this list had been drawn out in strict accordance with the laws of etiquette. The king's name was first on the list, next the queen-mother, then the queen, Monsieur, Madame, and so on. All hearts throbbed anxiously as the list was read out; more than three hundred persons had been invited, and each of them was anxious to learn whether his or her name was to be found in the number of privileged names. The king listened with as much attention as the others, and when the last name had been pronounced, he noticed that La Valliere had been omitted from the list. Every one, of course, remarked this omission. The king flushed as if much annoyed; but La Valliere, gentle and resigned, as usual, exhibited nothing of the sort. While the list was being read, the king had not taken his eyes off the young girl, who seemed to expand, as it were, beneath the happy influence she felt was shed around her, and who was delighted and too pure in spirit for any other thought than that of love to find an entrance either to her mind or her heart. Acknowledging this touching self-denial by the fixity of his attention, the king showed La Valliere how much he appreciated its delicacy. When the list was finished, the different faces of those who had been omitted or forgotten fully expressed their disappointment. Malicorne was also left out from amongst the men; and the grimace he made plainly said to Montalais, who was also forgotten, "Cannot we contrive to arrange matters with Fortune in such a manner that she shall not forget us?" to which a smile full of intelligence from Mademoiselle Aure, replied: "Certainly we can."

The tickets were distributed to each according to the number listed. The king received his first, next the queen-mother, then Monsieur, then the queen and Madame, and so on. After this, Anne of Austria opened a small Spanish leather bag, containing two hundred numbers engraved upon small balls of mother-of-pearl, and presented the open sack to the youngest of her maids of honor, for the purpose of taking one of the balls out of it. The eager expectation of the throng, amidst all the tediously slow preparations, was rather that of cupidity than curiosity. Saint-Aignan bent towards Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente to whisper to her, "Since we have each a number, let us unite our two chances. The bracelet shall be yours if I win, and if you are successful, deign to give me but one look of your beautiful eyes.”

“No,” said Athenais, “if you win the bracelet, keep it, every one for himself.”

“You are without any pity,” said Saint-Aignan, “and I will punish you by a quatrain: —

“Beautiful Iris, to my vows You are too opposed — ”

“Silence,” said Athenais, “you will prevent me hearing the winning number.”

“Number one,” said the young girl who had drawn the mother-of-pearl from the Spanish leather bag.

“The king!” exclaimed the queen-mother.

“The king has won,” repeated the queen, delightedly.

“Oh! the king! your dream!” said Madame, joyously, in the ear of Anne of Austria.

The king was the only one who did not exhibit any satisfaction. He merely thanked Fortune for what she had done for him, in addressing a slight salutation to the young girl who had been chosen as her proxy. Then receiving from the hands of Anne of Austria, amid the eager desire of the whole assembly, the casket inclosing the bracelets, he said, “Are these bracelets really beautiful, then?”

“Look at them,” said Anne of Austria, “and judge for yourself.”

The king looked at them, and said, “Yes, indeed, an admirable medallion. What perfect finish!”

Queen Maria Theresa easily saw, and that, too at the very first glance, that the king would not offer the bracelets to her; but, as he did not seem the least degree in the world disposed to offer them to Madame, she felt almost satisfied, or nearly so. The king sat down. The most intimate among the courtiers approached, one by one, for the purpose of admiring more closely the beautiful piece of workmanship, which soon, with the king’s permission, was handed about from person to person. Immediately, every one, connoisseurs or not, uttered various exclamations of surprise, and overwhelmed the king with congratulations. There was, in fact, something for everybody to admire — the brilliance for some, and the cutting for others. The ladies present visibly displayed their impatience to see such a treasure monopolized by the gentlemen.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," said the king, whom nothing escaped, "one would almost think that you wore bracelets as the Sabines used to do; hand them round for a while for the inspection of the ladies, who seem to have, and with far greater right, an excuse for understanding such matters!"

These words appeared to Madame the commencement of a decision she expected. She gathered, besides, this happy belief from the glances of the queen-mother. The courtier who held them at the moment the king made this remark, amidst the general agitation, hastened to place the bracelets in the hands of the queen, Maria Theresa, who, knowing too well, poor woman, that they were not designed for her, hardly looked at them, and almost immediately passed them on to Madame. The latter, and even more minutely, Monsieur, gave the bracelets a long look of anxious and almost covetous desire. She then handed the jewels to those ladies who were near her, pronouncing this single word, but with an accent which was worth a long phrase, "Magnificent!"

The ladies who had received the bracelets from Madame's hands looked at them as long as they chose to examine them, and then made them circulate by passing them on towards the right. During this time the king was tranquilly conversing with De Guiche and Fouquet, rather passively letting them talk than himself listening. Accustomed to the set form of ordinary phrases, his ear, like that of all men who exercise an incontestable superiority over others, merely selected from the conversations held in various directions the indispensable word which requires reply. His attention, however, was now elsewhere, for it wandered as his eyes did.

Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente was the last of the ladies inscribed for tickets; and, as if she had ranked according to her name upon the list, she had only Montalais and La Valliere near her. When the bracelets reached these two latter, no one appeared to take any further notice of them. The humble hands which for a moment touched these jewels, deprived them, for the time, of their importance — a circumstance which did not, however, prevent Montalais from starting with joy, envy, and covetous desire, at the sight of the beautiful stones still more than at their magnificent workmanship. It is evident that if she were compelled to decide between the pecuniary value and the artistic beauty, Montalais would unhesitatingly have preferred diamonds to cameos, and her disinclination, therefore, to pass them on to her companion, La Valliere, was very great. La Valliere fixed a look almost of indifference upon the jewels.

“Oh, how beautiful, how magnificent these bracelets are!” exclaimed Montalais; “and yet you do not go into ecstasies about them, Louise! You are no true woman, I am sure.”

“Yes, I am, indeed,” replied the young girl, with an accent of the most charming melancholy; “but why desire that which can never, by any possibility, be ours?”

The king, his head bent forward, was listening to what Louise was saying. Hardly had the vibration of her voice reached his ear than he rose, radiant with delight, and passing across the whole assembly, from the place where he stood, to La Valliere, “You are mistaken, mademoiselle,” he said, “you are a woman, and every woman has a right to wear jewels, which are a woman’s appurtenance.”

“Oh, sire!” said La Valliere, “your majesty will not absolutely believe in my modesty?”

“I believe you possess every virtue, mademoiselle; frankness as well as every other; I entreat you, therefore, to say frankly what you think of these bracelets?”

“That they are beautiful, sire, and cannot be offered to any other than a queen.”

“I am delighted that such is your opinion, mademoiselle; the bracelets are yours, and the king begs your acceptance of them.”

And as, with a movement almost resembling terror, La Valliere eagerly held out the casket to the king, the king gently pushed back her trembling hand.

A silence of astonishment, more profound than that of death, reigned in the assembly.

And yet, from the side where the queens were, no one had heard what he had said, nor understood what he had done. A charitable friend, however, took upon herself to spread the news; it was Tonnay-Charente, to whom Madame had made a sign to approach.

“Good heavens!” explained Tonnay-Charente, “how happy that La Valliere is! the king has just given her the bracelets.”

Madame bit her lips to such a degree that the blood appeared upon the surface of the skin. The young queen looked first at La Valliere and then at Madame, and began to laugh. Anne of Austria rested her chin upon her beautiful white hand, and remained for a long time absorbed by a presentiment that disturbed her mind, and by a terrible pang which stung her heart. De Guiche, observing Madame turn pale, and guessing the cause of her change of color, abruptly quitted the assembly and disappeared. Malicorne was then able to approach Montalais very quietly, and under cover of the general din of conversation, said to her:

“Aure, your fortune and our future are standing at your elbow.”

“Yes,” was her reply, as she tenderly embraced La Valliere, whom, inwardly, she was tempted to strangle.

VOLUME III: LOUISE DE LA VALLIERE

INTRODUCTION.

In the months of March-July in 1844, in the magazine Le Siecle, the first portion of a story appeared, penned by the celebrated playwright Alexandre Dumas. It was based, he claimed, on some manuscripts he had found a year earlier in the Bibliotheque Nationale while researching a history he planned to write on Louis XIV. They chronicled the adventures of a young man named D’Artagnan who, upon entering Paris, became almost immediately embroiled in court intrigues, international politics, and ill-fated affairs between royal lovers. Over the next six years, readers would enjoy the adventures of this youth and his three famous friends, Porthos, Athos, and Aramis, as their exploits unraveled behind the scenes of some of the most momentous events in French and even English history.

Eventually these serialized adventures were published in novel form, and became the three D’Artagnan Romances known today. Here is a brief summary of the first two novels:

The Three Musketeers (serialized March — July, 1844): The year is 1625. The young D’Artagnan arrives in Paris at the tender age of 18, and almost immediately offends three musketeers, Porthos, Aramis, and Athos. Instead of dueling, the four are attacked by five of the Cardinal’s guards, and the courage of the youth is made apparent during the battle. The four become fast friends, and, when asked by D’Artagnan’s landlord to find his missing wife, embark upon an adventure that takes them across both France and England in order to thwart the plans of the Cardinal Richelieu. Along the way, they encounter a beautiful young spy, named simply Milady, who will stop at nothing to disgrace Queen Anne of Austria before her husband, Louis XIII, and take her revenge upon the four friends.

Twenty Years After (serialized January — August, 1845): The year is now 1648, twenty years since the close of the last story. Louis XIII has died, as has Cardinal Richelieu, and while the crown of France may sit upon the head of Anne of Austria as Regent for the young Louis XIV, the real power resides with the Cardinal Mazarin, her secret husband. D’Artagnan is now a lieutenant of musketeers, and his three friends have retired to private life. Athos turned out to be a nobleman, the Comte de la Fere, and has retired to his home with his son, Raoul de Bragelonne. Aramis, whose real name is D’Herblay, has followed his intention of shedding the musketeer’s cassock for the priest’s robes, and Porthos has married a wealthy woman, who left him her fortune upon her death. But trouble is stirring in both France and England. Cromwell menaces the institution of royalty itself while marching against Charles I, and at home the Fronde is threatening to tear France apart. D’Artagnan brings his friends out of retirement to save the threatened English monarch, but Mordaunt, the son of Milady, who seeks to avenge his mother’s death at the musketeers’ hands, thwarts their valiant efforts. Undaunted, our heroes return to France just in time to help save the young Louis XIV, quiet the Fronde, and tweak the nose of Cardinal Mazarin.

The third novel, The Vicomte de Bragelonne (serialized October, 1847 — January, 1850), has enjoyed a strange history in its English translation. It has been split into three, four, or five volumes at various points in its history. The five-volume edition generally does not give titles to the smaller portions, but the others do. In the three-volume edition, the novels are entitled The Vicomte de Bragelonne, Louise de la Valliere, and The Man in the Iron Mask. For the purposes of this etext, I have chosen to split the novel as the four-volume edition does, with these titles: The Vicomte de Bragelonne, Ten Years Later, Louise de la Valliere, and The Man in the Iron Mask. In the first two etexts:

The Vicomte de Bragelonne (Etext 2609): It is the year 1660, and D’Artagnan, after thirty-five years of loyal service, has become disgusted with serving King Louis XIV while the real power resides with the Cardinal Mazarin, and has tendered his resignation. He embarks on his own project, that of restoring Charles II to the throne of England, and, with the help of Athos, succeeds, earning himself quite a fortune in the process. D’Artagnan returns to Paris to live the life of a rich citizen, and Athos, after negotiating the marriage of Philip, the king’s brother, to Princess Henrietta of England, likewise retires to his own estate, La Fere. Meanwhile, Mazarin has finally died, and left Louis to assume the reigns of power, with the assistance of M. Colbert, formerly Mazarin’s trusted clerk. Colbert has an intense hatred for M. Fouquet, the king’s superintendent of finances, and has resolved to use any means necessary to bring about his fall. With the new rank of intendant bestowed on him by Louis, Colbert succeeds in having two of Fouquet’s loyal friends tried and executed. He then brings to the king’s attention that Fouquet is fortifying the island of Belle-Ile-en-Mer, and could possibly be planning to use it as a base for some military operation against the king. Louis calls D’Artagnan out of retirement and sends him to investigate the island, promising him a tremendous salary and his long-promised promotion to captain of the musketeers upon his return. At Belle-Isle, D’Artagnan discovers that the engineer of the fortifications is, in fact, Porthos, now the Baron du Vallon, and that’s not all. The blueprints for the island, although in Porthos’s handwriting, show evidence of another script that has been erased, that of Aramis. D’Artagnan later discovers that Aramis has become the bishop of Vannes, which is, coincidentally, a parish belonging to M. Fouquet. Suspecting that D’Artagnan has arrived on the king’s behalf to investigate, Aramis tricks D’Artagnan into wandering around Vannes in search of Porthos, and sends Porthos on an heroic ride back to Paris to warn Fouquet of the danger. Fouquet rushes to the king, and gives him Belle-Isle as a present, thus allaying any suspicion, and at the same time humiliating Colbert, just minutes before the usher announces someone else seeking an audience with the king.

Ten Years Later (Etext 2681): As 1661 approaches, Princess Henrietta of England arrives for her marriage, and throws the court of France into complete disorder. The jealousy of the Duke of Buckingham, who is in love with her, nearly occasions a war on the streets of Le Havre, thankfully prevented by Raoul’s timely and tactful intervention. After the marriage, though, Monsieur Philip becomes horribly jealous of Buckingham, and has him exiled. Before leaving, however, the duke fights a duel with M. de Wardes at Calais. De Wardes is a malicious and spiteful man, the sworn enemy of D’Artagnan, and, by the same token, that of Athos, Aramis, Porthos, and Raoul as well. Both men are seriously wounded, and the duke is taken back to England to recover. Raoul’s friend, the Comte de Guiche, is the next to succumb to Henrietta’s charms, and Monsieur obtains his exile as well, though De Guiche soon effects a reconciliation. But then the king’s eye falls on Madame Henrietta during the comte’s absence, and this time Monsieur’s jealousy has no recourse. Anne of Austria intervenes, and the king and his sister-in-law decide to pick a young lady with whom the king can pretend to be in love, the better to mask their own affair. They unfortunately select Louise de la Valliere, Raoul’s fiancee. While the court is in residence at Fontainebleau, the king unwitting overhears Louise confessing her love for him while chatting with her friends beneath the royal oak, and the king promptly forgets his affection for Madame. That same night, Henrietta overhears, at the same oak, De Guiche confessing his love for her to Raoul. The two embark on their own affair. A few days later, during a rainstorm, Louis and Louise are trapped alone together, and the whole court begins to talk of the scandal while their love affair blossoms. Aware of Louise’s attachment, the king arranges for Raoul to be sent to England for an indefinite period.

Meanwhile, the struggle for power continues between Fouquet and Colbert. Although the Belle-Isle plot backfired, Colbert prompts the king to ask Fouquet for more and more money, and without his two friends to raise it for him, Fouquet is sorely pressed. The situation gets so bad that his new mistress, Madame de Belliere, must resort to selling all her jewels and her gold and silver plate. Aramis, while this is going on, has grown friendly with the governor of the Bastile, M. de Baisemeaux, a fact that Baisemeaux unwittingly reveals to D’Artagnan while inquiring of him as to Aramis’s whereabouts. This further arouses the suspicions of the musketeer, who was made to look ridiculous by Aramis. He had ridden overnight at an insane pace, but arrived a few minutes after Fouquet had already presented Belle-Isle to the king. Aramis learns from the governor the location of a mysterious prisoner, who bears a remarkable resemblance to Louis XIV — in fact, the two are identical. He uses the existence of this secret to persuade a dying Franciscan monk, the general of the society of the Jesuits, to name him, Aramis, the new general of the order. On Aramis’s advice, hoping to use Louise’s influence with the king to counteract Colbert’s influence, Fouquet also writes a love letter to La Valliere, unfortunately undated. It never reaches its destination, however, as the servant ordered to deliver it turns out to be an agent of Colbert’s.

Porthos, in the meantime, has been recovering from his midnight ride from Belle-Isle at Fouquet’s residence at Saint-Mande. Athos has retired, once again to La Fere. D’Artagnan, little amused by the court’s activities at Fontainebleau, and finding himself with nothing to do, has returned to Paris, and we find him again in Planchet’s grocery shop.

And so, the story continues in this, the third etext of The Vicomte de Bragelonne. Enjoy!

John Bursey

CHAPTER I.

Malaga.

During all these long and noisy debates between the opposite ambitions of politics and love, one of our characters, perhaps the one least deserving of neglect, was, however, very much neglected, very much forgotten, and exceedingly unhappy. In fact, D'Artagnan — D'Artagnan, we say, for we must call him by his name, to remind our readers of his existence — D'Artagnan, we repeat, had absolutely nothing whatever to do, amidst these brilliant butterflies of fashion. After following the king during two whole days at Fontainebleau, and critically observing the various pastoral fancies and heroi-comic transformations of his sovereign, the musketeer felt that he needed something more than this to satisfy the cravings of his nature. At every moment assailed by people asking him, "How do you think this costume suits me, Monsieur d'Artagnan?" he would reply to them in quiet, sarcastic tones, "Why, I think you are quite as well-dressed as the best-dressed monkey to be found in the fair at Saint-Laurent." It was just such a compliment D'Artagnan would choose where he did not feel disposed to pay any other: and, whether agreeable or not, the inquirer was obliged to be satisfied with it. Whenever any one asked him, "How do you intend to dress yourself this evening?" he replied, "I shall undress myself;" at which the ladies all laughed, and a few of them blushed. But after a couple of days passed in this manner, the musketeer, perceiving that nothing serious was likely to arise which would concern him, and that the king had completely, or, at least, appeared to have completely forgotten Paris, Saint-Mande, and Belle-Isle — that M. Colbert's mind was occupied with illuminations and fireworks — that for the next month, at least, the ladies had plenty of glances to bestow, and also to receive in exchange — D'Artagnan asked the king for leave of absence for a matter of private business. At the moment D'Artagnan made his request, his majesty was on the point of going to bed, quite exhausted from dancing.

"You wish to leave me, Monsieur d'Artagnan?" inquired the king, with an air of astonishment; for Louis XIV. could never understand why any one who had the distinguished honor of being near him could wish to leave him.

"Sire," said D'Artagnan, "I leave you simply because I am not of the slightest service to you in anything. Ah! if I could only hold the balancing-pole while you were dancing, it would be a very different affair."

"But, my dear Monsieur d'Artagnan," said the king, gravely, "people dance without balancing-poles."

"Ah! indeed," said the musketeer, continuing his imperceptible tone of irony, "I had no idea such a thing was possible."

"You have not seen me dance, then?" inquired the king.

"Yes; but I always thought dancers went from easy to difficult acrobatic feats. I was mistaken; all the more greater reason, therefore, that I should leave for a time. Sire, I repeat, you have no present occasion for my services; besides, if your majesty should have any need of me, you would know where to find me."

"Very well," said the king, and he granted him leave of absence.

We shall not look for D'Artagnan, therefore, at Fontainebleau, for to do so would be useless; but, with the permission of our readers, follow him to the Rue des Lombards, where he was located at the sign of the Pilon d'Or, in the house of our old friend Planchet. It was about eight o'clock in the evening, and the weather was exceedingly warm; there was only one window open, and that one belonging to a room on the *entresol*. A perfume of spices, mingled with another perfume less exotic, but more penetrating, namely, that which arose from the street, ascended to salute the nostrils of the musketeer. D'Artagnan, reclining in an immense straight-backed chair, with his legs not stretched out, but simply placed upon a stool, formed an angle of the most obtuse form that could possibly be seen. Both his arms were crossed over his head, his head reclining upon his left shoulder, like Alexander the Great. His eyes, usually so quick and intelligent in their expression, were now half-closed, and seemed fastened, as it were, upon a small corner of blue sky that was visible behind the opening of the chimneys; there was just enough blue, and no more, to fill one of the sacks of lentils, or haricots, which formed the principal furniture of the shop on the ground floor. Thus extended at his ease, and sheltered in his place of observation behind the window, D'Artagnan seemed as if he had ceased to be a soldier, as if he were no longer an officer belonging to the palace, but was, on the contrary, a quiet, easy-going citizen in a state of stagnation between his dinner and supper, or between his supper and his bed; one of those strong, ossified brains, which have no more room for a single idea, so fiercely does animal matter keep watch at the doors of intelligence, narrowly inspecting the contraband trade which might result from the introduction into the brain of a symptom of thought. We have already said night was closing in, the shops were being lighted, while the windows of the upper apartments were being closed, and the rhythmic steps of a patrol of soldiers forming the night watch could be heard retreating. D’Artagnan continued, however, to think of nothing, except the blue corner of the sky. A few paces from him, completely in the shade, lying on his stomach, upon a sack of Indian corn, was Planchet, with both his arms under his chin, and his eyes fixed on D’Artagnan, who was either thinking, dreaming, or sleeping, with his eyes open. Planchet had been watching him for a tolerably long time, and, by way of interruption, he began by exclaiming, “Hum! hum!” But D’Artagnan did not stir. Planchet then saw that it was necessary to have recourse to more effectual means still: after a prolonged reflection on the subject, the most ingenious means that suggested itself to him under the present circumstances, was to let himself roll off the sack on to the floor, murmuring, at the same time, against himself, the word “stupid.” But, notwithstanding the noise produced by Planchet’s fall, D’Artagnan, who had in the course of his existence heard many other, and very different falls, did not appear to pay the least attention to the present one. Besides, an enormous cart, laden with stones, passing from the Rue Saint-Mederic, absorbed, in the noise of its wheels, the noise of Planchet’s tumble. And yet Planchet fancied that, in token of tacit approval, he saw him imperceptibly smile at the word “stupid.” This emboldened him to say, “Are you asleep, Monsieur d’Artagnan?”

“No, Planchet, I am not *even* asleep,” replied the musketeer.

“I am in despair,” said Planchet, “to hear such a word as *even*.”

“Well, and why not; is it not a grammatical word, Monsieur Planchet?”

“Of course, Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

“Well!”

“Well, then, the word distresses me beyond measure.”

“Tell me why you are distressed, Planchet,” said D’Artagnan.

“If you say that you are not *even* asleep, it is as much as to say that you have not even the consolation of being able to sleep; or, better still, it is precisely the same as telling me that you are getting bored to death.”

“Planchet, you know that I am never bored.”

“Except to-day, and the day before yesterday.”

“Bah!”

“Monsieur d’Artagnan, it is a week since you returned here from Fontainebleau; in other words, you have no longer your orders to issue, or your men to review and maneuver. You need the sound of guns, drums, and all that din and confusion; I, who have myself carried a musket, can easily believe that.”

“Planchet,” replied D’Artagnan, “I assure you I am not bored in the least in the world.”

“In that case, what are you doing, lying there, as if you were dead?”

“My dear Planchet, there was, once upon a time, at the siege of La Rochelle, when I was there, when you were there, when we both were there, a certain Arab, who was celebrated for the manner in which he adjusted culverins. He was a clever fellow, although of a very odd complexion, which was the same color as your olives. Well, this Arab, whenever he had done eating or working, used to sit down to rest himself, as I am resting myself now, and smoked I cannot tell you what sort of magical leaves, in a large amber-mouthed tube; and if any officers, happening to pass, reproached him for being always asleep, he used quietly to reply: ‘Better to sit down than to stand up, to lie down than to sit down, to be dead than to lie down.’ He was an acutely melancholy Arab, and I remember him perfectly well, form the color of his skin, and the style of his conversation. He used to cut off the heads of Protestants with the most singular gusto!”

“Precisely; and then used to embalm them, when they were worth the trouble; and when he was thus engaged with his herbs and plants about him, he looked like a basket-maker making baskets.”

“You are quite right, Planchet, he did.”

“Oh! I can remember things very well, at times!”

“I have no doubt of it; but what do you think of his mode of reasoning?”

“I think it good in one sense, but very stupid in another.”

“Expound your meaning, M. Planchet.”

“Well, monsieur, in point of fact, then, ‘better to sit down than to stand up,’ is plain enough, especially when one may be fatigued,” and Planchet smiled in a roguish way; “as for ‘better to be lying down,’ let that pass, but as for the last proposition, that it is ‘better to be dead than alive,’ it is, in my opinion, very absurd, my own undoubted preference being for my bed; and if you are not of my opinion, it is simply, as I have already had the honor of telling you, because you are boring yourself to death."

"Planchet, do you know M. La Fontaine?"

"The chemist at the corner of the Rue Saint-Mederic?"

"No, the writer of fables."

"Oh! *Maitre Corbeau!*"

"Exactly; well, then, I am like his hare."

"He has got a hare also, then?"

"He has all sorts of animals."

"Well, what does his hare do, then?"

"M. La Fontaine's hare thinks."

"Ah, ah!"

"Planchet, I am like that hare — I am thinking."

"You are thinking, you say?" said Planchet, uneasily.

"Yes; your house is dull enough to drive people to think; you will admit that, I hope."

"And yet, monsieur, you have a look-out upon the street."

"Yes; and wonderfully interesting that is, of course."

"But it is no less true, monsieur, that, if you were living at the back of the house, you would bore yourself — I mean, you would think — more than ever."

"Upon my word, Planchet, I hardly know that."

"Still," said the grocer, "if your reflections are at all like those which led you to restore King Charles II. — " and Planchet finished by a little laugh which was not without its meaning.

"Ah! Planchet, my friend," returned D'Artagnan, "you are getting ambitious."

"Is there no other king to be restored, M. d'Artagnan — no second Monk to be packed up, like a salted hog, in a deal box?"

"No, my dear Planchet; all the kings are seated on their respective thrones; less comfortably so, perhaps, than I am upon this chair; but, at all events, there they are." And D'Artagnan sighed deeply.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," said Planchet, "you are making me very uneasy."

"You are very good, Planchet."

"I begin to suspect something."

"What is it?"

“Monsieur d’Artagnan, you are getting thin.”

“Oh!” said D’Artagnan, striking his chest which sounded like an empty cuirass, “it is impossible, Planchet.”

“Ah!” said Planchet, slightly overcome; “if you were to get thin in my house — ”

“Well?”

“I should do something rash.”

“What would you do? Tell me.”

“I should look out for the man who was the cause of all your anxieties.”

“Ah! according to your account, I am anxious now.”

“Yes, you are anxious; and you are getting thin, visibly getting thin. *Malaga!* if you go on getting thin, in this way, I will take my sword in my hand, and go straight to M. d’Herblay, and have it out with him.”

“What!” said M. d’Artagnan, starting in his chair; “what’s that you say? And what has M. d’Herblay’s name to do with your groceries?”

“Just as you please. Get angry if you like, or call me names, if you prefer it; but, the deuce is in it. *I know what I know*.”

D’Artagnan had, during this second outburst of Planchet’s, so placed himself as not to lose a single look of his face; that is, he sat with both his hands resting on both his knees, and his head stretched out towards the grocer. “Come, explain yourself,” he said, “and tell me how you could possibly utter such a blasphemy. M. d’Herblay, your old master, my friend, an ecclesiastic, a musketeer turned bishop — do you mean to say you would raise your sword against him, Planchet?”

“I could raise my sword against my own father, when I see you in such a state as you are now.”

“M. d’Herblay, a gentleman!”

“It’s all the same to me whether he’s a gentleman or not. He gives you the blue devils, that is all I know. And the blue devils make people get thin. *Malaga!* I have no notion of M. d’Artagnan leaving my house thinner than when he entered it.”

“How does he give me the blue devils, as you call it? Come, explain, explain.”

“You have had the nightmare during the last three nights.”

“I?”

“Yes, you; and in your nightmare you called out, several times, ‘Aramis, deceitful Aramis!’“

"Ah! I said that, did I?" murmured D'Artagnan, uneasily.

"Yes, those very words, upon my honor."

"Well, what else? You know the saying, Planchet, 'dreams go by contraries.'"

"Not so; for every time, during the last three days, when you went out, you have not once failed to ask me, on your return, 'Have you seen M. d'Herblay?' or else 'Have you received any letters for me from M. d'Herblay?'"

"Well, it is very natural I should take an interest in my old friend," said D'Artagnan.

"Of course; but not to such an extent as to get thin on that account."

"Planchet, I'll get fatter; I give you my word of honor I will."

"Very well, monsieur, I accept it; for I know that when you give your word of honor, it is sacred."

"I will not dream of Aramis any more; and I will never ask you again if there are any letters from M. d'Herblay; but on condition that you explain one thing to me."

"Tell me what it is, monsieur?"

"I am a great observer; and just now you made use of a very singular oath, which is unusual for you."

"You mean *Malaga!* I suppose?"

"Precisely."

"It is the oath I have used ever since I have been a grocer."

"Very proper, too; it is the name of a dried grape, or raisin, I believe?"

"It is my most ferocious oath; when I have once said *Malaga!* I am a man no longer."

"Still, I never knew you use that oath before."

"Very likely not, monsieur. I had a present made me of it," said Planchet; and, as he pronounced these words, he winked his eye with a cunning expression, which thoroughly awakened D'Artagnan's attention.

"Come, come, M. Planchet."

"Why, I am not like you, monsieur," said Planchet. "I don't pass my life in thinking."

"You do wrong, then."

"I mean in boring myself to death. We have but a very short time to live — why not make the best of it?"

"You are an Epicurean philosopher, I begin to think, Planchet."

“Why not? My hand is still as steady as ever; I can write, and can weigh out my sugar and spices; my foot is firm; I can dance and walk about; my stomach has its teeth still, for I eat and digest very well; my heart is not quite hardened. Well, monsieur?”

“Well, what, Planchet?”

“Why, you see — ” said the grocer, rubbing his hands together.

D’Artagnan crossed one leg over the other, and said, “Planchet, my friend, I am unnerved with extreme surprise; for you are revealing yourself to me under a perfectly new light.”

Planchet, flattered in the highest degree by this remark, continued to rub his hands very hard together. “Ah, ah,” he said, “because I happen to be only slow, you think me, perhaps, a positive fool.”

“Very good, Planchet; very well reasoned.”

“Follow my idea, monsieur, if you please. I said to myself,” continued Planchet, “that, without enjoyment, there is no happiness on this earth.”

“Quite true, what you say, Planchet,” interrupted D’Artagnan.

“At all events, if we cannot obtain pleasure — for pleasure is not so common a thing, after all — let us, at least, get consolations of some kind or another.”

“And so you console yourself?”

“Exactly so.”

“Tell me how you console yourself.”

“I put on a buckler for the purpose of confronting *ennui*. I place my time at the direction of patience; and on the very eve of feeling I am going to get bored, I amuse myself.”

“And you don’t find any difficulty in that?”

“None.”

“And you found it out quite by yourself?”

“Quite so.”

“It is miraculous.”

“What do you say?”

“I say, that your philosophy is not to be matched in the Christian or pagan world, in modern days or in antiquity!”

“You think so? — follow my example, then.”

“It is a very tempting one.”

“Do as I do.”

"I could not wish for anything better; but all minds are not of the same stamp; and it might possibly happen that if I were required to amuse myself in the manner you do, I should bore myself horribly."

"Bah! at least try first."

"Well, tell me what you do."

"Have you observed that I leave home occasionally?"

"Yes."

"In any particular way?"

"Periodically."

"That's the very thing. You have noticed it, then?"

"My dear Planchet, you must understand that when people see each other every day, and one of the two absents himself, the other misses him. Do you not feel the want of my society when I am in the country?"

"Prodigiously; that is to say, I feel like a body without a soul."

"That being understood then, proceed."

"What are the periods when I absent myself?"

"On the fifteenth and thirtieth of every month."

"And I remain away?"

"Sometimes two, sometimes three, and sometimes four days at a time."

"Have you ever given it a thought, why I was absent?"

"To look after your debts, I suppose."

"And when I returned, how did you think I looked, as far as my face was concerned?"

"Exceedingly self-satisfied."

"You admit, you say, that I always look satisfied. And what have you attributed my satisfaction to?"

"That your business was going on very well; that your purchases of rice, prunes, raw sugar, dried apples, pears, and treacle were advantageous. You were always very picturesque in your notions and ideas, Planchet; and I was not in the slightest degree surprised to find you had selected grocery as an occupation, which is of all trades the most varied, and the very pleasantest, as far as the character is concerned; inasmuch as one handles so many natural and perfumed productions."

"Perfectly true, monsieur; but you are very greatly mistaken."

"In what way?"

"In thinking that I leave here every fortnight, to collect my money or to make purchases. Ho, ho! how could you possibly have thought such a thing? Ho, ho, ho!” And Planchet began to laugh in a manner that inspired D’Artagnan with very serious misgivings as to his sanity.

“I confess,” said the musketeer, “that I do not precisely catch your meaning.”

“Very true, monsieur.”

“What do you mean by ‘very true’?”

“It must be true, since you say it; but pray, be assured that it in no way lessens my opinion of you.”

“Ah, that is lucky.”

“No; you are a man of genius; and whenever the question happens to be of war, tactics, surprises, or good honest blows to be dealt with, why, kings are marionettes, compared to you. But for the consolations of the mind, the proper care of the body, the agreeable things of like, if one may say so — ah! monsieur, don’t talk to me about men of genius; they are nothing short of executioners.”

“Good,” said D’Artagnan, really fidgety with curiosity, “upon my word you interest me in the highest degree.”

“You feel already less bored than you did just now, do you not?”

“I was not bored; yet since you have been talking to me, I feel more animated.”

“Very good, then; that is not a bad beginning. I will cure you, rely upon that.”

“There is nothing I should like better.”

“Will you let me try, then?”

“Immediately, if you like.”

“Very well. Have you any horses here?”

“Yes; ten, twenty, thirty.”

“Oh, there is no occasion for so many as that, two will be quite sufficient.”

“They are quite at your disposal, Planchet.”

“Very good; then I shall carry you off with me.”

“When?”

“To-morrow.”

“Where?”

“Ah, you are asking too much.”

“You will admit, however, that it is important I should know where I am going.”

"Do you like the country?"

"Only moderately, Planchet."

"In that case you like town better?"

"That is as may be."

"Very well; I am going to take you to a place, half town and half country."

"Good."

"To a place where I am sure you will amuse yourself."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes; and more wonderful still, to a place from which you have just returned for the purpose only, it would seem, of getting bored here."

"It is to Fontainebleau you are going, then?"

"Exactly; to Fontainebleau."

"And, in Heaven's name, what are you going to do at Fontainebleau?"

Planchet answered D'Artagnan by a wink full of sly humor.

"You have some property there, you rascal."

"Oh, a very paltry affair; a little bit of a house — nothing more."

"I understand you."

"But it is tolerable enough, after all."

"I am going to Planchet's country-seat!" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

"Whenever you like."

"Did we not fix to-morrow?"

"Let us say to-morrow, if you like; and then, besides, to-morrow is the 14th, that is to say, the day before the one when I am afraid of getting bored; so we will look upon it as an understood thing."

"Agreed, by all means."

"You will lend me one of your horses?"

"The best I have."

"No; I prefer the gentlest of all; I never was a very good rider, as you know, and in my grocery business I have got more awkward than ever; besides — "

"Besides what?"

"Why," added Planchet, "I do not wish to fatigue myself."

"Why so?" D'Artagnan ventured to ask.

"Because I should lose half the pleasure I expect to enjoy," replied Planchet. And thereupon he rose from his sack of Indian corn, stretching himself, and making all his bones crack, one after the other, with a sort of harmony.

"Planchet! Planchet!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "I do declare that there is no sybarite upon the face of the globe who can for a moment be compared to you. Oh, Planchet, it is very clear that we have never yet eaten a ton of salt together."

"Why so, monsieur?"

"Because, even now I can scarcely say I know you," said D'Artagnan, "and because, in point of fact, I return to the opinion which, for a moment, I had formed of you that day at Boulogne, when you strangled, or did so as nearly as possible, M. de Wardes's valet, Lubin; in plain language, Planchet, that you are a man of great resources."

Planchet began to laugh with a laugh full of self-conceit; bade the musketeer good-night, and went down to his back shop, which he used as a bedroom. D'Artagnan resumed his original position upon his chair, and his brow, which had been unruffled for a moment, became more pensive than ever. He had already forgotten the whims and dreams of Planchet. "Yes," said he, taking up again the thread of his thoughts, which had been broken by the whimsical conversation in which we have just permitted our readers to participate. "Yes, yes, those three points include everything: First, to ascertain what Baisemeaux wanted with Aramis; secondly, to learn why Aramis does not let me hear from him; and thirdly, to ascertain where Porthos is. The whole mystery lies in these three points. Since, therefore," continued D'Artagnan, "our friends tell us nothing, we must have recourse to our own poor intelligence. I must do what I can, *mordioux*, or rather *Malaga*, as Planchet would say."

CHAPTER II.

A Letter from M. Baisemeaux.

D’Artagnan, faithful to his plan, went the very next morning to pay a visit to M. de Baisemeaux. It was cleaning up or tidying day at the Bastile; the cannons were furbished up, the staircases scraped and cleaned; and the jailers seemed to be carefully engaged in polishing the very keys. As for the soldiers belonging to the garrison, they were walking about in different courtyards, under the pretense that they were clean enough. The governor, Baisemeaux, received D’Artagnan with more than ordinary politeness, but he behaved towards him with so marked a reserve of manner, that all D’Artagnan’s tact and cleverness could not get a syllable out of him. The more he kept himself within bounds, the more D’Artagnan’s suspicion increased. The latter even fancied he remarked that the governor was acting under the influence of a recent recommendation. Baisemeaux had not been at the Palais Royal with D’Artagnan the same cold and impenetrable man which the latter now found in the Baisemeaux of the Bastile. When D’Artagnan wished to make him talk about the urgent money matters which had brought Baisemeaux in search of D’Artagnan, and had rendered him expansive, notwithstanding what had passed on that evening, Baisemeaux pretended that he had some orders to give in the prison, and left D’Artagnan so long alone waiting for him, that our musketeer, feeling sure that he should not get another syllable out of him, left the Bastile without waiting until Baisemeaux returned from his inspection. But D’Artagnan’s suspicions were aroused, and when once that was the case, D’Artagnan could not sleep or remain quiet for a moment. He was among men what the cat is among quadrupeds, the emblem of anxiety and impatience, at the same moment. A restless cat can no more remain the same place than a silk thread wafted idly to and fro with every breath of air. A cat on the watch is as motionless as death stationed at its place of observation, and neither hunger nor thirst can draw it from its meditations. D’Artagnan, who was burning with impatience, suddenly threw aside the feeling, like a cloak which he felt too heavy on his shoulders, and said to himself that that which they were concealing from him was the very thing it was important he should know; and, consequently, he reasoned that Baisemeaux would not fail to put Aramis on his guard, if Aramis had given him any particular recommendation, and this was, in fact, the very thing that happened.

Baisemeaux had hardly had time to return from the donjon, than D'Artagnan placed himself in ambuscade close to the Rue de Petit-Musc, so as to see every one who might leave the gates of the Bastile. After he had spent an hour on the look-out from the "Golden Portcullis," under the pent-house of which he could keep himself a little in the shade, D'Artagnan observed a soldier leave the Bastile. This was, indeed, the surest indication he could possibly have wished for, as every jailer or warder has certain days, and even certain hours, for leaving the Bastile, since all are alike prohibited from having either wives or lodgings in the castle, and can accordingly leave without exciting any curiosity; but a soldier once in barracks is kept there for four and twenty hours when on duty, — and no one knew this better than D'Artagnan. The guardsman in question, therefore, was not likely to leave his regimentals, except on an express and urgent order. The soldier, we were saying, left the Bastile at a slow and lounging pace, like a happy mortal, in fact, who, instead of mounting sentry before a wearisome guard-house, or upon a bastion no less wearisome, has the good luck to get a little liberty, in addition to a walk — both pleasures being luckily reckoned as part of his time on duty. He bent his steps towards the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, enjoying the fresh air and the warmth of the sun, and looking at all the pretty faces he passed. D'Artagnan followed him at a distance; he had not yet arranged his ideas as what was to be done. "I must, first of all," he thought, "see the fellow's face. A man seen is a man judged." D'Artagnan increased his pace, and, which was not very difficult, by the by, soon got in advance of the soldier. Not only did he observe that his face showed a tolerable amount of intelligence and resolution, but he noticed also that his nose was a little red. "He has a weakness for brandy, I see," said D'Artagnan to himself. At the same moment that he remarked his red nose, he saw that the soldier had a white paper in his belt.

"Good, he has a letter," added D'Artagnan. The only difficulty was to get hold of the letter. But a common soldier would, of course, be only too delighted at having been selected by M. de Baisemeaux as a special messenger, and would not be likely to sell his message. As D'Artagnan was biting his nails, the soldier continued to advance more and more into the

Faubourg Saint-Antoine. “He is certainly going to Saint-Mande,” he said to himself, “and I shall not be able to learn what the letter contains.” It was enough to drive him wild. “If I were in uniform,” said D’Artagnan to himself, “I would have this fellow seized, and his letter with him. I could easily get assistance at the very first guard-house; but the devil take me if I mention my name in an affair of this kind. If I were to treat him to something to drink, his suspicions would be roused; and besides, he might drink me drunk. *Mordioux!* my wits seem to have left me,” said D’Artagnan; “it is all over with me. Yet, supposing I were to attack this poor devil, make him draw his sword and kill him for the sake of his letter? No harm in that, if it were a question of a letter from a queen to a nobleman, or a letter from a cardinal to a queen; but what miserable intrigues are those of Messieurs Aramis and Fouquet with M. Colbert. A man’s life for that? No, no, indeed; not even ten crowns.” As he philosophized in this manner, biting first his nails, and then his mustaches, he perceived a group of archers and a commissary of the police engaged in carrying away a man of very gentlemanly exterior, who was struggling with all his might against them. The archers had torn his clothes, and were dragging him roughly away. He begged they would lead him along more respectfully, asserting that he was a gentleman and a soldier. And observing our soldier walking in the street, he called out, “Help, comrade.”

The soldier walked on with the same step towards the man who had called out to him, followed by the crowd. An idea suddenly occurred to D’Artagnan; it was his first one, and we shall find it was not a bad one either. During the time the gentleman was relating to the soldier that he had just been seized in a house as a thief, when the truth was he was only there as a lover; and while the soldier was pitying him, and offering him consolation and advice with that gravity which a French soldier has always ready whenever his vanity or his *esprit de corps* is concerned, D’Artagnan glided behind the soldier, who was closely hemmed in by the crowd, and with a rapid sweep, like a sabre slash, snatched the letter from his belt. As at this moment the gentleman with the torn clothes was pulling about the soldier, to show how the commissary of police had pulled him about, D’Artagnan effected his pillage of the letter without the slightest interference. He stationed himself about ten paces distant, behind the pillar of an adjoining house, and read on the address, “To Monsieur du Vallon, at Monsieur Fouquet’s, Saint-Mande.”

“Good!” he said, and then he unsealed, without tearing the letter, drew out the paper, which was folded in four, from the inside; which contained only these words:

“DEAR MONSIEUR DU VALLON, — Will you be good enough to tell Monsieur d’Herblay that *he* has been to the Bastile, and has been making inquiries.

“Your devoted

“DE BAISEMEAUX.”

“Very good! all right!” exclaimed D’Artagnan; “it is clear enough now. Porthos is engaged in it.” Being now satisfied of what he wished to know: “*Mordioux!*” thought the musketeer, “what is to be done with that poor devil of a soldier? That hot-headed, cunning fellow, De Baisemeaux, will make him pay dearly for my trick, — if he returns without the letter, what will they do to him? Besides, I don’t want the letter; when the egg has been sucked, what is the good of the shell?” D’Artagnan perceived that the commissary and the archers had succeeded in convincing the soldier, and went on their way with the prisoner, the latter being still surrounded by the crowd, and continuing his complaints. D’Artagnan advanced into the very middle of the crowd, let the letter fall, without any one having observed him, and then retreated rapidly. The soldier resumed his route towards Saint-Mande, his mind occupied with the gentleman who had implored his protection. Suddenly he thought of his letter, and, looking at his belt, saw that it was no longer there. D’Artagnan derived no little satisfaction from his sudden, terrified cry. The poor soldier in the greatest anguish of mind looked round him on every side, and at last, about twenty paces behind him, he perceived the lucky envelope. He pounced on it like a falcon on its prey. The envelope was certainly a little dirty, and rather crumpled, but at all events the letter itself was found. D’Artagnan observed that the broken seal attracted the soldier’s attention a good deal, but he finished apparently by consoling himself, and returned the letter to his belt. “Go on,” said D’Artagnan, “I have plenty of time before me, so you may precede me. It appears that Aramis is not in Paris, since Baisemeaux writes to Porthos. Dear Porthos, how delighted I shall be to see him again, and to have some conversation with him!” said the Gascon. And, regulating his pace according to that of the soldier, he promised himself to arrive a quarter of an hour after him at M. Fouquet’s.

CHAPTER III.

In Which the Reader will be Delighted to Find that Porthos Has Lost Nothing of His Muscularity.

D'Artagnan had, according to his usual style, calculated that every hour is worth sixty minutes, and every minute worth sixty seconds. Thanks to this perfectly exact calculation of minutes and seconds, he reached the superintendent's door at the very moment the soldier was leaving it with his belt empty. D'Artagnan presented himself at the door, which a porter with a profusely embroidered livery held half opened for him. D'Artagnan would very much have liked to enter without giving his name, but this was impossible, and so he gave it. Notwithstanding this concession, which ought to have removed every difficulty in the way, at least D'Artagnan thought so, the *concierge* hesitated; however, at the second repetition of the title, captain of the king's guards, the *concierge*, without quite leaving the passage clear for him, ceased to bar it completely. D'Artagnan understood that orders of the most positive character had been given. He decided, therefore, to tell a falsehood, — a circumstance, moreover, which did not seriously affect his peace of mind, when he saw that beyond the falsehood the safety of the state itself, or even purely and simply his own individual personal interest, might be at stake. He moreover added to the declarations he had already made, that the soldier sent to M. du Vallon was his own messenger, and that the only object that letter had in view was to announce his intended arrival. From that moment, no one opposed D'Artagnan's entrance any further, and he entered accordingly. A valet wished to accompany him, but he answered that it was useless to take that trouble on his account, inasmuch as he knew perfectly well where M. du Vallon was. There was nothing, of course, to say to a man so thoroughly and completely informed on all points, and D'Artagnan was permitted, therefore, to do as he liked. The terraces, the magnificent apartments, the gardens, were all reviewed and narrowly inspected by the musketeer. He walked for a quarter of an hour in this more than royal residence, which included as many wonders as articles of furniture, and as many servants as there were columns and doors. “Decidedly,” he said to himself, “this mansion has no other limits than the pillars of the habitable world. Is it probable Porthos has taken it into his head to go back to Pierrefonds without even leaving M. Fouquet’s house?” He finally reached a remote part of the chateau inclosed by a stone wall, which was covered with a profusion of thick plants, luxuriant in blossoms as large and solid as fruit. At equal distances on the top of this wall were placed various statues in timid or mysterious attitudes. These were vestals hidden beneath the long Greek peplum, with its thick, sinuous folds; agile nymphs, covered with their marble veils, and guarding the palace with their fugitive glances. A statue of Hermes, with his finger on his lips; one of Iris, with extended wings; another of Night, sprinkled all over with poppies, dominated the gardens and outbuildings, which could be seen through the trees. All these statues threw in white relief their profiles upon the dark ground of the tall cypresses, which darted their somber summits towards the sky. Around these cypresses were entwined climbing roses, whose flowering rings were fastened to every fork of the branches, and spread over the lower boughs and the various statues, showers of flowers of the rarest fragrance. These enchantments seemed to the musketeer the result of the greatest efforts of the human mind. He felt in a dreamy, almost poetical, frame of mind. The idea that Porthos was living in so perfect an Eden gave him a higher idea of Porthos, showing how tremendously true it is, that even the very highest orders of minds are not quite exempt from the influence of surroundings. D’Artagnan found the door, and on, or rather in the door, a kind of spring which he detected; having touched it, the door flew open. D’Artagnan entered, closed the door behind him, and advanced into a pavilion built in a circular form, in which no other sound could be heard but cascades and the songs of birds. At the door of the pavilion he met a lackey.

“It is here, I believe,” said D’Artagnan, without hesitation, “that M. le Baron du Vallon is staying?”

“Yes, monsieur,” answered the lackey.

“Have the goodness to tell him that M. le Chevalier d’Artagnan, captain of the king’s musketeers, is waiting to see him.”

D’Artagnan was introduced into the *salon*, and had not long to remain in expectation: a well-remembered step shook the floor of the adjoining room, a door opened, or rather flew open, and Porthos appeared and threw himself into his friend’s arms with a sort of embarrassment which did not ill become him. “You here?” he exclaimed.

“And you?” replied D’Artagnan. “Ah, you sly fellow!”

“Yes,” said Porthos, with a somewhat embarrassed smile; “yes, you see I am staying in M. Fouquet’s house, at which you are not a little surprised, I suppose?”

“Not at all; why should you not be one of M. Fouquet’s friends? M. Fouquet has a very large number, particularly among clever men.”

Porthos had the modesty not to take the compliment to himself. “Besides,” he added, “you saw me at Belle-Isle.”

“A greater reason for my believing you to be one of M. Fouquet’s friends.”

“The fact is, I am acquainted with him,” said Porthos, with a certain embarrassment of manner.

“Ah, friend Porthos,” said D’Artagnan, “how treacherously you have behaved towards me.”

“In what way?” exclaimed Porthos.

“What! you complete so admirable a work as the fortifications of Belle-Isle, and you did not tell me of it!” Porthos colored. “Nay, more than that,” continued D’Artagnan, “you saw me out yonder, you know I am in the king’s service, and yet you could not guess that the king, jealously desirous of learning the name of the man whose abilities had wrought a work of which he heard the most wonderful accounts, — you could not guess, I say, that the king sent me to learn who this man was?”

“What! the king sent you to learn — ”

“Of course; but don’t let us speak of that any more.”

“Not speak of it!” said Porthos; “on the contrary, we will speak of it; and so the king knew that we were fortifying Belle-Isle?”

“Of course; does not the king know everything?”

“But he did not know who was fortifying it?”

“No, he only suspected, from what he had been told of the nature of the works, that it was some celebrated soldier or another.”

“The devil!” said Porthos, “if I had only known that!”

“You would not have run away from Vannes as you did, perhaps?”

“No; what did you say when you couldn’t find me?”

“My dear fellow, I reflected.”

“Ah, indeed; you reflect, do you? Well, and what did that reflection lead to?”

“It led me to guess the whole truth.”

“Come, then, tell me what did you guess after all?” said Porthos, settling himself into an armchair, and assuming the airs of a sphinx.

“I guessed, in the first place, that you were fortifying Belle-Isle.”

“There was no great difficulty in that, for you saw me at work.”

“Wait a minute; I also guessed something else, — that you were fortifying Belle-Isle by M. Fouquet’s orders.”

“That’s true.”

“But even that is not all. Whenever I feel myself in trim for guessing, I do not stop on my road; and so I guessed that M. Fouquet wished to preserve the most absolute secrecy respecting these fortifications.”

“I believe that was his intention, in fact,” said Porthos.

“Yes, but do you know why he wished to keep it secret?”

“In order it should not become known, perhaps,” said Porthos.

“That was his principal reason. But his wish was subservient to a bit of generosity — ”

“In fact,” said Porthos, “I have heard it said that M. Fouquet was a very generous man.”

“To a bit of generosity he wished to exhibit towards the king.”

“Oh, oh!”

“You seem surprised at that?”

“Yes.”

“And you didn’t guess?”

“No.”

“Well, I know it, then.”

“You are a wizard.”

“Not at all, I assure you.”

“How do you know it, then?”

“By a very simple means. I heard M. Fouquet himself say so to the king.”

“Say what to the king?”

“That he fortified Belle-Isle on his majesty’s account, and that he had made him a present of Belle Isle.”

“And you heard M. Fouquet say that to the king?”

“In those very words. He even added: ‘Belle-Isle has been fortified by an engineer, one of my friends, a man of a great deal of merit, whom I shall ask your majesty’s permission to present to you.’

“‘What is his name?’ said the king.

“‘The Baron du Vallon,’ M. Fouquet replied.

“‘Very well,’ returned his majesty, ‘you will present him to me.’“

“The king said that?”

“Upon the word of a D’Artagnan!”

“Oh, oh!” said Porthos. “Why have I not been presented, then?”

“Have they not spoken to you about this presentation?”

“Yes, certainly; but I am always kept waiting for it.”

“Be easy, it will be sure to come.”

“Humph! humph!” grumbled Porthos, which D’Artagnan pretended not to hear; and, changing the conversation, he said, “You seem to be living in a very solitary place here, my dear fellow?”

“I always preferred retirement. I am of a melancholy disposition,” replied Porthos, with a sigh.

“Really, that is odd,” said D’Artagnan, “I never remarked that before.”

“It is only since I have taken to reading,” said Porthos, with a thoughtful air.

“But the labors of the mind have not affected the health of the body, I trust?”

“Not in the slightest degree.”

“Your strength is as great as ever?”

“Too great, my friend, too great.”

“Ah! I had heard that, for a short time after your arrival — ”

“That I could hardly move a limb, I suppose?”

“How was it?” said D’Artagnan, smiling, “and why was it you could not move?”

Porthos, perceiving that he had made a mistake, wished to correct it. “Yes, I came from Belle-Isle upon very hard horses,” he said, “and that fatigued me.”

“I am no longer astonished, then, since I, who followed you, found seven or eight lying dead on the road.”

“I am very heavy, you know,” said Porthos.

“So that you were bruised all over.”

“My marrow melted, and that made me very ill.”

“Poor Porthos! But how did Aramis act towards you under those circumstances?”

“Very well, indeed. He had me attended to by M. Fouquet’s own doctor. But just imagine, at the end of a week I could not breathe any longer.”

“What do you mean?”

“The room was too small; I had absorbed every atom of air.”

“Indeed?”

“I was told so, at least; and so I was removed into another apartment.”

“Where you were able to breathe, I hope and trust?”

“Yes, more freely; but no exercise — nothing to do. The doctor pretended that I was not to stir; I, on the contrary, felt that I was stronger than ever; that was the cause of a very serious accident.”

“What accident?”

“Fancy, my dear fellow, that I revolted against the directions of that ass of a doctor, and I resolved to go out, whether it suited him or not: and, consequently, I told the valet who waited on me to bring me my clothes.”

“You were quite naked, then?”

“Oh, no! on the contrary, I had a magnificent dressing-gown to wear. The lackey obeyed; I dressed myself in my own clothes, which had become too large for me; but a strange circumstance had happened, — my feet had become too large.”

“Yes, I quite understand.”

“And my boots too small.”

“You mean your feet were still swollen?”

“Exactly; you have hit it.”

“*Pardieu!* And is that the accident you were going to tell me about?”

“Oh, yes; I did not make the same reflection you have done. I said to myself: ‘Since my feet have entered my boots ten times, there is no reason why they should not go in the eleventh.’“

“Allow me to tell you, my dear Porthos, that on this occasion you failed in your logic.”

“In short, then, they placed me opposite to a part of the room which was partitioned; I tried to get my boot on; I pulled it with my hands, I pushed with all the strength of the muscles of my leg, making the most unheard-of efforts, when suddenly the two tags of my boot remained in my hands, and my foot struck out like a ballista.”

“How learned you are in fortification, dear Porthos.”

“My foot darted out like a ballista, and came against the partition, which it broke in; I really thought that, like Samson, I had demolished the temple.

And the number of pictures, the quantity of china, vases of flowers, carpets, and window-panes that fell down were really wonderful."

"Indeed!"

"Without reckoning that on the other side of the partition was a small table laden with porcelain — "

"Which you knocked over?"

"Which I dashed to the other side of the room," said Porthos, laughing.

"Upon my word, it is, as you say, astonishing," replied D'Artagnan, beginning to laugh also; whereupon Porthos laughed louder than ever.

"I broke," said Porthos, in a voice half-choked from his increasing mirth, "more than three thousand francs worth of china — ha, ha, ha!"

"Good!" said D'Artagnan.

"I smashed more than four thousand francs worth of glass! — ho, ho, ho!"

"Excellent."

"Without counting a luster, which fell on my head and was broken into a thousand pieces — ha, ha, ha!"

"Upon your head?" said D'Artagnan, holding his sides.

"On top."

"But your head was broken, I suppose?"

"No, since I tell you, on the contrary, my dear fellow, that it was the luster which was broken, like glass, which, in point of fact, it was."

"Ah! the luster was glass, you say."

"Venetian glass! a perfect curiosity, quite matchless, indeed, and weighed two hundred pounds."

"And it fell upon your head!"

"Upon my head. Just imagine, a globe of crystal, gilded all over, the lower part beautifully encrusted, perfumes burning at the top, with jets from which flame issued when they were lighted."

"I quite understand, but they were not lighted at the time, I suppose?"

"Happily not, or I should have been grilled prematurely."

"And you were only knocked down flat, instead?"

"Not at all."

"How, 'not at all?'"

"Why, the luster fell on my skull. It appears that we have upon the top of our heads an exceedingly thick crust."

"Who told you that, Porthos?"

“The doctor. A sort of dome which would bear Notre-Dame.”

“Bah!”

“Yes, it seems that our skulls are made in that manner.”

“Speak for yourself, my dear fellow, it is your own skull that is made in that manner, and not the skulls of other people.”

“Well, that may be so,” said Porthos, conceitedly, “so much, however, was that the case, in my instance, that no sooner did the luster fall upon the dome which we have at the top of our head, than there was a report like a cannon, the crystal was broken to pieces, and I fell, covered from head to foot.”

“With blood, poor Porthos!”

“Not at all; with perfumes, which smelt like rich creams; it was delicious, but the odor was too strong, and I felt quite giddy from it; perhaps you have experienced it sometimes yourself, D’Artagnan?”

“Yes, in inhaling the scent of the lily of the valley; so that, my poor friend, you were knocked over by the shock and overpowered by the perfumes?”

“Yes; but what is very remarkable, for the doctor told me he had never seen anything like it — ”

“You had a bump on your head I suppose?” interrupted D’Artagnan.

“I had five.”

“Why five?”

“I will tell you; the luster had, at its lower extremity, five gilt ornaments; excessively sharp.”

“Oh!”

“Well, these five ornaments penetrated my hair, which, as you see, I wear very thick.”

“Fortunately so.”

“And they made a mark on my skin. But just notice the singularity of it, these things seem really only to happen to me! Instead of making indentations, they made bumps. The doctor could never succeed in explaining that to me satisfactorily.”

“Well, then, I will explain it to you.”

“You will do me a great service if you will,” said Porthos, winking his eyes, which, with him, was sign of the profoundest attention.

“Since you have been employing your brain in studies of an exalted character, in important calculations, and so on, the head has gained a certain advantage, so that your head is now too full of science.”

“Do you think so?”

“I am sure of it. The result is, that, instead of allowing any foreign matter to penetrate the interior of the head, your bony box or skull, which is already too full, avails itself of the openings which are made in allowing this excess to escape.”

“Ah!” said Porthos, to whom this explanation appeared clearer than that of the doctor.

“The five protuberances, caused by the five ornaments of the luster, must certainly have been scientific globules, brought to the surface by the force of circumstances.”

“In fact,” said Porthos, “the real truth is, that I felt far worse outside my head than inside. I will even confess, that when I put my hat upon my head, clapping it on my head with that graceful energy which we gentlemen of the sword possess, if my fist was not very gently applied, I experienced the most painful sensations.”

“I quite believe you, Porthos.”

“Therefore, my friend,” said the giant, “M. Fouquet decided, seeing how slightly built the house was, to give me another lodging, and so they brought me here.”

“It is the private park, I think, is it not?”

“Yes.”

“Where the rendezvous are made; that park, indeed, which is so celebrated in some of those mysterious stories about the superintendent?”

“I don’t know; I have had no rendezvous or heard mysterious stories myself, but they have authorized me to exercise my muscles, and I take advantage of the permission by rooting up some of the trees.”

“What for?”

“To keep my hand in, and also to take some birds’ nests; I find it more convenient than climbing.”

“You are as pastoral as Tyrcis, my dear Porthos.”

“Yes, I like the small eggs; I like them very much better than larger ones. You have no idea how delicate an *omelette* is, if made of four or five hundred eggs of linnets, chaffinches, starlings, blackbirds, and thrushes.”

“But five hundred eggs is perfectly monstrous!”

“A salad-bowl will hold them easily enough,” said Porthos.

D’Artagnan looked at Porthos admiringly for full five minutes, as if he had seen him for the first time, while Porthos spread his chest out joyously and proudly. They remained in this state several minutes, Porthos smiling, and D’Artagnan looking at him. D’Artagnan was evidently trying to give the conversation a new turn. “Do you amuse yourself much here, Porthos?” he asked at last, very likely after he had found out what he was searching for.

“Not always.”

“I can imagine that; but when you get thoroughly bored, by and by, what do you intend to do?”

“Oh! I shall not be here for any length of time. Aramis is waiting until the last bump on my head disappears, in order to present me to the king, who I am told cannot endure the sight of a bump.”

“Aramis is still in Paris, then?”

“No.”

“Whereabouts is he, then?”

“At Fontainebleau.”

“Alone?”

“With M. Fouquet.”

“Very good. But do you happen to know one thing?”

“No, tell it me, and then I shall know.”

“Well, then, I think Aramis is forgetting you.”

“Do you really think so?”

“Yes; for at Fontainebleau yonder, you must know, they are laughing, dancing, banqueting, and drawing the corks of M. de Mazarin’s wine in fine style. Are you aware that they have a ballet every evening there?”

“The deuce they have!”

“I assure you that your dear Aramis is forgetting you.”

“Well, that is not at all unlikely, and I have myself thought so sometimes.”

“Unless he is playing you a trick, the sly fellow!”

“Oh!”

“You know that Aramis is as sly as a fox.”

“Yes, but to play *me* a trick — ”

“Listen: in the first place, he puts you under a sort of sequestration.”

“He sequestrates me! Do you mean to say I am sequestrated?”

“I think so.”

"I wish you would have the goodness to prove that to me."

"Nothing easier. Do you ever go out?"

"Never."

"Do you ever ride on horseback?"

"Never."

"Are your friends allowed to come and see you?"

"Never."

"Very well, then; never to go out, never to ride on horseback, never to be allowed to see your friends, that is called being sequestrated."

"But why should Aramis sequestrate me?" inquired Porthos.

"Come," said D'Artagnan, "be frank, Porthos."

"As gold."

"It was Aramis who drew the plan of the fortifications at Belle-Isle, was it not?"

Porthos colored as he said, "Yes; but that was all he did."

"Exactly, and my own opinion is that it was no very great affair after all."

"That is mine, too."

"Very good; I am delighted we are of the same opinion."

"He never even came to Belle-Isle," said Porthos.

"There now, you see."

"It was I who went to Vannes, as you may have seen."

"Say rather, as I did see. Well, that is precisely the state of the case, my dear Porthos. Aramis, who only drew the plans, wishes to pass himself off as the engineer, whilst you, who, stone by stone, built the wall, the citadel, and the bastions, he wishes to reduce to the rank of a mere builder."

"By builder, you mean mason, perhaps?"

"Mason; the very word."

"Plasterer, in fact?"

"Hodman?"

"Exactly."

"Oh, oh! my dear Aramis, you seem to think you are only five and twenty years of age still."

"Yes, and that is not all, for he believes you are fifty."

"I should have amazingly liked to have seen him at work."

"Yes, indeed."

"A fellow who has got the gout?"

"Yes."

"Who has lost three of his teeth?"

"Four."

"While I, look at mine." And Porthos, opening his large mouth very wide, displayed two rows of teeth not quite as white as snow, but even, hard, and sound as ivory.

"You can hardly believe, Porthos," said D'Artagnan, "what a fancy the king has for good teeth. Yours decide me; I will present you to the king myself."

"You?"

"Why not? Do you think I have less credit at court than Aramis?"

"Oh, no!"

"Do you think I have the slightest pretensions upon the fortifications at Belle-Isle?"

"Certainly not."

"It is your own interest alone which would induce me to do it."

"I don't doubt it in the least."

"Well, I am the intimate friend of the king; and a proof of that is, that whenever there is anything disagreeable to tell him, it is I who have to do it."

"But, dear D'Artagnan, if you present me — "

"Well!"

"Aramis will be angry."

"With me?"

"No, with *me*."

"Bah! whether he or I present you, since you are to be presented, what does it matter?"

"They were going to get me some clothes made."

"Your own are splendid."

"Oh! those I had ordered were far more beautiful."

"Take care: the king likes simplicity."

"In that case, I will be simple. But what will M. Fouquet say, when he learns that I have left?"

"Are you a prisoner, then, on parole?"

"No, not quite that. But I promised him I would not leave without letting him know."

"Wait a minute, we shall return to that presently. Have you anything to do here?"

“I, nothing: nothing of any importance, at least.”

“Unless, indeed, you are Aramis’s representative for something of importance.”

“By no means.”

“What I tell you — pray, understand that — is out of interest for you. I suppose, for instance, that you are commissioned to send messages and letters to him?”

“Ah! letters — yes. I send certain letters to him.”

“Where?”

“To Fontainebleau.”

“Have you any letters, then?”

“But — ”

“Nay, let me speak. Have you any letters, I say?”

“I have just received one for him.”

“Interesting?”

“I suppose so.”

“You do not read them, then?”

“I am not at all curious,” said Porthos, as he drew out of his pocket the soldier’s letter which Porthos had not read, but D’Artagnan had.

“Do you know what to do with it?” said D’Artagnan.

“Of course; do as I always do, send it to him.”

“Not so.”

“Why not? Keep it, then?”

“Did they not tell you that this letter was important?”

“Very important.”

“Well, you must take it yourself to Fontainebleau.”

“To Aramis?”

“Yes.”

“Very good.”

“And since the king is there — ”

“You will profit by that.”

“I shall profit by the opportunity to present you to the king.”

“Ah! D’Artagnan, there is no one like you for expedients.”

“Therefore, instead of forwarding to our friend any messages, which may or may not be faithfully delivered, we will ourselves be the bearers of the letter.”

“I had never even thought of that, and yet it is simple enough.”

"And therefore, because it is urgent, Porthos, we ought to set off at once."

"In fact," said Porthos, "the sooner we set off the less chance there is of Aramis's letter being delayed."

"Porthos, your reasoning is always accurate, and, in your case, logic seems to serve as an auxiliary to the imagination."

"Do you think so?" said Porthos.

"It is the result of your hard reading," replied D'Artagnan. "So come along, let us be off."

"But," said Porthos, "my promise to M. Fouquet?"

"Which?"

"Not to leave Saint-Mande without telling him of it."

"Ah! Porthos," said D'Artagnan, "how very young you still are."

"In what way?"

"You are going to Fontainebleau, are you not, where you will find M. Fouquet?"

"Yes."

"Probably in the king's palace?"

"Yes," repeated Porthos, with an air full of majesty.

"Well, you will accost him with these words: 'M. Fouquet, I have the honor to inform you that I have just left Saint-Mande.'"

"And," said Porthos, with the same majestic mien, "seeing me at Fontainebleau at the king's, M. Fouquet will not be able to tell me I am not speaking the truth."

"My dear Porthos, I was just on the point of opening my lips to make the same remark, but you anticipate me in everything. Oh! Porthos, how fortunately you are gifted! Years have made not the slightest impression on you."

"Not over-much, certainly."

"Then there is nothing more to say?"

"I think not."

"All your scruples are removed?"

"Quite so."

"In that case I shall carry you off with me."

"Exactly; and I will go and get my horse saddled."

"You have horses here, then?"

"I have five."

"You had them sent from Pierrefonds, I suppose?"

"No, M. Fouquet gave them to me."

"My dear Porthos, we shall not want five horses for two persons; besides, I have already three in Paris, which would make eight, and that will be too many."

"It would not be too many if I had some of my servants here; but, alas! I have not got them."

"Do you regret them, then?"

"I regret Mousqueton; I miss Mousqueton."

"What a good-hearted fellow you are, Porthos," said D'Artagnan; "but the best thing you can do is to leave your horses here, as you have left Mousqueton out yonder."

"Why so?"

"Because, by and by, it might turn out a very good thing if M. Fouquet had never given you anything at all."

"I don't understand you," said Porthos.

"It is not necessary you should understand."

"But yet — "

"I will explain to you later, Porthos."

"I'll wager it is some piece of policy or other."

"And of the most subtle character," returned D'Artagnan.

Porthos nodded his head at this word policy; then, after a moment's reflection, he added, "I confess, D'Artagnan, that I am no politician."

"I know that well."

"Oh! no one knows what you told me yourself, you, the bravest of the brave."

"What did I tell you, Porthos?"

"That every man has his day. You told me so, and I have experienced it myself. There are certain days when one feels less pleasure than others in exposing one's self to a bullet or a sword-thrust."

"Exactly my own idea."

"And mine, too, although I can hardly believe in blows or thrusts that kill outright."

"The deuce! and yet you have killed a few in your time."

"Yes; but I have never been killed."

"Your reason is a very good one."

"Therefore, I do not believe I shall ever die from a thrust of a sword or a gun-shot."

“In that case, then, you are afraid of nothing. Ah! water, perhaps?”

“Oh! I swim like an otter.”

“Of a quartan fever, then?”

“I have never had one yet, and I don’t believe I ever shall; but there is one thing I will admit,” and Porthos dropped his voice.

“What is that?” asked D’Artagnan, adopting the same tone of voice as Porthos.

“I must confess,” repeated Porthos, “that I am horribly afraid of politics.”

“Ah, bah!” exclaimed D’Artagnan.

“Upon my word, it’s true,” said Porthos, in a stentorian voice. “I have seen his eminence Monsieur le Cardinal de Richelieu, and his eminence Monsieur le Cardinal de Mazarin; the one was a red politician, the other a black politician; I never felt very much more satisfied with the one than with the other; the first struck off the heads of M. de Marillac, M. de Thou, M. de Cinq-Mars, M. Chalais, M. de Bouteville, and M. de Montmorency; the second got a whole crowd of Frondeurs cut in pieces, and we belonged to them.”

“On the contrary, we did not belong to them,” said D’Artagnan.

“Oh! indeed, yes; for if I unsheathed my sword for the cardinal, I struck it for the king.”

“My good Porthos!”

“Well, I have done. My dread of politics is such, that if there is any question of politics in the matter, I should greatly prefer to return to Pierrefonds.”

“You would be quite right, if that were the case. But with me, my dear Porthos, no politics at all, that is quite clear. You have labored hard in fortifying Belle-Isle; the king wished to know the name of the clever engineer under whose directions the works were carried out; you are modest, as all men of true genius are; perhaps Aramis wishes to put you under a bushel. But I happen to seize hold of you; I make it known who you are; I produce you; the king rewards you; and that is the only policy I have to do with.”

“And the only one I will have to do with either,” said Porthos, holding out his hand to D’Artagnan.

But D’Artagnan knew Porthos’s grasp; he knew that, once imprisoned within the baron’s five fingers, no hand ever left it without being half-crushed. He therefore held out, not his hand, but his fist, and Porthos did not even perceive the difference. The servants talked a little with each other in an undertone, and whispered a few words, which D’Artagnan understood, but which he took very good care not to let Porthos understand. “Our friend,” he said to himself, “was really and truly Aramis’s prisoner. Let us now see what the result will be of the liberation of the captive.”

CHAPTER IV.

The Rat and the Cheese.

D’Artagnan and Porthos returned on foot, as D’Artagnan had set out. When D’Artagnan, as he entered the shop of the Pilon d’Or, announced to Planchet that M. du Vallon would be one of the privileged travelers, and as the plume in Porthos’s hat made the wooden candles suspended over the front jingle together, a melancholy presentiment seemed to eclipse the delight Planchet had promised himself for the morrow. But the grocer had a heart of gold, ever mindful of the good old times — a trait that carries youth into old age. So Planchet, notwithstanding a sort of internal shiver, checked as soon as experienced, received Porthos with respect, mingled with the tenderest cordiality. Porthos, who was a little cold and stiff in his manners at first, on account of the social difference existing at that period between a baron and a grocer, soon began to soften when he perceived so much good-feeling and so many kind attentions in Planchet. He was particularly touched by the liberty which was permitted him to plunge his great palms into the boxes of dried fruits and preserves, into the sacks of nuts and almonds, and into the drawers full of sweetmeats. So that, notwithstanding Planchet’s pressing invitations to go upstairs to the *entresol*, he chose as his favorite seat, during the evening which he had to spend at Planchet’s house, the shop itself, where his fingers could always fish up whatever his nose detected. The delicious figs from Provence, filberts from the forest, Tours plums, were subjects of his uninterrupted attention for five consecutive hours. His teeth, like millstones, cracked heaps of nuts, the shells of which were scattered all over the floor, where they were trampled by every one who went in and out of the shop; Porthos pulled from the stalk with his lips, at one mouthful, bunches of the rich Muscatel raisins with their beautiful bloom, half a pound of which passed at one gulp from his mouth to his stomach. In one of the corners of the shop, Planchet’s assistants, huddled together, looked at each other without venturing to open their lips. They did not know who Porthos was, for they had never seen him before. The race of those Titans who had worn the cuirasses of Hugh Capet, Philip Augustus, and Francis I. had already begun to disappear. They could hardly help thinking he might be the ogre of the fairy tale, who was going to turn the whole contents of Planchet's shop into his insatiable stomach, and that, too, without in the slightest degree displacing the barrels and chests that were in it. Cracking, munching, chewing, nibbling, sucking, and swallowing, Porthos occasionally said to the grocer:

"You do a very good business here, friend Planchet."

"He will very soon have none at all to do, if this sort of thing continues," grumbled the foreman, who had Planchet's word that he should be his successor. In the midst of his despair, he approached Porthos, who blocked up the whole of the passage leading from the back shop to the shop itself. He hoped that Porthos would rise and that this movement would distract his devouring ideas.

"What do you want, my man?" asked Porthos, affably.

"I should like to pass you, monsieur, if it is not troubling you too much."

"Very well," said Porthos, "it does not trouble me in the least."

At the same moment he took hold of the young fellow by the waistband, lifted him off the ground, and placed him very gently on the other side, smiling all the while with the same affable expression. As soon as Porthos had placed him on the ground, the lad's legs so shook under him that he fell back upon some sacks of corks. But noticing the giant's gentleness of manner, he ventured again, and said:

"Ah, monsieur! pray be careful."

"What about?" inquired Porthos.

"You are positively putting a fiery furnace into your body."

"How is that, my good fellow?"

"All those things are very heating to the system!"

"Which?"

"Raisins, nuts, and almonds."

"Yes; but if raisins, nuts, and almonds are heating — "

"There is no doubt at all of it, monsieur."

"Honey is very cooling," said Porthos, stretching out his hand toward a small barrel of honey which was open, and he plunged the scoop with which the wants of the customers were supplied into it, and swallowed a good half-pound at one gulp.

"I must trouble you for some water now, my man," said Porthos.

"In a pail, monsieur?" asked the lad, simply.

“No, in a water-bottle; that will be quite enough;” and raising the bottle to his mouth, as a trumpeter does his trumpet, he emptied the bottle at a single draught.

Planchet was agitated in every fibre of propriety and self-esteem. However, a worthy representative of the hospitality which prevailed in early days, he feigned to be talking very earnestly with D’Artagnan, and incessantly repeated: — ”Ah! monsieur, what a happiness! what an honor!”

“What time shall we have supper, Planchet?” inquired Porthos, “I feel hungry.”

The foreman clasped his hands together. The two others got under the counters, fearing Porthos might have a taste for human flesh.

“We shall only take a sort of snack here,” said D’Artagnan; “and when we get to Planchet’s country-seat, we will have supper.”

“Ah, ah! so we are going to your country-house, Planchet,” said Porthos; “so much the better.”

“You overwhelm me, monsieur le baron.”

The “monsieur le baron” had a great effect upon the men, who detected a personage of the highest quality in an appetite of that kind. This title, too, reassured them. They had never heard that an ogre was ever called “monsieur le baron”.

“I will take a few biscuits to eat on the road,” said Porthos, carelessly; and he emptied a whole jar of aniseed biscuits into the huge pocket of his doublet.

“My shop is saved!” exclaimed Planchet.

“Yes, as the cheese was,” whispered the foreman.

“What cheese?”

“The Dutch cheese, inside which a rat had made his way, and we found only the rind left.”

Planchet looked all round his shop, and observing the different articles which had escaped Porthos’s teeth, he found the comparison somewhat exaggerated. The foreman, who remarked what was passing in his master’s mind, said, “Take care; he is not gone yet.”

“Have you any fruit here?” said Porthos, as he went upstairs to the *entresol*, where it had just been announced that some refreshment was prepared.

“Alas!” thought the grocer, addressing a look at D’Artagnan full of entreaty, which the latter half understood.

As soon as they had finished eating they set off. It was late when the three riders, who had left Paris about six in the evening, arrived at Fontainebleau. The journey passed very agreeably. Porthos took a fancy to Planchet's society, because the latter was very respectful in his manners, and seemed delighted to talk to him about his meadows, his woods, and his rabbit-warrens. Porthos had all the taste and pride of a landed proprietor. When D'Artagnan saw his two companions in earnest conversation, he took the opposite side of the road, and letting his bridle drop upon his horse's neck, separated himself from the whole world, as he had done from Porthos and from Planchet. The moon shone softly through the foliage of the forest. The breezes of the open country rose deliciously perfumed to the horse's nostrils, and they snorted and pranced along delightedly. Porthos and Planchet began to talk about hay-crops. Planchet admitted to Porthos that in the advanced years of his life, he had certainly neglected agricultural pursuits for commerce, but that his childhood had been passed in Picardy in the beautiful meadows where the grass grew as high as the knees, and where he had played under the green apple-trees covered with red-cheeked fruit; he went on to say, that he had solemnly promised himself that as soon as he should have made his fortune, he would return to nature, and end his days, as he had begun them, as near as he possibly could to the earth itself, where all men must sleep at last.

"Eh, eh!" said Porthos; "in that case, my dear Monsieur Planchet, your retirement is not far distant."

"How so?"

"Why, you seem to be in the way of making your fortune very soon."

"Well, we are getting on pretty well, I must admit," replied Planchet.

"Come, tell me what is the extent of your ambition, and what is the amount you intend to retire upon?"

"There is one circumstance, monsieur," said Planchet, without answering the question, "which occasions me a good deal of anxiety."

"What is it?" inquired Porthos, looking all round him as if in search of the circumstance that annoyed Planchet, and desirous of freeing him from it.

"Why, formerly," said the grocer, "you used to call me Planchet quite short, and you would have spoken to me then in a much more familiar manner than you do now."

“Certainly, certainly, I should have said so formerly,” replied the good-natured Porthos, with an embarrassment full of delicacy; “but formerly — ”

“Formerly I was M. d’Artagnan’s lackey; is not that what you mean?”

“Yes.”

“Well if I am not quite his lackey, I am as much as ever I was his devoted servant; and more than that, since that time — ”

“Well, Planchet?”

“Since that time, I have had the honor of being in partnership with him.”

“Oh, oh!” said Porthos. “What, has D’Artagnan gone into the grocery business?”

“No, no,” said D’Artagnan, whom these words had drawn out of his reverie, and who entered into the conversation with that readiness and rapidity which distinguished every operation of his mind and body. “It was not D’Artagnan who entered into the grocery business, but Planchet who entered into a political affair with me.”

“Yes,” said Planchet, with mingled pride and satisfaction, “we transacted a little business which brought me in a hundred thousand francs and M. d’Artagnan two hundred thousand.”

“Oh, oh!” said Porthos, with admiration.

“So that, monsieur le baron,” continued the grocer, “I again beg you to be kind enough to call me Planchet, as you used to do; and to speak to me as familiarly as in old times. You cannot possibly imagine the pleasure it would give me.”

“If that be the case, my dear Planchet, I will do so, certainly,” replied Porthos. And as he was quite close to Planchet, he raised his hand, as if to strike him on the shoulder, in token of friendly cordiality; but a fortunate movement of the horse made him miss his aim, so that his hand fell on the crupper of Planchet’s horse, instead; which made the animal’s legs almost give way.

D’Artagnan burst out laughing, as he said, “Take care, Planchet; for if Porthos begins to like you so much, he will caress you, and if he caresses you he will knock you as flat as a pancake. Porthos is still as strong as ever, you know.”

“Oh,” said Planchet, “Mousqueton is not dead, and yet monsieur le baron is very fond of him.”

“Certainly,” said Porthos, with a sigh which made all the three horses rear; “and I was only saying, this very morning, to D’Artagnan, how much I regretted him. But tell me, Planchet?"

"Thank you, monsieur le baron, thank you."

"Good lad, good lad! How many acres of park have you got?"

"Of park?"

"Yes; we will reckon up the meadows presently, and the woods afterwards."

"Whereabouts, monsieur?" "At your chateau."

"Oh, monsieur le baron, I have neither chateau, nor park, nor meadows, nor woods."

"What have you got, then?" inquired Porthos, "and why do you call it a country-seat?"

"I did not call it a country-seat, monsieur le baron," replied Planchet, somewhat humiliated, "but a country-box."

"Ah, ah! I understand. You are modest."

"No, monsieur le baron, I speak the plain truth. I have rooms for a couple of friends, that's all."

"But in that case, whereabouts do your friends walk?"

"In the first place, they can walk about the king's forest, which is very beautiful."

"Yes, I know the forest is very fine," said Porthos; "nearly as beautiful as my forest at Berry."

Planchet opened his eyes very wide. "Have you a forest of the same kind as the forest at Fontainebleau, monsieur le baron?" he stammered out.

"Yes; I have two, indeed, but the one at Berry is my favorite."

"Why so?" asked Planchet.

"Because I don't know where it ends; and, also, because it is full of poachers."

"How can the poachers make the forest so agreeable to you?"

"Because they hunt my game, and I hunt them — which, in these peaceful times, is for me a sufficiently pleasing picture of war on a small scale."

They had reached this turn of conversation, when Planchet, looking up, perceived the houses at the commencement of Fontainebleau, the lofty outlines of which stood out strongly against the misty visage of the heavens; whilst, rising above the compact and irregularly formed mass of buildings, the pointed roofs of the chateau were clearly visible, the slates of which glistened beneath the light of the moon, like the scales of an immense fish. “Gentlemen,” said Planchet, “I have the honor to inform you that we have arrived at Fontainebleau.”

CHAPTER V.

Planchet’s Country-House.

The cavaliers looked up, and saw that what Planchet had announced to them was true. Ten minutes afterwards they were in the street called the Rue de Lyon, on the opposite side of the hostelry of the Beau Paon. A high hedge of bushy elders, hawthorn, and wild hops formed an impenetrable fence, behind which rose a white house, with a high tiled roof. Two of the windows, which were quite dark, looked upon the street. Between the two, a small door, with a porch supported by a couple of pillars, formed the entrance to the house. The door was gained by a step raised a little from the ground. Planchet got off his horse, as if he intended to knock at the door; but, on second thoughts, he took hold of his horse by the bridle, and led it about thirty paces further on, his two companions following him. He then advanced about another thirty paces, until he arrived at the door of a cart-house, lighted by an iron grating; and, lifting up a wooden latch, pushed open one of the folding-doors. He entered first, leading his horse after him by the bridle, into a small courtyard, where an odor met them which revealed their close vicinity to a stable. “That smells all right,” said Porthos, loudly, getting off his horse, “and I almost begin to think I am near my own cows at Pierrefonds.”

“I have only one cow,” Planchet hastened to say modestly.

“And I have thirty,” said Porthos; “or rather, I don’t exactly know how many I have.”

When the two cavaliers had entered, Planchet fastened the door behind them. In the meantime, D’Artagnan, who had dismounted with his usual agility, inhaled the fresh perfumed air with the delight a Parisian feels at the sight of green fields and fresh foliage, plucked a piece of honeysuckle with one hand, and of sweet-briar with the other. Porthos clawed hold of some peas which were twined round poles stuck into the ground, and ate, or rather browsed upon them, shells and all: and Planchet was busily engaged trying to wake up an old and infirm peasant, who was fast asleep in a shed, lying on a bed of moss, and dressed in an old stable suit of clothes. The peasant, recognizing Planchet, called him "the master," to the grocer's great satisfaction. "Stable the horses well, old fellow, and you shall have something good for yourself," said Planchet.

"Yes, yes; fine animals they are too," said the peasant. "Oh! they shall have as much as they like."

"Gently, gently, my man," said D'Artagnan, "we are getting on a little too fast. A few oats and a good bed — nothing more."

"Some bran and water for my horse," said Porthos, "for it is very warm, I think."

"Don't be afraid, gentlemen," replied Planchet; "Daddy Celestin is an old gendarme, who fought at Ivry. He knows all about horses; so come into the house." And he led the way along a well-sheltered walk, which crossed a kitchen-garden, then a small paddock, and came out into a little garden behind the house, the principal front of which, as we have already noticed, faced the street. As they approached, they could see, through two open windows on the ground floor, which led into a sitting-room, the interior of Planchet's residence. This room, softly lighted by a lamp placed on the table, seemed, from the end of the garden, like a smiling image of repose, comfort, and happiness. In every direction where the rays of light fell, whether upon a piece of old china, or upon an article of furniture shining from excessive neatness, or upon the weapons hanging against the wall, the soft light was softly reflected; and its rays seemed to linger everywhere upon something or another, agreeable to the eye. The lamp which lighted the room, whilst the foliage of jasmine and climbing roses hung in masses from the window-frames, splendidly illuminated a damask table-cloth as white as snow. The table was laid for two persons. Amber-colored wine sparkled in a long cut-glass bottle; and a large jug of blue china, with a silver lid, was filled with foaming cider. Near the table, in a high-backed armchair, reclined, fast asleep, a woman of about thirty years of age, her face the very picture of health and freshness. Upon her knees lay a large cat, with her paws folded under her, and her eyes half-closed, purring in that significant manner which, according to feline habits, indicates perfect contentment. The two friends paused before the window in complete amazement, while Planchet, perceiving their astonishment, was in no little degree secretly delighted at it.

"Ah! Planchet, you rascal," said D'Artagnan, "I now understand your absences."

"Oh, oh! there is some white linen!" said Porthos, in his turn, in a voice of thunder. At the sound of this gigantic voice, the cat took flight, the housekeeper woke up with a start, and Planchet, assuming a gracious air, introduced his two companions into the room, where the table was already laid.

"Permit me, my dear," he said, "to present to you Monsieur le Chevalier d'Artagnan, my patron." D'Artagnan took the lady's hand in his in the most courteous manner, and with precisely the same chivalrous air as he would have taken Madame's.

"Monsieur le Baron du Vallon de Bracieux de Pierrefonds," added Planchet. Porthos bowed with a reverence which Anne of Austria would have approved of.

It was then Planchet's turn, and he unhesitatingly embraced the lady in question, not, however, until he had made a sign as if requesting D'Artagnan's and Porthos's permission, a permission as a matter of course frankly conceded. D'Artagnan complimented Planchet, and said, "You are indeed a man who knows how to make life agreeable."

"Life, monsieur," said Planchet, laughing, "is capital which a man ought to invest as sensibly as he possibly can."

"And you get very good interest for yours," said Porthos, with a burst of laughter like a peal of thunder.

Planchet turned to his housekeeper. "You have before you," he said to her, "the two gentlemen who influenced the greatest, gayest, grandest portion of my life. I have spoken to you about them both very frequently."

"And about two others as well," said the lady, with a very decided Flemish accent.

"Madame is Dutch?" inquired D'Artagnan. Porthos curled his mustache, a circumstance which was not lost upon D'Artagnan, who noticed everything.

"I am from Antwerp," said the lady.

"And her name is Madame Getcher," said Planchet.

"You should not call her madame," said D'Artagnan.

"Why not?" asked Planchet.

"Because it would make her seem older every time you call her so."

"Well, I call her Truchen."

"And a very pretty name too," said Porthos.

“Truchen,” said Planchet, “came to me from Flanders with her virtue and two thousand florins. She ran away from a brute of a husband who was in the habit of beating her. Being myself a Picard born, I was always very fond of the Artesian women, and it is only a step from Artois to Flanders; she came crying bitterly to her godfather, my predecessor in the Rue des Lombards; she placed her two thousand florins in my establishment, which I have turned to very good account, and which have brought her in ten thousand.”

“Bravo, Planchet.”

“She is free and well off; she has a cow, a maid servant and old Celestin at her orders; she mends my linen, knits my winter stockings; she only sees me every fortnight, and seems to make herself in all things tolerably happy.

“And indeed, gentlemen, I *am* very happy and comfortable,” said Truchen, with perfect ingenuousness.

Porthos began to curl the other side of his mustache. “The deuce,” thought D’Artagnan, “can Porthos have any intentions in that quarter?”

In the meantime Truchen had set her cook to work, had laid the table for two more, and covered it with every possible delicacy that could convert a light supper into a substantial meal, a meal into a regular feast. Fresh butter, salt beef, anchovies, tunny, a shopful of Planchet’s commodities, fowls, vegetables, salad, fish from the pond and the river, game from the forest — all the produce, in fact, of the province. Moreover, Planchet returned from the cellar, laden with ten bottles of wine, the glass of which could hardly be seen for the thick coating of dust which covered them. Porthos’s heart began to expand as he said, “I am hungry,” and he sat himself beside Madame Truchen, whom he looked at in the most killing manner. D’Artagnan seated himself on the other side of her, while Planchet, discreetly and full of delight, took his seat opposite.

“Do not trouble yourselves,” he said, “if Truchen should leave the table now and then during supper; for she will have to look after your bedrooms.”

In fact, the housekeeper made her escape quite frequently, and they could hear, on the first floor above them, the creaking of the wooden bedsteads and the rolling of the castors on the floor. While this was going on, the three men, Porthos especially, ate and drank gloriously, — it was wonderful to see them. The ten full bottles were ten empty ones by the time Truchen returned with the cheese. D’Artagnan still preserved his dignity and self-possession, but Porthos had lost a portion of his; and the mirth soon began to grow somewhat uproarious. D'Artagnan recommended a new descent into the cellar, and, as Planchet no longer walked with the steadiness of a well-trained foot-soldier, the captain of the musketeers proposed to accompany him. They set off, humming songs wild enough to frighten anybody who might be listening. Truchen remained behind at table with Porthos. While the two wine-bibbers were looking behind the firewood for what they wanted, a sharp report was heard like the impact of a pair of lips on a lady's cheek.

"Porthos fancies himself at La Rochelle," thought D'Artagnan, as they returned freighted with bottles. Planchet was singing so loudly that he was incapable of noticing anything. D'Artagnan, whom nothing ever escaped, remarked how much redder Truchen's left cheek was than her right. Porthos was sitting on Truchen's left, and was curling with both his hands both sides of his mustache at once, and Truchen was looking at him with a most bewitching smile. The sparkling wine of Anjou very soon produced a remarkable effect upon the three companions. D'Artagnan had hardly strength enough left to take a candlestick to light Planchet up his own staircase. Planchet was pulling Porthos along, who was following Truchen, who was herself jovial enough. It was D'Artagnan who found out the rooms and the beds. Porthos threw himself into the one destined for him, after his friend had undressed him. D'Artagnan got into his own bed, saying to himself, "*Mordioux!* I had made up my mind never to touch that light-colored wine, which brings my early camp days back again. Fie! fie! if my musketeers were only to see their captain in such a state." And drawing the curtains of his bed, he added, "Fortunately enough, though, they will not see me."

"The country is very amusing," said Porthos, stretching out his legs, which passed through the wooden footboard, and made a tremendous crash, of which, however, no one in the house was capable of taking the slightest notice. By two o'clock in the morning every one was fast asleep.

CHAPTER VI.

Showing What Could Be Seen from Planchet's House.

The next morning found the three heroes sleeping soundly. Truchen had closed the outside blinds to keep the first rays of the sun from the leaden-lidded eyes of her guests, like a kind, good housekeeper. It was still perfectly dark, then, beneath Porthos's curtains and under Planchet's canopy, when D'Artagnan, awakened by an indiscreet ray of light which made its way through a peek-hole in the shutters, jumped hastily out of bed, as if he wished to be the first at a forlorn hope. He took by assault Porthos's room, which was next to his own. The worthy Porthos was sleeping with a noise like distant thunder; in the dim obscurity of the room his gigantic frame was prominently displayed, and his swollen fist hung down outside the bed upon the carpet. D'Artagnan awoke Porthos, who rubbed his eyes in a tolerably good humor. In the meantime Planchet was dressing himself, and met at their bedroom doors his two guests, who were still somewhat unsteady from their previous evening's entertainment. Although it was yet very early, the whole household was already up. The cook was mercilessly slaughtering in the poultry-yard; Celestin was gathering white cherries in the garden. Porthos, brisk and lively as ever, held out his hand to Planchet's, and D'Artagnan requested permission to embrace Madame Truchen. The latter, to show that she bore no ill-will, approached Porthos, upon whom she conferred the same favor. Porthos embraced Madame Truchen, heaving an enormous sigh. Planchet took both his friends by the hand.

"I am going to show you over the house," he said; "when we arrived last night it was as dark as an oven, and we were unable to see anything; but in broad daylight, everything looks different, and you will be satisfied, I hope."

"If we begin by the view you have here," said D'Artagnan, "that charms me beyond everything; I have always lived in royal mansions, you know, and royal personages have tolerably sound ideas upon the selection of points of view."

"I am a great stickler for a good view myself," said Porthos. "At my Chateau de Pierrefonds, I have had four avenues laid out, and at the end of each is a landscape of an altogether different character from the others."

"You shall see *my* prospect," said Planchet; and he led his two guests to a window.

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, "this is the Rue de Lyon."

"Yes, I have two windows on this side, a paltry, insignificant view, for there is always that bustling and noisy inn, which is a very disagreeable neighbor. I had four windows here, but I bricked up two."

"Let us go on," said D'Artagnan.

They entered a corridor leading to the bedrooms, and Planchet pushed open the outside blinds.

"Hollo! what is that out yonder?" said Porthos.

"The forest," said Planchet. "It is the horizon, — a thick line of green, which is yellow in the spring, green in the summer, red in the autumn, and white in the winter."

"All very well, but it is like a curtain, which prevents one seeing a greater distance."

"Yes," said Planchet; "still, one can see, at all events, everything that intervenes."

"Ah, the open country," said Porthos. "But what is that I see out there, — crosses and stones?"

"Ah, that is the cemetery," exclaimed D'Artagnan.

"Precisely," said Planchet; "I assure you it is very curious. Hardly a day passes that some one is not buried there; for Fontainebleau is by no means an inconsiderable place. Sometimes we see young girls clothed in white carrying banners; at others, some of the town-council, or rich citizens, with choristers and all the parish authorities; and then, too, we see some of the officers of the king's household."

"I should not like that," said Porthos.

"There is not much amusement in it, at all events," said D'Artagnan.

"I assure you it encourages religious thoughts," replied Planchet.

"Oh, I don't deny that."

"But," continued Planchet, "we must all die one day or another, and I once met with a maxim somewhere which I have remembered, that the thought of death is a thought that will do us all good."

"I am far from saying the contrary," said Porthos.

“But,” objected D’Artagnan, “the thought of green fields, flowers, rivers, blue horizons, extensive and boundless plains, is not likely to do us good.”

“If I had any, I should be far from rejecting them,” said Planchet; “but possessing only this little cemetery, full of flowers, so moss-grown, shady, and quiet, I am contented with it, and I think of those who live in town, in the Rue des Lombards, for instance, and who have to listen to the rumbling of a couple of thousand vehicles every day, and to the soulless tramp, tramp, tramp of a hundred and fifty thousand foot-passengers.”

“But living,” said Porthos; “living, remember that.”

“That is exactly the reason,” said Planchet, timidly, “why I feel it does me good to contemplate a few dead.”

“Upon my word,” said D’Artagnan, “that fellow Planchet is born a philosopher as well as a grocer.”

“Monsieur,” said Planchet, “I am one of those good-humored sort of men whom Heaven created for the purpose of living a certain span of days, and of considering all good they meet with during their transitory stay on earth.”

D’Artagnan sat down close to the window, and as there seemed to be something substantial in Planchet’s philosophy, he mused over it.

“Ah, ah!” exclaimed Planchet, “if I am not mistaken, we are going to have a representation now, for I think I heard something like chanting.”

“Yes,” said D’Artagnan, “I hear singing too.”

“Oh, it is only a burial of a very poor description,” said Planchet, disdainfully; “the officiating priest, the beadle, and only one chorister boy, nothing more. You observe, messieurs, that the defunct lady or gentleman could not have been of very high rank.”

“No; no one seems to be following the coffin.”

“Yes,” said Porthos; “I see a man.”

“You are right; a man wrapped in a cloak,” said D’Artagnan.

“It’s not worth looking at,” said Planchet.

“I find it interesting,” said D’Artagnan, leaning on the window-sill.

“Come, come, you are beginning to take a fancy to the place already,” said Planchet, delightedly; “it is exactly my own case. I was so melancholy at first that I could do nothing but make the sign of the cross all day, and the chants were like so many nails being driven into my head; but now, they lull me to sleep, and no bird I have ever seen or heard can sing better than those which are to be met with in this cemetery.”

“Well,” said Porthos, “this is beginning to get a little dull for me, and I prefer going downstairs.”

Planchet with one bound was beside his guest, whom he offered to lead into the garden.

“What!” said Porthos to D’Artagnan, as he turned round, “are you going to remain here?”

“Yes, I will join you presently.”

“Well, M. D’Artagnan is right, after all,” said Planchet: “are they beginning to bury yet?”

“Not yet.”

“Ah! yes, the grave-digger is waiting until the cords are fastened round the bier. But, see, a woman has just entered the cemetery at the other end.”

“Yes, yes, my dear Planchet,” said D’Artagnan, quickly, “leave me, leave me; I feel I am beginning already to be much comforted by my meditations, so do not interrupt me.”

Planchet left, and D’Artagnan remained, devouring with his eager gaze from behind the half-closed blinds what was taking place just before him. The two bearers of the corpse had unfastened the straps by which they carried the litter, and were letting their burden glide gently into the open grave. At a few paces distant, the man with the cloak wrapped round him, the only spectator of this melancholy scene, was leaning with his back against a large cypress-tree, and kept his face and person entirely concealed from the grave-diggers and the priests; the corpse was buried in five minutes. The grave having been filled up, the priests turned away, and the grave-digger having addressed a few words to them, followed them as they moved away. The man in the mantle bowed as they passed him, and put a piece of gold into the grave-digger’s hand.

“*Mordioux!*” murmured D’Artagnan; “it is Aramis himself.”

Aramis, in fact, remained alone, on that side at least; for hardly had he turned his head when a woman’s footsteps, and the rustling of her dress, were heard in the path close to him. He immediately turned round, and took off his hat with the most ceremonious respect; he led the lady under the shelter of some walnut and lime trees, which overshadowed a magnificent tomb.

“Ah! who would have thought it,” said D’Artagnan; “the bishop of Vannes at a rendezvous! He is still the same Abbe Aramis as he was at

Noisy-le-Sec. Yes," he added, after a pause; "but as it is in a cemetery, the rendezvous is sacred." But he almost laughed.

The conversation lasted for fully half an hour. D'Artagnan could not see the lady's face, for she kept her back turned towards him; but he saw perfectly well, by the erect attitude of both the speakers, by their gestures, by the measured and careful manner with which they glanced at each other, either by way of attack or defense, that they must be conversing about any other subject than of love. At the end of the conversation the lady rose, and bowed profoundly to Aramis.

"Oh, oh," said D'Artagnan; "this rendezvous finishes like one of a very tender nature though. The cavalier kneels at the beginning, the young lady by and by gets tamed down, and then it is she who has to supplicate. Who is this lady? I would give anything to ascertain."

This seemed impossible, however, for Aramis was the first to leave; the lady carefully concealed her head and face, and then immediately departed. D'Artagnan could hold out no longer; he ran to the window which looked out on the Rue de Lyon, and saw Aramis entering the inn. The lady was proceeding in quite an opposite direction, and seemed, in fact, to be about to rejoin an equipage, consisting of two led horses and a carriage, which he could see standing close to the borders of the forest. She was walking slowly, her head bent down, absorbed in the deepest meditation.

"*Mordioux! Mordioux!* I must and will learn who that woman is," said the musketeer again; and then, without further deliberation, he set off in pursuit of her. As he was going along, he tried to think how he could possibly contrive to make her raise her veil. "She is not young," he said, "and is a woman of high rank in society. I ought to know that figure and peculiar style of walk." As he ran, the sound of his spurs and of his boots upon the hard ground of the street made a strange jingling noise; a fortunate circumstance in itself, which he was far from reckoning upon. The noise disturbed the lady; she seemed to fancy she was being either followed or pursued, which was indeed the case, and turned round. D'Artagnan started as if he had received a charge of small shot in his legs, and then turning suddenly round as if he were going back the same way he had come, he murmured, "Madame de Chevreuse!" D'Artagnan would not go home until he had learnt everything. He asked Celestin to inquire of the grave-digger whose body it was they had buried that morning.

“A poor Franciscan mendicant friar,” replied the latter, “who had not even a dog to love him in this world, and to accompany him to his last resting-place.”

“If that were really the case,” thought D’Artagnan, “we should not have found Aramis present at his funeral. The bishop of Vannes is not precisely a dog as far as devotion goes: his scent, however, is quite as keen, I admit.”

CHAPTER VII.

How Porthos, Truchen, and Planchet Parted with Each Other on Friendly Terms, Thanks to D’Artagnan.

There was good living in Planchet’s house. Porthos broke a ladder and two cherry-trees, stripped the raspberry-bushes, and was only unable to succeed in reaching the strawberry-beds on account, as he said, of his belt. Truchen, who had become quite sociable with the giant, said that it was not the belt so much as his corporation; and Porthos, in a state of the highest delight, embraced Truchen, who gathered him a pailful of the strawberries, and made him eat them out of her hands. D’Artagnan, who arrived in the midst of these little innocent flirtations, scolded Porthos for his indolence, and silently pitied Planchet. Porthos breakfasted with a very good appetite, and when he had finished, he said, looking at Truchen, “I could make myself very happy here.” Truchen smiled at his remark, and so did Planchet, but not without embarrassment.

D’Artagnan then addressed Porthos: “You must not let the delights of Capua make you forget the real object of our journey to Fontainebleau.”

“My presentation to the king?”

“Certainly. I am going to take a turn in the town to get everything ready for that. Do not think of leaving the house, I beg.”

“Oh, no!” exclaimed Porthos.

Planchet looked at D’Artagnan nervously.

“Will you be away long?” he inquired.

“No, my friend; and this very evening I will release you from two troublesome guests.”

“Oh! Monsieur d’Artagnan! can you say — ”

“No, no; you are a noble-hearted fellow, but your house is very small. Such a house, with half a dozen acres of land, would be fit for a king, and make him very happy, too. But you were not born a great lord.”

“No more was M. Porthos,” murmured Planchet.

“But he has become so, my good fellow; his income has been a hundred thousand francs a year for the last twenty years, and for the last fifty years

Porthos has been the owner of a couple of fists and a backbone, which are not to be matched throughout the whole realm of France. Porthos is a man of the very greatest consequence compared to you, and... well, I need say no more, for I know you are an intelligent fellow.”

“No, no, monsieur, explain what you mean.”

“Look at your orchard, how stripped it is, how empty your larder, your bedstead broken, your cellar almost exhausted, look too... at Madame Truchen — ”

“Oh! my goodness gracious!” said Planchet.

“Madame Truchen is an excellent person,” continued D’Artagnan, “but keep her for yourself, do you understand?” and he slapped him on the shoulder.

Planchet at this moment perceived Porthos and Truchen sitting close together in an arbor; Truchen, with a grace of manner peculiarly Flemish, was making a pair of earrings for Porthos out of a double cherry, while Porthos was laughing as amorously as Samson in the company of Delilah. Planchet pressed D’Artagnan’s hand, and ran towards the arbor. We must do Porthos the justice to say that he did not move as they approached, and, very likely, he did not think he was doing any harm. Nor indeed did Truchen move either, which rather put Planchet out; but he, too, had been so accustomed to see fashionable folk in his shop, that he found no difficulty in putting a good countenance on what seemed disagreeable or rude. Planchet seized Porthos by the arm, and proposed to go and look at the horses, but Porthos pretended he was tired. Planchet then suggested that the Baron du Vallon should taste some noyeau of his own manufacture, which was not to be equaled anywhere; an offer the baron immediately accepted; and, in this way, Planchet managed to engage his enemy’s attention during the whole of the day, by dint of sacrificing his cellar, in preference to his *amour propre*. Two hours afterwards D’Artagnan returned.

“Everything is arranged,” he said; “I saw his majesty at the very moment he was setting off for the chase; the king expects us this evening.”

“The king expects *me!*” cried Porthos, drawing himself up. It is a sad thing to have to confess, but a man’s heart is like an ocean billow; for, from that very moment Porthos ceased to look at Madame Truchen in that touching manner which had so softened her heart. Planchet encouraged these ambitious leanings as best as he could. He talked over, or rather gave exaggerated accounts of all the splendors of the last reign, its battles, sieges, and grand court ceremonies. He spoke of the luxurious display which the English made; the prizes the three brave companions carried off; and how D'Artagnan, who at the beginning had been the humblest of the four, finished by becoming the leader. He fired Porthos with a generous feeling of enthusiasm by reminding him of his early youth now passed away; he boasted as much as he could of the moral life this great lord had led, and how religiously he respected the ties of friendship; he was eloquent, and skillful in his choice of subjects. He tickled Porthos, frightened Truchen, and made D'Artagnan think. At six o'clock, the musketeer ordered the horses to be brought round, and told Porthos to get ready. He thanked Planchet for his kind hospitality, whispered a few words about a post he might succeed in obtaining for him at court, which immediately raised Planchet in Truchen's estimation, where the poor grocer — so good, so generous, so devoted — had become much lowered ever since the appearance and comparison with him of the two great gentlemen. Such, however, is a woman's nature; they are anxious to possess what they have not got, and disdain it as soon as it is acquired. After having rendered this service to his friend Planchet, D'Artagnan said in a low tone of voice to Porthos: "That is a very beautiful ring you have on your finger."

"It is worth three hundred pistoles," said Porthos.

"Madame Truchen will remember you better if you leave her that ring," replied D'Artagnan, a suggestion which Porthos seemed to hesitate to adopt.

"You think it is not beautiful enough, perhaps," said the musketeer. "I understand your feelings; a great lord such as you would not think of accepting the hospitality of an old servant without paying him most handsomely for it: but I am sure that Planchet is too good-hearted a fellow to remember that you have an income of a hundred thousand francs a year."

"I have more than half a mind," said Porthos, flattered by the remark, "to make Madame Truchen a present of my little farm at Bracieux; it has twelve acres."

"It is too much, my good Porthos, too much just at present... Keep it for a future occasion." He then took the ring off Porthos's finger, and approaching Truchen, said to her: — "Madame, monsieur le baron hardly knows how to entreat you, out of your regard for him, to accept this little ring. M. du Vallon is one of the most generous and discreet men of my acquaintance. He wished to offer you a farm that he has at Bracieux, but I dissuaded him from it.”

“Oh!” said Truchen, looking eagerly at the diamond.

“Monsieur le baron!” exclaimed Planchet, quite overcome.

“My good friend,” stammered out Porthos, delighted at having been so well represented by D’Artagnan. These several exclamations, uttered at the same moment, made quite a pathetic winding-up of a day which might have finished in a very ridiculous manner. But D’Artagnan was there, and, on every occasion, wheresoever D’Artagnan exercised any control, matters ended only just in the very way he wished and willed. There were general embracings; Truchen, whom the baron’s munificence had restored to her proper position, very timidly, and blushing all the while, presented her forehead to the great lord with whom she had been on such very pretty terms the evening before. Planchet himself was overcome by a feeling of genuine humility. Still, in the same generosity of disposition, Porthos would have emptied his pockets into the hands of the cook and of Celestin; but D’Artagnan stopped him.

“No,” he said, “it is now my turn.” And he gave one pistole to the woman and two to the man; and the benedictions which were showered down upon them would have rejoiced the heart of Harpagon himself, and have rendered even him a prodigal.

D’Artagnan made Planchet lead them to the chateau, and introduced Porthos into his own apartment, where he arrived safely without having been perceived by those he was afraid of meeting.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Presentation of Porthos at Court.

At seven o'clock the same evening, the king gave an audience to an ambassador from the United Provinces, in the grand reception-room. The audience lasted a quarter of an hour. His majesty afterwards received those who had been recently presented, together with a few ladies, who paid their respects first. In one corner of the salon, concealed behind a column, Porthos and D'Artagnan were conversing together, waiting until their turn arrived.

"Have you heard the news?" inquired the musketeer of his friend.

"No!"

"Well, look, then." Porthos raised himself on tiptoe, and saw M. Fouquet in full court dress, leading Aramis towards the king.

"Aramis!" said Porthos.

"Presented to the king by M. Fouquet."

"Ah!" ejaculated Porthos.

"For having fortified Belle-Isle," continued D'Artagnan.

"And I?"

"You — oh, you! as I have already had the honor of telling you, are the good-natured, kind-hearted Porthos; and so they begged you to take care of Saint-Mande a little."

"Ah!" repeated Porthos.

"But, happily, I was there," said D'Artagnan, "and presently it will be *my* turn."

At this moment Fouquet addressed the king.

"Sire," he said, "I have a favor to solicit of your majesty. M. d'Herblay is not ambitious, but he knows when he can be of service. Your majesty needs a representative at Rome, who would be able to exercise a powerful influence there; may I request a cardinal's hat for M. d'Herblay?" The king started. "I do not often solicit anything of your majesty," said Fouquet.

"That is a reason, certainly," replied the king, who always expressed any hesitation he might have in that manner, and to which remark there was nothing to say in reply.

Fouquet and Aramis looked at each other. The king resumed: “M. d’Herblay can serve us equally well in France; an archbishopric, for instance.”

“Sire,” objected Fouquet, with a grace of manner peculiarly his own, “your majesty overwhelms M. d’Herblay; the archbishopric may, in your majesty’s extreme kindness, be conferred in addition to the hat; the one does not exclude the other.”

The king admired the readiness which he displayed, and smiled, saying: “D’Artagnan himself could not have answered better.” He had no sooner pronounced the name than D’Artagnan appeared.

“Did your majesty call me?” he said.

Aramis and Fouquet drew back a step, as if they were about to retire.

“Will your majesty allow me,” said D’Artagnan quickly, as he led forward Porthos, “to present to your majesty M. le Baron du Vallon, one of the bravest gentlemen of France?”

As soon as Aramis saw Porthos, he turned as pale as death, while Fouquet clenched his hands under his ruffles. D’Artagnan smiled blandly at both of them, while Porthos bowed, visibly overcome before the royal presence.

“Porthos here?” murmured Fouquet in Aramis’s ear.

“Hush! deep treachery at work,” hissed the latter.

“Sire,” said D’Artagnan, “it is more than six years ago I ought to have presented M. du Vallon to your majesty; but certain men resemble stars, they move not one inch unless their satellites accompany them. The Pleiades are never disunited, and that is the reason I have selected, for the purpose of presenting him to you, the very moment when you would see M. d’Herblay by his side.”

Aramis almost lost countenance. He looked at D’Artagnan with a proud, haughty air, as though willing to accept the defiance the latter seemed to throw down.

“Ah! these gentlemen are good friends, then?” said the king.

“Excellent friends, sire; the one can answer for the other. Ask M. de Vannes now in what manner Belle-Isle was fortified?” Fouquet moved back a step.

“Belle-Isle,” said Aramis, coldly, “was fortified by that gentleman,” and he indicated Porthos with his hand, who bowed a second time. Louis could not withhold his admiration, though at the same time his suspicions were aroused.

“Yes,” said D’Artagnan, “but ask monsieur le baron whose assistance he had in carrying the works out?”

“Aramis’s,” said Porthos, frankly; and he pointed to the bishop.

“What the deuce does all this mean?” thought the bishop, “and what sort of a termination are we to expect to this comedy?”

“What!” exclaimed the king, “is the cardinal’s, I mean this bishop’s, name *Aramis?*”

“His *nom de guerre*,” said D’Artagnan.

“My nickname,” said Aramis.

“A truce to modesty!” exclaimed D’Artagnan; “beneath the priest’s robe, sire, is concealed the most brilliant officer, a gentleman of the most unparalleled intrepidity, and the wisest theologian in your kingdom.”

Louis raised his head. “And an engineer, also, it appears,” he said, admiring Aramis’s calm, imperturbable self-possession.

“An engineer for a particular purpose, sire,” said the latter.

“My companion in the musketeers, sire,” said D’Artagnan, with great warmth of manner, “the man who has more than a hundred times aided your father’s ministers by his advice — M. d’Herblay, in a word, who, with M. du Vallon, myself, and M. le Comte de la Fere, who is known to your majesty, formed that quartette which was a good deal talked about during the late king’s reign, and during your majesty’s minority.”

“And who fortified Belle-Isle?” the king repeated, in a significant tone.

Aramis advanced and bowed: “In order to serve the son as I served the father.”

D’Artagnan looked very narrowly at Aramis while he uttered these words, which displayed so much true respect, so much warm devotion, such entire frankness and sincerity, that even he, D’Artagnan, the eternal doubter, he, the almost infallible in judgment, was deceived by it. “A man who lies cannot speak in such a tone as that,” he said.

Louis was overcome by it. “In that case,” he said to Fouquet, who anxiously awaited the result of this proof, “the cardinal’s hat is promised. Monsieur d’Herblay, I pledge you my honor that the first promotion shall be yours. Thank M. Fouquet for it.” Colbert overheard these words; they stung him to the quick, and he left the salon abruptly. “And you, Monsieur du Vallon,” said the king, “what have you to ask? I am truly pleased to have it in my power to acknowledge the services of those who were faithful to my father."

"Sire — " began Porthos, but he was unable to proceed with what he was going to say.

"Sire," exclaimed D'Artagnan, "this worthy gentleman is utterly overpowered by your majesty's presence, he who so valiantly sustained the looks and the fire of a thousand foes. But, knowing what his thoughts are, I — who am more accustomed to gaze upon the sun — can translate them: he needs nothing, absolutely nothing; his sole desire is to have the happiness of gazing upon your majesty for a quarter of an hour."

"You shall sup with me this evening," said the king, saluting Porthos with a gracious smile.

Porthos became crimson from delight and pride. The king dismissed him, and D'Artagnan pushed him into the adjoining apartment, after he had embraced him warmly.

"Sit next to me at table," said Porthos in his ear.

"Yes, my friend."

"Aramis is annoyed with me, I think."

"Aramis has never liked you so much as he does now. Fancy, it was I who was the means of his getting the cardinal's hat."

"Of course," said Porthos. "By the by, does the king like his guests to eat much at his table?"

"It is a compliment to himself if you do," said D'Artagnan, "for he himself possesses a royal appetite."

CHAPTER IX.

Explanations.

Aramis cleverly managed to effect a diversion for the purpose of finding D’Artagnan and Porthos. He came up to the latter, behind one of the columns, and, as he pressed his hand, said, “So you have escaped from my prison?”

“Do not scold him,” said D’Artagnan; “it was I, dear Aramis, who set him free.”

“Ah! my friend,” replied Aramis, looking at Porthos, “could you not have waited with a little more patience?”

D’Artagnan came to the assistance of Porthos, who already began to breathe hard, in sore perplexity.

“You see, you members of the Church are great politicians; we mere soldiers come at once to the point. The facts are these: I went to pay Baisemeaux a visit — ”

Aramis pricked up his ears at this announcement.

“Stay!” said Porthos; “you make me remember that I have a letter from Baisemeaux for you, Aramis.” And Porthos held out the bishop the letter we have already seen. Aramis begged to be allowed to read it, and read it without D’Artagnan feeling in the slightest degree embarrassed by the circumstance that he was so well acquainted with the contents of it. Besides, Aramis’s face was so impenetrable, that D’Artagnan could not but admire him more than ever; after he had read it, he put the letter into his pocket with the calmest possible air.

“You were saying, captain?” he observed.

“I was saying,” continued the musketeer, “that I had gone to pay Baisemeaux a visit on his majesty’s service.”

“On his majesty’s service?” said Aramis.

“Yes,” said D’Artagnan, “and, naturally enough, we talked about you and our friends. I must say that Baisemeaux received me coldly; so I soon took my leave of him. As I was returning, a soldier accosted me, and said (no doubt as he recognized me, notwithstanding I was in private clothes), ‘Captain, will you be good enough to read me the name written on this envelope?’ and I read, ‘To Monsieur du Vallon, at M. Fouquet’s house, Saint-Mande.’ The deuce, I said to myself, Porthos has not returned, then, as I fancied, to Bell-Isle, or to Pierrefonds, but is at M. Fouquet’s house, at Saint-Mande; and as M. Fouquet is not at Saint-Mande, Porthos must be quite alone, or, at all events, with Aramis; I will go and see Porthos, and I accordingly went to see Porthos.”

“Very good,” said Aramis, thoughtfully.

“You never told me that,” said Porthos.

“I had no time, my friend.”

“And you brought back Porthos with you to Fontainebleau?”

“Yes, to Planchet’s house.”

“Does Planchet live at Fontainebleau?” inquired Aramis.

“Yes, near the cemetery,” said Porthos, thoughtlessly.

“What do you mean by ‘near the cemetery?’“ said Aramis, suspiciously.

“Come,” thought the musketeer, “since there is to be a squabble, let us take advantage of it.”

“Yes, the cemetery,” said Porthos. “Planchet is a very excellent fellow, who makes very excellent preserves; but his house has windows which look out upon the cemetery. And a confoundedly melancholy prospect it is! So this morning — ”

“This morning?” said Aramis, more and more excited.

D’Artagnan turned his back to them, and walked to the window, where he began to play a march upon one of the panes of glass.

“Yes, this morning we saw a man buried there.”

“Ah!”

“Very depressing, was it not? I should never be able to live in a house where burials can always be seen from the window. D’Artagnan, on the contrary, seems to like it very much.”

“So D’Artagnan saw it as well?”

“Not simply *saw* it; he literally never took his eyes off the whole time.”

Aramis started, and turned to look at the musketeer, but the latter was engaged in earnest conversation with Saint-Aignan. Aramis continued to question Porthos, and when he had squeezed all the juice out of this enormous lemon, he threw the peel aside. He turned towards his friend D’Artagnan, and clapping him on the shoulder, when Saint-Aignan had left him, the king’s supper having been announced, said, “D’Artagnan.”

"Yes, my dear fellow," he replied.

"We do not sup with his majesty, I believe?"

"Well? — *we* do."

"Can you give me ten minutes' conversation?"

"Twenty, if you like. His majesty will take quite that time to get properly seated at table."

"Where shall we talk, then?"

"Here, upon these seats if you like; the king has left, we can sit down, and the apartment is empty."

"Let us sit down, then."

They sat down, and Aramis took one of D'Artagnan's hands in his.

"Tell me, candidly, my dear friend, whether you have not counseled Porthos to distrust me a little?"

"I admit, I have, but not as you understand it. I saw that Porthos was bored to death, and I wished, by presenting him to the king, to do for him, and for you, what you would never do for yourselves."

"What is that?"

"Speak in your own praise."

"And you have done it most nobly; I thank you."

"And I brought the cardinal's hat a little nearer, just as it seemed to be retreating from you."

"Ah! I admit that," said Aramis, with a singular smile, "you are, indeed, not to be matched for making your friends' fortunes for them."

"You see, then, that I only acted with the view of making Porthos's fortune for him."

"I meant to have done that myself; but your arm reaches farther than ours."

It was now D'Artagnan's turn to smile.

"Come," said Aramis, "we ought to deal truthfully with each other. Do you still love me, D'Artagnan?"

"The same as I used to do," replied D'Artagnan, without compromising himself too much by this reply.

"In that case, thanks; and now, for the most perfect frankness," said Aramis; "you visited Belle-Isle on behalf of the king?"

"*Pardieu!*"

"You wished to deprive us of the pleasure of offering Bell-Isle completely fortified to the king."

“But before I could deprive you of that pleasure, I ought to have been made acquainted with your intention of doing so.”

“You came to Belle-Isle without knowing anything?”

“Of you! yes. How the devil could I imagine that Aramis had become so clever an engineer as to be able to fortify like Polybius, or Archimedes?”

“True. And yet you smelt me out over yonder?”

“Oh! yes.”

“And Porthos, too?”

“I did not divine that Aramis was an engineer. I was only able to guess that Porthos might have become one. There is a saying, one becomes an orator, one is born a poet; but it has never been said, one is born Porthos, and one becomes an engineer.”

“Your wit is always amusing,” said Aramis, coldly.

“Well, I will go on.”

“Do. When you found out our secret, you made all the haste you could to communicate it to the king.”

“I certainly made as much haste as I could, since I saw that you were making still more. When a man weighing two hundred and fifty pounds, as Porthos does, rides post; when a gouty prelate — I beg your pardon, but you yourself told me you were so — when a prelate scours the highway — I naturally suppose that my two friends, who did not wish to be communicative with me, had certain matters of the highest importance to conceal from me, and so I made as much haste as my leanness and the absence of gout would allow.”

“Did it not occur to you, my dear friend, that you might be rendering Porthos and myself a very sad service?”

“Yes, I thought it not unlikely; but you and Porthos made me play a very ridiculous part at Belle-Isle.”

“I beg your pardon,” said Aramis.

“Excuse me,” said D’Artagnan.

“So that,” pursued Aramis, “you now know everything?”

“No, indeed.”

“You know I was obliged to inform M. Fouquet of what had happened, in order that he would be able to anticipate what you might have to tell the king?”

“That is rather obscure.”

“Not at all: M. Fouquet has his enemies — you will admit that, I suppose.”

“Certainly.”

“And one in particular.”

“A dangerous one?”

“A mortal enemy. Well, in order to counteract that man’s influence, it was necessary that M. Fouquet should give the king a proof of his great devotion to him, and of his readiness to make the greatest sacrifices. He surprised his majesty by offering him Belle-Isle. If you had been the first to reach Paris, the surprise would have been destroyed, it would have looked as if we had yielded to fear.”

“I understand.”

“That is the whole mystery,” said Aramis, satisfied that he had at last quite convinced the musketeer.

“Only,” said the latter, “it would have been more simple to have taken me aside, and said to me, ‘My dear D’Artagnan, we are fortifying Belle-Isle, and intend to offer it to the king. Tell us frankly, for whom you are acting. Are you a friend of M. Colbert, or of M. Fouquet?’ Perhaps I should not have answered you, but you would have added, — ’Are you my friend?’ I should have said ‘Yes.’“ Aramis hung down his head. “In this way,” continued D’Artagnan, “you would have paralyzed my movements, and I should have gone to the king, and said, ‘Sire, M. Fouquet is fortifying Belle-Isle, and exceedingly well, too; but here is a note, which the governor of Belle-Isle gave me for your majesty;’ or, ‘M. Fouquet is about to wait upon your majesty to explain his intentions with regard to it.’ I should not have been placed in an absurd position; you would have enjoyed the surprise so long planned, and we should not have had any occasion to look askant at each other when we met.”

“While, on the contrary,” replied Aramis, “you have acted altogether as one friendly to M. Colbert. And you really are a friend of his, I suppose?”

“Certainly not, indeed!” exclaimed the captain. “M. Colbert is a mean fellow, and I hate him as I used to hate Mazarin, but without fearing him.”

“Well, then,” said Aramis, “I love M. Fouquet, and his interests are mine. You know my position. I have no property or means whatever. M. Fouquet gave me several livings, a bishopric as well; M. Fouquet has served and obliged me like the generous-hearted man he is, and I know the world sufficiently well to appreciate a kindness when I meet with one. M. Fouquet has won my regard, and I have devoted myself to his service."

"You could not possibly do better. You will find him a very liberal master."

Aramis bit his lips; and then said, "The best a man could possibly have." He then paused for a minute, D'Artagnan taking good care not to interrupt him.

"I suppose you know how Porthos got mixed up in all this?"

"No," said D'Artagnan; "I am curious, of course, but I never question a friend when he wishes to keep a secret from me."

"Well, then, I will tell you."

"It is hardly worth the trouble, if the confidence is to bind me in any way."

"Oh! do not be afraid.; there is no man whom I love better than Porthos, because he is so simple-minded and good-natured. Porthos is so straightforward in everything. Since I have become a bishop, I have looked for these primeval natures, which make me love truth and hate intrigue."

D'Artagnan stroked his mustache, but said nothing.

"I saw Porthos and again cultivated his acquaintance; his own time hanging idly on his hands, his presence recalled my earlier and better days without engaging me in any present evil. I sent for Porthos to come to Vannes. M. Fouquet, whose regard for me is very great, having learnt that Porthos and I were attached to each other by old ties of friendship, promised him increase of rank at the earliest promotion, and that is the whole secret."

"I shall not abuse your confidence," said D'Artagnan.

"I am sure of that, my dear friend; no one has a finer sense of honor than yourself."

"I flatter myself that you are right, Aramis."

"And now" — and here the prelate looked searchingly and scrutinizingly at his friend — "now let us talk of ourselves and for ourselves; will you become one of M. Fouquet's friends? Do not interrupt me until you know what that means."

"Well, I am listening."

"Will you become a marechal of France, peer, duke, and the possessor of a duchy, with a million of francs?"

"But, my friend," replied D'Artagnan, "what must one do to get all that?"

"Belong to M. Fouquet."

"But I already belong to the king."

"Not exclusively, I suppose."

"Oh! a D'Artagnan cannot be divided."

"You have, I presume, ambitions, as noble hearts like yours have."

"Yes, certainly I have."

"Well?"

"Well! I wish to be a marechal; the king will make me marechal, duke, peer; the king will make me all that."

Aramis fixed a searching look upon D'Artagnan.

"Is not the king master?" said D'Artagnan.

"No one disputes it; but Louis XIII. was master also."

"Oh! my dear friend, between Richelieu and Louis XIII. stood no D'Artagnan," said the musketeer, very quietly.

"There are many stumbling-blocks round the king," said Aramis.

"Not for the king's feet."

"Very likely not; still — "

"One moment, Aramis; I observe that every one thinks of himself, and never of his poor prince; I will maintain myself maintaining him."

"And if you meet with ingratitude?"

"The weak alone are afraid of that."

"You are quite certain of yourself?"

"I think so."

"Still, the king may some day have no further need for you!"

"On the contrary, I think his need of me will soon be greater than ever; and hearken, my dear fellow, if it became necessary to arrest a new Conde, who would do it? This — this alone in France!" and D'Artagnan struck his sword, which clanked sullenly on the tesselated floor.

"You are right," said Aramis, turning very pale; and then he rose and pressed D'Artagnan's hand.

"That is the last summons for supper," said the captain of the musketeers; "will you excuse me?"

Aramis threw his arm round the musketeer's neck, and said, "A friend like you is the brightest jewel in the royal crown." And they immediately separated.

"I was right," mused D'Artagnan; "there is, indeed, something strangely serious stirring."

“We must hasten the explosion,” breathed the coming cardinal, “for D’Artagnan has discovered the existence of a plot.”

CHAPTER X.

Madame and De Guiche.

It will not be forgotten how Comte de Guiche left the queen-mother's apartments on the day when Louis XIV. presented La Valliere with the beautiful bracelets he had won in the lottery. The comte walked to and fro for some time outside the palace, in the greatest distress, from a thousand suspicions and anxieties with which his mind was beset. Presently he stopped and waited on the terrace opposite the grove of trees, watching for Madame's departure. More than half an hour passed away; and as he was at that moment quite alone, the comte could hardly have had any very diverting ideas at his command. He drew his tables from his pocket, and, after hesitating over and over again, determined to write these words: — "Madame, I implore you to grant me one moment's conversation. Do not be alarmed at this request, which contains nothing in any way opposed to the profound respect with which I subscribe myself, etc., etc." He had signed and folded this singular love-letter, when he suddenly observed several ladies leaving the chateau, and afterwards several courtiers too; in fact, almost every one that formed the queen's circle. He saw La Valliere herself, then Montalais talking with Malicorne; he watched the departure of the very last of the numerous guests that had a short time before thronged the queen-mother's cabinet.

Madame herself had not yet passed; she would be obliged, however, to cross the courtyard in order to enter her own apartments; and, from the terrace where he was standing, De Guiche could see all that was going on in the courtyard. At last he saw Madame leave, attended by a couple of pages, who were carrying torches before her. She was walking very quickly; as soon as she reached the door, she said:

"Let some one go and look for De Guiche: he has to render an account of a mission he had to discharge for me; if he should be disengaged, request him to be good enough to come to my apartment."

De Guiche remained silent, hidden in the shade; but as soon as Madame had withdrawn, he darted from the terrace down the steps and assumed a most indifferent air, so that the pages who were hurrying towards his rooms might meet him.

"Ah! it is Madame, then, who is seeking me!" he said to himself, quite overcome; and he crushed in his hand the now worse than useless letter.

"M. le comte," said one of the pages, approaching him, "we are indeed most fortunate in meeting you."

"Why so, messieurs?"

"A command from Madame."

"From Madame!" said De Guiche, looking surprised.

"Yes, M. le comte, her royal highness has been asking for you; she expects to hear, she told us, the result of a commission you had to execute for her. Are you at liberty?"

"I am quite at her royal highness's orders."

"Will you have the goodness to follow us, then?"

When De Guiche entered the princess's apartments, he found her pale and agitated. Montalais was standing at the door, evidently uneasy about what was passing in her mistress's mind. De Guiche appeared.

"Ah! is that you, Monsieur de Guiche?" said Madame; "come in, I beg. Mademoiselle de Montalais, I do not require your attendance any longer."

Montalais, more puzzled than ever, courtesied and withdrew. De Guiche and the princess were left alone. The comte had every advantage in his favor; it was Madame who had summoned him to a rendezvous. But how was it possible for the comte to make use of this advantage? Madame was so whimsical, and her disposition so changeable. She soon allowed this to be perceived, for, suddenly, opening the conversation, she said: "Well! have you nothing to say to me?"

He imagined she must have guessed his thoughts; he fancied (for those who are in love are thus constituted, being as credulous and blind as poets or prophets), he fancied she knew how ardent was his desire to see her, and also the subject uppermost in his mind.

"Yes, Madame," he said, "and I think it very singular."

"The affair of the bracelets," she exclaimed, eagerly, "you mean that, I suppose?"

"Yes, Madame."

"And you think the king is in love; do you not?"

Guiche looked at her for some time; her eyes sank under his gaze, which seemed to read her very heart.

"I think," he said, "that the king may possibly have had an idea of annoying some one; were it not for that, the king would hardly show himself so earnest in his attentions as he is; he would not run the risk of compromising, from mere thoughtlessness of disposition, a young girl against whom no one has been hitherto able to say a word."

"Indeed! the bold, shameless girl," said the princess, haughtily.

"I can positively assure your royal highness," said De Guiche, with a firmness marked by great respect, "that Mademoiselle de la Valliere is beloved by a man who merits every respect, for he is a brave and honorable gentleman."

"Bragelonne?"

"My friend; yes, Madame."

"Well, and though he is your friend, what does that matter to the king?"

"The king knows that Bragelonne is affianced to Mademoiselle de la Valliere; and as Raoul has served the king most valiantly, the king will not inflict an irreparable injury upon him."

Madame began to laugh in a manner that produced a sinister impression upon De Guiche.

"I repeat, Madame, I do not believe the king is in love with Mademoiselle de la Valliere; and the proof that I do not believe it is, that I was about to ask you whose *amour propre* it is likely the king is desirous of wounding? You, who are well acquainted with the whole court, can perhaps assist me in ascertaining that; and assuredly, with greater certainty, since it is everywhere said that your royal highness is on very friendly terms with the king."

Madame bit her lips, and, unable to assign any good and sufficient reasons, changed the conversation. "Prove to me," she said, fixing on him one of those looks in which the whole soul seems to pass into the eyes, "prove to me, I say, that you intended to interrogate me at the very moment I sent for you."

De Guiche gravely drew from his pocket the now crumpled note that he had written, and showed it to her.

"Sympathy," she said.

"Yes," said the comte, with an indescribable tenderness of tone, "sympathy. I have explained to you how and why I sought you; you, however, have yet to tell me, Madame, why you sent for me."

“True,” replied the princess. She hesitated, and then suddenly exclaimed, “Those bracelets will drive me mad.”

“You expected the king would offer them to you,” replied De Guiche.

“Why not?”

“But before you, Madame, before you, his sister-in-law, was there not the queen herself to whom the king should have offered them?”

“Before La Valliere,” cried the princess, wounded to the quick, “could he not have presented them to me? Was there not the whole court, indeed, to choose from?”

“I assure you, Madame,” said the comte, respectfully, “that if any one heard you speak in this manner, if any one were to see how red your eyes are, and, Heaven forgive me, to see, too, that tear trembling on your eyelids, it would be said that your royal highness was jealous.”

“Jealous!” said the princess, haughtily, “jealous of La Valliere!”

She expected to see De Guiche yield beneath her scornful gesture and her proud tone; but he simply and boldly replied, “Jealous of La Valliere; yes, Madame.”

“Am I to suppose, monsieur,” she stammered out, “that your object is to insult me?”

“It is not possible, Madame,” replied the comte, slightly agitated, but resolved to master that fiery nature.

“Leave the room!” said the princess, thoroughly exasperated, De Guiche’s coolness and silent respect having made her completely lose her temper.

De Guiche fell back a step, bowed slowly, but with great respect, drew himself up, looking as white as his lace cuffs, and, in a voice slightly trembling, said, “It was hardly worth while to have hurried here to be subjected to this unmerited disgrace.” And he turned away with hasty steps.

He had scarcely gone half a dozen paces when Madame darted like a tigress after him, seized him by the cuff, and making him turn round again, said, trembling with passion as she did so, “The respect you pretend to have is more insulting than the insult itself. Insult me, if you please, but at least speak.”

“Madame,” said the comte, gently, as he drew his sword, “thrust this blade into my heart, rather than kill me by degrees.”

At the look he fixed upon her, — a look full of love, resolution, and despair, even, — she knew how readily the comte, so outwardly calm in appearance, would pass his sword through his own breast if she added another word. She tore the blade from his hands, and, pressing his arm with a feverish impatience, which might pass for tenderness, said, “Do not be too hard upon me, comte. You see how I am suffering, and yet you have no pity for me.”

Tears, the cries of this strange attack, stifled her voice. As soon as De Guiche saw her weep, he took her in his arms and carried her to an armchair; in another moment she would have been suffocated.

“Oh, why,” he murmured, as he knelt by her side, “why do you conceal your troubles from me? Do you love any one — tell me? It would kill me, I know, but not until I should have comforted, consoled, and served you even.”

“And do you love me to that extent?” she replied, completely conquered.

“I do indeed love you to that extent, Madame.”

She placed both her hands in his. “My heart is indeed another’s,” she murmured in so low a tone that her voice could hardly be heard; but he heard it, and said, “Is it the king you love?”

She gently shook her head, and her smile was like a clear bright streak in the clouds, through which after the tempest has passed one almost fancies Paradise is opening. “But,” she added, “there are other passions in a high-born heart. Love is poetry; but the real life of the heart is pride. Comte, I was born on a throne, I am proud and jealous of my rank. Why does the king gather such unworthy objects round him?”

“Once more, I repeat,” said the comte, “you are acting unjustly towards that poor girl, who will one day be my friend’s wife.”

“Are you simple enough to believe that, comte?”

“If I did not believe it,” he said, turning very pale, “Bragelonne should be informed of it to-morrow; indeed he should, if I thought that poor La Valliere had forgotten the vows she had exchanged with Raoul. But no, it would be cowardly to betray a woman’s secret; it would be criminal to disturb a friend’s peace of mind.”

“You think, then,” said the princess, with a wild burst of laughter, “that ignorance is happiness?”

“I believe it,” he replied.

“Prove it to me, then,” she said, hurriedly.

“It is easily done, Madame. It is reported through the whole court that the king loves you, and that you return his affection.”

“Well?” she said, breathing with difficulty.

“Well; admit for a moment that Raoul, my friend, had come and said to me, ‘Yes, the king loves Madame, and has made an impression upon her heart,’ I possibly should have slain Raoul.”

“It would have been necessary,” said the princess, with the obstinacy of a woman who feels herself not easily overcome, “for M. de Bragelonne to have had proofs before he ventured to speak to you in that manner.”

“Such, however, is the case,” replied De Guiche, with a deep sigh, “that, not having been warned, I have never examined into the matter seriously; and I now find that my ignorance has saved my life.”

“So, then, you drive selfishness and coldness to that extent,” said Madame, “that you would let this unhappy young man continue to love La Valliere?”

“I would, until La Valliere’s guilt were revealed.”

“But the bracelets?”

“Well, Madame, since you yourself expected to receive them from the king, what can I possibly say?”

The argument was a telling one, and the princess was overwhelmed by it, and from that moment her defeat was assured. But as her heart and mind were instinct with noble and generous feelings, she understood De Guiche’s extreme delicacy. She saw that in his heart he really suspected that the king was in love with La Valliere, and that he did not wish to resort to the common expedient of ruining a rival in the mind of a woman, by giving the latter the assurance and certainty that this rival’s affections were transferred to another woman. She guessed that his suspicions of La Valliere were aroused, and that, in order to leave himself time for his convictions to undergo a change, so as not to ruin Louise utterly, he was determined to pursue a certain straightforward line of conduct. She could read so much real greatness of character, and such true generosity of disposition in her lover, that her heart really warmed with affection towards him, whose passion for her was so pure and delicate. Despite his fear of incurring her displeasure, De Guiche, by retaining his position as a man of proud independence of feeling and deep devotion, became almost a hero in her estimation, and reduced her to the state of a jealous and little-minded woman. She loved him for this so tenderly, that she could not refuse to give him a proof of her affection.

“See how many words we have wasted,” she said, taking his hand, “suspicions, anxieties, mistrust, sufferings — I think we have enumerated all those words.”

“Alas! Madame, yes.”

“Efface them from your heart as I drive them from mine. Whether La Valliere does or does not love the king, and whether the king does or does not love La Valliere — from this moment you and I will draw a distinction in the two characters I have to perform. You open your eyes so wide that I am sure you hardly understand me.”

“You are so impetuous, Madame, that I always tremble at the fear of displeasing you.”

“And see how he trembles now, poor fellow,” she said, with the most charming playfulness of manner. “Yes, monsieur, I have two characters to perform. I am the sister of the king, the sister-in-law of the king’s wife. In this character ought I not to take an interest in these domestic intrigues? Come, tell me what you think?”

“As little as possible, Madame.”

“Agreed, monsieur; but it is a question of dignity; and then, you know, I am the wife of the king’s brother.” De Guiche sighed. “A circumstance,” she added, with an expression of great tenderness, “which will remind you that I am always to be treated with the profoundest respect.” De Guiche fell at her feet, which he kissed, with the religious fervor of a worshipper. “And I begin to think that, really and truly, I have another character to perform. I was almost forgetting it.”

“Name it, oh! name it,” said De Guiche.

“I am a woman,” she said, in a voice lower than ever, “and I love.” He rose, she opened her arms, and their lips met. A footstep was heard behind the tapestry, and Mademoiselle de Montalais appeared.

“What do you want?” said Madame.

“M. de Guiche is wanted,” replied Montalais, who was just in time to see the agitation of the actors of these four characters; for De Guiche had consistently carried out his part with heroism.

CHAPTER XI.

Montalais and Malicorne.

Montalais was right. M. de Guiche, thus summoned in every direction, was very much exposed, from such a multiplication of business, to the risk of not attending to any. It so happened that, considering the awkwardness of the interruption, Madame, notwithstanding her wounded pride, and secret anger, could not, for the moment at least, reproach Montalais for having violated, in so bold a manner, the semi-royal order with which she had been dismissed on De Guiche's entrance. De Guiche, also, lost his presence of mind, or, it would be more correct to say, had already lost it, before Montalais's arrival, for, scarcely had he heard the young girl's voice, than, without taking leave of Madame, as the most ordinary politeness required, even between persons equal in rank and station, he fled from her presence, his heart tumultuously throbbing, and his brain on fire, leaving the princess with one hand raised, as though to bid him adieu. Montalais was at no loss, therefore, to perceive the agitation of the two lovers — the one who fled was agitated, and the one who remained was equally so.

"Well," murmured the young girl, as she glanced inquisitively round her, "this time, at least, I think I know as much as the most curious woman could possibly wish to know." Madame felt so embarrassed by this inquisitorial look, that, as if she heard Montalais's muttered side remark, she did not speak a word to her maid of honor, but, casting down her eyes, retired at once to her bedroom. Montalais, observing this, stood listening for a moment, and then heard Madame lock and bolt her door. By this she knew that the rest of the evening was at her own disposal; and making, behind the door which had just been closed, a gesture which indicated but little real respect for the princess, she went down the staircase in search of Malicorne, who was very busily engaged at that moment in watching a courier, who, covered with dust, had just left the Comte de Guiche's apartments. Montalais knew that Malicorne was engaged in a matter of some importance; she therefore allowed him to look and stretch out his neck as much as he pleased; and it was only when Malicorne had resumed his natural position, that she touched him on the shoulder. “Well,” said Montalais, “what is the latest intelligence you have?”

“M. de Guiche is in love with Madame.”

“Fine news, truly! I know something more recent than that.”

“Well, what do you know?”

“That Madame is in love with M. de Guiche.”

“The one is the consequence of the other.”

“Not always, my good monsieur.”

“Is that remark intended for me?”

“Present company always excepted.”

“Thank you,” said Malicorne. “Well, and in the other direction, what is stirring?”

“The king wished, this evening, after the lottery, to see Mademoiselle de la Valliere.”

“Well, and he has seen her?”

“No, indeed!”

“What do you mean by that?”

“The door was shut and locked.”

“So that — ”

“So that the king was obliged to go back again, looking very sheepish, like a thief who has forgotten his crowbar.”

“Good.”

“And in the third place?” inquired Montalais.

“The courier who has just arrived for De Guiche came from M. de Bragelonne.”

“Excellent,” said Montalais, clapping her hands together.

“Why so?”

“Because we have work to do. If we get weary now, something unlucky will be sure to happen.”

“We must divide the work, then,” said Malicorne, “in order to avoid confusion.”

“Nothing easier,” replied Montalais. “Three intrigues, carefully nursed, and carefully encouraged, will produce, one with another, and taking a low average, three love letters a day.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Malicorne, shrugging his shoulders, “you cannot mean what you say, darling; three letters a day, that may do for sentimental common people. A musketeer on duty, a young girl in a convent, may exchange letters with their lovers once a day, perhaps, from the top of a ladder, or through a hole in the wall. A letter contains all the poetry their poor little hearts have to boast of. But the cases we have in hand require to be dealt with very differently.”

“Well, finish,” said Montalais, out of patience with him. “Some one may come.”

“Finish! Why, I am only at the beginning. I have still three points as yet untouched.”

“Upon my word, he will be the death of me, with his Flemish indifference,” exclaimed Montalais.

“And you will drive me mad with your Italian vivacity. I was going to say that our lovers here will be writing volumes to each other. But what are you driving at?”

“At this. Not one of our lady correspondents will be able to keep the letters they may receive.”

“Very likely.”

“M. de Guiche will not be able to keep his either.”

“That is probable.”

“Very well, then; I will take care of all that.”

“That is the very thing that is impossible,” said Malicorne.

“Why so?”

“Because you are not your own mistress; your room is as much La Valliere’s as yours; and there are certain persons who will think nothing of visiting and searching a maid of honor’s room; so that I am terribly afraid of the queen, who is as jealous as a Spaniard; of the queen-mother, who is as jealous as a couple of Spaniards; and, last of all, of Madame herself, who has jealousy enough for ten Spaniards.”

“You forgot some one else.”

“Who?”

“Monsieur.”

“I was only speaking of the women. Let us add them up, then: we will call Monsieur, No. 1.”

“De Guiche?”

“No. 2.”

“The Vicomte de Bragelonne?”

“No. 3.”

“And the king, the king?”

“No. 4. Of course the king, who not only will be more jealous, but more powerful than all the rest put together. Ah, my dear!”

“Well?”

“Into what a wasp’s nest you have thrust yourself!”

“And as yet not quite far enough, if you will follow me into it.”

“Most certainly I will follow you where you like. Yet — ”

“Well, yet — ”

“While we have time, I think it will be prudent to turn back.”

“But I, on the contrary, think the wisest course to take is to put ourselves at once at the head of all these intrigues.”

“You will never be able to do it.”

“With you, I could superintend ten of them. I am in my element, you must know. I was born to live at the court, as the salamander is made to live in the fire.”

“Your comparison does not reassure me in the slightest degree in the world, my dear Montalais. I have heard it said, and by learned men too, that, in the first place, there are no salamanders at all, and that, if there had been any, they would have been infallibly baked or roasted on leaving the fire.”

“Your learned men may be very wise as far as salamanders are concerned, but they would never tell you what I can tell you; namely, that Aure de Montalais is destined, before a month is over, to become the first diplomatist in the court of France.”

“Be it so, but on condition that I shall be the second.”

“Agreed; an offensive and defensive alliance, of course.”

“Only be very careful of any letters.”

“I will hand them to you as I receive them.”

“What shall we tell the king about Madame?”

“That Madame is still in love with his majesty.”

“What shall we tell Madame about the king?”

“That she would be exceedingly wrong not to humor him.”

“What shall we tell La Valliere about Madame?”

“Whatever we choose, for La Valliere is in our power.”

“How so?”

“Every way.”

“What do you mean?”

“In the first place, through the Vicomte de Bragelonne.”

“Explain yourself.”

“You do not forget, I hope, that Monsieur de Bragelonne has written many letters to Mademoiselle de la Valliere.”

“I forget nothing.”

“Well, then, it was I who received, and I who intercepted those letters.”

“And, consequently, it is you who have them still?”

“Yes.”

“Where, — here?”

“Oh, no; I have them safe at Blois, in the little room you know well enough.”

“That dear little room, — that darling little room, the ante-chamber of the palace I intend you to live in one of these days. But, I beg your pardon, you said that all those letters are in that little room?”

“Yes.”

“Did you not put them in a box?”

“Of course; in the same box where I put all the letters I received from you, and where I put mine also when your business or your amusements prevented you from coming to our rendezvous.”

“Ah, very good,” said Malicorne.

“Why are you satisfied?”

“Because I see there is a possibility of not having to run to Blois after the letters, for I have them here.”

“You have brought the box away?”

“It was very dear to me, because it belonged to you.”

“Be sure and take care of it, for it contains original documents that will be of priceless value by and by.”

“I am perfectly well aware of that indeed, and that is the very reason why I laugh as I do, and with all my heart, too.”

“And now, one last word.”

“Why *last?*”

“Do we need any one to assist us?”

“No one.”

“Valets or maid-servants?”

“Bad policy. You will give the letters, — you will receive them. Oh! we must have no pride in this affair, otherwise M. Malicorne and Mademoiselle Aure, not transacting their own affairs themselves, will have to make up their minds to see them done by others.”

“You are quite right; but what is going on yonder in M. de Guiche’s room?”

“Nothing; he is only opening his window.”

“Let us be gone.” And they both immediately disappeared, all the terms of the contract being agreed on.

The window just opened was, in fact, that of the Comte de Guiche. It was not alone with the hope of catching a glimpse of Madame through her curtains that he seated himself by the open window for his preoccupation of mind had at that time a different origin. He had just received, as we have already stated, the courier who had been dispatched to him by Bragelonne, the latter having written to De Guiche a letter which had made the deepest impression upon him, and which he had read over and over again. “Strange, strange!” he murmured. “How irresponsible are the means by which destiny hurries men onward to their fate!” Leaving the window in order to approach nearer to the light, he once more read the letter he had just received: —

“CALAIS.

“MY DEAR COUNT, — I found M. de Wardes at Calais; he has been seriously wounded in an affair with the Duke of Buckingham. De Wardes is, as you know, unquestionably brave, but full of malevolent and wicked feelings. He conversed with me about yourself, for whom, he says, he has a warm regard, also about Madame, whom he considers a beautiful and amiable woman. He has guessed your affection for a certain person. He also talked to me about the lady for whom I have so ardent a regard, and showed the greatest interest on my behalf in expressing a deep pity for me, accompanied, however, by dark hints which alarmed me at first, but which I at last looked upon as the result of his usual love of mystery. These are the facts: he had received news of the court; you will understand, however, that it was only through M. de Lorraine. The report goes, so says the news, that a change has taken place in the king’s affections. You know whom that concerns. Afterwards, the news continues, people are talking about one of the maids of honor, respecting whom various slanderous reports are being circulated. These vague phrases have not allowed me to sleep. I have been deploring, ever since yesterday, that my diffidence and vacillation of purpose, notwithstanding a certain obstinacy of character I may possess, have left me unable to reply to these insinuations. In a word, M. de Wardes was setting off for Paris, and I did not delay his departure with explanations; for it seemed rather hard, I confess, to cross-examine a man whose wounds are hardly yet closed. In short, he travelled by short stages, as he was anxious to leave, he said, in order to be present at a curious spectacle the court cannot fail to offer within a short time. He added a few congratulatory words accompanied by vague sympathizing expressions. I could not understand the one any more than the other. I was bewildered by my own thoughts, and tormented by a mistrust of this man, — a mistrust which, you know better than any one else, I have never been able to overcome. As soon as he left, my perceptions seemed to become clearer. It is hardly possible that a man of De Wardes's character should not have communicated something of his own malicious nature to the statements he made to me. It is not unlikely, therefore, that in the strange hints De Wardes threw out in my presence, there may be a mysterious signification, which I might have some difficulty in applying either to myself or to some one with whom you are acquainted. Being compelled to leave as soon as possible, in obedience to the king's commands, the idea did not occur to me of running after De Wardes in order to ask him to explain his reserve; but I have dispatched a courier to you with this letter, which will explain in detail my various doubts. I regard you as myself; you have reflected and observed; it will be for you to act. M. de Wardes will arrive very shortly; endeavor to learn what he meant, if you do not already know. M. de Wardes, moreover, pretended that the Duke of Buckingham left Paris on the very best of terms with Madame. This was an affair which would have unhesitatingly made me draw my sword, had I not felt that I was under the necessity of dispatching the king's mission before undertaking any quarrel whatsoever. Burn this letter, which Olivain will hand you. Whatever Olivain says, you may confidently rely on. Will you have the goodness, my dear comte, to recall me to the remembrance of Mademoiselle de la Valliere, whose hands I kiss with the greatest respect.

"Your devoted

"DE BRAGELONNE.

"P. S. — If anything serious should happen — we should be prepared for everything, dispatch a courier to me with this one single word, 'come,' and I will be in Paris within six and thirty hours after the receipt of your letter."

De Guiche sighed, folded up the letter a third time, and, instead of burning it, as Raoul had recommended him to do, placed it in his pocket. He felt it needed reading over and over again.

"How much distress of mind, yet what sublime confidence, he shows!" murmured the comte; "he has poured out his whole soul in this letter. He says nothing of the Comte de la Fere, and speaks of his respect for Louise. He cautions me on my own account, and entreats me on his. Ah!" continued De Guiche, with a threatening gesture, "you interfere in my affairs, Monsieur de Wardes, do you? Very well, then; I will shortly occupy myself with yours. As for you, poor Raoul, — you who intrust your heart to my keeping, be assured I will watch over it."

With this promise, De Guiche begged Malicorne to come immediately to his apartments, if possible. Malicorne acknowledged the invitation with an activity which was the first result of his conversation with Montalais. And while De Guiche, who thought that his motive was undiscovered, cross-examined Malicorne, the latter, who appeared to be working in the dark, soon guessed his questioner's motives. The consequence was, that, after a quarter of an hour's conversation, during which De Guiche thought he had ascertained the whole truth with regard to La Valliere and the king, he had learned absolutely nothing more than his own eyes had already acquainted him with, while Malicorne learned, or guessed, that Raoul, who was absent, was fast becoming suspicious, and that De Guiche intended to watch over the treasure of the Hesperides. Malicorne accepted the office of dragon. De Guiche fancied he had done everything for his friend, and soon began to think of nothing but his personal affairs. The next evening, De Wardes's return and first appearance at the king's reception were announced. When that visit had been paid, the convalescent waited on Monsieur; De Guiche taking care, however, to be at Monsieur's apartments before the visit took place.

CHAPTER XII.

How De Wardes Was Received at Court.

Monsieur had received De Wardes with that marked favor light and frivolous minds bestow on every novelty that comes in their way. De Wardes, who had been absent for a month, was like fresh fruit to him. To treat him with marked kindness was an infidelity to old friends, and there is always something fascinating in that; moreover, it was a sort of reparation to De Wardes himself. Nothing, consequently, could exceed the favorable notice Monsieur took of him. The Chevalier de Lorraine, who feared this rival but a little, but who respected a character and disposition only too parallel to his own in every particular, with the addition of a bull-dog courage he did not himself possess, received De Wardes with a greater display of regard and affection than even Monsieur had done. De Guiche, as we have said, was there also, but kept in the background, waiting very patiently until all these interchanges were over. De Wardes, while talking to the others, and even to Monsieur himself, had not for a moment lost sight of De Guiche, who, he instinctively felt, was there on his account. As soon as he had finished with the others, he went up to De Guiche. They exchanged the most courteous compliments, after which De Wardes returned to Monsieur and the other gentlemen.

In the midst of these congratulations Madame was announced. She had been informed of De Wardes's arrival, and knowing all the details of his voyage and duel, she was not sorry to be present at the remarks she knew would be made, without delay, by one who, she felt assured, was her personal enemy. Two or three of her ladies accompanied her. De Wardes saluted Madame in the most graceful and respectful manner, and, as a commencement of hostilities, announced, in the first place, that he could furnish the Duke of Buckingham's friends with the latest news about him. This was a direct answer to the coldness with which Madame had received him. The attack was a vigorous one, and Madame felt the blow, but without appearing to have even noticed it. He rapidly cast a glance at Monsieur and at De Guiche, — the former colored, and the latter turned very pale.

Madame alone preserved an unmoved countenance; but, as she knew how many unpleasant thoughts and feelings her enemy could awaken in the two persons who were listening to him, she smilingly bent forward towards the traveler, as if to listen to the news he had brought — but he was speaking of other matters. Madame was brave, even to imprudence; if she were to retreat, it would be inviting an attack; so, after the first disagreeable impression had passed away, she returned to the charge.

"Have you suffered much from your wounds, Monsieur de Wardes?" she inquired, "for we have been told that you had the misfortune to get wounded."

It was now De Wardes's turn to wince; he bit his lips, and replied, "No, Madame, hardly at all."

"Indeed! and yet in this terribly hot weather — "

"The sea-breezes were very fresh and cool, Madame, and then I had one consolation."

"Indeed! What was it?"

"The knowledge that my adversary's sufferings were still greater than my own."

"Ah! you mean he was more seriously wounded than you were; I was not aware of that," said the princess, with utter indifference.

"Oh, Madame, you are mistaken, or rather you pretend to misunderstand my remark. I did not say that he was a greater sufferer in body than myself; but his heart was very seriously affected."

De Guiche comprehended instinctively from what direction the struggle was approaching; he ventured to make a sign to Madame, as if entreating her to retire from the contest. But she, without acknowledging De Guiche's gesture, without pretending to have noticed it even, and still smiling, continued:

"Is it possible," she said, "that the Duke of Buckingham's heart was touched? I had no idea, until now, that a heart-wound could be cured."

"Alas! Madame," replied De Wardes, politely, "every woman believes that; and it is this belief that gives them that superiority to man which confidence begets."

"You misunderstand altogether, dearest," said the prince, impatiently; "M. de Wardes means that the Duke of Buckingham's heart had been touched, not by the sword, but by something sharper."

“Ah! very good, very good!” exclaimed Madame. “It is a jest of M. de Wardes’s. Very good; but I should like to know if the Duke of Buckingham would appreciate the jest. It is, indeed, a very great pity he is not here, M. de Wardes.”

The young man’s eyes seemed to flash fire. “Oh!” he said, as he clenched his teeth, “there is nothing I should like better.”

De Guiche did not move. Madame seemed to expect that he would come to her assistance. Monsieur hesitated. The Chevalier de Lorraine advanced and continued the conversation.

“Madame,” he said, “De Wardes knows perfectly well that for a Buckingham’s heart to be touched is nothing new, and what he has said has already taken place.”

“Instead of an ally, I have two enemies,” murmured Madame; “two determined enemies, and in league with each other.” And she changed the conversation. To change the conversation is, as every one knows, a right possessed by princes which etiquette requires all to respect. The remainder of the conversation was moderate enough in tone; the principal actors had rehearsed their parts. Madame withdrew easily, and Monsieur, who wished to question her on several matters, offered her his hand on leaving. The chevalier was seriously afraid that an understanding might be established between the husband and wife if he were to leave them quietly together. He therefore made his way to Monsieur’s apartments, in order to surprise him on his return, and to destroy with a few words all the good impressions Madame might have been able to sow in his heart. De Guiche advanced towards De Wardes, who was surrounded by a large number of persons, and thereby indicated his wish to converse with him; De Wardes, at the same time, showing by his looks and by a movement of his head that he perfectly understood him. There was nothing in these signs to enable strangers to suppose they were otherwise than upon the most friendly footing. De Guiche could therefore turn away from him, and wait until he was at liberty. He had not long to wait; for De Wardes, freed from his questioners, approached De Guiche, and after a fresh salutation, they walked side by side together.

“You have made a good impression since your return, my dear De Wardes,” said the comte.

“Excellent, as you see.”

“And your spirits are just as lively as ever?”

“Better.”

“And a very great happiness, too.”

“Why not? Everything is so ridiculous in this world, everything so absurd around us.”

“You are right.”

“You are of my opinion, then?”

“I should think so! And what news do you bring us from yonder?”

“I? None at all. I have come to look for news here.”

“But, tell me, you surely must have seen some people at Boulogne, one of our friends, for instance; it is no great time ago.”

“Some people — one of our friends — ”

“Your memory is short.”

“Ah! true; Bragelonne, you mean.”

“Exactly so.”

“Who was on his way to fulfil a mission, with which he was intrusted to King Charles II.”

“Precisely. Well, then, did he not tell you, or did not you tell him — ”

“I do not precisely know what I told him, I must confess: but I do know what I did *not* tell him.” De Wardes was *finesse* itself. He perfectly well knew from De Guiche’s tone and manner, which was cold and dignified, that the conversation was about to assume a disagreeable turn. He resolved to let it take what course it pleased, and to keep strictly on his guard.

“May I ask you what you did not tell him?” inquired De Guiche.

“All about La Valliere.”

“La Valliere... What is it? and what was that strange circumstance you seem to have known over yonder, which Bragelonne, who was here on the spot, was not acquainted with?”

“Do you really ask me that in a serious manner?”

“Nothing more so.”

“What! you, a member of the court, living in Madame’s household, a friend of Monsieur’s, a guest at their table, the favorite of our lovely princess?”

Guiche colored violently from anger. “What princess are you alluding to?” he said.

“I am only acquainted with one, my dear fellow. I am speaking of Madame herself. Are you devoted to another princess, then? Come, tell me.”

De Guiche was on the point of launching out, but he saw the drift of the remark. A quarrel was imminent between the two young men. De Wardes wished the quarrel to be only in Madame's name, while De Guiche would not accept it except on La Valliere's account. From this moment, it became a series of feigned attacks, which would have continued until one of the two had been touched home. De Guiche therefore resumed all the self-possession he could command.

"There is not the slightest question in the world of Madame in this matter, my dear De Wardes." said Guiche, "but simply of what you were talking about just now."

"What was I saying?"

"That you had concealed certain things from Bragelonne."

"Certain things which you know as well as I do," replied De Wardes.

"No, upon my honor."

"Nonsense."

"If you tell me what they are, I shall know, but not otherwise, I swear."

"What! I who have just arrived from a distance of sixty leagues, and you who have not stirred from this place, who have witnessed with your own eyes that which rumor informed me of at Calais! Do you now tell me seriously that you do not know what it is about? Oh! comte, this is hardly charitable of you."

"As you like, De Wardes; but I again repeat, I know nothing."

"You are truly discreet — well! — perhaps it is very prudent of you."

"And so you will not tell me anything, will not tell me any more than you told Bragelonne?"

"You are pretending to be deaf, I see. I am convinced that Madame could not possibly have more command over herself than *you* have."

"Double hypocrite," murmured Guiche to himself, "you are again returning to the old subject."

"Very well, then," continued De Wardes, "since we find it so difficult to understand each other about La Valliere and Bragelonne let us speak about your own affairs."

"Nay," said De Guiche, "I have no affairs of my own to talk about. You have not said anything about me, I suppose, to Bragelonne, which you cannot repeat to my face?"

"No; but understand me, Guiche, that however much I may be ignorant of certain matters, I am quite as conversant with others. If, for instance, we were conversing about the intimacies of the Duke of Buckingham at Paris, as I did during my journey with the duke, I could tell you a great many interesting circumstances. Would you like me to mention them?”

De Guiche passed his hand across his forehead, which was covered in perspiration. “No, no,” he said, “a hundred times no! I have no curiosity for matters which do not concern me. The Duke of Buckingham is for me nothing more than a simple acquaintance, whilst Raoul is an intimate friend. I have not the slightest curiosity to learn what happened to the duke, while I have, on the contrary, the greatest interest in all that happened to Raoul.”

“In Paris?”

“Yes, in Paris, or Boulogne. You understand I am on the spot; if anything should happen, I am here to meet it; whilst Raoul is absent, and has only myself to represent him; so, Raoul’s affairs before my own.”

“But he will return?”

“Not, however, until his mission is completed. In the meantime, you understand, evil reports cannot be permitted to circulate about him without my looking into them.”

“And for a better reason still, that he will remain some time in London,” said De Wardes, chuckling.

“You think so,” said De Guiche, simply.

“Think so, indeed! do you suppose he was sent to London for no other purpose than to go there and return again immediately? No, no; he was sent to London to remain there.”

“Ah! De Wardes,” said De Guiche, grasping De Wardes’s hand, “that is a very serious suspicion concerning Bragelonne, which completely confirms what he wrote to me from Boulogne.”

De Wardes resumed his former coldness of manner: his love of raillery had led him too far, and by his own imprudence, he had laid himself open to attack.

“Well, tell me, what did he write to you about?” he inquired.

“He told me that you had artfully insinuated some injurious remarks against La Valliere, and that you had seemed to laugh at his great confidence in that young girl.”

“Well, it is perfectly true I did so,” said De Wardes, “and I was quite ready, at the time, to hear from the Vicomte de Bragelonne that which every man expects from another whenever anything may have been said to displease him. In the same way, for instance, if I were seeking a quarrel with you, I should tell you that Madame after having shown the greatest preference for the Duke of Buckingham, is at this moment supposed to have sent the handsome duke away for your benefit.”

“Oh! that would not wound me in the slightest degree, my dear De Wardes,” said De Guiche, smiling, notwithstanding the shiver that ran through his whole frame. “Why, such a favor would be too great a happiness.”

“I admit that, but if I absolutely wished to quarrel with you, I should try and invent a falsehood, perhaps, and speak to you about a certain arbor, where you and that illustrious princess were together — I should speak also of certain gratifications, of certain kissings of the hand; and you who are so secret on all occasions, so hasty, so punctilious — ”

“Well,” said De Guiche, interrupting him, with a smile upon his lips, although he almost felt as if he were going to die; “I swear I should not care for that, nor should I in any way contradict you; for you must know, my dear marquis, that for all matters which concern myself I am a block of ice; but it is a very different thing when an absent friend is concerned, a friend, who, on leaving, confided his interests to my safe-keeping; for such a friend, De Wardes, believe me, I am like fire itself.”

“I understand you, Monsieur de Guiche. In spite of what you say, there cannot be any question between us, just now, either of Bragelonne or of this insignificant girl, whose name is La Valliere.”

At this moment some of the younger courtiers were crossing the apartment, and having already heard the few words which had just been pronounced, were able also to hear those which were about to follow. De Wardes observed this, and continued aloud: — ”Oh! if La Valliere were a coquette like Madame, whose innocent flirtations, I am sure, were, first of all, the cause of the Duke of Buckingham being sent back to England, and afterwards were the reason of your being sent into exile; for you will not deny, I suppose, that Madame’s pretty ways really had a certain influence over you?”

The courtiers drew nearer to the speakers, Saint-Aignan at their head, and then Manicamp.

“But, my dear fellow, whose fault was that?” said De Guiche, laughing. “I am a vain, conceited fellow, I know, and everybody else knows it too. I took seriously that which was only intended as a jest, and got myself exiled for my pains. But I saw my error. I overcame my vanity, and I obtained my recall, by making the *amende honorable*, and by promising myself to overcome this defect; and the consequence is, that I am so thoroughly cured, that I now laugh at the very thing which, three or four days ago, would have almost broken my heart. But Raoul is in love, and is loved in return; he cannot laugh at the reports which disturb his happiness — reports which you seem to have undertaken to interpret, when you know, marquis, as I do, as these gentlemen do, as every one does in fact, that all such reports are pure calumny."

"Calumny!" exclaimed De Wardes, furious at seeing himself caught in the snare by De Guiche's coolness of temper.

"Certainly — calumny. Look at this letter from him, in which he tells me you have spoken ill of Mademoiselle de la Valliere; and where he asks me, if what you reported about this young girl is true or not. Do you wish me to appeal to these gentlemen, De Wardes, to decide?" And with admirable coolness, De Guiche read aloud the paragraph of the letter which referred to La Valliere. "And now," continued De Guiche, "there is no doubt in the world, as far as I am concerned, that you wished to disturb Bragelonne's peace of mind, and that your remarks were maliciously intended."

De Wardes looked round him, to see if he could find support from any one; but, at the idea that De Wardes had insulted, either directly or indirectly, the idol of the day, every one shook his head; and De Wardes saw that he was in the wrong.

"Messieurs," said De Guiche, intuitively divining the general feeling, "my discussion with Monsieur de Wardes refers to a subject so delicate in its nature, that it is most important no one should hear more than you have already heard. Close the doors, then, I beg you, and let us finish our conversation in the manner which becomes two gentlemen, one of whom has given the other the lie."

"Messieurs, messieurs!" exclaimed those who were present.

"Is it your opinion, then, that I was wrong in defending Mademoiselle de la Valliere?" said De Guiche. "In that case, I pass judgment upon myself, and am ready to withdraw the offensive words I may have used to Monsieur de Wardes."

"The deuce! certainly not!" said Saint-Aignan. "Mademoiselle de la Valliere is an angel."

"Virtue and purity itself," said Manicamp.

“You see, Monsieur de Wardes,” said De Guiche, “I am not the only one who undertakes the defense of that poor girl. I entreat you, therefore, messieurs, a second time, to leave us. You see, it is impossible we could be more calm and composed than we are.”

It was the very thing the courtiers wished; some went out at one door, and the rest at the other, and the two young men were left alone.

“Well played,” said De Wardes, to the comte.

“Was it not?” replied the latter.

“How can it be wondered at, my dear fellow; I have got quite rusty in the country, while the command you have acquired over yourself, comte, confounds me; a man always gains something in women’s society; so, pray accept my congratulations.”

“I do accept them.”

“And I will make Madame a present of them.”

“And now, my dear Monsieur de Wardes, let us speak as loud as you please.”

“Do not defy me.”

“I do defy you, for you are known to be an evil-minded man; if you do that, you will be looked upon as a coward, too; and Monsieur would have you hanged, this evening, at his window-casement. Speak, my dear De Wardes, speak.”

“I have fought already.”

“But not quite enough, yet.”

“I see, you would not be sorry to fight with me while my wounds are still open.”

“No; better still.”

“The deuce! you are unfortunate in the moment you have chosen; a duel, after the one I have just fought, would hardly suit me; I have lost too much blood at Boulogne; at the slightest effort my wounds would open again, and you would really have too good a bargain.”

“True,” said De Guiche; “and yet, on your arrival here, your looks and your arms showed there was nothing the matter with you.”

“Yes, my arms are all right, but my legs are weak; and then, I have not had a foil in my hand since that devil of a duel; and you, I am sure, have been fencing every day, in order to carry your little conspiracy against me to a successful issue.”

“Upon my honor, monsieur,” replied De Guiche, “it is six months since I last practiced.”

“No, comte, after due reflection, I will not fight, at least, with you. I will await Bragelonne’s return, since you say it is Bragelonne who finds fault with me.”

“Oh no, indeed! You shall not wait until Bragelonne’s return,” exclaimed the comte, losing all command over himself, “for you have said that Bragelonne might, possibly, be some time before he returns; and, in the meanwhile, your wicked insinuations would have had their effect.”

“Yet, I shall have my excuse. So take care.”

“I will give you a week to finish your recovery.”

“That is better. We will wait a week.”

“Yes, yes, I understand; a week will give time to my adversary to make his escape. No, no; I will not give you one day, even.”

“You are mad, monsieur,” said De Wardes, retreating a step.

“And you are a coward, if you do not fight willingly. Nay, what is more, I will denounce you to the king, as having refused to fight, after having insulted La Valliere.”

“Ah!” said De Wardes, “you are dangerously treacherous, though you pass for a man of honor.”

“There is nothing more dangerous than the treachery, as you term it, of the man whose conduct is always loyal and upright.”

“Restore me the use of my legs, then, or get yourself bled, till you are as white as I am, so as to equalize our chances.”

“No, no; I have something better than that to propose.”

“What is it?”

“We will fight on horseback, and will exchange three pistol-shots each. You are a first rate marksman. I have seen you bring down swallows with single balls, and at full gallop. Do not deny it, for I have seen you myself.”

“I believe you are right,” said De Wardes; “and as that is the case, it is not unlikely I might kill you.”

“You would be rendering me a very great service, if you did.”

“I will do my best.”

“Is it agreed? Give me your hand upon it.”

“There it is: but on one condition, however.”

“Name it.”

“That not a word shall be said about it to the king.”

“Not a word, I swear.”

“I will go and get my horse, then.”

“And I, mine.”

“Where shall we meet?”

“In the plain; I know an admirable place.”

“Shall we go together?”

“Why not?”

And both of them, on their way to the stables, passed beneath Madame’s windows, which were faintly lighted; a shadow could be seen behind the lace curtains. “There is a woman,” said De Wardes, smiling, “who does not suspect that we are going to fight — to die, perhaps, on her account.”

CHAPTER XIII.

The Combat.

De Wardes and De Guiche selected their horses, and saddled them with their own hands, with holster saddles. De Guiche, having two pairs of pistols, went to his apartments to get them; and after having loaded them, gave the choice to De Wardes, who selected the pair he had made use of twenty times before — the same, indeed, with which De Guiche had seen him kill swallows flying. "You will not be surprised," he said, "if I take every precaution. You know the weapons well, and, consequently, I am only making the chances equal."

"Your remark was quite useless," replied De Guiche, "and you have done no more than you are entitled to do."

"Now," said De Wardes, "I beg you to have the goodness to help me to mount; for I still experience a little difficulty in doing so."

"In that case, we had better settle the matter on foot."

"No; once in the saddle, I shall be all right."

"Very good, then; we will not speak of it again," said De Guiche, as he assisted De Wardes to mount his horse.

"And now," continued the young man, "in our eagerness to murder one another, we have neglected one circumstance."

"What is that?"

"That it is quite dark, and we shall almost be obliged to grope about, in order to kill."

"Oh!" said De Guiche, "you are as anxious as I am that everything should be done in proper order."

"Yes; but I do not wish people to say that you have assassinated me, any more than, supposing I were to kill you, I should myself like to be accused of such a crime."

"Did any one make a similar remark about your duel with the Duke of Buckingham?" said De Guiche; "it took place precisely under the same conditions as ours."

“Very true; but there was still light enough to see by; and we were up to our middles almost, in the water; besides, there were a good number of spectators on shore, looking at us.”

De Guiche reflected for a moment; and the thought which had already presented itself to him became more confirmed — that De Wardes wished to have witnesses present, in order to bring back the conversation about Madame, and to give a new turn to the combat. He avoided saying a word in reply, therefore; and, as De Wardes once more looked at him interrogatively, he replied, by a movement of the head, that it would be best to let things remain as they were. The two adversaries consequently set off, and left the chateau by the same gate, close to which we may remember to have seen Montalais and Malicorne together. The night, as if to counteract the extreme heat of the day, had gathered the clouds together in masses which were moving slowly along from the west to the east. The vault above, without a clear spot anywhere visible, or without the faintest indication of thunder, seemed to hang heavily over the earth, and soon began, by the force of the wind, to split into streamers, like a huge sheet torn to shreds. Large and warm drops of rain began to fall heavily, and gathered the dust into globules, which rolled along the ground. At the same time, the hedges, which seemed conscious of the approaching storm, the thirsty plants, the drooping branches of the trees, exhaled a thousand aromatic odors, which revived in the mind tender recollections, thoughts of youth, endless life, happiness, and love. “How fresh the earth smells,” said De Wardes; “it is a piece of coquetry to draw us to her.”

“By the by,” replied De Guiche, “several ideas have just occurred to me; and I wish to have your opinion upon them.”

“Relative to — ”

“Relative to our engagement.”

“It is quite some time, in fact, that we should begin to arrange matters.”

“Is it to be an ordinary combat, and conducted according to established custom?”

“Let me first know what your established custom is.”

“That we dismount in any particular open space that may suit us, fasten our horses to the nearest object, meet, each without our pistols in our hands, and afterwards retire for a hundred and fifty paces, in order to advance on each other.”

“Very good; that is precisely the way in which I killed poor Follivent, three weeks ago, at Saint-Denis.”

“I beg your pardon, but you forgot one circumstance.”

“What is that?”

“That in your duel with Follivent you advanced towards each other on foot, your swords between your teeth, and your pistols in your hands.”

“True.”

“While now, on the contrary, as you cannot walk, you yourself admit that we shall have to mount our horses again, and charge; and the first who wishes to fire will do so.”

“That is the best course, no doubt; but it is quite dark; we must make allowances for more missed shots than would be the case in the daytime.”

“Very well; each will fire three times; the pair of pistols already loaded, and one reload.”

“Excellent! Where shall our engagement take place?”

“Have you any preference?”

“No.”

“You see that small wood which lies before us?”

“The wood which is called Rochin?”

“Exactly.”

“You know it?”

“Perfectly.”

“You know that there is an open glade in the center?”

“Yes.”

“Well, this glade is admirably adapted for such a purpose, with a variety of roads, by-places, paths, ditches, windings, and avenues. We could not find a better spot.”

“I am perfectly satisfied, if you are so. We are at our destination, if I am not mistaken.”

“Yes. Look at the beautiful open space in the center. The faint light which the stars afford seems concentrated in this spot; the woods which surround it seem, with their barriers, to form its natural limits.”

“Very good. Do as you say.”

“Let us first settle the conditions.”

“These are mine; if you have any objection to make you will state it.”

“I am listening.”

“If the horse be killed, its rider will be obliged to fight on foot.”

“That is a matter of course, since we have no change of horses here.”

“But that does not oblige his adversary to dismount.”

“His adversary will, in fact, be free to act as he likes.”

“The adversaries, having once met in close contact, cannot quit each other under any circumstances, and may, consequently, fire muzzle to muzzle.”

“Agreed.”

“Three shots and no more will do, I suppose?”

“Quite sufficient, I think. Here are powder and balls for your pistols; measure out three charges, take three balls, I will do the same; then we will throw the rest of the powder and balls away.”

“And we will solemnly swear,” said De Wardes, “that we have neither balls nor powder about us?”

“Agreed; and I swear it,” said De Guiche, holding his hand towards heaven, a gesture which De Wardes imitated.

“And now, my dear comte,” said De Wardes, “allow me to tell you that I am in no way your dupe. You already are, or soon will be, the accepted lover of Madame. I have detected your secret, and you are afraid I shall tell others of it. You wish to kill me, to insure my silence; that is very clear; and in your place, I should do the same.” De Guiche hung down his head. “Only,” continued De Wardes, triumphantly, “was it really worth while, tell me, to throw this affair of Bragelonne’s on my shoulders? But, take care, my dear fellow; in bringing the wild boar to bay, you enrage him to madness; in running down the fox, you endow him with the ferocity of the jaguar. The consequence is, that brought to bay by you, I shall defend myself to the very last.”

“You will be quite right to do so.”

“Yes; but take care; I shall work more harm than you think. In the first place, as a beginning, you will readily suppose that I have not been absurd enough to lock up my secret, or your secret rather, in my own breast. There is a friend of mine, who resembles me in every way, a man whom you know very well, who shares my secret with me; so, pray understand, that if you kill me, my death will not have been of much service to you; whilst, on the contrary, if I kill you — and everything is possible, you know — you understand?” De Guiche shuddered. “If I kill you,” continued De Wardes, “you will have secured two mortal enemies to Madame, who will do their very utmost to ruin her.”

“Oh! monsieur,” exclaimed De Guiche, furiously, “do not reckon upon my death so easily. Of the two enemies you speak of, I trust most heartily to dispose of one immediately, and the other at the earliest opportunity.”

The only reply De Wardes made was a burst of laughter, so diabolical in its sound, that a superstitious man would have been terrified. But De Guiche was not so impressionable as that. “I think,” he said, “that everything is now settled, Monsieur de Wardes; so have the goodness to take your place first, unless you would prefer me to do so.”

“By no means,” said De Wardes. “I shall be delighted to save you the slightest trouble.” And spurring his horse to a gallop, he crossed the wide open space, and took his stand at that point of the circumference of the cross-road immediately opposite to where De Guiche was stationed. De Guiche remained motionless. At this distance of a hundred paces, the two adversaries were absolutely invisible to each other, being completely concealed by the thick shade of elms and chestnuts. A minute elapsed amidst the profoundest silence. At the end of the minute, each of them, in the deep shade in which he was concealed, heard the double click of the trigger, as they put the pistols on full cock. De Guiche, adopting the usual tactics, put his horse to a gallop, persuaded that he should render his safety doubly sure by the movement, as well as by the speed of the animal. He directed his course in a straight line towards the point where, in his opinion, De Wardes would be stationed; and he expected to meet De Wardes about half-way; but in this he was mistaken. He continued his course, presuming that his adversary was impatiently awaiting his approach. When, however, he had gone about two-thirds of the distance, he beheld the trees suddenly illuminated and a ball flew by, cutting the plume of his hat in two. Nearly at the same moment, and as if the flash of the first shot had served to indicate the direction of the other, a second report was heard, and a second ball passed through the head of De Guiche’s horse, a little below the ear. The animal fell. These two reports, proceeding from the very opposite direction in which he expected to find De Wardes, surprised him a great deal; but as he was a man of amazing self-possession, he prepared himself for his horse falling, but not so completely, however, that the toe of his boot escaped being caught under the animal as it fell. Very fortunately the horse in its dying agonies moved so as to enable him to release the leg which was less entangled than the other. De Guiche rose, felt himself all over, and found that he was not wounded. At the very moment he had felt the horse tottering under him, he placed his pistols in the holsters, afraid that the force of the fall might explode one at least, if not both of them, by which he would have been disarmed, and left utterly without defense. Once on his feet, he took the pistols out of the holsters, and advanced towards the spot where, by the light of the flash, he had seen De Wardes appear. De Wardes had, at the first shot, accounted for the maneuver, than which nothing could have been simpler. Instead of advancing to meet De Guiche, or remaining in his place to await his approach, De Wardes had, for about fifteen paces, followed the circle of the shadow which hid him from his adversary's observation, and at the very moment when the latter presented his flank in his career, he had fired from the place where he stood, carefully taking aim, and assisted instead of being inconvenienced by the horse's gallop. It has been seen that, notwithstanding the darkness, the first ball passed hardly more than an inch above De Guiche's head. De Wardes had so confidently relied upon his aim, that he thought he had seen De Guiche fall; his astonishment was extreme when he saw he still remained erect in his saddle. He hastened to fire his second shot, but his hand trembled, and he killed the horse instead. It would be a most fortunate chance for him if De Guiche were to remain held fast under the animal. Before he could have freed himself, De Wardes would have loaded his pistol and had De Guiche at his mercy. But De Guiche, on the contrary, was up, and had three shots to fire. De Guiche immediately understood the position of affairs. It would be necessary to exceed De Wardes in rapidity of execution. He advanced, therefore, so as to reach him before he should have had time to reload his pistol. De Wardes saw him approaching like a tempest. The ball was rather tight, and offered some resistance to the ramrod. To load carelessly would be simply to lose his last chance; to take the proper care in loading meant fatal loss of time, or rather, throwing away his life. He made his horse bound on one side. De Guiche turned round also, and, at the moment the horse was quiet again, fired, and the ball carried off De Wardes's hat from his head. De Wardes now knew that he had a moment's time at his own disposal; he availed himself of it in order to finish loading his pistol. De Guiche, noticing that his adversary did not fall, threw the pistol he had just discharged aside, and walked straight towards De Wardes, elevating the second pistol as he did so. He had hardly proceeded more than two or three paces, when De Wardes took aim at him as he was walking, and fired. An exclamation of anger was De Guiche's answer; the comte's arm contracted and dropped motionless by his side, and the pistol fell from his grasp. His anxiety was excessive. “I am lost,” murmured De Wardes, “he is not mortally wounded.” At the very moment, however, De Guiche was about to raise his pistol against De Wardes, the head, shoulders, and limbs of the comte seemed to collapse. He heaved a deep-drawn sigh, tottered, and fell at the feet of De Wardes’s horse.

“That is all right,” said De Wardes, and gathering up the reins, he struck his spurs into the horse’s sides. The horse cleared the comte’s motionless body, and bore De Wardes rapidly back to the chateau. When he arrived there, he remained a quarter of an hour deliberating within himself as to the proper course to be adopted. In his impatience to leave the field of battle, he had omitted to ascertain whether De Guiche were dead or not. A double hypothesis presented itself to De Wardes’s agitated mind; either De Guiche was killed, or De Guiche was wounded only. If he were killed, why should he leave his body in that manner to the tender mercies of the wolves; it was a perfectly useless piece of cruelty, for if De Guiche were dead, he certainly could not breathe a syllable of what had passed; if he were not killed, why should he, De Wardes, in leaving him there uncared for, allow himself to be regarded as a savage, incapable of one generous feeling? This last consideration determined his line of conduct.

De Wardes immediately instituted inquires after Manicamp. He was told that Manicamp had been looking after De Guiche, and, not knowing where to find him, had retired to bed. De Wardes went and awoke the sleeper, without any delay, and related the whole affair to him, which Manicamp listened to in perfect silence, but with an expression of momentarily increasing energy, of which his face could hardly have been supposed capable. It was only when De Wardes had finished, that Manicamp uttered the words, “Let us go.”

As they proceeded, Manicamp became more and more excited, and in proportion as De Wardes related the details of the affair to him, his countenance assumed every moment a darker expression. “And so,” he said, when De Wardes had finished, “you think he is dead?”

“Alas, I do.”

“And you fought in that manner, without witnesses?”

“He insisted upon it.”

“It is very singular.”

“What do you mean by saying it is singular?”

“That it is very unlike Monsieur de Guiche’s disposition.”

"You do not doubt my word, I suppose?"

"Hum! hum!"

"You do doubt it, then?"

"A little. But I shall doubt it more than ever, I warn you, if I find the poor fellow is really dead."

"Monsieur Manicamp!"

"Monsieur de Wardes!"

"It seems you intend to insult me."

"Just as you please. The fact is, I never did like people who come and say, 'I have killed such and such a gentleman in a corner; it is a great pity, but I killed him in a perfectly honorable manner.' It has an ugly appearance, M. de Wardes."

"Silence! we have arrived."

In fact, the glade could now be seen, and in the open space lay the motionless body of the dead horse. To the right of the horse, upon the dark grass, with his face against the ground, the poor comte lay, bathed in his blood. He had remained in the same spot, and did not even seem to have made the slightest movement. Manicamp threw himself on his knees, lifted the comte in his arms, and found him quite cold, and steeped in blood. He let him gently fall again. Then, stretching out his hand and feeling all over the ground close to where the comte lay, he sought until he found De Guiche's pistol.

"By Heaven!" he said, rising to his feet, pale as death and with the pistol in his hand, "you are not mistaken, he is quite dead."

"Dead!" repeated De Wardes.

"Yes; and his pistol is still loaded," added Manicamp, looking into the pan.

"But I told you that I took aim as he was walking towards me, and fired at him at the very moment he was going to fire at me."

"Are you quite sure that you fought with him, Monsieur de Wardes? I confess that I am very much afraid it has been a foul assassination. Nay, nay, no exclamations! You have had your three shots, and his pistol is still loaded. You have killed his horse, and he, De Guiche, one of the best marksmen in France, has not touched even either your horse or yourself. Well, Monsieur de Wardes, you have been very unlucky in bringing me here; all the blood in my body seems to have mounted to my head; and I verily believe that since so good an opportunity presents itself, I shall blow your brains out on the spot. So, Monsieur de Wardes, recommend yourself to Heaven."

"Monsieur Manicamp, you cannot think of such a thing!"

"On the contrary, I am thinking of it very strongly."

"Would you assassinate me?"

"Without the slightest remorse, at least for the present."

"Are you a gentleman?"

"I have given a great many proofs of that."

"Let me defend my life, then, at least."

"Very likely; in order, I suppose, that you may do to me what you have done to poor De Guiche."

And Manicamp slowly raised his pistol to the height of De Wardes's breast, and with arm stretched out, and a fixed, determined look on his face, took a careful aim.

De Wardes did not attempt a flight; he was completely terrified. In the midst, however, of this horrible silence, which lasted about a second, but which seemed an age to De Wardes, a faint sigh was heard.

"Oh," exclaimed De Wardes, "he still lives! Help, De Guiche, I am about to be assassinated!"

Manicamp fell back a step or two, and the two young men saw the comte raise himself slowly and painfully upon one hand. Manicamp threw the pistol away a dozen paces, and ran to his friend, uttering a cry of delight. De Wardes wiped his forehead, which was covered with a cold perspiration.

"It was just in time," he murmured.

"Where are you hurt?" inquired Manicamp of De Guiche, "and whereabouts are you wounded?"

De Guiche showed him his mutilated hand and his chest covered with blood.

"Comte," exclaimed De Wardes, "I am accused of having assassinated you; speak, I implore you, and say that I fought loyally."

"Perfectly so," said the wounded man; "Monsieur de Wardes fought quite loyally, and whoever says the contrary will make an enemy of me."

"Then, sir," said Manicamp, "assist me, in the first place, to carry this gentleman home, and I will afterwards give you every satisfaction you please; or, if you are in a hurry, we can do better still; let us stanch the blood from the comte's wounds here, with your pocket-handkerchief and mine, and then, as there are two shots left, we can have them between us."

“Thank you,” said De Wardes. “Twice already, in one hour, I have seen death too close at hand to be agreeable; I don’t like his look at all, and I prefer your apologies.”

Manicamp burst out laughing, and Guiche, too, in spite of his sufferings. The two young men wished to carry him, but he declared he felt quite strong enough to walk alone. The ball had broken his ring-finger and his little finger, and then had glanced along his side, but without penetrating deeply into his chest. It was the pain rather than the seriousness of the wound, therefore, which had overcome De Guiche. Manicamp passed his arm under one of the count’s shoulders, and De Wardes did the same with the other, and in this way they brought him back to Fontainebleau, to the house of the same doctor who had been present at the death of the Franciscan, Aramis’s predecessor.

CHAPTER XIV.

The King's Supper.

The king, while these matters were being arranged, was sitting at the supper-table, and the not very large number of guests for that day had taken their seats too, after the usual gesture intimating the royal permission. At this period of Louis XIV.'s reign, although etiquette was not governed by the strict regulations subsequently adopted, the French court had entirely thrown aside the traditions of good-fellowship and patriarchal affability existing in the time of Henry IV., which the suspicious mind of Louis XIII. had gradually replaced with pompous state and ceremony, which he despaired of being able fully to realize.

The king, therefore, was seated alone at a small separate table, which, like the desk of a president, overlooked the adjoining tables. Although we say a small table, we must not omit to add that this small table was the largest one there. Moreover, it was the one on which were placed the greatest number and quantity of dishes, consisting of fish, game, meat, fruit, vegetables, and preserves. The king was young and full of vigor and energy, very fond of hunting, addicted to all violent exercises of the body, possessing, besides, like all the members of the Bourbon family, a rapid digestion and an appetite speedily renewed. Louis XIV. was a formidable table-companion; he delighted in criticising his cooks; but when he honored them by praise and commendation, the honor was overwhelming. The king began by eating several kinds of soup, either mixed together or taken separately. He intermixed, or rather separated, each of the soups by a glass of old wine. He ate quickly and somewhat greedily. Porthos, who from the beginning had, out of respect, been waiting for a jog of D'Artagnan's arm, seeing the king make such rapid progress, turned to the musketeer and said in a low voice:

"It seems as if one might go on now; his majesty is very encouraging, from the example he sets. Look."

"The king eats," said D'Artagnan, "but he talks at the same time; try and manage matters in such a manner that, if he should happen to address a remark to you, he will not find you with your mouth full — which would be very disrespectful."

"The best way, in that case," said Porthos, "is to eat no supper at all; and yet I am very hungry, I admit, and everything looks and smells most invitingly, as if appealing to all my senses at once."

"Don't think of not eating for a moment," said D'Artagnan; "that would put his majesty out terribly. The king has a saying, 'that he who works well, eats well,' and he does not like people to eat indifferently at his table."

"How can I avoid having my mouth full if I eat?" said Porthos.

"All you have to do," replied the captain of the musketeers, "is simply to swallow what you have in it, whenever the king does you the honor to address a remark to you."

"Very good," said Porthos; and from that moment he began to eat with a certain well-bred enthusiasm.

The king occasionally looked at the different persons who were at table with him, and, *en connoisseur*, could appreciate the different dispositions of his guests.

"Monsieur du Vallon!" he said.

Porthos was enjoying a *salmi de lievre*, and swallowed half of the back. His name, pronounced in such a manner, made him start, and by a vigorous effort of his gullet he absorbed the whole mouthful.

"Sire," replied Porthos, in a stifled voice, but sufficiently intelligible, nevertheless.

"Let those *filets d'agneau* be handed to Monsieur du Vallon," said the king; "do you like brown meats, M. du Vallon?"

"Sire, I like everything," replied Porthos.

D'Artagnan whispered: "Everything your majesty sends me."

Porthos repeated: "Everything your majesty sends me," an observation which the king apparently received with great satisfaction.

"People eat well who work well," replied the king, delighted to have *en tete-a-tete* a guest who could eat as Porthos did. Porthos received the dish of lamb, and put a portion of it on his plate.

"Well?" said the king.

"Exquisite," said Porthos, calmly.

"Have you as good mutton in your part of the country, Monsieur du Vallon?" continued the king.

"Sire, I believe that from my own province, as everywhere else, the best of everything is sent to Paris for your majesty's use; but, on the other hand, I do not eat lamb in the same way your majesty does."

"Ah, ah! and how do you eat it?"

"Generally, I have a lamb dressed whole."

"*Whole?*"

"Yes, sire."

"In what manner, Monsieur du Vallon?"

"In this, sire: my cook, who is a German, first stuffs the lamb in question with small sausages he procures from Strasburg, force-meat balls from Troyes, and larks from Pithiviers; by some means or other, which I am not acquainted with, he bones the lamb as he would do a fowl, leaving the skin on, however, which forms a brown crust all over the animal; when it is cut in beautiful slices, in the same way as an enormous sausage, a rose-colored gravy pours forth, which is as agreeable to the eye as it is exquisite to the palate." And Porthos finished by smacking his lips.

The king opened his eyes with delight, and, while cutting some of the *faisan en daube*, which was being handed to him, he said:

"That is a dish I should very much like to taste, Monsieur du Vallon. Is it possible! a whole lamb!"

"Absolutely an entire lamb, sire."

"Pass those pheasants to M. du Vallon; I perceive he is an amateur."

The order was immediately obeyed. Then, continuing the conversation, he said: "And you do not find the lamb too fat?"

"No, sire, the fat falls down at the same time as the gravy does, and swims on the surface; then the servant who carves removes the fat with a spoon, which I have had expressly made for that purpose."

"Where do you reside?" inquired the king.

"At Pierrefonds, sire."

"At Pierrefonds; where is that, M. du Vallon — near Belle-Isle?"

"Oh, no, sire! Pierrefonds is in the Soissonnais."

"I thought you alluded to the lamb on account of the salt marshes."

"No, sire, I have marshes which are not salt, it is true, but which are not the less valuable on that account."

The king had now arrived at the *entrements*, but without losing sight of Porthos, who continued to play his part in the best manner.

“You have an excellent appetite, M. du Vallon,” said the king, “and you make an admirable guest at table.”

“Ah! sire, if your majesty were ever to pay a visit to Pierrefonds, we would both of us eat our lamb together; for your appetite is not an indifferent one by any means.”

D’Artagnan gave Porthos a kick under the table, which made Porthos color up.

“At your majesty’s present happy age,” said Porthos, in order to repair the mistake he had made, “I was in the musketeers, and nothing could ever satisfy me then. Your majesty has an excellent appetite, as I have already had the honor of mentioning, but you select what you eat with quite too much refinement to be called for one moment a great eater.”

The king seemed charmed at his guest’s politeness.

“Will you try some of these creams?” he said to Porthos.

“Sire, you majesty treats me with far too much kindness to prevent me speaking the whole truth.”

“Pray do so, M. du Vallon.”

“Will, sire, with regard to sweet dishes I only recognize pastry, and even that should be rather solid; all these frothy substances swell the stomach, and occupy a space which seems to me to be too precious to be so badly tenanted.”

“Ah! gentlemen,” said the king, indicating Porthos by a gesture, “here is indeed a model of gastronomy. It was in such a manner that our fathers, who so well knew what good living was, used to *eat*, while we,” added his majesty, “do nothing but tantalize with our stomachs.” And as he spoke, he took the breast of a chicken with ham, while Porthos attacked a dish of partridges and quails. The cup-bearer filled his majesty’s glass. “Give M. du Vallon some of my wine,” said the king. This was one of the greatest honors of the royal table. D’Artagnan pressed his friend’s knee. “If you could only manage to swallow the half of that boar’s head I see yonder,” said he to Porthos, “I shall believe you will be a duke and peer within the next twelvemonth.”

“Presently,” said Porthos, phlegmatically; “I shall come to that by and by.”

In fact it was not long before it came to the boar’s turn, for the king seemed to take pleasure in urging on his guest; he did not pass any of the dishes to Porthos until he had tasted them himself, and he accordingly took some of the boar’s head. Porthos showed that he could keep pace with his sovereign; and, instead of eating the half, as D’Artagnan had told him, he ate three-fourths of it. “It is impossible,” said the king in an undertone, “that a gentleman who eats so good a supper every day, and who has such beautiful teeth, can be otherwise than the most straightforward, upright man in my kingdom.”

“Do you hear?” said D’Artagnan in his friend’s ear.

“Yes; I think I am rather in favor,” said Porthos, balancing himself on his chair.

“Oh! you are in luck’s way.”

The king and Porthos continued to eat in the same manner, to the great satisfaction of the other guests, some of whom, from emulation, had attempted to follow them, but were obliged to give up half-way. The king soon began to get flushed and the reaction of the blood to his face announced that the moment of repletion had arrived. It was then that Louis XIV., instead of becoming gay and cheerful, as most good livers generally do, became dull, melancholy, and taciturn. Porthos, on the contrary, was lively and communicative. D’Artagnan’s foot had more than once to remind him of this peculiarity of the king. The dessert now made its appearance. The king had ceased to think anything further of Porthos; he turned his eyes anxiously towards the entrance-door, and he was heard occasionally to inquire how it happened that Monsieur de Saint-Aignan was so long in arriving. At last, at the moment when his majesty was finishing a pot of preserved plums with a deep sigh, Saint-Aignan appeared. The king’s eyes, which had become somewhat dull, immediately began to sparkle. The comte advanced towards the king’s table, and Louis rose at his approach. Everybody got up at the same time, including Porthos, who was just finishing an almond-cake capable of making the jaws of a crocodile stick together. The supper was over.

CHAPTER XV.

After Supper.

The king took Saint-Aignan by the arm, and passed into the adjoining apartment. “What has detained you, comte?” said the king.

“I was bringing the answer, sire,” replied the comte.

“She has taken a long time to reply to what I wrote her.”

“Sire, your majesty deigned to write in verse, and Mademoiselle de la Valliere wished to repay your majesty in the same coin; that is to say, in gold.”

“Verses! Saint-Aignan,” exclaimed the king in ecstasy. “Give them to me at once.” And Louis broke the seal of a little letter, inclosing the verses which history has preserved entire for us, and which are more meritorious in invention than in execution. Such as they were, however, the king was enchanted with them, and exhibited his satisfaction by unequivocal transports of delight; but the universal silence which reigned in the rooms warned Louis, so sensitively particular with regard to good breeding, that his delight must give rise to various interpretations. He turned aside and put the note in his pocket, and then advancing a few steps, which brought him again to the threshold of the door close to his guests, he said, “M. du Vallon, I have seen you to-day with the greatest pleasure, and my pleasure will be equally great to see you again.” Porthos bowed as the Colossus of Rhodes would have done, and retired from the room with his face towards the king. “M. d’Artagnan,” continued the king, “you will await my orders in the gallery; I am obliged to you for having made me acquainted with M. du Vallon. Gentlemen,” addressing himself to the other guests, “I return to Paris to-morrow on account of the departure of the Spanish and Dutch ambassadors. Until to-morrow then.”

The apartment was immediately cleared of the guests. The king took Saint-Aignan by the arm, made him read La Valliere’s verses over again, and said, “What do you think of them?”

“Charming, sire.”

“They charm me, in fact, and if they were known — ”

“Oh! the professional poets would be jealous of them; but it is not likely they will know anything about them.”

“Did you give her mine?”

“Oh! sire, she positively devoured them.”

“They were very weak, I am afraid.”

“That is not what Mademoiselle de la Valliere said of them.”

“Do you think she was pleased with them?”

“I am sure of it, sire.”

“I must answer, then.”

“Oh! sire, immediately after supper? Your majesty will fatigue yourself.”

“You are quite right; study after eating is notoriously injurious.”

“The labor of a poet especially so; and besides, there is great excitement prevailing at Mademoiselle de la Valliere’s.”

“What do you mean?”

“With her as with all the ladies of the court.”

“Why?”

“On account of poor De Guiche’s accident.”

“Has anything serious happened to De Guiche, then?”

“Yes, sire, he has one hand nearly destroyed, a hole in his breast; in fact, he is dying.”

“Good heavens! who told you that?”

“Manicamp brought him back just now to the house of a doctor here in Fontainebleau, and the rumor soon reached us all.”

“Brought back! Poor De Guiche; and how did it happen?”

“Ah! that is the very question, — how did it happen?”

“You say that in a very singular manner, Saint-Aignan. Give me the details. What does he say himself?”

“He says nothing, sire; but others do.”

“What others?”

“Those who brought him back, sire.”

“Who are they?”

“I do not know, sire; but M. de Manicamp knows. M. de Manicamp is one of his friends.”

“As everybody is, indeed,” said the king.

“Oh! no!” returned Saint-Aignan, “you are mistaken sire; every one is not precisely a friend of M. de Guiche.”

“How do you know that?”

"Does your majesty require me to explain myself?"

"Certainly I do."

"Well, sire, I believe I have heard something said about a quarrel between two gentlemen."

"When?"

"This very evening, before your majesty's supper was served."

"That can hardly be. I have issued such stringent and severe ordinances with respect to duelling, that no one, I presume, would dare to disobey them."

"In that case, Heaven preserve me from excusing any one!" exclaimed Saint-Aignan. "Your majesty commanded me to speak, and I spoke accordingly."

"Tell me, then, in what way the Comte de Guiche has been wounded?"

"Sire, it is said to have been at a boar-hunt."

"This evening?"

"Yes, sire."

"One of his hands shattered, and a hole in his breast. Who was at the hunt with M. de Guiche?"

"I do not know, sire; but M. de Manicamp knows, or ought to know."

"You are concealing something from me, Saint-Aignan."

"Nothing, sire, I assure you."

"Then, explain to me how the accident happened; was it a musket that burst?"

"Very likely, sire. But yet, on reflection, it could hardly have been that, for De Guiche's pistol was found close by him still loaded."

"His pistol? But a man does not go to a boar-hunt with a pistol, I should think."

"Sire, it is also said that De Guiche's horse was killed and that the horse is still to be found in the wide open glade in the forest."

"His horse? — Guiche go on horseback to a boar-hunt? — Saint-Aignan, I do not understand a syllable of what you have been telling me. Where did this affair happen?"

"At the Rond-point, in that part of the forest called the Bois-Rochin."

"That will do. Call M. d'Artagnan." Saint-Aignan obeyed, and the musketeer entered.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," said the king, "you will leave this place by the little door of the private staircase."

"Yes, sire."

"You will mount your horse."

"Yes, sire."

"And you will proceed to the Rond-point du Bois-Rochin. Do you know the spot?"

"Yes, sire. I have fought there twice."

"What!" exclaimed the king, amazed at the reply.

"Under the edicts, sire, of Cardinal Richelieu," returned D'Artagnan, with his usual impassability.

"That is very different, monsieur. You will, therefore, go there, and will examine the locality very carefully. A man has been wounded there, and you will find a horse lying dead. You will tell me what your opinion is upon the whole affair."

"Very good, sire."

"As a matter of course, it is your own opinion I require, and not that of any one else."

"You shall have it in an hour's time, sire."

"I prohibit your speaking with any one, whoever it may be."

"Except with the person who must give me a lantern," said D'Artagnan.

"Oh! that is a matter of course," said the king, laughing at the liberty, which he tolerated in no one but his captain of the musketeers. D'Artagnan left by the little staircase.

"Now, let my physician be sent for," said Louis. Ten minutes afterwards the king's physician arrived, quite out of breath.

"You will go, monsieur," said the king to him, "and accompany M. de Saint-Aignan wherever he may take you; you will render me an account of the state of the person you may see in the house you will be taken to." The physician obeyed without a remark, as at that time people began to obey Louis XIV., and left the room preceding Saint-Aignan.

"Do you, Saint-Aignan, send Manicamp to me, before the physician can possibly have spoken to him." And Saint-Aignan left in his turn.

CHAPTER XVI.

Showing in What Way D’Artagnan Discharged the Mission with Which the King Had Intrusted Him.

While the king was engaged in making these last-mentioned arrangements in order to ascertain the truth, D’Artagnan, without losing a second, ran to the stable, took down the lantern, saddled his horse himself, and proceeded towards the place his majesty had indicated. According to the promise he had made, he had not accosted any one; and, as we have observed, he had carried his scruples so far as to do without the assistance of the stable-helpers altogether. D’Artagnan was one of those who in moments of difficulty pride themselves on increasing their own value. By dint of hard galloping, he in less than five minutes reached the wood, fastened his horse to the first tree he came to, and penetrated to the broad open space on foot. He then began to inspect most carefully, on foot and with his lantern in his hand, the whole surface of the Rond-point, went forward, turned back again, measured, examined, and after half an hour’s minute inspection, he returned silently to where he had left his horse, and pursued his way in deep reflection and at a foot-pace to Fontainebleau. Louis was waiting in his cabinet; he was alone, and with a pencil was scribbling on paper certain lines which D’Artagnan at the first glance recognized as unequal and very much touched up. The conclusion he arrived at was, that they must be verses. The king raised his head and perceived D’Artagnan. “Well, monsieur,” he said, “do you bring me any news?”

“Yes, sire.”

“What have you seen?”

“As far as probability goes, sire — ” D’Artagnan began to reply.

“It was certainty I requested of you.”

“I will approach it as near as I possibly can. The weather was very well adapted for investigations of the character I have just made; it has been raining this evening, and the roads were wet and muddy — ”

“Well, the result, M. d’Artagnan?”

“Sire, your majesty told me that there was a horse lying dead in the cross-road of the Bois-Rochin, and I began, therefore, by studying the roads. I say the roads, because the center of the cross-road is reached by four separate roads. The one that I myself took was the only one that presented any fresh traces. Two horses had followed it side by side; their eight feet were marked very distinctly in the clay. One of the riders was more impatient than the other, for the footprints of the one were invariably in advance of the other about half a horse’s length.”

“Are you quite sure they were traveling together?” said the king.

“Yes sire. The horses are two rather large animals of equal pace, — horses well used to maneuvers of all kinds, for they wheeled round the barrier of the Rond-point together.”

“Well — and after?”

“The two cavaliers paused there for a minute, no doubt to arrange the conditions of the engagement; the horses grew restless and impatient. One of the riders spoke, while the other listened and seemed to have contented himself by simply answering. His horse pawed the ground, which proves that his attention was so taken up by listening that he let the bridle fall from his hand.”

“A hostile meeting did take place then?”

“Undoubtedly.”

“Continue; you are a very accurate observer.”

“One of the two cavaliers remained where he was standing, the one, in fact, who had been listening; the other crossed the open space, and at first placed himself directly opposite to his adversary. The one who had remained stationary traversed the Rond-point at a gallop, about two-thirds of its length, thinking that by this means he would gain upon his opponent; but the latter had followed the circumference of the wood.”

“You are ignorant of their names, I suppose?”

“Completely so, sire. Only he who followed the circumference of the wood was mounted on a black horse.”

“How do you know that?”

“I found a few hairs of his tail among the brambles which bordered the sides of the ditch.”

“Go on.”

“As for the other horse, there can be no trouble in describing him, since he was left dead on the field of battle.”

“What was the cause of his death?”

“A ball which had passed through his brain.”

“Was the ball that of a pistol or a gun?”

“It was a pistol-bullet, sire. Besides, the manner in which the horse was wounded explained to me the tactics of the man who had killed it. He had followed the circumference of the wood in order to take his adversary in flank. Moreover, I followed his foot-tracks on the grass.”

“The tracks of the black horse, do you mean?”

“Yes, sire.”

“Go on, Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

“As your majesty now perceives the position of the two adversaries, I will, for a moment, leave the cavalier who had remained stationary for the one who started off at a gallop.”

“Do so.”

“The horse of the cavalier who rode at full speed was killed on the spot.”

“How do you know that?”

“The cavalier had not time even to throw himself off his horse, and so fell with it. I observed the impression of his leg, which, with a great effort, he was enabled to extricate from under the horse. The spur, pressed down by the weight of the animal, had plowed up the ground.”

“Very good; and what did he do as soon as he rose up again?”

“He walked straight up to his adversary.”

“Who still remained upon the verge of the forest?”

“Yes, sire. Then, having reached a favorable distance, he stopped firmly, for the impression of both his heels are left in the ground quite close to each other, fired, and missed his adversary.”

“How do you know he did not hit him?”

“I found a hat with a ball through it.”

“Ah, a proof, then!” exclaimed the king.

“Insufficient, sire,” replied D’Artagnan, coldly; “it is a hat without any letters indicating its ownership, without arms; a red feather, as all hats have; the lace, even, had nothing particular in it.”

“Did the man with the hat through which the bullet had passed fire a second time?”

“Oh, sire, he had already fired twice.”

“How did you ascertain that?”

“I found the waddings of the pistol.”

"And what became of the bullet which did not kill the horse?"

"It cut in two the feather of the hat belonging to him against whom it was directed, and broke a small birch at the other end of the open glade."

"In that case, then, the man on the black horse was disarmed, whilst his adversary had still one more shot to fire?"

"Sire, while the dismounted rider was extricating himself from his horse, the other was reloading his pistol. Only, he was much agitated while he was loading it, and his hand trembled greatly."

"How do you know that?"

"Half the charge fell to the ground, and he threw the ramrod aside, not having time to replace it in the pistol."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan, this is marvellous you tell me."

"It is only close observation, sire, and the commonest highwayman could tell as much."

"The whole scene is before me from the manner in which you relate it."

"I have, in fact, reconstructed it in my own mind, with merely a few alterations."

"And now," said the king, "let us return to the dismounted cavalier. You were saying that he walked towards his adversary while the latter was loading his pistol."

"Yes; but at the very moment he himself was taking aim, the other fired."

"Oh!" said the king; "and the shot?"

"The shot told terribly, sire; the dismounted cavalier fell upon his face, after having staggered forward three or four paces."

"Where was he hit?"

"In two places; in the first place, in his right hand, and then, by the same bullet, in his chest."

"But how could you ascertain that?" inquired the king, full of admiration.

"By a very simple means; the butt end of the pistol was covered with blood, and the trace of the bullet could be observed, with fragments of a broken ring. The wounded man, in all probability, had the ring-finger and the little finger carried off."

"As far as the hand goes, I have nothing to say; but the chest?"

"Sire, there were two small pools of blood, at a distance of about two feet and a half from each other. At one of these pools of blood the grass was torn up by the clenched hand; at the other, the grass was simply pressed down by the weight of the body."

"Poor De Guiche!" exclaimed the king.

"Ah! it was M. de Guiche, then?" said the musketeer, quietly. "I suspected it, but did not venture to mention it to your majesty."

"And what made you suspect it?"

"I recognized the De Gramont arms upon the holsters of the dead horse."

"And you think he is seriously wounded?"

"Very seriously, since he fell immediately, and remained a long time in the same place; however, he was able to walk, as he left the spot, supported by two friends."

"You met him returning, then?"

"No; but I observed the footprints of three men; the one on the right and the one on the left walked freely and easily, but the one in the middle dragged his feet as he walked; besides, he left traces of blood at every step he took."

"Now, monsieur, since you saw the combat so distinctly that not a single detail seems to have escaped you, tell me something about De Guiche's adversary."

"Oh, sire, I do not know him."

"And yet you see everything very clearly."

"Yes, sire, I see everything; but I do not tell all I see; and, since the poor devil has escaped, your majesty will permit me to say that I do not intend to denounce him."

"And yet he is guilty, since he has fought a duel, monsieur."

"Not guilty in my eyes, sire," said D'Artagnan, coldly.

"Monsieur!" exclaimed the king, "are you aware of what you are saying?"

"Perfectly, sire; but, according to my notions, a man who fights a duel is a brave man; such, at least, is my own opinion; but your majesty may have another, it is but natural, for you are master here."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan, I ordered you, however — "

D'Artagnan interrupted the king by a respectful gesture. "You ordered me, sire, to gather what particulars I could, respecting a hostile meeting that had taken place; those particulars you have. If you order me to arrest M. de Guiche's adversary, I will do so; but do not order me to denounce him to you, for in that case I will not obey."

"Very well! Arrest him, then."

"Give me his name, sire."

The king stamped his foot angrily; but after a moment’s reflection, he said, “You are right — ten times, twenty times, a hundred times right.”

“That is my opinion, sire: I am happy that, this time, it accords with your majesty’s.”

“One word more. Who assisted Guiche?”

“I do not know, sire.”

“But you speak of two men. There was a person present, then, as second.”

“There was no second, sire. Nay, more than that, when M. de Guiche fell, his adversary fled without giving him any assistance.”

“The miserable coward!” exclaimed the king.

“The consequence of your ordinances, sire. If a man has fought well, and fairly, and has already escaped one chance of death, he naturally wishes to escape a second. M. de Bouteville cannot be forgotten very easily.”

“And so, men turn cowards.”

“No, they become prudent.”

“And he has fled, then, you say?”

“Yes; and as fast as his horse could possibly carry him.”

“In what direction?”

“In the direction of the chateau.”

“Well, and after that?”

“Afterwards, as I have had the honor of telling your majesty, two men on foot arrived, who carried M. de Guiche back with them.”

“What proof have you that these men arrived after the combat?”

“A very evident proof, sire; at the moment the encounter took place, the rain had just ceased, the ground had not had time to imbibe the moisture, and was, consequently, soaked; the footsteps sank in the ground; but while M. de Guiche was lying there in a fainting condition, the ground became firm again, and the footsteps made a less sensible impression.”

Louis clapped his hands together in sign of admiration. “Monsieur d’Artagnan,” he said, “you are positively the cleverest man in my kingdom.”

“The identical thing M. de Richelieu thought, and M. de Mazarin said, sire.”

“And now, it remains for us to see if your sagacity is at fault.”

“Oh! sire, a man may be mistaken; *humanum est errare*,” said the musketeer, philosophically.

“In that case, you are not human, Monsieur d’Artagnan, for I believe you are never mistaken.”

“Your majesty said that we were going to see whether such was the case, or not.”

“Yes.”

“In what way, may I venture to ask?”

“I have sent for M. de Manicamp, and M. de Manicamp is coming.”

“And M. de Manicamp knows the secret?”

“De Guiche has no secrets from M. de Manicamp.”

D’Artagnan shook his head. “No one was present at the combat, I repeat; and unless M. de Manicamp was one of the two men who brought him back — ”

“Hush!” said the king, “he is coming; remain, and listen attentively.”

“Very good, sire.”

And, at the very same moment, Manicamp and Saint-Aignan appeared at the threshold of the door.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Encounter.

The king signified with an imperious gesture, first to the musketeer, then to Saint-Aignan, “On your lives, not a word.” D’Artagnan withdrew, like a sentinel, to a corner of the room; Saint-Aignan, in his character of a favorite, leaned over the back of the king’s chair. Manicamp, with his right foot properly advanced, a smile upon his lips, and his white and well-formed hands gracefully disposed, advanced to make his reverence to the king, who returned the salutation by a bow. “Good evening, M. de Manicamp,” he said.

“Your majesty did me the honor to send for me,” said Manicamp.

“Yes, in order to learn from you all the details of the unfortunate accident which has befallen the Comte de Guiche.”

“Oh! sire, it is grievous indeed.”

“You were there?”

“Not precisely, sire.”

“But you arrived on the scene of the accident, a few minutes after it took place?”

“Sire, about half an hour afterwards.”

“And where did the accident happen?”

“I believe, sire, the place is called the Rond-point du Bois-Rochin.”

“Oh! the rendezvous of the hunt.”

“The very spot, sire.”

“Good; give me all the details you are acquainted with, respecting this unhappy affair, Monsieur de Manicamp.”

“Perhaps your majesty has already been informed of them, and I fear to fatigue you with useless repetition.”

“No, do not be afraid of that.”

Manicamp looked round him; he saw only D’Artagnan leaning with his back against the wainscot — D’Artagnan, calm, kind, and good-natured as usual — and Saint-Aignan whom he had accompanied, and who still leaned over the king’s armchair with an expression of countenance equally full of good feeling. He determined, therefore, to speak out. “Your majesty is perfectly aware,” he said, “that accidents are very frequent in hunting.”

“In hunting, do you say?”

“I mean, sire, when an animal is brought to bay.”

“Ah, ah!” said the king, “it was when the animal was brought to bay, then, that the accident happened?”

“Alas! sire, unhappily it was.”

The king paused for a moment before he said: “What animal was being hunted?”

“A wild boar, sire.”

“And what could possibly have possessed De Guiche to go to a wild boar-hunt by himself; that is but a clownish idea of sport, only fit for that class of people who, unlike the Marechal de Gramont, have no dogs and huntsmen, to hunt as gentlemen should do.”

Manicamp shrugged his shoulders. “Youth is very rash,” he said, sententiously.

“Well, go on,” said the king.

“At all events,” continued Manicamp, not venturing to be too precipitate and hasty, and letting his words fall very slowly one by one, “at all events, sire, poor De Guiche went hunting — all alone.”

“Quite alone? indeed? — What a sportsman! And is not M. de Guiche aware that the wild boar always stands at bay?”

“That is the very thing that really happened, sire.”

“He had some idea, then, of the beast being there?”

“Yes, sire, some peasants had seen it among their potatoes.”

“And what kind of animal was it?”

“A short, thick beast.”

“You may as well tell me, monsieur, that De Guiche had some idea of committing suicide; for I have seen him hunt, and he is an active and vigorous hunter. Whenever he fires at an animal brought to bay and held in check by the dogs, he takes every possible precaution, and yet he fires with a carbine, and on this occasion he seems to have faced the boar with pistols only.”

Manicamp started.

“A costly pair of pistols, excellent weapons to fight a duel with a man and not a wild boar. What an absurdity!”

“There are some things, sire, which are difficult of explanation.”

"You are quite right, and the event which we are now discussing is certainly one of them. Go on."

During the recital, Saint-Aignan, who probably would have made a sign to Manicamp to be careful what he was about, found that the king's glance was constantly fixed upon himself, so that it was utterly impossible to communicate with Manicamp in any way. As for D'Artagnan, the statue of Silence at Athens was far more noisy and far more expressive than he. Manicamp, therefore, was obliged to continue in the same way he had begun, and so contrived to get more and more entangled in his explanation. "Sire," he said, "this is probably how the affair happened. Guiche was waiting to receive the boar as it rushed towards him."

"On foot or on horseback?" inquired the king.

"On horseback. He fired upon the brute and missed his aim, and then it dashed upon him."

"And the horse was killed."

"Ah! your majesty knows that, then."

"I have been told that a horse has been found lying dead in the cross-roads of the Bois-Rochin, and I presume it was De Guiche's horse."

"Perfectly true, sire, it was his."

"Well, so much for the horse, and now for De Guiche?"

"De Guiche, once down, was attacked and worried by the wild boar, and wounded in the hand and in the chest."

"It is a horrible accident, but it must be admitted it was De Guiche's own fault. How could he possibly have gone to hunt such an animal merely armed with pistols; he must have forgotten the fable of Adonis?"

Manicamp rubbed his ear in seeming perplexity. "Very true," he said, "it was very imprudent."

"Can you explain it, Monsieur Manicamp?"

"Sire, what is written is written!"

"Ah! you are a fatalist."

Manicamp looked very uncomfortable and ill at ease.

"I am angry with you, Monsieur Manicamp," continued the king.

"With me, sire?"

"Yes. How was it that you, who are De Guiche's intimate friend, and who know that he is subject to such acts of folly, did not stop him in time?"

Manicamp no longer knew what to do; the tone in which the king spoke was anything but that of a credulous man. On the other hand, it did not indicate any particular severity, nor did he seem to care very much about the cross-examination. There was more of raillery in it than menace. “And you say, then,” continued the king, “that it was positively De Guiche’s horse that was found dead?”

“Quite positive, sire.”

“Did that astonish you?”

“No, sire; for your majesty will remember that, at the last hunt, M. de Saint-Maure had a horse killed under him, and in the same way.”

“Yes, but that one was ripped open.”

“Of course, sire.”

“Had Guiche’s horse been ripped open like M. de Saint-Maure’s horse, I should not have been astonished.”

Manicamp opened his eyes very wide.

“Am I mistaken,” resumed the king, “was it not in the frontal bone that De Guiche’s horse was struck? You must admit, Monsieur de Manicamp, that that is a very singular place for a wild boar to attack.”

“You are aware, sire, that the horse is a very intelligent animal, and he doubtless endeavoured to defend himself.”

“But a horse defends himself with his heels and not with his head.”

“In that case, the terrified horse may have slipped or fallen down,” said Manicamp, “and the boar, you understand sire, the boar — ”

“Oh! I understand that perfectly, as far as the horse is concerned; but how about his rider?”

“Well! that, too, is simple enough; the boar left the horse and attacked the rider; and, as I have already had the honor of informing your majesty, shattered De Guiche’s hand at the very moment he was about to discharge his second pistol at him, and then, with a gouge of his tusk, made that terrible hole in his chest.”

“Nothing is more likely; really, Monsieur de Manicamp, you are wrong in placing so little confidence in your own eloquence, and you can tell a story most admirably.”

“Your majesty is exceedingly kind,” said Manicamp, saluting him in the most embarrassed manner.

“From this day henceforth, I will prohibit any gentleman attached to my court going out to a similar encounter. Really, one might just as well permit duelling.”

Manicamp started, and moved as if he were about to withdraw. “Is your majesty satisfied?”

“Delighted; but do not withdraw yet, Monsieur de Manicamp,” said Louis, “I have something to say to you.”

“Well, well!” thought D’Artagnan, “there is another who is not up to the mark;” and he uttered a sigh which might signify, “Oh! the men of *our* stamp, where are they *now?*”

At this moment an usher lifted up the curtain before the door, and announced the king’s physician.

“Ah!” exclaimed Louis, “here comes Monsieur Valot, who has just been to see M. de Guiche. We shall now hear news of the man maltreated by the boar.”

Manicamp felt more uncomfortable than ever.

“In this way, at least,” added the king, “our conscience will be quite clear.” And he looked at D’Artagnan, who did not seem in the slightest degree discomposed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Physician.

M. Valot entered. The position of the different persons present was precisely the same: the king was seated, Saint-Aignan leaning over the back of his armchair, D'Artagnan with his back against the wall, and Manicamp still standing.

"Well, M. Valot," said the king, "did you obey my directions?"

"With the greatest alacrity, sire."

"You went to the doctor's house in Fontainebleau?"

"Yes, sire."

"And you found M. de Guiche there?"

"I did, sire."

"What state was he in? — speak unreservedly."

"In a very sad state indeed, sire."

"The wild boar did not quite devour him, however?"

"Devour whom?"

"De Guiche."

"What wild boar?"

"The boar that wounded him."

"M. de Guiche wounded by a boar?"

"So it is said, at least."

"By a poacher, rather, or by a jealous husband, or an ill-used lover, who, in order to be revenged, fired upon him."

"What is it that you say, Monsieur Valot? Were not M. de Guiche's wounds produced by defending himself against a wild boar?"

"M. de Guiche's wounds are the result of a pistol-bullet that broke his ring-finger and the little finger of the right hand, and afterwards buried itself in the intercostal muscles of the chest."

"A bullet! Are you sure Monsieur de Guiche was wounded by a *bullet?*" exclaimed the king, pretending to look much surprised.

"Indeed, I am, sire; so sure, in fact, that here it is." And he presented to the king a half-flattened bullet, which the king looked at, but did not touch.

“Did he have that in his chest, poor fellow?” he asked.

“Not precisely. The ball did not penetrate, but was flattened, as you see, either upon the trigger of the pistol or upon the right side of the breastbone.”

“Good heavens!” said the king, seriously, “you said nothing to me about this, Monsieur de Manicamp.”

“Sire — ”

“What does all this mean, then, this invention about hunting a wild boar at nightfall? Come, speak, monsieur.”

“Sire — ”

“It seems, then, that you are right,” said the king, turning round towards his captain of musketeers, “and that a duel actually took place.”

The king possessed, to a greater extent than any one else, the faculty enjoyed by the great in power or position, of compromising and dividing those beneath him. Manicamp darted a look full of reproaches at the musketeer. D’Artagnan understood the look at once, and not wishing to remain beneath the weight of such an accusation, advanced a step forward, and said: “Sire, your majesty commanded me to go and explore the place where the cross-roads meet in the Bois-Rochin, and to report to you, according to my own ideas, what had taken place there. I submitted my observations to you, but without denouncing any one. It was your majesty yourself who was the first to name the Comte de Guiche.”

“Well, monsieur, well,” said the king, haughtily; “you have done your duty, and I am satisfied with you. But you, Monsieur de Manicamp, have failed in yours, for you have told me a falsehood.”

“A falsehood, sire. The expression is a hard one.”

“Find a more accurate, then.”

“Sire, I will not attempt to do so. I have already been unfortunate enough to displease your majesty, and it will, in every respect, be far better for me to accept most humbly any reproaches you may think proper to address to me.”

“You are right, monsieur, whoever conceals the truth from me, risks my displeasure.”

“Sometimes, sire, one is ignorant of the truth.”

“No further falsehood, monsieur, or I double the punishment.”

Manicamp bowed and turned pale. D’Artagnan again made another step forward, determined to interfere, if the still increasing anger of the king attained certain limits.

“You see, monsieur,” continued the king, “that it is useless to deny the thing any longer. M. de Guiche has fought a duel.”

“I do not deny it, sire, and it would have been truly generous on your majesty’s part not to have forced me to tell a falsehood.”

“Forced? Who forced you?”

“Sire, M. de Guiche is my friend. Your majesty has forbidden duels under pain of death. A falsehood might save my friend’s life, and I told it.”

“Good!” murmured D’Artagnan, “an excellent fellow, upon my word.”

“Instead of telling a falsehood, monsieur, you should have prevented him from fighting,” said the king.

“Oh! sire, your majesty, who is the most accomplished gentleman in France, knows quite as well as any of us other gentlemen that we have never considered M. de Bouteville dishonored for having suffered death on the Place de Greve. That which does in truth dishonor a man is to avoid meeting his enemy — not to avoid meeting his executioner!”

“Well, monsieur, that may be so,” said Louis XIV.; “I am desirous of suggesting a means of your repairing all.”

“If it be a means of which a gentleman may avail himself, I shall most eagerly seize the opportunity.”

“The name of M. de Guiche’s adversary?”

“Oh, oh!” murmured D’Artagnan, “are we going to take Louis XIII. as a model?”

“Sire!” said Manicamp, with an accent of reproach.

“You will not name him, then?” said the king.

“Sire, I do not know him.”

“Bravo!” murmured D’Artagnan.

“Monsieur de Manicamp, hand your sword to the captain.”

Manicamp bowed very gracefully, unbuckled his sword, smiling as he did so, and handed it for the musketeer to take. But Saint-Aignan advanced hurriedly between him and D’Artagnan. “Sire,” he said, “will your majesty permit me to say a word?”

“Do so,” said the king, delighted, perhaps, at the bottom of his heart, for some one to step between him and the wrath he felt he had carried him too far.

“Manicamp, you are a brave man, and the king will appreciate your conduct; but to wish to serve your friends too well, is to destroy them.

Manicamp, you know the name the king asks you for?"

"It is perfectly true — I do know it."

"You will give it up then?"

"If I felt I ought to have mentioned it, I should have already done so."

"Then I will tell it, for I am not so extremely sensitive on such points of honor as you are."

"You are at liberty to do so, but it seems to me, however — "

"Oh! a truce to magnanimity; I will not permit you to go to the Bastile in that way. Do you speak; or I will."

Manicamp was keen-witted enough, and perfectly understood that he had done quite sufficient to produce a good opinion of his conduct; it was now only a question of persevering in such a manner as to regain the good graces of the king. "Speak, monsieur," he said to Saint-Aignan; "I have on my own behalf done all that my conscience told me to do; and it must have been very importunate," he added, turning towards the king, "since its mandates led me to disobey your majesty's commands; but your majesty will forgive me, I hope, when you learn that I was anxious to preserve the honor of a lady."

"Of a lady?" said the king, with some uneasiness.

"Yes, sire."

"A lady was the cause of this duel?"

Manicamp bowed.

"If the position of the lady in question warrants it," he said, "I shall not complain of your having acted with so much circumspection; on the contrary, indeed."

"Sire, everything which concerns your majesty's household, or the household of your majesty's brother, is of importance in my eyes."

"In my brother's household," repeated Louis XIV., with a slight hesitation. "The cause of the duel was a lady belonging to my brother's household, do you say?"

"Or to Madame's."

"Ah! to Madame's?"

"Yes, sire."

"Well — and this lady?"

"Is one of the maids of honor of her royal highness Madame la Duchesse d'Orleans."

"For whom M. de Guiche fought — do you say?"

"Yes, sire, and, this time, I tell no falsehood."

Louis seemed restless and anxious. "Gentlemen," he said, turning towards the spectators of this scene, "will you have the goodness to retire for a moment. I wish to be alone with M. de Manicamp; I know he has some important communication to make for his own justification, and which he will not venture before witnesses.... Put up your sword, M. de Manicamp."

Manicamp returned his sword to his belt.

"The fellow decidedly has his wits about him," murmured the musketeer, taking Saint-Aignan by the arm, and withdrawing with him.

"He will get out of it," said the latter in D'Artagnan's ear.

"And with honor, too, comte."

Manicamp cast a glance of recognition at Saint-Aignan and the captain, which luckily passed unnoticed by the king.

"Come, come," said D'Artagnan, as he left the room, "I had an indifferent opinion of the new generation. Well, I was mistaken after all. There is some good in them, I perceive."

Valot preceded the favorite and the captain, leaving the king and Manicamp alone in the cabinet.

CHAPTER XIX.

Wherein D’Artagnan Perceives that It Was He Who Was Mistaken, and Manicamp Who Was Right.

The king, determined to be satisfied that no one was listening, went himself to the door, and then returned precipitately and placed himself opposite Manicamp.

“And now we are alone, Monsieur de Manicamp, explain yourself.”

“With the greatest frankness, sire,” replied the young man.

“And in the first place, pray understand,” added the king, “that there is nothing to which I personally attach a greater importance than the honor of *any* lady.”

“That is the very reason, sire, why I endeavored to study your delicacy of sentiment and feeling.”

“Yes, I understand it all now. You say that it was one of the maids of honor of my sister-in-law who was the subject of dispute, and that the person in question, De Guiche’s adversary, the man, in point of fact, whom you will not name — ”

“But whom M. de Saint-Aignan will name, monsieur.”

“Yes, you say, however, that this man insulted some one belonging to the household of Madame.”

“Yes, sire. Mademoiselle de la Valliere.”

“Ah!” said the king, as if he had expected the name, and yet as if its announcement had caused him a sudden pang; “ah! it was Mademoiselle de la Valliere who was insulted.”

“I do not say precisely that she was insulted, sire.”

“But at all events — ”

“I merely say that she was spoken of in terms far enough from respectful.”

“A man dares to speak in disrespectful terms of Mademoiselle de la Valliere, and yet you refuse to tell me the name of the insulter?”

“Sire, I thought it was quite understood that your majesty had abandoned the idea of making me denounce him.”

“Perfectly true, monsieur,” returned the king, controlling his anger; “besides, I shall know in good time the name of this man whom I shall feel it my duty to punish.”

Manicamp perceived that they had returned to the question again. As for the king, he saw he had allowed himself to be hurried away a little too far, and therefore continued: — ”And I will punish him — not because there is any question of Mademoiselle de la Valliere, although I esteem her very highly — but because a lady was the object of the quarrel. And I intend that ladies shall be respected at my court, and that quarrels shall be put a stop to altogether.”

Manicamp bowed.

“And now, Monsieur de Manicamp,” continued the king, “what was said about Mademoiselle de la Valliere?”

“Cannot your majesty guess?”

“I?”

“Your majesty can imagine the character of the jest in which young men permit themselves to indulge.”

“They very probably said that she was in love with some one?” the king ventured to remark.

“Probably so.”

“But Mademoiselle de la Valliere has a perfect right to love any one she pleases,” said the king.

“That is the very point De Guiche maintained.”

“And on account of which he fought, do you mean?”

“Yes, sire, the sole and only cause.”

The king colored. “And you do not know anything more, then?”

“In what respect, sire?”

“In the very interesting respect which you are now referring to.”

“What does your majesty wish to know?”

“Why, the name of the man with whom La Valliere is in love, and whom De Guiche’s adversary disputed her right to love.”

“Sire, I know nothing — I have heard nothing — and have learnt nothing, even accidentally; but De Guiche is a noble-hearted fellow, and if, momentarily, he substituted himself in the place or stead of La Valliere’s protector, it was because that protector was himself of too exalted a position to undertake her defense.”

These words were more than transparent; they made the king blush, but this time with pleasure. He struck Manicamp gently on the shoulder. “Well, well, Monsieur de Manicamp, you are not only a ready, witty fellow, but a brave gentleman besides, and your friend De Guiche is a paladin quite after my own heart; you will express that to him from me.”

“Your majesty forgives me, then?”

“Completely.”

“And I am free?”

The king smiled and held out his hand to Manicamp, which he took and kissed respectfully. “And then,” added the king, “you relate stories so charmingly.”

“I, sire!”

“You told me in the most admirable manner the particulars of the accident which happened to Guiche. I can see the wild boar rushing out of the wood — I can see the horse fall down fighting with his head, and the boar rush from the horse to the rider. You do not simply relate a story well: you positively paint its incidents.”

“Sire, I think your majesty condescends to laugh at my expense,” said Manicamp.

“On the contrary,” said Louis, seriously, “I have so little intention of laughing, Monsieur de Manicamp, that I wish you to relate this adventure to every one.”

“The adventure of the hunt?”

“Yes; in the same manner you told it to me, without changing a single word — *you understand?*”

“Perfectly, sire.”

“And you will relate it, then?”

“Without losing a minute.”

“Very well! and now summon M. d’Artagnan; I hope you are no longer afraid of him.”

“Oh, sire, from the very moment I am sure of your majesty’s kind disposition, I no longer fear anything!”

“Call him, then,” said the king.

Manicamp opened the door, and said, “Gentlemen, the king wishes you to return.”

D’Artagnan, Saint-Aignan, and Valot entered.

"Gentlemen," said the king, "I summoned you for the purposes of saying that Monsieur de Manicamp's explanation has entirely satisfied me."

D'Artagnan glanced at Valot and Saint-Aignan, as much as to say, "Well! did I not tell you so?"

The king led Manicamp to the door, and then in a low tone of voice said: "See that M. de Guiche takes good care of himself, and particularly that he recovers as soon as possible; I am very desirous of thanking him in the name of every lady, but let him take special care that he does not begin again."

"Were he to die a hundred times, sire, he would begin again if your majesty's honor were in any way called in question."

This remark was direct enough. But we have already said that the incense of flattery was very pleasing to the king, and, provided he received it, he was not very particular as to its quality.

"Very well, very well," he said, as he dismissed Manicamp, "I will see De Guiche myself, and make him listen to reason." And as Manicamp left the apartment, the king turned round towards the three spectators of this scene, and said, "Tell me, Monsieur d'Artagnan, how does it happen that your sight is so imperfect? — you, whose eyes are generally so very good."

"My sight bad, sire?"

"Certainly."

"It must be the case since your majesty says so; but in what respect, may I ask?"

"Why, with regard to what occurred in the Bois-Rochin."

"Ah! ah!"

"Certainly. You pretended to have seen the tracks of two horses, to have detected the footprints of two men; and have described the particulars of an engagement, which you assert took place. Nothing of the sort occurred; pure illusion on your part."

"Ah! ah!" said D'Artagnan.

"Exactly the same thing with the galloping to and fro of the horses, and the other indications of a struggle. It was the struggle of De Guiche against the wild boar, and absolutely nothing else; only the struggle was a long and a terrible one, it seems."

"Ah! ah!" continued D'Artagnan.

"And when I think that I almost believed it for a moment — but, then, you told it with such confidence."

"I admit, sire, that I must have been very short-sighted," said D'Artagnan, with a readiness of humor which delighted the king.

"You do admit it, then?"

"Admit it, sire, most assuredly I do."

"So now that you see the thing — "

"In quite a different light from that in which I saw it half an hour ago."

"And to what, then, do you attribute this difference in your opinion?"

"Oh! a very simple thing, sire; half an hour ago I returned from Bois-Rochin, where I had nothing to light me but a stupid stable lantern — "

"While now?"

"While now I have all the wax-lights of your cabinet, and more than that, your majesty's own eyes, which illuminate everything, like the blazing sun at noonday."

The king began to laugh; and Saint-Aignan broke out into convulsions of merriment.

"It is precisely like M. Valot," said D'Artagnan, resuming the conversation where the king had left off; "he has been imagining all along, that not only was M. de Guiche wounded by a bullet, but still more, that he extracted it, even, from his chest."

"Upon my word," said Valot, "I assure you — "

"Now, did you not believe that?" continued D'Artagnan.

"Yes," said Valot; "not only did I believe it, but, at this very moment, I would swear it."

"Well, my dear doctor, you have dreamt it."

"I have dreamt it!"

"M. de Guiche's wound — a mere dream; the bullet, a dream. So, take my advice, and prate no more about it."

"Well said," returned the king, "M. d'Artagnan's advice is sound. Do not speak of your dream to any one, Monsieur Valot, and, upon the word of a gentleman, you will have no occasion to repent it. Good evening, gentlemen; a very sad affair, indeed, is a wild boar-hunt!"

"A very serious thing, indeed," repeated D'Artagnan, in a loud voice, "is a wild boar-hunt!" and he repeated it in every room through which he passed; and left the chateau, taking Valot with him.

"And now we are alone," said the king to Saint-Aignan, "what is the name of De Guiche's adversary?"

Saint-Aignan looked at the king.

“Oh! do not hesitate,” said the king; “you know that I am bound beforehand to forgive.”

“De Wardes,” said Saint-Aignan.

“Very good,” said Louis XIV.; and then, retiring to his own room, added to himself, “To forgive is not to forget.”

CHAPTER XX.

Showing the Advantage of Having Two Strings to One's Bow.

Manicamp quitted the king's apartment, delighted at having succeeded so well, when, just as he reached the bottom of the staircase and was passing a doorway, he felt that some one suddenly pulled him by the sleeve. He turned round and recognized Montalais, who was waiting for him in the passage, and who, in a very mysterious manner, with her body bent forward, and in a low tone of voice, said to him, "Follow me, monsieur, and without any delay, if you please."

"Where to, mademoiselle?" inquired Manicamp.

"In the first place, a true knight would not have asked such a question, but would have followed me without requiring any explanation."

"Well, mademoiselle, I am quite ready to conduct myself as a true knight."

"No; it is too late, and you cannot take the credit of it. We are going to Madame's apartment, so come at once."

"Ah, ah!" said Manicamp. "Lead on, then."

And he followed Montalais, who ran before him as light as Galatea.

"This time," said Manicamp, as he followed his guide, "I do not think that stories about hunting expeditions would be acceptable. We will try, however, and if need be — well, if there should be any occasion for it, we must try something else."

Montalais still ran on.

"How fatiguing it is," thought Manicamp, "to have need of one's head and legs at the same time."

At last, however, they arrived. Madame had just finished undressing, and was in a most elegant *deshabille*, but it must be understood that she had changed her dress before she had any idea of being subjected to the emotions now agitating her. She was waiting with the most restless impatience; and Montalais and Manicamp found her standing near the door. At the sound of their approaching footsteps, Madame came forward to meet them.

"Ah!" she said, "at last!"

"Here is M. Manicamp," replied Montalais.

Manicamp bowed with the greatest respect; Madame signed to Montalais to withdraw, and she immediately obeyed. Madame followed her with her eyes, in silence, until the door closed behind her, and then, turning towards Manicamp, said, "What is the matter? — and is it true, as I am told, Monsieur de Manicamp, that some one is lying wounded in the chateau?"

"Yes, Madame, unfortunately so — Monsieur de Guiche."

"Yes, Monsieur de Guiche," repeated the princess. "I had, in fact, heard it rumored, but not confirmed. And so, in truth, it is Monsieur de Guiche who has been thus unfortunate?"

"M. de Guiche himself, Madame."

"Are you aware, M. de Manicamp," said the princess, hastily, "that the king has the strongest antipathy to duels?"

"Perfectly so, Madame; but a duel with a wild beast is not answerable."

"Oh, you will not insult me by supposing that I credit the absurd fable, with what object I cannot tell, respecting M. de Guiche having been wounded by a wild boar. No, no, monsieur; the real truth is known, and, in addition to the inconvenience of his wound, M. de Guiche runs the risk of losing his liberty if not his life."

"Alas! Madame, I am well aware of that, but what is to be done?"

"You have seen the king?"

"Yes, Madame."

"What did you say to him?"

"I told him how M. de Guiche went to the chase, and how a wild boar rushed forth out of the Bois-Rochin; how M. de Guiche fired at it, and how, in fact, the furious brute dashed at De Guiche, killed his horse, and grievously wounded himself."

"And the king believed that?"

"Implicitly."

"Oh, you surprise me, Monsieur de Manicamp; you surprise me very much."

And Madame walked up and down the room, casting a searching look from time to time at Manicamp, who remained motionless and impassible in the same place. At last she stopped.

"And yet," she said, "every one here seems unanimous in giving another cause for this wound."

“What cause, Madame?” said Manicamp; “may I be permitted, without indiscretion, to ask your highness?”

“You ask such a question! You, M. de Guiche’s intimate friend, his confidant, indeed!”

“Oh, Madame! his intimate friend — yes; confidant — no. De Guiche is a man who can keep his own secrets, who has some of his own certainly, but who never breathes a syllable about them. De Guiche is discretion itself, Madame.”

“Very well, then; those secrets which M. de Guiche keeps so scrupulously, I shall have the pleasure of informing you of,” said the princess, almost spitefully; “for the king may possibly question you a second time, and if, on the second occasion, you were to repeat the same story to him, he possibly might not be very well satisfied with it.”

“But, Madame, I think your highness is mistaken with regard to the king. His majesty was perfectly satisfied with me, I assure you.”

“In that case, permit me to assure you, Monsieur de Manicamp, it only proves one thing, which is, that his majesty is very easily satisfied.”

“I think your highness is mistaken in arriving at such an opinion; his majesty is well known not to be contented except with very good reason.”

“And do you suppose that he will thank you for your officious falsehood, when he will learn to-morrow that M. de Guiche had, on behalf of his friend M. de Bragelonne, a quarrel which ended in a hostile meeting?”

“A quarrel on M. de Bragelonne’s account,” said Manicamp, with the most innocent expression in the world; “what does your royal highness do me the honor to tell me?”

“What is there astonishing in that? M. de Guiche is susceptible, irritable, and easily loses his temper.”

“On the contrary, Madame, I know M. de Guiche to be very patient, and never susceptible or irritable except upon very good grounds.”

“But is not friendship a just ground?” said the princess.

“Oh, certainly, Madame; and particularly for a heart like his.”

“Very good; you will not deny, I suppose, that M. de Bragelonne is M. de Guiche’s good friend?”

“A great friend.”

“Well, then, M. de Guiche has taken M. de Bragelonne’s part; and as M. de Bragelonne was absent and could not fight, he fought for him.”

Manicamp began to smile, and moved his head and shoulders very slightly, as much as to say, "Oh, if you will positively have it so — "

"But speak, at all events," said the princess, out of patience; "speak!"

"I?"

"Of course; it is quite clear you are not of my opinion, and that you have something to say."

"I have only one thing to say, Madame."

"Name it!"

"That I do not understand a single word of what you have just been telling me."

"What! — you do not understand a single word about M. de Guiche's quarrel with M. de Wardes," exclaimed the princess, almost out of temper.

Manicamp remained silent.

"A quarrel," she continued, "which arose out of a conversation scandalous in its tone and purport, and more or less well founded, respecting the virtue of a certain lady."

"Ah! of a certain lady, — this is quite another thing," said Manicamp.

"You begin to understand, do you not?"

"Your highness will excuse me, but I dare not — "

"You dare not," said Madame, exasperated; "very well, then, wait one moment, I will dare."

"Madame, Madame!" exclaimed Manicamp, as if in great dismay, "be careful of what you are going to say."

"It would seem, monsieur, that, if I happened to be a man, you would challenge me, notwithstanding his majesty's edicts, as Monsieur de Guiche challenged M. de Wardes; and that, too, on account of the virtue of Mademoiselle de la Valliere."

"Of Mademoiselle de la Valliere!" exclaimed Manicamp, starting backwards, as if that was the very last name he expected to hear pronounced.

"What makes you start in that manner, Monsieur de Manicamp?" said Madame, ironically; "do you mean to say you would be impertinent enough to suspect that young lady's honor?"

"Madame, in the whole course of this affair there has not been the slightest question of Mademoiselle de la Valliere's honor."

"What! when two men have almost blown each other's brains out on a woman's behalf, do you mean to say she has had nothing to do with the affair, and that her name has not been called in question at all? I did not think you so good a courtier, Monsieur de Manicamp."

"Pray forgive me, Madame," said the young man, "but we are very far from understanding one another. You do me the honor to speak one language while I am speaking altogether another."

"I beg your pardon, but I do not understand your meaning."

"Forgive me, then; but I fancied I understood your highness to remark that De Guiche and De Wardes had fought on Mademoiselle de la Valliere's account?"

"Certainly."

"On account of Mademoiselle de la Valliere, I think you said?" repeated Manicamp.

"I do not say that M. de Guiche personally took an interest in Mademoiselle de la Valliere, but I say that he did so as representing or acting on behalf of another."

"On behalf of another?"

"Come, do not always assume such a bewildered look. Does not every one here know that M. de Bragelonne is affianced to Mademoiselle de la Valliere, and that before he went on the mission with which the king intrusted him, he charged his friend M. de Guiche to watch over that interesting young lady?"

"There is nothing more for me to say, then. Your highness is well-informed."

"Of everything. I beg you to understand that clearly."

Manicamp began to laugh, which almost exasperated the princess, who was not, as we know, of a very patient disposition.

"Madame," resumed the discreet Manicamp, saluting the princess, "let us bury this affair altogether in forgetfulness, for it will probably never be quite cleared up."

"Oh, as far as that goes there is nothing more to do, and the information is complete. The king will learn that M. de Guiche has taken up the cause of this little adventuress, who gives herself all the airs of a grand lady; he will learn that Monsieur de Bragelonne, having nominated his friend M. de Guiche his guardian-in-ordinary, the latter immediately fastened, as he was required to do, upon the Marquis de Wardes, who ventured to trench upon his privileges. Moreover, you cannot pretend to deny, Monsieur Manicamp — you who know everything so well — that the king on his side casts a longing eye upon this famous treasure, and that he will bear no slight grudge against M. de Guiche for constituting himself its defender. Are you sufficiently well informed now, or do you require anything further? If so, speak, monsieur."

"No, Madame, there is nothing more I wish to know."

"Learn, however — for you ought to know it, Monsieur de Manicamp — learn that his majesty's indignation will be followed by terrible consequences. In princes of a similar temperament to that of his majesty, the passion which jealousy causes sweeps down like a whirlwind."

"Which you will temper, Madame."

"I!" exclaimed the princess, with a gesture of indescribable irony; "I! and by what title, may I ask?"

"Because you detest injustice, Madame."

"And according to your account, then, it would be an injustice to prevent the king arranging his love affairs as he pleases."

"You will intercede, however, in M. de Guiche's favor?"

"You are mad, monsieur," said the princess, in a haughty tone of voice.

"On the contrary, I am in the most perfect possession of my senses; and I repeat, you will defend M. de Guiche before the king."

"Why should I?"

"Because the cause of M. de Guiche is your own, Madame," said Manicamp, with ardor kindling in his eyes.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean, Madame, that, with respect to the defense which Monsieur de Guiche undertook in M. de Bragelonne's absence, I am surprised that your highness has not detected a pretext in La Valliere's name having been brought forward."

"A pretext? But a pretext for what?" repeated the princess, hesitatingly, for Manicamp's steady look had just revealed something of the truth to her.

"I trust, Madame," said the young man, "I have said sufficient to induce your highness not to overwhelm before his majesty my poor friend, De Guiche, against whom all the malevolence of a party bitterly opposed to your own will now be directed."

"You mean, on the contrary, I suppose, that all those who have no great affection for Mademoiselle de la Valliere, and even, perhaps, a few of those who have some regard for her, will be angry with the comte?"

“Oh, Madame! why will you push your obstinacy to such an extent, and refuse to open your ears and listen to the counsel of one whose devotion to you is unbounded? Must I expose myself to the risk of your displeasure, — am I really to be called upon to name, contrary to my own wish, the person who was the real cause of this quarrel?”

“The person?” said Madame, blushing.

“Must I,” continued Manicamp, “tell you how poor De Guiche became irritated, furious, exasperated beyond all control, at the different rumors now being circulated about this person? Must I, if you persist in this willful blindness, and if respect should continue to prevent me naming her, — must I, I repeat, recall to your recollection the various scenes which Monsieur had with the Duke of Buckingham, and the insinuations which were reported respecting the duke’s exile? Must I remind you of the anxious care the comte always took in his efforts to please, to watch, to protect that person for whom alone he lives, — for whom alone he breathes? Well! I will do so; and when I shall have made you recall all the particulars I refer to, you will perhaps understand how it happened that the comte, having lost all control over himself, and having been for some time past almost harassed to death by De Wardes, became, at the first disrespectful expression which the latter pronounced respecting the person in question, inflamed with passion, and panted only for an opportunity of avenging the affront.”

The princess concealed her face with her hands. “Monsieur, monsieur!” she exclaimed; “do you know what you are saying, and to whom you are speaking?”

“And so, Madame,” pursued Manicamp, as if he had not heard the exclamations of the princess, “nothing will astonish you any longer, — neither the comte’s ardor in seeking the quarrel, nor his wonderful address in transferring it to a quarter foreign to your own personal interests. That latter circumstance was, indeed, a marvelous instance of tact and perfect coolness, and if the person in whose behalf the comte so fought and shed his blood does, in reality, owe some gratitude to the poor wounded sufferer, it is not on account of the blood he has shed, or the agony he has suffered, but for the steps he has taken to preserve from comment or reflection an honor which is more precious to him than his own.”

“Oh!” cried Madame, as if she had been alone, “is it possible the quarrel was on my account!”

Manicamp felt he could now breathe for a moment — and gallantly had he won the right to do so. Madame, on her side, remained for some time plunged in a painful reverie. Her agitation could be seen by her quick respiration, by her drooping eyelids, by the frequency with which she pressed her hand upon her heart. But, in her, coquetry was not so much a passive quality, as, on the contrary, a fire which sought for fuel to maintain itself, finding anywhere and everywhere what it required.

"If it be as you assert," she said, "the comte will have obliged two persons at the same time; for Monsieur de Bragelonne also owes a deep debt of gratitude to M. de Guiche — and with far greater reason, indeed, because everywhere, and on every occasion, Mademoiselle de la Valliere will be regarded as having been defended by this generous champion."

Manicamp perceived that there still remained some lingering doubt in the princess's heart. "A truly admirable service, indeed," he said, "is the one he has rendered to Mademoiselle de la Valliere! A truly admirable service to M. de Bragelonne! The duel has created a sensation which, in some respects, casts a dishonorable suspicion upon that young girl; a sensation, indeed, which will embroil her with the vicomte. The consequence is that De Wardes's pistol-bullet has had three results instead of one; it destroys at the same time the honor of a woman, the happiness of a man, and, perhaps, it has wounded to death one of the best gentlemen in France. Oh, Madame! your logic is cold — even calculating; it always condemns — it never absolves."

Manicamp's concluding words scattered to the winds the last doubt which lingered, not in Madame's heart, but in her mind. She was no longer a princess full of scruples, nor a woman with her ever-returning suspicions, but one whose heart has just felt the mortal chill of a wound. "Wounded to death!" she murmured, in a faltering voice, "oh, Monsieur de Manicamp! did you not say, wounded to death?"

Manicamp returned no other answer than a deep sigh.

"And so you said that the comte is dangerously wounded?" continued the princess.

"Yes, Madame; one of his hands is shattered, and he has a bullet lodged in his breast."

"Gracious heavens!" resumed the princess, with a feverish excitement, "this is horrible! Monsieur de Manicamp! a hand shattered, do you say, and a bullet in his breast? And that coward! that wretch! that assassin, De Wardes, did it!"

Manicamp seemed overcome by a violent emotion. He had, in fact, displayed no little energy in the latter part of his speech. As for Madame, she entirely threw aside all regard for the formal observances of propriety society imposes; for when, with her, passion spoke in accents either of anger or sympathy, nothing could restrain her impulses. Madame approached Manicamp, who had subsided in a chair, as if his grief were a sufficiently powerful excuse for his infraction of the laws of etiquette. "Monsieur," she said, seizing him by the hand, "be frank with me."

Manicamp looked up.

"Is M. de Guiche in danger of death?"

"Doubly so, Madame," he replied; "in the first place on account of the hemorrhage which has taken place, an artery having been injured in the hand; and next, in consequence of the wound in his breast, which may, the doctor is afraid, at least, have injured some vital part."

"He may die, then?"

"Die, yes, Madame; and without even having had the consolation of knowing that you have been told of his devotion."

"You will tell him."

"I?"

"Yes; are you not his friend?"

"I? oh, no, Madame; I will only tell M. de Guiche — if, indeed, he is still in a condition to hear me — I will only tell him what I have seen; that is, your cruelty to him."

"Oh, monsieur, you will not be guilty of such barbarity!"

"Indeed, Madame, I shall speak the truth, for nature is very energetic in a man of his age. The physicians are clever men, and if, by chance, the poor comte should survive his wound, I should not wish him to die of a wound of the heart, after surviving one of the body." Manicamp rose, and with an expression of profoundest respect, seemed to be desirous of taking leave.

"At least, monsieur," said Madame, stopping him with almost a suppliant air, "you will be kind enough to tell me in what state your wounded friend is, and who is the physician who attends him?"

"As regards the state he is in, Madame, he is seriously ill; his physician is M. Valot, his majesty's private medical attendant. M. Valot is moreover assisted by a professional friend, to whose house M. de Guiche has been carried.”

“What! he is not in the chateau?” said Madame.

“Alas, Madame! the poor fellow was so ill, that he could not even be conveyed thither.”

“Give me the address, monsieur,” said the princess, hurriedly; “I will send to inquire after him.”

“Rue du Feurre; a brick-built house, with white outside blinds. The doctor’s name is on the door.”

“You are returning to your wounded friend, Monsieur de Manicamp?”

“Yes, Madame.”

“You will be able, then, to do me a service.”

“I am at your highness’s orders.”

“Do what you intended to do; return to M. de Guiche, send away all those whom you may find there, and have the kindness yourself to go away too.”

“Madame — ”

“Let us waste no time in useless explanations. Accept the fact as I present it to you; see nothing in it beyond what is really there, and ask nothing further than what I tell you. I am going to send one of my ladies, perhaps two, because it is now getting late; I do not wish them to see you, or rather I do not wish you to see them. These are scruples you can understand — you particularly, Monsieur de Manicamp, who seem capable of divining so much.”

“Oh, Madame, perfectly; I can even do better still, — I will precede, or rather walk, in advance of your attendants; it will, at the same time, be the means of showing them the way more accurately, and of protecting them, if occasion arises, though there is no probability of their needing protection.”

“And, by this means, then, they would be sure of entering without difficulty, would they not?”

“Certainly, Madame; for as I should be the first to pass, I thus remove any difficulties that might chance to be in the way.”

“Very well. Go, go, Monsieur de Manicamp, and wait at the bottom of the staircase.”

“I go at once, Madame.”

“Stay.”

Manicamp paused.

“When you hear the footsteps of two women descending the stairs, go out, and, without once turning round, take the road which leads to where the poor count is lying.”

“But if, by any mischance, two other persons were to descend, and I were to be mistaken?”

“You will hear one of the two clap her hands together softly. Go.”

Manicamp turned round, bowed once more, and left the room, his heart overflowing with joy. In fact, he knew very well that the presence of Madame herself would be the best balm to apply to his friend’s wounds. A quarter of an hour had hardly elapsed when he heard the sound of a door opened softly, and closed with like precaution. He listened to the light footfalls gliding down the staircase, and then heard the signal agreed upon. He immediately went out, and, faithful to his promise, bent his way, without once turning his head, through the streets of Fontainebleau, towards the doctor’s dwelling.

CHAPTER XXI.

M. Malicorne the Keeper of the Records of France.

Two women, their figures completely concealed by their mantles, and whose masks effectually hid the upper portion of their faces, timidly followed Manicamp's steps. On the first floor, behind curtains of red damask, the soft light of a lamp placed upon a low table faintly illumined the room, at the other extremity of which, on a large bedstead supported by spiral columns, around which curtains of the same color as those which deadened the rays of the lamp had been closely drawn, lay De Guiche, his head supported by pillows, his eyes looking as if the mists of death were gathering; his long black hair, scattered over the pillow, set off the young man's hollow temples. It was easy to see that fever was the chief tenant of the chamber. De Guiche was dreaming. His wandering mind was pursuing, through gloom and mystery, one of those wild creations delirium engenders. Two or three drops of blood, still liquid, stained the floor. Manicamp hurriedly ran up the stairs, but paused at the threshold of the door, looked into the room, and seeing that everything was perfectly quiet, he advanced towards the foot of the large leathern armchair, a specimen of furniture of the reign of Henry IV., and seeing that the nurse, as a matter of course, had dropped off to sleep, he awoke her, and begged her to pass into the adjoining room.

Then, standing by the side of the bed, he remained for a moment deliberating whether it would be better to awaken Guiche, in order to acquaint him with the good news. But, as he began to hear behind the door the rustling of silk dresses and the hurried breathing of his two companions, and as he already saw that the curtain screening the doorway seemed on the point of being impatiently drawn aside, he passed round the bed and followed the nurse into the next room. As soon as he had disappeared the curtain was raised, and his two female companions entered the room he had just left. The one who entered first made a gesture to her companion, which riveted her to the spot where she stood, close to the door, and then resolutely advanced towards the bed, drew back the curtains along the iron rod, and threw them in thick folds behind the head of the bed. She gazed upon the comte’s pallid face; remarked his right hand enveloped in linen whose dazzling whiteness was emphasized by the counterpane patterned with dark leaves thrown across the couch. She shuddered as she saw a stain of blood growing larger and larger upon the bandages. The young man’s breast was uncovered, as though for the cool night air to assist his respiration. A narrow bandage fastened the dressings of the wound, around which a purplish circle of extravasated blood was gradually increasing in size. A deep sigh broke from her lips. She leaned against one of the columns of the bed, and gazed, through the apertures in her mask, upon the harrowing spectacle before her. A hoarse harsh groan passed like a death-rattle through the comte’s clenched teeth. The masked lady seized his left hand, which scorched like burning coals. But at the very moment she placed her icy hand upon it, the action of the cold was such that De Guiche opened his eyes, and by a look in which revived intelligence was dawning, seemed as though struggling back again into existence. The first thing upon which he fixed his gaze was this phantom standing erect by his bedside. At that sight, his eyes became dilated, but without any appearance of consciousness in them. The lady thereupon made a sign to her companion, who had remained at the door; and in all probability the latter had already received her lesson, for in a clear tone of voice, and without any hesitation whatever, she pronounced these words: — ”Monsieur le comte, her royal highness Madame is desirous of knowing how you are able to bear your wound, and to express to you, by my lips, her great regret at seeing you suffer.”

As she pronounced the word Madame, Guiche started; he had not as yet remarked the person to whom the voice belonged, and he naturally turned towards the direction whence it preceded. But, as he felt the cold hand still resting on his own, he again turned towards the motionless figure beside him. “Was it you who spoke, madame?” he asked, in a weak voice, “or is there another person in beside you in the room?”

“Yes,” replied the figure, in an almost unintelligible voice, as she bent down her head.

“Well,” said the wounded man, with a great effort, “I thank you. Tell Madame that I no longer regret to die, since she has remembered me.”

At the words “to die,” pronounced by one whose life seemed to hang on a thread, the masked lady could not restrain her tears, which flowed under the mask, and appeared upon her cheeks just where the mask left her face bare.

If De Guiche had been in fuller possession of his senses, he would have seen her tears roll like glistening pearls, and fall upon his bed. The lady, forgetting that she wore her mask, raised her hand as though to wipe her eyes, and meeting the rough velvet, she tore away her mask in anger, and threw it on the floor. At the unexpected apparition before him, which seemed to issue from a cloud, De Guiche uttered a cry and stretched his arms towards her; but every word perished on his lips, and his strength seemed utterly abandoning him. His right hand, which had followed his first impulse, without calculating the amount of strength he had left, fell back again upon the bed, and immediately afterwards the white linen was stained with a larger spot than before. In the meantime, the young man's eyes became dim, and closed, as if he were already struggling with the messenger of death; and then, after a few involuntary movements, his head fell back motionless on his pillow; his face grew livid. The lady was frightened; but on this occasion, contrary to what is usually the case, fear attracted. She leaned over the young man, gazed earnestly, fixedly at his pale, cold face, which she almost touched, then imprinted a rapid kiss upon De Guiche's left hand, who, trembling as if an electric shock had passed through him, awoke a second time, opened his large eyes, incapable of recognition, and again fell into a state of complete insensibility. "Come," she said to her companion, "we must not remain here any longer; I shall be committing some folly or other."

"Madame, Madame, your highness is forgetting your mask!" said her vigilant companion.

"Pick it up," replied her mistress, as she tottered almost senseless towards the staircase, and as the outer door had been left only half-closed, the two women, light as birds, passed through it, and with hurried steps returned to the palace. One of them ascended towards Madame's apartments, where she disappeared; the other entered the rooms belonging to the maids of honor, namely, on the *entresol*, and having reached her own room, she sat down before a table, and without giving herself time even to breathe, wrote the following letter:

"This evening Madame has been to see M. de Guiche. Everything is going well on this side. See that your news is equally exemplary, and do not forget to burn this paper."

She folded the letter, and leaving her room with every possible precaution, crossed a corridor which led to the apartments appropriated to the gentlemen attached to Monsieur’s service. She stopped before a door, under which, having previously knocked twice in a short, quick manner, she thrust the paper, and fled. Then, returning to her own room, she removed every trace of her having gone out, and also of having written the letter. Amid the investigations she was so diligently pursuing she perceived on the table the mask which belonged to Madame, and which, according to her mistress’s directions, she had brought back but had forgotten to restore to her. “Oh, oh!” she said, “I must not forget to do to-morrow what I have forgotten to-day.”

And she took hold of the velvet mask by that part which covered the cheeks, and feeling that her thumb was wet, looked at it. It was not only wet, but reddened. The mask had fallen upon one of the spots of blood which, we have already said, stained the floor, and from that black velvet outside which had accidentally come into contact with it, the blood had passed through to the inside, and stained the white cambric lining. “Oh, oh!” said Montalais, for doubtless our readers have already recognized her by these various maneuvers, “I shall not give back this mask; it is far too precious now.”

And rising from her seat, she ran towards a box made of maple wood, which inclosed different articles of toilette and perfumery. “No, not here,” she said, “such a treasure must not be abandoned to the slightest chance of detection.”

Then, after a moment’s silence, and with a smile that was peculiarly her own, she added: — ”Beautiful mask, stained with the blood of that brave knight, you shall go and join that collection of wonders, La Valliere’s and Raoul’s letters, that loving collection, indeed, which will some day or other form part of the history of France, of European royalty. You shall be placed under M. Malicorne’s care,” said the laughing girl, as she began to undress herself, “under the protection of that worthy M. Malicorne,” she said, blowing out the taper, “who thinks he was born only to become the chief usher of Monsieur’s apartments, and whom I will make keeper of the records and historiographer of the house of Bourbon, and of the first houses in the kingdom. Let him grumble now, that discontented Malicorne,” she added, as she drew the curtains and fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Journey.

The next day being agreed upon for the departure, the king, at eleven o’clock precisely, descended the grand staircase with the two queens and Madame, in order to enter his carriage drawn by six horses, that were pawing the ground in impatience at the foot of the staircase. The whole court awaited the royal appearance in the *Fer-a-cheval* crescent, in their travelling costumes; the large number of saddled horses and carriages of ladies and gentlemen of the court, surrounded by their attendants, servants, and pages, formed a spectacle whose brilliancy could scarcely be equalled. The king entered his carriage with the two queens; Madame was in the same one with Monsieur. The maids of honor followed their example, and took their seats, two by two, in the carriages destined for them. The weather was exceedingly warm; a light breeze, which, early in the morning, all had thought would have proved sufficient to cool the air, soon became fiercely heated by the rays of the sun, although it was hidden behind the clouds, and filtered through the heated vapor which rose from the ground like a scorching wind, bearing particles of fine dust against the faces of the travelers. Madame was the first to complain of the heat. Monsieur’s only reply was to throw himself back in the carriage as though about to faint, and to inundate himself with scents and perfumes, uttering the deepest sighs all the while; whereupon Madame said to him, with her most amiable expression: — ”Really, Monsieur, I fancied that you would have been polite enough, on account of the terrible heat, to have left me my carriage to myself, and to have performed the journey yourself on horseback.”

“Ride on horseback!” cried the prince, with an accent of dismay which showed how little idea he had of adopting this unnatural advice; “you cannot suppose such a thing, Madame! My skin would peel off if I were to expose myself to such a burning breeze as this.”

Madame began to laugh.

“You can take my parasol,” she said.

"But the trouble of holding it!" replied Monsieur, with the greatest coolness; "besides, I have no horse."

"What, no horse?" replied the princess, who, if she did not secure the solitude she required, at least obtained the amusement of teasing. "No horse! You are mistaken, Monsieur; for I see your favorite bay out yonder."

"My bay horse!" exclaimed the prince, attempting to lean forward to look out of the door; but the movement he was obliged to make cost him so much trouble that he soon hastened to resume his immobility.

"Yes," said Madame; "your horse, led by M. de Malicorne."

"Poor beast," replied the prince; "how warm it must be!"

And with these words he closed his eyes, like a man on the point of death. Madame, on her side, reclined indolently in the other corner of the carriage, and closed her eyes also, not, however, to sleep, but to think more at her ease. In the meantime the king, seated in the front seat of his carriage, the back of which he had yielded up to the two queens, was a prey to that feverish contrariety experienced by anxious lovers, who, without being able to quench their ardent thirst, are ceaselessly desirous of seeing the loved object, and then go away partially satisfied, without perceiving they have acquired a more insatiable thirst than ever. The king, whose carriage headed the procession, could not from the place he occupied perceive the carriages of the ladies and maids of honor, which followed in a line behind it. Besides, he was obliged to answer the eternal questions of the young queen, who, happy to have with her "*her dear husband,*" as she called him in utter forgetfulness of royal etiquette, invested him with all her affection, stifled him with her attentions, afraid that some one might come to take him from her, or that he himself might suddenly take a fancy to quit her society. Anne of Austria, whom nothing at that moment occupied except the occasional cruel throbbings in her bosom, looked pleased and delighted, and although she perfectly realized the king's impatience, tantalizingly prolonged his sufferings by unexpectedly resuming the conversation at the very moment the king, absorbed in his own reflections, began to muse over his secret attachment. Everything seemed to combine — not alone the little teasing attentions of the queen, but also the queen-mother's interruptions — to make the king's position almost insupportable; for he knew not how to control the restless longings of his heart. At first, he complained of the heat — a complaint merely preliminary to others, but with sufficient tact to prevent Maria Theresa guessing his real object. Understanding the king's remark literally, she began to fan him with her ostrich plumes. But the heat passed away, and the king then complained of cramps and stiffness in his legs, and as the carriages at that moment stopped to change horses, the queen said: — ”Shall I get out with you? I too feel tired of sitting. We can walk on a little distance; the carriage will overtake us, and we can resume our places presently.”

The king frowned; it is a hard trial a jealous woman makes her husband submit to whose fidelity she suspects, when, although herself a prey to jealousy, she watches herself so narrowly that she avoids giving any pretext for an angry feeling. The king, therefore, in the present case, could not refuse; he accepted the offer, alighted from the carriage, gave his arm to the queen, and walked up and down with her while the horses were being changed. As he walked along, he cast an envious glance upon the courtiers, who were fortunate enough to be on horseback. The queen soon found out that the promenade she had suggested afforded the king as little pleasure as he had experienced from driving. She accordingly expressed a wish to return to her carriage, and the king conducted her to the door, but did not get in with her. He stepped back a few paces, and looked along the file of carriages for the purpose of recognizing the one in which he took so strong an interest. At the door of the sixth carriage he saw La Valliere’s fair countenance. As the king thus stood motionless, wrapt in thought, without perceiving that everything was ready, and that he alone was causing the delay, he heard a voice close beside him, addressing him in the most respectful manner. It was M. Malicorne, in a complete costume of an equerry, holding over his left arm the bridles of a couple of horses.

“Your majesty asked for a horse, I believe,” he said.

“A horse? Have you one of my horses here?” inquired the king, trying to remember the person who addressed him, and whose face was not as yet familiar to him.

“Sire,” replied Malicorne, “at all events I have a horse here which is at your majesty’s service.”

And Malicorne pointed at Monsieur’s bay horse, which Madame had observed. It was a beautiful creature royally caparisoned.

“This is not one of my horses, monsieur,” said the king.

“Sire, it is a horse out of his royal highness’s stables; but he does not ride when the weather is as hot as it is now.”

Louis did not reply, but approached the horse, which stood pawing the ground with its foot. Malicorne hastened to hold the stirrup for him, but the king was already in the saddle. Restored to good-humor by this lucky accident, the king hastened towards the queen's carriage, where he was anxiously expected; and notwithstanding Maria Theresa's thoughtful and preoccupied air, he said: "I have been fortunate enough to find this horse, and I intend to avail myself of it. I felt stifled in the carriage. Adieu, ladies."

Then bending gracefully over the arched neck of his beautiful steed, he disappeared in a second. Anne of Austria leaned forward, in order to look after him as he rode away; he did not get very far, for when he reached the sixth carriage, he reined in his horse suddenly and took off his hat. He saluted La Valliere, who uttered a cry of surprise as she saw him, blushing at the same time with pleasure. Montalais, who occupied the other seat in the carriage, made the king a most respectful bow. And then, with all the tact of a woman, she pretended to be exceedingly interested in the landscape, and withdrew herself into the left-hand corner. The conversation between the king and La Valliere began, as all lovers' conversations generally do, namely, by eloquent looks and by a few words utterly devoid of common sense. The king explained how warm he had felt in his carriage, so much so indeed that he could almost regard the horse he then rode as a blessing thrown in his way. "And," he added, "my benefactor is an exceedingly intelligent man, for he seemed to guess my thoughts intuitively. I have now only one wish, that of learning the name of the gentleman who so cleverly assisted his king out of his dilemma, and extricated him from his cruel position."

Montalais, during this colloquy, the first words of which had awakened her attention, had slightly altered her position, and contrived so as to meet the king's look as he finished his remark. It followed very naturally that the king looked inquiringly as much at her as at La Valliere; she had every reason to suppose that it was herself who was appealed to, and consequently might be permitted to answer. She therefore said: "Sire, the horse which your majesty is riding belongs to Monsieur, and was being led by one of his royal highness's gentlemen."

"And what is that gentleman's name, may I ask, mademoiselle?"

"M. de Malicorne, sire."

The name produced its usual effect, for the king repeated it smilingly.

“Yes, sire,” replied Aure. “Stay, it is the gentleman who is galloping on my left hand;” and she pointed out Malicorne, who, with a very sanctified expression, was galloping by the side of the carriage, knowing perfectly well that they were talking of him at that very moment, but sitting in his saddle as if he were deaf and dumb.

“Yes,” said the king, “that is the gentleman; I remember his face, and will not forget his name;” and the king looked tenderly at La Valliere.

Aure had now nothing further to do; she had let Malicorne’s name fall; the soil was good; all that was now left to be done was to let the name take root, and the event would bear fruit in due season. She consequently threw herself back in her corner, feeling perfectly justified in making as many agreeable signs of recognition as she liked to Malicorne, since the latter had had the happiness of pleasing the king. As will readily be believed, Montalais was not mistaken; and Malicorne, with his quick ear and his sly look, seemed to interpret her remark as “All goes on well,” the whole being accompanied by a pantomimic action, which he fancied conveyed something resembling a kiss.

“Alas! mademoiselle,” said the king, after a moment’s pause, “the liberty and freedom of the country is soon about to cease; your attendance on Madame will be more strictly enforced, and we shall see each other no more.”

“Your majesty is too much attached to Madame,” replied Louise, “not to come and see her very frequently; and whenever your majesty may chance to pass across the apartments — ”

“Ah!” said the king, in a tender voice, which was gradually lowered in its tone, “to perceive is not to see, and yet it seems that it would be quite sufficient for you.”

Louise did not answer a syllable; a sigh filled her heart almost to bursting, but she stifled it.

“You exercise a great control over yourself,” said the king to Louise, who smiled upon him with a melancholy expression. “Exert the strength you have in loving fondly,” he continued, “and I will bless Heaven for having bestowed it on you.”

La Valliere still remained silent, but raised her eyes, brimful of affection, toward the king. Louis, as if overcome by this burning glance, passed his hand across his forehead, and pressing the sides of his horse with his knees, made him bound several paces forward. La Valliere, leaning back in her carriage, with her eyes half closed, gazed fixedly upon the king, whose plumes were floating in the air; she could not but admire his graceful carriage, his delicate and nervous limbs which pressed his horse's sides, and the regular outline of his features, which his beautiful curling hair set off to great advantage, revealing occasionally his small and well-formed ear. In fact the poor girl was in love, and she reveled in her innocent affection. In a few moments the king was again by her side.

"Do you not perceive," he said, "how terribly your silence affects me? Oh! mademoiselle, how pitilessly inexorable you would become if you were ever to resolve to break off all acquaintance with any one; and then, too, I think you changeable; in fact — in fact, I dread this deep affection which fills my whole being."

"Oh! sire, you are mistaken," said La Valliere; "if ever I love, it will be for all my life."

"If you love, you say," exclaimed the king; "you do *not* love now, then?"

She hid her face in her hands.

"You see," said the king, "that I am right in accusing you; you must admit you are changeable, capricious, a coquette, perhaps."

"Oh, no! sire, be perfectly satisfied as to that. No, I say again; no, no!"

"Promise me, then, that to me you will always be the same."

"Oh! always, sire."

"That you will never show any of that severity which would break my heart, none of that fickleness of manner which would be worse than death to me."

"Oh! no, no."

"Very well, then! but listen. I like promises, I like to place under the guarantee of an oath, under the protection of Heaven, in fact, everything which interests my heart and my affections. Promise me, or rather swear to me, that if in the life we are about to commence, a life which will be full of sacrifice, mystery, anxiety, disappointment, and misunderstanding; swear to me that if we should in any way deceive, or misunderstand each other, or should judge each other unjustly, for that indeed would be criminal in love such as ours; swear to me, Louise — "

She trembled with agitation to the very depths of her heart; it was the first time she had heard her name pronounced in that manner by her royal lover. As for the king, taking off his glove, and placing his hand within the carriage, he continued: — "Swear, that never in all our quarrels will we allow one night even to pass by, if any misunderstanding should arise between us, without a visit, or at least a message, from either, in order to convey consolation and repose to the other."

La Valliere took her lover's burning hand between her own cool palms, and pressed it softly, until a movement of the horse, frightened by the proximity of the wheels, obliged her to abandon her happiness. She had vowed as he desired.

"Return, sire," she said, "return to the queen. I foresee a storm yonder, which threatens my peace of mind and yours."

Louis obeyed, saluted Mademoiselle de Montalais, and set off at a gallop to rejoin the queen. As he passed Monsieur's carriage, he observed that he was fast asleep, although Madame, on her part, was wide awake. As the king passed her she said, "What a beautiful horse, sire! Is it not Monsieur's bay horse?"

The young queen kindly asked, "Are you better now, sire?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

Triumfeminate.

On the king’s arrival in Paris, he sat at the council which had been summoned, and worked for a certain portion of the day. The queen remained with the queen-mother, and burst into tears as soon as she had taken leave of the king. “Ah, madame!” she said, “the king no longer loves me! What will become of me?”

“A husband always loves his wife when she is like you,” replied Anne of Austria.

“A time may come when he will love another woman instead of me.”

“What do you call loving?”

“Always thinking of a person — always seeking her society.”

“Do you happen to have remarked,” said Anne of Austria, “that the king has ever done anything of the sort?”

“No, madame,” said the young queen, hesitatingly.

“What is there to complain of, then, Marie?”

“You will admit that the king leaves me?”

“The king, my daughter, belongs to his people.”

“And that is the very reason why he no longer belongs to me; and that is the reason, too, why I shall find myself, as so many queens before me, forsaken and forgotten, whilst glory and honors will be reserved for others. Oh, my mother! the king is so handsome! how often will others tell him that they love him, and how much, indeed, they must do so!”

“It is very seldom, indeed, that women love the man in loving the king. But if such a thing happened, which I doubt, you would do better to wish, Marie, that such women should really love your husband. In the first place, the devoted love of a mistress is a rapid element of the dissolution of a lover’s affection; and then, by dint of loving, the mistress loses all influence over her lover, whose power of wealth she does not covet, caring only for his affection. Wish, therefore, that the king should love but lightly, and that his mistress should love with all her heart.”

“Oh, my mother, what power may not a deep affection exercise over him!”

“And yet you say you are resigned?”

“Quite true, quite true; I speak absurdly. There is a feeling of anguish, however, which I can never control.”

“And that is?”

“The king may make a happy choice — may find a home, with all the tender influences of home, not far from that we can offer him, — a home with children round him, the children of another woman. Oh, madame! I should die if I were but to see the king’s children.”

“Marie, Marie,” replied the queen-mother with a smile, and she took the young queen’s hand in her own, “remember what I am going to say, and let it always be a consolation to you: the king cannot have a Dauphin without *you*.”

With this remark the queen-mother quitted her daughter-in-law, in order to meet Madame, whose arrival in the grand cabinet had just been announced by one of the pages. Madame had scarcely taken time to change her dress. Her face revealed her agitation, which betrayed a plan, the execution of which occupied, while the result disturbed, her mind.

“I came to ascertain,” she said, “if your majesties are suffering any fatigue from our journey.”

“None at all,” said the queen-mother.

“A little,” replied Maria Theresa.

“I have suffered from annoyance more than anything else,” said Madame.

“How was that?” inquired Anne of Austria.

“The fatigue the king undergoes in riding about on horseback.”

“That does the king good.”

“And it was I who advised him,” said Maria Theresa, turning pale.

Madame said not a word in reply; but one of those smiles which were peculiarly her own flitted for a moment across her lips, without passing over the rest of her face; then, immediately changing the conversation, she continued, “We shall find Paris precisely the Paris we quitted; the same intrigues, plots, and flirtations going on.”

“Intrigues! What intrigues do you allude to?” inquired the queen-mother.

“People are talking a good deal about M. Fouquet and Madame Plessis-Belliere.”

“Who makes up the number to about ten thousand,” replied the queen-mother. “But what are the plots you speak of?”

“We have, it seems, certain misunderstandings with Holland to settle.”

“What about?”

“Monsieur has been telling me the story of the medals.”

“Oh!” exclaimed the young queen, “you mean those medals struck in Holland, on which a cloud is seen passing across the sun, which is the king’s device. You are wrong in calling that a plot — it is an insult.”

“But so contemptible that the king can well despise it,” replied the queen-mother. “Well, what are the flirtations which are alluded to? Do you mean that of Madame d’Olonne?”

“No, no; nearer ourselves than that.”

“*Casa de usted,*” murmured the queen-mother, and without moving her lips, in her daughter-in-law’s ear, without being overheard by Madame, who thus continued: — ”You know the terrible news?”

“Oh, yes; M. de Guiche’s wound.”

“And you attribute it, I suppose, as every one else does, to an accident which happened to him while hunting?”

“Yes, of course,” said both the queens together, their interest awakened.

Madame drew closer to them, as she said, in a low tone of voice, “It was a duel.”

“Ah!” said Anne of Austria, in a severe tone; for, in her ears, the word “duel,” which had been forbidden in France all the time she reigned over it, had a strange sound.

“A most deplorable duel, which has nearly cost Monsieur two of his best friends, and the king two of his best servants.”

“What was the cause of the duel?” inquired the young queen, animated by a secret instinct.

“Flirtation,” repeated Madame, triumphantly. “The gentlemen in question were conversing about the virtue of a particular lady belonging to the court. One of them thought that Pallas was a very second-rate person compared to her; the other pretended that the lady in question was an imitation of Venus alluring Mars; and thereupon the two gentlemen fought as fiercely as Hector and Achilles.”

“Venus alluring Mars?” said the young queen in a low tone of voice without venturing to examine into the allegory very deeply.

"Who is the lady?" inquired Anne of Austria abruptly. "You said, I believe, she was one of the ladies of honor?"

"Did I say so?" replied Madame.

"Yes; at least I thought I heard you mention it."

"Are you not aware that such a woman is of ill-omen to a royal house?"

"Is it not Mademoiselle de la Valliere?" said the queen-mother.

"Yes, indeed, that plain-looking creature."

"I thought she was affianced to a gentleman who certainly is not, at least so I have heard, either M. de Guiche or M. de Wardes?"

"Very possibly, madame."

The young queen took up a piece of tapestry, and began to broider with an affectation of tranquillity her trembling fingers contradicted.

"What were you saying about Venus and Mars?" pursued the queen-mother. "Is there a Mars also?"

"She boasts of that being the case."

"Did you say she boasts of it?"

"That was the cause of the duel."

"And M. de Guiche upheld the cause of Mars?"

"Yes, certainly; like the devoted servant he is."

"The devoted servant of whom?" exclaimed the young queen, forgetting her reserve in allowing her jealous feeling to escape.

"Mars, not to be defended except at the expense of Venus," replied Madame. "M. de Guiche maintained the perfect innocence of Mars, and no doubt affirmed that it was all a mere boast."

"And M. de Wardes," said Anne of Austria, quietly, "spread the report that Venus was within her rights, I suppose?"

"Oh, De Wardes," thought Madame, "you shall pay dearly for the wound you have given that noblest — best of men!" And she began to attack De Wardes with the greatest bitterness; thus discharging her own and De Guiche's debt, with the assurance that she was working the future ruin of her enemy. She said so much, in fact, that had Manicamp been there, he would have regretted he had shown such firm regard for his friend, inasmuch as it resulted in the ruin of his unfortunate foe.

"I see nothing in the whole affair but *one* cause of mischief, and that is La Valliere herself," said the queen-mother.

The young queen resumed her work with perfect indifference of manner, while Madame listened eagerly.

"I do not yet quite understand what you said just now about the danger of coquetry," resumed Anne of Austria.

"It is quite true," Madame hastened to say, "that if the girl had not been a coquette, Mars would not have thought at all about her."

The repetition of this word Mars brought a passing color to the queen's face; but she still continued her work.

"I will not permit that, in my court, gentlemen should be set against each other in this manner," said Anne of Austria, calmly. "Such manners were useful enough, perhaps, in days when the divided nobility had no other rallying-point than mere gallantry. At that time women, whose sway was absolute and undivided, were privileged to encourage men's valor by frequent trials of their courage. But now, thank Heaven, there is but one master in France, and to him every instinct of the mind, every pulse of the body are due. I will not allow my son to be deprived of any single one of his servants." And she turned towards the young queen, saying, "What is to be done with this La Valliere?"

"La Valliere?" said the queen, apparently surprised, "I do not even know the name;" and she accompanied this remark by one of those cold, fixed smiles only to be observed on royal lips.

Madame was herself a princess great in every respect, great in intelligence, great by birth, by pride; the queen's reply, however, completely astonished her, and she was obliged to pause for a moment in order to recover herself. "She is one of my maids of honor," she replied, with a bow.

"In that case," retorted Maria Theresa, in the same tone, "it is your affair, my sister, and not ours."

"I beg your pardon," resumed Anne of Austria, "it is my affair. And I perfectly well understand," she pursued, addressing a look full of intelligence at Madame, "Madame's motive for saying what she has just said."

"Everything which emanates from you, madame," said the English princess, "proceeds from the lips of Wisdom."

"If we send this girl back to her own family," said Maria Theresa, gently, "we must bestow a pension upon her."

"Which I will provide for out of my income," exclaimed Madame.

"No, no," interrupted Anne of Austria, "no disturbance, I beg. The king dislikes that the slightest disrespectful remark should be made of any lady. Let everything be done quietly. Will you have the kindness, Madame, to send for this girl here; and you, my daughter, will have the goodness to retire to your own room.”

The dowager queen’s entreaties were commands, and as Maria Theresa rose to return to her apartments, Madame rose in order to send a page to summon La Valliere.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The First Quarrel.

La Valliere entered the queen-mother's apartments without in the least suspecting that a serious plot was being concerted against her. She thought it was for something connected with her duties, and never had the queen-mother been unkind to her when such was the case. Besides, not being immediately under the control or direction of Anne of Austria, she could only have an official connection with her, to which her own gentleness of disposition, and the rank of the august princess, made her yield on every occasion with the best possible grace. She therefore advanced towards the queen-mother with that soft and gentle smile which constituted her principal charm, and as she did not approach sufficiently close, Anne of Austria signed to her to come nearer. Madame then entered the room, and with a perfectly calm air took her seat beside her mother-in-law, and continued the work which Maria Theresa had begun. When La Valliere, instead of the direction which she expected to receive immediately on entering the room, perceived these preparations, she looked with curiosity, if not with uneasiness, at the two princesses. Anne seemed full of thought, while Madame maintained an affectation of indifference that would have alarmed a less timid person even than Louise.

"Mademoiselle," said the queen-mother suddenly, without attempting to moderate or disguise her Spanish accent, which she never failed to do except when she was angry, "come closer; we were talking of you, as every one else seems to be doing."

"Of me!" exclaimed La Valliere, turning pale.

"Do you pretend to be ignorant of it; are you not aware of the duel between M. de Guiche and M. de Wardes?"

"Oh, madame! I heard of it yesterday," said La Valliere, clasping her hands together.

"And did you not foresee this quarrel?"

"Why should I, madame?"

“Because two men never fight without a motive, and because you must be aware of the motive which awakened the animosity of the two in question.”

“I am perfectly ignorant of it, madame.”

“A persevering denial is a very commonplace mode of defense, and you, who have great pretensions to be witty and clever, ought to avoid commonplaces. What else have you to say?”

“Oh! madame, your majesty terrifies me with your cold severity of manner; but I do not understand how I can have incurred your displeasure, or in what respect people concern themselves about me.”

“Then I will tell you. M. de Guiche has been obliged to undertake your defense.”

“My defense?”

“Yes. He is a gallant knight, and beautiful adventuresses like to see brave knights couch lances in their honor. But, for my part, I hate fields of battle, and above all I hate adventures, and — take my remark as you please.”

La Valliere sank at the queen’s feet, who turned her back upon her. She stretched out her hands towards Madame, who laughed in her face. A feeling of pride made her rise to her feet.

“I have begged your majesty to tell me what is the crime I am accused of — I can claim this at your hands; and I see I am condemned before I am even permitted to justify myself.”

“Eh! indeed,” cried Anne of Austria, “listen to her beautiful phrases, Madame, and to her fine sentiments; she is an inexhaustible well of tenderness and heroic expressions. One can easily see, young lady, that you have cultivated your mind in the society of crowned heads.”

La Valliere felt struck to the heart; she became, not whiter, but as white as a lily, and all her strength forsook her.

“I wished to inform you,” interrupted the queen, disdainfully, “that if you continue to nourish such feelings, you will humiliate us to such a degree that we shall be ashamed of appearing before you. Be simple in your manners. By the by, I am informed that you are affianced; is it the case?”

La Valliere pressed her hand over her heart, which was wrung with a fresh pang.

“Answer when you are spoken to!”

“Yes, madame.”

“To a gentleman?”

“Yes, madame.”

“His name?”

“The Vicomte de Bragelonne.”

“Are you aware that it is an exceedingly fortunate circumstance for you, mademoiselle, that such is the case, and without fortune or position, as you are, or without any very great personal advantages, you ought to bless Heaven for having procured you such a future as seems to be in store for you?”

La Valliere did not reply. “Where is the Vicomte de Bragelonne?” pursued the queen.

“In England,” said Madame, “where the report of this young lady’s success will not fail to reach him.”

“Oh, Heaven!” murmured La Valliere in despair.

“Very well, mademoiselle!” said Anne of Austria, “we will get this young gentleman to return, and send you away somewhere with him. If you are of a different opinion — for girls have strange views and fancies at times — trust to me, I will put you in a proper path again. I have done as much for girls who are not as good as you are, probably.”

La Valliere ceased to hear the queen, who pitilessly added: “I will send you somewhere, by yourself, where you will be able to indulge in a little serious reflection. Reflection calms the ardor of the blood, and swallows up the illusions of youth. I suppose you understand what I have been saying?”

“Madame!”

“Not a word?”

“I am innocent of everything your majesty supposes. Oh, madame! you are a witness of my despair. I love, I respect your majesty so much.”

“It would be far better not to respect me at all,” said the queen, with a chilling irony of manner. “It would be far better if you were not innocent. Do you presume to suppose that I should be satisfied simply to leave you unpunished if you had committed the fault?”

“Oh, madame! you are killing me.”

“No acting, if you please, or I will precipitate the *denouement* of this *play*; leave the room; return to your own apartment, and I trust my lesson may be of service to you.”

“Madame!” said La Valliere to the Duchess d’Orleans, whose hands she seized in her own, “do you, who are so good, intercede for me?”

"I!" replied the latter, with an insulting joy, "I — good! — Ah, mademoiselle, you think nothing of the kind;" and with a rude, hasty gesture she repulsed the young girl's grasp.

La Valliere, instead of giving way, as from her extreme pallor and her tears the two princesses possibly expected, suddenly resumed her calm and dignified air; she bowed profoundly, and left the room.

"Well!" said Anne of Austria to Madame, "do you think she will begin again?"

"I always suspect those gentle, patient characters," replied Madame. "Nothing is more full of courage than a patient heart, nothing more self-reliant than a gentle spirit."

"I feel I may almost venture to assure you she will think twice before she looks at the god Mars again."

"So long as she does not obtain the protection of his buckler I do not care," retorted Madame.

A proud, defiant look of the queen-mother was the reply to this objection, which was by no means deficient in finesse; and both of them, almost sure of their victory, went to look for Maria Theresa, who had been waiting for them with impatience.

It was about half-past six in the evening, and the king had just partaken of refreshment. He lost no time; but the repast finished, and business matters settled, he took Saint-Aignan by the arm, and desired him to lead the way to La Valliere's apartments. The courtier uttered an exclamation.

"Well, what is that for? It is a habit you will have to adopt, and in order to adopt a habit, one must make a beginning."

"Oh, sire!" said Saint-Aignan, "it is hardly possible: for every one can be seen entering or leaving those apartments. If, however, some pretext or other were made use of — if your majesty, for instance, would wait until Madame were in her own apartments — "

"No pretext; no delays. I have had enough of these impediments and mysteries; I cannot perceive in what respect the king of France dishonors himself by conversing with an amiable and clever girl. Evil be to him who evil thinks."

"Will your majesty forgive an excess of zeal on my part?"

"Speak freely."

"How about the queen?"

"True, true; I always wish the most entire respect to be shown to her majesty. Well, then, this evening only will I pay Mademoiselle de la Valliere a visit, and after to-day I will make use of any pretext you like. To-morrow we will devise all sorts of means; to-night I have no time."

Saint-Aignan made no reply; he descended the steps, preceding the king, and crossed the different courtyards with a feeling of shame, which the distinguished honor of accompanying the king did not remove. The reason was that Saint-Aignan wished to stand well with Madame, as well as with the queens, and also, that he did not, on the other hand, want to displease Mademoiselle de la Valliere: and in order to carry out so many promising affairs, it was difficult to avoid jostling against some obstacle or other. Besides, the windows of the young queen's rooms, those of the queen-mother's, and of Madame herself, looked out upon the courtyard of the maids of honor. To be seen, therefore, accompanying the king, would be effectually to quarrel with three great and influential princesses — whose authority was unbounded — for the purpose of supporting the ephemeral credit of a mistress. The unhappy Saint-Aignan, who had not displayed a very great amount of courage in taking La Valliere's part in the park of Fontainebleau, did not feel any braver in the broad day-light, and found a thousand defects in the poor girl which he was most eager to communicate to the king. But his trial soon finished, — the courtyards were crossed; not a curtain was drawn aside, nor a window opened. The king walked hastily, because of his impatience, and the long legs of Saint-Aignan, who preceded him. At the door, however, Saint-Aignan wished to retire, but the king desired him to remain; a delicate consideration, on the king's part, which the courtier could very well have dispensed with. He had to follow Louis into La Valliere's apartment. As soon as the king arrived the young girl dried her tears, but so precipitately that the king perceived it. He questioned her most anxiously and tenderly, and pressed her to tell him the cause of her emotion.

"Nothing is the matter, sire," she said.

"And yet you were weeping?"

"Oh, no, indeed, sire."

"Look, Saint-Aignan, and tell me if I am mistaken."

Saint-Aignan ought to have answered, but he was too much embarrassed.

"At all events your eyes are red, mademoiselle," said the king.

"The dust of the road merely, sire."

"No, no; you no longer possess the air of supreme contentment which renders you so beautiful and so attractive. You do not look at me. Why avoid my gaze?" he said, as she turned aside her head. "In Heaven's name, what is the matter?" he inquired, beginning to lose command over himself.

"Nothing at all, sire; and I am perfectly ready to assure your majesty that my mind is as free from anxiety as you could possibly wish."

"Your mind at ease, when I see you are embarrassed at the slightest thing. Has any one annoyed you?"

"No, no, sire."

"I insist upon knowing if such really be the case," said the prince, his eyes sparkling.

"No one, sire, no one has in any way offended me."

"In that case, pray resume your gentle air of gayety, or that sweet melancholy look which I so loved in you this morning; for pity's sake, do so."

"Yes, sire, yes."

The king tapped the floor impatiently with his foot, saying, "Such a change is positively inexplicable." And he looked at Saint-Aignan, who had also remarked La Valliere's peculiar lethargy, as well as the king's impatience.

It was futile for the king to entreat, and as useless for him to try to overcome her depression: the poor girl was completely overwhelmed, — the appearance of an angel would hardly have awakened her from her torpor.

The king saw in her repeated negative replies a mystery full of unkindness; he began to look round the apartment with a suspicious air. There happened to be in La Valliere's room a miniature of Athos. The king remarked that this portrait bore a strong resemblance to Bragelonne, for it had been taken when the count was quite a young man. He looked at it with a threatening air. La Valliere, in her misery far indeed from thinking of this portrait, could not conjecture the cause of the king's preoccupation. And yet the king's mind was occupied with a terrible remembrance, which had more than once taken possession of his mind, but which he had always driven away. He recalled the intimacy existing between the two young people from their birth, their engagement, and that Athos himself had come to solicit La Valliere's hand for Raoul. He therefore could not but suppose that on her return to Paris, La Valliere had found news from London awaiting her, and that this news had counterbalanced the influence he had been enabled to exert over her. He immediately felt himself stung, as it were, by feelings of the wildest jealousy; and again questioned her, with increased bitterness. La Valliere could not reply, unless she were to acknowledge everything, which would be to accuse the queen, and Madame also; and the consequence would be, that she would have to enter into an open warfare with these two great and powerful princesses. She thought within herself that as she made no attempt to conceal from the king what was passing in her own mind, the king ought to be able to read in her heart, in spite of her silence; and that, had he really loved her, he would have understood and guessed everything. What was sympathy, then, if not that divine flame which possesses the property of enlightening the heart, and of saving lovers the necessity of an expression of their thoughts and feelings? She maintained her silence, therefore, sighing, and concealing her face in her hands. These sighs and tears, which had at first distressed, then terrified Louis XIV., now irritated him. He could not bear opposition, — the opposition which tears and sighs exhibited, any more than opposition of any other kind. His remarks, therefore, became bitter, urgent, and openly aggressive in their nature. This was a fresh cause of distress for the poor girl. From that very circumstance, therefore, which she regarded as an injustice on her lover’s part, she drew sufficient courage to bear, not only her other troubles, but this one also.

The king next began to accuse her in direct terms. La Valliere did not even attempt to defend herself; she endured all his accusations without according any other reply than that of shaking her head; without any other remark than that which escapes the heart in deep distress — a prayerful appeal to Heaven for help. But this ejaculation, instead of calming the king’s displeasure, rather increased it. He, moreover, saw himself seconded by Saint-Aignan, for Saint-Aignan, as we have observed, having seen the storm increasing, and not knowing the extent of the regard of which Louis XIV. was capable, felt, by anticipation, all the collected wrath of the three princesses, and the near approach of poor La Valliere’s downfall, and he was not true knight enough to resist the fear that he himself might be dragged down in the impending ruin. Saint-Aignan did not reply to the king’s questions except by short, dry remarks, pronounced half-aloud; and by abrupt gestures, whose object was to make things worse, and bring about a misunderstanding, the result of which would be to free him from the annoyance of having to cross the courtyards in open day, in order to follow his illustrious companion to La Valliere's apartments. In the meantime the king's anger momentarily increased; he made two or three steps towards the door as if to leave the room, but returned. The young girl did not, however, raise her head, although the sound of his footsteps might have warned her that her lover was leaving her. He drew himself up, for a moment, before her, with his arms crossed.

"For the last time, mademoiselle," he said, "will you speak? Will you assign a reason for this change, this fickleness, for this caprice?"

"What can I say?" murmured La Valliere. "Do you not see, sire, that I am completely overwhelmed at this moment; that I have no power of will, or thought, or speech?"

"Is it so difficult, then, to speak the truth? You could have told me the whole truth in fewer words than those in which you have expressed yourself."

"But the truth about what, sire?"

"About everything."

La Valliere was just on the point of revealing the truth to the king, her arms made a sudden movement as if they were about to open, but her lips remained silent, and her hands again fell listlessly by her side. The poor girl had not yet endured sufficient unhappiness to risk the necessary revelation. "I know nothing," she stammered out.

"Oh!" exclaimed the king, "this is no longer mere coquetry, or caprice, it is treason."

And this time nothing could restrain him. The impulse of his heart was not sufficient to induce him to turn back, and he darted out of the room with a gesture full of despair. Saint-Aignan followed him, wishing for nothing better than to quit the place.

Louis XIV. did not pause until he reached the staircase, and grasping the balustrade, said: "You see how shamefully I have been duped."

"How, sire?" inquired the favorite.

"De Guiche fought on the Vicomte de Bragelonne's account, and this Bragelonne... oh! Saint-Aignan, she still loves him. I vow to you, Saint-Aignan, that if, in three days from now, there were to remain but an atom of affection for her in my heart, I should die from very shame." And the king resumed his way to his own apartments.

"I told your majesty how it would be," murmured Saint-Aignan, continuing to follow the king, and timidly glancing up at the different windows.

Unfortunately their return was not, like their arrival, unobserved. A curtain was suddenly drawn aside; Madame was behind it. She had seen the king leave the apartments of the maids of honor, and as soon as she observed that his majesty had passed, she left her own apartments with hurried steps, and ran up the staircase that led to the room the king had just left.

CHAPTER XXV.

Despair.

As soon as the king was gone La Valliere raised herself from the ground, and stretched out her arms, as if to follow and detain him, but when, having violently closed the door, the sound of his retreating footsteps could be heard in the distance, she had hardly sufficient strength left to totter towards and fall at the foot of her crucifix. There she remained, broken-hearted, absorbed, and overwhelmed by her grief, forgetful and indifferent to everything but her profound sorrow; — a grief she only vaguely realized — as though by instinct. In the midst of this wild tumult of thoughts, La Valliere heard her door open again; she started, and turned round, thinking it was the king who had returned. She was deceived, however, for it was Madame who appeared at the door. What did she now care for Madame! Again she sank down, her head supported by her *prie-Dieu* chair. It was Madame, agitated, angry, and threatening. But what was that to her? "Mademoiselle," said the princess, standing before La Valliere, "this is very fine, I admit, to kneel and pray, and make a pretense of being religious; but however submissive you may be in your address to Heaven, it is desirable that you should pay some little attention to the wishes of those who reign and rule here below."

La Valliere raised her head painfully in token of respect.

"Not long since," continued Madame, "a certain recommendation was addressed to you, I believe."

La Valliere's fixed and wild gaze showed how complete her forgetfulness or ignorance was.

"The queen recommended you," continued Madame, "to conduct yourself in such a manner that no one could be justified in spreading any reports about you."

La Valliere darted an inquiring look towards her.

"I will not," continued Madame, "allow my household, which is that of the first princess of the blood, to set an evil example to the court; you would be the cause of such an example. I beg you to understand, therefore, in the absence of any witness of your shame — for I do not wish to humiliate you — that you are from this moment at perfect liberty to leave, and that you can return to your mother at Blois.”

La Valliere could not sink lower, nor could she suffer more than she had already suffered. Her countenance did not even change, but she remained kneeling with her hands clasped, like the figure of the Magdalen.

“Did you hear me?” said Madame.

A shiver, which passed through her whole frame, was La Valliere’s only reply. And as the victim gave no other signs of life, Madame left the room. And then, her very respiration suspended, and her blood almost congealed, as it were, in her veins, La Valliere by degrees felt that the pulsation of her wrists, her neck, and temples, began to throb more and more painfully. These pulsations, as they gradually increased, soon changed into a species of brain fever, and in her temporary delirium she saw the figures of her friends contending with her enemies, floating before her vision. She heard, too, mingled together in her deafened ears, words of menace and words of fond affection; she seemed raised out of her existence as though it were upon the wings of a mighty tempest, and in the dim horizon of the path along which her delirium hurried her, she saw the stone which covered her tomb upraised, and the grim, appalling texture of eternal night revealed to her distracted gaze. But the horror of the dream which possessed her senses faded away, and she was again restored to the habitual resignation of her character. A ray of hope penetrated her heart, as a ray of sunlight streams into the dungeon of some unhappy captive. Her mind reverted to the journey from Fontainebleau, she saw the king riding beside her carriage, telling her that he loved her, asking for her love in return, requiring her to swear, and himself to swear too, that never should an evening pass by, if ever a misunderstanding were to arise between them, without a visit, a letter, a sign of some kind, being sent, to replace the troubled anxiety of the evening with the calm repose of the night. It was the king who had suggested that, who had imposed a promise on her, and who had sworn to it himself. It was impossible, therefore, she reasoned, that the king should fail in keeping the promise which he had himself exacted from her, unless, indeed, Louis was a despot who enforced love as he enforced obedience; unless, too, the king were so indifferent that the first obstacle in his way was sufficient to arrest his further progress. The king, that kind protector, who by a word, a single word, could relieve her distress of mind, the king even joined her persecutors. Oh! his anger could not possibly last. Now that he was alone, he would be suffering all that she herself was a prey to. But he was not tied hand and foot as she was; he could act, could move about, could come to her, while she could do nothing but wait. And the poor girl waited and waited, with breathless anxiety — for she could not believe it possible that the king would not come.

It was now about half-past ten. He would either come to her, or write to her, or send some kind word by M. de Saint-Aignan. If he were to come, oh! how she would fly to meet him; how she would thrust aside that excess of delicacy which she now discovered was misunderstood; how eagerly she would explain: “It is not I who do not love you — it is the fault of others who will not allow me to love you.” And then it must be confessed that she reflected upon it, and also the more she reflected, Louis appeared to her to be less guilty. In fact, he was ignorant of everything. What must he have thought of the obstinacy with which she remained silent? Impatient and irritable as the king was known to be, it was extraordinary that he had been able to preserve his temper so long. And yet, had it been her own case, she undoubtedly would not have acted in such a manner; she would have understood — have guessed everything. Yes, but she was nothing but a poor simple-minded girl, and not a great and powerful monarch. Oh! if he would but come, if he would but come! — how eagerly she would forgive him for all he had just made her suffer! how much more tenderly she would love him because she had so cruelly suffered! And so she sat, with her head bent forward in eager expectation towards the door, her lips slightly parted, as if — and Heaven forgive her for the mental exclamation! — they were awaiting the kiss which the king’s lips had in the morning so sweetly indicated, when he pronounced the word *love!* If the king did not come, at least he would write; it was a second chance; a chance less delightful certainly than the other, but which would show an affection just as strong, only more timid in its nature. Oh! how she would devour his letter, how eager she would be to answer it! and when the messenger who had brought it had left her, how she would kiss it, read it over and over again, press to her heart the lucky paper which would have brought her ease of mind, tranquillity, and perfect happiness. At all events, if the king did not come, if the king did not write, he could not do otherwise than send Saint-Aignan, or Saint-Aignan could not do otherwise than come of his own accord. Even if it were a third person, how openly she would speak to him; the royal presence would not be there to freeze her words upon her tongue, and then no suspicious feeling would remain a moment longer in the king's heart.

Everything with La Valliere, heart and look, body and mind, was concentrated in eager expectation. She said to herself that there was an hour left in which to indulge hope; that until midnight struck, the king might come, or write or send; that at midnight only would every expectation vanish, every hope be lost. Whenever she heard any stir in the palace, the poor girl fancied she was the cause of it; whenever she heard any one pass in the courtyard below she imagined they were messengers of the king coming to her. Eleven o'clock struck, then a quarter-past eleven; then half-past. The minutes dragged slowly on in this anxiety, and yet they seemed to pass too quickly. And now, it struck a quarter to twelve. Midnight — midnight was near, the last, the final hope that remained. With the last stroke of the clock, the last ray of light seemed to fade away; and with the last ray faded her final hope. And so, the king himself had deceived her; it was he who had been the first to fail in keeping the oath which he had sworn that very day; twelve hours only between his oath and his perjured vow; it was not long, alas! to have preserved the illusion. And so, not only did the king not love her, but he despised her whom every one ill-treated, he despised her to the extent even of abandoning her to the shame of an expulsion which was equivalent to having an ignominious sentence passed on her; and yet, it was he, the king himself, who was the first cause of this ignominy. A bitter smile, the only symptom of anger which during this long conflict had passed across the angelic face, appeared upon her lips. What, in fact, now remained on earth for her, after the king was lost to her? Nothing. But Heaven still remained, and her thoughts flew thither. She prayed that the proper course for her to follow might be suggested. "It is from Heaven," she thought, "that I expect everything; it is from Heaven I ought to expect everything." And she looked at her crucifix with a devotion full of tender love. "There," she said, "hangs before me a Master who never forgets and never abandons those who neither forget nor abandon Him; it is to Him alone that we must sacrifice ourselves." And, thereupon, could any one have gazed into the recesses of that chamber, they would have seen the poor despairing girl adopt a final resolution, and determine upon one last plan in her mind. Then, as her knees were no longer able to support her, she gradually sank down upon the *prie-Dieu*, and with her head pressed against the wooden cross, her eyes fixed, and her respiration short and quick, she watched for the earliest rays of approaching daylight. At two o’clock in the morning she was still in the same bewilderment of mind, or rather the same ecstasy of feeling. Her thoughts had almost ceased to hold communion with things of the world. And when she saw the pale violet tints of early dawn visible over the roofs of the palace, and vaguely revealing the outlines of the ivory crucifix which she held embraced, she rose from the ground with a new-born strength, kissed the feet of the divine martyr, descended the staircase leading from the room, and wrapped herself from head to foot in a mantle as she went along. She reached the wicket at the very moment the guard of the musketeers opened the gate to admit the first relief-guard belonging to one of the Swiss regiments. And then, gliding behind the soldiers, she reached the street before the officer in command of the patrol had even thought of asking who the young girl was who was making her escape from the palace at so early an hour.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The Flight.

La Valliere followed the patrol as it left the courtyard. The patrol bent its steps towards the right, by the Rue St. Honore, and mechanically La Valliere turned to the left. Her resolution was taken — her determination fixed; she wished to betake herself to the convent of the Carmelites at Chaillot, the superior of which enjoyed a reputation for severity which made the worldly-minded people of the court tremble. La Valliere had never seen Paris, she had never gone out on foot, and so would have been unable to find her way even had she been in a calmer frame of mind than was then the case; and this may explain why she ascended, instead of descending, the Rue St. Honore. Her only thought was to get away from the Palais Royal, and this she was doing; she had heard it said that Chaillot looked out upon the Seine, and she accordingly directed her steps towards the Seine. She took the Rue de Coq, and not being able to cross the Louvre, bore towards the church of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, proceeding along the site of the colonnade which was subsequently built there by Perrault. In a very short time she reached the quays. Her steps were rapid and agitated; she scarcely felt the weakness which reminded her of having sprained her foot when very young, and which obliged her to limp slightly. At any other hour in the day her countenance would have awakened the suspicions of the least clear-sighted, attracted the attention of the most indifferent. But at half-past two in the morning, the streets of Paris are almost, if not quite, deserted, and scarcely is any one to be seen but the hard-working artisan on his way to earn his daily bread or the roistering idlers of the streets, who are returning to their homes after a night of riot and debauchery; for the former the day was beginning, and for the latter it was just closing. La Valliere was afraid of both faces, in which her ignorance of Parisian types did not permit her to distinguish the type of probity from that of dishonesty. The appearance of misery alarmed her, and all she met seemed either vile or miserable. Her dress, which was the same she had worn during the previous evening, was elegant even in its careless disorder; for it was the one in which she had presented herself to the queen-mother; and, moreover, when she drew aside the mantle which covered her face, in order to enable her to see the way she was going, her pallor and her beautiful eyes spoke an unknown language to the men she met, and, unconsciously, the poor fugitive seemed to invite the brutal remarks of the one class, or to appeal to the compassion of the other. La Valliere still walked on in the same way, breathless and hurried, until she reached the top of the Place de Greve. She stopped from time to time, placed her hand upon her heart, leaned against a wall until she could breathe freely again, and then continued on her course more rapidly than before. On reaching the Place de Greve La Valliere suddenly came upon a group of three drunken men, reeling and staggering along, who were just leaving a boat which they had made fast to the quay; the boat was freighted with wines, and it was apparent that they had done ample justice to the merchandise. They were celebrating their convivial exploits in three different keys, when suddenly, as they reached the end of the railing leading down to the quay, they found an obstacle in their path, in the shape of this young girl. La Valliere stopped; while they, on their part, at the appearance of the young girl dressed in court costume, also halted, and seizing each other by the hand, they surrounded La Valliere, singing, —

“Oh! all ye weary wights, who mope alone, Come drink, and sing and laugh, round Venus’ throne.”

La Valliere at once understood that the men were insulting her, and wished to prevent her passing; she tried to do so several times, but her efforts were useless. Her limbs failed her; she felt she was on the point of falling, and uttered a cry of terror. At the same moment the circle which surrounded her was suddenly broken through in a most violent manner. One of her insulters was knocked to the left, another fell rolling over and over to the right, close to the water’s edge, while the third could hardly keep his feet. An officer of the musketeers stood face to face with the young girl, with threatening brow and hand raised to carry out his threat. The drunken fellows, at sight of the uniform, made their escape with what speed their staggering limbs could lend them, all the more eagerly for the proof of strength which the wearer of the uniform had just afforded them.

“Is it possible,” exclaimed the musketeer, “that it can be Mademoiselle de la Valliere?”

La Valliere, bewildered by what had just happened, and confounded by hearing her name pronounced, looked up and recognized D’Artagnan. “Oh,

M. d'Artagnan! it is indeed I;" and at the same moment she seized his arm. "You will protect me, will you not?" she added, in a tone of entreaty.

"Most certainly I will protect you; but, in Heaven's name, where are you going at this hour?"

"I am going to Chaillot."

"You are going to Chaillot by way of La Rapee! why, mademoiselle, you are turning your back upon it."

"In that case, monsieur, be kind enough to put me in the right way, and to go with me a short distance."

"Most willingly."

"But how does it happen that I have found you here? By what merciful intervention were you sent to my assistance? I almost seem to be dreaming, or to be losing my senses."

"I happened to be here, mademoiselle, because I have a house in the Place de Greve, at the sign of the Notre-Dame, the rent of which I went to receive yesterday, and where I, in fact, passed the night. And I also wished to be at the palace early, for the purposes of inspecting my posts."

"Thank you," said La Valliere.

"That is what *I* was doing," said D'Artagnan to himself; "but what is *she* doing, and why is she going to Chaillot at such an hour?" And he offered her his arm, which she took, and began to walk with increased precipitation, which ill-concealed, however, her weakness. D'Artagnan perceived it, and proposed to La Valliere that she should take a little rest, which she refused.

"You are ignorant, perhaps, where Chaillot is?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"Quite so."

"It is a great distance."

"That matters very little."

"It is at least a league."

"I can walk it."

D'Artagnan did not reply; he could tell, merely by the tone of a voice, when a resolution was real or not. He rather bore along rather than accompanied La Valliere, until they perceived the elevated ground of Chaillot.

"What house are you going to, mademoiselle?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"To the Carmelites, monsieur."

"To the Carmelites?" repeated D'Artagnan, in amazement.

“Yes; and since Heaven has directed you towards me to give me your support on my road, accept both my thanks and my adieux.”

“To the Carmelites! Your adieux! Are you going to become a nun?” exclaimed D’Artagnan.

“Yes, monsieur.”

“What, you!!!” There was in this “you,” which we have marked by three notes of exclamation in order to render it as expressive as possible, — there was, we repeat, in this “you” a complete poem; it recalled to La Valliere her old recollections of Blois, and her new recollections of Fontainebleau; it said to her, “*You*, who might be happy with Raoul; *you*, who might be powerful with Louis; *you* about to become a nun!”

“Yes, monsieur,” she said, “I am going to devote myself to the service of Heaven; and to renounce the world entirely.”

“But are you not mistaken with regard to your vocation, — are you not mistaken in supposing it to be the will of Heaven?”

“No, since Heaven has been pleased to throw you in my way. Had it not been for you, I should certainly have sunk from fatigue on the road, and since Heaven, I repeat, has thrown you in my way, it is because it has willed that I should carry out my intention.”

“Oh!” said D’Artagnan, doubtingly, “that is a rather subtle distinction, I think.”

“Whatever it may be,” returned the young girl, “I have acquainted you with the steps I have taken, and with my fixed resolution. And, now, I have one last favor to ask of you, even while I return you my thanks. The king is entirely ignorant of my flight from the Palais Royal, and is ignorant also of what I am about to do.”

“The king ignorant, you say!” exclaimed D’Artagnan. “Take care, mademoiselle; you are not aware of what you are doing. No one ought to do anything with which the king is unacquainted, especially those who belong to the court.”

“I no longer belong to the court, monsieur.”

D’Artagnan looked at the young girl with increasing astonishment.

“Do not be uneasy, monsieur,” she continued: “I have well calculated everything; and were it not so, it would now be too late to reconsider my resolution, — all is decided.”

“Well, mademoiselle, what do you wish me to do?”

"In the name of that sympathy which misfortune inspires, by your generous feeling, and by your honor as a gentleman, I entreat you to promise me one thing."

"Name it."

"Swear to me, Monsieur d'Artagnan, that you will not tell the king that you have seen me, and that I am at the Carmelites."

"I will not swear that," said D'Artagnan, shaking his head.

"Why?"

"Because I know the king, I know you, I know myself even, nay, the whole human race, too well; no, no, I will not swear that!"

"In that case," cried La Valliere, with an energy of which one would hardly have thought her capable, "instead of the blessing which I should have implored for you until my dying day, I will invoke a curse, for you are rendering me the most miserable creature that ever lived."

We have already observed that D'Artagnan could easily recognize the accents of truth and sincerity, and he could not resist this last appeal. He saw by her face how bitterly she suffered from a feeling of degradation, he remarked her trembling limbs, how her whole slight and delicate frame was violently agitated by some internal struggle, and clearly perceived that resistance might be fatal. "I will do as you wish, then," he said. "Be satisfied, mademoiselle, I will say nothing to the king."

"Oh! thanks, thanks," exclaimed La Valliere, "you are the most generous man breathing."

And in her extreme delight she seized hold of D'Artagnan's hands and pressed them between her own. D'Artagnan, who felt himself quite overcome, said: "This is touching, upon my word; she begins where others leave off."

And La Valliere, who, in the bitterness of her distress, had sunk upon the ground, rose and walked towards the convent of the Carmelites, which could now, in the dawning light, be perceived just before them. D'Artagnan followed her at a distance. The entrance-door was half-open; she glided in like a shadow, and thanking D'Artagnan by a parting gesture, disappeared from his sight. When D'Artagnan found himself quite alone, he reflected very profoundly upon what had just taken place. "Upon my word," he said, "this looks very much like what is called a false position. To keep such a secret as that, is to keep a burning coal in one's breeches-pocket, and trust that it may not burn the stuff. And yet, not to keep it when I have sworn to do so is dishonorable. It generally happens that some bright idea or other occurs to me as I am going along; but I am very much mistaken if I shall not, now, have to go a long way in order to find the solution of this affair. Yes, but which way to go? Oh! towards Paris, of course; that is the best way, after all. Only one must make haste, and in order to make haste four legs are better than two, and I, unhappily, only have two. 'A horse, a horse,' as I heard them say at the theatre in London, 'my kingdom for a horse!' And now I think of it, it need not cost me so much as that, for at the Barriere de la Conference there is a guard of musketeers, and instead of the one horse I need, I shall find ten there."

So, in pursuance of this resolution, which he adopted with his usual rapidity, D'Artagnan immediately turned his back upon the heights of Chaillot, reached the guard-house, took the fastest horse he could find there, and was at the palace in less than ten minutes. It was striking five as he reached the Palais Royal. The king, he was told, had gone to bed at his usual hour, having been long engaged with M. Colbert, and, in all probability, was still sound asleep. "Come," said D'Artagnan, "she spoke the truth; the king is ignorant of everything; if he only knew one-half of what has happened, the Palais Royal by this time would be turned upside down."

CHAPTER XXVII.

Showing How Louis, on His Part, Had Passed the Time from Ten to Half-Past Twelve at Night.

When the king left the apartments of the maids of honor, he found Colbert awaiting him to take directions for the next day's ceremony, as the king was then to receive the Dutch and Spanish ambassadors. Louis XIV. had serious causes of dissatisfaction with the Dutch; the States had already been guilty of many mean shifts and evasions with France, and without perceiving or without caring about the chances of a rupture, they again abandoned the alliance with his Most Christian Majesty, for the purpose of entering into all kinds of plots with Spain. Louis XIV. at his accession, that is to say, at the death of Cardinal Mazarin, had found this political question roughly sketched out; the solution was difficult for a young man, but as, at that time, the king represented the whole nation, anything that the head resolved upon, the body would be found ready to carry out. Any sudden impulse of anger, the reaction of young hot blood upon the brain, would be quite sufficient to change an old form of policy and create another system altogether. The part that diplomatists had to play in those days was that of arranging among themselves the different *coups-d'etat* which their sovereign masters might wish to effect. Louis was not in that calm frame of mind which was necessary to enable him to determine on a wise course of policy. Still much agitated from the quarrel he had just had with La Valliere, he walked hastily into his cabinet, dimly desirous of finding an opportunity of producing an explosion after he had controlled himself for so long a time. Colbert, as he saw the king enter, knew the position of affairs at a glance, understood the king's intentions, and resolved therefore to maneuver a little. When Louis requested to be informed what it would be necessary to say on the morrow, Colbert began by expressing his surprise that his majesty had not been properly informed by M. Fouquet. "M. Fouquet," he said, "is perfectly acquainted with the whole of this Dutch affair — he received the dispatches himself direct."

The king, who was accustomed to hear M. Colbert speak in not over-scrupulous terms of M. Fouquet, allowed this remark to pass unanswered, and merely listened. Colbert noticed the effect it had produced, and hastened to back out, saying that M. Fouquet was not on all occasions as blamable as at the first glance might seem to be the case, inasmuch as at that moment he was greatly occupied. The king looked up. "What do you allude to?" he said.

"Sire, men are but men, and M. Fouquet has his defects as well as his great qualities."

"Ah! defects, who is without them, M. Colbert?"

"Your majesty, hardly," said Colbert, boldly; for he knew how to convey a good deal of flattery in a light amount of blame, like the arrow which cleaves the air notwithstanding its weight, thanks to the light feathers which bear it up.

The king smiled. "What defect has M. Fouquet, then?" he said.

"Still the same, sire; it is said he is in love."

"In love! with whom?"

"I am not quite sure, sire; I have very little to do with matters of gallantry."

"At all events you know, since you speak of it."

"I have heard a name mentioned."

"Whose?"

"I cannot now remember whose, but I think it is one of Madame's maids of honor."

The king started. "You know more than you like to say, M. Colbert," he murmured.

"I assure you, no, sire."

"At all events, Madame's maids of honor are all known, and in mentioning their names to you, you will perhaps recollect the one you allude to."

"No, sire."

"At least, try."

"It would be useless, sire. Whenever the name of any lady who runs the risk of being compromised is concerned, my memory is like a coffer of bronze, the key of which I have lost."

A dark cloud seemed to pass over the mind as well as across the face of the king; then, wishing to appear as if he were perfect master of himself and his feelings, he said, “And now for the affair concerning Holland.”

“In the first place, sire, at what hour will your majesty receive the ambassadors?”

“Early in the morning.”

“Eleven o’clock?”

“That is too late — say nine o’clock.”

“That will be too early, sire.”

“For friends, that would be a matter of no importance; one does what one likes with one’s friends; but for one’s enemies, in that case nothing could be better than if they *were* to feel hurt. I should not be sorry, I confess, to have to finish altogether with these marsh-birds, who annoy me with their cries.”

“It shall be precisely as your majesty desires. At nine o’clock, therefore — I will give the necessary orders. Is it to be a formal audience?”

“No. I wish to have an explanation with them, and not to embitter matters, as is always the case when many persons are present, but, at the same time, I wish to clear up everything with them, in order not to have to begin over again.”

“Your majesty will inform me of the persons whom you wish to be present at the reception.”

“I will draw out a list. Let us speak of the ambassadors; what do they want?”

“Allies with Spain, they gain nothing; allies with France, they lose much.”

“How is that?”

“Allied with Spain, they see themselves bounded and protected by the possessions of their allies; they cannot touch them, however anxious they may be to do so. From Antwerp to Rotterdam is but a step, and that by the way of the Scheldt and the Meuse. If they wish to make a bite at the Spanish cake, you, sire, the son-in-law of the king of Spain, could with your cavalry sweep the earth from your dominions to Brussels in a couple of days. Their design is, therefore, only to quarrel so far with you, and only to make you suspect Spain so far, as will be sufficient to induce you not to interfere with their own affairs.”

“It would be far more simple, I should imagine,” replied the king, “to form a solid alliance with me, by means of which I should gain something, while they would gain everything.”

"Not so; for if, by chance, they were to have you, or France rather, as a boundary, your majesty is not an agreeable neighbor. Young, ardent, warlike, the king of France might inflict some serious mischief on Holland, especially if he were to get near her."

"I perfectly understand, M. Colbert, and you have explained it very clearly; but be good enough to tell me the conclusion you have arrived at."

"Your majesty's own decisions are never deficient in wisdom."

"What will these ambassadors say to me?"

"They will tell your majesty that they are ardently desirous of forming an alliance with you, which will be a falsehood: they will tell Spain that the three powers ought to unite so as to check the prosperity of England, and that will equally be a falsehood; for at present, the natural ally of your majesty is England, who has ships while we have none; England, who can counteract Dutch influence in India; England, in fact, a monarchical country, to which your majesty is attached by ties of relationship."

"Good; but how would you answer?"

"I should answer, sire, with the greatest possible moderation of tone, that the disposition of Holland does not seem friendly towards the Court of France; that the symptoms of public feeling among the Dutch are alarming as regards your majesty; that certain medals have been struck with insulting devices."

"Towards me?" exclaimed the young king, excitedly.

"Oh, no! sire, no; insulting is not the word; I was mistaken, I ought to have said immeasurably flattering to the Dutch."

"Oh! if that be so, the pride of the Dutch is a matter of indifference to me," said the king, sighing.

"Your majesty is right, a thousand times right. However, it is never a mistake in politics, your majesty knows better than myself, to exaggerate a little in order to obtain a concession in your own favor. If your majesty were to complain as if your susceptibility were offended, you would stand in a far higher position with them."

"What are these medals you speak of?" inquired Louis; "for if I allude to them, I ought to know what to say."

"Upon my word, sire, I cannot very well tell you — some overweeningly conceited device — that is the sense of it; the words have little to do with the thing itself."

"Very good! I will mention the word 'medal,' and they can understand it if they like."

"Oh! they will understand without any difficulty. Your majesty can also slip in a few words about certain pamphlets which are being circulated."

"Never! Pamphlets befoul those who write them much more than those against whom they are written. M. Colbert, I thank you. You can leave now. Do not forget the hour I have fixed, and be there yourself."

"Sire, I await your majesty's list."

"True," returned the king; and he began to meditate; he had not thought of the list in the least. The clock struck half-past eleven. The king's face revealed a violent conflict between pride and love. The political conversation had dispelled a good deal of the irritation which Louis had felt, and La Valliere's pale, worn features, in his imagination, spoke a very different language from that of the Dutch medals, or the Batavian pamphlets. He sat for ten minutes debating within himself whether he should or should not return to La Valliere; but Colbert having with some urgency respectfully requested that the list might be furnished him, the king was ashamed to be thinking of mere matters of affection where important state affairs required his attention. He therefore dictated: the queen-mother, the queen, Madame, Madame de Motteville, Madame de Chatillon, Madame de Navailles; and, for the men, M. le Prince, M. de Gramont, M. de Manicamp, M. de Saint-Aignan, and the officers on duty.

"The ministers?" asked Colbert.

"As a matter of course, and the secretaries also."

"Sire, I will leave at once in order to get everything prepared; the orders will be at the different residences to-morrow."

"Say rather to-day," replied Louis mournfully, as the clock struck twelve. It was the very hour when poor La Valliere was almost dying from anguish and bitter suffering. The king's attendants entered, it being the hour of his retirement to his chamber; the queen, indeed, had been waiting for more than an hour. Louis accordingly retreated to his bedroom with a sigh; but, as he sighed, he congratulated himself on his courage, and applauded himself for having been as firm in love as in affairs of state.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The Ambassadors.

D’Artagnan had, with very few exceptions, learned almost all of the particulars of what we have just been relating; for among his friends he reckoned all the useful, serviceable people in the royal household, — officious attendants who were proud of being recognized by the captain of the musketeers, for the captain’s influence was very great; and then, in addition to any ambitious views they may have imagined he could promote, they were proud of being regarded as worth being spoken to by a man as brave as D’Artagnan. In this manner D’Artagnan learned every morning what he had not been able either to see or to ascertain the night before, from the simple fact of his not being ubiquitous; so that, with the information he had been able by his own means to pick up during the day, and with what he had gathered from others, he succeeded in making up a bundle of weapons, which he was in the prudent habit of using only when occasion required. In this way, D’Artagnan’s two eyes rendered him the same service as the hundred eyes of Argus. Political secrets, bedside revelations, hints or scraps of conversation dropped by the courtiers on the threshold of the royal ante-chamber, in this way D’Artagnan managed to ascertain, and to store away everything in the vast and impenetrable mausoleum of his memory, by the side of those royal secrets so dearly bought and faithfully preserved. He therefore knew of the king’s interview with Colbert, and of the appointment made for the ambassadors in the morning, and, consequently, that the question of the medals would be brought up for debate; and, while he was arranging and constructing the conversation upon a few chance words which had reached his ears, he returned to his post in the royal apartments, so as to be there at the very moment the king awoke. It happened that the king rose very early, — proving thereby that he, too, on his side, had slept but indifferently. Towards seven o’clock, he half-opened his door very gently. D’Artagnan was at his post. His majesty was pale, and seemed wearied; he had not, moreover, quite finished dressing.

“Send for M. de Saint-Aignan,” he said.

Saint-Aignan was probably awaiting a summons, for the messenger, when he reached his apartment, found him already dressed. Saint-Aignan hastened to the king in obedience to the summons. A moment afterwards the king and Saint-Aignan passed by together — the king walking first. D’Artagnan went to the window which looked out upon the courtyard; he had no need to put himself to the trouble of watching in what direction the king went, for he had no difficulty in guessing beforehand where his majesty was going. The king, in fact, bent his steps towards the apartments of the maids of honor, — a circumstance which in no way astonished D’Artagnan, for he more than suspected, although La Valliere had not breathed a syllable on the subject, that the king had some kind of reparation to make. Saint-Aignan followed him as he had done the previous evening, rather less uneasy in his mind, though still slightly agitated, for he fervently trusted that at seven o’clock in the morning there might be only himself and the king awake amongst the august guests at the palace. D’Artagnan stood at the window, careless and perfectly calm in his manner. One could almost have sworn that he noticed nothing, and was utterly ignorant who were these two hunters after adventures, passing like shadows across the courtyard, wrapped up in their cloaks. And yet, all the while that D’Artagnan appeared not to be looking at them at all, he did not for one moment lose sight of them, and while he whistled that old march of the musketeers, which he rarely recalled except under great emergencies, he conjectured and prophesied how terrible would be the storm which would be raised on the king’s return. In fact, when the king entered La Valliere’s apartment and found the room empty and the bed untouched, he began to be alarmed, and called out to Montalais, who immediately answered the summons; but her astonishment was equal to the king’s. All that she could tell his majesty was, that she had fancied she had heard La Valliere’s weeping during a portion of the night, but, knowing that his majesty had paid her a visit, she had not dared to inquire what was the matter.

“But,” inquired the king, “where do you suppose she is gone?”

“Sire,” replied Montalais, “Louise is of a very sentimental disposition, and as I have often seen her rise at daybreak in order to go out into the garden, she may, perhaps, be there now.”

This appeared probable, and the king immediately ran down the staircase in search of the fugitive. D’Artagnan saw him grow very pale, and talking in an excited manner with his companion, as he went towards the gardens;

Saint-Aignan following him, out of breath. D'Artagnan did not stir from the window, but went on whistling, looking as if he saw nothing, yet seeing everything. "Come, come," he murmured, when the king disappeared, "his majesty's passion is stronger than I thought; he is now doing, I think, what he never did for Mademoiselle de Mancini."

In a quarter of an hour the king again appeared: he had looked everywhere, was completely out of breath, and, as a matter of course, had not discovered anything. Saint-Aignan, who still followed him, was fanning himself with his hat, and in a gasping voice, asking for information about La Valliere from such of the servants as were about, in fact from every one he met. Among others he came across Manicamp, who had arrived from Fontainebleau by easy stages; for whilst others had performed the journey in six hours, he had taken four and twenty.

"Have you seen Mademoiselle de la Valliere?" Saint-Aignan asked him.

Whereupon Manicamp, dreamy and absent as usual, answered, thinking that some one was asking him about De Guiche, "Thank you, the comte is a little better."

And he continued on his way until he reached the ante-chamber where D'Artagnan was, whom he asked to explain how it was that the king looked, as he thought, so bewildered; to which D'Artagnan replied that he was quite mistaken, that the king, on the contrary, was as lively and merry as he could possibly be.

In the midst of all this, eight o'clock struck. It was usual for the king to take his breakfast at this hour, for the code of etiquette prescribed that the king should always be hungry at eight o'clock. His breakfast was laid upon a small table in his bedroom, and he ate very fast. Saint-Aignan, of whom he would not lose sight, waited on the king. He then disposed of several military audiences, during which he dispatched Saint-Aignan to see what he could find out. Then, still occupied, full of anxiety, still watching Saint-Aignan's return, who had sent out the servants in every direction, to make inquires, and who had also gone himself, the hour of nine struck, and the king forthwith passed into his large cabinet.

As the clock was striking nine the ambassadors entered, and as it finished, the two queens and Madame made their appearance. There were three ambassadors from Holland, and two from Spain. The king glanced at them, and then bowed; and, at the same moment, Saint-Aignan entered, — an entrance which the king regarded as far more important, in a different sense, however, than that of ambassadors, however numerous they might be, and from whatever country they came; and so, setting everything aside, the king made a sign of interrogation to Saint-Aignan, which the latter answered by a most decisive negative. The king almost entirely lost his courage; but as the queens, the members of the nobility who were present, and the ambassadors, had their eyes fixed upon him, he overcame his emotion by a violent effort, and invited the latter to speak. Whereupon one of the Spanish deputies made a long oration, in which he boasted the advantages which the Spanish alliance would offer.

The king interrupted him, saying, “Monsieur, I trust that whatever is best for France must be exceedingly advantageous for Spain.”

This remark, and particularly the peremptory tone in which it was pronounced, made the ambassadors pale, and brought the color into the cheeks of the two queens, who, being Spanish, felt wounded in their pride of relationship and nationality by this reply.

The Dutch ambassador then began to address himself to the king, and complained of the injurious suspicions which the king exhibited against the government of his country.

The king interrupted him, saying, “It is very singular, monsieur, that you should come with any complaint, when it is I rather who have reason to be dissatisfied; and yet, you see, I do not complain.”

“Complain, sire, and in what respect?”

The king smiled bitterly. “Will you blame me, monsieur,” he said, “if I should happen to entertain suspicions against a government which authorizes and protects international impertinence?”

“Sire!”

“I tell you,” resumed the king, exciting himself by a recollection of his own personal annoyance, rather than from political grounds, “that Holland is a land of refuge for all who hate me, and especially for all who malign me.”

“Oh, sire!”

“You wish for proofs, perhaps? Very good; they can be had easily enough. Whence proceed all those vile and insolent pamphlets which represent me as a monarch without glory and without authority? your printing-presses groan under their number. If my secretaries were here, I would mention the titles of the works as well as the names of the printers.”

"Sire," replied the ambassador, "a pamphlet can hardly be regarded as the work of a whole nation. Is it just, is it reasonable, that a great and powerful monarch like your majesty should render a whole nation responsible for the crime of a few madmen, who are, perhaps, only scribbling in a garret for a few sous to buy bread for their family?"

"That may be the case, I admit. But when the mint itself, at Amsterdam, strikes off medals which reflect disgrace upon me, is that also the crime of a few madmen?"

"Medals!" stammered out the ambassador.

"Medals," repeated the king, looking at Colbert.

"Your majesty," the ambassador ventured, "should be quite sure — "

The king still looked at Colbert; but Colbert appeared not to understand him, and maintained an unbroken silence, notwithstanding the king's repeated hints. D'Artagnan then approached the king, and taking a piece of money out of his pocket, he placed it in the king's hands, saying, "*This* is the medal your majesty alludes to."

The king looked at it, and with a look which, ever since he had become his own master, was ever piercing as the eagle's, observed an insulting device representing Holland arresting the progress of the sun, with this inscription: "*In conspectu meo stetit sol*."

"In my presence the sun stands still," exclaimed the king, furiously. "Ah! you will hardly deny it now, I suppose."

"And the sun," said D'Artagnan, "is this," as he pointed to the panels of the cabinet, where the sun was brilliantly represented in every direction, with this motto, "*Nec pluribus impar*."

Louis's anger, increased by the bitterness of his own personal sufferings, hardly required this additional circumstance to foment it. Every one saw, from the kindling passion in the king's eyes, that an explosion was imminent. A look from Colbert kept postponed the bursting of the storm. The ambassador ventured to frame excuses by saying that the vanity of nations was a matter of little consequence; that Holland was proud that, with such limited resources, she had maintained her rank as a great nation, even against powerful monarchs, and that if a little smoke had intoxicated his countrymen, the king would be kindly disposed, and would even excuse this intoxication. The king seemed as if he would be glad of some suggestion; he looked at Colbert, who remained impassible; then at D'Artagnan, who simply shrugged his shoulders, a movement which was like the opening of the flood-gates, whereby the king’s anger, which he had restrained for so long a period, now burst forth. As no one knew what direction his anger might take, all preserved a dead silence. The second ambassador took advantage of it to begin his excuses also. While he was speaking, and while the king, who had again gradually returned to his own personal reflections, was automatically listening to the voice, full of nervous anxiety, with the air of an absent man listening to the murmuring of a cascade, D’Artagnan, on whose left hand Saint-Aignan was standing, approached the latter, and, in a voice which was loud enough to reach the king’s ears, said: “Have you heard the news?”

“What news?” said Saint-Aignan.

“About La Valliere.”

The king started, and advanced his head.

“What has happened to La Valliere?” inquired Saint-Aignan, in a tone which can easily be imagined.

“Ah! poor girl! she is going to take the veil.”

“The veil!” exclaimed Saint-Aignan.

“The veil!” cried the king, in the midst of the ambassador’s discourse; but then, mindful of the rules of etiquette, he mastered himself, still listening, however, with rapt attention.

“What order?” inquired Saint-Aignan.

“The Carmelites of Chaillot.”

“Who the deuce told you that?”

“She did herself.”

“You have seen her, then?”

“Nay, I even went with her to the Carmelites.”

The king did not lose a syllable of this conversation; and again he could hardly control his feelings.

“But what was the cause of her flight?” inquired Saint-Aignan.

“Because the poor girl was driven away from the court yesterday,” replied D’Artagnan.

He had no sooner said this, than the king, with an authoritative gesture, said to the ambassador, “Enough, monsieur, enough.” Then, advancing towards the captain, he exclaimed:

“Who says Mademoiselle de la Valliere is going to take the religious vows?”

“M. d’Artagnan,” answered the favorite.

“Is it true what you say?” said the king, turning towards the musketeer.

“As true as truth itself.”

The king clenched his hands, and turned pale.

“You have something further to add, M. d’Artagnan?” he said.

“I know nothing more, sire.”

“You added that Mademoiselle de la Valliere had been driven away from the court.”

“Yes, sire.”

“Is that true, also?”

“Ascertain for yourself, sire.”

“And from whom?”

“Ah!” sighed D’Artagnan, like a man who is declining to say anything further.

The king almost bounded from his seat, regardless of ambassadors, ministers, courtiers, queens, and politics. The queen-mother rose; she had heard everything, or, if she had not heard everything, she had guessed it. Madame, almost fainting from anger and fear, endeavored to rise as the queen-mother had done; but she sank down again upon her chair, which by an instinctive movement she made roll back a few paces.

“Gentlemen,” said the king, “the audience is over; I will communicate my answer, or rather my will, to Spain and to Holland;” and with a proud, imperious gesture, he dismissed the ambassadors.

“Take care, my son,” said the queen-mother, indignantly, “you are hardly master of yourself, I think.”

“Ah! madame,” returned the young lion, with a terrible gesture, “if I am not master of myself, I will be, I promise you, of those who do me a deadly injury; come with me, M. d’Artagnan, come.” And he quitted the room in the midst of general stupefaction and dismay. The king hastily descended the staircase, and was about to cross the courtyard.

“Sire,” said D’Artagnan, “your majesty mistakes the way.”

“No; I am going to the stables.”

“That is useless, sire, for I have horses ready for your majesty.”

The king’s only answer was a look, but this look promised more than the ambition of three D’Artagnans could have dared to hope.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Chaillot.

Although they had not been summoned, Manicamp and Malicorne had followed the king and D’Artagnan. They were both exceedingly intelligent men; except that Malicorne was too precipitate, owing to ambition, while Manicamp was frequently too tardy, owing to indolence. On this occasion, however, they arrived at precisely the proper moment. Five horses were in readiness. Two were seized upon by the king and D’Artagnan, two others by Manicamp and Malicorne, while a groom belonging to the stables mounted the fifth. The cavalcade set off at a gallop. D’Artagnan had been very careful in his selection of the horses; they were the very animals for distressed lovers — horses which did not simply run, but flew. Within ten minutes after their departure, the cavalcade, amidst a cloud of dust, arrived at Chaillot. The king literally threw himself off his horse; but notwithstanding the rapidity with which he accomplished this maneuver, he found D’Artagnan already holding his stirrup. With a sign of acknowledgement to the musketeer, he threw the bridle to the groom, and darted into the vestibule, violently pushed open the door, and entered the reception-room. Manicamp, Malicorne, and the groom remained outside, D’Artagnan alone following him. When he entered the reception-room, the first object which met his gaze was Louise herself, not simply on her knees, but lying at the foot of a large stone crucifix. The young girl was stretched upon the damp flag-stones, scarcely visible in the gloom of the apartment, which was lighted only by means of a narrow window, protected by bars and completely shaded by creeping plants. When the king saw her in this state, he thought she was dead, and uttered a loud cry, which made D’Artagnan hurry into the room. The king had already passed one of his arms round her body, and D’Artagnan assisted him in raising the poor girl, whom the torpor of death seemed already to have taken possession of. D’Artagnan seized hold of the alarm-bell and rang with all his might. The Carmelite sisters immediately hastened at the summons, and uttered loud exclamations of alarm and indignation at the sight of the two men holding a woman in their arms. The superior also hurried to the scene of action, but far more a creature of the world than any of the female members of the court, notwithstanding her austerity of manners, she recognized the king at the first glance, by the respect which those present exhibited for him, as well as by the imperious and authoritative way in which he had thrown the whole establishment into confusion. As soon as she saw the king, she retired to her own apartments, in order to avoid compromising her dignity. But by one of the nuns she sent various cordials, Hungary water, etc., etc., and ordered that all the doors should immediately be closed, a command which was just in time, for the king's distress was fast becoming of a most clamorous and despairing character. He had almost decided to send for his own physician, when La Valliere exhibited signs of returning animation. The first object which met her gaze, as she opened her eyes, was the king at her feet; in all probability she did not recognize him, for she uttered a deep sigh full of anguish and distress. Louis fixed his eyes devouringly upon her face; and when, in the course of a few moments, she recognized Louis, she endeavored to tear herself from his embrace.

"Oh, heavens!" she murmured, "is not the sacrifice yet made?"

"No, no!" exclaimed the king, "and it shall *not* be made, I swear."

Notwithstanding her weakness and utter despair, she rose from the ground, saying, "It must be made, however; it must be; so do not stay me in my purpose."

"I leave you to sacrifice yourself! I! never, never!" exclaimed the king.

"Well," murmured D'Artagnan, "I may as well go now. As soon as they begin to speak, we may as well prevent there being any listeners." And he quitted the room, leaving the lovers alone.

"Sire," continued La Valliere, "not another word, I implore you. Do not destroy the only future I can hope for — my salvation; do not destroy the glory and brightness of your own future for a mere caprice."

"A caprice?" cried the king.

"Oh, sire! it is now, only, that I can see clearly into your heart."

"You, Louise, what mean you?"

"An inexplicable impulse, foolish and unreasonable in its nature, may ephemerally appear to offer a sufficient excuse for your conduct; but there are duties imposed upon you which are incompatible with your regard for a poor girl such as I am. So, forget me."

"I forget you!"

“You have already done so, once.”

“Rather would I die.”

“You cannot love one whose peace of mind you hold so lightly, and whom you so cruelly abandoned, last night, to the bitterness of death.”

“What can you mean? Explain yourself, Louise.”

“What did you ask me yesterday morning? To love you. What did you promise me in return? Never to let midnight pass without offering me an opportunity of reconciliation, if, by any chance, your anger should be roused against me.”

“Oh! forgive me, Louise, forgive me! I was mad from jealousy.”

“Jealousy is a sentiment unworthy of a king — a man. You may become jealous again, and will end by killing me. Be merciful, then, and leave me now to die.”

“Another word, mademoiselle, in that strain, and you will see me expire at your feet.”

“No, no, sire, I am better acquainted with my own demerits; and believe me, that to sacrifice yourself for one whom all despise, would be needless.”

“Give me the names of those you have cause to complain of.”

“I have no complaints, sire, to prefer against any one; no one but myself to accuse. Farewell, sire; you are compromising yourself in speaking to me in such a manner.”

“Oh! be careful, Louise, in what you say; for you are reducing me to the darkness of despair.”

“Oh! sire, sire, leave me at least the protection of Heaven, I implore you.”

“No, no; Heaven itself shall not tear you from me.”

“Save me, then,” cried the poor girl, “from those determined and pitiless enemies who are thirsting to annihilate my life and honor too. If you have courage enough to love me, show at least that you have power enough to defend me. But no; she whom you say you love, others insult and mock, and drive shamelessly away.” And the gentle-hearted girl, forced, by her own bitter distress to accuse others, wrung her hands in an uncontrollable agony of tears.

“You have been driven away!” exclaimed the king. “This is the second time I have heard that said.”

“I have been driven away with shame and ignominy, sire. You see, then, that I have no other protector but Heaven, no consolation but prayer, and this cloister is my only refuge.”

“My palace, my whole court, shall be your park of peace. Oh! fear nothing further now, Louise; those — be they men or women — who yesterday drove you away, shall to-morrow tremble before you — to-morrow, do I say? nay, this very day I have already shown my displeasure — have already threatened. It is in my power, even now, to hurl the thunderbolt I have hitherto withheld. Louise, Louise, you shall be bitterly revenged; tears of blood shall repay you for the tears you have shed. Give me only the names of your enemies.”

“Never, never.”

“How can I show any anger, then?”

“Sire, those upon whom your anger would be prepared to fall, would force you to draw back your hand upraised to punish.”

“Oh! you do not know me,” cried the king, exasperated. “Rather than draw back, I would sacrifice my kingdom, and would abjure my family. Yes, I would strike until this arm had utterly destroyed all those who had ventured to make themselves the enemies of the gentlest and best of creatures.” And, as he said these words, Louis struck his fist violently against the oaken wainscoting with a force which alarmed La Valliere; for his anger, owing to his unbounded power, had something imposing and threatening in it, like the lightning, which may at any time prove deadly. She, who thought that her own sufferings could not be surpassed, was overwhelmed by a suffering which revealed itself by menace and by violence.

“Sire,” she said, “for the last time I implore you to leave me; already do I feel strengthened by the calm seclusion of this asylum; and the protection of Heaven has reassured me; for all the pretty human meanness of this world are forgotten beneath the Divine protection. Once more, then, sire, and for the last time, I again implore you to leave me.”

“Confess, rather,” cried Louis, “that you have never loved me; admit that my humility and my repentance are flattering to your pride, but that my distress affects you not; that the king of this wide realm is no longer regarded as a lover whose tenderness of devotion is capable of working out your happiness, but as a despot whose caprice has crushed your very heart beneath his iron heel. Do not say you are seeking Heaven, say rather you are fleeing from the king.”

Louise’s heart was wrung within her, as she listened to his passionate utterance, which made the fever of hope course once more through her every vein.

"But did you not hear me say that I have been driven away, scorned, despised?"

"I will make you the most respected, and most adored, and the most envied of my whole court."

"Prove to me that you have not ceased to love me."

"In what way?"

"By leaving me."

"I will prove it to you by never leaving you again."

"But do you imagine, sire, that I shall allow that; do you imagine that I will let you come to an open rupture with every member of your family; do you imagine that, for my sake, you could abandon mother, wife and sister?"

"Ah! you have named them, then, at last; it is they, then, who have wrought this grievous injury? By the heaven above us, then, upon them shall my anger fall."

"That is the reason why the future terrifies me, why I refuse everything, why I do not wish you to revenge me. Tears enough have already been shed, sufficient sorrow and affliction have already been occasioned. I, at least, will never be the cause of sorrow, or affliction, or distress to whomsoever it may be, for I have mourned and suffered, and wept too much myself."

"And do you count *my* sufferings, *my* tears, as nothing?"

"In Heaven's name, sire, do not speak to me in that manner. I need all my courage to enable me to accomplish the sacrifice."

"Louise, Louise, I implore you! whatever you desire, whatever you command, whether vengeance or forgiveness, your slightest wish shall be obeyed, but do not abandon me."

"Alas! sire, we must part."

"You do not love me, then!"

"Heaven knows I do!"

"It is false, Louise; it is false."

"Oh! sire, if I did not love you, I should let you do what you please; I should let you revenge me, in return for the insult which has been inflicted on me; I should accept the brilliant triumph to my pride which you propose; and yet, you cannot deny that I reject even the sweet compensation which your affection affords, that affection which for me is life itself, for I wished to die when I thought that you loved me no longer."

"Yes, yes; I now know, I now perceive it; you are the sweetest, best, and purest of women. There is no one so worthy as yourself, not alone of my respect and devotion, but also of the respect and devotion of all who surround me; and therefore no one shall be loved like yourself; no one shall ever possess the influence over me that you wield. You wish me to be calm, to forgive? — be it so, you shall find me perfectly unmoved. You wish to reign by gentleness and clemency? — I will be clement and gentle. Dictate for me the conduct you wish me to adopt, and I will obey blindly."

"In Heaven's name, no, sire; what am I, a poor girl, to dictate to so great a monarch as yourself?"

"You are my life, the very spirit and principle of my being. Is it not the spirit that rules the body?"

"You love me, then, sire?"

"On my knees, yes; with my hands upraised to you, yes; with all the strength and power of my being, yes; I love you so deeply, that I would lay down my life for you, gladly, at your merest wish."

"Oh! sire, now I know you love me, I have nothing to wish for in the world. Give me your hand, sire; and then, farewell! I have enjoyed in this life all the happiness I was ever meant for."

"Oh! no, no! your happiness is not a happiness of yesterday, it is of to-day, of to-morrow, ever enduring. The future is yours, everything which is mine is yours, too. Away with these ideas of separation, away with these gloomy, despairing thoughts. You will live for me, as I will live for you, Louise." And he threw himself at her feet, embracing her knees with the wildest transports of joy and gratitude.

"Oh! sire, sire! all that is but a wild dream."

"Why, a wild dream?"

"Because I cannot return to the court. Exiled, how can I see you again? Would it not be far better to bury myself in a cloister for the rest of my life, with the rich consolation that your affection gives me, with the pulses of your heart beating for me, and your latest confession of attachment still ringing in my ears?"

"Exiled, you!" exclaimed Louis XIV., "and who dares to exile, let me ask, when I recall?"

"Oh! sire, something which is greater than and superior to the kings even — the world and public opinion. Reflect for a moment; you cannot love a woman who has been ignominiously driven away — love one whom your mother has stained with suspicions; one whom your sister has threatened with disgrace; such a woman, indeed, would be unworthy of you."

"Unworthy! one who belongs to me?"

"Yes, sire, precisely on that account; from the very moment she belongs to you, the character of your mistress renders her unworthy."

"You are right, Louise; every shade of delicacy of feeling is yours. Very well, you shall not be exiled."

"Ah! from the tone in which you speak, you have not heard Madame, that is very clear."

"I will appeal from her to my mother."

"Again, sire, you have not seen your mother."

"She, too! — my poor Louise! every one's hand, then, is against you."

"Yes, yes, poor Louise, who was already bending beneath the fury of the storm, when you arrived and crushed her beneath the weight of your displeasure."

"Oh! forgive me."

"You will not, I know, be able to make either of them yield; believe me, the evil cannot be repaired, for I will not allow you to use violence, or to exercise your authority."

"Very well, Louise, to prove to you how fondly I love you, I will do one thing, I will see Madame; I will make her revoke her sentence, I will compel her to do so."

"Compel? Oh! no, no!"

"True; you are right. I will bend her."

Louise shook her head.

"I will entreat her, if it be necessary," said Louis. "Will you believe in my affection after that?"

Louise drew herself up. "Oh, never, never shall you humiliate yourself on my account; sooner, a thousand times, would I die."

Louis reflected; his features assumed a dark expression. "I will love you as much as you have loved; I will suffer as keenly as you have suffered; this shall be my expiation in your eyes. Come, mademoiselle, put aside these paltry considerations; let us show ourselves as great as our sufferings, as strong as our affection for each other." And, as he said this, he took her in his arms, and encircled her waist with both his hands, saying, "My own love! my own dearest and best beloved, follow me."

She made a final effort, in which she concentrated, no longer all of her firmness of will, for that had long since been overcome, but all her physical strength. “No!” she replied, weakly, “no! no! I should die from shame.”

“No! you shall return like a queen. No one knows of your having left — except, indeed, D’Artagnan.”

“He has betrayed me, then?”

“In what way?”

“He promised faithfully — ”

“I promised not to say anything to the king,” said D’Artagnan, putting his head through the half-opened door, “and I kept my word; I was speaking to M. de Saint-Aignan, and it was not my fault if the king overheard me; was it, sire?”

“It is quite true,” said the king; “forgive him.”

La Valliere smiled, and held out her small white hand to the musketeer.

“Monsieur d’Artagnan,” said the king, “be good enough to see if you can find a carriage for Mademoiselle de la Valliere.”

“Sire,” said the captain, “the carriage is waiting at the gate.”

“You are a magic mould of forethought,” exclaimed the king.

“You have taken a long time to find it out,” muttered D’Artagnan, notwithstanding he was flattered by the praise bestowed upon him.

La Valliere was overcome: after a little further hesitation, she allowed herself to be led away, half fainting, by her royal lover. But, as she was on the point of leaving the room, she tore herself from the king’s grasp, and returned to the stone crucifix, which she kissed, saying, “Oh, Heaven! it was thou who drewest me hither! thou, who has rejected me; but thy grace is infinite. Whenever I shall again return, forget that I have ever separated myself from thee, for, when I return it will be — never to leave thee again.”

The king could not restrain his emotion, and D’Artagnan, even, was overcome. Louis led the young girl away, lifted her into the carriage, and directed D’Artagnan to seat himself beside her, while he, mounting his horse, spurred violently towards the Palais Royal, where, immediately on his arrival, he sent to request an audience of Madame.

CHAPTER XXX.

Madame.

From the manner in which the king had dismissed the ambassadors, even the least clear-sighted persons belonging to the court imagined war would ensue. The ambassadors themselves, but slightly acquainted with the king's domestic disturbances, had interpreted as directed against themselves the celebrated sentence: "If I be not master of myself, I, at least, will be so of those who insult me." Happily for the destinies of France and Holland, Colbert had followed them out of the king's presence for the purpose of explaining matters to them; but the two queens and Madame, who were perfectly aware of every particular that had taken place in their several households, having heard the king's remark, so full of dark meaning, retired to their own apartments in no little fear and chagrin. Madame, especially, felt that the royal anger might fall upon her, and, as she was brave and exceedingly proud, instead of seeking support and encouragement from the queen-mother, she had returned to her own apartments, if not without some uneasiness, at least without any intention of avoiding an encounter. Anne of Austria, from time to time at frequent intervals, sent messages to learn if the king had returned. The silence which the whole palace preserved upon the matter, and upon Louise's disappearance, was indicative of a long train of misfortunes to all those who knew the haughty and irritable humor of the king. But Madame, unmoved in spite of all the flying rumors, shut herself up in her apartments, sent for Montalais, and, with a voice as calm as she could possibly command, desired her to relate all she knew about the event itself. At the moment that the eloquent Montalais was concluding, with all kinds of oratorical precautions, and was recommending, if not in actual language, at least in spirit, that she should show forbearance towards La Valliere, M. Malicorne made his appearance to beg an audience of Madame, on behalf of the king. Montalais's worthy friend bore upon his countenance all the signs of the very liveliest emotion. It was impossible to be mistaken; the interview which the king requested would be one of the most interesting chapters in the history of the hearts of kings and of men. Madame was disturbed by her brother-in-law's arrival; she did not expect it so soon, nor had she, indeed, expected any direct step on Louis's part. Besides, all women who wage war successfully by indirect means, are invariably neither very skillful nor very strong when it becomes a question of accepting a pitched battle. Madame, however, was not one who ever drew back; she had the very opposite defect or qualification, in whichever light it may be considered; she took an exaggerated view of what constituted real courage; and therefore the king's message, of which Malicorne had been the bearer, was regarded by her as the bugle-note proclaiming the commencement of hostilities. She, therefore, boldly accepted the gage of battle. Five minutes afterwards the king ascended the staircase. His color was heightened from having ridden hard. His dusty and disordered clothes formed a singular contrast with the fresh and perfectly arranged toilette of Madame, who, notwithstanding the rouge on her cheeks, turned pale as Louis entered the room. Louis lost no time in approaching the object of his visit; he sat down, and Montalais disappeared.

"My dear sister," said the king, "you are aware that Mademoiselle de la Valliere fled from her own room this morning, and that she has retired to a cloister, overwhelmed by grief and despair." As he pronounced these words, the king's voice was singularly moved.

"Your majesty is the first to inform me of it," replied Madame.

"I should have thought that you might have learned it this morning, during the reception of the ambassadors," said the king.

"From your emotion, sire, I imagined that something extraordinary had happened, but without knowing what."

The king, with his usual frankness, went straight to the point. "Why did you send Mademoiselle de la Valliere away?"

"Because I had reason to be dissatisfied with her conduct," she replied, dryly.

The king became crimson, and his eyes kindled with a fire which it required all Madame's courage to support. He mastered his anger, however, and continued: "A stronger reason than that is surely requisite, for one so good and kind as you are, to turn away and dishonor, not only the young girl herself, but every member of her family as well. You know that the whole city has its eyes fixed upon the conduct of the female portion of the court. To dismiss a maid of honor is to attribute a crime to her — at the very least a fault. What crime, what fault has Mademoiselle de la Valliere been guilty of?”

“Since you constitute yourself the protector of Mademoiselle de la Valliere,” replied Madame, coldly, “I will give you those explanations which I should have a perfect right to withhold from every one.”

“Even from the king!” exclaimed Louis, as, with a sudden gesture, he covered his head with his hat.

“You have called me your sister,” said Madame, “and I am in my own apartments.”

“It matters not,” said the youthful monarch, ashamed at having been hurried away by his anger; “neither you, nor any one else in this kingdom, can assert a right to withhold an explanation in my presence.”

“Since that is the way you regard it,” said Madame, in a hoarse, angry tone of voice, “all that remains for me to do is bow submission to your majesty, and to be silent.”

“Not so. Let there be no equivocation between us.”

“The protection with which you surround Mademoiselle de la Valliere does not impose any respect.”

“No equivocation, I repeat; you are perfectly aware that, as the head of the nobility in France, I am accountable to all for the honor of every family. You dismiss Mademoiselle de la Valliere, or whoever else it may be — ” Madame shrugged her shoulders. “Or whoever else it may be, I repeat,” continued the king; “and as, acting in that manner, you cast a dishonorable reflection upon that person, I ask you for an explanation, in order that I may confirm or annul the sentence.”

“Annul my sentence!” exclaimed Madame, haughtily. “What! when I have discharged one of my attendants, do you order me to take her back again?” The king remained silent.

“This would be a sheer abuse of power, sire; it would be indecorous and unseemly.”

“Madame!”

“As a woman, I should revolt against an abuse so insulting to me; I should no longer be able to regard myself as a princess of your blood, a daughter of a monarch; I should be the meanest of creatures, more humbled and disgraced than the servant I had sent away.”

The king rose from his seat with anger. “It cannot be a heart,” he cried, “you have beating in your bosom; if you act in such a way with me, I may have reason to act with corresponding severity.”

It sometimes happens that in a battle a chance ball may reach its mark. The observation which the king had made without any particular intention, struck Madame home, and staggered her for a moment; some day or other she might indeed have reason to dread reprisals. “At all events, sire,” she said, “explain what you require.”

“I ask, madame, what has Mademoiselle de la Valliere done to warrant your conduct toward her?”

“She is the most cunning fomenter of intrigues I know; she was the occasion of two personal friends engaging in mortal combat; and has made people talk of her in such shameless terms that the whole court is indignant at the mere sound of her name.”

“She! she!” cried the king.

“Under her soft and hypocritical manner,” continued Madame, “she hides a disposition full of foul and dark conceit.”

“She!”

“You may possibly be deceived, sire, but I know her right well; she is capable of creating dispute and misunderstanding between the most affectionate relatives and the most intimate friends. You see that she has already sown discord betwixt us two.”

“I do assure you — ” said the king.

“Sire, look well into the case as it stands; we were living on the most friendly understanding, and by the artfulness of her tales and complaints, she has set your majesty against me.”

“I swear to you,” said the king, “that on no occasion has a bitter word ever passed her lips; I swear that, even in my wildest bursts of passion, she would not allow me to menace any one; and I swear, too, that you do not possess a more devoted and respectful friend than she is.”

“Friend!” said Madame, with an expression of supreme disdain.

“Take care, Madame!” said the king; “you forget that you now understand me, and that from this moment everything is equalized. Mademoiselle de la Valliere will be whatever I may choose her to become; and to-morrow, if I were determined to do so, I could seat her on a throne.”

“She was not born to a throne, at least, and whatever you may do can affect the future alone, but cannot affect the past.”

“Madame, towards you I have shown every kind consideration, and every eager desire to please you; do not remind me that I am master.”

“It is the second time, sire, that you have made that remark, and I have already informed you I am ready to submit.”

“In that case, then, you will confer upon me the favor of receiving Mademoiselle de la Valliere back again.”

“For what purpose, sire, since you have a throne to bestow upon her? I am too insignificant to protect so exalted a personage.”

“Nay, a truce to this bitter and disdainful spirit. Grant me her forgiveness.”

“*Never!*”

“You drive me, then, to open warfare in my own family.”

“I, too, have a family with whom I can find refuge.”

“Do you mean that as a threat, and could you forget yourself so far? Do you believe that, if you push the affront to that extent, your family would encourage you?”

“I hope, sire, that you will not force me to take any step which would be unworthy of my rank.”

“I hoped that you would remember our recent friendship, and that you would treat me as a brother.”

Madame paused for a moment. “I do not disown you for a brother,” she said, “in refusing your majesty an injustice.”

“An injustice!”

“Oh, sire! if I informed others of La Valliere’s conduct; if the queen knew — ”

“Come, come, Henrietta, let your heart speak; remember that, for however brief a time, you once loved me; remember, too, that human hearts should be as merciful as the heart of a sovereign Master. Do not be inflexible with others; forgive La Valliere.”

“I cannot; she has offended me.”

“But for my sake.”

“Sire, it is for your sake I would do anything in the world, except that.”

“You will drive me to despair — you compel me to turn to the last resource of weak people, and seek counsel of my angry and wrathful disposition.”

“I advise you to be reasonable.”

“Reasonable! — I can be so no longer.”

“Nay, sire! I pray you — ”

"For pity's sake, Henrietta; it is the first time I entreated any one, and I have no hope in any one but in you."

"Oh, sire! you are weeping."

"From rage, from humiliation. That I, the king, should have been obliged to descend to entreaty. I shall hate this moment during my whole life. You have made me suffer in one moment more distress and more degradation than I could have anticipated in the greatest extremity in life." And the king rose and gave free vent to his tears, which, in fact, were tears of anger and shame.

Madame was not touched exactly — for the best women, when their pride is hurt, are without pity; but she was afraid that the tears the king was shedding might possibly carry away every soft and tender feeling in his heart.

"Give what commands you please, sire," she said; "and since you prefer my humiliation to your own — although mine is public and yours has been witnessed but by myself alone — speak, I will obey your majesty."

"No, no, Henrietta!" exclaimed Louis, transported with gratitude, "you will have yielded to a brother's wishes."

"I no longer have any brother, since I obey."

"All that I have would be too little in return."

"How passionately you love, sire, when you do love!"

Louis did not answer. He had seized upon Madame's hand and covered it with kisses. "And so you will receive this poor girl back again, and will forgive her; you will find how gentle and pure-hearted she is."

"I will maintain her in my household."

"No, you will give her your friendship, my sister."

"I never liked her."

"Well, for my sake, you will treat her kindly, will you not, Henrietta?"

"I will treat her as your — *mistress*."

The king rose suddenly to his feet. By this word, which had so infelicitously escaped her, Madame had destroyed the whole merit of her sacrifice. The king felt freed from all obligations. Exasperated beyond measure, and bitterly offended, he replied:

"I thank you, Madame; I shall never forget the service you have rendered me." And, saluting her with an affectation of ceremony, he took his leave of her. As he passed before a glass, he saw that his eyes were red, and angrily stamped his foot on the ground. But it was too late, for Malicorne and D’Artagnan, who were standing at the door, had seen his eyes.

“The king has been crying,” thought Malicorne. D’Artagnan approached the king with a respectful air, and said in a low tone of voice:

“Sire, it would be better to return to your own apartments by the small staircase.”

“Why?”

“Because the dust of the road has left its traces on your face,” said D’Artagnan. “By heavens!” he thought, “when the king has given way like a child, let those look to it who may make the lady weep for whom the king sheds tears.”

CHAPTER XXXI.

Mademoiselle de la Valliere’s Pocket-Handkerchief.

Madame was not bad-hearted — she was only hasty and impetuous. The king was not imprudent — he was simply in love. Hardly had they entered into this compact, which terminated in La Valliere’s recall, when they both sought to make as much as they could by their bargain. The king wished to see La Valliere every moment of the day, while Madame, who was sensible of the king’s annoyance ever since he had so entreated her, would not relinquish her revenge on La Valliere without a contest. She planted every conceivable difficulty in the king’s path; he was, in fact, obliged, in order to get a glimpse of La Valliere, to be exceedingly devoted in his attentions to his sister-in-law, and this, indeed, was Madame’s plan of policy. As she had chosen some one to second her efforts, and as this person was our old friend Montalais, the king found himself completely hemmed in every time he paid Madame a visit; he was surrounded, and was never left a moment alone. Madame displayed in her conversation a charm of manner and brilliancy of wit which dazzled everybody. Montalais followed her, and soon rendered herself perfectly insupportable to the king, which was, in fact, the very thing she expected would happen. She then set Malicorne at the king, who found means of informing his majesty that there was a young person belonging to the court who was exceedingly miserable; and on the king inquiring who this person was, Malicorne replied that it was Mademoiselle de Montalais. To this the king answered that it was perfectly just that a person should be unhappy when she rendered others so. Whereupon Malicorne explained how matters stood; for he had received his directions from Montalais. The king began to open his eyes; he remarked that, as soon as he made his appearance, Madame made hers too; that she remained in the corridors until after he had left; that she accompanied him back to his own apartments, fearing that he might speak in the ante-chambers to one of her maids of honor. One evening she went further still. The king was seated, surrounded by the ladies who were present, and holding in his hand, concealed by his lace ruffle, a small note which he wished to slip into La Valliere’s hand. Madame guessed both his intention and the letter too. It was difficult to prevent the king going wherever he pleased, and yet it was necessary to prevent his going near La Valliere, or speaking to her, as by so doing he could let the note fall into her lap behind her fan, or into her pocket-handkerchief. The king, who was also on the watch, suspected that a snare was being laid for him. He rose and pushed his chair, without affectation, near Mademoiselle de Chatillon, with whom he began to talk in a light tone. They were amusing themselves making rhymes; from Mademoiselle de Chatillon he went to Montalais, and then to Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente. And thus, by this skillful maneuver, he found himself seated opposite to La Valliere, whom he completely concealed. Madame pretended to be greatly occupied, altering a group of flowers that she was working in tapestry. The king showed the corner of his letter to La Valliere, and the latter held out her handkerchief with a look that signified, “Put the letter inside.” Then, as the king had placed his own handkerchief upon his chair, he was adroit enough to let it fall on the ground, so that La Valliere slipped her handkerchief on the chair. The king took it up quietly, without any one observing what he did, placed the letter within it, and returned the handkerchief to the place he had taken it from. There was only just time for La Valliere to stretch out her hand to take hold of the handkerchief with its valuable contents.

But Madame, who had observed everything that had passed, said to Mademoiselle de Chatillon, “Chatillon, be good enough to pick up the king’s handkerchief, if you please; it has fallen on the carpet.”

The young girl obeyed with the utmost precipitation, the king having moved from his seat, and La Valliere being in no little degree nervous and confused.

“Ah! I beg your majesty’s pardon,” said Mademoiselle de Chatillon; “you have two handkerchiefs, I perceive.”

And the king was accordingly obliged to put into his pocket La Valliere’s handkerchief as well as his own. He certainly gained that souvenir of Louise, who lost, however, a copy of verses which had cost the king ten hours’ hard labor, and which, as far as he was concerned, was perhaps as good as a long poem. It would be impossible to describe the king’s anger and La Valliere’s despair; but shortly afterwards a circumstance occurred which was more than remarkable. When the king left, in order to retire to his own apartments, Malicorne, informed of what had passed, one can hardly tell how, was waiting in the ante-chamber. The ante-chambers of the Palais Royal are naturally very dark, and, in the evening, they were but indifferently lighted. Nothing pleased the king more than this dim light. As a general rule, love, whose mind and heart are constantly in a blaze, contemns all light, except the sunshine of the soul. And so the ante-chamber was dark; a page carried a torch before the king, who walked on slowly, greatly annoyed at what had recently occurred. Malicorne passed close to the king, almost stumbled against him in fact, and begged his forgiveness with the profoundest humility; but the king, who was in an exceedingly ill-temper, was very sharp in his reproof to Malicorne, who disappeared as soon and as quietly as he possibly could. Louis retired to rest, having had a misunderstanding with the queen; and the next day, as soon as he entered the cabinet, he wished to have La Valliere's handkerchief in order to press his lips to it. He called his valet.

"Fetch me," he said, "the coat I wore yesterday evening, but be very sure you do not touch anything it may contain."

The order being obeyed, the king himself searched the pocket of the coat; he found only one handkerchief, and that his own; La Valliere's had disappeared. Whilst busied with all kinds of conjectures and suspicions, a letter was brought to him from La Valliere; it ran thus:

"How good and kind of you to have sent me those beautiful verses; how full of ingenuity and perseverance your affection is; how is it possible to help loving you so dearly!"

"What does this mean?" thought the king; "there must be some mistake. Look well about," said he to the valet, "for a pocket-handkerchief must be in one of my pockets; and if you do not find it, or if you have touched it —" He reflected for a moment. To make a state matter of the loss of the handkerchief would be to act absurdly, and he therefore added, "There was a letter of some importance inside the handkerchief, which had somehow got among the folds of it."

"Sire," said the valet, "your majesty had only one handkerchief, and that is it."

"True, true," replied the king, setting his teeth hard together. "Oh, poverty, how I envy you! Happy is the man who can empty his own pockets of letters and handkerchiefs!"

He read La Valliere's letter over again, endeavoring to imagine in what conceivable way his verses could have reached their destination. There was a postscript to the letter:

"I send you back by your messenger this reply, so unworthy of what you sent me."

"So far so good; I shall find out something now," he said delightedly. "Who is waiting, and who brought me this letter?"

"M. Malicorne," replied the *valet de chambre*, timidly.

"Desire him to come in."

Malicorne entered.

"You come from Mademoiselle de la Valliere?" said the king, with a sigh.

"Yes, sire."

"And you took Mademoiselle de la Valliere something from me?"

"I, sire?"

"Yes, you."

"Oh, no, sire."

"Mademoiselle de la Valliere says so, distinctly."

"Oh, sire, Mademoiselle de la Valliere is mistaken."

The king frowned. "What jest is this?" he said; "explain yourself. Why does Mademoiselle de la Valliere call you my messenger? What did you take to that lady? Speak, monsieur, and quickly."

"Sire, I merely took Mademoiselle de la Valliere a pocket-handkerchief, that was all."

"A handkerchief, — what handkerchief?"

"Sire, at the very moment when I had the misfortune to stumble against your majesty yesterday — a misfortune which I shall deplore to the last day of my life, especially after the dissatisfaction which you exhibited — I remained, sire, motionless with despair, your majesty being at too great a distance to hear my excuses, when I saw something white lying on the ground."

"Ah!" said the king.

"I stooped down, — it was a pocket-handkerchief. For a moment I had an idea that when I stumbled against your majesty I must have been the cause of the handkerchief falling from your pocket; but as I felt it all over very respectfully, I perceived a cipher at one of the corners, and, on looking at it closely, I found that it was Mademoiselle de la Valliere's cipher. I presumed that on her way to Madame's apartment in the earlier part of the evening she had let her handkerchief fall, and I accordingly hastened to restore it to her as she was leaving; and that is all I gave to Mademoiselle de la Valliere, I entreat your majesty to believe.” Malicorne’s manner was so simple, so full of contrition, and marked with such extreme humility, that the king was greatly amused in listening to him. He was as pleased with him for what he had done as if he had rendered him the greatest service.

“This is the second fortunate meeting I have had with you, monsieur,” he said; “you may count upon my good intentions.”

The plain and sober truth was, that Malicorne had picked the king’s pocket of the handkerchief as dexterously as any of the pickpockets of the good city of Paris could have done. Madame never knew of this little incident, but Montalais gave La Valliere some idea of the manner in which it had really happened, and La Valliere afterwards told the king, who laughed exceedingly at it and pronounced Malicorne to be a first rate politician. Louis XIV. was right, and it is well known that he was tolerably well acquainted with human nature.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Which Treats of Gardeners, of Ladders, and Maids of Honor.

Miracles, unfortunately, could not be always happening, whilst Madame's ill-humor still continued. In a week's time, matters had reached such a point, that the king could no longer look at La Valliere without a look full of suspicion crossing his own. Whenever a promenade was proposed, Madame, in order to avoid the recurrence of similar scenes to that of the thunder-storm, or the royal oak, had a variety of indispositions ready prepared; and, thanks to them, she was unable to go out, and her maids of honor were obliged to remain indoors also. There was not the slightest chance of means of paying a nocturnal visit; for in this respect the king had, on the very first occasion, experienced a severe check, which happened in the following manner. As at Fontainebleau, he had taken Saint-Aignan with him one evening when he wished to pay La Valliere a visit; but he had found no one but Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, who had begun to call out "Fire!" and "Thieves!" in such a manner that a perfect legion of chamber-maids, attendants, and pages, ran to her assistance; so that Saint-Aignan, who had remained behind in order to save the honor of his royal master, who had fled precipitately, was obliged to submit to a severe scolding from the queen-mother, as well as from Madame herself. In addition, he had, the next morning, received two challenges from the De Mortemart family, and the king had been obliged to interfere. This mistake had been owing to the circumstance of Madame having suddenly ordered a change in the apartments of her maids of honor, and directed La Valliere and Montalais to sleep in her own cabinet. No gateway, therefore, was any longer open — not even communication by letter; to write under the eyes of so ferocious an Argus as Madame, whose temper and disposition were so uncertain, was to run the risk of exposure to the greatest danger; and it can well be conceived into what a state of continuous irritation, and ever increasing anger, all these petty annoyances threw the young lion. The king almost tormented himself to death endeavoring to discover a means of communication; and, as he did not think proper to call in the aid of

Malicorne or D’Artagnan, the means were not discovered at all. Malicorne had, indeed, occasional brilliant flashes of imagination, with which he tried to inspire the king with confidence; but, whether from shame or suspicion, the king, who had at first begun to nibble at the bait, soon abandoned the hook. In this way, for instance, one evening, while the king was crossing the garden, and looking up at Madame’s windows, Malicorne stumbled over a ladder lying beside a border of box, and said to Manicamp, then walking with him behind the king, “Did you not see that I just now stumbled against a ladder, and was nearly thrown down?”

“No,” said Manicamp, as usual very absent-minded, “but it appears you did not fall.”

“That doesn’t matter; but it is not on that account the less dangerous to leave ladders lying about in that manner.”

“True, one might hurt one’s self, especially when troubled with fits of absence of mind.”

“I don’t mean that; what I did mean, was that it is dangerous to allow ladders to lie about so near the windows of the maids of honor.” Louis started imperceptibly.

“Why so?” inquired Manicamp.

“Speak louder,” whispered Malicorne, as he touched him with his arm.

“Why so?” said Manicamp, louder. The king listened.

“Because, for instance,” said Malicorne, “a ladder nineteen feet high is just the height of the cornice of those windows.” Manicamp, instead of answering, was dreaming of something else.

“Ask me, can’t you, what windows I mean,” whispered Malicorne.

“But what windows are you referring to?” said Manicamp, aloud.

“The windows of Madame’s apartments.”

“Eh!”

“Oh! I don’t say that any one would ever venture to go up a ladder into Madame’s room; but in Madame’s cabinet, merely separated by a partition, sleep two exceedingly pretty girls, Mesdemoiselles de la Valliere and de Montalais.”

“By a partition?” said Manicamp.

“Look; you see how brilliantly lighted Madame’s apartments are — well, do you see those two windows?”

“Yes.”

“And that window close to the others, but more dimly lighted?”

“Yes.”

“Well, that is the room of the maids of honor. Look, there is Mademoiselle de la Valliere opening the window. Ah! how many soft things could an enterprising lover say to her, if he only suspected that there was lying here a ladder nineteen feet long, which would just reach the cornice.”

“But she is not alone; you said Mademoiselle de Montalais is with her.”

“Mademoiselle de Montalais counts for nothing; she is her oldest friend, and exceedingly devoted to her — a positive well, into which can be thrown all sorts of secrets one might wish to get rid of.”

The king did not lose a single syllable of this conversation. Malicorne even remarked that his majesty slackened his pace, in order to give him time to finish. So, when they arrived at the door, Louis dismissed every one, with the exception of Malicorne — a circumstance which excited no surprise, for it was known that the king was in love; and they suspected he was going to compose some verses by moonlight; and, although there was no moon that evening, the king might, nevertheless, have some verses to compose. Every one, therefore, took his leave; and, immediately afterwards, the king turned towards Malicorne, who respectfully waited until his majesty should address him. “What were you saying, just now, about a ladder, Monsieur Malicorne?” he asked.

“Did I say anything about ladders, sire?” said Malicorne, looking up, as if in search of words which had flown away.

“Yes, of a ladder nineteen feet long.”

“Oh, yes, sire, I remember; but I spoke to M. Manicamp, and I should not have said a word had I known your majesty was near enough to hear us.”

“And why would you not have said a word?”

“Because I should not have liked to get the gardener into a scrape who left it there — poor fellow!”

“Don’t make yourself uneasy on that account. What is this ladder like?”

“If your majesty wishes to see it, nothing is easier, for there it is.”

“In that box hedge?”

“Exactly.”

“Show it to me.”

Malicorne turned back, and led the king up to the ladder, saying, “This is it, sire.”

“Pull it this way a little.”

When Malicorne had brought the ladder on to the gravel walk, the king began to step its whole length. “Hum!” he said; “you say it is nineteen feet long?”

“Yes, sire.”

“Nineteen feet — that is rather long; I hardly believe it can be so long as that.”

“You cannot judge very correctly with the ladder in that position, sire. If it were upright, against a tree or a wall, for instance, you would be better able to judge, because the comparison would assist you a good deal.”

“Oh! it does not matter, M. Malicorne; but I can hardly believe that the ladder is nineteen feet high.”

“I know how accurate your majesty’s glance is, and yet I would wager.”

The king shook his head. “There is one unanswerable means of verifying it,” said Malicorne.

“What is that?”

“Every one knows, sire, that the ground-floor of the palace is eighteen feet high.”

“True, that is very well known.”

“Well, sire, if I place the ladder against the wall, we shall be able to ascertain.”

“True.”

Malicorne took up the ladder, like a feather, and placed it upright against the wall. And, in order to try the experiment, he chose, or chance, perhaps, directed him to choose, the very window of the cabinet where La Valliere was. The ladder just reached the edge of the cornice, that is to say, the sill of the window; so that, by standing upon the last round but one of the ladder, a man of about the middle height, as the king was, for instance, could easily talk with those who might be in the room. Hardly had the ladder been properly placed, when the king, dropping the assumed part he had been playing in the comedy, began to ascend the rounds of the ladder, which Malicorne held at the bottom. But hardly had he completed half the distance when a patrol of Swiss guards appeared in the garden, and advanced straight towards them. The king descended with the utmost precipitation, and concealed himself among the trees. Malicorne at once perceived that he must offer himself as a sacrifice; for if he, too, were to conceal himself, the guard would search everywhere until they had found either himself or the king, perhaps both. It would be far better, therefore, that he alone should be discovered. And, consequently, Malicorne hid himself so clumsily that he was the only one arrested. As soon as he was arrested, Malicorne was taken to the guard-house, and there he declared who he was, and was immediately recognized. In the meantime, by concealing himself first behind one clump of trees and then behind another, the king reached the side door of his apartment, very much humiliated, and still more disappointed. More than that, the noise made in arresting Malicorne had drawn La Valliere and Montalais to their window; and even Madame herself had appeared at her own, with a pair of wax candles, one in each hand, clamorously asking what was the matter.

In the meantime, Malicorne sent for D'Artagnan, who did not lose a moment in hurrying to him. But it was in vain he attempted to make him understand his reasons, and in vain also that D'Artagnan did understand them; and, further, it was equally in vain that both their sharp and intuitive minds endeavored to give another turn to the adventure; there was no other resource left for Malicorne but to let it be supposed that he had wished to enter Mademoiselle de Montalais's apartment, as Saint-Aignan had passed for having wished to force Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente's door. Madame was inflexible; in the first place, because, if Malicorne had, in fact, wished to enter her apartment at night through the window, and by means of the ladder, in order to see Montalais, it was a punishable offense on Malicorne's part, and he must be punished accordingly; and, in the second place, if Malicorne, instead of acting in his own name, had acted as an intermediary between La Valliere and a person whose name it was superfluous to mention, his crime was in that case even greater, since love, which is an excuse for everything, did not exist in the case as an excuse. Madame therefore made the greatest possible disturbance about the matter, and obtained his dismissal from Monsieur's household, without reflecting, poor blind creature, that both Malicorne and Montalais held her fast in their clutches in consequence of her visit to De Guiche, and in a variety of other ways equally delicate. Montalais, who was perfectly furious, wished to revenge herself immediately, but Malicorne pointed out to her that the king's countenance would repay them for all the disgraces in the world, and that it was a great thing to have to suffer on his majesty's account.

Malicorne was perfectly right, and, therefore, although Montalais had the spirit of ten women in her, he succeeded in bringing her round to his own opinion. And we must not omit to state that the king helped them to console themselves, for, in the first place, he presented Malicorne with fifty thousand francs as a compensation for the post he had lost, and, in the next place, he gave him an appointment in his own household, delighted to have an opportunity of revenging himself in such a manner upon Madame for all she had made him and La Valliere suffer. But as Malicorne could no longer carry significant handkerchiefs for him or plant convenient ladders, the royal lover was in a terrible state. There seemed to be no hope, therefore, of ever getting near La Valliere again, so long as she should remain at the Palais Royal. All the dignities and all the money in the world could not remedy that. Fortunately, however, Malicorne was on the lookout, and this so successfully that he met Montalais, who, to do her justice, it must be admitted, was doing her best to meet Malicorne. “What do you do during the night in Madame’s apartment?” he asked the young girl.

“Why, I go to sleep, of course,” she replied.

“But it is very wrong to sleep; it can hardly be possible that, with the pain you are suffering, you can manage to do so.”

“And what am I suffering from, may I ask?”

“Are you not in despair at my absence?”

“Of course not, since you have received fifty thousand francs and an appointment in the king’s household.”

“That is a matter of no moment; you are exceedingly afflicted at not seeing me as you used to see me formerly, and more than all, you are in despair at my having lost Madame’s confidence; come now, is not that true?”

“Perfectly true.”

“Very good; your distress of mind prevents you sleeping at night, and so you sob, and sigh, and blow your nose ten times every minute as loud as possible.”

“But, my dear Malicorne, Madame cannot endure the slightest noise near her.”

“I know that perfectly well; of course she can’t endure anything; and so, I tell you, when she hears your deep distress, she will turn you out of her rooms without a moment’s delay.”

“I understand.”

“Very fortunate you *do*.”

“Well, and what will happen next?”

“The next thing that will happen will be, that La Valliere, finding herself alone without you, will groan and utter such loud lamentations, that she will exhibit despair enough for two.”

“In that case she will be put into *another* room, don’t you see?”

“Precisely so.”

“Yes, but which?”

“Which?”

“Yes, that will puzzle you to say, Mr. Inventor-General.”

“Not at all; whenever and whatever the room may be, it will always be preferable to Madame’s own room.”

“That is true.”

“Very good, so begin your lamentations to-night.”

“I certainly will not fail to do so.”

“And give La Valliere a hint also.”

“Oh! don’t fear her, she cries quite enough already to herself.”

“Very well! all she has to do is cry out loudly.”

And they separated.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Which Treats of Carpentry Operations, and Furnishes Details upon the Mode of Constructing Staircases.

The advice which had been given to Montalais was communicated by her to La Valliere, who could not but acknowledge that it was by no means deficient in judgment, and who, after a certain amount of resistance, rising rather from timidity than indifference to the project, resolved to put it into execution. This story of the two girls weeping, and filling Madame’s bedroom with the noisiest lamentations, was Malicorne’s *chef-d’oeuvre*. As nothing is so probable as improbability, so natural as romance, this kind of Arabian Nights story succeeded perfectly with Madame. The first thing she did was to send Montalais away, and then, three days, or rather three nights afterwards, she had La Valliere removed. She gave the latter one of the small rooms on the top story, situated immediately over the apartments allotted to the gentlemen of Monsieur’s suite. One story only, that is to say, a mere flooring separated the maids of honor from the officers and gentlemen of her husband’s household. A private staircase, which was placed under Madame de Navailles’s surveillance, was the only means of communication. For greater safety, Madame de Navailles, who had heard of his majesty’s previous attempts, had the windows of the rooms and the openings of the chimneys carefully barred. There was, therefore, every possible security provided for Mademoiselle de la Valliere, whose room now bore more resemblance to a cage than to anything else. When Mademoiselle de la Valliere was in her own room, and she was there very frequently, for Madame scarcely ever had any occasion for her services, since she once knew she was safe under Madame de Navailles’s inspection, Mademoiselle de la Valliere had no better means of amusing herself than looking through the bars of her windows. It happened, therefore, that one morning, as she was looking out as usual, she perceived Malicorne at one of the windows exactly opposite to her own. He held a carpenter’s rule in his hand, was surveying the buildings, and seemed to be adding up some figures on paper. La Valliere recognized Malicorne and nodded to him;

Malicorne, in his turn, replied by a formal bow, and disappeared from the window. She was surprised at this marked coolness, so different from his usual unfailing good-humor, but she remembered that he had lost his appointment on her account, and that he could hardly be very amiably disposed towards her, since, in all probability, she would never be in a position to make him any recompense for what he had lost. She knew how to forgive offenses, and with still more readiness could she sympathize with misfortune. La Valliere would have asked Montalais her opinion, if she had been within hearing, but she was absent, it being the hour she commonly devoted to her own correspondence. Suddenly La Valliere observed something thrown from the window where Malicorne had been standing, pass across the open space which separated the iron bars, and roll upon the floor. She advanced with no little curiosity towards this object, and picked it up; it was a wooden reel for silk, only, in this instance, instead of silk, a piece of paper was rolled round it. La Valliere unrolled it and read as follows:

"MADEMOISELLE, — I am exceedingly anxious to learn two things: the first is, to know if the flooring of your apartment is wood or brick; the second, to ascertain at what distance your bed is placed from the window. Forgive my importunity, and will you be good enough to send me an answer by the same way you receive this letter — that is to say, by means of the silk winder; only, instead of throwing into my room, as I have thrown it into yours, which will be too difficult for you to attempt, have the goodness merely to let it fall. Believe me, mademoiselle, your most humble, most respectful servant,

"MALICORNE.

"Write the reply, if you please, upon the letter itself."

"Ah! poor fellow," exclaimed La Valliere, "he must have gone out of his mind;" and she directed towards her correspondent — of whom she caught but a faint glimpse, in consequence of the darkness of the room — a look full of compassionate consideration. Malicorne understood her, and shook his head, as if he meant to say, "No, no, I am not out of my mind; be quite satisfied."

She smiled, as if still in doubt.

"No, no," he signified by a gesture, "my head is right," and pointed to his head, then, after moving his hand like a man who writes very rapidly, he put his hands together as if entreating her to write.

La Valliere, even if he were mad, saw no impropriety in doing what Malicorne requested her; she took a pencil and wrote "Wood," and then walked slowly from her window to her bed, and wrote, "Six paces," and having done this, she looked out again at Malicorne, who bowed to her, signifying that he was about to descend. La Valliere understood that it was to pick up the silk winder. She approached the window, and, in accordance with Malicorne's instructions, let it fall. The winder was still rolling along the flag-stones as Malicorne started after it, overtook and picked it up, and beginning to peel it as a monkey would do with a nut, he ran straight towards M. de Saint-Aignan's apartment. Saint-Aignan had chosen, or rather solicited, that his rooms might be as near the king as possible, as certain plants seek the sun's rays in order to develop themselves more luxuriantly. His apartment consisted of two rooms, in that portion of the palace occupied by Louis XIV. himself. M. de Saint-Aignan was very proud of this proximity, which afforded easy access to his majesty, and, more than that, the favor of occasional unexpected meetings. At the moment we are now referring to, he was engaged in having both his rooms magnificently carpeted, with expectation of receiving the honor of frequent visits from the king; for his majesty, since his passion for La Valliere, had chosen Saint-Aignan as his confidant, and could not, in fact, do without him, either night or day. Malicorne introduced himself to the comte, and met with no difficulties, because he had been favorably noticed by the king; and also, because the credit which one man may happen to enjoy is always a bait for others. Saint-Aignan asked his visitor if he brought any news with him.

"Yes; great news," replied the latter.

"Ah! ah!" said Saint-Aignan, "what is it?"

"Mademoiselle de la Valliere has changed her quarters."

"What do you mean?" said Saint-Aignan, opening his eyes very wide. "She was living in the same apartments as Madame."

"Precisely so; but Madame got tired of her proximity, and has installed her in a room which is situated exactly above your future apartment."

"What! up there," exclaimed Saint-Aignan, with surprise, and pointing at the floor above him with his finger.

"No," said Malicorne, "yonder," indicating the building opposite.

"What do you mean, then, by saying that her room is above my apartment?"

“Because I am sure that your apartment *ought*, providentially, to be under Mademoiselle de la Valliere’s room.”

Saint-Aignan, at this remark, gave poor Malicorne a look, similar to one of those La Valliere had already given a quarter of an hour before, that is to say, he thought he had lost his senses.

“Monsieur,” said Malicorne to him, “I wish to answer what you are thinking about.”

“What do you mean by ‘what I am thinking about’?”

“My reason is, that you have not clearly understood what I want to convey.”

“I admit it.”

“Well, then, you are aware that underneath the apartments set for Madame’s maids of honor, the gentlemen in attendance on the king and on Monsieur are lodged.”

“Yes, I know that, since Manicamp, De Wardes, and others are living there.”

“Precisely. Well, monsieur, admire the singularity of the circumstance; the two rooms destined for M. de Guiche are exactly the very two rooms situated underneath those which Mademoiselle de Montalais and Mademoiselle de la Valliere occupy.”

“Well; what then?”

“‘What then,’ do you say? Why, these two rooms are empty, since M. de Guiche is now lying wounded at Fontainebleau.”

“I assure you, my dear fellow, I cannot grasp your meaning.”

“Well! if I had the happiness to call myself Saint-Aignan, I should guess immediately.”

“And what would you do then?”

“I should at once change the rooms I am occupying here, for those which M. de Guiche is not using yonder.”

“Can you suppose such a thing?” said Saint-Aignan, disdainfully. “What! abandon the chief post of honor, the proximity to the king, a privilege conceded only to princes of the blood, to dukes, and peers! Permit me to tell you, my dear Monsieur de Malicorne, that you must be out of your senses.”

“Monsieur,” replied the young man, seriously, “you commit two mistakes. My name is Malicorne, simply; and I am in perfect possession of all my senses.” Then, drawing a paper from his pocket, he said, “Listen to what I am going to say; and afterwards, I will show you this paper.”

"I am listening," said Saint-Aignan.

"You know that Madame looks after La Valliere as carefully as Argus did after the nymph Io."

"I do."

"You know that the king has sought for an opportunity, but uselessly, of speaking to the prisoner, and that neither you nor myself have yet succeeded in procuring him this piece of good fortune."

"You certainly ought to know something about the subject, my poor Malicorne," said Saint-Aignan, smiling.

"Very good; what do you suppose would happen to the man whose imagination devised some means of bringing the lovers together?"

"Oh! the king would set no bounds to his gratitude."

"Let me ask you, then, M. de Saint-Aignan, whether you would not be curious to taste a little of this royal gratitude?"

"Certainly," replied Saint-Aignan, "any favor of my master, as a recognition of the proper discharge of my duty, would assuredly be most precious."

"In that case, look at this paper, monsieur le comte."

"What is it — a plan?"

"Yes; a plan of M. de Guiche's two rooms, which, in all probability, will soon be your two rooms."

"Oh! no, whatever may happen."

"Why so?"

"Because my rooms are the envy of too many gentlemen, to whom I certainly shall not give them up; M. de Roquelaure, for instance, M. de la Ferte, and M. de Dangeau, would all be anxious to get them."

"In that case I shall leave you, monsieur le comte, and I shall go and offer to one of those gentlemen the plan I have just shown you, together with the advantages annexed to it."

"But why do you not keep them for yourself?" inquired Saint-Aignan, suspiciously.

"Because the king would never do me the honor of paying me a visit openly, whilst he would readily go and see any one of those gentlemen."

"What! the king would go and see any one of those gentlemen?"

"Go! most certainly he would ten times instead of once. Is it possible you can ask me if the king would go to an apartment which would bring him nearer to Mademoiselle de la Valliere?"

“Yes, indeed, delightfully near her, with a floor between them.”

Malicorne unfolded the piece of paper which had been wrapped round the bobbin. “Monsieur le comte,” he said, “have the goodness to observe that the flooring of Mademoiselle de la Valliere’s room is merely a wooden flooring.”

“Well?”

“Well! all you would have to do would be to get hold of a journeyman carpenter, lock him up in your apartments, without letting him know where you have taken him to, and let him make a hole in your ceiling, and consequently in the flooring of Mademoiselle de la Valliere’s room.”

“Good heavens!” exclaimed Saint-Aignan, as if dazzled.

“What is the matter?” said Malicorne.

“Nothing, except that you have hit upon a singular, bold idea, monsieur.”

“It will seem a very trifling one to the king, I assure you.”

“Lovers never think of the risk they run.”

“What danger do you apprehend, monsieur le comte?”

“Why, effecting such an opening as that will make a terrible noise: it could be heard all over the palace.”

“Oh! monsieur le comte, I am quite sure that the carpenter I shall select will not make the slightest noise in the world. He will saw an opening three feet square, with a saw covered with tow, and no one, not even those adjoining, will know that he is at work.”

“My dear Monsieur Malicorne, you astound, you positively bewilder me.”

“To continue,” replied Malicorne, quietly, “in the room, the ceiling of which you will have cut through, you will put up a staircase, which will either allow Mademoiselle de la Valliere to descend into your room, or the king to ascend into Mademoiselle de la Valliere’s room.”

“But the staircase will be seen.”

“No; for in your room it will be hidden by a partition, over which you will throw a tapestry similar to that which covers the rest of the apartment; and in Mademoiselle de la Valliere’s room it will not be seen, for the trapdoor, which will be a part of the flooring itself, will be made to open under the bed.”

“Of course,” said Saint-Aignan, whose eyes began to sparkle with delight.

“And now, monsieur le comte, there is no occasion to make you admit that the king will frequently come to the room where such a staircase is constructed. I think that M. Dangeau, particularly, will be struck by my idea, and I shall now go and explain to him.”

“But, my dear Monsieur Malicorne, you forget that you spoke to me about it the first, and that I have consequently the right of priority.”

“Do you wish for the preference?”

“Do I wish it? Of course I do.”

“The fact is, Monsieur de Saint-Aignan, I am presenting you with a Jacob’s ladder, which is better than the promise of an additional step in the peerage — perhaps, even with a good estate to accompany your dukedom.”

“At least,” replied Saint-Aignan, “it will give me an opportunity of showing the king that he is not mistaken in occasionally calling me his friend; an opportunity, dear M. Malicorne, for which I am indebted to you.”

“And which you will not forget to remember?” inquired Malicorne, smiling.

“Nothing will delight me more, monsieur.”

“But I am not the king’s friend; I am simply his attendant.”

“Yes; and if you imagine that that staircase is as good as a dukedom for myself, I think there will certainly be letters of nobility at the top of it for you.”

Malicorne bowed.

“All I have to do now,” said Saint-Aignan, “is to move as soon as possible.”

“I do not think the king will object to it. Ask his permission, however.”

“I will go and see him this very moment.”

“And I will run and get the carpenter I was speaking of.”

“When will he be here?”

“This very evening.”

“Do not forget your precautions.”

“He shall be brought with his eyes bandaged.”

“And I will send you one of my carriages.”

“Without arms.”

“And one of my servants without livery. But stay, what will La Valliere say if she sees what is going on?”

“Oh! I can assure you she will be very much interested in the operation, and I am equally sure that if the king has not courage enough to ascend to her room, she will have sufficient curiosity to come down to him.”

“We will live in hope,” said Saint-Aignan; “and now I am off to his majesty. At what time will the carpenter be here?”

“At eight o’clock.”

“How long do you suppose he will take to make this opening?”

“About a couple of hours; only afterwards he must have sufficient time to construct what may be called the hyphen between the two rooms. One night and a portion of the following day will do; we must not reckon upon less than two days, including putting up the staircase.”

“Two days, that is a very long time.”

“Nay; when one undertakes to open up communications with paradise itself, we must at least take care that the approaches are respectable.”

“Quite right; so farewell for a short time, dear M. Malicorne. I shall begin to remove the day after to-morrow, in the evening.”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

The Promenade by Torchlight.

Saint-Aignan, delighted with what he had just heard, and rejoiced at what the future foreshadowed for him, bent his steps towards De Guiche’s two rooms. He who, a quarter of an hour previously, would hardly yield up his own rooms for a million francs, was now ready to expend a million, if it were necessary, upon the acquisition of the two happy rooms he coveted so eagerly. But he did not meet with so many obstacles. M. de Guiche did not yet know where he was to lodge, and, besides, was still too far ill to trouble himself about his lodgings; and so Saint-Aignan obtained De Guiche’s two rooms without difficulty. As for M. Dangeau, he was so immeasurably delighted, that he did not even give himself the trouble to think whether Saint-Aignan had any particular reason for removing. Within an hour after Saint-Aignan’s new resolution, he was in possession of the two rooms; and ten minutes later Malicorne entered, followed by the upholsterers. During this time, the king asked for Saint-Aignan; the valet ran to his late apartments and found M. Dangeau there; Dangeau sent him on to De Guiche’s, and Saint-Aignan was found there; but a little delay had of course taken place, and the king had already exhibited once or twice evident signs of impatience, when Saint-Aignan entered his royal master’s presence, quite out of breath.

“You, too, abandon me, then,” said Louis XIV., in a similar tone of lamentation to that with which Caesar, eighteen hundred years previously, had pronounced the *Et tu quoque*.

“Sire, I am far from abandoning you, for, on the contrary, I am busily occupied in changing my lodgings.”

“What do you mean? I thought you had finished moving three days ago.”

“Yes, sire. But I don’t find myself comfortable where I am, so I am going to change to the opposite side of the building.”

“Was I not right when I said you were abandoning me?” exclaimed the king. “Oh! this exceeds all endurance. But so it is: there was only one woman for whom my heart cared at all, and all my family is leagued together to tear her from me; and my friend, to whom I confided my distress, and who helped me to bear up under it, has become wearied of my complaints and is going to leave me without even asking my permission."

Saint-Aignan began to laugh. The king at once guessed there must be some mystery in this want of respect. "What is it?" cried the king, full of hope.

"This, sire, that the friend whom the king calumniates is going to try if he cannot restore to his sovereign the happiness he has lost."

"Are you going to let me see La Valliere?" said Louis XIV.

"I cannot say so, positively, but I hope so."

"How — how? — tell me that, Saint-Aignan. I wish to know what your project is, and to help you with all my power."

"Sire," replied Saint-Aignan, "I cannot, even myself, tell very well how I must set about attaining success; but I have every reason to believe that from to-morrow — "

"To-morrow, do you say! What happiness! But why are you changing your rooms?"

"In order to serve your majesty to better advantage."

"How can your moving serve me?"

"Do you happen to know where the two rooms destined for De Guiche are situated?"

"Yes."

"Well, your majesty now knows where I am going."

"Very likely; but that does not help me."

"What! is it possible that you do not understand, sire, that above De Guiche's lodgings are two rooms, one of which is Mademoiselle Montalais's, and the other — "

"La Valliere's, is it not so, Saint-Aignan? Oh! yes, yes. It is a brilliant idea, Saint-Aignan, a true friend's idea, a poet's idea. By bringing me nearer her from whom the world seems to unite to separate me — you are far more than Pylades was for Orestes, or Patroclus for Achilles."

"Sire," said Aignan, with a smile, "I question whether, if your majesty were to know my projects in their full extent, you would continue to pronounce such a pompous eulogium upon me. Ah! sire, I know how very different are the epithets which certain Puritans of the court will not fail to apply to me when they learn of what I intend to do for your majesty."

"Saint-Aignan, I am dying with impatience; I am in a perfect fever; I shall never be able to wait until to-morrow — to-morrow! why, to-morrow is an eternity!"

"And yet, sire, I shall require you, if you please, to go out presently and divert your impatience by a good walk."

"With you — agreed; we will talk about your projects, we will talk of her."

"Nay, sire; I remain here."

"Whom shall I go out with, then?"

"With the queen and all the ladies of the court."

"Nothing shall induce me to do that, Saint-Aignan."

"And yet, sire, you must."

"*Must?* — no, no — a thousand times no! I will never again expose myself to the horrible torture of being close to her, of seeing her, of touching her dress as I pass by her, and yet not be able to say a word to her. No, I renounce a torture which you suppose will bring me happiness, but which consumes and eats away my very life; to see her in the presence of strangers, and not to tell her that I love her, when my whole being reveals my affection and betrays me to every one; no! I have sworn never to do it again, and I will keep my oath."

"Yet, sire, pray listen to me for a moment."

"I will listen to nothing, Saint-Aignan."

"In that case, I will continue; it is most urgent, sire — pray understand me, it is of the greatest importance — that Madame and her maids of honor should be absent for two hours from the palace."

"I cannot understand your meaning at all, Saint-Aignan."

"It is hard for me to give my sovereign directions what to do; but under the circumstances I do give you directions, sire; and either a hunting or a promenade party must be got up."

"But if I were to do what you wish, it would be a caprice, a mere whim. In displaying such an impatient humor I show my whole court that I have no control over my own feelings. Do not people already say that I am dreaming of the conquest of the world, but that I ought previously to begin by achieving a conquest over myself?"

"Those who say so, sire, are as insolent as they would like to be thought facetious; but whomever they may be, if your majesty prefers to listen to them, I have nothing further to say. In such a case, that which we have fixed to take place to-morrow must be postponed indefinitely.”

“Nay, Saint-Aignan, I will go out this evening — I will go by torchlight to Saint-Germain: I will breakfast there to-morrow, and will return to Paris by three o’clock. Will that do?”

“Admirably.”

“In that case I will set out this evening at eight o’clock.”

“Your majesty has fixed upon the exact minute.”

“And you positively will tell me nothing more?”

“It is because I have nothing more to tell you. Industry counts for something in this world, sire; but still, chance plays so important a part in it that I have been accustomed to leave her the sidewalk, confident that she will manage so as to always take the street.”

“Well, I abandon myself entirely to you.”

“And you are quite right.”

Comforted in this manner, the king went immediately to Madame, to whom he announced the intended expedition. Madame fancied at the first moment that she saw in this unexpectedly arranged party a plot of the king’s to converse with La Valliere, either on the road under cover of the darkness, or in some other way, but she took especial care not to show any of her fancies to her brother-in-law, and accepted the invitation with a smile upon her lips. She gave directions aloud that her maids of honor should accompany her, secretly intending in the evening to take the most effectual steps to interfere with his majesty’s attachment. Then, when she was alone, and at the very moment the poor lover, who had issued orders for the departure, was reveling in the idea that Mademoiselle de la Valliere would form one of the party, — luxuriating in the sad happiness persecuted lovers enjoy of realizing through the sense of sight alone all the transports of possession, — Madame, who was surrounded by her maids of honor, was saying: — ”Two ladies will be enough for me this evening, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente and Mademoiselle de Montalais.”

La Valliere had anticipated her own omission, and was prepared for it: but persecution had rendered her courageous, and she did not give Madame the pleasure of seeing on her face the impression of the shock her heart received. On the contrary, smiling with that ineffable gentleness which gave an angelic expression to her features — ”In that case, Madame, I shall be at liberty this evening, I suppose?” she said.

“Of course.”

“I shall be able to employ it, then, in progressing with that piece of tapestry which your highness has been good enough to notice, and which I have already had the honor of offering to you.”

And having made a respectful obeisance she withdrew to her own apartment; Mesdemoiselles de Tonnay-Charente and de Montalais did the same. The rumor of the intended promenade soon spread all over the palace; ten minutes afterwards Malicorne learned Madame’s resolution, and slipped under Montalais’s door a note, in the following terms:

“L. V. must positively pass the night the night with Madame.”

Montalais, in pursuance of the compact she had entered into, began by burning the letter, and then sat down to reflect. Montalais was a girl full of expedients, and so she very soon arranged her plan. Towards five o’clock, which was the hour for her to repair to Madame’s apartment, she was running across the courtyard, and had reached within a dozen paces of a group of officers, when she uttered a cry, fell gracefully on one knee, rose again, with difficulty, and walked on limpingly. The gentlemen ran forward to her assistance; Montalais had sprained her foot. Faithful to the discharge of her duty, she insisted, however, notwithstanding her accident, upon going to Madame’s apartments.

“What is the matter, and why do you limp so?” she inquired; “I mistook you for La Valliere.”

Montalais related how it had happened, that in hurrying on, in order to arrive as quickly as possible, she had sprained her foot. Madame seemed to pity her, and wished to have a surgeon sent for immediately, but she, assuring her that there was nothing really serious in the accident, said: “My only regret, Madame, is, that it will preclude my attendance on you, and I should have begged Mademoiselle de la Valliere to take my place with your royal highness, but — ” seeing that Madame frowned, she added — ”I have not done so.”

“Why did you not do so?” inquired Madame.

“Because poor La Valliere seemed so happy to have her liberty for a whole evening and night too, that I did not feel courageous enough to ask her to take my place.”

“What, is she so delighted as that?” inquired madame, struck by these words.

“She is wild with delight; she, who is always so melancholy, was singing like a bird. Besides, your highness knows how much she detests going out, and also that her character has a spice of wildness in it.”

“So!” thought Madame, “this extreme delight hardly seems natural to me.”

“She has already made all her preparations for dining in her own room *tete-a-tete* with one of her favorite books. And then, as your highness has six other young ladies who would be delighted to accompany you, I did not make my proposal to La Valliere.” Madame did not say a word in reply.

“Have I acted properly?” continued Montalais, with a slight fluttering of the heart, seeing the little success that seemed to attend the *ruse de guerre* which she had relied upon with so much confidence that she had not thought it even necessary to try and find another. “Does Madame approve of what I have done?” she continued.

Madame was reflecting that the king could very easily leave Saint-Germain during the night, and that, as it was only four leagues and a half from Paris to Saint-Germain, he might readily be in Paris in an hour’s time. “Tell me,” she said, “whether La Valliere, when she heard of your accident, offered at least to bear you company?”

“Oh! she does not yet know of my accident; but even did she know of it, I most certainly should not ask her to do anything that might interfere with her own plans. I think she wishes this evening to realize quietly by herself that amusement of the late king, when he said to M. de Cinq-Mars, ‘Let us amuse ourselves by doing nothing, and making ourselves miserable.’“

Madame felt convinced that some mysterious love adventure lurked behind this strong desire for solitude. The secret *might* be Louis’s return during the night; it could not be doubted any longer La Valliere had been informed of his intended return, and that was the reason for her delight at having to remain behind at the Palais Royal. It was a plan settled and arranged beforehand.

“I will not be their dupe though,” said Madame, and she took a decisive step. “Mademoiselle de Montalais,” she said, “will you have the goodness to inform your friend, Mademoiselle de la Valliere, that I am exceedingly sorry to disarrange her projects of solitude, but that instead of becoming *ennuyee* by remaining behind alone as she wished, she will be good enough to accompany us to Saint-Germain and get *ennuyee* there.”

“Ah! poor La Valliere,” said Montalais, compassionately, but with her heart throbbing with delight; “oh, Madame, could there not be some means — ”

“Enough,” said Madame; “I desire it. I prefer Mademoiselle la Baume le Blanc’s society to that of any one else. Go, and send her to me, and take care of your foot.”

Montalais did not wait for the order to be repeated; she returned to her room, almost forgetting to feign lameness, wrote an answer to Malicorne, and slipped it under the carpet. The answer simply said: “She shall.” A Spartan could not have written more laconically.

“By this means,” thought Madame, “I will look narrowly after all on the road; she shall sleep near me during the night, and his majesty must be very clever if he can exchange a single word with Mademoiselle de la Valliere.”

La Valliere received the order to set off with the same indifferent gentleness with which she had received the order to play Cinderella. But, inwardly, her delight was extreme, and she looked upon this change in the princess’s resolution as a consolation which Providence had sent her. With less penetration than Madame possessed, she attributed all to chance. While every one, with the exception of those in disgrace, of those who were ill, and those who were suffering from sprains, were being driven towards Saint-Germain, Malicorne smuggled his workman into the palace in one of M. de Saint-Aignan’s carriages, and led him into the room corresponding to La Valliere’s. The man set to work with a will, tempted by the splendid reward which had been promised him. As the very best tools and implements had been selected from the reserve stock belonging to the engineers attached to the king’s household — and among others, a saw with teeth so sharp and well tempered that it was able, under water even, to cut through oaken joists as hard as iron — the work in question advanced very rapidly, and a square portion of the ceiling, taken from between two of the joists, fell into the arms of the delighted Saint-Aignan, Malicorne, the workman, and a confidential valet, the latter being one brought into the world to see and hear everything, but to repeat nothing. In accordance with a new plan indicated by Malicorne, the opening was effected in an angle of the room — and for this reason. As there was no dressing-closet adjoining La Valliere’s room, she had solicited, and had that very morning obtained, a large screen intended to serve as a partition. The screen that had been allotted her was perfectly sufficient to conceal the opening, which would, besides, be hidden by all the artifices skilled cabinet-makers would have at their command. The opening having been made, the workman glided between the joists, and found himself in La Valliere’s room. When there, he cut a square opening in the flooring, and out of the boards he manufactured a trap so accurately fitting into the opening that the most practised eye could hardly detect the necessary interstices made by its lines of juncture with the floor. Malicorne had provided for everything: a ring and a couple of hinges which had been bought for the purpose, were affixed to the trap-door; and a small circular stair-case, packed in sections, had been bought ready made by the industrious Malicorne, who had paid two thousand francs for it. It was higher than what was required, but the carpenter reduced the number of steps, and it was found to suit exactly. This staircase, destined to receive so illustrious a burden, was merely fastened to the wall by a couple of iron clamps, and its base was fixed into the floor of the comte’s room by two iron pegs screwed down tightly, so that the king, and all his cabinet councilors too, might pass up and down the staircase without any fear. Every blow of the hammer fell upon a thick pad or cushion, and the saw was not used until the handle had been wrapped in wool, and the blade steeped in oil. The noisiest part of the work, moreover, had taken place during the night and early in the morning, that is to say, when La Valliere and Madame were both absent. When, about two o’clock in the afternoon, the court returned to the Palais Royal, La Valliere went up into her own room. Everything was in its proper place — not the smallest particle of sawdust, not the smallest chip, was left to bear witness to the violation of her domicile. Saint-Aignan, however, wishing to do his utmost in forwarding the work, had torn his fingers and his shirt too, and had expended no ordinary amount of perspiration in the king’s service. The palms of his hands were covered with blisters, occasioned by his having held the ladder for Malicorne. He had, moreover, brought up, one by one, the seven pieces of the staircase, each consisting of two steps. In fact, we can safely assert that, if the king had seen him so ardently at work, his majesty would have sworn an eternal gratitude towards his faithful attendant. As Malicorne anticipated, the workman had completely finished the job in twenty-four hours; he received twenty-four louis, and left, overwhelmed with delight, for he had gained in one day as much as six months’ hard work would have procured him. No one had the slightest suspicion of what had taken place in the room under Mademoiselle de la

Valliere’s apartment. But in the evening of the second day, at the very moment La Valliere had just left Madame’s circle and returned to her own room, she heard a slight creaking sound in one corner. Astonished, she looked to see whence it proceeded, and the noise began again. “Who is there?” she said, in a tone of alarm.

“It is I, Louise,” replied the well-known voice of the king.

“You! you!” cried the young girl, who for a moment fancied herself under the influence of a dream. “But where? You, sire?”

“Here,” replied the king, opening one of the folds of the screen, and appearing like a ghost at the end of the room.

La Valliere uttered a loud cry, and fell trembling into an armchair, as the king advanced respectfully towards her.

CHAPTER XXXV.

The Apparition.

La Valliere very soon recovered from her surprise, for, owing to his respectful bearing, the king inspired her with more confidence by his presence than his sudden appearance had deprived her of. But, as he noticed that which made La Valliere most uneasy was the means by which he had effected an entrance into her room, he explained to her the system of the staircase concealed by the screen, and strongly disavowed the notion of his being a supernatural appearance.

“Oh, sire!” said La Valliere, shaking her fair head with a most engaging smile, “present or absent, you do not appear to my mind more at one time than at another.”

“Which means, Louise — ”

“Oh, what you know so well, sire; that there is not one moment in which the poor girl whose secret you surprised at Fontainebleau, and whom you came to snatch from the foot of the cross itself, does not think of you.”

“Louise, you overwhelm me with joy and happiness.”

La Valliere smiled mournfully, and continued: “But, sire, have you reflected that your ingenious invention could not be of the slightest service to us?”

“Why so? Tell me, — I am waiting most anxiously.”

“Because this room may be subject to being searched at any moment of the day. Madame herself may, at any time, come here accidentally; my companions run in at any moment they please. To fasten the door on the inside, is to denounce myself as plainly as if I had written above, ‘No admittance, — the king is within!’ Even now, sire, at this very moment, there is nothing to prevent the door opening, and your majesty being seen here.”

“In that case,” said the king, laughingly, “I should indeed be taken for a phantom, for no one can tell in what way I came here. Besides, it is only spirits that can pass through brick walls, or floors and ceilings.”

"Oh, sire, reflect for a moment how terrible the scandal would be! Nothing equal to it could ever have been previously said about the maids of honor, poor creatures! whom evil report, however, hardly ever spares."

"And your conclusion from all this, my dear Louise, — come, explain yourself."

"Alas! it is a hard thing to say — but your majesty must suppress staircase plots, surprises and all; for the evil consequences which would result from your being found here would be far greater than our happiness in seeing each other."

"Well, Louise," replied the king, tenderly, "instead of removing this staircase by which I have ascended, there is a far more simple means, of which you have not thought."

"A means — another means!"

"Yes, another. Oh, you do not love me as I love you, Louise, since my invention is quicker than yours."

She looked at the king, who held out his hand to her, which she took and gently pressed between her own.

"You were saying," continued the king, "that I shall be detected coming here, where any one who pleases can enter."

"Stay, sire; at this very moment, even while you are speaking about it, I tremble with dread of your being discovered."

"But you would not be found out, Louise, if you were to descend the staircase which leads to the room underneath."

"Oh, sire! what do you say?" cried Louise, in alarm.

"You do not quite understand me, Louise, since you get offended at my very first word; first of all, do you know to whom the apartments underneath belong?"

"To M. de Guiche, sire, I believe."

"Not at all; they are M. de Saint-Aignan's."

"Are you sure?" cried La Valliere; and this exclamation which escaped from the young girl's joyous heart made the king's heart throb with delight.

"Yes, to Saint-Aignan, *our friend*," he said.

"But, sire," returned La Valliere, "I cannot visit M. de Saint-Aignan's rooms any more than I could M. de Guiche's. It is impossible — impossible."

"And yet, Louise, I should have thought that, under the safe-conduct of the king, you would venture anything."

"Under the safe-conduct of the king," she said, with a look full of tenderness.

"You have faith in my word, I hope, Louise?"

"Yes, sire, when you are not present; but when you are present, — when you speak to me, — when I look upon you, I have faith in nothing."

"What can possibly be done to reassure you?"

"It is scarcely respectful, I know, to doubt the king, but — for me — you are *not* the king."

"Thank Heaven! — I, at least, hope so most devoutly; you see how anxiously I am trying to find or invent a means of removing all difficulty. Stay; would the presence of a third person reassure you?"

"The presence of M. de Saint-Aignan would, certainly."

"Really, Louise, you wound me by your suspicions."

Louise did not answer, she merely looked steadfastly at him with that clear, piercing gaze which penetrates the very heart, and said softly to herself, "Alas! alas! it is not you of whom I am afraid, — it is not you upon whom my doubts would fall."

"Well," said the king, sighing, "I agree; and M. de Saint-Aignan, who enjoys the inestimable privilege of reassuring you, shall always be present at our interviews, I promise you."

"You promise that, sire?"

"Upon my honor as a gentleman; and you, on your side — "

"Oh, wait, sire, that is not all yet; for such conversations ought, at least, to have a reasonable motive of some kind for M. de Saint-Aignan."

"Dear Louise, every shade of delicacy of feeling is yours, and my only study is to equal you on that point. It shall be just as you wish: therefore our conversations shall have a reasonable motive, and I have already hit upon one; so that from to-morrow, if you like — "

"To-morrow?"

"Do you meant that that is not soon enough?" exclaimed the king, caressing La Valliere's hand between his own.

At this moment the sound of steps was heard in the corridor.

"Sire! sire!" cried La Valliere, "some one is coming; do you hear? Oh, fly! fly! I implore you."

The king made but one bound from the chair where he was sitting to his hiding-place behind the screen. He had barely time; for as he drew one of the folds before him, the handle of the door was turned, and Montalais appeared at the threshold. As a matter of course she entered quite naturally, and without any ceremony, for she knew perfectly well that to knock at the door beforehand would be showing a suspicion towards La Valliere which would be displeasing to her. She accordingly entered, and after a rapid glance round the room, in the brief course of which she observed two chairs very close to each other, she was so long in shutting the door, which seemed to be difficult to close, one can hardly tell how or why, that the king had ample time to raise the trap-door, and to descend again to Saint-Aignan's room.

"Louise," she said to her, "I want to talk to you, and seriously, too."

"Good heavens! my dear Aure, what is the matter now?"

"The matter is, that Madame suspects *everything*."

"Explain yourself."

"Is there any occasion for us to enter into explanations, and do you not understand what I mean? Come, you must have noticed the fluctuations in Madame's humor during several days past; you must have noticed how she first kept you close beside her, then dismissed you, and then sent for you again."

"Yes, I have noticed it, of course."

"Well, it seems Madame has now succeeded in obtaining sufficient information, for she has now gone straight to the point, as there is nothing further left in France to withstand the torrent which sweeps away all obstacles before it; you know what I mean by the torrent?"

La Valliere hid her face in her hands.

"I mean," continued Montalais, pitilessly, "that torrent which burst through the gates of the Carmelites of Chaillot, and overthrew all the prejudices of the court, as well at Fontainebleau as at Paris."

"Alas! alas!" murmured La Valliere, her face still covered by her hands, and her tears streaming through her fingers.

"Oh, don't distress yourself in that manner, or you have only heard half of your troubles."

"In Heaven's name," exclaimed the young girl, in great anxiety, "what is the matter?"

"Well, then, this is how the matter stands: Madame, who can no longer rely upon any further assistance in France; for she has, one after the other, made use of the two queens, of Monsieur, and the whole court, too, now bethinks herself of a certain person who has certain pretended rights over you.”

La Valliere became as white as a marble statue.

“This person,” continued Madame, “is not in Paris at this moment; but, if I am not mistaken, is, just now, in England.”

“Yes, yes,” breathed La Valliere, almost overwhelmed with terror.

“And is to be found, I think, at the court of Charles II.; am I right?”

“Yes.”

“Well, this evening a letter has been dispatched by Madame to Saint James’s, with directions for the courier to go straight to Hampton Court, which I believe is one of the royal residences, situated about a dozen miles from London.”

“Yes, well?”

“Well; as Madame writes regularly to London once a fortnight, and as the ordinary courier left for London not more than three days ago, I have been thinking that some serious circumstance alone could have induced her to write again so soon, for you know she is a very indolent correspondent.”

“Yes.”

“This letter has been written, therefore, something tells me so, at least, on your account.”

“On my account?” repeated the unhappy girl, mechanically.

“And I, who saw the letter lying on Madame’s desk before she sealed it, fancied I could read — ”

“What did you fancy you could read?”

“I might possibly have been mistaken, though — ”

“Tell me, — what was it?”

“The name of Bragelonne.”

La Valliere rose hurriedly from her chair, a prey to the most painful agitation. “Montalais,” she said, her voice broken by sobs, “all my smiling dreams of youth and innocence have fled already. I have nothing now to conceal, either from you or any one else. My life is exposed to every one’s inspection, and can be opened like a book, in which all the world can read, from the king himself to the first passer-by. Aure, dearest Aure, what can I do — what will become of me?”

Montalais approached close to her, and said, “Consult your own heart, of course.”

"Well; I do not love M. de Bragelonne; when I say I do not love him, understand that I love him as the most affectionate sister could love the best of brothers, but that is not what he requires, nor what I promised him."

"In fact, you love the king," said Montalais, "and that is a sufficiently good excuse."

"Yes, I do love the king," hoarsely murmured the young girl, "and I have paid dearly enough for pronouncing those words. And now, Montalais, tell me — what can you do either for me, or against me, in my position?"

"You must speak more clearly still."

"What am I to say, then?"

"And so you have nothing very particular to tell me?"

"No!" said Louise, in astonishment.

"Very good; and so all you have to ask me is my advice respecting M. Raoul?"

"Nothing else."

"It is a very delicate subject," replied Montalais.

"No, it is nothing of the kind. Ought I to marry him in order to keep the promise I made, or ought I continue to listen to the king?"

"You have really placed me in a very difficult position," said Montalais, smiling; "you ask me if you ought to marry Raoul, whose friend I am, and whom I shall mortally offend in giving my opinion against him; and then, you ask me if you should cease to listen to the king, whose subject I am, and whom I should offend if I were to advise you in a particular way. Ah, Louise, you seem to hold a difficult position at a very cheap rate."

"You have not understood me, Aure," said La Valliere, wounded by the slightly mocking tone of her companion; "if I were to marry M. de Bragelonne, I should be far from bestowing on him the happiness he deserves; but, for the same reason, if I listen to the king he would become the possessor of one indifferent in very many aspects, I admit, but one whom his affection confers an appearance of value. What I ask you, then, is to tell me some means of disengaging myself honorably either from the one or from the other; or rather, I ask you, from which side you think I can free myself most honorably."

"My dear Louise," replied Montalais, after a pause, "I am not one of the seven wise men of Greece, and I have no perfectly invariable rules of conduct to govern me; but, on the other hand, I have a little experience, and I can assure you that no woman ever asks for advice of the nature which you have just asked me, without being in a terrible state of embarrassment. Besides, you have made a solemn promise, which every principle of honor requires you to fulfil; if, therefore, you are embarrassed, in consequence of having undertaken such an engagement, it is not a stranger's advice (every one is a stranger to a heart full of love), it is not my advice, I repeat, that can extricate you from your embarrassment. I shall not give it you, therefore; and for a greater reason still — because, were I in your place, I should feel much more embarrassed after the advice than before it. All I can do is, to repeat what I have already told you; shall I assist you?"

"Yes, yes."

"Very well; that is all. Tell me in what way you wish me to help you; tell me for and against whom, — in this way we shall not make any blunders."

"But first of all," said La Valliere, pressing her companion's hand, "for whom or against whom do you decide?"

"For you, if you are really and truly my friend."

"Are you not Madame's confidant?"

"A greater reason for being of service to you; if I were not to know what is going on in that direction I should not be of any service at all, and consequently you would not obtain any advantage from my acquaintance. Friendships live and thrive upon a system of reciprocal benefits."

"The result is, then, that you will remain at the same time Madame's friend also?"

"Evidently. Do you complain of that?"

"I hardly know," sighed La Valliere, thoughtfully, for this cynical frankness appeared to her an offense both to the woman and the friend.

"All well and good, then," said Montalais, "for if you did, you would be very foolish."

"You wish to serve me, then?"

"Devotedly — if you will serve me in return."

"One would almost say that you do not know my heart," said La Valliere, looking at Montalais with her eyes wide open.

"Why, the fact is, that since we have belonged to the court, my dear Louise, we are very much changed."

"In what way?"

"It is very simple. Were you the second queen of France yonder, at Blois?"

La Valliere hung down her head, and began to weep. Montalais looked at her in an indefinable manner, and murmured “Poor girl!” and then, adding, “Poor king!” she kissed Louise on the forehead, and returned to her apartment, where Malicorne was waiting for her.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

The Portrait.

In that malady which is termed love the paroxysms succeed each other at intervals, ever accelerating from the moment the disease declares itself. By and by, the paroxysms are less frequent, in proportion as the cure approaches. This being laid down as a general axiom, and as the leading article of a particular chapter, we will now proceed with our recital. The next day, the day fixed by the king for the first conversation in Saint-Aignan’s room, La Valliere, on opening one of the folds of the screen, found upon the floor a letter in the king’s handwriting. The letter had been passed, through a slit in the floor, from the lower apartment to her own. No indiscreet hand or curious gaze could have brought or did bring this single paper. This, too, was one of Malicorne’s ideas. Having seen how very serviceable Saint-Aignan would become to the king on account of his apartment, he did not wish that the courtier should become still more indispensable as a messenger, and so he had, on his own private account, reserved this last post for himself. La Valliere most eagerly read the letter, which fixed two o’clock that same afternoon for the rendezvous, and which indicated the way of raising the trap-door which was constructed out of the flooring. “Make yourself look as beautiful as you can,” added the postscript of the letter, words which astonished the young girl, but at the same time reassured her.

The hours passed away very slowly, but the time fixed, however, arrived at last. As punctual as the priestess Hero, Louise lifted up the trap-door at the last stroke of the hour of two, and found the king on the steps, waiting for her with the greatest respect, in order to give her his hand to descend. The delicacy and deference shown in this attention affected her very powerfully. At the foot of the staircase the two lovers found the comte, who, with a smile and a low reverence distinguished by the best taste, expressed his thanks to La Valliere for the honor she conferred upon him. Then turning towards the king, he said:

“Sire, our man is here.” La Valliere looked at the king with some uneasiness.

“Mademoiselle,” said the king, “if I have begged you to do me the honor of coming down here, it was from an interested motive. I have procured a most admirable portrait painter, who is celebrated for the fidelity of his likenesses, and I wish you to be kind enough to authorize him to paint yours. Besides, if you positively wish it, the portrait shall remain in your own possession.” La Valliere blushed. “You see,” said the king to her, “we shall not be three as you wished, but four instead. And, so long as we are not alone, there can be as many present as you please.” La Valliere gently pressed her royal lover’s hand.

“Shall we pass into the next room, sire?” said Saint-Aignan, opening the door to let his guests precede him. The king walked behind La Valliere, and fixed his eyes lingeringly and passionately upon that neck as white as snow, upon which her long fair ringlets fell in heavy masses. La Valliere was dressed in a thick silk robe of pearl gray color, with a tinge of rose, with jet ornaments, which displayed to greater effect the dazzling purity of her skin, holding in her slender and transparent hands a bouquet of heartsease, Bengal roses, and clematis, surrounded with leaves of the tenderest green, above which uprose, like a tiny goblet spilling magic influence a Haarlem tulip of gray and violet tints of a pure and beautiful species, which had cost the gardener five years’ toil of combinations, and the king five thousand francs. Louis had placed this bouquet in La Valliere’s hand as he saluted her. In the room, the door of which Saint-Aignan had just opened, a young man was standing, dressed in a purple velvet jacket, with beautiful black eyes and long brown hair. It was the painter; his canvas was quite ready, and his palette prepared for use.

He bowed to La Valliere with the grave curiosity of an artist who is studying his model, saluted the king discreetly, as if he did not recognize him, and as he would, consequently, have saluted any other gentleman. Then, leading Mademoiselle de la Valliere to the seat he had arranged for her, he begged her to sit down.

The young girl assumed an attitude graceful and unrestrained, her hands occupied and her limbs reclining on cushions; and in order that her gaze might not assume a vague or affected expression, the painter begged her to choose some kind of occupation, so as to engage her attention; whereupon Louis XIV., smiling, sat down on the cushions at La Valliere’s feet; so that she, in the reclining posture she had assumed, leaning back in the armchair, holding her flowers in her hand, and he, with his eyes raised towards her and fixed devouringly on her face — they, both together, formed so charming a group, that the artist contemplated painting it with professional delight, while on his side, Saint-Aignan regarded them with feelings of envy. The painter sketched rapidly; and very soon, beneath the earliest touches of the brush, there started into life, out of the gray background, the gentle, poetry-breathing face, with its soft calm eyes and delicately tinted cheeks, enframed in the masses of hair which fell about her neck. The lovers, however, spoke but little, and looked at each other a great deal; sometimes their eyes became so languishing in their gaze, that the painter was obliged to interrupt his work in order to avoid representing an Erycina instead of La Valliere. It was on such occasions that Saint-Aignan came to the rescue, and recited verses, or repeated one of those little tales such as Patru related, and Tallemant des Reaux wrote so cleverly. Or, it might be that La Valliere was fatigued, and the sitting was, therefore, suspended for awhile; and, immediately, a tray of precious porcelain laden with the most beautiful fruits which could be obtained, and rich wines distilling their bright colors in silver goblets, beautifully chased, served as accessories to the picture of which the painter could but retrace the most ephemeral resemblance.

Louis was intoxicated with love, La Valliere with happiness, Saint-Aignan with ambition, and the painter was storing up recollections for his old age. Two hours passed away in this manner, and four o’clock having struck, La Valliere rose, and made a sign to the king. Louis also rose, approached the picture, and addressed a few flattering remarks to the painter. Saint-Aignan also praised the picture, which, as he pretended, was already beginning to assume an accurate resemblance. La Valliere in her turn, blushingly thanked the painter and passed into the next room, where the king followed her, after having previously summoned Saint-Aignan.

“Will you not come to-morrow?” he said to La Valliere.

“Oh! sire, pray think that some one will be sure to come to my room, and will not find me there.”

“Well?”

“What will become of me in that case?”

“You are very apprehensive, Louise.”

“But at all events, suppose Madame were to send for me?”

"Oh!" replied the king, "will the day never come when you yourself will tell me to brave everything so that I may not have to leave you again?"

"On that day, sire, I shall be quite out of my mind, and you must not believe me."

"To-morrow, Louise."

La Valliere sighed, but, without the courage to oppose her royal lover's wish, she repeated, "To-morrow, then, since you desire it, sire," and with these words she ran lightly up the stairs, and disappeared from her lover's gaze.

"Well, sire?" inquired Saint-Aignan, when she had left.

"Well, Saint-Aignan, yesterday I thought myself the happiest of men."

"And does your majesty, then, regard yourself to-day," said the comte, smiling, "as the unhappiest of men?"

"No; but my love for her is an unquenchable thirst; in vain do I drink, in vain do I swallow the drops of water which your industry procures for me; the more I drink, the more unquenchable it becomes."

"Sire, that is in some degree your own fault, and your majesty alone has made the position such as it is."

"You are right."

"In that case, therefore, the means to be happy, is to fancy yourself satisfied, and to wait."

"Wait! you know that word, then?"

"There, there, sire — do not despair: I have already been at work on your behalf — I have still other resources in store." The king shook his head in a despairing manner.

"What, sire! have you not been satisfied hitherto?"

"Oh! yes, indeed, yes, my dear Saint-Aignan; but invent, for Heaven's sake, invent some further project yet."

"Sire, I undertake to do my best, and that is all that any one can do."

The king wished to see the portrait again, as he was unable to see the original. He pointed out several alterations to the painter and left the room, and then Saint-Aignan dismissed the artist. The easel, paints, and painter himself, had scarcely gone, when Malicorne showed his head in the doorway. He was received by Saint-Aignan with open arms, but still with a little sadness, for the cloud which had passed across the royal sun, veiled, in its turn, the faithful satellite, and Malicorne at a glance perceived the melancholy that brooded on Saint-Aignan's face.

"Oh, monsieur le comte," he said, "how sad you seem!"

"And good reason too, my dear Monsieur Malicorne. Will you believe that the king is still dissatisfied?"

"With his staircase, do you mean?"

"Oh, no; on the contrary, he is delighted with the staircase."

"The decorations of the apartments, I suppose, don't please him."

"Oh! he has not even thought of that. No, indeed, it seems that what has dissatisfied the king — "

"I will tell you, monsieur le comte, — he is dissatisfied at finding himself the fourth person at a rendezvous of this kind. How is it possible you could not have guessed that?"

"Why, how is it likely I could have done so, dear M. Malicorne, when I followed the king's instructions to the very letter?"

"Did his majesty really insist on your being present?"

"Positively."

"And also required that the painter, whom I met downstairs just now, should be here, too?"

"He insisted upon it."

"In that case, I can easily understand why his majesty is dissatisfied."

"What! dissatisfied that I have so punctually and so literally obeyed his orders? I don't understand you."

Malicorne began to scratch his ear, as he asked, "What time did the king fix for the rendezvous in your apartments?"

"Two o'clock."

"And you were waiting for the king?"

"Ever since half-past one; it would have been a fine thing, indeed, to have been unpunctual with his majesty."

Malicorne, notwithstanding his respect for Saint-Aignan, could not help smiling. "And the painter," he said, "did the king wish him to be here at two o'clock, also?"

"No; but I had him waiting here from midday. Far better, you know, for a painter to be kept waiting a couple of hours than the king a single minute."

Malicorne began to laugh aloud. "Come, dear Monsieur Malicorne," said Saint-Aignan, "laugh less at me, and speak a little more freely, I beg."

"Well, then, monsieur le comte, if you wish the king to be a little more satisfied the next time he comes — "

"'*Ventre saint-gris!*' as his grandfather used to say; of course I wish it."

“Well, all you have to do is, when the king comes to-morrow, to be obliged to go away on a most pressing matter of business, which cannot possibly be postponed, and stay away for twenty minutes.”

“What! leave the king alone for twenty minutes?” cried Saint-Aignan, in alarm.

“Very well, do as you like; don’t pay any attention to what I say,” said Malicorne, moving towards the door.

“Nay, nay, dear Monsieur Malicorne; on the contrary, go on — I begin to understand you. But the painter — ”

“Oh! the painter must be half an hour late.”

“Half an hour — do you really think so?”

“Yes, I do, decidedly.”

“Very well, then, I will do as you tell me.”

“And my opinion is, that you will be doing perfectly right. Will you allow me to call upon you for the latest news to-morrow?”

“Of course.”

“I have the honor to be your most respectful servant, M. de Saint-Aignan,” said Malicorne, bowing profoundly and retiring from the room backwards.

“There is no doubt that fellow has more invention than I have,” said Saint-Aignan, as if compelled by his conviction to admit it.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Hampton Court.

The revelation we have witnessed, that Montalais made to La Valliere, in a preceding chapter, very naturally makes us return to the principal hero of this tale, a poor wandering knight, roving about at the king's caprice. If our readers will be good enough to follow us, we will, in his company, cross that strait, more stormy than the Euripus, which separates Calais from Dover; we will speed across that green and fertile country, with its numerous little streams; through Maidstone, and many other villages and towns, each prettier than the other; and, finally, arrive at London. From thence, like bloodhounds following a track, after having ascertained that Raoul had made his first stay at Whitehall, his second at St. James's, and having learned that he had been warmly received by Monk, and introduced to the best society of Charles II.'s court, we will follow him to one of Charles II.'s summer residences near the lively little village of Kingston, at Hampton Court, situated on the Thames. The river is not, at that spot, the boastful highway which bears upon its broad bosom its thousands of travelers; nor are its waters black and troubled as those of Cocytus, as it boastfully asserts, "I, too, am cousin of the old ocean." No, at Hampton Court it is a soft and murmuring stream, with moss-fringed banks, reflecting, in its broad mirror, the willows and beeches which ornament its sides, and on which may occasionally be seen a light bark indolently reclining among the tall reeds, in a little creek formed of alders and forget-me-nots. The surrounding country on all sides smiled in happiness and wealth; the brick cottages from whose chimneys the blue smoke was slowly ascending in wreaths, peeped forth from the belts of green holly which environed them; children dressed in red frocks appeared and disappeared amidst the high grass, like poppies bowed by the gentler breath of the passing breeze. The sheep, ruminating with half-closed eyes, lay lazily about under the shadow of the stunted aspens, while, far and near, the kingfishers, plumed with emerald and gold, skimmed swiftly along the surface of the water, like a magic ball heedlessly touching, as he passed, the line of his brother angler, who sat watching in his boat the fish as they rose to the surface of the sparkling stream. High above this paradise of dark shadows and soft light, rose the palace of Hampton Court, built by Wolsey — a residence the haughty cardinal had been obliged, timid courtier that he was, to offer to his master, Henry VIII., who had glowered with envy and cupidity at the magnificent new home. Hampton Court, with its brick walls, its large windows, its handsome iron gates, as well as its curious bell turrets, its retired covered walks, and interior fountains, like those of the Alhambra, was a perfect bower of roses, jasmine, and clematis. Every sense, sight and smell particularly, was gratified, and the reception-rooms formed a very charming framework for the pictures of love which Charles II. unrolled among the voluptuous paintings of Titian, of Pordenone and of Van Dyck; the same Charles whose father's portrait — the martyr king — was hanging in his gallery, and who could show upon the wainscots of the various apartments the holes made by the balls of the puritanical followers of Cromwell, when on the 24th of August, 1648, at the time they had brought Charles I. prisoner to Hampton Court. There it was that the king, intoxicated with pleasure and adventure, held his court — he, who, a poet in feeling, thought himself justified in redeeming, by a whole day of voluptuousness, every minute which had been formerly passed in anguish and misery. It was not the soft green sward of Hampton Court — so soft that it almost resembled the richest velvet in the thickness of its texture — nor was it the beds of flowers, with their variegated hues which encircled the foot of every tree with rose-trees many feet in height, embracing most lovingly their trunks — nor even the enormous lime-trees, whose branches swept the earth like willows, offering a ready concealment for love or reflection beneath the shade of their foliage — it was none of these things for which Charles II. loved his palace of Hampton Court. Perhaps it might have been that beautiful sheet of water, which the cool breeze rippled like the wavy undulations of Cleopatra's hair, waters bedecked with cresses and white water-lilies, whose chaste bulbs coyly unfolding themselves beneath the sun's warm rays, reveal the golden gems which lie concealed within their milky petals — murmuring waters, on the bosom of which black swans majestically floated, and the graceful water-fowl, with their tender broods covered with silken down, darted restlessly in every direction, in pursuit of the insects among the reeds, or the fogs in their mossy retreats. Perhaps it might have been the enormous hollies, with their dark and tender green foliage; or the bridges uniting the banks of the canals in their embrace; or the fawns browsing in the endless avenues of the park; or the innumerable birds that hopped about the gardens, or flew from branch to branch, amidst the emerald foliage.

It might well have been any of these charms — for Hampton Court had them all; and possessed, too, almost forests of white roses, which climbed and trailed along the lofty trellises, showering down upon the ground their snowy leaves rich with soft perfumery. But no, what Charles II. most loved in Hampton Court were the charming figures who, when midday was past, flitted to and fro along the broad terraces of the gardens; like Louis XIV., he had their wealth of beauties painted for his gallery by one of the great artists of the period — an artist who well knew the secret of transferring to canvas the rays of light which escaped from beaming eyes heavy laden with love and love's delights.

The day of our arrival at Hampton Court is almost as clear and bright as a summer's day in France; the atmosphere is heavy with the delicious perfume of geraniums, sweet-peas, seringas, and heliotrope scattered in profusion around. It is past midday, and the king, having dined after his return from hunting, paid a visit to Lady Castlemaine, the lady who was reputed at the time to hold his heart in bondage; and this proof of his devotion discharged, he was readily permitted to pursue his infidelities until evening arrived. Love and amusement ruled the entire court; it was the period when ladies would seriously interrogate their ruder companions as to their opinions upon a foot more or less captivating, according to whether it wore a pink or lilac silk stocking — for it was the period when Charles II. had declared that there was no hope of safety for a woman who wore green silk stockings, because Miss Lucy Stewart wore them of that color. While the king is endeavoring in all directions to inculcate others with his preferences on this point, we will ourselves bend our steps towards an avenue of beech-trees opposite the terrace, and listen to the conversation of a young girl in a dark-colored dress, who is walking with another of about her own age dressed in blue. They crossed a beautiful lawn, from the center of which sprang a fountain, with the figure of a siren executed in bronze, and strolled on, talking as they went, towards the terrace, along which, looking out upon the park and interspersed at frequent intervals, were erected summer-houses, diverse in form and ornament; these summer-houses were nearly all occupied; the two young women passed on, the one blushing deeply, while the other seemed dreamily silent. At last, having reached the end of the terrace which looks on the river, and finding there a cool retreat, they sat down close to each other.

“Where are we going?” said the younger to her companion.

“My dear, we are going where you yourself led the way.”

“I?”

“Yes, you; to the extremity of the palace, towards that seat yonder, where the young Frenchman is seated, wasting his time in sighs and lamentations.”

Miss Mary Grafton hurriedly said, “No, no; I am not going there.”

“Why not?”

“Let us go back, Lucy.”

“Nay, on the contrary, let us go on, and have an explanation.”

“What about?”

“About how it happens that the Vicomte de Bragelonne always accompanies you in all your walks, as you invariably accompany him in his.”

“And you conclude either that he loves me, or that I love him?”

“Why not? — he is a most agreeable and charming companion. — No one hears me, I hope,” said Lucy Stewart, as she turned round with a smile, which indicated, moreover, that her uneasiness on the subject was not extreme.

“No, no,” said Mary, “the king is engaged in his summer-house with the Duke of Buckingham.”

“Oh! *a propos* of the duke, Mary, it seems he has shown you great attention since his return from France; how is your own heart in that direction?”

Mary Grafton shrugged her shoulders with seeming indifference.

“Well, well, I will ask Bragelonne about it,” said Stewart, laughing; “let us go and find him at once.”

“What for?”

“I wish to speak to him.”

“Not yet, one word before you do: come, come, you who know so many of the king’s secrets, tell me why M. de Bragelonne is in England?”

“Because he was sent as an envoy from one sovereign to another.”

“That may be; but, seriously, although politics do not much concern us, we know enough to be satisfied that M. de Bragelonne has no mission of serious import here.”

"Well, then, listen," said Stewart, with assumed gravity, "for your sake I am going to betray a state secret. Shall I tell you the nature of the letter which King Louis XIV. gave M. de Bragelonne for King Charles II.? I will; these are the very words: 'My brother, the bearer of this is a gentleman attached to my court, and the son of one whom you regard most warmly. Treat him kindly, I beg, and try and make him like England.'"

"Did it say that!"

"Word for word — or something very like it. I will not answer for the form, but the substance I am sure of."

"Well, and what conclusion do you, or rather what conclusion does the king, draw from that?"

"That the king of France has his own reasons for removing M. de Bragelonne, and for getting him married anywhere else than in France."

"So that, then, in consequence of this letter — "

"King Charles received M. de Bragelonne, as you are aware, in the most distinguished and friendly manner; the handsomest apartments in Whitehall were allotted to him; and as you are the most valuable and precious person in his court, inasmuch as you have rejected his heart, — nay, do not blush, — he wished you to take a fancy to this Frenchman, and he was desirous to confer upon him so costly a prize. And this is the reason why you, the heiress of three hundred thousand pounds, a future duchess, so beautiful, so good, have been thrown in Bragelonne's way, in all the promenades and parties of pleasure to which he was invited. In fact it was a plot, — a kind of conspiracy."

Mary Grafton smiled with that charming expression which was habitual to her, and pressing her companion's arm, said: "Thank the king, Lucy."

"Yes, yes, but the Duke of Buckingham is jealous, so take care."

Hardly had she pronounced these words, when the duke appeared from one of the pavilions on the terrace, and, approaching the two girls, with a smile, said, "You are mistaken, Miss Lucy; I am not jealous; and the proof, Miss Mary, is yonder, in the person of M. de Bragelonne himself, who ought to be the cause of my jealousy, but who is dreaming in pensive solitude. Poor fellow! Allow me to leave you for a few minutes, while I avail myself of those few minutes to converse with Miss Lucy Stewart, to whom I have something to say." And then, bowing to Lucy, he added, "Will you do me the honor to accept my hand, in order that I may lead you to the king, who is waiting for us?" With these words, Buckingham, still smiling, took Miss Stewart’s hand, and led her away. When by herself, Mary Grafton, her head gently inclined towards her shoulder, with that indolent gracefulness of action which distinguishes young English girls, remained for a moment with her eyes fixed on Raoul, but as if uncertain what to do. At last, after first blushing violently, and then turning deadly pale, thus revealing the internal combat which assailed her heart, she seemed to make up her mind to adopt a decided course, and with a tolerably firm step, advanced towards the seat on which Raoul was reclining, buried in the profoundest meditation, as we have already said. The sound of Miss Mary’s steps, though they could hardly be heard upon the green sward, awakened Raoul from his musing attitude; he turned round, perceived the young girl, and walked forward to meet the companion whom his happy destiny had thrown in his way.

“I have been sent to you, monsieur,” said Mary Grafton; “will you take care of me?”

“To whom is my gratitude due, for so great a happiness?” inquired Raoul.

“To the Duke of Buckingham,” replied Mary, affecting a gayety she did not really feel.

“To the Duke of Buckingham, do you say? — he who so passionately seeks your charming society! Am I really to believe you are serious, mademoiselle?”

“The fact is, monsieur, you perceive, that everything seems to conspire to make us pass the best, or rather the longest, part of our days together. Yesterday it was the king who desired me to beg you to seat yourself next to me at dinner; to-day, it is the Duke of Buckingham who begs me to come and place myself near you on this seat.”

“And he has gone away in order to leave us together?” asked Raoul, with some embarrassment.

“Look yonder, at the turning of that path; he is just out of sight, with Miss Stewart. Are these polite attentions usual in France, monsieur le vicomte?”

“I cannot very precisely say what people do in France, mademoiselle, for I can hardly be called a Frenchman. I have resided in many countries, and almost always as a soldier; and then, I have spent a long period of my life in the country. I am almost a savage.”

“You do not like your residence in England, I fear.”

“I scarcely know,” said Raoul, inattentively, and sighing deeply at the same time.

"What! you do not know?"

"Forgive me," said Raoul, shaking his head, and collecting his thoughts, "I did not hear you."

"Oh!" said the young girl, sighing in her turn, "how wrong the duke was to send me here!"

"Wrong!" said Raoul, "perhaps so; for I am but a rude, uncouth companion, and my society annoys you. The duke did, indeed, very wrong to send you."

"It is precisely," replied Mary Grafton, in a clear, calm voice, "because your society does not annoy me, that the duke was wrong to send me to you."

It was now Raoul's turn to blush. "But," he resumed, "how happens it that the Duke of Buckingham should send you to me; and why did you come? the duke loves you, and you love him."

"No," replied Mary, seriously, "the duke does not love me, because he is in love with the Duchesse d'Orleans; and, as for myself, I have no affection for the duke."

Raoul looked at the young lady with astonishment.

"Are you a friend of the Duke of Buckingham?" she inquired.

"The duke has honored me by calling me so ever since we met in France."

"You are simple acquaintances, then?"

"No; for the duke is the most intimate friend of one whom I regard as a brother."

"The Duc de Guiche?"

"Yes."

"He who is in love with Madame la Duchesse d'Orleans?"

"Oh! What is that you are saying?"

"And who loves him in return," continued the young girl, quietly.

Raoul bent down his head, and Mary Grafton, sighing deeply, continued, "They are very happy. But, leave me, Monsieur de Bragelonne, for the Duke of Buckingham has given you a very troublesome commission in offering me as a companion for your promenade. Your heart is elsewhere, and it is with the greatest difficulty you can be charitable enough to lend me your attention. Confess truly; it would be unfair on your part, vicomte, not to admit it."

"Madame, I do confess it."

She looked at him steadily. He was so noble and so handsome in his bearing, his eyes revealed so much gentleness, candor, and resolution, that the idea could not possibly enter her mind that he was either rudely discourteous, or a mere simpleton. She only perceived, clearly enough, that he loved another woman, and not herself, with the whole strength of his heart. "Ah! I now understand you," she said; "you have left your heart behind you in France." Raoul bowed. "The duke is aware of your affection?"

"No one knows it," replied Raoul.

"Why, therefore, do you tell me? Nay, answer me."

"I cannot."

"It is for me, then, to anticipate an explanation; you do not wish to tell me anything, because you are now convinced that I do not love the duke; because you see that I possibly might have loved you; because you are a gentleman of noble and delicate sentiments; and because, instead of accepting, even were it for the mere amusement of the passing hour, a hand which is almost pressed upon you; and because, instead of meeting my smiles with a smiling lip, you, who are young, have preferred to tell me, whom men have called beautiful, 'My heart is over the sea — it is in France.' For this, I thank you, Monsieur de Bragelonne; you are, indeed, a noble-hearted, noble-minded man, and I regard you all the more for it, as a friend only. And now let us cease speaking of myself, and talk of your own affairs. Forget that I have ever spoken to you of myself, tell me why you are sad, and why you have become more than usually so during these past four days?"

Raoul was deeply and sensibly moved by these sweet and melancholy tones; and as he could not, at the moment, find a word to say, the young girl again came to his assistance.

"Pity me," she said. "My mother was born in France, and I can truly affirm that I, too, am French in blood, as well as in feeling; but the leaden atmosphere and characteristic gloom of England seem to weigh upon me. Sometimes my dreams are golden-hued and full of wonderful enjoyments, when suddenly a mist rises and overspreads my fancy, blotting them out forever. Such, indeed, is the case at the present moment. Forgive me; I have now said enough on that subject; give me your hand, and relate your griefs to me as a friend."

"You say you are French in heart and soul?"

“Yes, not only, I repeat it, that my mother was French, but, further, as my father, a friend of King Charles I., was exiled in France, I, during the trial of that prince, as well as during the Protector’s life, was brought up in Paris; at the Restoration of King Charles II., my poor father returned to England, where he died almost immediately afterwards; and then the king created me a duchess, and has dowered me according to my rank.

“Have you any relations in France?” Raoul inquired, with the deepest interest.

“I have a sister there, my senior by seven or eight years, who was married in France, and was early left a widow; her name is Madame de Belliere. Do you know her?” she added, observing Raoul start suddenly.

“I have heard her name.”

“She, too, loves with her whole heart; and her last letters inform me she is happy, and her affection is, I conclude, returned. I told you, Monsieur de Bragelonne, that although I possess half of her nature, I do not share her happiness. But let us now speak of yourself; whom do you love in France?”

“A young girl, as soft and pure as a lily.”

“But if she loves you, why are you sad?”

“I have been told that she ceases to love me.”

“You do not believe it, I trust?”

“He who wrote me so does not sign his letter.”

“An anonymous denunciation! some treachery, be assured,” said Miss Grafton.

“Stay,” said Raoul, showing the young girl a letter which he had read over a thousand times; she took it from his hand and read as follows:

“VICOMTE, — You are perfectly right to amuse yourself yonder with the lovely faces of Charles II.’s court, for at Louis XIV.’s court, the castle in which your affections are enshrined is being besieged. Stay in London altogether, poor vicomte, or return without delay to Paris.”

“There is no signature,” said Miss Mary.

“None.”

“Believe it not, then.”

“Very good; but here is a second letter, from my friend De Guiche, which says, ‘I am lying here wounded and ill. Return, Raoul, oh, return!’“

“What do you intend doing?” inquired the young girl, with a feeling of oppression at her heart.

“My intention, as soon as I received this letter, was immediately to take my leave of the king.”

“When did you receive it?”

“The day before yesterday.”

“It is dated Fontainebleau.”

“A singular circumstance, do you not think, for the court is now at Paris? At all events, I would have set off; but when I mentioned my intention to the king, he began to laugh, and said to me, ‘How comes it, monsieur l’amassadeur, that you think of leaving? Has your sovereign recalled you?’ I colored, naturally enough, for I was confused by the question; for the fact is, the king himself sent me here, and I have received no order to return.”

Mary frowned in deep thought, and said, “Do you remain, then?”

“I must, mademoiselle.”

“Do you ever receive any letters from her to whom you are so devoted?”

“Never.”

“Never, do you say? Does she not love you, then?”

“At least, she has not written to me since my departure, although she used occasionally to write to me before. I trust she may have been prevented.”

“Hush! the duke is coming.”

And Buckingham at that moment was seen at the end of the walk, approaching towards them, alone and smiling; he advanced slowly, and held out his hands to them both. “Have you arrived at an understanding?” he said.

“About what?”

“About whatever might render you happy, dear Mary, and make Raoul less miserable.”

“I do not understand you, my lord,” said Raoul.

“That is my view of the subject, Miss Mary; do you wish me to mention it before M. de Bragelonne?” he added, with a smile.

“If you mean,” replied the young girl, haughtily, “that I was not indisposed to love M. de Bragelonne, that is useless, for I have told him so myself.”

Buckingham reflected for a moment, and, without seeming in any way discountenanced, as she expected, he said: “My reason for leaving you with M. de Bragelonne was, that I thoroughly knew your refined delicacy of feeling, no less than the perfect loyalty of your mind and heart, and I hoped that M. de Bragelonne’s cure might be effected by the hands of a physician such as you are.”

“But, my lord, before you spoke of M. de Bragelonne’s heart, you spoke to me of your own. Do you mean to effect the cure of two hearts at the same time?”

“Perfectly true, madame; but you will do me the justice to admit that I have long discontinued a useless pursuit, acknowledging that my own wound is incurable.”

“My lord,” said Mary, collecting herself for a moment before she spoke, “M. de Bragelonne is happy, for he loves and is beloved. He has no need of such a physician as I can be.”

“M. de Bragelonne,” said Buckingham, “is on the very eve of experiencing a serious misfortune, and he has greater need than ever of sympathy and affection.”

“Explain yourself, my lord,” inquired Raoul, anxiously.

“No; gradually I will explain myself; but, if you desire it, I can tell Miss Grafton what you may not listen to yourself.”

“My lord, you are putting me to the torture; you know something you wish to conceal from me?”

“I know that Miss Mary Grafton is the most charming object that a heart ill at ease could possibly meet with in its way through life.”

“I have already told you that the Vicomte de Bragelonne loves elsewhere,” said the young girl.

“He is wrong, then.”

“Do you assume to know, my lord, that *I* am wrong?”

“Yes.”

“Whom is it that he loves, then?” exclaimed the young girl.

“He loves a lady who is unworthy of him,” said Buckingham, with that calm, collected manner peculiar to Englishmen.

Miss Grafton uttered a cry, which, together with the remark that Buckingham had that moment made, spread over De Bragelonne’s features a deadly paleness, arising from the sudden surprise, and also from a vague fear of impending misfortune. “My lord,” he exclaimed, “you have just pronounced words which compel me, without a moment’s delay, to seek their explanation in Paris.”

“You will remain here,” said Buckingham, “because you have no right to leave; and no one has the right to quit the service of the king for that of any woman, even were she as worthy of being loved as Mary Grafton is."

"You will tell me all, then?"

"I will, on condition that you will remain."

"I will remain, if you will promise to speak openly and without reserve."

Thus far had their conversation proceeded, and Buckingham, in all probability, was on the point of revealing, not indeed all that had taken place, but at least all he was aware of, when one of the king's attendants appeared at the end of the terrace, and advanced towards the summer-house where the king was sitting with Lucy Stewart. A courier followed him, covered with dust from head to foot, and who seemed as if he had but a few moments before dismounted from his horse.

"The courier from France! Madame's courier!" exclaimed Raoul, recognizing the princess's livery; and while the attendant and the courier advanced towards the king, Buckingham and Miss Grafton exchanged a look full of intelligence with each other.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

The Courier from Madame.

Charles II. was busily engaged in proving, or in endeavoring to prove, to Miss Stewart that she was the only person for whom he cared at all, and consequently was avowing to her an affection similar to that which his ancestor Henry IV. had entertained for Gabrielle. Unfortunately for Charles II., he had hit upon an unlucky day, the very day Miss Stewart had taken it into her head to make him jealous, and therefore, instead of being touched by his offer, as the king had hoped, she laughed heartily.

"Oh! sire, sire," she cried, laughing all the while; "if I were to be unfortunate enough to ask you for a proof of the affection you possess, how easy it would be to see that you are telling a falsehood."

"Nay, listen to me," said Charles, "you know my cartoons by Raphael; you know whether I care for them or not; the whole world envies me their possession, as you well know also; my father commissioned Van Dyck to purchase them. Would you like me to send them to your house this very day?"

"Oh, no!" replied the young girl; "pray keep them yourself, sire; my house is far too small to accommodate such visitors."

"In that case you shall have Hampton Court to put the cartoons in."

"Be less generous, sire, and learn to love a little while longer, that is all I have to ask you."

"I shall never cease to love you; is not that enough?"

"You are smiling, sire."

"Do you wish me to weep?"

"No; but I should like to see you a little more melancholy."

"Thank Heaven, I have been so long enough; fourteen years of exile, poverty, and misery, I think I may well regard it as a debt discharged; besides, melancholy makes people look so plain."

"Far from that — for look at the young Frenchman."

"What! the Vicomte de Bragelonne? are you smitten too? By Heaven, they will all grow mad over him one after the other; but he, on the contrary, has a reason for being melancholy.”

“Why so?”

“Oh, indeed! you wish me to betray state secrets, do you?”

“If I wish it, you must do so, for you told me you were quite ready to do everything I wished.”

“Well, then, he is bored in his own country. Does that satisfy you?”

“Bored?”

“Yes, a proof that he is a simpleton; I allow him to fall in love with Miss Mary Grafton, and he feels bored. Can you believe it?”

“Very good; it seems, then, that if you were to find Miss Lucy Stewart indifferent to you, you would console yourself by falling in love with Miss Mary Grafton.”

“I don’t say that; in the first place, you know that Mary Grafton does not care for me; besides, a man can only console himself for a lost affection by the discovery of a new one. Again, however, I repeat, the question is not of myself, but of that young man. One might almost be tempted to call the girl he has left behind him a Helen — a Helen before the little ceremony she went through with Paris, of course.”

“He has left some one, then?”

“That is to say, some one has left *him*.”

“Poor fellow! so much the worse!”

“Why do you mean by ‘so much the worse’?”

“Why not? why did he leave?”

“Do you think it was of his own wish or will that he left?”

“Was he obliged to leave, then?”

“He left Paris under orders, my dear Stewart; and prepare to be surprised — by express orders of the king.”

“Ah! I begin to see, now.”

“At least say nothing at all about it.”

“You know very well that I am just as discreet as anybody else. And so the king sent him away?”

“Yes.”

“And during his absence he takes his sweetheart from him?”

“Yes; and, will you believe it? the silly fellow, instead of thanking the king, is making himself miserable.”

“What! thank the king for depriving him of the woman he loves! Really, sire, yours is a most ungallant speech.”

"But, pray understand me. If she whom the king had run off with was either a Miss Grafton or a Miss Stewart, I should not be of his opinion; nay, I should even think him not half wretched enough; but she is a little, thin, lame thing. Deuce take such fidelity as that! Surely, one can hardly understand how a man can refuse a girl who is rich for one who is poverty itself — a girl who loves him for one who deceives and betrays him."

"Do you think that Mary seriously wishes to please the vicomte, sire?"

"I do, indeed."

"Very good! the vicomte will settle down in England, for Mary has a clear head, and when she fixes her mind upon anything, she does so thoroughly."

"Take care, my dear Miss Stewart; if the vicomte has any idea of adopting our country, he has not long to do so, for it was only the day before yesterday that he again asked me for permission to leave."

"Which you refused him, I suppose?"

"I should think so, indeed; my royal brother is far too anxious for his absence; and, for myself, my *amour propre* is enlisted on his side, for I will never have it said that I had held out as a bait to this young man the noblest and gentlest creature in England — "

"You are very gallant, sire," said Miss Stewart, with a pretty pout.

"I do not allude to Miss Stewart, for she is worthy of a king's devotion; and since she has captivated me I trust that no one else will be caught by her; I say, therefore, finally, that the attention I have shown this young man will not have been thrown away; he will stay with us here, he will marry here, or I am very much mistaken."

"And I hope that when he is once married and settled, instead of being angry with your majesty, he will be grateful to you, for every one tries his utmost to please him; even the Duke of Buckingham, whose brilliancy, which is incredible, seems to pale before that of this young Frenchman."

"Including Miss Stewart even, who calls him the most finished gentleman she ever saw."

"Stay, sire; you have spoken quite enough, and quite highly enough, of Miss Grafton, to overlook what I may have said about De Bragelonne. But, by the by, sire, your kindness for some time past astonishes me: you think of those who are absent, you forgive those who have done you a wrong, in fact, you are as nearly as possible, perfect. How does it happen — "

"It is because you allow yourself to be loved," he said, beginning to laugh.

"Oh! there must be some other reason."

"Well, I am doing all I can to oblige my brother, Louis XIV."

"Nay, I must have another reason."

"Well, then, the true motive is that Buckingham strongly recommended the young man to me, saying: 'Sire, I begin by yielding up all claim to Miss Grafton; I pray you follow my example.'"

"The duke is, indeed, a true gentleman."

"Oh! of course, of course; it is Buckingham's turn now, I suppose, to turn your head. You seem determined to cross me in everything to-day."

At this moment some one rapped at the door.

"Who is it who presumes to interrupt us?" exclaimed Charles, impatiently.

"Really, sire, you are extremely vain with your 'who is it who presumes?' and in order to punish you for it — "

She went to the door and opened it.

"It is a courier from France," said Miss Stewart.

"A courier from France!" exclaimed Charles; "from my sister, perhaps?"

"Yes, sire," said the usher, "a special messenger."

"Let him come in at once," said Charles.

"You have a letter for me," said the king to the courier as he entered, "from the Duchess of Orleans?"

"Yes, sire," replied the courier, "and so urgent in its nature that I have only been twenty-six hours in bringing it to your majesty, and yet I lost three-quarters of an hour at Calais."

"Your zeal shall not be forgotten," said the king, as he opened the letter. When he had read it he burst out laughing, and exclaimed, "Upon my word, I am at a loss to understand anything about it." He then read the letter a second time, Miss Stewart assuming a manner marked by the greatest reserve, and doing her utmost to restrain her ardent curiosity.

"Francis," said the king to his valet, "see that this excellent fellow is well taken care of and sleeps soundly, and that on waking to-morrow he finds a purse of fifty sovereigns by his bedside."

"Sire!" said the courier, amazed.

"Begone, begone; my sister was perfectly right in desiring you to use the utmost diligence; the affair was most pressing." And he again began to laugh louder than ever. The courier, the valet, and Miss Stewart hardly knew what sort of countenance to assume. “Ah!” said the king, throwing himself back in his armchair: “When I think that you have knocked up — how many horses?”

“Two!”

“Two horses to bring this intelligence to me. That will do, you can leave us now.”

The courier retired with the valet. Charles went to the window, which he opened, and leaning forward, called out — ”Duke! Buckingham! come here, there’s a good fellow.”

The duke hurried to him, in obedience to the summons; but when he reached the door, and perceived Miss Stewart, he hesitated to enter.

“Come in, and shut the door,” said the king. The duke obeyed; and, perceiving in what an excellent humor the king was, he advanced, smiling, towards him. “Well, my dear duke, how do you get on with your Frenchman?”

“Sire, I am in the most perfect state of utter despair about him.”

“Why so?”

“Because charming Miss Grafton is willing to marry him, but he is unwilling.”

“Why, he is a perfect Boeotian!” cried Miss Stewart. “Let him say either ‘Yes,’ or No,’ and let the affair end.”

“But,” said Buckingham, seriously, “you know, or you ought to know, madame, that M. de Bragelonne is in love in another direction.”

“In that case,” said the king, coming to Miss Stewart’s help, “nothing is easier; let him say ‘No,’ then.”

“Very true; and I have proved to him he was wrong not to say ‘Yes.’“

“You told him candidly, I suppose, that La Valliere was deceiving him?”

“Yes, without the slightest reserve; and, as soon as I had done so, he gave a start, as if he were going to clear the Channel at a bound.”

“At all events,” said Miss Stewart, “he has done something; and a very good thing too, upon my word.”

“But,” said Buckingham, “I stopped him; I have left him and Miss Mary in conversation together, and I sincerely trust that now he will not leave, as he seemed to have an idea of doing.”

“An idea of leaving England?” cried the king.

"I, at one moment, hardly thought that any human power could have prevented him; but Miss Mary's eyes are now bent fully on him, and he will remain."

"Well, that is the very thing which deceives you, Buckingham," said the king, with a peal of laughter; "the poor fellow is predestined."

"Predestined to what?"

"If it were to be simply deceived, that is nothing; but, to look at him, it is a great deal."

"At a distance, and with Miss Grafton's aid, the blow will be warded off."

"Far from it, far from it; neither distance nor Miss Grafton's help will be of the slightest avail. Bragelonne will set off for Paris within an hour's time."

Buckingham started, and Miss Stewart opened her eyes very wide in astonishment.

"But, sire," said the duke, "your majesty knows that it is impossible."

"That is to say, my dear Buckingham, that it is impossible until it happens."

"Do not forget, sire, that the young man is a perfect lion, and that his wrath is terrible."

"I don't deny it, my dear duke."

"And that if he sees that his misfortune is certain, so much the worse for the author of it."

"I don't deny it; but what the deuce am I to do?"

"Were it the king himself," cried Buckingham, "I would not answer for him."

"Oh, the king has his musketeers to take care of him," said Charles, quietly; "I know that perfectly well, for I was kept dancing attendance in his ante-chamber at Blois. He has M. d'Artagnan, and what better guardian could the king have than M. d'Artagnan? I should make myself perfectly easy with twenty storms of passion, such as Bragelonne might display, if I had four guardians like D'Artagnan."

"But I entreat your majesty, who is so good and kind, to reflect a little."

"Stay," said Charles II., presenting the letter to the duke, "read, and answer yourself what you would do in my place."

Buckingham slowly took hold of Madame's letter, and trembling with emotion, read the following words:

"For your own sake, for mine, for the honor and safety of every one, send M. de Bragelonne back to France immediately. Your devoted sister, HENRIETTA."

"Well, Villiers, what do you say?"

"Really, sire, I have nothing to say," replied the duke, stupefied.

"Nay, would you, of all persons," said the king, artfully, "advise me not to listen to my sister when she writes so urgently?"

"Oh, no, no, sire; and yet — "

"You have not read the postscript, Villiers; it is under the fold of the letter, and escaped me at first; read it." And as the duke turned down a fold of the letter, he read:

"A thousand kind remembrances to those who love me."

The duke's head sank gradually on his breast; the paper trembled in his fingers, as if it had been changed to lead. The king paused for a moment, and, seeing that Buckingham did not speak, "He must follow his destiny, as we ours," continued the king; "every man has his own share of grief in this world; I have had my own, — I have had that of others who belong to me, — and have thus had a double weight of woe to endure! — But the deuce take all my cares now! Go, and bring our friend here, Villiers."

The duke opened the trellised door of the summer-house, and pointing at Raoul and Mary, who were walking together side by side, said, "What a cruel blow, sire, for poor Miss Grafton!"

"Nonsense; call him," said Charles II., knitting his black brows together; "every one seems to be sentimental here. There, look at Miss Stewart, who is wiping her eyes, — now deuce take the French fellow!"

The duke called to Raoul, and taking Miss Grafton by the hand, he led her towards the king.

"Monsieur de Bragelonne," said Charles II., "did you not ask me the day before yesterday for permission to return to Paris?"

"Yes, sire," replied Raoul, greatly puzzled by this address.

"And I refused you, I think?"

"Yes, sire."

"For which you were angry with me?"

"No, sire; your majesty had no doubt excellent reasons for withholding it; for you are so wise and so good that everything you do is well done."

"I alleged, I believe, as a reason, that the king of France had not recalled you?"

“Yes, sire, that was the reason you assigned.”

“Well, M. de Bragelonne, I have reflected over the matter since; if the king did not, in fact, fix your return, he begged me to render your sojourn in England as agreeable as possible; since, however, you ask my permission to return, it is because your longer residence in England is no longer agreeable to you.”

“I do not say that, sire.”

“No, but your request, at least,” said the king, “signified that another place of residence would be more agreeable to you than this.”

At this moment Raoul turned towards the door, against which Miss Grafton was leaning, pale and sorrow-stricken; her other hand was passed through the duke’s arm.

“You do not reply,” pursued Charles; “the proverb is plain enough, that ‘silence gives consent.’ Very good, Monsieur de Bragelonne; I am now in a position to satisfy you; whenever you please, therefore, you can leave for Paris, for which you have my authority.”

“Sire!” exclaimed Raoul, while Mary stifled an exclamation of grief which rose to her lips, unconsciously pressing Buckingham’s arm.

“You can be at Dover this evening,” continued the king, “the tide serves at two o’clock in the morning.”

Raoul, astounded, stammered out a few broken sentences, which equally answered the purpose both of thanks and of excuse.

“I therefore bid you adieu, Monsieur de Bragelonne, and wish you every sort of prosperity,” said the king, rising; “you will confer a pleasure on me by keeping this diamond in remembrance of me; I had intended it as a marriage gift.”

Miss Grafton felt her limbs almost giving way; and, as Raoul received the ring from the king’s hand, he, too, felt his strength and courage failing him. He addressed a few respectful words to the king, a passing compliment to Miss Stewart, and looked for Buckingham to bid him adieu. The king profited by this moment to disappear. Raoul found the duke engaged in endeavoring to encourage Miss Grafton.

“Tell him to remain, I implore you!” said Buckingham to Mary.

“No, I will tell him to go,” replied Miss Grafton, with returning animation; “I am not one of those women who have more pride than heart; if she whom he loves is in France, let him return thither and bless me for having advised him to go and seek his happiness there. If, on the contrary, she shall have ceased to love him, let him come back here again; I shall still love him, and his unhappiness will not have lessened him in my regard. In the arms of my house you will find that which Heaven has engraven on my heart — *Habenti parum, egenti cuncta*. 'To the rich is accorded little, to the poor everything.'"

"I do not believe, Bragelonne, that you will find yonder the equivalent of what you leave behind you here."

"I think, or at least hope," said Raoul, with a gloomy air, "that she whom I love is worthy of my affection; but if it be true she is unworthy of me, as you have endeavored to make me believe, I will tear her image from my heart, duke, even if my heart breaks in the attempt."

Mary Grafton gazed upon him with an expression of the most indefinable pity, and Raoul returned her look with a sweet, sorrowful smile, saying, "Mademoiselle, the diamond which the king has given me was destined for you, — give me leave to offer it for your acceptance: if I marry in France, you will send it me back; if I do not marry, keep it." And he bowed and left her.

"What does he mean?" thought Buckingham, while Raoul pressed Mary's icy hand with marks of the most reverential respect.

Mary understood the look that Buckingham fixed upon her.

"If it were a wedding-ring, I would not accept it," she said.

"And yet you were willing to ask him to return to you."

"Oh! duke," cried the young girl in heart-broken accents, "a woman such as I am is never accepted as a consolation by a man like him."

"You do not think he will return, then?"

"Never," said Miss Grafton, in a choking voice.

"And I grieve to tell you, Mary, that he will find yonder his happiness destroyed, his mistress lost to him. His honor even has not escaped. What will be left him, then, Mary, equal to your affection? Answer, Mary, you who know yourself so well."

Miss Grafton placed her white hand on Buckingham's arm, and, while Raoul was hurrying away with headlong speed, she repeated in dying accents the line from Romeo and Juliet:

"*I must be gone and live, or stay and die*."

As she finished the last word, Raoul disappeared. Miss Grafton returned to her own apartments, paler than death. Buckingham availed himself of the arrival of the courier, who had brought the letter to the king, to write to

Madame and to the Comte de Guiche. The king had not been mistaken, for at two in the morning the tide was at full flood, and Raoul had embarked for France.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Saint-Aignan Follows Malicorne’s Advice.

The king most assiduously followed the progress which was made in La Valliere’s portrait; and did so with a care and attention arising as much from a desire that it should resemble her as from the wish that the painter should prolong the period of its completion as much as possible. It was amusing to observe him follow the artist’s brush, awaiting the completion of a particular plan, or the result of a combination of colors, and suggesting various modifications to the painter, which the latter consented to adopt with the most respectful docility. And again, when the artist, following Malicorne’s advice, was a little late in arriving, and when Saint-Aignan had been obliged to be absent for some time, it was interesting to observe, though no one witnessed them, those moments of silence full of deep expression, which united in one sigh two souls most disposed to understand each other, and who by no means objected to the quiet meditation they enjoyed together. The minutes flew rapidly by, as if on wings, and as the king drew closer to Louise and bent his burning gaze upon her, a noise was suddenly heard in the ante-room. It was the artist, who had just arrived; Saint-Aignan, too, had returned, full of apologies; and the king began to talk and La Valliere to answer him very hurriedly, their eyes revealing to Saint-Aignan that they had enjoyed a century of happiness during his absence. In a word, Malicorne, philosopher that he was, though he knew it not, had learned how to inspire the king with an appetite in the midst of plenty, and with desire in the assurance of possession. La Valliere’s fears of interruption had never been realized, and no one imagined she was absent from her apartment two or three hours every day; she pretended that her health was very uncertain; those who went to her room always knocked before entering, and Malicorne, the man of so many ingenious inventions, had constructed an acoustic piece of mechanism, by means of which La Valliere, when in Saint-Aignan’s apartment, was always forewarned of any visits which were paid to the room she usually inhabited. In this manner, therefore, without leaving her room, and having no *confidante*, she was able to return to her apartment, thus removing by her appearance, a little tardy perhaps, the suspicions of the most determined skeptics. Malicorne having asked Saint-Aignan the next morning what news he had to report, the latter was obliged to confess that the quarter of an hour's liberty had made the king in most excellent humor. "We must double the dose," replied Malicorne, "but by insensible degrees; wait until they seem to wish it."

They were so desirous for it, however, that on the evening of the fourth day, at the moment when the painter was packing up his implements, during Saint-Aignan's continued absence, Saint-Aignan on his return noticed upon La Valliere's face a shade of disappointment and vexation, which she could not conceal. The king was less reserved, and exhibited his annoyance by a very significant shrug of the shoulders, at which La Valliere could not help blushing. "Very good!" thought Saint-Aignan to himself; "M. Malicorne will be delighted this evening;" as he, in fact, was, when it was reported to him.

"It is very evident," he remarked to the comte, "that Mademoiselle de la Valliere hoped that you would be at least ten minutes later."

"And the king that I should be half an hour later, dear Monsieur Malicorne."

"You would show but very indifferent devotion to the king," replied the latter, "if you were to refuse his majesty that half-hour's satisfaction."

"But the painter," objected Saint-Aignan.

"*I* will take care of him," said Malicorne, "only I must study faces and circumstances a little better before I act; those are my magical inventions and contrivances; and while sorcerers are enabled by means of their astrolabe to take the altitude of the sun, moon, and stars, I am satisfied merely by looking into people's faces, in order to see if their eyes are encircled with dark lines, and if the mouth describes a convex or concave arc."

And the cunning Malicorne had every opportunity of watching narrowly and closely, for the very same evening the king accompanied the queen to Madame's apartments, and made himself so remarked by his serious face and his deep sigh, and looked at La Valliere with such a languishing expression, that Malicorne said to Montalais during the evening: "To-morrow." And he went off to the painter's house in the street of the Jardins Saint-Paul to request him to postpone the next sitting for a couple of days. Saint-Aignan was not within, when La Valliere, who was now quite familiar with the lower story, lifted up the trap-door and descended. The king, as usual was waiting for her on the staircase, and held a bouquet in his hand; as soon as he saw her, he clasped her tenderly in his arms. La Valliere, much moved at the action, looked around the room, but as she saw the king was alone, she did not complain of it. They sat down, the king reclining near the cushions on which Louise was seated, with his head supported by her knees, placed there as in an asylum whence no one could banish him; he gazed ardently upon her, and as if the moment had arrived when nothing could interpose between their two hearts; she, too, gazed with similar passion upon him, and from her eyes, so softly pure, emanated a flame, whose rays first kindled and then inflamed the heart of the king, who, trembling with happiness as Louise's hand rested on his head, grew giddy from excess of joy, and momentarily awaited either the painter's or Saint-Aignan's return to break the sweet illusion. But the door remained closed, and neither Saint-Aignan nor the painter appeared, nor did the hangings even move. A deep mysterious silence reigned in the room — a silence which seemed to influence even the song-birds in their gilded prisons. The king, completely overcome, turned round his head and buried his burning lips in La Valliere's hands, who, herself faint, with excess of emotion, pressed her trembling hands against her lover's lips. Louis threw himself upon his knees, and as La Valliere did not move her head, the king's forehead being within reach of her lips, she furtively passed her lips across the perfumed locks which caressed her cheeks. The king seized her in his arms, and, unable to resist the temptation, they exchanged their first kiss, that burning kiss, which changes love into delirium. Suddenly, a noise upon the upper floor was heard, which had, in fact, continued, though it had remained unnoticed, for some time; it had at last aroused La Valliere's attention, though but slowly so. As the noise, however, continued, as it forced itself upon the attention, and recalled the poor girl from her dreams of happiness to the sad realities of life, she rose in a state of utter bewilderment, though beautiful in her disorder, saying:

"Some one is waiting for me above. Louis, Louis, do you not hear?"

"Well! and am I not waiting for you, also?" said the king, with infinite tenderness of tone. "Let others henceforth wait for you."

But she gently shook her head, as she replied: "Happiness hidden... power concealed... my pride should be as silent as my heart."

The noise was again resumed.

“I hear Montalais’s voice,” she said, and she hurried up the staircase; the king followed her, unable to let her leave his sight, and covering her hand with his kisses. “Yes, yes,” repeated La Valliere, who had passed half-way through the opening. “Yes, it is Montalais who is calling me; something important must have happened.”

“Go then, dearest love,” said the king, “but return quickly.”

“No, no, not to-day, sire! Adieu! adieu!” she said, as she stooped down once more to embrace her lover — and escaped. Montalais was, in fact, waiting for her, very pale and agitated.

“Quick, quick! *he* is coming,” she said.

“Who — who is coming?”

“Raoul,” murmured Montalais.

“It is I — I,” said a joyous voice, upon the last steps of the grand staircase.

La Valliere uttered a terrible shriek and threw herself back.

“I am here, dear Louise,” said Raoul, running towards her. “I knew but too well that you had not ceased to love me.”

La Valliere with a gesture, partly of extreme terror, and partly as if invoking a blessing, attempted to speak, but could not articulate one word. “No, no!” she said, as she fell into Montalais’s arms, murmuring, “Do not touch me, do not come near me.”

Montalais made a sign to Raoul, who stood almost petrified at the door, and did not even attempt to advance another step into the room. Then, looking towards the side of the room where the screen was, she exclaimed: “Imprudent girl, she has not even closed the trap-door.”

And she advanced towards the corner of the room to close the screen, and also, behind the screen, the trap-door. But suddenly the king, who had heard Louise’s exclamation, darted through the opening, and hurried forward to her assistance. He threw himself on his knees before her, as he overwhelmed Montalais with questions, who hardly knew where she was. At the moment, however, when the king threw himself on his knees, a cry of utter despair rang through the corridor, accompanied by the sound of retreating footsteps. The king wished to see who had uttered the cry and whose were the footsteps he had heard; and it was in vain that Montalais sought to retain him, for Louis, quitting his hold of La Valliere, hurried towards the door, too late, however, for Raoul was already at a distance, and the king only beheld a shadow that quickly vanished in the silent corridor.

CHAPTER XL.

Two Old Friends.

Whilst every one at court was busily engaged with his own affairs, a man mysteriously took up his post behind the Place de Greve, in the house which we once saw besieged by D’Artagnan on the occasion of the *emeute*. The principal entrance of the house was in the Place Baudoyer; it was tolerably large, surrounded by gardens, inclosed in the Rue Saint-Jean by the shops of toolmakers, which protected it from prying looks, and was walled in by a triple rampart of stone, noise, and verdure, like an embalmed mummy in its triple coffin. The man we have just alluded to walked along with a firm step, although he was no longer in his early prime. His dark cloak and long sword plainly revealed one who seemed in search of adventures; and, judging from his curling mustache, his fine smooth skin, which could be seen beneath his *sombrero*, it would not have been difficult to pronounce that gallantry had not a little share in his adventures. In fact, hardly had the cavalier entered the house, when the clock struck eight; and ten minutes afterwards a lady, followed by a servant armed to the teeth, approached and knocked at the same door, which an old woman immediately opened for her. The lady raised her veil as she entered; though no longer beautiful or young, she was still active and of an imposing carriage. She concealed, beneath a rich toilette and the most exquisite taste, an age which Ninon de l’Enclos alone could have smiled at with impunity. Hardly had she reached the vestibule, when the cavalier, whose features we have only roughly sketched, advanced towards her, holding out his hand.

“Good day, my dear duchesse,” he said.

“How do you do, my dear Aramis?” replied the duchesse.

He led her to a most elegantly furnished apartment, on whose high windows were reflected the expiring rays of the setting sun, which filtered gaudily through the dark green needles of the adjacent firs. They sat down side by side. Neither of them thought of asking for additional light in the room, and they buried themselves as it were in the shadow, as if they wished to bury themselves in forgetfulness.

“Chevalier,” said the duchesse, “you have never given me a single sign of life since our interview at Fontainebleau, and I confess that your presence there on the day of the Franciscan’s death, and your initiation in certain secrets, caused me the liveliest astonishment I ever experienced in my whole life.”

“I can explain my presence there to you, as well as my initiation,” said Aramis.

“But let us, first of all,” said the duchess, “talk a little of ourselves, for our friendship is by no means of recent date.”

“Yes, madame: and if Heaven wills it, we shall continue to be friends, I will not say for a long time, but forever.”

“That is quite certain, chevalier, and my visit is a proof of it.”

“Our interests, duchess, are no longer the same as they used to be,” said Aramis, smiling without apprehension in the growing gloom by which the room was overcast, for it could not reveal that his smile was less agreeable and not so bright as formerly.

“No, chevalier, at the present day we have other interests. Every period of life brings its own; and, as we now understand each other in conversing, as perfectly as we formerly did without saying a word, let us talk, if you like.”

“I am at your orders, duchesse. Ah! I beg your pardon, how did you obtain my address, and what was your object?”

“You ask me why? I have told you. Curiosity in the first place. I wished to know what you could have to do with the Franciscan, with whom I had certain business transactions, and who died so singularly. You know that on the occasion of our interview at Fontainebleau, in the cemetery, at the foot of the grave so recently closed, we were both so much overcome by our emotions that we omitted to confide to each other what we may have to say.”

“Yes, madame.”

“Well, then, I had no sooner left you than I repented, and have ever since been most anxious to ascertain the truth. You know that Madame de Longueville and myself are almost one, I suppose?”

“I was not aware,” said Aramis, discreetly.

“I remembered, therefore,” continued the duchesse, “that neither of us said anything to the other in the cemetery; that you did not speak of the relationship in which you stood to the Franciscan, whose burial you superintended, and that I did not refer to the position in which I stood to him; all which seemed very unworthy of two such old friends as ourselves, and I have sought an opportunity of an interview with you in order to give you some information that I have recently acquired, and to assure you that Marie Michon, now no more, has left behind her one who has preserved her recollection of events."

Aramis bowed over the duchess's hand, and pressed his lips upon it. "You must have had some trouble to find me again," he said.

"Yes," she answered, annoyed to find the subject taking a turn which Aramis wished to give it; "but I knew you were a friend of M. Fouquet's, and so I inquired in that direction."

"A friend! oh!" exclaimed the chevalier, "I can hardly pretend to be *that*. A poor priest who has been favored by a generous protector, and whose heart is full of gratitude and devotion, is all that I pretend to be to M. Fouquet."

"He made you a bishop?"

"Yes, duchesse."

"A very good retiring pension for so handsome a musketeer."

"Yes; in the same way that political intrigue is for yourself," thought Aramis. "And so," he added, "you inquired after me at M. Fouquet's?"

"Easily enough. You had been to Fontainebleau with him, and had undertaken a voyage to your diocese, which is Belle-Ile-en-Mer, I believe."

"No, madame," said Aramis. "My diocese is Vannes."

"I meant that. I only thought that Belle-Ile-en-Mer — "

"Is a property belonging to M. Fouquet, nothing more."

"Ah! I had been told that Belle-Isle was fortified; besides, I know how great the military knowledge is you possess."

"I have forgotten everything of the kind since I entered the Church," said Aramis, annoyed.

"Suffice it to know that I learned you had returned from Vannes, and I sent off to one of our friends, M. le Comte de la Fere, who is discretion itself, in order to ascertain it, but he answered that he was not aware of your address."

"So like Athos," thought the bishop; "the really good man never changes."

“Well, then, you know that I cannot venture to show myself here, and that the queen-mother has always some grievance or other against me.”

“Yes, indeed, and I am surprised at it.”

“Oh! there are various reasons for it. But, to continue, being obliged to conceal myself, I was fortunate enough to meet with M. d’Artagnan, who was formerly one of your old friends, I believe?”

“A friend of mine still, duchesse.”

“He gave me certain information, and sent me to M. Baisemeaux, the governor of the Bastile.”

Aramis was somewhat agitated at this remark, and a light flashed from his eyes in the darkness of the room, which he could not conceal from his keen-sighted friend. “M. de Baisemeaux!” he said, “why did D’Artagnan send you to M. de Baisemeaux?”

“I cannot tell you.”

“What can this possibly mean?” said the bishop, summoning all the resources of his mind to his aid, in order to carry on the combat in a befitting manner.

“M. de Baisemeaux is greatly indebted to you, D’Artagnan told me.”

“True, he is so.”

“And the address of a creditor is as easily ascertained as that of a debtor.”

“Very true; and so Baisemeaux indicated to you — ”

“Saint-Mande, where I forwarded a letter to you.”

“Which I have in my hand, and which is most precious to me,” said Aramis, “because I am indebted to it for the pleasure of seeing you here.” The duchesse, satisfied at having successfully overcome the various difficulties of so delicate an explanation, began to breathe freely again, which Aramis, however, could not succeed in doing. “We had got as far as your visit to M. Baisemeaux, I believe?”

“Nay,” she said, laughing, “farther than that.”

“In that case we must have been speaking about the grudge you have against the queen-mother.”

“Further still,” she returned, “further still; we were talking of the connection — ”

“Which existed between you and the Franciscan,” said Aramis, interrupting her eagerly, “well, I am listening to you very attentively.”

“It is easily explained,” returned the duchesse. “You know that I am living at Brussels with M. de Laicques?”

“I heard so.”

“You know that my children have ruined and stripped me of everything.”

“How terrible, dear duchesse.”

“Terrible indeed; this obliged me to resort to some means of obtaining a livelihood, and, particularly, to avoid vegetating for the remainder of my existence. I had old hatreds to turn to account, old friendships to make use of; I no longer had either credit or protectors.”

“*You*, who had extended protection towards so many persons,” said Aramis, softly.

“It is always the case, chevalier. Well, at the present time I am in the habit of seeing the king of Spain very frequently.”

“Ah!”

“Who has just nominated a general of the Jesuits, according to the usual custom.”

“Is it usual, indeed?”

“Were you not aware of it?”

“I beg your pardon; I was inattentive.”

“You must be aware of that — you who were on such good terms with the Franciscan.”

“With the general of the Jesuits, you mean?”

“Exactly. Well, then, I have seen the king of Spain, who wished to do me a service, but was unable. He gave me recommendations, however, to Flanders, both for myself and for Laicques too; and conferred a pension on me out of the funds belonging to the order.”

“Of Jesuits?”

“Yes. The general — I mean the Franciscan — was sent to me; and, for the purpose of conforming with the requisitions of the statues of the order, and of entitling me to the pension, I was reputed to be in a position to render certain services. You are aware that that is the rule?”

“No, I did not know it,” said Aramis.

Madame de Chevreuse paused to look at Aramis, but it was perfectly dark. “Well, such is the rule, however,” she resumed. “I had, therefore, to appear to possess a power of usefulness of some kind or other, and I proposed to travel for the order, and I was placed on the list of affiliated travelers. You understand it was a formality, by means of which I received my pension, which was very convenient for me.”

“Good heavens! duchesse, what you tell me is like a dagger-thrust. *You* obliged to receive a pension from the Jesuits?”

“No, chevalier! from Spain.”

“Except for a conscientious scruple, duchesse, you will admit that it is pretty nearly the same thing.”

“No, not at all.”

“But surely of your magnificent fortune there must remain — ”

“Dampierre is all that remains.”

“And that is handsome enough.”

“Yes; but Dampierre is burdened, mortgaged, and almost fallen to ruin, like its owner.”

“And can the queen-mother know and see all that, without shedding a tear?” said Aramis, with a penetrating look, which encountered nothing but darkness.

“Yes. She has forgotten everything.”

“You, I believe, attempted to get restored to favor?”

“Yes; but, most singularly, the young king inherits the antipathy his dear father had for me. You will, perhaps, tell me that I am indeed a woman to be hated, and that I am no longer one who can be loved.”

“Dear duchesse, pray come quickly to the cause that brought you here; for I think we can be of service to each other.”

“Such has been my own thought. I came to Fontainebleau with a double object in view. In the first place, I was summoned there by the Franciscan whom you knew. By the by, how did you know him? — for I have told you my story, and have not yet heard yours.”

“I knew him in a very natural way, duchesse. I studied theology with him at Parma. We became fast friends; and it happened, from time to time, that business, or travel, or war, separated us from each other.”

“You were, of course, aware that he was the general of the Jesuits?”

“I suspected it.”

“But by what extraordinary chance did it happen that you were at the hotel when the affiliated travelers met together?”

“Oh!” said Aramis, in a calm voice, “it was the merest chance in the world. I was going to Fontainebleau to see M. Fouquet, for the purpose of obtaining an audience of the king. I was passing by, unknown; I saw the poor dying monk in the road, and recognized him immediately. You know the rest — he died in my arms.”

“Yes; but bequeathing to you so vast a power that you issue your sovereign orders and directions like a monarch.”

“He certainly did leave me a few commissions to settle.”

“And what for me?”

“I have told you — a sum of twelve thousand livres was to be paid to you. I thought I had given you the necessary signature to enable you to receive it. Did you not get the money?”

“Oh! yes, yes. You give your orders, I am informed, with so much mystery, and such a majestic presence, that it is generally believed you are the successor of the defunct chief.”

Aramis colored impatiently, and the duchesse continued: “I have obtained my information,” she said, “from the king of Spain himself; and he cleared up some of my doubts on the point. Every general of the Jesuits is nominated by him, and must be a Spaniard, according to the statutes of the order. You are not a Spaniard, nor have you been nominated by the king of Spain.”

Aramis did not reply to this remark, except to say, “You see, duchesse, how greatly you were mistaken, since the king of Spain told you that.”

“Yes, my dear Aramis; but there was something else which I have been thinking of.”

“What is that?”

“You know, I believe, something about most things, and it occurred to me that you know the Spanish language.”

“Every Frenchman who has been actively engaged in the Fronde knows Spanish.”

“You have lived in Flanders?”

“Three years.”

“And have stayed at Madrid?”

“Fifteen months.”

“You are in a position, then, to become a naturalized Spaniard, when you like.”

“Really?” said Aramis, with a frankness which deceived the duchesse.

“Undoubtedly. Two years’ residence and an acquaintance with the language are indispensable. You have upwards of four years — more than double the time necessary.”

“What are you driving at, duchesse?”

“At this — I am on good terms with the king of Spain.”

“And I am not on bad terms,” thought Aramis to himself.

“Shall I ask the king,” continued the duchesse, “to confer the succession to the Franciscan’s post upon you?”

“Oh, duchesse!”

“You have it already, perhaps?” she said.

“No, upon my honor.”

“Very well, then, I can render you that service.”

“Why did you not render the same service to M. de Laicques, duchesse? He is a very talented man, and one you love, besides.”

“Yes, no doubt; but, at all events, putting Laicques aside, will you have it?”

“No, I thank you, duchesse.”

She paused. “He is nominated,” she thought; and then resumed aloud, “If you refuse me in this manner, it is not very encouraging for me, supposing I should have something to ask of you.”

“Oh! ask, pray, ask.”

“Ask! I cannot do so, if you have not the power to grant what I want.”

“However limited my power and ability, ask all the same.”

“I need a sum of money, to restore Dampierre.”

“Ah!” replied Aramis, coldly — ”money? Well, duchesse, how much would you require?”

“Oh! a tolerably round sum.”

“So much the worse — you know I am not rich.”

“No, no; but the order is — and if you had been the general — ”

“You know I am not the general, I think.”

“In that case, you have a friend who must be very wealthy — M. Fouquet.”

“M. Fouquet! He is more than half ruined, madame.”

“So it is said, but I did not believe it.”

“Why, duchesse?”

“Because I have, or rather Laicques has, certain letters in his possession from Cardinal Mazarin, which establish the existence of very strange accounts.”

“What accounts?”

“Relative to various sums of money borrowed and disposed of. I cannot very distinctly remember what they are; but they establish the fact that the superintendent, according to these letters, which are signed by Mazarin, had taken thirteen millions of francs from the coffers of the state. The case is a very serious one."

Aramis clenched his hands in anxiety and apprehension. "Is it possible," he said, "that you have such letters as you speak of, and have not communicated them to M. Fouquet?"

"Ah!" replied the duchesse, "I keep such trifling matters as these in reserve. The day may come when they will be of service; and they can be withdrawn from the safe custody in which they now remain."

"And that day has arrived?" said Aramis.

"Yes."

"And you are going to show those letters to M. Fouquet?"

"I prefer to talk about them with you, instead."

"You must be in sad want of money, my poor friend, to think of such things as these — you, too, who held M. de Mazarin's prose effusions in such indifferent esteem."

"The fact is, I am in want of money."

"And then," continued Aramis, in cold accents, "it must have been very distressing to you to be obliged to have recourse to such a means. It is cruel."

"Oh! if had wished to do harm instead of good," said Madame de Chevreuse, "instead of asking the general of the order, or M. Fouquet, for the five hundred thousand francs I require, I — "

"*Five hundred thousand francs!*"

"Yes; no more. Do you think it much? I require at least as much as that to restore Dampierre."

"Yes, madame."

"I say, therefore, that instead of asking for this amount, I should have gone to see my old friend the queen-mother; the letters from her husband, Signor Mazarini, would have served me as an introduction, and I should have begged this mere trifle of her, saying to her, 'I wish, madame, to have the honor of receiving you at Dampierre. Permit me to put Dampierre in a fit state for that purpose.'"

Aramis did not return a single word. "Well," she said, "what are you thinking about?"

"I am making certain additions," said Aramis.

"And M. Fouquet subtractions. I, on the other hand, am trying my hand at the art of multiplication. What excellent calculators we all three are! How well we might understand one another!”

“Will you allow me to reflect?” said Aramis.

“No, for with such an opening between people like ourselves, ‘yes’ or ‘no’ is the only answer, and that an immediate one.”

“It is a snare,” thought the bishop; “it is impossible that Anne of Austria would listen to such a woman as this.”

“Well?” said the duchesse.

“Well, madame, I should be very much astonished if M. Fouquet had five hundred thousand francs at his disposal at the present moment.”

“It is no use speaking of it, then,” said the duchesse, “and Dampierre must get restored how best it may.”

“Oh! you are not embarrassed to such an extent as that, I suppose.”

“No; I am never embarrassed.”

“And the queen,” continued the bishop, “will certainly do for you what the superintendent is unable to do?”

“Oh! certainly. But tell me, do you think it would be better that I should speak, myself, to M. Fouquet about these letters?”

“Nay, duchesse, you will do precisely whatever you please in that respect. M. Fouquet either feels or does not feel himself to be guilty; if he really be so, I know he is proud enough not to confess it; if he be not so, he will be exceedingly offended at your menace.”

“As usual, you reason like an angel,” said the duchesse, as she rose from her seat.

“And so, you are now going to denounce M. Fouquet to the queen,” said Aramis.

“‘Denounce!’ Oh! what a disagreeable word. I shall not ‘denounce’ my dear friend; you know matters of policy too well to be ignorant how easily these affairs are arranged. I shall merely side against M. Fouquet, and nothing more; and, in a war of party against party, a weapon is always a weapon.”

“No doubt.”

“And once on friendly terms again with the queen-mother, I may be dangerous towards some persons.”

“You are at liberty to prove so, duchesse.”

“A liberty of which I shall avail myself.”

“You are not ignorant, I suppose, duchesse, that M. Fouquet is on the best terms with the king of Spain.”

“I suppose so.”

“If, therefore, you begin a party warfare against M. Fouquet, he will reply in the same way; for he, too, is at perfect liberty to do so, is he not?”

“Oh! certainly.”

“And as he is on good terms with Spain, he will make use of that friendship as a weapon of attack.”

“You mean, that he is, naturally, on good terms with the general of the order of the Jesuits, my dear Aramis.”

“That may be the case, duchesse.”

“And that, consequently, the pension I have been receiving from the order will be stopped.”

“I am greatly afraid it might be.”

“Well; I must contrive to console myself in the best way I can; for after Richelieu, after the Fronde, after exile, what is there left for Madame de Chevreuse to be afraid of?”

“The pension, you are aware, is forty-eight thousand francs.”

“Alas! I am quite aware of it.”

“Moreover, in party contests, you know, the friends of one’s enemy do not escape.”

“Ah! you mean that poor Laicques will have to suffer.”

“I am afraid it is almost inevitable, duchesse.”

“Oh! he only receives twelve thousand francs pension.”

“Yes, but the king of Spain has some influence left; advised by M. Fouquet, he might get M. Laicques shut up in prison for a little while.”

“I am not very nervous on that point, my dear friend; because, once reconciled with Anne of Austria, I will undertake that France would insist upon M. Laicques’s liberation.”

“True. In that case, you will have something else to apprehend.”

“What can that be?” said the duchesse, pretending to be surprised and terrified.

“You will learn; indeed, you must know it already, that having once been an affiliated member of the order, it is not easy to leave it; for the secrets that any particular member may have acquired are unwholesome, and carry with them the germs of misfortune for whosoever may reveal them.”

The duchesse paused and reflected for a moment, and then said, “That is more serious: I will think it over.”

And notwithstanding the profound obscurity, Aramis seemed to feel a basilisk glance, like a white-hot iron, escape from his friend’s eyes, and plunge into his heart.

“Let us recapitulate,” said Aramis, determined to keep himself on his guard, and gliding his hand into his breast where he had a dagger concealed.

“Exactly, let us recapitulate; short accounts make long friends.”

“The suppression of your pension — ”

“Forty-eight thousand francs, and that of Laicques’s twelve, make together sixty thousand francs; that is what you mean, I suppose?”

“Precisely; and I was trying to find out what would be your equivalent for that.”

“Five hundred thousand francs, which I shall get from the queen.”

“Or, which you will *not* get.”

“I know a means of procuring them,” said the duchesse, thoughtlessly.

This remark made the chevalier prick up his ears; and from the moment his adversary had committed this error, his mind was so thoroughly on its guard, that he seemed every moment to gain the advantage more and more; and she, consequently, to lose it. “I will admit, for argument’s sake, that you obtain the money,” he resumed; “you will lose twice as much, having a hundred thousand francs’ pension to receive instead of sixty thousand, and that for a period of ten years.”

“Not so, for I shall only be subjected to this reduction of my income during the period of M. Fouquet’s remaining in power, a period which I estimate at two months.”

“Ah!” said Aramis.

“I am frank, you see.”

“I thank you for it, duchesse; but you would be wrong to suppose that after M. Fouquet’s disgrace the order would resume the payment of your pension.”

“I know a means of making the order pay, as I know a means of forcing the queen-mother to concede what I require.”

“In that case, duchesse, we are all obliged to strike our flags to you. The victory is yours, and the triumph also. Be clement, I entreat you.”

“But is it possible,” resumed the duchesse, without taking notice of the irony, “that you really draw back from a miserable sum of five hundred thousand francs, when it is a question of sparing you — I mean your friend

— I beg your pardon, I ought rather to say your protector — the disagreeable consequences which a party contest produces?"

"Duchesse, I tell you why; supposing the five hundred thousand francs were to be given you, M. Laicques will require his share, which will be another five hundred thousand francs, I presume? and then, after M. de Laicques's and your own portions have been arranged, the portions which your children, your poor pensioners, and various other persons will require, will start up as fresh claims, and these letters, however compromising they may be in their nature, are not worth from three to four millions. Can you have forgotten the queen of France's diamonds? — they were surely worth more than these bits of waste paper signed by Mazarin, and yet their recovery did not cost a fourth part of what you ask for yourself."

"Yes, that is true; but the merchant values his goods at his own price, and it is for the purchaser to buy or refuse."

"Stay a moment, duchesse; would you like me to tell you why I will not buy your letters?"

"Pray tell me."

"Because the letters you claim to be Mazarin's are false."

"What an absurdity."

"I have no doubt of it, for it would, to say the least, be very singular, that after you had quarreled with the queen through M. Mazarin's means, you should have kept up any intimate acquaintance with the latter; it would look as if you had been acting as a spy; and upon my word, I do not like to make use of the word."

"Oh! pray do."

"You great complacence would seem suspicions, at all events."

"That is quite true; but the contents of the letters are even more so."

"I pledge you my word, duchesse, that you will not be able to make use of it with the queen."

"Oh! yes, indeed; I can make use of everything with the queen."

"Very good," thought Aramis. "Croak on, old owl — hiss, beldame-viper."

But the duchesse had said enough, and advanced a few steps towards the door. Aramis, however, had reserved one exposure which she did *not* expect.

He rang the bell, candles immediately appeared in the adjoining room, and the bishop found himself completely encircled by lights, which shone upon the worn, haggard face of the duchesse, revealing every feature but too clearly. Aramis fixed a long ironical look upon her pale, thin, withered cheeks — her dim, dull eyes — and upon her lips, which she kept carefully closed over her discolored scanty teeth. He, however, had thrown himself into a graceful attitude, with his haughty and intelligent head thrown back; he smiled so as to reveal teeth still brilliant and dazzling. The antiquated coquette understood the trick that had been played her. She was standing immediately before a large mirror, in which her decrepitude, so carefully concealed, was only made more manifest. And, thereupon, without even saluting Aramis, who bowed with the ease and grace of the musketeer of early days, she hurried away with trembling steps, which her very precipitation only the more impeded. Aramis sprang across the room, like a zephyr, to lead her to the door. Madame de Chevreuse made a sign to her servant, who resumed his musket, and she left the house where such tender friends had not been able to understand each other only because they had understood each other too well.

CHAPTER XLI.

Wherein May Be Seen that a Bargain Which Cannot Be Made with One Person, Can Be Carried Out with Another.

Aramis had been perfectly correct in his supposition; for hardly had she left the house in the Place Baudoyer than Madame de Chevreuse proceeded homeward. She was doubtless afraid of being followed, and by this means thought she might succeed in throwing those who might be following her off their guard; but scarcely had she arrived within the door of the hotel, and hardly had assured herself that no one who could cause her any uneasiness was on her track, when she opened the door of the garden, leading into another street, and hurried towards the Rue Croix des Petits-Champs, where M. Colbert resided.

We have already said that evening, or rather night, had closed in; it was a dark, thick night, besides; Paris had once more sunk into its calm, quiescent state, enshrouding alike within its indulgent mantle the high-born duchesse carrying out her political intrigue, and the simple citizen's wife, who, having been detained late by a supper in the city, was making her way slowly homewards, hanging on the arm of a lover, by the shortest possible route. Madame de Chevreuse had been too well accustomed to nocturnal political intrigues to be ignorant that a minister never denies himself, even at his own private residence, to any young and beautiful woman who may chance to object to the dust and confusion of a public office, or to old women, as full of experience as of years, who dislike the indiscreet echo of official residences. A valet received the duchesse under the peristyle, and received her, it must be admitted, with some indifference of manner; he intimated, after having looked at her face, that it was hardly at such an hour that one so advanced in years as herself could be permitted to disturb Monsieur Colbert's important occupations. But Madame de Chevreuse, without looking or appearing to be annoyed, wrote her name upon a leaf of her tablets — a name which had but too frequently sounded so disagreeably in the ears of Louis XIII. and of the great cardinal. She wrote her name in the large, ill-formed characters of the higher classes of that period, handed it to the valet, without uttering a word, but with so haughty and imperious a gesture, that the fellow, well accustomed to judge of people from their manners and appearance, perceived at once the quality of the person before him, bowed his head, and ran to M. Colbert's room. The minister could not control a sudden exclamation as he opened the paper; and the valet, gathering from it the interest with which his master regarded the mysterious visitor, returned as fast as he could to beg the duchesse to follow him. She ascended to the first floor of the beautiful new house very slowly, rested herself on the landing-place, in order not to enter the apartment out of breath, and appeared before M. Colbert, who, with his own hands, held both the folding doors open. The duchesse paused at the threshold, for the purpose of well studying the character of the man with whom she was about to converse. At the first glance, the round, large, heavy head, thick brows, and ill-favored features of Colbert, who wore, thrust low down on his head, a cap like a priest's *calotte,* seemed to indicate that but little difficulty was likely to be met with in her negotiations with him, but also that she was to expect as little interest in the discussion of particulars; for there was scarcely any indication that the rough and uncouth nature of the man was susceptible to the impulses of a refined revenge, or of an exalted ambition. But when, on closer inspection, the duchesse perceived the small, piercingly black eyes, the longitudinal wrinkles of his high and massive forehead, the imperceptible twitching of the lips, on which were apparent traces of rough good-humor, Madame de Chevreuse altered her opinion of him, and felt she could say to herself: "I have found the man I want."

"What is the subject, madame, which procures me the honor of a visit from you?" he inquired.

"The need I have of you, monsieur," returned the duchesse, "as well as that which you have of me."

"I am delighted, madame, with the first portion of your sentence; but, as far as the second portion is concerned — "

Madame de Chevreuse sat down in the armchair which M. Colbert advanced towards her. "Monsieur Colbert, you are the intendant of finances, and are ambitious of becoming the superintendent?"

"Madame!"

"Nay, do not deny it; that would only unnecessarily prolong our conversation, and that is useless."

"And yet, madame, however well-disposed and inclined to show politeness I may be towards a lady of your position and merit, nothing will make me confess that I have ever entertained the idea of supplanting my superior."

"I said nothing about supplanting, Monsieur Colbert. Could I accidentally have made use of that word? I hardly think that likely. The word 'replace' is less aggressive in its signification, and more grammatically suitable, as M. de Voiture would say. I presume, therefore, that you are ambitious of replacing M. Fouquet."

"M. Fouquet's fortune, madame, enables him to withstand all attempts. The superintendent in this age plays the part of the Colossus of Rhodes; the vessels pass beneath him and do not overthrow him."

"I ought to have availed myself precisely of that very comparison. It is true, M. Fouquet plays the part of the Colossus of Rhodes; but I remember to have heard it said by M. Conrart, a member of the academy, I believe, that when the Colossus of Rhodes fell from its lofty position, the merchant who had cast it down — a merchant, nothing more, M. Colbert — loaded four hundred camels with the ruins. A merchant! and that is considerably less than an intendant of finances."

"Madame, I can assure you that I shall never overthrow M. Fouquet."

"Very good, Monsieur Colbert, since you persist in showing so much sensitiveness with me, as if you were ignorant that I am Madame de Chevreuse, and also that I am somewhat advanced in years; in other words, that you have to do with a woman who has had political dealings with the Cardinal Richelieu, and who has no time to lose; as, I repeat, you do not hesitate to commit such an imprudence, I shall go and find others who are more intelligent and more desirous of making their fortunes."

"How, madame, how?"

"You give me a very poor idea of negotiations of the present day. I assure you that if, in my earlier days, a woman had gone to M. de Cinq-Mars, who was not, moreover, a man of a very high order of intellect, and had said to him about the cardinal what I have just said to you of M. Fouquet, M. de Cinq-Mars would by this time have already set actively to work."

"Nay, madame, show a little indulgence, I entreat you."

"Well, then, do you really consent to replace M. Fouquet?"

"Certainly, I do, if the king dismisses M. Fouquet."

“Again, a word too much; it is quite evident that, if you have not yet succeeded in driving M. Fouquet from his post, it is because you have not been able to do so. Therefore, I should be the greatest simpleton possible if, in coming to you, I did not bring the very thing you require.”

“I am distressed to be obliged to persist, madame,” said Colbert, after a silence which enabled the duchesse to sound the depths of his dissimulation, “but I must warn you that, for the last six years, denunciation after denunciation has been made against M. Fouquet, and he has remained unshaken and unaffected by them.”

“There is a time for everything, Monsieur Colbert; those who were the authors of those denunciations were not called Madame de Chevreuse, and they had no proofs equal to the six letters from M. de Mazarin which establish the offense in question.”

“The offense!”

“The crime, if you like it better.”

“The crime! committed by M. Fouquet!”

“Nothing less. It is rather strange, M. Colbert, but your face, which just now was cold and indifferent, is now positively the very reverse.”

“A crime!”

“I am delighted to see that it makes an impression upon you.”

“It is because that word, madame, embraces so many things.”

“It embraces the post of superintendent of finance for yourself, and a letter of exile, or the Bastile, for M. Fouquet.”

“Forgive me, madame la duchesse, but it is almost impossible that M. Fouquet can be exiled; to be imprisoned or disgraced, that is already a great deal.”

“Oh, I am perfectly aware of what I am saying,” returned Madame de Chevreuse, coldly. “I do not live at such a distance from Paris as not to know what takes place there. The king does not like M. Fouquet, and he would willingly sacrifice M. Fouquet if an opportunity were only given him.”

“It must be a good one, though.”

“Good enough, and one I estimate to be worth five hundred thousand francs.”

“In what way?” said Colbert.

“I mean, monsieur, that holding this opportunity in my own hands, I will not allow it to be transferred to yours except for a sum of five hundred thousand francs."

"I understand you perfectly, madame. But since you have fixed a price for the sale, let me now see the value of the articles to be sold."

"Oh, a mere trifle; six letters, as I have already told you, from M. de Mazarin; and the autographs will most assuredly not be regarded as too highly priced, if they establish, in an irrefutable manner, that M. Fouquet has embezzled large sums of money from the treasury and appropriated them to his own purposes."

"In an irrefutable manner, do you say?" observed Colbert, whose eyes sparkled with delight.

"Perfectly so; would you like to read the letters?"

"With all my heart! Copies, of course?"

"Of course, the copies," said the duchesse, as she drew from her bosom a small packet of papers flattened by her velvet bodice. "Read," she said.

Colbert eagerly snatched the papers and devoured them. "Excellent!" he said.

"It is clear enough, is it not?"

"Yes, madame, yes; M. Mazarin must have handed the money to M. Fouquet, who must have kept it for his own purposes; but the question is, what money?"

"Exactly, — what money; if we come to terms I will join to these six letters a seventh, which will supply you with the fullest particulars."

Colbert reflected. "And the originals of these letters?"

"A useless question to ask; exactly as if I were to ask you, Monsieur Colbert, whether the money-bags you will give me will be full or empty."

"Very good, madame."

"Is it concluded?"

"No; for there is one circumstance to which neither of us has given any attention."

"Name it!"

"M. Fouquet can be utterly ruined, under the legal circumstances you have detailed, only by means of legal proceedings."

"Well?"

"A public scandal, for instance; and yet neither the legal proceedings nor the scandal can be commenced against him."

"Why not?"

"Because he is procureur-general of the parliament; because, too, in France, all public administrators, the army, justice itself, and commerce, are intimately connected by ties of good-fellowship, which people call *esprit de corps*. In such a case, madame, the parliament will never permit its chief to be dragged before a public tribunal; and never, even if he be dragged there by royal authority, never, I say, will he be condemned."

"Well, Monsieur Colbert, I do not see what I have to do with that."

"I am aware of that, madame; but I have to do with it, and it consequently diminishes the value of what you have brought to show me. What good can a proof of a crime be to me, without the possibility of obtaining a condemnation?"

"Even if he be only suspected, M. Fouquet will lose his post of superintendent."

"Is that all?" exclaimed Colbert, whose dark, gloomy features were momentarily lighted up by an expression of hate and vengeance.

"Ah! ah! Monsieur Colbert," said the duchesse, "forgive me, but I did not think you were so impressionable. Very good; in that case, since you need more than I have to give you, there is no occasion to speak of the matter at all."

"Yes, madame, we will go on talking of it; only, as the value of your commodities had decreased, you must lower your pretensions."

"You are bargaining, then?"

"Every man who wishes to deal loyally is obliged to do so."

"How much will you offer me?"

"Two hundred thousand francs," said Colbert.

The duchesse laughed in his face, and then said, suddenly, "Wait a moment, I have another arrangement to propose; will you give me three hundred thousand francs?"

"No, no."

"Oh, you can either accept or refuse my terms; besides, that is not all."

"More still! you are becoming too impracticable to deal with, madame."

"Less so than you think, perhaps, for it is not money I am going to ask you for."

"What is it, then?"

"A service; you know that I have always been most affectionately attached to the queen, and I am desirous of having an interview with her majesty."

“With the queen?”

“Yes, Monsieur Colbert, with the queen, who is, I admit, no longer my friend, and who has ceased to be so for a long time past, but who may again become so if the opportunity be only given her.”

“Her majesty has ceased to receive any one, madame. She is a great sufferer, and you may be aware that the paroxysms of her disease occur with greater frequency than ever.”

“That is the very reason why I wish to have an interview with her majesty; for in Flanders there is a great variety of these kinds of complaints.”

“What, cancers — a fearful, incurable disorder?”

“Do not believe that, Monsieur Colbert. The Flemish peasant is somewhat a man of nature, and his companion for life is not alone a wife, but a female laborer also; for while he is smoking his pipe, the woman works: it is she who draws the water from the well; she who loads the mule or the ass, and even bears herself a portion of the burden. Taking but little care of herself, she gets knocked about first in one direction, and then in another, and very often is beaten by her husband, and cancers frequently rise from contusions.”

“True, true,” said Colbert.

“The Flemish women do not die the sooner on that account. When they are great sufferers from this disease they go in search of remedies, and the Beguines of Bruges are excellent doctors for every kind of disease. They have precious waters of one sort or another; specifics of various kinds; and they give a bottle of it and a wax candle to the sufferer, whereby the priests are gainers, and Heaven is served by the disposal of both their wares. I will take the queen some of this holy water, which I will procure from the Beguines of Bruges; her majesty will recover, and will burn as many wax candles as she may see fit. You see, Monsieur Colbert, to prevent my seeing the queen is almost as bad as committing the crime of regicide.”

“You are undoubtedly, madame la duchesse, a woman of exceedingly great abilities, and I am more than astounded at their display; still I cannot but suppose that this charitable consideration towards the queen in some measure covers a slight personal interest for yourself.”

“I have not given myself the trouble to conceal it, that I am aware of, Monsieur Colbert. You said, I believe, that I had a slight personal interest? On the contrary, it is a very great interest, and I will prove it to you, by resuming what I was saying. If you procure me a personal interview with her majesty, I will be satisfied with the three hundred thousand francs I have claimed; if not, I shall keep my letters, unless, indeed, you give me, on the spot, five hundred thousand francs."

And rising from her seat with this decisive remark, the old duchesse plunged M. Colbert into a disagreeable perplexity. To bargain any further was out of the question; and not to bargain was to pay a great deal too dearly for them. "Madame," he said, "I shall have the pleasure of handing over a hundred thousand crowns; but how shall I get the actual letters themselves?"

"In the simplest manner in the world, my dear Monsieur Colbert — whom will you trust?"

The financier began to laugh, silently, so that his large eyebrows went up and down like the wings of a bat, upon the deep lines of his yellow forehead. "No one," he said.

"You surely will make an exception in your own favor, Monsieur Colbert?"

"In what way, madame?"

"I mean that, if you would take the trouble to accompany me to the place where the letters are, they would be delivered into your own hands, and you would be able to verify and check them."

"Quite true."

"You would bring the hundred thousand crowns with you at the same time, for I, too, do not trust any one."

Colbert colored to the tips of his ears. Like all eminent men in the art of figures, he was of an insolent and mathematical probity. "I will take with me, madame," he said, "two orders for the amount agreed upon, payable at my treasury. Will that satisfy you?"

"Would that the orders on your treasury were for two millions, monsieur l'intendant! I shall have the pleasure of showing you the way, then?"

"Allow me to order my carriage?"

"I have a carriage below, monsieur."

Colbert coughed like an irresolute man. He imagined, for a moment, that the proposition of the duchesse was a snare; that perhaps some one was waiting at the door; and that she whose secret had just been sold to Colbert for a hundred thousand crowns, had already offered it to Fouquet for the same sum. As he still hesitated, the duchesse looked at him full in the face.

"You prefer your own carriage?" she said.

"I admit I *do*."

"You suppose I am going to lead you into a snare or trap of some sort or other?"

"Madame la duchesse, you have the character of being somewhat inconsiderate at times, as I am reputed a sober, solemn character, a jest or practical joke might compromise me."

"Yes; the fact is, you are afraid. Well, then, take your own carriage, as many servants as you like, only think well of what I am going to say. What we two may arrange between ourselves, we are the only persons who will know — if a third person is present we might as well tell the whole world about it. After all, I do not make a point of it; my carriage shall follow yours, and I shall be satisfied to accompany you in your own carriage to the queen."

"To the queen?"

"Have you forgotten that already? Is it possible that one of the clauses of the agreement of so much importance to me, can have escaped you so soon? How trifling it seems to you, indeed; if I had known it I should have asked double what I have done."

"I have reflected, madame, and I shall not accompany you."

"Really — and why not?"

"Because I have the most perfect confidence in you."

"You overpower me. But — provided I receive the hundred thousand crowns?"

"Here they are, madame," said Colbert, scribbling a few lines on a piece of paper, which he handed to the duchesse, adding, "You are paid."

"The trait is a fine one, Monsieur Colbert, and I will reward you for it," she said, beginning to laugh.

Madame de Chevreuse's laugh was a very sinister sound; a man with youth, faith, love, life itself, throbbing in his heart, would prefer a sob to such a lamentable laugh. The duchesse opened the front of her dress and drew forth from her bosom, somewhat less white than it once had been, a small packet of papers, tied with a flame-colored ribbon, and, still laughing, she said, "There, Monsieur Colbert, are the originals of Cardinal Mazarin's letters; they are now your own property," she added, refastening the body of her dress; "your fortune is secured. And now accompany me to the queen."

"No, madame; if you are again about to run the chance of her majesty's displeasure, and it were known at the Palais Royal that I had been the means of introducing you there, the queen would never forgive me while she lived. No; there are certain persons at the palace who are devoted to me, who will procure you an admission without my being compromised."

"Just as you please, provided I enter."

"What do you term those religions women at Bruges who cure disorders?"

"Beguines."

"Good; are you one?"

"As you please, — but I must soon cease to be one."

"That is your affair."

"Excuse me, but I do not wish to be exposed to a refusal."

"That is again your own affair, madame. I am going to give directions to the head valet of the gentleman in waiting on the queen to allow admission to a Beguine, who brings an effectual remedy for her majesty's sufferings. You are the bearer of my letter, you will undertake to be provided with the remedy, and will give every explanation on the subject. I admit a knowledge of a Beguine, but I deny all knowledge of Madame de Chevreuse. Here, madame, then, is your letter of introduction."

CHAPTER XLII.

The Skin of the Bear.

Colbert handed the duchesse the letter, and gently drew aside the chair behind which she was standing; Madame de Chevreuse, with a very slight bow, immediately left the room. Colbert, who had recognized Mazarin's handwriting, and had counted the letters, rang to summon his secretary, whom he enjoined to go in immediate search of M. Vanel, a counselor of the parliament. The secretary replied that, according to his usual practice, M. Vanel had just that moment entered the house, in order to give the intendant an account of the principal details of the business which had been transacted during the day in parliament. Colbert approached one of the lamps, read the letters of the deceased cardinal over again, smiled repeatedly as he recognized the great value of the papers Madame de Chevreuse had just delivered — and burying his head in his hands for a few minutes, reflected profoundly. In the meantime, a tall, loosely-made man entered the room; his spare, thin face, steady look, and hooked nose, as he entered Colbert's cabinet, with a modest assurance of manner, revealed a character at once supple and decided, — supple towards the master who could throw him the prey, firm towards the dogs who might possibly be disposed to dispute its possession. M. Vanel carried a voluminous bundle of papers under his arm, and placed it on the desk on which Colbert was leaning both his elbows, as he supported his head.

"Good day, M. Vanel," said the latter, rousing himself from his meditation.

"Good day, monseigneur," said Vanel, naturally.

"You should say monsieur, and not monseigneur," replied Colbert, gently.

"We give the title of monseigneur to ministers," returned Vanel, with extreme self-possession, "and you are a minister."

"Not yet."

"You are so in point of fact, and I call you monseigneur accordingly; besides you are seigneur for *me*, and that is sufficient; if you dislike my calling you monseigneur before others, allow me, at least, to call you so in private."

Colbert raised his head as if to read, or try to read, upon Vanel's face how much or how little sincerity entered into this protestation of devotion. But the counselor knew perfectly well how to sustain the weight of such a look, even backed with the full authority of the title he had conferred. Colbert sighed; he could not read anything in Vanel's face, and Vanel might possibly be honest in his professions, but Colbert recollected that this man, inferior to himself in every other respect, was actually his master in virtue of the fact of his having a wife. As he was pitying this man's lot, Vanel coldly drew from his pocket a perfumed letter, sealed with Spanish wax, and held it towards Colbert, saying, "A letter from my wife, monseigneur."

Colbert coughed, took, opened and read the letter, and then put it carefully away in his pocket, while Vanel turned over the leaves of the papers he had brought with him with an unmoved and unconcerned air. "Vanel," he said suddenly to his *protege*, "you are a hard-working man, I know; would twelve hours' daily labor frighten you?"

"I work fifteen hours every day."

"Impossible. A counselor need not work more than three hours a day in parliament."

"Oh! I am working up some returns for a friend of mine in the department of accounts, and, as I still have spare time on my hands, I am studying Hebrew."

"Your reputation stands high in the parliament, Vanel."

"I believe so, monseigneur."

"You must not grow rusty in your post of counselor."

"What must I do to avoid it?"

"Purchase a high place. Mean and low ambitions are very difficult to satisfy."

"Small purses are the most difficult ones to fill, monseigneur."

"What post have you in view?" said Colbert.

"I see none — not one."

"There is one, certainly, but one need be almost the king himself to be able to buy it without inconvenience; and the king will not be inclined, I suppose, to purchase the post of procureur-general."

At these words, Vanel fixed his peculiar, humble, dull look upon Colbert, who could hardly tell whether Vanel comprehended him or not. "Why do you speak to me, monseigneur," said Vanel, "of the post of procureur-general to the parliament; I know no other post than the one M. Fouquet fills."

"Exactly so, my dear counselor."

"You are not over fastidious, monseigneur; but before the post can be bought, it must be offered for sale."

"I believe, Monsieur Vanel, that it will be for sale before long."

"For sale! What! M. Fouquet's post of procureur-general?"

"So it is *said*."

"The post which renders him so perfectly invincible, for sale! Ha, ha!" said Vanel, beginning to laugh.

"Would you be afraid, then, of the post?" said Colbert, gravely.

"Afraid! no; but — "

"Are you desirous of obtaining it?"

"You are laughing at me, monseigneur," replied Vanel. "Is it likely that a counselor of the parliament would not be desirous of becoming procureur-general?"

"Well, Monsieur Vanel, since I tell you that the post, as report goes, will be shortly for sale — "

"I cannot help repeating, monseigneur, that it is impossible; a man never throws away the buckler, behind which he maintains his honor, his fortune, his very life."

"There are certain men mad enough, Vanel, to fancy themselves out of the reach of all mischances."

"Yes, monseigneur; but such men never commit their mad acts for the advantage of the poor Vanels of the world."

"Why not?"

"For the very reason that those Vanels are poor."

"It is true that M. Fouquet's post might cost a good round sum. What would you bid for it, Monsieur Vanel?"

"Everything I am worth."

"Which means?"

"Three or four hundred thousand francs."

"And the post is worth — "

"A million and a half, at the very lowest. I know persons who have offered one million seven hundred thousand francs, without being able to persuade M. Fouquet to sell. Besides, supposing it were to happen that M.

Fouquet wished to sell, which I do not believe, in spite of what I have been told — ”

“Ah! you have heard something about it, then; who told you?”

“M. de Gourville, M. Pelisson, and others.”

“Very good; if, therefore, M. Fouquet did wish to sell — ”

“I could not buy it just yet, since the superintendent will only sell for ready money, and no one has a million and a half to put down at once.”

Colbert suddenly interrupted the counselor by an imperious gesture; he had begun to meditate. Observing his superior’s serious attitude, and his perseverance in continuing the conversation on this subject, Vanel awaited the solution without venturing to precipitate it.

“Explain to me the privileges which this post confers.”

“The right of impeaching every French subject who is not a prince of the blood; the right of quashing all proceedings taken against any Frenchman, who is neither king nor prince. The procureur-general is the king’s right hand to punish the guilty; the office is the means whereby also he can evade the administration of justice. M. Fouquet, therefore, would be able, by stirring up parliament, to maintain himself even against the king; and the king could as easily, by humoring M. Fouquet, get his edicts registered in spite of every opposition and objection. The procureur-general can be made a very useful or a very dangerous instrument.”

“Vanel, would you like to be procureur-general?” said Colbert, suddenly, softening both his look and his voice.

“I!” exclaimed the latter; “I have already had the honor to represent to you that I want about eleven hundred thousand francs to make up the amount.”

“Borrow that sum from your friends.”

“I have no friends richer than myself.”

“You are an honest and honorable man, Vanel.”

“Ah! monseigneur, if the world would only think as you do!”

“I think so, and that is quite enough; and if it should be needed, I will be your security.”

“Do not forget the proverb, monseigneur.”

“What is it?”

“That he who becomes responsible for another has to pay for his fancy.”

“Let that make no difference.”

Vanel rose, bewildered by this offer which had been so suddenly and unexpectedly made to him. “You are not trifling with me, monseigneur?” he said.

“Stay; you say that M. Gourville has spoken to you about M. Fouquet’s post?”

“Yes; and M. Pelisson, also.”

“Officially so, or only through their own suggestion?”

“These were their very words: ‘The parliament members are as proud as they are wealthy; they ought to club together two or three millions among themselves, to present to their protector and leader, M. Fouquet.’“

“And what did you reply?”

“I said that, for my own part, I would give ten thousand francs if necessary.”

“Ah! you like M. Fouquet, then!” exclaimed Colbert, with a look of hatred.

“No; but M. Fouquet is our chief. He is in debt — is on the high road to ruin; and we ought to save the honor of the body of which we are members.”

“Exactly; and that explains why M. Fouquet will be always safe and sound, so long as he occupies his present post,” replied Colbert.

“Thereupon,” said Vanel, “M. Gourville added, ‘If we were to do anything out of charity to M. Fouquet, it could not be otherwise than most humiliating to him; and he would be sure to refuse it. Let the parliament subscribe among themselves to purchase, in a proper manner, the post of procureur-general; in that case, all would go well; the honor of our body would be saved, and M. Fouquet’s pride spared.’“

“That is an opening.”

“I considered it so, monseigneur.”

“Well, Monsieur Vanel, you will go at once, and find out either M. Gourville or M. Pelisson. Do you know any other friend of M. Fouquet?”

“I know M. de la Fontaine very well.”

“La Fontaine, the rhymester?”

“Yes; he used to write verses to my wife, when M. Fouquet was one of our friends.”

“Go to him, then, and try and procure an interview with the superintendent.”

“Willingly — but the sum itself?”

“On the day and hour you arrange to settle the matter, Monsieur Vanel, you shall be supplied with the money, so do not make yourself uneasy on *that* account.”

“Monseigneur, such munificence! You eclipse kings even — you surpass M. Fouquet himself.”

“Stay a moment — do not let us mistake each other: I do not make you a present of fourteen hundred thousand francs, Monsieur Vanel; for I have children to provide for — but I will *lend* you that sum.”

“Ask whatever interest, whatever security you please, monseigneur; I am quite ready. And when all your requisitions are satisfied, I will still repeat, that you surpass kings and M. Fouquet in munificence. What conditions do you impose?”

“The repayment in eight years, and a mortgage upon the appointment itself.”

“Certainly. Is that all?”

“Wait a moment. I reserve to myself the right of purchasing the post from you at one hundred and fifty thousand francs profit for yourself, if, in your mode of filling the office, you do not follow out a line of conduct in conformity with the interests of the king and with my projects.”

“Ah-h!” said Vanel, in an altered tone.

“Is there anything in that which can possibly be objectionable to you, Monsieur Vanel?” said Colbert, coldly.

“Oh! no, no,” replied Vanel, nervously.

“Very good. We will sign an agreement to that effect whenever you like. And now go as quickly as you can to M. Fouquet’s friend, obtain an interview with the superintendent; do not be too difficult in making whatever concessions may be required of you; and when once the arrangements are all made — ”

“I will press him to sign.”

“Be most careful to do nothing of the kind; do not speak of signatures with M. Fouquet, nor of deeds, nor even ask him to pass his word. Understand this: otherwise you will lose everything. All you have to do is to get M. Fouquet to give you his hand on the matter. Go, go.”

CHAPTER XLIII.

An Interview with the Queen-Mother.

The queen-mother was in the bedroom at the Palais Royal, with Madame de Motteville and Senora Molina. King Louis, who had been impatiently expected the whole day, had not made his appearance; and the queen, who was growing impatient, had often sent to inquire about him. The moral atmosphere of the court seemed to indicate an approaching storm; the courtiers and the ladies of the court avoided meeting in the ante-chambers and the corridors in order not to converse on compromising subjects. Monsieur had joined the king early in the morning for a hunting-party; Madame remained in her own apartment, cool and distant to every one; and the queen-mother, after she had said her prayers in Latin, talked of domestic matters with her two friends in pure Castilian. Madame de Motteville, who understood the language perfectly, answered her in French. When the three ladies had exhausted every form of dissimulation and of politeness, as a circuitous mode of expressing that the king's conduct was making the queen and the queen-mother pine away through sheer grief and vexation, and when, in the most guarded and polished phrases, they had fulminated every variety of imprecation against Mademoiselle de la Valliere, the queen-mother terminated her attack by an exclamation indicative of her own reflections and character. "*Estos hijos!*" said she to Molina — which means, "These children!" words full of meaning on a mother's lips — words full of terrible significance in the mouth of a queen who, like Anne of Austria, hid many curious secrets in her soul.

"Yes," said Molina, "children, children! for whom every mother becomes a sacrifice."

"Yes," replied the queen; "a mother sacrifices everything, certainly." She did not finish her phrase; for she fancied, when she raised her eyes towards the full-length portrait of the pale Louis XIII., that light once more flashed from her husband's dull eyes, and his nostrils grew livid with wrath. The portrait seemed animated by a living expression — speak it did not, but it seemed to threaten. A profound silence succeeded the queen's last remark.

La Molina began to turn over ribbons and laces on a large work-table. Madame de Motteville, surprised at the look of mutual intelligence which had been exchanged between the confidant and her mistress, cast down her eyes like a discreet woman, and pretending to be observant of nothing that was passing, listened with the utmost attention to every word. She heard nothing, however, but a very insignificant "hum" on the part of the Spanish duenna, who was the incarnation of caution — and a profound sigh on that of the queen. She looked up immediately.

"You are suffering?" she said.

"No, Motteville, no; why do you say that?"

"Your majesty almost groaned just now."

"You are right; I did sigh, in truth."

"Monsieur Valot is not far off; I believe he is in Madame's apartment."

"Why is he with Madame?"

"Madame is troubled with nervous attacks."

"A very fine disorder, indeed! There is little good in M. Valot being there, when a very different physician would quickly cure Madame."

Madame de Motteville looked up with an air of great surprise, as she replied, "Another doctor instead of M. Valot? — whom do you mean?"

"Occupation, Motteville, occupation. If any one is really ill, it is my poor daughter."

"And your majesty, too."

"Less so this evening, though."

"Do not believe that too confidently, madame," said De Motteville. And, as if to justify her caution, a sharp, acute pain seized the queen, who turned deadly pale, and threw herself back in the chair, with every symptom of a sudden fainting fit. Molina ran to a richly gilded tortoise-shell cabinet, from which she took a large rock-crystal bottle of scented salts, and held it to the queen's nostrils, who inhaled it wildly for a few minutes, and murmured:

"It is hastening my death — but Heaven's will be done!"

"Your majesty's death is not so near at hand," added Molina, replacing the smelling-bottle in the cabinet.

"Does your majesty feel better now?" inquired Madame de Motteville.

"Much better," returned the queen, placing her finger on her lips, to impose silence on her favorite.

"It is very strange," remarked Madame de Motteville, after a pause.

"What is strange?" said the queen.

"Does your majesty remember the day when this pain attacked you for the first time?"

"I remember only that it was a grievously sad day for me, Motteville."

"But your majesty did not always regard that day as a sad one."

"Why?"

"Because three and twenty years ago, on that very day, his present majesty, your own glorious son, was born at the very same hour."

The queen uttered a loud cry, buried her face in her hands, and seemed utterly prostrated for some minutes; but whether from recollections which arose in her mind, or from reflection, or even with sheer pain, was doubtful. La Molina darted a look at Madame de Motteville, so full of bitter reproach, that the poor woman, perfectly ignorant of its meaning, was in her own exculpation on the point of asking an explanation, when, suddenly, Anne of Austria arose and said, "Yes, the 5th of September; my sorrow began on the 5th of September. The greatest joy, one day; the deepest sorrow the next; — the sorrow," she added, "the bitter expiation of a too excessive joy."

And, from that moment, Anne of Austria, whose memory and reason seemed to be suspended for the time, remained impenetrable, with vacant look, mind almost wandering, and hands hanging heavily down, as if life had almost departed.

"We must put her to bed," said La Molina.

"Presently, Molina."

"Let us leave the queen alone," added the Spanish attendant.

Madame de Motteville rose; large tears were rolling down the queen's pallid face; and Molina, having observed this sign of weakness, fixed her black vigilant eyes upon her.

"Yes, yes," replied the queen. "Leave us, Motteville; go."

The word "us" produced a disagreeable effect upon the ears of the French favorite; for it signified that an interchange of secrets, or of revelations of the past, was about to be made, and that one person was *de trop* in the conversation which seemed likely to take place.

"Will Molina, alone, be sufficient for your majesty to-night?" inquired the French woman.

"Yes," replied the queen. Madame de Motteville bowed in submission, and was about to withdraw, when suddenly an old female attendant, dressed as if she had belonged to the Spanish court of the year 1620, opened the door, and surprised the queen in her tears. “The remedy!” she cried, delightedly, to the queen, as she unceremoniously approached the group.

“What remedy?” said Anne of Austria.

“For your majesty’s sufferings,” the former replied.

“Who brings it?” asked Madame de Motteville, eagerly; “Monsieur Valot?”

“No; a lady from Flanders.”

“From Flanders? Is she Spanish?” inquired the queen.

“I don’t know.”

“Who sent her?”

“M. Colbert.”

“Her name?”

“She did not mention it.”

“Her position in life?”

“She will answer that herself.”

“Who is she?”

“She is masked.”

“Go, Molina; go and see!” cried the queen.

“It is needless,” suddenly replied a voice, at once firm and gentle in its tone, which proceeded from the other side of the tapestry hangings; a voice which made the attendants start, and the queen tremble excessively. At the same moment, a masked female appeared through the hangings, and, before the queen could speak a syllable she added, “I am connected with the order of the Beguines of Bruges, and do, indeed, bring with me the remedy which is certain to effect a cure of your majesty’s complaint.” No one uttered a sound, and the Beguine did not move a step.

“Speak,” said the queen.

“I will, when we are alone,” was the answer.

Anne of Austria looked at her attendants, who immediately withdrew. The Beguine, thereupon, advanced a few steps towards the queen, and bowed reverently before her. The queen gazed with increasing mistrust at this woman, who, in her turn, fixed a pair of brilliant eyes upon her, through her mask.

“The queen of France must, indeed, be very ill,” said Anne of Austria, “if it is known at the Beguinage of Bruges that she stands in need of being cured.”

“Your majesty is not irremediably ill.”

“But tell me how you happen to know I am suffering?”

“Your majesty has friends in Flanders.”

“Since these friends, then, sent you, mention their names.”

“Impossible, madame, since your majesty’s memory has not been awakened by your heart.”

Anne of Austria looked up, endeavoring to discover through the mysterious mask, and this ambiguous language, the name of her companion, who expressed herself with such familiarity and freedom; then, suddenly, wearied by a curiosity which wounded every feeling of pride in her nature, she said, “You are ignorant, perhaps, that royal personages are never spoken to with the face masked.”

“Deign to excuse me, madame,” replied the Beguine, humbly.

“I cannot excuse you. I may, possibly, forgive you, if you throw your mask aside.”

“I have made a vow, madame, to attend and aid all afflicted and suffering persons, without ever permitting them to behold my face. I might have been able to administer some relief to your body and to your mind, too; but since your majesty forbids me, I will take my leave. Adieu, madame, adieu!”

These words were uttered with a harmony of tone and respect of manner that disarmed the queen of all anger and suspicion, but did not remove her feeling of curiosity. “You are right,” she said; “it ill-becomes those who are suffering to reject the means of relief Heaven sends them. Speak, then; and may you, indeed, be able, as you assert, to administer relief to my body — ”

“Let us first speak a little of the mind, if you please,” said the Beguine — ”of the mind, which, I am sure, must also suffer.”

“My mind?”

“There are cancers so insidious in their nature that their very pulsations cannot be felt. Such cancers, madame, leave the ivory whiteness of the skin unblemished, and putrefy not the firm, fair flesh, with their blue tints; the physician who bends over the patient’s chest hears not, though he listens, the insatiable teeth of the disease grinding onward through the muscles, and the blood flows freely on; the knife has never been able to destroy, and rarely, even temporarily, to disarm the rage of these mortal scourges, — their home is in the mind, which they corrupt, — they gnaw the whole heart until it breaks. Such, madame, are the cancers fatal to queens; are you, too, free from their scourge?”

Anne slowly raised her arm, dazzling in its perfect whiteness, and pure in its rounded outlines as it was in the time of her earlier days.

"The evils to which you allude," she said, "are the condition of the lives of the high in rank upon earth, to whom Heaven has imparted mind. When those evils become too heavy to be borne, Heaven lightens their burdens by penitence and confession. Thus, only, we lay down our burden and the secrets that oppress us. But, forget not that the same gracious Heaven, in its mercy, apportions to their trials the strength of the feeble creatures of its hand; and my strength has enabled me to bear my burden. For the secrets of others, the silence of Heaven is more than sufficient; for my own secrets, that of my confessor is enough."

"You are as courageous, madame, I see, as ever, against your enemies. You do not acknowledge your confidence in your friends?"

"Queens have no friends; if you have nothing further to say to me, — if you feel yourself inspired by Heaven as a prophetess — leave me, I pray, for I dread the future."

"I should have supposed," said the Beguine, resolutely, "that you would rather have dreaded the past."

Hardly had these words escaped her lips, than the queen rose up proudly. "Speak," she cried, in a short, imperious tone of voice; "explain yourself briefly, quickly, entirely; or, if not — "

"Nay, do not threaten me, your majesty," said the Beguine, gently; "I came here to you full of compassion and respect. I came here on the part of a friend."

"Prove that to me! Comfort, instead of irritating me."

"Easily enough, and your majesty will see who is friendly to you. What misfortune has happened to your majesty during these three and twenty years past — "

"Serious misfortunes, indeed; have I not lost the king?"

"I speak not of misfortunes of *that* kind. I wish to ask you, if, since the birth of the king, any indiscretion on a friend's part has caused your majesty the slightest serious anxiety, or distress?"

"I do not understand you," replied the queen, clenching her teeth in order to conceal her emotion.

"I will make myself understood, then. Your majesty remembers that the king was born on the 5th of September, 1638, at a quarter past eleven o'clock."

"Yes," stammered out the queen.

"At half-past twelve," continued the Beguine, "the dauphin, who had been baptized by Monseigneur de Meaux in the king's and your own presence, was acknowledged as the heir of the crown of France. The king then went to the chapel of the old Chateau de Saint-Germain, to hear the *Te Deum* chanted."

"Quite true, quite true," murmured the queen.

"Your majesty's conferment took place in the presence of Monsieur, his majesty's late uncle, of the princes, and of the ladies attached to the court. The king's physician, Bouvard, and Honore, the surgeon, were stationed in the ante-chamber; your majesty slept from three o'clock until seven, I believe."

"Yes, yes; but you tell me no more than every one else knows as well as you and myself."

"I am now, madame, approaching that which very few persons are acquainted with. Very few persons, did I say, alas! I might say two only, for formerly there were but five in all, and, for many years past, the secret has been well preserved by the deaths of the principal participators in it. The late king sleeps now with his ancestors; Perronnette, the midwife, soon followed him; Laporte is already forgotten."

The queen opened her lips as though to reply; she felt, beneath her icy hand, with which she kept her face half concealed, the beads of perspiration on her brow.

"It was eight o'clock," pursued the Beguine; "the king was seated at supper, full of joy and happiness; around him on all sides arose wild cries of delight and drinking of healths; the people cheered beneath the balconies; the Swiss guards, the musketeers, and the royal guards wandered through the city, borne about in triumph by the drunken students. Those boisterous sounds of general joy disturbed the dauphin, the future king of France, who was quietly lying in the arms of Madame de Hausac, his nurse, and whose eyes, as he opened them, and stared about, might have observed two crowns at the foot of his cradle. Suddenly your majesty uttered a piercing cry, and Dame Perronnette immediately flew to your bedside. The doctors were dining in a room at some distance from your chamber; the palace, deserted from the frequency of the irruptions made into it, was without either sentinels or guards. The midwife, having questioned and examined your majesty, gave a sudden exclamation as if in wild astonishment, and taking you in her arms, bewildered almost out of her senses from sheer distress of mind, dispatched Laporte to inform the king that her majesty the queen-mother wished to see him in her room. Laporte, you are aware, madame, was a man of the most admirable calmness and presence of mind. He did not approach the king as if he were the bearer of alarming intelligence and wished to inspire the terror he himself experienced; besides, it was not a very terrifying intelligence which awaited the king. Therefore, Laporte appeared with a smile upon his lips, and approached the king's chair, saying to him — 'Sire, the queen is very happy, and would be still more so to see your majesty.' On that day, Louis XIII. would have given his crown away to the veriest beggar for a 'God bless you.' Animated, light-hearted, and full of gayety, the king rose from the table, and said to those around him, in a tone that Henry IV. might have adopted, — 'Gentlemen, I am going to see my wife.' He came to your beside, madame, at the very moment Dame Perronnette presented to him a second prince, as beautiful and healthy as the former, and said — 'Sire, Heaven will not allow the kingdom of France to fall into the female line.' The king, yielding to a first impulse, clasped the child in his arms, and cried, 'Oh, Heaven, I thank Thee!'"

At this part of her recital, the Beguine paused, observing how intensely the queen was suffering; she had thrown herself back in her chair, and with her head bent forward and her eyes fixed, listened without seeming to hear, and her lips moving convulsively, either breathing a prayer to Heaven or imprecations on the woman standing before her.

"Ah! I do not believe that, if, because there could be but one dauphin in France," exclaimed the Beguine, "the queen allowed that child to vegetate, banished from his royal parents' presence, she was on that account an unfeeling mother. Oh, no, no; there are those alive who have known and witnessed the passionate kisses she imprinted on that innocent creature in exchange for a life of misery and gloom to which state policy condemned the twin brother of Louis XIV."

"Oh! Heaven!" murmured the queen feebly.

"It is admitted," continued the Beguine, quickly, "that when the king perceived the effect which would result from the existence of two sons, equal in age and pretensions, he trembled for the welfare of France, for the tranquillity of the state; and it is equally well known that Cardinal de Richelieu, by the direction of Louis XIII., thought over the subject with deep attention, and after an hour's meditation in his majesty's cabinet, he pronounced the following sentence: — ’One prince means peace and safety for the state; two competitors, civil war and anarchy.’“

The queen rose suddenly from her seat, pale as death, and her hands clenched together:

“You know too much,” she said, in a hoarse, thick voice, “since you refer to secrets of state. As for the friends from whom you have acquired this secret, they are false and treacherous. You are their accomplice in the crime which is being now committed. Now, throw aside your mask, or I will have you arrested by my captain of the guards. Do not think that this secret terrifies me! You have obtained it, you shall restore it to me. Never shall it leave your bosom, for neither your secret nor your own life belong to you from this moment.”

Anne of Austria, joining gesture to the threat, advanced a couple of steps towards the Beguine.

“Learn,” said the latter, “to know and value the fidelity, the honor, and secrecy of the friends you have abandoned.” And, then, suddenly she threw aside her mask.

“Madame de Chevreuse!” exclaimed the queen.

“With your majesty, the sole living *confidante* of the secret.”

“Ah!” murmured Anne of Austria; “come and embrace me, duchesse. Alas! you kill your friend in thus trifling with her terrible distress.”

And the queen, leaning her head upon the shoulder of the old duchesse, burst into a flood of bitter tears. “How young you are — still!” said the latter, in a hollow voice; “you can weep!”

CHAPTER XLIV.

Two Friends.

The queen looked steadily at Madame de Chevreuse, and said: “I believe you just now made use of the word ‘happy’ in speaking of me. Hitherto, duchesse, I had thought it impossible that a human creature could anywhere be found more miserable than the queen of France.”

“Your afflictions, madame, have indeed been terrible enough. But by the side of those great and grand misfortunes to which we, two old friends, separated by men’s malice, were just now alluding, you possess sources of pleasure, slight enough in themselves it may be, but greatly envied by the world.”

“What are they?” said Anne of Austria, bitterly. “What can induce you to pronounce the word ‘pleasure,’ duchesse — you who, just now, admitted that my body and my mind both stood in need of remedies?”

Madame de Chevreuse collected herself for a moment, and then murmured, “How far removed kings are from other people!”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that they are so far removed from the vulgar herd that they forget that others often stand in need of the bare necessities of life. They are like the inhabitant of the African mountains, who, gazing from the verdant tableland, refreshed by the rills of melted snow, cannot comprehend that the dwellers in the plains below are perishing from hunger and thirst in the midst of the desert, burnt up by the heat of the sun.”

The queen colored, for she now began to perceive the drift of her friend’s remark. “It was very wrong,” she said, “to have neglected you.”

“Oh! madame, I know the king has inherited the hatred his father bore me. The king would exile me if he knew I were in the Palais Royal.”

“I cannot say that the king is very well disposed towards you, duchesse,” replied the queen; “but I could — secretly, you know — ”

The duchesse’s disdainful smile produced a feeling of uneasiness in the queen’s mind. “Duchesse,” she hastened to add, “you did perfectly right to come here, even were it only to give us the happiness of contradicting the report of your death."

"Has it been rumored, then, that I was dead?"

"Everywhere."

"And yet my children did not go into mourning."

"Ah! you know, duchesse, the court is very frequently moving about from place to place; we see M. Albert de Luynes but seldom, and many things escape our minds in the midst of the preoccupations that constantly beset us."

"Your majesty ought not to have believed the report of my death."

"Why not? Alas! we are all mortal; and you may perceive how rapidly I, your younger sister, as we used formerly to say, am approaching the tomb."

"If your majesty believed me dead, you ought, in that case, to have been astonished not to have received the news."

"Death not unfrequently takes us by surprise, duchesse."

"Oh! your majesty, those who are burdened with secrets such as we have just now discussed must, as a necessity of their nature, satisfy their craving desire to divulge them, and they feel they must gratify that desire before they die. Among the various preparations for their final journey, the task of placing their papers in order is not omitted."

The queen started.

"Your majesty will be sure to learn, in a particular manner, the day of my death."

"In what way?"

"Because your majesty will receive the next day, under several coverings, everything connected with our mysterious correspondence of former times."

"Did you not burn them?" cried Anne, in alarm.

"Traitors only," replied the duchesse, "destroy a royal correspondence."

"Traitors, do you say?"

"Yes, certainly, or rather they pretend to destroy, instead of which they keep or sell it. Faithful friends, on the contrary, most carefully secrete such treasures, for it may happen that some day or other they would wish to seek out their queen in order to say to her: 'Madame, I am getting old; my health is fast failing me; in the presence of the danger of death, for there is the risk for your majesty that this secret may be revealed, take, therefore, this paper, so fraught with menace for yourself, and trust not to another to burn it for you.'"

"What paper do you refer to?"

"As far as I am concerned, I have but one, it is true, but that is indeed most dangerous in its nature."

"Oh! duchesse, tell me what it is."

"A letter, dated Tuesday, the 2d of August, 1644, in which you beg me to go to Noisy-le-Sec, to see that unhappy child. In your own handwriting, madame, there are those words, 'that unhappy child!'"

A profound silence ensued; the queen's mind was busy in the past; Madame de Chevreuse was watching the progress of her scheme. "Yes, unhappy, most unhappy!" murmured Anne of Austria; "how sad the existence he led, poor child, to finish it in so cruel a manner."

"Is he dead?" cried the duchesse suddenly, with a curiosity whose genuine accents the queen instinctively detected.

"He died of consumption, died forgotten, died withered and blighted like the flowers a lover has given to his mistress, which she leaves to die secreted in a drawer where she had hid them from the gaze of others."

"Died!" repeated the duchesse with an air of discouragement, which would have afforded the queen the most unfeigned delight, had it not been tempered in some measure with a mixture of doubt — "Died — at Noisy-le-Sec?"

"Yes, in the arms of his tutor, a poor, honest man, who did not long survive him."

"That can easily be understood; it is so difficult to bear up under the weight of such a loss and such a secret," said Madame de Chevreuse, — the irony of which reflection the queen pretended not to perceive. Madame de Chevreuse continued: "Well, madame, I inquired some years ago at Noisy-le-Sec about this unhappy child. I was told that it was not believed he was dead, and that was my reason for not having at first condoled with your majesty; for, most certainly, if I could have thought it were true, never should I have made the slightest allusion to so deplorable an event, and thus have re-awakened your majesty's most natural distress."

"You say that it is not believed the child died at Noisy?"

"No, madame."

"What did they say about him, then?"

"They said — but, no doubt, they were mistaken — "

"Nay, speak, speak!"

"They said, that one evening, about the year 1645, a lady, beautiful and majestic in her bearing, which was observed notwithstanding the mask and the mantle that concealed her figure — a lady of rank, of very high rank, no doubt — came in a carriage to the place where the road branches off; the very same spot, you know, where I awaited news of the young prince when your majesty was graciously pleased to send me there."

"Well, well?"

"That the boy's tutor, or guardian, took the child to this lady."

"Well, what next?"

"That both the child and his tutor left that part of the country the very next day."

"There, you see there is some truth in what you relate, since, in point of fact, the poor child died from a sudden attack of illness, which makes the lives of all children, as doctors say, suspended as it were by a thread."

"What your majesty says is quite true; no one knows it better than yourself — no one believes it more strongly than myself. But yet, how strange it is — "

"What can it now be?" thought the queen.

"The person who gave me these details, who was sent to inquire after the child's health — "

"Did you confide such a charge to any one else? Oh, duchesse!"

"Some one as dumb as your majesty, as dumb as myself; we will suppose it was myself, Madame; this some one, some months after, passing through Touraine — "

"Touraine!"

"Recognized both the tutor and the child, too! I am wrong, thought he recognized them, both living, cheerful, happy, and flourishing, the one in a green old age, the other in the flower of his youth. Judge after that what truth can be attributed to the rumors which are circulated, or what faith, after that, placed in anything that may happen in the world! But I am fatiguing your majesty; it was not my intention, however, to do so, and I will take my leave of you, after renewing to you the assurance of my most respectful devotion."

"Stay, duchesse; let us first talk a little about yourself."

"Of myself, madame! I am not worthy that you should bend your looks upon me."

“Why not, indeed? Are you not the oldest friend I have? Are you angry with me, duchesse?”

“I, indeed! what motive could I have? If I had reason to be angry with your majesty, should I have come here?”

“Duchesse, age is fast creeping on us both; we should be united against that death whose approach cannot be far off.”

“You overpower me, madame, with the kindness of your language.”

“No one has ever loved or served me as you have done, duchesse.”

“Your majesty is too kind in remembering it.”

“Not so. Give me a proof of your friendship, duchesse.”

“My whole being is devoted to you, madame.”

“The proof I require is, that you should ask something of me.”

“Ask — ”

“Oh, I know you well, — no one is more disinterested, more noble, and truly loyal.”

“Do not praise me too highly, madame,” said the duchesse, somewhat anxiously.

“I could never praise you as much as you deserve to be praised.”

“And yet, age and misfortune effect a terrible change in people, madame.”

“So much the better; for the beautiful, the haughty, the adored duchesse of former days might have answered me ungratefully, ‘I do not wish for anything from you.’ Heaven be praised! The misfortunes you speak of have indeed worked a change in you, for you will now, perhaps, answer me, ‘I accept.’“

The duchesse’s look and smile soon changed at this conclusion, and she no longer attempted to act a false part.

“Speak, dearest, what do you want?”

“I must first explain to you — ”

“Do so unhesitatingly.”

“Well, then, your majesty can confer the greatest, the most ineffable pleasure upon me.”

“What is it?” said the queen, a little distant in her manner, from an uneasiness of feeling produced by this remark. “But do not forget, my good Chevreuse, that I am quite as much under my son’s influence as I was formerly under my husband’s.”

“I will not be too hard, madame.”

"Call me as you used to do; it will be a sweet echo of our happy youth."

"Well, then, my dear mistress, my darling Anne — "

"Do you know Spanish, still?"

"Yes."

"Ask me in Spanish, then."

"Will your majesty do me the honor to pass a few days with me at Dampierre?"

"Is that all?" said the queen, stupefied. "Nothing more than that?"

"Good heavens! can you possibly imagine that, in asking you that, I am not asking you the greatest conceivable favor? If that really be the case, you do not know me. Will you accept?"

"Yes, gladly. And I shall be happy," continued the queen, with some suspicion, "if my presence can in any way be useful to you."

"Useful!" exclaimed the duchesse, laughing; "oh, no, no, agreeable — delightful, if you like; and you promise me, then?"

"I swear it," said the queen, whereupon the duchesse seized her beautiful hand, and covered it with kisses. The queen could not help murmuring to herself, "She is a good-hearted woman, and very generous, too."

"Will your majesty consent to wait a fortnight before you come?"

"Certainly; but why?"

"Because," said the duchesse, "knowing me to be in disgrace, no one would lend me the hundred thousand francs, which I require to put Dampierre into a state of repair. But when it is known that I require that sum for the purpose of receiving your majesty at Dampierre properly, all the money in Paris will be at my disposal."

"Ah!" said the queen, gently nodding her head in sign of intelligence, "a hundred thousand francs! you want a hundred thousand francs to put Dampierre into repair?"

"Quite as much as that."

"And no one will lend you them?"

"No one."

"I will lend them to you, if you like, duchesse."

"Oh, I hardly dare accept such a sum."

"You would be wrong if you did *not*. Besides, a hundred thousand francs is really not much. I know but too well that you never set a right value upon your silence and secrecy. Push that table a little towards me, duchesse, and I will write you an order on M. Colbert; no, on M. Fouquet, who is a far more courteous and obliging man."

"Will he pay it, though?"

"If he will not pay it, I will; but it will be the first time he will have refused me."

The queen wrote and handed the duchesse the order, and afterwards dismissed her with a warm embrace.

CHAPTER XLV.

How Jean de La Fontaine Came to Write His First Tale.

All these intrigues are exhausted; the human mind, so variously complicated, has been enabled to develop itself at its ease in the three outlines with which our recital has supplied it. It is not unlikely that, in the future we are now preparing, a question of politics and intrigues may still arise, but the springs by which they work will be so carefully concealed that no one will be able to see aught but flowers and paintings, just as at a theater, where a colossus appears upon the scene, walking along moved by the small legs and slender arms of a child concealed within the framework.

We now return to Saint-Mande, where the superintendent was in the habit of receiving his select confederacy of epicureans. For some time past the host had met with nothing but trouble. Every one in the house was aware of and felt for the minister's distress. No more magnificent or recklessly improvident *reunions*. Money had been the pretext assigned by Fouquet, and never *was* any pretext, as Gourville said, more fallacious, for there was not even a shadow of money to be seen.

M. Vatel was resolutely painstaking in keeping up the reputation of the house, and yet the gardeners who supplied the kitchens complained of ruinous delays. The agents for the supply of Spanish wines sent drafts which no one honored; fishermen, whom the superintendent engaged on the coast of Normandy, calculated that if they were paid all that was due to them, the amount would enable them to retire comfortably for life; fish, which, at a later period, was the cause of Vatel's death, did not arrive at all. However, on the ordinary reception days, Fouquet's friends flocked in more numerously than ever. Gourville and the Abbe Fouquet talked over money matters — that is to say, the abbe borrowed a few pistoles from Gourville; Pelisson, seated with his legs crossed, was engaged in finishing the peroration of a speech with which Fouquet was to open the parliament; and this speech was a masterpiece, because Pelisson wrote it for his friend — that is to say, he inserted all kinds of clever things the latter would most certainly never have taken the trouble to say of his own accord. Presently

Loret and La Fontaine would enter from the garden, engaged in a dispute about the art of making verses. The painters and musicians, in their turn, were hovering near the dining-room. As soon as eight o'clock struck the supper would be announced, for the superintendent never kept any one waiting. It was already half-past seven, and the appetites of the guests were beginning to declare themselves in an emphatic manner. As soon as all the guests were assembled, Gourville went straight up to Pelisson, awoke him out of his reverie, and led him into the middle of a room, and closed the doors. "Well," he said, "anything new?"

Pelisson raised his intelligent and gentle face, and said: "I have borrowed five and twenty thousand francs of my aunt, and I have them here in good sterling money."

"Good," replied Gourville; "we only what one hundred and ninety-five thousand livres for the first payment."

"The payment of what?" asked La Fontaine.

"What! absent-minded as usual! Why, it was you who told us the small estate at Corbeli was going to be sold by one of M. Fouquet's creditors; and you, also, who proposed that all his friends should subscribe — more than that, it was you who said that you would sell a corner of your house at Chateau-Thierry, in order to furnish your own proportion, and you come and ask — '*The payment of what?*'"

This remark was received with a general laugh, which made La Fontaine blush. "I beg your pardon," he said, "I had not forgotten it; oh, no! only — "

"Only you remembered nothing about it," replied Loret.

"That is the truth, and the fact is, he is quite right, there is a great difference between forgetting and not remembering."

"Well, then," added Pelisson, "you bring your mite in the shape of the price of the piece of land you have sold?"

"Sold? no!"

"Have you not sold the field, then?" inquired Gourville, in astonishment, for he knew the poet's disinterestedness.

"My wife would not let me," replied the latter, at which there were fresh bursts of laughter.

"And yet you went to Chateau-Thierry for that purpose," said some one.

"Certainly I did, and on horseback."

"Poor fellow!"

"I had eight different horses, and I was almost bumped to death."

“You are an excellent fellow! And you rested yourself when you arrived there?”

“Rested! Oh! of course I did, for I had an immense deal of work to do.”

“How so?”

“My wife had been flirting with the man to whom I wished to sell the land. The fellow drew back from his bargain, and so I challenged him.”

“Very good, and you fought?”

“It seems not.”

“You know nothing about it, I suppose?”

“No, my wife and her relations interfered in the matter. I was kept a quarter of an hour with my sword in my hand; but I was not wounded.”

“And your adversary?”

“Oh! he wasn’t wounded either, for he never came on the field.”

“Capital!” cried his friends from all sides, “you must have been terribly angry.”

“Exceedingly so; I caught cold; I returned home and then my wife began to quarrel with me.”

“In real earnest?”

“Yes, in real earnest. She threw a loaf of bread at my head, a large loaf.”

“And what did you do?”

“Oh! I upset the table over her and her guests; and then I got on my horse again, and here I am.”

Every one had great difficulty in keeping his countenance at the exposure of this heroi-comedy, and when the laughter had subsided, one of the guests present said to La Fontaine: “Is that all you have brought back?”

“Oh, no! I have an excellent idea in my head.”

“What is it?”

“Have you noticed that there is a good deal of sportive, jesting poetry written in France?”

“Yes, of course,” replied every one.

“And,” pursued La Fontaine, “only a very small portion of it is printed.”

“The laws are strict, you know.”

“That may be; but a rare article is a dear article, and that is the reason why I have written a small poem, excessively free in its style, very broad, and extremely cynical in its tone.”

“The deuce you have!”

“Yes,” continued the poet, with assumed indifference, “and I have introduced the greatest freedom of language I could possibly employ.”

Peals of laughter again broke forth, while the poet was thus announcing the quality of his wares. “And,” he continued, “I have tried to excel everything that Boccaccio, Aretin, and other masters of their craft have written in the same style.”

“Its fate is clear,” said Pelisson; “it will be suppressed and forbidden.”

“Do you think so?” said La Fontaine, simply. “I assure you I did not do it on my own account so much as M. Fouquet’s.”

This wonderful conclusion again raised the mirth of all present.

“And I have sold the first edition of this little book for eight hundred livres,” exclaimed La Fontaine, rubbing his hands together. “Serious and religions books sell at about half that rate.”

“It would have been better,” said Gourville, “to have written two religious books instead.”

“It would have been too long, and not amusing enough,” replied La Fontaine tranquilly; “my eight hundred livres are in this little bag, and I beg to offer them as *my* contribution.”

As he said this, he placed his offering in the hands of their treasurer; it was then Loret’s turn, who gave a hundred and fifty livres; the others stripped themselves in the same way; and the total sum in the purse amounted to forty thousand livres. The money was still being counted over when the superintendent noiselessly entered the room; he had heard everything; and then this man, who had possessed so many millions, who had exhausted all the pleasures and honors the world had to bestow, this generous heart, this inexhaustible brain, which had, like two burning crucibles, devoured the material and moral substance of the first kingdom in Europe, was seen to cross the threshold with tears in his eyes, and pass his fingers through the gold and silver which the bag contained.

“Poor offering,” he said, in a softened and affected tone of voice, “you will disappear into the smallest corner of my empty purse, but you have filled to overflowing that which no one can ever exhaust, my heart. Thank you, my friends — thank you.” And as he could not embrace every one present, who were all tearful, too, philosophers as they were, he embraced La Fontaine, saying to him, “Poor fellow! so you have, on my account, been beaten by your wife and censured by your confessor.”

“Oh! it is a mere nothing,” replied the poet; “if your creditors will only wait a couple of years, I shall have written a hundred other tales, which, at two editions each, will pay off the debt.”

CHAPTER XLVI.

La Fontaine in the Character of a Negotiator.

Fouquet pressed La Fontaine’s hand most warmly, saying to him, “My dear poet, write a hundred other tales, not only for the eighty pistoles which each of them will produce you, but, still more, to enrich our language with a hundred new masterpieces of composition.”

“Oh!” said La Fontaine, with a little air of pride, “you must not suppose that I have only brought this idea and the eighty pistoles to the superintendent.”

“Oh! indeed,” was the general acclamation from all parts of the room, “M. de la Fontaine is in funds to-day.”

“Exactly,” replied La Fontaine.

“Quick, quick!” cried the assembly.

“Take care,” said Pelisson in La Fontaine’s ear; “you have had a most brilliant success up to the present moment; do not go beyond your depth.”

“Not at all, Monsieur Pelisson; and you, who are a man of decided taste, will be the first to approve of what I have done.”

“We are talking of millions, remember,” said Gourville.

“I have fifteen hundred thousand francs here, Monsieur Gourville,” he replied, striking himself on the chest.

“The deuce take this Gascon from Chateau-Thierry!” cried Loret.

“It is not the pocket you must tap — but the brain,” said Fouquet.

“Stay a moment, monsieur le surintendant,” added La Fontaine; “you are not procureur-general — you are a poet.”

“True, true!” cried Loret, Conrart, and every person present connected with literature.

“You are, I repeat, a poet and a painter, a sculptor, a friend of the arts and sciences; but, acknowledge that you are no lawyer.”

“Oh! I do acknowledge it,” replied M. Fouquet, smiling.

“If you were to be nominated at the Academy, you would refuse, I think.”

“I think I should, with all due deference to the academicians.”

“Very good; if, therefore, you do not wish to belong to the Academy, why do you allow yourself to form one of the parliament?”

“Oh!” said Pelisson, “we are talking politics.”

“I wish to know whether the barrister’s gown does or does not become M. Fouquet.”

“There is no question of the gown at all,” retorted Pelisson, annoyed at the laughter of those who were present.

“On the contrary, it is the gown,” said Loret.

“Take the gown away from the procureur-general,” said Conrart, “and we have M. Fouquet left us still, of whom we have no reason to complain; but, as he is no procureur-general without his gown, we agree with M. de la Fontaine and pronounce the gown to be nothing but a bugbear.”

“*Fugiunt risus leporesque*,” said Loret.

“The smiles and the graces,” said some one present.

“That is not the way,” said Pelisson, gravely, “that I translate *lepores*.”

“How do you translate it?” said La Fontaine.

“Thus: The hares run away as soon as they see M. Fouquet.” A burst of laughter, in which the superintendent joined, followed this sally.

“But why hares?” objected Conrart, vexed.

“Because the hare will be the very one who will not be over pleased to see M. Fouquet surrounded by all the attributes which his parliamentary strength and power confer on him.”

“Oh! oh!” murmured the poets.

“*Quo non ascendam*,” said Conrart, “seems impossible to me, when one is fortunate enough to wear the gown of the procureur-general.”

“On the contrary, it seems so to me without that gown,” said the obstinate Pelisson; “what is your opinion, Gourville?”

“I think the gown in question is a very good thing,” replied the latter; “but I equally think that a million and a half is far better than the gown.”

“And I am of Gourville’s opinion,” exclaimed Fouquet, stopping the discussion by the expression of his own opinion, which would necessarily bear down all the others.

“A million and a half,” Pelisson grumbled out; “now I happen to know an Indian fable — ”

“Tell it to me,” said La Fontaine; “I ought to know it too.”

“Tell it, tell it,” said the others.

“There was a tortoise, which was, as usual, well protected by its shell,” said Pelisson; “whenever its enemies threatened it, it took refuge within its covering. One day some one said to it, ‘You must feel very hot in such a house as that in the summer, and you are altogether prevented showing off your graces; there is a snake here, who will give you a million and a half for your shell.’“

“Good!” said the superintendent, laughing.

“Well, what next?” said La Fontaine, more interested in the apologue than in the moral.

“The tortoise sold his shell and remained naked and defenseless. A vulture happened to see him, and being hungry, broke the tortoise’s back with a blow of his beak and devoured it. The moral is, that M. Fouquet should take very good care to keep his gown.”

La Fontaine understood the moral seriously. “You forget Aeschylus,” he said, to his adversary.

“What do you mean?”

“Aeschylus was bald-headed, and a vulture — your vulture, probably — who was a great amateur in tortoises, mistook at a distance his head for a block of stone, and let a tortoise, which was shrunk up in his shell, fall upon it.”

“Yes, yes, La Fontaine is right,” resumed Fouquet, who had become very thoughtful; “whenever a vulture wishes to devour a tortoise, he well knows how to break his shell; but happy is that tortoise a snake pays a million and a half for his envelope. If any one were to bring me a generous-hearted snake like the one in your fable, Pelisson, I would give him my shell.”

“*Rara avis in terres!*” cried Conrart.

“And like a black swan, is he not?” added La Fontaine; “well, then, the bird in question, black and rare, is already found.”

“Do you mean to say that you have found a purchaser for my post of procureur-general?” exclaimed Fouquet.

“I have, monsieur.”

“But the superintendent never said that he wished to sell,” resumed Pelisson.

“I beg your pardon,” said Conrart, “you yourself spoke about it, even — ”

“Yes, I am a witness to that,” said Gourville.

"He seems very tenacious about his brilliant idea," said Fouquet, laughing. "Well, La Fontaine, who is the purchaser?"

"A perfect blackbird, for he is a counselor belonging to the parliament, an excellent fellow."

"What is his name?"

"Vanel."

"Vanel!" exclaimed Fouquet. "Vanel the husband of — "

"Precisely, her husband; yes, monsieur."

"Poor fellow!" said Fouquet, with an expression of great interest.

"He wishes to be everything that you have been, monsieur," said Gourville, "and to do everything that you have done."

"It is very agreeable; tell us all about it, La Fontaine."

"It is very simple. I see him occasionally, and a short time ago I met him, walking about on the Place de la Bastile, at the very moment when I was about to take the small carriage to come down here to Saint-Mande."

"He must have been watching his wife," interrupted Loret.

"Oh, no!" said La Fontaine, "he is far from being jealous. He accosted me, embraced me, and took me to the inn called L'Image Saint-Fiacre, and told me all about his troubles."

"He has his troubles, then?"

"Yes; his wife wants to make him ambitious."

"Well, and he told you — "

"That some one had spoken to him about a post in parliament; that M. Fouquet's name had been mentioned; that ever since, Madame Vanel dreams of nothing else than being called madame la procureur-generale, and that it makes her ill and kills her every night she does not dream about it."

"The deuce!"

"Poor woman!" said Fouquet.

"Wait a moment. Conrart is always telling me that I do not know how to conduct matters of business; you will see how I managed this one."

"Well, go on."

"'I suppose you know,' said I to Vanel, 'that the value of a post such as that which M. Fouquet holds is by no means trifling.'

"'How much do you imagine it to be?' he said.

"'M. Fouquet, I know, has refused seventeen hundred thousand francs.'

"'My wife,' replied Vanel, 'had estimated it at about fourteen hundred thousand.'

"'Ready money?' I said.

"'Yes; she has sold some property of hers in Guienne, and has received the purchase money.'"

"That's a pretty sum to touch all at once," said the Abbe Fouquet, who had not hitherto said a word.

"Poor Madame Vanel!" murmured Fouquet.

Pelisson shrugged his shoulders, as he whispered in Fouquet's ear, "That woman is a perfect fiend."

"That may be; and it will be delightful to make use of this fiend's money to repair the injury which an angel has done herself for me."

Pelisson looked with a surprised air at Fouquet, whose thoughts were from that moment fixed upon a fresh object in view.

"Well!" inquired La Fontaine, "what about my negotiation?"

"Admirable, my dear poet."

"Yes," said Gourville; "but there are some people who are anxious to have the steed who have not even money enough to pay for the bridle."

"And Vanel would draw back from his offer if he were to be taken at his word," continued the Abbe Fouquet.

"I do not believe it," said La Fontaine.

"What do you know about it?"

"Why, you have not yet heard the *denouement* of my story."

"If there is a *denouement*, why do you beat about the bush so much?"

"*Semper ad eventum*. Is that correct?" said Fouquet, with the air of a nobleman who condescends to barbarisms. To which the Latinists present answered with loud applause.

"My *denouement*," cried La Fontaine, "is that Vanel, that determined blackbird, knowing that I was coming to Saint-Mande, implored me to bring him with me, and, if possible, to present him to M. Fouquet."

"So that — "

"So that he is here; I left him in that part of the ground called Bel-Air. Well, M. Fouquet, what is your reply?"

"Well, it is not respectful towards Madame Vanel that her husband should run the risk of catching cold outside my house; send for him, La Fontaine, since you know where he is."

"I will go myself."

“And I will accompany you,” said the Abbe Fouquet; “I will carry the money bags.”

“No jesting,” said Fouquet, seriously; “let the business be a serious one, if it is to be one at all. But first of all, let us show we are hospitable. Make my apologies, La Fontaine, to M. Vanel, and tell him how distressed I am to have kept him waiting, but that I was not aware he was there.”

La Fontaine set off at once, fortunately accompanied by Gourville, for, absorbed in his own calculations, the poet would have mistaken the route, and was hurrying as fast as he could towards the village of Saint-Mande. Within a quarter of an hour afterwards, M. Vanel was introduced into the superintendent’s cabinet, a description of which has already been given at the beginning of this story. When Fouquet saw him enter, he called to Pelisson, and whispered a few words in his ear. “Do not lose a single word of what I am going to say: let all the silver and gold plate, together with my jewels of every description, be packed up in the carriage. You will take the black horses: the jeweler will accompany you; and you will postpone the supper until Madame de Belliere’s arrival.”

“Will it be necessary to inform Madame de Belliere of it?” said Pelisson.

“No; that will be useless; I will do that. So, away with you, my dear friend.”

Pelisson set off, not quite clear as to his friend’s meaning or intention, but confident, like every true friend, in the judgment of the man he was blindly obeying. It is that which constitutes the strength of such men; distrust only arises in the minds of inferior natures.

Vanel bowed lowly to the superintendent, and was about to begin a speech.

“Do not trouble yourself, monsieur,” said Fouquet, politely; “I am told you wish to purchase a post I hold. How much can you give me for it?”

“It is for you, monseigneur, to fix the amount you require. I know that offers of purchase have already been made to you for it.”

“Madame Vanel, I have been told, values it at fourteen hundred thousand livres.”

“That is all we have.”

“Can you give me the money immediately?”

“I have not the money with me,” said Vanel, frightened almost by the unpretending simplicity, amounting to greatness, of the man, for he had expected disputes, difficulties, opposition of every kind.

"When will you be able to bring it?"

"Whenever you please, monseigneur;" for he began to be afraid that Fouquet was trifling with him.

"If it were not for the trouble you would have in returning to Paris, I would say at once; but we will arrange that the payment and the signature shall take place at six o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Very good," said Vanel, as cold as ice, and feeling quite bewildered.

"Adieu, Monsieur Vanel, present my humblest respects to Madame Vanel," said Fouquet, as he rose; upon which Vanel, who felt the blood rushing to his head, for he was quite confounded by his success, said seriously to the superintendent, "Will you give me your word, monseigneur, upon this affair?"

Fouquet turned round his head, saying, "*Pardieu,* and you, monsieur?"

Vanel hesitated, trembled all over, and at last finished by hesitatingly holding out his hand. Fouquet opened and nobly extended his own; this loyal hand lay for a moment in Vanel's most hypocritical palm, and he pressed it in his own, in order the better to convince himself of the compact. The superintendent gently disengaged his hand, as he again said, "Adieu." And then Vanel ran hastily to the door, hurried along the vestibule, and fled as quickly as he could.

CHAPTER XLVII.

Madame de Belliere’s Plate and Diamonds.

Fouquet had no sooner dismissed Vanel than he began to reflect for a few moments — ”A man never can do too much for the woman he has once loved. Marguerite wishes to be the wife of a procureur-general — and why not confer this pleasure upon her? And, now that the most scrupulous and sensitive conscience will be unable to reproach me with anything, let my thoughts be bestowed on her who has shown so much devotion for me. Madame de Belliere ought to be there by this time,” he said, as he turned towards the secret door.

After he had locked himself in, he opened the subterranean passage, and rapidly hastened towards the means of communicating between the house at Vincennes and his own residence. He had neglected to apprise his friend of his approach, by ringing the bell, perfectly assured that she would never fail to be exact at the rendezvous; as, indeed, was the case, for she was already waiting. The noise the superintendent made aroused her; she ran to take from under the door the letter he had thrust there, and which simply said, “Come, marquise; we are waiting supper for you.” With her heart filled with happiness Madame de Belliere ran to her carriage in the Avenue de Vincennes, and in a few minutes she was holding out her hand to Gourville, who was standing at the entrance, where, in order the better to please his master, he had stationed himself to watch her arrival. She had not observed that Fouquet’s black horse arrived at the same time, all steaming and foam-flaked, having returned to Saint-Mande with Pelisson and the very jeweler to whom Madame de Belliere had sold her plate and her jewels. Pelisson introduced the goldsmith into the cabinet, which Fouquet had not yet left. The superintendent thanked him for having been good enough to regard as a simple deposit in his hands, the valuable property which he had every right to sell; and he cast his eyes on the total of the account, which amounted to thirteen hundred thousand francs. Then, going for a few moments to his desk, he wrote an order for fourteen hundred thousand francs, payable at sight, at his treasury, before twelve o’clock the next day.

“A hundred thousand francs profit!” cried the goldsmith. “Oh, monseigneur, what generosity!”

“Nay, nay, not so, monsieur,” said Fouquet, touching him on the shoulder; “there are certain kindnesses which can never be repaid. This profit is only what you have earned; but the interest of your money still remains to be arranged.” And, saying this, he unfastened from his sleeve a diamond button, which the goldsmith himself had often valued at three thousand pistoles. “Take this,” he said to the goldsmith, “in remembrance of me. Farewell; you are an honest man.”

“And you, monseigneur,” cried the goldsmith, completely overcome, “are the noblest man that ever lived.”

Fouquet let the worthy goldsmith pass out of the room by a secret door, and then went to receive Madame de Belliere, who was already surrounded by all the guests. The marquise was always beautiful, but now her loveliness was more dazzling than ever. “Do you not think, gentlemen,” said Fouquet, “that madame is more than usually beautiful this evening? And do you happen to know why?”

“Because madame is really the most beautiful of all women,” said some one present.

“No; but because she is the best. And yet — ”

“Yet?” said the marquise, smiling.

“And yet, all the jewels which madame is wearing this evening are nothing but false stones.” At this remark the marquise blushed most painfully.

“Oh, oh!” exclaimed all the guests, “that can very well be said of one who has the finest diamonds in Paris.”

“Well?” said Fouquet to Pelisson, in a low tone.

“Well, at last I have understood you,” returned the latter; “and you have done exceedingly well.”

“Supper is ready, monseigneur,” said Vatel, with majestic air and tone.

The crowd of guests hurried, more quickly than is usually the case with ministerial entertainments, towards the banqueting-room, where a magnificent spectacle presented itself. Upon the buffets, upon the side-tables, upon the supper-table itself, in the midst of flowers and light, glittered most dazzlingly the richest and most costly gold and silver plate that could possibly be seen — relics of those ancient magnificent productions the Florentine artists, whom the Medici family patronized, sculptured, chased, and moulded for the purpose of holding flowers, at a time when gold existed still in France. These hidden marvels, which had been buried during the civil wars, timidly reappeared during the intervals of that war of good taste called La Fronde; at a time when noblemen fighting against nobleman killed, but did not pillage each other. All the plate present had Madame de Belliere's arms engraved upon it. "Look," cried La Fontaine, "here is a P and a B."

But the most remarkable object present was the cover which Fouquet had assigned to the marquise. Near her was a pyramid of diamonds, sapphires, emeralds, antique cameos, sardonyx stones, carved by the old Greeks of Asia Minor, with mountings of Mysian gold; curious mosaics of ancient Alexandria, set in silver; massive Egyptian bracelets lay heaped on a large plate of Palissy ware, supported by a tripod of gilt bronze, sculptured by Benvenuto Cellini. The marquise turned pale, as she recognized what she had never expected to see again. A profound silence fell on every one of the restless and excited guests. Fouquet did not even make a sign in dismissal of the richly liveried servants who crowded like bees round the huge buffets and other tables in the room. "Gentlemen," he said, "all this plate which you behold once belonged to Madame de Belliere, who, having observed one of her friends in great distress, sent all this gold and silver, together with the heap of jewels now before her, to her goldsmith. This noble conduct of a devoted friend can well be understood by such friends as you. Happy indeed is that man who sees himself loved in such a manner. Let us drink to the health of Madame de Belliere."

A tremendous burst of applause followed his words, and made poor Madame de Belliere sink back dumb and breathless in her seat. "And then," added Pelisson, who was always affected by a noble action, as he was invariably impressed by beauty, "let us also drink to the health of him who inspired madame's noble conduct; for such a man is worthy of being worthily loved."

It was now the marquise's turn. She rose, pale and smiling; and as she held out her glass with a faltering hand, and her trembling fingers touched those of Fouquet, her look, full of love, found its mirror in that of her ardent and generous-hearted lover. Begun in this manner, the supper soon became a *fete*; no one tried to be witty, but no one failed in being so. La Fontaine forgot his Gorgny wine, and allowed Vatel to reconcile him to the wines of the Rhone, and those from the shores of Spain. The Abbe Fouquet became so kind and good-natured, that Gourville said to him, “Take care, monsieur l’abbe; if you are so tender, you will be carved and eaten.”

The hours passed away so joyously, that, contrary to his usual custom, the superintendent did not leave the table before the end of the dessert. He smiled upon his friends, delighted as a man is whose heart becomes intoxicated before his head — and, for the first time, looked at the clock. Suddenly a carriage rolled into the courtyard, and, strange to say, it was heard high above the noise of the mirth which prevailed. Fouquet listened attentively, and then turned his eyes towards the ante-chamber. It seemed as if he could hear a step passing across it, a step that, instead of pressing the ground, weighed heavily upon his heart. “M. d’Herblay, bishop of Vannes,” the usher announced. And Aramis’s grave and thoughtful face appeared upon the threshold of the door, between the remains of two garlands, of which the flame of a lamp had just burnt the thread that once united them.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

M. de Mazarin’s Receipt.

Fouquet would have uttered an exclamation of delight on seeing another friend arrive, if the cold air and averted aspect of Aramis had not restored all his reserve. “Are you going to join us at dessert?” he asked. “And yet you would be frightened, perhaps, at the noise which our wild friends here are making?”

“Monseigneur,” replied Aramis, respectfully, “I will begin by begging you to excuse me for having interrupted this merry meeting; and then, I will beg you to give me, as soon as your pleasure is attended to, a moment’s audience on matters of business.”

As the word “business” had aroused the attention of some of the epicureans present, Fouquet rose, saying: “Business first of all, Monsieur d’Herblay; we are too happy when matters of business arrive only at the end of a meal.”

As he said this, he took the hand of Madame de Belliere, who looked at him with a kind of uneasiness, and then led her to an adjoining *salon*, after having recommended her to the most reasonable of his guests. And then, taking Aramis by the arm, he led him towards his cabinet. As soon as Aramis was there, throwing aside the respectful air he had assumed, he threw himself into a chair, saying: “Guess whom I have seen this evening?”

“My dear chevalier, every time you begin in that manner, I am sure to hear you announce something disagreeable.”

“Well, and this time you will not be mistaken, either, my dear friend,” replied Aramis.

“Do not keep me in suspense,” added Fouquet, phlegmatically.

“Well, then, I have seen Madame de Chevreuse.”

“The old duchesse, do you mean?”

“Yes.”

“Her ghost, perhaps?”

“No, no; the old she-wolf herself.”

“Without teeth?”

"Possibly, but not without claws."

"Well! what harm can she meditate against me? I am no miser with women who are not prudes. A quality always prized, even by the woman who no longer presumes to look for love."

"Madame de Chevreuse knows very well that you are not avaricious, since she wishes to draw some money of you."

"Indeed! under what pretext?"

"Oh! pretexts are never wanting with *her*. Let me tell you what it is: it seems that the duchesse has a good many letters of M. de Mazarin's in her possession."

"I am not surprised at that, for the prelate was gallant enough."

"Yes, but these letters have nothing whatever to do with the prelate's love affairs. They concern, it is said, financial matters rather."

"And accordingly they are less interesting."

"Do you not suspect what I mean?"

"Not at all."

"Have you never heard speak of a prosecution being instituted for an embezzlement, or appropriation rather, of public funds?"

"Yes, a hundred, nay, a thousand times. Ever since I have been engaged in public matters I have hardly heard of anything else. It is precisely your own case, when, as a bishop, people reproach you for impiety; or, as a musketeer, for your cowardice; the very thing of which they are always accusing ministers of finance is the embezzlement of public funds."

"Very good; but take a particular instance, for the duchesse asserts that M. de Mazarin alludes to certain particular instances."

"What are they?"

"Something like a sum of thirteen millions of francs, of which it would be very difficult for you to define the precise nature of the employment."

"Thirteen millions!" said the superintendent, stretching himself in his armchair, in order to enable him the more comfortably to look up towards the ceiling. "Thirteen millions — I am trying to remember out of all those I have been accused of having stolen."

"Do not laugh, my dear monsieur, for it is very serious. It is positive that the duchesse has certain letters in her possession, and that these letters must be as she represents them, since she wished to sell them to me for five hundred thousand francs."

“Oh! one can have a very tolerable calumny got up for such a sum as that,” replied Fouquet. “Ah! now I know what you mean,” and he began to laugh very heartily.

“So much the better,” said Aramis, a little reassured.

“I remember the story of those thirteen millions now. Yes, yes, I remember them quite well.”

“I am delighted to hear it; tell me about them.”

“Well, then, one day Signor Mazarin, Heaven rest his soul! made a profit of thirteen millions upon a concession of lands in the Valtelline; he canceled them in the registry of receipts, sent them to me, and then made me advance them to him for war expenses.”

“Very good; then there is no doubt of their proper destination.”

“No; the cardinal made me invest them in my own name, and gave me a receipt.”

“You have the receipt?”

“Of course,” said Fouquet, as he quietly rose from his chair, and went to his large ebony bureau inlaid with mother-of-pearl and gold.

“What I most admire in you,” said Aramis, with an air of great satisfaction, “is, your memory in the first place, then your self-possession, and, finally, the perfect order which prevails in your administration; you, of all men, too, who are by nature a poet.”

“Yes,” said Fouquet, “I am orderly out of a spirit of idleness, to save myself the trouble of looking after things, and so I know that Mazarin’s receipt is in the third drawer under the letter M; I open the drawer, and place my hand upon the very paper I need. In the night, without a light, I could find it.”

And with a confident hand he felt the bundle of papers which were piled up in the open drawer. “Nay, more than that,” he continued, “I remember the paper as if I saw it; it is thick, somewhat crumpled, with gilt edges; Mazarin had made a blot upon the figure of the date. Ah!” he said, “the paper knows we are talking about it, and that we want it very much, and so it hides itself out of the way.”

And as the superintendent looked into the drawer, Aramis rose from his seat.

“This is very singular,” said Fouquet.

“Your memory is treacherous, my dear monseigneur; look in another drawer.”

Fouquet took out the bundle of papers, and turned them over once more; he then grew very pale.

“Don’t confine your search to that drawer,” said Aramis; “look elsewhere.”

“Quite useless; I have never made a mistake; no one but myself arranges any papers of mine of this nature; no one but myself ever opens this drawer, of which, besides, no one, myself excepted, is aware of the secret.”

“What do you conclude, then?” said Aramis, agitated.

“That Mazarin’s receipt has been stolen from me; Madame de Chevreuse was right, chevalier; I have appropriated the public funds, I have robbed the state coffers of thirteen millions of money; I am a thief, Monsieur d’Herblay.”

“Nay, nay, do not get irritated — do not get excited.”

“And why not, chevalier? surely there is every reason for it. If legal proceedings are well arranged, and a judgment given in accordance with them, your friend the superintendent will soon follow Montfaucon, his colleague Enguerrand de Marigny, and his predecessor, Semblancay.”

“Oh!” said Aramis, smiling, “not so fast as that.”

“And why not? why not so fast? What do you suppose Madame de Chevreuse has done with those letters — for you refused them, I suppose?”

“Yes; at once. I suppose that she went and sold them to M. Colbert.”

“Well?”

“I said I supposed so; I might have said I was sure of it, for I had her followed, and, when she left me, she returned to her own house, went out by a back door, and proceeded straight to the intendant’s house in the Rue Croix des Petits-Champs.”

“Legal proceedings will be instituted, then, scandal and dishonor will follow; and all will fall upon me like a thunderbolt, blindly, pitilessly.”

Aramis approached Fouquet, who sat trembling in his chair, close to the open drawers; he placed his hand on his shoulder, and in an affectionate tone of voice, said: “Do not forget that the position of M. Fouquet can in no way be compared to that of Semblancay or of Marigny.”

“And why not, in Heaven’s name?”

“Because the proceedings against those ministers were determined, completed, and the sentence carried out, whilst in your case the same thing cannot take place.”

“Another blow, why not? A peculator is, under any circumstances, a criminal.”

“Criminals who know how to find a safe asylum are never in danger.”

“What! make my escape? Fly?”

“No, I do not mean that; you forget that all such proceedings originate in the parliament, that they are instituted by the procureur-general, and that you are the procureur-general. You see that, unless you wish to condemn yourself — ”

“Oh!” cried Fouquet, suddenly, dashing his fist upon the table.

“Well! what? what is the matter?”

“I am procureur-general no longer.”

Aramis, at this reply, became as livid as death; he pressed his hands together convulsively, and with a wild, haggard look, which almost annihilated Fouquet, he said, laying a stress on every distinct syllable, “You are procureur-general no longer, do you say?”

“No.”

“Since when?”

“Since the last four or five hours.”

“Take care,” interrupted Aramis, coldly; “I do not think you are in the full possession of your senses, my friend; collect yourself.”

“I tell you,” returned Fouquet, “that a little while ago, some one came to me, brought by my friends, to offer me fourteen hundred thousand francs for the appointment, and that I sold it.”

Aramis looked as though he had been struck by lightning; the intelligent and mocking expression of his countenance assumed an aspect of such profound gloom and terror, that it had more effect upon the superintendent than all the exclamations and speeches in the world. “You had need of money, then?” he said, at last.

“Yes; to discharge a debt of honor.” And in a few words, he gave Aramis an account of Madame de Belliere’s generosity, and the manner in which he had thought it but right to discharge that act of generosity.

“Yes,” said Aramis, “that is, indeed, a fine trait. What has it cost?”

“Exactly the fourteen hundred thousand francs — the price of my appointment.”

“Which you received in that manner, without reflection. Oh, imprudent man!”

“I have not yet received the amount, but I shall to-morrow.”

“It is not yet completed, then?”

“It must be carried out, though; for I have given the goldsmith, for twelve o’clock to-morrow, an order upon my treasury, into which the purchaser’s money will be paid at six or seven o’clock.”

“Heaven be praised!” cried Aramis, clapping his hands together, “nothing is yet completed, since you have not yet been paid.”

“But the goldsmith?”

“You shall receive the fourteen hundred thousand francs from me, at a quarter before twelve.”

“Stay a moment; it is at six o’clock, this very morning, that I am to sign.”

“Oh! I will answer that you do not sign.”

“I have given my word, chevalier.”

“If you have given it, you will take it back again, that is all.”

“Can I believe what I hear?” cried Fouquet, in a most expressive tone. “Fouquet recall his word, after it has once been pledged!”

Aramis replied to the almost stern look of the minister by a look full of anger. “Monsieur,” he said, “I believe I have deserved to be called a man of honor? As a soldier, I have risked my life five hundred times; as a priest I have rendered still greater services, both to the state and to my friends. The value of a word, once passed, is estimated according to the worth of the man who gives it. So long as it is in his own keeping, it is of the purest, finest gold; when his wish to keep it has passed away, it is a two-edged sword. With that word, therefore, he defends himself as with an honorable weapon, considering that, when he disregards his word, he endangers his life and incurs an amount of risk far greater than that which his adversary is likely to derive of profit. In such a case, monsieur, he appeals to Heaven and to justice.”

Fouquet bent down his head, as he replied, “I am a poor, self-determined man, a true Breton born; my mind admires and fears yours. I do not say that I keep my word from a proper feeling only; I keep it, if you like, from custom, practice, pride, or what you will; but, at all events, the ordinary run of men are simple enough to admire this custom of mine; it is my sole good quality — leave me such honor as it confers.”

“And so you are determined to sign the sale of the very appointment which can alone defend you against all your enemies.”

“Yes, I shall sign.”

“You will deliver yourself up, then, bound hand and foot, from a false notion of honor, which the most scrupulous casuists would disdain?”

“I shall sign,” repeated Fouquet.

Aramis sighed deeply, and looked all round him with the impatient gesture of a man who would gladly dash something to pieces, as a relief to his feelings. “We have still one means left,” he said; “and I trust you will not refuse me to make use of that.”

“Certainly not, if it be loyal and honorable; as everything is, in fact, which you propose.”

“I know nothing more loyal than the renunciation of your purchaser. Is he a friend of yours?”

“Certainly: but — ”

“‘But!’ — if you allow me to manage the affair, I do not despair.”

“Oh! you shall be absolutely master to do what you please.”

“Whom are you in treaty with? What manner of man is it?”

“I am not aware whether you know the parliament.”

“Most of its members. One of the presidents, perhaps?”

“No; only a counselor, of the name of Vanel.”

Aramis became perfectly purple. “Vanel!” he cried, rising abruptly from his seat; “Vanel! the husband of Marguerite Vanel?”

“Exactly.”

“Of your former mistress?”

“Yes, my dear fellow; she is anxious to be the wife of the procureur-general. I certainly owed poor Vanel that slight concession, and I am a gainer by it; since I, at the same time, can confer a pleasure on his wife.”

Aramis walked straight up to Fouquet, and took hold of his hand. “Do you know,” he said, very calmly, “the name of Madame Vanel’s new lover?”

“Ah! she has a new lover, then? I was not aware of it; no, I have no idea what his name is.”

“His name is M. Jean-Baptiste Colbert; he is intendant of the finances: he lives in the Rue Croix des Petits-Champs, where Madame de Chevreuse has been this evening to take him Mazarin’s letters, which she wishes to sell.”

“Gracious Heaven!” murmured Fouquet, passing his hand across his forehead, from which the perspiration was starting.

“You now begin to understand, do you not?”

“That I am utterly lost! — yes.”

“Do you now think it worth while to be so scrupulous with regard to keeping your word?”

“Yes,” said Fouquet.

“These obstinate people always contrive matters in such a way, that one cannot but admire them all the while,” murmured Aramis.

Fouquet held out his hand to him, and, at the very moment, a richly ornamented tortoise-shell clock, supported by golden figures, which was standing on a console table opposite to the fireplace, struck six. The sound of a door being opened in the vestibule was heard, and Gourville came to the door of the cabinet to inquire if Fouquet would received M. Vanel. Fouquet turned his eyes from the gaze of Aramis, and then desired that M. Vanel should be shown in.

CHAPTER XLIX.

Monsieur Colbert’s Rough Draft.

Vanel, who entered at this stage of the conversation, was nothing less for Aramis and Fouquet than the full stop which completes a phrase. But, for Vanel, Aramis’s presence in Fouquet’s cabinet had quite another signification; and, therefore, at his first step into the room, he paused as he looked at the delicate yet firm features of the bishop of Vannes, and his look of astonishment soon became one of scrutinizing attention. As for Fouquet, a perfect politician, that is to say, complete master of himself, he had already, by the energy of his own resolute will, contrived to remove from his face all traces of the emotion which Aramis’s revelation had occasioned. He was no longer, therefore, a man overwhelmed by misfortune and reduced to resort to expedients; he held his head proudly erect, and indicated by a gesture that Vanel could enter. He was now the first minister of the state, and in his own palace. Aramis knew the superintendent well; the delicacy of the feelings of his heart and the exalted nature of his mind no longer surprised him. He confined himself, then, for the moment — intending to resume later an active part in the conversation — to the performance of the difficult part of a man who looks on and listens, in order to learn and understand. Vanel was visibly overcome, and advanced into the middle of the cabinet, bowing to everything and everybody. “I am here,” he said.

“You are punctual, Monsieur Vanel,” returned Fouquet.

“In matters of business, monseigneur,” replied Vanel, “I look upon exactitude as a virtue.”

“No doubt, monsieur.”

“I beg your pardon,” interrupted Aramis, indicating Vanel with his finger, but addressing himself to Fouquet; “this is the gentleman, I believe, who has come about the purchase of your appointment?”

“Yes, I am,” replied Vanel, astonished at the extremely haughty tone in which Aramis had put the question; “but in what way am I to address you, who do me the honor — ”

“Call me monseigneur,” replied Aramis, dryly. Vanel bowed.

“Come, gentlemen, a truce to these ceremonies; let us proceed to the matter itself.”

“Monseigneur sees,” said Vanel, “that I am waiting your pleasure.”

“On the contrary, I am waiting,” replied Fouquet.

“What for, may I be permitted to ask, monseigneur?”

“I thought that you had perhaps something to say.”

“Oh,” said Vanel to himself, “he has reflected on the matter and I am lost.” But resuming his courage, he continued, “No, monseigneur, nothing, absolutely nothing more than what I said to you yesterday, and which I am again ready to repeat to you now.”

“Come, now, tell me frankly, Monsieur Vanel, is not the affair rather a burdensome one for you?”

“Certainly, monseigneur; fourteen hundred thousand francs is an important sum.”

“So important, indeed,” said Fouquet, “that I have reflected — ”

“You have been reflecting, do you say, monseigneur?” exclaimed Vanel, anxiously.

“Yes; that you might not yet be in a position to purchase.”

“Oh, monseigneur!”

“Do not make yourself uneasy on that score, Monsieur Vanel; I shall not blame you for a failure in your word, which evidently may arise from inability on your part.”

“Oh, yes, monseigneur, you would blame me, and you would be right in doing so,” said Vanel; “for a man must either be very imprudent, or a fool, to undertake engagements which he cannot keep; and I, at least, have always regarded a thing agreed on as a thing actually carried out.”

Fouquet colored, while Aramis uttered a “Hum!” of impatience.

“You would be wrong to exaggerate such notions as those, monsieur,” said the superintendent; “for a man’s mind is variable, and full of these very excusable caprices, which are, however, sometimes estimable enough; and a man may have wished for something yesterday of which he repents to-day.”

Vanel felt a cold sweat trickle down his face. “Monseigneur!” he muttered.

Aramis, who was delighted to find the superintendent carry on the debate with such clearness and precision, stood leaning his arm upon the marble top of a console table and began to play with a small gold knife, with a malachite handle. Fouquet did not hasten to reply; but after a moment's pause, "Come, my dear Monsieur Vanel," he said, "I will explain to you how I am situated." Vanel began to tremble.

"Yesterday I wished to sell — "

"Monseigneur did more than wish to sell, he actually sold."

"Well, well, that may be so; but to-day I ask you the favor to restore me my word which I pledged you."

"I received your *word* as a satisfactory assurance that it would be kept."

"I know that, and that is the reason why I now entreat you; do you understand me? I entreat you to restore it to me."

Fouquet suddenly paused. The words "I entreat you," the effect of which he did not immediately perceive, seemed almost to choke him as he uttered it. Aramis, still playing with his knife, fixed a look upon Vanel which seemed as if he wished to penetrate the recesses of his heart. Vanel simply bowed, as he said, "I am overcome, monseigneur, at the honor you do me to consult me upon a matter of business which is already completed; but — "

"Nay, do not say *but,* dear Monsieur Vanel."

"Alas! monseigneur, you see," he said, as he opened a large pocket-book, "I have brought the money with me, — the whole sum, I mean. And here, monseigneur, is the contract of sale which I have just effected of a property belonging to my wife. The order is authentic in every particular, the necessary signatures have been attached to it, and it is made payable at sight; it is ready money, in fact, and, in one word, the whole affair is complete."

"My dear Monsieur Vanel, there is not a matter of business in this world, however important it may be, which cannot be postponed in order to oblige a man, who, by that means, might and would be made a devoted friend."

"Certainly," said Vanel, awkwardly.

"And much more justly acquired would that friend become, Monsieur Vanel, since the value of the service he had received would have been so considerable. Well, what do you say? what do you decide?"

Vanel preserved a perfect silence. In the meantime, Aramis had continued his close observation of the man. Vanel's narrow face, his deeply sunken eyes, his arched eyebrows, had revealed to the bishop of Vannes the type of an avaricious and ambitious character. Aramis's method was to oppose one passion by another. He saw that M. Fouquet was defeated — morally subdued — and so he came to his rescue with fresh weapons in his hands.

"Excuse me, monseigneur," he said; "you forgot to show M. Vanel that his own interests are diametrically opposed to this renunciation of the sale."

Vanel looked at the bishop with astonishment; he had hardly expected to find an auxiliary in him. Fouquet also paused to listen to the bishop.

"Do you not see," continued Aramis, "that M. Vanel, in order to purchase your appointment, has been obliged to sell a property belonging to his wife; well, that is no slight matter; for one cannot displace, as he has done, fourteen or fifteen hundred thousand francs without some considerable loss, and very serious inconvenience."

"Perfectly true," said Vanel, whose secret Aramis had, with keen-sighted gaze, wrung from the bottom of his heart.

"Inconveniences such as these are matters of great expense and calculation, and whenever a man has money matters to deal with, the expenses are generally the very first thing thought of."

"Yes, yes," said Fouquet, who began to understand Aramis's meaning.

Vanel remained perfectly silent; he, too, had understood him. Aramis observed his coldness of manner and his silence. "Very good," he said to himself, "you are waiting, I see, until you know the amount; but do not fear, I shall send you such a flight of crowns that you cannot but capitulate on the spot."

"We must offer M. Vanel a hundred thousand crowns at once," said Fouquet, carried away by his generous feelings.

The sum was a good one. A prince, even, would have been satisfied with such a bonus. A hundred thousand crowns at that period was the dowry of a king's daughter. Vanel, however, did not move.

"He is a perfect rascal!" thought the bishop, "well, we must offer the five hundred thousand francs at once," and he made a sign to Fouquet accordingly.

"You seem to have spent more than that, dear Monsieur Vanel," said the superintendent. "The price of ready money is enormous. You must have made a great sacrifice in selling your wife's property. Well, what can I have been thinking of? I ought to have offered to sign you an order for five hundred thousand francs; and even in that case I shall feel that I am greatly indebted to you."

There was not a gleam of delight or desire on Vanel's face, which remained perfectly impassible; not a muscle of it changed in the slightest degree. Aramis cast a look almost of despair at Fouquet, and then, going straight up to Vanel and taking hold of him by the coat, in a familiar manner, he said, “Monsieur Vanel, it is neither the inconvenience, nor the displacement of your money, nor the sale of your wife’s property even, that you are thinking of at this moment; it is something more important still. I can well understand it; so pay particular attention to what I am going to say.”

“Yes, monseigneur,” Vanel replied, beginning to tremble in every limb, as the prelate’s eyes seemed almost ready to devour him.

“I offer you, therefore, in the superintendent’s name, not three hundred thousand livres, nor five hundred thousand, but a million. A million — do you understand me?” he added, as he shook him nervously.

“A million!” repeated Vanel, as pale as death.

“A million; in other words, at the present rate of interest, an income of seventy thousand francs.”

“Come, monsieur,” said Fouquet, “you can hardly refuse that. Answer — do you accept?”

“Impossible,” murmured Vanel.

Aramis bit his lips, and something like a cloud seemed to pass over his face. The thunder behind this cloud could easily be imagined. He still kept his hold on Vanel. “You have purchased the appointment for fifteen hundred thousand francs, I think. Well, you will receive these fifteen hundred thousand francs back again; by paying M. Fouquet a visit, and shaking hands with him on the bargain, you will have become a gainer of a million and a half. You get honor and profit at the same time, Monsieur Vanel.”

“I cannot do it,” said Vanel, hoarsely.

“Very well,” replied Aramis, who had grasped Vanel so tightly by the coat that, when he let go his hold, Vanel staggered back a few paces, “very well; one can now see clearly enough your object in coming here.”

“Yes,” said Fouquet, “one can easily see that.”

“But — ” said Vanel, attempting to stand erect before the weakness of these two men of honor.

“Does the fellow presume to speak?” said Aramis, with the tone of an emperor.

“Fellow!” repeated Vanel.

“The scoundrel, I meant to say,” added Aramis, who had now resumed his usual self-possession. “Come, monsieur, produce your deed of sale, —

you have it about you, I suppose, in one of your pockets, already prepared, as an assassin holds his pistol or his dagger concealed under his cloak."

Vanel began to mutter something.

"Enough!" cried Fouquet. "Where is this deed?"

Vanel tremblingly searched in his pockets, and as he drew out his pocket-book, a paper fell out of it, while Vanel offered the other to Fouquet. Aramis pounced upon the paper which had fallen out, as soon as he recognized the handwriting. "I beg your pardon," said Vanel, "that is a rough draft of the deed."

"I see that very clearly," retorted Aramis, with a smile more cutting than a lash of a whip; "and what I admire most is, that this draft is in M. Colbert's handwriting. Look, monseigneur, look."

And he handed the draft to Fouquet, who recognized the truth of the fact; for, covered with erasures, with inserted words, the margins filled with additions, this deed — a living proof of Colbert's plot — had just revealed everything to its unhappy victim. "Well!" murmured Fouquet.

Vanel, completely humiliated, seemed as if he were looking for some hole wherein to hide himself.

"Well!" said Aramis, "if your name were not Fouquet, and if your enemy's name were not Colbert — if you had not this mean thief before you, I should say to you, 'Repudiate it;' such a proof as this absolves you from your word; but these fellows would think you were afraid; they would fear you less than they do; therefore sign the deed at once." And he held out a pen towards him.

Fouquet pressed Aramis's hand; but, instead of the deed which Vanel handed to him, he took the rough draft of it.

"No, not that paper," said Aramis, hastily; "this is the one. The other is too precious a document for you to part with."

"No, no!" replied Fouquet; "I will sign under M. Colbert's own handwriting even; and I write, 'The handwriting is approved of.'" He then signed, and said, "Here it is, Monsieur Vanel." And the latter seized the paper, dashed down the money, and was about to make his escape.

"One moment," said Aramis. "Are you quite sure the exact amount is there? It ought to be counted over, Monsieur Vanel; particularly since M. Colbert makes presents of money to ladies, I see. Ah, that worthy M. Colbert is not so generous as M. Fouquet." And Aramis, spelling every word, every letter of the order to pay, distilled his wrath and his contempt, drop by drop, upon the miserable wretch, who had to submit to this torture for a quarter of an hour. He was then dismissed, not in words, but by a gesture, as one dismisses or discharges a beggar or a menial.

As soon as Vanel had gone, the minister and the prelate, their eyes fixed on each other, remained silent for a few moments.

"Well," said Aramis, the first to break the silence; "to what can that man be compared, who, at the very moment he is on the point of entering into a conflict with an enemy armed from head to foot, panting for his life, presents himself for the contest utterly defenseless, throws down his arms, and smiles and kisses his hands to his adversary in the most gracious manner? Good faith, M. Fouquet, is a weapon which scoundrels frequently make use of against men of honor, and it answers their purpose. Men of honor, ought, in their turn, also, to make use of dishonest means against such scoundrels. You would soon see how strong they would become, without ceasing to be men of honor."

"What they did would be termed the acts of a scoundrel," replied Fouquet.

"Far from that; it would be merely coquetting or playing with the truth. At all events, since you have finished with this Vanel; since you have deprived yourself of the happiness of confounding him by repudiating your word; and since you have given up, for the purpose of being used against yourself, the only weapon which can ruin you — "

"My dear friend," said Fouquet, mournfully, "you are like the teacher of philosophy whom La Fontaine was telling us about the other day; he saw a child drowning, and began to read him a lecture divided into three heads."

Aramis smiled as he said, "Philosophy — yes; teacher — yes; a drowning child — yes; but a child can be saved — you shall see. But first of all let us talk about business. Did you not some time ago," he continued, as Fouquet looked at him with a bewildered air, "speak to me about an idea you had of giving a *fete* at Vaux?"

"Oh!" said Fouquet, "that was when affairs were flourishing."

"A *fete*, I believe, to which the king invited himself of his own accord?"

"No, no, my dear prelate; a *fete* to which M. Colbert advised the king to invite himself."

"Ah — exactly; as it would be a *fete* of so costly a character that you would be ruined in giving it."

"Precisely so. In happier days, as I said just now, I had a kind of pride in showing my enemies how inexhaustible my resources were; I felt it a point of honor to strike them with amazement, by creating millions under circumstances where they imagined nothing but bankruptcies and failures would follow. But, at present, I am arranging my accounts with the state, with the king, with myself; and I must now become a mean, stingy man; I shall be able to prove to the world that I can act or operate with my deniers as I used to do with my bags of pistoles, and from to-morrow my equipages shall be sold, my mansions mortgaged, my expenses curtailed."

"From to-morrow," interrupted Aramis, quietly, "you will occupy yourself, without the slightest delay, with your *fete* at Vaux, which must hereafter be spoken of as one of the most magnificent productions of your most prosperous days."

"Are you mad, Chevalier d'Herblay?"

"I! do you think so?"

"What do you mean, then? Do you not know that a *fete* at Vaux, one of the very simplest possible character, would cost four or five millions?"

"I do not speak of a *fete* of the very simplest possible character, my dear superintendent."

"But, since the *fete* is to be given to the king," replied Fouquet, who misunderstood Aramis's idea, "it cannot be simple."

"Just so: it ought to be on a scale of the most unbounded magnificence."

"In that case, I shall have to spend ten or twelve millions."

"You shall spend twenty, if you require it," said Aramis, in a perfectly calm voice.

"Where shall I get them?" exclaimed Fouquet.

"That is my affair, monsieur le surintendant; and do not be uneasy for a moment about it. The money shall be placed at once at your disposal, the moment you have arranged the plans of your *fete*."

"Chevalier! chevalier!" said Fouquet, giddy with amazement, "whither are you hurrying me?"

"Across the gulf into which you were about to fall," replied the bishop of Vannes. "Take hold of my cloak, and throw fear aside."

"Why did you not tell me that sooner, Aramis? There was a day when, with one million only, you could have saved me; whilst to-day — "

"Whilst to-day I can give you twenty," said the prelate. "Such is the case, however — the reason is very simple. On the day you speak of, I had not the million which you had need of at my disposal, whilst now I can easily procure the twenty millions we require."

"May Heaven hear you, and save me!"

Aramis resumed his usual smile, the expression of which was so singular. "Heaven never fails to hear me," he said.

"I abandon myself to your unreservedly," Fouquet murmured.

"No, no; I do not understand it in that manner. I am unreservedly devoted to you. Therefore, as you have the clearest, the most delicate, and the most ingenious mind of the two, you shall have entire control over the *fete,* even to the very smallest details. Only — "

"Only?" said Fouquet, as a man accustomed to understand and appreciate the value of a parenthesis.

"Well, then, leaving the entire invention of the details to you, I shall reserve to myself a general superintendence over the execution."

"In what way?"

"I mean, that you will make of me, on that day, a major-domo, a sort of inspector-general, or factotum — something between a captain of the guard and manager or steward. I will look after the people, and will keep the keys of the doors. You will give your orders, of course: but will give them to no one but me. They will pass through my lips, to reach those for whom they are intended — you understand?"

"No, I am very far from understanding."

"But you agree?"

"Of course, of course, my friend."

"That is all I care about, then. Thanks; and now go and prepare your list of invitations."

"Whom shall I invite?"

"Everybody you know."

CHAPTER L.

In Which the Author Thinks It Is High Time to Return to the Vicomte de Bragelonne.

Our readers will have observed in this story, the adventures of the new and of the past generation being detailed, as it were, side by side. He will have noticed in the former, the reflection of the glory of earlier years, the experience of the bitter things of this world; in the former, also, that peace which takes possession of the heart, and that healing of the scars which were formerly deep and painful wounds. In the latter, the conflicts of love and vanity; bitter disappointments, ineffable delights; life instead of memory. If, therefore, any variety has been presented to the reader in the different episodes of this tale, it is to be attributed to the numerous shades of color which are presented on this double tablet, where two pictures are seen side by side, mingling and harmonizing their severe and pleasing tones. The repose of the emotions of one is found in harmonious contrast with the fiery sentiments of the other. After having talked reason with older heads, one loves to talk nonsense with youth. Therefore, if the threads of the story do not seem very intimately to connect the chapter we are now writing with the one we have just written, we do not intend to give ourselves any more thought or trouble about it than Ruysdael took in painting an autumn sky, after having finished a spring-time scene. We accordingly resume Raoul de Bragelonne’s story at the very place where our last sketch left him.

In a state of frenzy and dismay, or rather without power or will of his own, — hardly knowing what he was doing, — he fled swiftly, after the scene in La Valliere’s chamber, that strange exclusion, Louise’s grief, Montalais’s terror, the king’s wrath — all seemed to indicate some misfortune. But what? He had arrived from London because he had been told of the existence of a danger; and almost on his arrival this appearance of danger was manifest. Was not this sufficient for a lover? Certainly it was, but it was insufficient for a pure and upright heart such as his. And yet Raoul did not seek for explanations in the very quarter where more jealous or less timid lovers would have done. He did not go straightaway to his mistress, and say, “Louise, is it true that you love me no longer? Is it true that you love another?” Full of courage, full of friendship as he was full of love; a religious observer of his word, and believing blindly the word of others, Raoul said within himself, “Guiche wrote to put me on my guard, Guiche knows something; I will go and ask Guiche what he knows, and tell him what I have seen.” The journey was not a long one. Guiche, who had been brought from Fontainebleau to Paris within the last two days, was beginning to recover from his wounds, and to walk about a little in his room. He uttered a cry of joy as he saw Raoul, with the eagerness of friendship, enter the apartment. Raoul was unable to refrain from a cry of grief, when he saw De Guiche, so pale, so thin, so melancholy. A very few words, and a simple gesture which De Guiche made to put aside Raoul’s arm, were sufficient to inform the latter of the truth.

“Ah! so it is,” said Raoul, seating himself beside his friend; “one loves and dies.”

“No, no, not dies,” replied Guiche, smiling, “since I am now recovering, and since, too, I can press you in my arms.”

“Ah! I understand.”

“And I understand you, too. You fancy I am unhappy, Raoul?”

“Alas!”

“No; I am the happiest of men. My body suffers, but not my mind or my heart. If you only knew — Oh! I am, indeed, the very happiest of men.”

“So much the better,” said Raoul; “so much the better, provided it lasts.”

“It is over. I have had enough happiness to last me to my dying day, Raoul.”

“I have no doubt you have had; but she — ”

“Listen; I love her, because — but you are not listening to me.”

“I beg your pardon.”

“Your mind is preoccupied.”

“Yes, your health, in the first place — ”

“It is not that, I know.”

“My dear friend, you would be wrong. I think, to ask me any questions — *you* of all persons in the world;” and he laid so much weight upon the "you," that he completely enlightened his friend upon the nature of the evil, and the difficulty of remedying it.

"You say that, Raoul, on account of what I wrote to you."

"Certainly. We will talk over that matter a little, when you have finished telling me of all your own pleasures and your pains."

"My dear friend, I am entirely at your service."

"Thank you; I have hurried, I have flown here; I came in half the time the government couriers usually take. Now, tell me, my dear friend, what did you want?"

"Nothing whatever, but to make you come."

"Well, then, I am here."

"All is quite right, then."

"There must have been something else, I suppose?"

"No, indeed."

"De Guiche!"

"Upon my honor!"

"You cannot possibly have crushed all my hopes so violently, or have exposed me to being disgraced by the king for my return, which is in disobedience of his orders — you cannot, I say, have planted jealousy in my heart, merely to say to me, 'It is all right, be perfectly easy.'"

"I do not say to you, Raoul, 'Be perfectly easy;' but pray understand me; I never will, nor can I, indeed, tell you anything else."

"What sort of person do you take me for?"

"What do you mean?"

"If you know anything, why conceal it from me? If you do not know anything, why did you write so warningly?"

"True, true, I was very wrong, and I regret having done so, Raoul. It seems nothing to write to a friend and say 'Come;' but to have this friend face to face, to feel him tremble, and breathlessly and anxiously wait to hear what one hardly dare tell him, is very difficult."

"Dare! I have courage enough, if you have not," exclaimed Raoul, in despair.

"See how unjust you are, and how soon you forget you have to do with a poor wounded fellow such as your unhappy friend is. So, calm yourself, Raoul. I said to you, 'Come' — you are here, so ask me nothing further."

"Your object in telling me to come was your hope that I should see with my own eyes, was it not? Nay, do not hesitate, for I have seen all."

“Oh!” exclaimed De Guiche.

“Or at least I thought — ”

“There, now, you see you are not sure. But if you have any doubt, my poor friend, what remains for me to do?”

“I saw Louise much agitated — Montalais in a state of bewilderment — the king — ”

“The king?”

“Yes. You turn your head aside. The danger is there, the evil is there; tell me, is it not so, is it not the king?”

“I say nothing.”

“Oh! you say a thousand times more than nothing. Give me facts, for pity’s sake, give me proofs. My friend, the only friend I have, speak — tell me all. My heart is crushed, wounded to death; I am dying from despair.”

“If that really be so, as I see it is, indeed, dear Raoul,” replied De Guiche, “you relieve me from my difficulty, and I will tell you all, perfectly sure that I can tell you nothing but what is consoling, compared to the despair from which I see you suffering.”

“Go on, — go on; I am listening.”

“Well, then, I can only tell you what you might learn from every one you meet.”

“From every one, do you say? It is talked about, then!”

“Before you say people talk about it, learn what it is that people have to talk about. I assure you solemnly, that people only talk about what may, in truth, be very innocent; perhaps a walk — ”

“Ah! a walk with the king?”

“Yes, certainly, a walk with the king; and I believe the king has already very frequently before taken walks with ladies, without on that account — ”

“You would not have written to me, shall I say again, if there had been nothing unusual in this promenade.”

“I know that while the storm lasted, it would have been far better if the king had taken shelter somewhere else, than to have remained with his head uncovered before La Valliere; but the king is so very courteous and polite.”

“Oh! De Guiche, De Guiche, you are killing me!”

“Do not let us talk any more, then.”

“Nay, let us continue. This walk was followed by others, I suppose?”

“No — I mean yes: there was the adventure of the oak, I think. But I know nothing about the matter at all.” Raoul rose; De Guiche endeavored to imitate him, notwithstanding his weakness. “Well, I will not add another word: I have said either too much or not enough. Let others give you further information if they will, or if they can; my duty was to warn you, and *that* I have done. Watch over your own affairs now, yourself.”

“Question others! Alas! you are no true friend to speak to me in that manner,” said the young man, in utter distress. “The first man I meet may be either evilly disposed or a fool, — if the former, he will tell me a lie to make me suffer more than I do now; if the latter, he will do worse still. Ah! De Guiche, De Guiche, before two hours are over, I shall have been told ten falsehoods, and shall have as many duels on my hands. Save me, then; is it not best to know the worst always?”

“But I know nothing, I tell you; I was wounded, attacked by fever: out of my senses; and I have only a very faint recollection of it all. But there is no reason why we should search very far, when the very man we want is close at hand. Is not D’Artagnan your friend?”

“Oh! true, true!”

“Got to him, then. He will be able to throw sufficient light upon the subject.” At this moment a lackey entered the room. “What is it?” said De Guiche.

“Some one is waiting for monseigneur in the Cabinet des Porcelaines.”

“Very well. Will you excuse me, my dear Raoul? I am so proud since I have been able to walk again.”

“I would offer you my arm, De Guiche, if I did not guess that the person in question is a lady.”

“I believe so,” said De Guiche, smiling as he quitted Raoul.

Raoul remained motionless, absorbed in grief, overwhelmed, like the miner upon whom a vault has just fallen in, who, wounded, his life-blood welling fast, his thoughts confused, endeavors to recover himself, to save his life and to retain his reason. A few minutes were all Raoul needed to dissipate the bewildering sensations occasioned by these two revelations. He had already recovered the thread of his ideas, when, suddenly, through the door, he fancied he recognized Montalais’s voice in the Cabinet des Porcelaines. “She!” he cried. “Yes, it is indeed her voice! She will be able to tell me the whole truth; but shall I question her here? She conceals herself even from me; she is coming, no doubt, from Madame. I will see her in her own apartment. She will explain her alarm, her flight, the strange manner in which I was driven out; she will tell me all that — after M. d’Artagnan, who knows everything, shall have given me a fresh strength and courage. Madame, a coquette I fear, and yet a coquette who is herself in love, has her moments of kindness; a coquette who is as capricious and uncertain as life or death, but who tells De Guiche that he is the happiest of men. He at least is lying on roses.” And so he hastily quitted the comte’s apartments, reproaching himself as he went for having talked of nothing but his own affairs to De Guiche, and soon reached D’Artagnan’s quarters.

CHAPTER LI.

Bragelonne Continues His Inquiries.

The captain, sitting buried in his leathern armchair, his spurs fixed in the floor, his sword between his legs, was reading a number of letters, as he twisted his mustache. D’Artagnan uttered a welcome full of pleasure when he perceived his friend’s son. “Raoul, my boy,” he said, “by what lucky accident does it happen that the king has recalled you?”

These words did not sound agreeably in the young man’s ears, who, as he seated himself, replied, “Upon my word I cannot tell you; all that I know is — I have come back.”

“Hum!” said D’Artagnan, folding up his letters and directing a look full of meaning at him; “what do you say, my boy? that the king has not recalled you, and you have returned? I do not understand that at all.”

Raoul was already pale enough; and he now began to turn his hat round and round in his hand.

“What the deuce is the matter that you look as you do, and what makes you so dumb?” said the captain. “Do people nowadays assume that sort of airs in England? I have been in England, and came here again as lively as a chaffinch. Will you not say something?”

“I have too much to say.”

“Ah! how is your father?”

“Forgive me, my dear friend, I was going to ask you that.”

D’Artagnan increased the sharpness of his penetrating gaze, which no secret was capable of resisting. “You are unhappy about something,” he said.

“I am, indeed; and you know the reason very well, Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

“I?”

“Of course. Nay, do not pretend to be astonished.”

“I am not pretending to be astonished, my friend.”

“Dear captain, I know very well that in all trials of *finesse*, as well as in all trials of strength, I shall be beaten by you. You can see that at the present moment I am an idiot, an absolute noodle. I have neither head nor arm; do not despise, but help me. In two words, I am the most wretched of living beings."

"Oh, oh! why that?" inquired D'Artagnan, unbuckling his belt and thawing the asperity of his smile.

"Because Mademoiselle de la Valliere is deceiving me."

"She is deceiving you," said D'Artagnan, not a muscle of whose face had moved; "those are big words. Who makes use of them?"

"Every one."

"Ah! if every one says so, there must be some truth in it. I begin to believe there is fire when I see smoke. It is ridiculous, perhaps, but it is so."

"Therefore you *do* believe me?" exclaimed Bragelonne, quickly.

"I never mix myself up in affairs of that kind; you know that very well."

"What! not for a friend, for a son!"

"Exactly. If you were a stranger, I should tell you — I will tell *you* nothing at all. How is Porthos, do you know?"

"Monsieur," cried Raoul, pressing D'Artagnan's hand, "I entreat you in the name of the friendship you vowed my father!"

"The deuce take it, you are really ill — from curiosity."

"No, it is not from curiosity, it is from love."

"Good. Another big word. If you were really in love, my dear Raoul, you would be very different."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that if you were really so deeply in love that I could believe I was addressing myself to your heart — but it is impossible."

"I tell you I love Louise to distraction."

D'Artagnan could read to the very bottom of the young man's heart.

"Impossible, I tell you," he said. "You are like all young men; you are not in love, you are out of your senses."

"Well! suppose it were only that?"

"No sensible man ever succeeded in making much of a brain when the head was turned. I have completely lost my senses in the same way a hundred times in my life. You would listen to me, but you would not hear me! you would hear, but you would not understand me; you would understand, but you would not obey me."

"Oh! try, try."

"I go far. Even if I were unfortunate enough to know something, and foolish enough to communicate it to you — You are my friend, you say?"

"Indeed, yes."

"Very good. I should quarrel with you. You would never forgive me for having destroyed your illusion, as people say in love affairs."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan, you know all; and yet you plunge me in perplexity and despair, in death itself."

"There, there now."

"I never complain, as you know; but as Heaven and my father would never forgive me for blowing out my brains, I will go and get the first person I meet to give me the information which you withhold; I will tell him he lies, and — "

"And you would kill him. And a fine affair that would be. So much the better. What should I care? Kill any one you please, my boy, if it gives you any pleasure. It is exactly like a man with a toothache, who keeps on saying, 'Oh! what torture I am suffering. I could bite a piece of iron in half.' My answer always is, 'Bite, my friend, bite; the tooth will remain all the same.'"

"I shall not kill any one, monsieur," said Raoul, gloomily.

"Yes, yes! you now assume a different tone: instead of killing, you will get killed yourself, I suppose you mean? Very fine, indeed! How much I should regret you! Of course I should go about all day, saying, 'Ah! what a fine stupid fellow that Bragelonne was! as great a stupid as I ever met with. I have passed my whole life almost in teaching him how to hold and use his sword properly, and the silly fellow has got himself spitted like a lark.' Go, then, Raoul, go and get yourself disposed of, if you like. I hardly know who can have taught you logic, but deuce take me if your father has not been regularly robbed of his money."

Raoul buried his face in his hands, murmuring: "No, no; I have not a single friend in the world."

"Oh! bah!" said D'Artagnan.

"I meet with nothing but raillery or indifference."

"Idle fancies, monsieur. I do not laugh at you, although I am a Gascon. And, as for being indifferent, if I were so, I should have sent you about your business a quarter of an hour ago, for you would make a man who was out of his senses with delight as dull as possible, and would be the death of one who was out of spirits. How now, young man! do you wish me to disgust you with the girl you are attached to, and to teach you to execrate the whole sex who constitute the honor and happiness of human life?”

“Oh! tell me, monsieur, and I will bless you.”

“Do you think, my dear fellow, that I can have crammed into my brain all about the carpenter, and the painter, and the staircase, and a hundred other similar tales of the same kind?”

“A carpenter! what do you mean?”

“Upon my word I don’t know; some one told me there was a carpenter who made an opening through a certain flooring.”

“In La Valliere’s room!”

“Oh! I don’t know where.”

“In the king’s apartment, perhaps?”

“Of course, if it were in the king’s apartment, I should tell you, I suppose.”

“In whose room, then?”

“I have told you for the last hour that I know nothing of the whole affair.”

“But the painter, then? the portrait — ”

“It seems that the king wished to have the portrait of one of the ladies belonging to the court.”

“La Valliere?”

“Why, you seem to have only that name in your mouth. Who spoke to you of La Valliere?”

“If it be not her portrait, then, why do you suppose it would concern me?”

“I do not suppose it will concern you. But you ask me all sorts of questions, and I answer you. You positively will learn all the scandal of the affair, and I tell you — make the best you can of it.”

Raoul struck his forehead with his hand in utter despair. “It will kill me!” he said.

“So you have said already.”

“Yes, you are right,” and he made a step or two, as if he were going to leave.

“Where are you going?”

“To look for some one who will tell me the truth.”

“Who is that?”

“A woman.”

“Mademoiselle de la Valliere herself, I suppose you mean?” said D’Artagnan, with a smile. “Ah! a famous idea that! You wish to be consoled by some one, and you will be so at once. She will tell you nothing ill of herself, of course. So be off.”

“You are mistaken, monsieur,” replied Raoul; “the woman I mean will tell me all the evil she possibly can.”

“You allude to Montalais, I suppose — her friend; a woman who, on that account, will exaggerate all that is either bad or good in the matter. Do not talk to Montalais, my good fellow.”

“You have some reasons for wishing me not to talk with Montalais?”

“Well, I admit it. And, in point of fact, why should I play with you as a cat does with a poor mouse? You distress me, you do, indeed. And if I wish you not to speak to Montalais just now, it is because you will be betraying your secret, and people will take advantage of it. Wait, if you can.”

“I cannot.”

“So much the worse. Why, you see, Raoul, if I had an idea, — but I have not got one.”

“Promise me that you will pity me, my friend, that is all I need, and leave me to get out of the affair by myself.”

“Oh! yes, indeed, in order that you may get deeper into the mire! A capital idea, truly! go and sit down at that table and take a pen in your hand.”

“What for?”

“To write and ask Montalais to give you an interview.”

“Ah!” said Raoul, snatching eagerly at the pen which the captain held out to him.

Suddenly the door opened, and one of the musketeers, approaching D’Artagnan, said, “Captain, Mademoiselle de Montalais is here, and wishes to speak to you.”

“To me?” murmured D’Artagnan. “Ask her to come in; I shall soon see,” he said to himself, “whether she wishes to speak to me or not.”

The cunning captain was quite right in his suspicions; for as soon as Montalais entered she exclaimed, “Oh, monsieur! monsieur! I beg your pardon, Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

“Oh! I forgive you, mademoiselle,” said D’Artagnan; “I know that, at my age, those who are looking for me generally need me for something or another.”

“I was looking for M. de Bragelonne,” replied Montalais.

“How very fortunate that is; he was looking for you, too. Raoul, will you accompany Mademoiselle de Montalais?”

“Oh! certainly.”

“Go along, then,” he said, as he gently pushed Raoul out of the cabinet; and then, taking hold of Montalais’s hand, he said, in a low voice, “Be kind towards him; spare him, and spare her, too, if you can.”

“Ah!” she said, in the same tone of voice, “it is not I who am going to speak to him.”

“Who, then?”

“It is Madame who has sent for him.”

“Very good,” cried D’Artagnan, “it is Madame, is it? In an hour’s time, then, the poor fellow will be cured.”

“Or else dead,” said Montalais, in a voice full of compassion. “Adieu, Monsieur d’Artagnan,” she said; and she ran to join Raoul, who was waiting for her at a little distance from the door, very much puzzled and thoroughly uneasy at the dialogue, which promised no good augury for him.

CHAPTER LII.

Two Jealousies.

Lovers are tender towards everything that forms part of the daily life of the object of their affection. Raoul no sooner found himself alone with Montalais, than he kissed her hand with rapture. “There, there,” said the young girl, sadly, “you are throwing your kisses away; I will guarantee that they will not bring you back any interest.”

“How so? — Why? — Will you explain to me, my dear Aure?”

“Madame will explain everything to you. I am going to take you to her apartments.

“*What!*”

“Silence! and throw away your dark and savage looks. The windows here have eyes, the walls have ears. Have the kindness not to look at me any longer; be good enough to speak to me aloud of the rain, of the fine weather, and of the charms of England.”

“At all events — ” interrupted Raoul.

“I tell you, I warn you, that wherever people may be, I know not how, Madame is sure to have eyes and ears open. I am not very desirous, you can easily believe, of being dismissed or thrown in to the Bastile. Let us talk, I tell you, or rather, do not let us talk at all.”

Raoul clenched his hands, and tried to assume the look and gait of a man of courage, it is true, but of a man of courage on his way to the torture chamber. Montalais, glancing in every direction, walking along with an easy swinging gait, and holding up her head pertly in the air, preceded him to Madame’s apartments, where he was at once introduced. “Well,” he thought, “this day will pass away without my learning anything. Guiche showed too much consideration for my feelings; he had no doubt come to an understanding with Madame, and both of them, by a friendly plot, agreed to postpone the solution of the problem. Why have I not a determined, inveterate enemy — that serpent, De Wardes, for instance; that he would bite, is very likely; but I should not hesitate any more. To hesitate, to doubt — better, far, to die.”

The next moment Raoul was in Madame’s presence. Henrietta, more charming than ever, was half lying, half reclining in her armchair, her small feet upon an embroidered velvet cushion; she was playing with a kitten with long silky fur, which was biting her fingers and hanging by the lace of her collar.

Madame seemed plunged in deep thought, so deep, indeed, that it required both Montalais and Raoul’s voice to disturb her from her reverie.

“Your highness sent for me?” repeated Raoul.

Madame shook her head as if she were just awakening, and then said, “Good morning, Monsieur de Bragelonne; yes, I sent for you; so you have returned from England?”

“Yes, Madame, and am at your royal highness’s commands.”

“Thank you; leave us, Montalais,” and the latter immediately left the room.

“You have a few minutes to give me, Monsieur de Bragelonne, have you not?”

“My life is at your royal highness’s disposal,” Raoul returned with respect, guessing that there was something serious in these unusual courtesies; nor was he displeased, indeed, to observe the seriousness of her manner, feeling persuaded that there was some sort of affinity between Madame’s sentiments and his own. In fact, every one at court, of any perception at all, knew perfectly well the capricious fancy and absurd despotism of the princess’s singular character. Madame had been flattered beyond all bounds by the king’s attention; she had made herself talked about; she had inspired the queen with that mortal jealousy which is the stinging scorpion at the heel of every woman’s happiness; Madame, in a word, in her attempts to cure a wounded pride, found that her heart had become deeply and passionately attached. We know what Madame had done to recall Raoul, who had been sent out of the way by Louis XIV. Raoul did not know of her letter to Charles II., although D’Artagnan had guessed its contents. Who will undertake to account for that seemingly inexplicable mixture of love and vanity, that passionate tenderness of feeling, that prodigious duplicity of conduct? No one can, indeed; not even the bad angel who kindles the love of coquetry in the heart of a woman. “Monsieur de Bragelonne,” said the princess, after a moment’s pause, “have you returned satisfied?”

Bragelonne looked at Madame Henrietta, and seeing how pale she was, not alone from what she was keeping back, but also from what she was burning to say, said: “Satisfied! what is there for me to be satisfied or dissatisfied about, Madame?”

“But what are those things with which a man of your age, and of your appearance, is usually either satisfied or dissatisfied?”

“How eager she is,” thought Raoul, almost terrified; “what venom is it she is going to distil into my heart?” and then, frightened at what she might possibly be going to tell him, and wishing to put off the opportunity of having everything explained, which he had hitherto so ardently wished for, yet had dreaded so much, he replied: “I left, Madame, a dear friend in good health, and on my return I find him very ill.”

“You refer to M. de Guiche,” replied Madame Henrietta, with imperturbable self-possession; “I *have* heard he is a very dear friend of yours.”

“He is, indeed, Madame.”

“Well, it is quite true he has been wounded; but he is better now. Oh! M. de Guiche is not to be pitied,” she said hurriedly; and then, recovering herself, added, “But has he anything to complain of? Has he complained of anything? Is there any cause of grief or sorrow that we are not acquainted with?”

“I allude only to his wound, Madame.”

“So much the better, then, for, in other respects, M. de Guiche seems to be very happy; he is always in very high spirits. I am sure that you, Monsieur de Bragelonne, would far prefer to be, like him, wounded only in the body... for what, in deed, is such a wound, after all!”

Raoul started. “Alas!” he said to himself, “she is returning to it.”

“What did you say?” she inquired.

“I did not say anything Madame.”

“You did not say anything; you disapprove of my observation, then? you are perfectly satisfied, I suppose?”

Raoul approached closer to her. “Madame,” he said, “your royal highness wishes to say something to me, and your instinctive kindness and generosity of disposition induce you to be careful and considerate as to your manner of conveying it. Will your royal highness throw this kind forbearance aside? I am able to bear everything; and I am listening.”

“Ah!” replied Henrietta, “what do you understand, then?”

“That which your royal highness wishes me to understand,” said Raoul, trembling, notwithstanding his command over himself, as he pronounced these words.

“In point of fact,” murmured the princess... “it seems cruel, but since I have begun — ”

“Yes, Madame, once your highness has deigned to begin, will you condescend to finish — ”

Henrietta rose hurriedly and walked a few paces up and down her room. “What did M. de Guiche tell you?” she said, suddenly.

“Nothing, Madame.”

“Nothing! Did he say nothing? Ah! how well I recognize him in that.”

“No doubt he wished to spare me.”

“And that is what friends call friendship. But surely, M. d’Artagnan, whom you have just left, must have told you.”

“No more than De Guiche, Madame.”

Henrietta made a gesture full of impatience, as she said, “At least, you know all the court knows.”

“I know nothing at all, Madame.”

“Not the scene in the storm?”

“No, Madame.”

“Not the *tete-a-tete* in the forest?”

“No, Madame.”

“Nor the flight to Chaillot?”

Raoul, whose head dropped like a blossom cut down by the reaper, made an almost superhuman effort to smile, as he replied with the greatest gentleness: “I have had the honor of telling your royal highness that I am absolutely ignorant of everything, that I am a poor unremembered outcast, who has this moment arrived from England. There have rolled so many stormy waves between myself and those I left behind me here, that the rumor of none of the circumstances your highness refers to, has been able to reach me.”

Henrietta was affected by his extreme pallor, his gentleness, and his great courage. The principal feeling in her heart at that moment was an eager desire to hear the nature of the remembrance which the poor lover retained of the woman who had made him suffer so much. “Monsieur de Bragelonne,” she said, “that which your friends have refused to do, I will do for you, whom I like and esteem very much. I will be your friend on this occasion. You hold your head high, as a man of honor should; and I deeply regret that you may have to bow before ridicule, and in a few days, it might be, contempt."

"Ah!" exclaimed Raoul, perfectly livid. "It is as bad as that, then?"

"If you do not know," said the princess, "I see that you guess; you were affianced, I believe, to Mademoiselle de la Valliere?"

"Yes, Madame."

"By that right, you deserve to be warned about her, as some day or another I shall be obliged to dismiss Mademoiselle de la Valliere from my service — "

"Dismiss La Valliere!" cried Bragelonne.

"Of course. Do you suppose I shall always be amenable to the tears and protestations of the king? No, no! my house shall no longer be made a convenience for such practices; but you tremble, you cannot stand — "

"No, Madame, no," said Bragelonne, making an effort over himself; "I thought I should have died just now, that was all. Your royal highness did me the honor to say that the king wept and implored you — "

"Yes, but in vain," returned the princess; who then related to Raoul the scene that took place at Chaillot, and the king's despair on his return; she told him of his indulgence to herself and the terrible word with which the outraged princess, the humiliated coquette, had quashed the royal anger.

Raoul stood with his head bent down.

"What do you think of it all?" she said.

"The king loves her," he replied.

"But you seem to think she does not love him!"

"Alas, Madame, I was thinking of the time when she loved *me*."

Henrietta was for a moment struck with admiration at this sublime disbelief: and then, shrugging her shoulders, she said, "You do not believe me, I see. How deeply you must love her. And you doubt if she loves the king?"

"I do, until I have a proof of it. Forgive me, Madame, but she has given me her word; and her mind and heart are too upright to tell a falsehood."

"You require a proof! Be it so. Come with me, then."

CHAPTER LIII.

A Domiciliary Visit.

The princess, preceding Raoul, led him through the courtyard towards that part of the building La Valliere inhabited, and, ascending the same staircase which Raoul himself had ascended that very morning, she paused at the door of the room in which the young man had been so strangely received by Montalais. The opportunity was remarkably well chosen to carry out the project Madame Henrietta had conceived, for the chateau was empty. The king, the courtiers, and the ladies of the court, had set off for Saint-Germain; Madame Henrietta was the only one who knew of Bragelonne's return, and thinking over the advantages which might be drawn from this return, she had feigned indisposition in order to remain behind. Madame was therefore confident of finding La Valliere's room and Saint-Aignan's apartment perfectly empty. She took a pass-key from her pocket and opened the door of her maid of honor's apartment. Bragelonne's gaze was immediately fixed upon the interior of the room, which he recognized at once; and the impression which the sight of it produced upon him was torture. The princess looked at him, and her practiced eye at once detected what was passing in the young man's heart.

"You asked for proofs," she said; "do not be astonished, then, if I give you them. But if you do not think you have courage enough to confront them, there is still time to withdraw."

"I thank you, Madame," said Bragelonne; "but I came here to be convinced. You promised to convince me, — do so."

"Enter, then," said Madame, "and shut the door behind you."

Bragelonne obeyed, and then turned towards the princess, whom he interrogated by a look.

"You know where you are, I suppose?" inquired Madame Henrietta.

"Everything leads me to believe I am in Mademoiselle de la Valliere's room."

"You are."

"But I would observe to your highness, that this room is a room, and is not a proof."

"Wait," said the princess, as she walked to the foot of the bed, folded up the screen into its several compartments, and stooped down towards the floor. "Look here," she continued; "stoop down and lift up this trap-door yourself."

"A trap-door!" said Raoul, astonished; for D'Artagnan's words began to return to his memory, and he had an indistinct recollection that D'Artagnan had made use of the same word. He looked, but uselessly, for some cleft or crevice which might indicate an opening or a ring to assist in lifting up the planking.

"Ah, I forgot," said Madame Henrietta, "I forgot the secret spring; the fourth plank of the flooring, — press on the spot where you will observe a knot in the wood. Those are the instructions; press, vicomte! press, I say, yourself."

Raoul, pale as death, pressed his finger on the spot which had been indicated to him; at the same moment the spring began to work, and the trap rose of its own accord.

"It is ingenious enough, certainly," said the princess; "and one can see that the architect foresaw that a woman's hand only would have to make use of this spring, for see how easily the trap-door opened without assistance."

"A staircase!" cried Raoul.

"Yes, and a very pretty one, too," said Madame Henrietta. "See, vicomte, the staircase has a balustrade, intended to prevent the falling of timid persons, who might be tempted to descend the staircase; and I will risk myself on it accordingly. Come, vicomte, follow me!"

"But before following you, madame, may I ask where this staircase leads to?"

"Ah, true; I forgot to tell you. You know, perhaps, that formerly M. de Saint-Aignan lived in the very next apartment to the king?"

"Yes, Madame, I am aware of that; that was the arrangement, at least, before I left; and more than once I had the honor of visiting his rooms."

"Well, he obtained the king's leave to change his former convenient and beautiful apartment for the two rooms to which this staircase will conduct us, and which together form a lodging for him half the size, and at ten times greater the distance from the king, — a close proximity to whom is by no means disdained, in general, by the gentlemen belonging to the court."

“Very good, Madame,” returned Raoul; “but go on, I beg, for I do not understand yet.”

“Well, then it accidentally happened,” continued the princess, “that M. de Saint-Aignan’s apartment is situated underneath the apartments of my maids of honor, and by a further coincidence, exactly underneath the room of La Valliere.”

“But what was the motive of this trap-door and this staircase?”

“That I cannot tell you. Would you like to go down to Monsieur de Saint-Aignan’s rooms? Perhaps we shall be able to find the solution of the enigma there.”

And Madame set the example by going down herself, while Raoul, sighing deeply, followed her. At every step Bragelonne took, he advanced further into that mysterious apartment which had witnessed La Valliere’s sighs and still retained the perfume of her presence. Bragelonne fancied he perceived, as he inhaled the atmosphere, that the young girl must have passed through. Then succeeded to these emanations of herself, which he regarded as invisible though certain proofs, flowers she preferred to all others — books of her own selection. If Raoul retained a single doubt on the subject, it would have vanished at the secret harmony of tastes and connection of the mind with the ordinary objects of life. La Valliere, in Bragelonne’s eyes, was present there in each article of furniture, in the color of the hangings, in all that surrounded him. Dumb, and now completely overwhelmed, there was nothing further for him now to learn, and he followed his pitiless conductress as blindly as the culprit follows the executioner; while Madame, as cruel as women of overstrung temperaments generally are, did not spare him the slightest detail. But it must be admitted that, notwithstanding the kind of apathy into which he had fallen, none of these details, even had he been left alone, would have escaped him. The happiness of the woman who loves, when that happiness is derived from a rival, is a living torture for a jealous man; but for a jealous man such as Raoul was, for one whose heart for the first time in its existence was being steeped in gall and bitterness, Louise’s happiness was in reality an ignominious death, a death of body and soul. He guessed all; he fancied he could see them, with their hands clasped in each other’s, their faces drawn close together, and reflected, side by side, in loving proximity, and they gazed upon the mirrors around them — so sweet an occupation for lovers, who, as they thus see themselves twice over, imprint the picture still more deeply on their memories. He could guess, too, the stolen kiss snatched as they separated from each other's loved society. The luxury, the studied elegance, eloquent of the perfection of indolence, of ease; the extreme care shown, either to spare the loved object every annoyance, or to occasion her a delightful surprise; that might and majesty of love multiplied by the majesty and might of royalty itself, seemed like a death-blow to Raoul. If there be anything which can in any way assuage or mitigate the tortures of jealousy, it is the inferiority of the man who is preferred to yourself; whilst, on the very contrary, if there be one anguish more bitter than another, a misery for which language lacks a word, it is the superiority of the man preferred to yourself, superior, perhaps, in youth, beauty, grace. It is in such moments as these that Heaven almost seems to have taken part against the disdained and rejected lover.

One final pang was reserved for poor Raoul. Madame Henrietta lifted up a silk curtain, and behind the canvas he perceived La Valliere's portrait. Not only the portrait of La Valliere, but of La Valliere radiant with youth, beauty, and happiness, inhaling life and enjoyment at every pore, because at eighteen years of age love itself is life.

"Louise!" murmured Bragelonne, — "Louise! is it true, then? Oh, you have never loved me, for never have you looked at me in that manner." And he felt as if his heart were crushed within his bosom.

Madame Henrietta looked at him, almost envious of his extreme grief, although she well knew there was nothing to envy in it, and that she herself was as passionately loved by De Guiche as Louise by Bragelonne. Raoul interpreted Madame Henrietta's look.

"Oh, forgive me, forgive me, Madame; in your presence I know I ought to have greater self-control. But Heaven grant that you may never be struck by similar misery to that which crushes me at this moment, for you are but a woman, and would not be able to endure so terrible an affliction. Forgive me, I again entreat you, Madame; I am but a man without rank or position, while you belong to a race whose happiness knows no bounds, whose power acknowledges no limit."

"Monsieur de Bragelonne," replied Henrietta, "a mind such as your merits all the consideration and respect which a queen's heart even can bestow. Regard me as your friend, monsieur; and as such, indeed, I would not allow your whole life to be poisoned by perfidy, and covered with ridicule. It was I, indeed, who, with more courage than any of your pretended friends, — I except M. de Guiche, — was the cause of your return from London; it is I, also, who now give you the melancholy proofs, necessary, however, for your cure if you are a lover with courage in his heart, and not a weeping Amadis. Do not thank me; pity me, even, and do not serve the king less faithfully than you have done."

Raoul smiled bitterly. "Ah! true, true; I was forgetting that; the king is my master."

"Your liberty, nay, your very life, is in danger."

A steady, penetrating look informed Madame Henrietta that she was mistaken, and that her last argument was not a likely one to affect the young man. "Take care, Monsieur de Bragelonne," she said, "for if you do not weigh well all your actions, you might throw into an extravagance of wrath a prince whose passions, once aroused, exceed the bounds of reason, and you would thereby involve your friends and family in the deepest distress; you must bend, you must submit, and you must cure yourself."

"I thank you, Madame; I appreciate the advice your royal highness is good enough to give me, and I will endeavor to follow it; but one final word, I beg."

"Name it."

"Should I be indiscreet in asking you the secret of this staircase, of this trap-door; a secret, which, it seems, you have discovered?"

"Nothing more simple. For the purpose of exercising a surveillance over the young girls who are attached to my service, I have duplicate keys of their doors. It seemed very strange to me that M. de Saint-Aignan should change his apartments. It seemed very strange that the king should come to see M. de Saint-Aignan every day, and, finally, it seemed very strange that so many things should be done during your absence, that the very habits and customs of the court appeared changed. I do not wish to be trifled with by the king, nor to serve as a cloak for his love affairs; for after La Valliere, who weeps incessantly, he will take a fancy to Montalais, who is always laughing; and then to Tonnay-Charente, who does nothing but sing all day; to act such a part as that would be unworthy of me. I thrust aside the scruples which my friendship for you suggested. I discovered the secret. I have wounded your feelings, I know, and I again entreat you to pardon me; but I had a duty to fulfil. I have discharged it. You are now forewarned; the tempest will soon burst; protect yourself accordingly."

“You naturally expect, however, that a result of some kind must follow,” replied Bragelonne, with firmness; “for you do not suppose I shall silently accept the shame thus thrust upon me, or the treachery which has been practiced against me?”

“You will take whatever steps in the matter you please, Monsieur Raoul, only do not betray the source whence you derived the truth. That is all I have to ask, — the only price I require for the service I have rendered you.”

“Fear nothing, Madame,” said Bragelonne, with a bitter smile.

“I bribed the locksmith, in whom the lovers confided. You can just as well have done so as myself, can you not?”

“Yes, Madame. Your royal highness, however, has no other advice or caution to give me, except that of not betraying you?”

“None.”

“I am about, therefore, to beg your royal highness to allow me to remain here for one moment.”

“Without me?”

“Oh! no, Madame. It matters very little; for what I have to do can be done in your presence. I only ask one moment to write a line to some one.”

“It is dangerous, Monsieur de Bragelonne. Take care.”

“No one can possibly know that your royal highness has done me the honor to conduct me here. Besides, I shall sign the letter I am going to write.”

“Do as you please, then.”

Raoul drew out his tablet, and wrote rapidly on one of the leaves the following words:

“MONSIEUR LE COMTE, — Do not be surprised to find this paper signed by me; the friend I shall very shortly send to call on you will have the honor to explain the object of my visit.

“VICOMTE RAOUL DE BRAGELONNE.”

He rolled up the paper, slipped it into the lock of the door which communicated with the room set apart for the two lovers, and satisfied himself that the missive was so apparent that Saint-Aignan could not but see it as he entered; he rejoined the princess, who had already reached the top of the staircase. They then separated, Raoul pretending to thank her highness; Henrietta pitying, or seeming to pity, with all her heart, the wretched young man she had just condemned to such fearful torture. “Oh!” she said, as she saw him disappear, pale as death, and his eyes bursting with blood, “if I had foreseen this, I would have hid the truth from that poor gentleman.”

CHAPTER LIV.

Porthos's Plan of Action.

The great number of individuals we have introduced into this long story is the reason why each of them has been forced to appear only in turn, according to the exigencies of the recital. The result is, that our readers have had no opportunity of meeting our friend Porthos since his return from Fontainebleau. The honors which he had received from the king had not changed the easy, affectionate character of that excellent-hearted man; he may, perhaps, have held up his head a little higher than usual, and a majesty of demeanor, as it were, may have betrayed itself since the honor of dining at the king's table had been accorded him. His majesty's banqueting-room had produced a certain effect on Porthos. Le Seigneur de Bracieux et de Pierrefonds delighted to remember that, during that memorable dinner, the numerous array of servants, and the large number of officials in attendance on the guests, gave a certain tone and effect to the repast, and seemed, as it were, to furnish the room. Porthos undertook to confer upon Mouston a position of some kind or other, in order to establish a sort of hierarchy among his other domestics, and to create a military household, which was not unusual among the great captains of the age, since, in the preceding century, this luxury had been greatly encouraged by Messieurs de Treville, de Schomberg, de la Vieuville, without alluding to M. de Richelieu, M. de Conde, and de Bouillon-Turenne. And, therefore, why should not he, Porthos, the friend of the king, and of M. Fouquet, a baron, and engineer, etc., why should not he, indeed, enjoy all the delightful privileges which large possessions and unusual merit invariably confer? Somewhat neglected by Aramis, who, we know, was greatly occupied with M. Fouquet; neglected, also, on account of his being on duty, by D'Artagnan; tired of Truchen and Planchet, Porthos was surprised to find himself dreaming, without precisely knowing why; but if any one had said to him, "Do you want anything, Porthos?" he would most certainly have replied, "Yes." After one of those dinners, during which Porthos attempted to recall to his recollection all the details of the royal banquet, gently joyful, thanks to the excellence of the wines; gently melancholy, thanks to his ambitious ideas, Porthos was gradually falling off into a placid doze, when his servant entered to announce that M. de Bragelonne wished to speak to him. Porthos passed into an adjoining room, where he found his young friend in the disposition of mind we are already aware of. Raoul advanced towards Porthos, and shook him by the hand; Porthos, surprised at his seriousness of aspect, offered him a seat. “Dear M. du Vallon,” said Raoul, “I have a service to ask of you.”

“Nothing could happen more fortunately, my young friend,” replied Porthos; “I have eight thousand livres sent me this morning from Pierrefonds; and if you want any money — ”

“No, I thank you; it is not money.”

“So much the worse, then. I have always heard it said that that is the rarest service, but the easiest to render. The remark struck me; I like to cite remarks that strike me.”

“Your heart is as good as your mind is sound and true.”

“You are much too kind, I declare. You will dine here, of course?”

“No; I am not hungry.”

“Eh! not dine? What a dreadful country England is!”

“Not too much so, indeed — but — ”

“Well, if such excellent fish and meat were not to be procured there, it would hardly be endurable.”

“Yes, I came to — ”

“I am listening. Only just allow me to take a little sip. One gets thirsty in Paris;” and he ordered a bottle of champagne to be brought; and, having first filled Raoul’s glass, he filled his own, drank it down at a gulp, and then resumed: “I needed that, in order to listen to you with proper attention. I am now entirely at your service. What do you wish to ask me, dear Raoul? What do you want?”

“Give me your opinion on quarrels in general, my dear friend.”

“My opinion! Well — but — Explain your idea a little more coherently,” replied Porthos, rubbing his forehead.

“I mean — you are generally good-humored, good-tempered, whenever any misunderstanding arises between a friend of yours and a stranger, for instance?”

“Oh! in the best of tempers.”

“Very good; but what do you do, in such a case?”

“Whenever any friend of mine gets into a quarrel, I always act on one principle.”

“What is that?”

“That lost time is irreparable, and one never arranges an affair so well as when everything has been done to embroil the disputants as much as possible.”

“Ah! indeed, is that the principle on which you proceed?”

“Precisely; so, as soon as a quarrel takes place, I bring the two parties together.”

“Exactly.”

“You understand that by this means it is impossible for an affair not to be arranged.”

“I should have thought that, treated in this manner, an affair would, on the contrary — ”

“Oh! not the least in the world. Just fancy, now, I have had in my life something like a hundred and eighty to a hundred and ninety regular duels, without reckoning hasty encounters, or chance meetings.”

“It is a very handsome aggregate,” said Raoul, unable to resist a smile.

“A mere nothing; but I am so gentle. D’Artagnan reckons his duels by hundreds. It is very true he is a little too hard and sharp — I have often told him so.”

“And so,” resumed Raoul, “you generally arrange the affairs of honor your friends confide to you.”

“There is not a single instance in which I have not finished by arranging every one of them,” said Porthos, with a gentleness and confidence that surprised Raoul.

“But the way in which you settle them is at least honorable, I suppose?”

“Oh! rely upon that; and at this stage, I will explain my other principle to you. As soon as my friend has intrusted his quarrel to me, this is what I do; I go to his adversary at once, armed with a politeness and self-possession absolutely requisite under such circumstances.”

“That is the way, then,” said Raoul, bitterly, “that you arrange affairs so safely.”

“I believe you. I go to the adversary, then, and say to him: ‘It is impossible, monsieur, that you are ignorant of the extent to which you have insulted my friend.’“ Raoul frowned at this remark.

"It sometimes happens — very often, indeed," pursued Porthos — "that my friend has not been insulted at all; he has even been the first to give offense; you can imagine, therefore, whether my language is or is not well chosen." And Porthos burst into a peal of laughter.

"Decidedly," said Raoul to himself while the merry thunder of Porthos's laughter was resounding in his ears, "I am very unfortunate. De Guiche treats me with coolness, D'Artagnan with ridicule, Porthos is too tame; no one will settle this affair in the only way I wish it to be settled. And I came to Porthos because I wanted to find a sword instead of cold reasoning at my service. My ill-luck dogs me."

Porthos, who had recovered himself, continued: "By one simple expression, I leave my adversary without an excuse."

"That is as it may happen," said Raoul, absently.

"Not at all, it is quite certain. I have not left him an excuse; and then it is that I display all my courtesy, in order to attain the happy issue of my project. I advance, therefore, with an air of great politeness, and taking my adversary by the hand, I say to him: 'Now that you are convinced of having given the offense, we are sure of reparation; between my friend and yourself, the future can only offer an exchange of mutual courtesies of conduct, and consequently, my mission now is to acquaint you with the length of my friend's sword.'"

"What!" said Raoul.

"Wait a minute. 'The length of my friend's sword. My horse is waiting below; my friend is in such and such a spot and is impatiently awaiting your agreeable society; I will take you with me; we can call upon your second as we go along:' and the affair is arranged."

"And so," said Raoul, pale with vexation, "you reconcile the two adversaries on the ground."

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Porthos. "Reconcile! What for?"

"You said that the affair was arranged."

"Of course! since my friend is waiting for him."

"Well! what then? If he is waiting — "

"Well! if he is waiting, it is merely to stretch his legs a little. The adversary, on the contrary, is stiff from riding; they place themselves in proper order, and my friend kills the opponent, and the affair is ended."

"Ah! he kills him, then?" cried Raoul.

“I should think so,” said Porthos. “Is it likely I should ever have as a friend a man who allows himself to get killed? I have a hundred and one friends; at the head of the list stand your father, Aramis, and D’Artagnan, all of whom are living and well, I believe?”

“Oh, my dear baron,” exclaimed Raoul, as he embraced Porthos.

“You approve of my method, then?” said the giant.

“I approve of it so thoroughly, that I shall have recourse to it this very day, without a moment’s delay, — at once, in fact. You are the very man I have been looking for.”

“Good; here I am, then; you want to fight, I suppose?”

“Absolutely.”

“It is very natural. With whom?”

“With M. de Saint-Aignan.”

“I know him — a most agreeable man, who was exceedingly polite to me the day I had the honor of dining with the king. I shall certainly acknowledge his politeness in return, even if it had not happened to be my usual custom. So, he has given you an offense?”

“A mortal offense.”

“The deuce! I can say so, I suppose?”

“More than that, even, if you like.”

“That is a very great convenience.”

“I may look upon it as one of your arranged affairs, may I not?” said Raoul, smiling.

“As a matter of course. Where will you be waiting for him?”

“Ah! I forgot; it is a very delicate matter. M. de Saint-Aignan is a very great friend of the king’s.”

“So I have heard it said.”

“So that if I kill him — ”

“Oh! you will kill him, certainly; you must take every precaution to do so. But there is no difficulty in these matters now; if you had lived in our early days, — ah, those were days worth living for!”

“My dear friend, you do not quite understand me. I mean, that M. de Saint-Aignan being a friend of the king, the affair will be more difficult to manage, since the king might learn beforehand — ”

“Oh! no; that is not likely. You know my method: ‘Monsieur, you have just injured my friend, and — ’“

“Yes, I know it.”

"And then: 'Monsieur, I have horses below.' I carry him off before he can have spoken to any one."

"Will he allow himself to be carried off like that?"

"I should think so! I should like to see it fail. It would be the first time, if it did. It is true, though, that the young men of the present day — Bah! I would carry him off bodily, if that were all," and Porthos, adding gesture to speech, lifted Raoul and the chair he was sitting on off the ground, and carried them round the room.

"Very good," said Raoul, laughing. "All we have to do is to state the grounds of the quarrel with M. de Saint-Aignan."

"Well, but that is done, it seems."

"No, my dear M. du Vallon, the usage of the present day requires that the cause of the quarrel should be explained."

"Very good. Tell me what it is, then."

"The fact is — "

"Deuce take it! how troublesome all this is! In former days we had no occasion to say anything about the matter. People fought for the sake of fighting; and I, for one, know no better reason than that."

"You are quite right, M. du Vallon."

"However, tell me what the cause is."

"It is too long a story to tell; only, as one must particularize to a certain extent, and as, on the other hand, the affair is full of difficulties, and requires the most absolute secrecy, you will have the kindness merely to tell M. de Saint-Aignan that he has, in the first place, insulted me by changing his lodgings."

"By changing his lodgings? Good," said Porthos, who began to count on his fingers; "next?"

"Then in getting a trap-door made in his new apartments."

"I understand," said Porthos; "a trap-door: upon my word, that is very serious; you ought to be furious at that. What the deuce does the fellow mean by getting trap-doors made without first consulting you? Trap-doors! *mordioux!* I haven't got any, except in my dungeons at Bracieux."

"And you will please add," said Raoul, "that my last motive for considering myself insulted is, the existence of the portrait that M. de Saint-Aignan well knows."

"Is it possible? A portrait, too! A change of residence, a trap-door, and a portrait! Why, my dear friend, with but one of these causes of complaint there is enough, and more than enough, for all the gentlemen in France and Spain to cut each other’s throats, and that is saying but very little.”

“Well, my dear friend, you are furnished with all you need, I suppose?”

“I shall take a second horse with me. Select your own rendezvous, and while you are waiting there, you can practice some of the best passes, so as to get your limbs as elastic as possible.”

“Thank you. I shall be waiting for you in the wood of Vincennes, close to Minimes.”

“All goes well, then. Where am I to find this M. de Saint-Aignan?”

“At the Palais Royal.”

Porthos ran a huge hand-bell. “My court suit,” he said to the servant who answered the summons, “my horse, and a led horse to accompany me.” Then turning to Raoul, as soon as the servant had quitted the room, he said: “Does your father know anything about this?”

“No; I am going to write to him.”

“And D’Artagnan?”

“No, nor D’Artagnan either. He is very cautious, you know, and might have diverted me from my purpose.”

“D’Artagnan is a sound adviser, though,” said Porthos, astonished that, in his own loyal faith in D’Artagnan, any one could have thought of himself, so long as there was a D’Artagnan in the world.

“Dear M. du Vallon,” said Raoul, “do not question me any more, I implore you. I have told you all that I had to say; it is prompt action I now expect, sharp and decided as you know how to arrange it. That, indeed, is my reason for having chosen you.”

“You will be satisfied with me,” replied Porthos.

“Do not forget, either, that, except ourselves, no one must know anything of this meeting.”

“People generally find these things out,” said Porthos, dryly, “when a dead body is discovered in a wood. But I promise everything, my dear friend, except the concealment of the dead body. There it is, and it must be seen, as a matter of course. It is a principle of mine, not to bury bodies. That has a smack of the assassin about it. Every risk has its peculiarities.”

“To work, then, my dear friend.”

“Rely upon me,” said the giant, finishing the bottle, while a servant spread out upon a sofa the gorgeously decorated dress trimmed with lace.

Raoul left the room, saying to himself, with a secret delight, “Perfidious king! traitorous monarch! I cannot reach thee. I do not wish it; for kings are sacred objects. But your friend, your accomplice, your panderer — the coward who represents you — shall pay for your crime. I will kill him in thy name, and, afterwards, we will bethink ourselves of — *Louise*.”

CHAPTER LV.

The Change of Residence, the Trap-Door, and the Portrait.

Porthos, intrusted, to his great delight, with this mission, which made him feel young again, took half an hour less than his usual time to put on his court suit. To show that he was a man acquainted with the usages of high society, he had begun by sending his lackey to inquire if Monsieur de Saint-Aignan were at home, and heard, in answer, that M. le Comte de Saint-Aignan had had the honor of accompanying the king to Saint-Germain, as well as the whole court; but that monsieur le comte had just that moment returned. Immediately upon this reply, Porthos made as much haste as possible, and reached Saint-Aignan's apartments just as the latter was having his boots taken off. The promenade had been delightful. The king, who was in love more than ever, and of course happier than ever, behaved in the most charming manner to every one. Nothing could possibly equal his kindness. M. de Saint-Aignan, it may be remembered, was a poet, and fancied that he had proved that he was so under too many a memorable circumstance to allow the title to be disputed by any one. An indefatigable rhymester, he had, during the whole of the journey, overwhelmed with quatrains, sextains, and madrigals, first the king, and then La Valliere. The king, on his side, was in a similarly poetical mood, and had made a distich; while La Valliere, delighting in poetry, as most women do who are in love, had composed two sonnets. The day, then, had not been a bad one for Apollo; and so, as soon as he had returned to Paris, Saint-Aignan, who knew beforehand that his verse would be sure to be extensively circulated in court circles, occupied himself, with a little more attention than he had been able to bestow during the promenade, with the composition, as well as with the idea itself. Consequently, with all the tenderness of a father about to start his children in life, he candidly interrogated himself whether the public would find these offsprings of his imagination sufficiently elegant and graceful; and in order to make his mind easy on the subject, M. de Saint-Aignan recited to himself the madrigal he had composed, and which he had repeated from memory to the king, and had promised to write out for him on his return. All the time he was committing these words to memory, the comte was engaged in undressing himself more completely. He had just taken off his coat, and was putting on his dressing-gown, when he was informed that Monsieur le Baron du Vallon de Bracieux de Pierrefonds was waiting to be received.

"Eh!" he said, "what does that bunch of names mean? I don't know anything about him."

"It is the same gentleman," replied the lackey, "who had the honor of dining with you, monseigneur, at the king's table, when his majesty was staying at Fontainebleau."

"Introduce him, then, at once," cried Saint-Aignan.

Porthos, in a few minutes, entered the room. M. de Saint-Aignan had an excellent recollection of persons, and, at the first glance, he recognized the gentleman from the country, who enjoyed so singular a reputation, and whom the king had received so favorably at Fontainebleau, in spite of the smiles of some of those who were present. He therefore advanced towards Porthos with all the outward signs of consideration of manner which Porthos thought but natural, considering that he himself, whenever he called upon an adversary, hoisted a standard of the most refined politeness. Saint-Aignan desired the servant to give Porthos a chair; and the latter, who saw nothing unusual in this act of politeness, sat down gravely and coughed. The ordinary courtesies having been exchanged between the two gentlemen, the comte, to whom the visit was paid, said, "May I ask, monsieur le baron, to what happy circumstance I am indebted for the favor of a visit from you?"

"The very thing I am about to have the honor of explaining to you, monsieur le comte; but, I beg your pardon — "

"What is the matter, monsieur?" inquired Saint-Aignan.

"I regret to say that I have broken your chair."

"Not at all, monsieur," said Saint-Aignan; "not at all."

"It is the fact, though, monsieur le comte; I have broken it — so much so, indeed, that if I do not move, I shall fall down, which would be an exceedingly disagreeable position for me in the discharge of the very serious mission which has been intrusted to me with regard to yourself."

Porthos rose; and but just in time, for the chair had given way several inches. Saint-Aignan looked about him for something more solid for his guest to sit upon.

“Modern articles of furniture,” said Porthos, while the comte was looking about, “are constructed in a ridiculously flimsy manner. In my early days, when I used to sit down with far more energy than is now the case, I do not remember ever to have broken a chair, except in taverns, with my arms.”

Saint-Aignan smiled at this remark. “But,” said Porthos, as he settled himself down on a couch, which creaked, but did not give way beneath his weight, “that unfortunately has nothing whatever to do with my present visit.”

“Why unfortunately? Are you the bearer of a message of ill-omen, monsieur le baron?”

“Of ill-omen — for a gentleman? Certainly not, monsieur le comte,” replied Porthos, nobly. “I have simply come to say that you have seriously insulted a friend of mine.”

“I, monsieur?” exclaimed Saint-Aignan — ”I have insulted a friend of yours, do you say? May I ask his name?”

“M. Raoul de Bragelonne.”

“I have insulted M. Raoul de Bragelonne!” cried Saint-Aignan. “I really assure you, monsieur, that it is quite impossible; for M. de Bragelonne, whom I know but very slightly, — nay, whom I know hardly at all — is in England, and, as I have not seen him for a long time past, I cannot possibly have insulted him.”

“M. de Bragelonne is in Paris, monsieur le comte,” said Porthos, perfectly unmoved; “and I repeat, it is quite certain you have insulted him, since he himself told me you had. Yes, monsieur, you have seriously insulted him, mortally insulted him, I repeat.”

“It is impossible, monsieur le baron, I swear, quite impossible.”

“Besides,” added Porthos, “you cannot be ignorant of the circumstance, since M. de Bragelonne informed me that he had already apprised you of it by a note.”

“I give you my word of honor, monsieur, that I have received no note whatever.”

“This is most extraordinary,” replied Porthos.

“I will convince you,” said Saint-Aignan, “that have received nothing in any way from him.” And he rang the bell. “Basque,” he said to the servant who entered, “how many letters or notes were sent here during my absence?”

"Three, monsieur le comte — a note from M. de Fiesque, one from Madame de Laferte, and a letter from M. de las Fuentes."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, monsieur le comte."

"Speak the truth before this gentleman — the truth, you understand. I will take care you are not blamed."

"There was a note, also, from — from — "

"Well, from whom?"

"From Mademoiselle — de — "

"Out with it!"

"De Laval."

"That is quite sufficient," interrupted Porthos. "I believe you, monsieur le comte."

Saint-Aignan dismissed the valet, and followed him to the door, in order to close it after him; and when he had done so, looking straight before him, he happened to see in the keyhole of the adjoining apartment the paper which Bragelonne had slipped in there as he left. "What is this?" he said.

Porthos, who was sitting with his back to the room, turned round. "Aha!" he said.

"A note in the keyhole!" exclaimed Saint-Aignan.

"That is not unlikely to be the missing letter, monsieur le comte," said Porthos.

Saint-Aignan took out the paper. "A note from M. de Bragelonne!" he exclaimed.

"You see, monsieur, I was right. Oh, when I say a thing — "

"Brought here by M. de Bragelonne himself," the comte murmured, turning pale. "This is infamous! How could he possibly have come here?" And the comte rang again.

"Who has been here during my absence with the king?"

"No one, monsieur."

"That is impossible! Some one must have been here."

"No one could possibly have entered, monsieur, since the keys have never left my pocket."

"And yet I find the letter in yonder lock; some one must have put it there; it could not have come here of its own accord."

Basque opened his arms as if signifying the most absolute ignorance on the subject.

"Probably it was M. de Bragelonne himself who placed it there," said Porthos.

"In that case he must have entered here."

"How could that have been, since I have the key in my own pocket?" returned Basque, perseveringly.

Saint-Aignan crumpled the letter in his palm, after having read it. "There is something mysterious about this," he murmured, absorbed in thought. Porthos left him to his reflections; but after a while returned to the mission he had undertaken.

"Shall we return to our little affair?" Porthos resumed, addressing Saint-Aignan after a brief pause.

"I think I can now understand it, from this note, which has arrived here in so singular a manner. Monsieur de Bragelonne says that a friend will call."

"I am his friend. I am the person he alludes to."

"For the purpose of giving me a challenge?"

"Precisely."

"And he complains that I have insulted him?"

"Mortally."

"In what way, may I ask; for his conduct is so mysterious, that, at least, it needs some explanation?"

"Monsieur," replied Porthos, "my friend cannot but be right; and, as far as his conduct is concerned, if it be mysterious, as you say, you have only yourself to blame for it." Porthos pronounced these words with an amount of confidence which, for a man who was unaccustomed to his ways, must have revealed an infinity of sense.

"Mystery, so be it; but what is all the mystery about?" said Saint-Aignan.

"You will think it the best, perhaps," Porthos replied, with a low bow, "if I do not enter in to particulars."

"Oh, I perfectly understand. We will touch very lightly upon it, then, so speak, monsieur, I am listening."

"In the first place, monsieur," said Porthos, "you have changed your apartments."

"Yes, that is quite true," said Saint-Aignan.

"You admit it," said Porthos, with an air of satisfaction.

"Admit it! of course I admit it. Why should I not admit it, do you suppose?"

"You have admitted it. Very good," said Porthos, lifting up one finger.

“But how can my having moved my lodgings have done M. de Bragelonne any harm? Have the goodness to tell me that, for I positively do not comprehend a word of what you are saying.”

Porthos stopped him, and then said, with great gravity, “Monsieur, this is the first of M. de Bragelonne’s complaints against you. If he makes a complaint, it is because he feels himself insulted.”

Saint-Aignan began to beat his foot impatiently on the ground. “This looks like a spurious quarrel,” he said.

“No one can possibly have a spurious quarrel with the Vicomte de Bragelonne,” returned Porthos; “but, at all events, you have nothing to add on the subject of your changing your apartments, I suppose?”

“Nothing. And what is the next point?”

“Ah, the next! You will observe, monsieur, that the one I have already mentioned is a most serious injury, to which you have given no answer, or rather, have answered very indifferently. Is it possible, monsieur, that you have changed your lodgings? M. de Bragelonne feels insulted at your having done so, and you do not attempt to excuse yourself.”

“What!” cried Saint-Aignan, who was getting annoyed at the perfect coolness of his visitor — ”what! am I to consult M. de Bragelonne whether I am to move or not? You can hardly be serious, monsieur.”

“I am. And it is absolutely necessary, monsieur; but under any circumstances, you will admit that it is nothing in comparison with the second ground of complaint.”

“Well, what is that?”

Porthos assumed a very solemn expression as he said: “How about the trap-door, monsieur?”

Saint-Aignan turned exceedingly pale. He pushed back his chair so abruptly, that Porthos, simple as he was, perceived that the blow had told. “The trap-door,” murmured Saint-Aignan.

“Yes, monsieur, explain that if you can,” said Porthos, shaking his head.

Saint-Aignan held down his head, as he murmured: “I have been betrayed, everything is known!”

“Everything,” replied Porthos, who knew nothing.

“You see me perfectly overwhelmed,” pursued Saint-Aignan, “overwhelmed to a degree that I hardly know what I am about.”

“A guilty conscience, monsieur. Your affair is a bad one, and when the public learns all about it, it will judge — ”

"Oh, monsieur!" exclaimed the count, hurriedly, "such a secret ought not to be known even by one's confessor."

"That we will think about," said Porthos; "the secret will not go far, in fact."

"Surely, monsieur," returned Saint-Aignan, "since M. de Bragelonne has penetrated the secret, he must be aware of the danger he as well as others run the risk of incurring."

"M. de Bragelonne runs no danger, monsieur, nor does he fear any either, as you, if it please Heaven, will find out very soon."

"This fellow is a perfect madman," thought Saint-Aignan. "What, in Heaven's name, does he want?" He then said aloud: "Come, monsieur, let us hush up this affair."

"You forget the portrait," said Porthos, in a voice of thunder, which made the comte's blood freeze in his veins.

As the portrait in question was La Valliere's portrait, and no mistake could any longer exist on the subject, Saint-Aignan's eyes were completely opened. "Ah!" he exclaimed — "ah! monsieur, I remember now that M. de Bragelonne was engaged to be married to her."

Porthos assumed an imposing air, all the majesty of ignorance, in fact, as he said: "It matters nothing whatever to me, nor to yourself, indeed, whether or not my friend was, as you say, engaged to be married. I am even astonished that you should have made use of so indiscreet a remark. It may possibly do your cause harm, monsieur."

"Monsieur," replied Saint-Aignan, "you are the incarnation of intelligence, delicacy, and loyalty of feeling united. I see the whole matter now clearly enough."

"So much the better," said Porthos.

"And," pursued Saint-Aignan, "you have made me comprehend it in the most ingenious and the most delicate manner possible. I beg you to accept my best thanks." Porthos drew himself up, unable to resist the flattery of the remark. "Only, now that I know everything, permit me to explain — "

Porthos shook his head, as a man who does not wish to hear, but Saint-Aignan continued: "I am in despair, I assure you, at all that has happened; but how would you have acted in my place? Come, between ourselves, tell me what you would have done?"

Porthos drew himself up as he answered: "There is now no question at all of what I should have done, young man; you have been made acquainted with the three causes of complaint against you, I believe?"

"As for the first, my change of rooms, and I now address myself to you as a man of honor and of great intelligence, could I, when the desire of so august a personage was so urgently expressed that I should move, ought I to have disobeyed?"

Porthos was about to speak, but Saint-Aignan did not give him time to answer. "Ah! my frankness, I see, convinces you," he said, interpreting the movement according to his own fancy. "You feel that I am right."

Porthos did not reply, and so Saint-Aignan continued: "I pass by that unfortunate trap-door," he said, placing his hand on Porthos's arm, "that trap-door, the occasion and means of so much unhappiness, and which was constructed for — you know what. Well, then, in plain truth, do you suppose that it was I who, of my own accord, in such a place, too, had that trap-door made? — Oh, no! — you do not believe it; and here, again, you feel, you guess, you understand the influence of a will superior to my own. You can conceive the infatuation, the blind, irresistible passion which has been at work. But, thank Heaven! I am fortunate in speaking to a man who has so much sensitiveness of feeling; and if it were not so, indeed, what an amount of misery and scandal would fall upon her, poor girl! and upon him — whom I will not name."

Porthos, confused and bewildered by the eloquence and gestures of Saint-Aignan, made a thousand efforts to stem this torrent of words, of which, by the by, he did not understand a single one; he remained upright and motionless on his seat, and that was all he could do. Saint-Aignan continued, and gave a new inflection to his voice, and an increasing vehemence to his gesture: "As for the portrait, for I readily believe the portrait is the principal cause of complaint, tell me candidly if you think me to blame? — Who was it who wished to have her portrait? Was it I? — Who is in love with her? Is it I? — Who wishes to gain her affection? Again, is it I? — Who took her likeness? I, do you think? No! a thousand times no! I know M. de Bragelonne must be in a state of despair; I know these misfortunes are most cruel. But I, too, am suffering as well; and yet there is no possibility of offering any resistance. Suppose we were to fight? we would be laughed at. If he obstinately persist in his course, he is lost. You will tell me, I know, that despair is ridiculous, but then you are a sensible man. You have understood me. I perceived by your serious, thoughtful, embarrassed air, even, that the importance of the situation we are placed in has not escaped you. Return, therefore, to M. de Bragelonne; thank him — as I have indeed reason to thank him — for having chosen as an intermediary a man of your high merit. Believe me that I shall, on my side, preserve an eternal gratitude for the man who has so ingeniously, so cleverly arranged the misunderstanding between us. And since ill luck would have it that the secret should be known to four instead of three, why, this secret, which might make the most ambitious man's fortune, I am delighted to share with you, monsieur, from the bottom of my heart I am delighted at it. From this very moment you can make use of me as you please, I place myself entirely at your mercy. What can I possibly do for you? What can I solicit, nay, require even? You have only to speak, monsieur, only to speak."

And, according to the familiarly friendly fashion of that period, Saint-Aignan threw his arms round Porthos, and clasped him tenderly in his embrace. Porthos allowed him to do this with the most perfect indifference. "Speak," resumed Saint-Aignan, "what do you require?"

"Monsieur," said Porthos, "I have a horse below: be good enough to mount him; he is a very good one and will play you no tricks."

"Mount on horseback! what for?" inquired Saint-Aignan, with no little curiosity.

"To accompany me to where M. de Bragelonne is waiting us."

"Ah! he wishes to speak to me, I suppose? I can well believe that; he wishes to have the details, very likely; alas! it is a very delicate matter; but at the present moment I cannot, for the king is waiting for me."

"The king must wait, then," said Porthos.

"What do you say? the king must wait!" interrupted the finished courtier, with a smile of utter amazement, for he could not understand that the king could under any circumstances be supposed to have to wait.

"It is merely the affair of a very short hour," returned Porthos.

"But where is M. de Bragelonne waiting for me?"

"At the Minimes, at Vincennes."

"Ah, indeed! but are we going to laugh over the affair when we get there?"

"I don't think it likely," said Porthos, as his face assumed a look of utter hardness.

"But the Minimes is a rendezvous where duels take place, and what can I have to do at the Minimes?"

Porthos slowly drew his sword, and said: “That is the length of my friend’s sword.”

“Why, the man is mad!” cried Saint-Aignan.

The color mounted to Porthos’s face, as he replied: “If I had not the honor of being in your own apartment, monsieur, and of representing M. de Bragelonne’s interests, I would throw you out of the window. It will be merely a pleasure postponed, and you will lose nothing by waiting. Will you come with me to the Minimes, monsieur, of your own free will?”

“But — ”

“Take care, I will carry you if you do not come quickly.”

“Basque!” cried Saint-Aignan. As soon as Basque appeared, he said, “The king wishes to see monsieur le comte.”

“That is very different,” said Porthos; “the king’s service before anything else. We will wait until this evening, monsieur.”

And saluting Saint-Aignan with his usual courtesy, Porthos left the room, delighted at having arranged another affair. Saint-Aignan looked after him as he left; and then hastily putting on his court dress again, he ran off, arranging his costume as he went along, muttering to himself, “The Minimes! the Minimes! We shall see how the king will fancy this challenge; for it is for him after all, that is certain.”

CHAPTER LVI.

Rivals in Politics.

On his return from the promenade, which had been so prolific in poetical effusions, and in which every one had paid his or her tribute to the Muses, as the poets of the period used to say, the king found M. Fouquet waiting for an audience. M. Colbert had lain in wait for his majesty in the corridor, and followed him like a jealous and watchful shadow; M. Colbert, with his square head, his vulgar and untidy, though rich costume, somewhat resembled a Flemish gentleman after he had been over-indulging in his national drink — beer. Fouquet, at sight of his enemy, remained perfectly unmoved, and during the whole of the scene which followed scrupulously resolved to observe a line of conduct particularly difficult to the man of superior mind, who does not even wish to show his contempt, for fear of doing his adversary too much honor. Colbert made no attempt to conceal his insolent expression of the vulgar joy he felt. In his opinion, M. Fouquet's was a game very badly played and hopelessly lost, although not yet finished. Colbert belonged to that school of politicians who think cleverness alone worthy of their admiration, and success the only thing worth caring for. Colbert, moreover, who was not simply an envious and jealous man, but who had the king's interest really at heart, because he was thoroughly imbued with the highest sense of probity in all matters of figures and accounts, could well afford to assign as a pretext for his conduct, that in hating and doing his utmost to ruin M. Fouquet, he had nothing in view but the welfare of the state and the dignity of the crown. None of these details escaped Fouquet's observation; through his enemy's thick, bushy brows, and despite the restless movement of his eyelids, he could, by merely looking at his eyes, penetrate to the very bottom of Colbert's heart, and he read to what an unbounded extent hate towards himself and triumph at his approaching fall existed there. But as, in observing everything, he wished to remain himself impenetrable, he composed his features, smiled with the charmingly sympathetic smile that was peculiarly his own, and saluted the king with the most dignified and graceful ease and elasticity of manner.

"Sire," he said, "I perceive by your majesty's joyous air that you have been gratified with the promenade."

"Most gratified, indeed, monsieur le surintendant, most gratified. You were very wrong not to come with us, as I invited you to do."

"I was working, sire," replied the superintendent, who did not even seem to take the trouble to turn aside his head in merest respect of Colbert's presence.

"Ah! M. Fouquet," cried the king, "there is nothing like the country. I should be delighted to live in the country always, in the open air and under the trees."

"I should hope that your majesty is not yet weary of the throne," said Fouquet.

"No; but thrones of soft turf are very pleasant."

"Your majesty gratifies my utmost wishes in speaking in that manner, for I have a request to submit to you."

"On whose behalf, monsieur?"

"Oh behalf of the nymphs of Vaux, sire."

"Ah! ah!" said Louis XIV.

"Your majesty, too, once deigned to make me a promise," said Fouquet.

"Yes, I remember it."

"The *fete* at Vaux, the celebrated *fete*, I think, it was, sire," said Colbert, endeavoring to show his importance by taking part in the conversation.

Fouquet, with the profoundest contempt, did not take the slightest notice of the remark, as if, as far as he was concerned, Colbert had not even thought or said a word.

"Your majesty is aware," he said, "that I destine my estate at Vaux to receive the most amiable of princes, the most powerful of monarchs."

"I have given you my promise, monsieur," said Louis XIV., smiling; "and a king never departs from his word."

"And I have come now, sire, to inform your majesty that I am ready to obey your orders in every respect."

"Do you promise me many wonders, monsieur le surintendant?" said Louis, looking at Colbert.

"Wonders? Oh! no, sire. I do not undertake that. I hope to be able to procure your majesty a little pleasure, perhaps even a little forgetfulness of the cares of state."

"Nay, nay, M. Fouquet," returned the king; "I insist upon the word 'wonders.' You are a magician, I believe; we all know the power you wield; we also know that you can find gold even when there is none to be found elsewhere; so much so, indeed, that people say you coin it."

Fouquet felt that the shot was discharged from a double quiver, and that the king had launched an arrow from his own bow as well as one from Colbert's. "Oh!" said he, laughingly, "the people know perfectly well out of what mine I procure the gold; and they know it only too well, perhaps; besides," he added, "I can assure your majesty that the gold destined to pay the expenses of the *fete* at Vaux will cost neither blood nor tears; hard labor it may, perhaps, but that can be paid for."

Louis paused quite confused. He wished to look at Colbert; Colbert, too, wished to reply to him; a glance as swift as an eagle's, a king-like glance, indeed, which Fouquet darted at the latter, arrested the words upon his lips. The king, who had by this time recovered his self-possession, turned towards Fouquet, saying, "I presume, therefore, I am now to consider myself formally invited?"

"Yes, sire, if your majesty will condescend so far as to accept my invitation."

"What day have you fixed?"

"Any day your majesty may find most convenient."

"You speak like an enchanter who has but to conjure up in actuality the wildest fancies, Monsieur Fouquet. I could not say so much, indeed, myself."

"Your majesty will do, whenever you please, everything that a monarch can and ought to do. The king of France has servants at his bidding who are able to do anything on his behalf, to accomplish everything to gratify his pleasures."

Colbert tried to look at the superintendent, in order to see whether this remark was an approach to less hostile sentiments on his part; but Fouquet had not even looked at his enemy, and Colbert hardly seemed to exist as far as he was concerned. "Very good, then," said the king. "Will a week hence suit you?"

"Perfectly well, sire."

"This is Tuesday; if I give you until next Sunday week, will that be sufficient?"

“The delay which your majesty deigns to accord me will greatly aid the various works which my architects have in hand for the purpose of adding to the amusement of your majesty and your friends.”

“By the by, speaking of my friends,” resumed the king; “how do you intend to treat them?”

“The king is master everywhere, sire; your majesty will draw up your own list and give your own orders. All those you may deign to invite will be my guests, my honored guests, indeed.”

“I thank you!” returned the king, touched by the noble thought expressed in so noble a tone.

Fouquet, therefore, took leave of Louis XIV., after a few words had been added with regard to the details of certain matters of business. He felt that Colbert would remain behind with the king, that they would both converse about him, and that neither of them would spare him in the least degree. The satisfaction of being able to give a last and terrible blow to his enemy seemed to him almost like a compensation for everything they were about to subject him to. He turned back again immediately, as soon, indeed, as he had reached the door, and addressing the king, said, “I was forgetting that I had to crave your majesty’s forgiveness.”

“In what respect?” said the king, graciously.

“For having committed a serious fault without perceiving it.”

“A fault! You! Ah! Monsieur Fouquet, I shall be unable to do otherwise than forgive you. In what way or against whom have you been found wanting?”

“Against every sense of propriety, sire. I forgot to inform your majesty of a circumstance that has lately occurred of some little importance.”

“What is it?”

Colbert trembled; he fancied that he was about to frame a denunciation against him. His conduct had been unmasked. A single syllable from Fouquet, a single proof formally advanced, and before the youthful loyalty of feeling which guided Louis XIV., Colbert’s favor would disappear at once; the latter trembled, therefore, lest so daring a blow might overthrow his whole scaffold; in point of fact, the opportunity was so admirably suited to be taken advantage of, that a skillful, practiced player like Aramis would not have let it slip. “Sire,” said Fouquet, with an easy, unconcerned air, “since you have had the kindness to forgive me, I am perfectly indifferent about my confession; this morning I sold one of the official appointments I hold."

"One of your appointments," said the king, "which?"

Colbert turned perfectly livid. "That which conferred upon me, sire, a grand gown, and a stern air of gravity; the appointment of procureur-general."

The king involuntarily uttered a loud exclamation and looked at Colbert, who, with his face bedewed with perspiration, felt almost on the point of fainting. "To whom have you sold this department, Monsieur Fouquet?" inquired the king.

Colbert was obliged to lean against a column of the fireplace. "To a councilor belonging to the parliament, sire, whose name is Vanel."

"Vanel?"

"Yes, sire, a particular friend of the intendant Colbert," added Fouquet; letting every word fall from his lips with the most inimitable nonchalance, and with an admirably assumed expression of forgetfulness and ignorance. And having finished, and having overwhelmed Colbert beneath the weight of this superiority, the superintendent again saluted the king and quitted the room, partially revenged by the stupefaction of the king and the humiliation of the favorite.

"Is it really possible," said the king, as soon as Fouquet had disappeared, "that he has sold that office?"

"Yes, sire," said Colbert, meaningly.

"He must be mad," the king added.

Colbert this time did not reply; he had penetrated the king's thought, a thought which amply revenged him for the humiliation he had just been made to suffer; his hatred was augmented by a feeling of bitter jealousy of Fouquet; and a threat of disgrace was now added to the plan he had arranged for his ruin. Colbert felt perfectly assured that for the future, between Louis XIV. and himself, their hostile feelings and ideas would meet with no obstacles, and that at the first fault committed by Fouquet, which could be laid hold of as a pretext, the chastisement so long impending would be precipitated. Fouquet had thrown aside his weapons of defense, and hate and jealousy had picked them up. Colbert was invited by the king to the *fete* at Vaux; he bowed like a man confident in himself, and accepted the invitation with the air of one who almost confers a favor. The king was about writing down Saint-Aignan's name on his list of royal commands, when the usher announced the Comte de Saint-Aignan. As soon as the royal “Mercury” entered, Colbert discreetly withdrew.

CHAPTER LVII.

Rivals in Love.

Saint-Aignan had quitted Louis XIV. hardly a couple of hours before; but in the first effervescence of his affection, whenever Louis XIV. was out of sight of La Valliere, he was obliged to talk about her. Besides, the only person with whom he could speak about her at his ease was Saint-Aignan, and thus Saint-Aignan had become an indispensable.

“Ah, is that you, comte?” he exclaimed, as soon as he perceived him, doubly delighted, not only to see him again, but also to get rid of Colbert, whose scowling face always put him out of humor. “So much the better, I am very glad to see you. You will make one of the best traveling party, I suppose?”

“Of what traveling part are you speaking, sire?” inquired Saint-Aignan.

“The one we are making up to go to the *fete* the superintendent is about to give at Vaux. Ah! Saint-Aignan, you will, at last, see a *fete*, a royal *fete*, by the side of which all our amusements at Fontainebleau are petty, contemptible affairs.”

“At Vaux! the superintendent going to give a *fete* in your majesty’s honor? Nothing more than that!”

“‘Nothing more than that,’ do you say? It is very diverting to find you treating it with so much disdain. Are you who express such an indifference on the subject, aware, that as soon as it is known that M. Fouquet is going to receive me at Vaux next Sunday week, people will be striving their very utmost to get invited to the *fete?* I repeat, Saint-Aignan, you shall be one of the invited guests.”

“Very well, sire; unless I shall, in the meantime, have undertaken a longer and a less agreeable journey.”

“What journey do you allude to?”

“The one across the Styx, sire.”

“Bah!” said Louis XIV., laughing.

“No, seriously, sire,” replied Saint-Aignan, “I am invited; and in such a way, in truth, that I hardly know what to say, or how to act, in order to refuse the invitation.”

“I do not understand you. I know that you are in a poetical vein; but try not to sink from Apollo to Phoebus.”

“Very well; if your majesty will deign to listen to me, I will not keep your mind on the rack a moment longer.”

“Speak.”

“Your majesty knows the Baron du Vallon?”

“Yes, indeed; a good servant to my father, the late king, and an admirable companion at table; for, I think, you are referring to the gentleman who dined with us at Fontainebleau?”

“Precisely so; but you have omitted to add to his other qualifications, sire, that he is a most charming polisher-off of other people.”

“What! Does M. du Vallon wish to polish you off?”

“Or to get me killed, which is much the same thing.”

“The deuce!”

“Do not laugh, sire, for I am not saying one word beyond the exact truth.”

“And you say he wishes to get you killed.”

“Such is that excellent person’s present idea.”

“Be easy; I will defend you, if he be in the wrong.”

“Ah! There is an ‘if’!”

“Of course; answer me as candidly as if it were some one else’s affair instead of your own, my poor Saint-Aignan; is he right or wrong?”

“Your majesty shall be the judge.”

“What have you done to him?”

“To him, personally, nothing at all; but, it seems, to one of his friends, I have.”

“It is all the same. Is his friend one of the celebrated ‘four’?”

“No. It is the son of one of the celebrated ‘four,’ though.”

“What have you done to the son? Come, tell me.”

“Why, it seems that I have helped some one to take his mistress from him.”

“You confess it, then?”

“I cannot help confessing it, for it is true.”

“In that case, you are wrong; and if he were to kill you, he would be doing perfectly right.”

“Ah! that is your majesty’s way of reasoning, then!”

“Do you think it a bad way?”

"It is a very expeditious way, at all events."

"'Good justice is prompt;' so my grandfather Henry IV. used to say."

"In that case, your majesty will, perhaps, be good enough to sign my adversary's pardon, for he is now waiting for me at the Minimes, for the purpose of putting me out of my misery."

"His name, and a parchment!"

"There is a parchment upon your majesty's table; and for his name — "

"Well, what is it?"

"The Vicomte de Bragelonne, sire."

"'The Vicomte de Bragelonne!'" exclaimed the king; changing from a fit of laughter to the most profound stupor, and then, after a moment's silence, while he wiped his forehead, which was bedewed with perspiration, he again murmured, "Bragelonne!"

"No other, sire."

"Bragelonne, who was affianced to — "

"Yes, sire."

"But — he has been in London."

"Yes; but I can assure you, sire, he is there no longer."

"Is he in Paris, then?"

"He is at Minimes, sire, where he is waiting for me, as I have already had the honor of telling you."

"Does he know all?"

"Yes; and many things besides. Perhaps your majesty would like to look at the letter I have received from him;" and Saint-Aignan drew from his pocket the note we are already acquainted with. "When your majesty has read the letter, I will tell you how it reached me."

The king read it in a great agitation, and immediately said, "Well?"

"Well, sire; your majesty knows a certain carved lock, closing a certain door of carved ebony, which separates a certain apartment from a certain blue and white sanctuary?"

"Of course; Louise's boudoir."

"Yes, sire. Well, it was in the keyhole of that lock that I found yonder note."

"Who placed it there?"

"Either M. de Bragelonne, or the devil himself; but, inasmuch as the note smells of musk and not of sulphur, I conclude that it must be, not the devil, but M. de Bragelonne."

Louis bent his head, and seemed absorbed in sad and bitter thought. Perhaps something like remorse was at that moment passing through his heart. “The secret is discovered,” he said.

“Sire, I shall do my utmost that the secret dies in the breast of the man who possesses it!” said Saint-Aignan, in a tone of bravado, as he moved towards the door; but a gesture of the king made him pause.

“Where are you going?” he inquired.

“Where they await me, sire.”

“What for?”

“To fight, in all probability.”

“*You* fight!” exclaimed the king. “One moment, if you please, monsieur le comte!”

Saint-Aignan shook his head, as a rebellious child does, whenever any one interferes to prevent him throwing himself into a well, or playing with a knife. “But, sire,” he said.

“In the first place,” continued the king. “I want to be enlightened a little further.”

“Upon all points, if your majesty will be pleased to interrogate me,” replied Saint-Aignan, “I will throw what light I can.”

“Who told you that M. de Bragelonne had penetrated into that room?”

“The letter which I found in the keyhole told me.”

“Who told you that it was De Bragelonne who put it there?”

“Who but himself would have dared to undertake such a mission?”

“You are right. How was he able to get into your rooms?”

“Ah! that is very serious, inasmuch as all the doors were closed, and my lackey, Basque, had the keys in his pocket.”

“Your lackey must have been bribed.”

“Impossible, sire; for if he had been bribed, those who did so would not have sacrificed the poor fellow, whom, it is not unlikely, they might want to turn to further use by and by, in showing so clearly that it was he whom they had made use of.”

“Quite true. And now I can only form one conjecture.”

“Tell me what it is, sire, and we shall see if it is the same that has presented itself to my mind.”

“That he effected an entrance by means of the staircase.”

“Alas, sire, that seems to me more than probable.”

"There is no doubt that some one must have sold the secret of the trap-door."

"Either sold it or given it."

"Why do you make that distinction?"

"Because there are certain persons, sire, who, being above the price of treason, give, and do not sell."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, sire! Your majesty's mind is too clear-sighted not to guess what I mean, and you will save me the embarrassment of naming the person I allude to."

"You are right: you mean Madame; I suppose her suspicions were aroused by your changing your lodgings."

"Madame has keys of the apartments of her maids of honor, and she is powerful enough to discover what no one but yourself could do, or she would not be able to discover anything."

"And you suppose, then, that my sister must have entered into an alliance with Bragelonne, and has informed him of all the details of the affair."

"Possibly even better still, for she perhaps accompanied him there."

"Which way? through your own apartments?"

"You think it impossible, sire? Well, listen to me. Your majesty knows that Madame is very fond of perfumes?"

"Yes, she acquired that taste from my mother."

"Vervain, particularly."

"Yes, it is the scent she prefers to all others."

"Very good, sire! my apartments happen to smell very strongly of vervain."

The king remained silent and thoughtful for a few moments, and then resumed: "But why should Madame take Bragelonne's part against me?"

Saint-Aignan could very easily have replied: "A woman's jealousy!" The king probed his friend to the bottom of his heart to ascertain if he had learned the secret of his flirtation with his sister-in-law. But Saint-Aignan was not an ordinary courtier; he did not lightly run the risk of finding out family secrets; and he was too a friend of the Muses not to think very frequently of poor Ovidius Naso, whose eyes shed so many tears in expiation of his crime for having once beheld something, one hardly knows what, in the palace of Augustus. He therefore passed by Madame's secret very skillfully. But as he had shown no ordinary sagacity in indicating

Madame’s presence in his rooms in company with Bragelonne, it was necessary, of course, for him to repay with interest the king’s *amour propre*, and reply plainly to the question which had been put to him of: “Why has Madame taken Bragelonne’s part against me?”

“Why?” replied Saint-Aignan. “Your majesty forgets, I presume, that the Comte de Guiche is the intimate friend of the Vicomte de Bragelonne.”

“I do not see the connection, however,” said the king.

“Ah! I beg your pardon, then, sire; but I thought the Comte de Guiche was a very great friend of Madame’s.”

“Quite true,” the king returned; “there is no occasion to search any further, the blow came from that direction.”

“And is not your majesty of opinion that, in order to ward it off, it will be necessary to deal another blow?”

“Yes, but not one of the kind given in the Bois de Vincennes,” replied the king.

“You forget, sire,” said Saint-Aignan, “that I am a gentleman, and that I have been challenged.”

“The challenge neither concerns nor was it intended for you.”

“But I am the man, sire, who has been expected at the Minimes, sire, during the last hour and more; and I shall be dishonored if I do not go.”

“The first honor and duty of a gentleman is obedience to his sovereign.”

“Sire!”

“I order you to remain.”

“Sire!”

“Obey, monsieur!”

“As your majesty pleases.”

“Besides, I wish to have the whole of this affair explained; I wish to know how it is that I have been so insolently trifled with, as to have the sanctuary of my affections pried into. It is not you, Saint-Aignan, whose business it is to punish those who have acted in this manner, for it is not your honor they have attacked, but my own.”

“I implore your majesty not to overwhelm M. de Bragelonne with your wrath, for although in the whole of this affair he may have shown himself deficient in prudence, he has not been so in his feelings of loyalty.”

“Enough! I shall know how to decide between the just and the unjust, even in the height of my anger. But take care that not a word of this is breathed to Madame.”

"But what am I to do with regard to M. de Bragelonne? He will be seeking me in every direction, and — "

"I shall either have spoken to him, or taken care that he has been spoken to, before the evening is over."

"Let me once more entreat your majesty to be indulgent towards him."

"I have been indulgent long enough, comte," said Louis XIV., frowning severely; "it is now quite time to show certain persons that I am master in my own palace."

The king had hardly pronounced these words, which betokened that a fresh feeling of irritation was mingling with the recollections of old, when an usher appeared at the door of the cabinet. "What is the matter?" inquired the king, "and why do you presume to come when I have not summoned you?"

"Sire," said the usher, "your majesty desired me to permit M. le Comte de la Fere to pass freely on any and every occasion, when he might wish to speak to your majesty."

"Well, monsieur?"

"M. le Comte de la Fere is now waiting to see your majesty."

The king and Saint-Aignan at this reply exchanged a look which betrayed more uneasiness than surprise. Louis hesitated for a moment, but immediately afterwards, seeming to make up his mind, he said:

"Go, Saint-Aignan, and find Louise; inform her of the plot against us; do not let her be ignorant that Madame will return to her system of persecutions against her, and that she has set those to work who would have found it far safer to remain neuter."

"Sire — "

"If Louise gets nervous and frightened, reassure her as much as you can; tell her that the king's affection is an impenetrable shield over her; if, which I suspect is the case, she already knows everything, or if she has already been herself subjected to an attack of some kind or other from any quarter, tell her, be sure to tell her, Saint-Aignan," added the king, trembling with passion, "tell her, I say, that this time, instead of defending her, I will avenge her, and that too so terribly that no one will in future even dare to raise his eyes towards her."

"Is that all, sire?"

"Yes, all. Go as quickly as you can, and remain faithful; for, you who live in the midst of this stake of infernal torments, have not, like myself, the hope of the paradise beyond it.”

Saint-Aignan exhausted himself in protestations of devotion, took the king’s hand, kissed it, and left the room radiant with delight.

CHAPTER LVIII.

King and Noble.

The king endeavored to recover his self-possession as quickly as possible, in order to meet M. de la Fere with an untroubled countenance. He clearly saw it was not mere chance that had induced the comte's visit, he had some vague impression of its importance; but he felt that to a man of Athos's tone of mind, to one of such a high order of intellect, his first reception ought not to present anything either disagreeable or otherwise than kind and courteous. As soon as the king had satisfied himself that, as far as appearances went, he was perfectly calm again, he gave directions to the ushers to introduce the comte. A few minutes afterwards Athos, in full court dress, and with his breast covered with the orders that he alone had the right to wear at the court of France, presented himself with so grave and solemn an air that the king perceived, at the first glance, that he was not deceived in his anticipations. Louis advanced a step towards the comte, and, with a smile, held out his hand to him, over which Athos bowed with the air of the deepest respect.

"Monsieur le Comte de la Fere," said the king rapidly, "you are so seldom here, that it is a real piece of good fortune to see you."

Athos bowed and replied, "I should wish always to enjoy the happiness of being near your majesty."

The tone, however, in which this reply was conveyed, evidently signified, "I should wish to be one of your majesty's advisers, to save you the commission of faults." The king felt it so, and determined in this man's presence to preserve all the advantages which could be derived from his command over himself, as well as from his rank and position.

"I see you have something to say to me," he said.

"Had it not been so, I should not have presumed to present myself before your majesty."

"Speak quickly, I am anxious to satisfy you," returned the king, seating himself.

“I am persuaded,” replied Athos, in a somewhat agitated tone of voice, “that your majesty will give me every satisfaction.”

“Ah!” said the king, with a certain haughtiness of manner, “you have come to lodge a complaint here, then?”

“It would be a complaint,” returned Athos, “only in the event of your majesty — but if you will deign to permit me, sire, I will begin the conversation from the very commencement.”

“Do so, I am listening.”

“Your majesty will remember that at the period of the Duke of Buckingham’s departure, I had the honor of an interview with you.”

“At or about that period, I think I remember you did; only, with regard to the subject of the conversation, I have quite forgotten it.”

Athos started, as he replied. “I shall have the honor to remind your majesty of it. It was with regard to a formal demand I had addressed to you respecting a marriage which M. de Bragelonne wished to contract with Mademoiselle de la Valliere.”

“Ah!” thought the king, “we have come to it now. — I remember,” he said, aloud.

“At that period,” pursued Athos, “your majesty was so kind and generous towards M. de Bragelonne and myself, that not a single word which then fell from your lips has escaped my memory; and, when I asked your majesty to accord me Mademoiselle de la Valliere’s hand for M. de Bragelonne, you refused.”

“Quite true,” said Louis, dryly.

“Alleging,” Athos hastened to say, “that the young lady had no position in society.”

Louis could hardly force himself to listen with an appearance of royal propriety.

“That,” added Athos, “she had but little fortune.”

The king threw himself back in his armchair.

“That her extraction was indifferent.”

A renewed impatience on the part of the king.

“And little beauty,” added Athos, pitilessly.

This last bolt buried itself deep in the king’s heart, and made him almost bound from his seat.

“You have a good memory, monsieur,” he said.

"I invariably have, on occasions when I have had the distinguished honor of an interview with your majesty," retorted the comte, without being in the least disconcerted.

"Very good: it is admitted that I said all that."

"And I thanked your majesty for your remarks at the time, because they testified an interest in M. de Bragelonne which did him much honor."

"And you may possibly remember," said the king, very deliberately, "that you had the greatest repugnance for this marriage."

"Quite true, sire."

"And that you solicited my permission, much against your own inclination?"

"Yes, sire."

"And finally, I remember, for I have a memory nearly as good as your own; I remember, I say, that you observed at the time: 'I do not believe that Mademoiselle de la Valliere loves M. de Bragelonne.' Is that true?"

The blow told well, but Athos did not draw back. "Sire," he said, "I have already begged your majesty's forgiveness; but there are certain particulars in that conversation which are only intelligible from the *denouement*."

"Well, what is the *denouement*, monsieur?"

"This: that your majesty then said, 'that you would defer the marriage out of regard for M. de Bragelonne's own interests.'"

The king remained silent. "M. de Bragelonne is now so exceedingly unhappy that he cannot any longer defer asking your majesty for a solution of the matter."

The king turned pale; Athos looked at him with fixed attention.

"And what," said the king, with considerable hesitation, "does M. de Bragelonne request?"

"Precisely the very thing that I came to ask your majesty for at my last audience, namely, your majesty's consent to his marriage."

The king remained perfectly silent. "The questions which referred to the different obstacles in the way are all now quite removed for us," continued Athos. "Mademoiselle de la Valliere, without fortune, birth, or beauty, is not the less on that account the only good match in the world for M. de Bragelonne, since he loves this young girl."

The king pressed his hands impatiently together. "Does your majesty hesitate?" inquired the comte, without losing a particle of either his firmness of his politeness.

“I do not hesitate — I refuse,” replied the king.

Athos paused a moment, as if to collect himself: “I have had the honor,” he said, in a mild tone, “to observe to your majesty that no obstacle now interferes with M. de Bragelonne’s affections, and that his determination seems unalterable.”

“There is my will — and that is an obstacle, I should imagine!”

“That is the most serious of all,” Athos replied quickly.

“Ah!”

“And may we, therefore, be permitted to ask your majesty, with the greatest humility, your reason for this refusal?”

“The reason! — A question to me!” exclaimed the king.

“A demand, sire!”

The king, leaning with both his hands upon the table, said, in a deep tone of concentrated passion: “You have lost all recollection of what is usual at court. At court, please to remember, no one ventures to put a question to the king.”

“Very true, sire; but if men do not question, they conjecture.”

“Conjecture! What may that mean, monsieur?”

“Very frequently, sire, conjecture with regard to a particular subject implies a want of frankness on the part of the king — ”

“Monsieur!”

“And a want of confidence on the part of the subject,” pursued Athos, intrepidly.

“You forget yourself,” said the king, hurried away by anger in spite of all his self-control.

“Sire, I am obliged to seek elsewhere for what I thought I should find in your majesty. Instead of obtaining a reply from you, I am compelled to make one for myself.”

The king rose. “Monsieur le comte,” he said, “I have now given you all the time I had at my disposal.” This was a dismissal.

“Sire,” replied the comte, “I have not yet had time to tell your majesty what I came with the express object of saying, and I so rarely see your majesty that I ought to avail myself of the opportunity.”

“Just now you spoke rudely of conjectures; you are now becoming offensive, monsieur.”

“Oh, sire! offend your majesty! I? — never! All my life through I have maintained that kings are above all other men, not only from their rank and power, but from their nobleness of heart and their true dignity of mind. I never can bring myself to believe that my sovereign, he who passed his word to me, did so with a mental reservation."

"What do you mean? what mental reservation do you allude to?"

"I will explain my meaning," said Athos, coldly. "If, in refusing Mademoiselle de la Valliere to Monsieur de Bragelonne, your majesty had some other object in view than the happiness and fortune of the vicomte — "

"You perceive, monsieur, that you are offending me."

"If, in requiring the vicomte to delay his marriage, your majesty's only object was to remove the gentleman to whom Mademoiselle de la Valliere was engaged — "

"Monsieur! monsieur!"

"I have heard it said so in every direction, sire. Your majesty's affection for Mademoiselle de la Valliere is spoken of on all sides."

The king tore his gloves, which he had been biting for some time. "Woe to those," he cried, "who interfere in my affairs. I have made up my mind to take a particular course, and I will break through every obstacle in my way."

"What obstacle?" said Athos.

The king stopped short, like a horse which, having taken the bit between his teeth and run away, finds it has slipped it back again, and that his career is checked. "I love Mademoiselle de la Valliere," he said suddenly, with mingled nobleness of feeling and passion.

"But," interrupted Athos, "that does not preclude your majesty from allowing M. de Bragelonne to marry Mademoiselle de la Valliere. The sacrifice is worthy of so great a monarch; it is fully merited by M. de Bragelonne, who has already rendered great service to your majesty, and who may well be regarded as a brave and worthy man. Your majesty, therefore, in renouncing the affection you entertain, offers a proof at once of generosity, gratitude, and good policy."

"Mademoiselle de la Valliere does not love M. de Bragelonne," said the king, hoarsely.

"Does your majesty know that to be the case?" remarked Athos, with a searching look.

"I do know it."

"Since a very short time, then; for doubtless, had your majesty known it when I first preferred my request, you would have taken the trouble to inform me of it."

"Since a very short time, it is true, monsieur."

Athos remained silent for a moment, and then resumed: "In that case, I do not understand why your majesty should have sent M. de Bragelonne to London. That exile, and most properly so, too, is a matter of astonishment to every one who regards your majesty's honor with sincere affection."

"Who presumes to impugn my honor, Monsieur de la Fere?"

"The king's honor, sire, is made up of the honor of his whole nobility. Whenever the king offends one of his gentlemen, that is, whenever he deprives him of the smallest particle of his honor, it is from him, from the king himself, that that portion of honor is stolen."

"Monsieur de la Fere!" said the king, haughtily.

"Sire, you sent M. de Bragelonne to London either before you were Mademoiselle de la Valliere's lover, or since you have become so."

The king, irritated beyond measure, especially because he felt that he was being mastered, endeavored to dismiss Athos by a gesture.

"Sire," replied the comte, "I will tell you all; I will not leave your presence until I have been satisfied by your majesty or by myself; satisfied if you prove to me that you are right, — satisfied if I prove to you that you are wrong. Nay, sire, you can but listen to me. I am old now, and I am attached to everything that is really great and really powerful in your kingdom. I am of those who have shed their blood for your father and for yourself, without ever having asked a single favor either from yourself or from your father. I have never inflicted the slightest wrong or injury on any one in this world, and even kings are still my debtors. You can but listen to me, I repeat. I have come to ask you for an account of the honor of one of your servants whom you have deceived by a falsehood, or betrayed by want of heart of judgment. I know that these words irritate your majesty, but the facts themselves are killing us. I know that you are endeavoring to find some means whereby to chastise me for my frankness; but I know also the chastisement I will implore God to inflict upon you when I relate to Him your perjury and my son's unhappiness."

The king during these remarks was walking hurriedly to and fro, his hand thrust into the breast of his coat, his head haughtily raised, his eyes blazing with wrath. "Monsieur," he cried, suddenly, "if I acted towards you as a king, you would be already punished; but I am only a man, and I have the right to love in this world every one who loves me, — a happiness which is so rarely found."

"You cannot pretend to such a right as a man any more than as a king, sire; or if you intend to exercise that right in a loyal manner, you should have told M. de Bragelonne so, and not have exiled him."

"It is too great a condescension, monsieur, to discuss these things with you," interrupted Louis XIV., with that majesty of air and manner he alone seemed able to give his look and his voice.

"I was hoping that you would reply to me," said the comte.

"You shall know my reply, monsieur."

"You already know my thoughts on the subject," was the Comte de la Fere's answer.

"You have forgotten you are speaking to the king, monsieur. It is a crime."

"You have forgotten you are destroying the lives of two men, sire. It is a mortal sin."

"Leave the room!"

"Not until I have said this: 'Son of Louis XIII., you begin your reign badly, for you begin it by abduction and disloyalty! My race — myself too — are now freed from all that affection and respect towards you, which I made my son swear to observe in the vaults of Saint-Denis, in the presence of the relics of your noble forefathers. You are now become our enemy, sire, and henceforth we have nothing to do save with Heaven alone, our sole master. Be warned, be warned, sire.'"

"What! do you threaten?"

"Oh, no," said Athos, sadly, "I have as little bravado as fear in my soul. The God of whom I spoke to you is now listening to me; He knows that for the safety and honor of your crown I would even yet shed every drop of blood twenty years of civil and foreign warfare have left in my veins. I can well say, then, that I threaten the king as little as I threaten the man; but I tell you, sire, you lose two servants; for you have destroyed faith in the heart of the father, and love in the heart of the son; the one ceases to believe in the royal word, the other no longer believes in the loyalty of the man, or the purity of woman: the one is dead to every feeling of respect, the other to obedience. Adieu!"

Thus saying, Athos broke his sword across his knee, slowly placed the two pieces upon the floor, and saluting the king, who was almost choking from rage and shame, he quitted the cabinet. Louis, who sat near the table, completely overwhelmed, was several minutes before he could collect himself; but he suddenly rose and rang the bell violently. “Tell M. d’Artagnan to come here,” he said to the terrified ushers.

CHAPTER LIX.

After the Storm.

Our readers will doubtlessly have been asking themselves how it happened that Athos, of whom not a word has been said for some time past, arrived so very opportunely at court. We will, without delay, endeavor to satisfy their curiosity.

Porthos, faithful to his duty as an arranger of affairs, had, immediately after leaving the Palais Royal, set off to join Raoul at the Minimes in the Bois de Vincennes, and had related everything, even to the smallest details, which had passed between Saint-Aignan and himself. He finished by saying that the message which the king had sent to his favorite would probably not occasion more than a short delay, and that Saint-Aignan, as soon as he could leave the king, would not lose a moment in accepting the invitation Raoul had sent him.

But Raoul, less credulous than his old friend, had concluded from Porthos's recital that if Saint-Aignan was going to the king, Saint-Aignan would tell the king everything, and that the king would most assuredly forbid Saint-Aignan to obey the summons he had received to the hostile meeting. The consequence of his reflections was, that he had left Porthos to remain at the place appointed for the meeting, in the very improbable case that Saint-Aignan would come there; having endeavored to make Porthos promise that he would not remain there more than an hour or an hour and a half at the very longest. Porthos, however, formally refused to do anything of the kind, but, on the contrary, installed himself in the Minimes as if he were going to take root there, making Raoul promise that when he had been to see his father, he would return to his own apartments, in order that Porthos's servant might know where to find him in case M. de Saint-Aignan should happen to come to the rendezvous.

Bragelonne had left Vincennes, and proceeded at once straight to the apartments of Athos, who had been in Paris during the last two days, the comte having been already informed of what had taken place, by a letter from D'Artagnan. Raoul arrived at his father's; Athos, after having held out his hand to him, and embraced him most affectionately, made a sign for him to sit down.

"I know you come to me as a man would go to a friend, vicomte, whenever he is suffering; tell me, therefore, what is it that brings you now."

The young man bowed, and began his recital; more than once in the course of it his tears almost choked his utterance, and a sob, checked in his throat, compelled him to suspend his narrative for a few minutes. Athos most probably already knew how matters stood, as we have just now said D'Artagnan had already written to him; but, preserving until the conclusion that calm, unruffled composure of manner which constituted the almost superhuman side of his character, he replied, "Raoul, I do not believe there is a word of truth in these rumors; I do not believe in the existence of what you fear, although I do not deny that persons best entitled to the fullest credit have already conversed with me on the subject. In my heart and soul I think it utterly impossible that the king could be guilty of such an outrage on a gentleman. I will answer for the king, therefore, and will soon bring you back the proof of what I say."

Raoul, wavering like a drunken man between what he had seen with his own eyes and the imperturbable faith he had in a man who had never told a falsehood, bowed and simply answered, "Go, then, monsieur le comte; I will await your return." And he sat down, burying his face in his hands. Athos dressed, and then left him, in order to wait upon the king; the result of that interview is already known to our readers.

When he returned to his lodgings, Raoul, pale and dejected, had not quitted his attitude of despair. At the sound, however, of the opening doors, and of his father's footsteps as he approached him, the young man raised his head. Athos's face was very pale, his head uncovered, and his manner full of seriousness; he gave his cloak and hat to the lackey, dismissed him with a gesture, and sat down near Raoul.

"Well, monsieur," inquired the young man, "are you convinced yet?"

"I am, Raoul; the king loves Mademoiselle de la Valliere."

"He confesses it, then?" cried Raoul.

"Yes," replied Athos.

"And she?"

"I have not seen her."

"No; but the king spoke to you about her. What did he say?"

"He says that she loves him."

“Oh, you see — you see, monsieur!” said the young man, with a gesture of despair.

“Raoul,” resumed the comte, “I told the king, believe me, all that you yourself could possibly have urged, and I believe I did so in becoming language, though sufficiently firm.”

“And what did you say to him, monsieur?”

“I told him, Raoul, that everything was now at an end between him and ourselves; that you would never serve him again. I told him that I, too, should remain aloof. Nothing further remains for me, then, but to be satisfied of one thing.”

“What is that, monsieur?”

“Whether you have determined to adopt any steps.”

“Any steps? Regarding what?”

“With reference to your disappointed affection, and — your ideas of vengeance.”

“Oh, monsieur, with regard to my affection, I shall, perhaps, some day or other, succeed in tearing it from my heart; I trust I shall do so, aided by Heaven’s merciful help, and your own wise exhortations. As far as vengeance is concerned, it occurred to me only when under the influence of an evil thought, for I could not revenge myself upon the one who is actually guilty; I have, therefore, already renounced every idea of revenge.”

“And you no longer think of seeking a quarrel with M. de Saint-Aignan?”

“No, monsieur; I sent him a challenge: if M. de Saint-Aignan accepts it, I will maintain it; if he does not take it up, I will leave things as they are.”

“And La Valliere?”

“You cannot, I know, have seriously thought that I should dream of revenging myself upon a woman!” replied Raoul, with a smile so sad that a tear started even to the eyes of his father, who had so many times in the course of his life bowed beneath his own sorrows and those of others.

He held out his hand to Raoul, which the latter seized most eagerly.

“And so, monsieur le comte, you are quite satisfied that the misfortune is one beyond all remedy?” inquired the young man.

“Poor boy!” he murmured.

“You think that I still live in hope,” said Raoul, “and you pity me. Oh, it is indeed horrible suffering for me to despise, as I am bound to do, the one I have loved so devotedly. If I had but some real cause of complaint against her, I should be happy, I should be able to forgive her.”

Athos looked at his son with a profoundly sorrowful air, for the words Raoul had just pronounced seemed to have issued out of his own heart. At this moment the servant announced M. d'Artagnan. This name sounded very differently to the ears of Athos and Raoul. The musketeer entered the room with a vague smile on his lips. Raoul paused. Athos walked towards his friend with an expression of face that did not escape Bragelonne. D'Artagnan answered Athos's look by an imperceptible movement of the eyelid; and then, advancing towards Raoul, whom he took by the hand, he said, addressing both father and son, "Well, you are trying to console this poor boy, it seems."

"And you, kind and good as usual, have come to help me in my difficult task."

As he said this, Athos pressed D'Artagnan's hand between both his own. Raoul fancied he observed in this pressure something beyond the sense his mere words conveyed.

"Yes," replied the musketeer, smoothing his mustache with the hand that Athos had left free, "yes, I have come too."

"You are most welcome, chevalier; not for the consolation you bring with you, but on your own account. I am already consoled," said Raoul; and he attempted to smile, but the effort was more sad than any tears D'Artagnan had ever seen shed.

"That is all well and good, then," said D'Artagnan.

"Only," continued Raoul, "you have arrived just as the comte was about to give me the details of his interview with the king. You will allow the comte to continue?" added the young man, as, with his eyes fixed on the musketeer, he seemed to read the very depths of his heart.

"His interview with the king?" said D'Artagnan, in a tone so natural and unassumed that there was no means of suspecting that his astonishment was feigned. "You have seen the king, then, Athos?"

Athos smiled as he said, "Yes, I have seen him."

"Ah, indeed; you were unaware, then, that the comte had seen his majesty?" inquired Raoul, half reassured.

"Yes, indeed, quite so."

"In that case, I am less uneasy," said Raoul.

"Uneasy — and about what?" inquired Athos.

"Forgive me, monsieur," said Raoul, "but knowing so well the regard and affection you have for me, I was afraid you might possibly have expressed somewhat plainly to his majesty my own sufferings and your indignation, and that the king had consequently — ”

“And that the king had consequently?” repeated D’Artagnan; “well, go on, finish what you were going to say.”

“I have now to ask you to forgive me, Monsieur d’Artagnan,” said Raoul. “For a moment, and I cannot help confessing it, I trembled lest you had come here, not as M. d’Artagnan, but as captain of the musketeers.”

“You are mad, my poor boy,” cried D’Artagnan, with a burst of laughter, in which an exact observer might perhaps have wished to have heard a little more frankness.

“So much the better,” said Raoul.

“Yes, mad; and do you know what I would advise you to do?”

“Tell me, monsieur, for the advice is sure to be good, as it comes from you.”

“Very good, then; I advise you, after your long journey from England, after your visit to M. de Guiche, after your visit to Madame, after your visit to Porthos, after your journey to Vincennes, I advise you, I say, to take a few hours’ rest; go and lie down, sleep for a dozen hours, and when you wake up, go and ride one of my horses until you have tired him to death.”

And drawing Raoul towards him, he embraced him as he would have done his own child. Athos did the like; only it was very visible that the kiss was still more affectionate, and the pressure of his lips even warmer with the father than with the friend. The young man again looked at both his companions, endeavoring to penetrate their real meaning or their real feelings with the utmost strength of his intelligence; but his look was powerless upon the smiling countenance of the musketeer or upon the calm and composed features of the Comte de la Fere. “Where are you going, Raoul?” inquired the latter, seeing that Bragelonne was preparing to go out.

“To my own apartments,” replied the latter, in his soft, sad voice.

“We shall be sure to find you there, then, if we should have anything to say to you?”

“Yes, monsieur; but do you suppose it likely you will have something to say to me?”

“How can I tell?” said Athos.

“Yes, something fresh to console you with,” said D’Artagnan, pushing him towards the door.

Raoul, observing the perfect composure which marked every gesture of his two friends, quitted the comte’s room, carrying away with him nothing but the individual feeling of his own particular distress.

“Thank Heaven,” he said, “since that is the case, I need only think of myself.”

And wrapping himself up in his cloak, in order to conceal from the passers-by in the streets his gloomy and sorrowful face, he quitted them, for the purpose of returning to his own rooms, as he had promised Porthos. The two friends watched the young man as he walked away with a feeling of genuine disinterested pity; only each expressed it in a different way.

“Poor Raoul!” said Athos, sighing deeply.

“Poor Raoul!” said D’Artagnan, shrugging his shoulders.

CHAPTER LX.

Heu! Miser!

“Poor Raoul!” had said Athos. “Poor Raoul!” had said D’Artagnan: and, in point of fact, to be pitied by both these men, Raoul must indeed have been most unhappy. And therefore, when he found himself alone, face to face, as it were, with his own troubles, leaving behind him the intrepid friend and the indulgent father; when he recalled the avowal of the king’s affection, which had robbed him of Louise de la Valliere, whom he loved so deeply, he felt his heart almost breaking, as indeed we all have at least once in our lives, at the first illusion destroyed, the first affection betrayed. “Oh!” he murmured, “all is over, then. Nothing is now left me in this world. Nothing to look forward to, nothing to hope for. Guiche has told me so, my father has told me so, M. d’Artagnan has told me so. All life is but an idle dream. The future which I have been hopelessly pursuing for the last ten years is a dream! the union of hearts, a dream! a life of love and happiness, a dream! Poor fool that I am,” he continued, after a pause, “to dream away my existence aloud, publicly, and in the face of others, friends and enemies — and for what purpose, too? in order that my friends may be saddened by my troubles, and my enemies may laugh at my sorrows. And so my unhappiness will soon become a notorious disgrace, a public scandal; and who knows but that to-morrow I may even be a public laughing-stock?”

And, despite the composure which he had promised his father and D’Artagnan to observe, Raoul could not resist uttering a few words of darkest menace. “And yet,” he continued, “if my name were De Wardes, and if I had the pliancy of character and strength of will of M. d’Artagnan, I should laugh, with my lips at least; I should convince other women that this perfidious girl, honored by the affection I have wasted on her, leaves me only one regret, that of having been abused and deceived by her seemingly modest and irreproachable conduct; a few might perhaps fawn on the king by jesting at my expense; I should put myself on the track of some of those buffoons; I should chastise a few of them, perhaps; the men would fear me, and by the time I had laid three dying or dead at my feet, I should be adored by the women. Yes, yes, that, indeed, would be the proper course to adopt, and the Comte de la Fere himself would not object to it. Has not he also been tried, in his earlier days, in the same manner as I have just been tried myself? Did he not replace affection by intoxication? He has often told me so. Why should I not replace love by pleasure? He must have suffered as much as I suffer, even more — if that is possible. The history of one man is the history of all, a dragging trial, more or less prolonged, more or less bitter — sorrowful. The note of human nature is nothing but one sustained cry. But what are the sufferings of others compared to those from which I am now suffering? Does the open wound in another's breast soften the anguish of the gaping ulcer in our own? Does the blood which is welling from another man's side stanch that which is pouring from our own? Does the general grief of our fellow-creatures lessen our own private and particular woe? No, no, each suffers on his own account, each struggles with his own grief, each sheds his own tears. And besides," he went on, "what has my life been up to the present moment? A cold, barren, sterile arena, in which I have always fought for others, never for myself. Sometimes for a king, sometimes for a woman. The king has betrayed, the woman disdained me. Miserable, unlucky wretch that I am! Women! Can I not make all expiate the crime of one of their sex? What does that need? To have a heart no longer, or to forget that I ever had one; to be strong, even against weakness itself; to lean always, even when one feels that the support is giving way. What is needed to attain, or succeed in all that? To be young, handsome, strong, valiant, rich. I am, or shall be, all that. But honor?" he still continued, "and what is honor after all? A theory which every man understands in his own way. My father tells me: 'Honor is the consideration of what is due to others, and particularly what is due to oneself.' But Guiche, and Manicamp, and Saint-Aignan particularly, would say to me: 'What's honor? Honor consists in studying and yielding to the passions and pleasures of one's king.' Honor such as that indeed, is easy and productive enough. With honor like that, I can keep my post at the court, become a gentleman of the chamber, and accept the command of a regiment, which may at any time be presented to me. With honor such as that, I can be duke and peer.

"The stain which that woman has stamped upon me, the grief that has broken my heart, the heart of the friend and playmate of her childhood, in no way affects M. de Bragelonne, an excellent officer, a courageous leader, who will cover himself with glory at the first encounter, and who will become a hundred times greater than Mademoiselle de la Valliere is to-day, the mistress of the king — for the king will not marry her — and the more publicly he will proclaim her as his mistress, the more opaque will grow the shadow of shame he casts upon her face, in the guise of a crown; and in proportion as others despise, as I despise her, I shall be gleaning honors in the field. Alas! we had walked together side by side, she and I, during the earliest, the brightest, the most angelic portion of our existence, hand in hand along the charming path of life, covered with the blossoms of youth; and then, alas! we reach a cross-road, where she separates herself from me, in which we have to follow a different route, whereby we become more and more widely separated from each other. And to attain the end of this path, oh, Heaven! I am now alone, in utter despair, and crushed to the very earth."

Such were the sinister reflections in which Raoul indulged, when his foot mechanically paused at the door of his own dwelling. He had reached it without remarking the streets through which he passed, without knowing how he had come; he pushed open the door, continued to advance, and ascended the staircase. The staircase, as in most of the houses at that period, was very dark, and the landings most obscure. Raoul lived on the first floor; he paused in order to ring. Olivain appeared, took his sword and cloak from his hands; Raoul himself opened the door which, from the ante-chamber, led into a small *salon*, richly furnished enough for the *salon* of a young man, and completely filled with flowers by Olivain, who, knowing his master's tastes, had shown himself studiously attentive in gratifying them, without caring whether his master perceived his attention or not. There was a portrait of La Valliere in the *salon*, which had been drawn by herself and given by her to Raoul. This portrait, fastened above a large easy chair covered with dark colored damask, was the first point towards which Raoul bent his steps — the first object on which he fixed his eyes. It was, moreover, Raoul's usual habit to do so; every time he entered his room, this portrait, before anything else, attracted his attention. This time, as usual, he walked straight up to the portrait, placed his knees upon the arm chair, and paused to look at it sadly. His arms were crossed upon his breast, his head slightly thrown back, his eyes filled with tears, his mouth worked into a bitter smile. He looked at the portrait of the one he had so tenderly loved; and then all that he had said passed before his mind again, all that he had suffered seemed again to assail his heart; and, after a long silence, he murmured for the third time, “Miserable, unhappy wretch that I am!”

He had hardly pronounced these words, when he heard the sound of a sigh and a groan behind him. He turned sharply round and perceived, in the angle of the *salon*, standing up, a bending veiled female figure, which he had been the means of concealing behind the door as he opened it, and which he had not perceived as he entered. He advanced towards the figure, whose presence in his room had not been announced to him; and as he bowed, and inquired at the same moment who she was, she suddenly raised her head, and removed the veil from her face, revealing her pale and sorrow-stricken features. Raoul staggered back as if he had seen a ghost.

“Louise!” he cried, in a tone of such absolute despair, one could hardly have thought the human voice was capable of so desponding a cry, without the snapping of the human heart.

CHAPTER LXI.

Wounds within Wounds.

Mademoiselle de la Valliere — for it was indeed she — advanced a few steps towards him. “Yes — Louise,” she murmured.

But this interval, short as it had been, was quite sufficient for Raoul to recover himself. “You, mademoiselle?” he said; and then added, in an indefinable tone, “You here!”

“Yes, Raoul,” the young girl replied, “I have been waiting for you.”

“I beg your pardon. When I came into the room I was not aware — ”

“I know — but I entreated Olivain not to tell you — ” She hesitated; and as Raoul did not attempt to interrupt her, a moment’s silence ensued, during which the sound of their throbbing hearts might have been heard, not in unison with each other, but the one beating as violently as the other. It was for Louise to speak, and she made an effort to do so.

“I wished to speak to you,” she said. “It was absolutely necessary that I should see you — myself — alone. I have not hesitated to adopt a step which must remain secret; for no one, except yourself, could understand my motive, Monsieur de Bragelonne.”

“In fact, mademoiselle,” Raoul stammered out, almost breathless from emotion, “as far as I am concerned, and despite the good opinion you have of me, I confess — ”

“Will you do me the great kindness to sit down and listen to me?” said Louise, interrupting him with her soft, sweet voice.

Bragelonne looked at her for a moment; then mournfully shaking his head, he sat, or rather fell down on a chair. “Speak,” he said.

She cast a glance all round her. This look was a timid entreaty, and implored secrecy far more effectually than her expressed words had done a few minutes before. Raoul rouse, and went to the door, which he opened. “Olivain,” he said, “I am not within for any one.” And then, turning towards Louise, he added, “Is not that what you wished?”

Nothing could have produced a greater effect upon Louise than these few words, which seemed to signify, “You see that I still understand you.” She passed a handkerchief across her eyes, in order to remove a rebellious tear which she could not restrain; and then, having collected herself for a moment, she said, “Raoul, do not turn your kind, frank look away from me. You are not one of those men who despise a woman for having given her heart to another, even though her affection might render him unhappy, or might wound his pride.” Raoul did not reply.

“Alas!” continued La Valliere, “it is only too true, my cause is a bad one, and I cannot tell in what way to begin. It will be better for me, I think, to relate to you, very simply, everything that has befallen me. As I shall speak but the pure and simple truth, I shall always find my path clear before me in spite of the obscurity and obstacles I have to brave in order to solace my heart, which is full to overflowing, and wishes to pour itself out at your feet.”

Raoul continued to preserve the same unbroken silence. La Valliere looked at him with an air that seemed to say, “Encourage me; for pity’s sake, but a single word!” But Raoul did not open his lips; and the young girl was obliged to continue:

“Just now,” she said, “M. de Saint-Aignan came to me by the king’s directions.” She cast down her eyes as she said this; while Raoul, on his side, turned his away, in order to avoid looking at her. “M. de Saint-Aignan came to me from the king,” she repeated, “and told me that you knew all;” and she attempted to look Raoul in the face, after inflicting this further wound upon him, in addition to the many others he had already received; but it was impossible to meet Raoul’s eyes.

“He told me you were incensed with me — and justly so, I admit.”

This time Raoul looked at the young girl, and a smile full of disdain passed across his lips.

“Oh!” she continued, “I entreat you, do not say that you have had any other feeling against me than that of anger merely. Raoul, wait until I have told you all — wait until I have said to you all that I had to say — all that I came to say.”

Raoul, by the strength of his iron will, forced his features to assume a calmer expression, and the disdainful smile upon his lip passed away.

“In the first place,” said La Valliere, “in the first place, with my hands raised in entreaty towards you, with my forehead bowed to the ground before you, I entreat you, as the most generous, as the noblest of men, to pardon, to forgive me. If I have left you in ignorance of what was passing in my own bosom, never, at least, would I have consented to deceive you. Oh! I entreat you, Raoul — I implore you on my knees — answer me one word, even though you wrong me in doing so. Better, far better, an injurious word from your lips, than suspicion resting in your heart."

"I admire your subtlety of expression, mademoiselle," said Raoul, making an effort to remain calm. "To leave another in ignorance that you are deceiving him, is loyal; but to deceive him — it seems that would be very wrong, and that you would not do it."

"Monsieur, for a long time I thought that I loved you better than anything else; and so long as I believed in my affection for you, I told you that loved you. I could have sworn it on the altar; but a day came when I was undeceived."

"Well, on that day, mademoiselle, knowing that I still continued to love you, true loyalty of conduct should have forced you to inform me you had ceased to love me."

"But on that day, Raoul — on that day, when I read in the depths of my own heart, when I confessed to myself that you no longer filled my mind entirely, when I saw another future before me than that of being your friend, your life-long companion, your wife — on that day, Raoul, you were not, alas! any more beside me."

"But you knew where I was, mademoiselle; you could have written to me."

"Raoul, I did not dare to do so. Raoul, I have been weak and cowardly. I knew you so thoroughly — I knew how devotedly you loved me, that I trembled at the bare idea of the grief I was about to cause you; and that is so true, Raoul, that this very moment I am now speaking to you, bending thus before you, my heart crushed in my bosom, my voice full of sighs, my eyes full of tears, it is so perfectly true, that I have no other defense than my frankness, I have no other sorrow greater than that which I read in your eyes."

Raoul attempted to smile.

"No!" said the young girl, with a profound conviction, "no, no; you will not do me so foul a wrong as to disguise your feelings before me now! You loved me; you were sure of your affection for me; you did not deceive yourself; you do not lie to your own heart — whilst I — I — " And pale as death, her arms thrown despairingly above her head, she fell upon her knees.

“Whilst you,” said Raoul, “you told me you loved me, and yet you loved another.”

“Alas, yes!” cried the poor girl; “alas, yes! I do love another; and that other — oh! for Heaven’s sake let me say it, Raoul, for it is my only excuse — that other I love better than my own life, better than my own soul even. Forgive my fault, or punish my treason, Raoul. I came here in no way to defend myself, but merely to say to you: ‘You know what it is to love!’ — in such a case am I! I love to that degree, that I would give my life, my very soul, to the man I love. If he should ever cease to love me, I shall die of grief and despair, unless Heaven come to my assistance, unless Heaven does show pity upon me. Raoul, I came here to submit myself to your will, whatever it might be — to die, if it were your wish I should die. Kill me, then, Raoul! if in your heart you believe I deserve death.”

“Take care, mademoiselle,” said Raoul: “the woman who invites death is one who has nothing but her heart’s blood to offer to her deceived and betrayed lover.”

“You are right,” she said.

Raoul uttered a deep sigh, as he exclaimed, “And you love without being able to forget?”

“I love without a wish to forget; without a wish ever to love any one else,” replied La Valliere.

“Very well,” said Raoul. “You have said to me, in fact, all you had to say; all I could possibly wish to know. And now, mademoiselle, it is I who ask your forgiveness, for it is I who have almost been an obstacle in your life; I, too, who have been wrong, for, in deceiving myself, I helped to deceive you.”

“Oh!” said La Valliere, “I do not ask you so much as that, Raoul.”

“I only am to blame, mademoiselle,” continued Raoul, “better informed than yourself of the difficulties of this life, I should have enlightened you. I ought not to have relied upon uncertainty; I ought to have extracted an answer from your heart, whilst I hardly even sought an acknowledgement from your lips. Once more, mademoiselle, it is I who ask your forgiveness.”

“Impossible, impossible!” she cried, “you are mocking me.”

“How, impossible?”

“Yes, it is impossible to be so good, and kind, ah! perfect to such a degree as that.”

"Take care!" said Raoul, with a bitter smile, "for presently you may say perhaps I did not love you."

"Oh! you love me like an affectionate brother; let me hope that, Raoul."

"As a brother! undeceive yourself, Louise. I love you as a lover — as a husband, with the deepest, the truest, the fondest affection."

"Raoul, Raoul!"

"As a brother! Oh, Louise! I love you so deeply, that I would have shed my blood for you, drop by drop; I would, oh! how willingly, have suffered myself to be torn to pieces for your sake, have sacrificed my very future for you. I love you so deeply, Louise, that my heart feels dead and crushed within me, — my faith in human nature all is gone, — my eyes have lost their light; I loved you so deeply, that I now no longer see, think of, care for, anything, either in this world or the next."

"Raoul — dear Raoul! spare me, I implore you!" cried La Valliere. "Oh! if I had but known — "

"It is too late, Louise; you love, you are happy in your affection; I read your happiness through your tears — behind the tears which the loyalty of your nature makes you shed; I feel the sighs your affection breathes forth. Louise, Louise, you have made me the most abjectly wretched man living; leave me, I entreat you. Adieu! adieu!"

"Forgive me! oh, forgive me, Raoul, for what I have done."

"Have I not done much, much more? *Have I not told you that I love you still?*" She buried her face in her hands.

"And to tell you that — do you hear me, Louise? — to tell you that, at such a moment as this, to tell you that, as I have told you, is to pronounce my own sentence of death. Adieu!" La Valliere held out her hands to him in vain.

"We ought not to see each other again in this world," he said, and as she was on the point of crying out in bitter agony at this remark, he placed his hand on her mouth to stifle the exclamation. She pressed her lips upon it, and fell fainting to the ground. "Olivain," said Raoul, "take this young lady and bear her to the carriage which is waiting for her at the door." As Olivain lifted her up, Raoul made a movement as if to dart towards La Valliere, in order to give her a first and last kiss, but, stopping abruptly, he said, "No! she is not mine. I am no thief — as is the king of France." And he returned to his room, whilst the lackey carried La Valliere, still fainting, to the carriage.

CHAPTER LXII.

What Raoul Had Guessed.

As soon as Raoul had quitted Athos and D’Artagnan, as the two exclamations that had followed his departure escaped their lips, they found themselves face to face alone. Athos immediately resumed the earnest air that he had assumed at D’Artagnan’s arrival.

“Well,” he said, “what have you come to announce to me, my friend?”

“I?” inquired D’Artagnan.

“Yes; I do not see you in this way without some reason for it,” said Athos, smiling.

“The deuce!” said D’Artagnan.

“I will place you at your ease. The king is furious, I suppose?”

“Well, I must say he is not altogether pleased.”

“And you have come to arrest me, then?”

“My dear friend, you have hit the very mark.”

“Oh, I expected it. I am quite ready to go with you.”

“Deuce take it!” said D’Artagnan, “what a hurry you are in.”

“I am afraid of delaying you,” said Athos, smiling.

“I have plenty of time. Are you not curious, besides, to know how things went on between the king and me?”

“If you will be good enough to tell me, I will listen with the greatest of pleasure,” said Athos, pointing out to D’Artagnan a large chair, into which the latter threw himself, assuming the easiest possible attitude.

“Well, I will do so willingly enough,” continued D’Artagnan, “for the conversation is rather curious, I must say. In the first place the king sent for me.”

“As soon as I had left?”

“You were just going down the last steps of the staircase, as the musketeers told me. I arrived. My dear Athos, he was not red in the face merely, he was positively purple. I was not aware, of course, of what had passed; only, on the ground, lying on the floor, I saw a sword broken in two.”

"'Captain d'Artagnan,' cried the king, as soon as he saw me.

"'Sire,' I replied.

"'M. de la Fere has just left me; he is an insolent man.'

"'An insolent man!' I exclaimed, in such a tone that the king stopped suddenly short.

"'Captain d'Artagnan,' resumed the king, with his teeth clenched, 'you will be good enough to listen to and hear me.'

"'That is my duty, sire.'

"'I have, out of consideration for M. de la Fere, wished to spare him — he is a man of whom I still retain some kind recollections — the discredit of being arrested in my palace. You will therefore take a carriage.' At this I made a slight movement.

"'If you object to arrest him yourself,' continued the king, 'send me my captain of the guards.'

"'Sire,' I replied, 'there is no necessity for the captain of the guards, since I am on duty.'

"'I should not like to annoy you,' said the king, kindly, 'for you have always served me well, Monsieur D'Artagnan.'

"'You do not "annoy" me, sire,' I replied; 'I am on duty, that is all.'

"'But,' said the king, in astonishment, 'I believe the comte is your friend?'

"'If he were my father, sire, it would not make me less on duty than I am.'

"The king looked at me; he saw how unmoved my face was, and seemed satisfied. 'You will arrest M. le Comte de la Fere, then?' he inquired.

"'Most certainly, sire, if you give me the order to do so.'

"'Very well; I order you to do so.'

"I bowed, and replied, 'Where is the comte, sire?'

"'You will look for him.'

"'And am I to arrest him, wherever he may be?'

"'Yes; but try that he may be at his own house. If he should have started for his own estate, leave Paris at once, and arrest him on his way thither.'

"I bowed; but as I did not move, he said, 'Well, what are you waiting for?'

"'For the order to arrest the comte, signed by yourself.'

"The king seemed annoyed; for, in point of fact, it was the exercise of a fresh act of authority, a repetition of the arbitrary act, if, indeed, it is to be considered as such. He took hold of his pen slowly, and evidently in no very good temper; and then he wrote, ‘Order for M. le Chevalier d’Artagnan, captain of my musketeers, to arrest M. le Comte de la Fere, wherever he is to be found.’ He then turned towards me; but I was looking on without moving a muscle of my face. In all probability he thought he perceived something like bravado in my tranquil manner, for he signed hurriedly, and then handing me the order, he said, ‘Go, monsieur!’ I obeyed; and here I am.”

Athos pressed his friend’s hand. “Well, let us set off,” he said.

“Oh! surely,” said D’Artagnan, “you must have some trifling matters to arrange before you leave your apartments in this manner.”

“I? — not at all.”

“Why not?”

“Why, you know, D’Artagnan, that I have always been a very simple traveler on this earth, ready to go to the end of the world by the order of my sovereign; ready to quit it at the summons of my Maker. What does a man who is thus prepared require in such a case? — a portmanteau, or a shroud. I am ready at this moment, as I have always been, my dear friend, and can accompany you at once.”

“But, Bragelonne — ”

“I have brought him up in the same principles I laid down for my own guidance; and you observed that, as soon as he perceived you, he guessed, that very moment, the motive of your visit. We have thrown him off his guard for a moment; but do not be uneasy, he is sufficiently prepared for my disgrace not to be too much alarmed at it. So, let us go.”

“Very well, let us go,” said D’Artagnan, quietly.

“As I broke my sword in the king’s presence, and threw the pieces at his feet, I presume that will dispense with the necessity of delivering it over to you.”

“You are quite right; and besides that, what the deuce do you suppose I could do with your sword?”

“Am I to walk behind, or before you?” inquired Athos, laughing.

“You will walk arm in arm with me,” replied D’Artagnan, as he took the comte’s arm to descend the staircase; and in this manner they arrived at the landing. Grimaud, whom they had met in the ante-room, looked at them as they went out together in this manner, with some little uneasiness; his experience of affairs was quite sufficient to give him good reason to suspect that there was something wrong.

“Ah! is that you, Grimaud?” said Athos, kindly. “We are going — ”

“To take a turn in my carriage,” interrupted D’Artagnan, with a friendly nod of the head.

Grimaud thanked D’Artagnan by a grimace, which was evidently intended for a smile, and accompanied both the friends to the door. Athos entered first into the carriage; D’Artagnan followed him without saying a word to the coachman. The departure had taken place so quietly, that it excited no disturbance or attention even in the neighborhood. When the carriage had reached the quays, “You are taking me to the Bastile, I perceive,” said Athos.

“I?” said D’Artagnan, “I take you wherever you may choose to go; nowhere else, I can assure you.”

“What do you mean?” said the comte, surprised.

“Why, surely, my dear friend,” said D’Artagnan, “you quite understand that I undertook the mission with no other object in view than that of carrying it out exactly as you liked. You surely did not expect that I was going to get you thrown into prison like that, brutally, and without any reflection. If I had anticipated that, I should have let the captain of the guards undertake it.”

“And so — ?” said Athos.

“And so, I repeat again, we will go wherever you may choose.”

“My dear friend,” said Athos, embracing D’Artagnan, “how like you that is!”

“Well, it seems simple enough to me. The coachman will take you to the barrier of the Cours-la-Reine; you will find a horse there which I have ordered to be kept ready for you; with that horse you will be able to do three posts without stopping; and I, on my side, will take care not to return to the king, to tell him that you have gone away, until the very moment it will be impossible to overtake you. In the meantime you will have reached Le Havre, and from Le Havre across to England, where you will find the charming residence of which M. Monk made me a present, without speaking of the hospitality which King Charles will not fail to show you. Well, what do you think of this project?”

Athos shook his head, and then said, smiling as he did so, “No, no, take me to the Bastile.”

“You are an obstinate fellow, my dear Athos,” returned D’Artagnan, “reflect for a few moments.”

“On what subject?”

“That you are no longer twenty years of age. Believe me, I speak according to my own knowledge and experience. A prison is certain death for men who are at our time of life. No, no; I will never allow you to languish in prison in such a way. Why, the very thought of it makes my head turn giddy.”

“Dear D’Artagnan,” Athos replied, “Heaven most fortunately made my body as strong, powerful, and enduring as my mind; and, rely upon it, I shall retain my strength up to the very last moment.”

“But this is not strength of mind or character; it is sheer madness.”

“No, D’Artagnan, it is the highest order of reasoning. Do not suppose that I should in the slightest degree in the world discuss the question with you, whether you would not be ruined in endeavoring to save me. I should have done precisely as you propose if flight had been part of my plan of action; I should, therefore, have accepted from you what, without any doubt, you would have accepted from me. No! I know you too well even to breathe a word upon the subject.”

“Ah! if you would only let me do it,” said D’Artagnan, “what a dance we would give his most gracious majesty!”

“Still he is the king; do not forget that, my dear friend.”

“Oh! that is all the same to me; and king though he be, I would plainly tell him, ‘Sire, imprison, exile, kill every one in France and Europe; order me to arrest and poniard even whom you like — even were it Monsieur, your own brother; but do not touch one of the four musketeers, or if so, *mordioux!*’“

“My dear friend,” replied Athos, with perfect calmness, “I should like to persuade you of one thing; namely, that I wish to be arrested; that I desire above all things that my arrest should take place.”

D’Artagnan made a slight movement of his shoulders.

“Nay, I wish it, I repeat, more than anything; if you were to let me escape, it would be only to return of my own accord, and constitute myself a prisoner. I wish to prove to this young man, who is dazzled by the power and splendor of his crown, that he can be regarded as the first and chiefest among men only on the one condition of his proving himself to be the most generous and the wisest. He may punish me, imprison, torture me, it matters not. He abuses his opportunities, and I wish him to learn the bitterness of remorse, while Heaven teaches him what chastisement is.”

“Well, well,” replied D’Artagnan, “I know only too well that, when you have once said, ‘no,’ you mean ‘no.’ I do not insist any longer; you wish to go to the Bastile?”

“I do wish to go there.”

“Let us go, then! To the Bastile!” cried D’Artagnan to the coachman. And throwing himself back in the carriage, he gnawed the ends of his mustache with a fury which, for Athos, who knew him well, signified a resolution either already taken or in course of formation. A profound silence ensued in the carriage, which continued to roll on, but neither faster nor slower than before. Athos took the musketeer by the hand.

“You are not angry with me, D’Artagnan?” he said.

“I! — oh, no! certainly not; of course not. What you do for heroism, I should have done from obstinacy.”

“But you are quite of opinion, are you not, that Heaven will avenge me, D’Artagnan?”

“And I know one or two on earth who will not fail to lend a helping hand,” said the captain.

CHAPTER LXIII.

Three Guests Astonished to Find Themselves at Supper Together.

The carriage arrived at the outside of the gate of the Bastile. A soldier on guard stopped it, but D'Artagnan had only to utter a single word to procure admittance, and the carriage passed on without further difficulty. Whilst they were proceeding along the covered way which led to the courtyard of the governor's residence, D'Artagnan, whose lynx eyes saw everything, even through the walls, suddenly cried out, "What is that out yonder?"

"Well," said Athos, quietly; "what is it?"

"Look yonder, Athos."

"In the courtyard?"

"Yes, yes; make haste!"

"Well, a carriage; very likely conveying a prisoner like myself."

"That would be too droll."

"I do not understand you."

"Make haste and look again, and look at the man who is just getting out of that carriage."

At that very moment a second sentinel stopped D'Artagnan, and while the formalities were being gone through, Athos could see at a hundred paces from him the man whom his friend had pointed out to him. He was, in fact, getting out of the carriage at the door of the governor's house. "Well," inquired D'Artagnan, "do you see him?"

"Yes; he is a man in a gray suit."

"What do you say of him?"

"I cannot very well tell; he is, as I have just now told you, a man in a gray suit, who is getting out of a carriage; that is all."

"Athos, I will wager anything that it is he."

"He, who?"

"Aramis."

"Aramis arrested? Impossible!"

"I do not say he is arrested, since we see him alone in his carriage."

"Well, then, what is he doing here?"

“Oh! he knows Baisemeaux, the governor,” replied the musketeer, slyly; “so we have arrived just in time.”

“What for?”

“In order to see what we can see.”

“I regret this meeting exceedingly. When Aramis sees me, he will be very much annoyed, in the first place, at seeing me, and in the next at being seen.”

“Very well reasoned.”

“Unfortunately, there is no remedy for it; whenever any one meets another in the Bastile, even if he wished to draw back to avoid him, it would be impossible.”

“Athos, I have an idea; the question is, to spare Aramis the annoyance you were speaking of, is it not?”

“What is to be done?”

“I will tell you; or in order to explain myself in the best possible way, let me relate the affair in my own manner; I will not recommend you to tell a falsehood, for that would be impossible for you to do; but I will tell falsehoods enough for both; it is easy to do that when one is born to the nature and habits of a Gascon.”

Athos smiled. The carriage stopped where the one we have just now pointed out had stopped; namely, at the door of the governor’s house. “It is understood, then?” said D’Artagnan, in a low voice to his friend. Athos consented by a gesture. They ascended the staircase. There will be no occasion for surprise at the facility with which they had entered into the Bastile, if it be remembered that, before passing the first gate, in fact, the most difficult of all, D’Artagnan had announced that he had brought a prisoner of state. At the third gate, on the contrary, that is to say, when he had once fairly entered the prison, he merely said to the sentinel, “To M. Baisemeaux;” and they both passed on. In a few minutes they were in the governor’s dining-room, and the first face which attracted D’Artagnan’s observation was that of Aramis, who was seated side by side with Baisemeaux, awaiting the announcement of a meal whose odor impregnated the whole apartment. If D’Artagnan pretended surprise, Aramis did not pretend at all; he started when he saw his two friends, and his emotion was very apparent. Athos and D’Artagnan, however, complimented him as usual, and Baisemeaux, amazed, completely stupefied by the presence of his three guests, began to perform a few evolutions around them.

“By what lucky accident — ”

“We were just going to ask you,” retorted D’Artagnan.

“Are we going to give ourselves up as prisoners?” cried Aramis, with an affection of hilarity.

“Ah! ah!” said D’Artagnan; “it is true the walls smell deucedly like a prison. Monsieur de Baisemeaux, you know you invited me to sup with you the other day.”

“I?” cried Baisemeaux.

“Yes, of course you did, although you now seem so struck with amazement. Don’t you remember it?”

Baisemeaux turned pale and then red, looked at Aramis, who looked at him, and finished by stammering out, “Certainly — I am delighted — but, upon my honor — I have not the slightest — Ah! I have such a wretched memory.”

“Well! I am wrong, I see,” said D’Artagnan, as if he were offended.

“Wrong, what for?”

“Wrong to remember anything about it, it seems.”

Baisemeaux hurried towards him. “Do not stand on ceremony, my dear captain,” he said; “I have the worst memory in the world. I no sooner leave off thinking of my pigeons and their pigeon-house, than I am no better than the rawest recruit.”

“At all events, you remember it now,” said D’Artagnan, boldly.

“Yes, yes,” replied the governor, hesitating; “I think I do remember.”

“It was when you came to the palace to see me; you told me some story or other about your accounts with M. de Louviere and M. de Tremblay.”

“Oh, yes! perfectly.”

“And about M. d’Herblay’s kindness towards you.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Aramis, looking at the unhappy governor full in the face, “and yet you just now said you had no memory, Monsieur de Baisemeaux.”

Baisemeaux interrupted the musketeer in the middle of his revelations. “Yes, yes; you’re quite right; how could I have forgotten; I remember it now as well as possible; I beg you a thousand pardons. But now, once for all, my dear M. d’Artagnan, be sure that at this present time, as at any other, whether invited or not, you are perfectly at home here, you and M. d’Herblay, your friend,” he said, turning towards Aramis; “and this gentleman, too,” he added, bowing to Athos.

“Well, I thought it would be sure to turn out so,” replied D’Artagnan, “and that is the reason I came. Having nothing to do this evening at the Palais Royal, I wished to judge for myself what your ordinary style of living was like; and as I was coming along, I met the Comte de la Fere.”

Athos bowed. “The comte, who had just left his majesty, handed me an order which required immediate attention. We were close by here; I wished to call in, even if it were for no other object than that of shaking hands with you and of presenting the comte to you, of whom you spoke so highly that evening at the palace when — ”

“Certainly, certainly — M. le Comte de la Fere?”

“Precisely.”

“The comte is welcome, I am sure.”

“And he will sup with you two, I suppose, whilst I, unfortunate dog that I am, must run off on a matter of duty. Oh! what happy beings you are, compared to myself,” he added, sighing as loud as Porthos might have done.

“And so you are going away, then?” said Aramis and Baisemeaux together, with the same expression of delighted surprise, the tone of which was immediately noticed by D’Artagnan.

“I leave you in my place,” he said, “a noble and excellent guest.” And he touched Athos gently on the shoulder, who, astonished also, could not help exhibiting his surprise a little; which was noticed by Aramis only, for M. de Baisemeaux was not quite equal to the three friends in point of intelligence.

“What, are you going to leave us?” resumed the governor.

“I shall only be about an hour, or an hour and a half. I will return in time for dessert.”

“Oh! we will wait for you,” said Baisemeaux.

“No, no; that would be really disobliging me.”

“You will be sure to return, though?” said Athos, with an expression of doubt.

“Most certainly,” he said, pressing his friend’s hand confidently; and he added, in a low voice, “Wait for me, Athos; be cheerful and lively as possible, and above all, don’t allude even to business affairs, for Heaven’s sake.”

And with a renewed pressure of the hand, he seemed to warn the comte of the necessity of keeping perfectly discreet and impenetrable. Baisemeaux led D’Artagnan to the gate. Aramis, with many friendly protestations of delight, sat down by Athos, determined to make him speak; but Athos possessed every virtue and quality to the very highest degree. If necessity had required it, he would have been the finest orator in the world, but on other occasions he would rather have died than have opened his lips.

Ten minutes after D'Artagnan's departure, the three gentlemen sat down to table, which was covered with the most substantial display of gastronomic luxury. Large joints, exquisite dishes, preserves, the greatest variety of wines, appeared successively upon the table, which was served at the king's expense, and of which expense M. Colbert would have found no difficulty in saving two thirds, without any one in the Bastile being the worse for it. Baisemeaux was the only one who ate and drank with gastronomic resolution. Aramis allowed nothing to pass by him, but merely touched everything he took; Athos, after the soup and three *hors d'oeuvres*, ate nothing more. The style of conversation was such as might have been anticipated between three men so opposite in temper and ideas. Aramis was incessantly asking himself by what extraordinary chance Athos was there at Baisemeaux's when D'Artagnan was no longer there, and why D'Artagnan did not remain when Athos was there. Athos sounded all the depths of the mind of Aramis, who lived in the midst of subterfuge, evasion, and intrigue; he studied his man well and thoroughly, and felt convinced that he was engaged upon some important project. And then he too began to think of his own personal affair, and to lose himself in conjectures as to D'Artagnan's reason for having left the Bastile so abruptly, and for leaving behind him a prisoner so badly introduced and so badly looked after by the prison authorities. But we shall not pause to examine into the thoughts and feelings of these personages, but will leave them to themselves, surrounded by the remains of poultry, game, and fish, which Baisemeaux's generous knife and fork had so mutilated. We are going to follow D'Artagnan instead, who, getting into the carriage which had brought him, said to the coachman, "Return to the palace, as fast as the horses can gallop."

CHAPTER LXIV.

What Took Place at the Louvre During the Supper at the Bastile.

M. de Saint-Aignan had executed the commission with which the king had intrusted him for La Valliere — as we have already seen in one of the preceding chapters; but, whatever his eloquence, he did not succeed in persuading the young girl that she had in the king a protector powerful enough for her under any combination of circumstances, and that she had no need of any one else in the world when the king was on her side. In point of fact, at the very first word which the favorite mentioned of the discovery of the famous secret, Louise, in a passion of tears, abandoned herself in utter despair to a sorrow which would have been far from flattering for the king, if he had been a witness of it from one of the corners of the room. Saint-Aignan, in his character of ambassador, felt almost as greatly offended at it as his master himself would have been, and returned to inform the king what he had seen and heard; and it is thus we find him, in a state of great agitation, in the presence of the king, who was, if possible, in a state of even greater flurry than himself.

"But," said the king to the courtier, when the latter had finished his report, "what did she decide to do? Shall I at least see her presently before supper? Will she come to me, or shall I be obliged to go to her room?"

"I believe, sire, that if your majesty wishes to see her, you will not only have to take the first step in advance, but will have to go the whole way."

"That I do not mind. Do you think she has yet a secret fancy for young Bragelonne?" muttered the king between his teeth.

"Oh! sire, that is not possible; for it is you alone, I am convinced, Mademoiselle de la Valliere loves, and that, too, with all her heart. But you know that De Bragelonne belongs to that proud race who play the part of Roman heroes."

The king smiled feebly; he knew how true the illustration was, for Athos had just left him.

"As for Mademoiselle de la Valliere," Saint-Aignan continued, "she was brought up under the care of the Dowager Madame, that is to say, in the greatest austerity and formality. This young engaged couple coldly exchanged their little vows in the prim presence of the moon and stars; and now, when they find they have to break those vows asunder, it plays the very deuce with them."

Saint-Aignan thought to have made the king laugh; but on the contrary, from a mere smile Louis passed to the greatest seriousness of manner. He already began to experience that remorse which the comte had promised D'Artagnan he would inflict upon him. He reflected that, in fact, these young persons had loved and sworn fidelity to each other; that one of the two had kept his word, and that the other was too conscientious not to feel her perjury most bitterly. And his remorse was not unaccompanied; for bitter pangs of jealousy began to beset the king's heart. He did not say another word, and instead of going to pay a visit to his mother, or the queen, or Madame, in order to amuse himself a little, and make the ladies laugh, as he himself used to say, he threw himself into the huge armchair in which his august father Louis XIII. had passed so many weary days and years in company with Barradat and Cinq-Mars. Saint-Aignan perceived the king was not to be amused at that moment; he tried a last resource, and pronounced Louise's name, which made the king look up immediately. "What does your majesty intend to do this evening — shall Mademoiselle de la Valliere be informed of your intention to see her?"

"It seems she is already aware of that," replied the king. "No, no, Saint-Aignan," he continued, after a moment's pause, "we will both of us pass our time in thinking, and musing, and dreaming; when Mademoiselle de la Valliere shall have sufficiently regretted what she now regrets, she will deign, perhaps, to give us some news of herself."

"Ah! sire, is it possible you can so misunderstand her heart, which is so full of devotion?"

The king rose, flushed from vexation and annoyance; he was a prey to jealousy as well as to remorse. Saint-Aignan was just beginning to feel that his position was becoming awkward, when the curtain before the door was raised. The king turned hastily round; his first idea was that a letter from Louise had arrived; but, instead of a letter of love, he only saw his captain of musketeers, standing upright, and perfectly silent in the doorway. "M. d'Artagnan," he said, "ah! Well, monsieur?"

D'Artagnan looked at Saint-Aignan; the king's eyes took the same direction as those of his captain; these looks would have been clear to any one, and for a still greater reason they were so for Saint-Aignan. The courtier bowed and quitted the room, leaving the king and D'Artagnan alone.

"Is it done?" inquired the king.

"Yes, sire," replied the captain of the musketeers, in a grave voice, "it is done."

The king was unable to say another word. Pride, however, obliged him not to pause at what he had done; whenever a sovereign has adopted a decisive course, even though it be unjust, he is compelled to prove to all witnesses, and particularly to prove it to himself, that he was quite right all through. A good means for effecting that — an almost infallible means, indeed — is, to try and prove his victim to be in the wrong. Louis, brought up by Mazarin and Anne of Austria, knew better than any one else his vocation as a monarch; he therefore endeavored to prove it on the present occasion. After a few moment's pause, which he had employed in making silently to himself the same reflections which we have just expressed aloud, he said, in an indifferent tone: "What did the comte say?"

"Nothing at all, sire."

"Surely he did not allow himself to be arrested without saying something?"

"He said he expected to be arrested, sire."

The king raised his head haughtily. "I presume," he said, "that M. le Comte de la Fere has not continued to play his obstinate and rebellious part."

"In the first place, sire, what do you wish to signify by *rebellious?*" quietly asked the musketeer. "A rebel, in the eyes of the king, is a man who not only allows himself to be shut up in the Bastile, but still more, who opposes those who do not wish to take him there."

"Who do not wish to take him there!" exclaimed the king. "What do you say, captain! Are you mad?"

"I believe not, sire."

"You speak of persons who did not wish to arrest M. de la Fere! Who are those persons, may I ask?"

"I should say those whom your majesty intrusted with that duty."

"But it was you whom I intrusted with it," exclaimed the king.

"Yes, sire; it was I."

"And yet you say that, despite my orders, you had the intention of not arresting the man who had insulted me!"

"Yes, sire — that was really my intention. I even proposed to the comte to mount a horse that I had prepared for him at the Barriere de la Conference."

"And what was your object in getting this horse ready?"

"Why, sire, in order that M. le Comte de la Fere might be able to reach Le Havre, and from that place make his escape to England."

"You betrayed me, then, monsieur?" cried the king, kindling with a wild pride.

"Exactly so."

There was nothing to say in answer to statements made in such a tone; the king was astounded at such an obstinate and open resistance on the part of D'Artagnan. "At least you had a reason, Monsieur d'Artagnan, for acting as you did?" said the king, proudly.

"I have always a reason for everything, sire."

"Your reason cannot be your friendship for the comte, at all events, — the only one that can be of any avail, the only one that could possibly excuse you, — for I placed you perfectly at your ease in that respect."

"Me, sire?"

"Did I not give you the choice to arrest, or not to arrest M. le Comte de la Fere?"

"Yes, sire, but — "

"But what?" exclaimed the king, impatiently.

"But you warned me, sire, that if I did not arrest him, your captain of the guard should do so."

"Was I not considerate enough towards you, from the very moment I did not compel you to obey me?"

"To me, sire, you were, but not to my friend, for my friend would be arrested all the same, whether by myself or by the captain of the guards."

"And this is your devotion, monsieur! a devotion which argues and reasons. You are no soldier, monsieur!"

"I wait for your majesty to tell me what I am."

"Well, then — you are a Frondeur."

"And since there is no longer any Fronde, sire, in that case — "

"But if what you say is true — "

"What I say is always true, sire."

"What have you come to say to me, monsieur?"

"I have come to say to your majesty, 'Sire, M. de la Fere is in the Bastile.'"

"That is not your fault, it would seem."

"That is true, sire; but at all events he is there; and since he is there, it is important that your majesty should know it."

"Ah! Monsieur d'Artagnan, so you set your king at defiance."

"Sire — "

"Monsieur d'Artagnan! I warn you that you are abusing my patience."

"On the contrary, sire."

"What do you mean by 'on the contrary'?"

"I have come to get myself arrested, too."

"To get yourself arrested, — you!"

"Of course. My friend will get wearied to death in the Bastile by himself; and I have come to propose to your majesty to permit me to bear him company; if your majesty will but give me the word, I will arrest myself; I shall not need the captain of the guards for that, I assure you."

The king darted towards the table and seized hold of a pen to write the order for D'Artagnan's imprisonment. "Pay attention, monsieur, that this is forever," cried the king, in tones of sternest menace.

"I can quite believe that," returned the musketeer; "for when you have once done such an act as that, you will never be able to look me in the face again."

The king dashed down his pen violently. "Leave the room, monsieur!" he said.

"Not so, if it please your majesty."

"What is that you say?"

"Sire, I came to speak gently and temperately to your majesty; your majesty got into a passion with me; that is a misfortune; but I shall not the less on that account say what I had to say to you."

"Your resignation, monsieur, — your resignation!" cried the king.

"Sire, you know whether I care about my resignation or not, since at Blois, on the very day when you refused King Charles the million which my friend the Comte de la Fere gave him, I then tendered my resignation to your majesty."

"Very well, monsieur — do it at once!"

"No, sire; for there is no question of my resignation at the present moment. Your majesty took up your pen just now to send me to the Bastile, — why should you change your intention?"

"D'Artagnan! Gascon that you are! who is king, allow me to ask, — you or myself?"

"You, sire, unfortunately."

"What do you mean by 'unfortunately'?"

"Yes, sire; for if it were I — "

"If it were you, you would approve of M. d'Artagnan's rebellious conduct, I suppose?"

"Certainly."

"Really!" said the king, shrugging his shoulders.

"And I should tell my captain of the musketeers," continued D'Artagnan, "I should tell him, looking at him all the while with human eyes, and not with eyes like coals of fire, 'M. d'Artagnan, I had forgotten that I was the king, for I descended from my throne in order to insult a gentleman.'"

"Monsieur," said the king, "do you think you can excuse your friend by exceeding him in insolence?"

"Oh! sire! I should go much further than he did," said D'Artagnan; "and it would be your own fault. I should tell you what he, a man full of the finest sense of delicacy, did not tell you; I should say — 'Sire, you have sacrificed his son, and he defended his son — you sacrificed himself; he addressed you in the name of honor, of religion, of virtue — you repulsed, drove him away, imprisoned him.' I should be harder than he was, for I should say to you — 'Sire; it is for you to choose. Do you wish to have friends or lackeys — soldiers or slaves — great men or mere puppets? Do you wish men to serve you, or to bend and crouch before you? Do you wish men to love you, or to be afraid of you? If you prefer baseness, intrigue, cowardice, say so at once, sire, and we will leave you, — we who are the only individuals who are left, — nay, I will say more, the only models of the valor of former times; we who have done our duty, and have exceeded, perhaps, in courage and in merit, the men already great for posterity. Choose, sire! and that, too, without delay. Whatever relics remain to you of the great nobility, guard them with a jealous eye; you will never be deficient in courtiers. Delay not — and send me to the Bastile with my friend; for, if you did not know how to listen to the Comte de la Fere, whose voice is the sweetest and noblest in all the world when honor is the theme; if you do not know how to listen to D'Artagnan, the frankest and honestest voice of sincerity, you are a bad king, and to-morrow will be a poor king. And learn from me, sire, that bad kings are hated by their people, and poor kings are driven ignominiously away.' That is what I had to say to you, sire; you were wrong to drive me to say it."

The king threw himself back in his chair, cold as death, and as livid as a corpse. Had a thunderbolt fallen at his feet, he could not have been more astonished; he seemed as if his respiration had utterly ceased, and that he was at the point of death. The honest voice of sincerity, as D'Artagnan had called it, had pierced through his heart like a sword-blade.

D'Artagnan had said all he had to say. Comprehending the king's anger, he drew his sword, and, approaching Louis XIV. respectfully, he placed it on the table. But the king, with a furious gesture, thrust aside the sword, which fell on the ground and rolled to D'Artagnan's feet. Notwithstanding the perfect mastery which D'Artagnan exercised over himself, he, too, in his turn, became pale, and, trembling with indignation, said: "A king may disgrace a soldier, — he may exile him, and may even condemn him to death; but were he a hundred times a king, he has no right to insult him by casting a dishonor upon his sword! Sire, a king of France has never repulsed with contempt the sword of a man such as I am! Stained with disgrace as this sword now is, it has henceforth no other sheath than either your heart or my own! I choose my own, sire; and you have to thank Heaven and my own patience that I do so." Then snatching up his sword, he cried, "My blood be upon your head!" and, with a rapid gesture, he placed the hilt upon the floor and directed the point of the blade towards his breast. The king, however, with a movement far more rapid than that of D'Artagnan, threw his right arm around the musketeer's neck, and with his left hand seized hold of the blade by the middle, and returned it silently to the scabbard. D'Artagnan, upright, pale, and still trembling, let the king do all to the very end. Louis, overcome and softened by gentler feelings, returned to the table, took a pen in his hand, wrote a few lines, signed them, and then held it out to D'Artagnan.

"What is this paper, sire?" inquired the captain.

"An order for M. d'Artagnan to set the Comte de la Fere at liberty immediately."

D'Artagnan seized the king's hand, and imprinted a kiss upon it; he then folded the order, placed it in his belt, and quitted the room. Neither the king nor the captain had uttered a syllable.

“Oh, human heart! thou guide and director of kings,” murmured Louis, when alone, “when shall I learn to read in your inmost recesses, as in the leaves of a book! Oh, I am not a bad king — nor am I a poor king; I am but still a child, when all is said and done.”

CHAPTER LXV.

Political Rivals.

D’Artagnan had promised M. de Baisemeaux to return in time for dessert, and he kept his word. They had just reached the finer and more delicate class of wines and liqueurs with which the governor’s cellar had the reputation of being most admirably stocked, when the silver spurs of the captain resounded in the corridor, and he himself appeared at the threshold. Athos and Aramis had played a close game; neither of the two had been able to gain the slightest advantage over the other. They had supped, talked a good deal about the Bastile, of the last journey to Fontainebleau, of the intended *fete* that M. Fouquet was about to give at Vaux; they had generalized on every possible subject; and no one, excepting Baisemeaux, had in the slightest degree alluded to private matters. D’Artagnan arrived in the very midst of the conversation, still pale and much disturbed by his interview with the king. Baisemeaux hastened to give him a chair; D’Artagnan accepted a glass of wine, and set it down empty. Athos and Aramis both remarked his emotion; as for Baisemeaux, he saw nothing more than the captain of the king’s musketeers, to whom he endeavored to show every possible attention. But, although Aramis had remarked his emotion, he had not been able to guess the cause of it. Athos alone believed he had detected it. For him, D’Artagnan’s return, and particularly the manner in which he, usually so impassible, seemed overcome, signified, “I have just asked the king something which the king has refused me.” Thoroughly convinced that his conjecture was correct, Athos smiled, rose from the table, and made a sign to D’Artagnan, as if to remind him that they had something else to do than to sup together. D’Artagnan immediately understood him, and replied by another sign. Aramis and Baisemeaux watched this silent dialogue, and looked inquiringly at each other. Athos felt that he was called upon to give an explanation of what was passing.

“The truth is, my friend,” said the Comte de la Fere, with a smile, “that you, Aramis, have been supping with a state criminal, and you, Monsieur de Baisemeaux, with your prisoner.”

Baisemeaux uttered an exclamation of surprise, and almost of delight; for he was exceedingly proud and vain of his fortress, and for his own individual profit, the more prisoners he had, the happier he was, and the higher in rank the prisoners happened to be, the prouder he felt. Aramis assumed the expression of countenance he thought the position justified, and said, "Well, dear Athos, forgive me, but I almost suspected what has happened. Some prank of Raoul and La Valliere, I suppose?"

"Alas!" said Baisemeaux.

"And," continued Aramis, "you, a high and powerful nobleman as you are, forgetful that courtiers now exist — you have been to the king, I suppose, and told him what you thought of his conduct?"

"Yes, you have guessed right."

"So that," said Baisemeaux, trembling at having supped so familiarly with a man who had fallen into disgrace with the king; "so that, monsieur le comte — "

"So that, my dear governor," said Athos, "my friend D'Artagnan will communicate to you the contents of the paper which I perceived just peeping out of his belt, and which assuredly can be nothing else than the order for my incarceration."

Baisemeaux held out his hand with his accustomed eagerness. D'Artagnan drew two papers from his belt, and presented one of them to the governor, who unfolded it, and then read, in a low tone of voice, looking at Athos over the paper, as he did so, and pausing from time to time: "'Order to detain, in my chateau of the Bastile, Monsieur le Comte de la Fere.' Oh, monsieur! this is indeed a very melancholy day for me."

"You will have a patient prisoner, monsieur," said Athos, in his calm, soft voice.

"A prisoner, too, who will not remain a month with you, my dear governor," said Aramis; while Baisemeaux, still holding the order in his hand, transcribed it upon the prison registry.

"Not a day, or rather not even a night," said D'Artagnan, displaying the second order of the king, "for now, dear M. de Baisemeaux, you will have the goodness to transcribe also this order for setting the comte immediately at liberty."

"Ah!" said Aramis, "it is a labor that you have deprived me of, D'Artagnan;" and he pressed the musketeer's hand in a significant manner, at the same moment as that of Athos.

“What!” said the latter in astonishment, “the king sets me at liberty!”

“Read, my dear friend,” returned D’Artagnan.

Athos took the order and read it. “It is quite true,” he said.

“Are you sorry for it?” asked D’Artagnan.

“Oh, no, on the contrary. I wish the king no harm; and the greatest evil or misfortune that any one can wish kings, is that they should commit an act of injustice. But you have had a difficult and painful task, I know. Tell me, have you not, D’Artagnan?”

“I? not at all,” said the musketeer, laughing: “the king does everything I wish him to do.”

Aramis looked fixedly at D’Artagnan, and saw that he was not speaking the truth. But Baisemeaux had eyes for nothing but D’Artagnan, so great was his admiration for a man who seemed to make the king do all he wished.

“And does the king exile Athos?” inquired Aramis.

“No, not precisely; the king did not explain himself upon that subject,” replied D’Artagnan; “but I think the comte could not well do better unless, indeed, he wishes particularly to thank the king — ”

“No, indeed,” replied Athos, smiling.

“Well, then, I think,” resumed D’Artagnan, “that the comte cannot do better than to retire to his *own* chateau. However, my dear Athos, you have only to speak, to tell me what you want. If any particular place of residence is more agreeable to you than another, I am influential enough, perhaps, to obtain it for you.”

“No, thank you,” said Athos; “nothing can be more agreeable to me, my dear friend, than to return to my solitude beneath my noble trees on the banks of the Loire. If Heaven be the overruling physician of the evils of the mind, nature is a sovereign remedy. And so, monsieur,” continued Athos, turning again towards Baisemeaux, “I am now free, I suppose?”

“Yes, monsieur le comte, I think so — at least, I hope so,” said the governor, turning over and over the two papers in question, “unless, however, M. d’Artagnan has a third order to give me.”

“No, my dear Baisemeaux, no,” said the musketeer; “the second is quite enough: we will stop there — if you please.”

“Ah! monsieur le comte,” said Baisemeaux addressing Athos, “you do not know what you are losing. I should have placed you among the thirty-franc prisoners, like the generals — what am I saying? — I mean among the fifty-francs, like the princes, and you would have supped every evening as you have done to-night.”

“Allow me, monsieur,” said Athos, “to prefer my own simpler fare.” And then, turning to D’Artagnan, he said, “Let us go, my dear friend. Shall I have that greatest of all pleasures for me — that of having you as my companion?”

“To the city gate only,” replied D’Artagnan, “after which I will tell you what I told the king: ‘I am on duty.’“

“And you, my dear Aramis,” said Athos, smiling; “will you accompany me? La Fere is on the road to Vannes.”

“Thank you, my dear friend,” said Aramis, “but I have an appointment in Paris this evening, and I cannot leave without very serious interests suffering by my absence.”

“In that case,” said Athos, “I must say adieu, and take my leave of you. My dear Monsieur de Baisemeaux, I have to thank you exceedingly for your kind and friendly disposition towards me, and particularly for the enjoyable specimen you have given me of the ordinary fare of the Bastile.” And, having embraced Aramis, and shaken hands with M. de Baisemeaux, and having received best wishes for a pleasant journey from them both, Athos set off with D’Artagnan.

Whilst the *denouement* of the scene of the Palais Royal was taking place at the Bastile, let us relate what was going on at the lodgings of Athos and Bragelonne. Grimaud, as we have seen, had accompanied his master to Paris; and, as we have said, he was present when Athos went out; he had observed D’Artagnan gnaw the corners of his mustache; he had seen his master get into the carriage; he had narrowly examined both their countenances, and he had known them both for a sufficiently long period to read and understand, through the mask of their impassibility, that something serious was the matter. As soon as Athos had gone, he began to reflect; he then, and then only, remembered the strange manner in which Athos had taken leave of him, the embarrassment — imperceptible as it would have been to any but himself — of the master whose ideas were, to him, so clear and defined, and the expression of whose wishes was so precise. He knew that Athos had taken nothing with him but the clothes he had on him at the time; and yet he seemed to fancy that Athos had not left for an hour merely; or even for a day. A long absence was signified by the manner in which he pronounced the word “Adieu.” All these circumstances recurred to his mind, with feelings of deep affection for Athos, with that horror of isolation and solitude which invariably besets the minds of those who love; and all these combined rendered poor Grimaud very melancholy, and particularly uneasy. Without being able to account to himself for what he did since his master's departure, he wandered about the room, seeking, as it were, for some traces of him, like a faithful dog, who is not exactly uneasy about his absent master, but at least is restless. Only as, in addition to the instinct of the animal, Grimaud subjoined the reasoning faculties of the man, Grimaud therefore felt uneasy and restless too. Not having found any indication which could serve as a guide, and having neither seen nor discovered anything which could satisfy his doubts, Grimaud began to wonder what could possibly have happened. Besides, imagination is the resource, or rather the plague of gentle and affectionate hearts. In fact, never does a feeling heart represent its absent friend to itself as being happy or cheerful. Never does the dove that wings its flight in search of adventures inspire anything but terror at home.

Grimaud soon passed from uneasiness to terror; he carefully went over, in his own mind, everything that had taken place: D'Artagnan's letter to Athos, the letter which had seemed to distress Athos so much after he had read it; then Raoul's visit to Athos, which resulted in Athos desiring him (Grimaud) to get his various orders and his court dress ready to put on; then his interview with the king, at the end of which Athos had returned home so unusually gloomy; then the explanation between the father and the son, at the termination of which Athos had embraced Raoul with such sadness of expression, while Raoul himself went away equally weary and melancholy; and finally, D'Artagnan's arrival, biting, as if he were vexed, the end of his mustache, and leaving again in the carriage, accompanied by the Comte de la Fere. All this composed a drama in five acts very clearly, particularly for so analytical an observer as Grimaud.

The first step he took was to search in his master's coat for M. d'Artagnan's letter; he found the letter still there, and its contents were found to run as follows:

"MY DEAR FRIEND, — Raoul has been to ask me for some particulars about the conduct of Mademoiselle de la Valliere, during our young friend's residence in London. I am a poor captain of musketeers, and I am sickened to death every day by hearing all the scandal of the barracks and bedside conversations. If I had told Raoul all I believe, I know the poor fellow would have died of it; but I am in the king's service, and cannot relate all I hear about the king's affairs. If your heart tells you to do it, set off at once; the matter concerns you more than it does myself, and almost as much as Raoul."

Grimaud tore, not a handful, but a finger-and-thumbful of hair out of his head; he would have done more if his head of hair had been in a more flourishing condition.

"Yes," he said, "that is the key of the whole enigma. The young girl has been playing her pranks; what people say about her and the king is true, then; our young master has been deceived; he ought to know it. Monsieur le comte has been to see the king, and has told him a piece of his mind; and then the king sent M. d'Artagnan to arrange the affair. Ah! gracious goodness!" continued Grimaud, "monsieur le comte, I now remember, returned without his sword."

This discovery made the perspiration break out all over poor Grimaud's face. He did not waste any more time in useless conjecture, but clapped his hat on his head, and ran to Raoul's lodgings.

Raoul, after Louise had left him, had mastered his grief, if not his affection; and, compelled to look forward on that perilous road over which madness and revulsion were hurrying him, he had seen, from the very first glance, his father exposed to the royal obstinacy, since Athos had himself been the first to oppose any resistance to the royal will. At this moment, from a very natural sequence of feeling, the unhappy young man remembered the mysterious signs which Athos had made, and the unexpected visit of D'Artagnan; the result of the conflict between a sovereign and a subject revealed itself to his terrified vision. As D'Artagnan was on duty, that is, a fixture at his post without the possibility of leaving it, it was certainly not likely that he had come to pay Athos a visit merely for the pleasure of seeing him. He must have come to say something to him. This something in the midst of such painful conjectures must have been the news of either a misfortune or a danger. Raoul trembled at having been so selfish as to have forgotten his father for his affection; at having, in a word, passed his time in idle dreams, or in an indulgence of despair, at a time when a necessity existed for repelling such an imminent attack on Athos. The very idea nearly drove him frantic; he buckled on his sword and ran towards his father's lodgings. On his way there he encountered Grimaud, who, having set off from the opposite pole, was running with equal eagerness in search of the truth. The two men embraced each other most warmly.

“Grimaud,” exclaimed Raoul, “is the comte well?”

“Have you seen him?”

“No; where is he?”

“I am trying to find out.”

“And M. d’Artagnan?”

“Went out with him.”

“When?”

“Ten minutes after you did.”

“In what way did they go out?”

“In a carriage.”

“Where did they go?”

“I have no idea at all.”

“Did my father take any money with him?”

“No.”

“Or his sword?”

“No.”

“I have an idea, Grimaud, that M. d’Artagnan came in order to — ”

“Arrest monsieur le comte, do you not think, monsieur?”

“Yes, Grimaud.”

“I could have sworn it.”

“What road did they take?”

“The way leading towards the quay.”

“To the Bastile, then?”

“Yes, yes.”

“Quick, quick; let us run.”

“Yes, let us not lose a moment.”

“But where are we to go?” said Raoul, overwhelmed.

“We will go to M. d’Artagnan’s first, we may perhaps learn something there.”

“No; if they keep me in ignorance at my father’s, they will do the same everywhere. Let us go to — Oh, good heavens! why, I must be mad to-day, Grimaud; I have forgotten M. du Vallon, who is waiting for and expecting me still.”

“Where is he, then?”

“At the Minimes of Vincennes.”

“Thank goodness, that is on the same side as the Bastile. I will run and saddle the horses, and we will go at once,” said Grimaud.

“Do, my friend, do.”

CHAPTER LXVI.

In Which Porthos Is Convinced without Having Understood Anything.

The good and worthy Porthos, faithful to all the laws of ancient chivalry, had determined to wait for M. de Saint-Aignan until sunset; and as Saint-Aignan did not come, as Raoul had forgotten to communicate with his second, and as he found that waiting so long was very wearisome, Porthos had desired one of the gate-keepers to fetch him a few bottles of good wine and a good joint of meat, — so that, at least, he might pass away the time by means of a glass or two and a mouthful of something to eat. He had just finished when Raoul arrived, escorted by Grimaud, both of them riding at full speed. As soon as Porthos saw the two cavaliers riding at such a pace along the road, he did not for a moment doubt but that they were the men he was expecting, and he rose from the grass upon which he had been indolently reclining and began to stretch his legs and arms, saying, “See what it is to have good habits. The fellow has finished by coming, after all. If I had gone away he would have found no one here and would have taken advantage of that.” He then threw himself into a martial attitude, and drew himself up to the full height of his gigantic stature. But instead of Saint-Aignan, he only saw Raoul, who, with the most despairing gestures, accosted him by crying out, “Pray forgive me, my dear friend, I am most wretched.”

“Raoul!” cried Porthos, surprised.

“You have been angry with me?” said Raoul, embracing Porthos.

“I? What for?”

“For having forgotten you. But I assure you my head seems utterly lost. If you only knew!”

“You have killed him?”

“Who?”

“Saint-Aignan; or, if that is not the case, what is the matter?”

“The matter is, that Monsieur le Comte de la Fere has by this time been arrested.”

Porthos gave a start that would have thrown down a wall.

"Arrested!" he cried out; "by whom?"

"By D'Artagnan."

"It is impossible," said Porthos.

"My dear friend, it is perfectly true."

Porthos turned towards Grimaud, as if he needed a second confirmation of the intelligence.

Grimaud nodded his head. "And where have they taken him?"

"Probably to the Bastile."

"What makes you think that?"

"As we came along we questioned some persons, who saw the carriage pass; and others who saw it enter the Bastile."

"Oh!" muttered Porthos.

"What do you intend to do?" inquired Raoul.

"I? Nothing; only I will not have Athos remain at the Bastile."

"Do you know," said Raoul, advancing nearer to Porthos, "that the arrest was made by order of the king?"

Porthos looked at the young man, as if to say, "What does that matter to me?" This dumb language seemed so eloquent of meaning to Raoul that he did not ask any other question. He mounted his horse again; and Porthos, assisted by Grimaud, had already done the same.

"Let us arrange our plan of action," said Raoul.

"Yes," returned Porthos, "that is the best thing we can do."

Raoul sighed deeply, and then paused suddenly.

"What is the matter?" asked Porthos; "are you faint?"

"No, only I feel how utterly helpless our position is. Can we three pretend to go and take the Bastile?"

"Well, if D'Artagnan were only here," replied Porthos, "I am not so very certain we would fail."

Raoul could not resist a feeling of admiration at the sight of such perfect confidence, heroic in its simplicity. These were truly the celebrated men who, by three or four, attacked armies and assaulted castles! Men who had terrified death itself, who had survived the wrecks of a tempestuous age, and still stood, stronger than the most robust of the young.

"Monsieur," said he to Porthos, "you have just given me an idea; we absolutely must see M. d'Artagnan."

"Undoubtedly."

“He ought by this time to have returned home, after having taken my father to the Bastile. Let us go to his house.”

“First inquire at the Bastile,” said Grimaud, who was in the habit of speaking little, but that to the purpose.

Accordingly, they hastened towards the fortress, when one of those chances which Heaven bestows on men of strong will caused Grimaud suddenly to perceive the carriage, which was entering by the great gate of the drawbridge. This was the moment that D’Artagnan was, as we have seen, returning from his visit to the king. In vain was it that Raoul urged on his horse in order to join the carriage, and to see whom it contained. The horses had already gained the other side of the great gate, which again closed, while one of the sentries struck the nose of Raoul’s horse with his musket; Raoul turned about, only too happy to find he had ascertained something respecting the carriage which had contained his father.

“We have him,” said Grimaud.

“If we wait a little it is certain he will leave; don’t you think so, my friend?”

“Unless, indeed, D’Artagnan also be a prisoner,” replied Porthos, “in which case everything is lost.”

Raoul returned no answer, for any hypothesis was admissible. He instructed Grimaud to lead the horses to the little street Jean-Beausire, so as to give rise to less suspicion, and himself with his piercing gaze watched for the exit either of D’Artagnan or the carriage. Nor had he decided wrongly; for twenty minutes had not elapsed before the gate reopened and the carriage reappeared. A dazzling of the eyes prevented Raoul from distinguishing what figures occupied the interior. Grimaud averred that he had seen two persons, and that one of them was his master. Porthos kept looking at Raoul and Grimaud by turns, in the hope of understanding their idea.

“It is clear,” said Grimaud, “that if the comte is in the carriage, either he is set at liberty or they are taking him to another prison.”

“We shall soon see that by the road he takes,” answered Porthos.

“If he is set at liberty,” said Grimaud, “they will conduct him home.”

“True,” rejoined Porthos.

“The carriage does not take that way,” cried Raoul; and indeed the horses were just disappearing down the Faubourg St. Antoine.

“Let us hasten,” said Porthos; “we will attack the carriage on the road and tell Athos to flee.”

“Rebellion,” murmured Raoul.

Porthos darted a second glance at Raoul, quite worthy of the first. Raoul replied only by spurring the flanks of his steed. In a few moments the three cavaliers had overtaken the carriage, and followed it so closely that their horses’ breath moistened the back of it. D’Artagnan, whose senses were ever on the alert, heard the trot of the horses, at the moment when Raoul was telling Porthos to pass the chariot, so as to see who was the person accompanying Athos. Porthos complied, but could not see anything, for the blinds were lowered. Rage and impatience were gaining mastery over Raoul. He had just noticed the mystery preserved by Athos’s companion, and determined on proceeding to extremities. On his part D’Artagnan had perfectly recognized Porthos, and Raoul also, from under the blinds, and had communicated to the comte the result of his observation. They were desirous only of seeing whether Raoul and Porthos would push the affair to the uttermost. And this they speedily did, for Raoul, presenting his pistol, threw himself on the leader, commanding the coachmen to stop. Porthos seized the coachman, and dragged him from his seat. Grimaud already had hold of the carriage door. Raoul threw open his arms, exclaiming, “M. le comte! M. le comte!”

“Ah! is it you, Raoul?” said Athos, intoxicated with joy.

“Not bad, indeed!” added D’Artagnan, with a burst of laughter, and they both embraced the young man and Porthos, who had taken possession of them.

“My brave Porthos! best of friends,” cried Athos, “it is still the same old way with you.”

“He is still only twenty,” said D’Artagnan, “brave Porthos!”

“Confound it,” answered Porthos, slightly confused, “we thought that you were being arrested.”

“While,” rejoined Athos, “the matter in question was nothing but my taking a drive in M. d’Artagnan’s carriage.”

“But we followed you from the Bastile,” returned Raoul, with a tone of suspicion and reproach.

“Where we had been to take supper with our friend M. Baisemeaux. Do you recollect Baisemeaux, Porthos?”

“Very well, indeed.”

“And there we saw Aramis.”

“In the Bastile?”

“At supper.”

“Ah!” said Porthos, again breathing freely.

“He gave us a thousand messages to you.”

“And where is M. le comte going?” asked Grimaud, already recompensed by a smile from his master.

“We were going home to Blois.”

“How can that be?”

“At once?” said Raoul.

“Yes, right forward.”

“Without any luggage?”

“Oh! Raoul would have been instructed to forward me mine, or to bring it with him on his return, *if* he returns.”

“If nothing detains him longer in Paris,” said D’Artagnan, with a glance firm and cutting as steel, and as painful (for it reopened the poor young fellow’s wounds), “he will do well to follow you, Athos.”

“There is nothing to keep me any longer in Paris,” said Raoul.

“Then we will go immediately.”

“And M. d’Artagnan?”

“Oh! as for me, I was only accompanying Athos as far as the barrier, and I return with Porthos.”

“Very good,” said the latter.

“Come, my son,” added the comte, gently passing his arm around Raoul’s neck to draw him into the carriage, and again embracing him. “Grimaud,” continued the comte, “you will return quietly to Paris with your horse and M. du Vallon’s, for Raoul and I will mount here and give up the carriage to these two gentlemen to return to Paris in; and then, as soon as you arrive, you will take my clothes and letters and forward the whole to me at home.”

“But,” observed Raoul, who was anxious to make the comte converse, “when you return to Paris, there will not be a single thing there for you — which will be very inconvenient.”

“I think it will be a very long time, Raoul, ere I return to Paris. The last sojourn we have made there has not been of a nature to encourage me to repeat it.”

Raoul hung down his head and said not a word more. Athos descended from the carriage and mounted the horse which had brought Porthos, and which seemed no little pleased at the exchange. Then they embraced, and clasped each other's hands, and interchanged a thousand pledges of eternal friendship. Porthos promised to spend a month with Athos at the first opportunity. D'Artagnan engaged to take advantage of his first leave of absence; and then, having embraced Raoul for the last time: "To you, my boy," said he, "I will write." Coming from D'Artagnan, who he knew wrote very seldom, these words expressed everything. Raoul was moved even to tears. He tore himself away from the musketeer and departed.

D'Artagnan rejoined Porthos in the carriage: "Well," said he, "my dear friend, what a day we have had!"

"Indeed we have," answered Porthos.

"You must be quite worn out."

"Not quite; however, I shall retire early to rest, so as to be ready for to-morrow."

"And wherefore?"

"Why! to complete what I have begun."

"You make me shudder, my friend, you seem to me quite angry. What the devil *have* you begun which is not finished?"

"Listen; Raoul has not fought, but *I* must fight!"

"With whom? with the king?"

"How!" exclaimed Porthos, astounded, "with the king?"

"Yes, I say, you great baby, with the king."

"I assure you it is with M. Saint-Aignan."

"Look now, this is what I mean; you draw your sword against the king in fighting with this gentleman."

"Ah!" said Porthos, staring; "are you sure of it?"

"Indeed I am."

"What in the world are we to do, then?"

"We must try and make a good supper, Porthos. The captain of the musketeers keeps a tolerable table. There you will see the handsome Saint-Aignan, and will drink his health."

"I?" cried Porthos, horrified.

"What!" said D'Artagnan, "you refuse to drink the king's health?"

"But, body alive! I am not talking to you about the king at all; I am speaking of M. de Saint-Aignan."

"But when I repeat that it is the same thing?"

"Ah, well, well!" said Porthos, overcome.

“You understand, don’t you?”
“No,” answered Porthos, “but ‘tis all the same.”

CHAPTER LXVII.

M. de Baisemeaux's "Society."

The reader has not forgotten that, on quitting the Bastile, D'Artagnan and the Comte de la Fere had left Aramis in close confabulation with Baisemeaux. When once these two guests had departed, Baisemeaux did not in the least perceive that the conversation suffered by their absence. He used to think that wine after supper, and that of the Bastile in particular, was excellent, and that it was a stimulation quite sufficient to make any honest man talkative. But he little knew his Greatness, who was never more impenetrable that at dessert. His Greatness, however, perfectly understood M. de Baisemeaux, when he reckoned on making the governor discourse by the means which the latter regarded as efficacious. The conversation, therefore, without flagging in appearance, flagged in reality; for Baisemeaux not only had it nearly all to himself, but further, kept speaking only of that singular event, the incarceration of Athos, followed by so prompt an order to set him again at liberty. Nor, moreover, had Baisemeaux failed to observe that the two orders of arrest and of liberation, were both in the king's hand. But then, the king would not take the trouble to write similar orders except under pressing circumstances. All this was very interesting, and, above all, very puzzling to Baisemeaux; but as, on the other hand, all this was very clear to Aramis, the latter did not attach to the occurrence the same importance as did the worthy governor. Besides, Aramis rarely put himself out of the way for anything, and he had not yet told M. de Baisemeaux for what reason he had now done so. And so at the very climax of Baisemeaux's dissertation, Aramis suddenly interrupted him.

"Tell me, my dear Baisemeaux," said he, "have you never had any other diversions at the Bastile than those at which I assisted during the two or three visits I have had the honor to pay you?"

This address was so unexpected that the governor, like a vane which suddenly receives an impulsion opposed to that of the wind, was quite dumbfounded at it. "Diversions!" said he; "but I take them continually, monseigneur."

"Oh, to be sure! And these diversions?"

"Are of every kind."

"Visits, no doubt?"

"No, not visits. Visits are not frequent at the Bastile."

"What, are visits rare, then?"

"Very much so."

"Even on the part of your society?"

"What do you term my society — the prisoners?"

"Oh, no! — your prisoners, indeed! I know well it is you who visit them, and not they you. By your society, I mean, my dear Baisemeaux, the society of which you are a member."

Baisemeaux looked fixedly at Aramis, and then, as if the idea which had flashed across his mind were impossible, "Oh," he said, "I have very little society at present. If I must own it to you, dear M. d'Herblay, the fact is, to stay at the Bastile appears, for the most part, distressing and distasteful to persons of the gay world. As for the ladies, it is never without a certain dread, which costs me infinite trouble to allay, that they succeed in reaching my quarters. And, indeed, how should they avoid trembling a little, poor things, when they see those gloomy dungeons, and reflect that they are inhabited by prisoners who — " And in proportion as the eyes of Baisemeaux concentrated their gaze on the face of Aramis, the worthy governor's tongue faltered more and more until it ended by stopping altogether.

"No, you don't understand me, my dear M. Baisemeaux; you don't understand me. I do not at all mean to speak of society in general, but of a particular society — of *the* society, in a word — to which you are affiliated."

Baisemeaux nearly dropped the glass of muscat which he was in the act of raising to his lips. "Affiliated," cried he, "affiliated!"

"Yes, affiliated, undoubtedly," repeated Aramis, with the greatest self-possession. "Are you not a member of a secret society, my dear M. Baisemeaux?"

"Secret?"

"Secret or mysterious."

"Oh, M. d'Herblay!"

"Consider, now, don't deny it."

"But believe me."

"I believe what I know."

"I swear to you."

"Listen to me, my dear M. Baisemeaux; I say yes, you say no; one of us two necessarily says what is true, and the other, it inevitably follows, what is false."

"Well, and then?"

"Well, we shall come to an understanding presently."

"Let us see," said Baisemeaux; "let us see."

"Now drink your glass of muscat, dear Monsieur de Baisemeaux," said Aramis. "What the devil! you look quite scared."

"No, no; not the least in the world; oh, no."

"Drink then." Baisemeaux drank, but he swallowed the wrong way.

"Well," resumed Aramis, "if, I say, you are not a member of a secret or mysterious society, which you like to call it — the epithet is of no consequence — if, I say, you are not a member of a society similar to that I wish to designate, well, then, you will not understand a word of what I am going to say. That is all."

"Oh! be sure beforehand that I shall not understand anything."

"Well, well!"

"Try, now; let us see!"

"That is what I am going to do."

"If, on the contrary, you are one of the members of this society, you will immediately answer me — yes or no."

"Begin your questions," continued Baisemeaux, trembling.

"You will agree, dear Monsieur de Baisemeaux," continued Aramis, with the same impassibility, "that it is evident a man cannot be a member of a society, it is evident that he cannot enjoy the advantages it offers to the affiliated, without being himself bound to certain little services."

"In short," stammered Baisemeaux, "that would be intelligible, if — "

"Well," resumed Aramis, "there is in the society of which I speak, and of which, as it seems you are not a member — "

"Allow me," said Baisemeaux. "I should not like to say absolutely."

"There is an engagement entered into by all the governors and captains of fortresses affiliated to the order." Baisemeaux grew pale.

"Now the engagement," continued Aramis firmly, "is of this nature."

Baisemeaux rose, manifesting unspeakable emotion: "Go on, dear M. d'Herblay: go on," said he.

Aramis then spoke, or rather recited the following paragraph, in the same tone as if he had been reading it from a book: “The aforesaid captain or governor of a fortress shall allow to enter, when need shall arise, and on demand of the prisoner, a confessor affiliated to the order.” He stopped. Baisemeaux was quite distressing to look at, being so wretchedly pale and trembling. “Is not that the text of the agreement?” quietly asked Aramis.

“Monseigneur!” began Baisemeaux.

“Ah! well, you begin to understand, I think.”

“Monseigneur,” cried Baisemeaux, “do not trifle so with my unhappy mind! I find myself as nothing in your hands, if you have the malignant desire to draw from me the little secrets of my administration.”

“Oh! by no means; pray undeceive yourself, dear M. Baisemeaux; it is not the little secrets of your administration, but those of your conscience that I aim at.”

“Well, then, my conscience be it, dear M. d’Herblay. But have some consideration for the situation I am in, which is no ordinary one.”

“It is no ordinary one, my dear monsieur,” continued the inflexible Aramis, “if you are a member of this society; but it is a quite natural one if free from all engagement. You are answerable only to the king.”

“Well, monsieur, well! I obey only the king, and whom else would you have a French nobleman obey?”

Aramis did not yield an inch, but with that silvery voice of his continued: “It is very pleasant,” said he, “for a French nobleman, for a prelate of France, to hear a man of your mark express himself so loyally, dear De Baisemeaux, and having heard you to believe no more than you do.”

“Have you doubted, monsieur?”

“I? oh, no!”

“And so you doubt no longer?”

“I have no longer any doubt that such a man as you, monsieur,” said Aramis, gravely, “does not faithfully serve the masters whom he voluntarily chose for himself.”

“Masters!” cried Baisemeaux.

“Yes, masters, I said.”

“Monsieur d’Herblay, you are still jesting, are you not?”

“Oh, yes! I understand that it is a more difficult position to have several masters than one; but the embarrassment is owing to you, my dear Baisemeaux, and I am not the cause of it.”

"Certainly not," returned the unfortunate governor, more embarrassed than ever; "but what are you doing? You are leaving the table?"

"Assuredly."

"Are you going?"

"Yes, I am going."

"But you are behaving very strangely towards me, monseigneur."

"I am behaving strangely — how do you make that out?"

"Have you sworn, then, to put me to the torture?"

"No, I should be sorry to do so."

"Remain, then."

"I cannot."

"And why?"

"Because I have no longer anything to do here; and, indeed, I have duties to fulfil elsewhere."

"Duties, so late as this?"

"Yes; understand me now, my dear De Baisemeaux: they told me at the place whence I came, 'The aforesaid governor or captain will allow to enter, as need shall arise, on the prisoner's demand, a confessor affiliated with the order.' I came; you do not know what I mean, and so I shall return to tell them that they are mistaken, and that they must send me elsewhere."

"What! you are — " cried Baisemeaux, looking at Aramis almost in terror.

"The confessor affiliated to the order," said Aramis, without changing his voice.

But, gentle as the words were, they had the same effect on the unhappy governor as a clap of thunder. Baisemeaux became livid, and it seemed to him as if Aramis's beaming eyes were two forks of flame, piercing to the very bottom of his soul. "The confessor!" murmured he; "you, monseigneur, the confessor of the order!"

"Yes, I; but we have nothing to unravel together, seeing that you are not one of the affiliated."

"Monseigneur!"

"And I understand that, not being so, you refuse to comply with its command."

"Monseigneur, I beseech you, condescend to hear me."

"And wherefore?"

"Monseigneur, I do not say that I have nothing to do with the society."

"Ah! ah!"

"I say not that I refuse to obey."

"Nevertheless, M. de Baisemeaux, what has passed wears very much the air of resistance."

"Oh, no! monseigneur, no; I only wished to be certain."

"To be certain of what?" said Aramis, in a tone of supreme contempt.

"Of nothing at all, monseigneur." Baisemeaux lowered his voice, and bending before the prelate, said, "I am at all times and in all places at the disposal of my superiors, but — "

"Very good. I like you better thus, monsieur," said Aramis, as he resumed his seat, and put out his glass to Baisemeaux, whose hand trembled so that he could not fill it. "You were saying 'but' — " continued Aramis.

"But," replied the unhappy man, "having received no notice, I was very far from expecting it."

"Does not the Gospel say, 'Watch, for the moment is known only of God?' Do not the rules of the order say, 'Watch, for that which I will, you ought always to will also.' And what pretext will serve you now that you did not expect the confessor, M. de Baisemeaux?"

"Because, monseigneur, there is at present in the Bastile no prisoner ill."

Aramis shrugged his shoulders. "What do you know about that?" said he.

"But, nevertheless, it appears to me — "

"M. de Baisemeaux," said Aramis, turning round in his chair, "here is your servant, who wishes to speak with you;" and at this moment, De Baisemeaux's servant appeared at the threshold of the door.

"What is it?" asked Baisemeaux, sharply.

"Monsieur," said the man, "they are bringing you the doctor's return."

Aramis looked at De Baisemeaux with a calm and confident eye.

"Well," said he, "let the messenger enter."

The messenger entered, saluted, and handed in the report. Baisemeaux ran his eye over it, and raising his head, said in surprise, "No. 12 is ill!"

"How was it, then," said Aramis, carelessly, "that you told me everybody was well in your hotel, M. de Baisemeaux?" And he emptied his glass without removing his eyes from Baisemeaux.

The governor then made a sign to the messenger, and when he had quitted the room, said, still trembling, "I think that there is in the article, 'on the prisoner's demand.'"

“Yes, it is so,” answered Aramis. “But see what it is they want with you now.”

And that moment a sergeant put his head in at the door. “What do you want now?” cried Baisemeaux. “Can you not leave me in peace for ten minutes?”

“Monsieur,” said the sergeant, “the sick man, No. 12, has commissioned the turnkey to request you to send him a confessor.”

Baisemeaux very nearly sank on the floor; but Aramis disdained to reassure him, just as he had disdained to terrify him. “What must I answer?” inquired Baisemeaux.

“Just what you please,” replied Aramis, compressing his lips; “that is your business. *I* am not the governor of the Bastile.”

“Tell the prisoner,” cried Baisemeaux, quickly, — ”tell the prisoner that his request is granted.” The sergeant left the room. “Oh! monseigneur, monseigneur,” murmured Baisemeaux, “how could I have suspected! — how could I have foreseen this!”

“Who requested you to suspect, and who besought you to foresee?” contemptuously answered Aramis. “The order suspects; the order knows; the order foresees — is that not enough?”

“What is it you command?” added Baisemeaux.

“I? — nothing at all. I am nothing but a poor priest, a simple confessor. Have I your orders to go and see the sufferer?”

“Oh, monseigneur, I do not order; I pray you to go.”

“‘Tis well; conduct me to him.”

VOLUME IV: THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

INTRODUCTION.

In the months of March-July in 1844, in the magazine Le Siecle, the first portion of a story appeared, penned by the celebrated playwright Alexandre Dumas. It was based, he claimed, on some manuscripts he had found a year earlier in the Bibliotheque Nationale while researching a history he planned to write on Louis XIV. They chronicled the adventures of a young man named D’Artagnan who, upon entering Paris, became almost immediately embroiled in court intrigues, international politics, and ill-fated affairs between royal lovers. Over the next six years, readers would enjoy the adventures of this youth and his three famous friends, Porthos, Athos, and Aramis, as their exploits unraveled behind the scenes of some of the most momentous events in French and even English history.

Eventually these serialized adventures were published in novel form, and became the three D’Artagnan Romances known today. Here is a brief summary of the first two novels:

The Three Musketeers (serialized March — July, 1844): The year is 1625. The young D’Artagnan arrives in Paris at the tender age of 18, and almost immediately offends three musketeers, Porthos, Aramis, and Athos. Instead of dueling, the four are attacked by five of the Cardinal’s guards, and the courage of the youth is made apparent during the battle. The four become fast friends, and, when asked by D’Artagnan’s landlord to find his missing wife, embark upon an adventure that takes them across both France and England in order to thwart the plans of the Cardinal Richelieu. Along the way, they encounter a beautiful young spy, named simply Milady, who will stop at nothing to disgrace Queen Anne of Austria before her husband, Louis XIII, and take her revenge upon the four friends.

Twenty Years After (serialized January — August, 1845): The year is now 1648, twenty years since the close of the last story. Louis XIII has died, as has Cardinal Richelieu, and while the crown of France may sit upon the head of Anne of Austria as Regent for the young Louis XIV, the real power resides with the Cardinal Mazarin, her secret husband. D’Artagnan is now a lieutenant of musketeers, and his three friends have retired to private life. Athos turned out to be a nobleman, the Comte de la Fere, and has retired to his home with his son, Raoul de Bragelonne. Aramis, whose real name is D’Herblay, has followed his intention of shedding the musketeer’s cassock for the priest’s robes, and Porthos has married a wealthy woman, who left him her fortune upon her death. But trouble is stirring in both France and England. Cromwell menaces the institution of royalty itself while marching against Charles I, and at home the Fronde is threatening to tear France apart. D’Artagnan brings his friends out of retirement to save the threatened English monarch, but Mordaunt, the son of Milady, who seeks to avenge his mother’s death at the musketeers’ hands, thwarts their valiant efforts. Undaunted, our heroes return to France just in time to help save the young Louis XIV, quiet the Fronde, and tweak the nose of Cardinal Mazarin.

The third novel, The Vicomte de Bragelonne (serialized October, 1847 — January, 1850), has enjoyed a strange history in its English translation. It has been split into three, four, or five volumes at various points in its history. The five-volume edition generally does not give titles to the smaller portions, but the others do. In the three-volume edition, the novels are entitled The Vicomte de Bragelonne, Louise de la Valliere, and The Man in the Iron Mask. For the purposes of this etext, I have chosen to split the novel as the four-volume edition does, with these titles: The Vicomte de Bragelonne, Ten Years Later, Louise de la Valliere, and The Man in the Iron Mask. In the first three etexts:

The Vicomte de Bragelonne (Etext 2609): It is the year 1660, and D’Artagnan, after thirty-five years of loyal service, has become disgusted with serving King Louis XIV while the real power resides with the Cardinal Mazarin, and has tendered his resignation. He embarks on his own project, that of restoring Charles II to the throne of England, and, with the help of Athos, succeeds, earning himself quite a fortune in the process. D’Artagnan returns to Paris to live the life of a rich citizen, and Athos, after negotiating the marriage of Philip, the king’s brother, to Princess Henrietta of England, likewise retires to his own estate, La Fere. Meanwhile, Mazarin has finally died, and left Louis to assume the reigns of power, with the assistance of M. Colbert, formerly Mazarin’s trusted clerk. Colbert has an intense hatred for M. Fouquet, the king’s superintendent of finances, and has resolved to use any means necessary to bring about his fall. With the new rank of intendant bestowed on him by Louis, Colbert succeeds in having two of Fouquet’s loyal friends tried and executed. He then brings to the king’s attention that Fouquet is fortifying the island of Belle-Ile-en-Mer, and could possibly be planning to use it as a base for some military operation against the king. Louis calls D'Artagnan out of retirement and sends him to investigate the island, promising him a tremendous salary and his long-promised promotion to captain of the musketeers upon his return. At Belle-Isle, D'Artagnan discovers that the engineer of the fortifications is, in fact, Porthos, now the Baron du Vallon, and that's not all. The blueprints for the island, although in Porthos's handwriting, show evidence of another script that has been erased, that of Aramis. D'Artagnan later discovers that Aramis has become the bishop of Vannes, which is, coincidentally, a parish belonging to M. Fouquet. Suspecting that D'Artagnan has arrived on the king's behalf to investigate, Aramis tricks D'Artagnan into wandering around Vannes in search of Porthos, and sends Porthos on an heroic ride back to Paris to warn Fouquet of the danger. Fouquet rushes to the king, and gives him Belle-Isle as a present, thus allaying any suspicion, and at the same time humiliating Colbert, just minutes before the usher announces someone else seeking an audience with the king.

Ten Years Later (Etext 2681): As 1661 approaches, Princess Henrietta of England arrives for her marriage, and throws the court of France into complete disorder. The jealousy of the Duke of Buckingham, who is in love with her, nearly occasions a war on the streets of Le Havre, thankfully prevented by Raoul's timely and tactful intervention. After the marriage, though, Monsieur Philip becomes horribly jealous of Buckingham, and has him exiled. Before leaving, however, the duke fights a duel with M. de Wardes at Calais. De Wardes is a malicious and spiteful man, the sworn enemy of D'Artagnan, and, by the same token, that of Athos, Aramis, Porthos, and Raoul as well. Both men are seriously wounded, and the duke is taken back to England to recover. Raoul's friend, the Comte de Guiche, is the next to succumb to Henrietta's charms, and Monsieur obtains his exile as well, though De Guiche soon effects a reconciliation. But then the king's eye falls on Madame Henrietta during the comte's absence, and this time Monsieur's jealousy has no recourse. Anne of Austria intervenes, and the king and his sister-in-law decide to pick a young lady with whom the king can pretend to be in love, the better to mask their own affair. They unfortunately select Louise de la Valliere, Raoul's fiancee. While the court is in residence at Fontainebleau, the king unwitting overhears Louise confessing her love for him while chatting with her friends beneath the royal oak, and the king promptly forgets his affection for Madame. That same night, Henrietta overhears, at the same oak, De Guiche confessing his love for her to Raoul. The two embark on their own affair. A few days later, during a rainstorm, Louis and Louise are trapped alone together, and the whole court begins to talk of the scandal while their love affair blossoms. Aware of Louise's attachment, the king arranges for Raoul to be sent to England for an indefinite period.

Meanwhile, the struggle for power continues between Fouquet and Colbert. Although the Belle-Isle plot backfired, Colbert prompts the king to ask Fouquet for more and more money, and without his two friends to raise it for him, Fouquet is sorely pressed. The situation gets so bad that his new mistress, Madame de Belliere, must resort to selling all her jewels and her gold and silver plate. Aramis, while this is going on, has grown friendly with the governor of the Bastile, M. de Baisemeaux, a fact that Baisemeaux unwittingly reveals to D'Artagnan while inquiring of him as to Aramis's whereabouts. This further arouses the suspicions of the musketeer, who was made to look ridiculous by Aramis. He had ridden overnight at an insane pace, but arrived a few minutes after Fouquet had already presented Belle-Isle to the king. Aramis learns from the governor the location of a mysterious prisoner, who bears a remarkable resemblance to Louis XIV — in fact, the two are identical. He uses the existence of this secret to persuade a dying Franciscan monk, the general of the society of the Jesuits, to name him, Aramis, the new general of the order. On Aramis's advice, hoping to use Louise's influence with the king to counteract Colbert's influence, Fouquet also writes a love letter to La Valliere, unfortunately undated. It never reaches its destination, however, as the servant ordered to deliver it turns out to be an agent of Colbert's.

Louise de la Valliere (Etext 2710): Believing D'Artagnan occupied at Fontainebleau and Porthos safely tucked away at Paris, Aramis holds a funeral for the dead Franciscan — but in fact, Aramis is wrong in both suppositions. D'Artagnan has left Fontainebleau, bored to tears by the *fetes*, retrieved Porthos, and is visiting the country-house of Planchet, his old lackey. This house happens to be right next door to the graveyard, and upon observing Aramis at this funeral, and his subsequent meeting with a mysterious hooded lady, D'Artagnan, suspicions aroused, resolves to make a little trouble for the bishop. He presents Porthos to the king at the same time as Fouquet presents Aramis, thereby surprising the wily prelate. Aramis's professions of affection and innocence do only a little to allay

D'Artagnan's concerns, and he continues to regard Aramis's actions with a curious and wary eye. Meanwhile, much to his delight, Porthos is invited to dine with the king as a result of his presentation, and with D'Artagnan's guidance, manages to behave in such a manner as to procure the king's marked favor.

The mysterious woman turns out to be the Duchesse de Chevreuse, a notorious schemer and former friend of Anne of Austria. She comes bearing more bad news for Fouquet, who is already in trouble, as the king has invited himself to a *fete* at Vaux, Fouquet's magnificent mansion, that will surely bankrupt the poor superintendent. The Duchesse has letters from Mazarin that prove that Fouquet has received thirteen million francs from the royal coffers, and she wishes to sell these letters to Aramis. Aramis refuses, and the letters are instead sold to Colbert. Fouquet, meanwhile, discovers that the receipt that proves his innocence in the affair has been stolen from him. Even worse, Fouquet, desperate for money, is forced to sell the parliamentary position that renders him untouchable by any court proceedings. As part of her deal with Colbert, though, Chevreuse also obtains a secret audience with the queen-mother, where the two discuss a shocking secret — Louis XIV has a twin brother, long believed, however, to be dead.

Meanwhile, in other quarters, De Wardes, Raoul's inveterate enemy, has returned from Calais, barely recovered from his wounds, and no sooner does he return than he begins again to insult people, particularly La Valliere, and this time the comte de Guiche is the one to challenge him. The duel leaves De Guiche horribly wounded, but enables Madame to use her influence to destroy De Wardes's standing at court. The *fetes*, however, come to an end, and the court returns to Paris. The king has been more than obvious about his affections for Louise, and Madame, the queen-mother, and the queen join forces to destroy her. She is dishonorably discharged from court, and in despair, she flees to the convent at Chaillot. Along the way, though, she runs into D'Artagnan, who manages to get word back to the king of what has taken place. By literally begging Madame in tears, Louis manages to secure Louise's return to court — but Madame still places every obstacle possible before the lovers. They have to resort to building a secret staircase and meeting in the apartments of M. de Saint-Aignan, where Louis has a painter create a portrait of Louise. But Madame recalls Raoul from London and shows him these proofs of Louise's infidelity. Raoul, crushed, challenges Saint-Aignan to a duel, which the king prevents, and Athos, furious, breaks his sword before the king. The king has D’Artagnan arrest Athos, and at the Bastile they encounter Aramis, who is paying Baisemeaux another visit. Raoul learns of Athos’s arrest, and with Porthos in tow, they effect a daring rescue, surprising the carriage containing D’Artagnan and Athos as they leave the Bastile. Although quite impressive, the intrepid raid is in vain, as D’Artagnan has already secured Athos’s pardon from the king. Instead, everybody switches modes of transport; D’Artagnan and Porthos take the horses back to Paris, and Athos and Raoul take the carriage back to La Fere, where they intend to reside permanently, as the king is now their sworn enemy, Raoul cannot bear to see Louise, and they have no more dealings in Paris.

Aramis, left alone with Baisemeaux, inquires the governor of the prison about his loyalties, in particular to the Jesuits. The bishop reveals that he is a confessor of the society, and invokes their regulations in order to obtain access to this mysterious prisoner who bears such a striking resemblance to Louis XIV...

And so Baisemeaux is conducting Aramis to the prisoner as the final section of The Vicomte de Bragelonne and this final story of the D’Artagnan Romances opens. I have written a “Cast of Historical Characters,” Etext 2760, that will enable curious readers to compare personages in the novel with their historical counterparts. Also of interest may be an essay Dumas wrote on the possible identity of the real Man in the Iron Mask, which is Etext 2751. Enjoy!

John Bursey

CHAPTER I.

The Prisoner.

Since Aramis's singular transformation into a confessor of the order, Baisemeaux was no longer the same man. Up to that period, the place which Aramis had held in the worthy governor's estimation was that of a prelate whom he respected and a friend to whom he owed a debt of gratitude; but now he felt himself an inferior, and that Aramis was his master. He himself lighted a lantern, summoned a turnkey, and said, returning to Aramis, "I am at your orders, monseigneur." Aramis merely nodded his head, as much as to say, "Very good"; and signed to him with his hand to lead the way. Baisemeaux advanced, and Aramis followed him. It was a calm and lovely starlit night; the steps of three men resounded on the flags of the terraces, and the clinking of the keys hanging from the jailer's girdle made itself heard up to the stories of the towers, as if to remind the prisoners that the liberty of earth was a luxury beyond their reach. It might have been said that the alteration effected in Baisemeaux extended even to the prisoners. The turnkey, the same who, on Aramis's first arrival had shown himself so inquisitive and curious, was now not only silent, but impassible. He held his head down, and seemed afraid to keep his ears open. In this wise they reached the basement of the Bertaudiere, the two first stories of which were mounted silently and somewhat slowly; for Baisemeaux, though far from disobeying, was far from exhibiting any eagerness to obey. On arriving at the door, Baisemeaux showed a disposition to enter the prisoner's chamber; but Aramis, stopping him on the threshold, said, "The rules do not allow the governor to hear the prisoner's confession."

Baisemeaux bowed, and made way for Aramis, who took the lantern and entered; and then signed to them to close the door behind him. For an instant he remained standing, listening whether Baisemeaux and the turnkey had retired; but as soon as he was assured by the sound of their descending footsteps that they had left the tower, he put the lantern on the table and gazed around. On a bed of green serge, similar in all respect to the other beds in the Bastile, save that it was newer, and under curtains half-drawn, reposed a young man, to whom we have already once before introduced Aramis. According to custom, the prisoner was without a light. At the hour of curfew, he was bound to extinguish his lamp, and we perceive how much he was favored, in being allowed to keep it burning even till then. Near the bed a large leathern armchair, with twisted legs, sustained his clothes. A little table — without pens, books, paper, or ink — stood neglected in sadness near the window; while several plates, still unemptied, showed that the prisoner had scarcely touched his evening meal. Aramis saw that the young man was stretched upon his bed, his face half concealed by his arms. The arrival of a visitor did not caused any change of position; either he was waiting in expectation, or was asleep. Aramis lighted the candle from the lantern, pushed back the armchair, and approached the bed with an evident mixture of interest and respect. The young man raised his head. “What is it?” said he.

“You desired a confessor?” replied Aramis.

“Yes.”

“Because you were ill?”

“Yes.”

“Very ill?”

The young man gave Aramis a piercing glance, and answered, “I thank you.” After a moment’s silence, “I have seen you before,” he continued. Aramis bowed.

Doubtless the scrutiny the prisoner had just made of the cold, crafty, and imperious character stamped upon the features of the bishop of Vannes was little reassuring to one in his situation, for he added, “I am better.”

“And so?” said Aramis.

“Why, then — being better, I have no longer the same need of a confessor, I think.”

“Not even of the hair-cloth, which the note you found in your bread informed you of?”

The young man started; but before he had either assented or denied, Aramis continued, “Not even of the ecclesiastic from whom you were to hear an important revelation?”

“If it be so,” said the young man, sinking again on his pillow, “it is different; I am listening.”

Aramis then looked at him more closely, and was struck with the easy majesty of his mien, one which can never be acquired unless Heaven has implanted it in the blood or heart. “Sit down, monsieur,” said the prisoner.

Aramis bowed and obeyed. “How does the Bastile agree with you?” asked the bishop.

“Very well.”

“You do not suffer?”

“No.”

“You have nothing to regret?”

“Nothing.”

“Not even your liberty?”

“What do you call liberty, monsieur?” asked the prisoner, with the tone of a man who is preparing for a struggle.

“I call liberty, the flowers, the air, light, the stars, the happiness of going whithersoever the sinewy limbs of one-and-twenty chance to wish to carry you.”

The young man smiled, whether in resignation or contempt, it was difficult to tell. “Look,” said he, “I have in that Japanese vase two roses gathered yesterday evening in the bud from the governor’s garden; this morning they have blown and spread their vermilion chalice beneath my gaze; with every opening petal they unfold the treasures of their perfumes, filling my chamber with a fragrance that embalms it. Look now on these two roses; even among roses these are beautiful, and the rose is the most beautiful of flowers. Why, then, do you bid me desire other flowers when I possess the loveliest of all?”

Aramis gazed at the young man in surprise.

“If *flowers* constitute liberty,” sadly resumed the captive, “I am free, for I possess them.”

“But the air!” cried Aramis; “air is so necessary to life!”

“Well, monsieur,” returned the prisoner; “draw near to the window; it is open. Between high heaven and earth the wind whirls on its waftages of hail and lightning, exhales its torrid mist or breathes in gentle breezes. It caresses my face. When mounted on the back of this armchair, with my arm around the bars of the window to sustain myself, I fancy I am swimming the wide expanse before me.” The countenance of Aramis darkened as the young man continued: “Light I have! what is better than light? I have the sun, a friend who comes to visit me every day without the permission of the governor or the jailer’s company. He comes in at the window, and traces in my room a square the shape of the window, which lights up the hangings of my bed and floods the very floor. This luminous square increases from ten o’clock till midday, and decreases from one till three slowly, as if, having hastened to my presence, it sorrowed at bidding me farewell. When its last ray disappears I have enjoyed its presence for five hours. Is not that sufficient? I have been told that there are unhappy beings who dig in quarries, and laborers who toil in mines, who never behold it at all.” Aramis wiped the drops from his brow. “As to the stars which are so delightful to view,” continued the young man, “they all resemble each other save in size and brilliancy. I am a favored mortal, for if you had not lighted that candle you would have been able to see the beautiful stars which I was gazing at from my couch before your arrival, whose silvery rays were stealing through my brain.”

Aramis lowered his head; he felt himself overwhelmed with the bitter flow of that sinister philosophy which is the religion of the captive.

“So much, then, for the flowers, the air, the daylight, and the stars,” tranquilly continued the young man; “there remains but exercise. Do I not walk all day in the governor’s garden if it is fine — here if it rains? in the fresh air if it is warm; in perfect warmth, thanks to my winter stove, if it be cold? Ah! monsieur, do you fancy,” continued the prisoner, not without bitterness, “that men have not done everything for me that a man can hope for or desire?”

“Men!” said Aramis; “be it so; but it seems to me you are forgetting Heaven.”

“Indeed I have forgotten Heaven,” murmured the prisoner, with emotion; “but why do you mention it? Of what use is it to talk to a prisoner of Heaven?”

Aramis looked steadily at this singular youth, who possessed the resignation of a martyr with the smile of an atheist. “Is not Heaven in everything?” he murmured in a reproachful tone.

“Say rather, at the end of everything,” answered the prisoner, firmly.

“Be it so,” said Aramis; “but let us return to our starting-point.”

“I ask nothing better,” returned the young man.

“I am your confessor.”

“Yes.”

“Well, then, you ought, as a penitent, to tell me the truth.”

“My whole desire is to tell it you.”

“Every prisoner has committed some crime for which he has been imprisoned. What crime, then, have you committed?”

“You asked me the same question the first time you saw me,” returned the prisoner.

“And then, as now you evaded giving me an answer.”

“And what reason have you for thinking that I shall now reply to you?”

“Because this time I am your confessor.”

“Then if you wish me to tell what crime I have committed, explain to me in what a crime consists. For as my conscience does not accuse me, I aver that I am not a criminal.”

“We are often criminals in the sight of the great of the earth, not alone for having ourselves committed crimes, but because we know that crimes have been committed.”

The prisoner manifested the deepest attention.

“Yes, I understand you,” he said, after a pause; “yes, you are right, monsieur; it is very possible that, in such a light, I am a criminal in the eyes of the great of the earth.”

“Ah! then you know something,” said Aramis, who thought he had pierced not merely through a defect in the harness, but through the joints of it.

“No, I am not aware of anything,” replied the young man; “but sometimes I think — and I say to myself — ”

“What do you say to yourself?”

“That if I were to think but a little more deeply I should either go mad or I should divine a great deal.”

“And then — and then?” said Aramis, impatiently.

“Then I leave off.”

“You leave off?”

“Yes; my head becomes confused and my ideas melancholy; I feel *ennui* overtaking me; I wish — ”

“What?”

“I don’t know; but I do not like to give myself up to longing for things which I do not possess, when I am so happy with what I have.”

“You are afraid of death?” said Aramis, with a slight uneasiness.

“Yes,” said the young man, smiling.

Aramis felt the chill of that smile, and shuddered. “Oh, as you fear death, you know more about matters than you say,” he cried.

“And you,” returned the prisoner, “who bade me to ask to see you; you, who, when I did ask to see you, came here promising a world of confidence; how is it that, nevertheless, it is you who are silent, leaving it for me to speak? Since, then, we both wear masks, either let us both retain them or put them aside together.”

Aramis felt the force and justice of the remark, saying to himself, “This is no ordinary man; I must be cautious. — Are you ambitious?” said he suddenly to the prisoner, aloud, without preparing him for the alteration.

“What do you mean by ambitious?” replied the youth.

“Ambition,” replied Aramis, “is the feeling which prompts a man to desire more — much more — than he possesses.”

“I said that I was contented, monsieur; but, perhaps, I deceive myself. I am ignorant of the nature of ambition; but it is not impossible I may have some. Tell me your mind; that is all I ask.”

“An ambitious man,” said Aramis, “is one who covets that which is beyond his station.”

“I covet nothing beyond my station,” said the young man, with an assurance of manner which for the second time made the bishop of Vannes tremble.

He was silent. But to look at the kindling eye, the knitted brow, and the reflective attitude of the captive, it was evident that he expected something more than silence, — a silence which Aramis now broke. “You lied the first time I saw you,” said he.

“Lied!” cried the young man, starting up on his couch, with such a tone in his voice, and such a lightning in his eyes, that Aramis recoiled, in spite of himself.

“I *should* say,” returned Aramis, bowing, “you concealed from me what you knew of your infancy.”

“A man’s secrets are his own, monsieur,” retorted the prisoner, “and not at the mercy of the first chance-comer.”

“True,” said Aramis, bowing still lower than before, “‘tis true; pardon me, but to-day do I still occupy the place of a chance-comer? I beseech you to reply, monseigneur.”

This title slightly disturbed the prisoner; but nevertheless he did not appear astonished that it was given him. “I do not know you, monsieur,” said he.

“Oh, but if I dared, I would take your hand and kiss it!”

The young man seemed as if he were going to give Aramis his hand; but the light which beamed in his eyes faded away, and he coldly and distrustfully withdrew his hand again. “Kiss the hand of a prisoner,” he said, shaking his head, “to what purpose?”

“Why did you tell me,” said Aramis, “that you were happy here? Why, that you aspired to nothing? Why, in a word, by thus speaking, do you prevent me from being frank in my turn?”

The same light shone a third time in the young man’s eyes, but died ineffectually away as before.

“You distrust me,” said Aramis.

“And why say you so, monsieur?”

“Oh, for a very simple reason; if you know what you ought to know, you ought to mistrust everybody.”

“Then do not be astonished that I am mistrustful, since you suspect me of knowing what I do not know.”

Aramis was struck with admiration at this energetic resistance. “Oh, monseigneur! you drive me to despair,” said he, striking the armchair with his fist.

“And, on my part, I do not comprehend you, monsieur.”

“Well, then, try to understand me.” The prisoner looked fixedly at Aramis.

“Sometimes it seems to me,” said the latter, “that I have before me the man whom I seek, and then — ”

“And then your man disappears, — is it not so?” said the prisoner, smiling. “So much the better.”

Aramis rose. “Certainly,” said he; “I have nothing further to say to a man who mistrusts me as you do.”

“And I, monsieur,” said the prisoner, in the same tone, “have nothing to say to a man who will not understand that a prisoner ought to be mistrustful of everybody.”

“Even of his old friends,” said Aramis. “Oh, monseigneur, you are *too* prudent!”

“Of my old friends? — you one of my old friends, — you?”

“Do you no longer remember,” said Aramis, “that you once saw, in the village where your early years were spent — ”

“Do you know the name of the village?” asked the prisoner.

“Noisy-le-Sec, monseigneur,” answered Aramis, firmly.

“Go on,” said the young man, with an immovable aspect.

“Stay, monseigneur,” said Aramis; “if you are positively resolved to carry on this game, let us break off. I am here to tell you many things, ‘tis true; but you must allow me to see that, on your side, you have a desire to know them. Before revealing the important matters I still withhold, be assured I am in need of some encouragement, if not candor; a little sympathy, if not confidence. But you keep yourself intrenched in a pretended which paralyzes me. Oh, not for the reason you think; for, ignorant as you may be, or indifferent as you feign to be, you are none the less what you are, monseigneur, and there is nothing — nothing, mark me! which can cause you not to be so.”

“I promise you,” replied the prisoner, “to hear you without impatience. Only it appears to me that I have a right to repeat the question I have already asked, ‘Who *are* you?’“

“Do you remember, fifteen or eighteen years ago, seeing at Noisy-le-Sec a cavalier, accompanied by a lady in black silk, with flame-colored ribbons in her hair?”

“Yes,” said the young man; “I once asked the name of this cavalier, and they told me that he called himself the Abbe d’Herblay. I was astonished that the abbe had so warlike an air, and they replied that there was nothing singular in that, seeing that he was one of Louis XIII.’s musketeers.”

“Well,” said Aramis, “that musketeer and abbe, afterwards bishop of Vannes, is your confessor now.”

“I know it; I recognized you.”

“Then, monseigneur, if you know that, I must further add a fact of which you are ignorant — that if the king were to know this evening of the presence of this musketeer, this abbe, this bishop, this confessor, *here* — he, who has risked everything to visit you, to-morrow would behold the steely glitter of the executioner’s axe in a dungeon more gloomy, more obscure than yours.”

While listening to these words, delivered with emphasis, the young man had raised himself on his couch, and was now gazing more and more eagerly at Aramis.

The result of his scrutiny was that he appeared to derive some confidence from it. “Yes,” he murmured, “I remember perfectly. The woman of whom you speak came once with you, and twice afterwards with another.” He hesitated.

“With another, who came to see you every month — is it not so, monseigneur?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know who this lady was?”

The light seemed ready to flash from the prisoner’s eyes. “I am aware that she was one of the ladies of the court,” he said.

“You remember that lady well, do you not?”

“Oh, my recollection can hardly be very confused on this head,” said the young prisoner. “I saw that lady once with a gentleman about forty-five years old. I saw her once with you, and with the lady dressed in black. I have seen her twice since then with the same person. These four people, with my master, and old Perronnette, my jailer, and the governor of the prison, are the only persons with whom I have ever spoken, and, indeed, almost the only persons I have ever seen.”

“Then you were in prison?”

“If I am a prisoner here, then I was comparatively free, although in a very narrow sense — a house I never quitted, a garden surrounded with walls I could not climb, these constituted my residence, but you know it, as you have been there. In a word, being accustomed to live within these bounds, I never cared to leave them. And so you will understand, monsieur, that having never seen anything of the world, I have nothing left to care for; and therefore, if you relate anything, you will be obliged to explain each item to me as you go along.”

“And I will do so,” said Aramis, bowing; “for it is my duty, monseigneur.”

“Well, then, begin by telling me who was my tutor.”

“A worthy and, above all, an honorable gentleman, monseigneur; fit guide for both body and soul. Had you ever any reason to complain of him?”

“Oh, no; quite the contrary. But this gentleman of yours often used to tell me that my father and mother were dead. Did he deceive me, or did he speak the truth?”

“He was compelled to comply with the orders given him.”

“Then he lied?”

“In one respect. Your father is dead.”

“And my mother?”

“She is dead *for you*.”

“But then she lives for others, does she not?”

“Yes.”

“And I — and I, then” (the young man looked sharply at Aramis) “am compelled to live in the obscurity of a prison?”

“Alas! I fear so.”

“And that because my presence in the world would lead to the revelation of a great secret?”

“Certainly, a very great secret.”

“My enemy must indeed be powerful, to be able to shut up in the Bastile a child such as I then was.”

“He is.”

“More powerful than my mother, then?”

“And why do you ask that?”

“Because my mother would have taken my part.”

Aramis hesitated. “Yes, monseigneur; more powerful than your mother.”

“Seeing, then, that my nurse and preceptor were carried off, and that I, also, was separated from them — either they were, or I am, very dangerous to my enemy?”

“Yes; but you are alluding to a peril from which he freed himself, by causing the nurse and preceptor to disappear,” answered Aramis, quietly.

“Disappear!” cried the prisoner, “how did they disappear?”

“In a very sure way,” answered Aramis — ”they are dead.”

The young man turned pale, and passed his hand tremblingly over his face. “Poison?” he asked.

“Poison.”

The prisoner reflected a moment. “My enemy must indeed have been very cruel, or hard beset by necessity, to assassinate those two innocent people, my sole support; for the worthy gentleman and the poor nurse had never harmed a living being.”

“In your family, monseigneur, necessity is stern. And so it is necessity which compels me, to my great regret, to tell you that this gentleman and the unhappy lady have been assassinated.”

“Oh, you tell me nothing I am not aware of,” said the prisoner, knitting his brows.

“How?”

"I suspected it."

"Why?"

"I will tell you."

At this moment the young man, supporting himself on his two elbows, drew close to Aramis's face, with such an expression of dignity, of self-command and of defiance even, that the bishop felt the electricity of enthusiasm strike in devouring flashes from that great heart of his, into his brain of adamant.

"Speak, monseigneur. I have already told you that by conversing with you I endanger my life. Little value as it has, I implore you to accept it as the ransom of your own."

"Well," resumed the young man, "this is why I suspected they had killed my nurse and my preceptor — "

"Whom you used to call your father?"

"Yes; whom I called my father, but whose son I well knew I was not."

"Who caused you to suppose so?"

"Just as you, monsieur, are too respectful for a friend, he was also too respectful for a father."

"I, however," said Aramis, "have no intention to disguise myself."

The young man nodded assent and continued: "Undoubtedly, I was not destined to perpetual seclusion," said the prisoner; "and that which makes me believe so, above all, now, is the care that was taken to render me as accomplished a cavalier as possible. The gentleman attached to my person taught me everything he knew himself — mathematics, a little geometry, astronomy, fencing and riding. Every morning I went through military exercises, and practiced on horseback. Well, one morning during the summer, it being very hot, I went to sleep in the hall. Nothing, up to that period, except the respect paid me, had enlightened me, or even roused my suspicions. I lived as children, as birds, as plants, as the air and the sun do. I had just turned my fifteenth year — "

"This, then, is eight years ago?"

"Yes, nearly; but I have ceased to reckon time."

"Excuse me; but what did your tutor tell you, to encourage you to work?"

"He used to say that a man was bound to make for himself, in the world, that fortune which Heaven had refused him at his birth. He added that, being a poor, obscure orphan, I had no one but myself to look to; and that nobody either did, or ever would, take any interest in me. I was, then, in the hall I have spoken of, asleep from fatigue with long fencing. My preceptor was in his room on the first floor, just over me. Suddenly I heard him exclaim, and then he called: ‘Perronnette! Perronnette!’ It was my nurse whom he called.”

“Yes, I know it,” said Aramis. “Continue, monseigneur.”

“Very likely she was in the garden; for my preceptor came hastily downstairs. I rose, anxious at seeing him anxious. He opened the garden-door, still crying out, ‘Perronnette! Perronnette!’ The windows of the hall looked into the court; the shutters were closed; but through a chink in them I saw my tutor draw near a large well, which was almost directly under the windows of his study. He stooped over the brim, looked into the well, and again cried out, and made wild and affrighted gestures. Where I was, I could not only see, but hear — and see and hear I did.”

“Go on, I pray you,” said Aramis.

“Dame Perronnette came running up, hearing the governor’s cries. He went to meet her, took her by the arm, and drew her quickly towards the edge; after which, as they both bent over it together, ‘Look, look,’ cried he, ‘what a misfortune!’

“‘Calm yourself, calm yourself,’ said Perronnette; ‘what is the matter?’

“‘The letter!’ he exclaimed; ‘do you see that letter?’ pointing to the bottom of the well.

“‘What letter?’ she cried.

“‘The letter you see down there; the last letter from the queen.’

“At this word I trembled. My tutor — he who passed for my father, he who was continually recommending me modesty and humility — in correspondence with the queen!

“‘The queen’s last letter!’ cried Perronnette, without showing more astonishment than at seeing this letter at the bottom of the well; ‘but how came it there?’

“‘A chance, Dame Perronnette — a singular chance. I was entering my room, and on opening the door, the window, too, being open, a puff of air came suddenly and carried off this paper — this letter of her majesty’s; I darted after it, and gained the window just in time to see it flutter a moment in the breeze and disappear down the well.’

“‘Well,’ said Dame Perronnette; ‘and if the letter has fallen into the well, ‘tis all the same as if it was burnt; and as the queen burns all her letters every time she comes — ’

"And so you see this lady who came every month was the queen," said the prisoner.

"'Doubtless, doubtless,' continued the old gentleman; 'but this letter contained instructions — how can I follow them?'

"'Write immediately to her; give her a plain account of the accident, and the queen will no doubt write you another letter in place of this.'

"'Oh! the queen would never believe the story,' said the good gentleman, shaking his head; 'she will imagine that I want to keep this letter instead of giving it up like the rest, so as to have a hold over her. She is so distrustful, and M. de Mazarin so — Yon devil of an Italian is capable of having us poisoned at the first breath of suspicion.'"

Aramis almost imperceptibly smiled.

"'You know, Dame Perronnette, they are both so suspicious in all that concerns Philippe.'

"Philippe was the name they gave me," said the prisoner.

"'Well, 'tis no use hesitating,' said Dame Perronnette, 'somebody must go down the well.'

"'Of course; so that the person who goes down may read the paper as he is coming up.'

"'But let us choose some villager who cannot read, and then you will be at ease.'

"'Granted; but will not any one who descends guess that a paper must be important for which we risk a man's life? However, you have given me an idea, Dame Perronnette; somebody shall go down the well, but that somebody shall be myself.'

"But at this notion Dame Perronnette lamented and cried in such a manner, and so implored the old nobleman, with tears in her eyes, that he promised her to obtain a ladder long enough to reach down, while she went in search of some stout-hearted youth, whom she was to persuade that a jewel had fallen into the well, and that this jewel was wrapped in a paper. 'And as paper,' remarked my preceptor, 'naturally unfolds in water, the young man would not be surprised at finding nothing, after all, but the letter wide open.'

"'But perhaps the writing will be already effaced by that time,' said Dame Perronnette.

"'No consequence, provided we secure the letter. On returning it to the queen, she will see at once that we have not betrayed her; and consequently, as we shall not rouse the distrust of Mazarin, we shall have nothing to fear from him.’

“Having come to this resolution, they parted. I pushed back the shutter, and, seeing that my tutor was about to re-enter, I threw myself on my couch, in a confusion of brain caused by all I had just heard. My governor opened the door a few moments after, and thinking I was asleep gently closed it again. As soon as ever it was shut, I rose, and, listening, heard the sound of retiring footsteps. Then I returned to the shutters, and saw my tutor and Dame Perronnette go out together. I was alone in the house. They had hardly closed the gate before I sprang from the window and ran to the well. Then, just as my governor had leaned over, so leaned I. Something white and luminous glistened in the green and quivering silence of the water. The brilliant disk fascinated and allured me; my eyes became fixed, and I could hardly breathe. The well seemed to draw me downwards with its slimy mouth and icy breath; and I thought I read, at the bottom of the water, characters of fire traced upon the letter the queen had touched. Then, scarcely knowing what I was about, and urged on by one of those instinctive impulses which drive men to destruction, I lowered the cord from the windlass of the well to within about three feet of the water, leaving the bucket dangling, at the same time taking infinite pains not to disturb that coveted letter, which was beginning to change its white tint for the hue of chrysoprase, — proof enough that it was sinking, — and then, with the rope weltering in my hands, slid down into the abyss. When I saw myself hanging over the dark pool, when I saw the sky lessening above my head, a cold shudder came over me, a chill fear got the better of me, I was seized with giddiness, and the hair rose on my head; but my strong will still reigned supreme over all the terror and disquietude. I gained the water, and at once plunged into it, holding on by one hand, while I immersed the other and seized the dear letter, which, alas! came in two in my grasp. I concealed the two fragments in my body-coat, and, helping myself with my feet against the sides of the pit, and clinging on with my hands, agile and vigorous as I was, and, above all, pressed for time, I regained the brink, drenching it as I touched it with the water that streamed off me. I was no sooner out of the well with my prize, than I rushed into the sunlight, and took refuge in a kind of shrubbery at the bottom of the garden. As I entered my hiding-place, the bell which resounded when the great gate was opened, rang. It was my preceptor come back again. I had but just time. I calculated that it would take ten minutes before he would gain my place of concealment, even if, guessing where I was, he came straight to it; and twenty if he were obliged to look for me. But this was time enough to allow me to read the cherished letter, whose fragments I hastened to unite again. The writing was already fading, but I managed to decipher it all.

"And will you tell me what you read therein, monseigneur?" asked Aramis, deeply interested.

"Quite enough, monsieur, to see that my tutor was a man of noble rank, and that Perronnette, without being a lady of quality, was far better than a servant; and also to perceived that I must myself be high-born, since the queen, Anne of Austria, and Mazarin, the prime minister, commended me so earnestly to their care." Here the young man paused, quite overcome.

"And what happened?" asked Aramis.

"It happened, monsieur," answered he, "that the workmen they had summoned found nothing in the well, after the closest search; that my governor perceived that the brink was all watery; that I was not so dried by the sun as to prevent Dame Perronnette spying that my garments were moist; and, lastly, that I was seized with a violent fever, owing to the chill and the excitement of my discovery, an attack of delirium supervening, during which I related the whole adventure; so that, guided by my avowal, my governor found the pieces of the queen's letter inside the bolster where I had concealed them."

"Ah!" said Aramis, "now I understand."

"Beyond this, all is conjecture. Doubtless the unfortunate lady and gentleman, not daring to keep the occurrence secret, wrote of all this to the queen and sent back the torn letter."

"After which," said Aramis, "you were arrested and removed to the Bastile."

"As you see."

"Your two attendants disappeared?"

"Alas!"

"Let us not take up our time with the dead, but see what can be done with the living. You told me you were resigned."

"I repeat it."

"Without any desire for freedom?"

"As I told you."

"Without ambition, sorrow, or thought?"

The young man made no answer.

“Well,” asked Aramis, “why are you silent?”

“I think I have spoken enough,” answered the prisoner, “and that now it is your turn. I am weary.”

Aramis gathered himself up, and a shade of deep solemnity spread itself over his countenance. It was evident that he had reached the crisis in the part he had come to the prison to play. “One question,” said Aramis.

“What is it? speak.”

“In the house you inhabited there were neither looking-glasses nor mirrors?”

“What are those two words, and what is their meaning?” asked the young man; “I have no sort of knowledge of them.”

“They designate two pieces of furniture which reflect objects; so that, for instance, you may see in them your own lineaments, as you see mine now, with the naked eye.”

“No; there was neither a glass nor a mirror in the house,” answered the young man.

Aramis looked round him. “Nor is there anything of the kind here, either,” he said; “they have again taken the same precaution.”

“To what end?”

“You will know directly. Now, you have told me that you were instructed in mathematics, astronomy, fencing, and riding; but you have not said a word about history.”

“My tutor sometimes related to me the principal deeds of the king, St. Louis, King Francis I., and King Henry IV.”

“Is that all?”

“Very nearly.”

“This also was done by design, then; just as they deprived you of mirrors, which reflect the present, so they left you in ignorance of history, which reflects the past. Since your imprisonment, books have been forbidden you; so that you are unacquainted with a number of facts, by means of which you would be able to reconstruct the shattered mansion of your recollections and your hopes.”

“It is true,” said the young man.

“Listen, then; I will in a few words tell you what has passed in France during the last twenty-three or twenty-four years; that is, from the probable date of your birth; in a word, from the time that interests you.”

"Say on." And the young man resumed his serious and attentive attitude.

"Do you know who was the son of Henry IV.?"

"At least I know who his successor was."

"How?"

"By means of a coin dated 1610, which bears the effigy of Henry IV.; and another of 1612, bearing that of Louis XIII. So I presumed that, there being only two years between the two dates, Louis was Henry's successor."

"Then," said Aramis, "you know that the last reigning monarch was Louis XIII.?"

"I do," answered the youth, slightly reddening.

"Well, he was a prince full of noble ideas and great projects, always, alas! deferred by the trouble of the times and the dread struggle that his minister Richelieu had to maintain against the great nobles of France. The king himself was of a feeble character, and died young and unhappy."

"I know it."

"He had been long anxious about having a heir; a care which weighs heavily on princes, who desire to leave behind them more than one pledge that their best thoughts and works will be continued."

"Did the king, then, die childless?" asked the prisoner, smiling.

"No, but he was long without one, and for a long while thought he should be the last of his race. This idea had reduced him to the depths of despair, when suddenly, his wife, Anne of Austria — "

The prisoner trembled.

"Did you know," said Aramis, "that Louis XIII.'s wife was called Anne of Austria?"

"Continue," said the young man, without replying to the question.

"When suddenly," resumed Aramis, "the queen announced an interesting event. There was great joy at the intelligence, and all prayed for her happy delivery. On the 5th of September, 1638, she gave birth to a son."

Here Aramis looked at his companion, and thought he observed him turning pale. "You are about to hear," said Aramis, "an account which few indeed could now avouch; for it refers to a secret which they imagined buried with the dead, entombed in the abyss of the confessional."

"And you will tell me this secret?" broke in the youth.

"Oh!" said Aramis, with unmistakable emphasis, "I do not know that I ought to risk this secret by intrusting it to one who has no desire to quit the Bastile."

“I hear you, monsieur.”

“The queen, then, gave birth to a son. But while the court was rejoicing over the event, when the king had show the new-born child to the nobility and people, and was sitting gayly down to table, to celebrate the event, the queen, who was alone in her room, was again taken ill and gave birth to a second son.”

“Oh!” said the prisoner, betraying a bitter acquaintance with affairs than he had owned to, “I thought that Monsieur was only born in — ”

Aramis raised his finger; “Permit me to continue,” he said.

The prisoner sighed impatiently, and paused.

“Yes,” said Aramis, “the queen had a second son, whom Dame Perronnette, the midwife, received in her arms.”

“Dame Perronnette!” murmured the young man.

“They ran at once to the banqueting-room, and whispered to the king what had happened; he rose and quitted the table. But this time it was no longer happiness that his face expressed, but something akin to terror. The birth of twins changed into bitterness the joy to which that of an only son had given rise, seeing that in France (a fact you are assuredly ignorant of) it is the oldest of the king’s sons who succeeds his father.”

“I know it.”

“And that the doctors and jurists assert that there is ground for doubting whether the son that first makes his appearance is the elder by the law of heaven and of nature.”

The prisoner uttered a smothered cry, and became whiter than the coverlet under which he hid himself.

“Now you understand,” pursued Aramis, “that the king, who with so much pleasure saw himself repeated in one, was in despair about two; fearing that the second might dispute the first’s claim to seniority, which had been recognized only two hours before; and so this second son, relying on party interests and caprices, might one day sow discord and engender civil war throughout the kingdom; by these means destroying the very dynasty he should have strengthened.”

“Oh, I understand! — I understand!” murmured the young man.

“Well,” continued Aramis; “this is what they relate, what they declare; this is why one of the queen’s two sons, shamefully parted from his brother, shamefully sequestered, is buried in profound obscurity; this is why that second son has disappeared, and so completely, that not a soul in France, save his mother, is aware of his existence.”

“Yes! his mother, who has cast him off,” cried the prisoner in a tone of despair.

“Except, also,” Aramis went on, “the lady in the black dress; and, finally, excepting — ”

“Excepting yourself — is it not? You who come and relate all this; you, who rouse in my soul curiosity, hatred, ambition, and, perhaps, even the thirst of vengeance; except you, monsieur, who, if you are the man to whom I expect, whom the note I have received applies to, whom, in short, Heaven ought to send me, must possess about you — ”

“What?” asked Aramis.

“A portrait of the king, Louis XIV., who at this moment reigns upon the throne of France.”

“Here is the portrait,” replied the bishop, handing the prisoner a miniature in enamel, on which Louis was depicted life-like, with a handsome, lofty mien. The prisoner eagerly seized the portrait, and gazed at it with devouring eyes.

“And now, monseigneur,” said Aramis, “here is a mirror.” Aramis left the prisoner time to recover his ideas.

“So high! — so high!” murmured the young man, eagerly comparing the likeness of Louis with his own countenance reflected in the glass.

“What do you think of it?” at length said Aramis.

“I think that I am lost,” replied the captive; “the king will never set me free.”

“And I — I demand to know,” added the bishop, fixing his piercing eyes significantly upon the prisoner, “I demand to know which of these two is king; the one this miniature portrays, or whom the glass reflects?”

“The king, monsieur,” sadly replied the young man, “is he who is on the throne, who is not in prison; and who, on the other hand, can cause others to be entombed there. Royalty means power; and you behold how powerless I am.”

“Monseigneur,” answered Aramis, with a respect he had not yet manifested, “the king, mark me, will, if you desire it, be the one that, quitting his dungeon, shall maintain himself upon the throne, on which his friends will place him.”

“Tempt me not, monsieur,” broke in the prisoner bitterly.

“Be not weak, monseigneur,” persisted Aramis; “I have brought you all the proofs of your birth; consult them; satisfy yourself that you are a king’s son; it is for *us* to act.”

“No, no; it is impossible.”

“Unless, indeed,” resumed the bishop ironically, “it be the destiny of your race, that the brothers excluded from the throne should be always princes void of courage and honesty, as was your uncle, M. Gaston d’Orleans, who ten times conspired against his brother Louis XIII.”

“What!” cried the prince, astonished; “my uncle Gaston ‘conspired against his brother’; conspired to dethrone him?”

“Exactly, monseigneur; for no other reason. I tell you the truth.”

“And he had friends — devoted friends?”

“As much so as I am to you.”

“And, after all, what did he do? — Failed!”

“He failed, I admit; but always through his own fault; and, for the sake of purchasing — not his life — for the life of the king’s brother is sacred and inviolable — but his liberty, he sacrificed the lives of all his friends, one after another. And so, at this day, he is a very blot on history, the detestation of a hundred noble families in this kingdom.”

“I understand, monsieur; either by weakness or treachery, my uncle slew his friends.”

“By weakness; which, in princes, is always treachery.”

“And cannot a man fail, then, from incapacity and ignorance? Do you really believe it possible that a poor captive such as I, brought up, not only at a distance from the court, but even from the world — do you believe it possible that such a one could assist those of his friends who should attempt to serve him?” And as Aramis was about to reply, the young man suddenly cried out, with a violence which betrayed the temper of his blood, “We are speaking of friends; but how can *I* have any friends — I, whom no one knows; and have neither liberty, money, nor influence, to gain any?”

“I fancy I had the honor to offer myself to your royal highness.”

“Oh, do not style me so, monsieur; ‘tis either treachery or cruelty. Bid me not think of aught beyond these prison-walls, which so grimly confine me; let me again love, or, at least, submit to my slavery and my obscurity.”

“Monseigneur, monseigneur; if you again utter these desperate words — if, after having received proof of your high birth, you still remain poor-spirited in body and soul, I will comply with your desire, I will depart, and renounce forever the service of a master, to whom so eagerly I came to devote my assistance and my life!"

"Monsieur," cried the prince, "would it not have been better for you to have reflected, before telling me all that you have done, that you have broken my heart forever?"

"And so I desire to do, monseigneur."

"To talk to me about power, grandeur, eye, and to prate of thrones! Is a prison the fit place? You wish to make me believe in splendor, and we are lying lost in night; you boast of glory, and we are smothering our words in the curtains of this miserable bed; you give me glimpses of power absolute whilst I hear the footsteps of the every-watchful jailer in the corridor — that step which, after all, makes you tremble more than it does me. To render me somewhat less incredulous, free me from the Bastile; let me breathe the fresh air; give me my spurs and trusty sword, then we shall begin to understand each other."

"It is precisely my intention to give you all this, monseigneur, and more; only, do you desire it?"

"A word more," said the prince. "I know there are guards in every gallery, bolts to every door, cannon and soldiery at every barrier. How will you overcome the sentries — spike the guns? How will you break through the bolts and bars?"

"Monseigneur, — how did you get the note which announced my arrival to you?"

"You can bribe a jailer for such a thing as a note."

"If we can corrupt one turnkey, we can corrupt ten."

"Well; I admit that it may be possible to release a poor captive from the Bastile; possible so to conceal him that the king's people shall not again ensnare him; possible, in some unknown retreat, to sustain the unhappy wretch in some suitable manner."

"Monseigneur!" said Aramis, smiling.

"I admit that, whoever would do this much for me, would seem more than mortal in my eyes; but as you tell me I am a prince, brother of the king, how can you restore me the rank and power which my mother and my brother have deprived me of? And as, to effect this, I must pass a life of war and hatred, how can you cause me to prevail in those combats — render me invulnerable by my enemies? Ah! monsieur, reflect on all this; place me, to-morrow, in some dark cavern at a mountain's base; yield me the delight of hearing in freedom sounds of the river, plain and valley, of beholding in freedom the sun of the blue heavens, or the stormy sky, and it is enough. Promise me no more than this, for, indeed, more you cannot give, and it would be a crime to deceive me, since you call yourself my friend."

Aramis waited in silence. "Monseigneur," he resumed, after a moment's reflection, "I admire the firm, sound sense which dictates your words; I am happy to have discovered my monarch's mind."

"Again, again! oh, God! for mercy's sake," cried the prince, pressing his icy hands upon his clammy brow, "do not play with me! I have no need to be a king to be the happiest of men."

"But I, monseigneur, wish you to be a king for the good of humanity."

"Ah!" said the prince, with fresh distrust inspired by the word; "ah! with what, then, has humanity to reproach my brother?"

"I forgot to say, monseigneur, that if you would allow me to guide you, and if you consent to become the most powerful monarch in Christendom, you will have promoted the interests of all the friends whom I devote to the success of your cause, and these friends are numerous."

"Numerous?"

"Less numerous than powerful, monseigneur."

"Explain yourself."

"It is impossible; I will explain, I swear before Heaven, on that day that I see you sitting on the throne of France."

"But my brother?"

"You shall decree his fate. Do you pity him?"

"Him, who leaves me to perish in a dungeon? No, no. For him I have no pity!"

"So much the better."

"He might have himself come to this prison, have taken me by the hand, and have said, 'My brother, Heaven created us to love, not to contend with one another. I come to you. A barbarous prejudice has condemned you to pass your days in obscurity, far from mankind, deprived of every joy. I will make you sit down beside me; I will buckle round your waist our father's sword. Will you take advantage of this reconciliation to put down or restrain me? Will you employ that sword to spill my blood?' 'Oh! never,' I would have replied to him, 'I look on you as my preserver, I will respect you as my master. You give me far more than Heaven bestowed; for through you I possess liberty and the privilege of loving and being loved in this world.'"

“And you would have kept your word, monseigneur?”

“On my life! While now — now that I have guilty ones to punish — ”

“In what manner, monseigneur?”

“What do you say as to the resemblance that Heaven has given me to my brother?”

“I say that there was in that likeness a providential instruction which the king ought to have heeded; I say that your mother committed a crime in rendering those different in happiness and fortune whom nature created so startlingly alike, of her own flesh, and I conclude that the object of punishment should be only to restore the equilibrium.”

“By which you mean — ”

“That if I restore you to your place on your brother’s throne, he shall take yours in prison.”

“Alas! there’s such infinity of suffering in prison, especially it would be so for one who has drunk so deeply of the cup of enjoyment.”

“Your royal highness will always be free to act as you may desire; and if it seems good to you, after punishment, you will have it in your power to pardon.”

“Good. And now, are you aware of one thing, monsieur?”

“Tell me, my prince.”

“It is that I will hear nothing further from you till I am clear of the Bastile.”

“I was going to say to your highness that I should only have the pleasure of seeing you once again.”

“And when?”

“The day when my prince leaves these gloomy walls.”

“Heavens! how will you give me notice of it?”

“By myself coming to fetch you.”

“Yourself?”

“My prince, do not leave this chamber save with me, or if in my absence you are compelled to do so, remember that I am not concerned in it.”

“And so I am not to speak a word of this to any one whatever, save to you?”

“Save only to me.” Aramis bowed very low. The prince offered his hand.

“Monsieur,” he said, in a tone that issued from his heart, “one word more, my last. If you have sought me for my destruction; if you are only a tool in the hands of my enemies; if from our conference, in which you have sounded the depths of my mind, anything worse than captivity result, that is to say, if death befall me, still receive my blessing, for you will have ended my troubles and given me repose from the tormenting fever that has preyed on me for eight long, weary years.”

“Monseigneur, wait the results ere you judge me,” said Aramis.

“I say that, in such a case, I bless and forgive you. If, on the other hand, you are come to restore me to that position in the sunshine of fortune and glory to which I was destined by Heaven; if by your means I am enabled to live in the memory of man, and confer luster on my race by deeds of valor, or by solid benefits bestowed upon my people; if, from my present depths of sorrow, aided by your generous hand, I raise myself to the very height of honor, then to you, whom I thank with blessings, to you will I offer half my power and my glory: though you would still be but partly recompensed, and your share must always remain incomplete, since I could not divide with you the happiness received at your hands.”

“Monseigneur,” replied Aramis, moved by the pallor and excitement of the young man, “the nobleness of your heart fills me with joy and admiration. It is not you who will have to thank me, but rather the nation whom you will render happy, the posterity whose name you will make glorious. Yes; I shall indeed have bestowed upon you more than life, I shall have given you immortality.”

The prince offered his hand to Aramis, who sank upon his knee and kissed it.

“It is the first act of homage paid to our future king,” said he. “When I see you again, I shall say, ‘Good day, sire.’“

“Till then,” said the young man, pressing his wan and wasted fingers over his heart, — ”till then, no more dreams, no more strain on my life — my heart would break! Oh, monsieur, how small is my prison — how low the window — how narrow are the doors! To think that so much pride, splendor, and happiness, should be able to enter in and to remain here!”

“Your royal highness makes me proud,” said Aramis, “since you infer it is I who brought all this.” And he rapped immediately on the door. The jailer came to open it with Baisemeaux, who, devoured by fear and uneasiness, was beginning, in spite of himself, to listen at the door. Happily, neither of the speakers had forgotten to smother his voice, even in the most passionate outbreaks.

“What a confessor!” said the governor, forcing a laugh; “who would believe that a compulsory recluse, a man as though in the very jaws of death, could have committed crimes so numerous, and so long to tell of?”

Aramis made no reply. He was eager to leave the Bastile, where the secret which overwhelmed him seemed to double the weight of the walls. As soon as they reached Baisemeaux’s quarters, “Let us proceed to business, my dear governor,” said Aramis.

“Alas!” replied Baisemeaux.

“You have to ask me for my receipt for one hundred and fifty thousand livres,” said the bishop.

“And to pay over the first third of the sum,” added the poor governor, with a sigh, taking three steps towards his iron strong-box.

“Here is the receipt,” said Aramis.

“And here is the money,” returned Baisemeaux, with a threefold sigh.

“The order instructed me only to give a receipt; it said nothing about receiving the money,” rejoined Aramis. “Adieu, monsieur le governeur!”

And he departed, leaving Baisemeaux almost more than stifled with joy and surprise at this regal present so liberally bestowed by the confessor extraordinary to the Bastile.

CHAPTER II.

How Mouston Had Become Fatter without Giving Porthos Notice Thereof, and of the Troubles Which Consequently Befell that Worthy Gentleman.

Since the departure of Athos for Blois, Porthos and D'Artagnan were seldom together. One was occupied with harassing duties for the king, the other had been making many purchases of furniture which he intended to forward to his estate, and by aid of which he hoped to establish in his various residences something of the courtly luxury he had witnessed in all its dazzling brightness in his majesty's society. D'Artagnan, ever faithful, one morning during an interval of service thought about Porthos, and being uneasy at not having heard anything of him for a fortnight, directed his steps towards his hotel, and pounced upon him just as he was getting up. The worthy baron had a pensive — nay, more than pensive — melancholy air. He was sitting on his bed, only half-dressed, and with legs dangling over the edge, contemplating a host of garments, which with their fringes, lace, embroidery, and slashes of ill-assorted hues, were strewed all over the floor. Porthos, sad and reflective as La Fontaine's hare, did not observe D'Artagnan's entrance, which was, moreover, screened at this moment by M. Mouston, whose personal corpulency, quite enough at any time to hide one man from another, was effectually doubled by a scarlet coat which the intendant was holding up for his master's inspection, by the sleeves, that he might the better see it all over. D'Artagnan stopped at the threshold and looked in at the pensive Porthos and then, as the sight of the innumerable garments strewing the floor caused mighty sighs to heave the bosom of that excellent gentleman, D'Artagnan thought it time to put an end to these dismal reflections, and coughed by way of announcing himself.

"Ah!" exclaimed Porthos, whose countenance brightened with joy; "ah! ah! Here is D'Artagnan. I shall then get hold of an idea!"

At these words Mouston, doubting what was going on behind him, got out of the way, smiling kindly at the friend of his master, who thus found himself freed from the material obstacle which had prevented his reaching

D'Artagnan. Porthos made his sturdy knees crack again in rising, and crossing the room in two strides, found himself face to face with his friend, whom he folded to his breast with a force of affection that seemed to increase with every day. "Ah!" he repeated, "you are always welcome, dear friend; but just now you are more welcome than ever."

"But you seem to have the megrims here!" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

Porthos replied by a look expressive of dejection. "Well, then, tell me all about it, Porthos, my friend, unless it is a secret."

"In the first place," returned Porthos, "you know I have no secrets from you. This, then, is what saddens me."

"Wait a minute, Porthos; let me first get rid of all this litter of satin and velvet!"

"Oh, never mind," said Porthos, contemptuously; "it is all trash."

"Trash, Porthos! Cloth at twenty-five livres an ell! gorgeous satin! regal velvet!"

"Then you think these clothes are — "

"Splendid, Porthos, splendid! I'll wager that you alone in France have so many; and suppose you never had any more made, and were to live to be a hundred years of age, which wouldn't astonish me in the very least, you could still wear a new dress the day of your death, without being obliged to see the nose of a single tailor from now till then."

Porthos shook his head.

"Come, my friend," said D'Artagnan, "this unnatural melancholy in you frightens me. My dear Porthos, pray get it out, then. And the sooner the better."

"Yes, my friend, so I will: if, indeed, it is possible."

"Perhaps you have received bad news from Bracieux?"

"No: they have felled the wood, and it has yielded a third more than the estimate."

"Then there has been a falling-off in the pools of Pierrefonds?"

"No, my friend: they have been fished, and there is enough left to stock all the pools in the neighborhood."

"Perhaps your estate at Vallon has been destroyed by an earthquake?"

"No, my friend; on the contrary, the ground was struck with lightning a hundred paces from the chateau, and a fountain sprung up in a place entirely destitute of water."

"What in the world *is* the matter, then?"

“The fact is, I have received an invitation for the *fete* at Vaux,” said Porthos, with a lugubrious expression.

“Well! do you complain of that? The king has caused a hundred mortal heart-burnings among the courtiers by refusing invitations. And so, my dear friend, you are really going to Vaux?”

“Indeed I am!”

“You will see a magnificent sight.”

“Alas! I doubt it, though.”

“Everything that is grand in France will be brought together there!”

“Ah!” cried Porthos, tearing out a lock of hair in his despair.

“Eh! good heavens, are you ill?” cried D’Artagnan.

“I am as firm as the Pont-Neuf! It isn’t that.”

“But what is it, then?”

“‘Tis that I have no clothes!”

D’Artagnan stood petrified. “No clothes! Porthos, no clothes!” he cried, “when I see at least fifty suits on the floor.”

“Fifty, truly; but not one which fits me!”

“What? not one that fits you? But are you not measured, then, when you give an order?”

“To be sure he is,” answered Mouston; “but unfortunately *I* have gotten stouter!”

“What! *you* stouter!”

“So much so that I am now bigger than the baron. Would you believe it, monsieur?”

“*Parbleu!* it seems to me that is quite evident.”

“Do you see, stupid?” said Porthos, “that is quite evident!”

“Be still, my dear Porthos,” resumed D’Artagnan, becoming slightly impatient, “I don’t understand why your clothes should not fit you, because Mouston has grown stouter.”

“I am going to explain it,” said Porthos. “You remember having related to me the story of the Roman general Antony, who had always seven wild boars kept roasting, each cooked up to a different point; so that he might be able to have his dinner at any time of the day he chose to ask for it. Well, then, I resolved, as at any time I might be invited to court to spend a week, I resolved to have always seven suits ready for the occasion.”

“Capitally reasoned, Porthos — only a man must have a fortune like yours to gratify such whims. Without counting the time lost in being measured, the fashions are always changing.”

“That is exactly the point,” said Porthos, “in regard to which I flattered myself I had hit on a very ingenious device.”

“Tell me what it is; for I don’t doubt your genius.”

“You remember what Mouston once was, then?”

“Yes; when he used to call himself Mousqueton.”

“And you remember, too, the period when he began to grow fatter?”

“No, not exactly. I beg your pardon, my good Mouston.”

“Oh! you are not in fault, monsieur,” said Mouston, graciously. “You were in Paris, and as for us, we were at Pierrefonds.”

“Well, well, my dear Porthos; there was a time when Mouston began to grow fat. Is that what you wished to say?”

“Yes, my friend; and I greatly rejoice over the period.”

“Indeed, I believe you do,” exclaimed D’Artagnan.

“You understand,” continued Porthos, “what a world of trouble it spared for me.”

“No, I don’t — by any means.”

“Look here, my friend. In the first place, as you have said, to be measured is a loss of time, even though it occur only once a fortnight. And then, one may be travelling; and then you wish to have seven suits always with you. In short, I have a horror of letting any one take my measure. Confound it! either one is a nobleman or not. To be scrutinized and scanned by a fellow who completely analyzes you, by inch and line — ’tis degrading! Here, they find you too hollow; there, too prominent. They recognize your strong and weak points. See, now, when we leave the measurer’s hands, we are like those strongholds whose angles and different thicknesses have been ascertained by a spy.”

“In truth, my dear Porthos, you possess ideas entirely original.”

“Ah! you see when a man is an engineer — ”

“And has fortified Belle-Isle — ’tis natural, my friend.”

“Well, I had an idea, which would doubtless have proved a good one, but for Mouston’s carelessness.”

D’Artagnan glanced at Mouston, who replied by a slight movement of his body, as if to say, “You will see whether I am at all to blame in all this.”

“I congratulated myself, then,” resumed Porthos, “at seeing Mouston get fat; and I did all I could, by means of substantial feeding, to make him stout

— always in the hope that he would come to equal myself in girth, and could then be measured in my stead.”

“Ah!” cried D’Artagnan. “I see — that spared you both time and humiliation.”

“Consider my joy when, after a year and a half’s judicious feeding — for I used to feed him up myself — the fellow — ”

“Oh! I lent a good hand myself, monsieur,” said Mouston, humbly.

“That’s true. Consider my joy when, one morning, I perceived Mouston was obliged to squeeze in, as I once did myself, to get through the little secret door that those fools of architects had made in the chamber of the late Madame du Vallon, in the chateau of Pierrefonds. And, by the way, about that door, my friend, I should like to ask you, who know everything, why these wretches of architects, who ought to have the compasses run into them, just to remind them, came to make doorways through which nobody but thin people can pass?”

“Oh, those doors,” answered D’Artagnan, “were meant for gallants, and they have generally slight and slender figures.”

“Madame du Vallon had no gallant!” answered Porthos, majestically.

“Perfectly true, my friend,” resumed D’Artagnan; “but the architects were probably making their calculations on a basis of the probability of your marrying again.”

“Ah! that is possible,” said Porthos. “And now I have received an explanation of how it is that doorways are made too narrow, let us return to the subject of Mouston’s fatness. But see how the two things apply to each other. I have always noticed that people’s ideas run parallel. And so, observe this phenomenon, D’Artagnan. I was talking to you of Mouston, who is fat, and it led us on to Madame du Vallon — ”

“Who was thin?”

“Hum! Is it not marvelous?”

“My dear friend, a *savant* of my acquaintance, M. Costar, has made the same observation as you have, and he calls the process by some Greek name which I forget.”

“What! my remark is not then original?” cried Porthos, astounded. “I thought I was the discoverer.”

“My friend, the fact was known before Aristotle’s days — that is to say, nearly two thousand years ago.”

“Well, well, ‘tis no less true,” said Porthos, delighted at the idea of having jumped to a conclusion so closely in agreement with the greatest sages of antiquity.

“Wonderfully — but suppose we return to Mouston. It seems to me, we have left him fattening under our very eyes.”

“Yes, monsieur,” said Mouston.

“Well,” said Porthos, “Mouston fattened so well, that he gratified all my hopes, by reaching my standard; a fact of which I was well able to convince myself, by seeing the rascal, one day, in a waistcoat of mine, which he had turned into a coat — a waistcoat, the mere embroidery of which was worth a hundred pistoles.”

“‘Twas only to try it on, monsieur,” said Mouston.

“From that moment I determined to put Mouston in communication with my tailors, and to have him measured instead of myself.”

“A capital idea, Porthos; but Mouston is a foot and a half shorter than you.”

“Exactly! They measured him down to the ground, and the end of the skirt came just below my knee.”

“What a marvelous man you are, Porthos! Such a thing could happen only to you.”

“Ah! yes; pay your compliments; you have ample grounds to go upon. It was exactly at that time — that is to say, nearly two years and a half ago — that I set out for Belle-Isle, instructing Mouston (so as always to have, in every event, a pattern of every fashion) to have a coat made for himself every month.”

“And did Mouston neglect complying with your instructions? Ah! that was anything but right, Mouston.”

“No, monsieur, quite the contrary; quite the contrary!”

“No, he never forgot to have his coats made; but he forgot to inform me that he had got stouter!”

“But it was not my fault, monsieur! your tailor never told me.”

“And this to such an extent, monsieur,” continued Porthos, “that the fellow in two years has gained eighteen inches in girth, and so my last dozen coats are all too large, from a foot to a foot and a half.”

“But the rest; those which were made when you were of the same size?”

“They are no longer the fashion, my dear friend. Were I to put them on, I should look like a fresh arrival from Siam; and as though I had been two years away from court.”

“I understand your difficulty. You have how many new suits? nine? thirty-six? and yet not one to wear. Well, you must have a thirty-seventh made, and give the thirty-six to Mouston.”

“Ah! monsieur!” said Mouston, with a gratified air. “The truth is, that monsieur has always been very generous to me.”

“Do you mean to insinuate that I hadn’t that idea, or that I was deterred by the expense? But it wants only two days to the *fete*; I received the invitation yesterday; made Mouston post hither with my wardrobe, and only this morning discovered my misfortune; and from now till the day after to-morrow, there isn’t a single fashionable tailor who will undertake to make me a suit.”

“That is to say, one covered all over with gold, isn’t it?”

“I wish it so! undoubtedly, all over.”

“Oh, we shall manage it. You won’t leave for three days. The invitations are for Wednesday, and this is only Sunday morning.”

“‘Tis true; but Aramis has strongly advised me to be at Vaux twenty-four hours beforehand.”

“How, Aramis?”

“Yes, it was Aramis who brought me the invitation.”

“Ah! to be sure, I see. You are invited on the part of M. Fouquet?”

“By no means! by the king, dear friend. The letter bears the following as large as life: ‘M. le Baron du Vallon is informed that the king has condescended to place him on the invitation list — ’“

“Very good; but you leave with M. Fouquet?”

“And when I think,” cried Porthos, stamping on the floor, “when I think I shall have no clothes, I am ready to burst with rage! I should like to strangle somebody or smash something!”

“Neither strangle anybody nor smash anything, Porthos; I will manage it all; put on one of your thirty-six suits, and come with me to a tailor.”

“Pooh! my agent has seen them all this morning.”

“Even M. Percerin?”

“Who is M. Percerin?”

“Oh! only the king’s tailor!”

“Oh, ah, yes,” said Porthos, who wished to appear to know the king’s tailor, but now heard his name mentioned for the first time; “to M. Percerin’s, by Jove! I was afraid he would be too busy.”

“Doubtless he will be; but be at ease, Porthos; he will do for me what he wouldn’t do for another. Only you must allow yourself to be measured!”

“Ah!” said Porthos, with a sigh, “‘tis vexatious, but what would you have me do?”

“Do? As others do; as the king does.”

“What! do they measure the king, too? does he put up with it?”

“The king is a beau, my good friend, and so are you, too, whatever you may say about it.”

Porthos smiled triumphantly. “Let us go to the king’s tailor,” he said; “and since he measures the king, I think, by my faith, I may do worse than allow him to measure *me!*”

CHAPTER III.

Who Messire Jean Percerin Was.

The king’s tailor, Messire Jean Percerin, occupied a rather large house in the Rue St. Honore, near the Rue de l’Arbre Sec. He was a man of great taste in elegant stuffs, embroideries, and velvets, being hereditary tailor to the king. The preferment of his house reached as far back as the time of Charles IX.; from whose reign dated, as we know, fancy in *bravery* difficult enough to gratify. The Percerin of that period was a Huguenot, like Ambrose Pare, and had been spared by the Queen of Navarre, the beautiful Margot, as they used to write and say, too, in those days; because, in sooth, he was the only one who could make for her those wonderful riding-habits which she so loved to wear, seeing that they were marvelously well suited to hide certain anatomical defects, which the Queen of Navarre used very studiously to conceal. Percerin being saved, made, out of gratitude, some beautiful black bodices, very inexpensively indeed, for Queen Catherine, who ended by being pleased at the preservation of a Huguenot people, on whom she had long looked with detestation. But Percerin was a very prudent man; and having heard it said that there was no more dangerous sign for a Protestant than to be smiled up on by Catherine, and having observed that her smiles were more frequent than usual, he speedily turned Catholic with all his family; and having thus become irreproachable, attained the lofty position of master tailor to the Crown of France. Under Henry III., gay king as he was, this position was a grand as the height of one of the loftiest peaks of the Cordilleras. Now Percerin had been a clever man all his life, and by way of keeping up his reputation beyond the grave, took very good care not to make a bad death of it, and so contrived to die very skillfully; and that at the very moment he felt his powers of invention declining. He left a son and a daughter, both worthy of the name they were called upon to bear; the son, a cutter as unerring and exact as the square rule; the daughter, apt at embroidery, and at designing ornaments. The marriage of Henry IV. and Marie de Medici, and the exquisite court-mourning for the afore-mentioned queen, together with a few words let fall by M. de Bassompiere, king of the *beaux* of the period, made the fortune of the second generation of Percerins. M. Concino Concini, and his wife Galligai, who subsequently shone at the French court, sought to Italianize the fashion, and introduced some Florentine tailors; but Percerin, touched to the quick in his patriotism and his self-esteem, entirely defeated these foreigners, and that so well that Concino was the first to give up his compatriots, and held the French tailor in such esteem that he would never employ any other, and thus wore a doublet of his on the very day that Vitry blew out his brains with a pistol at the Pont du Louvre.

And so it was a doublet issuing from M. Percerin's workshop, which the Parisians rejoiced in hacking into so many pieces with the living human body it contained. Notwithstanding the favor Concino Concini had shown Percerin, the king, Louis XIII., had the generosity to bear no malice to his tailor, and to retain him in his service. At the time that Louis the Just afforded this great example of equity, Percerin had brought up two sons, one of whom made his *debut* at the marriage of Anne of Austria, invented that admirable Spanish costume, in which Richelieu danced a saraband, made the costumes for the tragedy of "Mirame," and stitched on to Buckingham's mantle those famous pearls which were destined to be scattered about the pavements of the Louvre. A man becomes easily notable who has made the dresses of a Duke of Buckingham, a M. de Cinq-Mars, a Mademoiselle Ninon, a M. de Beaufort, and a Marion de Lorme. And thus Percerin the third had attained the summit of his glory when his father died. This same Percerin III., old, famous and wealthy, yet further dressed Louis XIV.; and having no son, which was a great cause of sorrow to him, seeing that with himself his dynasty would end, he had brought up several hopeful pupils. He possessed a carriage, a country house, men-servants the tallest in Paris; and by special authority from Louis XIV., a pack of hounds. He worked for MM. de Lyonne and Letellier, under a sort of patronage; but politic man as he was, and versed in state secrets, he never succeeded in fitting M. Colbert. This is beyond explanation; it is a matter for guessing or for intuition. Great geniuses of every kind live on unseen, intangible ideas; they act without themselves knowing why. The great Percerin (for, contrary to the rule of dynasties, it was, above all, the last of the Percerins who deserved the name of Great), the great Percerin was inspired when he cut a robe for the queen, or a coat for the king; he could mount a mantle for Monsieur, the clock of a stocking for Madame; but, in spite of his supreme talent, he could never hit off anything approaching a creditable fit for M. Colbert. “That man,” he used often to say, “is beyond my art; my needle can never dot him down.” We need scarcely say that Percerin was M. Fouquet’s tailor, and that the superintendent highly esteemed him. M. Percerin was nearly eighty years old, nevertheless still fresh, and at the same time so dry, the courtiers used to say, that he was positively brittle. His renown and his fortune were great enough for M. le Prince, that king of fops, to take his arm when talking over the fashions; and for those least eager to pay never to dare to leave their accounts in arrear with him; for Master Percerin would for the first time make clothes upon credit, but the second never, unless paid for the former order.

It is easy to see at once that a tailor of such renown, instead of running after customers, made difficulties about obliging any fresh ones. And so Percerin declined to fit *bourgeois*, or those who had but recently obtained patents of nobility. A story used to circulate that even M. de Mazarin, in exchange for Percerin supplying him with a full suit of ceremonial vestments as cardinal, one fine day slipped letters of nobility into his pocket.

It was to the house of this grand llama of tailors that D’Artagnan took the despairing Porthos; who, as they were going along, said to his friend, “Take care, my good D’Artagnan, not to compromise the dignity of a man such as I am with the arrogance of this Percerin, who will, I expect, be very impertinent; for I give you notice, my friend, that if he is wanting in respect I will infallibly chastise him.”

“Presented by me,” replied D’Artagnan, “you have nothing to fear, even though you were what you are not.”

“Ah! ‘tis because — ”

“What? Have you anything against Percerin, Porthos?”

“I think that I once sent Mouston to a fellow of that name.”

“And then?”

“The fellow refused to supply me.”

“Oh, a misunderstanding, no doubt, which it will be now exceedingly easy to set right. Mouston must have made a mistake.”

“Perhaps.”

“He has confused the names.”

“Possibly. That rascal Mouston never can remember names.”

“I will take it all upon myself.”

"Very good."

"Stop the carriage, Porthos; here we are."

"Here! how here? We are at the Halles; and you told me the house was at the corner of the Rue de l'Arbre Sec."

"'Tis true, but look."

"Well, I do look, and I see — "

"What?"

"*Pardieu!* that we are at the Halles!"

"You do not, I suppose, want our horses to clamber up on the roof of the carriage in front of us?"

"No."

"Nor the carriage in front of us to mount on top of the one in front of it. Nor that the second should be driven over the roofs of the thirty or forty others which have arrived before us."

"No, you are right, indeed. What a number of people! And what are they all about?"

"'Tis very simple. They are waiting their turn."

"Bah! Have the comedians of the Hotel de Bourgogne shifted their quarters?"

"No; their turn to obtain an entrance to M. Percerin's house."

"And we are going to wait too?"

"Oh, we shall show ourselves prompter and not so proud."

"What are we to do, then?"

"Get down, pass through the footmen and lackeys, and enter the tailor's house, which I will answer for our doing, if you go first."

"Come along, then," said Porthos.

They accordingly alighted and made their way on foot towards the establishment. The cause of the confusion was that M. Percerin's doors were closed, while a servant, standing before them, was explaining to the illustrious customers of the illustrious tailor that just then M. Percerin could not receive anybody. It was bruited about outside still, on the authority of what the great lackey had told some great noble whom he favored, in confidence, that M. Percerin was engaged on five costumes for the king, and that, owing to the urgency of the case, he was meditating in his office on the ornaments, colors, and cut of these five suits. Some, contented with this reason, went away again, contented to repeat the tale to others, but others, more tenacious, insisted on having the doors opened, and among these last three Blue Ribbons, intended to take parts in a ballet, which would inevitably fail unless the said three had their costumes shaped by the very hand of the great Percerin himself. D’Artagnan, pushing on Porthos, who scattered the groups of people right and left, succeeded in gaining the counter, behind which the journeyman tailors were doing their best to answer queries. (We forgot to mention that at the door they wanted to put off Porthos like the rest, but D’Artagnan, showing himself, pronounced merely these words, “The king’s order,” and was let in with his friend.) The poor fellows had enough to do, and did their best, to reply to the demands of the customers in the absence of their master, leaving off drawing a stitch to knit a sentence; and when wounded pride, or disappointed expectation, brought down upon them too cutting a rebuke, he who was attacked made a dive and disappeared under the counter. The line of discontented lords formed a truly remarkable picture. Our captain of musketeers, a man of sure and rapid observation, took it all in at a glance; and having run over the groups, his eye rested on a man in front of him. This man, seated upon a stool, scarcely showed his head above the counter that sheltered him. He was about forty years of age, with a melancholy aspect, pale face, and soft luminous eyes. He was looking at D’Artagnan and the rest, with his chin resting upon his hand, like a calm and inquiring amateur. Only on perceiving, and doubtless recognizing, our captain, he pulled his hat down over his eyes. It was this action, perhaps, that attracted D’Artagnan’s attention. If so, the gentleman who had pulled down his hat produced an effect entirely different from what he had desired. In other respects his costume was plain, and his hair evenly cut enough for customers, who were not close observers, to take him for a mere tailor’s apprentice, perched behind the board, and carefully stitching cloth or velvet. Nevertheless, this man held up his head too often to be very productively employed with his fingers. D’Artagnan was not deceived, — not he; and he saw at once that if this man was working at anything, it certainly was not at velvet.

“Eh!” said he, addressing this man, “and so you have become a tailor’s boy, Monsieur Moliere!”

“Hush, M. d’Artagnan!” replied the man, softly, “you will make them recognize me.”

“Well, and what harm?”

“The fact is, there is no harm, but — ”

“You were going to say there is no good in doing it either, is it not so?”

“Alas! no; for I was occupied in examining some excellent figures.”

“Go on — go on, Monsieur Moliere. I quite understand the interest you take in the plates — I will not disturb your studies.”

“Thank you.”

“But on one condition; that you tell me where M. Percerin really is.”

“Oh! willingly; in his own room. Only — ”

“Only that one can’t enter it?”

“Unapproachable.”

“For everybody?”

“Everybody. He brought me here so that I might be at my ease to make my observations, and then he went away.”

“Well, my dear Monsieur Moliere, but you will go and tell him I am here.”

“I!” exclaimed Moliere, in the tone of a courageous dog, from which you snatch the bone it has legitimately gained; “I disturb myself! Ah! Monsieur d’Artagnan, how hard you are upon me!”

“If you don’t go directly and tell M. Percerin that I am here, my dear Moliere,” said D’Artagnan, in a low tone, “I warn you of one thing: that I won’t exhibit to you the friend I have brought with me.”

Moliere indicated Porthos by an imperceptible gesture, “This gentleman, is it not?”

“Yes.”

Moliere fixed upon Porthos one of those looks which penetrate the minds and hearts of men. The subject doubtless appeared a very promising one, for he immediately rose and led the way into the adjoining chamber.

CHAPTER IV.

The Patterns.

During all this time the noble mob was slowly heaving away, leaving at every angle of the counter either a murmur or a menace, as the waves leave foam or scattered seaweed on the sands, when they retire with the ebbing tide. In about ten minutes Moliere reappeared, making another sign to D’Artagnan from under the hangings. The latter hurried after him, with Porthos in the rear, and after threading a labyrinth of corridors, introduced him to M. Percerin’s room. The old man, with his sleeves turned up, was gathering up in folds a piece of gold-flowered brocade, so as the better to exhibit its luster. Perceiving D’Artagnan, he put the silk aside, and came to meet him, by no means radiant with joy, and by no means courteous, but, take it altogether, in a tolerably civil manner.

“The captain of the king’s musketeers will excuse me, I am sure, for I am engaged.”

“Eh! yes, on the king’s costumes; I know that, my dear Monsieur Percerin. You are making three, they tell me.”

“Five, my dear sir, five.”

“Three or five, ‘tis all the same to me, my dear monsieur; and I know that you will make them most exquisitely.”

“Yes, I know. Once made they will be the most beautiful in the world, I do not deny it; but that they may be the most beautiful in the word, they must first be made; and to do this, captain, I am pressed for time.”

“Oh, bah! there are two days yet; ‘tis much more than you require, Monsieur Percerin,” said D’Artagnan, in the coolest possible manner.

Percerin raised his head with the air of a man little accustomed to be contradicted, even in his whims; but D’Artagnan did not pay the least attention to the airs which the illustrious tailor began to assume.

“My dear M. Percerin,” he continued, “I bring you a customer.”

“Ah! ah!” exclaimed Percerin, crossly.

“M. le Baron du Vallon de Bracieux de Pierrefonds,” continued D’Artagnan. Percerin attempted a bow, which found no favor in the eyes of the terrible Porthos, who, from his first entry into the room, had been regarding the tailor askance.

"A very good friend of mine," concluded D'Artagnan.

"I will attend to monsieur," said Percerin, "but later."

"Later? but when?"

"When I have time."

"You have already told my valet as much," broke in Porthos, discontentedly.

"Very likely," said Percerin; "I am nearly always pushed for time."

"My friend," returned Porthos, sententiously, "there is always time to be found when one chooses to seek it."

Percerin turned crimson; an ominous sign indeed in old men blanched by age.

"Monsieur is quite at liberty to confer his custom elsewhere."

"Come, come, Percerin," interposed D'Artagnan, "you are not in a good temper to-day. Well, I will say one more word to you, which will bring you on your knees; monsieur is not only a friend of mine, but more, a friend of M. Fouquet's."

"Ah! ah!" exclaimed the tailor, "that is another thing." Then turning to Porthos, "Monsieur le baron is attached to the superintendent?" he inquired.

"I am attached to myself," shouted Porthos, at the very moment that the tapestry was raised to introduce a new speaker in the dialogue. Moliere was all observation, D'Artagnan laughed, Porthos swore.

"My dear Percerin," said D'Artagnan, "you will make a dress for the baron. 'Tis I who ask you."

"To you I will not say nay, captain."

"But that is not all; you will make it for him at once."

"'Tis impossible within eight days."

"That, then, is as much as to refuse, because the dress is wanted for the *fete* at Vaux."

"I repeat that it is impossible," returned the obstinate old man.

"By no means, dear Monsieur Percerin, above all if *I* ask you," said a mild voice at the door, a silvery voice which made D'Artagnan prick up his ears. It was the voice of Aramis.

"Monsieur d'Herblay!" cried the tailor.

"Aramis," murmured D'Artagnan.

"Ah! our bishop!" said Porthos.

“Good morning, D’Artagnan; good morning, Porthos; good-morning, my dear friends,” said Aramis. “Come, come, M. Percerin, make the baron’s dress; and I will answer for it you will gratify M. Fouquet.” And he accompanied the words with a sign, which seemed to say, “Agree, and dismiss them.”

It appeared that Aramis had over Master Percerin an influence superior even to D’Artagnan’s, for the tailor bowed in assent, and turning round upon Porthos, said, “Go and get measured on the other side.”

Porthos colored in a formidable manner. D’Artagnan saw the storm coming, and addressing Moliere, said to him, in an undertone, “You see before you, my dear monsieur, a man who considers himself disgraced, if you measure the flesh and bones that Heaven has given him; study this type for me, Master Aristophanes, and profit by it.”

Moliere had no need of encouragement, and his gaze dwelt long and keenly on the Baron Porthos. “Monsieur,” he said, “if you will come with me, I will make them take your measure without touching you.”

“Oh!” said Porthos, “how do you make that out, my friend?”

“I say that they shall apply neither line nor rule to the seams of your dress. It is a new method we have invented for measuring people of quality, who are too sensitive to allow low-born fellows to touch them. We know some susceptible persons who will not put up with being measured, a process which, as I think, wounds the natural dignity of a man; and if perchance monsieur should be one of these — ”

“*Corboeuf!* I believe I am too!”

“Well, that is a capital and most consolatory coincidence, and you shall have the benefit of our invention.”

“But how in the world can it be done?” asked Porthos, delighted.

“Monsieur,” said Moliere, bowing, “if you will deign to follow me, you will see.”

Aramis observed this scene with all his eyes. Perhaps he fancied from D’Artagnan’s liveliness that he would leave with Porthos, so as not to lose the conclusion of a scene well begun. But, clear-sighted as he was, Aramis deceived himself. Porthos and Moliere left together: D’Artagnan remained with Percerin. Why? From curiosity, doubtless; probably to enjoy a little longer the society of his good friend Aramis. As Moliere and Porthos disappeared, D’Artagnan drew near the bishop of Vannes, a proceeding which appeared particularly to disconcert him.

"A dress for you, also, is it not, my friend?"

Aramis smiled. "No," said he.

"You will go to Vaux, however?"

"I shall go, but without a new dress. You forget, dear D'Artagnan, that a poor bishop of Vannes is not rich enough to have new dresses for every *fete*."

"Bah!" said the musketeer, laughing, "and do we write no more poems now, either?"

"Oh! D'Artagnan," exclaimed Aramis, "I have long ago given up all such tomfoolery."

"True," repeated D'Artagnan, only half convinced. As for Percerin, he was once more absorbed in contemplation of the brocades.

"Don't you perceive," said Aramis, smiling, "that we are greatly boring this good gentleman, my dear D'Artagnan?"

"Ah! ah!" murmured the musketeer, aside; "that is, I am boring you, my friend." Then aloud, "Well, then, let us leave; I have no further business here, and if you are as disengaged as I, Aramis — "

"No, not I — I wished — "

"Ah! you had something particular to say to M. Percerin? Why did you not tell me so at once?"

"Something particular, certainly," repeated Aramis, "but not for you, D'Artagnan. But, at the same time, I hope you will believe that I can never have anything so particular to say that a friend like you may not hear it."

"Oh, no, no! I am going," said D'Artagnan, imparting to his voice an evident tone of curiosity; for Aramis's annoyance, well dissembled as it was, had not a whit escaped him; and he knew that, in that impenetrable mind, every thing, even the most apparently trivial, was designed to some end; an unknown one, but an end that, from the knowledge he had of his friend's character, the musketeer felt must be important.

On his part, Aramis saw that D'Artagnan was not without suspicion, and pressed him. "Stay, by all means," he said, "this is what it is." Then turning towards the tailor, "My dear Percerin," said he, — "I am even very happy that you are here, D'Artagnan."

"Oh, indeed," exclaimed the Gascon, for the third time, even less deceived this time than before.

Percerin never moved. Aramis roused him violently, by snatching from his hands the stuff upon which he was engaged. "My dear Percerin," said he, “I have, near hand, M. Lebrun, one of M. Fouquet’s painters.”

“Ah, very good,” thought D’Artagnan; “but why Lebrun?”

Aramis looked at D’Artagnan, who seemed to be occupied with an engraving of Mark Antony. “And you wish that I should make him a dress, similar to those of the Epicureans?” answered Percerin. And while saying this, in an absent manner, the worthy tailor endeavored to recapture his piece of brocade.

“An Epicurean’s dress?” asked D’Artagnan, in a tone of inquiry.

“I see,” said Aramis, with a most engaging smile, “it is written that our dear D’Artagnan shall know all our secrets this evening. Yes, friend, you have surely heard speak of M. Fouquet’s Epicureans, have you not?”

“Undoubtedly. Is it not a kind of poetical society, of which La Fontaine, Loret, Pelisson, and Moliere are members, and which holds its sittings at Saint-Mande?”

“Exactly so. Well, we are going to put our poets in uniform, and enroll them in a regiment for the king.”

“Oh, very well, I understand; a surprise M. Fouquet is getting up for the king. Be at ease; if that is the secret about M. Lebrun, I will not mention it.”

“Always agreeable, my friend. No, Monsieur Lebrun has nothing to do with this part of it; the secret which concerns him is far more important than the other.”

“Then, if it is so important as all that, I prefer not to know it,” said D’Artagnan, making a show of departure.

“Come in, M. Lebrun, come in,” said Aramis, opening a side-door with his right hand, and holding back D’Artagnan with his left.

“I’faith, I too, am quite in the dark,” quoth Percerin.

Aramis took an “opportunity,” as is said in theatrical matters.

“My dear M. de Percerin,” Aramis continued, “you are making five dresses for the king, are you not? One in brocade; one in hunting-cloth; one in velvet; one in satin; and one in Florentine stuffs.”

“Yes; but how — do you know all that, monseigneur?” said Percerin, astounded.

“It is all very simple, my dear monsieur; there will be a hunt, a banquet, concert, promenade and reception; these five kinds of dress are required by etiquette.”

“You know everything, monseigneur!”

“And a thing or two in addition,” muttered D’Artagnan.

"But," cried the tailor, in triumph, "what you do not know, monseigneur — prince of the church though you are — what nobody will know — what only the king, Mademoiselle de la Valliere, and myself do know, is the color of the materials and nature of the ornaments, and the cut, the *ensemble,* the finish of it all!"

"Well," said Aramis, "that is precisely what I have come to ask you, dear Percerin."

"Ah, bah!" exclaimed the tailor, terrified, though Aramis had pronounced these words in his softest and most honeyed tones. The request appeared, on reflection, so exaggerated, so ridiculous, so monstrous to M. Percerin that first he laughed to himself, then aloud, and finished with a shout. D'Artagnan followed his example, not because he found the matter so "very funny," but in order not to allow Aramis to cool.

"At the outset, I appear to be hazarding an absurd question, do I not?" said Aramis. "But D'Artagnan, who is incarnate wisdom itself, will tell you that I could not do otherwise than ask you this."

"Let us see," said the attentive musketeer; perceiving with his wonderful instinct that they had only been skirmishing till now, and that the hour of battle was approaching.

"Let us see," said Percerin, incredulously.

"Why, now," continued Aramis, "does M. Fouquet give the king a *fete?* — Is it not to please him?"

"Assuredly," said Percerin. D'Artagnan nodded assent.

"By delicate attentions? by some happy device? by a succession of surprises, like that of which we were talking? — the enrolment of our Epicureans."

"Admirable."

"Well, then; this is the surprise we intend. M. Lebrun here is a man who draws most excellently."

"Yes," said Percerin; "I have seen his pictures, and observed that his dresses were highly elaborated. That is why I at once agreed to make him a costume — whether to agree with those of the Epicureans, or an original one."

"My dear monsieur, we accept your offer, and shall presently avail ourselves of it; but just now, M. Lebrun is not in want of the dresses you will make for himself, but of those you are making for the king."

Percerin made a bound backwards, which D’Artagnan — calmest and most appreciative of men, did not consider overdone, so many strange and startling aspects wore the proposal which Aramis had just hazarded. “The king’s dresses! Give the king’s dresses to any mortal whatever! Oh! for once, monseigneur, your grace is mad!” cried the poor tailor in extremity.

“Help me now, D’Artagnan,” said Aramis, more and more calm and smiling. “Help me now to persuade monsieur, for *you* understand; do you not?”

“Eh! eh! — not exactly, I declare.”

“What! you do not understand that M. Fouquet wishes to afford the king the surprise of finding his portrait on his arrival at Vaux; and that the portrait, which be a striking resemblance, ought to be dressed exactly as the king will be on the day it is shown?”

“Oh! yes, yes,” said the musketeer, nearly convinced, so plausible was this reasoning. “Yes, my dear Aramis, you are right; it is a happy idea. I will wager it is one of your own, Aramis.”

“Well, I don’t know,” replied the bishop; “either mine or M. Fouquet’s.” Then scanning Percerin, after noticing D’Artagnan’s hesitation, “Well, Monsieur Percerin,” he asked, “what do you say to this?”

“I say, that — ”

“That you are, doubtless, free to refuse. I know well — and I by no means count upon compelling you, my dear monsieur. I will say more, I even understand all the delicacy you feel in taking up with M. Fouquet’s idea; you dread appearing to flatter the king. A noble spirit, M. Percerin, a noble spirit!” The tailor stammered. “It would, indeed, be a very pretty compliment to pay the young prince,” continued Aramis; “but as the surintendant told me, ‘if Percerin refuse, tell him that it will not at all lower him in my opinion, and I shall always esteem him, only — ’“

“‘Only?’“ repeated Percerin, rather troubled.

“‘Only,’“ continued Aramis, “‘I shall be compelled to say to the king,’ — you understand, my dear Monsieur Percerin, that these are M. Fouquet’s words, — ’I shall be constrained to say to the king, “Sire, I had intended to present your majesty with your portrait, but owing to a feeling of delicacy, slightly exaggerated perhaps, although creditable, M. Percerin opposed the project.”‘“

“Opposed!” cried the tailor, terrified at the responsibility which would weigh upon him; “I to oppose the desire, the will of M. Fouquet when he is seeking to please the king! Oh, what a hateful word you have uttered, monseigneur. Oppose! Oh, ‘tis not I who said it, Heaven have mercy on me. I call the captain of the musketeers to witness it! Is it not true, Monsieur d’Artagnan, that I have opposed nothing?”

D’Artagnan made a sign indicating that he wished to remain neutral. He felt that there was an intrigue at the bottom of it, whether comedy or tragedy; he was at his wit’s end at not being able to fathom it, but in the meanwhile wished to keep clear.

But already Percerin, goaded by the idea that the king was to be told he stood in the way of a pleasant surprise, had offered Lebrun a chair, and proceeded to bring from a wardrobe four magnificent dresses, the fifth being still in the workmen’s hands; and these masterpieces he successively fitted upon four lay figures, which, imported into France in the time of Concini, had been given to Percerin II. by Marshal d’Onore, after the discomfiture of the Italian tailors ruined in their competition. The painter set to work to draw and then to paint the dresses. But Aramis, who was closely watching all the phases of his toil, suddenly stopped him.

“I think you have not quite got it, my dear Lebrun,” he said; “your colors will deceive you, and on canvas we shall lack that exact resemblance which is absolutely requisite. Time is necessary for attentively observing the finer shades.”

“Quite true,” said Percerin, “but time is wanting, and on that head, you will agree with me, monseigneur, I can do nothing.”

“Then the affair will fail,” said Aramis, quietly, “and that because of a want of precision in the colors.”

Nevertheless Lebrun went on copying the materials and ornaments with the closest fidelity — a process which Aramis watched with ill-concealed impatience.

“What in the world, now, is the meaning of this imbroglio?” the musketeer kept saying to himself.

“That will never do,” said Aramis: “M. Lebrun, close your box, and roll up your canvas.”

“But, monsieur,” cried the vexed painter, “the light is abominable here.”

“An idea, M. Lebrun, an idea! If we had a pattern of the materials, for example, and with time, and a better light — ”

“Oh, then,” cried Lebrun, “I would answer for the effect.”

“Good!” said D’Artagnan, “this ought to be the knotty point of the whole thing; they want a pattern of each of the materials. *Mordioux!* Will this Percerin give in now?”

Percerin, beaten from his last retreat, and duped, moreover, by the feigned good-nature of Aramis, cut out five patterns and handed them to the bishop of Vannes.

“I like this better. That is your opinion, is it not?” said Aramis to D’Artagnan.

“My dear Aramis,” said D’Artagnan, “my opinion is that you are always the same.”

“And, consequently, always your friend,” said the bishop in a charming tone.

“Yes, yes,” said D’Artagnan, aloud; then, in a low voice, “If I am your dupe, double Jesuit that you are, I will not be your accomplice; and to prevent it, ‘tis time I left this place. — Adieu, Aramis,” he added aloud, “adieu; I am going to rejoin Porthos.”

“Then wait for me,” said Aramis, pocketing the patterns, “for I have done, and shall be glad to say a parting word to our dear old friend.”

Lebrun packed up his paints and brushes, Percerin put back the dresses into the closet, Aramis put his hand on his pocket to assure himself the patterns were secure, — and they all left the study.

CHAPTER V.

Where, Probably, Moliere Obtained His First Idea of the Bourgeois Gentilhomme.

D’Artagnan found Porthos in the adjoining chamber; but no longer an irritated Porthos, or a disappointed Porthos, but Porthos radiant, blooming, fascinating, and chattering with Moliere, who was looking upon him with a species of idolatry, and as a man would who had not only never seen anything greater, but not even ever anything so great. Aramis went straight up to Porthos and offered him his white hand, which lost itself in the gigantic clasp of his old friend, — an operation which Aramis never hazarded without a certain uneasiness. But the friendly pressure having been performed not too painfully for him, the bishop of Vannes passed over to Moliere.

“Well, monsieur,” said he, “will you come with me to Saint-Mande?”

“I will go anywhere you like, monseigneur,” answered Moliere.

“To Saint-Mande!” cried Porthos, surprised at seeing the proud bishop of Vannes fraternizing with a journeyman tailor. “What, Aramis, are you going to take this gentleman to Saint-Mande?”

“Yes,” said Aramis, smiling, “our work is pressing.”

“And besides, my dear Porthos,” continued D’Artagnan, “M. Moliere is not altogether what he seems.”

“In what way?” asked Porthos.

“Why, this gentleman is one of M. Percerin’s chief clerks, and is expected at Saint-Mande to try on the dresses which M. Fouquet has ordered for the Epicureans.”

“‘Tis precisely so,” said Moliere.

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Come, then, my dear M. Moliere,” said Aramis, “that is, if you have done with M. du Vallon.”

“We have finished,” replied Porthos.

“And you are satisfied?” asked D’Artagnan.

“Completely so,” replied Porthos.

Moliere took his leave of Porthos with much ceremony, and grasped the hand which the captain of the musketeers furtively offered him.

“Pray, monsieur,” concluded Porthos, mincingly, “above all, be exact.”

“You will have your dress the day after to-morrow, monsieur le baron,” answered Moliere. And he left with Aramis.

Then D’Artagnan, taking Porthos’s arm, “What has this tailor done for you, my dear Porthos,” he asked, “that you are so pleased with him?”

“What has he done for me, my friend! done for me!” cried Porthos, enthusiastically.

“Yes, I ask you, what has he done for you?”

“My friend, he has done that which no tailor ever yet accomplished: he has taken my measure without touching me!”

“Ah, bah! tell me how he did it.”

“First, then, they went, I don’t know where, for a number of lay figures, of all heights and sizes, hoping there would be one to suit mine, but the largest — that of the drum-major of the Swiss guard — was two inches too short, and a half foot too narrow in the chest.”

“Indeed!”

“It is exactly as I tell you, D’Artagnan; but he is a great man, or at the very least a great tailor, is this M. Moliere. He was not at all put at fault by the circumstance.”

“What did he do, then?”

“Oh! it is a very simple matter. I’faith, ‘tis an unheard-of thing that people should have been so stupid as not to have discovered this method from the first. What annoyance and humiliation they would have spared me!”

“Not to mention of the costumes, my dear Porthos.”

“Yes, thirty dresses.”

“Well, my dear Porthos, come, tell me M. Moliere’s plan.”

“Moliere? You call him so, do you? I shall make a point of recollecting his name.”

“Yes; or Poquelin, if you prefer that.”

“No; I like Moliere best. When I wish to recollect his name, I shall think of *voliere* [an aviary]; and as I have one at Pierrefonds — ”

“Capital!” returned D’Artagnan. “And M. Moliere’s plan?”

“‘Tis this: instead of pulling me to pieces, as all these rascals do — of making me bend my back, and double my joints — all of them low and dishonorable practices — ” D’Artagnan made a sign of approbation with his head. “‘Monsieur,’ he said to me,” continued Porthos, “‘a gentleman ought to measure himself. Do me the pleasure to draw near this glass;’ and I drew near the glass. I must own I did not exactly understand what this good M. Voliere wanted with me.”

“Moliere!”

“Ah! yes, Moliere — Moliere. And as the fear of being measured still possessed me, ‘Take care,’ said I to him, ‘what you are going to do with me; I am very ticklish, I warn you.’ But he, with his soft voice (for he is a courteous fellow, we must admit, my friend), he with his soft voice, ‘Monsieur,’ said he, ‘that your dress may fit you well, it must be made according to your figure. Your figure is exactly reflected in this mirror. We shall take the measure of this reflection.’“

“In fact,” said D’Artagnan, “you saw yourself in the glass; but where did they find one in which you could see your whole figure?”

“My good friend, it is the very glass in which the king is used to look to see himself.”

“Yes; but the king is a foot and a half shorter than you are.”

“Ah! well, I know not how that may be; it is, no doubt, a cunning way of flattering the king; but the looking-glass was too large for me. ‘Tis true that its height was made up of three Venetian plates of glass, placed one above another, and its breadth of three similar parallelograms in juxtaposition.”

“Oh, Porthos! what excellent words you have command of. Where in the word did you acquire such a voluminous vocabulary?”

“At Belle-Isle. Aramis and I had to use such words in our strategic studies and castramentative experiments.”

D’Artagnan recoiled, as though the sesquipedalian syllables had knocked the breath out of his body.

“Ah! very good. Let us return to the looking-glass, my friend.”

“Then, this good M. Voliere — ”

“Moliere.”

“Yes — Moliere — you are right. You will see now, my dear friend, that I shall recollect his name quite well. This excellent M. Moliere set to work tracing out lines on the mirror, with a piece of Spanish chalk, following in all the make of my arms and my shoulders, all the while expounding this maxim, which I thought admirable: ‘It is advisable that a dress should not incommode its wearer.’“

“In reality,” said D’Artagnan, “that is an excellent maxim, which is, unfortunately, seldom carried out in practice.”

“That is why I found it all the more astonishing, when he expatiated upon it.”

“Ah! he expatiated?”

“*Parbleu!*”

“Let me hear his theory.”

“‘Seeing that,’ he continued, ‘one may, in awkward circumstances, or in a troublesome position, have one’s doublet on one’s shoulder, and not desire to take one’s doublet off — ’“

“True,” said D’Artagnan.

“‘And so,’ continued M. Voliere — ”

“Moliere.”

“Moliere, yes. ‘And so,’ went on M. Moliere, ‘you want to draw your sword, monsieur, and you have your doublet on your back. What do you do?’

“‘I take it off,’ I answered.

“‘Well, no,’ he replied.

“‘How no?’

“‘I say that the dress should be so well made, that it will in no way encumber you, even in drawing your sword.’

“‘Ah, ah!’

“‘Throw yourself on guard,’ pursued he.

“I did it with such wondrous firmness, that two panes of glass burst out of the window.

“‘‘Tis nothing, nothing,’ said he. ‘Keep your position.’

“I raised my left arm in the air, the forearm gracefully bent, the ruffle drooping, and my wrist curved, while my right arm, half extended, securely covered my wrist with the elbow, and my breast with the wrist.”

“Yes,” said D’Artagnan, “‘tis the true guard — the academic guard.”

“You have said the very word, dear friend. In the meanwhile, Voliere — ”

“Moliere.”

“Hold! I should certainly, after all, prefer to call him — what did you say his other name was?”

“Poquelin.”

“I prefer to call him Poquelin.”

“And how will you remember this name better than the other?”

“You understand, he calls himself Poquelin, does he not?”

“Yes.”

“If I were to call to mind Madame Coquenard.”

“Good.”

“And change *Coc* into *Poc, nard* into *lin*; and instead of Coquenard I shall have Poquelin.”

“‘Tis wonderful,” cried D’Artagnan, astounded. “Go on, my friend, I am listening to you with admiration.”

“This Coquelin sketched my arm on the glass.”

“I beg your pardon — Poquelin.”

“What did I say, then?”

“You said Coquelin.”

“Ah! true. This Poquelin, then, sketched my arm on the glass; but he took his time over it; he kept looking at me a good deal. The fact is, that I must have been looking particularly handsome.”

“‘Does it weary you?’ he asked.

“‘A little,’ I replied, bending a little in my hands, ‘but I could hold out for an hour or so longer.’

“‘No, no, I will not allow it; the willing fellows will make it a duty to support your arms, as of old, men supported those of the prophet.’

“‘Very good,’ I answered.

“‘That will not be humiliating to you?’

“‘My friend,’ said I, ‘there is, I think, a great difference between being supported and being measured.’“

“The distinction is full of the soundest sense,” interrupted D’Artagnan.

“Then,” continued Porthos, “he made a sign: two lads approached; one supported my left arm, while the other, with infinite address, supported my right.”

“‘Another, my man,’ cried he. A third approached. ‘Support monsieur by the waist,’ said he. The *garcon* complied.”

“So that you were at rest?” asked D’Artagnan.

“Perfectly; and Pocquenard drew me on the glass.”

“Poquelin, my friend.”

“Poquelin — you are right. Stay, decidedly I prefer calling him Voliere.”

“Yes; and then it was over, wasn’t it?”

“During that time Voliere drew me as I appeared in the mirror.”

“‘Twas delicate in him.”

“I much like the plan; it is respectful, and keeps every one in his place.”

“And there it ended?”

“Without a soul having touched me, my friend.”

“Except the three *garcons* who supported you.”

“Doubtless; but I have, I think, already explained to you the difference there is between supporting and measuring.”

“‘Tis true,” answered D’Artagnan; who said afterwards to himself, “I’faith, I greatly deceive myself, or I have been the means of a good windfall to that rascal Moliere, and we shall assuredly see the scene hit off to the life in some comedy or other.” Porthos smiled.

“What are you laughing at?” asked D’Artagnan.

“Must I confess? Well, I was laughing over my good fortune.”

“Oh, that is true; I don’t know a happier man than you. But what is this last piece of luck that has befallen you?’

“Well, my dear fellow, congratulate me.”

“I desire nothing better.”

“It seems that I am the first who has had his measure taken in that manner.”

“Are you so sure of it?’

“Nearly so. Certain signs of intelligence which passed between Voliere and the other *garcons* showed me the fact.”

“Well, my friend, that does not surprise me from Moliere,” said D’Artagnan.

“Voliere, my friend.”

“Oh, no, no, indeed! I am very willing to leave you to go on saying Voliere; but, as for me, I shall continued to say Moliere. Well, this, I was saying, does not surprise me, coming from Moliere, who is a very ingenious fellow, and inspired you with this grand idea.”

“It will be of great use to him by and by, I am sure.”

“Won’t it be of use to him, indeed? I believe you, it will, and that in the highest degree; — for you see my friend Moliere is of all known tailors the man who best clothes our barons, comtes, and marquises — according to their measure.”

On this observation, neither the application nor depth of which we shall discuss, D’Artagnan and Porthos quitted M. de Percerin’s house and rejoined their carriages, wherein we will leave them, in order to look after Moliere and Aramis at Saint-Mande.

CHAPTER VI.

The Bee-Hive, the Bees, and the Honey.

The bishop of Vannes, much annoyed at having met D'Artagnan at M. Percerin's, returned to Saint-Mande in no very good humor. Moliere, on the other hand, quite delighted at having made such a capital rough sketch, and at knowing where to find his original again, whenever he should desire to convert his sketch into a picture, Moliere arrived in the merriest of moods. All the first story of the left wing was occupied by the most celebrated Epicureans in Paris, and those on the freest footing in the house — every one in his compartment, like the bees in their cells, employed in producing the honey intended for that royal cake which M. Fouquet proposed to offer his majesty Louis XIV. during the *fete* at Vaux. Pelisson, his head leaning on his hand, was engaged in drawing out the plan of the prologue to the "Facheux," a comedy in three acts, which was to be put on the stage by Poquelin de Moliere, as D'Artagnan called him, or Coquelin de Voliere, as Porthos styled him. Loret, with all the charming innocence of a gazetteer, — the gazetteers of all ages have always been so artless! — Loret was composing an account of the *fetes* at Vaux, before those *fetes* had taken place. La Fontaine sauntered about from one to the other, a peripatetic, absent-minded, boring, unbearable dreamer, who kept buzzing and humming at everybody's elbow a thousand poetic abstractions. He so often disturbed Pelisson, that the latter, raising his head, crossly said, "At least, La Fontaine, supply me with a rhyme, since you have the run of the gardens at Parnassus."

"What rhyme do you want?" asked the *Fabler* as Madame de Sevigne used to call him.

"I want a rhyme to *lumiere*."

"*Orniere*," answered La Fontaine.

"Ah, but, my good friend, one cannot talk of *wheel-ruts* when celebrating the delights of Vaux," said Loret.

"Besides, it doesn't rhyme," answered Pelisson.

"What! doesn't rhyme!" cried La Fontaine, in surprise.

"Yes; you have an abominable habit, my friend, — a habit which will ever prevent your becoming a poet of the first order. You rhyme in a slovenly manner."

"Oh, oh, you think so, do you, Pelisson?"

"Yes, I do, indeed. Remember that a rhyme is never good so long as one can find a better."

"Then I will never write anything again save in prose," said La Fontaine, who had taken up Pelisson's reproach in earnest. "Ah! I often suspected I was nothing but a rascally poet! Yes, 'tis the very truth."

"Do not say so; your remark is too sweeping, and there is much that is good in your 'Fables.'"

"And to begin," continued La Fontaine, following up his idea, "I will go and burn a hundred verses I have just made."

"Where are your verses?"

"In my head."

"Well, if they are in your head you cannot burn them."

"True," said La Fontaine; "but if I do not burn them — "

"Well, what will happen if you do not burn them?"

"They will remain in my mind, and I shall never forget them!"

"The deuce!" cried Loret; "what a dangerous thing! One would go mad with it!"

"The deuce! the deuce!" repeated La Fontaine; "what can I do?"

"I have discovered the way," said Moliere, who had entered just at this point of the conversation.

"What way?"

"Write them first and burn them afterwards."

"How simple! Well, I should never have discovered that. What a mind that devil of a Moliere has!" said La Fontaine. Then, striking his forehead, "Oh, thou wilt never be aught but an ass, Jean La Fontaine!" he added.

"*What* are you saying there, my friend?" broke in Moliere, approaching the poet, whose aside he had heard.

"I say I shall never be aught but an ass," answered La Fontaine, with a heavy sigh and swimming eyes. "Yes, my friend," he added, with increasing grief, "it seems that I rhyme in a slovenly manner."

"Oh, 'tis wrong to say so."

"Nay, I am a poor creature!"

"Who said so?"

"*Parbleu!* 'twas Pelisson; did you not, Pelisson?"

Pelisson, again absorbed in his work, took good care not to answer.

"But if Pelisson said you were so," cried Moliere, "Pelisson has seriously offended you."

"Do you think so?"

"Ah! I advise you, as you are a gentleman, not to leave an insult like that unpunished."

"*What!*" exclaimed La Fontaine.

"Did you ever fight?"

"Once only, with a lieutenant in the light horse."

"What wrong had he done you?"

"It seems he ran away with my wife."

"Ah, ah!" said Moliere, becoming slightly pale; but as, at La Fontaine's declaration, the others had turned round, Moliere kept upon his lips the rallying smile which had so nearly died away, and continuing to make La Fontaine speak —

"And what was the result of the duel?"

"The result was, that on the ground my opponent disarmed me, and then made an apology, promising never again to set foot in my house."

"And you considered yourself satisfied?" said Moliere.

"Not at all! on the contrary, I picked up my sword. 'I beg your pardon, monsieur,' I said, 'I have not fought you because you were my wife's friend, but because I was told I ought to fight. So, as I have never known any peace save since you made her acquaintance, do me the pleasure to continue your visits as heretofore, or *morbleu!* let us set to again.' And so," continued La Fontaine, "he was compelled to resume his friendship with madame, and I continue to be the happiest of husbands."

All burst out laughing. Moliere alone passed his hand across his eyes. Why? Perhaps to wipe away a tear, perhaps to smother a sigh. Alas! we know that Moliere was a moralist, but he was not a philosopher. "'Tis all one," he said, returning to the topic of the conversation, "Pelisson has insulted you."

"Ah, truly! I had already forgotten it."

"And I am going to challenge him on your behalf."

"Well, you can do so, if you think it indispensable."

"I do think it indispensable, and I am going to — "

"Stay," exclaimed La Fontaine, "I want your advice."

"Upon what? this insult?"

"No; tell me really now whether *lumiere* does not rhyme with *orniere*."

"I should make them rhyme."

"Ah! I knew you would."

"And I have made a hundred thousand such rhymes in my time."

"A hundred thousand!" cried La Fontaine. "Four times as many as 'La Pucelle,' which M. Chaplain is meditating. Is it also on this subject, too, that you have composed a hundred thousand verses?"

"Listen to me, you eternally absent-minded creature," said Moliere.

"It is certain," continued La Fontaine, "that *legume*, for instance, rhymes with *posthume*."

"In the plural, above all."

"Yes, above all in the plural, seeing that then it rhymes not with three letters, but with four; as *orniere* does with *lumiere*."

"But give me *ornieres* and *lumieres* in the plural, my dear Pelisson," said La Fontaine, clapping his hand on the shoulder of his friend, whose insult he had quite forgotten, "and they will rhyme."

"Hem!" coughed Pelisson.

"Moliere says so, and Moliere is a judge of such things; he declares he has himself made a hundred thousand verses."

"Come," said Moliere, laughing, "he is off now."

"It is like *rivage*, which rhymes admirably with *herbage*. I would take my oath of it."

"But — " said Moliere.

"I tell you all this," continued La Fontaine, "because you are preparing a *divertissement* for Vaux, are you not?"

"Yes, the 'Facheux.'"

"Ah, yes, the 'Facheux;' yes, I recollect. Well, I was thinking a prologue would admirably suit your *divertissement*."

"Doubtless it would suit capitally."

"Ah! you are of my opinion?"

"So much so, that I have asked you to write this very prologue."

"You asked *me* to write it?"

"Yes, you, and on your refusal begged you to ask Pelisson, who is engaged upon it at this moment."

"Ah! that is what Pelisson is doing, then? I'faith, my dear Moliere, you are indeed often right."

“When?”

“When you call me absent-minded. It is a monstrous defect; I will cure myself of it, and do your prologue for you.”

“But inasmuch as Pelisson is about it! — ”

“Ah, true, miserable rascal that I am! Loret was indeed right in saying I was a poor creature.”

“It was not Loret who said so, my friend.”

“Well, then, whoever said so, ‘tis the same to me! And so your *divertissement* is called the ‘Facheux?’ Well, can you make *heureux* rhyme with *facheux?*”

“If obliged, yes.”

“And even with *capriceux*.”

“Oh, no, no.”

“It would be hazardous, and yet why so?”

“There is too great a difference in the cadences.”

“I was fancying,” said La Fontaine, leaving Moliere for Loret — ”I was fancying — ”

“What were you fancying?” said Loret, in the middle of a sentence. “Make haste.”

“You are writing the prologue to the ‘Facheux,’ are you not?”

“No! *mordieu!* it is Pelisson.”

“Ah, Pelisson,” cried La Fontaine, going over to him, “I was fancying,” he continued, “that the nymph of Vaux — ”

“Ah, beautiful!” cried Loret. “The nymph of Vaux! thank you, La Fontaine; you have just given me the two concluding verses of my paper.”

“Well, if you can rhyme so well, La Fontaine,” said Pelisson, “tell me now in what way you would begin my prologue?”

“I should say, for instance, ‘Oh! nymph, who — ’ After ‘who’ I should place a verb in the second person singular of the present indicative; and should go on thus: ‘this grot profound.’“

“But the verb, the verb?” asked Pelisson.

“To admire the greatest king of all kings round,” continued La Fontaine.

“But the verb, the verb,” obstinately insisted Pelisson. “This second person singular of the present indicative?”

“Well, then; quittest:

“Oh, nymph, who quittest now this grot profound, To admire the greatest king of all kings round.”

“You would not put ‘who quittest,’ would you?”

“Why not?”

“‘Quittest,’ after ‘you who’?”

“Ah! my dear fellow,” exclaimed La Fontaine, “you are a shocking pedant!”

“Without counting,” said Moliere, “that the second verse, ‘king of all kings round,’ is very weak, my dear La Fontaine.”

“Then you see clearly I am nothing but a poor creature, — a shuffler, as you said.”

“I never said so.”

“Then, as Loret said.”

“And it was not Loret either; it was Pelisson.”

“Well, Pelisson was right a hundred times over. But what annoys me more than anything, my dear Moliere, is, that I fear we shall not have our Epicurean dresses.”

“You expected yours, then, for the *fete?*”

“Yes, for the *fete*, and then for after the *fete*. My housekeeper told me that my own is rather faded.”

“*Diable!* your housekeeper is right; rather more than faded.”

“Ah, you see,” resumed La Fontaine, “the fact is, I left it on the floor in my room, and my cat — ”

“Well, your cat — ”

“She made her nest upon it, which has rather changed its color.”

Moliere burst out laughing; Pelisson and Loret followed his example. At this juncture, the bishop of Vannes appeared, with a roll of plans and parchments under his arm. As if the angel of death had chilled all gay and sprightly fancies — as if that wan form had scared away the Graces to whom Xenocrates sacrificed — silence immediately reigned through the study, and every one resumed his self-possession and his pen. Aramis distributed the notes of invitation, and thanked them in the name of M. Fouquet. “The superintendent,” he said, “being kept to his room by business, could not come and see them, but begged them to send him some of the fruits of their day’s work, to enable him to forget the fatigue of his labor in the night.”

At these words, all settled down to work. La Fontaine placed himself at a table, and set his rapid pen an endless dance across the smooth white vellum; Pelisson made a fair copy of his prologue; Moliere contributed fifty fresh verses, with which his visit to Percerin had inspired him; Loret, an article on the marvelous *fetes* he predicted; and Aramis, laden with his booty like the king of the bees, that great black drone, decked with purple and gold, re-entered his apartment, silent and busy. But before departing, "Remember, gentlemen," said he, "we leave to-morrow evening."

"In that case, I must give notice at home," said Moliere.

"Yes; poor Moliere!" said Loret, smiling; "he loves his home."

"'*He* loves,' yes," replied Moliere, with his sad, sweet smile. "'He loves,' that does not mean, they love *him*."

"As for me," said La Fontaine, "they love me at Chateau Thierry, I am very sure."

Aramis here re-entered after a brief disappearance.

"Will any one go with me?" he asked. "I am going by Paris, after having passed a quarter of an hour with M. Fouquet. I offer my carriage."

"Good," said Moliere, "I accept it. I am in a hurry."

"I shall dine here," said Loret. "M. de Gourville has promised me some craw-fish."

"He has promised me some whitings. Find a rhyme for that, La Fontaine."

Aramis went out laughing, as only he could laugh, and Moliere followed him. They were at the bottom of the stairs, when La Fontaine opened the door, and shouted out:

"He has promised us some whitings, In return for these our writings."

The shouts of laughter reached the ears of Fouquet at the moment Aramis opened the door of the study. As to Moliere, he had undertaken to order the horses, while Aramis went to exchange a parting word with the superintendent. "Oh, how they are laughing there!" said Fouquet, with a sigh.

"Do you not laugh, monseigneur?"

"I laugh no longer now, M. d'Herblay. The *fete* is approaching; money is departing."

"Have I not told you that was my business?"

"Yes, you promised me millions."

"You shall have them the day after the king's *entree* into Vaux."

Fouquet looked closely at Aramis, and passed the back of his icy hand across his moistened brow. Aramis perceived that the superintendent either doubted him, or felt he was powerless to obtain the money. How could Fouquet suppose that a poor bishop, ex-abbe, ex-musketeer, could find any?

“Why doubt me?” said Aramis. Fouquet smiled and shook his head.

“Man of little faith!” added the bishop.

“My dear M. d’Herblay,” answered Fouquet, “if I fall — ”

“Well; if you ‘fall’?”

“I shall, at least, fall from such a height, that I shall shatter myself in falling.” Then giving himself a shake, as though to escape from himself, “Whence came you,” said he, “my friend?”

“From Paris — from Percerin.”

“And what have you been doing at Percerin’s, for I suppose you attach no great importance to our poets’ dresses?”

“No; I went to prepare a surprise.”

“Surprise?”

“Yes; which you are going to give to the king.”

“And will it cost much?”

“Oh! a hundred pistoles you will give Lebrun.”

“A painting? — Ah! all the better! And what is this painting to represent?”

“I will tell you; then at the same time, whatever you may say or think of it, I went to see the dresses for our poets.”

“Bah! and they will be rich and elegant?”

“Splendid! There will be few great monseigneurs with so good. People will see the difference there is between the courtiers of wealth and those of friendship.”

“Ever generous and grateful, dear prelate.”

“In your school.”

Fouquet grasped his hand. “And where are you going?” he said.

“I am off to Paris, when you shall have given a certain letter.”

“For whom?”

“M. de Lyonne.”

“And what do you want with Lyonne?”

“I wish to make him sign a *lettre de cachet*.”

“‘*Lettre de cachet!*’ Do you desire to put somebody in the Bastile?”

“On the contrary — to let somebody out.”

“And who?”

“A poor devil — a youth, a lad who has been Bastiled these ten years, for two Latin verses he made against the Jesuits.”

“‘Two Latin verses!’ and, for ‘two Latin verses,’ the miserable being has been in prison for ten years!”

“Yes!”

“And has committed no other crime?”

“Beyond this, he is as innocent as you or I.”

“On your word?”

“On my honor!”

“And his name is — ”

“Seldon.”

“Yes. — But it is too bad. You knew this, and you never told me!”

“‘Twas only yesterday his mother applied to me, monseigneur.”

“And the woman is poor!”

“In the deepest misery.”

“Heaven,” said Fouquet, “sometimes bears with such injustice on earth, that I hardly wonder there are wretches who doubt of its existence. Stay, M. d’Herblay.” And Fouquet, taking a pen, wrote a few rapid lines to his colleague Lyonne. Aramis took the letter and made ready to go.

“Wait,” said Fouquet. He opened his drawer, and took out ten government notes which were there, each for a thousand francs. “Stay,” he said; “set the son at liberty, and give this to the mother; but, above all, do not tell her — ”

“What, monseigneur?”

“That she is ten thousand livres richer than I. She would say I am but a poor superintendent! Go! and I pray that God will bless those who are mindful of his poor!”

“So also do I pray,” replied Aramis, kissing Fouquet’s hand.

And he went out quickly, carrying off the letter for Lyonne and the notes for Seldon’s mother, and taking up Moliere, who was beginning to lose patience.

CHAPTER VII.

Another Supper at the Bastile.

Seven o'clock sounded from the great clock of the Bastile, that famous clock, which, like all the accessories of the state prison, the very use of which is a torture, recalled to the prisoners' minds the destination of every hour of their punishment. The time-piece of the Bastile, adorned with figures, like most of the clocks of the period, represented St. Peter in bonds. It was the supper hour of the unfortunate captives. The doors, grating on their enormous hinges, opened for the passage of the baskets and trays of provisions, the abundance and the delicacy of which, as M. de Baisemeaux has himself taught us, was regulated by the condition in life of the prisoner. We understand on this head the theories of M. de Baisemeaux, sovereign dispenser of gastronomic delicacies, head cook of the royal fortress, whose trays, full-laden, were ascending the steep staircases, carrying some consolation to the prisoners in the shape of honestly filled bottles of good vintages. This same hour was that of M. le gouverneur's supper also. He had a guest to-day, and the spit turned more heavily than usual. Roast partridges, flanked with quails and flanking a larded leveret; boiled fowls; hams, fried and sprinkled with white wine, *cardons* of Guipuzcoa and *la bisque ecrevisses*: these, together with soups and *hors d'oeuvres*, constituted the governor's bill of fare. Baisemeaux, seated at table, was rubbing his hands and looking at the bishop of Vannes, who, booted like a cavalier, dressed in gray and sword at side, kept talking of his hunger and testifying the liveliest impatience. M. de Baisemeaux de Montlezun was not accustomed to the unbending movements of his greatness my lord of Vannes, and this evening Aramis, becoming sprightly, volunteered confidence on confidence. The prelate had again a little touch of the musketeer about him. The bishop just trenched on the borders only of license in his style of conversation. As for M. de Baisemeaux, with the facility of vulgar people, he gave himself up entirely upon this point of his guest's freedom. "Monsieur," said he, "for indeed to-night I dare not call you monseigneur."

"By no means," said Aramis; "call me monsieur; I am booted."

"Do you know, monsieur, of whom you remind me this evening?"

"No! faith," said Aramis, taking up his glass; "but I hope I remind you of a capital guest."

"You remind me of two, monsieur. Francois, shut the window; the wind may annoy his greatness."

"And let him go," added Aramis. "The supper is completely served, and we shall eat it very well without waiters. I like exceedingly to be *tete-a-tete* when I am with a friend." Baisemeaux bowed respectfully.

"I like exceedingly," continued Aramis, "to help myself."

"Retire, Francois," cried Baisemeaux. "I was saying that your greatness puts me in mind of two persons; one very illustrious, the late cardinal, the great Cardinal de la Rochelle, who wore boots like you."

"Indeed," said Aramis; "and the other?"

"The other was a certain musketeer, very handsome, very brave, very adventurous, very fortunate, who, from being abbe, turned musketeer, and from musketeer turned abbe." Aramis condescended to smile. "From abbe," continued Baisemeaux, encouraged by Aramis's smile — "from abbe, bishop — and from bishop — "

"Ah! stay there, I beg," exclaimed Aramis.

"I have just said, monsieur, that you gave me the idea of a cardinal."

"Enough, dear M. Baisemeaux. As you said, I have on the boots of a cavalier, but I do not intend, for all that, to embroil myself with the church this evening."

"But you have wicked intentions, nevertheless, monseigneur."

"Oh, yes, wicked, I own, as everything mundane is."

"You traverse the town and the streets in disguise?"

"In disguise, as you say."

"And you still make use of your sword?"

"Yes, I should think so; but only when I am compelled. Do me the pleasure to summon Francois."

"Have you no wine there?"

"'Tis not for wine, but because it is hot here, and the window is shut."

"I shut the windows at supper-time so as not to hear the sounds or the arrival of couriers."

"Ah, yes. You hear them when the window is open?"

"But too well, and that disturbs me. You understand?"

"Nevertheless I am suffocated. Francois." Francois entered. "Open the windows, I pray you, Master Francois," said Aramis. "You will allow him, dear M. Baisemeaux?"

"You are at home here," answered the governor. The window was opened. "Do you not think," said M. de Baisemeaux, "that you will find yourself very lonely, now M. de la Fere has returned to his household gods at Blois? He is a very old friend, is he not?"

"You know it as I do, Baisemeaux, seeing that you were in the musketeers with us."

"Bah! with my friends I reckon neither bottles of wine nor years."

"And you are right. But I do more than love M. de la Fere, dear Baisemeaux; I venerate him."

"Well, for my part, though 'tis singular," said the governor, "I prefer M. d'Artagnan to him. There is a man for you, who drinks long and well! That kind of people allow you at least to penetrate their thoughts."

"Baisemeaux, make me tipsy to-night; let us have a merry time of it as of old, and if I have a trouble at the bottom of my heart, I promise you, you shall see it as you would a diamond at the bottom of your glass."

"Bravo!" said Baisemeaux, and he poured out a great glass of wine and drank it off at a draught, trembling with joy at the idea of being, by hook or by crook, in the secret of some high archiepiscopal misdemeanor. While he was drinking he did not see with what attention Aramis was noting the sounds in the great court. A courier came in about eight o'clock as Francois brought in the fifth bottle, and, although the courier made a great noise, Baisemeaux heard nothing.

"The devil take him," said Aramis.

"What! who?" asked Baisemeaux. "I hope 'tis neither the wine you drank nor he who is the cause of your drinking it."

"No; it is a horse, who is making noise enough in the court for a whole squadron."

"Pooh! some courier or other," replied the governor, redoubling his attention to the passing bottle. "Yes; and may the devil take him, and so quickly that we shall never hear him speak more. Hurrah! hurrah!"

"You forget me, Baisemeaux! my glass is empty," said Aramis, lifting his dazzling Venetian goblet.

"Upon my honor, you delight me. Francois, wine!" Francois entered. "Wine, fellow! and better."

"Yes, monsieur, yes; but a courier has just arrived."

"Let him go to the devil, I say."

"Yes, monsieur, but — "

"Let him leave his news at the office; we will see to it to-morrow. To-morrow, there will be time to-morrow; there will be daylight," said Baisemeaux, chanting the words.

"Ah, monsieur," grumbled the soldier Francois, in spite of himself, "monsieur."

"Take care," said Aramis, "take care!"

"Of what? dear M. d'Herblay," said Baisemeaux, half intoxicated.

"The letter which the courier brings to the governor of a fortress is sometimes an order."

"Nearly always."

"Do not orders issue from the ministers?"

"Yes, undoubtedly; but — "

"And what to these ministers do but countersign the signature of the king?"

"Perhaps you are right. Nevertheless, 'tis very tiresome when you are sitting before a good table, *tete-a-tete* with a friend — Ah! I beg your pardon, monsieur; I forgot it is I who engage you at supper, and that I speak to a future cardinal."

"Let us pass over that, dear Baisemeaux, and return to our soldier, to Francois."

"Well, and what has Francois done?"

"He has demurred!"

"He was wrong, then?"

"However, he *has* demurred, you see; 'tis because there is something extraordinary in this matter. It is very possible that it was not Francois who was wrong in demurring, but you, who are in the wrong in not listening to him."

"Wrong? I to be wrong before Francois? that seems rather hard."

"Pardon me, merely an irregularity. But I thought it my duty to make an observation which I deem important."

"Oh! perhaps you are right," stammered Baisemeaux. "The king's order is sacred; but as to orders that arrive when one is at supper, I repeat that the devil — "

“If you had said as much to the great cardinal — hem! my dear Baisemeaux, and if his order had any importance.”

“I do it that I may not disturb a bishop. *Mordioux!* am I not, then, excusable?”

“Do not forget, Baisemeaux, that I have worn the soldier’s coat, and I am accustomed to obedience everywhere.”

“You wish, then — ”

“I wish that you would do your duty, my friend; yes, at least before this soldier.”

“‘Tis mathematically true,” exclaimed Baisemeaux. Francois still waited: “Let them send this order of the king’s up to me,” he repeated, recovering himself. And he added in a low tone, “Do you know what it is? I will tell you something about as interesting as this. ‘Beware of fire near the powder magazine;’ or, ‘Look close after such and such a one, who is clever at escaping,’ Ah! if you only knew, monseigneur, how many times I have been suddenly awakened from the very sweetest, deepest slumber, by messengers arriving at full gallop to tell me, or rather, bring me a slip of paper containing these words: ‘Monsieur de Baisemeaux, what news?’ ‘Tis clear enough that those who waste their time writing such orders have never slept in the Bastile. They would know better; they have never considered the thickness of my walls, the vigilance of my officers, the number of rounds we go. But, indeed, what can you expect, monseigneur? It is their business to write and torment me when I am at rest, and to trouble me when I am happy,” added Baisemeaux, bowing to Aramis. “Then let them do their business.”

“And do you do yours,” added the bishop, smiling.

Francois re-entered; Baisemeaux took from his hands the minister’s order. He slowly undid it, and as slowly read it. Aramis pretended to be drinking, so as to be able to watch his host through the glass. Then, Baisemeaux, having read it: “What was I just saying?” he exclaimed.

“What is it?” asked the bishop.

“An order of release! There, now; excellent news indeed to disturb us!”

“Excellent news for him whom it concerns, you will at least agree, my dear governor!”

“And at eight o’clock in the evening!”

“It is charitable!”

"Oh! charity is all very well, but it is for that fellow who says he is so weary and tired, but not for me who am amusing myself," said Baisemeaux, exasperated.

"Will you lose by him, then? And is the prisoner who is to be set at liberty a good payer?"

"Oh, yes, indeed! a miserable, five-franc rat!"

"Let me see it," asked M. d'Herblay. "It is no indiscretion?"

"By no means; read it."

"There is 'Urgent,' on the paper; you have seen that, I suppose?"

"Oh, admirable! 'Urgent!' — a man who has been there ten years! It is *urgent* to set him free to-day, this very evening, at eight o'clock! — *urgent!*" And Baisemeaux, shrugging his shoulders with an air of supreme disdain, flung the order on the table and began eating again.

"They are fond of these tricks!" he said, with his mouth full; "they seize a man, some fine day, keep him under lock and key for ten years, and write to you, 'Watch this fellow well,' or 'Keep him very strictly.' And then, as soon as you are accustomed to look upon the prisoner as a dangerous man, all of a sudden, without rhyme or reason they write — 'Set him at liberty,' and actually add to their missive — 'urgent.' You will own, my lord, 'tis enough to make a man at dinner shrug his shoulders!"

"What do you expect? It is for them to write," said Aramis, "for you to execute the order."

"Good! good! execute it! Oh, patience! You must not imagine that I am a slave."

"Gracious Heaven! my very good M. Baisemeaux, who ever said so? Your independence is well known."

"Thank Heaven!"

"But your goodness of heart is also known."

"Ah! don't speak of it!"

"And your obedience to your superiors. Once a soldier, you see, Baisemeaux, always a soldier."

"And I shall directly obey; and to-morrow morning, at daybreak, the prisoner referred to shall be set free."

"To-morrow?"

"At dawn."

"Why not this evening, seeing that the *lettre de cachet* bears, both on the direction and inside, '*urgent*'?"

"Because this evening we are at supper, and our affairs are urgent, too!"

"Dear Baisemeaux, booted though I be, I feel myself a priest, and charity has higher claims upon me than hunger and thirst. This unfortunate man has suffered long enough, since you have just told me that he has been your prisoner these ten years. Abridge his suffering. His good time has come; give him the benefit quickly. God will repay you in Paradise with years of felicity."

"You wish it?"

"I entreat you."

"What! in the very middle of our repast?"

"I implore you; such an action is worth ten Benedicites."

"It shall be as you desire, only our supper will get cold."

"Oh! never heed that."

Baisemeaux leaned back to ring for Francois, and by a very natural motion turned round towards the door. The order had remained on the table; Aramis seized the opportunity when Baisemeaux was not looking to change the paper for another, folded in the same manner, which he drew swiftly from his pocket. "Francois," said the governor, "let the major come up here with the turnkeys of the Bertaudiere." Francois bowed and quitted the room, leaving the two companions alone.

CHAPTER VIII.

The General of the Order.

There was now a brief silence, during which Aramis never removed his eyes from Baisemeaux for a moment. The latter seemed only half decided to disturb himself thus in the middle of supper, and it was clear he was trying to invent some pretext, whether good or bad, for delay, at any rate till after dessert. And it appeared also that he had hit upon an excuse at last.

“Eh! but it is impossible!” he cried.

“How impossible?” said Aramis. “Give me a glimpse of this impossibility.”

“‘Tis impossible to set a prisoner at liberty at such an hour. Where can he go to, a man so unacquainted with Paris?”

“He will find a place wherever he can.”

“You see, now, one might as well set a blind man free!”

“I have a carriage, and will take him wherever he wishes.”

“You have an answer for everything. Francois, tell monsieur le major to go and open the cell of M. Seldon, No. 3, Bertaudiere.”

“Seldon!” exclaimed Aramis, very naturally. “You said Seldon, I think?”

“I said Seldon, of course. ‘Tis the name of the man they set free.”

“Oh! you mean to say Marchiali?” said Aramis.

“Marchiali? oh! yes, indeed. No, no, Seldon.”

“I think you are making a mistake, Monsieur Baisemeaux.”

“I have read the order.”

“And I also.”

“And I saw ‘Seldon’ in letters as large as that,” and Baisemeaux held up his finger.

“And I read ‘Marchiali’ in characters as large as this,” said Aramis, also holding up two fingers.

“To the proof; let us throw a light on the matter,” said Baisemeaux, confident he was right. “There is the paper, you have only to read it.”

“I read ‘Marchiali,’“ returned Aramis, spreading out the paper. “Look.”

Baisemeaux looked, and his arms dropped suddenly. “Yes, yes,” he said, quite overwhelmed; “yes, Marchiali. ‘Tis plainly written Marchiali! Quite true!”

“Ah! — ”

“How? the man of whom we have talked so much? The man whom they are every day telling me to take such care of?”

“There is ‘Marchiali,’“ repeated the inflexible Aramis.

“I must own it, monseigneur. But I understand nothing about it.”

“You believe your eyes, at any rate.”

“To tell me very plainly there is ‘Marchiali.’“

“And in a good handwriting, too.”

“‘Tis a wonder! I still see this order and the name of Seldon, Irishman. I see it. Ah! I even recollect that under this name there was a blot of ink.”

“No, there is no ink; no, there is no blot.”

“Oh! but there was, though; I know it, because I rubbed my finger — this very one — in the powder that was over the blot.”

“In a word, be it how it may, dear M. Baisemeaux,” said Aramis, “and whatever you may have seen, the order is signed to release Marchiali, blot or no blot.”

“The order is signed to release Marchiali,” replied Baisemeaux, mechanically, endeavoring to regain his courage.

“And you are going to release this prisoner. If your heart dictates you to deliver Seldon also, I declare to you I will not oppose it the least in the world.” Aramis accompanied this remark with a smile, the irony of which effectually dispelled Baisemeaux’s confusion of mind, and restored his courage.

“Monseigneur,” he said, “this Marchiali is the very same prisoner whom the other day a priest confessor of *our order* came to visit in so imperious and so secret a manner.”

“I don’t know that, monsieur,” replied the bishop.

“‘Tis no such long time ago, dear Monsieur d’Herblay.”

“It is true. But *with us*, monsieur, it is good that the man of to-day should no longer know what the man of yesterday did.”

“In any case,” said Baisemeaux, “the visit of the Jesuit confessor must have given happiness to this man.”

Aramis made no reply, but recommenced eating and drinking. As for Baisemeaux, no longer touching anything that was on the table, he again took up the order and examined it every way. This investigation, under ordinary circumstances, would have made the ears of the impatient Aramis burn with anger; but the bishop of Vannes did not become incensed for so little, above all, when he had murmured to himself that to do so was dangerous. “Are you going to release Marchiali?” he said. “What mellow, fragrant and delicious sherry this is, my dear governor.”

“Monseigneur,” replied Baisemeaux, “I shall release the prisoner Marchiali when I have summoned the courier who brought the order, and above all, when, by interrogating him, I have satisfied myself.”

“The order is sealed, and the courier is ignorant of the contents. What do you want to satisfy yourself about?”

“Be it so, monseigneur; but I shall send to the ministry, and M. de Lyonne will either confirm or withdraw the order.”

“What is the good of all that?” asked Aramis, coldly.

“What good?”

“Yes; what is your object, I ask?”

“The object of never deceiving oneself, monseigneur; nor being wanting in the respect which a subaltern owes to his superior officers, nor infringing the duties of a service one has accepted of one’s own free will.”

“Very good; you have just spoken so eloquently, that I cannot but admire you. It is true that a subaltern owes respect to his superiors; he is guilty when he deceives himself, and he should be punished if he infringed either the duties or laws of his office.”

Baisemeaux looked at the bishop with astonishment.

“It follows,” pursued Aramis, “that you are going to ask advice, to put your conscience at ease in the matter?”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“And if a superior officer gives you orders, you will obey?”

“Never doubt it, monseigneur.”

“You know the king’s signature well, M. de Baisemeaux?”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“Is it not on this order of release?”

“It is true, but it may — ”

“Be forged, you mean?”

“That is evident, monseigneur.”

“You are right. And that of M. de Lyonne?”

"I see it plain enough on the order; but for the same reason that the king's signature may have been forged, so also, and with even greater probability, may M. de Lyonne's."

"Your logic has the stride of a giant, M. de Baisemeaux," said Aramis; "and your reasoning is irresistible. But on what special grounds do you base your idea that these signatures are false?"

"On this: the absence of counter-signatures. Nothing checks his majesty's signature; and M. de Lyonne is not there to tell me he has signed."

"Well, Monsieur de Baisemeaux," said Aramis, bending an eagle glance on the governor, "I adopt so frankly your doubts, and your mode of clearing them up, that I will take a pen, if you will give me one."

Baisemeaux gave him a pen.

"And a sheet of white paper," added Aramis.

Baisemeaux handed him some paper.

"Now, I — I, also — I, here present — incontestably, I — am going to write an order to which I am certain you will give credence, incredulous as you are!"

Baisemeaux turned pale at this icy assurance of manner. It seemed to him that the voice of the bishop's, but just now so playful and gay, had become funereal and sad; that the wax lights changed into the tapers of a mortuary chapel, the very glasses of wine into chalices of blood.

Aramis took a pen and wrote. Baisemeaux, in terror, read over his shoulder.

"A. M. D. G.," wrote the bishop; and he drew a cross under these four letters, which signify *ad majorem Dei gloriam*, "to the greater glory of God;" and thus he continued: "It is our pleasure that the order brought to M. de Baisemeaux de Montlezun, governor, for the king, of the castle of the Bastile, be held by him good and effectual, and be immediately carried into operation."

(Signed) D'HERBLAY

"General of the Order, by the grace of God."

Baisemeaux was so profoundly astonished, that his features remained contracted, his lips parted, and his eyes fixed. He did not move an inch, nor articulate a sound. Nothing could be heard in that large chamber but the wing-whisper of a little moth, which was fluttering to its death about the candles. Aramis, without even deigning to look at the man whom he had reduced to so miserable a condition, drew from his pocket a small case of black wax; he sealed the letter, and stamped it with a seal suspended at his breast, beneath his doublet, and when the operation was concluded, presented — still in silence — the missive to M. de Baisemeaux. The latter, whose hands trembled in a manner to excite pity, turned a dull and meaningless gaze upon the letter. A last gleam of feeling played over his features, and he fell, as if thunder-struck, on a chair.

"Come, come," said Aramis, after a long silence, during which the governor of the Bastile had slowly recovered his senses, "do not lead me to believe, dear Baisemeaux, that the presence of the general of the order is as terrible as His, and that men die merely from having seen Him. Take courage, rouse yourself; give me your hand — obey."

Baisemeaux, reassured, if not satisfied, obeyed, kissed Aramis's hand, and rose. "Immediately?" he murmured.

"Oh, there is no pressing haste, my host; take your place again, and do the honors over this beautiful dessert."

"Monseigneur, I shall never recover such a shock as this; I who have laughed, who have jested with you! I who have dared to treat you on a footing of equality!"

"Say nothing about it, old comrade," replied the bishop, who perceived how strained the cord was and how dangerous it would have been to break it; "say nothing about it. Let us each live in our own way; to you, my protection and my friendship; to me, your obedience. Having exactly fulfilled these two requirements, let us live happily."

Baisemeaux reflected; he perceived, at a glance, the consequence of this withdrawal of a prisoner by means of a forged order; and, putting in the scale the guarantee offered him by the official order of the general, did not consider it of any value.

Aramis divined this. "My dear Baisemeaux," said he, "you are a simpleton. Lose this habit of reflection when I give myself the trouble to think for you."

And at another gesture he made, Baisemeaux bowed again. "How shall I set about it?" he said.

"What is the process for releasing a prisoner?"

"I have the regulations."

"Well, then, follow the regulations, my friend."

"I go with my major to the prisoner's room, and conduct him, if he is a personage of importance."

"But this Marchiali is not an important personage," said Aramis carelessly.

"I don't know," answered the governor, as if he would have said, "It is for you to instruct me."

"Then if you don't know it, I am right; so act towards Marchiali as you act towards one of obscure station."

"Good; the regulations so provide. They are to the effect that the turnkey, or one of the lower officials, shall bring the prisoner before the governor, in the office."

"Well, 'tis very wise, that; and then?"

"Then we return to the prisoner the valuables he wore at the time of his imprisonment, his clothes and papers, if the minister's orders have not otherwise dictated."

"What was the minister's order as to this Marchiali?"

"Nothing; for the unhappy man arrived here without jewels, without papers, and almost without clothes."

"See how simple, then, all is. Indeed, Baisemeaux, you make a mountain of everything. Remain here, and make them bring the prisoner to the governor's house."

Baisemeaux obeyed. He summoned his lieutenant, and gave him an order, which the latter passed on, without disturbing himself about it, to the next whom it concerned.

Half an hour afterwards they heard a gate shut in the court; it was the door to the dungeon, which had just rendered up its prey to the free air. Aramis blew out all the candles which lighted the room but one, which he left burning behind the door. This flickering glare prevented the sight from resting steadily on any object. It multiplied tenfold the changing forms and shadows of the place, by its wavering uncertainty. Steps drew near.

"Go and meet your men," said Aramis to Baisemeaux.

The governor obeyed. The sergeant and turnkeys disappeared. Baisemeaux re-entered, followed by a prisoner. Aramis had placed himself in the shade; he saw without being seen. Baisemeaux, in an agitated tone of voice, made the young man acquainted with the order which set him at liberty. The prisoner listened, without making a single gesture or saying a word.

"You will swear ('tis the regulation that requires it)," added the governor, "never to reveal anything that you have seen or heard in the Bastile."

The prisoner perceived a crucifix; he stretched out his hands and swore with his lips. “And now, monsieur, you are free. Whither do you intend going?”

The prisoner turned his head, as if looking behind him for some protection, on which he ought to rely. Then was it that Aramis came out of the shade: “I am here,” he said, “to render the gentleman whatever service he may please to ask.”

The prisoner slightly reddened, and, without hesitation, passed his arm through that of Aramis. “God have you in his holy keeping,” he said, in a voice the firmness of which made the governor tremble as much as the form of the blessing astonished him.

Aramis, on shaking hands with Baisemeaux, said to him; “Does my order trouble you? Do you fear their finding it here, should they come to search?”

“I desire to keep it, monseigneur,” said Baisemeaux. “If they found it here, it would be a certain indication I should be lost, and in that case you would be a powerful and a last auxiliary for me.”

“Being your accomplice, you mean?” answered Aramis, shrugging his shoulders. “Adieu, Baisemeaux,” said he.

The horses were in waiting, making each rusty spring reverberate the carriage again with their impatience. Baisemeaux accompanied the bishop to the bottom of the steps. Aramis caused his companion to mount before him, then followed, and without giving the driver any further order, “Go on,” said he. The carriage rattled over the pavement of the courtyard. An officer with a torch went before the horses, and gave orders at every post to let them pass. During the time taken in opening all the barriers, Aramis barely breathed, and you might have heard his “sealed heart knock against his ribs.” The prisoner, buried in a corner of the carriage, made no more sign of life than his companion. At length, a jolt more sever than the others announced to them that they had cleared the last watercourse. Behind the carriage closed the last gate, that in the Rue St. Antoine. No more walls either on the right or the left; heaven everywhere, liberty everywhere, and life everywhere. The horses, kept in check by a vigorous hand, went quietly as far as the middle of the faubourg. There they began to trot. Little by little, whether they were warming to their work, or whether they were urged, they gained in swiftness, and once past Bercy, the carriage seemed to fly, so great was the ardor of the coursers. The horses galloped thus as far as Villeneuve St. George’s, where relays were waiting. Then four instead of two whirled the carriage away in the direction of Melun, and pulled up for a moment in the middle of the forest of Senart. No doubt the order had been given the postilion beforehand, for Aramis had no occasion even to make a sign.

“What is the matter?” asked the prisoner, as if waking from a long dream.

“The matter is, monseigneur,” said Aramis, “that before going further, it is necessary your royal highness and I should converse.”

“I will await an opportunity, monsieur,” answered the young prince.

“We could not have a better, monseigneur. We are in the middle of a forest, and no one can hear us.”

“The postilion?”

“The postilion of this relay is deaf and dumb, monseigneur.”

“I am at your service, M. d’Herblay.”

“Is it your pleasure to remain in the carriage?”

“Yes; we are comfortably seated, and I like this carriage, for it has restored me to liberty.”

“Wait, monseigneur; there is yet a precaution to be taken.”

“What?”

“We are here on the highway; cavaliers or carriages traveling like ourselves might pass, and seeing us stopping, deem us in some difficulty. Let us avoid offers of assistance, which would embarrass us.”

“Give the postilion orders to conceal the carriage in one of the side avenues.”

“‘Tis exactly what I wished to do, monseigneur.”

Aramis made a sign to the deaf and dumb driver of the carriage, whom he touched on the arm. The latter dismounted, took the leaders by the bridle, and led them over the velvet sward and the mossy grass of a winding alley, at the bottom of which, on this moonless night, the deep shades formed a curtain blacker than ink. This done, the man lay down on a slope near his horses, who, on either side, kept nibbling the young oak shoots.

“I am listening,” said the young prince to Aramis; “but what are you doing there?”

“I am disarming myself of my pistols, of which we have no further need, monseigneur.”

CHAPTER IX.

The Tempter.

“My prince,” said Aramis, turning in the carriage towards his companion, “weak creature as I am, so unpretending in genius, so low in the scale of intelligent beings, it has never yet happened to me to converse with a man without penetrating his thoughts through that living mask which has been thrown over our mind, in order to retain its expression. But to-night, in this darkness, in the reserve which you maintain, I can read nothing on your features, and something tells me that I shall have great difficulty in wresting from you a sincere declaration. I beseech you, then, not for love of me, for subjects should never weigh as anything in the balance which princes hold, but for love of yourself, to retain every syllable, every inflexion which, under the present most grave circumstances, will all have a sense and value as important as any every uttered in the world.”

“I listen,” replied the young prince, “decidedly, without either eagerly seeking or fearing anything you are about to say to me.” And he buried himself still deeper in the thick cushions of the carriage, trying to deprive his companion not only of the sight of him, but even of the very idea of his presence.

Black was the darkness which fell wide and dense from the summits of the intertwining trees. The carriage, covered in by this prodigious roof, would not have received a particle of light, not even if a ray could have struggled through the wreaths of mist that were already rising in the avenue.

“Monseigneur,” resumed Aramis, “you know the history of the government which to-day controls France. The king issued from an infancy imprisoned like yours, obscure as yours, and confined as yours; only, instead of ending, like yourself, this slavery in a prison, this obscurity in solitude, these straightened circumstances in concealment, he was fain to bear all these miseries, humiliations, and distresses, in full daylight, under the pitiless sun of royalty; on an elevation flooded with light, where every stain appears a blemish, every glory a stain. The king has suffered; it rankles in his mind; and he will avenge himself. He will be a bad king. I say not that he will pour out his people’s blood, like Louis XI., or Charles IX.; for he has no mortal injuries to avenge; but he will devour the means and substance of his people; for he has himself undergone wrongs in his own interest and money. In the first place, then, I acquit my conscience, when I consider openly the merits and the faults of this great prince; and if I condemn him, my conscience absolves me.”

Aramis paused. It was not to listen if the silence of the forest remained undisturbed, but it was to gather up his thoughts from the very bottom of his soul — to leave the thoughts he had uttered sufficient time to eat deeply into the mind of his companion.

“All that Heaven does, Heaven does well,” continued the bishop of Vannes; “and I am so persuaded of it that I have long been thankful to have been chosen depositary of the secret which I have aided you to discover. To a just Providence was necessary an instrument, at once penetrating, persevering, and convinced, to accomplish a great work. I am this instrument. I possess penetration, perseverance, conviction; I govern a mysterious people, who has taken for its motto, the motto of God, ‘*Patiens quia oeternus*.’“ The prince moved. “I divine, monseigneur, why you are raising your head, and are surprised at the people I have under my command. You did not know you were dealing with a king — oh! monseigneur, king of a people very humble, much disinherited; humble because they have no force save when creeping; disinherited, because never, almost never in this world, do my people reap the harvest they sow, nor eat the fruit they cultivate. They labor for an abstract idea; they heap together all the atoms of their power, to from a single man; and round this man, with the sweat of their labor, they create a misty halo, which his genius shall, in turn, render a glory gilded with the rays of all the crowns in Christendom. Such is the man you have beside you, monseigneur. It is to tell you that he has drawn you from the abyss for a great purpose, to raise you above the powers of the earth — above himself.”

The prince lightly touched Aramis’s arm. “You speak to me,” he said, “of that religious order whose chief you are. For me, the result of your words is, that the day you desire to hurl down the man you shall have raised, the event will be accomplished; and that you will keep under your hand your creation of yesterday.”

“Undeceive yourself, monseigneur,” replied the bishop. “I should not take the trouble to play this terrible game with your royal highness, if I had not a double interest in gaining it. The day you are elevated, you are elevated forever; you will overturn the footstool, as you rise, and will send it rolling so far, that not even the sight of it will ever again recall to you its right to simple gratitude.”

“Oh, monsieur!”

“Your movement, monseigneur, arises from an excellent disposition. I thank you. Be well assured, I aspire to more than gratitude! I am convinced that, when arrived at the summit, you will judge me still more worthy to be your friend; and then, monseigneur, we two will do such great deeds, that ages hereafter shall long speak of them.”

“Tell me plainly, monsieur — tell me without disguise — what I am to-day, and what you aim at my being to-morrow.”

“You are the son of King Louis XIII., brother of Louis XIV., natural and legitimate heir to the throne of France. In keeping you near him, as Monsieur has been kept — Monsieur, your younger brother — the king reserved to himself the right of being legitimate sovereign. The doctors only could dispute his legitimacy. But the doctors always prefer the king who is to the king who is not. Providence has willed that you should be persecuted; this persecution to-day consecrates you king of France. You had, then, a right to reign, seeing that it is disputed; you had a right to be proclaimed seeing that you have been concealed; and you possess royal blood, since no one has dared to shed yours, as that of your servants has been shed. Now see, then, what this Providence, which you have so often accused of having in every way thwarted you, has done for you. It has given you the features, figure, age, and voice of your brother; and the very causes of your persecution are about to become those of your triumphant restoration. To-morrow, after to-morrow — from the very first, regal phantom, living shade of Louis XIV., you will sit upon his throne, whence the will of Heaven, confided in execution to the arm of man, will have hurled him, without hope of return.”

“I understand,” said the prince, “my brother’s blood will not be shed, then.”

“You will be sole arbiter of his fate.”

“The secret of which they made an evil use against me?”

“You will employ it against him. What did he do to conceal it? He concealed you. Living image of himself, you will defeat the conspiracy of Mazarin and Anne of Austria. You, my prince, will have the same interest in concealing him, who will, as a prisoner, resemble you, as you will resemble him as a king."

"I fall back on what I was saying to you. Who will guard him?"

"Who guarded *you?*"

"You know this secret — you have made use of it with regard to myself. Who else knows it?"

"The queen-mother and Madame de Chevreuse."

"What will they do?"

"Nothing, if you choose."

"How is that?"

"How can they recognize you, if you act in such a manner that no one can recognize you?"

"'Tis true; but there are grave difficulties."

"State them, prince."

"My brother is married; I cannot take my brother's wife."

"I will cause Spain to consent to a divorce; it is in the interest of your new policy; it is human morality. All that is really noble and really useful in this world will find its account therein."

"The imprisoned king will speak."

"To whom do you think he will speak — to the walls?"

"You mean, by walls, the men in whom you put confidence."

"If need be, yes. And besides, your royal highness — "

"Besides?"

"I was going to say, that the designs of Providence do not stop on such a fair road. Every scheme of this caliber is completed by its results, like a geometrical calculation. The king, in prison, will not be for you the cause of embarrassment that you have been for the king enthroned. His soul is naturally proud and impatient; it is, moreover, disarmed and enfeebled, by being accustomed to honors, and by the license of supreme power. The same Providence which has willed that the concluding step in the geometrical calculation I have had the honor of describing to your royal highness should be your ascension to the throne, and the destruction of him who is hurtful to you, has also determined that the conquered one shall soon end both his own and your sufferings. Therefore, his soul and body have been adapted for but a brief agony. Put into prison as a private individual, left alone with your doubts, deprived of everything, you have exhibited the most sublime, enduring principle of life in withstanding all this. But your brother, a captive, forgotten, and in bonds, will not long endure the calamity; and Heaven will resume his soul at the appointed time — that is to say, soon.”

At this point in Aramis’s gloomy analysis, a bird of night uttered from the depths of the forest that prolonged and plaintive cry which makes every creature tremble.

“I will exile the deposed king,” said Philippe, shuddering; “‘twill be more human.”

“The king’s good pleasure will decide the point,” said Aramis. “But has the problem been well put? Have I brought out of the solution according to the wishes or the foresight of your royal highness?”

“Yes, monsieur, yes; you have forgotten nothing — except, indeed, two things.”

“The first?”

“Let us speak of it at once, with the same frankness we have already conversed in. Let us speak of the causes which may bring about the ruin of all the hopes we have conceived. Let us speak of the risks we are running.”

“They would be immense, infinite, terrific, insurmountable, if, as I have said, all things did not concur to render them of absolutely no account. There is no danger either for you or for me, if the constancy and intrepidity of your royal highness are equal to that perfection of resemblance to your brother which nature has bestowed upon you. I repeat it, there are no dangers, only obstacles; a word, indeed, which I find in all languages, but have always ill-understood, and, were I king, would have obliterated as useless and absurd.”

“Yes, indeed, monsieur; there is a very serious obstacle, an insurmountable danger, which you are forgetting.”

“Ah!” said Aramis.

“There is conscience, which cries aloud; remorse, that never dies.”

“True, true,” said the bishop; “there is a weakness of heart of which you remind me. You are right, too, for that, indeed, is an immense obstacle. The horse afraid of the ditch, leaps into the middle of it, and is killed! The man who trembling crosses his sword with that of another leaves loopholes whereby his enemy has him in his power.”

“Have you a brother?” said the young man to Aramis.

“I am alone in the world,” said the latter, with a hard, dry voice.

"But, surely, there is some one in the world whom you love?" added Philippe.

"No one! — Yes, I love you."

The young man sank into so profound a silence, that the mere sound of his respiration seemed like a roaring tumult for Aramis. "Monseigneur," he resumed, "I have not said all I had to say to your royal highness; I have not offered you all the salutary counsels and useful resources which I have at my disposal. It is useless to flash bright visions before the eyes of one who seeks and loves darkness: useless, too, is it to let the magnificence of the cannon's roar make itself heard in the ears of one who loves repose and the quiet of the country. Monseigneur, I have your happiness spread out before me in my thoughts; listen to my words; precious they indeed are, in their import and their sense, for you who look with such tender regard upon the bright heavens, the verdant meadows, the pure air. I know a country instinct with delights of every kind, an unknown paradise, a secluded corner of the world — where alone, unfettered and unknown, in the thick covert of the woods, amidst flowers, and streams of rippling water, you will forget all the misery that human folly has so recently allotted you. Oh! listen to me, my prince. I do not jest. I have a heart, and mind, and soul, and can read your own, — aye, even to its depths. I will not take you unready for your task, in order to cast you into the crucible of my own desires, of my caprice, or my ambition. Let it be all or nothing. You are chilled and galled, sick at heart, overcome by excess of the emotions which but one hour's liberty has produced in you. For me, that is a certain and unmistakable sign that you do not wish to continue at liberty. Would you prefer a more humble life, a life more suited to your strength? Heaven is my witness, that I wish your happiness to be the result of the trial to which I have exposed you."

"Speak, speak," said the prince, with a vivacity which did not escape Aramis.

"I know," resumed the prelate, "in the Bas-Poitou, a canton, of which no one in France suspects the existence. Twenty leagues of country is immense, is it not? Twenty leagues, monseigneur, all covered with water and herbage, and reeds of the most luxuriant nature; the whole studded with islands covered with woods of the densest foliage. These large marshes, covered with reeds as with a thick mantle, sleep silently and calmly beneath the sun's soft and genial rays. A few fishermen with their families indolently pass their lives away there, with their great living-rafts of poplar and alder, the flooring formed of reeds, and the roof woven out of thick rushes. These barks, these floating-houses, are wafted to and fro by the changing winds. Whenever they touch a bank, it is but by chance; and so gently, too, that the sleeping fisherman is not awakened by the shock. Should he wish to land, it is merely because he has seen a large flight of landrails or plovers, of wild ducks, teal, widgeon, or woodchucks, which fall an easy pray to net or gun. Silver shad, eels, greedy pike, red and gray mullet, swim in shoals into his nets; he has but to choose the finest and largest, and return the others to the waters. Never yet has the food of the stranger, be he soldier or simple citizen, never has any one, indeed, penetrated into that district. The sun's rays there are soft and tempered: in plots of solid earth, whose soil is swart and fertile, grows the vine, nourishing with generous juice its purple, white, and golden grapes. Once a week, a boat is sent to deliver the bread which has been baked at an oven — the common property of all. There — like the seigneurs of early days — powerful in virtue of your dogs, your fishing-lines, your guns, and your beautiful reed-built house, would you live, rich in the produce of the chase, in plentitude of absolute secrecy. There would years of your life roll away, at the end of which, no longer recognizable, for you would have been perfectly transformed, you would have succeeded in acquiring a destiny accorded to you by Heaven. There are a thousand pistoles in this bag, monseigneur — more, far more, than sufficient to purchase the whole marsh of which I have spoken; more than enough to live there as many years as you have days to live; more than enough to constitute you the richest, the freest, and the happiest man in the country. Accept it, as I offer it you — sincerely, cheerfully. Forthwith, without a moment's pause, I will unharness two of my horses, which are attached to the carriage yonder, and they, accompanied by my servant — my deaf and dumb attendant — shall conduct you — traveling throughout the night, sleeping during the day — to the locality I have described; and I shall, at least, have the satisfaction of knowing that I have rendered to my prince the major service he himself preferred. I shall have made one human being happy; and Heaven for that will hold me in better account than if I had made one man powerful; the former task is far more difficult. And now, monseigneur, your answer to this proposition? Here is the money. Nay, do not hesitate. At Poitou, you can risk nothing, except the chance of catching the fevers prevalent there; and even of them, the so-called wizards of the country will cure you, for the sake of your pistoles. If you play the other game, you run the chance of being assassinated on a throne, strangled in a prison-cell. Upon my soul, I assure you, now I begin to compare them together, I myself should hesitate which lot I should accept.”

“Monsieur,” replied the young prince, “before I determine, let me alight from this carriage, walk on the ground, and consult that still voice within me, which Heaven bids us all to hearken to. Ten minutes is all I ask, and then you shall have your answer.”

“As you please, monseigneur,” said Aramis, bending before him with respect, so solemn and august in tone and address had sounded these strange words.

CHAPTER X.

Crown and Tiara.

Aramis was the first to descend from the carriage; he held the door open for the young man. He saw him place his foot on the mossy ground with a trembling of the whole body, and walk round the carriage with an unsteady and almost tottering step. It seemed as if the poor prisoner was unaccustomed to walk on God’s earth. It was the 15th of August, about eleven o’clock at night; thick clouds, portending a tempest, overspread the heavens, and shrouded every light and prospect underneath their heavy folds. The extremities of the avenues were imperceptibly detached from the copse, by a lighter shadow of opaque gray, which, upon closer examination, became visible in the midst of the obscurity. But the fragrance which ascended from the grass, fresher and more penetrating than that which exhaled from the trees around him; the warm and balmy air which enveloped him for the first time for many years past; the ineffable enjoyment of liberty in an open country, spoke to the prince in so seductive a language, that notwithstanding the preternatural caution, we would almost say dissimulation of his character, of which we have tried to give an idea, he could not restrain his emotion, and breathed a sigh of ecstasy. Then, by degrees, he raised his aching head and inhaled the softly scented air, as it was wafted in gentle gusts to his uplifted face. Crossing his arms on his chest, as if to control this new sensation of delight, he drank in delicious draughts of that mysterious air which interpenetrates at night the loftiest forests. The sky he was contemplating, the murmuring waters, the universal freshness — was not all this reality? Was not Aramis a madman to suppose that he had aught else to dream of in this world? Those exciting pictures of country life, so free from fears and troubles, the ocean of happy days that glitters incessantly before all young imaginations, are real allurements wherewith to fascinate a poor, unhappy prisoner, worn out by prison cares, emaciated by the stifling air of the Bastile. It was the picture, it will be remembered, drawn by Aramis, when he offered the thousand pistoles he had with him in the carriage to the prince, and the enchanted Eden which the deserts of Bas-Poitou hid from the eyes of the world. Such were the reflections of Aramis as he watched, with an anxiety impossible to describe, the silent progress of the emotions of Philippe, whom he perceived gradually becoming more and more absorbed in his meditations. The young prince was offering up an inward prayer to Heaven, to be divinely guided in this trying moment, upon which his life or death depended. It was an anxious time for the bishop of Vannes, who had never before been so perplexed. His iron will, accustomed to overcome all obstacles, never finding itself inferior or vanquished on any occasion, to be foiled in so vast a project from not having foreseen the influence which a view of nature in all its luxuriance would have on the human mind! Aramis, overwhelmed by anxiety, contemplated with emotion the painful struggle that was taking place in Philippe’s mind. This suspense lasted the whole ten minutes which the young man had requested. During this space of time, which appeared an eternity, Philippe continued gazing with an imploring and sorrowful look towards the heavens; Aramis did not remove the piercing glance he had fixed on Philippe. Suddenly the young man bowed his head. His thought returned to the earth, his looks perceptibly hardened, his brow contracted, his mouth assuming an expression of undaunted courage; again his looks became fixed, but this time they wore a worldly expression, hardened by covetousness, pride, and strong desire. Aramis’s look immediately became as soft as it had before been gloomy. Philippe, seizing his hand in a quick, agitated manner, exclaimed:

“Lead me to where the crown of France is to be found.”

“Is this your decision, monseigneur?” asked Aramis.

“It is.”

“Irrevocably so?”

Philippe did not even deign to reply. He gazed earnestly at the bishop, as if to ask him if it were possible for a man to waver after having once made up his mind.

“Such looks are flashes of the hidden fire that betrays men’s character,” said Aramis, bowing over Philippe’s hand; “you will be great, monseigneur, I will answer for that.”

“Let us resume our conversation. I wished to discuss two points with you; in the first place the dangers, or the obstacles we may meet with. That point is decided. The other is the conditions you intend imposing on me. It is your turn to speak, M. d’Herblay.”

"The conditions, monseigneur?"

"Doubtless. You will not allow so mere a trifle to stop me, and you will not do me the injustice to suppose that I think you have no interest in this affair. Therefore, without subterfuge or hesitation, tell me the truth — "

"I will do so, monseigneur. Once a king — "

"When will that be?"

"To-morrow evening — I mean in the night."

"Explain yourself."

"When I shall have asked your highness a question."

"Do so."

"I sent to your highness a man in my confidence with instructions to deliver some closely written notes, carefully drawn up, which will thoroughly acquaint your highness with the different persons who compose and will compose your court."

"I perused those notes."

"Attentively?"

"I know them by heart."

"And understand them? Pardon me, but I may venture to ask that question of a poor, abandoned captive of the Bastile? In a week's time it will not be requisite to further question a mind like yours. You will then be in full possession of liberty and power."

"Interrogate me, then, and I will be a scholar representing his lesson to his master."

"We will begin with your family, monseigneur."

"My mother, Anne of Austria! all her sorrows, her painful malady. Oh! I know her — I know her."

"Your second brother?" asked Aramis, bowing.

"To these notes," replied the prince, "you have added portraits so faithfully painted, that I am able to recognize the persons whose characters, manners, and history you have so carefully portrayed. Monsieur, my brother, is a fine, dark young man, with a pale face; he does not love his wife, Henrietta, whom I, Louis XIV., loved a little, and still flirt with, even although she made me weep on the day she wished to dismiss Mademoiselle de la Valliere from her service in disgrace."

"You will have to be careful with regard to the watchfulness of the latter," said Aramis; "she is sincerely attached to the actual king. The eyes of a woman who loves are not easily deceived."

“She is fair, has blue eyes, whose affectionate gaze reveals her identity. She halts slightly in her gait; she writes a letter every day, to which I have to send an answer by M. de Saint-Aignan.”

“Do you know the latter?”

“As if I saw him, and I know the last verses he composed for me, as well as those I composed in answer to his.”

“Very good. Do you know your ministers?”

“Colbert, an ugly, dark-browed man, but intelligent enough, his hair covering his forehead, a large, heavy, full head; the mortal enemy of M. Fouquet.”

“As for the latter, we need not disturb ourselves about him.”

“No; because necessarily you will not require me to exile him, I suppose?”

Aramis, struck with admiration at the remark, said, “You will become very great, monseigneur.”

“You see,” added the prince, “that I know my lesson by heart, and with Heaven’s assistance, and yours afterwards, I shall seldom go wrong.”

“You have still an awkward pair of eyes to deal with, monseigneur.”

“Yes, the captain of the musketeers, M. d’Artagnan, your friend.”

“Yes; I can well say ‘my friend.’“

“He who escorted La Valliere to Le Chaillot; he who delivered up Monk, cooped in an iron box, to Charles II.; he who so faithfully served my mother; he to whom the crown of France owes so much that it owes everything. Do you intend to ask me to exile him also?”

“Never, sire. D’Artagnan is a man to whom, at a certain given time, I will undertake to reveal everything; but be on your guard with him, for if he discovers our plot before it is revealed to him, you or I will certainly be killed or taken. He is a bold and enterprising man.”

“I will think it over. Now tell me about M. Fouquet; what do you wish to be done with regard to him?”

“One moment more, I entreat you, monseigneur; and forgive me, if I seem to fail in respect to questioning you further.”

“It is your duty to do so, nay, more than that, your right.”

“Before we pass to M. Fouquet, I should very much regret forgetting another friend of mine.”

“M. du Vallon, the Hercules of France, you mean; oh! as far as he is concerned, his interests are more than safe.”

"No; it is not he whom I intended to refer to."

"The Comte de la Fere, then?"

"And his son, the son of all four of us."

"That poor boy who is dying of love for La Valliere, whom my brother so disloyally bereft him of? Be easy on that score. I shall know how to rehabilitate his happiness. Tell me only one thing, Monsieur d'Herblay; do men, when they love, forget the treachery that has been shown them? Can a man ever forgive the woman who has betrayed him? Is that a French custom, or is it one of the laws of the human heart?"

"A man who loves deeply, as deeply as Raoul loves Mademoiselle de la Valliere, finishes by forgetting the fault or crime of the woman he loves; but I do not yet know whether Raoul will be able to forget."

"I will see after that. Have you anything further to say about your friend?"

"No; that is all."

"Well, then, now for M. Fouquet. What do you wish me to do for him?"

"To keep him on as surintendant, in the capacity in which he has hitherto acted, I entreat you."

"Be it so; but he is the first minister at present."

"Not quite so."

"A king, ignorant and embarrassed as I shall be, will, as a matter of course, require a first minister of state."

"Your majesty will require a friend."

"I have only one, and that is yourself."

"You will have many others by and by, but none so devoted, none so zealous for your glory."

"You shall be my first minister of state."

"Not immediately, monseigneur, for that would give rise to too much suspicion and astonishment."

"M. de Richelieu, the first minister of my grandmother, Marie de Medici, was simply bishop of Lucon, as you are bishop of Vannes."

"I perceive that your royal highness has studied my notes to great advantage; your amazing perspicacity overpowers me with delight."

"I am perfectly aware that M. de Richelieu, by means of the queen's protection, soon became cardinal."

"It would be better," said Aramis, bowing, "that I should not be appointed first minister until your royal highness has procured my nomination as cardinal."

"You shall be nominated before two months are past, Monsieur d'Herblay. But that is a matter of very trifling moment; you would not offend me if you were to ask more than that, and you would cause me serious regret if you were to limit yourself to that."

"In that case, I have something still further to hope for, monseigneur."

"Speak! speak!"

"M. Fouquet will not keep long at the head of affairs, he will soon get old. He is fond of pleasure, consistently, I mean, with all his labors, thanks to the youthfulness he still retains; but this protracted youth will disappear at the approach of the first serious annoyance, or at the first illness he may experience. We will spare him the annoyance, because he is an agreeable and noble-hearted man; but we cannot save him from ill-health. So it is determined. When you shall have paid all M. Fouquet's debts, and restored the finances to a sound condition, M. Fouquet will be able to remain the sovereign ruler in his little court of poets and painters, — we shall have made him rich. When that has been done, and I have become your royal highness's prime minister, I shall be able to think of my own interests and yours."

The young man looked at his interrogator.

"M. de Richelieu, of whom we were speaking just now, was very much to blame in the fixed idea he had of governing France alone, unaided. He allowed two kings, King Louis XIII. and himself, to be seated on the self-same throne, whilst he might have installed them more conveniently upon two separate and distinct thrones."

"Upon two thrones?" said the young man, thoughtfully.

"In fact," pursued Aramis, quietly, "a cardinal, prime minister of France, assisted by the favor and by the countenance of his Most Christian Majesty the King of France, a cardinal to whom the king his master lends the treasures of the state, his army, his counsel, such a man would be acting with twofold injustice in applying these mighty resources to France alone. Besides," added Aramis, "you will not be a king such as your father was, delicate in health, slow in judgment, whom all things wearied; you will be a king governing by your brain and by your sword; you will have in the government of the state no more than you will be able to manage unaided; I should only interfere with you. Besides, our friendship ought never to be, I do not say impaired, but in any degree affected, by a secret thought. I shall have given you the throne of France, you will confer on me the throne of St. Peter. Whenever your loyal, firm, and mailed hand should joined in ties of intimate association the hand of a pope such as I shall be, neither Charles V., who owned two-thirds of the habitable globe, nor Charlemagne, who possessed it entirely, will be able to reach to half your stature. I have no alliances, I have no predilections; I will not throw you into persecutions of heretics, nor will I cast you into the troubled waters of family dissension; I will simply say to you: The whole universe is our own; for me the minds of men, for you their bodies. And as I shall be the first to die, you will have my inheritance. What do you say of my plan, monseigneur?"

"I say that you render me happy and proud, for no other reason than that of having comprehended you thoroughly. Monsieur d'Herblay, you shall be cardinal, and when cardinal, my prime minister; and then you will point out to me the necessary steps to be taken to secure your election as pope, and I will take them. You can ask what guarantees from me you please."

"It is useless. Never shall I act except in such a manner that you will be the gainer; I shall never ascend the ladder of fortune, fame, or position, until I have first seen you placed upon the round of the ladder immediately above me; I shall always hold myself sufficiently aloof from you to escape incurring your jealousy, sufficiently near to sustain your personal advantage and to watch over your friendship. All the contracts in the world are easily violated because the interests included in them incline more to one side than to another. With us, however, this will never be the case; I have no need of any guarantees."

"And so — my dear brother — will disappear?"

"Simply. We will remove him from his bed by means of a plank which yields to the pressure of the finger. Having retired to rest a crowned sovereign, he will awake a captive. Alone you will rule from that moment, and you will have no interest dearer and better than that of keeping me near you."

"I believe it. There is my hand on it, Monsieur d'Herblay."

"Allow me to kneel before you, sire, most respectfully. We will embrace each other on the day we shall have upon our temples, you the crown, I the tiara."

"Still embrace me this very day also, and be, for and towards me, more than great, more than skillful, more than sublime in genius; be kind and indulgent — be my father!"

Aramis was almost overcome as he listened to his voice; he fancied he detected in his own heart an emotion hitherto unknown; but this impression was speedily removed. “His father!” he thought; “yes, his Holy Father.”

And they resumed their places in the carriage, which sped rapidly along the road leading to Vaux-le-Vicomte.

CHAPTER XI.

The Chateau de Vaux-le-Vicomte.

The chateau of Vaux-le-Vicomte, situated about a league from Melun, had been built by Fouquet in 1655, at a time when there was a scarcity of money in France; Mazarin had taken all that there was, and Fouquet expended the remainder. However, as certain men have fertile, false, and useful vices, Fouquet, in scattering broadcast millions of money in the construction of this palace, had found a means of gathering, as the result of his generous profusion, three illustrious men together: Levau, the architect of the building; Lenotre, the designer of the gardens; and Lebrun, the decorator of the apartments. If the Chateau de Vaux possessed a single fault with which it could be reproached, it was its grand, pretentious character. It is even at the present day proverbial to calculate the number of acres of roofing, the restoration of which would, in our age, be the ruin of fortunes cramped and narrowed as the epoch itself. Vaux-le-Vicomte, when its magnificent gates, supported by caryatides, have been passed through, has the principal front of the main building opening upon a vast, so-called, court of honor, inclosed by deep ditches, bordered by a magnificent stone balustrade. Nothing could be more noble in appearance than the central forecourt raised upon the flight of steps, like a king upon his throne, having around it four pavilions at the angles, the immense Ionic columns of which rose majestically to the whole height of the building. The friezes ornamented with arabesques, and the pediments which crowned the pilasters, conferred richness and grace on every part of the building, while the domes which surmounted the whole added proportion and majesty. This mansion, built by a subject, bore a far greater resemblance to those royal residences which Wolsey fancied he was called upon to construct, in order to present them to his master form the fear of rendering him jealous. But if magnificence and splendor were displayed in any one particular part of this palace more than another, — if anything could be preferred to the wonderful arrangement of the interior, to the sumptuousness of the gilding, and to the profusion of the paintings and statues, it would be the park and gardens of Vaux. The *jets d’eau*, which were regarded as wonderful in 1653, are still so, even at the present time; the cascades awakened the admiration of kings and princes; and as for the famous grotto, the theme of so many poetical effusions, the residence of that illustrious nymph of Vaux, whom Pelisson made converse with La Fontaine, we must be spared the description of all its beauties. We will do as Despreaux did, — we will enter the park, the trees of which are of eight years’ growth only — that is to say, in their present position — and whose summits even yet, as they proudly tower aloft, blushingly unfold their leaves to the earliest rays of the rising sun. Lenotre had hastened the pleasure of the Maecenas of his period; all the nursery-grounds had furnished trees whose growth had been accelerated by careful culture and the richest plant-food. Every tree in the neighborhood which presented a fair appearance of beauty or stature had been taken up by its roots and transplanted to the park. Fouquet could well afford to purchase trees to ornament his park, since he had bought up three villages and their appurtenances (to use a legal word) to increase its extent. M. de Scudery said of this palace, that, for the purpose of keeping the grounds and gardens well watered, M. Fouquet had divided a river into a thousand fountains, and gathered the waters of a thousand fountains into torrents. This same Monsieur de Scudery said a great many other things in his “Clelie,” about this palace of Valterre, the charms of which he describes most minutely. We should be far wiser to send our curious readers to Vaux to judge for themselves, than to refer them to “Clelie;” and yet there are as many leagues from Paris to Vaux, as there are volumes of the “Clelie.”

This magnificent palace had been got ready for the reception of the greatest reigning sovereign of the time. M. Fouquet’s friends had transported thither, some their actors and their dresses, others their troops of sculptors and artists; not forgetting others with their ready-mended pens, — floods of impromptus were contemplated. The cascades, somewhat rebellious nymphs though they were, poured forth their waters brighter and clearer than crystal: they scattered over the bronze triton and nereids their waves of foam, which glistened like fire in the rays of the sun. An army of servants were hurrying to and fro in squadrons in the courtyard and corridors; while Fouquet, who had only that morning arrived, walked all through the palace with a calm, observant glance, in order to give his last orders, after his intendants had inspected everything.

It was, as we have said, the 15th of August. The sun poured down its burning rays upon the heathen deities of marble and bronze: it raised the temperature of the water in the conch shells, and ripened, on the walls, those magnificent peaches, of which the king, fifty years later, spoke so regretfully, when, at Marly, on an occasion of a scarcity of the finer sorts of peaches being complained of, in the beautiful gardens there — gardens which had cost France double the amount that had been expended on Vaux — the *great king* observed to some one: “You are far too young to have eaten any of M. Fouquet’s peaches.”

Oh, fame! Oh, blazon of renown! Oh, glory of this earth! That very man whose judgment was so sound and accurate where merit was concerned — he who had swept into his coffers the inheritance of Nicholas Fouquet, who had robbed him of Lenotre and Lebrun, and had sent him to rot for the remainder of his life in one of the state prisons — merely remembered the peaches of that vanquished, crushed, forgotten enemy! It was to little purpose that Fouquet had squandered thirty millions of francs in the fountains of his gardens, in the crucibles of his sculptors, in the writing-desks of his literary friends, in the portfolios of his painters; vainly had he fancied that thereby he might be remembered. A peach — a blushing, rich-flavored fruit, nestling in the trellis work on the garden-wall, hidden beneath its long, green leaves, — this little vegetable production, that a dormouse would nibble up without a thought, was sufficient to recall to the memory of this great monarch the mournful shade of the last surintendant of France.

With a perfect reliance that Aramis had made arrangements fairly to distribute the vast number of guests throughout the palace, and that he had not omitted to attend to any of the internal regulations for their comfort, Fouquet devoted his entire attention to the *ensemble* alone. In one direction Gourville showed him the preparations which had been made for the fireworks; in another, Moliere led him over the theater; at last, after he had visited the chapel, the *salons*, and the galleries, and was again going downstairs, exhausted with fatigue, Fouquet saw Aramis on the staircase. The prelate beckoned to him. The surintendant joined his friend, and, with him, paused before a large picture scarcely finished. Applying himself, heart and soul, to his work, the painter Lebrun, covered with perspiration, stained with paint, pale from fatigue and the inspiration of genius, was putting the last finishing touches with his rapid brush. It was the portrait of the king, whom they were expecting, dressed in the court suit which Percerin had condescended to show beforehand to the bishop of Vannes. Fouquet placed himself before this portrait, which seemed to live, as one might say, in the cool freshness of its flesh, and in its warmth of color. He gazed upon it long and fixedly, estimated the prodigious labor that had been bestowed upon it, and, not being able to find any recompense sufficiently great for this Herculean effort, he passed his arm round the painter's neck and embraced him. The surintendant, by this action, had utterly ruined a suit of clothes worth a thousand pistoles, but he had satisfied, more than satisfied, Lebrun. It was a happy moment for the artist; it was an unhappy moment for M. Percerin, who was walking behind Fouquet, and was engaged in admiring, in Lebrun's painting, the suit that he had made for his majesty, a perfect *objet d'art*, as he called it, which was not to be matched except in the wardrobe of the surintendant. His distress and his exclamations were interrupted by a signal which had been given from the summit of the mansion. In the direction of Melun, in the still empty, open plain, the sentinels of Vaux had just perceived the advancing procession of the king and the queens. His majesty was entering Melun with his long train of carriages and cavaliers.

"In an hour — " said Aramis to Fouquet.

"In an hour!" replied the latter, sighing.

"And the people who ask one another what is the good of these royal *fetes!*" continued the bishop of Vannes, laughing, with his false smile.

"Alas! I, too, who am not the people, ask myself the same thing."

"I will answer you in four and twenty hours, monseigneur. Assume a cheerful countenance, for it should be a day of true rejoicing."

"Well, believe me or not, as you like, D'Herblay," said the surintendant, with a swelling heart, pointing at the *cortege* of Louis, visible in the horizon, "he certainly loves me but very little, and I do not care much more for him; but I cannot tell you how it is, that since he is approaching my house — "

"Well, what?"

"Well, since I know he is on his way here, as my guest, he is more sacred than ever for me; he is my acknowledged sovereign, and as such is very dear to me."

"Dear? yes," said Aramis, playing upon the word, as the Abbe Terray did, at a later period, with Louis XV.

“Do not laugh, D’Herblay; I feel that, if he really seemed to wish it, I could love that young man.”

“You should not say that to me,” returned Aramis, “but rather to M. Colbert.”

“To M. Colbert!” exclaimed Fouquet. “Why so?”

“Because he would allow you a pension out of the king’s privy purse, as soon as he becomes surintendant,” said Aramis, preparing to leave as soon as he had dealt this last blow.

“Where are you going?” returned Fouquet, with a gloomy look.

“To my own apartment, in order to change my costume, monseigneur.”

“Whereabouts are you lodging, D’Herblay?”

“In the blue room on the second story.”

“The room immediately over the king’s room?”

“Precisely.”

“You will be subject to very great restraint there. What an idea to condemn yourself to a room where you cannot stir or move about!”

“During the night, monseigneur, I sleep or read in my bed.”

“And your servants?”

“I have but one attendant with me. I find my reader quite sufficient. Adieu, monseigneur; do not overfatigue yourself; keep yourself fresh for the arrival of the king.”

“We shall see you by and by, I suppose, and shall see your friend Du Vallon also?”

“He is lodging next to me, and is at this moment dressing.”

And Fouquet, bowing, with a smile, passed on like a commander-in-chief who pays the different outposts a visit after the enemy has been signaled in sight.

CHAPTER XII.

The Wine of Melun.

The king had, in point of fact, entered Melun with the intention of merely passing through the city. The youthful monarch was most eagerly anxious for amusements; only twice during the journey had he been able to catch a glimpse of La Valliere, and, suspecting that his only opportunity of speaking to her would be after nightfall, in the gardens, and after the ceremonial of reception had been gone through, he had been very desirous to arrive at Vaux as early as possible. But he reckoned without his captain of the musketeers, and without M. Colbert. Like Calypso, who could not be consoled at the departure of Ulysses, our Gascon could not console himself for not having guessed why Aramis had asked Percerin to show him the king's new costumes. "There is not a doubt," he said to himself, "that my friend the bishop of Vannes had some motive in that;" and then he began to rack his brains most uselessly. D'Artagnan, so intimately acquainted with all the court intrigues, who knew the position of Fouquet better than even Fouquet himself did, had conceived the strangest fancies and suspicions at the announcement of the *fete*, which would have ruined a wealthy man, and which became impossible, utter madness even, for a man so poor as he was. And then, the presence of Aramis, who had returned from Belle-Isle, and been nominated by Monsieur Fouquet inspector-general of all the arrangements; his perseverance in mixing himself up with all the surintendant's affairs; his visits to Baisemeaux; all this suspicious singularity of conduct had excessively troubled and tormented D'Artagnan during the last two weeks.

"With men of Aramis's stamp," he said, "one is never the stronger except sword in hand. So long as Aramis continued a soldier, there was hope of getting the better of him; but since he has covered his cuirass with a stole, we are lost. But what can Aramis's object possibly be?" And D'Artagnan plunged again into deep thought. "What does it matter to me, after all," he continued, "if his only object is to overthrow M. Colbert? And what else can he be after?" And D'Artagnan rubbed his forehead — that fertile land, whence the plowshare of his nails had turned up so many and such admirable ideas in his time. He, at first, thought of talking the matter over with Colbert, but his friendship for Aramis, the oath of earlier days, bound him too strictly. He revolted at the bare idea of such a thing, and, besides, he hated the financier too cordially. Then, again, he wished to unburden his mind to the king; but yet the king would not be able to understand the suspicions which had not even a shadow of reality at their base. He resolved to address himself to Aramis, direct, the first time he met him. "I will get him," said the musketeer, "between a couple of candles, suddenly, and when he least expects it, I will place my hand upon his heart, and he will tell me — What will he tell me? Yes, he will tell me something, for *mordioux!* there is something in it, I know."

Somewhat calmer, D'Artagnan made every preparation for the journey, and took the greatest care that the military household of the king, as yet very inconsiderable in numbers, should be well officered and well disciplined in its meager and limited proportions. The result was that, through the captain's arrangements, the king, on arriving at Melun, saw himself at the head of both the musketeers and Swiss guards, as well as a picket of the French guards. It might almost have been called a small army. M. Colbert looked at the troops with great delight: he even wished they had been a third more in number.

"But why?" said the king.

"In order to show greater honor to M. Fouquet," replied Colbert.

"In order to ruin him the sooner," thought D'Artagnan.

When this little army appeared before Melun, the chief magistrates came out to meet the king, and to present him with the keys of the city, and invited him to enter the Hotel de Ville, in order to partake of the wine of honor. The king, who expected to pass through the city and to proceed to Vaux without delay, became quite red in the face from vexation.

"Who was fool enough to occasion this delay?" muttered the king, between his teeth, as the chief magistrate was in the middle of a long address.

"Not I, certainly," replied D'Artagnan, "but I believe it was M. Colbert."

Colbert, having heard his name pronounced, said, "What was M. d'Artagnan good enough to say?"

"I was good enough to remark that it was you who stopped the king's progress, so that he might taste the *vin de Brie*. Was I right?"

"Quite so, monsieur."

"In that case, then, it was you whom the king called some name or other."

"What name?"

"I hardly know; but wait a moment — idiot, I think it was — no, no, it was fool or dolt. Yes; his majesty said that the man who had thought of the *vin de Melun* was something of the sort."

D'Artagnan, after this broadside, quietly caressed his mustache; M. Colbert's large head seemed to become larger and larger than ever. D'Artagnan, seeing how ugly anger made him, did not stop half-way. The orator still went on with his speech, while the king's color was visibly increasing.

"*Mordioux!*" said the musketeer, coolly, "the king is going to have an attack of determination of blood to the head. Where the deuce did you get hold of that idea, Monsieur Colbert? You have no luck."

"Monsieur," said the financier, drawing himself up, "my zeal for the king's service inspired me with the idea."

"Bah!"

"Monsieur, Melun is a city, an excellent city, which pays well, and which it would be imprudent to displease."

"There, now! I, who do not pretend to be a financier, saw only one idea in your idea."

"What was that, monsieur?"

"That of causing a little annoyance to M. Fouquet, who is making himself quite giddy on his donjons yonder, in waiting for us."

This was a home-stroke, hard enough in all conscience. Colbert was completely thrown out of the saddle by it, and retired, thoroughly discomfited. Fortunately, the speech was now at an end; the king drank the wine which was presented to him, and then every one resumed the progress through the city. The king bit his lips in anger, for the evening was closing in, and all hope of a walk with La Valliere was at an end. In order that the whole of the king's household should enter Vaux, four hours at least were necessary, owing to the different arrangements. The king, therefore, who was boiling with impatience, hurried forward as much as possible, in order to reach it before nightfall. But, at the moment he was setting off again, other and fresh difficulties arose.

"Is not the king going to sleep at Melun?" said Colbert, in a low tone of voice, to D'Artagnan.

M. Colbert must have been badly inspired that day, to address himself in that manner to the chief of the musketeers; for the latter guessed that the king's intention was very far from that of remaining where he was. D'Artagnan would not allow him to enter Vaux except he were well and strongly accompanied; and desired that his majesty would not enter except with all the escort. On the other hand, he felt that these delays would irritate that impatient monarch beyond measure. In what way could he possibly reconcile these difficulties? D'Artagnan took up Colbert's remark, and determined to repeated it to the king.

"Sire," he said, "M. Colbert has been asking me if your majesty does not intend to sleep at Melun."

"Sleep at Melun! What for?" exclaimed Louis XIV. "Sleep at Melun! Who, in Heaven's name, can have thought of such a thing, when M. Fouquet is expecting us this evening?"

"It was simply," replied Colbert, quickly, "the fear of causing your majesty the least delay; for, according to established etiquette, you cannot enter any place, with the exception of your own royal residences, until the soldiers' quarters have been marked out by the quartermaster, and the garrison properly distributed."

D'Artagnan listened with the greatest attention, biting his mustache to conceal his vexation; and the queens were not less interested. They were fatigued, and would have preferred to go to rest without proceeding any farther; more especially, in order to prevent the king walking about in the evening with M. de Saint-Aignan and the ladies of the court, for, if etiquette required the princesses to remain within their own rooms, the ladies of honor, as soon as they had performed the services required of them, had no restrictions placed upon them, but were at liberty to walk about as they pleased. It will easily be conjectured that all these rival interests, gathering together in vapors, necessarily produced clouds, and that the clouds were likely to be followed by a tempest. The king had no mustache to gnaw, and therefore kept biting the handle of his whip instead, with ill-concealed impatience. How could he get out of it? D'Artagnan looked as agreeable as possible, and Colbert as sulky as he could. Who was there he could get in a passion with?

"We will consult the queen," said Louis XIV., bowing to the royal ladies. And this kindness of consideration softened Maria Theresa's heart, who, being of a kind and generous disposition, when left to her own free-will, replied:

"I shall be delighted to do whatever your majesty wishes."

"How long will it take us to get to Vaux?" inquired Anne of Austria, in slow and measured accents, placing her hand upon her bosom, where the seat of her pain lay.

"An hour for your majesty's carriages," said D'Artagnan; "the roads are tolerably good."

The king looked at him. "And a quarter of an hour for the king," he hastened to add.

"We should arrive by daylight?" said Louis XIV.

"But the billeting of the king's military escort," objected Colbert, softly, "will make his majesty lose all the advantage of his speed, however quick he may be."

"Double ass that you are!" thought D'Artagnan; "if I had any interest or motive in demolishing your credit with the king, I could do it in ten minutes. If I were in the king's place," he added aloud, "I should, in going to M. Fouquet, leave my escort behind me; I should go to him as a friend; I should enter accompanied only by my captain of the guards; I should consider that I was acting more nobly, and should be invested with a still more sacred character by doing so."

Delight sparkled in the king's eyes. "That is indeed a very sensible suggestion. We will go to see a friend as friends; the gentlemen who are with the carriages can go slowly: but we who are mounted will ride on." And he rode off, accompanied by all those who were mounted. Colbert hid his ugly head behind his horse's neck.

"I shall be quits," said D'Artagnan, as he galloped along, "by getting a little talk with Aramis this evening. And then, M. Fouquet is a man of honor. *Mordioux!* I have said so, and it must be so."

And this was the way how, towards seven o'clock in the evening, without announcing his arrival by the din of trumpets, and without even his advanced guard, without out-riders or musketeers, the king presented himself before the gate of Vaux, where Fouquet, who had been informed of his royal guest's approach, had been waiting for the last half-hour, with his head uncovered, surrounded by his household and his friends.

CHAPTER XIII.

Nectar and Ambrosia.

M. Fouquet held the stirrup of the king, who, having dismounted, bowed most graciously, and more graciously still held out his hand to him, which Fouquet, in spite of a slight resistance on the king's part, carried respectfully to his lips. The king wished to wait in the first courtyard for the arrival of the carriages, nor had he long to wait, for the roads had been put into excellent order by the superintendent, and a stone would hardly have been found of the size of an egg the whole way from Melun to Vaux; so that the carriages, rolling along as though on a carpet, brought the ladies to Vaux, without jolting or fatigue, by eight o'clock. They were received by Madame Fouquet, and at the moment they made their appearance, a light as bright as day burst forth from every quarter, trees, vases, and marble statues. This species of enchantment lasted until their majesties had retired into the palace. All these wonders and magical effects which the chronicler has heaped up, or rather embalmed, in his recital, at the risk of rivaling the brain-born scenes of romancers; these splendors whereby night seemed vanquished and nature corrected, together with every delight and luxury combined for the satisfaction of all the senses, as well as the imagination, Fouquet did in real truth offer to his sovereign in that enchanting retreat of which no monarch could at that time boast of possessing an equal. We do not intend to describe the grand banquet, at which the royal guests were present, nor the concerts, nor the fairy-like and more than magic transformations and metamorphoses; it will be enough for our purpose to depict the countenance the king assumed, which, from being gay, soon wore a very gloomy, constrained, and irritated expression. He remembered his own residence, royal though it was, and the mean and indifferent style of luxury that prevailed there, which comprised but little more than what was merely useful for the royal wants, without being his own personal property. The large vases of the Louvre, the older furniture and plate of Henry II., of Francis I., and of Louis XI., were but historic monuments of earlier days; nothing but specimens of art, the relics of his predecessors; while with

Fouquet, the value of the article was as much in the workmanship as in the article itself. Fouquet ate from a gold service, which artists in his own employ had modeled and cast for him alone. Fouquet drank wines of which the king of France did not even know the name, and drank them out of goblets each more valuable than the entire royal cellar.

What, too, was to be said of the apartments, the hangings, the pictures, the servants and officers, of every description, of his household? What of the mode of service in which etiquette was replaced by order; stiff formality by personal, unrestrained comfort; the happiness and contentment of the guest became the supreme law of all who obeyed the host? The perfect swarm of busily engaged persons moving about noiselessly; the multitude of guests, — who were, however, even less numerous than the servants who waited on them, — the myriad of exquisitely prepared dishes, of gold and silver vases; the floods of dazzling light, the masses of unknown flowers of which the hot-houses had been despoiled, redundant with luxuriance of unequaled scent and beauty; the perfect harmony of the surroundings, which, indeed, was no more than the prelude of the promised *fete*, charmed all who were there; and they testified their admiration over and over again, not by voice or gesture, but by deep silence and rapt attention, those two languages of the courtier which acknowledge the hand of no master powerful enough to restrain them.

As for the king, his eyes filled with tears; he dared not look at the queen. Anne of Austria, whose pride was superior to that of any creature breathing, overwhelmed her host by the contempt with which she treated everything handed to her. The young queen, kind-hearted by nature and curious by disposition, praised Fouquet, ate with an exceedingly good appetite, and asked the names of the strange fruits as they were placed upon the table. Fouquet replied that he was not aware of their names. The fruits came from his own stores; he had often cultivated them himself, having an intimate acquaintance with the cultivation of exotic fruits and plants. The king felt and appreciated the delicacy of the replies, but was only the more humiliated; he thought the queen a little too familiar in her manners, and that Anne of Austria resembled Juno a little too much, in being too proud and haughty; his chief anxiety, however, was himself, that he might remain cold and distant in his behavior, bordering lightly the limits of supreme disdain or simple admiration.

But Fouquet had foreseen all this; he was, in fact, one of those men who foresee everything. The king had expressly declared that, so long as he remained under Fouquet's roof, he did not wish his own different repasts to be served in accordance with the usual etiquette, and that he would, consequently, dine with the rest of society; but by the thoughtful attention of the surintendant, the king's dinner was served up separately, if one may so express it, in the middle of the general table; the dinner, wonderful in every respect, from the dishes of which was composed, comprised everything the king liked and generally preferred to anything else. Louis had no excuse — he, indeed, who had the keenest appetite in his kingdom — for saying that he was not hungry. Nay, M. Fouquet did even better still; he certainly, in obedience to the king's expressed desire, seated himself at the table, but as soon as the soups were served, he arose and personally waited on the king, while Madame Fouquet stood behind the queen-mother's armchair. The disdain of Juno and the sulky fits of temper of Jupiter could not resist this excess of kindly feeling and polite attention. The queen ate a biscuit dipped in a glass of San-Lucar wine; and the king ate of everything, saying to M. Fouquet: "It is impossible, monsieur le surintendant, to dine better anywhere." Whereupon the whole court began, on all sides, to devour the dishes spread before them with such enthusiasm that it looked as though a cloud of Egyptian locusts was settling down on green and growing crops.

As soon, however, as his hunger was appeased, the king became morose and overgloomed again; the more so in proportion to the satisfaction he fancied he had previously manifested, and particularly on account of the deferential manner which his courtiers had shown towards Fouquet. D'Artagnan, who ate a good deal and drank but little, without allowing it to be noticed, did not lose a single opportunity, but made a great number of observations which he turned to good profit.

When the supper was finished, the king expressed a wish not to lose the promenade. The park was illuminated; the moon, too, as if she had placed herself at the orders of the lord of Vaux, silvered the trees and lake with her own bright and quasi-phosphorescent light. The air was strangely soft and balmy; the daintily shell-gravelled walks through the thickly set avenues yielded luxuriously to the feet. The *fete* was complete in every respect, for the king, having met La Valliere in one of the winding paths of the wood, was able to press her hand and say, "I love you," without any one overhearing him except M. d’Artagnan, who followed, and M. Fouquet, who preceded him.

The dreamy night of magical enchantments stole smoothly on. The king having requested to be shown to his room, there was immediately a movement in every direction. The queens passed to their own apartments, accompanied by them music of theorbos and lutes; the king found his musketeers awaiting him on the grand flight of steps, for M. Fouquet had brought them on from Melun and had invited them to supper. D’Artagnan’s suspicions at once disappeared. He was weary, he had supped well, and wished, for once in his life, thoroughly to enjoy a *fete* given by a man who was in every sense of the word a king. “M. Fouquet,” he said, “is the man for me.”

The king was conducted with the greatest ceremony to the chamber of Morpheus, of which we owe some cursory description to our readers. It was the handsomest and largest in the palace. Lebrun had painted on the vaulted ceiling the happy as well as the unhappy dreams which Morpheus inflicts on kings as well as on other men. Everything that sleep gives birth to that is lovely, its fairy scenes, its flowers and nectar, the wild voluptuousness or profound repose of the senses, had the painter elaborated on his frescoes. It was a composition as soft and pleasing in one part as dark and gloomy and terrible in another. The poisoned chalice, the glittering dagger suspended over the head of the sleeper; wizards and phantoms with terrific masks, those half-dim shadows more alarming than the approach of fire or the somber face of midnight, these, and such as these, he had made the companions of his more pleasing pictures. No sooner had the king entered his room than a cold shiver seemed to pass through him, and on Fouquet asking him the cause of it, the king replied, as pale as death:

“I am sleepy, that is all.”

“Does your majesty wish for your attendants at once?”

“No; I have to talk with a few persons first,” said the king. “Will you have the goodness to tell M. Colbert I wish to see him.”

Fouquet bowed and left the room.

CHAPTER XIV.

A Gascon, and a Gascon and a Half.

D’Artagnan had determined to lose no time, and in fact he never was in the habit of doing so. After having inquired for Aramis, he had looked for him in every direction until he had succeeded in finding him. Besides, no sooner had the king entered Vaux, than Aramis had retired to his own room, meditating, doubtless, some new piece of gallant attention for his majesty’s amusement. D’Artagnan desired the servants to announce him, and found on the second story (in a beautiful room called the Blue Chamber, on account of the color of its hangings) the bishop of Vannes in company with Porthos and several of the modern Epicureans. Aramis came forward to embrace his friend, and offered him the best seat. As it was after awhile generally remarked among those present that the musketeer was reserved, and wished for an opportunity for conversing secretly with Aramis, the Epicureans took their leave. Porthos, however, did not stir; for true it is that, having dined exceedingly well, he was fast asleep in his armchair; and the freedom of conversation therefore was not interrupted by a third person. Porthos had a deep, harmonious snore, and people might talk in the midst of its loud bass without fear of disturbing him. D’Artagnan felt that he was called upon to open the conversation.

“Well, and so we have come to Vaux,” he said.

“Why, yes, D’Artagnan. And how do you like the place?”

“Very much, and I like M. Fouquet, also.”

“Is he not a charming host?”

“No one could be more so.”

“I am told that the king began by showing great distance of manner towards M. Fouquet, but that his majesty grew much more cordial afterwards.”

“You did not notice it, then, since you say you have been told so?”

“No; I was engaged with the gentlemen who have just left the room about the theatrical performances and the tournaments which are to take place to-morrow.”

"Ah, indeed! you are the comptroller-general of the *fetes* here, then?"

"You know I am a friend of all kinds of amusement where the exercise of the imagination is called into activity; I have always been a poet in one way or another."

"Yes, I remember the verses you used to write, they were charming."

"I have forgotten them, but I am delighted to read the verses of others, when those others are known by the names of Moliere, Pelisson, La Fontaine, etc."

"Do you know what idea occurred to me this evening, Aramis?"

"No; tell me what it was, for I should never be able to guess it, you have so many."

"Well, the idea occurred to me, that the true king of France is not Louis XIV."

"*What!*" said Aramis, involuntarily, looking the musketeer full in the eyes.

"No, it is Monsieur Fouquet."

Aramis breathed again, and smiled. "Ah! you are like all the rest, jealous," he said. "I would wager that it was M. Colbert who turned that pretty phrase." D'Artagnan, in order to throw Aramis off his guard, related Colbert's misadventures with regard to the *vin de Melun*.

"He comes of a mean race, does Colbert," said Aramis.

"Quite true."

"When I think, too," added the bishop, "that that fellow will be your minister within four months, and that you will serve him as blindly as you did Richelieu or Mazarin — "

"And as you serve M. Fouquet," said D'Artagnan.

"With this difference, though, that M. Fouquet is not M. Colbert."

"True, true," said D'Artagnan, as he pretended to become sad and full of reflection; and then, a moment after, he added, "Why do you tell me that M. Colbert will be minister in four months?"

"Because M. Fouquet will have ceased to be so," replied Aramis.

"He will be ruined, you mean?" said D'Artagnan.

"Completely so."

"Why does he give these *fetes*, then?" said the musketeer, in a tone so full of thoughtful consideration, and so well assumed, that the bishop was for the moment deceived by it. "Why did you not dissuade him from it?"

The latter part of the phrase was just a little too much, and Aramis's former suspicions were again aroused. "It is done with the object of humoring the king."

"By ruining himself?"

"Yes, by ruining himself for the king."

"A most eccentric, one might say, sinister calculation, that."

"Necessity, necessity, my friend."

"I don't see that, dear Aramis."

"Do you not? Have you not remarked M. Colbert's daily increasing antagonism, and that he is doing his utmost to drive the king to get rid of the superintendent?"

"One must be blind not to see it."

"And that a cabal is already armed against M. Fouquet?"

"That is well known."

"What likelihood is there that the king would join a party formed against a man who will have spent everything he had to please him?"

"True, true," said D'Artagnan, slowly, hardly convinced, yet curious to broach another phase of the conversation. "There are follies, and follies," he resumed, "and I do not like those you are committing."

"What do you allude to?"

"As for the banquet, the ball, the concert, the theatricals, the tournaments, the cascades, the fireworks, the illuminations, and the presents — these are well and good, I grant; but why were not these expenses sufficient? Why was it necessary to have new liveries and costumes for your whole household?"

"You are quite right. I told M. Fouquet that myself; he replied, that if he were rich enough he would offer the king a newly erected chateau, from the vanes at the houses to the very sub-cellars; completely new inside and out; and that, as soon as the king had left, he would burn the whole building and its contents, in order that it might not be made use of by any one else."

"How completely Spanish!"

"I told him so, and he then added this: 'Whoever advises me to spare expense, I shall look upon as my enemy.'"

"It is positive madness; and that portrait, too!"

"What portrait?" said Aramis.

"That of the king, and the surprise as well."

"What surprise?"

“The surprise you seem to have in view, and on account of which you took some specimens away, when I met you at Percerin’s.” D’Artagnan paused. The shaft was discharged, and all he had to do was to wait and watch its effect.

“That is merely an act of graceful attention,” replied Aramis.

D’Artagnan went up to his friend, took hold of both his hands, and looking him full in the eyes, said, “Aramis, do you still care for me a very little?”

“What a question to ask!”

“Very good. One favor, then. Why did you take some patterns of the king’s costumes at Percerin’s?”

“Come with me and ask poor Lebrun, who has been working upon them for the last two days and nights.”

“Aramis, that may be truth for everybody else, but for me — ”

“Upon my word, D’Artagnan, you astonish me.”

“Be a little considerate. Tell me the exact truth; you would not like anything disagreeable to happen to me, would you?”

“My dear friend, you are becoming quite incomprehensible. What suspicion can you have possibly got hold of?”

“Do you believe in my instinctive feelings? Formerly you used to have faith in them. Well, then, an instinct tells me that you have some concealed project on foot.”

“I — a project?”

“I am convinced of it.”

“What nonsense!”

“I am not only sure of it, but I would even swear it.”

“Indeed, D’Artagnan, you cause me the greatest pain. Is it likely, if I have any project in hand that I ought to keep secret from you, I should tell you about it? If I had one that I could and ought to have revealed, should I not have long ago divulged it?”

“No, Aramis, no. There are certain projects which are never revealed until the favorable opportunity arrives.”

“In that case, my dear fellow,” returned the bishop, laughing, “the only thing now is, that the ‘opportunity’ has not yet arrived.”

D’Artagnan shook his head with a sorrowful expression. “Oh, friendship, friendship!” he said, “what an idle word you are! Here is a man who, if I were but to ask it, would suffer himself to be cut in pieces for my sake.”

“You are right,” said Aramis, nobly.

“And this man, who would shed every drop of blood in his veins for me, will not open up before me the least corner in his heart. Friendship, I repeat, is nothing but an unsubstantial shadow — a lure, like everything else in this bright, dazzling world.”

“It is not thus you should speak of *our* friendship,” replied the bishop, in a firm, assured voice; “for ours is not of the same nature as those of which you have been speaking.”

“Look at us, Aramis; three out of the old ‘four.’ You are deceiving me; I suspect you; and Porthos is fast asleep. An admirable trio of friends, don’t you think so? What an affecting relic of the former dear old times!”

“I can only tell you one thing, D’Artagnan, and I swear it on the Bible: I love you just as I used to do. If I ever suspect you, it is on account of others, and not on account of either of us. In everything I may do, and should happen to succeed in, you will find your fourth. Will you promise me the same favor?”

“If I am not mistaken, Aramis, your words — at the moment you pronounce them — are full of generous feeling.”

“Such a thing is very possible.”

“You are conspiring against M. Colbert. If that be all, *mordioux*, tell me so at once. I have the instrument in my own hand, and will pull out the tooth easily enough.”

Aramis could not conceal a smile of disdain that flitted over his haughty features. “And supposing that I were conspiring against Colbert, what harm would there be in *that?*”

“No, no; that would be too trifling a matter for you to take in hand, and it was not on that account you asked Percerin for those patterns of the king’s costumes. Oh! Aramis, we are not enemies, remember — we are brothers. Tell me what you wish to undertake, and, upon the word of a D’Artagnan, if I cannot help you, I will swear to remain neuter.”

“I am undertaking nothing,” said Aramis.

“Aramis, a voice within me speaks and seems to trickle forth a rill of light within my darkness: it is a voice that has never yet deceived me. It is the king you are conspiring against.”

“The king?” exclaimed the bishop, pretending to be annoyed.

“Your face will not convince me; the king, I repeat.”

“Will you help me?” said Aramis, smiling ironically.

“Aramis, I will do more than help you — I will do more than remain neuter — I will save you.”

“You are mad, D’Artagnan.”

“I am the wiser of the two, in this matter.”

“You to suspect me of wishing to assassinate the king!”

“Who spoke of such a thing?” smiled the musketeer.

“Well, let us understand one another. I do not see what any one can do to a legitimate king as ours is, if he does not assassinate him.” D’Artagnan did not say a word. “Besides, you have your guards and your musketeers here,” said the bishop.

“True.”

“You are not in M. Fouquet’s house, but in your own.”

“True; but in spite of that, Aramis, grant me, for pity’s sake, one single word of a true friend.”

“A true friend’s word is ever truth itself. If I think of touching, even with my finger, the son of Anne of Austria, the true king of this realm of France — if I have not the firm intention of prostrating myself before his throne — if in every idea I may entertain to-morrow, here at Vaux, will not be the most glorious day my king ever enjoyed — may Heaven’s lightning blast me where I stand!” Aramis had pronounced these words with his face turned towards the alcove of his own bedroom, where D’Artagnan, seated with his back towards the alcove, could not suspect that any one was lying concealed. The earnestness of his words, the studied slowness with which he pronounced them, the solemnity of his oath, gave the musketeer the most complete satisfaction. He took hold of both Aramis’s hands, and shook them cordially. Aramis had endured reproaches without turning pale, and had blushed as he listened to words of praise. D’Artagnan, deceived, did him honor; but D’Artagnan, trustful and reliant, made him feel ashamed. “Are you going away?” he said, as he embraced him, in order to conceal the flush on his face.

“Yes. Duty summons me. I have to get the watch-word. It seems I am to be lodged in the king’s ante-room. Where does Porthos sleep?”

“Take him away with you, if you like, for he rumbles through his sleepy nose like a park of artillery.”

“Ah! he does not stay with you, then?” said D’Artagnan.

“Not the least in the world. He has a chamber to himself, but I don’t know where.”

“Very good!” said the musketeer; from whom this separation of the two associates removed his last suspicion, and he touched Porthos lightly on the shoulder; the latter replied by a loud yawn. “Come,” said D’Artagnan.

“What, D’Artagnan, my dear fellow, is that you? What a lucky chance! Oh, yes — true; I have forgotten; I am at the *fete* at Vaux.”

“Yes; and your beautiful dress, too.”

“Yes, it was very attentive on the part of Monsieur Coquelin de Voliere, was it not?”

“Hush!” said Aramis. “You are walking so heavily you will make the flooring give way.”

“True,” said the musketeer; “this room is above the dome, I think.”

“And I did not choose it for a fencing-room, I assure you,” added the bishop. “The ceiling of the king’s room has all the lightness and calm of wholesome sleep. Do not forget, therefore, that my flooring is merely the covering of his ceiling. Good night, my friends, and in ten minutes I shall be asleep myself.” And Aramis accompanied them to the door, laughing quietly all the while. As soon as they were outside, he bolted the door, hurriedly; closed up the chinks of the windows, and then called out, “Monseigneur! — monseigneur!” Philippe made his appearance from the alcove, as he pushed aside a sliding panel placed behind the bed.

“M. d’Artagnan entertains a great many suspicions, it seems,” he said.

“Ah! — you recognized M. d’Artagnan, then?”

“Before you called him by his name, even.”

“He is your captain of musketeers.”

“He is very devoted to *me*,” replied Philippe, laying a stress upon the personal pronoun.

“As faithful as a dog; but he bites sometimes. If D’Artagnan does not recognize you before *the other* has disappeared, rely upon D’Artagnan to the end of the world; for in that case, if he has seen nothing, he will keep his fidelity. If he sees, when it is too late, he is a Gascon, and will never admit that he has been deceived.”

“I thought so. What are we to do, now?”

“Sit in this folding-chair. I am going to push aside a portion of the flooring; you will look through the opening, which answers to one of the false windows made in the dome of the king’s apartment. Can you see?”

“Yes,” said Philippe, starting as at the sight of an enemy; “I see the king!”

“What is he doing?”

"He seems to wish some man to sit down close to him."

"M. Fouquet?"

"No, no; wait a moment — "

"Look at the notes and the portraits, my prince."

"The man whom the king wishes to sit down in his presence is M. Colbert."

"Colbert sit down in the king's presence!" exclaimed Aramis. "It is impossible."

"Look."

Aramis looked through the opening in the flooring. "Yes," he said. "Colbert himself. Oh, monseigneur! what can we be going to hear — and what can result from this intimacy?"

"Nothing good for M. Fouquet, at all events."

The prince did not deceive himself.

We have seen that Louis XIV. had sent for Colbert, and Colbert had arrived. The conversation began between them by the king according to him one of the highest favors that he had ever done; it was true the king was alone with his subject. "Colbert," said he, "sit down."

The intendant, overcome with delight, for he feared he was about to be dismissed, refused this unprecedented honor.

"Does he accept?" said Aramis.

"No, he remains standing."

"Let us listen, then." And the future king and the future pope listened eagerly to the simple mortals they held under their feet, ready to crush them when they liked.

"Colbert," said the king, "you have annoyed me exceedingly to-day."

"I know it, sire."

"Very good; I like that answer. Yes, you knew it, and there was courage in the doing of it."

"I ran the risk of displeasing your majesty, but I risked, also, the concealment of your best interests."

"What! you were afraid of something on *my* account?"

"I was, sire, even if it were nothing more than an indigestion," said Colbert; "for people do not give their sovereigns such banquets as the one of to-day, unless it be to stifle them beneath the burden of good living." Colbert awaited the effect this coarse jest would produce upon the king; and

Louis XIV., who was the vainest and the most fastidiously delicate man in his kingdom, forgave Colbert the joke.

“The truth is,” he said, “that M. Fouquet has given me too good a meal. Tell me, Colbert, where does he get all the money required for this enormous expenditure, — can you tell?”

“Yes, I do know, sire.”

“Will you be able to prove it with tolerable certainty?”

“Easily; and to the utmost farthing.”

“I know you are very exact.”

“Exactitude is the principal qualification required in an intendant of finances.”

“But all are not so.”

“I thank you majesty for so flattering a compliment from your own lips.”

“M. Fouquet, therefore, is rich — very rich, and I suppose every man knows he is so.”

“Every one, sire; the living as well as the dead.”

“What does that mean, Monsieur Colbert?”

“The living are witnesses of M. Fouquet’s wealth, — they admire and applaud the result produced; but the dead, wiser and better informed than we are, know how that wealth was obtained — and they rise up in accusation.”

“So that M. Fouquet owes his wealth to some cause or other.”

“The occupation of an intendant very often favors those who practice it.”

“You have something to say to me more confidentially, I perceive; do not be afraid, we are quite alone.”

“I am never afraid of anything under the shelter of my own conscience, and under the protection of your majesty,” said Colbert, bowing.

“If the dead, therefore, were to speak — ”

“They do speak sometimes, sire, — read.”

“Ah!” murmured Aramis, in the prince’s ear, who, close beside him, listened without losing a syllable, “since you are placed here, monseigneur, in order to learn your vocation of a king, listen to a piece of infamy — of a nature truly royal. You are about to be a witness of one of those scenes which the foul fiend alone conceives and executes. Listen attentively, — you will find your advantage in it.”

The prince redoubled his attention, and saw Louis XIV. take from Colbert’s hands a letter the latter held out to him.

"The late cardinal's handwriting," said the king.

"Your majesty has an excellent memory," replied Colbert, bowing; "it is an immense advantage for a king who is destined for hard work to recognize handwritings at the first glance."

The king read Mazarin's letter, and, as its contents are already known to the reader, in consequence of the misunderstanding between Madame de Chevreuse and Aramis, nothing further would be learned if we stated them here again.

"I do not quite understand," said the king, greatly interested.

"Your majesty has not acquired the utilitarian habit of checking the public accounts."

"I see that it refers to money that had been given to M. Fouquet."

"Thirteen millions. A tolerably good sum."

"Yes. Well, these thirteen millions are wanting to balance the total of the account. That is what I do not very well understand. How was this deficit possible?"

"Possible I do not say; but there is no doubt about fact that it is really so."

"You say that these thirteen millions are found to be wanting in the accounts?"

"I do not say so, but the registry does."

"And this letter of M. Mazarin indicates the employment of that sum and the name of the person with whom it was deposited?"

"As your majesty can judge for yourself."

"Yes; and the result is, then, that M. Fouquet has not yet restored the thirteen millions."

"That results from the accounts, certainly, sire."

"Well, and, consequently — "

"Well, sire, in that case, inasmuch as M. Fouquet has not yet given back the thirteen millions, he must have appropriated them to his own purpose; and with those thirteen millions one could incur four times and a little more as much expense, and make four times as great a display, as your majesty was able to do at Fontainebleau, where we only spent three millions altogether, if you remember."

For a blunderer, the *souvenir* he had evoked was a rather skillfully contrived piece of baseness; for by the remembrance of his own *fete* he, for the first time, perceived its inferiority compared with that of Fouquet. Colbert received back again at Vaux what Fouquet had given him at

Fontainebleau, and, as a good financier, returned it with the best possible interest. Having once disposed the king's mind in this artful way, Colbert had nothing of much importance to detain him. He felt that such was the case, for the king, too, had again sunk into a dull and gloomy state. Colbert awaited the first words from the king's lips with as much impatience as Philippe and Aramis did from their place of observation.

"Are you aware what is the usual and natural consequence of all this, Monsieur Colbert?" said the king, after a few moments' reflection.

"No, sire, I do not know."

"Well, then, the fact of the appropriation of the thirteen millions, if it can be proved — "

"But it is so already."

"I mean if it were to be declared and certified, M. Colbert."

"I think it will be to-morrow, if your majesty — "

"Were we not under M. Fouquet's roof, you were going to say, perhaps," replied the king, with something of nobility in his demeanor.

"The king is in his own palace wherever he may be — especially in houses which the royal money has constructed."

"I think," said Philippe in a low tone to Aramis, "that the architect who planned this dome ought, anticipating the use it could be put to at a future opportunity, so to have contrived that it might be made to fall upon the heads of scoundrels such as M. Colbert."

"I think so too," replied Aramis; "but M. Colbert is so very *near the king* at this moment."

"That is true, and that would open the succession."

"Of which your younger brother would reap all the advantage, monseigneur. But stay, let us keep quiet, and go on listening."

"We shall not have long to listen," said the young prince.

"Why not, monseigneur?"

"Because, if I were king, I should make no further reply."

"And what would you do?"

"I should wait until to-morrow morning to give myself time for reflection."

Louis XIV. at last raised his eyes, and finding Colbert attentively waiting for his next remarks, said, hastily, changing the conversation, "M. Colbert, I perceive it is getting very late, and I shall now retire to bed. By to-morrow morning I shall have made up my mind."

“Very good, sire,” returned Colbert, greatly incensed, although he restrained himself in the presence of the king.

The king made a gesture of adieu, and Colbert withdrew with a respectful bow. “My attendants!” cried the king; and, as they entered the apartment, Philippe was about to quit his post of observation.

“A moment longer,” said Aramis to him, with his accustomed gentleness of manner; “what has just now taken place is only a detail, and to-morrow we shall have no occasion to think anything more about it; but the ceremony of the king’s retiring to rest, the etiquette observed in addressing the king, that indeed is of the greatest importance. Learn, sire, and study well how you ought to go to bed of a night. Look! look!”

CHAPTER XV.

Colbert.

History will tell us, or rather history has told us, of the various events of the following day, of the splendid *fetes* given by the surintendant to his sovereign. Nothing but amusement and delight was allowed to prevail throughout the whole of the following day; there was a promenade, a banquet, a comedy to be acted, and a comedy, too, in which, to his great amazement, Porthos recognized “M. Coquelin de Voliere” as one of the actors, in the piece called “Les Facheux.” Full of preoccupation, however, from the scene of the previous evening, and hardly recovered from the effects of the poison which Colbert had then administered to him, the king, during the whole of the day, so brilliant in its effects, so full of unexpected and startling novelties, in which all the wonders of the “Arabian Night’s Entertainments” seemed to be reproduced for his especial amusement — the king, we say, showed himself cold, reserved, and taciturn. Nothing could smooth the frowns upon his face; every one who observed him noticed that a deep feeling of resentment, of remote origin, increased by slow degrees, as the source becomes a river, thanks to the thousand threads of water that increase its body, was keenly alive in the depths of the king’s heart. Towards the middle of the day only did he begin to resume a little serenity of manner, and by that time he had, in all probability, made up his mind. Aramis, who followed him step by step in his thoughts, as in his walk, concluded that the event he was expecting would not be long before it was announced. This time Colbert seemed to walk in concert with the bishop of Vannes, and had he received for every annoyance which he inflicted on the king a word of direction from Aramis, he could not have done better. During the whole of the day the king, who, in all probability, wished to free himself from some of the thoughts which disturbed his mind, seemed to seek La Valliere’s society as actively as he seemed to show his anxiety to flee that of M. Colbert or M. Fouquet. The evening came. The king had expressed a wish not to walk in the park until after cards in the evening. In the interval between supper and the promenade, cards and dice were introduced. The king won a thousand pistoles, and, having won them, put them in his pocket, and then rose, saying, “And now, gentlemen, to the park.” He found the ladies of the court were already there. The king, we have before observed, had won a thousand pistoles, and had put them in his pocket; but M. Fouquet had somehow contrived to lose ten thousand, so that among the courtiers there was still left a hundred and ninety thousand francs’ profit to divide, a circumstance which made the countenances of the courtiers and the officers of the king’s household the most joyous countenances in the world. It was not the same, however, with the king’s face; for, notwithstanding his success at play, to which he was by no means insensible, there still remained a slight shade of dissatisfaction. Colbert was waiting for or upon him at the corner of one of the avenues; he was most probably waiting there in consequence of a rendezvous which had been given him by the king, as Louis XIV., who had avoided him, or who had seemed to avoid him, suddenly made him a sign, and they then struck into the depths of the park together. But La Valliere, too, had observed the king’s gloomy aspect and kindling glances; she had remarked this — and as nothing which lay hidden or smoldering in his heart was hidden from the gaze of her affection, she understood that this repressed wrath menaced some one; she prepared to withstand the current of his vengeance, and intercede like an angel of mercy. Overcome by sadness, nervously agitated, deeply distressed at having been so long separated from her lover, disturbed at the sight of the emotion she had divined, she accordingly presented herself to the king with an embarrassed aspect, which in his then disposition of mind the king interpreted unfavorably. Then, as they were alone — nearly alone, inasmuch as Colbert, as soon as he perceived the young girl approaching, had stopped and drawn back a dozen paces — the king advanced towards La Valliere and took her by the hand. “Mademoiselle,” he said to her, “should I be guilty of an indiscretion if I were to inquire if you were indisposed? for you seem to breathe as if you were oppressed by some secret cause of uneasiness, and your eyes are filled with tears.”

“Oh! sire, if I be indeed so, and if my eyes are indeed full of tears, I am sorrowful only at the sadness which seems to oppress your majesty.”

“My sadness? You are mistaken, mademoiselle; no, it is not sadness I experience.”

“What is it, then, sire?”

“Humiliation.”

“Humiliation? oh! sire, what a word for you to use!”

“I mean, mademoiselle, that wherever I may happen to be, no one else ought to be the master. Well, then, look round you on every side, and judge whether I am not eclipsed — I, the king of France — before the monarch of these wide domains. Oh!” he continued, clenching his hands and teeth, “when I think that this king — ”

“Well, sire?” said Louise, terrified.

“ — That this king is a faithless, unworthy servant, who grows proud and self-sufficient upon the strength of property that belongs to me, and which he has stolen. And therefore I am about to change this impudent minister’s *fete* into sorrow and mourning, of which the nymph of Vaux, as the poets say, shall not soon lose the remembrance.”

“Oh! your majesty — ”

“Well, mademoiselle, are you about to take M. Fouquet’s part?” said Louis, impatiently.

“No, sire; I will only ask whether you are well informed. Your majesty has more than once learned the value of accusations made at court.”

Louis XIV. made a sign for Colbert to approach. “Speak, Monsieur Colbert,” said the young prince, “for I almost believe that Mademoiselle de la Valliere has need of your assistance before she can put any faith in the king’s word. Tell mademoiselle what M. Fouquet has done; and you, mademoiselle, will perhaps have the kindness to listen. It will not be long.”

Why did Louis XIV. insist upon it in such a manner? A very simple reason — his heart was not at rest, his mind was not thoroughly convinced; he imagined there lay some dark, hidden, tortuous intrigue behind these thirteen millions of francs; and he wished that the pure heart of La Valliere, which had revolted at the idea of theft or robbery, should approve — even were it only by a single word — the resolution he had taken, and which, nevertheless, he hesitated before carrying into execution.

“Speak, monsieur,” said La Valliere to Colbert, who had advanced; “speak, since the king wishes me to listen to you. Tell me, what is the crime with which M. Fouquet is charged?”

“Oh! not very heinous, mademoiselle,” he returned, “a mere abuse of confidence.”

“Speak, speak, Colbert; and when you have related it, leave us, and go and inform M. d’Artagnan that I have certain orders to give him.”

"M. d'Artagnan, sire!" exclaimed La Valliere; "but why send for M. d'Artagnan? I entreat you to tell me."

"*Pardieu!* in order to arrest this haughty, arrogant Titan who, true to his menace, threatens to scale my heaven."

"Arrest M. Fouquet, do you say?"

"Ah! does that surprise you?"

"In his own house!"

"Why not? If he be guilty, he is as guilty in his own house as anywhere else."

"M. Fouquet, who at this moment is ruining himself for his sovereign."

"In plain truth, mademoiselle, it seems as if you were defending this traitor."

Colbert began to chuckle silently. The king turned round at the sound of this suppressed mirth.

"Sire," said La Valliere, "it is not M. Fouquet I am defending; it is yourself."

"Me! you are defending me?"

"Sire, you would dishonor yourself if you were to give such an order."

"Dishonor myself!" murmured the king, turning pale with anger. "In plain truth, mademoiselle, you show a strange persistence in what you say."

"If I do, sire, my only motive is that of serving your majesty," replied the noble-hearted girl: "for that I would risk, I would sacrifice my very life, without the least reserve."

Colbert seemed inclined to grumble and complain. La Valliere, that timid, gentle lamb, turned round upon him, and with a glance like lightning imposed silence upon him. "Monsieur," she said, "when the king acts well, whether, in doing so, he does either myself or those who belong to me an injury, I have nothing to say; but were the king to confer a benefit either upon me or mine, and if he acted badly, I should tell him so."

"But it appears to me, mademoiselle," Colbert ventured to say, "that I too love the king."

"Yes, monseigneur, we both love him, but each in a different manner," replied La Valliere, with such an accent that the heart of the young king was powerfully affected by it. "I love him so deeply, that the whole world is aware of it; so purely, that the king himself does not doubt my affection. He is my king and my master; I am the least of all his servants. But whoso touches his honor assails my life. Therefore, I repeat, that they dishonor the king who advise him to arrest M. Fouquet under his own roof."

Colbert hung down his head, for he felt that the king had abandoned him. However, as he bent his head, he murmured, "Mademoiselle, I have only one word to say."

"Do not say it, then, monsieur; for I would not listen to it. Besides, what could you have to tell me? That M. Fouquet has been guilty of certain crimes? I believe he has, because the king has said so; and, from the moment the king said, 'I think so,' I have no occasion for other lips to say, 'I affirm it.' But, were M. Fouquet the vilest of men, I should say aloud, 'M. Fouquet's person is sacred to the king because he is the guest of M. Fouquet. Were his house a den of thieves, were Vaux a cave of coiners or robbers, his home is sacred, his palace is inviolable, since his wife is living in it; and that is an asylum which even executioners would not dare to violate.'"

La Valliere paused, and was silent. In spite of himself the king could not but admire her; he was overpowered by the passionate energy of her voice; by the nobleness of the cause she advocated. Colbert yielded, overcome by the inequality of the struggle. At last the king breathed again more freely, shook his head, and held out his hand to La Valliere. "Mademoiselle," he said, gently, "why do you decide against me? Do you know what this wretched fellow will do, if I give him time to breathe again?"

"Is he not a prey which will always be within your grasp?"

"Should he escape, and take to flight?" exclaimed Colbert.

"Well, monsieur, it will always remain on record, to the king's eternal honor, that he allowed M. Fouquet to flee; and the more guilty he may have been, the greater will the king's honor and glory appear, compared with such unnecessary misery and shame."

Louis kissed La Valliere's hand, as he knelt before her.

"I am lost," thought Colbert; then suddenly his face brightened up again. "Oh! no, no, aha, old fox! — not yet," he said to himself.

And while the king, protected from observation by the thick covert of an enormous lime, pressed La Valliere to his breast, with all the ardor of ineffable affection, Colbert tranquilly fumbled among the papers in his pocket-book and drew out of it a paper folded in the form of a letter, somewhat yellow, perhaps, but one that must have been most precious, since the intendant smiled as he looked at it; he then bent a look, full of hatred, upon the charming group which the young girl and the king formed together — a group revealed but for a moment, as the light of the approaching torches shone upon it. Louis noticed the light reflected upon La Valliere's white dress. "Leave me, Louise," he said, "for some one is coming."

"Mademoiselle, mademoiselle, some one is coming," cried Colbert, to expedite the young girl's departure.

Louise disappeared rapidly among the trees; and then, as the king, who had been on his knees before the young girl, was rising from his humble posture, Colbert exclaimed, "Ah! Mademoiselle de la Valliere has let something fall."

"What is it?" inquired the king.

"A paper — a letter — something white; look there, sire."

The king stooped down immediately and picked up the letter, crumpling it in his hand, as he did so; and at the same moment the torches arrived, inundating the blackness of the scene with a flood of light as bight as day.

CHAPTER XVI.

Jealousy.

The torches we have just referred to, the eager attention every one displayed, and the new ovation paid to the king by Fouquet, arrived in time to suspend the effect of a resolution which La Valliere had already considerably shaken in Louis XIV.'s heart. He looked at Fouquet with a feeling almost of gratitude for having given La Valliere an opportunity of showing herself so generously disposed, so powerful in the influence she exercised over his heart. The moment of the last and greatest display had arrived. Hardly had Fouquet conducted the king towards the chateau, when a mass of fire burst from the dome of Vaux, with a prodigious uproar, pouring a flood of dazzling cataracts of rays on every side, and illumining the remotest corners of the gardens. The fireworks began. Colbert, at twenty paces from the king, who was surrounded and *feted* by the owner of Vaux, seemed, by the obstinate persistence of his gloomy thoughts, to do his utmost to recall Louis's attention, which the magnificence of the spectacle was already, in his opinion, too easily diverting. Suddenly, just as Louis was on the point of holding it out to Fouquet, he perceived in his hand the paper which, as he believed, La Valliere had dropped at his feet as she hurried away. The still stronger magnet of love drew the young prince's attention towards the *souvenir* of his idol; and, by the brilliant light, which increased momentarily in beauty, and drew from the neighboring villages loud cheers of admiration, the king read the letter, which he supposed was a loving and tender epistle La Valliere had destined for him. But as he read it, a death-like pallor stole over his face, and an expression of deep-seated wrath, illumined by the many-colored fire which gleamed so brightly, soaringly around the scene, produced a terrible spectacle, which every one would have shuddered at, could they only have read into his heart, now torn by the most stormy and most bitter passions. There was no truce for him now, influenced as he was by jealousy and mad passion. From the very moment when the dark truth was revealed to him, every gentler feeling seemed to disappear; pity, kindness of consideration, the religion of hospitality, all were forgotten. In the bitter pang which wrung his heart, he, still too weak to hide his sufferings, was almost on the point of uttering a cry of alarm, and calling his guards to gather round him. This letter which Colbert had thrown down at the king's feet, the reader has doubtlessly guessed, was the same that had disappeared with the porter Toby at Fontainebleau, after the attempt which Fouquet had made upon La Valliere's heart. Fouquet saw the king's pallor, and was far from guessing the evil; Colbert saw the king's anger, and rejoiced inwardly at the approach of the storm. Fouquet's voice drew the young prince from his wrathful reverie.

"What is the matter, sire?" inquired the superintendent, with an expression of graceful interest.

Louis made a violent effort over himself, as he replied, "Nothing."

"I am afraid your majesty is suffering?"

"I am suffering, and have already told you so, monsieur; but it is nothing."

And the king, without waiting for the termination of the fireworks, turned towards the chateau. Fouquet accompanied him, and the whole court followed, leaving the remains of the fireworks consuming for their own amusement. The superintendent endeavored again to question Louis XIV., but did not succeed in obtaining a reply. He imagined there had been some misunderstanding between Louis and La Valliere in the park, which had resulted in a slight quarrel; and that the king, who was not ordinarily sulky by disposition, but completely absorbed by his passion for La Valliere, had taken a dislike to every one because his mistress had shown herself offended with him. This idea was sufficient to console him; he had even a friendly and kindly smile for the young king, when the latter wished him good night. This, however, was not all the king had to submit to; he was obliged to undergo the usual ceremony, which on that evening was marked by close adherence to the strictest etiquette. The next day was the one fixed for the departure; it was but proper that the guests should thank their host, and show him a little attention in return for the expenditure of his twelve millions. The only remark, approaching to amiability, which the king could find to say to M. Fouquet, as he took leave of him, were in these words, "M. Fouquet, you shall hear from me. Be good enough to desire M. d'Artagnan to come here."

But the blood of Louis XIV., who had so profoundly dissimulated his feelings, boiled in his veins; and he was perfectly willing to order M.

Fouquet to be put an end to with the same readiness, indeed, as his predecessor had caused the assassination of le Marechal d'Ancre; and so he disguised the terrible resolution he had formed beneath one of those royal smiles which, like lightning-flashes, indicated *coups d'etat*. Fouquet took the king's hand and kissed it; Louis shuddered throughout his whole frame, but allowed M. Fouquet to touch his hand with his lips. Five minutes afterwards, D'Artagnan, to whom the royal order had been communicated, entered Louis XIV.'s apartment. Aramis and Philippe were in theirs, still eagerly attentive, and still listening with all their ears. The king did not even give the captain of the musketeers time to approach his armchair, but ran forward to meet him. "Take care," he exclaimed, "that no one enters here."

"Very good, sire," replied the captain, whose glance had for a long time past analyzed the stormy indications on the royal countenance. He gave the necessary order at the door; but, returning to the king, he said, "Is there something fresh the matter, your majesty?"

"How many men have you here?" inquired the king, without making any other reply to the question addressed to him.

"What for, sire?"

"How many men have you, I say?" repeated the king, stamping upon the ground with his foot.

"I have the musketeers."

"Well; and what others?"

"Twenty guards and thirteen Swiss."

"How many men will be required to — "

"To do what, sire?" replied the musketeer, opening his large, calm eyes.

"To arrest M. Fouquet."

D'Artagnan fell back a step.

"To arrest M. Fouquet!" he burst forth.

"Are you going to tell me that it is impossible?" exclaimed the king, in tones of cold, vindictive passion.

"I never say that anything is impossible," replied D'Artagnan, wounded to the quick.

"Very well; do it, then."

D'Artagnan turned on his heel, and made his way towards the door; it was but a short distance, and he cleared it in half a dozen paces; when he reached it he suddenly paused, and said, "Your majesty will forgive me, but, in order to effect this arrest, I should like written directions."

"For what purpose — and since when has the king's word been insufficient for you?"

"Because the word of a king, when it springs from a feeling of anger, may possibly change when the feeling changes."

"A truce to set phrases, monsieur; you have another thought besides that?"

"Oh, I, at least, have certain thoughts and ideas, which, unfortunately, others have not," D'Artagnan replied, impertinently.

The king, in the tempest of his wrath, hesitated, and drew back in the face of D'Artagnan's frank courage, just as a horse crouches on his haunches under the strong hand of a bold and experienced rider. "What is your thought?" he exclaimed.

"This, sire," replied D'Artagnan: "you cause a man to be arrested when you are still under his roof; and passion is alone the cause of that. When your anger shall have passed, you will regret what you have done; and then I wish to be in a position to show you your signature. If that, however, should fail to be a reparation, it will at least show us that the king was wrong to lose his temper."

"Wrong to lose his temper!" cried the king, in a loud, passionate voice. "Did not my father, my grandfathers, too, before me, lose their temper at times, in Heaven's name?"

"The king your father and the king your grandfather never lost their temper except when under the protection of their own palace."

"The king is master wherever he may be."

"That is a flattering, complimentary phrase which cannot proceed from any one but M. Colbert; but it happens not to be the truth. The king is at home in every man's house when he has driven its owner out of it."

The king bit his lips, but said nothing.

"Can it be possible?" said D'Artagnan; "here is a man who is positively ruining himself in order to please you, and you wish to have him arrested! *Mordioux!* Sire, if my name was Fouquet, and people treated me in that manner, I would swallow at a single gulp all sorts of fireworks and other things, and I would set fire to them, and send myself and everybody else in blown-up atoms to the sky. But it is all the same; it is your wish, and it shall be done."

"Go," said the king; "but have you men enough?"

“Do you suppose I am going to take a whole host to help me? Arrest M. Fouquet! why, that is so easy that a very child might do it! It is like drinking a glass of wormwood; one makes an ugly face, and that is all.”

“If he defends himself?”

“He! it is not at all likely. Defend himself when such extreme harshness as you are going to practice makes the man a very martyr! Nay, I am sure that if he has a million of francs left, which I very much doubt, he would be willing enough to give it in order to have such a termination as this. But what does that matter? it shall be done at once.”

“Stay,” said the king; “do not make his arrest a public affair.”

“That will be more difficult.”

“Why so?”

“Because nothing is easier than to go up to M. Fouquet in the midst of a thousand enthusiastic guests who surround him, and say, ‘In the king’s name, I arrest you.’ But to go up to him, to turn him first one way and then another, to drive him up into one of the corners of the chess-board, in such a way that he cannot escape; to take him away from his guests, and keep him a prisoner for you, without one of them, alas! having heard anything about it; that, indeed, is a genuine difficulty, the greatest of all, in truth; and I hardly see how it is to be done.”

“You had better say it is impossible, and you will have finished much sooner. Heaven help me, but I seem to be surrounded by people who prevent me doing what I wish.”

“I do not prevent your doing anything. Have you indeed decided?”

“Take care of M. Fouquet, until I shall have made up my mind by to-morrow morning.”

“That shall be done, sire.”

“And return, when I rise in the morning, for further orders; and now leave me to myself.”

“You do not even want M. Colbert, then?” said the musketeer, firing his last shot as he was leaving the room. The king started. With his whole mind fixed on the thought of revenge, he had forgotten the cause and substance of the offense.

“No, no one,” he said; “no one here! Leave me.”

D’Artagnan quitted the room. The king closed the door with his own hands, and began to walk up and down his apartment at a furious pace, like a wounded bull in an arena, trailing from his horn the colored streamers and the iron darts. At last he began to take comfort in the expression of his violent feelings.

"Miserable wretch that he is! not only does he squander my finances, but with his ill-gotten plunder he corrupts secretaries, friends, generals, artists, and all, and tries to rob me of the one to whom I am most attached. This is the reason that perfidious girl so boldly took his part! Gratitude! and who can tell whether it was not a stronger feeling — love itself?" He gave himself up for a moment to the bitterest reflections. "A satyr!" he thought, with that abhorrent hate with which young men regard those more advanced in life, who still think of love. "A man who has never found opposition or resistance in any one, who lavishes his gold and jewels in every direction, and who retains his staff of painters in order to take the portraits of his mistresses in the costume of goddesses." The king trembled with passion as he continued, "He pollutes and profanes everything that belongs to me! He destroys everything that is mine. He will be my death at last, I know. That man is too much for me; he is my mortal enemy, but he shall forthwith fall! I hate him — I hate him — I hate him!" and as he pronounced these words, he struck the arm of the chair in which he was sitting violently, over and over again, and then rose like one in an epileptic fit. "To-morrow! to-morrow! oh, happy day!" he murmured, "when the sun rises, no other rival shall that brilliant king of space possess but me. That man shall fall so low that when people look at the abject ruin my anger shall have wrought, they will be forced to confess at last and at least that I am indeed greater than he." The king, who was incapable of mastering his emotions any longer, knocked over with a blow of his fist a small table placed close to his bedside, and in the very bitterness of anger, almost weeping, and half-suffocated, he threw himself on his bed, dressed as he was, and bit the sheets in his extremity of passion, trying to find repose of body at least there. The bed creaked beneath his weight, and with the exception of a few broken sounds, emerging, or, one might say, exploding, from his overburdened chest, absolute silence soon reigned in the chamber of Morpheus.

CHAPTER XVII.

High Treason.

The ungovernable fury which took possession of the king at the sight and at the perusal of Fouquet's letter to La Valliere by degrees subsided into a feeling of pain and extreme weariness. Youth, invigorated by health and lightness of spirits, requiring soon that what it loses should be immediately restored — youth knows not those endless, sleepless nights which enable us to realize the fable of the vulture unceasingly feeding on Prometheus. In cases where the man of middle life, in his acquired strength of will and purpose, and the old, in their state of natural exhaustion, find incessant augmentation of their bitter sorrow, a young man, surprised by the sudden appearance of misfortune, weakens himself in sighs, and groans, and tears, directly struggling with his grief, and is thereby far sooner overthrown by the inflexible enemy with whom he is engaged. Once overthrown, his struggles cease. Louis could not hold out more than a few minutes, at the end of which he had ceased to clench his hands, and scorch in fancy with his looks the invisible objects of his hatred; he soon ceased to attack with his violent imprecations not M. Fouquet alone, but even La Valliere herself; from fury he subsided into despair, and from despair to prostration. After he had thrown himself for a few minutes to and fro convulsively on his bed, his nerveless arms fell quietly down; his head lay languidly on his pillow; his limbs, exhausted with excessive emotion, still trembled occasionally, agitated by muscular contractions; while from his breast faint and infrequent sighs still issued. Morpheus, the tutelary deity of the apartment, towards whom Louis raised his eyes, wearied by his anger and reconciled by his tears, showered down upon him the sleep-inducing poppies with which his hands are ever filled; so presently the monarch closed his eyes and fell asleep. Then it seemed to him, as it often happens in that first sleep, so light and gentle, which raises the body above the couch, and the soul above the earth — it seemed to him, we say, as if the god Morpheus, painted on the ceiling, looked at him with eyes resembling human eyes; that something shone brightly, and moved to and fro in the dome above the sleeper; that the crowd of terrible dreams which thronged together in his brain, and which were interrupted for a moment, half revealed a human face, with a hand resting against the mouth, and in an attitude of deep and absorbed meditation. And strange enough, too, this man bore so wonderful a resemblance to the king himself, that Louis fancied he was looking at his own face reflected in a mirror; with the exception, however, that the face was saddened by a feeling of the profoundest pity. Then it seemed to him as if the dome gradually retired, escaping from his gaze, and that the figures and attributes painted by Lebrun became darker and darker as the distance became more and more remote. A gentle, easy movement, as regular as that by which a vessel plunges beneath the waves, had succeeded to the immovableness of the bed. Doubtless the king was dreaming, and in this dream the crown of gold, which fastened the curtains together, seemed to recede from his vision, just as the dome, to which it remained suspended, had done, so that the winged genius which, with both its hand, supported the crown, seemed, though vainly so, to call upon the king, who was fast disappearing from it. The bed still sunk. Louis, with his eyes open, could not resist the deception of this cruel hallucination. At last, as the light of the royal chamber faded away into darkness and gloom, something cold, gloomy, and inexplicable in its nature seemed to infect the air. No paintings, nor gold, nor velvet hangings, were visible any longer, nothing but walls of a dull gray color, which the increasing gloom made darker every moment. And yet the bed still continued to descend, and after a minute, which seemed in its duration almost an age to the king, it reached a stratum of air, black and chill as death, and then it stopped. The king could no longer see the light in his room, except as from the bottom of a well we can see the light of day. “I am under the influence of some atrocious dream,” he thought. “It is time to awaken from it. Come! let me wake.”

Every one has experienced the sensation the above remark conveys; there is hardly a person who, in the midst of a nightmare whose influence is suffocating, has not said to himself, by the help of that light which still burns in the brain when every human light is extinguished, “It is nothing but a dream, after all.” This was precisely what Louis XIV. said to himself; but when he said, “Come, come! wake up,” he perceived that not only was he already awake, but still more, that he had his eyes open also. And then he looked all round him. On his right hand and on his left two armed men stood in stolid silence, each wrapped in a huge cloak, and the face covered with a mask; one of them held a small lamp in his hand, whose glimmering light revealed the saddest picture a king could look upon. Louis could not help saying to himself that his dream still lasted, and that all he had to do to cause it to disappear was to move his arms or to say something aloud; he darted from his bed, and found himself upon the damp, moist ground. Then, addressing himself to the man who held the lamp in his hand, he said:

"What is this, monsieur, and what is the meaning of this jest?"

"It is no jest," replied in a deep voice the masked figure that held the lantern.

"Do you belong to M. Fouquet?" inquired the king, greatly astonished at his situation.

"It matters very little to whom we belong," said the phantom; "we are your masters now, that is sufficient."

The king, more impatient than intimidated, turned to the other masked figure. "If this is a comedy," he said, "you will tell M. Fouquet that I find it unseemly and improper, and that I command it should cease."

The second masked person to whom the king had addressed himself was a man of huge stature and vast circumference. He held himself erect and motionless as any block of marble. "Well!" added the king, stamping his foot, "you do not answer!"

"We do not answer you, my good monsieur," said the giant, in a stentorian voice, "because there is nothing to say."

"At least, tell me what you want," exclaimed Louis, folding his arms with a passionate gesture.

"You will know by and by," replied the man who held the lamp.

"In the meantime tell me where I am."

"Look."

Louis looked all round him; but by the light of the lamp which the masked figure raised for the purpose, he could perceive nothing but the damp walls which glistened here and there with the slimy traces of the snail. "Oh — oh! — a dungeon," cried the king.

"No, a subterranean passage."

"Which leads — ?"

"Will you be good enough to follow us?"

"I shall not stir from hence!" cried the king.

"If you are obstinate, my dear young friend," replied the taller of the two, "I will lift you up in my arms, and roll you up in your own cloak, and if you should happen to be stifled, why — so much the worse for you.”

As he said this, he disengaged from beneath his cloak a hand of which Milo of Crotona would have envied him the possession, on the day when he had that unhappy idea of rending his last oak. The king dreaded violence, for he could well believe that the two men into whose power he had fallen had not gone so far with any idea of drawing back, and that they would consequently be ready to proceed to extremities, if necessary. He shook his head and said: “It seems I have fallen into the hands of a couple of assassins. Move on, then.”

Neither of the men answered a word to this remark. The one who carried the lantern walked first, the king followed him, while the second masked figure closed the procession. In this manner they passed along a winding gallery of some length, with as many staircases leading out of it as are to be found in the mysterious and gloomy palaces of Ann Radcliffe’s creation. All these windings and turnings, during which the king heard the sound of running water *over his head*, ended at last in a long corridor closed by an iron door. The figure with the lamp opened the door with one of the keys he wore suspended at his girdle, where, during the whole of the brief journey, the king had heard them rattle. As soon as the door was opened and admitted the air, Louis recognized the balmy odors that trees exhale in hot summer nights. He paused, hesitatingly, for a moment or two; but the huge sentinel who followed him thrust him out of the subterranean passage.

“Another blow,” said the king, turning towards the one who had just had the audacity to touch his sovereign; “what do you intend to do with the king of France?”

“Try to forget that word,” replied the man with the lamp, in a tone which as little admitted of a reply as one of the famous decrees of Minos.

“You deserve to be broken on the wheel for the words that you have just made use of,” said the giant, as he extinguished the lamp his companion handed to him; “but the king is too kind-hearted.”

Louis, at that threat, made so sudden a movement that it seemed as if he meditated flight; but the giant’s hand was in a moment placed on his shoulder, and fixed him motionless where he stood. “But tell me, at least, where we are going,” said the king.

“Come,” replied the former of the two men, with a kind of respect in his manner, and leading his prisoner towards a carriage which seemed to be in waiting.

The carriage was completely concealed amid the trees. Two horses, with their feet fettered, were fastened by a halter to the lower branches of a large oak.

"Get in," said the same man, opening the carriage-door and letting down the step. The king obeyed, seated himself at the back of the carriage, the padded door of which was shut and locked immediately upon him and his guide. As for the giant, he cut the fastenings by which the horses were bound, harnessed them himself, and mounted on the box of the carriage, which was unoccupied. The carriage set off immediately at a quick trot, turned into the road to Paris, and in the forest of Senart found a relay of horses fastened to the trees in the same manner the first horses had been, and without a postilion. The man on the box changed the horses, and continued to follow the road towards Paris with the same rapidity, so that they entered the city about three o'clock in the morning. They carriage proceeded along the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, and, after having called out to the sentinel, "By the king's order," the driver conducted the horses into the circular inclosure of the Bastile, looking out upon the courtyard, called La Cour du Gouvernement. There the horses drew up, reeking with sweat, at the flight of steps, and a sergeant of the guard ran forward. "Go and wake the governor," said the coachman in a voice of thunder.

With the exception of this voice, which might have been heard at the entrance of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, everything remained as calm in the carriage as in the prison. Ten minutes afterwards, M. de Baisemeaux appeared in his dressing-gown on the threshold of the door. "What is the matter now?" he asked; "and whom have you brought me there?"

The man with the lantern opened the carriage-door, and said two or three words to the one who acted as driver, who immediately got down from his seat, took up a short musket which he kept under his feet, and placed its muzzle on his prisoner's chest.

"And fire at once if he speaks!" added aloud the man who alighted from the carriage.

"Very good," replied his companion, without another remark.

With this recommendation, the person who had accompanied the king in the carriage ascended the flight of steps, at the top of which the governor was awaiting him. "Monsieur d'Herblay!" said the latter.

"Hush!" said Aramis. "Let us go into your room."

"Good heavens! what brings you here at this hour?"

"A mistake, my dear Monsieur de Baisemeaux," Aramis replied, quietly. "It appears that you were quite right the other day."

"What about?" inquired the governor.

"About the order of release, my dear friend."

"Tell me what you mean, monsieur — no, monseigneur," said the governor, almost suffocated by surprise and terror.

"It is a very simple affair: you remember, dear M. de Baisemeaux, that an order of release was sent to you."

"Yes, for Marchiali."

"Very good! we both thought that it was for Marchiali?"

"Certainly; you will recollect, however, that I would not credit it, but that you compelled me to believe it."

"Oh! Baisemeaux, my good fellow, what a word to make use of! — strongly recommended, that was all."

"Strongly recommended, yes; strongly recommended to give him up to you; and that you carried him off with you in your carriage."

"Well, my dear Monsieur de Baisemeaux, it was a mistake; it was discovered at the ministry, so that I now bring you an order from the king to set at liberty Seldon, — that poor Seldon fellow, you know."

"Seldon! are you sure this time?"

"Well, read it yourself," added Aramis, handing him the order.

"Why," said Baisemeaux, "this order is the very same that has already passed through my hands."

"Indeed?"

"It is the very one I assured you I saw the other evening. *Parbleu!* I recognize it by the blot of ink."

"I do not know whether it is that; but all I know is, that I bring it for you."

"But then, what about the other?"

"What other?"

"Marchiali."

"I have got him here with me."

"But that is not enough for me. I require a new order to take him back again."

"Don't talk such nonsense, my dear Baisemeaux; you talk like a child! Where is the order you received respecting Marchiali?"

Baisemeaux ran to his iron chest and took it out. Aramis seized hold of it, coolly tore it in four pieces, held them to the lamp, and burnt them. “Good heavens! what are you doing?” exclaimed Baisemeaux, in an extremity of terror.

“Look at your position quietly, my good governor,” said Aramis, with imperturbable self-possession, “and you will see how very simple the whole affair is. You no longer possess any order justifying Marchiali’s release.”

“I am a lost man!”

“Far from it, my good fellow, since I have brought Marchiali back to you, and all accordingly is just the same as if he had never left.”

“Ah!” said the governor, completely overcome by terror.

“Plain enough, you see; and you will go and shut him up immediately.”

“I should think so, indeed.”

“And you will hand over this Seldon to me, whose liberation is authorized by this order. Do you understand?”

“I — I — ”

“You do understand, I see,” said Aramis. “Very good.” Baisemeaux clapped his hands together.

“But why, at all events, after having taken Marchiali away from me, do you bring him back again?” cried the unhappy governor, in a paroxysm of terror, and completely dumbfounded.

“For a friend such as you are,” said Aramis — ”for so devoted a servant, I have no secrets;” and he put his mouth close to Baisemeaux’s ear, as he said, in a low tone of voice, “you know the resemblance between that unfortunate fellow, and — ”

“And the king? — yes!”

“Very good; the first use that Marchiali made of his liberty was to persist — Can you guess what?”

“How is it likely I should guess?”

“To persist in saying that he was king of France; to dress himself up in clothes like those of the king; and then pretend to assume that he was the king himself.”

“Gracious heavens!”

“That is the reason why I have brought him back again, my dear friend. He is mad and lets every one see how mad he is.”

“What is to be done, then?”

“That is very simple; let no one hold any communication with him. You understand that when his peculiar style of madness came to the king’s ears, the king, who had pitied his terrible affliction, and saw that all his kindness had been repaid by black ingratitude, became perfectly furious; so that, now — and remember this very distinctly, dear Monsieur de Baisemeaux, for it concerns you most closely — so that there is now, I repeat, sentence of death pronounced against all those who may allow him to communicate with any one else but me or the king himself. You understand, Baisemeaux, sentence of death!”

“You need not ask me whether I understand.”

“And now, let us go down, and conduct this poor devil back to his dungeon again, unless you prefer he should come up here.”

“What would be the good of that?”

“It would be better, perhaps, to enter his name in the prison-book at once!”

“Of course, certainly; not a doubt of it.”

“In that case, have him up.”

Baisemeaux ordered the drums to be beaten and the bell to be rung, as a warning to every one to retire, in order to avoid meeting a prisoner, about whom it was desired to observe a certain mystery. Then, when the passages were free, he went to take the prisoner from the carriage, at whose breast Porthos, faithful to the directions which had been given him, still kept his musket leveled. “Ah! is that you, miserable wretch?” cried the governor, as soon as he perceived the king. “Very good, very good.” And immediately, making the king get out of the carriage, he led him, still accompanied by Porthos, who had not taken off his mask, and Aramis, who again resumed his, up the stairs, to the second Bertaudiere, and opened the door of the room in which Philippe for six long years had bemoaned his existence. The king entered the cell without pronouncing a single word: he faltered in as limp and haggard as a rain-struck lily. Baisemeaux shut the door upon him, turned the key twice in the lock, and then returned to Aramis. “It is quite true,” he said, in a low tone, “that he bears a striking resemblance to the king; but less so than you said.”

“So that,” said Aramis, “you would not have been deceived by the substitution of the one for the other?”

“What a question!”

“You are a most valuable fellow, Baisemeaux,” said Aramis; “and now, set Seldon free.”

“Oh, yes. I was going to forget that. I will go and give orders at once.”

“Bah! to-morrow will be time enough.”

“To-morrow! — oh, no. This very minute.”

“Well; go off to your affairs, I will go away to mine. But it is quite understood, is it not?”

“What ‘is quite understood’?”

“That no one is to enter the prisoner’s cell, expect with an order from the king; an order which I will myself bring.”

“Quite so. Adieu, monseigneur.”

Aramis returned to his companion. “Now, Porthos, my good fellow, back again to Vaux, and as fast as possible.”

“A man is light and easy enough, when he has faithfully served his king; and, in serving him, saved his country,” said Porthos. “The horses will be as light as if our tissues were constructed of the wind of heaven. So let us be off.” And the carriage, lightened of a prisoner, who might well be — as he in fact was — very heavy in the sight of Aramis, passed across the drawbridge of the Bastile, which was raised again immediately behind it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A Night at the Bastile.

Pain, anguish, and suffering in human life are always in proportion to the strength with which a man is endowed. We will not pretend to say that Heaven always apportions to a man's capability of endurance the anguish with which he afflicts him; for that, indeed, would not be true, since Heaven permits the existence of death, which is, sometimes, the only refuge open to those who are too closely pressed — too bitterly afflicted, as far as the body is concerned. Suffering is in proportion to the strength which has been accorded; in other words, the weak suffer more, where the trial is the same, than the strong. And what are the elementary principles, we may ask, that compose human strength? Is it not — more than anything else — exercise, habit, experience? We shall not even take the trouble to demonstrate this, for it is an axiom in morals, as in physics. When the young king, stupefied and crushed in every sense and feeling, found himself led to a cell in the Bastile, he fancied death itself is but a sleep; that it, too, has its dreams as well; that the bed had broken through the flooring of his room at Vaux; that death had resulted from the occurrence; and that, still carrying out his dream, the king, Louis XIV., now no longer living, was dreaming one of those horrors, impossible to realize in life, which is termed dethronement, imprisonment, and insult towards a sovereign who formerly wielded unlimited power. To be present at — an actual witness, too — of this bitterness of death; to float, indecisively, in an incomprehensible mystery, between resemblance and reality; to hear everything, to see everything, without interfering in a single detail of agonizing suffering, was — so the king thought within himself — a torture far more terrible, since it might last forever. "Is this what is termed eternity — hell?" he murmured, at the moment the door was closed upon him, which we remember Baisemeaux had shut with his own hands. He did not even look round him; and in the room, leaning with his back against the wall, he allowed himself to be carried away by the terrible supposition that he was already dead, as he closed his eyes, in order to avoid looking upon something even worse still.

“How can I have died?” he said to himself, sick with terror. “The bed might have been let down by some artificial means? But no! I do not remember to have felt a bruise, nor any shock either. Would they not rather have poisoned me at my meals, or with the fumes of wax, as they did my ancestress, Jeanne d’Albret?” Suddenly, the chill of the dungeons seemed to fall like a wet cloak upon Louis’s shoulders. “I have seen,” he said, “my father lying dead upon his funeral couch, in his regal robes. That pale face, so calm and worn; those hands, once so skillful, lying nerveless by his side; those limbs stiffened by the icy grasp of death; nothing there betokened a sleep that was disturbed by dreams. And yet, how numerous were the dreams which Heaven might have sent that royal corpse — him whom so many others had preceded, hurried away by him into eternal death! No, that king was still the king: he was enthroned still upon that funeral couch, as upon a velvet armchair; he had not abdicated one title of his majesty. God, who had not punished him, cannot, will not punish me, who have done nothing.” A strange sound attracted the young man’s attention. He looked round him, and saw on the mantel-shelf, just below an enormous crucifix, coarsely painted in fresco on the wall, a rat of enormous size engaged in nibbling a piece of dry bread, but fixing all the time, an intelligent and inquiring look upon the new occupant of the cell. The king could not resist a sudden impulse of fear and disgust: he moved back towards the door, uttering a loud cry; and as if he but needed this cry, which escaped from his breast almost unconsciously, to recognize himself, Louis knew that he was alive and in full possession of his natural senses. “A prisoner!” he cried. “I — I, a prisoner!” He looked round him for a bell to summon some one to him. “There are no bells in the Bastile,” he said, “and it is in the Bastile I am imprisoned. In what way can I have been made a prisoner? It must have been owing to a conspiracy of M. Fouquet. I have been drawn to Vaux, as to a snare. M. Fouquet cannot be acting alone in this affair. His agent — That voice that I but just now heard was M. d’Herblay’s; I recognized it. Colbert was right, then. But what is Fouquet’s object? To reign in my place and stead? — Impossible. Yet who knows!” thought the king, relapsing into gloom again. “Perhaps my brother, the Duc d’Orleans, is doing that which my uncle wished to do during the whole of his life against my father. But the queen? — My mother, too? And La Valliere? Oh! La Valliere, she will have been abandoned to Madame. Dear, dear girl! Yes, it is — it must be so. They have shut her up as they have me. We are separated forever!” And at this idea of separation the poor lover burst into a flood of tears and sobs and groans.

“There is a governor in this place,” the king continued, in a fury of passion; “I will speak to him, I will summon him to me.”

He called — no voice replied to his. He seized hold of his chair, and hurled it against the massive oaken door. The wood resounded against the door, and awakened many a mournful echo in the profound depths of the staircase; but from a human creature, none.

This was a fresh proof for the king of the slight regard in which he was held at the Bastile. Therefore, when his first fit of anger had passed away, having remarked a barred window through which there passed a stream of light, lozenge-shaped, which must be, he knew, the bright orb of approaching day, Louis began to call out, at first gently enough, then louder and louder still; but no one replied. Twenty other attempts which he made, one after another, obtained no other or better success. His blood began to boil within him, and mount to his head. His nature was such, that, accustomed to command, he trembled at the idea of disobedience. The prisoner broke the chair, which was too heavy for him to lift, and made use of it as a battering ram to strike against the door. He struck so loudly, and so repeatedly, that the perspiration soon began to pour down his face. The sound became tremendous and continuous; certain stifled, smothered cries replied in different directions. This sound produced a strange effect upon the king. He paused to listen; it was the voice of the prisoners, formerly his victims, now his companions. The voices ascended like vapors through the thick ceilings and the massive walls, and rose in accusations against the author of this noise, as doubtless their sighs and tears accused, in whispered tones, the author of their captivity. After having deprived so many people of their liberty, the king came among them to rob them of their rest. This idea almost drove him mad; it redoubled his strength, or rather his well, bent upon obtaining some information, or a conclusion to the affair. With a portion of the broken chair he recommenced the noise. At the end of an hour, Louis heard something in the corridor, behind the door of his cell, and a violent blow, which was returned upon the door itself, made him cease his own.

“Are you mad?” said a rude, brutal voice. “What is the matter with you this morning?”

“This morning!” thought the king; but he said aloud, politely, “Monsieur, are you the governor of the Bastile?”

“My good fellow, your head is out of sorts,” replied the voice; “but that is no reason why you should make such a terrible disturbance. Be quiet; *mordioux!*”

“Are you the governor?” the king inquired again.

He heard a door on the corridor close; the jailer had just left, not condescending to reply a single word. When the king had assured himself of his departure, his fury knew no longer any bounds. As agile as a tiger, he leaped from the table to the window, and struck the iron bars with all his might. He broke a pane of glass, the pieces of which fell clanking into the courtyard below. He shouted with increasing hoarseness, “The governor, the governor!” This excess lasted fully an hour, during which time he was in a burning fever. With his hair in disorder and matted on his forehead, his dress torn and covered with dust and plaster, his linen in shreds, the king never rested until his strength was utterly exhausted, and it was not until then that he clearly understood the pitiless thickness of the walls, the impenetrable nature of the cement, invincible to every influence but that of time, and that he possessed no other weapon but despair. He leaned his forehead against the door, and let the feverish throbbings of his heart calm by degrees; it had seemed as if one single additional pulsation would have made it burst.

“A moment will come when the food which is given to the prisoners will be brought to me. I shall then see some one, I shall speak to him, and get an answer.”

And the king tried to remember at what hour the first repast of the prisoners was served at the Bastile; he was ignorant even of this detail. The feeling of remorse at this remembrance smote him like the thrust of a dagger, that he should have lived for five and twenty years a king, and in the enjoyment of every happiness, without having bestowed a moment’s thought on the misery of those who had been unjustly deprived of their liberty. The king blushed for very shame. He felt that Heaven, in permitting this fearful humiliation, did no more than render to the man the same torture as had been inflicted by that man upon so many others. Nothing could be more efficacious for reawakening his mind to religious influences than the prostration of his heart and mind and soul beneath the feeling of such acute wretchedness. But Louis dared not even kneel in prayer to God to entreat him to terminate his bitter trial.

"Heaven is right," he said; "Heaven acts wisely. It would be cowardly to pray to Heaven for that which I have so often refused my own fellow-creatures."

He had reached this stage of his reflections, that is, of his agony of mind, when a similar noise was again heard behind his door, followed this time by the sound of the key in the lock, and of the bolts being withdrawn from their staples. The king bounded forward to be nearer to the person who was about to enter, but, suddenly reflecting that it was a movement unworthy of a sovereign, he paused, assumed a noble and calm expression, which for him was easy enough, and waited with his back turned towards the window, in order, to some extent, to conceal his agitation from the eyes of the person who was about to enter. It was only a jailer with a basket of provisions. The king looked at the man with restless anxiety, and waited until he spoke.

"Ah!" said the latter, "you have broken your chair. I said you had done so! Why, you have gone quite mad."

"Monsieur," said the king, "be careful what you say; it will be a very serious affair for you."

The jailer placed the basket on the table, and looked at his prisoner steadily. "What do you say?" he said.

"Desire the governor to come to me," added the king, in accents full of calm and dignity.

"Come, my boy," said the turnkey, "you have always been very quiet and reasonable, but you are getting vicious, it seems, and I wish you to know it in time. You have broken your chair, and made a great disturbance; that is an offense punishable by imprisonment in one of the lower dungeons. Promise me not to begin over again, and I will not say a word about it to the governor."

"I wish to see the governor," replied the king, still governing his passions.

"He will send you off to one of the dungeons, I tell you; so take care."

"I insist upon it, do you hear?"

"Ah! ah! your eyes are becoming wild again. Very good! I shall take away your knife."

And the jailer did what he said, quitted the prisoner, and closed the door, leaving the king more astounded, more wretched, more isolated than ever. It was useless, though he tried it, to make the same noise again on his door, and equally useless that he threw the plates and dishes out of the window; not a single sound was heard in recognition. Two hours afterwards he could not be recognized as a king, a gentleman, a man, a human being; he might rather be called a madman, tearing the door with his nails, trying to tear up the flooring of his cell, and uttering such wild and fearful cries that the old Bastile seemed to tremble to its very foundations for having revolted against its master. As for the governor, the jailer did not even think of disturbing him; the turnkeys and the sentinels had reported the occurrence to him, but what was the good of it? Were not these madmen common enough in such a prison? and were not the walls still stronger? M. de Baisemeaux, thoroughly impressed with what Aramis had told him, and in perfect conformity with the king's order, hoped only that one thing might happen; namely, that the madman Marchiali might be mad enough to hang himself to the canopy of his bed, or to one of the bars of the window. In fact, the prisoner was anything but a profitable investment for M. Baisemeaux, and became more annoying than agreeable to him. These complications of Seldon and Marchiali — the complications first of setting at liberty and then imprisoning again, the complications arising from the strong likeness in question — had at last found a very proper *denouement*. Baisemeaux even thought he had remarked that D'Herblay himself was not altogether dissatisfied with the result.

"And then, really," said Baisemeaux to his next in command, "an ordinary prisoner is already unhappy enough in being a prisoner; he suffers quite enough, indeed, to induce one to hope, charitably enough, that his death may not be far distant. With still greater reason, accordingly, when the prisoner has gone mad, and might bite and make a terrible disturbance in the Bastile; why, in such a case, it is not simply an act of mere charity to wish him dead; it would be almost a good and even commendable action, quietly to have him put out of his misery."

And the good-natured governor thereupon sat down to his late breakfast.

CHAPTER XIX.

The Shadow of M. Fouquet.

D’Artagnan, still confused and oppressed by the conversation he had just had with the king, could not resist asking himself if he were really in possession of his senses, if he were really and truly at Vaux; if he, D’Artagnan, were really the captain of the musketeers, and M. Fouquet the owner of the chateau in which Louis XIV. was at that moment partaking of his hospitality. These reflections were not those of a drunken man, although everything was in prodigal profusion at Vaux, and the surintendant’s wines had met with a distinguished reception at the *fete*. The Gascon, however, was a man of calm self-possession; and no sooner did he touch his bright steel blade, than he knew how to adopt morally the cold, keen weapon as his guide of action.

“Well,” he said, as he quitted the royal apartment, “I seem now to be mixed up historically with the destinies of the king and of the minister; it will be written, that M. d’Artagnan, a younger son of a Gascon family, placed his hand on the shoulder of M. Nicolas Fouquet, the surintendant of the finances of France. My descendants, if I have any, will flatter themselves with the distinction which this arrest will confer, just as the members of the De Luynes family have done with regard to the estates of the poor Marechal d’Ancre. But the thing is, how best to execute the king’s directions in a proper manner. Any man would know how to say to M. Fouquet, ‘Your sword, monsieur.’ But it is not every one who would be able to take care of M. Fouquet without others knowing anything about it. How am I to manage, then, so that M. le surintendant pass from the height of favor to the direst disgrace; that Vaux be turned into a dungeon for him; that after having been steeped to his lips, as it were, in all the perfumes and incense of Ahasuerus, he is transferred to the gallows of Haman; in other words, of Enguerrand de Marigny?” And at this reflection, D’Artagnan’s brow became clouded with perplexity. The musketeer had certain scruples on the matter, it must be admitted. To deliver up to death (for not a doubt existed that Louis hated Fouquet mortally) the man who had just shown himself so delightful and charming a host in every way, was a real insult to one’s conscience. “It almost seems,” said D’Artagnan to himself, “that if I am not a poor, mean, miserable fellow, I should let M. Fouquet know the opinion the king has about him. Yet, if I betray my master’s secret, I shall be a false-hearted, treacherous knave, a traitor, too, a crime provided for and punishable by military laws — so much so, indeed, that twenty times, in former days when wars were rife, I have seen many a miserable fellow strung up to a tree for doing, in but a small degree, what my scruples counsel me to undertake upon a great scale now. No, I think that a man of true readiness of wit ought to get out of this difficulty with more skill than that. And now, let us admit that I do possess a little readiness of invention; it is not at all certain, though, for, after having for forty years absorbed so large a quantity, I shall be lucky if there were to be a pistole’s-worth left.” D’Artagnan buried his head in his hands, tore at his mustache in sheer vexation, and added, “What can be the reason of M. Fouquet’s disgrace? There seem to be three good ones: the first, because M. Colbert doesn’t like him; the second, because he wished to fall in love with Mademoiselle de la Valliere; and lastly, because the king likes M. Colbert and loves Mademoiselle de la Valliere. Oh! he is lost! But shall I put my foot on his neck, I, of all men, when he is falling a prey to the intrigues of a pack of women and clerks? For shame! If he be dangerous, I will lay him low enough; if, however, he be only persecuted, I will look on. I have come to such a decisive determination, that neither king nor living man shall change my mind. If Athos were here, he would do as I have done. Therefore, instead of going, in cold blood, up to M. Fouquet, and arresting him off-hand and shutting him up altogether, I will try and conduct myself like a man who understands what good manners are. People will talk about it, of course; but they shall talk well of it, I am determined.” And D’Artagnan, drawing by a gesture peculiar to himself his shoulder-belt over his shoulder, went straight off to M. Fouquet, who, after he had taken leave of his guests, was preparing to retire for the night and to sleep tranquilly after the triumphs of the day. The air was still perfumed, or infected, whichever way it may be considered, with the odors of the torches and the fireworks. The wax-lights were dying away in their sockets, the flowers fell unfastened from the garlands, the groups of dancers and courtiers were separating in the salons. Surrounded by his friends, who complimented him and received his flattering remarks in return, the surintendant half-closed his wearied eyes. He longed for rest and quiet; he sank upon the bed of laurels which had been heaped up for him for so many days past; it might almost have been said that he seemed bowed beneath the weight of the new debts which he had incurred for the purpose of giving the greatest possible honor to this *fete*. Fouquet had just retired to his room, still smiling, but more than half-asleep. He could listen to nothing more, he could hardly keep his eyes open; his bed seemed to possess a fascinating and irresistible attraction for him. The god Morpheus, the presiding deity of the dome painted by Lebrun, had extended his influence over the adjoining rooms, and showered down his most sleep-inducing poppies upon the master of the house. Fouquet, almost entirely alone, was being assisted by his *valet de chambre* to undress, when M. d'Artagnan appeared at the entrance of the room. D'Artagnan had never been able to succeed in making himself common at the court; and notwithstanding he was seen everywhere and on all occasions, he never failed to produce an effect wherever and whenever he made his appearance. Such is the happy privilege of certain natures, which in that respect resemble either thunder or lightning; every one recognizes them; but their appearance never fails to arouse surprise and astonishment, and whenever they occur, the impression is always left that the last was the most conspicuous or most important.

"What! M. d'Artagnan?" said Fouquet, who had already taken his right arm out of the sleeve of his doublet.

"At your service," replied the musketeer.

"Come in, my dear M. d'Artagnan."

"Thank you."

"Have you come to criticise the *fete?* You are ingenious enough in your criticisms, I know."

"By no means."

"Are not your men looked after properly?"

"In every way."

"You are not comfortably lodged, perhaps?"

"Nothing could be better."

"In that case, I have to thank you for being so amiably disposed, and I must not fail to express my obligations to you for all your flattering kindness."

These words were as much as to say, "My dear D'Artagnan, pray go to bed, since you have a bed to lie down on, and let me do the same."

D’Artagnan did not seem to understand it.

“Are you going to bed already?” he said to the superintendent.

“Yes; have you anything to say to me?”

“Nothing, monsieur, nothing at all. You sleep in this room, then?”

“Yes; as you see.”

“You have given a most charming *fete* to the king.”

“Do you think so?”

“Oh! beautiful!”

“Is the king pleased?”

“Enchanted.”

“Did he desire you to say as much to me?”

“He would not choose so unworthy a messenger, monseigneur.”

“You do not do yourself justice, Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

“Is that your bed, there?”

“Yes; but why do you ask? Are you not satisfied with your own?”

“My I speak frankly to you?”

“Most assuredly.”

“Well, then, I am not.”

Fouquet started; and then replied, “Will you take my room, Monsieur d’Artagnan?”

“What! deprive you of it, monseigneur? never!”

“What am I to do, then?”

“Allow me to share yours with you.”

Fouquet looked at the musketeer fixedly. “Ah! ah!” he said, “you have just left the king.”

“I have, monseigneur.”

“And the king wishes you to pass the night in my room?”

“Monseigneur — ”

“Very well, Monsieur d’Artagnan, very well. You are the master here.”

“I assure you, monseigneur, that I do not wish to abuse — ”

Fouquet turned to his valet, and said, “Leave us.” When the man had left, he said to D’Artagnan, “You have something to say to me?”

“I?”

“A man of your superior intelligence cannot have come to talk with a man like myself, at such an hour as the present, without grave motives.”

“Do not interrogate me.”

“On the contrary. What do you want with me?”

“Nothing more than the pleasure of your society.”

“Come into the garden, then,” said the superintendent suddenly, “or into the park.”

“No,” replied the musketeer, hastily, “no.”

“Why?”

“The fresh air — ”

“Come, admit at once that you arrest me,” said the superintendent to the captain.

“Never!” said the latter.

“You intend to look after me, then?”

“Yes, monseigneur, I do, upon my honor.”

“Upon your honor — ah! that is quite another thing! So I am to be arrested in my own house.”

“Do not say such a thing.”

“On the contrary, I will proclaim it aloud.”

“If you do so, I shall be compelled to request you to be silent.”

“Very good! Violence towards me, and in my own house, too.”

“We do not seem to understand one another at all. Stay a moment; there is a chess-board there; we will have a game, if you have no objections.”

“Monsieur d’Artagnan, I am in disgrace, then?”

“Not at all; but — ”

“I am prohibited, I suppose, from withdrawing from your sight.”

“I do not understand a word you are saying, monseigneur; and if you wish me to withdraw, tell me so.”

“My dear Monsieur d’Artagnan, your mode of action is enough to drive me mad; I was almost sinking for want of sleep, but you have completely awakened me.”

“I shall never forgive myself, I am sure; and if you wish to reconcile me with myself, why, go to sleep in your bed in my presence; and I shall be delighted.”

“I am under surveillance, I see.”

“I will leave the room if you say any such thing.”

“You are beyond my comprehension.”

“Good night, monseigneur,” said D’Artagnan, as he pretended to withdraw.

Fouquet ran after him. “I will not lie down,” he said. “Seriously, and since you refuse to treat me as a man, and since you finesse with me, I will try and set you at bay, as a hunter does a wild boar."

"Bah!" cried D'Artagnan, pretending to smile.

"I shall order my horses, and set off for Paris," said Fouquet, sounding the captain of the musketeers.

"If that be the case, monseigneur, it is very difficult."

"You will arrest me, then?"

"No, but I shall go along with you."

"That is quite sufficient, Monsieur d'Artagnan," returned Fouquet, coldly. "It was not for nothing you acquired your reputation as a man of intelligence and resource; but with me all this is quite superfluous. Let us come to the point. Do me a service. Why do you arrest me? What have I done?"

"Oh! I know nothing about what you may have done; but I do not arrest you — this evening, at least!"

"This evening!" said Fouquet, turning pale, "but to-morrow?"

"It is not to-morrow just yet, monseigneur. Who can ever answer for the morrow?"

"Quick, quick, captain! let me speak to M. d'Herblay."

"Alas! that is quite impossible, monseigneur. I have strict orders to see that you hold no communication with any one."

"With M. d'Herblay, captain — with your friend!"

"Monseigneur, is M. d'Herblay the only person with whom you ought to be prevented holding any communication?"

Fouquet colored, and then assuming an air of resignation, he said: "You are right, monsieur; you have taught me a lesson I ought not to have evoked. A fallen man cannot assert his right to anything, even from those whose fortunes he may have made; for a still stronger reason, he cannot claim anything from those to whom he may never have had the happiness of doing a service."

"Monseigneur!"

"It is perfectly true, Monsieur d'Artagnan; you have always acted in the most admirable manner towards me — in such a manner, indeed, as most becomes the man who is destined to arrest me. You, at least, have never asked me anything."

"Monsieur," replied the Gascon, touched by his eloquent and noble tone of grief, "will you — I ask it as a favor — pledge me your word as a man of honor that you will not leave this room?"

"What is the use of it, dear Monsieur d'Artagnan, since you keep watch and ward over me? Do you suppose I should contend against the most valiant sword in the kingdom?"

"It is not that, at all, monseigneur; but that I am going to look for M. d'Herblay, and, consequently, to leave you alone."

Fouquet uttered a cry of delight and surprise.

"To look for M. d'Herblay! to leave me alone!" he exclaimed, clasping his hands together.

"Which is M. d'Herblay's room? The blue room is it not?"

"Yes, my friend, yes."

"Your friend! thank you for that word, monseigneur; you confer it upon me to-day, at least, if you have never done so before."

"Ah! you have saved me."

"It will take a good ten minutes to go from hence to the blue room, and to return?" said D'Artagnan.

"Nearly so."

"And then to wake Aramis, who sleeps very soundly, when he is asleep, I put that down at another five minutes; making a total of fifteen minutes' absence. And now, monseigneur, give me your word that you will not in any way attempt to make your escape, and that when I return I shall find you here again."

"I give it, monsieur," replied Fouquet, with an expression of the warmest and deepest gratitude.

D'Artagnan disappeared. Fouquet looked at him as he quitted the room, waited with a feverish impatience until the door was closed behind him, and as soon as it was shut, flew to his keys, opened two or three secret doors concealed in various articles of furniture in the room, looked vainly for certain papers, which doubtless he had left at Saint-Mande, and which he seemed to regret not having found in them; then hurriedly seizing hold of letters, contracts, papers, writings, he heaped them up into a pile, which he burnt in the extremest haste upon the marble hearth of the fireplace, not even taking time to draw from the interior of it the vases and pots of flowers with which it was filled. As soon as he had finished, like a man who has just escaped an imminent danger, and whose strength abandons him as soon as the danger is past, he sank down, completely overcome, on a couch. When D'Artagnan returned, he found Fouquet in the same position; the worthy musketeer had not the slightest doubt that Fouquet, having given his word, would not even think of failing to keep it, but he had thought it most likely that Fouquet would turn his (D'Artagnan's) absence to the best advantage in getting rid of all the papers, memorandums, and contracts, which might possibly render his position, which was even now serious enough, more dangerous than ever. And so, lifting up his head like a dog who has regained the scent, he perceived an odor resembling smoke he had relied on finding in the atmosphere, and having found it, made a movement of his head in token of satisfaction. As D'Artagnan entered, Fouquet, on his side, raised his head, and not one of D'Artagnan's movements escaped him. And then the looks of the two men met, and they both saw that they had understood each other without exchanging a syllable.

"Well!" asked Fouquet, the first to speak, "and M. d'Herblay?"

"Upon my word, monseigneur," replied D'Artagnan, "M. d'Herblay must be desperately fond of walking out at night, and composing verses by moonlight in the park of Vaux, with some of your poets, in all probability, for he is not in his own room."

"What! not in his own room?" cried Fouquet, whose last hope thus escaped him; for unless he could ascertain in what way the bishop of Vannes could assist him, he perfectly well knew that he could expect assistance from no other quarter.

"Or, indeed," continued D'Artagnan, "if he is in his own room, he has very good reasons for not answering."

"But surely you did not call him in such a manner that he could have heard you?"

"You can hardly suppose, monseigneur, that having already exceeded my orders, which forbade me leaving you a single moment — you can hardly suppose, I say, that I should have been mad enough to rouse the whole house and allow myself to be seen in the corridor of the bishop of Vannes, in order that M. Colbert might state with positive certainty that I gave you time to burn your papers."

"My papers?"

"Of course; at least that is what I should have done in your place. When any one opens a door for me I always avail myself of it."

"Yes, yes, and I thank you, for I have availed myself of it."

"And you have done perfectly right. Every man has his own peculiar secrets with which others have nothing to do. But let us return to Aramis, monseigneur."

"Well, then, I tell you, you could not have called loud enough, or Aramis would have heard you."

"However softly any one may call Aramis, monseigneur, Aramis always hears when he has an interest in hearing. I repeat what I said before — Aramis was not in his own room, or Aramis had certain reasons for not recognizing my voice, of which I am ignorant, and of which you may be even ignorant yourself, notwithstanding your liege-man is His Greatness the Lord Bishop of Vannes."

Fouquet drew a deep sigh, rose from his seat, took three or four turns in his room, and finished by seating himself, with an expression of extreme dejection, upon his magnificent bed with velvet hangings, and costliest lace. D'Artagnan looked at Fouquet with feelings of the deepest and sincerest pity.

"I have seen a good many men arrested in my life," said the musketeer, sadly; "I have seen both M. de Cinq-Mars and M. de Chalais arrested, though I was very young then. I have seen M. de Conde arrested with the princes; I have seen M. de Retz arrested; I have seen M. Broussel arrested. Stay a moment, monseigneur, it is disagreeable to have to say, but the very one of all those whom you most resemble at this moment was that poor fellow Broussel. You were very near doing as he did, putting your dinner napkin in your portfolio, and wiping your mouth with your papers. *Mordioux!* Monseigneur Fouquet, a man like you ought not to be dejected in this manner. Suppose your friends saw you?"

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," returned the surintendant, with a smile full of gentleness, "you do not understand me; it is precisely because my friends are not looking on, that I am as you see me now. I do not live, exist even, isolated from others; I am nothing when left to myself. Understand that throughout my whole life I have passed every moment of my time in making friends, whom I hoped to render my stay and support. In times of prosperity, all these cheerful, happy voices — rendered so through and by my means — formed in my honor a concert of praise and kindly actions. In the least disfavor, these humbler voices accompanied in harmonious accents the murmur of my own heart. Isolation I have never yet known. Poverty (a phantom I have sometimes beheld, clad in rags, awaiting me at the end of my journey through life) — poverty has been the specter with which many of my own friends have trifled for years past, which they poetize and caress, and which has attracted me towards them. Poverty! I accept it, acknowledge it, receive it, as a disinherited sister; for poverty is neither solitude, nor exile, nor imprisonment. Is it likely I shall ever be poor, with such friends as Pelisson, as La Fontaine, as Moliere? with such a mistress as — Oh! if you knew how utterly lonely and desolate I feel at this moment, and how you, who separate me from all I love, seem to resemble the image of solitude, of annihilation — death itself."

"But I have already told you, Monsieur Fouquet," replied D'Artagnan, moved to the depths of his soul, "that you are woefully exaggerating. The king likes you."

"No, no," said Fouquet, shaking his head.

"M. Colbert hates you."

"M. Colbert! What does that matter to me?"

"He will ruin you."

"Ah! I defy him to do that, for I am ruined already."

At this singular confession of the superintendent, D'Artagnan cast his glance all round the room; and although he did not open his lips, Fouquet understood him so thoroughly, that he added: "What can be done with such wealth of substance as surrounds us, when a man can no longer cultivate his taste for the magnificent? Do you know what good the greater part of the wealth and the possessions which we rich enjoy, confer upon us? merely to disgust us, by their very splendor even, with everything which does not equal it! Vaux! you will say, and the wonders of Vaux! What of it? What boot these wonders? If I am ruined, how shall I fill with water the urns which my Naiads bear in their arms, or force the air into the lungs of my Tritons? To be rich enough, Monsieur d'Artagnan, a man must be too rich."

D'Artagnan shook his head.

"Oh! I know very well what you think," replied Fouquet, quickly. "If Vaux were yours, you would sell it, and would purchase an estate in the country; an estate which should have woods, orchards, and land attached, so that the estate should be made to support its master. With forty millions you might — "

"Ten millions," interrupted D'Artagnan.

"Not a million, my dear captain. No one in France is rich enough to give two millions for Vaux, and to continue to maintain it as I have done; no one could do it, no one would know how."

"Well," said D'Artagnan, "in any case, a million is not abject misery."

"It is not far from it, my dear monsieur. But you do not understand me. No; I will not sell my residence at Vaux; I will give it to you, if you like;" and Fouquet accompanied these words with a movement of the shoulders to which it would be impossible to do justice.

"Give it to the king; you will make a better bargain."

"The king does not require me to give it to him," said Fouquet; "he will take it away from me with the most absolute ease and grace, if it pleases him to do so; and that is the very reason I should prefer to see it perish. Do you know, Monsieur d'Artagnan, that if the king did not happen to be under my roof, I would take this candle, go straight to the dome, and set fire to a couple of huge chests of fusees and fireworks which are in reserve there, and would reduce my palace to ashes."

"Bah!" said the musketeer, negligently. "At all events, you would not be able to burn the gardens, and that is the finest feature of the place."

"And yet," resumed Fouquet, thoughtfully, "what was I saying? Great heavens! burn Vaux! destroy my palace! But Vaux is not mine; these wonderful creations are, it is true, the property, as far as sense of enjoyment goes, of the man who has paid for them; but as far as duration is concerned, they belong to those who created them. Vaux belongs to Lebrun, to Lenotre, to Pelisson, to Levau, to La Fontaine, to Moliere; Vaux belongs to posterity, in fact. You see, Monsieur d'Artagnan, that my very house has ceased to be my own."

"That is all well and good," said D'Artagnan; "the idea is agreeable enough, and I recognize M. Fouquet himself in it. That idea, indeed, makes me forget that poor fellow Broussel altogether; and I now fail to recognize in you the whining complaints of that old Frondeur. If you are ruined, monsieur, look at the affair manfully, for you too, *mordioux!* belong to posterity, and have no right to lessen yourself in any way. Stay a moment; look at me, I who seem to exercise in some degree a kind of superiority over you, because I am arresting you; fate, which distributes their different parts to the comedians of this world, accorded me a less agreeable and less advantageous part to fill than yours has been. I am one of those who think that the parts which kings and powerful nobles are called upon to act are infinitely of more worth than the parts of beggars or lackeys. It is far better on the stage — on the stage, I mean, of another theater than the theater of this world — it is far better to wear a fine coat and to talk a fine language, than to walk the boards shod with a pair of old shoes, or to get one's backbone gently polished by a hearty dressing with a stick. In one word, you have been a prodigal with money, you have ordered and been obeyed — have been steeped to the lips in enjoyment; while I have dragged my tether after me, have been commanded and have obeyed, and have drudged my life away. Well, although I may seem of such trifling importance beside you, monseigneur, I do declare to you, that the recollection of what I have done serves me as a spur, and prevents me from bowing my old head too soon. I shall remain unto the very end a trooper; and when my turn comes, I shall fall perfectly straight, all in a heap, still alive, after having selected my place beforehand. Do as I do, Monsieur Fouquet, you will not find yourself the worse for it; a fall happens only once in a lifetime to men like yourself, and the chief thing is, to take it gracefully when the chance presents itself. There is a Latin proverb — the words have escaped me, but I remember the sense of it very well, for I have thought over it more than once — which says, ‘The end crowns the work!’“

Fouquet rose from his seat, passed his arm round D’Artagnan’s neck, and clasped him in a close embrace, whilst with the other hand he pressed his hand. “An excellent homily,” he said, after a moment’s pause.

“A soldier’s, monseigneur.”

“You have a regard for me, in telling me all that.”

“Perhaps.”

Fouquet resumed his pensive attitude once more, and then, a moment after, he said: “Where can M. d’Herblay be? I dare not ask you to send for him.”

“You would not ask me, because I would not do it, Monsieur Fouquet. People would learn it, and Aramis, who is not mixed up with the affair, might possibly be compromised and included in your disgrace.”

“I will wait here till daylight,” said Fouquet.

“Yes; that is best.”

“What shall we do when daylight comes?”

“I know nothing at all about it, monseigneur.”

“Monsieur d’Artagnan, will you do me a favor?”

“Most willingly.”

“You guard me, I remain; you are acting in the full discharge of your duty, I suppose?”

“Certainly.”

"Very good, then; remain as close to me as my shadow if you like; and I infinitely prefer such a shadow to any one else."

D'Artagnan bowed to the compliment.

"But, forget that you are Monsieur d'Artagnan, captain of the musketeers; forget that I am Monsieur Fouquet, surintendant of the finances; and let us talk about my affairs."

"That is rather a delicate subject."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; but, for your sake, Monsieur Fouquet, I will do what may almost be regarded as an impossibility."

"Thank you. What did the king say to you?"

"Nothing."

"Ah! is that the way you talk?"

"The deuce!"

"What do you think of my situation?"

"I do not know."

"However, unless you have some ill feeling against me — "

"Your position is a difficult one."

"In what respect?"

"Because you are under your own roof."

"However difficult it may be, I understand it very well."

"Do you suppose that, with any one else but yourself, I should have shown so much frankness?"

"What! so much frankness, do you say? you, who refuse to tell me the slightest thing?"

"At all events, then, so much ceremony and consideration."

"Ah! I have nothing to say in that respect."

"One moment, monseigneur: let me tell you how I should have behaved towards any one but yourself. It might be that I happened to arrive at your door just as your guests or your friends had left you — or, if they had not gone yet, I should wait until they were leaving, and should then catch them one after the other, like rabbits; I should lock them up quietly enough, I should steal softly along the carpet of your corridor, and with one hand upon you, before you suspected the slightest thing amiss, I should keep you safely until my master's breakfast in the morning. In this way, I should just the same have avoided all publicity, all disturbance, all opposition; but there would also have been no warning for M. Fouquet, no consideration for his feelings, none of those delicate concessions which are shown by persons who are essentially courteous in their natures, whenever the decisive moment may arrive. Are you satisfied with the plan?"

"It makes me shudder."

"I thought you would not like it. It would have been very disagreeable to have made my appearance to-morrow, without any preparation, and to have asked you to deliver up your sword."

"Oh! monsieur, I should have died of shame and anger."

"Your gratitude is too eloquently expressed. I have not done enough to deserve it, I assure you."

"Most certainly, monsieur, you will never get me to believe that."

"Well, then, monseigneur, if you are satisfied with what I have done, and have somewhat recovered from the shock which I prepared you for as much as I possibly could, let us allow the few hours that remain to pass away undisturbed. You are harassed, and should arrange your thoughts; I beg you, therefore, go to sleep, or pretend to go to sleep, either on your bed, or in your bed; I will sleep in this armchair; and when I fall asleep, my rest is so sound that a cannon would not wake me."

Fouquet smiled. "I expect, however," continued the musketeer, "the case of a door being opened, whether a secret door, or any other; or the case of any one going out of, or coming into, the room — for anything like that my ear is as quick and sensitive as the ear of a mouse. Creaking noises make me start. It arises, I suppose, from a natural antipathy to anything of the kind. Move about as much as you like; walk up and down in any part of the room, write, efface, destroy, burn, — nothing like that will prevent me from going to sleep or even prevent me from snoring, but do not touch either the key or the handle of the door, for I should start up in a moment, and that would shake my nerves and make me ill."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," said Fouquet, "you are certainly the most witty and the most courteous man I ever met with; and you will leave me only one regret, that of having made your acquaintance so late."

D'Artagnan drew a deep sigh, which seemed to say, "Alas! you have perhaps made it too soon." He then settled himself in his armchair, while Fouquet, half lying on his bed and leaning on his arm, was meditating on his misadventures. In this way, both of them, leaving the candles burning, awaited the first dawn of the day; and when Fouquet happened to sigh too loudly, D'Artagnan only snored the louder. Not a single visit, not even from

Aramis, disturbed their quietude: not a sound even was heard throughout the whole vast palace. Outside, however, the guards of honor on duty, and the patrol of musketeers, paced up and down; and the sound of their feet could be heard on the gravel walks. It seemed to act as an additional soporific for the sleepers, while the murmuring of the wind through the trees, and the unceasing music of the fountains whose waters tumbled in the basin, still went on uninterruptedly, without being disturbed at the slight noises and items of little moment that constitute the life and death of human nature.

CHAPTER XX.

The Morning.

In vivid contrast to the sad and terrible destiny of the king imprisoned in the Bastile, and tearing, in sheer despair, the bolts and bars of his dungeon, the rhetoric of the chroniclers of old would not fail to present, as a complete antithesis, the picture of Philippe lying asleep beneath the royal canopy. We do not pretend to say that such rhetoric is always bad, and always scatters, in places where they have no right to grow, the flowers with which it embellishes and enlivens history. But we shall, on the present occasion, carefully avoid polishing the antithesis in question, but shall proceed to draw another picture as minutely as possible, to serve as foil and counterfoil to the one in the preceding chapter. The young prince alighted from Aramis's room, in the same way the king had descended from the apartment dedicated to Morpheus. The dome gradually and slowly sank down under Aramis's pressure, and Philippe stood beside the royal bed, which had ascended again after having deposited its prisoner in the secret depths of the subterranean passage. Alone, in the presence of all the luxury which surrounded him; alone, in the presence of his power; alone, with the part he was about to be forced to act, Philippe for the first time felt his heart, and mind, and soul expand beneath the influence of a thousand mutable emotions, which are the vital throbs of a king's heart. He could not help changing color when he looked upon the empty bed, still tumbled by his brother's body. This mute accomplice had returned, after having completed the work it had been destined to perform; it returned with the traces of the crime; it spoke to the guilty author of that crime, with the frank and unreserved language which an accomplice never fears to use in the company of his companion in guilt; for it spoke the truth. Philippe bent over the bed, and perceived a pocket-handkerchief lying on it, which was still damp from the cold sweat which had poured from Louis XIV.'s face. This sweat-bestained handkerchief terrified Philippe, as the gore of Abel frightened Cain.

"I am face to face with my destiny," said Philippe, his eyes on fire, and his face a livid white. "Is it likely to be more terrifying than my captivity has been sad and gloomy? Though I am compelled to follow out, at every moment, the sovereign power and authority I have usurped, shall I cease to listen to the scruples of my heart? Yes! the king has lain on this bed; it is indeed his head that has left its impression on this pillow; his bitter tears that have stained this handkerchief: and yet, I hesitate to throw myself on the bed, or to press in my hand the handkerchief which is embroidered with my brother's arms. Away with such weakness; let me imitate M. d'Herblay, who asserts that a man's action should be always one degree above his thoughts; let me imitate M. d'Herblay, whose thoughts are of and for himself alone, who regards himself as a man of honor, so long as he injures or betrays his enemies only. I, I alone, should have occupied this bed, if Louis XIV. had not, owing to my mother's criminal abandonment, stood in my way; and this handkerchief, embroidered with the arms of France, would in right and justice belong to me alone, if, as M. d'Herblay observes, I had been left my royal cradle. Philippe, son of France, take your place on that bed; Philippe, sole king of France, resume the blazonry that is yours! Philippe, sole heir presumptive to Louis XIII., your father, show yourself without pity or mercy for the usurper who, at this moment, has not even to suffer the agony of the remorse of all that you have had to submit to."

With these words, Philippe, notwithstanding an instinctive repugnance of feeling, and in spite of the shudder of terror which mastered his will, threw himself on the royal bed, and forced his muscles to press the still warm place where Louis XIV. had lain, while he buried his burning face in the handkerchief still moistened by his brother's tears. With his head thrown back and buried in the soft down of his pillow, Philippe perceived above him the crown of France, suspended, as we have stated, by angels with outspread golden wings.

A man may be ambitious of lying in a lion's den, but can hardly hope to sleep there quietly. Philippe listened attentively to every sound; his heart panted and throbbed at the very suspicion of approaching terror and misfortune; but confident in his own strength, which was confirmed by the force of an overpoweringly resolute determination, he waited until some decisive circumstance should permit him to judge for himself. He hoped that imminent danger might be revealed to him, like those phosphoric lights of the tempest which show the sailors the altitude of the waves against which they have to struggle. But nothing approached. Silence, that mortal enemy of restless hearts, and of ambitious minds, shrouded in the thickness of its gloom during the remainder of the night the future king of France, who lay there sheltered beneath his stolen crown. Towards the morning a shadow, rather than a body, glided into the royal chamber; Philippe expected his approach and neither expressed nor exhibited any surprise.

"Well, M. d'Herblay?"

"Well, sire, all is accomplished."

"How?"

"Exactly as we expected."

"Did he resist?"

"Terribly! tears and entreaties."

"And then?"

"A perfect stupor."

"But at last?"

"Oh! at last, a complete victory, and absolute silence."

"Did the governor of the Bastile suspect anything?"

"Nothing."

"The resemblance, however — "

"Was the cause of the success."

"But the prisoner cannot fail to explain himself. Think well of that. I have myself been able to do as much as that, on former occasion."

"I have already provided for every chance. In a few days, sooner if necessary, we will take the captive out of his prison, and will send him out of the country, to a place of exile so remote — "

"People can return from their exile, Monsieur d'Herblay."

"To a place of exile so distant, I was going to say, that human strength and the duration of human life would not be enough for his return."

Once more a cold look of intelligence passed between Aramis and the young king.

"And M. du Vallon?" asked Philippe in order to change the conversation.

"He will be presented to you to-day, and confidentially will congratulate you on the danger which that conspirator has made you run."

"What is to be done with him?"

"With M. du Vallon?"

"Yes; confer a dukedom on him, I suppose."

"A dukedom," replied Aramis, smiling in a significant manner.

"Why do you laugh, Monsieur d'Herblay?"

"I laugh at the extreme caution of your idea."

"Cautious, why so?"

"Your majesty is doubtless afraid that poor Porthos may possible become a troublesome witness, and you wish to get rid of him."

"What! in making him a duke?"

"Certainly; you would assuredly kill him, for he would die from joy, and the secret would die with him."

"Good heavens!"

"Yes," said Aramis, phlegmatically; "I should lose a very good friend."

At this moment, and in the middle of this idle conversation, under the light tone of which the two conspirators concealed their joy and pride at their mutual success, Aramis heard something which made him prick up his ears.

"What is that?" said Philippe.

"The dawn, sire."

"Well?"

"Well, before you retired to bed last night, you probably decided to do something this morning at break of day."

"Yes, I told my captain of the musketeers," replied the young man hurriedly, "that I should expect him."

"If you told him that, he will certainly be here, for he is a most punctual man."

"I hear a step in the vestibule."

"It must be he."

"Come, let us begin the attack," said the young king resolutely.

"Be cautious for Heaven's sake. To begin the attack, and with D'Artagnan, would be madness. D'Artagnan knows nothing, he has seen nothing; he is a hundred miles from suspecting our mystery in the slightest degree, but if he comes into this room the first this morning, he will be sure to detect something of what has taken place, and which he would imagine it his business to occupy himself about. Before we allow D'Artagnan to penetrate into this room, we must air the room thoroughly, or introduce so many people into it, that the keenest scent in the whole kingdom may be deceived by the traces of twenty different persons."

"But how can I send him away, since I have given him a rendezvous?" observed the prince, impatient to measure swords with so redoubtable an antagonist.

"I will take care of that," replied the bishop, "and in order to begin, I am going to strike a blow which will completely stupefy our man."

"He, too, is striking a blow, for I hear him at the door," added the prince, hurriedly.

And, in fact, a knock at the door was heard at that moment. Aramis was not mistaken; for it was indeed D'Artagnan who adopted that mode of announcing himself.

We have seen how he passed the night in philosophizing with M. Fouquet, but the musketeer was very weary even of feigning to fall asleep, and as soon as earliest dawn illumined with its gloomy gleams of light the sumptuous cornices of the superintendent's room, D'Artagnan rose from his armchair, arranged his sword, brushed his coat and hat with his sleeve, like a private soldier getting ready for inspection.

"Are you going out?" said Fouquet.

"Yes, monseigneur. And you?"

"I shall remain."

"You pledge your word?"

"Certainly."

"Very good. Besides, my only reason for going out is to try and get that reply, — you know what I mean?"

"That sentence, you mean — "

"Stay, I have something of the old Roman in me. This morning, when I got up, I remarked that my sword had got caught in one of the *aiguillettes*, and that my shoulder-belt had slipped quite off. That is an infallible sign."

"Of prosperity?"

"Yes, be sure of it; for every time that that confounded belt of mine stuck fast to my back, it always signified a punishment from M. de Treville, or a refusal of money by M. de Mazarin. Every time my sword hung fast to my shoulder-belt, it always predicted some disagreeable commission or another for me to execute, and I have had showers of them all my life through. Every time, too, my sword danced about in its sheath, a duel, fortunate in its result, was sure to follow: whenever it dangled about the calves of my legs, it signified a slight wound; every time it fell completely out of the scabbard, I was booked, and made up my mind that I should have to remain on the field of battle, with two or three months under surgical bandages into the bargain."

“I did not know your sword kept you so well informed,” said Fouquet, with a faint smile, which showed how he was struggling against his own weakness. “Is your sword bewitched, or under the influence of some imperial charm?”

“Why, you must know that my sword may almost be regarded as part of my own body. I have heard that certain men seem to have warnings given them by feeling something the matter with their legs, or a throbbing of their temples. With me, it is my sword that warns me. Well, it told me of nothing this morning. But, stay a moment — look here, it has just fallen of its own accord into the last hole of the belt. Do you know what that is a warning of?”

“No.”

“Well, that tells me of an arrest that will have to be made this very day.”

“Well,” said the surintendant, more astonished than annoyed by this frankness, “if there is nothing disagreeable predicted to you by your sword, I am to conclude that it is not disagreeable for you to arrest me.”

“You! arrest *you!*”

“Of course. The warning — ”

“Does not concern you, since you have been arrested ever since yesterday. It is not you I shall have to arrest, be assured of that. That is the reason why I am delighted, and also the reason why I said that my day will be a happy one.”

And with these words, pronounced with the most affectionate graciousness of manner, the captain took leave of Fouquet in order to wait upon the king. He was on the point of leaving the room, when Fouquet said to him, “One last mark of kindness.”

“What is it, monseigneur?”

“M. d’Herblay; let me see Monsieur d’Herblay.”

“I am going to try and get him to come to you.”

D’Artagnan did not think himself so good a prophet. It was written that the day would pass away and realize all the predictions that had been made in the morning. He had accordingly knocked, as we have seen, at the king’s door. The door opened. The captain thought that it was the king who had just opened it himself; and this supposition was not altogether inadmissible, considering the state of agitation in which he had left Louis XIV. the previous evening; but instead of his royal master, whom he was on the point of saluting with the greatest respect, he perceived the long, calm features of

Aramis. So extreme was his surprise that he could hardly refrain from uttering a loud exclamation. “Aramis!” he said.

“Good morning, dear D’Artagnan,” replied the prelate, coldly.

“You here!” stammered out the musketeer.

“His majesty desires you to report that he is still sleeping, after having been greatly fatigued during the whole night.”

“Ah!” said D’Artagnan, who could not understand how the bishop of Vannes, who had been so indifferent a favorite the previous evening, had become in half a dozen hours the most magnificent mushroom of fortune that had ever sprung up in a sovereign’s bedroom. In fact, to transmit the orders of the king even to the mere threshold of that monarch’s room, to serve as an intermediary of Louis XIV. so as to be able to give a single order in his name at a couple paces from him, he must have become more than Richelieu had ever been to Louis XIII. D’Artagnan’s expressive eye, half-opened lips, his curling mustache, said as much indeed in the plainest language to the chief favorite, who remained calm and perfectly unmoved.

“Moreover,” continued the bishop, “you will be good enough, monsieur le capitaine des mousquetaires, to allow those only to pass into the king’s room this morning who have special permission. His majesty does not wish to be disturbed just yet.”

“But,” objected D’Artagnan, almost on the point of refusing to obey this order, and particularly of giving unrestrained passage to the suspicions which the king’s silence had aroused — ”but, monsieur l’eveque, his majesty gave me a rendezvous for this morning.”

“Later, later,” said the king’s voice, from the bottom of the alcove; a voice which made a cold shudder pass through the musketeer’s veins. He bowed, amazed, confused, and stupefied by the smile with which Aramis seemed to overwhelm him, as soon as these words had been pronounced.

“And then,” continued the bishop, “as an answer to what you were coming to ask the king, my dear D’Artagnan, here is an order of his majesty, which you will be good enough to attend to forthwith, for it concerns M. Fouquet.”

D’Artagnan took the order which was held out to him. “To be set at liberty!” he murmured. “Ah!” and he uttered a second “ah!” still more full of intelligence than the former; for this order explained Aramis’s presence with the king, and that Aramis, in order to have obtained Fouquet’s pardon, must have made considerable progress in the royal favor, and that this favor explained, in its tenor, the hardly conceivable assurance with which M. d’Herblay issued the order in the king’s name. For D’Artagnan it was quite sufficient to have understood something of the matter in hand to order to understand the rest. He bowed and withdrew a couple of paces, as though he were about to leave.

“I am going with you,” said the bishop.

“Where to?”

“To M. Fouquet; I wish to be a witness of his delight.”

“Ah! Aramis, how you puzzled me just now!” said D’Artagnan again.

“But you understand *now*, I suppose?”

“Of course I understand,” he said aloud; but added in a low tone to himself, almost hissing the words between his teeth, “No, no, I do not understand yet. But it is all the same, for here is the order for it.” And then he added, “I will lead the way, monseigneur,” and he conducted Aramis to Fouquet’s apartments.

CHAPTER XXI.

The King’s Friend.

Fouquet was waiting with anxiety; he had already sent away many of his servants and friends, who, anticipating the usual hour of his ordinary receptions, had called at his door to inquire after him. Preserving the utmost silence respecting the danger which hung suspended by a hair above his head, he only asked them, as he did every one, indeed, who came to the door, where Aramis was. When he saw D’Artagnan return, and when he perceived the bishop of Vannes behind him, he could hardly restrain his delight; it was fully equal to his previous uneasiness. The mere sight of Aramis was a complete compensation to the surintendant for the unhappiness he had undergone in his arrest. The prelate was silent and grave; D’Artagnan completely bewildered by such an accumulation of events.

“Well, captain, so you have brought M. d’Herblay to me.”

“And something better still, monseigneur.”

“What is that?”

“Liberty.”

“I am free!”

“Yes; by the king’s order.”

Fouquet resumed his usual serenity, that he might interrogate Aramis with a look.

“Oh! yes, you can thank M. l’eveque de Vannes,” pursued D’Artagnan, “for it is indeed to him that you owe the change that has taken place in the king.”

“Oh!” said Fouquet, more humiliated at the service than grateful at its success.

“But you,” continued D’Artagnan, addressing Aramis — ”you, who have become M. Fouquet’s protector and patron, can you not do something for me?”

“Anything in the wide world you like, my friend,” replied the bishop, in his calmest tones.

“One thing only, then, and I shall be perfectly satisfied. How on earth did you manage to become the favorite of the king, you who have never spoken to him more than twice in your life?”

“From a friend such as you are,” said Aramis, “I cannot conceal anything.”

“Ah! very good, tell me, then.”

“Very well. You think that I have seen the king only twice, whilst the fact is I have seen him more than a hundred times; only we have kept it very secret, that is all.” And without trying to remove the color which at this revelation made D’Artagnan’s face flush scarlet, Aramis turned towards M. Fouquet, who was as much surprised as the musketeer. “Monseigneur,” he resumed, “the king desires me to inform you that he is more than ever your friend, and that your beautiful *fete*, so generously offered by you on his behalf, has touched him to the very heart.”

And thereupon he saluted M. Fouquet with so much reverence of manner, that the latter, incapable of understanding a man whose diplomacy was of so prodigious a character, remained incapable of uttering a single syllable, and equally incapable of thought or movement. D’Artagnan fancied he perceived that these two men had something to say to each other, and he was about to yield to that feeling of instinctive politeness which in such a case hurries a man towards the door, when he feels his presence is an inconvenience for others; but his eager curiosity, spurred on by so many mysteries, counseled him to remain.

Aramis thereupon turned towards him, and said, in a quiet tone, “You will not forget, my friend, the king’s order respecting those whom he intends to receive this morning on rising.” These words were clear enough, and the musketeer understood them; he therefore bowed to Fouquet, and then to Aramis, — to the latter with a slight admixture of ironical respect, — and disappeared.

No sooner had he left, than Fouquet, whose impatience had hardly been able to wait for that moment, darted towards the door to close it, and then returning to the bishop, he said, “My dear D’Herblay, I think it now high time you should explain all that has passed, for, in plain and honest truth, I do not understand anything.”

“We will explain all that to you,” said Aramis, sitting down, and making Fouquet sit down also. “Where shall I begin?”

“With this first of all. Why does the king set me at liberty?”

“You ought rather to ask me what his reason was for having you arrested.”

“Since my arrest, I have had time to think over it, and my idea is that it arises out of some slight feeling of jealousy. My *fete* put M. Colbert out of temper, and M. Colbert discovered some cause of complaint against me; Belle-Isle, for instance.”

“No; there is no question at all just now of Belle-Isle.”

“What is it, then?”

“Do you remember those receipts for thirteen millions which M. de Mazarin contrived to steal from you?”

“Yes, of course!”

“Well, you are pronounced a public robber.”

“Good heavens!”

“Oh! that is not all. Do you also remember that letter you wrote to La Valliere?”

“Alas! yes.”

“And that proclaims you a traitor and a suborner.”

“Why should he have pardoned me, then?”

“We have not yet arrived at that part of our argument. I wish you to be quite convinced of the fact itself. Observe this well: the king knows you to be guilty of an appropriation of public funds. Oh! of course *I* know that you have done nothing of the kind; but, at all events, the king has seen the receipts, and he can do no other than believe you are incriminated.”

“I beg your pardon, I do not see — ”

“You will see presently, though. The king, moreover, having read your love-letter to La Valliere, and the offers you there made her, cannot retain any doubt of your intentions with regard to that young lady; you will admit that, I suppose?”

“Certainly. Pray conclude.”

“In the fewest words. The king, we may henceforth assume, is your powerful, implacable, and eternal enemy.”

“Agreed. But am I, then, so powerful, that he has not dared to sacrifice me, notwithstanding his hatred, with all the means which my weakness, or my misfortunes, may have given him as a hold upon me?”

“It is clear, beyond all doubt,” pursued Aramis, coldly, “that the king has quarreled with you — irreconcilably.”

“But, since he has absolved me — ”

"Do you believe it likely?" asked the bishop, with a searching look.

"Without believing in his sincerity, I believe it in the accomplished fact."

Aramis slightly shrugged his shoulders.

"But why, then, should Louis XIV. have commissioned you to tell me what you have just stated?"

"The king charged me with no message for you."

"With nothing!" said the superintendent, stupefied. "But, that order — "

"Oh! yes. You are quite right. There *is* an order, certainly;" and these words were pronounced by Aramis in so strange a tone, that Fouquet could not resist starting.

"You are concealing something from me, I see. What is it?"

Aramis softly rubbed his white fingers over his chin, but said nothing.

"Does the king exile me?"

"Do not act as if you were playing at the game children play at when they have to try and guess where a thing has been hidden, and are informed, by a bell being rung, when they are approaching near to it, or going away from it."

"Speak, then."

"Guess."

"You alarm me."

"Bah! that is because you have not guessed, then."

"What did the king say to you? In the name of our friendship, do not deceive me."

"The king has not said one word to me."

"You are killing me with impatience, D'Herblay. Am I still superintendent?"

"As long as you like."

"But what extraordinary empire have you so suddenly acquired over his majesty's mind?"

"Ah! that's the point."

"He does your bidding?"

"I believe so."

"It is hardly credible."

"So any one would say."

"D'Herblay, by our alliance, by our friendship, by everything you hold dearest in the world, speak openly, I implore you. By what means have you succeeded in overcoming Louis XIV.'s prejudices, for he did not like you, I am certain."

"The king will like me *now*," said Aramis, laying stress upon the last word.

"You have something particular, then, between you?"

"Yes."

"A secret, perhaps?"

"A secret."

"A secret of such a nature as to change his majesty's interests?"

"You are, indeed, a man of superior intelligence, monseigneur, and have made a particularly accurate guess. I have, in fact, discovered a secret, of a nature to change the interests of the king of France."

"Ah!" said Fouquet, with the reserve of a man who does not wish to ask any more questions.

"And you shall judge of it yourself," pursued Aramis; "and you shall tell me if I am mistaken with regard to the importance of this secret."

"I am listening, since you are good enough to unbosom yourself to me; only do not forget that I have asked you about nothing which it may be indiscreet in you to communicate."

Aramis seemed, for a moment, as if he were collecting himself.

"Do not speak!" said Fouquet: "there is still time enough."

"Do you remember," said the bishop, casting down his eyes, "the birth of Louis XIV.?"

"As if it were yesterday."

"Have you ever heard anything particular respecting his birth?"

"Nothing; except that the king was not really the son of Louis XIII."

"That does not matter to us, or the kingdom either; he is the son of his father, says the French law, whose father is recognized by law."

"True; but it is a grave matter, when the quality of races is called into question."

"A merely secondary question, after all. So that, in fact, you have never learned or heard anything in particular?"

"Nothing."

"That is where my secret begins. The queen, you must know, instead of being delivered of a son, was delivered of twins."

Fouquet looked up suddenly as he replied:

"And the second is dead?"

“You will see. These twins seemed likely to be regarded as the pride of their mother, and the hope of France; but the weak nature of the king, his superstitious feelings, made him apprehend a series of conflicts between two children whose rights were equal; so he put out of the way — he suppressed — one of the twins.”

“Suppressed, do you say?”

“Have patience. Both the children grew up; the one on the throne, whose minister you are — the other, who is my friend, in gloom and isolation.”

“Good heavens! What are you saying, Monsieur d’Herblay? And what is this poor prince doing?”

“Ask me, rather, what has he done.”

“Yes, yes.”

“He was brought up in the country, and then thrown into a fortress which goes by the name of the Bastile.”

“Is it possible?” cried the surintendant, clasping his hands.

“The one was the most fortunate of men: the other the most unhappy and miserable of all living beings.”

“Does his mother not know this?”

“Anne of Austria knows it all.”

“And the king?”

“Knows absolutely nothing.”

“So much the better,” said Fouquet.

This remark seemed to make a great impression on Aramis; he looked at Fouquet with the most anxious expression of countenance.

“I beg your pardon; I interrupted you,” said Fouquet.

“I was saying,” resumed Aramis, “that this poor prince was the unhappiest of human beings, when Heaven, whose thoughts are over all His creatures, undertook to come to his assistance.”

“Oh! in what way? Tell me.”

“You will see. The reigning king — I say the reigning king — you can guess very well why?”

“No. Why?”

“Because *both* of them, being legitimate princes, ought to have been kings. Is not that your opinion?”

“It is, certainly.”

“Unreservedly?”

“Most unreservedly; twins are one person in two bodies.”

"I am pleased that a legist of your learning and authority should have pronounced such an opinion. It is agreed, then, that each of them possessed equal rights, is it not?"

"Incontestably! but, gracious heavens, what an extraordinary circumstance!"

"We are not at the end of it yet. — Patience."

"Oh! I shall find 'patience' enough."

"Heaven wished to raise up for that oppressed child an avenger, or a supporter, or vindicator, if you prefer it. It happened that the reigning king, the usurper — you are quite of my opinion, I believe, that it is an act of usurpation quietly to enjoy, and selfishly to assume the right over, an inheritance to which a man has only half a right?"

"Yes, usurpation is the word."

"In that case, I continue. It was Heaven's will that the usurper should possess, in the person of his first minister, a man of great talent, of large and generous nature."

"Well, well," said Fouquet, "I understand you; you have relied upon me to repair the wrong which has been done to this unhappy brother of Louis XIV. You have thought well; I will help you. I thank you, D'Herblay, I thank you."

"Oh, no, it is not that at all; you have not allowed me to finish," said Aramis, perfectly unmoved.

"I will not say another word, then."

"M. Fouquet, I was observing, the minister of the reigning sovereign, was suddenly taken into the greatest aversion, and menaced with the ruin of his fortune, loss of liberty, loss of life even, by intrigue and personal hatred, to which the king gave too readily an attentive ear. But Heaven permits (still, however, out of consideration for the unhappy prince who had been sacrificed) that M. Fouquet should in his turn have a devoted friend who knew this state secret, and felt that he possessed strength and courage enough to divulge this secret, after having had the strength to carry it locked up in his own heart for twenty years.

"Go no farther," said Fouquet, full of generous feelings. "I understand you, and can guess everything now. You went to see the king when the intelligence of my arrest reached you; you implored him, he refused to listen to you; then you threatened him with that secret, threatened to reveal it, and Louis XIV., alarmed at the risk of its betrayal, granted to the terror of your indiscretion what he refused to your generous intercession. I understand, I understand; you have the king in your power; I understand."

"You understand *nothing* — as yet," replied Aramis, "and again you interrupt me. Then, too, allow me to observe that you pay no attention to logical reasoning, and seem to forget what you ought most to remember."

"What do you mean?"

"You know upon what I laid the greatest stress at the beginning of our conversation?"

"Yes, his majesty's hate, invincible hate for me; yes, but what feeling of hate could resist the threat of such a revelation?"

"Such a revelation, do you say? that is the very point where your logic fails you. What! do you suppose that if I had made such a revelation to the king, I should have been alive now?"

"It is not ten minutes ago that you were with the king."

"That may be. He might not have had the time to get me killed outright, but he would have had the time to get me gagged and thrown in a dungeon. Come, come, show a little consistency in your reasoning, *mordieu!*"

And by the mere use of this word, which was so thoroughly his old musketeer's expression, forgotten by one who never seemed to forget anything, Fouquet could not but understand to what a pitch of exaltation the calm, impenetrable bishop of Vannes had wrought himself. He shuddered.

"And then," replied the latter, after having mastered his feelings, "should I be the man I really am, should I be the true friend you believe me, if I were to expose you, whom the king already hates so bitterly, to a feeling more than ever to be dreaded in that young man? To have robbed him, is nothing; to have addressed the woman he loves, is not much; but to hold in your keeping both his crown and his honor, why, he would pluck out your heart with his own hands."

"You have not allowed him to penetrate your secret, then?"

"I would sooner, far sooner, have swallowed at one draught all the poisons that Mithridates drank in twenty years, in order to try and avoid death, than have betrayed my secret to the king."

"What have you done, then?"

"Ah! now we are coming to the point, monseigneur. I think I shall not fail to excite in you a little interest. You are listening, I hope."

"How can you ask me if I am listening? Go on."

Aramis walked softly all round the room, satisfied himself that they were alone, and that all was silent, and then returned and placed himself close to the armchair in which Fouquet was seated, awaiting with the deepest anxiety the revelation he had to make.

“I forgot to tell you,” resumed Aramis, addressing himself to Fouquet, who listened to him with the most absorbed attention — ”I forgot to mention a most remarkable circumstance respecting these twins, namely, that God had formed them so startlingly, so miraculously, like each other, that it would be utterly impossible to distinguish the one from the other. Their own mother would not be able to distinguish them.”

“Is it possible?” exclaimed Fouquet.

“The same noble character in their features, the same carriage, the same stature, the same voice.”

“But their thoughts? degree of intelligence? their knowledge of human life?”

“There is inequality there, I admit, monseigneur. Yes; for the prisoner of the Bastile is, most incontestably, superior in every way to his brother; and if, from his prison, this unhappy victim were to pass to the throne, France would not, from the earliest period of its history, perhaps, have had a master more powerful in genius and nobility of character.”

Fouquet buried his face in his hands, as if he were overwhelmed by the weight of this immense secret. Aramis approached him.

“There is a further inequality,” he said, continuing his work of temptation, “an inequality which concerns yourself, monseigneur, between the twins, both sons of Louis XIII., namely, the last comer does not know M. Colbert.”

Fouquet raised his head immediately — his features were pale and distorted. The bolt had hit its mark — not his heart, but his mind and comprehension.

“I understand you,” he said to Aramis; “you are proposing a conspiracy to me?”

“Something like it.”

“One of those attempts which, as you said at the beginning of this conversation, alters the fate of empires?”

“And of superintendents, too; yes, monseigneur.”

“In a word, you propose that I should agree to the substitution of the son of Louis XIII., who is now a prisoner in the Bastile, for the son of Louis

XIII., who is at this moment asleep in the Chamber of Morpheus?”

Aramis smiled with the sinister expression of the sinister thought which was passing through his brain. “Exactly,” he said.

“Have you thought,” continued Fouquet, becoming animated with that strength of talent which in a few seconds originates, and matures the conception of a plan, and with that largeness of view which foresees all consequences, and embraces every result at a glance — ”have you thought that we must assemble the nobility, the clergy, and the third estate of the realm; that we shall have to depose the reigning sovereign, to disturb by so frightful a scandal the tomb of their dead father, to sacrifice the life, the honor of a woman, Anne of Austria, the life and peace of mind and heart of another woman, Maria Theresa; and suppose that it were all done, if we were to succeed in doing it — ”

“I do not understand you,” continued Aramis, coldly. “There is not a single syllable of sense in all you have just said.”

“What!” said the superintendent, surprised, “a man like you refuse to view the practical bearing of the case! Do you confine yourself to the childish delight of a political illusion, and neglect the chances of its being carried into execution; in other words, the reality itself, is it possible?”

“My friend,” said Aramis, emphasizing the word with a kind of disdainful familiarity, “what does Heaven do in order to substitute one king for another?”

“Heaven!” exclaimed Fouquet — ”Heaven gives directions to its agent, who seizes upon the doomed victim, hurries him away, and seats the triumphant rival on the empty throne. But you forget that this agent is called death. Oh! Monsieur d’Herblay, in Heaven’s name, tell me if you have had the idea — ”

“There is no question of that, monseigneur; you are going beyond the object in view. Who spoke of Louis XIV.’s death? who spoke of adopting the example which Heaven sets in following out the strict execution of its decrees? No, I wish you to understand that Heaven effects its purposes without confusion or disturbance, without exciting comment or remark, without difficulty or exertion; and that men, inspired by Heaven, succeed like Heaven itself, in all their undertakings, in all they attempt, in all they do.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, my *friend*,” returned Aramis, with the same intonation on the word friend that he had applied to it the first time — ”I mean that if there has been any confusion, scandal, and even effort in the substitution of the prisoner for the king, I defy you to prove it.”

“What!” cried Fouquet, whiter than the handkerchief with which he wiped his temples, “what do you say?”

“Go to the king’s apartment,” continued Aramis, tranquilly, “and you who know the mystery, I defy even you to perceive that the prisoner of the Bastile is lying in his brother’s bed.”

“But the king,” stammered Fouquet, seized with horror at the intelligence.

“What king?” said Aramis, in his gentlest tone; “the one who hates you, or the one who likes you?”

“The king — of — *yesterday*.”

“The king of yesterday! be quite easy on that score; he has gone to take the place in the Bastile which his victim occupied for so many years.”

“Great God! And who took him there?”

“I.”

“You?”

“Yes, and in the simplest way. I carried him away last night. While he was descending into midnight, the other was ascending into day. I do not think there has been any disturbance whatever. A flash of lightning without thunder awakens nobody.”

Fouquet uttered a thick, smothered cry, as if he had been struck by some invisible blow, and clasping his head between his clenched hands, he murmured: “You did that?”

“Cleverly enough, too; what do you think of it?”

“You dethroned the king? imprisoned him, too?”

“Yes, that has been done.”

“And such an action was committed *here*, at Vaux?”

“Yes, here, at Vaux, in the Chamber of Morpheus. It would almost seem that it had been built in anticipation of such an act.”

“And at what time did it occur?”

“Last night, between twelve and one o’clock.”

Fouquet made a movement as if he were on the point of springing upon Aramis; he restrained himself. “At Vaux; under my roof!” he said, in a half-strangled voice.

“I believe so! for it is still your house, and it is likely to continue so, since M. Colbert cannot rob you of it now.”

“It was under my roof, then, monsieur, that you committed this crime?”

“This crime?” said Aramis, stupefied.

“This abominable crime!” pursued Fouquet, becoming more and more excited; “this crime more execrable than an assassination! this crime which dishonors my name forever, and entails upon me the horror of posterity.”

“You are not in your senses, monsieur,” replied Aramis, in an irresolute tone of voice; “you are speaking too loudly; take care!”

“I will call out so loudly, that the whole world shall hear me.”

“Monsieur Fouquet, take care!”

Fouquet turned round towards the prelate, whom he looked at full in the face. “You have dishonored me,” he said, “in committing so foul an act of treason, so heinous a crime upon my guest, upon one who was peacefully reposing beneath my roof. Oh! woe, woe is me!”

“Woe to the man, rather, who beneath your roof meditated the ruin of your fortune, your life. Do you forget that?”

“He was my guest, my sovereign.”

Aramis rose, his eyes literally bloodshot, his mouth trembling convulsively. “Have I a man out of his senses to deal with?” he said.

“You have an honorable man to deal with.”

“You are mad.”

“A man who will prevent you consummating your crime.”

“You are mad, I say.”

“A man who would sooner, oh! far sooner, die; who would kill you even, rather than allow you to complete his dishonor.”

And Fouquet snatched up his sword, which D’Artagnan had placed at the head of his bed, and clenched it resolutely in his hand. Aramis frowned, and thrust his hand into his breast as if in search of a weapon. This movement did not escape Fouquet, who, full of nobleness and pride in his magnanimity, threw his sword to a distance from him, and approached Aramis so close as to touch his shoulder with his disarmed hand. “Monsieur,” he said, “I would sooner die here on the spot than survive this terrible disgrace; and if you have any pity left for me, I entreat you to take my life.”

Aramis remained silent and motionless.

“You do not reply?” said Fouquet.

Aramis raised his head gently, and a glimmer of hope might be seen once more to animate his eyes. “Reflect, monseigneur,” he said, “upon everything we have to expect. As the matter now stands, the king is still alive, and his imprisonment saves your life.”

“Yes,” replied Fouquet, “you may have been acting on my behalf, but I will not, do not, accept your services. But, first of all, I do not wish your ruin. You will leave this house.”

Aramis stifled the exclamation which almost escaped his broken heart.

“I am hospitable towards all who are dwellers beneath my roof,” continued Fouquet, with an air of inexpressible majesty; “you will not be more fatally lost than he whose ruin you have consummated.”

“You will be so,” said Aramis, in a hoarse, prophetic voice, “you will be so, believe me.”

“I accept the augury, Monsieur d’Herblay; but nothing shall prevent me, nothing shall stop me. You will leave Vaux — you must leave France; I give you four hours to place yourself out of the king’s reach.”

“Four hours?” said Aramis, scornfully and incredulously.

“Upon the word of Fouquet, no one shall follow you before the expiration of that time. You will therefore have four hours’ advance of those whom the king may wish to dispatch after you.”

“Four hours!” repeated Aramis, in a thick, smothered voice.

“It is more than you will need to get on board a vessel and flee to Belle-Isle, which I give you as a place of refuge.”

“Ah!” murmured Aramis.

“Belle-Isle is as much mine for you, as Vaux is mine for the king. Go, D’Herblay, go! as long as I live, not a hair of your head shall be injured.”

“Thank you,” said Aramis, with a cold irony of manner.

“Go at once, then, and give me your hand, before we both hasten away; you to save your life, I to save my honor.”

Aramis withdrew from his breast the hand he had concealed there; it was stained with his blood. He had dug his nails into his flesh, as if in punishment for having nursed so many projects, more vain, insensate, and fleeting than the life of the man himself. Fouquet was horror-stricken, and then his heart smote him with pity. He threw open his arms as if to embrace him.

“I had no arms,” murmured Aramis, as wild and terrible in his wrath as the shade of Dido. And then, without touching Fouquet’s hand, he turned his head aside, and stepped back a pace or two. His last word was an imprecation, his last gesture a curse, which his blood-stained hand seemed to invoke, as it sprinkled on Fouquet's face a few drops of blood which flowed from his breast. And both of them darted out of the room by the secret staircase which led down to the inner courtyard. Fouquet ordered his best horses, while Aramis paused at the foot of the staircase which led to Porthos's apartment. He reflected profoundly and for some time, while Fouquet's carriage left the courtyard at full gallop.

"Shall I go alone?" said Aramis to himself, "or warn the prince? Oh! fury! Warn the prince, and then — do what? Take him with me? To carry this accusing witness about with me everywhere? War, too, would follow — civil war, implacable in its nature! And without any resource save myself — it is impossible! What could he do without me? Oh! without me he will be utterly destroyed. Yet who knows — let destiny be fulfilled — condemned he was, let him remain so then! Good or evil Spirit — gloomy and scornful Power, whom men call the genius of humanity, thou art a power more restlessly uncertain, more baselessly useless, than wild mountain wind! Chance, thou term'st thyself, but thou art nothing; thou inflamest everything with thy breath, crumblest mountains at thy approach, and suddenly art thyself destroyed at the presence of the Cross of dead wood behind which stand another Power invisible like thyself — whom thou deniest, perhaps, but whose avenging hand is on thee, and hurls thee in the dust dishonored and unnamed! Lost! — I am lost! What can be done? Flee to Belle-Isle? Yes, and leave Porthos behind me, to talk and relate the whole affair to every one! Porthos, too, who will have to suffer for what he has done. I will not let poor Porthos suffer. He seems like one of the members of my own frame; and his grief or misfortune would be mine as well. Porthos shall leave with me, and shall follow my destiny. It must be so."

And Aramis, apprehensive of meeting any one to whom his hurried movements might appear suspicious, ascended the staircase without being perceived. Porthos, so recently returned from Paris, was already in a profound sleep; his huge body forgot its fatigue, as his mind forgot its thoughts. Aramis entered, light as a shadow, and placed his nervous grasp on the giant's shoulder. "Come, Porthos," he cried, "come."

Porthos obeyed, rose from his bed, opened his eyes, even before his intelligence seemed to be aroused.

"We leave immediately," said Aramis.

“Ah!” returned Porthos.

“We shall go mounted, and faster than we have ever gone in our lives.”

“Ah!” repeated Porthos.

“Dress yourself, my friend.”

And he helped the giant to dress himself, and thrust his gold and diamonds into his pocket. Whilst he was thus engaged, a slight noise attracted his attention, and on looking up, he saw D’Artagnan watching them through the half-opened door. Aramis started.

“What the devil are you doing there in such an agitated manner?” said the musketeer.

“Hush!” said Porthos.

“We are going off on a mission of great importance,” added the bishop.

“You are very fortunate,” said the musketeer.

“Oh, dear me!” said Porthos, “I feel so wearied; I would far sooner have been fast asleep. But the service of the king....”

“Have you seen M. Fouquet?” said Aramis to D’Artagnan.

“Yes, this very minute, in a carriage.”

“What did he say to you?”

“‘Adieu;’ nothing more.”

“Was that all?”

“What else do you think he could say? Am I worth anything now, since you have got into such high favor?”

“Listen,” said Aramis, embracing the musketeer; “your good times are returning again. You will have no occasion to be jealous of any one.”

“Ah! bah!”

“I predict that something will happen to you to-day which will increase your importance more than ever.”

“Really?”

“You know that I know all the news?”

“Oh, yes!”

“Come, Porthos, are you ready? Let us go.”

“I am quite ready, Aramis.”

“Let us embrace D’Artagnan first.”

“Most certainly.”

“But the horses?”

“Oh! there is no want of them here. Will you have mine?”

“No; Porthos has his own stud. So adieu! adieu!”

The fugitives mounted their horses beneath the very eyes of the captain of the musketeers, who held Porthos's stirrup for him, and gazed after them until they were out of sight.

"On any other occasion," thought the Gascon, "I should say that those gentlemen were making their escape; but in these days politics seem so changed that such an exit is termed going on a mission. I have no objection; let me attend to my own affairs, that is more than enough for *me*," — and he philosophically entered his apartments.

CHAPTER XXII.

Showing How the Countersign Was Respected at the Bastile.

Fouquet tore along as fast as his horses could drag him. On his way he trembled with horror at the idea of what had just been revealed to him.

"What must have been," he thought, "the youth of those extraordinary men, who, even as age is stealing fast upon them, are still able to conceive such gigantic plans, and carry them through without a tremor?"

At one moment he could not resist the idea that all Aramis had just been recounting to him was nothing more than a dream, and whether the fable itself was not the snare; so that when Fouquet arrived at the Bastile, he might possibly find an order of arrest, which would send him to join the dethroned king. Strongly impressed with this idea, he gave certain sealed orders on his route, while fresh horses were being harnessed to his carriage. These orders were addressed to M. d'Artagnan and to certain others whose fidelity to the king was far above suspicion.

"In this way," said Fouquet to himself, "prisoner or not, I shall have performed the duty that I owe my honor. The orders will not reach them until after my return, if I should return free, and consequently they will not have been unsealed. I shall take them back again. If I am delayed; it will be because some misfortune will have befallen me; and in that case assistance will be sent for me as well as for the king."

Prepared in this manner, the superintendent arrived at the Bastile; he had traveled at the rate of five leagues and a half the hour. Every circumstance of delay which Aramis had escaped in his visit to the Bastile befell Fouquet. It was useless giving his name, equally useless his being recognized; he could not succeed in obtaining an entrance. By dint of entreaties, threats, commands, he succeeded in inducing a sentinel to speak to one of the subalterns, who went and told the major. As for the governor they did not even dare disturb him. Fouquet sat in his carriage, at the outer gate of the fortress, chafing with rage and impatience, awaiting the return of the officers, who at last re-appeared with a sufficiently sulky air.

"Well," said Fouquet, impatiently, "what did the major say?"

"Well, monsieur," replied the soldier, "the major laughed in my face. He told me that M. Fouquet was at Vaux, and that even were he at Paris, M. Fouquet would not get up at so early an hour as the present."

"*Mordieu!* you are an absolute set of fools," cried the minister, darting out of the carriage; and before the subaltern had time to shut the gate, Fouquet sprang through it, and ran forward in spite of the soldier, who cried out for assistance. Fouquet gained ground, regardless of the cries of the man, who, however, having at last come up with Fouquet, called out to the sentinel of the second gate, "Look out, look out, sentinel!" The man crossed his pike before the minister; but the latter, robust and active, and hurried away, too, by his passion, wrested the pike from the soldier and struck him a violent blow on the shoulder with it. The subaltern, who approached too closely, received a share of the blows as well. Both of them uttered loud and furious cries, at the sound of which the whole of the first body of the advanced guard poured out of the guardhouse. Among them there was one, however, who recognized the superintendent, and who called, "Monseigneur, ah! monseigneur. Stop, stop, you fellows!" And he effectually checked the soldiers, who were on the point of revenging their companions. Fouquet desired them to open the gate, but they refused to do so without the countersign; he desired them to inform the governor of his presence; but the latter had already heard the disturbance at the gate. He ran forward, followed by his major, and accompanied by a picket of twenty men, persuaded that an attack was being made on the Bastile. Baisemeaux also recognized Fouquet immediately, and dropped the sword he bravely had been brandishing.

"Ah! monseigneur," he stammered, "how can I excuse — "

"Monsieur," said the superintendent, flushed with anger, and heated by his exertions, "I congratulate you. Your watch and ward are admirably kept."

Baisemeaux turned pale, thinking that this remark was made ironically, and portended a furious burst of anger. But Fouquet had recovered his breath, and, beckoning the sentinel and the subaltern, who were rubbing their shoulders, towards him, he said, "There are twenty pistoles for the sentinel, and fifty for the officer. Pray receive my compliments, gentlemen. I will not fail to speak to his majesty about you. And now, M. Baisemeaux, a word with you."

And he followed the governor to his official residence, accompanied by a murmur of general satisfaction. Baisemeaux was already trembling with shame and uneasiness. Aramis's early visit, from that moment, seemed to possess consequences, which a functionary such as he (Baisemeaux) was, was perfectly justified in apprehending. It was quite another thing, however, when Fouquet in a sharp tone of voice, and with an imperious look, said, "You have seen M. d'Herblay this morning?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"And are you not horrified at the crime of which you have made yourself an accomplice?"

"Well," thought Baisemeaux, "good so far;" and then he added, aloud, "But what crime, monseigneur, do you allude to?"

"That for which you can be quartered alive, monsieur — do not forget that! But this is not a time to show anger. Conduct me immediately to the prisoner."

"To what prisoner?" said Baisemeaux, trembling.

"You pretend to be ignorant? Very good — it is the best plan for you, perhaps; for if, in fact, you were to admit your participation in such a crime, it would be all over with you. I wish, therefore, to seem to believe in your assumption of ignorance."

"I entreat you, monseigneur — "

"That will do. Lead me to the prisoner."

"To Marchiali?"

"Who is Marchiali?"

"The prisoner who was brought back this morning by M. d'Herblay."

"He is called Marchiali?" said the superintendent, his conviction somewhat shaken by Baisemeaux's cool manner.

"Yes, monseigneur; that is the name under which he was inscribed here."

Fouquet looked steadily at Baisemeaux, as if he would read his very heart; and perceived, with that clear-sightedness most men possess who are accustomed to the exercise of power, that the man was speaking with perfect sincerity. Besides, in observing his face for a few moments, he could not believe that Aramis would have chosen such a confidant.

"It is the prisoner," said the superintendent to him, "whom M. d'Herblay carried away the day before yesterday?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

“And whom he brought back this morning?” added Fouquet, quickly: for he understood immediately the mechanism of Aramis’s plan.

“Precisely, monseigneur.”

“And his name is Marchiali, you say?”

“Yes, Marchiali. If monseigneur has come here to remove him, so much the better, for I was going to write about him.”

“What has he done, then?”

“Ever since this morning he has annoyed me extremely. He has had such terrible fits of passion, as almost to make me believe that he would bring the Bastile itself down about our ears.”

“I will soon relieve you of his possession,” said Fouquet.

“Ah! so much the better.”

“Conduct me to his prison.”

“Will monseigneur give me the order?”

“What order?”

“An order from the king.”

“Wait until I sign you one.”

“That will not be sufficient, monseigneur. I must have an order from the king.”

Fouquet assumed an irritated expression. “As you are so scrupulous,” he said, “with regard to allowing prisoners to leave, show me the order by which this one was set at liberty.”

Baisemeaux showed him the order to release Seldon.

“Very good,” said Fouquet; “but Seldon is not Marchiali.”

“But Marchiali is not at liberty, monseigneur; he is here.”

“But you said that M. d’Herblay carried him away and brought him back again.”

“I did not say so.”

“So surely did you say it, that I almost seem to hear it now.”

“It was a slip of my tongue, then, monseigneur.”

“Take care, M. Baisemeaux, take care.”

“I have nothing to fear, monseigneur; I am acting according to the very strictest regulation.”

“Do you dare to say so?”

“I would say so in the presence of one of the apostles. M. d’Herblay brought me an order to set Seldon at liberty. Seldon is free.”

“I tell you that Marchiali has left the Bastile.”

“You must prove that, monseigneur.”

“Let me see him.”

“You, monseigneur, who govern this kingdom, know very well that no one can see any of the prisoners without an express order from the king.”

“M. d’Herblay has entered, however.”

“That remains to be proved, monseigneur.”

“M. de Baisemeaux, once more I warn you to pay particular attention to what you are saying.”

“All the documents are there, monseigneur.”

“M. d’Herblay is overthrown.”

“Overthrown? — M. d’Herblay! Impossible!”

“You see that he has undoubtedly influenced you.”

“No, monseigneur; what does, in fact, influence me, is the king’s service. I am doing my duty. Give me an order from him, and you shall enter.”

“Stay, M. le gouverneur, I give you my word that if you allow me to see the prisoner, I will give you an order from the king at once.”

“Give it to me now, monseigneur.”

“And that, if you refuse me, I will have you and all your officers arrested on the spot.”

“Before you commit such an act of violence, monseigneur, you will reflect,” said Baisemeaux, who had turned very pale, “that we will only obey an order signed by the king; and that it will be just as easy for you to obtain one to see Marchiali as to obtain one to do me so much injury; me, too, who am perfectly innocent.”

“True. True!” cried Fouquet, furiously; “perfectly true. M. de Baisemeaux,” he added, in a sonorous voice, drawing the unhappy governor towards him, “do you know why I am so anxious to speak to the prisoner?”

“No, monseigneur; and allow me to observe that you are terrifying me out of my senses; I am trembling all over — in fact, I feel as though I were about to faint.”

“You will stand a better chance of fainting outright, Monsieur Baisemeaux, when I return here at the head of ten thousand men and thirty pieces of cannon.”

“Good heavens, monseigneur, you are losing your senses.”

“When I have roused the whole population of Paris against you and your accursed towers, and have battered open the gates of this place, and hanged you to the topmost tree of yonder pinnacle!”

"Monseigneur! monseigneur! for pity's sake!"

"I give you ten minutes to make up your mind," added Fouquet, in a calm voice. "I will sit down here, in this armchair, and wait for you; if, in ten minutes' time, you still persist, I leave this place, and you may think me as mad as you like. Then — you shall *see!*"

Baisemeaux stamped his foot on the ground like a man in a state of despair, but he did not reply a single syllable; whereupon Fouquet seized a pen and ink, and wrote:

"Order for M. le Prevot des Marchands to assemble the municipal guard and to march upon the Bastile on the king's immediate service."

Baisemeaux shrugged his shoulders. Fouquet wrote:

"Order for the Duc de Bouillon and M. le Prince de Conde to assume the command of the Swiss guards, of the king's guards, and to march upon the Bastile on the king's immediate service."

Baisemeaux reflected. Fouquet still wrote:

"Order for every soldier, citizen, or gentleman to seize and apprehend, wherever he may be found, le Chevalier d'Herblay, Eveque de Vannes, and his accomplices, who are: first, M. de Baisemeaux, governor of the Bastile, suspected of the crimes of high treason and rebellion — "

"Stop, monseigneur!" cried Baisemeaux; "I do not understand a single jot of the whole matter; but so many misfortunes, even were it madness itself that had set them at their awful work, might happen here in a couple of hours, that the king, by whom I must be judged, will see whether I have been wrong in withdrawing the countersign before this flood of imminent catastrophes. Come with me to the keep, monseigneur, you shall see Marchiali."

Fouquet darted out of the room, followed by Baisemeaux as he wiped the perspiration from his face. "What a terrible morning!" he said; "what a disgrace for *me!*"

"Walk faster," replied Fouquet.

Baisemeaux made a sign to the jailer to precede them. He was afraid of his companion, which the latter could not fail to perceive.

"A truce to this child's play," he said, roughly. "Let the man remain here; take the keys yourself, and show me the way. Not a single person, do you understand, must hear what is going to take place here."

"Ah!" said Baisemeaux, undecided.

"Again!" cried M. Fouquet. "Ah! say 'no' at once, and I will leave the Bastile and will myself carry my own dispatches."

Baisemeaux bowed his head, took the keys, and unaccompanied, except by the minister, ascended the staircase. The higher they advanced up the spiral staircase, the more clearly did certain muffled murmurs become distinct appeals and fearful imprecations.

"What is that?" asked Fouquet.

"That is your Marchiali," said the governor; "this is the way these madmen scream."

And he accompanied that reply with a glance more pregnant with injurious allusion, as far as Fouquet was concerned, than politeness. The latter trembled; he had just recognized in one cry more terrible than any that had preceded it, the king's voice. He paused on the staircase, snatching the bunch of keys from Baisemeaux, who thought this new madman was going to dash out his brains with one of them. "Ah!" he cried, "M. d'Herblay did not say a word about that."

"Give me the keys at once!" cried Fouquet, tearing them from his hand. "Which is the key of the door I am to open?"

"That one."

A fearful cry, followed by a violent blow against the door, made the whole staircase resound with the echo.

"Leave this place," said Fouquet to Baisemeaux, in a threatening tone.

"I ask nothing better," murmured the latter, to himself. "There will be a couple of madmen face to face, and the one will kill the other, I am sure."

"Go!" repeated Fouquet. "If you place your foot on this staircase before I call you, remember that you shall take the place of the meanest prisoner in the Bastile."

"This job will kill me, I am sure it will," muttered Baisemeaux, as he withdrew with tottering steps.

The prisoner's cries became more and more terrible. When Fouquet had satisfied himself that Baisemeaux had reached the bottom of the staircase, he inserted the key in the first lock. It was then that he heard the hoarse, choking voice of the king, crying out, in a frenzy of rage, "Help, help! I am the king." The key of the second door was not the same as the first, and Fouquet was obliged to look for it on the bunch. The king, however, furious and almost mad with rage and passion, shouted at the top of his voice, "It was M. Fouquet who brought me here. Help me against M. Fouquet! I am the king! Help the king against M. Fouquet!” These cries filled the minister’s heart with terrible emotions. They were followed by a shower of blows leveled against the door with a part of the broken chair with which the king had armed himself. Fouquet at last succeeded in finding the key. The king was almost exhausted; he could hardly articulate distinctly as he shouted, “Death to Fouquet! death to the traitor Fouquet!” The door flew open.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The King’s Gratitude.

The two men were on the point of darting towards each other when they suddenly and abruptly stopped, as a mutual recognition took place, and each uttered a cry of horror.

“Have you come to assassinate me, monsieur?” said the king, when he recognized Fouquet.

“The king in this state!” murmured the minister.

Nothing could be more terrible indeed than the appearance of the young prince at the moment Fouquet had surprised him; his clothes were in tatters; his shirt, open and torn to rags, was stained with sweat and with the blood which streamed from his lacerated breast and arms. Haggard, ghastly pale, his hair in disheveled masses, Louis XIV. presented the most perfect picture of despair, distress, anger and fear combined that could possibly be united in one figure. Fouquet was so touched, so affected and disturbed by it, that he ran towards him with his arms stretched out and his eyes filled with tears. Louis held up the massive piece of wood of which he had made such a furious use.

“Sire,” said Fouquet, in a voice trembling with emotion, “do you not recognize the most faithful of your friends?”

“A friend — you!” repeated Louis, gnashing his teeth in a manner which betrayed his hate and desire for speedy vengeance.

“The most respectful of your servants,” added Fouquet, throwing himself on his knees. The king let the rude weapon fall from his grasp. Fouquet approached him, kissed his knees, and took him in his arms with inconceivable tenderness.

“My king, my child,” he said, “how you must have suffered!”

Louis, recalled to himself by the change of situation, looked at himself, and ashamed of the disordered state of his apparel, ashamed of his conduct, and ashamed of the air of pity and protection that was shown towards him, drew back. Fouquet did not understand this movement; he did not perceive that the king's feeling of pride would never forgive him for having been a witness of such an exhibition of weakness.

"Come, sire," he said, "you are free."

"Free?" repeated the king. "Oh! you set me at liberty, then, after having dared to lift up your hand against me."

"You do not believe that!" exclaimed Fouquet, indignantly; "you cannot believe me to be guilty of such an act."

And rapidly, warmly even, he related the whole particulars of the intrigue, the details of which are already known to the reader. While the recital continued, Louis suffered the most horrible anguish of mind; and when it was finished, the magnitude of the danger he had run struck him far more than the importance of the secret relative to his twin brother.

"Monsieur," he said, suddenly to Fouquet, "this double birth is a falsehood; it is impossible — you cannot have been the dupe of it."

"Sire!"

"It is impossible, I tell you, that the honor, the virtue of my mother can be suspected, and my first minister has not yet done justice on the criminals!"

"Reflect, sire, before you are hurried away by anger," replied Fouquet. "The birth of your brother — "

"I have only one brother — and that is Monsieur. You know it as well as myself. There is a plot, I tell you, beginning with the governor of the Bastile."

"Be careful, sire, for this man has been deceived as every one else has by the prince's likeness to yourself."

"Likeness? Absurd!"

"This Marchiali must be singularly like your majesty, to be able to deceive every one's eye," Fouquet persisted.

"Ridiculous!"

"Do not say so, sire; those who had prepared everything in order to face and deceive your ministers, your mother, your officers of state, the members of your family, must be quite confident of the resemblance between you."

"But where are these persons, then?" murmured the king.

"At Vaux."

"At Vaux! and you suffer them to remain there!"

"My most instant duty appeared to me to be your majesty's release. I have accomplished that duty; and now, whatever your majesty may command, shall be done. I await your orders.”

Louis reflected for a few moments.

“Muster all the troops in Paris,” he said.

“All the necessary orders are given for that purpose,” replied Fouquet.

“You have given orders!” exclaimed the king.

“For that purpose, yes, sire; your majesty will be at the head of ten thousand men in less than an hour.”

The only reply the king made was to take hold of Fouquet’s hand with such an expression of feeling, that it was very easy to perceive how strongly he had, until that remark, maintained his suspicions of the minister, notwithstanding the latter’s intervention.

“And with these troops,” he said, “we shall go at once and besiege in your house the rebels who by this time will have established and intrenched themselves therein.”

“I should be surprised if that were the case,” replied Fouquet.

“Why?”

“Because their chief — the very soul of the enterprise — having been unmasked by me, the whole plan seems to me to have miscarried.”

“You have unmasked this false prince also?”

“No, I have not seen him.”

“Whom have you seen, then?”

“The leader of the enterprise, not that unhappy young man; the latter is merely an instrument, destined through his whole life to wretchedness, I plainly perceive.”

“Most certainly.”

“It is M. l’Abbe d’Herblay, Eveque de Vannes.”

“Your friend?”

“He was my friend, sire,” replied Fouquet, nobly.

“An unfortunate circumstance for you,” said the king, in a less generous tone of voice.

“Such friendships, sire, had nothing dishonorable in them so long as I was ignorant of the crime.”

“You should have foreseen it.”

“If I am guilty, I place myself in your majesty’s hands.”

“Ah! Monsieur Fouquet, it was not that I meant,” returned the king, sorry to have shown the bitterness of his thought in such a manner. “Well! I assure you that, notwithstanding the mask with which the villain covered his face, I had something like a vague suspicion that he was the very man. But with this chief of the enterprise there was a man of prodigious strength, the one who menaced me with a force almost herculean; what is he?"

"It must be his friend the Baron du Vallon, formerly one of the musketeers."

"The friend of D'Artagnan? the friend of the Comte de la Fere? Ah!" exclaimed the king, as he paused at the name of the latter, "we must not forget the connection that existed between the conspirators and M. de Bragelonne."

"Sire, sire, do not go too far. M. de la Fere is the most honorable man in France. Be satisfied with those whom I deliver up to you."

"With those whom you deliver up to me, you say? Very good, for you will deliver up those who are guilty to me."

"What does your majesty understand by that?" inquired Fouquet.

"I understand," replied the king, "that we shall soon arrive at Vaux with a large body of troops, that we will lay violent hands upon that nest of vipers, and that not a soul shall escape."

"Your majesty will put these men to death!" cried Fouquet.

"To the very meanest of them."

"Oh! sire."

"Let us understand one another, Monsieur Fouquet," said the king, haughtily. "We no longer live in times when assassination was the only and the last resource kings held in reservation at extremity. No, Heaven be praised! I have parliaments who sit and judge in my name, and I have scaffolds on which supreme authority is carried out."

Fouquet turned pale. "I will take the liberty of observing to your majesty, that any proceedings instituted respecting these matters would bring down the greatest scandal upon the dignity of the throne. The august name of Anne of Austria must never be allowed to pass the lips of the people accompanied by a smile."

"Justice must be done, however, monsieur."

"Good, sire; but royal blood must not be shed upon a scaffold."

"The royal blood! you believe that!" cried the king with fury in his voice, stamping his foot on the ground. "This double birth is an invention; and in that invention, particularly, do I see M. d'Herblay's crime. It is the crime I wish to punish rather than the violence, or the insult."

"And punish it with death, sire?"

“With death; yes, monsieur, I have said it.”

“Sire,” said the surintendant, with firmness, as he raised his head proudly, “your majesty will take the life, if you please, of your brother Philippe of France; that concerns you alone, and you will doubtless consult the queen-mother upon the subject. Whatever she may command will be perfectly correct. I do not wish to mix myself up in it, not even for the honor of your crown, but I have a favor to ask of you, and I beg to submit it to you.”

“Speak,” said the king, in no little degree agitated by his minister’s last words. “What do you require?”

“The pardon of M. d’Herblay and of M. du Vallon.”

“My assassins?”

“Two rebels, sire, that is all.”

“Oh! I understand, then, you ask me to forgive your friends.”

“My friends!” said Fouquet, deeply wounded.

“Your friends, certainly; but the safety of the state requires that an exemplary punishment should be inflicted on the guilty.”

“I will not permit myself to remind your majesty that I have just restored you to liberty, and have saved your life.”

“Monsieur!”

“I will not allow myself to remind your majesty that had M. d’Herblay wished to carry out his character of an assassin, he could very easily have assassinated your majesty this morning in the forest of Senart, and all would have been over.” The king started.

“A pistol-bullet through the head,” pursued Fouquet, “and the disfigured features of Louis XIV., which no one could have recognized, would be M. d’Herblay’s complete and entire justification.”

The king turned pale and giddy at the bare idea of the danger he had escaped.

“If M. d’Herblay,” continued Fouquet, “had been an assassin, he had no occasion to inform me of his plan in order to succeed. Freed from the real king, it would have been impossible in all futurity to guess the false. And if the usurper had been recognized by Anne of Austria, he would still have been — her son. The usurper, as far as Monsieur d’Herblay’s conscience was concerned, was still a king of the blood of Louis XIII. Moreover, the conspirator, in that course, would have had security, secrecy, impunity. A pistol-bullet would have procured him all that. For the sake of Heaven, sire, grant me his forgiveness.”

The king, instead of being touched by the picture, so faithfully drawn in all details, of Aramis's generosity, felt himself most painfully and cruelly humiliated. His unconquerable pride revolted at the idea that a man had held suspended at the end of his finger the thread of his royal life. Every word that fell from Fouquet's lips, and which he thought most efficacious in procuring his friend's pardon, seemed to pour another drop of poison into the already ulcerated heart of Louis XIV. Nothing could bend or soften him. Addressing himself to Fouquet, he said, "I really don't know, monsieur, why you should solicit the pardon of these men. What good is there in asking that which can be obtained without solicitation?"

"I do not understand you, sire."

"It is not difficult, either. Where am I now?"

"In the Bastile, sire."

"Yes; in a dungeon. I am looked upon as a madman, am I not?"

"Yes, sire."

"And no one is known here but Marchiali?"

"Certainly."

"Well; change nothing in the position of affairs. Let the poor madman rot between the slimy walls of the Bastile, and M. d'Herblay and M. du Vallon will stand in no need of my forgiveness. Their new king will absolve them."

"Your majesty does me a great injustice, sire; and you are wrong," replied Fouquet, dryly; "I am not child enough, nor is M. d'Herblay silly enough, to have omitted to make all these reflections; and if I had wished to make a new king, as you say, I had no occasion to have come here to force open the gates and doors of the Bastile, to free you from this place. That would show a want of even common sense. Your majesty's mind is disturbed by anger; otherwise you would be far from offending, groundlessly, the very one of your servants who has rendered you the most important service of all."

Louis perceived that he had gone too far; that the gates of the Bastile were still closed upon him, whilst, by degrees, the floodgates were gradually being opened, behind which the generous-hearted Fouquet had restrained his anger. "I did not say that to humiliate you, Heaven knows, monsieur," he replied. "Only you are addressing yourself to me in order to obtain a pardon, and I answer according to my conscience. And so, judging by my conscience, the criminals we speak of are not worthy of consideration or forgiveness."

Fouquet was silent.

"What I do is as generous," added the king, "as what you have done, for I am in your power. I will even say it is more generous, inasmuch as you place before me certain conditions upon which my liberty, my life, may depend; and to reject which is to make a sacrifice of both."

"I was wrong, certainly," replied Fouquet. "Yes, — I had the appearance of extorting a favor; I regret it, and entreat your majesty's forgiveness."

"And you are forgiven, my dear Monsieur Fouquet," said the king, with a smile, which restored the serene expression of his features, which so many circumstances had altered since the preceding evening.

"I have my own forgiveness," replied the minister, with some degree of persistence; "but M. d'Herblay, and M. du Vallon?"

"They will never obtain theirs, as long as I live," replied the inflexible king. "Do me the kindness not to speak of it again."

"Your majesty shall be obeyed."

"And you will bear me no ill-will for it?"

"Oh! no, sire; for I anticipated the event."

"You had 'anticipated' that I should refuse to forgive those gentlemen?"

"Certainly; and all my measures were taken in consequence."

"What do you mean to say?" cried the king, surprised.

"M. d'Herblay came, as may be said, to deliver himself into my hands. M. d'Herblay left to me the happiness of saving my king and my country. I could not condemn M. d'Herblay to death; nor could I, on the other hand, expose him to your majesty's justifiable wrath; it would have been just the same as if I had killed him myself."

"Well! and what have you done?"

"Sire, I gave M. d'Herblay the best horses in my stables and four hours' start over all those your majesty might, probably, dispatch after him."

"Be it so!" murmured the king. "But still, the world is wide enough and large enough for those whom I may send to overtake your horses, notwithstanding the 'four hours' start' which you have given to M. d'Herblay."

"In giving him these four hours, sire, I knew I was giving him his life, and he will save his life."

"In what way?"

"After having galloped as hard as possible, with the four hours' start, before your musketeers, he will reach my chateau of Belle-Isle, where I have given him a safe asylum."

“That may be! But you forget that you have made me a present of Belle-Isle.”

“But not for you to arrest my friends.”

“You take it back again, then?”

“As far as that goes — yes, sire.”

“My musketeers shall capture it, and the affair will be at an end.”

“Neither your musketeers, nor your whole army could take Belle-Isle,” said Fouquet, coldly. “Belle-Isle is impregnable.”

The king became perfectly livid; a lightning flash seemed to dart from his eyes. Fouquet felt that he was lost, but he as not one to shrink when the voice of honor spoke loudly within him. He bore the king’s wrathful gaze; the latter swallowed his rage, and after a few moments’ silence, said, “Are we going to return to Vaux?”

“I am at your majesty’s orders,” replied Fouquet, with a low bow; “but I think that your majesty can hardly dispense with changing your clothes previous to appearing before your court.”

“We shall pass by the Louvre,” said the king. “Come.” And they left the prison, passing before Baisemeaux, who looked completely bewildered as he saw Marchiali once more leave; and, in his helplessness, tore out the major portion of his few remaining hairs. It was perfectly true, however, that Fouquet wrote and gave him an authority for the prisoner’s release, and that the king wrote beneath it, “Seen and approved, Louis”; a piece of madness that Baisemeaux, incapable of putting two ideas together, acknowledged by giving himself a terrible blow on the forehead with his own fist.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The False King.

In the meantime, usurped royalty was playing out its part bravely at Vaux. Philippe gave orders that for his *petit lever* the *grandes entrees*, already prepared to appear before the king, should be introduced. He determined to give this order notwithstanding the absence of M. d’Herblay, who did not return — our readers know the reason. But the prince, not believing that absence could be prolonged, wished, as all rash spirits do, to try his valor and his fortune far from all protection and instruction. Another reason urged him to this — Anne of Austria was about to appear; the guilty mother was about to stand in the presence of her sacrificed son. Philippe was not willing, if he had a weakness, to render the man a witness of it before whom he was bound thenceforth to display so much strength. Philippe opened his folding doors, and several persons entered silently. Philippe did not stir whilst his *valets de chambre* dressed him. He had watched, the evening before, all the habits of his brother, and played the king in such a manner as to awaken no suspicion. He was thus completely dressed in hunting costume when he received his visitors. His own memory and the notes of Aramis announced everybody to him, first of all Anne of Austria, to whom Monsieur gave his hand, and then Madame with M. de Saint-Aignan. He smiled at seeing these countenances, but trembled on recognizing his mother. That still so noble and imposing figure, ravaged by pain, pleaded in his heart the cause of the famous queen who had immolated a child to reasons of state. He found his mother still handsome. He knew that Louis XIV. loved her, and he promised himself to love her likewise, and not to prove a scourge to her old age. He contemplated his brother with a tenderness easily to be understood. The latter had usurped nothing, had cast no shades athwart his life. A separate tree, he allowed the stem to rise without heeding its elevation or majestic life. Philippe promised himself to be a kind brother to this prince, who required nothing but gold to minister to his pleasures. He bowed with a friendly air to Saint-Aignan, who was all reverences and smiles, and trembling held out his hand to Henrietta, his sister-in-law, whose beauty struck him; but he saw in the eyes of that princess an expression of coldness which would facilitate, as he thought, their future relations.

"How much more easy," thought he, "it will be to be the brother of that woman than her gallant, if she evinces towards me a coldness that my brother could not have for her, but which is imposed upon me as a duty." The only visit he dreaded at this moment was that of the queen; his heart — his mind — had just been shaken by so violent a trial, that, in spite of their firm temperament, they would not, perhaps, support another shock. Happily the queen did not come. Then commenced, on the part of Anne of Austria, a political dissertation upon the welcome M. Fouquet had given to the house of France. She mixed up hostilities with compliments addressed to the king, and questions as to his health, with little maternal flatteries and diplomatic artifices.

"Well, my son," said she, "are you convinced with regard to M. Fouquet?"

"Saint-Aignan," said Philippe, "have the goodness to go and inquire after the queen."

At these words, the first Philippe had pronounced aloud, the slight difference that there was between his voice and that of the king was sensible to maternal ears, and Anne of Austria looked earnestly at her son. Saint-Aignan left the room, and Philippe continued:

"Madame, I do not like to hear M. Fouquet ill-spoken of, you know I do not — and you have even spoken well of him yourself."

"That is true; therefore I only question you on the state of your sentiments with respect to him."

"Sire," said Henrietta, "I, on my part, have always liked M. Fouquet. He is a man of good taste, — a superior man."

"A superintendent who is never sordid or niggardly," added Monsieur; "and who pays in gold all the orders I have on him."

"Every one in this thinks too much of himself, and nobody for the state," said the old queen. "M. Fouquet, it is a fact, M. Fouquet is ruining the state."

"Well, mother!" replied Philippe, in rather a lower key, "do you likewise constitute yourself the buckler of M. Colbert?"

"How is that?" replied the old queen, rather surprised.

“Why, in truth,” replied Philippe, “you speak that just as your old friend Madame de Chevreuse would speak.”

“Why do you mention Madame de Chevreuse to me?” said she, “and what sort of humor are you in to-day towards me?”

Philippe continued: “Is not Madame de Chevreuse always in league against somebody? Has not Madame de Chevreuse been to pay you a visit, mother?”

“Monsieur, you speak to me now in such a manner that I can almost fancy I am listening to your father.”

“My father did not like Madame de Chevreuse, and had good reason for not liking her,” said the prince. “For my part, I like her no better than *he* did, and if she thinks proper to come here as she formerly did, to sow divisions and hatreds under the pretext of begging money — why — ”

“Well! what?” said Anne of Austria, proudly, herself provoking the storm.

“Well!” replied the young man firmly, “I will drive Madame de Chevreuse out of my kingdom — and with her all who meddle with its secrets and mysteries.”

He had not calculated the effect of this terrible speech, or perhaps he wished to judge the effect of it, like those who, suffering from a chronic pain, and seeking to break the monotony of that suffering, touch their wound to procure a sharper pang. Anne of Austria was nearly fainting; her eyes, open but meaningless, ceased to see for several seconds; she stretched out her arms towards her other son, who supported and embraced her without fear of irritating the king.

“Sire,” murmured she, “you are treating your mother very cruelly.”

“In what respect, madame?” replied he. “I am only speaking of Madame de Chevreuse; does my mother prefer Madame de Chevreuse to the security of the state and of my person? Well, then, madame, I tell you Madame de Chevreuse has returned to France to borrow money, and that she addressed herself to M. Fouquet to sell him a certain secret.”

“A certain secret!” cried Anne of Austria.

“Concerning pretended robberies that monsieur le surintendant had committed, which is false,” added Philippe. “M. Fouquet rejected her offers with indignation, preferring the esteem of the king to complicity with such intriguers. Then Madame de Chevreuse sold the secret to M. Colbert, and as she is insatiable, and was not satisfied with having extorted a hundred thousand crowns from a servant of the state, she has taken a still bolder flight, in search of surer sources of supply. Is that true, madame?”

“You know all, sire,” said the queen, more uneasy than irritated.

“Now,” continued Philippe, “I have good reason to dislike this fury, who comes to my court to plan the shame of some and the ruin of others. If Heaven has suffered certain crimes to be committed, and has concealed them in the shadow of its clemency, I will not permit Madame de Chevreuse to counteract the just designs of fate.”

The latter part of this speech had so agitated the queen-mother, that her son had pity on her. He took her hand and kissed it tenderly; she did not feel that in that kiss, given in spite of repulsion and bitterness of the heart, there was a pardon for eight years of suffering. Philippe allowed the silence of a moment to swallow the emotions that had just developed themselves. Then, with a cheerful smile:

“We will not go to-day,” said he, “I have a plan.” And, turning towards the door, he hoped to see Aramis, whose absence began to alarm him. The queen-mother wished to leave the room.

“Remain where you are, mother,” said he, “I wish you to make your peace with M. Fouquet.”

“I bear M. Fouquet no ill-will; I only dreaded his prodigalities.”

“We will put that to rights, and will take nothing of the superintendent but his good qualities.”

“What is your majesty looking for?” said Henrietta, seeing the king’s eyes constantly turned towards the door, and wishing to let fly a little poisoned arrow at his heart, supposing he was so anxiously expecting either La Valliere or a letter from her.

“My sister,” said the young man, who had divined her thought, thanks to that marvelous perspicuity of which fortune was from that time about to allow him the exercise, “my sister, I am expecting a most distinguished man, a most able counselor, whom I wish to present to you all, recommending him to your good graces. Ah! come in, then, D’Artagnan.”

“What does your majesty wish?” said D’Artagnan, appearing.

“Where is monsieur the bishop of Vannes, your friend?”

“Why, sire — ”

“I am waiting for him, and he does not come. Let him be sought for.”

D’Artagnan remained for an instant stupefied; but soon, reflecting that Aramis had left Vaux privately on a mission from the king, he concluded that the king wished to preserve the secret. “Sire,” replied he, “does your majesty absolutely require M. d’Herblay to be brought to you?”

“Absolutely is not the word,” said Philippe; “I do not want him so particularly as that; but if he can be found — ”

“I thought so,” said D’Artagnan to himself.

“Is this M. d’Herblay the bishop of Vannes?”

“Yes, madame.”

“A friend of M. Fouquet?”

“Yes, madame; an old musketeer.”

Anne of Austria blushed.

“One of the four braves who formerly performed such prodigies.”

The old queen repented of having wished to bite; she broke off the conversation, in order to preserve the rest of her teeth. “Whatever may be your choice, sire,” said she, “I have no doubt it will be excellent.”

All bowed in support of that sentiment.

“You will find in him,” continued Philippe, “the depth and penetration of M. de Richelieu, without the avarice of M. de Mazarin!”

“A prime minister, sire?” said Monsieur, in a fright.

“I will tell you all about that, brother; but it is strange that M. d’Herblay is not here!”

He called out:

“Let M. Fouquet be informed that I wish to speak to him — oh! before you, before you; do not retire!”

M. de Saint-Aignan returned, bringing satisfactory news of the queen, who only kept her bed from precaution, and to have strength to carry out the king’s wishes. Whilst everybody was seeking M. Fouquet and Aramis, the new king quietly continued his experiments, and everybody, family, officers, servants, had not the least suspicion of his identity, his air, his voice, and manners were so like the king’s. On his side, Philippe, applying to all countenances the accurate descriptions and key-notes of character supplied by his accomplice Aramis, conducted himself so as not to give birth to a doubt in the minds of those who surrounded him. Nothing from that time could disturb the usurper. With what strange facility had Providence just reversed the loftiest fortune of the world to substitute the lowliest in its stead! Philippe admired the goodness of God with regard to himself, and seconded it with all the resources of his admirable nature. But he felt, at times, something like a specter gliding between him and the rays of his new glory. Aramis did not appear. The conversation had languished in the royal family; Philippe, preoccupied, forgot to dismiss his brother and Madame Henrietta. The latter were astonished, and began, by degrees, to lose all patience. Anne of Austria stooped towards her son's ear and addressed some words to him in Spanish. Philippe was completely ignorant of that language, and grew pale at this unexpected obstacle. But, as if the spirit of the imperturbable Aramis had covered him with his infallibility, instead of appearing disconcerted, Philippe rose. "Well! what?" said Anne of Austria.

"What is all that noise?" said Philippe, turning round towards the door of the second staircase.

And a voice was heard saying, "This way, this way! A few steps more, sire!"

"The voice of M. Fouquet," said D'Artagnan, who was standing close to the queen-mother.

"Then M. d'Herblay cannot be far off," added Philippe.

But he then saw what he little thought to have beheld so near to him. All eyes were turned towards the door at which M. Fouquet was expected to enter; but it was not M. Fouquet who entered. A terrible cry resounded from all corners of the chamber, a painful cry uttered by the king and all present. It is given to but few men, even those whose destiny contains the strangest elements, and accidents the most wonderful, to contemplate such a spectacle similar to that which presented itself in the royal chamber at that moment. The half-closed shutters only admitted the entrance of an uncertain light passing through thick violet velvet curtains lined with silk. In this soft shade, the eyes were by degrees dilated, and every one present saw others rather with imagination than with actual sight. There could not, however, escape, in these circumstances, one of the surrounding details; and the new object which presented itself appeared as luminous as though it shone out in full sunlight. So it happened with Louis XIV., when he showed himself, pale and frowning, in the doorway of the secret stairs. The face of Fouquet appeared behind him, stamped with sorrow and determination. The queen-mother, who perceived Louis XIV., and who held the hand of Philippe, uttered a cry of which we have spoken, as if she beheld a phantom. Monsieur was bewildered, and kept turning his head in astonishment from one to the other. Madame made a step forward, thinking she was looking at the form of her brother-in-law reflected in a mirror. And, in fact, the illusion was possible. The two princes, both pale as death — for we renounce the hope of being able to describe the fearful state of Philippe — trembling, clenching their hands convulsively, measured each other with looks, and darted their glances, sharp as poniards, at each other. Silent, panting, bending forward, they appeared as if about to spring upon an enemy. The unheard-of resemblance of countenance, gesture, shape, height, even to the resemblance of costume, produced by chance — for Louis XIV. had been to the Louvre and put on a violet-colored dress — the perfect analogy of the two princes, completed the consternation of Anne of Austria. And yet she did not at once guess the truth. There are misfortunes in life so truly dreadful that no one will at first accept them; people rather believe in the supernatural and the impossible. Louis had not reckoned on these obstacles. He expected that he had only to appear to be acknowledged. A living sun, he could not endure the suspicion of equality with any one. He did not admit that every torch should not become darkness at the instant he shone out with his conquering ray. At the aspect of Philippe, then, he was perhaps more terrified than any one round him, and his silence, his immobility were, this time, a concentration and a calm which precede the violent explosions of concentrated passion.

But Fouquet! who shall paint his emotion and stupor in presence of this living portrait of his master! Fouquet thought Aramis was right, that this newly-arrived was a king as pure in his race as the other, and that, for having repudiated all participation in this *coup d'etat*, so skillfully got up by the General of the Jesuits, he must be a mad enthusiast, unworthy of ever dipping his hands in political grand strategy work. And then it was the blood of Louis XIII. which Fouquet was sacrificing to the blood of Louis XIII.; it was to a selfish ambition he was sacrificing a noble ambition; to the right of keeping he sacrificed the right of having. The whole extent of his fault was revealed to him at simple sight of the pretender. All that passed in the mind of Fouquet was lost upon the persons present. He had five minutes to focus meditation on this point of conscience; five minutes, that is to say five ages, during which the two kings and their family scarcely found energy to breathe after so terrible a shock. D'Artagnan, leaning against the wall, in front of Fouquet, with his hand to his brow, asked himself the cause of such a wonderful prodigy. He could not have said at once why he doubted, but he knew assuredly that he had reason to doubt, and that in this meeting of the two Louis XIV.s lay all the doubt and difficulty that during late days had rendered the conduct of Aramis so suspicious to the musketeer. These ideas were, however, enveloped in a haze, a veil of mystery. The actors in this assembly seemed to swim in the vapors of a confused waking. Suddenly Louis XIV., more impatient and more accustomed to command, ran to one of the shutters, which he opened, tearing the curtains in his eagerness. A flood of living light entered the chamber, and made Philippe draw back to the alcove. Louis seized upon this movement with eagerness, and addressing himself to the queen:

"My mother," said he, "do you not acknowledge your son, since every one here has forgotten his king!" Anne of Austria started, and raised her arms towards Heaven, without being able to articulate a single word.

"My mother," said Philippe, with a calm voice, "do you not acknowledge your son?" And this time, in his turn, Louis drew back.

As to Anne of Austria, struck suddenly in head and heart with fell remorse, she lost her equilibrium. No one aiding her, for all were petrified, she sank back in her fauteuil, breathing a weak, trembling sigh. Louis could not endure the spectacle and the affront. He bounded towards D'Artagnan, over whose brain a vertigo was stealing and who staggered as he caught at the door for support.

"*A moi! mousquetaire!*" said he. "Look us in the face and say which is the paler, he or I!"

This cry roused D'Artagnan, and stirred in his heart the fibers of obedience. He shook his head, and, without more hesitation, he walked straight up to Philippe, on whose shoulder he laid his hand, saying, "Monsieur, you are my prisoner!"

Philippe did not raise his eyes towards Heaven, nor stir from the spot, where he seemed nailed to the floor, his eye intently fixed upon the king his brother. He reproached him with a sublime silence for all misfortunes past, all tortures to come. Against this language of the soul the king felt he had no power; he cast down his eyes, dragging away precipitately his brother and sister, forgetting his mother, sitting motionless within three paces of the son whom she left a second time to be condemned to death. Philippe approached Anne of Austria, and said to her, in a soft and nobly agitated voice:

"If I were not your son, I should curse you, my mother, for having rendered me so unhappy."

D’Artagnan felt a shudder pass through the marrow of his bones. He bowed respectfully to the young prince, and said as he bent, “Excuse me, monseigneur, I am but a soldier, and my oaths are his who has just left the chamber.”

“Thank you, M. d’Artagnan.... What has become of M. d’Herblay?”

“M. d’Herblay is in safety, monseigneur,” said a voice behind them; “and no one, while I live and am free, shall cause a hair to fall from his head.”

“Monsieur Fouquet!” said the prince, smiling sadly.

“Pardon me, monseigneur,” said Fouquet, kneeling, “but he who is just gone out from hence was my guest.”

“Here are,” murmured Philippe, with a sigh, “brave friends and good hearts. They make me regret the world. On, M. d’Artagnan, I follow you.”

At the moment the captain of the musketeers was about to leave the room with his prisoner, Colbert appeared, and, after remitting an order from the king to D’Artagnan, retired. D’Artagnan read the paper, and then crushed it in his hand with rage.

“What is it?” asked the prince.

“Read, monseigneur,” replied the musketeer.

Philippe read the following words, hastily traced by the hand of the king:

“M. d’Artagnan will conduct the prisoner to the Ile Sainte-Marguerite. He will cover his face with an iron vizor, which the prisoner shall never raise except at peril of his life.”

“That is just,” said Philippe, with resignation; “I am ready.”

“Aramis was right,” said Fouquet, in a low voice, to the musketeer, “this one is every whit as much a king as the other.”

“More so!” replied D’Artagnan. “He wanted only you and me.”

CHAPTER XXV.

In Which Porthos Thinks He Is Pursuing a Duchy.

Aramis and Porthos, having profited by the time granted them by Fouquet, did honor to the French cavalry by their speed. Porthos did not clearly understand on what kind of mission he was forced to display so much velocity; but as he saw Aramis spurring on furiously, he, Porthos, spurred on in the same way. They had soon, in this manner, placed twelve leagues between them and Vaux; they were then obliged to change horses, and organize a sort of post arrangement. It was during a relay that Porthos ventured to interrogate Aramis discreetly.

"Hush!" replied the latter, "know only that our fortune depends on our speed."

As if Porthos had still been the musketeer, without a sou or a *maille* of 1626, he pushed forward. That magic word "fortune" always means something in the human ear. It means *enough* for those who have nothing; it means *too much* for those who have enough.

"I shall be made a duke!" said Porthos, aloud. He was speaking to himself.

"That is possible," replied Aramis, smiling after his own fashion, as Porthos's horse passed him. Aramis felt, notwithstanding, as though his brain were on fire; the activity of the body had not yet succeeded in subduing that of the mind. All there is of raging passion, mental toothache or mortal threat, raged, gnawed and grumbled in the thoughts of the unhappy prelate. His countenance exhibited visible traces of this rude combat. Free on the highway to abandon himself to every impression of the moment, Aramis did not fail to swear at every start of his horse, at every inequality in the road. Pale, at times inundated with boiling sweats, then again dry and icy, he flogged his horses till the blood streamed from their sides. Porthos, whose dominant fault was not sensibility, groaned at this. Thus traveled they on for eight long hours, and then arrived at Orleans. It was four o'clock in the afternoon. Aramis, on observing this, judged that nothing showed pursuit to be a possibility. It would be without example that a troop capable of taking him and Porthos should be furnished with relays sufficient to perform forty leagues in eight hours. Thus, admitting pursuit, which was not at all manifest, the fugitives were five hours in advance of their pursuers.

Aramis thought that there might be no imprudence in taking a little rest, but that to continue would make the matter more certain. Twenty leagues more, performed with the same rapidity, twenty more leagues devoured, and no one, not even D'Artagnan, could overtake the enemies of the king. Aramis felt obliged, therefore, to inflict upon Porthos the pain of mounting on horseback again. They rode on till seven o'clock in the evening, and had only one post more between them and Blois. But here a diabolical accident alarmed Aramis greatly. There were no horses at the post. The prelate asked himself by what infernal machination his enemies had succeeded in depriving him of the means of going further, — he who never recognized chance as a deity, who found a cause for every accident, preferred believing that the refusal of the postmaster, at such an hour, in such a country, was the consequence of an order emanating from above: an order given with a view of stopping short the king-maker in the midst of his flight. But at the moment he was about to fly into a passion, so as to procure either a horse or an explanation, he was struck with the recollection that the Comte de la Fere lived in the neighborhood.

"I am not traveling," said he; "I do not want horses for a whole stage. Find me two horses to go and pay a visit to a nobleman of my acquaintance who resides near this place."

"What nobleman?" asked the postmaster.

"M. le Comte de la Fere."

"Oh!" replied the postmaster, uncovering with respect, "a very worthy nobleman. But, whatever may be my desire to make myself agreeable to him, I cannot furnish you with horses, for all mine are engaged by M. le Duc de Beaufort."

"Indeed!" said Aramis, much disappointed.

"Only," continued the postmaster, "if you will put up with a little carriage I have, I will harness an old blind horse who has still his legs left, and peradventure will draw you to the house of M. le Comte de la Fere."

"It is worth a louis," said Aramis.

"No, monsieur, such a ride is worth no more than a crown; that is what M. Grimaud, the comte's intendant, always pays me when he makes use of that carriage; and I should not wish the Comte de la Fere to have to reproach me with having imposed on one of his friends."

"As you please," said Aramis, "particularly as regards disobliging the Comte de la Fere; only I think I have a right to give you a louis for your idea."

"Oh! doubtless," replied the postmaster with delight. And he himself harnessed the ancient horse to the creaking carriage. In the meantime Porthos was curious to behold. He imagined he had discovered a clew to the secret, and he felt pleased, because a visit to Athos, in the first place, promised him much satisfaction, and, in the next, gave him the hope of finding at the same time a good bed and good supper. The master, having got the carriage ready, ordered one of his men to drive the strangers to La Fere. Porthos took his seat by the side of Aramis, whispering in his ear, "I understand."

"Aha!" said Aramis, "and what do you understand, my friend?"

"We are going, on the part of the king, to make some great proposal to Athos."

"Pooh!" said Aramis.

"You need tell me nothing about it," added the worthy Porthos, endeavoring to reseat himself so as to avoid the jolting, "you need tell me nothing, I shall guess."

"Well! do, my friend; guess away."

They arrived at Athos's dwelling about nine o'clock in the evening, favored by a splendid moon. This cheerful light rejoiced Porthos beyond expression; but Aramis appeared annoyed by it in an equal degree. He could not help showing something of this to Porthos, who replied — "Ay! ay! I guess how it is! the mission is a secret one."

These were his last words in the carriage. The driver interrupted him by saying, "Gentlemen, we have arrived."

Porthos and his companion alighted before the gate of the little chateau, where we are about to meet again our old acquaintances Athos and Bragelonne, the latter of whom had disappeared since the discovery of the infidelity of La Valliere. If there be one saying truer than another, it is this: great griefs contain within themselves the germ of consolation. This painful wound, inflicted upon Raoul, had drawn him nearer to his father again; and God knows how sweet were the consolations which flowed from the eloquent mouth and generous heart of Athos. The wound was not cicatrized, but Athos, by dint of conversing with his son and mixing a little more of his life with that of the young man, had brought him to understand that this pang of a first infidelity is necessary to every human existence; and that no one has loved without encountering it. Raoul listened, again and again, but never understood. Nothing replaces in the deeply afflicted heart the remembrance and thought of the beloved object. Raoul then replied to the reasoning of his father:

“Monsieur, all that you tell me is true; I believe that no one has suffered in the affections of the heart so much as you have; but you are a man too great by reason of intelligence, and too severely tried by adverse fortune not to allow for the weakness of the soldier who suffers for the first time. I am paying a tribute that will not be paid a second time; permit me to plunge myself so deeply in my grief that I may forget myself in it, that I may drown even my reason in it.”

“Raoul! Raoul!”

“Listen, monsieur. Never shall I accustom myself to the idea that Louise, the chastest and most innocent of women, has been able to so basely deceive a man so honest and so true a lover as myself. Never can I persuade myself that I see that sweet and noble mask change into a hypocritical lascivious face. Louise lost! Louise infamous! Ah! monseigneur, that idea is much more cruel to me than Raoul abandoned — Raoul unhappy!”

Athos then employed the heroic remedy. He defended Louise against Raoul, and justified her perfidy by her love. “A woman who would have yielded to a king because he is a king,” said he, “would deserve to be styled infamous; but Louise loves Louis. Young, both, they have forgotten, he his rank, she her vows. Love absolves everything, Raoul. The two young people love each other with sincerity.”

And when he had dealt this severe poniard-thrust, Athos, with a sigh, saw Raoul bound away beneath the rankling wound, and fly to the thickest recesses of the wood, or the solitude of his chamber, whence, an hour after, he would return, pale, trembling, but subdued. Then, coming up to Athos with a smile, he would kiss his hand, like the dog who, having been beaten, caresses a respected master, to redeem his fault. Raoul redeemed nothing but his weakness, and only confessed his grief. Thus passed away the days that followed that scene in which Athos had so violently shaken the indomitable pride of the king. Never, when conversing with his son, did he make any allusion to that scene; never did he give him the details of that vigorous lecture, which might, perhaps, have consoled the young man, by showing him his rival humbled. Athos did not wish that the offended lover should forget the respect due to his king. And when Bragelonne, ardent, angry, and melancholy, spoke with contempt of royal words, of the equivocal faith which certain madmen draw from promises that emanate from thrones, when, passing over two centuries, with that rapidity of a bird that traverses a narrow strait to go from one continent to the other, Raoul ventured to predict the time in which kings would be esteemed as less than other men, Athos said to him, in his serene, persuasive voice, “You are right, Raoul; all that you say will happen; kings will lose their privileges, as stars which have survived their aeons lose their splendor. But when that moment comes, Raoul, we shall be dead. And remember well what I say to you. In this world, all, men, women, and kings, must live for the present. We can only live for the future for God.”

This was the manner in which Athos and Raoul were, as usual, conversing, and walking backwards and forwards in the long alley of limes in the park, when the bell which served to announce to the comte either the hour of dinner or the arrival of a visitor, was rung; and, without attaching any importance to it, he turned towards the house with his son; and at the end of the alley they found themselves in the presence of Aramis and Porthos.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The Last Adieux.

Raoul uttered a cry, and affectionately embraced Porthos. Aramis and Athos embraced like old men; and this embrace itself being a question for Aramis, he immediately said, “My friend, we have not long to remain with you.”

“Ah!” said the comte.

“Only time to tell you of my good fortune,” interrupted Porthos.

“Ah!” said Raoul.

Athos looked silently at Aramis, whose somber air had already appeared to him very little in harmony with the good news Porthos hinted.

“What is the good fortune that has happened to you? Let us hear it,” said Raoul, with a smile.

“The king has made me a duke,” said the worthy Porthos, with an air of mystery, in the ear of the young man, “a duke by *brevet*.”

But the *asides* of Porthos were always loud enough to be heard by everybody. His murmurs were in the diapason of ordinary roaring. Athos heard him, and uttered an exclamation which made Aramis start. The latter took Athos by the arm, and, after having asked Porthos’s permission to say a word to his friend in private, “My dear Athos,” he began, “you see me overwhelmed with grief and trouble.”

“With grief and trouble, my dear friend?” cried the comte; “oh, what?”

“In two words. I have conspired against the king; that conspiracy has failed, and, at this moment, I am doubtless pursued.”

“You are pursued! — a conspiracy! Eh! my friend, what do you tell me?”

“The saddest truth. I am entirely ruined.”

“Well, but Porthos — this title of duke — what does all that mean?”

“That is the subject of my severest pain; that is the deepest of my wounds. I have, believing in infallible success, drawn Porthos into my conspiracy. He threw himself into it, as you know he would do, with all his strength, without knowing what he was about; and now he is as much compromised as myself — as completely ruined as I am.”

"Good God!" And Athos turned towards Porthos, who was smiling complacently.

"I must make you acquainted with the whole. Listen to me," continued Aramis; and he related the history as we know it. Athos, during the recital, several times felt the sweat break from his forehead. "It was a great idea," said he, "but a great error."

"For which I am punished, Athos."

"Therefore, I will not tell you my entire thought."

"Tell it, nevertheless."

"It is a crime."

"A capital crime; I know it is. *Lese majeste*."

"Porthos! poor Porthos!"

"What would you advise me to do? Success, as I have told you, was certain."

"M. Fouquet is an honest man."

"And I a fool for having so ill-judged him," said Aramis. "Oh, the wisdom of man! Oh, millstone that grinds the world! and which is one day stopped by a grain of sand which has fallen, no one knows how, between its wheels."

"Say by a diamond, Aramis. But the thing is done. How do you think of acting?"

"I am taking away Porthos. The king will never believe that that worthy man has acted innocently. He never can believe that Porthos has thought he was serving the king, whilst acting as he has done. His head would pay my fault. It shall not, must not, be so."

"You are taking him away, whither?"

"To Belle-Isle, at first. That is an impregnable place of refuge. Then, I have the sea, and a vessel to pass over into England, where I have many relations."

"You? in England?"

"Yes, or else in Spain, where I have still more."

"But, our excellent Porthos! you ruin him, for the king will confiscate all his property."

"All is provided for. I know how, when once in Spain, to reconcile myself with Louis XIV., and restore Porthos to favor."

"You have credit, seemingly, Aramis!" said Athos, with a discreet air.

"Much; and at the service of my friends."

These words were accompanied by a warm pressure of the hand.

“Thank you,” replied the comte.

“And while we are on this head,” said Aramis, “you also are a malcontent; you also, Raoul, have griefs to lay to the king. Follow our example; pass over into Belle-Isle. Then we shall see, I guarantee upon my honor, that in a month there will be war between France and Spain on the subject of this son of Louis XIII., who is an Infante likewise, and whom France detains inhumanly. Now, as Louis XIV. would have no inclination for a war on that subject, I will answer for an arrangement, the result of which must bring greatness to Porthos and to me, and a duchy in France to you, who are already a grandee of Spain. Will you join us?”

“No; for my part I prefer having something to reproach the king with; it is a pride natural to my race to pretend to a superiority over royal races. Doing what you propose, I should become the obliged of the king; I should certainly be the gainer on that ground, but I should be a loser in my conscience. — No, thank you!”

“Then give me two things, Athos, — your absolution.”

“Oh! I give it you if you really wished to avenge the weak and oppressed against the oppressor.”

“That is sufficient for me,” said Aramis, with a blush which was lost in the obscurity of the night. “And now, give me your two best horses to gain the second post, as I have been refused any under the pretext of the Duc de Beaufort being traveling in this country.”

“You shall have the two best horses, Aramis; and again I recommend poor Porthos strongly to your care.”

“Oh! I have no fear on that score. One word more: do you think I am maneuvering for him as I ought?”

“The evil being committed, yes; for the king would not pardon him, and you have, whatever may be said, always a supporter in M. Fouquet, who will not abandon you, he being himself compromised, notwithstanding his heroic action.”

“You are right. And that is why, instead of gaining the sea at once, which would proclaim my fear and guilt, that is why I remain upon French ground. But Belle-Isle will be for me whatever ground I wish it to be, English, Spanish, or Roman; all will depend, with me, on the standard I shall think proper to unfurl.”

“How so?”

“It was I who fortified Belle-Isle; and, so long as I defend it, nobody can take Belle-Isle from me. And then, as you have said just now, M. Fouquet is there. Belle-Isle will not be attacked without the signature of M. Fouquet.”

“That is true. Nevertheless, be prudent. The king is both cunning and strong.” Aramis smiled.

“I again recommend Porthos to you,” repeated the count, with a sort of cold persistence.

“Whatever becomes of me, count,” replied Aramis, in the same tone, “our brother Porthos will fare as I do — or *better*.”

Athos bowed whilst pressing the hand of Aramis, and turned to embrace Porthos with emotion.

“I was born lucky, was I not?” murmured the latter, transported with happiness, as he folded his cloak round him.

“Come, my dear friend,” said Aramis.

Raoul had gone out to give orders for the saddling of the horses. The group was already divided. Athos saw his two friends on the point of departure, and something like a mist passed before his eyes and weighed upon his heart.

“It is strange,” thought he, “whence comes the inclination I feel to embrace Porthos once more?” At that moment Porthos turned round, and he came towards his old friend with open arms. This last endearment was tender as in youth, as in times when hearts were warm — life happy. And then Porthos mounted his horse. Aramis came back once more to throw his arms round the neck of Athos. The latter watched them along the high-road, elongated by the shade, in their white cloaks. Like phantoms they seemed to enlarge on their departure from the earth, and it was not in the mist, but in the declivity of the ground that they disappeared. At the end of the perspective, both seemed to have given a spring with their feet, which made them vanish as if evaporated into cloud-land.

Then Athos, with a very heavy heart, returned towards the house, saying to Bragelonne, “Raoul, I don’t know what it is that has just told me that I have seen those two for the last time.”

“It does not astonish me, monsieur, that you should have such a thought,” replied the young man, “for I have at this moment the same, and think also that I shall never see Messieurs du Vallon and d’Herblay again.”

“Oh! you,” replied the count, “you speak like a man rendered sad by a different cause; you see everything in black; you are young, and if you chance never to see those old friends again, it will because they no longer exist in the world in which you have yet many years to pass. But I — ”

Raoul shook his head sadly, and leaned upon the shoulder of the count, without either of them finding another word in their hearts, which were ready to overflow.

All at once a noise of horses and voices, from the extremity of the road to Blois, attracted their attention that way. Flambeaux-bearers shook their torches merrily among the trees of their route, and turned round, from time to time, to avoid distancing the horsemen who followed them. These flames, this noise, this dust of a dozen richly caparisoned horses, formed a strange contrast in the middle of the night with the melancholy and almost funereal disappearance of the two shadows of Aramis and Porthos. Athos went towards the house; but he had hardly reached the parterre, when the entrance gate appeared in a blaze; all the flambeaux stopped and appeared to enflame the road. A cry was heard of “M. le Duc de Beaufort” — and Athos sprang towards the door of his house. But the duke had already alighted from his horse, and was looking around him.

“I am here, monseigneur,” said Athos.

“Ah! good evening, dear count,” said the prince, with that frank cordiality which won him so many hearts. “Is it too late for a friend?”

“Ah! my dear prince, come in!” said the count.

And, M. de Beaufort leaning on the arm of Athos, they entered the house, followed by Raoul, who walked respectfully and modestly among the officers of the prince, with several of whom he was acquainted.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Monsieur de Beaufort.

The prince turned round at the moment when Raoul, in order to leave him alone with Athos, was shutting the door, and preparing to go with the other officers into an adjoining apartment.

"Is that the young man I have heard M. le Prince speak so highly of?" asked M. de Beaufort.

"It is, monseigneur."

"He is quite the soldier; let him stay, count, we cannot spare him."

"Remain, Raoul, since monseigneur permits it," said Athos.

"*Ma foi!* he is tall and handsome!" continued the duke. "Will you give him to me, monseigneur, if I ask him of you?"

"How am I to understand you, monseigneur?" said Athos.

"Why, I call upon you to bid you farewell."

"Farewell!"

"Yes, in good truth. Have you no idea of what I am about to become?"

"Why, I suppose, what you have always been, monseigneur, — a valiant prince, and an excellent gentleman."

"I am going to become an African prince, — a Bedouin gentleman. The king is sending me to make conquests among the Arabs."

"What is this you tell me, monseigneur?"

"Strange, is it not? I, the Parisian *par essence*, I who have reigned in the faubourgs, and have been called King of the Halles, — I am going to pass from the Place Maubert to the minarets of Gigelli; from a Frondeur I am becoming an adventurer!"

"Oh, monseigneur, if you did not yourself tell me that — "

"It would not be credible, would it? Believe me, nevertheless, and we have but to bid each other farewell. This is what comes of getting into favor again."

"Into favor?"

"Yes. You smile. Ah, my dear count, do you know why I have accepted this enterprise, can you guess?"

"Because your highness loves glory above — everything."

"Oh! no; there is no glory in firing muskets at savages. I see no glory in that, for my part, and it is more probable that I shall there meet with something else. But I have wished, and still wish earnestly, my dear count, that my life should have that last *facet*, after all the whimsical exhibitions I have seen myself make during fifty years. For, in short, you must admit that it is sufficiently strange to be born the grandson of a king, to have made war against kings, to have been reckoned among the powers of the age, to have maintained my rank, to feel Henry IV. within me, to be great admiral of France — and then to go and get killed at Gigelli, among all those Turks, Saracens, and Moors."

"Monseigneur, you harp with strange persistence on that theme," said Athos, in an agitated voice. "How can you suppose that so brilliant a destiny will be extinguished in that remote and miserable scene?"

"And can you believe, upright and simple as you are, that if I go into Africa for this ridiculous motive, I will not endeavor to come out of it without ridicule? Shall I not give the world cause to speak of me? And to be spoken of, nowadays, when there are Monsieur le Prince, M. de Turenne, and many others, my contemporaries, I, admiral of France, grandson of Henry IV., king of Paris, have I anything left but to get myself killed? *Cordieu!* I will be talked of, I tell you; I shall be killed whether or not; if no there, somewhere else."

"Why, monseigneur, this is mere exaggeration; and hitherto you have shown nothing exaggerated save in bravery."

"*Peste!* my dear friend, there is bravery in facing scurvy, dysentery, locusts, poisoned arrows, as my ancestor St. Louis did. Do you know those fellows still use poisoned arrows? And then, you know me of old, I fancy, and you know that when I once make up my mind to a thing, I perform it in grim earnest."

"Yes, you made up your mind to escape from Vincennes."

"Ay, but you aided me in that, my master; and, *a propos*, I turn this way and that, without seeing my old friend, M. Vaugrimaud. How is he?"

"M. Vaugrimaud is still your highness's most respectful servant," said Athos, smiling.

"I have a hundred pistoles here for him, which I bring as a legacy. My will is made, count."

"Ah! monseigneur! monseigneur!"

“And you may understand that if Grimaud’s name were to appear in my will — ” The duke began to laugh; then addressing Raoul, who, from the commencement of this conversation, had sunk into a profound reverie, “Young man,” said he, “I know there is to be found here a certain De Vouvray wine, and I believe — ” Raoul left the room precipitately to order the wine. In the meantime M. de Beaufort took the hand of Athos.

“What do you mean to do with him?” asked he.

“Nothing at present, monseigneur.”

“Ah! yes, I know; since the passion of the king for La Valliere.”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“That is all true, then, is it? I think I know her, that little La Valliere. She is not particularly handsome, if I remember right?”

“No, monseigneur,” said Athos.

“Do you know whom she reminds me of?”

“Does she remind your highness of any one?”

“She reminds me of a very agreeable girl, whose mother lived in the Halles.”

“Ah! ah!” said Athos, smiling.

“Oh! the good old times,” added M. de Beaufort. “Yes, La Valliere reminds me of that girl.”

“Who had a son, had she not?”

“I believe she had,” replied the duke, with careless *naivete* and a complaisant forgetfulness, of which no words could translate the tone and the vocal expression. “Now, here is poor Raoul, who is your son, I believe.”

“Yes, he is my son, monseigneur.”

“And the poor lad has been cut out by the king, and he frets.”

“Still better, monseigneur, he abstains.”

“You are going to let the boy rust in idleness; it is a mistake. Come, give him to me.”

“My wish is to keep him at home, monseigneur. I have no longer anything in the world but him, and as long as he likes to remain — ”

“Well, well,” replied the duke. “I could, nevertheless, have soon put matters to rights again. I assure you, I think he has in him the stuff of which marechals of France are made; I have seen more than one produced from less likely rough material.”

“That is very possible, monseigneur; but it is the king who makes marechals of France, and Raoul will never accept anything of the king.”

Raoul interrupted this conversation by his return. He preceded Grimaud, whose still steady hands carried the plateau with one glass and a bottle of the duke's favorite wine. On seeing his old *protege*, the duke uttered an exclamation of pleasure.

"Grimaud! Good evening, Grimaud!" said he; "how goes it?"

The servant bowed profoundly, as much gratified as his noble interlocutor.

"Two old friends!" said the duke, shaking honest Grimaud's shoulder after a vigorous fashion; which was followed by another still more profound and delighted bow from Grimaud.

"But what is this, count, only one glass?"

"I should not think of drinking with your highness, unless your highness permitted me," replied Athos, with noble humility.

"*Cordieu!* you were right to bring only one glass, we will both drink out of it, like two brothers in arms. Begin, count."

"Do me the honor," said Athos, gently putting back the glass.

"You are a charming friend," replied the Duc de Beaufort, who drank, and passed the goblet to his companion. "But that is not all," continued he, "I am still thirsty, and I wish to do honor to this handsome young man who stands here. I carry good luck with me, vicomte," said he to Raoul; "wish for something while drinking out of my glass, and may the black plague grab me if what you wish does not come to pass!" He held the goblet to Raoul, who hastily moistened his lips, and replied with the same promptitude:

"I have wished for something, monseigneur." His eyes sparkled with a gloomy fire, and the blood mounted to his cheeks; he terrified Athos, if only with his smile.

"And what have you wished for?" replied the duke, sinking back into his fauteuil, whilst with one hand he returned the bottle to Grimaud, and with the other gave him a purse.

"Will you promise me, monseigneur, to grant me what I wish for?"

"*Pardieu!* That is agreed upon."

"I wished, monsieur le duc, to go with you to Gigelli."

Athos became pale, and was unable to conceal his agitation. The duke looked at his friend, as if desirous to assist him to parry this unexpected blow.

“That is difficult, my dear vicomte, very difficult,” added he, in a lower tone of voice.

“Pardon me, monseigneur, I have been indiscreet,” replied Raoul, in a firm voice; “but as you yourself invited me to wish — ”

“To wish to leave me?” said Athos.

“Oh! monsieur — can you imagine — ”

“Well, *mordieu!*” cried the duke, “the young vicomte is right! What can he do here? He will go moldy with grief.”

Raoul blushed, and the excitable prince continued: “War is a distraction: we gain everything by it; we can only lose one thing by it — life — then so much the worse!”

“That is to say, memory,” said Raoul, eagerly; “and that is to say, so much the better!”

He repented of having spoken so warmly when he saw Athos rise and open the window; which was, doubtless, to conceal his emotion. Raoul sprang towards the comte, but the latter had already overcome his emotion, and turned to the lights with a serene and impassible countenance. “Well, come,” said the duke, “let us see! Shall he go, or shall he not? If he goes, comte, he shall be my aide-de-camp, my son.”

“Monseigneur!” cried Raoul, bending his knee.

“Monseigneur!” cried Athos, taking the hand of the duke; “Raoul shall do just as he likes.”

“Oh! no, monsieur, just as you like,” interrupted the young man.

“*Par la corbleu!*” said the prince in his turn, “it is neither the comte nor the vicomte that shall have his way, it is I. I will take him away. The marine offers a superb fortune, my friend.”

Raoul smiled again so sadly, that this time Athos felt his heart penetrated by it, and replied to him by a severe look. Raoul comprehended it all; he recovered his calmness, and was so guarded, that not another word escaped him. The duke at length rose, on observing the advanced hour, and said, with animation, “I am in great haste, but if I am told I have lost time in talking with a friend, I will reply I have gained — on the balance — a most excellent recruit.”

“Pardon me, monsieur le duc,” interrupted Raoul, “do not tell the king so, for it is not the king I wish to serve.”

“Eh! my friend, whom, then, will you serve? The times are past when you might have said, ‘I belong to M. de Beaufort.’ No, nowadays, we all belong to the king, great or small. Therefore, if you serve on board my vessels, there can be nothing equivocal about it, my dear vicomte; it will be the king you will serve."

Athos waited with a kind of impatient joy for the reply about to be made to this embarrassing question by Raoul, the intractable enemy of the king, his rival. The father hoped that the obstacle would overcome the desire. He was thankful to M. de Beaufort, whose lightness or generous reflection had thrown an impediment in the way of the departure of a son, now his only joy. But Raoul, still firm and tranquil, replied: "Monsieur le duc, the objection you make I have already considered in my mind. I will serve on board your vessels, because you do me the honor to take me with you; but I shall there serve a more powerful master than the king: I shall serve God!"

"God! how so?" said the duke and Athos together.

"My intention is to make profession, and become a knight of Malta," added Bragelonne, letting fall, one by one, words more icy than the drops which fall from the bare trees after the tempests of winter.

Under this blow Athos staggered and the prince himself was moved. Grimaud uttered a heavy groan, and let fall the bottle, which was broken without anybody paying attention. M. de Beaufort looked the young man in the face, and read plainly, though his eyes were cast down, the fire of resolution before which everything must give way. As to Athos, he was too well acquainted with that tender, but inflexible soul; he could not hope to make it deviate from the fatal road it had just chosen. He could only press the hand the duke held out to him. "Comte, I shall set off in two days for Toulon," said M. de Beaufort. "Will you meet me at Paris, in order that I may know your determination?"

"I will have the honor of thanking you there, *mon prince*, for all your kindness," replied the comte.

"And be sure to bring the vicomte with you, whether he follows me or does not follow me," added the duke; "he has my word, and I only ask yours."

Having thrown a little balm upon the wound of the paternal heart, he pulled the ear of Grimaud, whose eyes sparkled more than usual, and regained his escort in the parterre. The horses, rested and refreshed, set off with spirit through the lovely night, and soon placed a considerable distance between their master and the chateau.

Athos and Bragelonne were again face to face. Eleven o'clock was striking. The father and son preserved a profound silence towards each other, where an intelligent observer would have expected cries and tears. But these two men were of such a nature that all emotion following their final resolutions plunged itself so deep into their hearts that it was lost forever. They passed, then, silently and almost breathlessly, the hour that preceded midnight. The clock, by striking, alone pointed out to them how many minutes had lasted the painful journey made by their souls in the immensity of their remembrances of the past and fear of the future. Athos rose first, saying, "it is late, then.... Till to-morrow."

Raoul rose, and in his turn embraced his father. The latter held him clasped to his breast, and said, in a tremulous voice, "In two days, you will have left me, my son — left me forever, Raoul!"

"Monsieur," replied the young man, "I had formed a determination, that of piercing my heart with my sword; but you would have thought that cowardly. I have renounced that determination, and *therefore* we must part."

"You leave me desolate by going, Raoul."

"Listen to me again, monsieur, I implore you. If I do not go, I shall die here of grief and love. I know how long a time I have to live thus. Send me away quickly, monsieur, or you will see me basely die before your eyes — in your house — this is stronger than my will — stronger than my strength — you may plainly see that within one month I have lived thirty years, and that I approach the end of my life."

"Then," said Athos, coldly, "you go with the intention of getting killed in Africa? Oh, tell me! do not lie!"

Raoul grew deadly pale, and remained silent for two seconds, which were to his father two hours of agony. Then, all at once: "Monsieur," said he, "I have promised to devote myself to God. In exchange for the sacrifice I make of my youth and liberty, I will only ask of Him one thing, and that is, to preserve me for you, because you are the only tie which attaches me to this world. God alone can give me the strength not to forget that I owe you everything, and that nothing ought to stand in my esteem before you."

Athos embraced his son tenderly, and said:

"You have just replied to me on the word of honor of an honest man; in two days we shall be with M. de Beaufort at Paris, and you will then do what will be proper for you to do. You are free, Raoul; adieu."

And he slowly gained his bedroom. Raoul went down into the garden, and passed the night in the alley of limes.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Preparations for Departure.

Athos lost no more time in combating this immutable resolution. He gave all his attention to preparing, during the two days the duke had granted him, the proper appointments for Raoul. This labor chiefly concerned Grimaud, who immediately applied himself to it with the good-will and intelligence we know he possessed. Athos gave this worthy servant orders to take the route to Paris when the equipments should be ready; and, not to expose himself to the danger of keeping the duke waiting, or delaying Raoul, so that the duke should perceive his absence, he himself, the day after the visit of M. de Beaufort, set off for Paris with his son.

For the poor young man it was an emotion easily to be understood, thus to return to Paris amongst all the people who had known and loved him. Every face recalled a pang to him who had suffered so much; to him who had loved so much, some circumstance of his unhappy love. Raoul, on approaching Paris, felt as if he were dying. Once in Paris, he really existed no longer. When he reached Guiche's residence, he was informed that Guiche was with Monsieur. Raoul took the road to the Luxembourg, and when arrived, without suspecting that he was going to the place where La Valliere had lived, he heard so much music and respired so many perfumes, he heard so much joyous laughter, and saw so many dancing shadows, that if it had not been for a charitable woman, who perceived him so dejected and pale beneath a doorway, he would have remained there a few minutes, and then would have gone away, never to return. But, as we have said, in the first ante-chamber he had stopped, solely for the sake of not mixing himself with all those happy beings he felt were moving around him in the adjacent salons. And as one of Monsieur's servants, recognizing him, had asked him if he wished to see Monsieur or Madame, Raoul had scarcely answered him, but had sunk down upon a bench near the velvet doorway, looking at a clock, which had stopped for nearly an hour. The servant had passed on, and another, better acquainted with him, had come up, and interrogated Raoul whether he should inform M. de Guiche of his being there. This name did not even arouse the recollections of Raoul. The persistent servant went on to relate that De Guiche had just invented a new game of lottery, and was teaching it to the ladies. Raoul, opening his large eyes, like the absent man in Theophrastus, made no answer, but his sadness increased two shades. With his head hanging down, his limbs relaxed, his mouth half open for the escape of his sighs, Raoul remained, thus forgotten, in the ante-chamber, when all at once a lady's robe passed, rubbing against the doors of a side salon, which opened on the gallery. A lady, young, pretty, and gay, scolding an officer of the household, entered by that way, and expressed herself with much vivacity. The officer replied in calm but firm sentences; it was rather a little love pet than a quarrel of courtiers, and was terminated by a kiss on the fingers of the lady. Suddenly, on perceiving Raoul, the lady became silent, and pushing away the officer:

"Make your escape, Malicorne," said she; "I did not think there was any one here. I shall curse you, if they have either heard or seen us!"

Malicorne hastened away. The young lady advanced behind Raoul, and stretching her joyous face over him as he lay:

"Monsieur is a gallant man," said she, "and no doubt — "

She here interrupted herself by uttering a cry. "Raoul!" said she, blushing.

"Mademoiselle de Montalais!" said Raoul, paler than death.

He rose unsteadily, and tried to make his way across the slippery mosaic of the floor; but she had comprehended that savage and cruel grief; she felt that in the flight of Raoul there was an accusation of herself. A woman, ever vigilant, she did not think she ought to let the opportunity slip of making good her justification; but Raoul, though stopped by her in the middle of the gallery, did not seem disposed to surrender without a combat. He took it up in a tone so cold and embarrassed, that if they had been thus surprised, the whole court would have no doubt about the proceedings of Mademoiselle de Montalais.

"Ah! monsieur," said she with disdain, "what you are doing is very unworthy of a gentleman. My heart inclines me to speak to you; you compromise me by a reception almost uncivil; you are wrong, monsieur; and you confound your friends with enemies. Farewell!"

Raoul had sworn never to speak of Louise, never even to look at those who might have seen Louise; he was going into another world, that he might never meet with anything Louise had seen, or even touched. But after the first shock of his pride, after having had a glimpse of Montalais, the companion of Louise — Montalais, who reminded him of the turret of Blois and the joys of youth — all his reason faded away.

"Pardon me, mademoiselle; it enters not, it cannot enter into my thoughts to be uncivil."

"Do you wish to speak to me?" said she, with the smile of former days. "Well! come somewhere else; for we may be surprised."

"Oh!" said he.

She looked at the clock, doubtingly, then, having reflected:

"In my apartment," said she, "we shall have an hour to ourselves." And taking her course, lighter than a fairy, she ran up to her chamber, followed by Raoul. Shutting the door, and placing in the hands of her *cameriste* the mantle she had held upon her arm:

"You were seeking M. de Guiche, were you not?" said she to Raoul.

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"I will go and ask him to come up here, presently, after I have spoken to you."

"Do so, mademoiselle."

"Are you angry with me?"

Raoul looked at her for a moment, then, casting down his eyes, "Yes," said he.

"You think I was concerned in the plot which brought about the rupture, do you not?"

"Rupture!" said he, with bitterness. "Oh! mademoiselle, there can be no rupture where there has been no love."

"You are in error," replied Montalais; "Louise did love you."

Raoul started.

"Not with love, I know; but she liked you, and you ought to have married her before you set out for London."

Raoul broke into a sinister laugh, which made Montalais shudder.

"You tell me that very much at your ease, mademoiselle. Do people marry whom they like? You forget that the king then kept for himself as his mistress her of whom we are speaking."

"Listen," said the young woman, pressing the hands of Raoul in her own, "you were wrong in every way; a man of your age ought never to leave a woman of hers alone."

"There is no longer any faith in the world, then," said Raoul.

“No, vicomte,” said Montalais, quietly. “Nevertheless, let me tell you that, if, instead of loving Louise coldly and philosophically, you had endeavored to awaken her to love — ”

“Enough, I pray you, mademoiselle,” said Raoul. “I feel as though you are all, of both sexes, of a different age from me. You can laugh, and you can banter agreeably. I, mademoiselle, I loved Mademoiselle de — ” Raoul could not pronounce her name, — ”I loved her well! I put my faith in her — now I am quits by loving her no longer.”

“Oh, vicomte!” said Montalais, pointing to his reflection in a looking-glass.

“I know what you mean, mademoiselle; I am much altered, am I not? Well! Do you know why? Because my face is the mirror of my heart, the outer surface changed to match the mind within.”

“You are consoled, then?” said Montalais, sharply.

“No, I shall never be consoled.”

“I don’t understand you, M. de Bragelonne.”

“I care but little for that. I do not quite understand myself.”

“You have not even tried to speak to Louise?”

“Who! I?” exclaimed the young man, with eyes flashing fire; “I! — Why do you not advise me to marry her? Perhaps the king would consent now.” And he rose from his chair full of anger.

“I see,” said Montalais, “that you are not cured, and that Louise has one enemy the more.”

“One enemy the more!”

“Yes; favorites are but little beloved at the court of France.”

“Oh! while she has her lover to protect her, is not that enough? She has chosen him of such a quality that her enemies cannot prevail against her.” But, stopping all at once, “And then she has you for a friend, mademoiselle,” added he, with a shade of irony which did not glide off the cuirass.

“Who! I? — Oh, no! I am no longer one of those whom Mademoiselle de la Valliere condescends to look upon; but — ”

This *but*, so big with menace and with storm; this *but*, which made the heart of Raoul beat, such griefs did it presage for her whom lately he loved so dearly; this terrible *but*, so significant in a woman like Montalais, was interrupted by a moderately loud noise heard by the speakers proceeding from the alcove behind the wainscoting. Montalais turned to listen, and

Raoul was already rising, when a lady entered the room quietly by the secret door, which she closed after her.

"Madame!" exclaimed Raoul, on recognizing the sister-in-law of the king.

"Stupid wretch!" murmured Montalais, throwing herself, but too late, before the princess, "I have been mistaken in an hour!" She had, however, time to warn the princess, who was walking towards Raoul.

"M. de Bragelonne, Madame," and at these words the princess drew back, uttering a cry in her turn.

"Your royal highness," said Montalais, with volubility, "is kind enough to think of this lottery, and — "

The princess began to lose countenance. Raoul hastened his departure, without divining all, but he felt that he was in the way. Madame was preparing a word of transition to recover herself, when a closet opened in front of the alcove, and M. de Guiche issued, all radiant, also from that closet. The palest of the four, we must admit, was still Raoul. The princess, however, was near fainting, and was obliged to lean upon the foot of the bed for support. No one ventured to support her. This scene occupied several minutes of terrible suspense. But Raoul broke it. He went up to the count, whose inexpressible emotion made his knees tremble, and taking his hand, "Dear count," said he, "tell Madame I am too unhappy not to merit pardon; tell her also that I have loved in the course of my life, and that the horror of the treachery that has been practiced on me renders me inexorable towards all other treachery that may be committed around me. This is why, mademoiselle," said he, smiling to Montalais, "I never would divulge the secret of the visits of my friend to your apartment. Obtain from Madame — from Madame, who is so clement and so generous, — obtain her pardon for you whom she has just surprised also. You are both free, love each other, be happy!"

The princess felt for a moment a despair that cannot be described; it was repugnant to her, notwithstanding the exquisite delicacy which Raoul had exhibited, to feel herself at the mercy of one who had discovered such an indiscretion. It was equally repugnant to her to accept the evasion offered by this delicate deception. Agitated, nervous, she struggled against the double stings of these two troubles. Raoul comprehended her position, and came once more to her aid. Bending his knee before her: "Madame!" said he, in a low voice, “in two days I shall be far from Paris; in a fortnight I shall be far from France, where I shall never be seen again.”

“Are you going away, then?” said she, with great delight.

“With M. de Beaufort.”

“Into Africa!” cried De Guiche, in his turn. “You, Raoul — oh! my friend — into Africa, where everybody dies!”

And forgetting everything, forgetting that that forgetfulness itself compromised the princess more eloquently than his presence, “Ingrate!” said he, “and you have not even consulted me!” And he embraced him; during which time Montalais had led away Madame, and disappeared herself.

Raoul passed his hand over his brow, and said, with a smile, “I have been dreaming!” Then warmly to Guiche, who by degrees absorbed him, “My friend,” said he, “I conceal nothing from you, who are the elected of my heart. I am going to seek death in yonder country; your secret will not remain in my breast more than a year.”

“Oh, Raoul! a man!”

“Do you know what is my thought, count? This is it — I shall live more vividly, being buried beneath the earth, than I have lived for this month past. We are Christians, my friend, and if such sufferings were to continue, I would not be answerable for the safety of my soul.”

De Guiche was anxious to raise objections.

“Not one word more on my account,” said Raoul; “but advice to you, dear friend; what I am going to say to you is of much greater importance.”

“What is that?”

“Without doubt you risk much more than I do, because you love.”

“Oh!”

“It is a joy so sweet to me to be able to speak to you thus! Well, then, De Guiche, beware of Montalais.”

“What! of that kind friend?”

“She was the friend of — her you know of. She ruined her by pride.”

“You are mistaken.”

“And now, when she has ruined her, she would ravish from her the only thing that renders that woman excusable in my eyes.”

“What is that?”

“Her love.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I mean that there is a plot formed against her who is the mistress of the king — a plot formed in the very house of Madame.”

“Can you think so?”

“I am certain of it.”

“By Montalais?”

“Take her as the least dangerous of the enemies I dread for — the other!”

“Explain yourself clearly, my friend; and if I can understand you — ”

“In two words. Madame has been long jealous of the king.”

“I know she has — ”

“Oh! fear nothing — you are beloved — you are beloved, count; do you feel the value of these three words? They signify that you can raise your head, that you can sleep tranquilly, that you can thank God every minute of you life. You are beloved; that signifies that you may hear everything, even the counsel of a friend who wishes to preserve your happiness. You are beloved, De Guiche, you are beloved! You do not endure those atrocious nights, those nights without end, which, with arid eye and fainting heart, others pass through who are destined to die. You will live long, if you act like the miser who, bit by bit, crumb by crumb, collects and heaps up diamonds and gold. You are beloved! — allow me to tell you what you must do that you may be beloved forever.”

De Guiche contemplated for some time this unfortunate young man, half mad with despair, till there passed through his heart something like remorse at his own happiness. Raoul suppressed his feverish excitement, to assume the voice and countenance of an impassible man.

“They will make her, whose name I should wish still to be able to pronounce — they will make her suffer. Swear to me that you will not second them in anything — but that you will defend her when possible, as I would have done myself.”

“I swear I will,” replied De Guiche.

“And,” continued Raoul, “some day, when you shall have rendered her a great service — some day when she shall thank you, promise me to say these words to her — ’I have done you this kindness, madame, at the warm request of M. de Bragelonne, whom you so deeply injured.’“

“I swear I will,” murmured De Guiche.

“That is all. Adieu! I set out to-morrow, or the day after, for

Toulon. If you have a few hours to spare, give them to me.”

“All! all!” cried the young man.

“Thank you!”

“And what are you going to do now?”

“I am going to meet M. le comte at Planchet’s residence, where we hope to find M. d’Artagnan.”

“M. d’Artagnan?”

“Yes, I wish to embrace him before my departure. He is a brave man, who loves me dearly. Farewell, my friend; you are expected, no doubt; you will find me, when you wish, at the lodgings of the comte. Farewell!”

The two young men embraced. Those who chanced to see them both thus, would not have hesitated to say, pointing to Raoul, “That is the happy man!”

CHAPTER XXIX.

Planchet’s Inventory.

Athos, during the visit made to the Luxembourg by Raoul, had gone to Planchet’s residence to inquire after D’Artagnan. The comte, on arriving at the Rue des Lombards, found the shop of the grocer in great confusion; but it was not the encumberment of a lucky sale, or that of an arrival of goods. Planchet was not enthroned, as usual, on sacks and barrels. No. A young man with a pen behind his ear, and another with an account-book in his hand, were setting down a number of figures, whilst a third counted and weighed. An inventory was being taken. Athos, who had no knowledge of commercial matters, felt himself a little embarrassed by material obstacles and the majesty of those who were thus employed. He saw several customers sent away, and asked himself whether he, who came to buy nothing, would not be more properly deemed importunate. He therefore asked very politely if he could see M. Planchet. The reply, quite carelessly given, was that M. Planchet was packing his trunks. These words surprised Athos. “What! his trunks?” said he; “is M. Planchet going away?”

“Yes, monsieur, directly.”

“Then, if you please, inform him that M. le Comte de la Fere desires to speak to him for a moment.”

At the mention of the comte’s name, one of the young men, no doubt accustomed to hear it pronounced with respect, immediately went to inform Planchet. It was at this moment that Raoul, after his painful scene with Montalais and De Guiche, arrived at the grocer’s house. Planchet left his job directly he received the comte’s message.

“Ah! monsieur le comte!” exclaimed he, “how glad I am to see you! What good star brings you here?”

“My dear Planchet,” said Athos, pressing the hand of his son, whose sad look he silently observed, — ”we are come to learn of you — But in what confusion do I find you! You are as white as a miller; where have you been rummaging?”

“Ah, *diable!* take care, monsieur; don’t come near me till I have well shaken myself.”

“What for? Flour or dust only whiten.”

“No, no; what you see on my arms is arsenic.”

“Arsenic?”

“Yes; I am taking my precautions against rats.”

“Ay, I suppose in an establishment like this, rats play a conspicuous part.”

“It is not with this establishment I concern myself, monsieur le comte. The rats have robbed me of more here than they will ever rob me of again.”

“What do you mean?”

“Why, you may have observed, monsieur, my inventory is being taken.”

“Are you leaving trade, then?”

“Eh! *mon Dieu!* yes. I have disposed of my business to one of my young men.”

“Bah! you are rich, then, I suppose?”

“Monsieur, I have taken a dislike to the city; I don’t know whether it is because I am growing old, and as M. d’Artagnan one day said, when we grow old we more often think of the adventures of our youth; but for some time past I have felt myself attracted towards the country and gardening. I was a countryman formerly.” And Planchet marked this confession with a rather pretentious laugh for a man making profession of humility.

Athos made a gesture of approval, and then added: “You are going to buy an estate, then?”

“I have bought one, monsieur.”

“Ah! that is still better.”

“A little house at Fontainebleau, with something like twenty acres of land round it.”

“Very well, Planchet! Accept my compliments on your acquisition.”

“But, monsieur, we are not comfortable here; the cursed dust makes you cough. *Corbleu!* I do not wish to poison the most worthy gentleman in the kingdom.”

Athos did not smile at this little pleasantry which Planchet had aimed at him, in order to try his strength in mundane facetiousness.

“Yes,” said Athos, “let us have a little talk by ourselves — in your own room, for example. You have a room, have you not?”

“Certainly, monsieur le comte.”

"Upstairs, perhaps?" And Athos, seeing Planchet a little embarrassed, wished to relieve him by going first.

"It is — but — " said Planchet, hesitating.

Athos was mistaken in the cause of this hesitation, and, attributing it to a fear the grocer might have of offering humble hospitality, "Never mind, never mind," said he, still going up, "the dwelling of a tradesman in this quarter is not expected to be a palace. Come on."

Raoul nimbly preceded him, and entered first. Two cries were heard simultaneously — we may say three. One of these cries dominated the others; it emanated from a woman. Another proceeded from the mouth of Raoul; it was an exclamation of surprise. He had no sooner uttered it than he shut the door sharply. The third was from fright; it came from Planchet.

"I ask your pardon!" added he; "madame is dressing."

Raoul had, no doubt, seen that what Planchet said was true, for he turned round to go downstairs again.

"Madame — " said Athos. "Oh! pardon me, Planchet, I did not know that you had upstairs — "

"It is Truchen," added Planchet, blushing a little.

"It is whoever you please, my good Planchet; but pardon my rudeness."

"No, no; go up now, gentlemen."

"We will do no such thing," said Athos.

"Oh! madame, having notice, has had time — "

"No, Planchet; farewell!"

"Eh, gentlemen! you would not disoblige me by thus standing on the staircase, or by going away without having sat down."

"If we had known you had a lady upstairs," replied Athos, with his customary coolness, "we would have asked permission to pay our respects to her."

Planchet was so disconcerted by this little extravagance, that he forced the passage, and himself opened the door to admit the comte and his son. Truchen was quite dressed: in the costume of the shopkeeper's wife, rich yet coquettish; German eyes attacking French eyes. She left the apartment after two courtesies, and went down into the shop — but not without having listened at the door, to know what Planchet's gentlemen visitors would say of her. Athos suspected that, and therefore turned the conversation accordingly. Planchet, on his part, was burning to give explanations, which Athos avoided. But, as certain tenacities are stronger than others, Athos was forced to hear Planchet recite his idyls of felicity, translated into a language more chaste than that of Longus. So Planchet related how Truchen had charmed the years of his advancing age, and brought good luck to his business, as Ruth did to Boaz.

“You want nothing now, then, but heirs to your property.”

“If I had one he would have three hundred thousand livres,” said Planchet.

“Humph! you must have one, then,” said Athos, phlegmatically, “if only to prevent your little fortune being lost.”

This word *little fortune* placed Planchet in his rank, like the voice of the sergeant when Planchet was but a *piqueur* in the regiment of Piedmont, in which Rochefort had placed him. Athos perceived that the grocer would marry Truchen, and, in spite of fate, establish a family. This appeared the more evident to him when he learned that the young man to whom Planchet was selling the business was her cousin. Having heard all that was necessary of the happy prospects of the retiring grocer, “What is M. d’Artagnan about?” said he; “he is not at the Louvre.”

“Ah! monsieur le comte, Monsieur d’Artagnan has disappeared.”

“Disappeared!” said Athos, in surprise.

“Oh! monsieur, we know what that means.”

“But *I* do not know.”

“Whenever M. d’Artagnan disappears it is always for some mission or some great affair.”

“Has he said anything to you about it?”

“Never.”

“You were acquainted with his departure for England formerly, were you not?”

“On account of the speculation.” said Planchet, heedlessly.

“The speculation!”

“I mean — ” interrupted Planchet, quite confused.

“Well, well; neither your affairs nor those of your master are in question; the interest we take in him alone has induced me to apply to you. Since the captain of the musketeers is not here, and as we cannot learn from you where we are likely to find M. d’Artagnan, we will take our leave of you. *Au revoir*, Planchet, *au revoir*. Let us be gone, Raoul.”

“Monsieur le comte, I wish I were able to tell you — ”

“Oh, not at all; I am not the man to reproach a servant with discretion.”

This word “servant” struck rudely on the ears of the *demi-millionnaire* Planchet, but natural respect and *bonhomie* prevailed over pride. “There is nothing indiscreet in telling you, monsieur le comte, M. d’Artagnan came here the other day — ”

“Aha?”

“And remained several hours consulting a geographical chart.”

“You are right, then, my friend; say no more about it.”

“And the chart is there as a proof,” added Planchet, who went to fetch from the neighboring wall, where it was suspended by a twist, forming a triangle with the bar of the window to which it was fastened, the plan consulted by the captain on his last visit to Planchet. This plan, which he brought to the comte, was a map of France, upon which the practiced eye of that gentleman discovered an itinerary, marked out with small pins; wherever a pin was missing, a hole denoted its having been there. Athos, by following with his eye the pins and holes, saw that D’Artagnan had taken the direction of the south, and gone as far as the Mediterranean, towards Toulon. It was near Cannes that the marks and the punctured places ceased. The Comte de la Fere puzzled his brains for some time, to divine what the musketeer could be going to do at Cannes, and what motive could have led him to examine the banks of the Var. The reflections of Athos suggested nothing. His accustomed perspicacity was at fault. Raoul’s researches were not more successful than his father’s.

“Never mind,” said the young man to the comte, who silently, and with his finger, had made him understand the route of D’Artagnan; “we must confess that there is a Providence always occupied in connecting our destiny with that of M. d’Artagnan. There he is on the coast of Cannes, and you, monsieur, will, at least, conduct me as far as Toulon. Be assured that we shall meet with him more easily upon our route than on this map.”

Then, taking leave of Planchet, who was scolding his shopmen, even the cousin of Truchen, his successor, the gentlemen set out to pay a visit to M. de Beaufort. On leaving the grocer’s shop, they saw a coach, the future depository of the charms of Mademoiselle Truchen and Planchet’s bags of crowns.

“Every one journeys towards happiness by the route he chooses,” said Raoul, in a melancholy tone.

“Road to Fontainebleau!” cried Planchet to his coachman.

CHAPTER XXX.

The Inventory of M. de Beaufort.

To have talked of D'Artagnan with Planchet, to have seen Planchet quit Paris to bury himself in his country retreat, had been for Athos and his son like a last farewell to the noise of the capital — to their life of former days. What, in fact, did these men leave behind them — one of whom had exhausted the past age in glory, and the other, the present age in misfortune? Evidently neither of them had anything to ask of his contemporaries. They had only to pay a visit to M. de Beaufort, and arrange with him the particulars of departure. The duke was lodged magnificently in Paris. He had one of those superb establishments pertaining to great fortunes, the like of which certain old men remembered to have seen in all their glory in the times of wasteful liberality of Henry III.'s reign. Then, really, several great nobles were richer than the king. They knew it, used it, and never deprived themselves of the pleasure of humiliating his royal majesty when they had an opportunity. It was this egotistical aristocracy Richelieu had constrained to contribute, with its blood, its purse, and its duties, to what was from his time styled the king's service. From Louis XI. — that terrible mower-down of the great — to Richelieu, how many families had raised their heads! How many, from Richelieu to Louis XIV., had bowed their heads, never to raise them again! But M. de Beaufort was born a prince, and of a blood which is not shed upon scaffolds, unless by the decree of peoples, — a prince who had kept up a grand style of living. How did he maintain his horses, his people, and his table? Nobody knew; himself less than others. Only there were then privileges for the sons of kings, to whom nobody refused to become a creditor, whether from respect or the persuasion that they would some day be paid.

Athos and Raoul found the mansion of the duke in as much confusion as that of Planchet. The duke, likewise, was making his inventory; that is to say, he was distributing to his friends everything of value he had in his house. Owing nearly two millions — an enormous amount in those days — M. de Beaufort had calculated that he could not set out for Africa without a good round sum, and, in order to find that sum, he was distributing to his old creditors plate, arms, jewels, and furniture, which was more magnificent in selling it, and brought him back double. In fact, how could a man to whom ten thousand livres were owing, refuse to carry away a present worth six thousand, enhanced in estimation from having belonged to a descendant of Henry IV.? And how, after having carried away that present, could he refuse ten thousand livres more to this generous noble? This, then, was what had happened. The duke had no longer a dwelling-house — that had become useless to an admiral whose place of residence is his ship; he had no longer need of superfluous arms, when he was placed amidst his cannons; no more jewels, which the sea might rob him of; but he had three or four hundred thousand crowns fresh in his coffers. And throughout the house there was a joyous movement of people who believed they were plundering monseigneur. The prince had, in a supreme degree, the art of making happy the creditors most to be pitied. Every distressed man, every empty purse, found in him patience and sympathy for his position. To some he said, “I wish I had what *you* have; I would give it you.” And to others, “I have but this silver ewer; it is worth at least five hundred livres, — take it.” The effect of which was — so truly is courtesy a current payment — that the prince constantly found means to renew his creditors. This time he used no ceremony; it might be called a general pillage. He gave up everything. The Oriental fable of the poor Arab who carried away from the pillage of palace a kettle at the bottom of which was concealed a bag of gold, and whom everybody allowed to pass without jealousy, — this fable had become a truth in the prince’s mansion. Many contractors paid themselves upon the offices of the duke. Thus, the provision department, who plundered the clothes-presses and the harness-rooms, attached very little value to things which tailors and saddlers set great store by. Anxious to carry home to their wives presents given them by monseigneur, many were seen bounding joyously along, under the weight of earthen jars and bottles, gloriously stamped with the arms of the prince. M. de Beaufort finished by giving away his horses and the hay from his lofts. He made more than thirty happy with kitchen utensils; and thirty more with the contents of his cellar. Still further; all these people went away with the conviction that M. de Beaufort only acted in this manner to prepare for a new fortune concealed beneath the Arabs’ tents. They repeated to each other, while pillaging his hotel, that he was sent to Gigelli by the king to reconstruct his lost fortunes;

that the treasures of Africa would be equally divided between the admiral and the king of France; that these treasures consisted in mines of diamonds, or other fabulous stones; the gold and silver mines of Mount Atlas did not even obtain the honor of being named. In addition to the mines to be worked — which could not be begun till after the campaign — there would be the booty made by the army. M. de Beaufort would lay his hands on all the riches pirates had robbed Christendom of since the battle of Lepanto. The number of millions from these sources defied calculation. Why, then, should he, who was going in quest of such treasure, set any store by the poor utensils of his past life? And reciprocally, why should they spare the property of him who spared it so little himself?

Such was the position of affairs. Athos, with his piercing practiced glance, saw what was going on at once. He found the admiral of France a little exalted, for he was rising from a table of fifty covers, at which the guests had drunk long and deeply to the prosperity of the expedition; at the conclusion of which repast, the remains, with the dessert, had been given to the servants, and the empty dishes and plates to the curious. The prince was intoxicated with his ruin and his popularity at one and the same time. He had drunk his old wine to the health of his wine of the future. When he saw Athos and Raoul:

“There is my aide-de-camp being brought to me!” he cried. “Come hither, comte; come hither, vicomte.”

Athos tried to find a passage through the heaps of linen and plate.

“Ah! step over, step over!” said the duke, offering a full glass to Athos. The latter drank it; Raoul scarcely moistened his lips.

“Here is your commission,” said the prince to Raoul. “I had prepared it, reckoning upon you. You will go before me as far as Antibes.”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“Here is the order.” And De Beaufort gave Raoul the order. “Do you know anything of the sea?”

“Yes, monseigneur; I have traveled with M. le Prince.”

“That is well. All these barges and lighters must be in attendance to form an escort and carry my provisions. The army must be prepared to embark in a fortnight at the very latest.”

“That shall be done, monseigneur.”

“The present order gives you the right to visit and search all the isles along the coast; you will there make the enrolments and levies you may want for me.”

“Yes, monsieur le duc.”

“And you are an active man, and will work freely, you will spend much money.”

“I hope not, monseigneur.”

“But I am sure you will. My intendant has prepared the orders of a thousand livres, drawn upon the cities of the south; he will give you a hundred of them. Now, dear vicomte, be gone.”

Athos interrupted the prince. “Keep your money, monseigneur; war is to be waged among the Arabs with gold as well as lead.”

“I wish to try the contrary,” replied the duke; “and then you are acquainted with my ideas upon the expedition — plenty of noise, plenty of fire, and, if so it must be, I shall disappear in the smoke.” Having spoken thus, M. de Beaufort began to laugh; but his mirth was not reciprocated by Athos and Raoul. He perceived this at once. “Ah,” said he, with the courteous egotism of his rank and age, “you are such people as a man should not see after dinner; you are cold, stiff, and dry when I am all fire, suppleness, and wine. No, devil take me! I should always see you fasting, vicomte, and you, comte, if you wear such a face as that, you shall see me no more.”

He said this, pressing the hand of Athos, who replied with a smile, “Monseigneur, do not talk so grandly because you happen to have plenty of money. I predict that within a month you will be dry, stiff, and cold, in presence of your strong-box, and that then, having Raoul at your elbow, fasting, you will be surprised to see him gay, animated, and generous, because he will have some new crowns to offer you.”

“God grant it may be so!” cried the delighted duke. “Comte, stay with me!”

“No, I shall go with Raoul; the mission with which you charge him is a troublesome and difficult one. Alone it would be too much for him to execute. You do not observe, monseigneur, you have given him command of the first order.”

“Bah!”

“And in your naval arrangements, too.”

“That may be true. But one finds that such fine young fellows as your son generally do all that is required of them.”

“Monseigneur, I believe you will find nowhere so much zeal and intelligence, so much real bravery, as in Raoul; but if he failed to arrange your embarkation, you would only meet the fate that you deserve.”

“Humph! you are scolding me, then.”

“Monseigneur, to provision a fleet, to assemble a flotilla, to enroll your maritime force, would take an admiral a year. Raoul is a cavalry officer, and you allow him a fortnight!”

“I tell you he will do it.”

“He may; but I will go and help him.”

“To be sure you will; I reckoned upon you, and still further believe that when we are once at Toulon you will not let him depart alone.”

“Oh!” said Athos, shaking his head.

“Patience! patience!”

“Monseigneur, permit us to take our leave.”

“Begone, then, and may my good luck attend you.”

“Adieu! monseigneur; and may your own good luck attend you likewise.”

“Here is an expedition admirably commenced!” said Athos to his son. “No provisions — no store flotilla! What can be done, thus?”

“Humph!” murmured Raoul; “if all are going to do as I am, provisions will not be wanted.”

“Monsieur,” replied Athos, sternly, “do not be unjust and senseless in your egotism, or your grief, whichever you please to call it. If you set out for this war solely with the intention of getting killed therein, you stand in need of nobody, and it was scarcely worth while to recommend you to M. de Beaufort. But when you have been introduced to the prime commandant — when you have accepted the responsibility of a post in his army, the question is no longer about *you*, but about all those poor soldiers, who, as well as you, have hearts and bodies, who will weep for their country and endure all the necessities of their condition. Remember, Raoul, that officers are ministers as useful to the world as priests, and that they ought to have more charity.”

“Monsieur, I know it and have practiced it; I would have continued to do so still, but — ”

“You forget also that you are of a country that is proud of its military glory; go and die if you like, but do not die without honor and without advantage to France. Cheer up, Raoul! do not let my words grieve you; I love you, and wish to see you perfect.”

“I love your reproaches, monsieur,” said the young man, mildly; “they alone may cure me, because they prove to me that some one loves me still.”

“And now, Raoul, let us be off; the weather is so fine, the heavens so clear, those heavens which we always find above our heads, which you will see more clear still at Gigelli, and which will speak to you of me there, as they speak to me here of God.”

The two gentlemen, after having agreed on this point, talked over the wild freaks of the duke, convinced that France would be served in a very incomplete manner, as regarded both spirit and practice, in the ensuing expedition; and having summed up the ducal policy under the one word vanity, they set forward, in obedience rather to their will than destiny. The sacrifice was half accomplished.

CHAPTER XXXI.

The Silver Dish.

The journey passed off pretty well. Athos and his son traversed France at the rate of fifteen leagues per day; sometimes more, sometimes less, according to the intensity of Raoul's grief. It took them a fortnight to reach Toulon, and they lost all traces of D'Artagnan at Antibes. They were forced to believe that the captain of the musketeers was desirous of preserving an incognito on his route, for Athos derived from his inquiries an assurance that such a cavalier as he described had exchanged his horse for a well-closed carriage on quitting Avignon. Raoul was much affected at not meeting with D'Artagnan. His affectionate heart longed to take a farewell and received consolation from that heart of steel. Athos knew from experience that D'Artagnan became impenetrable when engaged in any serious affair, whether on his own account or on the service of the king. He even feared to offend his friend, or thwart him by too pressing inquiries. And yet when Raoul commenced his labor of classing the flotilla, and got together the *chalands* and lighters to send them to Toulon, one of the fishermen told the comte that his boat had been laid up to refit since a trip he had made on account of a gentleman who was in great haste to embark. Athos, believing that this man was telling a falsehood in order to be left at liberty to fish, and so gain more money when all his companions were gone, insisted upon having the details. The fisherman informed him that six days previously, a man had come in the night to hire his boat, for the purpose of visiting the island of St. Honnorat. The price was agreed upon, but the gentleman had arrived with an immense carriage case, which he insisted upon embarking, in spite of the many difficulties that opposed the operation. The fisherman wished to retract. He had even threatened, but his threats had procured him nothing but a shower of blows from the gentleman's cane, which fell upon his shoulders sharp and long. Swearing and grumbling, he had recourse to the syndic of his brotherhood at Antibes, who administer justice among themselves and protect each other; but the gentleman had exhibited a certain paper, at sight of which the syndic, bowing to the very ground, enjoined obedience from the fisherman, and abused him for having been refractory. They then departed with the freight.

"But all this does not tell us," said Athos, "how you injured your boat."

"This is the way. I was steering towards St. Honnorat as the gentleman desired me; but he changed his mind, and pretended that I could not pass to the south of the abbey."

"And why not?"

"Because, monsieur, there is in front of the square tower of the Benedictines, towards the southern point, the bank of the *Moines*."

"A rock?" asked Athos.

"Level with the water, but below water; a dangerous passage, yet one I have cleared a thousand times; the gentleman required me to land him at Sainte-Marguerite's."

"Well?"

"Well, monsieur!" cried the fisherman, with his *Provencal* accent, "a man is a sailor, or he is not; he knows his course, or he is nothing but a fresh-water lubber. I was obstinate, and wished to try the channel. The gentleman took me by the collar, and told me quietly he would strangle me. My mate armed himself with a hatchet, and so did I. We had the affront of the night before to pay him out for. But the gentleman drew his sword, and used it in such an astonishingly rapid manner, that we neither of us could get near him. I was about to hurl my hatchet at his head, and I had a right to do so, hadn't I, monsieur? for a sailor aboard is master, as a citizen is in his chamber; I was going, then, in self-defense, to cut the gentleman in two, when, all at once — believe me or not, monsieur — the great carriage case opened of itself, I don't know how, and there came out of it a sort of a phantom, his head covered with a black helmet and a black mask, something terrible to look upon, which came towards me threatening with its fist."

"And that was — " said Athos.

"That was the devil, monsieur; for the gentleman, with great glee, cried out, on seeing him: 'Ah! thank you, monseigneur!'"

"A most strange story!" murmured the comte, looking at Raoul.

"And what did you do?" asked the latter of the fisherman.

"You must know, monsieur, that two poor men, such as we are, could be no match for two gentlemen; but when one of them turned out to be the devil, we had no earthly chance! My companion and I did not stop to consult one another; we made but one jump into the sea, for we were within seven or eight hundred feet of the shore.”

“Well, and then?”

“Why, and then, monseigneur, as there was a little wind from the southwest, the boat drifted into the sands of Sainte-Marguerite’s.”

“Oh! — but the travelers?”

“Bah! you need not be uneasy about them! It was pretty plain that one was the devil, and protected the other; for when we recovered the boat, after she got afloat again, instead of finding these two creatures injured by the shock, we found nothing, not even the carriage or the case.”

“Very strange! very strange!” repeated the comte. “But after that, what did you do, my friend?”

“I made my complaint to the governor of Sainte-Marguerite’s, who brought my finger under my nose by telling me if I plagued him with such silly stories he would have me flogged.”

“What! did the governor himself say so?”

“Yes, monsieur; and yet my boat was injured, seriously injured, for the prow is left upon the point of Sainte-Marguerite’s, and the carpenter asks a hundred and twenty livres to repair it.”

“Very well,” replied Raoul; “you will be exempted from the service. Go.”

“We will go to Sainte-Marguerite’s, shall we?” said the comte to Bragelonne, as the man walked away.

“Yes, monsieur, for there is something to be cleared up; that man does not seem to me to have told the truth.”

“Nor to me either, Raoul. The story of the masked man and the carriage having disappeared, may be told to conceal some violence these fellows have committed upon their passengers in the open sea, to punish him for his persistence in embarking.”

“I formed the same suspicion; the carriage was more likely to contain property than a man.”

“We shall see to that, Raoul. The gentleman very much resembles D’Artagnan; I recognize his methods of proceeding. Alas! we are no longer the young invincibles of former days. Who knows whether the hatchet or the iron bar of this miserable coaster has not succeeded in doing that which the best blades of Europe, balls, and bullets have not been able to do in forty years?”

That same day they set out for Sainte-Marguerite’s, on board a *chasse-maree* come from Toulon under orders. The impression they experienced on landing was a singularly pleasing one. The island seemed loaded with flowers and fruits. In its cultivated part it served as a garden for the governor. Orange, pomegranate, and fig trees bent beneath the weight of their golden or purple fruits. All round this garden, in the uncultivated parts, red partridges ran about in conveys among the brambles and tufts of junipers, and at every step of the comte and Raoul a terrified rabbit quitted his thyme and heath to scuttle away to the burrow. In fact, this fortunate isle was uninhabited. Flat, offering nothing but a tiny bay for the convenience of embarkation, and under the protection of the governor, who went shares with them, smugglers made use of it as a provisional *entrepot*, at the expense of not killing the game or devastating the garden. With this compromise, the governor was in a situation to be satisfied with a garrison of eight men to guard his fortress, in which twelve cannons accumulated coats of moldy green. The governor was a sort of happy farmer, harvesting wines, figs, oil, and oranges, preserving his citrons and *cedrates* in the sun of his casemates. The fortress, encircled by a deep ditch, its only guardian, arose like three heads upon turrets connected with each other by terraces covered with moss.

Athos and Raoul wandered for some time round the fences of the garden without finding any one to introduce them to the governor. They ended by making their own way into the garden. It was at the hottest time of the day. Each living thing sought its shelter under grass or stone. The heavens spread their fiery veils as if to stifle all noises, to envelop all existences; the rabbit under the broom, the fly under the leaf, slept as the wave did beneath the heavens. Athos saw nothing living but a soldier, upon the terrace beneath the second and third court, who was carrying a basket of provisions on his head. This man returned almost immediately without his basket, and disappeared in the shade of his sentry-box. Athos supposed he must have been carrying dinner to some one, and, after having done so, returned to dine himself. All at once they heard some one call out, and raising their heads, perceived in the frame of the bars of the window something of a white color, like a hand that was waved backwards and forwards — something shining, like a polished weapon struck by the rays of the sun. And before they were able to ascertain what it was, a luminous train, accompanied by a hissing sound in the air, called their attention from the donjon to the ground. A second dull noise was heard from the ditch, and Raoul ran to pick up a silver plate which was rolling along the dry sand. The hand that had thrown this plate made a sign to the two gentlemen, and then disappeared. Athos and Raoul, approaching each other, commenced an attentive examination of the dusty plate, and they discovered, in characters traced upon the bottom of it with the point of a knife, this inscription:

"*I am the brother of the king of France — a prisoner to-day — a madman to-morrow. French gentlemen and Christians, pray to God for the soul and the reason of the son of your old rulers*."

The plate fell from the hands of Athos whilst Raoul was endeavoring to make out the meaning of these dismal words. At the same moment they heard a cry from the top of the donjon. Quick as lightning Raoul bent down his head, and forced down that of his father likewise. A musket-barrel glittered from the crest of the wall. A white smoke floated like a plume from the mouth of the musket, and a ball was flattened against a stone within six inches of the two gentlemen.

"*Cordieu!*" cried Athos. "What, are people assassinated here? Come down, cowards as you are!"

"Yes, come down!" cried Raoul, furiously shaking his fist at the castle.

One of the assailants — he who was about to fire — replied to these cries by an exclamation of surprise; and, as his companion, who wished to continue the attack, had re-seized his loaded musket, he who had cried out threw up the weapon, and the ball flew into the air. Athos and Raoul, seeing them disappear from the platform, expected they would come down to them, and waited with a firm demeanor. Five minutes had not elapsed, when a stroke upon a drum called the eight soldiers of the garrison to arms, and they showed themselves on the other side of the ditch with their muskets in hand. At the head of these men was an officer, whom Athos and Raoul recognized as the one who had fired the first musket. The man ordered the soldiers to "make ready."

"We are going to be shot!" cried Raoul; "but, sword in hand, at least, let us leap the ditch! We shall kill at least two of these scoundrels, when their muskets are empty." And, suiting the action to the word, Raoul was springing forward, followed by Athos, when a well-known voice resounded behind them, "Athos! Raoul!"

"D'Artagnan!" replied the two gentlemen.

“Recover arms! *Mordioux!*” cried the captain to the soldiers. “I was sure I could not be mistaken!”

“What is the meaning of this?” asked Athos. “What! were we to be shot without warning?”

“It was I who was going to shoot you, and if the governor missed you, I should not have missed you, my dear friends. How fortunate it is that I am accustomed to take a long aim, instead of firing at the instant I raise my weapon! I thought I recognized you. Ah! my dear friends, how fortunate!” And D’Artagnan wiped his brow, for he had run fast, and emotion with him was not feigned.

“How!” said Athos. “And is the gentleman who fired at us the governor of the fortress?”

“In person.”

“And why did he fire at us? What have we done to him?”

“*Pardieu!* You received what the prisoner threw to you?”

“That is true.”

“That plate — the prisoner has written something on it, has he not?”

“Yes.”

“Good heavens! I was afraid he had.”

And D’Artagnan, with all the marks of mortal disquietude, seized the plate, to read the inscription. When he had read it, a fearful pallor spread across his countenance. “Oh! good heavens!” repeated he. “Silence! — Here is the governor.”

“And what will he do to us? Is it our fault?”

“It is true, then?” said Athos, in a subdued voice. “It is true?”

“Silence! I tell you — silence! If he only believes you can read; if he only suspects you have understood; I love you, my dear friends, I would willingly be killed for you, but — ”

“But — ” said Athos and Raoul.

“But I could not save you from perpetual imprisonment if I saved you from death. Silence, then! Silence again!”

The governor came up, having crossed the ditch upon a plank bridge.

“Well!” said he to D’Artagnan, “what stops us?”

“You are Spaniards — you do not understand a word of French,” said the captain, eagerly, to his friends in a low voice.

“Well!” replied he, addressing the governor, “I was right; these gentlemen are two Spanish captains with whom I was acquainted at Ypres, last year; they don’t know a word of French.”

“Ah!” said the governor, sharply. “And yet they were trying to read the inscription on the plate.”

D’Artagnan took it out of his hands, effacing the characters with the point of his sword.

“How!” cried the governor, “what are you doing? I cannot read them now!”

“It is a state secret,” replied D’Artagnan, bluntly; “and as you know that, according to the king’s orders, it is under the penalty of death any one should penetrate it, I will, if you like, allow you to read it, and have you shot immediately afterwards.”

During this apostrophe — half serious, half ironical — Athos and Raoul preserved the coolest, most unconcerned silence.

“But, is it possible,” said the governor, “that these gentlemen do not comprehend at least some words?”

“Suppose they do! If they do understand a few spoken words, it does not follow that they should understand what is written. They cannot even read Spanish. A noble Spaniard, remember, ought never to know how to read.”

The governor was obliged to be satisfied with these explanations, but he was still tenacious. “Invite these gentlemen to come to the fortress,” said he.

“That I will willingly do. I was about to propose it to you.” The fact is, the captain had quite another idea, and would have wished his friends a hundred leagues off. But he was obliged to make the best of it. He addressed the two gentlemen in Spanish, giving them a polite invitation, which they accepted. They all turned towards the entrance of the fort, and, the incident being at an end, the eight soldiers returned to their delightful leisure, for a moment disturbed by this unexpected adventure.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Captive and Jailers.

When they had entered the fort, and whilst the governor was making some preparations for the reception of his guests, “Come,” said Athos, “let us have a word of explanation whilst we are alone.”

“It is simply this,” replied the musketeer. “I have conducted hither a prisoner, who the king commands shall not be seen. You came here, he has thrown something to you through the lattice of his window; I was at dinner with the governor, I saw the object thrown, and I saw Raoul pick it up. It does not take long to understand this. I understood it, and I thought you in intelligence with my prisoner. And then — ”

“And then — you commanded us to be shot.”

“*Ma foi!* I admit it; but, if I was the first to seize a musket, fortunately, I was the last to take aim at you.”

“If you had killed me, D’Artagnan, I should have had the good fortune to die for the royal house of France, and it would be an honor to die by your hand — you, its noblest and most loyal defender.”

“What the devil, Athos, do you mean by the royal house?” stammered D’Artagnan. “You don’t mean that you, a well-informed and sensible man, can place any faith in the nonsense written by an idiot?”

“I do believe in it.”

“With so much the more reason, my dear chevalier, from your having orders to kill all those who do believe in it,” said Raoul.

“That is because,” replied the captain of the musketeers — ”because every calumny, however absurd it may be, has the almost certain chance of becoming popular.”

“No, D’Artagnan,” replied Athos, promptly; “but because the king is not willing that the secret of his family should transpire among the people, and cover with shame the executioners of the son of Louis XIII.”

“Do not talk in such a childish manner, Athos, or I shall begin to think you have lost your senses. Besides, explain to me how it is possible Louis XIII. should have a son in the Isle of Sainte-Marguerite.”

"A son whom you have brought hither masked, in a fishing-boat," said Athos. "Why not?"

D'Artagnan was brought to a pause.

"Oh!" said he; "whence do you know that a fishing-boat — ?"

"Brought you to Sainte-Marguerite's with the carriage containing the prisoner — with a prisoner whom you styled monseigneur. Oh! I am acquainted with all that," resumed the comte. D'Artagnan bit his mustache.

"If it were true," said he, "that I had brought hither in a boat and with a carriage a masked prisoner, nothing proves that this prisoner must be a prince — a prince of the house of France."

"Ask Aramis such riddles," replied Athos, coolly.

"Aramis," cried the musketeer, quite at a stand. "Have you seen Aramis?"

"After his discomfiture at Vaux, yes; I have seen Aramis, a fugitive, pursued, bewildered, ruined; and Aramis has told me enough to make me believe in the complaints this unfortunate young prince cut upon the bottom of the plate."

D'Artagnan's head sunk on his breast in some confusion. "This is the way," said he, "in which God turns to nothing that which men call wisdom! A fine secret must that be of which twelve or fifteen persons hold the tattered fragments! Athos, cursed be the chance which has brought you face to face with me in this affair! for now — "

"Well," said Athos, with his customary mild severity, "is your secret lost because I know it? Consult your memory, my friend. Have I not borne secrets heavier than this?"

"You have never borne one so dangerous," replied D'Artagnan, in a tone of sadness. "I have something like a sinister idea that all who are concerned with this secret will die, and die unhappily."

"The will of God be done!" said Athos, "but here is your governor."

D'Artagnan and his friends immediately resumed their parts. The governor, suspicious and hard, behaved towards D'Artagnan with a politeness almost amounting to obsequiousness. With respect to the travelers, he contented himself with offering good cheer, and never taking his eye from them. Athos and Raoul observed that he often tried to embarrass them by sudden attacks, or to catch them off their guard; but neither the one nor the other gave him the least advantage. What D'Artagnan had said was probable, if the governor did not believe it to be quite true. They rose from the table to repose awhile.

“What is this man’s name? I don’t like the looks of him,” said Athos to D’Artagnan in Spanish.

“De Saint-Mars,” replied the captain.

“He is, then, I suppose, the prince’s jailer?”

“Eh! how can I tell? I may be kept at Sainte-Marguerite forever.”

“Oh! no, not you!”

“My friend, I am in the situation of a man who finds a treasure in the midst of a desert. He would like to carry it away, but he cannot; he would like to leave it, but he dares not. The king will not dare to recall me, for no one else would serve him as faithfully as I do; he regrets not having me near him, from being aware that no one would be of so much service near his person as myself. But it will happen as it may please God.”

“But,” observed Raoul, “your not being certain proves that your situation here is provisional, and you will return to Paris?”

“Ask these gentlemen,” interrupted the governor, “what was their purpose in coming to Saint-Marguerite?”

“They came from learning there was a convent of Benedictines at Sainte-Honnorat which is considered curious; and from being told there was excellent shooting in the island.”

“That is quite at their service, as well as yours,” replied Saint-Mars.

D’Artagnan politely thanked him.

“When will they depart?” added the governor.

“To-morrow,” replied D’Artagnan.

M. de Saint-Mars went to make his rounds, and left D’Artagnan alone with the pretended Spaniards.

“Oh!” exclaimed the musketeer, “here is a life and a society that suits me very little. I command this man, and he bores me, *mordioux!* Come, let us have a shot or two at the rabbits; the walk will be beautiful, and not fatiguing. The whole island is but a league and a half in length, with the breadth of a league; a real park. Let us try to amuse ourselves.”

“As you please, D’Artagnan; not for the sake of amusing ourselves, but to gain an opportunity for talking freely.”

D’Artagnan made a sign to a soldier, who brought the gentlemen some guns, and then returned to the fort.

“And now,” said the musketeer, “answer me the question put to you by that black-looking Saint-Mars: what did you come to do at the Lerin Isles?”

“To bid you farewell.”

“Bid me farewell! What do you mean by that? Is Raoul going anywhere?”

“Yes.”

“Then I will lay a wager it is with M. de Beaufort.”

“With M. de Beaufort it is, my dear friend. You always guess correctly.”

“From habit.”

Whilst the two friends were commencing their conversation, Raoul, with his head hanging down and his heart oppressed, seated himself on a mossy rock, his gun across his knees, looking at the sea — looking at the heavens, and listening to the voice of his soul; he allowed the sportsmen to attain a considerable distance from him. D’Artagnan remarked his absence.

“He has not recovered the blow?” said he to Athos.

“He is struck to death.”

“Oh! your fears exaggerate, I hope. Raoul is of a tempered nature. Around all hearts as noble as his, there is a second envelope that forms a cuirass. The first bleeds, the second resists.”

“No,” replied Athos, “Raoul will die of it.”

“*Mordioux!*” said D’Artagnan, in a melancholy tone. And he did not add a word to this exclamation. Then, a minute after, “Why do you let him go?”

“Because he insists on going.”

“And why do you not go with him?”

“Because I could not bear to see him die.”

D’Artagnan looked his friend earnestly in the face. “You know one thing,” continued the comte, leaning upon the arm of the captain; “you know that in the course of my life I have been afraid of but few things. Well! I have an incessant gnawing, insurmountable fear that an hour will come in which I shall hold the dead body of that boy in my arms.”

“Oh!” murmured D’Artagnan; “oh!”

“He will die, I know, I have a perfect conviction of that; but I would not see him die.”

“How is this, Athos? you come and place yourself in the presence of the bravest man, you say you have ever seen, of your own D’Artagnan, of that man without an equal, as you formerly called him, and you come and tell him, with your arms folded, that you are afraid of witnessing the death of your son, you who have seen all that can be seen in this world! Why have you this fear, Athos? Man upon this earth must expect everything, and ought to face everything.”

“Listen to me, my friend. After having worn myself out upon this earth of which you speak, I have preserved but two religions: that of life, friendship, my duty as a father — that of eternity, love, and respect for God. Now, I have within me the revelation that if God should decree that my friend or my son should render up his last sigh in my presence — oh! no, I cannot even tell you, D’Artagnan!”

“Speak, speak, tell me!”

“I am strong against everything, except against the death of those I love. For that only there is no remedy. He who dies, gains; he who sees others die, loses. No, this is it — to know that I should no more meet on earth him whom I now behold with joy; to know that there would nowhere be a D’Artagnan any more, nowhere again be a Raoul, oh! I am old, look you, I have no longer courage; I pray God to spare me in my weakness; but if he struck me so plainly and in that fashion, I should curse him. A Christian gentleman ought not to curse his God, D’Artagnan; it is enough to once have cursed a king!”

“Humph!” sighed D’Artagnan, a little confused by this violent tempest of grief.

“Let me speak to him, Athos. Who knows?”

“Try, if you please, but I am convinced you will not succeed.”

“I will not attempt to console him. I will serve him.”

“You will?”

“Doubtless, I will. Do you think this would be the first time a woman had repented of an infidelity? I will go to him, I tell you.”

Athos shook his head, and continued his walk alone, D’Artagnan, cutting across the brambles, rejoined Raoul and held out his hand to him. “Well, Raoul! You have something to say to me?”

“I have a kindness to ask of you,” replied Bragelonne.

“Ask it, then.”

“You will some day return to France?”

“I hope so.”

“Ought I to write to Mademoiselle de la Valliere?”

“No, you must not.”

“But I have many things to say to her.”

“Go and say them to her, then.”

“Never!”

"Pray, what virtue do you attribute to a letter, which your speech might not possess?"

"Perhaps you are right."

"She loves the king," said D'Artagnan, bluntly; "and she is an honest girl." Raoul started. "And you, you whom she abandons, she, perhaps, loves better than she does the king, but after another fashion."

"D'Artagnan, do you believe she loves the king?"

"To idolatry. Her heart is inaccessible to any other feeling. You might continue to live near her, and would be her best friend."

"Ah!" exclaimed Raoul, with a passionate burst of repugnance at such a hideous hope.

"Will you do so?"

"It would be base."

"That is a very absurd word, which would lead me to think slightly of your understanding. Please to understand, Raoul, that it is never base to do that which is imposed upon us by a superior force. If your heart says to you, 'Go there, or die,' why go, Raoul. Was she base or brave, she whom you loved, in preferring the king to you, the king whom her heart commanded her imperiously to prefer to you? No, she was the bravest of women. Do, then, as she has done. Oblige yourself. Do you know one thing of which I am sure, Raoul?"

"What is that?"

"Why, that by seeing her closely with the eyes of a jealous man — "

"Well?"

"Well! you would cease to love her."

"Then I am decided, my dear D'Artagnan."

"To set off to see her again?"

"No; to set off that I may *never* see her again. I wish to love her forever."

"Ha! I must confess," replied the musketeer, "that is a conclusion which I was far from expecting."

"This is what I wish, my friend. You will see her again, and you will give her a letter which, if you think proper, will explain to her, as to yourself, what is passing in my heart. Read it; I drew it up last night. Something told me I should see you to-day." He held the letter out, and D'Artagnan read:

"MADEMOISELLE, — You are not wrong in my eyes in not loving me. You have only been guilty of one fault towards me, that of having left me to believe you loved me. This error will cost me my life. I pardon you, but I cannot pardon myself. It is said that happy lovers are deaf to the sorrows of rejected lovers. It will not be so with you, who did not love me, save with anxiety. I am sure that if I had persisted in endeavoring to change that friendship into love, you would have yielded out of a fear of bringing about my death, or lessening the esteem I had for you. It is much more delightful to me to die, knowing that *you* are free and satisfied. How much, then, will you love me, when you will no longer fear either my presence or reproaches? You will love me, because, however charming a new love may appear to you, God has not made me in anything inferior to him you have chosen, and because my devotedness, my sacrifice, and my painful end will assure me, in your eyes, a certain superiority over him. I have allowed to escape, in the candid credulity of my heart, the treasure I possessed. Many people tell me that you loved me enough to lead me to hope you would have loved me much. That idea takes from my mind all bitterness, and leads me only to blame myself. You will accept this last farewell, and you will bless me for having taken refuge in the inviolable asylum where hatred is extinguished, and where all love endures forever. Adieu, mademoiselle. If your happiness could be purchased by the last drop of my blood, I would shed that drop. I willingly make the sacrifice of it to my misery!

“RAOUL, VICOTME DE BRAGELONNE.”

“The letter reads very well,” said the captain. “I have only one fault to find with it.”

“Tell me what that is!” said Raoul.

“Why, it is that it tells everything, except the thing which exhales, like a mortal poison from your eyes and from your heart; except the senseless love which still consumes you.” Raoul grew paler, but remained silent.

“Why did you not write simply these words:

“‘MADEMOISELLE, — Instead of cursing you, I love you and I die.’“

“That is true,” exclaimed Raoul, with a sinister kind of joy.

And tearing the letter he had just taken back, he wrote the following words upon a leaf of his tablets:

“To procure the happiness of once more telling you I love you, I commit the baseness of writing to you; and to punish myself for that baseness, I die.” And he signed it.

“You will give her these tablets, captain, will you not?”

“When?” asked the latter.

“On the day,” said Bragelonne, pointing to the last sentence, “on the day when you can place a date under these words.” And he sprang away quickly to join Athos, who was returning with slow steps.

As they re-entered the fort, the sea rose with that rapid, gusty vehemence which characterizes the Mediterranean; the ill-humor of the element became a tempest. Something shapeless, and tossed about violently by the waves, appeared just off the coast.

“What is that?” said Athos, — ”a wrecked boat?”

“No, it is not a boat,” said D’Artagnan.

“Pardon me,” said Raoul, “there is a bark gaining the port rapidly.”

“Yes, there is a bark in the creek, which is prudently seeking shelter here; but that which Athos points to in the sand is not a boat at all — it has run aground.”

“Yes, yes, I see it.”

“It is the carriage, which I threw into the sea after landing the prisoner.”

“Well!” said Athos, “if you take my advice, D’Artagnan, you will burn that carriage, in order that no vestige of it may remain, without which the fishermen of Antibes, who have believed they had to do with the devil, will endeavor to prove that your prisoner was but a man.”

“Your advice is good, Athos, and I will this night have it carried out, or rather, I will carry it out myself; but let us go in, for the rain falls heavily, and the lightning is terrific.”

As they were passing over the ramparts to a gallery of which D’Artagnan had the key, they saw M. de Saint-Mars directing his steps towards the chamber inhabited by the prisoner. Upon a sign from D’Artagnan, they concealed themselves in an angle of the staircase.

“What is it?” said Athos.

“You will see. Look. The prisoner is returning from chapel.”

And they saw, by the red flashes of lightning against the violet fog which the wind stamped upon the bank-ward sky, they saw pass gravely, at six paces behind the governor, a man clothed in black and masked by a vizor of polished steel, soldered to a helmet of the same nature, which altogether enveloped the whole of his head. The fire of the heavens cast red reflections on the polished surface, and these reflections, flying off capriciously, seemed to be angry looks launched by the unfortunate, instead of imprecations. In the middle of the gallery, the prisoner stopped for a moment, to contemplate the infinite horizon, to respire the sulphurous perfumes of the tempest, to drink in thirstily the hot rain, and to breathe a sigh resembling a smothered groan.

“Come on, monsieur,” said Saint-Mars, sharply, to the prisoner, for he already became uneasy at seeing him look so long beyond the walls. “Monsieur, come on!”

“Say monseigneur!” cried Athos, from his corner, with a voice so solemn and terrible, that the governor trembled from head to foot. Athos insisted upon respect being paid to fallen majesty. The prisoner turned round.

“Who spoke?” asked Saint-Mars.

“It was I,” replied D’Artagnan, showing himself promptly. “You know that is the order.”

“Call me neither monsieur nor monseigneur,” said the prisoner in his turn, in a voice that penetrated to the very soul of Raoul; “call me ACCURSED!” He passed on, and the iron door croaked after him.

“There goes a truly unfortunate man!” murmured the musketeer in a hollow whisper, pointing out to Raoul the chamber inhabited by the prince.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Promises.

Scarcely had D’Artagnan re-entered his apartment with his two friends, when one of the soldiers of the fort came to inform him that the governor was seeking him. The bark which Raoul had perceived at sea, and which appeared so eager to gain the port, came to Sainte-Marguerite with an important dispatch for the captain of the musketeers. On opening it, D’Artagnan recognized the writing of the king: “I should think,” said Louis XIV., “you will have completed the execution of my orders, Monsieur d’Artagnan; return, then, immediately to Paris, and join me at the Louvre.”

“There is the end of my exile!” cried the musketeer with joy; “God be praised, I am no longer a jailer!” And he showed the letter to Athos.

“So, then, you must leave us?” replied the latter, in a melancholy tone.

“Yes, but to meet again, dear friend, seeing that Raoul is old enough now to go alone with M. de Beaufort, and will prefer his father going back in company with M. d’Artagnan, to forcing him to travel two hundred leagues solitarily to reach home at La Fere; will you not, Raoul?”

“Certainly,” stammered the latter, with an expression of tender regret.

“No, no, my friend,” interrupted Athos, “I will never quit Raoul till the day his vessel disappears on the horizon. As long as he remains in France he shall not be separated from me.”

“As you please, dear friend; but we will, at least, leave Sainte-Marguerite together; take advantage of the bark that will convey me back to Antibes.”

“With all my heart; we cannot too soon be at a distance from this fort, and from the spectacle that shocked us so just now.”

The three friends quitted the little isle, after paying their respects to the governor, and by the last flashes of the departing tempest they took their farewell of the white walls of the fort. D’Artagnan parted from his friend that same night, after having seen fire set to the carriage upon the shore by the orders of Saint-Mars, according to the advice the captain had given him. Before getting on horseback, and after leaving the arms of Athos: “My friends,” said he, “you bear too much resemblance to two soldiers who are abandoning their post. Something warns me that Raoul will require being supported by you in his rank. Will you allow me to ask permission to go over into Africa with a hundred good muskets? The king will not refuse me, and I will take you with me.”

“Monsieur d’Artagnan,” replied Raoul, pressing his hand with emotion, “thanks for that offer, which would give us more than we wish, either monsieur le comte or I. I, who am young, stand in need of labor of mind and fatigue of body; monsieur le comte wants the profoundest repose. You are his best friend. I recommend him to your care. In watching over him, you are holding both our souls in your hands.”

“I must go; my horse is all in a fret,” said D’Artagnan, with whom the most manifest sign of a lively emotion was the change of ideas in conversation. “Come, comte, how many days longer has Raoul to stay here?”

“Three days at most.”

“And how long will it take you to reach home?”

“Oh! a considerable time,” replied Athos. “I shall not like the idea of being separated too quickly from Raoul. Time will travel too fast of itself to require me to aid it by distance. I shall only make half-stages.”

“And why so, my friend? Nothing is more dull than traveling slowly; and hostelry life does not become a man like you.”

“My friend, I came hither on post-horses; but I wish to purchase two animals of a superior kind. Now, to take them home fresh, it would not be prudent to make them travel more than seven or eight leagues a day.”

“Where is Grimaud?”

“He arrived yesterday morning with Raoul’s appointments; and I have left him to sleep.”

“That is, never to come back again,” D’Artagnan suffered to escape him. “Till we meet again, then, dear Athos — and if you are diligent, I shall embrace you the sooner.” So saying, he put his foot in the stirrup, which Raoul held.

“Farewell!” said the young man, embracing him.

“Farewell!” said D’Artagnan, as he got into his saddle.

His horse made a movement which divided the cavalier from his friends. This scene had taken place in front of the house chosen by Athos, near the gates of Antibes, whither D’Artagnan, after his supper, had ordered his horses to be brought. The road began to branch off there, white and undulating in the vapors of the night. The horse eagerly respired the salt, sharp perfume of the marshes. D’Artagnan put him to a trot; and Athos and Raoul sadly turned towards the house. All at once they heard the rapid approach of a horse’s steps, and first believed it to be one of those singular repercussions which deceive the ear at every turn in a road. But it was really the return of the horseman. They uttered a cry of joyous surprise; and the captain, springing to the ground like a young man, seized within his arms the two beloved heads of Athos and Raoul. He held them long embraced thus, without speaking a word, or suffering the sigh which was bursting his breast to escape him. Then, as rapidly as he had come back, he set off again, with a sharp application of his spurs to the sides of his fiery horse.

“Alas!” said the comte, in a low voice, “alas! alas!”

“An evil omen!” on his side, said D’Artagnan to himself, making up for lost time. “I could not smile upon them. An evil omen!”

The next day Grimaud was on foot again. The service commanded by M. de Beaufort was happily accomplished. The flotilla, sent to Toulon by the exertions of Raoul, had set out, dragging after it in little nutshells, almost invisible, the wives and friends of the fishermen and smugglers put in requisition for the service of the fleet. The time, so short, which remained for father and son to live together, appeared to go by with double rapidity, like some swift stream that flows towards eternity. Athos and Raoul returned to Toulon, which began to be filled with the noise of carriages, with the noise of arms, the noise of neighing horses. The trumpeters sounded their spirited marches; the drummers signalized their strength; the streets were overflowing with soldiers, servants, and tradespeople. The Duc de Beaufort was everywhere, superintending the embarkation with the zeal and interest of a good captain. He encouraged the humblest of his companions; he scolded his lieutenants, even those of the highest rank. Artillery, provisions, baggage, he insisted upon seeing all himself. He examined the equipment of every soldier; assured himself of the health and soundness of every horse. It was plain that, light, boastful, egotistical, in his hotel, the gentleman became the soldier again — the high noble, a captain — in face of the responsibility he had accepted. And yet, it must be admitted that, whatever was the care with which he presided over the preparations for departure, it was easy to perceive careless precipitation, and the absence of all the precaution that make the French soldier the first soldier in the world, because, in that world, he is the one most abandoned to his own physical and moral resources. All things having satisfied, or appearing to have satisfied, the admiral, he paid his compliments to Raoul, and gave the last orders for sailing, which was ordered the next morning at daybreak. He invited the comte had his son to dine with him; but they, under a pretext of service, kept themselves apart. Gaining their hostelry, situated under the trees of the great Place, they took their repast in haste, and Athos led Raoul to the rocks which dominate the city, vast gray mountains, whence the view is infinite and embraces a liquid horizon which appears, so remote is it, on a level with the rocks themselves. The night was fine, as it always is in these happy climes. The moon, rising behind the rocks, unrolled a silver sheet on the cerulean carpet of the sea. In the roadsteads maneuvered silently the vessels which had just taken their rank to facilitate the embarkation. The sea, loaded with phosphoric light, opened beneath the hulls of the barks that transported the baggage and munitions; every dip of the prow plowed up this gulf of white flames; from every oar dropped liquid diamonds. The sailors, rejoicing in the largesses of the admiral, were heard murmuring their slow and artless songs. Sometimes the grinding of the chains was mixed with the dull noise of shot falling into the holds. Such harmonies, such a spectacle, oppress the heart like fear, and dilate it like hope. All this life speaks of death. Athos had seated himself with his son, upon the moss, among the brambles of the promontory. Around their heads passed and repassed large bats, carried along by the fearful whirl of their blind chase. The feet of Raoul were over the edge of the cliff, bathed in that void which is peopled by vertigo, and provokes to self-annihilation. When the moon had risen to its fullest height, caressing with light the neighboring peaks, when the watery mirror was illumined in its full extent, and the little red fires had made their openings in the black masses of every ship, Athos, collecting all his ideas and all his courage, said:

“God has made all these things that we see, Raoul; He has made us also, — poor atoms mixed up with this monstrous universe. We shine like those fires and those stars; we sigh like those waves; we suffer like those great ships, which are worn out in plowing the waves, in obeying the wind that urges them towards an end, as the breath of God blows us towards a port. Everything likes to live, Raoul; and everything seems beautiful to living things.”

“Monsieur,” said Raoul, “we have before us a beautiful spectacle!”

“How good D’Artagnan is!” interrupted Athos, suddenly, “and what a rare good fortune it is to be supported during a whole life by such a friend as he is! That is what you have missed, Raoul.”

“A friend!” cried Raoul, “I have wanted a friend!”

“M. de Guiche is an agreeable companion,” resumed the comte, coldly, “but I believe, in the times in which you live, men are more engaged in their own interests and their own pleasures than they were in ours. You have sought a secluded life; that is a great happiness, but you have lost your strength thereby. We four, more weaned from those delicate abstractions that constitute your joy, furnished much more resistance when misfortune presented itself.”

“I have not interrupted you, monsieur, to tell you that I had a friend, and that that friend is M. de Guiche. *Certes*, he is good and generous, and moreover he loves me. But I have lived under the guardianship of another friendship, monsieur, as precious and as strong as that of which you speak, since it is yours.”

“I have not been a friend for you, Raoul,” said Athos.

“Eh! monsieur, and in what respect not?”

“Because I have given you reason to think that life has but one face, because, sad and severe, alas! I have always cut off for you, without, God knows, wishing to do so, the joyous buds that spring incessantly from the fair tree of youth; so that at this moment I repent of not having made of you a more expansive, dissipated, animated man.”

“I know why you say that, monsieur. No, it is not you who have made me what I am; it was love, which took me at the time when children only have inclinations; it is the constancy natural to my character, which with other creatures is but habit. I believed that I should always be as I was; I thought God had cast me in a path quite clear, quite straight, bordered with fruits and flowers. I had ever watching over me your vigilance and strength. I believed myself to be vigilant and strong. Nothing prepared me; I fell once, and that once deprived me of courage for the whole of my life. It is quite true that I wrecked myself. Oh, no, monsieur! you are nothing in my past but happiness — in my future but hope! No, I have no reproach to make against life such as you made it for me; I bless you, and I love you ardently.”

“My dear Raoul, your words do me good. They prove to me that you will act a little for me in the time to come.”

“I shall only act for you, monsieur.”

“Raoul, what I have never hitherto done with respect to you, I will henceforward do. I will be your friend, not your father. We will live in expanding ourselves, instead of living and holding ourselves prisoners, when you come back. And that will be soon, will it not?”

“Certainly, monsieur, for such an expedition cannot last long.”

“Soon, then, Raoul, soon, instead of living moderately on my income, I will give you the capital of my estates. It will suffice for launching you into the world till my death; and you will give me, I hope, before that time, the consolation of not seeing my race extinct.”

“I will do all you may command,” said Raoul, much agitated.

“It is not necessary, Raoul, that your duty as aide-de-camp should lead you into too hazardous enterprises. You have gone through your ordeal; you are known to be a true man under fire. Remember that war with Arabs is a war of snares, ambuscades, and assassinations.”

“So it is said, monsieur.”

“There is never much glory in falling in an ambuscade. It is a death which always implies a little rashness or want of foresight. Often, indeed, he who falls in one meets with but little pity. Those who are not pitied, Raoul, have died to little purpose. Still further, the conqueror laughs, and we Frenchmen ought not to allow stupid infidels to triumph over our faults. Do you clearly understand what I am saying to you, Raoul? God forbid I should encourage you to avoid encounters.”

“I am naturally prudent, monsieur, and I have very good fortune,” said Raoul, with a smile which chilled the heart of his poor father; “for,” the young man hastened to add, “in twenty combats through which I have been, I have only received one scratch.”

“There is in addition,” said Athos, “the climate to be dreaded: that is an ugly end, to die of fever! King Saint-Louis prayed God to send him an arrow or the plague, rather than the fever.”

“Oh, monsieur! with sobriety, with reasonable exercise — ”

“I have already obtained from M. de Beaufort a promise that his dispatches shall be sent off every fortnight to France. You, as his aide-de-camp, will be charged with expediting them, and will be sure not to forget me.”

“No, monsieur,” said Raoul, almost choked with emotion.

"Besides, Raoul, as you are a good Christian, and I am one also, we ought to reckon upon a more special protection of God and His guardian angels. Promise me that if anything evil should happen to you, on any occasion, you will think of me at once."

"First and at once! Oh! yes, monsieur."

"And will call upon me?"

"Instantly."

"You dream of me sometimes, do you not, Raoul?"

"Every night, monsieur. During my early youth I saw you in my dreams, calm and mild, with one hand stretched out over my head, and that it was which made me sleep so soundly — formerly."

"We love each other too dearly," said the comte, "that from this moment, in which we separate, a portion of both our souls should not travel with one and the other of us, and should not dwell wherever we may dwell. Whenever you may be sad, Raoul, I feel that my heart will be dissolved in sadness; and when you smile on thinking of me, be assured you will send me, from however remote a distance, a vital scintillation of your joy."

"I will not promise you to be joyous," replied the young man; "but you may be certain that I will never pass an hour without thinking of you, not one hour, I swear, unless I shall be dead."

Athos could contain himself no longer; he threw his arm round the neck of his son, and held him embraced with all the power of his heart. The moon began to be now eclipsed by twilight; a golden band surrounded the horizon, announcing the approach of the day. Athos threw his cloak over the shoulders of Raoul, and led him back to the city, where burdens and porters were already in motion, like a vast ant-hill. At the extremity of the plateau which Athos and Bragelonne were quitting, they saw a dark shadow moving uneasily backwards and forwards, as if in indecision or ashamed to be seen. It was Grimaud, who in his anxiety had tracked his master, and was there awaiting him.

"Oh! my good Grimaud," cried Raoul, "what do you want? You are come to tell us it is time to be gone, have you not?"

"Alone?" said Grimaud, addressing Athos and pointing to Raoul in a tone of reproach, which showed to what an extent the old man was troubled.

"Oh! you are right!" cried the comte. "No, Raoul shall not go alone; no, he shall not be left alone in a strange land without some friendly hand to support him, some friendly heart to recall to him all he loved!"

"I?" said Grimaud.

"You, yes, you!" cried Raoul, touched to the inmost heart.

"Alas!" said Athos, "you are very old, my good Grimaud."

"So much the better," replied the latter, with an inexpressible depth of feeling and intelligence.

"But the embarkation is begun," said Raoul, "and you are not prepared."

"Yes," said Grimaud, showing the keys of his trunks, mixed with those of his young master.

"But," again objected Raoul, "you cannot leave monsieur le comte thus alone; monsieur le comte, whom you have never quitted?"

Grimaud turned his diamond eyes upon Athos and Raoul, as if to measure the strength of both. The comte uttered not a word.

"Monsieur le comte prefers my going," said Grimaud.

"I do," said Athos, by an inclination of the head.

At that moment the drums suddenly rolled, and the clarions filled the air with their inspiring notes. The regiments destined for the expedition began to debouch from the city. They advanced to the number of five, each composed of forty companies. Royals marched first, distinguished by their white uniform, faced with blue. The *ordonnance* colors, quartered cross-wise, violet and dead leaf, with a sprinkling of golden *fleurs-de-lis,* left the white-colored flag, with its *fleur-de-lised* cross, to dominate the whole. Musketeers at the wings, with their forked sticks and their muskets on their shoulders; pikemen in the center, with their lances, fourteen feet in length, marched gayly towards the transports, which carried them in detail to the ships. The regiments of Picardy, Navarre, Normandy, and Royal Vaisseau, followed after. M. de Beaufort had known well how to select his troops. He himself was seen closing the march with his staff — it would take a full hour before he could reach the sea. Raoul with Athos turned his steps slowly towards the beach, in order to take his place when the prince embarked. Grimaud, boiling with the ardor of a young man, superintended the embarkation of Raoul's baggage in the admiral's vessel. Athos, with his arm passed through that of the son he was about to lose, absorbed in melancholy meditation, was deaf to every noise around him. An officer came quickly towards them to inform Raoul that M. de Beaufort was anxious to have him by his side.

"Have the kindness to tell the prince," said Raoul, "that I request he will allow me this hour to enjoy the company of my father."

“No, no,” said Athos, “an aide-de-camp ought not thus to quit his general. Please to tell the prince, monsieur, that the vicomte will join him immediately.” The officer set off at a gallop.

“Whether we part here or part there,” added the comte, “it is no less a separation.” He carefully brushed the dust from his son’s coat, and passed his hand over his hair as they walked along. “But, Raoul,” said he, “you want money. M. de Beaufort’s train will be splendid, and I am certain it will be agreeable to you to purchase horses and arms, which are very dear things in Africa. Now, as you are not actually in the service of the king or M. de Beaufort, and are simply a volunteer, you must not reckon upon either pay or largesse. But I should not like you to want for anything at Gigelli. Here are two hundred pistoles; if you would please me, Raoul, spend them.”

Raoul pressed the hand of his father, and, at the turning of a street, they saw M. de Beaufort, mounted on a magnificent white *genet*, which responded by graceful curvets to the applause of the women of the city. The duke called Raoul, and held out his hand to the comte. He spoke to him for some time, with such a kindly expression that the heart of the poor father even felt a little comforted. It was, however, evident to both father and son that their walk amounted to nothing less than a punishment. There was a terrible moment — that at which, on quitting the sands of the shore, the soldiers and sailors exchanged the last kisses with their families and friends; a supreme moment, in which, notwithstanding the clearness of the heavens, the warmth of the sun, of the perfumes of the air, and the rich life that was circulating in their veins, everything appeared black, everything bitter, everything created doubts of Providence, nay, at the most, of God. It was customary for the admiral and his suite to embark last; the cannon waited to announce, with its formidable voice, that the leader had placed his foot on board his vessel. Athos, forgetful of both the admiral and the fleet, and of his own dignity as a strong man, opened his arms to his son, and pressed him convulsively to his heart.

“Accompany us on board,” said the duke, very much affected; “you will gain a good half-hour.”

“No,” said Athos, “my farewell has been spoken, I do not wish to voice a second.”

“Then, vicomte, embark — embark quickly!” added the prince, wishing to spare the tears of these two men, whose hearts were bursting. And paternally, tenderly, very much as Porthos might have done, he took Raoul in his arms and placed him in the boat, the oars of which, at a signal, immediately were dipped in the waves. He himself, forgetful of ceremony, jumped into his boat, and pushed it off with a vigorous foot. “Adieu!” cried Raoul.

Athos replied only by a sign, but he felt something burning on his hand: it was the respectful kiss of Grimaud — the last farewell of the faithful dog. This kiss given, Grimaud jumped from the step of the mole upon the stem of a two-oared yawl, which had just been taken in tow by a *chaland* served by twelve galley-oars. Athos seated himself on the mole, stunned, deaf, abandoned. Every instant took from him one of the features, one of the shades of the pale face of his son. With his arms hanging down, his eyes fixed, his mouth open, he remained confounded with Raoul — in one same look, in one same thought, in one same stupor. The sea, by degrees, carried away boats and faces to that distance at which men become nothing but points, — loves, nothing but remembrances. Athos saw his son ascend the ladder of the admiral’s ship, he saw him lean upon the rail of the deck, and place himself in such a manner as to be always an object in the eye of his father. In vain the cannon thundered, in vain from the ship sounded the long and lordly tumult, responded to by immense acclamations from the shore; in vain did the noise deafen the ear of the father, the smoke obscured the cherished object of his aspirations. Raoul appeared to him to the last moment; and the imperceptible atom, passing from black to pale, from pale to white, from white to nothing, disappeared for Athos — disappeared very long after, to all the eyes of the spectators, had disappeared both gallant ships and swelling sails. Towards midday, when the sun devoured space, and scarcely the tops of the masts dominated the incandescent limit of the sea, Athos perceived a soft aerial shadow rise, and vanish as soon as seen. This was the smoke of a cannon, which M. de Beaufort ordered to be fired as a last salute to the coast of France. The point was buried in its turn beneath the sky, and Athos returned with slow and painful step to his deserted hostelry.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Among Women.

D’Artagnan had not been able to hide his feelings from his friends so much as he would have wished. The stoical soldier, the impassive man-at-arms, overcome by fear and sad presentiments, had yielded, for a few moments, to human weakness. When, therefore, he had silenced his heart and calmed the agitation of his nerves, turning towards his lackey, a silent servant, always listening, in order to obey the more promptly:

“Rabaud,” said he, “mind, we must travel thirty leagues a day.”

“At your pleasure, captain,” replied Rabaud.

And from that moment, D’Artagnan, accommodating his action to the pace of the horse, like a true centaur, gave up his thoughts to nothing — that is to say, to everything. He asked himself why the king had sent for him back; why the Iron Mask had thrown the silver plate at the feet of Raoul. As to the first subject, the reply was negative; he knew right well that the king’s calling him was from necessity. He still further knew that Louis XIV. must experience an imperious desire for a private conversation with one whom the possession of such a secret placed on a level with the highest powers of the kingdom. But as to saying exactly what the king’s wish was, D’Artagnan found himself completely at a loss. The musketeer had no doubts, either, upon the reason which had urged the unfortunate Philippe to reveal his character and birth. Philippe, buried forever beneath a mask of steel, exiled to a country where the men seemed little more than slaves of the elements; Philippe, deprived even of the society of D’Artagnan, who had loaded him with honors and delicate attentions, had nothing more to see than odious specters in this world, and, despair beginning to devour him, he poured himself forth in complaints, in the belief that his revelations would raise up some avenger for him. The manner in which the musketeer had been near killing his two best friends, the destiny which had so strangely brought Athos to participate in the great state secret, the farewell of Raoul, the obscurity of the future which threatened to end in a melancholy death; all this threw D’Artagnan incessantly back on lamentable predictions and forebodings, which the rapidity of his pace did not dissipate, as it used formerly to do. D'Artagnan passed from these considerations to the remembrance of the proscribed Porthos and Aramis. He saw them both, fugitives, tracked, ruined — laborious architects of fortunes they had lost; and as the king called for his man of execution in hours of vengeance and malice, D'Artagnan trembled at the very idea of receiving some commission that would make his very soul bleed. Sometimes, ascending hills, when the winded horse breathed hard from his red nostrils, and heaved his flanks, the captain, left to more freedom of thought, reflected on the prodigious genius of Aramis, a genius of acumen and intrigue, a match to which the Fronde and the civil war had produced but twice. Soldier, priest, diplomatist; gallant, avaricious, cunning; Aramis had never taken the good things of this life except as stepping-stones to rise to giddier ends. Generous in spirit, if not lofty in heart, he never did ill but for the sake of shining even yet more brilliantly. Towards the end of his career, at the moment of reaching the goal, like the patrician Fuscus, he had made a false step upon a plank, and had fallen into the sea. But Porthos, good, harmless Porthos! To see Porthos hungry, to see Mousqueton without gold lace, imprisoned, perhaps; to see Pierrefonds, Bracieux, razed to the very stones, dishonored even to the timber, — these were so many poignant griefs for D'Artagnan, and every time that one of these griefs struck him, he bounded like a horse at the sting of a gadfly beneath the vaults of foliage where he has sought shady shelter from the burning sun. Never was the man of spirit subjected to *ennui*, if his body was exposed to fatigue; never did the man of healthy body fail to find life light, if he had something to engage his mind. D'Artagnan, riding fast, thinking as constantly, alighted from his horse in Pairs, fresh and tender in his muscles as the athlete preparing for the gymnasium. The king did not expect him so soon, and had just departed for the chase towards Meudon. D'Artagnan, instead of riding after the king, as he would formerly have done, took off his boots, had a bath, and waited till his majesty should return dusty and tired. He occupied the interval of five hours in taking, as people say, the air of the house, and in arming himself against all ill chances. He learned that the king, during the last fortnight, had been gloomy; that the queen-mother was ill and much depressed; that Monsieur, the king's brother, was exhibiting a devotional turn; that Madame had the vapors; and that M. de Guiche was gone to one of his estates. He learned that M. Colbert was radiant; that M. Fouquet consulted a fresh physician every day, who still did not cure him, and that his principal complaint was one which physicians do not usually cure, unless they are political physicians. The king, D'Artagnan was told, behaved in the kindest manner to M. Fouquet, and did not allow him to be ever out of his sight; but the surintendant, touched to the heart, like one of those fine trees a worm has punctured, was declining daily, in spite of the royal smile, that sun of court trees. D'Artagnan learned that Mademoiselle de la Valliere had become indispensable to the king; that the king, during his sporting excursions, if he did not take her with him, wrote to her frequently, no longer verses, but, which was much worse, prose, and that whole pages at a time. Thus, as the political Pleiad of the day said, the *first king in the world* was seen descending from his horse *with an ardor beyond compare*, and on the crown of his hat scrawling bombastic phrases, which M. de Saint-Aignan, aide-de-camp in perpetuity, carried to La Valliere at the risk of foundering his horses. During this time, deer and pheasants were left to the free enjoyment of their nature, hunted so lazily that, it was said, the art of venery ran great risk of degenerating at the court of France. D'Artagnan then thought of the wishes of poor Raoul, of that desponding letter destined for a woman who passed her life in hoping, and as D'Artagnan loved to philosophize a little occasionally, he resolved to profit by the absence of the king to have a minute's talk with Mademoiselle de la Valliere. This was a very easy affair; while the king was hunting, Louise was walking with some other ladies in one of the galleries of the Palais Royal, exactly where the captain of the musketeers had some guards to inspect. D'Artagnan did not doubt that, if he could but open the conversation on Raoul, Louise might give him grounds for writing a consolatory letter to the poor exile; and hope, or at least consolation for Raoul, in the state of heart in which he had left him, was the sun, was life to two men, who were very dear to our captain. He directed his course, therefore, to the spot where he knew he should find Mademoiselle de la Valliere. D'Artagnan found La Valliere the center of the circle. In her apparent solitude, the king's favorite received, like a queen, more, perhaps, than the queen, a homage of which Madame had been so proud, when all the king's looks were directed to her and commanded the looks of the courtiers. D'Artagnan, although no squire of dames, received, nevertheless, civilities and attentions from the ladies; he was polite, as a brave man always is, and his terrible reputation had conciliated as much friendship among the men as admiration among the women. On seeing him enter, therefore, they immediately accosted him; and, as is not unfrequently the case with fair ladies, opened the attack by questions. “Where *had* he been? What *had* become of him so long? Why had they not seen him as usual make his fine horse curvet in such beautiful style, to the delight and astonishment of the curious from the king’s balcony?”

He replied that he had just come from the land of oranges. This set all the ladies laughing. Those were times in which everybody traveled, but in which, notwithstanding, a journey of a hundred leagues was a problem often solved by death.

“From the land of oranges?” cried Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente. “From Spain?”

“Eh! eh!” said the musketeer.

“From Malta?” echoed Montalais.

“*Ma foi!* You are coming very near, ladies.”

“Is it an island?” asked La Valliere.

“Mademoiselle,” said D’Artagnan; “I will not give you the trouble of seeking any further; I come from the country where M. de Beaufort is, at this moment, embarking for Algiers.”

“Have you seen the army?” asked several warlike fair ones.

“As plainly as I see you,” replied D’Artagnan.

“And the fleet?”

“Yes, I saw everything.”

“Have we any of us any friends there?” said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, coldly, but in a manner to attract attention to a question that was not without its calculated aim.

“Why,” replied D’Artagnan, “yes; there were M. de la Guillotiere, M. de Manchy, M. de Bragelonne — ”

La Valliere became pale. “M. de Bragelonne!” cried the perfidious Athenais. “Eh, what! — is he gone to the wars? — he!”

Montalais trod on her toe, but all in vain.

“Do you know what my opinion is?” continued she, addressing D’Artagnan.

“No, mademoiselle; but I should like very much to know it.”

“My opinion is, then, that all the men who go to this war are desperate, desponding men, whom love has treated ill; and who go to try if they cannot find jet-complexioned women more kind than fair ones have been.”

Some of the ladies laughed; La Valliere was evidently confused; Montalais coughed loud enough to waken the dead.

“Mademoiselle,” interrupted D’Artagnan, “you are in error when you speak of black women at Gigelli; the women there have not jet faces; it is true they are not white — they are yellow.”

“Yellow!” exclaimed the bevy of fair beauties.

“Eh! do not disparage it. I have never seen a finer color to match with black eyes and a coral mouth.”

“So much the better for M. de Bragelonne,” said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, with persistent malice. “He will make amends for his loss. Poor fellow!”

A profound silence followed these words; and D’Artagnan had time to observe and reflect that women — mild doves — treat each other more cruelly than tigers. But making La Valliere pale did not satisfy Athenais; she determined to make her blush likewise. Resuming the conversation without pause, “Do you know, Louise,” said she, “that there is a great sin on your conscience?”

“What sin, mademoiselle?” stammered the unfortunate girl, looking round her for support, without finding it.

“Eh! — why,” continued Athenais, “the poor young man was affianced to you; he loved you; you cast him off.”

“Well, that is a right which every honest woman has,” said Montalais, in an affected tone. “When we know we cannot constitute the happiness of a man, it is much better to cast him off.”

“Cast him off! or refuse him! — that’s all very well,” said Athenais, “but that is not the sin Mademoiselle de la Valliere has to reproach herself with. The actual sin is sending poor Bragelonne to the wars; and to wars in which death is so very likely to be met with.” Louise pressed her hand over her icy brow. “And if he dies,” continued her pitiless tormentor, “you will have killed him. That is the sin.”

Louise, half-dead, caught at the arm of the captain of the musketeers, whose face betrayed unusual emotion. “You wished to speak with me, Monsieur d’Artagnan,” said she, in a voice broken by anger and pain. “What had you to say to me?”

D’Artagnan made several steps along the gallery, holding Louise on his arm; then, when they were far enough removed from the others — ”What I had to say to you, mademoiselle,” replied he, “Mademoiselle de Tonnay-

Charente has just expressed; roughly and unkindly, it is true but still in its entirety.”

She uttered a faint cry; pierced to the heart by this new wound, she went her way, like one of those poor birds which, struck unto death, seek the shade of the thicket in which to die. She disappeared at one door, at the moment the king was entering by another. The first glance of the king was directed towards the empty seat of his mistress. Not perceiving La Valliere, a frown came over his brow; but as soon as he saw D’Artagnan, who bowed to him — ”Ah! monsieur!” cried he, “you *have* been diligent! I am much pleased with you.” This was the superlative expression of royal satisfaction. Many men would have been ready to lay down their lives for such a speech from the king. The maids of honor and the courtiers, who had formed a respectful circle round the king on his entrance, drew back, on observing he wished to speak privately with his captain of the musketeers. The king led the way out of the gallery, after having again, with his eyes, sought everywhere for La Valliere, whose absence he could not account for. The moment they were out of the reach of curious ears, “Well! Monsieur d’Artagnan,” said he, “the prisoner?”

“Is in his prison, sire.”

“What did he say on the road?”

“Nothing, sire.”

“What did he do?”

“There was a moment at which the fisherman — who took me in his boat to Sainte-Marguerite — revolted, and did his best to kill me. The — the prisoner defended me instead of attempting to fly.”

The king became pale. “Enough!” said he; and D’Artagnan bowed. Louis walked about his cabinet with hasty steps. “Were you at Antibes,” said he, “when Monsieur de Beaufort came there?”

“No, sire; I was setting off when monsieur le duc arrived.”

“Ah!” which was followed by a fresh silence. “Whom did you see there?”

“A great many persons,” said D’Artagnan, coolly.

The king perceived he was unwilling to speak. “I have sent for you, monsieur le capitaine, to desire you to go and prepare my lodgings at Nantes.”

“At Nantes!” cried D’Artagnan.

“In Bretagne.”

"Yes, sire, it is in Bretagne. Will you majesty make so long a journey as to Nantes?"

"The States are assembled there," replied the king. "I have two demands to make of them: I wish to be there."

"When shall I set out?" said the captain.

"This evening — to-morrow — to-morrow evening; for you must stand in need of rest."

"I have rested, sire."

"That is well. Then between this and to-morrow evening, when you please."

D'Artagnan bowed as if to take his leave; but, perceiving the king very much embarrassed, "Will you majesty," said he, stepping two paces forward, "take the court with you?"

"Certainly I shall."

"Then you majesty will, doubtless, want the musketeers?" And the eye of the king sank beneath the penetrating glance of the captain.

"Take a brigade of them," replied Louis.

"Is that all? Has your majesty no other orders to give me?"

"No — ah — yes."

"I am all attention, sire."

"At the castle of Nantes, which I hear is very ill arranged, you will adopt the practice of placing musketeers at the door of each of the principal dignitaries I shall take with me."

"Of the principal?"

"Yes."

"For instance, at the door of M. de Lyonne?"

"Yes."

"And that of M. Letellier?"

"Yes."

"Of M. de Brienne?"

"Yes."

"And of monsieur le surintendant?"

"Without doubt."

"Very well, sire. By to-morrow I shall have set out."

"Oh, yes; but one more word, Monsieur d'Artagnan. At Nantes you will meet with M. le Duc de Gesvres, captain of the guards. Be sure that your musketeers are placed before his guards arrive. Precedence always belongs to the first comer.”

“Yes, sire.”

“And if M. de Gesvres should question you?”

“Question me, sire! Is it likely that M. de Gesvres should question me?” And the musketeer, turning cavalierly on his heel, disappeared. “To Nantes!” said he to himself, as he descended from the stairs. “Why did he not dare to say, from thence to Belle-Isle?”

As he reached the great gates, one of M. Brienne’s clerks came running after him, exclaiming, “Monsieur d’Artagnan! I beg your pardon — ”

“What is the matter, Monsieur Ariste?”

“The king has desired me to give you this order.”

“Upon your cash-box?” asked the musketeer.

“No, monsieur; on that of M. Fouquet.”

D’Artagnan was surprised, but he took the order, which was in the king’s own writing, and was for two hundred pistoles. “What!” thought he, after having politely thanked M. Brienne’s clerk, “M. Fouquet is to pay for the journey, then! *Mordioux!* that is a bit of pure Louis XI. Why was not this order on the chest of M. Colbert? He would have paid it with such joy.” And D’Artagnan, faithful to his principle of never letting an order at sight get cold, went straight to the house of M. Fouquet, to receive his two hundred pistoles.

CHAPTER XXXV.

The Last Supper.

The superintendent had no doubt received advice of the approaching departure, for he was giving a farewell dinner to his friends. From the bottom to the top of the house, the hurry of the servants bearing dishes, and the diligence of the *registres*, denoted an approaching change in offices and kitchen. D'Artagnan, with his order in his hand, presented himself at the offices, when he was told it was too late to pay cash, the chest was closed. He only replied: "On the king's service."

The clerk, a little put out by the serious air of the captain, replied, that "that was a very respectable reason, but that the customs of the house were respectable likewise; and that, in consequence, he begged the bearer to call again next day." D'Artagnan asked if he could not see M. Fouquet. The clerk replied that M. le surintendant did not interfere with such details, and rudely closed the outer door in the captain's face. But the latter had foreseen this stroke, and placed his boot between the door and the door-case, so that the lock did not catch, and the clerk was still nose to nose with his interlocutor. This made him change his tone, and say, with terrified politeness, "If monsieur wishes to speak to M. le surintendant, he must go to the ante-chambers; these are the offices, where monseigneur never comes."

"Oh! very well! Where are they?" replied D'Artagnan.

"On the other side of the court," said the clerk, delighted to be free. D'Artagnan crossed the court, and fell in with a crowd of servants.

"Monseigneur sees nobody at this hour," he was answered by a fellow carrying a vermeil dish, in which were three pheasants and twelve quails.

"Tell him," said the captain, laying hold of the servant by the end of his dish, "that I am M. d'Artagnan, captain of his majesty's musketeers."

The fellow uttered a cry of surprise, and disappeared; D'Artagnan following him slowly. He arrived just in time to meet M. Pelisson in the ante-chamber: the latter, a little pale, came hastily out of the dining-room to learn what was the matter. D'Artagnan smiled.

"There is nothing unpleasant, Monsieur Pelisson; only a little order to receive the money for."

"Ah!" said Fouquet's friend, breathing more freely; and he took the captain by the hand, and, dragging him behind him, led him into the dining-room, where a number of friends surrounded the surintendant, placed in the center, and buried in the cushions of a *fauteuil*. There were assembled all the Epicureans who so lately at Vaux had done the honors of the mansion of wit and money in aid of M. Fouquet. Joyous friends, for the most part faithful, they had not fled their protector at the approach of the storm, and, in spite of the threatening heavens, in spite of the trembling earth, they remained there, smiling, cheerful, as devoted in misfortune as they had been in prosperity. On the left of the surintendant sat Madame de Belliere; on his right was Madame Fouquet; as if braving the laws of the world, and putting all vulgar reasons of propriety to silence, the two protecting angels of this man united to offer, at the moment of the crisis, the support of their twined arms. Madame de Belliere was pale, trembling, and full of respectful attentions for madame la surintendante, who, with one hand on her husband's, was looking anxiously towards the door by which Pelisson had gone out to bring D'Artagnan. The captain entered at first full of courtesy, and afterwards of admiration, when, with his infallible glance, he had divined as well as taken in the expression of every face. Fouquet raised himself up in his chair.

"Pardon me, Monsieur d'Artagnan," said he, "if I did not myself receive you when coming in the king's name." And he pronounced the last words with a sort of melancholy firmness, which filled the hearts of all his friends with terror.

"Monseigneur," replied D'Artagnan, "I only come to you in the king's name to demand payment of an order for two hundred pistoles."

The clouds passed from every brow but that of Fouquet, which still remained overcast.

"Ah! then," said he, "perhaps you also are setting out for Nantes?"

"I do not know whither I am setting out, monseigneur."

"But," said Madame Fouquet, recovered from her fright, "you are not going so soon, monsieur le capitaine, as not to do us the honor to take a seat with us?"

"Madame, I should esteem that a great honor done me, but I am so pressed for time, that, you see, I have been obliged to permit myself to interrupt your repast to procure payment of my note."

"The reply to which shall be gold," said Fouquet, making a sign to his intendant, who went out with the order D'Artagnan handed him.

"Oh!" said the latter, "I was not uneasy about the payment; the house is good."

A painful smile passed over the pale features of Fouquet.

"Are you in pain?" asked Madame de Belliere.

"Do you feel your attack coming on?" asked Madame Fouquet.

"Neither, thank you both," said Fouquet.

"Your attack?" said D'Artagnan, in his turn; "are you unwell, monseigneur?"

"I have a tertian fever, which seized me after the *fete* at Vaux."

"Caught cold in the grottos, at night, perhaps?"

"No, no; nothing but agitation, that was all."

"The too much heart you displayed in your reception of the king," said La Fontaine, quietly, without suspicion that he was uttering a sacrilege.

"We cannot devote too much heart to the reception of our king," said Fouquet, mildly, to his poet.

"Monsieur meant to say the too great ardor," interrupted D'Artagnan, with perfect frankness and much amenity. "The fact is, monseigneur, that hospitality was never practiced as at Vaux."

Madame Fouquet permitted her countenance to show clearly that if Fouquet had conducted himself well towards the king, the king had hardly done the like to the minister. But D'Artagnan knew the terrible secret. He alone with Fouquet knew it; those two men had not, the one the courage to complain, the other the right to accuse. The captain, to whom the two hundred pistoles were brought, was about to take his leave, when Fouquet, rising, took a glass of wine, and ordered one to be given to D'Artagnan.

"Monsieur," said he, "to the health of the king, *whatever may happen*."

"And to your health, monseigneur, *whatever may happen*," said D'Artagnan.

He bowed, with these words of evil omen, to all the company, who rose as soon as they heard the sound of his spurs and boots at the bottom of the stairs.

"I, for a moment, thought it was I and not my money he wanted," said Fouquet, endeavoring to laugh.

"You!" cried his friends; "and what for, in the name of Heaven!"

"Oh! do not deceive yourselves, my dear brothers in Epicurus," said the superintendent; "I do not wish to make a comparison between the most humble sinner on the earth, and the God we adore, but remember, he gave one day to his friends a repast which is called the Last Supper, and which was nothing but a farewell dinner, like that which we are making at this moment."

A painful cry of denial arose from all parts of the table. "Shut the doors," said Fouquet, and the servants disappeared. "My friends," continued Fouquet, lowering his voice, "what was I formerly? What am I now? Consult among yourselves and reply. A man like me sinks when he does not continue to rise. What shall we say, then, when he really sinks? I have no more money, no more credit; I have no longer anything but powerful enemies, and powerless friends."

"Quick!" cried Pelisson. "Since you explain yourself with such frankness, it is our duty to be frank, likewise. Yes, you are ruined — yes, you are hastening to your ruin — stop. And, in the first place, what money have we left?"

"Seven hundred thousand livres," said the intendant.

"Bread," murmured Madame Fouquet.

"Relays," said Pelisson, "relays, and fly!"

"Whither?"

"To Switzerland — to Savoy — but fly!"

"If monseigneur flies," said Madame Belliere, "it will be said that he was guilty — was afraid."

"More than that, it will be said that I have carried away twenty millions with me."

"We will draw up memoirs to justify you," said La Fontaine. "Fly!"

"I will remain," said Fouquet. "And, besides, does not everything serve me?"

"You have Belle-Isle," cried the Abbe Fouquet.

"And I am naturally going there, when going to Nantes," replied the superintendent. "Patience, then, patience!"

"Before arriving at Nantes, what a distance!" said Madame Fouquet.

"Yes, I know that well," replied Fouquet. "But what is to be done there? The king summons me to the States. I know well it is for the purpose of ruining me; but to refuse to go would be to evince uneasiness."

"Well, I have discovered the means of reconciling everything," cried Pelisson. "You are going to set out for Nantes."

Fouquet looked at him with an air of surprise.

"But with friends; but in your own carriage as far as Orleans; in your own barge as far as Nantes; always ready to defend yourself, if you are attacked; to escape, if you are threatened. In fact, you will carry your money against all chances; and, whilst flying, you will only have obeyed the king; then, reaching the sea, when you like, you will embark for Belle-Isle, and from Belle-Isle you will shoot out wherever it may please you, like the eagle that leaps into space when it has been driven from its eyrie."

A general assent followed Pelisson's words. "Yes, do so," said Madame Fouquet to her husband.

"Do so," said Madame de Belliere.

"Do it! do it!" cried all his friends.

"I will do so," replied Fouquet.

"This very evening?"

"In an hour?"

"Instantly."

"With seven hundred thousand livres you can lay the foundation of another fortune," said the Abbe Fouquet.

"What is there to prevent our arming corsairs at Belle-Isle?"

"And, if necessary, we will go and discover a new world," added La Fontaine, intoxicated with fresh projects and enthusiasm.

A knock at the door interrupted this concert of joy and hope. "A courier from the king," said the master of the ceremonies.

A profound silence immediately ensued, as if the message brought by this courier was nothing but a reply to all the projects given birth to a moment before. Every one waited to see what the master would do. His brow was streaming with perspiration, and he was really suffering from his fever at that instant. He passed into his cabinet, to receive the king's message. There prevailed, as we have said, such a silence in the chambers, and throughout the attendance, that from the dining-room could be heard the voice of Fouquet, saying, "That is well, monsieur." This voice was, however, broken by fatigue, and trembled with emotion. An instant after, Fouquet called Gourville, who crossed the gallery amidst the universal expectation. At length, he himself re-appeared among his guests; but it was no longer the same pale, spiritless countenance they had beheld when he left them; from pale he had become livid; and from spiritless, annihilated. A breathing, living specter, he advanced with his arms stretched out, his mouth parched, like a shade that comes to salute the friends of former days. On seeing him thus, every one cried out, and every one rushed towards Fouquet. The latter, looking at Pelisson, leaned upon his wife, and pressed the icy hand of the Marquise de Belliere.

"Well," said he, in a voice which had nothing human in it.

"What has happened, my God!" said some one to him.

Fouquet opened his right hand, which was clenched, but glistening with perspiration, and displayed a paper, upon which Pelisson cast a terrified glance. He read the following lines, written by the king's hand:

"'DEAR AND WELL-BELOVED MONSIEUR FOUQUET, — Give us, upon that which you have left of ours, the sum of seven hundred thousand livres, of which we stand in need to prepare for our departure.

"'And, as we know your health is not good, we pray God to restore you, and to have you in His holy keeping. "'LOUIS.

"'The present letter is to serve as a receipt.'"

A murmur of terror circulated through the apartment.

"Well," cried Pelisson, in his turn, "you have received that letter?"

"Received it, yes!"

"What will you do, then?"

"Nothing, since I have received it."

"But — "

"If I have received it, Pelisson, I have paid it," said the surintendant, with a simplicity that went to the heart of all present.

"You have paid it!" cried Madame Fouquet. "Then we are ruined!"

"Come, no useless words," interrupted Pelisson. "Next to money, life. Monseigneur, to horse! to horse!"

"What, leave us!" at once cried both the women, wild with grief.

"Eh! monseigneur, in saving yourself, you save us all. To horse!"

"But he cannot hold himself on. Look at him."

"Oh! if he takes time to reflect — " said the intrepid Pelisson.

"He is right," murmured Fouquet.

"Monseigneur! Monseigneur!" cried Gourville, rushing up the stairs, four steps at once. "Monseigneur!"

"Well! what?"

"I escorted, as you desired, the king's courier with the money."

"Yes."

"Well! when I arrived at the Palais Royal, I saw — "

"Take breath, my poor friend, take breath; you are suffocating."

"What did you see?" cried the impatient friends.

"I saw the musketeers mounting on horseback," said Gourville.

"There, then!" cried every voice at once; "there, then! is there an instant to be lost?"

Madame Fouquet rushed downstairs, calling for her horses; Madame de Belliere flew after her, catching her in her arms, and saying: "Madame, in the name of his safety, do not betray anything, do not manifest alarm."

Pelisson ran to have the horses put to the carriages. And, in the meantime, Gourville gathered in his hat all that the weeping friends were able to throw into it of gold and silver — the last offering, the pious alms made to misery by poverty. The surintendant, dragged along by some, carried by others, was shut up in his carriage. Gourville took the reins, and mounted the box. Pelisson supported Madame Fouquet, who had fainted. Madame de Belliere had more strength, and was well paid for it; she received Fouquet's last kiss. Pelisson easily explained this precipitate departure by saying that an order from the king had summoned the minister to Nantes.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

In M. Colbert’s Carriage.

As Gourville had seen, the king’s musketeers were mounting and following their captain. The latter, who did not like to be confined in his proceedings, left his brigade under the orders of a lieutenant, and set off on post horses, recommending his men to use all diligence. However rapidly they might travel, they could not arrive before him. He had time, in passing along the Rue des Petits-Champs, to see something which afforded him plenty of food for thought and conjecture. He saw M. Colbert coming out from his house to get into his carriage, which was stationed before the door. In this carriage D’Artagnan perceived the hoods of two women, and being rather curious, he wished to know the names of the ladies hid beneath these hoods. To get a glimpse at them, for they kept themselves closely covered up, he urged his horse so near the carriage, that he drove him against the step with such force as to shake everything containing and contained. The terrified women uttered, the one a faint cry, by which D’Artagnan recognized a young woman, the other an imprecation, in which he recognized the vigor and *aplomb* that half a century bestows. The hoods were thrown back: one of the women was Madame Vanel, the other the Duchesse de Chevreuse. D’Artagnan’s eyes were quicker than those of the ladies; he had seen and known them, whilst they did not recognize him; and as they laughed at their fright, pressing each other’s hands, —

“Humph!” said D’Artagnan, “the old duchesse is no more inaccessible to friendship than formerly. *She* paying her court to the mistress of M. Colbert! Poor M. Fouquet! that presages you nothing good!”

He rode on. M. Colbert got into his carriage and the distinguished trio commenced a sufficiently slow pilgrimage toward the wood of Vincennes. Madame de Chevreuse set down Madame Vanel at her husband’s house, and, left alone with M. Colbert, chatted upon affairs whilst continuing her ride. She had an inexhaustible fund of conversation, that dear duchesse, and as she always talked for the ill of others, though ever with a view to her own good, her conversation amused her interlocutor, and did not fail to leave a favorable impression.

She taught Colbert, who, poor man! was ignorant of the fact, how great a minister he was, and how Fouquet would soon become a cipher. She promised to rally around him, when he should become surintendant, all the old nobility of the kingdom, and questioned him as to the preponderance it would be proper to allow La Valliere. She praised him, she blamed him, she bewildered him. She showed him the secret of so many secrets that, for a moment, Colbert thought he was doing business with the devil. She proved to him that she held in her hand the Colbert of to-day, as she had held the Fouquet of yesterday; and as he asked her very simply the reason of her hatred for the surintendant: "Why do you yourself hate him?" said she.

"Madame, in politics," replied he, "the differences of system oft bring about dissentions between men. M. Fouquet always appeared to me to practice a system opposed to the true interests of the king."

She interrupted him. — "I will say no more to you about M. Fouquet. The journey the king is about to take to Nantes will give a good account of him. M. Fouquet, for me, is a man gone by — and for you also."

Colbert made no reply. "On his return from Nantes," continued the duchesse, "the king, who is only anxious for a pretext, will find that the States have not behaved well — that they have made too few sacrifices. The States will say that the imposts are too heavy, and that the surintendant has ruined them. The king will lay all the blame on M. Fouquet, and then — "

"And then?" said Colbert.

"Oh! he will be disgraced. Is not that your opinion?"

Colbert darted a glance at the duchesse, which plainly said: "If M. Fouquet be only disgraced, you will not be the cause of it."

"Your place, M. Colbert," the duchesse hastened to say, "must be a high place. Do you perceive any one between the king and yourself, after the fall of M. Fouquet?"

"I do not understand," said he.

"You *will* understand. To what does your ambition aspire?"

"I have none."

"It was useless, then, to overthrow the superintendent, Monsieur Colbert. It was idle."

"I had the honor to tell you, madame — "

“Oh! yes, I know, all about the interest of the king — but, if you please, we will speak of your own.”

“Mine! that is to say, the affairs of his majesty.”

“In short, are you, or are you not endeavoring to ruin M. Fouquet? Answer without evasion.”

“Madame, I ruin nobody.”

“I am endeavoring to comprehend, then, why you purchased from me the letters of M. Mazarin concerning M. Fouquet. Neither can I conceive why you have laid those letters before the king.”

Colbert, half stupefied, looked at the duchesse with an air of constraint.

“Madame,” said he, “I can less easily conceive how you, who received the money, can reproach me on that head — ”

“That is,” said the old duchesse, “because we must will that which we wish for, unless we are not able to obtain what we wish.”

“*Will!*” said Colbert, quite confounded by such coarse logic.

“You are not able, *hein!* Speak.”

“I am not able, I allow, to destroy certain influences near the king.”

“That fight in favor of M. Fouquet? What are they? Stop, let me help you.”

“Do, madame.”

“La Valliere?”

“Oh! very little influence; no knowledge of business, and small means. M. Fouquet has paid his court to her.”

“To defend him would be to accuse herself, would it not?”

“I think it would.”

“There is still another influence, what do you say to that?”

“Is it considerable?”

“The queen-mother, perhaps?”

“Her majesty, the queen-mother, has a weakness for M. Fouquet very prejudicial to her son.”

“Never believe that,” said the old duchesse, smiling.

“Oh!” said Colbert, with incredulity, “I have often experienced it.”

“Formerly?”

“Very recently, madame, at Vaux. It was she who prevented the king from having M. Fouquet arrested.”

“People do not forever entertain the same opinions, my dear monsieur. That which the queen may have wished recently, she would not wish, perhaps, to-day."

"And why not?" said Colbert, astonished.

"Oh! the reason is of very little consequence."

"On the contrary, I think it is of great consequence; for, if I were certain of not displeasing her majesty, the queen-mother, my scruples would be all removed."

"Well! have you never heard talk of a certain secret?"

"A secret?"

"Call it what you like. In short, the queen-mother has conceived a bitter hatred for all those who have participated, in one fashion or another, in the discovery of this secret, and M. Fouquet I believe is one of these."

"Then," said Colbert, "we may be sure of the assent of the queen-mother?"

"I have just left her majesty, and she assures me so."

"So be it, then, madame."

"But there is something further; do you happen to know a man who was the intimate friend of M. Fouquet, M. d'Herblay, a bishop, I believe?"

"Bishop of Vannes."

"Well! this M. d'Herblay, who also knew the secret, the queen-mother is pursuing with the utmost rancor."

"Indeed!"

"So hotly pursued, that if he were dead, she would not be satisfied with anything less than his head, to satisfy her he would never speak again."

"And is that the desire of the queen-mother?"

"An order is given for it."

"This Monsieur d'Herblay shall be sought for, madame."

"Oh! it is well known where he is."

Colbert looked at the duchesse.

"Say where, madame."

"He is at Belle-Ile-en-Mer."

"At the residence of M. Fouquet?"

"At the residence of M. Fouquet."

"He shall be taken."

It was now the duchesse's turn to smile. "Do not fancy the capture so easy," said she; "do not promise it so lightly."

"Why not, madame?"

“Because M. d’Herblay is not one of those people who can be taken when and where you please.”

“He is a rebel, then?”

“Oh! Monsieur Colbert, we have passed all our lives in making rebels, and yet you see plainly, that so far from being taken, we take others.”

Colbert fixed upon the old duchesse one of those fierce looks of which no words can convey the expression, accompanied by a firmness not altogether wanting in grandeur. “The times are gone,” said he, “in which subjects gained duchies by making war against the king of France. If M. d’Herblay conspires, he will perish on the scaffold. That will give, or will not give, pleasure to his enemies, — a matter, by the way, of little importance to *us*.”

And this *us*, a strange word in the mouth of Colbert, made the duchesse thoughtful for a moment. She caught herself reckoning inwardly with this man — Colbert had regained his superiority in the conversation, and he meant to keep it.

“You ask me, madame,” he said, “to have this M. d’Herblay arrested?”

“I? — I ask you nothing of the kind!”

“I thought you did, madame. But as I have been mistaken, we will leave him alone; the king has said nothing about him.”

The duchesse bit her nails.

“Besides,” continued Colbert, “what a poor capture would this bishop be! A bishop game for a king! Oh! no, no; I will not even take the slightest notice of him.”

The hatred of the duchesse now discovered itself.

“Game for a woman!” said she. “Is not the queen a woman? If she wishes M. d’Herblay arrested, she has her reasons. Besides, is not M. d’Herblay the friend of him who is doomed to fall?”

“Oh! never mind that,” said Colbert. “This man shall be spared, if he is not the enemy of the king. Is that displeasing to you?”

“I say nothing.”

“Yes — you wish to see him in prison, in the Bastile, for instance.”

“I believe a secret better concealed behind the walls of the Bastile than behind those of Belle-Isle.”

“I will speak to the king about it; he will clear up the point.”

“And whilst waiting for that enlightenment, Monsieur l’Eveque de Vannes will have escaped. I would do so.”

“Escaped! he! and whither should he escape? Europe is ours, in will, if not in fact.”

“He will always find an asylum, monsieur. It is evident you know nothing of the man you have to do with. You do not know D’Herblay; you do not know Aramis. He was one of those four musketeers who, under the late king, made Cardinal de Richelieu tremble, and who, during the regency, gave so much trouble to Monseigneur Mazarin.”

“But, madame, what can he do, unless he has a kingdom to back him?”

“He has one, monsieur.”

“A kingdom, he! what, Monsieur d’Herblay?”

“I repeat to you, monsieur, that if he wants a kingdom, he either has it or will have it.”

“Well, as you are so earnest that this rebel should not escape, madame, I promise you he shall not escape.”

“Belle-Isle is fortified, M. Colbert, and fortified by him.”

“If Belle-Isle were also defended by him, Belle-Isle is not impregnable; and if Monsieur l’Eveque de Vannes is shut up in Belle-Isle, well, madame, the place shall be besieged, and he will be taken.”

“You may be very certain, monsieur, that the zeal you display in the interest of the queen-mother will please her majesty mightily, and you will be magnificently rewarded; but what shall I tell her of your projects respecting this man?”

“That when once taken, he shall be shut up in a fortress from which her secret shall never escape.”

“Very well, Monsieur Colbert, and we may say, that, dating from this instant, we have formed a solid alliance, that is, you and I, and that I am absolutely at your service.”

“It is I, madame, who place myself at yours. This Chevalier d’Herblay is a kind of Spanish spy, is he not?”

“Much more.”

“A secret ambassador?”

“Higher still.”

“Stop — King Phillip III. of Spain is a bigot. He is, perhaps, the confessor of Phillip III.”

“You must go higher even than that.”

“*Mordieu!*” cried Colbert, who forgot himself so far as to swear in the presence of this great lady, of this old friend of the queen-mother. “He must then be the general of the Jesuits."

"I believe you have guessed it at last," replied the duchesse.

"Ah! then, madame, this man will ruin us all if we do not ruin him; and we must make haste, too."

"Such was my opinion, monsieur, but I did not dare to give it you."

"And it was lucky for us he has attacked the throne, and not us."

"But, mark this well, M. Colbert. M. d'Herblay is never discouraged; if he has missed one blow, he will be sure to make another; he will begin again. If he has allowed an opportunity to escape of making a king for himself, sooner or later, he will make another, of whom, to a certainty, you will not be prime minister."

Colbert knitted his brow with a menacing expression. "I feel assured that a prison will settle this affair for us, madame, in a manner satisfactory for both."

The duchesse smiled again.

"Oh! if you knew," said she, "how many times Aramis has got out of prison!"

"Oh!" replied Colbert, "we will take care that he shall not get out *this* time."

"But you were not attending to what I said to you just now. Do you remember that Aramis was one of the four invincibles whom Richelieu so dreaded? And at that period the four musketeers were not in possession of that which they have now — money and experience."

Colbert bit his lips.

"We will renounce the idea of the prison," said he, in a lower tone: "we will find a little retreat from which the invincible cannot possibly escape."

"That was well spoken, our ally!" replied the duchesse. "But it is getting late; had we not better return?"

"The more willingly, madame, from my having my preparations to make for setting out with the king."

"To Paris!" cried the duchesse to the coachman.

And the carriage returned towards the Faubourg Saint Antoine, after the conclusion of the treaty that gave to death the last friend of Fouquet, the last defender of Belle-Isle, the former friend of Marie Michon, the new foe of the old duchesse.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

The Two Lighters.

D’Artagnan had set off; Fouquet likewise was gone, and with a rapidity which doubled the tender interest of his friends. The first moments of this journey, or better say, this flight, were troubled by a ceaseless dread of every horse and carriage to be seen behind the fugitive. It was not natural, in fact, if Louis XIV. was determined to seize this prey, that he should allow it to escape; the young lion was already accustomed to the chase, and he had bloodhounds sufficiently clever to be trusted. But insensibly all fears were dispersed; the surintendant, by hard traveling, placed such a distance between himself and his persecutors, that no one of them could reasonably be expected to overtake him. As to his position, his friends had made it excellent for him. Was he not traveling to join the king at Nantes, and what did the rapidity prove but his zeal to obey? He arrived, fatigued, but reassured, at Orleans, where he found, thanks to the care of a courier who had preceded him, a handsome lighter of eight oars. These lighters, in the shape of gondolas, somewhat wide and heavy, containing a small chamber, covered by the deck, and a chamber in the poop, formed by a tent, then acted as passage-boats from Orleans to Nantes, by the Loire, and this passage, a long one in our days, appeared then more easy and convenient than the high-road, with its post-hacks and its ill-hung carriages. Fouquet went on board this lighter, which set out immediately. The rowers, knowing they had the honor of conveying the surintendant of the finances, pulled with all their strength, and that magic word, the *finances*, promised them a liberal gratification, of which they wished to prove themselves worthy. The lighter seemed to leap the mimic waves of the Loire. Magnificent weather, a sunrise that empurpled all the landscape, displayed the river in all its limpid serenity. The current and the rowers carried Fouquet along as wings carry a bird, and he arrived before Beaugency without the slightest accident having signalized the voyage. Fouquet hoped to be the first to arrive at Nantes; there he would see the notables and gain support among the principal members of the States; he would make himself a necessity, a thing very easy for a man of his merit, and would delay the catastrophe, if he did not succeed in avoiding it entirely. “Besides,” said Gourville to him, “at Nantes, you will make out, or we will make out, the intentions of your enemies; we will have horses always ready to convey you to Poitou, a bark in which to gain the sea, and when once upon the open sea, Belle-Isle is your inviolable port. You see, besides, that no one is watching you, no one is following.” He had scarcely finished when they discovered at a distance, behind an elbow formed by the river, the masts of a huge lighter coming down. The rowers of Fouquet’s boat uttered a cry of surprise on seeing this galley.

“What is the matter?” asked Fouquet.

“The matter is, monseigneur,” replied the patron of the bark, “that it is a truly remarkable thing — that lighter comes along like a hurricane.”

Gourville started, and mounted to the deck, in order to obtain a better view.

Fouquet did not go up with him, but said to Gourville, with restrained mistrust: “See what it is, dear friend.”

The lighter had just passed the elbow. It came on so fast, that behind it might be plainly seen the white wake illumined with the fires of the day.

“How they go,” repeated the skipper, “how they go! They must be well paid! I did not think,” he added, “that oars of wood could behave better than ours, but yonder oarsmen prove the contrary.”

“Well they may,” said one of the rowers, “they are twelve, and we but eight.”

“Twelve rowers!” replied Gourville, “twelve! impossible.”

The number of eight rowers for a lighter had never been exceeded, even for the king. This honor had been paid to monsieur le surintendant, more for the sake of haste than of respect.

“What does it mean?” said Gourville, endeavoring to distinguish beneath the tent, which was already apparent, travelers which the most piercing eye could not yet have succeeded in discovering.

“They must be in a hurry, for it is not the king,” said the patron.

Fouquet shuddered.

“By what sign do you know that it is not the king?” said Gourville.

“In the first place, because there is no white flag with fleurs-de-lis, which the royal lighter always carries.”

“And then,” said Fouquet, “because it is impossible it should be the king, Gourville, as the king was still in Paris yesterday.”

Gourville replied to the surintendant by a look which said: “You were there yourself yesterday.”

“And by what sign do you make out they are in such haste?” added he, for the sake of gaining time.

“By this, monsieur,” said the patron; “these people must have set out a long while after us, and they have already nearly overtaken us.”

“Bah!” said Gourville, “who told you that they do not come from Beaugency or from Moit even?”

“We have seen no lighter of that shape, except at Orleans. It comes from Orleans, monsieur, and makes great haste.”

Fouquet and Gourville exchanged a glance. The captain remarked their uneasiness, and, to mislead him, Gourville immediately said:

“Some friend, who has laid a wager he would catch us; let us win the wager, and not allow him to come up with us.”

The patron opened his mouth to say that it was quite impossible, but Fouquet said with much *hauteur*, — ”If it is any one who wishes to overtake us, let him come.”

“We can try, monseigneur,” said the man, timidly. “Come, you fellows, put out your strength; row, row!”

“No,” said Fouquet, “on the contrary; stop short.”

“Monseigneur! what folly!” interrupted Gourville, stooping towards his ear.

“Pull up!” repeated Fouquet. The eight oars stopped, and resisting the water, created a retrograde motion. It stopped. The twelve rowers in the other did not, at first, perceive this maneuver, for they continued to urge on their boat so vigorously that it arrived quickly within musket-shot. Fouquet was short-sighted, Gourville was annoyed by the sun, now full in his eyes; the skipper alone, with that habit and clearness which are acquired by a constant struggle with the elements, perceived distinctly the travelers in the neighboring lighter.

“I can see them!” cried he; “there are two.”

“I can see nothing,” said Gourville.

“You will not be long before you distinguish them; in twenty strokes of their oars they will be within ten paces of us.”

But what the patron announced was not realized; the lighter imitated the movement commanded by Fouquet, and instead of coming to join its pretended friends, it stopped short in the middle of the river.

"I cannot comprehend this," said the captain.

"Nor I," cried Gourville.

"You who can see so plainly the people in that lighter," resumed Fouquet, "try to describe them to us, before we are too far off."

"I thought I saw two," replied the boatman. "I can only see one now, under the tent."

"What sort of man is he?"

"He is a dark man, broad-shouldered, bull-necked."

A little cloud at that moment passed across the azure, darkening the sun. Gourville, who was still looking, with one hand over his eyes, became able to see what he sought, and all at once, jumping from the deck into the chamber where Fouquet awaited him: "Colbert!" said he, in a voice broken by emotion.

"Colbert!" repeated Fouquet. "Too strange! but no, it is impossible!"

"I tell you I recognized him, and he, at the same time, so plainly recognized me, that he is just gone into the chamber on the poop. Perhaps the king has sent him on our track."

"In that case he would join us, instead of lying by. What is he doing there?"

"He is watching us, without a doubt."

"I do not like uncertainty," said Fouquet; "let us go straight up to him."

"Oh! monseigneur, do not do that, the lighter is full of armed men."

"He wishes to arrest me, then, Gourville? Why does he not come on?"

"Monseigneur, it is not consistent with your dignity to go to meet even your ruin."

"But to allow them to watch me like a malefactor!"

"Nothing yet proves that they are watching you, monseigneur; be patient!"

"What is to be done, then?"

"Do not stop; you were only going so fast to appear to obey the king's order with zeal. Redouble the speed. He who lives will see!"

"That is better. Come!" cried Fouquet; "since they remain stock-still yonder, let us go on."

The captain gave the signal, and Fouquet's rowers resumed their task with all the success that could be looked for from men who had rested. Scarcely had the lighter made a hundred fathoms, than the other, that with the twelve rowers, resumed its rapid course. This position lasted all day, without any increase or diminution of distance between the two vessels. Towards evening Fouquet wished to try the intentions of his persecutor. He ordered his rowers to pull towards the shore, as if to effect a landing. Colbert's lighter imitated this maneuver, and steered towards the shore in a slanting direction. By the merest chance, at the spot where Fouquet pretended to wish to land, a stableman, from the chateau of Langeais, was following the flowery banks leading three horses in halters. Without doubt the people of the twelve-oared lighter fancied that Fouquet was directing his course to these horses ready for flight, for four or five men, armed with muskets, jumped from the lighter on to the shore, and marched along the banks, as if to gain ground on the horseman. Fouquet, satisfied of having forced the enemy to a demonstration, considered his intention evident, and put his boat in motion again. Colbert's people returned likewise to theirs, and the course of the two vessels was resumed with fresh perseverance. Upon seeing this, Fouquet felt himself threatened closely, and in a prophetic voice — "Well, Gourville," said he, whisperingly, "what did I say at our last repast, at my house? Am I going, or not, to my ruin?"

"Oh! monseigneur!"

"These two boats, which follow each other with so much emulation, as if we were disputing, M. Colbert and I, a prize for swiftness on the Loire, do they not aptly represent our fortunes; and do you not believe, Gourville, that one of the two will be wrecked at Nantes?"

"At least," objected Gourville, "there is still uncertainty; you are about to appear at the States; you are about to show what sort of man you are; your eloquence and genius for business are the buckler and sword that will serve to defend you, if not to conquer with. The Bretons do not know you; and when they become acquainted with you your cause is won! Oh! let M. Colbert look to it well, for his lighter is as much exposed as yours to being upset. Both go quickly, his faster than yours, it is true; we shall see which will be wrecked first."

Fouquet, taking Gourville's hand — "My friend," said he, "everything considered, remember the proverb, 'First come, first served!' Well! M. Colbert takes care not to pass me. He is a prudent man is M. Colbert."

He was right; the two lighters held their course as far as Nantes, watching each other. When the surintendant landed, Gourville hoped he should be able to seek refuge at once, and have the relays prepared. But, at the landing, the second lighter joined the first, and Colbert, approaching

Fouquet, saluted him on the quay with marks of the profoundest respect — marks so significant, so public, that their result was the bringing of the whole population upon La Fosse. Fouquet was completely self-possessed; he felt that in his last moments of greatness he had obligations towards himself. He wished to fall from such a height that his fall should crush some of his enemies. Colbert was there — so much the worse for Colbert. The surintendant, therefore, coming up to him, replied, with that arrogant semi-closure of the eyes peculiar to him — ”What! is that you, M. Colbert?”

“To offer you my respects, monseigneur,” said the latter.

“Were you in that lighter?” — pointing to the one with twelve rowers.

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“Of twelve rowers?” said Fouquet; “what luxury, M. Colbert. For a moment I thought it was the queen-mother.”

“Monseigneur!” — and Colbert blushed.

“This is a voyage that will cost those who have to pay for it dear, Monsieur l’Intendant!” said Fouquet. “But you have, happily, arrived! — You see, however,” added he, a moment after, “that I, who had but eight rowers, arrived before you.” And he turned his back towards him, leaving him uncertain whether the maneuvers of the second lighter had escaped the notice of the first. At least he did not give him the satisfaction of showing that he had been frightened. Colbert, so annoyingly attacked, did not give way.

“I have not been quick, monseigneur,” he replied, “because I followed your example whenever you stopped.”

“And why did you do that, Monsieur Colbert?” cried Fouquet, irritated by the base audacity; “as you had a superior crew to mine, why did you not either join me or pass me?”

“Out of respect,” said the intendant, bowing to the ground.

Fouquet got into a carriage which the city had sent to him, we know not why or how, and he repaired to *la Maison de Nantes*, escorted by a vast crowd of people, who for several days had been agog with expectation of a convocation of the States. Scarcely was he installed when Gourville went out to order horses on the route to Poitiers and Vannes, and a boat at Paimboef. He performed these various operations with so much mystery, activity, and generosity, that never was Fouquet, then laboring under an attack of fever, more nearly saved, except for the counteraction of that immense disturber of human projects, — chance. A report was spread during the night, that the king was coming in great haste on post horses, and would arrive in ten or twelve hours at the latest. The people, while waiting for the king, were greatly rejoiced to see the musketeers, newly arrived, with Monsieur d’Artagnan, their captain, and quartered in the castle, of which they occupied all the posts, in quality of guard of honor. M. d’Artagnan, who was very polite, presented himself, about ten o’clock, at the lodgings of the surintendant to pay his respectful compliments; and although the minister suffered from fever, although he was in such pain as to be bathed in sweat, he would receive M. d’Artagnan, who was delighted with that honor, as will be seen by the conversation they had together.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Friendly Advice.

Fouquet had gone to bed, like a man who clings to life, and wishes to economize, as much as possible, that slender tissue of existence, of which the shocks and frictions of this world so quickly wear out the tenuity. D’Artagnan appeared at the door of this chamber, and was saluted by the superintendent with a very affable “Good day.”

“*Bon jour!* monseigneur,” replied the musketeer; “how did you get through the journey?”

“Tolerably well, thank you.”

“And the fever?”

“But poorly. I drink, as you perceive. I am scarcely arrived, and I have already levied a contribution of *tisane* upon Nantes.”

“You should sleep first, monseigneur.”

“Eh! *corbleu!* my dear Monsieur d’Artagnan, I should be very glad to sleep.”

“Who hinders you?”

“Why, *you* in the first place.”

“I? Oh, monseigneur!”

“No doubt you do. Is it at Nantes as at Paris? Do you not come in the king’s name?”

“For Heaven’s sake, monseigneur,” replied the captain, “leave the king alone! The day on which I shall come on the part of the king, for the purpose you mean, take my word for it, I will not leave you long in doubt. You will see me place my hand on my sword, according to the *ordonnance*, and you will hear my say at once, in ceremonial voice, ‘Monseigneur, in the name of the king, I arrest you!’“

“You promise me that frankness?” said the superintendent.

“Upon my honor! But we have not come to that, believe me.”

“What makes you think that, M. d’Artagnan? For my part, I think quite the contrary.”

“I have heard speak of nothing of the kind,” replied D’Artagnan.

“Eh! eh!” said Fouquet.

“Indeed, no. You are an agreeable man, in spite of your fever. The king should not, cannot help loving you, at the bottom of his heart.”

Fouquet’s expression implied doubt. “But M. Colbert?” said he; “does M. Colbert love me as much as you say?”

“I am not speaking of M. Colbert,” replied D’Artagnan. “He is an exceptional man. He does not love you; so much is very possible; but, *mordioux!* the squirrel can guard himself against the adder with very little trouble.”

“Do you know that you are speaking to me quite as a friend?” replied Fouquet; “and that, upon my life! I have never met with a man of your intelligence, and heart?”

“You are pleased to say so,” replied D’Artagnan. “Why did you wait till to-day to pay me such a compliment?”

“Blind that we are!” murmured Fouquet.

“Your voice is getting hoarse,” said D’Artagnan; “drink, monseigneur, drink!” And he offered him a cup of *tisane*, with the most friendly cordiality; Fouquet took it, and thanked him by a gentle smile. “Such things only happen to me,” said the musketeer. “I have passed ten years under your very beard, while you were rolling about tons of gold. You were clearing an annual pension of four millions; you never observed me; and you find out there is such a person in the world, just at the moment you — ”

“Just at the moment I am about to fall,” interrupted Fouquet. “That is true, my dear Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

“I did not say so.”

“But you thought so; and that is the same thing. Well! if I fall, take my word as truth, I shall not pass a single day without saying to myself, as I strike my brow, ‘Fool! fool! — stupid mortal! You had a Monsieur d’Artagnan under your eye and hand, and you did not employ him, you did not enrich him!’“

“You overwhelm me,” said the captain. “I esteem you greatly.”

“There exists another man, then, who does not think as M. Colbert thinks,” said the surintendant.

“How this M. Colbert looms up in your imagination! He is worse than fever!”

“Oh! I have good cause,” said Fouquet. “Judge for yourself.” And he related the details of the course of the lighters, and the hypocritical persecution of Colbert. “Is not this a clear sign of my ruin?”

D’Artagnan became very serious. “That is true,” he said. “Yes; it has an unsavory odor, as M. de Treville used to say.” And he fixed on M. Fouquet his intelligent and significant look.

“Am I not clearly designated in that, captain? Is not the king bringing me to Nantes to get me away from Paris, where I have so many creatures, and to possess himself of Belle-Isle?”

“Where M. d’Herblay is,” added D’Artagnan. Fouquet raised his head. “As for me, monseigneur,” continued D’Artagnan, “I can assure you the king has said nothing to me against you.”

“Indeed!”

“The king commanded me to set out for Nantes, it is true; and to say nothing about it to M. de Gesvres.”

“My friend.”

“To M. de Gesvres, yes, monseigneur,” continued the musketeer, whose eye s did not cease to speak a language different from the language of his lips. “The king, moreover, commanded me to take a brigade of musketeers, which is apparently superfluous, as the country is quite quiet.”

“A brigade!” said Fouquet, raising himself upon his elbow.

“Ninety-six horsemen, yes, monseigneur. The same number as were employed in arresting MM. de Chalais, de Cinq-Mars, and Montmorency.”

Fouquet pricked up his ears at these words, pronounced without apparent value. “And what else?” said he.

“Oh! nothing but insignificant orders; such as guarding the castle, guarding every lodging, allowing none of M. de Gesvres’s guards to occupy a single post.”

“And as to myself,” cried Fouquet, “what orders had you?”

“As to you, monseigneur? — not the smallest word.”

“Monsieur d’Artagnan, my safety, my honor, perhaps my life are at stake. You would not deceive me?”

“I? — to what end? Are you threatened? Only there really is an order with respect to carriages and boats — ”

“An order?”

“Yes; but it cannot concern you — a simple measure of police.”

“What is it, captain? — what is it?”

“To forbid all horses or boats to leave Nantes, without a pass, signed by the king.”

“Great God! but — ”

D’Artagnan began to laugh. “All that is not to be put into execution before the arrival of the king at Nantes. So that you see plainly, monseigneur, the order in nowise concerns you.”

Fouquet became thoughtful, and D’Artagnan feigned not to observe his preoccupation. “It is evident, by my thus confiding to you the orders which have been given to me, that I am friendly towards you, and that I am trying to prove to you that none of them are directed against you.”

“Without doubt! — without doubt!” said Fouquet, still absent.

“Let us recapitulate,” said the captain, his glance beaming with earnestness. “A special guard about the castle, in which your lodging is to be, is it not?”

“Do you know the castle?”

“Ah! monseigneur, a regular prison! The absence of M. de Gesvres, who has the honor of being one of your friends. The closing of the gates of the city, and of the river without a pass; but, only when the king shall have arrived. Please to observe, Monsieur Fouquet, that if, instead of speaking to man like you, who are one of the first in the kingdom, I were speaking to a troubled, uneasy conscience — I should compromise myself forever. What a fine opportunity for any one who wished to be free! No police, no guards, no orders; the water free, the roads free, Monsieur d’Artagnan obliged to lend his horses, if required. All this ought to reassure you, Monsieur Fouquet, for the king would not have left me thus independent, if he had any sinister designs. In truth, Monsieur Fouquet, ask me whatever you like, I am at your service; and, in return, if you will consent to do it, do me a service, that of giving my compliments to Aramis and Porthos, in case you embark for Belle-Isle, as you have a right to do without changing your dress, immediately, in your *robe de chambre* — just as you are.” Saying these words, and with a profound bow, the musketeer, whose looks had lost none of their intelligent kindness, left the apartment. He had not reached the steps of the vestibule, when Fouquet, quite beside himself, hung to the bell-rope, and shouted, “My horses! — my lighter!” But nobody answered. The surintendant dressed himself with everything that came to hand.

“Gourville! — Gourville!” cried he, while slipping his watch into his pocket. And the bell sounded again, whilst Fouquet repeated, “Gourville! — Gourville!”

Gourville at length appeared, breathless and pale.

"Let us be gone! Let us be gone!" cried Fouquet, as soon as he saw him.

"It is too late!" said the surintendant's poor friend.

"Too late! — why?"

"Listen!" And they heard the sounds of trumpets and drums in front of the castle.

"What does that mean, Gourville?"

"It means the king is come, monseigneur."

"The king!"

"The king, who has ridden double stages, who has killed horses, and who is eight hours in advance of all our calculations."

"We are lost!" murmured Fouquet. "Brave D'Artagnan, all is over, thou has spoken to me too late!"

The king, in fact, was entering the city, which soon resounded with the cannon from the ramparts, and from a vessel which replied from the lower parts of the river. Fouquet's brow darkened; he called his *valets de chambre* and dressed in ceremonial costume. From his window, behind the curtains, he could see the eagerness of the people, and the movement of a large troop, which had followed the prince. The king was conducted to the castle with great pomp, and Fouquet saw him dismount under the portcullis, and say something in the ear of D'Artagnan, who held his stirrup. D'Artagnan, when the king had passed under the arch, directed his steps towards the house Fouquet was in; but so slowly, and stopping so frequently to speak to his musketeers, drawn up like a hedge, that it might be said he was counting the seconds, or the steps, before accomplishing his object. Fouquet opened the window to speak to him in the court.

"Ah!" cried D'Artagnan, on perceiving him, "are you still there, monseigneur?"

And that word *still* completed the proof to Fouquet of how much information and how many useful counsels were contained in the first visit the musketeer had paid him. The surintendant sighed deeply. "Good heavens! yes, monsieur," replied he. "The arrival of the king has interrupted me in the projects I had formed."

"Oh, then you know that the king has arrived?"

"Yes, monsieur, I have seen him; and this time you come from him — "

"To inquire after you, monseigneur; and, if your health is not too bad, to beg you to have the kindness to repair to the castle."

"Directly, Monsieur d'Artagnan, directly!"

“Ah, *mordioux!*” said the captain, “now the king is come, there is no more walking for anybody — no more free will; the password governs all now, you as much as me, me as much as you.”

Fouquet heaved a last sigh, climbed with difficulty into his carriage, so great was his weakness, and went to the castle, escorted by D’Artagnan, whose politeness was not less terrifying this time than it had just before been consoling and cheerful.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

How the King, Louis XIV., Played His Little Part.

As Fouquet was alighting from his carriage, to enter the castle of Nantes, a man of mean appearance went up to him with marks of the greatest respect, and gave him a letter. D'Artagnan endeavored to prevent this man from speaking to Fouquet, and pushed him away, but the message had been given to the surintendant. Fouquet opened the letter and read it, and instantly a vague terror, which D'Artagnan did not fail to penetrate, was painted on the countenance of the first minister. Fouquet put the paper into the portfolio which he had under his arm, and passed on towards the king's apartments. D'Artagnan, through the small windows made at every landing of the donjon stairs, saw, as he went up behind Fouquet, the man who had delivered the note, looking round him on the place and making signs to several persons, who disappeared in the adjacent streets, after having themselves repeated the signals. Fouquet was made to wait for a moment on the terrace of which we have spoken, — a terrace which abutted on the little corridor, at the end of which the cabinet of the king was located. Here D'Artagnan passed on before the surintendant, whom, till that time, he had respectfully accompanied, and entered the royal cabinet.

"Well?" asked Louis XIV., who, on perceiving him, threw on to the table covered with papers a large green cloth.

"The order is executed, sire."

"And Fouquet?"

"Monsieur le surintendant follows me," said D'Artagnan.

"In ten minutes let him be introduced," said the king, dismissing D'Artagnan again with a gesture. The latter retired; but had scarcely reached the corridor at the extremity of which Fouquet was waiting for him, when he was recalled by the king's bell.

"Did he not appear astonished?" asked the king.

"Who, sire?"

"*Fouquet*," replied the king, without saying monsieur, a peculiarity which confirmed the captain of the musketeers in his suspicions.

"No, sire," replied he.

"That's well!" And a second time Louis dismissed D'Artagnan.

Fouquet had not quitted the terrace where he had been left by his guide. He reperused his note, conceived thus:

"Something is being contrived against you. Perhaps they will not dare to carry it out at the castle; it will be on your return home. The house is already surrounded by musketeers. Do not enter. A white horse is in waiting for you behind the esplanade!"

Fouquet recognized the writing and zeal of Gourville. Not being willing that, if any evil happened to himself, this paper should compromise a faithful friend, the surintendant was busy tearing it into a thousand morsels, spread about by the wind from the balustrade of the terrace. D'Artagnan found him watching the snowflake fluttering of the last scraps in space.

"Monsieur," said he, "the king awaits you."

Fouquet walked with a deliberate step along the little corridor, where MM. de Brienne and Rose were at work, whilst the Duc de Saint-Aignan, seated on a chair, likewise in the corridor, appeared to be waiting for orders, with feverish impatience, his sword between his legs. It appeared strange to Fouquet that MM. Brienne, Rose, and de Saint-Aignan, in general so attentive and obsequious, should scarcely take the least notice, as he, the surintendant, passed. But how could he expect to find it otherwise among courtiers, he whom the king no longer called anything but *Fouquet?* He raised his head, determined to look every one and everything bravely in the face, and entered the king's apartment, where a little bell, which we already know, had already announced him to his majesty.

The king, without rising, nodded to him, and with interest: "Well! how are you, Monsieur Fouquet?" said he.

"I am in a high fever," replied the surintendant; "but I am at the king's service."

"That is well; the States assemble to-morrow; have you a speech ready?"

Fouquet looked at the king with astonishment. "I have not, sire," replied he; "but I will improvise one. I am too well acquainted with affairs to feel any embarrassment. I have only one question to ask; will your majesty permit me?"

"Certainly. Ask it."

"Why did not your majesty do his first minister the honor of giving him notice of this in Paris?"

“You were ill; I was not willing to fatigue you.”

“Never did a labor — never did an explanation fatigue me, sire; and since the moment is come for me to demand an explanation of my king — ”

“Oh, Monsieur Fouquet! an explanation? An explanation, pray, of what?”

“Of your majesty’s intentions with respect to myself.”

The king blushed. “I have been calumniated,” continued Fouquet, warmly, “and I feel called upon to adjure the justice of the king to make inquiries.”

“You say all this to me very uselessly, Monsieur Fouquet; I know what I know.”

“Your majesty can only know the things that have been told to you; and I, on my part, have said nothing to you, whilst others have spoken many, many times — ”

“What do you wish to say?” said the king, impatient to put an end to this embarrassing conversation.

“I will go straight to the facts, sire; and I accuse a certain man of having injured me in your majesty’s opinion.”

“Nobody has injured you, Monsieur Fouquet.”

“That reply proves to me, sire, that I am right.”

“Monsieur Fouquet, I do not like people to be accused.”

“Not when one is accused?”

“We have already spoken too much about this affair.”

“Your majesty will not allow me to justify myself?”

“I repeat that I do not accuse you.”

Fouquet, with a half-bow, made a step backward. “It is certain,” thought he, “that he has made up his mind. He alone who cannot go back can show such obstinacy. Not to see the danger now would be to be blind indeed; not to shun it would be stupid.” He resumed aloud, “Did your majesty send for me on business?”

“No, Monsieur Fouquet, but for some advice I wish to give you.”

“I respectfully await it, sire.”

“Rest yourself, Monsieur Fouquet, do not throw away your strength; the session of the States will be short, and when my secretaries shall have closed it, I do not wish business to be talked of in France for a fortnight.”

“Has the king nothing to say to me on the subject of this assembly of the States?”

“No, Monsieur Fouquet.”

“Not to me, the surintendant of the finances?”

“Rest yourself, I beg you; that is all I have to say to you.”

Fouquet bit his lips and hung his head. He was evidently busy with some uneasy thought. This uneasiness struck the king. “Are you angry at having to rest yourself, M. Fouquet?” said he.

“Yes, sire, I am not accustomed to take rest.”

“But you are ill; you must take care of yourself.”

“Your majesty spoke just now of a speech to be pronounced to-morrow.”

His majesty made no reply; this unexpected stroke embarrassed him. Fouquet felt the weight of this hesitation. He thought he could read danger in the eyes of the young prince, which fear would but precipitate. “If I appear frightened, I am lost,” thought he.

The king, on his part, was only uneasy at the alarm of Fouquet. “Has he a suspicion of anything?” murmured he.

“If his first word is severe,” again thought Fouquet; “if he becomes angry, or feigns to be angry for the sake of a pretext, how shall I extricate myself? Let us smooth the declivity a little. Gourville was right.”

“Sire,” said he, suddenly, “since the goodness of the king watches over my health to the point of dispensing with my labor, may I not be allowed to be absent from the council of to-morrow? I could pass the day in bed, and will entreat the king to grant me his physician, that we may endeavor to find a remedy against this fearful fever.”

“So be it, Monsieur Fouquet, it shall be as you desire; you shall have a holiday to-morrow, you shall have the physician, and shall be restored to health.”

“Thanks!” said Fouquet, bowing. Then, opening his game: “Shall I not have the happiness of conducting your majesty to my residence of Belle-Isle?”

And he looked Louis full in the face, to judge of the effect of such a proposal. The king blushed again.

“Do you know,” replied he, endeavoring to smile, “that you have just said, ‘My residence of Belle-Isle’?”

“Yes, sire.”

“Well! do you not remember,” continued the king in the same cheerful tone, “that you gave me Belle-Isle?”

“That is true again, sire. Only, as you have not taken it, you will doubtless come with me and take possession of it.”

"I mean to do so."

"That was, besides, your majesty's intention as well as mine; and I cannot express to your majesty how happy and proud I have been to see all the king's regiments from Paris to help take possession."

The king stammered out that he did not bring the musketeers for that alone.

"Oh, I am convinced of that," said Fouquet, warmly; "your majesty knows very well that you have nothing to do but to come alone with a cane in your hand, to bring to the ground all the fortifications of Belle-Isle."

"*Peste!*" cried the king; "I do not wish those fine fortifications, which cost so much to build, to fall at all. No, let them stand against the Dutch and English. You would not guess what I want to see at Belle-Isle, Monsieur Fouquet; it is the pretty peasants and women of the lands on the sea-shore, who dance so well, and are so seducing with their scarlet petticoats! I have heard great boast of your pretty tenants, monsieur le surintendant; well, let me have a sight of them."

"Whenever your majesty pleases."

"Have you any means of transport? It shall be to-morrow, if you like."

The surintendant felt this stroke, which was not adroit, and replied, "No, sire; I was ignorant of your majesty's wish; above all, I was ignorant of your haste to see Belle-Isle, and I am prepared with nothing."

"You have a boat of your own, nevertheless?"

"I have five; but they are all in port, or at Paimboeuf; and to join them, or bring them hither, would require at least twenty-four hours. Have I any occasion to send a courier? Must I do so?"

"Wait a little, put an end to the fever, — wait till to-morrow."

"That is true. Who knows but that by to-morrow we may not have a hundred other ideas?" replied Fouquet, now perfectly convinced and very pale.

The king started, and stretched his hand out towards his little bell, but Fouquet prevented his ringing.

"Sire," said he, "I have an ague — I am trembling with cold. If I remain a moment longer, I shall most likely faint. I request your majesty's permission to go and fling myself beneath the bedclothes."

"Indeed, you are in a shiver; it is painful to behold! Come, Monsieur Fouquet, begone! I will send to inquire after you."

"Your majesty overwhelms me with kindness. In an hour I shall be better."

"I will call some one to reconduct you," said the king.

"As you please, sire; I would gladly take the arm of any one."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan!" cried the king, ringing his little bell.

"Oh, sire," interrupted Fouquet, laughing in such a manner as made the prince feel cold, "would you give me the captain of your musketeers to take me to my lodgings? An equivocal honor that, sire! A simple footman, I beg."

"And why, M. Fouquet? M. d'Artagnan conducts me often, and extremely well!"

"Yes, but when he conducts you, sire, it is to obey you; whilst me — "

"Go on!"

"If I am obliged to return home supported by the leader of the musketeers, it would be everywhere said you had had me arrested."

"Arrested!" replied the king, who became paler than Fouquet himself, — "arrested! oh!"

"And why should they not say so?" continued Fouquet, still laughing; "and I would lay a wager there would be people found wicked enough to laugh at it." This sally disconcerted the monarch. Fouquet was skillful enough, or fortunate enough, to make Louis XIV. recoil before the appearance of the deed he meditated. M. d'Artagnan, when he appeared, received an order to desire a musketeer to accompany the surintendant.

"Quite unnecessary," said the latter; "sword for sword; I prefer Gourville, who is waiting for me below. But that will not prevent me enjoying the society of M. d'Artagnan. I am glad he will see Belle-Isle, he is so good a judge of fortifications."

D'Artagnan bowed, without at all comprehending what was going on. Fouquet bowed again and left the apartment, affecting all the slowness of a man who walks with difficulty. When once out of the castle, "I am saved!" said he. "Oh! yes, disloyal king, you shall see Belle-Isle, but it shall be when I am no longer there."

He disappeared, leaving D'Artagnan with the king.

"Captain," said the king, "you will follow M. Fouquet at the distance of a hundred paces."

"Yes, sire."

"He is going to his lodgings again. You will go with him."

“Yes, sire.”

“You will arrest him in my name, and will shut him up in a carriage.”

“In a carriage. Well, sire?”

“In such a fashion that he may not, on the road, either converse with any one or throw notes to people he may meet.”

“That will be rather difficult, sire.”

“Not at all.”

“Pardon me, sire, I cannot stifle M. Fouquet, and if he asks for liberty to breathe, I cannot prevent him by closing both the windows and the blinds. He will throw out at the doors all the cries and notes possible.”

“The case is provided for, Monsieur d’Artagnan; a carriage with a trellis will obviate both the difficulties you point out.”

“A carriage with an iron trellis!” cried D’Artagnan; “but a carriage with an iron trellis is not made in half an hour, and your majesty commands me to go immediately to M. Fouquet’s lodgings.”

“The carriage in question is already made.”

“Ah! that is quite a different thing,” said the captain; “if the carriage is ready made, very well, then, we have only to set it in motion.”

“It is ready — and the horses harnessed.”

“Ah!”

“And the coachman, with the outriders, is waiting in the lower court of the castle.”

D’Artagnan bowed. “There only remains for me to ask your majesty whither I shall conduct M. Fouquet.”

“To the castle of Angers, at first.”

“Very well, sire.”

“Afterwards we will see.”

“Yes, sire.”

“Monsieur d’Artagnan, one last word: you have remarked that, for making this capture of M. Fouquet, I have not employed my guards, on which account M. de Gesvres will be furious.”

“Your majesty does not employ your guards,” said the captain, a little humiliated, “because you mistrust M. de Gesvres, that is all.”

“That is to say, monsieur, that I have more confidence in you.”

“I know that very well, sire! and it is of no use to make so much of it.”

“It is only for the sake of arriving at this, monsieur, that if, from this moment, it should happen that by any chance whatever M. Fouquet should escape — such chances have been, monsieur — ”

“Oh! very often, sire; but for others, not for me.”

“And why not with you?”

“Because I, sire, have, for an instant, wished to save M. Fouquet.”

The king started. “Because,” continued the captain, “I had then a right to do so, having guessed your majesty’s plan, without you having spoken to me of it, and that I took an interest in M. Fouquet. Now, was I not at liberty to show my interest in this man?”

“In truth, monsieur, you do not reassure me with regard to your services.”

“If I had saved him then, I should have been perfectly innocent; I will say more, I should have done well, for M. Fouquet is not a bad man. But he was not willing; his destiny prevailed; he let the hour of liberty slip by. So much the worse! Now I have orders, I will obey those orders, and M. Fouquet you may consider as a man arrested. He is at the castle of Angers, this very M. Fouquet.”

“Oh! you have not got him yet, captain.”

“That concerns me; every one to his trade, sire; only, once more, reflect! Do you seriously give me orders to arrest M. Fouquet, sire?”

“Yes, a thousand times, yes!”

“In writing, sire, then.”

“Here is the order.”

D’Artagnan read it, bowed to the king, and left the room. From the height of the terrace he perceived Gourville, who went by with a joyous air towards the lodgings of M. Fouquet.

CHAPTER XL.

The White Horse and the Black.

“That is rather surprising,” said D’Artagnan; “Gourville running about the streets so gayly, when he is almost certain that M. Fouquet is in danger; when it is almost equally certain that it was Gourville who warned M. Fouquet just now by the note which was torn into a thousand pieces upon the terrace, and given to the winds by monsieur le surintendant. Gourville is rubbing his hands; that is because he has done something clever. Whence comes M. Gourville? Gourville is coming from the Rue aux Herbes. Whither does the Rue aux Herbes lead?” And D’Artagnan followed, along the tops of the houses of Nantes, dominated by the castle, the line traced by the streets, as he would have done upon a topographical plan; only, instead of the dead, flat paper, the living chart rose in relief with the cries, the movements, and the shadows of men and things. Beyond the inclosure of the city, the great verdant plains stretched out, bordering the Loire, and appeared to run towards the pink horizon, which was cut by the azure of the waters and the dark green of the marshes. Immediately outside the gates of Nantes two white roads were seen diverging like separate fingers of a gigantic hand. D’Artagnan, who had taken in all the panorama at a glance by crossing the terrace, was led by the line of the Rue aux Herbes to the mouth of one of those roads which took its rise under the gates of Nantes. One step more, and he was about to descend the stairs, take his trellised carriage, and go towards the lodgings of M. Fouquet. But chance decreed, at the moment of plunging into the staircase, that he was attracted by a moving point then gaining ground upon that road.

“What is that?” said the musketeer to himself; “a horse galloping, — a runaway horse, no doubt. What a rate he is going at!” The moving point became detached from the road, and entered into the fields. “A white horse,” continued the captain, who had just observed the color thrown luminously against the dark ground, “and he is mounted; it must be some boy whose horse is thirsty and has run away with him.”

These reflections, rapid as lightning, simultaneous with visual perception, D’Artagnan had already forgotten when he descended the first steps of the staircase. Some morsels of paper were spread over the stairs, and shone out white against the dirty stones. “Eh! eh!” said the captain to himself, “here are some of the fragments of the note torn by M. Fouquet. Poor man! he has given his secret to the wind; the wind will have no more to do with it, and brings it back to the king. Decidedly, Fouquet, you play with misfortune! the game is not a fair one, — fortune is against you. The star of Louis XIV. obscures yours; the adder is stronger and more cunning than the squirrel.” D’Artagnan picked up one of these morsels of paper as he descended. “Gourville’s pretty little hand!” cried he, whilst examining one of the fragments of the note; “I was not mistaken.” And he read the word “horse.” “Stop!” said he; and he examined another, upon which there was not a letter traced. Upon a third he read the word “white;” “white horse,” repeated he, like a child that is spelling. “Ah, *mordioux!*” cried the suspicious spirit, “a white horse!” And, like that grain of powder which, burning, dilates into ten thousand times its volume, D’Artagnan, enlightened by ideas and suspicions, rapidly reascended the stairs towards the terrace. The white horse was still galloping in the direction of the Loire, at the extremity of which, melting into the vapors of the water, a little sail appeared, wave-balanced like a water-butterfly. “Oh!” cried the musketeer, “only a man who wants to fly would go at that pace across plowed lands; there is but one Fouquet, a financier, to ride thus in open day upon a white horse; there is no one but the lord of Belle-Isle who would make his escape towards the sea, while there are such thick forests on land, and there is but one D’Artagnan in the world to catch M. Fouquet, who has half an hour’s start, and who will have gained his boat within an hour.” This being said, the musketeer gave orders that the carriage with the iron trellis should be taken immediately to a thicket situated just outside the city. He selected his best horse, jumped upon his back, galloped along the Rue aux Herbes, taking, not the road Fouquet had taken, but the bank itself of the Loire, certain that he should gain ten minutes upon the total distance, and, at the intersection of the two lines, come up with the fugitive, who could have no suspicion of being pursued in that direction. In the rapidity of the pursuit, and with the impatience of the avenger, animating himself as in war, D’Artagnan, so mild, so kind towards Fouquet, was surprised to find himself become ferocious — almost sanguinary. For a long time he galloped without catching sight of the white horse. His rage assumed fury, he doubted himself, — he suspected that Fouquet had buried himself in some subterranean road, or that he had changed the white horse for one of those famous black ones, as swift as the wind, which D'Artagnan, at Saint-Mande, had so frequently admired and envied for their vigor and their fleetness.

At such moments, when the wind cut his eyes so as to make the tears spring from them, when the saddle had become burning hot, when the galled and spurred horse reared with pain, and threw behind him a shower of dust and stones, D'Artagnan, raising himself in his stirrups, and seeing nothing on the waters, nothing beneath the trees, looked up into the air like a madman. He was losing his senses. In the paroxysms of eagerness he dreamt of aerial ways, — the discovery of following century; he called to his mind Daedalus and the vast wings that had saved him from the prisons of Crete. A hoarse sigh broke from his lips, as he repeated, devoured by the fear of ridicule, "I! I! duped by a Gourville! I! They will say that I am growing old, — they will say I have received a million to allow Fouquet to escape!" And he again dug his spurs into the sides of his horse: he had ridden astonishingly fast. Suddenly, at the extremity of some open pasture-ground, behind the hedges, he saw a white form which showed itself, disappeared, and at last remained distinctly visible against the rising ground. D'Artagnan's heart leaped with joy. He wiped the streaming sweat from his brow, relaxed the tension of his knees, — by which the horse breathed more freely, — and, gathering up his reins, moderated the speed of the vigorous animal, his active accomplice on this man-hunt. He had then time to study the direction of the road, and his position with regard to Fouquet. The superintendent had completely winded his horse by crossing the soft ground. He felt the necessity of gaining a firmer footing, and turned towards the road by the shortest secant line. D'Artagnan, on his part, had nothing to do but to ride straight on, concealed by the sloping shore; so that he would cut his quarry off the road when he came up with him. Then the real race would begin, — then the struggle would be in earnest.

D'Artagnan gave his horse good breathing-time. He observed that the superintendent had relaxed into a trot, which was to say, he, too, was favoring his horse. But both of them were too much pressed for time to allow them to continue long at that pace. The white horse sprang off like an arrow the moment his feet touched firm ground. D’Artagnan dropped his head, and his black horse broke into a gallop. Both followed the same route; the quadruple echoes of this new race-course were confounded. Fouquet had not yet perceived D’Artagnan. But on issuing from the slope, a single echo struck the air; it was that of the steps of D’Artagnan’s horse, which rolled along like thunder. Fouquet turned round, and saw behind him, within a hundred paces, his enemy bent over the neck of his horse. There could be no doubt — the shining baldrick, the red cassock — it was a musketeer. Fouquet slackened his hand likewise, and the white horse placed twenty feet more between his adversary and himself.

“Oh, but,” thought D’Artagnan, becoming very anxious, “that is not a common horse M. Fouquet is upon — let us see!” And he attentively examined with his infallible eye the shape and capabilities of the courser. Round full quarters — a thin long tail — large hocks — thin legs, as dry as bars of steel — hoofs hard as marble. He spurred his own, but the distance between the two remained the same. D’Artagnan listened attentively; not a breath of the horse reached him, and yet he seemed to cut the air. The black horse, on the contrary, began to puff like any blacksmith’s bellows.

“I must overtake him, if I kill my horse,” thought the musketeer; and he began to saw the mouth of the poor animal, whilst he buried the rowels of his merciless spurs into his sides. The maddened horse gained twenty toises, and came up within pistol-shot of Fouquet.

“Courage!” said the musketeer to himself, “courage! the white horse will perhaps grow weaker, and if the horse does not fall, the master must pull up at last.” But horse and rider remained upright together, gaining ground by difficult degrees. D’Artagnan uttered a wild cry, which made Fouquet turn round, and added speed to the white horse.

“A famous horse! a mad rider!” growled the captain. “Hola! *mordioux!* Monsieur Fouquet! stop! in the king’s name!” Fouquet made no reply.

“Do you hear me?” shouted D’Artagnan, whose horse had just stumbled.

“*Pardieu!*” replied Fouquet, laconically; and rode on faster.

D’Artagnan was nearly mad; the blood rushed boiling to his temples and his eyes. “In the king’s name!” cried he again, “stop, or I will bring you down with a pistol-shot!”

“Do!” replied Fouquet, without relaxing his speed.

D’Artagnan seized a pistol and cocked it, hoping that the double click of the spring would stop his enemy. “You have pistols likewise,” said he, “turn and defend yourself.”

Fouquet did turn round at the noise, and looking D’Artagnan full in the face, opened, with his right hand, the part of his dress which concealed his body, but he did not even touch his holsters. There were not more than twenty paces between the two.

“*Mordioux!*” said D’Artagnan, “I will not assassinate you; if you will not fire upon me, surrender! what is a prison?”

“I would rather die!” replied Fouquet; “I shall suffer less.”

D’Artagnan, drunk with despair, hurled his pistol to the ground. “I will take you alive!” said he; and by a prodigy of skill which this incomparable horseman alone was capable, he threw his horse forward to within ten paces of the white horse; already his hand was stretched out to seize his prey.

“Kill me! kill me!” cried Fouquet, “‘twould be more humane!”

“No! alive — alive!” murmured the captain.

At this moment his horse made a false step for the second time, and Fouquet’s again took the lead. It was an unheard-of spectacle, this race between two horses which now only kept alive by the will of their riders. It might be said that D’Artagnan rode, carrying his horse along between his knees. To the furious gallop had succeeded the fast trot, and that had sunk to what might be scarcely called a trot at all. But the chase appeared equally warm in the two fatigued *athletoe*. D’Artagnan, quite in despair, seized his second pistol, and cocked it.

“At your horse! not at you!” cried he to Fouquet. And he fired. The animal was hit in the quarters — he made a furious bound, and plunged forward. At that moment D’Artagnan’s horse fell dead.

“I am dishonored!” thought the musketeer; “I am a miserable wretch! for pity’s sake, M. Fouquet, throw me one of your pistols, that I may blow out my brains!” But Fouquet rode away.

“For mercy’s sake! for mercy’s sake!” cried D’Artagnan; “that which you will not do at this moment, I myself will do within an hour, but here, upon this road, I should die bravely; I should die esteemed; do me that service, M. Fouquet!”

M. Fouquet made no reply, but continued to trot on. D’Artagnan began to run after his enemy. Successively he threw away his hat, his coat, which embarrassed him, and then the sheath of his sword, which got between his legs as he was running. The sword in his hand itself became too heavy, and he threw it after the sheath. The white horse began to rattle in its throat; D'Artagnan gained upon him. From a trot the exhausted animal sunk to a staggering walk — the foam from his mouth was mixed with blood. D'Artagnan made a desperate effort, sprang towards Fouquet, and seized him by the leg, saying in a broken, breathless voice, "I arrest you in the king's name! blow my brains out, if you like; we have both done our duty."

Fouquet hurled far from him, into the river, the two pistols D'Artagnan might have seized, and dismounting from his horse — "I am your prisoner, monsieur," said he; "will you take my arm, for I see you are ready to faint?"

"Thanks!" murmured D'Artagnan, who, in fact, felt the earth sliding from under his feet, and the light of day turning to blackness around him; then he rolled upon the sand, without breath or strength. Fouquet hastened to the brink of the river, dipped some water in his hat, with which he bathed the temples of the musketeer, and introduced a few drop between his lips. D'Artagnan raised himself with difficulty, and looked about him with a wandering eye. He beheld Fouquet on his knees, with his wet hat in his hand, smiling upon him with ineffable sweetness. "You are not off, then?" cried he. "Oh, monsieur! the true king of royalty, in heart, in soul, is not Louis of the Louvre, or Philippe of Sainte-Marguerite; it is you, proscribed, condemned!"

"I, who this day am ruined by a single error, M. d'Artagnan."

"What, in the name of Heaven, is that?"

"I should have had you for a friend! But how shall we return to Nantes? We are a great way from it."

"That is true," said D'Artagnan, gloomily.

"The white horse will recover, perhaps; he is a good horse! Mount, Monsieur d'Artagnan; I will walk till you have rested a little."

"Poor beast! and wounded, too?" said the musketeer.

"He will go, I tell you; I know him; but we can do better still, let us both get up, and ride slowly."

"We can try," said the captain. But they had scarcely charged the animal with this double load, when he began to stagger, and then with a great effort walked a few minutes, then staggered again, and sank down dead by the side of the black horse, which he had just managed to come up to.

"We will go on foot — destiny wills it so — the walk will be pleasant," said Fouquet, passing his arm through that of D'Artagnan.

“*Mordioux!*” cried the latter, with a fixed eye, a contracted brow, and a swelling heart — ”What a disgraceful day!”

They walked slowly the four leagues which separated them from the little wood behind which the carriage and escort were in waiting. When Fouquet perceived that sinister machine, he said to D’Artagnan, who cast down his eyes, ashamed of Louis XIV., “There is an idea that did not emanate from a brave man, Captain d’Artagnan; it is not yours. What are these gratings for?” said he.

“To prevent your throwing letters out.”

“Ingenious!”

“But you can speak, if you cannot write,” said D’Artagnan.

“Can I speak to you?”

“Why, certainly, if you wish to do so.”

Fouquet reflected for a moment, then looking the captain full in the face, “One single word,” said he; “will you remember it?”

“I will not forget it.”

“Will you speak it to whom I wish?”

“I will.”

“Saint-Mande,” articulated Fouquet, in a low voice.

“Well! and for whom?”

“For Madame de Belliere or Pelisson.”

“It shall be done.”

The carriage rolled through Nantes, and took the route to Angers.

CHAPTER XLI.

In Which the Squirrel Falls, — the Adder Flies.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon. The king, full of impatience, went to his cabinet on the terrace, and kept opening the door of the corridor, to see what his secretaries were doing. M. Colbert, seated in the same place M. de Saint-Aignan had so long occupied in the morning, was chatting in a low voice with M. de Brienne. The king opened the door suddenly, and addressed them. "What is it you are saying?"

"We were speaking of the first sitting of the States," said M. de Brienne, rising.

"Very well," replied the king, and returned to his room.

Five minutes after, the summons of the bell recalled Rose, whose hour it was.

"Have you finished your copies?" asked the king.

"Not yet, sire."

"See if M. d'Artagnan has returned."

"Not yet, sire."

"It is very strange," murmured the king. "Call M. Colbert."

Colbert entered; he had been expecting this all the morning.

"Monsieur Colbert," said the king, very sharply; "you must ascertain what has become of M. d'Artagnan."

Colbert in his calm voice replied, "Where does your majesty desire him to be sought for?"

"Eh! monsieur! do you not know on what I have sent him?" replied Louis, acrimoniously.

"Your majesty did not inform me."

"Monsieur, there are things that must be guessed; and you, above all, are apt to guess them."

"I might have been able to imagine, sire; but I do not presume to be positive."

Colbert had not finished these words when a rougher voice than that of the king interrupted the interesting conversation thus begun between the monarch and his clerk.

“D’Artagnan!” cried the king, with evident joy.

D’Artagnan, pale and in evidently bad humor, cried to the king, as he entered, “Sire, is it your majesty who has given orders to my musketeers?”

“What orders?” said the king.

“About M. Fouquet’s house?”

“None!” replied Louis.

“Ha!” said D’Artagnan, biting his mustache; “I was not mistaken, then; it was monsieur here;” and he pointed to Colbert.

“What orders? Let me know,” said the king.

“Orders to turn the house topsy-turvy, to beat M. Fouquet’s servants, to force the drawers, to give over a peaceful house to pillage! *Mordioux!* these are savage orders!”

“Monsieur!” said Colbert, turning pale.

“Monsieur,” interrupted D’Artagnan, “the king alone, understand, — the king alone has a right to command my musketeers; but, as to you, I forbid you to do it, and I tell you so before his majesty; gentlemen who carry swords do not sling pens behind their ears.”

“D’Artagnan! D’Artagnan!” murmured the king.

“It is humiliating,” continued the musketeer; “my soldiers are disgraced. I do not command *reitres*, thank you, nor clerks of the intendant, *mordioux!*”

“Well! but what is all this about?” said the king with authority.

“About this, sire; monsieur — monsieur, who could not guess your majesty’s orders, and consequently could not know I was gone to arrest M. Fouquet; monsieur, who has caused the iron cage to be constructed for his patron of yesterday — has sent M. de Roncherolles to the lodgings of M. Fouquet, and, under the pretense of securing the surintendant’s papers, they have taken away the furniture. My musketeers have been posted round the house all the morning; such were my orders. Why did any one presume to order them to enter? Why, by forcing them to assist in this pillage, have they been made accomplices in it? *Mordioux!* we serve the king, we do; but we do not serve M. Colbert!”

“Monsieur d’Artagnan,” said the king, sternly, “take care; it is not in my presence that such explanations, and made in such a tone, should take place.”

“I have acted for the good of the king,” said Colbert, in a faltering voice. “It is hard to be so treated by one of your majesty’s officers, and that without redress, on account of the respect I owe the king.”

“The respect you owe the king,” cried D’Artagnan, his eyes flashing fire, “consists, in the first place, in making his authority respected, and his person beloved. Every agent of a power without control represents that power, and when people curse the hand which strikes them, it is the royal hand that God reproaches, do you hear? Must a soldier, hardened by forty years of wounds and blood, give you this lesson, monsieur? Must mercy be on my side, and ferocity on yours? You have caused the innocent to be arrested, bound, and imprisoned!”

“Accomplices, perhaps, of M. Fouquet,” said Colbert.

“Who told you M. Fouquet had accomplices, or even that he was guilty? The king alone knows that; his justice is not blind! When he says, ‘Arrest and imprison’ such and such a man, he is obeyed. Do not talk to me, then, any more of the respect you owe the king, and be careful of your words, that they may not chance to convey the slightest menace; for the king will not allow those to be threatened who do him service by others who do him disservice; and if in case I should have, which God forbid! a master so ungrateful, I would make myself respected.”

Thus saying, D’Artagnan took his station haughtily in the king’s cabinet, his eyes flashing, his hand on his sword, his lips trembling, affecting much more anger than he really felt. Colbert, humiliated and devoured with rage, bowed to the king as if to ask his permission to leave the room. The king, thwarted alike in pride and in curiosity, knew not which part to take. D’Artagnan saw him hesitate. To remain longer would have been a mistake: it was necessary to score a triumph over Colbert, and the only method was to touch the king so near the quick, that his majesty would have no other means of extrication but choosing between the two antagonists. D’Artagnan bowed as Colbert had done; but the king, who, in preference to everything else, was anxious to have all the exact details of the arrest of the surintendant of the finances from him who had made him tremble for a moment, — the king, perceiving that the ill-humor of D’Artagnan would put off for half an hour at least the details he was burning to be acquainted with, — Louis, we say, forgot Colbert, who had nothing new to tell him, and recalled his captain of the musketeers.

“In the first place,” said he, “let me see the result of your commission, monsieur; you may rest yourself hereafter.”

D’Artagnan, who was just passing through the doorway, stopped at the voice of the king, retraced his steps, and Colbert was forced to leave the closet. His countenance assumed almost a purple hue, his black and threatening eyes shone with a dark fire beneath their thick brows; he stepped out, bowed before the king, half drew himself up in passing D’Artagnan, and went away with death in his heart. D’Artagnan, on being left alone with the king, softened immediately, and composing his countenance: “Sire,” said he, “you are a young king. It is by the dawn that people judge whether the day will be fine or dull. How, sire, will the people, whom the hand of God has placed under your law, argue of your reign, if between them and you, you allow angry and violent ministers to interpose their mischief? But let us speak of myself, sire, let us leave a discussion that may appear idle, and perhaps inconvenient to you. Let us speak of myself. I have arrested M. Fouquet.”

“You took plenty of time about it,” said the king, sharply.

D’Artagnan looked at the king. “I perceive that I have expressed myself badly. I announced to your majesty that I had arrested Monsieur Fouquet.”

“You did; and what then?”

“Well! I ought to have told your majesty that M. Fouquet had arrested me; that would have been more just. I re-establish the truth, then; I have been arrested by M. Fouquet.”

It was now the turn of Louis XIV. to be surprised. His majesty was astonished in his turn.

D’Artagnan, with his quick glance, appreciated what was passing in the heart of his master. He did not allow him time to put any questions. He related, with that poetry, that picturesqueness, which perhaps he alone possessed at that period, the escape of Fouquet, the pursuit, the furious race, and, lastly, the inimitable generosity of the surintendant, who might have fled ten times over, who might have killed the adversary in the pursuit, but who had preferred imprisonment, perhaps worse, to the humiliation of one who wished to rob him of his liberty. In proportion as the tale advanced, the king became agitated, devouring the narrator’s words, and drumming with his finger-nails upon the table.

“It results from all this, sire, in my eyes, at least, that the man who conducts himself thus is a gallant man, and cannot be an enemy to the king. That is my opinion, and I repeat it to your majesty. I know what the king will say to me, and I bow to it, — reasons of state. So be it! To my ears that sounds highly respectable. But I am a soldier, and I have received my orders, my orders are executed — very unwillingly on my part, it is true, but they are executed. I say no more."

"Where is M. Fouquet at this moment?" asked Louis, after a short silence.

"M. Fouquet, sire," replied D'Artagnan, "is in the iron cage that M. Colbert had prepared for him, and is galloping as fast as four strong horses can drag him, towards Angers."

"Why did you leave him on the road?"

"Because your majesty did not tell me to go to Angers. The proof, the best proof of what I advance, is that the king desired me to be sought for but this minute. And then I had another reason."

"What is that?"

"Whilst I was with him, poor M. Fouquet would never attempt to escape."

"Well!" cried the king, astonished.

"Your majesty ought to understand, and does understand, certainly, that my warmest wish is to know that M. Fouquet is at liberty. I have given him one of my brigadiers, the most stupid I could find among my musketeers, in order that the prisoner might have a chance of escaping."

"Are you mad, Monsieur d'Artagnan?" cried the king, crossing his arms on his breast. "Do people utter such enormities, even when they have the misfortune to think them?"

"Ah! sire, you cannot expect that I should be an enemy to M. Fouquet, after what he has just done for you and me. No, no; if you desire that he should remain under your lock and bolt, never give him in charge to me; however closely wired might be the cage, the bird would, in the end, take wing."

"I am surprised," said the king, in his sternest tone, "you did not follow the fortunes of the man M. Fouquet wished to place upon my throne. You had in him all you want — affection, gratitude. In my service, monsieur, you will only find a master."

"If M. Fouquet had not gone to seek you in the Bastile, sire," replied D'Artagnan, with a deeply impressive manner, "one single man would have gone there, and I should have been that man — you know that right well, sire."

The king was brought to a pause. Before that speech of his captain of the musketeers, so frankly spoken and so true, the king had nothing to offer. On hearing D'Artagnan, Louis remembered the D'Artagnan of former times; him who, at the Palais Royal, held himself concealed behind the curtains of his bed, when the people of Paris, led by Cardinal de Retz, came to assure themselves of the presence of the king; the D'Artagnan whom he saluted with his hand at the door of his carriage, when repairing to Notre Dame on his return to Paris; the soldier who had quitted his service at Blois; the lieutenant he had recalled to be beside his person when the death of Mazarin restored his power; the man he had always found loyal, courageous, devoted. Louis advanced towards the door and called Colbert. Colbert had not left the corridor where the secretaries were at work. He reappeared.

"Colbert, did you make a perquisition on the house of M. Fouquet?"

"Yes, sire."

"What has it produced?"

"M. de Roncherolles, who was sent with your majesty's musketeers, has remitted me some papers," replied Colbert.

"I will look at them. Give me your hand."

"My hand, sire!"

"Yes, that I may place it in that of M. d'Artagnan. In fact, M. d'Artagnan," added he, with a smile, turning towards the soldier, who, at sight of the clerk, had resumed his haughty attitude, "you do not know this man; make his acquaintance." And he pointed to Colbert. "He has been made but a moderately valuable servant in subaltern positions, but he will be a great man if I raise him to the foremost rank."

"Sire!" stammered Colbert, confused with pleasure and fear.

"I always understood why," murmured D'Artagnan in the king's ear; "he was jealous."

"Precisely, and his jealousy confined his wings."

"He will henceforward be a winged-serpent," grumbled the musketeer, with a remnant of hatred against his recent adversary.

But Colbert, approaching him, offered to his eyes a physiognomy so different from that which he had been accustomed to see him wear; he appeared so good, so mild, so easy; his eyes took the expression of an intelligence so noble, that D'Artagnan, a connoisseur in physiognomies, was moved, and almost changed in his convictions. Colbert pressed his hand.

“That which the king has just told you, monsieur, proves how well his majesty is acquainted with men. The inveterate opposition I have displayed, up to this day, against abuses and not against men, proves that I had it in view to prepare for my king a glorious reign, for my country a great blessing. I have many ideas, M. d’Artagnan. You will see them expand in the sun of public peace; and if I have not the good fortune to conquer the friendship of honest men, I am at least certain, monsieur, that I shall obtain their esteem. For their admiration, monsieur, I would give my life.”

This change, this sudden elevation, this mute approbation of the king, gave the musketeer matter for profound reflection. He bowed civilly to Colbert, who did not take his eyes off him. The king, when he saw they were reconciled, dismissed them. They left the room together. As soon as they were out of the cabinet, the new minister, stopping the captain, said:

“Is it possible, M. d’Artagnan, that with such an eye as yours, you did not, at the first glance, at the first impression, discover what sort of man I am?”

“Monsieur Colbert,” replied the musketeer, “a ray of the sun in our eyes prevents us from seeing the most vivid flame. The man in power radiates, you know; and since you are there, why should you continue to persecute him who had just fallen into disgrace, and fallen from such a height?”

“I, monsieur!” said Colbert; “oh, monsieur! I would never persecute him. I wished to administer the finances and to administer them alone, because I am ambitious, and, above all, because I have the most entire confidence in my own merit; because I know that all the gold of this country will ebb and flow beneath my eyes, and I love to look at the king’s gold; because, if I live thirty years, in thirty years not a *denir* of it will remain in my hands; because, with that gold, I will build granaries, castles, cities, and harbors; because I will create a marine, I will equip navies that shall waft the name of France to the most distant people; because I will create libraries and academies; because I will make France the first country in the world, and the wealthiest. These are the motives for my animosity against M. Fouquet, who prevented my acting. And then, when I shall be great and strong, when France is great and strong, in my turn, then, will I cry, ‘Mercy’!”

“Mercy, did you say? then ask his liberty of the king. The king is only crushing him on *your* account.”

Colbert again raised his head. “Monsieur,” said he, “you know that is not so, and that the king has his own personal animosity against M. Fouquet; it is not for me to teach you that.”

“But the king will grow tired; he will forget.”

“The king never forgets, M. d’Artagnan. Hark! the king calls. He is going to issue an order. I have not influenced him, have I? Listen.”

The king, in fact, was calling his secretaries. “Monsieur d’Artagnan,” said he.

“I am here, sire.”

“Give twenty of your musketeers to M. de Saint-Aignan, to form a guard for M. Fouquet.”

D’Artagnan and Colbert exchanged looks. “And from Angers,” continued the king, “they will conduct the prisoner to the Bastile, in Paris.”

“You were right,” said the captain to the minister.

“Saint-Aignan,” continued the king, “you will have any one shot who shall attempt to speak privately with M. Fouquet, during the journey.”

“But myself, sire,” said the duke.

“You, monsieur, you will only speak to him in the presence of the musketeers.” The duke bowed and departed to execute his commission.

D’Artagnan was about to retire likewise; but the king stopped him.

“Monsieur,” said he, “you will go immediately, and take possession of the isle and fief of Belle-Ile-en-Mer.”

“Yes, sire. Alone?”

“You will take a sufficient number of troops to prevent delay, in case the place should be contumacious.”

A murmur of courtly incredulity rose from the group of courtiers. “That shall be done,” said D’Artagnan.

“I saw the place in my infancy,” resumed the king, “and I do not wish to see it again. You have heard me? Go, monsieur, and do not return without the keys.”

Colbert went up to D’Artagnan. “A commission which, if you carry it out well,” said he, “will be worth a marechal’s baton to you.”

“Why do you employ the words, ‘if you carry it out well’?”

“Because it is difficult.”

“Ah! in what respect?”

“You have friends in Belle-Isle, Monsieur d’Artagnan; and it is not an easy thing for men like you to march over the bodies of their friends to obtain success.”

D’Artagnan hung his head in deepest thought, whilst Colbert returned to the king. A quarter of an hour after, the captain received the written order from the king, to blow up the fortress of Belle-Isle, in case of resistance, with power of life and death over all the inhabitants or refugees, and an injunction not to allow one to escape.

“Colbert was right,” thought D’Artagnan; “for me the baton of a marechal of France will cost the lives of my two friends. Only they seem to forget that my friends are not more stupid than the birds, and that they will not wait for the hand of the fowler to extend over their wings. I will show them that hand so plainly, that they will have quite time enough to see it. Poor Porthos! Poor Aramis! No; my fortune should shall not cost your wings a feather.”

Having thus determined, D’Artagnan assembled the royal army, embarked it at Paimboeuf, and set sail, without the loss of an unnecessary minute.

CHAPTER XLII.

Belle-Ile-en-Mer.

At the extremity of the mole, against which the furious sea beats at the evening tide, two men, holding each other by the arm, were conversing in an animated and expansive tone, without the possibility of any other human being hearing their words, borne away, as they were, one by one, by the gusts of wind, with the white foam swept from the crests of the waves. The sun had just gone down in the vast sheet of the crimsoned ocean, like a gigantic crucible. From time to time, one of these men, turning towards the east, cast an anxious, inquiring look over the sea. The other, interrogating the features of his companion, seemed to seek for information in his looks. Then, both silent, busied with dismal thoughts, they resumed their walk. Every one has already perceived that these two men were our proscribed heroes, Porthos and Aramis, who had taken refuge in Belle-Isle, since the ruin of their hopes, since the discomfiture of the colossal schemes of M. d'Herblay.

"If is of no use your saying anything to the contrary, my dear Aramis," repeated Porthos, inhaling vigorously the salt breeze with which he charged his massive chest, "It is of no use, Aramis. The disappearance of all the fishing-boats that went out two days ago is not an ordinary circumstance. There has been no storm at sea; the weather has been constantly calm, not even the lightest gale; and even if we had had a tempest, all our boats would not have foundered. I repeat, it is strange. This complete disappearance astonishes me, I tell you."

"True," murmured Aramis. "You are right, friend Porthos; it is true, there is something strange in it."

"And further," added Porthos, whose ideas the assent of the bishop of Vannes seemed to enlarge; "and, further, do you not observe that if the boats have perished, not a single plank has washed ashore?"

"I have remarked it as well as yourself."

"And do you not think it strange that the two only boats we had left in the whole island, and which I sent in search of the others — "

Aramis here interrupted his companion by a cry, and by so sudden a movement, that Porthos stopped as if he were stupefied. “What do you say, Porthos? What! — You have sent the two boats — ”

“In search of the others! Yes, to be sure I have,” replied Porthos, calmly.

“Unhappy man! What have you done? Then we are indeed lost,” cried the bishop.

“Lost! — what did you say?” exclaimed the terrified Porthos. “How lost, Aramis? How are we lost?”

Aramis bit his lips. “Nothing! nothing! Your pardon, I meant to say — ”

“What?”

“That if we were inclined — if we took a fancy to make an excursion by sea, we could not.”

“Very good! and why should that vex you? A precious pleasure, *ma foi!* For my part, I don’t regret it at all. What I regret is certainly not the more or less amusement we can find at Belle-Isle: what I regret, Aramis, is Pierrefonds; Bracieux; le Vallon; beautiful France! Here, we are not in France, my dear friend; we are — I know not where. Oh! I tell you, in full sincerity of soul, and your affection will excuse my frankness, but I declare to you I am not happy at Belle-Isle. No; in good truth, I am not happy!”

Aramis breathed a long, but stifled sigh. “Dear friend,” replied he: “that is why it is so sad a thing you have sent the two boats we had left in search of the boats which disappeared two days ago. If you had not sent them away, we would have departed.”

“‘Departed!’ And the orders, Aramis?”

“What orders?”

“*Parbleu!* Why, the orders you have been constantly, in and out of season, repeating to me — that we were to hold Belle-Isle against the usurper. You know very well!”

“That is true!” murmured Aramis again.

“You see, then, plainly, my friend, that we could not depart; and that the sending away of the boats in search of the others cannot prove prejudicial to us in the very least.”

Aramis was silent; and his vague glances, luminous as that of an albatross, hovered for a long time over the sea, interrogating space, seeking to pierce the very horizon.

“With all that, Aramis,” continued Porthos, who adhered to his idea, and that the more closely from the bishop having apparently endorsed it, —

”with all that, you give me no explanation about what can have happened to these unfortunate boats. I am assailed by cries and complaints whichever way I go. The children cry to see the desolation of the women, as if I could restore the absent husbands and fathers. What do you suppose, my friend, and how ought I to answer them?”

“Think all you like, my good Porthos, and say nothing.”

This reply did not satisfy Porthos at all. He turned away grumbling something in ill-humor. Aramis stopped the valiant musketeer. “Do you remember,” said he, in a melancholy tone, kneading the two hands of the giant between his own with affectionate cordiality, “do you remember, my friend, that in the glorious days of youth — do you remember, Porthos, when we were all strong and valiant — we, and the other two — if we had then had an inclination to return to France, do you think this sheet of salt water would have stopped us?”

“Oh!” said Porthos; “but six leagues.”

“If you had seen me get astride of a plank, would you have remained on land, Porthos?”

“No, *pardieu!* No, Aramis. But, nowadays, what sort of a plank should we want, my friend! I, in particular.” And the Seigneur de Bracieux cast a profound glance over his colossal rotundity with a loud laugh. “And do you mean seriously to say you are not tired of Belle-Isle a little, and that you would not prefer the comforts of your dwelling — of your episcopal palace, at Vannes? Come, confess.”

“No,” replied Aramis, without daring to look at Porthos.

“Let us stay where we are, then,” said his friend, with a sigh, which, in spite of the efforts he made to restrain it, escaped his echoing breast. “Let us remain! — let us remain! And yet,” added he, “and yet, if we seriously wished, but that decidedly — if we had a fixed idea, one firmly taken, to return to France, and there were not boats — ”

“Have you remarked another thing, my friend — that is, since the disappearance of our barks, during the last two days’ absence of fishermen, not a single small boat has landed on the shores of the isle?”

“Yes, certainly! you are right. I, too, have remarked it, and the observation was the more naturally made, for, before the last two fatal days, barks and shallops were as plentiful as shrimps.”

“I must inquire,” said Aramis, suddenly, and with great agitation. “And then, if we had a raft constructed — ”

"But there are some canoes, my friend; shall I board one?"

"A canoe! — a canoe! Can you think of such a thing, Porthos? A canoe to be upset in. No, no," said the bishop of Vannes; "it is not our trade to ride upon the waves. We will wait, we will wait."

And Aramis continued walking about with increased agitation. Porthos, who grew tired of following all the feverish movements of his friend — Porthos, who in his faith and calmness understood nothing of the sort of exasperation which was betrayed by his companion's continual convulsive starts — Porthos stopped him. "Let us sit down upon this rock," said he. "Place yourself there, close to me, Aramis, and I conjure you, for the last time, to explain to me in a manner I can comprehend — explain to me what we are doing here."

"Porthos," said Aramis, much embarrassed.

"I know that the false king wished to dethrone the true king. That is a fact, that I understand. Well — "

"Yes?" said Aramis.

"I know that the false king formed the project of selling Belle-Isle to the English. I understand that, too."

"Yes?"

"I know that we engineers and captains came and threw ourselves into Belle-Isle to take direction of the works, and the command of ten companies levied and paid by M. Fouquet, or rather the ten companies of his son-in-law. All that is plain."

Aramis rose in a state of great impatience. He might be said to be a lion importuned by a gnat. Porthos held him by the arm. "But what I cannot understand, what, in spite of all the efforts of my mind, and all my reflections, I cannot comprehend, and never shall comprehend, is, that instead of sending us troops, instead of sending us reinforcements of men, munitions, provisions, they leave us without boats, they leave Belle-Isle without arrivals, without help; it is that instead of establishing with us a correspondence, whether by signals, or written or verbal communications, all relations with the shore are intercepted. Tell me, Aramis, answer me, or rather, before answering me, will you allow me to tell you what I have thought? Will you hear what my idea is, the plan I have conceived?"

The bishop raised his head. "Well! Aramis," continued Porthos, "I have dreamed, I have imagined that an event has taken place in France. I dreamt of M. Fouquet all the night, of lifeless fish, of broken eggs, of chambers badly furnished, meanly kept. Villainous dreams, my dear D'Herblay; very unlucky, such dreams!"

"Porthos, what is that yonder?" interrupted Aramis, rising suddenly, and pointing out to his friend a black spot upon the empurpled line of the water.

"A bark!" said Porthos; "yes, it is a bark! Ah! we shall have some news at last."

"There are two!" cried the bishop, on discovering another mast; "two! three! four!"

"Five!" said Porthos, in his turn. "Six! seven! Ah! *mon Dieu! mon Dieu!* it is a fleet!"

"Our boats returning, probably," said Aramis, very uneasily, in spite of the assurance he affected.

"They are very large for fishing-boats," observed Porthos, "and do you not remark, my friend, that they come from the Loire?"

"They come from the Loire — yes — "

"And look! everybody here sees them as well as ourselves; look, women and children are beginning to crowd the jetty."

An old fisherman passed. "Are those our barks, yonder?" asked Aramis.

The old man looked steadily into the eye of the horizon.

"No, monseigneur," replied he, "they are lighter boars, boats in the king's service."

"Boats in the royal service?" replied Aramis, starting. "How do you know that?" said he.

"By the flag."

"But," said Porthos, "the boat is scarcely visible; how the devil, my friend, can you distinguish the flag?"

"I see there is one," replied the old man; "our boats, trade lighters, do not carry any. That sort of craft is generally used for transport of troops."

"Ah!" groaned Aramis.

"*Vivat!*" cried Porthos, "they are sending us reinforcements, don't you think they are, Aramis?"

"Probably."

"Unless it is the English coming."

"By the Loire? That would have an evil look, Porthos; for they must have come through Paris!"

"You are right; they are reinforcements, decidedly, or provisions."

Aramis leaned his head upon his hands, and made no reply. Then, all at once, — ”Porthos,” said he, “have the alarm sounded.”

“The alarm! do you imagine such a thing?”

“Yes, and let the cannoniers mount their batteries, the artillerymen be at their pieces, and be particularly watchful of the coast batteries.”

Porthos opened his eyes to their widest extent. He looked attentively at his friend, to convince himself he was in his proper senses.

“*I* will do it, my dear Porthos,” continued Aramis, in his blandest tone; “I will go and have these orders executed myself, if you do not go, my friend.”

“Well! I will — instantly!” said Porthos, who went to execute the orders, casting all the while looks behind him, to see if the bishop of Vannes were not deceived; and if, on recovering more rational ideas, he would not recall him. The alarm was sounded, trumpets brayed, drums rolled; the great bronze bell swung in horror from its lofty belfry. The dikes and moles were quickly filled with the curious and soldiers; matches sparkled in the hands of the artillerymen, placed behind the large cannon bedded in their stone carriages. When every man was at his post, when all the preparations for defense were made: “Permit me, Aramis, to try to comprehend,” whispered Porthos, timidly, in Aramis’s ear.

“My dear friend, you will comprehend but too soon,” murmured M. d’Herblay, in reply to this question of his lieutenant.

“The fleet which is coming yonder, with sails unfurled, straight towards the port of Belle-Isle, is a royal fleet, is it not?”

“But as there are two kings in France, Porthos, to which of these two kings does this fleet belong?”

“Oh! you open my eyes,” replied the giant, stunned by the insinuation.

And Porthos, whose eyes this reply of his friend’s had at last opened, or rather thickened the bandage which covered his sight, went with his best speed to the batteries to overlook his people, and exhort every one to do his duty. In the meantime, Aramis, with his eye fixed on the horizon, saw the ships continually drawing nearer. The people and the soldiers, perched on the summits of the rocks, could distinguish the masts, then the lower sails, and at last the hulls of the lighters, bearing at the masthead the royal flag of France. It was night when one of these vessels, which had created such a sensation among the inhabitants of Belle-Isle, dropped anchor within cannon shot of the place. It was soon seen, notwithstanding the darkness, that some sort of agitation reigned on board the vessel, from the side of which a skiff was lowered, of which the three rowers, bending to their oars, took the direction of the port, and in a few instants struck land at the foot of the fort. The commander jumped ashore. He had a letter in his hand, which he waved in the air, and seemed to wish to communicate with somebody. This man was soon recognized by several soldiers as one of the pilots of the island. He was the captain of one of the two barks retained by Aramis, but which Porthos, in his anxiety with regard to the fate of the fishermen who had disappeared, had sent in search of the missing boats. He asked to be conducted to M. d'Herblay. Two soldiers, at a signal from a sergeant, marched him between them, and escorted him. Aramis was upon the quay. The envoy presented himself before the bishop of Vannes. The darkness was almost absolute, notwithstanding the flambeaux borne at a small distance by the soldiers who were following Aramis in his rounds.

"Well, Jonathan, from whom do you come?"

"Monseigneur, from those who captured me."

"Who captured you?"

"You know, monseigneur, we set out in search of our comrades?"

"Yes; and afterwards?"

"Well! monseigneur, within a short league we were captured by a *chasse maree* belonging to the king."

"Ah!" said Aramis.

"Of which king?" cried Porthos.

Jonathan started.

"Speak!" continued the bishop.

"We were captured, monseigneur, and joined to those who had been taken yesterday morning."

"What was the cause of the mania for capturing you all?" said Porthos.

"Monsieur, to prevent us from telling you," replied Jonathan.

Porthos was again at a loss to comprehend. "And they have released you to-day?" asked he.

"That I might tell you they have captured us, monsieur."

"Trouble upon trouble," thought honest Porthos.

During this time Aramis was reflecting.

"Humph!" said he, "then I suppose it is a royal fleet blockading the coasts?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Who commands it?"

“The captain of the king’s musketeers.”

“D’Artagnan?”

“D’Artagnan!” exclaimed Porthos.

“I believe that is the name.”

“And did he give you this letter?”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“Bring the torches nearer.”

“It is his writing,” said Porthos.

Aramis eagerly read the following lines:

“Order of the king to take Belle-Isle; or to put the garrison to the sword, if they resist; order to make prisoners of all the men of the garrison; signed, D’ARTAGNAN, who, the day before yesterday, arrested M. Fouquet, for the purpose of his being sent to the Bastile.”

Aramis turned pale, and crushed the paper in his hands.

“What is it?” asked Porthos.

“Nothing, my friend, nothing.”

“Tell me, Jonathan?”

“Monseigneur?”

“Did you speak to M. d’Artagnan?”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“What did he say to you?”

“That for ampler information, he would speak with monseigneur.”

“Where?”

“On board his own vessel.”

“On board his vessel!” and Porthos repeated, “On board his vessel!”

“M. le mousquetaire,” continued Jonathan, “told me to take you both on board my canoe, and bring you to him.”

“Let us go at once,” exclaimed Porthos. “Dear D’Artagnan!”

But Aramis stopped him. “Are you mad?” cried he. “Who knows that it is not a snare?”

“Of the other king’s?” said Porthos, mysteriously.

“A snare, in fact! That’s what it is, my friend.”

“Very possibly; what is to be done, then? If D’Artagnan sends for us — ”

“Who assures you that D’Artagnan sends for us?”

“Well, but — but his writing — ”

“Writing is easily counterfeited. This looks counterfeited — unsteady — ”

"You are always right; but, in the meantime, we know nothing."

Aramis was silent.

"It is true," said the good Porthos, "we do not want to know anything."

"What shall I do?" asked Jonathan.

"You will return on board this captain's vessel."

"Yes, monseigneur."

"And will tell him that we beg he will himself come into the island."

"Ah! I comprehend!" said Porthos.

"Yes, monseigneur," replied Jonathan; "but if the captain should refuse to come to Belle-Isle?"

"If he refuses, as we have cannon, we will make use of them."

"What! against D'Artagnan?"

"If it is D'Artagnan, Porthos, he will come. Go, Jonathan, go!"

"*Ma foi!* I no longer comprehend anything," murmured Porthos.

"I will make you comprehend it all, my dear friend; the time for it has come; sit down upon this gun-carriage, open your ears, and listen well to me."

"Oh! *pardieu!* I will listen, no fear of that."

"May I depart, monseigneur?" cried Jonathan.

"Yes, begone, and bring back an answer. Allow the canoe to pass, you men there!" And the canoe pushed off to regain the fleet.

Aramis took Porthos by the hand, and commenced his explanations.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Explanations by Aramis.

“What I have to say to you, friend Porthos, will probably surprise you, but it may prove instructive.”

“I like to be surprised,” said Porthos, in a kindly tone; “do not spare me, therefore, I beg. I am hardened against emotions; don’t fear, speak out.”

“It is difficult, Porthos — difficult; for, in truth, I warn you a second time, I have very strange things, very extraordinary things, to tell you.”

“Oh! you speak so well, my friend, that I could listen to you for days together. Speak, then, I beg — and — stop, I have an idea: I will, to make your task more easy, I will, to assist you in telling me such things, question you.”

“I shall be pleased at your doing so.”

“What are we going to fight for, Aramis?”

“If you ask me many such questions as that — if you would render my task the easier by interrupting my revelations thus, Porthos, you will not help me at all. So far, on the contrary, that is the very Gordian knot. But, my friend, with a man like you, good, generous, and devoted, the confession must be bravely made. I have deceived you, my worthy friend.”

“You have deceived me!”

“Good Heavens! yes.”

“Was it for my good, Aramis?”

“I thought so, Porthos; I thought so sincerely, my friend.”

“Then,” said the honest seigneur of Bracieux, “you have rendered me a service, and I thank you for it; for if you had not deceived me, I might have deceived myself. In what, then, have you deceived me, tell me?”

“In that I was serving the usurper against whom Louis XIV., at this moment, is directing his efforts.”

“The usurper!” said Porthos, scratching his head. “That is — well, I do not quite clearly comprehend!”

“He is one of the two kings who are contending fro the crown of France.”

“Very well! Then you were serving him who is not Louis XIV.?”

"You have hit the matter in one word."

"It follows that — "

"It follows that we are rebels, my poor friend."

"The devil! the devil!" cried Porthos, much disappointed.

"Oh! but, dear Porthos, be calm, we shall still find means of getting out of the affair, trust me."

"It is not that which makes me uneasy," replied Porthos; "that which alone touches me is that ugly word *rebels*."

"Ah! but — "

"And so, according to this, the duchy that was promised me — "

"It was the usurper that was to give it to you."

"And that is not the same thing, Aramis," said Porthos, majestically.

"My friend, if it had only depended upon me, you should have become a prince."

Porthos began to bite his nails in a melancholy way.

"That is where you have been wrong," continued he, "in deceiving me; for that promised duchy I reckoned upon. Oh! I reckoned upon it seriously, knowing you to be a man of your word, Aramis."

"Poor Porthos! pardon me, I implore you!"

"So, then," continued Porthos, without replying to the bishop's prayer, "so then, it seems, I have quite fallen out with Louis XIV.?"

"Oh! I will settle all that, my good friend, I will settle all that. I will take it on myself alone!"

"Aramis!"

"No, no, Porthos, I conjure you, let me act. No false generosity! No inopportune devotedness! You knew nothing of my projects. You have done nothing of yourself. With me it is different. I alone am the author of this plot. I stood in need of my inseparable companion; I called upon you, and you came to me in remembrance of our ancient device, 'All for one, one for all.' My crime is that I was an egotist."

"Now, that is a word I like," said Porthos; "and seeing that you have acted entirely for yourself, it is impossible for me to blame you. It is natural."

And upon this sublime reflection, Porthos pressed his friend's hand cordially.

In presence of this ingenuous greatness of soul, Aramis felt his own littleness. It was the second time he had been compelled to bend before real superiority of heart, which is more imposing than brilliancy of mind. He replied by a mute and energetic pressure to the endearment of his friend.

"Now," said Porthos, "that we have come to an explanation, now that I am perfectly aware of our situation with respect to Louis XIV., I think, my friend, it is time to make me comprehend the political intrigue of which we are the victims — for I plainly see there is a political intrigue at the bottom of all this."

"D'Artagnan, my good Porthos, D'Artagnan is coming, and will detail it to you in all its circumstances; but, excuse me, I am deeply grieved, I am bowed down with mental anguish, and I have need of all my presence of mind, all my powers of reflection, to extricate you from the false position in which I have so imprudently involved you; but nothing can be more clear, nothing more plain, than your position, henceforth. The king Louis XIV. has no longer now but one enemy: that enemy is myself, myself alone. I have made you a prisoner, you have followed me, to-day I liberate you, you fly back to your prince. You can perceive, Porthos, there is not one difficulty in all this."

"Do you think so?" said Porthos.

"I am quite sure of it."

"Then why," said the admirable good sense of Porthos, "then why, if we are in such an easy position, why, my friend, do we prepare cannon, muskets, and engines of all sorts? It seems to me it would be much more simple to say to Captain d'Artagnan: 'My dear friend, we have been mistaken; that error is to be repaired; open the door to us, let us pass through, and we will say good-bye.'"

"Ah! that!" said Aramis, shaking his head.

"Why do you say 'that'? Do you not approve of my plan, my friend?"

"I see a difficulty in it."

"What is it?"

"The hypothesis that D'Artagnan may come with orders which will oblige us to defend ourselves."

"What! defend ourselves against D'Artagnan? Folly! Against the good D'Artagnan!"

Aramis once more replied by shaking his head.

"Porthos," at length said he, "if I have had the matches lighted and the guns pointed, if I have had the signal of alarm sounded, if I have called every man to his post upon the ramparts, those good ramparts of Belle-Isle which you have so well fortified, it was not for nothing. Wait to judge; or rather, no, do not wait — ”

“What can I do?”

“If I knew, my friend, I would have told you.”

“But there is one thing much more simple than defending ourselves: — a boat, and away for France — where — ”

“My dear friend,” said Aramis, smiling with a strong shade of sadness, “do not let us reason like children; let us be men in council and in execution. — But, hark! I hear a hail for landing at the port. Attention, Porthos, serious attention!”

“It is D’Artagnan, no doubt,” said Porthos, in a voice of thunder, approaching the parapet.

“Yes, it is I,” replied the captain of the musketeers, running lightly up the steps of the mole, and gaining rapidly the little esplanade on which his two friends waited for him. As soon as he came towards them, Porthos and Aramis observed an officer who followed D’Artagnan, treading apparently in his very steps. The captain stopped upon the stairs of the mole, when half-way up. His companions imitated him.

“Make your men draw back,” cried D’Artagnan to Porthos and Aramis; “let them retire out of hearing.” This order, given by Porthos, was executed immediately. Then D’Artagnan, turning towards him who followed him:

“Monsieur,” said he, “we are no longer on board the king’s fleet, where, in virtue of your order, you spoke so arrogantly to me, just now.”

“Monsieur,” replied the officer, “I did not speak arrogantly to you; I simply, but rigorously, obeyed instructions. I was commanded to follow you. I follow you. I am directed not to allow you to communicate with any one without taking cognizance of what you do; I am in duty bound, accordingly, to overhear your conversations.”

D’Artagnan trembled with rage, and Porthos and Aramis, who heard this dialogue, trembled likewise, but with uneasiness and fear. D’Artagnan, biting his mustache with that vivacity which denoted in him exasperation, closely to be followed by an explosion, approached the officer.

“Monsieur,” said he, in a low voice, so much the more impressive, that, affecting calm, it threatened tempest — ”monsieur, when I sent a canoe hither, you wished to know what I wrote to the defenders of Belle-Isle. You produced an order to that effect; and, in my turn, I instantly showed you the note I had written. When the skipper of the boat sent by me returned, when

I received the reply of these two gentlemen” (and he pointed to Aramis and Porthos), “you heard every word of what the messenger said. All that was plainly in your orders, all that was well executed, very punctually, was it not?”

“Yes, monsieur,” stammered the officer; “yes, without doubt, but — ”

“Monsieur,” continued D’Artagnan, growing warm — ”monsieur, when I manifested the intention of quitting my vessel to cross to Belle-Isle, you demanded to accompany me; I did not hesitate; I brought you with me. You are now at Belle-Isle, are you not?”

“Yes, monsieur; but — ”

“But — the question no longer is of M. Colbert, who has given you that order, or of whomsoever in the world you are following the instructions; the question now is of a man who is a clog upon M. d’Artagnan, and who is alone with M. d’Artagnan upon steps whose feet are bathed by thirty feet of salt water; a bad position for that man, a bad position, monsieur! I warn you.”

“But, monsieur, if I am a restraint upon you,” said the officer, timidly, and almost faintly, “it is my duty which — ”

“Monsieur, you have had the misfortune, either you or those that sent you, to insult me. It is done. I cannot seek redress from those who employ you, — they are unknown to me, or are at too great a distance. But you are under my hand, and I swear that if you make one step behind me when I raise my feet to go up to those gentlemen, I swear to you by my name, I will cleave your head in two with my sword, and pitch you into the water. Oh! it will happen! it will happen! I have only been six times angry in my life, monsieur, and all five preceding times *I killed my man*.”

The officer did not stir; he became pale under this terrible threat, but replied with simplicity, “Monsieur, you are wrong in acting against my orders.”

Porthos and Aramis, mute and trembling at the top of the parapet, cried to the musketeer, “Good D’Artagnan, take care!”

D’Artagnan made them a sign to keep silence, raised his foot with ominous calmness to mount the stair, and turned round, sword in hand, to see if the officer followed him. The officer made a sign of the cross and stepped up. Porthos and Aramis, who knew their D’Artagnan, uttered a cry, and rushed down to prevent the blow they thought they already heard. But D’Artagnan passed his sword into his left hand, —

"Monsieur," said he to the officer, in an agitated voice, "you are a brave man. You will all the better comprehend what I am going to say to you now."

"Speak, Monsieur d'Artagnan, speak," replied the officer.

"These gentlemen we have just seen, and against whom you have orders, are my friends."

"I know they are, monsieur."

"You can understand whether or not I ought to act towards them as your instructions prescribe."

"I understand your reserve."

"Very well; permit me, then, to converse with them without a witness."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan, if I yield to your request, if I do that which you beg me, I break my word; but if I do not do it, I disoblige you. I prefer the one dilemma to the other. Converse with your friends, and do not despise me, monsieur, for doing this for *your* sake, whom I esteem and honor; do not despise me for committing for you, and you alone, an unworthy act." D'Artagnan, much agitated, threw his arm round the neck of the young man, and then went up to his friends. The officer, enveloped in his cloak, sat down on the damp, weed-covered steps.

"Well!" said D'Artagnan to his friends, "such is my position, judge for yourselves." All three embraced as in the glorious days of their youth.

"What is the meaning of all these preparations?" said Porthos.

"You ought to have a suspicion of what they signify," said D'Artagnan.

"Not any, I assure you, my dear captain; for, in fact, I have done nothing, no more has Aramis," the worthy baron hastened to say.

D'Artagnan darted a reproachful look at the prelate, which penetrated that hardened heart.

"Dear Porthos!" cried the bishop of Vannes.

"You see what is being done against you," said D'Artagnan; "interception of all boats coming to or going from Belle-Isle. Your means of transport seized. If you had endeavored to fly, you would have fallen into the hands of the cruisers that plow the sea in all directions, on the watch for you. The king wants you to be taken, and he will take you." D'Artagnan tore at his gray mustache. Aramis grew somber, Porthos angry.

"My idea was this," continued D'Artagnan: "to make you both come on board, to keep you near me, and restore you your liberty. But now, who can say, when I return to my ship, I may not find a superior; that I may not find secret orders which will take from me my command, and give it to another, who will dispose of me and you without hope of help?”

“We must remain at Belle-Isle,” said Aramis, resolutely; “and I assure you, for my part, I will not surrender easily.” Porthos said nothing. D’Artagnan remarked the silence of his friend.

“I have another trial to make of this officer, of this brave fellow who accompanies me, and whose courageous resistance makes me very happy; for it denotes an honest man, who, though an enemy, is a thousand times better than a complaisant coward. Let us try to learn from him what his instructions are, and what his orders permit or forbid.”

“Let us try,” said Aramis.

D’Artagnan went to the parapet, leaned over towards the steps of the mole, and called the officer, who immediately came up. “Monsieur,” said D’Artagnan, after having exchanged the cordial courtesies natural between gentlemen who know and appreciate each other, “monsieur, if I wished to take away these gentlemen from here, what would you do?”

“I should not oppose it, monsieur; but having direct explicit orders to put them under guard, I should detain them.”

“Ah!” said D’Artagnan.

“That’s all over,” said Aramis, gloomily. Porthos did not stir.

“But still take Porthos,” said the bishop of Vannes. “He can prove to the king, and I will help him do so, and you too, Monsieur d’Artagnan, that he had nothing to do with this affair.”

“Hum!” said D’Artagnan. “Will you come? Will you follow me, Porthos? The king is merciful.”

“I want time for reflection,” said Porthos.

“You will remain here, then?”

“Until fresh orders,” said Aramis, with vivacity.

“Until we have an idea,” resumed D’Artagnan; “and I now believe that will not be long, for I have one already.”

“Let us say adieu, then,” said Aramis; “but in truth, my good Porthos, you ought to go.”

“No,” said the latter, laconically.

“As you please,” replied Aramis, a little wounded in his susceptibilities at the morose tone of his companion. “Only I am reassured by the promise of an idea from D’Artagnan, an idea I fancy I have divined.”

"Let us see," said the musketeer, placing his ear near Aramis's mouth. The latter spoke several words rapidly, to which D'Artagnan replied, "That is it, precisely."

"Infallible!" cried Aramis.

"During the first emotion this resolution will cause, take care of yourself, Aramis."

"Oh! don't be afraid."

"Now, monsieur," said D'Artagnan to the officer, "thanks, a thousand thanks! You have made yourself three friends for life."

"Yes," added Aramis. Porthos alone said nothing, but merely bowed.

D'Artagnan, having tenderly embraced his two old friends, left Belle-Isle with the inseparable companion with whom M. Colbert had saddled him. Thus, with the exception of the explanation with which the worthy Porthos had been willing to be satisfied, nothing had changed in appearance in the fate of one or the other, "Only," said Aramis, "there is D'Artagnan's idea."

D'Artagnan did not return on board without profoundly analyzing the idea he had discovered. Now, we know that whatever D'Artagnan did examine, according to custom, daylight was certain to illuminate. As to the officer, now grown mute again, he had full time for meditation. Therefore, on putting his foot on board his vessel, moored within cannon-shot of the island, the captain of the musketeers had already got together all his means, offensive and defensive.

He immediately assembled his council, which consisted of the officers serving under his orders. These were eight in number; a chief of the maritime forces; a major directing the artillery; an engineer, the officer we are acquainted with, and four lieutenants. Having assembled them, D'Artagnan arose, took of his hat, and addressed them thus:

"Gentlemen, I have been to reconnoiter Belle-Ile-en-Mer, and I have found in it a good and solid garrison; moreover, preparations are made for a defense that may prove troublesome. I therefore intend to send for two of the principal officers of the place, that we may converse with them. Having separated them from their troops and cannon, we shall be better able to deal with them; particularly by reasoning with them. Is not this your opinion, gentlemen?"

The major of artillery rose.

"Monsieur," said he, with respect, but firmness, "I have heard you say that the place is preparing to make a troublesome defense. The place is then, as you know, determined on rebellion?”

D’Artagnan was visibly put out by this reply; but he was not the man to allow himself to be subdued by a trifle, and resumed:

“Monsieur,” said he, “your reply is just. But you are ignorant that Belle-Isle is a fief of M. Fouquet’s, and that former monarchs gave the right to the seigneurs of Belle-Isle to arm their people.” The major made a movement. “Oh! do not interrupt me,” continued D’Artagnan. “You are going to tell me that that right to arm themselves against the English was not a right to arm themselves against their king. But it is not M. Fouquet, I suppose, who holds Belle-Isle at this moment, since I arrested M. Fouquet the day before yesterday. Now the inhabitants and defenders of Belle-Isle know nothing of this arrest. You would announce it to them in vain. It is a thing so unheard-of and extraordinary, so unexpected, that they would not believe you. A Breton serves his master, and not his masters; he serves his master till he has seen him dead. Now the Bretons, as far as I know, have not seen the body of M. Fouquet. It is not, then, surprising they hold out against that which is neither M. Fouquet nor his signature.”

The major bowed in token of assent.

“That is why,” continued D’Artagnan, “I propose to cause two of the principal officers of the garrison to come on board my vessel. They will see you, gentlemen; they will see the forces we have at our disposal; they will consequently know to what they have to trust, and the fate that attends them, in case of rebellion. We will affirm to them, upon our honor, that M. Fouquet is a prisoner, and that all resistance can only be prejudicial to them. We will tell them that at the first cannon fired, there will be no further hope of mercy from the king. Then, or so at least I trust, they will resist no longer. They will yield up without fighting, and we shall have a place given up to us in a friendly way which it might cost prodigious efforts to subdue.”

The officer who had followed D’Artagnan to Belle-Isle was preparing to speak, but D’Artagnan interrupted him.

“Yes, I know what you are going to tell me, monsieur; I know that there is an order of the king’s to prevent all secret communications with the defenders of Belle-Isle, and that is exactly why I do not offer to communicate except in presence of my staff.”

And D’Artagnan made an inclination of the head to his officers, who knew him well enough to attach a certain value to the condescension.

The officers looked at each other as if to read each other’s opinions in their eyes, with the intention of evidently acting, should they agree, according to the desire of D’Artagnan. And already the latter saw with joy that the result of their consent would be sending a bark to Porthos and Aramis, when the king’s officer drew from a pocket a folded paper, which he placed in the hands of D’Artagnan.

This paper bore upon its superscription the number 1.

“What, more!” murmured the surprised captain.

“Read, monsieur,” said the officer, with a courtesy that was not free from sadness.

D’Artagnan, full of mistrust, unfolded the paper, and read these words: “Prohibition to M. d’Artagnan to assemble any council whatever, or to deliberate in any way before Belle-Isle be surrendered and the prisoners shot. Signed — LOUIS.”

D’Artagnan repressed the quiver of impatience that ran through his whole body, and with a gracious smile:

“That is well, monsieur,” said he; “the king’s orders shall be complied with.”

CHAPTER XLIV.

Result of the Ideas of the King, and the Ideas of D’Artagnan.

The blow was direct. It was severe, mortal. D’Artagnan, furious at having been anticipated by an idea of the king’s, did not despair, however, even yet; and reflecting upon the idea he had brought back from Belle-Isle, he elicited therefrom novel means of safety for his friends.

“Gentlemen,” said he, suddenly, “since the king has charged some other than myself with his secret orders, it must be because I no longer possess his confidence, and I should really be unworthy of it if I had the courage to hold a command subject to so many injurious suspicions. Therefore I will go immediately and carry my resignation to the king. I tender it before you all, enjoining you all to fall back with me upon the coast of France, in such a way as not to compromise the safety of the forces his majesty has confided to me. For this purpose, return all to your posts; within an hour, we shall have the ebb of the tide. To your posts, gentlemen! I suppose,” added he, on seeing that all prepared to obey him, except the surveillant officer, “you have no orders to object, this time?”

And D’Artagnan almost triumphed while speaking these words. This plan would prove the safety of his friends. The blockade once raised, they might embark immediately, and set sail for England or Spain, without fear of being molested. Whilst they were making their escape, D’Artagnan would return to the king; would justify his return by the indignation which the mistrust of Colbert had raised in him; he would be sent back with full powers, and he would take Belle-Isle; that is to say, the cage, after the birds had flown. But to this plan the officer opposed a further order of the king’s. It was thus conceived:

“From the moment M. d’Artagnan shall have manifested the desire of giving in his resignation, he shall no longer be reckoned leader of the expedition, and every officer placed under his orders shall be held to no longer obey him. Moreover, the said Monsieur d’Artagnan, having lost that quality of leader of the army sent against Belle-Isle, shall set out immediately for France, accompanied by the officer who will have remitted the message to him, and who will consider him a prisoner for whom he is answerable."

Brave and careless as he was, D'Artagnan turned pale. Everything had been calculated with a depth of precognition which, for the first time in thirty years, recalled to him the solid foresight and inflexible logic of the great cardinal. He leaned his head on his hand, thoughtful, scarcely breathing. "If I were to put this order in my pocket," thought he, "who would know it, what would prevent my doing it? Before the king had had time to be informed, I should have saved those poor fellows yonder. Let us exercise some small audacity! My head is not one of those the executioner strikes off for disobedience. We will disobey!" But at the moment he was about to adopt this plan, he saw the officers around him reading similar orders, which the passive agent of the thoughts of that infernal Colbert had distributed to them. This contingency of his disobedience had been foreseen — as all the rest had been.

"Monsieur," said the officer, coming up to him, "I await your good pleasure to depart."

"I am ready, monsieur," replied D'Artagnan, grinding his teeth.

The officer immediately ordered a canoe to receive M. d'Artagnan and himself. At sight of this he became almost distraught with rage.

"How," stammered he, "will you carry on the directions of the different corps?"

"When you are gone, monsieur," replied the commander of the fleet, "it is to me the command of the whole is committed."

"Then, monsieur," rejoined Colbert's man, addressing the new leader, "it is for you that this last order remitted to me is intended. Let us see your powers."

"Here they are," said the officer, exhibiting the royal signature.

"Here are your instructions," replied the officer, placing the folded paper in his hands; and turning round towards D'Artagnan, "Come, monsieur," said he, in an agitated voice (such despair did he behold in that man of iron), "do me the favor to depart at once."

"Immediately!" articulated D'Artagnan, feebly, subdued, crushed by implacable impossibility.

And he painfully subsided into the little boat, which started, favored by wind and tide, for the coast of France. The king's guards embarked with him. The musketeer still preserved the hope of reaching Nantes quickly, and of pleading the cause of his friends eloquently enough to incline the king to mercy. The bark flew like a swallow. D'Artagnan distinctly saw the land of France profiled in black against the white clouds of night.

"Ah! monsieur," said he, in a low voice, to the officer to whom, for an hour, he had ceased speaking, "what would I give to know the instructions for the new commander! They are all pacific, are they not? and — "

He did not finish; the thunder of a distant cannon rolled athwart the waves, another, and two or three still louder. D'Artagnan shuddered.

"They have commenced the siege of Belle-Isle," replied the officer. The canoe had just touched the soil of France.

CHAPTER XLV.

The Ancestors of Porthos.

When D’Artagnan left Aramis and Porthos, the latter returned to the principal fort, in order to converse with greater liberty. Porthos, still thoughtful, was a restraint on Aramis, whose mind had never felt itself more free.

“Dear Porthos,” said he, suddenly, “I will explain D’Artagnan’s idea to you.”

“What idea, Aramis?”

“An idea to which we shall owe our liberty within twelve hours.”

“Ah! indeed!” said Porthos, much astonished. “Let us hear it.”

“Did you remark, in the scene our friend had with the officer, that certain orders constrained him with regard to us?”

“Yes, I did notice that.”

“Well! D’Artagnan is going to give in his resignation to the king, and during the confusion that will result from his absence, we will get away, or rather you will get away, Porthos, if there is possibility of flight for only one.”

Here Porthos shook his head and replied: “We will escape together, Aramis, or we will stay together.”

“Thine is a right, a generous heart,” said Aramis, “only your melancholy uneasiness affects me.”

“I am not uneasy,” said Porthos.

“Then you are angry with me.”

“I am not angry with you.”

“Then why, my friend, do you put on such a dismal countenance?”

“I will tell you; I am making my will.” And while saying these words, the good Porthos looked sadly in the face of Aramis.

“Your will!” cried the bishop. “What, then! do you think yourself lost?”

“I feel fatigued. It is the first time, and there is a custom in our family.”

“What is it, my friend?”

“My grandfather was a man twice as strong as I am.”

“Indeed!” said Aramis; “then your grandfather must have been Samson himself.”

“No; his name was Antoine. Well! he was about my age, when, setting out one day for the chase, he felt his legs weak, the man who had never known what weakness was before.”

“What was the meaning of that fatigue, my friend?”

“Nothing good, as you will see; for having set out, complaining still of weakness of the legs, he met a wild boar, which made head against him; he missed him with his arquebuse, and was ripped up by the beast and died immediately.”

“There is no reason in that why you should alarm yourself, dear Porthos.”

“Oh! you will see. My father was as strong again as I am. He was a rough soldier, under Henry III. and Henry IV.; his name was not Antoine, but Gaspard, the same as M. de Coligny. Always on horseback, he had never known what lassitude was. One evening, as he rose from table, his legs failed him.”

“He had supped heartily, perhaps,” said Aramis, “and that was why he staggered.”

“Bah! A friend of M. de Bassompierre, nonsense! No, no, he was astonished at this lassitude, and said to my mother, who laughed at him, ‘Would not one believe I was going to meet with a wild boar, as the late M. du Vallon, my father did?’“

“Well?” said Aramis.

“Well, having this weakness, my father insisted upon going down into the garden, instead of going to bed; his foot slipped on the first stair, the staircase was steep; my father fell against a stone in which an iron hinge was fixed. The hinge gashed his temple; and he was stretched out dead upon the spot.”

Aramis raised his eyes to his friend: “These are two extraordinary circumstances,” said he; “let us not infer that there may succeed a third. It is not becoming in a man of your strength to be superstitious, my brave Porthos. Besides, when were your legs known to fail? Never have you stood so firm, so haughtily; why, you could carry a house on your shoulders.”

“At this moment,” said Porthos, “I feel myself pretty active; but at times I vacillate; I sink; and lately this phenomenon, as you say, has occurred four times. I will not say this frightens me, but it annoys me. Life is an agreeable thing. I have money; I have fine estates; I have horses that I love; I have also friends that I love: D'Artagnan, Athos, Raoul, and you."

The admirable Porthos did not even take the trouble to dissimulate in the very presence of Aramis the rank he gave him in his friendship. Aramis pressed his hand: "We will still live many years," said he, "to preserve to the world such specimens of its rarest men. Trust yourself to me, my friend; we have no reply from D'Artagnan, that is a good sign. He must have given orders to get the vessels together and clear the seas. On my part I have just issued directions that a bark should be rolled on rollers to the mouth of the great cavern of Locmaria, which you know, where we have so often lain in wait for the foxes."

"Yes, and which terminates at the little creek by a trench where we discovered the day that splendid fox escaped that way."

"Precisely. In case of misfortunes, a bark is to be concealed for us in that cavern; indeed, it must be there by this time. We will wait for a favorable moment, and during the night we will go to sea!"

"That is a grand idea. What shall we gain by it?"

"We shall gain this — nobody knows that grotto, or rather its issue, except ourselves and two or three hunters of the island; we shall gain this — that if the island is occupied, the scouts, seeing no bark upon the shore, will never imagine we can escape, and will cease to watch."

"I understand."

"Well! that weakness in the legs?"

"Oh! better, much, just now."

"You see, then, plainly, that everything conspires to give us quietude and hope. D'Artagnan will sweep the sea and leave us free. No royal fleet or descent to be dreaded. *Vive Dieu!* Porthos, we have still half a century of magnificent adventure before us, and if I once touch Spanish ground, I swear to you," added the bishop with terrible energy, "that your brevet of duke is not such a chance as it is said to be."

"We live by hope," said Porthos, enlivened by the warmth of his companion.

All at once a cry resounded in their ears: "To arms! to arms!"

This cry, repeated by a hundred throats, piercing the chamber where the two friends were conversing, carried surprise to one, and uneasiness to the other. Aramis opened the window; he saw a crowd of people running with flambeaux. Women were seeking places of safety, the armed population were hastening to their posts.

"The fleet! the fleet!" cried a soldier, who recognized Aramis.

"The fleet?" repeated the latter.

"Within half cannon-shot," continued the soldier.

"To arms!" cried Aramis.

"To arms!" repeated Porthos, formidably. And both rushed forth towards the mole to place themselves within the shelter of the batteries. Boats, laden with soldiers, were seen approaching; and in three directions, for the purpose of landing at three points at once.

"What must be done?" said an officer of the guard.

"Stop them; and if they persist, fire!" said Aramis.

Five minutes later, the cannonade commenced. These were the shots that D'Artagnan had heard as he landed in France. But the boats were too near the mole to allow the cannon to aim correctly. They landed, and the combat commenced hand to hand.

"What's the matter, Porthos?" said Aramis to his friend.

"Nothing! nothing! — only my legs; it is really incomprehensible! — they will be better when we charge." In fact, Porthos and Aramis did charge with such vigor, and so thoroughly animated their men, that the royalists re-embarked precipitately, without gaining anything but the wounds they carried away.

"Eh! but Porthos," cried Aramis, "we must have a prisoner, quick! quick!" Porthos bent over the stair of the mole, and seized by the nape of the neck one of the officers of the royal army who was waiting to embark till all his people should be in the boat. The arm of the giant lifted up his prey, which served him as a buckler, and he recovered himself without a shot being fired at him.

"Here is a prisoner for you," said Porthos coolly to Aramis.

"Well!" cried the latter, laughing, "did you not calumniate your legs?"

"It was not with my legs I captured him," said Porthos, "it was with my arms!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

The Son of Biscarrat.

The Bretons of the Isle were very proud of this victory; Aramis did not encourage them in the feeling.

"What will happen," said he to Porthos, when everybody was gone home, "will be that the anger of the king will be roused by the account of the resistance; and that these brave people will be decimated or shot when they are taken, which cannot fail to take place."

"From which it results, then," said Porthos, "that what we have done is of not the slightest use."

"For the moment it may be," replied the bishop, "for we have a prisoner from whom we shall learn what our enemies are preparing to do."

"Yes, let us interrogate the prisoner," said Porthos, "and the means of making him speak are very simple. We are going to supper; we will invite him to join us; as he drinks he will talk."

This was done. The officer was at first rather uneasy, but became reassured on seeing what sort of men he had to deal with. He gave, without having any fear of compromising himself, all the details imaginable of the resignation and departure of D'Artagnan. He explained how, after that departure, the new leader of the expedition had ordered a surprise upon Belle-Isle. There his explanations stopped. Aramis and Porthos exchanged a glance that evinced their despair. No more dependence to be placed now on D'Artagnan's fertile imagination — no further resource in the event of defeat. Aramis, continuing his interrogations, asked the prisoner what the leaders of the expedition contemplated doing with the leaders of Belle-Isle.

"The orders are," replied he, "to kill *during* combat, or hang *afterwards*."

Porthos and Aramis looked at each other again, and the color mounted to their faces.

"I am too light for the gallows," replied Aramis; "people like me are not hung."

"And I am too heavy," said Porthos; "people like me break the cord."

“I am sure,” said the prisoner, gallantly, “that we could have guaranteed you the exact kind of death you preferred.”

“A thousand thanks!” said Aramis, seriously. Porthos bowed.

“One more cup of wine to your health,” said he, drinking himself. From one subject to another the chat with the officer was prolonged. He was an intelligent gentleman, and suffered himself to be led on by the charm of Aramis’s wit and Porthos’s cordial *bonhomie*.

“Pardon me,” said he, “if I address a question to you; but men who are in their sixth bottle have a clear right to forget themselves a little.”

“Address it!” cried Porthos; “address it!”

“Speak,” said Aramis.

“Were you not, gentlemen, both in the musketeers of the late king?”

“Yes, monsieur, and amongst the best of them, if you please,” said Porthos.

“That is true; I should say even the best of all soldiers, messieurs, if I did not fear to offend the memory of my father.”

“Of your father?” cried Aramis.

“Do you know what my name is?”

“*Ma foi!* no, monsieur; but you can tell us, and — ”

“I am called Georges de Biscarrat.”

“Oh!” cried Porthos, in his turn. “Biscarrat! Do you remember that name, Aramis?”

“Biscarrat!” reflected the bishop. “It seems to me — ”

“Try to recollect, monsieur,” said the officer.

“*Pardieu!* that won’t take me long,” said Porthos. “Biscarrat — called Cardinal — one of the four who interrupted us on the day on which we formed our friendship with D’Artagnan, sword in hand.”

“Precisely, gentlemen.”

“The only one,” cried Aramis, eagerly, “we could not scratch.”

“Consequently, a capital blade?” said the prisoner.

“That’s true! most true!” exclaimed both friends together. “*Ma foi!* Monsieur Biscarrat, we are delighted to make the acquaintance of such a brave man’s son.”

Biscarrat pressed the hands held out by the two musketeers. Aramis looked at Porthos as much as to say, “Here is a man who will help us,” and without delay, — ”Confess, monsieur,” said he, “that it is good to have once been a good man.”

“My father always said so, monsieur.”

“Confess, likewise, that it is a sad circumstance in which you find yourself, of falling in with men destined to be shot or hung, and to learn that these men are old acquaintances, in fact, hereditary friends.”

“Oh! you are not reserved for such a frightful fate as that, messieurs and friends!” said the young man, warmly.

“Bah! you said so yourself.”

“I said so just now, when I did not know you; but now that I know you, I say — you will evade this dismal fate, if you wish!”

“How — if we wish?” echoed Aramis, whose eyes beamed with intelligence as he looked alternately at the prisoner and Porthos.

“Provided,” continued Porthos, looking, in his turn, with noble intrepidity, at M. Biscarrat and the bishop — ”provided nothing disgraceful be required of us.”

“Nothing at all will be required of you, gentlemen,” replied the officer — ”what should they ask of you? If they find you they will kill you, that is a predetermined thing; try, then, gentlemen, to prevent their finding you.”

“I don’t think I am mistaken,” said Porthos, with dignity; “but it appears evident to me that if they want to find us, they must come and seek us here.”

“In that you are perfectly right, my worthy friend,” replied Aramis, constantly consulting with his looks the countenance of Biscarrat, who had grown silent and constrained. “You wish, Monsieur de Biscarrat, to say something to us, to make us some overture, and you dare not — is that true?”

“Ah! gentlemen and friends! it is because by speaking I betray the watchword. But, hark! I hear a voice that frees mine by dominating it.”

“Cannon!” said Porthos.

“Cannon and musketry, too!” cried the bishop.

On hearing at a distance, among the rocks, these sinister reports of a combat which they thought had ceased:

“What can that be?” asked Porthos.

“Eh! *Pardieu!*” cried Aramis; “that is just what I expected.”

“What is that?”

“That the attack made by you was nothing but a feint; is not that true, monsieur? And whilst your companions allowed themselves to be repulsed, you were certain of effecting a landing on the other side of the island.”

“Oh! several, monsieur.”

“We are lost, then,” said the bishop of Vannes, quietly.

“Lost! that is possible,” replied the Seigneur de Pierrefonds, “but we are not taken or hung.” And so saying, he rose from the table, went to the wall, and coolly took down his sword and pistols, which he examined with the care of an old soldier who is preparing for battle, and who feels that life, in a great measure, depends upon the excellence and right conditions of his arms.

At the report of the cannon, at the news of the surprise which might deliver up the island to the royal troops, the terrified crowd rushed precipitately to the fort to demand assistance and advice from their leaders. Aramis, pale and downcast, between two flambeaux, showed himself at the window which looked into the principal court, full of soldiers waiting for orders and bewildered inhabitants imploring succor.

“My friends,” said D’Herblay, in a grave and sonorous voice, “M. Fouquet, your protector, your friend, you father, has been arrested by an order of the king, and thrown into the Bastile.” A sustained yell of vengeful fury came floating up to the window at which the bishop stood, and enveloped him in a magnetic field.

“Avenge Monsieur Fouquet!” cried the most excited of his hearers, “death to the royalists!”

“No, my friends,” replied Aramis, solemnly; “no, my friends; no resistance. The king is master in his kingdom. The king is the mandatory of God. The king and God have struck M. Fouquet. Humble yourselves before the hand of God. Love God and the king, who have struck M. Fouquet. But do not avenge your seigneur, do not think of avenging him. You would sacrifice yourselves in vain — you, your wives and children, your property, your liberty. Lay down your arms, my friends — lay down your arms! since the king commands you so to do — and retire peaceably to your dwellings. It is I who ask you to do so; it is I who beg you to do so; it is I who now, in the hour of need, command you to do so, in the name of M. Fouquet.”

The crowd collected under the window uttered a prolonged roar of anger and terror. “The soldiers of Louis XIV. have reached the island,” continued Aramis. “From this time it would no longer be a fight betwixt them and you — it would be a massacre. Begone, then, begone, and forget; this time I command you, in the name of the Lord of Hosts!”

The mutineers retired slowly, submissive, silent.

"Ah! what have you just been saying, my friend?" said Porthos.

"Monsieur," said Biscarrat to the bishop, "you may save all these inhabitants, but thus you will neither save yourself nor your friend."

"Monsieur de Biscarrat," said the bishop of Vannes, with a singular accent of nobility and courtesy, "Monsieur de Biscarrat, be kind enough to resume your liberty."

"I am very willing to do so, monsieur; but — "

"That would render us a service, for when announcing to the king's lieutenant the submission of the islanders, you will perhaps obtain some grace for us on informing him of the manner in which that submission has been effected."

"Grace!" replied Porthos with flashing eyes, "what is the meaning of that word?"

Aramis touched the elbow of his friend roughly, as he had been accustomed to do in the days of their youth, when he wanted to warn Porthos that he had committed, or was about to commit, a blunder. Porthos understood him, and was silent immediately.

"I will go, messieurs," replied Biscarrat, a little surprised likewise at the word "grace" pronounced by the haughty musketeer, of and to whom, but a few minutes before, he had related with so much enthusiasm the heroic exploits with which his father had delighted him.

"Go, then, Monsieur Biscarrat," said Aramis, bowing to him, "and at parting receive the expression of our entire gratitude."

"But you, messieurs, you whom I think it an honor to call my friends, since you have been willing to accept that title, what will become of you in the meantime?" replied the officer, very much agitated at taking leave of the two ancient adversaries of his father.

"We will wait here."

"But, *mon Dieu!* — the order is precise and formal."

"I am bishop of Vannes, Monsieur de Biscarrat; and they no more shoot a bishop than they hang a gentleman."

"Ah! yes, monsieur — yes, monseigneur," replied Biscarrat; "it is true, you are right, there is still that chance for you. Then, I will depart, I will repair to the commander of the expedition, the king's lieutenant. Adieu! then, messieurs, or rather, to meet again, I hope."

The worthy officer, jumping upon a horse given him by Aramis, departed in the direction of the sound of cannon, which, by surging the crowd into the fort, had interrupted the conversation of the two friends with their prisoner. Aramis watched the departure, and when left alone with Porthos:

“Well, do you comprehend?” said he.

“*Ma foi!* no.”

“Did not Biscarrat inconvenience you here?”

“No; he is a brave fellow.”

“Yes; but the grotto of Locmaria — is it necessary all the world should know it?”

“Ah! that is true, that is true; I comprehend. We are going to escape by the cavern.”

“If you please,” cried Aramis, gayly. “Forward, friend Porthos; our boat awaits us. King Louis has not caught us — *yet*.”

CHAPTER XLVII.

The Grotto of Locmaria.

The cavern of Locmaria was sufficiently distant from the mole to render it necessary for our friends to husband their strength in order to reach it. Besides, night was advancing; midnight had struck at the fort. Porthos and Aramis were loaded with money and arms. They walked, then, across the heath, which stretched between the mole and the cavern, listening to every noise, in order better to avoid an ambush. From time to time, on the road which they had carefully left on their left, passed fugitives coming from the interior, at the news of the landing of the royal troops. Aramis and Porthos, concealed behind some projecting mass of rock, collected the words that escaped from the poor people, who fled, trembling, carrying with them their most valuable effects, and tried, whilst listening to their complaints, to gather something from them for their own interest. At length, after a rapid race, frequently interrupted by prudent stoppages, they reached the deep grottoes, in which the prophetic bishop of Vannes had taken care to have secreted a bark capable of keeping the sea at this fine season.

"My good friend," said Porthos, panting vigorously, "we have arrived, it seems. But I thought you spoke of three men, three servants, who were to accompany us. I don't see them — where are they?"

"Why should you see them, Porthos?" replied Aramis. "They are certainly waiting for us in the cavern, and, no doubt, are resting, having accomplished their rough and difficult task."

Aramis stopped Porthos, who was preparing to enter the cavern. "Will you allow me, my friend," said he to the giant, "to pass in first? I know the signal I have given to these men; who, not hearing it, would be very likely to fire upon you or slash away with their knives in the dark."

"Go on, then, Aramis; go on — go first; you impersonate wisdom and foresight; go. Ah! there is that fatigue again, of which I spoke to you. It has just seized me afresh."

Aramis left Porthos sitting at the entrance of the grotto, and bowing his head, he penetrated into the interior of the cavern, imitating the cry of the owl. A little plaintive cooing, a scarcely distinct echo, replied from the depths of the cave. Aramis pursued his way cautiously, and soon was stopped by the same kind of cry as he had first uttered, within ten paces of him.

“Are you there, Yves?” said the bishop.

“Yes, monseigneur; Goenne is here likewise. His son accompanies us.”

“That is well. Are all things ready?”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“Go to the entrance of the grottoes, my good Yves, and you will there find the Seigneur de Pierrefonds, who is resting after the fatigue of our journey. And if he should happen not to be able to walk, lift him up, and bring him hither to me.”

The three men obeyed. But the recommendation given to his servants was superfluous. Porthos, refreshed, had already commenced the descent, and his heavy step resounded amongst the cavities, formed and supported by columns of porphyry and granite. As soon as the Seigneur de Bracieux had rejoined the bishop, the Bretons lighted a lantern with which they were furnished, and Porthos assured his friend that he felt as strong again as ever.

“Let us inspect the boat,” said Aramis, “and satisfy ourselves at once what it will hold.”

“Do not go too near with the light,” said the patron Yves; “for as you desired me, monseigneur, I have placed under the bench of the poop, in the coffer you know of, the barrel of powder, and the musket-charges that you sent me from the fort.”

“Very well,” said Aramis; and, taking the lantern himself, he examined minutely all parts of the canoe, with the precautions of a man who is neither timid nor ignorant in the face of danger. The canoe was long, light, drawing little water, thin of keel; in short, one of those that have always been so aptly built at Belle-Isle; a little high in its sides, solid upon the water, very manageable, furnished with planks which, in uncertain weather, formed a sort of deck over which the waves might glide, so as to protect the rowers. In two well-closed coffers, placed beneath the benches of the prow and the poop, Aramis found bread, biscuit, dried fruits, a quarter of bacon, a good provision of water in leathern bottles; the whole forming rations sufficient for people who did not mean to quit the coast, and would be able to revictual, if necessity commanded. The arms, eight muskets, and as many horse-pistols, were in good condition, and all loaded. There were additional oars, in case of accident, and that little sail called *trinquet*, which assists the speed of the canoe at the same time the boatmen row, and is so useful when the breeze is slack. When Aramis had seen to all these things, and appeared satisfied with the result of his inspection, “Let us consult Porthos,” said he, “to know if we must endeavor to get the boat out by the unknown extremity of the grotto, following the descent and the shade of the cavern, or whether it be better, in the open air, to make it slide upon its rollers through the bushes, leveling the road of the little beach, which is but twenty feet high, and gives, at high tide, three or four fathoms of good water upon a sound bottom.”

“It must be as you please, monseigneur,” replied the skipper Yves, respectfully; “but I don’t believe that by the slope of the cavern, and in the dark in which we shall be obliged to maneuver our boat, the road will be so convenient as the open air. I know the beach well, and can certify that it is as smooth as a grass-plot in a garden; the interior of the grotto, on the contrary, is rough; without reckoning, monseigneur, that at its extremity we shall come to the trench which leads into the sea, and perhaps the canoe will not pass down it.”

“I have made my calculation,” said the bishop, “and I am certain it will pass.”

“So be it; I wish it may, monseigneur,” continued Yves; “but your highness knows very well that to make it reach the extremity of the trench, there is an enormous stone to be lifted — that under which the fox always passes, and which closes the trench like a door.”

“It can be raised,” said Porthos; “that is nothing.”

“Oh! I know that monseigneur has the strength of ten men,” replied Yves; “but that is giving him a great deal of trouble.”

“I think the skipper may be right,” said Aramis; “let us try the open-air passage.”

“The more so, monseigneur,” continued the fisherman, “that we should not be able to embark before day, it will require so much labor, and that as soon as daylight appears, a good *vedette* placed outside the grotto would be necessary, indispensable even, to watch the maneuvers of the lighters or cruisers that are on the look-out for us.”

“Yes, yes, Yves, your reasons are good; we will go by the beach.”

And the three robust Bretons went to the boat, and were beginning to place their rollers underneath it to put it in motion, when the distant barking of dogs was heard, proceeding from the interior of the island.

Aramis darted out of the grotto, followed by Porthos. Dawn just tinted with purple and white the waves and plain; through the dim light, melancholy fir-trees waved their tender branches over the pebbles, and long flights of crows were skimming with their black wings the shimmering fields of buckwheat. In a quarter of an hour it would be clear daylight; the wakened birds announced it to all nature. The barkings which had been heard, which had stopped the three fishermen engaged in moving the boat, and had brought Aramis and Porthos out of the cavern, now seemed to come from a deep gorge within about a league of the grotto.

"It is a pack of hounds," said Porthos; "the dogs are on a scent."

"Who can be hunting at such a moment as this?" said Aramis.

"And this way, particularly," continued Porthos, "where they might expect the army of the royalists."

"The noise comes nearer. Yes, you are right, Porthos, the dogs are on a scent. But, Yves!" cried Aramis, "come here! come here!"

Yves ran towards him, letting fall the cylinder which he was about to place under the boat when the bishop's call interrupted him.

"What is the meaning of this hunt, skipper?" said Porthos.

"Eh! monseigneur, I cannot understand it," replied the Breton. "It is not at such a moment that the Seigneur de Locmaria would hunt. No, and yet the dogs — "

"Unless they have escaped from the kennel."

"No," said Goenne, "they are not the Seigneur de Locmaria's hounds."

"In common prudence," said Aramis, "let us go back into the grotto; the voices evidently draw nearer, we shall soon know what we have to trust to."

They re-entered, but had scarcely proceeded a hundred steps in the darkness, when a noise like the hoarse sigh of a creature in distress resounded through the cavern, and breathless, rapid, terrified, a fox passed like a flash of lightning before the fugitives, leaped over the boat and disappeared, leaving behind its sour scent, which was perceptible for several seconds under the low vaults of the cave.

"The fox!" cried the Bretons, with the glad surprise of born hunters.

"Accursed mischance!" cried the bishop, "our retreat is discovered."

"How so?" said Porthos; "are you afraid of a fox?"

"Eh! my friend, what do you mean by that? why do you specify the fox? It is not the fox alone. *Pardieu!* But don't you know, Porthos, that after the foxes come hounds, and after hounds men?”

Porthos hung his head. As though to confirm the words of Aramis, they heard the yelping pack approach with frightful swiftness upon the trail. Six foxhounds burst at once upon the little heath, with mingling yelps of triumph.

“There are the dogs, plain enough!” said Aramis, posted on the look-out behind a chink in the rocks; “now, who are the huntsmen?”

“If it is the Seigneur de Locmaria’s,” replied the sailor, “he will leave the dogs to hunt the grotto, for he knows them, and will not enter in himself, being quite sure that the fox will come out the other side; it is there he will wait for him.”

“It is not the Seigneur de Locmaria who is hunting,” replied Aramis, turning pale in spite of his efforts to maintain a placid countenance.

“Who is it, then?” said Porthos.

“Look!”

Porthos applied his eye to the slit, and saw at the summit of a hillock a dozen horsemen urging on their horses in the track of the dogs, shouting, “*Taiaut! taiaut!*”

“The guards!” said he.

“Yes, my friend, the king’s guards.”

“The king’s guards! do you say, monseigneur?” cried the Bretons, growing pale in turn.

“With Biscarrat at their head, mounted upon my gray horse,” continued Aramis.

The hounds at the same moment rushed into the grotto like an avalanche, and the depths of the cavern were filled with their deafening cries.

“Ah! the devil!” said Aramis, resuming all his coolness at the sight of this certain, inevitable danger. “I am perfectly satisfied we are lost, but we have, at least, one chance left. If the guards who follow their hounds happen to discover there is an issue to the grotto, there is no help for us, for on entering they must see both ourselves and our boat. The dogs must not go out of the cavern. Their masters must not enter.”

“That is clear,” said Porthos.

“You understand,” added Aramis, with the rapid precision of command; “there are six dogs that will be forced to stop at the great stone under which the fox has glided — but at the too narrow opening of which they must be themselves stopped and killed.”

The Bretons sprang forward, knife in hand. In a few minutes there was a lamentable concert of angry barks and mortal howls — and then, silence.

“That’s well!” said Aramis, coolly, “now for the masters!”

“What is to be done with them?” said Porthos.

“Wait their arrival, conceal ourselves, and kill them.”

“*Kill them!*” replied Porthos.

“There are sixteen,” said Aramis, “at least, at present.”

“And well armed,” added Porthos, with a smile of consolation.

“It will last about ten minutes,” said Aramis. “To work!”

And with a resolute air he took up a musket, and placed a hunting-knife between his teeth.

“Yves, Goenne, and his son,” continued Aramis, “will pass the muskets to us. You, Porthos, will fire when they are close. We shall have brought down, at the lowest computation, eight, before the others are aware of anything — that is certain; then all, there are five of us, will dispatch the other eight, knife in hand.”

“And poor Biscarrat?” said Porthos.

Aramis reflected a moment — ”Biscarrat first,” replied he, coolly. “He knows us.”

CHAPTER XLVIII.

The Grotto.

In spite of the sort of divination which was the remarkable side of the character of Aramis, the event, subject to the risks of things over which uncertainty presides, did not fall out exactly as the bishop of Vannes had foreseen. Biscarrat, better mounted than his companions, arrived first at the opening of the grotto, and comprehended that fox and hounds were one and all engulfed in it. Only, struck by that superstitious terror which every dark and subterraneous way naturally impresses upon the mind of man, he stopped at the outside of the grotto, and waited till his companions should have assembled round him.

"Well!" asked the young men, coming up, out of breath, and unable to understand the meaning of this inaction.

"Well! I cannot hear the dogs; they and the fox must all be lost in this infernal cavern."

"They were too close up," said one of the guards, "to have lost scent all at once. Besides, we should hear them from one side or another. They must, as Biscarrat says, be in this grotto."

"But then," said one of the young men, "why don't they give tongue?"

"It is strange!" muttered another.

"Well, but," said a fourth, "let us go into this grotto. Does it happen to be forbidden we should enter it?"

"No," replied Biscarrat. "Only, as it looks as dark as a wolf's mouth, we might break our necks in it."

"Witness the dogs," said a guard, "who seem to have broken theirs."

"What the devil can have become of them?" asked the young men in chorus. And every master called his dog by his name, whistled to him in his favorite mode, without a single one replying to either call or whistle.

"It is perhaps an enchanted grotto," said Biscarrat; "let us see." And, jumping from his horse, he made a step into the grotto.

"Stop! stop! I will accompany you," said one of the guards, on seeing Biscarrat disappear in the shades of the cavern's mouth.

"No," replied Biscarrat, "there must be something extraordinary in the place — don't let us risk ourselves all at once. If in ten minutes you do not hear of me, you can come in, but not all at once."

"Be it so," said the young man, who, besides, did not imagine that Biscarrat ran much risk in the enterprise, "we will wait for you." And without dismounting from their horses, they formed a circle round the grotto.

Biscarrat entered then alone, and advanced through the darkness till he came in contact with the muzzle of Porthos's musket. The resistance which his chest met with astonished him; he naturally raised his hand and laid hold of the icy barrel. At the same instant, Yves lifted a knife against the young man, which was about to fall upon him with all force of a Breton's arm, when the iron wrist of Porthos stopped it half-way. Then, like low muttering thunder, his voice growled in the darkness, "I will not have him killed!"

Biscarrat found himself between a protection and a threat, the one almost as terrible as the other. However brave the young man might be, he could not prevent a cry escaping him, which Aramis immediately suppressed by placing a handkerchief over his mouth. "Monsieur de Biscarrat," said he, in a low voice, "we mean you no harm, and you must know that if you have recognized us; but, at the first word, the first groan, the first whisper, we shall be forced to kill you as we have killed your dogs."

"Yes, I recognize you, gentlemen," said the officer, in a low voice. "But why are you here — what are you doing, here? Unfortunate men! I thought you were in the fort."

"And you, monsieur, you were to obtain conditions for us, I think?"

"I did all I was able, messieurs, but — "

"But what?"

"But there are positive orders."

"To kill us?"

Biscarrat made no reply. It would have cost him too much to speak of the cord to gentlemen. Aramis understood the silence of the prisoner.

"Monsieur Biscarrat," said he, "you would be already dead if we had not regard for your youth and our ancient association with your father; but you may yet escape from the place by swearing that you will not tell your companions what you have seen."

"I will not only swear that I will not speak of it," said Biscarrat, "but I still further swear that I will do everything in the world to prevent my companions from setting foot in the grotto."

"Biscarrat! Biscarrat!" cried several voices from the outside, coming like a whirlwind into the cave.

"Reply," said Aramis.

"Here I am!" cried Biscarrat.

"Now, begone; we depend on your loyalty." And he left his hold of the young man, who hastily returned towards the light.

"Biscarrat! Biscarrat!" cried the voices, still nearer. And the shadows of several human forms projected into the interior of the grotto. Biscarrat rushed to meet his friends in order to stop them, and met them just as they were adventuring into the cave. Aramis and Porthos listened with the intense attention of men whose life depends upon a breath of air.

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed one of the guards, as he came to the light, "how pale you are!"

"Pale!" cried another; "you ought to say corpse-color."

"I!" said the young man, endeavoring to collect his faculties.

"In the name of Heaven! what has happened?" exclaimed all the voices.

"You have not a drop of blood in your veins, my poor friend," said one of them, laughing.

"Messieurs, it is serious," said another, "he is going to faint; does any one of you happen to have any salts?" And they all laughed.

This hail of jests fell round Biscarrat's ears like musket-balls in a *melee*. He recovered himself amidst a deluge of interrogations.

"What do you suppose I have seen?" asked he. "I was too hot when I entered the grotto, and I have been struck with a chill. That is all."

"But the dogs, the dogs; have you seen them again — did you see anything of them — do you know anything about them?"

"I suppose they have got out some other way."

"Messieurs," said one of the young men, "there is in that which is going on, in the paleness and silence of our friend, a mystery which Biscarrat will not, or cannot reveal. Only, and this is certain, Biscarrat has seen something in the grotto. Well, for my part, I am very curious to see what it is, even if it is the devil! To the grotto! messieurs, to the grotto!"

"To the grotto!" repeated all the voices. And the echo of the cavern carried like a menace to Porthos and Aramis, "To the grotto! to the grotto!"

Biscarrat threw himself before his companions. "Messieurs! messieurs!" cried he, "in the name of Heaven! do not go in!"

“Why, what is there so terrific in the cavern?” asked several at once. “Come, speak, Biscarrat.”

“Decidedly, it is the devil he has seen,” repeated he who had before advanced that hypothesis.

“Well,” said another, “if he has seen him, he need not be selfish; he may as well let us have a look at him in turn.”

“Messieurs! messieurs! I beseech you,” urged Biscarrat.

“Nonsense! Let us pass!”

“Messieurs, I implore you not to enter!”

“Why, you went in yourself.”

Then one of the officers, who — of a riper age than the others — had till this time remained behind, and had said nothing, advanced. “Messieurs,” said he, with a calmness which contrasted with the animation of the young men, “there is in there some person, or something, that is not the devil; but which, whatever it may be, has had sufficient power to silence our dogs. We must discover who this some one is, or what this something is.”

Biscarrat made a last effort to stop his friends, but it was useless. In vain he threw himself before the rashest; in vain he clung to the rocks to bar the passage; the crowd of young men rushed into the cave, in the steps of the officer who had spoken last, but who had sprung in first, sword in hand, to face the unknown danger. Biscarrat, repulsed by his friends, unable to accompany them, without passing in the eyes of Porthos and Aramis for a traitor and a perjurer, with painfully attentive ear and unconsciously supplicating hands leaned against the rough side of a rock which he thought must be exposed to the fire of the musketeers. As to the guards, they penetrated further and further, with exclamations that grew fainter as they advanced. All at once, a discharge of musketry, growling like thunder, exploded in the entrails of the vault. Two or three balls were flattened against the rock on which Biscarrat was leaning. At the same instant, cries, shrieks, imprecations burst forth, and the little troop of gentlemen reappeared — some pale, some bleeding — all enveloped in a cloud of smoke, which the outer air seemed to suck from the depths of the cavern. “Biscarrat! Biscarrat!” cried the fugitives, “you knew there was an ambuscade in that cavern, and you did not warn us! Biscarrat, you are the cause that four of us are murdered men! Woe be to you, Biscarrat!”

“You are the cause of my being wounded unto death,” said one of the young men, letting a gush of scarlet life-blood vomit in his palm, and spattering it into Biscarrat's livid face. "My blood be on your head!" And he rolled in agony at the feet of the young man.

"But, at least, tell us who is there?" cried several furious voices.

Biscarrat remained silent. "Tell us, or die!" cried the wounded man, raising himself upon one knee, and lifting towards his companion an arm bearing a useless sword. Biscarrat rushed towards him, opening his breast for the blow, but the wounded man fell back not to rise again, uttering a groan which was his last. Biscarrat, with hair on end, haggard eyes, and bewildered head, advanced towards the interior of the cavern, saying, "You are right. Death to me, who have allowed my comrades to be assassinated. I am a worthless wretch!" And throwing away his sword, for he wished to die without defending himself, he rushed head foremost into the cavern. The others followed him. The eleven who remained out of sixteen imitated his example; but they did not go further than the first. A second discharge laid five upon the icy sand; and as it was impossible to see whence this murderous thunder issued, the others fell back with a terror that can be better imagined than described. But, far from flying, as the others had done, Biscarrat remained safe and sound, seated on a fragment of rock, and waited. There were only six gentlemen left.

"Seriously," said one of the survivors, "is it the devil?"

"*Ma foi!* it is much worse," said another.

"Ask Biscarrat, he knows."

"Where is Biscarrat?" The young men looked round them, and saw that Biscarrat did not answer.

"He is dead!" said two or three voices.

"Oh! no!" replied another, "I saw him through the smoke, sitting quietly on a rock. He is in the cavern; he is waiting for us."

"He must know who are there."

"And how should he know them?"

"He was taken prisoner by the rebels."

"That is true. Well! let us call him, and learn from him whom we have to deal with." And all voices shouted, "Biscarrat! Biscarrat!" But Biscarrat did not answer.

"Good!" said the officer who had shown so much coolness in the affair. "We have no longer any need of him; here are reinforcements coming."

In fact, a company of guards, left in the rear by their officers, whom the ardor of the chase had carried away — from seventy-five to eighty men —

arrived in good order, led by their captain and the first lieutenant. The five officers hastened to meet their soldiers; and, in language the eloquence of which may be easily imagined, they related the adventure, and asked for aid. The captain interrupted them. “Where are your companions?” demanded he.

“Dead!”

“But there were sixteen of you!”

“Ten are dead. Biscarrat is in the cavern, and we are five.”

“Biscarrat is a prisoner?”

“Probably.”

“No, for here he is — look.” In fact, Biscarrat appeared at the opening of the grotto.

“He is making a sign to come on,” said the officer. “Come on!”

“Come on!” cried all the troop. And they advanced to meet Biscarrat.

“Monsieur,” said the captain, addressing Biscarrat, “I am assured that you know who the men are in that grotto, and who make such a desperate defense. In the king’s name I command you to declare what you know.”

“Captain,” said Biscarrat, “you have no need to command me. My word has been restored to me this very instant; and I came in the name of these men.”

“To tell me who they are?”

“To tell you they are determined to defend themselves to the death, unless you grant them satisfactory terms.”

“How many are there of them, then?”

“There are two,” said Biscarrat.

“There are two — and want to impose conditions upon us?”

“There are two, and they have already killed ten of our men.”

“What sort of people are they — giants?”

“Worse than that. Do you remember the history of the Bastion Saint-Gervais, captain?”

“Yes; where four musketeers held out against an army.”

“Well, these are two of those same musketeers.”

“And their names?”

“At that period they were called Porthos and Aramis. Now they are styled M. d’Herblay and M. du Vallon.”

“And what interest have they in all this?”

“It is they who were holding Bell-Isle for M. Fouquet.”

A murmur ran through the ranks of the soldiers on hearing the two words “Porthos and Aramis.” “The musketeers! the musketeers!” repeated they. And among all these brave men, the idea that they were going to have a struggle against two of the oldest glories of the French army, made a shiver, half enthusiasm, two-thirds terror, run through them. In fact, those four names — D’Artagnan, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis — were venerated among all who wore a sword; as, in antiquity, the names of Hercules, Theseus, Castor, and Pollux were venerated.

“Two men — and they have killed ten in two discharges! It is impossible, Monsieur Biscarrat!”

“Eh! captain,” replied the latter, “I do not tell you that they have not with them two or three men, as the musketeers of the Bastion Saint-Gervais had two or three lackeys; but, believe me, captain, I have seen these men, I have been taken prisoner by them — I know they themselves alone are all-sufficient to destroy an army.”

“That we shall see,” said the captain, “and that in a moment, too. Gentlemen, attention!”

At this reply, no one stirred, and all prepared to obey. Biscarrat alone risked a last attempt.

“Monsieur,” said he, in a low voice, “be persuaded by me; let us pass on our way. Those two men, those two lions you are going to attack, will defend themselves to the death. They have already killed ten of our men; they will kill double the number, and end by killing themselves rather than surrender. What shall we gain by fighting them?”

“We shall gain the consciousness, monsieur, of not having allowed eighty of the king’s guards to retire before two rebels. If I listened to your advice, monsieur, I should be a dishonored man; and by dishonoring myself I should dishonor the army. Forward, my men!”

And he marched first as far as the opening of the grotto. There he halted. The object of this halt was to give Biscarrat and his companions time to describe to him the interior of the grotto. Then, when he believed he had a sufficient acquaintance with the place, he divided his company into three bodies, which were to enter successively, keeping up a sustained fire in all directions. No doubt, in this attack they would lose five more, perhaps ten; but, certainly, they must end by taking the rebels, since there was no issue; and, at any rate, two men could not kill eighty.

“Captain,” said Biscarrat, “I beg to be allowed to march at the head of the first platoon.”

“So be it,” replied the captain; “you have all the honor. I make you a present of it.”

“Thanks!” replied the young man, with all the firmness of his race.

“Take your sword, then.”

“I shall go as I am, captain,” said Biscarrat, “for I do not go to kill, I go to be killed.”

And placing himself at the head of the first platoon, with head uncovered and arms crossed, — ”March, gentlemen,” said he.

CHAPTER XLIX.

An Homeric Song.

It is time to pass to the other camp, and to describe at once the combatants and the field of battle. Aramis and Porthos had gone to the grotto of Locmaria with the expectation of finding there their canoe ready armed, as well as the three Bretons, their assistants; and they at first hoped to make the bark pass through the little issue of the cavern, concealing in that fashion both their labors and their flight. The arrival of the fox and dogs obliged them to remain concealed. The grotto extended the space of about a hundred *toises*, to that little slope dominating a creek. Formerly a temple of the Celtic divinities, when Belle-Isle was still called Kalonese, this grotto had beheld more than one human sacrifice accomplished in its mystic depths. The first entrance to the cavern was by a moderate descent, above which distorted rocks formed a weird arcade; the interior, very uneven and dangerous from the inequalities of the vault, was subdivided into several compartments, which communicated with each other by means of rough and jagged steps, fixed right and left, in uncouth natural pillars. At the third compartment the vault was so low, the passage so narrow, that the bark would scarcely have passed without touching the side; nevertheless, in moments of despair, wood softens and stone grows flexible beneath the human will. Such was the thought of Aramis, when, after having fought the fight, he decided upon flight — a flight most dangerous, since all the assailants were not dead; and that, admitting the possibility of putting the bark to sea, they would have to fly in open day, before the conquered, so interested on recognizing their small number, in pursuing their conquerors. When the two discharges had killed ten men, Aramis, familiar with the windings of the cavern, went to reconnoiter them one by one, and counted them, for the smoke prevented seeing outside; and he immediately commanded that the canoe should be rolled as far as the great stone, the closure of the liberating issue. Porthos collected all his strength, took the canoe in his arms, and raised it up, whilst the Bretons made it run rapidly along the rollers. They had descended into the third compartment; they had arrived at the stone which walled the outlet. Porthos seized this gigantic stone at its base, applied his robust shoulder, and gave a heave which made the wall crack. A cloud of dust fell from the vault, with the ashes of ten thousand generations of sea birds, whose nests stuck like cement to the rock. At the third shock the stone gave way, and oscillated for a minute. Porthos, placing his back against the neighboring rock, made an arch with his foot, which drove the block out of the calcareous masses which served for hinges and cramps. The stone fell, and daylight was visible, brilliant, radiant, flooding the cavern through the opening, and the blue sea appeared to the delighted Bretons. They began to lift the bark over the barricade. Twenty more *toises*, and it would glide into the ocean. It was during this time that the company arrived, was drawn up by the captain, and disposed for either an escalade or an assault. Aramis watched over everything, to favor the labors of his friends. He saw the reinforcements, counted the men, and convinced himself at a single glance of the insurmountable peril to which fresh combat would expose them. To escape by sea, at the moment the cavern was about to be invaded, was impossible. In fact, the daylight which had just been admitted to the last compartments had exposed to the soldiers the bark being rolled towards the sea, the two rebels within musket-shot; and one of their discharges would riddle the boat if it did not kill the navigators. Besides, allowing everything, — if the bark escaped with the men on board of it, how could the alarm be suppressed — how could notice to the royal lighters be prevented? What could hinder the poor canoe, followed by sea and watched from the shore, from succumbing before the end of the day? Aramis, digging his hands into his gray hair with rage, invoked the assistance of God and the assistance of the demons. Calling to Porthos, who was doing more work than all the rollers — whether of flesh or wood — ”My friend,” said he, “our adversaries have just received a reinforcement.”

“Ah, ah!” said Porthos, quietly, “what is to be done, then?”

“To recommence the combat,” said Aramis, “is hazardous.”

“Yes,” said Porthos, “for it is difficult to suppose that out of two, one should not be killed; and certainly, if one of us was killed, the other would get himself killed also.” Porthos spoke these words with that heroic nature which, with him, grew grander with necessity.

Aramis felt it like a spur to his heart. “We shall neither of us be killed if you do what I tell you, friend Porthos.”

“Tell me what?”

“These people are coming down into the grotto.”

“Yes.”

“We could kill about fifteen of them, but no more.”

“How many are there in all?” asked Porthos.

“They have received a reinforcement of seventy-five men.”

“Seventy-five and five, eighty. Ah!” sighed Porthos.

“If they fire all at once they will riddle us with balls.”

“Certainly they will.”

“Without reckoning,” added Aramis, “that the detonation might occasion a collapse of the cavern.”

“Ay,” said Porthos, “a piece of falling rock just now grazed my shoulder.”

“You see, then?”

“Oh! it is nothing.”

“We must determine upon something quickly. Our Bretons are going to continue to roll the canoe towards the sea.”

“Very well.”

“We two will keep the powder, the balls, and the muskets here.”

“But only two, my dear Aramis — we shall never fire three shots together,” said Porthos, innocently, “the defense by musketry is a bad one.”

“Find a better, then.”

“I have found one,” said the giant, eagerly; “I will place myself in ambuscade behind the pillar with this iron bar, and invisible, unattackable, if they come in floods, I can let my bar fall upon their skulls, thirty times in a minute. *Hein!* what do you think of the project? You smile!”

“Excellent, dear friend, perfect! I approve it greatly; only you will frighten them, and half of them will remain outside to take us by famine. What we want, my good friend, is the entire destruction of the troop. A single survivor encompasses our ruin.”

“You are right, my friend, but how can we attract them, pray?”

“By not stirring, my good Porthos.”

“Well! we won’t stir, then; but when they are all together — ”

“Then leave it to me, I have an idea.”

“If it is so, and your idea proves a good one — and your idea is most likely to be good — I am satisfied.”

“To your ambuscade, Porthos, and count how many enter.”

“But you, what will you do?”

“Don’t trouble yourself about me; I have a task to perform.”

“I think I hear shouts.”

“It is they! To your post. Keep within reach of my voice and hand.”

Porthos took refuge in the second compartment, which was in darkness, absolutely black. Aramis glided into the third; the giant held in his hand an iron bar of about fifty pounds weight. Porthos handled this lever, which had been used in rolling the bark, with marvelous facility. During this time, the Bretons had pushed the bark to the beach. In the further and lighter compartment, Aramis, stooping and concealed, was busy with some mysterious maneuver. A command was given in a loud voice. It was the last order of the captain commandant. Twenty-five men jumped from the upper rocks into the first compartment of the grotto, and having taken their ground, began to fire. The echoes shrieked and barked, the hissing balls seemed actually to rarefy the air, and then opaque smoke filled the vault.

“To the left! to the left!” cried Biscarrat, who, in his first assault, had seen the passage to the second chamber, and who, animated by the smell of powder, wished to guide his soldiers in that direction. The troop, accordingly, precipitated themselves to the left — the passage gradually growing narrower. Biscarrat, with his hands stretched forward, devoted to death, marched in advance of the muskets. “Come on! come on!” exclaimed he, “I see daylight!”

“Strike, Porthos!” cried the sepulchral voice of Aramis.

Porthos breathed a heavy sigh — but he obeyed. The iron bar fell full and direct upon the head of Biscarrat, who was dead before he had ended his cry. Then the formidable lever rose ten times in ten seconds, and made ten corpses. The soldiers could see nothing; they heard sighs and groans; they stumbled over dead bodies, but as they had no conception of the cause of all this, they came forward jostling each other. The implacable bar, still falling, annihilated the first platoon, without a single sound to warn the second, which was quietly advancing; only, commanded by the captain, the men had stripped a fir, growing on the shore, and, with its resinous branches twisted together, the captain had made a flambeau. On arriving at the compartment where Porthos, like the exterminating angel, had destroyed all he touched, the first rank drew back in terror. No firing had replied to that of the guards, and yet their way was stopped by a heap of dead bodies — they literally walked in blood. Porthos was still behind his pillar. The captain, illumining with trembling pine-torch this frightful carnage, of which he in vain sought the cause, drew back towards the pillar behind which Porthos was concealed. Then a gigantic hand issued from the shade, and fastened on the throat of the captain, who uttered a stifle rattle; his stretched-out arms beating the air, the torch fell and was extinguished in blood. A second after, the corpse of the captain dropped close to the extinguished torch, and added another body to the heap of dead which blocked up the passage. All this was effected as mysteriously as though by magic. At hearing the rattling in the throat of the captain, the soldiers who accompanied him had turned round, caught a glimpse of his extended arms, his eyes starting from their sockets, and then the torch fell and they were left in darkness. From an unreflective, instinctive, mechanical feeling, the lieutenant cried:

“Fire!”

Immediately a volley of musketry flamed, thundered, roared in the cavern, bringing down enormous fragments from the vaults. The cavern was lighted for an instant by this discharge, and then immediately returned to pitchy darkness rendered thicker by the smoke. To this succeeded a profound silence, broken only by the steps of the third brigade, now entering the cavern.

CHAPTER L.

The Death of a Titan.

At the moment when Porthos, more accustomed to the darkness than these men, coming from open daylight, was looking round him to see if through this artificial midnight Aramis were not making him some signal, he felt his arm gently touched, and a voice low as a breath murmured in his ear, “Come.”

“Oh!” said Porthos.

“Hush!” said Aramis, if possible, yet more softly.

And amidst the noise of the third brigade, which continued to advance, the imprecations of the guards still left alive, the muffled groans of the dying, Aramis and Porthos glided unseen along the granite walls of the cavern. Aramis led Porthos into the last but one compartment, and showed him, in a hollow of the rocky wall, a barrel of powder weighing from seventy to eighty pounds, to which he had just attached a fuse. “My friend,” said he to Porthos, “you will take this barrel, the match of which I am going to set fire to, and throw it amidst our enemies; can you do so?”

“*Parbleu!*” replied Porthos; and he lifted the barrel with one hand. “Light it!”

“Stop,” said Aramis, “till they are all massed together, and then, my Jupiter, hurl your thunderbolt among them.”

“Light it,” repeated Porthos.

“On my part,” continued Aramis, “I will join our Bretons, and help them to get the canoe to the sea. I will wait for you on the shore; launch it strongly, and hasten to us.”

“Light it,” said Porthos, a third time.

“But do you understand me?”

“*Parbleu!*” said Porthos again, with laughter that he did not even attempt to restrain, “when a thing is explained to me I understand it; begone, and give me the light.”

Aramis gave the burning match to Porthos, who held out his arm to him, his hands being engaged. Aramis pressed the arm of Porthos with both his hands, and fell back to the outlet of the cavern where the three rowers awaited him.

Porthos, left alone, applied the spark bravely to the match. The spark — a feeble spark, first principle of conflagration — shone in the darkness like a glow-worm, then was deadened against the match which it set fire to, Porthos enlivening the flame with his breath. The smoke was a little dispersed, and by the light of the sparkling match objects might, for two seconds, be distinguished. It was a brief but splendid spectacle, that of this giant, pale, bloody, his countenance lighted by the fire of the match burning in surrounding darkness! The soldiers saw him, they saw the barrel he held in his hand — they at once understood what was going to happen. Then, these men, already choked with horror at the sight of what had been accomplished, filled with terror at thought of what was about to be accomplished, gave out a simultaneous shriek of agony. Some endeavored to fly, but they encountered the third brigade, which barred their passage; others mechanically took aim and attempted to fire their discharged muskets; others fell instinctively upon their knees. Two or three officers cried out to Porthos to promise him his liberty if he would spare their lives. The lieutenant of the third brigade commanded his men to fire; but the guards had before them their terrified companions, who served as a living rampart for Porthos. We have said that the light produced by the spark and the match did not last more than two seconds; but during these two seconds this is what it illumined: in the first place, the giant, enlarged in the darkness; then, at ten paces off, a heap of bleeding bodies, crushed, mutilated, in the midst of which some still heaved in the last agony, lifting the mass as a last respiration inflating the sides of some old monster dying in the night. Every breath of Porthos, thus vivifying the match, sent towards this heap of bodies a phosphorescent aura, mingled with streaks of purple. In addition to this principal group scattered about the grotto, as the chances of death or surprise had stretched them, isolated bodies seemed to be making ghastly exhibitions of their gaping wounds. Above ground, bedded in pools of blood, rose, heavy and sparkling, the short, thick pillars of the cavern, of which the strongly marked shades threw out the luminous particles. And all this was seen by the tremulous light of a match attached to a barrel of powder, that is to say, a torch which, whilst throwing a light on the dead past, showed death to come.

As I have said, this spectacle did not last above two seconds. During this short space of time an officer of the third brigade got together eight men armed with muskets, and, through an opening, ordered them to fire upon Porthos. But they who received the order to fire trembled so that three guards fell by the discharge, and the five remaining balls hissed on to splinter the vault, plow the ground, or indent the pillars of the cavern.

A burst of laughter replied to this volley; then the arm of the giant swung round; then was seen whirling through the air, like a falling star, the train of fire. The barrel, hurled a distance of thirty feet, cleared the barricade of dead bodies, and fell amidst a group of shrieking soldiers, who threw themselves on their faces. The officer had followed the brilliant train in the air; he endeavored to precipitate himself upon the barrel and tear out the match before it reached the powder it contained. Useless! The air had made the flame attached to the conductor more active; the match, which at rest might have burnt five minutes, was consumed in thirty seconds, and the infernal work exploded. Furious vortices of sulphur and nitre, devouring shoals of fire which caught every object, the terrible thunder of the explosion, this is what the second which followed disclosed in that cavern of horrors. The rocks split like planks of deal beneath the axe. A jet of fire, smoke, and *debris* sprang from the middle of the grotto, enlarging as it mounted. The large walls of silex tottered and fell upon the sand, and the sand itself, an instrument of pain when launched from its hard bed, riddled the faces with its myriad cutting atoms. Shrieks, imprecations, human life, dead bodies — all were engulfed in one terrific crash.

The three first compartments became one sepulchral sink into which fell grimly back, in the order of their weight, every vegetable, mineral, or human fragment. Then the lighter sand and ash came down in turn, stretching like a winding sheet and smoking over the dismal scene. And now, in this burning tomb, this subterranean volcano, seek the king’s guards with their blue coats laced with silver. Seek the officers, brilliant in gold, seek for the arms upon which they depended for their defense. One single man has made of all of those things a chaos more confused, more shapeless, more terrible than the chaos which existed before the creation of the world. There remained nothing of the three compartments — nothing by which God could have recognized His handiwork. As for Porthos, after having hurled the barrel of powder amidst his enemies, he had fled, as Aramis had directed him to do, and had gained the last compartment, into which air, light, and sunshine penetrated through the opening. Scarcely had he turned the angle which separated the third compartment from the fourth when he perceived at a hundred paces from him the bark dancing on the waves. There were his friends, there liberty, there life and victory. Six more of his formidable strides, and he would be out of the vault; out of the vault! a dozen of his vigorous leaps and he would reach the canoe. Suddenly he felt his knees give way; his knees seemed powerless, his legs to yield beneath him.

“Oh! oh!” murmured he, “there is my weakness seizing me again! I can walk no further! What is this?”

Aramis perceived him through the opening, and unable to conceive what could induce him to stop thus — ”Come on, Porthos! come on,” he cried; “come quickly!”

“Oh!” replied the giant, making an effort that contorted every muscle of his body — ”oh! but I cannot.” While saying these words, he fell upon his knees, but with his mighty hands he clung to the rocks, and raised himself up again.

“Quick! quick!” repeated Aramis, bending forward towards the shore, as if to draw Porthos towards him with his arms.

“Here I am,” stammered Porthos, collecting all his strength to make one step more.

“In the name of Heaven! Porthos, make haste! the barrel will blow up!”

“Make haste, monseigneur!” shouted the Bretons to Porthos, who was floundering as in a dream.

But there was no time; the explosion thundered, earth gaped, the smoke which hurled through the clefts obscured the sky; the sea flowed back as though driven by the blast of flame which darted from the grotto as if from the jaws of some gigantic fiery chimera; the reflux took the bark out twenty *toises*; the solid rocks cracked to their base, and separated like blocks beneath the operation of the wedge; a portion of the vault was carried up towards heaven, as if it had been built of cardboard; the green and blue and topaz conflagration and black lava of liquefactions clashed and combated an instant beneath a majestic dome of smoke; then oscillated, declined, and fell successively the mighty monoliths of rock which the violence of the explosion had not been able to uproot from the bed of ages; they bowed to each other like grave and stiff old men, then prostrating themselves, lay down forever in their dusty tomb.

This frightful shock seemed to restore Porthos the strength that he had lost; he arose, a giant among granite giants. But at the moment he was flying between the double hedge of granite phantoms, these latter, which were no longer supported by the corresponding links, began to roll and totter round our Titan, who looked as if precipitated from heaven amidst rocks which he had just been launching. Porthos felt the very earth beneath his feet becoming jelly-tremulous. He stretched both hands to repulse the falling rocks. A gigantic block was held back by each of his extended arms. He bent his head, and a third granite mass sank between his shoulders. For an instant the power of Porthos seemed about to fail him, but this new Hercules united all his force, and the two walls of the prison in which he was buried fell back slowly and gave him place. For an instant he appeared, in this frame of granite, like the angel of chaos, but in pushing back the lateral rocks, he lost his point of support, for the monolith which weighed upon his shoulders, and the boulder, pressing upon him with all its weight, brought the giant down upon his knees. The lateral rocks, for an instant pushed back, drew together again, and added their weight to the ponderous mass which would have been sufficient to crush ten men. The hero fell without a groan — he fell while answering Aramis with words of encouragement and hope, for, thanks to the powerful arch of his hands, for an instant he believed that, like Enceladus, he would succeed in shaking off the triple load. But by degrees Aramis beheld the block sink; the hands, strung for an instant, the arms stiffened for a last effort, gave way, the extended shoulders sank, wounded and torn, and the rocks continued to gradually collapse.

“Porthos! Porthos!” cried Aramis, tearing his hair. “Porthos! where are you? Speak!”

“Here, here,” murmured Porthos, with a voice growing evidently weaker, “patience! patience!”

Scarcely had he pronounced these words, when the impulse of the fall augmented the weight; the enormous rock sank down, pressed by those others which sank in from the sides, and, as it were, swallowed up Porthos in a sepulcher of badly jointed stones. On hearing the dying voice of his friend, Aramis had sprung to land. Two of the Bretons followed him, with each a lever in his hand — one being sufficient to take care of the bark. The dying rattle of the valiant gladiator guided them amidst the ruins. Aramis, animated, active and young as at twenty, sprang towards the triple mass, and with his hands, delicate as those of a woman, raised by a miracle of strength the corner-stone of this great granite grave. Then he caught a glimpse, through the darkness of that charnel-house, of the still brilliant eye of his friend, to whom the momentary lifting of the mass restored a momentary respiration. The two men came rushing up, grasped their iron levers, united their triple strength, not merely to raise it, but sustain it. All was useless. They gave way with cries of grief, and the rough voice of Porthos, seeing them exhaust themselves in a useless struggle, murmured in an almost cheerful tone those supreme words which came to his lips with the last respiration, “Too heavy!”

After which his eyes darkened and closed, his face grew ashy pale, the hands whitened, and the colossus sank quite down, breathing his last sigh. With him sank the rock, which, even in his dying agony he had still held up. The three men dropped the levers, which rolled upon the tumulary stone. Then, breathless, pale, his brow covered with sweat, Aramis listened, his breast oppressed, his heart ready to break.

Nothing more. The giant slept the eternal sleep, in the sepulcher which God had built about him to his measure.

CHAPTER LI.

Porthos's Epitaph.

Aramis, silent and sad as ice, trembling like a timid child, arose shivering from the stone. A Christian does not walk on tombs. But, though capable of standing, he was not capable of walking. It might be said that something of dead Porthos had just died within him. His Bretons surrounded him; Aramis yielded to their kind exertions, and the three sailors, lifting him up, carried him to the canoe. Then, having laid him down upon the bench near the rudder, they took to their oars, preferring this to hoisting sail, which might betray them.

On all that leveled surface of the ancient grotto of Locmaria, one single hillock attracted their eyes. Aramis never removed his from it; and, at a distance out in the sea, in proportion as the shore receded, that menacing proud mass of rock seemed to draw itself up, as formerly Porthos used to draw himself up, raising a smiling, yet invincible head towards heaven, like that of his dear old honest valiant friend, the strongest of the four, yet the first dead. Strange destiny of these men of brass! The most simple of heart allied to the most crafty; strength of body guided by subtlety of mind; and in the decisive moment, when vigor alone could save mind and body, a stone, a rock, a vile material weight, triumphed over manly strength, and falling upon the body, drove out the mind.

Worthy Porthos! born to help other men, always ready to sacrifice himself for the safety of the weak, as if God had only given him strength for that purpose; when dying he only thought he was carrying out the conditions of his compact with Aramis, a compact, however, which Aramis alone had drawn up, and which Porthos had only known to suffer by its terrible solidarity. Noble Porthos! of what good now are thy chateaux overflowing with sumptuous furniture, forests overflowing with game, lakes overflowing with fish, cellars overflowing with wealth! Of what service to thee now thy lackeys in brilliant liveries, and in the midst of them Mousqueton, proud of the power delegated by thee! Oh, noble Porthos! careful heaper-up of treasure, was it worth while to labor to sweeten and gild life, to come upon a desert shore, surrounded by the cries of seagulls, and lay thyself, with broken bones, beneath a torpid stone? Was it worth while, in short, noble Porthos, to heap so much gold, and not have even the distich of a poor poet engraven upon thy monument? Valiant Porthos! he still, without doubt, sleeps, lost, forgotten, beneath the rock the shepherds of the heath take for the gigantic abode of a *dolmen*. And so many twining branches, so many mosses, bent by the bitter wind of ocean, so many lichens solder thy sepulcher to earth, that no passers-by will imagine such a block of granite could ever have been supported by the shoulders of one man.

Aramis, still pale, still icy-cold, his heart upon his lips, looked, even till, with the last ray of daylight, the shore faded on the horizon. Not a word escaped him, not a sigh rose from his deep breast. The superstitious Bretons looked upon him, trembling. Such silence was not that of a man, it was the silence of a statue. In the meantime, with the first gray lines that lighted up the heavens, the canoe hoisted its little sail, which, swelling with the kisses of the breeze, and carrying them rapidly from the coast, made bravest way towards Spain, across the dreaded Gulf of Gascony, so rife with storms. But scarcely half an hour after the sail had been hoisted, the rowers became inactive, reclining on their benches, and, making an eye-shade with their hands, pointed out to each other a white spot which appeared on the horizon as motionless as a gull rocked by the viewless respiration of the waves. But that which might have appeared motionless to ordinary eyes was moving at a quick rate to the experienced eye of the sailor; that which appeared stationary upon the ocean was cutting a rapid way through it. For some time, seeing the profound torpor in which their master was plunged, they did not dare to rouse him, and satisfied themselves with exchanging their conjectures in whispers. Aramis, in fact, so vigilant, so active — Aramis, whose eye, like that of the lynx, watched without ceasing, and saw better by night than by day — Aramis seemed to sleep in this despair of soul. An hour passed thus, during which daylight gradually disappeared, but during which also the sail in view gained so swiftly on the bark, that Goenne, one of the three sailors, ventured to say aloud:

“Monseigneur, we are being chased!”

Aramis made no reply; the ship still gained upon them. Then, of their own accord, two of the sailors, by the direction of the patron Yves, lowered the sail, in order that that single point upon the surface of the waters should cease to be a guide to the eye of the enemy pursuing them. On the part of the ship in sight, on the contrary, two more small sails were run up at the extremities of the masts. Unfortunately, it was the time of the finest and longest days of the year, and the moon, in all her brilliancy, succeeded inauspicious daylight. The *balancelle*, which was pursuing the little bark before the wind, had then still half an hour of twilight, and a whole night almost as light as day.

“Monseigneur! monseigneur! we are lost!” said the captain. “Look! they see us plainly, though we have lowered sail.”

“That is not to be wondered at,” murmured one of the sailors, “since they say that, by the aid of the devil, the Paris-folk have fabricated instruments with which they see as well at a distance as near, by night as well as by day.”

Aramis took a telescope from the bottom of the boat, focussed it silently, and passing it to the sailor, “Here,” said he, “look!” The sailor hesitated.

“Don’t be alarmed,” said the bishop, “there is no sin in it; and if there is any sin, I will take it on myself.”

The sailor lifted the glass to his eye, and uttered a cry. He believed that the vessel, which appeared to be distant about cannon-shot, had at a single bound cleared the whole distance. But, on withdrawing the instrument from his eye, he saw that, except the way which the *balancelle* had been able to make during that brief instant, it was still at the same distance.

“So,” murmured the sailor, “they can see us as we see them.”

“They see us,” said Aramis, and sank again into impassibility.

“What! — they see us!” said Yves. “Impossible!”

“Well, captain, look yourself,” said the sailor. And he passed him the glass.

“Monseigneur assures me that the devil has nothing to do with this?” asked Yves.

Aramis shrugged his shoulders.

The skipper lifted the glass to his eye. “Oh! monseigneur,” said he, “it is a miracle — there they are; it seems as if I were going to touch them. Twenty-five men at least! Ah! I see the captain forward. He holds a glass like this, and is looking at us. Ah! he turns round, and gives an order; they are rolling a piece of cannon forward — they are loading it — pointing it. *Misericorde!* they are firing at us!”

And by a mechanical movement, the skipper put aside the telescope, and the pursuing ship, relegated to the horizon, appeared again in its true aspect. The vessel was still at the distance of nearly a league, but the maneuver sighted thus was not less real. A light cloud of smoke appeared beneath the sails, more blue than they, and spreading like a flower opening; then, at about a mile from the little canoe, they saw the ball take the crown off two or three waves, dig a white furrow in the sea, and disappear at the end of it, as inoffensive as the stone with which, in play, a boy makes ducks and drakes. It was at once a menace and a warning.

"What is to be done?" asked the patron.

"They will sink us!" said Goenne, "give us absolution, monseigneur!" And the sailors fell on their knees before him.

"You forget that they can see you," said he.

"That is true!" said the sailors, ashamed of their weakness. "Give us your orders, monseigneur, we are prepared to die for you."

"Let us wait," said Aramis.

"How — let us wait?"

"Yes; do you not see, as you just now said, that if we endeavor to fly, they will sink us?"

"But, perhaps," the patron ventured to say, "perhaps under cover of night, we could escape them."

"Oh!" said Aramis, "they have, no doubt, Greek fire with which to lighten their own course and ours likewise."

At the same moment, as if the vessel was responsive to the appeal of Aramis, a second cloud of smoke mounted slowly to the heavens, and from the bosom of that cloud sparkled an arrow of flame, which described a parabola like a rainbow, and fell into the sea, where it continued to burn, illuminating a space of a quarter of a league in diameter.

The Bretons looked at each other in terror. "You see plainly," said Aramis, "it will be better to wait for them."

The oars dropped from the hands of the sailors, and the bark, ceasing to make way, rocked motionless upon the summits of the waves. Night came on, but still the ship drew nearer. It might be imagined it redoubled its speed with darkness. From time to time, as a vulture rears its head out of its nest, the formidable Greek fire darted from its sides, and cast its flame upon the ocean like an incandescent snowfall. At last it came within musket-shot. All the men were on deck, arms in hand; the cannoniers were at their guns, the matches burning. It might be thought they were about to board a frigate and to fight a crew superior in number to their own, not to attempt the capture of a canoe manned by four people.

“Surrender!” cried the commander of the *balancelle,* with the aid of his speaking-trumpet.

The sailors looked at Aramis. Aramis made a sign with his head. Yves waved a white cloth at the end of a gaff. This was like striking their flag. The pursuer came on like a race-horse. It launched a fresh Greek fire, which fell within twenty paces of the little canoe, and threw a light upon them as white as sunshine.

“At the first sign of resistance,” cried the commander of the *balancelle*, “fire!” The soldiers brought their muskets to the present.

“Did we not say we surrendered?” said Yves.

“Alive, alive, captain!” cried one excited soldier, “they must be taken alive.”

“Well, yes — living,” said the captain. Then turning towards the Bretons, “Your lives are safe, my friends!” cried he, “all but the Chevalier d’Herblay.”

Aramis stared imperceptibly. For an instant his eye was fixed upon the depths of the ocean, illumined by the last flashes of the Greek fire, which ran along the sides of the waves, played on the crests like plumes, and rendered still darker and more terrible the gulfs they covered.

“Do you hear, monseigneur?” said the sailors.

“Yes.”

“What are your orders?”

“Accept!”

“But you, monseigneur?”

Aramis leaned still more forward, and dipped the ends of his long white fingers in the green limpid waters of the sea, to which he turned with smiles as to a friend.

“Accept!” repeated he.

“We accept,” repeated the sailors; “but what security have we?”

“The word of a gentleman,” said the officer. “By my rank and by my name I swear that all except M. le Chevalier d’Herblay shall have their lives spared. I am lieutenant of the king’s frigate the ‘Pomona,’ and my name is Louis Constant de Pressigny.”

With a rapid gesture, Aramis — already bent over the side of the bark towards the sea — drew himself up, and with a flashing eye, and a smile upon his lips, “Throw out the ladder, messieurs,” said he, as if the command had belonged to him. He was obeyed. When Aramis, seizing the rope ladder, walked straight up to the commander, with a firm step, looked at him earnestly, made a sign to him with his hand, a mysterious and unknown sign at sight of which the officer turned pale, trembled, and bowed his head, the sailors were profoundly astonished. Without a word Aramis then raised his hand to the eyes of the commander and showed him the collet of a ring he wore on the ring-finger of his left hand. And while making this sign Aramis, draped in cold and haughty majesty, had the air of an emperor giving his hand to be kissed. The commandant, who for a moment had raised his head, bowed a second time with marks of the most profound respect. Then stretching his hand out, in his turn, towards the poop, that is to say, towards his own cabin, he drew back to allow Aramis to go first. The three Bretons, who had come on board after their bishop, looked at each other, stupefied. The crew were awed to silence. Five minutes after, the commander called the second lieutenant, who returned immediately, ordering the head to be put towards Corunna. Whilst this order was being executed, Aramis reappeared upon the deck, and took a seat near the *bastingage*. Night had fallen; the moon had not yet risen, yet Aramis looked incessantly towards Belle-Isle. Yves then approached the captain, who had returned to take his post in the stern, and said, in a low and humble voice, “What course are we to follow, captain?”

“We take what course monseigneur pleases,” replied the officer.

Aramis passed the night leaning upon the *bastingage*. Yves, on approaching him next morning, remarked that “the night must have been a very damp one, for the wood on which the bishop’s head had rested was soaked with dew.” Who knows? — that dew was, it may be, the first tears that had ever fallen from the eyes of Aramis!

What epitaph would have been worth that, good Porthos?

CHAPTER LII.

M. de Gesvres's Round.

D'Artagnan was little used to resistance like that he had just experienced. He returned, profoundly irritated, to Nantes. Irritation, with this vigorous man, usually vented itself in impetuous attack, which few people, hitherto, were they king, were they giants, had been able to resist. Trembling with rage, he went straight to the castle, and asked an audience with the king. It might be about seven o'clock in the morning, and, since his arrival at Nantes, the king had been an early riser. But on arriving at the corridor with which we are acquainted, D'Artagnan found M. de Gesvres, who stopped him politely, telling him not to speak too loud and disturb the king. "Is the king asleep?" said D'Artagnan. "Well, I will let him sleep. But about what o'clock do you suppose he will rise?"

"Oh! in about two hours; his majesty has been up all night."

D'Artagnan took his hat again, bowed to M. de Gesvres, and returned to his own apartments. He came back at half-past nine, and was told that the king was at breakfast. "That will just suit me," said D'Artagnan. "I will talk to the king while he is eating."

M. de Brienne reminded D'Artagnan that the king would not see any one at meal-time.

"But," said D'Artagnan, looking askant at Brienne, "you do not know, perhaps, monsieur, that I have the privilege of *entree* anywhere — and at any hour."

Brienne took the captain's hand kindly, and said, "Not at Nantes, dear Monsieur d'Artagnan. The king, in this journey, has changed everything."

D'Artagnan, a little softened, asked about what o'clock the king would have finished his breakfast.

"We don't know."

"Eh? — don't know! What does that mean? You don't know how much time the king devotes to eating? It is generally an hour; and, if we admit that the air of the Loire gives an additional appetite, we will extend it to an hour and a half; that is enough, I think. I will wait where I am."

“Oh! dear Monsieur d’Artagnan, the order of the day is not to allow any person to remain in this corridor; I am on guard for that particular purpose.”

D’Artagnan felt his anger mounting to his brain a second time. He went out quickly, for fear of complicating the affair by a display of premature ill-humor. As soon as he was out he began to reflect. “The king,” said he, “will not receive me, that is evident. The young man is angry; he is afraid, beforehand, of the words that I may speak to him. Yes; but in the meantime Belle-Isle is besieged, and my two friends by now probably taken or killed. Poor Porthos! As to Master Aramis, he is always full of resources, and I am easy on his account. But, no, no; Porthos is not yet an invalid, nor is Aramis in his dotage. The one with his arm, the other with his imagination, will find work for his majesty’s soldiers. Who knows if these brave men may not get up for the edification of his most Christian majesty a little bastion of Saint-Gervais! I don’t despair of it. They have cannon and a garrison. And yet,” continued D’Artagnan, “I don’t know whether it would not be better to stop the combat. For myself alone I will not put up with either surly looks or insults from the king; but for my friends I must put up with everything. Shall I go to M. Colbert? Now, there is a man I must acquire the habit of terrifying. I will go to M. Colbert.” And D’Artagnan set forward bravely to find M. Colbert, but was informed that he was working with the king, at the castle of Nantes. “Good!” cried he, “the times have come again in which I measured my steps from De Treville to the cardinal, from the cardinal to the queen, from the queen to Louis XIII. Truly is it said that men, in growing old, become children again! — To the castle, then!” He returned thither. M. de Lyonne was coming out. He gave D’Artagnan both hands, but told him that the king had been busy all the preceding evening and all night, and that orders had been given that no one should be admitted. “Not even the captain who takes the order?” cried D’Artagnan. “I think that is rather too strong.”

“Not even he,” said M. de Lyonne.

“Since that is the case,” replied D’Artagnan, wounded to the heart; “since the captain of the musketeers, who has always entered the king’s chamber, is no longer allowed to enter it, his cabinet, or his *salle-a-manger*, either the king is dead, or his captain is in disgrace. Do me the favor, then, M. de Lyonne, who are in favor, to return and tell the king, plainly, I send him my resignation.”

“D’Artagnan, beware of what you are doing!”

"For friendship's sake, go!" and he pushed him gently towards the cabinet.

"Well, I will go," said Lyonne.

D'Artagnan waited, walking about the corridor in no enviable mood. Lyonne returned.

"Well, what did the king say?" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

"He simply answered, ''Tis well,'" replied Lyonne.

"That it was well!" said the captain, with an explosion. "That is to say, that he accepts it? Good! Now, then, I am free! I am only a plain citizen, M. de Lyonne. I have the pleasure of bidding you good-bye! Farewell, castle, corridor, ante-chamber! a *bourgeois*, about to breathe at liberty, takes his farewell of you."

And without waiting longer, the captain sprang from the terrace down the staircase, where he had picked up the fragments of Gourville's letter. Five minutes after, he was at the hostelry, where, according to the custom of all great officers who have lodgings at the castle, he had taken what was called his city-chamber. But when he arrived there, instead of throwing off his sword and cloak, he took his pistols, put his money into a large leather purse, sent for his horses from the castle-stables, and gave orders that would ensure their reaching Vannes during the night. Everything went on according to his wishes. At eight o'clock in the evening, he was putting his foot in the stirrup, when M. de Gesvres appeared, at the head of twelve guards, in front of the hostelry. D'Artagnan saw all from the corner of his eye; he could not fail seeing thirteen men and thirteen horses. But he feigned not to observe anything, and was about to put his horse in motion. Gesvres rode up to him. "Monsieur d'Artagnan!" said he, aloud.

"Ah, Monsieur de Gesvres! good evening!"

"One would say you were getting on horseback."

"More than that, — I am mounted, — as you see."

"It is fortunate I have met with you."

"Were you looking for me, then?"

"*Mon Dieu!* yes."

"On the part of the king, I will wager?"

"Yes."

"As I, three days ago, went in search of M. Fouquet?"

"Oh!"

"Nonsense! It is of no use being over-delicate with me; that is all labor lost. Tell me at once you are come to arrest me."

"To arrest you? — Good heavens! no."

"Why do you come to accost me with twelve horsemen at your heels, then?"

"I am making my round."

"That isn't bad! And so you pick me up in your round, eh?"

"I don't pick you up; I meet with you, and I beg you to come with me."

"Where?"

"To the king."

"Good!" said D'Artagnan, with a bantering air; "the king is disengaged."

"For Heaven's sake, captain," said M. de Gesvres, in a low voice to the musketeer, "do not compromise yourself! these men hear you."

D'Artagnan laughed aloud, and replied:

"March! People who are arrested are placed between the six first guards and the six last."

"But as I am not arresting you," said M. de Gesvres, "you will march behind, with me, if you please."

"Well," said D'Artagnan, "that is very polite, duke, and you are right in being so; for if ever I had had to make my rounds near your *chambre-de-ville*, I should have been courteous to you, I assure you, on the word of a gentleman! Now, one favor more; what does the king want with me?"

"Oh, the king is furious!"

"Very well! the king, who has thought it worth while to be angry, may take the trouble to grow calm again; that is all. I shan't die of that, I will swear."

"No, but — "

"But — I shall be sent to keep company with unfortunate M. Fouquet. *Mordioux!* That is a gallant man, a worthy man! We shall live very sociably together, I will be sworn."

"Here we are at our place of destination," said the duke. "Captain, for Heaven's sake be calm with the king!"

"Ah! ah! you are playing the brave man with me, duke!" said D'Artagnan, throwing one of his defiant glances over Gesvres. "I have been told that you are ambitious of uniting your guards with my musketeers. This strikes me as a splendid opportunity."

"I will take exceeding good care not to avail myself of it, captain."

"And why not, pray?"

"Oh, for many reasons — in the first place, for this: if I were to succeed you in the musketeers after having arrested you — "

"Ah! then you admit you have arrested me?"

"No, I *don't*."

"Say met me, then. So, you were saying *if* you were to succeed me after having arrested me?"

"Your musketeers, at the first exercise with ball cartridges, would fire *my* way, by mistake."

"Oh, as to that I won't say; for the fellows *do* love me a little."

Gesvres made D'Artagnan pass in first, and took him straight to the cabinet where Louis was waiting for his captain of the musketeers, and placed himself behind his colleague in the ante-chamber. The king could be heard distinctly, speaking aloud to Colbert in the same cabinet where Colbert might have heard, a few days before, the king speaking aloud with M. d'Artagnan. The guards remained as a mounted picket before the principal gate; and the report was quickly spread throughout the city that monsieur le capitaine of the musketeers had been arrested by order of the king. Then these men were seen to be in motion, and as in the good old times of Louis XIII. and M. de Treville, groups were formed, and staircases were filled; vague murmurs, issuing from the court below, came rolling to the upper stories, like the distant moaning of the waves. M. de Gesvres became uneasy. He looked at his guards, who, after being interrogated by the musketeers who had just got among their ranks, began to shun them with a manifestation of innocence. D'Artagnan was certainly less disturbed by all this than M. de Gesvres, the captain of the guards. As soon as he entered, he seated himself on the ledge of a window whence with his eagle glance he saw all that was going on without the least emotion. No step of the progressive fermentation which had shown itself at the report of his arrest escaped him. He foresaw the very moment the explosion would take place; and we know that his previsions were in general correct.

"It would be very whimsical," thought he, "if, this evening, my praetorians should make me king of France. How I should laugh!"

But, at the height, all was stopped. Guards, musketeers, officers, soldiers, murmurs, uneasiness, dispersed, vanished, died away; there was an end of menace and sedition. One word had calmed the waves. The king had desired Brienne to say, "Hush, messieurs! you disturb the king."

D’Artagnan sighed. “All is over!” said he; “the musketeers of the present day are not those of his majesty Louis XIII. All is over!”

“Monsieur d’Artagnan, you are wanted in the ante-chamber of the king,” proclaimed an usher.

CHAPTER LIII.

King Louis XIV.

The king was seated in his cabinet, with his back turned towards the door of entrance. In front of him was a mirror, in which, while turning over his papers, he could see at a glance those who came in. He did not take any notice of the entrance of D'Artagnan, but spread above his letters and plans the large silk cloth he used to conceal his secrets from the importunate. D'Artagnan understood this by-play, and kept in the background; so that at the end of a minute the king, who heard nothing, and saw nothing save from the corner of his eye, was obliged to cry, "Is not M. d'Artagnan there?"

"I am here, sire," replied the musketeer, advancing.

"Well, monsieur," said the king, fixing his pellucid eyes on D'Artagnan, "what have you to say to me?"

"I, sire!" replied the latter, who watched the first blow of his adversary to make a good retort; "I have nothing to say to your majesty, unless it be that you have caused me to be arrested, and here I am."

The king was going to reply that he had not had D'Artagnan arrested, but any such sentence appeared too much like an excuse, and he was silent. D'Artagnan likewise preserved an obstinate silence.

"Monsieur," at length resumed the king, "what did I charge you to go and do at Belle-Isle? Tell me, if you please."

The king while uttering these words looked intently at his captain. Here D'Artagnan was fortunate; the king seemed to place the game in his hands.

"I believe," replied he, "that your majesty does me the honor to ask what I went to Belle-Isle to accomplish?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Well! sire, I know nothing about it; it is not of me that question should be asked, but of that infinite number of officers of all kinds, to whom have been given innumerable orders of all kinds, whilst to me, head of the expedition, nothing precise was said or stated in any form whatever."

The king was hurt: he showed it by his reply. "Monsieur," said he, "orders have only been given to such as were judged faithful."

"And, therefore, I have been astonished, sire," retorted the musketeer, "that a captain like myself, who ranks with a marechal of France, should have found himself under the orders of five or six lieutenants or majors, good to make spies of, possibly, but not at all fit to conduct a warlike expedition. It was upon this subject I came to demand an explanation of your majesty, when I found the door closed against me, which, the final insult offered to a brave man, has led me to quit your majesty's service."

"Monsieur," replied the king, "you still believe that you are living in an age when kings were, as you complain of having been, under the orders and at the discretion of their inferiors. You seem to forget that a king owes an account of his actions to none but God."

"I forget nothing, sire," said the musketeer, wounded by this lesson. "Besides, I do not see in what an honest man, when he asks of his king how he has ill-served him, offends him."

"You have ill-served me, monsieur, by siding with my enemies against me."

"Who are your enemies, sire?"

"The men I sent you to fight."

"Two men the enemies of the whole of your majesty's army! That is incredible."

"You have no power to judge of my will."

"But I have to judge of my own friendships, sire."

"He who serves his friends does not serve his master."

"I so well understand this, sire, that I have respectfully offered your majesty my resignation."

"And I have accepted it, monsieur," said the king. "Before being separated from you I was willing to prove to you that I know how to keep my word."

"Your majesty has kept more than your word, for your majesty has had me arrested," said D'Artagnan, with his cold, bantering air; "you did not promise me that, sire."

The king would not condescend to perceive the pleasantry, and continued, seriously, "You see, monsieur, to what grave steps your disobedience forces me."

"My disobedience!" cried D'Artagnan, red with anger.

"It is the mildest term that I can find," pursued the king. "My idea was to take and punish rebels; was I bound to inquire whether these rebels were your friends or not?”

“But I was,” replied D’Artagnan. “It was a cruelty on your majesty’s part to send me to capture my friends and lead them to your gibbets.”

“It was a trial I had to make, monsieur, of pretended servants, who eat my bread and *should* defend my person. The trial has succeeded ill, Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

“For one bad servant your majesty loses,” said the musketeer, with bitterness, “there are ten who, on that same day, go through a like ordeal. Listen to me, sire; I am not accustomed to that service. Mine is a rebel sword when I am required to do ill. It was ill to send me in pursuit of two men whose lives M. Fouquet, your majesty’s preserver, implored you to save. Still further, these men were my friends. They did not attack your majesty, they succumbed to your blind anger. Besides, why were they not allowed to escape? What crime had they committed? I admit you may contest with me the right of judging their conduct. But why suspect me before the action? Why surround me with spies? Why disgrace me before the army? Why me, in whom till now you showed the most entire confidence — who for thirty years have been attached to your person, and have given you a thousand proofs of my devotion — for it must be said, now that I am accused — why reduce me to see three thousand of the king’s soldiers march in battle against two men?”

“One would say you have forgotten what these men have done to me!” said the king, in a hollow voice, “and that it was no merit of theirs I was not lost.”

“Sire, one would imagine you forget that I was there.”

“Enough, Monsieur d’Artagnan, enough of these dominating interests which arise to keep the sun itself from my interests. I am founding a state in which there shall be but one master, as I promised you; the moment is at hand for me to keep my promise. You wish to be, according to your tastes or private friendships, free to destroy my plans and save my enemies? I will thwart you or will drop you — seek a more compliant master. I know full well that another king would not conduct himself as I do, and would allow himself to be dominated by you, at the risk of sending you some day to keep company with M. Fouquet and the rest; but I have an excellent memory, and for me, services are sacred titles to gratitude, to impunity. You shall only have this lesson, Monsieur d’Artagnan, as the punishment of your want of discipline, and I will not imitate my predecessors in anger, not having imitated them in favor. And, then, other reasons make me act mildly towards you; in the first place, because you are a man of sense, a man of excellent sense, a man of heart, and that you will be a capital servant to him who shall have mastered you; secondly, because you will cease to have any motives for insubordination. Your friends are now destroyed or ruined by me. These supports on which your capricious mind instinctively relied I have caused to disappear. At this moment, my soldiers have taken or killed the rebels of Belle-Isle."

D'Artagnan became pale. "Taken or killed!" cried he. "Oh! sire, if you thought what you tell, if you were sure you were telling me the truth, I should forget all that is just, all that is magnanimous in your words, to call you a barbarous king, and an unnatural man. But I pardon you these words," said he, smiling with pride; "I pardon them to a young prince who does not know, who cannot comprehend what such men as M. d'Herblay, M. du Vallon, and myself are. Taken or killed! Ah! Ah! sire! tell me, if the news is true, how much has it cost you in men and money. We will then reckon if the game has been worth the stakes."

As he spoke thus, the king went up to him in great anger, and said, "Monsieur d'Artagnan, your replies are those of a rebel! Tell me, if you please, who is king of France? Do you know any other?"

"Sire," replied the captain of the musketeers, coldly, "I very well remember that one morning at Vaux you addressed that question to many people who did not answer to it, whilst I, on my part, did answer to it. If I recognized my king on that day, when the thing was not easy, I think it would be useless to ask the question of me now, when your majesty and I are alone."

At these words Louis cast down his eyes. It appeared to him that the shade of the unfortunate Philippe passed between D'Artagnan and himself, to evoke the remembrance of that terrible adventure. Almost at the same moment an officer entered and placed a dispatch in the hands of the king, who, in his turn, changed color, while reading it.

"Monsieur," said he, "what I learn here you would know later; it is better I should tell you, and that you should learn it from the mouth of your king. A battle has taken place at Belle-Isle."

"Is it possible?" said D'Artagnan, with a calm air, though his heart was beating fast enough to choke him. "Well, sire?"

"Well, monsieur — and I have lost a hundred and ten men."

A beam of joy and pride shone in the eyes of D’Artagnan. “And the rebels?” said he.

“The rebels have fled,” said the king.

D’Artagnan could not restrain a cry of triumph. “Only,” added the king, “I have a fleet which closely blockades Belle-Isle, and I am certain not a bark can escape.”

“So that,” said the musketeer, brought back to his dismal idea, “if these two gentlemen are taken — ”

“They will be hanged,” said the king, quietly.

“And do they know it?” replied D’Artagnan, repressing his trembling.

“They know it, because you must have told them yourself; and all the country knows it.”

“Then, sire, they will never be taken alive, I will answer for that.”

“Ah!” said the king, negligently, and taking up his letter again. “Very well, they will be dead, then, Monsieur d’Artagnan, and that will come to the same thing, since I should only take them to have them hanged.”

D’Artagnan wiped the sweat which flowed from his brow.

“I have told you,” pursued Louis XIV., “that I would one day be an affectionate, generous, and constant master. You are now the only man of former times worthy of my anger or my friendship. I will not spare you either sentiment, according to your conduct. Could you serve a king, Monsieur d’Artagnan, who should have a hundred kings, his equals, in the kingdom? Could I, tell me, do with such weak instruments the great things I meditate? Did you ever see an artist effect great works with an unworthy tool? Far from us, monsieur, the old leaven of feudal abuse! The Fronde, which threatened to ruin monarchy, has emancipated it. I am master at home, Captain d’Artagnan, and I shall have servants who, lacking, perhaps, your genius, will carry devotion and obedience to the verge of heroism. Of what consequence, I ask you, of what consequence is it that God has given no sense to arms and legs? It is to the head he has given genius, and the head, you know, the rest obey. I am the head.”

D’Artagnan started. Louis XIV. continued as if he had seen nothing, although this emotion had not by any means escaped him. “Now, let us conclude between us two the bargain I promised to make with you one day when you found me in a very strange predicament at Blois. Do me justice, monsieur, when you admit I do not make any one pay for the tears of shame that I then shed. Look around you; lofty heads have bowed. Bow yours, or choose such exile as will suit you. Perhaps, when reflecting upon it, you will find your king has a generous heart, who reckons sufficiently upon your loyalty to allow you to leave him dissatisfied, when you possess a great state secret. You are a brave man; I know you to be so. Why have you judged me prematurely? Judge me from this day forward, D'Artagnan, and be as severe as you please."

D'Artagnan remained bewildered, mute, undecided for the first time in his life. At last he had found an adversary worthy of him. This was no longer trick, it was calculation; no longer violence, but strength; no longer passion, but will; no longer boasting, but council. This young man who had brought down a Fouquet, and could do without a D'Artagnan, deranged the somewhat headstrong calculations of the musketeer.

"Come, let us see what stops you?" said the king, kindly. "You have given in your resignation; shall I refuse to accept it? I admit that it may be hard for such an old captain to recover lost good-humor."

"Oh!" replied D'Artagnan, in a melancholy tone, "that is not my most serious care. I hesitate to take back my resignation because I am old in comparison with you, and have habits difficult to abandon. Henceforward, you must have courtiers who know how to amuse you — madmen who will get themselves killed to carry out what you call your great works. Great they will be, I feel — but, if by chance I should not think them so? I have seen war, sire, I have seen peace; I have served Richelieu and Mazarin; I have been scorched with your father, at the fire of Rochelle; riddled with sword-thrusts like a sieve, having grown a new skin ten times, as serpents do. After affronts and injustices, I have a command which was formerly something, because it gave the bearer the right of speaking as he liked to his king. But your captain of the musketeers will henceforward be an officer guarding the outer doors. Truly, sire, if that is to be my employment from this time, seize the opportunity of our being on good terms, to take it from me. Do not imagine that I bear malice; no, you have tamed me, as you say; but it must be confessed that in taming me you have lowered me; by bowing me you have convicted me of weakness. If you knew how well it suits me to carry my head high, and what a pitiful mien I shall have while scenting the dust of your carpets! Oh! sire, I regret sincerely, and you will regret as I do, the old days when the king of France saw in every vestibule those insolent gentlemen, lean, always swearing — cross-grained mastiffs, who could bite mortally in the hour of danger or of battle. These men were the best of courtiers to the hand which fed them — they would lick it; but for the hand that struck them, oh! the bite that followed! A little gold on the lace of their cloaks, a slender stomach in their *hauts-de-chausses*, a little sparkling of gray in their dry hair, and you will behold the handsome dukes and peers, the haughty *marechaux* of France. But why should I tell you all this? The king is master; he wills that I should make verses, he wills that I should polish the mosaics of his ante-chambers with satin shoes. *Mordioux!* that is difficult, but I have got over greater difficulties. I will do it. Why should I do it? Because I love money? — I have enough. Because I am ambitious? — my career is almost at an end. Because I love the court? No. I will remain here because I have been accustomed for thirty years to go and take the orderly word of the king, and to have said to me 'Good evening, D'Artagnan,' with a smile I did not beg for. That smile I will beg for! Are you content, sire?" And D'Artagnan bowed his silver head, upon which the smiling king placed his white hand with pride.

"Thanks, my old servant, my faithful friend," said he. "As, reckoning from this day, I have no longer any enemies in France, it remains with me to send you to a foreign field to gather your marshal's baton. Depend upon me for finding you an opportunity. In the meanwhile, eat of my very best bread, and sleep in absolute tranquillity."

"That is all kind and well!" said D'Artagnan, much agitated. "But those poor men at Belle-Isle? One of them, in particular — so good! so brave! so true!"

"Do you ask their pardon of me?"

"Upon my knees, sire!"

"Well! then, go and take it to them, if it be still in time. But do you answer for them?"

"With my life, sire."

“Go, then. To-morrow I set out for Paris. Return by that time, for I do not wish you to leave me in the future.”

“Be assured of that, sire,” said D’Artagnan, kissing the royal hand.

And with a heart swelling with joy, he rushed out of the castle on his way to Belle-Isle.

CHAPTER LIV.

M. Fouquet’s Friends.

The king had returned to Paris, and with him D’Artagnan, who, in twenty-four hours, having made with greatest care all possible inquiries at Belle-Isle, succeeded in learning nothing of the secret so well kept by the heavy rock of Locmaria, which had fallen on the heroic Porthos. The captain of the musketeers only knew what those two valiant men — these two friends, whose defense he had so nobly taken up, whose lives he had so earnestly endeavored to save — aided by three faithful Bretons, had accomplished against a whole army. He had seen, spread on the neighboring heath, the human remains which had stained with clouted blood the scattered stones among the flowering broom. He learned also that a bark had been seen far out at sea, and that, like a bird of prey, a royal vessel had pursued, overtaken, and devoured the poor little bird that was flying with such palpitating wings. But there D’Artagnan’s certainties ended. The field of supposition was thrown open. Now, what could he conjecture? The vessel had not returned. It is true that a brisk wind had prevailed for three days; but the corvette was known to be a good sailer and solid in its timbers; it had no need to fear a gale of wind, and it ought, according to the calculation of D’Artagnan, to have either returned to Brest, or come back to the mouth of the Loire. Such was the news, ambiguous, it is true, but in some degree reassuring to him personally, which D’Artagnan brought to Louis XIV., when the king, followed by all the court, returned to Paris.

Louis, satisfied with his success — Louis, more mild and affable as he felt himself more powerful — had not ceased for an instant to ride beside the carriage door of Mademoiselle de la Valliere. Everybody was anxious to amuse the two queens, so as to make them forget this abandonment by son and husband. Everything breathed the future, the past was nothing to anybody. Only that past was like a painful bleeding wound to the hearts of certain tender and devoted spirits. Scarcely was the king reinstalled in Paris, when he received a touching proof of this. Louis XIV. had just risen and taken his first repast when his captain of the musketeers presented himself before him. D’Artagnan was pale and looked unhappy. The king, at the first glance, perceived the change in a countenance generally so unconcerned. “What is the matter, D’Artagnan?” said he.

“Sire, a great misfortune has happened to me.”

“Good heavens! what is that?”

“Sire, I have lost one of my friends, M. du Vallon, in the affair of Belle-Isle.”

And, while speaking these words, D’Artagnan fixed his falcon eye upon Louis XIV., to catch the first feeling that would show itself.

“I knew it,” replied the king, quietly.

“You knew it, and did not tell me!” cried the musketeer.

“To what good? Your grief, my friend, was so well worthy of respect. It was my duty to treat it gently. To have informed you of this misfortune, which I knew would pain you so greatly, D’Artagnan, would have been, in your eyes, to have triumphed over you. Yes, I knew that M. du Vallon had buried himself beneath the rocks of Locmaria; I knew that M. d’Herblay had taken one of my vessels with its crew, and had compelled it to convey him to Bayonne. But I was willing you should learn these matters in a direct manner, in order that you might be convinced my friends are with me respected and sacred; that always in me the man will sacrifice himself to subjects, whilst the king is so often found to sacrifice men to majesty and power.”

“But, sire, how could you know?”

“How do you yourself know, D’Artagnan?”

“By this letter, sire, which M. d’Herblay, free and out of danger, writes me from Bayonne.”

“Look here,” said the king, drawing from a casket placed upon the table closet to the seat upon which D’Artagnan was leaning, “here is a letter copied exactly from that of M. d’Herblay. Here is the very letter, which Colbert placed in my hands a week before you received yours. I am well served, you may perceive.”

“Yes, sire,” murmured the musketeer, “you were the only man whose star was equal to the task of dominating the fortune and strength of my two friends. You have used your power, sire, you will not abuse it, will you?”

“D’Artagnan,” said the king, with a smile beaming with kindness, “I could have M. d’Herblay carried off from the territories of the king of Spain, and brought here, alive, to inflict justice upon him. But, D’Artagnan, be assured I will not yield to this first and natural impulse. He is free — let him continue free.”

“Oh, sire! you will not always remain so clement, so noble, so generous as you have shown yourself with respect to me and M. d’Herblay; you will have about you counselors who will cure you of that weakness.”

“No, D’Artagnan, you are mistaken when you accuse my council of urging me to pursue rigorous measures. The advice to spare M. d’Herblay comes from Colbert himself.”

“Oh, sire!” said D’Artagnan, extremely surprised.

“As for you,” continued the king, with a kindness very uncommon to him, “I have several pieces of good news to announce to you; but you shall know them, my dear captain, the moment I have made my accounts all straight. I have said that I wish to make, and would make, your fortune; that promise will soon become reality.”

“A thousand times thanks, sire! I can wait. But I implore you, whilst I go and practice patience, that your majesty will deign to notice those poor people who have for so long a time besieged your ante-chamber, and come humbly to lay a petition at your feet.”

“Who are they?”

“Enemies of your majesty.” The king raised his head.

“Friends of M. Fouquet,” added D’Artagnan.

“Their names?”

“M. Gourville, M. Pelisson, and a poet, M. Jean de la Fontaine.”

The king took a moment to reflect. “What do they want?”

“I do not know.”

“How do they appear?”

“In great affliction.”

“What do they say?”

“Nothing.”

“What do they do?”

“They weep.”

“Let them come in,” said the king, with a serious brow.

D’Artagnan turned rapidly on his heel, raised the tapestry which closed the entrance to the royal chamber, and directing his voice to the adjoining room, cried, “Enter.”

The three men D’Artagnan had named immediately appeared at the door of the cabinet in which were the king and his captain. A profound silence prevailed in their passage. The courtiers, at the approach of the friends of the unfortunate superintendent of finances, drew back, as if fearful of being affected by contagion with disgrace and misfortune. D'Artagnan, with a quick step, came forward to take by the hand the unhappy men who stood trembling at the door of the cabinet; he led them in front of the king's *fauteuil*, who, having placed himself in the embrasure of a window, awaited the moment of presentation, and was preparing himself to give the supplicants a rigorously diplomatic reception.

The first of the friends of Fouquet's to advance was Pelisson. He did not weep, but his tears were only restrained that the king might better hear his voice and prayer. Gourville bit his lips to check his tears, out of respect for the king. La Fontaine buried his face in his handkerchief, and the only signs of life he gave were the convulsive motions of his shoulders, raised by his sobs.

The king preserved his dignity. His countenance was impassible. He even maintained the frown which appeared when D'Artagnan announced his enemies. He made a gesture which signified, "Speak;" and he remained standing, with his eyes fixed searchingly on these desponding men. Pelisson bowed to the ground, and La Fontaine knelt as people do in churches. This dismal silence, disturbed only by sighs and groans, began to excite in the king, not compassion, but impatience.

"Monsieur Pelisson," said he, in a sharp, dry tone. "Monsieur Gourville, and you, Monsieur — " and he did not name La Fontaine, "I cannot, without sensible displeasure, see you come to plead for one of the greatest criminals it is the duty of justice to punish. A king does not allow himself to soften save at the tears of the innocent, the remorse of the guilty. I have no faith either in the remorse of M. Fouquet or the tears of his friends, because the one is tainted to the very heart, and the others ought to dread offending me in my own palace. For these reasons, I beg you, Monsieur Pelisson, Monsieur Gourville, and you, Monsieur — , to say nothing that will not plainly proclaim the respect you have for my will."

"Sire," replied Pelisson, trembling at these words, "we are come to say nothing to your majesty that is not the most profound expression of the most sincere respect and love that are due to a king from all his subjects. Your majesty's justice is redoubtable; every one must yield to the sentences it pronounces. We respectfully bow before it. Far from us the idea of coming to defend him who has had the misfortune to offend your majesty.

He who has incurred your displeasure may be a friend of ours, but he is an enemy to the state. We abandon him, but with tears, to the severity of the king.”

“Besides,” interrupted the king, calmed by that supplicating voice, and those persuasive words, “my parliament will decide. I do not strike without first having weighed the crime; my justice does not wield the sword without employing first a pair of scales.”

“Therefore we have every confidence in that impartiality of the king, and hope to make our feeble voices heard, with the consent of your majesty, when the hour for defending an accused friend strikes.”

“In that case, messieurs, what do you ask of me?” said the king, with his most imposing air.

“Sire,” continued Pelisson, “the accused has a wife and family. The little property he had was scarcely sufficient to pay his debts, and Madame Fouquet, since her husband’s captivity, is abandoned by everybody. The hand of your majesty strikes like the hand of God. When the Lord sends the curse of leprosy or pestilence into a family, every one flies and shuns the abode of the leprous or plague-stricken. Sometimes, but very rarely, a generous physician alone ventures to approach the ill-reputed threshold, passes it with courage, and risks his life to combat death. He is the last resource of the dying, the chosen instrument of heavenly mercy. Sire, we supplicate you, with clasped hands and bended knees, as a divinity is supplicated! Madame Fouquet has no longer any friends, no longer any means of support; she weeps in her deserted home, abandoned by all those who besieged its doors in the hour of prosperity; she has neither credit nor hope left. At least, the unhappy wretch upon whom your anger falls receives from you, however culpable he may be, his daily bread though moistened by his tears. As much afflicted, more destitute than her husband, Madame Fouquet — the lady who had the honor to receive your majesty at her table — Madame Fouquet, the wife of the ancient superintendent of your majesty’s finances, Madame Fouquet has no longer bread.”

Here the mortal silence which had chained the breath of Pelisson’s two friends was broken by an outburst of sobs; and D’Artagnan, whose chest heaved at hearing this humble prayer, turned round towards the angle of the cabinet to bite his mustache and conceal a groan.

The king had preserved his eye dry and his countenance severe; but the blood had mounted to his cheeks, and the firmness of his look was visibly diminished.

"What do you wish?" said he, in an agitated voice.

"We come humbly to ask your majesty," replied Pelisson, upon whom emotion was fast gaining, "to permit us, without incurring the displeasure of your majesty, to lend to Madame Fouquet two thousand pistoles collected among the old friends of her husband, in order that the widow may not stand in need of the necessaries of life."

At the word *widow*, pronounced by Pelisson whilst Fouquet was still alive, the king turned very pale; — his pride disappeared; pity rose from his heart to his lips; he cast a softened look upon the men who knelt sobbing at his feet.

"God forbid," said he, "that I should confound the innocent with the guilty. They know me but ill who doubt my mercy towards the weak. I strike none but the arrogant. Do, messieurs, do all that your hearts counsel you to assuage the grief of Madame Fouquet. Go, messieurs — go!"

The three now rose in silence with dry eyes. The tears had been scorched away by contact with their burning cheeks and eyelids. They had not the strength to address their thanks to the king, who himself cut short their solemn reverences by entrenching himself suddenly behind the *fauteuil*.

D'Artagnan remained alone with the king.

"Well," said he, approaching the young prince, who interrogated him with his look. "Well, my master! If you had not the device which belongs to your sun, I would recommend you one which M. Conrart might translate into eclectic Latin, 'Calm with the lowly; stormy with the strong.'"

The king smiled, and passed into the next apartment, after having said to D'Artagnan, "I give you the leave of absence you must want to put the affairs of your friend, the late M. du Vallon, in order."

CHAPTER LV.

Porthos’s Will.

At Pierrefonds everything was in mourning. The courts were deserted — the stables closed — the parterres neglected. In the basins, the fountains, formerly so jubilantly fresh and noisy, had stopped of themselves. Along the roads around the chateau came a few grave personages mounted on mules or country nags. These were rural neighbors, cures and bailiffs of adjacent estates. All these people entered the chateau silently, handed their horses to a melancholy-looking groom, and directed their steps, conducted by a huntsman in black, to the great dining-room, where Mousqueton received them at the door. Mousqueton had become so thin in two days that his clothes moved upon him like an ill-fitting scabbard in which the sword-blade dances at each motion. His face, composed of red and white, like that of the Madonna of Vandyke, was furrowed by two silver rivulets which had dug their beds in his cheeks, as full formerly as they had become flabby since his grief began. At each fresh arrival, Mousqueton found fresh tears, and it was pitiful to see him press his throat with his fat hand to keep from bursting into sobs and lamentations. All these visits were for the purpose of hearing the reading of Porthos’s will, announced for that day, and at which all the covetous friends of the dead man were anxious to be present, as he had left no relations behind him.

The visitors took their places as they arrived, and the great room had just been closed when the clock struck twelve, the hour fixed for the reading of the important document. Porthos’s procureur — and that was naturally the successor of Master Coquenard — commenced by slowly unfolding the vast parchment upon which the powerful hand of Porthos had traced his sovereign will. The seal broken — the spectacles put on — the preliminary cough having sounded — every one pricked up his ears. Mousqueton had squatted himself in a corner, the better to weep and the better to hear. All at once the folding-doors of the great room, which had been shut, were thrown open as if by magic, and a warlike figure appeared upon the threshold, resplendent in the full light of the sun. This was D’Artagnan, who had come alone to the gate, and finding nobody to hold his stirrup, had tied his horse to the knocker and announced himself. The splendor of daylight invading the room, the murmur of all present, and, more than all, the instinct of the faithful dog, drew Mousqueton from his reverie; he raised his head, recognized the old friend of his master, and, screaming with grief, he embraced his knees, watering the floor with his tears. D'Artagnan raised the poor intendant, embraced him as if he had been a brother, and, having nobly saluted the assembly, who all bowed as they whispered to each other his name, he went and took his seat at the extremity of the great carved oak hall, still holding by the hand poor Mousqueton, who was suffocating with excess of woe, and sank upon the steps. Then the procureur, who, like the rest, was considerably agitated, commenced.

Porthos, after a profession of faith of the most Christian character, asked pardon of his enemies for all the injuries he might have done them. At this paragraph, a ray of inexpressible pride beamed from the eyes of D'Artagnan.

He recalled to his mind the old soldier; all those enemies of Porthos brought to earth by his valiant hand; he reckoned up the numbers of them, and said to himself that Porthos had acted wisely, not to enumerate his enemies or the injuries done to them, or the task would have been too much for the reader. Then came the following schedule of his extensive lands:

"I possess at this present time, by the grace of God —

"1. The domain of Pierrefonds, lands, woods, meadows, waters, and forests, surrounded by good walls.

"2. The domain of Bracieux, chateaux, forests, plowed lands, forming three farms.

"3. The little estate Du Vallon, so named because it is in the valley." (Brave Porthos!)

"4. Fifty farms in Touraine, amounting to five hundred acres.

"5. Three mills upon the Cher, bringing in six hundred livres each.

"6. Three fish-pools in Berry, producing two hundred livres a year.

"As to my personal or movable property, so called because it can be moved, as is so well explained by my learned friend the bishop of Vannes — " (D'Artagnan shuddered at the dismal remembrance attached to that name) — the procureur continued imperturbably — "they consist — "

"1. In goods which I cannot detail here for want of room, and which furnish all my chateaux or houses, but of which the list is drawn up by my intendant.”

Every one turned his eyes towards Mousqueton, who was still lost in grief.

“2. In twenty horses for saddle and draught, which I have particularly at my chateau of Pierrefonds, and which are called — Bayard, Roland, Charlemagne, Pepin, Dunois, La Hire, Ogier, Samson, Milo, Nimrod, Urganda, Armida, Flastrade, Dalilah, Rebecca, Yolande, Finette, Grisette, Lisette, and Musette.

“3. In sixty dogs, forming six packs, divided as follows: the first, for the stag; the second, for the wolf; the third, for the wild boar; the fourth, for the hare; and the two others, for setters and protection.

“4. In arms for war and the chase contained in my gallery of arms.

“5. My wines of Anjou, selected for Athos, who liked them formerly; my wines of Burgundy, Champagne, Bordeaux, and Spain, stocking eight cellars and twelve vaults, in my various houses.

“6. My pictures and statues, which are said to be of great value, and which are sufficiently numerous to fatigue the sight.

“7. My library, consisting of six thousand volumes, quite new, and have never been opened.

“8. My silver plate, which is perhaps a little worn, but which ought to weigh from a thousand to twelve hundred pounds, for I had great trouble in lifting the coffer that contained it and could not carry it more than six times round my chamber.

“9. All these objects, in addition to the table and house linen, are divided in the residences I liked the best.”

Here the reader stopped to take breath. Every one sighed, coughed, and redoubled his attention. The procureur resumed:

“I have lived without having any children, and it is probable I never shall have any, which to me is a cutting grief. And yet I am mistaken, for I have a son, in common with my other friends; that is, M. Raoul Auguste Jules de Bragelonne, the true son of M. le Comte de la Fere.

“This young nobleman appears to me extremely worthy to succeed the valiant gentleman of whom I am the friend and very humble servant.”

Here a sharp sound interrupted the reader. It was D’Artagnan’s sword, which, slipping from his baldric, had fallen on the sonorous flooring. Every one turned his eyes that way, and saw that a large tear had rolled from the thick lid of D’Artagnan, half-way down to his aquiline nose, the luminous edge of which shone like a little crescent moon.

“This is why,” continued the procureur, “I have left all my property, movable, or immovable, comprised in the above enumerations, to M. le Vicomte Raoul Auguste Jules de Bragelonne, son of M. le Comte de la Fere, to console him for the grief he seems to suffer, and enable him to add more luster to his already glorious name.”

A vague murmur ran through the auditory. The procureur continued, seconded by the flashing eye of D’Artagnan, which, glancing over the assembly, quickly restored the interrupted silence:

“On condition that M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne do give to M. le Chevalier d’Artagnan, captain of the king’s musketeers, whatever the said Chevalier d’Artagnan may demand of my property. On condition that M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne do pay a good pension to M. le Chevalier d’Herblay, my friend, if he should need it in exile. I leave to my intendant Mousqueton all of my clothes, of city, war, or chase, to the number of forty-seven suits, in the assurance that he will wear them till they are worn out, for the love of and in remembrance of his master. Moreover, I bequeath to M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne my old servant and faithful friend Mousqueton, already named, providing that the said vicomte shall so act that Mousqueton shall declare, when dying, he has never ceased to be happy.”

On hearing these words, Mousqueton bowed, pale and trembling; his shoulders shook convulsively; his countenance, compressed by a frightful grief, appeared from between his icy hands, and the spectators saw him stagger and hesitate, as if, though wishing to leave the hall, he did not know the way.

“Mousqueton, my good friend,” said D’Artagnan, “go and make your preparations. I will take you with me to Athos’s house, whither I shall go on leaving Pierrefonds.”

Mousqueton made no reply. He scarcely breathed, as if everything in that hall would from that time be foreign. He opened the door, and slowly disappeared.

The procureur finished his reading, after which the greater part of those who had come to hear the last will of Porthos dispersed by degrees, many disappointed, but all penetrated with respect. As for D’Artagnan, thus left alone, after having received the formal compliments of the procureur, he was lost in admiration of the wisdom of the testator, who had so judiciously bestowed his wealth upon the most necessitous and the most worthy, with a delicacy that neither nobleman nor courtier could have displayed more kindly. When Porthos enjoined Raoul de Bragelonne to give D'Artagnan all that he would ask, he knew well, our worthy Porthos, that D'Artagnan would ask or take nothing; and in case he did demand anything, none but himself could say what. Porthos left a pension to Aramis, who, if he should be inclined to ask too much, was checked by the example of D'Artagnan; and that word *exile*, thrown out by the testator, without apparent intention, was it not the mildest, most exquisite criticism upon that conduct of Aramis which had brought about the death of Porthos? But there was no mention of Athos in the testament of the dead. Could the latter for a moment suppose that the son would not offer the best part to the father? The rough mind of Porthos had fathomed all these causes, seized all these shades more clearly than law, better than custom, with more propriety than taste.

"Porthos had indeed a heart," said D'Artagnan to himself with a sigh. As he made this reflection, he fancied he hard a groan in the room above him; and he thought immediately of poor Mousqueton, whom he felt it was a pleasing duty to divert from his grief. For this purpose he left the hall hastily to seek the worthy intendant, as he had not returned. He ascended the staircase leading to the first story, and perceived, in Porthos's own chamber, a heap of clothes of all colors and materials, upon which Mousqueton had laid himself down after heaping them all on the floor together. It was the legacy of the faithful friend. Those clothes were truly his own; they had been given to him; the hand of Mousqueton was stretched over these relics, which he was kissing with his lips, with all his face, and covered with his body. D'Artagnan approached to console the poor fellow.

"My God!" said he, "he does not stir — he has fainted!"

But D'Artagnan was mistaken. Mousqueton was dead! Dead, like the dog who, having lost his master, crawls back to die upon his cloak.

CHAPTER LVI.

The Old Age of Athos.

While these affairs were separating forever the four musketeers, formerly bound together in a manner that seemed indissoluble, Athos, left alone after the departure of Raoul, began to pay his tribute to that foretaste of death which is called the absence of those we love. Back in his house at Blois, no longer having even Grimaud to receive a poor smile as he passed through the parterre, Athos daily felt the decline of vigor of a nature which for so long a time had seemed impregnable. Age, which had been kept back by the presence of the beloved object, arrived with that *cortege* of pains and inconveniences, which grows by geometrical accretion. Athos had no longer his son to induce him to walk firmly, with head erect, as a good example; he had no longer, in those brilliant eyes of the young man, an ever-ardent focus at which to kindle anew the fire of his looks. And then, must it be said, that nature, exquisite in tenderness and reserve, no longer finding anything to understand its feelings, gave itself up to grief with all the warmth of common natures when they yield to joy. The Comte de la Fere, who had remained a young man to his sixty-second year; the warrior who had preserved his strength in spite of fatigue; his freshness of mind in spite of misfortune, his mild serenity of soul and body in spite of Milady, in spite of Mazarin, in spite of La Valliere; Athos had become an old man in a week, from the moment at which he lost the comfort of his later youth. Still handsome, though bent, noble, but sad, he sought, since his solitude, the deeper glades where sunshine scarcely penetrated. He discontinued all the mighty exercises he had enjoyed through life, when Raoul was no longer with him. The servants, accustomed to see him stirring with the dawn at all seasons, were astonished to hear seven o’clock strike before their master quitted his bed. Athos remained in bed with a book under his pillow — but he did not sleep, neither did he read. Remaining in bed that he might no longer have to carry his body, he allowed his soul and spirit to wander from their envelope and return to his son, or to God.

His people were sometimes terrified to see him, for hours together, absorbed in silent reverie, mute and insensible; he no longer heard the timid step of the servant who came to the door of his chamber to watch the sleeping or waking of his master. It often occurred that he forgot the day had half passed away, that the hours for the two first meals were gone by. Then he was awakened. He rose, descended to his shady walk, then came out a little into the sun, as though to partake of its warmth for a minute in memory of his absent child. And then the dismal monotonous walk recommenced, until, exhausted, he regained the chamber and his bed, his domicile by choice. For several days the comte did not speak a single word. He refused to receive the visits that were paid him, and during the night he was seen to relight his lamp and pass long hours in writing, or examining parchments.

Athos wrote one of these letters to Vannes, another to Fontainebleau; they remained without answers. We know why: Aramis had quitted France, and D'Artagnan was traveling from Nantes to Paris, from Paris to Pierrefonds. His *valet de chambre* observed that he shortened his walk every day by several turns. The great alley of limes soon became too long for feet that used to traverse it formerly a hundred times a day. The comte walked feebly as far as the middle trees, seated himself upon a mossy bank that sloped towards a sidewalk, and there waited the return of his strength, or rather the return of night. Very shortly a hundred steps exhausted him. At length Athos refused to rise at all; he declined all nourishment, and his terrified people, although he did not complain, although he wore a smile upon his lips, although he continued to speak with his sweet voice — his people went to Blois in search of the ancient physician of the late Monsieur, and brought him to the Comte de la Fere in such a fashion that he could see the comte without being himself seen. For this purpose, they placed him in a closet adjoining the chamber of the patient, and implored him not to show himself, for fear of displeasing their master, who had not asked for a physician. The doctor obeyed. Athos was a sort of model for the gentlemen of the country; the Blaisois boasted of possessing this sacred relic of French glory. Athos was a great seigneur compared with such nobles as the king improvised by touching with his artificial scepter the parched-up trunks of the heraldic trees of the province.

People respected Athos, we say, and they loved him. The physician could not bear to see his people weep, to see flock round him the poor of the canton, to whom Athos had so often given life and consolation by his kind words and his charities. He examined, therefore, from the depths of his hiding-place, the nature of that mysterious malady which bent and aged more mortally every day a man but lately so full of life and a desire to live. He remarked upon the cheeks of Athos the hectic hue of fever, which feeds upon itself; slow fever, pitiless, born in a fold of the heart, sheltering itself behind that rampart, growing from the suffering it engenders, at once cause and effect of a perilous situation. The comte spoke to nobody; he did not even talk to himself. His thought feared noise; it approached to that degree of over-excitement which borders upon ecstasy. Man thus absorbed, though he does not yet belong to God, already appertains no longer to the earth. The doctor remained for several hours studying this painful struggle of the will against superior power; he was terrified at seeing those eyes always fixed, ever directed on some invisible object; was terrified at the monotonous beating of that heart from which never a sigh arose to vary the melancholy state; for often pain becomes the hope of the physician. Half a day passed away thus. The doctor formed his resolution like a brave man; he issued suddenly from his place of retreat, and went straight up to Athos, who beheld him without evincing more surprise than if he had understood nothing of the apparition.

“Monsieur le comte, I crave your pardon,” said the doctor, coming up to the patient with open arms; “but I have a reproach to make you — you shall hear me.” And he seated himself by the pillow of Athos, who had great trouble in rousing himself from his preoccupation.

“What is the matter, doctor?” asked the comte, after a silence.

“The matter is, you are ill, monsieur, and have had no advice.”

“I! ill!” said Athos, smiling.

“Fever, consumption, weakness, decay, monsieur le comte!”

“Weakness!” replied Athos; “is it possible? I do not get up.”

“Come, come! monsieur le comte, no subterfuges; you are a good Christian?”

“I hope so,” said Athos.

“Is it your wish to kill yourself?”

“Never, doctor.”

“Well! monsieur, you are in a fair way of doing so. Thus to remain is suicide. Get well! monsieur le comte, get well!”

"Of what? Find the disease first. For my part, I never knew myself better; never did the sky appear more blue to me; never did I take more care of my flowers."

"You have a hidden grief."

"Concealed! — not at all; the absence of my son, doctor; that is my malady, and I do not conceal it."

"Monsieur le comte, your son lives, he is strong, he has all the future before him — the future of men of merit, of his race; live for him — "

"But I do live, doctor; oh! be satisfied of that," added he, with a melancholy smile; "for as long as Raoul lives, it will be plainly known, for as long as he lives, I shall live."

"What do you say?"

"A very simple thing. At this moment, doctor, I leave life suspended within me. A forgetful, dissipated, indifferent life would be beyond my strength, now I have no longer Raoul with me. You do not ask the lamp to burn when the match has not illumed the flame; do not ask me to live amidst noise and merriment. I vegetate, I prepare myself, I wait. Look, doctor; remember those soldiers we have so often seen together at the ports, where they were waiting to embark; lying down, indifferent, half on one element, half on the other; they were neither at the place where the sea was going to carry them, nor at the place the earth was going to lose them; baggage prepared, minds on the stretch, arms stacked — they waited. I repeat it, the word is the one which paints my present life. Lying down like the soldiers, my ear on the stretch for the report that may reach me, I wish to be ready to set out at the first summons. Who will make me that summons? life or death? God or Raoul? My baggage is packed, my soul is prepared, I await the signal — I wait, doctor, I wait!"

The doctor knew the temper of that mind; he appreciated the strength of that body; he reflected for the moment, told himself that words were useless, remedies absurd, and left the chateau, exhorting Athos's servants not to quit him for a moment.

The doctor being gone, Athos evinced neither anger nor vexation at having been disturbed. He did not even desire that all letters that came should be brought to him directly. He knew very well that every distraction which should arise would be a joy, a hope, which his servants would have paid with their blood to procure him. Sleep had become rare. By intense thinking, Athos forgot himself, for a few hours at most, in a reverie most profound, more obscure than other people would have called a dream. The momentary repose which this forgetfulness thus gave the body, still further fatigued the soul, for Athos lived a double life during these wanderings of his understanding. One night, he dreamt that Raoul was dressing himself in a tent, to go upon an expedition commanded by M. de Beaufort in person. The young man was sad; he clasped his cuirass slowly, and slowly he girded on his sword.

“What is the matter?” asked his father, tenderly.

“What afflicts me is the death of Porthos, ever so dear a friend,” replied Raoul. “I suffer here the grief you soon will feel at home.”

And the vision disappeared with the slumber of Athos. At daybreak one of his servants entered his master’s apartment, and gave him a letter which came from Spain.

“The writing of Aramis,” thought the comte; and he read.

“Porthos is dead!” cried he, after the first lines. “Oh! Raoul, Raoul! thanks! thou keepest thy promise, thou warnest me!”

And Athos, seized with a mortal sweat, fainted in his bed, without any other cause than weakness.

CHAPTER LVII.

Athos's Vision.

When this fainting of Athos had ceased, the comte, almost ashamed of having given way before this superior natural event, dressed himself and ordered his horse, determined to ride to Blois, to open more certain correspondences with either Africa, D'Artagnan, or Aramis. In fact, this letter from Aramis informed the Comte de la Fere of the bad success of the expedition of Belle-Isle. It gave him sufficient details of the death of Porthos to move the tender and devoted heart of Athos to its innermost fibers. Athos wished to go and pay his friend Porthos a last visit. To render this honor to his companion in arms, he meant to send to D'Artagnan, to prevail upon him to recommence the painful voyage to Belle-Isle, to accomplish in his company that sad pilgrimage to the tomb of the giant he had so much loved, then to return to his dwelling to obey that secret influence which was conducting him to eternity by a mysterious road. But scarcely had his joyous servants dressed their master, whom they saw with pleasure preparing for a journey which might dissipate his melancholy; scarcely had the comte's gentlest horse been saddled and brought to the door, when the father of Raoul felt his head become confused, his legs give way, and he clearly perceived the impossibility of going one step further. He ordered himself to be carried into the sun; they laid him upon his bed of moss where he passed a full hour before he could recover his spirits. Nothing could be more natural than this weakness after then inert repose of the latter days. Athos took a *bouillon*, to give him strength, and bathed his dried lips in a glassful of the wine he loved the best — that old Anjou wine mentioned by Porthos in his admirable will. Then, refreshed, free in mind, he had his horse brought again; but only with the aid of his servants was he able painfully to climb into the saddle. He did not go a hundred paces; a shivering seized him again at the turning of the road.

"This is very strange!" said he to his *valet de chambre*, who accompanied him.

“Let us stop, monsieur — I conjure you!” replied the faithful servant; “how pale you are getting!”

“That will not prevent my pursuing my route, now I have once started,” replied the comte. And he gave his horse his head again. But suddenly, the animal, instead of obeying the thought of his master, stopped. A movement, of which Athos was unconscious, had checked the bit.

“Something,” said Athos, “wills that I should go no further. Support me,” added he, stretching out his arms; “quick! come closer! I feel my muscles relax — I shall fall from my horse.”

The valet had seen the movement made by his master at the moment he received the order. He went up to him quickly, received the comte in his arms, and as they were not yet sufficiently distant from the house for the servants, who had remained at the door to watch their master’s departure, not to perceive the disorder in the usually regular proceeding of the comte, the valet called his comrades by gestures and voice, and all hastened to his assistance. Athos had gone but a few steps on his return, when he felt himself better again. His strength seemed to revive and with it the desire to go to Blois. He made his horse turn round: but, at the animal’s first steps, he sunk again into a state of torpor and anguish.

“Well! decidedly,” said he, “it is *willed* that I should stay at home.” His people flocked around him; they lifted him from his horse, and carried him as quickly as possible into the house. Everything was prepared in his chamber, and they put him to bed.

“You will be sure to remember,” said he, disposing himself to sleep, “that I expect letters from Africa this very day.”

“Monsieur will no doubt hear with pleasure that Blaisois’s son is gone on horseback, to gain an hour over the courier of Blois,” replied his *valet de chambre*.

“Thank you,” replied Athos, with his placid smile.

The comte fell asleep, but his disturbed slumber resembled torture rather than repose. The servant who watched him saw several times the expression of internal suffering shadowed on his features. Perhaps Athos was dreaming.

The day passed away. Blaisois’s son returned; the courier had brought no news. The comte reckoned the minutes with despair; he shuddered when those minutes made an hour. The idea that he was forgotten seized him once, and brought on a fearful pang of the heart. Everybody in the house had given up all hopes of the courier — his hour had long passed. Four times the express sent to Blois had repeated his journey, and there was nothing to the address of the comte. Athos knew that the courier only arrived once a week. Here, then, was a delay of eight mortal days to be endured. He commenced the night in this painful persuasion. All that a sick man, irritated by suffering, can add of melancholy suppositions to probabilities already gloomy, Athos heaped up during the early hours of this dismal night. The fever rose: it invaded the chest, where the fire soon caught, according to the expression of the physician, who had been brought back from Blois by Blaisois at his last journey. Soon it gained the head. The physician made two successive bleedings, which dislodged it for the time, but left the patient very weak, and without power of action in anything but his brain. And yet this redoubtable fever had ceased. It besieged with its last palpitations the tense extremities; it ended by yielding as midnight struck.

The physician, seeing the incontestable improvement, returned to Blois, after having ordered some prescriptions, and declared that the comte was saved. Then commenced for Athos a strange, indefinable state. Free to think, his mind turned towards Raoul, that beloved son. His imagination penetrated the fields of Africa in the environs of Gigelli, where M. de Beaufort must have landed with his army. A waste of gray rocks, rendered green in certain parts by the waters of the sea, when it lashed the shore in storms and tempest. Beyond, the shore, strewed over with these rocks like gravestones, ascended, in form of an amphitheater among mastic-trees and cactus, a sort of small town, full of smoke, confused noises, and terrified movements. All of a sudden, from the bosom of this smoke arose a flame, which succeeded, creeping along the houses, in covering the entire surface of the town, and increased by degrees, uniting in its red and angry vortices tears, screams, and supplicating arms outstretched to Heaven.

There was, for a moment, a frightful *pele-mele* of timbers falling to pieces, of swords broken, of stones calcined, trees burnt and disappearing. It was a strange thing that in this chaos, in which Athos distinguished raised arms, in which he heard cries, sobs, and groans, he did not see one human figure. The cannon thundered at a distance, musketry madly barked, the sea moaned, flocks made their escape, bounding over the verdant slope. But not a soldier to apply the match to the batteries of cannon, not a sailor to assist in maneuvering the fleet, not a shepherd in charge of the flocks. After the ruin of the village, the destruction of the forts which dominated it, a ruin and destruction magically wrought without the co-operation of a single human being, the flames were extinguished, the smoke began to subside, then diminished in intensity, paled and disappeared entirely. Night then came over the scene; night dark upon the earth, brilliant in the firmament. The large blazing stars which spangled the African sky glittered and gleamed without illuminating anything.

A long silence ensued, which gave, for a moment, repose to the troubled imagination of Athos; and as he felt that that which he saw was not terminated, he applied more attentively the eyes of his understanding on the strange spectacle which his imagination had presented. This spectacle was soon continued for him. A mild pale moon rose behind the declivities of the coast, streaking at first the undulating ripples of the sea, which appeared to have calmed after the roaring it had sent forth during the vision of Athos — the moon, we say, shed its diamonds and opals upon the briers and bushes of the hills. The gray rocks, so many silent and attentive phantoms, appeared to raise their heads to examine likewise the field of battle by the light of the moon, and Athos perceived that the field, empty during the combat, was now strewn with fallen bodies.

An inexpressible shudder of fear and horror seized his soul as he recognized the white and blue uniforms of the soldiers of Picardy, with their long pikes and blue handles, and muskets marked with the *fleur-de-lis* on the butts. When he saw all the gaping wounds, looking up to the bright heavens as if to demand back of them the souls to which they had opened a passage, — when he saw the slaughtered horses, stiff, their tongues hanging out at one side of their mouths, sleeping in the shiny blood congealed around them, staining their furniture and their manes, — when he saw the white horse of M. de Beaufort, with his head beaten to pieces, in the first ranks of the dead, Athos passed a cold hand over his brow, which he was astonished not to find burning. He was convinced by this touch that he was present, as a spectator, without delirium’s dreadful aid, the day after the battle fought upon the shores of Gigelli by the army of the expedition, which he had seen leave the coast of France and disappear upon the dim horizon, and of which he had saluted with thought and gesture the last cannon-shot fired by the duke as a signal of farewell to his country.

Who can paint the mortal agony with which his soul followed, like a vigilant eye, these effigies of clay-cold soldiers, and examined them, one after the other, to see if Raoul slept among them? Who can express the intoxication of joy with which Athos bowed before God, and thanked Him for not having seen him he sought with so much fear among the dead? In fact, fallen in their ranks, stiff, icy, the dead, still recognizable with ease, seemed to turn with complacency towards the Comte de la Fere, to be the better seen by him, during his sad review. But yet, he was astonished, while viewing all these bodies, not to perceive the survivors. To such a point did the illusion extend, that this vision was for him a real voyage made by the father into Africa, to obtain more exact information respecting his son.

Fatigued, therefore, with having traversed seas and continents, he sought repose under one of the tents sheltered behind a rock, on the top of which floated the white *fleur-de-lised* pennon. He looked for a soldier to conduct him to the tent of M. de Beaufort. Then, while his eye was wandering over the plain, turning on all sides, he saw a white form appear behind the scented myrtles. This figure was clothed in the costume of an officer; it held in its hand a broken sword; it advanced slowly towards Athos, who, stopping short and fixing his eyes upon it, neither spoke nor moved, but wished to open his arms, because in this silent officer he had already recognized Raoul. The comte attempted to utter a cry, but it was stifled in his throat. Raoul, with a gesture, directed him to be silent, placing his finger on his lips and drawing back by degrees, without Athos being able to see his legs move. The comte, still paler than Raoul, followed his son, painfully traversing briers and bushes, stones and ditches, Raoul not appearing to touch the earth, no obstacle seeming to impede the lightness of his march. The comte, whom the inequalities of the path fatigued, soon stopped, exhausted. Raoul still continued to beckon him to follow him. The tender father, to whom love restored strength, made a last effort, and climbed the mountain after the young man, who attracted him by gesture and by smile.

At length he gained the crest of the hill, and saw, thrown out in black, upon the horizon whitened by the moon, the aerial form of Raoul. Athos reached forth his hand to get closer to his beloved son upon the plateau, and the latter also stretched out his; but suddenly, as if the young man had been drawn away in his own despite, still retreating, he left the earth, and Athos saw the clear blue sky shine between the feet of his child and the ground of the hill. Raoul rose insensibly into the void, smiling, still calling with gesture: — he departed towards heaven. Athos uttered a cry of tenderness and terror. He looked below again. He saw a camp destroyed, and all those white bodies of the royal army, like so many motionless atoms. And, then, raising his head, he saw the figure of his son still beckoning him to climb the mystic void.

CHAPTER LVIII.

The Angel of Death.

Athos was at this part of his marvelous vision, when the charm was suddenly broken by a great noise rising from the outer gates. A horse was heard galloping over the hard gravel of the great alley, and the sound of noisy and animated conversations ascended to the chamber in which the comte was dreaming. Athos did not stir from the place he occupied; he scarcely turned his head towards the door to ascertain the sooner what these noises could be. A heavy step ascended the stairs; the horse, which had recently galloped, departed slowly towards the stables. Great hesitation appeared in the steps, which by degrees approached the chamber. A door was opened, and Athos, turning a little towards the part of the room the noise came from, cried, in a weak voice:

“It is a courier from Africa, is it not?”

“No, monsieur le comte,” replied a voice which made the father of Raoul start upright in his bed.

“Grimaud!” murmured he. And the sweat began to pour down his face. Grimaud appeared in the doorway. It was no longer the Grimaud we have seen, still young with courage and devotion, when he jumped the first into the boat destined to convey Raoul de Bragelonne to the vessels of the royal fleet. ‘Twas now a stern and pale old man, his clothes covered with dust, and hair whitened by old age. He trembled whilst leaning against the door-frame, and was near falling on seeing, by the light of the lamps, the countenance of his master. These two men who had lived so long together in a community of intelligence, and whose eyes, accustomed to economize expressions, knew how to say so many things silently — these two old friends, one as noble as the other in heart, if they were unequal in fortune and birth, remained tongue-tied whilst looking at each other. By the exchange of a single glance they had just read to the bottom of each other’s hearts. The old servitor bore upon his countenance the impression of a grief already old, the outward token of a grim familiarity with woe. He appeared to have no longer in use more than a single version of his thoughts. As formerly he was accustomed not to speak much, he was now accustomed not to smile at all. Athos read at a glance all these shades upon the visage of his faithful servant, and in the same tone he would have employed to speak to Raoul in his dream:

"Grimaud," said he, "Raoul is dead. *Is it not so?*"

Behind Grimaud the other servants listened breathlessly, with their eyes fixed upon the bed of their sick master. They heard the terrible question, and a heart-breaking silence followed.

"Yes," replied the old man, heaving the monosyllable from his chest with a hoarse, broken sigh.

Then arose voices of lamentation, which groaned without measure, and filled with regrets and prayers the chamber where the agonized father sought with his eyes the portrait of his son. This was for Athos like the transition which led to his dream. Without uttering a cry, without shedding a tear, patient, mild, resigned as a martyr, he raised his eyes towards Heaven, in order there to see again, rising above the mountain of Gigelli, the beloved shade that was leaving him at the moment of Grimaud's arrival. Without doubt, while looking towards the heavens, resuming his marvelous dream, he repassed by the same road by which the vision, at once so terrible and sweet, had led him before; for after having gently closed his eyes, he reopened them and began to smile: he had just seen Raoul, who had smiled upon him. With his hands joined upon his breast, his face turned towards the window, bathed by the fresh air of night, which brought upon its wings the aroma of the flowers and the woods, Athos entered, never again to come out of it, into the contemplation of that paradise which the living never see. God willed, no doubt, to open to this elect the treasures of eternal beatitude, at this hour when other men tremble with the idea of being severely received by the Lord, and cling to this life they know, in the dread of the other life of which they get but merest glimpses by the dismal murky torch of death. Athos was spirit-guided by the pure serene soul of his son, which aspired to be like the paternal soul. Everything for this just man was melody and perfume in the rough road souls take to return to the celestial country. After an hour of this ecstasy, Athos softly raised his hands as white as wax; the smile did not quit his lips, and he murmured low, so low as scarcely to be audible, these three words addressed to God or to Raoul:

"HERE I AM!"

And his hands fell slowly, as though he himself had laid them on the bed.

Death had been kind and mild to this noble creature. It had spared him the tortures of the agony, convulsions of the last departure; had opened with an indulgent finger the gates of eternity to that noble soul. God had no doubt ordered it thus that the pious remembrance of this death should remain in the hearts of those present, and in the memory of other men — a death which caused to be loved the passage from this life to the other by those whose existence upon this earth leads them not to dread the last judgment. Athos preserved, even in the eternal sleep, that placid and sincere smile — an ornament which was to accompany him to the tomb. The quietude and calm of his fine features made his servants for a long time doubt whether he had really quitted life. The comte's people wished to remove Grimaud, who, from a distance, devoured the face now quickly growing marble-pale, and did not approach, from pious fear of bringing to him the breath of death. But Grimaud, fatigued as he was, refused to leave the room. He sat himself down upon the threshold, watching his master with the vigilance of a sentinel, jealous to receive either his first waking look or his last dying sigh. The noises all were quiet in the house — every one respected the slumber of their lord. But Grimaud, by anxiously listening, perceived that the comte no longer breathed. He raised himself with his hands leaning on the ground, looked to see if there did not appear some motion in the body of his master. Nothing! Fear seized him; he rose completely up, and, at the very moment, heard some one coming up the stairs. A noise of spurs knocking against a sword — a warlike sound familiar to his ears — stopped him as he was going towards the bed of Athos. A voice more sonorous than brass or steel resounded within three paces of him.

"Athos! Athos! my friend!" cried this voice, agitated even to tears.

"Monsieur le Chevalier d'Artagnan," faltered out Grimaud.

"Where is he? Where is he?" continued the musketeer. Grimaud seized his arm in his bony fingers, and pointed to the bed, upon the sheets of which the livid tints of death already showed.

A choked respiration, the opposite to a sharp cry, swelled the throat of D'Artagnan. He advanced on tip-toe, trembling, frightened at the noise his feet made on the floor, his heart rent by a nameless agony. He placed his ear to the breast of Athos, his face to the comte's mouth. Neither noise, nor breath! D'Artagnan drew back. Grimaud, who had followed him with his eyes, and for whom each of his movements had been a revelation, came timidly; seated himself at the foot of the bed, and glued his lips to the sheet which was raised by the stiffened feet of his master. Then large drops began to flow from his red eyes. This old man in invincible despair, who wept, bent doubled without uttering a word, presented the most touching spectacle that D'Artagnan, in a life so filled with emotion, had ever met with.

The captain resumed standing in contemplation before that smiling dead man, who seemed to have burnished his last thought, to give his best friend, the man he had loved next to Raoul, a gracious welcome even beyond life. And for reply to that exalted flattery of hospitality, D'Artagnan went and kissed Athos fervently on the brow, and with his trembling fingers closed his eyes. Then he seated himself by the pillow without dread of that dead man, who had been so kind and affectionate to him for five and thirty years. He was feeding his soul with the remembrances the noble visage of the comte brought to his mind in crowds — some blooming and charming as that smile — some dark, dismal, and icy as that visage with its eyes now closed to all eternity.

All at once the bitter flood which mounted from minute to minute invaded his heart, and swelled his breast almost to bursting. Incapable of mastering his emotion, he arose, and tearing himself violently from the chamber where he had just found dead him to whom he came to report the news of the death of Porthos, he uttered sobs so heart-rending that the servants, who seemed only to wait for an explosion of grief, answered to it by their lugubrious clamors, and the dogs of the late comte by their lamentable howlings. Grimaud was the only one who did not lift up his voice. Even in the paroxysm of his grief he would not have dared to profane the dead, or for the first time disturb the slumber of his master. Had not Athos always bidden him be dumb?

At daybreak D'Artagnan, who had wandered about the lower hall, biting his fingers to stifle his sighs — D'Artagnan went up once more; and watching the moments when Grimaud turned his head towards him, he made him a sign to come to him, which the faithful servant obeyed without making more noise than a shadow. D'Artagnan went down again, followed by Grimaud; and when he had gained the vestibule, taking the old man's hands, "Grimaud," said he, "I have seen how the father died; now let me know about the son."

Grimaud drew from his breast a large letter, upon the envelope of which was traced the address of Athos. He recognized the writing of M. de

Beaufort, broke the seal, and began to read, while walking about in the first steel-chill rays of dawn, in the dark alley of old limes, marked by the still visible footsteps of the comte who had just died.

CHAPTER LIX.

The Bulletin.

The Duc de Beaufort wrote to Athos. The letter destined for the living only reached the dead. God had changed the address.

“MY DEAR COMTE,” wrote the prince, in his large, school-boy’s hand, — ”a great misfortune has struck us amidst a great triumph. The king loses one of the bravest of soldiers. I lose a friend. You lose M. de Bragelonne. He has died gloriously, so gloriously that I have not the strength to weep as I could wish. Receive my sad compliments, my dear comte. Heaven distributes trials according to the greatness of our hearts. This is an immense one, but not above your courage. Your good friend,

“LE DUC DE BEAUFORT.”

The letter contained a relation written by one of the prince’s secretaries. It was the most touching recital, and the most true, of that dismal episode which unraveled two existences. D’Artagnan, accustomed to battle emotions, and with a heart armed against tenderness, could not help starting on reading the name of Raoul, the name of that beloved boy who had become a shade now — like his father.

“In the morning,” said the prince’s secretary, “monseigneur commanded the attack. Normandy and Picardy had taken positions in the rocks dominated by the heights of the mountain, upon the declivity of which were raised the bastions of Gigelli.

“The cannon opened the action; the regiments marched full of resolution; the pikemen with pikes elevated, the musket-bearers with their weapons ready. The prince followed attentively the march and movements of the troops, so as to be able to sustain them with a strong reserve. With monseigneur were the oldest captains and his aides-de-camp. M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne had received orders not to leave his highness. In the meantime the enemy’s cannon, which at first thundered with little success against the masses, began to regulate their fire, and the balls, better directed, killed several men near the prince. The regiments formed in column, and, advancing against the ramparts, were rather roughly handled.

There was a sort of hesitation in our troops, who found themselves ill-seconded by the artillery. In fact, the batteries which had been established the evening before had but a weak and uncertain aim, on account of their position. The upward direction of the aim lessened the justness of the shots as well as their range.

"Monseigneur, comprehending the bad effect of this position on the siege artillery, commanded the frigates moored in the little road to commence a regular fire against the place. M. de Bragelonne offered himself at once to carry this order. But monseigneur refused to acquiesce in the vicomte's request. Monseigneur was right, for he loved and wished to spare the young nobleman. He was quite right, and the event took upon itself to justify his foresight and refusal; for scarcely had the sergeant charged with the message solicited by M. de Bragelonne gained the seashore, when two shots from long carbines issued from the enemy's ranks and laid him low. The sergeant fell, dyeing the sand with his blood; observing which, M. de Bragelonne smiled at monseigneur, who said to him, 'You see, vicomte, I have saved your life. Report that, some day, to M. le Comte de la Fere, in order that, learning it from you, he may thank me.' The young nobleman smiled sadly, and replied to the duke, 'It is true, monseigneur, that but for your kindness I should have been killed, where the poor sergeant has fallen, and should be at rest.' M. de Bragelonne made this reply in such a tone that monseigneur answered him warmly, '*Vrai Dieu!* Young man, one would say that your mouth waters for death; but, by the soul of Henry IV., I have promised your father to bring you back alive; and, please the Lord, I mean to keep my word.'

"Monseigneur de Bragelonne colored, and replied, in a lower voice, 'Monseigneur, pardon me, I beseech you. I have always had a desire to meet good opportunities; and it is so delightful to distinguish ourselves before our general, particularly when that general is M. le Duc de Beaufort.'

"Monseigneur was a little softened by this; and, turning to the officers who surrounded him, gave different orders. The grenadiers of the two regiments got near enough to the ditches and intrenchments to launch their grenades, which had but small effect. In the meanwhile, M. d'Estrees, who commanded the fleet, having seen the attempt of the sergeant to approach the vessels, understood that he must act without orders, and opened fire. Then the Arabs, finding themselves seriously injured by the balls from the fleet, and beholding the destruction and the ruin of their walls, uttered the most fearful cries. Their horsemen descended the mountain at a gallop, bent over their saddles, and rushed full tilt upon the columns of infantry, which, crossing their pikes, stopped this mad assault. Repulsed by the firm attitude of the battalion, the Arabs threw themselves with fury towards the *etat-major*, which was not on its guard at that moment.

"The danger was great; monseigneur drew his sword; his secretaries and people imitated him; the officers of the suite engaged in combat with the furious Arabs. It was then M. de Bragelonne was able to satisfy the inclination he had so clearly shown from the commencement of the action. He fought near the prince with the valor of a Roman, and killed three Arabs with his small sword. But it was evident that his bravery did not arise from that sentiment of pride so natural to all who fight. It was impetuous, affected, even forced; he sought to glut, intoxicate himself with strife and carnage. He excited himself to such a degree that monseigneur called to him to stop. He must have heard the voice of monseigneur, because we who were close to him heard it. He did not, however, stop, but continued his course to the intrenchments. As M. de Bragelonne was a well-disciplined officer, this disobedience to the orders of monseigneur very much surprised everybody, and M. de Beaufort redoubled his earnestness, crying, 'Stop, Bragelonne! Where are you going? Stop,' repeated monseigneur, 'I command you!'

"We all, imitating the gesture of M. le duc, we all raised our hands. We expected that the cavalier would turn bridle; but M. de Bragelonne continued to ride towards the palisades.

"'Stop, Bragelonne!' repeated the prince, in a very loud voice, 'stop! in the name of your father!'

"At these words M. de Bragelonne turned round; his countenance expressed a lively grief, but he did not stop; we then concluded that his horse must have run away with him. When M. le duc saw cause to conclude that the vicomte was no longer master of his horse, and had watched him precede the first grenadiers, his highness cried, 'Musketeers, kill his horse! A hundred pistoles for the man who kills his horse!' But who could expect to hit the beast without at least wounding his rider? No one dared the attempt. At length one presented himself; he was a sharp-shooter of the regiment of Picardy, named Luzerne, who took aim at the animal, fired, and hit him in the quarters, for we saw the blood redden the hair of the horse. Instead of falling, the cursed jennet was irritated, and carried him on more furiously than ever. Every Picard who saw this unfortunate young man rushing on to meet certain death, shouted in the loudest manner, ‘Throw yourself off, monsieur le vicomte! — off! — off! throw yourself off!’ M. de Bragelonne was an officer much beloved in the army. Already had the vicomte arrived within pistol-shot of the ramparts, when a discharge was poured upon him that enshrouded him in fire and smoke. We lost sight of him; the smoke dispersed; he was on foot, upright; his horse was killed.

“The vicomte was summoned to surrender by the Arabs, but he made them a negative sign with his head, and continued to march towards the palisades. This was a mortal imprudence. Nevertheless the entire army was pleased that he would not retreat, since ill-chance had led him so near. He marched a few paces further, and the two regiments clapped their hands. It was at this moment the second discharge shook the walls, and the Vicomte de Bragelonne again disappeared in the smoke; but this time the smoke dispersed in vain; we no longer saw him standing. He was down, with his head lower than his legs, among the bushes, and the Arabs began to think of leaving their intrenchments to come and cut off his head or take his body — as is the custom with the infidels. But Monseigneur le Duc de Beaufort had followed all this with his eyes, and the sad spectacle drew from him many painful sighs. He then cried aloud, seeing the Arabs running like white phantoms among the mastic-trees, ‘Grenadiers! lancers! will you let them take that noble body?’

“Saying these words and waving his sword, he himself rode towards the enemy. The regiments, rushing in his steps, ran in their turn, uttering cries as terrible as those of the Arabs were wild.

“The combat commenced over the body of M. de Bragelonne, and with such inveteracy was it fought that a hundred and sixty Arabs were left upon the field, by the side of at least fifty of our troops. It was a lieutenant from Normandy who took the body of the vicomte on his shoulders and carried it back to the lines. The advantage was, however, pursued, the regiments took the reserve with them, and the enemy’s palisades were utterly destroyed. At three o’clock the fire of the Arabs ceased; the hand-to-hand fight lasted two hours; it was a massacre. At five o’clock we were victorious at all points; the enemy had abandoned his positions, and M. le duc ordered the white flag to be planted on the summit of the little mountain. It was then we had time to think of M. de Bragelonne, who had eight large wounds in his body, through which almost all his blood had welled away. Still, however, he had breathed, which afforded inexpressible joy to monseigneur, who insisted on being present at the first dressing of the wounds and the consultation of the surgeons. There were two among them who declared M. de Bragelonne would live. Monseigneur threw his arms around their necks, and promised them a thousand louis each if they could save him.

"The vicomte heard these transports of joy, and whether he was in despair, or whether he suffered much from his wounds, he expressed by his countenance a contradiction, which gave rise to reflection, particularly in one of the secretaries when he had heard what follows. The third surgeon was the brother of Sylvain de Saint-Cosme, the most learned of them all. He probed the wounds in his turn, and said nothing. M. de Bragelonne fixed his eyes steadily upon the skillful surgeon, and seemed to interrogate his every movement. The latter, upon being questioned by monseigneur, replied that he saw plainly three mortal wounds out of eight, but so strong was the constitution of the wounded, so rich was he in youth, and so merciful was the goodness of God, that perhaps M. de Bragelonne might recover, particularly if he did not move in the slightest manner. Frere Sylvain added, turning towards his assistants, 'Above everything, do not allow him to move, even a finger, or you will kill him;' and we all left the tent in very low spirits. That secretary I have mentioned, on leaving the tent, thought he perceived a faint and sad smile glide over the lips of M. de Bragelonne when the duke said to him, in a cheerful, kind voice, 'We will save you, vicomte, we will save you yet.'

"In the evening, when it was believed the wounded youth had taken some repose, one of the assistants entered his tent, but rushed out again immediately, uttering loud cries. We all ran up in disorder, M. le duc with us, and the assistant pointed to the body of M. de Bragelonne upon the ground, at the foot of his bed, bathed in the remainder of his blood. It appeared that he had suffered some convulsion, some delirium, and that he had fallen; that the fall had accelerated his end, according to the prognosis of Frere Sylvain. We raised the vicomte; he was cold and dead. He held a lock of fair hair in his right hand, and that hand was tightly pressed upon his heart."

Then followed the details of the expedition, and of the victory obtained over the Arabs. D'Artagnan stopped at the account of the death of poor Raoul. "Oh!" murmured he, "unhappy boy! a suicide!" And turning his eyes towards the chamber of the chateau, in which Athos slept in eternal sleep, “They kept their words with each other,” said he, in a low voice; “now I believe them to be happy; they must be reunited.” And he returned through the parterre with slow and melancholy steps. All the village — all the neighborhood — were filled with grieving neighbors relating to each other the double catastrophe, and making preparations for the funeral.

CHAPTER LX.

The Last Canto of the Poem.

On the morrow, all the *noblesse* of the provinces, of the environs, and wherever messengers had carried the news, might have been seen arriving in detachments. D'Artagnan had shut himself up, without being willing to speak to anybody. Two such heavy deaths falling upon the captain, so closely after the death of Porthos, for a long time oppressed that spirit which had hitherto been so indefatigable and invulnerable. Except Grimaud, who entered his chamber once, the musketeer saw neither servants nor guests. He supposed, from the noises in the house, and the continual coming and going, that preparations were being made for the funeral of the comte. He wrote to the king to ask for an extension of his leave of absence. Grimaud, as we have said, had entered D'Artagnan's apartment, had seated himself upon a joint-stool near the door, like a man who meditates profoundly; then, rising, he made a sign to D'Artagnan to follow him. The latter obeyed in silence. Grimaud descended to the comte's bed-chamber, showed the captain with his finger the place of the empty bed, and raised his eyes eloquently towards Heaven.

"Yes," replied D'Artagnan, "yes, good Grimaud — now with the son he loved so much!"

Grimaud left the chamber, and led the way to the hall, where, according to the custom of the province, the body was laid out, previously to being put away forever. D'Artagnan was struck at seeing two open coffins in the hall. In reply to the mute invitation of Grimaud, he approached, and saw in one of them Athos, still handsome in death, and, in the other, Raoul with his eyes closed, his cheeks pearly as those of the Palls of Virgil, with a smile on his violet lips. He shuddered at seeing the father and son, those two departed souls, represented on earth by two silent, melancholy bodies, incapable of touching each other, however close they might be.

"Raoul here!" murmured he. "Oh! Grimaud, why did you not tell me this?"

Grimaud shook his head, and made no reply; but taking D’Artagnan by the hand, he led him to the coffin, and showed him, under the thin winding-sheet, the black wounds by which life had escaped. The captain turned away his eyes, and, judging it was useless to question Grimaud, who would not answer, he recollected that M. de Beaufort’s secretary had written more than he, D’Artagnan, had had the courage to read. Taking up the recital of the affair which had cost Raoul his life, he found these words, which ended the concluding paragraph of the letter:

“Monseigneur le duc has ordered that the body of monsieur le vicomte should be embalmed, after the manner practiced by the Arabs when they wish their dead to be carried to their native land; and monsieur le duc has appointed relays, so that the same confidential servant who brought up the young man might take back his remains to M. le Comte de la Fere.”

“And so,” thought D’Artagnan, “I shall follow thy funeral, my dear boy — I, already old — I, who am of no value on earth — and I shall scatter dust upon that brow I kissed but two months since. God has willed it to be so. Thou hast willed it to be so, thyself. I have no longer the right even to weep. Thou hast chosen death; it seemed to thee a preferable gift to life.”

At length arrived the moment when the chill remains of these two gentlemen were to be given back to mother earth. There was such an affluence of military and other people that up to the place of the sepulture, which was a little chapel on the plain, the road from the city was filled with horsemen and pedestrians in mourning. Athos had chosen for his resting-place the little inclosure of a chapel erected by himself near the boundary of his estates. He had had the stones, cut in 1550, brought from an old Gothic manor-house in Berry, which had sheltered his early youth. The chapel, thus rebuilt, transported, was pleasing to the eye beneath its leafy curtains of poplars and sycamores. It was ministered in every Sunday, by the cure of the neighboring bourg, to whom Athos paid an allowance of two hundred francs for this service; and all the vassals of his domain, with their families, came thither to hear mass, without having any occasion to go to the city.

Behind the chapel extended, surrounded by two high hedges of hazel, elder and white thorn, and a deep ditch, the little inclosure — uncultivated, though gay in its sterility; because the mosses there grew thick, wild heliotrope and ravenelles there mingled perfumes, while from beneath an ancient chestnut issued a crystal spring, a prisoner in its marble cistern, and on the thyme all around alighted thousands of bees from the neighboring plants, whilst chaffinches and redthroats sang cheerfully among the flower-spangled hedges. It was to this place the somber coffins were carried, attended by a silent and respectful crowd. The office of the dead being celebrated, the last adieux paid to the noble departed, the assembly dispersed, talking, along the roads, of the virtues and mild death of the father, of the hopes the son had given, and of his melancholy end upon the arid coast of Africa.

Little by little, all noises were extinguished, like the lamps illuminating the humble nave. The minister bowed for the last time to the altar and the still fresh graves; then, followed by his assistant, he slowly took the road back to the presbytery. D'Artagnan, left alone, perceived that night was coming on. He had forgotten the hour, thinking only of the dead. He arose from the oaken bench on which he was seated in the chapel, and wished, as the priest had done, to go and bid a last adieu to the double grave which contained his two lost friends.

A woman was praying, kneeling on the moist earth. D'Artagnan stopped at the door of the chapel, to avoid disturbing her, and also to endeavor to find out who was the pious friend who performed this sacred duty with so much zeal and perseverance. The unknown had hidden her face in her hands, which were white as alabaster. From the noble simplicity of her costume, she must be a woman of distinction. Outside the inclosure were several horses mounted by servants; a travelling carriage was in waiting for this lady. D'Artagnan in vain sought to make out what caused her delay. She continued praying, and frequently pressed her handkerchief to her face, by which D'Artagnan perceived she was weeping. He beheld her strike her breast with the compunction of a Christian woman. He heard her several times exclaim as from a wounded heart: "Pardon! pardon!" And as she appeared to abandon herself entirely to her grief, as she threw herself down, almost fainting, exhausted by complaints and prayers, D'Artagnan, touched by this love for his so much regretted friends, made a few steps towards the grave, in order to interrupt the melancholy colloquy of the penitent with the dead. But as soon as his step sounded on the gravel, the unknown raised her head, revealing to D'Artagnan a face aflood with tears, a well-known face. It was Mademoiselle de la Valliere! "Monsieur d'Artagnan!" murmured she.

"You!" replied the captain, in a stern voice, "you here! — oh! madame, I should better have liked to see you decked with flowers in the mansion of the Comte de la Fere. You would have wept less — and they too — and I!”

“Monsieur!” said she, sobbing.

“For it was you,” added this pitiless friend of the dead, — ”it was you who sped these two men to the grave.”

“Oh! spare me!”

“God forbid, madame, that I should offend a woman, or that I should make her weep in vain; but I must say that the place of the murderer is not upon the grave of her victims.” She wished to reply.

“What I now tell you,” added he, coldly, “I have already told the king.”

She clasped her hands. “I know,” said she, “I have caused the death of the Vicomte de Bragelonne.”

“Ah! you know it?”

“The news arrived at court yesterday. I have traveled during the night forty leagues to come and ask pardon of the comte, whom I supposed to be still living, and to pray God, on the tomb of Raoul, that he would send me all the misfortunes I have merited, except a single one. Now, monsieur, I know that the death of the son has killed the father; I have two crimes to reproach myself with; I have two punishments to expect from Heaven.”

“I will repeat to you, mademoiselle,” said D’Artagnan, “what M. de Bragelonne said of you, at Antibes, when he already meditated death: ‘If pride and coquetry have misled her, I pardon her while despising her. If love has produced her error, I pardon her, but I swear that no one could have loved her as I have done.’“

“You know,” interrupted Louise, “that of my love I was about to sacrifice myself; you know whether I suffered when you met me lost, dying, abandoned. Well! never have I suffered so much as now; because then I hoped, desired, — now I have no longer anything to wish for; because this death drags all my joy into the tomb; because I can no longer dare to love without remorse, and I feel that he whom I love — oh! it is but just! — will repay me with the tortures I have made others undergo.”

D’Artagnan made no reply; he was too well convinced that she was not mistaken.

“Well, then,” added she, “dear Monsieur d’Artagnan, do not overwhelm me to-day, I again implore you! I am like the branch torn from the trunk, I no longer hold to anything in this world — a current drags me on, I know not whither. I love madly, even to the point of coming to tell it, wretch that I am, over the ashes of the dead, and I do not blush for it — I have no remorse on this account. Such love is a religion. Only, as hereafter you will see me alone, forgotten, disdained; as you will see me punished, as I am destined to be punished, spare me in my ephemeral happiness, leave it to me for a few days, for a few minutes. Now, even at the moment I am speaking to you, perhaps it no longer exists. My God! this double murder is perhaps already expiated!”

While she was speaking thus, the sound of voices and of horses drew the attention of the captain. M. de Saint-Aignan came to seek La Valliere. “The king,” he said, “is a prey to jealousy and uneasiness.” Saint-Aignan did not perceive D’Artagnan, half concealed by the trunk of a chestnut-tree which shaded the double grave. Louise thanked Saint-Aignan, and dismissed him with a gesture. He rejoined the party outside the inclosure.

“You see, madame,” said the captain bitterly to the young woman, — ”you see your happiness still lasts.”

The young woman raised her head with a solemn air. “A day will come,” said she, “when you will repent of having so misjudged me. On that day, it is I who will pray God to forgive you for having been unjust towards me. Besides, I shall suffer so much that you yourself will be the first to pity my sufferings. Do not reproach me with my fleeting happiness, Monsieur d’Artagnan; it costs me dear, and I have not paid all my debt.” Saying these words, she again knelt down, softly and affectionately.

“Pardon me the last time, my affianced Raoul!” said she. “I have broken our chain; we are both destined to die of grief. It is thou who departest first; fear nothing, I shall follow thee. See, only, that I have not been base, and that I have come to bid thee this last adieu. The Lord is my witness, Raoul, that if with my life I could have redeemed thine, I would have given that life without hesitation. I could not give my love. Once more, forgive me, dearest, kindest friend.”

She strewed a few sweet flowers on the freshly sodded earth; then, wiping the tears from her eyes, the heavily stricken lady bowed to D’Artagnan, and disappeared.

The captain watched the departure of the horses, horsemen, and carriage, then crossing his arms upon his swelling chest, “When will it be my turn to depart?” said he, in an agitated voice. “What is there left for man after youth, love, glory, friendship, strength, and wealth have disappeared? That rock, under which sleeps Porthos, who possessed all I have named; this moss, under which repose Athos and Raoul, who possessed much more!”

He hesitated for a moment, with a dull eye; then, drawing himself up, “Forward! still forward!” said he. “When it is time, God will tell me, as he foretold the others.”

He touched the earth, moistened with the evening dew, with the ends of his fingers, signed himself as if he had been at the *benitier* in church, and retook alone — ever alone — the road to Paris.

Epilogue.

Four years after the scene we have just described, two horsemen, well mounted, traversed Blois early in the morning, for the purpose of arranging a hawking party the king had arranged to make in that uneven plain the Loire divides in two, which borders on the one side Meung, on the other Amboise. These were the keeper of the king’s harriers and the master of the falcons, personages greatly respected in the time of Louis XIII., but rather neglected by his successor. The horsemen, having reconnoitered the ground, were returning, their observations made, when they perceived certain little groups of soldiers, here and there, whom the sergeants were placing at distances at the openings of the inclosures. These were the king’s musketeers. Behind them came, upon a splendid horse, the captain, known by his richly embroidered uniform. His hair was gray, his beard turning so. He seemed a little bent, although sitting and handling his horse gracefully. He was looking about him watchfully.

“M. d’Artagnan does not get any older,” said the keeper of the harriers to his colleague the falconer; “with ten years more to carry than either of us, he has the seat of a young man on horseback.”

“That is true,” replied the falconer. “I don’t see any change in him for the last twenty years.”

But this officer was mistaken; D’Artagnan in the last four years had lived a dozen. Age had printed its pitiless claws at each angle of his eyes; his brow was bald; his hands, formerly brown and nervous, were getting white, as if the blood had half forgotten them.

D’Artagnan accosted the officers with the shade of affability which distinguishes superiors, and received in turn for his courtesy two most respectful bows.

"Ah! what a lucky chance to see you here, Monsieur d'Artagnan!" cried the falconer.

"It is rather I who should say that, messieurs," replied the captain, "for nowadays, the king makes more frequent use of his musketeers than of his falcons."

"Ah! it is not as it was in the good old times," sighed the falconer. "Do you remember, Monsieur d'Artagnan, when the late king flew the pie in the vineyards beyond Beaugence? Ah! *dame!* you were not the captain of the musketeers at that time, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"And you were nothing but under-corporal of the tiercelets," replied D'Artagnan, laughing. "Never mind that, it was a good time, seeing that it is always a good time when we are young. Good day, monsieur the keeper of the harriers."

"You do me honor, monsieur le comte," said the latter. D'Artagnan made no reply. The title of comte had hardly struck him; D'Artagnan had been a comte four years.

"Are you not very much fatigued with the long journey you have taken, monsieur le capitaine?" continued the falconer. "It must be full two hundred leagues from hence to Pignerol."

"Two hundred and sixty to go, and as many to return," said D'Artagnan, quietly.

"And," said the falconer, "is *he* well?"

"Who?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Why, poor M. Fouquet," continued the falconer, in a low voice. The keeper of the harriers had prudently withdrawn.

"No," replied D'Artagnan, "the poor man frets terribly; he cannot comprehend how imprisonment can be a favor; he says that parliament absolved him by banishing him, and banishment is, or should be, liberty. He cannot imagine that they had sworn his death, and that to save his life from the claws of parliament was to be under too much obligation to Heaven."

"Ah! yes; the poor man had a close chance of the scaffold," replied the falconer; "it is said that M. Colbert had given orders to the governor of the Bastile, and that the execution was ordered."

"Enough!" said D'Artagnan, pensively, and with a view of cutting short the conversation.

"Yes," said the keeper of the harriers, drawing towards them, "M. Fouquet is now at Pignerol; he has richly deserved it. He had the good fortune to be conducted there by you; he robbed the king sufficiently.”

D’Artagnan launched at the master of the dogs one of his crossest looks, and said to him, “Monsieur, if any one told me you had eaten your dogs’ meat, not only would I refuse to believe it; but still more, if you were condemned to the lash or to jail for it, I should pity you and would not allow people to speak ill of you. And yet, monsieur, honest man as you may be, I assure you that you are not more so than poor M. Fouquet was.”

After having undergone this sharp rebuke, the keeper of the harriers hung his head, and allowed the falconer to get two steps in advance of him nearer to D’Artagnan.

“He is content,” said the falconer, in a low voice, to the musketeer; “we all know that harriers are in fashion nowadays; if he were a falconer he would not talk in that way.”

D’Artagnan smiled in a melancholy manner at seeing this great political question resolved by the discontent of such humble interest. He for a moment ran over in his mind the glorious existence of the surintendant, the crumbling of his fortunes, and the melancholy death that awaited him; and to conclude, “Did M. Fouquet love falconry?” said he.

“Oh, passionately, monsieur!” repeated the falconer, with an accent of bitter regret and a sigh that was the funeral oration of Fouquet.

D’Artagnan allowed the ill-humor of the one and the regret of the other to pass, and continued to advance. They could already catch glimpses of the huntsmen at the issue of the wood, the feathers of the outriders passing like shooting stars across the clearings, and the white horses skirting the bosky thickets looking like illuminated apparitions.

“But,” resumed D’Artagnan, “will the sport last long? Pray, give us a good swift bird, for I am very tired. Is it a heron or a swan?”

“Both, Monsieur d’Artagnan,” said the falconer; “but you need not be alarmed; the king is not much of a sportsman; he does not take the field on his own account, he only wishes to amuse the ladies.”

The words “to amuse the ladies” were so strongly accented they set D’Artagnan thinking.

“Ah!” said he, looking keenly at the falconer.

The keeper of the harriers smiled, no doubt with a view of making it up with the musketeer.

“Oh! you may safely laugh,” said D’Artagnan; “I know nothing of current news; I only arrived yesterday, after a month’s absence. I left the court mourning the death of the queen-mother. The king was not willing to take any amusement after receiving the last sigh of Anne of Austria; but everything comes to an end in this world. Well! then he is no longer sad? So much the better."

"And everything begins as well as ends," said the keeper with a coarse laugh.

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, a second time, — he burned to know, but dignity would not allow him to interrogate people below him, — "there is something beginning, then, it seems?"

The keeper gave him a significant wink; but D'Artagnan was unwilling to learn anything from this man.

"Shall we see the king early?" asked he of the falconer.

"At seven o'clock, monsieur, I shall fly the birds."

"Who comes with the king? How is Madame? How is the queen?"

"Better, monsieur."

"Has she been ill, then?"

"Monsieur, since the last chagrin she suffered, her majesty has been unwell."

"What chagrin? You need not fancy your news is old. I have but just returned."

"It appears that the queen, a little neglected since the death of her mother-in-law, complained to the king, who answered her, — 'Do I not sleep at home every night, madame? What more do you expect?'"

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, — "poor woman! She must heartily hate Mademoiselle de la Valliere."

"Oh, no! not Mademoiselle de la Valliere," replied the falconer.

"Who then — " The blast of a hunting-horn interrupted this conversation. It summoned the dogs and the hawks. The falconer and his companions set off immediately, leaving D'Artagnan alone in the midst of the suspended sentence. The king appeared at a distance, surrounded by ladies and horsemen. All the troop advanced in beautiful order, at a foot's pace, the horns of various sorts animating the dogs and horses. There was an animation in the scene, a mirage of light, of which nothing now can give an idea, unless it be the fictitious splendor of a theatric spectacle. D'Artagnan, with an eye a little, just a little, dimmed by age, distinguished behind the group three carriages. The first was intended for the queen; it was empty. D'Artagnan, who did not see Mademoiselle de la Valliere by the king's side, on looking about for her, saw her in the second carriage. She was alone with two of her women, who seemed as dull as their mistress. On the left hand of the king, upon a high-spirited horse, restrained by a bold and skillful hand, shone a lady of most dazzling beauty. The king smiled upon her, and she smiled upon the king. Loud laughter followed every word she uttered.

"I must know that woman," thought the musketeer; "who can she be?" And he stooped towards his friend, the falconer, to whom he addressed the question he had put to himself.

The falconer was about to reply, when the king, perceiving D'Artagnan, "Ah, comte!" said he, "you are amongst us once more then! Why have I not seen you?"

"Sire," replied the captain, "because your majesty was asleep when I arrived, and not awake when I resumed my duties this morning."

"Still the same," said Louis, in a loud voice, denoting satisfaction. "Take some rest, comte; I command you to do so. You will dine with me to-day."

A murmur of admiration surrounded D'Artagnan like a caress. Every one was eager to salute him. Dining with the king was an honor his majesty was not so prodigal of as Henry IV. had been. The king passed a few steps in advance, and D'Artagnan found himself in the midst of a fresh group, among whom shone Colbert.

"Good-day, Monsieur d'Artagnan," said the minister, with marked affability, "have you had a pleasant journey?"

"Yes, monsieur," said D'Artagnan, bowing to the neck of his horse.

"I heard the king invite you to his table for this evening," continued the minister; "you will meet an old friend there."

"An old friend of mine?" asked D'Artagnan, plunging painfully into the dark waves of the past, which had swallowed up for him so many friendships and so many hatreds.

"M. le Duc d'Almeda, who is arrived this morning from Spain."

"The Duc d'Almeda?" said D'Artagnan, reflecting in vain.

"Here!" cried an old man, white as snow, sitting bent in his carriage, which he caused to be thrown open to make room for the musketeer.

"*Aramis!*" cried D'Artagnan, struck with profound amazement. And he felt, inert as it was, the thin arm of the old nobleman hanging round his neck.

Colbert, after having observed them in silence for a few moments, urged his horse forward, and left the two old friends together.

"And so," said the musketeer, taking Aramis's arm, "you, the exile, the rebel, are again in France?"

"Ah! and I shall dine with you at the king's table," said Aramis, smiling. "Yes, will you not ask yourself what is the use of fidelity in this world? Stop! let us allow poor La Valliere's carriage to pass. Look, how uneasy she is! How her eyes, dim with tears, follow the king, who is riding on horseback yonder!"

"With whom?"

"With Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, now Madame de Montespan," replied Aramis.

"She is jealous. Is she then deserted?"

"Not quite yet, but it will not be long before she *is*."

They chatted together, while following the sport, and Aramis's coachman drove them so cleverly that they arrived at the instant when the falcon, attacking the bird, beat him down, and fell upon him. The king alighted; Madame de Montespan followed his example. They were in front of an isolated chapel, concealed by huge trees, already despoiled of their leaves by the first cutting winds of autumn. Behind this chapel was an inclosure, closed by a latticed gate. The falcon had beaten down his prey in the inclosure belonging to this little chapel, and the king was desirous of going in to take the first feather, according to custom. The *cortege* formed a circle round the building and the hedges, too small to receive so many. D'Artagnan held back Aramis by the arm, as he was about, like the rest, to alight from his carriage, and in a hoarse, broken voice, "Do you know, Aramis," said he, "whither chance has conducted us?"

"No," replied the duke.

"Here repose men that we knew well," said D'Artagnan, greatly agitated.

Aramis, without divining anything, and with a trembling step, penetrated into the chapel by a little door which D'Artagnan opened for him. "Where are they buried?" said he.

"There, in the inclosure. There is a cross, you see, beneath yon little cypress. The tree of grief is planted over their tomb; don't go to it; the king is going that way; the heron has fallen just there."

Aramis stopped, and concealed himself in the shade. They then saw, without being seen, the pale face of La Valliere, who, neglected in her carriage, at first looked on, with a melancholy heart, from the door, and then, carried away by jealousy, advanced into the chapel, whence, leaning against a pillar, she contemplated the king smiling and making signs to Madame de Montespan to approach, as there was nothing to be afraid of. Madame de Montespan complied; she took the hand the king held out to her, and he, plucking out the first feather from the heron, which the falconer had strangled, placed it in his beautiful companion's hat. She, smiling in her turn, kissed the hand tenderly which made her this present. The king grew scarlet with vanity and pleasure; he looked at Madame de Montespan with all the fire of new love.

"What will you give me in exchange?" said he.

She broke off a little branch of cypress and offered it to the king, who looked intoxicated with hope.

"Humph!" said Aramis to D'Artagnan; "the present is but a sad one, for that cypress shades a tomb."

"Yes, and the tomb is that of Raoul de Bragelonne," said D'Artagnan aloud; "of Raoul, who sleeps under that cross with his father."

A groan resounded — they saw a woman fall fainting to the ground. Mademoiselle de la Valliere had seen all, heard all.

"Poor woman!" muttered D'Artagnan, as he helped the attendants to carry back to her carriage the lonely lady whose lot henceforth in life was suffering.

That evening D'Artagnan was seated at the king's table, near M. Colbert and M. le Duc d'Almeda. The king was very gay. He paid a thousand little attentions to the queen, a thousand kindnesses to Madame, seated at his left hand, and very sad. It might have been supposed that time of calm when the king was wont to watch his mother's eyes for the approval or disapproval of what he had just done.

Of mistresses there was no question at this dinner. The king addressed Aramis two or three times, calling him M. l'ambassadeur, which increased the surprise already felt by D'Artagnan at seeing his friend the rebel so marvelously well received at court.

The king, on rising from table, gave his hand to the queen, and made a sign to Colbert, whose eye was on his master's face. Colbert took D'Artagnan and Aramis on one side. The king began to chat with his sister, whilst Monsieur, very uneasy, entertained the queen with a preoccupied air, without ceasing to watch his wife and brother from the corner of his eye.

The conversation between Aramis, D'Artagnan, and Colbert turned upon indifferent subjects. They spoke of preceding ministers; Colbert related the successful tricks of Mazarin, and desired those of Richelieu to be related to him. D'Artagnan could not overcome his surprise at finding this man, with his heavy eyebrows and low forehead, display so much sound knowledge and cheerful spirits. Aramis was astonished at that lightness of character which permitted this serious man to retard with advantage the moment for more important conversation, to which nobody made any allusion, although all three interlocutors felt its imminence. It was very plain, from the embarrassed appearance of Monsieur, how much the conversation of the king and Madame annoyed him. Madame's eyes were almost red: was she going to complain? Was she going to expose a little scandal in open court? The king took her on one side, and in a tone so tender that it must have reminded the princess of the time when she was loved for herself:

"Sister," said he, "why do I see tears in those lovely eyes?"

"Why — sire — " said she.

"Monsieur is jealous, is he not, sister?"

She looked towards Monsieur, an infallible sign that they were talking about him.

"Yes," said she.

"Listen to me," said the king; "if your friends compromise you, it is not Monsieur's fault."

He spoke these words with so much kindness that Madame, encouraged, having borne so many solitary griefs so long, was nearly bursting into tears, so full was her heart.

"Come, come, dear little sister," said the king, "tell me your griefs; on the word of a brother, I pity them; on the word of a king, I will put an end to them."

She raised her glorious eyes and, in a melancholy tone:

"It is not my friends who compromise me," said she; "they are either absent or concealed; they have been brought into disgrace with your majesty; they, so devoted, so good, so loyal!"

"You say this on account of De Guiche, whom I have exiled, at Monsieur's desire?"

"And who, since that unjust exile, has endeavored to get himself killed once every day."

"Unjust, say you, sister?"

"So unjust, that if I had not had the respect mixed with friendship that I have always entertained for your majesty — "

"Well!"

"Well! I would have asked my brother Charles, upon whom I can always — "

The king started. "What, then?"

"I would have asked him to have had it represented to you that Monsieur and his favorite M. le Chevalier de Lorraine ought not with impunity to constitute themselves the executioners of my honor and my happiness."

"The Chevalier de Lorraine," said the king; "that dismal fellow?"

"Is my mortal enemy. Whilst that man lives in my household, where Monsieur retains him and delegates his power to him, I shall be the most miserable woman in the kingdom."

"So," said the king, slowly, "you call your brother of England a better friend than I am?"

"Actions speak for themselves, sire."

"And you would prefer going to ask assistance there — "

"To my own country!" said she with pride; "yes, sire."

"You are the grandchild of Henry IV. as well as myself, lady. Cousin and brother-in-law, does not that amount pretty well to the title of brother-germain?"

"Then," said Henrietta, "act!"

"Let us form an alliance."

"Begin."

"I have, you say, unjustly exiled De Guiche."

"Oh! yes," said she, blushing.

"De Guiche shall return."

"So far, well."

"And now you say that I do wrong in having in your household the Chevalier de Lorraine, who gives Monsieur ill advice respecting you?"

"Remember well what I tell you, sire; the Chevalier de Lorraine some day — Observe, if ever I come to a dreadful end, I beforehand accuse the Chevalier de Lorraine; he has a spirit that is capable of any crime!"

"The Chevalier de Lorraine shall no longer annoy you — I promise you that."

"Then that will be a true preliminary of alliance, sire, — I sign; but since you have done your part, tell me what shall be mine."

"Instead of embroiling me with your brother Charles, you must make him a more intimate friend than ever."

"That is very easy."

"Oh! not quite so easy as you may suppose, for in ordinary friendship people embrace or exercise hospitality, and that only costs a kiss or a return, profitable expenses; but in political friendship — "

"Ah! it's a political friendship, is it?"

"Yes, my sister; and then, instead of embraces and feasts, it is soldiers — it is soldiers all alive and well equipped — that we must serve up to our friends; vessels we must offer, all armed with cannons and stored with provisions. It hence results that we have not always coffers in a fit condition for such friendships."

"Ah! you are quite right," said Madame; "the coffers of the king of England have been sonorous for some time."

"But you, my sister, who have so much influence over your brother, you can secure more than an ambassador could ever get the promise of."

"To effect that I must go to London, my dear brother."

"I have thought so," replied the king, eagerly; "and I have said to myself that such a voyage would do your health and spirits good."

"Only," interrupted Madame, "it is possible I should fail. The king of England has dangerous counselors."

"Counselors, do you say?"

"Precisely. If, by chance, your majesty had any intention — I am only supposing so — of asking Charles II. his alliance in a war — "

"A war?"

"Yes; well! then the king's counselors, who are in number seven — Mademoiselle Stewart, Mademoiselle Wells, Mademoiselle Gwyn, Miss Orchay, Mademoiselle Zunga, Miss Davies, and the proud Countess of Castlemaine — will represent to the king that war costs a great deal of money; that it is better to give balls and suppers at Hampton Court than to equip ships of the line at Portsmouth and Greenwich."

"And then your negotiations will fail?"

"Oh! those ladies cause all negotiations to fall through which they don't make themselves."

"Do you know the idea that has struck me, sister?"

"No; inform me what it is."

"It is that, searching well around you, you might perhaps find a female counselor to take with you to your brother, whose eloquence might paralyze the ill-will of the seven others."

"That is really an idea, sire, and I will search."

"You will find what you want."

"I hope so."

"A pretty ambassadress is necessary; an agreeable face is better than an ugly one, is it not?"

"Most assuredly."

"An animated, lively, audacious character."

"Certainly."

"Nobility; that is, enough to enable her to approach the king without awkwardness — not too lofty, so as not to trouble herself about the dignity of her race."

"Very true."

"And who knows a little English."

"*Mon Dieu!* why, some one," cried Madame, "like Mademoiselle de Keroualle, for instance!"

"Oh! why, yes!" said Louis XIV.; "you have hit the mark, — it is you who have found, my sister."

"I will take her; she will have no cause to complain, I suppose."

"Oh! no, I will name her *seductrice plenipotentiaire* at once, and will add a dowry to the title."

"That is well."

"I fancy you already on your road, my dear little sister, consoled for all your griefs."

"I will go, on two conditions. The first is, that I shall know what I am negotiating about."

"That is it. The Dutch, you know, insult me daily in their gazettes, and by their republican attitude. I do not like republics."

"That may easily be imagined, sire."

"I see with pain that these kings of the sea — they call themselves so — keep trade from France in the Indies, and that their vessels will soon occupy all the ports of Europe. Such a power is too near me, sister."

"They are your allies, nevertheless."

"That is why they were wrong in having the medal you have heard of struck; a medal which represents Holland stopping the sun, as Joshua did, with this legend: *The sun had stopped before me*. There is not much fraternity in that, *is* there?”

“I thought you had forgotten that miserable episode?”

“I never forget anything, sister. And if my true friends, such as your brother Charles, are willing to second me — ” The princess remained pensively silent.

“Listen to me; there is the empire of the seas to be shared,” said Louis XIV. “For this partition, which England submits to, could I not represent the second party as well as the Dutch?”

“We have Mademoiselle de Keroualle to treat that question,” replied Madame.

“Your second condition for going, if you please, sister?”

“The consent of Monsieur, my husband.”

“You shall have it.”

“Then consider me already gone, brother.”

On hearing these words, Louis XIV. turned round towards the corner of the room in which D’Artagnan, Colbert, and Aramis stood, and made an affirmative sign to his minister. Colbert then broke in on the conversation suddenly, and said to Aramis:

“Monsieur l’ambassadeur, shall we talk about business?”

D’Artagnan immediately withdrew, from politeness. He directed his steps towards the fireplace, within hearing of what the king was about to say to Monsieur, who, evidently uneasy, had gone to him. The face of the king was animated. Upon his brow was stamped a strength of will, the expression of which already met no further contradiction in France, and was soon to meet no more in Europe.

“Monsieur,” said the king to his brother, “I am not pleased with M. le Chevalier de Lorraine. You, who do him the honor to protect him, must advise him to travel for a few months.”

These words fell with the crush of an avalanche upon Monsieur, who adored his favorite, and concentrated all his affections in him.

“In what has the chevalier been inconsiderate enough to displease your majesty?” cried he, darting a furious look at Madame.

“I will tell you that when he is gone,” said the king, suavely. “And also when Madame, here, shall have crossed over into England.”

“Madame! in England!” murmured Monsieur, in amazement.

“In a week, brother,” continued the king, “whilst we will go whither I will shortly tell you.” And the king turned on his heel, smiling in his brother’s face, to sweeten, as it were, the bitter draught he had given him.

During this time Colbert was talking with the Duc d’Almeda.

“Monsieur,” said Colbert to Aramis, “this is the moment for us to come to an understanding. I have made your peace with the king, and I owed that clearly to a man of so much merit; but as you have often expressed friendship for me, an opportunity presents itself for giving me a proof of it. You are, besides, more a Frenchman than a Spaniard. Shall we secure — answer me frankly — the neutrality of Spain, if we undertake anything against the United Provinces?”

“Monsieur,” replied Aramis, “the interest of Spain is clear. To embroil Europe with the Provinces would doubtless be our policy, but the king of France is an ally of the United Provinces. You are not ignorant, besides, that it would infer a maritime war, and that France is in no state to undertake this with advantage.”

Colbert, turning round at this moment, saw D’Artagnan who was seeking some interlocutor, during this “aside” of the king and Monsieur. He called him, at the same time saying in a low voice to Aramis, “We may talk openly with D’Artagnan, I suppose?”

“Oh! certainly,” replied the ambassador.

“We were saying, M. d’Almeda and I,” said Colbert, “that a conflict with the United Provinces would mean a maritime war.”

“That’s evident enough,” replied the musketeer.

“And what do you think of it, Monsieur d’Artagnan?”

“I think that to carry on such a war successfully, you must have very large land forces.”

“What did you say?” said Colbert, thinking he had ill understood him.

“Why such a large land army?” said Aramis.

“Because the king will be beaten by sea if he has not the English with him, and that when beaten by sea, he will soon be invaded, either by the Dutch in his ports, or by the Spaniards by land.”

“And Spain neutral?” asked Aramis.

“Neutral as long as the king shall prove stronger,” rejoined D’Artagnan.

Colbert admired that sagacity which never touched a question without enlightening it thoroughly. Aramis smiled, as he had long known that in diplomacy D’Artagnan acknowledged no superior. Colbert, who, like all proud men, dwelt upon his fantasy with a certainty of success, resumed the subject, “Who told you, M. d’Artagnan, that the king had no navy?”

“Oh! I take no heed of these details,” replied the captain. “I am but an indifferent sailor. Like all nervous people, I hate the sea; and yet I have an idea that, with ships, France being a seaport with two hundred exits, we might have sailors.”

Colbert drew from his pocket a little oblong book divided into two columns. On the first were the names of vessels, on the other the figures recapitulating the number of cannon and men requisite to equip these ships. “I have had the same idea as you,” said he to D’Artagnan, “and I have had an account drawn up of the vessels we have altogether — thirty-five ships.”

“Thirty-five ships! impossible!” cried D’Artagnan.

“Something like two thousand pieces of cannon,” said Colbert. “That is what the king possesses at this moment. Of five and thirty vessels we can make three squadrons, but I must have five.”

“Five!” cried Aramis.

“They will be afloat before the end of the year, gentlemen; the king will have fifty ship of the line. We may venture on a contest with them, may we not?”

“To build vessels,” said D’Artagnan, “is difficult, but possible. As to arming them, how is that to be done? In France there are neither foundries nor military docks.”

“Bah!” replied Colbert, in a bantering tone, “I have planned all that this year and a half past, did you not know it? Do you know M. d’Imfreville?”

“D’Imfreville?” replied D’Artagnan; “no.”

“He is a man I have discovered; he has a specialty; he is a man of genius — he knows how to set men to work. It is he who has cast cannon and cut the woods of Bourgogne. And then, monsieur l’ambassadeur, you may not believe what I am going to tell you, but I have a still further idea.”

“Oh, monsieur!” said Aramis, civilly, “I always believe you.”

“Calculating upon the character of the Dutch, our allies, I said to myself, ‘They are merchants, they are friendly with the king; they will be happy to sell to the king what they fabricate for themselves; then the more we buy’ — Ah! I must add this: I have Forant — do you know Forant, D’Artagnan?”

Colbert, in his warmth, forgot himself; he called the captain simply *D’Artagnan*, as the king did. But the captain only smiled at it.

“No,” replied he, “I do not know him.”

“That is another man I have discovered, with a genius for buying. This Forant has purchased for me 350,000 pounds of iron in balls, 200,000 pounds of powder, twelve cargoes of Northern timber, matches, grenades, pitch, tar — I know not what! with a saving of seven per cent upon what all those articles would cost me fabricated in France.”

“That is a capital and quaint idea,” replied D’Artagnan, “to have Dutch cannon-balls cast which will return to the Dutch.”

“Is it not, with loss, too?” And Colbert laughed aloud. He was delighted with his own joke.

“Still further,” added he, “these same Dutch are building for the king, at this moment, six vessels after the model of the best of their name. Destouches — Ah! perhaps you don’t know Destouches?”

“No, monsieur.”

“He is a man who has a sure glance to discern, when a ship is launched, what are the defects and qualities of that ship — that is valuable, observe! Nature is truly whimsical. Well, this Destouches appeared to me to be a man likely to prove useful in marine affairs, and he is superintending the construction of six vessels of seventy-eight guns, which the Provinces are building for his majesty. It results from this, my dear Monsieur d’Artagnan, that the king, if he wished to quarrel with the Provinces, would have a very pretty fleet. Now, you know better than anybody else if the land army is efficient.”

D’Artagnan and Aramis looked at each other, wondering at the mysterious labors this man had undertaken in so short a time. Colbert understood them, and was touched by this best of flatteries.

“If we, in France, were ignorant of what was going on,” said D’Artagnan, “out of France still less must be known.”

“That is why I told monsieur l’ambassadeur,” said Colbert, “that, Spain promising its neutrality, England helping us — ”

“If England assists you,” said Aramis, “I promise the neutrality of Spain.”

“I take you at your word,” Colbert hastened to reply with his blunt *bonhomie*. “And, *a propos* of Spain, you have not the ‘Golden Fleece,’ Monsieur d’Almeda. I heard the king say the other day that he should like to see you wear the *grand cordon* of St. Michael.”

Aramis bowed. “Oh!” thought D’Artagnan, “and Porthos is no longer here! What ells of ribbons would there be for him in these *largesses!* Dear Porthos!”

“Monsieur d’Artagnan,” resumed Colbert, “between us two, you will have, I wager, an inclination to lead your musketeers into Holland. Can you swim?” And he laughed like a man in high good humor.

“Like an eel,” replied D’Artagnan.

“Ah! but there are some bitter passages of canals and marshes yonder, Monsieur d’Artagnan, and the best swimmers are sometimes drowned there.”

“It is my profession to die for his majesty,” said the musketeer. “Only, as it is seldom in war that much water is met with without a little fire, I declare to you beforehand, that I will do my best to choose fire. I am getting old; water freezes me — but fire warms, Monsieur Colbert.”

And D’Artagnan looked so handsome still in quasi-juvenile strength as he pronounced these words, that Colbert, in his turn, could not help admiring him. D’Artagnan perceived the effect he had produced. He remembered that the best tradesman is he who fixes a high price upon his goods, when they are valuable. He prepared his price in advance.

“So, then,” said Colbert, “we go into Holland?”

“Yes,” replied D’Artagnan; “only — ”

“Only?” said M. Colbert.

“Only,” repeated D’Artagnan, “there lurks in everything the question of interest, the question of self-love. It is a very fine title, that of captain of the musketeers; but observe this: we have now the king’s guards and the military household of the king. A captain of musketeers ought to command all that, and then he would absorb a hundred thousand livres a year for expenses.”

“Well! but do you suppose the king would haggle with you?” said Colbert.

“Eh! monsieur, you have not understood me,” replied D’Artagnan, sure of carrying his point. “I was telling you that I, an old captain, formerly chief of the king’s guard, having precedence of the *marechaux* of France — I saw myself one day in the trenches with two other equals, the captain of the guards and the colonel commanding the Swiss. Now, at no price will I suffer that. I have old habits, and I will stand or fall by them.”

Colbert felt this blow, but he was prepared for it.

"I have been thinking of what you said just now," replied he.

"About what, monsieur?"

"We were speaking of canals and marshes in which people are drowned."

"Well!"

"Well! if they are drowned, it is for want of a boat, a plank, or a stick."

"Of a stick, however short it may be," said D'Artagnan.

"Exactly," said Colbert. "And, therefore, I never heard of an instance of a *marechal* of France being drowned."

D'Artagnan became very pale with joy, and in a not very firm voice, "People would be very proud of me in my country," said he, "if I were a *marechal* of France; but a man must have commanded an expedition in chief to obtain the *baton*."

"Monsieur!" said Colbert, "here is in this pocket-book which you will study, a plan of campaign you will have to lead a body of troops to carry out in the next spring."

D'Artagnan took the book, tremblingly, and his fingers meeting those of Colbert, the minister pressed the hand of the musketeer loyally.

"Monsieur," said he, "we had both a revenge to take, one over the other. I have begun; it is now your turn!"

"I will do you justice, monsieur," replied D'Artagnan, "and implore you to tell the king that the first opportunity that shall offer, he may depend upon a victory, or to behold me dead — *or both*."

"Then I will have the *fleurs-de-lis* for your *marechal's baton* prepared immediately," said Colbert.

On the morrow, Aramis, who was setting out for Madrid, to negotiate the neutrality of Spain, came to embrace D'Artagnan at his hotel.

"Let us love each other for four," said D'Artagnan. "We are now but two."

"And you will, perhaps, never see me again, dear D'Artagnan," said Aramis; "if you knew how I have loved you! I am old, I am extinct — ah, I am almost dead."

"My friend," said D'Artagnan, "you will live longer than I shall: diplomacy commands you to live; but, for my part, honor condemns me to die."

"Bah! such men as we are, monsieur le marechal," said Aramis, "only die satisfied with joy in glory."

“Ah!” replied D’Artagnan, with a melancholy smile, “I assure you, monsieur le duc, I feel very little appetite for either.”

They once more embraced, and, two hours after, separated — forever.

The Death of D’Artagnan.

Contrary to that which generally happens, whether in politics or morals, each kept his promises, and did honor to his engagements.

The king recalled M. de Guiche, and banished M. le Chevalier de Lorraine; so that Monsieur became ill in consequence. Madame set out for London, where she applied herself so earnestly to make her brother, Charles II., acquire a taste for the political counsels of Mademoiselle de Keroualle, that the alliance between England and France was signed, and the English vessels, ballasted by a few millions of French gold, made a terrible campaign against the fleets of the United Provinces. Charles II. had promised Mademoiselle de Keroualle a little gratitude for her good counsels; he made her Duchess of Portsmouth. Colbert had promised the king vessels, munitions, victories. He kept his word, as is well known. At length Aramis, upon whose promises there was least dependence to be placed, wrote Colbert the following letter, on the subject of the negotiations which he had undertaken at Madrid:

“MONSIEUR COLBERT, — I have the honor to expedite to you the R. P. Oliva, general *ad interim* of the Society of Jesus, my provisional successor. The reverend father will explain to you, Monsieur Colbert, that I preserve to myself the direction of all the affairs of the order which concern France and Spain; but that I am not willing to retain the title of general, which would throw too high a side-light on the progress of the negotiations with which His Catholic Majesty wishes to intrust me. I shall resume that title by the command of his majesty, when the labors I have undertaken in concert with you, for the great glory of God and His Church, shall be brought to a good end. The R. P. Oliva will inform you likewise, monsieur, of the consent His Catholic Majesty gives to the signature of a treaty which assures the neutrality of Spain in the event of a war between France and the United Provinces. This consent will be valid even if England, instead of being active, should satisfy herself with remaining neutral. As for Portugal, of which you and I have spoken, monsieur, I can assure you it will contribute with all its resources to assist the Most Christian King in his war. I beg you, Monsieur Colbert, to preserve your friendship and also to believe in my profound attachment, and to lay my respect at the feet of His Most Christian Majesty. Signed,

“LE DUC D’ALMEDA.”

Aramis had performed more than he had promised; it remained to be seen how the king, M. Colbert, and D’Artagnan would be faithful to each other. In the spring, as Colbert had predicted, the land army entered on its campaign. It preceded, in magnificent order, the court of Louis XIV., who, setting out on horseback, surrounded by carriages filled with ladies and courtiers, conducted the *elite* of his kingdom to this sanguinary *fete*. The officers of the army, it is true, had no other music save the artillery of the Dutch forts; but it was enough for a great number, who found in this war honor, advancement, fortune — or death.

M. d’Artagnan set out commanding a body of twelve thousand men, cavalry, and infantry, with which he was ordered to take the different places which form knots of that strategic network called La Frise. Never was an army conducted more gallantly to an expedition. The officers knew that their leader, prudent and skillful as he was brave, would not sacrifice a single man, nor yield an inch of ground without necessity. He had the old habits of war, to live upon the country, keeping his soldiers singing and the enemy weeping. The captain of the king’s musketeers well knew his business. Never were opportunities better chosen, *coups-de-main* better supported, errors of the besieged more quickly taken advantage of.

The army commanded by D’Artagnan took twelve small places within a month. He was engaged in besieging the thirteenth, which had held out five days. D’Artagnan caused the trenches to be opened without appearing to suppose that these people would ever allow themselves to be taken. The pioneers and laborers were, in the army of this man, a body full of ideas and zeal, because their commander treated them like soldiers, knew how to render their work glorious, and never allowed them to be killed if he could help it. It should have been seen with what eagerness the marshy glebes of Holland were turned over. Those turf-heaps, mounds of potter’s clay, melted at the word of the soldiers like butter in the frying-pans of Friesland housewives.

M. d’Artagnan dispatched a courier to the king to give him an account of the last success, which redoubled the good humor of his majesty and his inclination to amuse the ladies. These victories of M. d’Artagnan gave so much majesty to the prince, that Madame de Montespan no longer called him anything but Louis the Invincible. So that Mademoiselle de la Valliere, who only called the king Louis the Victorious, lost much of his majesty's favor. Besides, her eyes were frequently red, and to an Invincible nothing is more disagreeable than a mistress who weeps while everything is smiling round her. The star of Mademoiselle de la Valliere was being drowned in clouds and tears. But the gayety of Madame de Montespan redoubled with the successes of the king, and consoled him for every other unpleasant circumstance. It was to D'Artagnan the king owed this; and his majesty was anxious to acknowledge these services; he wrote to M. Colbert:

"MONSIEUR COLBERT, — We have a promise to fulfil with M. d'Artagnan, who so well keeps his. This is to inform you that the time is come for performing it. All provisions for this purpose you shall be furnished with in due time. LOUIS."

In consequence of this, Colbert, detaining D'Artagnan's envoy, placed in the hands of that messenger a letter from himself, and a small coffer of ebony inlaid with gold, not very important in appearance, but which, without doubt, was very heavy, as a guard of five men was given to the messenger, to assist him in carrying it. These people arrived before the place which D'Artagnan was besieging towards daybreak, and presented themselves at the lodgings of the general. They were told that M. d'Artagnan, annoyed by a sortie which the governor, an artful man, had made the evening before, and in which the works had been destroyed and seventy-seven men killed, and the reparation of the breaches commenced, had just gone with twenty companies of grenadiers to reconstruct the works.

M. Colbert's envoy had orders to go and seek M. d'Artagnan, wherever he might be, or at whatever hour of the day or night. He directed his course, therefore, towards the trenches, followed by his escort, all on horseback. They perceived M. d'Artagnan in the open plain, with his gold-laced hat, his long cane, and gilt cuffs. He was biting his white mustache, and wiping off, with his left hand, the dust which the passing balls threw up from the ground they plowed so near him. They also saw, amidst this terrible fire, which filled the air with whistling hisses, officers handling the shovel, soldiers rolling barrows, and vast fascines, rising by being either carried or dragged by from ten to twenty men, cover the front of the trench reopened to the center by this extraordinary effort of the general. In three hours, all was reinstated. D'Artagnan began to speak more mildly; and he became quite calm when the captain of the pioneers approached him, hat in hand, to tell him that the trench was again in proper order. This man had scarcely finished speaking, when a ball took off one of his legs, and he fell into the arms of D’Artagnan. The latter lifted up his soldier, and quietly, with soothing words, carried him into the trench, amidst the enthusiastic applause of the regiments. From that time it was no longer a question of valor — the army was delirious; two companies stole away to the advanced posts, which they instantly destroyed.

When their comrades, restrained with great difficulty by D’Artagnan, saw them lodged upon the bastions, they rushed forward likewise; and soon a furious assault was made upon the counterscarp, upon which depended the safety of the place. D’Artagnan perceived there was only one means left of checking his army — to take the place. He directed all his force to the two breaches, where the besieged were busy in repairing. The shock was terrible; eighteen companies took part in it, and D’Artagnan went with the rest, within half cannon-shot of the place, to support the attack by *echelons*. The cries of the Dutch, who were being poniarded upon their guns by D’Artagnan’s grenadiers, were distinctly audible. The struggle grew fiercer with the despair of the governor, who disputed his position foot by foot. D’Artagnan, to put an end to the affair, and to silence the fire, which was unceasing, sent a fresh column, which penetrated like a very wedge; and he soon perceived upon the ramparts, through the fire, the terrified flight of the besieged, pursued by the besiegers.

At this moment the general, breathing feely and full of joy, heard a voice behind him, saying, “Monsieur, if you please, from M. Colbert.”

He broke the seal of the letter, which contained these words:

“MONSIEUR D’ARTAGNAN: — The king commands me to inform you that he has nominated you marechal of France, as a reward for your magnificent services, and the honor you do to his arms. The king is highly pleased, monsieur, with the captures you have made; he commands you, in particular, to finish the siege you have commenced, with good fortune to you, and success for him.”

D’Artagnan was standing with a radiant countenance and sparkling eye. He looked up to watch the progress of his troops upon the walls, still enveloped in red and black volumes of smoke. “I have finished,” replied he to the messenger; “the city will have surrendered in a quarter of an hour.” He then resumed his reading:

"The *coffret*, Monsieur d'Artagnan, is my own present. You will not be sorry to see that, whilst you warriors are drawing the sword to defend the king, I am moving the pacific arts to ornament a present worthy of you. I commend myself to your friendship, monsieur le marechal, and beg you to believe in mine. COLBERT"

D'Artagnan, intoxicated with joy, made a sign to the messenger, who approached, with his *coffret* in his hands. But at the moment the *marechal* was going to look at it, a loud explosion resounded from the ramparts, and called his attention towards the city. "It is strange," said D'Artagnan, "that I don't yet see the king's flag on the walls, or hear the drums beat the *chamade*." He launched three hundred fresh men, under a high-spirited officer, and ordered another breach to be made. Then, more tranquilly, he turned towards the *coffret,* which Colbert's envoy held out to him. — It was his treasure — he had won it.

D'Artagnan was holding out his hand to open the *coffret*, when a ball from the city crushed the *coffret* in the arms of the officer, struck D'Artagnan full in the chest, and knocked him down upon a sloping heap of earth, whilst the *fleur-de-lised baton*, escaping from the broken box, came rolling under the powerless hand of the *marechal*. D'Artagnan endeavored to raise himself. It was thought he had been knocked down without being wounded. A terrible cry broke from the group of terrified officers; the *marechal* was covered with blood; the pallor of death ascended slowly to his noble countenance. Leaning upon the arms held out on all sides to receive him, he was able once more to turn his eyes towards the place, and to distinguish the white flag at the crest of the principal bastion; his ears, already deaf to the sounds of life, caught feebly the rolling of the drum which announced the victory. Then, clasping in his nerveless hand the *baton*, ornamented with its *fleurs-de-lis*, he cast on it his eyes, which had no longer the power of looking upwards towards Heaven, and fell back, murmuring strange words, which appeared to the soldiers cabalistic — words which had formerly represented so many things on earth, and which none but the dying man any longer comprehended:

"Athos — Porthos, farewell till we meet again! Aramis, adieu forever!"

Of the four valiant men whose history we have related, there now remained but one. Heaven had taken to itself three noble souls.

THE END

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VOLUME IV: THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

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THE QUEEN’S NECKLACE

Anonymous translation, 1895

First appearing in serial format in *La Presse*, this novel was first published in 1849, a year after the revolution in France. The story takes place in 1784 and is loosely based on the Affair of the Diamond Necklace, an episode involving fraud that scandalised the court of Louis XVI. This novel presents an idealised portrayal of Marie Antoinette, but it also depicts the decadence of the nobility of the time.

The first chapters of the novel, which feature a dinner hosted by the old Marshal of Richelieu, were inspired by Jean-François de La Harpe’s *The Prophecy of Cazotte*. In this passage, the Count of Cagliostro predicts for the various guests the tragic ends that await them, including the execution of Louis XVI.

Dumas, close to the time of publication

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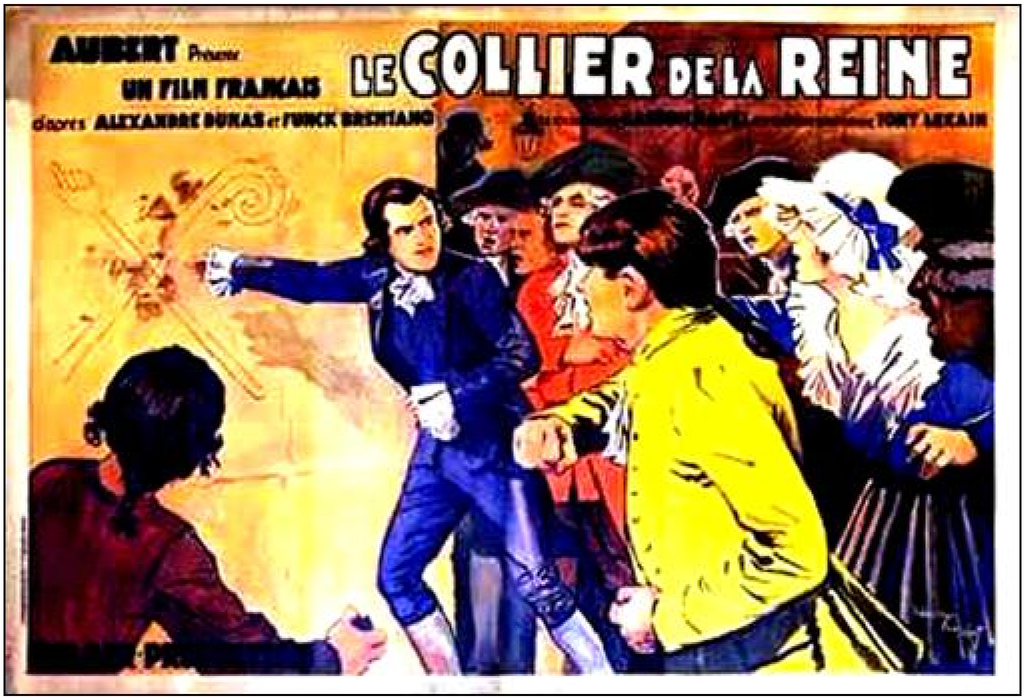
AUBERT Présente
UN FILM FRANCAIS
LE COLLIER DE LA REINE
d'après ALEXANDRE DUMAS et FUNCK BRENTANO
TONY LEKAIN

The 1929 film adaptation

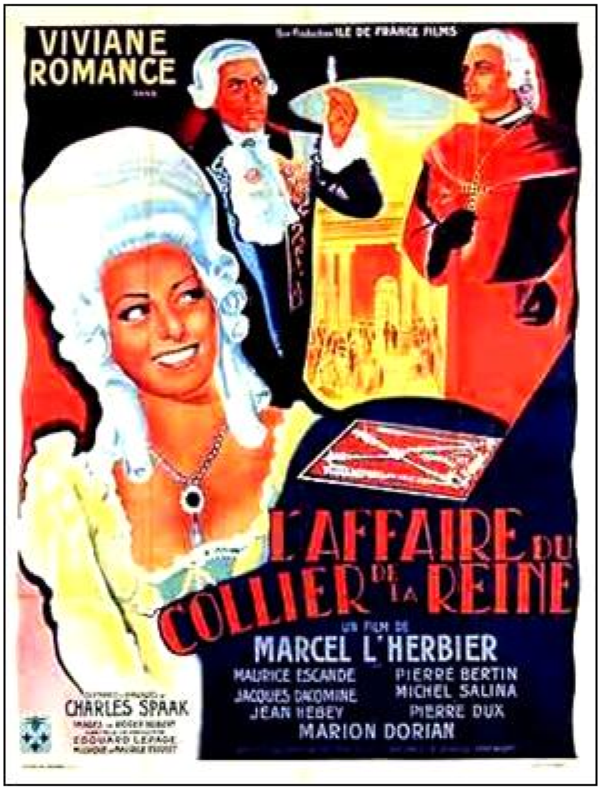
VIVIANE ROMANCE
ILE DE FRANCE FILMS
L'AFFAIRE DU COLLIER DE LA REINE
UN FILM DE
MARCEL L'HERBIER
MAURICE ESCANDE
PIERRE BERTIN
JACQUES DACOMINE
MICHEL SALINA
JEAN HEBEY
PIERRE DUX
MARION DORIAN
CHARLES SPAAK
EDOUARD LEPAGE

The 1946 film adaptation

HER BIRTHRIGHT WAS STOLEN. HER DIGNITY TAKEN. HER RIGHTS DENIED.
DECEPTION WAS THE ONLY OPTION.
ACADEMY AWARD WINNER
HILARY SWANK
The Affair of the Necklace

The 2001 film adaptation

PROLOGUE. — THE PREDICTIONS.

AN OLD NOBLEMAN AND AN OLD MAÎTRE-D’HÔTEL.

It was the beginning of April, 1784, between twelve and one o’clock. Our old acquaintance, the Marshal de Richelieu, having with his own hands colored his eyebrows with a perfumed dye, pushed away the mirror which was held to him by his valet, the successor of his faithful Raffè and shaking his head in the manner peculiar to himself, “Ah!” said he, “now I look myself;” and rising from his seat with juvenile vivacity, he commenced shaking off the powder which had fallen from his wig over his blue velvet coat, then, after taking a turn or two up and down his room, called for his maître-d’hôtel.

In five minutes this personage made his appearance, elaborately dressed.

The marshal turned towards him, and with a gravity befitting the occasion, said, “Sir, I suppose you have prepared me a good dinner?”

“Certainly, your grace.”

“You have the list of my guests?”

“I remember them perfectly, your grace; I have prepared a dinner for nine.”

“There are two sorts of dinners, sir,” said the marshal.

“True, your grace, but — — ”

The marshal interrupted him with a slightly impatient movement, although still dignified.

“Do you know, sir, that whenever I have heard the word ‘but,’ and I have heard it many times in the course of eighty-eight years, it has been each time, I am sorry to say, the harbinger of some folly.”

“Your grace — — ”

“In the first place, at what time do we dine?”

“Your grace, the citizens dine at two, the bar at three, the nobility at four — — ”

“And I, sir?”

“Your grace will dine to-day at five.”

“Oh, at five!”

“Yes, your grace, like the king — — ”

“And why like the king?”

“Because, on the list of your guests, is the name of a king.”

“Not so, sir, you mistake; all my guests to-day are simply noblemen.”

“Your grace is surely jesting; the Count Haga, who is among the guests — — ”

“Well, sir!”

“The Count Haga is a king.”

“I know no king so called.”

“Your grace must pardon me then,” said the maître-d’hôtel, bowing, “but, I believed, supposed — — ”

“Your business, sir, is neither to believe nor suppose; your business is to read, without comment, the orders I give you. When I wish a thing to be known, I tell it; when I do not tell it, I wish it unknown.”

The maître-d’hôtel bowed again, more respectfully, perhaps, than he would have done to a reigning monarch.

“Therefore, sir,” continued the old marshal, “you will, as I have none but noblemen to dinner, let us dine at my usual hour, four o’clock.”

At this order, the countenance of the maître-d’hôtel became clouded as if he had heard his sentence of death; he grew deadly pale; then, recovering himself, with the courage of despair he said, “In any event, your grace cannot dine before five o’clock.”

“Why so, sir?” cried the marshal.

“Because it is utterly impossible.”

“Sir,” said the marshal, with a haughty air, “it is now, I believe, twenty years since you entered my service?”

“Twenty-one years, a month, and two weeks.”

“Well, sir, to these twenty-one years, a month, and two weeks, you will not add a day, nor an hour. You understand me, sir,” he continued, biting his thin lips and depressing his eyebrows; “this evening you seek a new master. I do not choose that the word impossible shall be pronounced in my house; I am too old now to begin to learn its meaning.”

The maître-d’hôtel bowed a third time.

“This evening,” said he, “I shall have taken leave of your grace, but, at least, up to the last moment, my duty shall have been performed as it should be;” and he made two steps towards the door.

“What do you call as it should be?” cried the marshal. “Learn, sir, that to do it as it suits me is to do it as it should be. Now, I wish to dine at four, and it does not suit me, when I wish to dine at four, to be obliged to wait till five.”

“Your grace,” replied the maître-d’hôtel, gravely, “I have served as butler to his highness the Prince de Soubise, and as steward to his eminence the Cardinal de Rohan. With the first, his majesty, the late King of France, dined once a year; with the second, the Emperor of Austria dined once a month. I know, therefore, how a sovereign should be treated. When he visited the Prince de Soubise, Louis XV. called himself in vain the Baron de Gonesse; at the house of M. de Rohan, the Emperor Joseph was announced as the Count de Packenstein; but he was none the less emperor. To-day, your grace also receives a guest, who vainly calls himself Count Haga — Count Haga is still King of Sweden. I shall leave your service this evening, but Count Haga will have been treated like a king.”

“But that,” said the marshal, “is the very thing that I am tiring myself to death in forbidding; Count Haga wishes to preserve his incognito as strictly as possible. Well do I see through your absurd vanity; it is not the crown that you honor, but yourself that you wish to glorify; I repeat again, that I do not wish it imagined that I have a king here.”

“What, then, does your grace take me for? It is not that I wish it known that there is a king here.”

“Then in heaven’s name do not be obstinate, but let us have dinner at four.”

“But at four o’clock, your grace, what I am expecting will not have arrived.”

“What are you expecting? a fish, like M. Vatel?”

“Does your grace wish that I should tell you?”

“On my faith, I am curious.”

“Then, your grace, I wait for a bottle of wine.”

“A bottle of wine! Explain yourself, sir, the thing begins to interest me.”

“Listen then, your grace; his majesty the King of Sweden — I beg pardon, the Count Haga I should have said — drinks nothing but tokay.”

“Well, am I so poor as to have no tokay in my cellar? If so, I must dismiss my butler.”

“Not so, your grace; on the contrary, you have about sixty bottles.”

“Well, do you think Count Haga will drink sixty bottles with his dinner?”

“No, your grace; but when Count Haga first visited France, when he was only prince royal, he dined with the late king, who had received twelve bottles of tokay from the Emperor of Austria. You are aware that the tokay of the finest vintages is reserved exclusively for the cellar of the emperor, and that kings themselves can only drink it when he pleases to send it to them.”

“I know it.”

“Then, your grace, of these twelve bottles of which the prince royal drank, only two remain. One is in the cellar of his majesty Louis XVI. —— ”

“And the other?”

“Ah, your grace!” said the maître-d’hôtel, with a triumphant smile, for he felt that, after the long battle he had been fighting, the moment of victory was at hand, “the other one was stolen.”

“By whom, then?”

“By one of my friends, the late king’s butler, who was under great obligations to me.”

“Oh! and so he gave it to you.”

“Certainly, your grace,” said the maître-d’hôtel with pride.

“And what did you do with it?”

“I placed it carefully in my master’s cellar.”

“Your master! And who was your master at that time?”

“His eminence the Cardinal de Rohan.”

“Ah, mon Dieu! at Strasbourg?”

“At Saverne.”

“And you have sent to seek this bottle for me!” cried the old marshal.

“For you, your grace,” replied the maître-d’hôtel, in a tone which plainly said, “ungrateful as you are.”

The Duke de Richelieu seized the hand of the old servant and cried, “I beg pardon; you are the king of maîtres d’hôtel.”

“And you would have dismissed me,” he replied, with an indescribable shrug of his shoulders.

“Oh, I will pay you one hundred pistoles for this bottle of wine.”

“And the expenses of its coming here will be another hundred; but you will grant that it is worth it.”

“I will grant anything you please, and, to begin, from to-day I double your salary.”

“I seek no reward, your grace; I have but done my duty.”

“And when will your courier arrive?”

“Your grace may judge if I have lost time: on what day did I have my orders for the dinner?”

“Why, three days ago, I believe.”

“It takes a courier, at his utmost speed, twenty-four hours to go, and the same to return.”

“There still remain twenty-four hours,” said the marshal; “how have they been employed?”

“Alas, your grace, they were lost. The idea only came to me the day after I received the list of your guests. Now calculate the time necessary for the negotiation, and you will perceive that in asking you to wait till five I am only doing what I am absolutely obliged to do.”

“The bottle is not yet arrived, then?”

“No, your grace.”

“Ah, sir, if your colleague at Saverne be as devoted to the Prince de Rohan as you are to me, and should refuse the bottle, as you would do in his place — — ”

“I? your grace — — ”

“Yes; you would not, I suppose, have given away such a bottle, had it belonged to me?”

“I beg your pardon, humbly, your grace; but had a friend, having a king to provide for, asked me for your best bottle of wine, he should have had it immediately.”

“Oh!” said the marshal, with a grimace.

“It is only by helping others that we can expect help in our own need, your grace.”

“Well, then, I suppose we may calculate that it will be given, but there is still another risk — if the bottle should be broken?”

“Oh! your grace, who would break a bottle of wine of that value?”

“Well, I trust not; what time, then, do you expect your courier?”

“At four o’clock precisely.”

“Then why not dine at four?” replied the marshal.

“Your grace, the wine must rest for an hour; and had it not been for an invention of my own, it would have required three days to recover itself.”

Beaten at all points, the marshal gave way.

“Besides,” continued the old servant, “be sure, your grace, that your guests will not arrive before half-past four.”

“And why not?”

"Consider, your grace: to begin with M. de Launay; he comes from the Bastile, and with the ice at present covering the streets of Paris — — "

"No; but he will leave after the prisoners' dinner, at twelve o'clock."

"Pardon me, your grace, but the dinner hour at the Bastile has been changed since your grace was there; it is now one."

"Sir, you are learned on all points; pray go on."

"Madame Dubarry comes from the Luciennes, one continued descent, and in this frost."

"That would not prevent her being punctual, since she is no longer a duke's favorite; she plays the queen only among barons; but let me tell you, sir, that I desire to have dinner early on account of M. de la Pérouse, who sets off to-night, and would not wish to be late."

"But, your grace, M. de la Pérouse is with the king, discussing geography and cosmography; he will not get away too early."

"It is possible."

"It is certain, your grace, and it will be the same with M. de Favras, who is with the Count de Provence, talking, no doubt, of the new play by the Canon de Beaumarchais."

"You mean the 'Marriage of Figaro'?"

"Yes, your grace."

"Why, you are quite literary also, it seems."

"In my leisure moments I read, your grace."

"We have, however, M. de Condorcet, who, being a geometrician, should at least be punctual."

"Yes; but he will be deep in some calculation, from which, when he rouses himself, it will probably be at least half an hour too late. As for the Count Cagliostro, as he is a stranger, and not well acquainted with the customs of Versailles, he will, in all probability, make us wait for him."

"Well," said the marshal, "you have disposed of all my guests, except M. de Taverney, in a manner worthy of Homer, or of my poor Raffè."

The maître-d'hôtel bowed. "I have not," said he, "named M. de Taverney, because, being an old friend, he will probably be punctual."

"Good; and where do we dine?"

"In the great dining-room, your grace."

"But we shall freeze there."

"It has been warmed for three days, your grace; and I believe you will find it perfectly comfortable."

“Very well; but there is a clock striking! Why, it is half-past four!” cried the marshal.

“Yes, your grace; and there is the courier entering the courtyard with my bottle of tokay.”

“May I continue for another twenty years to be served in this manner!” said the marshal, turning again to his looking-glass, while the maître-d’hôtel ran down-stairs.

“Twenty years!” said a laughing voice, interrupting the marshal in his survey of himself; “twenty years, my dear duke! I wish them you; but then I shall be sixty — I shall be very old.”

“You, countess!” cried the marshal, “you are my first arrival, and, mon Dieu! you look as young and charming as ever.”

“Duke, I am frozen.”

“Come into the boudoir, then.”

“Oh! tête-à-tête, marshal?”

“Not so,” replied a somewhat broken voice.

“Ah! Taverney!” said the marshal; and then whispering to the countess, “Plague take him for disturbing us!”

Madame Dubarry laughed, and they all entered the adjoining room.

II. — M. DE LA PEROUSE.

At the same moment, the noise of carriages in the street warned the marshal that his guests were arriving; and soon after, thanks to the punctuality of his maître-d'hôtel, nine persons were seated round the oval table in the dining-room. Nine lackeys, silent as shadows, quick without bustle, and attentive without importunity, glided over the carpet, and passed among the guests, without ever touching their chairs, which were surrounded with furs, which were wrapped round the legs of the sitters. These furs, with the heat from the stoves, and the odors from the wine and the dinner, diffused a degree of comfort, which manifested itself in the gaiety of the guests, who had just finished their soup.

No sound was heard from without, and none within, save that made by the guests themselves; for the plates were changed, and the dishes moved round, with the most perfect quiet. Nor from the maître d'hôtel could a whisper be heard; he seemed to give his orders with his eyes.

The guests, therefore, began to feel as though they were alone. It seemed to them that servants so silent must also be deaf.

M. de Richelieu was the first who broke the silence, by saying to the guest on his right hand, “But, count, you drink nothing.”

This was addressed to a man about thirty-eight years of age, short, fair-haired, and with high shoulders; his eye a clear blue, now bright, but oftener with a pensive expression, and with nobility stamped unmistakably on his open and manly forehead.

“I only drink water, marshal,” he replied.

“Excepting with Louis XV.,” returned the marshal; “I had the honor of dining at his table with you, and you deigned that day to drink wine.”

“Ah! you recall a pleasing remembrance, marshal; that was in 1771. It was tokay, from the imperial cellar.”

“It was like that with which my maître-d'hôtel will now have the honor to fill your glass,” replied Richelieu, bowing.

Count Haga raised his glass, and looked through it. The wine sparkled in the light like liquid rubies. “It is true,” said he; “marshal, I thank you.”

These words were uttered in a manner so noble, that the guests, as if by a common impulse, rose, and cried, —

“Long live the king!”

“Yes,” said Count Haga, “long live his majesty the King of France. What say you, M. de la Pérouse?”

“My lord,” replied the captain, with that tone, at once flattering and respectful, common to those accustomed to address crowned heads, “I have just left the king, and his majesty has shown me so much kindness, that no one will more willingly cry ‘Long live the king’ than I. Only, as in another hour I must leave you to join the two ships which his majesty has put at my disposal, once out of this house, I shall take the liberty of saying, ‘Long life to another king, whom I should be proud to serve, had I not already so good a master.’“

“This health that you propose,” said Madame Dubarry, who sat on the marshal’s left hand, “we are all ready to drink, but the oldest of us should take the lead.”

“Is it you, that that concerns, or me, Taverney?” said the marshal, laughing.

“I do not believe,” said another on the opposite side, “that M. de Richelieu is the senior of our party.”

“Then it is you, Taverney,” said the duke.

“No, I am eight years younger than you! I was born in 1704,” returned he.

“How rude,” said the marshal, “to expose my eighty-eight years.”

“Impossible, duke! that you are eighty-eight,” said M. de Condorcet.

“It is, however, but too true; it is a calculation easy to make, and therefore unworthy of an algebraist like you, marquis. I am of the last century — the great century, as we call it. My date is 1696.”

“Impossible!” cried De Launay.

“Oh, if your father were here, he would not say impossible, he, who, when governor of the Bastile, had me for a lodger in 1714.”

“The senior in age, here, however,” said M. de Favras, “is the wine Count Haga is now drinking.”

“You are right, M. de Favras; this wine is a hundred and twenty years old; to the wine, then, belongs the honor — — ”

“One moment, gentlemen,” said Cagliostro, raising his eyes, beaming with intelligence and vivacity; “I claim the precedence.”

“You claim precedence over the tokay!” exclaimed all the guests in chorus.

“Assuredly,” returned Cagliostro, calmly; “since it was I who bottled it.”

“You?”

“Yes, I; on the day of the victory won by Montecucully over the Turks in 1664.”

A burst of laughter followed these words, which Cagliostro had pronounced with perfect gravity.

“By this calculation, you would be something like one hundred and thirty years old,” said Madame Dubarry; “for you must have been at least ten years old when you bottled the wine.”

“I was more than ten when I performed that operation, madame, as on the following day I had the honor of being deputed by his majesty the Emperor of Austria to congratulate Montecucully, who by the victory of St. Gothard had avenged the day at Especk, in Sclavonia, in which the infidels treated the imperialists so roughly, who were my friends and companions in arms in 1536.”

“Oh,” said Count Haga, as coldly as Cagliostro himself, “you must have been at least ten years old, when you were at that memorable battle.”

“A terrible defeat, count,” returned Cagliostro.

“Less terrible than Cressy, however,” said Condorcet, smiling.

“True, sir, for at the battle of Cressy, it was not only an army, but all France, that was beaten; but then this defeat was scarcely a fair victory to the English; for King Edward had cannon, a circumstance of which Philip de Valois was ignorant, or rather, which he would not believe, although I warned him that I had with my own eyes seen four pieces of artillery which Edward had bought from the Venetians.”

“Ah,” said Madame Dubarry; “you knew Philip de Valois?”

“Madame, I had the honor to be one of the five lords who escorted him off the field of battle; I came to France with the poor old King of Bohemia, who was blind, and who threw away his life when he heard that the battle was lost.”

“Ah, sir,” said M. de la Pérouse, “how much I regret, that instead of the battle of Cressy, it was not that of Actium at which you assisted.”

“Why so, sir?”

“Oh, because you might have given me some nautical details, which, in spite of Plutarch’s fine narration, have ever been obscure to me.”

“Which, sir? I should be happy to be of service to you.”

“Oh, you were there, then, also?”

“No, sir; I was then in Egypt. I had been employed by Queen Cleopatra to restore the library at Alexandria — an office for which I was better qualified than any one else, from having personally known the best authors of antiquity.”

“And you have seen Queen Cleopatra?” said Madame Dubarry.

“As I now see you, madame.”

“Was she as pretty as they say?”

“Madame, you know beauty is only comparative; a charming queen in Egypt, in Paris she would only have been a pretty grisette.”

“Say no harm of grisettes, count.”

“God forbid!”

“Then Cleopatra was — — ”

“Little, slender, lively, and intelligent; with large almond-shaped eyes, a Grecian nose, teeth like pearls, and a hand like your own, countess — a fit hand to hold a scepter. See, here is a diamond which she gave me, and which she had had from her brother Ptolemy; she wore it on her thumb.”

“On her thumb?” cried Madame Dubarry.

“Yes; it was an Egyptian fashion; and I, you see, can hardly put it on my little finger;” and taking off the ring, he handed it to Madame Dubarry.

It was a magnificent diamond, of such fine water, and so beautifully cut, as to be worth thirty thousand or forty thousand francs.

The diamond was passed round the table, and returned to Cagliostro, who, putting it quietly on his finger again, said, “Ah, I see well you are all incredulous; this fatal incredulity I have had to contend against all my life. Philip de Valois would not listen to me, when I told him to leave open a retreat to Edward; Cleopatra would not believe me when I warned her that Antony would be beaten: the Trojans would not credit me, when I said to them, with reference to the wooden horse, ‘Cassandra is inspired; listen to Cassandra.’“

“Oh! it is charming,” said Madame Dubarry, shaking with laughter; “I have never met a man at once so serious and so diverting.”

“I assure you,” replied Cagliostro, “that Jonathan was much more so. He was really a charming companion; until he was killed by Saul, he nearly drove me crazy with laughing.”

"Do you know," said the Duke de Richelieu, "if you go on in this way you will drive poor Taverney crazy; he is so afraid of death, that he is staring at you with all his eyes, hoping you to be an immortal."

"Immortal I cannot say, but one thing I can affirm — — "

"What?" cried Taverney, who was the most eager listener.

"That I have seen all the people and events of which I have been speaking to you."

"You have known Montecucully?"

"As well as I know you, M. de Favras; and, indeed, much better, for this is but the second or third time I have had the honor of seeing you, while I lived nearly a year under the same tent with him of whom you speak."

"You knew Philip de Valois?"

"As I have already had the honor of telling you, M. de Condorcet; but when he returned to Paris, I left France and returned to Bohemia."

"And Cleopatra."

"Yes, countess; Cleopatra, I can tell you, had eyes as black as yours, and shoulders almost as beautiful."

"But what do you know of my shoulders?"

"They are like what Cassandra's once were; and there is still a further resemblance, — she had like you, or rather, you have like her, a little black spot on your left side, just above the sixth rib."

"Oh, count, now you really are a sorcerer."

"No, no," cried the marshal, laughing; "it was I who told him."

"And pray how do you know?"

The marshal bit his lips, and replied, "Oh, it is a family secret."

"Well, really, marshal," said the countess, "one should put on a double coat of rouge before visiting you;" and turning again to Cagliostro, "then, sir, you have the art of renewing your youth? For although you say you are three or four thousand years old, you scarcely look forty."

"Yes, madame, I do possess that secret."

"Oh, then, sir, impart it to me."

"To you, madame? It is useless; your youth is already renewed; your age is only what it appears to be, and you do not look thirty."

"Ah! you flatter."

"No, madame, I speak only the truth, but it is easily explained: you have already tried my receipt."

"How so?"

"You have taken my elixir."

"I?"

"You, countess. Oh! you cannot have forgotten it. Do you not remember a certain house in the Rue St. Claude, and coming there on some business respecting M. de Sartines? You remember rendering a service to one of my friends, called Joseph Balsamo, and that this Joseph Balsamo gave you a bottle of elixir, recommending you to take three drops every morning? Do you not remember having done this regularly until the last year, when the bottle became exhausted? If you do not remember all this, countess, it is more than forgetfulness — it is ingratitude."

"Oh! M. Cagliostro, you are telling me things — — "

"Which were only known to yourself, I am aware; but what would be the use of being a sorcerer if one did not know one's neighbor's secrets?"

"Then Joseph Balsamo has, like you, the secret of this famous elixir?"

"No, madame, but he was one of my best friends, and I gave him three or four bottles."

"And has he any left?"

"Oh! I know nothing of that; for the last two or three years, poor Balsamo has disappeared. The last time I saw him was in America, on the banks of the Ohio: he was setting off on an expedition to the Rocky Mountains, and since then I have heard that he is dead."

"Come, come, count," cried the marshal; "let us have the secret, by all means."

"Are you speaking seriously, sir?" said Count Haga.

"Very seriously, sire, — I beg pardon, I mean count;" and Cagliostro bowed in such a way as to indicate that his error was a voluntary one.

"Then," said the marshal, "Madame Dubarry is not old enough to be made young again?"

"No, on my conscience."

"Well, then, I will give you another subject: here is my friend, M. Taverney — what do you say to him? Does he not look like a contemporary of Pontius Pilate? But perhaps, he, on the contrary, is too old."

Cagliostro looked at the baron. "No," said he.

"Ah! my dear count," exclaimed Richelieu; "if you will renew his youth, I will proclaim you a true pupil of Medea."

"You wish it?" asked Cagliostro of the host, and looking round at the same time on all assembled.

Every one called out, “Yes.”

“And you also, M. Taverney?”

“I more than any one,” said the baron.

“Well, it is easy,” returned Cagliostro; and he drew from his pocket a small bottle, and poured into a glass some of the liquid it contained. Then, mixing these drops with half a glass of iced champagne, he passed it to the baron.

All eyes followed his movements eagerly.

The baron took the glass, but as he was about to drink he hesitated.

Every one began to laugh, but Cagliostro called out, “Drink, baron, or you will lose a liquor of which each drop is worth a hundred louis d’ors.”

“The devil,” cried Richelieu; “that is even better than tokay.”

“I must then drink?” said the baron, almost trembling.

“Or pass the glass to another, sir, that some one at least may profit by it.”

“Pass it here,” said Richelieu, holding out his hand.

The baron raised the glass, and decided, doubtless, by the delicious smell and the beautiful rose color which those few drops had given to the champagne, he swallowed the magic liquor. In an instant a kind of shiver ran through him; he seemed to feel all his old and sluggish blood rushing quickly through his veins, from his heart to his feet, his wrinkled skin seemed to expand, his eyes, half covered by their lids, appeared to open without his will, and the pupils to grow and brighten, the trembling of his hands to cease, his voice to strengthen, and his limbs to recover their former youthful elasticity. In fact, it seemed as if the liquid in its descent had regenerated his whole body.

A cry of surprise, wonder, and admiration rang through the room.

Taverney, who had been slowly eating with his gums, began to feel famished; he seized a plate and helped himself largely to a ragout, and then demolished a partridge, bones and all, calling out that his teeth were coming back to him. He eat, laughed, and cried for joy, for half an hour, while the others remained gazing at him in stupefied wonder; then little by little he failed again, like a lamp whose oil is burning out, and all the former signs of old age returned upon him.

“Oh!” groaned he, “once more adieu to my youth,” and he gave utterance to a deep sigh, while two tears rolled over his cheeks.

Instinctively, at this mournful spectacle of the old man first made young again, and then seeming to become yet older than before, from the contrast, the sigh was echoed all round the table.

"It is easy to explain, gentlemen," said Cagliostro; "I gave the baron but thirty-five drops of the elixir. He became young, therefore, for only thirty-five minutes."

"Oh more, more, count!" cried the old man eagerly.

"No, sir, for perhaps the second trial would kill you."

Of all the guests, Madame Dubarry, who had already tested the virtue of the elixir, seemed most deeply interested while old Taverney's youth seemed thus to renew itself; she had watched him with delight and triumph, and half fancied herself growing young again at the sight, while she could hardly refrain from endeavoring to snatch from Cagliostro the wonderful bottle; but now, seeing him resume his old age even quicker than he had lost it, "Alas!" she said sadly, "all is vanity and deception; the effects of this wonderful secret last for thirty-five minutes."

"That is to say," said Count Haga, "that in order to resume your youth for two years, you would have to drink a perfect river."

Every one laughed.

"Oh!" said De Condorcet, "the calculation is simple; a mere nothing of 3,153,000 drops for one year's youth."

"An inundation," said La Pérouse.

"However, sir," continued Madame Dubarry; "according to you, I have not needed so much, as a small bottle about four times the size of that you hold has been sufficient to arrest the march of time for ten years."

"Just so, madame. And you alone approach this mysterious truth. The man who has already grown old needs this large quantity to produce an immediate and powerful effect; but a woman of thirty, as you were, or a man of forty, as I was, when I began to drink this elixir, still full of life and youth, needs but ten drops at each period of decay; and with these ten drops may eternally continue his life and youth at the same point."

"What do you call the periods of decay?" asked Count Haga.

"The natural periods, count. In a state of nature, man's strength increases until thirty-five years of age. It then remains stationary until forty; and from that time forward, it begins to diminish, but almost imperceptibly, until fifty; then the process becomes quicker and quicker to the day of his death. In our state of civilization, when the body is weakened by excess, cares, and maladies, the failure begins at thirty-five. The time, then, to take nature, is when she is stationary, so as to forestall the beginning of decay. He who, possessor as I am of the secret of this elixir, knows how to seize the happy moment, will live as I live; always young, or, at least, always young enough for what he has to do in the world."

"Oh, M. Cagliostro," cried the countess; "why, if you could choose your own age, did you not stop at twenty instead of at forty?"

"Because, madame," said Cagliostro, smiling, "it suits me better to be a man of forty, still healthy and vigorous, than a raw youth of twenty."

"Oh!" said the countess.

"Doubtless, madame," continued Cagliostro, "at twenty one pleases women of thirty; at forty, we govern women of twenty, and men of sixty."

"I yield, sir," said the countess, "for you are a living proof of the truth of your own words."

"Then I," said Taverney, piteously, "am condemned; it is too late for me."

"M. de Richelieu has been more skilful than you," said La Pérouse naïvely, "and I have always heard that he had some secret."

"It is a report that the women have spread," laughed Count Haga.

"Is that a reason for disbelieving it, duke?" asked Madame Dubarry.

The old duke colored, a rare thing for him; but replied, "Do you wish, gentlemen, to have my receipt?"

"Oh, by all means."

"Well, then, it is simply to take care of yourself."

"Oh, oh!" cried all.

"But, M. Cagliostro," continued Madame Dubarry, "I must ask more about the elixir."

"Well, madame?"

"You said you first used it at forty years of age — — "

"Yes, madame."

"And that since that time, that is, since the siege of Troy — — "

"A little before, madame."

"That you have always remained forty years old?"

"You see me now."

"But then, sir," said De Condorcet, "you argue, not only the perpetuation of youth, but the preservation of life; for if since the siege of Troy you have been always forty, you have never died."

"True, marquis, I have never died."

"But are you, then, invulnerable, like Achilles, or still more so, for Achilles was killed by the arrow of Paris?"

“No. I am not invulnerable, and there is my great regret,” said Cagliostro.

“Then, sir, you may be killed.”

“Alas! yes.”

“How, then, have you escaped all accidents for three thousand five hundred years?”

“It is chance, marquis, but will you follow my reasoning?”

“Yes, yes,” cried all, with eagerness.

Cagliostro continued: “What is the first requisite to life?” he asked, spreading out his white and beautiful hands covered with rings, among which Cleopatra’s shone conspicuously. “Is it not health!”

“Certainly.”

“And the way to preserve health is?”

“Proper management,” said Count Haga.

“Right, count. And why should not my elixir be the best possible method of treatment? And this treatment I have adopted, and with it have preserved my youth, and with youth, health, and life.”

“But all things exhaust themselves; the finest constitution, as well as the worst.”

“The body of Paris, like that of Vulcan,” said the countess. “Perhaps, you knew Paris, by the bye?”

“Perfectly, madame; he was a fine young man, but really did not deserve all that has been said of him. In the first place, he had red hair.”

“Red hair, horrible!”

“Unluckily, madame, Helen was not of your opinion: but to return to our subject. You say, M. de Taverney, that all things exhaust themselves; but you also know, that everything recovers again, regenerates, or is replaced, whichever you please to call it. The famous knife of St. Hubert, which so often changed both blade and handle, is an example, for through every change it still remained the knife of St. Hubert. The wines which the monks of Heidelberg preserve so carefully in their cellars, remain still the same wine, although each year they pour into it a fresh supply; therefore, this wine always remains clear, bright, and delicious: while the wine which Opimus and I hid in the earthen jars was, when I tried it a hundred years after, only a thick dirty substance, which might have been eaten, but certainly could not have been drunk. Well, I follow the example of the monks of Heidelberg, and preserve my body by introducing into it every year new elements, which regenerate the old. Every morning a new and fresh atom replaces in my blood, my flesh, and my bones, some particle which has perished. I stay that ruin which most men allow insensibly to invade their whole being, and I force into action all those powers which God has given to every human being, but which most people allow to lie dormant. This is the great study of my life, and as, in all things, he who does one thing constantly does that thing better than others, I am becoming more skilful than others in avoiding danger. Thus, you would not get me to enter a tottering house; I have seen too many houses not to tell at a glance the safe from the unsafe. You would not see me go out hunting with a man who managed his gun badly. From Cephalus, who killed his wife, down to the regent, who shot the prince in the eye, I have seen too many unskilful people. You could not make me accept in battle the post which many a man would take without thinking, because I should calculate in a moment the chances of danger at each point. You will tell me that one cannot foresee a stray bullet; but the man who has escaped a thousand gun-shots will hardly fall a victim to one now. Ah, you look incredulous, but am I not a living proof? I do not tell you that I am immortal, only that I know better than others how to avoid danger; for instance, I would not remain here now alone with M. de Launay, who is thinking that, if he had me in the Bastile, he would put my immortality to the test of starvation; neither would I remain with M. de Condorcet, for he is thinking that he might just empty into my glass the contents of that ring which he wears on his left hand, and which is full of poison — not with any evil intent, but just as a scientific experiment, to see if I should die."

The two people named looked at each other, and colored.

"Confess, M. de Launay, we are not in a court of justice; besides, thoughts are not punished. Did you not think what I said? And you, M. de Condorcet, would you not have liked to let me taste the poison in your ring, in the name of your beloved mistress, science?"

"Indeed," said M. de Launay, laughing, "I confess you are right; it was folly, but that folly did pass through my mind just before you accused me."

"And I," said M. de Condorcet, "will not be less candid. I did think that if you tasted the contents of my ring, I would not give much for your life."

A cry of admiration burst from the rest of the party; these avowals confirming not the immortality, but the penetration, of Count Cagliostro.

"You see," said Cagliostro, quietly, "that I divined these dangers; well, it is the same with other things. The experience of a long life reveals to me at a glance much of the past and of the future of those whom I meet. My capabilities in this way extend even to animals and inanimate objects. If I get into a carriage, I can tell from the look of the horses if they are likely to run away; and from that of the coachman, if he will overturn me. If I go on board ship, I can see if the captain is ignorant or obstinate, and consequently likely to endanger me. I should then leave the coachman or captain, escape from those horses or that ship. I do not deny chance, I only lessen it, and instead of incurring a hundred chances, like the rest of the world, I prevent ninety-nine of them, and endeavor to guard against the hundredth. This is the good of having lived three thousand years."

"Then," said La Pérouse, laughing, amidst the wonder and enthusiasm created by this speech of Cagliostro's, "you should come with me when I embark to make the tour of the world; you would render me a signal service."

Cagliostro did not reply.

"M. de Richelieu," continued La Pérouse, "as the Count Cagliostro, which is very intelligible, does not wish to quit such good company, you must permit me to do so without him. Excuse me, Count Haga, and you, madame, but it is seven o'clock, and I have promised his majesty to start at a quarter past. But since Count Cagliostro will not be tempted to come with me, and see my ships, perhaps he can tell me what will happen to me between Versailles and Brest. From Brest to the Pole I ask nothing; that is my own business."

Cagliostro looked at La Pérouse with such a melancholy air, so full both of pity and kindness, that the others were struck by it. The sailor himself, however, did not remark it. He took leave of the company, put on his fur riding coat, into one of the pockets of which Madame Dubarry pushed a bottle of delicious cordial, welcome to a traveler, but which he would not have provided for himself, to recall to him, she said, his absent friends during the long nights of a journey in such bitter cold.

La Pérouse, still full of gaiety, bowed respectfully to Count Haga, and held out his hand to the old marshal.

"Adieu, dear La Pérouse," said the latter.

"No, duke, au revoir," replied La Pérouse, "one would think I was going away forever; now I have but to circumnavigate the globe — five or six years' absence; it is scarcely worth while to say 'adieu' for that."

“Five or six years,” said the marshal; “you might almost as well say five or six centuries; days are years at my age, therefore I say, adieu.”

“Bah! ask the sorcerer,” returned La Pérouse, still laughing; “he will promise you twenty years’ more life. Will you not, Count Cagliostro? Oh, count, why did I not hear sooner of those precious drops of yours? Whatever the price, I should have shipped a tun. Madame, another kiss of that beautiful hand, I shall certainly not see such another till I return; au revoir,” and he left the room.

Cagliostro still preserved the same mournful silence. They heard the steps of the captain as he left the house, his gay voice in the courtyard, and his farewells to the people assembled to see him depart. Then the horses shook their heads, covered with bells, the door of the carriage shut with some noise, and the wheels were heard rolling along the street.

La Pérouse had started on that voyage from which he was destined never to return.

When they could no longer hear a sound, all looks were again turned to Cagliostro; there seemed a kind of inspired light in his eyes.

Count Haga first broke the silence, which had lasted for some minutes. “Why did you not reply to his question?” he inquired of Cagliostro.

Cagliostro started, as if the question had roused him from a reverie. “Because,” said he, “I must either have told a falsehood or a sad truth.”

“How so?”

“I must have said to him, — ’M. de la Pérouse, the duke is right in saying to you adieu, and not au revoir.’“

“Oh,” said Richelieu, turning pale, “what do you mean?”

“Reassure yourself, marshal, this sad prediction does not concern you.”

“What,” cried Madame Dubarry, “this poor La Pérouse, who has just kissed my hand — — ”

“Not only, madame, will never kiss it again, but will never again see those he has just left,” said Cagliostro, looking attentively at the glass of water he was holding up.

A cry of astonishment burst from all. The interest of the conversation deepened every moment, and you might have thought, from the solemn and anxious air with which all regarded Cagliostro, that it was some ancient and infallible oracle they were consulting.

“Pray then, count,” said Madame Dubarry, “tell us what will befall poor La Pérouse.”

Cagliostro shook his head.

“Oh, yes, let us hear!” cried all the rest.

“Well, then, M. de la Pérouse intends, as you know, to make the tour of the globe, and continue the researches of poor Captain Cook, who was killed in the Sandwich Islands.”

“Yes, yes, we know.”

“Everything should foretell a happy termination to this voyage; M. de la Pérouse is a good seaman, and his route has been most skilfully traced by the king.”

“Yes,” interrupted Count Haga, “the King of France is a clever geographer; is he not, M. de Condorcet?”

“More skilful than is needful for a king,” replied the marquis; “kings ought to know things only slightly, then they will let themselves be guided by those who know them thoroughly.”

“Is this a lesson, marquis?” said Count Haga, smiling.

“Oh, no. Only a simple reflection, a general truth.”

“Well, he is gone,” said Madame Dubarry, anxious to bring the conversation back to La Pérouse.

“Yes, he is gone,” replied Cagliostro, “but don’t believe, in spite of his haste, that he will soon embark. I foresee much time lost at Brest.”

“That would be a pity,” said De Condorcet; “this is the time to set out: it is even now rather late — February or March would have been better.”

“Oh, do not grudge him these few months, M. de Condorcet, for, during them, he will at least live and hope.”

“He has got good officers, I suppose?” said Richelieu.

“Yes, he who commands the second ship is a distinguished officer. I see him — - young, adventurous, brave, unhappily.”

“Why unhappily?”

“A year after I look for him, and see him no more,” said Cagliostro, anxiously consulting his glass. “No one here is related to M. de Langle?”

“No.”

“No one knows him?”

“No.”

“Well, death will commence with him.”

A murmur of affright escaped from all the guests.

“But he, La Pérouse?” cried several voices.

“He sails, he lands, he reembarks; I see one, two years, of successful navigation; we hear news of him, and then — — ”

“Then?”

“Years pass — — ”

“But at last?”

“The sea is vast, the heavens are clouded, here and there appear unknown lands, and figures hideous as the monsters of the Grecian Archipelago. They watch the ship, which is being carried in a fog amongst the breakers, by a tempest less fearful than themselves. Oh! La Pérouse, La Pérouse, if you could hear me, I would cry to you. You set out, like Columbus, to discover a world; beware of unknown isles!”

He ceased, and an icy shiver ran through the assembly.

“But why did you not warn him?” asked Count Haga, who, in spite of himself, had succumbed to the influence of this extraordinary man.

“Yes,” cried Madame Dubarry, “why not send after him and bring him back? The life of a man like La Pérouse is surely worth a courier, my dear marshal.”

The marshal rose to ring the bell.

Cagliostro extended his arm to stop him. “Alas!” said he, “All advice would be useless. I can foretell destiny, but I cannot change it. M. de la Pérouse would laugh if he heard my words, as the son of Priam laughed when Cassandra prophesied; and see, you begin to laugh yourself, Count Haga, and laughing is contagious: your companions are catching it. Do not restrain yourselves, gentlemen — I am accustomed to an incredulous audience.”

“Oh, we believe,” said Madame Dubarry and the Duke de Richelieu; “and I believe,” murmured Taverney; “and I also,” said Count Haga politely.

“Yes,” replied Cagliostro, “you believe, because it concerns La Pérouse; but, if I spoke of yourself, you would not believe.”

“I confess that what would have made me believe, would have been, if you had said to him, ‘Beware of unknown isles;’ then he would, at least, have had the chance of avoiding them.”

“I assure you no, count; and, if he had believed me, it would only have been more horrible, for the unfortunate man would have seen himself approaching those isles destined to be fatal to him, without the power to flee from them. Therefore he would have died, not one, but a hundred deaths, for he would have gone through it all by anticipation. Hope, of which I should have deprived him, is what best sustains a man under all trials."

"Yes," said De Condorcet; "the veil which hides from us our future is the only real good which God has vouchsafed to man."

"Nevertheless," said Count Haga, "did a man like you say to me, shun a certain man or a certain thing, I would beware, and I would thank you for the counsel."

Cagliostro shook his head, with a faint smile.

"I mean it, M. de Cagliostro," continued Count Haga; "warn me, and I will thank you."

"You wish me to tell you what I would not tell La Pérouse?"

"Yes, I wish it."

Cagliostro opened his mouth as if to begin, and then stopped, and said, "No, count, no!"

"I beg you."

Cagliostro still remained silent.

"Take care," said the count, "you are making me incredulous."

"Incredulity is better than misery."

"M. de Cagliostro," said the count, gravely, "you forget one thing, which is, that though there are men who had better remain ignorant of their destiny, there are others who should know it, as it concerns not themselves alone, but millions of others."

"Then," said Cagliostro, "command me; if your majesty commands, I will obey."

"I command you to reveal to me my destiny, M. de Cagliostro," said the king, with an air at once courteous and dignified.

At this moment, as Count Haga had dropped his incognito in speaking to Cagliostro, M. de Richelieu advanced towards him, and said, "Thanks, sire, for the honor you have done my house; will your majesty assume the place of honor?"

"Let us remain as we are, marshal; I wish to hear what M. de Cagliostro is about to say."

"One does not speak the truth to kings, sire."

"Bah! I am not in my kingdom; take your place again, duke. Proceed, M. de Cagliostro, I beg."

Cagliostro looked again through his glass, and one might have imagined the particles agitated by this look, as they danced in, the light. “Sire,” said he, “tell me what you wish to know?”

“Tell me by what death I shall die.”

“By a gun-shot, sire.”

The eyes of Gustavus grew bright. “Ah, in a battle!” said he; “the death of a soldier! Thanks, M. de Cagliostro, a thousand times thanks; oh, I foresee battles, and Gustavus Adolphus and Charles XII. have shown me how a King of Sweden should die.”

Cagliostro drooped his head, without replying.

“Oh!” cried Count Haga, “will not my wound then be given in battle?”

“No, sire.”

“In a sedition? — yes, that is possible.”

“No, not in a sedition, sire.”

“But, where then?”

“At a ball, sire.”

The king remained silent, and Cagliostro buried his head in his hands.

Every one looked pale and frightened; then M. de Condorcet took the glass of water and examined it, as if there he could solve the problem of all that had been going on; but finding nothing to satisfy him, “Well, I also,” said he, “will beg our illustrious prophet to consult for me his magic mirror: unfortunately, I am not a powerful lord; I cannot command, and my obscure life concerns no millions of people.”

“Sir,” said Count Haga, “you command in the name of science, and your life belongs not only to a nation, but to all mankind.”

“Thanks,” said De Condorcet; “but, perhaps, your opinion on this subject is not shared by M. de Cagliostro.”

Cagliostro raised his head. “Yes, marquis,” said he, in a manner which began to be excited, “you are indeed a powerful lord in the kingdom of intelligence; look me, then, in the face, and tell me, seriously, if you also wish that I should prophesy to you.”

“Seriously, count, upon my honor.”

“Well, marquis,” said Cagliostro, in a hoarse voice, “you will die of that poison which you carry in your ring; you will die — — ”

“Oh, but if I throw it away?”

“Throw it away!”

“You allow that that would be easy.”

"Throw it away!"

"Oh, yes, marquis," cried Madame Dubarry; "throw away that horrid poison! Throw it away, if it be only to falsify this prophet of evil, who threatens us all with so many misfortunes. For if you throw it away you cannot die by it, as M. de Cagliostro predicts; so there at least he will have been wrong."

"Madame la Comtesse is right," said Count Haga.

"Bravo, countess!" said Richelieu. "Come, marquis, throw away that poison, for now I know you carry it, I shall tremble every time we drink together; the ring might open of itself, and — — "

"It is useless," said Cagliostro quietly; "M. de Condorcet will not throw it away."

"No," returned De Condorcet, "I shall not throw it away; not that I wish to aid my destiny, but because this is a unique poison, prepared by Cabanis, and which chance has completely hardened, and that chance might never occur again; therefore I will not throw it away. Triumph if you will, M. de Cagliostro."

"Destiny," replied he, "ever finds some way to work out its own ends."

"Then I shall die by poison," said the marquis; "well, so be it. It is an admirable death, I think; a little poison on the tip of the tongue, and I am gone. It is scarcely dying: it is merely ceasing to live."

"It is not necessary for you to suffer, sir," said Cagliostro.

"Then, sir," said M. de Favras, "we have a shipwreck, a gun-shot, and a poisoning which makes my mouth water. Will you not do me the favor also to predict some little pleasure of the same kind for me?"

"Oh, marquis!" replied Cagliostro, beginning to grow warm under this irony, "do not envy these gentlemen, you will have still better."

"Better!" said M. de Favras, laughing; "that is pledging yourself to a great deal. It is difficult to beat the sea, fire, and poison!"

"There remains the cord, marquis," said Cagliostro, bowing.

"The cord! what do you mean?"

"I mean that you will be hanged," replied Cagliostro, seeming no more the master of his prophetic rage.

"Hanged! the devil!" cried Richelieu.

"Monsieur forgets that I am a nobleman," said M. de Favras, coldly; "or if he means to speak of a suicide, I warn him that I shall respect myself sufficiently, even in my last moments, not to use a cord while I have a sword.”

“I do not speak of a suicide, sir.”

“Then you speak of a punishment?”

“Yes.”

“You are a foreigner, sir, and therefore I pardon you.”

“What?”

“Your ignorance, sir. In France we decapitate noblemen.”

“You may arrange this, if you can, with the executioner,” replied Cagliostro.

M. de Favras said no more. There was a general silence and shrinking for a few minutes.

“Do you know that I tremble at last,” said M. de Launay; “my predecessors have come off so badly, that I fear for myself if I now take my turn.”

“Then you are more reasonable than they; you are right. Do not seek to know the future; good or bad, let it rest — it is in the hands of God.”

“Oh! M. de Launay,” said Madame Dubarry, “I hope you will not be less courageous than the others have been.”

“I hope so, too, madame,” said the governor. Then, turning to Cagliostro, “Sir,” he said, “favor me, in my turn, with my horoscope, if you please.”

“It is easy,” replied Cagliostro; “a blow on the head with a hatchet, and all will be over.”

A look of dismay was once more general. Richelieu and Taverney begged Cagliostro to say no more, but female curiosity carried the day.

“To hear you talk, count,” said Madame Dubarry, “one would think the whole universe must die a violent death. Here we were, eight of us, and five are already condemned by you.”

“Oh, you understand that it is all prearranged to frighten us, and we shall only laugh at it,” said M. de Favras, trying to do so.

“Certainly we will laugh,” said Count Haga, “be it true or false.”

“Oh, I will laugh too, then,” said Madame Dubarry. “I will not dishonor the assembly by my cowardice; but, alas! I am only a woman, I cannot rank among you and be worthy of a tragical end; a woman dies in her bed. My death, a sorrowful old woman abandoned by every one, will be the worst of all. Will it not, M. de Cagliostro?”

She stopped, and seemed to wait for the prophet to reassure her. Cagliostro did not speak; so, her curiosity obtaining the mastery over her fears, she went on. “Well, M. de Cagliostro, will you not answer me?”

“What do you wish me to say, madame?”

She hesitated — then, rallying her courage, “Yes,” she cried, “I will run the risk. Tell me the fate of Jeanne de Vaubernier, Countess Dubarry.”

“On the scaffold, madame,” replied the prophet of evil.

“A jest, sir, is it not?” said she, looking at him with a supplicating air.

Cagliostro seemed not to see it. “Why do you think I jest?” said he.

“Oh, because to die on the scaffold one must have committed some crime — stolen, or committed murder, or done something dreadful; and it is not likely I shall do that. It was a jest, was it not?”

“Oh, mon Dieu, yes,” said Cagliostro; “all I have said is but a jest.”

The countess laughed, but scarcely in a natural manner. “Come, M. de Favras,” said she, “let us order our funerals.”

“Oh, that will be needless for you, madame,” said Cagliostro.

“Why so, sir?”

“Because you will go to the scaffold in a car.”

“Oh, how horrible! This dreadful man, marshal! for heaven’s sake choose more cheerful guests next time, or I will never visit you again.”

“Excuse me, madame,” said Cagliostro, “but you, like all the rest, would have me speak.”

“At least I hope you will grant me time to choose my confessor.”

“It will be superfluous, countess.”

“Why?”

“The last person who will mount the scaffold in France with a confessor will be the King of France.” And Cagliostro pronounced these words in so thrilling a voice that every one was struck with horror.

All were silent.

Cagliostro raised to his lips the glass of water in which he had read these fearful prophecies, but scarcely had he touched it, when he set it down with a movement of disgust. He turned his eyes to M. de Taverney.

“Oh,” cried he, in terror, “do not tell me anything; I do not wish to know!”

“Well, then, I will ask instead of him,” said Richelieu.

“You, marshal, be happy; you are the only one of us all who will die in his bed.”

“Coffee, gentlemen, coffee,” cried the marshal, enchanted with the prediction. Every one rose.

But before passing into the drawing-room, Count Haga, approaching Cagliostro, said, —

“Tell me what to beware of.”

“Of a muff, sir,” replied Cagliostro.

“And I?” said Condorcet.

“Of an omelet.”

“Good; I renounce eggs,” and he left the room.

“And I?” said M. de Favras; “what must I fear?”

“A letter.”

“And I?” said De Launay.

“The taking of the Bastile.”

“Oh, you quite reassure me.” And he went away laughing.

“Now for me, sir,” said the countess, trembling.

“You, beautiful countess, shun the Place Louis XV.”

“Alas,” said the countess, “one day already I lost myself there; that day I suffered much.”

She left the room, and Cagliostro was about to follow her when Richelieu stopped him.

“One moment,” said he; “there remains only Taverney and I, my dear sorcerer.”

“M. de Taverney begged me to say nothing, and you, marshal, have asked me nothing.”

“Oh, I do not wish to hear,” again cried Taverney.

“But come, to prove your power, tell us something that only Taverney and I know,” said Richelieu.

“What?” asked Cagliostro, smiling.

“Tell us what makes Taverney come to Versailles, instead of living quietly in his beautiful house at Maison-Rouge, which the king bought for him three years ago.”

“Nothing more simple, marshal,” said Cagliostro. “Ten years ago, M. de Taverney wished to give his daughter, Mademoiselle Andrée, to the King Louis XV., but he did not succeed.”

“Oh!” growled Taverney.

“Now, monsieur wishes to give his son Philippe de Taverney, to the Queen Marie Antoinette; ask him if I speak the truth.”

“On my word,” said Taverney, trembling, “this man is a sorcerer; devil take me if he is not!”

“Do not speak so cavalierly of the devil, my old comrade,” said the marshal.

“It is frightful,” murmured Taverney, and he turned to implore Cagliostro to be discreet, but he was gone.

“Come, Taverney, to the drawing-room,” said the marshal; “or they will drink their coffee without us.”

But when they arrived there, the room was empty; no one had courage to face again the author of these terrible predictions.

The wax lights burned in the candelabra, the fire burned on the hearth, but all for nothing.

“Ma foi, old friend, it seems we must take our coffee tête-à-tête. Why, where the devil has he gone?” Richelieu looked all around him, but Taverney had vanished like the rest. “Never mind,” said the marshal, chuckling as Voltaire might have done, and rubbing his withered though still white hands; “I shall be the only one to die in my bed. Well, Count Cagliostro, at least I believe. In my bed! that was it; I shall die in my bed, and I trust not for a long time. Hola! my valet-de-chambre and my drops.”

The valet entered with the bottle, and the marshal went with him into the bedroom.

THEEND OF THE PROLOGUE.

CHAPTER I.

TWO UNKNOWN LADIES.

The winter of 1784, that monster which devoured half France, we could not see, although he growled at the doors, while at the house of M. de Richelieu, shut in as we were in that warm and comfortable dining-room.

A little frost on the windows seems but the luxury of nature added to that of man. Winter has its diamonds, its powder, and its silvery embroidery for the rich man wrapped in his furs, and packed in his carriage, or snug among the wadding and velvet of a well-warmed room. Hoar-frost is a beauty, ice a change of decoration by the greatest of artists, which the rich admire through their windows. He who is warm can admire the withered trees, and find a somber charm in the sight of the snow-covered plain. He who, after a day without suffering, when millions of his fellow-creatures are enduring dreadful privations, throws himself on his bed of down, between his fine and well-aired sheets, may find out that all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds.

But he who is hungry sees none of these beauties of nature; he who is cold hates the sky without a sun, and consequently without a smile for such unfortunates. Now, at the time at which we write, that is, about the middle of the month of April, three hundred thousand miserable beings, dying from cold and hunger, groaned in Paris alone — in that Paris where, in spite of the boast that scarcely another city contained so many rich people, nothing had been prepared to prevent the poor from perishing of cold and wretchedness.

For the last four months, the same leaden sky had driven the poor from the villages into the town, as it sent the wolves from the woods into the villages.

No more bread. No more wood.

No more bread for those who felt this cold — no more wood to cook it. All the provisions which had been collected, Paris had devoured in a month. The Provost, short-sighted and incapable, did not know how to procure for Paris, which was under his care, the wood which might have been collected in the neighborhood. When it froze, he said the frost prevented the horses from bringing it; if it thawed, he pleaded want of horses and conveyances. Louis XVI., ever good and humane, always ready to attend to the physical wants of his people, although he overlooked their social ones, began by contributing a sum of 200,000 francs for horses and carts, and insisting on their immediate use. Still the demand continued greater than the supply. At first no one was allowed to carry away from the public timber-yard more than a cart-load of wood; then they were limited to half this quantity. Soon the long strings of people might be seen waiting outside the doors, as they were afterwards seen at the bakers' shops. The king gave away the whole of his private income in charity. He procured 3,000,000 francs by a grant and applied it to the relief of the sufferers, declaring that every other need must give way before that of cold and famine. The queen, on her part, gave 500 louis from her purse. The convents, the hospitals, and the public buildings were thrown open as places of asylum for the poor, who came in crowds for the sake of the fires that were kept there. They kept hoping for a thaw, but heaven seemed inflexible. Every evening the same copper-colored sky disappointed their hopes; and the stars shone bright and clear as funeral torches through the long, cold nights, which hardened again and again the snow which fell during the day. All day long, thousands of workmen, with spades and shovels, cleared away the snow from before the houses; so that on each side of the streets, already too narrow for the traffic, rose a high, thick wall, blocking up the way. Soon these masses of snow and ice became so large that the shops were obscured by them, and they were obliged to allow it to remain where it fell. Paris could do no more. She gave in, and allowed the winter to do its worst. December, January, February, and March passed thus, although now and then a few days' thaw changed the streets, whose sewers were blocked up, into running streams. Horses were drowned, and carriages destroyed, in the streets, some of which could only be traversed in boats. Paris, faithful to its character, sang through this destruction by the thaw as it had done through that by famine. Processions were made to the markets to see the fisherwomen serving their customers with immense leathern boots on, inside which their trousers were pushed, and with their petticoats tucked round their waists, all laughing, gesticulating, and splashing each other as they stood in the water. These thaws, however, were but transitory; the frost returned, harder and more obstinate than ever, and recourse was had to sledges, pushed along by skaters, or drawn by roughshod horses along the causeways, which were like polished mirrors. The Seine, frozen many feet deep, was become the rendezvous for all idlers, who assembled there to skate or slide, until, warmed by exercise, they ran to the nearest fire, lest the perspiration should freeze upon them. All trembled for the time when, the water communications being stopped, and the roads impassable, provisions could no longer be sent in, and began to fear that Paris would perish from want. The king, in this extremity, called a council. They decided to implore all bishops, abbés, and monks to leave Paris and retire to their dioceses or convents; and all those magistrates and officials who, preferring the opera to their duties, had crowded to Paris, to return to their homes; for all these people used large quantities of wood in their hotels, and consumed no small amount of food. There were still the country gentlemen, who were also to be entreated to leave. But M. Lenoir, lieutenant of police, observed to the king that, as none of these people were criminals, and could not therefore be compelled to leave Paris in a day, they would probably be so long thinking about it, that the thaw would come before their departure, which would then be more hurtful than useful. All this care and pity of the king and queen, however, excited the ingenious gratitude of the people, who raised monuments to them, as ephemeral as the feelings which prompted them. Obelisks and pillars of snow and ice, engraved with their names, were to be seen all over Paris. At the end of March the thaw began, but by fits and starts, constant returns of frost prolonging the miseries of the people. Indeed, in the beginning of April it appeared to set in harder than ever, and the half-thawed streets, frozen again, became so slippery and dangerous, that nothing was seen but broken limbs and accidents of all kinds. The snow prevented the carriages from being heard, and the police had enough to do, from the reckless driving of the aristocracy, to preserve from the wheels those who were spared by cold and hunger.

It was about a week after the dinner given by M. de Richelieu that four elegant sledges entered Paris, gliding over the frozen snow which covered the Cours la Reine and the extremity of the boulevards. From thence they found it more difficult to proceed, for the sun and the traffic had begun to change the snow and ice into a wet mass of dirt.

In the foremost sledge were two men in brown riding coats with double capes. They were drawn by a black horse, and turned from time to time, as if to watch the sledge that followed them, and which contained two ladies so enveloped in furs that it was impossible to see their faces. It might even have been difficult to distinguish their sex, had it not been for the height of their coiffure, crowning which was a small hat with a plume of feathers. From the colossal edifice of this coiffure, all mingled with ribbons and jewels, escaped occasionally a cloud of white powder, as when a gust of wind shakes the snow from the trees.

These two ladies, seated side by side, were conversing so earnestly as scarcely to see the numerous spectators who watched their progress along the boulevards. One of them taller and more majestic than the other, and holding up before her face a finely-embroidered cambric handkerchief, carried her head erect and stately, in spite of the wind which swept across their sledge.

It had just struck five by the clock of the church St. Croix d’Antin and night was beginning to descend upon Paris, and with the night the bitter cold. They had just reached the Porte St. Denis, when the lady of whom we have spoken made a sign to the men in front, who thereupon quickened the pace of their horse, and soon disappeared among the evening mists, which were fast thickening around the colossal structure of the Bastile.

This signal she then repeated to the other two sledges, which also vanished along the Rue St. Denis. Meanwhile, the one in which she sat, having arrived at the Boulevard de Menilmontant, stopped.

In this place few people were to be seen; night had dispersed them. Besides, in this out-of-the-way quarter, not many citizens would trust themselves without torches and an escort, since winter had sharpened the wants of three or four thousand beggars who were easily changed into robbers.

The lady touched with her finger the shoulder of the coachman who was driving her, and said, “Weber, how long will it take you to bring the cabriolet you know where?”

“Madame wishes me to bring the cabriolet?” asked the coachman, with a strong German accent.

“Yes, I shall return by the streets; and as they are still more muddy than the boulevard, we should not get on in the sledge; besides, I begin to feel the cold. Do not you, petite?” said she, turning to the other lady.

“Yes, madame.”

“Then, Weber, we will have the cabriolet.”

“Very well, madame.”

"What is the time, petite?"

The young lady looked at her watch, which, however, she could hardly see, as it was growing dark, and said, "A quarter to six, madame."

"Then at a quarter to seven, Weber."

Saying these words, the lady leaped lightly from the sledge, followed by her friend, and walked away quickly; while the coachman murmured, with a kind of respectful despair, sufficiently loud for his mistress to hear, "Oh, mein Gott! what imprudence."

The two ladies laughed, drew their cloaks closer round them, and went tramping along through the snow, with their little feet.

"You have good eyes, Andrée," said the lady who seemed the elder of the two, although she could not have been more than thirty or thirty-two; "try to read the name at the corner of that street."

"Rue du Pont-aux-Choux, madame."

"Rue du Pont-aux-Choux! ah, mon Dieu, we must have come wrong. They told me the second street on the right; — but what a smell of hot bread!"

"That is not astonishing," said her companion, "for here is a baker's shop."

"Well, let us ask there for the Rue St. Claude," she said, moving to the door.

"Oh! do not you go in, madame; allow me," said Andrée.

"The Rue St. Claude, my pretty ladies?" said a cheerful voice. "Are you asking for the Rue St. Claude?"

The two ladies turned towards the voice, and saw, leaning against the door of the shop, a man who, in spite of the cold, had his chest and his legs quite bare.

"Oh! a naked man!" cried the young lady, half hiding behind her companion; "are we among savages?"

"Was not that what you asked for?" said the journeyman baker, for such he was, who did not understand her movement in the least, and, accustomed to his own costume, never dreamed of its effect upon them.

"Yes, my friend, the Rue St. Claude," said the elder lady, hardly able to keep from laughing.

"Oh, it is not difficult to find; besides, I will conduct you there myself;" and, suiting the action to the words, he began to move his long bony legs, which terminated in immense wooden shoes.

“Oh, no!” cried the elder lady, who did not fancy such a guide; “pray do not disturb yourself. Tell us the way, and we shall easily find it.”

“First street to the right,” said he, drawing back again.

“Thanks,” said the ladies, who ran on as fast as they could, that he might not hear the laughter which they could no longer restrain.

CHAPTER II.

AN INTERIOR.

If we do not calculate too much on the memory of our readers, they certainly know the Rue St. Claude, which joins at one end the boulevard, and at the other the Rue St. Louis; this was an important street in the first part of our story, when it was inhabited by Joseph Balsamo, his sibyl, Lorenza, and his master, Althotas. It was still a respectable street, though badly lighted, and by no means clean, but little known or frequented.

There was, however, at the corner of the boulevard a large house, with an aristocratic air; but this house, which might, from the number of its windows, have illuminated the whole street, had it been lighted up, was the darkest and most somber-looking of any. The door was never seen to open; and the windows were thick with dust, which seemed never disturbed. Sometimes an idler, attracted by curiosity, approached the gates and peeped through; all he could see, however, were masses of weeds growing between the stones of the courtyard, and green moss spreading itself over everything. Occasionally an enormous rat, sole inmate of those deserted domains, ran across the yard, on his way to his usual habitation in the cellars, which seemed, however, to be an excess of modesty, when he had the choice of so many fine sitting-rooms, where he need never fear the intrusion of a cat.

At times, one or two of the neighbors, passing the house, might stop to take a survey, and one would say to the other:

"Well, what do you see?"

"Why," he would reply, "I see the rat."

"Oh! let me look at him. How fat he has grown!"

"That is not to be wondered at; he is never disturbed; and there must be some good pickings in the house. M. de Balsamo disappeared so suddenly, that he must have left something behind."

"But you forget that the house was half burned down."

And they would pursue their way.

Opposite this ruin was a high narrow house inclosed within a garden wall. From the upper windows, a light was to be seen; the rest was shrouded in darkness. Either all the inhabitants were already asleep, or they were very economical of wood and candles, which certainly were frightfully dear this winter. It is, however, with the fifth story only that we have any business.

We must, in the first place, take a survey of the house, and, ascending the staircase, open the first door. This room is empty and dark, however, but it opens into another of which the furniture deserves our attention.

The doors were gaudily painted, and it contained easy chairs covered in white, with yellow velvet trimming, and a sofa to match; the cushions of which, however, were so full of the wrinkles of old age as scarcely to be cushions any longer. Two portraits hanging on the walls next attracted attention. A candle and a lamp — one placed on a stand, about three feet high, and the other on the chimney-piece — threw a constant light on them.

The first was a well-known portrait of Henry III., King of France and Poland; a cap on his head, surmounting his long pale face and heavy eyes; a pointed beard, and a ruff round his neck.

Under it was the inscription, traced in black letters, on a badly-gilded frame, “Henri de Valois.”

The other portrait, of which the gilding was newer, and the painting more fresh and recent, represented a young lady with black eyes, a straight nose, and rather compressed lips, who appeared crushed under a tower of hair and ribbons, to which the cap of Henry III. was in the proportion of a mole-hill to a pyramid.

Under this portrait was inscribed, “Jeanne de Valois.”

Glance at the fireless hearth, at the faded curtains, and then turn towards a little oak table in the corner; for there, leaning on her elbow, and writing the addresses of some letters, sits the original of this portrait.

A few steps off, in an attitude half curious, half respectful, stands a little old woman, apparently about sixty.

“Jeanne de Valois,” says the inscription; but if this lady be indeed a Valois, one wonders however the portrait of Henry III., the sybarite king, the great voluptuary, could support the sight of so much poverty in a person not only of his race, but bearing his name.

In her person, however, this lady of the fifth story did no discredit to her portrait. She had white and delicate hands, which from time to time she rubbed together, as if to endeavor to put some warmth into them; her foot also, which was encased in a rather coquettish velvet slipper, was small and pretty.

The wind whistled through all the old doors, and penetrated the crevices of the shaking windows; and the old servant kept glancing sadly towards the empty grate. Her lady continued her occupation, talking aloud as she did so.

"Madame de Misery," she murmured; "first lady of the bedchamber to her majesty — I cannot expect more than six louis from her, for she has already given to me once." And she sighed. "Madame Patrick, lady's-maid to her majesty, two louis; M. d'Ormesson, an audience; M. de Calonne, some good advice, M. de Rohan, a visit; at least, we will try to induce him," said she, smiling at the thought. "Well, then, I think I may hope for eight louis within a week." Then, looking up, "Dame Clotilde," she said, "snuff this candle."

The old woman did as she was bid, and then resumed her place. This kind of inquisition seemed to annoy the young lady, for she said, "Pray go and look if you cannot find the end of a wax candle for me; this tallow is odious."

"There is none," replied the old woman.

"But just look."

"Where?"

"In the ante-chamber."

"It is so cold there."

"There is some one ringing," said the young lady.

"Madame is mistaken," replied the obstinate old woman.

"I thought I heard it, Dame Clotilde;" then, abandoning the attempt, she turned again to her calculations. "Eight louis! Three I owe for the rent, and five I have promised to M. de la Motte, to make him support his stay at Bar-sur-Aube. Pauvre diable, our marriage has not enriched him as yet — but patience;" and she smiled again, and looked at herself in the mirror that hung between the two portraits. "Well, then," she continued, "I still want one louis for going from Versailles to Paris and back again; living for a week, one louis; dress, and gifts to the porters of the houses where I go, four louis; but," said she, starting up, "some one is ringing!"

"No, madame," replied the old woman. "It is below, on the next floor."

"But I tell you it is not," said she angrily, as the bell rang yet louder.

Even the old woman could deny it no longer; so she hobbled off to open the door, while her mistress rapidly cleared away all the papers, and seated herself on the sofa, assuming the air of a person humble and resigned, although suffering.

It was, however, only her body that reposed; for her eyes, restless and unquiet, sought incessantly, first her mirror and then the door.

At last it opened, and she heard a young and sweet voice saying, “Is it here that Madame la Comtesse de la Motte lives?”

“Madame la Comtesse de la Motte Valois,” replied Clotilde.

“It is the same person, my good woman; is she at home?”

“Yes, madame; she is too ill to go out.”

During this colloquy, the pretended invalid saw reflected in the glass the figure of a lady talking to Clotilde, unquestionably belonging to the higher ranks. She then saw her turn round, and say to some one behind, “We can go in — it is here.”

And the two ladies we have before seen asking the way prepared to enter the room.

“Whom shall I announce to the countess?” said Clotilde.

“Announce a Sister of Charity,” said the elder lady.

“From Paris?”

“No; from Versailles.”

Clotilde entered the room, and the strangers followed her.

Jeanne de Valois seemed to rise with difficulty from her seat to receive her visitors.

Clotilde placed chairs for them, and then unwillingly withdrew.

CHAPTER III.

JEANNE DE LA MOTTE VALOIS.

The first thought of Jeanne de la Motte was to examine the faces of her visitors, so as to gather what she could of their characters. The elder lady, who might have been, as we have said, about thirty-two years of age, was remarkably beautiful, although, at first sight, a great air of hauteur detracted slightly from the charm of her expression; her carriage was so proud, and her whole appearance so distingué that Jeanne could not doubt her nobility, even at a cursory glance.

She, however, seemed purposely to place herself as far as possible from the light, so as to be little seen.

Her companion appeared four or five years younger, and was not less beautiful. Her complexion was charming; her hair, drawn back from her temples, showed to advantage the perfect oval of her face; two large blue eyes, calm and serene; a well-formed mouth, indicating great frankness of disposition; a nose that rivaled the Venus de Medicis; such was the other face which presented itself to the gaze of Jeanne de Valois.

She inquired gently to what happy circumstance she owed the honor of their visit.

The elder lady signed to the younger, who thereupon said, “Madame, for I believe you are married — — ”

“I have the honor to be the wife of M. le Comte de la Motte, an excellent gentleman.”

“Well, Madame la Comtesse, we are at the head of a charitable institution, and have heard concerning your condition things that interest us, and we consequently wished to have more precise details on the subject.”

“Mesdames,” replied Jeanne, “you see there the portrait of Henry III., that is to say, of the brother of my grandfather, for I am truly of the race of Valois, as you have doubtless been told.” And she waited for the next question, looking at her visitors with a sort of proud humility.

“Madame,” said the grave and sweet voice of the elder lady, “is it true, as we have also heard, that your mother was housekeeper at a place called

Fontelle, near Bar-sur-Seine?”

Jeanne colored at this question, but replied, “It is true, madame; and,” she went on, “as Marie Jossel, my mother, was possessed of rare beauty, my father fell in love with her, and married her, for it is by my father that I am nobly descended; he was a St. Rémy de Valois, direct descendant of the Valois who were on the throne.”

“But how have you been reduced to this degree of poverty, madame?”

“Alas! that is easily told. You are not ignorant that after the accession of Henry IV., by which the crown passed from the house of Valois to that of Bourbon, there still remained many branches of the fallen family, obscure, doubtless, but incontestably springing from the same root as the four brothers who all perished so miserably.”

The two ladies made a sign of assent.

“Then,” continued Jeanne, “these remnants of the Valois, fearing, in spite of their obscurity, to be obnoxious to the reigning family, changed their name of Valois into that of St. Rémy, which they took from some property, and they may be traced under this name down to my father, who, seeing the monarchy so firmly established, and the old branch forgotten, thought he need no longer deprive himself of his illustrious name, and again called himself Valois, which name he bore in poverty and obscurity in a distant province, while no one at the court of France even knew of the existence of this descendant of their ancient kings.”

Jeanne stopped at these words, which she had spoken with a simplicity and mildness which created a favorable impression.

“You have, doubtless, your proofs already arranged, madame,” said the elder lady, with kindness.

“Oh, madame,” she replied, with a bitter smile, “proofs are not wanting — my father arranged them, and left them to me as his sole legacy; but of what use are proofs of a truth which no one will recognize?”

“Your father is then dead?” asked the younger lady.

“Alas! yes.”

“Did he die in the provinces?”

“No, madame.”

“At Paris, then?”

“Yes.”

“In this room?”

“No, madame; my father, Baron de Valois, great-nephew of the King Henry III., died of misery and hunger; and not even in this poor retreat, not in his own bed, poor as that was. No; my father died side by side with the suffering wretches in the Hôtel Dieu!”

The ladies uttered an exclamation of surprise and distress.

“From what you tell me, madame, you have experienced, it is evident, great misfortunes; above all, the death of your father.”

“Oh, if you heard all the story of my life, madame, you would see that my father’s death does not rank among its greatest misfortunes.”

“How, madame! You regard as a minor evil the death of your father?” said the elder lady, with a frown.

“Yes, madame; and in so doing I speak only as a pious daughter, for my father was thereby delivered from all the ills which he experienced in this life, and which continue to assail his family. I experience, in the midst of the grief which his death causes me, a certain joy in knowing that the descendant of kings is no longer obliged to beg his bread.”

“To beg his bread?”

“Yes, madame; I say it without shame, for in all our misfortunes there was no blame to my father or myself.”

“But you do not speak of your mother?”

“Well, with the same frankness with which I told you just now that I blessed God for taking my father, I complain that He left me my mother.”

The two ladies looked at each other, almost shuddering at these strange words.

“Would it be indiscreet, madame, to ask you for a more detailed account of your misfortunes?”

“The indiscretion, madame, would be in me, if I fatigued you with such a long catalogue of woes.”

“Speak, madame,” said the elder lady, so commandingly, that her companion looked at her, as if to warn her to be more guarded. Indeed, Madame de la Motte had been struck with this imperious accent, and stared at her with some astonishment.

“I listen, madame,” she then said, in a more gentle tone; “if you will be good enough to inform us what we ask.”

Her companion saw her shiver as she spoke, and fearing she felt cold, pushed towards her a rug, on which to place her feet, and which she had discovered under one of the chairs.

“Keep it yourself, my sister,” said she, pushing it back again. “You are more delicate than I.”

“Indeed, madame,” said Jeanne, “it grieves me much to see you suffer from the cold; but wood is now so dear, and my stock was exhausted a week ago.”

“You said, madame, that you were unhappy in having a mother,” said the elder lady, returning to the subject.

“Yes, madame. Doubtless, such a blasphemy shocks you much, does it not?” said Jeanne; “but hear my explanation. I have already had the honor to tell you that my father made a mésalliance, and married his housekeeper. Marie Jossel, my mother, instead of feeling gratified and proud of the honor he had done her, began by ruining my father, which certainly was not difficult to a person determined to consult only her own pleasures. And having reduced him to sell all his remaining property, she induced him to go to Paris to claim the rights to which his name entitled him. My father was easily persuaded; perhaps he hoped in the justice of the king. He came then, having first turned all he possessed into money. He had, besides me, another daughter, and a son.

“His son, unhappy as myself, vegetates in the lowest ranks of the army; the daughter, my poor sister, was abandoned, on the evening of our departure, before the house of a neighboring farmer.

“The journey exhausted our little resources — my father wore himself out in fruitless appeals — we scarcely ever saw him — our house was wretched — and my mother, to whom a victim was necessary, vented her discontent and ill-humor upon me: she even reproached me with what I ate, and for the slightest fault I was unmercifully beaten. The neighbors, thinking to serve me, told my father of the treatment I experienced. He endeavored to protect me, but his interference only served to embitter her still more against me.

“At last my father fell ill, and was confined first to the house, and then to his bed. My mother banished me from his room on the pretext that I disturbed him. She made me now learn a sentence, which, child as I was, I shrank from saying; but she would drive me out into the street with blows, ordering me to repeat it to each passer-by, if I did not wish to be beaten to death.”

“And what was this sentence?” asked the elder lady.

"It was this, madame: 'Have pity on a little orphan, who descends in a direct line from Henri de Valois.'"

"What a shame!" cried the ladies.

"But what effect did this produce on the people?" inquired Andrée.

"Some listened and pitied me, others were angry and menaced me; some kind people stopped and warned me that I ran a great risk from repeating such words; but I knew no other danger than that of disobeying my mother. The result was, however, as she hoped: I generally brought home a little money, which kept us for a time from starvation or the hospital; but this life became so odious to me, that at last, one day, instead of repeating my accustomed phrase, I sat on a doorstep all the time, and returned in the evening empty-handed. My mother beat me so that the next day I fell ill; then my poor father, deprived of all resources, was obliged to go to the Hôtel Dieu, where he died."

"Oh! what a horrible history," cried the ladies.

"What became of you after your father's death?" asked the elder lady.

"God took pity upon me a month after my father's death, my mother ran away with a soldier, abandoning my brother and me. We felt ourselves relieved by her departure, and lived on public charity, although we never begged for more than enough to eat. One day, I saw a carriage going slowly along the Faubourg Saint Marcel. There were four footmen behind, and a beautiful lady inside; I held out my hand to her for charity. She questioned me, and my reply and my name seemed to strike her with surprise. She asked for my address, and the next day made inquiries, and finding that I had told her the truth, she took charge of my brother and myself; she placed my brother in the army, and me with a dressmaker."

"Was not this lady Madame de Boulainvilliers?"

"It was."

"She is dead, I believe?"

"Yes; and her death deprived me of my only protector."

"Her husband still lives, and is rich."

"Ah, madame, it is to him that I owe my later misfortunes. I had grown tall, and, as he thought, pretty, and he wished to put a price upon his benefits which I refused to pay. Meanwhile, Madame de Boulainvilliers died, having first married me to a brave and loyal soldier, M. de la Motte, but, separated from him, I seemed more abandoned after her death than I had been after that of my father. This is my history, madame, which I have shortened as much as possible, in order not to weary you."

"Where, then, is your husband?" asked the elder lady.

"He is in garrison at Bar-sur-Aube; he serves in the gendarmerie, and is waiting, like myself, in hopes of better times."

"But you have laid your case before the court?"

"Undoubtedly."

"The name of Valois must have awakened some sympathy."

"I know not, madame, what sentiments it may have awakened, for I have received no answer to any of my petitions."

"You have seen neither the ministers, the king, nor the queen?"

"No one. Everywhere I have failed."

"You cannot now beg, however."

"No, madame; I have lost the habit; but I can die of hunger, like my poor father."

"You have no child?"

"No, madame; and my husband, by getting killed in the service of his king, will find for himself a glorious end to all our miseries."

"Can you, madame — I beg pardon if I seem intrusive — but can you bring forward the proofs of your genealogy?"

Jeanne rose, opened a drawer, and drew out some papers, which she presented to the lady, who rose to come nearer the light, that she might examine them; but seeing that Jeanne eagerly seized this opportunity to observe her more clearly than she had yet been able to do, she turned away as if the light hurt her eyes, turning her back to Madame de la Motte.

"But," said she, at last, "these are only copies."

"Oh! madame, I have the originals safe, and am ready to produce them."

"If any important occasion should present itself, I suppose?" said the lady, smiling.

"It is, doubtless, madame, an important occasion which procures me the honor of your visit, but these papers are so precious — — "

"That you cannot show them to the first comer. I understand you."

"Oh, madame!" cried the countess; "you shall see them;" and opening a secret drawer above the other, she drew out the originals, which were carefully inclosed in an old portfolio, on which were the arms of the Valois.

The lady took them, and after examining them, said, "You are right; these are perfectly satisfactory, and you must hold yourself in readiness to produce them when called upon by proper authority.”

“And what do you think I may expect, madame?” asked Jeanne.

“Doubtless a pension for yourself, and advancement for M. de la Motte, if he prove worthy of it.”

“My husband is an honorable man, madame, and has never failed in his military duties.”

“It is enough, madame,” said the lady, drawing her hood still more over her face. She then put her hand in her pocket, and drew out first the same embroidered handkerchief with which we before saw her hiding her face when in the sledge, then a small roll about an inch in diameter, and three or four in length, which she placed on the chiffonier, saying, “The treasurer of our charity authorizes me, madame, to offer you this small assistance, until you shall obtain something better.”

Madame de la Motte threw a rapid glance at the little roll. “Three-franc pieces,” thought she, “and there must be nearly a hundred of them; what a boon from heaven.”

While she was thus thinking, the two ladies moved quickly into the outer room, where Clotilde had fallen asleep in her chair.

The candle was burning out in the socket, and the smell which came from it made the ladies draw out their smelling-bottles. Jeanne woke Clotilde, who insisted on following them with the obnoxious candle-end.

“Au revoir, Madame la Comtesse,” said they.

“Where may I have the honor of coming to thank you?” asked Jeanne.

“We will let you know,” replied the elder lady, going quickly down the stairs.

Madame de la Motte ran back into her room, impatient to examine her rouleau, but her foot struck against something, and stooping to pick it up, she saw a small flat gold box.

She was some time before she could open it, but having at last found the spring, it flew open and disclosed the portrait of a lady possessing no small beauty. The coiffure was German, and she wore a collar like an order. An M and a T encircled by a laurel wreath ornamented the inside of the box. Madame de la Motte did not doubt, from the resemblance of the portrait to the lady who had just left her, that it was that of her mother, or some near relation.

She ran to the stairs to give it back to them; but hearing the street-door shut, she ran back, thinking to call them from the window, but arrived there only in time to see a cabriolet driving rapidly away. She was therefore obliged to keep the box for the present, and turned again to the little rouleau.

When she opened it, she uttered a cry of joy, “Double louis, fifty double louis, two thousand and four hundred francs!” and transported at the sight of more gold than she had ever seen before in her life, she remained with clasped hands and open lips. “A hundred louis,” she repeated; “these ladies are then very rich. Oh! I will find them again.”

CHAPTER IV.

BELUS.

Madame de la Motte was not wrong in thinking that the cabriolet which she saw driving off contained the two ladies who had just left her.

They had, in fact, found it waiting for them on their exit. It was lightly built, open and fashionable, with high wheels, and a place behind for a servant to stand. It was drawn by a magnificent bay horse of Irish breed, short-tailed, and plump, which was driven by the same man whom we have already heard addressed by the name of Weber. The horse had become so impatient with waiting, that it was with some difficulty that Weber kept him stationary.

When he saw the ladies, he said, “Madame, I intended to bring Scipio, who is gentle and easy to manage, but unluckily he received an injury last evening, and I was forced to bring Bélus, and he is rather unmanageable.”

“Oh, Weber, I do not mind in the least,” said the lady; “I am well used to driving, and not at all timid.”

“I know how well madame drives, but the roads are so bad. Where are we to go?”

“To Versailles.”

“By the boulevards then, madame?”

“No, Weber; it freezes hard, and the boulevards will be dreadful; the streets will be better.”

He held the horse for the ladies to get in, then jumped up behind, and they set off at a rapid pace.

“Well, Andrée, what do you think of the countess?” asked the elder lady.

“I think, madame,” she replied, “that Madame de la Motte is poor and unfortunate.”

“She has good manners, has she not?”

“Yes, doubtless.”

“You are somewhat cold about her, Andrée.”

“I must confess, there is a look of cunning in her face that does not please me.”

"Oh, you are always difficult to please, Andrée; to please you, one must have every good quality. Now, I find the little countess interesting and simple, both in her pride and in her humility."

"It is fortunate for her, madame, that she has succeeded in pleasing you."

"Take care!" cried the lady, at the same time endeavoring to check her horse, which nearly ran over a street-porter at the corner of the Rue St. Antoine.

"Gare!" shouted Weber, in the voice of the Stentor.

They heard the man growling and swearing, in which he was joined by several people near, but Bélus soon carried them away from the sound, and they quickly reached the Place Baudoyer.

From thence the skilful conductress continued her rapid course down the Rue de la Tisseranderie, a narrow unaristocratic street, always crowded. Thus, in spite of the reiterated warnings of herself and Weber, the numbers began to increase around them, many of whom cried fiercely, "Oh! the cabriolet! down with the cabriolet!"

Bélus, however, guided by the steady hand which held the reins, kept on his rapid course, and not the smallest accident had yet occurred.

But in spite of this skilful progress, the people seemed discontented at the rapid course of the cabriolet, which certainly required some care on their part to avoid, and the lady, perhaps half frightened at the murmurs, and knowing the present excited state of the people, only urged on her horse the faster to escape from them.

Thus they proceeded until they reached the Rue du Coq St. Honoré, and here had been raised one of the most beautiful of those monuments in snow of which we have spoken.

Round this a great crowd had collected, and they were obliged to stop until the people would make an opening for them to pass, which they did at last, but with great grumbling and discontent.

The next obstacle was at the gates of the Palais Royal, where, in a courtyard, which had been thrown open, were a host of beggars crowding round fires which had been lighted there, and receiving soup, which the servants of M. le Duc d'Orleans were distributing to them in earthen basins; and as in Paris a crowd collects to see everything, the number of the spectators of this scene far exceeded that of the actors.

Here, then, they were again obliged to stop, and to their dismay, began to hear distinctly from behind loud cries of "Down with the cabriolet! down with those that crush the poor!”

“Can it be that those cries are addressed to us?” said the elder lady to her companion.

“Indeed, madame, I fear so,” she replied.

“Have we, do you think, run over any one?”

“I am sure you have not.”

But still the cries seemed to increase. A crowd soon gathered round them, and some even seized Bélus by the reins, who thereupon began to stamp and foam most furiously.

“To the magistrate! to the magistrate!” cried several voices.

The two ladies looked at each other in terror. Curious heads began to peep under the apron of the cabriolet.

“Oh, they are women,” cried some; “Opera girls, doubtless,” said others, “who think they have a right to crush the poor because they receive ten thousand francs a month.”

A general shout hailed these words, and they began again to cry, “To the magistrate!”

The younger lady shrank back trembling with fear; the other looked around her with wonderful resolution, though with frowning brows and compressed lips.

“Oh, madame,” cried her companione, “for heaven’s sake, take care!”

“Courage, Andrée, courage!” she replied.

“But they will recognize you, madame.”

“Look through the windows, if Weber is still behind the cabriolet.”

“He is trying to get down, but the mob surrounds him. Ah! here he comes.”

“Weber,” said the lady in German, “we will get out.”

The man vigorously pushed aside those nearest the carriage, and opened the door. The ladies jumped out, and the crowd instantly seized on the horse and cabriolet, which would evidently soon be in pieces.

“What in heaven’s name does it all mean? Do you understand it, Weber?” said the lady, still in German.

“Ma foi, no, madame,” he replied, struggling to free a passage for them to pass.

“But they are not men, they are wild beasts,” continued the lady; “with what do they possibly reproach me?”

She was answered by a voice, whose polite and gentlemanly tone contrasted strangely with the savage murmurs of the people, and which said in excellent German, “They reproach you, madame, with having braved the police order, which appeared this morning, and which prohibited all cabriolets, which are always dangerous, and fifty times more so in this frost, when people can hardly escape fast enough, from driving through the streets until the spring.”

The lady turned, and saw she was addressed by a young officer, whose distinguished and pleasing air, and fine figure, could not but make a favorable impression.

“Oh, mon Dieu, monsieur,” she said, “I was perfectly ignorant of this order.”

“You are a foreigner, madame?” inquired the young officer.

“Yes, sir; but tell me what I must do? they are destroying my cabriolet.”

“You must let them destroy it, and take advantage of that time to escape. The people are furious just now against all the rich, and on the pretext of your breaking this regulation would conduct you before the magistrate.”

“Oh, never!” cried Andrée.

“Then,” said the officer, laughing, “profit by the space which I shall make in the crowd, and vanish.”

The ladies gathered from his manner that he shared the opinion of the people as to their station, but it was no time for explanations.

“Give us your arm to a cab-stand,” said the elder lady, in a voice full of authority.

“I was going to make your horse rear, and thereby clear you a passage,” said the young man, who did not much wish to take the charge of escorting them through the crowd; “the people will become yet more enraged, if they hear us speaking in a language unknown to them.”

“Weber,” cried the lady, in a firm voice, “make Bélus rear to disperse the crowd.”

“And then, madame?”

“Remain till we are gone.”

“But they will destroy the carriage.”

“Let them; what does that matter? save Bélus if you can, but yourself above all.”

“Yes, madame;” and a slight touch to the horse soon produced the desired effect of dispersing the nearest part of the crowd, and throwing down those who held by his reins.

“Your arm, sir!” again said the lady to the officer; “come on, petite,” turning to Andrée.

“Let us go then, courageous woman,” said the young man, giving his arm, with real admiration, to her who asked for it.

In a few minutes he had conducted them to a cab-stand, but the men were all asleep on their seats.

CHAPTER V.

THE ROAD TO VERSAILLES.

The ladies were free from the crowd for the present, but there was some danger that they might be followed and recognized, when the same tumult would doubtless be renewed and escape a second time be more difficult. The young officer knew this, and therefore hastened to awaken one of the half-frozen and sleepy men. So stupefied, however, did they seem, that he had great difficulty in rousing one of them. At last he took him by the collar and shook him roughly.

"Gently, gently!" cried the man, sitting up.

"Where do you wish to go, ladies?" asked the officer.

"To Versailles," said the elder lady, still speaking German.

"Oh, to Versailles!" repeated the coachman; "four miles and a half over this ice. No, I would rather not."

"We will pay well," said the lady.

This was repeated to the coachman in French by the young officer.

"But how much?" said the coachman; "you see it is not only going, I must come back again."

"A louis; is that enough?" asked the lady of the officer, who, turning to the coachman, said, —

"These ladies offer you a louis."

"Well, that will do, though I risk breaking my horses' legs."

"Why, you rascal, you know that if you were paid all the way there and back, it would be but twelve francs, and we offer you twenty-four."

"Oh, do not stay to bargain," cried the lady; "he shall have twenty louis if he will only set off at once."

"One is enough, madame."

"Come down, sir, and open the door."

"I will be paid first," said the man.

"You will!" said the officer fiercely.

"Oh! let us pay," said the lady, putting her hand in her pocket. She turned pale. "Oh! mon Dieu, I have lost my purse! Feel for yours, Andrée."

“Oh! madame, it is gone too.”

They looked at each other in dismay, while the young officer watched their proceedings, and the coachman sat grinning, and priding himself on his caution.

The lady was about to offer her gold chain as a pledge, when the young officer drew out a louis, and offered it to the man, who thereupon got down and opened the door.

The ladies thanked him warmly and got in.

“And now, sir, drive these ladies carefully and honestly.”

The ladies looked at each other in terror; they could not bear to see their protector leave them.

“Oh! madame,” said Andrée, “do not let him go away.”

“But why not? we will ask for his address, and return him his louis to-morrow, with a little note of thanks, which you shall write.”

“But, madame, suppose the coachman should not keep faith with us, and should turn us out half way, what would become of us?”

“Oh! we will take his number.”

“Yes, madame, I do not deny that you could have him punished afterwards; but meanwhile, you would not reach Versailles, and what would they think?”

“True,” replied her companion.

The officer advanced to take leave.

“Monsieur,” said Andrée, “one word more, if you please.”

“At your orders, madame,” he said politely, but somewhat stiffly.

“Monsieur, you cannot refuse us one more favor, after serving us so much?”

“What is it, madame?”

“We are afraid of the coachman, who seems so unwilling to go.”

“You need not fear,” replied he; “I have his number, and if he does not behave well, apply to me.”

“To you, sir?” said Andrée in French, forgetting herself; “we do not even know your name.”

“You speak French,” exclaimed the young man, “and you have been condemning me all this time to blunder on in German!”

“Excuse us, sir,” said the elder lady, coming to Andrée’s rescue, “but you must see, that though not perhaps foreigners, we are strangers in Paris, and above all, out of our places in a hackney coach. You are sufficiently a man of the world to see that we are placed in an awkward position. I feel assured you are generous enough to believe the best of us, and to complete the service you have rendered, and above all, to ask us no questions."

"Madame," replied the officer, charmed with her noble, yet pleasing manner, "dispose of me as you will."

"Then, sir, have the kindness to get in, and accompany us to Versailles."

The officer instantly placed himself opposite to them, and directed the man to drive on.

After proceeding in silence for some little time, he began to feel himself surrounded with delicate and delicious perfumes, and gradually began to think better of the ladies' position. "They are," thought he, "ladies who have been detained late at some rendezvous, and are now anxious to regain Versailles, much frightened, and a little ashamed; still, two ladies, driving themselves in a cabriolet! However," recollected he, "there was a servant behind; but then again, no money on either of them, but probably the footman carried the purse; and the carriage was certainly a very elegant one, and the horse could not have been worth less than one hundred and fifty louis; therefore they must be rich, so that the accidental want of money proves nothing. But why speak a foreign language when they must be French? However, that at least shows a good education, and they speak both languages with perfect purity; besides, there is an air of distinction about them. The supplication of the younger one was touching, and the request of the other was noble and imposing; indeed, I begin to feel it dangerous to pass two or three hours in a carriage with two such pretty women, pretty and discreet also; for they do not speak, but wait for me to begin."

On their parts, the ladies were doubtless thinking of him, for just as he had arrived at these conclusions, the elder lady said to her companion, but this time in English:

"Really, this coachman crawls along; we shall never reach Versailles; I fear our poor companion must be terribly ennuyé."

"Particularly," answered Andrée, smiling, "as our conversation has not been very amusing."

"Do you not think he has a most distinguished air?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Besides, he wears the uniform of a naval officer, and all naval officers are of good family. He looks well in it, too, for he is very handsome."

Here the young man interrupted them. “Your pardon, ladies,” said he, in excellent English, “but I must tell you that I understand English perfectly; I do not, however, know Spanish; therefore, if you can and like to speak in that language, you are safe from my understanding you.”

“Oh, monsieur,” replied the lady, laughing, “we had no harm to say of you, as you must have heard; therefore we will content ourselves with French for the remainder of the time.”

“Thanks, madame, but if my presence be irksome to you — — ”

“You cannot suppose that, sir, as it was we who begged you to accompany us.”

“Exacted it, even,” said Andrée.

“Oh, madame, you overwhelm me; pray pardon me my momentary hesitation; but Paris is so full of snares and deceptions.”

“You then took us for — — ”

“Monsieur took us for snares, that is all.”

“Oh! ladies,” said the young man, quite humiliated, “I assure you, I did not.”

“But what is the matter? The coach stops.”

“I will see, madame.”

“Oh! I think we are overturning; pray take care, sir.”

And Andrée, in her terror, laid her hand on the young man’s shoulder.

He, yielding to an impulse, attempted to seize her little hand; but she had in a moment thrown herself back again in the carriage. He therefore got out, and found the coachman engaged in raising one of his horses, which had fallen on the ice.

The horse, with his aid, was soon on its legs again, and they pursued their way.

It seemed, however, that this little interruption had destroyed the intimacy which had begun to spring up, for after the ladies had asked and been told the cause of their detention, all relapsed into silence.

The young man, however, who had derived some pleasure from the touch of that little hand, thought he would at least have a foot in exchange; he therefore stretched out his, and endeavored to touch hers, which, was, however, quickly withdrawn; and when he did just touch that of the elder lady, she said, with great sang-froid, — —

“I fear, sir, I am dreadfully in your way.”

He colored up to the ears, and felt thankful to the darkness, which prevented it from being seen. After this, he desisted, and remained perfectly still, fearing even to renew the conversation, lest he should seem impertinent to these ladies, to whom, at first, he had thought himself rather condescending in his politeness.

Still, in spite of himself, he felt more and more strongly attracted towards them, and an increasing interest in them. From time to time he heard them speak softly to each other, and he caught these words:

“So late an hour! what excuse for being out?”

At last the coach stopped again, but this time it was no accident, but simply that they had arrived at Versailles.

The young man thought the time had passed with marvelous quickness.

“We are at Versailles,” said the coachman.

“Where must he stop, ladies?” asked the officer.

“At the Place d’Armes.”

“At the Place d’Armes, coachman,” said the officer; “go on. — I must say something to them,” thought he, “or they will now think me a stupid, as they must before have thought me impertinent.”

“Mesdames,” said he, “you are at length arrived.”

“Thanks to your generous assistance.”

“What trouble we have given you,” added Andrée.

“Oh, madame, do not speak of it!”

“Well, sir, we shall not forget; will you tell us your name?”

“My name?”

“Certainly, sir; you do not wish to make us a present of a louis, I hope.”

“Oh, madame, if that is it,” said the young man, rather piqued, “I yield; I am the Comte de Charney, and as madame has already remarked, a naval officer.”

“Charney,” repeated the elder lady, “I shall not forget.”

“Yes, madame, Georges de Charney.”

“And you live — — ?”

“Hôtel des Princes, Rue de Richelieu.”

The coach stopped. The elder lady opened the door and jumped out quickly, holding out a hand to her companion.

“But pray, ladies,” said he, preparing to follow them, “take my arm; you are not yet at your own home.”

“Oh, sir, do not move.”

"Not move?"

"No; pray remain in the coach."

"You cannot walk alone at this time of night; it is impossible."

"Now, you see," said the elder lady, gaily, "after almost refusing to oblige us, you wish to be too obliging."

"But, madame — — "

"Sir, remain to the end a loyal and gallant cavalier; we thank you, M. de Charney, with all our hearts, and will not even ask your word — — "

"To do what, madame?"

"To shut the door, and order the man to drive back to Paris, without even looking where we go, which you will do, will you not?"

"I will obey you, madame; coachman, back again." And he put a second louis into the man's hand, who joyfully set off on his return.

The young man sighed, as he took his place on the cushions which the unknown ladies had just occupied.

They remained motionless till the coach was out of sight, and then took their way towards the castle.

CHAPTER VI.

LAURENT.

At this moment our heroines heard the clock strike from the church of St. Louis.

“Oh, mon Dieu! a quarter to twelve,” they cried, in terror.

“See, all the doors are shut,” said Andrée.

“Oh, that is nothing; for, if they were open, we would not go in here. Let us go round by the reservoirs.” And they turned to the right, where there was a private entrance.

When they arrived there, “The door is shut, Andrée,” said the elder lady, rather uneasily.

“Let us knock, madame.”

“No, we will call; Laurent must be waiting for me, for I told him perhaps I should return late.”

“I will call,” said Andrée, approaching the door.

“Who is there?” said a voice from inside.

“Oh, it is not Laurent!” said she, terrified.

“Is it not?” and the other lady advanced, and called softly, “Laurent.”

No answer.

“Laurent?” again she called, louder.

“There is no Laurent here,” replied the voice, rudely.

“But,” said Andrée, “whether he be here or not, open the door.”

“I cannot open it.”

“But Laurent would have opened it immediately.”

“I have my orders,” was all the reply.

“Who are you, then?”

“Rather, who are you?”

Rude as the question was, it was no time to find fault, so they answered, “We are ladies of her majesty’s suite, we lodge in the castle, and we wish to get home.”

“Well, I, mesdames, am a Suisse of the Salischamade company, and I shall do just the contrary of Laurent, for I shall leave you at the door.”

“Oh!” murmured the ladies, in terror and anger.

Then, making an effort over herself, the elder lady said, “My friend, I understand that you are obeying orders, and I do not quarrel with you for that — it is a soldier’s duty; only do me the favor to call Laurent — he cannot be far distant.”

“I cannot quit my post.”

“Then send some one.”

“I have no one to send.”

“For pity’s sake!”

“Oh, mon Dieu, sleep in the town, that is no great thing; if I were shut out of the barracks, I would soon find a bed.”

“Listen,” said the lady again; “you shall have twenty louis, if you open this door.”

“And twelve years at the galleys: no, thank you. Forty-eight francs a year is not sufficient pay for that.”

“I will get you made a sergeant.”

“Yes, and he who gave me the order will have me shot.”

“And who did give you the order?”

“The king.”

“The king!” cried they; “oh, we are lost!”

“Is there no other door?”

“Oh! madame, if this one is closed, be sure all the others will be so also,” said Andrée.

“You are right, Andrée. ‘Tis a horrible trick of the king,” she said, with a contempt almost menacing.

There was a sort of bank outside the door, which they sank down upon in despair. They could see the light under the door, and could hear the steps of the sentinel as he paced to and fro.

Within this little door was salvation; without, shame and scandal.

“Oh! to-morrow, to-morrow, when they will find out,” murmured the elder lady.

“You will tell the truth, madame.”

“But shall I be believed?”

“Oh! we can prove it; besides, the soldier will not stay all night; he will be relieved, and perhaps his successor will be more complacent.”

“Yes, but the patrol will pass directly, and will find me here, waiting outside. It is infamous; I am suffocated with rage.”

"Oh, take courage, madame! you, who are always so brave."

"It is a plot, Andrée, in order to ruin me. This door is never closed. Oh, I shall die!"

At this moment they heard a step approaching, and then the voice of a young man, singing gaily as he went along.

"That voice," cried the lady, "I know it, I am sure."

"Oh, yes, madame, he will save us."

A young man, wrapped up in a fur riding-coat, came quickly up, and without noticing them, knocked at the door, and called, "Laurent."

"Brother," said the elder lady, touching him on the shoulder.

"The queen," cried he, taking off his hat.

"Hush," said she.

"You are not alone?"

"No, I am with Mademoiselle Andrée de Taverney."

"Oh, good evening, mademoiselle."

"Good evening, monseigneur."

"Are you going out, madame?" asked he.

"No."

"Then you are going in."

"We wished to do so."

"Have you not called Laurent?"

"Yes, we have, but — — "

"But what?"

"You call Laurent, and you will see."

The young man, whom the reader has, perhaps, already recognized as the Comte d'Artois, approached and again called "Laurent."

"I warn you," answered from within the voice of the Suisse, "that if you torment me any more I will go and fetch my commanding officer."

"Who is this?" asked the count, turning round in astonishment to the queen.

"A Swiss who has been substituted for Laurent."

"By whom?"

"By the king."

"The king?"

"Yes, he told us so himself."

"And with orders?"

"Most strict, apparently."

“Diable! we must capitulate.”

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“Offer him money.”

“I have already done so, and he has refused it.”

“Offer him promotion.”

“I have offered that also, but he would not listen.”

“Then there is but one way.”

“What?”

“To make a noise.”

“My dear Charles, you will compromise us.”

“Not the least in the world; you keep in the background, I will knock like thunder, and shout like a madman; they will open at last, and you can slide in with me.”

“Try, then.”

The young prince began calling Laurent, knocking at the door and striking with his sword, till at last the Swiss said, “Ah, well! I will call my officer.”

“Go and call him, that is just what I want.”

They soon heard other steps approaching. The queen and Andrée kept close, ready to slip in if the door should open; then they heard the Swiss say, “It is a gentleman, lieutenant, who insists on coming in.”

“Well, I suppose that is not astonishing, as we belong to the castle,” said the count.

“It is no doubt a natural wish, but a forbidden one,” replied the officer.

“Forbidden — by whom? morbleu!”

“By the king.”

“But the king would not wish an officer of the castle to sleep outside.”

“Sir, I am not the judge of that; I have only to obey orders.”

“Come, lieutenant, open the door; we cannot talk through this oak.”

“Sir, I repeat to you that my orders are to keep it shut; and if you are an officer, as you say, you know that I must obey.”

“Lieutenant, you speak to the colonel of a regiment.”

“Excuse me, then, colonel, but my orders are positive.”

“But they cannot concern a prince. Come, sir, a prince cannot be kept out.”

“My prince, I am in despair, but the king has ordered — — ”

"The king has ordered you to turn away his brother like a beggar or a robber? I am the Comte d'Artois, sir. Mordieu! you keep me here freezing at the door."

"Monseigneur, God is my witness that I would shed my blood for your royal highness. But the king gave me his orders in person, and confiding to me the charge of this door, ordered me not to open to any one, should it be even himself, after eleven o'clock. Therefore, monseigneur, I ask your pardon humbly for disobeying you, but I am a soldier, and were it her majesty the queen who asked admittance, I should be forced most unwillingly to refuse."

Having said this, the officer turned away and left the place.

"We are lost," said the queen.

"Do they know that you are out?" asked the count.

"Alas, I know not!"

"Perhaps, then, this order is leveled against me; the king knows I often go out at night, and stay late. Madame la Comtesse d'Artois must have heard something, and complained to him, and hence this tyrannical order."

"Ah, no, brother, I thank you for trying to reassure me, but I feel that it is against me these precautions are taken."

"Impossible, sister! the king has too much esteem — — "

"Meanwhile, I am left at the door, and to-morrow a frightful scandal will be the result. I know well I have an enemy near the king."

"It is possible; however, I have an idea."

"What? only be quick. If you can but save us from the ridicule of this position, it is all I care for."

"Oh, I will save you; I am not more foolish than he, for all his learning."

"Than whom?"

"Ah, pardieu, the Comte de Provence."

"Ah, then, you also know my enemy."

"Is he not the enemy of all that are young and beautiful, of all who are better than himself?"

"Count, I believe you know something about this order."

"Perhaps, but do not let us stop here. Come with me, dear sister."

"Where?"

"You shall see, somewhere where at least you will be warm, and en route I will tell you all I know about this. Take my arm, sister, and you the other, Madlle. de Taverney, and let us turn to the right."

“Well, but now go on,” said the queen.

“This evening after the king’s supper, he came to his cabinet. He had been talking all day to Count Haga, you had not been seen — — ”

“No, at two o’clock I left to go to Paris.”

“I know it. The king, allow me to tell you, dear sister, was thinking no more about you than about Haroun-al-Raschid, or his Vizier Giaffar, and was talking geography. I listened with some impatience, for I also wanted to go out; probably not with the same object as you.”

“Where are we going?” interrupted the queen.

“Oh, close by; take care, there is a snow-heap. Madlle. de Taverney, if you leave my arm you will certainly fall. But to return to the king: he was thinking of nothing but latitude and longitude, when M. de Provence said to him, ‘I should like to pay my respects to the queen.’

“‘The queen sups at home,’ replied the king.

“‘Oh, I believed her at Paris.’

“‘No, she is at home,’ said the king, quietly.

“‘I have just come from there, and been denied to her,’ said M. de Provence.

“Then I saw the king frown. He dismissed us, and doubtless went to make inquiries. Louis is jealous by fits, you know; he must have asked to see you, and being refused, become suspicious.”

“Yes, Madame de Misery had orders to do so.”

“Then, to know whether you were out or not, he has given these strict orders.”

“Oh, it is shameful treatment. Confess, is it not?”

“Indeed, I think so; but here we are.”

“This house?”

“Does it displease you?”

“No, I do not say that — it is charming. But your servants?”

“Well!”

“If they see me.”

“Come in, sister, and I will guarantee that no one sees you, not even whoever opens the door.”

“Impossible!”

“We will try,” said he, laughing; and laying his hand on one of the panels, the door flew open.

“Enter, I pray you,” said he, “there is no one near.”

The queen looked at Andrée, then, making up her mind, went in, and the door shut behind them.

She found herself in a vestibule, small, but ornamented in perfect taste. The floor was mosaic work, representing bouquets of flowers, while numerous rose-trees on marble brackets scented the air with a perfume equally delicious as rare at that time of the year.

It looked all so charming, that the ladies began to forget their fears and scruples.

“So far well,” said the queen; “we have a shelter, at all events, and seemingly a very charming one; but you had better see to one thing — that is, to keep off your servants.”

“Oh, nothing more easy;” and the prince, seizing a little bell which hung on one of the pillars, rang one clear stroke.

“Oh!” cried the queen, frightened, “is that the way to keep them off? I should have thought it would bring them.”

“If I had rung again, it would have done so, but when I only ring once, they know they are not wanted.”

“Oh, you are a man of precaution!” said the queen laughing.

“Now, dear sister, take the trouble to go up-stairs.”

“Let us obey,” said the queen, “the genius of this place appears not disagreeable;” and they went up, their steps making no sound on the thick Aubusson carpet.

At the top, the prince rang another bell, which gave them a fresh start of surprise, and their astonishment increased when they saw the doors open of themselves.

“Really, Andrée,” said the queen, “I begin to tremble, do not you?”

“Oh, madame, I shall follow fearlessly wherever your majesty goes.”

“Enter,” said the prince, “for here is your apartment;” and he ushered them into a charming little room, furnished ‘en buhl,’ with a painted ceiling and walls, and a rosewood floor. It opened into a boudoir, fitted up with white cashmere, beautifully embroidered with groups of flowers, and hung with tapestry of exquisite workmanship. Beyond the boudoir was a bedroom, painted blue, hung with curtains of silk and lace, and with a sumptuous bed in an alcove. A fire burned on the hearth, and a dozen perfumed wax-lights in candelabra.

Such were the marvels which presented themselves to the eyes of the wondering ladies. No living being was to be seen; fire and lights seemed to have come without hands.

The queen stopped on the threshold of the bedroom, looking half afraid to enter.

“Sister,” said the count, “these are my bachelor apartments; here I come alone.”

“Always?” asked the queen.

“Doubtless,” answered he.

“I understand now,” said the queen, “why Madame la Comtesse is sometimes unquiet.”

“Confess, however, that if she is unquiet to-night, it Will be without reason.”

“To-night, I do not say, but other nights.” Then, sitting down; “I am dreadfully tired,” she said; “are not you, Andrée?”

“I can scarcely stand, and if your majesty permits — — ”

“Indeed you look ill, mademoiselle,” said the count.

“You must go to bed,” said the queen. “M. le Comte gives us up this room; do you not, Charles?”

“Entirely, madame.”

“One moment, count. If you go away, how can we recall you?”

“You will not need me; you are mistress of this house.”

“But there are other rooms.”

“Certainly, there is a dining-room, which I advise you to visit.”

“With a table ready spread, no doubt.”

“Oh, yes, and Mademoiselle de Taverney, who seems to me to need it much, will find there jellies or chicken, and wine, and you, sister, plenty of those fruits you are so fond of.”

“And no servants?”

“None.”

“We will see; but how to return?”

“You must not think of returning to-night. At six o’clock the gates will be opened, go out a quarter before, you will find in these drawers mantles of all colors and all shapes, if you wish to disguise yourselves. Go therefore to the château, regain your rooms, go to bed, and all will be right.”

“But you, what will you do?”

“Oh, I am going away.”

“We turn you out, my poor brother!”

“It is better for me not to remain in the same house with you.”

“But you must sleep somewhere.”

“Do not fear; I have three other houses like this.”

The queen laughed. “And he pretends Madame la Comtesse has no cause to be anxious; oh, I will tell her!”

“You dare not.”

“It is true, we are dependent upon you. Then, to go away to-morrow morning without seeing any one?”

“You must ring once, as I did below, and the door will open.”

“By itself?”

“By itself.”

“Then good night, brother.”

“Good night, sister.” He bowed and disappeared.

CHAPTER VII.

THE QUEEN’S BED-CHAMBER.

The next day, or rather the same morning, for our last chapter brought us to two o’clock, the King Louis XVI., in a violet-colored morning dress, in some disorder, and with no powder in his hair, knocked at the door of the queen’s ante-chamber.

It was opened by one of her women.

“The queen?” asked Louis, in a brusque manner.

“Her majesty is asleep, sire.”

The king made a movement, as though to pass in but the woman did not move.

“Do you not see,” he said, “that I wish to come in.”

“But the queen is asleep, sire,” again she said timidly.

“I told you to let me pass,” answered the king, going in as he spoke.

When he reached the door of the bedroom, the king saw Madame de Misery, the first lady-in-waiting, who was sitting reading from her mass book.

She rose on seeing him. “Sire,” she said, in a low voice, and with a profound reverence, “her majesty has not yet called for me.”

“Really?” said the king, in an ironical tone.

“But, sire, it is only half-past six, and her majesty never rings before seven.”

“And you are sure that her majesty is asleep in bed?”

“I cannot affirm that she is asleep, sire, but I can that she is in bed.”

The king could contain himself no longer, but went straight to the door, which he opened with some noise. The room was in complete darkness, the shutters closed, and the curtains drawn. A night lamp burned on a bracket, but it only gave a dim and feeble light.

The king walked rapidly towards the bed.

“Oh, Madame de Misery,” said the queen, “how noisy you are — you have disturbed me!”

The king remained stupefied. “It is not Madame de Misery,” he murmured.

“What, is it you, sire?” said Marie Antoinette, raising herself up.

“Good morning, madame,” said the king, in a surly tone.

“What good wind blows you here, sire? Madame de Misery, come and open the shutters.”

She came in instantly, as usual, opened all the doors and windows, to let in light and fresh air.

“You sleep well, madame,” said the king, seating himself, and casting scrutinizing glances round the room.

“Yes, sire, I read late, and had your majesty not disturbed me, might have slept for some time longer.”

“How was it that you did not receive visitors yesterday?” asked the king.

“Whom do you mean? — M. de Provence,” said the queen, with great presence of mind.

“Yes, exactly; he wished to pay his respects to you, and was refused.”

“Well!”

“They said you were out.”

“Did they say that?” asked the queen carelessly. “Madame de Misery — — ”

The lady appeared, bringing in with her a number of letters on a gold salver. “Did your majesty call?” she asked.

“Yes. Did they tell M. de Provence yesterday that I was out? Will you tell the king, for really I forget.”

“Sire,” said Madame de Misery, while the queen took her letters and began to read, “I told Monseigneur le Comte de Provence that her majesty did not receive.”

“And by whose orders?”

“By the queen’s, sire.”

Meanwhile, the queen had opened one of the letters, and read these lines: “You returned from Paris yesterday, and entered the château at eight o’clock in the evening; Laurent saw you.”

Madame de Misery left the room.

“Pardon, sire,” said the queen, “but will you answer me one question?”

“What, madame?”

“Am I, or am I not, at liberty to see M. de Provence only when it pleases me?”

“Oh, perfectly at liberty, madame, but — — ”

“Well, his conversation wearies me; besides, he does not love me, and I like him no better. I expected his visit, and went to bed at eight o’clock to avoid it. But you look disturbed, sire.”

“I believed you to be in Paris yesterday.”

“At what time?”

“At the time at which you pretend to have gone to bed.”

“Doubtless, I went to Paris; but what of that?”

“All, madame, depends on what time you returned.”

“Oh, you wish to know at what time exactly I returned?”

“Yes.”

“It is easy. Madame de Misery — — ”

The Lady reappeared.

“What time was it when I returned from Paris yesterday?”

“About eight o’clock, your majesty.”

“I do not believe it,” said the king, “you make a mistake, Madame de Misery.”

The lady walked to the door, and called, “Madame Dural!”

“Yes, madame,” replied a voice.

“At what time did her majesty return from Paris yesterday?”

“About eight o’clock, madame,” replied the other.

“The king thinks we are mistaken.”

Madame Dural put her head out of the window, and cried, “Laurent!”

“Who is Laurent?” asked the king.

“The porter at the gate where her majesty entered,” said Madame de Misery.

“Laurent,” said Madame Dural, “what time was it when her majesty came home last evening?”

“About eight o’clock,” answered Laurent.

Madame de Misery then left the room, and the king and queen remained alone.

He felt ashamed of his suspicions.

The queen, however, only said coldly, “Well, sire, is there anything else you wish to know?”

“Oh, nothing!” cried he, taking her hands in his; “forgive me; I do not know what came into my head — my joy is as great as my repentance. You will not be angry, will you? I am in despair at having annoyed you.”

The queen withdrew her hand, and said; “Sire, a queen of France must not tell a falsehood.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that I did not return at eight o’clock last evening.”

The king drew back in surprise.

“I mean,” continued the queen in the same cold manner, “that I only returned at six o’clock this morning.”

“Madame!”

“And that, but for the kindness of M. le Comte d’Artois, who gave me an asylum, and lodged me out of pity in one of his houses, I should have been left all night at the door of the château like a beggar.”

“Ah! you had not then returned?” said the king, gloomily; “then I was right.”

“Sire, you have not behaved towards me as a gentleman should.”

“In what, madame?”

“In this — that if you wish to know whether I return late or early, you have no need to close the gates, with orders not to open them, but simply to come to me and ask, ‘Madame, at what time did you return?’ You have no more reason to doubt, sire. Your spies have been deceived, your precautions nullified, and your suspicions dissipated. I saw you ashamed of the part you had played, and I might have continued to triumph in my victory, but I think your proceedings shameful for a king, and unworthy of a gentleman; and I would not refuse myself the satisfaction of telling you so.

“It is useless, sire,” she continued, seeing the king about to speak; “nothing can excuse your conduct towards me.”

“On the contrary, madame,” replied he, “nothing is more easy. Not a single person in the château suspected that you had not already returned; therefore no one could think that my orders referred to you. Probably they were attributed to the dissipations of M. le Comte d’Artois — for that I care nothing. Therefore, madame, appearances were saved, as far as you were concerned. I wished simply to give you a secret lesson, from which the amount of irritation you show leads me to hope you will profit. Therefore, I still think I was in the right, and do not repent what I have done.”

The queen listened, and seemed to calm herself, by an effort, to prepare for the approaching contest. “Then, sire,” she said, “you think you need no excuse for keeping at the door of your castle the daughter of Maria Theresa, your wife, and the mother of your children? No! it is in your eyes a pleasantry worthy of a king, and of which the morality doubles the value. It is nothing to you, to have forced the Queen of France to pass the night in this ‘petite maison,’ where the Comte d’Artois receives the ladies of the Opera and the ‘femmes galantes’ of your court. Oh no! that is nothing. A philosopher king is above all such considerations. Only, on this occasion, I have reason to thank heaven that my brother-in-law is a dissipated man, as his dissipation has saved me from disgrace, and his vices have sheltered my honor.”

The king colored, and moved uneasily on his chair.

“Oh yes!” continued the queen, with a bitter laugh, “I know that you are a moral king, but your morality produces strange effects. You say that no one knew that I was out. Will you tell me that M. de Provence, your instigator, did not know it; or M. le Comte d’Artois — or my women? who, by my orders, told you falsehoods this morning; or Laurent — bought by M. d’Artois and by me? Let us continue this habit, sire; you, to set spies and Swiss guards; and I, to buy them over and cheat you; and in a month we will calculate together how much the dignity of the throne and our marriage has gained by it.”

It was evident that her words had made a great impression on him to whom they were addressed.

“You know,” said he, in an altered voice, “that I am always sincere, and willing to acknowledge if I have been wrong. Will you prove to me that you were right to go into Paris in sledges, accompanied by a gay party, which, in the present unhappy state of things, is likely to give offense? Will you prove to me, that you were right to disappear in Paris, like maskers at a ball, and only to reappear scandalously late at night, when every one else was asleep? You have spoken of the dignity of the throne, and of marriage; think you that it befits a queen, a wife, and a mother, to act thus?”

“I will reply in a few words, sire; for it seems to me, that such accusations merit nothing but contempt. I left Versailles in a sledge, because it is the quickest way of getting to Paris at present. I went with Madlle. de Taverney, whose reputation is certainly one of the purest in our court. I went to Paris, I repeat, to verify the fact that the King of France, the great upholder of morality — he who takes care of poor strangers, warms the beggars, and earns the gratitude of the people by his charities, leaves dying of hunger, exposed to every attack of vice and misery, one of his own family — one who is as much as himself a descendant of the kings who have reigned in France."

"What!" cried the king in surprise.

"I mounted," continued the queen, "into a garret, and there saw, without fire, almost without light, and without money, the granddaughter of a great prince, and I gave one hundred louis to this victim of royal forgetfulness and neglect. Then, as I was detained late there, and as the frost was severe, and horses go slowly over ice, particularly hackney-coach horses — — "

"Hackney-coach horses!" cried the king. "You returned in a hackney-coach?"

"Yes, sire — No. 107."

"Oh, oh!" said the king, with every sign of vexation.

"Yes, and only too happy to get it," said the queen.

"Madame!" interrupted he, "you are full of noble feelings; but this impetuous generosity becomes a fault. Remember," continued he, "that I never suspected you of anything that was not perfectly pure and honest: it is only your mode of acting and adventurous spirit that displease me. You have, as usual, been doing good, but the way you set about it makes it injurious to yourself. This is what I reproach you with. You say that I have faults to repair — that I have failed in my duty to a member of my own family. Tell me who the unfortunate is, and he shall no longer have reason to complain."

"The name of Valois, sire, is sufficiently illustrious not to have escaped your memory."

"Ah!" cried Louis, with a shout of laughter, "I know now whom you mean. La petite Valois, is it not? — a countess of something or other."

"De la Motte, sire."

"Precisely, De la Motte; her husband is a gendarme."

"Yes, sire."

"And his wife is an intrigante. Oh! you need not trouble yourself about her: she is moving heaven and earth; she worries my ministers, she teases my aunts, and overwhelms me with supplications, memorials, and genealogies."

"And all this uselessly, sire."

"I must confess it."

"Is she, or is she not, a Valois?"

"I believe she is."

“Well, then, I ask an honorable pension for her and a regiment for her husband. In fact, a decent position for this branch of the royal family.”

“An honorable pension? Mon Dieu! how you run on, madame. Do you know what a terrible hole this winter has made in my funds? A regiment for this little gendarme, who speculated in marrying a Valois? Why, I have no regiments to give, even to those who deserve them, or who can pay for them. An income befitting a Valois for these people? when we, monarch as we are, have not one befitting a rich gentleman. Why, M. d’Orleans has sent his horses and mules to England for sale, and has cut off a third of his establishment. I have put down my wolf-hounds, and given up many other things. We are all on the privation list, great and small.”

“But these Valois must not die of hunger.”

“Have you not just given them one hundred louis?”

“And what is that?”

“A royal gift.”

“Then give such another.”

“Yours will do for us both.”

“No, I want a pension for them.”

“No, I will not bind myself to anything fixed; they will not let me forget them, and I will give when I have money to spare. I do not think much of this little Valois.”

Saying these words, Louis held out his hand to the queen, who, however, turned from him and said, “No, you are not good to me, and I am angry.”

“You bear malice,” said the king “and I — — ”

“Oh, you shut the gates against me; you come at half-past six to my room, and force open the door in a passion.”

“I was not in a passion,” said the king.

“You are not now, you mean.”

“What will you give me if I prove that I was not, even when I came in?”

“Let me see the proof.”

“Oh, it is very easy; I have it in my pocket.”

“Bah!” said the queen; but adding, with curiosity, “You have brought something to give me, but I warn you I shall not believe you, unless you show it me at once.”

Then, with a smile full of kindness, the king began searching in his pockets, with that slowness which makes the child doubly impatient for his toy, the animal for his food, and the woman for her present: at last he drew out a box of red morocco leather, artistically ornamented in gold.

“A jewel box!” cried the queen.

The king laid it on the bed.

She opened it impatiently, and then called out, “Oh, mon Dieu! how beautiful!”

The king smiled with delight. “Do you think so?” said he.

The queen could not answer — she was breathless with admiration. Then she drew out of the box a necklace of diamonds, so large, so pure, so glittering, and so even, that, with sparkling eyes, she cried again, “Oh! it is magnificent.”

“Then you are content?” said the king.

“Enchanted, sire; you make me too happy.”

“Really?”

“See this first row; the diamonds are as large as filberts, and so even, you could not tell one from the other; then how beautifully the gradation of the rows is managed; the jeweler who made this necklace is an artist.”

“They are two.”

“Then I wager it is Bœhmer and Bossange.”

“You have guessed right.”

“Indeed, no one but they would risk making such a thing.”

“Madame, take care,” said the king; “you will have to pay too dear for this necklace.”

“Oh, sire!” cried the queen, all the delight fading from her countenance.

“You must pay the price of letting me be the first to put it on:” and he approached her, holding in his hands the two ends of the magnificent necklace, of which the clasp was one great diamond.

She stopped him, saying, “But, sire, is it very dear?”

“Have I not told you the price?”

“Ah, Louis, we must not jest. Put the necklace back again.”

“You refuse to allow me to put it on?”

“Oh no, sire, if I were going to wear it.”

“What?” said the king, surprised.

“No,” she said; “no one shall see a necklace of this price round my neck.”

“You will not wear it?”

“Never.”

“You refuse me.”

“I refuse to wear a million or a million and a half of francs round my neck, for this necklace must cost that.”

“I do not deny it,” said the king.

“Then I do refuse to wear such a necklace while the king’s coffers are empty, when he is forced to stint his charities, and to say to the poor, ‘God help you, for I have no more to give.’“

“Are you serious in saying this?”

“Listen, sire; M. de Sartines told me a short time since that with that sum we could build a ship of the line; and in truth, sire, the king has more need of a ship than the queen of a necklace.”

“Oh!” cried the king, joyfully, and with his eyes full of tears, “what you do is sublime. Thanks, Antoinette; you are a good wife!” and he threw his arms round her neck and kissed her. “Oh! how France will bless you,” continued he; “and it shall hear what you have done.”

The queen sighed.

“You regret,” said he: “it is not too late.”

“No, sire; shut this case, and return it to the jewelers.”

“But listen, first; I have arranged the terms of payment, and I have the money.”

“No, I have decided. I will not have the necklace; but I want something else.”

“Diable! then my 1,600,000 francs are gone, after all.”

“What! it would have cost that?”

“Indeed it would.”

“Reassure yourself; what I ask is much cheaper.”

“What do you wish for?”

“To go to Paris once more.”

“Oh! that is easy enough, and not dear.”

“But wait — — ”

“Diable!”

“To the Place Vendôme, to see M. Mesmer.”

“Diable!” again said the king; but added: “Well, as you have denied yourself the necklace, I suppose I must let you go; but, on one condition.”

“What?”

“You must be accompanied by a princess of the blood.”

“Shall it be Madame de Lamballe?”

“Yes, if you like.”

“I promise.”

“Then I consent.”

“Thanks, sire.”

“And, now,” said the king, “I shall order my ship of the line, and call it the ‘Queen’s Necklace.’ You shall stand godmother, and then I will send it out to La Pérouse;” and, kissing his wife’s hand, he went away quite joyful.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE QUEEN’S PETITE LEVEE.

No sooner was the king gone than the queen rose, and went to the window. The morning was lovely, and had the charming feeling of the commencement of spring, while the sun seemed almost warm. The wind had gone round to the west, and if it remained in that quarter this terrible winter was probably at an end.

The snow was beginning to drip from the trees, under the influence of this genial morning.

“If we wish to profit by the ice,” cried the queen, “I believe we must make haste; for look, Madame de Misery, the spring seems to have begun. I much wish to make up a party on the Swiss lake, and will go to-day, for to-morrow it may be too late.”

“Then at what hour will your majesty wish to dress?”

“Immediately; I will breakfast and then go.”

“Are there any other orders, madame?”

“See if Madlle. de Taverney has risen, and tell her I wish to speak to her.”

“She is already waiting for you in the boudoir, madame.”

“Already?” said the queen, who knew at what time she had gone to bed.

“She has been there for twenty minutes, madame.”

“Ask her to come in.”

Andrée soon entered, dressed with her usual care, and smiling, though rather unquiet.

The queen’s answering smile quite reassured her.

“Go, my good Misery, and send me Leonard.”

When she was gone, “The king has been charming,” said the queen to Andrée; “he has laughed, and is quite disarmed.”

“But does he know, madame?”

“You understand, Andrée, that a woman does not tell falsehoods when she has done no wrong and is the Queen of France.”

“Certainly, madame.”

“Still, my dear Andrée, it seems we have been wrong — — ”

"Doubtless, madame, but how?"

"Why, in pitying Madame de la Motte; the king dislikes her, but I confess she pleased me."

"Here is Leonard," said Madame de Misery, returning.

The queen seated herself before her silver-gilt toilet-table, and the celebrated hair-dresser commenced his operations.

She had the most beautiful hair in the world, and was fond of looking at it; Leonard knew this, and therefore with her was always tardy in his movements, that she might have time to admire it.

Marie Antoinette was looking beautiful that morning: she was pleased and happy.

Her hair finished, she turned again to Andrée.

"You have not been scolded," she said; "you are free: besides, they say every one is afraid of you, because, like Minerva, you are too wise."

"I, madame?"

"Yes, you; but, oh, mon Dieu! how happy you are to be unmarried, and, above all, to be content to be so."

Andrée blushed, and tried to smile.

"It is a vow that I have made," said she.

"And which you will keep, beautiful vestal?"

"I hope so."

"Apropos," said the queen, "I remember, that although unmarried, you have a master since yesterday morning."

"A master, madame?"

"Yes, your dear brother; what do you call him? — Philippe, is it not?"

"Yes, madame."

"Has he arrived?"

"He came yesterday."

"And you have not yet seen him? I took you away to Paris, selfish that I was; it was unpardonable."

"Oh, madame! I pardon you willingly, and Philippe also."

"Are you sure?"

"I answer for both of us."

"How is he?"

"As usual, beautiful and good, madame."

"How old is he now?"

"Thirty-two."

"Poor Philippe! do you know that it is fourteen years since I first met him! But I have not seen him now for nine or ten."

"Whenever your majesty pleases to receive him he will be but too happy to assure you that this long absence has not altered the sentiment of respectful devotion which he has ever felt for his queen."

"I will see him at once."

"In a quarter of an hour he will be at your majesty's feet."

Scarcely was Andrée gone, when the queen saw reflected in the glass an arch and laughing face. "My brother D'Artois," cried the queen; "how you frightened me!"

"Good morning, your majesty," said the young prince; "how did your majesty pass the night?"

"Very badly, brother."

"And the morning?"

"Very well."

"That is the most important; I guessed that all had gone right, for I have just met the king, and he was smiling most graciously."

The queen laughed, and he echoed it.

The queen had just cast off her dressing-gown of India muslin, and put on her morning dress, when the door opened and Andrée entered, leading by the hand a handsome man with a brown complexion, noble black eyes, profoundly imbued with melancholy, and a soldier-like carriage. He looked like one of Coypel's or Gainsborough's beautiful portraits.

He was dressed in a dark gray coat, embroidered in silver, a white cravat, and a dark waistcoat; and this rather somber style of dress seemed to suit the manly character of his beauty.

"Your majesty," said Andrée, "here is my brother."

Philippe bowed gravely.

The queen, who had until now been looking at his figure reflected in her mirror, turned round and saluted him. She was beautiful, with that royal beauty which made all around her not only partisans of the throne, but adorers of the woman. She possessed the power of beauty; and, if we may make use of the inversion, the beauty of power. Philippe, seeing her smile, and feeling those limpid eyes, at once soft and proud, fixed upon him, turned pale, and could hardly restrain his emotion.

"It appears, M. de Taverney," said she, "that you pay me your first visit; I thank you for it."

“Your majesty deigns to forget that it is I who should give thanks.”

“How many years have passed since we last met, monsieur? Alas! the most beautiful part of our lives.”

“For me, madame, but not for your majesty, to whom all days are alike charming.”

“You were then pleased with America, M. de Taverney, as you remained there so long?”

“Madame,” answered Philippe, “M. de la Fayette, when he left the New World, had need of an officer in whom he could place confidence to take the command of the French auxiliaries. He proposed me, therefore, to General Washington, who accepted me.”

“It seems,” said the queen, “that this new country sends us home many heroes.”

“Your majesty does not mean that for me?” asked Philippe, laughing.

“Why not?” Then turning to the Comte d’Artois, “See, brother,” she said; “has not M. de Taverney the look of a hero?”

Philippe, seeing himself thus introduced to the young prince, bowed low. He returned it, and said, “I am most happy to make the acquaintance of such a gentleman. What are your intentions in returning to France, sir?”

“Monseigneur,” answered Philippe, “my sister is my first consideration; whatever she wishes, I shall do.”

“But she has a father, I believe,” said the count.

“Never mind him,” said the queen, quickly, “I prefer Andrée under her brother’s protection, and he under yours, count. You will take charge of M. de Taverney, will you not?”

The count bowed an assent.

“For, do you know,” continued she, “that a very strong link binds me to M. de Taverney?”

“What do you mean, sister?”

“That he was the first Frenchman who presented himself to my eyes when I arrived in this country; and I had taken a very sincere vow to promote the happiness of the first Frenchman I should meet.”

Philippe felt the blood rush to his face, and Andrée looked at him rather sadly.

The queen observed these looks of the brother and sister, and fancied she divined the cause. “Why,” she thought, “should not Monsieur de Taverney have partaken the epidemic passion which pervaded all France for the dauphiness in 1774?” Marie Antoinette therefore attributed these looks to some confidence of this kind which the brother had made to the sister; and in consequence, she smiled still more upon him, and redoubled her kindness towards Andrée.

The queen was a true woman, and gloried in being loved.

It was an innocent coquetry, and the most generous souls have the most strongly these aspirations for the love of all who surround them.

Alas! a time is coming for thee, poor queen, when those smiles towards those who love thee, with which thou hast been reproached, thou shalt vainly bestow on those that love thee not!

The Comte d’Artois approached Philippe while the queen was talking to Andrée, and said, “Do you think Washington so very great a general?”

“Certainly a great man, monseigneur.”

“And what effect did our French produce out there?”

“As much good as the English did harm.”

“Ah, you are a partisan of the new ideas, my dear M. Philippe de Taverney; but have you reflected on one thing?”

“What, monseigneur? I assure you that out there, encamped in the fields, and in the savannahs on the borders of the great lakes, I had plenty of time for reflection.”

“On this, that in making war out there, it was neither on the Indians nor on the English, but on us.”

“Ah, monseigneur, I do not deny that that is possible.”

“Therefore I do not admire so much these victories of M. de la Fayette and Washington. It is egotism, perhaps, but it is not egotism for myself alone.”

“Oh, monseigneur!”

“But do you know why I will still support you with all my power?”

“Whatever be the reason, I shall be truly grateful.”

“It is, because you are not one of those whose names have been blazoned forth. You have done your duty bravely, but you have not thrust yourself forward; you are not known in Paris.”

The young prince then kissed the queen’s hand, and bowing to Andrée, left the room.

Then the queen turned again to Philippe, saying, “Have you seen your father, sir?”

“No, madame.”

“Why did you not go to see him first?”

“I had sent home my valet, and my luggage, but my father sent the servant back again, with orders to present myself first to you, or the king.”

“It is a lovely morning,” said the queen; “to-morrow the ice will begin to melt. Madame de Misery, order my sledge and send my chocolate in here.”

“Will not your majesty take something to eat? You had no supper last night.”

“You mistake, my good Misery, we had supper. Had we not, Andrée?”

“A very good one, madame.”

“So I will only have my chocolate. Quick, Madame de Misery; this fine weather tempts me, and the Swiss lake will be full of company.”

“Your majesty is going to skate?” asked Philippe.

“Ah, you will laugh at us, M. l’Américain; you, who have traversed lakes where there are more miles than we have feet here.”

“Madame,” replied Philippe, “here you amuse yourself with the cold, but there they die of it.”

“Ah, here is my chocolate; Andrée, take a cup with me.”

Andrée bowed, coloring with pleasure.

“You see, M. de Taverney, I am always the same, hating all etiquette, as in old times. Do you remember those old days? Are you changed since then, M. Philippe?”

“No, madame,” replied the young man, “I am not changed — at least, not in heart.”

“Well, I am glad to hear that, for it was a good one. A cup for M. de Taverney, Madame de Misery.”

“Oh, madame!” cried Philippe, “you cannot mean it; such an honor for a poor obscure soldier like me.”

“An old friend,” said the queen; “this day seems to remind me of my youth; I seem again happy, free, proud and yet foolish. This day recalls to me that happy time at my dear Trianon, and all our frolics there, Andrée and I together. This day brings back to my memory my roses, my strawberries, and my birds, that I was so fond of, all, even to my good gardeners, whose happy faces often announced to me a new flower or a delicious fruit; and M. de Jussieu and that original old Rousseau, who is since dead. But come,” continued she, herself pouring the chocolate into his cup, “you are a soldier, and accustomed to fire, so burn yourself gloriously with this chocolate, for I am in a hurry.”

She laughed, but Philippe, taking it seriously, drank it off most heroically.

The queen saw him, and laughing still more, said, “You are indeed a perfect hero, M. de Taverney.” She then rose, and her woman brought her bonnet, ermine mantle, and gloves.

Philippe took his hat under his arm, and followed her and Andrée out.

“M. de Taverney, I do not mean you to leave me,” said the queen. “Come round to my right.”

They went down the great staircase; the drums were beating, the clarions of the body-guard were playing, and this whole scene, and the enthusiasm everywhere shown towards that beautiful queen by whose side he was walking, completed the intoxication of the young man. The change was too sudden, after so many years of exile and regret, to such great joy and honor.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SWISS LAKE.

Every one knows this piece of water, which still goes by the same name. An avenue of linden trees skirts each bank, and these avenues were on this day thronged with pedestrians, of all ranks and ages, who had come to enjoy the sight of the sledges and the skating. The toilets of the ladies presented a brilliant spectacle of luxury and gaiety, their high coiffures, gay bonnets with the veils half down, fur mantles, and brilliant silks with deep flounces, were mingled with the orange or blue coats of the gentlemen.

Gay lackeys also, in blue and red, passed among the crowd, looking like poppies and cornflowers blown about by the wind.

Now and then a cry of admiration burst from the crowd, as St. George, the celebrated skater, executed some circle so perfect, that a mathematician could scarcely have found a fault in it.

While the banks of the lake were thus crowded, the ice itself presented a scene not less gay, and still more animated: sledges flew about in all directions. Several dogs, clothed in embroidered velvet, and with plumes of feathers on their heads, looking like fabulous animals, drew a sledge in which sat M. de Lauzun, who was wrapped up in a tiger skin. Here you might see a lady masked, doubtless on account of the cold, in some sledge of a quieter character, while a handsome skater, in a velvet riding-coat, hangs over the back, to assist and direct her progress; whatever they may be saying to each other is quite inaudible, amidst this busy hum of voices; but who can blame a rendezvous which takes place in the open air, and under the eyes of all Versailles? and whatever they may be saying matters to no one else: it is evident that in the midst of this crowd their life is an isolated one; they think only of each other.

All at once a general movement in the crowd announces that they have recognized the queen, who is approaching the lake. A general cry of “Vive la reine!” is heard, and all endeavor to approach as nearly as possible to the place where she has stationed herself. One person alone does not appear to share this feeling, for on her approach he disappears with all his suite as fast as possible in the opposite direction.

"Do you see," said the Comte d'Artois to the queen, whom he had hastened to join, "how my brother Provence flies from you?"

"He fears that I should reproach him."

"Oh, no; it is not that that makes him fly."

"It is his conscience, then."

"Not even that, sister."

"What then?"

"I will tell you. He had just heard that M. de Suffren, our glorious commander, will arrive this evening; and as the news is important, he wishes to leave you in ignorance of it."

"But is the Minister of Marine ignorant of this arrival?"

"Ah, mon Dieu, sister, have you not learned enough of ministers, during the fourteen years you have passed here, as dauphiness and queen, to know that they are always ignorant of precisely what they ought to know? However, I have told him about this, and he is deeply grateful."

"I should think so," said the queen.

"Yes, and I have need of his gratitude, for I want a loan."

"Oh," cried the queen, laughing, "how disinterested you are."

"Sister," said he, "you must want money; I offer you half of what I am going to receive."

"Oh no, brother, keep it for yourself; I thank you, but I want nothing just now."

"Diable! do not wait too long to claim my promise, because if you do, I may not be in a condition to fulfil it."

"In that case I must endeavor to find out some state secret for myself."

"Sister, you begin to look cold."

"Well, here is M. de Taverney returning with my sledge."

"Then you do not want me any longer?"

"No."

"Then send me away, I beg."

"Why? do you imagine you will be in my way?"

"No; it is I who want my liberty."

"Adieu, then."

"Au revoir, dear sister."

"Till when?"

“Till this evening.”

“Is there anything to take place to-night, then?”

“Yes; this evening the minister will bring M. de Suffren to the jeu du roi.”

“Very well, then, till this evening.”

And the young prince, bowing with his habitual elegance, disappeared among the crowd.

Old Taverney, who was one of the nearest spectators of all this, had been watching his son eagerly, and felt almost chagrined at this conversation between the queen and her brother-in-law, as it interrupted the familiar intercourse which his son had before been enjoying; therefore, when the young man returned with the queen’s sledge, and, seeing his father, whom he had not met for ten years, advanced towards him, he motioned him away, saying, “We will talk afterwards, when you have left the queen.”

Philippe, therefore, returned to the queen, who was getting into the sledge with Andrée. Two attendants approached to push it, but she said, “No; I do not wish to go like that; you skate, M. de Taverney? Does he not, Andrée?”

“Philippe used to skate remarkably well,” replied she.

“And now I dare say he rivals St. George,” said the queen.

“I will do my best to justify your majesty’s opinion,” said he; and putting on his skates, he placed himself behind her sledge, and they commenced their course.

St. George, seeing the queen on the ice, began to execute his most skilful maneuvers, and finished off by going in circles round her sledge, making the most elegant bows each time he passed her.

Then Philippe, moved to emulation, began to push along the sledge with such wonderful rapidity that St. George found no little difficulty in keeping pace with it.

Several people, however, seeing the queen move at this marvelous rate, uttered cries of terror.

“If your majesty desires,” said Philippe, “I will stop, or go slower.”

“Oh no!” said she, with that enthusiasm which she carried into everything; “oh no! I am not at all afraid; quicker still, chevalier, if you can.”

“Oh yes, madame, and you are quite safe; you may trust to me;” and his vigorous arm propelled them at a still increased pace. He emulated the circles of St. George, and flew round as fast with the sledge as could even that experienced skater without it.

Then, leaving these evolutions, he pushed the sledge straight before him, and with such force that he himself remained behind.

St. George, seeing this, made a tremendous effort to gain the sledge before him, but was distanced by Philippe, who once more seized it, turned it, and flew in a new direction.

The air now rang with such acclamations, that Philippe began to feel ashamed.

Then the queen, who had joined the applause with her hands, turned round and said to him, “And now, M. de Taverney, that you have gained the victory, stop, I beg, or you will kill me.”

CHAPTER X.

THE TEMPTER.

Philippe, at this request of the queen, made a strong effort, and stopped the sledge abruptly.

“And now, rest yourself,” said she, coming out of it all trembling. “Indeed, I never could have believed the delight of going so fast, but you have made me quite tremble;” and she took Philippe’s arm to support herself, until a general murmur reminded her that she was once more committing a breach of etiquette.

As for Philippe, overwhelmed by this great honor, he felt more ashamed than if his sovereign had insulted him publicly; he lowered his eyes, and his heart beat as though it would burst.

The queen, however, withdrew her arm almost immediately, and asked for a seat. They brought her one.

“Thanks, M. de Taverney,” said she; then, in a lower tone, “Mon Dieu, how disagreeable it is to be always surrounded by spying fools!”

A number of ladies and gentlemen soon crowded round her, and all looked with no little curiosity at Philippe, who, to hide his confusion, stooped to take off his skates, and then fell into the background.

After a short time, however, the queen said, “I shall take cold if I sit here, I must take another turn;” and she remounted her sledge.

Philippe waited, but in vain, for another order.

Twenty gentlemen soon presented themselves, but she said, “No, I thank you, I have my attendants;” and she moved slowly off, while Philippe remained alone.

He looked about for St. George, to console him for his defeat by some compliment, but he had received a message from his patron, the duke d’Orleans, and had left the place.

Philippe, therefore, rather tired, and half frightened at all that had passed, remained stationary, following with his eyes the queen’s sledge, which was now at some distance, when he felt some one touch him; he turned round and saw his father.

The little old man, more shrunk than ever, enveloped in furs like a Laplander, had touched his son with his elbow, that he might not be obliged to take his hands out of the muff that hung from his neck.

“You do not embrace me, my son,” said he.

“My dear father, I do it with all my heart.”

“And now,” said the old man, “go quickly;” and he pushed him away.

“Where do you wish me to go, sir?”

“Why, morbleu, over there.”

“Where?”

“To the queen.”

“No, I thank you, father.”

“How? No, I thank you! are you mad? You will not go after the queen?”

“My dear father, it is impossible!”

“Impossible to join the queen, who is expecting you?”

“Who is expecting me!”

“Yes, who wishes for you.”

“Wishes for me? Indeed, father,” added he, coldly, “I think you forget yourself.”

“It is astonishing!” said the old man, stamping his foot. “Where on earth do you spring from?”

“Monsieur,” said his son, sadly, “you will make me conclude one of two things.”

“What?”

“Either that you are laughing at me, or else, excuse me, that you are losing your senses.”

The old man seized his son by the arm so energetically that he made him start. “Listen, M. Philippe,” said he; “America is, I know, a country a long way from this, and where there is neither king nor queen.”

“Nor subjects.”

“Nor subjects, M. Philosopher; I do not deny it; that point does not interest me; but what does so is that I fear also to have to come to a conclusion — — ”

“What, father?”

“That you are a simpleton, my son; just trouble yourself to look over there.”

“Well, sir!”

"Well, the queen looks back, and it is the third time she has done so; there! she turns again, and who do you think she is looking for but for you, M. Puritan?"

"Well, sir," said the young man; "if it were true, which it probably is not, that the queen was looking for — — "

"Oh!" interrupted the old man, angrily, "this fellow is not of my blood; he cannot be a Taverney. Sir, I repeat to you that the queen is looking for you."

"You have good sight, sir," said his son, dryly.

"Come," said the old man, more gently, and trying to moderate his impatience, "trust my experience: are you, or are you not, a man?"

Philippe made no reply.

His father ground his teeth with anger, to see himself opposed by this steadfast will; but making one more effort, "Philippe, my son," said he, still more gently, "listen to me."

"It seems to me, sir, that I have been doing nothing else for the last quarter of an hour."

"Oh," thought the old man, "I will draw you down from your stilts. I will find out your weak side." Then aloud, "You have overlooked one thing, Philippe."

"What, sir?"

"When you left for America, there was a king, but no queen, if it were not the Dubarry; hardly a respectable sovereign. You come back and see a queen, and you think you must be very respectful."

"Doubtless."

"Poor child!" said his father, laughing.

"How, sir? You blame me for respecting the monarchy — you, a Taverney Maison-Rouge, one of the best names in France."

"I do not speak of the monarchy, but only of the queen."

"And you make a difference?"

"Pardieu, I should think so. What is royalty? a crown that is unapproachable. But what is a queen? a woman, and she, on the contrary, is very approachable."

Philippe made a gesture of disgust.

"You do not believe me," continued the old man, almost fiercely; "well, ask M. de Coigny, ask M. de Lauzun, or M. de Vaudreuil."

"Silence, father!" cried Philippe; "or for these three blasphemies, not being able to strike you three blows with my sword, I shall strike them on myself.”

The old man stepped back, murmuring, “Mon Dieu, what a stupid animal! Good evening, son; you rejoice me; I thought I was the father, the old man, but now I think it is I who must be the young Apollo, and you the old man;” and he turned away.

Philippe stopped him: “You did not speak seriously, did you, father? It is impossible that a gentleman of good blood like you should give ear to these calumnies, spread by the enemies, not only of the queen, but of the throne.”

“He will not believe, the double mule!” said the old man.

“You speak to me as you would speak before God?”

“Yes, truly.”

“Before God, whom you approach every day?”

“It seems to me, my son,” replied he, “that I am a gentleman, and that you may believe my word.”

“It is, then, your opinion that the queen has had lovers?”

“Certainly.”

“Those whom you have named?”

“And others, for what I know. Ask all the town and the court. One must be just returned from America to be ignorant of all they say.”

“And who say this, sir? some vile pamphleteers!”

“Oh! do you, then, take me for an editor?”

“No, and there is the mischief, when men like you repeat such calumnies, which, without that, would melt away like the unwholesome vapors which sometimes obscure the most brilliant sunshine; but people like you, repeating them, give them a terrible stability. Oh! monsieur, for mercy’s sake do not repeat such things.”

“I do repeat them, however.”

“And why do you repeat them?” cried Philippe, fiercely.

“Oh!” said the old man with his satanic laugh, “to prove to you that I was not wrong when I said, ‘Philippe, the queen looks back; she is looking for you. Philippe, the queen wishes for you; run to her.’“

“Oh! father, hold your tongue, or you will drive me mad.”

“Really, Philippe, I do not understand you. Is it a crime to love? It shows that one has a heart; and in the eyes of this woman, in her voice, in everything, can you not read her heart? She loves; is it you? or is it another? I know not, but believe in my own experience: at this moment she loves, or is beginning to love, some one. But you are a philosopher, a Puritan, a

Quaker, an American; you do not love; well, then, let her look; let her turn again and again; despise her, Philippe, I should say Joseph de Taverney."

The old man hurried away, satisfied with the effect he had produced, and fled like the serpent who was the first tempter into crime.

Philippe remained alone, his heart swelling and his blood boiling. He remained fixed in his place for about half an hour, when the queen, having finished her tour, returned to where he stood, and called out to him:

"You must be rested now, M. de Taverney; come, then, for there is no one like you to guide a queen royally."

Philippe ran to her, giddy, and hardly knowing what he did. He placed his hand on the back of the sledge, but started as though he had burned his fingers; the queen had thrown herself negligently back in the sledge, and the fingers of the young man touched the locks of Marie Antoinette.

CHAPTER XI.

M. DE SUFFREN.

Contrary to the usual habits of a court, the secret had been faithfully confined to Louis XVI. and the Comte d’Artois. No one knew at what time or hour M. de Suffren would arrive.

The king had announced his jeu du roi for the evening; and at seven o’clock he entered, with ten princes and princesses of his family. The queen came holding the princess royal, now about seven years old, by the hand. The assembly was numerous and brilliant. The Comte d’Artois approached the queen, and said, “Look around you, madame.”

“Well?”

“What do you see?”

The queen looked all around, and then said, “I see nothing but happy and friendly faces.”

“Rather, then, whom do you not see?”

“Oh! I understand; I wonder if he is always going to run away from me.”

“Oh no! only this is a good joke; M. de Provence has gone to wait at the barrier for M. de Suffren.”

“Well, I do not see why you laugh at that; he has been the most cunning, after all, and will be the first to receive and pay his compliments to this gentleman.”

“Come, dear sister,” replied the young prince, laughing, “you have a very mean opinion of our diplomacy. M. de Provence has gone to meet him at Fontainebleau; but we have sent some one to meet him at Villejuif, so that my brother will wait by himself at Fontainebleau, while our messenger will conduct M. de Suffren straight to Versailles, without passing through Paris at all.”

“That is excellently imagined.”

“It is not bad, I flatter myself; but it is your turn to play.”

The king had noticed that M. d’Artois was making the queen laugh, and guessing what it was about, gave them a significant glance, to show that he shared their amusement.

The saloon where they played was full of persons of the highest rank — M. de Condé, M. de Penthièvre, M. de Tremouille, etc. The news of the arrival of M. de Suffren had, as we have said, been kept quiet, but there had been a kind of vague rumor that some one was expected, and all were somewhat preoccupied and watchful. Even the king, who was in the habit of playing six-franc pieces in order to moderate the play of the court, played gold without thinking of it.

The queen, however, to all appearances entered, as usual, eagerly into the game.

Philippe, who, with his sister, was admitted to the party, in vain endeavored to shake from his mind his father's words. He asked himself if indeed this old man, who had seen so much of courts, was not right; and if his own ideas were indeed those of a Puritan, and belonging to another land. This queen, so charming, so beautiful, and so friendly towards him, was she indeed only a terrible coquette, anxious to add one lover more to her list, as the entomologist transfixes a new insect or butterfly, without thinking of the tortures of the poor creature whose heart he is piercing? "Coigny, Vaudreuil," repeated he to himself, "they loved the queen, and were loved by her. Oh, why does this calumny haunt me so, or why will not some ray of light discover to me the heart of this woman?"

Then Philippe turned his eyes to the other end of the table, where, by a strange chance, these gentlemen were sitting side by side, and both seemingly equally forgetful of, and insensible to, the queen; and he thought that it was impossible that these men could have loved and be so calm, or that they could have been loved and seem so forgetful. From them he turned to look at Marie Antoinette herself and interrogated that pure forehead, that haughty mouth, and beautiful face; and the answer they all seemed to give him was: calumnies, all calumnies, these rumors, originating only in the hates and jealousies of a court.

While he was coming to these conclusions the clock struck a quarter to eight, and at that moment a great noise of footsteps and the sound of many voices were heard on the staircase. The king, hearing it, signed to the queen, and they both rose and broke up the game. She then passed into the great reception-hall, and the king followed her.

An aide-de-camp of M. de Castries, Minister of Marine, approached the king and said something in a low tone, when M. de Castries himself entered, and said aloud, “Will your majesty receive M. de Suffren, who has arrived from Toulon?”

At this name a general movement took place in the assembly.

“Yes, sir,” said the king, “with great pleasure;” and M. de Castries left the room.

To explain this interest for M. de Suffren, and why king, queen, princes, and ministers contended who should be the first to receive him, a few words will suffice.

Suffren is a name essentially French, like Turenne or Jean Bart. Since the last war with England, M. de Suffren had fought seven great naval battles without sustaining a defeat. He had taken Trincomalee and Gondeleur, scoured the seas, and taught the Nabob Hyder Ali that France was the first Power in Europe. He had carried into his profession all the skill of an able diplomatist, all the bravery and all the tactics of a soldier, and all the prudence of a wise ruler. Hardy, indefatigable, and proud when the honor of the French nation was in question, he had harassed the English, by land and by sea, till even these fierce islanders were afraid of him.

But after the battle, in which he risked his life like the meanest sailor, he ever showed himself humane, generous, and compassionate. He was now about fifty-six years of age, stout and short, but with an eye of fire and a noble carriage, and, like a man accustomed to surmount all difficulties, he had dressed in his traveling-carriage.

He wore a blue coat embroidered with gold, a red waistcoat, and blue trousers.

All the guards through whom he had passed, when he was named to them by M. de Castries, had saluted him as they would have done a king.

“M. de Suffren,” said the king when he entered, “welcome to Versailles; you bring glory with you.”

M. de Suffren bent his knee to the king, who, however, raised him and embraced him cordially; then, turning to the queen, “Madame,” said he, “here is M. de Suffren, the victor of Trincomalee and Gondeleur, and the terror of the English.”

“Monsieur,” said the queen, “I wish you to know that you have not fired a shot for the glory of France but my heart has beaten with admiration and gratitude.”

When she ceased, the Comte d’Artois approached with his son, the Duc d’Angoulême.

“My son,” said he, “you see a hero; look at him well, for it is a rare sight.”

“Monseigneur,” replied the young prince, “I have read about the great men in Plutarch, but I could not see them; I thank you for showing me M. de Suffren.”

The king now took the arm of M. de Suffren, in order to lead him to his study, and talk to him of his travels; but he made a respectful resistance.

“Sire,” said he, “will your majesty permit me — — ”

“Oh! whatever you wish, sir.”

“Then, sire, one of my officers has committed so grave a fault against discipline, that I thought your majesty ought to be sole judge of the offense.”

“Oh, M. de Suffren, I had hoped your first request would have been a favor, and not a punishment.”

“Your majesty, as I have had the honor to say, shall judge what ought to be done. In the last battle the officer of whom I speak was on board *La Sévère*.”

“Oh, the ship that struck her flag!” cried the king, frowning.

“Yes, sire. The captain of *La Sévère* had indeed struck his flag, and already Sir Hugh, the English admiral, had despatched a boat to take possession of his prize, when the lieutenant in command of the guns of the middle deck, perceiving that the firing above had ceased, and having received orders to stop his own fire, went on deck, saw the flag lowered, and the captain ready to surrender. At this sight, sir, all his French blood revolted, he took the flag which lay there, and, seizing a hammer, ordered the men to recommence the fire, while he nailed it to the mast. It was by this action, sire, that *La Sévère* was preserved to your majesty.”

“A splendid action!” cried the king and queen simultaneously.

“Yes, sire — yes, madame, but a grave fault against discipline. The order had been given by the captain, and the lieutenant ought to have obeyed. I, however, ask for the pardon of the officer, and the more so as he is my own nephew.”

“Your nephew!” cried the king; “and you have never mentioned him!”

“Not to you, sire; but I made my report to the ministers, begging them to say nothing about it until I had obtained his pardon from your majesty.”

“It is granted,” said the king. “I promise beforehand my protection to all who may violate discipline in such a cause. You must present this officer to me, M. de Suffren."

M. de Suffren turned. "Approach, M. de Charny," he said.

The queen started at the sound of this name, which she had so recently heard. A young officer advanced from the crowd, and presented himself before the king.

The queen and Andrée looked anxiously at each other; but M. de Charny bowed before the king almost without raising his eyes, and, after kissing his hand, retired again, without seeming to have observed the queen.

"Come now, M. de Suffren," said the king, "and let us converse; I am impatient to hear all your adventures." But before leaving the room he turned to the queen and said. "Apropos, madame, I am going to have built, as you know, a ship of one hundred guns, and I think of changing the name we had destined for it, and of calling it instead — — "

"Oh yes!" cried Marie Antoinette, catching his thought, "we will call it *Le Suffren*, and I will still stand sponsor."

"Vive le roi! vive la reine!" cried all.

"And vive M. de Suffren!" added the king, and then left the room with him.

CHAPTER XII.

M. DE CHARNY.

M. de Suffren had requested his nephew to wait his return, and he therefore remained in the group as before.

The queen, speaking low to Andrée, and glancing towards him, said: “It is he, there is no doubt.”

“Mon Dieu! yes, madame, it is he indeed.”

At this moment the door opened, and a gentleman dressed in the robes of a cardinal, and followed by a long train of officers and prelates, entered the room.

The queen immediately recognized M. de Rohan, and turned away her head, without taking the trouble to hide the frown which overspread her face.

He crossed the room without stopping to speak to any one, and, coming straight up to her, bowed to her more as a man of the world bows to a lady than as a subject to a queen, and then addressed some rather high-flown compliments to her; but she scarcely looked at him, and, after murmuring a few cold words in reply, began to talk to Madame de Lamballe.

The cardinal did not seem to notice this chilling reception, but bowed again, and retired without appearing in the least disconcerted.

He then turned to the king’s aunts, from whom he met with a reception as cordial as the queen’s had been the reverse. The Cardinal Louis de Rohan was a man in the prime of life, and of an imposing figure and noble bearing; his eyes shone with intelligence, his mouth was well cut and handsome, and his hands were beautiful. A premature baldness indicated either a man of pleasure or a studious one — and he was both. He was a man no little sought after by the ladies, and was noted for his magnificent style of living; indeed, he had found the way to feel himself poor with an income of 1,600,000 francs.

The king liked him for his learning, but the queen hated him. The reasons for this hate were twofold: first, when ambassador to Vienna, he had written to Louis XV. letters so full of sarcasm on Maria Theresa, that her daughter had never forgiven him; and he had also written letters opposing her marriage, which had been read aloud by Louis XV. at a supper at Madame Dubarry's. The embassy at Vienna had been taken from M. de Breteuil and given to M. de Rohan; the former gentleman, not strong enough to revenge himself alone, had procured copies of these letters, which he had laid before the dauphiness, thus making her the eternal enemy of M. de Rohan.

This hatred rendered the cardinal's position at court not a little uncomfortable. Every time he presented himself before the queen, he met with the same discouraging reception. In spite of this, he neglected no occasion of being near her, for which he had frequent opportunities, as he was chaplain to the court; and he never complained of the treatment he received. A circle of friends, among whom the Baron de Planta was the most intimate, helped to console him for these royal rebuffs; not to speak of the ladies of the court, who by no means imitated the severity of the queen towards him.

When he was gone, Marie Antoinette recovered her serenity, and said to Madame de Lamballe:

"Do you not think that this action of the nephew of M. de Suffren is one of the most remarkable of the war? What is his name, by the bye?"

"M. de Charny, I believe," replied the princess. "Was it not?" she said, turning to Andrée.

"Yes, your highness."

"M. de Charny shall describe it to us himself," said the queen. "Is he still here? Let him be sought for."

An officer who stood near hastened to obey her, and immediately returned with M. de Charny, and the circle round the queen made way for him to approach.

He was a young man, about eight-and-twenty, tall and well made; his face, animated and yet sweet, took a character of singular energy when he spoke, and dilated his large blue eyes; and he was, strange to say, for one who had been fighting in India, as fair as Philippe was dark.

When he had approached the place where the queen sat, with Madlle. de Taverney standing near her, he did not betray his surprise in any way, although it must have been great, in recognizing the ladies of the evening before. He did not look up until she addressed him, saying:

"M. de Charny, these ladies experience the natural desire, which I share with them, to hear from yourself all the details of this action of your ship."

“Madame,” replied the young officer, “I beg your majesty to spare me the recital, not from modesty, but from humanity. What I did as lieutenant, a dozen other officers doubtless wished to do, only I was the first to put it in execution; and it is not worthy being made the subject of a narration to your majesty. Besides, the captain of *La Sévère* is a brave officer, who on that day lost his presence of mind. Alas, madame, we all know that the most courageous are not always equally brave. He wanted but ten minutes to recover himself; my determination not to surrender gave him the breathing time, his natural courage returned to him, and he showed himself the bravest of us all. Therefore I beg your majesty not to exaggerate the merit of my action, and thereby crush this deserving officer, who deplores incessantly the failing of a few moments.”

“Right!” said the queen, touched by these generous words; “you are a true gentleman, M. de Charny, and such I already know you to be.”

The young man colored crimson, and looked almost frightened at Andrée, fearing what the queen’s rash generosity might lead her to say.

“For,” continued the intrepid queen, “I must tell you all, that this is not the first time I have heard of M. de Charny, who deserves to be known and admired by all ladies; and to show you that he is as indulgent to our sex as he is merciless to his enemies, I will relate a little history of him which does him the greatest honor.”

“Oh, madame!” stammered the young man, who felt as if he would have given a year of his life to be back in the West Indies.

“This, then, is it,” continued the queen, to her eager listeners: “two ladies, whom I know, were detained out late and became embarrassed in a crowd; they ran a great risk, a real danger awaited them; M. de Charny happily passed by at the moment: he dispersed the crowd, and, although they were unknown to him, and it was impossible to recognize their rank, took them under his protection, and escorted them a long way, ten miles from Paris, I believe.”

“Oh! your majesty exaggerates,” said M. de Charny, laughing, and now quite reassured.

“Well, we will call it five,” said the Count d’Artois, suddenly joining in the conversation.

“Let it be five, then, brother,” said the queen; “but the most admirable part of the story is, that M. de Charny did not seek even to know the names of these ladies whom he had served, but left them at the place where they wished to stop, and went away without even looking back, so that they escaped from his protection without even a moment's disquietude."

All expressed their admiration.

"A knight of the round table could not have acted better," her majesty went on; "and so, M. de Charny, as the king will doubtless take upon himself to reward M. de Suffren, I, for my part, wish to do something for the nephew of this great man."

As she spoke, she held out her hand to him, and Charny, pale with joy, pressed his lips to this beautiful hand, while Philippe looked on from an obscure corner, pale with an opposite emotion.

The voice of M. d'Artois interrupted this scene, saying loudly, "Ah, Provence! you come too late! you have missed a fine sight, the reception of M. de Suffren. Really, it was one that a Frenchman can never forget. How the devil did it happen that you were not here — you who are generally the punctual man par excellence?"

M. de Provence bit his lips with vexation, and whispered to M. de Favras, his captain of the guards, "How does it come to pass that he is here?"

"Ah! monseigneur, I have been asking myself that question for the last hour, and have not yet found an answer."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ONE HUNDRED LOUIS OF THE QUEEN.

Now we have introduced the principal characters of this history to our readers, and have taken them both into the “petite maison” of the Comte d’Artois and into the king’s palace at Versailles, we will return to that house in the Rue St. Claude where we saw the queen enter incognito with Mademoiselle Andrée de Taverney.

We left Madame de la Motte counting over and delighted with her fifty double louis; next to the pleasure of having them, she knew no greater than that of displaying them, and having no one else, she called Dame Clotilde, who was still in the ante-chamber.

When she entered, “Come and look here!” said her mistress.

“Oh, madame!” cried the old woman, clasping her hands in astonishment.

“You were uneasy about your wages,” said the countess.

“Oh, madame! I never said that; I only asked madame if she could pay me, as I had received nothing for three months.”

“Do you think there is enough there to pay you?”

“Oh! madame, if I had all that, I should be rich for the rest of my life. But in what will madame spend all that?”

“In everything.”

“The first thing, I think, madame, will be to furnish the kitchen, for you will have good dinners cooked now.”

“Listen!” said Madame de la Motte; “someone knocks.”

“I did not hear it,” said the old woman.

“But I tell you that I did; so go at once.” She hastily gathered up her money, and put it into a drawer, murmuring, “Oh! if Providence will but send me another such a visitor.” Then she heard the steps of a man below, but could not distinguish what he said. Soon however, the door opened, and Clotilde came in with a letter.

The countess examined it attentively, and asked, “Was this brought by a servant?”

“Yes, madame.”

"In livery?"

"No, madame."

"I know these arms, surely," said Jeanne to herself. "Who can it be from? but the letter will soon show for itself;" and opening it, she read: "Madame, the person to whom you wrote will see you to-morrow evening, if it be agreeable to you to remain at home for that purpose;" and that was all. "I have written to so many people," thought the countess. "Is this a man or a woman? The writing is no guide, nor is the style; it might come from either. Who is it that uses these arms? Oh! I remember now — the arms of the Rohans. Yes, I wrote to M. de Guémenée, and to M. de Rohan; it is one of them: but the shield is not quartered — it is therefore the cardinal. Ah! Monsieur de Rohan, the man of gallantry, the fine gentleman, and the ambitious one; he will come to see Jeanne de la Motte, if it be agreeable to her. Oh, yes! M. de Rohan, it is very agreeable. A charitable lady who gives a hundred louis may be received in a garret, freeze in my cold room, and suffer on my hard chair; but a clerical prince, a lady's man, that is quite another thing. We must have luxury to greet him."

Then, turning to Clotilde, who was getting her bed ready, she said: "Be sure to call me early to-morrow morning;" and when she did retire to rest, so absorbed was she in her expectations and plans, that it was nearly three o'clock before she fell asleep; nevertheless, she was quite ready when Dame Clotilde called her according to her directions early in the morning, and had finished her toilet by eight o'clock, although this day it consisted of an elegant silk dress, and her hair was elaborately dressed.

She sent Clotilde for a coach, and ordered the man to drive to the Place Royale, where, under one of the arcades, was the shop of M. Fingret, an upholsterer and decorator, and who had furniture always ready for sale or hire.

She entered his immense show-rooms, of which the walls were hung with different tapestries, and the ceiling completely hidden by the number of chandeliers and lamps that hung from it. On the ground were furniture, carpets, and cornices of every fashion and description.

CHAPTER XIV.

M. FINGRET.

Madame de la Motte, looking at all this, began to perceive how much she wanted. She wanted a drawing-room to hold sofas and lounging-chairs; a dining-room for tables and sideboards; and a boudoir for Persian curtains, screens, and knick-knacks; above all, she wanted the money to buy all these things. But in Paris, whatever you cannot afford to buy, you can hire; and Madame de la Motte set her heart on a set of furniture covered in yellow silk, with gilt nails, which she thought would be very becoming to her dark complexion. But this furniture she felt sure would never go into her rooms on the fifth story; it would be necessary to hire the third, which was composed of an ante-chamber, a dining-room, small drawing-room, and bedroom, so that she might, she thought, receive on this third story the visits of the cardinal, and on the fifth those of ladies of charity — that is to say, receive in luxury those who give from ostentation, and in poverty those who only desire to give when it is needed.

The countess, having made all these reflections, turned to where M. Fingret himself stood, with his hat in his hand, waiting for her commands.

“Madame?” said he in a tone of interrogation, advancing towards her.

“Madame la Comtesse de la Motte Valois,” said Jeanne.

At this high-sounding name M. Fingret bowed low, and said: “But there is nothing in this room worthy Madame la Comtesse’s inspection. If madame will take the trouble to step into the next one, she will see what is new and beautiful.”

Jeanne colored. All this had seemed so splendid to her, too splendid even to hope to possess it; and this high opinion of M. Fingret’s concerning her perplexed her not a little. She regretted that she had not announced herself as a simple bourgeoise; but it was necessary to speak, so she said, “I do not wish for new furniture.”

“Madame has doubtless some friend’s apartments to furnish?”

“Just so,” she replied.

“Will madame, then, choose?” said M. Fingret, who did not care whether he sold new or old, as he gained equally by both.

“This set,” said Jeanne, pointing to the yellow silk one.

“That is such a small set, madame.”

“Oh, the rooms are small.”

“It is nearly new, as madame may see.”

“But the price?”

“Eight hundred francs.”

The price made the countess tremble; and how was she to confess that a countess was content with second-hand things, and then could not afford to pay eight hundred francs for them? She therefore thought the best thing was to appear angry, and said: “Who thinks of buying, sir? Who do you think would buy such old things? I only want to hire.”

Fingret made a grimace; his customer began gradually to lose her value in his eyes. She did not want to buy new things, only to hire old ones, “You wish it for a year?” he asked.

“No, only for a month. It is for some one coming from the country.”

“It will be one hundred francs a month.”

“You jest, surely, monsieur; why, in eight months I should have paid the full price of it.”

“Granted, Madame la Comtesse.”

“Well, is not that too bad?”

“I shall have the expense of doing it up again when you return it.”

Madame de la Motte reflected. “One hundred francs a month is very dear, certainly; but either I can return it at the end of that time and say it is too dear, or I shall then perhaps be in a situation to buy.”

“I will take it,” she said, “with curtains to match.”

“Yes, madame.”

“And carpets.”

“Here they are.”

“What can you give me for another room?”

“These oak chairs, this table with twisted legs, and green damask curtains.”

“And for a bedroom?”

“A large and handsome bed, a counterpane of velvet embroidered in rose-color and silver, an excellent couch, and blue curtains.”

“And for my dressing-room?”

"A toilet-table hung with Mechlin lace; chest of drawers with marqueterie; sofa and chairs of tapestry. The whole came from the bedroom of Madame de Pompadour at Choisy."

"All this for what price?"

"For a month?"

"Yes."

"Four hundred francs."

"Come, Monsieur Fingret, do not take me for a grisette who is dazzled by your fine descriptions. Please to reflect that you are asking at the rate of four thousand eight hundred francs a year, and for that I can take a whole furnished house. You disgust me with the Place Royale."

"I am very sorry, madame."

"Prove it, then; I will only give half that price." Jeanne pronounced these words with so much authority that the merchant began again to think she might be worth conciliating.

"So be it, then, madame."

"And on one condition, M. Fingret."

"What, madame?"

"That everything be arranged in its proper place by three o'clock."

"But consider, madame, it is now ten."

"Can you do it or not?"

"Where must they go to?"

"Rue St. Claude."

"Close by?"

"Precisely."

The upholsterer opened a door, and called, "Sylvain! Landry! Rémy!"

Three men answered to the call.

"The carts and the trucks instantly. Rémy, you shall take this yellow furniture; Sylvain, you take that for the dining-room; and you, Landry, that for the bedroom. Here is the bill, madame; shall I receipt it?"

"Here are six double louis," she said, "and you can give the change to these men if the order is completed in time;" and, having given her address, she reentered her coach.

On her return she engaged the third floor, and in a few hours all was in order.

The lodgings thus transformed, the windows cleaned, and the fires lighted, Jeanne went again to her toilet, which she made as recherché as possible, and then took a last look at all the delights around her. Nothing had been forgotten: there were gilded branches from the walls for wax-lights, and glass lusters on each side of the mirror; Jeanne had also added flowers, to complete the embellishment of the paradise in which she intended to receive his eminence. She took care even to leave the door of the bedroom a little open, through which the light of a bright fire gave a glimpse of the luxuries within.

All these preparations completed, she seated herself in a chair by the fire, with a book in her hand, listening eagerly to the sound of every carriage that passed; but nine, ten, and eleven o’clock struck, and no one came. Still she did not despair; it was not too late for a gallant prelate, who had probably been first to some supper, and would come to her from there. But at last twelve struck; no one appeared, the lights were burning low, and the old servant, after many lamentations over her new cap, had fallen asleep in her chair.

At half-past twelve Jeanne rose furious from her chair, looked out of window for the hundredth time, and, seeing no one near, undressed herself and went to bed, refusing supper, or to answer any of the remarks made to her by Clotilde; and on her sumptuous bed, under her beautiful curtains, she experienced no better rest than she had on the previous night. At last, however, her anger began a little to abate, and she commenced framing excuses for the cardinal. He had so much to occupy him, he must have been detained, and, most potent of all, he had not yet seen her. She would not have been so easily consoled if he had broken the promise of a second visit.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CARDINAL DE ROHAN.

The next evening Jeanne, not discouraged, renewed all her preparations of the night before; and on this occasion she had no time to grow impatient, for at seven o’clock a carriage drove up to the door, from which a gentleman got out. At the sound of the door-bell Jeanne’s heart beat so loud that you might almost have heard it; however, she composed herself as well as she could, and in a few minutes Clotilde opened the door, and announced the person who had written the day before yesterday.

“Let him come in,” said Jeanne; and a gentleman dressed in silk and velvet, and with a lofty carriage, entered the room.

Jeanne made a step forward, and said: “To whom have I the honor of speaking?”

“I am the Cardinal de Rohan,” he replied; at which Madame de la Motte, feigning to be overwhelmed with the honor, courtesied, as though he were a king. Then she advanced an armchair for him, and placed herself in another.

The cardinal laid his hat on the table, and, looking at Jeanne, began: “It is, then, true, mademoiselle — — ”

“Madame,” interrupted Jeanne.

“Pardon me; I forgot.”

“My husband is called De la Motte, monseigneur.”

“Oh, yes; a gendarme, is he not?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And you, madame, are a Valois?”

“I am, monseigneur.”

“A great name,” said the cardinal, “but rare — believed extinct.”

“Not extinct, sir, since I bear it, and as I have a brother, Baron de Valois.”

“Recognized?”

“That has nothing to do with it. Recognized or unrecognized, rich or poor, he is still Baron de Valois.”

“Madame, explain to me this descent; it interests me; I love heraldry.”

Jeanne repeated all that the reader already knows.

The cardinal listened and looked. He did not believe either her story or her merit; but she was poor and pretty.

"So that," he said carelessly, when she had finished, "you have really been unfortunate."

"I do not complain, monseigneur."

"Indeed, I had heard a most exaggerated account of the difficulties of your position; this lodging is commodious and well furnished."

"For a grisette, no doubt," replied Jeanne.

"What! do you call these rooms fit for a grisette?"

"I do not think you can call them fit for a princess," replied Jeanne.

"And you are a princess?" said he, in an ironical tone.

"I was born a Valois, monseigneur, as you were a Rohan," said Jeanne, with so much dignity that he felt a little touched by it.

"Madame," said he, "I forgot that my first words should have been an apology. I wrote to you that I would come yesterday, but I had to go to Versailles to assist at the reception of M. de Suffren."

"Monseigneur does me too much honor in remembering me to-day; and my husband will more than ever regret the exile to which poverty compels him, since it prevents him from sharing this favor with me."

"You live alone, madame?" asked the cardinal.

"Absolutely alone. I should be out of place in all society but that from which my poverty debars me."

"The genealogists do not contest your claim?"

"No; but what good does it do me?"

"Madame," continued the cardinal, "I shall be glad to know in what I can serve you."

"In nothing, monseigneur," she said.

"How! in nothing? Pray be frank."

"I cannot be more frank than I am."

"You were complaining just now."

"Certainly, I complain."

"Well, then?"

"Well, then, monseigneur, I see that you wish to bestow charity on me."

"Oh, madame!"

"Yes, sir, I have taken charity, but I will do so no more. I have borne great humiliation."

"Madame, you are wrong, there is no humiliation in misfortune."

"Not even with the name I bear? Would you beg, M. de Rohan?"

"I do not speak of myself," said he, with an embarrassment mingled with hauteur.

"Monseigneur, I only know two ways of begging: in a carriage, or at a church door in velvet or in rags. Well, just now, I did not expect the honor of this visit; I thought you had forgotten me."

"Oh, you knew, then, that it was I who wrote?"

"Were not your arms on the seal?"

"However, you feigned not to know me."

"Because you did not do me the honor to announce yourself."

"This pride pleases me," said the cardinal.

"I had then," continued Jeanne, "despairing of seeing you, taken the resolution of throwing off all this flimsy parade, which covers my real poverty, and of going in rags, like other mendicants, to beg my bread from the passers-by."

"You are not at the end of your resources, I trust, madame?"

Jeanne did not reply.

"You have some property, even if it be mortgaged? Some family jewels? This, for example," and he pointed to a box, with which the delicate fingers of the lady had been playing. "A singular box, upon my word! Will you permit me to look? Oh, a portrait!" he continued, with a look of great surprise. "Do you know the original of this portrait?" asked Jeanne.

"It is that of Maria Theresa."

"Of Maria Theresa?"

"Yes, the Empress of Austria."

"Really!" cried Jeanne. "Are you sure, monseigneur?"

"Where did you get it?" he asked.

"From a lady who came the day before yesterday."

"To see you?"

"Yes."

The cardinal examined the box with minute attention.

"There were two ladies," continued Jeanne.

"And one of them gave you this box?" said he, with evident suspicion.

"No; she dropped it here."

The cardinal remained thoughtful for some time, and then said, "What was the name of this lady? I beg pardon for being inquisitive."

"Indeed, it is a somewhat strange question."

"Indiscreet, perhaps, but not strange."

"Yes, very strange; for if I had known her name, I should have returned it long before this."

"Then, you know not who she is?"

"I only know she is the head of some charitable house."

"In Paris?"

"No; in Versailles."

"From Versailles; the head of a charitable house!"

"Monseigneur, I accept charity from ladies; that does not so much humiliate a poor woman; and this lady, who had heard of my wants, left a hundred louis on my table when she went away."

"A hundred louis!" said the cardinal in surprise; then, fearing to offend, he added, "I am not astonished, madame, that they should give you such a sum. You merit, on the contrary, all the solicitude of charitable people, and your name makes it a duty to help you. It is only the title of the Sister of Charity that surprised me, they are not in the habit of giving such donations. Could you describe this lady to me?"

"Not easily, sir."

"How so, since she came here?"

"Yes, but she probably did not wish to be recognized, for she hid her face as much as possible in her hood, and was besides, enveloped in furs."

"Well, but you saw something?"

"My impressions were, that she had blue eyes, and a small mouth, though the lips were rather thick."

"Tall or short?"

"Of middle height."

"Her hands?"

"Perfect."

"Her throat?"

"Long and slender."

"Her expression?"

"Severe and noble. But you, perhaps, know this lady, monseigneur?"

"Why should you think so, madame?"

"From the manner in which you question me; besides, there is a sympathy between the doers of good works."

"No, madame, I do not know her."

"But, sir, if you had some suspicion."

"How should I?"

"Oh, from this portrait, perhaps."

"Yes, certainly, the portrait," said the cardinal, rather uneasily.

"Well, sir, this portrait you still believe to be that of Maria Theresa?"

"I believe so, certainly."

"Then you think — — ?"

"That you have received a visit from some German lady who has founded one of these houses!" But it was evident that the cardinal doubted, and he was pondering how this box, which he had seen a hundred times in the hands of the queen, came into the possession of this woman. Had the queen really been to see her? If she had been, was she indeed unknown to Jeanne? Or, if not, why did she try to hide the knowledge from him. If the queen had really been there, it was no longer a poor woman he had to deal with, but a princess succored by a queen, who bestowed her gifts in person.

Jeanne saw that the cardinal was thoughtful, and even suspicious of her. She felt uneasy, and knew not what to say.

At last, however, he broke the silence by saying, "And the other lady?"

"Oh, I could see her perfectly; she is tall and beautiful, with a determined expression, and a brilliant complexion."

"And the other lady did not name her?"

"Yes, once; but by her Christian name."

"What was it?"

"Andrée."

"Andrée!" repeated the cardinal, with a start.

This name put an end to all his doubts. It was known that the queen had gone to Paris on that day with Mademoiselle de Taverney. It was evident, also, that Jeanne had no intention of deceiving him; she was telling all she knew. Still, he would try one more proof.

"Countess," he said, "one thing astonishes me, that you have not addressed yourself to the king."

"But, sir, I have sent him twenty petitions."

"Without result?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, the princes of the blood; M. le Duc d'Orleans is charitable, and often likes to do what the king refuses."

"I have tried him, equally fruitlessly."

"That astonishes me."

“Oh, when one is poor, and not supported by any one — — ”

“There is still the Comte d’Artois; sometimes dissipated men do more generous actions than charitable ones.”

“It is the same story with him.”

“But the princesses, the aunts of the king, Madame Elizabeth particularly, would refuse assistance to no one.”

“It is true, monseigneur, her royal highness, to whom I wrote, promised to receive me; but, I know not why, after having received my husband, I could never get any more notice from her.”

“It is strange, certainly,” said the cardinal; then, as if the thought had just struck him, he cried, “Ah! mon Dieu! but we are forgetting the person to whom you should have addressed yourself first of all.”

“Whom do you mean?”

“To the dispenser of all favors, she who never refuses help where it is deserved — to the queen. Have you seen her?”

“No,” answered Jeanne.

“You have never presented your petition to the queen?”

“Never.”

“You have not tried to obtain an audience of her?”

“I have tried, but failed.”

“Have you tried to throw yourself in her way, that she might remark you?”

“No, monseigneur.”

“But that is very strange.”

“I have only been twice to Versailles, and then saw but two persons there; one was Doctor Louis, who had attended my poor father at the Hôtel Dieu, and the other was M. le Baron de Taverney, to whom I had an introduction.”

“What did M. de Taverney say to you? He might have brought you to the queen.”

“He told me that I was very foolish to bring forward as a claim to the benevolence of the king a relationship which would be sure to displease him, as nobody likes poor relations.”

“I recognize the egotistical and rude old baron. Well,” continued he, “I will conduct you myself to Versailles, and will open the doors for you.”

“Oh, monseigneur, how good you are,” cried Jeanne, overwhelmed with joy.

The cardinal approached her, and said, “It is impossible but that before long all must interest themselves in you.”

“Alas! monseigneur,” said Jeanne, with a sigh, “do you think so?”

“I am sure of it.”

“I fear you flatter me,” she said, looking earnestly at him, for she could hardly believe in his sudden change of manner, he had been so cold and suspicious at first.

This look had no small effect on the cardinal; he began to think he had never met a woman prettier or more attractive. “Ah, ma foi!” said he to himself, with the eternally scheming spirit of a man used to diplomacy, “it would be too extraordinary and too fortunate if I have met at once an honest woman with the attractions of a scheming one, and found in this poverty an able coadjutrix to my desires.”

“Monseigneur, the silence you keep every now and then disquiets me.”

“Why so, countess?”

“Because a man like you only fails in politeness to two kinds of women.”

“Mon Dieu! countess, you frighten me. What are you about to say?” and he took her hand.

“I repeat it,” said she, “with women that you love too much, or with women whom you do not esteem enough to be polite to.”

“Countess, you make me blush. Have I, then, failed in politeness towards you?”

“Rather so, monseigneur; and yet you cannot love me too much, and I have given you no cause to despise me.”

“Oh, countess, you speak as if you were angry with me.”

“No, monseigneur; you have not yet merited my anger.”

“And I never will, madame. From this day, in which I have had the pleasure of making your acquaintance, my solicitude for you will not cease.”

“Oh, sir, do not speak to me of your protection.”

“Oh, mon Dieu! I should humiliate myself, not you, in mentioning such a thing;” and he pressed her hand, which he continued to hold, to his lips.

She tried to withdraw it; but he said, “Only politeness, madame,” and she let it remain.

“To know,” said she, “that I shall occupy a place, however small, in the mind of a man so eminent and so busy, would console me for a year.”

“Let us hope the consolation will last longer than that, countess.”

“Well, perhaps so, monseigneur; I have confidence in you, because I feel that you are capable of appreciating a mind like mine, adventurous, brave, and pure, in spite of my poverty, and of the enemies which my position has made me. Your eminence will, I am sure, discover all the good that is in me, and be indulgent to all the rest.”

“We, are, then, warm friends, madame;” and he advanced towards her, but his arms were a little more extended than the occasion required. She avoided him, and said, laughing:

“It must be a friendship among three, cardinal.”

“Among three?”

“Doubtless, for there exists an exile, a poor gendarme, who is called M. de la Motte.”

“Oh, countess, what a deplorably good memory you have!”

“I must speak to you of him, that you may not forget him.”

“Do you know why I do not speak of him, countess?”

“No; pray tell me.”

“Because he will speak enough for himself: husbands never let themselves be forgotten. We shall hear that M. le Comte de la Motte found it good, or found it bad, that the Cardinal de Rohan came two, three, or four times a week to visit his wife.”

“Ah! but will you come so often, monseigneur?”

“Without that, where would be our friendship? Four times! I should have said six or seven.”

Jeanne laughed, “I should not indeed wonder in that case if people did talk of it.”

“Oh! but we can easily prevent them.”

“How?”

“Quite easily. The people know me — — ”

“Certainly, monseigneur.”

“But you they have the misfortune not to know.”

“Well?”

“Therefore, if you would — — ”

“What, sir?”

“Come out instead of me.”

“Come to your hotel, monseigneur?”

“You would go to see a minister.”

“Oh! a minister is not a man.”

"You are adorable, countess. But I did not speak of my hotel; I have a house — — "

"Oh! a petite maison?"

"No; a house of yours."

"A house of mine, cardinal! Indeed, I did not know it."

"To-morrow, at ten o'clock, you shall have the address."

The countess blushed; the cardinal took her hand again, and imprinted another kiss upon it, at once bold, respectful, and tender. They then bowed to each other.

"Light monseigneur down," said the countess; and he went away.

"Well," thought she, "I have made a great step in the world."

"Come," said the cardinal to himself as he drove off, "I think I have killed two birds with one stone; this woman has too much talent not to catch the queen as she has caught me?"

CHAPTER XVI.

MESMER AND ST. MARTIN.

The fashionable study in Paris at this time, and that which engrossed most of those who had no business to attend to, was Mesmerism — a mysterious science, badly defined by its discoverers, who did not wish to render it too plain to the eyes of the people. Dr. Mesmer, who had given to it his own name, was then in Paris, as we have already heard from Marie Antoinette.

This Doctor Mesmer deserves a few words from us, as his name was then in all mouths.

He had brought this science from Germany, the land of mysteries, in 1777. He had previously made his début there, by a theory on the influence of the planets. He had endeavored to establish that these celestial bodies, through the same power by which they attract each other, exercised an influence over living bodies, and particularly over the nervous system, by means of a subtle fluid with which the air is impregnated. But this first theory was too abstract: one must, to understand it, be initiated into all the sciences of Galileo or Newton; and it would have been necessary, for this to have become popular, that the nobility should have been transformed into a body of savants. He therefore abandoned this system, and took up that of the loadstone, which was then attracting great attention, people fancying that this wonderful power was efficacious in curing illnesses.

Unhappily for him, however, he found a rival in this already established in Vienna; therefore he once more announced that he abandoned mineral magnetism, and intended to effect his cures through animal magnetism.

This, although a new name, was not in reality a new science; it was as old as the Greeks and Egyptians, and had been preserved in traditions, and revived every now and then by the sorcerers of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, many of whom had paid for their knowledge with their lives. Urbain Grandier was nothing but an animal magnetizer; and Joseph Balsamo we have seen practising it. Mesmer only condensed this knowledge into a science, and gave it a name. He then communicated his system to the scientific academies of Paris, London, and Berlin. The two first did not answer him, and the third said that he was mad. He came to France, and took out of the hands of Dr. Storck, and of the oculist Wenzel, a young girl seventeen years old, who had a complaint of the liver and gutta serena, and after three months of his treatment, restored her health and her sight.

This cure convinced many people, and among them a doctor called Deslon, who, from his enemy, became his pupil. Prom this time his reputation gradually increased; the academy declared itself against him, but the court for him. At last the government offered him, in the king's name, an income for life of twenty thousand francs to give lectures in public, and ten thousand more to instruct three persons, who should be chosen by them, in his system.

Mesmer, however, indignant at the royal parsimony, refused, and set out for the Spa waters with one of his patients; but while he was gone, Deslon, his pupil, possessor of the secret which he had refused to sell for thirty thousand francs a year, opened a public establishment for the treatment of patients. Mesmer was furious, and exhausted himself in complaints and menaces. One of his patients, however, M. de Bergasse, conceived the idea of forming a company. They raised a capital of 340,000 francs, on the condition that the secret should be revealed to the shareholders. It was a fortunate time: the people, having no great public events to interest them, entered eagerly into every new amusement and occupation; and this mysterious theory possessed no little attraction, professing, as it did, to cure invalids, restore mind to the fools, and amuse the wise.

Everywhere Mesmer was talked of. What had he done? On whom had he performed these miracles? To what great lord had he restored sight? To what lady worn out with dissipation had he renovated the nerves? To what young girl had he shown the future in a magnetic trance? The future! that word of ever-entrancing interest and curiosity.

Voltaire was dead; there was no one left to make France laugh, except perhaps Beaumarchais, who was still more bitter than his master; Rousseau was dead, and with him the sect of religious philosophers. War had generally occupied strongly the minds of the French people, but now the only war in which they were engaged was in America, where the people fought for what they called independence, and what the French called liberty; and even this distant war in another land, and affecting another people, was on the point of termination. Therefore they felt more interest just now in M. Mesmer, who was near, than in Washington or Lord Cornwallis, who were so far off. Mesmer's only rival in the public interest was St. Martin, the professor of spiritualism, as Mesmer was of materialism, and who professed to cure souls, as he did bodies.

Imagine an atheist with a religion more attractive than religion itself; a republican full of politeness and interest for kings; a gentleman of the privileged classes tender and solicitous for the people, endowed with the most startling eloquence, attacking all the received religions of the earth.

Imagine Epicurus in white powder, embroidered coat, and silk stockings, not content with endeavoring to overturn a religion in which he did not believe, but also attacking all existing governments, and promulgating the theory that all men are equal, or, to use his own words, that all intelligent beings are kings.

Imagine the effect of all this in society as it then was, without fixed principles or steady guides, and how it was all assisting to light the fire with which France not long after began to consume herself.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BUCKET.

We have endeavored to give an idea in the last chapter of the interest and enthusiasm which drew such crowds of the people to see M. Mesmer perform publicly his wonderful experiments.

The king, as we know, had given permission to the queen to go and see what all Paris was talking of, accompanied by one of the princesses. It was two days after the visit of M. de Rohan to the countess. The weather was fine, and the thaw was complete, and hundreds of sweepers were employed in cleaning away the snow from the streets. The clear blue sky was just beginning to be illumined by its first stars, when Madame de la Motte, elegantly dressed, and presenting every appearance of opulence, arrived in a coach, which Clotilde had carefully chosen as the best looking at the Place Vendôme, and stopped before a brilliantly-lighted house.

It was that of Doctor Mesmer. Numbers of other carriages were waiting at the door, and a crowd of people had collected to see the patients arrive and depart, who seemed to derive much pleasure when they saw some rich invalid, enveloped in furs and satins, carried in by footmen, from the evident proof it afforded that God made men healthy or unhealthy, without reference to their purses or their genealogies. A universal murmur would arise when they recognized some duke paralyzed in an arm or leg; or some marshal whose feet refused their office, less in consequence of military fatigues and marches than from halts made with the ladies of the Opera, or of the Comédie Italienne. Sometimes it was a lady carried in by her servants with drooping head and languid eye, who, weakened by late hours and an irregular life, came to demand from Doctor Mesmer the health she had vainly sought to regain elsewhere.

Many of these ladies were as well known as the gentlemen, but a great many escaped the public gaze, especially on this evening, by wearing masks; for there was a ball at the Opera that night, and many of them intended to drive straight there when they left the doctor’s house.

Through this crowd Madame de la Motte walked erect and firm, also with a mask on, and elicited only the exclamation, “This one does not look ill, at all events.”

Ever since the cardinal’s visit, the attention with which he had examined the box and portrait had been on Jeanne’s mind; and she could not but feel that all his graciousness commenced after seeing it, and she therefore felt proportionate curiosity to learn more about it.

First she had gone to Versailles to inquire at all the houses of charity about German ladies; but there were there, perhaps, a hundred and fifty or two hundred, and all Jeanne’s inquiries about the two ladies who had visited her had proved fruitless. In vain she repeated that one of them was called Andrée; no one knew a German lady of that name, which indeed was not German. Baffled in this, she determined to try elsewhere, and having heard much of M. Mesmer, and the wonderful secrets revealed through him, determined upon going there. Many were the stories of this kind in circulation. Madame de Duras had recovered a child who had been lost; Madame de Chantoué, an English dog, not much bigger than her fist, for which she would have given all the children in the world; and M. de Vaudreuil a lock of hair, which he would have bought back with half his fortune. All these revelations had been made by clairvoyants after the magnetic operations of Doctor Mesmer.

Those who came to see him, after traversing the ante-chambers, were admitted into a large room, from which the darkened and hermetically closed windows excluded light and air. In the middle of this room, under a luster which gave but a feeble light, was a vast unornamented tank, filled with water impregnated with sulphur, and to the cover of which was fastened an iron ring; attached to this ring was a long chain, the object of which we shall presently see.

All the patients were seated round the room, men and women indiscriminately; then a valet, taking the chain, wound it round the limbs of the patients, so that they might all feel, at the same time, the effects of the electricity contained in the tank; they were then directed to touch each other in some way, either by the shoulder, the elbow, or the feet, and each was to take in his hand a bar of iron, which was also connected with the tank, and to place it to the heart, head, or whatever was the seat of the malady. When they were all ready, a soft and pleasing strain of music, executed by invisible performers, was heard. Among the most eager of the crowd, on the evening of which we speak, was a young, distinguished-looking, and beautiful woman, with a graceful figure, and rather showily dressed, who pressed the iron to her heart with wonderful energy, rolling her beautiful eyes, and beginning to show, in the trembling of her hands, the first effects of the electric fluid.

As she constantly threw back her head, resting it on the cushions of her chair, all around could see perfectly her pale but beautiful face, and her white throat. Many seemed to look at her with great astonishment, and a general whispering commenced among those who surrounded her.

Madame de la Motte was one of the most curious of the party; and of all she saw around her, nothing attracted her attention so much as this young lady, and after gazing earnestly at her for some time, she at last murmured, "Oh! it is she, there is no doubt. It is the lady who came to see me the other day." And convinced that she was not mistaken, she advanced towards her, congratulating herself that chance had effected for her what she had so long been vainly trying to accomplish; but at this moment the young lady closed her eyes, contracted her mouth, and began to beat the air feebly with her hands, which hands, however, did not seem to Jeanne the white and beautiful ones she had seen in her room a few days before.

The patients now began to grow excited under the influence of the fluid. Men and women began to utter sighs, and even cries, moving convulsively their heads, arms, and legs. Then a man suddenly made his appearance; no one had seen him enter; you might have fancied he came out of the tank. He was dressed in a lilac robe, and held in his hand a long wand, which he several times dipped into the mysterious tank; then he made a sign, the doors opened, and twenty robust servants entered, and seizing such of the patients as began to totter on their seats, carried them into an adjoining room.

While this was going on Madame de la Motte heard a man who had approached near to the young lady before-mentioned, and who was in a perfect paroxysm of excitement, say in a loud voice, "It is surely she!" Jeanne was about to ask him who she was, when her attention was drawn to two ladies who were just entering, followed by a man, who, though disguised as a bourgeois, had still the appearance of a servant.

The tournure of one of these ladies struck Jeanne so forcibly that she made a step towards them, when a cry from the young woman near her startled every one. The same man whom Jeanne had heard speak before now called out, “But look, gentlemen, it is the queen.”

“The queen!” cried many voices, in surprise. “The queen here! The queen in that state! Impossible!”

“But look,” said he again; “do you know the queen, or not?”

“Indeed,” said many, “the resemblance is incredible.”

“Monsieur,” said Jeanne to the speaker, who was a stout man, with quick observant eyes, “did you say the queen?”

“Oh! madame, there is no doubt of it.”

“And where is she?”

“Why, that young lady that you see there, on the violet cushions, and in such a state that she cannot moderate her transports, is the queen.”

“But on what do you found such an idea, monsieur?”

“Simply because it is the queen.” And he left Jeanne to go and spread his news among the rest.

She turned from the almost revolting spectacle, and going near to the door, found herself face to face with the two ladies she had seen enter. Scarcely had she seen the elder one than she uttered a cry of surprise.

“What is the matter?” asked the lady.

Jeanne took off her mask, and asked, “Do you recognize me, madame?”

The lady made, but quickly suppressed, a movement of surprise, and said, “No, madame.”

“Well, madame, I recognize you, and will give you a proof;” and she drew the box from her pocket, saying, “you left this at my house.”

“But supposing this to be true, what makes you so agitated?”

“I am agitated by the danger that your majesty is incurring here.”

“Explain yourself.”

“Not before you have put on this mask;” and she offered hers to the queen, who, however, did not take it.

“I beg your majesty; there is not an instant to lose.”

The queen put on the mask. “And now, pray come away,” added Jeanne.

“But why?” said the queen.

“Your majesty has not been seen by any one?”

“I believe not.”

“So much the better.”

The queen mechanically moved to the door, but said again, “Will you explain yourself?”

"Will not your majesty believe your humble servant for the present, that you were running a great risk?"

"But what risk?"

"I will have the honor to tell your majesty whenever you will grant me an hour's audience; but it would take too long now;" and seeing that the queen looked displeased, "Pray, madame," said she, turning to the Princess Lamballe, "join your petitions to mine that the queen should leave this place immediately."

"I think we had better, madame," said the princess.

"Well, then, I will," answered the queen; then, turning to Madame de la Motte, "You ask for an audience?" she said.

"I beg for that honor, that I may explain this conduct to your majesty."

"Well, bring this box with you, and you shall be admitted; Laurent, the porter, shall have orders to do so." Then going into the street, she called in German, "Kommen sie da, Weber."

A carriage immediately drove up, they got in, and were immediately out of sight.

When they were gone, Madame de la Motte said to herself, "I have done right in this — for the rest, I must consider."

CHAPTER XVIII.

MADEMOISELLE OLIVA.

During this time, the man who had pointed out the fictitious queen to the people touched on the shoulder another man who stood near him, in a shabby dress, and said. “For you, who are a journalist, here is a fine subject for an article.”

“How so?” replied the man.

“Shall I tell you?”

“Certainly.”

“The danger of being governed by a king who is governed by a queen who indulges in such paroxysms as these.”

The journalist laughed. “But the Bastile?” he said.

“Pooh, nonsense! I do not mean you to write it out plainly. Who can interfere with you if you relate the history of Prince Silou and the Princess Etteniotna, Queen of Narfec? What do you say to that?”

“It is an admirable idea!” said the journalist.

“And I do not doubt that a pamphlet called ‘The Paroxysms of the Princess Etteniotna at the house of the Fakeer Remsem’ would have a great success.”

“I believe it also.”

“Then go and do it.”

The journalist pressed the hand of the unknown. “Shall I send you some copies, sir? I will with pleasure if you will give me your name.”

“Certainly; the idea pleases me. What is the usual circulation of your journal?”

“Two thousand.”

“Then do me a favor: take these fifty louis, and publish six thousand.”

“Oh, sir, you overwhelm me. May I not know the name of such a generous patron of literature?”

“You shall know, when I call for one thousand copies — at two francs each, are they not? Will they be ready in a week?”

“I will work night and day, monsieur.”

“Let it be amusing.”

“It shall make all Paris die with laughing, except one person.”

“Who will weep over it. Apropos, date the publication from London.”

“Sir, I am your humble servant.” And the journalist took his leave, with his fifty louis in his pocket, highly delighted.

The unknown again turned to look at the young woman, who had now subsided into a state of exhaustion, and looked beautiful as she lay there. “Really,” he said to himself, “the resemblance is frightful. God had his motives in creating it, and has no doubt condemned her to whom the resemblance is so strong.”

While he made these reflections, she rose slowly from the midst of the cushions, assisting herself with the arm of an attendant, and began to arrange her somewhat disordered toilet, and then traversed the rooms, confronting boldly the looks of the people. She was somewhat astonished, however, when she found herself saluted with deep and respectful bows by a group which had already been assembled by the indefatigable stranger, who kept whispering, “Never mind, gentlemen, never mind, she is still the Queen of France; let us salute her.” She next entered the courtyard, and looked about for a coach or chair, but, seeing none, was about to set off on foot, when a footman approached and said, “Shall I call madame’s carriage?”

“I have none,” she replied.

“Madame came in a coach?”

“Yes.”

“From the Rue Dauphine?”

“Yes.”

“I will take madame home.”

“Do so, then,” said she, although somewhat surprised at the offer.

The man made a sign, and a carriage drove up. He opened the door for her, and then said to the coachman, “To the Rue Dauphine.” They set off, and the young woman, who much approved of this mode of transit, regretted she had not further to go. They soon stopped, however; the footman handed her out, and immediately drove off again.

“Really,” said she to herself, “this is an agreeable adventure; it is very gallant of M. Mesmer. Oh, I am very tired, and he must have foreseen that. He is a great doctor.”

Saying these words, she mounted to the second story, and knocked at a door, which was quickly opened by an old woman.

“Is supper ready, mother?”

“Yes, and growing cold.”

“Has he come?”

“No, not yet, but the gentleman has.”

“What gentleman?”

“He who was to speak to you this evening.”

“To me?”

“Yes.”

This colloquy took place in a kind of ante-chamber opening into her room, which was furnished with old curtains of yellow silk, chairs of green Utrecht velvet, not very new, and an old yellow sofa.

She opened the door, and, going in, saw a man seated on the sofa whom she did not know in the least, although we do, for it was the same man whom we have seen taking so much interest in her at Mesmer’s.

She had not time to question him, for he began immediately: “I know all that you are going to ask, and will tell you without asking. You are Mademoiselle Oliva, are you not?”

“Yes, sir.”

“A charming person, highly nervous, and much taken by the system of M. Mesmer.”

“I have just left there.”

“All this, however, your beautiful eyes are saying plainly, does not explain what brings me here.”

“You are right, sir.”

“Will you not do me the favor to sit down, or I shall be obliged to get up also, and that is an uncomfortable way of talking.”

“Really, sir, you have very extraordinary manners.”

“Mademoiselle, I saw you just now at M. Mesmer’s, and found you to be all I could wish.”

“Sir!”

“Do not alarm yourself, mademoiselle. I do not tell you that I found you charming — that would seem like a declaration of love, and I have no such intention. I know that you are accustomed to have yourself called beautiful, but I, who also think so, have other things to talk to you about.”

“Really, sir, the manner in which you speak to me — — ”

“Do not get angry before you have heard me. Is there any one that can overhear us?”

“No, sir, no one. But still — — ”

“Then, if no one can hear, we can converse at our ease. What do you say to a little partnership between us?”

“Really, sir — — ”

“Do not misunderstand; I do not say ‘liaison’ — I say partnership; I am not talking of love, but of business.”

“What kind of business?” said Oliva, with growing curiosity.

“What do you do all day?”

“Why, I do nothing, or, at least, as little as possible.”

“You have no occupation — so much the better. Do you like walking?”

“Very much.”

“To see sights, and go to balls?”

“Excessively.”

“To live well?”

“Above all things.”

“If I gave you twenty-five louis a month, would you refuse me?”

“Sir!”

“My dear Mademoiselle Oliva, now you are beginning to doubt me again, and it was agreed that you were to listen quietly. I will say fifty louis if you like.”

“I like fifty louis better than twenty-five, but what I like better than either is to be able to choose my own lover.”

“Morbleu! but I have already told you that I do not desire to be your lover. Set your mind at ease about that.”

“Then what am I to do to earn my fifty louis?”

“You must receive me at your house, and always be glad to see me. Walk out with me whenever I desire it, and come to me whenever I send for you.”

“But I have a lover, sir.”

“Well, dismiss him.”

“Oh, Beausire cannot be sent away like that!”

“I will help you.”

“No; I love him.”

“Oh!”

“A little.”

“That is just a little too much.”

“I cannot help it.”

“Then he may stop.”

“You are very obliging.”

“Well — but do my conditions suit you?”

“Yes, if you have told me all.”

“I believe I have said all I wish to say now.”

“On your honor?”

“On my honor.”

“Very well.”

“Then that is settled; and here is the first month in advance.”

He held out the money, and, as she still seemed to hesitate a little, slipped it himself into her pocket.

Scarcely had he done so, when a knock at the door made Oliva run to the window. “Good God!” she cried; “escape quickly; here he is!”

“Who?”

“Beausire, my lover. Be quick, sir!”

“Nonsense!”

“He will half murder you.”

“Bah!”

“Do you hear how he knocks?”

“Well, open the door.” And he sat down again on the sofa, saying to himself, “I must see this fellow, and judge what he is like.”

The knocks became louder, and mingled with oaths.

“Go, mother, and open the door,” cried Oliva. “As for you, sir, if any harm happens to you, it is your own fault.”

CHAPTER XIX.

MONSIEUR BEAUSIRE.

Oliva ran to meet a man, who came in swearing furiously, and in a frightful passion.

“Come, Beausire,” said she, apparently not at all frightened.

“Let me alone!” cried he, shaking her off brutally. “Ah! I see, it was because there is a man here that the door was not opened!” And as the visitor remained perfectly still, he advanced furiously towards him, saying, “Will you answer me, sir?”

“What do you want to know, my dear M. Beausire?”

“What are you doing here, and who are you?”

“I am a very quiet man, and I was simply talking to madame.”

“That was all,” said Oliva.

“Will you hold your tongue?” bawled Beausire.

“Now,” said the visitor, “do not be so rude to madame, who has done nothing to deserve it; and if you are in a bad temper — — ”

“Yes, I am.”

“He must have lost at cards,” murmured Oliva.

“I am cleaned out, mort de diable!” cried Beausire. “But you, sir, will do me the favor to leave this room.”

“But, M. Beausire — — ”

“Diable! if you do not go immediately it will be the worse for you.”

“You did not tell me, mademoiselle, that he was troubled with these fits. Good heavens! what ferocity!”

Beausire, exasperated, drew his sword, and roared, “If you do not move, I will pin you to the sofa!”

“Really, it is impossible to be more disagreeable,” said the visitor, also drawing a small sword, which they had not before seen.

Oliva uttered piercing shrieks.

“Oh, mademoiselle, pray be quiet,” said he, “or two things will happen: first, you will stun M. Beausire, and he will get killed; secondly, the watch will come up and carry you straight off to St. Lazare.”

Oliva ceased her cries.

The scene that ensued was curious. Beausire, furious with rage, was making wild and unskilful passes at his adversary, who, still seated on the sofa, parried them with the utmost ease, laughing immoderately all the time.

Beausire began to grow tired and also frightened, for he felt that if this man, who was now content to stand on the defensive, were to attack him in his turn, he should be done for in a moment. Suddenly, however, by a skilful movement, the stranger sent Beausire's sword flying across the room; it went through an open window, and fell into the street.

"Oh, M. Beausire," said he, "you should take more care; if your sword falls on any one, it will kill him."

Beausire ran down at his utmost speed to fetch his sword, and meanwhile, Oliva, seizing the hand of the victor, said:

"Oh, sir, you are very brave; but as soon as you are gone, Beausire will beat me."

"Then I will remain."

"Oh, no; when he beats me, I beat him in return, and I always get the best of it, because I am not obliged to take any care; so if you would but go, sir — — "

"But, my dear, if I go now, I shall meet M. Beausire on the stairs; probably the combat will recommence, and as I shall not feel inclined to stand on the staircase, I shall have to kill M. Beausire."

"Mon Dieu! it is true."

"Well, then, to avoid that I will remain here."

"No, sir, I entreat; go up to the next story, and as soon as he returns to this room I will lock the door and take the key, and you can walk away while we fight it out."

"You are a charming girl. Au revoir!"

"Till when?"

"To-night, if you please."

"To-night! are you mad?"

"Not at all; but there is a ball at the Opera to-night."

"But it is now midnight."

"That does not matter."

"I should want a domino."

"Beausire will fetch it when you have beaten him."

"You are right," said Oliva, laughing.

“And here are ten louis to buy it with.”

“Adieu! and thanks.” And she pushed him out, saying, “Quick! he is coming back.”

“But if by chance he should beat you, how will you let me know?”

She reflected a moment. “You have a servant?”

“Yes.”

“Send him here, and let him wait under the window till I let a note fall.”

“I will. Adieu!” And he went up-stairs.

Oliva drowned the sound of his footsteps by calling loudly to Beausire, “Are you coming back, madman?” for he did not seem in much hurry to reencounter his formidable adversary. At last, however, he came up. Oliva was standing outside the door; she pushed him in, locked it, and put the key in her pocket.

Before the stranger left the house, he heard the noise of the combat begin, and both voices loud and furious. “There is no doubt,” said he to himself, “that this woman knows how to take care of herself.” His carriage was waiting for him at the corner of the street, but before getting in he spoke to the footman, who thereupon stationed himself within view of Mademoiselle Oliva’s windows.

CHAPTER XX.

GOLD.

We must now return to the interior of the room. Beausire was much surprised to see Oliva lock the door, and still more so not to see his adversary. He began to feel triumphant, for if he was hiding from him he must, he thought, be afraid of him. He therefore began to search for him; but Oliva talked so loud and fast that he advanced towards her to try and stop her, but was received with a box on the ear, which he returned in kind. Oliva replied by throwing a china vase at his head, and his answer was a blow with a cane. She, furious, flew at him and seized him by the throat, and he, trying to free himself, tore her dress.

Then, with a cry, she pushed him from her with such force that he fell in the middle of the room.

He began to get tired of this, so he said, without commencing another attack, “You are a wicked creature; you ruin me.”

“On the contrary, it is you who ruin me.”

“Oh, I ruin her! — she who has nothing!”

“Say that I have nothing now, say that you have eaten, and drank, and played away all that I had.”

“You reproach me with my poverty.”

“Yes, for it comes from your vices.”

“Do not talk of vices; it only remained for you to take a lover.”

“And what do you call all those wretches who sit by you in the tennis-court, where you play?”

“I play to live.”

“And nicely you succeed; we should die of hunger from your industry.”

“And you, with yours, are obliged to cry if you get your dress torn, because you have nothing to buy another with.”

“I do better than you, at all events;” and, putting her hand in her pocket, she drew out some gold and threw it across the room.

When Beausire saw this, he remained stupefied.

“Louis!” cried he at last.

She took out some more, and threw them in his face.

"Oh!" cried he, "Oliva has become rich!"

"This is what my industry brings in," said she, pushing him with her foot as he kneeled down to pick up the gold.

"Sixteen, seventeen, eighteen," counted he, joyfully.

"Miserable wretch!" said Oliva.

"Nineteen, twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two."

"Coward!"

"Twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five."

"Infamous wretch!"

He got up. "And so, mademoiselle, you have been saving money when you kept me without necessaries. You let me go about in an old hat, darned stockings, and patched clothes, while you had all this money! Where does it come from! From the sale of my things?"

"Scoundrel!" murmured Oliva, looking at him with contempt.

"But I pardon your avarice," continued he.

"You would have killed me just now," said Oliva.

"Then I should have been right; now I should be wrong to do it."

"Why, if you please?"

"Because now you contribute to our ménage."

"You are a base wretch.'"

"My little Oliva!"

"Give me back my money."

"Oh, my darling!"

"If you do not, I will pass your own sword through your body!"

"Oliva!"

"Will you give it?"

"Oh, you would not take it away?"

"Ah, coward! you beg, you solicit for the fruits of my bad conduct — that is what they call a man! I have always despised you."

"I gave to you when I could, Nicole."

"Do not call me Nicole."

"Pardon, then, Oliva. But is it not true?"

"Fine presents, certainly: some silver buckles, six louis d'or, two silk dresses, and three embroidered handkerchiefs."

"It is a great deal for a soldier."

“Hold your tongue! The buckles you stole from some one else, the louis d’or you borrowed and never returned, the silk dresses — — ”

“Oliva! Oliva!”

“Give me back my money.”

“What shall I give you instead?”

“Double the quantity.”

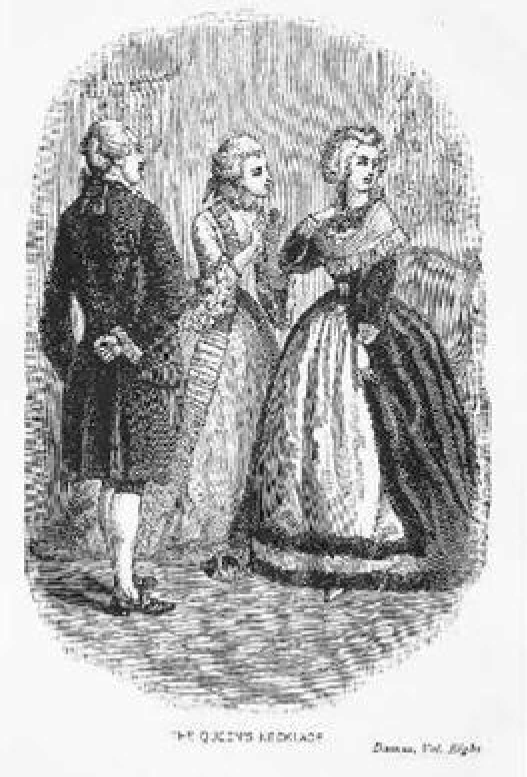

THE QUEEN'S NECKLACE

Dumas, Vol. Eight

“Well,” said the rogue, gravely, “I will go to the Rue de Bussy and play with it, and bring you back, not the double, but the quintuple;” and he made two steps to the door.

She caught him by the coat.

“There,” said he, “you have torn my coat.”

“Never mind; you shall have a new one.”

“That will be six louis, Oliva. Luckily, at the Rue de Bussy they are not particular about dress.”

Oliva seized hold of the other tail, and tore it right off.

Beausire became furious.

“Mort de tous les diables!” cried he, “you will make me kill you at last! You are tearing me to bits! Now I cannot go out.”

“On the contrary, you must go out immediately.”

“Without a coat?”

"Put on your great-coat."

"It is all in holes."

"Then do not put it on; but you must go out."

"I will not."

She took out of her pocket another handful of gold, and put it into his hands.

Beausire kneeled at her feet and cried, "Order, and I will obey!"

"Go quickly to the Capucin, Rue de Seine, where they sell dominoes for the bal masque, and buy me one complete, mask and all."

"Good."

"And one for yourself — black, but mine white; and I only give you twenty minutes to do it in."

"Are we going to the ball?"

"Yes, if you are obedient."

"Oh, always."

"Go, then, and show your zeal."

"I run; but the money?"

"You have twenty-five louis, that you picked up."

"Oh, Oliva, I thought you meant to give me those."

"You shall have more another time, but if I give you them now, you will stop and play."

"She is right," said he to himself; "that is just what I intended to do;" and he set off.

As soon as he was gone, Oliva wrote rapidly these words: "The peace is signed, and the ball decided on; at two o'clock we shall be at the Opera. I shall wear a white domino, with a blue ribbon on my left shoulder." Then, rolling this round a bit of the broken vase, she went to the window and threw it out.

The valet picked it up, and made off immediately.

In less than half an hour M. Beausire returned, followed by two men, bringing, at the cost of eighteen louis, two beautiful dominoes, such as were only turned out at the Capucin, makers to her majesty and the maids of honor.

CHAPTER XXI.

LA PETITE MAISON.

We left Madame de la Motte at M. Mesmer's door, watching the queen's carriage as it drove off. Then she went home; for she also intended to put on a domino, and indulge herself by going to the Opera. But a contretemps awaited her: a man was waiting at her door with a note from the Cardinal de Rohan. She opened it, and read as follows:

"Madame la Comtesse, you have doubtless not forgotten that we have business together; even if you have a short memory, I never forget what has pleased me. I shall have the honor to wait for you where my messenger will conduct you, if you please to come."

Jeanne, although rather vexed, immediately reentered the coach, and told the footman to get on the box with the coachman. Ten minutes sufficed to bring her to the entrance of the Faubourg St. Antoine, where, in a hollow and completely hidden by great trees, was one of those pretty houses built in the time of Louis XV., with all the taste of the sixteenth, with the comfort of the eighteenth, century.

"Oh, oh! a petite maison!" said she to herself. "It is very natural on the part of M. de Rohan, but very humiliating for Valois. But, patience."

She was led from room to room till she came to a small dining-room, fitted up with exquisite taste. There she found the cardinal waiting for her. He was looking over some pamphlets, but rose immediately on seeing her.

"Ah, here you are. Thanks, Madame la Comtesse," and he approached to kiss her hand; but she drew back with a reproachful and indignant air.

"What is the matter, madame?" he asked.

"You are, doubtless, not accustomed, monseigneur, to receive such a greeting from the women whom your eminence is in the habit of summoning here."

"Oh! madame."

"We are in your petite maison, are we not, sir?" continued she, looking disdainfully around her.

"But, madame — — "

"I had hoped that your eminence would have deigned to remember in what rank I was born. I had hoped that you would have been pleased to consider, that if God has made me poor, He has at least left me the pride of my race."

"Come, come, countess, I took you for a woman of intellect."

"You call a woman of intellect, it appears, monseigneur, every one who is indifferent to, and laughs at, everything, even dishonor. To these women, pardon me, your eminence, I have been in the habit of giving a different name."

"No, countess, you deceive yourself; I call a woman of intellect one who listens when you speak to her, and does not speak before having listened."

"I listen, then."

"I had to speak to you of serious matters, countess."

"Therefore you receive me in a dining-room."

"Why, would you have preferred my receiving you in a boudoir?"

"The distinction is nice," said she.

"I think so, countess."

"Then I am simply to sup with you?"

"Nothing else."

"I trust your eminence is persuaded that I feel the honor as I ought."

"You are quizzing, countess."

"No, I only laugh; would you rather I were angry? You are difficult to please, monseigneur."

"Oh; you are charming when you laugh, and I ask nothing better than to see you always doing so; but at this moment you are not laughing; oh, no! there is anger in that smile which shows your beautiful teeth."

"Not the least in the world, monseigneur."

"That is good."

"And I hope you will sup well."

"I shall sup well, and you?"

"Oh, I am not hungry."

"How, madame, you refuse to sup with me — you send me away?"

"I do not understand you, monseigneur."

"Listen, dear countess; if you were less in a passion, I would tell you that it is useless to behave like this — you are always equally charming; but as at each compliment I fear to be dismissed, I abstain."

"You fear to be dismissed? Really, I beg pardon of your eminence, but you become unintelligible."

"It is, however, quite clear, what I say. The other day, when I came to see you, you complained that you were lodged unsuitably to your rank. I thought, therefore, that to restore you to your proper place would be like restoring air to the bird whom the experimenter has placed under his air-pump. Consequently, beautiful countess, that you might receive me with pleasure, and that I, on my part, might visit you without compromising either you or myself — — " He stopped and looked at her.

"Well!" she said.

"I hoped that you would deign to accept this small residence; you observe, I do not call it 'petite maison.'"

"Accept! you give me this house, monseigneur?" said Jeanne, her heart beating with eagerness.

"A very small gift, countess; but if I had offered you more, you would have refused."

"Oh, monseigneur, it is impossible for me to accept this."

"Impossible, why? Do not say that word to me, for I do not believe in it. The house belongs to you, the keys are here on this silver plate; do you find out another humiliation in this?"

"No, but — — "

"Then accept."

"Monseigneur, I have told you."

"How, madame? you write to the ministers for a pension, you accept a hundred louis from an unknown lady — — "

"Oh, monseigneur, it is different."

"Come, I have waited for you in your dining-room. I have not yet seen the boudoir, nor the drawing-room, nor the bedrooms, for I suppose there are all these."

"Oh, monseigneur, forgive me; you force me to confess that you the most delicate of men," and she blushed with the pleasure she had been so long restraining. But checking herself, she sat down and said, "Now, will your eminence give me my supper?"

The cardinal took off his cloak, and sat down also.

Supper was served in a few moments. Jeanne put on her mask before the servants came in.

"It is I who ought to wear a mask," said the cardinal, "for you are at home, among your own people."

Jeanne laughed, but did not take hers off. In spite of her pleasure and surprise, she made a good supper. The cardinal was a man of much talent, and from his great knowledge of the world and of women, he was a man difficult to contend with, and he thought that this country girl, full of pretension, but who, in spite of her pride, could not conceal her greediness, would be an easy conquest, worth undertaking on account of her beauty, and of a something piquant about her, very pleasing to a man "blasé" like him. He therefore never took pains to be much on his guard with her; and she, more cunning than he thought, saw through his opinion of her, and tried to strengthen it by playing the provincial coquette, and appearing silly, that her adversary might be in reality weak in his over-confidence.

The cardinal thought her completely dazzled by the present he had made her — and so, indeed, she was; but he forgot that he himself was below the mark of the ambition of a woman like Jeanne.

"Come," said he, pouring out for her a glass of cyprus wine, "as you have signed your contract with me, you will not be unfriendly any more, countess."

"Oh no!"

"You will receive me here sometimes without repugnance?"

"I shall never be so ungrateful as to forget whose house this really is."

"Not mine."

"Oh yes, monseigneur."

"Do not contradict me, I advise you, or I shall begin to impose conditions."

"You take care on your part — — "

"Of what?"

"Why, I am at home here, you know, and if your conditions are unreasonable, I shall call my servants — — "

The cardinal laughed.

"Ah, you laugh, sir; you think if I call they will not come."

"Oh, you quite mistake, countess. I am nothing here, only your guest. Apropos," continued he, as if it had just entered his head, "have you heard anything more of the ladies who came to see you?"

"The ladies of the portrait?" said Jeanne, who, now knowing the queen, saw through the artifice.

"Yes, the ladies of the portrait."

"Monseigneur, you know them as well and even better than I do, I feel sure."

"Oh, countess, you do me wrong. Did you not express a wish to learn who they were?"

"Certainly; it is natural to desire to know your benefactors."

"Well, if knew, I should have told you."

"M. le Cardinal, you do know them."

"No."

"If you repeat that 'no,' I shall have to call you a liar."

"I shall know how to avenge that insult."

"How?"

"With a kiss."

"You know the portrait of Maria Theresa?"

"Certainly, but what of that?"

"That, having recognized this portrait, you must have had some suspicion of the person to whom it belonged."

"And why?"

"Because it was natural to think that the portrait of a mother would only be in the hands of her daughter."

"The queen!" cried the cardinal, with so truthful a tone of surprise that it duped even Jeanne. "Do you really think the queen came to see you?"

"And you did not suspect it?"

"Mon Dieu, no! how should I? I, who speak to you, am neither son, daughter, nor even relation of Maria Theresa, yet I have a portrait of her about me at this moment. Look," said he — and he drew out a snuff-box and showed it to her; "therefore you see that if I, who am in no way related to the imperial house, carry about such a portrait, another might do the same, and yet be a stranger."

Jeanne was silent — she had nothing to answer.

"Then it is your opinion," he went on, "that you have had a visit from the queen, Marie Antoinette."

"The queen and another lady."

"Madame de Polignac?"

"I do not know."

"Perhaps Madame de Lamballe?"

"A young lady, very beautiful and very serious."

"Oh, perhaps Mademoiselle de Taverney."

"It is possible; I do not know her."

"Well, if her majesty has really come to visit you, you are sure of her protection. It is a great step towards your fortune."

"I believe it, monseigneur."

"And her majesty was generous to you?"

"She gave me a hundred louis."

"And she is not rich, particularly now."

"That doubles my gratitude."

"Did she show much interest in you?"

"Very great."

"Then all goes well," said the prelate; "there only remains one thing now — to penetrate to Versailles."

The countess smiled.

"Ah, countess, it is not so easy."

She smiled again, more significantly than before.

"Really, you provincials," said he, "doubt nothing; because you have seen Versailles with the doors open, and stairs to go up, you think any one may open these doors and ascend these stairs. Have you seen the monsters of brass, of marble, and of lead, which adorn the park and the terraces?"

"Yes."

"Griffins, gorgons, ghouls, and other ferocious beasts. Well, you will find ten times as many, and more wicked, living animals between you and the favor of sovereigns."

"Your eminence will aid me to pass through the ranks of these monsters."

"I will try, but it will be difficult. And if you pronounce my name, if you discover your talisman, it will lose all its power."

"Happily, then, I am guarded by the immediate protection of the queen, and I shall enter Versailles with a good key."

"What key, countess?"

"Ah, Monsieur le Cardinal, that is my secret — or rather it is not, for if it were mine, I should feel bound to tell it to my generous protector."

"There is, then, an obstacle, countess?"

"Alas! yes, monseigneur. It is not my secret, and I must keep it. Let it suffice you to know that to-morrow I shall go to Versailles; that I shall be received, and, I have every reason to hope, well received."

The cardinal looked at her with wonder. “Ah, countess,” said he, laughing, “I shall see if you will get in.”

“You will push your curiosity so far as to follow me?”

“Exactly.”

“Very well.”

“Really, countess, you are a living enigma.”

“One of those monsters who inhabit Versailles.”

“Oh, you believe me a man of taste, do you not?”

“Certainly, monseigneur.”

“Well, here I am at your knees, and I take your hand and kiss it. Should I do that if I thought you a monster?”

“I beg you, sir, to remember,” said Jeanne coldly, “that I am neither a grisette nor an opera girl; that I am my own mistress, feeling myself the equal of any man in this kingdom. Therefore I shall take freely and spontaneously, when it shall please me, the man who will have gained my affections. Therefore, monseigneur, respect me a little, and, in me, the nobility to which we both belong.”

The cardinal rose. “I see,” said he, “you wish me to love you seriously.”

“I do not say that; but I wish to be able to love you. When that day comes — if it does comes — you will easily find it out, believe me. If you do not, I will let you know it; for I feel young enough and attractive enough not to mind making the first advances, nor to fear a repulse.”

“Countess, if it depends upon me, you shall love me.”

“We shall see.”

“You have already a friendship for me, have you not?”

“More than that.”

“Oh! then we are at least half way. And you are a woman that I should adore, if — — ” He stopped and sighed.

“Well,” said she, “if — — ”

“If you would permit it.”

“Perhaps I shall, when I shall be independent of your assistance, and you can no longer suspect that I encourage you from interested motives.”

“Then you forbid me to pay my court now?”

“Not at all; but there are other ways besides kneeling and kissing hands.”

“Well, countess, let us hear; what will you permit?”

“All that is compatible with my tastes and duties.”

“Oh, that is vague indeed.”

“Stop! I was going to add — my caprices.”

“I am lost!”

“You draw back?”

“No,” said the cardinal, “I do not.”

“Well, then, I want a proof.”

“Speak.”

“I want to go to the ball at the Opera.”

“Well, countess, that only concerns yourself. Are you not free as air to go where you wish?”

“Ah, but you have not heard all. I want you to go with me.”

“I to the Opera, countess!” said he, with a start of horror.

“See already how much your desire to please me is worth.”

“A cardinal cannot go to a ball at the Opera, countess. It is as if I proposed to you to go into a public-house.”

“Then a cardinal does not dance, I suppose?”

“Oh no!”

“But I have read that M. le Cardinal de Richelieu danced a saraband.”

“Yes, before Anne of Austria.”

“Before a queen,” repeated Jeanne. “Perhaps you would do as much for a queen?”

The cardinal could not help blushing, dissembler as he was.

“Is it not natural,” she continued, “that I should feel hurt when, after all your protestations, you will not do as much for me as you would for a queen? — especially when I only ask you to go concealed in a domino and a mask; besides, a man like you, who may do anything with impunity!”

The cardinal yielded to her flattery and her blandishments. Taking her hand, he said, “For you I will do anything, even the impossible.”

“Thanks, monseigneur; you are really amiable. But now you have consented, I will let you off.”

“No, no! he who does the work can alone claim the reward. Countess, I will attend you, but in a domino.”

“We shall pass through the Rue St. Denis, close to the Opera,” said the countess. “I will go in masked, buy a domino and a mask for you, and you can put them on in the carriage.”

“That will do delightfully.”

“Oh, monseigneur, you are very good! But, now I think of it, perhaps at the Hôtel Rohan you might find a domino more to your taste than the one I should buy.”

“Now, countess, that is unpardonable malice. Believe me if I go to the Opera, I shall be as surprised to find myself there as you were to find yourself supping tête-à-tête with a man not your husband.”

Jeanne had nothing to reply to this. Soon a carriage without arms drove up; they both got in, and drove off at a rapid pace.

CHAPTER XXII.

SOME WORDS ABOUT THE OPERA.

The Opera, that temple of pleasure at Paris, was burned in the month of June, 1781. Twenty persons had perished in the ruins; and as it was the second time within eighteen years that this had happened, it created a prejudice against the place where it then stood, in the Palais Royal, and the king had ordered its removal to a less central spot. The place chosen was La Porte St. Martin.

The king, vexed to see Paris deprived for so long of its Opera, became as sorrowful as if the arrivals of grain had ceased, or bread had risen to more than seven sous the quartern loaf. It was melancholy to see the nobility, the army, and the citizens without their after-dinner amusement; and to see the promenades thronged with the unemployed divinities, from the chorus-singers to the prima donnas.

An architect was then introduced to the king, full of new plans, who promised so perfect a ventilation, that even in case of fire no one could be smothered. He would make eight doors for exit, besides five large windows placed so low that any one could jump out of them. In the place of the beautiful hall of Moreau he was to erect a building with ninety-six feet of frontage towards the boulevard, ornamented with eight caryatides on pillars forming three entrance-doors, a bas-relief above the capitals, and a gallery with three windows. The stage was to be thirty-six feet wide, the theater seventy-two feet deep and eighty across, from one wall to the other. He asked only seventy-five days and nights before he opened it to the public.

This appeared to all a mere gasconade, and was much laughed at. The king, however, concluded the agreement with him. Lenoir set to work, and kept his word. But the public feared that a building so quickly erected could not be safe, and when it opened no one would go.

Even the few courageous ones who did go to the first representation of “Adéle de Ponthieu” made their wills first. The architect was in despair. He came to the king to consult him as to what was to be done.

It was just after the birth of the dauphin; all Paris was full of joy. The king advised him to announce a gratuitous performance in honor of the event, and give a ball after. Doubtless plenty would come, and if the theater stood, its safety was established.

“Thanks, sire,” said the architect.

“But reflect, first,” said the king, “if there be a crowd, are you sure of your building?”

“Sire, I am sure, and shall go there myself.”

“I will go to the second representation,” said the king.

The architect followed this advice. They played “Adéle de Ponthieu” to three thousand spectators, who afterwards danced. After this there could be no more fear. It was three years afterwards that Madame de la Motte and the cardinal went to the ball.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BALL AT THE OPERA.

The ball was at its height when they glided in quietly, and were soon lost in the crowd. A couple had taken refuge from the pressure under the queen’s box; one of them wore a white domino and the other a black one. They were talking with great animation. “I tell you, Oliva,” said the black domino, “that I am sure you are expecting some one. Your head is no longer a head, but a weather cock, and turns round to look after every newcomer.”

“Well, is it astonishing that I should look at the people, when that is what I came here for?”

“Oh, that is what you came for!”

“Well, sir, and for what do people generally come?”

“A thousand things.”

“Men perhaps, but women only for one — to see and be seen by as many people as possible.”

“Mademoiselle Oliva!”

“Oh, do not speak in that big voice, it does so frighten me; and above all, do not call me by name; it is bad taste to let every one here know who you are.”

The black domino made an angry gesture; it was interrupted by a blue domino who approached them.

“Come, monsieur,” said he, “let madame amuse herself; it is not every night one comes to a ball at the Opera.”

“Meddle with your own affairs,” replied Beausire, rudely.

“Monsieur, learn once for all that a little courtesy is never out of place.”

“I do not know you,” he replied, “and do not want to have anything to do with you.”

“No, you do not know me; but I know you, M. Beausire.”

At hearing his name thus pronounced, Beausire visibly trembled.

“Oh, do not be afraid, M. Beausire; I am not what you take me for.”

“Pardieu! sir, do you guess thoughts, as well as names?”

“Why not?”

"Then tell me what I thought. I have never seen a sorcerer, and should find it amusing."

"Oh, what you ask is not difficult enough to entitle me to that name."

"Never mind — tell."

"Well, then! you took me for an agent of M. de Crosne."

"M. de Crosne!" he repeated.

"Yes; the lieutenant of police."

"Sir!"

"Softly, M. de Beausire, you really look as if you were feeling for your sword."

"And so I was, sir."

"Good heavens! what a warlike disposition; but I think, dear M. Beausire, you left your sword at home, and you did well. But to speak of something else, will you relinquish to me madame for a time?"

"Give you up madame?"

"Yes, sir; that is not uncommon, I believe, at a ball at the Opera."

"Certainly not, when it suits the gentleman."

"It suffices sometimes that it should please the lady."

"Do you ask it for a long time?"

"Really, M. Beausire, you are too curious. Perhaps for ten minutes — perhaps for an hour — perhaps for all the evening."

"You are laughing at me, sir."

"Come, reply; will you or not?"

"No, sir."

"Come, come, do not be ill-tempered, you who were so gentle just now."

"Just now?"

"Yes; at the Rue Dauphine."

Oliva laughed.

"Hold your tongue, madame," said Beausire.

"Yes," continued the blue domino, "where you were on the point of killing this poor lady, but stopped at the sight of some louis."

"Oh, I see; you and she have an understanding together."

"How can you say such a thing?" cried Oliva.

"And if it were so," said the stranger, "it is all for your benefit."

"For my benefit! that would be curious."

"I will prove to you that your presence here is as hurtful as your absence would be profitable. You are a member of a certain academy, not the

Académie Française, but in the Rue du Pôt au Fer, in the second story, is it not, my dear M. Beausire?"

"Hush!" said Beausire.

The blue domino drew out his watch, which was studded with diamonds that made Beausire's eyes water to look at them. "Well!" continued he, "in a quarter of an hour they are going to discuss there a little project, by which, they hope to secure 2,000,000 francs among the twelve members, of whom you are one, M. Beausire."

"And you must be another; if you are not — — "

"Pray go on."

"A member of the police."

"Oh, M. Beausire, I thought you had more sense. If I were of the police, I should have taken you long ago, for some little affairs less honorable than this speculation."

"So, sir, you wish to send me to the Rue du Pôt au Fer: but I know why — that I may be arrested there: I am not such a fool."

"Now, you are one. If I wanted to arrest you, I had only to do it, and I am rid of you at once; but gentleness and persuasion are my maxims."

"Oh, I know now," said Beausire, "you are the man that was on the sofa two hours ago."

"What sofa?"

"Never mind; you have induced me to go, and if you are sending a gallant man into harm, you will pay for it some day."

"Be tranquil," said the blue domino, laughing; "by sending you there, I give you 100,000 francs at least, for you know the rule of this society is, that whoever is absent loses his share."

"Well, then, good-by!" said Beausire, and vanished.

The blue domino took possession of Oliva's arm, left at liberty by Beausire.

"Now!" said she, "I have let you manage poor Beausire at your ease, but I warn you, you will find me not so easy to talk over; therefore, find something pretty to say to me, or — — "

"I know nothing prettier than your own history, dear Mademoiselle Nicole," said he, pressing the pretty round arm of the little woman, who uttered a cry at hearing herself so addressed; but, recovering herself with marvelous quickness, said:

“Oh, mon Dieu! what a name! Is it I whom you call Nicole? If so, you are wrong, for that is not my name.”

“At present I know that you call yourself Oliva, but we will talk afterwards of Oliva; at present I want to speak of Nicole. Have you forgotten the time when you bore that name? I do not believe it, my dear child, for the name that one bears as a young girl is ever the one enshrined in the heart, although one may have been forced to take another to hide the first. Poor Oliva, happy Nicole!”

“Why do you say ‘Poor Oliva’? do you not think me happy?”

“It would be difficult to be happy with a man like Beausire.”

Oliva sighed and said, “Indeed I am not.”

“You love him, however.”

“A little.”

“If you do not love him much, leave him.”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Because I should no sooner have done so than I should regret it.”

“Do you think so?”

“I am afraid I should.”

“What could you have to regret in a drunkard; a gambler, a man who beats you, and a black-leg, who will one day come to the gallows?”

“You would not understand me if I told you.”

“Try.”

“I should regret the excitement he keeps me in.”

“I ought to have guessed it; that comes of passing your youth with such silent people.”

“You know about my youth?”

“Perfectly.”

Oliva laughed and shook her head.

“You doubt it?”

“Really I do.”

“Then we will talk a little about it, Mademoiselle Nicole.”

“Very well; but I warn you, I will tell nothing.”

“I do not wish it. I do not mean your childhood. I begin from the time when you first perceived that you had a heart capable of love.”

“Love for whom?”

“For Gilbert.”

At this name Oliva trembled.

“Ah, mon Dieu!” she cried. “How do you know?” Then with, a sigh said, “Oh, sir! you have pronounced a name indeed fertile in remembrances. You knew Gilbert?”

“Yes; since I speak to you of him.”

“Alas!”

“A charming lad, upon my word. You loved him?”

“He was handsome. No, perhaps not; but I thought him so; he was full of mind, my equal in birth, but Gilbert thought no woman his equal.”

“Not even Mademoiselle de Ta — — ”

“Oh, I know whom you mean, sir. You are well instructed. Yes, Gilbert loved higher than the poor Nicole: you are possessed of terrible secrets, sir; tell me, if you can,” she continued, looking earnestly at him, “what has become of him?”

“You should know best.”

“Why, in heaven’s name?”

“Because if he followed you from Taverney to Paris, you followed him from Paris to Trianon.”

“Yes, that is true, but that is ten years ago; and I wished to know what hag passed since the time I ran away, and since he disappeared. When Gilbert loved Mademoiselle de — — ”

“Do not pronounce names aloud,” said he.

“Well, then, when he loved her so much that each tree at Trianon was witness to his love — — ”

“You loved him no more.”

“On the contrary, I loved him more than ever; and this love was my ruin. I am beautiful, proud, and, when I please, insolent; and would lay my head on the scaffold rather than confess myself despised.”

“You have a heart, Nicole?”

“I had then,” she said, sighing.

“This conversation makes you sad.”

“No, it does me good to speak of my youth. But tell me why Gilbert fled from Trianon.”

“Do you wish me to confirm a suspicion, or to tell you something you do not know.”

“Something I do not know.”

“Well, I cannot tell you this. Have you not heard that he is dead?”

“Yes, I have, but — — ”

“Well, he is dead.”

“Dead!” said Nicole, with an air of doubt. Then, with a sudden start, “Grant me one favor!” she cried.

“As many as you like.”

“I saw you two hours ago; for it was you, was it not?”

“Certainly.”

“You did not, then, try to disguise yourself?”

“Not at all.”

“But I was stupid; I saw you, but I did not observe you.”

“I do not understand.”

“Do you know what I want?”

“No.”

“Take off your mask.”

“Here! impossible!”

“Oh, you cannot fear other people seeing you. Here, behind this column, you will be quite hidden. You fear that I should recognize you.”

“You!”

“And that I should cry, ‘It is you — it is Gilbert!’“

“What folly!”

“Take off your mask.”

“Yes, on one condition — that you will take off yours, if I ask it.”

“Agreed.” The unknown took off his immediately.

Oliva looked earnestly at him, then sighed, and said:

“Alas! no, it is not Gilbert.”

“And who am I?”

“Oh, I do not care, as you are not he.”

“And if it had been Gilbert?” said he, as he put on his mask again.

“Ah! if it had been,” cried she passionately, “and he had said to me, ‘Nicole, do you remember Taverney Maison-Rouge?’ then there would have been no longer a Beausire in the world for me.”

“But I have told you, my dear child, that Gilbert is dead.”

“Ah! perhaps, then, it is for the best,” said Oliva, with a sigh.

“Yes; he would never have loved you, beautiful as you are.”

“Do you, then, think he despised me?”

“No; he rather feared you.”

“That is possible.”

"Then you think it better he is dead?"

"Do not repeat my words; in your mouth they wound me."

"But it is better for Mademoiselle Oliva. You observe, I abandon Nicole, and speak to Oliva. You have before you a future, happy, rich, and brilliant."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, if you make up your mind to do anything to arrive at this end."

"I promise you."

"But you must give up sighing, as you were doing just now."

"Very well. I sighed for Gilbert, and as he is dead, and there are not two Gilberts in the world, I shall sigh no more. But enough of him."

"Yes; we will speak of yourself. Why did you run away with Beausire?"

"Because I wished to quit Trianon, and I was obliged to go with some one; I could no longer remain a 'pis aller,' rejected by Gilbert."

"You have, then, been faithful for ten years through pride? You have paid dearly for it."

Oliva laughed.

"Oh, I know what you are laughing at. To hear a man, who pretends to know everything, accuse you of having been ten years faithful, when you think you have not rendered yourself worthy of such a ridiculous reproach. However, I know all about you. I know that you went to Portugal with Beausire, where you remained two years; that you then left him, and went to the Indies with the captain of a frigate, who hid you in his cabin, and who left you at Chandernagor when he returned to Europe. I know that you had two millions of rupees to spend in the house of a nabob who kept you shut up; that you escaped through the window on the shoulders of a slave. Then, rich — for you had carried away two beautiful pearl bracelets, two diamonds, and three large rubies — you came back to France. When landing at Brest, your evil genius made you encounter Beausire on the quay, who recognized you immediately, bronzed and altered as you were, while you almost fainted at the sight of him."

"Oh, mon Dieu!" cried Oliva, "who are you, then, who know all this?"

"I know, further, that Beausire carried you off again, persuaded you that he loved you, sold your jewels, and reduced you to poverty. Still, you say you love him, and, as love is the root of all happiness, of course you ought to be happy."

Oliva hung her head, and covered her eyes with her hands, but two large tears might be seen forcing their way through her fingers — liquid pearls, more precious, though not so marketable, as those Beausire had sold.

“And this woman,” at last she said, “whom you describe as so proud and so happy, you have bought to-day for fifty louis.”

“I am aware it is too little, mademoiselle.”

“No, sir; on the contrary, I am surprised that a woman like me should be worth so much.”

“You are worth more than that, as I will show you; but just now I want all your attention.”

“Then I will be silent.”

“No; talk, on the contrary, of anything, it does not matter what, so that we seem occupied.”

“You are very odd.”

“Take hold of my arm, and let us walk.”

They walked on among the various groups. In a minute or two, Oliva asked a question.

“Talk as much as you like, only do not ask questions at present,” said her companion, “for I cannot answer now; only, as you speak, disguise your voice, hold your head up, and scratch your neck with your fan.”

She obeyed.

In a minute, they passed a highly perfumed group, in the center of which a very elegant-looking man was talking fast to three companions, who were listening respectfully.

“Who is that young man in that beautiful gray domino?” asked Oliva.

“M. le Comte d’Artois; but pray do not speak just now!” At this moment two other dominoes passed them, and stood in a place near, which was rather free from people.

“Lean on this pillar, countess,” said one of them in a low voice, but which was overheard by the blue domino, who started at its sound.

Then a yellow domino, passing through the crowd, came up to the blue one, and said, “It is he.”

“Very good,” replied the other, and the yellow domino vanished.

“Now, then,” said Oliva’s companion, turning to her, “we will begin to enjoy ourselves a little.”

“I hope so, for you have twice made me sad: first by taking away Beausire, and then by speaking of Gilbert.”

“I will be both Gilbert and Beausire to you,” said the unknown.

“Oh!” sighed Oliva.

“I do not ask you to love me, remember; I only ask you to accept the life I offer you — that is, the accomplishment of all your desires, provided occasionally you give way to mine. Just now I have one.”

“What?”

“That black domino that you see there is a German of my acquaintance, who refused to come to the ball with me, saying he was not well; and now he is here, and a lady with him.”

“Who is she?”

“I do not know. We will approach them; I will pretend that you are a German, and you must not speak, for fear of being found out. Now, pretend to point him out to me with the end of your fan.”

“Like that?”

“Yes; very well. Now whisper to me.”

Oliva obeyed with a docility which charmed her companion.

The black domino, who had his back turned to them, did not see all this; but his companion did. “Take care, monseigneur,” said she; “there are two masks watching us.”

“Oh, do not be afraid, countess; they cannot recognize us. Do not mind them; but let me assure you that never form was so enchanting as yours, never eyes so brilliant, never — — ”

“Hush! the spies approach.”

“Spies!” said the cardinal, uneasily. “Disguise your voice if they make you speak, and I will do the same.”

Oliva and her blue domino indeed approached; he came up to the cardinal, and said, “Mask — — ”

“What do you want?” said the cardinal, in a voice as unlike his natural one as he could make it.

“The lady who accompanies me desires me to ask you some questions.”

“Ask,” said M. de Rohan.

“Are they very indiscreet?” said Madame de la Motte.

“So indiscreet that you shall not hear them;” and he pretended to whisper to Oliva, who made a sign in answer. Then, in irreproachable German, he said to the cardinal, “Monseigneur, are you in love with the lady who accompanies you?”

The cardinal trembled.

"Did you say monseigneur?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You deceive yourself; I am not the person you think."

"Oh, M. le Cardinal, do not deny it; it is useless. If even I did not know you, the lady who accompanies me assures me she knows you perfectly." And he again whispered to Oliva, "Make a sign for 'yes.' Do so each time I press your arm."

She did so.

"You astonish me!" said the cardinal. "Who is this lady?"

"Oh, monseigneur, I thought you would have known; she soon knew you. It is true that jealousy — — "

"Madame is jealous of me!" cried the cardinal.

"We do not say that," replied the unknown, rather haughtily.

"What are you talking about?" asked Madame de la Motte, who did not like this conversation in German.

"Oh, nothing, nothing!"

"Madame," said the cardinal to Oliva, "one word from you, and I promise to recognize you instantly."

Oliva, who saw him speaking to her, but did not understand a word, whispered to her companion.

All this mystery piqued the cardinal.

"One single German word," he said, "could not much compromise madame."

The blue domino again pretended to take her orders, and then said: "M. le Cardinal, these are the words of madame, 'He whose thoughts are not ever on the alert, he whose imagination does not perpetually suggest the presence of the loved one, does not love, however much he may pretend it.'"

The cardinal appeared struck with these words; all his attitude expressed surprise, respect and devotion.

"It is impossible!" he murmured in French.

"What is impossible?" asked Madame de la Motte, who seized eagerly on these few words she could understand.

"Nothing, madame, nothing!"

"Really, cardinal, you are making me play but a sorry part," said she, withdrawing her arm angrily.

He did not even seem to notice it, so great was his preoccupation with the German lady.

“Madame,” said he to her, “these words that your companion has repeated to me in your name are some German lines which I read in a house which is perhaps known to you.”

The blue domino pressed Oliva’s arm, who thereupon bowed an assent.

“That house,” said the cardinal, hesitatingly, “is it not called Schoenbrunn?”

She again made a gesture of assent.

“They were written on a table of cherry-wood, with a gold bodkin, by an august hand.”

“Yes,” bowed Oliva again.

The cardinal stopped, he tottered, and leaned against a pillar for support. Madame de la Motte stood by, watching this strange scene. Then the cardinal, touching the blue domino, said: “This is the conclusion of the quotation — ’But he who sees everywhere the loved object, who recognizes her by a flower, by a perfume, through the thickest veils, he can still be silent — his voice is in his heart — and if one other understands him, he is happy.’“

“Oh, they are speaking German here,” said a young voice from an approaching group; “let us listen. Do you speak German, marshal?”

“No, monseigneur.”

“You, Charny?”

“Yes, your highness.”

“Here is M. le Comte d’Artois,” said Oliva softly to her companion.

A crowd followed them, and many were passing round.

“Take care, gentlemen!” said the blue domino.

“Monsieur,” replied the prince, “the people are pushing us.”

At this moment some invisible hand pulled Oliva’s hood from behind, and her mask fell. She replaced it as quickly as possible, with a half-terrified cry, which was echoed by one of affected disquiet from her companion.

Several others around looked no little bewildered.

The cardinal nearly fainted, and Madame de la Motte supported him. The pressure of the crowd separated the Comte d’Artois and his party from them. Then the blue domino approached the cardinal, and said:

“This is indeed an irreparable misfortune; this lady’s honor is at your mercy.”

“Oh, monsieur!” murmured the cardinal, who was much agitated.

“Let us go quickly,” said the blue domino to Oliva; and they moved away.

“Now I know,” said Madame de la Motte to herself, “what the cardinal meant was impossible: he took this woman for the queen. But what an effect it has had on him?”

“Would you like to leave the ball?” asked M. de Rohan, in a feeble voice.

“As you please, monseigneur,” replied Jeanne.

“I do not find much interest here, do you?”

“None at all.”

They pushed their way through the crowd. The cardinal, who was tall, looked all around him, to try and see again the vision which had disappeared; but blue, white, and gray dominoes were everywhere, and he could distinguish no one. They had been some time in the carriage, and he had not yet spoken to Jeanne.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE EXAMINATION.

At last Jeanne said, “Where is this carriage taking me to, cardinal?”

“Back to your own house, countess.”

“My house — in the faubourg?”

“Yes, countess. A very small house to contain so many charms.”

They soon stopped. Jeanne alighted, and he was preparing to follow her, but she stopped him, and said, “It is very late, cardinal.”

“Adieu, then,” said he; and he drove away, absorbed with the scene at the ball.

Jeanne entered alone into her new house. Six lackeys waited for her in the hall, and she looked at them as calmly as though she had been used to it all her life.

“Where are my femmes de chambre?” said she.

One of the men advanced respectfully.

“Two women wait for madame in her room.”

“Call them.” The valet obeyed.

“Where do you usually sleep?” said Jeanne to them, when they entered.

“We have no place as yet,” said one of them; “we can sleep wherever madame pleases.”

“Where are the keys?”

“Here, madame.”

“Well, for this night you shall sleep out of the house.”

The women looked at her in surprise.

“You have some place to go to?” said Jeanne.

“Certainly, madame; but it is late. Still, if madame wishes — — ”

“And these men can accompany you,” she continued, dismissing the valets also, who seemed rather pleased.

“When shall we return?” asked one of them.

“To-morrow at noon.”

They seemed more astonished than ever, but Jeanne looked so imperious that they did not speak.

“Is there any one else here?” she asked.

“No one, madame. It is impossible for madame to remain like this; surely you must have some one here.”

“I want no one.”

“The house might take fire; madame might be ill.”

“Go, all of you,” said Jeanne; “and take this,” added she, giving them money from her purse.

They all thanked her, and disappeared, saying to each other that they had found a strange mistress.

Jeanne then locked the doors and said triumphantly, “Now I am alone here, in my own house.” She now commenced an examination, admiring each thing individually. The ground-floor contained a bath-room, dining-room, three drawing-rooms, and two morning-rooms. The furniture of these rooms was handsome, though not new. It pleased Jeanne better than if it had been furnished expressly for her. All the rich antiques disdained by fashionable ladies, the marvelous pieces of carved ebony, the glass lusters, the gothic clocks; chefs-d’œuvre of carving and enamel, the screens with embroidered Chinese figures, and the immense vases, threw Jeanne into indescribable raptures. Here on a chimney-piece two gilded tritons were bearing branches of coral, upon which were hung jeweled fruits. In another place, on a gilded console table, was an enormous elephant, with sapphires hanging from his ears, supporting a tower filled with little bottles of scent. Books in gilt bindings were on rosewood shelves. One room was hung with Gobelin tapestry, and furnished in gray and gold; another, paneled in paintings by Vernet. The small rooms contained pictures. The whole was evidently the collection of years.

Jeanne examined it all with delight. Then, as her domino was inconvenient, she went into her room to put on a dressing-gown of wadded silk; and, secure of meeting no one, she wandered from room to room, continuing her examination, till at last, her light nearly exhausted, she returned to her bedroom, which was hung with embroidered blue satin.

She had seen everything, and admired everything: there only remained herself to be admired; and she thought, as she undressed before the long mirror, that she was not the object least worthy of admiration in the place. At last, wearied out with pleasurable excitement, she went to bed, and soon sank to sleep.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ACADEMY OF M. BEAUSIRE.

Beausire had followed the advice of the blue domino, and repaired to the place of meeting in the Rue du Pôt au Fer. He was frightened by the apparent exclusion which his companions had seemed to meditate, in not communicating their plans to him; and he knew none of them to be particularly scrupulous. He had acquired the reputation among them of a man to be feared; it was not wonderful, as he had been a soldier, and worn a uniform. He knew how to draw his sword, and he had a habit of looking very fierce at the slightest word that displeased him — all things which appear rather terrifying to those of doubtful courage, especially when they have reason to shun the éclat of a duel and the curiosity of the police.

Beausire counted, therefore, on revenging himself by frightening them a little. It was a long way, but Beausire had money in his pocket; so he took a coach, promised the driver an extra franc to go fast, and, to make up for the absence of his sword, he assumed as fierce a look as he could on entering the room.

It was a large hall, full of tables, at which were seated about twenty players, drinking beer or syrups, and smiling now and then on some highly rouged women who sat near them. They were playing faro at the principal table, but the stakes were low, and the excitement small in proportion.

On the entrance of the domino, all the women smiled on him, half in raillery, and half in coquetry, for M. Beausire was a favorite among them. However, he advanced in silence to the table without noticing any one.

One of the players, who was a good-humored looking fellow, said to him, “Corbleu, chevalier, you come from the ball looking out of sorts.”

“Is your domino uncomfortable?” said another.

“No, it is not my domino,” replied Beausire, gruffly.

“Oh!” said the banker, “he has been unfaithful to us; he has been playing somewhere else and lost.”

“It is not I who am unfaithful to my friends; I am incapable of it. I leave that to others.”

"What do you mean, dear chevalier?"

"I know what I mean," replied he; "I thought I had friends here."

"Certainly," replied several voices.

"Well, I was deceived."

"How?"

"You plan things without me."

Several of the members began to protest it was not true.

"I know better," said Beausire; "and these false friends shall be punished." He put his hand to his side to feel for his sword, but, as it was not there, he only shook his pocket, and the gold rattled.

"Oh, oh!" said the banker, "M. Beausire has not lost. Come, will you not play?"

"Thanks," said Beausire; "I will keep what I have got."

"Only one louis," said one of the women, caressingly.

"I do not play for miserable louis," said he. "We play for millions here to-night — yes, gentlemen, millions."

He had worked himself up into a great state of excitement, and was losing sight of all prudence, when a blow from behind made him turn, and he saw by him a great dark figure, stiff and upright, and with two shining black eyes. He met Beausire's furious glance with a ceremonious bow.

"The Portuguese!" said Beausire.

"The Portuguese!" echoed the ladies, who abandoned Beausire to crowd round the newcomer, he being their especial pet, as he was in the habit of bringing them sweetmeats, sometimes wrapped up in notes of forty or fifty francs. This man was one of the twelve associates.

He was used as a bait at their society. It was agreed that he should lose a hundred louis a week as an inducement to allure strangers to play. He was, therefore, considered a useful man. He was also an agreeable one, and was held in much consideration.

Beausire became silent on seeing him.

The Portuguese took his place at the table, and put down twenty louis, which he soon lost, thereby making some of those who had been stripped before forget their losses.

All the money received by the banker was dropped into a well under the table, and he was forbidden to wear long sleeves, lest he should conceal any within them, although the other members generally took the liberty of searching both sleeves and pockets before they left.

Several now put on their great-coats and took leave — some happy enough to escort the ladies.

A few, however, after making a feint to go, returned into another room; and here the twelve associates soon found themselves united.

“Now we will have an explanation,” said Beausire.

“Do not speak so loud,” said the Portuguese in good French. Then they examined the doors and windows to make certain that all was secure, drew the curtain close, and seated themselves.

“I have a communication to make,” said the Portuguese; “it was lucky, however, I arrived when I did, for M. Beausire was seized this evening with a most imprudent flow of eloquence.”

Beausire tried to speak.

“Silence,” said the Portuguese; “let us not waste words: you know my ideas beforehand very well; you are a man of talent, and may have guessed it, but I think ‘amour propre’ should never overcome self-interest.”

“I do not understand.”

“M. Beausire hoped to be the first to make this proposition.”

“What proposition?” cried the rest.

“Concerning the two million francs,” said Beausire.

“Two million francs!” cried they.

“First,” said the Portuguese, “you exaggerate; it is not as much as that.”

“We do not know what you are talking of,” said the banker.

“But are not the less all ears,” said another.

The Portuguese drank off a large glass of Orgeat, and then began: “The necklace is not worth more than 1,500,000 francs.”

“Oh, then it concerns a necklace?” said Beausire.

“Yes, did you not mean the same thing?”

“Perhaps.”

“Now he is going to be discreet after his former folly,” said the Portuguese; “but time presses, for the ambassador will arrive in eight days.”

“This matter becomes complicated,” said the banker; “a necklace! 1,500,000 francs! and an ambassador! Pray explain.”

“In a few words,” said the Portuguese; “MM. Bœhmer and Bossange offered to the queen a necklace worth that sum. She refused it, and now they do not know what to do with it, for none but a royal fortune could buy it. Well, I have found the royal personage who will buy this necklace, and obtain the custody of it from MM. Bœhmer and Bossange; and that is my gracious sovereign the Queen of Portugal.”

“We understand it less than ever,” said the associates.

“And I not at all,” thought Beausire; then he said aloud, “Explain yourself clearly, dear M. Manoël; our private differences should give place to the public interests. I acknowledge you the author of the idea, and renounce all right to its paternity. Therefore speak on.”

“Willingly,” said Manoël, drinking a second glass of Orgeat; “the embassy is vacant just now; the new ambassador, M. de Souza, will not arrive for a week. Well, he may arrive sooner.”

They all looked stupefied but Beausire, who said, “Do you not see some ambassador, whether true or false?”

“Exactly,” said Manoël; “and the ambassador who arrives may desire to buy this necklace for the Queen of Portugal, and treat accordingly with MM. Bœhmer and Bossange; that is all.”

“But,” said the banker, “they would not allow such a necklace to pass into the hands of M. de Souza himself without good security.”

“Oh, I have thought of all that; the ambassador’s house is vacant, with the exception of the chancellor, who is a Frenchman, and speaks bad Portuguese, and who is therefore delighted when the Portuguese speak French to him, as he does not then betray himself; but who likes to speak Portuguese to the French, as it sounds grand. Well, we will present ourselves to this chancellor with all the appearances of a new legation.”

“Appearances are something,” said Beausire: “but the credentials are much more.”

“We will have them,” replied Manoël.

“No one can deny that Don Manoël is an invaluable man,” said Beausire.

“Well, our appearances, and the credentials having convinced the chancellor of our identity, we will establish ourselves at the house.”

“That is pretty bold,” said Beausire.

“It is necessary, and quite easy,” said Manoël; “the chancellor will be convinced, and if he should afterwards become less credulous, we will dismiss him. I believe an ambassador has the right to change his chancellor.”

“Certainly.”

“Then, when we are masters of the hotel, our first operation will be to wait on MM. Bœhmer and Bossange.”

"But you forget one thing," said Beausire; "our first act should be to ask an audience of the king, and then we should break down. The famous Riza Bey, who was presented to Louis XIV. as ambassador from the Shah of Persia, spoke Persian at least, and there were no savants here capable of knowing how well; but we should be found out at once. We should be told directly that our Portuguese was remarkably French, and we should be sent to the Bastile."

"We will escape this danger by remaining quietly at home."

"Then M. Bœhmer will not believe in our ambassadorship."

"M. Bœhmer will be told that we are sent merely to buy the necklace. We will show him our order to do this, as we shall before have shown it to the chancellor, only we must try to avoid showing it to the ministers, for they are suspicious, and might find a host of little flaws."

"Oh yes," cried they all, "let us avoid the ministers."

"But if MM. Bœhmer and Bossange require money on account?" asked Beausire.

"That would complicate the affair, certainly."

"For," continued Beausire, "it is usual for an ambassador to have letters of credit, at least, if not ready money; and here we should fail."

"You find plenty of reasons why it should fail," said Manoël, "but nothing to make it succeed."

"It is because I wish it to succeed that I speak of the difficulties. But stop — a thought strikes me: in every ambassador's house there is a strong box."

"Yes; but it may be empty."

"Well! if it be, we must ask MM. Bœhmer and Bossange who are their correspondents at Lisbon, and we will sign and stamp for them letters of credit for the sum demanded."

"That will do," said Manoël, "I was engrossed with the grand idea, but had not sufficiently considered the details."

"Now, let us think of arranging the parts," said Beausire. "Don Manoël will be ambassador."

"Certainly," they all said.

"And M. Beausire my secretary and interpreter," said Manoël.

"Why so?" said Beausire, rather uneasily.

"I am M. de Souza, and must not speak a word of French; for I know that that gentleman speaks nothing but Portuguese, and very little of that. You, on the contrary, M. Beausire, who have traveled, and have acquired French habits, who speak Portuguese also — — ”

“Very badly,” said Beausire.

“Quite enough to deceive a Parisian; and then, you know, the most useful agents will have the largest shares.”

“Assuredly,” said the others.

“Well! it is agreed; I am secretary and interpreter. Then as to the money?”

“It shall be divided into twelve parts; but I as ambassador and author of the scheme shall have a share and a half; M. Beausire the same, as interpreter, and because he partly shared my idea; and also a share and a half to him who sells the jewels.”

“So far, then, it is settled! we will arrange the minor details to-morrow, for it is very late,” said Beausire, who was thinking of Oliva, left at the ball with the blue domino, towards whom, in spite of his readiness in giving away louis d’or, he did not feel very friendly.

“No, no; we will finish at once,” said the others. “What is to be prepared?”

“A traveling carriage, with the arms of M. de Souza,” said Beausire.

“That would take too long to paint and to dry,” said Manoël.

“Then we must say that the ambassador’s carriage broke down on the way, and he was forced to use that of the secretary: I must have a carriage, and my arms will do for that. Besides, we will have plenty of bruises and injuries on the carriage, and especially round the arms, and no one will think of them.”

“But the rest of the embassy?”

“We will arrive in the evening; it is the best time to make a début, and you shall all follow next day, when we have prepared the way.”

“Very well.”

“But every ambassador, besides a secretary, must have a valet de chambre. You, captain,” said Don Manoël, addressing one of the gang, “shall take this part.”

The captain bowed.

“And the money for the purchases?” said Manoël. “I have nothing.”

“I have a little,” said Beausire, “but it belongs to my mistress. What have we in our fund?”

“Your keys, gentlemen,” said the banker.

Each drew out a key, which opened one of twelve locks in the table; so that none of these honest associates could open it without all the others. They went to look.

"One hundred and ninety-eight louis, besides the reserve fund," said the banker.

"Give them to M. Beausire and me. It is not too much," said Manoël.

"Give us two-thirds, and leave the rest," said Beausire, with a generosity which won all their hearts.

Don Manoël and Beausire received, therefore, one hundred and thirty-two louis and sixty-six remained for the others.

They then separated, having fixed a rendezvous for the next day.

Beausire rolled up his domino under his arm, and hastened to the Rue Dauphine, where he hoped to find Oliva in possession of some new louis d'or.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE AMBASSADOR.

On the evening of the next day a traveling-carriage passed through the Barrière d’Enfer, so covered with dust and scratches that no one could discern the arms. The four horses that drew it went at a rapid pace, until it arrived before an hotel of handsome appearance, in the Rue de la Jussienne, at the door of which two men, one of whom was in full dress, were waiting. The carriage entered the courtyard of the hotel, and one of the persons waiting approached the door, and commenced speaking in bad Portuguese.

“Who are you?” said a voice from the inside, speaking the language perfectly.

“The unworthy chancellor of the embassy, your excellency.”

“Very well. Mon Dieu! how badly you speak our language, my dear chancellor! But where are we to go?”

“This way, monseigneur.”

“This is a poor reception,” said Don Manoël, as he got out of the carriage, leaning on the arms of his secretary and valet.

“Your excellency must pardon me,” said the chancellor, “but the courier announcing your arrival only reached the hotel at two o’clock to-day. I was absent on some business, and when I returned, found your excellency’s letter; I have only had time to have the rooms opened and lighted.”

“Very good.”

“It gives me great pleasure to see the illustrious person of our ambassador.”

“We desire to keep as quiet as possible,” said Don Manoël, “until we receive further orders, from Lisbon. But pray show me to my room, for I am dying with fatigue; my secretary will give you all necessary directions.”

The chancellor bowed respectfully to Beausire, who returned it, and then said, “We will speak French, sir; I think it will be better for both of us.”

“Yes,” murmured the chancellor, “I shall be more at my ease; for I confess that my pronunciation — — ”

“So I hear,” interrupted Beausire.

“I will take the liberty to say to you, sir, as you seem so amiable, that I trust M. de Souza will not be annoyed at my speaking such bad Portuguese.”

“Oh, not at all, as you speak French.”

“French!” cried the chancellor; “I was born in the Rue St. Honoré.”

“Oh, that will do,” said Beausire. “Your name is Ducorneau, is it not?”

“Yes, monsieur; rather a lucky one, as it has a Spanish termination. It is very flattering to me that monsieur knew my name.”

“Oh, you are well known; so well that we did not bring a chancellor from Lisbon with us.”

“I am very grateful, monsieur; but I think M. de Souza is ringing.”

“Let us go and see.”

They found Manoël attired in a magnificent dressing-gown. Several boxes and dressing-cases, of rich appearance, were already unpacked and lying about.

“Enter,” said he to the chancellor.

“Will his excellency be angry if I answer in French?” said Ducorneau, in a low voice, to Beausire.

“Oh, no; I am sure of it.”

M. Ducorneau, therefore, paid the compliments in French.

“Oh, it is very convenient that you speak French so well, M. Ducorno,” said the ambassador.

“He takes me for a Portuguese,” thought the chancellor, with joy.

“Now,” said Manoël, “can I have supper?”

“Certainly, your excellency. The Palais Royal is only two steps from here, and I know an excellent restaurant, from which your excellency can have a good supper in a very short time.”

“Order it in your own name, if you please, M. Ducorno.”

“And if your excellency will permit me, I will add to it some bottles of capital wine.”

“Oh, our chancellor keeps a good cellar, then?” said Beausire, jokingly.

“It is my only luxury,” replied he. And now, by the wax-lights, they could remark his rather red nose and puffed cheeks.

“Very well, M. Ducorno; bring your wine, and sup with us.”

“Such an honor — — ”

“Oh, no etiquette to-night; I am only a traveler. I shall not begin to be ambassador till to-morrow; then we will talk of business.”

"Monseigneur will permit me to arrange my toilet."

"Oh, you are superb already," said Beausire.

"Yes, but this is a reception dress, and not a gala one."

"Remain as you are, monsieur, and give the time to expediting our supper."

Ducorneau, delighted, left the room to fulfil his orders. Then the three rogues, left together, began to discuss their affairs.

"Does this chancellor sleep here?" said Manoël.

"No; the fellow has a good cellar, and, I doubt not, a snug lodging somewhere or other. He is an old bachelor."

"There is a Suisse."

"We must get rid of him; and there are a few valets, whom we must replace to-morrow with our own friends."

"Who is in the kitchen department?"

"No one. The old ambassador did not live here; he had a house in the town."

"What about the strong-box?"

"Oh, on that point we must consult the chancellor; it is a delicate matter."

"I charge myself with it," said Beausire; "we are already capital friends."

"Hush! here he comes."

Ducorneau entered, quite out of breath. He had ordered the supper, and fetched six bottles of wine from his cellar, and was looking quite radiant at the thoughts of the coming repast.

"Will your excellency descend to the dining-room?"

"No, we will sup up here."

"Here is the wine, then," said Ducorneau.

"It sparkles like rubies," said Beausire, holding it to the light.

"Sit down, M. Ducorneau; my valet will wait upon us. What day did the last despatches arrive?"

"Immediately after the departure of your excellency's predecessor."

"Are the affairs of the embassy in good order?"

"Oh yes, monseigneur."

"No money difficulties? no debts?"

"Not that I know of."

"Because, if there are, we must begin by paying them."

"Oh, your excellency will have nothing of that sort to do. All the accounts were paid up three weeks ago; and the day after the departure of the late ambassador one hundred thousand francs arrived here.”

“One hundred thousand francs?” said Beausire.

“Yes, in gold.”

“So,” said Beausire, “the box contains — — ”

“100,380 francs, monsieur.”

“It is not much,” said Manoël, coldly; “but, happily, her majesty has placed funds at my disposal. I told you,” continued he, turning to Beausire, “that I thought we should need it at Paris.”

“Your excellency took wise precautions,” said Beausire, respectfully.

From the time of this important communication the hilarity of the party went on increasing. A good supper, consisting of salmon, crabs, and sweets, contributed to their satisfaction. Ducorneau, quite at his ease, ate enough for ten, and did not fail, either, in demonstrating that a Parisian could do honor to port and sherry.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MESSRS. BŒHMER AND BOSSANGE.

M. Ducorneau blessed heaven repeatedly for sending an ambassador who preferred his speaking French to Portuguese, and liked Portuguese wines better than French ones. At last, Manoël expressed a wish to go to bed; Ducorneau rose and left the room, although, it must be confessed, he found some difficulty in the operation.

It was now the turn of the valet to have supper, which he did with great good-will.

The next day the hotel assumed an air of business; all the bureaux were opened, and everything indicated life in the recently deserted place.

The report soon spread in the neighborhood that some great personages had arrived from Portugal during the night. This, although what was wanted to give them credit, could not but inspire the conspirators with some alarm; for the police had quick ears and Argus eyes. Still, they thought that by audacity, combined with prudence, they might easily keep them from becoming suspicious, until they had had time to complete their business.

Two carriages containing the other nine associates arrived, as agreed upon, and they were soon installed in their different departments.

Beausire induced Ducorneau himself to dismiss the porter, on the ground that he did not speak Portuguese. They were, therefore, in a good situation to keep off all unwelcome visitors.

About noon, Don Manoël, gaily dressed, got into a carriage, which they had hired for five hundred francs a month, and set out, with his secretary, for the residence of MM. Bœhmer and Bossange.

Their servant knocked at the door, which was secured with immense locks, and studded with great nails, like that of a prison. A servant opened it. “His Excellency the Ambassador of Portugal desires to speak to MM. Bœhmer and Bossange.”

They got out, and M. Bœhmer came to them in a few moments, and received them with a profusion of polite speeches, but, seeing that the ambassador did not deign even a smile in reply, looked somewhat disconcerted.

"His excellency does not speak or understand French, sir, and you must communicate to him through me, if you do not speak Portuguese," said Beausire.

"No, monsieur, I do not."

Manoël then spoke in Portuguese to Beausire, who, turning to M. Bœhmer, said:

"His excellency M. le Comte de Souza, ambassador from the Queen of Portugal, desires me to ask you if you have not in your possession a beautiful diamond necklace?"

Bœhmer looked at him scrutinizingly.

"A beautiful diamond necklace!" repeated he.

"The one which you offered to the Queen of France, and which our gracious queen has heard of."

"Monsieur," said Bœhmer, "is an officer of the ambassador's?"

"His secretary, monsieur."

Don Manoël was seated with the air of a great man, looking carelessly at the pictures which hung round the room.

"M. Bœhmer," said Beausire abruptly, "do you not understand what I am saying to you?"

"Yes, sir," answered Bœhmer, rather startled by the manner of the secretary.

"Because I see his excellency is becoming impatient."

"Excuse me, sir," said Bœhmer, coloring, "but I dare not show the necklace, except in my partner's presence."

"Well, sir, call your partner."

Don Manoël approached Beausire, and began again talking to him in Portuguese.

"His excellency says," interpreted he, "that he has already waited ten minutes, and that he is not accustomed to be kept waiting."

Bœhmer bowed, and rang the bell. A minute afterwards M. Bossange entered.

Bœhmer explained the matter to him, who, after looking scrutinizingly at the Portuguese, left the room with a key given him by his partner, and soon returned with a case in one hand; the other was hidden under his coat, but they distinctly saw the shining barrel of a pistol.

"However well we may look," said Manoël gravely, in Portuguese, to his companion, "these gentlemen seem to take us for pickpockets rather than ambassadors."

M. Bossange advanced, and put the case into the hands of Manoël. He opened it, and then cried angrily to his secretary:

"Monsieur, tell these gentlemen that they tire my patience! I ask for a diamond necklace, and they bring me paste. Tell them I will complain to the ministers, and will have them thrown into the Bastile, impertinent people, who play tricks upon an ambassador." And he threw down the case in such a passion that they did not need an interpretation of his speech, but began explaining most humbly that in France it was usual to show only the models of diamonds, so as not to tempt people to robbery, were they so inclined.

Manoël, with an indignant gesture, walked towards the door.

"His excellency desires me to tell you," said Beausire, "that he is sorry that people like MM. Bœhmer and Bossange, jewelers to the queen, should not know better how to distinguish an ambassador from a rogue, and that he will return to his hotel."

The jewelers began to utter most respectful protestations, but Manoël walked on, and Beausire followed him.

"To the ambassador's hotel, Rue de la Jussienne," said Beausire to the footman.

"A lost business," groaned the valet, as they set off.

"On the contrary, a safe one; in an hour these men will follow us."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE AMBASSADOR’S HOTEL.

On returning to their hotel, these gentlemen found Ducorneau dining quietly in his bureau. Beausire desired him, when he had finished, to go up and see the ambassador, and added:

“You will see, my dear chancellor, that M. de Souza is not an ordinary man.”

“I see that already.”

“His excellency,” continued Beausire, “wishes to take a distinguished position in Paris, and this residence will be insupportable to him. He will require a private house.”

“That will complicate the diplomatic business,” said Ducorneau; “we shall have to go so often to obtain his signature.”

“His excellency will give you a carriage, M. Ducorneau.”

“A carriage for me!”

“Certainly; every chancellor of a great ambassador should have a carriage. But we will talk of that afterwards. His excellency wishes to know where the strong-box is.”

“Up-stairs, close to his own room.”

“So far from you?”

“For greater safety, sir. Robbers would find greater difficulty in penetrating there, than here on the ground-floor.”

“Robbers!” said Beausire, disdainfully, “for such a little sum?”

“One hundred thousand francs!” said Ducorneau. “It is easy to see M. de Souza is rich, but there is not more kept in any ambassador’s house in Europe.”

“Shall we examine it now?” said Beausire. “I am rather in a hurry to attend to my own business.”

“Immediately, monsieur.”

They went up and the money was found all right.

Ducorneau gave his key to Beausire, who kept it for some time, pretending to admire its ingenious construction, while he cleverly took the impression of it in wax. Then he gave it back, saying, “Keep it, M. Ducorneau; it is better in your hands than in mine. Let us now go to the ambassador.”

They found Don Manoël drinking chocolate, and apparently much occupied with a paper covered with ciphers.

“Do you understand the ciphers used in the late correspondence?” said he to the chancellor.

“No, your excellency.”

“I should wish you to learn it; it will save me a great deal of trouble. What about the box?” said he to Beausire.

“Perfectly correct, like everything else with which M. Ducorneau has any connection.”

“Well, sit down, M. Ducorneau; I want you to give me some information. Do you know any honest jewelers in Paris?”

“There are MM. Bœhmer and Bossange, jewelers to the queen.”

“But they are precisely the people I do not wish to employ. I have just quitted them, never to return.”

“Have they had the misfortune to displease your excellency?”

“Seriously, M. Ducorneau.”

“Oh, if I dared speak.”

“You may.”

“I would ask how these people, who bear so high a name — — ”

“They are perfect Jews, M. Ducorneau, and their bad behavior will make them lose a million or two. I was sent by her gracious majesty to make an offer to them for a diamond necklace.”

“Oh! the famous necklace which had been ordered by the late king for Madame Dubarry?”

“You are a valuable man, sir — you know everything. Well, now, I shall not buy it.”

“Shall I interfere?”

“M. Ducorneau!”

“Oh, only as a diplomatic affair.”

“If you knew them at all.”

“Bossange is a distant relation of mine.”

At this moment a valet opened the door, and announced MM. Bœhmer and Bossange. Don Manoël rose quickly, and said in any angry tone, “Send those people away!”

The valet made a step forward. “No; you do it,” said he to his secretary.

“I beg you to allow me,” said Ducorneau; and he advanced to meet them.

“There! this affair is destined to fail,” said Manoël.

“No; Ducorneau will arrange it.”

“I am convinced he will embroil it. You said at the jewelers that I did not understand French, and Ducorneau will let out that I do.”

“I will go,” said Beausire.

“Perhaps that is equally dangerous.”

“Oh, no; only leave me to act.”

Beausire went down. Ducorneau had found the jewelers much more disposed to politeness and confidence since entering the hotel; also, on seeing an old friend, Bossange was delighted.

“You here!” said he; and he approached to embrace him.

“Ah! you are very amiable to-day, my rich cousin,” said Ducorneau.

“Oh,” said Bossange, “if we have been a little separated, forgive, and render me a service.”

“I came to do it.”

“Thanks. You are, then, attached to the embassy?”

“Yes.”

“I want advice.”

“On what?”

“On this embassy.”

“I am the chancellor.”

“That is well; but about the ambassador?”

“I come to you, on his behalf, to tell you that he begs you to leave his hotel as quickly as possible.”

The two jewelers looked at each other, disconcerted.

“Because,” continued Ducorneau, “it seems you have been uncivil to him.”

“But listen — — ”

“It is useless,” said Beausire, who suddenly appeared; “his excellency told you to dismiss them — do it.”

“But, monsieur — — ”

“I cannot listen,” said Beausire.

The chancellor took his relation by the shoulder, and pushed him out, saying, “You have spoiled your fortune.”

“Mon Dieu! how susceptible these foreigners are!”

“When one is called Souza, and has nine hundred thousand francs a year, one has a right to be anything,” said Ducorneau.

“Ah!” sighed Bossange, “I told you, Bœhmer, you were too stiff about it.”

“Well,” replied the obstinate German, “at least, if we do not get his money, he will not get our necklace.”

Ducorneau laughed. “You do not understand either a Portuguese or an ambassador, bourgeois that you are. I will tell you what they are: one ambassador, M. de Potemkin, bought every year for his queen, on the first of January, a basket of cherries which cost one hundred thousand crowns — one thousand francs a cherry. Well, M. de Souza will buy up the mines of Brazil till he finds a diamond as big as all yours put together. If it cost him twenty years of his income, what does he care? — he has no children.”

And he was going to shut the door, when Bossange said:

“Arrange this affair, and you shall have — — ”

“I am incorruptible,” said he, and closed the door.

That evening the ambassador received this letter:

“Monseigneur, — A man who waits for your orders, and desires to present you our respectful excuses, is at the door of your hotel, and at a word from your excellency he will place in the hands of one of your people the necklace of which you did us the honor to speak. Deign to receive, monseigneur, the assurances of our most profound respect.

“Bœhmer and Bossange.”

“Well,” said Manoël, on reading this note, “the necklace is ours.”

“Not so,” said Beausire; “it will only be ours when we have bought it. We must buy it; but remember, your excellency does not know French.”

“Yes, I know; but this chancellor?”

“Oh, I will send him away on some diplomatic mission.”

“You are wrong; he will be our security with these men.”

“But he will say that you know French.”

“No, he will not; I will tell him not to do so.”

“Very well, then; we will have up the man.”

The man was introduced: it was Bœhmer himself, who made many bows and excuses, and offered the necklace for examination.

“Sit down,” said Beausire; “his excellency pardons you.”

“Oh, how much trouble to sell!” sighed Bœhmer.

“How much trouble to steal!” thought Beausire.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE BARGAIN.

Then the ambassador consented to examine the necklace in detail. M. Bœhmer showed each individual beauty.

“On the whole,” said Beausire, interpreting for Manoël, “his excellency sees nothing to complain of in the necklace, but there are ten of the diamonds rather spotted.”

“Oh!” said Bœhmer.

“His excellency,” interrupted Beausire, “understands diamonds perfectly. The Portuguese nobility play with the diamonds of Brazil, as children do here with glass beads.”

“Whatever it may be, however,” said Bœhmer, “this necklace is the finest collection of diamonds in all Europe.”

“That is true,” said Manoël.

Then Beausire went on: “Well, M. Bœhmer, her majesty the Queen of Portugal has heard of this necklace, and has given M. de Souza a commission to buy it, if he approved of the diamonds, which he does. Now, what is the price?”

“1,600,000 francs.”

Beausire repeated this to the ambassador.

“It is 100,000 francs too much,” replied Manoël.

“Monseigneur,” replied the jeweler, “one cannot fix the exact price of the diamonds on a thing like this. It has been necessary, in making this collection, to undertake voyages, and make searches and inquiries which no one would believe but myself.”

“100,000 francs too dear,” repeated Manoël.

“And if his excellency says this,” said Beausire, “it must be his firm conviction, for he never bargains.”

Bœhmer was shaken. Nothing reassures a suspicious merchant so much as a customer who beats down the price. However, he said, after a minute’s thought, “I cannot consent to a deduction which will make all the difference of loss or profit to myself and my partner.”

Don Manoël, after hearing this translated, rose, and Beausire returned the case to the jeweler.

"I will, however, speak to M. Bossange about it," contained Bœhmer. "I am to understand that his excellency offers 1,500,000 francs for the necklace."

"Yes, he never draws back from what he has said."

"But, monsieur, you understand that I must consult with my partner."

"Certainly, M. Bœhmer."

"Certainly," repeated Don Manoël, after hearing this translated; "but I must have a speedy answer."

"Well, monseigneur, if my partner will accept the price, I will."

"Good."

"It then only remains, excepting the consent of M. Bossange, to settle the mode of payment."

"There will be no difficulty about that," said Beausire. "How do you wish to be paid?"

"Oh," said Bœhmer, laughing, "if ready money be possible — — "

"What do you call ready money?" said Beausire coldly.

"Oh, I know no one has a million and a half of francs ready to pay down," said Bœhmer, sighing.

"Certainly not."

"Still, I cannot consent to dispense with some ready money."

"That is but reasonable." Then, turning to Manoël: "How much will your excellency pay down to M. Bœhmer?"

"100,000 francs." Beausire repeated this.

"And when the remainder?" asked Bœhmer.

"When we shall have had time to send to Lisbon."

"Oh!" said Bœhmer, "we have a correspondent there, and by writing to him — — "

"Yes," said Beausire, laughing ironically, "write to him, and ask if M. de Souza is solvent, and if her majesty be good for 1,400,000 francs."

"We cannot, sir, let this necklace leave France forever without informing the queen; and our respect and loyalty demand that we should once more give her the refusal of it."

"It is just," said Manoël, with dignity. "I should wish a Portuguese merchant to act in the same way."

“I am very happy that monseigneur approves of my conduct. Then all is settled, subject only to the consent of M. Bossange, and the reiterated refusal of her majesty. I ask three days to settle these two points.”

“On one side,” said Beausire, “100,000 francs down, the necklace to be placed in my hands, who will accompany you to Lisbon, to the honor of your correspondents, who are also our bankers. The whole of the money to be paid in three months.”

“Yes, monseigneur,” said Bœhmer, bowing.

Manoël returned it, and the jeweler took leave.

When they were alone, Manoël said angrily to Beausire, “Please to explain what the devil you mean by this journey to Portugal? Are you mad? Why not have the jewels here in exchange for our money?”

“You think yourself too really ambassador,” replied Beausire; “you are not yet quite M. de Souza to this jeweler.”

“If he had not thought so he would not have treated.”

“Agreed; but every man in possession of 1,500,000 francs holds himself above all the ambassadors in the world; and every one who gives that value in exchange for pieces of paper wishes first to know what the papers are worth.”

“Then you mean to go to Portugal — you, who cannot speak Portuguese properly? I tell you, you are mad.”

“Not at all; you shall go yourself, if you like.”

“Thank you,” said Don Manoël. “There are reasons why I would rather not return to Portugal.”

“Well, I tell you, M. Bœhmer would never give up the diamonds for mere papers.”

“Papers signed Souza?”

“I said you thought yourself a real Souza.”

“Better say at once that we have failed,” said Manoël.

“Not at all. Come here, captain,” said Beausire to the valet; “you know what we are talking of?”

“Yes.”

“You have listened to everything?”

“Certainly.”

“Very well; do you think I have committed a folly?”

“I think you perfectly right.”

“Explain why.”

“M. Bœhmer would, on the other plan, have been incessantly watching us, and all connected with us. Now, with the money and the diamonds both in his hands, he can have no suspicion, but will set out quietly for Portugal, which, however, he will never reach. Is it not so, M. Beausire?”

“Ah, you are a lad of discernment!”

“Explain your plan,” said Manoël.

“About fifty leagues from here,” said Beausire, “this clever fellow here will come and present two pistols at the heads of our postilions, will steal from us all we have, including the diamonds, and will leave M. Bœhmer half dead with blows.”

“Oh, I did not understand exactly that,” said the valet. “I thought you would embark for Portugal.”

“And then — — ”

“M. Bœhmer, like all Germans, will like the sea, and walk on the deck. One day he may slip and fall over, and the necklace will be supposed to have perished with him.”

“Oh, I understand,” said Manoël.

“That is lucky at last.”

“Only,” replied Manoël, “for stealing diamonds one is simply sent to the Bastile, but for murder one is hanged.”

“But for stealing diamonds one may be taken; for a little push to M. Bœhmer we should never even be suspected.”

“Well, we will settle all this afterwards,” said Beausire.

“At present let us conduct our business in style, so that they may say, ‘If he was not really ambassador, at least he seemed like one.’“

CHAPTER XXX.

THE JOURNALIST’S HOUSE.

It was the day after the agreement with M. Bœhmer, and three days after the ball at the Opera. In the Rue Montorgueil, at the end of a courtyard, was a high and narrow house. The ground floor was a kind of shop, and here lived a tolerably well-known journalist. The other stories were occupied by quiet people, who lived there for cheapness. M. Reteau, the journalist, published his paper weekly. It was issued on the day of which we speak; and when M. Reteau rose at eight o’clock, his servant brought him a copy, still wet from the press. He hastened to peruse it, with the care which a tender father bestows on the virtues or failings of his offspring. When he had finished it:

“Aldegonde,” said he to the old woman, “this is a capital number; have you read it?”

“Not yet; my soup is not finished.”

“It is excellent,” repeated the journalist.

“Yes,” said she; “but do you know what they say of it in the printing-office?”

“What?”

“That you will certainly be sent to the Bastile.”

“Aldegonde,” replied Reteau, calmly, “make me a good soup, and do not meddle with literature.”

“Always the same,” said she, “rash and imprudent.”

“I will buy you some buckles with what I make to-day. Have many copies been sold yet?”

“No, and I fear my buckles will be but poor. Do you remember the number against M. de Broglie? We sold one hundred before ten o’clock; therefore this cannot be as good.”

“Do you know the difference, Aldegonde? Now, instead of attacking an individual, I attack a body; and instead of a soldier, I attack a queen.”

“The queen! Oh, then there is no fear; the numbers will sell, and I shall have my buckles.”

“Some one rings,” said Reteau.

The old woman ran to the shop, and returned a minute after, triumphant.

"One thousand copies!" said she, "there is an order!"

"In whose name?" asked Reteau, quickly.

"I do not know."

"But I want to know; run and ask."

"Oh, there is plenty of time; they cannot count a thousand copies in a minute."

"Yes, but be quick; ask the servant — is it a servant?"

"It is a porter."

"Well, ask him where he is to take them to."

Aldegonde went, and the man replied that he was to take them to the Rue Neuve St. Gilles, to the house of the Count de Cagliostro.

The journalist jumped with delight, and ran to assist in counting off the numbers.

They were not long gone when there was another ring.

"Perhaps that is for another thousand copies," cried Aldegonde. "As it is against the Austrian, every one will join in the chorus."

"Hush, hush, Aldegonde! do not speak so loud, but go and see who it is."

Aldegonde opened the door to a man, who asked if he could speak to the editor of the paper.

"What do you want to say to him?" asked Aldegonde, rather suspiciously.

The man rattled some money in his pocket, and said:

"I come to pay for the thousand copies sent for by M. le Comte de Cagliostro."

"Oh, come in!"

A young and handsome man, who had advanced just behind him, stopped him as he was about to shut the door, and followed him in.

Aldegonde ran to her master. "Come," said she, "here is the money for the thousand copies."

He went directly, and the man, taking out a small bag, paid down one hundred six-franc pieces.

Reteau counted them and gave a receipt, smiling graciously on the man, and said, "Tell the Count de Cagliostro that I shall always be at his orders, and that I can keep a secret."

"There is no need," replied the man; "M. de Cagliostro is independent. He does not believe in magnetism, and wishes to make people laugh at M. Mesmer — that is all."

"Good!" replied another voice; "we will see if we cannot turn the laugh against M. de Cagliostro;" and M. Reteau, turning, saw before him the young man we mentioned.

His glance was menacing; he had his left hand on the hilt of his sword, and a stick in his right.

"What can I do for you, sir?" said Reteau, trembling.

"You are M. Reteau?" asked the young man.

"Yes, sir."

"Journalist, and author of this article?" said the visitor, drawing the new number from his pocket.

"Not exactly the author, but the publisher," said Reteau.

"Very well, that comes to the same thing; for if you had not the audacity to write it, you have had the baseness to give it publicity. I say baseness, for, as I am a gentleman, I wish to keep within bounds even with you. If I expressed all I think, I should say that he who wrote this article is infamous, and that he who published it is a villain!"

"Monsieur!" said Reteau, growing pale.

"Now listen," continued the young man; "you have received one payment in money, now you shall have another in caning."

"Oh!" cried Reteau, "we will see about that."

"Yes, we will see," said the young man, advancing towards him; but Reteau was used to these sort of affairs, and knew the conveniences of his own house. Turning quickly round, he gained a door which shut after him, and which opened into a passage leading to a gate, through which there was an exit into the Rue Vieux Augustins. Once there, he was safe; for in this gate the key was always left, and he could lock it behind him.

But this day was an unlucky one for the poor journalist, for, just as he was about to turn the key, he saw coming towards him another young man, who, in his agitation, appeared to him like a perfect Hercules. He would have retreated, but he was now between two fires, as his first opponent had by this time discovered him, and was advancing upon him.

"Monsieur, let me pass, if you please," said Reteau to the young man who guarded the gate.

"Monsieur," cried the one who followed him, "stop the fellow, I beg!"

"Do not be afraid, M. de Charny; he shall not pass."

"M. de Taverney!" cried Charny; for it was really he who was the first comer.

Both these young men, on reading the article that morning, had conceived the same idea, because they were animated with the same sentiments, and, unknown to each other, had hastened to put it in practise. Each, however, felt a kind of displeasure at seeing the other, divining a rival in the man who had the same idea as himself. Thus it was that with a rather disturbed manner Charny had called out, “You, M. de Taverney!”

“Even so,” replied the other, in the same way; “but it seems I am come too late, and can only look on, unless you will be kind enough to open the gate.”

“Oh!” cried Reteau, “do you want to murder me, gentlemen?”

“No,” said Charny, “we do not want to murder you; but first we will ask a few questions, then we will see the end. You permit me to speak, M. de Taverney?”

“Certainly, sir; you have the precedence, having arrived first.”

Charny bowed; then, turning to Reteau, said:

“You confess, then, that you have published against the queen the playful little tale, as you call it, which appeared this morning in your paper?”

“Monsieur, it is not against the queen.”

“Good! it only wanted that.”

“You are very patient, sir!” cried Philippe, who was boiling with rage outside the gate.

“Oh, be easy, sir,” replied Charny; “he shall lose nothing by waiting.”

“Yes,” murmured Philippe; “but I also am waiting.”

Charny turned again to Reteau. “Etteniotna is Antoinette transposed — oh, do not lie, sir, or instead of beating, or simply killing you, I shall burn you alive! But tell me if you are the sole author of this?”

“I am not an informer,” said Reteau.

“Very well; that means that you have an accomplice; and, first, the man who bought a thousand copies of this infamy, the Count de Cagliostro; but he shall pay for his share, when you have paid for yours.”

“Monsieur, I do not accuse him,” said Reteau, who feared that he should encounter the anger of Cagliostro after he had done with these two.

Charny raised his cane.

“Oh, if I had a sword!” cried Reteau.

“M. Philippe, will you lend your sword to this man?”

“No, M. de Charny, I cannot lend my sword to a man like that; but I will lend you my cane, if yours does not suffice.”

“Corbleu! a cane!” cried Reteau. “Do you know that I am a gentleman?”

“Then lend me your sword, M. de Taverney; he shall have mine, and I will never touch it again!” cried Charny.

Philippe unsheathed his sword, and passed it through the railings.

“Now,” said Charny, throwing down his sword at the feet of Reteau, “you call yourself a gentleman, and you write such infamies against the Queen of France; pick up that sword, and let us see what kind of a gentleman you are.”

But Reteau did not stir; he seemed as afraid of the sword at his feet as he had been of the uplifted cane.

“Morbleu!” cried Philippe, “open the gate to me!”

“Pardon, monsieur,” said Charny, “but you acknowledged my right to be first.”

“Then be quick, for I am in a hurry to begin.”

“I wished to try other methods before resorting to this, for I am not much more fond of inflicting a caning than M. Reteau is of receiving one; but as he prefers it to fighting, he shall be satisfied;” and a cry from Reteau soon announced that Charny had begun.

The noise soon attracted old Aldegonde, who joined her voice to her master’s.

Charny minded one no more than the other; at last, however, he stopped, tired with his work.

“Now have you finished, sir?” said Philippe.

“Yes.”

“Then pray return me my sword, and let me in.”

“Oh, no, monsieur!” implored Reteau, who hoped for a protector in the man who had finished with him.

“I cannot leave monsieur outside the door,” said Charny.

“Oh, it is a murder!” cried Reteau. “Kill me right off, and have done with it!”

“Be easy,” said Charny; “I do not think monsieur will touch you.”

“You are right,” said Philippe; “you have been beaten — let it suffice; but there are the remaining numbers, which must be destroyed.”

“Oh yes!” cried Charny. “You see, two heads are better than one; I should have forgotten that. But how did you happen to come to this gate, M. de Taverney?”

"I made some inquiries in the neighborhood about this fellow, and hearing that he had this mode of escape, I thought by coming in here, and locking the gate after me, I should cut off his retreat, and make sure of him. The same idea of vengeance struck you, only more in a hurry, you came straight to his house without any inquiries, and he would have escaped you if I had not luckily been here."

"I am rejoiced that you were, M. de Taverney. Now, fellow, lead us to your press."

"It is not here," said Reteau.

"A lie!" said Charny.

"No, no," cried Philippe, "we do not want the press; the numbers are all printed and here, except those sold to M. de Cagliostro."

"Then he shall burn them before our eyes!"

And they pushed Reteau into his shop.

CHAPTER XXXI.

HOW TWO FRIENDS BECAME ENEMIES.

Aldegonde, however, had gone to fetch the guard; but before she returned they had had time to light a fire with the first numbers, and were throwing them in, one after another, as quickly as possible, when the guard appeared, followed by a crowd of ragged men, women, and boys.

Happily, Philippe and Charny knew Reteau's secret exit, so when they caught sight of the guard they made their escape through it, carrying the key with them.

Then Reteau began crying "Murder!" while Aldegonde, seeing the flames through the window, cried "Fire!"

The soldiers arrived, but finding the young men gone, and the house not on fire, went away again, leaving Reteau to bathe his bruises. But the crowd lingered about all day, hoping to see a renewal of the fun.

When Taverney and Charny found themselves in the Rue Vieux Augustins, "Monsieur," said Charny, "now we have finished that business, can I be of any use to you?"

"Thanks, sir, I was about to ask you the same question."

"Thank you, but I have private business which will probably keep me in Paris all day."

"Permit me, then, to take leave of you; I am happy to have met you."

"And I you, sir;" and the two young men bowed, but it was easy to see that all this courtesy went no further than the lips.

Philippe went towards the boulevards, while Charny turned to the river; each turned two or three times till he thought himself quite out of sight, but after walking for some time Charny entered the Rue Neuve St. Gilles, and there once more found himself face to face with Philippe.

Each had again the same idea of demanding satisfaction from the Count de Cagliostro. They could not now doubt each other's intentions, so Philippe said:

"I left you the seller, leave me the buyer; I left you the cane, leave me the sword."

"Sir," replied Charny, "you left it to me simply because I came first, and for no other reason."

"Well," replied Taverney, "here we arrive both together, and I will make no concession."

"I did not ask you for any, sir; only I will defend my right."

"And that, according to you, M. de Charny, is to make M. de Cagliostro burn his thousand copies."

"Remember, sir, that it was my idea to burn the others."

"Then I will have these torn."

"Monsieur, I am sorry to tell you that I wish to have the first turn with M. de Cagliostro."

"All that I can agree to, sir, is to take our chance. I will throw up a louis, and whoever guesses right shall be first."

"Thanks, sir, but I am not generally lucky, and should probably lose," and he stepped towards the door.

Charny stopped him.

"Stay, sir, we will soon understand each other."

"Well, sir?" answered Philippe, turning back.

"Then, before asking satisfaction of M. de Cagliostro, suppose we take a turn in the Bois de Boulogne: it will be out of our way, but perhaps we can settle our dispute there. One of us will probably be left behind, and the other be uninterrupted."

"Really, monsieur," said Philippe, "you echo my own thoughts — where shall we meet?"

"Well, if my society be not insupportable to you, we need not part. I ordered my carriage to wait for me in the Place Royale, close by here."

"Then you will give me a seat?" said Philippe.

"With the greatest pleasure;" and they walked together to the carriage, and getting in, set off for the Champs Elysées.

First, however, Charny wrote a few words on his tablets, and gave them to the footman to take to his hotel.

In less than half an hour they reached the Bois de Boulogne. The weather was lovely, and the air delightful, although the power of the sun was already felt: the fresh leaves were appearing on the trees, and the violets filled the place with their perfume.

"It is a fine day for our promenade, is it not, M. de Taverney?" said Charny.

"Beautiful, sir."

"You may go," said Charny to his coachman.

"Are you not wrong, sir, to send away your carriage? — one of us may need it."

"No, sir," replied Charny; "in this affair secrecy before everything, and once in the knowledge of a servant, we risk it being talked of all over Paris to-morrow."

"As you please, but do you think the fellow does not know what he came here for? These people know well what brings two gentlemen to the Bois de Boulogne, and even if he did not feel sure now, he will perhaps afterwards see one of us wounded, and will have no doubts left then. Is it not then better to keep him here to take back either who shall need him, than to be left, or leave me here, wounded and alone?"

"You are right, monsieur," replied Charny; and, turning to the coachman, he said, "No, stop, Dauphin; you shall wait here."

Dauphin remained accordingly, and as he perfectly guessed what was coming, he arranged his position, so as to see through the still leafless trees all that passed.

They walked on a little way, then Philippe said, "I think, M. de Charny, this is a good place."

"Excellent, monsieur," said Charny, and added: "Chevalier, if it were any one but you, I would say one word of courtesy, and we were friends again; but to you, coming from America, where they fight so well, I cannot."

"And I, sir, to you, who the other evening gained the admiration of an entire court by a glorious feat of arms, can only say, M. le Comte, do me the honor to draw your sword."

"Monsieur," said Charny, "I believe we have neither of us touched on the real cause of quarrel."

"I do not understand you, comte."

"Oh! you understand me perfectly, sir; and you blush while you deny it."

"Defend yourself," cried Philippe; their swords crossed. Philippe soon perceived that he was superior to his adversary, and therefore became as calm as though he had been only fencing, and was satisfied with defending himself without attacking.

"You spare me, sir," said Charny; "may I ask why?"

Philippe went on as before; Charny grew warm, and wished to provoke him from this sang froid, therefore he said:

“I told you, sir, that we had not touched on the real cause of the quarrel.”

Philippe did not reply.

“The true cause,” continued Charny, “why you sought a quarrel, for it was you who sought it, was, that you were jealous of me.”

Still Philippe remained silent.

“What is your intention?” again said Charny. “Do you wish to tire my arm? that is a calculation unworthy of you. Kill me if you can, but do not dally thus.”

“Yes, sir,” replied Philippe at last, “your reproach is just; the quarrel did begin with me, and I was wrong.”

“That is not the question now. You have your sword in your hand; use it for something more than mere defense.”

“Monsieur,” said Philippe, “I have the honor to tell you once more I was wrong, and that I apologize.”

But Charny was by this time too excited to appreciate the generosity of his adversary. “Oh!” said he, “I understand; you wish to play the magnanimous with me; that is it, is it not, chevalier? You wish to relate to the ladies this evening how you brought me here, and then spared my life.”

“Count,” said Philippe, “I fear you are losing your senses.”

“You wish to kill M. de Cagliostro to please the queen; and, for the same reason, you wish to turn me into ridicule.”

“Ah! this is too much,” cried Philippe, “and proves to me that you have not as generous a heart as I thought.”

“Pierce it then,” cried Charny, exposing himself as Philippe made another pass.

The sword glanced along his ribs, and the blood flowed rapidly.

“At last,” cried Charny, “I am wounded. Now I may kill you if I can.”

“Decidedly,” said Philippe, “you are mad. You will not kill me — you will only be disabled without cause, and without profit; for no one will ever know for what you have fought;” and as Charny made another pass, he dexterously sent his sword flying from his hand; then, seizing it, he broke it across his foot. “M. de Charny,” said he, “you did not require to prove to me that you were brave; you must therefore detest me very much when you fight with such fury.”

Charny did not reply, but grew visibly pale, and then tottered.

Philippe advanced to support him, but he repulsed him, saying, “I can reach my carriage.”

“At least take this handkerchief to stop the blood.”

“Willingly.”

“And my arm, sir; at the least obstacle you met you would fall, and give yourself unnecessary pain.”

“The sword has only penetrated the skin. I hope soon to be well.”

“So much the better, sir; but I warn you, that you will find it difficult to make me your adversary again.”

Charny tried to reply, but the words died on his lips. He staggered, and Philippe had but just time to catch him in his arms, and bear him half fainting to his carriage.

Dauphin, who had seen what had passed, advanced to meet him, and they put Charny in.

“Drive slowly,” said Philippe, who then took his way back to Paris, murmuring to himself, with a sigh, “She will pity him.”

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE HOUSE IN THE RUE ST. GILLES.

Philippe jumped into the first coach he saw, and told the man to drive to the Rue St. Gilles, where he stopped at the house of M. de Cagliostro.

A large carriage, with two good horses, was standing in the courtyard; the coachman was asleep, wrapped in a greatcoat of fox-skins, and two footmen walked up and down before the door.

“Does the Count Cagliostro live here?” asked Philippe.

“He is just going out.”

“The more reason to be quick, for I wish to speak to him first. Announce the Chevalier Philippe de Taverney;” and he followed the men up-stairs.

“Ask him to walk in,” said, from within, a voice at once manly and gentle.

“Excuse me, sir,” said the chevalier to a man whom we have already seen, first at the table of M. de Richelieu, then at the exhibition of M. Mesmer, in Oliva’s room, and with her at the Opera ball.

“For what, sir?” replied he.

“Because I prevent you from going out.”

“You would have needed an excuse had you been much later, for I was waiting for you.”

“For me?”

“Yes, I was forewarned of your visit.”

“Of my visit?”

“Yes; two hours ago. It is about that time, is it not, since you were coming here before, when an interruption caused you to postpone the execution of your project?”

Philippe began to experience the same strange sensation with which this man inspired every one.

“Sit down, M. de Taverney,” continued he; “this armchair was placed for you.”

“A truce to pleasantry, sir,” said Philippe, in a voice which he vainly tried to render calm.

"I do not jest, sir."

"Then a truce to charlatanism. If you are a sorcerer, I did not come to make trial of your skill; but if you are, so much the better, for you must know what I am come to say to you."

"Oh, yes, you are come to seek a quarrel."

"You know that? perhaps you also know why?"

"On account of the queen. Now, sir, I am ready to listen;" and these last words were no longer pronounced in the courteous tones of a host, but in the hard and dry ones of an adversary.

"Sir, there exists a certain publication."

"There are many publications," said Cagliostro.

"Well, this publication to-day was written against the queen."

Cagliostro did not reply.

"You know what I refer to, count?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have bought one thousand copies of it?"

"I do not deny it."

"Luckily, they have not reached your hands."

"What makes you think so, sir?"

"Because I met the porter, paid him, and sent him with them to my house; and my servant, instructed by me, will destroy them."

"You should always finish yourself the work you commence, sir. Are you sure these thousand copies are at your house?"

"Certainly."

"You deceive yourself, sir; they are here. Ah, you thought that I, sorcerer that I am, would let myself be foiled in that way. You thought it a brilliant idea to buy off my messenger. Well, I have a steward, and you see it is natural for the steward of a sorcerer to be one also. He divined that you would go to the journalist, and that you would meet my messenger, whom he afterwards followed, and threatened to make him give back the gold you had given him, if he did not follow his original instructions, instead of taking them to you. But I see you doubt."

"I do."

"Look, then, and you will believe;" and, opening an oak cabinet, he showed the astonished chevalier the thousand copies lying there.

Philippe approached the count in a menacing attitude, but he did not stir. "Sir," said Philippe, "you appear a man of courage; I call upon you to give me immediate satisfaction.”

“Satisfaction for what?”

“For the insult to the queen, of which you render yourself an accomplice while you keep one number of this vile paper.”

“Monsieur,” said Cagliostro, “you are in error; I like novelties, scandalous reports, and other amusing things, and collect them, that I may remember at a later day what I should otherwise forget.”

“A man of honor, sir, does not collect infamies.”

“But, if I do not think this an infamy?”

“You will allow at least that it is a lie.”

“You deceive yourself, sir. The queen was at M. Mesmer’s.”

“It is false, sir.”

“You mean to tell me I lie?”

“I do.”

“Well, I will reply in a few words — I saw her there.”

“You saw her!”

“As plainly as I now see you.”

Philippe looked full at Cagliostro. “I still say, sir, that you lie.”

Cagliostro shrugged his shoulders, as though he were talking to a madman.

“Do you not hear me, sir?” said Philippe.

“Every word.”

“And do you not know what giving the lie deserves?”

“Yes, sir; there is a French proverb which says it merits a box on the ears.”

“Well, sir, I am astonished that your hand has not been already raised to give it, as you are a French gentleman, and know the proverb.”

“Although a French gentleman, I am a man, and love my brother.”

“Then you refuse me satisfaction?”

“I only pay what I owe.”

“Then you will compel me to take satisfaction in another manner.”

“How?”

“I exact that you burn the numbers before my eyes, or I will proceed with you as with the journalist.”

“Oh! a beating,” said Cagliostro, laughing.

“Neither more nor less, sir. Doubtless you can call your servants.”

“Oh, I shall not call my servants; it is my own business. I am stronger than you, and if you approach me with your cane, I shall take you in my arms and throw you across the room, and shall repeat this as often as you repeat your attempt.”

“Well, M. Hercules, I accept the challenge,” said Philippe, throwing himself furiously upon Cagliostro, who, seizing him round the neck and waist with a grasp of iron, threw him on a pile of cushions, which lay some way off, and then remained standing as coolly as ever.

Philippe rose as pale as death. “Sir,” said he, in a hoarse voice, “you are in fact stronger than I am, but your logic is not as strong as your arm; and you forgot, when you treated me thus, that you gave me the right to say, ‘Defend yourself, count, or I will kill you.’“

Cagliostro did not move.

“Draw your sword, I tell you, sir, or you are a dead man.”

“You are not yet sufficiently near for me to treat you as before, and I will not expose myself to be killed by you, like poor Gilbert.”

“Gilbert!” cried Philippe, reeling back. “Did you say Gilbert?”

“Happily you have no gun this time, only a sword.”

“Monsieur,” cried Philippe, “you have pronounced a name — — ”

“Which has awakened a terrible echo in your remembrance, has it not? A name that you never thought to hear again, for you were alone with the poor boy, in the grotto of Açores, when you assassinated him.”

“Oh!” said Philippe, “will you not draw?”

“If you knew,” said Cagliostro, “how easily I could make your sword fly from your hand!”

“With your sword?”

“Yes, with my sword, if I wished.”

“Then try.”

“No, I have a still surer method.”

“For the last time, defend yourself,” said Philippe, advancing towards him.

Then the count took from his pocket a little bottle, which he uncorked, and threw the contents in Philippe’s face. Scarcely had it touched him, when he reeled, let his sword drop, and fell senseless.

Cagliostro picked him up, put him on a sofa, waited for his senses to return, and then said, “At your age, chevalier, we should have done with follies; cease, therefore, to act like a foolish boy, and listen to me.”

Philippe made an effort to shake off the torpor which still held possession of him, and murmured, “Oh, sir, do you call these the weapons of a gentleman?”

Cagliostro shrugged his shoulders. “You repeat forever the same word,” he said; “when we of the nobility have opened our mouths wide enough to utter the word gentleman, we think we have said everything. What do you call the weapons of a gentleman? Is it your sword, which served you so badly against me, or is it your gun, which served you so well against Gilbert? What makes some men superior to others? Do you think that it is that high-sounding word gentleman? No; it is first reason, then strength, most of all, science. Well, I have used all these against you. With my reason I braved your insults, with my strength I conquered yours, and with my science I extinguished at once your moral and physical powers. Now I wish to show you that you have committed two faults in coming here with menaces in your mouth. Will you listen to me?”

“You have overpowered me,” replied Philippe; “I can scarcely move. You have made yourself master of my muscles and of my mind, and then you ask me if I will listen!”

Then Cagliostro took down from the chimney-piece another little gold phial. “Smell this, chevalier,” said he.

Philippe obeyed, and it seemed to him that the cloud which hung over him dispersed. “Oh, I revive!” he cried.

“And you feel free and strong?”

“Yes.”

“With your full powers and memory of the past?”

“Yes.”

“Then this memory gives me an advantage over you.”

“No,” said Philippe, “for I acted in defense of a vital and sacred principle.”

“What do you mean?”

“I defended the monarchy.”

“You defended the monarchy! — you, who went to America to defend a republic. Ah, mon Dieu! be frank; it is not the monarchy you defend.”

Philippe colored.

“To love those who disdain you,” continued Cagliostro, “who deceive and forget you, is the attribute of great souls. It is the law of the Scriptures to return good for evil. You are a Christian, M. de Taverney.”

“Monsieur,” cried Philippe, “not a word more; if I did not defend the monarchy, I defended the queen, that is to say, an innocent woman, and to be respected even if she were not so, for it is a divine law not to attack the weak.”

“The weak! the queen — you call a feeble being her to whom twenty-eight million human beings bow the knee!”

“Monsieur, they calumniate her.”

“How do you know?”

“I believe it.”

“Well, I believe the contrary; we have each the right to think as we please.”

“But you act like an evil genius.”

“Who tells you so?” cried Cagliostro, with sparkling eyes. “How, have you the temerity to assume that you are right, and that I am wrong? You defend royalty; well, I defend the people. You say, render to Cæsar the things which are Cæsar’s; and I say, render to God the things that are God’s. Republican of America, I recall you to the love of the people, to the love of equality. You trample on the people to kiss the hands of a queen; I would throw down a queen to elevate a people. I do not disturb you in your adoration; leave me in peace at my work. You say to me, die, for you have offended the object of my worship; and I say to you, who combat mine, live, for I feel myself so strong in my principles, that neither you nor any one else can retard my progress for an instant.”

“Sir, you frighten me,” said Philippe; “you show me the danger in which our monarchy is.”

“Then be prudent, and shun the opening gulf.”

“You know,” replied Philippe, “that I would sooner entomb myself in it, than see those whom I defend in danger.”

“Well, I have warned you.”

“And I,” said Philippe, “I, who am but a feeble individual, will use against you the arms of the weak. I implore you, with tearful eyes and joined hands, to be merciful towards those whom you pursue. I ask you to spare me the remorse of knowing you were acting against this poor queen, and not preventing you. I beg you to destroy this publication, which would make a woman shed tears. I ask you, by the love which you have guessed, or I swear that with this sword, which has proved so powerless against you, I will pierce myself before your eyes!”

"Ah!" murmured Cagliostro, "why are they not all like you? Then I would join them, and they should not perish."

"Monsieur, monsieur, I pray you to reply to me!"

"See, then," said Cagliostro, "if all the thousand numbers be there, and burn them yourself."

Philippe ran to the cabinet, took them out, and threw them on the fire. "Adieu, monsieur!" then he said; "a hundred thanks for the favor you have granted me."

"I owed the brother," said Cagliostro, when he had gone, "some compensation for all I made the sister endure."

Then he called for his carriage.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE HEAD OF THE TAVERNEY FAMILY.

While this was passing in the Rue St. Gilles, the elder M. Taverney was walking in his garden, followed by two footmen, who carried a chair, with which they approached him every five minutes, that he might rest. While doing so, a servant came to announce the chevalier.

"My son," said the old man, "come, Philippe, you arrive àpropos — my heart is full of happy thoughts; but how solemn you look!"

"Do I, sir?"

"You know already the results of that affair?"

"What affair?"

The old man looked to see that no one was listening, then said, "I speak of the ball."

"I do not understand."

"Oh, the ball at the Opera."

Philippe colored.

"Sit down," continued his father; "I want to talk to you. It seems that you, so timid and delicate at first, now compromise her too much."

"Whom do you mean, sir?"

"Pardieu! do you think I am ignorant of your escapade, both together at the Opera ball? It was pretty."

"Sir, I protest — — "

"Oh, do not be angry; I only mean to warn you for your good. You are not careful enough; you were seen there with her."

"I was seen?"

"Pardieu! had you, or not, a blue domino?"

Philippe was about to explain that he had not, and did not know what his father meant, but he thought to himself, "It is of no use to explain to him; he never believes me. Besides, I wish to learn more."

"You see," continued the old man, triumphantly, "you were recognized. Indeed, M. de Richelieu, who was at the ball in spite of his eighty-four years, wondered who the blue domino could be with whom the queen was walking, and he could only suspect you, for he knew all the others.”

“And pray how does he say he recognized the queen?”

“Not very difficult, when she took her mask off. Such audacity as that surpasses all imagination; she must really be mad about you. But take care, chevalier; you have jealous rivals to fear; it is an envied post to be favorite of the queen, when the queen is the real king. Pardon my moralizing, but I do not wish that the breath of chance should blow down what you have reared so skilfully.”

Philippe rose; the conversation was hateful to him, but a kind of savage curiosity impelled him to hear everything.

“We are already envied,” continued the old man; “that is natural, but we have not yet attained the height to which we shall rise. To you will belong the glory of raising our name; and now you are progressing so well, only be prudent, or you will fail after all. Soon, however, you must ask for some high post, and obtain for me a lord-lieutenancy not too far from Paris. Then you can have a peerage, and become a duke and lieutenant-general. In two years, if I am still alive — — ”

“Enough, enough!” groaned Philippe.

“Oh, if you are satisfied with that, I am not. You have a whole life before you; I, perhaps, only a few months. However, I do not complain; God gave me two children, and if my daughter has been useless in repairing our fortunes, you will make up for it. I see in you the great Taverney, and you inspire me with respect, for your conduct has been admirable; you show no jealousy, but leave the field apparently open to every one, while you really hold it alone.”

“I do not understand you,” replied Philippe.

“Oh, no modesty; it was exactly the conduct of M. Potemkin, who astonished the world with his fortunes. He saw that Catherine loved variety in her amours; that, if left free, she would fly from flower to flower, returning always to the sweetest and most beautiful; but that, if pursued, she would fly right away. He took his part, therefore; he even introduced new favorites to his sovereign, to weary her out with their number; but through and after the quickly succeeding reigns of the twelve Cæsars, as they were ironically called, Potemkin in reality was supreme.”

“What incomprehensible infamies!” murmured poor Philippe. But the old man went on:

“According to his system, however, you have been still a little wrong. He never abandoned his surveillance, and you are too lax in this.”

Philippe replied only by shrugging his shoulders. He really began to think his father was crazy.

“Ah! you thought I did not see your game. You are already providing a successor, for you have divined that there is no stability in the queen’s amours, and in the event of her changing, you wish not to be quite thrown aside; therefore you make friends with M. de Charny, who might otherwise, when his turn comes, exile you, as you now might MM. de Coigny, Vaudreuil, and others.”

Philippe, with an angry flush, said:

“Once more, enough; I am ashamed to have listened so long. Those who say that the Queen of France is a Messalina are criminal calumniators.”

“I tell you,” said the old man, “no one can hear, and I approve your plan. M. de Charny will repay your kindness some day.”

“Your logic is admirable, sir; and M. de Charny is so much my favorite that I have just passed my sword through his ribs.”

“What!” cried the old man, somewhat frightened at his son’s flashing eyes, “you have not been fighting?”

“Yes, sir; that is my method of conciliating my successors. And he turned to go away.

“Philippe, you jest.”

“I do not, sir.”

The old man rose, and tottered off to the house.

“Quick,” said he to the servant; “let a man on horseback go at once and ask after M. de Charny, who has been wounded, and let him be sure to say he comes from me.” Then he murmured to himself, “Mine is still the only head in the family.”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE STANZAS OF M. DE PROVENCE.

While these events were passing in Paris and in Versailles, the king, tranquil as usual, sat in his study, surrounded by maps and plans, and traced new paths for the vessels of La Pérouse.

A slight knock at his door roused him from his study, and a voice said, “May I come in, brother?”

“The Comte de Provence,” growled the king, discontentedly. “Enter.”

A short person came in.

“You did not expect me, brother?” he said.

“No, indeed.”

“Do I disturb you?”

“Have you anything particular to say?”

“Such a strange report — — ”

“Oh, some scandal?”

“Yes, brother.”

“Which has amused you?”

“Because it is so strange.”

“Something against me?”

“Should I laugh if it were?”

“Then against the queen?”

“Sire, imagine that I was told quite seriously that the queen slept out the other night.”

“That would be very sad if it were true,” replied the king.

“But it is not true, is it?”

“No.”

“Nor that the queen was seen waiting outside the gate at the reservoirs?”

“No.”

“The day, you know, that you ordered the gates to be shut at eleven o’clock?”

“I do not remember.”

“Well, brother, they pretend that the queen was seen arm-in-arm with M. d’Artois at half-past twelve that night.”

“Where?”

“Going to a house which he possesses behind the stables. Has not your majesty heard this report?”

“Yes, you took care of that.”

“How, sire? — what have I done?”

“Some verses which were printed in the *Mercury*.”

“Some verses!” said the count, growing red.

“Oh, yes; you are a favorite of the Muses.”

“Not I, sire.”

“Oh, do not deny it; I have the manuscript in your writing! Now, if you had informed yourself of what the queen really did that day, instead of writing these lines against her, and consequently against me, you would have written an ode in her favor. Perhaps the subject does not inspire you; but I should have liked a bad ode better than a good satire.”

“Sire, you overwhelm me; but I trust you will believe I was deceived, and did not mean harm.”

“Perhaps.”

“Besides, I did not say I believed it; and then, a few verses are nothing. Now, a pamphlet like one I have just seen — — ”

“A pamphlet?”

“Yes, sire; and I want an order for the Bastile for the author of it.”

The king rose. “Let me see it,” he said.

“I do not know if I ought.”

“Certainly you ought. Have you got it with you?”

“Yes, sire;” and he drew from his pocket “The History of the Queen Etteniotna,” one of the fatal numbers which had escaped from Philippe and Charny.

The king glanced over it rapidly. “Infamous!” he cried.

“You see, sire, they pretend the queen went to M. Mesmer’s.”

“Well, she did go.”

“She went?”

“Authorized by me.”

“Oh, sire!”

“That is nothing against her; I gave my consent.”

“Did your majesty intend that she should experimentalize on herself?”

The king stamped with rage as the count said this; he was reading one of the most insulting passages — the history of her contortions, voluptuous disorder, and the attention she had excited.

“Impossible!” he cried, growing pale; and he rang the bell. “Oh, the police shall deal with this! Fetch M. de Crosne.”

“Sire, it is his day for coming here, and he is now waiting.”

“Let him come in.”

“Shall I go, brother?” said the count.

“No; remain. If the queen be guilty, you are one of the family, and must know it; if innocent, you, who have suspected her, must hear it.”

M. de Crosne entered, and bowed, saying, “The report is ready, sire.”

“First, sir,” said the king, “explain how you allow such infamous publications against the queen.”

“Etteniotna?” asked M. de Crosne.

“Yes.”

“Well, sire, it is a man called Reteau.”

“You know his name, and have not arrested him!”

“Sire, nothing is more easy. I have an order already prepared in my portfolio.”

“Then why is it not done?”

M. de Crosne looked at the count.

“I see, M. de Crosne wishes me to leave,” said he.

“No,” replied the king, “remain. And you, M. de Crosne, speak freely.”

“Well, sire, I wished first to consult your majesty whether you would not rather give him some money, and send him away to be hanged elsewhere.”

“Why?”

“Because, sire, if these men tell lies, the people are glad enough to see them whipped, or even hanged; but if they chance upon a truth — — ”

“A truth! It is true that the queen went to M. Mesmer’s, but I gave her permission.”

“Oh, sire!” cried M. de Crosne.

His tone of sincerity struck the king more than anything M. de Provence had said; and he answered, “I suppose, sir, that was no harm.”

“No, sire; but her majesty has compromised herself.”

“M. de Crosne, what have your police told you?”

“Sire, many things, which, with all possible respect for her majesty, agree in many points with this pamphlet.”

"Let me hear."

"That the queen went in a common dress, in the middle of this crowd, and alone."

"Alone!" cried the king.

"Yes, sire."

"You are deceived, M. de Crosne."

"I do not think so, sire."

"You have bad reporters, sir."

"So exact, that I can give your majesty a description of her dress, of all her movements, of her cries — — "

"Her cries!"

"Even her sighs were observed, sire."

"It is impossible she could have so far forgotten what is due to me and to herself."

"Oh, yes," said the Comte de Provence; "her majesty is surely incapable — — "

Louis XVI. interrupted him. "Sir," said he, to M. de Crosne, "you maintain what you have said?"

"Unhappily, yes, sire."

"I will examine into it further," said the king, passing his handkerchief over his forehead, on which the drops hung from anxiety and vexation. "I did permit the queen to go, but I ordered her to take with her a person safe, irreproachable, and even holy."

"Ah," said M. de Crosne, "if she had but done so — — "

"Yes," said the count; "if a lady like Madame de Lamballe for instance — — "

"It was precisely she whom the queen promised to take."

"Unhappily, sire, she did not do so."

"Well," said the king, with agitation; "if she has disobeyed me so openly I ought to punish, and I will punish; only some doubts still remain on my mind; these doubts you do not share; that is natural; you are not the king, husband, and friend of her whom they accuse. However, I will proceed to clear the affair up." He rang. "Let some one see," said he to the person who came, "where Madame de Lamballe is."

"Sire, she is walking in the garden with her majesty and another lady."

"Beg her to come to me. Now, gentlemen, in ten minutes we shall know the truth."

All were silent.

M. de Crosne was really sad, and the count put on an affectation of it which might have solemnized Momus himself.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE PRINCESS DE LAMBALLE.

The Princesse de Lamballe entered beautiful and calm. Her hair drawn back from her noble forehead, her dark penciled eyebrows, her clear blue eyes and beautiful lips, and her unrivaled figure, formed a lovely tout ensemble. She seemed always surrounded by an atmosphere of virtue and grace.

The king looked at her with a troubled expression, dreading what he was about to hear; then bowing, said, “Sit down, princess.”

“What does your majesty desire?” asked she, in a sweet voice.

“Some information, princess: what day did you last go with the queen to Paris?”

“Wednesday, sire.”

“Pardon me, cousin,” said Louis XVI.; “but I wish to know the exact truth.”

“You will never hear anything else from me, sire.”

“What did you go there for?”

“I went to M. Mesmer’s, Place Vendôme.”

The two witnesses trembled. The king colored with delight.

“Alone?” asked the king.

“No, sire; with the queen.”

“With the queen?” cried Louis, seizing her hand.

“Yes, sire.”

M. de Provence and M. de Crosne looked stupefied.

“Your majesty had authorized the queen to go; at least, so she told me,” continued the princess.

“It was true, cousin: gentlemen, I breathe again; Madame de Lamballe never tells a falsehood.”

“Never, sire.”

“Oh, never, sire,” said M. de Crosne, with perfect sincerity. “But will you permit me, sire?”

“Certainly, monsieur; question, search as much as you please; I place the princess at your disposal.”

Madame de Lamballe smiled. “I am ready,” she said.

“Madame,” said the lieutenant of police, “have the goodness to tell his majesty what you did there, and how the queen was dressed.”

“She had on a dress of gray taffeta, a mantle of embroidered muslin, an ermine muff, and a rose-colored velvet bonnet, trimmed with black.”

M. de Crosne looked astonished. It was a totally different dress from that which he had had described to him. The Comte de Provence bit his lips with vexation, and the king rubbed his hands.

“What did you do on entering?” asked he.

“Sire, you are right to say on entering, for we had hardly entered the room — — ”

“Together?”

“Yes, sire; and we could scarcely have been seen, for every one was occupied with the experiments going on, when a lady approached the queen, and, offering her a mask, implored her to turn back.”

“And you stopped?”

“Yes, sire.”

“You never went through the rooms?” asked M. de Crosne.

“No, monsieur.”

“And you never quitted the queen?” asked the king.

“Not for a moment, sire. Her majesty never left my arm.”

“Now!” cried the king, “what do you say, M. de Crosne? and you, brother?”

“It is extraordinary, quite supernatural,” said the count, who affected a gaiety which could not conceal his disappointment.

“There is nothing supernatural,” said M. de Crosne, who felt real remorse: “what Madame de Lamballe says is undoubtedly true; therefore my informants must have been mistaken.”

“Do you speak seriously, sir?” asked the count.

“Perfectly, monseigneur. Her majesty did what Madame de Lamballe states, and nothing more, I feel convinced; my agents were, somehow or other, deceived. As for this journalist, I will immediately send the order for his imprisonment.”

Madame de Lamballe looked from one to the other with an expression of innocent curiosity.

“One moment,” said the king; “you spoke of a lady who came to stop you; tell us who she was?”

“Her majesty seemed to know her, sire.”

“Because, cousin, I must speak to this person; then we shall learn the key to this mystery.”

“That is my opinion also, sire,” said M. de Crosne.

“Did the queen tell you that she knew this person?” said the count.

“She told me so, monseigneur.”

“My brother means to say that you probably know her name.”

“Madame de la Motte Valois.”

“That intriguer!” cried the king.

“Diable!” said the count; “she will be difficult to interrogate: she is cunning.”

“We will be as cunning as she,” said M. de Crosne.

“I do not like such people about the queen,” said Louis; “she is so good that all the beggars crowd round her.”

“Madame de la Motte is a true Valois,” said the princess.

“However that may be, I will not see her here. I prefer depriving myself of the pleasure of hearing the queen’s innocence confirmed, to doing that.”

“But you must see her, sire,” said the queen, entering at that moment, pale with anger, beautiful with a noble indignation. “It is not now for you to say, ‘I do, or I do not wish to see her.’ She is a witness from whom the intelligence of my accusers,” said she, looking at her brother-in-law, “and the justice of my judges,” turning to the king and M. de Crosne, “must draw the truth. I, the accused, demand that she be heard.”

“Madame,” said the king, “we will not do Madame de la Motte the honor of sending for her to give evidence either for or against you. I cannot stake your honor against the veracity of this woman.”

“You need not send for her, she is here.”

“Here!” cried the king.

“Sire, you know I went to see her one day; that day of which so many things were said,” and she looked again at the Comte de Provence, who felt ready to sink through the ground; “and I then dropped at her house a box, containing a portrait, which she was to return to me to-day, and she is here.”

“No, no,” said the king; “I am satisfied, and do not wish to see her.”

“But I am not satisfied, and shall bring her in. Besides, why this repugnance? What has she done? If there be anything, tell me; you, M. de Crosne? you know everything.”

“I know nothing against this lady,” replied he.

“Really?”

“Certainly not; she is poor, and perhaps ambitious, but that is all.”

“If there be no more than that against her, the king can surely admit her.”

“I do not know why,” said Louis; “but I have a presentiment that this woman will be the cause of misfortune to me.”

“Oh! sire, that is superstition; pray fetch her, Madame de Lamballe.”

Five minutes after, Jeanne, with a timid air, although with a distinguished appearance, entered the room.

Louis XVI., strong in his antipathies, had turned his back towards her, and was leaning his head on his hands, seeming to take no longer a part in the conversation. The Comte de Provence cast on her a look which, had her modesty been real, would have increased her confusion; but it required much more than that to trouble Jeanne.

“Madame,” said the queen, “have the goodness to tell the king exactly what passed the other day at M. Mesmer’s.”

Jeanne did not speak.

“It requires no consideration,” continued the queen; “we want nothing but the simple truth.”

Jeanne understood immediately that the queen had need of her, and knew that she could clear her in a moment by speaking the simple truth; but she felt inclined to keep her secret.

“Sire,” said she, “I went to see M. Mesmer from curiosity, like the rest of the world. The spectacle appeared to me rather a coarse one; I turned and suddenly saw her majesty entering, whom I had already had the honor of seeing, but without knowing her till her generosity revealed her rank. It seemed to me that her majesty was out of place in this room, where much suffering and many ridiculous exhibitions were going on. I beg pardon for having taken it on myself to judge; it was a woman’s instinct, but I humbly beg pardon if I passed the bounds of proper respect.” She seemed overcome with emotion as she concluded.

Every one but the king was pleased.

Madame de Lamballe thought her conduct delicate, and herself timid, intelligent, and good.

The queen thanked her by a look.

“Well,” she said, “you have heard, sire.”

He did not move, but said, “I did not need her testimony.”

“I was told to speak,” said Jeanne timidly, “and I obeyed.”

"It is enough," answered he; "when the queen says a thing she needs no witnesses to confirm her; and when she has my approbation, and she has it, she need care for that of no one else."

He cast an overwhelming look on his brother, and kissing the hands of the queen and the princess, and begging pardon of the latter for having disturbed her for nothing, made a very slight bow to Jeanne.

The ladies then left the room.

"Brother," said Louis to the count, "now I will detain you no longer; I have work to do with M. de Crosne. You have heard your sister's complete justification, and it is easy to see you are as pleased as myself. Pray sit down, M. de Crosne."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE QUEEN.

The queen, after leaving the king, felt deeply the danger she had been so nearly incurring. She was therefore pleased with Jeanne, who had been the means of preventing it, and said to her, with a gracious smile:

"It is really fortunate, madame, that you prevented my prolonging my stay at M. Mesmer's, for only think, they have taken advantage of my being there to say that I was under the influence of the magnetism."

"But," said Madame de Lamballe, "it is very strange that the police should have been so deceived, and have affirmed that they saw the queen in the inner room."

"It is strange," said the queen; "and M. de Crosne is an honest man, and would not willingly injure me; but his agents may have been bought. I have enemies, dear Lamballe. Still there must have been some foundation for this tale. This infamous libel represents me as intoxicated, and overcome to such a degree by the magnetic fluid, that I lost all control over myself, and all womanly reserve. Did any such scene take place, Madame la Comtesse? Was there any one who behaved like this?"

Jeanne colored; the secret once told, she lost all the fatal influence which she could now exercise over the queen's destiny; therefore she again resolved to keep silent on this point.

"Madame," said she, "there was a woman much agitated who attracted great attention by her contortions and cries."

"Probably some actress or loose character."

"Possibly, madame."

"Countess, you replied very well to the king, and I will not forget you. How have you advanced in your own affairs?"

At this moment Madame de Misery came in, to say that Mademoiselle de Taverney wished to know if her majesty would receive her.

"Assuredly," said the queen. "How ceremonious you always are, Andrée; why do you stand so much upon etiquette?"

"Your majesty is too good to me."

Madame de Lamballe now availed herself of Andrée’s entrance to take leave.

“Well, Andrée,” the queen then said, “here is this lady whom we went to see the other day.”

“I recognize madame,” said Andrée, bowing.

“Do you know what they have been saying of me?”

“Yes, madame; M. de Provence has been repeating the story.”

“Oh! no doubt; therefore we will leave that subject. Countess, we were speaking of you — who protects you now?”

“You, madame,” replied Jeanne, boldly, “since you permit me to come and kiss your hand. Few people,” she continued, “dared to protect me when I was in obscurity; now that I have been seen with your majesty, every one will be anxious to do so.”

“Then,” said the queen, “no one has been either brave enough or corrupt enough to protect you for yourself?”

“I had first Madame de Boulainvilliers, a brave protector; then her husband, a corrupt one; but since my marriage no one. Oh yes, I forget one brave man — a generous prince.”

“Prince, countess! who is it?”

“Monsieur the Cardinal de Rohan.”

“My enemy,” said the queen, smiling.

“Your enemy! Oh, madame!”

“It seems you are astonished that a queen should have an enemy. It is evident you have not lived at court.”

“But, madame, he adores you. The devotion of the cardinal equals his respect for you.”

“Oh, doubtless,” said the queen, with a hearty laugh; “that is why he is my enemy.”

Jeanne looked surprised.

“And you are his protégée,” continued the queen; “tell me all about it.”

“It is very simple; his eminence has assisted me in the most generous, yet the most considerate, manner.”

“Good; Prince Louis is generous; no one can deny that. But do you not think, Andrée, that M. le Cardinal also adores this pretty countess a little? Come, countess, tell us.” And Marie Antoinette laughed again in her frank, joyous manner.

"All this gaiety must be put on," thought Jeanne. So she answered, in a grave tone, "Madame, I have the honor to affirm to your majesty that M. de Rohan — — "

"Well, since you are his friend, ask him what he did with some hair of mine which he bribed a certain hair-dresser to steal; and which trick cost the poor man dear, for he lost my custom."

"Your majesty surprises me; M. de Rohan did that?"

"Oh, yes; all his adoration, you know. After having hated me at Vienna, and having employed every means to try and prevent my marriage, he at last began to perceive that I was a woman, and his queen, and that he had offended me forever. Then this dear prince began to fear for his future, and, like all of his profession, who seem most fond of those whom they most fear, and as he knew me young and believed me foolish and vain, he turned — he became a professed admirer, and began with sighs and glances. He adores me, does he not, Andrée?"

"Madame!"

"Oh! Andrée will not compromise herself, but I say what I please; at least I may have that advantage from being a queen. So it is a settled thing that the cardinal adores me, and you may tell him, countess, that he has my permission."

Jeanne, instead of seeing in all this only the angry disdain of a noble character, which she was incapable of appreciating, thought it all pique against M. de Rohan, hiding another feeling for him, and therefore began to defend him with all her eloquence.

The queen listened.

"Good! she listens," thought Jeanne, and did not again understand that she listened through generosity, and through pleasure at anything so novel as to hear any person defend one of whom the sovereign chose to speak ill, and felt pleased with her, thinking she saw a heart where none was placed.

All at once a joyous voice was heard near, and the queen said, "Here is the Comte d'Artois."

When he entered, the queen introduced the countess to him.

"Pray do not let me send you away, Madame la Comtesse," said he, as Jeanne made a move to depart.

The queen also requested her to stay. "You have returned from the wolf-hunt, then?" she said.

"Yes, sister, and have had good sport; I have killed seven. I am not sure," continued he, laughing, "but they say so. However, do you know I have gained seven hundred francs?"

"How?"

"Why, they pay a hundred francs a head for these beasts. It is dear, but I would give two hundred of them just now for the head of a certain journalist."

"Ah! you know the story?"

"M. de Provence told me."

"He is indefatigable. But tell me how he related it."

"So as to make you whiter than snow, or Venus Aphroditus. It seems you came out of it gloriously; you are fortunate."

"Oh, you call that fortunate. Do you hear him, Andrée?"

"Yes, for you might have gone alone, without Madame de Lamballe; and you might not have had Madame de la Motte there to stop your entrance."

"Ah! you know that too?"

"Oh yes; the count told everything. Then you might not have had Madame de la Motte at hand to give her testimony. You will tell me, doubtless, that virtue and innocence are like the violet which does not require to be seen in order to be recognized; but still I say you are fortunate."

"Badly proved."

"I will prove it still better. Saved so well from the unlucky scrape of the cabriolet, saved from this affair, and then the ball," whispered he in her ear.

"What ball?"

"The ball at the Opera."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean the ball at the Opera; but I beg pardon, I should not have mentioned it."

"Really, brother, you puzzle me; I know nothing about the ball at the Opera."

The words "ball" and "Opera" caught Jeanne's ear, and she listened intently.

"I am dumb," said the prince.

"But, count, I insist on knowing what it means."

"Oh, pray allow me to let it drop."

"Do you want to disoblige me?"

"No, sister; but I have said quite enough for you to understand."

"You have told me nothing."

"Oh, sister, it is needless with me."

"But really I am in earnest."

"You wish me to speak?"

"Immediately."

"Not here," said he, looking at the others.

"Yes, here; there cannot be too many at such an explanation."

"Then you mean to say you were not at the last ball?"

"I!" cried the queen, "at the ball at the Opera?"

"Hush, I beg."

"No, I will not hush; I will speak it aloud. You say I was at the ball?"

"Certainly I do."

"Perhaps you saw me?" she said ironically.

"Yes, I did."

"Me?"

"Yes, you."

"Oh, it is too much! Why did you not speak to me?"

"Ma foi! I was just going to do so, when the crowd separated us."

"You are mad!"

"I should not have spoken of it. I have been very foolish."

The queen rose, and walked up and down the room in great agitation.

Andrée trembled with fear and disquietude, and Jeanne could hardly keep from laughing.

Then the queen stopped, and said:

"My friend, do not jest any more; you see, I am so passionate that I have lost my temper already. Tell me at once that you were joking with me."

"I will, if you please, sister."

"Be serious, Charles. You have invented all this, have you not?"

He winked at the ladies, and said, "Oh, yes, of course."

"You do not understand me, brother!" cried the queen vehemently. "Say yes or no. Do not tell falsehoods; I only want the truth!"

"Well, then, sister," said he, in a low voice, "I have told the truth, but I am sorry I spoke."

"You saw me there?"

"As plain as I see you now; and you saw me."

The queen uttered a cry, and, running up to Andrée and Jeanne, cried, “Ladies, M. le Comte d’Artois affirms that he saw me at the ball at the Opera; let him prove it.”

“Well,” said he, “I was with M. de Richelieu and others, when your mask fell off.”

“My mask!”

“I was about to say, ‘This is too rash, sister,’ but the gentleman with you drew you away so quickly.”

“Oh, mon Dieu! you will drive me mad! What gentleman?”

“The blue domino.”

The queen passed her hand over her eyes.

“What day was this?” she asked.

“Saturday. The next day I set off to hunt, before you were up.”

“What time do you say you saw me?”

“Between two and three.”

“Decidedly one of us is mad!”

“Oh, it is I. It is all a mistake. Do not be so afraid; there is no harm done. At first I thought you were with the king; but the blue domino spoke German, and he does not.”

“Well, brother, on Saturday I went to bed at eleven.”

The count bowed, with an incredulous smile.

The queen rang. “Madame de Misery shall tell you.”

“Why do you not call Laurent also?” said he, laughing.

“Oh!” cried the queen in a rage, “not to be believed!”

“My dear sister, if I believed you, others would not.”

“What others?”

“Those who saw you as well as myself.”

“Who were they?”

“M. Philippe de Taverney, for instance.”

“My brother?” cried Andrée.

“Yes; shall we ask him?”

“Immediately.”

“Mon Dieu!” murmured Andrée, “my brother a witness!”

“Yes; I wish it;” and she went to seek him at his father’s.

He was just leaving, after the scene we have described with his father, when the messenger met him. He came quickly, and Marie Antoinette turned to him at once.

"Sir," said she, "are you capable of speaking the truth?"

"Incapable of anything else, madame."

"Well, then, say frankly, have you seen me at any public place within the last week?"

"Yes, madame."

All hearts beat so that you might have heard them.

"Where?" said the queen, in a terrible voice.

Philippe was silent.

"Oh, no concealment, sir! My brother says you saw me at the ball of the Opera."

"I did, madame."

The queen sank on a sofa; then, rising furiously, she said:

"It is impossible, for I was not there! Take care, M. de Taverney!"

"Your majesty," said Andrée, pale with anger, "if my brother says he saw you, he did see you."

"You also!" cried Marie Antoinette; "it only remains now for you to have seen me. Pardieu! my enemies overwhelm me."

"When I saw that the blue domino was not the king," said the Comte d'Artois, "I believed him to be that nephew of M. de Suffren whom you received so well here the other night."

The queen colored.

"Did it not look something like his tournure, M. de Taverney?" continued the count.

"I did not remark, monseigneur," said he, in a choking voice.

"But I soon found out that it was not he; for suddenly I saw him before me, and he was close by you when your mask fell off."

"So he saw me too?"

"If he were not blind, he did."

The queen rang.

"What are you about to do?"

"Send for him also, and ask. I will drain this cup to the dregs!"

"I do not think he can come," said Philippe.

"Why?"

"Because I believe he is not well."

"Oh, he must come, monsieur! I am not well either, but I would go to the end of the world barefoot to prove — — "

All at once Andrée, who was near the window, uttered an exclamation.

“What is it?” cried the queen.

“Oh, nothing; only here comes M. de Charny.”

The queen, in her excitement, ran to the window, opened it, and cried, “M. de Charny!”

He, full of astonishment, hastened to enter.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AN ALIBI.

M. de Charny entered, a little pale, but upright, and not apparently suffering.

“Take care, sister,” said the Comte d’Artois; “what is the use of asking so many people?”

“Brother, I will ask the whole world, till I meet some one who will tell you you are deceived.”

Charny and Philippe bowed courteously to each other, and Philippe said in a low voice, “You are surely mad to come out wounded; one would say you wished to die.”

“One does not die from the scratch of a thorn in the Bois de Boulogne,” replied Charny.

The queen approached, and put an end to this conversation. “M. de Charny,” said she, “these gentlemen say that you were at the ball at the Opera?”

“Yes, your majesty.”

“Tell us what you saw there.”

“Does your majesty mean whom I saw there?”

“Precisely; and no complaisant reserve, M. de Charny.”

“Must I say, madame?”

The cheeks of the queen assumed once more that deadly paleness, which had many times that morning alternated with a burning red.

“Did you see me?” she asked.

“Yes, your majesty, at the moment when your mask unhappily fell off.”

Marie Antoinette clasped her hands.

“Monsieur,” said she, almost sobbing, “look at me well; are you sure of what you say?”

“Madame, your features are engraved in the hearts of your subjects; to see your majesty once is to see you forever.”

“But, monsieur,” said she, “I assure you I was not at the ball at the Opera.”

“Oh, madame,” said the young man, bowing low, “has not your majesty the right to go where you please?”

“I do not ask you to find excuses for me; I only ask you to believe.”

“I will believe all your majesty wishes me to believe,” cried he.

“Sister, sister, it is too much,” murmured the count.

“No one believes me!” cried she, throwing herself on the sofa, with tears in her eyes.

“Sister, pardon me,” said the count tenderly, “you are surrounded by devoted friends; this secret, which terrifies you so, we alone know. It is confined to our hearts, and no one shall drag it from us while we have life.”

“This secret! oh, I want nothing but to prove the truth.”

“Madame,” said Andrée, “some one approaches.”

The king was announced.

“The king! oh, so much the better. He is my only friend; he would not believe me guilty even if he thought he saw me.”

The king entered with an air of calmness, in strange contrast to the disturbed countenances of those present.

“Sire,” said the queen, “you come àpropos; there is yet another calumny, another insult to combat.”

“What is it?” said Louis, advancing.

“An infamous report. Aid me, sire, for now it is no longer my enemies that accuse me, but my friends.”

“Your friends!”

“Yes, sire; M. le Comte d’Artois, M. de Taverney, and M. de Charny affirm that they saw me at the ball at the Opera.”

“At the ball at the Opera!” cried the king.

A terrible silence ensued.

Madame de la Motte saw the mortal paleness of the queen, the terrible disquietude of the king and of all the others, and with one word she could have put an end to all this, and saved the queen, not only now, but in the future, from much distress. But she said to herself that it was too late; that they would see, if she spoke now, that she had deceived them before when the simple truth would have been of such advantage to the queen, and she should forfeit her newly-acquired favor. So she remained silent.

The king repeated, with an air of anguish, “At the ball at the Opera! Does M. de Provence know this?”

"But, sire, it is not true. M. le Comte d'Artois is deceived; M. de Taverney is deceived; M. de Charny, you are deceived, one may be mistaken."

All bowed.

"Come," continued she, "call all my people, ask every one. You say it was Saturday?"

"Yes, sister."

"Well, what did I do on Saturday? Let some one tell me, for I think I am going mad, and shall begin at last to believe that I did go to this infamous ball. But, gentlemen, if I had been there I would have confessed it."

At this moment the king approached her, every cloud gone from his brow. "Well, Marie," said he, "if it was Saturday, there is no need to call your women, or only to ask them at what hour I came to your room. I believe it was past eleven."

"Oh!" cried the queen, joyfully, "you are right, sire." And she threw herself into his arms; then, blushing and confused, she hid her face on his shoulder, while he kissed her tenderly.

"Well," said the Comte d'Artois, full of both surprise and joy, "I will certainly buy spectacles. But on my word, I would not have lost this scene for a million of money. Would you, gentlemen?"

Philippe was leaning against the wainscot as pale as death. Charny wiped the burning drops from his forehead.

"Therefore, gentlemen," said the king, turning towards them, "I know it to be impossible that the queen was that night at the ball at the Opera. Believe it or not, as you please. The queen I am sure is content that I know her to be innocent."

"Well," said M. d'Artois, "Provence may say what he pleases, but I defy his wife to prove an alibi in the same way, if she should be accused of passing the night out."

"Charles!"

"Pardon, sire, now I will take my leave."

"Well, I will go with you." And once more kissing the queen's hand, they left the room.

"M. de Taverney," said the queen severely, when they were gone, "do you not accompany M. d'Artois?"

Philippe started, all the blood rushed to his head, and he had hardly strength to bow and leave the room.

Andrée was to be pitied also. She knew that Philippe would have given the world to have taken M. de Charny away with him, but she felt as though she could not follow to comfort him, leaving Charny alone with the queen, or only with Madame de la Motte, who, she instinctively felt, was worse than no one. But why this feeling? She could not love Charny; that, she told herself, was impossible. So slight and recent an acquaintance, and she who had vowed to love no one. Why then did she suffer so much when Charny addressed words of such respectful devotion to the queen? Was not this jealousy? "Yes," she thought, but only jealousy that this woman should draw all hearts towards her, while the whole world of gallantry and love passed her coldly by. It was no attraction to be a living problem, ever cold and reserved like Andrée; they felt it, turned from her beauty and her intellect, and contented themselves with mere politeness. Andrée felt this deeply; but on the night when they first met Charny, he showed towards her nothing of this coldness or reserve; she was to him as interesting as any other beautiful woman, and she felt cheered and warmed by it. But now the queen absorbed his every look and thought, and left her lonely again; therefore she did not follow her brother, although she suffered in his sufferings, and almost idolized him. She did not, however, attempt to mingle in the conversation, but sat down by the fire almost with her back to the queen and Charny, while Madame de la Motte stood in one of the deep windows, nearly out of sight, although she could observe all that passed.

The Queen remained silent for some minutes, then she said, almost to herself, "Would any one believe that such things pass here?" Then, turning to Charny, said, "We hear, sir, of the dangers of the sea and of the fury of tempests, but you have doubtless encountered all their assaults, and you are still safe and honored."

"Madame — — "

"Then the English, our enemies, have attacked you with their guns and their power, but still you are safe; and on account of the enemies you have conquered, the king felicitates and admires you, and the people bless and love you; therefore, blessed are such enemies who menace us only with death. Our enemies do not endanger existence, it is true, but they add years to our lives; they make us bow the head, fearing, though innocent, to meet, as I have done, the double attacks of friends and enemies. And then, sir, if you knew how hard it is to be hated!"

Andrée listened anxiously for his reply, but he only leaned against the wall, and grew pale.

The queen looked at him, and said, “It is too hot here; Madame de la Motte, open the window; monsieur is accustomed to the fresh sea-breezes; he would stifle in our boudoirs.”

“It is not that, madame; but I am on duty at two o’clock, and unless your majesty wishes me to remain — — ”

“Oh! no, monsieur; we know what duty is. You are free,” said the queen, in a tone of slight pique.

Charny bowed, and disappeared like a man in haste; but in a minute they beard from the ante-chamber the sound of a groan, and people hurrying forward. The queen, who was near the door, opened it, and uttered an exclamation; and was going out, when Andrée rose quickly, saying, “Oh no! madame.”

Then they saw through the open door the guards assisting M. de Charny, who had fainted. The queen closed the door, and sat down again, pensive and thoughtful. At last, she said, “It is an odd thing, but I do not believe M. de Charny was convinced!”

“Oh, madame! in spite of the king’s word — impossible!”

“He may have thought the king said it for his own sake.”

“My brother was not so incredulous,” said Andrée.

“It would be very wrong,” continued the queen, not heeding her; “he could not have as noble a heart as I thought. But, after all, why should he believe? He thought he saw me. They all thought so. There is something in all this; something which I must clear up. Andrée, I must find out what it all means.”

“Your majesty is right; you must investigate it.”

“For,” continued the queen, “people said they saw me at M. Mesmer’s.”

“But your majesty was there,” said Madame de la Motte.

“Yes; but I did not do what they insist they saw me do. And they saw me at the Opera, and I was not there. Oh!” cried she, “at last I guess the truth.”

“The truth!” stammered the countess.

“Oh! I hope so,” said Andrée.

“Send for M. de Crosne,” said the queen, joyously.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

M. DE CROSNE.

M. de Crosne had felt himself in no slight degree embarrassed since his interview with the king and queen. It was no light matter to have the care of the interests of a crown and of the fame of a queen; and he feared that he was about to encounter all the weight of a woman’s anger and a queen’s indignation. He knew, however, that he had but done his duty, and he entered, therefore, tranquilly, with a smile on his face.

“Now, M. de Crosne,” said the queen, “it is our turn for an explanation.”

“I am at your majesty’s orders.”

“You ought to know the cause of all that has happened to me, sir.”

M. de Crosne looked round him rather frightened.

“Never mind these ladies,” said the queen; “you know them both; you know every one.”

“Nearly,” said the magistrate; “and I know the effects, but not the cause, of what has happened to your majesty.”

“Then I must enlighten you, although it is a disagreeable task. I might tell you in private, but my thoughts and words are always open as the day; all the world may know them. I attribute the attacks that have been made upon me to the misconduct of some one who resembles me, and who goes everywhere; and thus your agents have made these mistakes.”

“A resemblance!” cried M. de Crosne, too much occupied with the idea to observe the unquiet look which Jeanne could not for a moment prevent appearing.

“Well, sir, do you think this impossible; or do you prefer to think that I am deceiving you?”

“Oh no, madame! but surely, however strong a resemblance may be, there must be some points of difference to prevent people being so deceived.”

“It seems not, sir; some are deceived.”

“Oh! and I remember,” said Andrée, “when we lived at Taverney Maison Rouge, we had a servant who very strongly — — ”

"Resembled me?"

"Most wonderfully, your majesty."

"And what became of her?"

"We did not then know the great generosity of your majesty's mind, and my father feared that this resemblance might be disagreeable to you; and when we were at Trianon we kept her out of sight."

"You see, M. de Crosne. Ah! this interests you."

"Much, madame."

"Afterwards, dear Andrée?"

"Madame, this girl, who was of an ambitious disposition and troublesome temper, grew tired of this quiet life, and had doubtless made bad acquaintances, for one night when I went to bed I was surprised not to see her; we sought her in vain, she had disappeared."

"Did she steal anything?"

"Nothing, madame."

"You did not know all this, M. de Crosne?"

"No, madame."

"Thus, then, there is a woman whose resemblance to me is striking, and you do not know her. I fear your police is badly organized."

"No, madame; a police magistrate is but a man, and though the vulgar may rate his power as something almost superhuman, your majesty is more reasonable."

"Still, sir, when a man has secured all possible powers for penetrating secrets, when he pays agents and spies, and to such an extent as to know every movement I make, he might prevent this sort of thing."

"Madame, when your majesty passed the night out, I knew it, the day you went to see madame at the Rue St. Claude; therefore my police is not bad. When you went to M. Mesmer's, my agents saw you. When you went to the Opera — — "

The queen started.

"Pardon me, madame, if I saw you; but if your own brother-in-law mistook you, surely an agent at a crown a day may be pardoned for having done so. They thought they saw you, and reported accordingly; therefore my police is not bad. They also knew this affair of the journalist, so well punished by M. de Charny."

"M. de Charny!" cried the queen and Andrée in a breath.

"Yes, madame: his blows are yet fresh on the shoulders of the journalist."

"M. de Charny committed himself with this fellow!"

"I know it by my calumniated police, madame; and also, which was more difficult, the duel which followed."

"A duel! M. de Charny fought?"

"With the journalist?" asked Andrée.

"No, madame; the journalist was too well beaten to give M. de Charny the sword-thrust which made him faint here just now."

"Wounded!" cried the queen; "how and when? He was here just now."

"Oh!" said Andrée, "I saw that he suffered."

"What do you say?" cried the queen, almost angrily; "you saw that he suffered, and did not mention it!"

Andrée did not reply.

Jeanne, who wished to make a friend of her, came to her aid, saying, "I also, madame, saw that M. de Charny had difficulty in standing up while your majesty spoke to him."

"Monsieur," said the queen again to M. de Crosne, "with whom and why did M. de Charny fight?"

"With a gentleman who — — But really, madame, it is useless now. The two adversaries are friends again, for they spoke just now in your majesty's presence."

"In my presence!"

"Yes, madame; the conqueror left about twenty minutes ago."

"M. de Taverney!" cried the queen.

"My brother!" murmured Andrée.

"I believe," said M. de Crosne, "that it was he with whom M. de Charny fought."

The queen made an angry gesture. "It is not right," she said; "these are American manners brought to Versailles. It is not because one has fought under M. Lafayette and Washington that my court should be disgraced by such proceedings. Andrée, did you know your brother had fought?"

"Not till this moment, madame."

"Why did he fight?"

"If my brother fought," said Andrée, "it was in your majesty's service."

"That is to say, that M. de Charny fought against me."

"Your majesty, I spoke only of my brother, and of no one else."

The queen tried hard to remain calm. She walked once or twice up and down the room, and then said, "M. de Crosne, you have convinced me: I was much disturbed by these rumors and accusations; your police is efficient, but I beg you not to forget to investigate this resemblance of which I have spoken. Adieu!” and she held out her hand to him with her own peculiar grace.

Andrée made a movement to depart. The queen gave her a careless adieu.

Jeanne also prepared to leave, when Madame de Misery entered.

“Madame,” said she to the queen, “did your majesty appoint this hour to receive MM. Bœhmer and Bossange?”

“Oh, yes, it is true; let them come in. Remain a little longer, Madame de la Motte; I want the king to make a full peace with you.” Perhaps she wished to pique Andrée by this favor to a newcomer, but Andrée did not seem to heed.

“All these Taverneys are made of iron,” thought the queen. “Ah, gentlemen, what do you bring me now? you know I have no money.”

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE TEMPTRESS.

Madame de la Motte remained, therefore, as before.

“Madame,” replied M. Bœhmer, “we do not come to offer anything to your majesty, we should fear to be indiscreet; but we come to fulfil a duty, and that has emboldened us — — ”

“A duty?”

“Concerning the necklace which your majesty did not deign to take.”

“Oh! then, the necklace has come again,” said Marie Antoinette, laughing. “It was really beautiful, M. Bœhmer.”

“So beautiful,” said Bossange, “that your majesty alone was worthy to wear it.”

“My consolation is,” said the queen, with a sigh which did not escape Jeanne, “that it cost a million and a half. Was not that the price, M. Bœhmer?”

“Yes, your majesty.”

“And in these times,” continued the queen, “there is no sovereign that can give such a sum for a necklace; so that although I cannot wear it, no one else can: and once broken up, I should care nothing about it.”

“That is an error of your majesty’s; the necklace is sold.”

“Sold!” cried the queen. “To whom?”

“Ah! madame, that is a state secret.”

“Oh!” said the queen, “I think I am safe. A state secret means that there is nothing to tell.”

“With your majesty,” continued Bœhmer, as gravely as ever, “we do not act as with others. The necklace is sold, but in the most secret manner, and an ambassador — — ”

“I really think he believes it himself!” interrupted the queen, laughing again. “Come, M. Bœhmer, tell me at least the country he comes from, or, at all events, the first letter of his name.”

“Madame, it is the ambassador from Portugal,” said Bœhmer, in a low voice, that Madame de la Motte might not hear.

“The ambassador from Portugal!” said the queen. “There is none here, M. Bœhmer.”

“He came expressly for this, madame.”

“Do you imagine so?”

“Yes, madame.”

“What is his name?”

“M. de Souza.”

The queen did not reply for a few minutes, and then said, “Well, so much the better for the Queen of Portugal. Let us speak of it no more.”

“But allow us one moment, madame,” said Bœhmer.

“Have you ever seen those diamonds?” said the queen to Jeanne.

“No, madame.”

“They are beautiful. It is a pity these gentlemen have not brought them.”

“Here they are,” said Bœhmer, opening the case.

“Come, countess, you are a woman, and these will please you.”

Jeanne uttered a cry of admiration when she saw them, and said, “They are indeed beautiful.”

“1,500,000 francs, which you hold in the palm of your hand,” said the queen.

“Monsieur was right,” said Jeanne, “when he said that no one was worthy to wear these diamonds but your majesty.”

“However, my majesty will not wear them.”

“We could not let them leave France without expressing our regret to your majesty. It is a necklace which is now known all over Europe, and we wished to know definitively that your majesty really refused it before we parted with it.”

“My refusal has been made public,” said the queen, “and has been too much applauded for me to repent of it.”

“Oh, madame!” said Bœhmer, “if the people found it admirable that your majesty preferred a ship of war to a necklace, the nobility at least would not think it surprising if you bought the necklace after all.”

“Do not speak of it any more,” said Marie Antoinette, casting at the same time a longing look at the casket.

Jeanne sighed, “Ah, you sigh, countess; in my place you would act differently.”

“I do not know, madame.”

“Have you looked enough?”

“Oh no! I could look forever.”

“Let her look, gentlemen; that takes nothing from the value. Unfortunately, they are still worth 1,500,000 francs.”

“Oh,” thought Jeanne, “she is regretting it.” And she said, “On your neck, madame, they would make all women die with jealousy, were they as beautiful as Cleopatra or Venus.” And, approaching, she clasped it round her neck. “Ah, your majesty is beautiful so!”

The queen turned to the mirror. It was really splendid; every one must have admired. Marie Antoinette forgot herself for a time in admiration; then, seized with fear, she tried to take it off.

“It has touched your majesty’s neck; it ought not to belong to any one else,” said Bœhmer.

“Impossible!” said the queen, firmly. “Gentlemen, I have amused myself with these jewels; to do more would be a fault.”

“We will return to-morrow,” said Bœhmer.

“No; I must pay sooner or later; and, besides, doubtless you want your money. You will get it soon.”

“Yes, your majesty,” said the merchant, a man of business again.

“Take the necklace back,” said the queen; “put it away immediately.”

“Your majesty forgets that such a thing is equal to money itself.”

“And that in a hundred years it will be worth as much as it is now,” said Jeanne.

“Give me 1,500,000 francs,” said the queen, “and we shall see.”

“Oh, if I had them!”

MM. Bœhmer and Bossange took as long as possible to put back the necklace, but the queen did not speak.

At last they said, “Your majesty refuses them?”

“Yes, oh yes!” And they quitted the room.

Marie Antoinette remained sitting, looking rather gloomy, and beating with her foot in an impatient manner; at last she said, “Countess, it seems the king will not return; we must defer our supplication till another time.”

Jeanne bowed respectfully.

“But I will not forget you,” added the queen.

“She is regretting and desiring,” thought Jeanne, as she left; “and yet she is a queen.”

CHAPTER XL.

TWO AMBITIONS THAT WISH TO PASS FOR TWO LOVES.

When Jeanne returned to her pretty little house in the faubourg, it was still early; so she took a pen and wrote a few rapid lines, enclosed them in a perfumed envelope, and rang the bell. “Take this letter to Monseigneur the Cardinal de Rohan,” said she.

In five minutes the man returned.

“Well,” said Madame de la Motte, impatiently, “why are you not gone?”

“Just as I left the house, madame, his eminence came to the door. I told him I was about to go to his hotel with a letter from you; he read it, and is now waiting to come in.”

“Let him enter,” said the countess.

Jeanne had been thinking all the way home of the beautiful necklace, and wishing it was hers. It would be a fortune in itself.

The cardinal entered. He also was full of desires and ambitions, which he wished to hide under the mask of love.

“Ah, dear Jeanne,” said he, “you have really become so necessary to me that I have been gloomy all day knowing you to be so far off. But you have returned from Versailles?”

“As you see, monseigneur.”

“And content?”

“Enchanted.”

“The queen received you, then?”

“I was introduced immediately on my arrival.”

“You were fortunate. I suppose, from your triumphant air, that she spoke to you.”

“I passed three hours in her majesty’s cabinet.”

“Three hours! You are really an enchantress whom no one can resist. But perhaps you exaggerate. Three hours!” he repeated; “how many things a clever woman like you might say in three hours!”

“Oh, I assure you, monseigneur, that I did not waste my time.”

“I dare say that in the whole three hours you did not once think of me.”

“Ungrateful man!”

“Really!” cried the cardinal.

“I did more than think of you; I spoke of you.”

“Spoke of me! to whom?” asked the prelate, in a voice from which all his power over himself could not banish some emotion.

“To whom should it be but to the queen?”

“Ah, dear countess, tell me about it. I interest myself so much in all that concerns you, that I should like to hear the most minute details.”

Jeanne smiled. She knew what interested the cardinal as well as he did himself. Then she related to him all the circumstances which had so fortunately made her, from a stranger, almost the friend and confidant of the queen.

Scarcely had she finished, when the servant entered to announce supper.

Jeanne invited the cardinal to accompany her.

He gave her his arm, and they went in together.

During supper, the cardinal continued to drink in long draughts of love and hope from the recitals which Jeanne kept making to him from time to time. He remarked also, with surprise, that, instead of making herself sought like a woman that knows that you have need of her, she had thrown off all her former pride, and only seemed anxious to please him. She did the honors of her table as if she had all her life mixed in the highest circles; there was neither awkwardness nor embarrassment.

“Countess,” said he at length, “there are two women in you.”

“How so?”

“One of yesterday, and another of to-day.”

“And which does your excellency prefer?”

“I do not know, but at least the one of this evening is a Circe — a something irresistible.”

“And which you will not attempt to resist, I hope, prince as you are.”

The cardinal imprinted a long kiss on her hand.

CHAPTER XLI.

FACES UNDER THEIR MASKS.

Two hours had elapsed, and the conversation still continued. The cardinal was now the slave, and Jeanne was triumphant. Two men often deceive each other as they shake hands, a man and a woman as they kiss; but here, each only deceived the other because they wished to be deceived: each had an end to gain, and for that end intimacy was necessary.

The cardinal now did not demonstrate his impatience, but always managed to bring back the conversation to Versailles, and to the honors which awaited the queen's new favorite.

"She is generous," said he, "and spares nothing towards those she loves. She has the rare talent of giving a little to every one, and a great deal to a few."

"You think, then, she is rich?"

"She makes resources with a word or a smile; no minister, except perhaps Turgot, ever refused her anything."

"Well," said Madame de la Motte, "I have seen her poorer than you think."

"What do you mean?"

"Are those rich who are obliged to impose privations on themselves?"

"Privations! What do you mean, dear countess?"

"I will tell you what I saw — I saw the queen suffer. Do you know what a woman's desire is, my dear prince?"

"No, countess; but I should like you to tell me."

"Well, the queen has a desire, which she cannot satisfy."

"For what?"

"For a diamond necklace."

"Oh, I know what you mean — the diamonds of MM. Bœhmer and Bossange."

"Precisely."

"That is an old story, countess."

“Old or new, it is a real vexation for a queen not to be able to buy what was intended for a simple favorite. Fifteen more days added to the life of Louis XV., and Jeanne Vaubernier would have had what Marie Antoinette cannot buy.”

“My dear countess, you mistake; the queen could have had it, and she refused it; the king offered them to her.”

And he recounted the history of the ship of war.

“Well,” said she, “after all, what does that prove?”

“That she did not want them, it seems to me.”

Jeanne shrugged her shoulders.

“You know women and courts, and believe that? The queen wanted to do a popular act, and she has done it.”

“Good!” said the cardinal; “that is how you believe in the royal virtues. Ah, skeptic, St. Thomas was credulous, compared to you!”

“Skeptic or not, I can assure you of one thing — that the queen had no sooner refused it than she earnestly desired to have it.”

“You imagine all this, my dear countess; for if the queen has one quality more than another, it is disinterestedness. She does not care for gold or jewels, and likes a simple flower as well as a diamond.”

“I do not know that; I only know she wishes for this necklace.”

“Prove it, countess.”

“It is easy. I saw the necklace, and touched it.”

“Where?”

“At Versailles, when the jewelers brought it for the last time to try and tempt the queen.”

“And it is beautiful?”

“Marvelous! I, who am a woman, think that one might lose sleep and appetite in wishing for it.”

“Alas! why have I not a vessel to give the king?”

“A vessel!”

“Yes, for in return he would give me the necklace, and then you could eat and sleep in peace.”

“You laugh.”

“No, really.”

“Well, I will tell you something that will astonish you. I would not have the necklace.”

“So much the better, countess, for I could not give it to you.”

"Neither you nor any one — that is what the queen feels."

"But I tell you that the king offered it to her."

"And I tell you that women like best those presents that come from people from whom they are not forced to accept them."

"I do not understand you."

"Well, never mind; and, after all, what does it matter to you, since you cannot have it?"

"Oh, if I were king and you were queen, I would force you to have it."

"Well, without being king, oblige the queen to have it, and see if she is angry, as you suppose she would be."

The cardinal looked at her with wonder.

"You are sure," said he, "that you are not deceived, and that the queen wishes for it?"

"Intensely. Listen, dear prince. Did you tell me, or where did I hear it, that you would like to be minister?"

"You may have heard me say so, countess."

"Well, I will bet that the queen would make that man a minister who would place the necklace on her toilet within a week."

"Oh, countess!"

"I say what I think. Would you rather I kept silent?"

"Certainly not."

"However, it does not concern you, after all. It is absurd to suppose that you would throw away a million and a half on a royal caprice; that would be paying too dearly for the portfolio, which you ought to have for nothing, so think no more of what I have said."

The cardinal continued silent and thoughtful.

"Ah, you despise me now!" continued she; "you think I judge the queen by myself. So I do; I thought she wanted these diamonds because she sighed as she looked at them, and because in her place I should have coveted them."

"You are an adorable woman, countess! You have, by a wonderful combination, softness of mind and strength of heart; sometimes you are so little of a woman that I am frightened; at others, so charmingly so, that I bless Heaven and you for it. And now we will talk of business no more."

"So be it," thought Jeanne; "but I believe the bait has taken, nevertheless."

Indeed, although the cardinal said, “Speak of it no more,” in a few minutes he asked, “Does not Bœhmer live somewhere on the Quai de la Ferraille, near the Pont Neuf?”

“Yes, you are right; I saw the name on the door as I drove along.”

Jeanne was not mistaken — the fish had taken the hook; and the next morning the cardinal drove to M. Bœhmer. He intended to preserve his incognito, but they knew him, and called him “Monseigneur” directly.

“Well, gentlemen,” said he, “if you know me, keep my secret from others.”

“Monseigneur may rely upon us. What can we do for your eminence?”

“I come to buy the necklace which you showed her majesty.”

“Really we are in despair, but it is too late.”

“How so?”

“It is sold.”

“Impossible, as you offered it only yesterday to the queen.”

“Who again refused it, so our other bargain held good.”

“And with whom was this bargain?”

“It is secret, monseigneur.”

“Too many secrets, M. Bœhmer,” said he, rising; “but I should have thought that a French jeweler would prefer selling these beautiful stones in France. You prefer Portugal — very well.”

“Monseigneur knows that!” cried the jeweler.

“Well, is that astonishing?”

“No one knew it but the queen.”

“And if that were so?” said M. de Rohan without contradicting a supposition that flattered him.

“Ah! that would change matters.”

“Why so, sir?”

“May I speak freely?”

“Certainly.”

“The queen wishes for the necklace.”

“You think so?”

“I am sure of it.”

“Then why did she not buy it?”

“Because she had already refused the king, and she thought it would look capricious to buy it now.”

“But the king wished her to have it.”

"Yes, but he thanked her for refusing; therefore I think she wishes to have it without seeming to buy it."

"Well, you are wrong, sir."

"I am sorry for it, monseigneur. It would have been our only excuse for breaking our word to the Portuguese ambassador."

The cardinal reflected for a moment. "Then, sir, let us suppose that the queen wishes for your necklace."

"Oh! in that case, monseigneur, we would break through anything, that she should have it."

"What is the price?"

"1,500,000 francs."

"How do you want payment?"

"The Portuguese was to give 100,000 francs down, and I was to take the necklace myself to Lisbon, where the balance was to be paid."

"Well, the 100,000 francs down you shall have; that is reasonable. As for the rest — — "

"Your eminence wishes for time? With such a guarantee, we should not object; only credit implies a loss. The interest of our money must be considered."

"Well, call it 1,600,000 francs, and divide the time of payment into three periods, making a year."

"That would be a loss to us, sir."

"Oh! nonsense; if I paid you the whole amount to-morrow, you would hardly know what to do with it."

"There are two of us, monseigneur."

"Well, you will receive 500,000 francs every four months. That ought to satisfy you."

"Monseigneur forgets that these diamonds do not belong to us; if they did, we should be rich enough to wait; they belong to a dozen different creditors. We got some from Hamburg, some from Naples, one at Buenos Ayres, and one at Moscow. All these people wait for the sale of the necklace to be paid. The profit that we make is all that will be ours; and we have already had it two years on hand."

M. de Rohan interrupted him. "After all," said he, "I have not seen the necklace."

"True, monseigneur; here it is."

"It is really superb," cried the cardinal; "it is a bargain?"

“Yes, monseigneur. I must go to the ambassador and excuse myself.”

“I did not think there was a Portuguese ambassador just now.”

“M. de Souza arrived incognito.”

“To buy this necklace?”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“Oh! poor Souza, I know him well,” said he, laughing.

“With whom am I to conclude the transaction?” asked M. Bœhmer.

“With myself; you will see no one else. To-morrow I will bring the 100,000 francs, and will sign the agreement. And as you are a man of secrets, M. Bœhmer, remember that you now possess an important one.”

“Monseigneur, I feel it, and will merit your confidence and the queen’s.”

M. de Rohan went away happy, like all men who ruin themselves in a transport of passion.

The next day M. Bœhmer went to the hotel of the Portuguese ambassador. At the moment he knocked at the door, M. Beausire was going through some accounts with M. Ducorneau, while Don Manoël was taking over some new plan with the valet, his associate.

M. Ducorneau was charmed to find an ambassador so free from national prejudice as to have formed his whole establishment of Frenchmen. Thus his conversation was full of praises of him.

“The Souzas, you see,” replied Beausire, “are not of the old school of Portuguese. They are great travelers, very rich, who might be kings if they liked.”

“And do they not?”

“Why should they? With a certain number of millions, and the name of a prince, one is better than a king.”

“Ah, Portugal will soon become great with such men at its head. But when is the presentation to take place? It is most anxiously looked for. The people around begin to talk of it, and to collect about the doors of the hotel, as though they were of glass, and they could see through.”

“Do you mean the people of the neighborhood?” asked Beausire.

“And others; for, the mission of M. de Souza being a secret one, you may be sure the police would soon interest themselves about it; and look,” continued Ducorneau, leading Beausire to the window, “do you see that man in the brown surtout, how he looks at the house?”

“Yes, he does indeed. Who do you take him to be?”

“Probably a spy of M. de Crosne. However, between ourselves, M. de Crosne is not equal to M. Sartines. Did you know him?”

“No.”

“Ah! he would have found out all about you long ago, in spite of all your precautions.”

A bell rang. “His excellency rings!” said Beausire, who was beginning to feel embarrassed by the conversation, and opening the door quickly, he nearly knocked down two of the clerks who were listening.

CHAPTER XLII.

IN WHICH M. DUCORNEAU UNDERSTANDS NOTHING OF WHAT IS PASSING.

Don Manoël was less yellow than usual, that is to say, he was more red. He had just been having a fierce altercation with his valet, and they were still disputing when Beausire entered.

“Come, M. Beausire, and set us right,” said the valet.

“About what?”

“This 100,000 francs. It is the property of the association, is it not?”

“Certainly.”

“Ah, M. Beausire agrees with me.”

“Wait,” said Don Manoël.

“Well, then,” continued the valet, “the chest ought not to be kept close to the ambassador’s room.”

“Why not?” asked Beausire.

“M. Manoël ought to give us each a key to it.”

“Not so,” said Manoël; “do you suspect me of wishing to rob the association? I may equally suspect you, when you ask for a key.”

“But,” said the valet, “we have all equal rights.”

“Really, monsieur, if you wish to make us all equal, we ought to have played the ambassador in turn. It would have been less plausible in the eyes of the public, but it would have satisfied you.”

“And besides,” said Beausire, “M. Manoël has the incontestable privilege of the inventor.”

“Oh,” replied the valet, “the thing once started, there are no more privileges. I do not speak for myself only; all our comrades think the same.”

“They are wrong,” said both Manoël and Beausire.

“I was wrong myself to take the opinion of M. Beausire; of course the secretary supports the ambassador.”

“Monsieur,” replied Beausire, “you are a knave, whose ears I would slit, if it had not already been done too often. You insult me by saying that I have an understanding with Manoël.”

“And me also,” said Manoël.

“And I demand satisfaction,” added Beausire.

“Oh, I am no fighter.”

“So I see,” said Beausire, seizing hold of him.

“Help! help!” cried the valet, attacked at once by both of them. But just then they heard a bell ring.

“Leave him, and let him open the door,” said Manoël.

“Our comrades shall hear all this,” replied the valet.

“Tell them what you please; we will answer for our conduct.”

“M. Bœhmer!” cried the porter from below.

“Well, we shall have no more contests about the 100,000 francs,” said Manoël; “for they will disappear with M. Bœhmer.”

M. Bœhmer entered, followed by Bossange. Both looked humble and embarrassed. Bœhmer began, and explained that political reasons would prevent their fulfilling their contract.

Manoël cried out angrily; Beausire looked fierce.

Manoël said “that the bargain was completed, and the money ready.”

Bœhmer persisted.

Manoël, always through Beausire, replied, “that his Government had been apprised of the conclusion of the bargain, and that it was an insult to his queen to break it off.”

M. Bœhmer was very sorry, but it was impossible to act otherwise.

Beausire, in Manoël’s name, refused to accept the retractation, and abused M. Bœhmer as a man without faith, and ended by saying, “You have found some one to pay more for it.”

The jewelers colored.

Beausire saw that he was right, and feigned to consult his ambassador. “Well,” said he at length, “if another will give you more for your diamonds, we would do the same, rather than have this affront offered to our queen. Will you take 50,000 francs more?”

Bœhmer shook his head.

“100,000, or even 150,000,” continued Beausire, willing to offer anything rather than lose the booty.

The jewelers looked dazzled for a moment, consulted together, and then said, “No, monsieur, it is useless to tempt us. A will more powerful than our own compels us to decline. You understand, no doubt, that it is not we who refuse. We only obey the orders of one greater than any of us.”

Beausire and Manoël saw that it was useless to say more, and tried to look and speak indifferently on the matter.

Meanwhile the valet had been listening attentively, and just then making an unlucky movement, stumbled against the door. Beausire ran to the antechamber. “What on earth are you about?” cried he.

“Monsieur, I bring the morning despatches.”

“Good,” said Beausire, taking them from him, “now go.”

They were letters from Portugal, generally very insignificant, but which, passing through their hands before going to Ducorneau, often gave them useful information about the affairs of the embassy.

The jewelers, hearing the word despatches, rose to leave like men who had received their congé.

“Well,” said Manoël, when they were gone, “we are completely beaten. Only 100,000 francs, a poor spoil; we shall have but 8,000 each.”

“It is not worth the trouble. But it might be 50,000 each.”

“Good,” replied Manoël, “but the valet will never leave us now he knows the affair has failed.”

“Oh, I know how we will manage him. He will return immediately, and claim his share and that of his comrades, and we shall have the whole house on our hands. Well, I will call him first to a secret conference; then leave me to act.”

“I think I understand,” said Manoël.

Neither, however, would leave his friend alone with the chest while he went to call him.

Manoël said “that his dignity as ambassador prevented him from taking such a step.”

“You are not ambassador to him,” said Beausire; “however, I will call through the window.”

The valet, who was just beginning a conversation with the porter, hearing himself called, came up.

Beausire said to him, with a smiling air, “I suppose you were telling this business to the porter?”

“Oh, no.”

“Are you sure?”

“I swear!”

“For if you were, you were committing a great folly, and have lost a great deal of money.”

"How so?"

"Why, at present only we three know the secret, and could divide the 100,000 francs between us, as they all now think we have given it to M. Bœhmer."

"Morbleu!" cried the valet, "it is true: 33,300 francs each."

"Then you accept?"

"I should think so."

"I said you were a rogue," said Beausire, in a thundering voice; "come, Don Manoël, help me to seize this man, and give him up to our associates."

"Pardon! pardon!" cried the unfortunate, "I did but jest."

"Shut him up until we can devise his punishment."

The man began to cry out.

"Take care," said Beausire, "that Ducorneau does not hear us."

"If you do not leave me alone," said the valet, "I will denounce you all."

"And I will strangle you," said Don Manoël, trying to push him into a neighboring closet.

"Send away Ducorneau somewhere, Beausire, while I finish this fellow."

When he had locked him up, he returned to the room. Beausire was not there; Don Manoël felt tempted. He was alone, and Beausire might be some little time; he could open the chest, take out all the bank-notes, and be off in two minutes. He ran to the room where it was: the door was locked. "Ah," thought he, "Beausire distrusted me, and locked the door before he went." He forced back the lock with his sword, and then uttered a terrible cry. The chest was opened and empty. Beausire had got, as we know, a second key; he had forestalled Manoël.

Manoël ran down like a madman; the porter was singing at the door — he asked if Beausire had passed.

"Yes, some ten minutes ago."

Manoël became furious, summoned them all, and ran to release the unfortunate valet. But when he told his story, Manoël was accused of being an accomplice of Beausire, and they all turned against him.

M. Ducorneau felt ready to faint, when he entered and saw the men preparing to hang M. de Souza. "Hang M. de Souza!" cried he. "It is high treason."

At last they threw him into a cellar, fearing his cries would arouse the neighborhood.

At that moment loud knocks at the door disturbed them, — they looked at each other in dismay. The knocks were repeated, and some one cried, “Open in the name of the Portuguese ambassador.”

On hearing this, each made his escape in terror, as he best could, scrambling over walls and roofs. The true ambassador could only enter by the help of the police.

They found and arrested M. Ducorneau, who slept that night in the Châtelet.

Thus ended the adventure of the sham embassy from the Portugal.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ILLUSIONS AND REALITIES.

Beausire, on leaving the house, ran as fast as possible down the Rue Coquillière, then into the Rue St. Honoré, and took everywhere the most intricate and improbable turnings he could think of, and continued this until he became quite exhausted. Then, thinking himself tolerably safe, he sat down in the corn market, on a sack, to recover his breath. “Ah!” thought he, “now I have made my fortune; I will be an honest man for the future, and I will make Oliva an honest woman. She is beautiful, and she will not mind leading a retired life with me in some province, where we shall live like lords. She is very good; she has but two faults, idleness and pride, and as I shall satisfy her on both these points, she will be perfect.” He then began to reflect on what he should do next. They would seek him, of course, and most likely divide into different parties, and some would probably go first to his own house. Here lay his great difficulty, for there they would find Oliva, and they might ill-treat her. They might even take her as a hostage, speculating on his love for her. What should he do? Love carried the day; he ran off again like lightning, took a coach, and drove to the Pont Neuf. He then looked cautiously down the Rue Dauphine to reconnoiter, and he saw two men, who seemed also looking anxiously down the street. He thought they were police spies, but that was nothing uncommon in that part of the town; so, bending his back, and walking lamely, for disguise, he went on till he nearly reached his house. Suddenly he thought he saw the coat of a gendarme in the courtyard; then he saw one at the window of Oliva’s room. He felt ready to drop, but he thought his best plan was to walk quietly on; he had that courage, and passed the house. Heavens! what a sight! the yard was full of soldiers, and among them a police commissioner. Beausire’s rapid glance showed him what he thought disappointed faces. He thought that M. de Crosne had somehow begun to suspect him, and, sending to take him, had found only Oliva.

“I cannot help her now,” thought he; “I should only lose my money and destroy us both. No, let me place that in safety, and then I will see what can be done.” He therefore ran off again, taking his way almost mechanically towards the Luxembourg; but as he turned the corner of the Rue St. Germain, he was almost knocked down by a handsome carriage which was driving towards the Rue Dauphine, and, raising his head to swear at the coachman, he thought he saw Oliva inside, talking with much animation to a handsome man who sat by her. He gave a cry of surprise, and would have run after it, but he could not again encounter the Rue Dauphine. He felt bewildered, for he had before settled that Oliva had been arrested in her own house, and he fancied his brain must be turning when he believed he saw her in the carriage. But he started off again and took refuge in a small cabaret at the Luxembourg, where the hostess was an old friend. There he gradually began to recover again his courage and hope. He thought the police would not find him, and that his money was safe. He remembered also that Oliva had committed no crime, and that the time was passed when people were kept prisoners for nothing. He also thought that his money would soon obtain her release, even if she were sent to prison, and he would then set off with her for Switzerland. Such were his dreams and projects as he sat sipping his wine.

CHAPTER XLIV.

OLIVA BEGINS TO ASK WHAT THEY WANT OF HER.

If M. Beausire had trusted to his eyesight, which was excellent, instead of trusting his imagination, he would have spared himself much regret and many mistakes. It was, in fact, Oliva who sat in the carriage by the side of a man, whom he would also have recognized if he had looked a little longer. She had gone that morning, as usual, to take a walk in the gardens of the Luxembourg, where she had met the strange friend whose acquaintance she had made the day of the ball at the Opera.

It was just as she was about to return that he appeared before her, and said, “Where are you going?”

“Home, monsieur.”

“Just what the people want who are there waiting for you.”

“Waiting for me? No one is there for me.”

“Oh, yes, a dozen visitors at least.”

“A whole regiment, perhaps?” said Oliva, laughing.

“Perhaps, had it been possible to send a whole regiment, they would have done so.”

“You astonish me!”

“You would be far more astonished if I let you go.”

“Why?”

“Because you would be arrested.”

“I! arrested?”

“Assuredly. The twelve gentlemen who wait for you are sent by M. de Crosne.”

Oliva trembled. Some people are always fearful on certain points. But she said:

“I have done nothing; why should they arrest me?”

“For some intrigue, perhaps.”

“I have none.”

“But you have had.”

“Oh, perhaps.”

“Well, perhaps they are wrong to wish to arrest you, but the fact is that they do desire to do so. Will you still go home?”

“You deceive me,” said Oliva; “if you know anything, tell me at once. Is it not Beausire they want?”

“Perhaps; he may have a conscience less clear than yours.”

“Poor fellow!”

“Pity him, if you like; but if he is taken, there is no need for you to be taken too.”

“What interest have you in protecting me?” asked she. “It is not natural for a man like you.”

“I would not lose time if I were you; they are very likely to seek you here, finding you do not return.”

“How should they know I am here?”

“Are you not always here? My carriage is close by, if you will come with me. But I see you doubt still.”

“Yes.”

“Well, we will commit an imprudence to convince you. We will drive past your house, and when you have seen these gentlemen there, I think you will better appreciate my good offices.”

He led her to the carriage, and drove to the Rue Dauphine, at the corner of which they passed Beausire. Had Oliva seen him, doubtless she would have abandoned everything to fly with him and share his fate, whatever it might be; but Cagliostro, who did see him, took care to engage her attention by showing her the crowd, which was already in sight, and which was waiting to see what the police would do.

When Oliva could distinguish the soldiers who filled her house, she threw herself into the arms of her protector in despair. “Save me! save me!” she cried.

He pressed her hand. “I promise you.”

“But they will find me out anywhere.”

“Not where I shall take you; they will not seek you at my house.”

“Oh!” cried she, frightened, “am I to go home with you?”

“You are foolish,” said he; “I am not your lover, and do not wish to become so. If you prefer a prison, you are free to choose.”

“No,” replied she, “I trust myself to you, take me where you please.”

He conducted her to the Rue Neuve St. Gilles, into a small room on the second floor.

“How triste!” said she; “here, without liberty, and without even a garden to walk in.”

“You are right,” said he; “besides, my people would see you here at last.”

“And would betray me, perhaps.”

“No fear of that. But I will look out for another abode for you; I do not mean you to remain here.”

Oliva was consoled; besides, she found amusing books and easy-chairs.

He left her, saying, “If you want me, ring; I will come directly if I am at home.”

“Ah!” cried she, “get me some news of Beausire.”

“Before everything.” Then, as he went down, he said to himself, “It will be a profanation to lodge her in that house in the Rue St. Claude; but it is important that no one should see her, and there no one will. So I will extinguish the last spark of my old light.”

CHAPTER XLV.

THE DESERTED HOUSE.

When Cagliostro arrived at the deserted house in the Rue St. Claude, with which our readers are already acquainted, it was getting dark, and but few people were to be seen in the streets.

Cagliostro drew a key from his pocket, and applied it to the lock; but the door was swollen with the damp, and stiff with age, and it required all his strength to open it. The courtyard was overgrown with moss, the steps crumbling away; all looked desolate and deserted. He entered the hall, and lighted a lamp which he had brought with him. He felt a strange agitation as he approached the door which he had so often entered to visit Lorenza. A slight noise made his heart beat quickly; he turned, and saw an adder gliding down the staircase; it disappeared in a hole near the bottom.

He entered the room; it was empty, but in the grate still lay some ashes, the remains of the furniture which had adorned it, and which he had burned there. Among it several pieces of gold and silver still sparkled. As he turned, he saw something glittering on the floor; he picked it up. It was one of those silver arrows with which the Italian women were in the habit of confining their hair. He pressed it to his lips, and a tear stood in his eyes as he murmured, “Lorenza!” It was but for a moment; then he opened the window and threw it out, saying to himself, “Adieu! this last souvenir, which would soften me. This house is about to be profaned — another woman will ascend the staircase, and perhaps even into this room, where Lorenza’s last sigh still vibrates; but to serve my end the sacrifice shall be made. I must, however, have some alterations made.”

He then wrote on his tablets the following words: “To M. Lenoir, my architect, — Clean out the court and vestibule, restore the coach-house and stable, and demolish the interior of the pavilion. To be done in eight days.”

“Now, let us see,” said he to himself, “if we can perfectly distinguish the window of the countess. It is infallible,” said he, after looking out; “the women must see each other.”

The next day fifty workmen had invaded the house and commenced the projected alterations, which were completed within the given time. Some of the passers-by saw a large rat hung up by the tail.

CHAPTER XLVI.

JEANNE THE PROTECTRESS.

M. le Cardinal de Rohan received, two days after his visit to M. Bœhmer, the following note:

“His Eminence the Cardinal de Rohan knows, doubtless, where he will sup this evening.”

“From the little countess,” said he; “I will go.”

Among the footmen given to her by the cardinal, Jeanne had distinguished one, black-haired and dark-eyed, and, as she thought, active and intelligent. She set this man to watch the cardinal, and learned from him that he had been twice to M. Bœhmer’s. Therefore she concluded the necklace was bought, and yet he had not communicated it to her. She frowned at the thought, and wrote the note which we have seen.

M. de Rohan sent before him a basket of Tokay and other rarities, just as if he was going to sup with La Guimard or Mademoiselle Dangeville. Jeanne determined not to use any of it at supper.

“When they were alone, she said to him:

“Really, monseigneur, one thing afflicts me.”

“What, countess?”

“To see, not only that you no longer love me, but that you never have loved me.”

“Oh, countess! how can you say so?”

“Do not make excuses, monseigneur; it would be lost time.”

“Oh, countess!”

“Do not be uneasy; I am quite indifferent about it now.”

“Whether I love you or not?”

“Yes, because I do not love you.”

“That is not flattering.”

“Indeed, we are not exchanging compliments, but facts. We have never loved each other.”

“Oh, as for myself, I cannot allow that; I have a great affection for you, countess.”

"Come, monseigneur, let us esteem each other enough to speak the truth, and that is, that there is between us a much stronger bond than love — that is, interest."

"Oh, countess, what a shame!"

"Monseigneur, if you are ashamed, I am not."

"Well, countess, supposing ourselves interested, how can we serve each other?"

"First, monseigneur, I wish to ask you a question. Why have you failed in confidence towards me?"

"I! How so, pray?"

"Will you deny that, after skilfully drawing from me the details — which, I confess, I was not unwilling to give you — concerning the desire of a certain great lady for a certain thing, you have taken means to gratify that desire without telling me?"

"Countess, you are a real enigma, a sphinx."

"Oh, no enigma, cardinal; I speak of the queen, and of the diamonds which you bought yesterday of MM. Bœhmer and Bossange."

"Countess!" cried he, growing pale.

"Oh, do not look so frightened," continued she. "Did you not conclude your bargain yesterday?"

He did not speak, but looked uncomfortable, and half angry. She took his hand.

"Pardon, prince," she said, "but I wished to show you your mistake about me; you believe me foolish and spiteful."

"Oh, countess, now I understand you perfectly. I expected to find you a pretty woman and a clever one, but you are better than this. Listen to me: you have, you say, been willing to become my friend without loving me?"

"I repeat it," replied she.

"Then you had some object?"

"Assuredly. Do you wish me to tell it to you?"

"No; I understand it. You wished to make my fortune; that once done, you are sure that my first care would be for yours. Am I right?"

"Yes, monseigneur; but I have not pursued my plans with any repugnance — the road has been a pleasant one."

"You are an amiable woman, countess, and it is a pleasure to discuss business with you. You have guessed rightly that I have a respectful attachment towards a certain person."

"I saw it at the Opera ball," she said.

"I know well that this affection will never be returned."

"Oh, a queen is only a woman, and you are surely equal to Cardinal Mazarin."

"He was a very handsome man," said M. de Rohan, laughing.

"And an excellent minister," said Jeanne.

"Countess, it is superfluous trouble to talk to you; you guess and know everything. Yes, I do wish to become prime minister. Everything entitles me to it — my birth, my knowledge of business, my standing with foreign courts, and the affection which is felt for me by the French people."

"There is but one obstacle," said Jeanne.

"An antipathy."

"Yes, of the queen's; and the king always ends by liking what she likes, and hating what she hates."

"And she hates me? Be frank, countess."

"Well, monseigneur, she does not love you."

"Then I am lost! Of what use is the necklace?"

"You deceive yourself, prince."

"It is bought."

"At least, it will show the queen that you love her. You know, monseigneur, we have agreed to call things by their right names."

"Then you say you do not despair of seeing me one day prime minister?"

"I am sure of it."

"And what are your own ambitions?"

"I will tell you, prince, when you are in a position to satisfy them."

"We will hope for that day."

"Now let us sup."

"I am not hungry."

"Then let us talk."

"I have nothing more to say."

"Then go."

"How! is that what you call our alliance? Do you send me away?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Well, countess, I will not deceive myself again about you." Before leaving, however, he turned, and said, "What must I do now, countess?"

"Nothing; wait for me to act. I will go to Versailles."

"When?"

“To-morrow.”

“And when shall I hear from you?”

“Immediately.”

“Then I abandon myself to your protection; au revoir, countess.”

CHAPTER XLVII.

JEANNE PROTECTED.

Mistress of such a secret, rich in such a future, and supported by such a friend, Jeanne felt herself strong against the world. To appear at court, no longer as a suppliant, as the poor mendicant, drawn from poverty by Madame de Boulainvilliers, but as a Valois, with an income of 100,000 francs; to be called the favorite of the queen, and consequently governing the king and state through her. — Such was the panorama that floated before the eyes of Jeanne.

She went to Versailles. She had no audience promised, but she trusted to her good fortune, and as the queen had received her so well before, all the officials were anxious to serve her. Therefore, one of the doorkeepers said aloud, as the queen came from chapel, to one of her gentlemen, “Monsieur, what am I to do? Here is Madame la Comtesse de la Motte Valois asking admission, and she has no letter of audience.”

The queen heard and turned round. “Did you say Madame de la Motte Valois was here?” she asked.

“Your majesty, the doorkeeper says so.”

“I will receive her; bring her to the bath-room.”

The man told Jeanne what he had done. She drew out her purse; but he said, “Will Madame la Comtesse allow this debt to accumulate? Some day she can pay me with interest.”

“You are right, my friend; I thank you.”

Marie Antoinette looked serious when Jeanne entered.

“She supposes I am come again to beg,” thought Jeanne.

“Madame,” said the queen, “I have not yet had an opportunity to speak to the king.”

“Oh, your majesty has already done too much for me; I ask nothing more. I came — — ” she hesitated.

“Is it something urgent, that you did not wait to ask for an audience?”

“Urgent! Yes, madame; but not for myself.”

"For me, then?" and the queen conducted her into the bath-room, where her women were waiting for her. Once in the bath, she sent them away.

"Now, countess."

"Madame," said Jeanne, "I am much embarrassed."

"Why so?"

"Your majesty knows the kindness I have received from M. de Rohan."

The queen frowned. "Well, madame?"

"Yesterday his eminence came to see me, and spoke to me as usual of your majesty's goodness and kindness."

"What does he want?"

"I expressed to him all my sense of your generosity, which constantly empties your purse, and told him that I felt almost guilty in thinking of your majesty's gift to myself, and remembering that were it not for such liberality your majesty need not have been forced to deny yourself the beautiful necklace which became you so well. When I related this circumstance to M. de Rohan, I saw him grow pale and the tears came into his eyes. Indeed, madame, his fine face, full of admiration for, and emotion caused by, your noble conduct, is ever before my eyes."

"Well, countess, if he has impressed you so deeply, I advise you not to let him see it. M. de Rohan is a worldly prelate, and gathers the sheep as much for himself as for his Lord."

"Oh, madame!"

"It is not I who say it: that is his reputation; he almost glories in it; his trophies are numerous, and some of them have made no little scandal."

"Well, madame, I am sure he thought then of no one but your majesty."

The queen laughed.

"Your majesty's modesty will not allow you to listen to praises."

"Not from the cardinal — I suspect them all."

"It is not my part," replied Jeanne, respectfully, "to defend any one who has incurred your majesty's displeasure."

"M. de Rohan has offended me, but I am a queen and a Christian, and do not wish to dwell on offenses."

Jeanne was silent.

"You think differently to me on this subject?"

"Completely, your majesty."

"You would not speak so if you knew what he has done against me; but as you have so great a friendship for him, I will not attack him again before you. You have not, then, forgotten the diamonds?"

"Oh, madame, I have thought of them night and day. They will look so well on your majesty."

"What do you mean? They are sold to the Portuguese ambassador."

Jeanne shook her head.

"Not sold!" cried the queen.

"Yes, madame, but to M. de Rohan."

"Oh," said the queen, becoming suddenly cold again.

"Oh! your majesty," cried Jeanne; "do not be ungenerous towards him. It was the impulse of a generous heart that your majesty should understand and sympathize with. When he heard my account he cried, — 'What! the queen refuse herself such a thing, and perhaps see it one day worn by one of her subjects!' And when I told him that it was bought for the Queen of Portugal, he was more indignant than ever. He cried, 'It is no longer a simple question of pleasure for the queen, but of the dignity of the French crown. I know the spirit of foreign courts; they will laugh at our queen because they happen to have more money to spare: and I will never suffer this.' And he left me abruptly. An hour after I heard that he had bought the necklace."

"For 1,500,000 francs?"

"1,600,000, madame."

"With what intention?"

"That at least if your majesty would not have them no one else should."

"Are you sure it is not for some mistress?"

"I am sure he would rather break it to pieces than see it on any other neck than your own."

Marie Antoinette reflected, and her expressive countenance showed clearly every thought that passed through her mind. At last she said:

"What M. de Rohan has done is a noble trait of a delicate devotion, and you will thank him for me."

"Oh yes, madame."

"You will add, that he has proved to me his friendship, and that I accept it, but not his gift."

"But, madame — — "

"No, but as a loan. He has advanced his money and his credit to please me, and I will repay him. Bœhmer has asked for money down?"

"Yes, madame."

“How much?”

“100,000 francs.”

“That is my quarter’s allowance from the king. I received it this morning; it is in advance, but still I have it.” She rang the bell. Her woman came and wrapped her in warm sheets, and then she dressed herself. Once more alone in her bedroom with Jeanne, she said:

“Open that drawer, and you will see a portfolio.”

“Here it is, madame.”

“It holds the 100,000 francs — count them.”

Jeanne obeyed.

“Take them to the cardinal with my thanks; each quarter I will pay the same. In this manner I shall have the necklace which pleased me so much, and if it embarrasses me to pay it, at least it will not hurt the king; and I shall have gained the knowledge that I have a friend who has guessed my wishes.” Then, after a pause, “You will add, countess, that M. de Rohan will be welcome at Versailles to receive my thanks.”

Jeanne went away full of joy and delight.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE QUEEN'S PORTFOLIO.

The cardinal was at home when Madame de la Motte came to his hotel. She had herself announced, and was immediately admitted.

"You come from Versailles?" said he.

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Well, monseigneur, what do you expect?"

"Ah, countess, you say that with an air that frightens me."

"You wished me to see the queen, and I have seen her; and that I should speak to her of you whom she has always so much disliked."

"And you did?"

"Yes, and her majesty listened."

"Say no more, countess, I see she will not overcome her repugnance."

"Oh! as to that, I spoke of the necklace."

"And did you dare to say that I wished — — "

"To buy it for her? Yes."

"Oh, countess, you are sublime; and she listened?"

"Yes, but she refused."

"Oh, I am lost."

"Refused to accept it as a gift, but not as a loan."

"I lend to the queen! countess, it is impossible."

"It is more than giving, is it not?"

"A thousand times."

"So I thought."

The cardinal rose and came towards her. "Do not deceive me," he said.

"One does not play with the affections of a man like you, monseigneur."

"Then it is true?"

"The exact truth."

"I have a secret with the queen!" and he pressed Jeanne's hand.

"I like that clasp of the hand," she said, "it is like one man to another."

"It is that of a happy man to a protecting angel."

"Monseigneur, do not exaggerate."

"Oh, my joy! my gratitude! impossible."

"But lending a million and a half to the queen is not all you wish for? Buckingham would have asked for more."

"Buckingham believed what I dare not even dream of."

"The queen sends you word that she will see you with pleasure at Versailles."

The cardinal looked as pale as a youth who gives his first kiss of love.

"Ah," thought she, "it is still more serious than I imagined. I can get what I please from him, for he acts really not from ambition but from love."

He quickly recovered himself, however: "My friend," said he, "how does the queen mean to act about this loan she talks of?"

"Ah, you think she has no money. But she will pay you as she would have paid Bœhmer. Only if she had paid him all Paris must have known it, which she would not have liked, after the credit she has had for her refusal of it. You are a cashier for her, and a solvent one if she becomes embarrassed. She is happy and she pays. Ask no more."

"She pays?"

"Yes, she knows you have debts; and when I told her you had advanced 100,000 francs — — "

"You told her?"

"Yes; why not?" Jeanne put her hand in her pocket, and drew out the portfolio. "The queen sends you this with thanks; it is all right, for I have counted it."

"Who cares for that? But the portfolio?"

"Well, it is not handsome."

"It pleases me, nevertheless."

"You have good taste."

"Ah, you quiz me."

"You have the same taste as the queen, at all events."

"Then it was hers?"

"Do you wish for it?"

"I cannot deprive you of it."

"Take it."

"Oh, countess, you are a precious friend; but while you have worked for me, I have not forgotten you."

Jeanne looked surprised.

“Yes,” said he, “my banker came to propose to me some plan of a marsh to drain, which must be profitable. I took two hundred shares, and fifty of them are for you.”

“Oh, monseigneur!”

“He soon returned, he had realized already on them cent. per cent. He gave me 100,000 francs, and here is your share, dear countess;” and from the pocket-book she had just given him he slid 25,000 francs into her hand.

“Thanks, monseigneur. What gratifies me most is, that you thought of me.”

“I shall ever do so,” said he, kissing her hand.

“And I of you, at Versailles.”

CHAPTER XLIX.

IN WHICH WE FIND DR. LOUIS.

Perhaps our readers, remembering in what a position we left M. de Charny, will not dislike to return with us to that little ante-chamber at Versailles into which this brave seaman, who feared neither men nor elements, had fled, lest he should show his weakness to the queen. Once arrived there, he felt it impossible to go further; he stretched out his arms, and was only saved from falling to the ground by the aid of those around. He then fainted, and was totally ignorant that the queen had seen him, and would have run to his assistance had Andrée not prevented her, more even from a feeling of jealousy than from regard for appearances. Immediately after the king entered, and seeing a man lying supported by two guards, who, unaccustomed to see men faint, scarcely knew what to do, advanced, saying, “Some one is ill here.”

At his voice the men started and let their burden fall.

“Oh!” cried the king, “it is M. de Charny. Place him on this couch, gentlemen.” Then they brought him restoratives, and sent for a doctor.

The king waited to hear the result. The doctor’s first care was to open the waistcoat and shirt of the young man to give him air, and then he saw the wound.

“A wound!” cried the king.

“Yes,” said M. de Charny, faintly, “an old wound, which has reopened;” and he pressed the hand of the doctor to make him understand.

But this was not a court doctor, who understands everything; so, willing to show his knowledge, “Old, sir! this wound is not twenty-four hours old.”

Charny raised himself at this, and said, “Do you teach me, sir, when I received my wound?” Then, turning round, he cried, “The king!” and hastened to button his waistcoat.

“Yes, M. de Charny, who fortunately arrived in time to procure you assistance.”

“A mere scratch, sire,” stammered Charny, “an old wound.”

“Old or new,” replied Louis, “it has shown me the blood of a brave man.”

“Whom a couple of hours in bed will quite restore,” continued Charny, trying to rise; but his strength failed him, his head swam, and he sank back again.

“He is very ill,” said the king.

“Yes, sire,” said the doctor, with importance, “but I can cure him.”

The king understood well that M. de Charny wished to hide some secret from him, and determined to respect it. “I do not wish,” said he, “that M. de Charny should run the risk of being moved; we will take care of him here. Let M. de Suffren be called, this gentleman recompensed, and my own physician, Dr. Louis, be sent for.”

While one officer went to execute these orders, two others carried Charny into a room at the end of the gallery. Dr. Louis and M. de Suffren soon arrived. The latter understood nothing of his nephew’s illness. “It is strange,” said he; “do you know, doctor, I never knew my nephew ill before.”

“That proves nothing,” replied the doctor.

“The air of Versailles must be bad for him.”

“It is his wound,” said one of the officers.

“His wound!” cried M. de Suffren; “he never was wounded in his life.”

“Oh, excuse me,” said the officer, opening the shirt, covered with blood, “but I thought — — ”

“Well,” said the doctor, who began to see the state of the case, “do not let us lose time disputing over the cause, but see what can be done to cure him.”

“Is it dangerous, doctor?” asked M. de Suffren, with anxiety.

“Not at all,” replied he.

M. de Suffren took his leave, and left Charny with the doctor. Fever commenced, and before long he was delirious. Three hours after the doctor called a servant, and told him to take Charny in his arms, who uttered doleful cries. “Roll the sheet over his head,” said the doctor.

“But,” said the man, “he struggles so much that I must ask assistance from one of the guards.”

“Are you afraid of a sick man, sir? If he is too heavy for you, you are not strong enough for me. I must send you back to Auvergne.” This threat had its effect. Charny, crying, fighting, and gesticulating, was carried by the man through the guards.

Some of the officers questioned the doctor.

“Oh! gentlemen,” said he, “this gallery is too far off for me; I must have him in my own rooms.”

“But I assure you, doctor, we would all have looked after him here. We all love M. de Suffren.”

“Oh yes, I know your sort of care! The sick man is thirsty, and you give him something to drink, and kill him.”

“Now there remains but one danger,” said the doctor to himself, as he followed Charny, “that the king should want to visit him, and if he hear him — — Diable! I must speak to the queen.” The good doctor, therefore, having bathed the head and face of his patient with cold water, and seen him safe in bed, went out and locked the door on him, leaving his servant to look after him. He went towards the queen’s apartments, and met Madame de Misery, who had just been despatched to ask after the patient.

“Come with me,” he said.

“But, doctor, the queen waits for intelligence.”

“I am going to her.”

“The queen wishes — — ”

“The queen shall know all she wishes. I will take care of that.”

CHAPTER L.

ÆGRI SOMNIA.

The queen was expecting the return of Madame de Misery. The doctor entered with his accustomed familiarity. “Madame,” he said, “the patient in whom your majesty and the king are interested is as well as any one can be who has a fever.”

“Is it a slight wound?” asked the queen.

“Slight or not, he is in a fever.”

“Poor fellow! — a bad fever?”

“Terrible!”

“You frighten me; dear doctor; you, who are generally so cheering. Besides, you look about you, as though you had a secret to tell.”

“So I have.”

“About the fever?”

“Yes.”

“To tell me?”

“Yes.”

“Speak, then, for I am curious.”

“I wait for you to question me, madame.”

“Well, how does the fever go on?”

“No; ask me why I have taken him away from the guard’s gallery, where the king left him, to my own room.”

“Well, I ask. Indeed it is strange.”

“Then, madame, I did so, because it is not an ordinary fever.”

The queen looked surprised. “What do you mean?”

“M. de Charny is delirious already, and in his delirium he says a number of things rather delicate for the gentlemen of the guard to hear.”

“Doctor!”

“Oh, madame! you should not question me, if you do not wish to hear my answers.”

“Well, then, dear doctor, is he an atheist? Does he blaspheme?”

“Oh, no! he is on the contrary a devotee.”

The queen assumed a look of sang-froid. “M. de Charny,” she said, “interests me. He is the nephew of M. de Suffren, and has besides rendered me personal services. I wish to be a friend to him. Tell me, therefore, the exact truth.”

“But I cannot tell you, madame. If your majesty wishes to know, the only way is to hear him yourself.”

“But if he says such strange things?”

“Things which your majesty ought to hear.”

“But,” said the queen, “I cannot move a step here, without some charitable spy watching me.”

“I will answer for your security. Come through my private way, and I will lock the door after us.”

“I trust to you, then, dear doctor.” And she followed him, burning with curiosity.

When they reached the second door the doctor put his ear to the keyhole.

“Is your patient in there, doctor?”

“No, madame, or you would have heard him at the end of the corridor. Even here you can hear his voice.”

“He groans.”

“No, he speaks loud and distinct.”

“But I cannot go in to him.”

“I do not mean you to do so. I only wish you to listen in the adjoining room, where you will hear without being seen.” They went on, and the doctor entered the sick-room alone.

Charny, still dressed in his uniform, was making fruitless efforts to rise, and was repeating to himself his interview with the German lady in the coach. “German!” he cried — ”German! Queen of France!”

“Do you hear, madame?”

“It is frightful,” continued Charny, “to love an angel, a woman — to love her madly — to be willing to give your life for her; and when you come near her, to find her only a queen — of velvet and of gold, of metal and of silk, and no heart.”

“Oh! oh!” cried the doctor again.

“I love a married woman!” Charny went on, “and with that wild love which, makes me forget everything else. Well, I will say to her, there remain for us still some happy days on this earth. Come, my beloved, and we will live the life of the blessed, if we love each other. Afterwards there will be death — better than a life like this. Let us love at least."

"Not badly reasoned for a man in a fever," said the doctor.

"But her children!" cried Charny suddenly, with fury; "she will not leave her children. Oh! we will carry them away also. Surely I can carry her, she is so light, and her children too." Then he gave a terrible cry: "But they are the children of a king!"

The doctor left his patient and approached the queen.

"You are right, doctor," said she; "this young man would incur a terrible danger if he were overheard."

"Listen again," said the doctor.

"Oh, no more."

But just then Charny said, in a gentler voice:

"Marie, I feel that you love me, but I will say nothing about it. Marie, I felt the touch of your foot in the coach; your hand touched mine, but I will never tell; I will keep this secret with my life. My blood may all flow away, Marie, but my secret shall not escape with it. My enemy steeped his sword in my blood, but if he has guessed my secret, yours is safe. Fear nothing, Marie, I do not even ask you if you love me; you blushed, that is enough."

"Oh!" thought the doctor; "this sounds less like delirium than like memory."

"I have heard enough," cried the queen, rising and trembling violently; and she tried to go.

The doctor stopped her. "Madame," said he, "what do you wish?"

"Nothing, doctor, nothing."

"But if the king ask to see my patient?"

"Oh! that would be dreadful!"

"What shall I say?"

"Doctor, I cannot think; this dreadful spectacle has confused me."

"I think you have caught his fever," said the doctor, feeling her pulse.

She drew away her hand, and escaped.

CHAPTER LI.

ANDRÉE.

The doctor remained thoughtful, then said to himself, — ”There are other difficulties here besides those I can contend with by science.” He bathed again the temples of his patient, who for the time began to grow calmer.

All at once the doctor heard the rustling of a dress outside. “Can it be the queen returned?” thought he; and opening the door softly, he saw before him the motionless figure of a woman, looking like a statue of despair. It was almost dark; he advanced suddenly along the corridor to the place where the figure was standing. On seeing him, she uttered a cry.

“Who is there?” asked Doctor Louis.

“I, doctor!” replied a sweet and sorrowful voice — a voice that he knew but could not immediately recognize. “I, Andrée de Taverney,” continued she.

“Oh, mon Dieu! what is the matter?” cried the doctor; “is she ill?”

“She! who?”

The doctor felt that he had committed an imprudence.

“Excuse me, but I saw a lady going away just now, perhaps it was you.”

“Oh, yes, there has been a lady here before me, has there not?” asked Andrée, in a tone of emotion.

“My dear child,” replied the doctor, “of whom do you speak? what do you want to know?”

“Doctor,” answered Andrée, in a sorrowful voice, “you always speak the truth, do not deceive me now; I am sure there was a woman here before me.”

“Doubtless. Why should I deceive you? Madame de Misery was here.”

“It was Madame de Misery who came?”

“Certainly; what makes you doubt? What inexplicable beings women are.”

“Dear doctor.”

“Well, but to the point. Is she worse?”

“Who?”

“Pardieu, the queen.”

“The queen!”

“Yes, the queen, for whom Madame de Misery came to fetch me, and who was troubled with her palpitations. If you come from her, tell me, and we will go back together.”

“No, doctor, I do not come from the queen, and was even ignorant that she was suffering. But pardon me, doctor, I scarcely know what I an saying.” In fact, she seemed on the point of fainting.

The doctor supported her. She rallied by a strong effort. “Doctor,” she said, “you know I am nervous in the dark; I lost my way in these intricate passages, and have grown frightened and foolish.”

“And why the devil should you be wandering about these dark passages, since you came for nothing?”

“I did not say I came for nothing, only that no one sent me.”

“Well, if you have anything to say to me, come away from here, for I am tired of standing.”

“Oh, I shall not be ten minutes; can any one hear us?”

“No one.”

“Not even your patient in there?”

“Oh, no fear of his hearing anything.”

Andrée clasped her hands. “Oh, mon Dieu!” she cried, “he is, then, very ill?”

“Indeed he is not well. But tell me quickly what brings you here, for I cannot wait.”

“Well, doctor, we have spoken of it; I came to ask after him.”

Doctor Louis received this confession with a solemn silence, which Andrée took for a reproach.

“You may excuse this step, doctor,” she said, “as he was wounded in a duel with my brother.”

“Your brother! I was ignorant of that.”

“But now that you know it, you understand why I inquire after him.”

“Oh, certainly, my child,” said the good doctor, enchanted to find an excuse for being indulgent; “I could not know this.”

“A duel between two gentlemen is a thing of everyday occurrence, doctor.”

“Certainly; the only thing that could make it of importance would be that they have fought about a lady!”

"About a lady!"

"About yourself, for example."

Andrée sighed.

"Oh, doctor! they did not fight about me."

"Then," said the doctor, "is it your brother that has sent you for news of M. de Charny?"

"Oh, yes, my brother, doctor."

Dr. Louis looked at her scrutinizingly.

"I will find out the truth," thought he. Then he said, "Well, I will tell you the truth, that your brother may make his arrangements accordingly; you understand."

"No, doctor."

"Why, a duel is never a very agreeable thing to the king, and if it makes a scandal, he often banishes or imprisons the actors; but when death ensues, he is always inflexible. Therefore counsel your brother to hide for a time."

"Then," cried Andrée, "M. de Charny is — dangerously ill?"

"My dear young lady, if he is not out of danger by this time to-morrow, if before that time I cannot quell the fever that devours him, M. de Charny is a dead man."

Andrée bit her lips till the blood came, and clenched her hands till the nails stuck into the flesh, to stifle the cry that was ready to burst from her. Having conquered herself, she said, "My brother will not fly; he wounded M. de Charny in fair fight, and if he has killed him, he will take his chance."

The doctor was deceived. She did not come on her own account, he thought.

"How does the queen take it?" he asked.

"The queen? I know not. What is it to her?"

"But she likes your brother."

"Well, he is safe; and perhaps she will defend him if he is accused."

"Then, mademoiselle, you have learned what you wished. Let your brother fly, or not, as he pleases; that is your affair. Mine is to do the best to-night for the wounded man; without which, death will infallibly carry him off. Adieu."

Andrée fled back to her room, locked herself in, and falling on her knees by the side of her bed, "My God!" cried she, with a torrent of burning tears, "you will not leave this young man to die who has done no wrong, and who is so loved in this world. Oh! save him, that I may see a God of mercy, and not of vengeance.” Her strength gave way, and she fell senseless on the floor. When her senses returned to her, her first muttered words were, “I love him! oh, I love him!”

CHAPTER LII.

DELIRIUM.

M. De Charny conquered the fever. The next day the report was favorable. Once out of danger, Doctor Louis ceased to take so much interest in him; and after the lapse of a week, as he had not forgotten all that had passed in his delirium, he wished to have him removed from Versailles: but Charny, at the first hint of this, rebelled, and said angrily, “that his majesty had given him shelter there, and that no one had a right to disturb him.”

The doctor, who was not patient with intractable convalescents, ordered four men to come in and move him; but Charny caught hold of his bed with one hand, and struck furiously with the other at every one who approached; and with the effort, the wound reopened, the fever returned, and he began to cry out that the doctor wished to deprive him of the visions that he had in his sleep, but that it was all in vain; for that she who sent them to him was of too high rank to mind the doctor.

Then the doctor, frightened, sent the men away, and dressed the wound again; but as the delirium returned stronger than ever, he determined to go once more to the queen.

Marie Antoinette received him with a smile; she expected to hear that the patient was cured, but on hearing that he was very ill, she cried:

“Why, yesterday you said he was going on so well!”

“It was not true, madame.”

“And why did you deceive me? Is there, then, danger?”

“Yes, madame, to himself and others; but the evil is moral, not physical. The wound in itself is nothing; but, madame, M. de Charny is fast becoming a monomaniac, and this I cannot cure. Madame, you will have ruined this young man.”

“I, doctor! Am I the cause, if he is mad?”

“If you are not now, you soon will be.”

“What must I do, then? Command me, doctor.”

“This young man must be cured either with kindness or coercion. The woman whose name he evokes every instant must kill or cure him.”

“Doctor, you exaggerate. Can you kill a man with a hard word, or cure a madman with a smile?”

“If your majesty be incredulous, I have only to pay my respects, and take leave.”

“No, doctor; tell me what you wish.”

“Madame, if you desire to free this palace from his cries, and from scandal, you must act.”

“You wish me to come and see him?”

“Yes.”

“Then I will call some one — Mademoiselle de Taverney, for example — and you have all ready to receive us. But it is a dreadful responsibility to run the risk of kill or cure, as you say.”

“It is what I have to do every day. Come, madame, all is ready.”

The queen sighed, and followed the doctor, without waiting for Andrée, who was not to be found.

It was eleven o’clock in the morning, and Charny was asleep, after the troubled night he had gone through. The queen, attired in an elegant morning dress, entered the corridor. The doctor advised her to present herself suddenly, determined to produce a crisis, either for good or ill; but at the door they found a woman standing, who had not time to assume her usual unmoved tranquillity, but showed an agitated countenance, and trembled before them.

“Andrée!” cried the queen.

“Yes, your majesty; you are here too!”

“I sent for you, but they could not find you.”

Andrée, anxious to hide her feelings, even at the price of a falsehood, said, “I heard your majesty had asked for me, and came after you.”

“How did you know I was here?”

“They said you were gone with Doctor Louis, so I guessed it.”

“Well guessed,” replied the queen, who was little suspicious, and forgot immediately her first surprise.

She went on, leaving Andrée with the doctor.

Andrée, seeing her disappear, gave a look full of anger and grief. The doctor said to her:

“Do you think she will succeed?”

“Succeed in what?”

“In getting this poor fellow removed, who will die here.”

“Will he live elsewhere?” asked Andrée, surprised.

“I believe so.”

“Oh, then, may she succeed!”

CHAPTER LIII.

CONVALESCENCE.

The queen walked straight up to where Charny lay, dressed, on a couch. He raised his head, wakened by her entrance.

“The queen!” cried he, trying to rise.

“Yes, sir, the queen,” she replied, “who knows how you strive to lose both reason and life; the queen, whom you offend both dreaming and waking; the queen, who cares for your honor and your safety, and therefore comes to you. Is it possible,” continued she, “that a gentleman, formerly renowned like you for his loyalty and honor, should become such an enemy as you have been to the reputation of a woman? What will my enemies do, if you set them the example of treason?”

“Treason!” stammered Charny.

“Yes, sir. Either you are a madman, and must be forcibly prevented from doing harm; or you are a traitor, and must be punished.”

“Oh, madame, do not call me a traitor! From the mouth of a king, such an accusation would precede death; from the mouth of a woman, it is dishonor. Queen, kill me, or spare me!”

“Are you in your right mind, M. de Charny?” said the queen, in a moved voice.

“Yes, madame.”

“Do you remember your wrongs towards me, and towards the king?”

“Mon Dieu!” he murmured.

“For you too easily forget, you gentlemen, that the king is the husband of the woman whom you insult, by raising your eyes to her — that he is the father of your future master, the dauphin; you forget, also, that he is a greater and better man than any of you — a man whom I esteem and love.”

“Oh!” murmured Charny, with a groan, and seemed ready to faint.

This cry pierced the queen’s heart; she thought he was about to die, and was going to call for assistance; but, after an instant’s reflection, she went on: “Let us converse quietly, and be a man. Doctor Louis has vainly tried to cure you; your wound, which was nothing, has been rendered dangerous through your own extravagances. When will you cease to present to the good doctor the spectacle of a scandalous folly which disquiets him? When will you leave the castle?"

"Madame," replied Charny, "your majesty sends me away; I go, I go!" And he rose with a violent effort, as though he would have fled that instant, but, unable to stand, fell almost into the arms of the queen, who had risen to stop him.

She replaced him on the sofa; a bloody foam rose to his lips. "Ah, so much the better!" cried he; "I die, killed by you!" The queen forgot everything but his danger; she supported his drooping head on her shoulders, and pressed her cold hands to his forehead and heart. Her touch seemed to revive him as if by magic — he lived again; then she wished to fly, but he caught hold of her dress, saying:

"Madame, in the name of the respect which I feel for you — — "

"Adieu, adieu!" cried the queen.

"Oh, madame, pardon me!"

"I do pardon you."

"Madame, one last look."

"M. de Charny," said the queen, trembling, "if you are not the basest of men, to-morrow you will be dead, or have left this castle."

He threw himself at her feet; she opened the door, and rushed away.

Andrée saw for an instant the young man on his knees before her, and felt struck with both hate and despair. She thought, as she saw the queen return, that God had given too much to this woman in adding to her throne and her beauty this half-hour with M. de Charny.

The doctor, occupied only with the success of the negotiation, said, "Well, madame, what will he do?"

"He will leave," replied the queen; and, passing them quickly, she returned to her apartment.

The doctor went to his patient, and Andrée to her room.

Doctor Louis found Charny a changed man, declaring himself perfectly strong, asking the doctor how he should be moved, and when he should be quite well, with so much energy that the doctor feared it was too much, and that he must relapse after it. He was, however, so reasonable as to feel the necessity of explaining this sudden change. "The queen has done me more good by making me ashamed of myself," he said, "than you, dear doctor, with all your science. She has vanquished me by an appeal to my amour propre."

"So much the better," said the doctor.

"Yes. I remember that a Spaniard — they are all boasters — told me one day, to prove the force of his will, that it sufficed for him in a duel which he had fought, and in which he had been wounded, to will that the blood should not flow in the presence of his adversary in order to retain it. I laughed at him. However, I now feel something like it myself; I think that if my fever and delirium wished to return, I could chase them away, saying, Fever and delirium, I forbid you to appear!"

"We know such things are possible," replied the doctor. "Allow me to congratulate you, for you are cured morally."

"Oh yes."

"Well, the physical cure will soon follow. Once sound in mind, you will be sound in body within a week."

"Thanks, doctor."

"And, to begin, you must leave this place."

"I am ready immediately."

"Oh, we will not be rash; we will wait till this evening. Where will you go?"

"Anywhere — to the end of the world if you like."

"That is too far for a first journey; we will content ourselves with Versailles. I have a house there where you shall go to-night."

Accordingly, that evening the four valets, who had been so rudely repulsed before, carried him to his carriage. The king had been hunting all day; Charny felt somewhat uneasy at leaving without apprizing him; but the doctor promised to make his excuses.

Andrée, concealed behind her curtains, saw the carriage drive off.

"If he resumes his desire to die," thought the doctor, "at least it will not be in my rooms, and under my care."

Charny arrived safely, however, and the next day the doctor found him so well, that he told him he thought he would require him no longer.

He received a visit from his uncle, and from an officer sent by the king to inquire after him. At the end of a week he could ride slowly on horseback: then the doctor advised him to go for a time to his estates in Picardy to regain strength. He accordingly took leave of the king, charged M. de

Suffren with his adieus to the queen, who was ill that evening, and set off for his château at Boursonnes.

CHAPTER LIV.

TWO BLEEDING HEARTS.

On the day following the queen's visit to M. de Charny, Madlle. de Taverney entered the royal bedroom as usual at the hour of the petite toilette. The queen was just laughing over a note from Madame de la Motte. Andrée, paler than usual, looked cold and grave: the queen, however, being occupied, did not notice it, but merely turning her head, said in her usual friendly tone, "Bon jour, petite." At last, however, Andrée's silence struck her, and looking up she saw her sad expression and said, "Mon Dieu! Andrée, what is the matter? Has any misfortune happened to you?"

"Yes, madame, a great one."

"What is it?"

"I am going to leave your majesty."

"Leave me!"

"Yes, madame."

"Where are you going? and what is the cause of this sudden departure?"

"Madame, I am not happy in my affections; in my family affections, I mean," added Andrée, blushing.

"I do not understand you — you seemed happy yesterday."

"No, madame," replied Andrée, firmly. "Yesterday was one of the unhappy days of my life."

"Explain yourself."

"It would but fatigue your majesty, and the details are not worthy of your hearing. Suffice it to say, that I have no satisfaction in my family — that I have no good to expect in this world. I come, therefore, to beg your majesty's permission to retire into a convent."

The queen rose, and although with some effort to her pride, took Andrée's hand, and said: "What is the meaning of this foolish resolution? Have you not to-day, like yesterday, a father and a brother? and were they different yesterday from to-day? Tell me your difficulties. Am I no longer your protectress and mother?"

Andrée, trembling, and bowing low, said, “Madame, your kindness penetrates my heart, but does not shake my resolution. I have resolved to quit the court. I have need of solitude. Do not force me to give up the vocation to which I feel called.”

“Since yesterday?”

“I beg your majesty not to make me speak on this point.”

“Be free, then,” said the queen, rather bitterly; “only I have always shown you sufficient confidence for you to have placed some in me. But it is useless to question one who will not speak. Keep your secrets, and I trust you will be happier away than you have been here. Remember one thing, however, that my friendship does not expire with people’s caprices, and that I shall ever look on you as a friend. Now, go, Andrée; you are at liberty. But where are you going to?”

“To the convent of St. Denis, madame.”

“Well, mademoiselle, I consider you guilty towards me of ingratitude and forgetfulness.”

Andrée, however, left the room and the castle without giving any of those explanations which the good heart of the queen expected, and without in any way softening or humbling herself. When she arrived at home, she found Philippe in the garden — the brother dreamed, while the sister acted. At the sight of Andrée, whose duties always kept her with the queen at that hour, he advanced, surprised, and almost frightened, which was increased when he perceived her gloomy look.

He questioned her, and she told him that she was about to leave the service of the queen, and go into a convent.

He clasped his hands, and cried, “What! you also, sister?”

“I also! what do you mean?”

“‘Tis a cursed contact for us, that of the Bourbons. You wish to take religious vows; you, at once the least worldly of women, and the least fitted for a life of asceticism. What have you to reproach the queen with?”

“I have nothing to reproach her with; but you, Philippe, who expected, and had the right to expect, so much — why did not you remain at court? You did not remain there three days; I have been there as many years.”

“She is capricious, Andrée.”

“You, as a man, might put up with it. I, a woman, could not, and do not wish to do so.”

"All this, my sister, does not inform me what quarrel you have had with her."

"None, Philippe, I assure you. Had you any when you left her? Oh, she is ungrateful!"

"We must pardon her, Andrée; she is a little spoiled by flattery, but she has a good heart."

"Witness what she has done for you, Philippe."

"What has she done?"

"You have already forgotten. I have a better memory, and with one stroke pay off your debts and my own."

"Very dear, it seems to me, Andrée — to renounce the world at your age, and with your beauty. Take care, dear sister, if you renounce it young, you will regret it old, and will return to it when the time will be passed, and you have outlived all your friends."

"You do not reason thus for yourself, brother. You are so little careful of your fortunes, that when a hundred others would have acquired titles and gold, you have only said — she is capricious, she is perfidious, and a coquette, and I prefer not to serve her. Therefore, you have renounced the world, though you have not entered into a monastery."

"You are right, sister; and were it not for our father — — "

"Our father! Ah, Philippe! do not speak of him," replied Andrée, bitterly. "A father should be a support to his children, or accept their support. But what does ours do? Could you confide a secret to M. de Taverney, or do you believe him capable of confiding in you? M. de Taverney is made to live alone in this world."

"True, Andrée, but not to die alone."

"Ah, Philippe! you take me for a daughter without feeling, but you know I am a fond sister; and to have been a good daughter, required only to have had a father; but everything seems to conspire to destroy in me every tender feeling. It never happens in this world that hearts respond; those whom we choose prefer others."

Philippe looked at her with astonishment. "What do you mean?" said he.

"Nothing," replied Andrée, shrinking from a confidence. "I think my brain is wandering; do not attend to my words."

"But — — "

Andrée took his hand. "Enough on this subject, my dearest brother. I am come to beg you to conduct me to the convent of St. Denis; but be easy, I will take no vows. I can do that at a later period, if I wish. Instead of going, like most women, to seek forgetfulness, I will go to seek memory. It seems to me that I have too often forgotten my Creator. He is the only consolation, as He is really the only afflictor. In approaching Him more nearly, I shall do more for my happiness than if all the rich and great in this world had combined to make life pleasant to me."

"Still, Andrée, I oppose this desperate resolution, for you have not confided to me the cause of your despair!"

"Despair!" said she, with a disdainful air. "No, thank God, I am not despairing; no, a thousand times, no."

"This excess of disdain shows a state of mind which cannot last. If you reject the word 'despair,' I must use that of 'pique.'"

"Pique! do you believe that I am so weak as to yield up my place in the world through pique? Judge me by yourself, Philippe; if you were to retire to La Trappe, what would you call the cause of your determination?"

"I should call it an incurable grief."

"Well, Philippe, I adopt your words, for they suit me."

"Then," he replied, "brother and sister are alike in their lives: happy together, they have become unhappy at the same time." Then, thinking further remonstrance useless, he asked, "When do you want to go?"

"To-morrow, even to-day, if it were possible."

"I shall be ready whenever you require me."

Andrée retired to make her preparations. Soon she received this note from Philippe:

"You can see our father at five o'clock this evening. You must be prepared for reproaches, but an adieu is indispensable."

She answered:

"At five o'clock I will be with M. de Taverney all ready to start, and by seven we can be at St. Denis, if you will give me up your evening."

CHAPTER LV.

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE.

We have seen that the queen, before receiving Andrée, was smiling over a note from Madame de la Motte. She was, however, rendered serious by the interview with Mademoiselle de Taverney. Scarcely had she gone, when Madame de Misery came to announce M. de Calonne. He was a man of much intellect, but, foreseeing that disaster was hanging over France, determined to think only of the present, and enjoy it to the utmost. He was a courtier, and a popular man. M. de Necker had shown the impossibility of finding finances, and called for reforms which would have struck at the estates of the nobility and the revenues of the clergy; he exposed his designs too openly, and was overwhelmed by a torrent of opposition; to show the enemy your plan of attack is half to give them the victory. Calonne, equally alive to the danger, but seeing no way of escape, gave way to it. He completely carried with him the king and queen, who implicitly believed in his system, and this is, perhaps, the only political fault which Louis XVI was guilty of towards posterity. M. de Calonne was handsome, and had an ingratiating manner; he knew how to please a queen, and always arrived with a smile on his face, when others might have worn a frown.

The queen received him graciously, and said, “Have we any money, M. de Calonne?”

“Certainly, madame; we have always money.”

“You are perfectly marvelous,” replied she, “an incomparable financier, for you seem always ready when we want money.”

“How much does your majesty require?”

“Explain to me first how you manage to find money, when M. Necker declared that there was none.”

“M. Necker was right, madame; for when I became minister on the 3d of November, 1783, there were but one thousand and two hundred francs in the public treasury. Had M. Necker, madame, instead of crying out, ‘There is no money,’ done as I have done, and borrowed 100,000,000 the first year, and 125,000,000 the second, and had he been as sure as I am of a new loan of 80,000,000 for the third, he would have been a true financier. Every one can say there is no money, but not that there is plenty.”

“That is what I compliment you on, sir; but how to pay all this?”

“Oh, madame, be sure we shall pay it,” replied he, with a strange smile.

“Well, I trust to you,” said the queen.

“I have now a project, madame,” replied he, bowing, “which will put 20,000,000 into the pockets of the nation, and 7,000,000 or 8,000,000 into your own.”

“They will be welcome, but where are they to come from?”

“Your majesty is aware that money is not of the same value in all the countries of Europe.”

“Certainly. In Spain gold is dearer than in France.”

“Your majesty is perfectly right. Gold in Spain has been for the last five or six years worth considerably more than in France; it results that the exporters gain on eight ounces of gold, that they send from here, about the value of fourteen ounces of silver.”

“That is a great deal.”

“Well, madame, I mean to raise the price of gold one-fifth of this difference, and where we have now thirty louis we shall then have thirty-two.”

“It is a brilliant idea!” cried the queen.

“I believe it, and am happy that it meets your majesty’s approbation.”

“Always have such, and I am sure you will soon pay our debts.”

“But allow me, madame, to return to what you want of me,” said the minister.

“Would it be possible to have at present — I am afraid it is too much — — ”

Calonne smiled in an encouraging manner.

“500,000 francs?” continued the queen.

“Oh, madame, really your majesty frightened me; I was afraid it was something great.”

“Then you can?”

“Assuredly.”

“Without the king’s knowledge?”

“Oh, madame, that is impossible. Every month all my accounts are laid before the king; however, he does not always read them.”

“When can I have it?”

“What day does your majesty wish for it?”

“On the fifth of next month.”

“Your majesty shall have it on the third.”

“Thanks, M. de Calonne.”

“My greatest happiness is to please your majesty, and I beg you never will allow yourself to be embarrassed for want of money.” He rose, the queen gave him her hand to kiss, and then said, “After all, this money causes me some remorse, for it is for a caprice.”

“Never mind; some one will gain by it.”

“That is true; you have a charming mode of consoling one.”

“Oh, madame, if we had none of us more reasons for remorse than you, we should all go straight to heaven.”

“But it will be cruel to make the poor people pay for my caprices.”

“Have no scruples, madame; it is not the poor who will pay.”

“How so?” asked the queen, in some surprise.

“Because, madame, they have nothing to pay with.”

He bowed and retired.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE CARDINAL DE ROHAN.

Hardly had M. de Calonne traversed the gallery, when Madame de la Motte was shown in to the queen.

“Madame,” said she, “the cardinal is here.” She then introduced him, and took her leave.

The cardinal, finding himself alone with the queen, bowed respectfully, without raising his eyes.

“Monsieur,” said the queen, “I have heard of you what has effaced many wrongs.”

“Permit me, madame,” said he, trembling with real emotion, “to assure your majesty that these wrongs of which you speak I could explain in a few words.”

“I do not forbid you to justify yourself,” replied she, with dignity; “but if what you are about to say throws the smallest shade upon my family or country, you will only wound me still more. Let us leave this subject; and I will only see you under the fresh light, which shows you to me obliging, respectful, and devoted.”

“Devoted until death,” replied he.

“But,” said Marie Antoinette, with a smile, “at present it is a question not of death, but of ruin; and I do not wish you devoted even so far. You shall live, and not be ruined, at least, not by me; for they say you are ruining yourself.”

“Madame!”

“Oh! that is your own business; only, as a friend, I would counsel you to be economical — the king would like you better.”

“I would become a miser to please your majesty.”

“Oh, the king,” replied she, with an accent on the word, “does not love misers either.”

“I will become whatever your majesty desires,” replied he, with a hardly-disguised passion.

"I said, then," continued she, "that you shall not be ruined for me. You have advanced money on my account, and I have the means of meeting the calls; therefore, regard the affair for the future as in my hands."

"To finish it, then, it only remains for me to offer the necklace to your majesty;" and drawing out the case, he presented it to her.

She took it, but did not open it, and laid it down by her side. She received kindly all his polite speeches, but as she was longing to be left alone with her diamonds, she began to answer somewhat absently.

He thought she was embarrassed, and was delighted, thinking it showed, at least, an absence of indifference. He then kissed her hand, and took leave, going away full of enthusiasm and hope.

Jeanne was waiting for him in the carriage, and received his ardent protestations with pleasure. "Well," said she, "shall you be Richelieu or Mazarin? Have her lips given you encouragement in ambition or love? Are you launched in politics or intrigue?"

"Do not laugh, dear countess; I am full of happiness."

"Already!"

"Assist me, and in three weeks I may be a minister."

"Peste! that is a long time; the next payment is in a fortnight."

"Ah! the queen has money, and will pay, and I shall have only the merit of the intention. It is too little; I would willingly have paid for this reconciliation with the whole sum."

"Make yourself easy," replied the countess; "you shall have this merit if you desire it."

"I should have preferred it; the queen would then have been under an obligation to me."

"Monseigneur, something tells me you will have this satisfaction. Are you prepared for it?"

"I have mortgaged all my revenue for the ensuing year."

"Then you have the money?"

"Certainly, for this payment; after that, I do not know what I shall do."

"Oh, this payment will give you three quiet months; who knows what may happen in three months?"

"That is true; but she said that the king wished me to incur no more debt."

"Two months in the ministry would set all straight."

"Countess!"

“Oh, do not be fastidious; if you do not assist yourself, others will.”

“You are right. Where are you going now?”

“Back to the queen, to hear what she says of your interview.”

“Good! I go to Paris.”

“Why? You should go this evening to the ‘jeu du roi;’ it is good policy to keep your ground.”

“No, countess; I must attend a rendezvous, for which I received a note this morning.”

“A rendezvous?”

“Yes, and a serious one, by the contents of the note. Look.”

“A man’s writing,” said the countess; and, opening the note, she read:

“Monseigneur, — Some one wishes to see you about raising an important sum of money. This person will wait on you this evening, at Paris, to solicit the honor of an interview.”

“Anonymous — some beggar?”

“No, countess; no beggar would expose himself to the risk of being beaten by my servants. Besides, I fancy I have seen the writing before. So au revoir, countess.”

“Apropos, monseigneur, if you are going to get a windfall, some large sum, I understand we are to share.”

“Countess, you have brought me luck; I shall not be ungrateful.” And they separated.

The cardinal was full of happy dreams: the queen had received him kindly. He would place himself at the head of her party, and make it a popular one; he would protect her, and for her sake would abandon his slothful life, and live an active one.

As soon as he arrived at his hotel, he commenced burning a box full of love-letters; then he called his steward to order some economical reforms, and sat down to his history of English politics. Soon he heard a ring, and a servant entered to announce the person who had written to him that morning.

“Ask his name,” said the cardinal.

The man, having inquired, returned and said:

“M. le Comte de Cagliostro.”

“Let him come in.”

The count entered.

“Mon Dieu!” cried the cardinal, “is it possible? Joseph Balsamo, who was supposed to have perished in the flames?”

“Yes, monseigneur, more alive than ever.”

“But, sir, you have taken a new name.”

“Yes, monseigneur; the other recalled too many painful recollections. Possibly, you yourself would not have opened your door to Joseph Balsamo.”

“I! oh yes, sir.”

“Then monseigneur has a better memory and more honesty than most men.”

“Monsieur, you once rendered me a service.”

“Am I not, monseigneur, a good specimen of the results of my elixir?”

“I confess it, sir; but you seem above humanity — you, who distribute health and gold to all.”

“Health perhaps, monseigneur, but not gold.”

“You make no more gold.”

“No, monseigneur.”

“Why?”

“Because I lost the parcel of an indispensable ingredient which Althotas discovered, but of which I never had the receipt. He has carried that secret with him to the grave.”

“He is dead, then? How, could you not preserve the life of this man, so useful to you, as you have kept yourself through so many centuries?”

“Because I can guard against illness, but not against such accidents as kill before I can act.”

“He died from an accident, then?”

“The fire in which you thought I died killed him; or rather he, weary of life, chose to die.”

“It is strange.”

“No, it is natural; I have a hundred times thought of ending my life.”

“But you have not done so.”

“Because I enjoy a state of youth, in which health and pleasure kept me from ennui; but he had chosen one of old age. He was a savant, and cared only for science; and thus youth, with its thousand pleasures, would have constantly drawn him from its study. An old man meditates better than a young one. Althotas died a victim to his love of science: I lead a worldly life, and do nothing — I live like a planet.”

“Oh, sir, your words and appearance bring to me dreams of my youth. It is ten years since I saw you.”

“Yes; but if you are no longer a fine young man, you are a prince. Do you remember the day when, in my cabinet, I promised you the love of the woman whose fair locks I consulted?”

The cardinal turned from pale to red. Terror and joy almost stopped the beating of his heart.

“I remember,” said he.

“Ah, let me try if I can still play the magician. This fair child of your dreams — — ”

“What is she doing now?”

“Ah, I suspect you yourself have seen her to-day; indeed, you have not long left her.”

The cardinal could hardly stand.

“Oh, I beg, sir — — ” he cried.

“Let us speak of something else,” said Cagliostro, sitting down.

CHAPTER LVII.

DEBTOR AND CREDITOR.

“Now that we have renewed our acquaintance, let us converse,” said Cagliostro.

“Yes,” replied the cardinal, “about the money you wrote of; it was a pretext, was it not?”

“No, monsieur, a serious matter, as it concerns a sum of 500,000 francs.”

“The sum which you lent me?” cried the cardinal, growing pale.

“Yes, monseigneur; I love to see so good a memory in a great prince like you.”

The cardinal felt overwhelmed by the blow. At last, trying to smile, he said:

“I thought that Joseph Balsamo had carried his debt with him to the tomb, as he threw the receipt into the fire.”

“Monseigneur,” replied the count, “the life of Joseph Balsamo is as indestructible as the sheet on which you wrote. Death cannot conquer the elixir of life; fire is powerless against asbestos.”

“I do not understand,” said the cardinal.

“You soon will,” replied Cagliostro, producing a folded paper, which he offered to the prince.

He, before opening it, cried, “My receipt!”

“Yes, monseigneur, your receipt.”

“But I saw you burn it.”

“True, I threw it on the fire, but by accident you had written on a piece of asbestos, so that the receipt remained uninjured among the cinders.”

“Monsieur,” said the cardinal, haughtily, for he thought this a proof that he had been suspected, “believe me, I should not have denied my debt, even without this paper; therefore you were wrong to deceive me.”

“I deceived you?”

“Yes; you made me think the paper was destroyed.”

“To leave you the calm enjoyment of 500,000 francs.”

“But, sir, why have you left such a sum for ten years unclaimed?”

"I knew, monseigneur, that it was safe. Various events have deprived me of my wealth; but, knowing that I had this sum in reserve, I have waited patiently until the last moment."

"And has that arrived?"

"Alas! yes, monseigneur."

"So that you can really wait no longer?"

"No, monseigneur."

"You want it at once?"

"If it please you to pay it."

The cardinal was at first silent, through despair. Then he said, in a hoarse voice:

"M. le Comte, we unhappy princes of the earth do not improvise fortunes as quickly as you enchanters."

"Oh, monseigneur," said Cagliostro, "I would not have asked you for this sum, had I not known beforehand that you had it."

"I have 500,000 francs?"

"30,000 in gold, 11,000 in silver, and the rest in notes, which are in this buhl cabinet."

The cardinal turned white. "You knew this?"

"Yes, monseigneur, and I know you have made great sacrifices to obtain it. I have heard that you will pay heavily for it."

"Oh, it is too true!"

"But, monseigneur, during these ten years I have often been in want and embarrassment, yet I have kept this paper back, so as not to trouble you; therefore I do not think you can complain."

"Complain! oh, no, sir; when you graciously lent me such a sum, I must ever remain your debtor. But during those ten years there were twenty occasions when I could have repaid you with ease, while to-day the restitution you demand embarrasses me dreadfully. You, who know everything, who read even hearts, and penetrate the doors of cabinets, doubtless, know also the purpose for which this money was destined."

"You are wrong, monseigneur," said Cagliostro, coldly. "My knowledge has brought me so much misery and disappointment, that I no longer seek to penetrate the secrets of others. It concerned me to know whether you had this money, as I wished to claim it; but once having ascertained that, I did not trouble myself to think for what purpose it was destined. Besides, did I know it, it might seem so grave a matter as almost to force me to waive my claim, which really at present I cannot afford to do. Therefore, I prefer to be ignorant."

"Oh, monsieur," cried the cardinal, "do not think I wish to parade my embarrassments in order to elude my debt! You have your own interests to look to; they are guaranteed by this paper, which bears my signature — that is enough. You shall have your money, although I do not think there was any promise to pay."

"Your eminence is mistaken;" and opening the paper he read these words:

"I acknowledge the receipt of 500,000 francs from M. Joseph Balsamo, which I will repay on demand.

"Louis de Rohan."

"You see, monseigneur, that I only ask my right; besides, as this was a spontaneous loan by me to a man I hardly knew, the payment might have been equally spontaneous, without waiting for me to claim it. But you did not think so. Well, monseigneur, I withdraw this paper, and bid you adieu."

"No, count," replied the cardinal; "a Rohan must not receive lessons in generosity; besides, this is a mere question of honesty. Give me the paper, sir, and I will discharge my debt."

For a moment Cagliostro hesitated, for the pale face and distressed air of the cardinal inclined him to pity; but quickly hardening himself he handed him the paper. M. de Rohan went to the cabinet, and took out the money. "There," said he, "are your 500,000 francs; and I owe you 250,000 more for interest, which you shall have if you will give me time."

"Monseigneur," said Cagliostro, "I lent 500,000 francs to M. de Rohan, which he has paid me; he therefore owes me nothing more. I will take the notes with me, and send for the money. I thank you for your compliance with my request." Then, bowing, he left the room.

"Well," sighed M. de Rohan, "it is likely, at least, that the queen has the money, and no Joseph Balsamo will come and take it from her."

CHAPTER LVIII.

FAMILY ACCOUNTS.

It was the day before the first payment was due, and M. de Calonne had so much to do, that he had forgotten his promise. The queen had up to this time waited patiently, relying on his word; she now, however, was beginning to grow uneasy, when she received the following note:

"This evening the business with which your majesty has charged me will be settled by the Council; the money will be with the queen to-morrow evening."

Marie Antoinette recovered all her gaiety directly.

After dinner the king went to the Council, but in a rather bad humor. The news from Russia was bad; a vessel had been lost; some of the provinces refused to pay the taxes; also a beautiful map of the world, made by himself, had that day split into two pieces. Vainly, therefore, M. de Calonne produced his accounts, with his usual smiling air; the king continued out of temper. For a long time he sat, as usual, drawing hieroglyphics on a piece of paper, whilst the foreign correspondence was being read, and paying little attention to what passed around him.

At last, however, M. de Calonne began to speak of the loan to be raised for the ensuing year. The king became attentive, and said, "Always borrowing; but how is it to be repaid? That is a problem, M. de Calonne, for you to solve."

"Sire, a loan is only turning a stream from one direction, to cause it to flow more abundantly in another. In deepening the channel, you only increase the supply; therefore, let us not think of paying, but only of obtaining present supplies." M. de Calonne then explained his plans, which were approved by his colleagues.

The king agreed, with a sigh.

"Now we have money," said M. de Calonne, "let us dispose of it;" and he handed a paper to the king, with a list of pensions, gifts, and payments to be made.

The king glanced at the total, — ”1,900,000 francs for this — enormous!”

“But, sire, one item is 500,000 francs.”

“Which?”

“The advance to the queen.”

“To the queen! 500,000 francs to the queen! — impossible!”

“Pardon, sire, it is correct.”

“But there must be a mistake; a fortnight ago her majesty received her money.”

“Sire, but if her majesty has need of money; and we all know how well she employs it.”

“No,” cried the king; “the queen does not want this money; she said to me that she preferred a vessel to jewels. The queen thinks but of France, and when France is poor, we that are rich ought to lend to France; and if she does require this money, it will be a greater merit to wait for it; and I guarantee that she will wait.”

The ministers applauded this patriotic speech of the king, — only M. de Calonne insisted.

“Really, monsieur,” said the king, “you are more interested for us than we are for ourselves.”

“The queen, sire, will accuse us of having been backward when her interests were concerned.”

“I will plead your cause.”

“But, sire, the queen never asks without necessity.”

“If the queen has wants, they are, I trust, less imperious than those of the poor, and she will be the first to acknowledge it.”

“Sire!”

“I am resolved,” said the king; “and I fancy I hear the queen in her generosity thanking me for having so well understood her heart.”

M. de Calonne bit his lips, and Louis, content with this personal sacrifice, signed all the rest without looking at them.

“Calonne, you shall tell the queen yourself.”

“Oh! sire, I beg to resign to you the honor.”

“So be it then. Ah! here she comes, let us meet her.”

“I beg your majesty to excuse me,” he replied, and retired quickly.

The king approached the queen — she was leaning on the arm of the Comte d’Artois, and seemed very gay.

“Madame,” said the king, “have you had a pleasant walk?”

“Yes, sire. And you an agreeable council?”

“Yes, madame, I have gained you 500,000 francs.”

“M. de Calonne has kept his word,” thought the queen.

“Only imagine, madame,” continued the king; “M. de Calonne had put down 500,000 francs for you, and I have struck it out, — a clear gain, therefore, of that sum.”

“Struck it through!” cried the queen, turning pale; “but, sire — — ”

“Oh! I am so hungry, I am going to supper;” and he went away delighted with his work.

“Brother,” said the queen, “seek M. de Calonne for me.”

At that moment a note from him was handed to her: “Your majesty will have learned that the king refused your grant. It was incomprehensible, and I retired from the council penetrated with grief.”

“Read,” said she, passing the note to the count.

“And there are people,” said he, “who say that we squander the revenue! This is an extraordinary proceeding — — ”

“Quite husbandlike,” said the queen. “Adieu, brother.”

“I condole with you,” he replied; “and it is a lesson for me. I was going to make a request to-morrow for myself.”

“Send for Madame de la Motte,” said the queen, when she returned to her room.

CHAPTER LIX.

MARIE ANTOINETTE AS QUEEN, AND MADAME DE LA MOTTE AS WOMAN.

The courier despatched for Madame de la Motte, not finding her at home, went to the hotel of the Cardinal de Rohan to inquire if she were there.

The well-tutored Swiss replied that she was not, but that he could get any message transmitted to her.

The courier, therefore, left word for her to come to the queen as soon as possible. The man had hardly left the door before the message was delivered to Jeanne as she sat at supper with the cardinal. She set off immediately, and was at once introduced into the queen's chamber.

"Oh!" cried the queen on seeing her, "I have something to tell you. The king has refused me 500,000 francs."

"Mon Dieu!" murmured the countess.

"Incredible, is it not? He struck through the item; but it is useless to talk of it; you must return to Paris, and tell the cardinal that since he is so kind I accept the 500,000 francs he offered me. It is selfish, I know, but what can I do?"

"Oh! madame!" cried Jeanne, "we are lost — the cardinal no longer has the money."

The queen started.

"No money!" stammered she.

"No, madame; an unexpected creditor claimed this money from him. It was a debt of honor, and he paid it."

"The whole 500,000 francs?

"Yes, madame."

"And he has no more?"

"No, madame, he told me this an hour and a half ago, and confessed to me that he had no other resources."

The queen leaned her head on her hands; then, after a few moments' reflection, she said:

“This, countess, is a terrible lesson for me, and a punishment for having done anything, great or small, without the king’s knowledge. It was a folly; I had no need of this necklace.”

“True, madame; but if the queen consulted only her absolute wants — — ”

“I must consult before everything the tranquillity and happiness of my household. I renounce forever what has begun with so much annoyance. I will sacrifice my vanity on the altar of duty, as M. de Provence would say; and beautiful as this necklace is, you shall carry it back to MM. Bœhmer and Bossange.”

“Carry it back?”

“Yes.”

“But, madame, your majesty has already given 100,000 francs for it.”

“Well, I shall gain all the rest that was to have been paid for it.”

“But, madame, they will not like to return your money.”

“I give it up on condition of their breaking the contract. Now, countess, that I have come to this determination, I feel at ease once more. This necklace brought with it cares and fears; diamonds cannot compensate for these. Take it away, countess; the jewelers must be satisfied; they will have their necklace, and 100,000 francs into the bargain.”

“But M. de Rohan?”

“He only acted to give me pleasure, and when he is told it is my pleasure, not to have the necklace, he will understand me, I am sure; and if he is a good friend, he will approve and strengthen me in my sacrifice.” Saying these words, the queen held out the casket to Jeanne.

She did not take it. “Why not ask for time, madame?”

“No, countess, it is humiliation. One may humiliate one’s self for a person one loves, to save a living creature, were it only a dog; but only to keep some sparkling stones — never, countess; take it away.”

“But, madame, it will surely become known that your majesty has had the jewels, and was obliged to return them.”

“No one will know anything about it. The jewelers will surely hold their tongues for 100,000 francs. Take it away, countess, and thank M. de Rohan for his good-will towards me. There is no time to lose; go as soon as possible, and bring me back a receipt for them.”

“Madame, it shall be done as you wish.”

She first drove home, and changed her dress, which was too elegant for a visit to the jewelers. Meanwhile she reflected much; she thought still it was a fault for M. de Rohan to allow the queen to part with these jewels; and should she obey her orders without consulting him, would he not have reason to complain? Would he not rather sell himself than let the queen return them? “I must consult him,” she thought; “but, after all, he never can get the money.” She then took the necklace from the case, once more to look at and admire it. “1,600,000 francs in my possession; true, it is but for an hour. To carry away such a sum in gold I should want two horses, yet how easily I hold it here! But I must decide. Shall I go to the cardinal, or take it direct to the jewelers, as the queen ordered? And the receipt — in what form shall I get it, so as not to compromise the queen, the cardinal, or myself? Shall I consult — — Ah! if he loved me more, and could give me the diamonds.”

She sat down again and remained nearly an hour in deep thought. Then she rose, with a strange look in her eyes, and rang the bell with a determined air.

She ordered a coach, and in a few minutes she reached the house of the journalist, M. Reteau de Villette.

CHAPTER LX.

THE RECEIPT OF MM. BŒHMER AND BOSSANGE, AND THE GRATITUDE OF THE QUEEN.

The result of Madame de la Motte’s visit to M. Reteau de Villette appeared the next day. At seven o’clock in the morning she sent to the queen the following paper:

“We, the undersigned, acknowledge having received back again the diamond necklace sold to the queen for 1,600,000 francs, the diamonds not suiting her majesty, who has paid us for our loss and trouble 100,000 francs.

“Bœhmer and Bossange.”

The queen, now tranquil about the whole affair, locked up the receipt, and thought no more of it.

But, in strange contradiction to this receipt, the jewelers received a visit two days after from M. de Rohan, who felt uneasy about the payment.

If the instalment had not been paid, he expected to find them naturally annoyed; but to his great satisfaction they received him with smiles.

“The queen has paid, then?” he asked.

“No, monseigneur, the queen could not procure the money, as the king had refused it to her; but she has guaranteed the debt, and that fully satisfies us.”

“Ah! so much the better; but how? Through the countess?”

“No, monseigneur. On hearing of the king’s refusal, which soon became public, we wrote to Madame de la Motte — — ”

“When?”

“Yesterday.”

“And she replied?”

“By one word, ‘Wait.’ That evening we received from the queen, by a courier, a letter.”

“A letter to you?”

“Or rather a guarantee, in due form.”

“Let me see it.”

"Oh! we would with pleasure, but her majesty enjoins that it is not to be shown to any one."

"Then you are safe?"

"Perfectly, monseigneur."

"The queen acknowledges the debt?"

"Fully."

"And engages to pay?"

"500,000 francs in three months, the rest in six;" and she adds, "let the affair rest between ourselves. You will have no cause to repent it."

"I am charmed that it is settled," said the cardinal.

We must now raise the veil, though, doubtless, our readers comprehend how Jeanne de la Motte had acted towards her benefactress, and how she had managed to satisfy both the queen and the jewelers by borrowing the pen of M. Reteau.

Three months were thus obtained for the completion of her design of crime and deception, and within three months everything would be arranged.

She went to M. de Rohan, and repeated to him what the jewelers had already told him.

He asked if the queen remembered his good intentions. She drew a picture of her gratitude, which enchanted him.

Her intention had been to sell some of the diamonds to the value of 100,000 crowns, and then pass over to England, where, when necessary, she could dispose of the remainder. But her first essay frightened her; some offered despicably small sums for the stones, others went into raptures, declaring they had never seen such diamonds but in the necklace of MM. Bœhmer and Bossange.

She abandoned this course, therefore, which she saw might soon bring about her ruin. She shut up the diamonds carefully, and resolved to wait. But her position was critical. A few words of explanation between the queen and the cardinal, and all would be discovered. She consoled herself by thinking that the cardinal was too much in love not to fall into all the snares she might lay for him.

One thought alone occupied her — how to prevent their meeting. That he would not be long satisfied without an interview she knew — what should she do? Persuade him to ask for one, and offend the queen by his presumption? — but then the queen would speak her anger out, and all would come to light. She must compromise her, and endeavor so to close her lips. But if they met by chance, what remained for her but flight? That was easy; a few hours would suffice. Then, again, she thought of the name she would leave behind her, and bear with her; no longer a woman of rank, but a thief, whom justice only does not reach, because she is too far off. No, she would not fly, if she could help it. She would try what audacity and skill could do, remain here and act between them. “To prevent them from meeting — that is the difficulty, as he is in love, and a prince, who has a right to see the queen; and she is now grateful and will no longer fly from him; but if I excite him to too open an admiration and disgust her, I alienate them more than ever. She will take fire easily, but what I want is something to make the queen tremble as well as him; something which would give me power to say, ‘If you accuse me, I will accuse you and ruin you — leave me my wealth, and I will you your honor.’ This is what I must seek for, and what I must find.”

CHAPTER LXI.

THE PRISONER.

Meanwhile a different scene was passing in the Rue St. Claude, where M. de Cagliostro had lodged Oliva in the old house, to keep her from the pursuit of the police. There she lived, retired, and almost happy: Cagliostro lavished care and attentions on her, and she liked being protected by this great lord, who asked nothing from her in return. Only what did he want? she often asked herself, uselessly, for he must have some object. Her amour propre made her decide that after all he was in love with her; and she began to build castles in the air in which we must confess poor Beausire now very rarely had a place. Therefore the two visits a week paid to her by Cagliostro were always eagerly looked forward to, and between them she amused herself with her dreams, and playing the great lady. However, her books were soon read through, at least such as suited her taste, and pictures and music soon wearied her. She soon began to regret her mornings passed at the windows of the Rue Dauphine, where she used to sit to attract the attention of the passers-by; and her delightful promenades in the Quartier St. Germain, where so many people used to turn to look after her. True, the police-agents were formidable people, but what availed safety if she was not amused; so she first regretted her liberty, and then regretted Beausire.

Then she began to lose her appetite for want of fresh air, for she had been used to walk every day.

One day, when she was bemoaning her fate, she received an unexpected visit from Cagliostro. He gave his accustomed signal, and she opened the door, which was always kept bolted, with an eagerness which showed her delight; and, seizing his hands, she cried, in an impatient voice, “Monsieur, I am ennuyée here.”

“This is unlucky, my dear child.”

“I shall die here.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

"Well," said he, soothingly, "do not blame me, blame the lieutenant of police, who persecutes you."

"You exasperate me with your sang froid, monsieur; I would rather you flew in a passion."

"Confess, mademoiselle, that you are unreasonable," said he, seating himself.

"It is all very well for you to talk," replied she; "you come and go as you like, you breathe the fresh air, your life is full of pleasure. I vegetate in the space to which you have limited me, and your assistance, is useless to me if I am to die here."

"Die!" said the count, smiling.

"You behave very badly to me; you forget that I love passionately."

"M. Beausire?"

"Yes, Beausire, I love him. I always told you so. Did you think I had forgotten him?"

"So little did I think so, mademoiselle, that I bring you news of him."

"Ah!"

"He is a charming person, young and handsome, is he not?"

"Full of imagination and fire, rather rough toward me, but that is his way of showing his love."

"Therefore I wished to take you back to him."

"You did not wish that a month ago."

"No, but when I see how you love him."

"Ah! you are laughing at me."

"Oh, no, you have resisted all my advances so well."

"Yes, have I not?"

"It was your love for him."

"But yours, then, was not very tenacious."

"No, I am neither old enough nor ugly enough, neither poor enough nor foolish enough, to run the risk of a refusal; and I saw that you would always have preferred Beausire."

"Oh, but," cried the coquette, using her eyes, which had remained idle so long, "this famous compact which you proposed to me, the right of always giving me your arm, of visiting me when you liked; did that give you no hope?"

Cagliostro did not reply, but turned his eyes as if dazzled by her glances.

"Let us return to Beausire," she said, piqued at his indifference; "why have you not brought him here? it would have been a charity. He is free —— "

"Because," replied Cagliostro, "Beausire has too much imagination, and has also embroiled himself with the police."

"What has he done?"

"Oh, a delightful trick, a most ingenious idea; I call it a joke, but matter-of-fact people — and you know how matter-of-fact M. de Crosne can be — call it a theft."

"A theft!" cried Oliva, frightened. "Is he arrested?"

"No, but he is pursued."

"And is he in danger?"

"That I cannot tell you; he is well hunted for, and if you were together, the chances of his being taken would be doubled."

"Oh, yes, he must hide, poor fellow; I will hide too; let me leave France, monsieur. Pray render me this service; for if I remain shut up here, I shall end by committing some imprudence."

"What do you call imprudence?"

"Oh, just getting some fresh air."

"I do not want to prevent your getting fresh air; you would lose your beauty, and M. Beausire would love you no longer. Open the windows as much as you like."

"Oh, I see I have offended you; you care no more about me."

"Offended me — how?"

"Because you had taken a fancy to me, and I repulsed you. A man of your consequence, a handsome man like you, has a right to be angry at being rejected by a poor girl like me. But do not abandon me, sir, I entreat;" and she put her arms round his neck.

"Poor little thing," said he, kissing her forehead; "do not be afraid; I am not angry or offended. Indeed, were you to offer me your love, I should refuse you, so much do I desire to inspire pure sentiments. Besides, I should think you influenced more by gratitude than love; so we will remain as we are, and I will continue to protect you."

Oliva let his hand fall, humiliated, and duped by the pretended generosity of Cagliostro. "Oh, I shall say henceforth," she cried, "that there are men superior to what I ever thought."

"All women are good," thought Cagliostro, "if you only touch the right chord. — From this evening," he said aloud, "you shall move to other rooms, where the windows look on Menilmontant and the Bellevue. You need not fear to show yourself to the neighbors; they are all honest, simple people, who will never suspect you. Only keep a little back from the window, lest any one passing through the street should see you. At least you will have air and sunshine."

Oliva looked pleased.

"Shall I conduct you there now?"

"Oh, yes."

He took a light, and she followed him up a staircase to the third story, and entered a room, completely furnished, and ready for occupation.

"One would think it was prepared for me," she said.

"Not for you, but for myself; I like this place, and often come here to sleep. Nothing shall be wanting to make you comfortable, and your femme-de-chambre shall attend you in a quarter of an hour." And he left the room.

The poor prisoner sat down by her elegant bed, murmuring, "I understand nothing of all this."

CHAPTER LXII.

THE LOOK OUT.

Oliva went to bed, and slept better. She admired the count, whom she did not in the least understand. She could no longer think him timid; she did not suspect that he was only cold and insensible. She felt pleased at the perfect safety in which he assured her she was; and in the morning she examined her new rooms, and found them nobly and luxuriously furnished, and enjoyed immensely her privilege of going out into the balcony, filled with flowers, and where she got sunshine and fresh air, although she drew back whenever she saw any one approaching, or heard a carriage coming. There were not many, however, in the Rue St. Claude. She could see the château of Menilmontant, the great trees in the cemetery, myriads of houses of all colors; and she could see the fields beyond, full of children at play, and the peasants trotting along the roads on their donkeys. All this charmed Oliva, who had always a heart of love for the country, since she had left Taverney Maison-Rouge. At last, getting tired of this distant view, she began to examine the houses opposite to her. In some, she saw birds in cages; and in one, hung with yellow silk curtains, and ornamented with flowers, she thought she could distinguish a figure moving about. She called her femme-de-chambre to make inquiries about them; but the woman could only show her mistress all the churches, and tell her the names of the streets; she knew nothing of the neighbors. Oliva therefore sent her away again, and determined to watch for herself.

She saw some open their doors, and come out for a walk, and others variously occupied. At last she saw the figure of a woman seat herself in an armchair, in the room with the yellow curtains, and abandon her head for an hour and a half to a hair-dresser, while he built up one of those immense edifices worn at that time, in which minerals, vegetables, and even animals, were introduced. At last, it was complete: Oliva thought she looked pretty, and admired her little foot, encased in a rose-colored slipper, which rested on another chair. She began to construct all sorts of romances about this lady, and made various movements to attract her attention, but she never turned her eyes that way, as that room had never before been occupied, and she began to despair. The lady was, of course, Jeanne de Valois, who was deeply absorbed in devising some scheme for preventing the queen and the cardinal from meeting. At last, Oliva, turning suddenly round, knocked over a flower-pot which fell from the balcony with a crash: at the sound the lady turned and saw her, and clasping her hands she called out, “The Queen;” but looking again, she murmured, “Oh! I sought for a means to gain my end, and I have found one.” Then, hearing a sound behind her, Oliva turned and saw Cagliostro, and came in directly.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE TWO NEIGHBORS.

Cagliostro recommended her using the greatest circumspection, and, above all, not to make friends with her neighbors; but she did not feel disposed to relinquish the intercourse which she hoped for with her fair neighbor opposite. She, however, promised to obey him; but he was no sooner gone than she returned to her balcony, hoping to attract her attention again. Nor was she disappointed, for Jeanne, who was watching for her, acknowledged her with a bow and by kissing her hand. This went on for two days. Jeanne was ever ready to wave her a good morning, or an adieu when she went out.

Cagliostro, at his next visit, informed Oliva that an unknown person had paid a visit to her hotel.

“What do you mean?” cried Oliva.

“A very pretty and elegant lady presented herself here, and asked the servant who inhabited this story, and wished to see you. I fear you are discovered; you must take care, the police have female spies as well as male, and I warn you, that if M. de Crosne claims you, I cannot refuse to give you up.”

Oliva was not at all frightened, she recognized the portrait of her opposite neighbor, and felt delighted at this advance, but she dissembled with the count, and said, “Oh! I am not at all frightened; no one has seen me; she could not have meant me.”

“But she said a lady in these rooms.”

“Well, I will be more careful than ever, and, besides, this house is so impenetrable.”

“Yes, without climbing the wall, which is not easy, or opening the little door with a key like mine, which I never lend, no one can come in, so I think you are safe.”

Oliva overwhelmed the count with thanks and protestations, but at six o’clock the next morning she was out in the balcony. She had not long to wait before Jeanne appeared, who, after looking cautiously up and down the street, and observing that all the doors and windows were still closed, and that everything was quiet, called across, “I wish to pay you a visit, madame; is it impossible to see you?”

“Alas, yes!” said Oliva.

“Can I send a letter?”

“Oh, no!”

Jeanne, after a moment’s thought, left her balcony, but soon returned with a cross-bow, with which she shot a little wooden ball right through the open window of Oliva’s room.

She picked it up and found wrapped round it the following note:

“You interest me, beautiful lady. I find you charming, and love you only by having seen you. Are you a prisoner? I vainly tried to obtain admission to you. Does the enchanter who guards you never let any one approach you? Will you be my friend? If you cannot go out, you can at least write, and as I go out when I please, wait till you see me pass, and then throw out your answer. Tie a thread to your balcony, and attach your note to it; I will take it off and fasten mine on, and in the dark no one will observe us. If your eyes have not deceived me, I count on a return of my affection and esteem, and between us we will outwit any one.

“Your Friend.”

Oliva trembled with joy when she read this note. She replied as follows:

“I love you as you love me. I am a victim of the wickedness and cruelty of men; but he who keeps me here is a protector and not a tyrant; he comes to see me nearly every day. I will explain all this some day; but, alas! I cannot go out; I am locked up. Oh! if I could but see you; there is so much we cannot write.

“Your friend,

“Oliva Legay.”

Then, when evening came, she let the thread fall over the balcony. Jeanne, who was below, caught it, and half an hour afterwards attached to it the following answer:

“You seem generally alone. How is your house secured — with a key? Who has this key? Could you not borrow or steal it? It would be no harm, but would procure you a few hours of liberty, or a few walks with a friend, who would console you for all your misfortune.”

Oliva devoured this eagerly. She had remarked that when the count came in he put down his lantern and the key on a chiffonier. So she prepared some wax to take the impression of the key at his first visit. This she accomplished without his once turning to look at her, and as soon as he was gone, she put it into a little box, and lowered it to Jeanne, with a note.

The next day she received the following answer:

“My Dearest,

“To-night, at eleven o’clock, you will descend and unlock the door, when you will find yourself in the arms of your faithful friend.”

Oliva felt more charmed than with the most tender love-letter that she had ever received. At the appointed time she went down and met Jeanne, who embraced her tenderly, and made her get into a carriage that waited a little way off; they remained out two hours, and parted with kisses and protestations of affection. Jeanne learned the name of Oliva’s protector; she feared this man, and determined to preserve the most perfect mystery as to her plans. Oliva had confided everything to her about Beausire, the police, and all. Jeanne gave herself out for a young lady of rank, living here secretly, without the knowledge of her friends. One knew all, the other nothing. From this day, then, it was no longer necessary to throw out notes; Jeanne had her key, and carried off Oliva whenever she pleased. “M. de Cagliostro suspects nothing?” she often asked Oliva.

“Oh! no,” she would reply; “I do not think he would believe it if I told him.”

A week passed thus.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE RENDEZVOUS.

When Charny arrived at his estates, the doctor ordered him to keep within doors, and not receive visitors; orders which he rigorously obeyed, to the great disappointment of all the young ladies in the neighborhood, who were most anxious to see this young man, reputed to be at once so brave and so handsome. His malady, however, was more mental than bodily; he was devoured by regrets, by longings, and by ennui; so, after a week, he set off one night on horseback, and, before the morning, was at Versailles. He found a little house there, outside the park, which had been empty for some time; it had been inhabited by one of the king's huntsmen, who had cut his throat, and since then the place had been deserted. There Charny lived in profound solitude; but he could see the queen from afar when she walked in the park with her ladies, and when she went in again he could see her windows from his own, and watch her lights every evening until they disappeared; and he even fancied he could see her shadow pass before the window. One evening he had watched all this as usual, and after sitting two hours longer at his window, was preparing to go to bed, for midnight was striking from a neighboring clock, when the sound of a key turning in a lock arrested his attention. It was that of a little door leading into the park, only twenty paces from his cottage, and which was never used, except sometimes on hunting-days. Whoever it was that entered did not speak, but closed it again quietly, and entered an avenue under his windows. At first Charny could not distinguish them through the thick wood, though he could hear the rustling of dresses; but as they emerged into an open space, and bright moonlight, he almost uttered a cry of joy in recognizing the tournure of Marie Antoinette, and a glimpse of her face; she held in her hand a beautiful rose. Stifling his emotion, he stepped down as quietly as possible into the park, and hid behind a clump of trees, where he could see her better. “Oh!” thought he, “were she but alone, I would brave tortures, or death itself, that I might once fall on my knees before her, and tell her, ‘I love you!’“ Oh, were she but menaced by some danger, how gladly would he have risked his life to save hers. Suddenly the two ladies stopped, and the shortest, after saying a few words to her companion in a low voice, left her. The queen, therefore, remained alone, and Charny felt inclined to run towards her; but he reflected that the moment she saw him she would take fright, and call out, and that her cries would first bring back her companion, and then the guards; that his retreat would be discovered, and he should be forced to leave it. In a few minutes the other lady reappeared, but not alone. Behind her came a man muffled up in a large cloak, and whose face was concealed by a slouch hat.

This man advanced with an uncertain and hesitating step to where the queen stood, when he took off his hat and made a low bow. The surprise which Charny felt at first soon changed into a more painful feeling. Why was the queen in the park at this time of night? Who was this man who was waiting for her, and whom she had sent her companion to fetch? Then he remembered that the queen often occupied herself with foreign politics, much to the annoyance of the king. Was this a secret messenger from Schoenbrunn, or from Berlin? This idea restored him to some degree of composure. The queen's companion stood a few steps off, anxiously watching lest they should be seen; but it was as necessary to guard against spies in a secret political rendezvous as in one of love. After a short time Charny saw the gentleman bow to the ground, and turn to leave, when the companion of the queen said to him, "Stop." He stopped, and the two ladies passed close to Charny, who could even recognize the queen's favorite scent, vervain, mixed with mignonette. They passed on, and disappeared. A few moments after the gentleman passed; he held in his hand a rose, which he pressed passionately to his lips. Did this look political? Charny's head turned; he felt a strong impulse to rush on this man and tear the flower from him, when the queen's companion reappeared, and said, "Come, monseigneur." He joined her quickly, and they went away. Charny remained in a distracted state, leaning against the tree.

CHAPTER LXV.

THE QUEEN’S HAND.

When Charny reentered the house, he felt overwhelmed by what he had seen — that he should have discovered this retreat, which he had thought so precious, only to be the witness of a crime, committed by the queen against her conjugal duty and royal dignity. This man must be a lover; in vain did he try to persuade himself that the rose was the pledge of some political compact, given instead of a letter, which might have been too compromising. The passionate kiss which he had seen imprinted on it forbade this supposition. These thoughts haunted him all night and all the next day, through which he waited with a feverish impatience, fearing the new revelations which the night might bring forth. He saw her taking her ordinary walk with her ladies, then watched the lights extinguished one by one, and he waited nervously for the stroke of midnight, the hour of the rendezvous of the preceding night. It struck, and no one had appeared. He then wondered how he could have expected it; she surely would not repeat the same imprudence two nights following. But as these thoughts passed through his mind, he heard the key turn again and saw the door open. Charny grew deadly pale when he recognized the same two figures enter the park. “Oh, it is too much,” he said to himself, and then repeated his movements of the night before, swearing that, whatever happened, he would restrain himself, and remember that she was his queen. All passed exactly as the night before: the confidante left and returned with the same man; only this time, instead of advancing with his former timid respect, he almost ran up to the queen, and kneeled down before her. Charny could not hear what he said, but he seemed to speak with passionate energy. She did not reply, but stood in a pensive attitude; then he spoke again, and at last she said a few words, in a low voice, when the unknown cried out, in a loud voice, so that Charny could hear, “Oh! thanks, your majesty, till to-morrow, then.” The queen drew her hood still more over her face, and held out both her hands to the unknown, who imprinted on them a kiss so long and tender that Charny gnashed his teeth with rage. The queen then took the arm of her companion and walked quickly away; the unknown passed also. Charny remained in a state of fury not to be described; he ran about the park like a madman: at last he began to wonder where this man came from; he traced his steps to the door behind the baths of Apollo. He comes not from Versailles, but from Paris, thought Charny, and to-morrow he will return, for he said, “to-morrow.” Till then let me devour my tears in silence, but to-morrow shall be the last day of my life, for we will be four at the rendezvous.

CHAPTER LXVI.

WOMAN AND QUEEN.

The next night the door opened at the same time, and the two ladies appeared. Charny had taken his resolution — he would find out who this lover was; but when he entered the avenue he could see no one — they had entered the baths of Apollo. He walked towards the door, and saw the confidante, who waited outside. The queen, then, was in there alone with her lover; it was too much. Charny was about to seize this woman, and force her to tell him everything; but the rage and emotion he had endured were too much for him — a mist passed over his eyes, internal bleeding commenced, and he fainted. When he came to himself again, the clock was striking two, the place was deserted, and there was no trace of what had passed there. He went home, and passed a night almost of delirium. The next morning he arose, pale as death, and went towards the Castle of Trianon just as the queen was leaving the chapel. All heads were respectfully lowered as she passed. She was looking beautiful, and when she saw Charny she colored, and uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"I thought you were in the country, M. de Charny," she said.

"I have returned, madame," said he, in a brusque and almost rude tone.

She looked at him in surprise; then, turning to the ladies, "Good morning, countess," she said to Madame de la Motte, who stood near.

Charny started as he caught sight of her, and looked at her almost wildly. "He has not quite recovered his reason," thought the queen, observing his strange manner. Then, turning to him again, "How are you now, M. de Charny?" said she, in a kind voice.

"Very well, madame."

She looked surprised again; then said:

"Where are you living?"

"At Versailles, madame."

"Since when?"

"For three nights," replied he, in a marked manner.

The queen manifested no emotion, but Jeanne trembled.

"Have you not something to say to me?" asked the queen again, with kindness.

"Oh, madame, I should have too much to say to your majesty."

"Come," said she, and she walked towards her apartments; but to avoid the appearance of a tête-à-tête, she invited several ladies to follow her. Jeanne, unquiet, placed herself among them; but when they arrived, she dismissed Madame de Misery, and the other ladies, understanding that she wished to be alone, left her. Charny stood before her.

"Speak," said the queen; "you appear troubled, sir."

"How can I begin?" said Charny, thinking aloud; "how can I dare to accuse honor and majesty?"

"Sir!" cried Marie Antoinette, with a flaming look.

"And yet I should only say what I have seen."

The queen rose. "Sir," said she, "it is very early in the morning for me to think you intoxicated, but I can find no other solution for this conduct."

Charny, unmoved, continued, "After all, what is a queen? — a woman. And am I not a man as well as a subject?"

"Monsieur!"

"Madame, anger is out of place now. I believe I have formerly proved that I had respect for your royal dignity. I fear I proved that I had an insane love for yourself. Choose, therefore, to whom I shall speak. Is it to the queen, or the woman, that I shall address my accusation of dishonor and shame?"

"Monsieur de Charny," cried the queen, growing pale, "if you do not leave this room, I must have you turned out by my guards!"

"But I will tell you first," cried he, passionately, "why I call you an unworthy queen and woman! I have been in the park these three nights!"

Instead of seeing her tremble, as he believed she would on hearing these words, the queen rose, and, approaching him, said, "M. de Charny, your state excites my pity. Your hands tremble, you grow pale; you are suffering. Shall I call for help?"

"I saw you!" cried he again; "saw you with that man to whom you gave the rose! saw you when he kissed your hands! saw you when you entered the baths of Apollo with him!"

The queen passed her hands over her eyes, as if to make sure that she was not dreaming.

"Sit down," said she, "or you will fall."

Charny, indeed, unable to keep up, fell upon the sofa.

She sat down by him. “Be calm,” said she, “and repeat what you have just said.”

“Do you want to kill me?” he murmured.

“Then let me question,” she said. “How long have you returned from the country?”

“A fortnight.”

“Where do you live?”

“In the huntsman’s house, which I have hired.”

“At the end of the park?”

“Yes.”

“You speak of some one whom you saw with me.”

“Yes.”

“Where?”

“In the park.”

“When?”

“At midnight. Tuesday, for the first time, I saw you and your companion.”

“Oh, I had a companion! Do you know her also?”

“I thought just now I recognized her, but I could not be positive, because it was only the figure — she always hid her face, like all who commit crimes.”

“And this person to whom you say I gave a rose?”

“I have never been able to meet him.”

“You do not know him, then?”

“Only that he is called monseigneur.”

The queen stamped her foot.

“Go on!” said she. “Tuesday I gave him a rose — — ”

“Wednesday you gave him your hands to kiss, and yesterday you went alone with him into the baths of Apollo, while your companion waited outside.”

“And you saw me?” said she, rising.

He lifted his hands to heaven, and cried, “I swear it!”

“Oh, he swears!”

“Yes. On Tuesday you wore your green dress, moirée, with gold; Wednesday, the dress with great blue and brown leaves; and yesterday, the same dress that you wore when I last kissed your hand. Oh, madame, I am ready to die with grief and shame while I repeat that, on my life, my honor, it was really you!"

"What can I say?" cried the queen dreadfully agitated. "If I swore, he would not believe me."

Charny shook his head.

"Madman!" cried she, "thus to accuse your queen — to dishonor thus an innocent woman! Do you believe me when I swear, by all I hold sacred, that I was not in the park on either of those days after four o'clock? Do you wish it to be proved by my women — by the king? No; he does not believe me."

"I saw you," replied he.

"Oh, I know!" she cried. "Did they not see me at the ball at the Opera, at Mesmer's, scandalizing the crowd? You know it — you, who fought for me!"

"Madame, then I fought because I did not believe it; now I might fight, but I believe."

The queen raised her arms to heaven, while burning tears rolled down her cheeks.

"My God," she cried, "send me some thought which will save me! I do not wish this man to despise me."

Charny, moved to the heart, hid his face in his hands.

Then, after a moment's silence, the queen continued:

"Sir, you owe me reparation. I exact this from you. You say you have seen me three nights with a man; I have been already injured through the resemblance to me of some woman, I know not whom, but who is like her unhappy queen; but you are pleased to think it was me. Well, I will go with you into the park; and if she appears again, you will be satisfied? Perhaps we shall see her together; then, sir, you will regret the suffering you have caused me."

Charny pressed his hands to his heart.

"Oh, madame, you overwhelm me with your kindness!"

"I wish to overwhelm you with proofs. Not a word, to any one, but this evening, at ten o'clock, wait alone at the door of the park. Now go, sir."

Charny kneeled, and went away without a word.

Jeanne, who was waiting in the ante-chamber, examined him attentively as he came out. She was soon after summoned to the queen.

CHAPTER LXVII.

WOMAN AND DEMON.

Jeanne had remarked the trouble of Charny, the solicitude of the queen, and the eagerness of both for a conversation.

After what we have already told of the meetings between Jeanne and Oliva, our readers will have been at no loss to understand the scenes in the park. Jeanne, when she came in to the queen, watched her closely, hoping to gather something from her; but Marie Antoinette was beginning to learn caution, and she guarded herself carefully. Jeanne was, therefore, reduced to conjectures. She had already ordered one of her footmen to follow M. de Charny; the man reported that he had gone into a house at the end of the park.

“There is, then, no more doubt,” thought Jeanne; “it is a lover who has seen everything, it is clear. I should be a fool not to understand. I must undo what I have done.”

On leaving Versailles, she drove to the Rue St. Claude; there she found a superb present of plate, sent to her by the cardinal. She then drove to his house, and found him radiant with joy and pride. On her entrance he ran to meet her, calling her “Dear countess,” and full of protestations and gratitude.

“Thank you also, for your charming present. You are more than a happy man; you are a triumphant victor.”

“Countess, it frightens me; it is too much.”

Jeanne smiled.

“You come from Versailles?” continued he.

“Yes.”

“You have seen her?”

“I have just left her.”

“And she said nothing?”

“What do you expect that she said?”

“Oh, I am insatiable.”

“Well, you had better not ask.”

“You frighten me. Is anything wrong? Have I come to the height of my happiness, and is the descent to begin?”

“You are very fortunate not to have been discovered.”

“Oh! with precautions, and the intelligence of two hearts and one mind — — ”

“That will not prevent eyes seeing through the trees.”

“We have been seen?”

“I fear so.”

“And recognized?”

“Oh, monseigneur, if you had been — if this secret had been known to any one, Jeanne de Valois would be out of the kingdom, and you would be dead.”

“True; but tell me quickly. They have seen people walking in the park; is there any harm in that?”

“Ask the king.”

“The king knows?”

“I repeat to you, if the king knew, you would be in the Bastile. But I advise you not to tempt Providence again.”

“What do you mean, dear countess?”

“Do you not understand?”

“I fear to understand,” he replied.

“I shall fear, if you do not promise to go no more to Versailles.”

“By day?”

“Or by night.”

“Impossible!”

“Why so, monseigneur?”

“Because I have in my heart a love which will end only with my life.”

“So I perceive,” replied she, ironically; “and it is to arrive more quickly at this result that you persist in returning to the park; for most assuredly, if you do, your love and your life will end together.”

“Oh, countess, how fearful you are — you who were so brave yesterday!”

“I am always brave when there is no danger.”

“But I have the bravery of my race, and am happier in the presence of danger.”

“But permit me to tell you — — ”

“No, countess, the die is cast. Death, if it comes; but first, love. I shall return to Versailles.”

“Alone, then.”

“You abandon me?”

“And not I alone.”

“She will come?”

“You deceive yourself; she will not come.”

“Is that what you were sent to tell me?”

“It is what I have been preparing you for.”

“She will see me no more?”

“Never; and it is I who have counseled it.”

“Madame, do not plunge the knife into my heart!” cried he, in a doleful voice.

“It would be much more cruel, monseigneur, to let two foolish people destroy themselves for want of a little good advice.”

“Countess, I would rather die.”

“As regards yourself, that is easy; but, subject, you dare not dethrone your queen; man, you will not destroy a woman.”

“But confess that you do not come in her name, that she does not throw me off.”

“I speak in her name.”

“It is only a delay she asks?”

“Take it as you wish; but obey her orders.”

“The park is not the only place of meeting. There are a hundred safer spots — the queen can come to you, for instance.”

“Monseigneur, not a word more. The weight of your secret is too much for me, and I believe her capable, in a fit of remorse, of confessing all to the king.”

“Good God! impossible.”

“If you saw her, you would pity her.”

“What can I do then?”

“Insure your safety by your silence.”

“But she will think I have forgotten her, and accuse me of being a coward.”

“To save her.”

“Can a woman forgive him who abandons her?”

“Do not judge her like others.”

"I believe her great and strong. I love her for her courage and her noble heart. She may count on me, as I do on her. Once more I will see her, lay bare my heart to her; and whatever she then commands, I will sacredly obey."

Jeanne rose. "Go, then," said she, "but go alone. I have thrown the key of the park into the river. You can go to Versailles — I shall go to Switzerland or Holland. The further off I am when the shell bursts the better."

"Countess, you abandon me. With whom shall I talk of her?"

"Oh! you have the park and the echoes. You can teach them her name!"

"Countess, pity me; I am in despair."

"Well, but do not act in so childish and dangerous a manner. If you love her so much, guard her name, and if you are not totally without gratitude, do not involve in your own ruin those who have served you through friendship. Swear to me not to attempt to see or speak to her for a fortnight, and I will remain, and may yet be of service to you. But if you decide to brave all, I shall leave at once, and you must extricate yourself as you can."

"It is dreadful," murmured the cardinal; "the fall from so much happiness is overwhelming. I shall die of it."

"Suffering is always the consequence of love. Come, monseigneur, decide. Am I to remain here, or start for Lausanne?"

"Remain, countess."

"You swear to obey me."

"On the faith of a Rohan."

"Good. Well, then, I forbid interviews, but not letters."

"Really! I may write?"

"Yes."

"And she will answer."

"Try."

The cardinal kissed Jeanne's hand again, and called her his guardian angel. The demon within her must have laughed.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE NIGHT.

That day, at four o’clock, a man on horseback stopped in the outskirts of the park, just behind the baths of Apollo, where M. de Rohan used to wait. He got off, and looked at the places where the grass had been trodden down. “Here are the traces,” thought he; “it is as I supposed. M. de Charny has returned for a fortnight, and this is where he enters the park.” And he sighed. “Leave him to his happiness. God gives to one, and denies to another. But I will have proof to-night. I will hide in the bushes, and see what happens.”

As for Charny, obedient to the queen’s commands, he waited for orders; but it was half-past ten, and no one appeared. He waited with impatient anxiety. Then he began to think she had deceived him, and had promised what she did not mean to perform. “How could I be so foolish — I, who saw her — to be taken in by her words and promises!” At last he saw a figure approaching, wrapped in a large black mantle, and he uttered a cry of joy, for he recognized the queen. He ran to her, and fell at her feet.

“Ah, here you are, sir! it is well.”

“Ah, madame! I scarcely hoped you were coming.”

“Have you your sword?”

“Yes, madame.”

“Where do you say those people came in?”

“By this door.”

“At what time?”

“At midnight each time.”

“There is no reason why they should not come again to-night. You have not spoken to any one.”

“To no one.”

“Come into the thick wood, and let us watch, I have not spoken of this to M. de Crosne. I have already mentioned this creature to him, and if she be not arrested, he is either incapable, or in league with my enemies. It seems incredible that any one should dare to play such tricks under my eyes, unless they were sure of impunity. Therefore, I think it is time to take the care of my reputation on myself. What do you think?”

“Oh, madame! allow me to be silent! I am ashamed of all I have said.”

“At least you are an honest man,” replied the queen, “and speak to the accused face to face. You do not stab in the dark.”

“Oh, madame, it is eleven o’clock! I tremble.”

“Look about, that no one is here.”

Charny obeyed.

“No one,” said he.

“Where did the scenes pass that you have described?”

“Oh, madame! I had a shock when I returned to you; for she stood just where you are at this moment.”

“Here!” cried the queen, leaving the place with disgust.

“Yes, madame; under the chestnut tree.”

“Then, sir, let us move, for they will most likely come here again.”

He followed the queen to a different place. She, silent and proud, waited for the proof of her innocence to appear. Midnight struck. The door did not open. Half an hour passed, during which the queen asked ten times if they had always been punctual.

Three-quarters struck — the queen stamped with impatience. “They will not come,” she cried; “these misfortunes only happen to me;” and she looked at Charny, ready to quarrel with him, if she saw any expression of triumph or irony: but he, as his suspicions began to return, grew so pale and looked so melancholy, that he was like the figure of a martyr.

At last she took his arm, and led him under the chestnut tree. “You say,” she murmured, “that it was here you saw her?”

“Yes, madame.”

“Here that she gave the rose?” And the queen, fatigued and wearied with waiting and disappointment leaned against the tree, and covered her face with her hands, but Charny could see the tears stealing through. At last she raised her head:

“Sir,” said she, “I am condemned. I promised to prove to you to-day that I was calumniated; God does not permit it, and I submit. I have done what no other woman, not to say queen, would have done. What a queen! who cannot reign over one heart, who cannot obtain the esteem of one honest man. Come, sir, give me your arm, if you do not despise me too much.”

“Oh, madame!” cried he, falling at her feet, “if I were only an unhappy man who loves you, could you not pardon me?”

“You!” cried she, with a bitter laugh, “you love me! and believe me infamous!”

“Oh, madame!”

“You accuse me of giving roses, kisses, and love. No, sir, no falsehoods! you do not love me.”

“Madame, I saw these phantoms. Pity me, for I am on the rack.”

She took his hands. “Yes, you saw, and you think it was I. Well, if here under this same tree, you at my feet, I press your hands, and say to you, ‘M, de Charny, I love you, I have loved, and shall love no one else in this world, may God pardon me’ — will that convince you? Will you believe me then?” As she spoke, she came so close to him that he felt her breath on his lips. “Oh!” cried Charny, “now I am ready to die.”

“Give me your arm,” said she, “and teach me where they went, and where she gave the rose,” — and she took from her bosom a rose and held it to him. He took it and pressed it to his heart.

“Then,” continued she, “the other gave him her hand to kiss.”

“Both her hands,” cried Charny, pressing his burning lips passionately on hers.

“Now they visited, the baths — so will we; follow me to the place.” He followed her, like a man in a strange, happy dream. They looked all round, then opened the door, and walked through. Then they came out again: two o’clock struck. “Adieu,” said she; “go home until to-morrow.” And she walked away quickly towards the château.

When they were gone, a man rose from among the bushes. He had heard and seen all.

CHAPTER LXIX.

THE CONGE.

The queen went to mass the next day, which was Sunday, smiling and beautiful. When she woke in the morning she said, “It is a lovely day, it makes me happy only to live.” She seemed full of joy, and was generous and gracious to every one. The road was lined as usual on her return with ladies and gentlemen. Among them were Madame de la Motte and M. de Charny, who was complimented by many friends on his return, and on his radiant looks. Glancing round, he saw Philippe standing near him, whom he had not seen since the day of the duel.

“Gentlemen,” said Charny, passing through the crowd, “allow me to fulfil an act of politeness;” and, advancing towards Philippe, he said, “Allow me, M. de Taverney, to thank you now for the interest you have taken in my health. I shall have the honor to pay you a visit to-morrow. I trust you preserve no enmity towards me.”

“None, sir,” replied Philippe.

Charny held out his hand, but Philippe, without seeming to notice it, said, “Here comes the queen, sir.” As she approached, she fixed her looks on Charny with that rash openness which she always showed in her affections, while she said to several gentlemen who were pressing round her, “Ask me what you please, gentlemen, for to-day I can refuse nothing.” A voice said, “Madame.” She turned, and saw Philippe, and thus found herself between two men, of whom she almost reproached herself with loving one too much and the other too little.

“M. de Taverney, you have something to ask me; pray speak — — ”

“Only ten minutes’ audience at your majesty’s leisure,” replied he, with grave solemnity.

“Immediately, sir — follow me.” A quarter of an hour after, Philippe was introduced into the library, where the queen waited for him.

“Ah! M. de Taverney, enter,” said she in a gay tone, “and do not look so sorrowful. Do you know I feel rather frightened whenever a Taverney asks for an audience. Reassure me quickly, and tell me that you are not come to announce a misfortune."

"Madame, this time I only bring you good news."

"Oh! some news."

"Alas, yes, your majesty."

"There! an 'alas' again."

"Madame, I am about to assure your majesty that you need never again fear to be saddened by the sight of a Taverney; for, madame, the last of this family, to whom you once deigned to show some kindness, is about to leave the court of France forever."

The queen, dropping her gay tone, said, "You leave us?"

"Yes, your majesty."

"You also!"

Philippe bowed. "My sister, madame, has already had that grief; I am much more useless to your majesty."

The queen started as she remembered that Andrée had asked for her congé on the day following her first visit to Charny in the doctor's apartments. "It is strange," she murmured, as Philippe remained motionless as a statue, waiting his dismissal. At last she said abruptly, "Where are you going?"

"To join M. de la Pérouse, madame."

"He is at Newfoundland."

"I have prepared to join him there."

"Do you know that a frightful death has been predicted for him?"

"A speedy one," replied Philippe; "that is not necessarily a frightful one."

"And you are really going?"

"Yes, madame, to share his fate."

The queen was silent for a time, and then said, "Why do you go?"

"Because I am anxious to travel."

"But you have already made the tour of the world."

"Of the New World, madame, but not of the Old."

"A race of iron, with hearts of steel, are you Taverneys. You and your sister are terrible people — you go not for the sake of traveling, but to leave me. Your sister said she was called by religions duty; it was a pretext. However, she wished to go, and she went. May she be happy! You might be happy here, but you also wish to go away."

“Spare us, I pray you, madame; if you could read our hearts, you would find them full of unlimited devotion towards you.”

“Oh!” cried the queen, “you are too exacting; she takes the world for a heaven, where one should only live as a saint; you look upon it as a hell — and both fly from it; she because she finds what she does not seek, and you because you do not find what you do seek. Am I not right? Ah! M. de Taverney, allow human beings to be imperfect, and do not expect royalty to be superhuman. Be more tolerant, or, rather, less egotistical.” She spoke earnestly, and continued: “All I know is, that I loved Andrée, and that she left me; that I valued you, and you are about to do the same. It is humiliating to see two such people abandon my court.”

“Nothing can humiliate persons like your majesty. Shame does not reach those placed so high.”

“What has wounded you?” asked the queen.

“Nothing, madame.”

“Your rank has been raised, your fortune was progressing.”

“I can but repeat to your majesty that the court does not please me.”

“And if I ordered you to stay here?”

“I should have the grief of disobeying your majesty.”

“Oh! I know,” cried she impatiently, “you bear malice; you quarreled with a gentleman here, M. de Charny, and wounded him; and because you see him returned to-day, you are jealous, and wish to leave.”

Philippe turned pale, but replied, “Madame, I saw him sooner than you imagine, for I met him at two o’clock this morning by the baths of Apollo.”

It was now the queen’s time to grow pale, but she felt a kind of admiration for one who had retained so much courtesy and self-command in the midst of his anger and grief. “Go,” murmured she at length, in a faint voice, “I will keep you no longer.”

Philippe bowed, and left the room, while the queen sank, terrified and overwhelmed, on the sofa.

CHAPTER LXX.

THE JEALOUSY OF THE CARDINAL.

The cardinal passed three nights very different to those when he went to the park, and which he constantly lived over again in his memory. No news of any one, no hope of a visit; nothing but a dead silence, and perfect darkness, after such brightness and happiness. He began to fear that, after all, his sacrifice had been displeasing to the queen. His uneasiness became insupportable. He sent ten times in one day to Madame de la Motte: the tenth messenger brought Jeanne to him. On seeing her he cried out, "How! you live so tranquilly; you know my anxiety, and you, my friend, never come near me."

"Oh, monseigneur, patience, I beg. I have been far more useful to you at Versailles than I could have been here."

"Tell me," replied he, "what does she say? Is she less cruel?"

"Absence is equal pain, whether borne at Versailles or at Paris."

"Oh, I thank you, but the proofs — — "

"Proofs! Are you in your senses, monseigneur, to ask a woman for proofs of her own infidelity?"

"I am not speaking of proofs for a lawsuit, countess, only a token of love."

"It seems to me that you are either very exacting or very forgetful."

"Oh! I know you will tell me that I might be more than satisfied. But judge by yourself, countess; would you like to be thrown on one side, after having received assurances of favor?"

"Assurances!"

"Oh, certainly, I have nothing to complain of, but still — — "

"I cannot be answerable for unreasonable discontents."

"Countess, you treat me ill. Instead of reproaching me for my folly, you should try to aid me."

"I cannot aid you. I see nothing to do."

"Nothing to do?"

"No."

"Well, madame, I do not say the same."

"Ah, monseigneur, anger will not help you; and besides, you are unjust."

"No, countess; if you do not assist me any longer, I know it is because you cannot. Only tell me the truth at once."

"What truth?"

"That the queen is a perfidious coquette, who makes people adore her, and then drives them to despair."

Jeanne looked at him with an air of surprise, although she had expected him to arrive at this state, and she felt really pleased, for she thought that it would help her out of her difficult position. "Explain yourself," she said.

"Confess that the queen refuses to see me."

"I do not say so, monseigneur."

"She wishes to keep me away lest I should rouse the suspicions of some other lover."

"Ah, monseigneur!" cried Jeanne in a tone which gave him liberty to suspect anything.

"Listen," continued he; "the last time I saw her, I thought I heard steps in the wood — — "

"Folly!"

"And I suspect — — "

"Say no more, monseigneur. It is an insult to the queen; besides, even if it were true that she fears the surveillance of another lover, why should you reproach her with a past which she has sacrificed to you?"

"But if this past be again a present, and about to be a future?"

"Fie, monseigneur, your suspicions are offensive both to the queen and to me."

"Then, countess, bring me a proof — does she love me at all?"

"It is very simple," replied Jeanne, pointing to his writing table, "to ask her."

"You will give her a note?"

"Who else would, if not I?"

"And you will bring me an answer?"

"If possible."

"Ah! now you are a good creature, countess."

He sat down, but though he was an eloquent writer, he commenced and destroyed a dozen sheets of paper before he satisfied himself.

"If you go on so, you will never have done," said Jeanne.

"You see, countess, I fear my own tenderness, lest I displease the queen."

"Oh," replied Jeanne, "if you write a business letter, you will get one in reply. That is your own affair."

"You are right, countess; you always see what is best." He then wrote a letter, so full of loving reproaches and ardent protestations, that Jeanne, when he gave it to her to read, thought, "He has written of his own accord what I never should have dared to dictate."

"Will it do?" asked he.

"If she loves you. You will see to-morrow: till then be quiet."

"Till to-morrow, then."

On her return home Jeanne gave way to her reflections. This letter was just what she wanted. How could the cardinal ever accuse her, when he was called on to pay for the necklace? Even admitting that the queen and cardinal met, and that everything was explained, how could they turn against her while she held in her hands such proofs of a scandalous secret? No, they must let her go quietly off with her fortune of a million and a half of francs. They would know she had stolen the diamonds, but they never would publish all this affair; and if one letter was not enough, she would have seven or eight. The first explosion would come from the jewelers, who would claim their money. Then she must confess to M. de Rohan, and make him pay by threatening to publish his letters. Surely they would purchase the honor of a queen and a prince at the price of a million and a half! The jewelers once paid, that question was at an end; Jeanne felt sure of her fortune. She knew that the cardinal had a conviction so firm that nothing could shake it, that he had met the queen. There was but one living witness against her, and that one she would soon cause to disappear. Arrived at this point, she went to the window and saw Oliva, who was watching in her balcony. She made the accustomed sign for her to come down, and Oliva replied joyfully. The great thing now was to get rid of her. To destroy the instrument that has served them in the constant endeavor of those who intrigue; but here it is that they generally fail; they do not succeed in doing so before there has been time to disclose the secret. Jeanne knew that Oliva would not be easy to get rid of, unless she could think of something that would induce her to fly willingly. Oliva, on her part, much as she enjoyed her nocturnal promenades at first, after so much confinement, was already beginning to weary of them, and to sigh once more for liberty and Beausire.

The night came, and they went out together; Oliva disguised under a large cloak and hood, and Jeanne dressed as a grisette; besides which the carriage bore the respectable arms of Valois, which prevented the police, who alone might have recognized Oliva, from searching it.

“Oh! I have been so ennuyée,” cried Oliva, “I have been expecting you so long.”

“It was impossible to come and see you, I should have run, and made you run, a great danger.”

“How so?” said Oliva, astonished.

“A terrible danger at which I still tremble. You know how ennuyée you were, and how much you wished to go out.”

“Yes; and you assisted me like a friend.”

“Certainly; I proposed that we should have some amusement with that officer who is rather mad, and in love with the queen, whom you resemble a little; and endeavor to persuade him that it was the queen he was walking with.”

“Yes,” said Oliva.

“The first two nights you walked in the park, and you played your part to perfection; he was quite taken in.”

“Yes,” said Oliva, “but it was almost a pity to deceive him, poor fellow, he was so delightful.”

“Yes, but the evil is not there. To give a man a rose, to let him kiss your hands, and call you ‘your majesty,’ was all good fun; but, my little Oliva, it seems you did not stop here.”

Oliva colored.

“How?” stammered she.

“There was a third interview.”

“Yes,” replied Oliva, hastily, “you know, for you were there.”

“Excuse me, dear friend; I was there, but at a distance. I neither saw nor heard what passed within, I only know what you told me, that he talked and kissed your hands.”

“Oh, mon Dieu!” murmured Oliva.

“You surely could not have exposed us both to such a terrible danger without telling me of it.”

Oliva trembled from head to foot.

Jeanne continued. “How could I imagine that you, who said you loved M. Beausire, and were courted by a man like Count Cagliostro, whom you refused; oh! it cannot be true.”

“But where is the danger?” asked Oliva.

“The danger! Have we not to manage a madman, one who fears nothing, and will not be controlled. It was no great thing for the queen to give him her hand to kiss or to give him a rose; oh, my dear child, I have not smiled since I heard this.”

“What do you fear?” asked Oliva, her teeth chattering with terror.

“Why, as you are not the queen, and have taken her name, and in her name have committed a folly of this kind, that is unfortunately treason. He has no proof of this — they may be satisfied with a prison or banishment.”

“A prison! banishment!” shrieked Oliva.

“I, at least, intend to take precautions and hide myself.”

“You fear also?”

“Oh! will not this madman divulge my share also? My poor Oliva, this trick of yours will cost us dear.”

Oliva burst into tears.

“Oh!” she cried, “I think I am possessed of a demon, that I can never rest: just saved from one danger, I must rush into another. Suppose I confess all to my protector?”

“A fine story to confess to him, whose advances you refused, that you have committed this imprudence with a stranger.”

“Mon Dieu! you are right.”

“Soon this report will spread, and will reach his ears; then do you not think he will give you up to the police? Even if he only send you away, what will become of you?”

“Oh! I am lost.”

“And M. Beausire, when he shall hear this — — ?”

Oliva started, and wringing her hands violently, cried out, “Oh, he would kill me; but no, I will kill myself. You cannot save me, since you are compromised also.”

“I have,” replied Jeanne, “in the furthest part of Picardy, a little farm. If you can gain this refuge, you might be safe.”

“But you?”

“Oh, once you were gone, I should not fear him.”

“I will go whenever you like.”

“I think you are wise.”

“Must I go at once?”

“Wait till I have prepared everything to insure safety; meanwhile, hide yourself, and do not come near the window.”

“Oh yes, dear friend.”

“And to begin, let us go home, as there is no more to say.”

“How long will your preparations take?”

“I do not know, but remember henceforth, until the day of your departure I shall not come to the window. When you see me there, you will know that the day has arrived, and be prepared.”

They returned in silence. On arriving, Oliva begged pardon humbly of her friend for bringing her into so much danger through her folly.

“I am a woman,” replied Jeanne, “and can pardon a woman’s weakness.”

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE FLIGHT.

Oliva kept her promise, and Jeanne also. Oliva hid herself from every one, and Jeanne made her preparations, and in a few days made her appearance at the window as a sign to Oliva to be ready that evening for flight.

Oliva, divided between joy and terror, began immediately to prepare. Jeanne went to arrange about the carriage that was to convey her away. Eleven o'clock at night had just struck when Jeanne arrived with a post-chaise to which three strong horses were harnessed. A man wrapped in a cloak sat on the box, directing the postilions. Jeanne made them stop at the corner of the street, saying, "Remain here — half an hour will suffice — and then I will bring the person whom you are to conduct with all possible speed to Amiens. There you will give her into the care of the farmer who is my tenant; he has his instructions."

"Yes, madame."

"I forgot — are you armed? This lady is menaced by a madman; he might, perhaps, try to stop her on the road."

"What should I do?"

"Fire on any one who tries to impede your journey."

"Yes, madame."

"You asked me seventy louis; I will give you a hundred, and will pay the expenses of the voyage which you had better make to London. Do not return here; it is more prudent for you to go to St. Valery, and embark at once for England."

"Rely on me, madame."

"Well, I will go and bring the lady."

All seemed asleep in that quiet house. Jeanne lighted the lamp which was to be the signal to Oliva, but received no answering sign. "She will come down in the dark," thought Jeanne; and she went to the door, but it did not open. Oliva was perhaps bringing down her packages. "The fool!" murmured the countess, "how much time she is wasting over her rubbish!" She waited a quarter of an hour — no one came; then half-past eleven struck. “Perhaps she did not see my signal,” thought Jeanne; and she went up and lighted it again, but it was not acknowledged. “She must be ill,” cried Jeanne, in a rage, “and cannot move.” Then she took the key which Oliva had given her; but just as she was about to open the door, she thought, “Suppose some one should be there? But I should hear voices on the staircase, and could return. I must risk something.” She went up, and on arriving outside Oliva’s door she saw a light inside and heard footsteps, but no voices. “It is all right,” she thought; “she was only a long time getting ready.” “Oliva,” said she softly, “open the door.” The door opened, and Jeanne found herself face to face with a man holding a torch in his hand.

“Oliva,” said he, “is this you?” Then, with a tone of admirably-feigned surprise, cried, “Madame de la Motte!”

“M. de Cagliostro!” said she in terror, feeling half inclined to run away; but he took her hand politely, and begged her to sit down.

“To what do I owe the honor of this visit, madame?”

“Monsieur,” said she, stammering, “I came — I sought — — ”

“Allow me, madame, to inquire which of my servants was guilty of the rudeness of letting you come up unattended?”

Jeanne trembled.

“You must have fallen to the lot of my stupid German porter, who is always tipsy.”

“Do not scold him, I beg you, sir,” replied Jeanne, who could hardly speak.

“But was it he?”

“I believe so. But you promise me not to scold him?”

“I will not; only, madame, will you now explain to me — — ”

Jeanne began to gather courage.

“I came to consult you, sir, about certain reports.”

“What reports?”

“Do not hurry me, sir; it is a delicate subject.”

“Ah! you want time to invent,” thought he.

“You are a friend of M. le Cardinal de Rohan?”

“I am acquainted with him, madame.”

“Well, I came to ask you — — ”

“What?”

“Oh, sir, you must know that he has shown me much kindness, and I wish to know if I may rely upon it. You understand me, sir? You read all hearts.”

“You must be a little more explicit before I can assist you, madame.”

“Monsieur, they say that his eminence loves elsewhere in a high quarter.”

“Madame, allow me first to ask you one question. How did you come to seek me here, since I do not live here?” Jeanne trembled. “How did you get in? — for there are neither porter nor servants in this part of my hotel. It could not be me you sought here — who was it? You do not reply; I must aid you a little. You came in by the help of a key which you have now in your pocket. You came to seek a young woman whom from pure kindness I had concealed here.”

Jeanne trembled visibly, but replied, “If it were so, it is no crime; one woman is permitted to visit another. Call her; she will tell you if my friendship is a hurtful one.”

“Madame, you say that because you know she is not here.”

“Not here! Oliva not here?”

“Oh you do not know that — you, who helped her to escape!”

“I!” cried Jeanne; “you accuse me of that?”

“I convict you,” replied Cagliostro; and he took a paper from the table, and showed her the following words, addressed to himself:

“Monsieur, and my generous protector, forgive me for leaving you; but above all things I love M. Beausire. He came and I follow him. Adieu! Believe in my gratitude!”

“Beausire!” cried Jeanne, petrified; “he, who did not even know her address?”

“Oh, madame, here is another paper, which was doubtless dropped by M. Beausire.” The countess read, shuddering:

“M. Beausire will find Mademoiselle Oliva, Rue St. Claude, at the corner of the boulevard. He had better come for her at once; it is time. This is the advice of a sincere friend.”

“Oh!” groaned the countess.

“And he has taken her away,” said Cagliostro.

“But who wrote this note?”

“Doubtless yourself.”

“But how did he get in?”

“Probably with your key.”

“But as I have it here, he could not have it.”

“Whoever has one can easily have two.”

“You are convinced,” replied she, “while I can only suspect.” She turned and went away, but found the staircase lighted and filled with men-servants. Cagliostro called out loudly before them, “Madame la Comtesse de la Motte!” She went out full of rage and disappointment.

CHAPTER LXXII.

THE LETTER AND THE RECEIPT.

The day arrived for the payment of the first 500,000 francs. The jewelers had prepared a receipt, but no one came with the money in exchange for it. They passed the day and night in a state of cruel anxiety. The following day M. Bœhmer went to Versailles, and asked to see the queen; he was told that he could not be admitted without a letter of audience. However, he begged so hard, and urged his solicitations so well among the servants, that they consented to place him in the queen's way when she went out. Marie Antoinette, still full of joy from her interview with Charny, came along, looking bright and happy, when she caught sight of the somewhat solemn face of M. Bœhmer. She smiled on him, which he took for a favorable sign, and asked for an audience, which was promised him for two o'clock. On his return to Bossange, they agreed that no doubt the money was all right, only the queen had been unable to send it the day before. At two o'clock Bœhmer returned to Versailles.

"What is it now, M. Bœhmer?" asked the queen, as he entered. Bœhmer thought some one must be listening, and looked cautiously around him.

"Have you any secret to tell?" asked the queen, in surprise. "The same as before, I suppose — some jewels to sell. But make yourself easy; no one can hear you."

"Ahem!" murmured Bœhmer, startled at his reception.

"Well, what?"

"Then I may speak out to your majesty?"

"Anything; only be quick."

"I only wished to say that your majesty probably forgot us yesterday."

"Forgot you! what do you mean?"

"Yesterday the sum was due — — "

"What sum?"

"Pardon me, your majesty, if I am indiscreet. Perhaps your majesty is not prepared. It would be a misfortune; but still — — "

"But," interrupted the queen, "I do not understand a word of what you are saying. Pray explain yourself."

"Yesterday the first payment for the necklace was due."

"Have you sold it, then?"

"Certainly, your majesty," replied Bœhmer, looking stupefied.

"And those to whom you have sold it have not paid, my poor Bœhmer? So much the worse; but they must do as I did, and, if they cannot pay, send it you back again."

The jeweler staggered like a man who had just had a sunstroke. "I do not understand your majesty," he said.

"Why, Bœhmer, if ten purchasers were each to send it back, and give you 100,000 francs, as I did, you would make a million, and keep your necklace also."

"Your majesty says," cried Bœhmer, ready to drop, "that you sent me back the necklace!"

"Certainly. What is the matter?"

"What! your majesty denies having bought the necklace?"

"Ah! what comedy is this, sir?" said the queen, severely. "Is this unlucky necklace destined to turn some one's brain?"

"But did your majesty really say that you had returned the necklace?"

"Happily," replied the queen, "I can refresh your memory, as you are so forgetful, to say nothing more." She went to her secretaire, and, taking out the receipt, showed it to him, saying, "I suppose this is clear enough?"

Bœhmer's expression changed from incredulity to terror. "Madame," cried he, "I never signed this receipt!"

"You deny it!" said the queen, with flashing eyes.

"Positively, if I lose my life for it. I never received the necklace; I never signed the receipt. Were the headsman here, or the gallows, I would repeat the same thing!"

"Then, sir," said the queen, "do you think I have robbed you? do you think I have your necklace?"

Bœhmer drew out a pocket-book, and in his turn produced a letter. "I do not believe," said he, "that if your majesty had wished to return the necklace, you would have written this."

"I write! I never wrote to you; that is not my writing."

"It is signed," said Bœhmer.

“Yes, ‘Marie Antoinette of France.’ You are mad! Do you think that is the way I sign? I am of Austria. Go, M. Bœhmer; you have played this game unskilfully; your forgers have not understood their work.”

“My forgers!” cried the poor Bœhmer, ready to faint at this new blow. “You suspect me?”

“You accuse me, Marie Antoinette?” replied she.

“But this letter?”

“This receipt? Give it me back, and take your letter; the first lawyer you ask will tell you how much that is worth.” And taking the receipt from his trembling hands, and throwing the letter indignantly down, she left the room.

The unfortunate man ran to communicate this dreadful blow to his partner, who was waiting in the carriage for him; and on their way home their gestures and cries of grief were so frantic as to attract the attention of every passer-by. At last they decided to return to Versailles.

Immediately they presented themselves they were admitted by the order of the queen.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

“Roi ne puis, prince ne daigne,
Rohan je suis.”

“Ah!” cried the queen, immediately they entered, “you have brought a reinforcement, M. Bœhmer; so much the better.”

Bœhmer kneeled at her feet, and Bossange followed his example.

“Gentlemen,” said she, “I have now grown calm, and an idea has come into my head which has modified my opinion with regard to you. It seems to me that we have both been duped.”

“Ah, madame, you suspect me no longer. Forger was a dreadful word.”

“No, I do not suspect you now.”

“Does your majesty suspect any one else?”

“Reply to my questions. You say you have not these diamonds?”

“No, madame, we have not.”

“It then matters little to you that I sent them — that is my affair. Did you not see Madame de la Motte?”

“Yes, madame.”

“And she gave you nothing from me?”

“No, madame; she only said to us, ‘Wait.’“

“But this letter — who brought it?”

“An unknown messenger, during the night.”

She rang, and a servant entered.

“Send for Madame de la Motte. And,” continued the queen to M. Bœhmer, “did you see M. de Rohan?”

“Yes, madame; he paid us a visit in order to ask.”

“Good!” said the queen. “I wish to hear no more now; but if he be mixed up with this affair, I think you need not despair. I think I can guess what Madame de la Motte meant by saying ‘Wait.’ Meanwhile, go to M. de Rohan, and tell him all you have told us, and that I know it.”

The jewelers had a renewed spark of hope; only Bossange said that the receipt was a false one, and that that was a crime.

“True,” replied Marie Antoinette, “if you did not write it, it is a crime; but to prove this I must confront you with the person whom I charged to return you the jewels.”

“Whenever your majesty pleases; we do not fear the test.”

“Go first to M. de Rohan; he alone can enlighten you.”

“And will your majesty permit us to bring you his answer?”

“Yes; but I dare say I shall know all before you do.”

When they were gone she was restless and unquiet, and despatched courier after courier for Madame de la Motte.

We will, however, leave her for the present, and follow the jewelers in their search after the truth.

The cardinal was at home, reading, with a rage impossible to describe, a little note which Madame de la Motte had just sent him, as she said, from Versailles. It was harsh, forbidding any hope, ordering him to think no more of the past, not to appear again at Versailles, and ending with an appeal to his loyalty not to attempt to renew relations which were become impossible.

“Coquette, capricious, perfidious!” cried he. “Here are four letters which she has written to me, each more unjust and tyrannical than the other. She encouraged me only for a caprice, and now sacrifices me to a new one.”

It was at this moment that the jewelers presented themselves. Three times he refused them admittance, and each time the servant came back, saying that they would not go without an audience. “Let them come in, then,” said he.

“What means this rudeness, gentlemen? No one owes you anything here.”

The jewelers, driven to despair, made a half-menacing gesture.

“Are you mad?” asked the cardinal.

“Monseigneur,” replied Bœhmer, with a sigh, “do us justice, and do not compel us to be rude to an illustrious prince.”

“Either you are not mad, in which case my servants shall throw you out of the window; or you are mad, and they shall simply push you out of the door.”

“Monseigneur, we are not mad, but we have been robbed.”

“What is that to me? I am not lieutenant of police.”

“But you have had the necklace in your hands, and in justice — — ”

“The necklace! is it the necklace that is stolen?”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“Well, what does the queen say about it?”

“She sent me to you.”

“She is very amiable; but what can I do, my poor fellows?”

“You can tell us, monseigneur, what has been done with it.”

“I?”

“Doubtless.”

“Do you think I stole the necklace from the queen?”

“It is not the queen from whom it was stolen.”

“Mon Dieu! from whom, then?”

“The queen denies having had it in her possession.”

“How! she denies it? But I thought you had an acknowledgment from her.”

“She says it is a forged one.”

“Decidedly, you are mad!” cried the cardinal.

“We simply speak the truth.”

“Then she denied it because some one was there.”

“No, monseigneur. And this is not all: not only does the queen deny her own acknowledgment, but she produced a receipt from us, purporting that we had received back the necklace.”

“A receipt from you?”

“Which also is a forgery, M. le Cardinal — you know it.”

“A forgery, and I know it!”

“Assuredly, for you came to confirm what Madame de la Motte had said; and you knew that we had sold the necklace to the queen.”

“Come,” said the cardinal, “this seems a serious affair. This is what I did: first, I bought the necklace of you for her majesty, and paid you 100,000 francs.”

“True, monseigneur.”

“Afterwards you told me that the queen had acknowledged the debt in writing, and fixed the periods of payment.”

“We said so. Will your eminence look at this signature?”

He looked at it, and said directly, “‘Marie Antoinette of France:’ you have been deceived, gentlemen; this is not her signature; she is of the House of Austria.”

“Then,” cried the jewelers, “Madame de la Motte must know the forger and the robber.”

The cardinal appeared struck with this. He acted like the queen; he rang, and said, “Send for Madame de la Motte.” His servants went after Jeanne’s carriage, which had not long left the hotel.

M. Bœhmer continued, “But where is the necklace?”

“How can I tell?” cried the cardinal; “I gave it to the queen. I know no more.”

“We must have our necklace, or our money,” cried the jewelers.

“Gentlemen, this is not my business.”

“It is Madame de la Motte,” cried they in despair, “who has ruined us.”

“I forbid you to accuse her here.”

“Some one must be guilty; some one wrote the forged papers.”

“Was it I?” asked M. de Rohan, haughtily.

“Monseigneur, we do not wish to say so.”

“Well, who then?”

“Monseigneur, we desire an explanation.”

“Wait till I have one myself.”

“But, monseigneur, what are we to say to the queen? For she accused us at first.”

“What does she say now?”

“She says that either you or Madame de la Motte has the necklace, for she has not.”

“Well,” replied the cardinal, pale with rage and shame, “go and tell her — no, tell her nothing; there is scandal enough. But to-morrow I officiate at the chapel at Versailles: when I approach the queen, come to us; I will ask her again if she has the necklace, and you shall hear what she replies; if she denies it before me, then, gentlemen, I am a Rohan, and will pay.” And with these words, pronounced with an indescribable dignity, he dismissed them.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

LOVE AND DIPLOMACY.

The next morning, about ten o’clock, a carriage bearing the arms of M. de Breteuil entered Versailles. Our readers will not have forgotten that this gentleman was a personal enemy of M. de Rohan, and had long been on the watch for an opportunity of injuring him. He now requested an audience from the king, and was admitted.

“It is a beautiful day,” said Louis to his minister; “there is not a cloud in the sky.”

“Sire, I am sorry to bring with me a cloud on your tranquillity.”

“So am I,” replied the king, “but what is it?”

“I feel very much embarrassed, sire, more especially as, perhaps, this affair naturally concerns the lieutenant of police rather than myself, for it is a sort of theft.”

“A theft! well, speak out.”

“Sire, your majesty knows the diamond necklace?”

“M. Bœhmer’s, which the queen refused?”

“Precisely, sire,” said M. de Breteuil; and ignorant of all the mischief he was about to do, he continued, “and this necklace has been stolen.”

“Ah! so much the worse. But diamonds are very easy to trace.”

“But, sire, this is not an ordinary theft; it is pretended that the queen has kept the necklace.”

“Why, she refused it in my presence.”

“Sire, I did not use the right word; the calumnies are too gross.”

“Ah!” said the king with a smile, “I suppose they say now that the queen has stolen the necklace.”

“Sire,” replied M. Breteuil, “they say that the queen recommenced the negotiation for the purchase privately, and that the jewelers hold a paper signed by her, acknowledging that she kept it. I need not tell your majesty how much I despise all such scandalous falsehoods.”

“They say this!” said the king, turning pale. “What do they not say? Had the queen really bought it afterwards, I should not have blamed her. She is a woman, and the necklace is marvelously beautiful; and, thank God, she could still afford it, if she wished for it. I shall only blame her for one thing, for hiding her wishes from me. But that has nothing to do with the king, only with the husband. A husband may scold his wife if he pleases, and no one has a right to interfere. But then," continued he, "what do you mean by a robbery?"

"Oh! I fear I have made your majesty angry."

The king laughed. "Come, tell me all; tell me even that the queen sold the necklace to the Jews. Poor woman, she is often in want of money, oftener than I can give it to her."

"Exactly so; about two months ago the queen asked for 500,000 francs, and your majesty refused it."

"True."

"Well, sire, they say that this money was to have been the first payment for the necklace. The queen, being denied the money, could not pay — — "

"Well!"

"Well, sire, they say the queen applied to some one to help her."

"To a Jew?"

"No, sire; not to a Jew."

"Oh! I guess, some foreign intrigue. The queen asked her mother, or some of her family, for money."

"It would have been better if she had, sire."

"Well, to whom, then, did she apply?"

"Sire, I dare not — — "

"Monsieur, I am tired of this. I order you to speak out at once. Who lent this money to the queen?"

"M. de Rohan."

"M. de Rohan! Are you not ashamed to name to me the most embarrassed man in my kingdom?"

"Sire," said M. de Breteuil, lowering his eyes.

"M. de Breteuil, your manner annoys me. If you have anything to say, speak at once."

"Sire, I cannot bring myself to utter things so compromising to the honor of my king and queen."

"Speak, sir; if there are calumnies, they must be refuted."

"Then, sire, M. de Rohan went to the jewelers, and arranged for the purchase of the necklace, and the mode of payment."

“Really!” cried the king, annoyed and angry.

“It is a fact, sire, capable of being proved with the greatest certainty. I pledge my word for this.”

“This is most annoying,” said the king; “but still, sir, we have not heard of a theft.”

“Sire, the jewelers say that they have a receipt signed by the queen, and she denies having the necklace.”

“Ah!” cried the king, with renewed hope; “she denies it, you see, M. de Breteuil.”

“Oh, sire! I never doubted her majesty’s innocence. I am indeed unfortunate, if your majesty does not see all my respect for the purest of women.”

“Then you only accuse M. de Rohan?”

“Yes, sire. And appearances demand some inquiry into his conduct. The queen says she has not the necklace — the jewelers say they sold it to her. It is not to be found, and the word ‘theft’ is used as connected both with the queen and M. de Rohan.”

“You are right, M. de Breteuil; this affair must be cleared up. But who is that passing below? Is it not M. de Rohan going to the chapel?”

“Not yet, sire; he does not come till eleven o’clock, and he will be dressed in his robes, for he officiates to-day.”

“Then I will send for him and speak to him.”

“Permit me to advise your majesty to speak first to the queen.”

“Yes, she will tell me the truth.”

“Doubtless, sire.”

“But first tell me all you know about it.”

M. de Breteuil, with ingenious hate, mentioned every particular which he thought could injure M. de Rohan. They were interrupted by an officer, who approached the king, and said, “Sire, the queen begs you will come to her.”

“What is it?” asked the king, turning pale. “Wait here, M. de Breteuil.”

CHAPTER LXXV.

CHARNY, CARDINAL, AND QUEEN.

At the same moment as M. de Breteuil asked for an audience of the king, M. de Charny, pale and agitated, begged one of the queen. He was admitted, and touching tremblingly the hand she held out to him, said in an agitated voice, “Oh! madame, what a misfortune!”

“What is the matter?”

“Do you know what I have just heard? What the king has perhaps already heard, or will hear to-morrow.”

She trembled, for she thought of her night with Charny, and fancied they had been seen. “Speak,” said she; “I am strong.”

“They say, madame, that you bought a necklace from M. Bœhmer.”

“I returned it,” said she quickly.

“But they say that you only pretended to do so, when the king prevented you from paying for it by refusing you the money, and that you went to borrow the amount from some one else, who is your lover.”

“And,” cried the queen, with her usual impetuous confidence, “you, monsieur — you let them say that?”

“Madame, yesterday I went to M. Bœhmer’s with my uncle, who had brought some diamonds from the Indies, and wished to have them valued. There we heard this frightful story now being spread abroad by your majesty’s enemies. Madame, I am in despair; if you bought the necklace, tell me; if you have not paid, tell me; but do not let me hear that M. de Rohan paid for you.”

“M. de Rohan!”

“Yes, M. de Rohan, whom they call your lover — whom they say lent the money — and whom an unhappy man, called Charny, saw in the park in Versailles, kneeling before the queen, and kissing her hand.”

“Monsieur,” cried Marie Antoinette, “if you believe these things when you leave me, you do not love me.”

“Oh!” cried the young man, “the danger presses. I come to beg you to do me a favor.”

“What danger?”

“Oh, madame! the cardinal paying for the queen dishonors her. I do not speak now of the grief such a confidence in him causes to me. No; of these things one dies, but does not complain.”

“You are mad!” cried Marie Antoinette, in anger.

“I am not mad, madame, but you are unhappy and lost. I saw you in the park — I told you so — I was not deceived. To-day all the horrible truth has burst out. M. de Rohan boasts, perhaps — — ”

The queen seized his arm. “You are mad,” repeated she, with inexpressible anguish. “Believe anything — believe the impossible — but, in the name of heaven, after all I have said to you, do not believe me guilty. I, who never even thought of you without praying to God to pardon me for my fault. Oh, M. de Charny! if you do not wish to kill me, do not tell me that you think me guilty.”

Charny wrung his hands with anguish. “Listen,” said he, “if you wish me to serve you efficaciously.”

“A service from you? — from you, more cruel than my enemies? A service from a man who despises me? Never, sir — never.”

Charny approached, and took her hands in his. “This evening it will be too late. Save me from despair, by saving yourself from shame.”

“Monsieur!”

“Oh, I cannot pick my words with death, before me! If you do not listen to me, we shall both die; you from shame, and I from grief. You want money to pay for this necklace.”

“I?”

“Do not deny it.”

“I tell you — — ”

“Do not tell me that you have not the necklace.”

“I swear!”

“Do not swear, if you wish me to love you. There remains one way to save at once your honor and my love. The necklace is worth 1,600,000 francs — you have paid 100,000. Here is the remainder; take it, and pay.”

“You have sold your possessions — you have ruined yourself for me! Good and noble heart, I love you!”

“Then you accept?”

“No; but I love you.”

“And let M. de Rohan pay. Remember, madame, this would be no generosity towards me, but the refinement of cruelty.”

“M. de Charny, I am a queen. I give to my subjects, but do not accept from them.”

“What do you mean to do, then?”

“You are frank. What do the jewelers say?”

“That as you cannot pay, M. de Rohan will pay for you.”

“What does the public say?”

“That you have the necklace hidden, and will produce it when it shall have been paid for; either by the cardinal, in his love for you, or by the king, to prevent scandal.”

“And you, Charny; in your turn, I ask, what do you say?”

“I think, madame, that you have need to prove your innocence to me.”

The Prince Louis, Cardinal de Rohan, was at that moment announced by an usher.

“You shall have your wish,” said the queen.

“You are going to receive him?”

“Yes.”

“And I?”

“Go into my boudoir, and leave the door ajar, that you may hear. Be quick — here he is.”

M. de Rohan appeared in his robes of office. The queen advanced towards him, attempting a smile, which died away on her lips.

He was serious, and said, “Madame, I have several important things to communicate to you, although you shun my presence.”

“I shun you so little, monsieur, that I was about to send for you.”

“Am I alone with your majesty?” said he, in a low voice. “May I speak freely?”

“Perfectly, monseigneur. Do not constrain yourself,” said she aloud, for M. de. Charny to hear.

“The king will not come?”

“Have no fear of the king, or any one else.”

“Oh, it is yourself I fear,” said he, in a moved voice.

“Well, I am not formidable. Say quickly and openly what you have to say. I like frankness, and want no reserve. They say you complain of me; what have you to reproach me with?”

The cardinal sighed.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

EXPLANATIONS.

“Madame,” said the cardinal, bowing, “you know what is passing concerning the necklace?”

“No, monsieur; I wish to learn it from you.”

“Why has your majesty for so long only deigned to communicate with me through another? If you have any reason to hate me, why not explain it?”

“I do not know what you mean. I do not hate you; but that is not, I think, the subject of our interview. I wish to hear all about this unlucky necklace; but first, where is Madame de la Motte?”

“I was about to ask your majesty the same question.”

“Really, monsieur, if any one knows, I think it ought to be you.”

“I, madame! why?”

“Oh! I do not wish to receive your confessions about her, but I wish to speak to her, and have sent for her ten times without receiving any answer.”

“And I, madame, am astonished at her disappearance, for I also sent to ask her to come, and, like your majesty, received no answer.”

“Then let us leave her, monsieur, and speak of ourselves.”

“Oh no, madame; let us speak of her first, for a few words of your majesty’s gave me a painful suspicion; it seemed to me that your majesty reproached me with my assiduities to her.”

“I have not reproached you at all, sir.”

“Oh! madame, such a suspicion would explain all to me; then I should understand all your rigor towards me, which I have hitherto found so inexplicable.”

“Here we cease to understand each other, and I beg of you not to still further involve in obscurity what I wished you to explain to me.”

“Madame,” cried the cardinal, clasping his hands, “I entreat you not to change the subject; allow me only two words more, and I am sure we shall understand each other.”

“Really, sir, you speak in language that I do not understand. Pray return to plain French; where is the necklace that I returned to the jewelers?”

“The necklace that you sent back?”

“Yes; what have you done with it?”

“I! I do not know, madame.”

“Listen, and one thing is simple; Madame de la Motte took away the necklace, and returned it to the jewelers in my name. The jewelers say they never had it, and I hold in my hands a receipt which proves the contrary; but they say the receipt is forged; Madame de la Motte, if sincere, could explain all, but as she is not to be found, I can but conjecture. She wished to return it, but you, who had always the generous wish to present me the necklace, you, who brought it to me, with the offer to pay for it — — ”

“Which your majesty refused.”

“Yes. Well, you have persevered in your idea, and you kept back the necklace, hoping to return it to me at some other time. Madame de la Motte was weak; she knew my inability to pay for it, and my determination not to keep it when I could not pay; she therefore entered into a conspiracy with you. Have I guessed right? Say yes. Let me believe in this slight disobedience to my orders, and I promise you both pardon; so let Madame de la Motte come out from her hiding-place. But, for pity’s sake, let there be perfect clearness and openness, monsieur. A cloud rests over me; I will have it dispersed.”

“Madame,” replied the cardinal, with a sigh, “unfortunately it is not true. I did not persevere in my idea, for I believed the necklace was in your own hands; I never conspired with Madame de la Motte about it, and I have it no more than you say you or the jewelers have it.”

“Impossible! you have not got it?”

“No, madame.”

“Is it not you who hide it?”

“No, madame.”

“You do not know what has become of it?”

“No, madame.”

“But, then, how do you explain its disappearance?”

“I do not pretend to explain it, madame; and, moreover, it is not the first time that I have had to complain that your majesty did not understand me.”

“How, sir?”

“Pray, madame, have the goodness to retrace my letters in your memory.”

"Your letters! — you have written to me?"

"Too seldom, madame, to express all that was in my heart."

The queen rose.

"Terminate this jesting, sir. What do you mean by letters? How can you dare to say such things?"

"Ah! madame, perhaps I have allowed myself to speak too freely the secret of my soul."

"What secret? Are you in your senses, monsieur?"

"Madame!"

"Oh! speak out. You speak now like a man who wishes to embarrass one before witnesses."

"Madame, is there really any one listening to us?"

"No, monsieur. Explain yourself, and prove to me, if you can, that you are in your right senses."

"Oh! why is not Madame de la Motte here? she could aid me to reawaken, if not your majesty's attachment, at least your memory."

"My attachment! my memory!"

"Ah, madame," cried he, growing excited, "spare me, I beg. It is free to you to love no longer, but do not insult me."

"Ah, mon Dieu!" cried the queen, turning pale: "hear what this man says."

"Well, madame," said he, getting still more excited, "I think I have been sufficiently discreet and reserved not to be ill-treated. But I should have known that when a queen says, 'I will not any longer,' it is as imperious as when a woman says, 'I will.'"

"But, sir, to whom, or when, have I said either the one or the other?"

"Both, to me."

"To you! You are a liar, M. de Rohan. A coward, for you calumniate a woman; and a traitor, for you insult the queen."

"And you are a heartless woman and a faithless queen. You led me to feel for you the most ardent love. You let me drink my fill of hopes — — "

"Of hopes! My God! am I mad, or what is he?"

"Should I have dared to ask you for the midnight interviews which you granted me?"

The queen uttered a cry of rage, as she fancied she heard a sigh from the boudoir.

“Should I,” continued M. de Rohan, “have dared to come into the park if you had not sent Madame de la Motte for me?”

“Mon Dieu!”

“Should I have dared to steal the key? Should I have ventured to ask for this rose, which since then I have worn here on my heart, and burned up with my kisses? Should I have dared to kiss your hands? And, above all, should I have dared even to dream of sweet but perfidious love.”

“Monsieur!” cried she, “you blaspheme.”

“Mon Dieu!” exclaimed the cardinal, “heaven knows that to be loved by this deceitful woman I would have given my all, my liberty, my life.”

“M. de Rohan, if you wish to preserve either, you will confess immediately that you invented all these horrors; that you did not come to the park at night.”

“I did come,” he replied.

“You are a dead man if you maintain this.”

“A Rohan cannot lie, madame; I did come.”

“M. de Rohan, in heaven’s name say that you did not see me there.”

“I will die if you wish it, and as you threaten me; but I did come to the park at Versailles, where Madame de la Motte brought me.”

“Once more, confess it is a horrible plot against me.”

“No.”

“Then believe that you were mistaken — deceived — that it was all a fancy.”

“No.”

“Then we will have recourse,” said she, solemnly, “to the justice of the king.”

The cardinal bowed.

The queen rang violently. “Tell his majesty that I desire his presence.”

The cardinal remained firm. Marie Antoinette went ten times to the door of the boudoir, and each time returned without going in.

At last the king appeared.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

THE ARREST.

“Sire,” cried the queen, “here is M. de Rohan, who says incredible things, which I wish him to repeat to you.”

At these unexpected words the cardinal turned pale. Indeed, it was a strange position to hear himself called upon to repeat to the king and the husband all the claims which he believed he had over the queen and the wife.

But the king, turning towards him, said, “About a certain necklace, is it not, sir?”

M. de Rohan took advantage of the king’s question, and chose the least of two evils. “Yes, sire,” he murmured, “about the necklace.”

“Then, sir, you have brought the necklace?”

“Sire — — ”

“Yes, or no, sir.”

The cardinal looked at the queen, and did not reply.

“The truth, sir,” said the queen, answering his look. “We want nothing but the truth.”

M. de Rohan turned away his head, and did not speak.

“If M. de Rohan will not reply, will you, madame, explain?” said the king. “You must know something about it; did you buy it?”

“No.”

M. de Rohan smiled rather contemptuously.

“You say nothing, sir,” said the king.

“Of what am I accused, sire?”

“The jewelers say they sold the necklace either to you or the queen. They show a receipt from her majesty — — ”

“A forged one,” interrupted the queen.

“The jewelers,” continued the king, “say that in case the queen does not pay, you are bound to do so by your engagements.”

“I do not refuse to pay, sire. It must be the truth, as the queen permits it to be said.” And a second look, still more contemptuous than the first, accompanied this speech.

The queen trembled, for she began to think his behavior like the indignation of an honest man.

“Well, M. le Cardinal, some one has imitated the signature of the Queen of France,” said the king.

“The queen, sire, is free to attribute to me whatever crimes she pleases.”

“Sir,” said the king, “instead of justifying yourself, you assume the air of an accuser.”

The cardinal paused a moment, and then cried, “Justify myself? — impossible!”

“Monsieur, these people say that this necklace has been stolen under a promise to pay for it; do you confess the crime?”

“Who would believe it, if I did?” asked the cardinal, with a haughty disdain.

“Then, sir, you think they will believe — — ”

“Sire, I know nothing of what is said,” interrupted the cardinal; “all that I can affirm is, that I have not the necklace; some one has it who will not produce it; and I can but say, let the shame of the crime fall on the person who knows himself guilty.”

“The question, madame, is between you two,” said the king. “Once more, have you the necklace?”

“No, by the honor of my mother, by the life of my son.”

The king joyfully turned towards the cardinal. “Then, sir, the affair lies between you and justice, unless you prefer trusting to my clemency.”

“The clemency of kings is for the guilty, sire; I prefer the justice of men!”

“You will confess nothing?”

“I have nothing to say.”

“But, sir, your silence compromises my honor,” cried the queen.

The cardinal did not speak.

“Well, then, I will speak,” cried she. “Learn, sire, that M. de Rohan’s chief crime is not the theft of this necklace.”

M. de Rohan turned pale.

“What do you mean?” cried the king.

“Madame!” murmured the cardinal.

“Oh! no reasons, no fear, no weakness shall close my mouth. I would proclaim my innocence in public if necessary.”

“Your innocence,” said the king. “Oh, madame, who would be rash enough, or base enough, to compel you to defend that?”

"I beg you, madame," said the cardinal.

"Ah! you begin to tremble. I was right: such plots bear not the light. Sire, will you order M. de Rohan to repeat to you what he has just said to me."

"Madame," cried the cardinal, "take care; you pass all bounds."

"Sir," said the king, "do you dare to speak thus to the queen?"

"Yes, sire," said Marie Antoinette; "this is the way he speaks to me, and pretends he has the right to do so."

"You, sir!" cried the king, livid with rage.

"Oh! he says he has letters — — "

"Let us see them, sir," said the king.

"Yes, produce them," cried the queen.

The cardinal passed his hands over his burning eyes, and asked himself how heaven could ever have created a being so perfidious and so audacious; but he remained silent.

"But that is not all," continued the queen, getting more and more excited: "M. le Cardinal says he has obtained interviews — — "

"Madame, for pity's sake," cried the king.

"For modesty's sake," murmured the cardinal.

"One word, sir. If you are not the basest of men; if you hold anything sacred in this world; if you have proofs, produce them."

"No, madame," replied he, at length, "I have not."

"You said you had a witness."

"Who?" asked the king.

"Madame de la Motte."

"Ah!" cried the king, whose suspicions against her were easily excited; "let us see this woman."

"Yes," said the queen, "but she has disappeared. Ask monsieur what he has done with her."

"Others have made her disappear who had more interest in doing so than I had."

"But, sir, if you are innocent, help us to find the guilty."

The cardinal crossed his hands and turned his back.

"Monsieur," cried the king, "you shall go to the Bastile."

"As I am, sire, in my robes? Consider, sire, the scandal will commence, and will fall heavily on whomsoever it rests."

"I wish it to do so, sir."

"It is an injustice, sire."

"It shall be so." And the king looked round for some one to execute his orders. M. de Breteuil was near, anticipating the fall of his rival; the king spoke to him, and he cried immediately, "Guards! arrest M. le Cardinal de Rohan."

The cardinal passed by the queen without saluting her; then, bowing to the king, went towards the lieutenant of the guards, who approached timidly, seeming to wait for a confirmation of the order he had received.

"Yes, sir," said M. de Rohan, "it is I whom you are to arrest."

"Conduct monsieur to his apartment until I have written the order;" said the king.

When they were alone, the king said, "Madame, you know this must lead to a public trial, and that scandal will fall heavily on the heads of the guilty."

"I thank you, sire; you have taken the only method of justifying me."

"You thank me."

"With all my heart; believe me, you have acted like a king, and I as a queen."

"Good," replied the king, joyfully; "we shall find out the truth at last, and when once we have crushed the serpent, I hope we may live in more tranquillity." He kissed the queen, and left her.

"Monsieur," said the cardinal to the officer who conducted him, "can I send word home that I have been arrested?"

"If no one sees, monseigneur."

The cardinal wrote some words on a page of his missal, then tore it out, and let it fall at the feet of the officer.

"She ruins me," murmured the cardinal; "but I will save her, for your sake, oh! my king, and because it is my duty to forgive."

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

THE PROCÈS-VERBAL.

When the king reentered his room he signed the order to consign M. de Rohan to the Bastile. The Count de Provence soon came in and began making a series of signs to M. de Breteuil, who, however willing, could not understand their meaning. This, however, the count did not care for, as his sole object was to attract the king's attention. He at last succeeded, and the king, after dismissing M. de Breteuil, said to him, "What was the meaning of all those signs you were making just now? I suppose they meant something."

"Undoubtedly, but — — "

"Oh, you are quite free to say or not."

"Sire, I have just heard of the arrest of M. de Rohan."

"Well, and what then? Am I wrong to do justice even on him?"

"Oh no, brother; I did not mean that."

"I should have been surprised had you not taken part somehow against the queen. I have just seen her, and am quite satisfied."

"Oh, sire, God forbid that I should accuse her! The queen has no friend more devoted than myself."

"Then you approve of my proceedings? which will, I trust, terminate all the scandals which have lately disgraced our court."

"Yes, sire, I entirely approve your majesty's conduct, and I think all is for the best as regards the necklace — — "

"Pardieu, it is clear enough. M. de Rohan has been making himself great on a pretended familiarity with the queen; and conducting in her name a bargain for the diamonds, and leaving it to be supposed that she had them. It is monstrous. And then these tales never stop at the truth, but add all sorts of dreadful details which would end in a frightful scandal on the queen."

"Yes, brother, I repeat as far as the necklace is concerned you were perfectly right."

"What else is there, then?"

"Sire, you embarrass me. The queen has not, then, told you?"

“Oh, the other boastings of M. de Rohan? The pretended correspondence and interviews he speaks of? All that I know is, that I have the most absolute confidence in the queen, which she merits by the nobleness of her character. It was easy for her to have told me nothing of all this; but she always makes an immediate appeal to me in all difficulties, and confides to me the care of her honor. I am her confessor and her judge.”

“Sire, you make me afraid to speak, lest I should be again accused of want of friendship for the queen. But it is right that all should be spoken, that she may justify herself from the other accusations.”

“Well, what have you to say?”

“Let me first hear what she told you?”

“She said she had not the necklace; that she never signed the receipt for the jewels; that she never authorized M. de Rohan to buy them; that she had never given him the right to think himself more to her than any other of her subjects; and that she was perfectly indifferent to him.”

“Ah! she said that — — ?”

“Most decidedly.”

“Then these rumors about other people — — ”

“What others?”

“Why, if it were not M. de Rohan, who walked with the queen — — ”

“How! do they say he walked with her?”

“The queen denies it, you say? but how came she to be in the park at night, and with whom did she walk?”

“The queen in the park at night!”

“Doubtless, there are always eyes ready to watch every movement of a queen.”

“Brother, these are infamous things that you repeat, take care.”

“Sire, I openly repeat them, that your majesty may search out the truth.”

“And they say that the queen walked at night in the park?”

“Yes, sire, tête-à-tête.”

“I do not believe any one says it.”

“Unfortunately I can prove it but too well. There are four witnesses: one is the captain of the hunt, who says he saw the queen go out two following nights by the door near the kennel of the wolf-hounds; here is his declaration signed.”

The king, trembling, took the paper.

"The next is the night watchman at Trianon, who says he saw the queen walking arm in arm with a gentleman. The third is the porter of the west door, who also saw the queen going through the little gate; he states how she was dressed, but that he could not recognize the gentleman, but thought he looked like an officer; he says he could not be mistaken, for that the queen was accompanied by her friend, Madame de la Motte."

"Her friend!" cried the king, furiously.

"The last is from the man whose duty it is to see that all the doors are locked at night. He says that he saw the queen go into the baths of Apollo with a gentleman."

The king, pale with anger and emotion, snatched the paper from the hands of his brother.

"It is true," continued the count, "that Madame de la Motte was outside, and that the queen did not remain more than an hour."

"The name of the gentleman?" cried the king.

"This report does not name him; but here is one dated the next day, by a forester, who says it was M. de Charny."

"M. de Charny!" cried the king. "Wait here; I will soon learn the truth of all this."

CHAPTER LXXIX.

THE LAST ACCUSATION.

As soon as the king left the room, the queen ran towards the boudoir, and opened the door; then, as if her strength failed her, sank down on a chair, waiting for the decision of M. de Charny, her last and most formidable judge.

He came out more sad and pale than ever.

“Well?” said she.

“Madame,” replied he, “you see, everything opposes our friendship. There can be no peace for me while such scandalous reports circulate in public, putting my private convictions aside.”

“Then,” said the queen, “all I have done, this perilous aggression, this public defiance of one of the greatest nobles in the kingdom, and my conduct being exposed to the test of public opinion, does not satisfy you?”

“Oh!” cried Charny, “you are noble and generous, I know — — ”

“But you believe me guilty — you believe the cardinal. I command you to tell me what you think.”

“I must say, then, madame, that he is neither mad nor wicked, as you called him, but a man thoroughly convinced of the truth of what he said — a man who loves you, and the victim of an error which will bring him to ruin, and you — — ”

“Well?”

“To dishonor.”

“Mon Dieu!”

“This odious woman, this Madame de la Motte, disappearing just when her testimony might have restored you to repose and honor — she is the evil genius, the curse, of your reign; she whom you have, unfortunately, admitted to partake of your intimacy and your secrets.”

“Oh, sir!”

“Yes, madame, it is clear that you combined with her and the cardinal to buy this necklace. Pardon if I offend you.”

"Stay, sir," replied the queen, with a pride not unmixed with anger; "what the king believes, others might believe, and my friends not be harder than my husband. It seems to me that it can give no pleasure to any man to see a woman whom he does not esteem. I do not speak of you, sir; to you I am not a woman, but a queen; as you are to me, not a man, but a subject. I had advised you to remain in the country, and it was wise; far from the court, you might have judged me more truly. Too ready to condescend, I have neglected to keep up, with those whom I thought loved me, the prestige of royalty. I should have been a queen, and content to govern, and not have wished to be loved."

"I cannot express," replied Charny, "how much your severity wounds me. I may have forgotten that you were a queen, but never that you were the woman most in the world worthy of my respect and love."

"Sir, I think your absence is necessary; something tells me that it will end by your name being mixed up in all this."

"Impossible, madame!"

"You say 'impossible'; reflect on the power of those who have for so long played with my reputation. You say that M. de Rohan is convinced of what he asserts; those who cause such convictions would not be long in proving you a disloyal subject to the king, and a disgraceful friend for me. Those who invent so easily what is false will not be long in discovering the truth. Lose no time, therefore; the peril is great. Retire, and fly from the scandal which will ensue from the approaching trial; I do not wish that my destiny should involve yours, or your future be ruined. I, who am, thank God, innocent, and without a stain on my life — I, who would lay bare my heart to my enemies, could they thus read its purity, will resist to the last. For you might come ruin, defamation, and perhaps imprisonment. Take away the money you so nobly offered me, and the assurance that not one movement of your generous heart has escaped me, and that your doubts, though they have wounded, have not estranged me. Go, I say, and seek elsewhere what the Queen of France can no longer give you — hope and happiness. From this time to the convocation of Parliament, and the production of witnesses must be a fortnight; your uncle has vessels ready to sail — go and leave me; I bring misfortunes on my friends." Saying this, the queen rose, and seemed to give Charny his congé.

He approached quickly, but respectfully. "Your majesty," cried he, in a moved voice, "shows me my duty. It is here that danger awaits you, here that you are to be judged, and, that you may have one loyal witness on your side, I remain here. Perhaps we may still make your enemies tremble before the majesty of an innocent queen, and the courage of a devoted man. And if you wish it, madame, I will be equally hidden and unseen as though I went. During a fortnight that I lived within a hundred yards of you, watching your every movement, counting your steps, living in your life, no one saw me; I can do so again, if it please you."

"As you please," replied she; "I am no coquette, M. de Charny, and to say what I please is the true privilege of a queen. One day, sir, I chose you from every one. I do not know what drew my heart towards you, but I had need of a strong and pure friendship, and I allowed you to perceive that need; but now I see that your soul does not respond to mine, and I tell you so frankly."

"Oh, madame," cried Charny, "I cannot let you take away your heart from me! If you have once given it to me, I will keep it with my life; I cannot lose you. You reproached me with my doubts — oh, do not doubt me!"

"Ah," said she, "but you are weak, and I, alas, am so also."

"You are all I love you to be."

"What!" cried she, passionately, "this abused queen, this woman about to be publicly judged, that the world condemns, and that her king and husband may, perhaps, also in turn condemn, has she found one heart to love her?"

"A slave, who venerates her, and offers her his heart's blood in exchange for every pang he has caused her!"

"Then," cried she, "this woman is blessed and happy, and complains of nothing!"

Charny fell at her feet, and kissed her hands in transport. At that moment the door opened, and the king surprised, at the feet of his wife, the man whom he had just heard accused by the Comte de Provence.

CHAPTER LXXX.

THE PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE.

The queen and Charny exchanged a look so full of terror, that their most cruel enemy must have pitied them.

Charny rose slowly, and bowed to the king, whose heart might almost have been seen to beat.

“Ah!” cried he, in a hoarse voice, “M. de Charny!”

The queen could not speak — she thought she was lost.

“M. de Charny,” repeated the king, “it is little honorable for a gentleman to be taken in the act of theft.”

“Of theft?” murmured Charny.

“Yes, sir, to kneel before the wife of another is a theft; and when this woman is a queen, his crime is called high treason!”

The count was about to speak, but the queen, ever impatient in her generosity, forestalled him.

“Sire,” said she, “you seem in the mood for evil suspicions and unfavorable suppositions, which fall falsely, I warn you; and if respect chains the count’s tongue, I will not hear him wrongfully accused without defending him.” Here she stopped, overcome by emotion, frightened at the falsehood she was about to tell, and bewildered because she could not find one to utter.

But these few words had somewhat softened the king, who replied more gently, “You will not tell me, madame, that I did not see M. de Charny kneeling before you, and without your attempting to raise him?”

“Therefore you might think,” replied she, “that he had some favor to ask me.”

“A favor?”

“Yes, sire, and one which I could not easily grant, or he would not have insisted with so much less warmth.”

Charny breathed again, and the king’s look became calmer. Marie Antoinette was searching for something to say, with mingled rage at being obliged to lie, and grief at not being able to think of anything probable to say. She half hoped the king would be satisfied, and ask no more, but he said:

“Let us hear, madame, what is the favor so warmly solicited, which made M. de Charny kneel before you; I may, perhaps, more happy than you, be able to grant it.”

She hesitated; to lie before the man she loved was agony to her, and she would have given the world for Charny to find the answer. But of this he was incapable.

“Sire, I told you that M. de Charny asked an impossible thing.”

“What is it?”

“What can one ask on one’s knees?”

“I want to hear.”

“Sire, it is a family secret.”

“There are no secrets from the king — a father interested in all his subjects, who are his children, although, like unnatural children, they may sometimes attack the honor and safety of their father.”

This speech made the queen tremble anew.

“M. de Charny asked,” replied she, “permission to marry.”

“Really,” cried the king, reassured for a moment. Then, after a pause, he said, “But why should it be impossible for M. de Charny to marry? Is he not noble? Has he not a good fortune? Is he not brave and handsome? Really, to refuse him, the lady ought to be a princess, or already married. I can see no other reason for an impossibility. Therefore, madame, tell me the name of the lady who is loved by M. de Charny, and let me see if I cannot remove the difficulty.”

The queen, forced to continue her falsehood, replied:

“No, sire; there are difficulties which even you cannot remove, and the present one is of this nature.”

“Still, I wish to hear,” replied the king, his anger returning.

Charny looked at the queen — she seemed ready to faint. He made a step towards her and then drew back. How dared he approach her in the king’s presence?

“Oh!” thought she, “for an idea — something that the king can neither doubt nor disbelieve.” Then suddenly a thought struck her. She who has dedicated herself to heaven the king cannot influence. “Sire!” she cried, “she whom M. de Charny wishes to marry is in a convent.”

"Oh! that is a difficulty; no doubt. But this seems a very sudden love of M. de Charny's. I have never heard of it from any one. Who is the lady you love, M. de Charny?"

The queen felt in despair, not knowing what he would say, and dreading to hear him name any one. But Charny could not reply: so, after a pause, she cried, "Sire, you know her; it is Andrée de Taverney."

Charny buried his face in his hands; the queen pressed her hand to her heart, and could hardly support herself.

"Mademoiselle de Taverney? but she has gone to St. Denis."

"Yes, sire," replied the queen.

"But she has taken no vows."

"No, but she is about to do so."

"We will see if we can persuade her. Why should she take the vows?"

"She is poor," said the queen.

"That I can soon alter, madame, if M. de Charny loves her."

The queen shuddered, and cast a glance at the young man, as if begging him to deny it. He did not speak.

"And I dare say," continued the king, taking his silence for consent, "that Mademoiselle de Taverney loves M. de Charny. I will give her as dowry the 500,000 francs which I refused the other day to you. Thank the queen, M. de Charny, for telling me of this, and ensuring your happiness."

Charny bowed like a pale statue which had received an instant's life.

"Oh, it is worth kneeling again for!" said the king.

The queen trembled, and stretched out her hand to the young man, who left on it a burning kiss.

"Now," said the king, "come with me."

M. de Charny turned once, to read the anguish in the eyes of the queen.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

ST. DENIS.

The queen remained alone and despairing. So many blows had struck her that she hardly knew from which she suffered most. How she longed to retract the words she had spoken, to take from Andrée even the chance of the happiness which she still hoped she would refuse; but if she refused, would not the king's suspicions reawaken, and everything seem only the worse for this falsehood? She dared not risk this — she must go to Andrée and confess, and implore her to make this sacrifice; or if she would only temporize, the king's suspicions might pass away, and he might cease to interest himself about it. Thus the liberty of Mlle. de Taverney would not be sacrificed, neither would that of M. de Charny; and she would be spared the remorse of having sacrificed the happiness of two people to her honor. She longed to speak again to Charny, but feared discovery; and she knew she might rely upon him to ratify anything she chose to say. Three o'clock arrived — the state dinner and the presentations; and the queen went through all with a serene and smiling air. When all was over she changed her dress, got into her carriage, and, without any guards, and only one companion, drove to St. Denis, and asked to see Andrée. Andrée was at that moment kneeling, dressed in her white peignoir; and praying with fervor. She had quitted the court voluntarily, and separated herself from all that could feed her love; but she could not stifle her regrets and bitter feelings. Had she not seen Charny apparently indifferent towards her, while the queen occupied all his thoughts? Yet, when she heard that the queen was asking for her, she felt a thrill of pleasure and delight. She threw a mantle over her shoulders, and hastened to see her; but on the way she reproached herself with the pleasure that she felt, endeavoring to think that the queen and the court had alike ceased to interest her.

"Come here, Andrée," said the queen, with a smile, as she entered.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

A DEAD HEART.

“Andrée,” continued the queen, “it looks strange to see you in this dress; to see an old friend and companion already lost to life, is like a warning to ourselves from the tomb.”

“Madame, no one has a right to warn or counsel your majesty.”

“That was never my wish,” said the queen; “tell me truly, Andrée, had you to complain of me when you were at court?”

“Your majesty was good enough to ask me that question when I took leave, and I replied then as now, no, madame.”

“But often,” said the queen, “a grief hurts us which is not personal; have I injured any one belonging to you? Andrée, the retreat which you have chosen is an asylum against evil passions; here God teaches gentleness, moderation and forgiveness of injuries. I come as a friend, and ask you to receive me as such.”

Andrée felt touched. “Your majesty knows,” said she, “that the Taverneys cannot be your enemies.”

“I understand,” replied the queen; “you cannot pardon me for having been cold to your brother, and, perhaps, he himself accuses me of caprice.”

“My brother is too respectful a subject to accuse the queen,” said Andrée, coldly.

The queen saw that it was useless to try and propitiate Andrée on this subject; so she said only, “Well, at least, I am ever your friend.”

“Your majesty overwhelms me with your goodness.”

“Do not speak thus; cannot the queen have a friend?”

“I assure you, madame, that I have loved you as much as I shall ever love any one in this world.” She colored as she spoke.

“You have loved me; then you love me no more? Can a cloister so quickly extinguish all affection and all remembrance? if so, it is a cursed place.”

“Do not accuse my heart, madame, it is dead.”

“Your heart dead, Andrée? you, so young and beautiful.”

“I repeat to you, madame, nothing in the court, nothing in the world, is any more to me. Here I live like the herb or the flower, alone for myself. I entreat you to pardon me; this forgetfulness of the glorious vanities of the world is no crime. My confessor congratulates me on it every day.”

“Then you like the convent?”

“I embrace with pleasure a solitary life.”

“Nothing remains which attracts you back to the world?”

“Nothing!”

“Mon dieu!” thought the queen; “shall I fail? If nothing else will succeed, I must have recourse to entreaties; to beg her to accept M. de Charny — heavens, how unhappy I am! — Andrée,” she said, “what you say takes from me the hope I had conceived.”

“What hope, madame?”

“Oh! if you are as decided as you appear to be, it is useless to speak.”

“If your majesty would explain — — ”

“You never regret what you have done?”

“Never, madame.”

“Then it is superfluous to speak; and I yet hoped to make you happy.”

“Me?”

“Yes, you, ingrate; but you know best your inclinations.”

“Still, if your majesty would tell me — — ”

“Oh, it is simple; I wished you to return to court.”

“Never!”

“You refuse me?”

“Oh, madame, why should you wish me? — sorrowful, poor, despised, avoided by every one, incapable of inspiring sympathy in either sex! Ah, madame, and dear mistress, leave me here to become worthy to be accepted by God, for even He would reject me at present.”

“But,” said the queen, “what I was about to propose to you would have removed all these humiliations of which you complain. A marriage, which would have made you one of our great ladies.”

“A marriage?” stammered Andrée.

“Yes.”

“Oh, I refuse, I refuse!”

“Andrée!” cried the queen, in a supplicating voice.

“Ah, no, I refuse!”

Marie Antoinette prepared herself, with a fearfully-palpitating heart, for her last resource; but as she hesitated, Andrée said, “But, madame, tell me the name of the man who is willing to think of me as his companion for life.”

“M. de Charny,” said the queen, with an effort.

“M. de Charny?” — —

“Yes, the nephew of M. de Suffren.”

“It is he!” cried Andrée, with burning cheeks, and sparkling eyes; “he consents — — ”

“He asks you in marriage.”

“Oh, I accept, I accept, for I love him.”

The queen became livid, and sank back trembling, whilst Andrée kissed her hands, bathing them with her tears. “Oh, I am ready,” murmured she.

“Come, then!” cried the queen, who felt as though her strength was failing her, with a last effort to preserve appearances.

Andrée left the room to prepare. Then Marie Antoinette cried, with bitter sobs, “Oh, mon Dieu! how can one heart bear so much suffering? and yet I should be thankful, for does it not save my children and myself from shame?”

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

IN WHICH IT IS EXPLAINED WHY THE BARON DE TAVERNEY GREW FAT.

Meanwhile Philippe was hastening the preparations for his departure. He did not wish to witness the dishonor of the queen, his first and only passion. When all was ready, he requested an interview with his father. For the last three months the baron had been growing fat; he seemed to feed on the scandals circulating at the court — they were meat and drink to him. When he received his son's message, instead of sending for him, he went to seek him in his room, already full of the disorder consequent on packing. Philippe did not expect much sensibility from his father, still he did not think he would be pleased. Andrée had already left him, and it was one less to torment, and he must feel a blank when his son went also. Therefore Philippe was astonished to hear his father call out, with a burst of laughter, "Oh, mon Dieu! he is going away, I was sure of it, I would have bet upon it. Well played, Philippe, well played."

"What is well played, sir?"

"Admirable!" repeated the old man.

"You give me praises, sir, which I neither understand nor merit, unless you are pleased at my departure, and glad to get rid of me."

"Oh! oh!" laughed the old man again, "I am not your dupe. Do you think I believe in your departure?"

"You do not believe? really, sir, you surprise me."

"Yes, it is surprising that I should have guessed. You are quite right to pretend to leave; without this ruse all, probably, would have been discovered."

"Monsieur, I protest I do not understand one word of what you say to me."

"Where do you say you go to?"

"I go first to Taverney Maison Rouge."

"Very well, but be prudent. There are sharp eyes on you both, and she is so fiery and incautious, that you must be prudent for both. What is your address, in case I want to send you any pressing news?"

"Taverney, monsieur."

"Taverney, nonsense! I do not ask you for the address of your house in the park; but choose some third address near here. You, who have managed so well for your love, can easily manage this."

"Sir, you play at enigmas, and I cannot find the solution."

"Oh, you are discreet beyond all bounds. However, keep your secrets, tell me nothing of the huntsman's house, nor the nightly walks with two dear friends, nor the rose, nor the kisses."

"Monsieur!" cried Philippe, mad with jealousy and rage, "will you hold your tongue?"

"Well, I know it all — your intimacy with the queen, and your meetings in the baths of Apollo. Mon Dieu! our fortunes are assured forever."

"Monsieur, you cause me horror!" cried poor Philippe, hiding his face in his hands. And, indeed, he felt it, at hearing attributed to himself all the happiness of another. All the rumors that the father had heard, he had assigned to his son, and believed that it was he that the queen loved, and no one else; hence his perfect contentment and happiness.

"Yes," he went on, "some said it was Rohan; others, that it was Charny; not one that it was Taverney. Oh, you have acted well."

At this moment a carriage was heard to drive up, and a servant entering, said, "Here is mademoiselle."

"My sister!" cried Philippe.

Then another servant appeared, and said that Mademoiselle de Taverney wished to speak to her brother in the boudoir. Another carriage now came to the door.

"Who the devil comes now?" muttered the baron; "it is an evening of adventures."

"M. le Comte de Charny," cried the powerful voice of the porter at the gate.

"Conduct M. le Comte to the drawing-room; my father will see him; and I will go to my sister — What can he want here?" thought Philippe, as he went down.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

THE FATHER AND THE FIANCÉE.

Philippe hastened to the boudoir, where his sister awaited him. She ran to embrace him with a joyous air.

“What is it, Andrée?” cried he.

“Something which makes me happy. Oh! very happy, brother.”

“And you come back to announce it to me.”

“I come back for ever,” said Andrée.

“Speak low, sister; there is, or is going to be, some one in the next room who might hear you.”

“Who?”

“Listen.”

“M. le Comte de Charny,” announced the servant.

“He! oh, I know well what he comes for.”

“You know!”

“Yes, and soon I shall be summoned to hear what he has to say.”

“Do you speak seriously, my dear Andrée?”

“Listen, Philippe. The queen has brought me suddenly back, and I must go and change my dress for one fit for a fiancée.” And saying this, with a kiss to Philippe, she ran off.

Philippe remained alone. He could hear what passed in the adjoining room. M. de Taverney entered, and saluted the count with a recherché though stiff politeness.

“I come, monsieur,” said Charny, “to make a request, and beg you to excuse my not having brought my uncle with me, which I know would have been more proper.”

“A request?”

“I have the honor,” continued Charny, in a voice full of emotion, “to ask the hand of Mademoiselle Andrée, your daughter.”

The baron opened his eyes in astonishment — ”My daughter?”

“Yes, M. le Baron, if Mademoiselle de Taverney feels no repugnance.”

"Oh," thought the old man, "Philippe's favor is already so well-known, that one of his rivals wishes to marry his sister." Then aloud, he said, "This request is such an honor to us, M. le Comte, that I accede with much pleasure; and as I should wish you to carry away a perfectly favorable answer, I will send for my daughter."

"Monsieur," interrupted the count, rather coldly, "the queen has been good enough to consult Mademoiselle de Taverney already, and her reply was favorable."

"Ah!" said the baron, more and more astonished, "it is the queen then — — "

"Yes, monsieur, who took the trouble to go to St. Denis."

"Then, sir, it only remains to acquaint you with my daughter's fortune. She is not rich, and before concluding — — "

"It is needless, M. le Baron; I am rich enough for both."

At this moment the door opened, and Philippe entered, pale and wild looking.

"Sir," said he, "my father was right to wish to discuss these things with you. While he goes up-stairs to bring the papers I have something to say to you."

When they were left alone, "M. de Charny," said he, "how dare you come here to ask for the hand of my sister?" Charny colored. "Is it," continued Philippe, "in order to hide better your amours with another woman whom you love, and who loves you? Is it, that by becoming the husband of a woman who is always near your mistress, you will have more facilities for seeing her?"

"Sir, you pass all bounds."

"It is, perhaps; and this is what I believe, that were I your brother-in-law, you think my tongue would be tied about what I know of your past amours."

"What you know?"

"Yes," cried Philippe, "the huntsman's house hired by you, your mysterious promenades in the park at night, and the tender parting at the little gate."

"Monsieur, in heaven's name — — "

"Oh, sir, I was concealed behind the baths of Apollo when you came out, arm in arm with the queen."

Charny was completely overwhelmed for a time; then, after a few moments, he said, “Well, sir, even after all this, I reiterate my demand for the hand of your sister. I am not the base calculator you suppose me; but the queen must be saved.”

“The queen is not lost, because I saw her on your arm, raising to heaven her eyes full of happiness; because I know that she loves you. That is no reason why my sister should be sacrificed, M. de Charny.”

“Monsieur,” replied Charny, “this morning the king surprised me at her feet — — ”

“Mon Dieu!”

“And she, pressed by his jealous questions, replied that I was kneeling to ask the hand of your sister. Therefore if I do not marry her, the queen is lost. Do you now understand?”

A cry from the boudoir now interrupted them, followed by another from the ante-chamber. Charny ran to the boudoir; he saw there Andrée, dressed in white like a bride: she had heard all, and had fainted. Philippe ran to where the other cry came from; it was his father, whose hopes this revelation of the queen’s love for Charny had just destroyed; struck by apoplexy, he had given his last sigh. Philippe, who understood it, looked at the corpse for a few minutes in silence, and then returned to the drawing-room, and there saw Charny watching the senseless form of his sister. He then said, “My father has just expired, sir; I am now the head of the family; if my sister survive, I will give her to you in marriage.”

Charny regarded the corpse of the baron with horror, and the form of Andrée with despair. Philippe uttered a groan of agony, then continued, “M. de Charny, I make this engagement in the name of my sister, now lying senseless before us; she will give her happiness to the queen, and I, perhaps, some day shall be happy enough to give my life for her. Adieu, M. de Charny — — ” and taking his sister in his arms, he carried her into the next room.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

AFTER THE DRAGON, THE VIPER.

Oliva was preparing to fly, as Jeanne had arranged, when Beausire, warned by an anonymous letter, discovered her and carried her away. In order to trace them, Jeanne put all her powers in requisition — she preferred being able to watch over her own secret — and her disappointment was great when all her agents returned announcing a failure. At this time she received in her hiding-place numerous messages from the queen.

She went by night to Bar-sur-Aube, and there remained for two days. At last she was traced, and an express sent to take her. Then she learnt the arrest of the cardinal. “The queen has been rash,” thought she, “in refusing to compromise with the cardinal, or to pay the jewelers; but she did not know my power.”

“Monsieur,” said she to the officer who arrested her, “do you love the queen?”

“Certainly, madame.”

“Well, in the name of that love I beg you to conduct me straight to her. Believe me, you will be doing her a service.”

The man was persuaded, and did so. The queen received her haughtily, for she began to suspect that her conduct had not been straightforward. She called in two ladies as witnesses of what was about to pass.

“You are found at last, madame,” said the queen; “why did you hide?”

“I did not hide, madame.”

“Run away, then, if that pleases you better.”

“That is to say, that I quitted Paris. I had some little business at Bar-sur-Aube, and, to tell the truth, I did not know I was so necessary to your majesty as to be obliged to ask leave for an absence of eight days.”

“Have you seen the king?”

“No, madame.”

“You shall see him.”

“It will be a great honor for me; but your majesty seems very severe towards me — I am all trembling.”

"Oh, madame, this is but the beginning. Do you know that M. de Rohan has been arrested?"

"They told me so, madame."

"You guess why?"

"No, madame."

"You proposed to me that he should pay for a certain necklace; did I accept or refuse?"

"Refuse."

"Ah!" said the queen, well pleased.

"Your majesty even paid 100,000 francs on account."

"Well, and afterwards?"

"Afterwards, as your majesty could not pay, you sent it back to M. Bœhmer."

"By whom?"

"By me."

"And what did you do with it?"

"I took it to the cardinal."

"And why to the cardinal instead of to the jewelers, as I told you?"

"Because I thought he would be hurt if I returned it without letting him know."

"But how did you get a receipt from the jewelers?"

"M. de Rohan gave it to me."

"But why did you take a letter to them as coming from me?"

"Because he gave it to me, and asked me to do so."

"It is, then, all his doing?"

"What is, madame?"

"The receipt and the letter are both forged."

"Forged, madame!" cried Jeanne, with much apparent astonishment.

"Well, you must be confronted with him to prove the truth."

"Why, madame?"

"He himself demands it. He says he has sought you everywhere, and that he wishes to prove that you have deceived him."

"Oh! then, madame, let us meet."

"You shall. You deny all knowledge of where the necklace is?"

"How should I know, madame?"

"You deny having aided the cardinal in his intrigues?"

"I am a Valois, madame."

"But M. de Rohan maintained before the king many calumnies, which he said you would confirm."

"I do not understand."

"He declares he wrote to me."

Jeanne did not reply.

"Do you hear?" said the queen.

"Yes, madame."

"What do you reply?"

"I will reply when I have seen him."

"But speak the truth now."

"Your majesty overwhelms me."

"That is no answer."

"I will give no other here;" and she looked at the two ladies. The queen understood, but would not yield; she scorned to purchase anything by concession.

"M. de Rohan," said the queen, "was sent to the Bastile for saying too much; take care, madame, that you are not sent for saying too little."

Jeanne smiled. "A pure conscience can brave persecution," she replied; "the Bastile will not convict me of a crime I did not commit."

"Will you reply?"

"Only to your majesty."

"Are you not speaking to me?"

"Not alone."

"Ah! you fear scandal, after being the cause of so much to me."

"What I did," said Jeanne, "was done for you."

"What insolence!"

"I submit to the insults of my queen."

"You will sleep in the Bastile to-night, madame!"

"So be it; I will first pray to God to preserve your majesty's honor."

The queen rose furiously, and went into the next room.

"After having conquered the dragon," she said, "I can crush the viper!"

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

HOW IT CAME TO PASS THAT M. BEAUSIRE WAS TRACKED BY THE AGENTS OF M. DE CROSNE.

Madame de la Motte was imprisoned as the queen had threatened, and the whole affair created no little talk and excitement through France. M. de Rohan lived at the Bastile like a prince: he had everything but liberty. He demanded to be confronted with Madame de la Motte as soon as he heard of her arrest. This was done. She whispered to him, “Send every one away, and I will explain.” He asked this, but was refused; they said his counsel might communicate with her. She said to this gentleman that she was ignorant of what had become of the necklace, but that they might well have given it to her in recompense for the services she had rendered the queen and the cardinal, which were well worth a million and a half. The cardinal turned pale on hearing this repeated, and felt how much they were in Jeanne’s power. He was determined not to accuse the queen, although his friends endeavored to convince him that it was his only way to prove his innocence of the robbery. Jeanne said that she did not wish to accuse either the queen or the cardinal, but that, if they persisted in making her responsible for the necklace, she would do so to show that they were interested in accusing her of falsehood. Then M. de Rohan expressed all his contempt for her, and said that he began to understand much of Jeanne’s conduct, but not the queen’s. All this was reported to Marie Antoinette. She ordered another private examination of the parties, but gained nothing from it. Jeanne denied everything to those sent by the queen; but when they were gone she altered her tone, and said, “If they do not leave me alone I will tell all.” The cardinal said nothing, and brought no accusations; but rumors began to spread fast, and the question soon became, not “Has the queen stolen the necklace?” but “Has she allowed some one else to steal it because she knew all about her amours?” Madame de la Motte had involved her in a maze, from which there seemed no honorable exit; but she determined not to lose courage. She began to come to the conclusion that the cardinal was an honest man, and did not wish to ruin her, but was acting like herself, only to preserve his honor. They strove earnestly but ineffectually to trace the necklace. All opinions were against Jeanne, and she began to fear that, even if she dragged down the queen and cardinal, she should be quite overwhelmed under the ruins she had caused; and she had not even at hand the fruits of her dishonesty to corrupt her judges with. Affairs were in this state when a new episode changed the face of things. Oliva and M. Beausire were living, happy and rich, in a country house, when one day Beausire, going out hunting, fell into the company of two of the agents of M. de Crosne, whom he had scattered all over the country. They recognized Beausire immediately, but, as it was Oliva whom they most wanted, they did not arrest him there, but only joined the chase. Beausire, seeing two strangers, called the huntsman, and asked who they were. He replied that he did not know, but, if he had permission, would send them away. On his questioning them, they said they were friends of that gentleman, pointing to M. Beausire. Then the man brought them to him, saying, “M. de Linville, these gentlemen say they are friends of yours.”

“Ah, you are called De Linville now, dear M. Beausire!”

Beausire trembled; he had concealed his name so carefully. He sent away the huntsman, and asked them who they were.

“Take us home with you, and we will tell you.”

“Home?”

“Yes; do not be inhospitable.” Beausire was frightened, but still feared to refuse these men who knew him.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

THE TURTLES ARE CAGED.

Beausire, on entering the house, made a noise to attract Oliva’s attention, for, though he knew nothing about her later escapades, he knew enough about the ball at the Opera, and the morning at M. Mesmer’s, to make him fear letting her be seen by strangers. Accordingly, Oliva, hearing the dogs bark, looked out, and, seeing Beausire returning with two strangers, did not come to meet him as usual. Unfortunately the servant asked if he should call madame. The men rallied him about the lady whom he had concealed; he let them laugh, but did not offer to call her. They dined; then Beausire asked where they had met him before. “We are,” replied they, “friends of one of your associates in a little affair about the Portuguese embassy.”

Beausire turned pale.

“Ah!” said he: “and you came on your friend’s part?”

“Yes, dear M. Beausire, to ask for 10,000 francs.”

“Gentlemen,” replied Beausire, “you cannot think I have such a sum in the house.”

“Very likely not, monsieur; we do not ask for impossibilities. How much have you?”

“Not more than fifty or sixty louis.”

“We will take them to begin with.”

“I will go and fetch them,” said Beausire. But they did not choose to let him leave the room without them, so they caught hold of him by the coat, saying:

“Oh no, dear M. Beausire, do not leave us.”

“But how am I to get the money if I do not leave you?”

“We will go with you.”

“But it is in my wife’s bedroom.”

“Ah,” cried one of them, “you hide your wife from us!”

“Are we not presentable?” asked the other. “We wish to see her.”

“You are tipsy, and I will turn you out!” said Beausire.

They laughed.

"Now you shall not even have the money I promised," said he, emboldened by what he thought their intoxication; and he ran out of the room.

They followed and caught him; he cried out, and at the sound a door opened, and a woman looked out with a frightened air. On seeing her, the men released Beausire, and gave a cry of exultation, for they recognized her immediately who resembled the Queen of France so strongly.

Beausire, who believed them for a moment disarmed by the sight of a woman, was soon cruelly undeceived.

One of the men approached Oliva, and said:

"I arrest you."

"Arrest her! Why?" cried Beausire.

"Because it is M. de Crosne's orders."

A thunderbolt falling between the lovers would have frightened them less than this declaration.

At last Beausire said, "You came to arrest me?"

"No; it was a chance."

"Never mind, you might have arrested me, and for sixty louis you were about to leave me at liberty."

"Oh no, we should have asked another sixty; however, for one hundred we will do so."

"And madame?"

"Oh, that is quite a different affair."

"She is worth two hundred louis," said Beausire.

They laughed again, and this time Beausire began to understand this terrible laugh.

"Three hundred, four hundred, a thousand — see, I will give you one thousand louis to leave her at liberty!"

They did not answer.

"Is not that enough? Ah, you know I have money, and you want to make me pay. Well, I will give you two thousand louis; it will make both your fortunes!"

"For 100,000 crowns we would not give up this woman. M. de Rohan will give us 500,000 francs for her, and the queen 1,000,000. Now we must go. You doubtless have a carriage of some kind here; have it prepared for madame. We will take you also, for form's sake; but on the way you can escape, and we will shut our eyes."

Beausire replied, “Where she goes, I will go; I will never leave her.”

“Oh, so much the better; the more prisoners we bring M. de Crosne, the better he will be pleased.”

A quarter of an hour after, Beausire’s carriage started, with the two lovers in it. One may imagine the effect of this capture on M. de Crosne. The agents probably did not receive the 1,000,000 francs they hoped for, but there is reason to believe they were satisfied. M. de Crosne went to Versailles, followed by another carriage well guarded. He asked to see the queen, and was instantly admitted. She judged from his face that he had good news for her, and felt the first sensation of joy she had experienced for a month.

“Madame,” said M. de Crosne, “have you a room here where you can see without being seen?”

“Oh yes — my library.”

“Well, madame, I have a carriage below, in which is some one whom I wish to introduce into the castle unseen by any one.”

“Nothing more easy,” replied the queen, ringing to give her orders.

All was executed as he wished. Then she conducted M. de Crosne to the library, where, concealed from view behind a large screen, she soon saw enter a form which made her utter a cry of surprise. It was Oliva, dressed in one of her own favorite costumes — a green dress with broad stripes of black moirée, green satin slippers with high heels, and her hair dressed like her own. It might have been herself reflected in the glass.

“What says your majesty to this resemblance?” asked M. de Crosne, triumphantly.

“Incredible,” said the queen. She then thought to herself, “Ah! Charny; why are you not here?”

“What does your majesty wish?”

“Nothing, sir, but that the king should know.”

“And M. de Provence see her? shall he not, madame?”

“Thanks, M. de Crosne, you hold now, I think, the clue to the whole plot.”

“Nearly so, madame.”

“And M. de Rohan?”

“Knows nothing yet.”

“Ah!” cried the queen; “in this woman, doubtless, lies all his error.”

“Possibly, madame; but if it be his error it is the crime of some one else.”

"Seek well, sir; the honor of France is in your hands."

"Believe me worthy of the trust. At present, the accused parties deny everything. I shall wait for the proper time to overwhelm them with this living witness that I now hold."

"Madame de la Motte?"

"Knows nothing of this capture. She accuses M. de Cagliostro of having excited the cardinal to say what he did."

"And what does M. de Cagliostro say?"

"He has promised to come to me this morning. He is a dangerous man, but a useful one, and attacked by Madame de la Motte, I am in hopes he will sting back again."

"You hope for revelations?"

"I do."

"How so, sir? Tell me everything which can reassure me."

"These are my reasons, madame. Madame de la Motte lived in the Rue St. Claude, and M. de Cagliostro just opposite her. So I think her movements cannot have been unnoticed by him; but if your majesty will excuse me, it is close to the time he appointed to meet me."

"Go, monsieur, go; and assure yourself of my gratitude."

When he was gone the queen burst into tears. "My justification begins," said she; "I shall soon read my triumph in all faces; but the one I most cared to know me innocent, him I shall not see."

M. de Crosne drove back to Paris, where M. de Cagliostro waited for him. He knew all; for he had discovered Beausire's retreat, and was on the road to see him, and induce him to leave France, when he met the carriage containing Beausire and Oliva. Beausire saw the count, and the idea crossed his mind that he might help them. He therefore accepted the offer of the police-agents, gave them the hundred louis, and made his escape, in spite of the tears shed by Oliva; saying, "I go to try and save you." He ran after M. de Cagliostro's carriage, which he soon overtook, as the count had stopped, it being useless to proceed. Beausire soon told his story; Cagliostro listened in silence, then said, "She is lost."

"Why so?" Then Cagliostro told him all he did not already know — all the intrigues in the park.

"Oh! save her," cried Beausire; "and I will give her to you, if you love her still."

“My friend,” replied Cagliostro, “you deceive yourself; I never loved Mademoiselle Oliva; I had but one aim — that of weaning her from the life of debauchery she was leading with you.”

“But — — ” said Beausire.

“That astonishes you — know that I belong to a society whose object is moral reform. Ask her if ever she heard from my mouth one word of gallantry, or if my services were not disinterested.”

“Oh, monsieur! but will you save her?”

“I will try, but it will depend on yourself.”

“I will do anything.”

“Then return with me to Paris, and if you follow my instructions implicitly, we may succeed in saving her. I only impose one condition, which I will tell you when I reach home.”

“I promise beforehand. But can I see her again?”

“I think so, and you can tell her what I say to you.” In two hours they overtook the carriage containing Oliva, and Beausire bought for fifty louis permission to embrace her, and tell her all the count had said. The agents admired this violent love, and hoped for more louis, but Beausire was gone. Cagliostro drove him to Paris.

We will now return to M. de Crosne.

This gentleman knew a good deal about Cagliostro, his former names, his pretensions to ubiquity and perpetual regeneration, his secrets in alchemy and magnetism, and looked upon him as a great charlatan.

“Monsieur,” said he to Cagliostro, “you asked me for an audience; I have returned from Versailles to meet you.”

“Sir, I thought you would wish to question me about what is passing, so I came to you.”

“Question you?” said the magistrate, affecting surprise. “On what?”

“Monsieur,” replied Cagliostro, “you are much occupied about Madame de la Motte, and the missing necklace.”

“Have you found it?” asked M. de Crosne, laughing.

“No, sir, but Madame de la Motte lived in the Rue St. Claude — — ”

“I know, opposite you.”

“Oh, if you know all about Oliva, I have nothing more to tell you.”

“Who is Oliva?”

“You do not know? Then, sir, imagine a young girl very pretty, with blue eyes, and an oval face, a style of beauty something like her majesty, for instance.”

“Well, sir?”

“This young girl led a bad life; it gave me pain to see it; for she was once in the service of an old friend of mine, M. de Taverney — but I weary you.”

“Oh no, pray go on.”

“Well, Oliva led not only a bad life, but an unhappy one, with a fellow she called her lover, who beat and robbed her.”

“Beausire,” said the magistrate.

“Ah! you know him. You are still more a magician than I am. Well, one day when Beausire had beaten the poor girl more than usual, she fled to me for refuge; I pitied her, and gave her shelter in one of my houses.”

“In your house!” cried M. de Crosne in surprise.

“Oh! why not? I am a bachelor,” said Cagliostro, with an air which quite deceived M. de Crosne.

“That is then the reason why my agents could not find her.”

“What! you were seeking this little girl? Had she then been guilty of any crime?”

“No, sir, no; pray go on.”

“Oh! I have done. I lodged her at my house, and that is all.”

“No, sir, for you just now associated her name with that of Madame de la Motte.”

“Only as neighbors.”

“But, sir, this Oliva, whom you say you had in your house, I found in the country with Beausire.”

“With Beausire? Ah! then I have wronged Madame de la Motte.”

“How so, sir?”

“Why just as I thought I had hopes of reforming Oliva, and bringing her back to an honest life, some one carried her away from me.”

“That is strange.”

“Is it not? And I firmly believed it to be Madame de la Motte. But as you found her with Beausire, it was not she, and all her signals and correspondence with Oliva meant nothing.”

“With Oliva?”

“Yes.”

“They met?”

“Yes, Madame de la Motte found a way to take Oliva out every night.”

“Are you sure of this?”

"I saw and heard her."

"Oh, sir, you tell me what I would have paid for with one thousand francs a word. But you are a friend of M. de Rohan?"

"Yes."

"You ought to know how far he was connected with this affair."

"I do not wish to know."

"But you know the object of these nightly excursions of Madame de la Motte and Oliva?"

"Of that also I wish to be ignorant."

"Sir, I only wish to ask you one more question. Have you proofs of the correspondence of Madame de la Motte and Oliva?"

"Plenty."

"What are they?"

"Notes which Madame de la Motte used to throw over to Oliva with a cross-bow. Several of them did not reach their destination, and were picked up either by myself, or my servants, in the street."

"Sir, you will be ready to produce them, if called upon?"

"Certainly; they are perfectly innocent, and cannot injure any one."

"And have you any other proofs of intimacy?"

"I know that she had a method of entering my house to see Oliva. I saw her myself, just after Oliva had disappeared, and my servants saw her also."

"But what did she come for, if Oliva was gone?"

"I did not know. I saw her come out of a carriage at the corner of the street. My idea was that she wished to attach Oliva to her, and keep her near her."

"And you let her do it?"

"Why not? She is a great lady, and received at court. Why should I have prevented her taking charge of Oliva, and taking her off my hands?"

"What did she say when she found that Oliva was gone?"

"She appeared distressed."

"You suppose that Beausire carried her off?"

"I suppose so, for you tell me you found them together. I did not suspect him before, for he did not know where she was."

"She must have let him know herself."

"I think not, as she had fled from him. I think Madame de la Motte must have sent him a key."

"Ah! what day was it?"

"The evening of St. Louis."

"Monsieur, you have rendered a great service to me and to the state."

"I am happy to hear it."

"You shall be thanked as you deserve. I may count on the production of the proofs you mention?"

"I am ready, sir, to assist justice at all times."

As Cagliostro left, he muttered, "Ah, countess! you tried to accuse me — take care of yourself."

Meanwhile, M. de Breteuil was sent by the king to examine Madame de la Motte. She declared that she had proofs of her innocence, which she would produce at the proper time; she also declared, that she would only speak the truth in the presence of the cardinal. She was told that the cardinal laid all the blame upon her. "Tell him then," she said, "that I advise him not to persist in such a foolish system of defense."

"Whom then do you accuse?" asked M. Breteuil.

"I accuse no one," was her reply.

A report was spread at last that the diamonds were being sold in England by M. Reteau de Villette. This man was soon found and arrested, and brought over and confronted with Jeanne. To her utter confusion, he acknowledged that he had forged a receipt from the jewelers, and a letter from the queen at the request of Madame de la Motte. She denied furiously, and declared that she had never seen M. Reteau. M. de Crosne produced as witness a coachman, who swore to having driven her, on the day named, to the house of M. Reteau. Also, one of the servants of M. de Cagliostro deposed to having seen this man on the box of Jeanne's carriage on the night that she came to his master's house. Now, Jeanne began to abuse the count, and accused him of having inspired M. de Rohan with the ideas inimical to the royal dignity. M. de Rohan defended him, and Jeanne at once plainly accused the cardinal of a violent love for the queen. M. de Cagliostro requested to be incarcerated, and allowed to prove his innocence publicly. Then the queen caused to be published all the reports made to the king about the nocturnal promenades, and requested M. de Crosne to state all that he knew about it. This public avowal overturned all Jeanne's plans, and she denied having assisted at any meetings between the queen and the cardinal. This declaration would have cleared the queen, had it been possible to attach any credence to what this woman said. While Jeanne continued to deny that she had ever been in the park, they brought forward

Oliva at last, a living witness of all the falsehoods of the countess. When Oliva was shown to the cardinal the blow was dreadful. He saw at last how infamously he had been played upon. This man, so full of delicacy and noble passions, discovered that an adventuress had led him to insult and despise the Queen of France; a woman whom he loved, and who was innocent. He would have shed all his blood at the feet of Marie Antoinette to make atonement. But he could not even acknowledge his mistake without owning that he loved her — even his excuse would involve an offense; so he was obliged to keep silent, and allow Jeanne to deny everything. Oliva confessed all without reserve. At last Jeanne, driven from every hold, confessed that she had deceived the cardinal, but declared that it was done with the consent of the queen, who watched and enjoyed the scene, hidden behind the trees. To this story she kept; the queen could never disprove it, and there were plenty of people willing to believe it true.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

THE LAST HOPE LOST.

Here the affair therefore rested, for Jeanne was determined to share the blame with some one, as she could not turn it from herself. All her calculations had been defeated by the frankness with which the queen had met, and made public, every accusation against her.

At last Jeanne wrote the following letter to the queen:

“Madame,

“In spite of my painful position and rigorous treatment, I have not uttered a complaint; all that has been tried to extort avowals from me has failed to make me compromise my sovereign. However, although persuaded that my constancy and discretion will facilitate my release from my present position, the friends of the cardinal make me fear I shall become his victim. A long imprisonment, endless questions, and the shame and despair of being accused of such crimes, begin to exhaust my courage, and I tremble lest my constancy should at last give way. Your majesty might end all this by a few words to M. de Breteuil, who could give the affair in the king’s eyes any color your majesty likes without compromising you. It is the fear of being compelled to reveal all which makes me beg your majesty to take steps to relieve me from my painful position. I am, with profound respect,

“Your humble servant,

“Jeanne de la Motte.”

Jeanne calculated either that this letter would frighten the queen, or, what was more probable, would never reach her hands, but be carried by the messenger to the governor of the Bastile, where it could hardly fail to tell against the queen. She then wrote to the cardinal:

“I cannot conceive, monseigneur, why you persist in not speaking plainly. It seems to me that your best plan would be to confide fully in our judges. As for me, I am resolved to be silent if you will not second me; but why do you not speak? Explain all the circumstances of this mysterious affair, for if I were to speak first, and you not support me, I should be sacrificed to the vengeance of her who wishes to ruin us. But I have written her a letter which will perhaps induce her to spare us, who have nothing to reproach ourselves with.”

This letter she gave to the cardinal at their last confrontation. He grew pale with anger at her audacity, and left the room. Then Jeanne produced her letter to the queen, and begged the Abbé Lekel, chaplain of the Bastile, who had accompanied the cardinal, and was devoted to him, to take charge of it and convey it to the queen. He refused to take it. She declared that if he did not she would produce M. de Rohan’s letters to the queen. “And take care, sir,” added she, “for they will cause his head to fall on the scaffold.”

At this moment the cardinal reappeared.

“Madame,” said he, “let my head fall, so that I have the satisfaction of seeing also the scaffold which you shall mount as a thief and a forger. Come, Abbé.” He went away, leaving Jeanne devoured with rage and disappointment at her failures at every turn.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

THE BAPTISM OF THE LITTLE BEAUSIRE.

Madame de la Motte had deceived herself on all points, Cagliostro upon none. Once in the Bastile, he saw a good opportunity for working at the ruin of the monarchy, which he had been trying to undermine for so many years. He prepared the famous letter, dated from London, which appeared a month after. In this letter, after attacking king, queen, cardinal, and even M. de Breteuil, he said, “Yes, I repeat, now free after my imprisonment, there is no crime that would not be expiated by six months in the Bastile. They ask me if I shall ever return to France? Yes, I reply, when the Bastile becomes a public promenade. You have all that is necessary to happiness, you Frenchmen; a fertile soil and genial climate, good hearts, gay tempers, genius, and grace. You only want, my friends, one little thing — to feel sure of sleeping quietly in your beds when you are innocent.”

Oliva kept her word faithfully to Cagliostro, and uttered no word that could compromise him. She threw all the blame on Madame de la Motte, and asserted vehemently her own innocent participation in what she believed to be a joke, played on a gentleman unknown to her. All this time she did not see Beausire, but she had a souvenir of him; for in the month of May she gave birth to a son. Beausire was allowed to attend the baptism, which took place in the prison, which he did with much pleasure, swearing that if Oliva ever recovered her liberty he would make her his wife.

CHAPTER XC.

THE TRIAL.

The day at last arrived, after long investigations, when the judgment of the court was to be pronounced. All the accused had been removed to the Conciergerie, to be in readiness to appear when called on. Oliva continued to be frank and timid; Cagliostro, tranquil and indifferent; Reteau, despairing, cowardly, and weeping; and Jeanne, violent, menacing, and venomous. She had managed to interest the keeper and his wife, and thus obtain more freedom and indulgences.

The first who took his place on the wooden stool, which was appropriated for the accused, was Reteau, who asked pardon with tears and prayers, declared all he knew, and avowed his crimes. He interested no one; he was simply a knave and a coward. After him came Madame de la Motte. Her appearance produced a great sensation; at the sight of the disgraceful seat prepared for her, she, who called herself a Valois, threw around her furious looks, but, meeting curiosity instead of sympathy, repressed her rage. When interrogated, she continued, as before, to throw out insinuations, stating nothing clearly but her own innocence. When questioned as to the letters which she was reported to have said passed between the queen and the cardinal, she answered that she did not wish to compromise the queen, and that the cardinal was best able to answer this question himself. “Ask him to produce them,” said she; “I wish to say nothing about them.” She inspired in nearly all a feeling of distrust and anger. When she retired, her only consolation was the hope of seeing the cardinal in the seat after her; and her rage was extreme when she saw it taken away, and an armchair brought for his use. The cardinal advanced, accompanied by four attendants, and the governor of the Bastile walked by his side. At his entrance he was greeted by a long murmur of sympathy and respect; it was echoed by loud shouts from without — it was the people who cheered him. He was pale, and much moved. The president spoke politely to him, and begged him to sit down. When he spoke, it was with a trembling voice, and a troubled and even humble manner. He gave excuses rather than proofs, and supplications more than reasons, but said little, and seemed to be deserted by his former eloquence. Oliva came next. The wooden stool was brought back for her. Many people trembled at seeing this living image of the queen sitting there as a criminal. Then Cagliostro was called, but almost as a matter of form, and dismissed immediately. The court then announced that the proceedings were concluded, and the deliberations about to begin. All the prisoners were locked for the night in the Conciergerie. The sentence was not pronounced till the following day. Jeanne seated herself early at the window, and before long heard a tremendous shouting from the crowd collected to hear the sentence. This continued for some time, when she distinctly heard a passer-by say, "A grand day for the cardinal!" "For the cardinal," thought Jeanne; "then he is acquitted;" and she ran to M. Hubert, the keeper, to ask, but he did not know. "He must be acquitted!" she said; "they said it was a grand day for him. But I — — "

"Well, madame," said he, "if he is acquitted, why should you not be acquitted also?"

Jeanne returned to the window. "You are wrong, madame," said Madame Hubert to her; "you only become agitated, without perfectly understanding what is passing. Pray remain quiet until your counsel comes to communicate your fate."

"I cannot," said Jeanne, continuing to listen to what passed in the street.

A woman passed, gaily dressed, and with a bouquet in her hand. "He shall have my bouquet, the dear man!" said she. "Oh, I would embrace him if I could!"

"And I also," said another.

"He is so handsome!" said a third.

"It must be the cardinal," said Jeanne; "he is acquitted."

And she said this with so much bitterness that the keeper said, "But, madame, do you not wish the poor prisoner to be released?"

Jeanne, unwilling to lose their sympathy, replied, "Oh, you misunderstand me. Do you believe me so envious and wicked as to wish ill to my companions in misfortune? Oh no; I trust he is free. It is only impatience to learn my own fate, and you tell me nothing."

"We do not know," replied they.

Then other loud cries were heard. Jeanne could see the crowd pressing round an open carriage, which was going slowly along. Flowers were thrown, hats waved; some even mounted on the steps to kiss the hand of a man who sat grave and half frightened at his own popularity. This was the cardinal. Another man sat by him, and cries of “Vive Cagliostro!” were mingled with the shouts for M. de Rohan. Jeanne began to gather courage from all this sympathy for those whom she chose to call the queen’s victims; but suddenly the thought flashed on her, “They are already set free, and no one has even been to announce my sentence!” and she trembled. New shouts now drew her attention to a coach, which was also advancing, followed by a crowd; and in this Jeanne recognized Oliva, who sat smiling with delight at the people who cheered her, holding her child in her arms. Then Jeanne, seeing all these people free, happy, and fêted, began to utter loud complaints that she was not also liberated, or at least told her fate.

“Calm yourself, madame,” said Madame Hubert.

“But tell me, for you must know.”

“Madame.”

“I implore you! You see how I suffer.”

“We are forbidden, madame.”

“Is it so frightful that you dare not?”

“Oh no; calm yourself.”

“Then speak.”

“Will you be patient, and not betray us?”

“I swear.”

“Well, the cardinal is acquitted.”

“I know it.”

“M. de Cagliostro and Mademoiselle Oliva are also acquitted, M. Reteau condemned to the galleys — — ”

“And I?” cried Jeanne, furiously.

“Madame, you promised to be patient.”

“See — speak — I am calm.”

“Banished,” said the woman, feebly.

A flash of delight shone for a moment in the eyes of the countess; then she pretended to faint, and threw herself into the arms of Madame Hubert. “What would it have been,” thought she, “if I had told her the truth!”

“Banishment!” thought Jeanne; “that is liberty, riches, vengeance; it is what I hoped for. I have won!”

CHAPTER XCI.

THE EXECUTION.

Jeanne waited for her counsel to come and announce her fate; but, being now at ease, said to herself, “What do I care that I am thought more guilty than M. de Rohan? I am banished — that is to say, I can carry away my million and a half with me, and live under the orange trees of Seville during the winter, and in Germany or England in the summer. Then I can tell my own story, and, young, rich, and celebrated, live as I please among my friends.”

Pleasing herself with these notions, she commenced settling all her future plans, the disposal of her diamonds, and her establishment in London. This brought to her mind M. Reteau. “Poor fellow!” thought she, “it is he who pays for all; some one must suffer, and it always falls on the humblest instrument. Poor Reteau pays now for his pamphlets against the queen; he has led a hard life of blows and escapes, and now it terminates with the galleys.” She dined with M. and Madame Hubert, and was quite gay; but they did not respond, and were silent and uneasy. Jeanne, however, felt so happy that she cared little for their manner towards her. After dinner, she asked when they were coming to read her sentence.

M. Hubert said they were probably waiting till she returned to her room. She therefore rose to go, when Madame Hubert ran to her and took her hands, looking at her with an expression of so much pity and sympathy, that it struck her for a moment with terror. She was about to question her, but Hubert took her hand, and led her from the room. When she reached her own apartment, she found eight soldiers waiting outside; she felt surprised, but went in, and allowed the man to lock her up as usual. Soon, however, the door opened again, and one of the turnkeys appeared.

“Will madame please to follow me?” he said.

“Where?”

“Below.”

“What for? What do they want with me?”

“Madame, M. Viollet, your counsel, wishes to speak to you.”

“Why does he not come here?”

“Madame, he has received letters from Versailles, and wishes to show them to you.”

“Letters from Versailles,” thought Jeanne; “perhaps the queen has interested herself for me, since the sentence was passed. Wait a little,” she said; “Till I arrange my dress.” In five minutes she was ready. “Perhaps,” she thought, “M. Viollet has come to get me to leave France at once, and the queen is anxious to facilitate the departure of so dangerous an enemy.”

She followed the turnkey down-stairs, and they entered a room, which looked like a vault; it was damp, and almost dark.

“Sir,” said she, trying to overcome her terror, “where is M. Viollet?”

The man did not reply.

“What do you want?” continued she; “have you anything to say to me? you have chosen a very singular place for a rendezvous.”

“We are waiting for M. Viollet,” he replied.

“It is not possible that M. Viollet should wish for me to wait for him here.” All at once, another door, which Jeanne had not before observed, opened, and three men entered. Jeanne looked at them in surprise, and with growing terror. One of them, who was dressed in black, with a roll of papers in his hand, advanced, and said:

“You are Jeanne de St. Rémy de Valois, wife of Marie Antoine, Count de la Motte?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Born at Fontette, on the 22d of July, 1756?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You live at Paris, Rue St. Claude?”

“Yes, sir; but why these questions?”

“Madame, I am the registrar of the court, and I am come to read to you the sentence of the court of the 31st of May, 1786.”

Jeanne trembled again, and now looked at the other two men; one had a gray dress with steel buttons, the other a fur cap on and an apron, which seemed to her spotted with blood. She drew back, but the registrar said, “On your knees, madame, if you please.”

“On my knees?” cried Jeanne; “I, a Valois!”

“It is the order, madame.”

“But, sir, it is an unheard-of thing, except where some degrading sentence has been pronounced; and banishment is not such.”

“I did not tell you you were sentenced to banishment,” said he gravely.

“But to what, then?”

“I will tell you, madame, when you are on your knees.”

“Never!”

“Madame, I only follow my instructions.”

“Never! I tell you.”

“Madame, it is the order that when the condemned refuse to kneel, they should be forced to do it.”

“Force — to a woman!”

“There is no distinction in the eyes of justice.”

“Ah!” cried Jeanne, “this is the queen’s doings; I recognize the hands of an enemy.”

“You are wrong to accuse the queen; she has nothing to do with the orders of the court. Come, madame, I beg you to spare me the necessity of violence, and kneel down.”

“Never!” and she planted herself firmly in a corner of the room.

The registrar then signed to the two other men, who, approaching, seized her, and in spite of her cries dragged her into the middle of the room. But she bounded up again.

“Let me stand,” said she, “and I will listen patiently.”

“Madame, whenever criminals are punished by whipping, they kneel to receive the sentence.”

“Whipping!” screamed Jeanne; “miserable wretch, how dare you — — ”

The men forced her on her knees once more, and held her down, but she struggled so furiously that they called out, “Read quickly, monsieur, for we cannot hold her.”

“I will never hear such an infamous sentence,” she cried; and indeed she drowned his voice so effectually with her screams, that although he read, not a word could be heard.

He replaced his papers in his pocket, and she, thinking he had finished, stopped her cries. Then he said, “And the sentence shall be executed at the place of executions, Cour de Justice.”

“Publicly!” screamed she.

“Monsieur de Paris, I deliver you this woman,” said the registrar, addressing the man with the leathern apron.

“Who is this man?” cried Jeanne, in a fright.

“The executioner,” replied the registrar.

The two men then took hold of her to lead her out, but her resistance was so violent that they were obliged to drag her along by force, and she never ceased uttering the most frantic cries. They took her thus into the court called Cour de Justice, where there was a scaffold and which was crowded with spectators. On a platform, raised about eight feet, was a post garnished with iron rings, and with a ladder to mount to it. This place was surrounded with soldiers. When she appeared, cries of "Here she is!" mingled with much abuse, were heard from the crowd. Numbers of the partisans of M. de Rohan had assembled to hoot her, and cries of "A bas la Motte, the forger!" were heard on every side, and those who tried to express pity for her were soon silenced. Then she cried in a loud voice, "Do you know who I am? I am of the blood of your kings. They strike in me, not a criminal, but a rival; not only a rival, but an accomplice. Yes," repeated she, as the people kept silence to kept listen, "an accomplice. They punish one who knows the secrets of — — "

"Take care," interrupted the registrar.

She turned and saw the executioner with the whip in his hand. At this sight she forgot her desire to captivate the multitude, and even her hatred, and sinking on her knees she said, "Have pity!" and seized his hand; but he raised the other, and let the whip fall lightly on her shoulders. She jumped up, and was about to try and throw herself off the scaffold, when she saw the other man, who was drawing from a fire a hot iron. At this sight she uttered a perfect howl, which was echoed by the people.

"Help! help!" she cried, trying to shake off the cord with which they were tying her hands. The executioner at last forced her on her knees, and tore open her dress; but she cried, with a voice which was heard through all the tumult, "Cowardly Frenchmen! you do not defend me, but let me be tortured; oh! it is my own fault. If I had said all I knew of the queen I should have been — — "

She could say no more, for she was gagged by the attendants: then two men held her, while the executioner performed his office. At the touch of the iron she fainted, and was carried back insensible to the Conciergerie when the crowd gradually dispersed.

CHAPTER XCII.

THE MARRIAGE.

On the same day at noon the king entered a drawing-room, where the queen was sitting in full dress, but pale through her rouge, and surrounded by a party of ladies and gentlemen. He glanced frequently towards the door. “Are not the young couple ready? I believe it is noon,” he said.

“Sire, M. de Charny is waiting in the gallery for your majesty’s orders,” said the queen, with a violent effort.

“Oh! let him come in.” The queen turned from the door. “The bride ought to be here also,” continued the king, “it is time.”

“Your majesty must excuse Mademoiselle de Taverney, if she is late,” replied M. de Charny, advancing; “for since the death of her father she has not left her bed until to-day, and she fainted when she did so.”

“This dear child loved her father so much,” replied the king, “but we hope a good husband will console her. M. de Breteuil,” said he, turning to that gentleman, “have you made out the order of banishment for M. de Cagliostro?”

“Yes, sire.”

“And that De la Motte. Is it not to-day she is to be branded?”

At this moment, Andrée appeared, dressed in white like a bride, and with cheeks nearly as white as her dress. She advanced leaning on her brother’s arm. M. de Suffren, leading his nephew, came to meet her, and then drew back to allow her to approach the king.

“Mademoiselle,” said Louis, taking her hand, “I begged of you to hasten this marriage, instead of waiting until the time of your mourning had expired, that I might have the pleasure of assisting at the ceremony; for to-morrow I and the queen commence a tour through France.” And he led Andrée up to the queen, who could hardly stand, and did not raise her eyes. The king then, putting Andrée’s hand into Philippe’s, said, “Gentlemen, to the chapel,” — and they began to move. The queen kneeled on her prie Dieu, her face buried in her hands, praying for strength. Charny, though pale as death, feeling that all eyes were upon him, appeared calm and strong. Andrée remained immovable as a statue; she did not pray — she had nothing to ask, to hope for, or to fear. The ceremony over, the king kissed Andrée on the forehead, saying, “Madame la Comtesse, go to the queen, she wishes to give you a wedding present.”

“Oh!” murmured Andrée to Philippe, “it is too much; I can bear no more; I cannot do that.”

“Courage, sister, one effort more.”

“I cannot, Philippe; if she speaks to me, I shall die.”

“Then, you will be happier than I, for I cannot die.”

Andrée said no more, but went to the queen. She found her in her chair with closed eyes and clasped hands, seeming more dead than alive, except for the shudders which, shook her from time to time. Andrée waited tremblingly to hear her speak; but, after a minute, she rose slowly, and took from the table a paper, which she put into Andrée’s hands. Andrée opened it, and read:

“Andrée, you have saved me. My honor comes from you; my life belongs to you. In the name of this honor, which has cost you so dear, I swear to you that you may call me sister without blushing. This paper is the pledge of my gratitude, the dowry which I give you. Your heart is noble and will thank me for this gift.

“MARIE ANTOINETTE DE LORRAINE D’AUTRICHE.”

Andrée looked at the queen, and saw tears falling from her eyes; she seemed expecting an answer, but Andrée, putting the letter in the fire, turned and left the room. Then Charny, who was waiting for her, took her hand, and they, each pale and silent, left the room. Two traveling-carriages were in the courtyard; Andrée got into one, and then said:

“Sir, I believe you go to Picardy.”

“Yes, madame.”

“And I to where my mother lies dead. Adieu, monsieur.”

Charny bowed, but did not reply, and Andrée drove off.

Charny himself, after giving his hand to Philippe, got into the other, and also drove off.

Then Philippe cried, in a tone of anguish, “My task is done!” and he too vanished.

THE END

THE BLACK TULIP

Anonymous translation, 1894

This historical novel was originally published in three volumes in 1850. The story begins with the 1672 lynching of the Dutch Grand Pensionary Johan de Witt and his brother Cornelis, by a wild mob of their own countrymen. The rest of the narrative, involving fictional characters, takes place in the following eighteen months; gradually revealing its connection with the killing of the de Witt brothers.

In the story, the city of Haarlem, Netherlands has set a prize of 100,000 guilders to the person who can grow a black tulip, sparking competition between the country's best gardeners to win the money, honour and fame. The young and bourgeois Cornelius van Baerle has almost succeeded, but is suddenly thrown into the Loevestein prison. There he meets the prison guard's beautiful daughter Rosa, who will be his comfort and help, and at last his rescuer.

The rare variety of black tulips at Ottawa

An original illustration

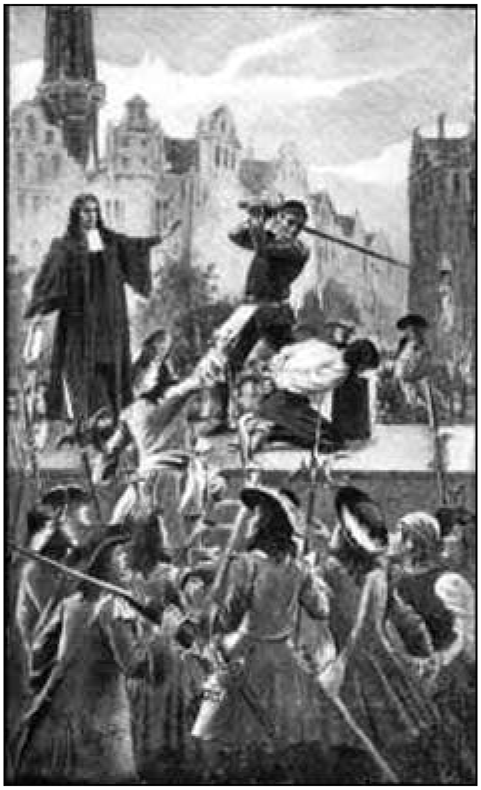

An original illustration

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LA TULIPE NOIRE
CHRISTIAN-JAQUE
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HENRI JEANSON
FRANCIS BLANCHE

The 1963 film adaptation

CHAPTER 1.

A Grateful People

On the 20th of August, 1672, the city of the Hague, always so lively, so neat, and so trim that one might believe every day to be Sunday, with its shady park, with its tall trees, spreading over its Gothic houses, with its canals like large mirrors, in which its steeples and its almost Eastern cupolas are reflected, — the city of the Hague, the capital of the Seven United Provinces, was swelling in all its arteries with a black and red stream of hurried, panting, and restless citizens, who, with their knives in their girdles, muskets on their shoulders, or sticks in their hands, were pushing on to the Buytenhof, a terrible prison, the grated windows of which are still shown, where, on the charge of attempted murder preferred against him by the surgeon Tyckelaer, Cornelius de Witt, the brother of the Grand Pensionary of Holland was confined.

If the history of that time, and especially that of the year in the middle of which our narrative commences, were not indissolubly connected with the two names just mentioned, the few explanatory pages which we are about to add might appear quite supererogatory; but we will, from the very first, apprise the reader — our old friend, to whom we are wont on the first page to promise amusement, and with whom we always try to keep our word as well as is in our power — that this explanation is as indispensable to the right understanding of our story as to that of the great event itself on which it is based.

Cornelius de Witt, Ruart de Pulten, that is to say, warden of the dikes, ex-burgomaster of Dort, his native town, and member of the Assembly of the States of Holland, was forty-nine years of age, when the Dutch people, tired of the Republic such as John de Witt, the Grand Pensionary of Holland, understood it, at once conceived a most violent affection for the Stadtholderate, which had been abolished for ever in Holland by the "Perpetual Edict" forced by John de Witt upon the United Provinces.

As it rarely happens that public opinion, in its whimsical flights, does not identify a principle with a man, thus the people saw the personification of the Republic in the two stern figures of the brothers De Witt, those Romans of Holland, spurning to pander to the fancies of the mob, and wedding themselves with unbending fidelity to liberty without licentiousness, and prosperity without the waste of superfluity; on the other hand, the Stadtholderate recalled to the popular mind the grave and thoughtful image of the young Prince William of Orange.

The brothers De Witt humoured Louis XIV., whose moral influence was felt by the whole of Europe, and the pressure of whose material power Holland had been made to feel in that marvellous campaign on the Rhine, which, in the space of three months, had laid the power of the United Provinces prostrate.

Louis XIV. had long been the enemy of the Dutch, who insulted or ridiculed him to their hearts' content, although it must be said that they generally used French refugees for the mouthpiece of their spite. Their national pride held him up as the Mithridates of the Republic. The brothers De Witt, therefore, had to strive against a double difficulty, — against the force of national antipathy, and, besides, against the feeling of weariness which is natural to all vanquished people, when they hope that a new chief will be able to save them from ruin and shame.

This new chief, quite ready to appear on the political stage, and to measure himself against Louis XIV., however gigantic the fortunes of the Grand Monarch loomed in the future, was William, Prince of Orange, son of William II., and grandson, by his mother Henrietta Stuart, of Charles I. of England. We have mentioned him before as the person by whom the people expected to see the office of Stadtholder restored.

This young man was, in 1672, twenty-two years of age. John de Witt, who was his tutor, had brought him up with the view of making him a good citizen. Loving his country better than he did his disciple, the master had, by the Perpetual Edict, extinguished the hope which the young Prince might have entertained of one day becoming Stadtholder. But God laughs at the presumption of man, who wants to raise and prostrate the powers on earth without consulting the King above; and the fickleness and caprice of the Dutch combined with the terror inspired by Louis XIV., in repealing the Perpetual Edict, and re-establishing the office of Stadtholder in favour of William of Orange, for whom the hand of Providence had traced out ulterior destinies on the hidden map of the future.

The Grand Pensionary bowed before the will of his fellow citizens; Cornelius de Witt, however, was more obstinate, and notwithstanding all the threats of death from the Orangist rabble, who besieged him in his house at Dort, he stoutly refused to sign the act by which the office of Stadtholder was restored. Moved by the tears and entreaties of his wife, he at last complied, only adding to his signature the two letters V. C. (Vi Coactus), notifying thereby that he only yielded to force.

It was a real miracle that on that day he escaped from the doom intended for him.

John de Witt derived no advantage from his ready compliance with the wishes of his fellow citizens. Only a few days after, an attempt was made to stab him, in which he was severely although not mortally wounded.

This by no means suited the views of the Orange faction. The life of the two brothers being a constant obstacle to their plans, they changed their tactics, and tried to obtain by calumny what they had not been able to effect by the aid of the poniard.

How rarely does it happen that, in the right moment, a great man is found to head the execution of vast and noble designs; and for that reason, when such a providential concurrence of circumstances does occur, history is prompt to record the name of the chosen one, and to hold him up to the admiration of posterity. But when Satan interposes in human affairs to cast a shadow upon some happy existence, or to overthrow a kingdom, it seldom happens that he does not find at his side some miserable tool, in whose ear he has but to whisper a word to set him at once about his task.

The wretched tool who was at hand to be the agent of this dastardly plot was one Tyckelaer whom we have already mentioned, a surgeon by profession.

He lodged an information against Cornelius de Witt, setting forth that the warden — who, as he had shown by the letters added to his signature, was fuming at the repeal of the Perpetual Edict — had, from hatred against William of Orange, hired an assassin to deliver the new Republic of its new Stadtholder; and he, Tyckelaer was the person thus chosen; but that, horrified at the bare idea of the act which he was asked to perpetrate, he had preferred rather to reveal the crime than to commit it.

This disclosure was, indeed, well calculated to call forth a furious outbreak among the Orange faction. The Attorney General caused, on the 16th of August, 1672, Cornelius de Witt to be arrested; and the noble brother of John de Witt had, like the vilest criminal, to undergo, in one of the apartments of the town prison, the preparatory degrees of torture, by means of which his judges expected to force from him the confession of his alleged plot against William of Orange.

But Cornelius was not only possessed of a great mind, but also of a great heart. He belonged to that race of martyrs who, indissolubly wedded to their political convictions as their ancestors were to their faith, are able to smile on pain: while being stretched on the rack, he recited with a firm voice, and scanning the lines according to measure, the first strophe of the “Justum ac tenacem” of Horace, and, making no confession, tired not only the strength, but even the fanaticism, of his executioners.

The judges, notwithstanding, acquitted Tyckelaer from every charge; at the same time sentencing Cornelius to be deposed from all his offices and dignities; to pay all the costs of the trial; and to be banished from the soil of the Republic for ever.

This judgment against not only an innocent, but also a great man, was indeed some gratification to the passions of the people, to whose interests Cornelius de Witt had always devoted himself: but, as we shall soon see, it was not enough.

The Athenians, who indeed have left behind them a pretty tolerable reputation for ingratitude, have in this respect to yield precedence to the Dutch. They, at least in the case of Aristides, contented themselves with banishing him.

John de Witt, at the first intimation of the charge brought against his brother, had resigned his office of Grand Pensionary. He too received a noble recompense for his devotedness to the best interests of his country, taking with him into the retirement of private life the hatred of a host of enemies, and the fresh scars of wounds inflicted by assassins, only too often the sole guerdon obtained by honest people, who are guilty of having worked for their country, and of having forgotten their own private interests.

In the meanwhile William of Orange urged on the course of events by every means in his power, eagerly waiting for the time when the people, by whom he was idolised, should have made of the bodies of the brothers the two steps over which he might ascend to the chair of Stadtholder.

Thus, then, on the 20th of August, 1672, as we have already stated in the beginning of this chapter, the whole town was crowding towards the Buytenhof, to witness the departure of Cornelius de Witt from prison, as he was going to exile; and to see what traces the torture of the rack had left on the noble frame of the man who knew his Horace so well.

Yet all this multitude was not crowding to the Buytenhof with the innocent view of merely feasting their eyes with the spectacle; there were many who went there to play an active part in it, and to take upon themselves an office which they conceived had been badly filled, — that of the executioner.

There were, indeed, others with less hostile intentions. All that they cared for was the spectacle, always so attractive to the mob, whose instinctive pride is flattered by it, — the sight of greatness hurled down into the dust.

“Has not,” they would say, “this Cornelius de Witt been locked up and broken by the rack? Shall we not see him pale, streaming with blood, covered with shame?” And was not this a sweet triumph for the burghers of the Hague, whose envy even beat that of the common rabble; a triumph in which every honest citizen and townsman might be expected to share?

“Moreover,” hinted the Orange agitators interspersed through the crowd, whom they hoped to manage like a sharp-edged and at the same time crushing instrument, — ”moreover, will there not, from the Buytenhof to the gate of the town, a nice little opportunity present itself to throw some handfuls of dirt, or a few stones, at this Cornelius de Witt, who not only conferred the dignity of Stadtholder on the Prince of Orange merely vi coactus, but who also intended to have him assassinated?”

“Besides which,” the fierce enemies of France chimed in, “if the work were done well and bravely at the Hague, Cornelius would certainly not be allowed to go into exile, where he will renew his intrigues with France, and live with his big scoundrel of a brother, John, on the gold of the Marquis de Louvois.”

Being in such a temper, people generally will run rather than walk; which was the reason why the inhabitants of the Hague were hurrying so fast towards the Buytenhof.

Honest Tyckelaer, with a heart full of spite and malice, and with no particular plan settled in his mind, was one of the foremost, being paraded about by the Orange party like a hero of probity, national honour, and Christian charity.

This daring miscreant detailed, with all the embellishments and flourishes suggested by his base mind and his ruffianly imagination, the attempts which he pretended Cornelius de Witt had made to corrupt him; the sums of money which were promised, and all the diabolical stratagems planned beforehand to smooth for him, Tyckelaer, all the difficulties in the path of murder.

And every phase of his speech, eagerly listened to by the populace, called forth enthusiastic cheers for the Prince of Orange, and groans and imprecations of blind fury against the brothers De Witt.

The mob even began to vent its rage by inveighing against the iniquitous judges, who had allowed such a detestable criminal as the villain Cornelius to get off so cheaply.

Some of the agitators whispered, “He will be off, he will escape from us!”

Others replied, “A vessel is waiting for him at Schevening, a French craft. Tyckelaer has seen her.”

“Honest Tyckelaer! Hurrah for Tyckelaer!” the mob cried in chorus.

“And let us not forget,” a voice exclaimed from the crowd, “that at the same time with Cornelius his brother John, who is as rascally a traitor as himself, will likewise make his escape.”

“And the two rogues will in France make merry with our money, with the money for our vessels, our arsenals, and our dockyards, which they have sold to Louis XIV.”

“Well, then, don’t let us allow them to depart!” advised one of the patriots who had gained the start of the others.

“Forward to the prison, to the prison!” echoed the crowd.

Amid these cries, the citizens ran along faster and faster, cocking their muskets, brandishing their hatchets, and looking death and defiance in all directions.

No violence, however, had as yet been committed; and the file of horsemen who were guarding the approaches of the Buytenhof remained cool, unmoved, silent, much more threatening in their impassibility than all this crowd of burghers, with their cries, their agitation, and their threats. The men on their horses, indeed, stood like so many statues, under the eye of their chief, Count Tilly, the captain of the mounted troops of the Hague, who had his sword drawn, but held it with its point downwards, in a line with the straps of his stirrup.

This troop, the only defence of the prison, overawed by its firm attitude not only the disorderly riotous mass of the populace, but also the detachment of the burgher guard, which, being placed opposite the

Buytenhof to support the soldiers in keeping order, gave to the rioters the example of seditious cries, shouting, —

“Hurrah for Orange! Down with the traitors!”

The presence of Tilly and his horsemen, indeed, exercised a salutary check on these civic warriors; but by degrees they waxed more and more angry by their own shouts, and as they were not able to understand how any one could have courage without showing it by cries, they attributed the silence of the dragoons to pusillanimity, and advanced one step towards the prison, with all the turbulent mob following in their wake.

In this moment, Count Tilly rode forth towards them single-handed, merely lifting his sword and contracting his brow whilst he addressed them: —

“Well, gentlemen of the burgher guard, what are you advancing for, and what do you wish?”

The burghers shook their muskets, repeating their cry, —

“Hurrah for Orange! Death to the traitors!”

“‘Hurrah for Orange!’ all well and good!” replied Tilly, “although I certainly am more partial to happy faces than to gloomy ones. ‘Death to the traitors!’ as much of it as you like, as long as you show your wishes only by cries. But, as to putting them to death in good earnest, I am here to prevent that, and I shall prevent it.”

Then, turning round to his men, he gave the word of command, —

“Soldiers, ready!”

The troopers obeyed orders with a precision which immediately caused the burgher guard and the people to fall back, in a degree of confusion which excited the smile of the cavalry officer.

“Holloa!” he exclaimed, with that bantering tone which is peculiar to men of his profession; “be easy, gentlemen, my soldiers will not fire a shot; but, on the other hand, you will not advance by one step towards the prison.”

“And do you know, sir, that we have muskets?” roared the commandant of the burghers.

“I must know it, by Jove, you have made them glitter enough before my eyes; but I beg you to observe also that we on our side have pistols, that the pistol carries admirably to a distance of fifty yards, and that you are only twenty-five from us.”

“Death to the traitors!” cried the exasperated burghers.

"Go along with you," growled the officer, "you always cry the same thing over again. It is very tiresome."

With this, he took his post at the head of his troops, whilst the tumult grew fiercer and fiercer about the Buytenhof.

And yet the fuming crowd did not know that, at that very moment when they were tracking the scent of one of their victims, the other, as if hurrying to meet his fate, passed, at a distance of not more than a hundred yards, behind the groups of people and the dragoons, to betake himself to the Buytenhof.

John de Witt, indeed, had alighted from his coach with his servant, and quietly walked across the courtyard of the prison.

Mentioning his name to the turnkey, who however knew him, he said, —

"Good morning, Gryphus; I am coming to take away my brother, who, as you know, is condemned to exile, and to carry him out of the town."

Whereupon the jailer, a sort of bear, trained to lock and unlock the gates of the prison, had greeted him and admitted him into the building, the doors of which were immediately closed again.

Ten yards farther on, John de Witt met a lovely young girl, of about seventeen or eighteen, dressed in the national costume of the Frisian women, who, with pretty demureness, dropped a curtesy to him. Chucking her under the chin, he said to her, —

"Good morning, my good and fair Rosa; how is my brother?"

"Oh, Mynheer John!" the young girl replied, "I am not afraid of the harm which has been done to him. That's all over now."

"But what is it you are afraid of?"

"I am afraid of the harm which they are going to do to him."

"Oh, yes," said De Witt, "you mean to speak of the people down below, don't you?"

"Do you hear them?"

"They are indeed in a state of great excitement; but when they see us perhaps they will grow calmer, as we have never done them anything but good."

"That's unfortunately no reason, except for the contrary," muttered the girl, as, on an imperative sign from her father, she withdrew.

"Indeed, child, what you say is only too true."

Then, in pursuing his way, he said to himself, —

“Here is a damsel who very likely does not know how to read, who consequently has never read anything, and yet with one word she has just told the whole history of the world.”

And with the same calm mien, but more melancholy than he had been on entering the prison, the Grand Pensionary proceeded towards the cell of his brother.

CHAPTER 2.

The Two Brothers

As the fair Rosa, with foreboding doubt, had foretold, so it happened. Whilst John de Witt was climbing the narrow winding stairs which led to the prison of his brother Cornelius, the burghers did their best to have the troop of Tilly, which was in their way, removed.

Seeing this disposition, King Mob, who fully appreciated the laudable intentions of his own beloved militia, shouted most lustily, —

“Hurrah for the burghers!”

As to Count Tilly, who was as prudent as he was firm, he began to parley with the burghers, under the protection of the cocked pistols of his dragoons, explaining to the valiant townsmen, that his order from the States commanded him to guard the prison and its approaches with three companies.

“Wherefore such an order? Why guard the prison?” cried the Orangists.

“Stop,” replied the Count, “there you at once ask me more than I can tell you. I was told, ‘Guard the prison,’ and I guard it. You, gentlemen, who are almost military men yourselves, you are aware that an order must never be gainsaid.”

“But this order has been given to you that the traitors may be enabled to leave the town.”

“Very possibly, as the traitors are condemned to exile,” replied Tilly.

“But who has given this order?”

“The States, to be sure!”

“The States are traitors.”

“I don’t know anything about that!”

“And you are a traitor yourself!”

“I?”

“Yes, you.”

“Well, as to that, let us understand each other gentlemen. Whom should I betray? The States? Why, I cannot betray them, whilst, being in their pay, I faithfully obey their orders.”

As the Count was so indisputably in the right that it was impossible to argue against him, the mob answered only by redoubled clamour and horrible threats, to which the Count opposed the most perfect urbanity.

"Gentlemen," he said, "uncock your muskets, one of them may go off by accident; and if the shot chanced to wound one of my men, we should knock over a couple of hundreds of yours, for which we should, indeed, be very sorry, but you even more so; especially as such a thing is neither contemplated by you nor by myself."

"If you did that," cried the burghers, "we should have a pop at you, too."

"Of course you would; but suppose you killed every man Jack of us, those whom we should have killed would not, for all that, be less dead."

"Then leave the place to us, and you will perform the part of a good citizen."

"First of all," said the Count, "I am not a citizen, but an officer, which is a very different thing; and secondly, I am not a Hollander, but a Frenchman, which is more different still. I have to do with no one but the States, by whom I am paid; let me see an order from them to leave the place to you, and I shall only be too glad to wheel off in an instant, as I am confoundedly bored here."

"Yes, yes!" cried a hundred voices; the din of which was immediately swelled by five hundred others; "let us march to the Town-hall; let us go and see the deputies! Come along! come along!"

"That's it," Tilly muttered between his teeth, as he saw the most violent among the crowd turning away; "go and ask for a meanness at the Town-hall, and you will see whether they will grant it; go, my fine fellows, go!"

The worthy officer relied on the honour of the magistrates, who, on their side, relied on his honour as a soldier.

"I say, Captain," the first lieutenant whispered into the ear of the Count, "I hope the deputies will give these madmen a flat refusal; but, after all, it would do no harm if they would send us some reinforcement."

In the meanwhile, John de Witt, whom we left climbing the stairs, after the conversation with the jailer Gryphus and his daughter Rosa, had reached the door of the cell, where on a mattress his brother Cornelius was resting, after having undergone the preparatory degrees of the torture. The sentence of banishment having been pronounced, there was no occasion for inflicting the torture extraordinary.

Cornelius was stretched on his couch, with broken wrists and crushed fingers. He had not confessed a crime of which he was not guilty; and now, after three days of agony, he once more breathed freely, on being informed that the judges, from whom he had expected death, were only condemning him to exile.

Endowed with an iron frame and a stout heart, how would he have disappointed his enemies if they could only have seen, in the dark cell of the Buytenhof, his pale face lit up by the smile of the martyr, who forgets the dross of this earth after having obtained a glimpse of the bright glory of heaven.

The warden, indeed, had already recovered his full strength, much more owing to the force of his own strong will than to actual aid; and he was calculating how long the formalities of the law would still detain him in prison.

This was just at the very moment when the mingled shouts of the burgher guard and of the mob were raging against the two brothers, and threatening Captain Tilly, who served as a rampart to them. This noise, which roared outside of the walls of the prison, as the surf dashing against the rocks, now reached the ears of the prisoner.

But, threatening as it sounded, Cornelius appeared not to deem it worth his while to inquire after its cause; nor did he get up to look out of the narrow grated window, which gave access to the light and to the noise of the world without.

He was so absorbed in his never-ceasing pain that it had almost become a habit with him. He felt with such delight the bonds which connected his immortal being with his perishable frame gradually loosening, that it seemed to him as if his spirit, freed from the trammels of the body, were hovering above it, like the expiring flame which rises from the half-extinguished embers.

He also thought of his brother; and whilst the latter was thus vividly present to his mind the door opened, and John entered, hurrying to the bedside of the prisoner, who stretched out his broken limbs and his hands tied up in bandages towards that glorious brother, whom he now excelled, not in services rendered to the country, but in the hatred which the Dutch bore him.

John tenderly kissed his brother on the forehead, and put his sore hands gently back on the mattress.

"Cornelius, my poor brother, you are suffering great pain, are you not?"

"I am suffering no longer, since I see you, my brother."

"Oh, my poor dear Cornelius! I feel most wretched to see you in such a state."

"And, indeed, I have thought more of you than of myself; and whilst they were torturing me, I never thought of uttering a complaint, except once, to say, 'Poor brother!' But now that you are here, let us forget all. You are coming to take me away, are you not?"

"I am."

"I am quite healed; help me to get up, and you shall see how I can walk."

"You will not have to walk far, as I have my coach near the pond, behind Tilly's dragoons."

"Tilly's dragoons! What are they near the pond for?"

"Well," said the Grand Pensionary with a melancholy smile which was habitual to him, "the gentlemen at the Town-hall expect that the people at the Hague would like to see you depart, and there is some apprehension of a tumult."

"Of a tumult?" replied Cornelius, fixing his eyes on his perplexed brother; "a tumult?"

"Yes, Cornelius."

"Oh! that's what I heard just now," said the prisoner, as if speaking to himself. Then, turning to his brother, he continued, —

"Are there many persons down before the prison."

"Yes, my brother, there are."

"But then, to come here to me — — "

"Well?"

"How is it that they have allowed you to pass?"

"You know well that we are not very popular, Cornelius," said the Grand Pensionary, with gloomy bitterness. "I have made my way through all sorts of bystreets and alleys."

"You hid yourself, John?"

"I wished to reach you without loss of time, and I did what people will do in politics, or on the sea when the wind is against them, — I tacked."

At this moment the noise in the square below was heard to roar with increasing fury. Tilly was parleying with the burghers.

"Well, well," said Cornelius, "you are a very skilful pilot, John; but I doubt whether you will as safely guide your brother out of the Buytenhof in the midst of this gale, and through the raging surf of popular hatred, as you did the fleet of Van Tromp past the shoals of the Scheldt to Antwerp.”

“With the help of God, Cornelius, we’ll at least try,” answered John; “but, first of all, a word with you.”

“Speak!”

The shouts began anew.

“Hark, hark!” continued Cornelius, “how angry those people are! Is it against you, or against me?”

“I should say it is against us both, Cornelius. I told you, my dear brother, that the Orange party, while assailing us with their absurd calumnies, have also made it a reproach against us that we have negotiated with France.”

“What blockheads they are!”

“But, indeed, they reproach us with it.”

“And yet, if these negotiations had been successful, they would have prevented the defeats of Rees, Orsay, Wesel, and Rheinberg; the Rhine would not have been crossed, and Holland might still consider herself invincible in the midst of her marshes and canals.”

“All this is quite true, my dear Cornelius, but still more certain it is, that if at this moment our correspondence with the Marquis de Louvois were discovered, skilful pilot as I am, I should not be able to save the frail barque which is to carry the brothers De Witt and their fortunes out of Holland. That correspondence, which might prove to honest people how dearly I love my country, and what sacrifices I have offered to make for its liberty and glory, would be ruin to us if it fell into the hands of the Orange party. I hope you have burned the letters before you left Dort to join me at the Hague.”

“My dear brother,” Cornelius answered, “your correspondence with M. de Louvois affords ample proof of your having been of late the greatest, most generous, and most able citizen of the Seven United Provinces. I rejoice in the glory of my country; and particularly do I rejoice in your glory, John. I have taken good care not to burn that correspondence.”

“Then we are lost, as far as this life is concerned,” quietly said the Grand Pensionary, approaching the window.

“No, on the contrary, John, we shall at the same time save our lives and regain our popularity.”

“But what have you done with these letters?”

“I have intrusted them to the care of Cornelius van Baerle, my godson, whom you know, and who lives at Dort.”

"Poor honest Van Baerle! who knows so much, and yet thinks of nothing but of flowers and of God who made them. You have intrusted him with this fatal secret; it will be his ruin, poor soul!"

"His ruin?"

"Yes, for he will either be strong or he will be weak. If he is strong, he will, when he hears of what has happened to us, boast of our acquaintance; if he is weak, he will be afraid on account of his connection with us: if he is strong, he will betray the secret by his boldness; if he is weak, he will allow it to be forced from him. In either case he is lost, and so are we. Let us, therefore, fly, fly, as long as there is still time."

Cornelius de Witt, raising himself on his couch, and grasping the hand of his brother, who shuddered at the touch of his linen bandages, replied, —

"Do not I know my godson? have not I been enabled to read every thought in Van Baerle's mind, and every sentiment in his heart? You ask whether he is strong or weak. He is neither the one nor the other; but that is not now the question. The principal point is, that he is sure not to divulge the secret, for the very good reason that he does not know it himself."

John turned round in surprise.

"You must know, my dear brother, that I have been trained in the school of that distinguished politician John de Witt; and I repeat to you, that Van Baerle is not aware of the nature and importance of the deposit which I have intrusted to him."

"Quick then," cried John, "as there is still time, let us convey to him directions to burn the parcel."

"Through whom?"

"Through my servant Craeke, who was to have accompanied us on horseback, and who has entered the prison with me, to assist you downstairs."

"Consider well before having those precious documents burnt, John!"

"I consider, above all things, that the brothers De Witt must necessarily save their lives, to be able to save their character. If we are dead, who will defend us? Who will have fully understood our intentions?"

"You expect, then, that they would kill us if those papers were found?"

John, without answering, pointed with his hand to the square, whence, at that very moment, fierce shouts and savage yells made themselves heard.

"Yes, yes," said Cornelius, "I hear these shouts very plainly, but what is their meaning?"

John opened the window.

“Death to the traitors!” howled the populace.

“Do you hear now, Cornelius?”

“To the traitors! that means us!” said the prisoner, raising his eyes to heaven and shrugging his shoulders.

“Yes, it means us,” repeated John.

“Where is Craeke?”

“At the door of your cell, I suppose.”

“Let him enter then.”

John opened the door; the faithful servant was waiting on the threshold.

“Come in, Craeke, and mind well what my brother will tell you.”

“No, John; it will not suffice to send a verbal message; unfortunately, I shall be obliged to write.”

“And why that?”

“Because Van Baerle will neither give up the parcel nor burn it without a special command to do so.”

“But will you be able to write, poor old fellow?” John asked, with a look on the scorched and bruised hands of the unfortunate sufferer.

“If I had pen and ink you would soon see,” said Cornelius.

“Here is a pencil, at any rate.”

“Have you any paper? for they have left me nothing.”

“Here, take this Bible, and tear out the fly-leaf.”

“Very well, that will do.”

“But your writing will be illegible.”

“Just leave me alone for that,” said Cornelius. “The executioners have indeed pinched me badly enough, but my hand will not tremble once in tracing the few lines which are requisite.”

And really Cornelius took the pencil and began to write, when through the white linen bandages drops of blood oozed out which the pressure of the fingers against the pencil squeezed from the raw flesh.

A cold sweat stood on the brow of the Grand Pensionary.

Cornelius wrote: —

“My dear Godson, —

“Burn the parcel which I have intrusted to you. Burn it without looking at it, and without opening it, so that its contents may for ever remain unknown to yourself. Secrets of this description are death to those with whom they are deposited. Burn it, and you will have saved John and Cornelius de Witt.

“Farewell, and love me.

“Cornelius de Witt

“August 20th, 1672.”

John, with tears in his eyes, wiped off a drop of the noble blood which had soiled the leaf, and, after having handed the despatch to Craeke with a last direction, returned to Cornelius, who seemed overcome by intense pain, and near fainting.

“Now,” said he, “when honest Craeke sounds his coxswain’s whistle, it will be a signal of his being clear of the crowd, and of his having reached the other side of the pond. And then it will be our turn to depart.”

Five minutes had not elapsed, before a long and shrill whistle was heard through the din and noise of the square of the Buytenhof.

John gratefully raised his eyes to heaven.

“And now,” said he, “let us off, Cornelius.”

CHAPTER 3.

The Pupil of John de Witt

Whilst the clamour of the crowd in the square of Buytenhof, which grew more and more menacing against the two brothers, determined John de Witt to hasten the departure of his brother Cornelius, a deputation of burghers had gone to the Town-hall to demand the withdrawal of Tilly’s horse.

It was not far from the Buytenhof to Hoogstraet (High Street); and a stranger, who since the beginning of this scene had watched all its incidents with intense interest, was seen to wend his way with, or rather in the wake of, the others towards the Town-hall, to hear as soon as possible the current news of the hour.

This stranger was a very young man, of scarcely twenty-two or three, with nothing about him that bespoke any great energy. He evidently had his good reasons for not making himself known, as he hid his face in a handkerchief of fine Frisian linen, with which he incessantly wiped his brow or his burning lips.

With an eye keen as that of a bird of prey, — with a long aquiline nose, a finely cut mouth, which he generally kept open, or rather which was gaping like the edges of a wound, — this man would have presented to Lavater, if Lavater had lived at that time, a subject for physiognomical observations which at the first blush would not have been very favourable to the person in question.

“What difference is there between the figure of the conqueror and that of the pirate?” said the ancients. The difference only between the eagle and the vulture, — serenity or restlessness.

And indeed the sallow physiognomy, the thin and sickly body, and the prowling ways of the stranger, were the very type of a suspecting master, or an unquiet thief; and a police officer would certainly have decided in favour of the latter supposition, on account of the great care which the mysterious person evidently took to hide himself.

He was plainly dressed, and apparently unarmed; his arm was lean but wiry, and his hands dry, but of an aristocratic whiteness and delicacy, and he leaned on the shoulder of an officer, who, with his hand on his sword, had watched the scenes in the Buytenhof with eager curiosity, very natural in a military man, until his companion drew him away with him.

On arriving at the square of the Hoogstraet, the man with the sallow face pushed the other behind an open shutter, from which corner he himself began to survey the balcony of the Town-hall.

At the savage yells of the mob, the window of the Town-hall opened, and a man came forth to address the people.

"Who is that on the balcony?" asked the young man, glancing at the orator.

"It is the Deputy Bowelt," replied the officer.

"What sort of a man is he? Do you know anything of him?"

"An honest man; at least I believe so, Monseigneur."

Hearing this character given of Bowelt, the young man showed signs of such a strange disappointment and evident dissatisfaction that the officer could not but remark it, and therefore added, —

"At least people say so, Monseigneur. I cannot say anything about it myself, as I have no personal acquaintance with Mynheer Bowelt."

"An honest man," repeated he who was addressed as Monseigneur; "do you mean to say that he is an honest man (brave homme), or a brave one (homme brave)?"

"Ah, Monseigneur must excuse me; I would not presume to draw such a fine distinction in the case of a man whom, I assure your Highness once more, I know only by sight."

"If this Bowelt is an honest man," his Highness continued, "he will give to the demand of these furibund petitioners a very queer reception."

The nervous quiver of his hand, which moved on the shoulder of his companion as the fingers of a player on the keys of a harpsichord, betrayed his burning impatience, so ill concealed at certain times, and particularly at that moment, under the icy and sombre expression of his face.

The chief of the deputation of the burghers was then heard addressing an interpellation to Mynheer Bowelt, whom he requested to let them know where the other deputies, his colleagues, were.

"Gentlemen," Bowelt repeated for the second time, "I assure you that in this moment I am here alone with Mynheer d'Asperen, and I cannot take any resolution on my own responsibility."

"The order! we want the order!" cried several thousand voices.

Mynheer Bowelt wished to speak, but his words were not heard, and he was only seen moving his arms in all sorts of gestures, which plainly showed that he felt his position to be desperate. When, at last, he saw that he could not make himself heard, he turned round towards the open window, and called Mynheer d'Asperen.

The latter gentleman now made his appearance on the balcony, where he was saluted with shouts even more energetic than those with which, ten minutes before, his colleague had been received.

This did not prevent him from undertaking the difficult task of haranguing the mob; but the mob preferred forcing the guard of the States — which, however, offered no resistance to the sovereign people — to listening to the speech of Mynheer d'Asperen.

"Now, then," the young man coolly remarked, whilst the crowd was rushing into the principal gate of the Town-hall, "it seems the question will be discussed indoors, Captain. Come along, and let us hear the debate."

"Oh, Monseigneur! Monseigneur! take care!"

"Of what?"

"Among these deputies there are many who have had dealings with you, and it would be sufficient, that one of them should recognize your Highness."

"Yes, that I might be charged with having been the instigator of all this work, indeed, you are right," said the young man, blushing for a moment from regret of having betrayed so much eagerness. "From this place we shall see them return with or without the order for the withdrawal of the dragoons, then we may judge which is greater, Mynheer Bowelt's honesty or his courage."

"But," replied the officer, looking with astonishment at the personage whom he addressed as Monseigneur, "but your Highness surely does not suppose for one instant that the deputies will order Tilly's horse to quit their post?"

"Why not?" the young man quietly retorted.

"Because doing so would simply be signing the death warrant of Cornelius and John de Witt."

"We shall see," his Highness replied, with the most perfect coolness; "God alone knows what is going on within the hearts of men."

The officer looked askance at the impassible figure of his companion, and grew pale: he was an honest man as well as a brave one.

From the spot where they stood, his Highness and his attendant heard the tumult and the heavy tramp of the crowd on the staircase of the Town-hall. The noise thereupon sounded through the windows of the hall, on the balcony of which Mynheers Bowelt and D’Asperen had presented themselves. These two gentlemen had retired into the building, very likely from fear of being forced over the balustrade by the pressure of the crowd.

After this, fluctuating shadows in tumultuous confusion were seen flitting to and fro across the windows: the council hall was filling.

Suddenly the noise subsided, and as suddenly again it rose with redoubled intensity, and at last reached such a pitch that the old building shook to the very roof.

At length, the living stream poured back through the galleries and stairs to the arched gateway, from which it was seen issuing like waters from a spout.

At the head of the first group, man was flying rather than running, his face hideously distorted with satanic glee: this man was the surgeon Tyckelaer.

“We have it! we have it!” he cried, brandishing a paper in the air.

“They have got the order!” muttered the officer in amazement.

“Well, then,” his Highness quietly remarked, “now I know what to believe with regard to Mynheer Bowelt’s honesty and courage: he has neither the one nor the other.”

Then, looking with a steady glance after the crowd which was rushing along before him, he continued, —

“Let us now go to the Buytenhof, Captain; I expect we shall see a very strange sight there.”

The officer bowed, and, without making any reply, followed in the steps of his master.

There was an immense crowd in the square and about the neighbourhood of the prison. But the dragoons of Tilly still kept it in check with the same success and with the same firmness.

It was not long before the Count heard the increasing din of the approaching multitude, the first ranks of which rushed on with the rapidity of a cataract.

At the same time he observed the paper, which was waving above the surface of clenched fists and glittering arms.

“Halloa!” he said, rising in his stirrups, and touching his lieutenant with the knob of his sword; “I really believe those rascals have got the order.”

“Dastardly ruffians they are,” cried the lieutenant.

It was indeed the order, which the burgher guard received with a roar of triumph. They immediately sallied forth, with lowered arms and fierce shouts, to meet Count Tilly’s dragoons.

But the Count was not the man to allow them to approach within an inconvenient distance.

“Stop!” he cried, “stop, and keep off from my horse, or I shall give the word of command to advance.”

“Here is the order!” a hundred insolent voices answered at once.

He took it in amazement, cast a rapid glance on it, and said quite aloud, —

“Those who have signed this order are the real murderers of Cornelius de Witt. I would rather have my two hands cut off than have written one single letter of this infamous order.”

And, pushing back with the hilt of his sword the man who wanted to take it from him, he added, —

“Wait a minute, papers like this are of importance, and are to be kept.”

Saying this, he folded up the document, and carefully put it in the pocket of his coat.

Then, turning round towards his troop, he gave the word of command, —

“Tilly’s dragoons, wheel to the right!”

After this, he added, in an undertone, yet loud enough for his words to be not altogether lost to those about him, —

“And now, ye butchers, do your work!”

A savage yell, in which all the keen hatred and ferocious triumph rife in the precincts of the prison simultaneously burst forth, and accompanied the departure of the dragoons, as they were quietly filing off.

The Count tarried behind, facing to the last the infuriated populace, which advanced at the same rate as the Count retired.

John de Witt, therefore, had by no means exaggerated the danger, when, assisting his brother in getting up, he hurried his departure. Cornelius, leaning on the arm of the Ex-Grand Pensionary, descended the stairs which led to the courtyard. At the bottom of the staircase he found little Rosa, trembling all over.

“Oh, Mynheer John,” she said, “what a misfortune!”

“What is it, my child?” asked De Witt.

“They say that they are gone to the Town-hall to fetch the order for Tilly’s horse to withdraw.”

“You do not say so!” replied John. “Indeed, my dear child, if the dragoons are off, we shall be in a very sad plight.”

“I have some advice to give you,” Rosa said, trembling even more violently than before.

“Well, let us hear what you have to say, my child. Why should not God speak by your mouth?”

“Now, then, Mynheer John, if I were in your place, I should not go out through the main street.”

“And why so, as the dragoons of Tilly are still at their post?”

“Yes, but their order, as long as it is not revoked, enjoins them to stop before the prison.”

“Undoubtedly.”

“Have you got an order for them to accompany you out of the town?”

“We have not?”

“Well, then, in the very moment when you have passed the ranks of the dragoons you will fall into the hands of the people.”

“But the burgher guard?”

“Alas! the burgher guard are the most enraged of all.”

“What are we to do, then?”

“If I were in your place, Mynheer John,” the young girl timidly continued, “I should leave by the postern, which leads into a deserted by-lane, whilst all the people are waiting in the High Street to see you come out by the principal entrance. From there I should try to reach the gate by which you intend to leave the town.”

“But my brother is not able to walk,” said John.

“I shall try,” Cornelius said, with an expression of most sublime fortitude.

“But have you not got your carriage?” asked the girl.

“The carriage is down near the great entrance.”

“Not so,” she replied. “I considered your coachman to be a faithful man, and I told him to wait for you at the postern.”

The two brothers looked first at each other, and then at Rosa, with a glance full of the most tender gratitude.

“The question is now,” said the Grand Pensionary, “whether Gryphus will open this door for us.”

“Indeed, he will do no such thing,” said Rosa.

“Well, and how then?”

“I have foreseen his refusal, and just now whilst he was talking from the window of the porter’s lodge with a dragoon, I took away the key from his bunch.”

“And you have got it?”

“Here it is, Mynheer John.”

“My child,” said Cornelius, “I have nothing to give you in exchange for the service you are rendering us but the Bible which you will find in my room; it is the last gift of an honest man; I hope it will bring you good luck.”

“I thank you, Master Cornelius, it shall never leave me,” replied Rosa.

And then, with a sigh, she said to herself, “What a pity that I do not know how to read!”

“The shouts and cries are growing louder and louder,” said John; “there is not a moment to be lost.”

“Come along, gentlemen,” said the girl, who now led the two brothers through an inner lobby to the back of the prison. Guided by her, they descended a staircase of about a dozen steps; traversed a small courtyard, which was surrounded by castellated walls; and, the arched door having been opened for them by Rosa, they emerged into a lonely street where their carriage was ready to receive them.

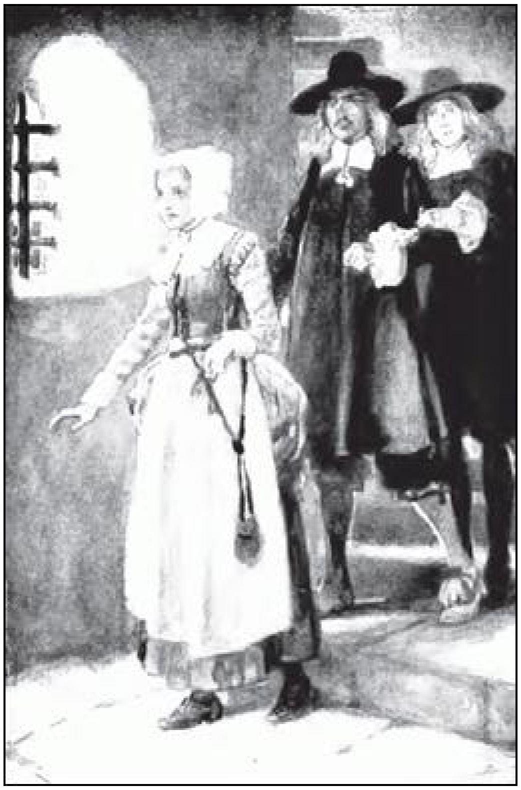

“Quick, quick, my masters! do you hear them?” cried the coachman, in a deadly fright.

Yet, after having made Cornelius get into the carriage first, the Grand Pensionary turned round towards the girl, to whom he said, —

“Good-bye, my child! words could never express our gratitude. God will reward you for having saved the lives of two men.”

Rosa took the hand which John de Witt proffered to her, and kissed it with every show of respect.

“Go! for Heaven’s sake, go!” she said; “it seems they are going to force the gate.”

John de Witt hastily got in, sat himself down by the side of his brother, and, fastening the apron of the carriage, called out to the coachman, —

“To the Tol-Hek!”

The Tol-Hek was the iron gate leading to the harbor of Schevening, in which a small vessel was waiting for the two brothers.

The carriage drove off with the fugitives at the full speed of a pair of spirited Flemish horses. Rosa followed them with her eyes until they turned the corner of the street, upon which, closing the door after her, she went back and threw the key into a cell.

The noise which had made Rosa suppose that the people were forcing the prison door was indeed owing to the mob battering against it after the square had been left by the military.

Solid as the gate was, and although Gryphus, to do him justice, stoutly enough refused to open it, yet evidently it could not resist much longer, and the jailer, growing very pale, put to himself the question whether it would not be better to open the door than to allow it to be forced, when he felt some one gently pulling his coat.

He turned round and saw Rosa.

"Do you hear these madmen?" he said.

"I hear them so well, my father, that in your place — — "

"You would open the door?"

"No, I should allow it to be forced."

"But they will kill me!"

"Yes, if they see you."

"How shall they not see me?"

"Hide yourself."

"Where?"

"In the secret dungeon."

"But you, my child?"

"I shall get into it with you. We shall lock the door and when they have left the prison, we shall again come forth from our hiding place."

"Zounds, you are right, there!" cried Gryphus; "it's surprising how much sense there is in such a little head!"

Then, as the gate began to give way amidst the triumphant shouts of the mob, she opened a little trap-door, and said, —

"Come along, come along, father."

"But our prisoners?"

"God will watch over them, and I shall watch over you."

Gryphus followed his daughter, and the trap-door closed over his head, just as the broken gate gave admittance to the populace.

The dungeon where Rosa had induced her father to hide himself, and where for the present we must leave the two, offered to them a perfectly safe retreat, being known only to those in power, who used to place there important prisoners of state, to guard against a rescue or a revolt.

The people rushed into the prison, with the cry —

“Death to the traitors! To the gallows with Cornelius de Witt! Death! death!”

CHAPTER 4.

The Murderers

The young man with his hat slouched over his eyes, still leaning on the arm of the officer, and still wiping from time to time his brow with his handkerchief, was watching in a corner of the Buytenhof, in the shade of the overhanging weather-board of a closed shop, the doings of the infuriated mob, a spectacle which seemed to draw near its catastrophe.

"Indeed," said he to the officer, "indeed, I think you were right, Van Deken; the order which the deputies have signed is truly the death-warrant of Master Cornelius. Do you hear these people? They certainly bear a sad grudge to the two De Witts."

"In truth," replied the officer, "I never heard such shouts."

"They seem to have found out the cell of the man. Look, look! is not that the window of the cell where Cornelius was locked up?"

A man had seized with both hands and was shaking the iron bars of the window in the room which Cornelius had left only ten minutes before.

"Halloa, halloa!" the man called out, "he is gone."

"How is that? gone?" asked those of the mob who had not been able to get into the prison, crowded as it was with the mass of intruders.

"Gone, gone," repeated the man in a rage, "the bird has flown."

"What does this man say?" asked his Highness, growing quite pale.

"Oh, Monseigneur, he says a thing which would be very fortunate if it should turn out true!"

"Certainly it would be fortunate if it were true," said the young man; "unfortunately it cannot be true."

"However, look!" said the officer.

And indeed, some more faces, furious and contorted with rage, showed themselves at the windows, crying, —

"Escaped, gone, they have helped them off!"

And the people in the street repeated, with fearful imprecations, —

"Escaped gone! After them, and catch them!"

“Monseigneur, it seems that Mynheer Cornelius has really escaped,” said the officer.

“Yes, from prison, perhaps, but not from the town; you will see, Van Deken, that the poor fellow will find the gate closed against him which he hoped to find open.”

“Has an order been given to close the town gates, Monseigneur?”

“No, — at least I do not think so; who could have given such an order?”

“Indeed, but what makes your Highness suppose?”

“There are fatalities,” Monseigneur replied, in an offhand manner; “and the greatest men have sometimes fallen victims to such fatalities.”

At these words the officer felt his blood run cold, as somehow or other he was convinced that the prisoner was lost.

At this moment the roar of the multitude broke forth like thunder, for it was now quite certain that Cornelius de Witt was no longer in the prison.

Cornelius and John, after driving along the pond, had taken the main street, which leads to the Tol-Hek, giving directions to the coachman to slacken his pace, in order not to excite any suspicion.

But when, on having proceeded half-way down that street, the man felt that he had left the prison and death behind, and before him there was life and liberty, he neglected every precaution, and set his horses off at a gallop.

All at once he stopped.

“What is the matter?” asked John, putting his head out of the coach window.

“Oh, my masters!” cried the coachman, “it is — — ”

Terror choked the voice of the honest fellow.

“Well, say what you have to say!” urged the Grand Pensionary.

“The gate is closed, that’s what it is.”

“How is this? It is not usual to close the gate by day.”

“Just look!”

John de Witt leaned out of the window, and indeed saw that the man was right.

“Never mind, but drive on,” said John, “I have with me the order for the commutation of the punishment, the gate-keeper will let us through.”

The carriage moved along, but it was evident that the driver was no longer urging his horses with the same degree of confidence.

Moreover, as John de Witt put his head out of the carriage window, he was seen and recognized by a brewer, who, being behind his companions, was just shutting his door in all haste to join them at the Buytenhof. He uttered a cry of surprise, and ran after two other men before him, whom he overtook about a hundred yards farther on, and told them what he had seen. The three men then stopped, looking after the carriage, being however not yet quite sure as to whom it contained.

The carriage in the meanwhile arrived at the Tol-Hek.

"Open!" cried the coachman.

"Open!" echoed the gatekeeper, from the threshold of his lodge; "it's all very well to say 'Open!' but what am I to do it with?"

"With the key, to be sure!" said the coachman.

"With the key! Oh, yes! but if you have not got it?"

"How is that? Have not you got the key?" asked the coachman.

"No, I haven't."

"What has become of it?"

"Well, they have taken it from me."

"Who?"

"Some one, I dare say, who had a mind that no one should leave the town."

"My good man," said the Grand Pensionary, putting out his head from the window, and risking all for gaining all; "my good man, it is for me, John de Witt, and for my brother Cornelius, who I am taking away into exile."

"Oh, Mynheer de Witt! I am indeed very much grieved," said the gatekeeper, rushing towards the carriage; "but, upon my sacred word, the key has been taken from me."

"When?"

"This morning."

"By whom?"

"By a pale and thin young man, of about twenty-two."

"And wherefore did you give it up to him?"

"Because he showed me an order, signed and sealed."

"By whom?"

"By the gentlemen of the Town-hall."

"Well, then," said Cornelius calmly, "our doom seems to be fixed."

"Do you know whether the same precaution has been taken at the other gates?"

"I do not."

“Now then,” said John to the coachman, “God commands man to do all that is in his power to preserve his life; go, and drive to another gate.”

And whilst the servant was turning round the vehicle the Grand Pensionary said to the gatekeeper, —

“Take our thanks for your good intentions; the will must count for the deed; you had the will to save us, and that, in the eyes of the Lord, is as if you had succeeded in doing so.”

“Alas!” said the gatekeeper, “do you see down there?”

“Drive at a gallop through that group,” John called out to the coachman, “and take the street on the left; it is our only chance.”

The group which John alluded to had, for its nucleus, those three men whom we left looking after the carriage, and who, in the meanwhile, had been joined by seven or eight others.

These new-comers evidently meant mischief with regard to the carriage.

When they saw the horses galloping down upon them, they placed themselves across the street, brandishing cudgels in their hands, and calling out, —

“Stop! stop!”

The coachman, on his side, lashed his horses into increased speed, until the coach and the men encountered.

The brothers De Witt, enclosed within the body of the carriage, were not able to see anything; but they felt a severe shock, occasioned by the rearing of the horses. The whole vehicle for a moment shook and stopped; but immediately after, passing over something round and elastic, which seemed to be the body of a prostrate man set off again amidst a volley of the fiercest oaths.

“Alas!” said Cornelius, “I am afraid we have hurt some one.”

“Gallop! gallop!” called John.

But, notwithstanding this order, the coachman suddenly came to a stop.

“Now, then, what is the matter again?” asked John.

“Look there!” said the coachman.

John looked. The whole mass of the populace from the Buytenhof appeared at the extremity of the street along which the carriage was to proceed, and its stream moved roaring and rapid, as if lashed on by a hurricane.

“Stop and get off,” said John to the coachman; “it is useless to go any farther; we are lost!”

“Here they are! here they are!” five hundred voices were crying at the same time.

“Yes, here they are, the traitors, the murderers, the assassins!” answered the men who were running after the carriage to the people who were coming to meet it. The former carried in their arms the bruised body of one of their companions, who, trying to seize the reins of the horses, had been trodden down by them.

This was the object over which the two brothers had felt their carriage pass.

The coachman stopped, but, however strongly his master urged him, he refused to get off and save himself.

In an instant the carriage was hemmed in between those who followed and those who met it. It rose above the mass of moving heads like a floating island. But in another instant it came to a dead stop. A blacksmith had with his hammer struck down one of the horses, which fell in the traces.

At this moment, the shutter of a window opened, and disclosed the sallow face and the dark eyes of the young man, who with intense interest watched the scene which was preparing. Behind him appeared the head of the officer, almost as pale as himself.

“Good heavens, Monseigneur, what is going on there?” whispered the officer.

“Something very terrible, to a certainty,” replied the other.

“Don’t you see, Monseigneur, they are dragging the Grand Pensionary from the carriage, they strike him, they tear him to pieces!”

“Indeed, these people must certainly be prompted by a most violent indignation,” said the young marl, with the same impassible tone which he had preserved all along.

“And here is Cornelius, whom they now likewise drag out of the carriage, — Cornelius, who is already quite broken and mangled by the torture. Only look, look!”

“Indeed, it is Cornelius, and no mistake.”

The officer uttered a feeble cry, and turned his head away; the brother of the Grand Pensionary, before having set foot on the ground, whilst still on the bottom step of the carriage, was struck down with an iron bar which broke his skull. He rose once more, but immediately fell again.

Some fellows then seized him by the feet, and dragged him into the crowd, into the middle of which one might have followed his bloody track, and he was soon closed in among the savage yells of malignant exultation.

The young man — a thing which would have been thought impossible — grew even paler than before, and his eyes were for a moment veiled behind the lids.

The officer saw this sign of compassion, and, wishing to avail himself of this softened tone of his feelings, continued, —

“Come, come, Monseigneur, for here they are also going to murder the Grand Pensionary.”

But the young man had already opened his eyes again.

“To be sure,” he said. “These people are really implacable. It does no one good to offend them.”

“Monseigneur,” said the officer, “may not one save this poor man, who has been your Highness’s instructor? If there be any means, name it, and if I should perish in the attempt — — ”

William of Orange — for he it was — knit his brows in a very forbidding manner, restrained the glance of gloomy malice which glistened in his half-closed eye, and answered, —

“Captain Van Deken, I request you to go and look after my troops, that they may be armed for any emergency.”

“But am I to leave your Highness here, alone, in the presence of all these murderers?”

“Go, and don’t you trouble yourself about me more than I do myself,” the Prince gruffly replied.

The officer started off with a speed which was much less owing to his sense of military obedience than to his pleasure at being relieved from the necessity of witnessing the shocking spectacle of the murder of the other brother.

He had scarcely left the room, when John — who, with an almost superhuman effort, had reached the stone steps of a house nearly opposite that where his former pupil concealed himself — began to stagger under the blows which were inflicted on him from all sides, calling out, —

“My brother! where is my brother?”

One of the ruffians knocked off his hat with a blow of his clenched fist.

Another showed to him his bloody hands; for this fellow had ripped open Cornelius and disembowelled him, and was now hastening to the spot in order not to lose the opportunity of serving the Grand Pensionary in the same manner, whilst they were dragging the dead body of Cornelius to the gibbet.

John uttered a cry of agony and grief, and put one of his hands before his eyes.

“Oh, you close your eyes, do you?” said one of the soldiers of the burgher guard; “well, I shall open them for you.”

And saying this he stabbed him with his pike in the face, and the blood spurted forth.

“My brother!” cried John de Witt, trying to see through the stream of blood which blinded him, what had become of Cornelius; “my brother, my brother!”

“Go and run after him!” bellowed another murderer, putting his musket to his temples and pulling the trigger.

But the gun did not go off.

The fellow then turned his musket round, and, taking it by the barrel with both hands, struck John de Witt down with the butt-end. John staggered and fell down at his feet, but, raising himself with a last effort, he once more called out, —

“My brother!” with a voice so full of anguish that the young man opposite closed the shutter.

There remained little more to see; a third murderer fired a pistol with the muzzle to his face; and this time the shot took effect, blowing out his brains. John de Witt fell to rise no more.

On this, every one of the miscreants, emboldened by his fall, wanted to fire his gun at him, or strike him with blows of the sledge-hammer, or stab him with a knife or swords, every one wanted to draw a drop of blood from the fallen hero, and tear off a shred from his garments.

And after having mangled, and torn, and completely stripped the two brothers, the mob dragged their naked and bloody bodies to an extemporised gibbet, where amateur executioners hung them up by the feet.

Then came the most dastardly scoundrels of all, who not having dared to strike the living flesh, cut the dead in pieces, and then went about the town selling small slices of the bodies of John and Cornelius at ten sous a piece.

We cannot take upon ourselves to say whether, through the almost imperceptible chink of the shutter, the young man witnessed the conclusion of this shocking scene; but at the very moment when they were hanging the two martyrs on the gibbet he passed through the terrible mob, which was too much absorbed in the task, so grateful to its taste, to take any notice of him, and thus he reached unobserved the Tol-Hek, which was still closed.

“Ah! sir,” said the gatekeeper, “do you bring me the key?”

“Yes, my man, here it is.”

“It is most unfortunate that you did not bring me that key only one quarter of an hour sooner,” said the gatekeeper, with a sigh.

“And why that?” asked the other.

“Because I might have opened the gate to Mynheers de Witt; whereas, finding the gate locked, they were obliged to retrace their steps.”

“Gate! gate!” cried a voice which seemed to be that of a man in a hurry.

The Prince, turning round, observed Captain Van Deken.

“Is that you, Captain?” he said. “You are not yet out of the Hague? This is executing my orders very slowly.”

“Monseigneur,” replied the Captain, “this is the third gate at which I have presented myself; the other two were closed.”

“Well, this good man will open this one for you; do it, my friend.”

The last words were addressed to the gatekeeper, who stood quite thunderstruck on hearing Captain Van Deken addressing by the title of Monseigneur this pale young man, to whom he himself had spoken in such a familiar way.

As it were to make up for his fault, he hastened to open the gate, which swung creaking on its hinges.

“Will Monseigneur avail himself of my horse?” asked the Captain.

“I thank you, Captain, I shall use my own steed, which is waiting for me close at hand.”

And taking from his pocket a golden whistle, such as was generally used at that time for summoning the servants, he sounded it with a shrill and prolonged call, on which an equerry on horseback speedily made his appearance, leading another horse by the bridle.

William, without touching the stirrup, vaulted into the saddle of the led horse, and, setting his spurs into its flanks, started off for the Leyden road. Having reached it, he turned round and beckoned to the Captain who was far behind, to ride by his side.

“Do you know,” he then said, without stopping, “that those rascals have killed John de Witt as well as his brother?”

“Alas! Monseigneur,” the Captain answered sadly, “I should like it much better if these two difficulties were still in your Highness’s way of becoming de facto Stadtholder of Holland."

"Certainly, it would have been better," said William, "if what did happen had not happened. But it cannot be helped now, and we have had nothing to do with it. Let us push on, Captain, that we may arrive at Alphen before the message which the States-General are sure to send to me to the camp."

The Captain bowed, allowed the Prince to ride ahead and, for the remainder of the journey, kept at the same respectful distance as he had done before his Highness called him to his side.

"How I should wish," William of Orange malignantly muttered to himself, with a dark frown and setting the spurs to his horse, "to see the figure which Louis will cut when he is apprised of the manner in which his dear friends De Witt have been served! Oh thou Sun! thou Sun! as truly as I am called William the Silent, thou Sun, thou hadst best look to thy rays!"

And the young Prince, the relentless rival of the Great King, sped away upon his fiery steed, — this future Stadtholder who had been but the day before very uncertainly established in his new power, but for whom the burghers of the Hague had built a staircase with the bodies of John and Cornelius, two princes as noble as he in the eyes of God and man.

CHAPTER 5.

The Tulip-fancier and his Neighbour

Whilst the burghers of the Hague were tearing in pieces the bodies of John and Cornelius de Witt, and whilst William of Orange, after having made sure that his two antagonists were really dead, was galloping over the Leyden road, followed by Captain van Deken, whom he found a little too compassionate to honour him any longer with his confidence, Craeke, the faithful servant, mounted on a good horse, and little suspecting what terrible events had taken place since his departure, proceeded along the high road lined with trees, until he was clear of the town and the neighbouring villages.

Being once safe, he left his horse at a livery stable in order not to arouse suspicion, and tranquilly continued his journey on the canal-boats, which conveyed him by easy stages to Dort, pursuing their way under skilful guidance by the shortest possible routes through the windings of the river, which held in its watery embrace so many enchanting little islands, edged with willows and rushes, and abounding in luxurious vegetation, whereon flocks of fat sheep browsed in peaceful sleepiness. Craeke from afar off recognised Dort, the smiling city, at the foot of a hill dotted with windmills. He saw the fine red brick houses, mortared in white lines, standing on the edge of the water, and their balconies, open towards the river, decked out with silk tapestry embroidered with gold flowers, the wonderful manufacture of India and China; and near these brilliant stuffs, large lines set to catch the voracious eels, which are attracted towards the houses by the garbage thrown every day from the kitchens into the river.

Craeke, standing on the deck of the boat, saw, across the moving sails of the windmills, on the slope of the hill, the red and pink house which was the goal of his errand. The outlines of its roof were merging in the yellow foliage of a curtain of poplar trees, the whole habitation having for background a dark grove of gigantic elms. The mansion was situated in such a way that the sun, falling on it as into a funnel, dried up, warmed, and fertilised the mist which the verdant screen could not prevent the river wind from carrying there every morning and evening.

Having disembarked unobserved amid the usual bustle of the city, Craeke at once directed his steps towards the house which we have just described, and which — white, trim, and tidy, even more cleanly scoured and more carefully waxed in the hidden corners than in the places which were exposed to view — enclosed a truly happy mortal.

This happy mortal, rara avis, was Dr. van Baerle, the godson of Cornelius de Witt. He had inhabited the same house ever since his childhood, for it was the house in which his father and grandfather, old established princely merchants of the princely city of Dort, were born.

Mynheer van Baerle the father had amassed in the Indian trade three or four hundred thousand guilders, which Mynheer van Baerle the son, at the death of his dear and worthy parents, found still quite new, although one set of them bore the date of coinage of 1640, and the other that of 1610, a fact which proved that they were guilders of Van Baerle the father and of Van Baerle the grandfather; but we will inform the reader at once that these three or four hundred thousand guilders were only the pocket money, or sort of purse, for Cornelius van Baerle, the hero of this story, as his landed property in the province yielded him an income of about ten thousand guilders a year.

When the worthy citizen, the father of Cornelius, passed from time into eternity, three months after having buried his wife, who seemed to have departed first to smooth for him the path of death as she had smoothed for him the path of life, he said to his son, as he embraced him for the last time, —

“Eat, drink, and spend your money, if you wish to know what life really is, for as to toiling from morn to evening on a wooden stool, or a leathern chair, in a counting-house or a laboratory, that certainly is not living. Your time to die will also come; and if you are not then so fortunate as to have a son, you will let my name grow extinct, and my guilders, which no one has ever fingered but my father, myself, and the coiner, will have the surprise of passing to an unknown master. And least of all, imitate the example of your godfather, Cornelius de Witt, who has plunged into politics, the most ungrateful of all careers, and who will certainly come to an untimely end.”

Having given utterance to this paternal advice, the worthy Mynheer van Baerle died, to the intense grief of his son Cornelius, who cared very little for the guilders, and very much for his father.

Cornelius then remained alone in his large house. In vain his godfather offered to him a place in the public service, — in vain did he try to give him a taste for glory, — although Cornelius, to gratify his godfather, did embark with De Ruyter upon “The Seven Provinces,” the flagship of a fleet of one hundred and thirty-nine sail, with which the famous admiral set out to contend singlehanded against the combined forces of France and England. When, guided by the pilot Leger, he had come within musket-shot of the “Prince,” with the Duke of York (the English king’s brother) aboard, upon which De Ruyter, his mentor, made so sharp and well directed an attack that the Duke, perceiving that his vessel would soon have to strike, made the best of his way aboard the “Saint Michael”; when he had seen the “Saint Michael,” riddled and shattered by the Dutch broadside, drift out of the line; when he had witnessed the sinking of the “Earl of Sandwich,” and the death by fire or drowning of four hundred sailors; when he realized that the result of all this destruction — after twenty ships had been blown to pieces, three thousand men killed and five thousand injured — was that nothing was decided, that both sides claimed the victory, that the fighting would soon begin again, and that just one more name, that of Southwold Bay, had been added to the list of battles; when he had estimated how much time is lost simply in shutting his eyes and ears by a man who likes to use his reflective powers even while his fellow creatures are cannonading one another; — Cornelius bade farewell to De Ruyter, to the Ruart de Pulten, and to glory, kissed the knees of the Grand Pensionary, for whom he entertained the deepest veneration, and retired to his house at Dort, rich in his well-earned repose, his twenty-eight years, an iron constitution and keen perceptions, and his capital of more than four hundred thousands of florins and income of ten thousand, convinced that a man is always endowed by Heaven with too much for his own happiness, and just enough to make him miserable.

Consequently, and to indulge his own idea of happiness, Cornelius began to be interested in the study of plants and insects, collected and classified the Flora of all the Dutch islands, arranged the whole entomology of the province, on which he wrote a treatise, with plates drawn by his own hands; and at last, being at a loss what to do with his time, and especially with his money, which went on accumulating at a most alarming rate, he took it into his head to select for himself, from all the follies of his country and of his age, one of the most elegant and expensive, — he became a tulip-fancier.

It was the time when the Dutch and the Portuguese, rivalling each other in this branch of horticulture, had begun to worship that flower, and to make more of a cult of it than ever naturalists dared to make of the human race for fear of arousing the jealousy of God.

Soon people from Dort to Mons began to talk of Mynheer van Baerle's tulips; and his beds, pits, drying-rooms, and drawers of bulbs were visited, as the galleries and libraries of Alexandria were by illustrious Roman travellers.

Van Baerle began by expending his yearly revenue in laying the groundwork of his collection, after which he broke in upon his new guilders to bring it to perfection. His exertions, indeed, were crowned with a most magnificent result: he produced three new tulips, which he called the "Jane," after his mother; the "Van Baerle," after his father; and the "Cornelius," after his godfather; the other names have escaped us, but the fanciers will be sure to find them in the catalogues of the times.

In the beginning of the year 1672, Cornelius de Witt came to Dort for three months, to live at his old family mansion; for not only was he born in that city, but his family had been resident there for centuries.

Cornelius, at that period, as William of Orange said, began to enjoy the most perfect unpopularity. To his fellow citizens, the good burghers of Dort, however, he did not appear in the light of a criminal who deserved to be hung. It is true, they did not particularly like his somewhat austere republicanism, but they were proud of his valour; and when he made his entrance into their town, the cup of honour was offered to him, readily enough, in the name of the city.

After having thanked his fellow citizens, Cornelius proceeded to his old paternal house, and gave directions for some repairs, which he wished to have executed before the arrival of his wife and children; and thence he wended his way to the house of his godson, who perhaps was the only person in Dort as yet unacquainted with the presence of Cornelius in the town.

In the same degree as Cornelius de Witt had excited the hatred of the people by sowing those evil seeds which are called political passions, Van Baerle had gained the affections of his fellow citizens by completely shunning the pursuit of politics, absorbed as he was in the peaceful pursuit of cultivating tulips.

Van Baerle was truly beloved by his servants and labourers; nor had he any conception that there was in this world a man who wished ill to another.

And yet it must be said, to the disgrace of mankind, that Cornelius van Baerle, without being aware of the fact, had a much more ferocious, fierce, and implacable enemy than the Grand Pensionary and his brother had among the Orange party, who were most hostile to the devoted brothers, who had never been sundered by the least misunderstanding during their lives, and by their mutual devotion in the face of death made sure the existence of their brotherly affection beyond the grave.

At the time when Cornelius van Baerle began to devote himself to tulip-growing, expending on this hobby his yearly revenue and the guilders of his father, there was at Dort, living next door to him, a citizen of the name of Isaac Boxtel who from the age when he was able to think for himself had indulged the same fancy, and who was in ecstasies at the mere mention of the word “tulban,” which (as we are assured by the “Floriste Francaise,” the most highly considered authority in matters relating to this flower) is the first word in the Cingalese tongue which was ever used to designate that masterpiece of floriculture which is now called the tulip.

Boxtel had not the good fortune of being rich, like Van Baerle. He had therefore, with great care and patience, and by dint of strenuous exertions, laid out near his house at Dort a garden fit for the culture of his cherished flower; he had mixed the soil according to the most approved prescriptions, and given to his hotbeds just as much heat and fresh air as the strictest rules of horticulture exact.

Isaac knew the temperature of his frames to the twentieth part of a degree. He knew the strength of the current of air, and tempered it so as to adapt it to the wave of the stems of his flowers. His productions also began to meet with the favour of the public. They were beautiful, nay, distinguished. Several fanciers had come to see Boxtel’s tulips. At last he had even started amongst all the Linnaeuses and Tourneforts a tulip which bore his name, and which, after having travelled all through France, had found its way into Spain, and penetrated as far as Portugal; and the King, Don Alfonso VI. — who, being expelled from Lisbon, had retired to the island of Terceira, where he amused himself, not, like the great Conde, with watering his carnations, but with growing tulips — had, on seeing the Boxtel tulip, exclaimed, “Not so bad, by any means!”

All at once, Cornelius van Baerle, who, after all his learned pursuits, had been seized with the tulipomania, made some changes in his house at Dort, which, as we have stated, was next door to that of Boxtel. He raised a certain building in his court-yard by a story, which shutting out the sun, took half a degree of warmth from Boxtel's garden, and, on the other hand, added half a degree of cold in winter; not to mention that it cut the wind, and disturbed all the horticultural calculations and arrangements of his neighbour.

After all, this mishap appeared to Boxtel of no great consequence. Van Baerle was but a painter, a sort of fool who tried to reproduce and disfigure on canvas the wonders of nature. The painter, he thought, had raised his studio by a story to get better light, and thus far he had only been in the right. Mynheer van Baerle was a painter, as Mynheer Boxtel was a tulip-grower; he wanted somewhat more sun for his paintings, and he took half a degree from his neighbour's tulips.

The law was for Van Baerle, and Boxtel had to abide by it.

Besides, Isaac had made the discovery that too much sun was injurious to tulips, and that this flower grew quicker, and had a better colouring, with the temperate warmth of morning, than with the powerful heat of the midday sun. He therefore felt almost grateful to Cornelius van Baerle for having given him a screen gratis.

Maybe this was not quite in accordance with the true state of things in general, and of Isaac Boxtel's feelings in particular. It is certainly astonishing what rich comfort great minds, in the midst of momentous catastrophes, will derive from the consolations of philosophy.

But alas! What was the agony of the unfortunate Boxtel on seeing the windows of the new story set out with bulbs and seedlings of tulips for the border, and tulips in pots; in short, with everything pertaining to the pursuits of a tulip-monomaniac!

There were bundles of labels, cupboards, and drawers with compartments, and wire guards for the cupboards, to allow free access to the air whilst keeping out slugs, mice, dormice, and rats, all of them very curious fanciers of tulips at two thousand francs a bulb.

Boxtel was quite amazed when he saw all this apparatus, but he was not as yet aware of the full extent of his misfortune. Van Baerle was known to be fond of everything that pleases the eye. He studied Nature in all her aspects for the benefit of his paintings, which were as minutely finished as those of Gerard Dow, his master, and of Mieris, his friend. Was it not possible, that, having to paint the interior of a tulip-grower's, he had collected in his new studio all the accessories of decoration?

Yet, although thus consoling himself with illusory suppositions, Boxtel was not able to resist the burning curiosity which was devouring him. In the evening, therefore, he placed a ladder against the partition wall between their gardens, and, looking into that of his neighbour Van Baerle, he convinced himself that the soil of a large square bed, which had formerly been occupied by different plants, was removed, and the ground disposed in beds of loam mixed with river mud (a combination which is particularly favourable to the tulip), and the whole surrounded by a border of turf to keep the soil in its place. Besides this, sufficient shade to temper the noonday heat; aspect south-southwest; water in abundant supply, and at hand; in short, every requirement to insure not only success but also progress. There could not be a doubt that Van Baerle had become a tulip-grower.

Boxtel at once pictured to himself this learned man, with a capital of four hundred thousand and a yearly income of ten thousand guilders, devoting all his intellectual and financial resources to the cultivation of the tulip. He foresaw his neighbour's success, and he felt such a pang at the mere idea of this success that his hands dropped powerless, his knees trembled, and he fell in despair from the ladder.

And thus it was not for the sake of painted tulips, but for real ones, that Van Baerle took from him half a degree of warmth. And thus Van Baerle was to have the most admirably fitted aspect, and, besides, a large, airy, and well ventilated chamber where to preserve his bulbs and seedlings; while he, Boxtel, had been obliged to give up for this purpose his bedroom, and, lest his sleeping in the same apartment might injure his bulbs and seedlings, had taken up his abode in a miserable garret.

Boxtel, then, was to have next door to him a rival and successful competitor; and his rival, instead of being some unknown, obscure gardener, was the godson of Mynheer Cornelius de Witt, that is to say, a celebrity.

Boxtel, as the reader may see, was not possessed of the spirit of Porus, who, on being conquered by Alexander, consoled himself with the celebrity of his conqueror.

And now if Van Baerle produced a new tulip, and named it the John de Witt, after having named one the Cornelius? It was indeed enough to choke one with rage.

Thus Boxtel, with jealous foreboding, became the prophet of his own misfortune. And, after having made this melancholy discovery, he passed the most wretched night imaginable.

CHAPTER 6.

The Hatred of a Tulip-fancier

From that moment Boxtel's interest in tulips was no longer a stimulus to his exertions, but a deadening anxiety. Henceforth all his thoughts ran only upon the injury which his neighbour would cause him, and thus his favourite occupation was changed into a constant source of misery to him.

Van Baerle, as may easily be imagined, had no sooner begun to apply his natural ingenuity to his new fancy, than he succeeded in growing the finest tulips. Indeed; he knew better than any one else at Haarlem or Leyden — the two towns which boast the best soil and the most congenial climate — how to vary the colours, to modify the shape, and to produce new species.

He belonged to that natural, humorous school who took for their motto in the seventeenth century the aphorism uttered by one of their number in 1653, — ”To despise flowers is to offend God.”

From that premise the school of tulip-fanciers, the most exclusive of all schools, worked out the following syllogism in the same year: —

“To despise flowers is to offend God.

“The more beautiful the flower is, the more does one offend God in despising it.

“The tulip is the most beautiful of all flowers.

“Therefore, he who despises the tulip offends God beyond measure.”

By reasoning of this kind, it can be seen that the four or five thousand tulip-growers of Holland, France, and Portugal, leaving out those of Ceylon and China and the Indies, might, if so disposed, put the whole world under the ban, and condemn as schismatics and heretics and deserving of death the several hundred millions of mankind whose hopes of salvation were not centred upon the tulip.

We cannot doubt that in such a cause Boxtel, though he was Van Baerle's deadly foe, would have marched under the same banner with him.

Mynheer van Baerle and his tulips, therefore, were in the mouth of everybody; so much so, that Boxtel's name disappeared for ever from the list of the notable tulip-growers in Holland, and those of Dort were now represented by Cornelius van Baerle, the modest and inoffensive savant.

Engaging, heart and soul, in his pursuits of sowing, planting, and gathering, Van Baerle, caressed by the whole fraternity of tulip-growers in Europe, entertained nor the least suspicion that there was at his very door a pretender whose throne he had usurped.

He went on in his career, and consequently in his triumphs; and in the course of two years he covered his borders with such marvellous productions as no mortal man, following in the tracks of the Creator, except perhaps Shakespeare and Rubens, have equalled in point of numbers.

And also, if Dante had wished for a new type to be added to his characters of the Inferno, he might have chosen Boxtel during the period of Van Baerle's successes. Whilst Cornelius was weeding, manuring, watering his beds, whilst, kneeling on the turf border, he analysed every vein of the flowering tulips, and meditated on the modifications which might be effected by crosses of colour or otherwise, Boxtel, concealed behind a small sycamore which he had trained at the top of the partition wall in the shape of a fan, watched, with his eyes starting from their sockets and with foaming mouth, every step and every gesture of his neighbour; and whenever he thought he saw him look happy, or descried a smile on his lips, or a flash of contentment glistening in his eyes, he poured out towards him such a volley of maledictions and furious threats as to make it indeed a matter of wonder that this venomous breath of envy and hatred did not carry a blight on the innocent flowers which had excited it.

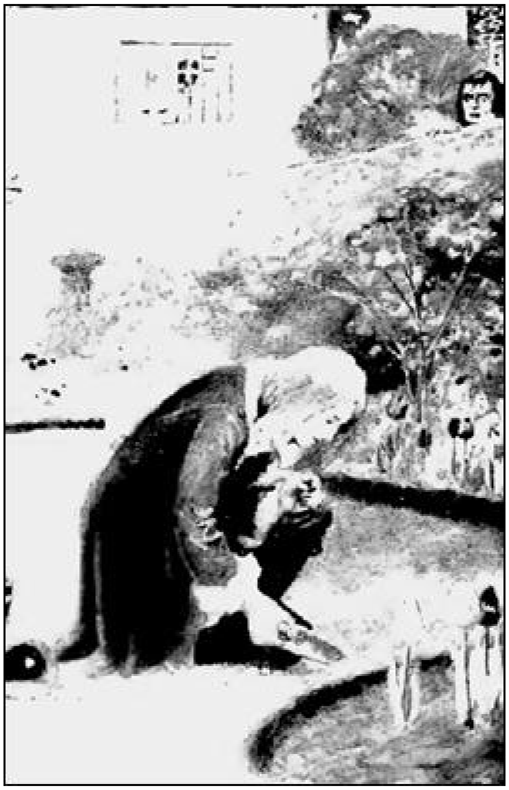

When the evil spirit has once taken hold of the heart of man, it urges him on, without letting him stop. Thus Boxtel soon was no longer content with seeing Van Baerle. He wanted to see his flowers, too; he had the feelings of an artist, the master-piece of a rival engrossed his interest.

He therefore bought a telescope, which enabled him to watch as accurately as did the owner himself every progressive development of the flower, from the moment when, in the first year, its pale seed-leaf begins to peep from the ground, to that glorious one, when, after five years, its petals at last reveal the hidden treasures of its chalice. How often had the miserable, jealous man to observe in Van Baerle's beds tulips which dazzled him by their beauty, and almost choked him by their perfection!

And then, after the first blush of the admiration which he could not help feeling, he began to be tortured by the pangs of envy, by that slow fever which creeps over the heart and changes it into a nest of vipers, each devouring the other and ever born anew. How often did Boxtel, in the midst of tortures which no pen is able fully to describe, — how often did he feel an inclination to jump down into the garden during the night, to destroy the plants, to tear the bulbs with his teeth, and to sacrifice to his wrath the owner himself, if he should venture to stand up for the defence of his tulips!

But to kill a tulip was a horrible crime in the eyes of a genuine tulip-fancier; as to killing a man, it would not have mattered so very much.

Yet Van Baerle made such progress in the noble science of growing tulips, which he seemed to master with the true instinct of genius, that Boxtel at last was maddened to such a degree as to think of throwing stones and sticks into the flower-stands of his neighbour. But, remembering that he would be sure to be found out, and that he would not only be punished by law, but also dishonoured for ever in the face of all the tulip-growers of Europe, he had recourse to stratagem, and, to gratify his hatred, tried to devise a plan by means of which he might gain his ends without being compromised himself.

He considered a long time, and at last his meditations were crowned with success.

One evening he tied two cats together by their hind legs with a string about six feet in length, and threw them from the wall into the midst of that noble, that princely, that royal bed, which contained not only the “Cornelius de Witt,” but also the “Beauty of Brabant,” milk-white, edged with purple and pink, the “Marble of Rotterdam,” colour of flax, blossoms feathered red and flesh colour, the “Wonder of Haarlem,” the “Colombin obscur,” and the “Columbin clair terni.”

The frightened cats, having alighted on the ground, first tried to fly each in a different direction, until the string by which they were tied together was tightly stretched across the bed; then, however, feeling that they were not able to get off, they began to pull to and fro, and to wheel about with hideous caterwaulings, mowing down with their string the flowers among which they were struggling, until, after a furious strife of about a quarter of an hour, the string broke and the combatants vanished.

Boxtel, hidden behind his sycamore, could not see anything, as it was pitch-dark; but the piercing cries of the cats told the whole tale, and his heart overflowing with gall now throbbed with triumphant joy.

Boxtel was so eager to ascertain the extent of the injury, that he remained at his post until morning to feast his eyes on the sad state in which the two cats had left the flower-beds of his neighbour. The mists of the morning chilled his frame, but he did not feel the cold, the hope of revenge keeping his blood at fever heat. The chagrin of his rival was to pay for all the inconvenience which he incurred himself.

At the earliest dawn the door of the white house opened, and Van Baerle made his appearance, approaching the flower-beds with the smile of a man who has passed the night comfortably in his bed, and has had happy dreams.

All at once he perceived furrows and little mounds of earth on the beds which only the evening before had been as smooth as a mirror, all at once he perceived the symmetrical rows of his tulips to be completely disordered, like the pikes of a battalion in the midst of which a shell has fallen.

He ran up to them with blanched cheek.

Boxtel trembled with joy. Fifteen or twenty tulips, torn and crushed, were lying about, some of them bent, others completely broken and already withering, the sap oozing from their bleeding bulbs: how gladly would Van Baerle have redeemed that precious sap with his own blood!

But what were his surprise and his delight! what was the disappointment of his rival! Not one of the four tulips which the latter had meant to destroy was injured at all. They raised proudly their noble heads above the corpses of their slain companions. This was enough to console Van Baerle, and enough to fan the rage of the horticultural murderer, who tore his hair at the sight of the effects of the crime which he had committed in vain.

Van Baerle could not imagine the cause of the mishap, which, fortunately, was of far less consequence than it might have been. On making inquiries, he learned that the whole night had been disturbed by terrible caterwaulings. He besides found traces of the cats, their footmarks and hairs left behind on the battle-field; to guard, therefore, in future against a similar outrage, he gave orders that henceforth one of the under gardeners should sleep in the garden in a sentry-box near the flower-beds.

Boxtel heard him give the order, and saw the sentry-box put up that very day; but he deemed himself lucky in not having been suspected, and, being more than ever incensed against the successful horticulturist, he resolved to bide his time.

Just then the Tulip Society of Haarlem offered a prize for the discovery (we dare not say the manufacture) of a large black tulip without a spot of colour, a thing which had not yet been accomplished, and was considered impossible, as at that time there did not exist a flower of that species approaching even to a dark nut brown. It was, therefore, generally said that the founders of the prize might just as well have offered two millions as a hundred thousand guilders, since no one would be able to gain it.

The tulip-growing world, however, was thrown by it into a state of most active commotion. Some fanciers caught at the idea without believing it practicable, but such is the power of imagination among florists, that although considering the undertaking as certain to fail, all their thoughts were engrossed by that great black tulip, which was looked upon to be as chimerical as the black swan of Horace or the white raven of French tradition.

Van Baerle was one of the tulip-growers who were struck with the idea; Boxtel thought of it in the light of a speculation. Van Baerle, as soon as the idea had once taken root in his clear and ingenious mind, began slowly the necessary planting and cross-breeding to reduce the tulips which he had grown already from red to brown, and from brown to dark brown.

By the next year he had obtained flowers of a perfect nut-brown, and Boxtel espied them in the border, whereas he had himself as yet only succeeded in producing the light brown.

It might perhaps be interesting to explain to the gentle reader the beautiful chain of theories which go to prove that the tulip borrows its colors from the elements; perhaps we should give him pleasure if we were to maintain and establish that nothing is impossible for a florist who avails himself with judgment and discretion and patience of the sun’s heat; the clear water, the juices of the earth, and the cool breezes. But this is not a treatise upon tulips in general; it is the story of one particular tulip which we have undertaken to write, and to that we limit ourselves, however alluring the subject which is so closely allied to ours.

Boxtel, once more worsted by the superiority of his hated rival, was now completely disgusted with tulip-growing, and, being driven half mad, devoted himself entirely to observation.

The house of his rival was quite open to view; a garden exposed to the sun; cabinets with glass walls, shelves, cupboards, boxes, and ticketed pigeon-holes, which could easily be surveyed by the telescope. Boxtel allowed his bulbs to rot in the pits, his seedlings to dry up in their cases, and his tulips to wither in the borders and henceforward occupied himself with nothing else but the doings at Van Baerle’s. He breathed through the stalks of Van Baerle’s tulips, quenched his thirst with the water he sprinkled upon them, and feasted on the fine soft earth which his neighbour scattered upon his cherished bulbs.

But the most curious part of the operations was not performed in the garden.

It might be one o’clock in the morning when Van Baerle went up to his laboratory, into the glazed cabinet whither Boxtel’s telescope had such an easy access; and here, as soon as the lamp illuminated the walls and windows, Boxtel saw the inventive genius of his rival at work.

He beheld him sifting his seeds, and soaking them in liquids which were destined to modify or to deepen their colours. He knew what Cornelius meant when heating certain grains, then moistening them, then combining them with others by a sort of grafting, — a minute and marvellously delicate manipulation, — and when he shut up in darkness those which were expected to furnish the black colour, exposed to the sun or to the lamp those which were to produce red, and placed between the endless reflections of two water-mirrors those intended for white, the pure representation of the limpid element.

This innocent magic, the fruit at the same time of child-like musings and of manly genius — this patient untiring labour, of which Boxtel knew himself to be incapable — made him, gnawed as he was with envy, centre all his life, all his thoughts, and all his hopes in his telescope.

For, strange to say, the love and interest of horticulture had not deadened in Isaac his fierce envy and thirst of revenge. Sometimes, whilst covering Van Baerle with his telescope, he deluded himself into a belief that he was levelling a never-failing musket at him; and then he would seek with his finger for the trigger to fire the shot which was to have killed his neighbour. But it is time that we should connect with this epoch of the operations of the one, and the espionage of the other, the visit which Cornelius de Witt came to pay to his native town.

CHAPTER 7.

The Happy Man makes Acquaintance with Misfortune

Cornelius de Witt, after having attended to his family affairs, reached the house of his godson, Cornelius van Baerle, one evening in the month of January, 1672.

De Witt, although being very little of a horticulturist or of an artist, went over the whole mansion, from the studio to the green-house, inspecting everything, from the pictures down to the tulips. He thanked his godson for having joined him on the deck of the admiral’s ship “The Seven Provinces,” during the battle of Southwold Bay, and for having given his name to a magnificent tulip; and whilst he thus, with the kindness and affability of a father to a son, visited Van Baerle’s treasures, the crowd gathered with curiosity, and even respect, before the door of the happy man.

All this hubbub excited the attention of Boxtel, who was just taking his meal by his fireside. He inquired what it meant, and, on being informed of the cause of all this stir, climbed up to his post of observation, where in spite of the cold, he took his stand, with the telescope to his eye.

This telescope had not been of great service to him since the autumn of 1671. The tulips, like true daughters of the East, averse to cold, do not abide in the open ground in winter. They need the shelter of the house, the soft bed on the shelves, and the congenial warmth of the stove. Van Baerle, therefore, passed the whole winter in his laboratory, in the midst of his books and pictures. He went only rarely to the room where he kept his bulbs, unless it were to allow some occasional rays of the sun to enter, by opening one of the movable sashes of the glass front.

On the evening of which we are speaking, after the two Corneliuses had visited together all the apartments of the house, whilst a train of domestics followed their steps, De Witt said in a low voice to Van Baerle, —

“My dear son, send these people away, and let us be alone for some minutes.”

The younger Cornelius, bowing assent, said aloud, —

“Would you now, sir, please to see my dry-room?”

The dry-room, this pantheon, this sanctum sanctorum of the tulip-fancier, was, as Delphi of old, interdicted to the profane uninitiated.

Never had any of his servants been bold enough to set his foot there. Cornelius admitted only the inoffensive broom of an old Frisian housekeeper, who had been his nurse, and who from the time when he had devoted himself to the culture of tulips ventured no longer to put onions in his stews, for fear of pulling to pieces and mincing the idol of her foster child.

At the mere mention of the dry-room, therefore, the servants who were carrying the lights respectfully fell back. Cornelius, taking the candlestick from the hands of the foremost, conducted his godfather into that room, which was no other than that very cabinet with a glass front into which Boxtel was continually prying with his telescope.

The envious spy was watching more intently than ever.

First of all he saw the walls and windows lit up.

Then two dark figures appeared.

One of them, tall, majestic, stern, sat down near the table on which Van Baerle had placed the taper.

In this figure, Boxtel recognised the pale features of Cornelius de Witt, whose long hair, parted in front, fell over his shoulders.

De Witt, after having said some few words to Cornelius, the meaning of which the prying neighbour could not read in the movement of his lips, took from his breast pocket a white parcel, carefully sealed, which Boxtel, judging from the manner in which Cornelius received it, and placed it in one of the presses, supposed to contain papers of the greatest importance.

His first thought was that this precious deposit enclosed some newly imported bulbs from Bengal or Ceylon; but he soon reflected that Cornelius de Witt was very little addicted to tulip-growing, and that he only occupied himself with the affairs of man, a pursuit by far less peaceful and agreeable than that of the florist. He therefore came to the conclusion that the parcel contained simply some papers, and that these papers were relating to politics.

But why should papers of political import be intrusted to Van Baerle, who not only was, but also boasted of being, an entire stranger to the science of government, which, in his opinion, was more occult than alchemy itself?

It was undoubtedly a deposit which Cornelius de Witt, already threatened by the unpopularity with which his countrymen were going to honour him, was placing in the hands of his godson; a contrivance so much the more cleverly devised, as it certainly was not at all likely that it should be searched for at the house of one who had always stood aloof from every sort of intrigue.

And, besides, if the parcel had been made up of bulbs, Boxtel knew his neighbour too well not to expect that Van Baerle would not have lost one moment in satisfying his curiosity and feasting his eyes on the present which he had received.

But, on the contrary, Cornelius had received the parcel from the hands of his godfather with every mark of respect, and put it by with the same respectful manner in a drawer, stowing it away so that it should not take up too much of the room which was reserved to his bulbs.

The parcel thus being secreted, Cornelius de Witt got up, pressed the hand of his godson, and turned towards the door, Van Baerle seizing the candlestick, and lighting him on his way down to the street, which was still crowded with people who wished to see their great fellow citizen getting into his coach.

Boxtel had not been mistaken in his supposition. The deposit intrusted to Van Baerle, and carefully locked up by him, was nothing more nor less than John de Witt's correspondence with the Marquis de Louvois, the war minister of the King of France; only the godfather forbore giving to his godson the least intimation concerning the political importance of the secret, merely desiring him not to deliver the parcel to any one but to himself, or to whomsoever he should send to claim it in his name.

And Van Baerle, as we have seen, locked it up with his most precious bulbs, to think no more of it, after his godfather had left him; very unlike Boxtel, who looked upon this parcel as a clever pilot does on the distant and scarcely perceptible cloud which is increasing on its way and which is fraught with a storm.

Little dreaming of the jealous hatred of his neighbour, Van Baerle had proceeded step by step towards gaining the prize offered by the Horticultural Society of Haarlem. He had progressed from hazel-nut shade to that of roasted coffee, and on the very day when the frightful events took place at the Hague which we have related in the preceding chapters, we find him, about one o'clock in the day, gathering from the border the young suckers raised from tulips of the colour of roasted coffee; and which, being expected to flower for the first time in the spring of 1675, would undoubtedly produce the large black tulip required by the Haarlem Society.

On the 20th of August, 1672, at one o’clock, Cornelius was therefore in his dry-room, with his feet resting on the foot-bar of the table, and his elbows on the cover, looking with intense delight on three suckers which he had just detached from the mother bulb, pure, perfect, and entire, and from which was to grow that wonderful produce of horticulture which would render the name of Cornelius van Baerle for ever illustrious.

“I shall find the black tulip,” said Cornelius to himself, whilst detaching the suckers. “I shall obtain the hundred thousand guilders offered by the Society. I shall distribute them among the poor of Dort; and thus the hatred which every rich man has to encounter in times of civil wars will be soothed down, and I shall be able, without fearing any harm either from Republicans or Orangists, to keep as heretofore my borders in splendid condition. I need no more be afraid lest on the day of a riot the shopkeepers of the town and the sailors of the port should come and tear out my bulbs, to boil them as onions for their families, as they have sometimes quietly threatened when they happened to remember my having paid two or three hundred guilders for one bulb. It is therefore settled I shall give the hundred thousand guilders of the Haarlem prize to-the poor. And yet — — ”

Here Cornelius stopped and heaved a sigh. “And yet,” he continued, “it would have been so very delightful to spend the hundred thousand guilders on the enlargement of my tulip-bed or even on a journey to the East, the country of beautiful flowers. But, alas! these are no thoughts for the present times, when muskets, standards, proclamations, and beating of drums are the order of the day.”

Van Baerle raised his eyes to heaven and sighed again. Then turning his glance towards his bulbs, — objects of much greater importance to him than all those muskets, standards, drums, and proclamations, which he conceived only to be fit to disturb the minds of honest people, — he said: —

“These are, indeed, beautiful bulbs; how smooth they are, how well formed; there is that air of melancholy about them which promises to produce a flower of the colour of ebony. On their skin you cannot even distinguish the circulating veins with the naked eye. Certainly, certainly, not a light spot will disfigure the tulip which I have called into existence. And by what name shall we call this offspring of my sleepless nights, of my labour and my thought? Tulipa nigra Barlaensis?

“Yes Barlaensis: a fine name. All the tulip-fanciers — that is to say, all the intelligent people of Europe — will feel a thrill of excitement when the rumour spreads to the four quarters of the globe: The grand black tulip is found! ‘How is it called?’ the fanciers will ask. — ’Tulipa nigra Barlaensis!’ — ’Why Barlaensis?’ — ’After its grower, Van Baerle,’ will be the answer. — ’And who is this Van Baerle?’ — ’It is the same who has already produced five new tulips: the Jane, the John de Witt, the Cornelius de Witt, etc.’ Well, that is what I call my ambition. It will cause tears to no one. And people will talk of my Tulipa nigra Barlaensis when perhaps my godfather, this sublime politician, is only known from the tulip to which I have given his name.

“Oh! these darling bulbs!

“When my tulip has flowered,” Baerle continued in his soliloquy, “and when tranquillity is restored in Holland, I shall give to the poor only fifty thousand guilders, which, after all, is a goodly sum for a man who is under no obligation whatever. Then, with the remaining fifty thousand guilders, I shall make experiments. With them I shall succeed in imparting scent to the tulip. Ah! if I succeed in giving it the odour of the rose or the carnation, or, what would be still better, a completely new scent; if I restored to this queen of flowers its natural distinctive perfume, which she has lost in passing from her Eastern to her European throne, and which she must have in the Indian peninsula at Goa, Bombay, and Madras, and especially in that island which in olden times, as is asserted, was the terrestrial paradise, and which is called Ceylon, — oh, what glory! I must say, I would then rather be Cornelius van Baerle than Alexander, Caesar, or Maximilian.

“Oh the admirable bulbs!”

Thus Cornelius indulged in the delights of contemplation, and was carried away by the sweetest dreams.

Suddenly the bell of his cabinet was rung much more violently than usual.

Cornelius, startled, laid his hands on his bulbs, and turned round.

“Who is here?” he asked.

“Sir,” answered the servant, “it is a messenger from the Hague.”

“A messenger from the Hague! What does he want?”

“Sir, it is Craeke.”

"Craeke! the confidential servant of Mynheer John de Witt? Good, let him wait."

"I cannot wait," said a voice in the lobby.

And at the same time forcing his way in, Craeke rushed into the dry-room.

This abrupt entrance was such an infringement on the established rules of the household of Cornelius van Baerle, that the latter, at the sight of Craeke, almost convulsively moved his hand which covered the bulbs, so that two of them fell on the floor, one of them rolling under a small table, and the other into the fireplace.

"Zounds!" said Cornelius, eagerly picking up his precious bulbs, "what's the matter?"

"The matter, sir!" said Craeke, laying a paper on the large table, on which the third bulb was lying, — "the matter is, that you are requested to read this paper without losing one moment."

And Craeke, who thought he had remarked in the streets of Dort symptoms of a tumult similar to that which he had witnessed before his departure from the Hague, ran off without even looking behind him.

"All right! all right! my dear Craeke," said Cornelius, stretching his arm under the table for the bulb; "your paper shall be read, indeed it shall."

Then, examining the bulb which he held in the hollow of his hand, he said: "Well, here is one of them uninjured. That confounded Craeke! thus to rush into my dry-room; let us now look after the other."

And without laying down the bulb which he already held, Baerle went to the fireplace, knelt down and stirred with the tip of his finger the ashes, which fortunately were quite cold.

He at once felt the other bulb.

"Well, here it is," he said; and, looking at it with almost fatherly affection, he exclaimed, "Uninjured as the first!"

At this very instant, and whilst Cornelius, still on his knees, was examining his pets, the door of the dry-room was so violently shaken, and opened in such a brusque manner, that Cornelius felt rising in his cheeks and his ears the glow of that evil counsellor which is called wrath.

"Now, what is it again," he demanded; "are people going mad here?"

"Oh, sir! sir!" cried the servant, rushing into the dry-room with a much paler face and with a much more frightened mien than Craeke had shown.

"Well!" asked Cornelius, foreboding some mischief from the double breach of the strict rule of his house.

"Oh, sir, fly! fly quick!" cried the servant.

"Fly! and what for?"

"Sir, the house is full of the guards of the States."

"What do they want?"

"They want you."

"What for?"

"To arrest you."

"Arrest me? arrest me, do you say?"

"Yes, sir, and they are headed by a magistrate."

"What's the meaning of all this?" said Van Baerle, grasping in his hands the two bulbs, and directing his terrified glance towards the staircase.

"They are coming up! they are coming up!" cried the servant.

"Oh, my dear child, my worthy master!" cried the old housekeeper, who now likewise made her appearance in the dry-room, "take your gold, your jewelry, and fly, fly!"

"But how shall I make my escape, nurse?" said Van Baerle.

"Jump out of the window."

"Twenty-five feet from the ground!"

"But you will fall on six feet of soft soil!"

"Yes, but I should fall on my tulips."

"Never mind, jump out."

Cornelius took the third bulb, approached the window and opened it, but seeing what havoc he would necessarily cause in his borders, and, more than this, what a height he would have to jump, he called out, "Never!" and fell back a step.

At this moment they saw across the banister of the staircase the points of the halberds of the soldiers rising.

The housekeeper raised her hands to heaven.

As to Cornelius van Baerle, it must be stated to his honour, not as a man, but as a tulip-fancier, his only thought was for his inestimable bulbs.

Looking about for a paper in which to wrap them up, he noticed the fly-leaf from the Bible, which Craeke had laid upon the table, took it without in his confusion remembering whence it came, folded in it the three bulbs, secreted them in his bosom, and waited.

At this very moment the soldiers, preceded by a magistrate, entered the room.

"Are you Dr. Cornelius van Baerle?" demanded the magistrate (who, although knowing the young man very well, put his question according to the forms of justice, which gave his proceedings a much more dignified air).

"I am that person, Master van Spennen," answered Cornelius, politely, to his judge, "and you know it very well."

"Then give up to us the seditious papers which you secrete in your house."

"The seditious papers!" repeated Cornelius, quite dumfounded at the imputation.

"Now don't look astonished, if you please."

"I vow to you, Master van Spennen," Cornelius replied, "that I am completely at a loss to understand what you want."

"Then I shall put you in the way, Doctor," said the judge; "give up to us the papers which the traitor Cornelius de Witt deposited with you in the month of January last."

A sudden light came into the mind of Cornelius.

"Halloa!" said Van Spennen, "you begin now to remember, don't you?"

"Indeed I do, but you spoke of seditious papers, and I have none of that sort."

"You deny it then?"

"Certainly I do."

The magistrate turned round and took a rapid survey of the whole cabinet.

"Where is the apartment you call your dry-room?" he asked.

"The very same where you now are, Master van Spennen."

The magistrate cast a glance at a small note at the top of his papers.

"All right," he said, like a man who is sure of his ground.

Then, turning round towards Cornelius, he continued, "Will you give up those papers to me?"

"But I cannot, Master van Spennen; those papers do not belong to me; they have been deposited with me as a trust, and a trust is sacred."

"Dr. Cornelius," said the judge, "in the name of the States, I order you to open this drawer, and to give up to me the papers which it contains."

Saying this, the judge pointed with his finger to the third drawer of the press, near the fireplace.

In this very drawer, indeed the papers deposited by the Warden of the Dikes with his godson were lying; a proof that the police had received very exact information.

“Ah! you will not,” said Van Spennen, when he saw Cornelius standing immovable and bewildered, “then I shall open the drawer myself.”

And, pulling out the drawer to its full length, the magistrate at first alighted on about twenty bulbs, carefully arranged and ticketed, and then on the paper parcel, which had remained in exactly the same state as it was when delivered by the unfortunate Cornelius de Witt to his godson.

The magistrate broke the seals, tore off the envelope, cast an eager glance on the first leaves which met his eye and then exclaimed, in a terrible voice, —

“Well, justice has been rightly informed after all!”

“How,” said Cornelius, “how is this?”

“Don’t pretend to be ignorant, Mynheer van Baerle,” answered the magistrate. “Follow me.”

“How’s that! follow you?” cried the Doctor.

“Yes, sir, for in the name of the States I arrest you.”

Arrests were not as yet made in the name of William of Orange; he had not been Stadtholder long enough for that.

“Arrest me!” cried Cornelius; “but what have I done?”

“That’s no affair of mine, Doctor; you will explain all that before your judges.”

“Where?”

“At the Hague.”

Cornelius, in mute stupefaction, embraced his old nurse, who was in a swoon; shook hands with his servants, who were bathed in tears, and followed the magistrate, who put him in a coach as a prisoner of state and had him driven at full gallop to the Hague.

CHAPTER 8.

An Invasion

The incident just related was, as the reader has guessed before this, the diabolical work of Mynheer Isaac Boxtel.

It will be remembered that, with the help of his telescope, not even the least detail of the private meeting between Cornelius de Witt and Van Baerle had escaped him. He had, indeed, heard nothing, but he had seen everything, and had rightly concluded that the papers intrusted by the Warden to the Doctor must have been of great importance, as he saw Van Baerle so carefully secreting the parcel in the drawer where he used to keep his most precious bulbs.

The upshot of all this was that when Boxtel, who watched the course of political events much more attentively than his neighbour Cornelius was used to do, heard the news of the brothers De Witt being arrested on a charge of high treason against the States, he thought within his heart that very likely he needed only to say one word, and the godson would be arrested as well as the godfather.

Yet, full of happiness as was Boxtel's heart at the chance, he at first shrank with horror from the idea of informing against a man whom this information might lead to the scaffold.

But there is this terrible thing in evil thoughts, that evil minds soon grow familiar with them.

Besides this, Mynheer Isaac Boxtel encouraged himself with the following sophism: —

"Cornelius de Witt is a bad citizen, as he is charged with high treason, and arrested.

"I, on the contrary, am a good citizen, as I am not charged with anything in the world, as I am as free as the air of heaven."

"If, therefore, Cornelius de Witt is a bad citizen, — of which there can be no doubt, as he is charged with high treason, and arrested, — his accomplice, Cornelius van Baerle, is no less a bad citizen than himself.

“And, as I am a good citizen, and as it is the duty of every good citizen to inform against the bad ones, it is my duty to inform against Cornelius van Baerle.”

Specious as this mode of reasoning might sound, it would not perhaps have taken so complete a hold of Boxtel, nor would he perhaps have yielded to the mere desire of vengeance which was gnawing at his heart, had not the demon of envy been joined with that of cupidity.

Boxtel was quite aware of the progress which Van Baerle had made towards producing the grand black tulip.

Dr. Cornelius, notwithstanding all his modesty, had not been able to hide from his most intimate friends that he was all but certain to win, in the year of grace 1673, the prize of a hundred thousand guilders offered by the Horticultural Society of Haarlem.

It was just this certainty of Cornelius van Baerle that caused the fever which raged in the heart of Isaac Boxtel.

If Cornelius should be arrested there would necessarily be a great upset in his house, and during the night after his arrest no one would think of keeping watch over the tulips in his garden.

Now in that night Boxtel would climb over the wall and, as he knew the position of the bulb which was to produce the grand black tulip, he would filch it; and instead of flowering for Cornelius, it would flower for him, Isaac; he also, instead of Van Baerle, would have the prize of a hundred thousand guilders, not to speak of the sublime honour of calling the new flower Tulipa nigra Boxtellensis, — a result which would satisfy not only his vengeance, but also his cupidity and his ambition.

Awake, he thought of nothing but the grand black tulip; asleep, he dreamed of it.

At last, on the 19th of August, about two o’clock in the afternoon, the temptation grew so strong, that Mynheer Isaac was no longer able to resist it.

Accordingly, he wrote an anonymous information, the minute exactness of which made up for its want of authenticity, and posted his letter.

Never did a venomous paper, slipped into the jaws of the bronze lions at Venice, produce a more prompt and terrible effect.

On the same evening the letter reached the principal magistrate, who without a moment’s delay convoked his colleagues early for the next morning. On the following morning, therefore, they assembled, and decided on Van Baerle's arrest, placing the order for its execution in the hands of Master van Spennen, who, as we have seen, performed his duty like a true Hollander, and who arrested the Doctor at the very hour when the Orange party at the Hague were roasting the bleeding shreds of flesh torn from the corpses of Cornelius and John de Witt.

But, whether from a feeling of shame or from craven weakness, Isaac Boxtel did not venture that day to point his telescope either at the garden, or at the laboratory, or at the dry-room.

He knew too well what was about to happen in the house of the poor doctor to feel any desire to look into it. He did not even get up when his only servant — who envied the lot of the servants of Cornelius just as bitterly as Boxtel did that of their master — entered his bedroom. He said to the man, —

"I shall not get up to-day, I am ill."

About nine o'clock he heard a great noise in the street which made him tremble, at this moment he was paler than a real invalid, and shook more violently than a man in the height of fever.

His servant entered the room; Boxtel hid himself under the counterpane.

"Oh, sir!" cried the servant, not without some inkling that, whilst deploring the mishap which had befallen Van Baerle, he was announcing agreeable news to his master, — "oh, sir! you do not know, then, what is happening at this moment?"

"How can I know it?" answered Boxtel, with an almost unintelligible voice.

"Well, Mynheer Boxtel, at this moment your neighbour Cornelius van Baerle is arrested for high treason."

"Nonsense!" Boxtel muttered, with a faltering voice; "the thing is impossible."

"Faith, sir, at any rate that's what people say; and, besides, I have seen Judge van Spennen with the archers entering the house."

"Well, if you have seen it with your own eyes, that's a different case altogether."

"At all events," said the servant, "I shall go and inquire once more. Be you quiet, sir, I shall let you know all about it."

Boxtel contented himself with signifying his approval of the zeal of his servant by dumb show.

The man went out, and returned in half an hour.

“Oh, sir, all that I told you is indeed quite true.”

“How so?”

“Mynheer van Baerle is arrested, and has been put into a carriage, and they are driving him to the Hague.”

“To the Hague!”

“Yes, to the Hague, and if what people say is true, it won’t do him much good.”

“And what do they say?” Boxtel asked.

“Faith, sir, they say — but it is not quite sure — that by this hour the burghers must be murdering Mynheer Cornelius and Mynheer John de Witt.”

“Oh,” muttered, or rather growled Boxtel, closing his eyes from the dreadful picture which presented itself to his imagination.

“Why, to be sure,” said the servant to himself, whilst leaving the room, “Mynheer Isaac Boxtel must be very sick not to have jumped from his bed on hearing such good news.”

And, in reality, Isaac Boxtel was very sick, like a man who has murdered another.

But he had murdered his man with a double object; the first was attained, the second was still to be attained.

Night closed in. It was the night which Boxtel had looked forward to.

As soon as it was dark he got up.

He then climbed into his sycamore.

He had calculated correctly; no one thought of keeping watch over the garden; the house and the servants were all in the utmost confusion.

He heard the clock strike — ten, eleven, twelve.

At midnight, with a beating heart, trembling hands, and a livid countenance, he descended from the tree, took a ladder, leaned it against the wall, mounted it to the last step but one, and listened.

All was perfectly quiet, not a sound broke the silence of the night; one solitary light, that of the housekeeper, was burning in the house.

This silence and this darkness emboldened Boxtel; he got astride the wall, stopped for an instant, and, after having ascertained that there was nothing to fear, he put his ladder from his own garden into that of Cornelius, and descended.

Then, knowing to an inch where the bulbs which were to produce the black tulip were planted, he ran towards the spot, following, however, the gravelled walks in order not to be betrayed by his footprints, and, on arriving at the precise spot, he proceeded, with the eagerness of a tiger, to plunge his hand into the soft ground.

He found nothing, and thought he was mistaken.

In the meanwhile, the cold sweat stood on his brow.

He felt about close by it, — nothing.

He felt about on the right, and on the left, — nothing.

He felt about in front and at the back, — nothing.

He was nearly mad, when at last he satisfied himself that on that very morning the earth had been disturbed.

In fact, whilst Boxtel was lying in bed, Cornelius had gone down to his garden, had taken up the mother bulb, and, as we have seen, divided it into three.

Boxtel could not bring himself to leave the place. He dug up with his hands more than ten square feet of ground.

At last no doubt remained of his misfortune. Mad with rage, he returned to his ladder, mounted the wall, drew up the ladder, flung it into his own garden, and jumped after it.

All at once, a last ray of hope presented itself to his mind: the seedling bulbs might be in the dry-room; it was therefore only requisite to make his entry there as he had done into the garden.

There he would find them, and, moreover, it was not at all difficult, as the sashes of the dry-room might be raised like those of a greenhouse. Cornelius had opened them on that morning, and no one had thought of closing them again.

Everything, therefore, depended upon whether he could procure a ladder of sufficient length, — one of twenty-five feet instead of ten.

Boxtel had noticed in the street where he lived a house which was being repaired, and against which a very tall ladder was placed.

This ladder would do admirably, unless the workmen had taken it away.

He ran to the house: the ladder was there. Boxtel took it, carried it with great exertion to his garden, and with even greater difficulty raised it against the wall of Van Baerle’s house, where it just reached to the window.

Boxtel put a lighted dark lantern into his pocket, mounted the ladder, and slipped into the dry-room.

On reaching this sanctuary of the florist he stopped, supporting himself against the table; his legs failed him, his heart beat as if it would choke him.

Here it was even worse than in the garden; there Boxtel was only a trespasser, here he was a thief.

However, he took courage again: he had not gone so far to turn back with empty hands.

But in vain did he search the whole room, open and shut all the drawers, even that privileged one where the parcel which had been so fatal to Cornelius had been deposited; he found ticketed, as in a botanical garden, the "Jane," the "John de Witt," the hazel-nut, and the roasted-coffee coloured tulip; but of the black tulip, or rather the seedling bulbs within which it was still sleeping, not a trace was found.

And yet, on looking over the register of seeds and bulbs, which Van Baerle kept in duplicate, if possible even with greater exactitude and care than the first commercial houses of Amsterdam their ledgers, Boxtel read these lines: —

"To-day, 20th of August, 1672, I have taken up the mother bulb of the grand black tulip, which I have divided into three perfect suckers."

"Oh these bulbs, these bulbs!" howled Boxtel, turning over everything in the dry-room, "where could he have concealed them?"

Then, suddenly striking his forehead in his frenzy, he called out, "Oh wretch that I am! Oh thrice fool Boxtel! Would any one be separated from his bulbs? Would any one leave them at Dort, when one goes to the Hague? Could one live far from one's bulbs, when they enclose the grand black tulip? He had time to get hold of them, the scoundrel, he has them about him, he has taken them to the Hague!"

It was like a flash of lightning which showed to Boxtel the abyss of a uselessly committed crime.

Boxtel sank quite paralyzed on that very table, and on that very spot where, some hours before, the unfortunate Van Baerle had so leisurely, and with such intense delight, contemplated his darling bulbs.

"Well, then, after all," said the envious Boxtel, — raising his livid face from his hands in which it had been buried — "if he has them, he can keep them only as long as he lives, and — — "

The rest of this detestable thought was expressed by a hideous smile.

"The bulbs are at the Hague," he said, "therefore, I can no longer live at Dort: away, then, for them, to the Hague! to the Hague!"

And Boxtel, without taking any notice of the treasures about him, so entirely were his thoughts absorbed by another inestimable treasure, let himself out by the window, glided down the ladder, carried it back to the place whence he had taken it, and, like a beast of prey, returned growling to his house.

CHAPTER 9.

The Family Cell

It was about midnight when poor Van Baerle was locked up in the prison of the Buytenhof.

What Rosa foresaw had come to pass. On finding the cell of Cornelius de Witt empty, the wrath of the people ran very high, and had Gryphus fallen into the hands of those madmen he would certainly have had to pay with his life for the prisoner.

But this fury had vented itself most fully on the two brothers when they were overtaken by the murderers, thanks to the precaution which William — the man of precautions — had taken in having the gates of the city closed.

A momentary lull had therefore set in whilst the prison was empty, and Rosa availed herself of this favourable moment to come forth from her hiding place, which she also induced her father to leave.

The prison was therefore completely deserted. Why should people remain in the jail whilst murder was going on at the Tol-Hek?

Gryphus came forth trembling behind the courageous Rosa. They went to close the great gate, at least as well as it would close, considering that it was half demolished. It was easy to see that a hurricane of mighty fury had vented itself upon it.

About four o’clock a return of the noise was heard, but of no threatening character to Gryphus and his daughter. The people were only dragging in the two corpses, which they came back to gibbet at the usual place of execution.

Rosa hid herself this time also, but only that she might not see the ghastly spectacle.

At midnight, people again knocked at the gate of the jail, or rather at the barricade which served in its stead: it was Cornelius van Baerle whom they were bringing.

When the jailer received this new inmate, and saw from the warrant the name and station of his prisoner, he muttered with his turnkey smile, —

"Godson of Cornelius de Witt! Well, young man, we have the family cell here, and we will give it to you."

And quite enchanted with his joke, the ferocious Orangeman took his cresset and his keys to conduct Cornelius to the cell, which on that very morning Cornelius de Witt had left to go into exile, or what in revolutionary times is meant instead by those sublime philosophers who lay it down as an axiom of high policy, "It is the dead only who do not return."

On the way which the despairing florist had to traverse to reach that cell he heard nothing but the barking of a dog, and saw nothing but the face of a young girl.

The dog rushed forth from a niche in the wall, shaking his heavy chain, and sniffing all round Cornelius in order so much the better to recognise him in case he should be ordered to pounce upon him.

The young girl, whilst the prisoner was mounting the staircase, appeared at the narrow door of her chamber, which opened on that very flight of steps; and, holding the lamp in her right hand, she at the same time lit up her pretty blooming face, surrounded by a profusion of rich wavy golden locks, whilst with her left she held her white night-dress closely over her breast, having been roused from her first slumber by the unexpected arrival of Van Baerle.

It would have made a fine picture, worthy of Rembrandt, the gloomy winding stairs illuminated by the reddish glare of the cresset of Gryphus, with his scowling jailer's countenance at the top, the melancholy figure of Cornelius bending over the banister to look down upon the sweet face of Rosa, standing, as it were, in the bright frame of the door of her chamber, with embarrassed mien at being thus seen by a stranger.

And at the bottom, quite in the shade, where the details are absorbed in the obscurity, the mastiff, with his eyes glistening like carbuncles, and shaking his chain, on which the double light from the lamp of Rosa and the lantern of Gryphus threw a brilliant glitter.

The sublime master would, however, have been altogether unable to render the sorrow expressed in the face of Rosa, when she saw this pale, handsome young man slowly climbing the stairs, and thought of the full import of the words, which her father had just spoken, "You will have the family cell."

This vision lasted but a moment, — much less time than we have taken to describe it. Gryphus then proceeded on his way, Cornelius was forced to follow him, and five minutes afterwards he entered his prison, of which it is unnecessary to say more, as the reader is already acquainted with it.

Gryphus pointed with his finger to the bed on which the martyr had suffered so much, who on that day had rendered his soul to God. Then, taking up his cresset, he quitted the cell.

Thus left alone, Cornelius threw himself on his bed, but he slept not, he kept his eye fixed on the narrow window, barred with iron, which looked on the Buytenhof; and in this way saw from behind the trees that first pale beam of light which morning sheds on the earth as a white mantle.

Now and then during the night horses had galloped at a smart pace over the Buytenhof, the heavy tramp of the patrols had resounded from the pavement, and the slow matches of the arquebuses, flaring in the east wind, had thrown up at intervals a sudden glare as far as to the panes of his window.

But when the rising sun began to gild the coping stones at the gable ends of the houses, Cornelius, eager to know whether there was any living creature about him, approached the window, and cast a sad look round the circular yard before him.

At the end of the yard a dark mass, tinted with a dingy blue by the morning dawn, rose before him, its dark outlines standing out in contrast to the houses already illuminated by the pale light of early morning.

Cornelius recognised the gibbet.

On it were suspended two shapeless trunks, which indeed were no more than bleeding skeletons.

The good people of the Hague had chopped off the flesh of its victims, but faithfully carried the remainder to the gibbet, to have a pretext for a double inscription written on a huge placard, on which Cornelius; with the keen sight of a young man of twenty-eight, was able to read the following lines, daubed by the coarse brush of a sign-painter: —

“Here are hanging the great rogue of the name of John de Witt, and the little rogue Cornelius de Witt, his brother, two enemies of the people, but great friends of the king of France.”

Cornelius uttered a cry of horror, and in the agony of his frantic terror knocked with his hands and feet at the door so violently and continuously, that Gryphus, with his huge bunch of keys in his hand, ran furiously up.

The jailer opened the door, with terrible imprecations against the prisoner who disturbed him at an hour which Master Gryphus was not accustomed to be aroused.

“Well, now, by my soul, he is mad, this new De Witt,” he cried, “but all those De Witts have the devil in them.”

“Master, master,” cried Cornelius, seizing the jailer by the arm and dragging him towards the window, — ”master, what have I read down there?”

“Where down there?”

“On that placard.”

And, trembling, pale, and gasping for breath, he pointed to the gibbet at the other side of the yard, with the cynical inscription surmounting it.

Gryphus broke out into a laugh.

“Eh! eh!” he answered, “so, you have read it. Well, my good sir, that’s what people will get for corresponding with the enemies of his Highness the Prince of Orange.”

“The brothers De Witt are murdered!” Cornelius muttered, with the cold sweat on his brow, and sank on his bed, his arms hanging by his side, and his eyes closed.

“The brothers De Witt have been judged by the people,” said Gryphus; “you call that murdered, do you? well, I call it executed.”

And seeing that the prisoner was not only quiet, but entirely prostrate and senseless, he rushed from the cell, violently slamming the door, and noisily drawing the bolts.

Recovering his consciousness, Cornelius found himself alone, and recognised the room where he was, — ”the family cell,” as Gryphus had called it, — as the fatal passage leading to ignominious death.

And as he was a philosopher, and, more than that, as he was a Christian, he began to pray for the soul of his godfather, then for that of the Grand Pensionary, and at last submitted with resignation to all the sufferings which God might ordain for him.

Then turning again to the concerns of earth, and having satisfied himself that he was alone in his dungeon, he drew from his breast the three bulbs of the black tulip, and concealed them behind a block of stone, on which the traditional water-jug of the prison was standing, in the darkest corner of his cell.

Useless labour of so many years! such sweet hopes crushed; his discovery was, after all, to lead to naught, just as his own career was to be cut short. Here, in his prison, there was not a trace of vegetation, not an atom of soil, not a ray of sunshine.

At this thought Cornelius fell into a gloomy despair, from which he was only aroused by an extraordinary circumstance.

What was this circumstance?

We shall inform the reader in our next chapter.

CHAPTER 10.

The Jailer’s Daughter

On the same evening Gryphus, as he brought the prisoner his mess, slipped on the damp flags whilst opening the door of the cell, and fell, in the attempt to steady himself, on his hand; but as it was turned the wrong way, he broke his arm just above the wrist.

Cornelius rushed forward towards the jailer, but Gryphus, who was not yet aware of the serious nature of his injury, called out to him, —

“It is nothing: don’t you stir.”

He then tried to support himself on his arm, but the bone gave way; then only he felt the pain, and uttered a cry.

When he became aware that his arm was broken, this man, so harsh to others, fell swooning on the threshold, where he remained motionless and cold, as if dead.

During all this time the door of the cell stood open and Cornelius found himself almost free. But the thought never entered his mind of profiting by this accident; he had seen from the manner in which the arm was bent, and from the noise it made in bending, that the bone was fractured, and that the patient must be in great pain; and now he thought of nothing else but of administering relief to the sufferer, however little benevolent the man had shown himself during their short interview.

At the noise of Gryphus’s fall, and at the cry which escaped him, a hasty step was heard on the staircase, and immediately after a lovely apparition presented itself to the eyes of Cornelius.

It was the beautiful young Frisian, who, seeing her father stretched on the ground, and the prisoner bending over him, uttered a faint cry, as in the first fright she thought Gryphus, whose brutality she well knew, had fallen in consequence of a struggle between him and the prisoner.

Cornelius understood what was passing in the mind of the girl, at the very moment when the suspicion arose in her heart.

But one moment told her the true state of the case and, ashamed of her first thoughts, she cast her beautiful eyes, wet with tears, on the young man, and said to him, —

“I beg your pardon, and thank you, sir; the first for what I have thought, and the second for what you are doing.”

Cornelius blushed, and said, “I am but doing my duty as a Christian in helping my neighbour.”

“Yes, and affording him your help this evening, you have forgotten the abuse which he heaped on you this morning. Oh, sir! this is more than humanity, — this is indeed Christian charity.”

Cornelius cast his eyes on the beautiful girl, quite astonished to hear from the mouth of one so humble such a noble and feeling speech.

But he had no time to express his surprise. Gryphus recovered from his swoon, opened his eyes, and as his brutality was returning with his senses, he growled “That’s it, a fellow is in a hurry to bring to a prisoner his supper, and falls and breaks his arm, and is left lying on the ground.”

“Hush, my father,” said Rosa, “you are unjust to this gentleman, whom I found endeavouring to give you his aid.”

“His aid?” Gryphus replied, with a doubtful air.

“It is quite true, master! I am quite ready to help you still more.”

“You!” said Gryphus, “are you a medical man?”

“It was formerly my profession.”

“And so you would be able to set my arm?”

“Perfectly.”

“And what would you need to do it? let us hear.”

“Two splinters of wood, and some linen for a bandage.”

“Do you hear, Rosa?” said Gryphus, “the prisoner is going to set my arm, that’s a saving; come, assist me to get up, I feel as heavy as lead.”

Rosa lent the sufferer her shoulder; he put his unhurt arm around her neck, and making an effort, got on his legs, whilst Cornelius, to save him a walk, pushed a chair towards him.

Gryphus sat down; then, turning towards his daughter, he said, —

“Well, didn’t you hear? go and fetch what is wanted.”

Rosa went down, and immediately after returned with two staves of a small barrel and a large roll of linen bandage.

Cornelius had made use of the intervening moments to take off the man’s coat, and to tuck up his shirt sleeve.

“Is this what you require, sir?” asked Rosa.

"Yes, mademoiselle," answered Cornelius, looking at the things she had brought, — "yes, that's right. Now push this table, whilst I support the arm of your father."

Rosa pushed the table, Cornelius placed the broken arm on it so as to make it flat, and with perfect skill set the bone, adjusted the splinters, and fastened the bandages.

At the last touch, the jailer fainted a second time.

"Go and fetch vinegar, mademoiselle," said Cornelius; "we will bathe his temples, and he will recover."

But, instead of acting up to the doctor's prescription, Rosa, after having satisfied herself that her father was still unconscious, approached Cornelius and said, —

"Service for service, sir."

"What do you mean, my pretty child?" said Cornelius.

"I mean to say, sir, that the judge who is to examine you to-morrow has inquired to-day for the room in which you are confined, and, on being told that you are occupying the cell of Mynheer Cornelius de Witt, laughed in a very strange and very disagreeable manner, which makes me fear that no good awaits you."

"But," asked Cornelius, "what harm can they do to me?"

"Look at that gibbet."

"But I am not guilty," said Cornelius.

"Were they guilty whom you see down there gibbeted, mangled, and torn to pieces?"

"That's true," said Cornelius, gravely.

"And besides," continued Rosa, "the people want to find you guilty. But whether innocent or guilty, your trial begins to-morrow, and the day after you will be condemned. Matters are settled very quickly in these times."

"Well, and what do you conclude from all this?"

"I conclude that I am alone, that I am weak, that my father is lying in a swoon, that the dog is muzzled, and that consequently there is nothing to prevent your making your escape. Fly, then; that's what I mean."

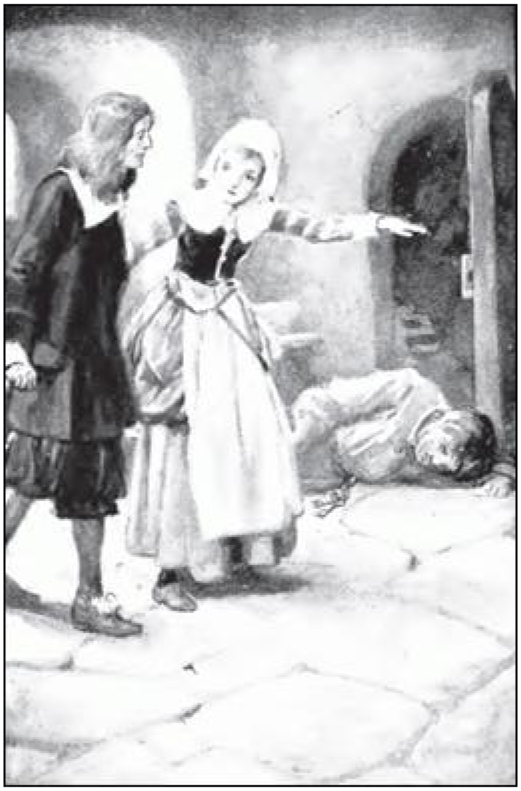

"What do you say?"

"I say that I was not able to save Mynheer Cornelius or Mynheer John de Witt, and that I should like to save you. Only be quick; there, my father is regaining his breath, one minute more, and he will open his eyes, and it will be too late. Do you hesitate?"

In fact, Cornelius stood immovable, looking at Rosa, yet looking at her as if he did not hear her.

"Don't you understand me?" said the young girl, with some impatience.

"Yes, I do," said Cornelius, "but — — "

"But?"

"I will not, they would accuse you."

"Never mind," said Rosa, blushing, "never mind that."

"You are very good, my dear child," replied Cornelius, "but I stay."

"You stay, oh, sir! oh, sir! don't you understand that you will be condemned to death, executed on the scaffold, perhaps assassinated and torn to pieces, just like Mynheer John and Mynheer Cornelius. For heaven's sake, don't think of me, but fly from this place, Take care, it bears ill luck to the De Witts!"

"Halloa!" cried the jailer, recovering his senses, "who is talking of those rogues, those wretches, those villains, the De Witts?"

“Don’t be angry, my good man,” said Cornelius, with his good-tempered smile, “the worst thing for a fracture is excitement, by which the blood is heated.”

Thereupon, he said in an undertone to Rosa —

“My child, I am innocent, and I shall await my trial with tranquillity and an easy mind.”

“Hush,” said Rosa.

“Why hush?”

“My father must not suppose that we have been talking to each other.”

“What harm would that do?”

“What harm? He would never allow me to come here any more,” said Rosa.

Cornelius received this innocent confidence with a smile; he felt as if a ray of good fortune were shining on his path.

“Now, then, what are you chattering there together about?” said Gryphus, rising and supporting his right arm with his left.

“Nothing,” said Rosa; “the doctor is explaining to me what diet you are to keep.”

“Diet, diet for me? Well, my fine girl, I shall put you on diet too.”

“On what diet, my father?”

“Never to go to the cells of the prisoners, and, if ever you should happen to go, to leave them as soon as possible. Come, off with me, lead the way, and be quick.”

Rosa and Cornelius exchanged glances.

That of Rosa tried to express, —

“There, you see?”

That of Cornelius said, —

“Let it be as the Lord wills.”

CHAPTER 11.

Cornelius van Baerle’s Will

Rosa had not been mistaken; the judges came on the following day to the Buytenhof, and proceeded with the trial of Cornelius van Baerle. The examination, however, did not last long, it having appeared on evidence that Cornelius had kept at his house that fatal correspondence of the brothers De Witt with France.

He did not deny it.

The only point about which there seemed any difficulty was whether this correspondence had been intrusted to him by his godfather, Cornelius de Witt.

But as, since the death of those two martyrs, Van Baerle had no longer any reason for withholding the truth, he not only did not deny that the parcel had been delivered to him by Cornelius de Witt himself, but he also stated all the circumstances under which it was done.

This confession involved the godson in the crime of the godfather; manifest complicity being considered to exist between Cornelius de Witt and Cornelius van Baerle.

The honest doctor did not confine himself to this avowal, but told the whole truth with regard to his own tastes, habits, and daily life. He described his indifference to politics, his love of study, of the fine arts, of science, and of flowers. He explained that, since the day when Cornelius de Witt handed to him the parcel at Dort, he himself had never touched, nor even noticed it.

To this it was objected, that in this respect he could not possibly be speaking the truth, since the papers had been deposited in a press in which both his hands and his eyes must have been engaged every day.

Cornelius answered that it was indeed so; that, however, he never put his hand into the press but to ascertain whether his bulbs were dry, and that he never looked into it but to see if they were beginning to sprout.

To this again it was objected, that his pretended indifference respecting this deposit was not to be reasonably entertained, as he could not have received such papers from the hand of his godfather without being made acquainted with their important character.

He replied that his godfather Cornelius loved him too well, and, above all, that he was too considerate a man to have communicated to him anything of the contents of the parcel, well knowing that such a confidence would only have caused anxiety to him who received it.

To this it was objected that, if De Witt had wished to act in such a way, he would have added to the parcel, in case of accidents, a certificate setting forth that his godson was an entire stranger to the nature of this correspondence, or at least he would during his trial have written a letter to him, which might be produced as his justification.

Cornelius replied that undoubtedly his godfather could not have thought that there was any risk for the safety of his deposit, hidden as it was in a press which was looked upon as sacred as the tabernacle by the whole household of Van Baerle; and that consequently he had considered the certificate as useless. As to a letter, he certainly had some remembrance that some moments previous to his arrest, whilst he was absorbed in the contemplation of one of the rarest of his bulbs, John de Witt’s servant entered his dry-room, and handed to him a paper, but the whole was to him only like a vague dream; the servant had disappeared, and as to the paper, perhaps it might be found if a proper search were made.

As far as Craeke was concerned, it was impossible to find him, as he had left Holland.

The paper also was not very likely to be found, and no one gave himself the trouble to look for it.

Cornelius himself did not much press this point, since, even supposing that the paper should turn up, it could not have any direct connection with the correspondence which constituted the crime.

The judges wished to make it appear as though they wanted to urge Cornelius to make a better defence; they displayed that benevolent patience which is generally a sign of the magistrate’s being interested for the prisoner, or of a man’s having so completely got the better of his adversary that he needs no longer any oppressive means to ruin him.

Cornelius did not accept of this hypocritical protection, and in a last answer, which he set forth with the noble bearing of a martyr and the calm serenity of a righteous man, he said, —

"You ask me things, gentlemen, to which I can answer only the exact truth. Hear it. The parcel was put into my hands in the way I have described; I vow before God that I was, and am still, ignorant of its contents, and that it was not until my arrest that I learned that this deposit was the correspondence of the Grand Pensionary with the Marquis de Louvois. And lastly, I vow and protest that I do not understand how any one should have known that this parcel was in my house; and, above all, how I can be deemed criminal for having received what my illustrious and unfortunate godfather brought to my house."

This was Van Baerle's whole defence; after which the judges began to deliberate on the verdict.

They considered that every offshoot of civil discord is mischievous, because it revives the contest which it is the interest of all to put down.

One of them, who bore the character of a profound observer, laid down as his opinion that this young man, so phlegmatic in appearance, must in reality be very dangerous, as under this icy exterior he was sure to conceal an ardent desire to avenge his friends, the De Witts.

Another observed that the love of tulips agreed perfectly well with that of politics, and that it was proved in history that many very dangerous men were engaged in gardening, just as if it had been their profession, whilst really they occupied themselves with perfectly different concerns; witness Tarquin the Elder, who grew poppies at Gabii, and the Great Conde, who watered his carnations at the dungeon of Vincennes at the very moment when the former meditated his return to Rome, and the latter his escape from prison.

The judge summed up with the following dilemma: —

"Either Cornelius van Baerle is a great lover of tulips, or a great lover of politics; in either case, he has told us a falsehood; first, because his having occupied himself with politics is proved by the letters which were found at his house; and secondly, because his having occupied himself with tulips is proved by the bulbs which leave no doubt of the fact. And herein lies the enormity of the case. As Cornelius van Baerle was concerned in the growing of tulips and in the pursuit of politics at one and the same time, the prisoner is of hybrid character, of an amphibious organisation, working with equal ardour at politics and at tulips, which proves him to belong to the class of men most dangerous to public tranquillity, and shows a certain, or rather a complete, analogy between his character and that of those master minds of which Tarquin the Elder and the Great Conde have been felicitously quoted as examples."

The upshot of all these reasonings was, that his Highness the Prince Stadtholder of Holland would feel infinitely obliged to the magistracy of the Hague if they simplified for him the government of the Seven Provinces by destroying even the least germ of conspiracy against his authority.

This argument capped all the others, and, in order so much the more effectually to destroy the germ of conspiracy, sentence of death was unanimously pronounced against Cornelius van Baerle, as being arraigned, and convicted, for having, under the innocent appearance of a tulip-fancier, participated in the detestable intrigues and abominable plots of the brothers De Witt against Dutch nationality and in their secret relations with their French enemy.

A supplementary clause was tacked to the sentence, to the effect that "the aforesaid Cornelius van Baerle should be led from the prison of the Buytenhof to the scaffold in the yard of the same name, where the public executioner would cut off his head."

As this deliberation was a most serious affair, it lasted a full half-hour, during which the prisoner was remanded to his cell.

There the Recorder of the States came to read the sentence to him.

Master Gryphus was detained in bed by the fever caused by the fracture of his arm. His keys passed into the hands of one of his assistants. Behind this turnkey, who introduced the Recorder, Rosa, the fair Frisian maid, had slipped into the recess of the door, with a handkerchief to her mouth to stifle her sobs.

Cornelius listened to the sentence with an expression rather of surprise than sadness.

After the sentence was read, the Recorder asked him whether he had anything to answer.

"Indeed, I have not," he replied. "Only I confess that, among all the causes of death against which a cautious man may guard, I should never have supposed this to be comprised."

On this answer, the Recorder saluted Van Baerle with all that consideration which such functionaries generally bestow upon great criminals of every sort.

But whilst he was about to withdraw, Cornelius asked, "By the bye, Mr. Recorder, what day is the thing — you know what I mean — to take place?”

“Why, to-day,” answered the Recorder, a little surprised by the self-possession of the condemned man.

A sob was heard behind the door, and Cornelius turned round to look from whom it came; but Rosa, who had foreseen this movement, had fallen back.

“And,” continued Cornelius, “what hour is appointed?”

“Twelve o’clock, sir.”

“Indeed,” said Cornelius, “I think I heard the clock strike ten about twenty minutes ago; I have not much time to spare.”

“Indeed you have not, if you wish to make your peace with God,” said the Recorder, bowing to the ground. “You may ask for any clergyman you please.”

Saying these words he went out backwards, and the assistant turnkey was going to follow him, and to lock the door of Cornelius’s cell, when a white and trembling arm interposed between him and the heavy door.

Cornelius saw nothing but the golden brocade cap, tipped with lace, such as the Frisian girls wore; he heard nothing but some one whispering into the ear of the turnkey. But the latter put his heavy keys into the white hand which was stretched out to receive them, and, descending some steps, sat down on the staircase which was thus guarded above by himself, and below by the dog. The head-dress turned round, and Cornelius beheld the face of Rosa, blanched with grief, and her beautiful eyes streaming with tears.

She went up to Cornelius, crossing her arms on her heaving breast.

“Oh, sir, sir!” she said, but sobs choked her utterance.

“My good girl,” Cornelius replied with emotion, “what do you wish? I may tell you that my time on earth is short.”

“I come to ask a favour of you,” said Rosa, extending her arms partly towards him and partly towards heaven.

“Don’t weep so, Rosa,” said the prisoner, “for your tears go much more to my heart than my approaching fate, and you know, the less guilty a prisoner is, the more it is his duty to die calmly, and even joyfully, as he dies a martyr. Come, there’s a dear, don’t cry any more, and tell me what you want, my pretty Rosa.”

She fell on her knees. “Forgive my father,” she said.

“Your father, your father!” said Cornelius, astonished.

"Yes, he has been so harsh to you; but it is his nature, he is so to every one, and you are not the only one whom he has bullied."

"He is punished, my dear Rosa, more than punished, by the accident that has befallen him, and I forgive him."

"I thank you, sir," said Rosa. "And now tell me — oh, tell me — can I do anything for you?"

"You can dry your beautiful eyes, my dear child," answered Cornelius, with a good-tempered smile.

"But what can I do for you, — for you I mean?"

"A man who has only one hour longer to live must be a great Sybarite still to want anything, my dear Rosa."

"The clergyman whom they have proposed to you?"

"I have worshipped God all my life, I have worshipped Him in His works, and praised Him in His decrees. I am at peace with Him and do not wish for a clergyman. The last thought which occupies my mind, however has reference to the glory of the Almighty, and, indeed, my dear, I should ask you to help me in carrying out this last thought."

"Oh, Mynheer Cornelius, speak, speak!" exclaimed Rosa, still bathed in tears.

"Give me your hand, and promise me not to laugh, my dear child."

"Laugh," exclaimed Rosa, frantic with grief, "laugh at this moment! do you not see my tears?"

"Rosa, you are no stranger to me. I have not seen much of you, but that little is enough to make me appreciate your character. I have never seen a woman more fair or more pure than you are, and if from this moment I take no more notice of you, forgive me; it is only because, on leaving this world, I do not wish to have any further regret."

Rosa felt a shudder creeping over her frame, for, whilst the prisoner pronounced these words, the belfry clock of the Buytenhof struck eleven.

Cornelius understood her. "Yes, yes, let us make haste," he said, "you are right, Rosa."

Then, taking the paper with the three suckers from his breast, where he had again put it, since he had no longer any fear of being searched, he said: "My dear girl, I have been very fond of flowers. That was at a time when I did not know that there was anything else to be loved. Don't blush, Rosa, nor turn away; and even if I were making you a declaration of love, alas! poor dear, it would be of no more consequence. Down there in the yard, there is an instrument of steel, which in sixty minutes will put an end to my boldness. Well, Rosa, I loved flowers dearly, and I have found, or at least I believe so, the secret of the great black tulip, which it has been considered impossible to grow, and for which, as you know, or may not know, a prize of a hundred thousand guilders has been offered by the Horticultural Society of Haarlem. These hundred thousand guilders — and Heaven knows I do not regret them — these hundred thousand guilders I have here in this paper, for they are won by the three bulbs wrapped up in it, which you may take, Rosa, as I make you a present of them."

"Mynheer Cornelius!"

"Yes, yes, Rosa, you may take them; you are not wronging any one, my child. I am alone in this world; my parents are dead; I never had a sister or a brother. I have never had a thought of loving any one with what is called love, and if any one has loved me, I have not known it. However, you see well, Rosa, that I am abandoned by everybody, as in this sad hour you alone are with me in my prison, consoling and assisting me."

"But, sir, a hundred thousand guilders!"

"Well, let us talk seriously, my dear child: those hundred thousand guilders will be a nice marriage portion, with your pretty face; you shall have them, Rosa, dear Rosa, and I ask nothing in return but your promise that you will marry a fine young man, whom you love, and who will love you, as dearly as I loved my flowers. Don't interrupt me, Rosa dear, I have only a few minutes more."

The poor girl was nearly choking with her sobs.

Cornelius took her by the hand.

"Listen to me," he continued: "I'll tell you how to manage it. Go to Dort and ask Butruysheim, my gardener, for soil from my border number six, fill a deep box with it, and plant in it these three bulbs. They will flower next May, that is to say, in seven months; and, when you see the flower forming on the stem, be careful at night to protect them from the wind, and by day to screen them from the sun. They will flower black, I am quite sure of it. You are then to apprise the President of the Haarlem Society. He will cause the color of the flower to be proved before a committee and these hundred thousand guilders will be paid to you."

Rosa heaved a deep sigh.

"And now," continued Cornelius, — wiping away a tear which was glistening in his eye, and which was shed much more for that marvellous black tulip which he was not to see than for the life which he was about to lose, — ”I have no wish left, except that the tulip should be called Rosa Barlaensis, that is to say, that its name should combine yours and mine; and as, of course, you do not understand Latin, and might therefore forget this name, try to get for me pencil and paper, that I may write it down for you.”

Rosa sobbed afresh, and handed to him a book, bound in shagreen, which bore the initials C. W.

“What is this?” asked the prisoner.

“Alas!” replied Rosa, “it is the Bible of your poor godfather, Cornelius de Witt. From it he derived strength to endure the torture, and to bear his sentence without flinching. I found it in this cell, after the death of the martyr, and have preserved it as a relic. To-day I brought it to you, for it seemed to me that this book must possess in itself a divine power. Write in it what you have to write, Mynheer Cornelius; and though, unfortunately, I am not able to read, I will take care that what you write shall be accomplished.”

Cornelius took the Bible, and kissed it reverently.

“With what shall I write?” asked Cornelius.

“There is a pencil in the Bible,” said Rosa.

This was the pencil which John de Witt had lent to his brother, and which he had forgotten to take away with him.

Cornelius took it, and on the second fly leaf (for it will be remembered that the first was torn out), drawing near his end like his godfather, he wrote with a no less firm hand: —

“On this day, the 23d of August, 1672, being on the point of rendering, although innocent, my soul to God on the scaffold, I bequeath to Rosa Gryphus the only worldly goods which remain to me of all that I have possessed in this world, the rest having been confiscated; I bequeath, I say, to Rosa Gryphus three bulbs, which I am convinced must produce, in the next May, the Grand Black Tulip for which a prize of a hundred thousand guilders has been offered by the Haarlem Society, requesting that she may be paid the same sum in my stead, as my sole heiress, under the only condition of her marrying a respectable young man of about my age, who loves her, and whom she loves, and of her giving the black tulip, which will constitute a new species, the name of Rosa Barlaensis, that is to say, hers and mine combined.

“So may God grant me mercy, and to her health and long life!

“Cornelius van Baerle.”

The prisoner then, giving the Bible to Rosa, said, —

“Read.”

“Alas!” she answered, “I have already told you I cannot read.”

Cornelius then read to Rosa the testament that he had just made.

The agony of the poor girl almost overpowered her.

“Do you accept my conditions?” asked the prisoner, with a melancholy smile, kissing the trembling hands of the afflicted girl.

“Oh, I don’t know, sir,” she stammered.

“You don’t know, child, and why not?”

“Because there is one condition which I am afraid I cannot keep.”

“Which? I should have thought that all was settled between us.”

“You give me the hundred thousand guilders as a marriage portion, don’t you?

“And under the condition of my marrying a man whom I love?”

“Certainly.”

“Well, then, sir, this money cannot belong to me. I shall never love any one; neither shall I marry.”

And, after having with difficulty uttered these words, Rosa almost swooned away in the violence of her grief.

Cornelius, frightened at seeing her so pale and sinking, was going to take her in his arms, when a heavy step, followed by other dismal sounds, was heard on the staircase, amidst the continued barking of the dog.

“They are coming to fetch you. Oh God! Oh God!” cried Rosa, wringing her hands. “And have you nothing more to tell me?”

She fell on her knees with her face buried in her hands and became almost senseless.

“I have only to say, that I wish you to preserve these bulbs as a most precious treasure, and carefully to treat them according to the directions I have given you. Do it for my sake, and now farewell, Rosa.”

“Yes, yes,” she said, without raising her head, “I will do anything you bid me, except marrying,” she added, in a low voice, “for that, oh! that is impossible for me.”

She then put the cherished treasure next her beating heart.

The noise on the staircase which Cornelius and Rosa had heard was caused by the Recorder, who was coming for the prisoner. He was followed by the executioner, by the soldiers who were to form the guard round the scaffold, and by some curious hangers-on of the prison.

Cornelius, without showing any weakness, but likewise without any bravado, received them rather as friends than as persecutors, and quietly submitted to all those preparations which these men were obliged to make in performance of their duty.

Then, casting a glance into the yard through the narrow iron-barred window of his cell, he perceived the scaffold, and, at twenty paces distant from it, the gibbet, from which, by order of the Stadtholder, the outraged remains of the two brothers De Witt had been taken down.

When the moment came to descend in order to follow the guards, Cornelius sought with his eyes the angelic look of Rosa, but he saw, behind the swords and halberds, only a form lying outstretched near a wooden bench, and a deathlike face half covered with long golden locks.

But Rosa, whilst falling down senseless, still obeying her friend, had pressed her hand on her velvet bodice and, forgetting everything in the world besides, instinctively grasped the precious deposit which Cornelius had intrusted to her care.

Leaving the cell, the young man could still see in the convulsively clinched fingers of Rosa the yellowish leaf from that Bible on which Cornelius de Witt had with such difficulty and pain written these few lines, which, if Van Baerle had read them, would undoubtedly have been the saving of a man and a tulip.

CHAPTER 12.

The Execution

Cornelius had not three hundred paces to walk outside the prison to reach the foot of the scaffold. At the bottom of the staircase, the dog quietly looked at him whilst he was passing; Cornelius even fancied he saw in the eyes of the monster a certain expression as it were of compassion.

The dog perhaps knew the condemned prisoners, and only bit those who left as free men.

The shorter the way from the door of the prison to the foot of the scaffold, the more fully, of course, it was crowded with curious people.

These were the same who, not satisfied with the blood which they had shed three days before, were now craving for a new victim.

And scarcely had Cornelius made his appearance than a fierce groan ran through the whole street, spreading all over the yard, and re-echoing from the streets which led to the scaffold, and which were likewise crowded with spectators.

The scaffold indeed looked like an islet at the confluence of several rivers.

In the midst of these threats, groans, and yells, Cornelius, very likely in order not to hear them, had buried himself in his own thoughts.

And what did he think of in his last melancholy journey?

Neither of his enemies, nor of his judges, nor of his executioners.

He thought of the beautiful tulips which he would see from heaven above, at Ceylon, or Bengal, or elsewhere, when he would be able to look with pity on this earth, where John and Cornelius de Witt had been murdered for having thought too much of politics, and where Cornelius van Baerle was about to be murdered for having thought too much of tulips.

“It is only one stroke of the axe,” said the philosopher to himself, “and my beautiful dream will begin to be realised.”

Only there was still a chance, just as it had happened before to M. de Chalais, to M. de Thou, and other slovenly executed people, that the headsman might inflict more than one stroke, that is to say, more than one martyrdom, on the poor tulip-fancier.

Yet, notwithstanding all this, Van Baerle mounted the scaffold not the less resolutely, proud of having been the friend of that illustrious John, and godson of that noble Cornelius de Witt, whom the ruffians, who were now crowding to witness his own doom, had torn to pieces and burnt three days before.

He knelt down, said his prayers, and observed, not without a feeling of sincere joy, that, laying his head on the block, and keeping his eyes open, he would be able to his last moment to see the grated window of the Buytenhof.

At length the fatal moment arrived, and Cornelius placed his chin on the cold damp block. But at this moment his eyes closed involuntarily, to receive more resolutely the terrible avalanche which was about to fall on his head, and to engulf his life.

A gleam like that of lightning passed across the scaffold: it was the executioner raising his sword.

Van Baerle bade farewell to the great black tulip, certain of awaking in another world full of light and glorious tints.

Three times he felt, with a shudder, the cold current of air from the knife near his neck, but what a surprise! he felt neither pain nor shock.

He saw no change in the colour of the sky, or of the world around him.

Then suddenly Van Baerle felt gentle hands raising him, and soon stood on his feet again, although trembling a little.

He looked around him. There was some one by his side, reading a large parchment, sealed with a huge seal of red wax.

And the same sun, yellow and pale, as it behooves a Dutch sun to be, was shining in the skies; and the same grated window looked down upon him from the Buytenhof; and the same rabble, no longer yelling, but completely thunderstruck, were staring at him from the streets below.

Van Baerle began to be sensible to what was going on around him.

His Highness, William, Prince of Orange, very likely afraid that Van Baerle’s blood would turn the scale of judgment against him, had compassionately taken into consideration his good character, and the apparent proofs of his innocence.

His Highness, accordingly, had granted him his life.

Cornelius at first hoped that the pardon would be complete, and that he would be restored to his full liberty and to his flower borders at Dort.

But Cornelius was mistaken. To use an expression of Madame de Sevigne, who wrote about the same time, “there was a postscript to the letter;” and the most important part of the letter was contained in the postscript.

In this postscript, William of Orange, Stadtholder of Holland, condemned Cornelius van Baerle to imprisonment for life. He was not sufficiently guilty to suffer death, but he was too much so to be set at liberty.

Cornelius heard this clause, but, the first feeling of vexation and disappointment over, he said to himself, —

“Never mind, all this is not lost yet; there is some good in this perpetual imprisonment; Rosa will be there, and also my three bulbs of the black tulip are there.”

But Cornelius forgot that the Seven Provinces had seven prisons, one for each, and that the board of the prisoner is anywhere else less expensive than at the Hague, which is a capital.

His Highness, who, as it seems, did not possess the means to feed Van Baerle at the Hague, sent him to undergo his perpetual imprisonment at the fortress of Loewestein, very near Dort, but, alas! also very far from it; for Loewestein, as the geographers tell us, is situated at the point of the islet which is formed by the confluence of the Waal and the Meuse, opposite Gorcum.

Van Baerle was sufficiently versed in the history of his country to know that the celebrated Grotius was confined in that castle after the death of Barneveldt; and that the States, in their generosity to the illustrious publicist, jurist, historian, poet, and divine, had granted to him for his daily maintenance the sum of twenty-four stivers.

“I,” said Van Baerle to himself, “I am worth much less than Grotius. They will hardly give me twelve stivers, and I shall live miserably; but never mind, at all events I shall live.”

Then suddenly a terrible thought struck him.

“Ah!” he exclaimed, “how damp and misty that part of the country is, and the soil so bad for the tulips! And then Rosa will not be at Loewestein!”

CHAPTER 13.

What was going on all this Time in the Mind of one of the Spectators

Whilst Cornelius was engaged with his own thoughts, a coach had driven up to the scaffold. This vehicle was for the prisoner. He was invited to enter it, and he obeyed.

His last look was towards the Buytenhof. He hoped to see at the window the face of Rosa, brightening up again.

But the coach was drawn by good horses, who soon carried Van Baerle away from among the shouts which the rabble roared in honour of the most magnanimous Stadtholder, mixing with it a spice of abuse against the brothers De Witt and the godson of Cornelius, who had just now been saved from death.

This reprieve suggested to the worthy spectators remarks such as the following: —

“It’s very fortunate that we used such speed in having justice done to that great villain John, and to that little rogue Cornelius, otherwise his Highness might have snatched them from us, just as he has done this fellow.”

Among all the spectators whom Van Baerle’s execution had attracted to the Buytenhof, and whom the sudden turn of affairs had disagreeably surprised, undoubtedly the one most disappointed was a certain respectably dressed burgher, who from early morning had made such a good use of his feet and elbows that he at last was separated from the scaffold only by the file of soldiers which surrounded it.

Many had shown themselves eager to see the perfidious blood of the guilty Cornelius flow, but not one had shown such a keen anxiety as the individual just alluded to.

The most furious had come to the Buytenhof at daybreak, to secure a better place; but he, outdoing even them, had passed the night at the threshold of the prison, from whence, as we have already said, he had advanced to the very foremost rank, unguibus et rostro, — that is to say, coaxing some, and kicking the others.

And when the executioner had conducted the prisoner to the scaffold, the burgher, who had mounted on the stone of the pump the better to see and be seen, made to the executioner a sign which meant, —

"It's a bargain, isn't it?"

The executioner answered by another sign, which was meant to say, —

"Be quiet, it's all right."

This burgher was no other than Mynheer Isaac Boxtel, who since the arrest of Cornelius had come to the Hague to try if he could not get hold of the three bulbs of the black tulip.

Boxtel had at first tried to gain over Gryphus to his interest, but the jailer had not only the snarling fierceness, but likewise the fidelity, of a dog. He had therefore bristled up at Boxtel's hatred, whom he had suspected to be a warm friend of the prisoner, making trifling inquiries to contrive with the more certainty some means of escape for him.

Thus to the very first proposals which Boxtel made to Gryphus to filch the bulbs which Cornelius van Baerle must be supposed to conceal, if not in his breast, at least in some corner of his cell, the surly jailer had only answered by kicking Mynheer Isaac out, and setting the dog at him.

The piece which the mastiff had torn from his hose did not discourage Boxtel. He came back to the charge, but this time Gryphus was in bed, feverish, and with a broken arm. He therefore was not able to admit the petitioner, who then addressed himself to Rosa, offering to buy her a head-dress of pure gold if she would get the bulbs for him. On this, the generous girl, although not yet knowing the value of the object of the robbery, which was to be so well remunerated, had directed the tempter to the executioner, as the heir of the prisoner.

In the meanwhile the sentence had been pronounced. Thus Isaac had no more time to bribe any one. He therefore clung to the idea which Rosa had suggested: he went to the executioner.

Isaac had not the least doubt that Cornelius would die with the bulbs on his heart.

But there were two things which Boxtel did not calculate upon: —

Rosa, that is to say, love;

William of Orange, that is to say, clemency.

But for Rosa and William, the calculations of the envious neighbour would have been correct.

But for William, Cornelius would have died.

But for Rosa, Cornelius would have died with his bulbs on his heart.

Mynheer Boxtel went to the headsman, to whom he gave himself out as a great friend of the condemned man; and from whom he bought all the clothes of the dead man that was to be, for one hundred guilders; rather an exorbitant sum, as he engaged to leave all the trinkets of gold and silver to the executioner.

But what was the sum of a hundred guilders to a man who was all but sure to buy with it the prize of the Haarlem Society?

It was money lent at a thousand per cent., which, as nobody will deny, was a very handsome investment.

The headsman, on the other hand, had scarcely anything to do to earn his hundred guilders. He needed only, as soon as the execution was over, to allow Mynheer Boxtel to ascend the scaffold with his servants, to remove the inanimate remains of his friend.

The thing was, moreover, quite customary among the “faithful brethren,” when one of their masters died a public death in the yard of the Buytenhof.

A fanatic like Cornelius might very easily have found another fanatic who would give a hundred guilders for his remains.

The executioner also readily acquiesced in the proposal, making only one condition, — that of being paid in advance.

Boxtel, like the people who enter a show at a fair, might be disappointed, and refuse to pay on going out.

Boxtel paid in advance, and waited.

After this, the reader may imagine how excited Boxtel was; with what anxiety he watched the guards, the Recorder, and the executioner; and with what intense interest he surveyed the movements of Van Baerle. How would he place himself on the block? how would he fall? and would he not, in falling, crush those inestimable bulbs? had not he at least taken care to enclose them in a golden box, — as gold is the hardest of all metals?

Every trifling delay irritated him. Why did that stupid executioner thus lose time in brandishing his sword over the head of Cornelius, instead of cutting that head off?

But when he saw the Recorder take the hand of the condemned, and raise him, whilst drawing forth the parchment from his pocket, — when he heard the pardon of the Stadtholder publicly read out, — then Boxtel was no more like a human being; the rage and malice of the tiger, of the hyena, and of the serpent glistened in his eyes, and vented itself in his yell and his movements. Had he been able to get at Van Baerle, he would have pounced upon him and strangled him.

And so, then, Cornelius was to live, and was to go with him to Loewestein, and thither to his prison he would take with him his bulbs; and perhaps he would even find a garden where the black tulip would flower for him.

Boxtel, quite overcome by his frenzy, fell from the stone upon some Orangemen, who, like him, were sorely vexed at the turn which affairs had taken. They, mistaking the frantic cries of Mynheer Isaac for demonstrations of joy, began to belabour him with kicks and cuffs, such as could not have been administered in better style by any prize-fighter on the other side of the Channel.

Blows were, however, nothing to him. He wanted to run after the coach which was carrying away Cornelius with his bulbs. But in his hurry he overlooked a paving-stone in his way, stumbled, lost his centre of gravity, rolled over to a distance of some yards, and only rose again, bruised and begrimed, after the whole rabble of the Hague, with their muddy feet, had passed over him.

One would think that this was enough for one day, but Mynheer Boxtel did not seem to think so, as, in addition to having his clothes torn, his back bruised, and his hands scratched, he inflicted upon himself the further punishment of tearing out his hair by handfuls, as an offering to that goddess of envy who, as mythology teaches us, wears a head-dress of serpents.

CHAPTER 14.

The Pigeons of Dort

It was indeed in itself a great honour for Cornelius van Baerle to be confined in the same prison which had once received the learned master Grotius.

But on arriving at the prison he met with an honour even greater. As chance would have it, the cell formerly inhabited by the illustrious Barneveldt happened to be vacant, when the clemency of the Prince of Orange sent the tulip-fancier Van Baerle there.

The cell had a very bad character at the castle since the time when Grotius, by means of the device of his wife, made escape from it in that famous book-chest which the jailers forgot to examine.

On the other hand, it seemed to Van Baerle an auspicious omen that this very cell was assigned to him, for according to his ideas, a jailer ought never to have given to a second pigeon the cage from which the first had so easily flown.

The cell had an historical character. We will only state here that, with the exception of an alcove which was contrived there for the use of Madame Grotius, it differed in no respect from the other cells of the prison; only, perhaps, it was a little higher, and had a splendid view from the grated window.

Cornelius felt himself perfectly indifferent as to the place where he had to lead an existence which was little more than vegetation. There were only two things now for which he cared, and the possession of which was a happiness enjoyed only in imagination.

A flower, and a woman; both of them, as he conceived, lost to him for ever.

Fortunately the good doctor was mistaken. In his prison cell the most adventurous life which ever fell to the lot of any tulip-fancier was reserved for him.

One morning, whilst at his window inhaling the fresh air which came from the river, and casting a longing look to the windmills of his dear old city Dort, which were looming in the distance behind a forest of chimneys, he saw flocks of pigeons coming from that quarter to perch fluttering on the pointed gables of Loewestein.

These pigeons, Van Baerle said to himself, are coming from Dort, and consequently may return there. By fastening a little note to the wing of one of these pigeons, one might have a chance to send a message there. Then, after a few moments' consideration, he exclaimed, —

"I will do it."

A man grows very patient who is twenty-eight years of age, and condemned to a prison for life, — that is to say, to something like twenty-two or twenty-three thousand days of captivity.

Van Baerle, from whose thoughts the three bulbs were never absent, made a snare for catching the pigeons, baiting the birds with all the resources of his kitchen, such as it was for eight slivers (sixpence English) a day; and, after a month of unsuccessful attempts, he at last caught a female bird.

It cost him two more months to catch a male bird; he then shut them up together, and having about the beginning of the year 1673 obtained some eggs from them, he released the female, which, leaving the male behind to hatch the eggs in her stead, flew joyously to Dort, with the note under her wing.

She returned in the evening. She had preserved the note.

Thus it went on for fifteen days, at first to the disappointment, and then to the great grief, of Van Baerle.

On the sixteenth day, at last, she came back without it.

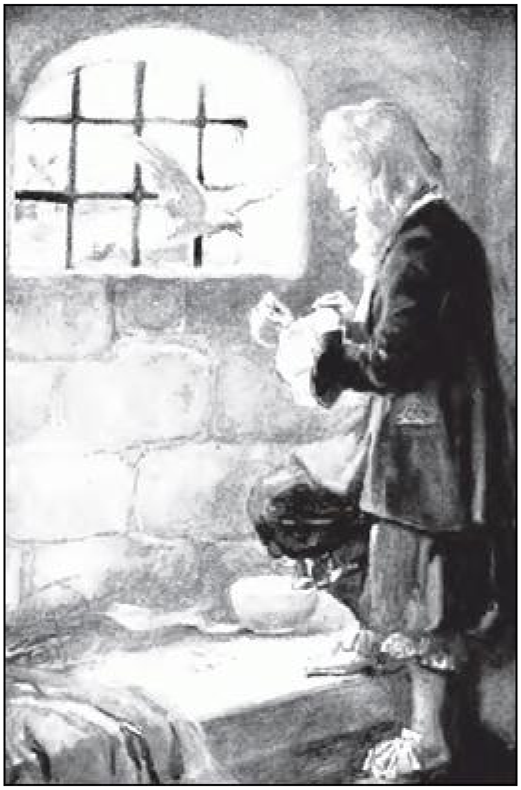

Van Baerle had addressed it to his nurse, the old Frisian woman; and implored any charitable soul who might find it to convey it to her as safely and as speedily as possible.

In this letter there was a little note enclosed for Rosa.

Van Baerle's nurse had received the letter in the following way.

Leaving Dort, Mynheer Isaac Boxtel had abandoned, not only his house, his servants, his observatory, and his telescope, but also his pigeons.

The servant, having been left without wages, first lived on his little savings, and then on his master's pigeons.

Seeing this, the pigeons emigrated from the roof of Isaac Boxtel to that of Cornelius van Baerle.

The nurse was a kind-hearted woman, who could not live without something to love. She conceived an affection for the pigeons which had thrown themselves on her hospitality; and when Boxtel's servant reclaimed them with culinary intentions, having eaten the first fifteen already, and now wishing to eat the other fifteen, she offered to buy them from him for a consideration of six stivers per head.

This being just double their value, the man was very glad to close the bargain, and the nurse found herself in undisputed possession of the pigeons of her master's envious neighbour.

In the course of their wanderings, these pigeons with others visited the Hague, Loewestein, and Rotterdam, seeking variety, doubtless, in the flavour of their wheat or hempseed.

Chance, or rather God, for we can see the hand of God in everything, had willed that Cornelius van Baerle should happen to hit upon one of these very pigeons.

Therefore, if the envious wretch had not left Dort to follow his rival to the Hague in the first place, and then to Gorcum or to Loewestein, — for the two places are separated only by the confluence of the Waal and the Meuse, — Van Baerle's letter would have fallen into his hands and not the nurse's: in which event the poor prisoner, like the raven of the Roman cobbler, would have thrown away his time, his trouble, and, instead of having to relate the series of exciting events which are about to flow from beneath our pen like the varied hues of a many coloured tapestry, we should have naught to describe but a weary waste of days, dull and melancholy and gloomy as night's dark mantle.

The note, as we have said, had reached Van Baerle's nurse.

And also it came to pass, that one evening in the beginning of February, just when the stars were beginning to twinkle, Cornelius heard on the staircase of the little turret a voice which thrilled through him.

He put his hand on his heart, and listened.

It was the sweet harmonious voice of Rosa.

Let us confess it, Cornelius was not so stupefied with surprise, or so beyond himself with joy, as he would have been but for the pigeon, which, in answer to his letter, had brought back hope to him under her empty wing; and, knowing Rosa, he expected, if the note had ever reached her, to hear of her whom he loved, and also of his three darling bulbs.

He rose, listened once more, and bent forward towards the door.

Yes, they were indeed the accents which had fallen so sweetly on his heart at the Hague.

The question now was, whether Rosa, who had made the journey from the Hague to Loewestein, and who — Cornelius did not understand how — had succeeded even in penetrating into the prison, would also be fortunate enough in penetrating to the prisoner himself.

Whilst Cornelius, debating this point within himself, was building all sorts of castles in the air, and was struggling between hope and fear, the shutter of the grating in the door opened, and Rosa, beaming with joy, and beautiful in her pretty national costume — but still more beautiful from the grief which for the last five months had blanched her cheeks — pressed her little face against the wire grating of the window, saying to him, —

“Oh, sir, sir! here I am!”

Cornelius stretched out his arms, and, looking to heaven, uttered a cry of joy, —

“Oh, Rosa, Rosa!”

“Hush! let us speak low: my father follows on my heels,” said the girl.

“Your father?”

“Yes, he is in the courtyard at the bottom of the staircase, receiving the instructions of the Governor; he will presently come up.”

“The instructions of the Governor?”

“Listen to me, I’ll try to tell you all in a few words. The Stadtholder has a country-house, one league distant from Leyden, properly speaking a kind of large dairy, and my aunt, who was his nurse, has the management of it. As soon as I received your letter, which, alas! I could not read myself, but which your housekeeper read to me, I hastened to my aunt; there I remained until the Prince should come to the dairy; and when he came, I asked him as a favour to allow my father to exchange his post at the prison of the Hague with the jailer of the fortress of Loewestein. The Prince could not have suspected my object; had he known it, he would have refused my request, but as it is he granted it.”

“And so you are here?”

“As you see.”

“And thus I shall see you every day?”

“As often as I can manage it.”

“Oh, Rosa, my beautiful Rosa, do you love me a little?”

“A little?” she said, “you make no great pretensions, Mynheer Cornelius.”

Cornelius tenderly stretched out his hands towards her, but they were only able to touch each other with the tips of their fingers through the wire grating.

“Here is my father,” said she.

Rosa then abruptly drew back from the door, and ran to meet old Gryphus, who made his appearance at the top of the staircase.

CHAPTER 15.

The Little Grated Window

Gryphus was followed by the mastiff.

The turnkey took the animal round the jail, so that, if needs be, he might recognize the prisoners.

“Father,” said Rosa, “here is the famous prison from which Mynheer Grotius escaped. You know Mynheer Grotius?”

“Oh, yes, that rogue Grotius, a friend of that villain Barneveldt, whom I saw executed when I was a child. Ah! so Grotius; and that’s the chamber from which he escaped. Well, I’ll answer for it that no one shall escape after him in my time.”

And thus opening the door, he began in the dark to talk to the prisoner.

The dog, on his part, went up to the prisoner, and, growling, smelled about his legs just as though to ask him what right he had still to be alive, after having left the prison in the company of the Recorder and the executioner.

But the fair Rosa called him to her side.

“Well, my master,” said Gryphus, holding up his lantern to throw a little light around, “you see in me your new jailer. I am head turnkey, and have all the cells under my care. I am not vicious, but I’m not to be trifled with, as far as discipline goes.”

“My good Master Gryphus, I know you perfectly well,” said the prisoner, approaching within the circle of light cast around by the lantern.

“Halloa! that’s you, Mynheer van Baerle,” said Gryphus. “That’s you; well, I declare, it’s astonishing how people do meet.”

“Oh, yes; and it’s really a great pleasure to me, good Master Gryphus, to see that your arm is doing well, as you are able to hold your lantern with it.”

Gryphus knitted his brow. “Now, that’s just it,” he said, “people always make blunders in politics. His Highness has granted you your life; I’m sure I should never have done so.”

“Don’t say so,” replied Cornelius; “why not?”

“Because you are the very man to conspire again. You learned people have dealings with the devil.”

“Nonsense, Master Gryphus. Are you dissatisfied with the manner in which I have set your arm, or with the price that I asked you?” said Cornelius, laughing.

“On the contrary,” growled the jailer, “you have set it only too well. There is some witchcraft in this. After six weeks, I was able to use it as if nothing had happened, so much so, that the doctor of the Buytenhof, who knows his trade well, wanted to break it again, to set it in the regular way, and promised me that I should have my blessed three months for my money before I should be able to move it.”

“And you did not want that?”

“I said, ‘Nay, as long as I can make the sign of the cross with that arm’ (Gryphus was a Roman Catholic), ‘I laugh at the devil.’“

“But if you laugh at the devil, Master Gryphus, you ought with so much more reason to laugh at learned people.”

“Ah, learned people, learned people! Why, I would rather have to guard ten soldiers than one scholar. The soldiers smoke, guzzle, and get drunk; they are gentle as lambs if you only give them brandy or Moselle, but scholars, and drink, smoke, and fuddle — ah, yes, that’s altogether different. They keep sober, spend nothing, and have their heads always clear to make conspiracies. But I tell you, at the very outset, it won’t be such an easy matter for you to conspire. First of all, you will have no books, no paper, and no conjuring book. It’s books that helped Mynheer Grotius to get off.”

“I assure you, Master Gryphus,” replied Van Baerle, “that if I have entertained the idea of escaping, I most decidedly have it no longer.”

“Well, well,” said Gryphus, “just look sharp: that’s what I shall do also. But, for all that, I say his Highness has made a great mistake.”

“Not to have cut off my head? thank you, Master Gryphus.”

“Just so, look whether the Mynheer de Witt don’t keep very quiet now.”

“That’s very shocking what you say now, Master Gryphus,” cried Van Baerle, turning away his head to conceal his disgust. “You forget that one of those unfortunate gentlemen was my friend, and the other my second father.”

“Yes, but I also remember that the one, as well as the other, was a conspirator. And, moreover, I am speaking from Christian charity.”

“Oh, indeed! explain that a little to me, my good Master Gryphus. I do not quite understand it.”

“Well, then, if you had remained on the block of Master Harbruck — —”

“What?”

“You would not suffer any longer; whereas, I will not disguise it from you, I shall lead you a sad life of it.”

“Thank you for the promise, Master Gryphus.”

And whilst the prisoner smiled ironically at the old jailer, Rosa, from the outside, answered by a bright smile, which carried sweet consolation to the heart of Van Baerle.

Gryphus stepped towards the window.

It was still light enough to see, although indistinctly, through the gray haze of the evening, the vast expanse of the horizon.

“What view has one from here?” asked Gryphus.

“Why, a very fine and pleasant one,” said Cornelius, looking at Rosa.

“Yes, yes, too much of a view, too much.”

And at this moment the two pigeons, scared by the sight and especially by the voice of the stranger, left their nest, and disappeared, quite frightened in the evening mist.

“Halloa! what’s this?” cried Gryphus.

“My pigeons,” answered Cornelius.

“Your pigeons,” cried the jailer, “your pigeons! has a prisoner anything of his own?”

“Why, then,” said Cornelius, “the pigeons which a merciful Father in Heaven has lent to me.”

“So, here we have a breach of the rules already,” replied Gryphus. “Pigeons! ah, young man, young man! I’ll tell you one thing, that before to-morrow is over, your pigeons will boil in my pot.”

“First of all you should catch them, Master Gryphus. You won’t allow these pigeons to be mine! Well, I vow they are even less yours than mine.”

“Omittance is no acquittance,” growled the jailer, “and I shall certainly wring their necks before twenty-four hours are over: you may be sure of that.”

Whilst giving utterance to this ill-natured promise, Gryphus put his head out of the window to examine the nest. This gave Van Baerle time to run to the door, and squeeze the hand of Rosa, who whispered to him, —

“At nine o’clock this evening.”

Gryphus, quite taken up with the desire of catching the pigeons next day, as he had promised he would do, saw and heard nothing of this short interlude; and, after having closed the window, he took the arm of his daughter, left the cell, turned the key twice, drew the bolts, and went off to make the same kind promise to the other prisoners.

He had scarcely withdrawn, when Cornelius went to the door to listen to the sound of his footsteps, and, as soon as they had died away, he ran to the window, and completely demolished the nest of the pigeons.

Rather than expose them to the tender mercies of his bullying jailer, he drove away for ever those gentle messengers to whom he owed the happiness of having seen Rosa again.

This visit of the jailer, his brutal threats, and the gloomy prospect of the harshness with which, as he had before experienced, Gryphus watched his prisoners, — all this was unable to extinguish in Cornelius the sweet thoughts, and especially the sweet hope, which the presence of Rosa had reawakened in his heart.

He waited eagerly to hear the clock of the tower of Loewestein strike nine.

The last chime was still vibrating through the air, when Cornelius heard on the staircase the light step and the rustle of the flowing dress of the fair Frisian maid, and soon after a light appeared at the little grated window in the door, on which the prisoner fixed his earnest gaze.

The shutter opened on the outside.

“Here I am,” said Rosa, out of breath from running up the stairs, “here I am.”

“Oh, my good Rosa.”

“You are then glad to see me?”

“Can you ask? But how did you contrive to get here? tell me.”

“Now listen to me. My father falls asleep every evening almost immediately after his supper; I then make him lie down, a little stupefied with his gin. Don’t say anything about it, because, thanks to this nap, I shall be able to come every evening and chat for an hour with you.”

“Oh, I thank you, Rosa, dear Rosa.”

Saying these words, Cornelius put his face so near the little window that Rosa withdrew hers.

“I have brought back to you your bulbs.”

Cornelius's heart leaped with joy. He had not yet dared to ask Rosa what she had done with the precious treasure which he had intrusted to her.

"Oh, you have preserved them, then?"

"Did you not give them to me as a thing which was dear to you?"

"Yes, but as I have given them to you, it seems to me that they belong to you."

"They would have belonged to me after your death, but, fortunately, you are alive now. Oh how I blessed his Highness in my heart! If God grants to him all the happiness that I have wished him, certainly Prince William will be the happiest man on earth. When I looked at the Bible of your godfather Cornelius, I was resolved to bring back to you your bulbs, only I did not know how to accomplish it. I had, however, already formed the plan of going to the Stadtholder, to ask from him for my father the appointment of jailer of Loewestein, when your housekeeper brought me your letter. Oh, how we wept together! But your letter only confirmed me the more in my resolution. I then left for Leyden, and the rest you know."

"What, my dear Rosa, you thought, even before receiving my letter, of coming to meet me again?"

"If I thought of it," said Rosa, allowing her love to get the better of her bashfulness, "I thought of nothing else."

And, saying these words, Rosa looked so exceedingly pretty, that for the second time Cornelius placed his forehead and lips against the wire grating; of course, we must presume with the laudable desire to thank the young lady.

Rosa, however, drew back as before.

"In truth," she said, with that coquetry which somehow or other is in the heart of every young girl, "I have often been sorry that I am not able to read, but never so much so as when your housekeeper brought me your letter. I kept the paper in my hands, which spoke to other people, and which was dumb to poor stupid me."

"So you have often regretted not being able to read," said Cornelius. "I should just like to know on what occasions."

"Troth," she said, laughing, "to read all the letters which were written to me."

"Oh, you received letters, Rosa?"

"By hundreds."

"But who wrote to you?"

“Who! why, in the first place, all the students who passed over the Buytenhof, all the officers who went to parade, all the clerks, and even the merchants who saw me at my little window.”

“And what did you do with all these notes, my dear Rosa?”

“Formerly,” she answered, “I got some friend to read them to me, which was capital fun, but since a certain time — well, what use is it to attend to all this nonsense? — since a certain time I have burnt them.”

“Since a certain time!” exclaimed Cornelius, with a look beaming with love and joy.

Rosa cast down her eyes, blushing. In her sweet confusion, she did not observe the lips of Cornelius, which, alas! only met the cold wire-grating. Yet, in spite of this obstacle, they communicated to the lips of the young girl the glowing breath of the most tender kiss.

At this sudden outburst of tenderness, Rosa grew very pale, — perhaps paler than she had been on the day of the execution. She uttered a plaintive sob, closed her fine eyes, and fled, trying in vain to still the beating of her heart.

And thus Cornelius was again alone.

Rosa had fled so precipitately, that she completely forgot to return to Cornelius the three bulbs of the Black Tulip.

CHAPTER 16.

Master and Pupil

The worthy Master Gryphus, as the reader may have seen, was far from sharing the kindly feeling of his daughter for the godson of Cornelius de Witt.

There being only five prisoners at Loewestein, the post of turnkey was not a very onerous one, but rather a sort of sinecure, given after a long period of service.

But the worthy jailer, in his zeal, had magnified with all the power of his imagination the importance of his office. To him Cornelius had swelled to the gigantic proportions of a criminal of the first order. He looked upon him, therefore, as the most dangerous of all his prisoners. He watched all his steps, and always spoke to him with an angry countenance; punishing him for what he called his dreadful rebellion against such a clement prince as the Stadtholder.

Three times a day he entered Van Baerle’s cell, expecting to find him trespassing; but Cornelius had ceased to correspond, since his correspondent was at hand. It is even probable that, if Cornelius had obtained his full liberty, with permission to go wherever he liked, the prison, with Rosa and his bulbs, would have appeared to him preferable to any other habitation in the world without Rosa and his bulbs.

Rosa, in fact, had promised to come and see him every evening, and from the first evening she had kept her word.

On the following evening she went up as before, with the same mysteriousness and the same precaution. Only she had this time resolved within herself not to approach too near the grating. In order, however, to engage Van Baerle in a conversation from the very first which would seriously occupy his attention, she tendered to him through the grating the three bulbs, which were still wrapped up in the same paper.

But to the great astonishment of Rosa, Van Baerle pushed back her white hand with the tips of his fingers.

The young man had been considering about the matter.

"Listen to me," he said. "I think we should risk too much by embarking our whole fortune in one ship. Only think, my dear Rosa, that the question is to carry out an enterprise which until now has been considered impossible, namely, that of making the great black tulip flower. Let us, therefore, take every possible precaution, so that in case of a failure we may not have anything to reproach ourselves with. I will now tell you the way I have traced out for us."

Rosa was all attention to what he would say, much more on account of the importance which the unfortunate tulip-fancier attached to it, than that she felt interested in the matter herself.

"I will explain to you, Rosa," he said. "I dare say you have in this fortress a small garden, or some courtyard, or, if not that, at least some terrace."

"We have a very fine garden," said Rosa, "it runs along the edge of the Waal, and is full of fine old trees."

"Could you bring me some soil from the garden, that I may judge?"

"I will do so to-morrow."

"Take some from a sunny spot, and some from a shady, so that I may judge of its properties in a dry and in a moist state."

"Be assured I shall."

"After having chosen the soil, and, if it be necessary, modified it, we will divide our three bulbs; you will take one and plant it, on the day that I will tell you, in the soil chosen by me. It is sure to flower, if you tend it according to my directions."

"I will not lose sight of it for a minute."

"You will give me another, which I will try to grow here in my cell, and which will help me to beguile those long weary hours when I cannot see you. I confess to you I have very little hope for the latter one, and I look beforehand on this unfortunate bulb as sacrificed to my selfishness. However, the sun sometimes visits me. I will, besides, try to convert everything into an artificial help, even the heat and the ashes of my pipe, and lastly, we, or rather you, will keep in reserve the third sucker as our last resource, in case our first two experiments should prove a failure. In this manner, my dear Rosa, it is impossible that we should not succeed in gaining the hundred thousand guilders for your marriage portion; and how dearly shall we enjoy that supreme happiness of seeing our work brought to a successful issue!"

"I know it all now," said Rosa. "I will bring you the soil to-morrow, and you will choose it for your bulb and for mine. As to that in which yours is to grow, I shall have several journeys to convey it to you, as I cannot bring much at a time."

"There is no hurry for it, dear Rosa; our tulips need not be put into the ground for a month at least. So you see we have plenty of time before us. Only I hope that, in planting your bulb, you will strictly follow all my instructions."

"I promise you I will."

"And when you have once planted it, you will communicate to me all the circumstances which may interest our nursling; such as change of weather, footprints on the walks, or footprints in the borders. You will listen at night whether our garden is not resorted to by cats. A couple of those untoward animals laid waste two of my borders at Dort."

"I will listen."

"On moonlight nights have you ever looked at your garden, my dear child?"

"The window of my sleeping-room overlooks it."

"Well, on moonlight nights you will observe whether any rats come out from the holes in the wall. The rats are most mischievous by their gnawing everything; and I have heard unfortunate tulip-growers complain most bitterly of Noah for having put a couple of rats in the ark."

"I will observe, and if there are cats or rats — — "

"You will apprise me of it, — that's right. And, moreover," Van Baerle, having become mistrustful in his captivity, continued, "there is an animal much more to be feared than even the cat or the rat."

"What animal?"

"Man. You comprehend, my dear Rosa, a man may steal a guilder, and risk the prison for such a trifle, and, consequently, it is much more likely that some one might steal a hundred thousand guilders."

"No one ever enters the garden but myself."

"Thank you, thank you, my dear Rosa. All the joy of my life has still to come from you."

And as the lips of Van Baerle approached the grating with the same ardor as the day before, and as, moreover, the hour for retiring had struck, Rosa drew back her head, and stretched out her hand.

In this pretty little hand, of which the coquettish damsel was particularly proud, was the bulb.

Cornelius kissed most tenderly the tips of her fingers. Did he do so because the hand kept one of the bulbs of the great black tulip, or because this hand was Rosa's? We shall leave this point to the decision of wiser heads than ours.

Rosa withdrew with the other two suckers, pressing them to her heart.

Did she press them to her heart because they were the bulbs of the great black tulip, or because she had them from Cornelius?

This point, we believe, might be more readily decided than the other.

However that may have been, from that moment life became sweet, and again full of interest to the prisoner.

Rosa, as we have seen, had returned to him one of the suckers.

Every evening she brought to him, handful by handful, a quantity of soil from that part of the garden which he had found to be the best, and which, indeed, was excellent.

A large jug, which Cornelius had skilfully broken, did service as a flower-pot. He half filled it, and mixed the earth of the garden with a small portion of dried river mud, a mixture which formed an excellent soil.

Then, at the beginning of April, he planted his first sucker in that jug.

Not a day passed on which Rosa did not come to have her chat with Cornelius.

The tulips, concerning whose cultivation Rosa was taught all the mysteries of the art, formed the principal topic of the conversation; but, interesting as the subject was, people cannot always talk about tulips.

They therefore began to chat also about other things, and the tulip-fancier found out to his great astonishment what a vast range of subjects a conversation may comprise.

Only Rosa had made it a habit to keep her pretty face invariably six inches distant from the grating, having perhaps become distrustful of herself.

There was one thing especially which gave Cornelius almost as much anxiety as his bulbs — a subject to which he always returned — the dependence of Rosa on her father.

Indeed, Van Baerle's happiness depended on the whim of this man. He might one day find Loewestein dull, or the air of the place unhealthy, or the gin bad, and leave the fortress, and take his daughter with him, when Cornelius and Rosa would again be separated.

"Of what use would the carrier pigeons then be?" said Cornelius to Rosa, "as you, my dear girl, would not be able to read what I should write to you, nor to write to me your thoughts in return."

"Well," answered Rosa, who in her heart was as much afraid of a separation as Cornelius himself, "we have one hour every evening, let us make good use of it."

"I don't think we make such a bad use of it as it is."

"Let us employ it even better," said Rosa, smiling. "Teach me to read and write. I shall make the best of your lessons, believe me; and, in this way, we shall never be separated any more, except by our own will."

"Oh, then, we have an eternity before us," said Cornelius.

Rosa smiled, and quietly shrugged her shoulders.

"Will you remain for ever in prison?" she said, "and after having granted you your life, will not his Highness also grant you your liberty? And will you not then recover your fortune, and be a rich man, and then, when you are driving in your own coach, riding your own horse, will you still look at poor Rosa, the daughter of a jailer, scarcely better than a hangman?"

Cornelius tried to contradict her, and certainly he would have done so with all his heart, and with all the sincerity of a soul full of love.

She, however, smilingly interrupted him, saying, "How is your tulip going on?"

To speak to Cornelius of his tulip was an expedient resorted to by her to make him forget everything, even Rosa herself.

"Very well, indeed," he said, "the coat is growing black, the sprouting has commenced, the veins of the bulb are swelling, in eight days hence, and perhaps sooner, we may distinguish the first buds of the leaves protruding. And yours Rosa?"

"Oh, I have done things on a large scale, and according to your directions."

"Now, let me hear, Rosa, what you have done," said Cornelius, with as tender an anxiety as he had lately shown to herself.

"Well," she said, smiling, for in her own heart she could not help studying this double love of the prisoner for herself and for the black tulip, "I have done things on a large scale; I have prepared a bed as you described it to me, on a clear spot, far from trees and walls, in a soil slightly mixed with sand, rather moist than dry without a fragment of stone or pebble."

"Well done, Rosa, well done."

"I am now only waiting for your further orders to put in the bulb, you know that I must be behindhand with you, as I have in my favour all the chances of good air, of the sun, and abundance of moisture."

"All true, all true," exclaimed Cornelius, clapping his hands with joy, "you are a good pupil, Rosa, and you are sure to gain your hundred thousand guilders."

"Don't forget," said Rosa, smiling, "that your pupil, as you call me, has still other things to learn besides the cultivation of tulips."

"Yes, yes, and I am as anxious as you are, Rosa, that you should learn to read."

"When shall we begin?"

"At once."

"No, to-morrow."

"Why to-morrow?"

"Because to-day our hour is expired, and I must leave you."

"Already? But what shall we read?"

"Oh," said Rosa, "I have a book, — a book which I hope will bring us luck."

"To-morrow, then."

"Yes, to-morrow."

On the following evening Rosa returned with the Bible of Cornelius de Witt.

CHAPTER 17.

The First Bulb

On the following evening, as we have said, Rosa returned with the Bible of Cornelius de Witt.

Then began between the master and the pupil one of those charming scenes which are the delight of the novelist who has to describe them.

The grated window, the only opening through which the two lovers were able to communicate, was too high for conveniently reading a book, although it had been quite convenient for them to read each other's faces.

Rosa therefore had to press the open book against the grating edgewise, holding above it in her right hand the lamp, but Cornelius hit upon the lucky idea of fixing it to the bars, so as to afford her a little rest. Rosa was then enabled to follow with her finger the letters and syllables, which she was to spell for Cornelius, who with a straw pointed out the letters to his attentive pupil through the holes of the grating.

The light of the lamp illuminated the rich complexion of Rosa, her blue liquid eyes, and her golden hair under her head-dress of gold brocade, with her fingers held up, and showing in the blood, as it flowed downwards in the veins that pale pink hue which shines before the light owing to the living transparency of the flesh tint.

Rosa's intellect rapidly developed itself under the animating influence of Cornelius, and when the difficulties seemed too arduous, the sympathy of two loving hearts seemed to smooth them away.

And Rosa, after having returned to her room, repeated in her solitude the reading lessons, and at the same time recalled all the delight which she had felt whilst receiving them.

One evening she came half an hour later than usual. This was too extraordinary an instance not to call forth at once Cornelius's inquiries after its cause.

"Oh! do not be angry with me," she said, "it is not my fault. My father has renewed an acquaintance with an old crony who used to visit him at the Hague, and to ask him to let him see the prison. He is a good sort of fellow, fond of his bottle, tells funny stories, and moreover is very free with his money, so as always to be ready to stand a treat."

"You don't know anything further of him?" asked Cornelius, surprised.

"No," she answered; "it's only for about a fortnight that my father has taken such a fancy to this friend who is so assiduous in visiting him."

"Ah, so," said Cornelius, shaking his head uneasily as every new incident seemed to him to forebode some catastrophe; "very likely some spy, one of those who are sent into jails to watch both prisoners and their keepers."

"I don't believe that," said Rosa, smiling; "if that worthy person is spying after any one, it is certainly not after my father."

"After whom, then?"

"Me, for instance."

"You?"

"Why not?" said Rosa, smiling.

"Ah, that's true," Cornelius observed, with a sigh. "You will not always have suitors in vain; this man may become your husband."

"I don't say anything to the contrary."

"What cause have you to entertain such a happy prospect?"

"Rather say, this fear, Mynheer Cornelius."

"Thank you, Rosa, you are right; well, I will say then, this fear?"

"I have only this reason — — "

"Tell me, I am anxious to hear."

"This man came several times before to the Buytenhof, at the Hague. I remember now, it was just about the time when you were confined there. When I left, he left too; when I came here, he came after me. At the Hague his pretext was that he wanted to see you."

"See me?"

"Yes, it must have undoubtedly been only a pretext for now, when he could plead the same reason, as you are my father's prisoner again, he does not care any longer for you; quite the contrary, — I heard him say to my father only yesterday that he did not know you."

"Go on, Rosa, pray do, that I may guess who that man is, and what he wants."

"Are you quite sure, Mynheer Cornelius, that none of your friends can interest himself for you?"

"I have no friends, Rosa; I have only my old nurse, whom you know, and who knows you. Alas, poor Sue! she would come herself, and use no roundabout ways. She would at once say to your father, or to you, ‘My good sir, or my good miss, my child is here; see how grieved I am; let me see him only for one hour, and I’ll pray for you as long as I live.’ No, no,” continued Cornelius; “with the exception of my poor old Sue, I have no friends in this world.”

“Then I come back to what I thought before; and the more so as last evening at sunset, whilst I was arranging the border where I am to plant your bulb, I saw a shadow gliding between the alder trees and the aspens. I did not appear to see him, but it was this man. He concealed himself and saw me digging the ground, and certainly it was me whom he followed, and me whom he was spying after. I could not move my rake, or touch one atom of soil, without his noticing it.”

“Oh, yes, yes, he is in love with you,” said Cornelius. “Is he young? Is he handsome?”

Saying this he looked anxiously at Rosa, eagerly waiting for her answer.

“Young? handsome?” cried Rosa, bursting into a laugh. “He is hideous to look at; crooked, nearly fifty years of age, and never dares to look me in the face, or to speak, except in an undertone.”

“And his name?”

“Jacob Gisels.”

“I don’t know him.”

“Then you see that, at all events, he does not come after you.”

“At any rate, if he loves you, Rosa, which is very likely, as to see you is to love you, at least you don’t love him.”

“To be sure I don’t.”

“Then you wish me to keep my mind easy?”

“I should certainly ask you to do so.”

“Well, then, now as you begin to know how to read you will read all that I write to you of the pangs of jealousy and of absence, won’t you, Rosa?”

“I shall read it, if you write with good big letters.”

Then, as the turn which the conversation took began to make Rosa uneasy, she asked, —

“By the bye, how is your tulip going on?”

“Oh, Rosa, only imagine my joy, this morning I looked at it in the sun, and after having moved the soil aside which covers the bulb, I saw the first sprouting of the leaves. This small germ has caused me a much greater emotion than the order of his Highness which turned aside the sword already raised at the Buytenhof."

"You hope, then?" said Rosa, smiling.

"Yes, yes, I hope."

"And I, in my turn, when shall I plant my bulb?"

"Oh, the first favourable day I will tell you; but, whatever you do, let nobody help you, and don't confide your secret to any one in the world; do you see, a connoisseur by merely looking at the bulb would be able to distinguish its value; and so, my dearest Rosa, be careful in locking up the third sucker which remains to you."

"It is still wrapped up in the same paper in which you put it, and just as you gave it me. I have laid it at the bottom of my chest under my point lace, which keeps it dry, without pressing upon it. But good night, my poor captive gentleman."

"How? already?"

"It must be, it must be."

"Coming so late and going so soon."

"My father might grow impatient not seeing me return, and that precious lover might suspect a rival."

Here she listened uneasily.

"What is it?" asked Van Baerle. "I thought I heard something."

"What, then?"

"Something like a step, creaking on the staircase."

"Surely," said the prisoner, "that cannot be Master Gryphus, he is always heard at a distance."

"No, it is not my father, I am quite sure, but — — "

"But?"

"But it might be Mynheer Jacob."

Rosa rushed toward the staircase, and a door was really heard rapidly to close before the young damsel had got down the first ten steps.

Cornelius was very uneasy about it, but it was after all only a prelude to greater anxieties.

The flowing day passed without any remarkable incident. Gryphus made his three visits, and discovered nothing. He never came at the same hours as he hoped thus to discover the secrets of the prisoner. Van Baerle, therefore, had devised a contrivance, a sort of pulley, by means of which he was able to lower or to raise his jug below the ledge of tiles and stone before his window. The strings by which this was effected he had found means to cover with that moss which generally grows on tiles, or in the crannies of the walls.

Gryphus suspected nothing, and the device succeeded for eight days. One morning, however, when Cornelius, absorbed in the contemplation of his bulb, from which a germ of vegetation was already peeping forth, had not heard old Gryphus coming upstairs as a gale of wind was blowing which shook the whole tower, the door suddenly opened.

Gryphus, perceiving an unknown and consequently a forbidden object in the hands of his prisoner, pounced upon it with the same rapidity as the hawk on its prey.

As ill luck would have it, his coarse, hard hand, the same which he had broken, and which Cornelius van Baerle had set so well, grasped at once in the midst of the jug, on the spot where the bulb was lying in the soil.

“What have you got here?” he roared. “Ah! have I caught you?” and with this he grabbed in the soil.

“I? nothing, nothing,” cried Cornelius, trembling.

“Ah! have I caught you? a jug and earth in it There is some criminal secret at the bottom of all this.”

“Oh, my good Master Gryphus,” said Van Baerle, imploringly, and anxious as the partridge robbed of her young by the reaper.

In fact, Gryphus was beginning to dig the soil with his crooked fingers.

“Take care, sir, take care,” said Cornelius, growing quite pale.

“Care of what? Zounds! of what?” roared the jailer.

“Take care, I say, you will crush it, Master Gryphus.”

And with a rapid and almost frantic movement he snatched the jug from the hands of Gryphus, and hid it like a treasure under his arms.

But Gryphus, obstinate, like an old man, and more and more convinced that he was discovering here a conspiracy against the Prince of Orange, rushed up to his prisoner, raising his stick; seeing, however, the impassible resolution of the captive to protect his flower-pot he was convinced that Cornelius trembled much less for his head than for his jug.

He therefore tried to wrest it from him by force.

“Halloa!” said the jailer, furious, “here, you see, you are rebelling.”

“Leave me my tulip,” cried Van Baerle.

“Ah, yes, tulip,” replied the old man, “we know well the shifts of prisoners.”

“But I vow to you — — ”

“Let go,” repeated Gryphus, stamping his foot, “let go, or I shall call the guard.”

“Call whoever you like, but you shall not have this flower except with my life.”

Gryphus, exasperated, plunged his finger a second time into the soil, and now he drew out the bulb, which certainly looked quite black; and whilst Van Baerle, quite happy to have saved the vessel, did not suspect that the adversary had possessed himself of its precious contents, Gryphus hurled the softened bulb with all his force on the flags, where almost immediately after it was crushed to atoms under his heavy shoe.

Van Baerle saw the work of destruction, got a glimpse of the juicy remains of his darling bulb, and, guessing the cause of the ferocious joy of Gryphus, uttered a cry of agony, which would have melted the heart even of that ruthless jailer who some years before killed Pelisson’s spider.

The idea of striking down this spiteful bully passed like lightning through the brain of the tulip-fancier. The blood rushed to his brow, and seemed like fire in his eyes, which blinded him, and he raised in his two hands the heavy jug with all the now useless earth which remained in it. One instant more, and he would have flung it on the bald head of old Gryphus.

But a cry stopped him; a cry of agony, uttered by poor Rosa, who, trembling and pale, with her arms raised to heaven, made her appearance behind the grated window, and thus interposed between her father and her friend.

Gryphus then understood the danger with which he had been threatened, and he broke out in a volley of the most terrible abuse.

“Indeed,” said Cornelius to him, “you must be a very mean and spiteful fellow to rob a poor prisoner of his only consolation, a tulip bulb.”

“For shame, my father,” Rosa chimed in, “it is indeed a crime you have committed here.”

“Ah, is that you, my little chatter-box?” the old man cried, boiling with rage and turning towards her; “don’t you meddle with what don’t concern you, but go down as quickly as possible.”

“Unfortunate me,” continued Cornelius, overwhelmed with grief.

“After all, it is but a tulip,” Gryphus resumed, as he began to be a little ashamed of himself. “You may have as many tulips as you like: I have three hundred of them in my loft.”

“To the devil with your tulips!” cried Cornelius; “you are worthy of each other: had I a hundred thousand millions of them, I would gladly give them for the one which you have just destroyed.”

“Oh, so!” Gryphus said, in a tone of triumph; “now there we have it. It was not your tulip you cared for. There was in that false bulb some witchcraft, perhaps some means of correspondence with conspirators against his Highness who has granted you your life. I always said they were wrong in not cutting your head off.”

“Father, father!” cried Rosa.

“Yes, yes! it is better as it is now,” repeated Gryphus, growing warm; “I have destroyed it, and I’ll do the same again, as often as you repeat the trick. Didn’t I tell you, my fine fellow, that I would make your life a hard one?”

“A curse on you!” Cornelius exclaimed, quite beyond himself with despair, as he gathered, with his trembling fingers, the remnants of that bulb on which he had rested so many joys and so many hopes.

“We shall plant the other to-morrow, my dear Mynheer Cornelius,” said Rosa, in a low voice, who understood the intense grief of the unfortunate tulip-fancier, and who, with the pure sacred love of her innocent heart, poured these kind words, like a drop of balm, on the bleeding wounds of Cornelius.

CHAPTER 18.

Rosa’s Lover

Rosa had scarcely pronounced these consolatory words when a voice was heard from the staircase asking Gryphus how matters were going on.

“Do you hear, father?” said Rosa.

“What?”

“Master Jacob calls you, he is uneasy.”

“There was such a noise,” said Gryphus; “wouldn’t you have thought he would murder me, this doctor? They are always very troublesome fellows, these scholars.”

Then, pointing with his finger towards the staircase, he said to Rosa: “Just lead the way, Miss.”

After this he locked the door and called out: “I shall be with you directly, friend Jacob.”

Poor Cornelius, thus left alone with his bitter grief, muttered to himself, —

“Ah, you old hangman! it is me you have trodden under foot; you have murdered me; I shall not survive it.”

And certainly the unfortunate prisoner would have fallen ill but for the counterpoise which Providence had granted to his grief, and which was called Rosa.

In the evening she came back. Her first words announced to Cornelius that henceforth her father would make no objection to his cultivating flowers.

“And how do you know that?” the prisoner asked, with a doleful look.

“I know it because he has said so.”

“To deceive me, perhaps.”

“No, he repents.”

“Ah yes! but too late.”

“This repentance is not of himself.”

“And who put it into him?”

“If you only knew how his friend scolded him!”

“Ah, Master Jacob; he does not leave you, then, that Master Jacob?”

“At any rate, he leaves us as little as he can help.”

Saying this, she smiled in such a way that the little cloud of jealousy which had darkened the brow of Cornelius speedily vanished.

“How was it?” asked the prisoner.

“Well, being asked by his friend, my father told at supper the whole story of the tulip, or rather of the bulb, and of his own fine exploit of crushing it.”

Cornelius heaved a sigh, which might have been called a groan.

“Had you only seen Master Jacob at that moment!” continued Rosa. “I really thought he would set fire to the castle; his eyes were like two flaming torches, his hair stood on end, and he clinched his fist for a moment; I thought he would have strangled my father.”

“‘You have done that,’ he cried, ‘you have crushed the bulb?’

“‘Indeed I have.’

“‘It is infamous,’ said Master Jacob, ‘it is odious! You have committed a great crime!’

“My father was quite dumbfounded.

“‘Are you mad, too?’ he asked his friend.”

“Oh, what a worthy man is this Master Jacob!” muttered Cornelius, — ”an honest soul, an excellent heart that he is.”

“The truth is, that it is impossible to treat a man more rudely than he did my father; he was really quite in despair, repeating over and over again, —

“‘Crushed, crushed the bulb! my God, my God! crushed!’

“Then, turning toward me, he asked, ‘But it was not the only one that he had?’“

“Did he ask that?” inquired Cornelius, with some anxiety.

“‘You think it was not the only one?’ said my father. ‘Very well, we shall search for the others.’

“‘You will search for the others?’ cried Jacob, taking my father by the collar; but he immediately loosed him. Then, turning towards me, he continued, asking ‘And what did that poor young man say?’

“I did not know what to answer, as you had so strictly enjoined me never to allow any one to guess the interest which you are taking in the bulb. Fortunately, my father saved me from the difficulty by chiming in, —

“‘What did he say? Didn’t he fume and fret?’

“I interrupted him, saying, ‘Was it not natural that he should be furious, you were so unjust and brutal, father?’

"'Well, now, are you mad?' cried my father; 'what immense misfortune is it to crush a tulip bulb? You may buy a hundred of them in the market of Gorcum.'

"'Perhaps some less precious one than that was!' I quite incautiously replied."

"And what did Jacob say or do at these words?" asked Cornelius.

"At these words, if I must say it, his eyes seemed to flash like lightning."

"But," said Cornelius, "that was not all; I am sure he said something in his turn."

"'So, then, my pretty Rosa,' he said, with a voice as sweet a honey, — 'so you think that bulb to have been a precious one?'

"I saw that I had made a blunder.

"'What do I know?' I said, negligently; 'do I understand anything of tulips? I only know — as unfortunately it is our lot to live with prisoners — that for them any pastime is of value. This poor Mynheer van Baerle amused himself with this bulb. Well, I think it very cruel to take from him the only thing that he could have amused himself with.'

"'But, first of all,' said my father, 'we ought to know how he has contrived to procure this bulb.'

"I turned my eyes away to avoid my father's look; but I met those of Jacob.

"It was as if he had tried to read my thoughts at the bottom of my heart.

"Some little show of anger sometimes saves an answer. I shrugged my shoulders, turned my back, and advanced towards the door.

"But I was kept by something which I heard, although it was uttered in a very low voice only.

"Jacob said to my father, —

"'It would not be so difficult to ascertain that.'

"'How so?'

"'You need only search his person: and if he has the other bulbs, we shall find them, as there usually are three suckers!'"

"Three suckers!" cried Cornelius. "Did you say that I have three?"

"The word certainly struck me just as much as it does you. I turned round. They were both of them so deeply engaged in their conversation that they did not observe my movement.

"'But,' said my father, 'perhaps he has not got his bulbs about him?'

"'Then take him down, under some pretext or other and I will search his cell in the meanwhile.'"

"Halloa, halloa!" said Cornelius. "But this Mr. Jacob of yours is a villain, it seems."

"I am afraid he is."

"Tell me, Rosa," continued Cornelius, with a pensive air.

"What?"

"Did you not tell me that on the day when you prepared your borders this man followed you?"

"So he did."

"That he glided like a shadow behind the elder trees?"

"Certainly."

"That not one of your movements escaped him?"

"Not one, indeed."

"Rosa," said Cornelius, growing quite pale.

"Well?"

"It was not you he was after."

"Who else, then?"

"It is not you that he was in love with!"

"But with whom else?"

"He was after my bulb, and is in love with my tulip!"

"You don't say so! And yet it is very possible," said Rosa.

"Will you make sure of it?"

"In what manner?"

"Oh, it would be very easy!"

"Tell me."

"Go to-morrow into the garden; manage matters so that Jacob may know, as he did the first time, that you are going there, and that he may follow you. Feign to put the bulb into the ground; leave the garden, but look through the keyhole of the door and watch him."

"Well, and what then?"

"What then? We shall do as he does."

"Oh!" said Rosa, with a sigh, "you are very fond of your bulbs."

"To tell the truth," said the prisoner, sighing likewise, "since your father crushed that unfortunate bulb, I feel as if part of my own self had been paralyzed."

"Now just hear me," said Rosa; "will you try something else?"

"What?"

"Will you accept the proposition of my father?"

"Which proposition?"

"Did not he offer to you tulip bulbs by hundreds?"

"Indeed he did."

"Accept two or three, and, along with them, you may grow the third sucker."

"Yes, that would do very well," said Cornelius, knitting his brow; "if your father were alone, but there is that Master Jacob, who watches all our ways."

"Well, that is true; but only think! you are depriving yourself, as I can easily see, of a very great pleasure."

She pronounced these words with a smile, which was not altogether without a tinge of irony.

Cornelius reflected for a moment; he evidently was struggling against some vehement desire.

"No!" he cried at last, with the stoicism of a Roman of old, "it would be a weakness, it would be a folly, it would be a meanness! If I thus give up the only and last resource which we possess to the uncertain chances of the bad passions of anger and envy, I should never deserve to be forgiven. No, Rosa, no; to-morrow we shall come to a conclusion as to the spot to be chosen for your tulip; you will plant it according to my instructions; and as to the third sucker," — Cornelius here heaved a deep sigh, — "watch over it as a miser over his first or last piece of gold; as the mother over her child; as the wounded over the last drop of blood in his veins; watch over it, Rosa! Some voice within me tells me that it will be our saving, that it will be a source of good to us."

"Be easy, Mynheer Cornelius," said Rosa, with a sweet mixture of melancholy and gravity, "be easy; your wishes are commands to me."

"And even," continued Van Baerle, warming more and more with his subject, "if you should perceive that your steps are watched, and that your speech has excited the suspicion of your father and of that detestable Master Jacob, — well, Rosa, don't hesitate for one moment to sacrifice me, who am only still living through you, — me, who have no one in the world but you; sacrifice me, — don't come to see me any more."

Rosa felt her heart sink within her, and her eyes were filling with tears.

"Alas!" she said.

“What is it?” asked Cornelius.

“I see one thing.”

“What do you see?”

“I see,” said she, bursting out in sobs, “I see that you love your tulips with such love as to have no more room in your heart left for other affections.”

Saying this, she fled.

Cornelius, after this, passed one of the worst nights he ever had in his life.

Rosa was vexed with him, and with good reason. Perhaps she would never return to see the prisoner, and then he would have no more news, either of Rosa or of his tulips.

We have to confess, to the disgrace of our hero and of floriculture, that of his two affections he felt most strongly inclined to regret the loss of Rosa; and when, at about three in the morning, he fell asleep overcome with fatigue, and harassed with remorse, the grand black tulip yielded precedence in his dreams to the sweet blue eyes of the fair maid of Friesland.

CHAPTER 19.

The Maid and the Flower

But poor Rosa, in her secluded chamber, could not have known of whom or of what Cornelius was dreaming.

From what he had said she was more ready to believe that he dreamed of the black tulip than of her; and yet Rosa was mistaken.

But as there was no one to tell her so, and as the words of Cornelius's thoughtless speech had fallen upon her heart like drops of poison, she did not dream, but she wept.

The fact was, that, as Rosa was a high-spirited creature, of no mean perception and a noble heart, she took a very clear and judicious view of her own social position, if not of her moral and physical qualities.

Cornelius was a scholar, and was wealthy, — at least he had been before the confiscation of his property; Cornelius belonged to the merchant-bourgeoisie, who were prouder of their richly emblazoned shop signs than the hereditary nobility of their heraldic bearings. Therefore, although he might find Rosa a pleasant companion for the dreary hours of his captivity, when it came to a question of bestowing his heart it was almost certain that he would bestow it upon a tulip, — that is to say, upon the proudest and noblest of flowers, rather than upon poor Rosa, the jailer's lowly child.

Thus Rosa understood Cornelius's preference of the tulip to herself, but was only so much the more unhappy therefor.

During the whole of this terrible night the poor girl did not close an eye, and before she rose in the morning she had come to the resolution of making her appearance at the grated window no more.

But as she knew with what ardent desire Cornelius looked forward to the news about his tulip; and as, notwithstanding her determination not to see any more a man her pity for whose fate was fast growing into love, she did not, on the other hand, wish to drive him to despair, she resolved to continue by herself the reading and writing lessons; and, fortunately, she had made sufficient progress to dispense with the help of a master when the master was not to be Cornelius.

Rosa therefore applied herself most diligently to reading poor Cornelius de Witt's Bible, on the second fly leaf of which the last will of Cornelius van Baerle was written.

"Alas!" she muttered, when perusing again this document, which she never finished without a tear, the pearl of love, rolling from her limpid eyes on her pale cheeks — "alas! at that time I thought for one moment he loved me."

Poor Rosa! she was mistaken. Never had the love of the prisoner been more sincere than at the time at which we are now arrived, when in the contest between the black tulip and Rosa the tulip had had to yield to her the first and foremost place in Cornelius's heart.

But Rosa was not aware of it.

Having finished reading, she took her pen, and began with as laudable diligence the by far more difficult task of writing.

As, however, Rosa was already able to write a legible hand when Cornelius so uncautiously opened his heart, she did not despair of progressing quickly enough to write, after eight days at the latest, to the prisoner an account of his tulip.

She had not forgotten one word of the directions given to her by Cornelius, whose speeches she treasured in her heart, even when they did not take the shape of directions.

He, on his part, awoke deeper in love than ever. The tulip, indeed, was still a luminous and prominent object in his mind; but he no longer looked upon it as a treasure to which he ought to sacrifice everything, and even Rosa, but as a marvellous combination of nature and art with which he would have been happy to adorn the bosom of his beloved one.

Yet during the whole of that day he was haunted with a vague uneasiness, at the bottom of which was the fear lest Rosa should not come in the evening to pay him her usual visit. This thought took more and more hold of him, until at the approach of evening his whole mind was absorbed in it.

How his heart beat when darkness closed in! The words which he had said to Rosa on the evening before and which had so deeply afflicted her, now came back to his mind more vividly than ever, and he asked himself how he could have told his gentle comforter to sacrifice him to his tulip, — that is to say, to give up seeing him, if need be, — whereas to him the sight of Rosa had become a condition of life.

In Cornelius's cell one heard the chimes of the clock of the fortress. It struck seven, it struck eight, it struck nine. Never did the metal voice vibrate more forcibly through the heart of any man than did the last stroke, marking the ninth hour, through the heart of Cornelius.

All was then silent again. Cornelius put his hand on his heart, to repress as it were its violent palpitation, and listened.

The noise of her footstep, the rustling of her gown on the staircase, were so familiar to his ear, that she had no sooner mounted one step than he used to say to himself, —

"Here comes Rosa."

This evening none of those little noises broke the silence of the lobby, the clock struck nine, and a quarter; the half-hour, then a quarter to ten, and at last its deep tone announced, not only to the inmates of the fortress, but also to all the inhabitants of Loewestein, that it was ten.

This was the hour at which Rosa generally used to leave Cornelius. The hour had struck, but Rosa had not come.

Thus then his foreboding had not deceived him; Rosa, being vexed, shut herself up in her room and left him to himself.

"Alas!" he thought, "I have deserved all this. She will come no more, and she is right in staying away; in her place I should do just the same."

Yet notwithstanding all this, Cornelius listened, waited, and hoped until midnight, then he threw himself upon the bed, with his clothes on.

It was a long and sad night for him, and the day brought no hope to the prisoner.

At eight in the morning, the door of his cell opened; but Cornelius did not even turn his head; he had heard the heavy step of Gryphus in the lobby, but this step had perfectly satisfied the prisoner that his jailer was coming alone.

Thus Cornelius did not even look at Gryphus.

And yet he would have been so glad to draw him out, and to inquire about Rosa. He even very nearly made this inquiry, strange as it would needs have appeared to her father. To tell the truth, there was in all this some selfish hope to hear from Gryphus that his daughter was ill.

Except on extraordinary occasions, Rosa never came during the day. Cornelius therefore did not really expect her as long as the day lasted. Yet his sudden starts, his listening at the door, his rapid glances at every little noise towards the grated window, showed clearly that the prisoner entertained some latent hope that Rosa would, somehow or other, break her rule.

At the second visit of Gryphus, Cornelius, contrary to all his former habits, asked the old jailer, with the most winning voice, about her health; but Gryphus contented himself with giving the laconical answer, —

“All’s well.”

At the third visit of the day, Cornelius changed his former inquiry: —

“I hope nobody is ill at Loewestein?”

“Nobody,” replied, even more laconically, the jailer, shutting the door before the nose of the prisoner.

Gryphus, being little used to this sort of civility on the part of Cornelius, began to suspect that his prisoner was about to try and bribe him.

Cornelius was now alone once more; it was seven o’clock in the evening, and the anxiety of yesterday returned with increased intensity.

But another time the hours passed away without bringing the sweet vision which lighted up, through the grated window, the cell of poor Cornelius, and which, in retiring, left light enough in his heart to last until it came back again.

Van Baerle passed the night in an agony of despair. On the following day Gryphus appeared to him even more hideous, brutal, and hateful than usual; in his mind, or rather in his heart, there had been some hope that it was the old man who prevented his daughter from coming.

In his wrath he would have strangled Gryphus, but would not this have separated him for ever from Rosa?

The evening closing in, his despair changed into melancholy, which was the more gloomy as, involuntarily, Van Baerle mixed up with it the thought of his poor tulip. It was now just that week in April which the most experienced gardeners point out as the precise time when tulips ought to be planted. He had said to Rosa, —

“I shall tell you the day when you are to put the bulb in the ground.”

He had intended to fix, at the vainly hoped for interview, the following day as the time for that momentous operation. The weather was propitious; the air, though still damp, began to be tempered by those pale rays of the April sun which, being the first, appear so congenial, although so pale. How if Rosa allowed the right moment for planting the bulb to pass by, — if, in addition to the grief of seeing her no more, he should have to deplore the misfortune of seeing his tulip fail on account of its having been planted too late, or of its not having been planted at all!

These two vexations combined might well make him leave off eating and drinking.

This was the case on the fourth day.

It was pitiful to see Cornelius, dumb with grief, and pale from utter prostration, stretch out his head through the iron bars of his window, at the risk of not being able to draw it back again, to try and get a glimpse of the garden on the left spoken of by Rosa, who had told him that its parapet overlooked the river. He hoped that perhaps he might see, in the light of the April sun, Rosa or the tulip, the two lost objects of his love.

In the evening, Gryphus took away the breakfast and dinner of Cornelius, who had scarcely touched them.

On the following day he did not touch them at all, and Gryphus carried the dishes away just as he had brought them.

Cornelius had remained in bed the whole day.

“Well,” said Gryphus, coming down from the last visit, “I think we shall soon get rid of our scholar.”

Rosa was startled.

“Nonsense!” said Jacob. “What do you mean?”

“He doesn’t drink, he doesn’t eat, he doesn’t leave his bed. He will get out of it, like Mynheer Grotius, in a chest, only the chest will be a coffin.”

Rosa grew pale as death.

“Ah!” she said to herself, “he is uneasy about his tulip.”

And, rising with a heavy heart, she returned to her chamber, where she took a pen and paper, and during the whole of that night busied herself with tracing letters.

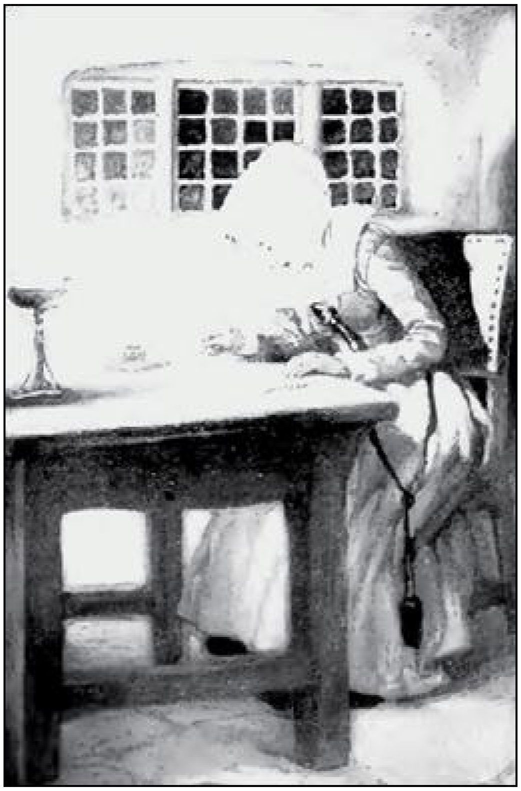

On the following morning, when Cornelius got up to drag himself to the window, he perceived a paper which had been slipped under the door.

He pounced upon it, opened it, and read the following words, in a handwriting which he could scarcely have recognized as that of Rosa, so much had she improved during her short absence of seven days, —

“Be easy; your tulip is going on well.”

Although these few words of Rosa’s somewhat soothed the grief of Cornelius, yet he felt not the less the irony which was at the bottom of them. Rosa, then, was not ill, she was offended; she had not been forcibly prevented from coming, but had voluntarily stayed away. Thus Rosa, being at liberty, found in her own will the force not to come and see him, who was dying with grief at not having seen her.

Cornelius had paper and a pencil which Rosa had brought to him. He guessed that she expected an answer, but that she would not come before the evening to fetch it. He therefore wrote on a piece of paper, similar to that which he had received, —

“It was not my anxiety about the tulip that has made me ill, but the grief at not seeing you.”

After Gryphus had made his last visit of the day, and darkness had set in, he slipped the paper under the door, and listened with the most intense attention, but he neither heard Rosa’s footsteps nor the rustling of her gown.

He only heard a voice as feeble as a breath, and gentle like a caress, which whispered through the grated little window in the door the word, —

“To-morrow!”

Now to-morrow was the eighth day. For eight days Cornelius and Rosa had not seen each other.

CHAPTER 20.

The Events which took place during those Eight Days

On the following evening, at the usual hour, Van Baerle heard some one scratch at the grated little window, just as Rosa had been in the habit of doing in the heyday of their friendship.

Cornelius being, as may easily be imagined, not far off from the door, perceived Rosa, who at last was waiting again for him with her lamp in her hand.

Seeing him so sad and pale, she was startled, and said, —

“You are ill, Mynheer Cornelius?”

“Yes, I am,” he answered, as indeed he was suffering in mind and in body.

“I saw that you did not eat,” said Rosa; “my father told me that you remained in bed all day. I then wrote to calm your uneasiness concerning the fate of the most precious object of your anxiety.”

“And I,” said Cornelius, “I have answered. Seeing your return, my dear Rosa, I thought you had received my letter.”

“It is true; I have received it.”

“You cannot this time excuse yourself with not being able to read. Not only do you read very fluently, but also you have made marvellous progress in writing.”

“Indeed, I have not only received, but also read your note. Accordingly I am come to see whether there might not be some remedy to restore you to health.”

“Restore me to health?” cried Cornelius; “but have you any good news to communicate to me?”

Saying this, the poor prisoner looked at Rosa, his eyes sparkling with hope.

Whether she did not, or would not, understand this look, Rosa answered gravely, —

“I have only to speak to you about your tulip, which, as I well know, is the object uppermost in your mind.”

Rosa pronounced those few words in a freezing tone, which cut deeply into the heart of Cornelius. He did not suspect what lay hidden under this appearance of indifference with which the poor girl affected to speak of her rival, the black tulip.

“Oh!” muttered Cornelius, “again! again! Have I not told you, Rosa, that I thought but of you? that it was you alone whom I regretted, you whom I missed, you whose absence I felt more than the loss of liberty and of life itself?”

Rosa smiled with a melancholy air.

“Ah!” she said, “your tulip has been in such danger.”

Cornelius trembled involuntarily, and showed himself clearly to be caught in the trap, if ever the remark was meant as such.

“Danger!” he cried, quite alarmed; “what danger?”

Rosa looked at him with gentle compassion; she felt that what she wished was beyond the power of this man, and that he must be taken as he was, with his little foible.

“Yes,” she said, “you have guessed the truth; that suitor and amorous swain, Jacob, did not come on my account.”

“And what did he come for?” Cornelius anxiously asked.

“He came for the sake of the tulip.”

“Alas!” said Cornelius, growing even paler at this piece of information than he had been when Rosa, a fortnight before, had told him that Jacob was coming for her sake.

Rosa saw this alarm, and Cornelius guessed, from the expression of her face, in what direction her thoughts were running.

“Oh, pardon me, Rosa!” he said, “I know you, and I am well aware of the kindness and sincerity of your heart. To you God has given the thought and strength for defending yourself; but to my poor tulip, when it is in danger, God has given nothing of the sort.”

Rosa, without replying to this excuse of the prisoner, continued, —

“From the moment when I first knew that you were uneasy on account of the man who followed me, and in whom I had recognized Jacob, I was even more uneasy myself. On the day, therefore, after that on which I saw you last, and on which you said — ”

Cornelius interrupted her.

“Once more, pardon me, Rosa!” he cried. “I was wrong in saying to you what I said. I have asked your pardon for that unfortunate speech before. I ask it again: shall I always ask it in vain?”

“On the following day,” Rosa continued, “remembering what you had told me about the stratagem which I was to employ to ascertain whether that odious man was after the tulip, or after me — — ”

“Yes, yes, odious. Tell me,” he said, “do you hate that man?”

“I do hate him,” said Rosa, “as he is the cause of all the unhappiness I have suffered these eight days.”

“You, too, have been unhappy, Rosa? I thank you a thousand times for this kind confession.”

“Well, on the day after that unfortunate one, I went down into the garden and proceeded towards the border where I was to plant your tulip, looking round all the while to see whether I was again followed as I was last time.”

“And then?” Cornelius asked.

“And then the same shadow glided between the gate and the wall, and once more disappeared behind the elder-trees.”

“You feigned not to see him, didn’t you?” Cornelius asked, remembering all the details of the advice which he had given to Rosa.

“Yes, and I stooped over the border, in which I dug with a spade, as if I was going to put the bulb in.”

“And he, — what did he do during all this time?”

“I saw his eyes glisten through the branches of the tree like those of a tiger.”

“There you see, there you see!” cried Cornelius.

“Then, after having finished my make-believe work, I retired.”

“But only behind the garden door, I dare say, so that you might see through the keyhole what he was going to do when you had left?”

“He waited for a moment, very likely to make sure of my not coming back, after which he sneaked forth from his hiding-place, and approached the border by a long round-about; at last, having reached his goal, that is to say, the spot where the ground was newly turned, he stopped with a careless air, looking about in all directions, and scanning every corner of the garden, every window of the neighbouring houses, and even the sky; after which, thinking himself quite alone, quite isolated, and out of everybody’s sight, he pounced upon the border, plunged both his hands into the soft soil, took a handful of the mould, which he gently frittered between his fingers to see whether the bulb was in it, and repeated the same thing twice or three times, until at last he perceived that he was outwitted. Then, keeping down the agitation which was raging in his breast, he took up the rake, smoothed the ground, so as to leave it on his retiring in the same state as he had found it, and, quite abashed and rueful, walked back to the door, affecting the unconcerned air of an ordinary visitor of the garden."

"Oh, the wretch!" muttered Cornelius, wiping the cold sweat from his brow. "Oh, the wretch! I guessed his intentions. But the bulb, Rosa; what have you done with it? It is already rather late to plant it."

"The bulb? It has been in the ground for these six days."

"Where? and how?" cried Cornelius. "Good Heaven, what imprudence! What is it? In what sort of soil is it? In what aspect? Good or bad? Is there no risk of having it filched by that detestable Jacob?"

"There is no danger of its being stolen," said Rosa, "unless Jacob will force the door of my chamber."

"Oh! then it is with you in your bedroom?" said Cornelius, somewhat relieved. "But in what soil? in what vessel? You don't let it grow, I hope, in water like those good ladies of Haarlem and Dort, who imagine that water could replace the earth?"

"You may make yourself comfortable on that score," said Rosa, smiling; "your bulb is not growing in water."

"I breathe again."

"It is in a good, sound stone pot, just about the size of the jug in which you had planted yours. The soil is composed of three parts of common mould, taken from the best spot of the garden, and one of the sweepings of the road. I have heard you and that detestable Jacob, as you call him, so often talk about what is the soil best fitted for growing tulips, that I know it as well as the first gardener of Haarlem."

"And now what is the aspect, Rosa?"

"At present it has the sun all day long, — that is to say when the sun shines. But when it once peeps out of the ground, I shall do as you have done here, dear Mynheer Cornelius: I shall put it out of my window on the eastern side from eight in the morning until eleven and in my window towards the west from three to five in the afternoon."

"That's it! that's it!" cried Cornelius; "and you are a perfect gardener, my pretty Rosa. But I am afraid the nursing of my tulip will take up all your time."

"Yes, it will," said Rosa; "but never mind. Your tulip is my daughter. I shall devote to it the same time as I should to a child of mine, if I were a mother. Only by becoming its mother,” Rosa added, smilingly, “can I cease to be its rival.”

“My kind and pretty Rosa!” muttered Cornelius casting on her a glance in which there was much more of the lover than of the gardener, and which afforded Rosa some consolation.

Then, after a silence of some moments, during which Cornelius had grasped through the openings of the grating for the receding hand of Rosa, he said, —

“Do you mean to say that the bulb has now been in the ground for six days?”

“Yes, six days, Mynheer Cornelius,” she answered.

“And it does not yet show leaf?”

“No, but I think it will to-morrow.”

“Well, then, to-morrow you will bring me news about it, and about yourself, won’t you, Rosa? I care very much for the daughter, as you called it just now, but I care even much more for the mother.”

“To-morrow?” said Rosa, looking at Cornelius askance. “I don’t know whether I shall be able to come to-morrow.”

“Good heavens!” said Cornelius, “why can’t you come to-morrow?”

“Mynheer Cornelius, I have lots of things to do.”

“And I have only one,” muttered Cornelius.

“Yes,” said Rosa, “to love your tulip.”

“To love you, Rosa.”

Rosa shook her head, after which followed a pause.

“Well,” — Cornelius at last broke the silence, — ”well, Rosa, everything changes in the realm of nature; the flowers of spring are succeeded by other flowers; and the bees, which so tenderly caressed the violets and the wall-flowers, will flutter with just as much love about the honey-suckles, the rose, the jessamine, and the carnation.”

“What does all this mean?” asked Rosa.

“You have abandoned me, Miss Rosa, to seek your pleasure elsewhere. You have done well, and I will not complain. What claim have I to your fidelity?”

“My fidelity!” Rosa exclaimed, with her eyes full of tears, and without caring any longer to hide from Cornelius this dew of pearls dropping on her cheeks, “my fidelity! have I not been faithful to you?”

“Do you call it faithful to desert me, and to leave me here to die?”

“But, Mynheer Cornelius,” said Rosa, “am I not doing everything for you that could give you pleasure? have I not devoted myself to your tulip?”

“You are bitter, Rosa, you reproach me with the only unalloyed pleasure which I have had in this world.”

“I reproach you with nothing, Mynheer Cornelius, except, perhaps, with the intense grief which I felt when people came to tell me at the Buytenhof that you were about to be put to death.”

“You are displeased, Rosa, my sweet girl, with my loving flowers.”

“I am not displeased with your loving them, Mynheer Cornelius, only it makes me sad to think that you love them better than you do me.”

“Oh, my dear, dear Rosa! look how my hands tremble; look at my pale cheek, hear how my heart beats. It is for you, my love, not for the black tulip. Destroy the bulb, destroy the germ of that flower, extinguish the gentle light of that innocent and delightful dream, to which I have accustomed myself; but love me, Rosa, love me; for I feel deeply that I love but you.”

“Yes, after the black tulip,” sighed Rosa, who at last no longer coyly withdrew her warm hands from the grating, as Cornelius most affectionately kissed them.

“Above and before everything in this world, Rosa.”

“May I believe you?”

“As you believe in your own existence.”

“Well, then, be it so; but loving me does not bind you too much.”

“Unfortunately, it does not bind me more than I am bound; but it binds you, Rosa, you.”

“To what?”

“First of all, not to marry.”

She smiled.

“That’s your way,” she said; “you are tyrants all of you. You worship a certain beauty, you think of nothing but her. Then you are condemned to death, and whilst walking to the scaffold, you devote to her your last sigh; and now you expect poor me to sacrifice to you all my dreams and my happiness.”

“But who is the beauty you are talking of, Rosa?” said Cornelius, trying in vain to remember a woman to whom Rosa might possibly be alluding.

“The dark beauty with a slender waist, small feet, and a noble head; in short, I am speaking of your flower.”

Cornelius smiled.

"That is an imaginary lady love, at all events; whereas, without counting that amorous Jacob, you by your own account are surrounded with all sorts of swains eager to make love to you. Do you remember Rosa, what you told me of the students, officers, and clerks of the Hague? Are there no clerks, officers, or students at Loewestein?"

"Indeed there are, and lots of them."

"Who write letters?"

"They do write."

"And now, as you know how to read — — "

Here Cornelius heaved a sigh at the thought, that, poor captive as he was, to him alone Rosa owed the faculty of reading the love-letters which she received.

"As to that," said Rosa, "I think that in reading the notes addressed to me, and passing the different swains in review who send them to me, I am only following your instructions."

"How so? My instructions?"

"Indeed, your instructions, sir," said Rosa, sighing in her turn; "have you forgotten the will written by your hand on the Bible of Cornelius de Witt? I have not forgotten it; for now, as I know how to read, I read it every day over and over again. In that will you bid me to love and marry a handsome young man of twenty-six or eight years. I am on the look-out for that young man, and as the whole of my day is taken up with your tulip, you must needs leave me the evenings to find him."

"But, Rosa, the will was made in the expectation of death, and, thanks to Heaven, I am still alive."

"Well, then, I shall not be after the handsome young man, and I shall come to see you."

"That's it, Rosa, come! come!"

"Under one condition."

"Granted beforehand!"

"That the black tulip shall not be mentioned for the next three days."

"It shall never be mentioned any more, if you wish it, Rosa."

"No, no," the damsel said, laughing, "I will not ask for impossibilities."

And, saying this, she brought her fresh cheek, as if unconsciously, so near the iron grating, that Cornelius was able to touch it with his lips.

Rosa uttered a little scream, which, however, was full of love, and disappeared.

CHAPTER 21.

The Second Bulb

The night was a happy one, and the whole of the next day happier still. During the last few days, the prison had been heavy, dark, and lowering, as it were, with all its weight on the unfortunate captive. Its walls were black, its air chilling, the iron bars seemed to exclude every ray of light.

But when Cornelius awoke next morning, a beam of the morning sun was playing about those iron bars; pigeons were hovering about with outspread wings, whilst others were lovingly cooing on the roof or near the still closed window.

Cornelius ran to that window and opened it; it seemed to him as if new life, and joy, and liberty itself were entering with this sunbeam into his cell, which, so dreary of late, was now cheered and irradiated by the light of love.

When Gryphus, therefore, came to see his prisoner in the morning, he no longer found him morose and lying in bed, but standing at the window, and singing a little ditty.

“Halloa!” exclaimed the jailer.

“How are you this morning?” asked Cornelius.

Gryphus looked at him with a scowl.

“And how is the dog, and Master Jacob, and our pretty Rosa?”

Gryphus ground his teeth, saying. —

“Here is your breakfast.”

“Thank you, friend Cerberus,” said the prisoner; “you are just in time; I am very hungry.”

“Oh! you are hungry, are you?” said Gryphus.

“And why not?” asked Van Baerle.

“The conspiracy seems to thrive,” remarked Gryphus.

“What conspiracy?”

“Very well, I know what I know, Master Scholar; just be quiet, we shall be on our guard.”

“Be on your guard, friend Gryphus; be on your guard as long as you please; my conspiracy, as well as my person, is entirely at your service.”

“We’ll see that at noon.”

Saying this, Gryphus went out.

“At noon?” repeated Cornelius; “what does that mean? Well, let us wait until the clock strikes twelve, and we shall see.”

It was very easy for Cornelius to wait for twelve at midday, as he was already waiting for nine at night.

It struck twelve, and there were heard on the staircase not only the steps of Gryphus, but also those of three or four soldiers, who were coming up with him.

The door opened. Gryphus entered, led his men in, and shut the door after them.

“There, now search!”

They searched not only the pockets of Cornelius, but even his person; yet they found nothing.

They then searched the sheets, the mattress, and the straw mattress of his bed; and again they found nothing.

Now, Cornelius rejoiced that he had not taken the third sucker under his own care. Gryphus would have been sure to ferret it out in the search, and would then have treated it as he did the first.

And certainly never did prisoner look with greater complacency at a search made in his cell than Cornelius.

Gryphus retired with the pencil and the two or three leaves of white paper which Rosa had given to Van Baerle, this was the only trophy brought back from the expedition.

At six Gryphus came back again, but alone; Cornelius tried to propitiate him, but Gryphus growled, showed a large tooth like a tusk, which he had in the corner of his mouth, and went out backwards, like a man who is afraid of being attacked from behind.

Cornelius burst out laughing, to which Gryphus answered through the grating, —

“Let him laugh that wins.”

The winner that day was Cornelius; Rosa came at nine.

She was without a lantern. She needed no longer a light, as she could now read. Moreover, the light might betray her, as Jacob was dogging her steps more than ever. And lastly, the light would have shown her blushes.

Of what did the young people speak that evening? Of those matters of which lovers speak at the house doors in France, or from a balcony into the street in Spain, or down from a terrace into a garden in the East.

They spoke of those things which give wings to the hours; they spoke of everything except the black tulip.

At last, when the clock struck ten, they parted as usual.

Cornelius was happy, as thoroughly happy as a tulip-fancier would be to whom one has not spoken of his tulip.

He found Rosa pretty, good, graceful, and charming.

But why did Rosa object to the tulip being spoken of?

This was indeed a great defect in Rosa.

Cornelius confessed to himself, sighing, that woman was not perfect.

Part of the night he thought of this imperfection; that is to say, so long as he was awake he thought of Rosa.

After having fallen asleep, he dreamed of her.

But the Rosa of his dreams was by far more perfect than the Rosa of real life. Not only did the Rosa of his dreams speak of the tulip, but also brought to him a black one in a china vase.

Cornelius then awoke, trembling with joy, and muttering, —

“Rosa, Rosa, I love you.”

And as it was already day, he thought it right not to fall asleep again, and he continued following up the line of thought in which his mind was engaged when he awoke.

Ah! if Rosa had only conversed about the tulip, Cornelius would have preferred her to Queen Semiramis, to Queen Cleopatra, to Queen Elizabeth, to Queen Anne of Austria; that is to say, to the greatest or most beautiful queens whom the world has seen.

But Rosa had forbidden it under pain of not returning; Rosa had forbidden the least mention of the tulip for three days. That meant seventy-two hours given to the lover to be sure; but it was seventy-two hours stolen from the horticulturist.

There was one consolation: of the seventy-two hours during which Rosa would not allow the tulip to be mentioned, thirty-six had passed already; and the remaining thirty-six would pass quickly enough: eighteen with waiting for the evening’s interview, and eighteen with rejoicing in its remembrance.

Rosa came at the same hour, and Cornelius submitted most heroically to the pangs which the compulsory silence concerning the tulip gave him.

His fair visitor, however, was well aware that, to command on the one point, people must yield on another; she therefore no longer drew back her hands from the grating, and even allowed Cornelius tenderly to kiss her beautiful golden tresses.

Poor girl! she had no idea that these playful little lovers' tricks were much more dangerous than speaking of the tulip was; but she became aware of the fact as she returned with a beating heart, with glowing cheeks, dry lips, and moist eyes.

And on the following evening, after the first exchange of salutations, she retired a step, looking at him with a glance, the expression of which would have rejoiced his heart could he but have seen it.

"Well," she said, "she is up."

"She is up! Who? What?" asked Cornelius, who did not venture on a belief that Rosa would, of her own accord, have abridged the term of his probation.

"She? Well, my daughter, the tulip," said Rosa.

"What!" cried Cornelius, "you give me permission, then?"

"I do," said Rosa, with the tone of an affectionate mother who grants a pleasure to her child.

"Ah, Rosa!" said Cornelius, putting his lips to the grating with the hope of touching a cheek, a hand, a forehead, — anything, in short.

He touched something much better, — two warm and half open lips.

Rosa uttered a slight scream.

Cornelius understood that he must make haste to continue the conversation. He guessed that this unexpected kiss had frightened Rosa.

"Is it growing up straight?"

"Straight as a rocket," said Rosa.

"How high?"

"At least two inches."

"Oh, Rosa, take good care of it, and we shall soon see it grow quickly."

"Can I take more care of it?" said she. "Indeed, I think of nothing else but the tulip."

"Of nothing else, Rosa? Why, now I shall grow jealous in my turn."

"Oh, you know that to think of the tulip is to think of you; I never lose sight of it. I see it from my bed, on awaking it is the first object that meets my eyes, and on falling asleep the last on which they rest. During the day I sit and work by its side, for I have never left my chamber since I put it there.”

“You are right Rosa, it is your dowry, you know.”

“Yes, and with it I may marry a young man of twenty-six or twenty-eight years, whom I shall be in love with.”

“Don’t talk in that way, you naughty girl.”

That evening Cornelius was one of the happiest of men. Rosa allowed him to press her hand in his, and to keep it as long as he would, besides which he might talk of his tulip as much as he liked.

From that hour every day marked some progress in the growth of the tulip and in the affection of the two young people.

At one time it was that the leaves had expanded, and at another that the flower itself had formed.

Great was the joy of Cornelius at this news, and his questions succeeded one another with a rapidity which gave proof of their importance.

“Formed!” exclaimed Cornelius, “is it really formed?”

“It is,” repeated Rosa.

Cornelius trembled with joy, so much so that he was obliged to hold by the grating.

“Good heavens!” he exclaimed.

Then, turning again to Rosa, he continued his questions.

“Is the oval regular? the cylinder full? and are the points very green?”

“The oval is almost one inch long, and tapers like a needle, the cylinder swells at the sides, and the points are ready to open.”

Two days after Rosa announced that they were open.

“Open, Rosa!” cried Cornelius. “Is the involucrum open? but then one may see and already distinguish — — ”

Here the prisoner paused, anxiously taking breath.

“Yes,” answered Rosa, “one may already distinguish a thread of different colour, as thin as a hair.”

“And its colour?” asked Cornelius, trembling.

“Oh,” answered Rosa, “it is very dark!”

“Brown?”

“Darker than that.”

“Darker, my good Rosa, darker? Thank you. Dark as — — ”

“Dark as the ink with which I wrote to you.”

Cornelius uttered a cry of mad joy.

Then, suddenly stopping and clasping his hands, he said, —

“Oh, there is not an angel in heaven that may be compared to you, Rosa!”

“Indeed!” said Rosa, smiling at his enthusiasm.

“Rosa, you have worked with such ardour, — you have done so much for me! Rosa, my tulip is about to flower, and it will flower black! Rosa, Rosa, you are the most perfect being on earth!”

“After the tulip, though.”

“Ah! be quiet, you malicious little creature, be quiet! For shame! Do not spoil my pleasure. But tell me, Rosa, — as the tulip is so far advanced, it will flower in two or three days, at the latest?”

“To-morrow, or the day after.”

“Ah! and I shall not see it,” cried Cornelius, starting back, “I shall not kiss it, as a wonderful work of the Almighty, as I kiss your hand and your cheek, Rosa, when by chance they are near the grating.”

Rosa drew near, not by accident, but intentionally, and Cornelius kissed her tenderly.

“Faith, I shall cull it, if you wish it.”

“Oh, no, no, Rosa! when it is open, place it carefully in the shade, and immediately send a message to Haarlem, to the President of the Horticultural Society, that the grand black tulip is in flower. I know well it is far to Haarlem, but with money you will find a messenger. Have you any money, Rosa?”

Rosa smiled.

“Oh, yes!” she said.

“Enough?” said Cornelius.

“I have three hundred guilders.”

“Oh, if you have three hundred guilders, you must not send a messenger, Rosa, but you must go to Haarlem yourself.”

“But what in the meantime is to become of the flower?”

“Oh, the flower! you must take it with you. You understand that you must not separate from it for an instant.”

“But whilst I am not separating from it, I am separating from you, Mynheer Cornelius.”

“Ah! that’s true, my sweet Rosa. Oh, my God! how wicked men are! What have I done to offend them, and why have they deprived me of my liberty? You are right, Rosa, I cannot live without you. Well, you will send some one to Haarlem, — that’s settled; really, the matter is wonderful enough for the President to put himself to some trouble. He will come himself to Loewestein to see the tulip.”

Then, suddenly checking himself, he said, with a faltering voice, —

“Rosa, Rosa, if after all it should not flower black!”

“Oh, surely, surely, you will know to-morrow, or the day after.”

“And to wait until evening to know it, Rosa! I shall die with impatience. Could we not agree about a signal?”

“I shall do better than that.”

“What will you do?”

“If it opens at night, I shall come and tell you myself. If it is day, I shall pass your door, and slip you a note either under the door, or through the grating, during the time between my father’s first and second inspection.”

“Yes, Rosa, let it be so. One word of yours, announcing this news to me, will be a double happiness.”

“There, ten o’clock strikes,” said Rosa, “I must now leave you.”

“Yes, yes,” said Cornelius, “go, Rosa, go!”

Rosa withdrew, almost melancholy, for Cornelius had all but sent her away.

It is true that he did so in order that she might watch over his black tulip.

CHAPTER 22.

The Opening of the Flower

The night passed away very sweetly for Cornelius, although in great agitation. Every instant he fancied he heard the gentle voice of Rosa calling him. He then started up, went to the door, and looked through the grating, but no one was behind it, and the lobby was empty.

Rosa, no doubt, would be watching too, but, happier than he, she watched over the tulip; she had before her eyes that noble flower, that wonder of wonders, which not only was unknown, but was not even thought possible until then.

What would the world say when it heard that the black tulip was found, that it existed and that it was the prisoner Van Baerle who had found it?

How Cornelius would have spurned the offer of his liberty in exchange for his tulip!

Day came, without any news; the tulip was not yet in flower.

The day passed as the night. Night came, and with it Rosa, joyous and cheerful as a bird.

“Well?” asked Cornelius.

“Well, all is going on prosperously. This night, without any doubt, our tulip will be in flower.”

“And will it flower black?”

“Black as jet.”

“Without a speck of any other colour.”

“Without one speck.”

“Good Heavens! my dear Rosa, I have been dreaming all night, in the first place of you,” (Rosa made a sign of incredulity,) “and then of what we must do.”

“Well?”

“Well, and I will tell you now what I have decided on. The tulip once being in flower, and it being quite certain that it is perfectly black, you must find a messenger.”

“If it is no more than that, I have a messenger quite ready.”

"Is he safe?"

"One for whom I will answer, — he is one of my lovers."

"I hope not Jacob."

"No, be quiet, it is the ferryman of Loewestein, a smart young man of twenty-five."

"By Jove!"

"Be quiet," said Rosa, smiling, "he is still under age, as you have yourself fixed it from twenty-six to twenty-eight."

"In fine, do you think you may rely on this young man?"

"As on myself; he would throw himself into the Waal or the Meuse if I bade him."

"Well, Rosa, this lad may be at Haarlem in ten hours; you will give me paper and pencil, and, perhaps better still, pen and ink, and I will write, or rather, on second thoughts, you will, for if I did, being a poor prisoner, people might, like your father, see a conspiracy in it. You will write to the President of the Horticultural Society, and I am sure he will come."

"But if he tarries?"

"Well, let us suppose that he tarries one day, or even two; but it is impossible. A tulip-fancier like him will not tarry one hour, not one minute, not one second, to set out to see the eighth wonder of the world. But, as I said, if he tarried one or even two days, the tulip will still be in its full splendour. The flower once being seen by the President, and the protocol being drawn up, all is in order; you will only keep a duplicate of the protocol, and intrust the tulip to him. Ah! if we had been able to carry it ourselves, Rosa, it would never have left my hands but to pass into yours; but this is a dream, which we must not entertain," continued Cornelius with a sigh, "the eyes of strangers will see it flower to the last. And above all, Rosa, before the President has seen it, let it not be seen by any one. Alas! if any one saw the black tulip, it would be stolen."

"Oh!"

"Did you not tell me yourself of what you apprehended from your lover Jacob? People will steal one guilder, why not a hundred thousand?"

"I shall watch; be quiet."

"But if it opened whilst you were here?"

"The whimsical little thing would indeed be quite capable of playing such a trick," said Rosa.

"And if on your return you find it open?"

"Well?"

"Oh, Rosa, whenever it opens, remember that not a moment must be lost in apprising the President."

"And in apprising you. Yes, I understand."

Rosa sighed, yet without any bitter feeling, but rather like a woman who begins to understand a foible, and to accustom herself to it.

"I return to your tulip, Mynheer van Baerle, and as soon as it opens I will give you news, which being done the messenger will set out immediately."

"Rosa, Rosa, I don't know to what wonder under the sun I shall compare you."

"Compare me to the black tulip, and I promise you I shall feel very much flattered. Good night, then, till we meet again, Mynheer Cornelius."

"Oh, say 'Good night, my friend.'"

"Good night, my friend," said Rosa, a little consoled.

"Say, 'My very dear friend.'"

"Oh, my friend — "

"Very dear friend, I entreat you, say 'very dear,' Rosa, very dear."

"Very dear, yes, very dear," said Rosa, with a beating heart, beyond herself with happiness.

"And now that you have said 'very dear,' dear Rosa, say also 'most happy': say 'happier and more blessed than ever man was under the sun.' I only lack one thing, Rosa."

"And that is?"

"Your cheek, — your fresh cheek, your soft, rosy cheek. Oh, Rosa, give it me of your own free will, and not by chance. Ah!"

The prisoner's prayer ended in a sigh of ecstasy; his lips met those of the maiden, — not by chance, nor by stratagem, but as Saint-Preux's was to meet the lips of Julie a hundred years later.

Rosa made her escape.

Cornelius stood with his heart upon his lips, and his face glued to the wicket in the door.

He was fairly choking with happiness and joy. He opened his window, and gazed long, with swelling heart, at the cloudless vault of heaven, and the moon, which shone like silver upon the two-fold stream flowing from far beyond the hills. He filled his lungs with the pure, sweet air, while his brain dwelt upon thoughts of happiness, and his heart overflowed with gratitude and religious fervour.

“Oh Thou art always watching from on high, my God,” he cried, half prostrate, his glowing eyes fixed upon the stars: “forgive me that I almost doubted Thy existence during these latter days, for Thou didst hide Thy face behind the clouds, and wert for a moment lost to my sight, O Thou merciful God, Thou pitying Father everlasting! But to-day, this evening, and to-night, again I see Thee in all Thy wondrous glory in the mirror of Thy heavenly abode, and more clearly still in the mirror of my grateful heart.”

He was well again, the poor invalid; the wretched captive was free once more.

During part of the night Cornelius, with his heart full of joy and delight, remained at his window, gazing at the stars, and listening for every sound.

Then casting a glance from time to time towards the lobby, —

“Down there,” he said, “is Rosa, watching like myself, and waiting from minute to minute; down there, under Rosa’s eyes, is the mysterious flower, which lives, which expands, which opens, perhaps Rosa holds in this moment the stem of the tulip between her delicate fingers. Touch it gently, Rosa. Perhaps she touches with her lips its expanding chalice. Touch it cautiously, Rosa, your lips are burning. Yes, perhaps at this moment the two objects of my dearest love caress each other under the eye of Heaven.”

At this moment, a star blazed in the southern sky, and shot through the whole horizon, falling down, as it were, on the fortress of Loewestein.

Cornelius felt a thrill run through his frame.

“Ah!” he said, “here is Heaven sending a soul to my flower.”

And as if he had guessed correctly, nearly at that very moment the prisoner heard in the lobby a step light as that of a sylph, and the rustling of a gown, and a well-known voice, which said to him, —

“Cornelius, my friend, my very dear friend, and very happy friend, come, come quickly.”

Cornelius darted with one spring from the window to the door, his lips met those of Rosa, who told him, with a kiss, —

“It is open, it is black, here it is.”

“How! here it is?” exclaimed Cornelius.

“Yes, yes, we ought indeed to run some little risk to give a great joy; here it is, take it.”

And with one hand she raised to the level of the grating a dark lantern, which she had lit in the meanwhile, whilst with the other she held to the same height the miraculous tulip.

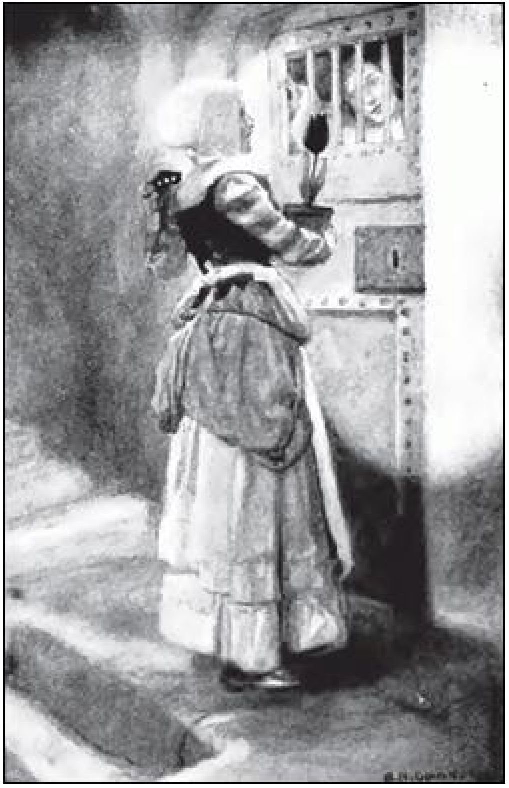

Cornelius uttered a cry, and was nearly fainting.

"Oh!" muttered he, "my God, my God, Thou dost reward me for my innocence and my captivity, as Thou hast allowed two such flowers to grow at the grated window of my prison!"

The tulip was beautiful, splendid, magnificent; its stem was more than eighteen inches high; it rose from out of four green leaves, which were as smooth and straight as iron lance-heads; the whole of the flower was as black and shining as jet.

"Rosa," said Cornelius, almost gasping, "Rosa, there is not one moment to lose in writing the letter."

"It is written, my dearest Cornelius," said Rosa.

"Is it, indeed?"

"Whilst the tulip opened I wrote it myself, for I did not wish to lose a moment. Here is the letter, and tell me whether you approve of it."

Cornelius took the letter, and read, in a handwriting which was much improved even since the last little note he had received from Rosa, as follows: —

"Mynheer President, — The black tulip is about to open, perhaps in ten minutes. As soon as it is open, I shall send a messenger to you, with the request that you will come and fetch it in person from the fortress at Loewestein. I am the daughter of the jailer, Gryphus, almost as much of a captive as the prisoners of my father. I cannot, therefore, bring to you this wonderful flower. This is the reason why I beg you to come and fetch it yourself.

"It is my wish that it should be called Rosa Barlaensis.

"It has opened; it is perfectly black; come, Mynheer President, come.

"I have the honour to be your humble servant,

"Rosa Gryphus.

"That's it, dear Rosa, that's it. Your letter is admirable! I could not have written it with such beautiful simplicity. You will give to the committee all the information that will be required of you. They will then know how the tulip has been grown, how much care and anxiety, and how many sleepless nights, it has cost. But for the present not a minute must be lost. The messenger! the messenger!"

"What's the name of the President?"

"Give me the letter, I will direct it. Oh, he is very well known: it is Mynheer van Systens, the burgomaster of Haarlem; give it to me, Rosa, give it to me."

And with a trembling hand Cornelius wrote the address, —

"To Mynheer Peter van Systens, Burgomaster, and President of the Horticultural Society of Haarlem."

"And now, Rosa, go, go," said Cornelius, "and let us implore the protection of God, who has so kindly watched over us until now."

CHAPTER 23.

The Rival

And in fact the poor young people were in great need of protection.

They had never been so near the destruction of their hopes as at this moment, when they thought themselves certain of their fulfilment.

The reader cannot but have recognized in Jacob our old friend, or rather enemy, Isaac Boxtel, and has guessed, no doubt, that this worthy had followed from the Buytenhof to Loewestein the object of his love and the object of his hatred, — the black tulip and Cornelius van Baerle.

What no one but a tulip-fancier, and an envious tulip-fancier, could have discovered, — the existence of the bulbs and the endeavours of the prisoner, — jealousy had enabled Boxtel, if not to discover, at least to guess.

We have seen him, more successful under the name of Jacob than under that of Isaac, gain the friendship of Gryphus, which for several months he cultivated by means of the best Genievre ever distilled from the Texel to Antwerp, and he lulled the suspicion of the jealous turnkey by holding out to him the flattering prospect of his designing to marry Rosa.

Besides thus offering a bait to the ambition of the father, he managed, at the same time, to interest his zeal as a jailer, picturing to him in the blackest colours the learned prisoner whom Gryphus had in his keeping, and who, as the sham Jacob had it, was in league with Satan, to the detriment of his Highness the Prince of Orange.

At first he had also made some way with Rosa; not, indeed, in her affections, but inasmuch as, by talking to her of marriage and of love, he had evaded all the suspicions which he might otherwise have excited.

We have seen how his imprudence in following Rosa into the garden had unmasked him in the eyes of the young damsel, and how the instinctive fears of Cornelius had put the two lovers on their guard against him.

The reader will remember that the first cause of uneasiness was given to the prisoner by the rage of Jacob when Gryphus crushed the first bulb. In that moment Boxtel's exasperation was the more fierce, as, though suspecting that Cornelius possessed a second bulb, he by no means felt sure of it.

From that moment he began to dodge the steps of Rosa, not only following her to the garden, but also to the lobbies.

Only as this time he followed her in the night, and bare-footed, he was neither seen nor heard except once, when Rosa thought she saw something like a shadow on the staircase.

Her discovery, however, was made too late, as Boxtel had heard from the mouth of the prisoner himself that a second bulb existed.

Taken in by the stratagem of Rosa, who had feigned to put it in the ground, and entertaining no doubt that this little farce had been played in order to force him to betray himself, he redoubled his precaution, and employed every means suggested by his crafty nature to watch the others without being watched himself.

He saw Rosa conveying a large flower-pot of white earthenware from her father's kitchen to her bedroom. He saw Rosa washing in pails of water her pretty little hands, begrimed as they were with the mould which she had handled, to give her tulip the best soil possible.

And at last he hired, just opposite Rosa's window, a little attic, distant enough not to allow him to be recognized with the naked eye, but sufficiently near to enable him, with the help of his telescope, to watch everything that was going on at the Loewestein in Rosa's room, just as at Dort he had watched the dry-room of Cornelius.

He had not been installed more than three days in his attic before all his doubts were removed.

From morning to sunset the flower-pot was in the window, and, like those charming female figures of Mieris and Metzys, Rosa appeared at that window as in a frame, formed by the first budding sprays of the wild vine and the honeysuckle encircling her window.

Rosa watched the flower-pot with an interest which betrayed to Boxtel the real value of the object enclosed in it.

This object could not be anything else but the second bulb, that is to say, the quintessence of all the hopes of the prisoner.

When the nights threatened to be too cold, Rosa took in the flower-pot.

Well, it was then quite evident she was following the instructions of Cornelius, who was afraid of the bulb being killed by frost.

When the sun became too hot, Rosa likewise took in the pot from eleven in the morning until two in the afternoon.

Another proof: Cornelius was afraid lest the soil should become too dry.

But when the first leaves peeped out of the earth Boxtel was fully convinced; and his telescope left him no longer in any uncertainty before they had grown one inch in height.

Cornelius possessed two bulbs, and the second was intrusted to the love and care of Rosa.

For it may well be imagined that the tender secret of the two lovers had not escaped the prying curiosity of Boxtel.

The question, therefore, was how to wrest the second bulb from the care of Rosa.

Certainly this was no easy task.

Rosa watched over her tulip as a mother over her child, or a dove over her eggs.

Rosa never left her room during the day, and, more than that, strange to say, she never left it in the evening.

For seven days Boxtel in vain watched Rosa; she was always at her post.

This happened during those seven days which made Cornelius so unhappy, depriving him at the same time of all news of Rosa and of his tulip.

Would the coolness between Rosa and Cornelius last for ever?

This would have made the theft much more difficult than Mynheer Isaac had at first expected.

We say the theft, for Isaac had simply made up his mind to steal the tulip; and as it grew in the most profound secrecy, and as, moreover, his word, being that of a renowned tulip-grower, would any day be taken against that of an unknown girl without any knowledge of horticulture, or against that of a prisoner convicted of high treason, he confidently hoped that, having once got possession of the bulb, he would be certain to obtain the prize; and then the tulip, instead of being called Tulipa nigra Barlaensis, would go down to posterity under the name of Tulipa nigra Boxtellensis or Boxtellea.

Mynheer Isaac had not yet quite decided which of these two names he would give to the tulip, but, as both meant the same thing, this was, after all, not the important point.

The point was to steal the tulip. But in order that Boxtel might steal the tulip, it was necessary that Rosa should leave her room.

Great therefore was his joy when he saw the usual evening meetings of the lovers resumed.

He first of all took advantage of Rosa’s absence to make himself fully acquainted with all the peculiarities of the door of her chamber. The lock was a double one and in good order, but Rosa always took the key with her.

Boxtel at first entertained an idea of stealing the key, but it soon occurred to him, not only that it would be exceedingly difficult to abstract it from her pocket, but also that, when she perceived her loss, she would not leave her room until the lock was changed, and then Boxtel’s first theft would be useless.

He thought it, therefore, better to employ a different expedient. He collected as many keys as he could, and tried all of them during one of those delightful hours which Rosa and Cornelius passed together at the grating of the cell.

Two of the keys entered the lock, and one of them turned round once, but not the second time.

There was, therefore, only a little to be done to this key.

Boxtel covered it with a slight coat of wax, and when he thus renewed the experiment, the obstacle which prevented the key from being turned a second time left its impression on the wax.

It cost Boxtel two days more to bring his key to perfection, with the aid of a small file.

Rosa’s door thus opened without noise and without difficulty, and Boxtel found himself in her room alone with the tulip.

The first guilty act of Boxtel had been to climb over a wall in order to dig up the tulip; the second, to introduce himself into the dry-room of Cornelius, through an open window; and the third, to enter Rosa’s room by means of a false key.

Thus envy urged Boxtel on with rapid steps in the career of crime.

Boxtel, as we have said, was alone with the tulip.

A common thief would have taken the pot under his arm, and carried it off.

But Boxtel was not a common thief, and he reflected.

It was not yet certain, although very probable, that the tulip would flower black; if, therefore, he stole it now, he not only might be committing a useless crime, but also the theft might be discovered in the time which must elapse until the flower should open.

He therefore — as being in possession of the key, he might enter Rosa's chamber whenever he liked — thought it better to wait and to take it either an hour before or after opening, and to start on the instant to Haarlem, where the tulip would be before the judges of the committee before any one else could put in a reclamation.

Should any one then reclaim it, Boxtel would in his turn charge him or her with theft.

This was a deep-laid scheme, and quite worthy of its author.

Thus, every evening during that delightful hour which the two lovers passed together at the grated window, Boxtel entered Rosa's chamber to watch the progress which the black tulip had made towards flowering.

On the evening at which we have arrived he was going to enter according to custom; but the two lovers, as we have seen, only exchanged a few words before Cornelius sent Rosa back to watch over the tulip.

Seeing Rosa enter her room ten minutes after she had left it, Boxtel guessed that the tulip had opened, or was about to open.

During that night, therefore, the great blow was to be struck. Boxtel presented himself before Gryphus with a double supply of Genievre, that is to say, with a bottle in each pocket.

Gryphus being once fuddled, Boxtel was very nearly master of the house.

At eleven o'clock Gryphus was dead drunk. At two in the morning Boxtel saw Rosa leaving the chamber; but evidently she held in her arms something which she carried with great care.

He did not doubt that this was the black tulip which was in flower.

But what was she going to do with it? Would she set out that instant to Haarlem with it?

It was not possible that a young girl should undertake such a journey alone during the night.

Was she only going to show the tulip to Cornelius? This was more likely.

He followed Rosa in his stocking feet, walking on tiptoe.

He saw her approach the grated window. He heard her calling Cornelius. By the light of the dark lantern he saw the tulip open, and black as the night in which he was hidden.

He heard the plan concerted between Cornelius and Rosa to send a messenger to Haarlem. He saw the lips of the lovers meet, and then heard Cornelius send Rosa away.

He saw Rosa extinguish the light and return to her chamber. Ten minutes after, he saw her leave the room again, and lock it twice.

Boxtel, who saw all this whilst hiding himself on the landing-place of the staircase above, descended step by step from his story as Rosa descended from hers; so that, when she touched with her light foot the lowest step of the staircase, Boxtel touched with a still lighter hand the lock of Rosa's chamber.

And in that hand, it must be understood, he held the false key which opened Rosa's door as easily as did the real one.

And this is why, in the beginning of the chapter, we said that the poor young people were in great need of the protection of God.

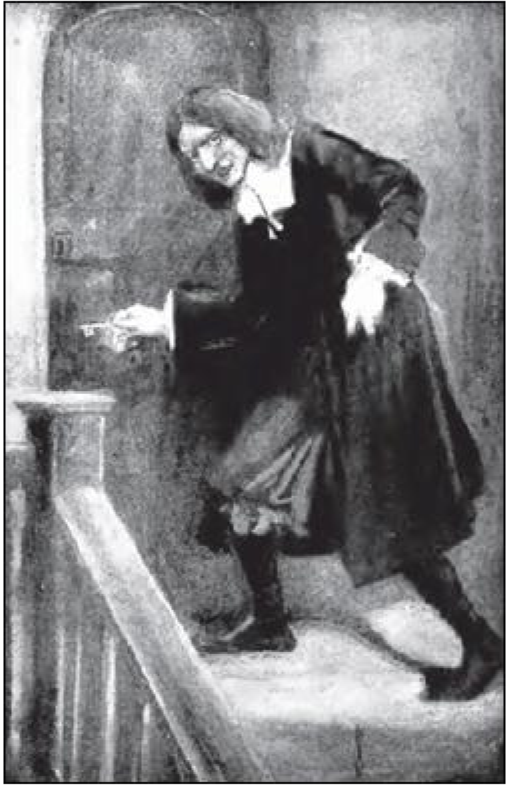

CHAPTER 24.

The Black Tulip changes Masters

Cornelius remained standing on the spot where Rosa had left him. He was quite overpowered with the weight of his twofold happiness.

Half an hour passed away. Already did the first rays of the sun enter through the iron grating of the prison, when Cornelius was suddenly startled at the noise of steps which came up the staircase, and of cries which approached nearer and nearer.

Almost at the same instant he saw before him the pale and distracted face of Rosa.

He started, and turned pale with fright.

“Cornelius, Cornelius!” she screamed, gasping for breath.

“Good Heaven! what is it?” asked the prisoner.

“Cornelius! the tulip — — ”

“Well?”

“How shall I tell you?”

“Speak, speak, Rosa!”

“Some one has taken — stolen it from us.”

“Stolen — taken?” said Cornelius.

“Yes,” said Rosa, leaning against the door to support herself; “yes, taken, stolen!”

And saying this, she felt her limbs failing her, and she fell on her knees.

“But how? Tell me, explain to me.”

“Oh, it is not my fault, my friend.”

Poor Rosa! she no longer dared to call him “My beloved one.”

“You have then left it alone,” said Cornelius, ruefully.

“One minute only, to instruct our messenger, who lives scarcely fifty yards off, on the banks of the Waal.”

“And during that time, notwithstanding all my injunctions, you left the key behind, unfortunate child!”

“No, no, no! this is what I cannot understand. The key was never out of my hands; I clinched it as if I were afraid it would take wings.”

“But how did it happen, then?”

“That’s what I cannot make out. I had given the letter to my messenger; he started before I left his house; I came home, and my door was locked, everything in my room was as I had left it, except the tulip, — that was gone. Some one must have had a key for my room, or have got a false one made on purpose.”

She was nearly choking with sobs, and was unable to continue.

Cornelius, immovable and full of consternation, heard almost without understanding, and only muttered, —

“Stolen, stolen, and I am lost!”

“O Cornelius, forgive me, forgive me, it will kill me!”

Seeing Rosa’s distress, Cornelius seized the iron bars of the grating, and furiously shaking them, called out, —

“Rosa, Rosa, we have been robbed, it is true, but shall we allow ourselves to be dejected for all that? No, no; the misfortune is great, but it may perhaps be remedied. Rosa, we know the thief!”

“Alas! what can I say about it?”

“But I say that it is no one else but that infamous Jacob. Shall we allow him to carry to Haarlem the fruit of our labour, the fruit of our sleepless nights, the child of our love? Rosa, we must pursue, we must overtake him!”

“But how can we do all this, my friend, without letting my father know we were in communication with each other? How should I, a poor girl, with so little knowledge of the world and its ways, be able to attain this end, which perhaps you could not attain yourself?”

“Rosa, Rosa, open this door to me, and you will see whether I will not find the thief, — whether I will not make him confess his crime and beg for mercy.”

“Alas!” cried Rosa, sobbing, “can I open the door for you? have I the keys? If I had had them, would not you have been free long ago?”

“Your father has them, — your wicked father, who has already crushed the first bulb of my tulip. Oh, the wretch! he is an accomplice of Jacob!”

“Don’t speak so loud, for Heaven’s sake!”

“Oh, Rosa, if you don’t open the door to me,” Cornelius cried in his rage, “I shall force these bars, and kill everything I find in the prison.”

“Be merciful, be merciful, my friend!”

“I tell you, Rosa, that I shall demolish this prison, stone for stone!” and the unfortunate man, whose strength was increased tenfold by his rage, began to shake the door with a great noise, little heeding that the thunder of his voice was re-echoing through the spiral staircase.

Rosa, in her fright, made vain attempts to check this furious outbreak.

“I tell you that I shall kill that infamous Gryphus?” roared Cornelius. “I tell you I shall shed his blood as he did that of my black tulip.”

The wretched prisoner began really to rave.

“Well, then, yes,” said Rosa, all in a tremble. “Yes, yes, only be quiet. Yes, yes, I will take his keys, I will open the door for you! Yes, only be quiet, my own dear Cornelius.”

She did not finish her speech, as a growl by her side interrupted her.

“My father!” cried Rosa.

“Gryphus!” roared Van Baerle. “Oh, you villain!”

Old Gryphus, in the midst of all the noise, had ascended the staircase without being heard.

He rudely seized his daughter by the wrist.

“So you will take my keys?” he said, in a voice choked with rage. “Ah! this dastardly fellow, this monster, this gallows-bird of a conspirator, is your own dear Cornelius, is he? Ah! Missy has communications with prisoners of state. Ah! won’t I teach you — won’t I?”

Rosa clasped her hands in despair.

“Ah!” Gryphus continued, passing from the madness of anger to the cool irony of a man who has got the better of his enemy, — ”Ah, you innocent tulip-fancier, you gentle scholar; you will kill me, and drink my blood! Very well! very well! And you have my daughter for an accomplice. Am I, forsooth, in a den of thieves, — in a cave of brigands? Yes, but the Governor shall know all to-morrow, and his Highness the Stadtholder the day after. We know the law, — we shall give a second edition of the Buytenhof, Master Scholar, and a good one this time. Yes, yes, just gnaw your paws like a bear in his cage, and you, my fine little lady, devour your dear Cornelius with your eyes. I tell you, my lambkins, you shall not much longer have the felicity of conspiring together. Away with you, unnatural daughter! And as to you, Master Scholar, we shall see each other again. Just be quiet, — we shall.”

Rosa, beyond herself with terror and despair, kissed her hands to her friend; then, suddenly struck with a bright thought, she rushed toward the staircase, saying, —

“All is not yet lost, Cornelius. Rely on me, my Cornelius.”

Her father followed her, growling.

As to poor Cornelius, he gradually loosened his hold of the bars, which his fingers still grasped convulsively. His head was heavy, his eyes almost started from their sockets, and he fell heavily on the floor of his cell, muttering, —

“Stolen! it has been stolen from me!”

During this time Boxtel had left the fortress by the door which Rosa herself had opened. He carried the black tulip wrapped up in a cloak, and, throwing himself into a coach, which was waiting for him at Gorcum, he drove off, without, as may well be imagined, having informed his friend Gryphus of his sudden departure.

And now, as we have seen him enter his coach, we shall with the consent of the reader, follow him to the end of his journey.

He proceeded but slowly, as the black tulip could not bear travelling post-haste.

But Boxtel, fearing that he might not arrive early enough, procured at Delft a box, lined all round with fresh moss, in which he packed the tulip. The flower was so lightly pressed upon all sides, with a supply of air from above, that the coach could now travel full speed without any possibility of injury to the tulip.

He arrived next morning at Haarlem, fatigued but triumphant; and, to do away with every trace of the theft, he transplanted the tulip, and, breaking the original flower-pot, threw the pieces into the canal. After which he wrote the President of the Horticultural Society a letter, in which he announced to him that he had just arrived at Haarlem with a perfectly black tulip; and, with his flower all safe, took up his quarters at a good hotel in the town, and there he waited.

CHAPTER 25.

The President van Systens

Rosa, on leaving Cornelius, had fixed on her plan, which was no other than to restore to Cornelius the stolen tulip, or never to see him again.

She had seen the despair of the prisoner, and she knew that it was derived from a double source, and that it was incurable.

On the one hand, separation became inevitable, — Gryphus having at the same time surprised the secret of their love and of their secret meetings.

On the other hand, all the hopes on the fulfilment of which Cornelius van Baerle had rested his ambition for the last seven years were now crushed.

Rosa was one of those women who are dejected by trifles, but who in great emergencies are supplied by the misfortune itself with the energy for combating or with the resources for remedying it.

She went to her room, and cast a last glance about her to see whether she had not been mistaken, and whether the tulip was not stowed away in some corner where it had escaped her notice. But she sought in vain, the tulip was still missing; the tulip was indeed stolen.

Rosa made up a little parcel of things indispensable for a journey; took her three hundred guilders, — that is to say, all her fortune, — fetched the third bulb from among her lace, where she had laid it up, and carefully hid it in her bosom; after which she locked her door twice to disguise her flight as long as possible, and, leaving the prison by the same door which an hour before had let out Boxtel, she went to a stable-keeper to hire a carriage.

The man had only a two-wheel chaise, and this was the vehicle which Boxtel had hired since last evening, and in which he was now driving along the road to Delft; for the road from Loewestein to Haarlem, owing to the many canals, rivers, and rivulets intersecting the country, is exceedingly circuitous.

Not being able to procure a vehicle, Rosa was obliged to take a horse, with which the stable-keeper readily intrusted her, knowing her to be the daughter of the jailer of the fortress.

Rosa hoped to overtake her messenger, a kind-hearted and honest lad, whom she would take with her, and who might at the same time serve her as a guide and a protector.

And in fact she had not proceeded more than a league before she saw him hastening along one of the side paths of a very pretty road by the river. Setting her horse off at a canter, she soon came up with him.

The honest lad was not aware of the important character of his message; nevertheless, he used as much speed as if he had known it; and in less than an hour he had already gone a league and a half.

Rosa took from him the note, which had now become useless, and explained to him what she wanted him to do for her. The boatman placed himself entirely at her disposal, promising to keep pace with the horse if Rosa would allow him to take hold of either the croup or the bridle of her horse. The two travellers had been on their way for five hours, and made more than eight leagues, and yet Gryphus had not the least suspicion of his daughter having left the fortress.

The jailer, who was of a very spiteful and cruel disposition, chuckled within himself at the idea of having struck such terror into his daughter’s heart.

But whilst he was congratulating himself on having such a nice story to tell to his boon companion, Jacob, that worthy was on his road to Delft; and, thanks to the swiftness of the horse, had already the start of Rosa and her companion by four leagues.

And whilst the affectionate father was rejoicing at the thought of his daughter weeping in her room, Rosa was making the best of her way towards Haarlem.

Thus the prisoner alone was where Gryphus thought him to be.

Rosa was so little with her father since she took care of the tulip, that at his dinner hour, that is to say, at twelve o’clock, he was reminded for the first time by his appetite that his daughter was fretting rather too long.

He sent one of the under-turnkeys to call her; and, when the man came back to tell him that he had called and sought her in vain, he resolved to go and call her himself.

He first went to her room, but, loud as he knocked, Rosa answered not.

The locksmith of the fortress was sent for; he opened the door, but Gryphus no more found Rosa than she had found the tulip.

At that very moment she entered Rotterdam.

Gryphus therefore had just as little chance of finding her in the kitchen as in her room, and just as little in the garden as in the kitchen.

The reader may imagine the anger of the jailer when, after having made inquiries about the neighbourhood, he heard that his daughter had hired a horse, and, like an adventuress, set out on a journey without saying where she was going.

Gryphus again went up in his fury to Van Baerle, abused him, threatened him, knocked all the miserable furniture of his cell about, and promised him all sorts of misery, even starvation and flogging.

Cornelius, without even hearing what his jailer said, allowed himself to be ill-treated, abused, and threatened, remaining all the while sullen, immovable, dead to every emotion and fear.

After having sought for Rosa in every direction, Gryphus looked out for Jacob, and, as he could not find him either, he began to suspect from that moment that Jacob had run away with her.

The damsel, meanwhile, after having stopped for two hours at Rotterdam, had started again on her journey. On that evening she slept at Delft, and on the following morning she reached Haarlem, four hours after Boxtel had arrived there.

Rosa, first of all, caused herself to be led before Mynheer van Systens, the President of the Horticultural Society of Haarlem.

She found that worthy gentleman in a situation which, to do justice to our story, we must not pass over in our description.

The President was drawing up a report to the committee of the society.

This report was written on large-sized paper, in the finest handwriting of the President.

Rosa was announced simply as Rosa Gryphus; but as her name, well as it might sound, was unknown to the President, she was refused admittance.

Rosa, however, was by no means abashed, having vowed in her heart, in pursuing her cause, not to allow herself to be put down either by refusal, or abuse, or even brutality.

“Announce to the President,” she said to the servant, “that I want to speak to him about the black tulip.”

These words seemed to be an “Open Sesame,” for she soon found herself in the office of the President, Van Systens, who gallantly rose from his chair to meet her.

He was a spare little man, resembling the stem of a flower, his head forming its chalice, and his two limp arms representing the double leaf of the tulip; the resemblance was rendered complete by his waddling gait which made him even more like that flower when it bends under a breeze.

“Well, miss,” he said, “you are coming, I am told, about the affair of the black tulip.”

To the President of the Horticultural Society the Tulipa nigra was a first-rate power, which, in its character as queen of the tulips, might send ambassadors.

“Yes, sir,” answered Rosa; “I come at least to speak of it.”

“Is it doing well, then?” asked Van Systens, with a smile of tender veneration.

“Alas! sir, I don’t know,” said Rosa.

“How is that? could any misfortune have happened to it?”

“A very great one, sir; yet not to it, but to me.”

“What?”

“It has been stolen from me.”

“Stolen! the black tulip?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Do you know the thief?”

“I have my suspicions, but I must not yet accuse any one.”

“But the matter may very easily be ascertained.”

“How is that?”

“As it has been stolen from you, the thief cannot be far off.”

“Why not?”

“Because I have seen the black tulip only two hours ago.”

“You have seen the black tulip!” cried Rosa, rushing up to Mynheer van Systens.

“As I see you, miss.”

“But where?”

“Well, with your master, of course.”

“With my master?”

“Yes, are you not in the service of Master Isaac Boxtel?”

“I?”

“Yes, you.”

“But for whom do you take me, sir?”

“And for whom do you take me?”

“I hope, sir, I take you for what you are, — that is to say, for the honorable Mynheer van Systens, Burgomaster of Haarlem, and President of the Horticultural Society.”

“And what is it you told me just now?”

“I told you, sir, that my tulip has been stolen.”

“Then your tulip is that of Mynheer Boxtel. Well, my child, you express yourself very badly. The tulip has been stolen, not from you, but from Mynheer Boxtel.”

“I repeat to you, sir, that I do not know who this Mynheer Boxtel is, and that I have now heard his name pronounced for the first time.”

“You do not know who Mynheer Boxtel is, and you also had a black tulip?”

“But is there any other besides mine?” asked Rosa, trembling.

“Yes, — that of Mynheer Boxtel.”

“How is it?”

“Black, of course.”

“Without speck?”

“Without a single speck, or even point.”

“And you have this tulip, — you have it deposited here?”

“No, but it will be, as it has to be exhibited before the committee previous to the prize being awarded.”

“Oh, sir!” cried Rosa, “this Boxtel — this Isaac Boxtel — who calls himself the owner of the black tulip — — ”

“And who is its owner?”

“Is he not a very thin man?”

“Bald?”

“Yes.”

“With sunken eyes?”

“I think he has.”

“Restless, stooping, and bowlegged?”

“In truth, you draw Master Boxtel’s portrait feature by feature.”

“And the tulip, sir? Is it not in a pot of white and blue earthenware, with yellowish flowers in a basket on three sides?”

“Oh, as to that I am not quite sure; I looked more at the flower than at the pot.”

“Oh, sir! that’s my tulip, which has been stolen from me. I came here to reclaim it before you and from you.”

“Oh! oh!” said Van Systens, looking at Rosa. “What! you are here to claim the tulip of Master Boxtel? Well, I must say, you are cool enough.”

“Honoured sir,” a little put out by this apostrophe, “I do not say that I am coming to claim the tulip of Master Boxtel, but to reclaim my own.”

“Yours?”

“Yes, the one which I have myself planted and nursed.”

“Well, then, go and find out Master Boxtel, at the White Swan Inn, and you can then settle matters with him; as for me, considering that the cause seems to me as difficult to judge as that which was brought before King Solomon, and that I do not pretend to be as wise as he was, I shall content myself with making my report, establishing the existence of the black tulip, and ordering the hundred thousand guilders to be paid to its grower. Good-bye, my child.”

“Oh, sir, sir!” said Rosa, imploringly.

“Only, my child,” continued Van Systens, “as you are young and pretty, and as there may be still some good in you, I’ll give you some good advice. Be prudent in this matter, for we have a court of justice and a prison here at Haarlem, and, moreover, we are exceedingly ticklish as far as the honour of our tulips is concerned. Go, my child, go, remember, Master Isaac Boxtel at the White Swan Inn.”

And Mynheer van Systens, taking up his fine pen, resumed his report, which had been interrupted by Rosa’s visit.

CHAPTER 26.

A Member of the Horticultural Society

Rosa, beyond herself and nearly mad with joy and fear at the idea of the black tulip being found again, started for the White Swan, followed by the boatman, a stout lad from Frisia, who was strong enough to knock down a dozen Boxtels single-handed.

He had been made acquainted in the course of the journey with the state of affairs, and was not afraid of any encounter; only he had orders, in such a case, to spare the tulip.

But on arriving in the great market-place Rosa at once stopped, a sudden thought had struck her, just as Homer’s Minerva seizes Achilles by the hair at the moment when he is about to be carried away by his anger.

“Good Heaven!” she muttered to herself, “I have made a grievous blunder; it may be I have ruined Cornelius, the tulip, and myself. I have given the alarm, and perhaps awakened suspicion. I am but a woman; these men may league themselves against me, and then I shall be lost. If I am lost that matters nothing, — but Cornelius and the tulip!”

She reflected for a moment.

“If I go to that Boxtel, and do not know him; if that Boxtel is not my Jacob, but another fancier, who has also discovered the black tulip; or if my tulip has been stolen by some one else, or has already passed into the hands of a third person; — if I do not recognize the man, only the tulip, how shall I prove that it belongs to me? On the other hand, if I recognise this Boxtel as Jacob, who knows what will come out of it? whilst we are contesting with each other, the tulip will die.”

In the meanwhile, a great noise was heard, like the distant roar of the sea, at the other extremity of the market-place. People were running about, doors opening and shutting, Rosa alone was unconscious of all this hubbub among the multitude.

“We must return to the President,” she muttered.

“Well, then, let us return,” said the boatman.

They took a small street, which led them straight to the mansion of Mynheer van Systens, who with his best pen in his finest hand continued to draw up his report.

Everywhere on her way Rosa heard people speaking only of the black tulip, and the prize of a hundred thousand guilders. The news had spread like wildfire through the town.

Rosa had not a little difficulty is penetrating a second time into the office of Mynheer van Systens, who, however, was again moved by the magic name of the black tulip.

But when he recognised Rosa, whom in his own mind he had set down as mad, or even worse, he grew angry, and wanted to send her away.

Rosa, however, clasped her hands, and said with that tone of honest truth which generally finds its way to the hearts of men, —

“For Heaven’s sake, sir, do not turn me away; listen to what I have to tell you, and if it be not possible for you to do me justice, at least you will not one day have to reproach yourself before God for having made yourself the accomplice of a bad action.”

Van Systens stamped his foot with impatience; it was the second time that Rosa interrupted him in the midst of a composition which stimulated his vanity, both as a burgomaster and as President of the Horticultural Society.

“But my report!” he cried, — ”my report on the black tulip!”

“Mynheer van Systens,” Rosa continued, with the firmness of innocence and truth, “your report on the black tulip will, if you don’t hear me, be based on crime or on falsehood. I implore you, sir, let this Master Boxtel, whom I assert to be Master Jacob, be brought here before you and me, and I swear that I will leave him in undisturbed possession of the tulip if I do not recognise the flower and its holder.”

“Well, I declare, here is a proposal,” said Van Systens.

“What do you mean?”

“I ask you what can be proved by your recognising them?”

“After all,” said Rosa, in her despair, “you are an honest man, sir; how would you feel if one day you found out that you had given the prize to a man for something which he not only had not produced, but which he had even stolen?”

Rosa’s speech seemed to have brought a certain conviction into the heart of Van Systens, and he was going to answer her in a gentler tone, when at once a great noise was heard in the street, and loud cheers shook the house.

“What is this?” cried the burgomaster; “what is this? Is it possible? have I heard aright?”

And he rushed towards his anteroom, without any longer heeding Rosa, whom he left in his cabinet.

Scarcely had he reached his anteroom when he cried out aloud on seeing his staircase invaded, up to the very landing-place, by the multitude, which was accompanying, or rather following, a young man, simply clad in a violet-coloured velvet, embroidered with silver; who, with a certain aristocratic slowness, ascended the white stone steps of the house.

In his wake followed two officers, one of the navy, and the other of the cavalry.

Van Systens, having found his way through the frightened domestics, began to bow, almost to prostrate himself before his visitor, who had been the cause of all this stir.

“Monseigneur,” he called out, “Monseigneur! What distinguished honour is your Highness bestowing for ever on my humble house by your visit?”

“Dear Mynheer van Systens,” said William of Orange, with a serenity which, with him, took the place of a smile, “I am a true Hollander, I am fond of the water, of beer, and of flowers, sometimes even of that cheese the flavour of which seems so grateful to the French; the flower which I prefer to all others is, of course, the tulip. I heard at Leyden that the city of Haarlem at last possessed the black tulip; and, after having satisfied myself of the truth of news which seemed so incredible, I have come to know all about it from the President of the Horticultural Society.”

“Oh, Monseigneur, Monseigneur!” said Van Systens, “what glory to the society if its endeavours are pleasing to your Highness!”

“Have you got the flower here?” said the Prince, who, very likely, already regretted having made such a long speech.

“I am sorry to say we have not.”

“And where is it?”

“With its owner.”

“Who is he?”

“An honest tulip-grower of Dort.”

“His name?”

“Boxtel.”

“His quarters?”

“At the White Swan; I shall send for him, and if in the meanwhile your Highness will do me the honour of stepping into my drawing-room, he will be sure — knowing that your Highness is here — to lose no time in bringing his tulip.”

“Very well, send for him.”

“Yes, your Highness, but — — ”

“What is it?”

“Oh, nothing of any consequence, Monseigneur.”

“Everything is of consequence, Mynheer van Systens.”

“Well, then, Monseigneur, if it must be said, a little difficulty has presented itself.”

“What difficulty?”

“This tulip has already been claimed by usurpers. It’s true that it is worth a hundred thousand guilders.”

“Indeed!”

“Yes, Monseigneur, by usurpers, by forgers.”

“This is a crime, Mynheer van Systens.”

“So it is, your Highness.”

“And have you any proofs of their guilt?”

“No, Monseigneur, the guilty woman — — ”

“The guilty woman, Sir?”

“I ought to say, the woman who claims the tulip, Monseigneur, is here in the room close by.”

“And what do you think of her?”

“I think, Monseigneur, that the bait of a hundred thousand guilders may have tempted her.”

“And so she claims the tulip?”

“Yes Monseigneur.”

“And what proof does she offer?”

“I was just going to question her when your Highness came in.”

“Question her, Mynheer van Systens, question her. I am the first magistrate of the country; I will hear the case and administer justice.”

“I have found my King Solomon,” said Van Systens, bowing, and showing the way to the Prince.

His Highness was just going to walk ahead, but, suddenly recollecting himself he said —

“Go before me, and call me plain Mynheer.”

The two then entered the cabinet.

Rosa was still standing at the same place, leaning on the window, and looking through the panes into the garden.

“Ah! a Frisian girl,” said the Prince, as he observed Rosa’s gold brocade headdress and red petticoat.

At the noise of their footsteps she turned round, but scarcely saw the Prince, who seated himself in the darkest corner of the apartment.

All her attention, as may be easily imagined, was fixed on that important person who was called Van Systens, so that she had no time to notice the humble stranger who was following the master of the house, and who, for aught she knew, might be somebody or nobody.

The humble stranger took a book down from the shelf, and made Van Systens a sign to commence the examination forthwith.

Van Systens, likewise at the invitation of the young man in the violet coat, sat down in his turn, and, quite happy and proud of the importance thus cast upon him, began, —

“My child, you promise to tell me the truth and the entire truth concerning this tulip?”

“I promise.”

“Well, then, speak before this gentleman; this gentleman is one of the members of the Horticultural Society.”

“What am I to tell you, sir,” said Rosa, “beside that which I have told you already.”

“Well, then, what is it?”

“I repeat the question I have addressed to you before.”

“Which?”

“That you will order Mynheer Boxtel to come here with his tulip. If I do not recognise it as mine I will frankly tell it; but if I do recognise it I will reclaim it, even if I go before his Highness the Stadtholder himself, with my proofs in my hands.”

“You have, then, some proofs, my child?”

“God, who knows my good right, will assist me to some.”

Van Systens exchanged a look with the Prince, who, since the first words of Rosa, seemed to try to remember her, as if it were not for the first time that this sweet voice rang in his ears.

An officer went off to fetch Boxtel, and Van Systens in the meanwhile continued his examination.

“And with what do you support your assertion that you are the real owner of the black tulip?”

“With the very simple fact of my having planted and grown it in my own chamber.”

“In your chamber? Where was your chamber?”

“At Loewestein.”

“You are from Loewestein?”

“I am the daughter of the jailer of the fortress.”

The Prince made a little movement, as much as to say, “Well, that’s it, I remember now.”

And, all the while feigning to be engaged with his book, he watched Rosa with even more attention than he had before.

“And you are fond of flowers?” continued Mynheer van Systens.

“Yes, sir.”

“Then you are an experienced florist, I dare say?”

Rosa hesitated a moment; then with a tone which came from the depth of her heart, she said, —

“Gentlemen, I am speaking to men of honor.”

There was such an expression of truth in the tone of her voice, that Van Systens and the Prince answered simultaneously by an affirmative movement of their heads.

“Well, then, I am not an experienced florist; I am only a poor girl, one of the people, who, three months ago, knew neither how to read nor how to write. No, the black tulip has not been found by myself.”

“But by whom else?”

“By a poor prisoner of Loewestein.”

“By a prisoner of Loewestein?” repeated the Prince.

The tone of his voice startled Rosa, who was sure she had heard it before.

“By a prisoner of state, then,” continued the Prince, “as there are none else there.”

Having said this he began to read again, at least in appearance.

“Yes,” said Rosa, with a faltering voice, “yes, by a prisoner of state.”

Van Systens trembled as he heard such a confession made in the presence of such a witness.

“Continue,” said William dryly, to the President of the Horticultural Society.

“Ah, sir,” said Rosa, addressing the person whom she thought to be her real judge, “I am going to incriminate myself very seriously.”

“Certainly,” said Van Systens, “the prisoner of state ought to be kept in close confinement at Loewestein.”

“Alas! sir.”

“And from what you tell me you took advantage of your position, as daughter of the jailer, to communicate with a prisoner of state about the cultivation of flowers.”

“So it is, sir,” Rosa murmured in dismay; “yes, I am bound to confess, I saw him every day.”

“Unfortunate girl!” exclaimed Van Systens.

The Prince, observing the fright of Rosa and the pallor of the President, raised his head, and said, in his clear and decided tone, —

“This cannot signify anything to the members of the Horticultural Society; they have to judge on the black tulip, and have no cognizance to take of political offences. Go on, young woman, go on.”

Van Systens, by means of an eloquent glance, offered, in the name of the tulip, his thanks to the new member of the Horticultural Society.

Rosa, reassured by this sort of encouragement which the stranger was giving her, related all that had happened for the last three months, all that she had done, and all that she had suffered. She described the cruelty of Gryphus; the destruction of the first bulb; the grief of the prisoner; the precautions taken to insure the success of the second bulb; the patience of the prisoner and his anxiety during their separation; how he was about to starve himself because he had no longer any news of his tulip; his joy when she went to see him again; and, lastly, their despair when they found that the tulip which had come into flower was stolen just one hour after it had opened.

All this was detailed with an accent of truth which, although producing no change in the impassible mien of the Prince, did not fail to take effect on Van Systens.

“But,” said the Prince, “it cannot be long since you knew the prisoner.”

Rosa opened her large eyes and looked at the stranger, who drew back into the dark corner, as if he wished to escape her observation.

“Why, sir?” she asked him.

“Because it is not yet four months since the jailer Gryphus and his daughter were removed to Loewestein.”

“That is true, sir.”

“Otherwise, you must have solicited the transfer of your father, in order to be able to follow some prisoner who may have been transported from the Hague to Loewestein.”

“Sir,” said Rosa, blushing.

“Finish what you have to say,” said William.

“I confess I knew the prisoner at the Hague.”

“Happy prisoner!” said William, smiling.

At this moment the officer who had been sent for Boxtel returned, and announced to the Prince that the person whom he had been to fetch was following on his heels with his tulip.

CHAPTER 27.

The Third Bulb

Boxtel’s return was scarcely announced, when he entered in person the drawing-room of Mynheer van Systens, followed by two men, who carried in a box their precious burden and deposited it on a table.

The Prince, on being informed, left the cabinet, passed into the drawing-room, admired the flower, and silently resumed his seat in the dark corner, where he had himself placed his chair.

Rosa, trembling, pale and terrified, expected to be invited in her turn to see the tulip.

She now heard the voice of Boxtel.

“It is he!” she exclaimed.

The Prince made her a sign to go and look through the open door into the drawing-room.

“It is my tulip,” cried Rosa, “I recognise it. Oh, my poor Cornelius!”

And saying this she burst into tears.

The Prince rose from his seat, went to the door, where he stood for some time with the full light falling upon his figure.

As Rosa’s eyes now rested upon him, she felt more than ever convinced that this was not the first time she had seen the stranger.

“Master Boxtel,” said the Prince, “come in here, if you please.”

Boxtel eagerly approached, and, finding himself face to face with William of Orange, started back.

“His Highness!” he called out.

“His Highness!” Rosa repeated in dismay.

Hearing this exclamation on his left, Boxtel turned round, and perceived Rosa.

At this sight the whole frame of the thief shook as if under the influence of a galvanic shock.

“Ah!” muttered the Prince to himself, “he is confused.”

But Boxtel, making a violent effort to control his feelings, was already himself again.

“Master Boxtel,” said William, “you seem to have discovered the secret of growing the black tulip?”

“Yes, your Highness,” answered Boxtel, in a voice which still betrayed some confusion.

It is true his agitation might have been attributable to the emotion which the man must have felt on suddenly recognising the Prince.

“But,” continued the Stadtholder, “here is a young damsel who also pretends to have found it.”

Boxtel, with a disdainful smile, shrugged his shoulders.

William watched all his movements with evident interest and curiosity.

“Then you don’t know this young girl?” said the Prince.

“No, your Highness!”

“And you, child, do you know Master Boxtel?”

“No, I don’t know Master Boxtel, but I know Master Jacob.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean to say that at Loewestein the man who here calls himself Isaac Boxtel went by the name of Master Jacob.”

“What do you say to that, Master Boxtel?”

“I say that this damsel lies, your Highness.”

“You deny, therefore, having ever been at Loewestein?”

Boxtel hesitated; the fixed and searching glance of the proud eye of the Prince prevented him from lying.

“I cannot deny having been at Loewestein, your Highness, but I deny having stolen the tulip.”

“You have stolen it, and that from my room,” cried Rosa, with indignation.

“I deny it.”

“Now listen to me. Do you deny having followed me into the garden, on the day when I prepared the border where I was to plant it? Do you deny having followed me into the garden when I pretended to plant it? Do you deny that, on that evening, you rushed after my departure to the spot where you hoped to find the bulb? Do you deny having dug in the ground with your hands — but, thank God! in vain, as it was a stratagem to discover your intentions. Say, do you deny all this?”

Boxtel did not deem it fit to answer these several charges, but, turning to the Prince, continued, —

"I have now for twenty years grown tulips at Dort. I have even acquired some reputation in this art; one of my hybrids is entered in the catalogue under the name of an illustrious personage. I have dedicated it to the King of Portugal. The truth in the matter is as I shall now tell your Highness. This damsel knew that I had produced the black tulip, and, in concert with a lover of hers in the fortress of Loewestein, she formed the plan of ruining me by appropriating to herself the prize of a hundred thousand guilders, which, with the help of your Highness's justice, I hope to gain."

"Yah!" cried Rosa, beyond herself with anger.

"Silence!" said the Prince.

Then, turning to Boxtel, he said, —

"And who is that prisoner to whom you allude as the lover of this young woman?"

Rosa nearly swooned, for Cornelius was designated as a dangerous prisoner, and recommended by the Prince to the especial surveillance of the jailer.

Nothing could have been more agreeable to Boxtel than this question.

"This prisoner," he said, "is a man whose name in itself will prove to your Highness what trust you may place in his probity. He is a prisoner of state, who was once condemned to death."

"And his name?"

Rosa hid her face in her hands with a movement of despair.

"His name is Cornelius van Baerle," said Boxtel, "and he is godson of that villain Cornelius de Witt."

The Prince gave a start, his generally quiet eye flashed, and a death-like paleness spread over his impassible features.

He went up to Rosa, and with his finger, gave her a sign to remove her hands from her face.

Rosa obeyed, as if under mesmeric influence, without having seen the sign.

"It was, then to follow this man that you came to me at Leyden to solicit for the transfer of your father?"

Rosa hung down her head, and, nearly choking, said, —

"Yes, your Highness."

"Go on," said the Prince to Boxtel.

"I have nothing more to say," Isaac continued. "Your Highness knows all. But there is one thing which I did not intend to say, because I did not wish to make this girl blush for her ingratitude. I came to Loewestein because I had business there. On this occasion I made the acquaintance of old Gryphus, and, falling in love with his daughter, made an offer of marriage to her; and, not being rich, I committed the imprudence of mentioning to them my prospect of gaining a hundred thousand guilders, in proof of which I showed to them the black tulip. Her lover having himself made a show at Dort of cultivating tulips to hide his political intrigues, they now plotted together for my ruin. On the eve of the day when the flower was expected to open, the tulip was taken away by this young woman. She carried it to her room, from which I had the good luck to recover it at the very moment when she had the impudence to despatch a messenger to announce to the members of the Horticultural Society that she had produced the grand black tulip. But she did not stop there. There is no doubt that, during the few hours which she kept the flower in her room, she showed it to some persons whom she may now call as witnesses. But, fortunately, your Highness has now been warned against this impostor and her witnesses."

"Oh, my God, my God! what infamous falsehoods!" said Rosa, bursting into tears, and throwing herself at the feet of the Stadtholder, who, although thinking her guilty, felt pity for her dreadful agony.

"You have done very wrong, my child," he said, "and your lover shall be punished for having thus badly advised you. For you are so young, and have such an honest look, that I am inclined to believe the mischief to have been his doing, and not yours."

"Monseigneur! Monseigneur!" cried Rosa, "Cornelius is not guilty."

William started.

"Not guilty of having advised you? that's what you want to say, is it not?"

"What I wish to say, your Highness, is that Cornelius is as little guilty of the second crime imputed to him as he was of the first."

"Of the first? And do you know what was his first crime? Do you know of what he was accused and convicted? Of having, as an accomplice of Cornelius de Witt, concealed the correspondence of the Grand Pensionary and the Marquis de Louvois."

"Well, sir, he was ignorant of this correspondence being deposited with him; completely ignorant. I am as certain as of my life, that, if it were not so, he would have told me; for how could that pure mind have harboured a secret without revealing it to me? No, no, your Highness, I repeat it, and even at the risk of incurring your displeasure, Cornelius is no more guilty of the first crime than of the second; and of the second no more than of the first. Oh, would to Heaven that you knew my Cornelius; Monseigneur!"

"He is a De Witt!" cried Boxtel. "His Highness knows only too much of him, having once granted him his life."

"Silence!" said the Prince; "all these affairs of state, as I have already said, are completely out of the province of the Horticultural Society of Haarlem."

Then, knitting his brow, he added, —

"As to the tulip, make yourself easy, Master Boxtel, you shall have justice done to you."

Boxtel bowed with a heart full of joy, and received the congratulations of the President.

"You, my child," William of Orange continued, "you were going to commit a crime. I will not punish you; but the real evil-doer shall pay the penalty for both. A man of his name may be a conspirator, and even a traitor, but he ought not to be a thief."

"A thief!" cried Rosa. "Cornelius a thief? Pray, your Highness, do not say such a word, it would kill him, if he knew it. If theft there has been, I swear to you, Sir, no one else but this man has committed it."

"Prove it," Boxtel coolly remarked.

"I shall prove it. With God's help I shall."

Then, turning towards Boxtel, she asked, —

"The tulip is yours?"

"It is."

"How many bulbs were there of it?"

Boxtel hesitated for a moment, but after a short consideration he came to the conclusion that she would not ask this question if there were none besides the two bulbs of which he had known already. He therefore answered, —

"Three."

"What has become of these bulbs?"

"Oh! what has become of them? Well, one has failed; the second has produced the black tulip."

"And the third?"

"The third!"

"The third, — where is it?"

"I have it at home," said Boxtel, quite confused.

“At home? Where? At Loewestein, or at Dort?”

“At Dort,” said Boxtel.

“You lie!” cried Rosa. “Monseigneur,” she continued, whilst turning round to the Prince, “I will tell you the true story of these three bulbs. The first was crushed by my father in the prisoner’s cell, and this man is quite aware of it, for he himself wanted to get hold of it, and, being balked in his hope, he very nearly fell out with my father, who had been the cause of his disappointment. The second bulb, planted by me, has produced the black tulip, and the third and last” — saying this, she drew it from her bosom — ”here it is, in the very same paper in which it was wrapped up together with the two others. When about to be led to the scaffold, Cornelius van Baerle gave me all the three. Take it, Monseigneur, take it.”

And Rosa, unfolding the paper, offered the bulb to the Prince, who took it from her hands and examined it.

“But, Monseigneur, this young woman may have stolen the bulb, as she did the tulip,” Boxtel said, with a faltering voice, and evidently alarmed at the attention with which the Prince examined the bulb; and even more at the movements of Rosa, who was reading some lines written on the paper which remained in her hands.

Her eyes suddenly lighted up; she read, with breathless anxiety, the mysterious paper over and over again; and at last, uttering a cry, held it out to the Prince and said, “Read, Monseigneur, for Heaven’s sake, read!”

William handed the third bulb to Van Systens, took the paper, and read.

No sooner had he looked at it than he began to stagger; his hand trembled, and very nearly let the paper fall to the ground; and the expression of pain and compassion in his features was really frightful to see.

It was that fly-leaf, taken from the Bible, which Cornelius de Witt had sent to Dort by Craeke, the servant of his brother John, to request Van Baerle to burn the correspondence of the Grand Pensionary with the Marquis de Louvois.

This request, as the reader may remember, was couched in the following terms: —

“My Dear Godson, —

“Burn the parcel which I have intrusted to you. Burn it without looking at it, and without opening it, so that its contents may for ever remain unknown to yourself. Secrets of this description are death to those with whom they are deposited. Burn it, and you will have saved John and Cornelius de Witt.

"Farewell, and love me.

"Cornelius de Witt.

"August 20, 1672."

This slip of paper offered the proofs both of Van Baerle's innocence and of his claim to the property of the tulip.

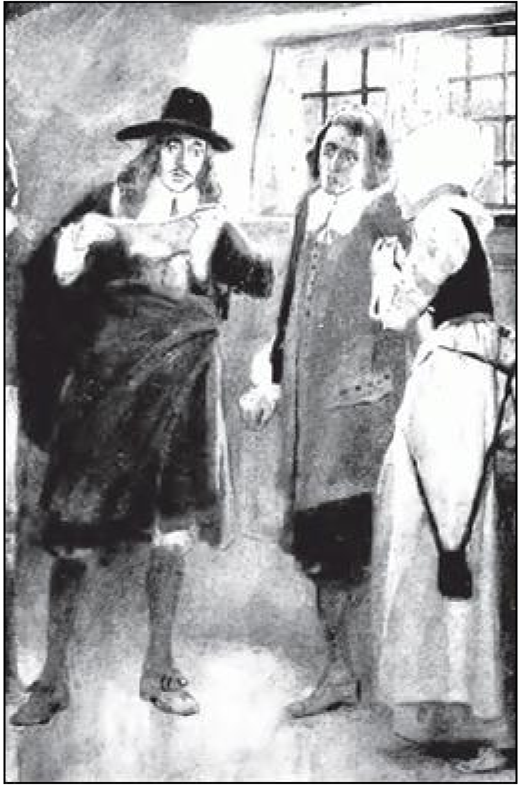

Rosa and the Stadtholder exchanged one look only.

That of Rosa was meant to express, "Here, you see yourself."

That of the Stadtholder signified, "Be quiet, and wait."

The Prince wiped the cold sweat from his forehead, and slowly folded up the paper, whilst his thoughts were wandering in that labyrinth without a goal and without a guide, which is called remorse and shame for the past.

Soon, however, raising his head with an effort, he said, in his usual voice, —

"Go, Mr. Boxtel; justice shall be done, I promise you."

Then, turning to the President, he added, —

"You, my dear Mynheer van Systens, take charge of this young woman and of the tulip. Good-bye."

All bowed, and the Prince left, among the deafening cheers of the crowd outside.

Boxtel returned to his inn, rather puzzled and uneasy, tormented by misgivings about that paper which William had received from the hand of Rosa, and which his Highness had read, folded up, and so carefully put in his pocket. What was the meaning of all this?

Rosa went up to the tulip, tenderly kissed its leaves and, with a heart full of happiness and confidence in the ways of God, broke out in the words, —

“Thou knowest best for what end Thou madest my good Cornelius teach me to read.”

CHAPTER 28.

The Hymn of the Flowers

Whilst the events we have described in our last chapter were taking place, the unfortunate Van Baerle, forgotten in his cell in the fortress of Loewestein, suffered at the hands of Gryphus all that a prisoner can suffer when his jailer has formed the determination of playing the part of hangman.

Gryphus, not having received any tidings of Rosa or of Jacob, persuaded himself that all that had happened was the devil's work, and that Dr. Cornelius van Baerle had been sent on earth by Satan.

The result of it was, that, one fine morning, the third after the disappearance of Jacob and Rosa, he went up to the cell of Cornelius in even a greater rage than usual.

The latter, leaning with his elbows on the window-sill and supporting his head with his two hands, whilst his eyes wandered over the distant hazy horizon where the windmills of Dort were turning their sails, was breathing the fresh air, in order to be able to keep down his tears and to fortify himself in his philosophy.

The pigeons were still there, but hope was not there; there was no future to look forward to.

Alas! Rosa, being watched, was no longer able to come. Could she not write? and if so, could she convey her letters to him?

No, no. He had seen during the two preceding days too much fury and malignity in the eyes of old Gryphus to expect that his vigilance would relax, even for one moment. Moreover, had not she to suffer even worse torments than those of seclusion and separation? Did this brutal, blaspheming, drunken bully take revenge on his daughter, like the ruthless fathers of the Greek drama? And when the Genievre had heated his brain, would it not give to his arm, which had been only too well set by Cornelius, even double force?

The idea that Rosa might perhaps be ill-treated nearly drove Cornelius mad.

He then felt his own powerlessness. He asked himself whether God was just in inflicting so much tribulation on two innocent creatures. And certainly in these moments he began to doubt the wisdom of Providence. It is one of the curses of misfortune that it thus begets doubt.

Van Baerle had proposed to write to Rosa, but where was she?

He also would have wished to write to the Hague to be beforehand with Gryphus, who, he had no doubt, would by denouncing him do his best to bring new storms on his head.

But how should he write? Gryphus had taken the paper and pencil from him, and even if he had both, he could hardly expect Gryphus to despatch his letter.

Then Cornelius revolved in his mind all those stratagems resorted to by unfortunate prisoners.

He had thought of an attempt to escape, a thing which never entered his head whilst he could see Rosa every day; but the more he thought of it, the more clearly he saw the impracticability of such an attempt. He was one of those choice spirits who abhor everything that is common, and who often lose a good chance through not taking the way of the vulgar, that high road of mediocrity which leads to everything.

“How is it possible,” said Cornelius to himself, “that I should escape from Loewestein, as Grotius has done the same thing before me? Has not every precaution been taken since? Are not the windows barred? Are not the doors of double and even of treble strength, and the sentinels ten times more watchful? And have not I, besides all this, an Argus so much the more dangerous as he has the keen eyes of hatred? Finally, is there not one fact which takes away all my spirit, I mean Rosa’s absence? But suppose I should waste ten years of my life in making a file to file off my bars, or in braiding cords to let myself down from the window, or in sticking wings on my shoulders to fly, like Daedalus? But luck is against me now. The file would get dull, the rope would break, or my wings would melt in the sun; I should surely kill myself, I should be picked up maimed and crippled; I should be labelled, and put on exhibition in the museum at the Hague between the blood-stained doublet of William the Taciturn and the female walrus captured at Stavesen, and the only result of my enterprise will have been to procure me a place among the curiosities of Holland.

“But no; and it is much better so. Some fine day Gryphus will commit some atrocity. I am losing my patience, since I have lost the joy and company of Rosa, and especially since I have lost my tulip. Undoubtedly, some day or other Gryphus will attack me in a manner painful to my self-respect, or to my love, or even threaten my personal safety. I don't know how it is, but since my imprisonment I feel a strange and almost irresistible pugnacity. Well, I shall get at the throat of that old villain, and strangle him."

Cornelius at these words stopped for a moment, biting his lips and staring out before him; then, eagerly returning to an idea which seemed to possess a strange fascination for him, he continued, —

"Well, and once having strangled him, why should I not take his keys from him, why not go down the stairs as if I had done the most virtuous action, why not go and fetch Rosa from her room, why not tell her all, and jump from her window into the Waal? I am expert enough as a swimmer to save both of us. Rosa, — but, oh Heaven, Gryphus is her father! Whatever may be her affection for me, she will never approve of my having strangled her father, brutal and malicious as he has been.

"I shall have to enter into an argument with her; and in the midst of my speech some wretched turnkey who has found Gryphus with the death-rattle in his throat, or perhaps actually dead, will come along and put his hand on my shoulder. Then I shall see the Buytenhof again, and the gleam of that infernal sword, — which will not stop half-way a second time, but will make acquaintance with the nape of my neck.

"It will not do, Cornelius, my fine fellow, — it is a bad plan. But, then, what is to become of me, and how shall I find Rosa again?"

Such were the cogitations of Cornelius three days after the sad scene of separation from Rosa, at the moment when we find him standing at the window.

And at that very moment Gryphus entered.

He held in his hand a huge stick, his eyes glistening with spiteful thoughts, a malignant smile played round his lips, and the whole of his carriage, and even all his movements, betokened bad and malicious intentions.

Cornelius heard him enter, and guessed that it was he, but did not turn round, as he knew well that Rosa was not coming after him.

There is nothing more galling to angry people than the coolness of those on whom they wish to vent their spleen.

The expense being once incurred, one does not like to lose it; one’s passion is roused, and one’s blood boiling, so it would be labour lost not to have at least a nice little row.

Gryphus, therefore, on seeing that Cornelius did not stir, tried to attract his attention by a loud —

“Umph, umph!”

Cornelius was humming between his teeth the “Hymn of Flowers,” — a sad but very charming song, —

“We are the daughters of the secret fire Of the fire which runs through the veins of the earth; We are the daughters of Aurora and of the dew; We are the daughters of the air; We are the daughters of the water; But we are, above all, the daughters of heaven.”

This song, the placid melancholy of which was still heightened by its calm and sweet melody, exasperated Gryphus.

He struck his stick on the stone pavement of the cell, and called out, —

“Halloa! my warbling gentleman, don’t you hear me?”

Cornelius turned round, merely saying, “Good morning,” and then began his song again: —

“Men defile us and kill us while loving us, We hang to the earth by a thread; This thread is our root, that is to say, our life, But we raise on high our arms towards heaven.”

“Ah, you accursed sorcerer! you are making game of me, I believe,” roared Gryphus.

Cornelius continued: —

“For heaven is our home, Our true home, as from thence comes our soul, As thither our soul returns, — Our soul, that is to say, our perfume.”

Gryphus went up to the prisoner and said, —

“But you don’t see that I have taken means to get you under, and to force you to confess your crimes.”

“Are you mad, my dear Master Gryphus?” asked Cornelius.

And, as he now for the first time observed the frenzied features, the flashing eyes, and foaming mouth of the old jailer, he said, —

“Bless the man, he is more than mad, he is furious.”

Gryphus flourished his stick above his head, but Van Baerle moved not, and remained standing with his arms akimbo.

“It seems your intention to threaten me, Master Gryphus.”

“Yes, indeed, I threaten you,” cried the jailer.

"And with what?"

"First of all, look at what I have in my hand."

"I think that's a stick," said Cornelius calmly, "but I don't suppose you will threaten me with that."

"Oh, you don't suppose! why not?"

"Because any jailer who strikes a prisoner is liable to two penalties, — the first laid down in Article 9 of the regulations at Loewestein: —

"'Any jailer, inspector, or turnkey who lays hands upon any prisoner of State will be dismissed.'"

"Yes, who lays hands," said Gryphus, mad with rage, "but there is not a word about a stick in the regulation."

"And the second," continued Cornelius, "which is not written in the regulation, but which is to be found elsewhere: —

"'Whosoever takes up the stick will be thrashed by the stick.'"

Gryphus, growing more and more exasperated by the calm and sententious tone of Cornelius, brandished his cudgel, but at the moment when he raised it Cornelius rushed at him, snatched it from his hands, and put it under his own arm.

Gryphus fairly bellowed with rage.

"Hush, hush, my good man," said Cornelius, "don't do anything to lose your place."

"Ah, you sorcerer! I'll pinch you worse," roared Gryphus.

"I wish you may."

"Don't you see my hand is empty?"

"Yes, I see it, and I am glad of it."

"You know that it is not generally so when I come upstairs in the morning."

"It's true, you generally bring me the worst soup, and the most miserable rations one can imagine. But that's not a punishment to me; I eat only bread, and the worse the bread is to your taste, the better it is to mine."

"How so?"

"Oh, it's a very simple thing."

"Well, tell it me," said Gryphus.

"Very willingly. I know that in giving me bad bread you think you do me harm."

"Certainly; I don't give it you to please you, you brigand."

“Well, then, I, who am a sorcerer, as you know, change your bad into excellent bread, which I relish more than the best cake; and then I have the double pleasure of eating something that gratifies my palate, and of doing something that puts you in a rage.”

Gryphus answered with a growl.

“Oh! you confess, then, that you are a sorcerer.”

“Indeed, I am one. I don’t say it before all the world, because they might burn me for it, but as we are alone, I don’t mind telling you.”

“Well, well, well,” answered Gryphus. “But if a sorcerer can change black bread into white, won’t he die of hunger if he has no bread at all?”

“What’s that?” said Cornelius.

“Consequently, I shall not bring you any bread at all, and we shall see how it will be after eight days.”

Cornelius grew pale.

“And,” continued Gryphus, “we’ll begin this very day. As you are such a clever sorcerer, why, you had better change the furniture of your room into bread; as to myself, I shall pocket the eighteen sous which are paid to me for your board.”

“But that’s murder,” cried Cornelius, carried away by the first impulse of the very natural terror with which this horrible mode of death inspired him.

“Well,” Gryphus went on, in his jeering way, “as you are a sorcerer, you will live, notwithstanding.”

Cornelius put on a smiling face again, and said, —

“Have you not seen me make the pigeons come here from Dort?”

“Well?” said Gryphus.

“Well, a pigeon is a very dainty morsel, and a man who eats one every day would not starve, I think.”

“And how about the fire?” said Gryphus.

“Fire! but you know that I’m in league with the devil. Do you think the devil will leave me without fire? Why, fire is his proper element.”

“A man, however healthy his appetite may be, would not eat a pigeon every day. Wagers have been laid to do so, and those who made them gave them up.”

“Well, but when I am tired of pigeons, I shall make the fish of the Waal and of the Meuse come up to me.”

Gryphus opened his large eyes, quite bewildered.

“I am rather fond of fish,” continued Cornelius; “you never let me have any. Well, I shall turn your starving me to advantage, and regale myself with fish.”

Gryphus nearly fainted with anger and with fright, but he soon rallied, and said, putting his hand in his pocket, —

“Well, as you force me to it,” and with these words he drew forth a clasp-knife and opened it.

“Halloa! a knife?” said Cornelius, preparing to defend himself with his stick.

CHAPTER 29.

In which Van Baerle, before leaving Loewestein, settles Accounts with Gryphus

The two remained silent for some minutes, Gryphus on the offensive, and Van Baerle on the defensive.

Then, as the situation might be prolonged to an indefinite length, Cornelius, anxious to know something more of the causes which had so fiercely exasperated his jailer, spoke first by putting the question, —

“Well, what do you want, after all?”

“I’ll tell you what I want,” answered Gryphus; “I want you to restore to me my daughter Rosa.”

“Your daughter?” cried Van Baerle.

“Yes, my daughter Rosa, whom you have taken from me by your devilish magic. Now, will you tell me where she is?”

And the attitude of Gryphus became more and more threatening.

“Rosa is not at Loewestein?” cried Cornelius.

“You know well she is not. Once more, will you restore her to me?”

“I see,” said Cornelius, “this is a trap you are laying for me.”

“Now, for the last time, will you tell me where my daughter is?”

“Guess it, you rogue, if you don’t know it.”

“Only wait, only wait,” growled Gryphus, white with rage, and with quivering lips, as his brain began to turn. “Ah, you will not tell me anything? Well, I’ll unlock your teeth!”

He advanced a step towards Cornelius, and said, showing him the weapon which he held in his hands, —

“Do you see this knife? Well, I have killed more than fifty black cocks with it, and I vow I’ll kill their master, the devil, as well as them.”

“But, you blockhead,” said Cornelius, “will you really kill me?”

“I shall open your heart to see in it the place where you hide my daughter.”

Saying this, Gryphus in his frenzy rushed towards Cornelius, who had barely time to retreat behind his table to avoid the first thrust; but as

Gryphus continued, with horrid threats, to brandish his huge knife, and as, although out of the reach of his weapon, yet, as long as it remained in the madman's hand, the ruffian might fling it at him, Cornelius lost no time, and availing himself of the stick, which he held tight under his arm, dealt the jailer a vigorous blow on the wrist of that hand which held the knife.

The knife fell to the ground, and Cornelius put his foot on it.

Then, as Gryphus seemed bent upon engaging in a struggle which the pain in his wrist, and shame for having allowed himself to be disarmed, would have made desperate, Cornelius took a decisive step, belaboring his jailer with the most heroic self-possession, and selecting the exact spot for every blow of the terrible cudgel.

It was not long before Gryphus begged for mercy. But before begging for mercy, he had lustily roared for help, and his cries had roused all the functionaries of the prison. Two turnkeys, an inspector, and three or four guards, made their appearance all at once, and found Cornelius still using the stick, with the knife under his foot.

At the sight of these witnesses, who could not know all the circumstances which had provoked and might justify his offence, Cornelius felt that he was irretrievably lost.

In fact, appearances were sadly against him.

In one moment Cornelius was disarmed, and Gryphus raised and supported; and, bellowing with rage and pain, he was able to count on his back and shoulders the bruises which were beginning to swell like the hills dotting the slopes of a mountain ridge.

A protocol of the violence practiced by the prisoner against his jailer was immediately drawn up, and as it was made on the depositions of Gryphus, it certainly could not be said to be too tame; the prisoner being charged with neither more nor less than with an attempt to murder, for a long time premeditated, with open rebellion.

Whilst the charge was made out against Cornelius, Gryphus, whose presence was no longer necessary after having made his depositions, was taken down by his turnkeys to his lodge, groaning and covered with bruises.

During this time, the guards who had seized Cornelius busied themselves in charitably informing their prisoner of the usages and customs of Loewestein, which however he knew as well as they did. The regulations had been read to him at the moment of his entering the prison, and certain articles in them remained fixed in his memory.

Among other things they told him that this regulation had been carried out to its full extent in the case of a prisoner named Mathias, who in 1668, that is to say, five years before, had committed a much less violent act of rebellion than that of which Cornelius was guilty. He had found his soup too hot, and thrown it at the head of the chief turnkey, who in consequence of this ablution had been put to the inconvenience of having his skin come off as he wiped his face.

Mathias was taken within twelve hours from his cell, then led to the jailer's lodge, where he was registered as leaving Loewestein, then taken to the Esplanade, from which there is a very fine prospect over a wide expanse of country. There they fettered his hands, bandaged his eyes, and let him say his prayers.

Hereupon he was invited to go down on his knees, and the guards of Loewestein, twelve in number, at a sign from a sergeant, very cleverly lodged a musket-ball each in his body.

In consequence of this proceeding, Mathias incontinently did then and there die.

Cornelius listened with the greatest attention to this delightful recital, and then said, —

"Ah! ah! within twelve hours, you say?"

"Yes, the twelfth hour had not even struck, if I remember right," said the guard who had told him the story.

"Thank you," said Cornelius.

The guard still had the smile on his face with which he accompanied and as it were accentuated his tale, when footsteps and a jingling of spurs were heard ascending the stair-case.

The guards fell back to allow an officer to pass, who entered the cell of Cornelius at the moment when the clerk of Loewestein was still making out his report.

"Is this No. 11?" he asked.

"Yes, Captain," answered a non-commissioned officer.

"Then this is the cell of the prisoner Cornelius van Baerle?"

"Exactly, Captain."

"Where is the prisoner?"

"Here I am, sir," answered Cornelius, growing rather pale, notwithstanding all his courage.

“You are Dr. Cornelius van Baerle?” asked he, this time addressing the prisoner himself.

“Yes, sir.”

“Then follow me.”

“Oh! oh!” said Cornelius, whose heart felt oppressed by the first dread of death. “What quick work they make here in the fortress of Loewestein. And the rascal talked to me of twelve hours!”

“Ah! what did I tell you?” whispered the communicative guard in the ear of the culprit.

“A lie.”

“How so?”

“You promised me twelve hours.”

“Ah, yes, but here comes to you an aide-de-camp of his Highness, even one of his most intimate companions Van Deken. Zounds! they did not grant such an honour to poor Mathias.”

“Come, come!” said Cornelius, drawing a long breath. “Come, I’ll show to these people that an honest burgher, godson of Cornelius de Witt, can without flinching receive as many musket-balls as that Mathias.”

Saying this, he passed proudly before the clerk, who, being interrupted in his work, ventured to say to the officer, —

“But, Captain van Deken, the protocol is not yet finished.”

“It is not worth while finishing it,” answered the officer.

“All right,” replied the clerk, philosophically putting up his paper and pen into a greasy and well-worn writing-case.

“It was written,” thought poor Cornelius, “that I should not in this world give my name either to a child to a flower, or to a book, — the three things by which a man’s memory is perpetuated.”

Repressing his melancholy thoughts, he followed the officer with a resolute heart, and carrying his head erect.

Cornelius counted the steps which led to the Esplanade, regretting that he had not asked the guard how many there were of them, which the man, in his official complaisance, would not have failed to tell him.

What the poor prisoner was most afraid of during this walk, which he considered as leading him to the end of the journey of life, was to see Gryphus and not to see Rosa. What savage satisfaction would glisten in the eyes of the father, and what sorrow dim those of the daughter!

How Gryphus would glory in his punishment! Punishment? Rather savage vengeance for an eminently righteous deed, which Cornelius had the satisfaction of having performed as a bounden duty.

But Rosa, poor girl! must he die without a glimpse of her, without an opportunity to give her one last kiss, or even to say one last word of farewell?

And, worst of all, must he die without any intelligence of the black tulip, and regain his consciousness in heaven with no idea in what direction he should look to find it?

In truth, to restrain his tears at such a crisis the poor wretch's heart must have been encased in more of the aes triplex — ”the triple brass” — than Horace bestows upon the sailor who first visited the terrifying Acroceraunian shoals.

In vain did Cornelius look to the right and to the left; he saw no sign either of Rosa or Gryphus.

On reaching the Esplanade, he bravely looked about for the guards who were to be his executioners, and in reality saw a dozen soldiers assembled. But they were not standing in line, or carrying muskets, but talking together so gayly that Cornelius felt almost shocked.

All at once, Gryphus, limping, staggering, and supporting himself on a crooked stick, came forth from the jailer's lodge; his old eyes, gray as those of a cat, were lit up by a gleam in which all his hatred was concentrated. He then began to pour forth such a torrent of disgusting imprecations against Cornelius, that the latter, addressing the officer, said, —

“I do not think it very becoming sir, that I should be thus insulted by this man, especially at a moment like this.”

“Well! hear me,” said the officer, laughing, “it is quite natural that this worthy fellow should bear you a grudge, — you seem to have given it him very soundly.”

“But, sir, it was only in self-defence.”

“Never mind,” said the Captain, shrugging his shoulders like a true philosopher, “let him talk; what does it matter to you now?”

The cold sweat stood on the brow of Cornelius at this answer, which he looked upon somewhat in the light of brutal irony, especially as coming from an officer of whom he had heard it said that he was attached to the person of the Prince.

The unfortunate tulip-fancier then felt that he had no more resources, and no more friends, and resigned himself to his fate.

“God’s will be done,” he muttered, bowing his head; then, turning towards the officer, who seemed complacently to wait until he had finished his meditations he asked, —

“Please, sir, tell me now, where am I to go?”

The officer pointed to a carriage, drawn by four horses, which reminded him very strongly of that which, under similar circumstances, had before attracted his attention at Buytenhof.

“Enter,” said the officer.

“Ah!” muttered Cornelius to himself, “it seems they are not going to treat me to the honours of the Esplanade.”

He uttered these words loud enough for the chatty guard, who was at his heels, to overhear him.

That kind soul very likely thought it his duty to give Cornelius some new information; for, approaching the door of the carriage, whilst the officer, with one foot on the step, was still giving some orders, he whispered to Van Baerle, —

“Condemned prisoners have sometimes been taken to their own town to be made an example of, and have then been executed before the door of their own house. It’s all according to circumstances.”

Cornelius thanked him by signs, and then said to himself, —

“Well, here is a fellow who never misses giving consolation whenever an opportunity presents itself. In truth, my friend, I’m very much obliged to you. Goodbye.”

The carriage drove away.

“Ah! you villain, you brigand,” roared Gryphus, clinching his fists at the victim who was escaping from his clutches, “is it not a shame that this fellow gets off without having restored my daughter to me?”

“If they take me to Dort,” thought Cornelius, “I shall see, in passing my house, whether my poor borders have been much spoiled.”

CHAPTER 30.

Wherein the Reader begins to guess the Kind of Execution that was awaiting Van Baerle

The carriage rolled on during the whole day; it passed on the right of Dort, went through Rotterdam, and reached Delft. At five o’clock in the evening, at least twenty leagues had been travelled.

Cornelius addressed some questions to the officer, who was at the same time his guard and his companion; but, cautious as were his inquiries, he had the disappointment of receiving no answer.

Cornelius regretted that he had no longer by his side the chatty soldier, who would talk without being questioned.

That obliging person would undoubtedly have given him as pleasant details and exact explanations concerning this third strange part of his adventures as he had done concerning the first two.

The travellers passed the night in the carriage. On the following morning at dawn Cornelius found himself beyond Leyden, having the North Sea on his left, and the Zuyder Zee on his right.

Three hours after, he entered Haarlem.

Cornelius was not aware of what had passed at Haarlem, and we shall leave him in ignorance of it until the course of events enlightens him.

But the reader has a right to know all about it even before our hero, and therefore we shall not make him wait.

We have seen that Rosa and the tulip, like two orphan sisters, had been left by Prince William of Orange at the house of the President van Systens.

Rosa did not hear again from the Stadtholder until the evening of that day on which she had seen him face to face.

Toward evening, an officer called at Van Systen’s house. He came from his Highness, with a request for Rosa to appear at the Town Hall.

There, in the large Council Room into which she was ushered, she found the Prince writing.

He was alone, with a large Frisian greyhound at his feet, which looked at him with a steady glance, as if the faithful animal were wishing to do what no man could do, — read the thoughts of his master in his face.

William continued his writing for a moment; then, raising his eyes, and seeing Rosa standing near the door, he said, without laying down his pen, —

“Come here, my child.”

Rosa advanced a few steps towards the table.

“Sit down,” he said.

Rosa obeyed, for the Prince was fixing his eyes upon her, but he had scarcely turned them again to his paper when she bashfully retired to the door.

The Prince finished his letter.

During this time, the greyhound went up to Rosa, surveyed her and began to caress her.

“Ah, ah!” said William to his dog, “it’s easy to see that she is a countrywoman of yours, and that you recognise her.”

Then, turning towards Rosa, and fixing on her his scrutinising, and at the same time impenetrable glance, he said, —

“Now, my child.”

The Prince was scarcely twenty-three, and Rosa eighteen or twenty. He might therefore perhaps better have said, My sister.

“My child,” he said, with that strangely commanding accent which chilled all those who approached him, “we are alone; let us speak together.”

Rosa began to tremble, and yet there was nothing but kindness in the expression of the Prince’s face.

“Monseigneur,” she stammered.

“You have a father at Loewestein?”

“Yes, your Highness.”

“You do not love him?”

“I do not; at least, not as a daughter ought to do, Monseigneur.”

“It is not right not to love one’s father, but it is right not to tell a falsehood.”

Rosa cast her eyes to the ground.

“What is the reason of your not loving your father?”

“He is wicked.”

“In what way does he show his wickedness?”

“He ill-treats the prisoners.”

“All of them?”

“All.”

“But don’t you bear him a grudge for ill-treating some one in particular?”

“My father ill-treats in particular Mynheer van Baerle, who — — ”

“Who is your lover?”

Rosa started back a step.

“Whom I love, Monseigneur,” she answered proudly.

“Since when?” asked the Prince.

“Since the day when I first saw him.”

“And when was that?”

“The day after that on which the Grand Pensionary John and his brother Cornelius met with such an awful death.”

The Prince compressed his lips, and knit his brow and his eyelids dropped so as to hide his eyes for an instant. After a momentary silence, he resumed the conversation.

“But to what can it lead to love a man who is doomed to live and die in prison?”

“It will lead, if he lives and dies in prison, to my aiding him in life and in death.”

“And would you accept the lot of being the wife of a prisoner?”

“As the wife of Mynheer van Baerle, I should, under any circumstances, be the proudest and happiest woman in the world; but — — ”

“But what?”

“I dare not say, Monseigneur.”

“There is something like hope in your tone; what do you hope?”

She raised her moist and beautiful eyes, and looked at William with a glance full of meaning, which was calculated to stir up in the recesses of his heart the clemency which was slumbering there.

“Ah, I understand you,” he said.

Rosa, with a smile, clasped her hands.

“You hope in me?” said the Prince.

“Yes, Monseigneur.”

“Umph!”

The Prince sealed the letter which he had just written, and summoned one of his officers, to whom he said, —

“Captain van Deken, carry this despatch to Loewestein; you will read the orders which I give to the Governor, and execute them as far as they regard you.”

The officer bowed, and a few minutes afterwards the gallop of a horse was heard resounding in the vaulted archway.

“My child,” continued the Prince, “the feast of the tulip will be on Sunday next, that is to say, the day after to-morrow. Make yourself smart with these five hundred guilders, as I wish that day to be a great day for you.”

“How does your Highness wish me to be dressed?” faltered Rosa.

“Take the costume of a Frisian bride.” said William; “it will suit you very well indeed.”

CHAPTER 31.

Haarlem

Haarlem, whither, three days ago, we conducted our gentle reader, and whither we request him to follow us once more in the footsteps of the prisoner, is a pleasant city, which justly prides itself on being one of the most shady in all the Netherlands.

While other towns boast of the magnificence of their arsenals and dock-yards, and the splendour of their shops and markets, Haarlem's claims to fame rest upon her superiority to all other provincial cities in the number and beauty of her spreading elms, graceful poplars, and, more than all, upon her pleasant walks, shaded by the lovely arches of magnificent oaks, lindens, and chestnuts.

Haarlem, — just as her neighbour, Leyden, became the centre of science, and her queen, Amsterdam, that of commerce, — Haarlem preferred to be the agricultural, or, more strictly speaking, the horticultural metropolis.

In fact, girt about as she was, breezy and exposed to the sun's hot rays, she seemed to offer to gardeners so many more guarantees of success than other places, with their heavy sea air, and their scorching heat.

On this account all the serene souls who loved the earth and its fruits had gradually gathered together at Haarlem, just as all the nervous, uneasy spirits, whose ambition was for travel and commerce, had settled in Rotterdam and Amsterdam, and all the politicians and selfish worldlings at the Hague.

We have observed that Leyden overflowed with scholars. In like manner Haarlem was devoted to the gentle pursuits of peace, — to music and painting, orchards and avenues, groves and parks. Haarlem went wild about flowers, and tulips received their full share of worship.

Haarlem offered prizes for tulip-growing; and this fact brings us in the most natural manner to that celebration which the city intended to hold on May 15th, 1673 in honour of the great black tulip, immaculate and perfect, which should gain for its discoverer one hundred thousand guilders!

Haarlem, having placed on exhibition its favourite, having advertised its love of flowers in general and of tulips in particular, at a period when the souls of men were filled with war and sedition, — Haarlem, having enjoyed the exquisite pleasure of admiring the very purest ideal of tulips in full bloom, — Haarlem, this tiny town, full of trees and of sunshine, of light and shade, had determined that the ceremony of bestowing the prize should be a fete which should live for ever in the memory of men.

So much the more reason was there, too, in her determination, in that Holland is the home of fetes; never did sluggish natures manifest more eager energy of the singing and dancing sort than those of the good republicans of the Seven Provinces when amusement was the order of the day.

Study the pictures of the two Teniers.

It is certain that sluggish folk are of all men the most earnest in tiring themselves, not when they are at work, but at play.

Thus Haarlem was thrice given over to rejoicing, for a three-fold celebration was to take place.

In the first place, the black tulip had been produced; secondly, the Prince William of Orange, as a true Hollander, had promised to be present at the ceremony of its inauguration; and, thirdly, it was a point of honour with the States to show to the French, at the conclusion of such a disastrous war as that of 1672, that the flooring of the Batavian Republic was solid enough for its people to dance on it, with the accompaniment of the cannon of their fleets.

The Horticultural Society of Haarlem had shown itself worthy of its fame by giving a hundred thousand guilders for the bulb of a tulip. The town, which did not wish to be outdone, voted a like sum, which was placed in the hands of that notable body to solemnise the auspicious event.

And indeed on the Sunday fixed for this ceremony there was such a stir among the people, and such an enthusiasm among the townsfolk, that even a Frenchman, who laughs at everything at all times, could not have helped admiring the character of those honest Hollanders, who were equally ready to spend their money for the construction of a man-of-war — that is to say, for the support of national honour — as they were to reward the growth of a new flower, destined to bloom for one day, and to serve during that day to divert the ladies, the learned, and the curious.

At the head of the notables and of the Horticultural Committee shone Mynheer van Systens, dressed in his richest habiliments.

The worthy man had done his best to imitate his favourite flower in the sombre and stern elegance of his garments; and we are bound to record, to his honour, that he had perfectly succeeded in his object.

Dark crimson velvet, dark purple silk, and jet-black cloth, with linen of dazzling whiteness, composed the festive dress of the President, who marched at the head of his Committee carrying an enormous nosegay, like that which a hundred and twenty-one years later, Monsieur de Robespierre displayed at the festival of “The Supreme Being.”

There was, however, a little difference between the two; very different from the French tribune, whose heart was so full of hatred and ambitious vindictiveness, was the honest President, who carried in his bosom a heart as innocent as the flowers which he held in his hand.

Behind the Committee, who were as gay as a meadow, and as fragrant as a garden in spring, marched the learned societies of the town, the magistrates, the military, the nobles and the boors.

The people, even among the respected republicans of the Seven Provinces, had no place assigned to them in the procession; they merely lined the streets.

This is the place for the multitude, which with true philosophic spirit, waits until the triumphal pageants have passed, to know what to say of them, and sometimes also to know what to do.

This time, however, there was no question either of the triumph of Pompey or of Caesar; neither of the defeat of Mithridates, nor of the conquest of Gaul. The procession was as placid as the passing of a flock of lambs, and as inoffensive as a flight of birds sweeping through the air.

Haarlem had no other triumphers, except its gardeners. Worshipping flowers, Haarlem idolised the florist.

In the centre of this pacific and fragrant cortege the black tulip was seen, carried on a litter, which was covered with white velvet and fringed with gold.

The handles of the litter were supported by four men, who were from time to time relieved by fresh relays, — even as the bearers of Mother Cybele used to take turn and turn about at Rome in the ancient days, when she was brought from Etruria to the Eternal City, amid the blare of trumpets and the worship of a whole nation.

This public exhibition of the tulip was an act of adoration rendered by an entire nation, unlettered and unrefined, to the refinement and culture of its illustrious and devout leaders, whose blood had stained the foul pavement of the Buytenhof, reserving the right at a future day to inscribe the names of its victims upon the highest stone of the Dutch Pantheon.

It was arranged that the Prince Stadtholder himself should give the prize of a hundred thousand guilders, which interested the people at large, and it was thought that perhaps he would make a speech which interested more particularly his friends and enemies.

For in the most insignificant words of men of political importance their friends and their opponents always endeavour to detect, and hence think they can interpret, something of their true thoughts.

As if your true politician's hat were not a bushel under which he always hides his light!

At length the great and long-expected day — May 15, 1673 — arrived; and all Haarlem, swelled by her neighbours, was gathered in the beautiful tree-lined streets, determined on this occasion not to waste its applause upon military heroes, or those who had won notable victories in the field of science, but to reserve their applause for those who had overcome Nature, and had forced the inexhaustible mother to be delivered of what had theretofore been regarded as impossible, — a completely black tulip.

Nothing however, is more fickle than such a resolution of the people. When a crowd is once in the humour to cheer, it is just the same as when it begins to hiss. It never knows when to stop.

It therefore, in the first place, cheered Van Systens and his nosegay, then the corporation, then followed a cheer for the people; and, at last, and for once with great justice, there was one for the excellent music with which the gentlemen of the town councils generously treated the assemblage at every halt.

Every eye was looking eagerly for the heroine of the festival, — that is to say, the black tulip, — and for its hero in the person of the one who had grown it.

In case this hero should make his appearance after the address we have seen worthy Van Systens at work on so conscientiously, he would not fail to make as much of a sensation as the Stadtholder himself.

But the interest of the day's proceedings for us is centred neither in the learned discourse of our friend Van Systens, however eloquent it might be, nor in the young dandies, resplendent in their Sunday clothes, and munching their heavy cakes; nor in the poor young peasants, gnawing smoked eels as if they were sticks of vanilla sweetmeat; neither is our interest in the lovely Dutch girls, with red cheeks and ivory bosoms; nor in the fat, round mynheers, who had never left their homes before; nor in the sallow, thin travellers from Ceylon or Java; nor in the thirsty crowds, who quenched their thirst with pickled cucumbers; — no, so far as we are concerned, the real interest of the situation, the fascinating, dramatic interest, is not to be found here.

Our interest is in a smiling, sparkling face to be seen amid the members of the Horticultural Committee; in the person with a flower in his belt, combed and brushed, and all clad in scarlet, — a colour which makes his black hair and yellow skin stand out in violent contrast.

This hero, radiant with rapturous joy, who had the distinguished honour of making the people forget the speech of Van Systens, and even the presence of the Stadtholder, was Isaac Boxtel, who saw, carried on his right before him, the black tulip, his pretended daughter; and on his left, in a large purse, the hundred thousand guilders in glittering gold pieces, towards which he was constantly squinting, fearful of losing sight of them for one moment.

Now and then Boxtel quickened his step to rub elbows for a moment with Van Systens. He borrowed a little importance from everybody to make a kind of false importance for himself, as he had stolen Rosa’s tulip to effect his own glory, and thereby make his fortune.

Another quarter of an hour and the Prince will arrive and the procession will halt for the last time; after the tulip is placed on its throne, the Prince, yielding precedence to this rival for the popular adoration, will take a magnificently emblazoned parchment, on which is written the name of the grower; and his Highness, in a loud and audible tone, will proclaim him to be the discoverer of a wonder; that Holland, by the instrumentality of him, Boxtel, has forced Nature to produce a black flower, which shall henceforth be called Tulipa nigra Boxtellea.

From time to time, however, Boxtel withdrew his eyes for a moment from the tulip and the purse, timidly looking among the crowd, for more than anything he dreaded to descry there the pale face of the pretty Frisian girl.

She would have been a spectre spoiling the joy of the festival for him, just as Banquo’s ghost did that of Macbeth.

And yet, if the truth must be told, this wretch, who had stolen what was the boast of man, and the dowry of a woman, did not consider himself as a thief. He had so intently watched this tulip, followed it so eagerly from the drawer in Cornelius’s dry-room to the scaffold of the Buytenhof, and from the scaffold to the fortress of Loewestein; he had seen it bud and grow in Rosa’s window, and so often warmed the air round it with his breath, that he felt as if no one had a better right to call himself its producer than he had; and any one who would now take the black tulip from him would have appeared to him as a thief.

Yet he did not perceive Rosa; his joy therefore was not spoiled.

In the centre of a circle of magnificent trees, which were decorated with garlands and inscriptions, the procession halted, amidst the sounds of lively music, and the young damsels of Haarlem made their appearance to escort the tulip to the raised seat which it was to occupy on the platform, by the side of the gilded chair of his Highness the Stadtholder.

And the proud tulip, raised on its pedestal, soon overlooked the assembled crowd of people, who clapped their hands, and made the old town of Haarlem re-echo with their tremendous cheers.

CHAPTER 32.

A Last Request

At this solemn moment, and whilst the cheers still resounded, a carriage was driving along the road on the outskirts of the green on which the scene occurred; it pursued its way slowly, on account of the flocks of children who were pushed out of the avenue by the crowd of men and women.

This carriage, covered with dust, and creaking on its axles, the result of a long journey, enclosed the unfortunate Van Baerle, who was just beginning to get a glimpse through the open window of the scene which we have tried — with poor success, no doubt — to present to the eyes of the reader.

The crowd and the noise and the display of artificial and natural magnificence were as dazzling to the prisoner as a ray of light flashing suddenly into his dungeon.

Notwithstanding the little readiness which his companion had shown in answering his questions concerning his fate, he ventured once more to ask the meaning of all this bustle, which at first sight seemed to be utterly disconnected with his own affairs.

“What is all this, pray, Mynheer Lieutenant?” he asked of his conductor.

“As you may see, sir,” replied the officer, “it is a feast.”

“Ah, a feast,” said Cornelius, in the sad tone of indifference of a man to whom no joy remains in this world.

Then, after some moments, silence, during which the carriage had proceeded a few yards, he asked once more, —

“The feast of the patron saint of Haarlem? as I see so many flowers.”

“It is, indeed, a feast in which flowers play a principal part.”

“Oh, the sweet scents! oh, the beautiful colours!” cried Cornelius.

“Stop, that the gentleman may see,” said the officer, with that frank kindliness which is peculiar to military men, to the soldier who was acting as postilion.

“Oh, thank you, Sir, for your kindness,” replied Van Baerle, in a melancholy tone; “the joy of others pains me; please spare me this pang.”

"Just as you wish. Drive on! I ordered the driver to stop because I thought it would please you, as you are said to love flowers, and especially that the feast of which is celebrated to-day."

"And what flower is that?"

"The tulip."

"The tulip!" cried Van Baerle, "is to-day the feast of tulips?"

"Yes, sir; but as this spectacle displeases you, let us drive on."

The officer was about to give the order to proceed, but Cornelius stopped him, a painful thought having struck him. He asked, with faltering voice, —

"Is the prize given to-day, sir?"

"Yes, the prize for the black tulip."

Cornelius's cheek flushed, his whole frame trembled, and the cold sweat stood on his brow.

"Alas! sir," he said, "all these good people will be as unfortunate as myself, for they will not see the solemnity which they have come to witness, or at least they will see it incompletely."

"What is it you mean to say?"

"I mean to say." replied Cornelius, throwing himself back in the carriage, "that the black tulip will not be found, except by one whom I know."

"In this case," said the officer, "the person whom you know has found it, for the thing which the whole of Haarlem is looking at at this moment is neither more nor less than the black tulip."

"The black tulip!" replied Van Baerle, thrusting half his body out of the carriage window. "Where is it? where is it?"

"Down there on the throne, — don't you see?"

"I do see it."

"Come along, sir," said the officer. "Now we must drive off."

"Oh, have pity, have mercy, sir!" said Van Baerle, "don't take me away! Let me look once more! Is what I see down there the black tulip? Quite black? Is it possible? Oh, sir, have you seen it? It must have specks, it must be imperfect, it must only be dyed black. Ah! if I were there, I should see it at once. Let me alight, let me see it close, I beg of you."

"Are you mad, Sir? How could I allow such a thing?"

"I implore you."

"But you forget that you are a prisoner."

"It is true I am a prisoner, but I am a man of honour, and I promise you on my word that I will not run away, I will not attempt to escape, — only let me see the flower."

"But my orders, Sir, my orders." And the officer again made the driver a sign to proceed.

Cornelius stopped him once more.

"Oh, be forbearing, be generous! my whole life depends upon your pity. Alas! perhaps it will not be much longer. You don't know, sir, what I suffer. You don't know the struggle going on in my heart and mind. For after all," Cornelius cried in despair, "if this were my tulip, if it were the one which has been stolen from Rosa! Oh, I must alight, sir! I must see the flower! You may kill me afterwards if you like, but I will see it, I must see it."

"Be quiet, unfortunate man, and come quickly back into the carriage, for here is the escort of his Highness the Stadtholder, and if the Prince observed any disturbance, or heard any noise, it would be ruin to me, as well as to you."

Van Baerle, more afraid for his companion than himself, threw himself back into the carriage, but he could only keep quiet for half a minute, and the first twenty horsemen had scarcely passed when he again leaned out of the carriage window, gesticulating imploringly towards the Stadtholder at the very moment when he passed.

William, impassible and quiet as usual, was proceeding to the green to fulfil his duty as chairman. He held in his hand the roll of parchment, which, on this festive day, had become his baton.

Seeing the man gesticulate with imploring mien, and perhaps also recognising the officer who accompanied him, his Highness ordered his carriage to stop.

In an instant his snorting steeds stood still, at a distance of about six yards from the carriage in which Van Baerle was caged.

"What is this?" the Prince asked the officer, who at the first order of the Stadtholder had jumped out of the carriage, and was respectfully approaching him.

"Monseigneur," he cried, "this is the prisoner of state whom I have fetched from Loewestein, and whom I have brought to Haarlem according to your Highness's command."

"What does he want?"

"He entreats for permission to stop here for minute."

"To see the black tulip, Monseigneur," said Van Baerle, clasping his hands, "and when I have seen it, when I have seen what I desire to know, I am quite ready to die, if die I must; but in dying I shall bless your Highness’s mercy for having allowed me to witness the glorification of my work.”

It was, indeed, a curious spectacle to see these two men at the windows of their several carriages; the one surrounded by his guards, and all powerful, the other a prisoner and miserable; the one going to mount a throne, the other believing himself to be on his way to the scaffold.

William, looking with his cold glance on Cornelius, listened to his anxious and urgent request.

Then addressing himself to the officer, he said, —

“Is this person the mutinous prisoner who has attempted to kill his jailer at Loewestein?”

Cornelius heaved a sigh and hung his head. His good-tempered honest face turned pale and red at the same instant. These words of the all-powerful Prince, who by some secret messenger unavailable to other mortals had already been apprised of his crime, seemed to him to forebode not only his doom, but also the refusal of his last request.

He did not try to make a struggle, or to defend himself; and he presented to the Prince the affecting spectacle of despairing innocence, like that of a child, — a spectacle which was fully understood and felt by the great mind and the great heart of him who observed it.

“Allow the prisoner to alight, and let him see the black tulip; it is well worth being seen once.”

“Thank you, Monseigneur, thank you,” said Cornelius, nearly swooning with joy, and staggering on the steps of his carriage; had not the officer supported him, our poor friend would have made his thanks to his Highness prostrate on his knees with his forehead in the dust.

After having granted this permission, the Prince proceeded on his way over the green amidst the most enthusiastic acclamations.

He soon arrived at the platform, and the thunder of cannon shook the air.

CHAPTER 33.

Conclusion

Van Baerle, led by four guards, who pushed their way through the crowd, sidled up to the black tulip, towards which his gaze was attracted with increasing interest the nearer he approached to it.

He saw it at last, that unique flower, which he was to see once and no more. He saw it at the distance of six paces, and was delighted with its perfection and gracefulness; he saw it surrounded by young and beautiful girls, who formed, as it were, a guard of honour for this queen of excellence and purity. And yet, the more he ascertained with his own eyes the perfection of the flower, the more wretched and miserable he felt. He looked all around for some one to whom he might address only one question, but his eyes everywhere met strange faces, and the attention of all was directed towards the chair of state, on which the Stadtholder had seated himself.

William rose, casting a tranquil glance over the enthusiastic crowd, and his keen eyes rested by turns on the three extremities of a triangle formed opposite to him by three persons of very different interests and feelings.

At one of the angles, Boxtel, trembling with impatience, and quite absorbed in watching the Prince, the guilders, the black tulip, and the crowd.

At the other, Cornelius, panting for breath, silent, and his attention, his eyes, his life, his heart, his love, quite concentrated on the black tulip.

And thirdly, standing on a raised step among the maidens of Haarlem, a beautiful Frisian girl, dressed in fine scarlet woollen cloth, embroidered with silver, and covered with a lace veil, which fell in rich folds from her head-dress of gold brocade; in one word, Rosa, who, faint and with swimming eyes, was leaning on the arm of one of the officers of William.

The Prince then slowly unfolded the parchment, and said, with a calm clear voice, which, although low, made itself perfectly heard amidst the respectful silence, which all at once arrested the breath of fifty thousand spectators. —

“You know what has brought us here?

“A prize of one hundred thousand guilders has been promised to whosoever should grow the black tulip.

“The black tulip has been grown; here it is before your eyes, coming up to all the conditions required by the programme of the Horticultural Society of Haarlem.

“The history of its production, and the name of its grower, will be inscribed in the book of honour of the city.

“Let the person approach to whom the black tulip belongs.”

In pronouncing these words, the Prince, to judge of the effect they produced, surveyed with his eagle eye the three extremities of the triangle.

He saw Boxtel rushing forward. He saw Cornelius make an involuntary movement; and lastly he saw the officer who was taking care of Rosa lead, or rather push her forward towards him.

At the sight of Rosa, a double cry arose on the right and left of the Prince.

Boxtel, thunderstruck, and Cornelius, in joyful amazement, both exclaimed, —

“Rosa! Rosa!”

“This tulip is yours, is it not, my child?” said the Prince.

“Yes, Monseigneur,” stammered Rosa, whose striking beauty excited a general murmur of applause.

“Oh!” muttered Cornelius, “she has then belied me, when she said this flower was stolen from her. Oh! that’s why she left Loewestein. Alas! am I then forgotten, betrayed by her whom I thought my best friend on earth?”

“Oh!” sighed Boxtel, “I am lost.”

“This tulip,” continued the Prince, “will therefore bear the name of its producer, and figure in the catalogue under the title, Tulipa nigra Rosa Barlaensis, because of the name Van Baerle, which will henceforth be the name of this damsel.”

And at the same time William took Rosa’s hand, and placed it in that of a young man, who rushed forth, pale and beyond himself with joy, to the foot of the throne saluting alternately the Prince and his bride; and who with a grateful look to heaven, returned his thanks to the Giver of all this happiness.

At the same moment there fell at the feet of the President van Systens another man, struck down by a very different emotion.

Boxtel, crushed by the failure of his hopes, lay senseless on the ground.

When they raised him, and examined his pulse and his heart, he was quite dead.

This incident did not much disturb the festival, as neither the Prince nor the President seemed to mind it much.

Cornelius started back in dismay, when in the thief, in the pretended Jacob, he recognised his neighbour, Isaac Boxtel, whom, in the innocence of his heart, he had not for one instant suspected of such a wicked action.

Then, to the sound of trumpets, the procession marched back without any change in its order, except that Boxtel was now dead, and that Cornelius and Rosa were walking triumphantly side by side and hand in hand.

On their arriving at the Hotel de Ville, the Prince, pointing with his finger to the purse with the hundred thousand guilders, said to Cornelius, —

"It is difficult to say by whom this money is gained, by you or by Rosa; for if you have found the black tulip, she has nursed it and brought it into flower. It would therefore be unjust to consider it as her dowry; it is the gift of the town of Haarlem to the tulip."

Cornelius wondered what the Prince was driving at. The latter continued, —

"I give to Rosa the sum of a hundred thousand guilders, which she has fairly earned, and which she can offer to you. They are the reward of her love, her courage, and her honesty. As to you, Sir — thanks to Rosa again, who has furnished the proofs of your innocence — — "

And, saying these words, the Prince handed to Cornelius that fly-leaf of the Bible on which was written the letter of Cornelius de Witt, and in which the third bulb had been wrapped, —

"As to you, it has come to light that you were imprisoned for a crime which you had not committed. This means, that you are not only free, but that your property will be restored to you; as the property of an innocent man cannot be confiscated. Cornelius van Baerle, you are the godson of Cornelius de Witt and the friend of his brother John. Remain worthy of the name you have received from one of them, and of the friendship you have enjoyed with the other. The two De Witts, wrongly judged and wrongly punished in a moment of popular error, were two great citizens, of whom Holland is now proud."

The Prince, after these last words, which contrary to his custom, he pronounced with a voice full of emotion, gave his hands to the lovers to kiss, whilst they were kneeling before him.

Then heaving a sigh, he said, —

"Alas! you are very happy, who, dreaming only of what perhaps is the true glory of Holland, and forms especially her true happiness, do not attempt to acquire for her anything beyond new colours of tulips."

And, casting a glance towards that point of the compass where France lay, as if he saw new clouds gathering there, he entered his carriage and drove off.

Cornelius started on the same day for Dort with Rosa, who sent her lover's old housekeeper as a messenger to her father, to apprise him of all that had taken place.

Those who, thanks to our description, have learned the character of old Gryphus, will comprehend that it was hard for him to become reconciled to his son-in-law. He had not yet forgotten the blows which he had received in that famous encounter. To judge from the weals which he counted, their number, he said, amounted to forty-one; but at last, in order, as he declared, not to be less generous than his Highness the Stadtholder, he consented to make his peace.

Appointed to watch over the tulips, the old man made the rudest keeper of flowers in the whole of the Seven Provinces.

It was indeed a sight to see him watching the obnoxious moths and butterflies, killing slugs, and driving away the hungry bees.

As he had heard Boxtel's story, and was furious at having been the dupe of the pretended Jacob, he destroyed the sycamore behind which the envious Isaac had spied into the garden; for the plot of ground belonging to him had been bought by Cornelius, and taken into his own garden.

Rosa, growing not only in beauty, but in wisdom also, after two years of her married life, could read and write so well that she was able to undertake by herself the education of two beautiful children which she had borne in 1674 and 1675, both in May, the month of flowers.

As a matter of course, one was a boy, the other a girl, the former being called Cornelius, the other Rosa.

Van Baerle remained faithfully attached to Rosa and to his tulips. The whole of his life was devoted to the happiness of his wife and the culture of flowers, in the latter of which occupations he was so successful that a great number of his varieties found a place in the catalogue of Holland.

The two principal ornaments of his drawing-room were those two leaves from the Bible of Cornelius de Witt, in large golden frames; one of them containing the letter in which his godfather enjoined him to burn the correspondence of the Marquis de Louvois, and the other his own will, in which he bequeathed to Rosa his bulbs under condition that she should marry a young man of from twenty-six to twenty-eight years, who loved her and whom she loved, a condition which was scrupulously fulfilled, although, or rather because, Cornelius did not die.

And to ward off any envious attempts of another Isaac Boxtel, he wrote over his door the lines which Grotius had, on the day of his flight, scratched on the walls of his prison: —

“Sometimes one has suffered so much that he has the right never to be able to say, ‘I am too happy.’“

THE END

THE MOUTH OF HELL

Translated by Alfred Allinson

Written entirely by Dumas, *Le Trou de l'enfer* was published in 1851 and features events that occur forty years previously. The narrative concerns unrest in Germany during the rule of Napoleon.

On their way to Heidelberg in order to accomplish a mission for Tugendbund (a secret society aspiring to freedom of the German people) two students, Julius d’Hermelindfeld and Samuel Gelb, are caught in a violent storm, close to a chasm called the Mouth of Hell. Guided by Gretchen, a pretty young goatherd, they find refuge with Pastor Schreiber, who lives with his daughter Christiane and her little son Lothario.

Dumas, close to the time of publication

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INTRODUCTION

"I SIT here reading Dumas' last. Dumas is astonishing; he never will write himself out, there's no dust on his shoes after all this running, his last books are better than his first." So wrote Elizabeth Barrett Browning from Florence to a friend in the winter of 1852-3. Dumas was then about fifty; he had written hundreds of volumes of romances and some scores of plays, and both romances and plays were streaming forth as fast as ever. "But for him the day of French novels seems over," wrote a reviewer at this time; "George Sand is silent; Balzac and Soulié are dead; Eugène Sue has fallen into hopeless inanity and wearisomeness; Paul de Kock has exhausted his gaiety; Madame Reybaud is silent; Dumas alone is as active as ever." Our author had lost his, excellent collaborator Maquet, but he was "as active as ever," and in the opinion of Mrs. Browning his last books were "better than his first."

Dumas' performances were indeed marvellous. At one time it was pretty generally believed that the name Dumas was not that of a man, but of a company of men; but as the books and plays multiplied, it was seen that, with a few exceptions, they hung together just as the Waverley novels hang together. "Now listen," wrote Mrs. Browning, "Alexandre Dumas *does* write his own books, that's a fact. You know I always maintained it, through the odour of Dumas in the books, but people swore the contrary with great, foolish oaths worth nothing. Maquet prepares historical materials, gathers together notes, and so on, but Dumas writes every word of his books with his own hand, and with a facility amounting to inspiration, said my informant, a most credible witness and highly cultivated man."

Mrs. Browning's conviction was shared by most people when Maquet, after the dissolution of the partnership, wrote novels which proved failures, while Dumas produced romances of the quality of *The Mouth of Hell (Le Trou de l'Enfer),* its sequel *Dieu Dispose,* and *Olympe de Cleves.*

These books were enormously enjoyed even by the most jaded readers, who were accustomed to take their fiction, like pills, in small doses from the feuilleton columns of the daily papers. Indeed, from first to last, perhaps they got more enjoyment out of Dumas than did any other class of readers.

One’s favourite paper was “running “a romance by Sue, Soulié, or Reybaud, in which one was more or less interested. Suddenly one morning there was an announcement. The great, the illustrious Alexandre Dumas was returning from Switzerland, or from Russia, or from somewhere else, and immediately on his arrival was going to set to work upon a long romance, the first chapters of which would appear at the beginning of the new year. The subject of the romance, known to the editor of the journal, must be a profound secret, locked in his inviolable bosom, but the title would presently be made known. The next news was that Dumas, younger than ever in appearance and wearing several new decorations, bestowed upon him by potentates in whose dominions he had been travelling, had returned to Paris, that the editor had seen him, nay, had shaken hands with him, and had been promised the first chapter “very shortly.” The next announcement gave the title, *Le Trou de* l’*Enfer* (say), and with the advent of the new year, so impatiently awaited, came Chapter I. And with the appearance of that chapter life became different, brighter, lighter, more interesting. One’s old friend, Alphonse or Adolphe, was taking the same paper, and one had the most exciting arguments with him over the romance as it daily progressed. He proved to be wrong over and over again in his prognostications about the course of events in the book, but one day, on the authority, of a bookseller who knew Dumas, he averred that the Emperor Napoleon was about to be introduced into the romance. Sure enough he *was* introduced, and Alphonse or Adolphe was henceforth a man of distinction.

“It is for the people that I always write,” said Dumas, but besides “the people” he had a great following among cultivated readers, of whom, as we have seen, Mrs. Browning was one. Then there was the mass of subscribers to circulating libraries, and the Mudies of the day had one half of their shelves devoted to Dumas, and the other half to his literary brethren. If serious illness overtook one, or business occupied all one’s time for a few months, Dumas shot ahead, and on returning to the literary world one found not only that the two romances one had been reading were completed, but that fifteen or twenty volumes with a new title were in existence. “Dumas’ last, Sir, is *Les Mohicans de Paris;* there are to be thirty-two volumes, only fifteen are published, volume sixteen we are expecting to-morrow.” And this incessant literary production went on for forty years!

To write *The Mouth of Hell*, our author gave a fresh turn to his. wonderful kaleidoscope, then, looking at the pattern, he pronounced it good. The reader, when his eyes have’ become accustomed to the brilliance of the colours, recognizes the fantastic pattern to be one of Dumas’. If he care for dramatic power, invention, gaiety, wit, he will plunge into the book and know only one anxiety — that the end will come too soon; if he dislike extravagance, a certain simplicity that at times amounts to childishness, and at the same time an exotic quality which is not far removed from savagery — he will leave the book on one side, and take up Stendhal or Balzac. The reader who admires Dumas will remark that the best scenes in the book are precisely those which appear to be improvised by the author; the reader who dislikes him will see nothing of value in chapters which were so clearly written without hesitation or effort.

No book of Dumas’ has a more idyllic commencement, and none has more shocking incidents; in no book is he more airily fantastic — his fancy takes him at times as a breeze does a water-jet, showering it in diamonds over foliage and turf — in none is he more bent on impressing the reader with unrealities and absurdities. He is by turns wise and foolish, witty and dull. He seems to have the key to all knowledge, but he forgets to turn it. He sets gaily out as if to tell a short story, and at the end of a long one the reader finds that he is at the beginning of another, and a much longer one. *Le Trou de* l’*Enfer,* which was published by Cadot (Paris) in four volumes in 1850-51, is in fact but the first part of *Dieu Dispose.*

R. S. G.

CHAPTER I.

STORM AND SONG.

WHO were the two travellers wandering amongst the ravines and the rocks of the Odenwald, during the night of the 18th May, 1810, is a question which, at a distance of four paces off, not even their most intimate friends would have been able to answer, so profound was the darkness. In vain to scan the sky for a gleam of the moon, a glint of the stars; the sky was blacker than the earth, and the heavy clouds which swept across its surface seemed like an inverted ocean threatening the world with a second deluge.

A confused mass moving against a motionless background, nothing more would the eye, most trained to darkness, have been able to distinguish of the two riders. Occasionally a neigh of terror mingled with the whistling of the squall in the fir-trees, or a shower of sparks struck from the stones by the hoofs of the horses, this was all that was seen, all that was heard of the two travellers.

More and more imminent grew the storm. Great whirlwinds of dust blinded the travellers and their steeds. Whilst these hurricanes lasted the branches writhed and groaned; plaintive shrieks resounded in the depths of the valley, then, re-echoing from rock to rock, seemed to scale the mountain which tottered as if about to crumble into ruin. And each time that one of these storm-blasts rose from the earth to the sky, the crags, torn from their granite sockets, crashed noisily down the precipices, and the century-old trees, uprooted, torn from their base, hurled themselves as if in frantic despair headlong into the abyss.

Nothing is more terrible than destruction in darkness, nothing more appalling than noise in shadow. When sight cannot calculate the danger, the danger increases immeasurably, and the terrified imagination overleaps all the limits of the possible.

Suddenly the wind ceased, the clamour died away, everything was still, everything motionless; all nature held its breath, waiting for the storm to-break forth afresh. In the midst of this silence a voice was heard; it was that of one-of the two riders:

"Upon my word! Samuel," he was saying, "I must own that it was a most unlucky idea of yours that we should leave Erbach at this hour and in this weather. We were in an excellent inn, such an one as we had not come across since we left Frankfort a week ago. You had the choice between your bed and the storm, between a bottle of excellent Hockheim and a wind, compared with which the Sirocco and the Simoon are zephyrs, and you choose the storm and the wind! Quiet! Sturm!" interrupted the young man, reining in his horse which had shied suddenly; "quiet! If," he went on, "there were even something pleasant to hurry us forward, if we were bound for some delightful 'rendezvous 'where we were, certain of finding both the rising sun and the smile of a loved one. But the mistress we are going to rejoin is an old blue-stocking, by name the University of Heidelberg. The 'rendezvous' awaiting us is, probably, a duel to the death. At all events, we are only summoned for the 20th. Oh! the more I think of it, the more do I feel that we are downright madmen not to have remained there, sheltered from, wind and rain. But that is my nature; I always give in to you; you lead and I follow."

"Complain about following me!" replied Samuel, in a somewhat ironical tone, "when it is I who light your way. If I had not led the way you would have broken your neck ten times over by now, rolling from the top of the mountain to the bottom. Come, steady now, and settle yourself in your stirrups; here's a fir-tree barring the way."

There was a moment's silence, during which the noise of two horses clearing an obstacle was heard.

"Holloa!" said Samuel. Then, turning towards his companion: "Well," said he, "my poor Julius."

"Well!" said Julius, "I still complain of your obstinacy, and I am right; instead of following the road indicated to us, that is to say, skirting the little river Mumling, which would have brought us direct to the Neckar, you take a cross-road, pretending that you know the country, when you have never been in it before, I am sure. As you know, I wanted to take a guide."

"A guide! what for? Bah! I know the way."

"Yes, you know it so well, that here we are lost in the hills, knowing neither which is north, nor which south, and unable either to go forward or to go back. And now we shall have to endure until morning the threatened downpour, and what a downpour! See, there are the first drops. So laugh now, you who laugh at everything, or at least pretend to do so.”

“And why should I not laugh?” said Samuel. “Is it not a laughable thing, to hear a great fellow of twenty, a student of Heidelberg, complaining like a shepherdess who has not gathered in her flock in time? Laugh! much merit there would be in that! I am going to do better than laugh, my dear Julius, I am going to sing.”

And, as a matter of fact, the young man began to sing in a harsh, sonorous voice the first verse of some strange unknown song, probably improvised and which at least derived its merit from the situation:

“I laugh at the rain
  Heaven’s nasal catarrh!
‘Tis gentler by far
  Than the tears of man’s pain.”

As Samuel concluded the last word of his couplet, the last note of his air, a vivid flash of lightning rent, from one end to the other of the horizon, the veil of clouds spread over the surface of the heavens by the hand of the storm, and illumined with a light, splendid yet sinister, the forms of the two riders.

Both appeared to be the same age, that is, from nineteen to twenty-one years; but there the resemblance’ ended.

The one, evidently Julius, graceful, fair, pale, with blue eyes, was of medium height, but admirably proportioned. He might have been taken for a youthful Faust.

The other, evidently Samuel, tall and meagre, with shifty grey eyes, thin mocking lips, black hair and eyebrows, high forehead, and sharp, protruding nose, seemed the living image of Mephistopheles.

Both wore a short riding coat, of some dark shade, confined at the waist by a leathern girdle, light trousers, soft boots and a white cap with a little chain completed the costume.

As was implied by several things Julius had said, both were students.

Surprised and dazzled by the lightning, Julius started and shut his eyes. Samuel, on the contrary, looked up, and gazed unflinchingly at the lightning.

Then all relapsed into black darkness. The lightning had scarcely died away ere a loud clap of thunder resounded, and went rolling in the depths of the mountain from echo to echo.

"My dear Samuel," said Julius, "I think we would do well to stop. Our advance might attract the thunder-bolt."

For sole reply, Samuel burst into a peal of laughter, and dug his two spurs in the flanks of his horse, who galloped off, making the sparks fly, and scattering the pebbles, whilst the horseman sang:

"I laugh at the fire
  The lightning displays!
A bitter look preys
  With results much more dire!"

He continued thus a hundred paces, then turning sharply round, he galloped back to Julius.

"In Heaven's name!" cried the latter, "do be quiet, Samuel Of what use all this bravado? Is this a time to sing? Beware that God does not accept your challenge!"

A second clap of thunder, more terrible and more resounding even than the first, burst immediately over their heads.

"Third verse!" said Samuel, "I am a privileged sportsman; the heavens accompany my song, and the thunder bellows the refrain.

Then, in imitation of the thunder which had roared more loudly, so Samuel sang in a louder voice:

"I laugh at the storm
  Summer's cough of disdain!
Love's harsh cry of pain
  No such contrast can form!"

And, as the thunder was this time behindhand: "Come now, chorus!" said he, looking up at the sky; "thunder, you are out of time!"

But, in default of the thunder, the rain answered to Samuel's call, and began to fall in torrents. Soon the flashes of lightning and claps of thunder no longer needed to be provoked, and succeeded each other without interruption. Julius felt that sort of uneasiness from which even the bravest is not exempt, before the omnipotence of the elements; the littleness of man in Nature's anger overwhelmed him. Samuel, on the contrary, was radiant. A savage joy shone in his eyes; he stood erect in his stirrups, he waved his cap as if, seeing that danger shunned him, he longed to draw it to him; glad to feel his brows swept by his damp hair, laughing, singing, happy.

“What were you saying just now, Julius?” cried he, as if under the influence of some weird inspiration; “you wanted to stay at Erbach? you wanted to miss this glorious night? Then you have never felt the wild joy of battling with the elements, my dear boy. I brought you away because I expected this weather. My nerves have been on edge and irritated the whole day, but now I am well again. Hurrah for the hurricane. How the devil do you not feel this delight! Is not this war of the heavens in harmony with these peaks and these precipices, these bogs and these ruins? Are you eighty years of age, that you should wish everything to be as quiet and dead as your heart? You have your passions, however calm you may appear. Very well! then let the elements have theirs. As for me, I am young; I feel my twenty years singing rj. the depths of my heart, a bottle of wine boiling in my brain, and I love the thunder. King Lear used to call the storm his daughter; I call it my sister. Never fear for us, Julius. I do not laugh at the lightning, I laugh with it — I do not disdain it, I love it. The storm and I are friends. It would not wish to harm me, I resemble it. Men think it malevolent, they are fools! the storm is a benevolent necessity. It is the moment to learn a little science.. This powerful electricity, which rumbles and flames, does not kill and destroy at random, except to add to the sum of vegetable and animal life. I too, I am a storm-man. It is the time to study a little philosophy. I too would not hesitate to do evil that good might come, to employ death so as to produce life. The gist is that a superior intelligence animates these acts of violence, and justifies the murderous means by the richness of result.”

“Be quiet, you do yourself an injustice, Samuel.”

Superstitious child! Do you imagine, because we are astride among scenery suggestive of ‘Der Freyschiitz ‘that I am the devil, Satan, Beelzebub or Mephistopheles, and that I am going to change myself into a black cat, a dog-fiend? Oh! oh! what is this?”

This exclamation was extorted from Samuel by a quick movement of his horse, who, utterly terrified, had just backed on to that of Julius.

Evidently some danger lurked in their road. The young man, leaning in the direction whence the danger threatened, waited for a flash. He had not long to wait. The heavens were rent; a sheet of flame swept the horizon from one end to the other and lighted up the landscape.

The path was interrupted by a yawning abyss, the lightning had flashed against the sides of a precipice, then died away, without allowing the gaze of the two young men to fathom its depth.

"There's a fine gap!" said Samuel, compelling his horse to approach nearer to the precipice.

"But do be careful!" cried Julius.

"Bless me! I must look at it quite close," said Samuel.

And, dismounting from his horse, he threw the bridle over Julius's arm, approached the abyss and gazed curiously into it.

But, as his gaze could not pierce the darkness, he pushed over a large stone which plunged into the depths.

He listened, but heard nothing.

"Good," said he, "my boulder must have fallen on soft earth, for it has not made the least noise.'- He had just finished speaking when a great splash resounded from the sombre depths.

"Ah! the abyss is deep!" said Samuel. "Who the devil will tell me what this gap-is called?"

"The Mouth of Hell!" answered a clear, grave voice from the other side of the gulf.

"Who answers me from over there?" exclaimed Samuel with astonishment, if not fear. "I see no one."

Another flash lit up the sky, and, on the opposite side of the pit, the two young men beheld a strange apparition.

CHAPTER II.

THE APPARITION.

A YOUNG girl, standing erect, her hair unbound, her arms and legs bare, a black hood inflated by the wind waving round her head, a short skirt of reddish hue, dyed an even deeper red by the lightning, beautiful with a strange wild beauty, having at her side a horned beast which she held by a leash, — such was the vision which appeared to the two young men on the farther side of the Mouth of Hell.

The lightning died away, and the vision with it. — ” Did you see, Samuel?” asked Julius, far from reassured.

“Egad! yes, — saw and heard too.”

“Do you know, if it were allowable for intelligent men to believe in witches, we might easily believe we have just seen one?”

“But,” said Samuel, “it is one, I sincerely hope! You saw that nothing was wanting, not even the goat. However, the witch is pretty. Ay! little one!” he cried.

And he listened as he had done when he rolled the boulder into the abyss. But, again, nothing answered him.

“By the Mouth of Hell!” said Samuel, “I will not be foiled.”

Snatching his horse’s bridle, he leapt into the saddle, and, with one bound, and heedless of the warnings of Julius, he galloped round to the other side of the precipice; in a moment he had reached the spot where the vision had appeared; but it was in vain that he sought, he saw nothing, — neither girl, nor animal, nor witch, nor goat.

Samuel was not the man to rest satisfied with this; he examined the precipice, searched the bushes and brambles, struck a light, went hither and thither. But, at last, Julius imploring him to give up this useless quest, Samuel rejoined his companion, angry and vexed; he was one of those tenacious beings, who make it a practice to go to the end of every trail, to the bottom of everything, and in whom doubt arouses, not a train of thought, but irritation.

They resumed their way.

The flashes of lightning guided them to some extent, affording them at the same time a magnificent sight. At intervals the forest was dyed purple from the top of the mountain to the bottom of the ravine, while the stream at their feet assumed the deadly whiteness of steel.

Julius had said nothing for the last quarter of an hour, and Samuel continued to mock at the last bursts of the dying thunder, when suddenly Julius stopped his horse, and cried:

“Ah! this will do for us.”

And he pointed out to Samuel a ruined tower, which rose on their right.

“That ruin?” said Samuel.

“Yes, we are sure to find some corner there to shelter us. We can stay there until the storm is over, or at any rate, until the rain ceases.”

“Yes, and our clothes will dry on our backs, and we shall catch a fine cold on the chest by standing still in our damp garments! Never mind! let us see what the place is like.”

In a few steps they reached the foot of the ruin; but it was not easy to gain admittance to it. The castle, abandoned by man, had been invaded by bushes. The entrance was obstructed by these plants and shrubs, that flourished amid the crumbling walls. Samuel urged on his horse through everything, adding, to the prick of the spur, the sting of the thorns.

Julius’ horse followed, and the two friends found themselves in the interior of the castle, if indeed such words as castle and interior may be applied to crumbling ruins, open on all sides to the winds of heaven.

“Oh! oh! you have brought us to this place for shelter?” said Samuel, looking up; “it seems to me, that, to attain that end, a roof or a ceiling would be indispensable; unfortunately, roof and ceilings are conspicuous by their absence.”

In point of fact, time had made of this castle, which perhaps in old days had been powerful and imposing, a miserable skeleton; of the four walls, but three now remained, and even these were rent by their windows being enlarged out of all proportion; the fourth had crumbled away even to the last stone.

The horses stumbled at every step; roots protruded and in places the pavement was cracked and broken into holes, as if the vegetation, imprisoned for three hundred years, had succeeded, by the long toil of centuries, in piercing, with its gnarled and stubborn fingers, the stones of its prison.

The three surviving walls swayed and bent under the blast of the tempest. Night birds of every kind circled round and round in this open hall, greeting each breath of the storm, each roar of thunder, with horrid cries, from among which rose above all others the scream of the osprey, whose note resembles the cry of a murdered man.

Samuel surveyed everything with that habit of minute scrutiny peculiar to himself.

"Good!" said he to Julius, "if you like to stay here until morning, I am equally willing to do so. We are remarkably well here, almost as well as in the open air, and have, besides, this advantage, that the wind rushes much more furiously into this eyrie. We are, to be perfectly exact, in the funnel of the storm. And then these crows and bats, deuce take them! are not a pleasure to be scorned. These quarters suit me splendidly. Eh! why! see that owl, the philosopher's bird, she is fixing her burning eyes upon us; is she not the most delightful thing in the world? Exclusive of all this, we will be able to boast of having galloped round a dining-room."

So saying, Samuel put spurs to his horse and urged him towards the spot where the wall was missing; but scarce had he gone ten paces before the horse reared so violently, pivoting on itself, that its eyes looked full into Samuel's face.

At the same moment a voice cried:

"Stop! the Neckar!"

Samuel looked down.

He hung suspended two hundred feet above the river. In turning upon itself, the horse's two fore-legs had described a semi-circle in empty space.

The mountain, at this spot, was perpendicular; the castle had been built overlooking the abyss, which formed part of the strength of its position.

Wild creepers ran from end to end like a garland, clinging to the ragged surface of the granite, so that the old stronghold, undermined by the ages. and almost plunging down the precipice, into which it was ready to fall, seemed only held together by a thin festoon of ivy.

One step more must have meant certain death to rider and horse.

And thus the horse, with bristling mane, flaming nostrils, foaming mouth, trembled in every muscle, shook in every limb.

But as for Samuel, calm, or rather sceptical as usual, the danger he had so narrowly escaped aroused in him but one reflection.

"Upon my word! the same voice," said he.

Samuel recognised the voice as being that of the young girl who had warned him from the Mouth of Hell.

"Oh! this time," Samuel exclaimed, "were you what I accused you of being, a witch of the third power, I shall find you."

And he urged his horse in the direction from which the voice had proceeded.

But, this time again, in vain he searched, in vain the lightning gleamed, he did not find, he did not see anyone.

"Come, come, Samuel!" said Julius, who now was not sorry to leave these ruins, full of croakings, of pitfalls, and of precipices; "come, let us get on our way! we have already wasted too much time!"

Samuel followed, looking searchingly round him with an. annoyance which the darkness enabled him to conceal.

They found the road again, and continued on their way; Julius, serious and silent; Samuel, laughing and swearing like one of Schiller's bandits.

A discovery restored some hope to Julius. On leaving the ruins, he perceived a pathway, which, by a gentle but broken incline, sloped down to the river. Probably this path, which was practicable and evidently frequented, led to some village, or at least to some house.

But at the end of half an hour they had come across nothing but the river, skirting its steep bank and ascending its noisy course.

No shelter of any sort was to be seen.

During all this time the rain fell with the same violence. The clothes of the two men were wet through; the horses were exhausted with fatigue. Julius was worn out; Samuel himself was beginning to lose his buoyant spirits.

"By Satan!" cried he, "the affair grows tame, for more than ten minutes we have had neither thunder nor lightning. This is nothing but a downpour. In truth, heaven plays an unkind jest upon us. I was quite willing to put up with a great excitement but not with a wearisome annoyance. The storm mocks me in its turn; I defy it to strike me with its thunderbolt, and it chills me to the bone."

Julius did not reply.

"By my troth!" said Samuel, "I feel strongly inclined to try what an invocation would do."

And in a loud and solemn voice he added:

“In the name of the Mouth of Hell from which we beheld you issue! in the name of the goat, your best friend! in the name of the ravens, the bats, and the owls who have abounded in our path since our happy encounter with you! charming witch, who hast already addressed me twice, I adjure thee! In the name of the gulf, of the goat, of the ravens, of the bats, of the owls, appear! appear! appear! and tell us if we are near any human habitation.”

“If you had strayed from your path,” said the clear voice of the young girl in the darkness, “I would have warned you. You are in the right road; follow it ten minutes more, and you will find on its right, behind a group of lindens, hospitable shelter. Till we meet again!”

Samuel looked up in the direction from which the voice proceeded, and perceived a kind of shadow which appeared to hover at about ten feet above his head, running up the side of the mountain.

He felt instinctively that she was going to disappear.

“Stop! “Samuel cried, “I have yet something to ask you.”

“What is it?” said she, as she stood still on the top of the rock, of which the pointed extremity was such, that it seemed impossible for a foot, even the foot of a witch, to stand upon it.

He looked about for some way by which he could get up at her; but the pathway along which the two horsemen rode was hollowed out of the rock. It was a path for men; the one the witch followed was only a goat-track.

Seeing that he could not reach the beautiful girl by means of his horse, he determined to reach her at least by his voice.

Turning to his friend “Well! my dear Julius,” he said, “I was enumerating to you, an hour ago, the harmonies of this night; the tempest; my twenty years, the wine of the old stream, and, by thunder! I was forgetting love! love, which comprises all the others, love, the real youth, love, the real storm, love, the real intoxication.”

Then, urging forward his horse, with one bound he approached nearer the girl.

“I love you!” said he, “charming witch. “Love me too, and, if you will, we will have a fine wedding. Yes, at once. When queens get married, the fountains are made to play and guns are fired. At our wedding, God makes the rain to fall and the thunder to roar. I see very well that it is a real goat you have there, and I take you to be a witch, but I will have you — I give you my soul, give me your beauty.”

"You are impious towards God and ungrateful towards me," said the young girl as she disappeared.

Once more Samuel tried to follow her, but decidedly the mountain side was unscaleable.

"Come, come, let us go on," said Julius.

"And where do you want me to go?" said Samuel out of temper.

"To the house to which she directed us of course."

"Nonsense! you believe it?" retorted Samuel. "And if this house does exist, who is to tell you that it is not a cutthroat place to which it is the mission of our fair guide to lure 'belated travellers '?"

"You heard what she told you, Samuel? Ungrateful towards her, blasphemous towards God."

"Come on, then, since you wish it," said the young man. "I have no faith, but if it can afford you any pleasure, I can pretend to believe."

"See, unbeliever!" rejoined Julius ten minutes later.

And he pointed out to his friend the cluster of linden trees which the young girl had spoken of. A bright light shining through the trees indicated the existence of a house. Both rode under the limes and arrived at the gateway.

Julius raised his hand to the bell.

"You ring at the cut-throats' door?" said Samuel.

Julius made no answer, but rang the bell.

"I wager," said Samuel, laying his hand on the young man's arm, "I wager you it will be the girl with the goat who will open us the door."

The inner door opened and a human form, carrying a muffled lantern, advanced to the gate which Julius had rung.

"Whoever you are," said Julius to the person who approached, "consider the weather and our present plight; for more than four hours we have been walking beside precipices and torrents; give us shelter for the night."

"Enter," said a voice familiar to the young men.

It was that of the young girl who had addressed them on the road to the ruined castle, and at the Mouth of Hell.

"You see," said Samuel to Julius, who could not repress a shudder.

"What house is this?" asked Julius.

"Well! are you not coming in, gentlemen?" asked the girl.

"Egad! yes, of course we are!" said Samuel. "I would enter into hell itself, provided the portress were a pretty girl."

CHAPTER III.

A MAY MORNING.

THE next morning, when Julius awoke and found himself in a comfortable bed, it was some time before he could realize where he was.

He opened his eyes. A glad ray of sunshine, glinting through the openings of a shutter, danced cheerfully about, alive with sprightly atoms, on a floor, spotlessly white and clean. A joyous concert of birds added melody to the brightness.

Julius sprang out of bed. A dressing gown and slippers had been laid out for him; he slipped them on and went to the window.

Scarcely had he opened the window and pushed back the shutters, ere the room was, as it were, flooded with song, sunshine and perfume. The room overlooked a beautiful garden, full of birds and of flowers. Beyond the garden, the valley of the Neckar, traversed and quickened by the river. In the distance, on the horizon, the mountains.

And over all, the radiant sky of a glorious May morning; and in the midst of all, that exuberant life with which the air is alive in the springtime of the year.

The storm had swept every cloud from the sky. The vault of heaven was everywhere of that calm deep blue which suggests an idea of what the smile of God must be.

Julius experienced an indefinable sensation of restfulness and well being. The garden, freshened and fertilised by the night’s rain, was overflowing with sap. The sparrows, the warblers, and the goldfinches. celebrating their gladness at having escaped the storm, converted each branch into an orchestra. The raindrops played upon by the sun turned each blade of grass into an emerald.

A vine crept lightly in at the casement, and tried to find its way into the room to pay Julius a friendly visit.

But suddenly vine, birds, dew on the grass, songs in the leaves, mountains in the distance, splendours in the sky, Julius saw nothing, heard nothing, of them all.

A young pure voice had reached his ear. He leant forward, and, in the shade of a honeysuckle, perceived the most charming group fancy can paint.

A young girl of scarce fifteen summers held on her knees a little boy of about five years of age, and was teaching him to read.

The young girl was of the most winsome grace imaginable. Blue eyes brimming over with sweetness and intelligence, hair of palest gold clustering in such profusion over her head, that her neck seemed too slender to support its weight, a witching symmetry of form. These are words too weak to describe the exquisite creature which Julius beheld. Her chief charm lay in her bright youthfulness. Her whole personality seemed an ode to innocence, a hymn to truth, a sonnet to springtime. There was an inexpressible harmony between the young girl and the glorious morning, between the bright look which shone in her eyes and the dew that glistened on the grass. It was frame and picture.

What she possessed above all was exquisite grace. But her gracefulness did not result from delicacy, everything about her was eloquent of life and health.

She was dressed in German fashion; a white bodice, tight-fitting to the waist; a dress, white also, festooned at the bottom, fell in graceful folds from her hips, and was sufficiently short to disclose to view a pretty foot and ankle.

The little boy whom she held on her knees, fair and rosy, with flaxen curls, was learning his lesson with a serious and attentive air. He was saying his alphabet, pointing with his tiny finger to each big letter. After he had named a letter, he looked anxiously up into his mistress’s face to see whether he had made a mistake. If he were wrong, she corrected him and he began again. If he were right, she smiled and he went on.

Julius could not take his eyes off this charming picture. This exquisite group in this exquisite spot, the voice of the child with the warbling of the birds, the beauty of the young girl with the beauty of nature, the springtime of life, with the springtime of earth; these were all in such contrast to the violent emotions of the night, that a wave of tenderness swept over him, and he became absorbed in delicious contemplation.

He was suddenly roused from it by feeling a head touch his own. It was Samuel who had just entered his room, and approached on tip-toe to see what Julius was gazing at so attentively.

Julius, with an imploring gesture, warned him to make no noise. But Samuel, a stranger to sentiment, gave no heed to his request, and, as the vine somewhat intercepted his view, he pushed it aside with his hand.

The rustling of the leaves made the young girl look up and a faint flush rose to her face. The little boy also turned to the window, and, on seeing the strangers, neglected his book. He made a mistake over nearly every letter. The young girl seemed to become slightly impatient, more from embarrassment at the strangers' gaze than from the child's mistakes; then, a moment later, she quietly closed the book, put the child down, got up, and passing under Julius's window returned the young men's salute, and went into the house with the boy.

Julius turned towards Samuel with a look of annoyance.

"What business had you to startle her?" said he.

"Yes, I understand," said Samuel mockingly, "the sparrow-hawk has frightened the lark. But, do not be anxious, those birds are tame and invariably return. Well, after all, you have not been murdered in the night? Judging by appearances, this cut-throat place is fairly habitable. I see that your room is no worse than mine. In fact, yours has the advantage over mine, in being adorned with these engravings of the history of Tobias."

"It seems to me I have been dreaming," said Julius. "Come, let us go over the events of last night; it really was the pretty girl with the ugly goat who opened the door to us, was it not? By some mysterious sign, she imposed silence, showed us where to stable our horses; then, leading the way into the house, she conducted us to the second storey, to these two rooms which adjoin; lighted this lamp; made a curtsey, and, without having spoken a word, she hurriedly disappeared. You seemed to me, Samuel, almost as stupefied as myself. Yet, you wanted to follow her, but I restrained you, and we made up our minds to go to bed and have a good night's rest. Now is that what happened?"

"Your recollections," said Samuel, "are most correct, and, in all probability, most realistically true. And I dare swear that now you forgive me for having induced you to leave the inn last night. Will you again rail against the storm? Was I wrong in telling you that evil produced good? The thunder and the rain have already procured us two very comfortably furnished rooms, a view of most beautiful country, and the acquaintance of a lovely maiden, whom politeness demands that we should make love to, the laws of hospitality likewise demanding from her that she should return our love."

"Blaspheming again!" said Julius.

Samuel was about to utter some jest in reply, when the door of the room opened and an old servant entered, bringing the two companions their clothes, dried and brushed, together with some bread and some milk for breakfast.

Julius thanked her, and asked in whose house they were. The old woman replied that they were at the manse of Landeck, at Pastor Schreiber's.

And, whilst setting the room in order, the good woman, who was evidently loquacious, went on to say:

The pastor's wife had died fifteen years ago, in giving birth to Mademoiselle Christiane. Then, three years back, the pastor had sustained another loss, in the death of his eldest daughter, Marguerite, and, now he lived alone with his daughter, Mademoiselle Christiane, and his grandson Lothario, Marguerite's child.

The worthy pastor had just that moment started, with Christiane, for the village church, where his religious duties called him. But he would be back by mid-day, the dinner-hour, and would then see his guests.

"But," said Samuel, "who then conducted us hither yesterday?"

"Ah!" replied the servant, "it was Gretchen!"

"Good! Now explain to us who is Gretchen?"

"Gretchen? Why the goat herd."

"The goat herd," said Julius, "That, of course, explains things in general, and the goat in particular. And where is she now?"

"Oh! she has gone back to the mountain. In the winter, or when the weather is too stormy in summer, she cannot spend the night in her wood hut, so comes to sleep in the parsonage, where she has a bedroom next to mine, but she never stays here long. She is a queer creature. She feels stifled between four walls; air is as necessary to her as to her animals."

"But by what right did she bring us here?" asked Julius.

"It was not by virtue of right but of duty," replied the servant, "and my master the pastor, each time that he sees her, charges her to bring hither every weary or belated traveller she may come across; because there is no inn anywhere near, and he says that the priest's house is the house of God, and the house of God is the house of all."

The old woman went out. The young men breakfasted, dressed, and went down to the garden.

“Let us take a turn before dinner,” said Samuel.

“No “Julius replied, “I am tired.”

And he sat down on a bench shaded by a climbing honeysuckle.

“Tired?” said Samuel. “You are only just out of bed.” Then immediately he burst into a laugh.

“Ah! yes, I understand; that is the bench where Christiane was sitting. Ah! my poor Julius! already smitten!”

Julius got up, quite confused.

“As a matter of fact,” he rejoined, “we may just as well walk about. There will be plenty of time to sit down. Let us go and look at the garden.”

And he began to talk about the flowers, and to admire the laying out of the garden, as if anxious to turn the conversation from the subject introduced by Samuel, that is to say, from the bench and the pastor’s daughter. He did not know why, but the name of Christiane on Samuel’s mocking lips began to jar upon him.

They strolled about thus for an hour. At the end of the garden was the orchard. But at this season of the year the orchard was likewise a garden. The apple trees and peach trees were masses of white and pink blossom.

“What are you thinking about? “Samuel said suddenly to Julius, who, for the last few moments, had been dreamy and silent.

We dare not assert that Julius was perfectly sincere in his reply, however he answered: “About my father.”

“Your father! And à propos of what have your thoughts flown to that illustrious man of science, I pray you?”

“Why! à propos of the fact that tomorrow at this hour he may have no son.”

“Oh! my dear fellow, do not let us make our wills beforehand, eh?” said Samuel. “To-morrow, I shall be in quite as much danger as you. But tomorrow will be quite time enough to think of it. You cannot believe to what extent the imagination weakens the will. In that lies the difference between men of sound intellect and fools. As for us, let us not anticipate.”

“Do not be afraid!” replied Julius. “Neither my will, nor my courage will fail to-morrow in the face of danger.”

“I do not doubt it, Julius. But do cheer up. If I mistake not, I see the pastor returning with his daughter. Come! come! I fancy your smile returns with them. Can it have gone with them to church?”

“You tiresome fellow!” said Julius.

The pastor and Christiane were, in fact, on their way back. Christiane walked straight into the house; the pastor hastened towards his guests.

CHAPTER IV.

FIVE HOURS IN FIVE MINUTES.

PASTOR SCHREIBER had the straightforward honest look of a German pastor accustomed to practise what he preached. He was a man of forty-five or thereabouts, consequently still young. His benevolent face was grave and sad. The seriousness arose from his calling; the sadness, from the death of his wife and daughter. It was evident that time had failed to heal his wound, and the ceaseless shadow of human regret warred on his brow with the comforting light of Christian hope.

He shook hands with the young men, enquired how they had slept, and thanked them for having sought shelter at his house.

A moment later the dinner-bell rang.

“Let us join my daughter, gentlemen,” said the pastor. “I will lead the way.”

“He does not ask our names,” Samuel whispered in Julius’ ear. “Needless, then, to tell him. Yours is perhaps too illustrious for the little one’s modesty, and mine too Jewish for the old man’s piety.”

“So be it,” said Julius, “let us give ourselves princely airs and assume an incognito.”

They went into the dining-room, where they found Christiane and her nephew. Christiane bowed to the two young men with shy and shrinking grace.

They sat down at a square table simply but plentifully spread; the pastor between the two friends, Christiane opposite to him, and separated from Julius by the child.

The meal was at first a silent one. Julius, embarrassed in the presence of Christiane, said nothing. Christiane seemed able to attend to no one but the child, whom she tended like a young mother, and who called her sister. The conversation was almost entirely sustained by the pastor and Samuel. The pastor was delighted to receive the students.

“I, too, have been ‘studiosus,’ “said he. “A student’s life was a happy one in those days.”

“It is a trifle more dramatic nowadays,” said Samuel looking at Julius.

“Ah!” continued the pastor, “that was the best time of my life. Since then, I have paid dearly for the happiness of those early days. I looked hopefully on life then. Now, it is quite the reverse. Oh! I do not say this to sadden you, my young friends; as you see, I speak almost cheerfully.,. And, whatever happens, I hope I may be permitted to remain on earth until I have seen my Christiane happy in the home of her forefathers...”

“Father, father! “... Christiane interrupted in a tone of tender reproach.

“You are right, my wise fairy,” said the pastor, “let us talk of something else. Do you know that, thank God, the storm of last night has spared nearly all my beloved plants.”

“Are you a botanist?” asked Samuel.

“Somewhat,” the pastor replied with a certain pride. “Do you happen to be one too, sir?”

“In my leisure moments,” the young man carelessly replied.

Then, allowing the pastor to enter into a dissertation on his favourite studies, Samuel suddenly unmasked, so to speak, a profound and daring, knowledge of the subject, amused himself in bewildering the worthy man by his new thoughts and hitherto undreamt-of notions, without departing from his polite, cold and somewhat mocking manner, and without appearing to wish to do so, completely put to rout, by the superiority of his true science, the somewhat superficial, and above all somewhat superannuated, learning of the pastor.

Meanwhile Julius; and Christiane, who up to the present had remained silent, only looking stealthily at each other, began to grow a little more sociable.

Lothario served at first as a link between them. Julius was not yet venturesome enough to address Christiane himself, but he put questions to the child which it was impossible for Lothario to answer. Then the child questioned Christiane, who replied to Lothario and to Julius. And Julius rejoiced that the young girl’s thoughts should reach him through the medium of those pure lips so dear to her. At dessert, thanks to that quick and trustful unreserve which is the great charm of children, the three were already good friends.

So, when they rose from the table and went into the garden to drink coffee under the trees, a frown crossed Julius’ brow on seeing Samuel approach them, and a pang shot through his heart that he should come and disturb the commencement of their sweet intimacy. The pastor had insisted on going himself to fetch his best old brandy.

It was not for want of boldness that he sinned, this cold, sardonic Samuel, and Julius felt very indignant on seeing the quiet, self-satisfied look which he bent on sweet Christiane, as he said: — ” We must ask your forgiveness, Mademoiselle, for having, this morning, so foolishly disturbed the lesson which you were giving your little nephew.”

“Oh!” she said, “I had finished.”

“I could not suppress an exclamation. Do you know that, because of her dress, her goat and the lightning, we were almost inclined to believe that the young girl who introduced us here yesterday was a witch? We fell asleep under that impression, and in the morning, on opening our window, we find the goat changed into an adorable child, and the witch--

“Was I!” said Christiane, with a joyous and, it must be confessed, slightly coquettish, pout.

And, turning towards Julius, who affected a reserved air: — ” And you, sir, did you too take me for a witch?” asked she.

“Eh!” said Julius, “well, you see it is not natural to be so beautiful.”

Christiane, who had smiled at Samuel’s words, blushed at Julius’ speech.

Confused at having said so much, Julius hurriedly turned to the child.

“Lothario, would you like us to take you to the University?” said he.

“Sister,” Lothario asked Christiane, “what is the University?”

“It is a place which is supposed to teach you everything,” the, pastor, who had just returned, said with alacrity.

The child turned gravely to Julius.

“I need not go with you because my sister is a university to me. She knows how to read and write, besides French, music and Italian. I shall never leave her, never in all my life.”

“Alas! you are luckier than we are, my little man,” said Samuel, “because the hour has come for us to set off again, Julius.”

“What!” exclaimed the pastor, “you will not give us even this one day! not stay to supper to-night!”

“A thousand thanks!” rejoined Samuel, “but it is absolutely imperative for us to be in Heidelberg this evening.”

“Come! there are no lectures, and no roll-call in the evening.”

“No! it is even a more serious duty that calls us, as Julius is well aware.”

“Let us consider the matter,” said the pastor. “Heidelberg is not more than seven or eight miles from Landeck. So to rest your horses and avoid the heat of the day you can easily arrange not to leave here until four o’clock. “Even then, you will reach the town before nightfall, I assure you.”

“Impossible. Considering the nature of the business that calls us there, we ought instead to have left earlier, am I not right, Julius?”

“Really!” murmured Christiane in a low voice, raising her lovely blue eyes to Julius’ face.

Julius, who up to the present had said nothing, was powerless to resist the sweet interrogation.

“Look here, Samuel,” said he, “let us not appear ungrateful for our host’s kindness. We can leave at four o’clock punctually.”

Samuel looked from Julius to the young girl with a wicked glance.

“Since you wish it, I have nothing further to say,” said he to Julius with a sardonic smile.

“That’s right!” exclaimed the pastor, “and now here is the programme for the day. It will take us until three o’clock to inspect my collections and my garden. After that the children and I will see you on your way as far as the crossroads of Neckarsteinach. I have a strong, careful lad who will lead your horses as far. You will see! the road, which appeared to you so horrible in the storm and darkness, is beautiful in the sunshine. And probably, we shall come across your so-called witch, on the way. For she really is one in a certain sense, but in the most Christianlike way imaginable; she is an innocent, God-fearing child.”

“Ah! I would be glad to see her again by daylight,” replied Samuel. “May we inspect your collection of plants, sir,” said he to the pastor, rising.

And, in passing Julius, he breathed in his ear:

“I am going to look after the father, and sound him on Tournefort and Linnaeus. Am I a devoted friend?”

And in fact he monopolised the father, leaving Julius alone for some moments with Christiane and Lothario. Now they felt more at ease with one another, and ventured to look at, and speak to each other.

The impression that Christiane had made upon Julius that morning, engraved itself more and more deeply upon him. Nothing fresher nor more animated than this sweet face in which could be read as in an open book all the innocence of maidenhood. Christiane’s glance was clear as water from a spring, and was the reflex of a warm trusting heart. Beautiful and good, hers was a nature as transparent as this day in May.

Lothario’s presence imparted both innocence and freedom to this sweet intercourse. Christiane showed Julius her flowers, her bees, her poultry-yard, her music, her books, that is to say, all her calm and simple life. Then she questioned him about himself.

“How comes it?” she said once, “how comes it that you, who appear so quiet, and so gentle, should have, as your friend, a man so proud and cynical?”

It had not escaped her notice that, when unobserved, Samuel laughed at her father’s simplicity, and this had at once made her dislike him.

Julius thought that Goethe’s Marguerite had said something very like this of Mephistopheles in the delicious garden scene. But already was he convinced that Faust’s Marguerite could not compare with his Christiane. By degrees, as they chatted together, he remarked that the girl’s frankness and charm concealed a fund of good sense and firmness due probably to the sadness of her motherless childhood. The child was fast merging into the woman.

Neither of them could repress a frank movement of surprise, when the pastor and Samuel coming back to them, reminded them that it was three o’clock and time to start.

Five hours seem like five minutes to the happy and forgetful time-keeper of the heart’s first throbs of love.

CHAPTER V.

THE FLOWERS AND HERBS MANIFEST DISTRUST OF SAMUEL GELB.

THEY had therefore to set out on their way. But, at least, an hour yet was theirs in which to be together.

Julius was glad at the thought. He relied upon continuing, as they went along, the conversation which he and Christiane had begun; but he was mistaken. Christiane instinctively felt that it were best for her and Julius not to be too much together. She slipped her hand through her father's arm, who was still absorbed in his discussion with Samuel. Julius grew sad and walked behind them.

They went up a pleasant ascent through a charming wood where the rays of the sun laughed through the leafy shadows. The peacefulness of the afternoon was welcomed by the amorous notes of the nightingale.

Julius, as we said, held aloof, already vexed with Christiane.

He made this attempt:

"Lothario, come and see this," said he to the pretty child, who walked beside Christiane, holding on to her hand and taking three steps for one.

Lothario ran up to his old friend of two hours' standing. Julius showed him a dragon-fly that had settled on a bush, slender, quivering, splendid. The child gave a cry of delight.

"What a pity," said Julius, "that Christiane does not see it."

"Sister," said Lothario, "come quick!"

And as Christiane made no response, well aware that it was not the child who had called her, Lothario sprang after her, pulled at her dress, compelled her to loose her father's arm and triumphantly brought her to see the insect's beautiful wings.

The dragon-fly had flown away, but Christiane had come.

"You called me for nothing," said Christiane and she went back to her father's side.

Julius employed this subterfuge several times. He would make Lothario admire all the butterflies and all the flowers along their way, invariably expressing regret that Christiane was not there to enjoy their beauty too. Each time, Lothario would immediately run after Christiane, and comes he must, so insistent was he. Thus Julius made use of the child to steal a few minutes' conversation with the young girl.

He succeeded too in making her accept, through the little hands of Lothario, his innocent accomplice, a magnificent wild rose just freshly blown.

But Christiane always returned to her father's side.

Yet she could not feel angry with Julius for his longing and his perseverance; had she not, the sweet gentle girl, to fight against her own heart not to stay?

"Listen," she said, in a childlike tone which enraptured him; "listen, it would be absolutely impolite, on my part, to speak to no one but you, and my father would wonder if I were never with him or your companion. But you will soon come back, will you not? We will go for walks again with my father and Lothario; and see, if you like, we will visit the Mouth of Hell and the ruins of the Castle of Eberbach. Most noble views, Herr Julius, which it was impossible for you to see at night, but you will enjoy seeing them by daylight, and then we can talk, as we go along."

They arrived at the cross-roads. The horses that were to meet them there, under the guidance of Herr Schreiber's young servant, had not yet come.

"Let us walk a few steps in this direction," said the pastor, "and perhaps we may find Gretchen in her hut."

In a very short time, they perceived the little goat-herd. Her cabin was mid-way up the mountain-side, in the shelter of the rock. Around Gretchen, a dozen goats were browsing, restless, suspicious, clinging wherever a hole was to be found, and only nibbling at the grass which grew in the marshy ground; in fact, true Virgilian goats, hanging on to the rock and browsing bitter herbs.

In the full light of day, Gretchen was even more weird and more beautiful than in the gleam of lightning. A sombre flame illumined her dark eyes. Her hair, black as her eyes, was interwoven with strange flowers. At this particular moment, she sat huddled together, her chin in her hand, as if a prey to some absorbing train of thought. Her attitude, her headgear, her whole appearance had much of the gipsy, a little of the mad girl. Christiane and the pastor came up to her. She did not appear to see them.

“Well!” said the pastor, “what ails you, Gretchen? I pass along, and you do not hasten to me as usual? Evidently you do not want me to thank you for the guests you brought to my home last night?”

Gretchen did not rise, but sighing deeply, said in a sad voice:

“You do well to thank me to-day; you might not do so to-morrow.”

Samuel threw a scornful glance at the goat-herd.

“Evidently you repent having brought us?” said he.

“You in particular,” was her reply. “But he also,” she went on, looking at Christiane with an air of sorrowful affection, “he also, has not brought happiness...”

“And how have you found that out?” asked Samuel with his accustomed sneer.

“By the night-shade and the withered clover.”

“Ah! “Samuel said to the pastor, “Gretchen too studies botany?”

“Yes,” replied Christiane’s father; “she professes to read the present and the future in plants.”

“I believe,” said the goat-herd gravely, “that plants and flowers, not having done the harm that men have, are more worthy that God should talk to them. Because of their innocence, they know everything. I have lived so much with them, that they have ended by telling me some of their secrets.”

And Gretchen relapsed into her gloomy abstraction. Nevertheless, although apparently absorbed in her thoughts, she went on, as if talking to herself, and yet loud enough to be heard by all.

“Yes, I have brought ill-luck to the roof that is dear to me. The pastor saved my mother, God grant I have not lost him his daughter. My mother wandered about the country fortune-telling, carrying me on her back, without a husband, without religion, without anyone on earth or in heaven to care for her. The pastor took us in, fed us, taught us. Thanks to him, my mother died a Christian. Well! mother, you see, he who gave paradise to your soul, and bread to your daughter, I show my gratitude to him by bringing men of ill-luck into his house. Ungrateful wretch that I am! I should have guessed what sort of men they were from the manner in which I met them. I should have been distrustful of them after what I heard them say. The storm brought them and they brought the storm.”

“Poor child!” said the pastor. “She will certainly go mad, if she is not so already.”

“Has she frightened you, Mademoiselle?” Julius said to Christiane.

“No, but her words impressed me. She is in one of her visionary moods,” replied the young girl.

“Well!” said Samuel, “for my own part, whether she be awake or asleep, by day or by night, in sunshine or in storm, I think her both charming and amusing.”

Poor Gretchen! the inhabitants of the parsonage treated her as the inhabitants of Troy treated Cassandra.

A sound of steps aroused the spectators of this singular scene from the different emotions which it had engendered. The horses had arrived.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH THE SCENE CHANGES FROM JOY TO JUBILATION, WHICH TO SOME IS A DIFFERENT THING ALTOGETHER.

THE moment of parting had come.

The farewell words must be spoken. The pastor obtained from Julius and Samuel a promise that they would return to the parsonage at the earliest opportunity.

“You do not study on Sundays,” Christiane ventured to say; and on this remark, it was agreed that the two young men would return the very next Sunday; which meant but three whole days’ absence.

When the students were in the saddle, Julius looked at Christiane with eyes that tried not to be sad.

And at the same time his gaze dwelt enviously on the wild rose that he had given her through Lothario, and which he would gladly have taken back, now that she had worn it.

But she seemed not to notice it; only, in giving him her hand in farewell, she said, with a bright smile:

“Till Sunday, for certain?”

“Oh, yes, surely,” he replied in a tone which made the young girl smile and Samuel laugh. “Unless some misfortune should befall me,” he added in an undertone.

But though he had spoken so low, Christiane heard the words.

“Why, what misfortune can befall you in three days?” she asked, turning pale.

“Who knows!” said Julius, half in jest, half in earnest.

“But if you are anxious for me to escape all these perils, you, who are an angel, have but to offer up a few prayers to God for me; to-morrow, for instance, at the service.”

“To-morrow? at the service?” repeated Christiane, evidently impressed. “Do you hear what Monsieur Julius asks, father?”

“I have always accustomed you to pray for our guests, my child,” said the pastor.

“Now I am invulnerable,” said Julius, “armed with the prayer of a seraph; all, now, that I lack is the fairy talisman.”

His eyes were still fastened on the white rose.

“Come,” rejoined Samuel, “it is high time to go, were it only to put an end to all these imaginary perils. Do not all men run into dangers every day, from which they escape? Besides I am there, I, whom Gretchen imagines, I believe, to be the devil in disguise, and the devil can do much in human affairs. And after all, what matters! the real end and aim of mortals, is it not, to die?”

“To die!” cried Christiane, finding her voice again. “Oh, yes, Herr Julius, I will pray for you, although I do not think you are in any danger of death!”

“Now, adieu, adieu,” said Samuel impatiently. “Come along, Julius, come along.”

“Good-bye, my big. friend,” cried Lothario.

“Why,” said Christiane, “will you not give your flower to your big friend as a keepsake?”

And she placed the wild rose in the child’s hand.

“But I am too small!” said Lothario, vainly holding up his hand.

Then Christiane raised the child in her arms and carried him close up to Julius’ horse, and Julius took the wild rose.

It was acceptable even from the hand of Lothario.

“Thank you and farewell!” cried he, deeply moved.

And, waving a last farewell to Christiane and her father, he put spurs to his horse, as if to overcome his emotion, and galloped off.

Samuel followed. Another minute, and the two friends were already far away.

But when they had gone about fifty yards, Julius turned in his saddle, and saw Christiane, looking back and waving him adieu.

To both, this departure was even now a separation, and each felt that he left with the other a part of himself.

The young men rode for a quarter of a league, urging on their horses and without exchanging a word.

The road was charming. On one side mountain and forest; on the other the Neckar, reflecting in its calm waters the serene beauty of the sky. The sun, already tempered by the approach of evening, bathed the trees in a rosy light.

“What a smiling landscape,” said Samuel, slackening speed.

“And we are leaving it for noisy streets and smoke-filled taverns,” replied Julius. “Never have I felt so much as now how little suited I am to all your orgies, all your quarrels, all your tumults. I was meant for a quiet life, for peaceful joys...”

“And for Christiane! You forget the one essential. Confess that for you the village means the village maiden. Well! You are not far wrong. The girl is pretty and so is the witch. And I, like you, fully intend to revisit the neighbourhood. But the fact of our having discovered this sweet little bird’s nest is no reason why we should be sad. On the contrary, let us decide about to-morrow, and we can think of Sunday afterwards. If we survive we shall have plenty of time to compose sonnets and even to fancy ourselves in love; but until then let us be men.”

They stopped a short time at Neckarsteinach to drink a bottle of beer and to rest their horses. Then they hastily pursued their way, and it was still daylight when they reached Heidelberg.

In all the streets, and at the windows of all the houses, nothing but students were to be seen. On recognizing Samuel and Julius, they all bowed. Samuel seemed to be the object of the deepest respect. Caps of every colour, yellow, green, red, white, were raised respectfully as he passed.

But on reaching the principal street, respect gave place to enthusiasm, and the entry became a triumph.

Students, of whatever grade, “Mossy-Pates,” as well as simple “Finches,”

“Golden Foxes,” as also “Mules,” flock to doors and windows, some waving their caps in the air, others presenting arms with billiard cues, everyone shouting, at the top of his voice, the celebrated song; “Who cometh clown the mountain side?” terminated by the interminable “*Viva, viva, viva, vallera!”*

To all these marks of honour Samuel responded but by a slight inclination of the head. And seeing that these demonstrations of joy increased Julius’ melancholy:

“Silence!” cried he, “you make my friend’s head ache. Come! enough! do you take us for ‘Camels’ or ‘Philistines,’ that you deafen us with this uproar. Holla! stand back, or it will be impossible for us to dismount.”

But the crowd would not fall back. Each one vied with the other as to which should secure the bridle of Samuel’s horse, so as to have the honour of leading it to the stable.

One student, of quite thirty years, who must have been an “Oldster,” if not a “Mossy Pate,” rushed out of the hotel, waved back the “Finches “and the “Freshmen,” who surrounded Samuel, and indulging in prodigious leaps and bounds:

“Hands down,” cried he. “Ah, good-day, Samuel! Good-day, my noble senior. Hurrah!”

“Good-day, Trichter; good-day, my dear ‘Pet Fox,’ “said Samuel.

“You have returned at last, noble sir!” resumed Trichter. “Ah, time and existence have hung heavily on our hands during your absence! However, here you are! *Viv aller aller a!...”*

“Good Trichter, good! I appreciate your welcome. But permit me to alight. There. Let Lewald take my horse. Why do you make a wry face?”

“Why, you see!” said Trichter, in a piqued tone, “such a favour as that..”

“Yes, Lewald is only one of the ‘Boys,’ I know. But, it is advisable that, now and then, kings should do something for the people. You may come with Julius and me into the *Commerz* House!”

What Samuel called the *Commerz* House was the Inn of the Swan, the principal tavern in Heidelberg, at the door of which he had alighted.

“Why are so many people here? “Samuel asked Trichter. “Was I expected?”

“This merry-making is in honour of the re-opening of term after the Easter vacation,”, said Trichter; “you are here just in time. There is going to be a ‘Foxes” *Commerz.”*

“Then let us go to it,” said Samuel.

The landlord of the inn, having been apprised of Samuel’s arrival, at this moment hastened forward, with a proud yet humble air.

“Oh! oh! you are in no hurry!” said Samuel.

“I crave your pardon,” replied the landlord, “the fact is this evening we are expecting H.R.H. Prince Charles Augustus, the son of the Elector of Baden, who is passing through Heidelberg on his way to Stuttgart.”

“Well! what is that to me? He is only a prince; I am a king!”

Julius approached Samuel and whispered:

“Does the presence of the prince alter in any way our arrangement for to-night and to-morrow?” he asked.

“On the contrary.”

“Very well. Then let us go in.”

And Samuel, Julius and Trichter entered the disorderly entertainment which Trichter had called the “Foxes’ “*Commerz.*

CHAPTER VII.

THE FUCHSENCOMMERZ.

WHEN the door of the immense hall opened, Julius at first could see nothing, hear nothing.

The smoke blinded him, the noise deafened him. Of course, everyone was in the same plight. But one Beckme inured little by little, and, after some time, one was able vaguely to distinguish objects amid the clouds of tobacco. Then the enormous lustres gleamed out feebly like street lamps in a fog, and finally, in the dim light, you grew aware of appearances like human forms moving about.

Hurrah and *viva vallera!* There were students in that hall, quite young fellows, who could have given points to a Chaldean sage for the length of their beards; there were moustaches that would have been the envy of a weeping-willow. There were to be seen some of the most fantastic costumes imaginable, Faust caps, with a Huron feather, monster ties, which sometimes all but hid the wearer’s face; massive gold chains round bare necks; above all there were glasses enough to scare a waiter and pipes to strike consternation into a factory chimney.

Smoke, rivers of wine, a din of music, deafening choruses, waltzes, resounding kisses on the rosy cheeks of pretty, breathless girls, who burst into peals of laughter, all these sounds rose in a strange diabolical pandemonium of noise.

Samuel was greeted in the hall as he had been outside. Immediately, his pipe and his gigantic royal “Rômer” brimming over, were placed before him.

“What have you there?” said he.

“Strong beer.”

“Come! do I look like a student from Jena? Throw that away and bring me punch.”

The beaker was filled with punch. It held more than a pint. He emptied it at one draught. Cheers thundered out from one end of the hall to the other.

“You are childish,” said Samuel.

He resumed:

“But I see with regret that the waltz lacks animation and the songs zest. Strike up, then!” cried he to the orchestra.

And going up to a “golden fox,” who was dancing with the prettiest girl in the room, he took her from him without ceremony, and began to waltz.

At once the whole hall became silent, attentive, absorbed. For in Samuel’s dancing there was something fantastic yet finished, which held the spectators spellbound. He began in stately measure, gliding into an amorous tender movement, unexpectedly interrupted by an abrupt gesture. Then he whirled round with a rapidity incredible, impassioned, unbridled, all-powerful. Then suddenly, in the midst of this insane joy, he stopped and passed straight from the. wild frenzy of enthusiasm to cold disdain; an ironical smile curved his lips. At times his expression was one of unutterable sadness, which aroused pity in the onlookers; but the next moment this was crushed back and stifled by some ludicrous movement, or a shrug of the shoulders, on his part. Or else his melancholy changed to bitterness — a sinister fire flashed from his eyes and his partner quivered in his arms like a dove in the talons of a vulture.

A unique dance which in a second transported one from heaven to hell, and at the sight of which one knew not whether to laugh, to cry or to tremble.

He brought it to a close with a paroxysm of whirling round and round, so contagious, so fascinating, that the other waltzers, who until then had remained gazing at them, were carried into the vortex, and, for the next quarter of an hour, the hall was converted into a hurricane.

Then Samuel quietly sat down, not a sign of moisture on his brow. He merely asked for a second bowl of punch.

Julius had taken no part in the bacchanal. Drowned in this sea of noise, his thoughts were at the manse of Landeck. Strange thing! in all this tempest of hoarse sounds, he heard but the sweet voice of a maiden teaching a little child his letters under the trees.

The landlord came up to Samuel and whispered something in his ear.

Prince Charles Augustus craved permission of the King of the Students to join in the *Fuchsencommerz.*

“Let him enter,” said Samuel.

At the entrance of the prince the “studiosi “raised their caps. Samuel, alone, excepted. He extended his hand to the prince and said:

“Welcome, my cousin.”

And he offered him a seat beside himself and Julius.

Just then, a little maid who accompanied herself on the guitar, had been singing one of Koener’s songs, and was making a collection. She stopped in front of Charles-Augustus, who turned round intending to ask some member of his suite for money. But no one had been permitted to enter with him. Then he turned to Samuel.

“Will you give something for me, sire?”

“With pleasure.”

Samuel drew out his purse.

“Here,” said he to the gipsy, “this I give you for myself, the king, five gold frederics, and this is for the prince, one kreutzer.”

A kreutzer is worth a little over a farthing.

A frenzy of applause shook the hall to its foundations. The young prince smiled and joined in the applause.

He left the hall a few minutes later. Almost immediately Samuel made a sign to Julius:

“It is time,” he said in a whisper.

Julius nodded and slipped out of the room.

The orgie was at its height. The dust and tobacco smoke had made the atmosphere more impenetrable than a December fog. It was now impossible to distinguish who went in or out.

Samuel got up, and in his turn glided outside.

CHAPTER VIII.

SAMUEL IS ALMOST MOVED TO ASTONISHMENT.

IT was now midnight; in all German towns and even at the Universities, everybody by this time has been asleep for a good two hours. Not a soul was awake in all Heidelberg, except at the *Foxes’ Commerz.*

Samuel walked towards the quay, choosing the least frequented streets, and turning round at intervals to satisfy himself that he was not followed. In this way he reached the Neckar, loitered up and down its banks for some time; then, turning abruptly to the right, he climbed the ascent which leads to the ruins of the Castle of Heidelberg.

At the first stage of that flight of steps that climbs the hill, a man suddenly emerged from a thicket of trees and stood in front of Samuel.

“Where are you going?”

“I am going to the heights leading up to God,” replied Samuel, in accordance with the prescribed formula.

“Pass on,” said the man.

Samuel continued his ascent, and had soon scaled the last flight.

When he arrived at the precincts of the castle, a second watchman challenged him at a postern.

“What are you doing here at this hour?”

“I am doing...” said Samuel. Then, instead of finishing the password, he began to chuckle; acting on one of those foolish impulses which crossed his mind at times. “You want to know what I am doing here at such an hour? Confound it all! I am taking a walk.”

The watchman started; and, as if in a rage, he knocked noisily at the wall with a heavily weighted stick, at the same time saying to Samuel:

“I advise you to return to your home, neither the hour nor the place is suited to a walk.”

Samuel shrugged his shoulders.

“It suits my fancy to admire the ruins by moonlight. Who are you that you should prevent my doing so?”

"I am one of the Custodians of the Castle, and our orders are that no one be allowed admittance after ten o'clock."

"Your orders are for the Philistines," said Samuel, "but I am a student."

And he made as if he would push the watchman aside in order to enter.

"Not one step more, on your peril!" cried the man thrusting his hand into his bosom.

Samuel thought he saw the gleam of a blade. At the same moment, warned by the blows of the fellow's stick, five or six men silently drew near, gliding behind the brushwood.

"Oh! pardon me," Samuel said then with a laugh, "perhaps you are he to whom I have to reply: "I am doing the work of them who sleep."

The watchman drew a deep breath and replaced his knife in his bosom. The others stepped back.

"It was time, my friend," said the watchman. "One second more and you would have been a dead man."

"Oh! I would have had a fight for it. *But* I sincerely congratulate you. I see that we shall be well guarded."

"Never mind, comrade, you are bold to play with such things."

"I have played with many others."

He passed in and entered the courtyard. The moon shone full on the façade of the ancient Castle of Friedrich IV. and Otto Heinrich. The two richly sculptured frontages, the one covered with divinities and chimeras, the other with palatines and emperors, presented a magnificent spectacle when thus illumined by the light of the moon.

But Samuel was in no mood to admire sculptures. He contented himself with flinging an obscene word at Venus, and a gesture of defiance at Charlemagne, as he passed, and went straight to the entrance of the ruin.

A third sentinel barred the way.

"Who goes there?"

"One of those who avenge the avengers."

"Follow me," said the sentry.

Samuel followed his guide through the brushwood and the ruins, stumbling more than once against the fallen stones, which lay half buried in the high grasses.

When he had traversed these extensive remains of a great palace and a great history, when he had trampled many a ceiling which kings had seen above their heads, the guide stopped, opened a low door, and disclosed a cavity in the ground.

“Descend,” said he, “and do not move till some one comes to fetch you.”

He shut the door, and Samuel found himself in a path inclining downwards-,where not a ray of light could penetrate; then, the slope ceased. Just as Samuel emerged into a sort of deep cave, and before his eyes had grown used to the gloom, he felt a hand press his own, and heard Julius’ voice say:

“You are late. They are taking their seats. Let us listen and observe.”

Samuel became accustomed to the darkness, and was then able to distinguish a few feet away, several human forms in a kind of chamber enclosed by a swelling of the ground and by shrubs. There, seated on blocks of stone, on remains of steps, on fragments of statues, were seven masked men; three on the right, three on the left, the seventh in the centre, and raised above the others.

A stream of moonlight, filtering through the chinks of the rock, illumined feebly this mysterious conclave.

“Bring forward the two champions,” said one of the seven. But he who spoke was not the man who appeared to be the president — this latter remained silent and motionless.

Samuel was about to advance when two young men, preceded by an assessor, entered.

“Samuel and Julius recognised two of their fellow-students at the University.

One of the Seven, he who had requested that they should be brought in, questioned them.

“Your name is Otto Dormagen?” said he to the one.

“Yes.”

“And you, Franz Ritter?” he asked the other.

“Yes.”

“You both belong to the Tugendbund?” (Guild of Virtue).

“Yes.”

“As such, you are aware that you owe us absolute obedience?”

“We acknowledge it.”

“You belong to’ the University of Heidelberg and to the ‘Burgenschaft, the Students’ Guild’; therefore you are acquainted with two of your number who hold high degrees at the University, Samuel Gelb and Julius von Hermelinfeld?”

Samuel and Julius looked at each other in the darkness.

“We know them,” the students replied.

“You both have a good reputation for fencing, and have always been fortunate in all such duels as give you students an appetite for breakfast?”

“Quite true.”

“Well! these are our orders: Tomorrow, without further delay and on no matter what pretext, you are to challenge Julius von Hermelinfeld and Samuel Gelb, and fight a duel with them.”

Samuel bent over towards Julius.

“Upon my word,” said he, “the scene is not devoid of originality. But why the deuce do they make us spectators of it?”

“Will you obey?” asked the masked man.

Otto Dormagen and Franz Ritter were silent and seemed to hesitate. Otto attempted to answer.

“The fact is,” said he, “Samuel and Julius are also skilled in the use of the rapier.”

“The flatterer! “Samuel murmured.

“It is for that reason,” the’ voice went on, “that we have chosen two such fencers as you.”

“If one wishes to be sure of one’s aim,” said Franz, “the dagger would be better than the sword.”

“So I think,” said Samuel.

The man with the mask answered:

“It is necessary to give a natural explanation of the wound. A students’ quarrel is an everyday occurrence which will arouse no suspicion.”

The two “studiosi “still seemed undecided.

“Remember,” added the voice, “that to-day is the first of June, in ten days, the great assembly, and that it rests with us to demand reward or punishment for you.”

“I will obey,” said Franz Ritter.

“I will obey,” said Otto Dormagen.

“That is well. Good courage and good luck. You may retire.”

Franz and Otto went out, preceded by the assessor who had introduced them. The Seven did not utter a word. Five minutes after, the assessor returned and said: “They are out of the precincts.”

“Bring forward the two other champions,” said the man with the mask who spoke in the name of the Seven.

The assessor walked towards the place where Julius and Samuel waited.

“Come,” said he.

And Samuel and Julius found themselves, in turn, in this strange council hall, in presence of the seven masked men.

CHAPTER IX.

SAMUEL ALMOST LOSES HIS EQUANIMITY.

THE same masked man who had questioned Franz and Otto, addressed them:

“You are called Julius von Hermelinfeld?” said he to Julius. “Yes.”

“And you Samuel Gelb?”

“Yes.”

“You belong to Tugendbund, and, as such, you owe us obedience?”

“You speak truly.”

“You have seen the faces and heard the names of the two students who have just left here. You know what they have promised for to-morrow?”

“They have promised the bear’s skin,!’ said Samuel, who would have joked with God Almighty Himself.

“They will challenge you. You will fight. You are the two most skilled fencers at the University of Heidelberg. It is unnecessary to kill them. You will content yourselves with wounding them seriously. Will you obey?”

“I shall obey,” replied Julius. “That is well,” said the voice. “But you, Samuel Gelb, are you reflecting?”

“Well! Yes,” replied Samuel; “I am reflecting that what you are asking us to do is precisely what you asked of the other two, and I am trying to understand what can be your object in making your own men fight against each other. Until now, I had thought that young Germany was not Old England, and that the Tugendbund had been instituted with other aims than those of amusing itself with cock-fights.”

“It is not a question of amusement,” retorted the masked man, “it is a question of punishment. We owe you no explanation; but it is right and just that our indignation should animate you. We have to rid ourselves of two false brothers who are betraying us, and the Guild confers upon you the honour of placing its sword in your hands.”

“In ours or in theirs?” questioned Samuel.... What guarantee have we that it is not us you want to be rid of?”

“Your conscience. We want to chastise two traitors; you yourselves best know if this applies to you.”

“Oh! is it not possible for you to think us traitors without our being such?”

“Brother of little faith! If it were against you that we had prepared this duel, we should not have arranged for you to be present when your adversaries were interviewed; we should have given them our orders in secret; they would have insulted you; you are brave, you would have fought, and would not have known that we had had any hand in the affair. On the contrary, we have warned you ten days in advance. You were spending your vacation in your native town of Frankfort when the Traveller of the Main came to summon you for the 20th of May, charging you to practice fencing, as you would have to sustain, that very day, a mortal combat. That is a strange fashion of laying a snare for you!”

“But,” persisted Samuel, who, under all feigned doubts, concealed a bitter secret thought, “but if Franz and Otto are traitors, why do you enjoin upon us only to wound them?”

The masked man hesitated a moment; then, after having by a sign consulted the other masked men:

“Listen, we want you to have full confidence in your cause and in our intentions. Therefore, and although the statutes exact of you passive and unquestioning obedience, we consent to answer you fully.”

He went on:

“Seven months ago the Treaty of Vienna was signed. France is triumphant. In Germany, now, but two real powers exist: the Emperor Napoleon and the Tugendbund. Whilst the official cabinets, Austria and Prussia, bow their necks under the heel of the conqueror, the Guild pursues its work. Where the sword ceases, the knife begins. Friedrich Staps devoted his life to the cause, and his dagger came near to making Schônbrunn the altar of our independence. He is dead, but the blood of martyrs baptises ideas and engenders devotion. Napoleon knows this and keeps his eye upon us. He has us watched, Otto Dormagen and Franz Ritter are his, of this we have the certainty. They calculate on being present, by virtue of their right, at our general assembly on the 1st of June, in order to know and to sell the important resolutions which will then be communicated to the adepts. They must not be there. How to prevent them? By killing them you would say? But, they suppressed, Napoleon’s police would replace them at all costs.

Now, our interest is to know the spies in order to guard against them, and to deceive the enemy, if need be, by false disclosures. Therefore these must not die. A fairly deep wound will confine them to bed for some days, and, by the time they are well enough to be about again, the assembly will be over. We have even pursued our caution so far as to give them the rôle of aggressors. They will not have the least suspicion and will continue to keep France informed of such plans as we may think fit to confide to them. Now, do you understand why we advise you to wound them only?"

"And supposing they wound us? "Samuel still objected.

"Then," said the voice, "the laws on duelling compel them to keep in hiding for the first few days, and we have friends in a position to pursue them officially, and arrest them for at least a fortnight."

"Yes, in both cases, everything is advantageous — for the Tugendbund," rejoined Samuel.

The six masked men made a gesture of impatience. The only one who had, as yet, spoken, now addressed Samuel in a sterner tone.

"Samuel Gelb, we were quite willing to give you an explanation, when we might have given you nothing but a command. Enough words. Will you obey? Yes or no?"

"I do not say that I refuse," replied Samuel, "but," he added, betraying at last his real thought, "it is scarcely to be wondered at if I feel somewhat humiliated at the mean use which the Tugendbund makes of us. We are not deemed of much account, it seems to me, nor used very generously. I frankly admit it, I am vain enough to set a higher value upon myself than you seem to do. I, who rank first at Heidelberg, have only attained to the third degree in the Guild. I do not know who you are, and I am willing to believe that some among you are my superiors. I bow, if so desired, before him who has spoken, and whose voice, I believe, I have already heard this evening. But I maintain that I am at least the equal of more than one, in your superior grades. I therefore consider that you might have commissioned us with a more important undertaking, and that you employ the arm, where you might make use of the head. I have spoken. To-morrow I shall act."

Then he of the seven who was raised above the others, and who, so far, had neither spoken nor moved, addressed Samuel in a slow grave tone:

"Samuel Gelb," said he, "you are known to us. You have not been admitted into the Tugendbund without being put to the test. And who is to tell you that what you are now called upon to do is not another trial? We know you to be a man of superior intellect and strong determination. You can and you will. But you lack heart, faith, abnegation. Samuel Gelb, I fear that your wish to be one of us arose, not from a desire for the liberty of all, but for your own personal pride; not to serve our cause, but to make use of our power.

"Now, we are not struggling and suffering in order to gratify personal ambitions, we are fighting for a religion. Here, there is neither small nor great work; all contribute to the same end; the last is equal to the first. There are only believers, and the favoured ones are the martyrs. You are among the favoured ones, since you are chosen for a post of danger. When we ask. a service at your hands, you say, 'Why,' you ought to have said 'Thank you.'

"Unhappy man! you have no faith in anything, except in yourself. We do not mistrust your valour, but we do mistrust your virtue. And perhaps that is why, up to the present, you have not advanced in the 'Guild of Virtue.'"

Samuel had listened with profound attention to this magisterial and dignified address.

He appeared impressed by it, as it was in quite a different tone; after a few moments silence, he answered:

"You are mistaken. If I have tried to impress you with a sense of my own worth, it was in the interest of the work, not of the workman. Henceforth, I shall let my actions speak for themselves. Tomorrow, to begin with, I shall be your soldier, and nothing but your soldier."

"That is well!" said the president. "We rely upon you. You must rely upon God."

At a sign from the president, the man who had conducted Samuel and Julius into the room, led them away. They traversed the vaulted path they had ascended, picked their way through the ruins, repassed the three sentinels, and regained the slumbering town.

Half-an-hour later they were both in Samuel's room at the Inn of the Swan.

CHAPTER X.

A QUESTION OF LIFE AND DEATH.

THE cool air of a night in May came in at the open window, and the stars basked loverlike in the calm and peaceful shining of the moon.

Samuel and Julius, both silent, were still under the spell of the mysterious scene which they had lately witnessed.

Julius' one idea as to how this would affect Christiane, was really mingled, this time, with thoughts of his father. The reflections of Samuel had for their sole and only object, — Samuel.

Samuel was not easily disconcerted, but it is an undoubted fact that the President of the Supreme Council had for. once impressed him. Who could this man be, he asked himself, who spoke with such high authority, chief of chiefs, head of a body which boasts of princes of the blood as members? It was not difficult for Samuel to imagine that the mask concealed an emperor.

"Oh! to become one day the chief of that sovereign and all-powerful association, what a dream! To hold in one's hands not only the paltry lives of a few individuals, but to play with the destinies of whole nations, what a 'rôle.'"

Thus Samuel communed with himself, and that is why the severe warning of the unknown president had so powerfully affected his mind.

Samuel became aware with terror and confusion of one thing; he, who thought he possessed every failing, at least all those of any consequence, found that one great one was lacking — hypocrisy. Was he then but half a power? What! he had been imprudent enough to allow an insight, to proudly lay bare his hopes and his self-esteem to those who, having the power, must feel but little inclination to admit a greedy and encroaching personality to share it. Folly and worse than folly!

"Decidedly," thought Samuel, "Iago is a great man, and egad! when one plays cards, why! the question is to win, no matter how."

Then, hastily rising from the easy-chair in which he sat, and striding up and down the room, "After all, no!" he said to himself, a heavy frown on his brow, his hands clenched, his eyes flashing fire!" no, better lose than cheat! In a word, audacity has joys and triumphs more magnificent than trickery! and I shall wait yet a few years before I make myself into a Tartuffe. Let us be a Titan still and try to scale the heavens before we resolve to cheat them."

He stopped in front of Julius who, with head bowed in his hands, seemed absorbed in deep thought.

"Are you soon going to bed? "Samuel asked him, laying his hand on his shoulder.

Julius started from his reverie. "No, no," said he, "I must first write a letter."

"To whom? to Christiane?"

"Oh! that's impossible. Under what pretext or by what right could I address her? But I want to write to my father."

"Tired as you are? Why not write to-morrow?"

"I shall not delay any longer; no, Samuel, I am going to write at once."

"Very well," said Samuel. "Such being the case, I also will write to that great man by the same post. And," he muttered between his teeth, "'twill be a letter written with a pen dipped in the ink that Shem used when he wrote to Noah. Let us burn these boats to begin with." He resumed in a loud voice: "But first, Julius, we have an essential point to settle between us."

"What is that?"

"To-morrow we are to fight with Franz and Otto. Although they are to challenge us, yet we can, — by giving them opportunities, and either by avoiding the one, or seeking the other, — we can, as I say, each choose our adversary in advance. Now, Otto Dormagen is, undoubtedly, the stronger swordsman of the two."

"Well?"

"On our side, your modesty will allow that, of us two, I am the better man with his sword?"

"That may be. What then?"

"What then, my dear boy? Why, then I think it but fair that I should undertake to look after Otto Dormagen, and I am going to do so. You, therefore, need only trouble about Ritter."

"Which means that you have no confidence in me? Thanks."

"Do not be absurd. In the interest of the Tugendbund, if not in your own, I am anxious to get all the chances on our side, that's all, and you will not even take it kindly. Remember that Dormagen is master of certain tricks of fence that are extremely dangerous."

"All the more reason. I shall always refuse an unequally divided danger?"

"Ah! you are ridiculously proud! After all, do as you like," said Samuel. "But, of course, I am proud too, and tomorrow we will both think ourselves obliged to make advances to the more dangerous one; each being desirous to anticipate the other, this will result in an unnatural eagerness in our greeting of the said Otto; we shall be the aggressors, the parts will be reversed, and we shall have disobeyed the Guild."

"Take Franz and leave Otto to me."

"What a child you are!" said Samuel. "Come, then, let us draw lots."

"As to that, I am quite willing."

"That's good."

Samuel wrote the names Franz and Otto on two pieces of paper.

"It is absurd, upon my honour! A most foolish thing to do," said he, rolling up the papers, and shaking them about in his cap. "For my part, I can never understand why man should, under any circumstances, subordinate his free intelligent will to the blind and stupid caprice of chance. Take your ticket. If you have drawn the name of Dormagen, it is probably your death-sentence, and you will have allowed yourself to be marked by fate, like sheep by the butcher; what splendid foolhardiness?"

Already Julius was unfolding the ticket he had taken; he stopped.

"No," said he, "I had rather not read it until after I have written to my father."

And he put it between the leaves of his Bible.

"Upon my word!" said Samuel, "I will follow your example, out of indifference."

And he thrust the ticket into his pocket.

Then they both sat down, opposite to each other, at their study-table, and, by the light of the same lamp, began to write.

A letter is a revealer of character. Therefore let us read the letter Julius wrote, and the one Samuel wrote.

We will begin with Julius.

"MY DEAR AND HONOURED FATHER, "I know and am deeply sensible of all that I owe you. Not only an illustrious name, the name of the greatest chemist of the age; not only a considerable fortune, gloriously acquired by works of European renown; but above all, the inexhaustible and unbounded tenderness which has more than consoled me for the loss of a mother whom I never knew. Believe me! I am deeply touched at the thought of your kindness and indulgence. All this has made me your son twice over, and I love you both as father and as mother.

"I feel the more constrained to tell you this, as my abrupt departure from Frankfort, in defiance of your command, seems to accuse me of ingratitude and indifference. On leaving for Cassel you forbade me to return to Heidelberg. You wanted to send me to the University of Jena, where I would be separated from Samuel, whose influence over me you dread. When you return from Frankfort, you will be vexed with me for having taken advantage of your absence to journey hither. But listen to what I have to say, my dear father, and you will forgive me.

"It is neither ingratitude nor is it an escapade which has brought me back to Heidelberg, it is an imperative duty. What that duty is, I cannot tell you. The responsibility of your position and your official duties alike do not permit me to speak, because they might not permit you to keep silent.

"As to the influence which Samuel may have over me, I do not deny it. He exercises over my will a domination to which I cannot but yield; a power, strong, evil, fatal, but necessary. I see his faults as you do, but you do not see mine as I do. I am more quiet, more gentle than he, but I lack firmness and decision. Weariness and disgust easily take possession of me. I fall an easy prey to fatigue. I am quiet through want of energy, delicate through somnolence. Well! Samuel rouses me.

"Samuel, with his superabundant energy, his indomitable will, is, I believe, I am afraid, indispensable to my apathy. I feel myself alive only when he is there. When he is absent, scarcely do I exist. He is strong in place of me. My sole initiative, is he. Without him, I relapse. His scathing merriment, his wild sarcasm lash my blood. He is my intoxicant. This he knows and takes advantage of, for his is not an affectionate nor a devoted nature. But what would you? Do we reproach the guide with brutality when he rouses the sleepy traveller in the snow? Will you find fault with the bitterness of the draught that burns my lips, to rouse me from my torpor? And which would you rather see me, drunk or dead?

"Besides, my journey will not have been all in vain. I came back by the Odenwald, and passed through some exquisite country which I had never seen before. I will tell you, in my next, the different impressions that this charming excursion has left on my memory. I will confide everything to you, to you who are my best friend. In the Odenwald I came across a house, and in this house... But am I wise in telling you this? Will you not laugh at me likewise? Besides, at this moment, I do wish, I do not dare to evoke this thought, this picture.

"I return to the object of this letter. My dear father, forgive my disregard of your wishes. Just now, I stand in greater need of your forgiveness than you know. My God! my mysterious allusions may perhaps make you uneasy? Dear father, if God decide for us, I will add a few lines to this to reassure you. If I add nothing.... if I add nothing, you will forgive, will you not?..."

For the last few minutes, Julius had been struggling against the weariness which threatened to overcome him. At this point, the pen slipped from his fingers, his head dropped on his left arm, his eyes closed, he fell asleep.

"Here! Julius!" said Samuel, on perceiving this.

Julius did not stir.

"Weak nature! "Samuel said to himself, interrupting the writing of his letter. "Eighteen hours without sleep is sufficient to exhaust him. Has he even finished his epistle? Let me see, what has he written to his father?"

He took up without ceremony Julius' letter and read it through! On perusing the passage which referred to himself, a sardonic smile curved his lips.

"Yes," said he, "you belong to me, Julius; and to a greater extent than you know, you or your father. During the last two years, I dispose of your soul; during the last minute, perhaps, of your life. But, as a matter of fact, I can ascertain that."

He took from his pocket the ticket which he had drawn by lot, and read "Franz Ritter."

He began to laugh.

"So, it rests with me, to all appearances, whether this boy live or die. I have only to let things remain as they are. Otto Dormagen will run him through like a chicken. He is asleep; I can take his ticket from his Bible, and carefully insert mine in its place; with Franz he will come oft all right. Shall I do it? Shall I not? Egad! I cannot say. This is a situation after my own heart. To hold in one's hand like a dice-box the life of a human creature, to, play with life and death; it's fun. Let us prolong this pleasure of the gods. Before deciding, I will finish my letter, couched, that's very certain, in less respectful terms than that of Julius, although I have, undoubtedly, the same..... natural reasons for respecting the illustrious baron.”

Samuel’s letter was, to say the least, daring enough!

CHAPTER XI.

“CREDO IN HOMINEM...”.

HERE is Samuel’s letter, and we do not hesitate to reproduce it, in all its audacity.

“SIR AND MOST ILLUSTRIOUS MASTER,

“Frankly, do you believe in God?

“That is to say, let us understand each other; do you believe in a God, distinct from us, solitary, selfish, and proud; creator, ruler and judge; who, if He does not foresee the things to come, is blind and ridiculous like every other head of executive power; who, if He *does* foresee the future, is as feeble as a tenth-rate play-writer; for in that case, man, his masterpiece, is but a weak, dependent, stupid creature.

“Or do you believe that that which we call God, is an entity inseparable from life and from humanity. And that, whether you will or no, your Christianity expresses this, when it says that God became man.

“To every enlightened and non-official conscience in these days, that question is a thing of the past. But, in face of the drastic consequences of this certain principle, timid minds hesitate, doubt, and grow troubled.

“The first of these consequences is the following: ‘If God is man, man is God; when I say man, I do not mean the citizen or the peasant, the creature who counts up his crowns like a base huckster, you came there, and, in passing, you saw, seated at the threshold of the door, sewing, a young girl of surpassing loveliness; and because of this you came again.

“You were not then the scholar whom Germany has enriched and honoured; but you were young, and of keen intellect. The Jewess had strong affections. What resulted from this encounter of her affection and your intellect, is a question which you naturally will not be the one to answer.

“But I know that I was born a year later, and that I am a bastard.

“My mother married later, and died, I know not where, in Hungary. I have known only my grandfather, old Samuel Gelb, who undertook the care of the son of his only daughter.

“As to my father, I must have met him more than once; but never has he condescended to know who I was; never has he acknowledged me, either in public or private. I may have chanced to be alone with him; never has he put his arms round me, never has he whispered in a low tone: ‘My child.’

“I supposed that he had made his way in the world, and that he had married. He could not, of course, recognize a Jew, and a bastard, because of his rank, because of his wife, because of the birth, perhaps, of some legitimate son.”

It was at this part of his letter that Samuel perceived that Julius was asleep, called him in vain to wake, took from his pocket the ticket he had drawn, and read on it the name of Franz Ritter.

After some hesitation, Samuel, as we have seen, replaced the ticket in his pocket, and continued his letter.

of who furrows his land like an ox; I mean a man who thinks, who loves, who desires; I mean you, I mean me; in a word, I mean man!

“Now, if man is God, he has the rights of a god, that’s evident. He is free to act as it pleases him, and he knows no barriers except the limits of his power. The man of genius depends on his genius alone. He has no scruples. Napoleon, whom at present we are disposed to curse, and whom we shall deify ten years hence, knows or feels this, and in that lies his greatness. Over the vulgar herd, the man of genius has the full power of the shepherd or the butcher.

“Milton’s Satan said, ‘Evil, be my good! ‘That is exclusive and limited. I would not believe myself compelled at any time to do what men call evil; but, in the same way, I would never believe myself compelled to do what they call good. Nature, that produces birds, does it not likewise produce reptiles?

“But what of social order, I hear you say? Let us discuss it.

“You are a staunch advocate of social order, I should imagine; you are one of its favoured ones. But I! I am a Jew, I am a bastard, I am poor; three stigmas independent of my will, and yet because of which your society spurns me, and for which it punishes me as for three crimes. You will allow me not to feel overwhelmed with gratitude to her on that account. So much the worse for those who ill-treat their dog instead of giving him a drink, and who feed him with blows. The dog goes mad and bites them.

“To whom then am I under any obligation? to you perhaps? Let us see.

“There exists at Frankfort a narrow street, dark and dirty, paved with sharp pebbles, and compressed between two rows of tottering houses, the fronts of which incline towards the houses opposite, as if they were drunk; a street whose empty shops open on to backyards filled with old iron and broken pots and pans; a street which at night is barred and bolted and double-locked, like a lazar-house; this is the street of the Jews.

“Never has the sun deigned to descend into this foul darkness. Well! you have been less disdainful than the sun. One day, some twenty years ago, “I lived thus until the age of twelve, not knowing who my father was and not knowing who you were. At this age, I was sitting one morning, reading, on the same threshold where thirteen years before you had seen my mother at her needle, when suddenly, on looking up, I saw a grave man looking fixedly at me. It was you. You came into the shop. My grandfather, on your questioning him, humbly explained that I was not lacking either in intelligence or perseverance; that I learnt without difficulty; that I already knew all the French and Hebrew he was able to teach me; that I devoured every book I came across; but that he was poor, and could ill-afford to educate me.

“Then you were so extremely kind as to take me into your laboratory, partly as a pupil, partly as a servant. But I kept my ears open and studied hard. During seven years, thanks to my iron constitution, which enabled me to work by night as well as by day; thanks to my energy, which aroused in me a perfect passion for study, I penetrated, one by one, all the secrets of your learning, and, at nineteen, I was your equal in knowledge.

“I had learnt Latin and Greek, into the bargain, only by being present at Julius’ lessons.

“You had become fond of me to a certain extent, I took so keen an interest in your experiments. And, as with set purpose, I was taciturn and reserved, you had no suspicion of what lay behind. But this could not last. It did not take you long to discover that I, on my side, walked alone and in advance of you. You became irritated and this irritated me. An explanation took place between us.

“I asked to what end all your knowledge tended; your reply was: ‘To knowledge.’ Eh! knowledge is not an end, it is a means. My aim was to apply it to life.

“What! we held within our hands, secrets and terrible powers; we were able, thanks to our analyses and to our discoveries, to produce death, love, madness, to quicken or quench intelligence, and, by allowing one single drop to fall on a fruit, to kill, if we so wished, a Napoleon! And this marvellous potency, the result of our toil and labour, we made no use of it! This superhuman force, this weapon of power, this principle of sovereignty, we allowed it to lie dormant. We did nothing with it. We were content to hide it in a corner, like the foolish miser who buries those millions that would make him master of the world. Thereupon you grew indignant and honoured me so far as to consider me a dangerous man. You deemed it prudent to close your laboratory against me, and you deprived me of your lessons, which I no longer needed. You refused to lead me any farther, when already I was in advance of you. And so, two years ago, you sent me to this University of Heidelberg, which, to be perfectly frank, is the very thing I longed for most, being anxious to acquire a knowledge of the legislations and philosophies of the world.

"But, another offence! Julius is here with me, and naturally, I have the influence over him, which a mind like mine must always exercise over a nature like his. Consequently, paternal jealousy and uneasiness. That son is dear to you, I readily understand; you idolise in him the heir to your fortune, to your fame, and to the twelve letters of your name. So, to take him out of my clutches, you attempted to separate us, a fortnight ago, by sending him to Jena. He chose to follow me, almost despite myself. Is it my fault?

"To sum up. What do I owe you? I owe you life. Do not be alarmed; I do not mean to say that I am your son; you have always treated me as a stranger; I accept the position that you have assigned me. I mean to say that I owe you the fact of being alive — I owe you knowledge, education, the life of the mind. I owe you, also, the allowance which for the last two years you have made me. Is that all?

"Well! I return to the starting point of my letter. I am strong, and I wish to be free. I wish to be a man, the expression of God. I shall be twenty-one tomorrow. My grandfather died a fortnight ago. I lost my mother long since. I have no father. There are no ties to restrain me. I attach value to nothing but my own self-esteem, my pride, if you will. I want nothing from anyone, and I want to be beholden to no one.

"Old Samuel Gelb has left me about ten thousand florins. I begin by sending you back the amount of the allowance you have made me. That settles the money question. As to my moral debt, an opportunity is, I believe, now at hand, in which to requite my obligation, and, at the same time, prove to you that I am capable of everything, even of good.

"Your son, your only son, Julius, is, at the present moment, in peril of death. By a combination of circumstances, which it would be superfluous to explain to you, his life depends on a paper which is there in his Bible. If he finds it, he is lost. Well! listen to what I am going to do when I have signed this letter of farewell. I shall take from my pocket a paper similar to the one that Julius chose, place it in his Bible, and take his, and with it, the danger. By this means I readjust the workings of Providence in favour of your son; in a word; I save his life. Are we quits?

"After that, my knowledge is my own, and I shall do with it as I will.

"Farewell and oblivion.

"SAMUEL GELB."

Samuel rose, opened the Bible, took from it the ticket, and replaced it by the one from in his pocket. He was sealing his letter and it was broad daylight when Julius awoke.

"Have you had any sleep?" said Samuel.

Julius rubbed his eyes, and began to collect his thoughts. In answer to his first impulse, he opened his Bible and took from it the ticket which had fallen to him.

He read "Franz Ritter."

"Well! I have the man I wanted," Samuel said quietly. "He! he! this kind Providence is decidedly more intelligent than I supposed, and it may be that it really knows whether we shall see the setting of this sun which is now rising. Only, it ought to tell us so."

CHAPTER XII.

THE “PET FOX”.

WHILST Julius finished his letter and sealed it, Samuel lighted his pipe.

“Now, then,” said he, puffing out a whiff, “we have no reason to suppose that Dormagen and Ritter may not have had the same idea as ourselves, and have each chosen his adversary. It is therefore wise to forestall them. We must furnish them with such an opportunity to quarrel, as they will be unable to avoid.”

“Let us look up the questions of honour,” said Julius, “as stated in the Code.”

“Oh!” Samuel rejoined, “it is important that we should not fight for a students’ quarrel, but for some insult as between man and man, in order that we may have the right to inflict a serious wound upon these gentlemen. Let me see, has Ritter still his same mistress?”

“Yes, little Lolotte.”

“She rather favours you, if I remember rightly. Very well, that is fortunate for us. We are going to walk past his house. It is a fine morning. She will be, as usual, sewing at her window. You will say a few polite nothings to her as we pass and we will await the result.”

“No,” said Julius, with an embarrassed air, “I prefer some other means.”

“Why?”

“I do not know, but I refuse to have it said that I fought a duel for the sake of a girl.”

The colour mounted to his cheeks, and Samuel laughed.

“What charming candour! He has not forgotten how to blush.”

“What nonsense! I”

“Come! you are thinking of Christiane, admit it; and you do not wish to be even seemingly unfaithful to your thought of her.”

“Are you mad!” said Julius, who experienced an inexplicable sense of uneasiness whenever Samuel spoke of Christiane.

“If I am mad, you are absurd in not wishing to say even one word to Lolotte. It would not compromise you in any way, and it is impossible for us to find a more simple or more certain pretext. Unless, of course, you have made up your mind to speak to no one but Christiane, to look at no one but Christiane, to meet no one but....”

“Enough said! I consent,” said Julius, with an effort.

“That’s right. As for myself, against what flint can I strike, to set alight a quarrel between Dormagen and me? Deuce take me, if I can tell. Has he a mistress, too, I wonder? But should both of us employ the same means, that would show great paucity of imagination, and then, for me to fight for a woman, the thing would look improbable, on the face of it.”

He reflected for a few moments.

“Ah! I have it,” he exclaimed suddenly.

He rang the bell. A waiter appeared in reply to his summons.

“You know my ‘pet fox,’ Ludwig Trichter?”

“Yes, Herr Samuel.”

“Go as quickly as you can to the ‘Raven,’ where he is staying, and tell him from me, that I want to see him at once.”

The waiter left the room.

“Whilst waiting,” said Samuel, “suppose we have a wash?”

Ten minutes later, Ludwig Trichter burst into the room, breathless, and his eyes still heavy with sleep.

Ludwig Trichter, on whom we have only bestowed a cursory glance, was the type of a student in his twentieth year. He was really at least thirty. This venerable personage had already seen four generations of students succeed each other. His beard flowed over his breast. Fierce moustaches turning upwards like the points of a crescent, eyes bleared through long-standing dissipation, lent to the face of this Nestor of taverns a singular expression of fatherly provocation.

In his dress, he affected to copy Samuel, but, as a matter of fact, Ludwig Trichter, like all imitators, aped Samuel’s eccentricities, by exaggerating them.

Trichter’s age and experience rendered him invaluable in many ways. He was conversant with every precedent which could affect the relations between students and Philistines, and between students among themselves. He was, as it were, the living tradition of the University. That is why Samuel had chosen him for his “pet fox.”

Trichter was puffed up with pride at this honour, and the humble and servile attitude which he affected towards Samuel, made it easy to guess how insolent and haughty he must be with others.

When he entered, he held his pipe in his hand, not having allowed himself time to light it.

Samuel deigned to notice this extraordinary proof of precipitation.

“Light your pipe,” said he. “Have you not yet breakfasted?”

“No, although it is seven o’clock,” Trichter replied, shamefacedly, “The fact is, my dear senior, I did not return from the *Fuchsencommerz* before the small hours of the morning, and had only just fallen asleep when your gracious message awoke me with a start.”

“Good, it happens fortunately that you have taken nothing. Now tell me: as Dormagen is one of our oldest ‘Mossy Heads,’ he, too, I suppose, has his own ‘pet fox.’”

“Yes, Fresswanst.”

“Is he a hard drinker, this Fresswanst?”

“Colossal; he drinks harder than anyone of us.”

Samuel frowned:

“What!” said he angrily, “I have a fox, and that fox does not surpass all others in everything?”

“Oh! oh!” said Trichter, humiliated and pulling himself together, “we have never been seriously pitted against each other; but should an opportunity arise, I am quite capable of holding my own.”

“Then make an opportunity this very morning, if you value my good opinion. Alas! the great school is disappearing. The traditions are being lost. There has been no liquid duel at the University for three months. There must be one this very day, do you understand? Challenge Fresswanst. I command you to drink him down.”

“Enough, senior,” said Trichter proudly. “But one word more. Am I to challenge him for simple beer or for wine?”

“For wine, Trichter, wine! we leave pistols and beer for the Philistines. The sword and wine are the weapons for students and gentlemen.”

“Your wishes will be attended to. I am going from here to the ‘Great Tun,’ where Fresswanst has breakfast.”

“Go, and tell everybody that Julius and I will join you, after Thibault’s lecture, at half-past nine punctually. I will be your second.”

“Thanks. I, on my part, will try to be worthy of you, noble sir!”

CHAPTER XIII

LOLOTTE.

WHEN Trichter had gone, Samuel turned to Julius.

“Here is our programme and the course we must follow; first to the street where Lolotte lives, then to the lecture on law, so as not to alter our usual habits, then to the ‘Great Tun.’”

They went out, and on reaching the foot of the staircase, a servant handed Samuel a letter.

“The deuce! can it be one of our opponents already?” said he.

But the letter was from the professor of chemistry, Zacchâus, inviting Samuel to breakfast.

“Tell your master that I have a previous engagement, and that I cannot go to him before to-morrow.”

The servant departed. “Poor man! “Samuel resumed. “He Is puzzled over some point. Without me, how would he get through his lessons?”

They left the tavern and reached the Brod Strasse.

Seated at an open window on the ground-floor of one of the houses, sat Lolotte, sewing. She was dark, lively, well-proportioned, with glossy hair shading her brow, and a cap pushed jauntily at the back of her head.

“There are three foxes talking to each other ten yards off,” said Samuel. “Ritter will hear of it. Speak to the child.”

“But what shall I tell her?”

“What you like. It is enough for you to speak to her.”

Julius approached reluctantly. “Up already and at work, Lolotte!” said he to the young girl. “I can see that you were not at the “Foxes’ *Commerz* “last night!”

Lolotte blushed with delight on hearing Julius speak to her. She got up and stood at the window, work in hand.

“Oh! no, Monsieur Julius, I never go to a dance; Franz is so jealous! Good morning, Monsieur Samuel. But I do not believe that you noticed my absence, Monsieur Julius.’’

“I dare not say yes, Franz is so jealous!”

“Nonsense!” said she with a saucy pout of defiance.

“What are you making, Lolotte?” asked Julius.

“Some scented sachets in satin.”

“How pretty they are. Will you give me one?”

“What an idea! what would you do with it?”

“Keep it in memory of you, of course,” said Samuel. “Oh, the bold fellow, spite of his timid looks!”

“This is the prettiest,” Lolotte rejoined bravely, after some slight hesitation. “Will you fasten it on with a ribbon?”

“How infatuated he is! “Samuel exclaimed comically. “It looks serious.”

“There Thanks, my dear, sweet Lolotte.”

Julius drew off a ring from his little finger.

“Take this in exchange, Lolotte.”

“I do not think I ought....”

“Nonsense!” said Julius in his turn. Lolotte took the ring.

“Now we must say good-bye,” Julius resumed. “It is time for the lecture, and we are already late. I will see you as we return.”

“Well! you are going away without even shaking hands; decidedly you are afraid of Franz.”

“Make haste,” said Samuel in a low tone, “here are the foxes coming towards us.”

In fact the three “foxes “were passing in front of Lolotte’s house, and saw Julius kiss the young girl’s hand.

“Good-bye,” said Julius. And he passed on with Samuel.

When they reached the lecture hall, the lesson was already well begun. A course of lectures in Heidelberg is much the same as one in Paris. The audience already showed signs of weariness. A small number took notes. About twenty others listened without writing. The rest talked, idled away the time, and yawned. Several were remarkable for the strange attitudes which they assumed. One ‘branded fox,’ at the extreme end of a bench, was lying on his back, with his legs in perpendicular fashion, against the wall. Another, lying on his stomach, his elbows on the seat, and his head supported in his hands, amused himself, during the lecture, with the perusal of patriotic songs. We do not doubt that the professor’s words did not always penetrate the minds of the students, but it is very certain that often they went in by one ear and out by the other.

Neither Franz nor Otto attended Thibault’s lecture.

The discussion over, Samuel and Julius went out with the crowd, and the clock was striking half-past nine as they entered the tavern known as the Great Sun, where the dual action, bacchic and tragic, was about to take place.

The principal hall into which Samuel and Julius entered was crowded with students. Their arrival caused a sensation.

“There is Samuel! Trichter, there is your ‘senior,’ “said the students.

They were evidently expected.

But the attention which had at first been directed to Samuel, became riveted on Julius, when Franz Ritter, deadly pale, was seen to leave the crowd and walk straight up to him.

Samuel, on seeing him advance, had only time to whisper to Julius:

“Be very careful. It is advisable for us to act in such a manner as to make the blame rest on our adversaries, so that, should anything serious result, the witnesses may be able to attest that we were provoked.”

Ritter came up to Julius and stood aggressively in his way.

“Julius,” said he, “you were seen speaking to Lolotte this morning on your way to the lecture?”

“That may be! probably I was asking her for news of you, Franz!”

“This is no joking matter. You were seen to kiss her hand. You must understand that I resent it.”

“And you must understand that she does not resent it.”

“You jest in order to exasperate me.”

“I joke so as to pacify you.”

“The only thing that can pacify me, is a walk with you, my dear fellow, to the Kaiserstuhl hill.”

“A little blood-letting in the hot weather is, indeed, rather refreshing. I shall practise it on you, if you like, my boy.”

“In an hour?”

“In an hour.”

They separated. Julius came back to Samuel.

“On my side the affair is settled,” said he.

“Good! I am going to settle mine,” said Samuel.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WINE DUEL.

SAMUEL had taken Trichter aside, and had already assured himself of the manner in which his favourite fox had executed his orders.

“This is what took place,” said Trichter. “When I came into the tavern agreed upon, Fresswanst was at breakfast. I sauntered up to his table without pretending anything, in a hap-hazard way, as if I were simply going by. But, as I passed, I raised the cover of his tankard, and seeing only frothy beer, I said in a tone of real commiseration: ‘Weak drinker! ‘These two words of gentle pity made him spring from his seat, in a rage. Yet, he tried to control himself, and said coldly: ‘That deserves a sword thrust.’ I remained perfectly cool, and said in the same melancholy tone: ‘You see I was right; I humble the drinker, ‘tis the swordsman that replies. Moreever,’ I added, ‘I am equally ready at the point or at the pint.’”

“Good, my brave fox!” said Samuel. “After that?”

“After that, he began to understand: ‘If it is an encounter with glasses that you want,’ he then said, ‘I am pleased to hear it, my throat was getting rusty. I am going to ask my senior, Otto Dormagen, to act as my second.’ — ’My senior, Samuel Gelb, is coming and will be mine,’ was my reply. — ’What weapons? “Wine and Liqueurs.’ — ’Braggart! ‘said he, in a tone which he tried to make contemptuous, but which conveyed surprise and respect. And, at this very moment, the blue room is being prepared with all things necessary to this memorable combat. Dormager and Fresswanst are there awaiting us.”

“We must not keep them waiting,’ said Samuel.

Accompanied by Julius, they went into the blue room.

Even at the present day, wine duels and beer duels are by no means uncommon at German Universities. The liquid duel has its rules and its “code “like any other. It is executed with method, according to a system of progression, which it is not permissible to infringe.

Each drinker in turn swallows a quantity of liquid, then hurls some insult at his adversary, who, to be avenged, is obliged to drink, and to double the insult.

In beer duels, the quantity is everything; but in wine duels, there is a tariff of proportion that indicates the strength of the wines and the quantity of alcohol that they contain. In the same way, there is, for the insults, an ascending scale, a climax of insult, an acme of affront, which no one has the right to disregard. Thus the struggle ascends from claret to brandy, from the pint to the jugful, from refined epigram to coarse jest, until one of the two drinkers is incapable, unable to move his tongue to speak, open his mouth to drink. That man is the defeated one.

Besides, the liquid duel is no less fatal than the other, and for this reason the police try to check it by every possible means; which fact seems likely to perpetuate it.

When Samuel, Trichter and Julius entered the blue room, everything was in readiness for the encounter. Two formidable rows of bottles, and flagons of all sizes, all colours, all shapes, were massed at the two ends of the table, around which stood a score of “Golden Foxes,” grave and silent.

Two chairs only, one opposite to the other. Fresswanst was already seated on one, Trichter appropriated the other.

Otto was beside Fresswanst; Samuel placed himself near Trichter.

Samuel took from his pocket a florin, and tossed it up in the air.

“Heads,” said Dormagen.

The florin fell face downwards. It was Trichter to begin. Muse, tell us of the bumpers and of the glorious fight in which these two noble sons of Germany proved to other nations to what degree of elasticity the human envelope can be distended, and how, contrary to all laws of physics, the container is sometimes less than the contained.

We pass over the first glasses and the first insults, preliminary skirmishes or reconnoitres, which exhausted but a few epithets, and emptied barely five or six bottles between the two combatants.

We go on to the moment when the worthy fox, Samuel’s favourite, took up a bottle of Moselle, poured more than half of its contents into a huge Bohemian glass, drank negligently and turned the empty glass upside down on the table.

Then, looking at Fresswanst, he said:

“Smug!”

Generous Fresswanst smiled scornfully. He took two glasses of the same size as the one Trichter had used, filled them to the brim with claret, and with assumed indifference swallowed the contents of both to the last drop, as if his thoughts were far away.

Having gulped down this enormous bumper, he said:

“Water-drinker.”

All eyes were at once turned towards big Ludwig Trichter who showed himself not unworthy of so flattering a curiosity. The wine which immediately follows claret, in the alcoholic scale, is Rhine wine. Trichter had the hardihood to skip over one degree and at once attacked Burgundy. He caught hold of a bulging flagon, emptied the contents into his glass, and having drained it to the last drop, cried in stentorian tones:

“Friend of Kings!”

The only acknowledgment which this exclamation and show of bravado received from Trichter’s adversary was a shrug of the shoulders, which in itself was an insult. The illustrious Fresswanst would not be outdone; Trichter had omitted Rhine wine, he left out Malaga, and boldly attacked Madeira.

Not content with this achievement, and desirous of introducing some further innovation, he caught hold of the glass which until then he had made use of, and smashed it against the table. Then he took the bottle itself and funnelled the contents-into his mouth with marvellous dexterity.

The spectators saw the wine flow from the bottle into the man, and Fresswanst did not even stop to take breath, never for one moment faltered. A quarter disappeared, then half, then three quarters, and this valiant Fresswanst drank on.

When he had done drinking, he turned the bottle upside down. Not a drop fell out of it.

A thrill of admiration passed over the spectators.

But that was not all. The stroke did not count unless completed by an insult. And we must confess that the gallant Fresswanst seemed almost passed saying anything at all. His whole energy had evidently spent itself in this tremendous effort. The rugged champion was now on a chair, exhausted, dejected, his nostrils unnaturally distended, and his mouth hermetically closed. The Madeira was wrestling. At last it appeared vanquished because Fresswanst the magnificent, half opening his lips, succeeded in muttering the one word:

“Coward!”

The applause was loud and long.

Then, O Trichter, didst thou surpass thyself. Feeling that the decisive moment was approaching, thou didst rise. No longer affecting indifference, which would have been out of place at this stage of the drama, thou didst shake thy thick head of hair, which fanned the crowd like a lion’s mane. Slowly didst thou tuck up the sleeve of thy right arm to give thee freedom of movement (because we refuse to believe that this was for the unworthy purpose of gaining time), and, with a solemn gesture, raising to thy lips a bottle of Port, thou didst engulf it at one draught.

Then, without allowing himself a second’s breathing time, and as if in a hurry to get it over, Trichter articulated in a clear voice, these two syllables:

“Swindler!”

“Good! “Samuel deigned to say.

But when the famous Trichter attempted to sit down again, his eyes apparently deceived him as to the position of his chair, for he fell down heavily, measuring his length on the floor, a very excusable position, to be sure, after such a drowning.

Immediately all eyes turned towards Fresswanst. But alas! Fresswanst seemed utterly unfit to parry the unexpected thrust of his opponent. The Unfortunate fox had slipped from his chair and likewise sat on the floor, his back supported against the leg of a table, his legs stretched wide apart, — there he lay, stupefied, his eyes fixed, his arms stiff and inert.

Dormagen said to him:

“Courage! Come, it’s your turn.”

Fresswanst did not stir.

Nothing remained but to resort to desperate measures.

CHAPTER XV.

ONE DROP PREVAILS OVER EIGHT PAILS OF WATER.

FRESSWANST was clearly deaf to all words, insensible to all blows. Nevertheless, he was still partially conscious.

Dormagen therefore resorted to the great and final expedient sanctioned by the laws on liquid duelling.

Kneeling down, so as to be as close as possible to Fresswanst's ear, he called aloud:

"Hey, Fresswanst! Fresswanst! do you hear me?"

He was answered by an almost imperceptible sigh, and Dormagen resumed solemnly:

"Fresswanst! how many sword-thrusts did the great Gustavus Adolphus receive?"

Fresswanst, unable to articulate a syllable, nodded his head once.

Dormagen made a sign to a student, who went out and returned a minute later with a pail filled with water.

Dormagen poured the water over Fresswanst's head.

Fresswanst seemed perfectly unconscious of it.

Dormagen again spoke loudly in his ear:

"How many sabre-cuts did the great Gustavus Adolphus receive?"

Fresswanst nodded his head twice.

Two students went to fetch two pails of water which were again religiously emptied over his occiput.

Fresswanst made no sign.

Dormagen continued his questioning:

"How many gun-shots did the great Gustavus Adolphus receive?"

Fresswanst nodded his head five times.

Five students brought in five pails and continued inundating the lethargic drinker.

At the fifth ducking, which made the eighth, a contraction of the muscles of Fresswanst's face, proved that he was coming to.

Dormagen hurriedly snatched from the table a flagon of gin, which he held to Fresswanst's lips.

Fresswanst, thus aided, gulped down the diabolical liquor, and, roused by this fiery liquid after the icy water, he sat bolt upright, and, in a harsh voice and thick speech, mechanically uttered the word:

"Murderer!"

Then he fell back, this time, hopelessly.

But Dormagen's side triumphed.

Trichter, lying prone on the floor, insensible, half-dead, was evidently not in a fit condition to continue the joust.

"We have won," said Dormagen.

"Do you think so?" said Samuel.

He went up to his fox, and shouted to him with might and main: Trichter was deaf to everything. Samuel, enraged, gave him a kick: Trichter gave not the least sign of life. Samuel shook him roughly; it was of no use. Samuel seized from off the table a flagon similar to that which Fresswanst had so valiantly drained; only, instead of gin, this was kirsch; he tilted the flagon and attempted to insert the neck of it in Trichter's mouth; but the latter instinctively clenched his teeth The spectators were already congratulating Dormagen.

"Oh, human will! dost claim to resist me!" muttered Samuel between his teeth.

He rose, went to a sideboard, took from it a knife and a funnel.

With the blade of the knife he forced open Trichter's teeth; thrust the end of the funnel into the opening, and quietly poured in the kirsch, which filtered drop by drop down the throat of the helpless fox.

Trichter offered no resistance, not even opening his eyes. Those around stooped over him anxiously. His lips moved, but in vain. He could not utter a sound.

"Nothing done so long as he has not spoken!" cried Dormagen.

"And I must confess that it appears impossible to extract a word from that hogshead," said Julius, shaking his head.

Samuel looked at them fixedly, drew from his pocket a tiny phial, and carefully poured one drop of its contents on Trichter's lips.

He had not withdrawn his hand before Trichter, as if struck by an electric shock, drew himself up, started to his feet, sneezed, and with flashing eyes and outstretched arm, hurled at Fresswanst, in a clear voice the word that, in students’ vocabulary, is the acme of insult, compared with which coward, swindler, and murderer are sweet madrigals:

“Fool!”

There was a universal exclamation of admiration and surprise.

“That’s cheating!” exclaimed Otto Dormagen, furious.

“Why?” said Samuel with a frown.

“It is allowable to throw water in the combatants’ face, to shake them, to make them drink by force; but it is not fair to make use of an occult and unknown beverage.”

“What do you mean?” retorted Samuel: “a drinking duel necessarily admits everything which can be drunk.”

“That? fair! that’s fair!” said everyone.

And what is this drug?” rejoined Dormagen.

“A simple liquor, which I place at your disposal,” replied Samuel. “I poured, and quite ostensibly, it seems to me, one drop of it into a flagon of kirsch, the quantity that Fresswanst must drink to take up the challenge; add to it two drops, and Fresswanst will speak.”

“Give it me,” said Dormagen.

“There is the phial. But a word of warning; this composition is not quite without danger, and if your fox drinks two drops of it, he certainly will never recover from the effects. For the one drop, I shall even now have trouble to save mine.”

A shudder passed over those assembled.

“I may add,” resumed Samuel, “that if you resort to this extremity, you will not even then have the last word. Samuel Gelb will not be defeated. I will not hesitate to sacrifice Trichter, and will make him drink three drops.”

This was said with such cold-blooded heartlessness, that, despite the terror Samuel inspired, a prolonged murmur arose. Julius was bathed from head to foot in cold sweat.

The general feeling inspired Otto Dormagen with courage, he stepped up to Samuel, and looking him straight in the face, said:

“Our language is poor, and reduces me to these words all too weak to convey my thought: Samuel Gelb, you are a villain and a scoundrel.”

Everyone shuddered, and waited anxiously to hear what Samuel would reply to such an insult. A lightning flash illumined the eyes of the students’ King, his hand clenched instinctively, but only for a second; he at once regained control over himself, and replied in a tone of the utmost calmness. But his calmness was more terrifying than his anger:

“Then we will fight presently. Dietrich, you will be my second. Let seconds and friends arrange in such a manner as for us to find all in readiness at the Kaiser-stuhl. Let the scouts post themselves along the road. The police would spoil everything. The report of a duel between Ritter and von Hermelinfeld must already have reached their ears. And it is necessary that we should not be disturbed. For, by the devil! I swear to you, this will be no laughing encounter. This is the first time I have been insulted, it will be the last. Gentlemen, I promise you all a duel which will make the very stones speak.”

Once more it was the King of students who addressed them. He spoke with authority, and all present bowed themselves and obeyed his command. He sent out, in uneven numbers and in scattered groups, the students who were in the hall, indicating to them, in a few brief words, the manner of procedure they were to adopt, so as not to arouse suspicion, and the place at which they were to station themselves on the Kaiserstuhl.

Dormagen himself waited for the commands of this General, before withdrawing.

At last Samuel turned to Julius: “Go on ahead, I will rejoin you at the Acacias. You have your second?”

“Yes, Lewald.”

“Very well, good-bye for the present.” Julius went out, but only from the hall, not, at first, from the hotel. Ought we to confess what he did? He entered a small room, locked himself in, pulled out his pocket book and took from it a faded wild rose, kissed it, then slipped it carefully into the satin sachet which he had purchased from Lolotte, passed the ribbon round his neck, and concealed the dear relic beneath his garments. This manly unmanliness accomplished, he smiled as if satisfied, and only then quitted the tavern, Then, Samuel, when there remained in the blue room but himself and the two drinkers, lying dead-drunk on the floor, stooped down, and placed his hand on Trichter’s forehead. Trichter sighed. Samuel said, “That’s all right!”

Then he muttered: “That Dormagen! he has forgotten his fox, who was, for all that, colossal. It is a good sign.”

Samuel called a waiter, and pointing to the two combatants:

“Put them in the ‘Chamber of the dead,’ “said he.

The chamber of the dead is a small room stuffed with straw, where drinkers, who have reached a state of total insensibility, are taken to be looked after.

Samuel then was the last to leave, and bent his steps towards the Kaiserstuhl hill, whistling a *viva vallera*.

CHAPTER XVI.

A DOUBLE DUEL.

AT the meeting place agreed upon, Samuel rejoined Julius and the two students, who were to act as their seconds, The customary place for encounters between “Studiosi “is behind the Kaiserstuhl Hill, two miles out of Heidelberg.

When a mile from the town, the students proceeded more cautiously. They left the main road and pursued their way across country. Occasionally they looked back to satisfy themselves that they were not followed. On meeting any townsmen, Dietrich and Lewald, the two seconds, accosted them, and with a threatening gesture, rendered all the more forcible by the heavy sticks they carried, advised them to go in some other direction. The citizens obeyed with alacrity.

Samuel’s orders had been carried out to the letter. At stated intervals, students had been placed on the look-out to avoid surprise. Dietrich exchanged a few words with them in a low tone, and the scouts answered, “Pass on!”

At last, after thirty-five minutes’ walk, they arrived at a little inn, hidden among the trees, fresh, smiling, with green shutters, rose-coloured walls, the roof buried under a choice profusion of creepers.

The four students walked through a garden in which the rays of the sun played among the flowers, and entered into the dancing and duelling hall, which measured sixty feet long by thirty wide, and admitted of waltzing or fighting, loving or dying at ease.

Ritter had already arrived, and with him the students from the blue room; Dormagen came in shortly after with his second.

Four “Mossy Heads “were busily employed chalking out the space limits for each duel, in order that the one might not interfere with the other.

Meanwhile four “Golden Foxes” adjusted hilts to blades, sharp and triangular like bayonets, and from this resulted four Jena rapiers, two and a half feet long.

The swords of the Studiosi “are made in two sections, which come apart, to insure their being more easily concealed from the police; the “studiosi “carry the blade under their cloak and the hilt in their pocket, and thus defy detection.

“Are we ready to begin?” said Ritter.

“Presently,” replied a student, who was preparing a box of instruments in one corner of the room.

This was the surgeon, a student in medicine who had come for the purpose of stitching up the wounds and gashes which the swords were about to inflict.

The surgeon went to a door at the end of the room and cried out: “Be quick.”

A servant entered carrying two towels, a basin and a can of water, which he placed beside the box of instruments.

Dormagen looked on impatiently while all these preparations were being made, addressing a few curt, abrupt words to the students who crowded round him; Franz went from Otto to the surgeon; Julius was calm and grave.

So far as Samuel was concerned, his whole attention seemed concentrated on repulsing the assault of a little rose, which aided by a joyous breeze, seemed bent on effecting an entrance by the window.

“Now, everything is ready,” said the surgeon.

Julius approached Samuel, and Ritter went up to Dormagen.

The four seconds took down from a rack nailed against the wall, four felt masks, four gauntlets, and four padded belts, and were about to fasten them on the combatants.

Samuel pushed Dietrich aside:

“Take this rubbish away!”

“But it is the rule,” Dietrich objected, and he pointed to the “Code,” an old greasy book, bound in black with red clasps, which lay open on the table.

“The ‘Code,’ “rejoined Samuel, “regulates quarrels between students, this is a quarrel between men. It will not end only in pin-pricks; and this is not the time to wear protectors, but rather to strip off one’s clothes.”

And, suiting the action to the word, he divested himself of his coat and threw it to the other end of the hall.

Then he took up the first sword that came to hand, and pressing its point to the floor, tested the blade, then he drew himself up and waited.

Otto followed his example, likewise Julius and Dormagen, and all four stood ready for the attack, chest and arms bare, sword in hand.

Samuel's speech and action gravely impressed the onlookers. There was a general presentiment that the affair might have a tragic ending.

Dietrich clapped his hands three times, then uttered the emphatic and orthodox word:

"Engage!"

The four swords met simultaneously.

In the hall, all eyes were fixed, every breath suspended.

The first pass was, on both sides, a trial one. The adversaries were taking their measure.

Julius and Ritter appeared evenly matched. The storm of anger, that jealousy had aroused in Franz at the moment of the challenge, had given place to cold concentrated rage. As to Julius, it must be acknowledged, that he was at his best. Calm, firm, brave without bravado, his youthful grace was enhanced by the manly pride born of peril and courage. On both sides, however, such agility and presence of mind was manifested, that the encounter might have suggested rather a display than a duel, had not an occasional rapid disengagement, quick thrust, more quickly parried, which appeared to graze the chests of the opponents, reminded the spectators that the danger was real, and that life and death hung at the end of these pointed blades, flashing with such swift grace.

Contrary to the usual custom of students' duels, which is a rather more than ordinarily dangerous fencing match, neither Julius nor Franz spoke a word.

As regards the other contest, it was evident from the first that it was of a far more serious and terrible nature.

Samuel Gelb had, on his side, the advantage of his superior height and cool imperturbability.

But Otto Dormagen was supple, impetuous, daring, and there was no avoiding the boldness and unexpectedness of his movements.

It was an unusual and thrilling spectacle to witness the coolness and ease of Samuel, in face of the agility and impetuosity of his adversary. The encounter of these two swords was assuredly exciting! the one quick, swift, cunning, blinding like the zig-zag of lightning, the other inflexible, imperturbable, sure, straight, like the needle of the lightning rod.

Samuel could not refrain from speaking and laughing. He met Otto's furious attacks with disdainful assurance, never missing an opportunity of sneering, and accompanying each thrust by some sarcastic remark.

He corrected Dormagen, warned him, gave him advice, as a fencing master would to a pupil.

"Badly parried. I had exposed my self purposely! Let us begin again. In tierce this time. That's better now! Young man, you will succeed. Look out, sir! I am going to lunge direct."

And he suited the action to the word; Dormagen had only time to step back quickly. Another second, Samuel's sword would have pierced his breast.

This scornful recklessness, however, began to exasperate Dormagen. In proportion as his annoyance increased, and his wounded self-esteem betrayed itself in the more jerky activity of his hand, Samuel redoubled in superb scorn, and added the stabs of his tongue to the stabs of his sword.

His face shone with savage delight. One felt that danger was his element, catastrophe his delight, death his life. He, too, in his way, was magnificent, and his powerful head, with its strong angular features, was incontestably splendid. His nostrils were dilated, the curve of his lips, his substitute for a smile, was more coldly insolent than ever, his wild changing eyes glittered like a tiger's. An indescribable expression of fierce pride, animating his whole being, held the spectators spell-bound between horror and admiration. There were moments when he swept the entire hall with his haughty glance, eloquent of superb indifference to life and death.

It was impossible, seeing him thus, calm, prompt, steadfast, and pouring out words, like a fencing-master under his *plastron*, not to conceive the idea that he was invulnerable.

Dormagen, who began to feel uncomfortable under the pressure of this glacial raillery, wished to put an end to it, and risked the lunge of which Samuel had made mention to Julius.

It was a feint of extraordinary boldness and impetuosity. He lunged after a free thrust, and, without recovering, lunged a second time, having missed his opponent. The danger lay in the vigour, the spring, and the rapidity which he put into this second onslaught.

There was a cry. Everybody thought Samuel dead.

But Samuel, as if he had divined Dormagen's thought at the moment of its conception, had swerved aside so quickly that the stroke, deadly though it was, only grazed the full folds of his shirt.

Samuel sneered and Dormagen grew pale.

Just at that moment, Julius was less fortunate. He was a little too late with his guard “in prime “to parry a thrust, and was slightly wounded in the left arm.

The seconds interposed and these two strokes brought the first engagement to a finish.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN ANGEL’S PRAYER A FAIRY’S TALISMAN.

AT this stage of the proceedings, an attempt was made to bring the affair between Julius and Franz to an end. The seconds were of opinion that sufficient satisfaction had been given for so small a matter as a passing word to a “grisette.” But Franz, apart from his jealousy, had received his orders from the *Tugendbund* as to Julius.

“Come now, gentlemen,” said he, “when one of us two has fallen at the feet of the other, we shall stop, not before. If we come here expecting only a scratch, swords are needless, a needle would suffice.”

And, turning to Ritter: “Are you rested?” said he. So far as Otto and Samuel were concerned, no one for a moment entertained the idea of inducing them to stop at this point, so plainly evident in the attitude of the one was the furious rage of a missed stroke, and in the attitude of the other the unfaltering resolve of an iron will.

This interlude in no wise interrupted Samuel’s decisive remarks:

“Remember this,” said he to Dietrich, “there is no advantage possible without its disadvantage. Thus, Otto’s thrust is a distinct advantage until such time as he misses it. At the present moment you see my worthy adversary thoroughly demoralised.”

“You think so?” said Dormagen exasperated.

“Oh! if I have any advice to give you, my dear Otto,” rejoined Samuel, “don’t talk. You are already out of breath through the very praiseworthy efforts you have made to insert into my skin half a foot of pointed steel, and, if you talk, you will but further increase the difficulty you experience in breathing.”

Dormagen snatched up his sword.

“Come on!” said he, with such authoritative anger, that the seconds instinctively gave the signal.

At that moment Julius was thinking: “Eleven o’clock! *She* must be at church; perhaps *she* is praying for me. \ Without doubt, it is that which saved my life a few moments ago.”

The signal, whilst rousing him from his sweet reverie, found him, as will be imagined, only more ready and more determined.

The duel recommenced.

This time, Dormagen no longer heard Samuel's jeers. In a fury of rage, he attacked almost without defending himself, more eager to wound than to cover. But, as invariably happens, the tumult of his mind caused his hand to tremble and he struck with more fury than accuracy.

Samuel perceived the excitement under which his adversary laboured, and did all he could to increase it. This time, he entirely changed his tactics. Instead of being quiet and imperturbable, as in the first pass, he sprang, lunged, changed his sword from one hand to the other, teasing, annoying, irritating Dormagen, blinding him with the lightning of his feints, dazing him with the unceasing din of his words.

Dormagen began to lose his head.

Suddenly Samuel called out:

"Eh! gentlemen! Philip of Macedon, of which eye was he blind?"

He went on, by his amazing agility persistently tiring Otto Dormagen, who grew wilder and wilder, less and less accurate in his fence.

"I think it was of the left eye. Philip, the father of the great Alexander, gentlemen, was laying siege to — I have forgotten the name of the town. An archer of the town took an arrow, upon which he wrote: 'To the left eye of Philip!' and the arrow arrived at its address. But why the devil! the left eye rather than the right."

Otto replied with a direct lunge.

But he had miscalculated; his blade glided over Samuel's, the point of whose sword he felt at his breast.

"You are exposing yourself," said Samuel.

Otto ground his teeth. It was evident that Samuel spared him, and played with his life like a cat with a mouse.

The encounter was no less animated for the other couple. But it was more equal.

However, on a feint of disengagement, Ritter parried by a straight stroke, so prompt, so lightning-like, that Julius had not time to defend.

The steel touched him on the right side.

But, wonderful chance! instead of penetrating, the steel glanced aside on a silky yielding substance whose movable course it followed, barely grazing the skin on his breast.

On this Julius had but to thrust out his sword; it buried itself three inches deep in Ritter’s side, who sank to the ground.

What had saved Julius’ life was the little silk sachet suspended round his neck and containing the faded wild rose.

“Ah! you have finished?” said Samuel.

At these words, the seconds understood that Samuel likewise wished to bring his encounter to a close. Dormagen tried to forestall him, and attempted a second time the stroke in which he had already failed.

“Again!” said Samuel. “You repeat yourself!”

Already he had avoided the steel by the same dexterous agility; but, this time, by a singular and unforeseen stroke, forcibly raising Otto’s sword, he simultaneously turned back his own, dug the point of it into Dormagen’s brow, then by a subtle movement quickly withdrew it.

But the point had penetrated the left eye an inch and a half deep.

Dormagen uttered a terrible cry.

“I purposely chose the left eye,” said Samuel. “It will be less inconvenient for shooting.”

The witnesses crowded round the wounded men.

Franz’s right lung had been pierced. But the surgeon was hopeful of saving his life.

The surgeon came up to Dormagen.

Samuel did not wait for him to speak.

“His life is not endangered,” said he. “I simply wished to deprive him of one eye. You will notice that instead of penetrating the skull, and injuring the brain, as it lay in my power to do, I withdrew the steel as delicately as a surgical instrument. It is in fact an operation.”

And turning to the surgeon:

“He has not breakfasted. Bleed him quickly, if you wish to avoid a rush of blood to the brain. With care, he will be out again in a fortnight from now.”

Just as the surgeon, lancet in hand, was preparing to act on Samuel’s advice, a ‘Finch’ came hurriedly into the hall.

“Well! what is the matter?” said Samuel.

“The police!” cried the ‘Finch.’

“I thought as much,” Samuel said tranquilly. “They could do no less than honour me with some slight attention; are they far off?”

“Fifty yards away.”

“Then we have time. Do not be uneasy, gentlemen, this is my business.”

He tore up his handkerchief and bound it tightly round Julius’ left arm.

“And now, quick, put on your coat.”

He likewise resumed his own.

The police were coming up the garden.

A ‘fox ‘addressed Samuel:

“Are we not going to resist the ‘stiff-collars? ‘“

“A free-fight? “Samuel answered. “That would be exciting. We would thrash them in a trice, and you tempt me, demon. But it is inadvisable to be too lavish of sanguinary amusements, it would end in our becoming ‘blasés.’ There is another and more simple way.”

Knocking was heard at the door.

“In the name of the law!” said a voice.

“Open to these gentlemen,” said Samuel.

The door was opened and a squad of police-officers entered the hall.

“There has been fighting here?” said the man in charge of the detachment.

“That is possible,” said Samuel.

“The combatants must follow us to prison,” resumed the chief.

“That is scarcely as possible,” replied Samuel.

“Why so? Where are they?”

Samuel pointed to Otto and Franz:

“Here they are, both in the doctor’s hands. They have mutually wounded each other. You can see for yourself that at present they stand more in need of the surgeon than of the jailor.”

One glance sufficed to convince the chief of the serious nature of the wounds, — a look of disappointment passed over his face, and, without uttering a word, he withdrew with his men.

As soon as the “stiff-collars “had disappeared, Julius went into a small room adjoining, sat down at the table, reopened the unfinished letter to his father, added a few lines, and sealed it.

After which, he wrote on another sheet of paper:

“MY DEAR SIR, “The prayer of an angel and the talisman of a fairy, have already twice saved my life. We are alive, and all danger is passed.

“Until Sunday, when I hope to express my thanks in person.

“JULIUS.”

He then handed the two letters to Dietrich, who was returning at once to Heidelberg, and would post them before the next mail went out.

When Julius returned to the duelling hall, the two wounded men were being removed on stretchers, and Samuel was saying:

“And now we must kill time until dinner. That is the wearisome result of our morning’s excitement. What shall we do till mid-day?”

“What shall we do till Sunday?” thought Julius.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TWO WAYS OF LOOKING AT LOVE.

THE next Sunday, as early as seven o’clock in the morning, Samuel and Julius left Heidelberg, and, following the course of the Neckar, took the road leading to Landeck. They were on horseback, each carrying his fowling-piece fastened on to the saddle. In addition, a portmanteau was strapped behind Samuel.

Trichter, now completely recovered from his victory, walked along smoking his pipe; he seemed prouder than ever of his noble senior, whom he accompanied as far as the last houses.

He stated that on the previous evening he had been to see the two wounded men. They were both certain to recover. But Dormagen would be confined to the house three weeks, and Ritter a month.

On reaching the gates of the town, Samuel dismissed his favourite fox, and the two companions started off at a trot.

Julius’ whole being responded to the beauty of the dawn, further enhanced by thoughts of Christiane.

Never had Samuel seemed to him more witty, more animated, more amusing, and, in flashes, more unfathomable. Samuel’s words, sparkling and sentient, full of caprice and full of thought, were an exact interpretation of Julius’ delight in the scenery as also of his sense of enjoyment. Julius received the impression, Samuel added to it the expression. And thus they arrived at Neckarsteinach.

They had discussed University life, studies and amusements. They had spoken about Germany and independence, Julius was one of those young, loyal natures which respond ardently to such ideas, and he felt happy and proud at having bravely done his duty, and fearlessly risked his life for a dear and sacred cause.

Samuel and Julius had, in fact, spoken of everything except of the one subject of Christiane; Samuel had not mentioned her, perhaps because he had not thought of her; Julius, possibly, because he thought of her too much.

Samuel was the one to speak of her first.

"Now then!" he said suddenly to Julius, "what are you bringing?"

"What am I bringing?"

"Yes! surely you have bought some trinket for Christiane?"

"Oh! do you suppose that she would have accepted it? Do you take her for a Lolotte?"

"Nonsense! there was once a queen who said that the acceptance of a gift depended on its costliness. But, at least, you have thought of bringing the father some rare book on botany? For example, the 'Linnaei Opera,' with engravings, that valuable edition of which Steinbach, the bookseller, has such a fine copy."

"What a fool I am! I never thought of the father," Julius ingenuously confessed.

"Rather an unfortunate omission," Samuel rejoined, "but I am quite certain that you have not forgotten the pretty child who did not leave Christiane's side, and whose side you did not leave. You have, of course, for Lothario, one of those marvellous toys from Nuremberg, which are the delight of all German children between five and ten years of age?

Once when we were together we admired immensely a prodigious Boar-hunt: you remember, the swarming bas-relief in wood, on which was to be seen an entire village, magistrate, schoolmaster, citizen, hanging to the tail, to the ears, to the bristles of his swinish majesty, it made us hold our sides with laughter, grown-up children that we are. I bet that you have bought the bas-relief. And what a splendid idea on your "part. You were right just now; the child was the one to whom to give Christiane's present. In that way, generosity is perfected by delicacy. In giving to Lothario, you give to Christiane twice over."

"Why do you tell me this so late?" said Julius, vexed with himself."

And, giving a quick jerk to his reins, he turned his horse's head towards Heidelberg.

"Stop!" cried Samuel. "There is no need for you to go as far as Heidelberg for the toy and the book: they are both here."

"What!"

"The rare edition of Linnaeus, and the Homeric pig-hunt, both are in my portmanteau, and I make you a present of them."

"Oh! thanks," said Julius. "That is very thoughtful of you."

“The fact is, my dear boy, you must not allow the grass to grow under your feet where this little one is concerned. I will help you. If I allowed you to go your own sweet way, you would abandon yourself to melancholy sentiment, and, at the end of a year, would be no farther advanced than on the evening of the day when first you saw her. But I am there, so do not be anxious. You already see how willingly I have abstained from competing with you. I fall back on Gretchen. The goat-herd bears me ill-will, she distrusts me instinctively, she had almost insulted me. That nettles me. I shall succeed in the end. I do not attract her; therefore she attracts me. Which of us two will be the first to win. Shall we have a bet on it? And now, let us put spurs to our horses, begin this race for beauty, and you will see how easily I leap over scruples.”

Julius had become serious.

“Samuel,” he said, “I must beg of you never to discuss Christiane in my presence.”

“Do you consider that I spoil her name by mentioning it? Well! I think you might let me say what I let you do; and, as I do not suppose that you go to Landeck solely on account of Messieurs Schreiber and Lothario, you might surely allow me to insinuate that you go for Christiane.”

“Supposing that it is for her? ‘“If it is for her, I imagine that you have some aim in view; and, admitting that, it is not with the intention of making her your wife...”

“Why not?”

“Why not? Ha! ha! ha! how young he is! Frankly for two reasons. To begin with, Baron von Hermelinfeld, that very wealthy, very honourable, very powerful nobleman, will not choose as his daughter-in-law a simple country maiden, when there are daughters of counts, of princes, and of millionaires, who would be proud to bear his name. Besides, you yourself would not wish it. Are you old enough to be a husband?”

“Love knows no age.”

“Love and marriage are two things, my young friend.”

He went on in deep passionate tones: “Oh! I do not disparage love! Love is possession. To be master of a human creature, to conquer a soul, to add to your own heart that of another which is no less your own although it beats in another breast, to extend your own existence by means of other existences, dependent and subject, that indeed is grand, sublime! I confess to that Promethean ambition of love! But the question is to add to one’s own personality as many other personalities as possible; to enrich oneself with all the devotion one meets with; to absorb every iota of power and of life one finds within reach. Such men are fools as content themselves with one woman, and are satisfied with one better-half, rather than with a hundred. That makes women weep! So much the worse for them. The sea is the sea for the sole reason that it absorbs every drop from every river. For my own part, I would drink every tear shed by every woman, to experience the intoxication and pride of the ocean."

"You deceive yourself, my friend," replied Julius, "greatness does not consist in having, but in being. Wealth does not result from receiving, but from giving. As for me, I would, give my entire self, and for always, to the woman I loved. I would not fritter away my heart in the base coin of fifty trivial and passing fancies; I would concentrate it in one golden love, deep and eternal. Nor, on that account would I deem myself more petty, more, miserly; quite the reverse. It is thus, Samuel, that human joy develops into divine happiness. The end of Don Juan, with his thousand-and-three mistresses, is hell; the end of Dante, with his one and only Beatrice, is heaven."

"You see," said Samuel, "that theory develops into literary poetry and love, But here we are at the cross-roads. Let us draw rein and descend to reality First of all, we had best be known only b; out Christian names, not our surnames.''

"Yes!" said Julius. "Not because distrust her, but because I distrust myself. I want to pass for a simple student without fortune, so as to be quite certain that she loves me for myself alone, not for my name."

"Yes, to be loved for oneself! we have heard that before," said Samuel. "Let us proceed, — and, in the second place, listen quietly to the friendly proposal I am abut to make you. You will marry Christiane, so be it; but it is necessary that ne be willing to do so. Therefore, it is essential that you should make yourself beloved. So, make use of me, if needs be, as adviser, or even... or even, because that may assist, as chemist."

"Enough! "Julius cried in horror. "You excite yourself quite needlessly," Samuel replied quietly. "Lovelace, who was as good a man as you, adopted just those means with Clarissa."

Julius looked Samuel in the face: "Look here, you must be very radically corrupt if the thought of this pure girl arouses in you such monstrous designs; your soul must be utterly dead if this glorious sun gives birth to such reptiles! She, so confiding, so innocent, so unsuspecting! to take advantage of her goodness and guileless confidence! Ah! it would not be very difficult to ruin her! there would be no need of your charms and philtres. Spells would be unnecessary; her love would be all-sufficient.” Then, as if talking to himself, he added: “She had good reason to mistrust him and to warn me against him.”

“Ah! she said that?” demanded Samuel, with a start. “Ha! she has spoken against me to you? Perhaps she hates me? Take care. I have so far taken no notice of her, as you know; I was leaving her to you. But take my word for it, if she hated me, I would love her. Hatred is a difficulty; that is to ay, a provocation; it is an obstacle, and! love obstacles. If she were to love me, ‘would ignore her; but if she hates me, beware!”

“Beware yourself!” retorted Julius. ‘For her sake, I feel there is no friendship that would weigh with me. Know that for the happiness of a woman I loved, I would not hesitate to die.”

“And I,” said Samuel, “for the un-happiness of a woman who hated me, I would not hesitate to kill you!”

The conversation so happily begun, seemed likely to take a tragic turn. But at this moment, the horses brought them within sight of the manse.

Christiane and Lothario awaited Julius under the limes and waved him a joyous welcome.

Oh foolish nature of lovers! In the twinkling of an eye, Julius forgot the dark and threatening attitude Samuel had assumed, and to him the world was bathed in light, sweetness and purity.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FAIR RECLUSE OF THE WOODS.

JULIUS set spurs to his horse, quickly reached the gate, and looking at Christiane with glad tender gratitude:

“Thank you!” said he. “Is all danger over? “Christiane asked.

“Quite over. Your prayer has saved us. God could not deny us His protection; we implored it through” you.”

He dismounted. Samuel soon rode up, and bowed to Christiane, who greeted him politely but coldly. She summoned the stable-boy, and told him to lead the horses to the stable and carry the luggage into the bedrooms.

Then she accompanied her guests into the house.

Gretchen was there, looking rather awkward, poor girl, in her Sunday clothes. The length of her dress impeded her movements; her stockings cramped her legs, she could not walk comfortably in shoes.

She bestowed on Samuel a hostile glance, and on Julius a sad smile.

“Where is Herr Schreiber?” asked Samuel.

“My father will be here presently,” replied Christiane. “But, on leaving the church, he was detained by one of the village lads, who wished to speak to him on an important matter. It concerns someone in whom we are deeply interested.”

And Christiane looked with a smile at Gretchen, whose air of astonishment proved that she did not understand.

Just then, the pastor came into the room, eager, genial, and as frankly delighted at seeing his guests as if they had been old acquaintances.

They had waited only for his return to sit down to table. This second dinner was more animated, more unrestrained than the other. In accordance with the good old German custom, Gretchen was of the party.

Samuel, who now studied Christiane’s pure, maidenly face with new interest, exerted himself to please, and was full of animation and wit. He gave an account of the duel, omitting, of course, the causes and pretexts which led up to it, and maintaining also a discreet silence in connection with the Castle of Heidelberg and Lolotte’s window. But he made

Christiane laugh over the scene in the blue room and caused her to tremble over the encounter at the Kaiserstuhl.

“Dear me!” she said to Julius, “supposing, however that you had had this Dormagen as adversary?”

“Oh! then, I should have been a dead man, without a doubt,” Julius laughingly replied.

“These duels, which our students treat so lightly, are a most barbarous and culpable custom,” said the pastor. “I do not speak only as a priest, gentlemen, I speak as a man. And I feel almost tempted to congratulate you, Herr Julius, in not being more skilled in these deadly encounters.”

“Then,” Christiane rejoined, not knowing herself why she put the question, “Herr Samuel is superior to you in fencing, Herr Julius?”

“That I cannot deny,” replied Julius.

“Luckily,” added Samuel, “a duel is not likely to take place between comrades as *brotherly* as ourselves.”

“Or if such a thing did happen,” said Julius, “it would be a duel to the death, a duel from which only one of us would rise again, and, under such circumstances, it is always possible to equalise the chances.”

“Are you challenging fate?” rejoined Samuel quietly. “In that case it would decide against you. I do not know whether it be because I have always scorned to play for money, but each time that I have tempted chance, it has never failed me. So take warning! This is capital wine of yours, Herr Schreiber; it is Liebfraumilch, is it not?”

Whether from presentiment or foreboding, we cannot tell, but certain it is, that at Samuel’s quiet, sinister words, Christiane grew pale and could not repress a shudder. Samuel possibly perceived this.

“This is not a remarkably cheerful subject of conversation,” he rejoined. “Can you not introduce something more cheerful, Julius?”

Julius understood Samuel’s meaning, he went out and returned almost immediately with the Boar-Hunt, which he gave to Lothario, and the Linnaeus, which he presented to the pastor.

Lothario’s delight was unbounded. His face shone with joy, and he remained speechless, overpowered by the wonder of it. Alas! by bestowing such delights on children, life imagines that it owes nothing more to man.

But the pastor was no less delighted, and no less a child than his grandson. He was lost in apologies and thanks, reproaching Julius with ruining himself. It was too much for the purse of a student.

Julius felt somewhat abashed at thus accepting the credit for an attention which belonged to Samuel; but Christiane thanked him with a look. He had not the courage to give up that look to Samuel.

He kept all to keep the smile.

They went into the garden where coffee was served. Gretchen, who had throughout maintained her defiant attitude towards Samuel, placed herself behind Christiane's chair.

"Now, Gretchen," said the pastor, as he poured his hot coffee into his saucer, "I want to speak to you."

"To me, sir?"

"Yes, to you and on a serious matter. That makes you laugh? Yet you are no longer a child, Gretchen. Do you know that you will soon be eighteen?"

"What of that, sir?"

"What of that! At eighteen, it is time for a girl to think of the future. You do not want to spend your whole life among the goats?"

"With whom, then, do you wish me to spend it?"

"With an honest fellow, who will be your husband."

Gretchen shook her head laughing the while:

"And who would ever want me for a wife?"

"Such a thing is not improbable, my child; and, in fact, supposing it did happen?"

The goat-herd became serious: "Are you in earnest?"

"I told you that I would have to speak to you on serious matters."

"Then, if you are serious," rejoined Gretchen, "I shall answer you in a like manner. If any man asked me to marry him, I should refuse?"

"Why?"

"Why, sir? Well in the first place, my mother, after you had converted her, dedicated me to the Virgin."

"That was against my will, and contrary to our religion. Besides, her vow is not binding on you and if there are no other reasons...."

"There are others, sir. One is that I do not wish to be dependent on anything or anybody; another, that I am not used to having a roof over my head, nor a will above my will. Once married, I should have to leave my goats, my plants, my forests, my rocks. I should have to stay in villages, walk in streets, live in houses. As it is, when winter comes I suffer enough in rooms, I feel choked enough on Sundays in these clothes. Ah! if you had ever spent the summer nights as I have, in the open air, under a ceiling of stars, on a bed of moss and flowers which the good God Himself makes fresh every morning! Why! there are monks and nuns who cloister themselves during their whole lives in convents and in monasteries; well, for me, my cloister should be the forest. I would be a recluse of the woods. I belong to solitude and to the Virgin. I do not wish to belong to any man. Now I go where I will, and I do what I like. If I were married, I should do what my husband liked. You probably deem this pride on my part. But I dislike the world, whose touch withers and soils whatever it comes in contact with. Perhaps this feeling arises from having seen so many of my poor flowers die when uprooted from the ground, or when only bruised. I shall never allow myself to be touched. It seems to me that I would rather die. Truly, dear master, that vow was not made by my mother from selfish motives, but from motherly love, not in thinking of her sins, but in remembering her sufferings. The love of man is humiliating and cruel. When young horses that have never known the curb, see anyone approach, they take fright. I am like a wild horse, and I will not be curbed."

Gretchen said this in so resolute and proud a tone of untamed innocence and incorruptible modesty, that Samuel turned his ardent gaze from Christiane to her.

He looked fixedly at her.

"Nonsense!" he said. "Supposing that, instead of a peasant, some one of better birth offered himself; if, for example, I asked your hand in marriage."

"You?" said she, as if hesitating to reply.

"Yes, I! Do you know that I am capable of doing it?"

And at the time he thought he spoke the truth.

"If it were true," she replied, after a moment's silence, "I should accept you even less. I say that I detest villages; then I am not likely to love towns! I say that the thought of every man is in some way revolting to me; it is not the thought of you that can tempt me."

"I thank you for the compliment, and I shall remember it," said Samuel with his menacing laugh.

"You will think over my words, Gretchen," the pastor hastened to say. "There comes a time when our legs refuse to climb peaks and ravines. Besides, when you know the name of the worthy lad who loves you and would be glad to make you his wife, you may perhaps change your mind. Your friend, Christiane, will speak to you about it later on."

There the conversation ended. But, a few minutes later, Gretchen, ill at ease with those in whose presence the question of her marriage had been discussed, disappeared without saying a word. The pastor became absorbed in the pages of his Linnaeus. Lothario, since rising from table, was entirely taken up with the delights of his new plaything.

On Christiane alone devolved the duties of hospitality towards Julius and Samuel.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MOUTH OF HELL.

WHO could ever know what thoughts agitated the deep, unfathomable mind of Samuel Gelb? When he saw that the pastor and the child were absorbed by the presents of Julius, he entered upon a cordial defence of his friend to Christiane. Julius, according to him, had every quality — tenderness, devotion, faithfulness — and, beneath his gentleness, should occasion arise, a fund of energy and strong determination. Those he loved could always depend upon him. He had fought splendidly, and so on, and so on. Samuel embarrassed Christiane by this point-blank enthusiasm, and the young girl instinctively suffered on hearing such praise from the lips of Samuel. Although believing what he said, she could not help detecting the irony beneath his words. He had nothing but good to say of Julius; she would have preferred that he had spoken ill of him.

As to Julius, he was not listening. After having laughed and mistrusted Samuel's praise, he had let his thoughts wander elsewhere. He remembered the happy talk he had had with Christiane on that other afternoon, and felt sad at memory of that past joy.

Christiane took pity on him:

"Father," she said, raising her voice, "I have promised that we will take these gentlemen to the ruins of Eberbach and to the 'Mouth of Hell.' Will you come as far?"

"Willingly," said the pastor, closing the book with a regretful air.

But nothing would induce Lothario to go out. He had asked Gretchen to tell some of his little friends in the village that he had an important piece of news for them, and had determined to stay in so as to dazzle them with the Hunt.

They set off without him, and took a delightful crossroad, which would bring them out at the "Mouth of Hell;" this being the most distant point, they wished to begin by it. The pastor, stimulated to botanize by the rare volume, monopolized Samuel, questioning and wrangling with him over all the plants they came across. This was another way of continuing the reading of Linnaeus.

At last Julius found himself alone with Christiane.

How he had longed for this opportunity. And now, when it was actually within his grasp, he felt embarrassed and knew not how to turn it to his advantage.

He had not a word to say. He remained silent, not daring to give expression to the only thing he had to tell.

Christiane noticed Julius' embarrassment, which but increased her own.

They walked on, therefore, side by side, silent, troubled, but happy. But what mattered their silence! did not the birds in the sky, the sunbeams in the trees, the flowers in the field speak for them, and tell them the exact words they would have told each other.

They arrived thus at the "Mouth of Hell."

Just as they came in sight of it, Samuel, clinging with one hand to a root, was leaning over the abyss.

"Bless my soul!" he was saying, "that is a pit deserving of its name. Devil take me if I can see the bottom of it. The last time, when I could not see the bottom, I thought it was on account of the darkness; now, I realize that it is because of the depth. I see that I do not see. Come and look down, Julius."

Julius advanced to the edge, greatly to Christiane's alarm.

"Do you know," said Samuel, "that this would be a convenient spot to rid oneself of a man against whom one had a grudge? A jerk of the elbow would be enough, and I doubt if the man would ever come up again or if anyone would descend to look for him."

"Stand back!" cried Christiane in alarm, quickly pulling Julius' arm.

Samuel burst into a laugh.

"Are you afraid that I shall give Julius a push?"

"Ah! you see the least false step! "Christiane stammered, covered with confusion.

"As a matter of fact, the Mouth of Hell is perilous," rejoined the pastor, "and, in addition to its legend full of mystery, it has its history, full of tragical incident.

Not two years ago a farmer in the vicinity either fell or threw himself into it, poor fellow! Attempts were made to recover his body. But those who had the courage to be lowered with ropes into the abyss, had scarcely time to shout to be drawn up again. At a certain depth, the mephitic exhalations from the gulf cause asphyxiation and death."

"Grand, deep gulf!" said Samuel. "For all that, it appeals to me no less in the sunshine than in the darkness. Yet, see, wild flowers grow there. Foliage adorns the danger lurking beneath. It is fascinating and deadly. Attraction and repulsion. I said by night that I loved it; I find by day that it resembles me."

"Oh! it's true," Christiane exclaimed irresistibly, as if struck by his words.

"I must in turn caution you to beware of falling over, Mademoiselle! "Samuel replied politely, drawing her away from the brink.

"Let us leave this spot," said Christiane. "You may laugh at me, but in this horrible place, I always feel afraid. My heart grows heavy, my mind becomes filled with foreboding. To see my open grave would terrify me less. Misfortune lurks here. Let us walk on to the ruin."

In silence, the four companions bent their steps towards the old castle, and some minutes later, found themselves among the remains of what had once been the Castle of Eberbach.

The ruin appeared as smiling and pleasing by day, as it was gloomy and terrifying by night. A confusion of moss-grown vegetation, and sweetly scented wild flowers, diffusing perfume all around, almost entirely concealed the débris, each cleft and cranny being held together by long trails of ivy, or tendrils of the vine, hope born of this past, youth of this old age, life of this death.

Birds sang from every branch, and at the base of the castle, on that side where Samuel's horse had so terribly circled round in empty space, the Neckar, shining in the sun, flowed broadly on, far as the eye could reach, through the luxuriant valley.

This grand yet smiling spectacle awakened in Julius a train of delicious thought. Samuel had enticed the pastor towards a door surmounted by defaced armorial bearings, and was listening to the history of the ancient counts of Eberbach.

you; that you do not reject this dream of living together, among all this exquisite scenery, we two, alone with your father."

"And without Samuel," quietly said an ironical voice behind them.

It was Samuel, who had left the pastor, and had overheard Julius' last words.

Christiane blushed. Julius turned round, furious with Samuel for having so inopportunely broken in on his sweet waking dream.

But just as he was about to utter some scathing retort, he was prevented from doing so by the re-appearance of the pastor.

Samuel whispered to Julius:

“Would you rather have been surprised by the father?”

They turned back in the direction of the manse.

This time they all walked together. Christiane avoided Julius. Julius, on his side, no longer sought to be alone with Christiane. He feared to receive her answer as much as he had before desired it.

In returning along the road, the approach of the party suddenly startled and dispersed four or five goats.

“Those are Gretchen’s goats,” said Christiane. “The goat-herd cannot be far *off.”*

And, in fact, Gretchen soon came into sight, seated on the summit of a hillock; she had resumed with her simple, rustic clothes, her untamed care and gracefulness.

The pastor called Christiane to his side, and said a few words in her ear. Christiane replied by a gesture of assent, and at once began to climb the hillock, directing her steps towards Gretchen.

Simultaneously Julius and Samuel sprang forward to help her up the ascent.

“No, no!” said she, laughing. “I must speak with Gretchen alone, and I am a sufficiently good mountaineer to dispense with your assistance, gentlemen.”

And she bounded quickly and lightly up the steep path, and had soon rejoined the goat-herd.

Gretchen was sad and the tears were in her eyes.

“What is the matter?” asked Christiane.

Christiane turned to Julius: “What are you thinking about? “The young girl’s gesture, when she drew him away from the precipice, had somewhat emboldened Julius.

“What am I thinking of?” he answered. “Oh! Christiane you said awhile ago, when standing by the abyss, misfortune lurks here! ‘I dream, in the midst of these ruins, ‘happiness is here.’ Oh! Christiane, anyone who were to restore this castle to its beauty and its former magnificence, and who, fencing in his future within the relics of this past as if to preserve and ennoble it, were to live in this solitude, the sky above his head, this scenery before his eyes, and at his side a sweet young wife, innocent and pure, — oh! Christiane, listen to me."

Without knowing why, Christiane felt deeply moved. The tears came into her eyes, although never had she felt more happy.

"Listen," Julius went on, "I owe my life to you. This is no mere empty phrase, it is a fact. I am superstitious at heart. At one time, in this duel, I saw the sword of my adversary pointed at my breast. I gave myself up for lost. At once, I thought of you; inwardly I spoke your name, and the sword only grazed the skin."

"At what hour was this?" said Christiane.

"At eleven o'clock."

"Oh! I was praying at that hour!" the girl said naively, with glad surprise.

"I knew it. But that is not all. At the second pass, again was I touched and would have been a dead man, if my adversary's blade had not come in contact with a silken bag, containing, can you guess what? The magical wild rose that you had given me."

"Ah! can it be true? Blessed Virgin, I thank thee!" cried Christiane. Julius resumed:

"Well, Christiane, since you have taken the trouble to intercede for me, since your prayer has been heard, maybe it is because my life will be of use to you in some way. Ah! if you would!"

Christiane was trembling and said nothing in reply.

"One word!" pursued Julius, bending on her a look of passionate and tender love, "or, if not a word, at least, a sign, to assure that what I say does not grieve "Oh! Mademoiselle, you know my little roe, the one I found motherless in the forest, and that I reared like my own child, on returning hither I could not find her anywhere, she is lost."

"Do not be anxious! she will come back," said Christiane. "But listen, Gretchen, I want to have a long talk with you. Expect to see me between six and seven o'clock to-morrow morning."

"And I also have much to tell you," Gretchen replied. "During the last three days the plants have told me many things about you."

"Very well! where will you lead your goats?"

"Near the Mouth of Hell, if agreeable to you?"

"No, no; rather in the direction of the ruins."

"I will be there, Mademoiselle."

“Very good! to-morrow morning, at six o’clock, near the ruins. Good-bye till then, Gretchen.”

As Christiane turned to retrace her steps she was astonished to see Samuel immediately behind her; with a few quick bounds, he had climbed the hill.

“I felt that I must at least offer you my arm to descend,” he said.

She could not tell whether he had overheard their words.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHAT THE FLOWERS FORETOLD.

THE following morning, before half-past five had struck, Samuel came into Julius' room, fully dressed and with his gun slung across his shoulder.

"Halloa! you everlasting sleeper," said he, "I suppose you do not feel inclined to come out shooting? "Julius rubbed his eyes. "Are you going out shooting?"

"Yes! in search of all kinds of game. Why should we have brought our guns, if not for that? Ha! you are falling off to sleep again. Listen, if you decide to get up, you will rejoin me."

"No," Julius answered, "I shall not go out this morning."

"Ah! and may I ask why?"

"I am going to write to my father."

"Again! What an epistolary son you are becoming!"

"I have matters of importance to communicate to him."

"As you will," rejoined Samuel, who had his reasons for not insisting. "Goodbye for the present, then."

"Good luck.", "Thanks for the wish and for the omen."

Samuel went out and Julius got up.

But, though Samuel had risen early, Christiane had risen still earlier. At the very hour when for somewhat doubtful reasons, the sceptical student walked through the dew empearled grass, whistling as he went along, the sweet young maiden, more prompt in the performance of her good action, had already joined Gretchen at the ruins of Eberbach, and, with tender, persuasive words, had introduced to the little goat-herd the honest fellow who wanted to make her his wife. He was a young farm labourer of Landeck, Gottlob by name, a good hard-working peasant, who, from afar, and without daring to speak his love, had, for the last year, worshipped the lovely goat-herd with his whole heart.

Gretchen, sad but determined, persisted in refusing him.

"Then you will have nothing to say to me, Gretchen?" said poor Gottlob, with a heavy heart. "You refuse me, you scorn me."

"I thank you and I bless you, Gottlob," Gretchen replied. "You must have a good heart to have dreamed of marrying this little goat-tender, who does not possess a penny; this gipsy girl, who has no home and no relatives. But, Gottlob, the plant that has no roots must have no flowers. Leave me to my solitude and my roving life."

"Listen, dear Gretchen," rejoined Christiane, "my father says that what is against nature is against God, and that perhaps, some day, you will be punished for having disregarded the common law, and will regret what you have done."

"Dear lady, you have all the goodness and beauty of the flowers, and your father all their wisdom and serenity. But I follow my natural instincts in wishing to keep to my free forest life. Transplant into your garden this wild thorn, and it will die."

"No! say rather that you hate me, Gretchen!" cried Gottlob. "Let us leave her, Mademoiselle Christiane, I see very plainly that she hates me."

"Stop, Gottlob," rejoined Gretchen, "and do not go away with bitter thoughts of me. Gottlob, had I ever wished to live in the house, and under the rule of a husband, I would have chosen your roof and your authority in preference to any other, do you know, because you are good and faithful, and you work steadily and with energy, as is the duty of every human creature. Gottlob, I say more; should Gretchen ever change her mind, and you have not plighted your faith to another, Gretchen will take no other husband but you; this she swears before God. That is all I can say, Gottlob. And now, let us shake hands and do not think unkindly of me, who will ever think of you as of a brother."

Poor Gottlob tried to speak but could not utter a word. He simply pressed the hand which Gretchen held out to him, bowed humbly to Christiane, and, with faltering steps, retraced his way through the ruins.

When he was gone, Christiane tried once more to reason with Gretchen; but the goat-herd implored her to desist from her entreaties.

"Let us speak of you, my dear young lady," said she; of you, who, God be thanked, have none of my wicked, wild disposition, and who may be loved as you deserve to be."

"We have time," Christiane laughingly replied. "And what of the lost roe?"

"She has not come back, Mademoiselle," Gretchen answered sadly. "I spent the whole night calling to her, in vain! This is not the first time she has run away, ungrateful little thing! and I always hoped she would come back. But never has she stayed so long in the forest."

"You will find her again, never fear."

"I am afraid not. You see, she is different to my goats that are quickly tamed. The roe is wild from birth, and has trouble to accustom herself to sheds and to human faces. She has freedom in the blood. She is like me, and that is why I loved her, that is why...."

Gretchen did not finish. Suddenly she trembled and started to her feet, terrified.

"What is the matter with you?" exclaimed Christiane.

"Did you not hear?"

"What?"

"The report of a gun."

"No."

"Well I heard it, and it is as if the shot had entered my heart. If it were my roe that has been shot....!"

"Come! are you mad. Calm yourself, and since you want to speak about me, let us rather do so."

The thought of Christiane was all-sufficient to make Gretchen forget her anxiety. She sat down again on the ground, and looking up into Christiane's face with eyes full of tenderness.

"Yes, yes, let us talk about you," said she. "I speak of you every day to my flowers."

"Tell me," rejoined Christiane, not without some hesitation, "do you really believe in what the flowers tell you?"

"Do I believe it!" said Gretchen, and a look of strange inspiration lighted up her face. "Not only do I believe in it, I am sure of it. What interest could the flowers have in saying what was untrue? Nothing in the world is more certain. The science of the language of flowers is very ancient. It comes from the East, and from the early ages of the world, when men were yet simple and pure enough for God to deign to speak to them. My mother knew how to read the plants, and she taught me how to do so; her mother had taught her. You have no faith in the flowers? The proof that they say what is true, is that they have told me that you will love Monsieur Julius."

"They are mistaken! "Christiane said quickly.

"You do not believe in it? The proof that they say what is true, is that they have told me that Monsieur Julius loves you."

“Is that the truth? “Christiane replied. “Well, I am willing to believe in it. Let us consult them together.”

“See, I have brought quite a harvest of them,” said Gretchen, pointing to a large scented nosegay at her feet. “On what shall we consult them?”

“You hinted the other day that they had told you that these two young men would bring me misfortune. I should like to know what they mean by that.”

“It is precisely about these two young people that I wanted to speak to you.”

“Well!”

“See. These plants were culled this morning before dawn. We are going to question them. But I know beforehand what they will reply; for, since the other day, I have already tried them thirteen times, and on each occasion their answer has been the same.”

“What was it?”

“You shall see for yourself.” She got up, took the plants in her hand, spread them out on a table of moss-covered stone and arranged them in a certain mysterious order, according to their shape, and the hour or the place in which they had been gathered.

Then, riveting her gaze upon them, forgetting by degrees the presence of Christiane, and, losing herself more and more in ecstatic contemplation, she began to speak in a slow and almost solemn voice:

“Yes, the flowers say everything to those who know how to Understand them. Men have books in which they write their thought with letters; God’s book is nature, and His thoughts are written in its plants. But, one must know how to read nature. My mother has taught me how to spell the flowers.” Her face clouded over. “Always the same words!” she muttered. “He who always appears at unforeseen moments is a man of ill-fortune. Why did I bring him hither? And the other, will he be less fatal? Poor dear girl, already she loves him.”

“But I do not! “Christiane interrupted. “Your flowers are wrong.”

“And he,” went on Gretchen, not noticing the interruption, “how he loves Christiane!”

“Which said that?” hurriedly asked Christiane. “Was it that mauve flower? How beautiful it is! “Gretchen continued, still absorbed: “They are young, they love one another, they are good, and therefore they will be unhappy. Always the same reply. But here is an extraordinary thing!”

“What then!” Christiane asked anxiously.

“I had not yet seen as much. Here, I see them both united; then, the union ends suddenly, almost at once. But that is strange! the separation is not death, and yet they still love each other. The one without the other, for long years, separated, far apart, they live as strangers. What does that mean?”

As she was stooping anxiously over the table, a shadow obscured the sun, and was suddenly reflected on the plants.

Christiane and Gretchen turned round with a start.

It was Samuel.

Samuel feigned profound astonishment on seeing Christiane.

“Pardon my disturbing you,” said he, “but I came to ask Gretchen, who knows all the intricacies of the forest, to do me a service. This is what has happened: I shot a head of game just now in the forest.”

Gretchen shuddered. Samuel continued:

“I must have wounded it severely. I will gladly give Gretchen a *friedrich* if she will discover the place where it has gone to die. It disappeared in the direction of the ‘Mouth of Hell.’”

“A roe? “Gretchen asked in a trembling voice.

“White, with grey spots.”

“I told you so!” exclaimed Gretchen to Christiane. And she sped away like an arrow.

Samuel viewed this abrupt exit with surprise.

“Upon my word!” said he to himself, “I have succeeded more easily than I had hoped in being alone with Christiane.”

CHAPTER XXII.

THREE WOUNDS.

CHRISTIANE moved as if to follow Gretchen, but Samuel said: “Pardon my detaining you, I wish to speak to you.”

“To me, sir?” said Christiane, taken aback.

“To you,” Samuel repeated, “and permit me to ask you, plainly and frankly, a question which, since yesterday, has preoccupied my thoughts. Is it true you hate me?”

The colour rose to Christiane’s face. “Answer me freely and without reserve,” he continued, “and do not be afraid of hurting my feelings. The fact of being disliked does not affect me. I shall tell you why presently.”

“Sir,” Christiane answered in troubled tones and selecting her words with care, “you are my father’s guest, and, up to the present, you have neither said nor done anything which could justify my having any aversion to you. Besides, I hope I am not so uncharitable as to hate anyone.”

Samuel’s keen, piercing eye had never left the young’s girl’s face whilst she spoke thus, with timid, downcast gaze. He resumed:

“I have not listened to your words, I have studied your face. It is more truthful than your reply. One thing is very certain, if you do not absolutely hate me, you, at any rate, dislike me. Pray do not excuse yourself. I repeat that that does not displease me; on the contrary, I am rather glad to know it.”

“Sir!....”

“I prefer hatred to apathy, anger to forgetfulness, active dislike to passive indifference. Bless me! you are a pretty girl, and to men like myself, a pretty girl is already an incentive. It is something that appeals and stimulates any heart with a spark of pride. Never have I beheld beauty in a maid of sixteen summers, without being seized with that ungovernable desire to appropriate it. But, as time is an object with me, more often than not I pass by. However, in this instance, the provocation is two-fold. You do me the honour of hating me. To the provocation of your beauty, you add that of your aversion! You declare war against me! I accept the ‘challenge.’”

“Upon my word, sir, where have you seen....?”

“Oh! in your look, in your tone, in your words at the Mouth of Hell. And not only that. Have you not already tried to come between Julius and me? Do not deny it! You have placed yourself between my friend and me, imprudent girl! You have tried, bold maiden! to rob me of his confidence, to take his affection from me. That is your third challenge! Very well! so be it. I am his evil genius, so his father says; you will be his good angel. The drama of all the old legends will be played out between we two. This prospect is attractive. Dual struggle! struggle between you and me for Julius, struggle between Julius and me for you. He will have your love, I, your hatred. Be it love or hate, it is equally a part of your soul. And already I am more certain of my success than of his. You undoubtedly feel aversion to me; are you certain of any feeling of love for him?”

Christiane made no reply; but standing erect, mute, indignant, and, despite herself, charming, her whole appearance spoke for her.

Samuel resumed:

“Yes, I am in advance of Julius. You have not yet told him that you love him. More than that; probably, he himself has not yet openly avowed his love. This young man is gentle and good, but he is utterly lacking in decision. Well! on this point again I forestall him. Listen: You hate me. I love you.”

“Sir, this is too much!” exclaimed Christiane, unable to restrain herself.

Samuel appeared not to notice the young girl’s indignation. He glanced carelessly at the table on which were still spread the flowers consulted by Gretchen.

“What were you doing when I interrupted you?” he asked carelessly. “Ah! you were questioning the plants? Well, would you like me to answer for them? Shall I tell you the good fortune, or if you prefer the epithet, the ill-fortune they foretell? I am going to begin with one item of news in which you will, I hope, be fairly interested. I predict that you will love me.”

Christiane shook her head scornfully.

“Oh! as to that,” said she, “I do not believe it, nor am I afraid of doing so.”

“Let us understand each other,” replied Samuel. “When I say that you will love me, I do not exactly mean that you will think me charming, or feel an overwhelming affection for me. But what matters, if, to subdue you, I am willing to forego your tenderness, and, the means being different, the result be the same?"

"I do not understand you, sir."

"You will soon do so. I say that that child who dares to defy me, Samuel Gelb, will, some day or other, before we die, whether she will or no, be mine."

Christiane drew herself up proudly, trembling with anger. It was the girl who had listened; it was the woman who replied.

"Oh!" said she with a bitter smile, "you sent Gretchen out of the way, because you were afraid in the presence of two children, and now that there is only one, you dare to speak! you dare to insult the daughter of your host! Very well! although I am in your power, although you have a gun in your hands and wickedness in your heart, yet I am not afraid of you, and you will not prevent my answering you. You have wrongly interpreted the future. It is now my turn to tell you what will happen, not at some vague, far-off date, but within an hour; I am going, and before an hour has passed over our heads, I shall have told all to my father, who will forbid you the house, and to your friend, who will give you the chastisement you deserve."

She turned away as if to leave him. Samuel, instead of attempting to detain her, simply said, "Go!"

She stopped in surprise, and looked at him alarmed.

"Well! go then!" said he with cold composure. "You think me a coward for having told you what was in my heart and on my mind! But, if I were a coward, I should have carried out my intention and kept silence. Child! child!" he went on in a strange tone, "you will understand some day that at heart this man, whom you defy, is utterly contemptuous of humanity in general, and of life in particular. If you desire to understand this at once, fly to denounce me. But no," he resumed, "you will not do that; you will not mention a word of all this either to your father or to Julius; you will riot complain of me, and you will most carefully avoid any outward signs of repulsion towards me. Your attitude will be as icily polite as this marble."

"Why should you suppose so?" said Christiane.

"Because if you even appeared to bear me ill-will, your father would enquire from you the reason why, and Julius would demand satisfaction from me. Now, as Julius himself has told you, I am undoubtedly his superior in fencing. But the pistol is my favourite weapon. You see I am clever at most things. I do not say this to boast, nor do I claim any merit for it; it results from the fact that I never sleep more than four hours a day. Therefore that leaves me fifteen hours for “study and five for enjoyment. And of these five hours of apparent leisure, not one is wasted, so far as my will and my mind is concerned. When I seem to be taking a little relaxation, I am learning a language, or training myself in some bodily exercise, or in some new feat of horsemanship or of arms. These things are always useful, you see. Therefore, to tell Julius a word is plainly to kill him. Should you yield to your inclination, I shall look upon it as a mark of your favour.”

Christiane looked him full in the face.

“So be it!” said she, “I shall mention it neither to my father nor to Monsieur Julius. I shall defend myself alone. And I am not afraid of you, and I laugh at your threats. What can avail your audacity against my honour? And since you compel me to tell you so, yes, it is true, from the first day I saw you, from the very first, I felt an unconquerable aversion for you. I felt that you had a bad heart. But it is not hatred. I do not hate you, I despise you.”

A flash of anger, quickly repressed, shot across Samuel’s face; but, in a moment, he recovered his usual composure.

“That’s right!” exclaimed he, “I call that well spoken. That is how I love to see you. You are beautiful like that. Let us express the whole matter in two words. The question lies in a nutshell. Firstly you want to rob me of Julius’ heart and mind, and you will not succeed. Secondly, you hate me, I love you, and I will have you. There it is. Ah! here comes Gretchen.”

Gretchen, in fact, drew near slowly and carefully, bringing back with difficulty her wounded roe. She seated herself on a rock, holding on her knees the poor animal, which looked at her with imploring eyes.

Samuel approached, and leaning on his gun:

“What nonsense!” said he. “She has only a broken leg.”

Gretchen, who was leaning over her pet, looked up at Samuel with eyes ablaze with anger.

“You are a monster!” she said.

“You are an angel,” said he. “You hate me also. I love you also. Do you imagine that two loves are too many for my pride? One day, at the University, I fought two students at the same time; I wounded both my adversaries, not receiving even a scratch. Farewell, my sweet foes!”

He slung his gun across his shoulder, bowed to the two young girls, and walked away in the direction of the Manse.

“Did I not tell you, Mademoiselle,” cried Gretchen, “that that man would be fatal to us?”

CHAPTER XXIII.

COMMENCEMENT OF HOSTILITIES.

MEANWHILE Julius had written lengthily to his father.

After sealing the letter, he dressed and went out into the garden. There he found the pastor. Julius went up to him and pressed his hands warmly and respectfully.

“You have not, then, gone shooting, with your friend?” asked the pastor.

“No,” Julius replied, “I had to write,” and he added:

“A letter, on which the happiness of my life depends.”

He drew the letter from his pocket.

“In it, I ask my father a question, the answer to which I shall await with impatience. To get it an hour earlier, I would give I know not what. Go for it myself? I entertained the idea for a moment, but have not the courage to do so. Can I not find at Landeck some postillion, some special messenger who could ride off at once, take this letter to Frankfort, and bring me back an immediate answer at Heidelberg? I would pay him whatever he asked.”

“That is easily done,” said the pastor. “The post-boy’s son lives at Landeck. He is known to the post-masters all along the line, because of having sometimes replaced his father, and will be delighted to earn a few florins.”

“Oh! then, here is the letter.”

Herr Schreiber took the letter, summoned his servant lad, and sent him to the boy at the post-house with instructions that he should find himself in the saddle at the Manse within three-quarters of an hour.

“That is exactly the time it takes to go from here to Landeck and back,” said he to Julius. “You will give him the letter yourself, that it may not go astray between this and then.”

Then, glancing mechanically at the address:

“To the Baron von Hermelinfeld?” said he in a voice of deep and glad surprise. “Is that the name of your father, Herr Julius?”

“Yes,” Julius answered.

“You are the son of Baron von Hermelinfeld! A poor country parson like myself has the honour of receiving into his house the son of that illustrious man, whose name is famous throughout Germany! I was glad to welcome you here, now I am proud to do so. And you did not give your name?”

“And I must beg of you not to mention my name before Mademoiselle Christiane or before Samuel,” said Julius “We had agreed, Samuel and I, not to disclose our identity, and I do not wish to seem like a child who cannot keep a promise for twenty-four hours together.”

“Set your mind at rest,” said the kind pastor, “I will be as secret as yourself. But I am so delighted to know you. The son of Baron von Hermelinfeld! If you knew how I admire your father! Often have I spoken of him to my intimate friend, Pastor Ottfried, who was a fellow-student of his.”

The conversation was interrupted by the return of Samuel.

“Well! have you had a successful morning? “Julius asked.

“Delightful! I have not killed anything, for all that,” added he, with a laugh; “but I have found lairs and discovered trails.”

Christiane returned almost at the same moment.

On the previous evening the young men had announced their intention of leaving immediately after breakfast.

They therefore sat down to the morning meal, the pastor glad of the news he had heard, Julius dreamy, Christiane serious, Samuel in very high spirits.

Breakfast over, the pastor turned to Julius with a cordial and entreating look: “Come now,” said he, “is it absolutely necessary for you to return to Heidelberg so soon? Since you are in such a hurry to have a reply to your letter, why do you not wait here for it, you would have it two hours sooner?”

“As regards myself,” said Samuel, “it is quite impossible for me to remain. Of course, it is very delightful to while away my time in the enjoyment of your hospitality, in shooting and living out-of-doors; but I have to study, especially now. I am engaged in an experiment which demands my immediate attention.”

“But Monsieur Julius?”

“Oh! Julius can do as he likes. But, let him remember that he too has engagements yonder.”

Christiane, who so far had said nothing, looked steadily at Samuel and said: “Are these engagements of such a nature as to absolutely prevent

Monsieur Julius from sparing us this one day?”

“That’s right! add your entreaties to mine, my child,” said the pastor joyously.

“Ah! is this the beginning of hostilities?” said Samuel, laughing likewise, but bending on Christiane a look which held its meaning for her. “The contest is really not equal. However, I refuse to yield, and if Mademoiselle will permit me to speak to Julius apart, I can then remind him of his engagements at Heidelberg “Oh! certainly,” said Christiane with disdain.

Samuel drew Julius aside.

“Have you confidence in me?” said he, in a low tone, “and have you ever regretted following my advice in the ruling of your life? Well! believe me. Do not be weak. The little one takes the bait. But take care, it is best not to appear too eager. Come away with me and let solitude and loneliness do its work. Absence will prove your best ally. Another thing: remember that on Saturday, or rather Sunday, at one o’clock in the morning, there is the General Assembly of the Tugendbund, and do not risk being lulled to sleep in the delights of Capua. Are you a man who loves his country, or a child like Lothario, tied to a woman’s apron-strings? Now, do as you like, you are free.”

Julius returned to the table in deep thought.

“Well!” said the pastor.

“Well! “Julius answered, “I must confess that he has given me sufficiently good reasons.”

The pastor’s face fell, and Samuel turned to Christiane with a triumphant air.

“Do not yet despair, father,” said Christiane, laughing and trembling. “It is now my turn to say a few words aside to Monsieur Julius. That is fair, is it not?”

“Quite so!” exclaimed the kind old pastor, who had no suspicion of the drama which was being enacted beneath this comedy.

Christiane lead Julius apart.

“Listen, I have only a word to say to you, and should that word not prevail against the advice of your Monsieur Samuel, very well; I shall at least gain a salutary experience. Yesterday, in the ruins of Eberbach, you asked me a question which I could not then answer. If you remain, I will give you your answer.”

“Oh! I will stay!” cried Julius.

"Bravo! Christiane," said the pastor.

"I thought as much," said Samuel coldly. "When will you return?"

"To-morrow, I suppose," said Julius. '"At latest, the day after. I will have the answer from my father to-morrow, shall I not, Monsieur Schreiber?"

"Yes, to-morrow," replied the pastor. "And you," he said to Samuel, "can we not over-persuade you? Will not the example of your friend induce you to change your mind?"

"Oh! I," Samuel rejoined, "once I have made a decision, I never swerve from it."

Christiane did not appear to notice the menacing tone in which Samuel had pronounced these words. And in the most natural manner possible, she said: "Ah! there are the horses."

And sure enough, the horses or Julius and, Samuel were at the gate ready saddled.

"Lead Monsieur Julius' horse back to the stable," she said to the boy, who stood at the horses' heads.

Samuel sprang into the saddle.

"Well," the pastor said to him, "you have no studies on Sunday. We shall expect you with Monsieur Julius."

"Till Sunday, then," said Samuel. "I shall expect to see you to-morrow, Julius; don't forget Saturday."

And, with a bow to Christiane and her father, he set spurs to his horse and galloped off.

Behind him came the messenger, to whom the pastor gave Julius' letter.

"A hundred florins for you if you are back here to-morrow before mid-day," Julius said to him; "there are twenty-five in advance."

The messenger opened his eyes in amazement, stood stock-still with delight, then suddenly started off at full gallop.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TUGENDBUND.

ON the Tuesday evening, Julius had not yet returned to Heidelberg.

Samuel smiled to himself. He had expected this. Wednesday and Thursday came and went, and yet Julius did not appear. Samuel, absorbed in his feverish love of work, did not notice it. But, on the Friday, when enjoying an hour's rest, he began to get rather anxious. What did this prolonged absence portend? He took up his pen and wrote to Julius: —

"MY DEAR FRIEND, "Hercules has had the right, up to the present, to spin at the feet of Ompnale. But I hope he has not forgotten the work that awaits him to-morrow. Unless Omphale be not Circe, and has not changed him from a man into a beast, he will remember the duty that calls him. A mother comes before a mistress, duty before love. For fatherland and freedom!"

"I am certain now that he will come," Samuel said to himself.

He thought no more of Julius throughout the whole of Saturday. The General Assembly of the Tugendbund was fixed only for midnight.

During the day he sent to enquire after the two wounded men. Franz Ritter and Otto Dormagen were in bed, and, so the doctor said, would be unable to rise for another fortnight. The commands of the Guild had been obeyed. Samuel and Julius could present themselves proudly to their chiefs.

At dusk, Samuel went for his accustomed walk along the road leading to Neckarsteinach, by which Julius should come. At a point where the road branched off, he saw someone coming towards him whom he thought he recognized; but no Julius. He went back to the hotel.

"Is Julius upstairs?" he asked the landlord.

"No, Monsieur Samuel," the man answered.

Samuel went up to his room, and locked himself in, vexed and angry.

"The little one has more influence than I imagined," so ran his thoughts.

I will make her pay for this. The Bible says, "Love strong as death." We shall have to see whether it is."

Nine o'clock, ten o'clock, half-past ten struck. Not a sign of Julius.

At eleven o’clock, Samuel, having given up all hope, prepared to set out alone.

He had taken his cap and was leaving the room, when a hasty step sounded in the corridor. Almost immediately someone knocked.

“Ah! at last!” said Samuel, “that’s lucky! “He opened the door. But it was not Julius, it was one of the servants.

“What is it?” said Samuel sharply.

“A student from Leipsic, on tour, asks to see the King of the students.”

“I have not time now,” replied Samuel. “Let him call to-morrow.”

“He is unable to do so. He requested me to tell you that he was on a journey.”

At the word “journey,” Samuel’s face resumed its usual gravity.

“Ask him to come in,” he at once said. The servant left the room, the so-called student from Leipsic entered, and Samuel carefully closed the door.

The newcomer grasped Samuel’s hands, crossing the thumbs in a particular way, said a few words in a low voice, finally bared his breast and showed him a medal.

“That is all well!” said Samuel. “Besides, I recognise you. You are the Traveller of the Neckar. What have you come to tell me?”

“I bring a counter-order. The General Assembly will not take place to-night.”

“Indeed!” said Samuel. “And what is the reason?”

“Because information has been lodged against it, and it would have been surrounded and surprised. Fortunately, one of the high dignitaries had been warned of it in time. The meeting is postponed. There will be a fresh summons.”

“At what hour was the information received?” asked Samuel.

“At mid-day.”

“That’s strange, then,” commented the suspicious King of the students. “I met someone at dusk, going towards a certain side of the castle, half hidden in his cloak and with his hat drawn over his eyes, but who, if I mistake not, should be one of our chiefs. What does it mean?”

“I know not, brother; I have fulfilled my duty towards you, and now have only to withdraw.”

“But,” persisted Samuel, “if, disregarding the warning, I went to the ‘rendezvous’?”

"I advise you not to do so; you would find guards in ambush, the police is evidently in possession of the road, and you would stand a good chance of spending twenty years of your life in a State prison."

Samuel smiled haughtily.

"Very well," said he, "thanks, brother."

And he accompanied the traveller to the door.

The man went away, Samuel consulted his watch; it was half-past eleven o'clock.

"I have time," said he to himself.

He put on his cap, took his heavy stick and two pistols, and went out.

As on the first occasion, he made his way direct to the quay, but he ascended the banks of the Neckar very much farther up, and instead of climbing at once the steep ascent, he rounded the castle in order to reach it in the direction opposite to the town.

When he had walked four or five hundred paces beyond the black mass formed by the mountain and the ruin, he stopped, peered into the darkness to discover if anyone was prowling round, saw not a living soul, and retraced his steps straight for the great foundation wall, formerly rising sheer to a great height, now half demolished.

"It was at this corner," he said to himself as he walked along, "that, a little while ago, I met my man. Now, the road he took has no outlet, and ends in a blank wall. Our most illustrious and most mysterious directors must therefore have discovered, like myself, the cave hidden in the undergrowth. As to the police, needless to say that, in accordance with its praiseworthy custom, it remains on that point supremely ignorant, and contents itself with closely guarding the public door through which no one will go in or go out. Splendid institution, equally great among all civilized nations!"

Samuel had reached the foot of the high wall, which was entirely covered with bushes, creepers and ivy. He went to a spot where the vegetation grew thickest, pushed aside, not without wounding his hands, the brambles and ivy, moved away an enormous stone, and after replacing it, descended, or rather tumbled into a kind of cave and soon found himself in the old vaults of this portion of the castle.

But the chiefs of the Tugendbund, granting that Samuel was right in believing them to be there, were not easy to find in the mysterious depths of these immense catacombs. For a long time Samuel walked at random, bruising himself in the darkness against fallen stones, and mistaking for human voices the screams of the night birds, which he had disturbed and which repeatedly struck him sharply in the face with their cramped wings.

“Another would get frightened or tired out, I do believe! “Samuel said to himself.

At last, after groping and stumbling about for half an hour, he caught sight of a feeble glimmer, like that thrown by a muffled lantern.

He walked in that direction, and, his eyes being accustomed to the darkness, he soon perceived, seated in a deep embrasure, three masked men.

When sufficiently near to them, he stopped, held his breath and. listened, but in vain; he could hear nothing.

Yet, from the gestures of the three men, it was evident that they were speaking together in low tones.

Samuel approached nearer, stopped a second time, and again listened.

Still he heard nothing.

Suddenly he decided on his course of action.

“It is I!” he cried boldly, “one of you, Samuel Gelb!”

And he advanced towards the three masked men.

At these words, as if moved by one impulse, the three men started up from the blocks of stone on which they sat, and caught hold of pistols which lay beside them ready primed. But where to aim in the dark? Samuel, who saw them, already held a loaded pistol in each hand.

“Ho! there!” he said quietly, “are we going to make a noise and attract the police? Is that your manner of greeting friends? Because I am a friend, I tell you! Samuel Gelb.. But let me warn you that I shall defend myself and that, before I die, I shall kill at least one of you. Besides, what will you gain by killing me!”

And as he spoke, he continued to advance. The three masked men yielded, despite themselves, to the influence of his strange, daring recklessness.

The muzzles of the pistols were lowered.

“That’s right!” said Samuel.

He uncocked his pistols, replaced them in his pocket, and drew quite near to the three masked figures.

“Unhappy man!” said one of the chiefs, who, by his voice, Samuel recognised as being the one who, on his previous appearance before the conclave, had addressed him in such solemn words, and with such impressive severity, “how have you penetrated hither? Did you not receive the warning? Speak in a low voice, at least.”

“I shall speak as low as you please. And, never fear! no one has followed me, and the entrance, which is known to myself alone, I have carefully closed. The notice reached me; but for the very reason that there was no general meeting up yonder, a chance encounter led me to suppose that there would be one down here, perhaps a special meeting in this very cave which I discovered probably long before you. And as you see, my deductions were not far wrong.”

“Do you then presume to thrust yourself into the deliberations of the supreme council?”

“I do not presume to thrust myself into anything whatever. Set your minds at rest, I do not come to obtrude myself, but to offer my services.”

“How so?”

“It is very certain that the affairs of the Guild are a little disorganised, and that you must be somewhat in difficulties. Well! is it not my right, is it not my duty to redouble in zeal when difficulties accumulate, and to come here and place myself at your disposal?”

“Is this indeed the motive which prompted you to this hazardous proceeding?”

“What other motive could I have? Do you doubt my zeal? You have already tested me, and it appears to me that I have not proved entirely undeserving of your confidence.”

The three consulted together for a moment.

Evidently the consultation was favourable to Samuel, for the chief said to him:

“Samuel Gelb, you are a bold comrade. We believe you to be loyal; we know you to be intelligent and brave. It is true that you have rendered a very real service to the Guild; you have valiantly wielded our sword in your duel with traitors, and we regretted being unable to tender you our thanks to-day. Now you have so boldly forced your way to us, we are going to testify our gratitude in some better way than by mere words. We have decided to give you an unprecedented proof of confidence. We will acquaint you with the matter now under discussion, and that appoints you by right an associate of the second degree.”

“Thank you,” said Samuel, bowing low; “but I swear before God that you will never repent the honour you now do me.”

“Well, listen; this is what has happened: One of us, who occupies a very high position in public affairs, has found himself under the necessity of having a watch set upon us to-night. The wounds inflicted on Otto Dormagen and Franz Ritter are largely responsible for this mischance. When it was known that they could not be present at our meeting, it was probably deemed wise to stamp out what could not be supervised, and it was resolved to come to an open rupture with us. Dormagen and Ritter have betrayed the pass-words, and the secrets of the formalities for admission. He among us who had received the order to trap us, could not disobey without betraying his complicity, and without denouncing himself; he was therefore compelled to set the police on our track. But he has had time to warn us. The police guard the passages along which all the adepts were to come; they have the pass-word, and are waiting. They will wait until to-morrow morning; but no one will appear; they will go back as they came, and we have escaped this danger.”

“Well!” said Samuel, “it only means that the General Assembly is adjourned, that’s all.”

“That is no great inconvenience; as a matter of fact,” rejoined the chief, “we have no immediate plans in contemplation. At the present time our great enemy, the Emperor Napoleon, is at the zenith of his fame and glory. Our kings and our princes throng his ante-chambers, and their ambition is limited to procuring for themselves an invitation to his hunting parties. Nothing to be done just now for the independence of Germany. But changes may come about. He who has risen may fall. And once a man is on the decline, an unexpected push is sometimes enough to send him to the bottom.”

“I heartily hope so,” said Samuel, “and should such an occasion present itself, Samuel Gelb will be able to be of still further use to you. But until then, what are your wishes?”

“Until then it is imperative that the Tugendbund hold itself ready for all eventualities, and that its chiefs have some place in which to communicate with the principal adepts. These ruins are no longer safe for us to use. The subterranean vault in which we are at present has but one outlet and we would all be captured, up to the last man. Where will the general meetings take place henceforth? That is the question we were debating when you interrupted us, a question perhaps of life or death. We know of no place that appears to us secure enough.”

"It is not, truly, an easy question to solve," said Samuel Gelb.

"Might you by any chance know of a secret place?" resumed the chief. "Have you any knowledge of some impenetrable retreat, rendered secure by numerous outlets, at once closed from espionage and open to flight? If you know of one, you will have rendered to the Guild a fresh service, infinitely superior, indeed, to the first."

Samuel reflected a moment and said: "You take me unawares. For the moment, I know of none, but I will look out for one, which, with me, means: I shall find one. When I have succeeded, how am I to, inform you of it? Assign me a 'rendezvous.'"

"That is impossible. But listen: on the 15th of each month, the traveller of the river on whose banks you reside, will go to you with the question: 'Are you ready? 'On the day on which you are, we will see you again."

"Agreed. Thanks, you may rely upon me. Now, having found if not the place, at least the man who will find it for you, you may separate."

"We have no heed to bind you to secrecy. This is a matter where your head, as well as our own, is at stake.

Samuel shrugged his shoulders.

Then, at a sign from the chief, he bowed and turned away.

He found his way back more easily than he had come. The moon, shining through the undergrowth, enabled him to dimly discern the egress.

He returned, glad and proud of the step he had gained, his mind full of lofty ambition; and it was only on re-entering his room that his thoughts reverted to Julius.

"Upon my word!" he said to himself,." what the devil is Julius doing? Has this little Christiane really robbed me of this being whom I believed so absolutely my own? Has he too received information at Landeck that the meeting is postponed? And what has he done all the week? However! no use worrying about it. To-morrow is Sunday, I shall know to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXV.

VICTORY BY STRATAGEM.

WHEN Samuel arrived at the parsonage, at the same hour as on the preceding Sunday, he found the entrance closed. He rang the bell. The little stable boy and the servant appeared.

The lad took charge of his horse, and the servant conducted him to the dining-room.

The table was set, but only for two.

Samuel began to wonder.

The servant had left the room, asking him to wait.

A moment later, the door opened. Samuel advanced; then, on seeing the person who entered, he stepped back in amazement.

It was Baron von Hermelinfeld.

The father of Julius was a man of stern, imposing appearance. Of fifty years or thereabouts, tall, with hair grown white through study, a high forehead, keen, deep-set eyes, a proud, manly bearing, a grave, calm, rather sad look.

He came towards Samuel, who seemed thoroughly taken aback.

“You did not expect to see me again, especially here, did you, sir?” said he to Samuel.

“Frankly, I did not,” he replied.

“Sit down. Kind pastor Schreiber had invited you here to-day. He was loth that you should find the house shut. I remained to welcome you.”

“Pardon me! I fail to understand,” said Samuel.

“Yes, I daresay my words appear to you enigmatical, do they not?” rejoined Baron von Hermelinfeld.

“If you are curious to solve the riddle, sit down to breakfast with me; I will acquaint you with the facts.”

“Certainly,” said Samuel, inclining his head.

And putting a bold face on the turn of affairs, he sat down to table opposite to the baron.

There was a pause during which these two men, so closely connected yet so widely opposed, studied each other.

The baron began at last:

“This is what has happened. Help yourself, I pray. You may perhaps be aware that on Monday morning Julius wrote to me. I received his letter at Frankfort. It was a letter full of anxiety and love.”

“I surmised as much,” said Samuel.

“Julius related to me how he had seen Christiane, and all that she had become to him almost from the first — she, his one love, his life, his dream. He spoke of her grace, of her innocence, of her father, and of the peaceful life he might lead in this quiet family and in this quiet valley.

“Now this is what he had to ask me. Rich, noble, celebrated as I was, would I ever sanction his love for a girl, poor, humble and obscure? You had made him doubt it.”

“That’s true,” said Samuel.

“Julius added, however, that in the event of my refusing, because of her position, he would not do what you suggested; never would he seduce Christiane; he loathed the advice and the adviser.

“No, he would not abuse the generous confidence reposed in him by the daughter and the father, he would not dishonour Christiane, he would not purchase a moment’s happiness for himself at the cost of a lifetime of tears for her; he would tear himself away from her dear presence. He would tell Christiane his name, and the decision of his father, and then leave her for ever,”

“All that is really very fine,” said Samuel. “May I trouble you for a little ham, sir?”

“When I received this letter from Julius, breathing such affection and filial devotion,” continued Baron von Hermelinfeld, “I had for four days been reflecting over your bold, blasphemous epistle, for four days I had been debating with myself how in the world I should be able to break the fatal influence which you had usurped over the sensitive, impressionable mind of Julius. And, ten minutes after the receipt of Julius’ letter, I had decided what course to pursue.

“We men of an intellectual and scientific turn of mind are usually supposed to be incapable of taking prompt action, for the sole reason that we do not give up our whole existence to the fruitless excitement of those busy men, who, to convince themselves that they are practical, advance the theory that they are nothing if not that. One might as well accuse birds of not knowing how to walk, because they have wings. At one flutter of their wings they cover a hundred yards. We do more in one day than those others in ten years.”

“You tell me nothing new, sir,” said Samuel; “that has always been my opinion.”

“The messenger waited for an answer,” resumed the baron, “and was due at Landeck the next day at noon. I told him that there was no answer, and expressed a desire that he should not return before the following evening.

“He refused. Julius had promised him a hundred florins.

“I offered him two hundred. He consented.

“That done, without losing a moment, I went to see Pastor Ottfried, one of the luminaries of the reformed church, and a companion of my boyhood.

“I asked him if he knew Pastor Schreiber.

“He was one of his intimate friends.

“Ottfried described him as simple, modest, disinterested, a heart of gold, his thoughts for ever raised to heaven, seeking there his God, and the spirits of two loved ones gone before, his one aim on earth to relieve the unhappiness of others.

“As to Christiane, Ottfried described her in one word; she was a worthy daughter of the pastor.

“On returning I passed through the Zeile; I ordered post-horses, and, that very night, started for Landeck.

“I arrived there on the Tuesday morning. I put up my carriage at Neckarsteinach; went into nearly every house at Landeck, pursuing my enquiries with regard to Herr Schreiber and his daughter.

“Everyone, without exception, corroborated what Ottfried had told me. Never did a more unanimous chorus of heartfelt benediction ascend from earth, imploring God’s blessing on human creatures. The pastor and his daughter were to the honest folk a visible Providence. They were more than the life of this village: they were its soul.

“Ah! whatever you may say, Samuel, virtue brings its own reward. It is glorious to be loved.”

“It is also sometimes profitable,” said Samuel.

“I retraced my steps and entered the Manse.

“In this room where we now sit, I found Julius, Christiane and the pastor.

“Julius, in utter amazement, exclaimed, « My father!’

"'Baron von Hermelinfeld! 'ejaculated the pastor, no less astonished.

"'Yes, sir, I am Baron von Hermelinfeld, and have the honour of asking the hand of your daughter Christiane in marriage with my son Julius.'

"Herr Schreiber was petrified, believing that he had not heard aright, that he was dreaming or had lost his senses.

"Christiane burst into tears and threw herself into his arms. Without knowing why, he too began to weep and then to smile."

Samuel interrupted the baron.

"It's an affecting scene," said he, "but pass it over. As you know, I am not of a sentimental turn of mind."

Samuel had long since recovered from his surprise. On seeing the baron and hearing his first words, the young man had realised that there was some conspiracy against his influence, and, strife being his natural element, he soon summoned his forces together. Recovering his usual haughty and ironical composure, he listened to what the baron had to say, eating and drinking the while, losing neither a point nor a mouthful, with the most perfectly self-possessed air imaginable.

Baron von Hermelinfeld resumed: "To be brief. Besides, I am at the end of my story.

"I spent the whole of that day with the happy lovers. Poor children! their, happiness repaid me more than enough. They were so grateful, as if the right to undo what God had so well done, had ever lain with me. You know me very little, Samuel, and have formed too low an estimate of my character. I admit that, at times, you have seen me yield to the petty and iniquitous exigencies of the world; but remember this, whilst appearing to submit to them, I waited for an opportunity to make amends. But, let me be frank, let us be just: does not nature seem but too often to decide in favour of society?"

"I understand the delicate allusion, sir," said Samuel bitterly. "Continue." The baron resumed: "Why should I have opposed this marriage? Because Christiane is not rich? Julius is rich enough for both. He will have more money than he will know what to do with, when he inherits my brother's fortune. Because Christiane is not highly connected? Was I, twenty years ago?

"But to come to the point. On Wednesday, I returned to Frankfort; Thursday, I was back at Landeck, furnished with both civil and religious licences, and accompanied by my friend Ottfried.

Yesterday morning, Saturday, Julius and Christiane were married by Ottfried at the church of Landeck. You must forgive Julius for not having invited you to his wedding. I was the cause of his not writing.

“An hour after the marriage, Julius and Christiane started on a year’s journey. They are going to visit Greece and the East, and will return through Italy.

“Herr Schreiber, could not make up his mind to be separated so suddenly from his daughter. He accompanies “them with Lothario as far as Vienna by easy stages. There he will part from them and return to his valley home, leaving them to sunshine and love. Well! what do you say to it all, Samuel?”

“I say,” said Samuel, rising from the table, “that you have most cleverly juggled me out of Julius. The kidnapping has succeeded. I had strained your generosity and disinterestedness to the utmost; you have made the best of a desperate position. It is a bold stroke, and I confess that I have lost the first rubber. But I shall have my revenge.”

He summoned the servant.

“Order my horse round,” said he, “I am leaving at once.”

The baron smiled.

“Are you going in pursuit of them?”

“Good Heavens!” said Samuel; “I shall wait for them. Thank God, I have something else to do, and I have no intention of giving up my whole life to the sole and petty aim of winning a kind of wager. But everything comes to him who can wait. You and Christiane have scored against me this time; my turn will come. You have finished; I begin.”

“I have not finished,” retorted the baron. “During the year that they will be absent, I intend to realise one of Julius’ dreams. I have not remained here for the sole purpose of keeping you company. At a push, a letter posted in time to reach you this morning, when about to set out, would have spared you the inconvenience of coming such a distance to find only servants in the house. I am expecting an architect from Frankfort. I want to buy, and rebuild within the year, the castle of Eberbach. Thus Julius, instead of the ruins he has left, will find his wish realised and the castle of his dreams firmly established on the mountain. For I desire that he should lack for nothing, either in himself, or in his surroundings, and that the love in his heart be completed by the harmony in his life. My weapon against you will be his happiness.”

"Which means that mine will be his misery," replied Samuel. "But I warn you, tender father, though you may do your utmost, you will not rob me of Julius. He admires me, and I love him. Yes, damn it all!" he continued, replying to a gesture of the baron's, "I love him as strong, proud souls know how to love the weak, sensitive souls which belong to them. Too long have I stamped my impress on the mind of your son for you to succeed in effacing it now. You will not change his nature, nor mine. You will not make him energetic, nor me scrupulous. You will rebuild him a castle, will you rebuild him a character? His wavering instincts have need of a firm, harsh hand to uphold and to guide them. Is it a child like Christiane who will be able to do this for him? Before a year is over he will regret me. Run after him? Why should I! It is he who will seek me out."

"Listen, Samuel," said the baron; "you know me to be a man willing at all times to take up a challenge, or enter into contest. Let me tell you one thing: that which Christiane could not tell Julius, she could tell his father, and she has confided in me. Yes, she revealed to me your astounding threats, and, necessarily, I shall act as her second against you."

"Very well! so much the better!" said Samuel; "that will make it all the more comfortable for me."

"No, Samuel, you are unjust to yourself, surely you must be!" rejoined the baron. "You are not so insensible to remorse or, if you prefer it, to appearances. I am determined to leave no stone unturned to bring about a reconciliation between us. Samuel, is it peace? I, too, have perhaps wronged you. I will tear up your letter, and forget your words. You are ambitious and proud; well! I am rich enough and powerful enough to help you without prejudice to Julius. I have, as you know, an elder brother in New York, who has made a fortune in business three or four times larger and more imposing than mine. He has no children, and all he possesses will belong to Julius. His will is made in advance, and I hold a copy of it. I may therefore dispose without scruple of what I have acquired by my own efforts. Samuel, swear to renounce your odious designs and tell me what you want."

"A mess of pottage?" sneered Samuel. "But you choose an inopportune moment at which to bargain with me after Herr Schreiber's copious breakfast. I am no longer hungry, and I maintain my birthright."

The clatter of hoofs was heard beneath the windows of the dining-room, and the servant came to inform Samuel that his horse was at the door.

“Farewell, sir,” said Samuel. “I prefer my freedom to your wealth. Never will I allow a millstone to be tied round my neck, were the millstone of gold. Know that I am one of those ambitious spirits who live willingly on dry bread, — one of those proud souls who wear without shame a shabby coat.”

“One word more,” said the baron. “Observe how, up to the present, your evil designs have turned against you.

The chief reason that induced me to give Julius to Christiane was the letter in which you threatened to take him from me. It is you who have brought about this marriage between these two children; it is your hate which has made their love; your threat which has effected their happiness.”

“Very well, then, you should hope for a continuance of my hatred and my threats, since everything I do against them is likely to prove well for them. Your wish will be consummated. Ah! my hatred brings them success! In that case, you may rely on my working for their prosperity. I shall give you so much proof of affection, rest assured! That will be my way of being your son. Not farewell, sir. In a year, perhaps before a year has passed, we shall meet again.”

And, bowing to the baron, Samuel went out, with a proud look and threatening air.

Baron von Hermelinfeld let his head fall on his breast.

“Ungodly strife,” said he. “He is at war with the world; but am I at peace with the world? And, in Thine impenetrable designs, my God! shall we not be a scourge to each other?”

CHAPTER XXVI.

A SURPRISE.

THIRTEEN months after the events already related, on the 16th July, 1811, at about half-past ten o’clock in the morning, a post-chaise drove away from the Manse at Landeck, and rolled along the same road where the previous year Julius and Samuel had met Gretchen.

Four persons were in the carriage, or rather, five, if we include a tiny pink and white infant, scarcely two months old, who lay asleep in the arms of his nurse, a handsome, healthy-looking peasant, attired in the striking costume worn by Greek women.

The three other travellers were a very young woman in deep mourning, a young man, and a maid.

Seated at the back of the carriage was a valet.

The young woman was Christiane; the young man, Julius; the infant, their child.

It was for her father that Christiane still wore mourning. Herr Schreiber had been dead already ten months. Through going up into the mountain one stormy night, to administer the last consolations of religion to a dying man, the worthy pastor had contracted the germs of that disease which rapidly brought him to the grave. As Christiane needed him no longer, he thanked God for permitting him to rejoin his wife and his other daughter. Slowly, almost gladly, he faded away. Baron von Hermelinfeld sent for Lothario and to the care of Pastor Ottfried he entrusted the grandson of Pastor Schreiber, This sad news passed like a black cloud across the dawn of Christiane’s happiness. She received the intelligence of her father’s death and of his illness at the same moment; it was therefore impossible for her to return and embrace him for the last time. Besides she was already likely to become a mother, and under the circumstances Julius was averse to her travelling any considerable distance. Through excess of precaution, he even refused to continue their journey, and stopped with his beloved in one of the flower-laden Isles of the Archipelago.

The first keen edge of their sorrow gradually wore off. Having now no one in the world but Julius, Christiane lavished all her love upon him, and grief at the loss of her father was by degrees soothed, in the expectation of her child. The mother consoled the daughter.

Thus Julius and Christiane spent the happiest months of their lives, amid all the enchantments which the Orient of the world can add to the Orient of love, their souls steeped in the soft sea-breezes, their pure hearts reflected in the azure of the skies of Greece, their one request of heaven, that this glorious present might last for ever.

Then Christiane became the mother of the little boy whom we have seen asleep in the post-chaise. The doctor advised that, in order to rear the child, it would be wise to return to a temperate climate before the hot weather set in. Julius and Christiane decided therefore to return at once. Landing at Trieste, they travelled by easy stages *via* Linz and Wiirzburg.

But before returning to Frankfort, they wished to pass through Landeck. Naturally, they went first to the cemetery.; Christiane prayed and wept at her father’s grave. Then she insisted on revisiting the parsonage, which she found occupied by the pastor who replaced Herr Schreiber. This house, where she had lived since childhood and which was now in the possession of strangers, where her memories of the past faded away in the presence of those unknown to her, which held so large a portion of her heart, of her life, of her dreams, and which now belonged to others, this house was painful to her. She suffered more bitterly there than in the churchyard. Her father seemed more dead at the presbytery than at the grave.

Julius hurried her away as quickly as possible.

Thirteen months of married life did not appear to have diminished Julius’ love for Christiane. The look he bent upon her was full, if not of the vehement passion of ardent temperaments, at least of all the chivalrous tenderness of loving natures. The husband was still the lover. He tried to distract his dear one from the painful memories aroused by the sight of her old home, by drawing her attention to the valley they were driving through, and which recalled so many happy moments to them both.

Then, he showed her their little child who had just awoke and was gazing at its mother with half-opened and vaguely astonished eyes. He took him from his nurse’s arms, and raised the helpless child to Christiane’s lips.

“See how free from jealousy I am!” said he. “I myself make you kiss my rival. Because henceforth I have a rival. Two months ago, I was the only one you loved; now there are two of us. You have divided your heart into two parts, and I am not at all sure that he who has the largest share, is not the baby boy.”

And, even as he spoke, he himself kissed the child, laughed with him, and made him laugh.

Christiane, grateful for the efforts Julius made to comfort her, tried to smile too.

“But,” Julius asked by way of making her talk, “ought we not soon to be at the ruins of Eberbach?”

“Yes, presently,” she replied.

Herr Schreiber’s successor, during the short conversation they had held together, had said that of course they were going to the Castle of Eberbach. On their answering in the negative, he had asked when they intended going there.

“What for? “Julius had said.

At this question the pastor had seemed surprised, but could not be induced to say anything further, and simply advised them to pass by the ruins. Without understanding what he meant, Julius had seen in this a possible means of rousing Christiane from her sad thoughts, and had told the postillion to drive round by the Mouth of Hell.

Suddenly, as the carriage turned a sharp bend in the road, an exclamation broke from Julius.

“What is the matter?” said Christiane.

“Look up there,” said he. “Can I be mistaken? I fancied that the ruins of Eberbach stood there.”

“Well?” said she, rousing herself at last from her abstraction.

“Well! do you remember a dream of mine that I told you about among these ruins?”

“You spoke of rebuilding the castle.”

“There is our dream realised.”

“How strange!” replied Christiane, as surprised as her husband.

In fact, in the place where they had left three tottering, crumbling, half-ruined walls, now stood a newly-built castle, complete and perfect, proudly set upon the rock, rising boldly between the precipice and the sky.

The castle which they now beheld was a square keep, flanked at each of the four corners by a round turret. One was entirely visible to them, as also the pointed roofs of the others. But the trees, already in leaf, hid from them the details.

“If you do not mind, Christiane,” said Julius, “I feel curious to know who is the magician whose whim it has been to realize our dream.”

“Let us enquire,” said Christiane.

The chaise had arrived at the main entrance, an opening in the outer wall like a large breach, and through which the eye lighted on a winding avenue leading to the castle. Julius ordered the postillion to stop. The valet sprang to the ground and rang the bell.

On either side of the entrance were two small lodges, in the style of the Renaissance. A man came out of the lodge on the right and opened the gates.

“To whom does this castle belong?” asked Julius.

“To the Viscount von Eberbach.”

“Is he here?”

“No,” said the lodge-keeper, “he is travelling abroad.”

“May we go over the castle?”

“I will enquire, sir.”

Whilst the porter walked towards the castle-keep, Julius cast an eager, jealous eye over this noble dwelling, which had sprung so rapidly from the ground. The sloping avenue was formed out of a portion of the old forest, the architect having cut a clearing in such a manner as to leave a wide lawn between two double rows of large trees. The sward, inundated by high grasses, was like a sea of verdure with islets of flowers.

At the end of this grassy path gleamed the façade of the castle. There was probably another frontage commanding the Mouth of Hell, stern no doubt, proud and forbidding as the abyss over which it towered perpendicularly. But this aspect was peaceful and smiling. A mixture of red sandstone gave a cheerful appearance to the edifice, and took from it the bare, chalky look which results from the whiteness of new stones. Carvings of light foliage, full of nests of birds, ran along the pointed arches of the windows. And already real live birds were beginning to build their nests in the carved work, so that, hearing little cries issuing from the friezes, one wondered from which nests they came, whether from the nests of moss or from the nests of stone. All this leafage fluttered and rustled in the passing breeze, and Julius was sure he saw one charming little sculptured goldfinch ruffle its granite plumage.

The lodge-keeper returned and asked them to enter.

Julius linked his arm in that of Christiane, and the nurse followed behind with the child. They ascended the avenue of trees, and came to a flight of steps in wrought stone, with a carved balustrade in trefoil, at the top of which opened, in an inner wall, a great arched oaken door, studded with chased nails. They passed through two or three doors or courtyards more. Then the lodge-keeper showed them into the castle.

After crossing the threshold, one seemed quickly transported from the present into the past. The middle ages were revived in the arrangement and furniture of the rooms. Each had its speciality; one was devoted to armour, another to tapestries. There was one in which stood huge chests crammed with goblets, tankards and enormous cups. Another was a perfect museum adorned with magnificent paintings by Holbein, Albert Durer and Lucas van Leyden. Daylight filtered into a chapel through the brilliant colouring of the finest glass windows of the day. What clever artist, what archaeologist-poet, what precursor-antiquary, anticipating, so early as 1811,. the great Gothic movement of 1830, had so completely restored the past ages? Julius was struck with admiration and surprise. It was the perfect restoration of four vanished centuries, from the twelfth to the sixteenth. At the end of the armoury there was a closed door. Julius asked the porter to unlock it.

“I have not the key of the private apartments,” the man replied.

But just then the door opened.

“I have it,” said a voice.

It was Baron von Hermelinfeld.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FOR WHOM THE CASTLE WAS BUILT.

THE baron held out his arms to his son and daughter and embraced them tenderly.

The first impression experienced by the baron, Julius and Christiane was one of joy, the second was one of astonishment.

How came the baron to be there, and how came the keys of the castle in his possession! The baron was no less surprised than Julius. He had not expected his son so soon. Julius, wishing to give him a surprise, had not informed him of his arrival. It was indeed some time since the baron had received news from the young couple. The last letter that Julius had written him dated as far back as Christiane's confinement.

So, after an interchange of loving greetings, a whole volley of questions was poured out. The baron thought Christiane looking sweet and fair, so effectually had Julius, with loving solicitude, sheltered her from the southern sun. But the child came in for the largest share of attention. The grandfather never wearied of kissing his grandson. He thanked Christiane for having called the child Wilhelm after him. Wilhelm was not yet christened, they had waited until their return home, in order that the baron might be his sponsor.

Then it was the turn of the travellers to question the baron.

“But how comes it, father, that you are as free here at the Viscount von Eberbach's as in your own house?”

“Bless me!” replied the baron, “the Viscount von Eberbach is an intimate friend of mine.”

“I had never heard you mention him, father, and I believed the house of Eberbach to be extinct.”

“The best proof that a Viscount von Eberbach exists, is that this is his castle, and the proof that I know him is that, if you wish, I will do the honours in his absence.”

They went into the room which the baron had opened, and, having visited the state apartments, passed into the private portion of the castle.

These rooms combined at once every modern comfort with Gothic splendour, spacious, to be cool in summer, thick-walled and well-built, to be warm in winter.

There were stoves and fireplaces everywhere, so that added to the warmth of a fire was the cheerfulness of a blaze.

The view of the surrounding country was magnificent. The windows commanded the finest and most varied landscape in the world; some overlooking the river, others the mountain. Through one of these, Christiane caught sight of Gretchen's hut. But the hut, like the ruins, was rebuilt. The wonderful architect, who, in so short a time, had reared from the ground and from the past, this enormous pile, had had no difficulty in erecting a cottage into the bargain.

"Gretchen! how I should like to see her," said Christiane.

"We have only to send for her," said Julius.

"Just now," replied the baron, "she is probably in the forest with her goats. When she returns she shall be told."

At last, there remained but two rooms to visit: the baron opened them. In one, a bed in carved oak with hangings of red damask; in the other, an inlaid bed with pink silk curtains.

Between the two rooms, a library, a study in the most severe style, overlooking the mountain, and an oratory-boudoir in exquisite taste, commanding a view of the Neckar.

Julius sighed. He could not refrain from thinking that these two rooms seemed made purposely for Christiane and himself. Alas! someone more fortunate than he had accomplished his wish and robbed him of his dream.

The baron smilingly said to Julius:

"You seem to envy the man who owns this castle."

"I do not envy him; I congratulate him."

"You think then that one could be happy here?"

"If not here, nowhere!" said Julius.

"And you feel convinced that, if you lived here with your wife and child, you would regret nothing, and wish for nothing?"

"What more could I wish for?"

"Well! my dear Julius, my sweet Christiane, be happy together. You are in your own home."

"What!" said Julius, scarce knowing what he said in his joy, "this beautiful castle ?"

"It belongs to you."

"But," Julius objected, not daring to believe in the truth of what he heard, "the Viscount von Eberbach."

"Is you! On New Year's day of the present year, His Majesty, the King of Prussia, when conferring on me the Order of Merit of the first rank, was graciously pleased to make me Graf von Eberbach, and has settled on you in succession the castle, also the surrounding meadows and woods, which likewise belong to you."

"My dear father!"

"How can we prove our gratitude?" said Christiane.

"By being happy," said the baron. "That is all I ask. But this much I deserve, for it has not been without trouble that I have compassed this reconstruction within a year. I held to giving you this surprise. The architect has proved himself a genius. I was doubtful of him at first. He submitted some Greco-Roman designs, which harmonised but ill with the old substructions dating from the days of Barbarossa. But it appears that he discovered at the library in Heidelberg the original plans of the ancient castle. Then he came across some young fellow, a learned antiquarian I believe, who has thrown himself heart and soul into this resuscitation.

"He had the knowledge, I had the money, in consequence things have succeeded wonderfully well. Even to the smallest details, to the furniture, the locks, the fire-irons, all is pure mediaeval, is it not? We shall have to congratulate this unlooked-for coadjutor on his masterpiece.

"Curiously enough I have not yet seen him. My time being fully occupied, I could only come occasionally to see how the work was progressing, and, then was unfortunate; whenever I came, invariably he had just gone. However, I am not altogether sorry, before complimenting him as he deserves, to have your opinion. Now that you are here, you will invite him, and receive him as our guest."

"But," said Christiane, "you must have ruined yourself?"

"I confess," the baron answered gaily, lowering his voice, "that I have considered your delight more than my purse, and that this folly almost drained my resources. My architects became each day increasingly eager, and, as their expenditure was reasonable from three points of view — history, art, and my love for you — I let them have their own way. Fortunately I found an auxiliary to my extravagance, and you have not only me, my children, to thank and to scold."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AGAINST WHOM THE CASTLE WAS BUILT.

“To whom else then are we indebted, father?” said Julius, “for the magic of this rapid and magnificent reconstruction?”

“To your uncle Fritz, Julius,” replied the baron. “Listen to this extract from a letter which I received from New York two months ago: —

“‘My fortune is unreservedly yours, my dear and illustrious brother. I have no other child but your son Julius. Permit me then to contribute half towards the gift you are making him. I enclose in this a cheque for five hundred thousand thalers, drawn on my bankers, Braubach, of Frankfort. Should this amount not be sufficient, draw upon me at sight, for the sum necessary, simply advising me a month in advance.

“‘I am proud and happy, Wilhelm, by sending you this practical assistance, to have it in my power to further the glory of our house. We two have fully accomplished our father’s wish! but I shall merely have brought the family wealth, you will have brought it fame.

“‘You tell me that I should rest. I am, in fact, somewhat weary. But, by this time next year, I shall have settled up my affairs and liquidated *our* fortune, which will probably amount, exclusive of what I send you, to five million francs. Will that be enough? If you reply in the affirmative, then, after this space has elapsed, I shall return home, to dear old Europe, dear old Germany. So keep a corner for me in this castle that you are having built. I should be sorry to die without seeing you and Julius again... ‘“

“Dear uncle!” said Julius. “How we will welcome him and love him!”

“So, as you see, Julius, it is thanks to him that I have been able to settle this succession upon you, and to complete the building of this castle...”

“Ah! with this princely fortune we shall be able to live like real burgraves,” Julius gaily said, “raise our own troops, arm our battlements, and, if needs be, hold our own against the enemy.”

“Do not joke!” said the baron. “There is an enemy against whom this castle has been constructed.”

“Indeed! who is this enemy?”

“Samuel Gelb.”

“Samuel Gelb? “Julius replied with a laugh.

“I repeat that I am in earnest,” rejoined the baron.

“What do you mean, father?”

“You have assured me, Julius, that here you would neither regret nor wish for anything. It was in the hope of this, my son, that I planned out this castle for you. I was desirous of making your life so full and so happy that you would not feel the need of anyone. Tell me that I have succeeded, and promise me not to see Samuel again,”

Julius made no reply, however strong his respect and affection for his father, he was inwardly humiliated and vexed at this request. Was he still a child, that the influence of another’s will upon his own was to be so greatly dreaded? Samuel was the companion of a lifetime, full of wit, of learning and of energy, whom he had longed for more than once, he admitted secretly to himself, even in all the delights of his travels. If one had treated the other badly, it was not Samuel; he had not been married without even letting his old friend know; he had not buried himself for a whole year without sending even a line to let his bosom friend know that he was alive. “You do not reply?” said the baron. “What pretext could I have, father,” Julius answered at last, “for closing my doors against the companion of my childhood, with whom, after all, I have no fault to find except that he holds theories more or less paradoxical?”

“Do not close your doors against him, Julius. But do not write to him, do not invite him. That is all I ask. Samuel is proud, he will not come unasked. He wrote me an insolent letter a year ago, and I have not heard from him since.”

“Even if I did see him,” Julius again demurred, “I am not eight years of age to let myself be led blindfold by another. Were Samuel as bad as you deem him to be, surely, I have arrived at years of discretion, and I can take the good and leave the evil.”

The baron rejoined solemnly: “Julius, you believe in my affection for you, do you not? and you do not think me a man who would be foolishly obstinate over a childish caprice. Well! Julius, I ask you, as a favour, not to see Samuel again. I beseech you to accede to my request. Rest assured that there is some grave reason for my advice, my entreaty. I can remain with you only a few days, then I shall have to return to Berlin. Do not let me go away with this anxiety. No, I do not say this from any petty spite against

Samuel, or unjustifiable mistrust of you. I have more serious reasons. Put more confidence, my son, in the experience and affection of your father. Set my mind at rest, and give me your promise not to write to Samuel. Christiane, do you not wish him to promise me this?"

Christiane, who had turned pale and trembled at the words of the baron, drew near to Julius coaxingly, placed her two hands on his shoulder, and looking up into his face beseechingly and tenderly.

"Oh!" said she, "for myself, so long as I have my Wilhelm, and so long as Julius loves me, this beautiful home is enough for me without anyone else. And you, Julius, besides me, you have your father!"

"Upon my word! Christiane, do you also wish it?" said Julius. "So be it, then, since such is your desire; I shall not write to Samuel."

"Thank you!" said Christiane.

"Thank you!" said the baron. "Now it only remains for you to take possession of your new home."

The afternoon passed in settling into the castle, and making plans for the future.

Lothario, for whom Christiane had, with true motherly instinct, at once enquired, could not, just then, have his studies interrupted, as Pastor Ottfried had arranged that he should pursue them with his own grandchildren; but, within a month, he would come to the castle to spend his holidays with his sister Christiane.

The servants, chosen by the baron, were already at their posts, and after dinner the new arrivals took a stroll round the gardens, and, quickly acclimatised to happiness, it seemed to them, when evening came, as if the castle had always been their home.

Christiane, being tired with the journey, retired early. The baron and Julius soon followed her example.

Before retiring to his room, Julius, as he passed, glanced into his library. On the carved oak book-shelves was a valuable collection of books, beautifully bound and emblazoned with his coat-of-arms. But what struck him most was the choice of the volumes. Who then had been able to guess his taste so well, without making even a single mistake as to his favourites? Had he himself drawn up the list, he would not have altered a single title. Samuel, who knew all his favourite authors, through having himself developed his taste for literature, would not have chosen differently.

While these thoughts passed through his mind, he suddenly felt a hand on his shoulder.

He started; he had not heard the door open.

He turned round and saw Samuel Gelb.

“Well! has my dear Julius had a happy year and enjoyed his tour abroad?”

“Samuel!” exclaimed Julius, both astonished and delighted. “Samuel! but how came you here?”

“‘Pon my soul,” said Samuel; “for the very simple reason that I live here.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE ENEMY WITHIN THE FORTRESS.

WAS it instinct, presentiment, or the vague fears of a woman? Christiane, in this beautiful and majestic castle, felt a dread of something. She felt as if surrounded by some danger. Did it threaten her or Julius? It mattered not! She thought regretfully of their blissful, quiet life together in the happy perfumed island, where neither the cares of the world nor the passions of men had for a moment disturbed their peace of mind. Yet, in what way, apparently, had her life changed? Her husband loved her devotedly; she worshipped her child. What had she to wish for? What need she fear?

Baron von Hermelinfeld had to return at the end of a few days to Berlin, whither his duties and his work called him. But, before leaving the castle, he took Christiane aside and said to her:

“My dear child, it is perfectly true that for thirteen months I have seen nothing of Samuel Gelb. But, thirteen months ago, on the morning after you left, I did see him. And he refused to withdraw, in fact, if anything, he persisted even more strongly in his bold declaration of war against you. However, for the present let us hope that this was nothing but insolent bravado. Should it prove otherwise, Christiane, if the enemy dares to re-appear, remember, my child, that I am your champion and your second. Send for me and I will come to you at once.”

This promise had only half reassured Christiane. She had tried, by questioning Gretchen, to extract from her whether she had seen Samuel again since the scene at the ruins. But, on that subject, Gretchen gave but vague and evasive replies.

The reader must know that Christiane had found the little goat-herd as devoted no doubt, but perhaps even wilder than in the past. Herr Schreiber being dead and Christiane away, Gretchen had quite lost touch with social life, and consequently, had devoted herself entirely to her plants and her animals. It was even more difficult to accustom her to the castle than to the parsonage. Even her hut no longer gave her pleasure since it had been rebuilt; she thought it too grand, too near to the castle, too like the houses in the village. She buried herself in the mountain with her goats, and sometimes did not return for days together.

Christiane was therefore compelled to stifle her fears in her own breast, this being all the more difficult because they were so vague and so gloomy; what is more to be feared than the unknown? And, hardest thing of all to this loving nature, Julius was the last to whom, on this subject, she could or would unburden herself.

Christiane had already suffered on seeing the resistance which Julius had opposed to his father on the subject of Samuel, and the reluctance with which he had finally yielded. She was not then all-sufficient to him? She was not everything to him? And the aversion which, from the very first, she had shown for Samuel, had evidently not rendered him repulsive or unpleasant to his friend.

Still, with that promptitude of love to justify the one beloved, Christiane afterwards found excuses for Julius’ opposition, by attributing to it the legitimate sensitiveness which any man would feel at being supposed to depend on a comrade, and have no will of his own. Assuredly, it was not Samuel Gelb he had defended, it was himself, and Christiane ended by thinking he was right, and that, in his place, she would have acted in the same way.

Moreover, her refuge, her consolation, her safeguard was her son. Seated beside Wilhelm’s cradle, she forgot everything. It was a sweet yet touching picture to behold this child the mother of a child, the still closed bud issued from the scarce-opened bud. Christiane, seen without her child, had retained the grace, the timidity, the candour of maidenhood; but when she gazed at her boy, when she caressed him, when she held him in her arms, her son, her love, her Jesus, then how unmistakably was she a mother!

Her great grief was that she was not able to nurse the dear babe! The doctors had deemed her too young and too delicate, and Julius had agreed with what they said. Oh! if they had listened to the mother, she would have found the necessary strength! She envied, she hated, almost as much as she watched over and tended, that nurse, that rival, that foreign woman, that strong, stupid peasant to whom she, Christiane, was forced to resign the sweetest part of her motherhood. What right had this stranger to suckle her child? When the nurse gave the breast to Wilhelm, she would look at her with sad, jealous eyes. She would have given years of her existence to be the source of life to those sweet lips.

This mother of sixteen years gave, however, everything but this to her son; her days, her nights, her soul, her heart, her whole being, all was his. It was she who bathed him, dressed him, cradled him, sang to him, put him to sleep. He knew her, how sweet the thought, better than his nurse, to whom the mother resigned him only long enough for her to feed him. She insisted that his cradle be placed beside her bed; the nurse slept in another bed made up every night in Christiane's own room. Thus not a movement, not a breath, not a cry of the child's escaped the mother.

And so, when she thought of Samuel, with Wilhelm in her arms, already she felt reassured. The unknown menace of the dark enemy faded by degrees from her mind, and, like darkness before dawn, disappeared in her love for her child.

One morning, Julius, coming into Christiane's room, found her sitting beside the cot, which she gently rocked from side to side with a light, even touch. She placed her finger to her lips to enjoin silence, put up her face to receive his kiss, and beckoned him to a low chair beside her. Then, in a half-whisper, she said:

"I am anxious; Wilhelm has slept badly, he was moaning and has been very restless. I do not know what ails him. He has just fallen asleep. Speak softly."

"You alarm yourself unnecessarily," Julius replied. "The boy has never looked more rosy nor more bonny."

"You really think so? Perhaps you are right. I am always anxious where he is concerned."

With her left hand she drew Julius head on to her shoulder, still rocking the cradle with her right.

"I am happy thus," said she, "between my two dear ones. Ah! if even one of the two were taken from me, I think I should die."

"So you admit," said Julius, shaking his head, "that now only half of your heart belongs to me?"

"Ungrateful boy! is he not part of you?"

"Since he is asleep," rejoined Julius, "let me have you all to myself for at least a little while."

"Oh! no, he must feel himself rocked the whole time."

"Well! tell the nurse or Veronique to rock him."

"He must feel himself rocked the whole time by me, sir."

"What nonsense!"

“Well! try.”

She relinquished the cradle to Julius, who swayed it from side to side as gently as possible. But the child awoke and began to cry.

“There! you see!” said Christiane with a triumphant look.

After half-an-hour spent in this fond, foolish bantering, Julius went back to his study. But he had not been there more than twenty minutes, when Christiane entered, in a state of great agitation.

“The child is undoubtedly ill,” she said; “he has refused the breast, and does nothing but cry and scream. Then, it seems to me he is somewhat feverish. You must send for a doctor, Julius dear.”

“Of course,” said Julius; “but I fear there is not one at Landeck.”

“A groom can ride over to Neckarsteinach. He will be back in two hours. I will go myself and give instructions.”

She despatched the messenger and returned to the room; there she found Julius, beside the child, who was crying incessantly.

“Is he no better? My God! how I wish that doctor had arrived!”

“Patience!” said Julius.

Just then the door opened and Samuel Gelb entered with a quick step, as if he were expected.

“Monsieur Samuel! “Christiane exclaimed in amazement.

CHAPTER XXX.

SAMUEL AS PHYSICIAN.

SAMUEL bowed gravely to Christiane.

Julius, who, strangely enough, showed no surprise at seeing him, went up and shook him by the hand.

"You are more than half a doctor," said he, "can you do anything for our little one? he is ill."

Samuel silently examined the child, then, looking round, he perceived the nurse, went up to her and felt her pulse.

"But sir," said Christiane, whose anxiety was stronger than her fear, "it is not the nurse who is ill, but the child."

"Madame," Samuel replied coldly but politely, still continuing his examination. "The mother sees only the child, the doctor looks for the cause. The indisposition of your little one is but the result of the indisposition of his nurse. The poor little lad is hungry, that is all, and this woman cannot suckle him. Change of climate and customs, 'ennui,' homesickness, who knows what? have dried up her milk. She must be replaced at once."

"Replaced? By whom?" asked Christiane.

"Is there no nurse in the neighbourhood?"

''Good heavens! I do not know. Oh! I am a very careless mother, or at least a very inexperienced one. You must not be too hard upon me, sir."

The child still cried and whimpered.

"Do not be anxious, madame," Samuel resumed in the same frigidly polite tone, "the child is by no means ill, and in no danger whatever. You can do this. Take one of Gretchen's young goats as foster-nurse."

"Will it be advisable for Wilhelm?"

"He will thrive splendidly on it. But, when once you have begun, you will have to continue. Too frequent changes of milk might be injurious. Then, a goat is a nurse that will not suffer from nostalgia."

Julius despatched a messenger for Gretchen, who arrived almost directly.

She too showed no surprise at seeing Samuel. But Christiane, who was watching her, noticed a bitter smile curve her lips.

Her delight, however, soon returned when she was told that one of her goats was to feed little Wilhelm. She had just the very one needed, young and strong and with good rich milk. She hurried away to fetch it.

During her absence Samuel succeeded in reassuring Christiane. His manner was totally different, though perhaps no more reassuring. A sort of respectful, but icy reserve had replaced his proud, bitter scorn.

Gretchen returned with a fine goat, white and clean, whom she made lie down on the carpet. The child was placed beside it, and at once took his nourishment quite naturally.

Christiane clapped her hands.

“The difficulty is solved!” said Samuel, smiling.

Christiane could not refrain from bestowing on him a look of gratitude.

This strange man added in a pensive tone:

“I love children. I wish I had one. They are charming and not proud; weak and not wicked. I love children; they are not yet men.”

He rose as if to depart.

“You will stay to breakfast with us?” said Julius to him.

“I cannot do so,” Samuel replied, looking at Christiane.

Julius insisted. But Christiane said nothing. The past, which she had forgotten in the first impulse of motherhood, returned to her memory, and the woman re-appeared beneath the mother.

Samuel seemed conscious of Christiane’s silence, and replied more drily to the entreaties of Julius:

“Impossible. Order a horse round for me. I will send him back to you from Neckarsteinach.”

Julius complied reluctantly. Christiane, no longer troubled by the fear that Samuel would remain, felt more free to thank him, and when the servant announced that the horse was ready, she went with Julius to the entrance to see him off and again thanked him.

But she did not invite him to return.

And, as he mounted his horse, she whispered to Julius:

“Why is Monsieur Samuel Gelb here, and how did he come, Julius?”

“Upon my word of honour,” replied Julius, “I know no more than you.”

Samuel bowed and galloped off.

“He is gone!” said Christiane, as if relieved.

Gretchen was, just then, leaving the house with her goat. She overheard Christiane’s remark, and shook her head: “Ah!” said she, in a low voice, “do you really believe he has gone!”

CHAPTER XXXI.

BY WHOM THE CASTLE WAS BUILT.

A FEW mornings later, the sun lighted up a charming group, near the castle of Eberbach.

Ten yards distance from Gretchen’s hut, now entirely rebuilt as a rustic cottage, on a sloping emerald lawn, made in the rock itself with artificial earth, sat Christiane and Gretchen on a seat sheltered by the overhanging rock. At their feet lay a white goat, suckling a lovely child, who lay half-naked on a rug, covered over with a fine white cloth; the animal was eating grass from Gretchen’s hand, and seemed to understand that it must not move during its nurseling’s meal. Christiane, armed with a twig, chased away the flies that incessantly teased the poor, patient beast. After awhile the child, evidently satisfied, closed its eyes and fell asleep.

Then Christiane, without waking him, raised him gently on to her knee.

The goat, as if relieved from the responsibility of the child, started up, leapt about as if to stretch its cramped limbs, then rejoined its companion, whose fine intelligent head had just peeped out from between the shrubs.

“And you say, madame,” continued Gretchen, resuming their conversation, “that he appeared amongst you quite suddenly, even the lodge-keeper not having seen him pass?”

“Yes! You were quite right in saying that he was never so near as when we imagined him far away.”

Gretchen sat pensive awhile.

“Oh! yes!” she resumed, in a tone of excitement peculiarly her own, “this man is undoubtedly a devil. I have felt certain of it for over a year.”

“Then you have seen him during the past year? He has been here again? Speak, I beseech you. You are aware how important it is that I should know.”

Gretchen appeared to hesitate a moment; then, apparently making up her mind, she drew nearer to Christiane.

“Will you promise me not to reveal to the baron what I am about to tell you? Swear it, that I may speak plainly and perhaps save you.”

“Why this oath?”

“Listen. Some days after your departure, my wounded roe, in spite of my care, lay dying in terrible agony.

“The herbs I had placed on the wound, my prayers to the Virgin, nothing availed. She looked at me with pathetic eyes, as if imploring me not to let her die! I was in despair. Three or four strangers passed my hut, walking in the direction of the castle. Samuel Gelb was among them. He looked up, saw me, and in three quick strides he had reached my side.

“I pointed to my poor dying roe, and said ‘You brute!’

“‘What! ‘said he, ‘you allow your goat to die, you, with such a knowledge of herbs?’

“‘Is there any chance of saving her life? ‘I cried.

“‘Undoubtedly!’

“‘Oh! save her!’

“He looked steadily at me and said:

“‘Let us strike a bargain.’

“What do you mean?’

“I shall often have to come to Landeck, and I do not wish it known. I shall arrange in such a manner as not to pass by the Manse, therefore Herr Schreiber will not see me. But so far as you are concerned, your hut is so close to the ruins that I cannot avoid you. Promise me that, neither directly nor indirectly, will you let Baron von Hermelinfeld know that I come to this part of the country, and I, in return, will undertake to cure your roe.’

“‘And supposing that you do not cure her?’

“‘Then you are at liberty to speak.’

“I was about to promise, but some scruple made me hesitate. Turning to him I said:

“‘What you intend to do, will it injure my neighbour in this world, or my soul in the next?’

“‘No,’ he answered.

“‘Then I will keep silence.’

“‘You promise that neither directly nor indirectly shall the Baron von Hermelinfeld know through you of my presence at Landeck?’

“‘I promise.’

“‘Very well! I shall not be gone long, meanwhile have some boiling water ready.’

"He went away, but returned a few moments later with some herbs which he did not allow me to see, but plunged at once into the boiling water. He then applied them to the wounded leg and bandaged it tightly.

"'You are not to change this dressing for three days,' he said. 'After that, your roe will limp, but will be cured. But, if you break your word I will kill her.'

"That is why, madame, I ask you not to mention a word of what I am going to tell you to the baron, so that he may not hear of it indirectly through me."

"Do not be anxious," said Christiane, "I swear not to say a word. But tell me all about it."

"Well, your castle, madame, this castle which has been given you by your father, and in which you live to-day, I believe Monsieur Samuel is the actual builder of it."

Christiane shuddered. Samuel's sudden appearance at the castle rushed into her mind.

"But how could it be he?" she asked.

"Who but he, dear madame," Christiane went on, "would have been able to make this castle spring out of the earth in so short a time? As you see, he is the devil! Unless it were so, despite the crowd of workmen employed, would he have been able to raise these dead ruins from the dust in eleven months? And how did he superintend the work? He was everywhere and nowhere. He lived, without doubt, somewhere in the neighbourhood, because the moment he was wanted, he was there to the very second; and yet, where did he live? Neither at Landeck, nor at the parsonage, nor here..... And he had no horse!

"How had he come? No one could say. Who had brought him hither? When my lord the baron came to see how the work was progressing he was never visible. The baron has never had the least suspicion that he was connected with it in any way. And how did Monsieur Samuel compel the architect not to mention it? In the daytime he went for long excursions up the mountain, under pretext of studying and botanizing, as he says. And then he has had excavations made under the rock on which the castle is built, he has dug up the ground and hollowed it out in all directions. I cannot imagine what he was plotting down there. You will again wonder if I am mad; but one evening, on stooping to listen, I feel convinced that I heard something like the neighing of a horse under ground.”, “You must have dreamt this, or it is a fairy tale,” said Christiane.

Gretchen went on.

“Shall I give you a more certain proof, madame? One day I noticed that he was having stone foundations laid quite near to my old hut. I could not understand what that meant. However, early, next morning, as I noticed that my goats were frightened by his workmen, I took my poor beasts up into the mountain, and did not return until late that night. My hut had disappeared, and in its place I found this cottage, arranged and furnished as you now see it. Tell me, does this not appear to you like witchcraft? That man Samuel was there. He told me that this alteration had been made according to instructions given to the architect by my lord the baron. Be that as it may, that does not explain how this building could be completed in twelve hours. Well, madame, you may say what you please, my new cottage is decidedly more convenient, and especially more substantial than the other, that I do not deny. Yet, I regret the other; I am afraid in this one, and there are times when I almost feel as if I were living in a house built by the devil.”

“What you tell me is, in fact, most strange,” said Christiane; “and although I do not share your superstitious fears with regard to Monsieur Samuel, yet, like you, I should feel somewhat uneasy if I had to live in a house which he had built. But tell me one thing. Whilst we were abroad, when you saw him again, did he renew his threats, or was he in any way insolent?”

“No, on the contrary, he was kind and thoughtful. He knows more about the virtues and properties of plants than I do, although he will not admit what I believe — that they have a soul. Often has he told me of cures for my sick animals.”

“Then I see that you have somewhat modified your opinion of him?”

“I wish I had, but I cannot do so. I have not known him do or say anything wrong during the whole year. Quite the reverse. But the flowers and plants persist in saying that he is fatal, fatal to those I love, to you and to your husband. And the flowers have never lied. He must have some deep-laid scheme. He pretends to have forgotten everything, in order to surprise us unawares. Whenever I see him, I cannot help it, the same feeling of anger comes over me. Although I try to overcome it, and remind myself of the many kindnesses he has done me, yet I who have never hated anyone before, I think I actually hate him. But I should not say so aloud; because he is a wizard, he will know, he will know that I have told you all, that I hate him, that....”

“That mothers are the most ungrateful beings in existence,” Samuel Gelb said suddenly and quietly behind the two women.

Gretchen and Christiane turned round. Christiane could not suppress a cry. Wilhelm awoke screaming.

Samuel looked at Christiane with a grave, severe look; but there was nothing scornful nor ironical in his manner. In his right hand he held a white felt hat which he had just raised from his head, his gun was in his left. A black velvet coat buttoned up to the chin heightened the cold deadly pallor of his face.

Where had he come from? Behind the bench on which Christiane and Gretchen sat, the rock rose perpendicularly fifty feet high.

“Why this alarm? “Samuel asked quietly. “Look, you have made your child cry.”

Gretchen was still trembling:

“By which road did you gain access here?” said she. “Whence do you come?”

“In fact, sir, how did you get here?” asked Christiane.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DEFIANCE.

“HOW have I come, madame?” said Samuel, replying to Christiane’s question. “Are you truly under the impression, as is Gretchen, that I come from hell? Alas! I am neither as supernatural nor as wonderful a being. But you were so absorbed in speaking ill of me that you neither saw nor heard me come. That is all.”

Christiane, slightly reassured, pacified Wilhelm, who soon fell asleep again. Samuel resumed:

“Well, apparently my advice was good, for Wilhelm is better.”

“That’s perfectly true, sir, and with all my heart do I thank you.”

“As to you, Gretchen, your favourite would be dead had I not cured her. Your goats were threatened with sickness and you would have lost almost every one of them but for the invaluable remedy I gave you.”

“That is true!” said Gretchen, with a fierce look. “But whom have you learnt all these secrets from?”

“Even were it from Satan, as you suppose, you should both feel all the more grateful to me for having lost my soul for your sakes; instead of which you hate me. Is that just?”

“Monsieur Samuel,” said Christiane gravely’, “you it is who wish us to hate you; for my own part I would be only too glad to hold you in esteem. You certainly possess a singular power. Why, instead of applying it to wrong purposes, do you not apply it to what is right?”

“I will do so, madame, when you have taught me what is right and what is wrong. Is it wrong for a man to think a woman beautiful? for him to contemplate with delight her fair pale loveliness? to think, despite himself, that he who possesses this exquisite creature is happy beyond measure! Take yourself, for example. Let us suppose that I love you. Would it be wrong? Julius loved you, and you thought it right.

“How comes it that what was right for him would be Wrong for me? No, the right is that which (the mind desires, that which nature permits. Why are you not able to love to-day a man whom you could have loved fifteen months ago? Is virtue then a matter of date?”

Christiane bent over her child and kissed him, as if to shelter the woman behind the mother.

Having regained her composure, she turned to him:

“I shall not reply to your sophistry, sir. Not only from duty, but from my own free will, do I love Julius. I wish to love him only.”

“You wish to love him?” said Samuel, still in the same studiously polite tone.

“Oh! you are quite right, madame, Julius deserves it. He has many qualifications. No one can deny that he is affectionate, tender, unselfish and intellectual — any more than anyone can affirm that he has the initiative, the energy, the magnetic power that I possess. Now, have you the power to refuse to acknowledge and appreciate that strong vitality which is mine. Pardon my making no pretence at modesty, but modesty is a lie, and I never tell a lie. Well! I venture to say that there have been times when, although fearing me, you have admired me. And Julius, come, I was not with you on your travels, but in your heart you cannot refute my plain speaking. Notwithstanding the passionate love Julius has for you, he felt bored — excuse the word — more than once during that year. How could it be otherwise! he has no notion how to guide his life, it is life that guides him. Look you! man’s greatest virtue is will power. Without this, intellect and goodness can accomplish nothing. You, you are a woman, exempt from the need of will power, but your nature demands it in the man who is your protector. You fail to find it. In consequence of which you have no hold over Julius, and Julius cannot keep you. Your influence over him is of the heart, mine is of the mind. Summary of my philosophy and of the situation: You are a woman, he is womanly. Consequently he belongs to me.... I dare not say: consequently, you....”

“Indeed, you will do well not to say it, sir,” Christiane quickly interrupted, galled beyond measure. “Do not say it, unless you wish to remind me of your insufferable insolence in the past.”

But Samuel drew himself up, a white, angry,. threatening, sinister look on his face.

“Madame, which of us two has most to fear in recalling memories of the past? Fourteen months ago, when I had the pleasure of making your acquaintance, I neither thought of you, sought you out, nor injured you in any way; yet I was so unfortunate as to incur your displeasure. Why? For no reason; perhaps because of my appearance, my face, my smile, how can I tell? Gretchen spoke against me to you; you spoke against me to Julius. You yourself have admitted this. The wolf let the sheep alone, the vulture did not trouble about the dove. But the dove, the sheep provoked the vulture and the wolf. You wounded me in my vulnerable point, pride. You defied me with your hatred, I defied you with my love. An(d you accepted the challenge: kindly remember that. Also, you began the struggle at once; you prevailed upon Julius to remain at Landeck when I wanted to take him back to Heidelberg. Your first victory, which was quickly followed by a second equally important. A formidable and powerful ally came to your assistance in the person of Baron von Hermelinfeld, who brought about your, marriage with Julius, much less for the sake of Julius than against Samuel. This he himself acknowledged. I find myself therefore humiliated, vanquished, defeated. You carried off your Julius for one whole year a thousand leagues away from me, and you combated his remembrance of me by means of your kisses, whilst his father, in order to confine Julius in his paradise and secure him against me, his evil genius, caused this most inaccessible castle to be built at an enormous expense.

“Thus, your love, your marriage, your journey, your child, and I believe this castle, with double walls and double moat, and an expenditure of three millions, all that has been done, plotted, concocted, almost solely against this humble adversary who now stands before you.

“You reproached me, thirteen months ago, with waging war against a woman. But to-day, in truth, the odds against me are heavy. You have on your side one of the most powerful men in Germany, as well as an impregnable fortress.

“Madame, again I repeat, you were the one to declare war. From the moment that you elected we should be enemies you accepted the possibility of defeat. And I swear to you, you will be defeated, madame, defeated as a woman is by a man.”

“You think so, sir?” said Christiane with a smile of ineffable disdain.

“I am certain of it, madame. There are some things which we know to be necessary and inevitable. When Baron von Hermelinfeld attempted to remove Julius from my influence, I did not lose patience nor did I fret about it. I knew he would come back. So I simply waited. Likewise in your case, madame, I shall wait. Even now you are back in my neighbourhood. Soon you will be in my power."

"Insolent fellow!" Gretchen muttered.

Samuel turned to her.

"As to you, Gretchen, you disliked me and I was attracted to you from the first. To-day, needless that you should be my chief care, my chief point of attack. I am able and I intend to make an example of you, and prove, through you, how effectually I can subdue those who provoke me."

"I subdued!" said the untamed girl.

"Child!" said Samuel, "I might say that you are that already. For the last year, who is the being most often in your thoughts? Is it Gottlob? Is it anyone in the village? No, it is I. You are mine, from fear, from hatred, what matters it? When you sleep, the name that haunts your dreams, is my name. When you wake, the thought that first rushes into your mind, is not, as formerly, the memory of your mother, or an un-uttered prayer to the Virgin, but the thought of Samuel. When I appear, your whole being rises in revolt. When I am away, you expect me back at any moment. How often have you not anxiously watched for me when I was supposed to have left for Heidelberg? How often have you not crouched on the ground imagining you heard in the rock the neighing of my horse? Never did a lover await more longingly the return of his beloved. Call it love or hate; I call it possession, and ask nothing more."

Gretchen, terrified, pressed close to Christiane at Samuel's words.

"It is true, madame! every word that he says is true! And how does he know it? Good Heavens, madame, can I be indeed possessed by the devil?"

"Do not fret, Gretchen," Christiane said. "Monsieur Samuel makes use of equivocal expressions. We are not masters of those that hate us. We only possess what is freely given."

"Then according to that," Samuel rejoined, "Napoleon does not possess the twenty departments that he has conquered. But that is of little consequence! I am not the man to withdraw from the challenge even after hearing the terms in which you couch it. You assert, madame, that we can only possess what is freely given. Very well, so be it! You will give yourself."

"Villain!" cried Christiane and Gretchen in a breath. They had both risen, quivering with anger and fear.

“And as for you, Gretchen,” continued Samuel, “that your punishment may be more prompt, and the example more striking, before a week has passed, you will place yourself in my power.”

“You lie! “Gretchen cried.

“I thought I had told you that I never lie,” replied Samuel, unmoved.

“Gretchen,” said Christiane, “you are not to remain alone in your cottage, you must stay at the castle every night.”

“Oh! of course the castle is inaccessible to me,” said Samuel with a shrug of the shoulders. “But you still appear to be under the impression that I shall employ violence. Once for all, I do not need such means. But as Julius, and men of his languishing temperament, employ their gentleness, their good looks, such expedients, in fact, as they chance to possess, so I may perhaps be allowed to employ my learning and such powers as I have earned by hard work. Gretchen will remain free and mistress of herself; but of course I shall be at liberty to make use of those inclinations and instincts which are the auxiliaries nature gives me; I shall surely have the right to awaken love in her soul, to arouse desire in her dreams, in fact to set alight in the veins of this beautiful gipsy, the blood of the Bohemian and the wanton.”

“Oh! villain, how dare you insult in mother!”

She still held in her hand one of the flower-laden branches with which she had been feeding the goat; in a fury of rage, she violently lashed Samuel’s face with it.

Samuel turned pale, and for a moment his lips contracted with anger. But he controlled himself.

“Look, Gretchen,” he quietly said, “you have again awakened Wilhelm.”

As if in confirmation of his words, the child began to cry.

“And do you know what is the burden of his cry, in his innocence and weakness? “Christiane indignantly said. “He cries aloud that the man who insults two women is a coward.”

This time no sign was allowed to escape Samuel of the quickly suppressed movement which Gretchen’s words had evoked. He remained impassive, but his composure was similar to that which he had maintained when Otto Dormagen insulted him.

“Good!” said he. “You hurl insults at me by that which, you both hold dearest and most sacred; you Gretchen, by your flowers; you;, madame, by your child. Fools that you are. This in itself will bring you ill-luck.:” I see so clearly into the future, and my revenge is so assured, that I cannot even, be angry. I pity you. Farewell.”

He waved his hand as a sign of adieu or of menace, and walked quickly away.

Christiane reflected a moment; then placing Wilhelm in Gretchente arms, she said: “Will you put him in his cradle?”

And, as if determined on a certain course of action, she ran to the castle, went direct to Julius’ study, and knocked at the door.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CHRISTIANE ASKS A QUESTION.

“WHO is there?” asked Julius.

Christiane said, “It is I!” whereupon he replied: “Wait a moment.”

It seemed to Christiane that Julius was conversing with someone in a low voice.

A second later he opened the door. Christiane drew back, nonplussed; already Samuel was in the room.

He bowed to Christiane with amazing coolness.

“I trust you are well, madame,” he said, “after the anxiety you went through some nights ago. I need not ask after Wilhelm, for Julius has just been telling me that he is thriving well on the goat’s milk.”

Christiane could not at once recover her composure.

“You appear surprised at finding Samuel here?” said Julius. “I would beg of you to be indulgent to us both, and I pray you not to inform my father of, the presence of my forbidden friend. In accordance with my promise, I did not invite Samuel, but I — how can I put it? — I met him. I felt it impossible, I must confess, to sacrifice an old friendship to idle prejudice. My father believes that Samuel will be the ruin of his son; but I know that, most probably, he has saved the life of mine.”

Christiane had already resolved what to do, and plucked up her courage.

“I shall ever be grateful to Monsieur Samuel Gelb,” she said, “for the medical services he has rendered us. But; without wishing to minimise the gratitude which We owe to him, I think, Julius, that we owe some as well to your father. Rightly or Wrongly your father is uneasy; why disobey and displease him? If Monsieur Samuel be really your friend, he will not induce a son to go against his father’s wishes. And, when all is said, your father is not the only one who’ mistrusts Monsieur Samuel. I am loyal and brave,” she added, looking at Samuel,” and I shall say openly what I think; This prejudice is shared by me. I believe that Monsieur Samuel Gelb’s sole reason in coming here, is to disturb our happiness and our love.”

“Christiane! “Julius exclaimed reproachfully, “Samuel is our guest!”

“Does he think so? does he say so?” questioned Christiane, looking at him with a proud, steady gaze.

Samuel smiled and turned it off with a compliment beneath which lurked a threat.

“Animation makes you more charming than ever, and I believe it is out of a spirit of pure coquetry that you always pretend to dislike me.”

“Forgive her, Samuel,” said Julius. “She is but a child. My dearest Christiane, it is not Samuel who foists himself upon us, but I who keep him here. It is to my interest not to be deprived of his pleasant, intellectual companionship.”

“Throughout one whole year you did not miss him. Has it come to this, that your wife and child no longer suffice for you.”

Julius, exchanging a look with Samuel, made Christiane sit down, placed himself on a footstool at her feet, and taking her hands between both his own:

“Now,” said he, “let us have a serious talk together. Believe me, Christiane dear, I love you as dearly as “ever. My greatest happiness is to love you, my crowning joy to be loved by you. You are the only woman I have ever loved, and — I say it before Samuel — the only woman I shall ever love. But, after all, be reasonable; in you, in the woman who loves me, there is also the mother, is there not? and you consecrate to your child a large portion of your heart and of your life. Well! similarly, the husband is not the whole man. God has given us not only a heart. He has endowed us with a mind. Side by side with our happiness, He has placed our duty; with the gratification of our desires, He has mingled the restlessness of our thoughts. Even in the interest of our love, Christiane, I want to be deserving of your esteem, I want to grow, I want to be something.

“I will not allow that life which belongs to you to become enervated through idleness. My ambition would have been to serve my country worthily, but up to the present I feel myself fitted for no calling but that of a soldier, and it certainly is not with the defeat of Germany that I should care to commence my career. At least at my country’s call, let me be found ready. Now, Samuel, whose nature is so entirely opposite to mine (since you have spoken ill of him in his presence, it is but fair that I should speak well of him to his face), Samuel is necessary to me to keep alive the power of my will. Remember that here we live alone, out of the world, in seclusion, in the past, forgotten by many, dead to almost all. I regret neither

Heidelberg, nor Frankfort, not in the least! but when a little life comes our way, why should we thrust it from us?

"I may from one day to another have need of my will, let us therefore endeavour to strengthen it. Am I unreasonable in what I say? You and my father have conjured up false ideas with regard to Samuel. If my friendship for him did you any wrong, any injury, I would give him up without a moment's hesitation. But what have you to say against him? My father disapproves of his ideas. I do not share Samuel's ideas, but still I am not sufficiently his superior intellectually, to take exception at them. As to you, Christiane, what has Samuel ever done to you?"

"And, if he has insulted me?" said Christiane, unable to contain herself.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TWO PROMISES.

JULIUS started to his feet, deadly pale.

“Do you mean to imply that you have been insulted, Christiane, and not told me of it? Am I not here to protect you? Samuel, what does she mean?”

And the look he darted at Samuel glittered like the flash of a sword.

“We must allow madame to explain,” Samuel quietly replied.

And his glance was cold as steel.

Christiane saw the two glances meet. To her it seemed that Samuel’s was a sword and pierced Julius’ breast.

She threw her arms round her husband’s neck, as if to protect him.

“Speak,” said Julius, curtly. “What has taken place?”

“Nothing,” said she, bursting into tears.

“But what did you mean? To what did you refer?”

“I referred to nothing in particular, Julius; I spoke from instinct alone.”

“He has done nothing to you? “Julius persisted.

“Nothing at all,” she replied.

“He has said nothing to you.”

Again she replied, “Nothing.”

“Then what did you mean?” rejoined Julius, heartily glad to be able to remain Samuel’s friend.

Samuel smiled.

Then there was a short silence, during which Christiane wiped away her tears; then she said:

‘‘Let us say no more about it. But just now you were complaining of the very secluded life we lead, and you are quite right. A man of your worth, Julius, is made to live among men. It is good that women should have only their affections. But, indeed, I will prove that I know how to love you! I do not wish to monopolise you! I do not wish to keep you away from those to whom you could be of service! We must not bury ourselves for ever in this castle; we can come back here whenever you like, whenever you feel the want of rest. Let us go to Berlin, Julius, or to Frankfort, where you will be able to exercise your high faculties, where you will win admiration as you have won affection.”

“My darling,” Julius said, kissing her tenderly, “what would my father say, who has given us this castle, if we did not seem to appreciate it?”

“Well!” she resumed, “without giving up the castle, we might go occasionally to Heidelberg. You have often told me what a gay, exciting life is, at times, that of a student. You regret it perhaps. We can easily have a little place in the town. You can renew your studies, see your companions of former days, enjoy your festivities, your large library.”

“Impossible, my dear Christiane. Can I lead the life of a student with a wife and child?”

“You refuse me everything, Julius,” said Christiane, with tears in her eyes.

Samuel, who had remained at a distance, now drew near.

“Julius is right, madame,” said he. “The reigning Viscount von Eberbach cannot possibly return to student life; and Landeck cannot come to Heidelberg. But would you like Heidelberg to come to Landeck?”

“What do you mean? “Julius asked.

“I mean that madame is more powerful than Mahomet, and that the mountain can come every step of the way towards her.”

“I do not understand you, sir,” said Christiane.

Samuel resumed gravely, almost solemnly:

“I hold to giving you proof that I am entirely yours to command. Just now, you desire two things; firstly, that Julius should occasionally be able to join in the gay, yet earnest life of the University. Well! within three days, the University will be transplanted to the vicinity of this castle.”

“Come! you are joking?” said Julius.

“Not at all! “Samuel answered, “you shall see. The other request you made Julius, madame, concerns me. The sight of me offends you, and you would be glad to keep me at a distance. Well! on this point too, your wish shall be gratified. Your own boudoir adjoins, if I mistake not, this study. May I ask you to accompany me thither for a moment?”

He opened the door. Christiane obediently passed into the next room. He followed.

“May I not come too?” asked Julius laughingly.

“Why! of course,” Samuel replied.

Julius joined Samuel and Christiane.

Samuel led Christiane up to a panel in the wall.

“You see this panel, madame? You see this bust of an emperor holding a globe in his right hand? It may happen that some day or other you will want to see me....”

Christiane shook her head incredulously.

“Egad! who knows? “Samuel rejoined. “Let us not say ‘no! ‘to any eventuality. However, should it ever happen that I can be of service to you in any way, this is what you will have to do in order to summon me. Just come to this panel, press your finger to the globe that this emperor holds. The globe communicates with a spring; the spring causes a bell to ring; the ring warns me. Whether I am far or near, madame, I shall come in answer to your call, within twenty-four hours if I am absent, at once if I am near at hand. But until then, mark well my words, until you yourself summon me, I give you my word of honour that you shall not see me again.”

For a moment Christiane remained stupefied, then turning to Julius she said:

“What do you think of that, Julius? Are you not surprised, to say the least, that Monsieur Samuel should know your house better than you do yourself, and be so much at home in it?”

Samuel answered:

“That is precisely the mystery that I was about to explain to Julius when’ you entered. Pardon my not speaking in your presence, but this has reference to a secret which does not belong to me, and which I can confide to no one but Julius. I hope that, except in this, I have given you every satisfaction.”

“Yes, sir,” said Christiane, “and although there is some contradiction between your words and your deeds, I leave you with the hope that I may trust in. your word.”

“You shall see whether I fail to keep it,” said Samuel. “Within three days, the University of Heidelberg, like the Forest of Macbeth, will have come to you. And you will not see me again until you press the spring.”

Samuel opened the door for her to pass out, bowing with perfect ease. This time she returned his bow with less repugnance, interested in spite of herself, in the promises of this strange man.

Samuel listened until her steps had died away, then he returned to Julius.

“Now,” said he, “let us repair to your study, where every precaution has been taken to ensure our not being overheard; we have more important matters to discuss.”

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE DOUBLE CASTLE.

SAMUEL bolted the doors, then returned to Julius.

“Now then!” said he, “I hope that you are not going to express surprise like your wife at the simplest things. I implore you not to be astonished. This is the place for the ‘nil admirari’ which we learnt at college.”

“Well and good! “Julius said, smiling. “Besides, with you, I am always prepared for surprises, and I expect nothing but the unexpected.”

“My dear Julius,” rejoined Samuel, “to begin with you must know that in your absence I have dabbled, as usual, a little in everything; a little in medicine, a little in architecture, a little in politics, a little in geology, a little in botany, etc. A little in medicine? You saw how I discovered that the illness of your child could be traced to his nurse. A little in architecture? you are going to have a specimen of my skill, and you will acknowledge that the architect is as clever as the doctor, unless you deem it more wonderful to preserve a child from death, than to resuscitate a dead period.”

“What do you mean? “Julius asked.

“Let me first show you a repetition of the secret in the next room,” said Samuel.

He went to a corner of the library. A lion carved in the wood-work gaped, with jaws wide open. Samuel placed his finger on the tongue of the lion, a panel slid back, revealing the wall. A button appeared. Samuel pressed it and the wall revolved, disclosing a passage large enough for a man to pass through.

“Now, follow me!” said Samuel to Tulius, who stood amazed. “You know but the half of your castle, lucky owner! I am going to show you the other half.”

“Are we to enter that way? “Julius asked.

“Of course. Pass in first, that I may restore the library to order, and close the door.”

Julius passed in and the door being closed, they found themselves in total darkness.

“I cannot see a bit,” Julius said, laughing. “What devilish witchcraft is this?”

“That’s good! you are slightly astonished, but not in the least alarmed. Give me your hand. Right. I will lead you. This way. Be careful, we are at the top of the staircase. Hold the cord firmly. A hundred and thirty-two steps to go down; it is quite easy; the staircase winds.”

They descended cautiously in the dark, inhaling the damp, cold moisture of depths to which air does not penetrate.

At the forty-fourth step, Samuel stopped:

“Here we come to the first iron door,” said he.

The door opened and closed, they continued to descend.

“After the next forty-four steps, Samuel stopped again.

“Another door!” said he.

At length, after descending the last forty-four steps and passing through the third door, the light suddenly burst on Julius’ sight.

“We have arrived,” said Samuel.

They were in a circular room, lighted by a lamp which hung from the ceiling. This room was about ten feet in diameter. No woodwork, nothing but stone. Under the lamp stood a black table with chairs placed round it.

“Let us sit down and talk,” said Samuel. “We have a quarter of an hour. They will not be here before two o’clock.”

“Who is to be here at two o’clock?” questioned Julius.

“You will see. I told you not to be surprised. Let us have a chat.”

Samuel sat down. Julius did likewise.

“You have now seen part of the subterranean region of your castle,” said Samuel, “we will go over the remainder presently, when the company has arrived. But what you have seen suffices to make you suspect that it is not wholly your father’s architect who has built this castle. I own to having collaborated with him to a certain extent.

“This poor devil of an architect by Royal appointment) was extremely puzzled over Gothic architecture. He used to come to the library at Heidelberg to hunt up old engravings. Picture to yourself a sloppy Greco-Roman fellow receiving a commission to build a robbers’ hold for Goetz von Berlichingen? He suggested plans that would have made Erwin von Steinbach and Phidias shudder, one as much as the other. Fortunately I happened to be there. I convinced him that I had found the plans of the original castle of Eberbach. Imagine his delight! He let me do as I liked, all the more willingly that I had my reasons for keeping out of sight, and allowed all the credit to rest with him. So, I amused myself with restoring in minutest detail the castle of some dead and gone Count Palatine. Do you consider that I have succeeded fairly well in resuscitating this Lazarus of stone? Fairly well, have I not?”

“Splendidly,” said Julius thoughtfully.

“The architect,” Samuel continued, “has only seen that portion of it which glitters above in the sunshine. He was not always there, God be thanked! the poor man having to superintend the building of some nice, square, white ashlar houses at Frankfort. And as for me, whilst I had the workmen under my orders, I made use of them without mentioning the fact to him. Under pretence of foundations and cellars, I had them to construct on my own account some staircases and masonry. ‘This was part of the original plan,’ said I. And my letters-patent architect suspected nothing. Thus whilst I was occupied building one castle, I built two, — one over, one under, and you see I was not boasting when I told you that I had done a little in architecture.”

“But what was your object?” said Julius.

“Ah! to dabble a little in politics.”

“How so? “Julius asked with some embarrassment.

Samuel answered gravely: “Julius, I cannot help noticing that you never speak to me about the Tugendbund! Have you then so entirely forgotten it? Are you no longer the Julius of former days, always responsive to the idea of freedom and fatherland, always chafing under the yoke of the foreigner, always ready to devote your life? It is, I know, customary for students, once their studies are over, to leave behind them at the University their youth, their aspirations, their generosity, their soul. We forget all that as we would an old pipe, thrown aside on a table at some festival of foxes. The man who scorned to bow to a Philistine becomes a Philistine himself, marries, multiplies, respects Royalty, bows to authority, and considers that he was very ridiculous and very childish to go and enquire into the welfare of mankind and the independence of his country. But I had thought we left these metamorphoses to the vulgar herd, and that there were still to be found choice spirits capable of persisting in a noble undertaking. Julius, are you still one of us or not?”

“For ever! “Julius cried with sparkling eyes. “But can I still hope to be admitted? Believe me, Samuel, if I have not mentioned the Tugendbund to you, it is not from indifference, but remorse. The very day of my marriage, there was a meeting of the Guild, and I did not attend. What, would you? My happiness made me neglect my duty. I have regretted this every day since. I feel that I was to blame, and am ashamed to think of it. If I have not spoken to you on the subject, it is not that I do not think of it; on the contrary, it is never out of my thoughts."

"And supposing I gave you an opportunity, not only of reinstating yourself in the eyes of the Guild; but of raising yourself; not only of winning forgiveness, but of earning thanks."

"Oh! how gladly would I seize such an opportunity!"

"Very well! "Samuel said. "Listen."

Just then a bell rang. Samuel did not move. The bell rang a second time, then a third. Samuel rose.

He opened a small door opposite to the one through which they had entered.

Julius caught sight of a staircase, evidently a continuation of the first, and completing undoubtedly the descent towards the Neckar.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE LION'S DEN.

ALMOST at once there entered three masked men. The first carried a torch.

Samuel bowed with deep respect, and motioned them to be seated. But the. three masked men did not advance, surprised probably at seeing Julius.

“Julius von Hermelinfeld, gentlemen,” said Samuel, as if introducing him to them; “the master of this castle, which he places at your disposal, of which it was at least his due. to do the honours. Julius, our chiefs and masters of the Supreme Council are here for the first time to inspect the safe retreat we have prepared for them.”

The three made a gesture of assent and sat down. Samuel and Julius remained standing.

“I hope, my lord, the chiefs had no trouble to find the way?” said Samuel.

“Not the least,” answered one of the three, “thanks to the plan which you had traced, and which we followed step by step.”

“If this room suited your purpose it could be used for your private meetings.”

“Very well indeed. But should we be perfectly safe against surprise?”

“You shall see. Julius, help me pull this rope.”

He pointed to a thick rope in plaited and twisted iron wire, which hung from the roof against the wall.

By holding on to the handle, Samuel and Julius drew it down a foot. Then Samuel hooked the handle into an iron cramp made fast in the stonework.

“This,” said he, “has opened twenty trap-doors in each of the two staircases; leading here. As you see, the three iron doors — shutting them off, are superfluous. At present, an army could not reach you; it would be necessary to bombard, the castle and raze it to the ground and you have four exits for escape.”. “Good!” said the chief.

“And now do you wish to see the large hall for the general meetings?”

“We are here for the purpose of examining everything.”

“Wait, then, while I close the trap doors,” said Samuel.

He detached the handle from the cramp, the iron rope went up a foot, and the dull thud of the trap doors could be indistinctly heard as they closed again.

Then, taking a torch, Samuel opened the small door through which the three chiefs had entered, and they all five descended the staircase.

After going down about twenty steps, Samuel touched a spring in the stone, revealing an opening, and the chiefs found themselves in a long straight passage, down which they followed Samuel.

They walked thus for a quarter of an hour.

At last, they came to a door.

“Here we are!” said Samuel.

He opened the door and led the three chiefs and Julius into an enormous excavation in the rock, capable of holding two hundred persons quite comfortably.

“Here,” Samuel resumed, “we are no longer beneath the castle. The adepts will arrive up the side of the mountain, and will be in ignorance of there being any communication whatever between this hall and the Castle of Eberbach. I have arranged it thus in case of need, lest, should an Otto Dormagen betray the assembly, he could not compromise either the owners of the castle, nor disturb your private meetings. And now that you have seen all, does this place meet with your approval? Are you satisfied?”

“Satisfied and grateful, Samuel Gelb. We accept this safe retreat, so skilfully, so powerfully contrived. The chiefs will henceforth be your guests. This is the second service you render to the Guild. We thank you both.”

“No,” Julius said. “I cannot share the praise which Samuel alone deserves. I should have been happy to participate in his idea, and I thank him for having made use of my castle as I would have been only too glad to do. But I was away, and the entire credit is due to him.”

“Keep your share, Julius von Hermelinfeld,” replied the chief. “Samuel Gelb would not have made use of your property had he not been certain of your soul. The Union and Germany owes much to you both, and in order that you may both be rewarded, we confer upon you the same grade as we bestowed upon Samuel. Julius von Hermelinfeld you now hold second rank in the Guild.”

“Oh! a thousand thanks,” exclaimed Julius, elated with pride.

“And now we must leave you,” said the chief.

“I will accompany you,” said Samuel. “Julius, wait here for me.”

He conducted the three to one of the principal exits, where they found their horses which they had tied to trees.

Then Samuel returned to Julius.

Julius thanked him effusively.

“Bah!” said Samuel, “as I told you before, I have dabbled a little in geology, that is all. Do not however imagine that these subterranean passages are responsible for the considerable inroads made in your father’s purse. They have not cost him much, for they already existed. The ancient possessors of the castle probably had them hollowed out in case of siege. This huge rock is honeycombed with passages and cells like a bee-hive. With reference to that let me give you a little useful advice: Never take it into your head to venture into them alone. You would be swallowed up in them like a drop of water in a sponge. To anyone not knowing the place as I do, there are traps everywhere, and you would quickly disappear down some ‘oubliette.’”

“I now understand,” said Julius, “why you were able to promise Christiane that you would come in answer to her call. You have your own rooms somewhere about here?”

“Why, egad! I live here. Would you like to see my quarters?”

“I should indeed,” said Julius.

Samuel, returning through the passage which terminated in the large hall, walked along for about five minutes, followed by Julius.

Then he stopped, opened a door on the right, ascended fifty steps or thereabouts, and came to a species of platform, divided into three parts.

One was a living room, another a stable, the third a laboratory.

In the room was a bed, and only such furniture as was indispensable.

In the stable, Samuel’s horse was eating a truss of hay.

The laboratory was strewn with retorts, phials, books and plants. This evidently was the centre of Samuel’s operations. A skeleton grinned horribly and grotesquely in one corner. Two glass masks stood on a stove.

To anyone entering this mysterious vault, immediately after admiring in some engraving the cell of Rembrandt’s “Philosopher,” the contrast between that peaceful, holy “retreat,” so softly lighted by the beams of the rising sun, and this room of gloomy subterranean night, into which a sepulchral light penetrated drearily, the contrast would have been strange indeed. He would have thought that after gazing on the light of God’s face, he saw the reflection of Satan’s firebrands.

“This is my place of abode,” said Samuel.

A feeling of uneasiness came over Julius in this laboratory of occult science.

“But,” Samuel went on, “you have been long enough without breathing the outer air, and when not used to it, a mountain over one’s head after a time produces a sense of oppression. I am going to take you back to the upper regions. Just wait a moment whilst I set my stove alight and put some plants to boil which I gathered this morning.”

Having prepared his decoction he said to Julius: “Are you ready?” and conducted him in silence up a flight of steps which joined the one they had descended.

“You see,” he resumed. “Notice well these two doors. When you wish to come and see me, slide back the panel in the library, and go down forty-four steps, which will bring you to two doors. The door on the right leads to the circular hall; that on the left to my rooms. Here is one key, I have another.”

He accompanied Julius until they arrived at the door of the library.

“Good-bye,” said Julius, breathing freely on regaining daylight and fresh air.

“Come whenever you like. You know the way.”

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE PHILTRE.

SAMUEL went down into his laboratory.

The mixture he had put on the fire was boiling. He let it simmer slowly, and whilst waiting took a slice of bread and a little water and began to eat and drink.

His meal over, he took up a phial, poured the mixture into it, and put the phial in his pocket.

He looked at his watch.

It was a quarter to five.

“I have three hours to myself,” said he.

He took up a book and was soon absorbed in its pages, laying down the volume at intervals to write long notes.

The hours passed by without his tearing himself away from his work or making any movement except to turn over the leaves and jot down a few lines.

At last he laid down the book.

“Now,” said he, “I think it is time.”

He again consulted his watch.

“Half-past seven. Good.”

He rose, passed through the stable, and ascended a sloping passage, without a light, without feeling his way, and yet with as little hesitation as if he were walking in the country in broad daylight.

Then he stopped and listened.

Not hearing a sound, he pressed in a certain way on a portion of the rock which turned on its hinges, and he passed out.

He was at the back of Gretchen’s hut, on the very spot where Gretchen and Christiane had been so surprised to see him appear that very morning.

It was growing dusk. Gretchen had not yet returned with her goats.

He tried the cottage door. It was locked. Taking a key from his pocket, he unlocked the door and entered.

In a cupboard was half a loaf, Gretchen’s supper. Samuel took the bread, poured on it three drops from the phial which he had brought and put it back in its place.

“As a beginning, and to accustom her to its effect, this is sufficient,” he muttered. “To-morrow I will return in time to double the dose.”

Then he went out and locked the door.

But before burying himself again in his subterranean abode, he looked round, then stood still.

Gretchen’s hut was now on his left, and on his right, dimly outlined against the evening sky, was the castle, on whose dark façade Christiane’s windows alone shone out, brilliantly lighted up.

A menacing glitter shone in his eyes.

“Yes!” cried he, “I am master of you both and have you both in my power. I shall enter into your destinies as I do into your rooms, whenever I will — at my own time. I am master of the castle and master of the rock, so I must be master of those who appear to be the life of the rock and the soul of the castle, of dark Gretchen, fierce and wild as her verdant forest, of fair Christiane, fragile and precious as her sculptured palace.

“I will! Now I myself can no longer go back. My will has become my law and your doom. It is your fault. Why has your assumed purity, defied, fought against, and gone so far, up to the present, as to defeat my would-be crime? Why has your seeming weakness dared, insulted, and I think, God curse me! struck at what I called my strength? And this has lasted for over a year. In this terrible competition entered into by your pride against mine, can I be the loser? The only one I fear in the wide world is myself. Can I abdicate, in the face of these two children, this last sentiment — my own self-esteem?

“Besides, your defeat is necessary to the struggle which, like Jacob, I wage against the Spirit of God. I must prove to myself that man is master both of good and of evil, and is able, either working with or against Providence, to make the most pure to sin, and the most strong to fall.

“Who knows? perhaps the crux of the whole matter lies in the love which I exact from you. Lovelace, proud, eccentric! lulls to sleep her whom he wishes to conquer. I shall not send you to sleep, Gretchen, I will awaken you. The Marquis de Sade, strange voluptuary! pursues the ideal of infinite spirit in the torture of limited matter. It is not your body, Christiane, but your soul that I will possess through suffering. And we shall see whether my alchemy of human will cannot produce some result.

“Come now I am I really trying to find excuses and reasons to justify my actions? Tush! I act thus, by the Lord! because I am what I am, because such is my nature and my good pleasure, ‘quia nominor leo....’ Ah! here comes Gretchen.”

By the pale light of the stars, Gretchen was, in fact, returning home, driving her goats before her, but she walked with head bent down, and seemed dreamy and absent-minded.

“She is already thinking of me,” Samuel said to himself, smiling.

Just then Christiane’s window opened, and Samuel’s keen glance distinguished Christiane herself, who stepped out on to her balcony and raised her beautiful azure eyes to the azure skies.

“And is this other one always thinking of God?” muttered Samuel, biting his lips. “Oh! before these stars rise a second time, I shall have forced her to think of me, to think of the man who in twenty-four hours will have been able to compass the removal of a town, and the ‘undoing ‘of a soul.”

He re-entered hurriedly into the rock.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

TRICHTER’S TROUBLES OF HEART AND PURSE.

THE next morning at ten o’clock, Samuel went into the Raven Inn at Heidelberg, and enquired if Trichter were in.

On receiving an answer in the affirmative from the servant of whom he had asked the question, he went up to the room of his favourite fox.

Trichter evinced great delight and immense pride at being honoured by a visit from his “senior.” In fact, in his joy, he let the enormous pipe which he was smoking, fall on to the floor.

-Since we saw him a year ago, our friend Trichter had grown unmistakably more rubicund. His face showed signs of having aimed at preserving the honourable impress of the wine he had absorbed in his memorable duel. His cheeks and his forehead resembled a red mask. As to his nose, to give a satisfactory description of it, would need no less than the great William Shakespeare himself, the colour artist of Bardolph’s fiery nose. Like Bardolph’s nose, that of Trichter emitted rays of ruby-coloured light, and at night it should have procured to its noble possessor a wonderful economy of candles.

“My ‘senior’ honours me with a visit!” cried he. “Oh! will you allow me to fetch Fresswanst?”

“What for?” said Samuel.

“That he may share this privilege with me.

“Impossible. I have to speak to you on important business.”

“All the more, reason. Fresswanst is the friend of my heart and of my drinking bouts, my most intimate companion, and I do nothing without him.”

“No! I tell you. We must be alone. Give me a pipe and let us have a talk while we smoke.”

“Take your, choice.”

And he pointed to a formidable array of pipes hanging on the wall, and arranged according to size.

Samuel took the largest he could find, filled and lighted it.

While occupied with these preliminaries, he went on chatting to Trichter.

“Come, now, tell me: since when have you become so attached to Fresswanst?”

“Since our duel,” Trichter replied. “I love him as my trophy. He is my conquest and I drag him about with me everywhere. Besides, he is really the best fellow living. He bears me no ill-will at all for having gained the day; Dormagen is the man he is aggrieved at. He has no respect for him, because he did not make him drink two drops of the ‘liqueur’ you offered him. He says that you saved my honour, and that Dormagen saved his life. He will never forgive him. For you he has tremendous admiration. He envies me, I can tell you, for being your fox. He has refused to be Dormagen’s any longer. As he cannot be yours, he has drawn as near as he can to you by becoming my shadow. We are now foxes of the bottle. We spend our days in proving our affection for each other by mock challenges as to which will drink most. That keeps us in form in case of a duel.”

“It appears to me that you were already in fairly good form,” said Samuel, puffing out a whiff of smoke.

“Oh! that was nothing. We have made astonishing progress since then. Take my word for it.”

“Your nose speaks eloquently enough. But these constant libations must make extensive inroads into your purses.”

“Alas!” Trichter woefully said; “the truth of the matter is that emptying flagons soon makes a hole in one’s pocket. During the first three months we ran ourselves into debt for the remainder of our lives. But we do not run into debt now.”

“How is that?”

“Because no one will trust us. Besides, we are now able to drink without its costing us a ‘pfennig.’”

“Ha! ha!” said Samuel incredulously.

“Does that appear to you unlikely?

Listen. In a word, this is our form of procedure: we bet. As we win every bet, then it is the lookers-on who pay the expenses. But even this noble expedient might fail after a time. Alas! we are too strong. No one dare oppose themselves to us now. They are afraid of us. Unlucky beggars that we are! We have reached the position of being admired by all. So I see looming before us the ill-omened day when there will no longer be bettors to pay for us, and then how shall we do about drinking?”

And Trichter added sadly: “I want to drink so badly, — oh, so badly!”

“You are very fond of wine, then?” said Samuel.

“It is not the wine, but the forgetfulness it brings.”

“What is it you are so desirous to forget? Your debts?”

“No, my behaviour,” rejoined Trichter with a horrible grimace. “Ah! I am a scoundrel! I have my mother in Strasburg; I should have worked to help her. Instead of which I have always been an expense to her, like a coward. After the death of my father, who should have supported her? I, of course. Well! I was base enough to say to myself that I had an uncle, one of her brothers, lieutenant in the army of Napoleon, and it is he who has supported his sister. Then my uncle was killed two years ago. So I had no further excuse and said to myself: ‘Now, villain, this is the time!’ But, unfortunately, my uncle left us a small legacy; so that, instead of sending money to my mother, I asked her for some. I postponed my good intentions. The legacy was not a large one, and it was soon swallowed up, the more so as I spent the greater part of it on drink, and soon not a penny was left. You see I am an utter scoundrel. I tell you all this that you may understand why I drink: it is to drown thought. I do not want you to think that I am a coarse drunkard, a vile sponge, a drinking machine. I am a miserable wretch.”

“But,” said Samuel, “how do you expect to extricate yourself from all this?”

“I have no idea. As best I can. I do not mind what I do. Ah! if I had to die that my mother might have bread, I would willingly do so.”

“Are you in earnest?”

“In sober earnest.”

“That is a good thing to know,”

Samuel added, “and I shall not forget it. But before coming to such a pass, why do you not appeal to Napoleon, since your mother’s brother was killed in his service? He has that quality common to all great men, that he knows how to reward those who serve him. He would give your mother a pension, a post, something which would enable her to live.”

Trichter held up his head proudly:

“I am German: can I ask anything of the tyrant of Germany?”

“You are German, it is true, but did you not tell me one day that your mother was French?”

“Yes, she is French.”

“Then your scruples are exaggerated. We can discuss this later on. For the present, it is more urgent that your debts be paid.”

“Oh! I have given up that Utopian idea.”

“You must never give up anything. This is the subject I wanted to talk to you about. Which of your creditors duns you most?”

“Would you believe it? it is not a taverner,” said Trichter. “The taverners treat me with respect and consideration, and give me encouragement as a rare and curious drinker, as an ideal difficult to attain, whom they hold up to the admiration of the public. My wagers result in enormous receipts for them, and naturally a number of little drinking encounters spring up around me in emulation of my example. I am the head of a school. Besides, I am an attraction in a tavern; I adorn the place; I am a luxury! A manager offered to engage me at thirty florins a week, on condition that he might put on his advertisement:

“‘Trichter will drink!’

“Dignity compelled me to refuse, but at heart I felt flattered. Oh! no, the taverners are not those who torment me. My most ferocious creditor is Muhldorf.”

“The tailor?”

“That’s the man! Under the pretext that he has made my clothes for the last seven years, and has not yet received payment of the first account, that cur pursues me everywhere. ‘For six years, each time he sent in his account, I ordered a new suit from him; but, this last year, he has utterly refused to supply me with any clothes at all. Not content with that, he literally persecutes me. The day before yesterday, as I passed his shop, he had the impertinence to rush out and tell me in the open street that the suit I was wearing was his, because I had not paid him for it, and, suiting the action to the word, he was about to lay a sacrilegious hand on my collar.”

“He would have dared to ignore to such an extent the privileges of the University! “Samuel exclaimed.

“Set your mind at rest,” said Trichter. “A haughty glance quieted down the bold man in time. I forgive him. I can imagine the rage of this full-blooded tradesman, exasperated by long waiting for a round sum, and who cannot bring his complaint before the courts, on account of the laws of the University, which forbid citizens to give us credit. Besides, as I tell you, his intention has not been carried into effect.”

“The intention even is too much,” Samuel exclaimed. “It behoves that Muhldorf be punished.”

“It would be well, certainly, but...

“But what?.... I sentence him to give you a receipt in full, and grant you, besides, a substantial indemnity. Does that suit you?”

“Admirably. But you are joking?”

“You shall see. Give me writing materials.”

Trichter scratched his head in perplexity.

“Well! something to write with? “Samuel repeated.

“The fact of the matter is,” said Trichter, “I have neither pens, ink, nor paper.”

“Ring; there must be some in the hotel.”

“I do not know; it is an hotel for students. I have never asked for any.”

In answer to Trichter’s ring, a waiter appeared, and soon returned with what was required.

“Wait,” Samuel said to the waiter.

He wrote:

“MY DEAR MONSIEUR MUHLDORF, “A friend begs to inform you that your debtor Trichter has just received five hundred crowns from his mother.”

“Are you writing to Muhldorf?” asked Trichter.

“I am.”

“And what are you writing to him?”

“A preface, an introduction to the subject, the argument to “comedy or a tragedy.”

“Ah!” said Trichter, satisfied but unable to understand.

Samuel sealed the letter, addressed it, and gave it to the waiter.

“Send round this letter by the first urchin you see, and give him this money for running the errand. He is to deliver the letter without saying where it comes from.”

The waiter went out.

“Now, Trichter,” Samuel went on, “you are to go at once to Muhldorf.”

“What for?”

“To order yourself a new suit.”

“He will ask me for money!”

“That’s evident, of course! But you just tell him to go to the devil!”

“Hum! He is capable of getting angry if I beard him in his own den!”

“You must insult him, exasperate him.”

“But....”

“Now then,” Samuel interrupted in a severe tone, “since when does my ‘Pet Fox ‘permit himself to raise objections when his ‘senior ‘has spoken? I guide you, it is not necessary for you to see; you have my eyes. Go to Muhldorf, be very insolent and very impertinent, and pray God that the tailor may put a finishing touch to his movement against you a few days since.”

“Ought I to tolerate it?” asked Trichter humbly.

“Oh! on that point, you may please yourself,” said Samuel. “I leave you to follow your own instinct.”

“That’s all right then!” cried Trichter, on his mettle at once.

“Take your stick.”

“I should think so!”

Trichter took up his stick, and walked out.

“That is how all great wars begin! “Samuel said to himself, “and always because of a woman! Christiane will be satisfied.”

CHAPTER XXXIX.

WHAT COULD ONE DO AGAINST THREE?

FIVE minutes later, Trichter entered! Muhldorf’s, his hat on one side, arrogant, quarrelsome, aggressive, in anticipation of the reception which he expected to receive from the tailor.

Muhldorf received him with a gracious smile.

“Pray be seated, my dear Monsieur Trichter,” said he, “I am delighted to see you.”

“Bah!” said Trichter. “Have you any idea what I come for?”

“I can guess,” the tailor answered, rubbing his hands together.

“I come to order a new suit.”

“Capital! When do you want it?”

“At once,” said Trichter, lost in astonishment at the tailor’s pleasant manner. “Be quick and take my measure.”

The tailor obeyed with alacrity. When he had finished he said:

“It will be ready for you on Saturday.”

“Very well. Send it on to me,” said Trichter, turning to go away.

“You are going?” said Muhldorf.

“What should I stay here for?”

“I do not ask you to stay, but I hope you are going to leave me something.”

“What do you want?”

“A hundred florins at any rate, simply on account.”

“My good fellow,” rejoined Trichter, “you have been too polite to me to-day, and have taken my measure in too friendly a manner for me to answer you as an honest student should reply to a vulgar demand for money. The remembrance of the clothes you have made me for seven years, and the expectation of the suit you are to let me have on Saturday, induce me not to take exception to your call on my pocket. I forgive you.”

“Forgive and give,” said Muhldorf, putting out his hand.

Trichter grasped the tailor’s hand.

“A handshake if you like,” said he; “but I have not a penny.”

And he turned towards the door.

Mulhdorf stood in his way.

“Not a penny!” he exclaimed, “and what about the five hundred florins your mother has sent you?”

“Five hundred florins? my mother? “Trichter repeated. “Ah! that’s a good joke! Muhldorf, you are getting witty.”

“That is to say,” cried Muhldorf, attempting to suppress his rising anger, “that, not content with not paying for your previous suits, you have come to laugh at me in my own shop by ordering new ones.”

“That is to say,” retorted Trichter, already a little excited too, “that your reason for receiving me so obsequiously, and taking my measure with such cringing politeness, is just to poke fun at me.”

“So,” snapped Muhldorf, taking up Samuel’s letter from his counter and putting it, in a fury of rage, under Trichter’s very nose, “this letter is a hoax?”

“So,” roared Trichter, throwing an angry glance at the letter, “when you were promising me a complete suit of clothes for Saturday, it was for the money with which you imagined my pockets were plentifully lined, not for the inestimable honour of making my clothes?”

And he brandished his heavy stick about. But Muhldorf snatched up his yard measure.

“It is not a question of the clothes I was going to make you,” cried the exasperated creditor, “but of those I have made you and which you are going to pay for or give me back.”

He advanced on Trichter, holding the yard measure aloft.

Muhldorf had barely raised his yard measure against Trichter ere Trichter’s stick descended on Muhldorf.

Muhldorf uttered a cry, stepped back quickly, drove his elbows through two of his front windows, and turned again on Trichter, who was waving his stick wildly in the air.

At the cry of the tailor, two neighbours, a pork butcher and a shoemaker, rushed in.

The noble Trichter struck the shoemaker in the eye, in nowise alarmed at the number of his assailants. But suddenly he became sensible of an attack on his left calf which he had neither parried nor foreseen. It was the pork butcher’s dog that had come to his master’s assistance. Trichter instinctively looked down to see what had happened. The three adversaries took advantage of this movement to throw themselves upon him and kick him out of doors.

The impetus was such that the gallant Trichter went rolling into the gutter, pell-mell with the dog, which had the good sense not to loose his hold of the leg.

At the first onslaught all Trichter had been able to do as he shot past was to twist his stick about in such a manner as to throw it straight through the shop front, reducing all the remainder of the glass to atoms.

But, as he fell, he caught sight of two foxes passing at the end of the road.

“Help! help!” cried he at the top of his voice.

CHAPTER XL.

THE TABOO.

LET us relate with exciting brevity the rapid and important events which followed:

At Trichter's call the two foxes rushed up, rescued their comrade from the grip of the dog, and, grasping the situation at a glance, attacked the house of the tailor.

It was a stiff fight, the noise of which soon attracted other neighbours and other students to the spot. The fray was on the point of becoming general, when the police arrived.

Trichter and his friends found themselves hemmed in between the townsmen on one side and the police on the other. Although they made a gallant resistance, it was in vain — their position was a hopeless one. They had to yield. Some of the students managed to escape; but Trichter and the two other foxes were arrested.

They were led to prison, securely handcuffed. Fortunately the gaol was close by; for the students were beginning to appear in groups, and there were even some attempts made to rescue the prisoners. But the police, aided by the tradespeople, held out, and the three foxes were incarcerated safe and sound.

Reports of the skirmish and of the insult offered to the University were soon noised abroad. In ten minutes every student knew of it. In the twinkling of an eye the lecture halls were deserted and even the most popular professors addressed their words first to backs, finally to empty benches.

Groups collected in the streets. Three students arrested because of a dispute with a tradesman! the matter was a serious one and demanded vengeance. It was decided to deliberate on it in conclave, and all wended their way towards the hotel where Samuel lodged, The circumstance was of sufficient importance for the king to be informed of it.

Samuel had them all to enter into the immense hall which we have already seen made use of at the “Foxes’ *Comtnerz* He presided over the meeting and each one was able to express his opinion. It was a most memorable meeting, and as little parliamentary as possible. Needless to say that nearly all the suggestions proposed were violent, furious, inflammatory. The most extreme measures were those which received greatest applause.

One ‘mossy head ‘suggested that Muhldorf’s shop should be set on fire.

A ‘finch ‘was hustled out with an explosion of hisses for having insinuated that it might be best to rest satisfied with the removal from office of those police officers who had arrested Trichter and his worthy defenders.

“Thunder and lightning!” roared a ‘branded fox ‘; “the dismissal of their chiefs is the least we require, and even that would not be enough.”

This was greeted with loud applause.

Then arose a perfect hubbub of the wildest and most extravagant proposals.

One suggested that all the tailors of the town should be punished for the crime of Muhldorf, that every beggar in the neighbourhood should be assembled and clothed gratis with all the cloth to be found in all the shops.

Another, whose speech it was said ought to be printed, maintained that that would be but scant satisfaction, that a tailor was not the only one mixed up in the affair, there was also a pork butcher and a shoemaker; that it was not only as tailor, pork butcher and shoemaker that they had thrashed the students, but as townsmen, in consequence of that natural and undying hatred between townsmen and students; and that therefore they must be revenged, not only on tailors, shoemakers and pork butchers, but on the citizens in a body, and that the University would not be truly revenged but by the sacking of the town.

The discussion, fanned into a flame by the heated imaginations of the fiery students, was now at its height. Samuel Gelb stood up.

There was a deep silence and the president addressed the meeting in these words:

“GENTLEMEN AND DEAR COMRADES, “Many excellent things have been said, and the University will only have to make its choice between the different schemes of vengeance which have been proposed and expounded. -But the honourable last speakers will, permit me to say that there is perhaps something more pressing than to be revenged on our enemies (‘Hear! hear’); we must first rescue our friends! (Applause.).

“Whilst we are deliberating here, three of our men are in prison; they expect us, they wonder at not seeing us come to their aid; they have the right to lose confidence in us! ('Bravo! that's true! that's true! ')

"What! some of our students have been already imprisoned half-an-hour, and are not yet released! (Sensation.)

"Let us begin with them and end *with.* the others. ('Good! hear! hear! ') Let us fling open the door, and give them the pleasure of participating with us in the punishment of their insulters! "(Loud cheers.)

The meeting dispersed with enthusiasm. The word of command was given. The students hastily armed themselves with stakes, crowbars and beams., A quarter of an hour later the prison was besieged.

All this had happened so quickly that the authorities had not had time to be warned. The prison was protected only by the ordinary guard. On seeing the' students swarming round the corner of the street, the chief of the guard gave orders, to lock the gates. But of what use were a dozen men against four hundred students?

"Forward!" cried Samuel. "We must not give time for the soldiers to come up."

And, placing himself at the head of a group which carried a formidable beam of timber, he marched first against the gates.

"Fire!" said the chief, and a volley was discharged against the assailants.. Not a student retreated an inch. A few pistol shots replied. Then, before the - guard had had time to reload their, muskets, twenty battering-rams struck the principal gates with tremendous force. The gates yielded.

"Courage, lads!" exclaimed Samuel, "one more blow, and we shall be inside. But wait.",; He let go the beam, seized a crowbar and put it under the gates. Ten or twelve foxes did the same, and their united: efforts slightly raised the gates.

"Now strike!" said Samuel.

The shock of twenty battering rams was heard, and the gates burst open with a crash.

Ay second volley crashed into the students' ranks. Samuel was already in the courtyard, A soldier took aim at him. He rushed at; the man with the leap of a panther, and stretched him dead with a blow from his crowbar.

"Lay down your arms!" he commanded the guard.

But the order was unnecessary. The students had crowded in after him, and already the courtyard was so thronged that it would have been impossible to take aim.

Besides the soldier filled by Samuel, three others lay bleeding on the ground, more or less seriously wounded by pistol-bullets. Seven or eight "studiosi" had received wounds, but fortunately none were dangerous.

The assailants disarmed the guard, and rushed to the cells where Trichter and his two comrades were confined and released them.

Then the conquerors smashed windows and doors.

After which they amused themselves, wise precaution, with destroying part of the prison.

Whilst they gave themselves up to this diverting form of exercise, a messenger came to. warn them that the academical council had assembled and was about to pass judgment on the leaders of the revolt.

"Ah! the academical council is sitting in judgment on us," said Samuel. "Very well! we shall sit in judgment on the academical council. Ho! there!" cried he, "foxes and finches, guard the entrance-gates. The convention of 'seniores' is going to deliberate."

The "seniores "assembled in a hall attached to the prison.

Samuel immediately addressed the assembly. This time his harangue was short, to the point, Tacitus-like, and in harmony with the sound of the tumult, and the distant beat of drums; his remarks did not meet with a single interruption from those Conscript Fathers of twenty summers.

"Listen. We have no time to lose. I hear the beat to arms. The troops will soon be here. It is wise, to decide on a course of action at once. This is my advice:

"All manner of schemes have been suggested. The setting on fire of Muhldorfs house, the sacking of the town; etc. Each one of these methods of revenge has its charm, I do not deny. But that would entail an engagement with the troops, the shedding of blood, and the loss of valued friends. Would it not be better to obtain the same result without bloodshed?

"What is it we want? To punish the tradespeople. Well! there is a more terrible method of punishing them than by smashing a few shop-fronts and setting fire to the frame-work. We can ruin Heidelberg in a quarter of an hour. All we have to do is to take ourselves off.

"Upon what does Heidelberg live, if not upon us? Who give her tailors the wherewithal to live? Those who wear their clothes. Who give the shoemakers work to do? Those who wear their boots. Who puts money in the butcher's pocket? Those who eat meat.

“Therefore, deprive the tradesmen of their customers, the professors of their pupils, and, instantly, professors and tradesmen no longer exist. Heidelberg without us is a body without a soul. It is dead.

“What; a tradesman has dared to refuse his merchandise to a student? Well! all the students will leave all the merchandise to all the merchants. And we shall see what they will do with it! One of these has refused to supply one of us. Very well! they will no longer supply any of us! I propose to make one of those striking examples which mark the history of the Students’ Guild, and become the rule of the ‘studentes’ and a lesson to the Philistines for the future. I propose the emigration in a body of the University, and the interdict of the town of Heidelberg.”

Samuel’s words were drowned in a thunder of applause.

The departure was unanimously voted.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE WISDOM OF THE SERPENT AND THE STRENGTH OF THE LION.

THE “seniores” went among the crowd and announced the decision arrived at, which excited enthusiastic cheers from everyone.

It was decided that the students would have the remainder of the day in which to complete their arrangements, that they would mention the proposed scheme to no one and that they would leave the town quietly and silently during the night, in order that the townsmen, on their waking, would be unexpectedly struck with stupor and remorse.

Just as all this was arranged, a young fox rushed in breathless.

A clerk of the court, who had been present at the assembly of the academical council, and who was related to him, had told him the result of the sitting.

This is what had been decided:

If the students resisted, the troops had orders to fire on them, and, at any cost, compel them to submit.

If they dispersed quietly, an amnesty to all, except Samuel, who had killed a soldier, and who was looked upon as the ringleader of all this uproar, and the instigator of Trichter, his favourite fox. Samuel was the only one blamed. An order of arrest had been issued against him, and the troops must even now be on their way to secure him.

A universal cry arose.

“War to the knife rather than give up the King!

Trichter in particular was loud in his expressions of indignation:

“Ah! upon my honour! let them but try to lay a finger on my ‘senior,’ on him who has just rescued me, the King of the students, Samuel Gelb, a fine thing, indeed! Rascally council! we shall soon see!”

And he stood in front of Samuel, like a bull-dog before his master, grinding his teeth and growling to himself.

During the uproar, Samuel said a few words to a student, who ran off hurriedly.

“A fight! a fight!” cried the crowd.

“No! there must be no fighting!” said Samuel.

“The University has proved its valour. Our comrades are free; so our honour is safe. The ‘Taboo ‘has gone forth. To put it into execution, you have no need of me.”

“Do you want us to let them arrest you?” asked Trichter in consternation.’

“Oh! “Samuel rejoined, smiling, “they have not got me yet, never fear! I shall know how to keep out of their clutches unaided.

“Now, is it quite understood? to-morrow morning Heidelberg will no longer be in Heidelberg, but where I am. As to the customary formalities of departure, Trichter knows them as well as he does his ‘Code.’ For myself, I am going on ahead to have quarters prepared for you at our ‘Mons Aventinus.’ You will find the flag of the University ready set up.”

“Where?” asked several voices.

“At Landeck! “Samuel replied.

Murmurs rose from the crowd.

“At Landeck? Make for Landeck? Where is Landeck? Never mind! Landeck is nothing now, Landeck Will be for us. Hurrah for Landeck!”

“Good!” rejoined. Samuel. “But make way. Here comes my horse.”

The student to whom he had whispered, rode up. He dismounted. Samuel sprang into the saddle.

“Give me the flag?” said he.

The student who carried the University flag handed it to him. Samuel wound it round the staff, strapped it to the saddle, armed himself with two pairs of pistols and a sword, and saying, “At Landeck, to-morrow,”

He set spurs to his horse and galloped off.

At the first winding of the road he encountered a detachment of police, which he hustled aside. One of their numbers evidently recognised him, for he heard an exclamation, then several bullets whizzed round him. Samuel paid back such things; he turned round and, without stopping, discharged two of his pistols. But the police officers were on foot. In a few seconds, Samuel was out of reach, and, taking the least frequented byways, he soon found himself galloping along the main road.

Samuel had not hurried away too soon, for almost immediately after his departure the troops arrived.

In a moment the exits were guarded. Twelve constables advanced, supported by a platoon of soldiers, and one of them solemnly demanded that Samuel Gelb be delivered over to them, promising an amnesty to all on that condition.

The crowd offered no resistance, but simply said: “Find him.”

The search began. It had lasted ten minutes, when an order arrived from the academical council. One of the police officers whom Samuel had jostled had brought the news of his having left the town. The council accepted this departure as sufficient satisfaction for the present, and demanded but one thing more: that the students should quietly disperse.

The order was read. The students dispersed and returned quietly to their rooms.

The council was delighted although surprised at this quick and peaceful ending. The remainder of the day only strengthened their delight and surprise. Not a challenge, not a quarrel, not a threat. To all appearances the students had entirely forgotten the uproar of the morning.

Night came. The townspeople retired proudly to rest. At ten o’clock, as usual, all the town was snugly asleep.

But, at midnight, had anyone been awake, they would have seen a strange sight.

CHAPTER XLII.

SHAKING THE DUST FROM OFF THEIR FEET.

AT midnight the doors of the students’ quarters opened mysteriously; one student appeared, then a second, then a third; the majority were on foot, others on horseback, some in carriages, and all, walking in the shadow, bent their steps towards the University Square.

When they came across a street lamp they unhooked it noiselessly.

The crowd began to grow dense on the University Square and increased every moment. The shadows moving about there, greeted each other with a shake of the hand and a few words in an undertone. One of the most energetic was our friend Trichter, who had an enormous pipe in his mouth, and a graceful girl hanging on his arm.

Oh! frailty! thy name is woman! This girl was Lolotte, the former mistress of Franz Ritter. Triumphant Trichter had not only robbed Dormagen of his fox, but also Ritter of his sweetheart. One fine morning, taking advantage of a quarrel between the jealous swain and the flirt, he had supplanted Franz.

At about two o’clock, Trichter went up to a group:

“The torches,” said he.

Suddenly twenty torches, were lighted.

Trichter took one, waved it furiously about, called for silence and attention, and turning solemnly towards the centre of the town, pronounced the following imprecation in the true ancient lyric style:

“Cursed! cursed! thrice cursed town!

“Since your tailors have become blind to the honour of seeing their cloth converted into graceful habiliments for the student corps.

“Since your shoemakers are no longer content that their leather should pleasantly define our instep.

“Since your pork butchers cherish for their pigs a fate other than that of making that rich blood in our veins which aroused in us such noble ideas. Since, instead of paying us for these many advantages, they demand that we should pay them; very well! let them keep their shoes, their clothes, their meat! May their avarice ruin them. Their cloth will become the shroud of their fortune. To eke out their incomes they will be reduced to wearing our shoes themselves, and their wives will wear our boots. Their uneaten sausages will become tainted and give them the plague. Weep citizens, tradesmen, merchants of every kind! Henceforth, for you, no more money, no more festivities. No more will you have the pleasure of seeing us pass beneath your windows, joyous, dressed in bright attire, pleasant for the eye to rest upon and gaily singing '*Viva vallera';* no more will you be wakened at night by the stones which we amused ourselves with throwing at your windows. No more will your daughters be kissed by us. Weep, citizens, weep!

"Especially you, ungrateful taverners, the entire hope of your purse will follow on our heels. You may die of starvation through excess of victuals. And you may perish with thirst, but never again shall we drink your wine."

Here, Trichter quickly turned his torch upside down on the pavement, and said:

"I extinguish the life of Heidelberg with the light of this torch."

The nineteen other torch-bearers did the same, and repeated:

"I extinguish the life of Heidelberg with the light of this torch."

Darkness reigned once more.

The extinction of the torches was the signal for departure.

The crowd therefore set out and was soon on the road to Neckarsteinach.

The rising sun shone with an astonished ray on this strange band. It was a medley of men, dogs, foils, pipes, hatchets, women, horses and carriages. Pale, tired, dressed in slovenly fashion, the students carried away with them their most precious and most necessary possessions, flasks of brandy, a little linen, and no books.

Although the flight had taken place so secretly, it had been impossible to prevent the stable boys from the Inns, and a few early-rising tradesmen from witnessing it. So, at the tail of the procession, there was already a file of barrows and small carts laden with bread, meat, spirits, and all kinds of provisions. Trichter, who marched at the head, turned round, recognized a taverner, and suppressed a smile of content.

"Ah! a few 'Vivandiers! said he in as careless a tone as possible.

But, a moment later, under what pretext we know not, he quitted the side of the ambling nag on which he had perched Lolotte, allowed everyone to pass on, went straight up to the wine merchant, ordered himself a large glass of gin, then rejoined his sweetheart.

At Neckarsteinach they halted for a short rest. The walk had sharpened the appetite of the students, and the provisions from Heidelberg which, seeing the urgency of the case, it was agreed to consume yet this once, were swallowed up in a trice. The innkeepers of Neckarsteinach gave up their last chicken and their last bottle of wine.

Thus restored, the students set out again. They walked on nearly four hours longer, then arrived at some cross-roads.

“Now then!” said Trichter, “the road branches off. Must we go to the right or. to the left? I hesitate as did Buridan’s ass between his two pecks of oats.”

Just then, the galloping of a horse was heard in the distance. A cloud of dust was seen flying along the road to the left and approaching rapidly. A second later, the horseman was recognised; it was Samuel.

“Hurrah!” shouted the crowd.

“Which road must we take?” asked Trichter.

“Follow me! “Said Samuel.

CHAPTER XLIII.

MYSTERIES OF A NIGHT AND OF A SOUL.

WHAT had Samuel been doing since the previous day, since his departure from Heidelberg?

The preceding evening, his horse had brought him back to Landeck at about seven o’clock, less than twenty-four hours after he had left it.

Once more he had gained admittance into Gretchen’s hut.

He had left it barely five minutes, when Gretchen returned with her goats. She was bringing them home earlier than usual, not even waiting until night had quite closed in. Since the morning she had felt a strange sense of uneasiness, which had deprived her of sleep and appetite. The whole day long, she had been feverish. She felt at once excited and depressed.

After milking her goats and penning them in for the night, she went into her hut; but she soon came out again; nowhere could she rest.

This July night threatened to be overpoweringly hot. There was not a breath of air. The chirp of the cricket arose from every nook and corner of these sun-scorched fields. By some singular contradiction, Gretchen was as thirsty as this parched land, and yet felt no inclination to drink; she was as sleepy as this heavy atmosphere, and yet had no inclination to sleep.

A sort of mysterious, latent voluptuousness hung over all things. The cooings and flutterings of the birds died away amorously in the nests. A pungent odour rose from the grasses. The stars shone softly through the warm transparent darkness.

Gretchen wanted to go in, and yet she remained seated on the grass, her hands clasping her knees, gazing without seeing, her eyes on the stars, her thoughts nowhere. She suffered in all her being, without knowing why. She longed to cry; it seemed to her that tears would relieve her, and she tried to force them to come, like the parched land entreating for a drop of dew. After a tremendous effort she felt the tears spring to her burning eyes.

What astonished her most of all was that she could not rid her mind of one thought, which, for the last twenty-four hours, had been uppermost, in despite of herself, the thought of Gottlob, that young labourer who, the previous year, had asked her to marry him. Why did she think of this young man? Why did she think of him with mingled pain and pleasure, she, who had always been indifferent to him?

Not a month ago, Gottlob, meeting her one day, had diffidently asked whether she had not changed her mind, if she still loved a solitary life. She had said in answer that her freedom was dearer to her than ever.

Gottlob had told her that his parents wished to force him into a marriage with Rose, a girl living in the neighbourhood. Gretchen had not felt the least jealous. She had warmly advised Gottlob to please his parents, and, far from any feeling of heart-ache or wounded vanity, she had been truly glad to know that this honest fellow would be able to console himself with another and live happily with her.

Since this meeting, her thoughts had often reverted to this marriage of Gottlob’s and always with the same feeling of pleasure.

Why then did she think of it today with mingled bitterness and regret? Why could she not picture this young man in the arms of another, without a sensation of unutterable pain? Why did the remembrance of Gottlob, vainly repulsed, return unceasingly to torment her, like those teasing flies which she brushed away with her hand?

Why on that very day, instead of taking her goats, as she usually did, among the rocks or in the depths of the forest, had she, on the contrary, sought the outskirts of the wood and the borders of the plain? Gottlob had some pieces of ground that way. Why had she stayed in that neighbourhood the whole day, and why, Gottlob not having appeared, had she felt weighed down with some vague sense of sadness?

She had decided to return, not eyen waiting till the close of day. Suddenly she had started; she heard Gottlob’s voice behind her. She had turned round, and at the bend of the road, saw the young man coming home from the fields. But he was not alone. Rose’s father and Rose herself were with him..

He had given his arm to his sweetheart and was talking gaily to her. Gretchen had hidden herself behind the trees, and had not been seen. Why had her heart throbbed painfully? Why had a pang of jealousy shot through her on looking at Rose? Why had she conjured up, for the first time in her life, the passionate mysteries of a nuptial night? Why did the delight of Gottlob and the proud smile on Rose’s face haunt her even to the threshold of her cottage? Why was she sad because her wish had come to pass? Why did the happiness of others bring these hot, burning tears into her eyes — she, who had never harboured an unkind thought of anyone?

To all these questions she could find no answer.

She wanted to distract her thoughts. She stood up. Her eyes and lips were hot and feverish.

“It must be because I am thirsty and in want of sleep,” she said to herself, She went into her hut, struck a light and lighted her lamp.

Then she opened her cupboard and took from it some bread.

She ate only a mouthful. She was not hungry. Besides, it seemed to her that the bread still had that strange taste which she had already noticed the previous evening.

She had put some sour milk aside in one corner of the shelf. She began to drink thirstily.

Suddenly she put down the bowl. There was a curiously bitter flavour in the milk. But she was so parched that this did not deter her.

“Bah!” said she, “I am mad!”

And she drank to the last drop. She felt somewhat refreshed, and lay down fully dressed on her bed of bracken.

But she could not sleep. After a while, she felt more restless than ever. The milk she had drunk, instead of allaying her thirst, seemed to have further stimulated it. She felt choking in this close room, there was fire in her veins, fire in her brain.

She could not endure it, and got up to go outside.

On reaching the door, her foot slipped on something. Looking down, she saw some shining object. She stooped and picked up a tiny phial in some metal which was neither gold nor silver, and which was unknown to her.

Who had left that little phial there?

Gretchen had locked the door on leaving. She felt sure of it.

The phial was empty; but the odour of what it had contained still remained. Gretchen recognized the same odour as she fancied she had noticed in her bread and in the milk.

She put her hand to her head.

“Surely I must be mad,” she said to herself in bewilderment. “Herr Schreiber was right after all. Solitude is not good. Oh! God!”

She compelled herself to think and to remember. She looked round the rooms, and fancied that her few belongings were arranged differently to when she left. Could anyone have been in the room?

She went outside. Night had fallen more than two hours since, and the air should have been growing cooler.

And yet it seemed to her hotter than before. She felt as if she were inhaling fire.

She stretched herself on the grass, but the grass seemed to her burning hot.

She lay down on the rock; but the stone was as hot as the ground; the granite, like a stove that remains hot after the wood is consumed, had retained the heat from the sun.

“Whatever had she drunk? what was that philtre? who had brought, that phial?” Suddenly she shuddered from head to foot; the thought of Samuel, dispelled until then by the thought of Gottlob, had just flashed across her mind. Samuel! oh yes! it must be he. Instantly all her superstitious fears returned. Samuel was certainly the devil. Yes, that was it, he had threatened her, he was keeping his word, he had laid hold of her, he had taken possession of her, he was coming to claim her. The devil had no trouble to get into houses without a key; no locks could withstand him. Gretchen felt she was lost.

And, infernal mystery! although terrified and in despair, she was at the same time almost glad. She felt a bitter joy at the thought that the devil had her in his power. She was certain that Samuel was coming, and expected him with mingled impatience and horror. One part of her said, “I cannot escape!” and the other part: “So much the better! “Some terrible frenzy took hold of her imagination. The vertigo of hell began to seize her. She longed to hurl herself into damnation.

Presently the thought of Gottlob returned to her. But now she saw him with different eyes. Instead of thinking longingly of him, he became repulsive to her. What was he to her, this peasant with coarse red hands and rough manners, more stolid than his oxen. She, jealous of Rose! Ah! likely indeed! The husband, the lover she wanted, was not a rustic with hands only fit for the plough, but a young man with a broad forehead, shapely hands, keen piercing eyes; clever man with an intimate knowledge of plants, conversant with the remedies needed for wounded roes, — and wounded souls, knowing how to cure and how to kill. The sound of a footstep on the gravel made her start to her feet.

She opened her eyes to their fullest extent.

It was Samuel.

CHAPTER XLIV.

SIN IS NEVER TO BE TRIFLED WITH.

ON seeing Samuel, Gretchen drew herself up, and stepped back; but by some instinct stronger than her will, in retreating she held out her hands to Samuel.

Samuel stood still, his pallor further heightened by the rays of the moon. In the expression of his face there was neither mockery, triumph, nor hatred; his look was grave, almost melancholy. Gretchen thought he looked taller than usual.

She still retreated towards the door, struggling between two impulses, frightened, yet fascinated, her feet turned towards her cottage, her face held out to Samuel.

“Do not come near me!” she cried. “Begone, devil! I am afraid of you! I hate and I loathe you, do you hear? In the name of the Holy Virgin, begone, reprobate!”

And she made the sign of the cross.

“Do not come near me!” she repeated.

“I do not mean to,” Samuel slowly replied. “Not one step will I go towards you. It is you who will come to me.”

“Ah!” she said, despairingly, “that’s very possible. For I do not know what you have made me drink. You have brought it from that hell of yours. It is poison, is it not?”

“It is not poison. It is the essence of certain flowers which you are very fond of, and with which you have dared to insult me. It is an elixir in which the concentrated forces of nature waken the slumbering forces of life. Love was asleep in you, I have wakened it, that is all.”

“Ah! the flowers have betrayed me!” Gretchen exclaimed, in heart-broken tones.

Then, looking at Samuel with sadness, rather than anger:

“I see that you speak the truth,” she went on, “for my mother used to tell me that love means suffering and I do suffer.” And she still tried to flee from him. Samuel did not stir. He stood motionless, and, but for the fire in his burning, passionate eyes, he might have been mistaken for a statue.

"If you are suffering," said he, "why do you not ask me to cure you?"

He said these words in a sweet, persuasive voice which stirred Gretchen to the inmost fibres of her being. She made one step towards him, then another and yet another. But suddenly she started away, terrified; "No, no, no! I will not! You are a terrible and a cursed man. You want my ruin. But you have no hold over me."

"I repeat," said Samuel, "that I shall not take one step towards you. You see very well that I do not move. If I wished, could I not with three strides compel you to my will? But I prefer to wait your pleasure."

"I am thirsty," said Gretchen. Then in a humble, caressing voice, she asked:

"Is it true that you can cure me?"

"Perhaps," said Samuel. She drew a knife from her pocket, opened it, and approached Samuel, armed and reassured.

"Do not touch me," said she, "or I shall strike you. But make me well again."

Suddenly, however, the poor child flung the knife from her.

"Am I mad?" said she. "I want him to cure me and I threaten him! No, my Samuel, I no longer threaten you. See, I have thrown away my knife. I entreat you. My head aches so terribly. I ask your forgiveness. Make me well, — save me."

She fell at Samuel's feet and clasped her arms about his knees.

It was a marvellous picture to see, under the wan light of the moon and amid such wild surroundings, the girl, dishevelled and in tears, twining her arms round the knees of this statue. Samuel, with arms folded, watched with a sinister look the fire, which he had set alight in this young virgin blood, flame up and consume her. Passion beyond description animated Gretchen; sparks flashed from her eyes and lighted up her dark skin. She looked beautiful thus. Samuel, against his will, felt the fire in this child's veins communicate itself to him. The fever which consumed her and radiated from her began to affect him.

"Ah! so you are still angry with me," said the beautiful girl. "Why do you hate me?"

"I do not hate you," Samuel replied. "I love you. It is you who hate me."

"Oh! not now," she softly said, raising her sweet face to his.

Then, changing her mind in a moment:

“Yes! I always hate you!” she went on, harshly. And she attempted to fly from him. But, after taking three steps, she fell rigid and as if dead.

Samuel did not stir a muscle.

He simply called, “Gretchen!”

She rose to her knees, and without speaking, held out imploring arms to him.

“Well! come!” said he.

And she dragged herself to him, grovelling on her knees.

“I have no strength left,” she said; “help me up.”

“You yourself ask me to do so.”

He stooped, and raising her by both arms, helped her to rise.

“Oh! you are strong!” said she, as if proud of him. “Let me look at you.”

She placed her hand on Samuel’s shoulder and drew a little away from him as if to gaze at him more easily.

“You are beautiful,” she said, “you look like the King of night.”

All this was said and done with bewitching grace, and with indescribable suppleness in her every movement with irresistible magnetism in her voice. Up to the present there had been more terror than temptation in the struggle of this poor innocent soul. But Samuel felt his sang-froid forsaking him, and his composure melting away at the furnace of this flaming heart.

Suddenly Gretchen threw her two arms round his neck, and, standing on tip-toe, brushed her cheek across his forehead. Seized by the passion he had aroused in her, he pressed his lips to hers.

The moment she felt him touch her, Gretchen shuddered. Instantly her languor turned into rage, she bit Samuel violently on the cheek, disengaged herself from his arms and started back with a harsh indignant cry.

But just as quickly appeased, a shiver ran through her, and she looked at Samuel trembling, repentant, asking forgiveness.

“Oh! I have hurt you, have I not?” she said.

“No!” he replied, and at last the marble statue seemed stirred into being and thoroughly active; “no! on the contrary, I thank you. That very pain is what is sweet. That it is which mingles the horrible and the beautiful, danger and joy, love and hate, heaven and hell; that is the infinite. That is what I love in you.”

“Ah well! so much the worse, I love you too,” exclaimed Gretchen.

But changing suddenly:

"Ah! how hateful I am! shall I be false to my vow? No, rather let me die."

With a movement quicker than lightning she snatched up her knife which lay glistening in the grass, and plunged it in her bosom.

But Samuel had seized her arm. The blade did not penetrate far, but the blood spurted out.

"Unhappy child!" said he, taking possession of the knife. "Luckily I caught hold of your arm in time. It will be nothing."

Gretchen seemed unconscious of the wound. She looked vaguely in front of her, as if thinking of something else. Then she passed her hand across her brow.

"Are you hurt?" she asked.

"No; on the contrary, that has done me good. I am coming back to my senses. Now I understand. I see what I must tell you."

She burst into tears and clasped her hands tightly together.

"Listen to me, sir," said she. "You must spare me. You must take pity on me, for mercy's sake. I crawl at your feet. I am conquered, you are the stronger, I am yours if you so wish it; well! spare me! It is more mighty to spare than it is to yield. Oh! with all my heart and soul, I do entreat you! What good would it do you to carry out your evil intentions towards me? For a moment's gratified vanity, you would ruin a whole existence? What would become of me afterwards? Reflect. Do not be afraid that once out of danger, I will defy you again. Ah! there is no fear, this is a lesson that I shall never forget. I shall even tell Madame Christiane about it. Whatever you command, I will do. Surely what I say is reasonable, and you see for yourself that there is no need to torture me further, and you will be merciful to me. What more could I do, since I am at your feet? You are a man, and I, I am not even a woman, I am only a child. Does one give any heed to what a child may say or think? Does one ruin her for a word she may have said? Oh! sir, have mercy!"

Her tone was so pitiful, her abandonment so complete, that even Samuel was touched. For the first time perhaps his resolution faltered. An uncontrollable wave of emotion swept over him, before the deep despair of this snow-white purity upon which he in his pride was about to inflict a perhaps mortal stain. Besides, was she not sufficiently tamed, sufficiently conquered, sufficiently possessed? Was she not entirely in his power? Did not she herself admit that she was absolutely dependent upon him? Then, he could afford to be generous. The moment that she was willing to give herself, why take her?

Unfortunately, Gretchen was very lovely, and the potion still continued to do its work. Little by little her despair relaxed into vague feverish languor, she had taken Samuel's hands in hers and was covering them with kisses, which breathed already of something besides entreaty, she looked at him with eyes full of melting tenderness.

"Oh!" she said, in a strange tone, "make haste to cure me, soon it will be too late."

"Yes," he answered, gazing at her with burning passionate eyes, "yes, I shall soon cure you; I am going to fetch another philtre, which will calm and quiet your blood. I am going."

But instead of going, his gaze remained riveted on her beauty, as, lost in some vague ecstasy, she clung voluptuously to him.

"Yes, go," she said.

But instead of thrusting him from her, she retained his hand. She did not relax her hold of him. Her voice said "go!" her eyes said "stay!"

Samuel made a violent effort.

"Am I no longer master of my will? You are wholly subdued, tell Christiane so. That is enough; useless to commit unnecessary crime. Farewell, Gretchen."

He tore himself away from Gretchen's clinging hands and rushed towards the rock.

"You are going!" Gretchen cried sadly and tenderly.

"Yes, farewell!"

But scarcely had Samuel reached the entrance and the shadow of the rock, ere two nervous arms were thrown round his neck, burning lips were pressed to his, and, horror stricken, he in turn felt himself seized, overpowered, mastered by his sin.

CHAPTER XLV.

CHRISTIANE IS AFRAID.

THE next day at about four o’clock in the afternoon, Julius and Christiane left the castle to take a walk.

“Where shall we go? “Julius asked.

“Wherever you like,” said Christiane.

“Oh! it is quite immaterial to me,” rejoined Julius, with lazy indifference.

“Well! let us go and see Gretchen. She did not come this morning. I had to send to fetch the goat, so I am rather anxious about her.”

They climbed the ascent leading to Gretchen’s cottage. Christiane turned back to look at the valley.

“What a glorious view,” said she to Julius, pointing to the river and to the hills on the horizon.

“Yes,” said Julius, without turning to look. Christiane feigned not to notice her husband’s listlessness. She walked on towards Gretchen’s hut.

The door was locked.

“Probably she is up the mountain with her goats,” Julius remarked.

Christiane walked on a few steps to the hollow in the rock where Gretchen’s goats were usually penned. The goats were there.

“That’s strange,” she thought.

And coming back to the door, she called:

“Gretchen! are you there? Gretchen!”

There was no answer.

Just at this moment, a great noise arose far off in the valley. Julius and Christiane looked in the direction from whence this sound proceeded. The road from Neckarsteinach seemed a black moving mass. A cloud of dust prevented one from distinguishing what it was. Shouts and a medley of songs broken by the wind, that was all could be heard. All that could be seen, was that there must be a throng of five or six hundred people.

This confused mass was approaching rapidly. Suddenly Julius clapped his hands.

“Yes,” he exclaimed, “Samuel is keeping his word.”

"What do you mean?" asked Christiane.

"I mean," Julius repeated, "that there is Heidelberg coming to Landeck. Samuel had promised to do this for you, and whatever he promises he performs. But to have done that in so short a time! Yes, they are indeed my comrades. Now that they are nearer I can distinguish the students from the University. Do you hear their *Viva vallera?* Oh! what a glorious surprise!"

And Julius who, a few moments since, had been apathetic, was now eager and alert. Christiane grew thoughtful.

The road wound round the base of the rock on which Christiane and Julius stood, about a thousand paces away. The troop advanced lightly and quickly. Soon Julius was able to recognise Samuel at the head of the procession. He was on horseback, grave as the general of an army.

Behind him was borne the great banner of the University.

The students approached nearer, soon they were opposite to Julius and Christiane.

As he passed, Samuel looked up, saw them and bowed.

The students recognised Julius. Every cap was flung up in the air, and every voice thundered out the most heart-stirring refrain which had ever burst on human ears.

"My sweet little Christiane," said Julius, "my comrades have seen me, and I think it would be advisable for me to go and do the honours of our part of the country. You are quite near to the castle, and will not mind going home without me; for, I am somewhat impatient, I must admit, to renew acquaintance with my friends and to know what this means. I shall be back soon."

"Go by all means," said Christiane, a sense of sadness coming over her, she could not tell why.

Julius did not wait to be told twice. He kissed Christiane on the forehead, pretended to walk quietly until he reached the turning in the road, then when he was round the corner and Christiane could no longer see him, he took to his heels, and, in a few moments had joined the crowd.

Christiane watched him out of sight.

"As soon as Samuel appears," said she to herself, "he hastens to him."

She wiped the tears from her eyes, and was turning to go away, when she heard a footstep on the gravel behind her.

Looking round, she saw Gretchen.

"Gretchen!" she said, "but whatever is the matter with you?"

The little goatherd had changed terribly since the previous evening. Pale, dejected, with dishevelled hair, and black circles round her eyes, she seemed to have aged ten years. The excitement natural to her had given place to a sinister wildness; there was something mournful and fatal about her whole appearance.

“What is the matter? “Christiane repeated, “and where do you come from?”

“From my hut.”

“We called you, why did you not come?”

“Because my lord the Viscount was there, and I do not wish anyone to see me now. No, I shall hide myself from everyone, and speak to no one but you. I am ashamed. You I love, and I positively had to tell you. Be on your guard. Believe me, Samuel Gelb does not lie. What he says, he does. Where he has threatened, he strikes. You cannot help it, nor perhaps, can he. See, it hurts me more than I can say to tell you this, but I do so to save you. Turn your eyes away, do not look at me, I implore you, and I will tell you all. Do not look at me; there, that’s right. Now listen: Samuel Gelb had said that I should be his. Well! he made me drink a potion made of his hell and of my flowers

In a word, I am his. Look to yourself! Farewell.”

And immediately taking flight, she rushed into her hut and locked the door.

Christiane was horror-stricken and stood as if turned to stone.

“Gretchen! Gretchen!” she cried.

But she called in vain, Gretchen did not come.

“Oh!” thought Christiane, trembling all over, “it is quite true; he does whatever he says he will do. Heidelberg is at Landeck. Gretchen is ruined, and she leaves me, and my husband leaves me too. Alone! oh! I feel afraid. I will write to the baron, and ask him to come to my assistance.”

CHAPTER XLVI.

GAUDEAMUS IGITUR.

THE students were singing at the top of their voices:

“Gaudeamus igitur,
Tuvenes dum sumus;
Ubi sunt qui ante nos
In mundo fuêre?”

Suddenly they came to a turning in the road, and a village appeared. All the inhabitants, men, women, children, attracted by the noise, were at their cottage doors, staring with all their might at the invasion of this strange army.

Samuel was no longer there. He had gone in the rear to have a talk with Julius.

The student who headed the procession addressed himself to the first peasant:

“Hallo! rustic, what village is this?”

“Landeck.”

Immediately a shout burst from every lip:

“Hallo! Hurrah! Houp-la! Foxes and finches, halt! this is Landeck!”

Then a thousand different cries arose.

“Hail, Landeck!”

“Mons Aventinus of our academic Rome, we greet thee!”

“Hideous conglomeration of hovels, hail!”

“Hail! village from this time forth historical, sublime hamlet, immortal hole.”

Trichter turned to Fresswanst:

“I am thirsty,” said he.

A finch went up to a plough-boy.

“Hi! peasant, native of these parts, semblance of a man who gazes at me with the eyes of a fish, have you sufficient intelligence to direct me to the

Raven Inn?”

“There is no Raven Inn at Landeck,” replied the peasant amazed.

“Well, the Golden Lion Inn.”

“There is no Golden Lion tavern in Landeck.”

“The best tavern in the neighbourhood, then, you idiot?”

“There is no tavern at all in Landeck.”

This reply was greeted with a shout of indignation from the students.

“Do you hear what this farmer-fellow says?” exclaimed the finch; “there is not one tavern in Landeck.”

“Where shall I put my hat-boxes?” asked one student dolefully.

“Where can I put my dog?” groaned a fox.

“Where shall I put my pipe?” roared furiously a moss-covered head.

“And I,” exclaimed another, “where shall I put the apple of my eye, the rose of my springtime, the beloved of my heart?”

Fresswanst said to Trichter:

“I am thirsty.”

All the students began to sing, in a doleful tone which formed a contrast to the more than merry meaning of the words, the second verse of the famous Latin song:

“Vivant omnes Virgines Faciles, formosae; Vivat membrum quodlibet Vivant membra quaelibet!”

Some began to show signs of ill-humour. The glamour of the exodus was fading away. Discontented groups provoked each other and seemed inclined to quarrel.

“Look here, Meyer,” said one big burly fox to his neighbour, “you have given me a thump in the back with your elbow, brute that you are!”

“You fool!” said Meyer.

“Fool, did you say? Very well! Meet me in a quarter of an hour, at the Kaiserstuhl hill! Ah! bless my soul! but where will be our Kaiserstuhl hill?”

“It’s appalling! no place even where we can have a fight.” A peasant cried out: “I say, sir student, take care! your dog....”

The student looked sternly at him. “Your worshipful dog, rustic, if you please!”

“Well! sir, your worshipful dog has just bitten me.”

“What! you have made my dog bite you, you rascal! There, there, take that! “He gave the rustic a thrashing. “Bravo!” shouted the students. And the chorus broke out again as if in philosophical encouragement:

“Vita nostra brevis est;
Brevi finietur.

Venit mors velociter;
Rapit nos atrociter.”

Trichter and Fresswanst said in the same breath:

“I am fearfully thirsty!”

“Now, then,” asked one student, “are we going to take root in the heart of this stupid little village and remain stuck here like posts to point out the way to travellers?”

“Samuel was to tell us what to do.”

“Samuel! Samuel! where is Samuel?”

“Hallo! Samuel, come along, do; we do not know which way to turn; anarchy has passed all bounds, revolt is rife, confusion is worse confounded.”

“Coriolanus, is one supposed neither to eat, drink, nor sleep, among the Volscians?”

Samuel came up quietly with Julius. “What’s wrong?” he asked. “Why, everything is wrong,” said Meyer, “because nothing is right.”

“What do you want, then?”

“We want the one thing man is least able to do without; a tavern.”

“Children of little faith,” rejoined Samuel. “Give me five minutes and you will have everything you want. I am going with Julius to the burgomaster’s house, to make out the riot-programme. Where is Trichter?”

“He stood there a few minutes ago, complaining of thirst.”

“Look out for him in any place where gin is to be found, and send him to me that he may act as my secretary. I advise you not to make too much noise while your King is at work.”

“All right, Samuel,” thundered the whole company.

Samuel and Julius went into the house pointed out to them as the burgomaster’s dwelling, and Trichter joined them almost immediately.

Scarcely had they entered ere the emigrants, faithful to their promise of silence, shouted in formidable tones:

“Pereat tristitia!

Pereant osores!
Pereat diabolus
Quivis antiburschius!”

CHAPTER XLVII.

BURGOMASTER PFAFFENDORF.

WHEN the burgomaster’s door opened, Samuel, Julius and Trichter found themselves in the presence of an enormous person, with a bloated face which wore a scared expression.

“Is the burgomaster in?” asked Samuel.

“What do you want him for?” stammered the extraordinarily large man.

“To speak to “him.”

“You do not intend to harm him?” this Falstaff timidly ventured to say.

“On the contrary.”

“Then, I am he.”

“I am delighted to make your acquaintance,” rejoined Samuel. “But you must have some other room than the bottom step of this staircase; if agreeable to you, we will take up our quarters in it.”

The burgomaster, trembling all over, led them into his office. Samuel sat down.

“See here!” said he, “we take possession of Landeck. We hope that you will make no resistance, and that you will spare us the unpleasant necessity of making an attack on the houses. The University deigns to make this its headquarters for a time. You understand that we must, to a certain extent, have a free hand, and that we shall probably indulge in eccentricities which it will be advisable for you not to oppose. I am here to come to terms with you. You are the burgomaster of Landeck, and I am the King of the University. The hierarchy requires that you transfer your authority to me. I accept it. Thanks.”

“But, gracious heaven,” demurred the big burgomaster in a grave voice, “what in the world do you mean to do?”

“Oh! never fear, honest.... Pardon me, what am I to call you?”

“Pfaffendorf.”

“Never fear, honest Pfaffendorf. We have come simply to study and amuse ourselves. We will entertain the village; we will give you fêtes. Will that suit you?”

"You promise to respect property and persons?"

"I pledge you my royal word."

"Thank goodness!" said Pfaffendorf, breathing more freely.

"It is agreed!" said Samuel.

"Agreed."

"Give me your hand on it, noble burgomaster, and have no fear that it is my intention to annihilate, nor even to diminish in any way your worthy importance. I will preserve you a rank befitting your position, and I promise you a place of honour at all entertainments and ceremonials."

"You are very kind," replied Pfaffendorf with a beaming face. "But I have just thought of something. If you require the militiamen of the village, I place them at your disposal."

"How many are there?"

"One!"

"Let us have him," said Samuel, "we will look after him."

"Do not hurt him. I will go and look for him."

The burgomaster went out of the room, delighted with Samuel.

In the office there was a table and a good supply of writing materials.

"Sit down there," said Samuel to Trichter.

"Now, then," Julius asked Samuel, "where are you going to find house-room for Heidelberg at Landeck? The castle is quite at your service, but it will be in adequate."

"To begin with," said Samuel, "it will be absolutely forbidden to approach the castle. We are here to obey Madame von Hermelinfeld, not to annoy her. We shall be very happy if she will condescend to be present at some of the entertainments which I intend to improvise, and we hope that, in spite of her nervousness, she will venture to attend. But she must follow her own inclination, and we will not thrust our close proximity upon her."

"Then, where do you intend to house them all?"

"Why, truly, at the most tempting sign of any on these fine August nights: 'Under the stars of Heaven! 'The forest will be our green dormitory. If it rains, I have grottoes large enough to accommodate four hundred persons. Do not be afraid, these grottoes are in a different direction to those you know of. As to provisions, our people from Heidelberg have brought sufficient for a day, and to-morrow Landeck will be crammed with food, for the inhabitants will not be foolish enough to neglect to profit by the rain of gulden which falls on them from Heaven. They will lay in supplies to-night, and, at dawn, we shall be revelling in the abundance of a Gargantuan banquet.”

Then turning to Trichter:

“Transcribe the orders of the day.”

A quarter of an hour later, Trichter, standing on a chair, read out to the students, who swarmed round him, the following Napoleonic decree:

“We, Samuel I., Emperor of Foxes, Tyrant of Camels and Philistines, Protector of the Academic Confederation, etc.

“We have decreed, and do decree the following:

“GENERAL ORDERS

“*Art. I.* — Considering that there is no tavern at Landeck, all the houses of Landeck are converted into taverns.

“*Art. II.* — Considering however, that the houses of Landeck will not suffice for our colony, a camp, provided with all the comforts of life, will be formed in the wood; there will be tents of tick, beds of bracken, sofas of straw, divans of hay. Women, children, and valetudinarians, with certificate from the medical council, will alone inhabit the vile houses of lath and plaster.

“Art. III. — Rents, and general or special articles of refreshment to be paid for either out of the public funds, or out of the purses of the individual, as the case may be, except so far as goods that the inhabitants of Landeck may have purchased from Heidelberg are concerned. All merchandise coming from that excommunicated town will be confiscated without mercy. With this one exception, all outrage against properties, as also against persons, will be severely reprimanded and duly punished according to the disciplinary penalties in use in the Students’ Guild.

“However, this rule applies only to the ‘studentes,’ and, in order to allow the noble inhabitants of Landeck absolute freedom, that glorious endowment of humanity, men will not be forbidden to lend, nor women to give, whatsoever they please.

“PROVISIONAL ORDERS: —

“The close of the first day will be employed in reconnoitring the ground and in installation.

“To-morrow, two placards will announce, the one the syllabus of lectures, the other the programme of amusements and rejoicings which are to be organised, in this promised land of Landeck, to sweeten and charm away for the ‘studentes ‘the sadness of life.

“This very night, Julius von Eberbach bids his old comrades to a monster punch in the forest.

“Executed at Landeck, this 10th August, 1811.

“SAMUEL I.

“A true and faithful copy,

“TRICHTER.”

The reading was interrupted with cheers. The promise of punch was hailed with especial delight. When Trichter had finished speaking, there was a perfect thunder of vivats and hurrahs.

The burgomaster Pfaffendorf arrived at this moment with the man who composed the Militia of Landeck.

Samuel caught hold of them and cried:

“All women, horses and luggage, to follow me.”

Then, escorted by the burgomaster and the militiaman, who represented authority and consequently obviated the necessity of his employing force, he installed as best he could, in the houses of the village, the women, the bandboxes, and the carriages.

Afterwards he came back to the men: “And you,” he said, “who prefer the sky to a ceiling and the stars to candles, follow me.”

CHAPTER XLVIII.

FOREST REVELS.

SAMUEL GELB led the troop along a pleasant road, winding upwards through wooded slopes. The students ascended for about a quarter of an hour; then, turning to the left, followed a narrow path that opened all of a sudden on to a vast platform two hundred feet square or thereabouts, and enclosed on all sides by a thick curtain of large trees.

The sun, which was setting behind the mountain, seemed as if anxious to make itself regretted, by bathing the branches of the trees in rosy-coloured light. A stream of sparkling water flowed over the pebbles on the borders of the woods, and made as much noise as it could with its tiny voice and its tiny cataracts. The singing of a million birds mingled with this entrancing sound and blended so harmoniously with it that the stream seemed to flow in notes and the singing to; gush out in drops.

“Does this room suit you?” asked Samuel.

“*Viva vallera!*” the students replied.

“Very well! make this into your sleeping quarters.”

The majority began to pitch tents, others to sling hammocks. Acting on Trichter’s advice before starting, they had taken the precaution of providing themselves with all the canvas necessary. Fresswanst prepared to drive in his stakes.

But Trichter stopped him.

“Fresswanst,” said he seriously, “you are departing from history.”

“What history?” asked Fresswanst, astonished.

“The history of Robinson Crusoe.”

“What is that?”

“Have you not read, dear fox of the - I 111

bottle, that Robinson, having no bedroom in his island, and afraid of wild beasts if he slept on the ground, climbed up into a tree and made his bed on one of the branches? I feel the noble desire to imitate this great example. To-night I shall not go to bed, I will go to roost.”

“And supposing I fall from the top to the bottom? “Fresswanst asked uneasily.

“That will show that a parrot can beat you any day; Fresswanst,” Tritcher added, lowering his voice, “we must give the lie to some evil reports that are being circulated about us, and prove to the younger generation that we never get tipsy. Look here, set your mind at rest, if you are afraid of falling, I will tie you up securely.”

“All right. In that case, I give up my tent.”

“Give it up for good, and do not let it be said that we have never been to bed in a nest.”

By the time all these delightful preparations were made, night had fallen. The burgomaster, whom Samuel had invited to the entertainment, hastened thither long before the appointed time, and appeared upon the scene, radiant, proud and imposing, just as the students were sitting down to supper on the grass.

Pfaffendorf was greeted on his arrival, by shouts as pleasant to his soul as they were harsh to his ears. He admired Samuel’s choice, and the quarters which the students had built for themselves.

“Capital! capital!” said he. “Upon my word! you have lopped off the finest branches and uprooted the young trees for the framework. That’s very clever! my young friends, very clever indeed!”

The supper was a lively one, and never was more ready wit coupled with more hearty appetite.

At dessert, and when night had quite closed in, the servants from the castle, in obedience to Julius’ instructions, arrived with two kegs of rum and brandy, and all the goblets from the cup-room. Under cover of the darkness, they were not seen, and were able, without further ado, to arrange the vessels, fill them, and set the brandy and rum alight.

Suddenly, with the rapidity of lightning, a bluish fire burst out in the forest. Blue, red and white flames danced in immense bowls, and flooded the green depths of the wood with fantastic lights.

The awakened birds, marvelling that the dawn had, that night, returned so soon, began to sing.

“Long live Shakespeare!” cried Trichter. “We are in the midst of the fifth act of the Merry Wives of Windsor. There are the spirits dancing on the grass. I daresay we shall soon see Herne the Hunter appear. Let us look for him, oh, my friends! I would know him again; his brow is surmounted by two large stag horns. Ah! I see him, it's Pfaffendorf."

"I plead guilty," said the stout burgomaster, entering into the spirit of the joke. "I had concealed the fact for fear of alarming you, but now I am compelled to throw aside my incognito."

"To the health of Herne the Hunter!" shouted Trichter, seizing hold of an enormous goblet.

This was the signal. The punch was put out, poured into bowls and glasses, and the delights of the palate replaced the delights of the eye.

Libations, toasts, songs, followed each other in quick succession. Two hours later, a subdued hilarity had spread among the different groups. A sane spectator would have gazed with wonder at this phenomenon, everyone speaking at once, no one listening. Pfaffendorf began to stutter pleasantly and endeavoured to convince Trichter that he, old and a burgomaster though he was now, had once been young.

But Trichter obstinately refused to believe him.

That was the only cloud which marred Pfaffendorf's bliss on that enjoyable evening-

It did not, however, prevent his giving Trichter a cordial shake of the hand on leaving; then, having respectfully taken leave of Samuel, he started on his way home.

But we dare not assert that he reached there.

Julius, at last, tore himself away from the merry company, which brought him back the stir and bustle of life. He wished good-bye to Samuel.

"Well," Samuel asked, "are you glad to have seen your friends again?"

"I feel as if I had come back to life."

"Until to-morrow, I suppose?

"Yes! to-morrow."

"You'll see," rejoined Samuel, "I will map out for them the most brilliant, the most active, the most full life they have ever conceived possible. I want to show Governments how to make the people happy! You'll see!"

Samuel accompanied Julius a little way. As they were about to separate, they heard a noise above their heads in one of the trees. They looked up, and, by the light of the stars, perceived Trichter, busily engaged in tying up Fresswanst, who, sitting on a cross branch, had his neck already fastened to the trunk of the tree, and, with a grave face, offered not the slightest resistance.

“Trichter,” said Samuel, “what on earth are you doing?”

“I’m tucking up my friend for the night,” Trichter answered.

Julius walked away roaring with laughter.

But he who had been the life of this multitude, the leader of this mirth, the main-spring of this bacchanal, Samuel Gelb, when he found himself alone, instead of going to sleep, plunged into the depths of the forest, and, sad and mournful, with knitted brows, his head on his breast, snapping the branches in his path, scattering the dead leaves beneath his feet, walked in the night like a wounded lion.

He thought:

“How fatiguing, and how wearisome! To shed life and merriment on all around, and feel doubt and anxiety within one’s own breast! If I imagined myself capable of that stupid regret which we call remorse, I think, Heaven crush me! that I could be angry, not, perhaps, at what was done last night, but, at any rate, at the way in which it was done. Ah! my will! my will! It faltered, it yielded, it knew not whether to do right or wrong. I fled at sight of my deed, and then allowed it to master me. Dual cowardice!

“Oh! in that, I committed more than a crime, a mistake! a mistake which, for the furtherance of my plans, makes me anxious and uneasy. Am I going to persevere? in truth, I scarce can tell! Confound it! Why did I want to ruin Gretchen? In order to ruin Christiane. And Gretchen would save her! The goat herd to me was merely a way to the Viscontesse, and the means would deter me from the end! Ah! Samuel, you are brought low! Search your soul, at this moment; you are glad to have pledged your word not to appear before Christiane until summoned by her; you hope that she will not summon you, and you will carry out none of the resolutions you had made to constrain her to do so. You yield to woman-like scruples, you falter, you draw back And, alas! poor wretch, you suffer!

“I am sick with vexation and disgust. Is there, then, something over and above my wish? I had said to myself, ‘To rouse in one single breast a struggle between horror and desire, must be a strange experience, and one which may satisfy that fierce indescribable curiosity which devours me.’ Well! no, quite the reverse, the remembrance of it is a painful one. Now, to effect the union of love and hate in two persons, to surrender indignant Christiane to impassioned Samuel, that would be more difficult, and nearer akin to this cruel ideal.... But, how should I be able to carry my whim to a successful issue?”

Thus ran Samuel Gelb’s thoughts, while he bit his lip till the blood came. Meantime, the remembrance of Gretchen, dishonoured and driven to despair, never once flashed across the mind of this strange being.

But, whilst revolving these odious and daring thoughts, he still strode hurriedly on, and strangely enough, as he walked, this man, who so prided himself on his will power, obeyed some kind of mechanical instinct or imperative habit, and unthinkingly, without noticing the fact, he entered his subterranean passage, lighted a dark lantern, passed along the gloomy corridors, climbed two steep flights of steps, arrived at the door of Christiane’s boudoir, and, as if in a dream, entered it. All was asleep in the castle, and the thick carpets muffled the sound of his footsteps.

He flashed the light from his lantern over every object and every piece of furniture, stopped in front of the rosewood writing-desk, opened it softly with a small key which he took from his pocket, and saw on the velvet shelf a letter ready sealed.

He read the address, “To the Baron von Hermelinfeld.”

He cut the seal with a penknife, unfolded it, read it, then a smile came over his face and he slowly burnt the paper at the flame of his lantern.

Then he put a blank sheet of paper into the envelope, replaced the seal with skilful care, and closed the writing-desk again.

“Yet another sign of weakness!” said he to himself.

“Why prevent this letter from arriving at its destination? Am I not perfectly well aware that I disarm myself in disarming her?”

His eager piercing gaze rested on the door of the room in which Christiane lay asleep.

“Is it possible that a man like myself,” he went on thinking, “cannot keep and brood over a thought for fourteen months without that thought in turn taking possession of and getting the mastery over him? Is it possible that I love this woman? Ha! ha! ha! Samuel Gelb in love! That remains to be seen.”

He returned as in a dream to the corridor, and, still unconscious of what he did, regained his subterranean chamber.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A STRANGE CURRICULUM.

THE next morning before Christiane was up, Julius, who usually rose very much later than she, was already at the students’ camp. He found them gay, noisy and singing merrily. They had spent this glorious summer’s night, some sleeping under tents, some in hammocks slung between the trees, others simply lying flat on the grass their faces turned to the stars. They all declared that they had slept splendidly.

Fresswanst alone admitted that he had slept in a somewhat uncomfortable position; the weight of his body, which slumber only increased, had caused the rope that secured him, likewise the branch on which he was perched, to cut into his flesh, and he asked whether anyone felt inclined to purchase from him a zebra skin, which, until the night before, had belonged to him.

Trichter, on the contrary, was delighted with his night’s rest. He pretended that only birds properly understood the art of bed-making, and begged all his friends to examine his back and see whether he had wings growing there, The stream was responsible. for the general ablutions, which were performed to the accompaniment of jokes and roars of laughter. Everything therefore betokened animation, freshness, youth, morning. It was a gipsy encampment, minus dirt, plus money.

Samuel, before daybreak, had left his subterranean chamber, and, in the privacy of the royal tent, was drawing up, as it behoves the chief of a revolution to do, the two promised programmes, the programme of studies and the programme of amusements.

He had at first indited them with this sole object in view: To rouse Christiane’s curiosity, to make her think, to compel her to admire him, perhaps to force her to come to the camp, since he could not go to the castle.

Moreover, like the practical man that he was, he had had to think of the material side of his plans, and to the carrying of them into effect, to dispatch messengers to Darmstadt and to Mannheim, in fact to organise everything, whether for the maintenance or for the amusement of the improvident “studentes.”

When he had completed all these difficult arrangements, he came out, cheered by unanimous consent, and gave instructions that his bills be posted up on the trees.

The student-people, contrary to custom, showed themselves delighted at the way in which their king had provided for the common weal. One thing in particular caused unbounded delight: the announcement, for one of the ensuing evenings, of a performance of Schiller’s *Brigands*, to be acted on a stage built for the purpose in the forest, Samuel Gelb himself to play the part of Karl Moor. What a true king, thoughtful of the pleasures of his people! Nero alone in all history had this delicacy of feeling. Therefore, whatever aristocratic historians may say of him, his name, even at the present day, is still popular in Rome. The other promises on Samuel’s. announcements were no less tempting. But in contradistinction to the custom of programmes, they were all religiously maintained, or rather exceeded. It is therefore unnecessary to give a description of them in advance; we shall witness their performance.

‘As to the placard with reference to the studies, we subjoin a notable extract

“UNIVERSITY OF LANDECK

“LECTURES FOR THE MONTH OF AUGUST l8ll

“Considering that pleasure by and for itself leads at once to satiety and tedium, and that work should form the basis of life, “We, Rector of the Sylvan University of Landeck, have decreed that daily lectures, particulars of which are given below, will be held, to replace with advantage lessons by the professors of Heidelberg.

“POLITICAL ECONOMY

Professor: Samuel Gelb — He will demonstrate that Political Economy is the science of nothingness, the arithmetic of negation, and is only economical for the economists.

THEOLOGY

“Professor: Samuel Gelb — He will prove that Theology leads to doubt concerning God, and that its chief use is to secure a living to theologians.

“CHEMISTRY

“Professor: Samuel Gelb — He will discourse upon the grand alchemy of nature, which seeks an absolute good, a treasure more undiscoverable than gold.

“HEBREW TONGUE

“Professor: Samuel Gelb — He will translate the Bible from the original text, and by identification of translators’ errors, and commentators’ interpolations, will demonstrate that, under pretext of divine revelation, mankind believes in lies set forth by men,

“LAW

“Professor: Samuel Gelb — He will consider conscientiously the principles of law, that is to say, human injustice, ambition and cupidity.”

The syllabus continued in this strain. Medicine, literature, anatomy, history, all the professorships were to be filled by Samuel Gelb. That strange and universal professor was to show the reverse side of every science. The only lecture of any positive nature announced by him, was one on psychology, when he promised to discourse on his favourite subject: “The theory of will-power.”

But it was well known that, scornful and amusing though he might be, he would still remain learned and profound, and not a single student would have willingly absented himself from the original teaching of this many-sided master, who was about to achieve the unheard-of feat of being in himself alone a whole university.

The afternoon, from two to six, was devoted to study.

The morning, until dinner, which was fixed for one o’clock, was given up to excursions on the river or in the forest.

For that very morning, arrangements were already made for a boating expedition on the Neckar. Stout, jovial Pfaffendorf, having received notice the previous evening from the king of the students, had put into requisition all the boats on the river, and when the whole troop arrived at the “rendezvous “agreed upon, it found an entire flotilla of both sailing and rowing boats.

Pfaffendorf was there, dressed in his best; maroon coat, white cravat, square hat, silken breeches, coloured stockings, and shoes with buckles.

Taken unawares, the previous day, by the sudden invasion of the students, Pfaffendorf feared that his every-day clothes had not given a correct impression of himself; he wanted his revenge, and, determined to dazzle his young friends, he had not even been deterred by the fear of spoiling his holiday attire in a boat, and of exposing his ancient silk stockings to the splashings of the oars.

The plucky burgomaster threw himself into Samuel’s boat, with the recklessness of a man dressed in his oldest clothes. He even carried forgetfulness of what ha was wearing to the extent of rowing himself, to the loud applause of Trichter.

The excursion was a delightful one. The Neckar is a miniature Rhine; frowning fortresses, suspended like eagles’ nests on the summits of rocks; gay villagers, assembled in groups in the heart of some luxuriant valley; wild and narrow gorges, like the entrance into hell, leading suddenly to rich smiling country, like the threshold of paradise; such were the wonderful and varied scenes which, within a few hours, unfolded themselves to the eyes and the minds of our students,: whilst their oars struck the water in! cadence, and their voices in unison awoke: with patriotic songs the quiet echoes of the Neckar asleep for long years in their grottoes.

Julius had intended to return to the castle immediately on landing. But he then discovered that the hour for the lecture was drawing near, and he was quite as eager as any of his old comrades to hear Professor Samuel. So he dined with the merry band, and afterwards attended the lecture.

It was such as was to be expected considering the learned and humorous irony of this master-scoffer. A shudder ran through the audience at more than one of his terrible sallies on this life and the next. The sceptic doctor questioned the Creator of creation, God in humanity, with that daring criticism, and bold frankness which was already tolerated in absolutist Germany, and which is not allowed even at the present day in democratic France.

The discourse over, it was six o’clock.

Julius debated within himself whether was now worth his while to return to the castle before night The evening promised to be a worthy ending to this already full day; the programme ran as follows: “Supper by torchlight, and concert in the wood.” Christiane knew where her husband was and could not possibly feel anxious. Besides, he had only to send her word.

He wrote a note, saying that he would return home earlier than the previous evening, and asking her to send his two whippers-in. The supper under the trees, illuminated with coloured lamps, was most fantastic and most entertaining. During the meal, Julius’ two prickers, lost in the intricacies of the wood, sounded the distant, dreamy, harmonies of the hunting-horn, calling and answering each other like a harmonious echo. A pleasing dialogue, that startled the deer at this unaccustomed hour, and which led them to mistake the pale reflex of the moon for the grey light of dawn.

After supper, those of the students who possessed instruments, and part of the orchestra from the theatre at Mannheim, which Samuel, availing himself of the dramatic holidays, had taken the precaution of securing the previous day, improvised an excellent concert and played some of the finest selections from Mozart, Gluck, and Beethoven, eliciting enthusiastic applause from the select audience.

After these hours of delight, one can understand that Julius again felt reluctant to return.

“You know,” Samuel said to him, “that we have a big hunt to-morrow.”

“Yes, I know,” Julius replied.

But in his heart he began to feel uncomfortable at leaving Christiane so much alone.

“Look here,” he added, “of course it would not be quite the thing for Christiane to come to one of our river parties or to our suppers, but did you not say that there could be no objection to her following the hunt on horseback or in a carriage? She would enjoy that.”

“I have promised her not to give any signs of life unless she herself summons me,” Samuel answered coldly; “she is perfectly well aware that we should deem it an honour and a pleasure if she took part in our amusements. You speak to her about it and bring her.”

“Yes,” Julius said, “I will speak to her about it this very evening, for I cannot always leave her like this, and either she must come with me, or I must remain with her.”

On his return, Julius gave Christiane a glowing description of the river excursion in the morning and the music in the evening. He told her of the hunting expedition arranged for the next day and insinuated that she ought to be of the party. She could follow in a carriage if she wished, and keep as much out of the way as she thought fit; she would see without being seen.

Christiane, who looked grave and rather sad, flatly refused.

They parted displeased with one another; she vexed with her husband for being happy, he vexed with his wife for being sad.

CHAPTER L.

TRICHTER AND FRESSWANST REACH THE CLIMAX OF EPIC ACHIEVEMENT.

BAYING of hounds, shouts of students, discussions with Julius' whippers-in, neighing of horses, flourish of horns, loading of guns, exchange of ammunition, all these preparations for hunting, more enjoyable than the hunt itself, animated with expectation and pleasure the dawn of the third day.

The "studentes" equipped themselves as best they could. An alarming rise had been declared on the market value of all guns in the environs. The greater number had been hired at double their cost.

A few female-students, curious like women, and courageous like men, were on horseback with a loaded gun in their hands, and imparted a less severe character to this Vander-Meulen picture.

Julius found Samuel giving orders for the hunt like a commander-in-chief.

"I had forgotten to tell you, Julius," Samuel said jokingly, "that I have also gone in for a little hunting. Moreover you have splendid whippers-in. They have beaten the wood in masterly fashion, and discovered for us the trail of a stag and of a wild boar. With the pack, which is royal, my boy, we should have splendid sport."

The signal was no sooner given than students and hounds bounded away helter skelter, all at the same time, baying and shouting. For, despite of efforts on Samuel's part, this was not a steady, orthodox hunt, it was a wild, impetuous run, which had also its charm. The flourish of horns, the startled or joyous laughter of the women, the shouts of the men, the yelping of the hounds, the random shots of ignorant or impatient hunters, all these sounds mingled and swept through the forest like a living hurricane.

The fine strategical arrangements of Samuel and the whippers-in triumphed, however, over all this indiscipline. The stag was run down first, then came the wild boar's turn.

A tremendous flourish was merrily sounded by the horns, and drowned the death-rattle of the wild beast; then the wild boar and the horns were silent.

At this moment a sound of dance music was heard approaching.

The animated scraping of two violins formed an accompaniment to these happy voices. At intervals could be heard outbursts of ringing laughter.

Two minutes later, there appeared in sight, at the end of the path where the huntsmen were still assembled, about twenty couples dressed all in their best and with happy faces.

It was the wedding party of Gottlob and Rose, who had been married that very morning.

On perceiving the students, the wedding party seemed about to turn to the left, as if startled.

But Samuel went up to Rose.

“Madame Bride,” said he gallantly, “permit us to offer you for your wedding supper two dishes of game: a wild boar and a stag. If you will be kind enough to invite us, we will all sup together and dance until morning. Will you do me the honour of granting me the first quadrille?”

Rose looked at Gottlob, who made her a sign to accept.

The union of the hunt and the wedding was sealed by a horn and violin duet, and the parties separated to meet again in the evening.

“Now for a lesson in history!” said the indefatigable Samuel, “and I am going to make a Rabelaisian dissertation on the institution of marriage, from Adam to the present day.”

“Bravo! that is the right kind of knowledge!” shouted the audience, delighted in anticipation.

Was it the result of this open-air life? was it the example of this indomitable Samuel, always ready, never tired! Certain it is that in the last three days the students’ abilities seemed to have increased tenfold; material activity and moral activity were multiplied the one by the other, and the body found rest in the working of the mind.

The wedding supper in the evening was magnificent. The burgomaster Pfafferdorf made himself splendidly tipsy. When there was nothing left of the game but bones, and nothing of the wine but bottles, a ritornello struck up and the ball began, Samuel took Rose’s hand, and Lolotte accepted Pfaffendorf as her partner.

The students engaged the prettiest girls in the place, and the “grisettes “shared the millers and farmers between them. And until morning the wildest, maddest dancing was kept up to confirm the fusion of Heidelberg with Landeck.

Trichter and Fresswanst did not dance; they drank.

At midnight Samuel Gelb, that courteous tyrant who, in matter of excess and abuse, neither feared nor proscribed either, except those of pleasure, ruthlessly gave the signal to retire.

“Here comes the hardest time of all!” sighed Trichter. “I must go and lead Lolotte back to Landeck — oh! to her very door.”

“Well! I will accompany you,” said Fresswanst with emotion.

“Thanks, noble heart!” said Trichter, grasping his hand.

So the twin-drinkers, silent and grave, together accompanied lively, talkative Lolotte as far as the village. When they had virtuously reinstated her in her domicile, Trichter said to Fresswanst:

“I am thirsty.”

“I thought so,” was Fresswanst’s rejoinder. With an eloquent gesture and a happy smile, Trichter pointed out to his friend a doorway, over which the uncertain brightness of this fine clear night enabled him to distinguish a crown of vine leaves.

Without another word Trichter knocked at the door. No one answered and nothing stirred. Trichter knocked a second time more loudly.

For only answer a dog barked.

“Hallo! hey!” cried Trichter and Fresswanst, kicking at the door with their feet.

The dog began to yelp furiously.

“We three together,” said Trichter, “we shall probably succeed in rousing someone. Ah! there’s a window opening.”

“What do you want?” asked a voice.

“Brandy,” Trichter answered. “We are two poor travellers who have had nothing to drink for the last five minutes.”

“The fact is my husband is not here,” went on the voice.

“We don’t want your husband, we want brandy.”

“Wait a moment.”

Two minutes later an old woman opened the door to them. She was half asleep, and her eyes blinked even more than the candle which she held in her hand. She put the candle on a table, placed two glasses beside it, and still half asleep, groped about in a cupboard.

“Dear me! there is not another drop of spirits here,” she said. “My husband has just gone to Neckarsteinach to get a fresh supply. Ah! after all, here is a little remnant of brandy.”

She placed a bottle two-thirds empty on the table.

“Barely four small glasses!” said Trichter, making a horrible grimace. “A drop of water in the desert! However, we may as well refresh ourselves with this mere nothing.”

They tossed it off at one gulp, paid the old woman, and went away grumbling and swearing.

The old woman, before going back to bed, set to arranging some plates and dishes, and was still up when a quarter of an hour later her husband returned.

“How comes it you are awake at this hour, old girl?” said he.

“Oh, along of two students who made me get up to give them brandy!”

“Brandy? There was none left,” said the man, relieving himself of his parcels.

“But there was!” rejoined the innkeeper’s wife. “I found there was a little remaining in the bottom of this bottle.”

The husband looked intently at the empty bottle.

“They have drunk that?” said he, trembling all over.

“Why, yes,” replied the wife.

“Unhappy woman!” he exclaimed, tearing his hair.

“Whatever is the matter with you?”

“Do you know what you have given to those two poor young fellows?”

“Brandy?”

“Brandy! No, *aqua fortis*, I tell you, dilute *aqua fortis!”*

We have left the universe uneasy as to the fate of Trichter and Fresswanst. These two were really very great drinkers.

The imprudent wife of the taverner was put to infinitely more torture yet, which was but fair.

On hearing her husband utter the words, *aqua fortis,* she turned positively green.

“Oh God!” she stammered out. “I was half asleep.... it was dark.... I served them without seeing very clearly....”

“Ah well! we are in a fine pickle!” rejoined the man. “By this time, these young people are dead or in their death-agony on the road. And as for us, we shall be arrested as poisoners.”

The woman burst into tears and wanted to throw herself pathetically into the arms of her husband, but he pushed her from him roughly.

“Yes, cry, do! a lot of good that will do us. Why could you not pay more attention! What are we going to do? Escape? We should be caught again! Ah! my uncle was quite right in advising me not to marry you, forty-one years ago!”

We will draw a veil over the night of anguish and tears which this Philemon and Baucis spent in upbraiding each other.

At daybreak, Baucis was on her doorstep, awaiting her fate. Suddenly she uttered a cry: she had just caught sight of two men, no! two ghosts, without doubt! — walking along the road and making straight for her house.

“What is it?” asked her husband, shaking from head to foot.

“It’s them!” said the woman.

“Them! who, them?”

“The two young men.”

“Ah! ‘‘the husband stammered, sinking on to a chair.

Trichter and Fresswanst entered as quietly and simply as if nothing had happened and sat at the table.

“Let us have some brandy!” said Trichter.

“The same,” he added.

“Yes, the same, it had a splendid flavour,” said Fresswanst.

CHAPTER LI.

A DISPLAY OF FIREWORKS.

THUS passed three or four days for the emigrant-students, in the midst of ever-fresh delights which the strange and powerful genius of Samuel knew how to extract from everything within his reach; from the forest and from the river, from the village and from the castle, from knowledge and from pleasure, from dreams and from reality.

Meanwhile the news received from Heidelberg heightened, by contrast, the merriment at Landeck. A fox who, much against his will, had been detained at the excommunicated town through rather serious indisposition, had rejoined his comrades as soon as he was able to move. He gave a gloomy account of Heidelberg.

The streets were deserted, the shops empty. A silence as of death hovered over the doomed town. Not a sound by day, not a light by night! The shopkeepers shut themselves up sadly tête-à-tête with their wares and their wives. The professors, having no pupils to teach, quarrelled amongst themselves. All this learning of the professors, all these materials of the drapers, all these wines of the innkeepers, intended to circulate in brains, on shoulders, and down throats, accumulated and stagnated dismally in the shops and in the deserted lecture-rooms like slime on a fetid marsh.

Professors and shopkeepers were now at loggerheads, the one throwing the responsibility of the emigration on the other.

“Why had the merchants offended Trichter? Why had the professors condemned Samuel? “The time was approaching when a civil war would break out between the academy and the counter.

This news only had the effect of increasing the animation of the encampment, and, on that very evening, Samuel celebrated it by a splendid display of fireworks which he had been preparing for the last three days.

He had arranged for the fireworks to be sent off on the opposite bank of the Neckar. Nothing more strange or more lovely than the sight of the bombs and rockets reflected in the river, and the fires flashing in mid-air repeated in the reddened waters beneath. The effect was that of two distinct displays of fireworks, one in the sky, one in the waves.

The entire population of Landeck was on the river bank, with the exception of Christiane and Gretchen. But Samuel had selected his place accordingly, and knew perfectly well that the refractory ones would have to be spectators of the fire-scene, whether they would or no, and that the great red flames would search them out, the one in her hut, the other in her castle.

Gretchen, in point of fact, saw them; she turned pale and murmured, “The devil is playing with fire, it is quite natural! “She rushed away, half scared, and shut herself into her hut, hiding her face in her hands to shut out the fiery flashes that dyed her windows and her walls. Everything that reminded her of Samuel horrified her now.

Everything that reminded Christiane of Samuel as yet only made her feel afraid. Attracted to her balcony by the glow in the sky, she remained there, pondering over the inexplicable reserve of Samuel, and the involuntary neglect of Julius.

She was indeed compelled to acknowledge the truth of what Samuel had told her, as to her husband’s weak, wavering disposition. There was still much of the child in this young man, who, no doubt, at this very moment, was loudly applauding Samuel’s firework display.

Christiane felt that she was fast losing her hold upon Julius. What could she do to keep him? Was she acting wisely in holding herself aloof from his amusements? By refusing to go with him, by accustoming him to do without her, would she not accustom him to think of his wife as apart from his pleasures? Would it not be best that the two should be connected in his mind? Would she not be acting more prudently in identifying herself so entirely with the amusements and the happiness of her husband, that he would be unable to dissociate them from her? Poor gentle Christiane asked herself what objection there could be, after all, to her taking part a little in all these pleasures necessary to Julius. Of course she would only take part in them at a distance, and up to the limits of decorum. What could result from her action? Samuel would perhaps exult over it and think that he had made her yield. Well! after all, Samuel was one of those natures whose mind is set upon obstacles, and the more she held aloof, the more did she irritate him. Samuel, in short, had so far kept strictly to his promise that he would not attempt to see her again. After all, had she been wise in writing to Baron von Hermelinfeld? Supposing she changed her tactics? By accompanying her husband she gained a double advantage; she re-awakened the love of Julius, and she extinguished the hatred of Samuel.

So that evening she watched for Julius' return, went brightly to meet him, and herself asked for an account of how they had spent the day. He did not require pressing.

"So you have thoroughly enjoyed yourself?" she said.

"I acknowledge that I have. That fellow Samuel does know how to live."

"Is it not to-morrow evening that they are to act the *Robbers?"*

"Yes, to-morrow evening," Julius replied. "Oh! if you would only consent to come with me!"

"Well! I feel strongly tempted to do so. As you know, Schiller is my favourite poet."

"That's right, then!" exclaimed Julius delighted. "So that's settled. No more difficulties; I shall come for you tomorrow evening."

And he kissed Christiane effusively.

"It is pretty nearly a week since he has given me so loving a kiss!" thought Christiane sadly.

CHAPTER LII.

A DRESS REHEARSAL.

THE day on which the *Robbers* was to be played, each of the students, apart from the two hours for study, was at liberty to spend the time as he chose, and to devote it either to his "liaisons" or to his own particular branch of study.

Samuel Gelb, that great stage manager, knew to how great an extent pleasure is stimulated by expectation and desire, and that all light is only appreciated by comparison with darkness. Samuel Gelb, that politician, considered that in every society, were it only a society for amusement and pleasure, a large portion should be left to the liberty and the caprice of the individual. In a word, Samuel, that great practical man, knew that he himself needed the entire day to complete his preparation for the performance in the evening.

The scene of the *Robbers* is laid almost entirely in the forest, therefore, as with the ancients, the decoration happened to be ready-made naturally. Instead of canvas and cardboard as at Mannheim, there was, as at Athens, real foliage and a real wood. For the scenes of interiors, large canvases boldly painted, were placed between the trees to represent rooms. Samuel had had no difficulty in improvising his theatre; wings and exits had not been wanting.

He took much more pains over the dress rehearsal. But his actors were so docile, so enthusiastic, and such scholars, that with them he entertained no doubt of the success of Schiller's masterpiece.

The rehearsal was at the scene when the monk comes to offer a full and entire pardon to the brigands on condition that they deliver up their chief, Karl Moor, when word was brought to Samuel that a deputation from the academic council of Heidelberg had come to make proposals to the students.

"Bring them here," said Samuel. "They arrive at an opportune moment."

Three professors entered. One acted as spokesman. The council of Heidelberg offered, if the students agreed to return to their duty, free pardon to all; with the exception of Samuel, who would be expelled from the University.

“My most worthy envoys,” said Samuel, “this scene bears a devilish strong resemblance to the very one we are rehearsing at the present moment.”

And turning towards the students:

“Listen now, all of you, what the law commands I should make known to you. Will you handcuff and deliver up at once this condemned malefactor to the constituted authorities? The punishment of your crimes will be remitted; the sacred ‘University’ will receive you with renewed affection into her maternal bosom like sheep that have gone astray, and each one of you will be given a fresh start in life.”

A shout of unanimous laughter greeted this borrowed version of Schiller.

One of the professors addressed himself to the students:

“It is to you, gentlemen, to you only we are speaking, and we hope that you will reply to us in different fashion than by ill-timed jests.”

“Pardon me! I am quite serious,” rejoined Samuel, “and quite seriously do I, as a true Karl Moor, advise my comrades to accept your conditions, to make short work of me, and to return to Heidelberg and resume the regular course of study. This, certainly, is not a place where they will obtain diplomas, or give their parents satisfaction.”

“But we,” said a “Mossy Head,”

“we in our turn, answer like true Schiller robbers, that we will not abandon our chief. A less meritorious action on our part than on that of Karl Moor’s companions; for we incur no risk to either body or mind, not being exposed, gentlemen, so far as I know, to either your bullets or your lectures.”

“But come,” replied the professor, “what do you ask to return?”

“We leave it to Samuel,” replied the “Mossy Head.”

“Yes, Samuel! Samuel!” cried the whole band.

“Well! what might be the pretentions put forth by Monsieur Samuel Gelb?” replied the spokesman of the University in bitter tones. “We would be very glad to know his wishes, out of curiosity.”

Samuel then began to speak, with the air of a Coriolanus.

“You have mistaken the part you have to play, gentlemen,” said he, “in coming here with the object of imposing conditions upon us. We have none to receive, but to dictate. Listen, this is our decision, and I advise you to tell those who have sent you, that it is irrevocable. Pardon for all, for me, as well as for the others, that of course is self-evident. But, furthermore, the tradespeople who have tried to bully Trichter, will come here to apologise. As war-tax, Trichter's debts will be considered as paid off, and an indemnity of five hundred florins will be granted him besides. Finally an indemnity of a thousand florins will be handed over to each of the students wounded in the fray. On these conditions alone do we consent to return to Heidelberg. If you say 'No,' we shall reply 'No, thank you.'

"Trichter, conduct the deputies of the Academy as far as the limits of Landeck."

The three professors considered it due to their dignity not to say one word in reply, and went back crestfallen.

"We will now proceed with the rehearsal, gentlemen," Samuel said quietly to his actors, "and will those who are taking no part in the play be good enough to withdraw?"

When the rehearsal was over, and Julius told Samuel that he was going to fetch Christiane, Samuel, despite his self-control, could not repress a gleam of joy.

"Ah! she is coming!" said he. "Be quick, Julius, for night is upon us; and we will begin as soon as it is dark."

Julius went off, and Samuel, feeling almost uneasy, went to dress.

An hour later, Julius returned with Christiane. The Frau von Eberbach was received with respect by the students. A special place had been prepared for her in the front row, in such a manner as to isolate her in the crowd.

Christiane's heart was beating fast; this was the first time since his daring challenge that she was to see Samuel at close quarters.

In the midst of a deep and sympathetic silence the play began.

CHAPTER LIII.

“THE ROBBERS”.

EVERYBODY knows that Schiller’s *Robbers* is one of the most poignant, the most terrible, the most daring outcries of protest ever raised against social life in former days. Karl Moor, the son of a Count, declares war against constituted justice, against established order, and, so as to constitute himself, in his own way, the judge and redresser of wrongs, becomes a bandit, but maintains, through all his crimes, so exalted an ideal of energy and pride, that all interest remains riveted on this brigand, and that, from beginning to end, right seems always on the side of the rebel.

The play, popular all over Germany, is an especial object of veneration to eager, hot-blooded youth, to all who imagine themselves strong, to all who believe themselves free. Not one of the students of Heidelberg but knew the *Robbers* almost by heart; but the impression which the master-piece produced upon them was always fresh, and always more profound, and that evening they listened to the drama as if they heard it for the first time.

Yet the first scene did not produce the usual impression; Samuel had not yet appeared. But at the second from the moment that Karl Moor entered, some instinctive emotion stirred every breast.

Of commanding stature, with a broad forehead, his look expressive of bitterness, disdain, passion, scorn of orthodox virtues, revolt against social quibbles, the original Karl Moor seemed to live again in Samuel.

But, although in his own estimation Samuel Gelb considered himself, perhaps, greater than Karl Moor, because his enemy was the Almighty, because he challenged not only one man, but God, Christiane at the very time could and did assert to herself that the unworthy seducer of Gretchen was infinitely beneath the murderer of the Bohemian forests; because in the depths of his soul must be hatred, not love.

But, to any one who knew nothing of his life, and judged only of his acting, the illusion was striking, and when the curtain rose on Karl Moor absorbed in the reading of his Plutarch, Samuel’s attitude was so perfect, his air so imposing, that only at sight of him a thunder of applause burst forth.

And in what a tone of sarcasm did Samuel, pacing up and down with rapid strides, utter the famous anathema:

"What! imprison my body in a strait-jacket, and submit my will to the embrace of the law? never! The law? it reduces the flight of the eagle to the slowness of the snail. The law? has it ever produced a great man? The real mother of giants and prodigies is liberty! Place me at the head of a troop of men of a like calibre to myself, and I undertake to make of Germany a republic compared with which Rome and Sparta would resemble the convents of nuns."

Meanwhile, Karl Moor, spurned by his father in favour of his brother, rises furiously in opposition to that society from which he is banished, and consents to be captain of his comrades who have become outlaws. Samuel was thinking no doubt of the injustice and desertion of his own father, because never did any great comedian attain to the convincing truth with which he cried:

"Murderers! brigands! with these words do I trample the law under my feet. Avaunt, sympathy! compassion, avaunt! I have now no father and no love. Blood and death must make me forget that ever did I hold anything dear, Come, come. Oh! I thirst for some terrible diversion."

Samuel uttered these words with such savage emphasis, that a shudder passed over the audience. A wild light gleamed in his eyes.

Christiane trembled. It seemed to her that Samuel's glance had fallen upon her; an electric shock thrilled through her. She regretted having come.

There was so much analogy between the part and the actor, that, at times, she could scarcely tell whether it was Samuel who impersonated Karl Moor, or Karl Moor who impersonated Samuel.

This brigand, who made crime appear grander than virtue, and who seemed too great to be confined by the narrow prejudices of society, terrified Christiane. Then, all at once, he was another man.

The remembrance of her whom he loved and whom he still loves, flashes one day across the blood-stained, polluted life of Karl Moor, like a ray of sunshine into an abyss. An uncontrollable longing seizes him; he must see his Amelia once again, and, instantly, he hurries off all his docile companions into Franconia. In disguise he enters into the paternal castle alone, and, being shown round the gallery of portraits by Amelia herself, who does not recognise him, he questions her anxiously as to what she has had to endure.

Instantly all the haughty fierceness of Samuel Karl melted into burning passion. A tear dimmed the brightness of his hitherto unrelenting eyes, and when Amelia betrays her emotion, at sight of Karl’s portrait, and flies from him blushing, Samuel cried: “She loves me! she loves me!” in such a transport of happiness and triumph, that thunders of applause arose on all sides, and Christiane grew pale and trembled with emotion and fear.

But the tenderness lasts but a moment. The bandit soon throws off this passing impression, forces back his rising tears, his violence returns, and was it not the blasphemy of Samuel Gelb himself who uttered that odious defiance:

“No, no, man may not stumble. Be what you will, nameless being up above, provided that my ‘ego ‘remain faithful to me. Be what you will, provided that I preserve my ‘ego ‘wherever I go. Outward things are but the trappings of the man. Myself am my heaven and my hell!”

Nevertheless, Karl Moor experiences yet another return to tenderness when Amelia, knowing what he is, loves him in spite of all, and clasps her arms about him.

“She forgives me! She loves me! I am pure as the blue of heaven. She loves me! Peace has returned to my soul. Pain is soothed. Hell is no more! See! oh, see! the children of light embrace with tears the demons who weep.”

Samuel threw into these sublime words a depth of anguish and feeling which again affected Christiane, despite herself. For a moment the thought crossed her mind that it might not be wholly impossible to reclaim Samuel, and that beneath the dark workings of this terrible mind there might perhaps lurk some semblance of a heart.

But no, evil is too tenacious for that. It does not let those whom it has seized escape so easily. A great criminal cannot change his ways. Any reconciliation between crime and innocence is impossible. Amelia is condemned. Fatality must run its course. The love of Karl cannot but be fatal. His wild companions will not tolerate his leaving them. They place their blood-stained swords between him and his beloved, they tear off their garments, show him the wounds which they have received for his sake, and remind him of the forests of Bohemia, of his oaths, of the community of crime, which binds him to them. Karl is their possession. They had bought him in bondage with their heart’s blood. Sacrifice for sacrifice, Amelia for the band!

And already one of them takes aim at Amelia. But Karl Moor snatches the gun from him and kills his beloved with his own hand.

Christiane uttered a cry. She felt as if Samuel had aimed at her, and as if his bullet had penetrated her heart.

Julius smiled, thinking that Christiane's terror was simply the effect produced usually upon women by the report of a gun. Christiane recovered her composure during the last words of the play, and her emotion explained itself easily by the dramatic ending of the masterpiece. The curtain was lowered in the midst of thundering applause. Samuel was recalled and received a frantic ovation.

"Quickly! let us go! let us go! "Christiane said to her husband.

"As soon as we have congratulated Samuel," said Julius.

CHAPTER LIV.

GOOD INTENTIONS ARE NOT ALWAYS ENOUGH.

JULIUS hurriedly led Christiane behind the scenes.

On seeing them, Samuel came up to them, still attired in his handsome yet sombre costume, still pale from his real or simulated passion.

Julius shook him by the hand with enthusiasm.

“You were splendid!” said he. “You are and you do whatever you wish!”

“You think so?” rejoined Samuel with his evil smile.

Christiane said nothing. But her pallor, her emotion and her silence spoke for her.

Julius, who, in his loyalty, suspected nothing and was anxious to break the ice, moved away unconcernedly and engaged in conversation with some of his comrades, leaving Samuel alone with Christiane.

Samuel began to speak with that respectful ease which with him seemed always a cloak for irony.

“Allow me to thank you, madame, for having deigned to be present at one of our entertainments. So far, they have not met with your approval, and yet, for whom has all this been organised, if not for you? Is it not you who desired this transplantation of a town? Is it not at your command that I have brought to Julius the life of Heidelberg?”

“Which proves,” Christiane replied almost in a whisper, “that we occasionally repent of our wishes.”

“You repent having brought us here?” asked Samuel. “Does this crowd begin to bore you? Then say but the word, madame, and, as I made these people come here, so I will make them return there.”

“Would you do this?” said Christiane.

“Whenever you wish, on my word of honour. Besides, it is best that adventures of this sort should not be too prolonged, so that they may remain in the memory like a lightning flash, which passes and is gone. During these eight days, my people have not known a moment’s dulness, the sky has been blue and cloudless. It is time for us to go. We weary you; I will rid you of us, of me the first.”

Christiane bowed with cold courtesy. “I only hope,” continued Samuel, “that our little journey will not have been altogether fruitless as regards your happiness. Julius, it is true, needed rousing. You see, madame, your dear husband is a clock of which I have the honour of being the clock maker. I give him back to you wound up for at least three months.”

“Herr Samuel--” Christiane interrupted with dignity.

“Pardon, madame,” rejoined Samuel, “I had no wish to offend. Never, I suppose, will I accustom myself to the idea that the truth can offend. Yet, according to ordinary notions, I should be considered, what shall I say? wanting in decorum, is it not? if, for example, trying to read your thoughts, I ventured to conjecture that, during this play, the passion which, was in reality, beyond my control, succeeded in affecting you by its sincerity and its vigour.”

“But I would not hesitate to admit that,” said Christiane.

“If I made bold, then,” Samuel went on, “to suppose that you may have drawn comparisons between this passionate ardour, and the weak sensitiveness of Julius--’

Christiane again interrupted Samuel: “Monsieur Samuel,” said she firmly, “I love no one in the world but my husband and my child. They have my whole soul. These affections satisfy the aspirations of my heart. It is rich enough thus and has never dreamed of comparing its riches with those of others.”

“Oh stony virtue! “Samuel exclaimed bitterly. “This harshness may perhaps be honourable, madame, but it is not diplomatic. Who knows if with a little less pride and unkindness, a little more cunning and ingenuity, you would not have softened my heart, weaker in reality, than I imagined? Why not even try to deceive me, alas!”

Christiane realised the strategical mistake she had made when dealing with so formidable an opponent.

“I, in my turn, sir,’’ she said, “can only repeat that I had no wish to offend.”

“We will say no more about it,” Samuel replied coldly. “There only remains, madame, for me to bid you adieu. I have given you my word never to reappear before you until the ring of your bell shall summon the most humble of your servants. Don’t be afraid, I forget nothing, you understand, nothing that I have promised.”

“What! nothing?” Christiane faltered.

“Nothing! madame?” rejoined Samuel, who had again assumed his menacing tone. “In point of words and oaths, I have the failing and the misfortune of a pitiless memory; Gretchen has perhaps told you so?”

“Gretchen!” exclaimed Christiane, shuddering. “Oh! sir, how dare you utter her name?”

“What has been done, madame, has been done solely for your sake.”

“For my sake! Ah! sir, do not make me an accomplice, even though involuntary, of so abominable a crime.”

“For you, madame! “Samuel insisted, “to convince you that when I love and when I desire, I do not even stop at crime.”

Happily for Christiane’s agitation and alarm, Julius returned just then.

“I have been congratulating your actors and our comrades,” said he. “Now, I am quite at your service. I’ll see you to-morrow, Samuel.”

“To-morrow, Julius, we may not be here.”

“What! are you returning to Heidelberg so soon?” said Julius.

“Probably.”

“But you do not intend to accept the conditions laid down by the professors, I suppose?”

“Oh! no,” rejoined Samuel. “But tomorrow they will accept ours.”

“So much the better!” said Julius. “Never mind! I will contrive to see you again before you leave, so will say goodbye only for to-night.”

“Good-bye, sir,” Christiane said to Samuel.

“Au revoir, madame,” was Samuel’s reply.

Samuel had not been too bold in his conjectures. On the following day, the deputies from the academic council returned, accompanied by the tailor, the shoemaker and the pork-butcher who gave the honourable Trichter a thrashing. All the students’ conditions were accepted, the indemnities agreed to. The three tradesmen made a humble apology in their own name, and in that of the other tradespeople.

Trichter proved himself worthy of the occasion. He received gravely the receipted account from his tailor, heard the petition of his three adversaries, and when they had finished, he said amiably:

“You are scoundrels, but I forgive you.”

It was not without regret that the students quitted this exquisite wood, where they had spent such delightful days. They set out immediately after breakfast, and reached Heidelberg at dusk.

The whole town was illuminated. The townsfolk, standing in their doorways, waved their caps in the air and cheered their loudest, while, under their breath, they cursed those rascally young students who always contrived to get their own way; and all that evening Heidelberg presented the joyful yet crestfallen appearance of a town taken by assault after a protracted siege and long famine, to which the conqueror brings, at the same time, confusion and provisions.

CHAPTER LV.

THE WORKINGS OF FATE.

TWO months passed away. The autumn was already decking the ‘woods and fields in its golden mantle, and *j* a thick carpet of dead leaves muffled the noise of the wheels of the Baron von Hermelinfeld’s post-chaise, as, on a grey October day, it rolled along the road from Frankfort to Eberbach.

From the back of the carriage, the baron, careworn and gloomy, his head supported on his hand, vaguely watched the trees and bushes fly past along the road. All of a sudden, he saw a human creature speed like an arrow from the top. of a steep incline, and alight, or rather fall in front of the horses, and nearly under the wheels, crying: “Stop! stop! “Despite her altered looks and wild appearance, the baron recognised Gretchen. He ordered the postillion to stop.

“What is the matter, Gretchen?” he asked anxiously; “has there been any accident at the castle?”

“No,” Gretchen replied in a strange tone, “God watches over them still; but Samuel watches too. You will arrive in time. And, yet, will you be as powerful for good, as he is for evil? However that may be, my duty is to warn you, even at the cost of my blushes and my shame. And on seeing you from up there I hastened at once, because the instinct for good, which the devil has not been able to kill in me, commands me to speak to you.”

“Not just now, my child,” Baron von Hermelinfeld answered kindly. “The grave and sad event that brings me to Eberbach, does not allow of the least delay. I have not a moment to lose. But can you tell me, Gretchen, whether I shall find my son at home?”

“At home? What do you call his home?” replied Gretchen; “do you then imagine that he is master in his house? No, he is not the lord, nor is his wife the lady of the castle. Yet, perhaps it is she who has sent for you....? Did she ask you to come, tell me?”

“Are you raving or feverish, little one?” asked the baron. “I cannot understand what all this talk means. No, Christiane has not sent for me. I am bringing sad news to my children, but I have received none from them.”

"Were you bringing news of a death," rejoined Gretchen, "it would seem as nothing compared with what I have to tell you. Because better certain death than possible dishonour!"

"Dishonour! Indeed! what do you mean?" exclaimed the baron, impressed, despite himself, at the peremptory and convincing way in which Gretchen spoke.

"Listen," said Gretchen; "in a carriage it will take you a quarter of an hour to reach the castle. Come with me on foot along this short cut and you will be there in ten minutes. And, on the way, I will tell you those secrets which my conscience would like to keep to itself. But the memory of the pastor who saved my mother impels me to save his daughter. Herr von Eberbach must not break his head against the walls of that cursed castle; Madame Christiane must not run mad like poor Gretchen; the child, nursling of my goat, must not be left an orphan in a cruel world. So come, and I will speak."

"I will be with you in a moment, Gretchen," said the baron, seized, in spite of himself, with fear.

He stepped out of the carriage, told the postillion to drive on to the castle and wait there for him, and, with a still quick and youthful step, accompanied Gretchen along the path indicated.

"I will tell you my story as we walk along," said Gretchen, "first of all because you are in a hurry, and then because, in this way, no tree and no bush in my forest will hear my story of shame in its entirety."

She shook in all her limbs.

"Be calm, my child," the baron said kindly, "and speak fearlessly to an old friend, to a father."

"Yes, you are a father," said Gretchen, "and you will help me in my trouble. You know, I believe, sir, of the terrible threats which that reprobate, that hater, that Samuel Gelb, since I must pronounce his name, used against Madame Christiane and me."

"I heard about it, yes, Gretchen. My God! is it Samuel again? Speak, speak, my child."

"Sir," resumed Gretchen, hiding her face in her hands. "Samuel Gelb, as you know, swore that we both should love him, or, at least, that we should be his. "Well!.... well! he has already been as good as his word so far as I am concerned."

"What! Gretchen! you love him?"

“Oh! I hate him!” Gretchen exclaimed with fierce energy. “But there came a day, there came an hour, when he succeeded, but too well, in compelling me, the instrument of hell.... I do not know if it is to love him.... but, in short, may my mother forgive me! I am his!”

“Is it possible, Gretchen! Gretchen! Are you in your right mind?”

“Oh! if only I were not! But, unfortunately, sir, it is true, true as my conscience, true as my memory. There is only one thing upon which I am in doubt. You, sir, are learned. Enlighten my poor clouded mind. I seem to speak only of myself, but it is for the sake of your son’s wife that I speak. So be frank with me as I am with you. Sir, can it be that the God of gentleness and mercy has left, within reach of the wicked, weapons and means against the good, from which the good cannot escape? Are there infernal forces which can compel an honest and innocent soul to sin? Are there insurmountable powers of magic which lead us to stain even that which is pure, and to possess even that which we abhor?”

“Explain yourself, my child.”

“Sir,” Gretchen went on, “examine this small phial which I found one evening on the floor of my hut.”

Baron von Hermelinfeld took the platinum phial that Gretchen held out to him, uncorked it, then smelt it.

“Good God!” he cried, “have you then drunk any of this potion?”

“When I loved Samuel despite my hatred of him, sir, I noticed on the previous evening, and on that very day, the smell of this phial on my bread and in my milk.”

“Oh! the unfortunate girl! Oh! the villain!” cried the baron.”

“Well! what do you say, sir?”

“I say, my poor child, that your will has been coerced, drugged, blinded. I say that the crime has been double for him and null for you. I say that you are innocent notwithstanding your error, and pure notwithstanding your defilement.”

“Oh! thank God!” exclaimed Gretchen, clasping her hands together with an expression of radiant joy. “Dear mother, then I have not been false to my vow. Blest be God, in heaven! and blest may you be, sir, on earth!”

But all of a sudden she went on, discouraged.

“For all that, there are some terrible mysteries. The soul is spotless, but the body is no longer so. And although I am white within, none the less am I sullied.”

"Be consoled, be comforted, poor little one! The angels are not purer than you. I repeat, this villain has done all, and you need not complete the sad story, I guess the rest. He forced his way into your hut during the night, like a scoundrel. He took advantage of the solitude, and of your confidence, the coward. Oh! but we will punish him, never fear."

Gretchen raised her head, sad and proud, as if to shake off her depression.

"Let us not think any more of me," she said, "but of your daughter."

"Christiane is, thank God, less exposed than you, poor child," rejoined the baron. "Christiane does not live alone, in an open hut, but in a castle enclosed by high walls and surrounded by devoted servants whom she can summon to her aid and who are able to defend her, should her husband be absent."

"Is that what you think?" said Gretchen with a bitter smile. "Does not Samuel Gelb open every door of the castle that opens with a key, and even every door that opens without a lock?"

"What! Gretchen, so far as you know, has Samuel Gelb ever been inside the castle?"

"And how could he who built it, never have been inside it?"

"He who built it?" the baron repeated in amazement.

"I may tell you everything now," resumed Gretchen. "His crime has freed me from my oath, and my little roe, on which the monster was to be revenged, died a month ago. Already we are in sight of the Castle. Listen attentively, sir."

And she related how Samuel had constructed the double Castle.

"Oh! what daring!" exclaimed the baron. "And is Christiane not aware of all this?"

"She knows all, but she swore secrecy to me."

"What matter!" said the baron, "considering the danger she runs, why has she not written to me, according to her promise? Thank you again, Gretchen, thank you for confiding in me. I may keep this phial, may I not? and the villain is in my power, I hope."

"If he is in your power, do not let him escape!" said Gretchen, her eyes flashing with anger. "Oh! how I hate him! What a blessing I have the right to hate him! I live only for the day when I shall see him punished, and punished he will be, if not by you, by God."

She resumed:

“We are at the postern of the Castle, sir, and I must go back to my goats. I have done my duty, it is for you to act.”

“Adieu, Gretchen,” said the baron, “I thought only an unfortunate event called me to the Castle, but I find a danger summoned me as well, I have now two reasons for making haste. Adieu.”

He walked with rapid strides towards the Castle.

The first servant he met informed him that Julius had gone out two hours ago; after dinner, he had taken his gun, and intended to be out shooting until evening. But Madame von Eberbach was at the Castle.

The baron displayed the liveliest annoyance. He walked straight to Christiane’s apartments, refusing to be announced.

When, after knocking, he entered into Christiane’s room, he found her absorbed in that occupation, so interesting to mothers, of cooing to her baby.

Christiane gave a cry of surprise on recognising her father-in-law and advanced eagerly towards him.

The baron embraced her tenderly. Then he lavished caresses on his grandson, who he thought looked bonny and well.

“Yes, he is a fine boy, is he not, my Wilhelm?” said Christiane. “There are not, I think, many children as beautiful. Would you believe that he already understands when I speak to him! Oh! I love him! Come, now, smile at your grandfather, you ugly little rosebud of a face.”

“He is charming, my dear daughter, he resembles you,” said the baron. “But send him to his nurse. I must have a serious talk with you, and I am afraid of a distraction such as that. So Julius is in the forest?” he asked.

“Yes, he is out shooting.”

“Does any one know where? Can he be found?”

“We can, at least, try,” said Christiane.

“Well, I should be glad if you would. I have serious, urgent matters to discuss with him.”

Christiane rang, and gave orders that three of the servants should search the wood each in a different direction, and request Julius to return.

“But whatever is the matter?” she asked the baron anxiously.

“Nothing,” replied the uneasy baron. “At least, Julius is the one to whom I must speak about it. So we will discuss the matter when he returns. Meanwhile, tell me about yourself. You have not written to me?”

“But I have, my dear father,” Christiane said.

“Ah! yes, a few loving words at the end of Julius’ letters. But I mean no letters have passed between you and me.”

“Excuse me, father, I wrote you two and half months ago, a long and urgent letter of a private nature.”

“Well! nothing of the kind has reached me,” said the baron in surprise. “But, wait a moment. Yes, two or three months ago, it is true, I received an envelope bearing the Heidelberg postmark, by containing only a blank sheet of paper. I mentioned it in one of my letters to Julius, but he replied that he did not understand what I meant.”

“I am quite certain of having put the letter into the envelope,”. Christiane said. “I can see myself now at that bureau, writing it and sealing it. My God! could he have come and taken it away?”

“Who?” quickly asked the baron.

“He who was the subject of my letter to you.”

“Samuel Gelb?”

“Yes, Samuel Gelb, father.”

There was a moment’s silence. Christiane, dismayed, pondered over this fresh insolence on Samuel’s part.

The baron studied his daughter-in-law.

“Have you then seen this Samuel again,” he asked.

“Alas! yes, twice.”

“Here!” resumed the Baron.

“No, outside,” Christiane replied after a moment’s hesitation.

She remembered that the baron had particularly forbidden Julius to receive Samuel, and she told a lie to screen Julius.

“And what did Samuel say to you?” the Baron went on.

“The first time he repeated his insolent threats.”

“The villain!”

“It was on that I wrote to you, father, asking your help, begging you to come to me. The second time that I saw him, was eight or ten days later, at a play in public.”

And Christiane told the baron of the emigration of the students and the representation of the *Robbers.* She laid all the blame on her woman’s curiosity; it was she who wanted to be present at the entertainment and who induced Julius to go to it. Julius yielded out of deference to his wife. Besides, Samuel, with whom she exchanged a few words after the play, swore that he would not re-appear before her until she herself summoned him. And, of course, that she would never do. The students returned to Heidelberg on the following day.

"For the last two months," Christiane added, "Monsieur Samuel has scrupulously kept his word. Therefore, surprised at receiving no reply from you, I have not written you again. During these two months, neither the sight, nor the remembrance, nor even the name of this man has troubled my happiness. For, in reality, I have never been happier nor more quiet than I am now. Wilhelm has not had the least recurrence of his indisposition, nor does Julius feel any return of that languor which our secluded life at first cast over him, after the excitement and noise to which he had been accustomed. In fact," Christiane continued smiling, "the father and the child are quite cured. And, I, who live only in them, and am half Wilhelm, half Julius, the love of Julius and the health of Wilhelm make my happiness complete. I thank God every day of my life, and I wish for no other paradise than my present made eternal."

"And Gretchen?" said the baron suddenly.

Christiane shuddered.

"Gretchen!" she answered, sad and pensive; "Gretchen shows herself to no one now. She used to be shy, now she has become wild, savage, unapproachable. All intercourse with human beings seems so unbearable to her that, in order to avoid bringing the goat that feeds Wilhelm to the castle, she no longer takes him along with her flock. The goat remains at the castle and the servants look after it. The people of Landeck who have had occasion to exchange a few words with Gretchen, say that her mind appears to be unhinged. As to myself, I have been five or six times to her hut to try to see her, but in vain did I knock and call, Gretchen never answered. I have often seen her in the distance when I go out with Wilhelm. But the moment she perceives me she flies into the depths of the forest."

"That's strange!" said the baron, "now I have been at Eberbach but half an hour, and Gretchen has been the first to accost me and has spoken to me at great length."

"And what has she told you?"

"Everything. Samuel's crime, his plans, his indiscretion. He has built this castle; he can come into it whenever he likes, and it is not outside, it is here, Christiane, that he has seen you."

"Well! father?"

"Well! you have not told me the whole truth, Christiane."

A smile of sad dignity flitted across Christiane’s lips. But she did not vindicate herself.

The Baron got up, a prey to some violent emotion, and strode up and down the room.

“I will see Samuel,” said he, “and have a talk with him. Let him beware. This time, I will not confine myself to words. As soon as I have spoken to Julius, I will set off, and this very night, I shall be at Heidelberg.”

“Excuse me, father,” said Christiane, “but I implore you to reflect before you do that. I have already told you that for the last two months this man has left us in peace. Is it prudent to excite and rouse him? I admit to you that I am afraid, as afraid as if you spoke of striking a sleeping tiger.”

“Then have you any particular reasons, Christiane, for taking exception to this step?”

Christiane coloured, feeling insulted at his tone.

“Men,” said she as if to herself, “with their strange suspicions, do not understand the modesty of a woman, nor do they know that the more quiet the lake, the more easily a breath will ruffle it. If you want to see Samuel Gelb, sir, you need not go to Heidelberg, nor wait until this evening for that.”

“What do you mean?” said the baron.

Christiane went direct to the panel Samuel had indicated to her, and placed her finger on the button.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE DAY OF RECKONING IS SURE TO COME.

“WHAT are you going to do, Christiane?” cried the Baron.

“Have I not told you, father,” Christiane replied, “that Samuel Gelb swore never to appear before me again unless I should summon him by this signal. Well! since you are desirous of seeing him, I am sending for him, that is all.”

And, trembling with both fear and pride, she pressed the button.

The button yielded, then rebounded all of a sudden before she had time to remove her finger. The shock sent a thrill through her, and she drew back pale and startled, as if Samuel were about to appear suddenly.

She looked round the wainscoting in fear and trembling, not knowing where Samuel might spring from. It seemed to her that he emerged from all sides at once; she felt hemmed in by this invisible enemy, and fancied that she heard thousands of footsteps behind the oak panelling.

Notwithstanding, the wall remained motionless and silent.

“No one comes,” said the baron, after two or three moments’ silence.

“Wait yet awhile! “Christiane replied.

And she sat down, quivering with fear, her gaze always fixed, on the wainscot. But a quarter of an hour passed, and the panel did not move.

“Christiane, you have been dreaming or this man has lied to you,” said the baron.

Then Christiane rose, radiant, and drew a long breath of relief.

“Ah! you are right, my father!” she exclaimed. “How foolish of me to have been afraid. How foolish of me to have believed that Samuel was going to appear from behind the panel. No, he will not come. He told me that to strike my imagination, to make me believe that he was always near, unknown to me, that I might feel his presence whatever I was doing, that I might be compelled to think of him always. He calculated on my never attempting to push the spring. By sheer chance I have pushed it, and this has revealed the falsehood. Oh my God! I thank Thee! How grateful I am, father, that you drove me to this act of daring.”

Her outburst of joy was so spontaneous, so sincere that instantly the baron felt touched and convinced.

“You are a pure and loyal creature, my child,” he said, taking her hands in his. “If, without wishing it, I have offended you, forgive me.”

“Oh! father! father!....” said Christiane.

Just then the servants whom Christiane had sent in search of Julius, returned to say that they had scoured the wood and called in vain.

“At what time does Julius usually return from shooting?” asked the baron. I “At about six o’clock in the evening,” j replied Christiane.

“Yet two or three hours to wait!” said, the baron. “Why, it’s a day lost How very annoying.... but we must make the best of it. My dear child, will you let me have some writing materials? When Julius returns, let me be at once informed.”

Christiane installed her father-in-law in Julius’ library, and left him writing.

At dusk, Julius had not yet come back, and the baron returned to the drawing-room, where he found Christiane.

He had scarcely been in the room a moment before she suddenly uttered a cry.

One of the panels had moved and opened slowly, giving admittance to Samuel Gelb.

At first Samuel saw only Christiane’s white dress, and did not distinguish the baron sitting in the shadow.

He advanced towards Christiane, to whom he bowed with his graceful and cold politeness.

“Forgive me, madame,” said he, “for not coming sooner in answer to your call. I have undoubtedly delayed a long time, hours, or even perhaps a day. The reason is that I was at Heidelberg. On my return to Landeck, the position of the bell warned me that you had rung, and I hasten to you. In what may I have the happiness of serving you? But first, let me thank you for having sent for me.”

“It is not Christiane who has sent for you; it is I, sir,” said the baron rising.

Samuel could not help starting at this, so to speak, physical surprise; but his powerful will regained, almost at once, the ascendancy.

“The Baron von Hermelinfeld!” he exclaimed. “A pleasant surprise. Good evening, sir!”

Then turning to Christiane:

“Ah! is that the game you are playing with me, madame?” he continued, with his bitter smile and ironical air of former times. “Ah! it’s a trap! Very well! be it so! and we shall see which will be caught in it, the wolf or the hunter.”

“Do you dare still to use your threats?.” cried the baron, indignant.

“Why not? “Samuel replied quietly. “Have I, in your opinion, lost any advantage because I present myself here in such perfect good faith? I think, between ourselves, the contrary.”

“Indeed?” said the baron with a sneer.

“That’s obvious,” rejoined Samuel. “First of all, a man against a woman! I might have appeared to be abusing my strength against her weakness; but you are two against me to-day. In the second place it seems to me that I was leaving madame entirely alone, I was not provoking her, nor was I attacking her. Is it she or I who breaks the truce Who recommences the war? Henceforth I am released, I believe, from all scruples. Now the game is in my hands, and I thank you for beginning the attack.”

Christiane looked at the baron with a glance which meant: “What did I tell you?

“This being understood,” Samuel went on, “I repeat to you, sir, what I said to madame: What do you want of me?”

“I want to give you a little useful advice, sir.” replied the baron, severe and menacing. “I have, so far, employed tolerance and persuasion with regard to you. That has never succeeded well. Now I no longer entreat, I command.”

“Ah!” said Samuel. “And what do you command? And why should you command me?”

“Do you recognise this, sir?” asked the baron, showing Samuel the platinum phial which Gretchen had given him.

“That phial!” said Samuel. “Do I recognise it? Yes or no. I cannot say; it’s possible.”

“Sir,” rejoined the baron, “my duty would, no doubt, be to denounce you this very day to justice. You understand what is the consideration which still makes me hesitate. But if you do not free my daughter for ever from your monstrous threats, if you move one step or say one syllable against her, if you do not make every effort to disappear from her life and from her mind, I swear before God that I will turn a deaf ear to pity, and that I will make use of the horrible secret that I know. You do not believe in divine justice; but I will in truth compel you to believe in human justice!”

Samuel folded his arms and sneered openly.

“Ah! bah!” said he. “You would do that? Well! by the devil, I wish you would for the curiosity of it. Ah! you would speak? And so would I speak. Do you suppose that I have nothing to say? On my faith! the dialogue between accuser and accused promises to be somewhat unedifying. I have several things on my mind, do you understand? Accuse me, I shall deny nothing, I’ll warrant you. On the contrary.”

“Good Heavens! What abominable cynicism!” cried the baron, thunderstruck.

“Not at all, nothing more simple,” said Samuel. You attack me, I defend myself. Is it my fault now if the contest between us is not equal? Is it my fault if you have all and I nothing to lose? Is it my fault if I risk neither name, nor family, nor fortune, nor reputation, nor rank, and if you stand to lose all that? You want there to be a duel between us? Is it my fault if you present an enormous surface, and if I am thin as the blade of a razor? And what can I say except, Sir, fire first.’”

Baron von Hermelinfeld was for a moment dumfounded at such unparalleled audacity. But, rousing himself from his amazement, he said:

“Very well, be it so; even in these terms, I accept your challenge, and we shall see in whose favour justice and society will decide.”

“Justice! society!” retorted Samuel. “But I shall say to them, sir, what I say to you. You attacked me first, oppressed me first. Is it my fault? Do I belong to that society which proscribes me? What do I owe to that justice which forsakes me? I am not a legitimate son, a presumptive heir, the virtuous descendant of a virtuous father, a child according to law and to religion; in my veins there does not run honest blood licensed by the law; I am not Julius. No! I am Samuel, curse you! a bastard, a love-child, the son of an idle whim, the inheritor of vice, and I have in my veins only the scum and the dregs of my father’s blood. Julius may represent the integrity, the authority, the ‘virtue of his official father; I represent the passion, the rebellion, the licentiousness of my unknown father. ‘Qualis pater, talis filius?’ it is a rudimentary rule. The court will judge. Call my conduct by what name you will. Say that I have committed a crime. Very well. I am glad to have the opportunity of letting the judges choose between him who has committed the crime and him who has made the criminal!”

The baron was white with surprise and anger. Christiane was shaking with fear. Baron von Hermelinfeld resumed:

"Let me tell you once more, sir, you are not being attacked. By consent of your first victim you are spared, on condition that you do not attempt to make a Second. But should you even appear again before my daughter, whatever the consequences, I denounce you. The judges will decide, if you wish, in favour of your theories, I doubt if they will decide in favour of your crime. The living witness is there: Gretchen; the palpable proof is there: this phial. What will the accused be able to reply?"

"Good! "Samuel said with a laugh, "he will still be obliged to turn accuser, that's all. I shall apply the law of retaliation. Had I committed a crime of a different nature, a theft or a murder, I could understand the assurance of my informers, and I might tremble or flee. But, in this case, what is it all about? The seduction of a young girl. Why! my mother was seduced too. I have letters which prove her resistance and the culpable perseverance of her seducer. Is the dead witness, less sacred than the living one, sir? As regards this phial, you say it is a proof against me, very well; but it is a proof against the other too. I shall say, no need that it be true, I shall say that I discovered the clever and terrible nature of this potion by analysing a similar phial lost at my mother's."

"Oh! it is an infamous slander," cried the baron.

"Who has told you so and who will prove it?" retorted Samuel. "Now do you understand my methods of defence, Herr von Hermelinfeld? I am not a criminal, I am an avenger. My counsel? that will simply be my address to the court."

He was silent. The baron, thoroughly overcome, his hands trembling, his white hairs damp with an icy sweat, maintained a stupefied silence. Samuel went on triumphantly:

"Sir, I await your summons to appear. Madame von Eberbach, I await the sound of your bell. I wish you both '*au revoir.*'"

And, conveying a threat into the words "au revoir," he went out, not by the secret exit, but by the door of the room, which he slammed violently after him. "Samuel!" cried the Baron. But he was already out of hearing. "Oh! my child!" said the baron to Christiane, who, mute with terror, clung to his breast, "this Samuel is a fatal man. It is impossible for me to attack him, as you see, but I shall know how to defend you. You must beware of him, never stay alone, have someone always with you, in fact, leave this castle or have it carefully explored and rebuilt. Don’t be anxious, I am here to watch over you.”

A footstep was heard in the corridor.

“Ah! that’s Julius’ step,” exclaimed Christiane reassured.

The next moment Julius entered.

CHAPTER LVII.

WIFE AND MOTHER.

“MY dear father,” said Julius, “after affectionate greetings had passed between them, “you have been waiting for me several hours, so I am told, and the servants searched all over the forest. They did not find me, for the very good reason that I was not there. Dear me, as usual I went off with my gun over my shoulder, and the only thing I made use of was a book which I had in my pocket. A mile away from here, I sat down on the grass, and read Klop stock till dusk. With me the dreamer invariably gets the better of the sportsman. But had you anything very important to tell me?”

“Alas! yes, Julius.”

“What is it? You appear thoughtful and sad.”

The baron glanced at Christiane and seemed to hesitate.

“Am I in the way? “Christiane said quickly. “I shall leave, you two alone.”

“No, remain here, my daughter. You have firmness and resolution, have you not?”

“You alarm me,” said Christiane. “Oh! I had a presentiment of some misfortune.”

“It is necessary,” pursued the baron, “that you should know what brings me here; because I depend upon you to persuade Julius to do what I came to ask of him.”

“What do you wish me to do?” asked Julius. The baron handed him a letter.

“Read this aloud!” said he.

“It is a letter from Uncle Fritz,” said Julius, And he read out the following letter, not without breaking off more than once through his emotion: —

“New York, “25th August, 1811. “MY DEAREST BROTHER, “It is a dying man who writes to you. The victim of a disease which never spares, I shall not rise from this bed to which I have been confined for two months, but to rest in my grave. I have yet three months to live. MY doctor, who is one of my friends, and knows my stamp of character, has yielded to my urgent entreaty, and told me the truth.

"You understand me too, and you know perfectly well that if this news has affected me painfully, it is not from mean fear of death or cowardly regret of life. I have lived long enough, since I have succeeded, by dint of assiduity, work and economy, in amassing a fortune that will contribute to your happiness and to that of my beloved nephew. But I had hoped to see a little of this happiness before dying. I wanted to realise my possessions, bring the proceeds over to you in Europe and say, 'Be happy! 'That was the reward I had promised myself for so much toil. It seemed that God owed me that at least. God has decided otherwise, His will be done.

"So I shall never see my country again. I shall never look again upon those whom I love best in the world. A stranger will close my eyes. I do not say this that you should come, you and your son, or perhaps one of the two. You are prevented by duty; he, by happiness. I do not send for you. Besides, you would have to start at once on receipt of this. There would be just time for you to get here, and what a world of trouble only to see me die immediately. You would waste three months to give me one day.

"Do not come. Ah! and yet I would have died less sadly, had your looks of affection gladdened the last hours of an existence shortened in working for you. I would also have wished to feel there was someone trustworthy, to whom I could give my instructions as to business and the possessions which I leave. But it was foretold that I would die in exile and alone.

"Farewell, it is this thought which takes away my courage. To you my last thoughts, to you my whole fortune. Why did I leave you? But I do not repent, since I am able to bequeath a little of this world's goods to you. Above all, do not imagine that I urge you to come.

"I embrace you both tenderly.

"Your dying brother, "FRITZ VON HERMELINFELD."

"Father," said Julius, wiping away a tear, "at your age and in your position, you cannot undertake a long journey. I will go instead."

"Thank you, my son," said the baron. "That is what I came to ask you to do. But what does Christiane say?"

Christiane, deathly pale, had sunk into a chair.

"May I not accompany Julius?" she asked.

“Of course “said Julius, “I shall take you with me.”

“But Wilhelm,” said the mother.

“Oh! it’s true,” Julius rejoined.

“It is impossible,” said the Baron, “to expose the child to such a long voyage. Wilhelm has been improving for some time, but he still seems delicate! How would he stand the sea and change of climate? If Christiane goes, she must leave him with me.”

“Leave my child!” exclaimed Christiane. And she burst into tears.

Let her husband go without her, that was impossible, but go without her child, that was even more impossible.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE EVE OF DEPARTURE.

HE Baron von Hermelinfeld tried to interpose in Christiane’s perplexity. “The wisest thing,” he said gently, “would be that Julius should go alone to New York. After all, it would not be a separation for any great length of time. Unfortunately, my poor brother will not detain him there long. Julius will arrive in time to close his eyes, and will be able to return immediately. I know, my children, how sad even the shortest absence will be, but we have to take the exigencies of life as they present themselves, and you, Julius, must think of your uncle; you Christiane, of your son.”

Christiane threw herself into her husband’s arms.

“Is it then absolutely necessary that he should go?” she said.

“Put the question to your own noble heart,” replied the baron. “It is the more necessary for Julius to go in that by remaining he would lose nothing. My poor brother sent me, by the same mail as this letter, a copy of his will. Whether Julius goes or stays, the entire fortune of Fritz comes to us. My brother did not wish us to attend his death bed from interested motives, and he has generously left us free to act as we thought best. But does not the very fact of his generosity make it the more incumbent upon us to go to him? I leave you to judge, my dear distressed one. For myself, I consider it so imperative a duty not to let Fritz die alone, that if Julius remains, I must go.”

“Oh! I mean to go,” Julius said.

“Yes, he must go,” said Christiane, “but I will accompany him.”

She went quickly up to the baron and added in a low voice:

“In that way, not only shall I be with Julius, but I shall escape Samuel.”

“I could not have the heart to blame you,” the baron rejoined aloud. “Your first journey met with very little success, so far as what you dread is concerned. But it is useless to argue with those who love. And if you absolutely wish to accompany Julius, I will undertake to take charge of Wilhelm, and try to replace you as a mother.”

“Oh! “Christiane said, shaking her head, “a mother cannot be replaced. Oh God! if my Wilhelm were to fall ill when I was away; if he were to die! You are right, my father, not only as regards those that hate me, but also those I love; I took a journey once before, and on my return, found that my father had gone to his long rest; if, on my return this time, I were to find my child’s grave! No, let Julius go, since he must; I shall remain to look after my boy.”

“Christiane,” said Julius, “you are both wise and loving; remain with our Wilhelm, that is my advice too. Our separation will be cruel pain. But you without your child, your child without you, that would be hardest of all. I am a man, and if the parting is pain to me, well, I shall be back in three or four months, and your kisses will make me forget the pain. But our baby, if he is ill, and you are not there to save him, all will be over, and all your tears on your return would avail nothing. You are yet more necessary to him than to me.”

He went on instantly as if to end all further discussion:

“When must I leave, father?”

“Alas! I am sorry to give you so little time,” said the baron, “but you would have to leave this very evening.”

Oh! but that’s utterly impossible!” exclaimed Christiane.

“Come, be calm, my child,” went on the baron. “Since Julius has to go, is it not far better to cut short this sad time of parting? The sooner he goes, the sooner will he return. Besides, my poor brother cannot wait, and if Julius does not arrive in time to be with him at the last, of what use for him to go at all? I have made all enquiries as to the departure of the boats. There is the ‘Commerce’ which leaves Ostend in two days. After that, it would be necessary to wait a fortnight. That would be too late. Besides, the ‘Commerce ‘is a safe and quick boat. It would be unwise to miss this opportunity. Think, my dear Christiane, what a comfort it will be to us to feel that Julius is on a good ship. The ‘Commerce ‘is the fastest boat and the most sea-worthy sailing from Ostend. I am certain that Julius will arrive in time, and you will be equally certain that he will return.”

“Oh! my father,” said Christiane, “it is only that I cannot bear the thought of his having to leave me so hurriedly! Can you not give me a day or two in which to accustom myself to the idea?”

Julius interposed with the question: “When does the ‘Commerce’ sail, father?”

“The day after to-morrow.”

“At what time?”

“At eight o’clock in the evening.”

“Well! father, by paying the postillion double, it does not take more than thirty-six hours to get to Ostend. I have forty-eight hours before me. I understand all your reasons; I must sail by the ‘Commerce ‘in order to be certain of finding my uncle still alive; but I do not wish to rob my darling Christiane of a single moment that belongs to her, I shall leave to-morrow morning.”

“And I will go with you as far as Ostend,” Christiane added.

“We will see about that,” said Julius.

“No, I want it to be decided at once.”

“Very well, we will arrange it so!” said Julius, glancing at his father.

The matter was decided thus. Christiane left Julius and the baron a few moments, to hasten on the preparations for her husband’s journey.

Father and son exchanged a few words in an undertone.

Christiane returned almost immediately. She had given her orders, and wanted to make the most of the few hours remaining to her.

The evening passed sadly yet pleasantly. Nothing is more painful and yet more sweet than these partings. It is at such times that we realize how greatly we love! Everything that comes to an end has a kind of bitter, poignant charm, which we do not experience in the plenitude of settled and permanent affections. Anguish of heart reveals of what nature are the ties which bind us one to the other. We measure past happiness by present misery; for there is no surer thermometer of love than pain.

The baron retired early in order to rest from his fatigue of the day, and prepare for his journey on the morrow.

Christiane and Julius remained together weeping, and consoling each other, gazing at their child in his cradle, repeating how unhappy they would be without the other, how neither must fret overmuch, and promising never to forget each other. Then, each one tried to smile in order to convince the other that he would not be too miserable, and that this journey was not so great a misfortune after all. But this fictitious smile soon belied itself, and the burst of laughter ended in sobs.

Meanwhile night was advancing. They were in Christiane’s room.

“It is late,” she said; “you need to rest for the fatigue which lies before you. Go to your own room, my dear Julius, and try to sleep.”

“Do you send me away? “Julius said with a smile. “When we are about to be parted for many nights to come, you send me away?”

“Oh! my beloved!” cried Christiane, pressing her lips to his. “I love you!”

When the dawn crept stealthily into the room, Christiane lay in a deep slumber. She was worn out by the emotions she had gone through. One lovely arm hung out of bed, the other, bent under her head, supported her weary brow. Her whole attitude, the black circle round her eyes, the repose of her delicate limbs, betrayed the exhaustion of a body vanquished by too much soul. From time to time, a shadow passed across her forehead, a spasm contracted her sweet face like the expression of some bad dream, and her fingers twitched nervously.

She was alone.

Suddenly she opened her eyes wide, sat up in bed and looked round the room.

“How strange!” she said, “I fancied Julius was there.”

Then, hastily jumping out of bed, she ran to Julius’ room.

The room was empty.

She pulled the bell violently. Her maid hastened to reply.

“My husband!” she cried, “where is my husband?”

“He is gone, Madame.”

“Gone, without bidding me good-bye! impossible!”

“He bade me tell you that he had left a letter for you.”

“Where is it?”

“On the mantel-piece in your bedroom.”

Christiane rushed to her room.

On the chimney-piece were two letters, one from Julius, the other from the baron.

Julius explained to Christiane that he had wished to spare her the agony of a last farewell. He had been afraid that he would not have the courage to go, if he saw her again sobbing and in despair as on the previous evening. He begged her to take courage; she would not be alone, since she would be with her child. He had to make the best of it, he, who at one stroke, was leaving both wife and child.

Long after Christiane had read the last word of this letter, she remained looking at it, motionless, rigid, petrified, without a tear.

The maid took little Wilhelm out of his cradle and placed him in his mother’s arms.

“Ah! there you are,” she said, without seeming to notice the child.

And she gave him back to the maid. “And his father, what does he tell me? “She read the baron’s letter.

“MY DEAR DAUGHTER, “Forgive me for having taken your husband away so suddenly. Why prolong heart-breaking farewells? Do not be anxious about Julius. I am going with him as far as Ostend, and shall wait to see him off. As soon as the ship has left the harbour, I will return to you at full speed. So in three days, you will have news of your husband. It is in order to afford you this consolation that I accompany him. And yet I have been questioning, this whole night, whether it were not wiser for me to stay here with you, to protect you against the odious threats of which you know. But, on the other hand, we must not carry our fears to the length of exaggeration and childishness. By taking, during these seventy-two hours that you are going to be alone, every precaution which human prudence can devise, I cannot see that there is any danger to fear. Have someone always with you, make up your mind never to go out of the castle, and at night, have armed servants to sleep in the drawing-room and in the library, and lock yourself into your own room with your maid and Wilhelm’s nurse. By these means, what need you dread?

“In three days, I shall be with you. My duties call me back to Berlin; I will take you with me. Employ these three days in making your preparations. I have, as you know, at the gates of Berlin, a house with a garden, where our Wilhelm can live in the open air and my Christiane be in safety. You will both remain with me while Julius is away.

“Till Thursday, then. Be brave, then, and kiss your Julius on the cheeks of Wilhelm.

“Your devoted father, “BARON VON HERMELINFELD.”

This letter did Christiane good. The thought that Julius had some one who would accompany him, and bring her news in three days, gave her fresh courage. Julius had not wholly gone from her so long as they were kept in touch through the baron.

She went to Wilhelm’s cot, took up her child and embraced him with tears.

But suddenly a sinister idea flashed across her mind. She remembered the prophecy of Gretchen’s flowers at the ruins.

“Yes,” she murmured, “Gretchen foretold it, the union ends almost at once; we live and we love one another, and yet we are parted. And Gretchen added that the separation would last for long years, and that we should live far from each other, like two strangers. Oh! my God! preserve me against these superstitious fears.”

And with the thought of Gretchen came the remembrance of Samuel.

“Oh!” she cried in terror, “he who ought to protect me, goes away, and he who wants to ruin me, stays.”

She strained Wilhelm to her breast as if to shelter the purity of the mother behind the innocence of the child, and threw herself on her knees before the crucifix that hung over the cradle.

“Thou, God!” she cried, “have pity on a poor woman who loves and who is hated. Thou alone canst restore my husband to me, and preserve his wife to him.”

CHAPTER LIX.

THE BELL RINGS.

AT about half-past eleven o’clock on the evening of that same day, the Three met in the deep circular hall where Samuel had presented Julius to the chiefs of the Tugendbund (Guild of Virtue.)

The Three, masked as usual, sat around the Hall which was lighted by the lamp suspended from the ceiling.

Samuel was standing before them, his face uncovered.

“So,” Samuel was saying, “you do not wish me to act now?”

“No,” replied the chief. “It is not from want of confidence in your ability and courage; but is not our principal reason the actual position of our enemy? Most certainly Napoleon’s star is just now in the ascendant; everything favours him; he is more secure than ever on the throne of Europe. He already had dominion, the birth of the King of Rome has now ensured its continuance. At present God is assuredly with him.”

“It is when at their zenith,” interrupted Samuel, “that I like to oppose my enemies.”

“We know that,” replied the chief, “and we know too, that the serenity of the sky calls forth the thunder. But reflect on the consequences which would follow an attempt at this moment. The fact is nothing without the idea; action is useless, and consequently wrong, if it does not carry with it the conscience of the world. So, to strike Napoleon at a time of universal peace, when he attacks no one, when he threatens no one, would it not be to place general opinion on his side? Should we not be the aggressors, we who are on the contrary, the avengers and protectors of human liberty? Should the attempt fail, we strengthen his position; should it succeed, we strengthen his dynasty. You see the hour has not come.”

“Very well! let us wait,” said Samuel. “But if it is only peace that stands in your way, then you will not have long to wait, that I promise you. Napoleon cannot rest without being false to his principle, and without forswearing himself. He is war or he is nothing. They who reproach him with his insatiable thirst of conquest and territory, do not understand the first word of his mission. Napoleon is armed revolution. He must go from nation to nation, pouring French blood into the trenches and into the minds of the people, which will give an impetus everywhere to the growth of revolt and popular instinct. He remain in a gilded chair, like an idle king! He has not come to earth for that. He has not yet been round the world, do not imagine he intends to rest. Therefore the day, and I warn you that that day is not far off, on which Napoleon shall declare war against no matter what country, whether Prussia or Russia, the Tugendbund will give me permission to act."

"Perhaps. But do you remember Friedrich Staps?"

"I remember that he is dead, and that he is not avenged."

"Before authorising you to act," resumed the chief, "we must know what you intend to do?"

"I shall act independently of you, and will not compromise you. Will that satisfy you?"

"No," said the chief. "The Guild has the right to know everything. You cannot isolate yourself, and all the members are conjointly responsible."

"Very well!" said Samuel. "Listen!"

The three turned their attention to Samuel, and he was about to speak.

Suddenly a metallic sound was heard, Samuel started.

The same sound was repeated.

"What does this mean? "Samuel thought. "The baron and Julius have gone to Ostend. Christiane is alone. Is this journey a blind, and can they be setting a trap for me again?"

"Well! speak on," skid the chief.

But Samuel gave no further thought to the three, no further thought to the Emperor, no further thought to anything. He thought only of Christiane.

"Did you not hear?" said he.

"Yes, something like the ring of a bell. What is the matter?"

"The matter is," Samuel answered without ceremony, "that we will continue this conversation later on. Excuse my leaving you, but I am wanted."

"Who wants you?" asked the chief.

"She does," he replied, unmindful whom he was addressing. But he corrected himself immediately.

"A little goat-herd," said he, "who warns me that there are spies in the environs. You have only time to fly."

“You will do nothing before seeing us again?” said the chief.

“Nothing,” said Samuel, “don’t be alarmed.”

And he opened the door for them. As it closed after them, the bell rang again more urgently and like a cry of anguish.

“If it were a trap,” said Samuel, “she would not summon me so violently and so persistently. What in the world has happened that she should send for me in the absence of her husband and of the baron? Let us see what she wants of me. Come, Samuel, be worthy of yourself. Be calm and composed! and don’t be so ridiculously agitated like a school boy over his first passion.”

And he hurriedly mounted the staircase, which led to Christiane’s boudoir.

CHAPTER LX.

FATE PLAYS INTO SAMUEL’S HANDS.

THIS first day of the separation had been a sad one to Christiane. She had taken refuge in the only place where she could still find happiness, beside little Wilhelm. She had not left him the whole day long, rocking him, singing to him, kissing his golden curls, speaking to him as if he could understand.

“I have no one now but you, my Wilhelm. Oh! try to fill my life and my soul, I implore you. Take my thoughts into your tiny hands, and keep them there. Your father has left me, do you know that? Comfort me, my little one. Let us both smile. Smile at me first and I will try to smile afterwards.”

And the child smiled and the mother wept.

Never had Wilhelm looked more beautiful, more fresh, more rosy. He took his eight or nine meals splendidly from his wild nurse. When night was come, Christiane put him to sleep in his cradle, drew the little curtains close to shade the light of the lamp from the child’s eyes, fetched a book from the library and sat down to read.

But she could not fix her mind on her book; her thoughts were on the road to Ostend, flying after the galloping horses.

Julius must already be far away. Each turn of the wheels took him rapidly farther. At this present moment, even supposing Christiane wished to rejoin him before he embarked, to see him again, were it but for an instant, she could no longer do so. Already it seemed to her that the ocean lay between them.

There came to Christiane a sting of remorse. Why did she not, on waking in the morning, have the horses put in, and why did she not start off in pursuit of the fugitive? By doubling the postillion’s pay, she would have overtaken her husband, and would have been able to give him a last embrace.

But alas! one embrace must always be the last!

Julius had done right in going away like this. What would have become of Wilhelm during her absence of three days. Ah! naughty, adored child.

Always the child between the husband and the wife!

All these ideas passed through Christiane's mind in the vague, dreaming confusion which night lends to thought.

Suddenly Wilhelm awoke crying.

Christiane ran to the cradle.

The child whom she had left so smiling, so quiet, now lay with contracted features and bathed in a cold sweat. His head was heavy as lead, and his pulse beat quick and strong.

"Ah! dear me," exclaimed Christiane, "this is indeed the last straw; Wilhelm is ill."

To call, rush to the bell, take up her child, clasp him to her bosom as if to impart to him her breath, her health, her life, all this was, to the mother, but the work of a second.

But the child remained cold and inert. He no longer even cried. There was a perceptible wheeze each time he drew his breath. His throat was closing up.

The servants hurried into the room.

"Quick," cried Christiane, "to horse! a doctor! my child is dying. No matter which. Ten thousand florins to him who brings me a doctor! Go to Neckarsteinach, to Heidelberg, everywhere. But start away at once, I say. Oh! my God; my God!"

The men rushed out and Christiane remained with the women.

Christiane turned to the nurse.

"Come here," said she, "look at Wilhelm. You ought to understand children's ailments, or you are not a good nurse. What is the matter with him? Oh! not even to know what ails him. All mothers ought to study medicine. To think that the remedy is perhaps at hand, quite simple, ready prepared, that I would only have to give it to him and yet I do not know it. Oh! my very life, do not die, or I will die too. And his father, why has he gone? For money, for an uncle. What is that to me, an uncle and money. Ah! his uncle is ill? Well! his child is ill too! My child! my child! Now then, have you looked at him? What has he got?"

"Madame," said the nurse, "you excite him too much. He must be put back in his cradle."

"In his cradle, you said. There now he is in it. I obey you, but save him. It will not be much, will it? Oh! I entreat you, say that it will not be much."

The nurse shook her head.

“Alas! my dear good mistress, he has all the symptoms of the croup.”

“The croup! “Christiane said. “What is that, the croup? If you know the disease, you know the remedy.”

“Good gracious! madame, I had the misfortune to lose my first child from the croup.”

“Lost him, did you say? Your child died of the croup? Then it is not the croup that Wilhelm has, if children die of it. Are you mad to quietly tell me such a thing; as if Wilhelm could die! And what was done to your child?.... But no, it’s useless to tell me, since what was done made him die.”

“Madame, he was bled.”

“Even if it were right to bleed him, no one here knows how to bleed. Why ever don’t people learn? but then, it might not perhaps be the right thing. We must have a doctor. Oh! those servants are not back yet.”

And in a fever of anxiety she looked at the child whose breathing grew more and more difficult.

“They have not been gone ten minutes, madame,” said one of the maids, “and it takes quite two hours to go to Neckarsteinach and back, galloping the whole way»

“Two hours,” cried Christiane in despair, “why, it is an eternity. Oh! what a cruel and stupid thing is distance! Not a doctor in Landeck! Why did we come and bury ourselves here? Ah! the pastor No, he knows nothing, nothing but how to pray. Well! that’s always something. Let someone go and tell him to pray. Quick, send to him. And I too, in waiting for the doctor, I will try to pray.”

She threw herself on her knees, made the sign of the cross and cried:

“Oh God! oh God!”

Suddenly she rose. An idea had just crossed her mind.

“Yes,” she said. “Gretchen! She understands plants and herbs. Let some one go for her. No, she would not come, I will go myself. You others, look after my child.”

And with nothing over her head or shoulders, she flew down the staircase, rushed through the courtyards, climbed the rocks, and in a moment had reached the door of the hut.

“Gretchen! Gretchen!” she cried.

No answer.

“Now then! it is not a question today of your pretending; to be either wild or mad. My child is dying, do you hear? That is more serious than anything.

Gretchen, in the name of your mother, my child is dying. Help! help!"

"I am coming," replied Gretchen's voice.

A moment later, the door opened and Gretchen appeared on the threshold, gloomy and dejected.

"What do you want with me?" she said.

"Gretchen," Christiane replied, "my poor little Wilhelm, you know him? well! he is dying. You alone can save him. They say he has the croup. Do you know what it is? Have you any remedies for that? Yes, have you not? For if you had no remedies for the croup, of what use would your knowledge of herbs be?"

Gretchen smiled a bitter smile.

"Herbs? Of what use, indeed, is my knowledge of them? I believe in them no longer. They are all poisonous."

"Oh! come," said Christiane imploringly.

"Of what use? "Gretchen replied, without moving; "I tell you that the flowers have played me false."

"Gretchen, my dear Gretchen, summon up your devotion, your courage, your reason. In fact, what harm can it do you to try."

"You wish it?" said Gretchen; "very well, I will take some plants which my mother used to say were good for children's ailments. But my mother was mistaken. The plants have something else to do than to save children; they have to ruin women."

"I believe in the plants," said Christiane. "Be quick, take those you speak of, and hasten to the castle. Do not be long, my dear little one. I am going back to Wilhelm. I rely upon you."

She rushed away and returned to the cot. The child seemed slightly better. The pulse was quieter.

"Saved!" cried Christiane. "It was nothing; it was not the croup. Thank God!"

Gretchen entered at this moment.

"There is no need now," said Christiane.

"Wilhelm is quite well again."

"I think not," said Gretchen.

"You think not. Why?"

"I have thought it over in coming along," Gretchen replied, in a solemn and convincing tone.

“The diseases which affect us now are not natural. They come from a man who bears us both a grudge. They last as long as he likes. He is the only one who can cure the invalid.”

Christiane started.

“Are you speaking of Samuel?”

“Yes,” said Gretchen. “And look now.” She pointed to Wilhelm, whose face was again contracted with pain and his breathing laboured. The child’s skin was dry, wrinkled and burning; his little limbs were growing rigid.

“Your herbs? Gretchen! your herbs!” cried Christiane, falling forward in her despair.

Gretchen shook her head with a dubious air. But, to satisfy the mother, she applied her ‘herbs on the neck and on the breast of the child.

“Let us wait and see,” she said. “But, I tell you again, it will have no effect.”

Christiane waited, watching the effect of the plants on Wilhelm, trembling, breathless.

The same terrible symptoms continued.

“I warned you before,” said Gretchen, shaking her head. “There is only one man who can save him.”

“You are right!” exclaimed Christiane.

And she ran into the adjoining boudoir.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE CROUP.

GRETCHEN followed Christiane mechanically, not knowing what possessed her. She saw her place her finger on a projecting part of one of the wood panels.

“Madame, what are you doing?”

“I am calling him.”

“Whom?”

“Why! the man who is able to save my child?”

“You are calling Samuel Gelb? “Gretchen faltered.

“Good Heavens! do you suppose I am going to let Wilhelm die?”

“He! but he is not the doctor, he is the executioner. Madame, you are invoking the devil.”

“Well! have I not invoked God in vain! Ah! there is only one thing I am afraid of, and that is Wilhelm’s illness. Everything sinks into nothingness beside the thought that Wilhelm may be dying. Oh! my God! if he were to be absent again? I would give my life for him to come quickly.”

And she pressed on the spring with all her might.

“He will hear me this time,” she said; “he is here, he will come in a moment Let us go back to Wilhelm.”

She returned to her room with Gretchen.

“What is the time?” she asked the nurse.

“It must certainly be two hours since those men left.”

“Alas! madame “said the nurse, “it is not yet half-an-hour ago.”

There was no improvement in the child’s condition.

Christiane ran back to the boudoir, rang a third time, then returned to the cradle.

Each second seemed to her an eternity. She could not keep still. Her blood boiled in her veins. She knelt beside the cot, then, rising, walked up and down the room, nervous, dishevelled, haggard, mistaking each sound for Samuel.

“Will he let my child die?” she said with numb despair.

She went back to the boudoir, and was again about to press the spring when the panel revolved sharply.

Samuel appeared.

At any other time, his appearance alone would have alarmed Christiane. With tightly compressed lips and unflinching gaze, he stood before her, grave, pale, cold, and as if armed with an inflexible resolve. It was no longer a reasoning being, it was no longer a heart, it was a will, a will rigid, inflexible, of iron, fatal, terrible and deadly, But Christiane did not even glance at him. She flung herself at his feet.

“My child is dying, sir! save him,” she cried.

“Ah!” said Samuel, “so it is not a trap.”

“Oh! “Christiane replied, “there is no question of that! I crave your mercy. You are great, you will be kind. Forgive me the past. I was wrong. I kneel to you, I bless you. Come quickly. Save my little one!”

And she took his hand and drew him into the room.

“Look at him!” she said, “he is very ill, but you are so clever.”

Samuel stooped over the cradle. But one glance was enough.

“That child has the croup,” he said coldly.

“The croup! Ah! it is the croup!” exclaimed Christiane. “You, who know everything, tell me what must be done.”

Samuel remained silent a moment, seemed to reflect, looked at Christiane who, breathless, waited, watched, for his first word, his first gesture.

“To begin with,” he said slowly, “this room is too crowded. Every one must leave it.”

“Leave the room, all of you,” Christiane commanded.

The maids and the nurse obeyed.

On looking round to see if any one remained, Samuel perceived Gretchen crouching down in a corner trembling, scared, terrified at seeing Samuel, and unable to remove her eyes from him.

“Must she go out too? “Christiane asked.

She above all,” said Samuel.

“Go, Gretchen,” Christiane ordered.

Without speaking a word, Gretchen retreated towards the door, her eyes still fixed on Samuel, as if to guard against some attack, a frown contracting her brow, fierce and menacing.

When she was almost out of the room:

“Madame! look to yourself!” she cried.

And hurriedly closing the door, she fled. Samuel and Christiane remained alone beside the cot.

CHAPTER LXII.

A MOTHER'S TEMPTATION.

"NOW then, sir, we are alone," Christiane said impatiently to Samuel. "Sir, what in the world are you thinking about? "For Samuel seemed absent-minded and absorbed in deep thought.

Most strange indeed! who could guess of what, at this supreme moment, Samuel was in reality thinking? Of an engraving of Albert Durer's, celebrated in Germany, and entitled "The Violater." This picture represents the mysterious, grotesque figure of a man half-naked, hairy, muscular, who is drawing on to his knees a resisting and desperate woman, but he draws her with a force so powerful and so invincible, with a determination so unconcerned and so heedless, that at sight of the crime which seems to mingle murder with love, the impression of terror effaces all idea of voluptuousness, and that beneath the sinister symbol one imagines everything that is most cruel and pitiless in the world: Terror, Fatality, Death.

Yet this horrible picture was the subject of Samuel's thoughts beside the dying child's cradle, and Christiane was obliged to repeat:

"What are you thinking about, sir? Speak, act, in Heaven's name! I place my child in your hands. This terrible malady is not fatal, is it?"

"It can be cured, Madame," Samuel answered at last in a deep voice, "it can be cured, if taken in time."

"Oh! this attack is taken in time!" exclaimed Christiane. "It is not half-an-hour since the first symptoms broke out."

"There is yet time, Madame, it is true. But you have been wise not to delay. In half-an-hour it would have been too late."

"Well! why do you not begin at once."

"I am waiting — waiting for a word from you."

"A word from me? What word?"

Samuel was visibly agitated. No one but a mother anxious for her child would have failed to notice the ardent passionate look which flashed into his hitherto cold, scornful eyes, as he glanced round Christiane's room, which, at this hour, inspired thoughts of the mysteries which must have happened at times such as this, and at lovely Christiane with loosened hair, shoulders half-bare, eyes shining with emotion, whose woman’s beauty was enhanced by her mother love.

“Listen, Madame,” rejoined Samuel, as if making an unalterable decision.

You have, up to the present, set me at defiance, scorned me, worsted me. Now it is my turn. The seconds are numbered. I have not time to be other than brutal. You ask me for the life, the whole life of your child. Very well, I will give it you. But, in exchange, you will give me ten minutes of yours.”

Christiane looked at him, without understanding.

“What do you mean?”

“I say that I propose an exchange,” Samuel went on. “It lies with me to give you the being who is dearest to you in the whole world. You ask me to do that. It lies with you to give me the being who is dearest to me in the whole world; I ask that of you. And I repeat that I will give you a life and that you will give me ten minutes only. That is not yet plain enough? In a word, you love your child, and I — I love you!”

Christiane understood, for she gave a cry of horror.”

“Ah! you understand at last?” said Samuel. “That is very fortunate!”

“Villain!” cried the young woman indignant, “such words! and at such a time!”

“I await your answer, and not insults,” was Samuel’s rejoinder.

“Not another word, wretch!” said Christiane, “for it seems to me that God will take my child from me that his innocence may not be witness of so gross an insult to his mother.”

“Madame,” Samuel rejoined, “since I have said that, you may be certain that I will not go from what I have said. Time is flying, and it is Wilhelm’s life that you are wasting in words. My decision is irrevocable. I love you more than I myself imagined. While you hesitate the croup hesitates not. In five and twenty minutes it will be too late. Beware that you do not give yourself lifelong remorse through a mere scruple. I swear to you that you have to choose between two things alone: Give your child to the grave or yourself to me.”

“Is it some bad dream? “Christiane said aloud to herself, “but no, I feel that it is only too true. Listen, sir,” she continued entreatingly, “you are a sensible man. How is it possible for me to give myself as you suggest? Would you want me under such conditions? No, you have too much respect for me. You would scorn such a moral violation. There is nothing to wound you in what I have said. Even supposing that I loved you, how could I be yours when I belong to another. And to whom! Good God! remember to whom."

"Do not rouse the evil passions of Cain, Madame," muttered Samuel, resuming his threatening tone.

"Do you want my fortune? my whole fortune? Say but a word and it is yours. This is no empty phrase. Before God, before my father and mother who are in Heaven, I will get Julius. I do not know how, but I swear that I will succeed in getting him to share his fortune with you, or, if you will, he will give you the whole of it. All that we possess, take it, I implore you."

"I thank you, Madame, for providing me with an opportunity of ennobling my offence. I want of you only yourself."

The child was seized with a fresh paroxysm.

"Well!" the unhappy mother attempted again, "since it is me that you want, save my child, and perhaps then I shall love you, because you will have been generous and noble. I cannot give myself to you without loving you; make me love you."

"Time is passing," Samuel remarked.

"But after all," Christiane cried, "you are a doctor and it is your duty to succour and save those who are suffering and dying. If you refuse you will be punished."

"I am not a doctor, Madame, and only if I perform a cure am I liable to incur punishment."

Christiane said nothing for a few seconds, turning over in her mind what she ought to say and do, in face of this determined obstinacy.

"Sir, I implore you, on my knees, with clasped hands, will you not yield to my entreaties? Sir, if you love me as you say you do, you will not convince me of your love by murdering my child."

"Your child, Madame!... It was through your child you insulted me."

"Sir, yet once again, have mercy. Yet once again I beseech you, I entreat you, on my knees!"

"Madame, try to stop the hands of that clock," said Samuel.

Christiane stood up.

"Ah! it is infamous," said the poor woman, wringing her hands. "Well! I will do without you. The doctors will arrive in time. You lie when you say that in half-an-hour it will be too late."

"It was half-an-hour ten minutes ago,"

Samuel interrupted. "Now it is only twenty minutes."

"You lie!" she burst out. "You say that to frighten me. But I do not believe you; go away. You are a scoundrel. And if I were mad enough to give myself up, who is to tell me that you would save my child afterwards? Would it even be in your power to do so? You are not a doctor, you have admitted as much. The real doctors will be here soon. They will save Wilhelm. I have no need of you. You will lose for the shame of your infamous proposal. And I will have you punished. I will bring you to justice for what you have done to Gretchen. Get you gone." Samuel turned to go.

"I am going," said he. "I came again, because you called me again; yesterday, it was to deliver me up to your father; today, so fate decreed, it has been for you to deliver yourself up to me. But you tell me to go, and I obey."

He looked at the clock in passing.

"Twelve minutes have slipped away," said he. The child gave a sort of plaintive, heart-breaking groan.

"Sir, do you hear him?" cried Christiane with a despairing sob. "Ah! such a cry would touch even a wild beast."

Samuel stooped over the cradle.

"In another quarter-of-an-hour," he said, "I shall be able to do nothing. At this moment I can answer unhesitatingly for Wilhelm's life. It is you who are without pity, madame. Yes or no? No? I am going. Wait for your doctors. They will find a corpse."

He walked towards the door.

Christiane hesitated for one terrible moment.

"Sir," she said.

Samuel turned, quivering.

"Sir! sir! have you carefully considered what an atrocious thing you are about to do?"

"What waste of words and time!" said Samuel.

"No! I cannot!" sobbed Christiane.

"Then, farewell."

And he took three firm strides.

"Look," she resumed in a low voice, "since you place a mother between the monstrous alternative of killing her honour or her child; well! save Wilhelm, and — I swear that I will be yours."

"No," said Samuel, "such bargains are concluded on the nail. I will save him after."

"Then, no," said she. "Rather must my child die."

Already Samuel was opening the secret door; she rushed after him terror-stricken.

"Another offer," said she. "What do you want? To be revenged on me. You do not love me, you hate me. Well, you can punish me in another way, and your pride will be just as well satisfied. I will kill myself there, under your very eyes, and my boy will live. I tell you of it instead of doing it, because once dead you would be capable of allowing my child to die just the same."

"Indeed," said Samuel. "And I refuse your proposal."

"Oh my God! my God! my God!" moaned the poor mother, wringing her hands.

"Time is passing," remarked Samuel. "Madame, look at your child."

Christiane looked with a haggard eye at the cradle, and her whole body was seized with nervous trembling. The poor little body was all stiff and stark, and the scarce perceptible breath that issued from his parted lips resembled already the death-rattle.

She turned towards Samuel, crushed and defeated.

"I am ready," she murmured in a broken voice, as if exhausted. "But know one thing: If I do not kill myself before, I will kill myself after!"

"Why?" said Samuel. "I will undertake, if you are afraid of my rights, never to appear before you again. Besides, Gretchen has not killed herself, and she had no child. Christiane, I love you."

"And I hate you!" exclaimed Christiane.

"I know quite well you do!" said Samuel.

The words decided her never to consent; but one cry of the child, and the mother was determined to break her resolve.

"Oh! villain!" said she, as she felt his arms close round her; "in vain will you implore forgiveness some day; nor God, nor I will then be able to grant it you."

CHAPTER LXIII.

CALAMITY AND VENGEANCE.

SOME weeks after that horrible night, Gretchen had just returned to her hut, and was humming over to herself some vague monotonous air, as mad people usually do, when she saw the door open, and Christiane appear, pale, mournful, terrifying.

Christiane's face wore such a look of suffering and despair, that the goat-herd started from her reverie.

"Has anything fresh happened?" she asked.

Christiane made no reply. She sank on to the floor and crouched there, her head on her breast, her face in her hands, not uttering a word, like a statue of misery.

Gretchen, struck with amazement, approached and knelt beside her.

"Madame! my dear mistress! whatever ails you?" she said. "I had not seen you for seven days and was feeling very anxious. We cannot desert each other now. What is the matter? Surely your misery has not become greater than it was?"

Christiane slowly raised her head.

"Yes," she replied, "it has."

"Oh! how can that be? I do not think so. God would not permit such a thing."

"Oh, God! "Christiane repeated with a bitter smile. "Listen, Gretchen, listen to what God has done. I do not know whether the child He has put in my womb is my Julius' child, or the child of Samuel."

Gretchen could not repress a cry of horror.

Since the fatal night, Gretchen no longer avoided Christiane, and Christiane sought no one but Gretchen.

That night, when Samuel had at last rung for the maids, to ask for the things necessary for the treatment of Wilhelm, Gretchen, who was watching in the boudoir, had been the first to enter.

And, while the maids were hurrying to and fro, and Samuel attending to the child, Gretchen had approached Christiane, who remained in a corner, immovable and dry-eyed.

For a moment she had gazed at her sadly and compassionately; then taking her hand, she had said quite in a whisper:

“He did not threaten us in vain.”

“What is it? “Christiane had replied, drawing herself up haughtily, a painful flush dyeing her cheeks.

“Ah! you distrust your sister in misfortune,” Gretchen had replied.

She had said this in a tone of such tender reproach, with such touching familiarity, with the tears standing in her eyes, that all Christiane’s haughtiness had melted away, and she had held out her hand to the goat-herd.

“Oh! at least, my sister, be silent.”

Then, as if relieved by this disclosure, she had burst into tears.

Samuel, too, had fulfilled his part of the awful compact. The mother lost, he had saved the child.

On the arrival of the doctors they had found Wilhelm out of danger.

And then there appeared on Christiane’s face such a look as, probably, no human face will ever wear again, — a look of celestial joy mingled with the despair of a damned soul.

The doctors, judging their presence unnecessary, had withdrawn. One only, in case of any fresh development arising, had remained at the castle.

Samuel had bowed gravely and respectfully to Christiane.

“Madame,” he had said, “can I be of any further use to you?”

“Sir,” Christiane had replied, without raising her eyes, and with a quiver in her voice, “you will remember your oath to me? ‘That of my own free-will, you will not see me again? ‘“

“Yes, madame. You both know,” he had added with a glance which included both Christiane and Gretchen, “that I keep my word, whatever it may be.” With another bow he had gone.

Neither Christiane nor Gretchen had seen him since.

Two days later the baron had returned from Ostend, bringing the farewell messages of Julius to Christiane.

“Are you ready to leave?” he had asked.

“Where for, father?”

“For Berlin. Is it not decided so?”

“No,” Christiane had said. “I have changed my mind.”

She had excused herself on the plea of Wilhelm’s illness; the shock of two nights ago had weakened him. It would be unwise to allow him to travel in that condition.”

“But what about Samuel?” the baron had objected.

“Oh! I am not afraid of him now,” Christiane had replied shaking her head.

“Is it possible you can have seen him again?”

“You believe my word, do you not, father?”

“Of course, Christiane.”

“Well! believe me, I have nothing to fear now from that quarter.”

The baron had attributed the strange tone in which Christiane had said this to her anxiety of mind consequent on the departure of Julius and the critical condition of Wilhelm. He had, however, tried to insist, feeling uneasy at leaving Christiane alone in this isolated castle. But Christiane had shown herself firmly resolved. The idea of leaving her home now was unbearable to her. It seemed to her that the eyes of her father-in-law would eventually discover on her brow and on her lips the infamous kisses of the wretch to whom she had sold her honour for the life of her child.

What she craved for was solitude; she longed to be like Gretchen, alone in the world, that she might shut herself up in a hut where no one would enter.

The baron, finding that he could not induce Christiane to alter her decision, had been obliged to leave her a few days later. Before leaving, he had suggested sending her her little nephew Lothario.”

“Thank you, thank you! but enough of children,” she had exclaimed. “Keep him with you; children are our ruin. One alone has cost dear enough already.”

“You used to be so fond of him.”

“Yes, I have been too fond of children. That has been my misfortune.”

The baron had again attributed these strange words to wifely and motherly fears. Christiane’s mind had no doubt been affected by two shocks so sudden and coming so close together. But she would become reconciled to her husband’s absence, and, as her child grew stronger, her mind would recover its normal balance.

So the baron had gone away somewhat reassured. Christiane had only asked that he would send a doctor to take up his residence at the castle. The Baron knew an old physician, celebrated for his treatment of children’s diseases, and who would be glad to live in retirement. Pending his arrival, Christiane was to retain the services of the doctor from Neckarsteinach, so as not to be exposed to the anxiety of a night like the last.

When all these arrangements were concluded, and the Baron had returned to Berlin, Christiane had at least the consolation of being alone with her shame and sorrow. For a month she had passed her life between her prie-dieu and her baby’s cot.

She would speak to no one but Gretchen, and they both found a sort of gloomy joy in talking over their misery and their dishonour. A fresh link, indissoluble indeed, bound them for eternity to one another. Gretchen had spoken truly; they were sisters.

Sometimes Gretchen would come to the castle; more often Christiane would go to the hut; there, they were more alone, and could talk more unreservedly.

“What am I to do? “Christiane would ask. “Tell Julius to return. But a letter could not reach him at sea. And supposing he did return? even then, what am I to do? Tell him everything? he would challenge Samuel, and that demon would kill him. Conceal everything! I could never have the courage to be such a cowardly hypocrite. How shall I be able to meet him? How shall I endure the touch of his lips on this dishonoured face where that villain’s lips have rested? Better to die. Ah! if I had not Wilhelm! Unhappy women that we are, to wish for children! Mine has already condemned me to disgrace, and now he condemns me to live.”

“Yes, one must live,” Gretchen would reply, “else that would be questioning the justice of God. Trust me, my sister, that man will be punished. Let us be patient, and await his chastisement. Who knows that we may not contribute towards it? We are needed here; we have not the right to desert our post.”

The superstitions of the goat-herd penetrated Christiane’s despair. Madness is contagious. Gretchen, more and more cut adrift from the actual world, drew Christiane with her in her visions and fancies. The tender, sensitive soul of Christiane now viewed life and the future through a species of vague and ever-increasing frenzy. Her conscience vacillated like a flame at the mercy of a high wind, and in her eyes things assumed the exaggerated and terrible proportions that objects present in the dusk.

So for a whole month Christiane saw Gretchen every day. Then, all of a sudden, she ceased to visit even her. She no longer came to the hut. On the third day, Gretchen went to the castle; Christiane would not see her. She had locked herself in her room, refusing to open the door or speak to any one, and Gretchen was at a loss to understand what new development of disaster and shame made her now unable to endure even the gaze of her companion in misfortune.

Seven days had therefore passed since Christiane had seen her when on the above-mentioned evening she rushed into the hut with the terrible news.

Struck dumb by such a calamity, Gretchen at first could only utter a cry of dismay and had not a word to say.

Christiane went on, plucking at her hair with both her hands.

“That is my position. What is to become of me? Is it not too awful for a poor girl who has not yet reached her seventeenth year? And you spoke of the justice of God!”

Then Gretchen drew herself up to her full height, as if moved by some wild inspiration.

“Yes,” said she, “I spoke of the justice of God, and I maintain what I said. There is some purpose in all this. The God who is in Heaven cannot have sent you this added suffering for the sole pleasure of torturing so young and frail a creature. Listen; he sends us an avenger. Yes, I predict that this child will avenge us. Our ruin will be the means of punishing the villain. Ah! the sin has produced the punishment; on our knees, my sister, and let us thank God! The coward will be punished.”

And, in a transport of savage joy, Gretchen knelt down and began to murmur a prayer of thanksgiving.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE QUESTION.

CHRISTIANE in her anguish, still clung to one doubt, or rather one hope. Perhaps she had spoken too soon; perhaps she was mistaken; perhaps her fear had been imaginary. She waited.

But this very hope was destined to bring her but added pain; for it made time a torment; each hour, each day brought home to her slowly but surely the awful certainty.

At last, the time came when it was impossible for her to doubt. The appalling truth was revealed to her in all its horror.

What would she do with this child? Bring it up under the name and under the eyes of her husband, a child who belonged perhaps to another, or else cast it off and give to Samuel a child who might be the child of Julius, which of these two alternatives was the most cruel and the most impossible? How would she look upon her child? with the proud enraptured look of the happy wife glad to let the whole world see the fruit of her love, or with the shamed malevolent look of the wretched adulteress, anxious to hide from God Himself the fruit of her sin?

Ah! never would she be able to live face to face with the living witness of her fall, with the melancholy secret, with that terrible question put everlastingly to her mind by unfathomable nature.

It must be remembered that Christiane was a pure and innocent soul, incapable of compounding with evil or glossing over a fault. Her stain, even though involuntary, tortured none the less with remorse this young loyal heart, offended none the less the purity of this virgin soul.

Tell Julius all? Ah! at the first word, she would fall dead. And then, was it not enough that she should have been subjected to all this torture and infamy, without making her husband share them? And after all, had she saved Wilhelm at this cost, only to kill Julius?

Why had she not done away with herself at once? The baron would have taken care of Wilhelm until the return of Julius. Julius would have mourned for her for some time, then he would have married some other woman worthy of him. Now, she had no right to kill herself; she would no longer die alone. Suicide would be murder.

And unceasingly, whether awake or asleep, would return the awful question, “Whose child is it?”

There were some days when she loved this child. After all, whoever its father was, none the less was she its mother. She was moved to pity at the fate of this poor creature, disowned before it was born. She was angry with herself at having for a moment thought of giving it to Samuel, of sending it away from the castle, of exiling it from her arms. On those days she had no difficulty in persuading herself that it was Julius’ child.

But there were days, and these were the most frequent, when she believed that Samuel was the father of the child. Her whole being revolted at the thought, as if it were a thief who desired to rob little Wilhelm of the half of his inheritance. At night especially, in her moments of sleeplessness, when her brain was tortured by the monstrous visions of darkness, she would curse him, wish that he might never come into the world, threaten to smother him. Oh! he must evidently be Samuel’s child, for God would not have allowed her to hate the child of Julius.

She no longer slept in her own bed, defiled from henceforth. Nor had she wished to occupy Julius’ room, feeling that she was no longer worthy to enter it. She lay on a couch in the boudoir. But she had taken the precaution of having a heavy piece of furniture placed in front of the panel through which Samuel had entered. But this was from superstition rather than precaution, for Samuel always kept his word. And, besides, were there not many other means of entrance known to himself alone, the man who had built this castle.

And during these nights, so long to her who very rarely closed her eyes, in the pale gleam of a night light always burning in case the child were ill, or in the melancholy twilight, she would sometimes fix her eyes on the ceiling with an imperious, magnetic gaze, hoping that it might fall on her head and put an end at one stroke to her agony of mind. Or else, in her delirium, she would pray that a storm might wreck Julius’ ship and drown her husband, or at least, cast him on some island from which he would never return.

“Let all be lost,” she would cry. “He in the sea, I in hell; but at least let all be over!”

She would fling herself on her knees before the crucifix, and implore God to pardon her for having had such terrible thoughts.

The thing she dreaded most was Julius' return. He had been gone three months. He might return any day. Whenever this thought crossed Christiane's mind, she would turn icy cold, fling herself on the floor, hiding her face, and remain there, sometimes an hour, without moving.

One morning, the nurse brought her a letter.

Christiane glanced at the envelope and gave a cry. It was a letter from Julius.

Two hours passed, and yet she dare not open it. But an idea reassured her; the letter was from New York. Evidently Julius was not yet on his way home, else there would have been no need to write, since he would have arrived as soon as his letter.

This lifted a weight of her mind.

But this very relief gave her fresh torture.

"And so it has come to this," she said; "that I am glad that Julius should not return."

She opened the letter.

Julius in fact, wrote that he was detained in New York for some weeks. He had arrived in perfect health. The delight that his arrival had given his uncle Fritz had resulted in a visible improvement in the condition of the invalid. But, the doctors could not give any hope yet. To deprive his uncle of this glimpse of home and country would be to kill him. Julius must therefore prolong this separation, hard though it was for him to do so.

But he would not remain a moment longer than gratitude and humanity demanded. He had left his heart at Landeck, and he hungered for a glimpse of Christiane and Wilhelm. It was evident that in speaking of his dear ones, he had restrained himself for fear of making Christiane sad; but love and loneliness had wrung these few words from him.

Somewhat reassured by this respite, Christiane grew more calm, and bore her sorrow more quietly.

Time slips by, even when we suffer. The weeks succeeded each other.

At the end of December the baron came to visit his daughter-in-law and tried to draw her from her seclusion at least during the depressing months of rain and snow.

But, as on the first occasion, he failed to persuade her.

She excused herself on the pretext of her sadness at the prolonged absence of Julius.

The baron found her greatly altered. She, however, confessed to not feeling very well.

“Ah! is that so?” asked the baron with a smile.

“Oh! you are mistaken, my father!” she had the courage to say, shuddering inwardly.

She had concealed her condition from every one. She had resolved to hide it so long as was possible. Why? she could not have said. It was always so much gained. Gretchen alone was in her confidence. A dangerous confidante with her hallucinations and feverish reveries.

The baron returned to Berlin, and Christiane relapsed into the monotony of her despair. From time to time she received letters from Julius, who was detained from week to week by the fluctuating condition of his uncle’s health. She struggled bravely with herself to write him a few short, sad lines, in which she made no mention of her condition, trustfully leaving in God’s hands the “dénouement “of the drama.

Thus the winter slipped by.

In the middle of April a sad event gave a fresh turn to Christiane’s anxieties.

Wilhelm was taken seriously ill.

The old doctor from Berlin was at the castle. For the first two weeks the child’s illness did not appear to be of a serious nature.

Christiane nursed and tended this dearly loved boy with the love, the devotion, the passion of a mother to whom her child has cost more than life.

But suddenly other symptoms appeared. This time no medical skill was wanting. In addition to the clever old doctor, three or four of his most famous confrères from Frankfort and Heidelberg were summoned in consultation. All their efforts were of no avail.

On the twenty-fifth day of the malady, Wilhelm died.

When the doctor announced the mournful news to Christiane, who, for some days, had known that he could not recover, she said not a word, but looked at the clock.

The hands pointed to a quarter before midnight.

“That’s it,” murmured Christiane; “the very hour of the compact. He was to die at this hour. That was a bargain with hell which God could not sanction.”

And she fell heavily to the floor beside the cot, to kiss for the last time the cold forehead of her little one.

Whether it was the result of the fall, she knew not — but, as the shock vibrated through her whole being, she felt a stirring of life within her.

“Already,” she thought, turning pale. “Yes, quite possible; it’s already seven months ago.”

As she rose, trembling, from her knees, the baron, to whom the doctor had written to Berlin, arrived in great haste. In his hand was a letter.

“You come too late, father,” said Christiane, pointing to her dead child. “He is just gone.”

“But I bring you consoling news, my dear daughter; Julius will soon be home.”

Christiane sprang to her feet.

“Julius!” said she, turning white as death.

“Look, read this,” said the Baron, — and he gave her the letter.

Julius wrote that his uncle Fritz was dead. He would leave for home immediately after the funeral; and arrive at Landeck about the 15th of May.

This was the 13th.

“Ah! startling news indeed!”

And she fell backwards in a swoon.

CHAPTER LXV.

NAPOLEON AND GERMANY.

WHILE these sorrows and fears were agitating the heart of a woman, great and formidable events were convulsing Europe.

Napoleon, after having hesitated a long time, had raised the grand army, and declared war against Russia. He had started from Paris on the 9th of May for that epic campaign of 1812, and at the same time as Christiane, half distracted, wondered what fate was going to make of her, the astonished world watched what Napoleon was going to make of fate.

On the 11th of May the Emperor had arrived at Mayence, where, on the 12th, he inspected the troops, visited the fortifications and received the Grand Duke of Hesse Darmstadt.

During the night of the 12th and 13th there was a meeting of the Tugendbund, in the secret hall of the Double-Castle.

On this occasion, the Seven who had attended the first meeting, were present.

They were masked, although they met alone. As soon as they had all taken their seats around the table, the president addressed them:

“Friends and brothers,” said he, “I enter without preamble on the subject in hand, for time is short. You see for yourselves, everything appears to turn against us. We waited for-the day when Napoleon would recommence the war, convinced that our princes would seize that great opportunity to separate themselves from his cause and join forces with his enemies. Well! this rising in arms, which we hoped would be the signal of an insurrection throughout Germany, Napoleon has turned it into a formidable and unprecedented triumph, and the German princes do not march against him but with him. The vanquished of Wag-ram, of Jena, and of Madrid, swell the ranks of the conquering army against Russia. Napoleon has expressed the wish that our kings should come to do him homage as he passes through; not one will fail to comply with this command. At Dresden he will find himself surrounded by a Court of Crowned Heads. Saxony, Wurtemberg, Austria, Prussia, Bavaria, Austria, and Naples, each will vie with the other in forming part of this humble and dazzling procession. This is the degradation to which we have sunk! So much for our kings. Let us pass on to the people."

And, addressing one of the Seven, who had a packet of letters in front of him:

"Read the reports," added the president.

He to whom the chief spoke, opened a first letter and read as follows: —

"MAYENCE.

"Napoleon has been received with enthusiasm. Offers to accommodate his escort pour in from all sides. People fraternise at every step. Civilians and soldiers — all are wildly excited. It is a state of universal adoration. The Emperor is a God here."

"But," interrupted the president, "that only relates to French Germany. Read the other."

The reader opened the second despatch, and read: —

"WURTZBURG.

"At the news that Napoleon is to pass through on the evening of the 13th, the people from the towns and surrounding country are pouring in, all eager to see him. At the gates are triumphal arches erected in his honour. A military concert will be offered him, and, this morning, the crowd, that stands listening to the rehearsal, loudly applauds the French airs which the band performs. Everything is 'en fête.' Illumination lamps are at a premium. The whole town is to be illuminated,"

"At Wurtzburg," said the chief, "we are not yet at the heart of Germany. We may perhaps feel it pulsate at Dresden."

The reader took up a third report: —

"DRESDEN.

"The King and Queen of Saxony are making their preparations to welcome the Emperor Napoleon. The town will follow the King's lead, and, swelled by the population from twenty leagues round about, will go out to meet the great man. We have here a crush of princes and kings, a 'mêlée' of thrones, an assembly of crowned heads. As to the people, they are dazzled; enthusiasm knows no bounds. Napoleon will be deafened with acclamations. At the theatre, a play adapted to the circumstances is in course of preparation, in which he is lauded to the skies. The King has read the manuscript and conferred the Legion of Honour on the author. All the seats are booked...."

“Enough!” interrupted the president. “Let us turn our eyes away from this humiliation of our country. This is the manner in which Germany receives a master! She licks the feet of the man who tramples her in the dust! This man goes out to war as a conqueror returns from it; he triumphs in advance, so certain is he of success!”

The president added, not without pride:

“We, however, remain; the Tugendbund still exists.”

And he turned to another of the Seven:

“Tell us the state of the Tugendbund.”

“Alas!” this one replied, “in all parts our members are demoralised. This universal acclamation which follows the steps of the conqueror, appears to them to confirm the consecration of Providence, which has raised him from his humble position and placed him on this pedestal. Superstition is rife. Many have sent in requests to withdraw. Nearly every one believes that God is with Napoleon, and that it is impious to fight against him.”

“That is the conclusion of the whole matter,” resumed the chief. “So, everywhere, we find cowardice, pusillanimity, self-abasement. Not one soul that will avenge human nature, and, in the general prostration, refuse to bow down. Every one cringes at his feet. The clanking of the spurs of the passing despot strikes fear into all these once gallant hearts, that grovel in the dust and allow themselves to be crushed without a murmur. Ah! has Germany indeed come to this. Must we give up our independence? Must we renounce the work and say: ‘Since you wish to be slaves, be it so! Will no one come forward for the good of all? Is there not a man to be found?”

As the president uttered these despondent words, a bell resounded feebly above the seat he occupied.

“What is that noise?” asked one of the Seven.

“That is our host, Samuel Gelb,” said the chief. “He asks admittance.”

“Admit him!” they all rejoined. “He is perhaps the bearer of better news.”

The chief rang a bell.

“I was asking if no man could be found,” said he. “Who knows if God is not answering my prayer? Samuel is a strong and courageous champion who might indeed be the very man needed for the country and freedom.”

CHAPTER LXVI.

SAMUEL IS FOR IMITATING JOSHUA.

A MINUTE later Samuel entered the secret chamber of the council of the Union.

He bowed low, and waited for the chief to question him.

“Samuel Gelb, have you any communication to make?” asked the chief.

“Yes,” replied Samuel. “Speak. What do you know, and what can you do?”

“What do I know? “Samuel said. “I know that the Emperor Napoleon has just entered Germany, and that at this present moment he is but a few miles from here. I know that around him moves an army of 420,000 men, with six pontoon trains, 11,000 forage waggons, 1,372 guns, besides 60,000 Austrians, Prussians, and Spaniards. I know that, on his side, the Emperor Alexander has succeeded in arming 300,000 men, divided into three armies; the army of the East, under Barclay; the army of the West, under Bagration; and the reserve army, under Tormasof. Besides this there are two other army corps, and a vast camp intrenched behind these three armies. I know, in fact, that never has the world beheld a more formidable encounter of empires and of nations. You ask what I can do? I can cause all this terrible commotion to vanish like a soap-bubble.”

“Is it possible?” said the chief. “Tell us how.”

A murmur of surprise and incredulity arose from these impassive and haughty men.

“Ah! this astonishes you?” Samuel rejoined. “You cannot imagine it possible that a humble associate of the second-class can be capable of such a miracle. If, however, I accomplish what I say, will you consider me deserving of some reward, shall I have proved myself worthy of promotion to the first degree of the Union?”

“Do what you say,” answered the chief, “and then ask what you will.”, “You will remember your promise?”

“I give you my oath! But explain what you intend to do. What methods will you employ? Will you act as did Brutus? Have you picked up the dagger of Friedrich Staps from the foot of his blood-stained scaffold?”

“Only to miss my stroke, is that what you think? and thus increase the tyrant’s popularity by giving colour to the idea that Providence watches over him? Not so, my masters. No! I shall not glide through the crowd to pierce Napoleon to the heart, so that his guard may tear me to pieces and that the good people of Germany, whom I wish to rescue, may reward me by trampling me to death. Napoleon will die, and I shall live. From here will I strike him, without leaving this mountain on which we are, from afar, from above, like Jupiter.”

“What do you mean? explain yourself.”

“The time is not yet ripe. You know the end, what matters the means.”

“Are you jesting, sir?” asked the chief severely.

“At the most I am only showing some natural reluctance to reveal my plans,” was Samuel’s rejoinder. “Of course, all you gentlemen here present, are high and important personages, above all suspicion, above all crime. But to save a Napoleon, is a temptation to any one. I should be afraid of its tempting God Himself, if I believed in God. I therefore follow but the dictates of common prudence in asking you to permit me to keep my plan to myself until such time as it becomes impossible to prevent the execution of it.”

“Then why tell us the half of your plan?” asked the president.

“To ascertain in advance if you would be grateful to me. You might easily, like the princes and people of Germany, have become satellites of the sun, and delivered up or punished your deliverer. In the second place, was it not necessary to convince you that you must meet again to-morrow to decide, in case of need, on some course of action? Listen, it is two o’clock in the morning; at this moment Napoleon has left Mayence, and is on his way to Wurtzburg.. To-morrow morning, at ten o’clock, he will halt at Aschaffenburg for breakfast. Aschaffenburg is only a few miles from here. Remain close at hand to-night; and to-morrow, at two o’clock, assemble again in this hall. I will then tell you what I have done. After that we will await the result.”

“How shall we know it?” asked the president.

“At two o’clock,” said Samuel, “one of our men, the traveller of the Neckar, will be here, and will bring the news that what your Providence itself would have hesitated to do, Samuel Gelb has accomplished.”

“Agreed,” said the president, “we will be here, at ten o’clock, and will wait your news.”

CHAPTER LXVII.

IN THE GRIP OF PAIN.

ON that same night, a few paces distant from the meeting of the Seven, Gretchen, who was always in her hut, suddenly heard some one calling outside, and loud knocking at her door.

"Who is there? Is it you, madame?" she asked.

"Yes," said the voice of Christiane.

Gretchen quickly opened the door.

Christiane came in, half dressed, her hair unbound, looking wild and scared.

"Whatever has happened, madame? "Gretchen asked; "how comes it that you have left your apartments and the castle at this hour?"

"I do not know," Christiane said at first with a vacant look. "Ah! yes, wait, I remember, I have escaped. No one has seen me. The Baron von Hermelinfeld is there. I fell backwards. And then the pains began; the first pains of childbirth, Gretchen! Gretchen! I am about to be confined."

"What!" cried Gretchen, half frightened, half glad, "but the time has not expired. Oh! then your child is the child of Herr von Eberbach?"

"No, Gretchen, I am sure not. Oh! if only I could deceive myself, I would deceive the others too. But no! make my life one long falsehood, I would rather die! Gretchen, Wilhelm is dead.... Julius is on his way home.... I fell senseless to the ground.... and all these misfortunes have precipitated the last.... Oh! I suffer! if only I could die!"

All this she said disconnectedly, without sequence, looking half-distracted, and seizing the hands of Gretchen, who appeared equally troubled.

"What is to be done?" said Gretchen. "Ah! I am going for the doctor."

And she took one step towards the door. Christiane rushed after her and caught her by the arm.

"Will you stay where you are, wretched girl! I have not escaped so as to live, but to die, to hide myself in the bowels of the earth, to destroy myself in some abyss. Dead, my Julius will love me, will respect me, will mourn me. Life! do I want to live? What I want is secrecy! Try to understand what I tell you. I do not know what is the matter with my brain. I must

CHAPTER LXVIII.

TRICHTER DRUNK — WITH FEAR.

THE next morning, the whole town of Aschaffenburg was “en fête.” Men, women, tiny children, and even old men of over eighty, flocked into the streets of the town and outside the walls. Napoleon was coming. The man of history who filled all minds was about to appear before their eyes. Every one would be able to compare him to the idea they had formed of him.

A tremendous stir agitated this vast sea of heads, like the tide, flowing beneath the compelling influence of the moon.

The crowds hurried by. Everything was forgotten; business, cares of the previous day, affairs in process of settlement. Handsome lads, walking arm-in-arm with pretty lasses, availed themselves of this opportunity to steal a few kisses, which the maidens, it must be confessed, seemed nothing loth to accept, but returned with interest. One solitary being was melancholy in this universal rejoicing.

This was our friend Trichter.

He walked about sad and dejected, with a new acquaintance whom he had just made, and who was none other than the traveller from the Neckar.

“But what in the world is the matter with you?” queried the latter.

“My dear Raumer,” said Trichter, “I am excited.”

“Excited with wine,” the traveller asked judiciously, who, at the sight of Trichter’s flaming nose, had soon recognised in him a drunkard.

“Bah! “Trichter replied with scorn, “for the last fifteen years wine has had no effect upon me. Not that I have abstained from drinking this morning. On the contrary, foreseeing the excitement which, at this very moment, is half choking me, I was anxious to whet my fancy a little; I tried to get drunk. Futile endeavour! I see it now with sorrow, I can make myself ill, I can kill myself with drink, I can. flood, I can drown myself with liquor; but, oh! lamentable weakness! I can ‘no longer get drunk. What helplessness!”

“But,” said Raumer, “why the devil were you so keen on getting drunk today?”

be going mad. But secrecy, secrecy at all costs.”

“Secrecy at all costs!” repeated Gretchen, entirely losing her head, too.

The atrocious physical pain, added to that terrible agony of mind, succeeded in mastering Christiane. She had flung herself on Gretchen’s bed. There she remained for some moments, a prey: to torture and hallucination, but maintaining this one idea fixed in her mind that she must conceal her misery and her shame from all, and biting her handkerchief to smother her cries.

Gretchen was sobbing and hovering restlessly about her, useless, anxious, desperate.

During a moment of respite Christiane called her.

“Gretchen, swear that you will do what I ask.”

“I swear it, my dear mistress.”

“That, whatever happens, you will divulge my secret to no one, neither to the baron, nor to my Julius, nor even to that monster.”

“To no one.”

“If the child lives, Gretchen, you will take him to this Samuel, but without letting any one know, see, or suspect it.”

“That’s it!” exclaimed Gretchen, with savage delight, “let us fling the devil’s progeny back to the devil.”

“Ah! and yet it is my child, my only child!” said Christiane, seized with another paroxysm of pain. “Oh! but the poor infant must be dead! Oh! my God, let me die too, let me die too! Gretchen, if the child is dead, you will bury it, do you understand, yourself, alone, at night, in the forest. Do you swear to do this?”

“I swear.”

“And then, Gretchen, bury me too. Let no one know.... Oh! my Julius, adieu! I loved you so well.... To die without seeing you again!.... Gretchen, the secret, the secret; the secret at all costs.”

And she fell back senseless.

‘‘The secret; yes, I understand,” said Gretchen. And she repeated several times as if mechanically:

“The secret! — at all costs, the secret.”

“Because I have to present a petition to Napoleon.”

“What petition?”

"A petition that Samuel has himself drawn up. Can you imagine my position? To approach this great man, to look at him, speak to him if he questions me, speak to this sublime and colossal Emperor before whom the very cannon thunder in lowered tones. How can I do this in cold blood? Excited! I should think I *am* excited, my friend. Ah! at times I tingle from head to foot!"

"Nonsense!" said the traveller. "You exaggerate the matter. It's a mere nothing to present a petition. Shall I present it for you?"

"No," Trichter answered, "Samuel made me swear to present it myself."

"Well! you will present it. An aide-de-camp will take it from you; the Emperor will go on his way, without even bestowing a glance upon you. Do not imagine for a moment that he will read your petition?"

"I am certain that he will," said Trichter. "Samuel has made sure and reliable inquiries. At Mayence and all along the route, Napoleon has himself opened every petition and dictated the reply on the same evening. He is anxious to win popularity in Germany, which he is leaving in his rear."

"And is this petition of great importance to you?"

"I should think so! It means bread for my old mother. Bread which I will not be able to drink away from her, for, do you know, I am a wretched, insatiable sponge. One day last year I had five thousand florins of my own. I sent her five hundred, with which she paid her debts. I fully intended to send her more. But for a long while our ideal, mine and that of one of my friends called Fresswanst, was to devote ourselves seriously and consistently to some comparative studies on foreign wines. We attacked this work in so conscientious a manner that within three months our throats had drained our purse."

Raumer began to laugh. "Do not "laugh," said Trichter, sadly. "Alas'! I lost at the same time my money and my friend. Fresswanst died, after the last bottle, of a rush of blood to the head. A sad end! Between ourselves," Trichter added, lowering his voice, "was Fresswanst deserving of his reputation? Whatever may be the opinion of posterity as to this drinker, I was ruined. I tried to induce Samuel Gelb, *my* noble 'senior 'to arrange for a fresh emigration to Landeck. A delightful village, this Landock, where one goes to bed in nests, where one drinks unparalleled brandy, and from which one returns with five thousand florins! But Samuel would not yield to my wish. Yesterday, to compensate for his refusal, he advised me to present this position, which he himself has drawn up, and as to the result of which he has not a doubt.”

“But,” rejoined Raumer, “you have then some claim on Napoleon?”

“An uncle of mine was killed in his service. For you must know, my dear fellow, that I am half French on my mother’s side. That is why, although German and a student, I can ask a favour at Napoleon’s hands without scruple. I speak purer French than did Racine. My uncle was the one who supported my mother; the Emperor has robbed her of her support, it is only fair that he should come to her assistance. If he grants me the pension that I claim for her, it will relieve me of all filial anxiety, and I shall then be able to accomplish alone the experiments which my financial difficulties and the untimely death of that weak Fresswanst interrupted, so unfortunately for my researches. For, if I drink, do not run away with the idea that I do so with the vile object of personal gratification. It is long since it has been any pleasure to me to swill your mild insipid spirits. To me, kirsch and absinthe are milk and honey. With the exception of that species of brandy which I drank at Landeck, and which produced in me, I confess, a mild heat, everything tastes to me like plain water. It is from purely disinterested motives, in the interest of science and from simple love of humanity, that the dilettante who has the honour of addressing you persists in his researches. You will therefore understand of what importance it is to the world that the Emperor should receive and grant my petition.”

“He will grant it, I don’t doubt,” answered Raumer. “But I bear the cheers of the crowd.”

“Can it be the great Napoleon?” asked Trichter, all in a tremor.

“No. They are only shouting, ‘Long live France!’ Probably it is only some of the generals or aides-de-camp who precede him.”

“Thank God!” said Trichter, beginning to breathe again.

“Where will you present your petition to him? “Raumer asked.

“Oh! I have already decided on the place. At the entrance of the palace of the prince-primate. The Emperor is to alight there for breakfast, and to receive the deputations from round about. Two of the soldiers forming the line, ardent admirers of my capacity in the way of liquid, have promised to allow me to approach the great man. I am only afraid that I shall be nervous. Ah! if only I had been able to get under the influence of drink. You must think me a great chatterbox. But if I have been talking to you so volubly for the last half-hour, it has not been from the wish to weary you with my affairs, but to get my tongue in practice, if I have to address the Emperor. I am trying to screw my courage up to the sticking point.”

All of a sudden Trichter stopped speaking and began to tremble.

“Ah!” he stammered, “this time there is no mistaking the cry of ‘Long live the Emperor.’”

And indeed deafening shouts heralded the approach of the man-prodigy. An immense concourse of people surged towards the two men.

CHAPTER LXIX.

POISON.

THERE was no mistaking the meaning of the shouts and the movement of the crowd.

“It is the Emperor, there’s no doubt about it,” said the traveller to Trichter; “let us make haste.”

And they hastened towards the palace of the prince-primate.

“I do beg of you, my dear Raumer,” said Trichter, “to stay near me as long as possible and not to go away. Remain close at hand until I return, that I may have the look of a friend to give me strength when I approach the terrible vision, and the arms of a friend to receive me if I swoon.”

He hurried up to two soldiers, who told him to keep close behind them and they would allow him to pass as the Emperor alighted from his horse.

It was time, for almost at once the square, already swarming with people, was invaded by such a crowd, that it became one seething mass, and it would have been impossible for Trichter and Raumer to force their way through the inextricable human maze.

To Trichter time flew by with the rapidity of lightning. His temples throbbed painfully. He felt his ‘heart sink within him, like a foundering ship. He felt tempted to forego his petition and the pension for his mother.

He even went so far as to hope that the Emperor might alter his mind, make peace with Russia, and return to France without entering the palace of the prince-primate.

Suddenly there was a flourish of trumpets, a beating of drums, and Napoleon emerged into the square, accompanied by a storm of cheers.

The Emperor rode beside the carriage of the Empress. He bowed to the crowd.

And Trichter grew more and more petrified at the approach of the Emperor, who, more truly than Atlas, carried the world on his shoulders, in his head, if not upon it.

Arrived in front of the palace of the prince-primate, Napoleon alighted.

The prince-primate, with his suite, stood at the entrance bare-headed.

He gave a short speech of enthusiastic welcome to the Emperor, who replied by a few well-chosen words of thanks; then the Empress stepped from her carriage, and the imperial couple prepared to mount the steps of the palace.

"Now is your time!" said one of the soldiers to Trichter. "Be quick."

Trichter glanced despairingly at Raumer.

"Pray God for me!" he said.

Then, grasping his hand frantically, he advanced with an unsteady step, not, alas! the result of wine.

"Ah! a German student!" said Napoleon. "I love this proud young blood. What can I do for you, my friend?"

Trichter tried to reply, but his utterance was choked and he could not articulate a word.

All he could do was to hold out to this glorious Emperor the petition, which he held in his right hand; and even to accomplish this, he had to leave go his cap, which was in his left hand; he was incapable of holding two things at the same time.

The Emperor took the petition with a smile.

"Calm yourself," said he. "Do you speak French?"

Trichter made a violent effort to regain his self-possession.

"My mother!..." he stammered out. "Your Majesty.... My uncle too.... He is dead.... But I.... I am not French."

He felt that he was saying the very reverse to what he had intended.

"Well!" said the Emperor, "since you speak French, come in with me, and you yourself will tell me what you want."

The drums beat the salute, and the Emperor ascended the steps, still holding the petition.

.Trichter walked behind him, bewildered, ill at ease in this procession, dazzled by all this magnificence, weighed down by all this glory, bathed in the sunshine.

They entered thus into the reception-hall.

The Emperor received graciously the envoys of kings and princes. For each one he had some flattering speech.

To General Schwartzemberg, who represented Austria, he spoke of his military talent, which he knew and appreciated.

To the Baron von Hermelinfeld, who came to offer the respects of the King of Prussia, he said that science was common to all nations, and that minds like his made all men fellow-countrymen.

When the representative of the Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar was presented to him, he advanced quickly, drew him aside, conversed with him for some moments and, on leaving him said:

“Herr von Goethe, you are indeed a man!”

The audience over, the prince-primate requested the Emperor to pass into the dining-rooms.

“Will you kindly conduct the Empress thither?” said Napoleon. “I shall be with you in a moment. I have some instructions to give — Ah! where is my student?”

Trichter, who had slightly recovered his composure while the Emperor’s attention was diverted from him, felt his cursed emotion again get the better of him. He was hustled into a small room which the Emperor entered with only his secretary and two aides-de-camp.

Napoleon sat down at a table.

“Now, my friend,” said he to Trichter. “What do you wish to ask of me?”

“Sire, my mother.... or rather my uncle. Yes, sire, a brave soldier of your Majesty’s.....” Trichter’s hoarse voice tried to answer.

“Compose yourself,” said the Emperor. “Where is your petition? Ah! I have it.”

He handed it to Trichter.

“Come, since you cannot speak, read it. out to me.”

Trichter took the petition, broke open the seal, and unfolded it with trembling fingers.

But his eyes had scarcely rested upon it when he staggered and turned pale.

“Well! what is the matter?” said the Emperor.

Trichter fell to the ground, rigid and insensible.

The aides-de-camp rushed forward.

“Don’t go near, gentlemen,” exclaimed the Emperor, who had risen from his seat, “there is something behind this,”

“Shall we send for a doctor?” asked one of the aides-de-camp.

“No!” said the Emperor, his eyes fixed on the outstretched figure of Trichter. “Send for the Baron von Hermelinfeld. But no noise, no scene, not a word. Only the baron is to come.”

A minute later the baron entered.

“Sir,” said the Emperor, “here is a man who has just fallen down overpowered whilst reading a paper, see, that paper there, on the floor. Don’t touch it; he fell when unfolding it.”

The baron approached Trichter.

“The man is dead,” he said.

Then he went to the fireplace, took up the tongs, and, with the tongs, held the paper over the smoke, but without allowing the flame to touch it.

But he observed attentively the colour which the smoke assumed.

Then after a moment or two, he drew the paper nearer, and, slowly and cautiously, examined it, felt it, smelt it.

Then all of a sudden he was seen to turn pale.

He had just recognised the composition of a poison recovered from the middle ages, and the secret of which was known to only two persons living: himself and Samuel.

“You look pale,” said the Emperor. “It’s nothing,” rejoined the baron. “A last emanation, perhaps.”

“Do you recognise this poison?” asked Napoleon. “Can it put us on the track of the assassin?”

Baron von Hermelinfeld experienced a moment of hesitation and anxiety. For this once, the life of Samuel Gelb was in his hands.

After a short silence, he replied: “Sire, I am as yet unable to answer your Majesty. I must analyse this paper. But the probability is that I may discover some clue.”

“Very well,” said the Emperor. “I have every confidence in your skill and in your loyalty, Herr von Hermelinfeld. But above all, listen to me; we are five of us here. On your honour, gentlemen, on your life,” he added, turning to his aides-de-camp and his secretary, “I exact from you absolute silence. The attempt of a Friedrich Staps may be revealed on leaving a country, but not on entering it.”

CHAPTER LXX.

IN WHICH SAMUEL FALTERS.

AT the same hour as this was happening at Aschaffenburg, Samuel, in his subterranean chamber of the castle, was revealing to the Seven his attempt, and the means he had adopted.

“It is now a few minutes after ten,” Samuel said; “at this moment, Napoleon is dead, the Empire broken up, Germany free.”

The Seven answered not a word.

“You are silent! “Samuel resumed. “Am I to understand that you disapprove of what I have done?”

“Friedrich Staps sacrificed himself,” said one of the Seven.

“What a paltry scruple!” replied Samuel, shrugging his shoulders. “It is not the general who fires the gun. Besides, it seems to me that your vaunted Providence does not set to work in a different way to me, and that it makes use of us just as I have of Trichter. It employs us for the furtherance of its own plans, and does not hesitate to kill us if our death appears necessary to the life of an idea. What have I done differently? I have sacrificed Trichter, my friend. Of a drunkard I have made a martyr. I do not think he has lost by the exchange. Come, let us have done with these childish scruples! Are you satisfied with me?”

“The means you have employed,” the chief said at last, “are between you and your conscience. But if you have in truth delivered Germany, we will only consider the result, and you will have deserved well of your country and of the Tugendbund. When shall we receive the intelligence?”

“The traveller of the Neckar is already on his way! We must wait his arrival.”

They waited in the deepest anxiety... At one o’clock the bell rang.

“Here he comes,” said Samuel.

And he opened the door.

The traveller of the Neckar entered, slowly and gravely.

“Well?” they all asked.

“I will tell you what I have seen,” replied the traveller. “I have carried out to the letter the orders which Samuel Gelb conveyed to me from you. I was with Trichter up to the moment that he presented the petition to Napoleon. The Emperor made him accompany him into the Palace of the Prince-Primate.

“How wonderfully fortunate!” said Samuel.

“One moment!” said the traveller. “As Trichter did not return, I hung about the palace, trying to find some means of entrance, when I perceived two men glide out of a side door, carrying a covered stretcher, and go in the direction of the hospital. I followed these men. The curtain of the stretcher flew apart for one moment. A hand hung down. I recognised a glove similar to those which Trichter wore. I made enquiries from the porter at the hospital. He informed me that he had registered the death of a man, unknown, to be buried that same evening.”

“Trichter dead!” interrupted Samuel, visibly affected.

The traveller resumed:

“I went back in the direction of the palace. Just as I arrived in front of it, I saw the Emperor enter his carriage with the Empress, and drive off towards Wurtzburg, in the midst of the unanimous and enthusiastic cheering of the crowd.”

These words, which gave no room for doubt, were followed by a long silence.

“That is well,” said the president to the traveller from the Neckar, “you may withdraw.”

The man bowed and went out.

“Samuel Gelb,” resumed the chief, “God is more powerful than you. You have only killed your friend. If we have any advice to give you, it is that you should find a safe place for yourself as soon as you can.”

And, turning to his masked companions:

“As to ourselves, gentlemen, we shall do well to disperse.”

The Seven went out, leaving Samuel mute and thunderstruck.

CHAPTER LXXI.

SUICIDE AND NEW-BORN LIFE.

HALF an hour later, Samuel was riding along the road to Heidelberg.

He trotted quietly along without hurrying himself, like a man on his way home, not like one anxious to hide.

On reaching his hotel that evening, he found an old servant awaiting him at the door. He looked at him, and recognised the man as being in the service of the Baron von Hermelinfeld for the last twenty-five years.

“What is it, Tobias?” he asked.

“Herr Samuel,” said the servant, “the Herr Baron von Hermelinfeld has sent me to you in all haste. He has not written, but you will guess the reason why, so he told me; but he charged me to repeat to you his words ‘verbatim,’ saying that it was unnecessary that I should understand them, and commanding me to forget them as soon as I had transmitted them to you.”

“Speak,” said Samuel.

“The Herr Baron sends you this message: ‘I was at Aschaffenburg, I know all, I can prove everything, you are in my power, and, if you have not left German soil within twelve hours! ‘This is, word for word, all that the Herr Baron made me learn by heart, and commanded me to tell you.”

These words, repeated in an expressionless tone and as if mechanically, produced a singular effect upon Samuel.

“The message is sufficiently clear, I confess,” said he. “Well! you will thank the Baron from me, Tobias.”

“Then, the Herr Baron told me that if you were in want of money, I was to hand you over.....”

“Enough,” interrupted Samuel. “You will tell him, Tobias, since you are so exact an emissary, that I interrupted you at this point, and did not allow you to complete your sentence.”

“And will you go away, sir? I must again ask for your reply on behalf of the Herr Baron.”

“He will know. I shall see. I am still undecided. I cannot say yes or no.”

“Then my commission is done, sir, and I shall return.”

“Good-bye, Tobias.”

Tobias bowed and departed.

Samuel went to his room.

He threw himself into a chair, placed his two elbows on the table and let his head fall between his hands.

The almost visible intervention of God in his plan had somewhat startled him.

He thought:

“What am I to do? How do I stand? Let me recapitulate the balance sheet of my life. It is a poor one.

“The Baron will give me up to justice, I have no doubt. It is evident that, this time, my fate is in his hands. The seducer of Gretchen could hold in check the seducer of my mother. But a murder, a crime of high treason exposes me, betrays me without mercy — disadvantage number one. On the other hand, instead of gaining a higher position in the Guild of Virtue, rather have I gone lower. These narrow intellects would have admired me in success, but they scorn me in defeat. I saw it unmistakably in their hurried departure, and disdainful farewells. My aim in this direction is postponed, perhaps for ever. So much for the active part. And now as regards the sentimental. No one cares for me, and I care for no one. That sheep called Julius, and that fool called Trichter, are now, to all intents and purposes, dead to me. As to women, I have pursued love, that human expression of the Infinite, into its most painful contrasts. I have tried to excite it out of violence and hatred as we do fire from iron and stone; futile attempt and useless crime. Ah! I am weary and sick of the whole thing.

“Shall I take refuge in flight! Am I indeed reduced to flee, I, Samuel Gelb? And where shall I go? My safest refuge would be the lion’s mouth; Paris, Paris, the modern capital, the Rome of intellect, the new City, has always attracted me. It is a theatre worthy of me. Yes, but what part can I play there? The scholar? I would be asked for my diplomas. The politician? I shall be a stranger. It means starting life afresh. And recommencing when one has finished, what more irksome and nauseating?

“Bah! supposing I gave myself up to justice. After all, that would embarrass the baron and perhaps the Emperor. Who knows whether Napoleon might not pardon my offence, so as to pose as a Titus or an Augustus in the eyes of Germany? He could not condemn to death a man who had given himself up of his own free will. And the worthy baron would look rather sheepish. Ah! they would have me strangled in my cell. And then, am I willing to accept pardon from any one? am I willing to live on charity? Perhaps Napoleon would have me tried. In that case, mine would be a famous trial, and the eyes of all Europe would be fixed on Napoleon and Samuel Gelb.

"A fine ambition! Provide entertainment for the gaping crowd? Is that what I aim at? This swarm of humanity, of which ninety-nine hundredths spend their life in gaining money, and think that man's aim on earth is to amass a certain quantity of coins of a certain metal, this swarm of humanity disgusts me.

"Influence it, of what use? Too much time would be lost in making it advance, and one man alone does too little. I could understand the rôle of reformer or civiliser if, at one stroke, we were able to extemporise the future. But there is a world of difference between what we imagine we can do, and what we actually perform. Of what use to start on a journey when we know beforehand that we shall never reach the end of it. Would Christopher Columbus have put out to sea if he had known that on the second day of the voyage he would die. A fig for beginning things, and passing them on to others to finish! I am quite willing to move mountains, even at the risk of being crushed under them; but I refuse to crumble them to pieces, and remove them by barrowfuls. Civilisers, mighty carriers of grains of sand! I give it up.

"The shortest, the most simple and the least theatrical way would be to cut my throat. This was the custom of the Romans, and it was not without its greatness. I'll do away with myself! that's decided. The idea of suicide has always appealed to me. Death, involuntary, necessary, fatal, has always been repugnant to me; to come to the grave like an ox to the slaughter, is sheer animalism. To make our exit from life freely and proudly, as we take ourselves off from some wearisome "soirée" at our own time, when we have had enough of it, when we are tired, when we are satiated, well and good! that is worthy of a man. Let me see, do I forget nothing, regret nothing, is there nothing which makes me hold to life? No. Come, my boy, without any further delay, or reflection, and above all, without making a will, cut your throat."

And this strange man walked quietly up to his dressing table, took a razor and sharpened it.

Suddenly he heard a feeble cry issuing from the recess.

He stopped in surprise.

A second cry followed.

“What in the world does that mean?” said he.

He strode quickly up to the bed and drew aside the curtains.

On the bed, wrapped in swaddling-clothes carelessly knotted together, lay a new-born child.

CHAPTER LXXII.

THE ROAD TO PARIS.

SAMUEL GELB, at sight of this child apparently fallen from the skies, started back in astonishment.

“Oh! oh! what is this?” he said to himself. “Who the devil has put that child there? He is a pretty little fellow, so far as such a mite of humanity, as yet without a soul, can be pretty. Ah! it’s a girl. What an odd adventure!”

He reflected for a moment, assailed by a thousand thoughts.

“Is it a practical joke on the part of some friend? Is it the work of some mother in a moment of despair? Could the child be mine? If it were my child?”

He stopped, surprised himself at the effect which this thought produced upon him.

“But no!” he resumed, “it’s impossible. Let me see. This child was born certainly not earlier than yesterday, perhaps to-day. For Gretchen it is too late, and for Christiane too soon. Besides, I should have known it. And of course, in that case, the baron would not have spared me. As to the rest, it is unfathomable, buried in the ocean. Useless to try to solve the problem. The sea would be more likely to tell which river supplies each of its waves. Indubitably I am not the father. Never mind! she is a pretty little girl.”

And as the child was beginning to cry, perhaps for hunger, Samuel melted some sugar in a little milk and water, and with a spoon, poured a few drops into the infant’s mouth.

“Samuel Gelb metamorphosed into a nurse,” he thought. “Ah! how people would laugh if they saw me.”

He ‘drew himself up gravely and proudly as if to answer to some challenge.

“And why should they laugh? It is only fools who look upon me as a monster, because I am a man, a man in the fullest sense of the world, a free man, a man unshackled by conventionalities, superior to appearances. That does not hinder me, when I see a tiny creature, helpless, forsaken, and in pain, from succouring it, like a Saint Vincent de Paul, and all the more credit to me, I fancy, since the rewards of Paradise never enter into my speculations. Nevertheless, although I believe myself as capable of good as evil, it is certain that up to the present I have done more evil than good. Opportunity is responsible for this. It might have been just the reverse. And again am I about to do what is called wrong, by sending this child to the hospital?"

He put the child back on the bed with gentle care, and went downstairs to question the people of the hotel.

No one had asked to see Samuel. No one had been observed to take his key and go up to his room.

Samuel went upstairs again.

"Waste of breath!" he thought. "The servant who allowed admittance into my room will have been liberally bribed, or the mother will have entrusted the commission to some one very daring and very clever. Useless trying, I am certain to find out nothing. Could it be a child of Lolotte's? I made mischief between her and Trichter, why did she try to prevent his drinking? she may have deemed it but fair to burden me with his child? Or else some student may have desired to do homage to his king, by presenting him with his offspring. Bah! What does it matter? That children are born, is no reason why men should not die. On the contrary. So I am going to take this rough sketch of a woman to the hospital, and proceed with the occupation which her crying interrupted."

The child again began to cry. He gave it a little more to drink.

"Sleep, little one, the slumber of the beginning, and let me sleep the slumber of the end."

The child grew quiet and appeared, in fact, to fall asleep. Samuel gazed at it.

"Poor little soul! A spirit dwells there. This fragile life, this drop containing an ocean, this ephemera containing an immortality, what will all this become? Hamlet philosophised over a skull, that is to say on the past, on death, on the finite. But how much greater cause for thought on a new-born child, on the future, on life, on the unknown.

"At this present moment, this child, who has come into the world as I was. about to leave it, its fate is in my hands. I can let this girl be like myself a bastard, a cursed creature, without father or mother; I could, too, bring her up, love her, save her. Supposing I were to do this? But I was on the point of dying; is it worth troubling about?

“Bah! I don’t care very much whether I live or die. And after all, why should I die? Because I have nothing to do here. If I wish, the incentive to live, which was lacking, is here, in my grasp. What greater, more essential incentive could I desire? This is no pretext made to myself, no! I do not pose for my own benefit. But I feel that my existence would have been incomplete, my rôle of Vice-destiny unaccomplished, my Promethean nature would have failed in its ideal, if I had never moulded in my hand that soft and exquisite wax, the education, the mind, the life of a child. What a diversion and what a power! To mould after my own way, to fashion according to my fancy, to carve according to my dream, that divine clay — a soul.

“What should I make of this infant? a demon of perdition or an angel of virtue? a Desdemona or a Lady Macbeth? According to the education I give her, according to the sentiments with which I inspire her, according to the shape in which I mould her, she will be darkness or light, purity or vice, wings or claws. I wondered if I were her father; if I am not, I shall be! What matters whether or no she be the child of my body, she will be the child of my mind! Much better so! Poets and sculptors do a fine thing in producing intangible shadows in books or insensible shapes on pedestals! I, I am greater than Shakespeare or Michael-Angelo; I am a poet and sculptor of souls.

“So, it is decided. Child, I adopt you. The idea of making a new start in life alone, was wearisome to me. It will amuse me to begin afresh with you. I was throwing my life out of window, you happened to be beneath and picked it up. Take it, I give it to you.”

Then Samuel quietly put the razor back into its case, went downstairs and gave instructions for a carriage to be brought round the next morning at half-past seven.

“It was at seven o’clock,” he said to himself as he went up the staircase, “that Tobias warned me on the part of the baron to make myself scarce within twelve hours. I am curious to see whether Julius’ father will actually dare to have me arrested. If, at half-past seven, he has not put in an appearance, I shall go.

Half-past seven o’clock struck the next morning, and yet the baron had given no signs of life to Samuel.

Just then, Herr von Hermelinfeld was occupied with a matter of far greater import.

Samuel therefore went to the Rector to demand his passport; the latter signed it with praiseworthy alacrity, thankful to be at last relieved of such a pupil.

When the horses were harnessed, Samuel took the little money he had, packed a few possessions into a bag and a trunk, and stepped into the carriage, holding the child in his arms, wrapped in his cloak.

“The road to Paris!” he cried to the postillion, in the same tone in which Napoleon must have cried: “The road to Moscow.”

CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE MOUTH OF HELL.

JUST at about the same time as Samuel was saying to his postillion; “The road to Paris! “Gretchen was hurrying back to her hut at Eberbach.

Where did she come from?

She seemed to have come a long distance. Her shoes were covered with dust. Her gown was torn. Her dry, hollow eyes told of a sleepless night.

She appeared exhausted with fatigue. She entered the hut and found it empty.

“What!” she exclaimed, appalled, “can madame have gone? She had no strength but the little resulting from fever and delirium! Oh my God! Has she returned to the castle. I’ll run and see.”

She was about to hurry away when she caught sight of a piece of paper on the table.

The paper contained a few disjointed lines, written in pencil.

“What does this say?” said Gretchen.

She read the following: —

“You told me that the child was dead. I fainted away, and on regaining consciousness, I find neither it nor you. All the better. As the child is dead, I may die too. Had it lived I should have been obliged to live. Now I may go to rejoin Wilhelm and my father. On your soul and on mine, the secret; never, never reveal our secret.”

A cry broke from Gretchen’s lips.

“What have I done?” said she.

She rushed to the castle.

There she found, overwhelmed with distress, the baron, who had lately returned from Aschaffenburg, and Julius, who had just arrived from Havre.

They were about to set out in search of Christiane.

Half-an-hour before the arrival of Julius, one of the servants had seen Christiane return to the castle, glide like a phantom up to her room, then descend almost at once and go out.

Julius had rushed up to Christiane’s room. The bed had evidently not been slept in.

On the mantel-piece, on the very spot where Julius, on leaving seven months previously, had placed his note of farewell, there was a sealed letter.

Julius has torn it open, and read the following lines: —

“My Julius, forgive me. Your return is my death warrant, and yet I die only because I love you. You would no longer have loved me, perhaps you would have despised me; our child is dead. So you see, I must die too.”

“Father! “Julius had cried, aghast.

The baron, after reading the letter which Julius had handed to him, said:

“Take courage. Perhaps it is not yet too late. Let us search for her.”

“Search! “Julius had cried, agitated by conflicting emotions.

At this moment Gretchen appeared.

Julius rushed towards her.

“Christiane!” said he, “have you seen Christiane?”

“Do you know what has become of her?”

“I am looking for her! “Gretchen answered. “Is she not here?”

“You are looking for her? What for? You have seen her, then? Did she go to your hut?”

“No,” Gretchen replied, after a short silence.

“But everybody is looking for her.”

“Ah! I can well believe it,” cried Julius despairingly; “Gretchen, she wants to die.”

“Come, Julius, do be reasonable,” said the baron. “Where and how could she have killed herself? She has neither poison nor a pistol!”

One word, one terrible word which Christiane had often muttered in her delirium, flashed across Gretchen’s memory.

“The Mouth of Hell!” she cried.

“Why! yes, let us go,” said Julius.

The three rushed out of the house, followed by the servants.

Then occurred a terrible thing; Julius, standing on the edge of the precipice, tried to call his wife’s name, but emotion choked his utterance, and his mouth remained open without his being able to articulate a sound; or else the heartbreaking cry which he tried to utter, died away in an indistinguishable murmur.

“Call her,” he said in broken tones to his father and Gretchen. “Call her, then; you see I cannot!”

At last they arrived at the Mouth of Hell. And, looking round in all directions, they saw nothing.

They leant over the abyss.

And yet they saw nothing.

Julius, at the risk of slipping into the gulf, supported himself by a root, and, in order to see better, let his head and shoulders be suspended in empty space.

“Oh! father,” said he, “I see something.”

Fifty fathoms down, the trunk of a tree projected from the side of the precipice. On one of its large branches fluttered some shreds of the gown which Christiane had worn that morning, also a silk scarf of brilliant colours which belonged to her, and which she had bought in Greece.

“Farewell, father,” said Julius. And he loosed his hold of the root. But already the baron had forcibly seized him by the arm.

He dragged him on to “terra firma,” making a sign to the servants to stand near him, for fear that Julius should wrench himself out of his grasp.

“My son! my son! be a man, be a Christian!” he said.

“Ah! father! “Julius cried, bursting into heavy sobs, “what am I to do? I come home to find my wife killed, my son dead. Some people will say that I come back a millionaire.”

Meanwhile the baron approached Gretchen.

“Gretchen,” he said in a low voice, “you know something about all this. Samuel is mixed up in it. Gretchen, I adjure you to speak.”

But Gretchen looked him straight in the face, and replied firmly and coldly:

“I know nothing — I have nothing to say.”

Either she was absolutely ignorant, or unalterably determined.

The Baron von Hermelinfeld shook his head, and approached his son. Then, half dragging him, half coaxing him, he succeeded in leading him towards the castle.

The servants followed.

Gretchen remained alone on the brink of the Mouth of Hell.

“Yes,” she said, “I will keep my oath, and I will be as secret and as unfathomable as thou, thou grim abyss. All the same, you have done wrong, Christiane; you have gone to challenge the justice of God above. I await it here on earth!”

THE END

ANGE PITOU

Anonymous translation, 1895

First published in 1851 in *La Presse*, this is the third instalment of the *Memoirs of a Physician* series, following *Joseph Balsamo* and *The Queen’s Necklace*. The novel concerns the French Revolution and the exciting story of the taking of the Bastille.

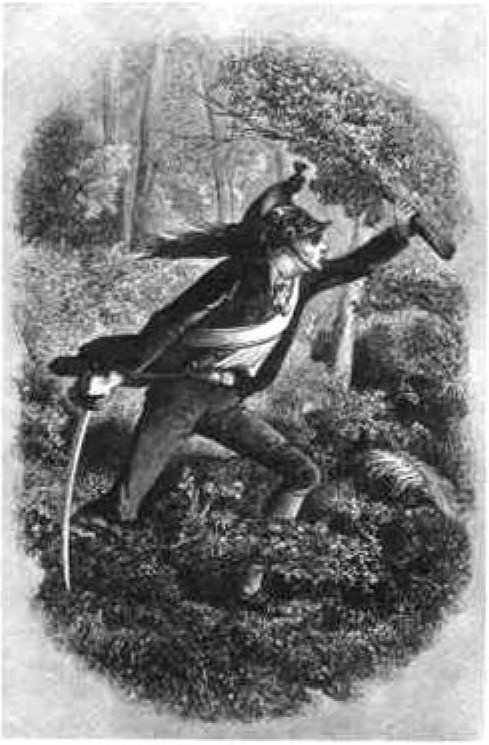

An original illustration

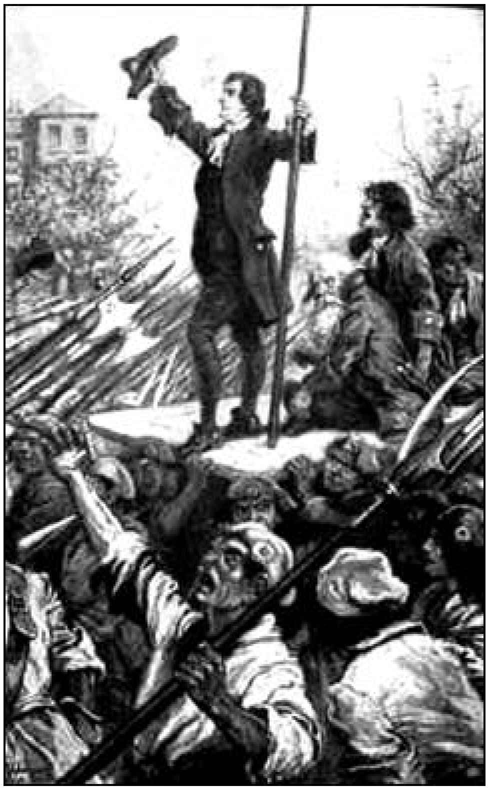

An illustration from the first English edition

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

ON Christmas Day, 1753, Lord Chesterfield wrote from Paris, summing up his observations on the state of France: “In short, all the symptoms which I have ever met with in history, previous to great changes and revolutions in government, now exist and daily increase in France.”

This, being written so early and by a foreigner, is perhaps the most noteworthy of the prophecies of disaster to come which were trumpeted forth by so many keen-sighted intellects during the last half of the eighteenth century. It was floating in the air; it was written upon the faces of the starving, down-trodden people, who found themselves burdened with this tax and that tax, with tithes and *tailles*, from which the nobility and clergy Were exempt; while on the other hand, the luxury and extravagance of those privileged classes grew every day more wanton, and their vices more shameless. Upon such a foundation the philosophers and encyclopædists had built solidly and well, so that Voltaire wrote exultingly of the “glorious sights” which the young men of his day would live to see; wherefore they were greatly to be envied!

The old Marquis de Mirabeau, father of him who became so prominent a figure during the early months of the Revolution, — a curious, crabbed old fellow, who called himself the “friend of men,” and whose peculiarities are described by Dumas in the “Comtesse de Charny,” — wrote in his memoirs a description of a peasant’s holiday which he witnessed in the provinces about the time of the death of Louis XV. (1774). After describing the dance which ended in a battle, and “the frightful men, or rather frightful wild animals,of gigantic stature, heightened by high wooden clogs,their faces haggard and covered with long greasy hair,-the upper part of the visage waxing pale, the lower, distorting itself into the attempt at a cruel laugh and a sort of ferocious impatience,” — he moralizes thus: “And these people pay the *taille*! And you want, further, to take their salt from them! And you know not what it is you are stripping barer, or as you call it, governing, — what, by a spurt of your pen, in its cold, dastard indifference, you will fancy you can starve always with impunity, always till the catastrophe come! Ah, Madame, such government by blindman’s-buff, stumbling along too far, will end in a general overturn.”

It is curious to notice with what unanimity the good intentions of Louis XVI. are admitted, almost taken for granted, by all writers upon this period, except the virulent pamphleteers of the day. Even Michelet admits it, though somewhat grudgingly, — Michelet, who went out of his way to charge Louis XV., whose load of sin was heavy enough in all conscience, with a foul crime for which there seems to be no shadow of authority.

But it is hard to convince one's self that the general overturn could have been avoided, even had the will and character of the young king been as worthy of praise as his impulses and intentions undoubtedly were. Hastened it was, beyond question, by his weakness at critical moments, by his subserviency to the will of the queen, which was exerted uninterruptedly, and with what now seems like fatal perversity, in the wrong direction, during the years when there was still a chance, at least, of saving the monarchy. It was through the influence of the queen and her intimate circle that step after step, which, if taken in time, would have made a favorable impression upon an impressionable people, "whose nature it was to love their kings," was delayed until it was, so to say, extorted, and hence bereft of all appearance of a willing, voluntary concession. Numerous instances of this fatality, if we may so call it, are told by Dumas; notably the day's postponement of the king's journey to Paris after the day of the Bastille.

With the virtuous, philosophic Turgot, "who had a whole reformed France in his head," for Controller-General of the Finances, the reign of Louis XVI. seemed to start off under the best of auspices. But, as Carlyle tersely puts it, "Turgot has faculties, honesty, insight, heroic volition, but the Fortunatus's purse he has not. Sanguine controller-general! a whole pacific French Revolution may stand schemed in the head of the thinker, but who shall pay the unspeakable 'indemnities' that will be needed? Alas! far from that; on the very threshold of the business he proposes that the clergy, the *noblesse* , the very parliaments, be subjected to taxes like the people! One shriek of indignation and astonishment reverberates through all the chateau galleries;the poor king, who had written to him a few weeks ago, 'You and I are the only ones who have the people's interest at heart,' must write now a dismissal, and let the French Revolution accomplish itself, pacifically or not, as it can."

To Turgot succeeded Necker, also a skilful and honest financier, also with schemes of peaceful reform in his head. For five years he carried the burden; and at last he, too, was driven to propose the taxation of clergy and nobility, and thereupon to take his departure, May, 1781.

Under the short administrations of Joly de Fleury and D’Ormesson, matters failed to improve (as indeed, how could they do otherwise?), until on the retirement of the latter, when the king purchased Rambouillet, without consulting him, in the autumn of 1783, “matters threaten to come to a still-stand,” says Carlyle.

At such a crisis destiny decreed that M. de Calonne should be put forward to fill the vacancy, — a man of indisputable genius, “before all things, for borrowing.”

“Hope radiates from his face, persuasion hangs on his tongue. For all straits he has present remedy, and will make the world roll on wheels before him.”

In the “Diamond Necklace,” Dumas has given us a faithful picture of Calonne and his method of exploiting his financial genius. His grandiloquent, “Madame, if it is but difficult, it is done; if it is impossible, it shall be done,” seems hardly to stamp him as the man for the place at that critical period, however great may have been the felicity of the Œil-de-Bœuf under the temporary plenty which resulted from the policy of “borrowing at any price.”

It would be hard to exaggerate the effect upon the growing aspirations of the French people after the unfamiliar something which they came to call “liberty,” of the result of the struggle in America, in which the cause of the colonists was so powerfully supported by the little band of Frenchmen of whom Lafayette was the most prominent and the most notable. He returned to France in 1783, to be dubbed in some quarters “Scipio Americanus.”

The scandalous affair of the necklace was, as we have heretofore seen, seized upon by the enemies of the queen as a weapon with which to assail her reputation, although her absolute innocence of any guilty connection with it is now beyond doubt. The results of this unfortunate episode — the “immense rumor and conjecture from all mankind,” coupled with the slanderous charges made by Madame Lamotte in a letter from London after her escape from the Salpétrière — went far towards creating the unreasoning hatred of the “Austrian woman,” which she herself did so little to assuage when the clouds became blacker than night, and began to emit the thunder and lightning of the Revolution.

In the spring of 1787, Calonne, his borrowing powers being at an end, conceived the idea of convoking the “Notables” — an expedient unheard of for one hundred and sixty years — to sanction his new plan of taxation. They met on the 22d of February, 1787, one hundred and thirty-seven of them, “men of the sword, men of the robe, peers, dignified clergy, parliamentary presidents,” with seven princes of the blood to preside over the seven *bureaux,* — ”a round gross in all.” They would have none of Calonne or his plans; and he was dismissed in April, after which the “Notables” sat until May 25, “treating of all manner of public things,” and then first were the States-General mentioned.

Calonne was succeeded by Cardinal Loménie de Brienne, — a dissolute, worthless sexagenarian, who devised various tax-edicts, stamp-taxes, and the like, all of which the Parliament of Paris refused to register. The expedient of a Bed of Justice was resorted to, and resulted in the most ominous of all portents: for the first time in history the Parliament refused to obey the royal “Je veux” (I wish it.) They were exiled for a month, — August to September, 1787, — and returned upon conditions.

In the spring of 1788, Loménie’s great scheme of dismissing the parliaments altogether, and substituting a more subservient “Plenary Court” was detected before it was ripe, and denounced to the Parliament of Paris, which body, upon remonstrating, was again exiled (May). An attempt thereafter to raise supplies by royal edict simply, led to the rebellion of all the provincial parliaments, the public expressing its approval more noisily than ever. On August 8 appeared a royal edict to the effect that the States-General should be convoked for May following; it was followed by another edict, that treasury payments should thenceforth be made three-fifths in cash and two-fifths in paper, — a virtual confession that the treasury was insolvent. Thereupon Loménie was incontinently dismissed, and Necker recalled from Switzerland to become the “Savior of France.”

A second convocation of the “Notables” (November 6 to December 12, 1788) undertook to decide how the States should be held: whether the three estates should meet as one deliberative body, or as three, or two; and, most important of all, what should be the relative force, in voting, of the Third Estate, or Commonalty. They separated without settling any of the points in question.

In January, 1789, the elections began, — the real beginning of the French Revolution in the opinion of Carlyle, and indeed, of most writers.

On the 13th of July, 1788, there had been a most destructive hail-storm throughout France, and the growing crops were literally destroyed; whereby the extreme destitution which had come to be the natural condition of the lower classes had been accentuated. In addition, the winter of 1788-89 was one of extreme rigor, so that it seemed almost as if God himself were openly manifesting his will that the general overturn should come.

The riot in which Réveillon, the paper manufacturer, was concerned occurred in April, 1789, just prior to the assembling of the States-General on May 4.

The clergy and nobility at once exhibited their purpose to act as separate bodies; and the Third Estate, led by Mirabeau and others, decided that it must be the mainspring of the whole, and that it would remain “inert” until the other two estates should join with it; under which circumstances it could outvote them and do what it chose. For seven weeks this state of “inertia” endured, until the court decided to intervene and the assembly hall was found closed against the representatives of the people on June 20. Thereupon they met in the old tennis-court (Jeu de Paume), and there the celebrated “Oath of the Tennis-Court” was taken by every man of them but one, — an oath “that they will not separate for man below, but will meet in all places, under all circumstances, wheresoever two or three can get together, till they have made the Constitution.”

One subsequent attempt was made by the king to intimidate this ominously persistent body; but the messenger whom he despatched to command them to separate (“Mercury” de Brézé, Carlyle calls him) was addressed in very plain language by the lion-headed Mirabeau, and retired in confusion. The court recoiled before the spectacle of “all France on the edge of blazing out;” the other two estates joined the Third, which triumphed in every particular. Henceforth the States-General are the “National Assembly,” sometimes called the “Constituent Assembly,” or assembly met to make the constitution.

This cursory sketch of the leading events of the early years of the reign of Louis XVI. is offered as a sort of supplement to that presented by Dumas before he takes his readers into the “thick of the business” in Paris.

The badly veiled military preparations to which the terror of the queen and the court led the king to consent, kept the Parisian populace in a constant state of fermentation, which was powerfully helped on by the continued scarcity of food and the consequent influx of starving provincials into the metropolis. The Gardes Françaises gave indubitable symptoms of popular leanings, which perhaps emboldened the effervescent spirits of the mob more than a little.

The news of the dismissal of Necker, circulated on Sunday, July 12, kindled the first panic terror of Paris into a wild frenzy, and resulted in the siege of the Bastille, "perhaps the most momentous known to history."

The course of events immediately preceding the descent upon that "stronghold of tyranny, called Bastille, or 'building,' as if there were no other building," as well as those of the siege itself, is traced with marvellous fidelity by Dumas, due allowance being made, of course, for the necessities of the romance. He closely follows Michelet; but the details are told, with substantial unanimity, by all historians of the fateful event.

The part assigned to Billot in the narrative before us was in reality played by several persons. It was Thuriot, an elector from the Hôtel de Ville, who gained admission to the fortress and investigated its condition; who ascended with De Launay to the battlements and showed himself to the mob to quiet their fears that he had been foully dealt with. This same Thuriot, as president of the convention, refused to allow Robespierre to speak in his own defence on the 10th Thermidor, year II. (July 28, 1794). It was Louis Tournay, a blacksmith and old soldier of the Regiment Dauphiné, who hacked away the chain which upheld the first drawbridge. It was an unknown man who first essayed to cross the ditch to take the note dictating terms and fell to the bottom (and was killed); but it was Stanislas Maillard who followed and made the passage in safety.

Élie and Hullin, it is needless to say, are historical characters; and worthy of an honorable place in history for their heroic attempts, then and afterwards, to prevent the needless shedding of blood.

The extraordinary thing about the attack on the Bastille is the startling unanimity of the people that it was the first and fittest object of attack. It seems the more extraordinary because, as Michelet has said, it "was by no means reasonable;" for the lower orders had suffered but little from imprisonment in the Bastille.

"Nobody proposed, but all believed and all acted. Along the streets, the quays, the bridges, and the boulevards, the crowd shouted to the crowd: 'To the Bastille! The Bastille!' And the tolling of the tocsin sounded in every ear: *à la Bastille*!

“Nobody, I repeat, gave the impulse. The orators of the Palais Royal passed the time in drawing up a list of proscriptions, in condemning the queen to death, as well as Madame de Polignac, Artois, Flesselles, the provost, and others. The names of the conquerors of the Bastille do not include one of these makers of motions.”

Perhaps we may accept, in the absence of a better, Michelet’s explanation of this instinctive action of the mob, as having been caused by the recent publicity given to the experience of one Latude, who was first confined in the Bastille during the reign of Madame de Pompadour, and had since “worn out all their prisons,” and had finally reached the “dunghillss of Bicêtre,” by way of Vincennes and Charenton. He was at last released through the pertinacious efforts of one Madame Legros, a poor mercer, who became interested in him by chance, and persevered for three years, meeting with obstacles of every sort and exposed to the vilest calumny, until success came at last, and Latude was released in 1784, after more than forty years of confinement. His release was followed by an ordinance enjoining intendants never again to incarcerate anybody at the request of families *without a well-grounded reason*, and in every case *to indicate the duration of confinement*, — a decidedly naive confession of the degree of arbitrariness which had been reached.

“From that day” (of Latude’s deliverance), says Michelet, “the people of the town and the faubourg, who, in that much-frequented quarter, were ever passing and repassing in its shadow, never failed to curse it.”

It is proper to observe that the state of things which existed in the Bastille when the Cellamare conspirators underwent mock imprisonment there (witness the Regency Romances) had been done away with. While other prisons had become more merciful, this had become more cruel. From reign to reign the privileges were taken away, the windows were walled up one after another, and new bars were added. The other encroachments by De Launay upon the “liberties of the Bastille” are described by Dumas in the course of the narrative.

To quote Michelet once more: “The Bastille was known and detested by the whole world. ‘Bastille’ and ‘tyranny’ were in every language synonymous terms. Every nation, at the news of its destruction, believed it had recovered its liberty.”

The Comte de Ségur, then ambassador at Russia, relates that when the news arrived in St. Petersburg, men of every nation were to be seen shouting and weeping in the streets, and repeating, as they embraced one another: “Who can help weeping for joy? The Bastille is taken!”

The Duc de Liancourt announced the fall of the fortress to Louis XVI. “Why,” said the king, “it is downright revolt!” “It’s more than that,” replied Liancourt, “it is revolution.”

Nothing need be added to the description given by Dumas of the painful excitement at Versailles, or of the king’s journey to Paris and experience there. The scenes attending the summary vengeance wreaked upon Foulon and Berthier, who were the very incarnation of the old régime, are also portrayed with the careful attention to detail which is so striking a characteristic of the historical portions of the author’s romances; and the same may be said of the assassination of Flesselles, and, by anticipation, of the events of the 5th of October in the streets of Paris and at the Hôtel de Ville, when Stanislas Maillard assumed the leadership of the women (“the Menadic hosts”), and Lafayette was reluctantly compelled to lead the march of the thirty thousand upon Versailles.

The fall of the Bastille was followed throughout France by the enlistment of National Guards, ostensibly, in most instances, as a protection against mythical brigands, whose coming in great numbers was continually heralded in every town and village, but who never came. The experience of Pitou, in Haramont, is typical of the great movement which was in progress everywhere.

“It is a terrible but certain fact,” says Michelet, “that in Paris, that city of eight hundred thousand souls, there was no public authority for the space of three months, from July to October.”

Meanwhile the National Assembly was going haltingly on with its work of constitution-making. The session of the 4th of August shines out with peculiar prominence, as it was the occasion of all the privileged classes vying with one another in renouncing their privileges. Such good effect as this tardy renunciation might have had, however, was destroyed by the king’s refusal to sanction it, except in so far as he was personally affected.

Towards the end of August the knotty question of the veto was duly reached: whether the king should have any veto upon the acts of the Assembly, and if so, whether it should be absolute or suspensive.

Throughout Lafayette assumed a position of great prominence in other directions than as commander-in-chief of the National Guard. The suspensive” veto was finally decided upon, and there was a vague prospect of a return of quieter times, except for the continued scarcity and dearness of grain. “Our rights of man are voted,” says Carlyle; “feudalism and all tyranny abolished; yet behold we stand in queue [at the bakers’ doors]! Is it aristocrat forestallers — a court still bent on intrigue? Something is rotten somewhere.”

With hope, terror, suspicion, excitement, succeeding one another with bewildering rapidity, comes the certainty that the “Œil-de-Bœuf is rallying,” that the Flanders regiment has been summoned to Versailles, and that some scheme of flight or repression is in the wind. Then comes the news of the banquet of the 1st of October, — of the appearance of the king and queen, the trampling under foot of cockades, and the announcement of Marie Antoinette the next day, that she was “enchanted with the events of the supper.” Of all fatuous performances of mortals foredoomed to destroy themselves, surely that was the most fatuous. It is significant, by the way, of the extreme caution with which the statements of Madame Campan must be accepted, that in describing this scene, at which she was present, she does not mention the word “cockade,” nor does she imply that it was aught but a quiet, orderly function, at which, perhaps, some one or two may have imbibed a thought too freely.

With regard to the events of the night of October 5-6 at Versailles, nothing need be said, save that the body-guard who heroically defended the door to the queen’s apartments, where Georges de Charny is said to have been slain, was one Miomandre de Sainte-Marie; and that although “fractured, slashed, lacerated, left for dead, he has crawled to the Œil-de-Bœuf, and shall live honored of loyal France.”

In the “Comtesse de Charny” we shall find the king and queen on the road to Paris, on the 6th of October. We shall there meet many old acquaintances and make some new ones, and shall follow the setting sun of the time-honored monarchy of France till it sinks at last below the horizon.

VOLUME I

CHAPTER I.

In which the Reader is made acquainted with the Hero of this History, as well as with the Country in which he first saw the Light

ON the borders of Picardy and the province of Soissons, and on that part of the national territory which, under the name of the Isle of France, formed a portion of the ancient patrimony of our kings, and in the centre of an immense crescent formed by a forest of fifty thousand acres which stretches its horns to the north and south, rises, almost buried amid the shades of a vast park planted by Francis I. and Henry II., the small city of Villers-Cotterets. This place is celebrated from having given birth to Charles Albert Demoustier, who, at the period when our present history commences, was there writing his “Letters to Emilie on Mythology,” to the unbounded satisfaction of the pretty women of those days, who eagerly snatched his publications from each other as soon as printed.

Let us add, to complete the poetical reputation of this little city, whose detractors, not withstanding its royal chateau and its two thousand four hundred inhabitants, obstinately persist in calling it a mere village, — let us add, we say, to complete its poetical reputation, that it is situated at two leagues’ distance from Laferté-Milon, where Racine was born, and eight leagues from Château-Thierry, the birthplace of La Fontaine.

Let us also state that the mother of the author of “Britannicus” and “Athalie” was from Villers-Cotterets.

But now we must return to its royal chateau and its two thousand four hundred inhabitants.

This royal chateau, begun by Francis I., whose salamanders still decorate it, and finished by Henry II., whose cipher it bears entwined with that of Catherine de Médicis and encircled by the three crescents of Diana of Poictiers, after having sheltered the loves of the knightking with Madame d’Étampes, and those of Louis-Philippe of Orleans with the beautiful Madame de Montesson, had become almost uninhabited since the death of this last named prince; his son, Philippe d’Orléans, afterwards called

Égalité, having reduced it from the rank of a royal residence to that of a mere hunting rendezvous.

It is well known that the chateau and forest of Villers-Cotterets formed part of the appanage settled by Louis XIV. on his brother *Monsieur*, when the second son of Anne of Austria married the sister of Charles II., the Princess Henrietta of England.

As to the two thousand four hundred inhabitants of whom we have promised our readers to say a word, they were, as in all localities where two thousand four hundred people are united, a heterogeneous assemblage.

First, of a few nobles, who spent their summers in the neighboring châteaux and their winters in Paris, and who, mimicking the prince, had only a lodging-place in the city.

Secondly, of a goodly number of citizens, who could be seen, let the weather be what it might, leaving their houses after dinner, umbrella in hand, to take their daily walk, — a walk which was regularly bounded by a wide ditch which separated the park from the forest, situated about a quarter of a league from the town, and which was called, doubtless on account of the exclamation which the sight of it drew from the asthmatic lungs of the promenaders, satisfied at finding themselves, after so long a walk, not too much out of breath, the “Ha! ha!”

Thirdly, of a considerably greater number of artisans, who worked the whole of the week, and only allowed themselves to take a walk on the Sunday; whereas their fellow-townsmen, more favored by fortune, could enjoy it every day.

Fourthly and finally, of some miserable proletarians, for whom the week had not even a Sabbath, and who, after having toiled six days in the pay of the nobles, the citizens, or even of the artisans, wandered on the seventh day through the forest to gather up dry wood or branches of the lofty trees, torn from them by the storm, — that mower of the forest, to whom oak-trees are but as ears of wheat, — and which it scattered over the humid soil beneath the lofty trees, the magnificent appanage of a prince.

If Villers-Cotterets *(Villerii ad Cotiam Retiæ)* had been, unfortunately, a town of sufficient importance in history to induce archaeologists to ascertain and follow up its successive changes from a village to a burgh and from a burgh to a city, — the last, as we have said, being strongly contested, — they would certainly have proved this fact, that the village had begun by being a row of houses on either side of the road from Paris to Soissons; then they would have added that its situation on the borders of a beautiful forest having, though by slow degrees, brought to it a great increase of inhabitants, other streets were added to the first, diverging like the rays of a star and leading towards other small villages with which it was important to keep up communication, and converging towards a point which naturally became the centre, — that is to say, what in the provinces is called The Square, — around which the handsomest buildings of the village, now become a burgh, were erected, and in the middle of which rises a fountain, now decorated with a quadruple dial; in short, they would have fixed the precise date when, near the modest village church — the first want of a people — arose the first turrets of the vast château, the last caprice of a king; a château which, after having been, as we have already said, by turns a royal and a princely residence, has in our days become a melancholy and hideous receptacle for mendicants under the direction of the Prefecture of the Seine.

But at the period at which this history commences, royal affairs, though already somewhat tottering, had not yet fallen to the low degree to which they have fallen in our days; the château was no longer inhabited by a prince, ‘t is true, but it had not yet become the abode of beggars; it was simply uninhabited, excepting the indispensable attendants required for its preservation; among whom were to be remarked the doorkeeper, the master of the tennis court, and the house steward; and therefore the windows of this immense edifice, some of which looked toward the park and others on a large court aristocratically called the square of the chateau, were all closed, which added not a little to the gloominess and solitary appearance of this square, at one of the extremities of which rose a small house, regarding which the reader, we hope, will permit us to say a few words.

It was a small house, of which, if we may be allowed to use the term, the back only was to be seen. But, as is the case with many individuals, this back had the privilege of being the most presentable part. In fact, the front, which was towards the Rue de Soissons, one of the principal streets of the town, opened upon it by an awkwardly constructed gate, which was ill-naturedly kept closed eighteen hours out of the twenty-four, while the back was gay and smiling; that is to say, on the back was a garden, above the wall of which could be seen the tops of cherry, pear, and plum trees, while on each side of a small gate by which the garden was entered from the square was a centenary acacia-tree, which in the spring appeared to stretch out their branches above the wall to scatter their perfumed flowers over the surrounding grounds.

The abode was the residence of the chaplain of the chateau, who, notwithstanding the absence of the master, performed mass every Sunday in the seignorial church. He had a small pension, and besides this had the charge of two purses, — the one to send a scholar yearly to the college of Plessis, the other for one to the seminary at Soissons. It is needless to say that it was the Orleans family who supplied these purses, — founded, that of the seminary by the son of the Regent, that for the college by the father of the prince, — and that these two purses were the objects of ambition to all parents, at the same time that they were a cause of absolute despair to the pupils, being the source of extraordinary compositions, which compositions were to be presented for approval of the chaplain every Thursday.

Well, one Thursday in the month of July, 1789, a somewhat disagreeable day, being darkened by a storm, beneath which the two magnificent acacias we have spoken of, having already lost the virginal whiteness of their spring attire, shed a few leaves yellowed by the first heats of summer, after a silence of some duration, broken only by the rustling of those leaves as they whirled against each other upon the beaten ground of the square, or by the shrill cry of the martin pursuing flies as it skimmed along the ground, eleven o’clock resounded from the pointed and slated belfry of the town hall.

Instantly a hurrah, loud as could have been uttered by a whole regiment of fusileers, accompanied by a rushing sound like that of the avalanche when bounding from crag to crag, was heard; the door between the two acaciatrees was opened, or rather burst open, and gave egress to a torrent of boys, who spread themselves over the square, when instantly some five or six joyous and noisy groups were formed, — one around a circle formed to keep pegtops prisoners, another about a game of hop-scotch traced with chalk upon the ground, another before several holes scientifically hollowed out, where those who were fortunate enough to have sous might lose them at pitch and toss.

At the same time that these gambling and playful scholars — who were apostrophized by the few neighbors whose windows opened on this square as wicked do-no-goods, and who, in general, wore trousers the knees of which were torn, as were also the elbows of their jackets — assembled to play upon the square, those who were called good and reasonable boys, and who, in the opinion of the gossips, must be the pride and joy of their respective parents, were seen to detach themselves from the general mass, and by various paths, though with slow steps, indicative of their regret, to walk, basket in hand, towards their paternal roofs, where awaited them the slice of bread and butter, or of bread and preserved fruit, destined to be their compensation for the games they had thus abjured. The latter were, in general, dressed in jackets in tolerably good condition, and in breeches which were almost irreproachable; and this, together with their boasted propriety of demeanor, rendered them objects of derision and even of hatred to their worse-dressed and, above all, worse-disciplined companions.

Besides the two classes we have pointed out under the denomination of gambling and well-conducted scholars, there was still a third, which we shall designate by the name of idle scholars, who scarcely ever left school with the others, whether to play in the square or to return to their paternal homes; seeing that this unfortunate class were almost constantly, what in school language is termed “kept,” which means to say, that while their companions, after having said their lessons and written their themes, were playing at top or eating their bread and jam, they remained nailed to their school benches or before their desks, that they might learn their lessons or write their themes during the hours of recreation, which they had not been able to accomplish satisfactorily during the class, when, indeed, the gravity of their faults did not demand a punishment more severe than that of mere detention, such as the rod, the cane, or the cat-o’-nine-tails.

And had any one followed the path which led into the schoolroom, and which the pupils had just used, in the inverse sense, to get out of it, he would, — after going through a narrow alley, which prudently ran outside of the fruit garden and opened into a large yard which served as a private playground, — he would, as we have said, have heard, on entering this courtyard, a loud harsh voice resounding from the upper part of a staircase, while a scholar, whom our impartiality as historians compels us to acknowledge as belonging to the third class we have mentioned, that is to say, to that of the idle boys, was precipitately descending the said staircase, making just such a movement with his shoulders as asses are wont to do when endeavoring to rid themselves of a cruel rider, or as scholars when they have received a sharp blow from the cat-o’-nine-tails, to alleviate the pain they are enduring.

"Ah! miscreant; ah! you little excommunicated villain," cried the voice, "ah! you young serpent, away with you, off with you; *vade, vade*! Remember that for three whole years have I been patient with you; but there are rascals who would tire the patience of even God himself. But now it is all over. I have done with you. Take your squirrels, take your frogs, take your lizards, take your silk-worms, take your cock-chafers, and go to your aunt, go to your uncle if you have one, or to the devil if you will, so that I never more set eyes upon you; *vade, vade!"*

"Oh, my good Monsieur Fortier, do pray forgive me," replied the other voice, still upon the staircase and in a supplicating tone; "is it worth your while to put yourself into such a towering passion for a poor little barbarism and a few solecisms, as you call them?"

"Three barbarisms and seven solecisms in a theme of only twenty-five lines!" replied the voice, in a rougher and still more angry tone.

"It has been so to-day, sir, I acknowledge; Thursday is always my unlucky day; but if by chance to-morrow my theme should be well written, would you not forgive me my misfortunes of to-day? Tell me, now, would you not, my good Abbé?"

"On every composition day for the last three years you have repeated that same thing to me, you idle fellow, and the examination is fixed for the first of November, and I, on the entreaty of your aunt Angelique, have had the weakness to put your name down on the list of candidates for the Soissons purse; I shall have the shame of seeing my pupil rejected, and of hearing it everywhere declared that Pitou is an ass, — *Angelus Petovius asinus est.*"

Let us hasten to say — that the kind-hearted reader may from the first moment feel for him all the interest he deserves — that Ange Pitou, whose name the Abbé Fortier had so picturesquely Latinized, is the hero of this story.

"Oh, my good Monsieur Fortier! oh, my dear master!" replied the scholar, in despair.

"I, your master!" exclaimed the abbé, deeply humiliated by the appellation. "God be thanked, I am no more your master than you are my pupil. I disown you, — I do not know you. I would that I had never seen you. I forbid you to mention my name, or even to bow to me. *Retro* , miserable boy, *retro!"*

"Oh, Monsieur l'Abbé," insisted the unhappy Pitou, who appeared to have some weighty motive for not falling out with his master, "do not, I entreat you, withdraw your interest in me on account of a poor halting theme.”

“Ah!” exclaimed the abbé, quite beside himself on hearing this last supplication, and running down the first four steps of the staircase, while Ange Pitou jumped down the four bottom ones and made his appearance in the courtyard, — ”ah! you are chopping logic when you cannot even write a theme; you are calculating the extent of my patience, when you know not how to distinguish the nominative from the accusative.”

“You have always been so kind to me, Monsieur l’Abbé,” replied the committer of barbarisms, “and you will only have to say a word in my favor to my lord the bishop.”

“Would you have me belie my conscience, wretched boy?”

“If it be to do a good action, Monsieur l’Abbé, the God of mercy will forgive you for it.”

“Never! never!”

“And besides, who knows, the examiners perhaps will not be more severe towards me than they were towards my foster-brother, Sebastian Gilbert, when last year he was a candidate for the Paris purse; and he was a famous fellow for barbarisms, if ever there was one, although he was only thirteen years old, and I was seventeen.”

“Ah! indeed; and this is another precious stupidity which you have uttered,” cried the abbé, coming down the remaining steps, and in his turn appearing at the door with his cat-o’-nine-tails in his hand, while Pitou took care to keep at the prudent distance from his professor which he had all along maintained. “Yes, I say stupidity,” continued the abbé, crossing his arms and looking indignantly at his scholar; “and this is the reward of my lessons in logic. Triple animal that you are! it is thus you remember the old axiom, — *Noli minora, loqui majora volens.* Why, it was precisely because Gilbert was so much younger, that they were more indulgent towards a child — a child of fourteen years old — than they would have been to a great simpleton of nearly eighteen.”

“Yes, and because he is the son of Monsieur Honoré Gilbert, who has an income of eighteen thousand livres from good landed property, and this on the plain of Pillaleux,” replied the logician, in a piteous tone.

The Abbé Fortier looked at Pitou, pouting his lips and knitting his brows.

“This is somewhat less stupid,” grumbled he, after a moment’s silence and scrutiny. “And yet it is but specious, and without any basis: *Species,* *non autem corpus.*”

“Oh, if I were the son of a man possessing an income of eighteen thousand livres!” repeated Ange Pitou, who thought he perceived that his answer had made some impression on the professor.

“Yes, but you are not so, and to make up for it, you are as ignorant as the clown of whom Juvenal speaks, — a profane citation,” the abbe crossed himself, “but no less *just, — Arcadius juvenis.* I would wager that you do not even know what *Arcadius* means?”

“Why, Arcadian, to be sure,” replied Ange Pitou, drawing himself up with the majesty of pride.

“And what besides?”

“Besides what?”

“Arcadia was the country of donkeys, and with the ancients, as with us, *asinus* was synonymous with *stultus.*”

“I did not wish to understand your question in that sense,” rejoined Pitou, “seeing that it was far from my imagination that the austere mind of my worthy preceptor could have descended to satire.”

The Abbé Fortier looked at him a second time, and with as profound attention as the first.

“Upon my word!” cried he, somewhat mollified by the incense which his disciple had offered him; “there are really moments when one would swear that the fellow is less stupid than he appears to be.”

“Come, Monsieur l’Abbé,” said Pitou, who, if he had not heard the words the abbe had uttered, had caught the expression of a return to a more merciful consideration which had passed over his countenance, “forgive me this time, and you will see what a beautiful theme I will write by to-morrow.”

“Well, then, I will consent,” said the abbé, placing, in sign of truce, his cat-o’-nine-tails in his belt and approaching Pitou, who observing this pacific demonstration, made no further attempt to move.

“Oh, thanks, thanks!” cried the pupil.

“Wait a moment, and be not so hasty with your thanks. Yes, I forgive you, but on one condition.”

Pitou hung down his head, and as he was now at the discretion of the abbé, he waited with resignation.

“It is that you shall correctly reply to a question I shall put to you.”

“In Latin?” inquired Pitou with much anxiety.

“Latinè,” replied the professor.

Pitou drew a deep sigh.

There was a momentary silence, during which the joyous cries of the schoolboys who were playing on the square reached the ears of Ange Pitou. He sighed a second time, more deeply than the first.

“Quid virtus, quid religion?” asked the abbé.

These words, pronounced with all the pomposity of a pedagogue, rang in the ears of poor Ange Pitou like the trumpet of the angel on the day of judgment; a cloud passed before his eyes, and such an effect was produced upon his intellect by it, that he thought for a moment he was on the point of becoming mad.

However, as this violent cerebral labor did not appear to produce any result, the required answer was indefinitely postponed. A prolonged noise was then heard, as the professor slowly inhaled a pinch of snuff.

Pitou clearly saw that it was necessary to say something.

“Nescio,” he replied, hoping that his ignorance would be pardoned by his avowing that ignorance in Latin.

“You do not know what is virtue!” exclaimed the abbé, choking with rage; “you do not know what is religion!”

“I know very well what it is in French,” replied Ange, “but I do not know it in Latin.”

“Well, then, get thee to Arcadia, *juvenis;* all is now ended between us, pitiful wretch!”

Pitou was so overwhelmed that he did not move a step, although the Abbé Fortier had drawn his cat-o’-nine-tails from his belt with as much dignity as the commander of an army would, at the commencement of a battle, have drawn his sword from the scabbard.

“But what is to become of me?” cried the poor youth, letting his arms fall listlessly by his side. “What will become of me if I lose the hope of being admitted into the seminary?”

“Become whatever you can. It is, by heaven! the same to me.”

The good abbé was so angry that he almost swore.

“But you do not know, then, that my aunt believes I am already an abbé?”

“Well, then, she will know that you are not fit to be made even a sacristan!”

“But, Monsieur Fortier — ”

“I tell you to depart — *limine linguæ*.”

"Well, then," cried Pitou, as a man who makes up his mind to a painful resolution, but who in fact does make it, "will you allow me to take my desk?" said he to the abbé, hoping that during the time he would be performing this operation a respite would be given him, and the abbé's heart would become impressed with more merciful feelings.

"Most assuredly," said the latter; "your desk, with all that it contains."

Pitou sorrowfully reascended the staircase, for the schoolroom was on the first floor. On returning to the room — in which, assembled around a large table, and pretending to be hard at work, were seated some fourteen boys — and carefully raising the flap of his desk to ascertain whether all the animals and insects which belonged to him were safely stowed in it, and lifting it so gently that it proved the great care he took of his favorites, he walked with slow and measured steps along the corridor.

At the top of the stairs was the Abbé Fortier, with outstretched arm, pointing to the staircase with the end of his cat-o'-nine-tails.

It was necessary to run the gauntlet. Ange Pitou made himself as humble and as small as he possibly could, but this did not prevent him from receiving, as he passed by, a last thwack from the instrument to which Abbé Fortier owed his best pupils, and the employment of which, although more frequent and more prolonged on the back of Ange Pitou, had produced the sorrowful results just witnessed.

While Ange Pitou, wiping away a last tear, was bending his steps, his desk upon his head, towards Pleux, the quarter of the town in which his aunt resided, let us say a few words as to his physical appearance and his antecedents.

CHAPTER II.

In which it is proved that an Aunt is not always a Mother

LOUIS ANGE PITOU, as he himself said in his dialogue with the Abbé Fortier, was, at the period when this history commences, seventeen and a half years old. He was a tall, slender youth, with yellow hair, red cheeks, and blue eyes. The bloom of youth, fresh and innocent, was expanded over his wide mouth, the thick lips of which discovered, when extended by a hearty laugh, two perfectly complete rows of formidable teeth, — particularly formidable to those of whose dinner he was about to partake. At the end of his long bony arms were solidly attached hands as large as beetles, legs rather inclined to be bowed, knees as big as a child's head, which regularly made their way through his tight black breeches, and immense feet, which, notwithstanding, were at their ease in calfskin shoes reddened by constant use; such, with a sort of cassock of brown serge, a garment something between a frock-coat and a blouse, is an exact and impartial description of the ex-disciple of the Abbé Fortier.

We must now sketch his moral character.

Ange Pitou had been left an orphan when only twelve years old, the time at which he had the misfortune to lose his mother, of whom he was the only child. That is to say, that since the death of his father, which event had occurred before he had attained the years of recollection, Ange Pitou, adored by his poor mother, had been allowed to do whatever he thought fit, which had greatly developed his physical education, but had altogether retarded the advancement of his moral faculties. Born in a charming village called Haramont, situated at the distance of a league from the town, and in the centre of a wood, his first walks had been to explore the depths of his native forest, and the first application of his intelligence was that of making war upon the animals by which it was inhabited. The result of this application, thus directed towards one sole object, was, that at ten years old Pitou was a very distinguished poacher, and a birdcatcher of the first order; and that almost without any labor, and above all without receiving lessons from any one, but by the sole power of that instinct given by nature to man when born in the midst of woods, and which would seem to be a portion of that same instinct with which she has endowed the animal kingdom. And therefore every run of hare or rabbit within the circle of three leagues was known to him, and not a marshy pool, where birds were wont to drink, had escaped his investigation. In every direction were to be seen the marks made by his pruning-knife on trees that were adapted to catching birds by imitating their calls. From these different exercises it resulted that in some of them Pitou had attained the most extraordinary skill.

Thanks to his long arms and his prominent knees, which enabled him to climb the largest standard trees, he would ascend to their very summits, to take the highest nests, with an agility and a certainty which attracted the admiration of his companions, and which, in a latitude nearer to the Equator, would have excited the esteem even of monkeys. In that sport, so attractive even to grown people, in which the bird-catcher inveigles the birds to light upon a tree set with limed twigs, by imi- tating the cry of the jay or the owlet, — birds which, among the plumed tribe, enjoy the bitter hatred of the whole species, and to such an extent that every sparrow, every finch or tomtit, hastens at the call in the hope of plucking out a single feather from the common enemy, and, for the most, leave all their own, — Pitou's companions either made use of a natural owlet or a natural jay, or with some particular plant formed a pipe, by aid of which they managed to imitate indifferently the cry of either the one or the other of these birds. But Pitou disdained all such preparations, despised such petty subterfuges. It was upon his own resources that he relied, it was with his own natural means that he drew them into the snare. It was, in short, his own lips that modulated the shrieking and discordant cries, which brought around him not only other birds, but birds of the same species, who allowed themselves to be enticed, we will not say by this note, but by this cry, so admirably did he imitate it. As to the sport in the marshy pools, it was to Pitou the easiest thing in the world, and he would certainly have despised it as a pursuit of art had it been less productive as an object of profit. But notwithstanding the contempt with which he regarded this sport, there was not one of the most expert in the art who could have vied with Pitou in covering with fern a pool that was too extensive to be completely "laid," — that is the technical term; none of them knew so well as he how to give the proper inclination to his limed twigs, so that the most cunning birds could not drink either over or under them; and finally, none of them had that steadiness of hand and that clearsightedness which must insure the due mixture, though in scientifically unequal quantities, of the rosin, oil, and glue, in order that the glue should not become either too fluid or too brittle.

Now, as the estimation of the qualities of a man changes according to the theatre on which these qualities are produced, and according to the spectators before whom they are exhibited, Pitou, in his own native village, Haramont, amidst his country neighbors, — that is to say, men accustomed to demand of nature at least half their resources, and, like all peasants, possessing an instinctive hatred of civilization, — Pitou enjoyed such distinguished consideration that his poor mother could not for a moment entertain the idea that he was pursuing a wrong path, and that the most perfect education that can be given, and at great expense, to a man, was not precisely that which her son, a privileged person in this respect, had given, gratis, to himself.

But when the good woman fell sick, when she felt that death was approaching, when she understood that she was about to leave her child alone and isolated in the world, she began to entertain doubts, and looked around her for some one who would be the stay and the support of the future orphan. She then remembered that ten years before, a young man had knocked at her door in the middle of the night, bringing with him a newly born child, to take charge of which he had not only given her a tolerably good round sum, but had deposited a still larger sum for the benefit of the child with a notary at Villers-Cotterets. All that she had then known of this mysterious young man was that his name was Gilbert, but about three years previous to her falling ill he had reappeared. He was then a man about twenty-seven years of age, somewhat stiff in his demeanor, dogmatical in his conversation, and cold in his manner; but this first layer of ice melted at once when his child was brought to him, on finding that he was hale, hearty, and smiling, and brought up in the way in which he had directed, — that is to say, as a child of nature. He then pressed the hand of the good woman and merely said to her, —

“In the hour of need calculate upon me.”

Then he had taken the child, had inquired the way to Ermenonville, and with his son performed the pilgrimage to the tomb of Rousseau, after which he returned to Villers-Cotterets. Then, induced, no doubt, by the wholesome air he breathed there, by the favorable manner in which the notary had spoken of the school under the charge of the Abbé Fortier, he had left little

Gilbert with the worthy man, whose philosophic appearance had struck him at first sight; for at that period philosophy held such great sway that it had insinuated itself even among churchmen.

After this he had set out again for Paris, leaving his address with the Abbé Fortier.

Pitou's mother was aware of all these circumstances. When at the point of death, those words, 'In the hour of need calculate upon me,' returned to her recollection. This was at once a ray of light to her; doubtless Providence had regulated all this in such a manner that poor Pitou might find even more than he was about to lose. She sent for the curate of the parish; as she had never learned to write, the curate wrote, and the same day the letter was taken to the Abbé Fortier, who immediately added Gilbert's address, and took it to the post-office.

It was high time, for the poor woman died two days afterwards. Pitou was too young to feel the full extent of the loss he had suffered. He wept for his mother, not from comprehending the eternal separation of the grave, but because he saw his mother cold, pale, disfigured. Then the poor lad felt instinctively that the guardian angel of their hearth had fled; that the house, deprived of his mother, had become deserted and uninhabitable. Not only could he not comprehend what was to be his future fate, but even how he was to exist the following day. Therefore, after following his mother's remains to the churchyard, when the earth, thrown into the grave, resounded upon her coffin, when the modest mound that covered it had been rounded off, he sat down upon it, and replied to every observation that was made to him as to his leaving it, by shaking his head and saying that he had never left his mother Madeleine, and that he would remain where she remained.

He stayed during the whole of that day and night, seated upon his mother's grave.

It was there that the worthy Doctor Gilbert, — have we not already informed the reader that the future protector of Pitou was a physician? — it was there that the worthy doctor found him, when, feeling the full extent of the duty imposed upon him by the promise he had made, he had hastened to fulfil it, and this within forty-eight hours after the letter had been despatched.

Ange was very young when he had first seen the doctor, but it is well known that the impressions received in youth are so strong that they leave eternal reminiscences. Then the passage of the mysterious young man had left its trace in the house. He had there left the young child of whom we have spoken, and with him comparative ease and comfort; every time that Ange had heard his mother pronounce the name of Gilbert, it had been with a feeling that approached to adoration; then again, when he had reappeared at the house a grown man, and with the title of doctor, when he had added to the benefits he had showered upon it the promise of future protection, Pitou had comprehended, from the fervent gratitude of his mother, that he himself ought also to be grateful, and the poor youth, without precisely understanding what he was saying, had stammered out the words of eternal remembrance and profound gratitude which had before been uttered by his mother.

Therefore, as soon as he saw the doctor appear at the grated gate of the cemetery, and saw him advancing towards him amid the mossy graves and broken crosses, he recognized him, rose up and went to meet him, for he understood that to the person who had thus come on being called for by his mother he could not say no, as he had done to others; he therefore made no further resistance than that of turning back to give a last look at the grave, when Gilbert took him by the hand and gently drew him away from the gloomy enclosure. An elegant cabriolet was standing at the gate; he made the poor child get into it, and for the moment leaving the house of Pitou’s mother under the guardianship of public faith and the interest which misfortune always inspires, he drove his young *protégé* to the town and alighted with him at the best inn, which at that time was called The Dauphin. He was scarcely installed there when he sent for a tailor, who, having been forewarned, brought with him a quantity of ready-made clothes. He with due precaution selected for Pitou garments which were too long for him by two or three inches, — a superfluity which, from the rate at which our hero was growing, promised not to be of long duration. After this he walked with him towards that quarter of the town which we have designated, and which was called Pleux.

The nearer Pitou approached this quarter, the slower did his steps become, for it was evident that he was about to be conducted to the house of his aunt Angélique; and notwithstanding that he had but seldom seen his godmother, — for it was Aunt Angélique who had bestowed on Pitou his poetical Christian name, — he had retained a very formidable remembrance of his respectable relative.

And in fact there was nothing about Aunt Angélique that could be in any way attractive to a child accustomed to all the tender care of maternal solicitude. Aunt Angélique was at that time an old maid between fifty-five and fifty-eight years of age, stultified by the most minute practices of religious bigotry, and in whom an ill-understood piety had inverted every charitable, merciful, and humane feeling, to cultivate in their stead an unnatural thirst for malicious gossip, which was increased day by day from her constant intercourse with the bigoted old gossips of the town. She did not precisely live on charity; but besides the sale of the thread she spun upon her wheel, and the letting out of chairs in the church, which office had been granted to her by the chapter, she from time to time received from pious souls, who allowed themselves to be deceived by her pretensions to religion, small sums, which from their original copper she converted into silver, and then from silver into golden louis, which disappeared not only without any person seeing them disappear, but without any one ever suspecting their existence, and which were buried, one by one, in the cushion of the arm-chair upon which she sat at work; and when once in this hiding-place, they rejoined by degrees a certain number of their fellow-coins, which had been gathered one by one, and like them destined thenceforth to be sequestered from circulation until the unknown day of the death of the old maid should place them in the hands of her heir.

It was, then, towards the abode of this venerable relation that Doctor Gilbert was advancing, leading the great Pitou by the hand.

We say the great Pitou, because from three months after his birth Pitou had been too tall for his age.

Mademoiselle Rose Angélique Pitou, at the moment when her door opened to give ingress to her nephew and the doctor, was in a perfect transport of joyous humor. While they were singing mass for the dead over the dead body of her sister-in-law in the church at Haramont, there was a wedding and several baptisms in the church of Villers-Cotterets, so that her chair-letting had in a single day amounted to six livres. Mademoiselle Angélique had therefore converted her sous into a silver crown, which, in its turn, added to three others which had been put by at different periods, had given her a golden louis. This louis had at this precise moment been sent to rejoin the others in the chair-cushion, and these days of reunion were naturally days of high festivity to Mademoiselle Angélique.

It was at the moment, and after having opened her door, which had been closed during the important operation, and Aunt Angélique had taken a last walk round her arm-chair to assure herself that no external demonstration could reveal the existence of the treasure concealed within, that the doctor and Pitou entered.

The scene might have been particularly affecting, but in the eyes of a man who was so perspicacious an observer as Doctor Gilbert, it was merely grotesque. On perceiving her nephew, the old bigot uttered a few words about her poor dear sister, whom she had loved so much; and then she appeared to wipe away a tear. On his side the doctor, who wished to examine the deepest recesses of the old maid's heart before coming to any determination with respect to her, took upon himself to utter a sort of sermon on the duties of aunts toward their nephews. But by degrees, as the sermon was progressing and the unctuous words fell from the doctor's lips, the arid eyes of the old maid drank up the imperceptible tear which had moistened them; all her features resumed the dryness of parchment, with which they appeared to be covered; she raised her left hand to the height of her pointed chin, and with the right hand she began to calculate on her skinny fingers the quantity of sous which her letting of chairs produced to her per annum. So that chance having so directed it that her calculation had terminated at the same time with the doctor's sermon, she could reply at the very moment, that whatever might have been the love she entertained for her poor sister, and the degree of interest she might feel for her dear nephew, the mediocrity of her receipts did not permit her, notwithstanding her double title of aunt and godmother, to incur any increased expense.

The doctor, however, was prepared for this refusal. It did not, therefore, in any way surprise him. He was a great advocate for new ideas; and as the first volume of Lavater had just then appeared, he had already applied the physiognomic doctrines of the Zurich philosopher to the yellow and skinny features of Mademoiselle Angélique.

The result of this examination was, that the doctor felt assured, from the small sharp eyes of the old maid, her long and pinched-up nose and thin lips, that she united in her single person the three sins of avarice, selfishness, and hypocrisy.

Her answer, as we have said, did not cause any species of astonishment. However, he wished to convince himself, in his quality of observer of human nature, how far the devotee would carry the development of these three defects.

"But, Mademoiselle," said he, "Ange Pitou is a poor orphan child, the son of your own brother, and in the name of humanity you cannot abandon your brother's son to be dependent on public charity."

"Well, now, listen to me, Monsieur Gilbert," said the old maid; "it would be an increase of expense of at least six sous a day, and that at the lowest calculation; for that great fellow would eat at least a pound of bread a day."

Pitou made a wry face: he was in the habit of eating a pound and a half at his breakfast alone.

"And without calculating the soap for his washing," added Mademoiselle Angélique; "and I recollect that he is a sad one for dirtying clothes."

In fact, Pitou did sadly dirty his clothes, and that is very conceivable, when we remember the life he had led, climbing trees and lying down in marshes; but we must render him this justice, that he tore his clothes even more than he soiled them.

"Oh, fie, Mademoiselle," cried the doctor, "fie, Mademoiselle Angélique! Can you, who so well practise Christian charity, enter into such minute calculations with regard to your own nephew and godson?"

"And without calculating the cost of his clothes," cried the old devotee most energetically, who suddenly remembered having seen her sister Madeleine busily employed in sewing patches on her nephew's jacket and knee-caps on his small-clothes.

"Then," said the doctor, "am I to understand that you refuse to take charge of your nephew? The orphan who has been repulsed from his aunt's threshold will be compelled to beg for alms at the threshold of strangers."

Mademoiselle Angélique, notwithstanding her avarice, was alive to the odium which would naturally attach to her if from her refusal to receive her nephew he should be compelled to have recourse to such an extremity.

"No," said she, "I will take charge of him."

"Ah!" exclaimed the doctor, happy to find a single good feeling in a heart which he had thought completely withered.

"Yes," continued the devotee, "I will recommend him to the Augustin Friars at Bourg Fontaine, and he shall enter their monastery as a lay-servant."

We have already said that the doctor was a philosopher. We know what was the meaning of the word philosopher in those days.

He therefore instantly resolved to snatch a neophyte from the Augustin brotherhood, and that with as much zealous fervor as the Augustins, on their side, could have displayed in carrying off an adept from the philosopher.

“Well, then,” he rejoined, plunging his hand into his deep pocket, “since you are in such a position of pecuniary difficulty, my dear Mademoiselle Angélique, as to be compelled, from your deficiency in personal resources, to recommend your nephew to the charity of others, I will seek elsewhere for some one who can more efficaciously than yourself apply to the maintenance of your nephew the sum which I had designed for him. I am obliged to return to America. I will, before I set out, apprentice your nephew Pitou to some joiner, or a smith. He shall, however, himself choose the trade for which he feels a vocation. During my absence he will grow bigger, and on my return he will already have become acquainted with his business, and then — why, I shall see what can be made of him. Come, my child, kiss your aunt,” continued the doctor, “and let us be off at once.”

The doctor had not concluded the sentence when Pitou rushed towards the antiquated spinster; his long arms were extended, and he was in fact most eager to embrace his aunt, on the condition that this kiss was to be the signal, between him and her, of an eternal separation.

But at the words “the sum,” the gesture with which the doctor had accompanied them, the thrusting his hand into his pocket, the silvery sound which that hand had incontinently given to a heap of crown-pieces, the amount of which might have been estimated by the tension of the pocket, the old maid had felt the fire of cupidity mount even to her heart.

“Oh,” cried she, “my dear Monsieur Gilbert, you must be well aware of one thing!”

“And what is that?” asked the doctor.

“Why, good heaven! that no one in the world can love this poor child half so much as I do.”

And entwining her scraggy arms round Pitou’s neck, she imprinted a sour kiss on each of his cheeks, which made him shudder from the tips of his toes to the roots of his hair.

“Oh, certainly,” replied the doctor; “I know that well, and I so little doubted your affection for him that I brought him at once to you as his natural support. But that which you have just said to me, dear mademoiselle, has convinced me at the same time of your good-will and of your inability, and I see clearly that you are too poor to aid those who are poorer than yourself.”

“Why, my good Monsieur Gilbert,” rejoined the old devotee, “there is a merciful God in heaven, and from heaven does he not feed all his creatures?”

“That is true,” replied Gilbert; “but although he gives food to the ravens, he does not put out orphans as apprentices. Now, this is what must be done for Ange Pitou, and this, with your small means, would doubtless cost you too much.”

“But yet, if you were to give that sum, good Doctor.”

“What sum?”

“The sum of which you spoke, the sum which is there in your pocket,” added the devotee, stretching her crooked finger toward the doctor’s coat.

“I will assuredly give it, dear Mademoiselle Angélique,” said the doctor; “but I forewarn you it will be on one condition.”

“And what is that?”

“That the boy shall have a profession.”

“He shall have one, and that I promise you on the faith of Angélique Pitou, most worthy Doctor,” cried the devotee, her eyes riveted on the pocket which was swaying to and fro.

“You promise it?”

“I promise you it shall be so.”

“Seriously, is it not?”

“On the truth of the living God, my dear Monsieur Gilbert, I swear to do it.”

And Mademoiselle Angélique horizontally extended her emaciated hand.

“Well, then, be it so,” said the doctor, drawing from his pocket a well-rounded bag; “I am ready to give the money, as you see. On your side, are you ready to make yourself responsible to me for the child?”

“Upon the true cross, Monsieur Gilbert.”

“Do not let us swear so much, dear Mademoiselle, but let us sign a little more.”

“I will sign, Monsieur Gilbert, I will sign.”

“Before a notary?”

“Before a notary.”

“Well, then, let us go at once to Papa Niguet.”

Papa Niguet, to whom, thanks to his long acquaintance with him, the doctor applied this friendly title, was, as those know who are familiar with our work entitled “Joseph Balsamo,” the notary of greatest reputation in the town.

Mademoiselle Angélique, of whom Master Niguet was also the notary, had no objection to offer to the choice made by the doctor. She followed him therefore to the notary’s office. There the scrivener registered the promise made by Mademoiselle Rose Angélique Pitou, to take charge of and to place in the exercise of an honorable profession Louis Ange Pitou, her nephew, and so doing should annually receive the sum of two hundred livres. The contract was made for five years. The doctor deposited eight hundred livres in the hands of the notary; the other two hundred were to be paid to Mademoiselle Angélique in advance.

The following day the doctor left Villers-Cotterêts after having settled some accounts with one of his farmers, with regard to whom we shall speak hereafter; and Mademoiselle Pitou, pouncing like a vulture upon the aforesaid two hundred livres payable in advance, deposited eight golden louis in the cushion of her arm-chair.

As to the eight livres which remained, they waited, in a small delf saucer which had, during the last thirty or forty years, been the receptacle of clouds of coins of every description, until the harvest of the following two or three Sunday had made up the sum of twenty-four livres, on attaining which, as we have already stated, the abovenamed sum underwent the golden metamorphosis, and passed from the saucer into the arm-chair.

CHAPTER III.

Ange Pitou at his Aunt’s

WE have observed the very slight degree of inclination which Ange Pitou felt towards a long-continued sojourn with his Aunt Angélique; the poor child, endowed with instinct equal to, and perhaps superior to, that of the animals against whom he continually made war, had divined at once, we will not say all the disappointments — we have seen that he did not for a single moment delude himself upon the subject — but all the vexations, tribulations, and annoyances to which he would be exposed.

In the first place — but we must admit that this was by no means the reason which most influenced Pitou to dislike his aunt — Doctor Gilbert having left VillersCotterêts, there never was a word said about placing the child as an apprentice. The good notary had indeed given her a hint or two with regard to her formal obligation; but Mademoiselle Angélique had replied that her nephew was very young, and above all, that his health was too delicate to be subjected to labor which would probably be beyond his strength. The notary, on hearing this observation, had in good faith admired the kindness of heart of Mademoiselle Pitou, and had deferred taking any steps as to the apprenticeship until the following year. There was no time lost, the child being then only in his twelfth year.

Once installed at his aunt’s, and while the latter was ruminating as to the mode she should adopt whereby to make the most of her dear nephew, Pitou, who once more found himself in his forest, or very near to it, had already made his topographical observations in order to lead the same life at Villers-Cotterêts as at Haramont.

In fact, he had made a circuit of the neighborhood, in which he had convinced himself that the best pools were those on the road to Dampleux, that to Compiègne and that to Vivières, and that the best district for game was that of the Wolf’s Heath.

Pitou, having made this survey, took all the necessary measures for pursuing his juvenile sport.

The thing most easy to be procured, as it did not require any outlay of capital, was bird-lime; the bark of the holly, brayed in a mortar and steeped in water, gave the lime; and as to the twigs to be limed, they were to be found by thousands on every birch-tree in the neighborhood. Pitou therefore manufactured, without saying a word to any one on the subject, a thousand of limed twigs and a pot of glue of the first quality; and one fine morning, after having the previous evening taken on his aunt's account at the baker's a four-pound loaf, he set off at daybreak, remained out the whole day, and returned home when the evening had closed in.

Pitou had not formed such a resolution without duly calculating the effect it would produce. He had foreseen a tempest. Without possessing the wisdom of Socrates, he knew the temper of his Aunt Angélique as well as the illustrious tutor of Alcibiades knew that of his wife Xantippe.

Pitou had not deceived himself in his foresight, but he thought he would be able to brave the storm by presenting to the old devotee the produce of his day's sport; only he had not been able to foretell from what spot the thunder would be hurled at him.

The thunderbolt struck him immediately on entering the house.

Mademoiselle Angélique had ensconced herself behind the door, that she might not miss her nephew as he entered, so that at the very moment he ventured to put his foot into the room, he received a cuff upon the occiput, and in which, without further information, he at once recognized the withered hand of the old devotee.

Fortunately, Pitou's head was a tolerably hard one, and although the blow had scarcely staggered him, he pretended, in order to mollify his aunt, whose anger had increased, from having hurt her fingers in striking with such violence, to fall, stumbling as he went, at the opposite end of the room; there, seated on the floor, and seeing that his aunt was returning to the assault, her distaff in her hand, he hastened to draw from his pocket the talisman on which he had relied to allay the storm, and obtain pardon for his flight. And this was two dozen of birds, among which were a dozen redbreasts and half-a-dozen thrushes.

Mademoiselle Angélique, perfectly astounded, opened her eyes widely, continuing to scold for form's sake; but although still scolding, she took possession of her nephew's sport, retreating three paces towards the lamp.

"What is all this?" she asked.

"You must see clearly enough, my dear little Aunt Angélique," replied Pitou, "that they are birds."

"Good to eat?" eagerly inquired the old maid, who, in her quality of devotee, was naturally a great eater.

"Good to eat!" reiterated Pitou; "well, that is singular. Redbreasts and thrushes good to eat! I believe they are, indeed!"

"And where did you steal these birds, you little wretch?"

"I did not steal them; I caught them."

"Caught them! how?"

"By lime-twigging them."

"Lime-twigging, — what do you mean by that?"

Pitou looked at his aunt with an air of astonishment; he could not comprehend that the education of any person in existence could have been so neglected as not to know the meaning of lime-twigging.

"Lime-twigging?" said he; "why, zounds! 'tis lime-twigging."

"Yes; but, saucy fellow, I do not understand what you mean by lime-twigging."

As Pitou was full of compassion for the uninitiated, "Well, you see, Aunt," said he, "in the forest here there are at least thirty small pools; you place the lime twigs around them, and when the birds go to drink there, as they do not — poor silly things! — know anything about them, they run their heads into them and are caught."

"By what?"

"By the birdlime."

"Ah! ah!" exclaimed Aunt Angélique, "I understand; but who gave you the money?"

"Money!" cried Pitou, astonished that any one could have believed that he had ever possessed a sou; "money, Aunt Angélique?"

"Yes."

"No one."

"But where did you buy the birdlime, then?"

"I made it myself."

"And the lime-twigs?"

"I made them also, to be sure."

"Therefore, these birds — "

"Well, Aunt?"

"Cost you nothing?"

“The trouble of stooping to pick them up.”

“And can you go often to these pools?”

“One might go every day.”

“Good!”

“Only, it would not do.”

“What would not do?”

“To go there every day.”

“And for what reason?”

“Why, because it would ruin it.”

“Ruin what?”

“The lime-twigging. You understand, Aunt Angélique, that the birds which are caught — ”

“Well?”

“Well, they can’t return to the pool.”

“That is true,” said the aunt.

This was the first time, since Pitou had lived with her, that Aunt Angélique had allowed her nephew was in the right, and this unaccustomed approbation perfectly delighted him.

“But,” said he, “the days that one does not go to the pools one goes somewhere else. The days we do not catch birds, we catch something else.”

“And what do you catch?”

“Why, we catch rabbits.”

“Rabbits?”

“Yes; we eat the rabbits and sell their skins. A rabbitskin is worth two sous.”

Aunt Angélique gazed at her nephew with astonished eyes; she had never considered him so great an economist. Pitou had suddenly revealed himself.

“But will it not be my business to sell the skins?”

“Undoubtedly,” replied Pitou; “as Mamma Madeleine used to do.”

It had never entered the mind of the boy that he could claim any part of the produce of his sport excepting that which he consumed.

“And when will you go out to catch rabbits?”

“Ah! that’s another matter; when I can get the wires,” replied Pitou.

“Well, then, make the wires.”

Pitou shook his head.

“Why, you made the birdlime and the twigs.”

“Oh, yes, I can make birdlime and I can set the twigs, but I cannot make brass wire; that is bought ready made at the grocer’s.”

“And how much does it cost?”

“Oh, for four sous,” replied Pitou, calculating upon his fingers, “I could make at least two dozen.”

“And with two dozen how many rabbits could you catch?”

“That is as it may happen, — four, five, six perhaps, — and they can be used over and over again if the gamekeeper does not find them.”

“See, now, here are four sous,” said Aunt Angélique; “go and buy some brass wire at Monsieur Dambrun’s, and go to-morrow and catch rabbits.”

“I will lay them to-morrow,” said Pitou, “but it will only be the next morning that I shall know whether I have caught any.”

“Well, be it so; but go and buy the wire.”

Brass wire was cheaper at Villers-Cotterets than in the country, seeing that the grocers at Haramont purchased their supplies in the town; Pitou, therefore, bought wire enough for twenty-four snares for three sous. He took the remaining sou back to his aunt.

This unexpected probity in her nephew almost touched the heart of the old maid. For a moment she had the idea, the intention, of bestowing upon her nephew the sou which he had not expended; unfortunately for Pitou, it was one that had been beaten out with a hammer, and which, in the dusk, might be passed for a twosous piece. Mademoiselle Angélique thought it would never do to dispossess herself of a coin by which she could make cent per cent, and she let it drop again into her pocket.

Pitou had remarked this hesitation, but had not analyzed it; he never could have imagined that his aunt would give him a sou.

He at once set to work to make his wires. The next day he asked his aunt for a bag.

“What for?” inquired the old maid.

“Because I want it,” replied Pitou. — Pitou was full of mystery.

Mademoiselle Angélique gave him the required bag, put into it the provision of bread and cheese which was to serve for breakfast and dinner to her nephew, who set out very early for Wolf’s Heath.

As to Aunt Angélique, she set to work to pick the twelve redbreasts which she had destined for her own breakfast and dinner. She carried two thrushes to the Abbé Fortier, and sold the remaining four to the host of the

Golden Ball, who paid her three sous apiece for them, promising her to take as many as she would bring him at the same price.

Aunt Angélique returned home transported with joy. The blessing of heaven had entered beneath her roof with Ange Pitou.

"Ah!" cried she, while eating her robin-redbreasts, which were as fat as ortolans and as delicate as beccaficos, "people are right in saying that a good deed never goes unrewarded."

In the evening Ange returned; his bag, which was magnificently rounded, he carried on his shoulders. On this occasion Aunt Angélique did not waylay him behind the door, but waited for him on the threshold, and instead of giving him a box on the ear, she received the lad with a grimace which very much resembled a smile.

"Here I am!" cried Pitou, on entering the room with all that firmness which denotes a conviction of having well employed one's time.

"You and your bag," said Aunt Angélique.

"I and my bag," said Pitou

"And what have you in your bag?" inquired Aunt Angélique, stretching forth her hand with curiosity.

"Beech-mast," said Pitou.

"Beech-mast!"

"Undoubtedly; you must understand, Aunt Angélique, that if old Father La Jeunesse, the gamekeeper at the Wolf's Heath, had seen me prowling over his grounds without my bag, he would have said to me, 'What do you come here after, you little vagabond?' And this without calculating that he might have suspected something; while having my bag, were he to ask me what I was doing there, I should say to him, 'why I am come to gather mast; is it forbidden to gather mast?' 'No.' 'Well, then, if it is not forbidden, you have nothing to say.' And indeed, should he say anything, Father La Jeunesse would be in the wrong."

"Then you have spent your whole day in gathering mast instead of laying your wires, you idle fellow!" exclaimed aunt Angélique angrily, who thought that the rabbits were escaping her through her nephew's excessive cunning.

"On the contrary, I laid my snares while he saw me at work gathering the mast."

"And did he say nothing to you?"

"Oh, yes, he said to me, 'You will present my compliments to your aunt, Pitou.' Hey! Is not Father La Jeunesse a kind, good man?"

"But the rabbits?" again repeated the old devotee, whom nothing could divert from her fixed idea.

"The rabbits? Why, the moon will rise at midnight, and at one o'clock I will go and see if there are any caught."

"Where?"

"In the woods."

"How! would you go into the woods at one o'clock in the morning?"

"To be sure."

"And without being afraid?"

"Afraid! of what?"

Angélique was as much astounded at Pitou's courage as she had been astonished at his calculations.

The fact is, that Pitou, as simple as a child of nature, knew nothing of those factitious dangers which terrify children born in cities.

Therefore at midnight he went his way, walking along the churchyard wall without once looking back. The innocent youth who had never offended, at least according to his ideas of independence, either God or man, feared not the dead more than he did the living.

There was only one person of whom he felt any sort of apprehension, and this was Father La Jeunesse; and therefore did he take the precaution to go somewhat out of his way to pass by his house. As the doors and shutters were all closed, and there was no light to be perceived, Pitou, in order to assure himself that the keeper was really at home and not upon the watch, began to imitate the barking of a dog, and so perfectly that Ronflot, the keeper's terrier, was deceived by it, and answered it by giving tongue with all his might, and by sniffing the air under the door.

From that moment Pitou was perfectly reassured; as Ronflot was at home, Father La Jeunesse must be there also. Ronflot and Father La Jeunesse were inseparable; and at the moment the one was seen, it was certain that the other would soon make his appearance.

Pitou, being perfectly satisfied of this fact, went on towards the Wolf's Heath. The snares had done their work; two rabbits had been caught and strangled.

Pitou put them into the capacious pocket of that coat, which, then too long for him, was destined within a year to become too short, and then returned to his aunt’s house.

The old maid had gone to bed, but her cupidity had kept her awake; like Perrette, she had been calculating what her rabbit-skins might produce, and this calculation had led her on so far, that she had not been able to close her eyes; and therefore was it with nervous tremulation that she asked the boy what success he had had.

“A couple,” said he. “Ah! the deuce! Aunt Angélique, it is not my fault that I have not brought more, but it appears that Father Jeunesse’s rabbits are of a cunning sort.”

The hopes of Aunt Angélique were fulfilled, and even more. She seized, trembling with joy, the two unlucky quadrupeds and examined their skins, which had remained intact, and locked them up in her meat-safe, which never had seen such provisions as those it had contained since Pitou had hit upon the idea of supplying it.

Then, in a very honeyed tone, she advised Pitou to go to bed, which the lad, who was much fatigued, did instantly, and that without even asking for his supper, which raised him greatly in the opinion of his aunt.

Two days after this Pitou renewed his attempts, and on this occasion was more fortunate than the first. He brought home three rabbits. Two of them took the road to the Golden Ball, and the third that of the presbytery. Aunt Angélique was very attentive to the Abbé Fortier, who on his side strongly recommended her to the pious souls of the parish.

Things went on in this manner during three or four months. Aunt Angélique was enchanted, and Pitou found his position somewhat supportable. In fact, with the exception of the tender cares of his mother, Pitou led nearly the same life at Villers-Cotterets which he had done at Haramont. But an unexpected circumstance, which, however, might have been foreseen, at once dashed to the ground the milk-pitcher of the aunt and put a stop to the excursions of the nephew.

A letter had been received from Doctor Gilbert, dated from New York. On placing his foot on the soil of the United States the philosophic traveller had not forgotten his protégé. He had written to Master Niguet, the notary, to inquire whether his instructions had been carried into effect, and to claim the execution of the agreement if they had not been, or to cancel it altogether if the old aunt would not abide by her engagements.

The case was a serious one; the responsibility of the public officer was at stake; he presented himself at the house of Aunt Pitou, and with the doctor’s letter in his hand called upon her to perform the promise she had made.

There was no backing out; all allegations as to illhealth were at once belied by the physical appearance of Pitou. Pitou was tall and thin. Every sapling of the forest was also thin and tall, but this did not prevent it from being in a perfectly healthy and thriving condition.

Mademoiselle Angélique asked for a delay of eight days, in order to make up her mind as to the trade or occupation in which she should place her nephew.

Pitou was quite as sorrowful as his aunt. The mode of life he led appeared to him a very excellent one, and he did not desire any other.

During these eight days there was no thought of going bird-catching or poaching; moreover, the winter had arrived, and in winter the birds find water everywhere; but some snow had fallen, and while that was on the ground Pitou did not dare go out to lay his snares. Snow retains the impression of footsteps, and Pitou possessed a pair of feet so huge that they gave Father La Jeunesse the greatest possible chance of ascertaining in four-andtwenty hours who was the skilful poacher who had depopulated his rabbit warren.

During these eight days the claws of the old maid again showed themselves. Pitou had once more found the aunt of former days, she who had caused him so much terror, and whom self-interest, the *primum mobile* of her whole life, had for a while rendered as smooth as velvet.

As the day for the important decision approached, the temper of the old maid became more and more crabbed, and to such a degree that, about the fifth day, Pitou sincerely desired that his aunt would immediately decide upon some trade, be it what it might, provided it should no longer be that of the scolded drudge which he had been filling in the old maid’s house.

Suddenly a sublime idea struck the mind of the old woman who had been so cruelly agitated. This idea restored her equanimity, which for six days had altogether abandoned her.

This idea consisted in entreating the Abbé Fortier to receive into his school, and this without any remuneration whatever, poor Pitou, and enable him to obtain the purse for entering the seminary, founded by his highness the Duke of Orleans. This was an apprenticeship which would cost nothing to Aunt Angélique; and Monsieur Fortier, without taking into calculation the thrushes, blackbirds, and rabbits with which the old devotee had so abundantly supplied him for the last month, was bound to do something, more than for any other, for the nephew of the chair-letter of his own church. Thus kept as under a glass frame, Ange would continue to be profitable to her at the present time, and promised to be much more so in the future.

Consequently Ange was received into the Abbé Fortier's school without any charge for his education. This abbé was a worthy man, and not in any way interested, giving his knowledge to the poor in mind, and his money to the poor in body. He was, however, intractable on one single point; solecisms rendered him altogether furious, barbarisms would send him almost out of his mind; on these occasions he considered neither friends nor foes, neither poor nor rich, nor paying pupils nor gratuitous scholars; he struck all with agrarian impartiality and with Lacedemonian stoicism, and as his arm was strong he struck severely.

This was well known to the parents, and it was for them to decide whether they would or would not send their sons to the Abbé Fortier's school; or if they did send them there, they knew they must abandon them entirely to his mercy, for when any maternal complaint was made to him, the abbé always replied to it by this device, which he had engraved on the handle of his cane and on that of his cat-o'-nine-tails, "Who loves well chastises well."

Upon the recommendation of his aunt, Ange Pitou was therefore received by the Abbé Fortier. The old devotee, quite proud of this reception, — which was much less agreeable to Pitou, whose wandering and independent mode of life it altogether destroyed, — presented herself to Master Niguet, and told him that she had not only conformed to her agreement with Doctor Gilbert, but had even gone beyond it. In fact, Doctor Gilbert had demanded for Ange Pitou an honorable means of living, and she gave him much more than this, since she gave him an excellent education. And where was it that she gave him this education? Why, in the very academy in which Sebastian Gilbert received his, and for which he paid no less than fifty livres per month.

It was indeed true that Ange Pitou received his education *gratis;* but there was no necessity whatever for letting Doctor Gilbert into this secret. And if he should discover it, the impartiality and the disinterestedness of the Abbé Fortier were well known; as his sublime Master, he stretched out his arms, saying, "Suffer little children to come unto me;" only the two hands affixed to these two paternal arms were armed, the one with a Latin grammar, and the other with a large birch rod; so that in the greater number of instances, instead of, like the Saviour, receiving the children weeping and sending them away consoled, the Abbé Fortier saw the children approach him with terror in their countenances and sent them away weeping.

The new scholar made his entrance into the schoolroom with an old trunk under his arm, a horn inkstand in his hand, and two or three stumps of pens stuck behind his ears. The old trunk was intended to supply, as it best might, the absence of a regular desk. The inkstand was a gift from the grocer, and Mademoiselle Angélique had picked up the stumps of pens at Monsieur Niguet, the notary's, when she had paid him a visit the evening before.

Ange Pitou was welcomed with that fraternal gentleness which is born in children and perpetuated in grown men, — that is to say, with hootings. The whole time devoted to the morning class was passed in making game of him. Two of the scholars were kept for laughing at his yellow hair, and two others for ridiculing his marvellous knees, of which we have already slightly made mention. The two latter had said that each of Pitou's legs looked like a well-rope in which a knot had been tied. This jest was attended with great success, had gone round the room and excited general hilarity, and consequently the susceptibility of the Abbé Fortier.

Therefore, the account being made up at noon when about to leave the school, — that is to say, after having remained four hours in class, — Pitou, without having addressed a single word to any one, without having done anything but gape behind his trunk, Pitou had made six enemies in the school; six enemies, so much the more inveterate that he had not inflicted any wrong upon them, and therefore did they over the fire-stove, which in the schoolroom represented the altar of their country, swear a solemn oath, some to tear out his yellow hair, others to punch out his earthenware blue eyes, and the remainder to straighten his crooked knees.

Pitou was altogether ignorant of these hostile intentions. As he was going out he asked a boy near him why six of their comrades remained in school, when all the rest were leaving it.

The boy looked askance at Pitou, called him a shabby tale-bearer, and went away, unwilling to enter into conversation with him.

Pitou asked himself how it could have happened that he, not having uttered a single word during the whole time, could be called a shabby tale-bearer. But while the class had lasted he had heard so many things said, either by the pupils or by the Abbé Fortier, which he could in no way comprehend, that he classed this accusation of his schoolfellow with those things which were too elevated for him to understand.

On seeing Pitou return at noon, Aunt Angélique, with great ardor for the success of an education for which it was generally understood she made great sacrifices, inquired of him what he had learned.

Pitou replied that he had learned to remain silent. The answer was worthy of a Pythagorean; only a Pythagorean would have made it by a sign.

The new scholar returned to school at one o’clock without too much repugnance. The hours of study in the morning had been passed by the pupils in examining the physical appearance of Pitou; those of the afternoon were employed by the professor in examining his moral capabilities. This examination being made, the Abbé Fortier remained convinced that Pitou had every possible disposition to become a Robinson Crusoe, but very little chance of ever becoming a Fontenelle or a Bossuet.

During the whole time that the class lasted, and which was much more fatiguing to the future seminarist than that of the morning, the scholars who had been punished on account of him repeatedly shook their fists at him. In all countries, whether blessed with civilization or not, this demonstration is considered as a sign of threat. Pitou therefore determined to be on his guard.

Our hero was not mistaken. On leaving, or rather when he had left, and got clear away from all the dependencies of the collegiate house, it was notified to Pitou by the six scholars who had been kept in the morning, that he would have to pay for the two hours of arbitrary detention, with damages, interest and capital.

Pitou at once understood that he would have to fight a pugilistic duel. Although he was far from having studied the fifth book of the Æneid, in which young Dares and the old Entellus give proofs of their great skill in this manly exercise before the loudly applauding Trojan fugitives, he knew something of this species of recreation, to which the country people in his village were not altogether strangers. He therefore declared that he was ready to enter the lists with either of his adversaries who might wish to begin, and to combat successively with all his six enemies. This demonstration began to raise the last comer in the consideration of his schoolfellows.

The conditions were agreed on as Pitou had proposed. A circle was soon formed round the place of combat, and the champions, the one having thrown off his jacket, the other his coat, advanced towards each other.

We have already spoken of Pitou’s hands. These hands, which were by no means agreeable to look at, were still less agreeable to feel. Pitou at the end of each arm whirled round a fist equal in size to a child’s head, and although boxing had not at that time been introduced into France, and consequently Pitou had not studied the elementary principles of the science, he managed to apply to one of the eyes of his adversary a blow so well directed that the eye he struck was instantly surrounded by a dark bistre-colored circle, so geometrically drawn that the most skilful mathematician could not have formed it more correctly with his compasses.

The second then presented himself. If Pitou had against him the fatigue occasioned by his first combat, on the other side, his adversary was visibly less powerful than his former antagonist. The battle did not last long. Pitou aimed a straightforward blow at his enemy’s nose, and his formidable fist fell with such weight that instantly his opponent’s two nostrils gave evidence of the validity of the blow by spouting forth a double stream of blood.

The third got off with merely a broken tooth; he received much less damage than the two former. The other three declared that they were satisfied.

Pitou then pressed through the crowd, which opened as he approached with the respect due to a conqueror, and he withdrew safe and sound to his own fireside, or rather to that of his aunt.

The next morning, when the three pupils reached the school, the one with his eye poached, the second with a fearfully lacerated nose, and the third with his lips swelled, the Abbé Fortier instituted an inquiry. But young collegians have their good points too. Not one of the wounded whispered a word against Pitou, and it was only through an indirect channel, that is to say, from a person who had been a witness of the fight, but who was altogether unconnected with the school, that the Abbé Fortier learned, the following day, that it was Pitou who had done the damage to the faces of his pupils, which had caused him so much uneasiness the day before.

And, in fact, the Abbé Fortier was responsible to the parents, not only for the morals, but for the physical state of his pupils. He had received complaints from the three families. A reparation was absolutely necessary. Pitou was kept in school three days: one day for the eye, one day for the bloody nose, and one day for the tooth.

This three days' detention suggested an ingenious idea to Mademoiselle Angélique. It was to deprive Pitou of his dinner every time that the Abbé Fortier kept him in school. This determination must necessarily have an advantageous effect on Pitou's education, since it would naturally induce him to think twice before committing a fault which would subject him to this double punishment.

Only, Pitou could never rightly comprehend why it was that he had been called a tale-bearer, when he had not opened his lips, and why it was he had been punished for beating those who had wished to beat him; but if people were to comprehend everything that happens in this world, they would lose one of the principal charms of life, — that of mystery and the unforeseen.

Pitou was therefore detained three days in school, and during those three days he contented himself with his breakfast and supper.

Contented himself is not the word, for Pitou was by no means content; but our language is so poor, and the Academy so severe, that we must *content* ourselves with what we have.

Only that this punishment submitted to by Pitou, without saying a word of the aggression to which he had been subjected, and to which he had only properly replied, won him the esteem of the whole school. It is true that the three majestic blows he had been seen to deliver might also have had some little influence on his schoolfellows.

From that time forward the life of Pitou was pretty nearly that of most of the scholars, with this sole difference, that from his compositions being more defective than those of any of the rest, he was kept twice as often as any of his condisciples.

But it must be said there was one thing in Pitou's nature which arose from the primary education he had received, or rather from that which he had not received,-a thing which is necessary to consider as contributing at least a third to the numerous penalties he underwent; and this was his natural inclination for animals.

The famous trunk which his Aunt Angélique had dignified with the name of desk, had become, thanks to its vastness, and the numerous compartments with which Pitou had decorated its interior, a sort of Noah's ark, containing a couple of every species of climbing, crawling, or flying reptiles. There were lizards, adders, ant-eaters, beetles, and frogs, which reptiles became so much dearer to Pitou from their being the cause of his being subjected to punishment more or less severe.

It was in his walks during the week that Pitou made collections for his menagerie. He had wished for salamanders, which were very popular at Villers-Cotterets, being the crest of François I., who had them sculptured on every chimney-piece in the chateau. He had succeeded in obtaining them; only one thing had strongly preoccupied his mind, and he ended by placing this thing among the number of those which were beyond his intelligence; it was, that he had constantly found in the water these reptiles which poets have pretended exist only in fire. This circumstance had given to Pitou, who was a lad of precise mind, a profound contempt for poets.

Pitou, being the proprietor of two salamanders, set to work to find a chameleon; but this time his search was altogether vain, and success did not attend his labors. Pitou at last concluded, from these unfruitful researches, that the chameleon did not exist, or at all events that it existed in some other latitude.

This point being settled, Pitou did not obstinately continue his search for the chameleon.

The two other thirds of Pitou’s punishments were occasioned by those accursed solecisms and those confounded barbarisms, which sprang up in the themes written by Pitou as tares do in a field of wheat.

As to Sundays and Thursdays, days when there was no attendance at school, he had continued to employ them in laying his lime-twigs or in poaching; only, as Pitou was still growing taller, as he was already five feet six, and sixteen years of age, a circumstance occurred which somewhat withdrew Pitou’s attention from his favorite occupations.

Upon the road to the Wolf’s Heath is situated the village of Pisseleu, the same perhaps which gave a name to the beautiful Anne d’Heilly, the mistress of François I.

Near this village stood the farm-house of Father Billot, as he was called throughout the neighborhood, and at the door of this farm-house was standing, no doubt by chance, but almost every time when Pitou passed and repassed, a pretty girl from seventeen to eighteen years of age, fresh-colored, lively, jovial, and who was called by her baptismal name, Catherine, but still more frequently after her father’s name, La Billote.

Pitou began by bowing to La Billote; afterwards he by degrees became emboldened, and smiled while he was bowing; then at last one fine day, after having bowed, after having smiled, he stopped, and although blushing deeply, ventured to stammer out the following words, which he considered as great audacity on his part:

CHAPTER IV.

Of the Influence which a Barbarism and Seven Solecisms may have upon the Whole Life of a Man

THESE details were indispensable to the reader, whatever be the degree of intelligence we suppose him to possess, in order that he might comprehend the whole horror of the position in which Pitou found himself on being finally expelled from the school.

With one arm hanging down, the other maintaining the equilibrium of the trunk upon his head, his ears still ringing with the furious vituperations of the Abbé Fortier, he slowly directed his steps towards Pleux, in a state of meditation which was nothing more than stupor carried to the highest possible degree.

At last an idea presented itself to his imagination, and four words, which composed his whole thought, escaped his lips: —

“O Lord! my aunt!”

And indeed what would Mademoiselle Angélique Pitou say to this complete overthrow of all her hopes?

However, Ange Pitou knew nothing of the projects of the old maid, excepting as a faithful dog surmises the intentions of his master, that is to say, by an inspection of his physiognomy. Instinct is a most valuable guide, — it seldom deceives; while reason, on the contrary, may be led astray by the imagination.

The result of these reflections on the part of Ange Pitou, and which had given birth to the doleful exclama- tion we have given above, was the apprehension of the violent outbreak of discontent to which the old maid would give way on receiving the fatal news. Now, he knew from sad experience the result of discontent in Mademoiselle Angélique. Only upon this occasion the cause of discontent arising from an incalculably important event, the result would attain a degree altogether incalculable.

It was under these terrific impressions that Pitou entered Pleux. He had taken a quarter of an hour to traverse the distance between the great gate at the Abbé Fortier's and the entrance to this street, and yet it was scarcely three hundred yards.

At that moment the church clock struck one; he then perceived that his final conversation with the Abbé Fortier and the slowness with which he had walked had delayed him in all sixty minutes, and that consequently he was half an hour later than the time at which no more dinner was to be had in Aunt Angélique's abode.

We have already said that such was the salutary restraint which Aunt Angélique had added to his being kept in school, and on the wild ramblings of her nephew; it was thus that in the course of a year she managed to economize some sixty dinners at the expense of her poor nephew's stomach.

But this time, that which rendered more uneasy the retarded schoolboy was not the loss of his aunt's meagre dinner, although his breakfast had been meagre enough, for his heart was too full to allow him to perceive the emptiness of his stomach.

There is a frightful torment, well known to a student, however perverse he may be, and this is the illegitimate hiding in some retired corner, after being expelled from college; it is the definitive and compelled holiday which he is constrained to take advantage of, while his fellowstudents pass by him with their books and writings under their arm, proceeding to their daily task. That college, formerly so hated, then assumes a most desirable form; the scholar occupies his mind with the great affairs of themes and exercises, to which he before so little directed his attention, and which are being proceeded with in his absence. There is a great similarity between a pupil so expelled by his professor and a man who has been excommunicated for his impiety, and who no longer has a right to enter the church, although burning with desire to hear a mass.

And this was why, the nearer he approached his aunt's house, his residence in that house appeared the more frightful to poor Pitou. And this was why, for the first time in his life, his imagination pictured to him the school as a terrestrial paradise, from which the Abbé Fortier, as the exterminating angel, had driven him forth, with his cat-o'-nine-tails wielded as a flaming sword.

But yet, slowly as he walked, and although he halted at every ten steps, — halts which became still longer as he approached nearer, — he could not avoid at last reaching the threshold of that most formidable house. Pitou then crossed the threshold with shuffling feet, and mechanically rubbing his hand on the seam of his nether garment.

“Ah, Aunt Angélique, I am really very sick,” said he, in order to stop her raillery or her reproaches, and perhaps also to induce her to pity him, poor boy.

“Pshaw!” said Angélique. “I well know what your sickness is; and it would be cured at once by putting back the hands of the clock an hour and a half.”

“Oh, good heavens, no!” cried Pitou; “for I am not hungry.”

Aunt Angélique was surprised and almost anxious. Sickness equally alarms affectionate mothers and crabbed stepmothers, — affectionate mothers from the dangers caused by sickness, and stepmothers from the heavy pulls it makes upon their purse.

“Well, what is the matter? Come, now, speak out at once,” said the old maid.

On hearing these words, which were, however, pronounced without any very tender sympathy, Ange Pitou burst into tears; and it must be acknowledged that the wry faces he made when proceeding from complaints to tears were the most terrifically ugly wry faces that could be seen.

“Oh, my good Aunt,” cried he, sobbing, “a great misfortune has happened to me!”

“And what is it?” asked the old maid.

“The Abbé Fortier has sent me away,” replied Ange, sobbing so violently that he was scarcely intelligible.

“Sent you away?” repeated Mademoiselle Angélique, as if she had not perfectly comprehended what he said.

“Yes, Aunt.”

“And from where has he sent you!”

“From the school.”

And Pitou’s sobs redoubled.

“From the school?”

“Yes, Aunt.”

“What! altogether?”

“Yes, Aunt.”

“So there is to be no examination, no competition, no purse, no seminary?”

Pitou’s sobs were changed into perfect howlings.

Mademoiselle Angélique looked at him, as if she would read the very heart of her nephew to ascertain the cause of his dismissal.

“I will wager that you have again been among the bushes instead of going to school. I would wager that you have again been prowling about Father Billot’s farm. Oh, fie! and a future abbé!”

Ange shook his head.

“You are lying,” cried the old maid, whose anger augmented in proportion as she acquired the certainty that the state of matters was very serious. “You are lying. Only last Sunday you were seen in the Lane of Sighs with La Billote.”

It was Mademoiselle Angélique who was lying. But devotees have, in all ages, considered themselves authorized to lie, in virtue of that Jesuitical axiom, “It is permitted to assert that which is false, in order to discover that which is true.”

“No one could have seen me in the Lane of Sighs,” replied Pitou; “that is impossible, for we were walking near the orangery.”

“Ah, wretch! you see that you were with her.”

“But, Aunt,” rejoined Pitou, blushing, “Mademoiselle Billot has nothing to do with this affair.”

“Yes, call her mademoiselle, in order to conceal your impure conduct. But I will let this minx’s confessor know all about it.”

“But, Aunt, I swear to you that Mademoiselle Billot is not a minx.”

“Ah! you defend her, when it is you that stand in need of being excused. Oh, yes; you understand each other better and better. What are we coming to, good heaven! and children only sixteen years old.”

“Aunt, so far from there being any understanding between me and Catherine, it is Catherine who always drives me away from her.”

“Ah! you see you are cutting your own throat; for now you call her Catherine, right out. Yes, she drives you away from her, hypocrite, when people are looking at you.”

“Ho! ho!” said Pitou to himself, illuminated by this idea. “Well, that is true. I had never thought of that.”

“Ah, there again!” said the old maid, taking advantage of the ingenuous exclamation of her nephew to prove his connivance with La Billote; “but let me manage it. I will soon put all this to rights again. Monsieur Fortier is her confessor. I will beg him to have you shut up in prison, and order you to live on bread and water for a fortnight; as to Mademoiselle Catherine, if she requires a convent to moderate her passion for you, well, she shall have a taste of it. We will send her to St. Remy."

The old maid uttered these last words with such authority, and with such conviction of her power, that they made Pitou tremble.

"My good aunt," cried he, clasping his hands, "you are mistaken, I swear to you, if you believe that Mademoiselle Billot has anything to do with the misfortune that has befallen me."

"Impurity is the mother of all vices," sententiously rejoined Mademoiselle Angélique.

"Aunt, I again tell you that the Abbé Fortier did not send me away because I was impure; but he has dismissed me because I make too many barbarisms, mingled with solecisms, which every now and then escape me, and which deprive me, as he says, of all chance of obtaining the purse for the seminary."

"All chance, say you? Then you will not have that purse; then you will not be an abbé; then I shall not be your housekeeper?"

"Ah, good heaven, no! dear Aunt."

"And what is to become of you, then?" cried the old maid, in a savage tone.

"I know not," cried Pitou, piteously, raising his eyes to heaven. "Whatever it may please Providence to order," he added.

"Ah! Providence, you say. I see how it is," exclaimed Mademoiselle Angélique. "Some one has been exciting his brain. Some one has been talking to him of these new ideas; some one has been endeavoring to fill him with these principles of philosophy."

"It cannot be that, Aunt; because no one gets into philosophy before having gone through his rhetoric, and I have never yet been able to get even so far as that."

"Oh, yes! — jest — jest! It is not of that philosophy that I am speaking. I speak of the philosophy of the philosophers, you wretch. I speak of the philosophy of Monsieur Arouet; I speak of the philosophy of Monsieur Jean Jacques; of the philosophy of Monsieur Diderot, who wrote 'La Religieuse.'"

Mademoiselle Angélique crossed herself.

"'La Religieuse!'" cried Pitou; "what is that, Aunt?"

"You have read it, wretch!"

“I swear to you, Aunt, that I have not.”

“And this is the reason why you will not go into the church.”

“Aunt, Aunt, you are mistaken. It is the church that will not admit me.”

“Why, decidedly, this child is a perfect serpent. He even dares to retort.”

“No, Aunt; I answer, and that is all.”

“Oh, he is lost!” exclaimed Mademoiselle Angélique, with all the signs of most profound discouragement, and falling into her favorite arm-chair.

In fact, “He is lost!” merely signified, “I am lost!”

The danger was imminent; Aunt Angélique formed an extreme resolve. She rose as if some secret spring had forced her to her feet, and ran off to the Abbé Fortier to ask him for an explanation, and above all to make a last effort to get him to change his determination.

Pitou followed his aunt with his eyes till she had reached the door, and when she had disappeared, he went to the threshold and watched her walking with extraordinary rapidity towards the Rue de Soissons. He was surprised at the quickness of her movements; but he had no longer any doubt as to the intentions of Mademoiselle Angélique, and was convinced that she was going to his professor’s house.

He could therefore calculate on at least a quarter of an hour’s tranquillity. Pitou thought of making a good use of this quarter of an hour which Providence had granted to him. He snatched up the remainder of his aunt’s dinner to feed his lizards, caught two or three flies for his ants and frogs, then, opening successively a hutch and a cupboard, he set about feeding himself; for with solitude his appetite had returned to him.

Having arranged all these matters, he returned to watch at the door, that he might not be surprised by the return of his second mother.

Mademoiselle Angélique had given herself the title of Pitou’s second mother.

While he was watching, a handsome young girl passed at the end of the Pleux, going along a narrow lane which led from the end of the Rue de Soissons to that of the Rue de Lormet. She was seated on a pillion on the back of a horse loaded with two panniers, the one full of fowls, the other of pigeons. It was Catherine. On perceiving Pitou standing at his door, she stopped.

Pitou blushed as was his wont, then remained with his mouth wide open, looking at her, that is to say, admiring her, — for Mademoiselle Billot was in his eyes the most heavenly sample of human beauty.

The young girl darted a glance into the street, saluted Pitou with a little graceful nod, and continued on her way.

Pitou replied to it, trembling with satisfaction.

This little scene lasted just time enough to occupy the tall scholar's attention, who was quite lost in his contemplation, and continued eagerly gazing at the spot where Mademoiselle Catherine had appeared, so as to prevent him from perceiving his aunt when she returned from the Abbé Fortier, who suddenly seized his hand, turning pale with anger.

Ange being thus startlingly awakened from his sweet dream by that electrical shock which the touch of Mademoiselle Angélique always communicated to him, turned round, and seeing that the enraged looks of his aunt were fixed upon his hand, cast his own eyes down upon it, and saw with horror that it was holding the half of a large round of bread upon which he had apparently spread a too generous layer of butter, with a corresponding slice of cheese.

Mademoiselle Angélique uttered a cry of terror, and Pitou a groan of alarm; Angélique raised her bony hand, Pitou bobbed down his head; Angélique seized a broomhandle which unluckily was but too near her, Pitou let fall his slice of bread-and-butter, and took to his heels without further explanation.

These two hearts now understood each other, and felt that henceforth there could be no communion between them.

Mademoiselle Angélique went into her house and double-locked the door. Pitou, whom the grating noise alarmed as a continuation of the storm, ran on still faster.

From this scene resulted an effect which Mademoiselle Angélique was very far from foreseeing, and which certainly Pitou in no way expected.

CHAPTER V.

A Philosophical Farmer

PITOU ran as if all the demons of the infernal regions were at his heels, and in a few seconds he was outside the town.

On turning round the corner of the cemetery, he very nearly ran his head against the hind part of a horse.

“Why, good Lord!” cried a sweet voice well known to Pitou, “where are you running to at this rate, Monsieur Ange? You have very nearly made Cadet run away with me, you frightened us both so much.”

“Ah, Mademoiselle Catherine!” cried Pitou, replying rather to his own thoughts than to the question of the young girl. “Ah, Mademoiselle Catherine, what a misfortune! great God, what a misfortune!”

“Oh, you quite terrify me!” said the young girl, pulling up her horse in the middle of the road. “What, then, has happened, Monsieur Ange?”

“What has happened!” said Pitou; and then, lowering his voice as if about to reveal some mysterious iniquity, “why, it is, that I am not to be an abbé, Mademoiselle.”

But instead of receiving the fatal intelligence with all those signs of commiseration which Pitou had expected, Mademoiselle Billot gave way to a long burst of laughter.

“You are not to be an abbé?” asked Catherine.

“No,” replied Pitou, in perfect consternation; “it appears that it is impossible.”

“Well, then, you can be a soldier,” said Catherine.

“A soldier?”

“Undoubtedly. You should not be in despair for such a trifle. Good Lord! I at first thought that you had come to announce to me the sudden death of your aunt.”

“Oh,” said Pitou, feelingly, “it is precisely the same thing to me as if she were dead indeed, since she has driven me out of her house.”

“I beg your pardon,” said Catherine, laughing; “you have not now the satisfaction of weeping for her.”

And Catherine began to laugh more heartily than before, which scandalized poor Pitou more than ever.

“But did you not hear that she has turned me out of doors?” rejoined the student, in despair.

“Well, so much the better,” she replied.

“You are very happy in being able to laugh in that manner, Mademoiselle Billot; and it proves that you have a most agreeable disposition, since the sorrows of others make so little impression upon you.”

“And who has told you, then, that, should a real misfortune happen to you, I would not pity you, Monsieur Ange?”

“You would pity me if a real misfortune should befall me! But do you not, then, know that I have no other resource?”

“So much the better again!” cried Catherine.

Pitou was perplexed.

“But one must eat!” said he; “one cannot live without eating! and I, above all, for I am always hungry.”

“You do not wish to work, then, Monsieur Pitou?”

“Work, and at what? Monsieur Fortier and my Aunt Angélique have told me more than a hundred times that I was fit for nothing. Ah! if they had only apprenticed me to a carpenter or a blacksmith, instead of wanting to make an abbé of me! Decidedly, now, Mademoiselle Catherine,” said Pitou, with a gesture of despair, “decidedly there is a curse upon me.”

“Alas!” said the young girl, compassionately, for she knew, as did all the neighborhood, Pitou’s lamentable story. “There is some truth in what you have just now said, my dear Monsieur Ange; but why do you not do one thing?”

“What is it?” cried Pitou, eagerly clinging to the proposal which Mademoiselle Billot was about to make, as a drowning man clings to a willow branch. “What is it; tell me?”

“You had a protector; at least, I think I have heard so.”

“Doctor Gilbert.”

“You were the schoolfellow of his son, since he was educated, as you have been, by the Abbé Fortier.”

“I believe I was indeed, and I have more than once saved him from being thrashed.”

“Well, then, why do you not write to his father? He will not abandon you.”

“Why, I would certainly do so, did I know what had become of him; but your father perhaps knows this, Mademoiselle Billot, since Doctor Gilbert is his landlord.”

“I know that he sends part of the rent of the farm to him in America, and pays the remainder to a notary at Paris.”

“Ah!” said Pitou, sighing, “in America; that is very far.”

“You would go to America, — you?” cried the young girl, almost terrified at Pitou’s resolution.

“Who, I, Mademoiselle Catherine! Never, never! If I knew where to go, and how to procure food, I should be very happy in France.”

“Very happy!” repeated Mademoiselle Billot.

Pitou cast down his eyes. The young girl remained silent. This silence lasted some time. Pitou was plunged in meditations which would have greatly surprised the Abbé Fortier, with all his logic.

These meditations, though rising from an obscure point, had become lucid; then they again became confused, though brilliant, like the lightning whose origin is concealed, whose source is lost.

During this time Cadet had again moved on, though at a walk, and Pitou walked at Cadet’s side, with one hand leaning on one of the panniers. As to Mademoiselle Catherine, who had also become full of thought, she allowed her reins to fall upon her courser’s neck, without fearing that he would run away with her. Moreover, there were no monsters on the road, and Cadet was of a race which had no sort of relation to the steeds of Hippolytus.

Pitou stopped mechanically when the horse stopped. They had arrived at the farm.

“Well, now, is it you, Pitou?” cried a broad-shouldered man, standing somewhat proudly by the side of a pond to which he had led his horse to drink.

“Eh! good Lord! Yes, Monsieur Billot, it is myself.”

“Another misfortune has befallen this poor Pitou,” said the young girl, jumping off her horse, without feeling at all uneasy as to whether her petticoat hitched or not, to show the color of her garters; “his aunt has turned him out of doors.”

“And what has he done to the old bigot?” said the farmer.

“It appears that I am not strong enough in Greek.”

He was boasting, the puppy. He ought to have said in Latin.

"Not strong enough in Greek!" exclaimed the broadshouldered man. "And why should you wish to be strong in Greek?"

"To construe Theocritus and read the Iliad."

"And of what use would it be to you to construe Theocritus and read the Iliad?"

"It would be of use in making me an abbé."

"Bah!" ejaculated Monsieur Billot, "and do I know Greek? do I know Latin? do I know even French? do I know how to read do I know how to write? That does not hinder me from sowing, from reaping, and getting my harvest into the granary."

"Yes, but you, Monsieur Billot, you are not an abbé; you are a cultivator of the earth, *agricola,* as Virgil says. *O fortunatos nimium* — "

"Well, and do you then believe that a cultivator is not equal to a black-cap; say, then, you shabby chorister you, is he not so, particularly when this cultivator has sixty acres of good land in the sunshine, and a thousand louis in the shade?"

"I had been always told that to be an abbé was the best thing in the world. It is true," added Pitou, smiling with his most agreeable smile, "that I did not always listen to what was told me."

"And I give you joy, my boy. You see that I can rhyme like any one else when I set to work. It appears to me that there is stuff in you to make something better than an abbé, and that it is a lucky thing for you not to take to that trade, particularly as times now go. Do you see now, as a farmer I know something of the weather, and the weather just now is bad for abbés."

"Bah!" exclaimed Pitou.

"Yes, we shall have a storm," rejoined the farmer, "and that ere long, believe me. You are honest, you are learned — "

Pitou bowed, much honored at being called learned, for the first time in his life.

"You can therefore gain a livelihood without that."

Mademoiselle Billot, while taking the fowls and pigeons out of the panniers, was listening with much interest to the dialogue between Pitou and her father.

"Gain a livelihood," rejoined Pitou; "that appears a difficult matter to me."

"What can you do?"

“Do! why, I can lay lime-twigs, and set wires for rabbits. I can imitate, and tolerably well, the notes of birds, can I not, Mademoiselle Catherine?”

“Oh, that is true enough!” she replied. “He can whistle like a blackbird.”

“Yes, but all this is not a trade, a profession,” observed Father Billot.

“And that is what I say, by heaven!”

“You swear, — that is already something.”

“How, did I swear?” said Pitou. “I beg your pardon for having done so, Monsieur Billot.”

“Oh, there is no occasion, none at all,” said the farmer; “it happens also to me sometimes. Eh! thunder of heaven!” cried he, turning to his horse, “will you be quiet, hey? These devils of Perch horses, they must be always neighing and fidgeting about. But now, tell me,” said he, again addressing Pitou, “are you lazy?”

“I do not know. I have never done anything but Latin and Greek, and — ”

“And what?”

“And I must admit that I did not take to them very readily.”

“So much the better,” cried Billot; “that proves you are not so stupid as I thought you.”

Pitou opened his eyes to an almost terrific width; it was the first time he had ever heard such an order of things advocated, and which was completely subversive of all the theories which up to that time he had been taught.

“I ask you,” said Billot, “if you are so lazy as to be afraid of fatigue.”

“Oh, with regard to fatigue, that is quite another thing,” replied Pitou; “no, no, no; I could go ten leagues without being fatigued.”

“Good! that’s something, at all events,” rejoined Billot; “by getting a few pounds of flesh more off your bones, you could set up for a runner.”

“A few pounds more!” cried Pitou, looking at his own lanky form, his long arms and his legs, which had much the appearance of stilts; “it seems to me, Monsieur Billot, that I am thin enough as it is.”

“Upon my word, my friend,” cried Billot, laughing very heartily, “you are a perfect treasure.”

It was also the first time that Pitou had been estimated at so high a price, and therefore was he advancing from surprise to surprise.

“Listen to me,” said the farmer; “I ask you whether you are lazy in respect to work?”

“What sort of work?”

"Why, work in general."

"I do not know, not I; for I have never worked."

Catherine also began to laugh, but this time Père Billot took the matter in a serious point of view.

"Those rascally priests!" said he, shaking his clenched fist towards the town; "and this is the way they bring up lads, in idleness and uselessness. In what way, I ask you, can this great stripling here be of service to his brethren?"

"Ah! not of much use, certainly; that I know full well," replied Pitou; "fortunately I have no brothers."

"By brethren I mean men in general," observed Billot. "Would you, perchance, insist that all men are not brothers?"

"Oh, that I acknowledge; moreover, it is so said in the gospel."

"And equals," continued the farmer.

"Ah! as to that," said Pitou, "that is quite another affair. If I had been the equal of Monsieur Fortier, he would not so often have thrashed me with his cat-o'-ninetails and his cane; and if I had been the equal of my aunt, she would not have turned me out of doors."

"I tell you that all men are equal," rejoined the farmer, "and we will very soon prove it to the tyrants."

"Tyrannis," added Pitou.

"And the proof of this is, that I will take you into my house."

"You will take me into your house, my dear Monsieur Billot?" cried Pitou, amazed. "Is it not to make game of me that you say this?"

"No; come now, tell me, what would you require to live?"

"Zounds! about three pounds of bread daily."

"And with your bread?"

"A little butter or cheese."

"Well, well," said the farmer; "I see it will not be very expensive to keep you in food. My lad, you shall be fed."

"Monsieur Pitou," said Catherine, " had you not something to ask my father?"

"Who? I, Mademoiselle! Oh, good Lord, no!"

"And why was it that you came here, then?"

"Because you were coming here."

"Ah!" cried Catherine, "that is really very gallant; but I accept compliments only at their true value. You came, Monsieur Pitou, to ask my father if he had any news of your protector.”

“Ah, that is true!” replied Pitou. “Well, now, how very droll! I had forgotten that altogether.”

“You are speaking of our worthy Monsieur Gilbert?” said the farmer, in a tone which evinced the very high consideration he felt for his landlord.

“Precisely,” said Pitou. “But I have no longer any need of him; and since Monsieur Billot takes me into his house, I can tranquilly wait his return from America.”

“In that case, my friend, you will not have to wait long, for he has returned.”

“Really!” cried Pitou; “and when did he arrive?”

“I do not know exactly; but what I know is, that he was at Havre a week ago; for I have in my holsters a packet which comes from him, which he sent to me as soon as he arrived, and which was delivered to me this very morning at Villers-Cotterets; and in proof of that, here it is.”

“Who was it told you that it was from him, Father?” said Catherine.

“Why, zounds! since there is a letter in the packet — ”

“Excuse me, Father,” said Catherine, smiling, “but I thought that you could not read. I only say this, Father, because you make a boast of not knowing how to read.”

“Yes, I do boast of it. I wish that people should say, ‘Father Billot owes nothing to any man, — not even a schoolmaster. Father Billot made his fortune himself.’ That is what I wish people to say. It was not, therefore, I who read the letter. It was the quartermaster of the gendarmerie, whom I happened to meet.”

“And what did this letter tell you, Father? He is always well satisfied with us, is he not?”

“Judge for yourself.”

And the farmer drew from his leather wallet a letter, which he handed to his daughter. Catherine read as follows: —

MY DEAR MONSIEUR BILLOT, — I have arrived from America, where I found a people richer, greater, and happier than the people of our country. This arises from their being free, which we are not. But we are also advanced toward a new era. Every one should labor to hasten the day when the light shall shine. I know your principles, Monsieur Billot. I know your influence over your brother farmers, and over the whole of that worthy population of workmen and laborers whom you order, not as a king, but as a father. Inculcate in them principles of self-devotedness and fraternity, which I have observed that you possess. Philosophy is universal: all men ought to read their duties by the light of its torch. I send you a small book, in which all these duties and all these rights are set forth. This little book was written by me, although my name does not appear upon the titlepage. Propagate the principles it contains, which are those of universal equality. Let it be read aloud in the long winter evenings. Reading is the pasture of the mind, as bread is the food of the body.

One of these days I shall go to see you, and propose to you a new system of farm-letting, which is much in use in America. It consists in dividing the produce of the land between the farmer and landlord. This appears to me more in conformity with the laws of primitive society, and above all more in accordance with the goodness of God. Health and fraternity.

HONORÉ GILBERT,
Citizen of Philadelphia.

"Oh! oh!" cried Pitou; "this is a well-written letter."

"Is it not?" said Billot, delighted.

"Yes, my dear father," observed Catherine; "but I doubt whether the quartermaster of the gendarmerie is of your opinion."

"And why do you think so?"

"Because it appears to me that this letter may not only bring the doctor into trouble, but you also, my dear father."

"Pshaw!" said Billot; "you are always afraid. But that matters not. Here is the pamphlet; and here is employment ready found for you, Pitou. In the evenings you shall read it."

"And in the daytime?"

"In the daytime you will take care of the sheep and cows. In the mean time, there is your pamphlet."

And the farmer took from one of his holsters one of those small pamphlets with a red cover of which so great a number were published in those days, either with or without permission of the authorities.

Only, in the latter case, the author ran the risk of being sent to the galleys.

"Read me the title of that book, Pitou, that I may always speak of the title until I shall be able to speak of the work itself. You shall read the remainder to me another time."

Pitou read on the first page these words, which habit has since rendered very vague and very insignificant, but which at that period struck to the very fibres of all hearts:

"Of the Independence of Man, and the Liberty of Nations."

"What do you say to that, Pitou?" inquired the farmer.

"I say that it appears to me, Monsieur Billot, that independence and liberty are the same thing. My protector would be turned out of Monsieur Fortier's class for being guilty of a pleonasm."

"Pleonasm or not," cried the farmer, "that book is the book of a man."

"That matters not, Father," said Catherine, with woman's admirable instinct. "Hide it, I entreat you! It will bring you into trouble. As to myself, I know that I am trembling even at the sight of it."

"And why would you have it injure me, since it has not injured its author?"

"And how can you tell that, Father? It is eight days since that letter was written; and it could not have taken eight days for the parcel to have come from Havre. I also have received a letter this morning."

"And from whom?"

"From Sebastian Gilbert, who has written to make inquiries. He desires me, even, to remember him to his foster-brother, Pitou. I had forgotten to deliver his message."

"Well!"

"Well! he says that for three days he had been expecting his father's arrival in Paris, and that he had not arrived."

"Mademoiselle is right," said Pitou. "It seems to me that this non-arrival is disquieting."

"Hold your tongue, you timid fellow, and read the doctor's treatise," said the farmer; "then you will become not only learned, but a man."

It was thus people spoke in those days; for they were at the preface of that great Grecian and Roman history which the French nation imitated, during ten years, in all its phases, devotedness, proscriptions, victories, and slavery.

Pitou put the book under his arm with so solemn a gesture that he completely gained the farmer's heart.

"And now," said Billot, "have you dined?"

"No, sir," replied Pitou, maintaining the semi-religious, semi-heroic attitude he had assumed since the book had been intrusted to his care.

“He was just going to get his dinner, when he was driven out of doors,” said the young girl.

“Well, then,” said Billot, “go in and ask my wife for the usual farm fare, and to-morrow you shall enter on your functions.”

Pitou, with an eloquent look, thanked Monsieur Billot, and, led by Catherine, entered the kitchen, — a domain placed under the absolute direction of Madame Billot.

CHAPTER VI.

Pastoral Scenes

MADAME BILLOT was a stout, buxom mamma, between thirty-five and thirty-six years old, round as a ball, fresh-colored, smooth-skinned, and cordial in her manners. She trotted continually from the fowl-house to the dovecote, from the sheep-pens to the cow-stable. She inspected the simmering of her soup, the stoves on which her fricassees and ragouts were cooking, and the spit on which the joint was roasting, as does a general when surveying his cantonments, judging by a mere glance whether everything was in its right place, and by their very odor, whether the thyme and laurel-leaves were distributed in due proportions in the stewpans. She scolded from habit, but without the slightest intention that her scolding should be disagreeable; and her husband, whom she honored as she would the greatest potentate of the earth, did not escape. Her daughter also got her share, though she loved her more than Madame de Sevigné loved Madame de Grignan; and neither were her workpeople overlooked, though she fed them better than any farmer in a circuit of ten leagues fed his. Therefore was it, that when a vacancy occurred in her household, there was great competition to obtain the place. But, as in heaven, unfortunately there were many applicants and comparatively but few chosen.

We have seen that Pitou, without having been an applicant, had been elected. This was a happiness that he appreciated at its just value, especially when he saw the well-browned loaf which was placed at his left hand, the pot of cider which was on his right, and the piece of pickled pork on a plate before him. Since the moment that he lost his poor mother, and that was about five years since, Pitou had not, even on great festival days, partaken of such fare.

Therefore Pitou, full of gratitude, felt, as by degrees he bolted the bread which he devoured, and as he washed down the pork with large draughts of the cider, — therefore Pitou felt a vast augmentation of respect for the farmer, of admiration for his wife, and of love for his daughter. There was only one thing which disquieted him, and that was the humiliating function he would have to fulfil, during the day, of herding the sheep and cows, — a function so little in harmony with that which awaited him each evening, and the object of which was to instruct humanity in the most elevated principles of socialism and philosophy.

It was on this subject that Pitou was meditating immediately after his dinner. But even in this reverie the influence of that excellent dinner was sensibly manifested. He began to consider things in a very different point of view from that which he had taken of them when fasting. The functions of a shepherd and a cow-driver, which he considered as so far beneath him, had been fulfilled by gods and demi-gods.

Apollo, in a situation very similar to his own, that is to say, driven from Olympus by Jupiter, as he, Pitou had been driven from Pleux by his aunt, had become a shepherd, and tended the flocks of Admetus. It is true that Admetus was a shepherd-king; but then, Apollo was a god!

Hercules had been a cow-keeper, or something very like it, since — as we are told by mythology — he seized the cows of Geryon by the tail; for whether a man leads a cow by the tail or by the head depends entirely on the difference of custom of those who take care of them, and that is all; and this would not in any way change the fact itself that he was a cow-leader, that is to say, a cow-keeper.

And moreover, Tityrus, reclining at the foot of a beech-tree, of whom Virgil speaks, and who congratulates himself, in such beautiful verses, on the repose which Augustus has granted to him, — he also was a shepherd. And, finally, Melibæus was a shepherd, who so poetically bewails having left his domestic hearth.

Certainly, all these persons spoke Latin well enough to have been abbés, and yet they preferred seeing their goats browse on the bitter cytisus to saying mass or to chanting vespers. Therefore, taking everything into consideration, the calling of a shepherd had its charms. Moreover, what was to prevent Pitou from restoring to it the poetry and the dignity it had lost? who could prevent Pitou from proposing trials of skill in singing, to the Menalcas and the Palemons of the neighboring villages? No one, undoubtedly. Pitou had more than once sung in the choir; and but for his having once been caught drinking the wine out of the Abbé Fortier’s cruet, who, with his usual rigor, had on the instant dismissed the singing boy, this talent might have become transcendent. He could not play upon the pipe, ‘t is true, but he could imitate the note of every bird, which is very nearly the same thing. He could not make himself a lute with pipes of unequal thickness, as did the lover of Syrinx; but from the linden-tree or the chestnut he could cut whistles whose perfection had more than once aroused the enthusiastic applause of his companions. Pitou therefore could become a shepherd without great derogation of his dignity. He did not lower himself to this profession, so ill appreciated in modern days; he elevated the profession to his own standard.

Besides which, the sheepfolds were placed under the special direction of Mademoiselle Billot, and receiving orders from her lips was not receiving orders.

But, on her part, Catherine watched over the dignity of Pitou.

In the evening, when the young man approached her, and asked her at what hour he ought to go out to rejoin the shepherds, she said, smiling, —

“You will not go out at all.”

“And why so?” said Pitou, with astonishment.

“I have made my father comprehend that the education you have received places you above the functions which he had allotted to you. You will remain at the farm.”

“Ah! so much the better,” said Pitou. “In this way, I shall not leave you.”

The exclamation had escaped the ingenuous Pitou. But he had no sooner uttered it, than he blushed to his very ears; while Catherine, on her part, held down her head and smiled.

“Ah! forgive me, Mademoiselle. It came from my heart in spite of me. You must not be angry with me on that account,” said Pitou.

“I am not angry with you, Monsieur Pitou,” said Catherine; “and it is no fault of yours if you feel pleasure in remaining with me.”

There was a silence of some moments. This was not at all astonishing, the poor children had said so much to each other in so few words.

“But,” said Pitou, “I cannot remain at the farm doing nothing. What am I to do at the farm?”

“You will do what I used to do. You will keep the books, the accounts with the work-people, and of our receipts and expenses. You know how to reckon, do you not?”

“I know my four rules,” proudly replied Pitou.

“That is one more than ever I knew,” said Catherine. “I never was able to get farther than the third. You see, therefore, that my father will be a gainer by having you for his accountant; and as I also shall gain, and you yourself will gain by it, everybody will be a gainer."

"And in what way will you gain by it, Mademoiselle?" inquired Pitou.

"I shall gain time by it, and in that time I will make myself caps, that I may look prettier."

"Ah!" cried Pitou, "I think you quite pretty enough without caps."

"That is possible; but it is only your own individual taste," said the young girl, laughing. "Moreover, I cannot go and dance on a Sunday at Villers-Cotterets, without having some sort of a cap upon my head. That is all very well for your great ladies, who have the right of wearing powder and going bareheaded."

"I think your hair more beautiful as it is, than if it were powdered," said Pitou.

"Come, come, now; I see you are bent on paying me compliments."

"No, Mademoiselle, I do not know how to make them. We did not learn that at the Abbé Fortier's."

"And did you learn to dance there?"

"To dance?" inquired Pitou, greatly astonished.

"Yes — to dance?"

"To dance, and at the Abbé Fortier's? Good Lord, Mademoiselle! — oh! learn to dance, indeed!"

"Then, you do not know how to dance?"

"No," said Pitou.

"Well, then, you shall go with me to the ball on Sunday, and you will look at Monsieur de Charny while he is dancing. He is the best dancer of all the young men in the neighborhood."

"And who is this Monsieur de Charny?" demanded Pitou.

"He is the proprietor of the Château de Boursonne."

"And he will dance on Sunday?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And with whom?"

"With me."

Pitou's heart sank within him, without his being able to ascertain a reason for it.

"Then," said he, "it is in order to dance with him that you wish to dress yourself so finely."

"To dance with him — with others — with everybody."

"Excepting with me."

"And why not with you?"

"Because I do not know how to dance."

"You will learn."

"Ah! if you would but teach me, — you, Mademoiselle Catherine. I should learn much better than by seeing Monsieur de Charny, I can assure you."

"We shall see as to that," said Catherine. "In the mean time, it is bedtime. Good-night, Pitou."

"Good-night, Mademoiselle Catherine."

There was something both agreeable and disagreeable in what Mademoiselle Catherine had said to Pitou. The agreeable was, that he had been promoted from the rank of a cow-keeper and shepherd to that of book-keeper. The disagreeable was, that he did not know how to dance, and that Monsieur de Charny did know. According to what Catherine had said, he was the best dancer in the whole neighborhood.

Pitou was dreaming all night that he saw Monsieur de Charny dancing, and that he danced very badly.

The next day Pitou entered upon his new office, under the direction of Catherine. Then one thing struck him, and it was that, under some masters, study is altogether delightful. In the space of about two hours he completely understood the duties he had to perform.

"Ah, Mademoiselle!" exclaimed he, "if you had but taught me Latin, instead of that Abbé Fortier, I believe I never should have committed any barbarisms."

"And you would have become an abbé?"

"And I should have been an abbé," replied Pitou.

"So, then, you would have shut yourself up in a seminary, in which no woman would have entered."

"Well, now," cried Pitou, "I really had never thought of that, Mademoiselle Catherine. I would much rather, then, not be an abbé."

The good man Billot returned home at nine o'clock. He had gone out before Pitou was up. Every morning the farmer rose at three o'clock, to see to the sending out of his horses and his wagoners. Then he went over his fields until nine o'clock, to see that every one was at his post, and that all his laborers were doing their duty. At nine o'clock he returned to the house to breakfast, and went out again at ten. One o'clock was the dinner-hour;

and the afternoon was, like the morning, spent in looking after the workmen. Thus the affairs of worthy Billot were prospering marvellously. As he had said, he possessed sixty acres in the sunshine, and a thousand louis in the shade; and it was even probable that, had the calculation been correctly made — had Pitou made up the account, and had not been too much agitated by the presence or remembrance of Mademoiselle Catherine, some few acres of land, and some few hundred louis more, would have been found than the worthy farmer had himself admitted.

At breakfast, Billot informed Pitou that the first reading of Dr. Gilbert's new book was to take place in the barn, two days after, at ten in the morning.

Pitou then timidly observed that ten o'clock was the hour for attending mass. But the farmer said that he had specially selected that hour to try his workmen.

We have already said that Father Billot was a philosopher.

He detested the priests, whom he considered as the apostles of tyranny; and finding an opportunity for raising an altar against an altar, he eagerly took advantage of it.

Madame Billot and Catherine ventured to offer some observations; but the farmer replied that the women might, if they chose, go to mass, seeing that religion had been made expressly for women; but as to the men, they should attend the reading of the doctor's work, or they should leave his service.

Billot, the philosopher, was very despotic in his own house. Catherine alone had the privilege of raising her voice against his decrees. But if these decrees were so tenaciously determined upon that he knitted his brows when replying to her, Catherine became as silent as the rest.

Catherine, however, thought of taking advantage of the circumstance to benefit Pitou. On rising from table she observed to her father that, in order to read all the magnificent phrases he would have to read on the Sunday morning, Pitou was but miserably clad; that he was about to play the part of a master, since he was to instruct others; and that the master ought not to be placed in a position to blush in the presence of his disciples.

Billot authorized his daughter to make an arrangement with Monsieur Dulauroy, the tailor at Villers-Cotterets, for a new suit of clothes for Pitou.

Catherine was right; for new garments were not merely a matter of taste with regard to Pitou. The breeches which he wore were the same which Dr.

Gilbert had, five years before, ordered for him. At that time they were too long, but since then had become much too short. We are compelled to acknowledge, however, that, through the care of Mademoiselle Angélique, they had been elongated at least two inches every year. As to the coat and waistcoat, they had both disappeared for upwards of two years, and had been replaced by the serge gown in which our hero first presented himself to the observation of our readers.

Pitou had never paid any attention to his toilet. A looking-glass was an unknown piece of furniture in the abode of Mademoiselle Angélique; and not having, like the handsome Narcissus, any violent tendency to fall in love with himself, Pitou had never thought of looking at himself in the transparent rivulets near which he set his bird-snares.

But from the moment that Mademoiselle Catherine had spoken to him of accompanying her to the ball, from the moment the elegant cavalier, Monsieur de Charny's name had been mentioned, since the conversation about caps, on which the young girl calculated to increase her attractions, Pitou had looked at himself in a mirror, and, being rendered melancholy by the very dilapidated condition of his garments, had asked himself in what way he also could make any addition to his natural advantages.

Unfortunately, Pitou was not able to find any solution to this question. The dilapidation of his clothes was positive. Now, in order to have new clothes made, it was necessary to have ready cash; and during the whole course of his existence Pitou had never possessed a single sou.

Pitou had undoubtedly read that, when shepherds were contending for the prize in music or in poetry, they decorated themselves with roses. But he thought, and with great reason, that although such a wreath might well assort with his expressive features, it would only place in stronger relief the miserable state of his habiliments.

Pitou was, therefore, most agreeably surprised when, on the Sunday morning, at eight o'clock, and at the moment he was racking his brains for some means of embellishing his person, Monsieur Dulauroy entered his room and placed upon a chair a coat and breeches of sky-blue cloth, and a large white waistcoat with red stripes.

At the same instant a sempstress came in, and laid upon another chair, opposite to the above-mentioned one, a new shirt and a cravat. If the shirt fitted well, she had orders to complete the half-dozen.

It was a moment teeming with surprise. Behind the sempstress appeared the hat-maker. He had brought with him a small cocked hat of the very latest fashion and of most elegant shape, and which had been fabricated by Monsieur Cornu, the first hat-maker in Villers-Cotterets.

A shoemaker had also been ordered to bring shoes for Pitou; and he had with him a pair with handsome silver buckles made expressly for him.

Pitou could not recover his amazement; he could not in any way comprehend that all these riches were for him. In his most exaggerated dreams he could not even have dared to wish for so sumptuous a wardrobe. Tears of gratitude gushed from his eyelids, and he could only murmur out these words: —

“Oh! Mademoiselle Catherine! Mademoiselle Catherine! never will I forget what you have done for me.”

Everything fitted remarkably well, and as if Pitou had been actually measured for them, with the sole exception of the shoes, which were too small by half. Monsieur Lauderau, the shoemaker, had taken measure by the foot of his son, who was four years Pitou’s senior.

This superiority over young Lauderau gave a momentary feeling of pride to our hero; but this feeling of pride was soon checked by the reflection that he would either be obliged to go to the dance in his old shoes, or in no shoes at all, which would not be in accordance with the remainder of his costume. But this uneasiness was not of long duration. A pair of shoes which had been sent home at the same time to Farmer Billot fitted him exactly. It fortunately happened that Billot’s feet and Pitou’s were of the same dimensions, which was carefully concealed from Billot, for fear that so alarming a fact might annoy him.

While Pitou was busied in arraying himself in these sumptuous habiliments, the hairdresser came in and divided Pitou’s hair into three compartments. One, and the most voluminous, was destined to fall over the collar of his coat, in the form of a tail; the two others were destined to ornament the temples, by the strange and unpoetical name of dog’s-ears, — ridiculous enough, but that was the name given to them in those days.

And now there is one thing we must acknowledge, — and that is, that when Pitou, thus combed and frizzled, dressed in his sky-blue coat and breeches, with his rose-striped waistcoat and his frilled shirt, with his tail and his dog’s-ear curls, looked at himself in the glass, he found great difficulty in recognizing himself, and twisted himself about to see whether Adonis in person had not redescended on the earth.

He was alone. He smiled graciously at himself; and with head erect, his thumbs thrust into his waistcoat pockets, he said, raising himself upon his toes: —

“We shall see this Monsieur de Charny!”

It is true that Ange Pitou in his new costume resembled, as one pea does another, not one of Virgil’s shepherds, but one of those so admirably painted by Watteau.

Consequently, the first step which Pitou made on entering the farm-kitchen was a perfect triumph.

“Oh, mamma, only see,” cried Catherine, “how well Pitou looks now!”

“The fact is, that one would hardly know him again,” replied Madame Billot.

Unfortunately, after the first general survey which had so much struck the young girl, she entered into a more minute examination of the details, and found Pitou less good-looking in the detailed than in the general view.

“Oh, how singular!” cried Catherine! “what great hands you have!”

“Yes,” said Pitou, proudly, “I have famous hands, have I not?”

“And what thick knees!”

“That is a proof that I shall grow taller.”

“Why, it appears to me that you are tall enough already, Monsieur Pitou,” observed Catherine.

“That does not matter; I shall grow taller still,” said Pitou. “I am only seventeen and a half years old.”

“And no calves!”

“Ah, yes, that is true, — none at all; but they will grow soon.”

“That is to be hoped,” said Catherine, “but no matter, you are very well as you are.”

Pitou made a bow.

“Oh! oh!” exclaimed Billot, coming in at that moment, and also struck with Pitou’s appearance. “How fine you are, my lad! How I wish your Aunt Angélique could see you now.”

“And so do I,” said Pitou.

“I wonder what she would say?”

“She would not say a word, she would be in a perfect fury.”

“But, Father,” said Catherine, with a certain degree of uneasiness, “would she not have the right to take him back again?”

“Why, she turned him out of doors.”

“And, besides,” said Pitou, “the five years have gone by.”

“What five years?” inquired Catherine.

“The five years for which Doctor Gilbert left a thousand francs.”

“Had he then left a thousand francs with your aunt?”

“Yes, yes, yes: to get me into a good apprenticeship.”

“That *is* a man!” exclaimed the farmer. “When one thinks that I hear something of the same kind related of him every day. Therefore — to him,” he added, stretching out his hands with a gesture of admiration, “will I be devoted in life and death.”

“He wished that I should learn some trade,” said Pitou.

“And he was right. And this is the way in which good intentions are thwarted. A man leaves a thousand francs that a child may be taught a trade, and instead of having him taught a trade, he is placed under the tuition of a bigoted priest who destines him for the seminary! And how much did she pay to your Abbé Fortier?”

“Who?”

“Your aunt.”

“She never paid him anything.”

“What? Did she pocket the two hundred livres a year, which that good Monsieur Gilbert paid!”

“Probably.”

“Listen to me, for I have a bit of advice to give you, Pitou; whenever your bigoted old aunt shall walk off, take care to examine minutely every cupboard, every mattress, every pickle-jar — ”

“And for what?” asked Pitou.

“Because, do you see, you will find some hidden treasure, some good old louis, in some old stocking-foot. Why, it must undoubtedly be so, for she could never have found a purse large enough to contain all her savings.”

“Do you think so?”

“Most assuredly. But we will speak of this at a more proper time and place. To-day we must take a little walk. Have you Doctor Gilbert’s book?”

“I have it here, in my pocket.”

“Father,” said Catherine, “have you well reflected upon this?”

“There is no need for reflection,” replied the farmer, “when one is about to do a good thing, my child. The doctor told me to have the book read, and to propagate the principles which it contains; the book shall therefore be read, and the principles shall be propagated.”

“And,” said Catherine, timidly, “may my mother and I, then, go to attend mass?”

“Go to mass, my child; go with your mother,” replied Billot. “You are women; we, who are men, have other things to think of. Come, Pitou, we must be off, for we are waited for.”

Pitou bowed majestically to Madame Billot and Mademoiselle Catherine; then with head erect he followed the worthy farmer, proud of having been thus, for the first time, called a man.

CHAPTER VII.

In which it is demonstrated that although Long Legs’s may be somewhat Ungraceful in Dancing, they are very useful in Running

THERE was a numerous assemblage in the barn. Billot, as we have said, was much respected by his laborers, inasmuch as, though he scolded them unscrupulously, he fed and paid them well.

Consequently every one of them had hastened eagerly to accept his invitation.

Moreover, at this period the people had been seized with that extraordinary fever which pervades nations when nations are about to set themselves to work to produce some great change. Strange, new words, which until then had scarcely ever been uttered, issued from mouths which had never before pronounced them. They were the words, Liberty, Independence, Emancipation; and, strange to say, it was not only among the people that these words were heard; no, these words had been pronounced in the first place by the nobility, and the voice which responded to them was but an echo.

It was in the west that had first shone forth this light, which was destined to illuminate until it seared. It was in America that arose this sun, which, in accomplishing its course, was to make France one vast conflagration, by the light of which the affrighted nations were to read the word Republic traced in vivid characters of blood.

But notwithstanding this, meetings in which political affairs were discussed were less frequent than one would imagine. Men who had sprung up no one knew from where, apostles of an invisible deity, had traversed town and country, disseminating everywhere words in praise of liberty. The government, blinded heretofore, began at length to open its eyes. Those who were at the head of the immense machine denominated the “state,” felt that some of its wheels were paralyzed, without being able to comprehend whence the obstacle proceeded. The opposition existed in all minds, if it had not yet instilled itself into all hands and arms; invisible, though present, though sensible, though threatening, and still more threatening from being like ghosts intangible, and from being divined although it could not be clutched.

Twenty or twenty-five husbandmen, all in the employment of Billot, had assembled in the barn.

Billot entered it, followed by Pitou. All heads were instantly uncovered, and they waved their hats to welcome their loved master. It was plainly visible that all these men were ready to meet death, should he but give the signal.

The farmer explained to the country-people that the pamphlet which Pitou was about to read to them was the work of Doctor Gilbert. The doctor was well known throughout the whole district, in which he was the proprietor of several farms, the one rented by Billot being the most considerable.

A cask had been prepared for the reader. Pitou ascended this extempore forum, and at once began.

It is to be remarked that people of the lower class, and I might almost venture to say, men in general, listen with most attention to that which they understand the least. It was evident that the general sense of the pamphlet escaped the perceptions of the most enlightened among this rustic auditory, and even of Billot himself. But in the midst of that obscure phraseology from time to time flashed, like lightning in a dark sky charged with electricity, the luminous words, Independence, Liberty, Equality. Nothing more was necessary; shouts of applause burst forth; cries of “Long live Doctor Gilbert!” resounded on every side. Not more than one third of the pamphlet had been read; it was decided that the remainder should be delivered on the two following Sundays.

The auditors were therefore invited for the next Sunday, and every one of them promised to attend.

Pitou had well performed his part; he had read energetically and well. Nothing succeeds so well as success. The reader had taken his share of the plaudits which had been addressed to the work, and, submitting to the influence of this relative science, Billot himself felt growing within him a certain degree of consideration for the pupil of the Abbé Fortier. Pitou, already a giant in his physical proportions, had morally grown ten inches in the opinion of Billot.

But there was one thing wanting to Pitou’s happiness; Mademoiselle Catherine had not been present at his triumph.

But Father Billot, enchanted with the effect produced by the doctor’s pamphlet, hastened to communicate its success to his wife and daughter. Madame Billot made no reply; she was a short-sighted woman.

Mademoiselle Catherine smiled sorrowfully.

“Well, what is the matter with you now “ said the farmer.

“Father! my dear father!” cried Catherine, “I fear that you are running into danger.”

“There, now; are you going to play the bird of ill omen? You are well aware that I like the lark better than the owl.”

“Father, I have already been told to warn you that eyes are watching you.”

“And who was it that told you this, if you please?”

“A friend.”

“A friend? All advice is deserving of thanks. You must tell me the name of this friend. Who is he? Come, now, let us hear.”

“A man who ought to be well informed upon such matters.”

“But who is it?”

“Monsieur Isidore de Charny.”

“What business has that fop to meddle in such matters? Does he pretend to give me advice upon my way of thinking? Do I give him advice upon his mode of dressing It appears to me that as much might be said on one subject as the other.”

“My dear father, I do not tell you this to vex you. The advice he gave me was well intended.”

“Well, then, in return, I will give him my counsel, which you can on my behalf transmit to him.”

“And what is that?”

“It is that he and his fellows take good care what they are about. They shake these noble gentlemen about very nicely in the National Assembly, and more than once a great deal has been said of court favorites, male and female. Let him forewarn his brother, Monsieur Oliver de Charny, who is out yonder, to look to himself, for it is said he is not on bad terms with the Austrian woman.”

“Father,” said Catherine, “you have more experience than we have; act according to your pleasure.”

“Yes, indeed,” murmured Pitou, whose success had given him great confidence, “what business has your Monsieur Isidore to make and meddle?”

Catherine either did not hear him, or pretended not to hear him, and the conversation dropped.

The dinner was got through as usual. Never did dinner appear so long to Pitou. He was feverishly impatient to show himself abroad with Mademoiselle Catherine leaning on his arm. This Sunday was a momentous day to him, and he resolved that the date, the 12th of July, should ever remain engraved upon his memory.

They left the farm at last at about three o’clock. Catherine was positively charming. She was a pretty, fair-haired girl, with black eyes, slight and flexible as the willows that shaded the small spring from which the farm was supplied with water. She was, moreover, dressed with that natural coquetry which enhances the attractions of every woman, and her pretty little fantastic cap, made with her own hands, as she had told Pitou, became her admirably.

The ball did not in general commence till six o’clock. Four village minstrels, mounted upon a small stage formed of planks, did the honors of this ball-room in the open air, on receiving a contribution of six shillings for every country dance.

While waiting for the opening of the dance, the company walked in the celebrated Lane of Sighs, of which Aunt Angélique had spoken, to see the young gentlemen of the town and the neighborhood play at tennis, under the direction of Master Farollet, tennis-master-in-chief to his Highness the Duke of Orleans. Master Farollet was considered a perfect oracle, and his decision in matters of *chasse* and *passe*, and service, was as irrevocable as were the laws of the Medes and Persians.

Pitou, without knowing why, would have very much desired to remain in the Lane of Sighs; but it was not for the purpose of remaining concealed beneath the shade of this double row of beech-trees that Catherine had attired herself in the becoming dress which had so much astonished Pitou.

Women are like the flowers which chance has brought forth in the shade: their tendency is always towards the light; and one way or the other they must expand their fresh and perfumed petals in the sunshine, though it withers and destroys them.

The violet alone, as is asserted by the poets, has the modesty to remain concealed; but then she is arrayed in mourning, as if deploring her useless, because unnoticed, charms.

Catherine, therefore, dragged away at Pitou's arm, and so successfully, that they took the path to the tennis-court. We must, however, hasten to acknowledge that Pitou did not go very unwillingly. He also was as anxious to display his sky-blue suit and his cocked hat, as Catherine was to show her Galatea cap and her shining short silk bodice.

One thing above all flattered our hero, and gave him a momentary advantage over Catherine. As no one recognized him, Pitou never having been seen in such sumptuous habiliments, they took him for some young stranger arrived in the town, some nephew or cousin of the Billot family; some even asserted that he was Catherine's intended. But Pitou felt too great an interest in proving his own identity, to allow the error to be of long continuance.

He gave so many nods to his friends, he so frequently took off his hat to his acquaintance, that at last the unworthy pupil of the Abbé Fortier was recognized in the spruce young countryman.

A sort of buzzing murmur quickly ran through the throng, and many of his former companions exclaimed, "Why, really, it is Pitou!" "Only look at Pitou!" "Did you see Ange Pitou?"

This clamor at length reached the ears of Mademoiselle Angélique; but as this clamor informed her that the good-looking youth pointed out by it was her nephew, walking with his toes turned out and his elbows gracefully curved, the old maid, who had always seen Pitou walk with his toes turned in and his elbows stuck to his ribs, shook her head incredulously, and merely said, —

"You are mistaken; that is not my pitiful nephew."

The two young people reached the tennis-court. On that day there happened to be a match between the players of Soissons and those of Villers-Cotterets, so that the game was very animated. Catherine and Pitou placed themselves close to the rope stretched to prevent the crowd from interfering with the players; it was Catherine who had selected this place as being the best.

In about a minute the voice of Master Farollet was heard, calling out, —

"Two in — go over."

The players effectually changed places; that is to say, they each went to defend their quarters and attack those of their adversaries. One of the players, on passing by, bowed to Catherine with a smile; Catherine replied by a courtesy, and blushed. At the same moment Pitou felt a nervous trembling shoot through Catherine’s arm, which was leaning on his.

An unknown anguish shot through Pitou’s heart.

“That is Monsieur de Charny,” said he, looking at his companion.

“Yes,” replied Catherine. “Ah! you know him, then?”

“I do not know him,” replied Pitou, “but I guessed that it was he.”

And, in fact, Pitou had readily conceived this young man to be Monsieur de Charny, from what Catherine had said to him the previous evening.

The person who had bowed to the young girl was an elegant gentleman, who might be twenty-three or twenty-four years of age; he was handsome, of good stature, well formed, and graceful in his movements, as are all those who have had an aristocratic education from their very cradle. All those manly exercises in which perfection can only be attained on the condition of their being studied from childhood, Monsieur Isidore de Charny executed with remarkable perfection; besides, he was one of those whose costume always harmonizes with the pursuit in which they are engaged. His hunting-dresses were quoted for their perfect taste; his attire in the fencing-room might have served as a pattern to Saint-Georges himself; and his riding-coats were — or rather appeared to be, thanks to his manner of wearing them — of a particularly elegant shape.

On the present occasion Monsieur de Charny, a younger brother of our old acquaintance the Count de Charny, was attired in tight-fitting pantaloons of a light color, which set off to great advantage the shape of his finely formed and muscular limbs; his hair was negligently dressed, as for the morning; elegant tennis sandals for the moment were substituted for the red-heeled shoe or the top-boots; his waistcoat was of white marsella, fitting as closely to his waist as if he had worn stays; and to sum up all, his servant was waiting upon the slope with a green coat embroidered with gold lace, for his master to put on when the match was ended.

The animation of the game communicated to his features all the charm and freshness of youth, notwithstanding his twenty-three years, the nightly excesses he had committed, and the gambling parties he had attended, which frequently the rising sun had illumined with its rays; all this had made sad havoc with his constitution.

None of these personal advantages, which doubtless the young girl had remarked, had escaped the jealous eyes of Pitou. On observing the small hands and feet of Monsieur de Charny, he began to feel less proud of that prodigality of nature which had given him the victory over the shoemaker’s son, and he reflected that nature might have distributed in a more skilful manner over every part of his frame the elements of which it was composed.

In fact, with what there was too much in the hands, the feet, and the knees of Pitou, nature might have furnished him with a handsome, well-formed leg. Only, things were not in their right place: where a certain delicacy of proportion was required, there was an unnatural thickness; where a certain sleekness and rotundity would have been advantageous, there was an utter void.

Pitou looked at his legs with the same expression as the stag did of whom we have read in the fable.

“What is the matter with you, Monsieur Pitou?” said Catherine, who had observed his discontented looks.

Pitou did not reply: be could not explain his feelings; he therefore only sighed.

The game had terminated. The Viscount de Charny took advantage of the interval between the game just finished and the one about to commence, to come over to speak to Catherine. As he approached them, Pitou observed the color heightening in the young girl’s cheeks, and felt her arm become more and more trembling.

The Viscount gave a nod to Pitou, and then, with that familiar politeness which the nobility of that period knew how to adopt with the citizens’ daughters, and grisettes, he inquired of Catherine as to the state of her health, and asked her to be his partner in the first dance. Catherine accepted. A smile conveyed the thanks of the young nobleman. The game was about to begin, and he was called for. He bowed to Catherine, and then left her with the same elegant ease with which he had approached her.

Pitou felt all the superiority which the man possessed over him, who could speak, smile, approach, and take leave in such a manner.

A month’s study, employed in endeavoring to imitate the simple though elegant movements of Monsieur de Charny, would only have produced a ridiculous parody, and this Pitou himself acknowledged.

If Pitou had been capable of entertaining a feeling of hatred, he would from that moment have detested the Viscount de Charny.

Catherine remained looking at the tennis-players until the moment when they called their servants to bring their coats to them. She then directed her steps towards the place set apart for dancing, to Pitou’s great despair, who on that day appeared to be destined to go everywhere but where he wished.

Monsieur de Charny did not allow Catherine to wait long for him. A slight change in his dress had converted him from a tennis-player into an elegant dancer.

The violins gave the signal, and he at once presented his hand to Catherine, reminding her of the promise she had made to dance with him.

That which Pitou experienced when he felt Catherine withdrawing her arm from within his, and saw the young girl blushing deeply as she advanced with her cavalier into the circle, was one of the most disagreeable sensations of his whole life. A cold perspiration stood upon his brow; a cloud passed over his eyes; he stretched out his hand and caught hold of the balustrade for support, for he felt that his knees, strongly constituted as they were, were giving way.

As to Catherine, she did not appear to have, and very probably even had not, any idea of what was passing in poor Pitou’s heart. She was at once happy and proud, — happy at being about to dance, and proud of dancing with the handsomest cavalier of the whole neighborhood.

If Pitou had been constrained to admire Monsieur de Charny as a tennis-player, he was no less compelled to do him justice as a dancer. In those days the fashion had not yet sprung up of walking instead of dancing. Dancing was an art which formed a necessary part of the education of every one. Without citing the case of Monsieur de Lauzun, who had owed his fortune to the manner in which he had danced his first steps in the king’s quadrille, more than one nobleman owed the favor he had enjoyed at court to the manner in which he had extended his legs or pointed the extremity of his toe. In this respect the Viscount was a model of grace and perfection, and he might, like Louis XIV., have danced in a theatre with the chance of being applauded, although he was neither a king nor an actor.

For the second time Pitou looked at his own legs, and was obliged to acknowledge that unless some great metamorphosis should take place in that portion of his individuality, he must altogether renounce any attempt to succeed in vying with Monsieur de Charny in the particular art which he was displaying at that moment.

The country dance having ended, — for Catherine it had scarcely lasted a few seconds, but to Pitou it had appeared a century, — she returned to resume the arm of her cavalier, and could not avoid observing the change which had taken place in his countenance. He was pale; the perspiration stood in beads upon his forehead, and a tear, half dried up by jealousy, shone in his humid eye.

"Ah! good heaven!" she exclaimed, "what is the matter with you, Pitou?"

"The matter is," replied the poor youth, "that I shall never dare to dance with you, after having seen you dance with Monsieur de Charny."

"Pshaw!" said Catherine, "you must not allow yourself to be cast down in this way; you will dance as well as you are able, and I shall not feel the less pleasure in dancing with you."

"Ah!" cried Pitou, "you say that, Mademoiselle, to console me; but I know myself, and I feel assured that you will always feel more pleasure in dancing with this young nobleman than with me."

Catherine made no reply, for she would not utter a falsehood, only, as she was an excellent creature, and had begun to perceive that something extraordinary was passing in the heart of the poor youth, she treated him very kindly; but this kindness could not restore to him his lost joy and peace of mind. Father Billot had spoken truly: Pitou was beginning to be a man, — he was suffering.

Catherine danced five or six country dances after this, one of which was with Monsieur de Charny. This time, without suffering less in reality than before, Pitou was, in appearance, much more calm. He followed with eager eyes each movement of Catherine and her cavalier. He endeavored from the motion of their lips to divine what they were saying to each other, and when, during the figures of the dance, their hands were joined, he tried to discern whether their hands merely touched or pressed each other when thus they came in contact.

Doubtless it was the second dance with De Charny that Catherine had been awaiting, for it was scarcely ended when the young girl proposed to Pitou to return to the farm. Never was proposal acceded to with more alacrity; but the blow was struck, and Pitou, while taking long strides which Catherine from time to time was obliged to restrain, remained perfectly silent.

"What is the matter with you?" at length said Catherine to him, "and why is it that you do not speak to me?"

"I do not speak to you, Mademoiselle," said Pitou, "because I do not know how to speak as Monsieur de Charny does. What would you have me say to you, after all the fine things which he whispered to you while dancing with you?”

“Only see how unjust you are, Monsieur Ange; why, we were speaking of you.”

“Of me, Mademoiselle, and how so?”

“Why, Monsieur Pitou, if your protector should not return, you must have another found to supply his place.”

“I am then no longer capable of keeping the farm accounts?” inquired Pitou, with a sigh.

“On the contrary, Monsieur Ange, it is the farm accounts which are no longer worthy of being kept by you. With the education that you have received, you can find some more fitting occupation.”

“I do not know what I may be fit for, but this I know, that I will not accept anything better if I am to obtain it through the Viscount de Charny.”

“And why should you refuse his protection? His brother, the Count de Charny, is, it would appear, in high favor at court, and has married an intimate friend of the Queen. He told me that if it would be agreeable to me he could obtain for you a place in the custom-house.”

“Much obliged, Mademoiselle; but I have already told you that I am well satisfied to remain as I am, and unless, indeed, your father wishes to send me away, I will remain at the farm.”

“And why in the Devil’s name should I send you away?” cried a gruff voice, which Catherine tremblingly recognized to be that of her father.

“My dear Pitou,” said Catherine in a whisper, “do not say a word of Monsieur Isidore, I beg of you.”

“Well! why don’t you answer?”

“Why, really, I don’t know,” said Pitou, much confused; “perhaps you do not think me sufficiently well informed to be useful to you?”

“Not sufficiently well informed, when you calculate as well as Barême, and when you read well enough to teach our schoolmaster, who notwithstanding thinks himself a great scholar No, Pitou, it is God who brings to my house the people who enter it, and when once they are in it they shall remain there as long as God pleases.”

Pitou returned to the farm on this assurance; but although this was something, it was not enough. A great change had taken place in his mind between the time of his going out and returning: he had lost a thing which, once lost, is never recovered; this was confidence in himself, and therefore

Pitou, contrary to his usual custom, slept very badly. In his waking moments he recalled to mind Doctor Gilbert's book; this book was written principally against the nobility, against the abuses committed by the privileged classes, against the cowardice of those who submitted to them; it appeared to Pitou that he only then began to comprehend all the fine ideas which he had read that morning, and he promised himself, as soon as it should be daylight, to read again for his own satisfaction, and to himself, the masterpiece which he had read aloud and to everybody,

But as Pitou had slept badly he awoke late. He did not, however, the less determine on carrying into effect his project of reading the book. It was seven o'clock; the farmer would not return until nine; besides, were he to return earlier, he could not but approve an occupation which he had himself recommended.

He descended by a small staircase, and seated himself on a low bench which happened to be under Catherine's window. Was it accident that had led Pitou to seat himself precisely in that spot, or did he know the relative positions of that window and that bench?

Be that as it may, Pitou was attired in his old everyday clothes, which there had not yet been time to get replaced, and which were composed of his black breeches, his green cassock, and his rusty-looking shoes. He drew the pamphlet from his pocket and began to read.

We would not venture to say that on beginning to read, the eyes of Pitou were not, from time to time, turned from his book to the window; but as the window did not exhibit the fair face of the young girl in its framework of nasturtiums and convolvuli, Pitou's eyes at length fixed themselves intently on his book.

It is true that as his hand neglected to turn over the leaves, and that the more fixed his attention appeared to be, the less did his hand move, it might be believed that his mind was fixed upon some other object, and that he was meditating instead of reading.

Suddenly it appeared to Pitou that a shade was thrown over the pages of the pamphlet, until then illuminated by the morning sun. This shadow, too dense to be that of a cloud, could therefore only be produced by some opaque body. Now, there are opaque bodies which are so delightful to look upon, that Pitou quickly turned round to ascertain what it was that thus intercepted his sunshine.

Pitou’s hopes were, however, delusive. There was in fact an opaque body which robbed him of the daylight and heat which Diogenes desired Alexander not to deprive him of. But this opaque body, instead of being delightful, presented to his view a sufficiently disagreeable appearance.

It was that of a man about forty-five years old, who was taller and thinner than Pitou himself, dressed in a coat almost as threadbare as his own, and who was leaning his head over his shoulder, and appeared to be reading the pamphlet with a curiosity equal to Pitou’s absence of mind.

Pitou was very much astonished; a gracious smile was playing round the lips of the dark-looking gentleman, exhibiting a mouth which had only retained four teeth, two in the upper and two in the lower jaw, crossing and sharpening themselves against each other, like the tusks of the wild boar.

“An American edition,” said the man, with a strong nasal twang; “an octavo: ‘On the Liberty of Man and the Independence of Nations, Boston, 1788.’“

While the black man was talking, Pitou opened his eyes with progressively increasing astonishment, so that when the man ceased speaking, Pitou’s eyes had attained the greatest possible development of which they were capable.

“Boston, 1788. That is right, sir,” replied Pitou.

“It is the treatise of Doctor Gilbert,” said the gentleman in black.

“Yes, sir,” politely replied Pitou, rising from his seat, for he had been told that it was uncivil to remain sitting when speaking to a superior; and in the still ingenuous mind of Pitou this man had the right to claim superiority over him.

But on getting up, Pitou observed something of a rosy color moving towards the window, and which gave him a significant glance. This rosy something was Mademoiselle Catherine. The young girl looked at him with an extraordinary expression, and made strange signs to him.

“Sir, if it is not being indiscreet,” said the gentleman in black, who, having his back turned towards the window, was altogether ignorant of what was passing, “may I ask to whom this book belongs?”

And he pointed with his finger to the pamphlet which Pitou held in his hand.

Pitou was about to say that the book belonged to Monsieur Billot, when he heard the following words uttered in an almost supplicating tone: —

“Say that it is your own.”

The gentleman in black, who was at that moment all eyes, did not hear these words.

"Sir," replied Pitou majestically, "this book belongs to me."

The gentleman in black raised his head, for he began to remark that the amazed looks of Pitou were from time to time diverted from him, to fix themselves on one particular spot. He saw the window, but Catherine had divined the movement of the gentleman in black, and, rapid as a bird, she had disappeared.

"What are you looking at, up yonder " inquired the gentleman in black.

"Well, now," replied Pitou, smiling, "permit me to observe to you that you are very inquisitive, — *curiosus*, or rather *avidus cognoscendi*, as the Abbé Fortier, my preceptor, used to say."

"You say, then," rejoined the interrogator, without appearing in the slightest degree intimidated by the proof of learning which Pitou had just given, with the intention of affording the gentleman in black a higher idea of his acquirements than he had before entertained, — "you say, then, that this book is yours?"

Pitou gave his eyes a furtive glance, so that the window came within the scope of his visual organs. Catherine's head again appeared at it, and made him an affirmative sign.

"Yes, sir," replied Pitou. "You are, perhaps, anxious to read it, — *Avidus legendi libri*, or *legendæ historiæ*."

"Sir," said the gentleman in black, "you appear to be much above the position which your attire would indicate. *Non dives vestitu sed ingenio*. Consequently, I arrest you."

"How! you arrest me " cried Pitou, completely astounded.

"Yes, sir; follow me, I beg of you."

Pitou no longer looked up in the air, but around him, and perceived two police sergeants who were awaiting the orders of the gentleman in black. The two sergeants seemed to him to have sprung up from beneath the ground.

"Let us draw up our report, gentlemen," said the gentleman in black.

The sergeants tied Pitou's hands together with a rope, while they took care to secure Doctor Gilbert's book.

Then they fastened Pitou himself to a ring which was in the wall under the window.

Pitou was about to exclaim against this treatment, but he heard the low voice which had so much influence over him, saying, “Let them do what they please.”

Pitou therefore allowed them to do as they pleased, with a docility which perfectly enchanted the sergeants, and above all the gentleman in black; so that without the slightest mistrust they entered the farm-house, the two sergeants to fetch a table, the gentleman in black to — but this we shall learn by-and-by.

The sergeants and the gentleman in black had scarcely entered the house when the soft voice was again heard.

“Hold up your hands,” said the voice.

Pitou not only held up his hands but his head, and he perceived the pale and terrified face of Catherine; she had a knife in her hand.

“Higher! higher!” said she.

Pitou raised himself on tiptoe. Catherine leaned out of the window, the knife touched the rope, and Pitou recovered the liberty of his hands.

“Take the knife,” said Catherine, “ and in your turn cut the rope which fastens you to the ring.”

It was not necessary to repeat this to Pitou. He cut the cord, and was then completely free.

“And now,” said Catherine, “here is a double louis. You have good legs; make your escape. Go to Paris and acquaint the doctor — ”

She could not complete the sentence. The two sergeants reappeared, and the double louis fell at Pitou’s feet.

Pitou quickly snatched it up. The sergeants were on the threshold of the door, where they remained for a moment or two, astonished at seeing the man at liberty, whom so short a time before they had so securely tied up. On seeing them, Pitou’s hair stood on end, and he confusedly remembered the *in crinibus angues* of the Eumenides.

The two sergeants and Pitou remained for a short time in the position of two pointer dogs and a hare, — motionless, and looking at each other. But as at the slightest movement of the dogs the hare springs off, at the first movement of the sergeants Pitou gave a prodigious bound, and leaped over a high hedge.

The sergeants uttered a cry which made the exempt rush out of the house, carrying a small casket under his arm. The exempt did not lose any time in parleying, but instantly ran after Pitou; the two sergeants imitated his example; but they were not active enough to jump, as he had done, over a hedge three feet and a half in height. They were therefore compelled to go round to a gate.

But when they reached the corner of the hedge, they perceived Pitou five hundred yards off in the plain, and hastening towards the forest, from which he was distant scarcely a quarter of a league, and which he would doubtless reach in some six or seven minutes.

At that moment Pitou turned round and on perceiving the sergeants, who were pursuing him rather from a desire to perform their duty than with the hope of catching him, he redoubled his speed, and soon disappeared in the skirts of the wood.

Pitou ran on at this rate for another quarter of an hour. He could have run two hours had it been necessary, for he had the wind of a stag, as well as its velocity.

But at the end of a quarter of an hour he felt instinctively that he must be out of danger. He stopped, drew breath, and listened; and having assured himself that he had completely distanced his pursuers, he said to himself, —

“It is incredible that so many events can have been crowded into three days;” and he looked alternately at his double louis and his knife.

“Oh,” said he, “I wish I had only time to change my double louis, and give two sous to Mademoiselle Catherine, for I am much afraid that this knife will cut our friendship. No matter,” added he, “since she has desired me to go to Paris, let us go there.”

And Pitou, having looked about him to ascertain what part of the country he had reached, and finding that he was between Bouronne and Yvors, took a narrow path which would lead him straight to Gondreville Heaths, which path was crossed by the road which led direct to Paris.

CHAPTER VIII.

Showing why the Gentleman in Black had gone into the Farm at the same time with the Two Sergeants

BUT now let us return to the farm, and relate the catastrophe of which Pitou's episode was the winding up.

At about six o'clock in the morning an agent of the Paris police, accompanied by two sergeants, arrived at Villers-Cotterets, had presented themselves to the Commissary of Police, and had requested that the residence of Farmer Billot might be pointed out to them.

When they came within about five hundred yards of the farm, the exempt perceived a laborer working in a field. He went to him and asked him whether he should find Monsieur Billot at home. The laborer replied that Monsieur Billot never returned home till nine o'clock, — that is to say, before the breakfast hour. But at that very moment, as chance would have it, the laborer raised his eyes, and pointed to a man on horseback, who was talking with a shepherd at the distance of a quarter of a league from the farm.

"And yonder," said he, "is the person you are inquiring for."

"Monsieur Billot?"

"Yes."

"That horseman?"

"Yes; that is Monsieur Billot."

"Well, then, my friend," rejoined the exempt, "do you wish to afford great pleasure to your master?"

"I should like it vastly."

"Go and tell him that a gentleman from Paris is waiting for him at the farm."

"Oh," cried the laborer, "can it be Doctor Gilbert?"

"Tell him what I say; that is all."

The countryman did not wait to have the order repeated, but ran as hard as he could across the fields, while the police-officer and the two sergeants went and concealed themselves behind a half-ruined wall which stood facing the gate of the farm-yard.

In a very few minutes the galloping of a horse was heard. It was Billot, who had hastened back.

He went into the farm-yard, jumped from his horse, threw the bridle to one of the stable-boys, and rushed into the kitchen, being convinced that the first person he should see there would be Dr. Gilbert, standing beneath the immense mantel-piece; but he only saw Madame Billot seated in the middle of the room, plucking the feathers from a duck with all the minute care which this difficult operation demands.

Catherine was in her own room, employed in making a cap for the following Sunday. As it appears, Catherine was determined to be prepared in good time; but if the women have one pleasure almost equal to that of being well-dressed, it is that of preparing the articles with which they are to adorn themselves.

Billot paused on the threshold of the kitchen, and looked around inquiringly.

“Who, then, was it sent for me?” said he.

“It was I,” replied a flute-like voice behind him.

Billot turned round, and perceived the gentleman in black and the two sergeants.

“Hey-day!” cried he, retreating three paces from them; “and what do you want with me?”

“Oh, good heavens! almost nothing, my dear Monsieur Billot,” said the man with the flute-like voice; “only to make a perquisition in your farm, that is all.”

“A perquisition?” exclaimed the astonished Billot.

“A perquisition,” repeated the exempt.

Billot cast a glance at his fowling-piece, which was hanging over the chimney.

“Since we have a National Assembly,” said he, “I thought that citizens were no longer exposed to such vexations, which belong to another age, and which appertain to a bygone state of things. What do you want with me? I am a peaceable and loyal man.”

The agents of every police in the world have one habit which is common to them all, — that of never replying to the questions of their victims; but while they are searching their pockets, while they are arresting them, or tying their hands behind, some appear to be moved by pity. These tender-hearted ones are the most dangerous, inasmuch as they appear to be the most kind-hearted.

The one who was exercising his functions in the house of Farmer Billot was of the true Tapin and Desgrés school, made up of sweets, having always a tear for those whom they are persecuting, but who nevertheless do not use their hands to wipe their eyes.

The one in question, although heaving a deep sigh, made a sign with his hand to the two sergeants, who approached Billot. The worthy farmer sprang backward, and stretched out his hand to seize his gun; but it was diverted from the weapon, — a doubly-dangerous act at such a moment, as it might not only have killed the person about to use it, but the one against whom it was to be pointed. His hand was seized and imprisoned between two little hands, rendered strong by terror and powerful by supplication.

It was Catherine, who had run downstairs on hearing the noise, and had arrived in time to save her father from committing the crime of rebelling against the constituted authorities.

The first moment of anger having passed by, Billot no longer offered any resistance. The exempt ordered that he should be confined in a room on the ground floor, and Catherine in a room on the first story. As to Madame Billot, she was considered so inoffensive that no attention was paid to her, and she was allowed to remain in the kitchen. After this, finding himself master of the place, the exempt began to search the secretaries, wardrobes, and chests-of-drawers.

Billot, on finding himself alone, wished to make his escape. But, like most of the rooms on the ground floor of the farm-house, the windows of the one in which he was imprisoned were secured by iron bars. The gentleman in black had at a glance observed these bars, while Billot, who had had them placed there, had forgotten them.

Then, peeping through the key-hole, he perceived the exempt and his two acolytes, who were ransacking everything throughout the house.

“Hilloa!” cried he; “what is the meaning of all this? What are you doing there?”

“You can very plainly see that, my dear Monsieur Billot,” said the exempt. “We are seeking for something which we have not yet found.”

“But perhaps you are banditti, villains, regular thieves. Who knows?”

“Oh, sir!” replied the exempt, through the door, “you do us wrong. We are honest people, as you are; only that we are in the pay of his Majesty, and consequently compelled to obey his orders.”

“His Majesty’s orders!” exclaimed Billot. “The king, Louis XVI., has ordered you to search my secretary, to turn everything topsy-turvy in my closets and my wardrobes?”

“Yes.”

“His Majesty,” rejoined Billot, “who last year, when there was such a frightful famine that we were thinking of eating our horses, — his Majesty, who two years ago, when the hail-storm of the 13th of July destroyed our whole harvest, did not then deign to feel any anxiety about us, — what has he now to do with my farm, which he never saw, or with me, whom he does not know?”

“You will pardon me, sir,” said the exempt, opening the door a little, but with great precaution, and exhibiting his order, signed by the lieutenant of police, which, according to the usual form, was headed with these words, “In the king’s name,” — ”his Majesty has heard you spoken of, although he may not be personally acquainted with you; therefore, do not refuse the honor which he does you, and receive in a fitting manner those who present themselves to you in his name.”

And the exempt, with a polite bow, and a friendly wink of the eye, closed the door again; after which the search was resumed.

Billot said not a word more, but crossed his arms and paced up and down the room, like a lion in a cage. He felt that he was caught, and in the power of these men.

The investigation was silently continued. These men appeared to have dropped from the clouds. No one had seen them, but the laborer who had been sent to fetch Billot. Even the dogs in the yards had not barked on their approach. Assuredly the chief of this expedition must have been considered a skilful man, even by his own fraternity. It was evidently not his first enterprise of this nature.

Billot heard the meanings of his daughter, shut up in the room above his own, and he remembered her prophetic words; for there could not be a doubt that the persecution to which the farmer had been subjected had for its cause the doctor’s book.

At length the clock struck nine, and Billot through his grated window could count his laborers as they returned to the farm-house to get their breakfast. On seeing this, he reflected that, in case of any conflict, might, if not right, was not on his side. This conviction made the blood boil in his veins. He had no longer the fortitude to restrain his feelings; and seizing the door with both hands, he shook it so violently, that with two or three efforts of the same nature he would have burst the lock.

The police-agents immediately opened the door, and they saw the farmer standing close by it, with threatening looks. All was confusion in the house.

"But finally," cried Billot, " what is it you are seeking for in my house? Tell me, or, zounds! I will make you tell me."

The successive return of the laborers had not escaped the experienced eye of such a man as the exempt. He had counted the farm-servants, and had admitted to himself that in case of any combat he would not be able to retain possession of the field of battle. He therefore approached Billot with a demeanor more honeyed even than before, and bowing almost to the ground, said: —

"I will tell you what it is, dear Monsieur Billot, although it is against our custom. What we are seeking for in your house is a subversive book, an incendiary pamphlet, placed under ban by our royal censors."

"A book! — and in the house of a farmer who cannot read?"

"What is there astonishing in that, if you are a friend of the author, and he has sent it to you?"

"I am not the friend of Doctor Gilbert; I am merely his humble servant. The friend of the doctor, indeed! — that would be too great an honor for a poor farmer like me."

This inconsiderate outbreak, in which Billot betrayed himself by acknowledging that he not only knew the author, which was natural enough, he being his landlord, but that he knew the book, insured the agent's victory. The latter drew himself up, assumed his most amiable air, and touching Billot's arm, said, with a smile which appeared to extend transversely over his face: —

"“Tis thou hast named him.' Do you know that verse, my dear Monsieur Billot?"

"I know no verses."

"It is by Racine, a very great poet."

"Well, what is the meaning of that line?" cried Billot.

"It means that you have betrayed yourself."

"Who — I?"

"Yourself."

"And how so?"

"By being the first to mention Monsieur Gilbert, whom we had the discretion not to name."

"That is true," said Billot.

"You acknowledge it, then?"

"I will do more than that."

"My dear Monsieur Billot, you overwhelm us with kindness: what is it you will do?"

"If it is that book you are hunting after, and I tell you where that book is," rejoined the farmer, with an uneasiness which he could not altogether control, "you will leave off turning everything topsy-turvy here, will you not?"

The exempt made a sign to his two assistants.

"Most assuredly," replied the exempt, "since it is that book which is the object of our perquisition. Only," continued he, with his smiling grimace, "you may perhaps acknowledge one copy of it when you may have ten in your possession."

"I have only one, and that I swear to you."

"But it is this we are obliged to ascertain by a most careful search, dear Monsieur Billot," rejoined the exempt. "Have patience, therefore; in five minutes it will be concluded. We are only poor sergeants obeying the orders of the authorities, and you would not surely prevent men of honor, — there are men of honor in every station of life, dear Monsieur Billot, — you would not throw any impediment in the way of men of honor when they are doing their duty."

The gentleman in black had adopted the right mode: this was the proper course for persuading Billot.

"Well, do it then," replied the farmer, "but do it quickly."

And he turned his back upon them.

The exempt then very gently closed the door, and more gently still turned the key in the lock, at which Billot shrugged his shoulders in disdain, being certain of pulling open the door whenever he might please.

On his side the gentleman in black made a sign to the sergeants, who resumed their investigation, and they set to work much more actively than before. Books, papers, linen, were all opened, examined, unfolded.

Suddenly, at the bottom of a wardrobe which had been completely emptied, they perceived a small oaken casket bound with iron. The exempt darted upon it as a vulture on his prey. At the mere sight, the scent, the handling of this object, he undoubtedly at once recognized that which he was in search of, for he quickly concealed the casket beneath his threadbare coat, and made a sign to the two sergeants that his mission was effected.

Billot was again becoming impatient; he stopped before the locked door.

"Why, I tell you again that you will not find it unless I tell you where it is," he cried; "it is not worth the while to tumble and destroy all my things for nothing. I am not a conspirator. In the Devil's name listen to me. Do you not hear what I am saying? Answer me, or I will set off for Paris, and will complain to the king, to the National Assembly, to everybody."

In those days the king was always mentioned before the people.

"Yes, my dear Monsieur Billot, we hear you, and we are quite ready to do justice to your excellent reasoning. Come, now, tell us where is this book And as we are now convinced that you have only that single copy, we will take it, and then we will withdraw, and all will be over."

"Well," replied Billot, "the book is in the possession of an honest lad to whom I have given it with the charge of carrying it to a friend."

"And what is the name of this honest lad?" asked the gentleman in black, in an insinuating tone.

"Ange Pitou; he is a poor orphan whom I have taken into my house from charity, and who does not even know the subject of this book."

"Thanks, dear Monsieur Billot," said the exempt.

They threw the linen back into the wardrobe, and locked it up again, but the casket was not there.

"And where is this amiable youth to be found?"

"I think I saw him as I returned, somewhere near the bed of scarlet-runners, close to the arbor. Go, take the book from him; but take care not to do him any injury."

"Injury! Oh, my dear Monsieur Billot, how little you know us! We would not harm even a fly."

And they went towards the indicated spot. When they got near the scarlet-runners they perceived Pitou, whose tall stature made him appear more formidable than he was in reality. Thinking that the two sergeants would stand in need of his assistance to master the young giant, the exempt had taken off his cloak, had rolled the casket in it, and had hid the whole in a secret corner, but where he could easily regain possession of it.

But Catherine, who had been listening with her ear glued, as it were, to the door, had vaguely heard the words *Book*, *Doctor,* and *Pitou*. Therefore, finding the storm she had predicted had burst upon them, she had formed the idea of attenuating its effects. It was then that she prompted Pitou to say that he was the owner of the book.

We have related what then passed regarding it: how Pitou, bound and handcuffed by the exempt and his acolytes, had been restored to liberty by Catherine, who had taken advantage of the moment when the two sergeants went into the house to fetch a table to write upon, and the gentleman in black to take his cloak and casket.

We have stated how Pitou made his escape by jumping over a hedge; but that which we did not state is, that, like a man of talent, the exempt had taken advantage of this flight.

And, in fact, the twofold mission intrusted to the exempt having been accomplished, the flight of Pitou afforded an excellent opportunity to the exempt and his two men to make their escape also.

The gentleman in black, although he knew he had not the slightest chance of catching the fugitive, excited the two sergeants by his vociferations and his example to such a degree, that on seeing them racing through the clover, the wheat, and Spanish trefoil fields, one would have imagined that they were the most inveterate enemies of Pitou, whose long legs they were most cordially blessing in their hearts.

But Pitou had scarcely gained the covert of the wood, when the confederates, who had not even passed the skirts of it, halted behind a bush. During their race they had been joined by two other sergeants, who had kept themselves concealed in the neighborhood of the farm, and who had been instructed not to show themselves unless summoned by their chief.

“Upon my word,” said the exempt, “it is very well that our gallant young fellow had not the casket instead of the book, for we should have been obliged to hire post-horses to catch him. By Jupiter! those legs of his are not men’s legs, but those of a stag.”

“Yes,” replied one of the sergeants, “but he has not got it, has he, Monsieur Wolfsfoot? for, on the contrary, ‘t is you who have it.”

“Undoubtedly, my friend, and here it is,” replied the exempt, whose name we have now given for the first time, or we should rather say the nickname which had been given to him on account of the lightness of his step and the stealthiness of his walk.

“Then we are entitled to the reward which was promised us,” observed one of the sergeants.

“Here it is,” said the exempt, taking from his pocket four golden louis, which he divided among his four sergeants, without any distinction as to those who had been actively engaged in the perquisition or those who had merely remained concealed.

“Long live the lieutenant of police!” cried the sergeants.

“There is no harm in crying ‘Long live the lieutenant!’“ said Wolfsfoot; “but every time you utter such exclamations you should do it with discernment. It is not the lieutenant who pays.”

“Who is it, then?”

“Some gentleman or lady friend of his, I know not which, but who desires that his or her name may not be mentioned in the business.”

“I would wager that it is the person who wishes for the casket,” said one of the sergeants.

“Hear now, Rigold, my friend,” said the gentleman in black; “I have always affirmed that you are a lad replete with perspicacity, but until the day when this perspicacity shall produce its fruits by being amply recompensed, I advise you to be silent. What we have now to do is to make the best of our way on foot out of this neighborhood. That damned farmer has not the appearance of being conciliatory, and as soon as he discovers that the casket is missing, he will despatch all his farm laborers in pursuit of us, and they are fellows who can aim a gun as truly as any of his Majesty’s Swiss guards.”

This opinion was doubtless that of the majority of the party, for they all five set off at once, and, continuing to remain within the border of the forest, which concealed them from all eyes, they rapidly pursued their way, until, after walking three quarters of a league, they came out upon the public road.

This precaution was not a useless one, for Catherine had scarcely seen the gentleman in black and his two attendants disappear in pursuit of Pitou, than, full of confidence in the agility of him whom they pursued, who, unless some accident happened to him, would lead them a long dance, she called the husbandmen, who were well aware that something strange was going on, although they were ignorant of the positive facts, to tell them to open her door for her.

The laborers instantly obeyed her, and Catherine, again free, hastened to set her father at liberty.

Billot appeared to be in a dream. Instead of at once rushing out of the room, he seemed to walk mistrustfully, and returned from the door into the middle of the apartment. It might have been imagined that he did not dare to remain in the same spot, and yet that he was afraid of casting his eyes upon the articles of furniture which had been broken open and emptied by the sergeants.

“But,” cried he on seeing his daughter, “tell me, did they take the book from him?”

“I believe so, Father,” she replied, “but they did not take him.”

“Whom do you mean?”

“Pitou; he has escaped from them, and they are still running after him. They must already have got to Cayolles or Vauciennes.”

“So much the better! Poor fellow! It is I who have brought this upon him.”

“Oh, Father, do not feel uneasy about him, but think only of what we have to do! Pitou, you may rest assured, will get out of this scrape. But what disorder! good heaven! only look, mother.”

“Oh, my linen wardrobe!” cried Madame Billot; “they have not even respected my linen wardrobe! What villains they must be!”

“They have searched the wardrobe where the linen was kept!” exclaimed Billot.

And he rushed towards the wardrobe, which the exempt, as we have before stated, had carefully closed again, and plunged his hands into piles of towels and table napkins, all confusedly huddled together.

“Oh,” cried he, “it cannot be possible!”

“What are you looking for, Father?” inquired Catherine.

Billot gazed around him as if completely bewildered.

“Search, — search if you can see it anywhere! But no; not in that chest-of-drawers, — not in that secretary. Besides, it was there, — there; it was I myself who put it there. I saw it there only yesterday. It was not the book they were seeking for, — the wretches! — but the casket!”

“What casket?” asked Catherine.

“Why, you know well enough.”

"What! Doctor Gilbert's casket?" inquired Madame Billot, who always, in matters of transcendent importance, allowed others to speak and act.

"Yes, Doctor Gilbert's casket!" cried Billot, plunging his fingers into his thick hair; "that casket which was so precious to him."

"You terrify me, my dear father," said Catherine.

"Unfortunate man that I am!" cried Billot, with furious anger; "and I, who had not in the slightest imagined such a thing, — I, who did not even for a moment think of that casket! Oh, what will the doctor say? What will he think of me? That I am a traitor, a coward, a miserable wretch!"

"But, good heaven! what did this casket contain, Father?"

"I do not know; but this I know, that I had engaged, even at the hazard of my life, to keep it safe; and I ought to have allowed myself to be killed in order to defend it."

And Billot made a gesture of such despair, that his wife and daughter started back with terror.

"Oh God! oh God! are you losing your reason, my poor father " said Catherine.

And she burst into tears.

"Answer me, then," she cried; "for the love of Heaven, answer me!"

"Pierre, my friend," said Madame Billot, "answer your daughter; answer your wife."

"My horse! my horse!" cried the farmer; "bring out my horse!"

"Where are you going, Father?"

"To let the doctor know. The doctor must be informed of this."

"But where will you find him?"

"At Paris. Did you not read in the letter he wrote to us that he was going to Paris? He must be there by this time. I will go to Paris. My horse! my horse!"

"And you will leave us thus, my dear father? You will leave us in such a moment as this? You will leave us full of anxiety and anguish?"

"It must be so, my child; it must be so," said the farmer, taking his daughter's face between his hands and convulsively fixing his lips upon it. "'If ever you should lose this casket,' said the doctor to me, 'or rather, should it ever be surreptitiously taken from you, the instant you discover the robbery, set off at once, Billot, and inform me of it, wherever I may be. Let nothing stop you, not even the life of a man.'"

"Good Lord! what can this casket contain?"

“Of that I know nothing; all that I know is, that it was placed under my care, and that I have allowed it to be taken from me. Ah, here is my horse! From the son, who is at college, I shall learn where to find the father.”

And kissing his wife and daughter for the last time, the farmer jumped into his saddle, and galloped across the country, in the direction of the high-road to Paris.

CHAPTER IX.

The Road to Paris

LET us return to Pitou.

Pitou was urged onwards by the two most powerful stimulants known in this great world, — Fear and Love.

Fear whispered to him in direct terms: —

“You may be either arrested or beaten; take care of yourself, Pitou!”

And that sufficed to make him run as swiftly as a roebuck.

Love had said to him, in the voice of Catherine: —

“Escape quickly, my dear Pitou!”

And Pitou had escaped.

These two stimulants combined, as we have said, had such an effect upon him, that Pitou did not merely run: Pitou absolutely flew.

How useful did Pitou’s long legs, which appeared to be knotted to him, and his enormous knees, which looked so ungainly in a ballroom, prove to him in the open country, when his heart, enlarged with terror, beat three pulsations in a second.

Monsieur de Charny, with his small feet, his elegantly formed knees, and his symmetrically shaped calves, could not have run at such a rate as that.

Pitou recalled to his mind that pretty fable, in which a stag is represented weeping over his slim shanks, reflected in a fountain; and although he did not bear on his forehead the ornament which the quadruped deemed some compensation for his slender legs, he reproached himself for having so much despised his *stilts*.

For such was the appellation which Madame Billot gave to Pitou’s legs when Pitou looked at them standing before a looking-glass.

Pitou, therefore, continued making his way through the wood, leaving Cayolles on his right and Yvors on his left, turning round at every corner of a bush, to see, or rather to listen; for it was long since he had seen anything of his persecutors, who had been distanced at the outset by the brilliant proof of swiftness Pitou had given, in placing a space of at least a thousand yards between them and himself, — a distance which he was increasing every moment.

Why was Atalanta married? Pitou would have entered the lists with her; and to have excelled Hippomenes he would not assuredly have needed to employ, as he did, the subterfuge of the three golden apples.

It is true, as we have already said, that Monsieur Wolfsfoot's agents, delighted at having possession of their booty, cared not a fig as to what became of Pitou; but Pitou knew not this.

Ceasing to be pursued by the reality, he continued to be pursued by the shadows.

As to the black-clothed gentlemen, they had that confidence in themselves which renders human beings lazy.

"Run! run!" cried they, thrusting their hands into their pockets, and making the reward which Monsieur Wolfsfoot had given them jingle in them: "run, good fellow, run; we can always find you again, should we want you."

Which, we may say in passing, far from being a vain boast, was the precise truth.

And Pitou continued to run as if he had heard the *aside* of Monsieur Wolfsfoot's agents.

When he had, by scientifically altering his course, and turning and twisting as do the wild denizens of the forest to throw the hounds off scent, when he had doubled and turned so as to form such a maze that Nimrod himself would not have been able to unravel it, he at once made up his mind as to his route, and taking a sharp turn to the right, went in a direct line to the high road which leads from Villers-Cotterets to Paris, from the hill near Gondreville Heaths.

Having formed this resolution, he bounded through the copse, and after running for a little more than a quarter of an hour, he perceived the road enclosed by its yellow sand and bordered with its green trees.

An hour after his departure from the farm he was on the king's highway.

He had run about four leagues and a half during that hour; as much as any rider could expect from an active horse, going a good round trot.

He cast a glance behind him. There was nothing on the road.

He cast a glance before him. There were two women upon asses.

Pitou had got hold of a small work on mythology, with engravings, belonging to young Gilbert; mythology was much studied in those days.

The history of the gods and goddesses of the Grecian Olympus formed part of the education of young persons. By dint of looking at the engravings Pitou had become acquainted with mythology. He had seen Jupiter metamorphose himself into a bull, to carry off Europa; into a swan, that he might approach and make love to the daughter of King Tyndarus. He had, in short, seen other gods transforming themselves into forms more or less picturesque; but that one of his Majesty's police-officers should have transformed himself into an ass had never come within the scope of his erudition. King Midas himself had never had anything of the animal but the ears, — and he was a king, — he made gold at will, — he had therefore money enough to purchase the whole skin of the quadruped.

Somewhat reassured by what he saw, or rather by what he did not see, Pitou threw himself down on the grassy bank of the roadside, wiped with his sleeve his broad red face, and thus luxuriously reclining on the fresh clover, he yielded himself up to the satisfaction of perspiring in tranquillity.

But the sweet emanations from the clover and marjoram could not make Pitou forget the pickled pork made by Madame Billot, and the quarter of a six-pound loaf which Catherine allotted to him at every meal, — that is to say, three times a day.

This bread at that time cost four sous and a half a pound, a most exorbitant price, equivalent at least to nine sous in our days, and was so scarce throughout France that when it was eatable, it passed for the fabulous *brioche,* which the Duchess of Polignac advised the Parisians to feed upon when flour should altogether fail them.

Pitou therefore said to himself philosophically that Mademoiselle Catherine was the most generous princess in the world, and that Father Billot's farm was the most sumptuous palace in the universe.

Then, as the Israelites on the banks of the Jordan, he turned a dying eye towards the east, that is to say,

in the direction of that thrice happy farm, and sighed heavily.

But sighing is not so disagreeable an operation to a man who stands in need of taking breath after a violent race.

Pitou breathed more freely when sighing, and he felt his ideas, which for a time had been much confused and agitated, return to him gradually with his breath.

"Why is it," reasoned he with himself, "that so many extraordinary events have happened to me in so short a space of time? Why should I have met with more accidents within the last three days than during the whole course of my previous life?

"It is because I dreamed of a cat that wanted to fly at me," continued Pitou.

And he made a gesture signifying that the source of all his misfortunes had been thus already pointed out to him.

"Yes," added he, after a moment's reflection, "but this is not the logic of my venerable friend the Abbé Fortier. It is not because I dreamed of an irritated cat that all these adventures have happened to me. Dreams are only given to a man as a sort of warning, and this is why an author said, 'Thou hast been dreaming, beware! — *Cave, somniasti!'*

"Somniasti," said Pitou, doubtingly, and with somewhat of alarm; "am I then again committing a barbarism? Oh, no; I am only making an elision; it was *somniavisti* which I should have said, in grammatical language.

"It is astonishing," cried Pitou, considering himself admiringly, "how well I understand Latin since I no longer study it!"

And after this glorification of himself, Pitou resumed his journey.

Pitou walked on very quickly, though he was much tranquillized. His pace was somewhere about two leagues an hour.

The result of this was that two hours after he had recommenced his walk Pitou had got beyond Nanteuil, and was getting on towards Dammartin.

Suddenly the ears of Pitou, as acute as those of an Osage Indian, were struck with the distant sound of a horse's feet upon the paved road.

"Oh," cried Pitou, scanning the celebrated verse of Virgil, —

"'Quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum.'"

And he looked behind him.

But he saw nothing.

Could it be the asses which he had passed at Levignon, and which had now come on at a gallop? No: for the iron hoof, as the poet calls it, rang upon the paved road; and Pitou, whether at Haramont or at Villers-Cotterets, had never known an ass, excepting that of Mother Sabot, that was shod, and even this was because Mother Sabot performed the duty of letter-carrier between Villers-Cotterets and Crespy.

He therefore momentarily forgot the noise he had heard, to return to his reflections.

Who could these men in black be who had questioned him about Doctor Gilbert, who had tied his hands, who had pursued him, and whom he had at length so completely distanced?

Where could these men have sprung from, for they were altogether unknown in the district?

What could they have in particular to do with Pitou, — he who had never seen them, and who, consequently, did not know them?

How then was it, as he did not know them, that they had known him? Why had Mademoiselle Catherine told him to set off for Paris; and why, in order to facilitate his journey, had she given him a louis of forty-eight francs, — that is to say, two hundred and forty pounds of bread, at four sous a pound. Why, it was enough to supply him with food for eighty days, or three months, if he would stint his rations somewhat.

Could Mademoiselle Catherine suppose that Pitou was to remain eighty days absent from the farm?

Pitou suddenly started.

"Oh! oh!" he exclaimed, "again that horse's hoofs."

"This time," said Pitou, all on the alert, "I am not mistaken. The noise I hear is positively that of a horse galloping. I shall see it when he gets to the top of yon hill."

Pitou had scarcely spoken when a horse appeared at the top of a hill he had just left behind him, that is to say, at the distance of about four hundred yards from the spot on which he stood.

Pitou, who would not allow that a police agent could have transmogrified himself into an ass, admitted at once that he might have got on horseback to regain the prey that had escaped him.

Terror, from which he had been for some time relieved, again seized on Pitou, and immediately his legs became even longer and more intrepid than when he had made such marvellous good use of them some two hours previously.

Therefore, without reflecting, without looking behind, without even endeavoring to conceal his flight, calculating on the excellence of his steel-like sinews, Pitou, with a tremendous leap, sprang across the ditch which ran by the roadside, and began a rapid course across the country in the direction of Ermenonville. Pitou did not know anything of Ermenonville, he only saw upon the horizon the summits of some tall trees, and he said to himself, —

"If I reach those trees, which are undoubtedly on the border of some forest, I am saved."

And he ran toward Ermenonville.

On this occasion he had to outvie a horse in running. Pitou had no longer legs, but wings.

And his rapidity was increased after having run some hundred yards, for Pitou had cast a glance behind him, and had seen the horseman oblige his horse to take the same immense leap which he had taken over the ditch by the roadside.

From that moment there could be no longer a doubt in the mind of the fugitive that the horseman was, in reality, in pursuit of him, and consequently the fugitive had increased his speed, never again turning his head, for fear of losing time. What most urged him on at that moment was not the clattering on the paved road, — that noise was deadened by the clover and the fallow fields; what most urged him on was a sort of cry which pursued him, the last syllable of his name pronounced by the horseman, a sort of hou! hou! which appeared to be uttered angrily, and which reached him on the wings of the wind, which he was endeavoring to outstrip.

But after having maintained this sharp race during ten minutes, Pitou began to feel that his chest became oppressed, — the blood rushed to his head, — his eyes began to wander. It seemed to him that his knees became more and more developed, — that his loins were filling with small pebbles. From time to time he stumbled over the furrows, — he who usually raised his feet so high, when running, that every nail in the soles of his shoes was visible.

At last the horse, created superior to man in the art of running, gained on the biped Pitou, and at the same time he heard the voice of the horseman, who no longer cried "Hou! hou!" but clearly and distinctly, "Pitou! Pitou!"

All was over. All was lost.

However, Pitou endeavored to continue the race. It had become a sort of mechanical movement; he rushed on, impelled by the power of repulsion. Suddenly, his knees failed him; he staggered and fell at full length, with his face to the ground.

But at the same time that he thus fell, fully resolved not to get up again, — at all events, of his own free will, — he received a lash from a horsewhip which wound round his loins.

With a tremendous oath, which was not unfamiliar to his ears, a well-known voice cried out to him, —

"How now, you stupid fellow! how now, you simpleton! have you sworn to founder Cadet?"

The name of Cadet at once dispelled all Pitou's suspense.

"Ah!" cried he, turning himself round, so that instead of lying upon his face he lay upon his back, — "Ah! I hear the voice of Monsieur Billot!"

It was in fact Goodman Billot. When Pitou was well assured of his identity, he assumed a sitting posture.

The farmer, on his side, had pulled up Cadet, covered with flakes of foam.

"Ah! dear Monsieur Billot," exclaimed Pitou, "how kind it is of you to ride in this way after me! I swear to you I should have returned to the farm after having expended the double louis Mademoiselle Catherine gave me. But since you are here, take back your double louis, — for of course it must be yours, — and let us return to the farm."

"A thousand devils!" exclaimed Billot; "who was thinking of the farm? Where are the *mouchards?*"

"The *mouchards?*" inquired Pitou, who did not comprehend the meaning of this word, which had only just been admitted into the vocabulary of our language.

"Yes, the *mouchards*," rejoined Billot; "the men in black. Do you not understand me?"

"Ah! the men in black! You will readily understand, my dear Monsieur Billot, that I did not amuse myself by waiting for them."

"Bravo! You have left them behind, then?"

"Why, I flatter myself I have; after the race I have run, it was to be expected, as it appears to me."

"Then, if you were so sure of your affair, what the devil made you run at such a rate?"

"Because I thought it was their chief, who, not to be outwitted, was pursuing me on horseback."

"Well, well! You are not quite so simple as I thought you. Then, as the road is clear, up up! and away for Dammartin!"

"What do you mean by 'up, up'?"

"Yes, get up and come with me."

"We are going, then, to Dammartin?"

“Yes. I will borrow a horse, there, of old Lefranc. I will leave Cadet with him, for he can go no farther; and to-night we will push on to Paris.”

“Be it so, Monsieur Billot; be it so.”

“Well, then, up! — up!”

Pitou made an effort to obey him.

“I should much wish to do as you desire,” said he, “but, my dear Monsieur Billot, I cannot.”

“How, — you cannot get up?”

“No.”

“But just now you could manage to turn round.”

“Oh, just now! that was by no means astonishing. I heard your voice, and at the same moment I received a swingeing cut across the back. But such things can only succeed once. At present, I am accustomed to your voice; and as to your whip, I feel well assured that you can only apply it to managing our poor Cadet, who is almost as heated as I am.”

Pitou’s logic, which, after all, was nothing more than the Abbé Fortier’s, persuaded, and even affected, the farmer.

“I have not time to sympathize in your fate,” said he to Pitou; “but, come now, make an effort and get up behind me.”

“Why,” said Pitou, “that would be, indeed, the way to founder Cadet at once, poor beast!”

“Pooh! in half an hour we shall be at old Lefranc’s.”

“But it appears to me, dear Monsieur Billot,” said Pitou, “that it would be altogether useless for me to go with you to old Lefranc’s.”

“And why so?”

“Because, although you have business at Dammartin, I have no business there, — not I.”

“Yes; but I want you to come to Paris with me. In Paris you will be of use to me. You have good stout fists; and I am certain it will not be long before hard knocks will be given there.”

“Ah! ah!” cried Pitou, not much delighted with this prospect; “do you believe that?”

And he managed to get on Cadet’s back, Billot dragging him up as he would a sack of flour.

The good farmer soon got on the high-road again, and so well managed his bridle, whip, and spurs, that in less than half an hour, as he had said, they reached Dammartin.

Billot had entered the town by a narrow lane, which was well known to him. He soon arrived at Father Lefranc's farm-house; and leaving Pitou and Cadet in the middle of the farm-yard, he ran straight to the kitchen, where Father Lefranc, who was setting out to take a turn round his fields, was buttoning on his gaiters.

"Quick! — quick! my friend," cried Billot, before Lefranc had recovered from the astonishment which his arrival had produced; "the strongest horse you have!"

"That is Margot," replied Lefranc; "and fortunately she is already saddled; I was going out."

"Well, Margot be it, then; only it is possible I may founder her, and of that I forewarn you."

"What, founder Margot! and why so, I ask?"

"Because it is necessary that I should be in Paris this very night."

And he made a masonic sign to Lefranc, which was most significant.

"Well, founder Margot if you will," said old Lefranc; "you shall give me Cadet, if you do."

"Agreed."

"A glass of wine?"

"Two."

"But it seemed to me that you were not alone?"

"No; I have a worthy lad there whom I am taking with me, and who is so fatigued that he had not the strength to come in here. Send out something to him."

"Immediately, immediately," said the farmer.

In ten minutes the two old comrades had each managed to soak in a bottle of good wine, and Pitou had bolted a two-pound loaf, with half a pound of bacon. While he was eating, one of the farm-servants, a good fellow, rubbed him down with a handful of clean straw, to take the mud from his clothes, and with as much care as if he had been cleaning a favorite horse.

Thus freshened up and invigorated, Pitou had also some wine given to him, taken from a third bottle, which was the sooner emptied from Pitou's having his share of it; after which Billot mounted Margot, and Pitou, stiff as a pair of compasses, was lifted on behind him.

The poor beast, being thereunto urged by whip and spur, trotted off bravely, under this double load, on the road to Paris, and without ceasing whisked away the flies with its formidable tail, the thick hair of which threw the dust of the road on Pitou’s back, and every now and then lashed his calfless legs, which were exposed to view, his stockings having fallen down to his ankles.

CHAPTER X.

What was happening at the End of the Road which Pitou was travelling upon, — that is to say, at Paris

IT is eight leagues from Dammartin to Paris. The four first leagues were tolerably well got over; but after they reached Bourget, poor Margot's legs at length began to grow somewhat stiff. Night was closing in.

On arriving at La Villette, Billot thought he perceived a great light extending over Paris.

He made Pitou observe the red light, which rose above the horizon.

"You do not see, then," said Pitou to him, "that there are troops bivouacking, and that they have lighted their fires."

"What mean you by troops?" cried Billot.

"There are troops here," said Pitou; "why should there not be some farther on?"

And, in fact, on examining attentively, Father Billot saw, on looking to the right, that the plain of St. Denis was dotted over with black-looking detachments of infantry and cavalry, which were marching silently in the darkness.

Their arms glistened occasionally with the pale reflection of the stars.

Pitou, whose nocturnal excursions in the woods had accustomed him to see clearly in the dark, — Pitou pointed out to his master pieces of artillery, which had sunk up to the axles in the middle of the muddy plain. "Oh! oh!" cried Billot, "there is something new up yonder, then! Let make haste! Let us make haste! Let us make haste!"

"Yes, yes; there is a fire out yonder," said Pitou, who had raised himself on Margot's back. "Look! — look! Do you not see the sparks?"

Margot stopped. Billot jumped off her back, and approaching a group of soldiers in blue and yellow uniform, who were bivouacking under the trees by the road-side, "Comrades," said he to them, "can you tell me what there is going on at Paris?"

But the soldiers merely replied to him by oaths, which they uttered in the German language.

"What the devil is it they say? " inquired Billot, addressing Pitou.

"It is not Latin, dear Monsieur Billot," replied Pitou, trembling; "and that is all I can tell you."

Billot reflected, and looked again.

"Simpleton that I was," said he, "to attempt to question these *Kaiserliks.*"

And in his curiosity he remained motionless in the middle of the road.

An officer went up to him.

"Bass on your roat," said he; "bass on quickly."

"Your pardon, Captain," replied Billot; "but I am going to Paris."

"Vell, mein Gott; vot den?"

"And as I see that you are drawn up across the road,

I fear that we cannot get through the barriers."

"You can get drough."

And Billot remounted his mare and went on. But it was only to fall in the midst of the Bercheur

Hussars, who encumbered the street of La Villette.

This time he had to deal with his own countrymen.

He questioned them with more success. "Sir," said he, "what has there happened at Paris, if you please?"

"That your headstrong Parisians," replied the hussar, "will have their Necker; and they are firing musket-shots at us, as if we had anything to do with the matter!"

"Have Necker!" exclaimed Billot. "They have lost him, then?"

"Assuredly, since the king has dismissed him."

"The king has dismissed Monsieur Necker!" exclaimed Billot, with the stupefaction of a devotee calling out against a sacrilege: "the king has dismissed that great man?"

"Oh, in faith he has, my worthy sir; and more than that, this great man is now on his road to Brussels."

"Well, then, in that case we shall see some fun," cried Billot, in a tremendous voice, without caring for the danger he was incurring by thus preaching insurrection in the midst of twelve or fifteen hundred royalist sabres.

And he again mounted Margot, spurring her on with cruel violence, until he reached the barrier.

As he advanced, he perceived that the fire was increasing and becoming redder. A long column of flame ascended from the barrier towards the sky.

It was the barrier itself that was burning.

A howling, furious mob, in which there were many women, who, as usual, threatened and vociferated more loudly than the men, were feeding the fire with pieces of wainscoting, and chairs and tables, and other articles of furniture belonging to the clerks employed to collect the city dues.

Upon the road were Hungarian and German regiments, who, leaning upon their grounded arms, were looking on with vacant eyes at this scene of devastation.

Billot did not allow this rampart of flames to arrest his progress. He spurred on Margot through the fire. Margot rushed through the flaming ruins; but when she had reached the inner side of the barrier she was obliged to stop, being met by a crowd of people coming from the centre of the city, towards the suburbs. Some of them were singing, others shouting, “To arms!”

Billot had the appearance of being what he really was, a good farmer coming to Paris on his own affairs. Perhaps he cried out rather too loudly, “Make room! make room!” but Pitou repeated the words so politely, “Room if you please; let us pass!” that the one was a corrective of the other. No one had any interest in preventing Billot from going to his affairs, and he was allowed to pass.

Margot, during all this, had recovered her wind and strength; the fire had singed her coat. All these unaccustomed shouts appeared greatly to amaze her, and Billot was obliged to restrain the efforts she now made to advance, for fear of trampling under foot some of the numerous spectators whom curiosity had drawn together before their doors to see the gate on fire, and as many curious people who were running from their doors towards the burning toll-house.

Billot went on pushing through the crowd, pulling Margot first to the right and then to the left, twisting and turning in every direction, until they reached the Boulevard; but having got thus far he was obliged to stop.

A procession was then passing, coming from the Bastille, and going towards the place called the Garde

Meuble, those two masses of stone which in those days formed a girdle which attached the centre of the city to its outworks.

This procession, which obstructed the whole of the Boulevard, was following a bier; on this bier were borne two busts, — the one veiled with black crape, the other crowned with flowers.

The bust covered with black crape was that of Necker, a minister who had not been disgraced, but dismissed. The one crowned with flowers was that of the Duke of Orleans, who had openly espoused at court the party of the Genevese economist.

Billot immediately inquired what was the meaning of this procession. He was informed that it was a popular homage paid to M. Necker and to his defender, the Duke of Orleans.

Billot had been born in a part of the country where the name of the Duke of Orleans had been venerated for a century and a half. Billot belonged to the new sect of philosophers, and consequently considered Monsieur Necker not only as a great minister, but as an apostle of humanity.

This was more than sufficient to excite Billot. He jumped off his horse, without being exactly aware of what he was about to do, shouting, “Long live the Duke of Orleans! long live Necker!” and then mingled with the crowd. Having once got into the thick of the throng, all personal liberty was at an end at once; as every one knows, the use of our free will at once ceases. We wish what the crowd wishes, we do what it does. Billot, moreover, allowed himself the more easily to be drawn into this movement, from being near the head of the procession.

The mob kept on vociferating most strenuously, “Long live Necker! no more foreign troops! Down with the foreign troops!”

Billot mingled his stentorian voice with all these voices. A superiority, be it of whatsoever nature it may, is always appreciated by the people. The Parisian of the suburbs, with his faint hoarse voice, enfeebled by inanition or worn out by drinking, duly appreciated the full, rich, and sonorous voice of Billot, and readily made way for him, so that without being too much elbowed, too much pushed about, too much pressed by the crowd, Billot at length managed to get close up to the bier.

About ten minutes after this, one of the bearers, whose enthusiasm had been greater than his strength, yielded his place to Billot.

As has been seen, the honest farmer had rapidly obtained promotion.

The day before he had been merely the propagator of the principles contained in Doctor Gilbert’s pamphlet, and now he had become one of the instruments of the great triumph of Necker and the Duke of Orleans.

But he had scarcely attained this post when an idea crossed his mind.

“What had become of Pitou, — what had become of

Margot?”

Though carefully bearing his portion of the bier, he gave a glance behind him, and by the light of the torches which accompanied the procession, by the light of the lamps which illuminated every window, he perceived in the midst of the procession a sort of ambulating eminence, formed of five or six men, who were gesticulating and shouting.

Amidst these gesticulations and shouts it was easy to distinguish the voice and recognize the long arms of his follower, Pitou. Pitou was doing all he could to protect Margot; but despite all his efforts Margot had been invaded. Margot no longer bore Billot and Pitou, a very honorable and sufficient burden for the poor animal.

Margot was bearing as many people as could manage to get upon her back, her croup, her neck; Margot looked in the obscurity of the night, which always magnifies the appearance of objects, like an elephant loaded with hunters going to attack a tiger.

Five or six furious fellows had taken possession of Margot’s broad back, vociferating, “Long live Necker!”

“Long live the Duke of Orleans!”

“Down with the foreigners!” to which Pitou replied,-”You will break Margot’s back!” The enthusiasm was general.

Billot for a moment entertained the idea of rushing to the aid of Pitou and poor Margot; but he reflected that if he should only for a moment resign the honor of carrying one of the corners of the bier, he would not be able to regain his triumphal post. Then he reflected that by the barter he had agreed to with old Lefranc, that of giving him Cadet for Margot, Margot belonged to him, and that, should any accident happen to Margot, it was, after all, but an affair of some three or four hundred livres, and that he, Billot, was undoubtedly rich enough to make the sacrifice of three or four hundred livres to his country.

During this time the procession kept on advancing; it had moved obliquely to the left, and had gone down the Rue Montmartre to the Place des Victoires. When it reached the Palais Royal some great impediment prevented its passing on. A troop of men with green leaves in their hats were shouting “To arms!”

It was necessary to reconnoitre. Were these men who blocked up the Rue Vivienne friends, or enemies? Green was the color of the Count d’Artois. Why, then, these green cockades?

After a minute's conference all was explained. On learning the dismissal of Necker, a young man had issued from the Café Foy, had jumped upon a table in the garden of the Palais Royal, and taking a pistol from his breast, had cried, "To arms!"

On hearing this cry, all the persons who were walking there had assembled round him, and had shouted, "To arms!"

We have already said that all the foreign regiments had been collected around Paris. One might have imagined that it was an invasion by the Austrians. The names of these regiments alarmed the ears of all Frenchmen; they were Reynac, Salis Samade, Diesbach, Esterhazy, Rmer; the very naming of them was sufficient to make the crowd understand that they were the names of enemies. The young man named them; he announced that the Swiss were encamped in the Champs Élysées, with four pieces of artillery, and that they were to enter Paris the same night, preceded by the dragoons commanded by Prince Lambesq. He proposed a new cockade which was not theirs, snatched a leaf from a chestnuttree and placed it in the band of his hat. Upon the instant every one present followed his example. Three thousand persons had in ten minutes unleaved the trees of the Palais Royal.

That morning no one knew the name of that young man; in the evening it was in every mouth.

That young man's name was Camille Desmoulins. The two crowds recognized each other as friends; they fraternized, they embraced each other, and then the procession continued on its way. During the momentary halt we have just described, the curiosity of those who had not been able to discover, even by standing on tiptoe, what was going on, had overloaded Margot with an increasing burden. Every inch on which a foot could be placed had been invaded, so that when the crowd again moved on, the poor beast was literally crushed by the enormous weight which overwhelmed her.

At the corner of the Rue Richelieu Billot cast a look behind him; Margot had disappeared.

He heaved a deep sigh, addressed to the memory of the unfortunate animal; then, soon recovering from his grief, and calling up the whole power of his voice, he three times called Pitou, as did the Romans of ancient times when attending the funeral of a relative. He imagined that he heard, issuing from the centre of the crowd, a voice which replied to his own, but that voice was lost among the confused clamors which ascended towards the heavens, half threatening, half with applauding acclamations.

The procession still moved on. All the shops were closed; but all the windows were open, and from every window issued cries of encouragement which fell like blessings on the heads of those who formed this great ovation.

In this way they reached the Place Vendôme. But on arriving there the procession was obstructed by an unforeseen obstacle.

Like to those trunks of trees rooted up by a river that has overflown its banks, and which, on encountering the piers of a bridge, recoil upon the wreck of matter which is following them, the popular army found a detachment of the Royal Germans on the Place Vendôme.

These foreign soldiers were dragoons, who, seeing an inundation streaming from the Rue St. Honoré, and which began to overflow the Place Vendôme, loosened their horses' reins, who, impatient at having been stationed there during five hours, at once galloped furiously forward, charging upon the people.

The bearers of the bier received the first shock, and were thrown down beneath their burden. A Savoyard, who was walking before Billot, was the first to spring to his feet again; he raised the effigy of the Duke of Orleans, and placing it on the top of a stick, held it above his head, crying,- "Long live the Duke of Orleans!" whom he had never seen; and "Long live Necker!" whom he did not know.

Billot was about to do as much for the bust of Necker, but found himself forestalled. A young man, about twenty-four or twenty-five years old, and sufficiently well-dressed to deserve the title of a beau, had followed it with his eyes, which he could do more easily than Billot, who was carrying it; and as soon as the bust had fallen to the ground, he had rushed towards it and seized upon it.

The good farmer therefore vainly endeavored to find it on the ground; the bust of Necker was already on the point of a sort of pike, and, side by side with that of the Duke of Orleans, rallied around them a good portion of the procession.

Suddenly a great light illuminates the square; at the same moment a peal of musketry is heard; balls whiz through the air; something heavy strikes Billot on the forehead; he falls. At first, Billot imagined himself killed.

But as his senses had not abandoned him, as, excepting a violent pain in the head, he felt no other injury,

Billot comprehended that he was, even at the worst, but wounded. He pressed his hand to his forehead, to ascertain the extent of damage he had received, and perceived at one and the same time that he had only a contusion on the head, and that his hands were streaming with blood.

The elegantly dressed young man who had supplanted Billot had received a ball full in his breast. It was he who was shot. The blood on Billot's hands was his. The blow which Billot had experienced was from the bust of Necker, which, losing its supporter, had fallen upon his head.

Billot utters a cry, partly of anger, partly of terror. He draws back from the young man, who was convulsed in the agonies of death. Those who surrounded him also draw back; and the shout he had uttered, repeated by the crowd, is prolonged like a funeral echo by the groups assembled in the Rue St. Honoré.

This shout was a second rebellion. A second detonation was then heard, and immediately deep vacancies hollowed in the mass attested the passage of the murderous projectiles.

To pick up the bust, the whole face of which was stained with blood; to raise it above his head, and protest against this outrage with his sonorous voice, at the risk of being shot down, as had been the handsome young man whose body was then lying at his feet, was what Billot's indignation prompted him to effect, and which he did in the first moment of his enthusiasm.

But at the same instant a large and powerful hand was placed upon the farmer's shoulder, and with so much vigor that he was compelled to bend down beneath its weight. The farmer wishes to relieve himself from this pressure; another hand, no less heavy than the first, falls on his other shoulder. He turned round, reddening with anger, to ascertain what sort of antagonist he had to contend with.

"Pitou!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, yes," replied Pitou. "Down! down! and you will soon see."

And redoubling his efforts, he managed to drag with him to the ground the opposing farmer.

No sooner had he forced Billot to lie down flat upon the pavement, than another discharge was heard. The Savoyard who was carrying the bust of the Duke of Orleans gave way in his turn, struck by a ball in the thigh.

Then was heard the crushing of the pavement beneath the horses' hoofs; then the dragoons charged a second time; a horse, with streaming mane, and furious as that of the Apocalypse, bounds over the unfortunate Savoyard, who feels the cold steel of a lance penetrate his breast. He falls on Billot and Pitou.

The tempest rushed onward towards the end of the street, spreading, as it passed, terror and death. Dead bodies alone remained on the pavement of the square. All those who had formed the procession fled through the adjacent streets. The windows are instantly closed,-a gloomy silence succeeds to the shouts of enthusiasm and the cries of anger.

Billot waited a moment, still restrained by the prudent Pitou; he felt that the danger was becoming more distant with the noise, while Pitou, like a hare in its bed, was beginning to raise, not his head, but his ears.

"Well, Monsieur Billot," said Pitou, "I think that you spoke truly, and that we have arrived here in the nick of time."

"Come, now, help me!"

"And what to do, — to run away?"

"No. The young dandy is dead as a door-nail, but the poor Savoyard, in my opinion, has only fainted. Help me to put him on my back. We cannot leave him here, to be finished by those damned Germans."

Billot spoke a language which went straight to Pitou's heart. He had no answer to make but to obey. He took up the fainting and bleeding body of the poor Savoyard, and threw him, as he would have done a sack, across the shoulders of the robust farmer; who, seeing that the Rue St. Honoré was free, and to all appearance deserted, advanced with Pitou towards the Palais Royal.

CHAPTER XI.

The Night between the 12th and 13th of July

THE street had, in the first place, appeared empty and deserted to Billot and Pitou, because the dragoons, being engaged in the pursuit of the great body of the fugitives, had turned into the market of St. Honor, and had followed them up the Rue Louis — le — Grand and the Rue Gaillon. But as Billot advanced towards the Palais Royal, roaring instinctively, but in a subdued voice, the word “Vengeance!” men made their appearance at the corners of the streets, at the end of alleys, and from under the carriage gateways, who, at first, mute and terrified, looked around them, but being at length assured of the absence of the dragoons, brought up the rear of this funereal march, repeating, first in hollow whispers, but soon aloud, and finally with shouts, the word “Vengeance! vengeance!”

Pitou walked behind the farmer, carrying the Savoyard’s black cap in his hand.

They arrived thus, in gloomy and fearful procession, upon the square before the Palais Royal, where a whole people, drunk with rage, was holding council, and soliciting the support of French soldiers against the foreigners.

“Who are these men in uniform?” inquired Billot, on arriving in front of a company who were standing with grounded arms, stopping the passage across the square, from the gate of the palace to the Rue de Chartres.

“They are the French Guards!” cried several voices.

“Ah!” exclaimed Billot, approaching them, and showing them the body of the Savoyard, which was now a lifeless corpse, — ”Ah! you are Frenchmen, and you allow us to be murdered by these Germans!”

The French Guards drew back with horror.

“Dead?” murmured a voice from within their ranks.

“Yes, dead! dead! assassinated! — he and many more besides!”

“And by whom?”

“By the Royal German Dragoons. Did you not hear the cries, the firing, the galloping of their horses?”

"Yes, yes, we did!" cried two or three hundred voices. "They were butchering the people on the Place Vendôme!"

"And you are part of the people, by Heaven, you are!" cried Billot, addressing the soldiers. "It is therefore cowardly in you to allow your brothers to be butchered."

"Cowardly!" exclaimed several threatening voices in the ranks.

"Yes, cowardly! I have said it, and I repeat the word. Come, now," continued Billot, advancing three steps towards the spot from whence these murmurs had proceeded; "well, now, will you not kill me, in order to prove that you are not cowards?"

"Good that is all well, very well," said one of the soldiers. "You are a brave fellow, my friend. You are a citizen, and can do what you will; but a military man is a soldier, do you see, and he must obey orders."

"So that," replied Billot, " if you received orders to fire upon us, — that is to say, upon unarmed men, — you would fire, you who have succeeded the men of Fontenoy, who gave the advantage to the English by telling them to fire first!"

"As to me, I know that I would not fire, for one," said a voice from the ranks.

"Nor I! — Nor I!" repeated a hundred voices.

"Then see that others do not fire upon us," cried Billot. "To allow the Germans to butcher us is just the same thing as if you slaughtered us yourselves."

"The dragoons! the dragoons!" cried several voices at the same time that the crowd, driven backwards, began to throng the square, flying by the Rue de Richelieu.

And there was heard the distant sound of the galloping of heavy cavalry upon the pavement, but which became louder at every moment.

"To arms! to arms!" cried the fugitives.

"A thousand gods!" cried Billot, throwing the dead body of the Savoyard upon the ground, which he had till then held in his arms; "give us your muskets, at least, if you will not yourselves make use of them."

"Well, then, yes; by a thousand thunders, we will make use of them!" said the soldier to whom Billot had addressed himself, snatching out of his hand his musket, which the other had already seized. "Come, come! let us bite our cartridges, and if the Austrians have anything to say to these brave fellows, we shall see!"

“Yes, yes, we’ll see!” cried the soldiers, putting their hands into their cartouche — boxes and biting off the ends of their cartridges.

“Oh, thunder!” cried Billot, stamping his feet; “and to think that I have not brought my fowling — piece! But perhaps one of those rascally Austrians will be killed, and then I will take his carbine.”

“In the mean time,” said a voice, “take this carbine; it is ready loaded.”

And at the same time an unknown man slipped a richly mounted carbine into Billot’s hands.

At that instant the dragoons galloped into the square, riding down and sabring all that were in their way.

The officer who commanded the French Guards advanced four steps.

“Hilloa, there, gentlemen dragoons!” cried he; “halt there, if you please!”

Whether the dragoons did not hear, or whether they did not choose to hear, or whether they could not at once arrest the violent course of their horses, they rode across the square, making a half — wheel to the right, and ran over a woman and an old man, who disappeared beneath their horses’ hoofs.

“Fire, then, fire!” cried Billot.

Billot was standing close to the officer. It might have been thought that it was the latter who had given the word.

The French Guards presented their guns, and fired a volley, which at once brought the dragoons to a stand.

“Why, gentlemen of the Guards,” said a German officer, advancing in front of his disordered squadron, “do you know that you are firing upon us?”

“Do we not know it?” cried Billot; and he fired at the officer, who fell from his horse.

Then the French Guards fired a second volley, and the Germans, seeing that they had on this occasion to deal, not with plain citizens, who would fly at the first sabrecut, but with soldiers, who firmly waited their attack, turned to the right — about, and galloped back to the Place Vendôme, amidst so formidable an explosion of bravoes and shouts of triumph, that several of their horses, terrified at the noise, ran off with their riders, and knocked their heads against the closed shutters of the shops.

“Long live the French Guards!” cried the people.

“Long live the soldiers of the country!” cried Billot.

“Thanks,” replied the latter. “We have smelt gunpowder, and we are now baptized.”

“And I, too,” said Pitou, “I have smelt gunpowder.”

“And what do you think of it?” inquired Billot.

“Why, really, I do not find it so disagreeable as I had expected,” replied Pitou.

“But now,” said Billot, who had had time to examine the carbine, and had ascertained that it was a weapon of some value, “but now, to whom belongs this gun?”

“To my master,” said the voice which had already spoken behind him. “But my master thinks that you make too good use of it to take it back again.”

Billot turned round, and perceived a huntsman in the livery of the Duke of Orleans.

“And where is your master?” said he.

The huntsman pointed to a half — open Venetian blind, behind which the prince had been watching all that had passed.

“Your master is then on our side?” asked Billot. “With the people, heart and soul,” replied the huntsman.

“In that case, once more, ‘Long live the Duke of Orleans!’“ cried Billot. “My friends, the Duke of Orleans is with us. Long live the Duke of Orleans!”

And he pointed to the blind behind which the prince stood.

Then the blind was thrown completely open, and the Duke of Orleans bowed three times.

After which the blind was again closed.

Although of such short duration, his appearance had wound up the enthusiasm of the people to its acme.

“Long live the Duke of Orleans!” vociferated two or three thousand voices.

“Let us break open the armorers’ shops!” cried a voice in the crowd.

“Let us run to the Invalides!” cried some old soldiers. “Sombreuil has twenty thousand muskets.”

“To the Invalides!”

“To the Hôtel de Ville!” exclaimed several voices. “Flesselles the provost of the merchants, has the key of the depôt in which the arms of the Guards are kept. He will give them to us.”

“To the Hôtel de Ville!” cried a fraction of the crowd.

And the whole crowd dispersed, taking the three directions which had been pointed out.

During this time the dragoons had rallied round the Baron de Besenval and the Prince de Lambesq, on the Place Louis XV.

Of this Billot and Pitou were ignorant. They had not followed either of the three troops of citizens, and they found themselves almost alone in the square before the Palais Royal.

“Well, dear Monsieur Billot, where are we to go next, if you please?” said Pitou.

“Why,” replied Billot, “I should have desired to follow those worthy people, — not to the gunmakers’ shops, since I have such a beautiful carbine, but to the Hôtel de Ville or to the Invalides. However, not having come to Paris to fight, but to find out the address of Doctor Gilbert, it appears to me that I ought to go to the College of Louis — le — Grand, where his son now is; and then, after having seen the doctor, why, we can throw ourselves again into this seething whirlpool.” And the eyes of the farmer flashed lightning.

“To go in the first place to the College of Louisle — Grand appears to me quite logical,” sententiously observed Pitou; “since it was for that purpose that we came to Paris.”

“Go, get a musket, a sabre, a weapon of some kind or other from some one or other of those idle fellows who are lying on the pavement yonder,” said Billot, pointing to one out of five or six dragoons who were stretched upon the ground; “and let us at once go to the college.”

“But these arms,” said Pitou, hesitating, “they are not mine.”

“Who, then, do they belong to?” asked Billot.

“To the king.”

“They belong to the people,” rejoined Billot.

And Pitou, yielding implicitly to the opinion of the farmer, whom he knew to be a man who would not rob a neighbor of a grain of millet, approached with every necessary precaution the dragoon who happened to be the nearest to him, and after having assured himself that he was really dead, took from him his sabre, his musketoon, and his cartouche — box.

Pitou had a great desire to take his helmet also, only he was not quite certain that what Father Billot had said with regard to offensive weapons extended to defensive accoutrements.

But while thus arming himself, Pitou directed his ears towards the Place Vendôme.

“Ho, ho!” said he, “it appears to me that the Royal

Germans are coming this way again.”

And in fact the noise of a troop of horsemen returning at a foot — pace could be heard. Pitou peeped from behind the corner of the coffee — house called La Regence, and perceived, at about the distance of the market of St. Honoré, a patrol of dragoons advancing, with their musketoons in hand.

“Oh, quick, quick!” cried Pitou, “here they are, coming back again.”

Billot cast his eyes around him to see if there was any means of offering resistance. There was scarcely a person in the square.

“Let us go, then,” said he, “to the College Louis — le — Grand.”

And he went up the Rue de Chartres, followed by Pitou, who, not knowing the use of the hook upon his belt, was dragging his long sabre after him.

“A thousand thunders!” exclaimed Billot; “why, you look like a dealer in old iron. Fasten me up that lath there.”

“But how?” asked Pitou.

“Why, so, by Heaven! — there!” said Billot. And he hooked Pitou’s long sabre up to his belt, which enabled the latter to walk with more celerity than he could have done but for this expedient.

They pursued their way without meeting with any impediment, till they reached the Place Louis XV.; but there Billot and Pitou fell in with the column which had left them to proceed to the Invalides, and which had been stopped short in its progress.

“Well!” cried Billot, “what is the matter?”

“The matter is, that we cannot go across the Bridge Louis XV.”

“But you can go along the quays.”

“All passage is stopped that way, too.”

“And across the Champs Élysées?”

“Also.”

“Then let us retrace our steps, and go over the bridge at the Tuileries.”

The proposal was a perfectly natural one, and the crowd, by following Billot, showed that they were eager to accede to it. But they saw sabres gleaming half — way between them and the Tuileries Gardens. The quay was occupied by a squadron of dragoons.

“Why, these cursed dragoons are, then, everywhere,” murmured the farmer.

“I say, my dear Monsieur Billot,” said Pitou, “I believe that we are caught.”

“Pshaw! they cannot catch five or six thousand men; and we are five or six thousand men, at least.”

The dragoons on the quay were advancing slowly, it is true, at a very gentle walk; but they were visibly advancing.

“The Rue Royale still remains open to us. Come this way; come, Pitou.”

Pitou followed the farmer as if he had been his shadow. But a line of soldiers was drawn across the street, near the St. Honoré gate.

“Ah, ah!” muttered Billot; “you may be in the right, friend Pitou.”

“Hum!” was Pitou’s sole reply.

But this word expressed, by the tone in which it had been pronounced, all the regret which Pitou felt at not having been mistaken.

The crowd, by its agitation and its clamors, proved that it was not less sensible than Pitou of the position in which it was then placed.

And, in fact, by a skilful manoeuvre, the Prince de Lambesq had surrounded not only the rebels, but also those who had been drawn there from mere curiosity, and by preventing all egress by the Bridge Louis XV., the quays, the Champs Élysées, the Rue Royale, and Les Feuillants, he had enclosed them in a bow of iron, the string of which was represented by the walls of the Tuileries Gardens, which it would be very difficult to escalade, and the iron gate of the Pont Tournant, which it was almost impossible to force.

Billot reflected on their position; it certainly was not a favorable one; however, as he was a man of calm, cool mind, full of resources when in danger, he cast his eyes around him, and perceiving a pile of timber lying beside the river, —

“I have an idea,” said he to Pitou: “come this way.”

Pitou followed him, without asking him what the idea was.

Billot advanced towards the timber, and seizing the end of a large block, said to Pitou, “ Help me to carry this.”

Pitou, for his part, without questioning him as to his intentions, caught hold of the other end of the piece of timber. He had such implicit confidence in the farmer, that he would have gone down to the infernal regions with him, without even making any observation as to the length of the descent or the depth of the abyss.

They were soon upon the quay again, bearing a load which five or six men of ordinary strength would have found difficult to raise.

Strength is always a subject of admiration to the mob, and although so compactly huddled together, they made way for Billot and Pitou.

Then, as they felt convinced that the manuvre which was being accomplished was one of general interest, some men walked before Billot, crying, “Make way! make way!”

“Tell me now, Father Billot,” inquired Pitou, after having carried the timber some thirty yards, “are we going far?”

“As far as the gate of the Tuileries.”

“Ho! ho!” cried the crowd, who at once divined his intention.

And it made way for them more eagerly even than before.

Pitou looked about him, and saw that the gate was not more than thirty paces distant.

“I can reach it,” said he, with the brevity of a Pythagorean.

The labor was so much the easier to Pitou from five or six of the strongest of the crowd taking their share in the burden.

The result of this was a very notable acceleration in their progress.

In five minutes they had reached the iron gate.

“Come, now,” cried Billot, “clap your shoulders to it, and all push together.”

“Good!” said Pitou. “I understand it now. We have just made a warlike engine; the Romans used to call it a ram.”

“Now, my boys,” cried Billot, “once, twice, thrice!” And the joist, directed with a furious impetus, struck the lock of the gate with resounding violence.

The soldiers who were on guard in the interior of the garden hastened to resist this invasion. But at the third stroke the gate gave way, turning violently on its hinges, and through that gaping and gloomy mouth the crowd rushed impetuously.

From the movement that was then made, the Prince de Lambesq perceived at once that an opening had been effected which allowed the escape of those whom he had considered as his prisoners. He was furious with disappointment. He urged his horse forward in order the better to judge of the position of affairs. The dragoons who were drawn up behind him imagined that the order had been given to charge, and they followed him. The horses, going off at full speed, could not be suddenly pulled up. The men, who wished to be revenged for the check they had received on the square before the Palais Royal, scarcely endeavored to restrain them.

The prince saw that it would be impossible to moderate their advance, and allowed himself to be borne away by it. A sudden shriek uttered by the women and children ascended to heaven crying for vengeance against the brutal soldiers.

A frightful scene then occurred, rendered still more terrific by the darkness. Those who were charged upon became mad with pain; those who charged them were mad with anger.

Then a species of defence was organized from the top of a terrace. Chairs were hurled down on the dragoons. The Prince de Lambesq, who had been struck on the head, replied by giving a sabre — cut to the person nearest to him, without considering that he was punishing an innocent man instead of a guilty one, and an old man more than seventy years of age fell beneath his sword.

Billot saw this man fall, and uttered a loud cry. In a moment his carbine was at his shoulder. A furrow of light for a moment illuminated the darkness, and the prince had then died, had not his horse, by chance, reared at the same instant.

The horse received the ball in his neck, and fell.

It was thought that the prince was killed; the dragoons then rushed into the Tuileries, pursuing the fugitives, and firing their pistols at them.

But the fugitives, having now a greater space, dispersed among the trees.

Billot quietly reloaded his carbine.

“In good faith, Pitou,” said he, “I think that you were right. We really have arrived in the nick of time.”

“If I should become a bold, daring fellow!” said Pitou, discharging his musketoon at the thickest group of the dragoons. “It seems to me not so difficult as I had thought.”

“Yes,” replied Billot; “but useless courage is not real courage. Come this way, Pitou, and take care that your sword does not get between your legs.”

“Wait a moment for me, dear Monsieur Billot; if I should lose you I should not know which way to go. I do not know Paris as you do: I was never here before.”

“Come along, come along,” said Billot; and he went by the terrace by the water — side, until he had got ahead of the line of troops, which were advancing along the quay; but this time as rapidly as they could, to give their aid to the Lambesq dragoons, should such aid be necessary.

When they reached the end of the terrace, Billot seated himself on the parapet and jumped on to the quay.

Pitou followed his example.

CHAPTER XII.

What occurred during the Night of the 12th July, 1789

ONCE upon the quay, the two countrymen saw glittering on the bridge near the Tuileries the arms of another body of men, which in all probability was not a body of friends; they silently glided to the end of the quay and descended the bank which leads along the Seine.

The clock of the Tuileries was just then striking eleven.

When they had got beneath the trees which line the banks of the river, fine aspen-trees and poplars, which bathe their feet in its current; when they were lost to the sight of their pursuers, hid by their friendly foliage, the farmer and Pitou threw themselves upon the grass and opened a council of war.

The question was to know, — and this was suggested by the farmer, — whether they should remain where they were, that is to say, in safety, or comparatively so, or whether they should again throw themselves into the tumult and take their share of the struggle which was going on, and which appeared likely to be continued the greater part of the night.

The question being mooted, Billot awaited the reply of Pitou.

Pitou had risen very greatly in the opinion of the farmer, — in the first place, by the knowledge which he had shown the day before, and afterwards by the courage of which he had given such proofs during the evening.

Pitou instinctively felt this, but instead of being prouder for it, he was only the more grateful towards the good farmer. Pitou was naturally very humble.

“Monsieur Billot,” said he, “it is evident that you are more brave and I less a poltroon than I imagined. Horace, who, however, was a very different man from us, with regard to poetry, at least, threw away his arms and ran off at the very first blow. As to me, I have still my musketoon, my cartridge-box, and my sabre, which proves that I am braver than Horace.”

“Well, what are you driving at?”

"What I mean is this, dear Monsieur Billot, — that the bravest man in the world may be killed by a ball."

"And what then?" inquired the farmer.

"And then, my dear sir, thus it is: as you stated, on leaving your farm, that you were going to Paris for an important object — "

"Oh, confound it, that is true, for the casket!"

"Well, then, did you come about this casket, — yes, or no?"

"I came about the casket, by a thousand thunders! and for nothing else."

"If you should allow yourself to be killed by a ball, the affair for which you came cannot be accomplished."

"In truth, you are ten times right, Pitou."

"Do you hear that crashing noise — those cries?" continued Pitou, encouraged by the farmer's approbation; "wood is being torn like paper, iron is twisted as if it were but hemp."

"It is because the people are angry, Pitou."

"But it appears to me." Pitou ventured to say, "that the king is tolerably angry too."

"How say you, — the king?"

"Undoubtedly; the Austrians, the Germans, the Kaiserliks, as you call them, are the king's soldiers. Well, if they charge the people, it is the king who orders them to charge, and for him to give such an order, he must be angry too."

"You are both right and wrong, Pitou."

"That does not appear possible to me, Monsieur Billot, and I dare not say to you that had you studied logic, you would not venture on such a paradox."

"You are right and you are wrong, Pitou and I will presently make you comprehend how this can be."

"I do not ask anything better, but I doubt it."

"See you now, Pitou, there are two parties at court, — that of the king, who loves the people, and that of the queen, who loves the Austrians?"

"That is because the king is a Frenchman, and the queen an Austrian," philosophically replied Pitou.

"Wait a moment. On the king's side are Monsieur Turgot and Monsieur Necker, on the queen's, Monsieur de Breteuil and the Polignacs. The king is not the master, since he has been obliged to send away Monsieur Turgot and

Monsieur Necker. It is therefore the queen who is the mistress, the Breteuils and the Polignacs: therefore all goes badly.

"Do you see, Pitou, the evil proceeds from Madame Deficit, and Madame Deficit is in a rage, and it is in her name that the troops charge; the Austrians defend the Austrian woman, that is natural enough."

"Your pardon, Monsieur Billot," said Pitou, interrupting him, "but *deficit* is a Latin word, which means to say a want of something. What is it that is wanting?"

"Zounds! why, money, to be sure; and it is because money is wanting, it is because the queen's favorites have devoured this money which is wanting, that the queen is called Madame Deficit. It is not therefore the king who is angry, but the queen. The king is only vexed, — vexed that everything goes so badly."

"I comprehend," said Pitou; but the casket?"

"That is true, that is true, Pitou; these devilish politics always drag me on farther than I would go — yes, the casket, before everything. You are right, Pitou; when I shall have seen Doctor Gilbert, why, then, we can return to politics — it is a sacred duty."

"There is nothing more sacred than sacred duties," said Pitou.

"Well, then, let us go to the College Louis-le-Grand, where Sebastien Gilbert now is," said Billot.

"Let us go," said Pitou, sighing; for he would be compelled to leave a bed of moss-like grass, to which he had accustomed himself. Besides which, notwithstanding the over-excitement of the evening, sleep, the assiduous host of pure consciences and tired limbs, had descended with all its poppies to welcome the virtuous and heartily tired Pitou.

Billot was already on his feet, and Pitou was about to rise, when the half-hour struck.

"But," said Billot, "at half-past eleven o'clock the college of Louis-le-Grand must, it would appear to me, be closed."

"Oh, most assuredly," said Pitou.

"And then, in the dark," continued Billot, "we might fall into some ambuscade; it seems to me that I see the fires of a bivouac in the direction of the Palace of Justice. I may be arrested, or I may be killed; you are right, Pitou, I must not be arrested, — I must not be killed."

It was the third time since morning that Pitou's ears had been saluted with those words so flattering to human pride, —

“You are right.”

Pitou thought he could not do better than to repeat the words of Billot.

“You are right,” he repeated, lying down again upon the grass; “you must not allow yourself to be killed, dear Monsieur Billot.”

And the conclusion of this phrase died away in Pitou’s throat. *Vox faucibus hæsit*, he might have added, had he been awake; but he was fast asleep.

Billot did not perceive it.

“All idea,” said he.

“Ah!” snored Pitou.

“Listen to me; I have an idea. Notwithstanding all the precautions I am taking, I may be killed. I may be cut down by a sabre or killed from a distance by a ball, — killed suddenly upon the spot; if that should happen, you ought to know what you will have to say to Doctor Gilbert in my stead: but you must be mute, Pitou.”

Pitou heard not a word of this, and consequently made no reply.

“Should I be wounded mortally, and not be able to fulfil my mission, you will, in my place, seek out Doctor Gilbert, and you will say to him — do you understand me, Pitou?” added the farmer, stooping towards his companion, “and you will say to him — why, confound him, he is positively snoring, the sad fellow!”

All the excitement of Billot was at once damped on ascertaining that Pitou was asleep.

“Well, let us sleep, then,” said he; and he laid himself down by Pitou’s side, without grumbling very seriously. For, however accustomed to fatigue, the ride of the previous day and the events of the evening did not fail to have a soporific effect on the good farmer.

And the day broke about three hours after they had gone to sleep, or rather, we should say, after their senses were benumbed.

When they again opened their eyes, Paris had lost nothing of that savage countenance which they had observed the night before. Only there were no soldiers to be seen; the people were everywhere.

The people armed themselves with pikes hastily manufactured, with muskets which the majority of them knew not how to handle, with magnificent weapons made centuries before, and of which the bearers admired the ornaments, some being inlaid with gold or ivory or mother-of-pearl, without comprehending the use or the mechanism of them.

Immediately after the retreat of the soldiers the populace had pillaged the palace called the Garde-Meuble.

And the people dragged towards the Hôtel de Ville two small pieces of artillery.

The alarm-bell was rung from the towers of Notre Dame, at the Hôtel de Ville, and in all the parish churches. There were seen issuing, — from where no one could tell, — but as from beneath the pavement, legions of men and women, squalid, emaciated, in filthy rags, half naked, who but the evening before cried, “Give us bread!” but now vociferated, “Give us arms!”

Nothing could be more terrifying than these bands of spectres, who, during the last three months had poured into the capital from the country, passing through the city gates silently, and installing themselves in Paris, where famine reigned, like Arabian ghouls in a cemetery.

On that day the whole of France, represented in Paris by the starving people from each province, cried to its king, “Give us liberty!” and to its God, “Give us food!”

Billot, who was first to awake, roused up Pitou, and they both set off to the College Louis-le-Grand; looking around them, shuddering and terrified at the miserable creatures they saw on every side.

By degrees, as they advanced towards that part of the town which we now call the Latin Quarter, as they ascended the Rue de la Harpe, as they approached their destination, the Rue Saint Jacques, they saw, as during the times of La Fronde, barricades being raised in every street. Women and children were carrying to the tops of the houses ponderous folio volumes, heavy pieces of furniture, and precious marble ornaments, destined to crush the foreign soldiers in case of their venturing into the narrow and tortuous streets of old Paris.

From time to time Billot observed one or two of the French Guards forming the centre of some meeting which they were organizing, and which, with marvellous rapidity, they were teaching the handling of a musket,-exercises which women and children were curiously observing, and almost with a desire of learning them themselves.

Billot and Pitou found the College of Louis-le-Grand in flagrant insurrection; the pupils had risen against their teachers, and had driven them from the building. At the moment when the farmer and his companion reached the grated gate, the scholars were attacking this gate, uttering loud threats, to which the affrighted principal replied with tears.

The farmer for a moment gazed on this intestine revolt, when suddenly, in a stentorian voice, he cried out: —

"Which of you here is called Sebastien Gilbert?"

"'Tis I," replied a young lad, about fifteen years of age, of almost feminine beauty, and who, with the assistance of four or five of his comrades, was carrying a ladder wherewith to escalade the walls, seeing that they could not force open the gate.

"Come nearer to me, my child."

"What is it that you want with me?" said young Sebastien to Billot.

"Do you wish to take him away?" cried the principal, terrified at the aspect of two armed men, one of whom — the one who had spoken to young Gilbert — was covered with blood.

The boy, on his side, looked with astonishment at these two men, and was endeavoring, but uselessly, to recognize his foster-brother, Pitou, who had grown so immeasurably tall since he last saw him, and who was altogether metamorphosed by the warlike accoutrements he had put on.

"Take him away!" exclaimed Billot, "take away Monsieur Gilbert's son, and lead him into all this turmoil, — expose him to receiving some unhappy blow! Oh! no, indeed!"

"Do you see, Sebastien," said the principal, "do you see, you furious fellow, that even your friends will have nothing to do with you? For, in short, these gentlemen appear to be your friends. Come, gentlemen, come, my young pupils, come, my children," cried the poor principal, "obey me — obey me, I command you — obey me, I entreat you."

"*Oro obtestorque,*" said Pitou.

"Sir," said young Gilbert, with a firmness that was extraordinary in a youth of his age, "retain my comrades, if such be your pleasure; but as to me, do you understand me, I will go out."

He made a movement towards the gate; the professor caught him by the arm.

But he, shaking his fine auburn curls upon his pallid forehead, —

"Sir," said he, "beware what you are doing. I am not in the same position as your other pupils. My father has been arrested, imprisoned; my father is in the power of the tyrants."

“In the power of the tyrants!” exclaimed Billot; “speak, my child; what is it that you mean?”

“Yes, yes,” cried several of the scholars, “Sebastien is right; his father has been arrested; and since the people have opened the prisons, he wishes they should open his father’s prison too.”

“Oh, oh!” said the farmer, shaking the bars of the gate with his herculean arms, “ they have arrested Doctor Gilbert, have they? By Heaven! my little Catherine, then, was right!”

“Yes, sir,” continued young Gilbert, “they have arrested my father, and that is why I wish to get out, why I wish to take a musket, why I wish to fight until I have liberated my dear father.”

And these words were accompanied and encouraged by a hundred furious voices, crying in every key: —

“Arms! arms! let us have arms!”

On hearing these cries, the crowd which had collected in the street, animated in its turn by an heroic ardor, rushed towards the gate to give liberty to the collegians.

The principal threw himself upon his knees between his scholars and the invaders, and held out his arms with a supplicating gesture.

“Oh, my friends! my friends!” cried he, “respect my children!”

“Do we not respect them?” said a French Guard. “I believe we do, indeed. They are fine boys, and they will do their exercise admirably.”

“My friends! my friends! These children are a sacred deposit which their parents have confided to me; I am responsible for them; their parents calculate upon me; for them I would sacrifice my life; but, in the name of Heaven! do not take away these children!”

Hootings, proceeding from the street, that is to say, from the hindmost ranks of the crowd, replied to these piteous supplications.

Billot rushed forward, opposing the French Guards, the crowd, the scholars themselves: —

“He is right, it is a sacred trust; let men fight, let men get themselves killed, but let children live; they are seed for the future.”

A disapproving murmur followed these words.

“Who is it that murmurs?” cried Billot; “assuredly, it cannot be a father. I who am now speaking to you, had two men killed in my arms; their blood is upon my shirt. See this!”

And he showed his shirt and waistcoat all begrimed with blood, and with a dignified movement which electrified the crowd.

“Yesterday,” continued Billot, “I fought at the Palais Royal; and at the Tuileries, and this lad also fought there, but this lad has neither father nor mother; moreover, he is almost a man.”

And he pointed to Pitou, who looked proudly around him.

“To-day,” continued Billot, “I shall fight again; but let no one say to me, ‘The Parisians were not strong enough to contend against the foreign soldiers, and they called children to their aid.’“

“Yes, yes,” resounded on every side, proceeding from women in the crowd, and several of the soldiers; “he is right, children: go into the college; go into the college.”

“Oh, thanks, thanks, sir!” murmured the principal of the college, endeavoring to catch hold of Billot’s hand through the bars of the gate.

“And, above all, take special care of Sebastien; keep him safe,” said the latter.

“Keep me! I say, on the contrary, that I will not be kept here,” cried the boy, livid with anger, and struggling with the college servants, who were dragging him away.

“Let me in,” said Billot. “I will engage to quiet him.”

The crowd made way for him to pass; the farmer dragged Pitou after him, and entered the courtyard of the college.

Already three or four of the French Guards, and about ten men, placed themselves as sentinels at the gate, and prevented the egress of the young insurgents.

Billot went straight up to young Sebastien, and taking between his huge and horny palms the small white hands of the child —

“Sebastien,” he said, “do you not recognize me?”

“No.”

“I am old Billot, your father’s farmer.”

“I know you now, sir.”

“And this lad,” rejoined Billot, pointing to his companion, “do you know him?”

“Ange Pitou,” said the boy.

“Yes, Sebastien; it is I — it is I.”

And Pitou, weeping with joy, threw his arms round the neck of his foster-brother and former schoolfellow.

“Well,” said the boy, whose brow still remained scowling, “what is now to be done?”

“What?” cried Billot. “Why, if they have taken your father from you, I will restore him to you. Do you understand?”

“You?”

“Yes, I — I, and all those who are out yonder with me. What the devil! Yesterday, we had to deal with the Austrians, and we saw their cartridge-boxes.”

“In proof of which, I have one of them,” said Pitou.

“Shall we not release his father?” cried Billot, addressing the crowd.

“Yes! yes!” roared the crowd. “We will release him.”

Sebastien shook his head.

“My father is in the Bastille,” said he in a despairing tone.

“And what then?” cried Billot.

“The Bastille cannot be taken,” replied the child.

“Then what was it you wished to do, if such is your conviction?”

“I wished to go to the open space before the castle. There will be fighting there, and my father might have seen me through the bars of his window.”

“Impossible!”

“Impossible? And why should I not do so? One day, when I was walking out with all the boys here, I saw the head of a prisoner. If I could have seen my father as I saw that prisoner, I should have recognized him, and I would have called out to him, ‘Do not be unhappy, Father, I love you!’“

“And if the soldiers of the Bastille should have killed you?”

“Well, then, they would have killed me under the eyes of my father.”

“The death of all the devils!” exclaimed Billot. “You are a wicked lad to think of getting yourself killed in your father’s sight, and make him die of grief, in a cage, — he who has only you in the world, he who loves you so tenderly Decidedly, you have a bad heart, Gilbert.”

And the farmer pushed the boy from him.

“Yes, yes; a wicked heart!” howled Pitou, bursting into tears.

Sebastien did not reply.

And, while he was meditating in gloomy silence, Billot was admiring his beautifully pale face, his flashing eyes, his ironical expressive mouth, his well-shaped nose, and his strongly developed chin, all of which gave testimony at once of his nobility of soul and nobility of race.

“You say that your father is in the Bastille,” said the farmer, at length breaking the silence.

“Yes.”

“And for what?”

“Because my father is the friend of Lafayette and Washington; because my father has fought with his sword for the independence of America, and with his pen for the liberty of France; because my father is well known in both worlds as the detester of tyranny; because he has called down curses on the Bastille, in which so many have suffered; therefore have they sent him there!”

“And when was this?”

“Six days ago.”

“And where did they arrest him?”

“At Havre, where he had just landed.”

“How do you know all this?”

“I have received a letter from him.”

“Dated from Havre?”

“Yes.”

“And it was at Havre itself that he was arrested?”

“It was at Lillebonne.”

“Come now, child, do not feel angry with me, but give me all the particulars that you know. I swear to you that I will either leave my bones on the Place de la Bastille, or you shall see your father again.”

Sebastien looked at the farmer, and seeing that he spoke from his heart, his angry feelings subsided.

“Well, then,” said he, “at Lillebonne he had time to write in a book, with a pencil, these words: —

SEBASTIEN, — I have been arrested, and they are taking me to the Bastille. Be patient, hope, and study diligently.

LILLEBONNE, July 7, 1789.

P.S. — I am arrested in the cause of Liberty. I have a son in the College Louis-le-Grand, at Paris. The person who shall find this book is entreated, in the name of humanity, to get it conveyed to my son. His name is Sebastien Gilbert.

“And this book?” inquired Billot, palpitating with emotion.

“He put a piece of gold into this book, tied a cord round it, and threw it out of the window.”

“And — ”

“The curate of the place found it, and chose from among his parishioners a robust young man, to whom he said: —

“‘Leave twelve francs with your family, who are without bread, and with the other twelve go to Paris; carry this book to a poor boy whose father has just been arrested because he has too great a love for the people.’

“The young man arrived here at noon yesterday, and delivered to me my father’s book. And this is the way I learned how my father had been arrested.”

“Come, come,” cried Billot, “this reconciles me somewhat to the priests. Unfortunately they are not all like this one. And this worthy young man, — what has become of him?”

“He set off to return home last night. He hoped to carry back with him to his family five francs out of the twelve he had brought with him.”

“Admirable! admirable!” exclaimed Pitou, weeping for joy. “Oh, the people have good feelings! Go on, Gilbert.”

“Why, now you know all.”

“Yes.”

“You promised me, if I would tell you all, that you would bring back my father to me. I have told you all; now remember your promise.”

“I told you that I would save him, or I should be killed in the attempt. That is true. And now, show me the book,” said Billot.

“Here it is,” said the boy, taking from his pocket a volume of the “Contrat Social.”

“And where is your father’s writing?”

“Here,” replied the boy, pointing to what the doctor had written.

The farmer kissed the written characters.

“And now,” said he, “tranquillize yourself. I am going to seek your father in the Bastille.”

“Unhappy man!” cried the principal of the college, seizing Billot’s hands; “how can you obtain access to a prisoner of State?”

“Zounds! by taking the Bastille!”

Some of the French Guards began to laugh. In a few moments the laugh had become general.

“Why,” said Billot, casting around him a glance flashing with anger, “ what then is in the Bastille, if you please?”

“Stone,” said a soldier.

“Iron,” said another.

“And fire,” said a third. “Take care, my worthy man: you may burn your fingers.”

“Yes, yes; you may burn yourself,” reiterated the crowd, with horror.

“Ah! Parisians,” shouted the farmer, “you have pickaxes, and you are afraid of stone! Ah! you have lead, and you fear iron! You have gunpowder, and you are afraid of fire! Parisians! — cowards! Parisians! — poltroons! Parisians! — machines for slavery! A thousand demons! — where is the man of heart who will go with me and Pitou to take the king’s Bastille? My name is Billot, a farmer of the Isle de France. Forward!”

Billot had raised himself to the very climax of audacity.

The crowd, rendered enthusiastic by his address, and trembling with excitement, pressed around him, crying, “To the Bastille!”

Sebastien endeavored to cling to Billot, but the latter gently pushed him back.

“Child,” said he, “what is the last word your father wrote to you?”

“Work,” replied Sebastien.

“Well, then, *work* here. We are going to *work* down yonder; only our work is called destroying and killing.”

The young man did not utter a word in reply. He hid his face with both hands, without even pressing the hand of Pitou, who embraced him; and he fell into such violent convulsions that he was immediately carried into the infirmary attached to the college.

“To the Bastille!” cried Billot.

“To the Bastille!” cried Pitou.

“To the Bastille!” shouted the crowd.

And they immediately commenced their march towards the Bastille.

CHAPTER XIII.

The King is so good! the Queen is so good!

AND now we request our readers to allow us to give them an insight into the principal political events that have occurred since the period at which, in a previous publication, we abandoned the court of France.

Those who know the history of that period, or those whom dry, plain history may alarm, may skip this chapter, and pass on to the next one, which connects exactly with Chapter XII.; the one we are now writing being intended for those very precise and exacting spirits who are determined to be informed on every point.

During the last year or two something unheard of, unknown, something emanating from the past and looking towards the future, was threatening and growling in the air.

It was the Revolution.

Voltaire had raised himself for a moment, while in his last agony, and, leaning upon his elbow in his death-bed, he had seen shining, even amidst the darkness in which he was about to sleep forever, the brilliant lightning of this dawn.

When Anne of Austria assumed the regency of France, says Cardinal de Retz, there was but one saying in every mouth, — ”The queen is so good!”

One day Madame de Pompadour’s physician, Quesnoy, who had an apartment in her house, saw Louis XV. coming in. A feeling altogether unconnected with respect agitated him so much that he trembled and turned pale.

“What is the matter with you?” said Madame de Hausset to him.

“The matter is,” replied Quesnoy, “that every time I see the king I say to myself, ‘There is a man who, if he should feel so inclined, can have my head cut off.’“

“Oh, there’s no danger of that,” rejoined Madame de Hausset. “The king is so good!”

It is with these two phrases — ”The king is so good!” “The queen is so good!” — that the French Revolution was effected.

When Louis XV. died, France breathed again. The country was delivered at the same moment from the king, the Pompadours, the Dubarrys, and the *Parc aux Cerfs.*

The pleasures of Louis XV. had cost the nation very dear. In them alone were expended three millions of livres a year.

Fortunately, after him came a king who was young, moral, philanthropic, almost philosophical.

A king who, like the Émile of Jean Jacques Rousseau, had studied a trade, or rather, we should say, three trades.

He was a locksmith, a watchmaker, and a mechanician.

Being alarmed at the abyss over which he was suspended, the king began by refusing all favors that were asked of him. The courtiers trembled. Fortunately, there was one circumstance which reassured them, — it was not the king who refused, but Turgot, — it was, that the queen was not yet in reality a queen, and consequently could not have that influence to-day which she might acquire to-morrow.

At last, towards the year 1777, she acquired that influence which had been so long desired. The queen became a mother. The king, who was already so good a king, so good a husband, could now also prove himself a good father.

How could anything be now refused to her who had given an heir to the crown?

And, besides, that was not all; the king was also a good brother. The anecdote is well known of Beaumarchais being sacrificed to the Count de Provence; and yet the king did not like the Count de Provence, who was a pedant.

But, to make up for this, he was very fond of his younger brother, the Count d’Artois, the type of French wit, elegance, and nobleness.

He loved him so much that if he sometimes refused the queen any favor she might have asked of him, the Count d’Artois had only to add his solicitations to those of the queen, and the king had no longer the firmness to refuse.

It was, in fact, the reign of amiable men. Monsieur de Calonne, one of the most amiable men in the world, was comptroller-general. It was Calonne who said to the queen, —

“Madame, if it is possible, it is done; and if it is impossible, it shall be done.”

From the very day on which this charming reply was circulated in all the drawing-rooms of Paris and Versailles, the Red Book, which every one had thought closed forever, was reopened.

The queen buys Saint Cloud.

The king buys Rambouillet.

It is no longer the king who has lady favorites, it is the queen. Mesdames Diana and Jules de Polignac cost as much to France as La Pompadour and La Dubarry.

The queen is so good!

A reduction is proposed in the salaries of the high officers of the court. Some of them make up their minds to it. But one of the most habitual frequenters of the palace obstinately refuses to submit to this reduction; it is Monsieur de Coigny. He meets the king in one of the corridors, a terrible scene occurs, the king runs away, and in the evening says laughingly, —

“Upon my word, I believe if I had not yielded, Coigny would have beaten me.”

The king is so good!

And then the fate of a kingdom sometimes depends upon a very trivial circumstance; the spur of a page, for instance.

Louis XV. dies; who is to succeed Monsieur d’Aiguillon?

The king, Louis XVI., is for Machaut. Machaut is one of the ministers who had sustained the already tottering throne. Mesdames, that is to say, the king’s aunts, are for Monsieur de Maurepas, who is so amusing, and who writes such pretty songs. He wrote three volumes of them at Pontchartrain, which he called his memoirs.

All this is a steeple-chase affair. The question was as to who should arrive first, — the king and queen at Arnouville, or mesdames at Pontchartrain.

The king has the power in his own hands; the chances are therefore in his favor.

He hastens to write: —

Set out, the very moment you receive this, for Paris; I am waiting for you.

He slips his despatch into an envelope, and on the envelope he writes, —

“Monsieur le Comte de Machaut, at Arnouville.”

A page of the king’s stables is sent for; the royal missive is put into his hands, and he is ordered to mount a horse, and to go to Arnouville full speed.

And now that the page is despatched, the king can receive mesdames.

Mesdames, — the same whom the king their father, as has been seen in “Balsamo,” called Loque, Chiffe, and Graille, three names eminently aristocratic, — mesdames are waiting at a door opposite to that by which the page goes out, until he shall have left the room.

The page once gone out, mesdames may go in.

They go in, entreat the king in favor of Monsieur Maurepas; all this is a mere question of time; the king does not like to refuse mesdames anything, — *the king is so good!*

He will accede to their request when the page shall have got so far on his journey that no one can come up with him.

He contested the point with mesdames, his eyes fixed on the time-piece. Half an hour will be sufficient for him. The time-piece will not deceive him. It is the time-piece which he himself regulates.

Twenty minutes have elapsed, and he yields.

“Let the page be overtaken,” said he, “ and all shall be as you please.”

Mesdames rush out of the room; they will despatch a man on horseback; he shall kill a horse, two horses, ten horses, but the page must be overtaken.

All these determinations are unnecessary; not a single horse will be killed.

In going down the staircase one of the page’s spurs struck against one of the stone steps and broke short off. How could any one go at full speed with only one spur?

Besides, the Chevalier d’Abzac is the chief of the great stable, and he would not allow a courier to mount his horse — he whose duty it was to inspect the couriers-if the courier was about to set out in a manner that would not do honor to the royal stables.

The page therefore could not set out without having both his spurs.

The result of all this was, that instead of overtaking the page on the road to Arnouville — galloping at full speed — he was overtaken before he had left the courtyard of the palace.

He was already in the saddle and was about to depart in the most irreproachable good order.

The despatch is taken from him, the text of the missive is left unchanged, for it was as good for the one as the other. Only instead of writing the address, “To Monsieur de Machaut, at Arnouville,” mesdames wrote, “To Monsieur le Comte de Maurepas, at Pontchartrain.”

The honor of the royal stable is saved, but the monarchy is lost.

With Maurepas and Calonne everything goes on marvellously: the one sings, the other pays; but besides the courtiers, there are the receivers-general, who also have their functions to perform.

Louis XIV. began his reign by ordering two receivers-general to be hanged, with the advice of Colbert; after which he took Lavallière for his mistress and built Versailles. Lavallière cost him nothing.

But Versailles, in which he wished to lodge her, cost him a round sum.

Then, in 1685, under the pretext that they were Protestants, he drove a million of industrious men from France.

And thus, in 1707, still under the *great* king, Boisguilbert said, speaking of 1698: —

“Things still went on well in those days, there was yet some oil in the lamp. But now all has come to an end for want of aliment.”

What could be said eighty years afterwards, when the Dubarrys, the Polignacs, had taken their fill? After having made the people sweat water, they would make them sweat blood. That was all.

And all this in so delightful and polite a manner.

In former days the contractors of the public revenue were harsh, brutal, and cold, as the prison gates into which they cast their victims.

But in these days they are philanthropists: with one hand they despoil the people, it is true; but with the other they build hospitals for them.

One of my friends, a great financier, has assured me that out of one hundred and twenty millions, which the town dues bring in, the contractors managed to keep seventy millions for themselves.

It happened that at a meeting where the state of expenses was demanded, a counsellor, playing upon the word, said: —

“It is not any particular state that we require; what we want are the States-General.”

The spark fell upon gunpowder, the powder ignited and caused a general conflagration.

Every one repeated the saying of the counsellor, and the States-General were loudly called for.

The court fixed the opening of the States-General for the 1st of March, 1789.

On the 24th of August, 1788, Monsieur de Brienne withdrew from public affairs. He was another who had managed the financial affairs with tolerable recklessness.

But on withdrawing, he at least gave good counsel; he advised that Necker should be recalled.

Necker resumed the administration of affairs, and all again breathed confidently.

Notwithstanding this, the great question of the three orders was discussed throughout France.

Sieyès published his famous pamphlets upon the Tiers État

Dauphiny, the States of which province still met in spite of all the court could do, decided that the representation of the Tiers État should be on an equality with that of the nobility and clergy.

The assembly of the notables was reconstructed.

This assembly lasted thirty-two days, that is to say, from the 6th of November to the 8th of December, 1788.

On this occasion the elements performed their part. When the whip of kings does not suffice, the whip of Providence whistles in the air and compels the people to move onward.

Winter came, accompanied by famine. Hunger and cold opened the gates of 1789.

Paris was filled with troops, its streets with patrols.

Two or three times the muskets of the soldiers were loaded in the presence of the people, who were dying of hunger.

And then the muskets being loaded, and the moment having arrived for using them, they did not use them at all.

One morning, the 28th of April, five days before the opening of the States-General, a name was circulated among the crowd.

This name was accompanied by maledictions, and the more vituperative because this name was that of a workman who had become rich.

Réveillon, as was then asserted, — Réveillon, the director of the celebrated paper manufactory of the Faubourg Saint Antoine, — Réveillon had said that the wages of workmen ought to be reduced to fifteen sous a day.

And this was true.

It was also said that the court was about to decorate him with the black ribbon, — that is to say, with the Order of Saint Michael.

But this was an absurdity.

There is always some absurd rumor in popular commotions; and it is remarkable that it is also by this rumor that they increase their numbers, that they recruit, and at last become a revolution.

The crowd makes an effigy, baptizes it with the name of Réveillon, decorates it with the black ribbon, sets fire to it before Réveillon’s own door, and then proceeds to the square before the Hôtel de Ville, where it completes the burning of the effigy before the eyes of the municipal authorities, who see it burning.

Impunity emboldens the crowd, who give notice that, after having done justice on the effigy, they will the following day do justice on the real person of the offender.

This was a challenge in due form addressed to the public authorities.

The authorities sent thirty of the French Guards, and even then it was not the authorities who sent them, but their colonel, Monsieur de Biron.

These thirty French Guards were merely witnesses of this great duel, which they could not prevent. They looked on while the mob was pillaging the manufactory, throwing the furniture out of the windows, breaking everything, burning everything. Amid all this hubbub, five hundred louis in gold were stolen.

They drank the wine in the cellars, and when there was no more wine, they drank the dyes of the manufactory, which they took for wine.

The whole of the day of the 27th was employed in effecting this villanous spoliation.

A reinforcement was sent to the thirty men. It consisted of several companies of the French Guards, who in the first place fired blank cartridges, then balls. Towards evening there came to the support of the Guards part of the Swiss regiment of Monsieur de Besenval.

The Swiss never make a jest of matters connected with revolution.

The Swiss forgot to take the balls out of their cartridges, and as the Swiss are naturally sportsmen, and good marksmen too, about twenty of the pillagers remained upon the pavement.

Some of them had about them a portion of the five hundred louis which we have mentioned, and which from the secretary of Réveillon had passed into the pockets of the pillagers, and from the pockets of the pillagers into those of the Swiss Guards.

Besenval had done all this; he had done it “out of his own head,” as the vulgar saying has it.

The king did not thank him for what he had done, nor did he blame him for it.

Now, when the king does not thank, the king blames.

The parliament opened an inquiry.

The king closed it.

The king was so good!

Who it was that had stirred on the people to do this no one could tell.

Has it not been often seen, during the great heats of summer, that conflagrations have taken place without any apparent cause.

The Duke of Orleans was accused of having excited this disturbance.

The accusation was absurd, and it fell to the ground.

On the 29th Paris was perfectly tranquil, or at least appeared to be so.

The 4th of May arrived. The king and the queen went in procession with the whole Court to the Cathedral of Notre Dame to hear “Veni, Creator.”

There were great shouts of “Long live the king!” and above all of, “Long live the queen!”

The queen was so good!

This was the last day of peace. The next day the shouts of “Long live the queen!” were not so frequent, but the mob cried more frequently, “Long live the Duke of Orleans!”

These cries wounded her feelings much, poor woman! — she who detested the duke to such a degree that she said he was a coward.

As if there had ever been a coward in the Orleans family, — from Monsieur, who gained the battle of Cassel, down to the Duke of Chartres, who contributed to the gaining of those at Jemmapes and Valmy!

It went so far that the poor woman was near fainting, but was supported, her head drooping on her shoulder. Madame Campan relates this incident in her memoirs.

But this reclining head raised itself up haughty and disdainful. Those who saw the expression of those features were at once cured, and forever, of using the expression: —

The queen is so good!

There exist three portraits of the queen: one painted in 1776, another in 1784, and a third in 1788.

I have seen all three of them. See them in your turn! If ever these three portraits are placed in the same gallery, the history of Marie Antoinette can be read in those three portraits.

The meeting of the three orders, which was to have produced a general pacification, proved a declaration of war.

“Three orders,” said Sieyès; “no, three nations.”

On the 3d of May, the eve of the Mass of the Holy Ghost, the king received the deputies at Versailles.

Some persons counselled him to substitute cordiality for etiquette.

The king would not listen to anything.

He in the first place received the clergy.

After them the nobility.

At last the Tiers État.

The Third had been waiting a long time.

The Third murmured.

In the assemblies of former times the Tiers État pronounced their discourses on their knees.

There was no possibility of inducing the president of the Tiers État to go down on his knees.

It was decided that the Tiers État should not pronounce an oration.

In the sittings of the 5th the king put on his hat.

The nobility put on their hats.

The Tiers État were about to put on their hats also, but the king then took off his. He preferred holding it in his hand to seeing the Tiers État covered in his presence.

On Wednesday, the 10th of June, Sieyès entered the assembly. He found it almost entirely composed of the Tiers État.

The clergy and the nobility were assembled elsewhere.

“Let us cut the cable,” said Sieyès. “It is now time.”

And Sieyès proposed that the clergy and the nobility should be summoned to attend within an hour from that time at the latest.

In case of non-appearance, default should be pronounced against the absent.

A German and Swiss army surrounded Versailles. A battery of artillery was pointed against the assembly.

Sieyès saw nothing of all this; he saw the people, who were starving; but the Third, Sieyès was told, could not, of itself, form the States-General.

“So much the better,” replied Sieyès, “it will form the National Assembly.”

The absent did not present themselves; the proposal of Sieyès was adopted; the Tiers État calls itself the National Assembly by a majority of four hundred votes.

On the 19th of June the king orders the building in which the National Assembly held their meetings to be closed.

But the king, in order to accomplish such a *coup d’état,* needed some pretext.

The hall was closed for the purpose of making preparations for a royal sitting, which was to take place on the following Monday.

On the 20th of June, at seven in the morning, the President of the National Assembly is informed that there will be no meeting on that day.

At eight o’clock he presents himself at the door of the hall, with a great number of the deputies.

The doors are closed, and sentinels are guarding the doors.

The rain is falling.

They wish to break open the doors.

The sentinels had received their orders, and they present their bayonets.

One of the deputies proposes that they should meet at the Place d’Armes.

Another that it should be at Marly.

Guillotin proposes the Jeu de Paume.

Guillotin!

What a strange thing that it should be Guillotin, whose name, by adding an *e* to it, should become so celebrated four years afterwards, — how strange that it should be Guillotin who proposed the Jeu de Paume, — the Jeu de Paume, unfurnished, dilapidated, open to the four winds of heaven!

To this great demonstration the king replies by the royal word, “Veto!”

Monsieur de Brézé is sent to the rebels to order them to disperse.

“We are here by the will of the people,” said Mirabeau, “and we will not leave this place but with bayonets pointed at our breasts.”

And not, as it has been asserted, that he said” *by the force of bayonets.* “Why is it that there is always behind great men some paltry rhetorician who spoils his sayings under pretext of arranging them?

Why was there such a rhetorician behind Mirabeau at the Jeu de Paume?

And behind Cambronne at Waterloo?

The reply was at once reported to the king.

He walked about for some time with the air of a man who was suffering from *ennui*.

“They will not go away” said he.

“No, Sire.”

“Well, then, leave them where they are.”

As is here shown, royalty was already bending beneath the hand of the people, and bending very low.

From the 21st of June to the 12th of July all appeared tolerably calm; but it was that heavy and stifling calm which precedes the tempest.

It was like the uneasy dream of an uneasy slumber.

On the 11th the king formed a resolution, urged to it by the queen, the Count d’Artois, the Polignacs, — in fact, the whole of the *Camarilla* of Versailles; in short, he dismissed Necker.

On the 12th this intelligence reached Paris.

The effect which it produced has already been seen.

On the evening of the 13th, Billot arrived just in time to see the barriers burning.

On the 13th, in the evening, Paris was defending itself.

On the 14th, in the morning, Paris was ready to attack.

On the morning of the 14th Billot cried, “To the Bastille!” and three thousand men, imitating Billot, reiterated the same cry, which was about to become that of the whole population of Paris.

The reason was, that there had existed during five centuries a monument weighing heavily upon the breast of France, like the infernal rock upon the shoulders of Sisyphus.

Only that, less confiding than the Titan in his strength, France had never attempted to throw it off.

This monument, the seal of feudality, imprinted on the forehead of Paris, was the Bastille.

The king was too good, as Madame de Hausset had said, to have a head cut off.

But the king sent people to the Bastille.

When once a man became acquainted with the Bastille, by order of the king, that man was forgotten, sequestrated, interred, annihilated.

He remained there until the king remembered him; and kings have so many new things occurring around them every day, of which they are obliged to think, that they often forget to think of old matters.

Moreover, in France there was not only one Bastille, there were twenty other Bastilles, which were called Fort l'Evêque, Saint-Lazare, the Châtelet, the Conciergerie, Vincennes, the Castle of La Roche, the Castle of If, the Isles of St. Marguerite, Pignerolles, etc.

Only the fortress at the gate St. Antoine was called *the Bastille* , as *Rome* was called *the* city.

It was the Bastille, *par excellence*. It was of more importance than all the others.

During nearly a whole century the governorship of the Bastille had continued in one and the same family.

The grandfather of this elect race was Monsieur de Châteauneuf. His son, Lavrillière, succeeded him, who, in turn, was succeeded by his grandson, Saint Florentin. The dynasty became extinct in 1777.

During this triple reign, the greater part of which passed during the reign of Louis XV., it would be impossible to state the number of *lettres de cachet.* Saint Florentin alone received more than fifty thousand.

The *lettres de cachet* were a great source of revenue.

They were sold to fathers who wished to get rid of their sons.

They were sold to women who wished to get rid of their husbands.

The prettier the wives were, the less did the *lettre de cachet* cost them.

It then became, between them and the minister, an exchange of polite attentions, and that was all.

Since the end of the reign of Louis XIV., all the state

prisons, and particularly the Bastille, were in the hands of the Jesuits.

Among the prisoners, it will be recollected, the following were of the greatest note: —

The Iron Mask, Lauzun, Latude. The Jesuits were father confessors; for greater security they confessed the prisoners.

For greater security still, the prisoners were buried under supposititious names.

The Iron Mask, it will be remembered, was buried under the name of Marchialy. He had remained forty-five years in prison.

Lauzun remained there fourteen years. Latude, thirty years.

But, at all events, the Iron Mask and Lauzun had committed heinous crimes.

The Iron Mask, whether brother or not of Louis XIV., it is asserted, resembled King Louis XIV. so strongly that it was almost impossible to distinguish the one from the other.

It is exceedingly imprudent to dare to resemble a king.

Lauzun had been very near marrying, or did actually marry, the Grande Mademoiselle.

It is exceedingly imprudent to dare to marry the niece of King Louis XIII., the granddaughter of Henry IV.

But Latude, poor devil, what had he done?

He had dared to fall in love with Mademoiselle Poisson, Dame de Pompadour, the king's mistress.

He had written a note to her.

This note, which a respectable woman would have sent back to the man who wrote it, was handed by Madame de Pompadour to Monsieur de Sartines, the lieutenant-general of police.

And Latude, arrested, fugitive, taken and retaken, remained thirty years locked up in the Bastille, the Castle of Vincennes, and Bicêtre.

It was not, therefore, without reason that the Bastille was abhorred.

The people hated it as if it were a living thing. They had formed of it a gigantic chimera, one of those monsters like those of Gévauden, who pitilessly devour the human species.

The grief of poor Sebastien Gilbert will therefore be fully comprehended, when he was informed that his father was in the Bastille.

Billot's conviction will also be understood, that the doctor would never be released from his prison unless he was released by force.

The frenetic impulse of the people will be also understood, when Billot vociferated, "To the Bastille!"

Only that it was a senseless idea, as the soldiers had remarked, that the Bastille could be taken.

The Bastille had provisions, a garrison, artillery.

The Bastille had walls, which were fifteen feet thick at their summit and forty at their base.

The Bastille had a governor, whose name was De Launay, who had stored thirty thousand pounds of gunpowder in his cellars, and who had sworn, in case of being surprised by a *coup de main*, to blow up the Bastille, and with it half the Faubourg St. Antoine.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Three Powers of France

BILLOT still walked on, but it was no longer he who shouted. The crowd, delighted with his martial air, recognized in this man one of their own class. Commenting on his words and action, they followed him, still increasing like the waves of the incoming tide.

Behind Billot, when he issued from the narrow streets and came upon the Quay St. Michel, marched more than three thousand men, armed with cutlasses or pikes or guns.

They all cried, “To the Bastille! to the Bastille!”

Billot counselled with his own thoughts. The reflections which we made at the close of the last chapter presented themselves to his mind, and by degrees all the fumes of his feverish excitement evaporated.

Then he saw clearly into his own mind.

The enterprise was sublime, but insensate. This was easily to be understood from the affrighted and ironical countenances on which were reflected the impressions produced by the cry of “To the Bastille!” But nevertheless he was only the more strengthened in his resolution.

He could not, however, but comprehend that he was responsible to mothers, wives, and children for the lives of the men who were following him, and he felt bound to use every possible precaution.

Billot, therefore, began by leading his little army on to the square in front of the Hôtel de Ville.

There he appointed his lieutenant and other officers — watch-dogs — to restrain the flock.

“Let us see,” thought Billot, “there is a power in France, — there are even two, — there are even three. Let us consult.”

He entered the Hôtel de Ville, asking who was the chief of the municipality.

He was told it was the Provost of the Merchants, the mayor of Paris, Monsieur de Flesselles.

“Ah, ah!” cried he, with a dissatisfied air. “Monsieur *de* Flesselles, a noble, that is to say, an enemy of the people.”

“Why no,” they replied to him; “he is a man of talent.”

Billot ascended the staircase of the Hôtel de Ville.

In the ante-chamber he met an usher.

“I wish to speak with Monsieur Flesselles,” said he, perceiving that the usher was approaching him to ask him what he wanted.

“Impossible!” replied the usher; “he is now occupied in drawing up the lists of a militia force which the city is about to organize.”

“That falls out marvellously well,” observed Billot, “for I also am organizing a militia, and as I have already three thousand men enlisted, I am as good as Monsieur de Flesselles, who has not a single soldier yet afoot. Enable me, therefore, to speak with Monsieur de Flesselles, and that instantly. Oh, look out of the window, if you will!”

The usher had, in fact, cast a rapid glance upon the quays, and had perceived Billot’s men. He therefore hastened to inform the mayor, to whom he showed the three thousand men in question, as a postscript to his message.

This inspired the provost with a sort of respect for the person who wished to see him: he left the council-room and went into the ante-chamber, looking about for his visitor.

He perceived Billot, guessed that he was the person, and smiled.

“It was you who were asking for me, was it not?” said he.

“You are Monsieur de Flesselles, Provost of the Merchants, I believe?” replied Billot.

“Yes, sir. In what way, may I ask, can I be of service to you? Only speak quickly, for my mind is much occupied.”

“Good Monsieur Provost,” continued Billot, “how many powers are there in France?”

“Why, that is as people may choose to understand it, my dear sir,” replied Flesselles.

“Say it, then, as you yourself understand it.”

“Were you to consult Monsieur Bailly, he would tell you there is but one, the National Assembly; if you consult Monsieur de Dreux Brézé, he would also tell you there is but one — the king.”

“And you, Monsieur Provost, — of these two opinions, which is yours?”

"My own opinion, and above all at the present moment, is, that there is but one."

"The assembly, or the king?" demanded Billot

"Neither the one nor the other; it is the nation," replied Flesselles, playing with the frill of his shirt.

"Ah! ah! the nation!" cried the farmer.

"Yes; that is to say, those gentlemen who are waiting down yonder on the quay with knives and roasting-spits. The nation, — by that I mean everybody."

"You may perhaps be right, Monsieur de Flesselles," replied Billot, "and they were not wrong in telling me that you are a man of talent."

De Flesselles bowed.

"To which of these three powers do you think of appealing, sir?" asked Flesselles.

"Upon my faith," said Billot, "I believe that when one has anything very important to ask, a man had better address himself at once to God and not to his saints."

"Which means to say that you are about to address yourself to the king."

"I am inclined to do so."

"Would it be indiscreet to inquire what it is you think of asking of the king?"

"The liberation of Doctor Gilbert, who is in the Bastille."

"Doctor Gilbert?" solemnly asked Monsieur de Flesselles; "he is a writer of pamphlets, is he not?"

"Say a philosopher, sir."

"That is one and the same thing, my dear Monsieur Billot. I think you stand but a poor chance of obtaining what you desire from the king."

"And why so?"

"In the first place, because, if the king sent Doctor Gilbert to the Bastille he must have had reasons for so doing."

"'Tis well," replied Billot; "he shall give me his reasons on the subject, and I will give him mine."

"My dear Monsieur Billot, the king is just now very busy, and he would not even receive you."

"Oh, if he does not receive me, I shall find some means of getting in without his permission!"

“Yes; and when you have once got in, you will find there Monsieur de Dreux Brézé, who will have you shoved out of doors.”

“Who will have me shoved out of doors?”

“Yes; he wished to do that to the National Assembly altogether. It is true that he did not succeed; but that is a stronger reason for his being in a furious rage, and taking his revenge on you.”

“Very well; then I will apply to the Assembly.”

“The road to Versailles is intercepted.”

“I will go there with my three thousand men.”

“Take care, my dear sir. You would find on your road some four or five thousand Swiss soldiers and two or three thousand Austrians, who would make only a mouthful of you and your three thousand men. In the twinkling of an eye you would be swallowed.”

“Ah! the devil! What ought I to do, then?”

“Do what you please; but do me the service to take away your three thousand men who are beating the pavement yonder with their pikes, and who are smoking. There are seven or eight thousand pounds of powder in our cellars here. A single spark might blow us all up.”

“In that case, I think, I will neither address myself to the King nor to the National Assembly. I will address myself to the nation, and we will take the Bastille.”

“And with what?”

“With the eight thousand pounds of powder that you are going to give me, Monsieur Provost.”

“Ah, really!” said Flesselles, in a jeering tone.

“It is precisely as I say, sir. The keys of the cellars, if you please.”

“Hey! you are jesting, sure!” cried the provost.

“No, sir, I am not jesting,” said Billot.

And seizing Flesselles by the collar of his coat with both hands, — ”The keys,” cried he, “or I call up my men.”

Flesselles turned as pale as death. His lips and his teeth were closed convulsively; but when he spoke, his voice was in no way agitated, and he did not even change the ironical tone he had assumed.

“In fact, sir,” said he, “you are doing me a great service by relieving me from the charge of this powder. I will therefore order the keys to be delivered to you, as you desire. Only please not to forget that I am your first magistrate, and that if you have the misfortune to conduct yourself towards me before others in the way you have done when alone with me, an hour afterwards you would be hanged by the town guards. You insist on having this powder?"

"I insist," replied Billot.

"And you will distribute it yourself?"

"Myself."

"And when?"

"This very moment."

"Your pardon. Let us understand each other. I have business which will detain me here about a quarter of an hour, and should rather like, if it is the same to you, that the distribution should not be commenced until I have left the place. It has been predicted to me that I shall die a violent death; but I acknowledge that I have a very decided repugnance to being blown into the air."

"Be it so. In a quarter of an hour, then. But now, in my turn, I have a request to make."

"What is it?"

"Let us both go close up to that window."

"For what purpose?"

"I wish to make you popular."

"I am greatly obliged; but in what manner?"

"You shall see."

Billot took the provost to the window, which was open, and called out to his friends in the square below.

"My friends," said he, "you still wish to take the Bastille, do you not?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" shouted three or four thousand voices.

"But you want gunpowder, do you not?"

"Yes! gunpowder! gunpowder!"

"Well, then, here is his honor the provost, who is willing to give us all he has in the cellars of the Hôtel de Ville. Thank him for it, my friends."

"Long live the Provost of the Merchants! Long live Monsieur de Flesselles!" shouted the whole crowd.

"Thanks, my friends: thanks for myself, thanks for him," cried Billot.

Then, turning towards the provost: —

"And now, sir," said Billot, "it is no longer necessary that I should take you by the collar, while here alone with you, or before all the world; for if you do not give me the gunpowder, the nation, as you call it, the nation will tear you to pieces."

"Here are the keys, sir," said the provost. "You have so persuasive a mode of asking, that it does not even admit a refusal."

"What you say really encourages me," said Billot, who appeared to be meditating some other project.

"Ah, the deuce! Can you have anything else to ask of me?"

"Yes. Are you acquainted with the governor of the
Bastille?"

"Monsieur de Launay?"

"I do not know what his name is."

"His name is De Launay."

"Be it so. Well, do you know Monsieur de Launay?"

"He is a friend of mine."

"In that case, you must desire that no misfortune should happen to him."

"In fact, I should desire it."

"Well, then, the way to prevent any misfortune happening to him is, that he should surrender the Bastille to me, or, at all events, liberate the doctor."

"You do not imagine, surely, that I should have influence enough with him to induce him to surrender to you either his prisoner or his fortress, do you?"

"That is my affair. All that I ask is, that you will give me an introduction to him."

"My dear Monsieur Billot, I forewarn you that if you go into the Bastille you will go into it alone."

"Very well."

"I forewarn you, moreover, that if you enter it alone you will perhaps not get out again."

"Marvellously well."

"Then I will give you your permission to go into the Bastille."

"I will wait for it."

"But it will be on still another condition."

"What is that?"

"It is that you will not come to me again to-morrow and ask for a passport to the moon. I forewarn you that I am not acquainted with any one in those regions."

“Flesselles! Flesselles!” said a hollow and threatening voice from behind the Provost of the Merchants, “if you continue to wear two faces, — the one which laughs with the aristocrats, the other which smiles upon the people, — you will perhaps receive between this and tomorrow morning a passport for a world from which no one returns.”

The provost turned round, shuddering.

“Who is it that speaks thus?” said he.

“‘Tis I, Marat.”

“Marat, the philosopher! Marat, the physician!” exclaimed Billot.

“Yes,” replied the same voice.

“Yes, Marat, the philosopher; Marat, the physician,” repeated Flesselles; “who in this last capacity ought to attend to curing lunatics, which would have been a sure means of now having a goodly number of patients.”

“Monsieur de Flesselles,” replied the lugubrious interlocutor, “this worthy citizen has asked you for a passport which will facilitate his seeing Monsieur de Launay. I would observe to you, that not only is he waiting for you, but that three thousand men are waiting for him.”

“‘Tis well, sir; he shall soon have it.”

Flesselles went to a table, passed one hand over his brow, and with the other seizing a pen, he rapidly wrote several lines.

“Here is your safe-conduct,” said he, delivering the paper to Billot.

“Read it,” said Marat.

“I cannot read,” said Billot.

“Well, then, give it to me; I can read.”

Billot handed the paper to Marat.

This passport was conceived in the following terms:

M. GOVERNOR, — We, Provost of the Merchants of the city of Paris, send to you M. Billot, in order to concert with you as to the interests of the said city.

DE FLESSELLES.

July 14, 1789.

“Good!” said Billot, “give it to me.”

“You find this passport good as it is?” said Marat.

“Undoubtedly.”

“Stop a minute. The provost is going to add a postscript to it, which will make it better.”

And he went up to Flesselles, who had remained standing, his hand on the table, and who looked with a disdainful air at the two men with whom he was so particularly engaged, and at a third one, half naked, who had just presented himself at the door, leaning upon a musketoon.

It was Pitou, who had followed Billot, and who held himself ready to obey the farmer’s orders, be they what they might.

“Sir,” said Marat to Flesselles, “the postscript which you are about to add, and which will render the passport so much better, is the following:”

“Say on, Monsieur Marat.”

Marat placed the paper on the table, and, pointing with his finger to the place on which the provost was to write the required postscript: —

“The citizen Billot,” said he, “having the character of bearer of a flag of truce, I confide his care to your honor.”

Flesselles looked at Marat, as if he would rather have smashed his flat face with his fist than do that which he had requested.

“Would you resist, sir?” demanded Marat.

“No,” replied Flesselles, “for, after all, you only ask me what is strictly right.”

And he wrote the postscript demanded of him.

“However, gentlemen, you will be pleased to observe this well, that I do not answer for the safety of Monsieur Billot.”

“And I — I will be answerable for it,” said Marat, jerking the paper out of his hands; “for your liberty is the guarantee of his liberty, — your head for the safety of his head. Here, worthy Billot,” continued Marat, “here is your passport.”

“Labrie!” cried M. de Flesselles, — ”Labrie!”

A lackey in grand livery entered the room.

“My carriage,” said the provost.

“It is waiting for you, sir, in the courtyard.”

“Let us go, then,” said the provost. “ There is nothing else which you desire, gentlemen?”

“No,” simultaneously replied Billot and Marat.

“Am I to let them pass?” inquired Pitou.

“My friend,” said Flesselles to him, “I would observe to you that you are rather too indecently attired to mount guard at my door. If you insist upon remaining here, turn your cartouche-box round in front, and set your back against the wall."

"Am I to let them pass?" Pitou repeated, with an air which indicated that he did not greatly relish the jest of which he had been the subject.

"Yes," said Billot.

Pitou made way for the provost to pass by him.

"Perhaps you were wrong in allowing that man to go," said Marat. "He would have been a good hostage to have kept. But, in any case, let him go where he will, you may feel perfectly assured that I will find him again."

"Labrie," said the Provost of the Merchants, as he was getting into his carriage, "they are going to distribute powder here. Should the Hôtel de Ville perchance blow up, I should like to be out of the way of the splinters. Let us get out of gunshot, Labrie, — out of gunshot."

The carriage rattled through the gateway, and appeared upon the square, on which were growling some four or five thousand persons.

Flesselles was afraid that they might misinterpret his departure, which might be considered as a flight.

He leaned half-way out of the door.

"To the National Assembly," cried he, in a loud voice to the coachman.

This drew upon him from the crowd a loud and continued outburst of applause.

Marat and Billot were on the balcony, and had heard the last words of Flesselles.

"My head against his," said Marat, "that he is not going to the National Assembly, but to the king."

"Would it not be well to have him stopped?" said Billot.

"No," replied Marat, with his hideous smile; "make yourself easy; however quickly he may go, we shall go still quicker than he. But now for the gunpowder."

"Yes, to the gunpowder," said Billot.

And they both went down the great staircase, followed by Pitou.

CHAPTER XV.

Monsieur de Launay, Governor of the Bastille

As Monsieur de Flesselles had said, there were eight thousand pounds of gunpowder in the cellars of the Hôtel de Ville.

Marat and Billot went into the first cellar with a lantern, which they suspended to a hook in the ceiling.

Pitou mounted guard at the door.

The powder was in small kegs, containing each about twenty pounds. Men were stationed upon the stairs, forming a chain which reached the square, and they at once began to send up the kegs.

There was at first a momentary confusion. It was not known whether there would be powder enough for everybody, and they all rushed forward to secure their share. But the chain formed by Billot at length succeeded in making the people wait patiently for their turn, and the distribution was effected with something like an approach to order.

Every citizen received half a pound of powder, — about thirty or forty shots.

But when every one had received the powder, it was perceived that muskets were sadly deficient. There were scarcely five hundred among the whole crowd.

While the distribution was going on, a portion of this furious population who were crying out for arms, went up to the rooms where the electors held their sittings. They were occupied in forming the National Guard, of which the usher had spoken to Billot.

They had just decreed that this civic militia should be composed of forty — eight thousand men. This militia but yet existed in the decree, and they were disputing as to the general who should command it.

It was in the midst of this discussion that the people invaded the Hôtel de Ville. They had organized themselves. They only asked to march; all they required was arms.

At that moment the noise of a carriage coming into the courtyard was heard. It was the Provost of the Merchants, who had not been allowed to proceed upon his journey, although he had exhibited a mandate from the king, ordering him to proceed to Versailles, and he was brought back by force to the Hôtel de Ville.

“Give us arms! give us arms!” cried the crowd, as soon as they perceived him at a distance.

“Arms!” cried he; “I have no arms; but there must be some at the arsenal.”

“To the arsenal! to the arsenal!” cried the crowd.

And five or six thousand men rushed on to the Quay de la Grève.

The arsenal was empty.

They returned, with bitter lamentations, to the Hôtel de Ville.

The provost had no arms, or rather would not give them. Pressed by the people, he had the idea of sending them to the Chartreux.

The Chartreux opened its gates. They searched it in every direction, but did not find even a pocket — pistol.

During this time Flesselles, having been informed that Billot and Marat were still in the cellars of the Hôtel de Ville, completing the distribution of the gunpowder, proposed to send a deputation to De Launay, to propose to him that he should withdraw the cannon from his ramparts, so as to be out of sight.

That which the evening before had made the crowd hoot most obstreperously was these guns, which, stretching forth their long necks, were seen beyond the turreted parapets. Flesselles hoped that, by causing them to disappear, the people would be contented by the concession, and would withdraw satisfied.

The deputation had just set forth, when the people returned in great fury.

On hearing the cries they uttered, Billot and Marat ran upstairs into the courtyard.

Flesselles, from an interior balcony, endeavored to calm the people. He proposed a decree which should authorize the districts to manufacture fifty thousand pikes.

The people were about to accept this proposal.

“Decidedly this man is betraying us,” said Marat. Then, turning to Billot, —

“Go to the Bastille,” said he, “and do what you proposed to do. In an hour I will send you there twenty thousand men, and each man with a musket on his shoulder.”

Billot, at first sight, had felt great confidence in this man, whose name had become so popular that it had reached even him. He did not even ask him how he calculated on procuring them. An abbé was there, imbued with the general enthusiasm, and crying, like all the rest, “To the Bastille!” Billot did not like abbés, but this one pleased him. He gave him the charge of continuing the distribution, which the worthy abbé accepted. Then Marat mounted upon a post. There was at that moment the most frightful noise and tumult.

“Silence!” cried he; “I am Marat, and I wish to speak.”

They were at once quieted as if by magic, and every eye was directed towards the orator.

“You wish for arms?” he said.

“Yes, yes!” replied thousands of voices.

“To take the Bastille?”

“Yes! yes! yes!”

“Well then, come with me, and you shall have them.”

“And where?”

“To the Invalides, where there are twenty — five thousand muskets. To the Invalides!”

“To the Invalides! to the Invalides!” cried every voice.

“And now,” said Marat to Billot, who had just called Pitou; “you will go to the Bastille?”

“Yes.”

“Stay. It might happen that before my men arrive you may stand in need of assistance.”

“In fact,” said Billot, “that is possible.”

Marat tore out a leaf from a small memorandum book, and wrote four words upon it with a pencil: —

“This comes from Marat.”

Then he drew a sign upon the paper.

“Well!” cried Billot, “what would you have me do with this note, since you do not tell me the name or the address of the person to whom I am to deliver it?”

“As to the address, the man to whom I recommend you has none; as to his name, it is well known. Ask the first workman you may meet for Gonchon, the Mirabeau of the people.”

“Gonchon — you will remember that name, Pitou.”

“Gonchon or *Gonchonius,*” said Pitou. “I shall not forget it.”

“To the Invalides! to the Invalides!” howled the mob, with increasing ferocity.

“Well, then, go!” said Marat to Billot; “and may the genius of Liberty march before thee!”

“To the Invalides!” he then cried in his turn.

And he went down the Quai de Gévres, followed by more than twenty thousand men.

Billot, on his side, took with him some five or six thousand. These were all armed in one way or another.

At the moment when they were about to proceed along the bank of the river, and the remainder were going towards the Boulevard, the Provost of the Merchants appeared at a window.

“My friends,” said he, “why is it that I see a green cockade in your hats?”

They were the leaves of the linden — trees, of Camille Desmoulins, which many had adopted merely from seeing others wear them, but without even knowing their signification.

“Hope! hope!” cried several voices.

“Yes; but the color that denotes hope is, at the same time, that of the Count d’Artois. Would you have the air of wearing the livery of a prince?”

“No, no!” cried all the crowd in chorus, and Billot louder than the rest.

“Well! then you ought to change that cockade; and, if you will wear a livery, let it at least be that of the city of Paris, the mother of us all, — blue and red, my friends, blue and red.”

“Yes, yes,” cried every tongue; “blue and red.”

Upon these words, every one trampled under foot his green cockade, every one called for ribbons; as if by enchantment, the windows round the square were opened, and blue and red ribbons rained down in floods.

But all the ribbons that fell scarcely sufficed for a thousand men.

Instantly aprons, silk gowns, scarfs, curtains, were torn, stripped, and cut in fragments; these fragments were formed into bows, rosettes, and scarfs. Every one took his share.

After which Billot’s small army again moved forward.

It kept on recruiting as it advanced; all the arteries of the Faubourg St. Antoine sent to it as it passed the most ardent and the most active of their population.

They reached, in tolerably good order, the end of the Rue Lesdiguières, where already a mass of curious lookers — on — some timid, others calm, and others insolent — were gazing at the towers of the Bastille, exposed to an ardent sun.

The arrival of the popular drums by the Faubourg St. Antoine;

The arrival of about a hundred of the French Guards from the Boulevards;

The arrival of Billot and his troop, at once changed the character and the aspect of the assembled crowd; the timid became emboldened, the calm became excited, and the insolent began to threaten.

“Down with the cannon! down with the cannon!” cried twenty thousand voices, threatening with their clinched fists the heavy guns which stretched forth their brazen necks from the embrasures of the platforms.

Just at that moment, as if the governor of the Bastille was obeying the injunctions of the crowd, some artillery — men approached the guns, which they drew in, till at last they disappeared entirely.

The crowd clapped their hands; they had then become a power, since the governor had yielded to their threats.

Notwithstanding this, the sentinels continued pacing backwards and forwards on the platforms. At every post was an Invalide and a Swiss.

After having cried, “Down with the cannon!” the crowd shouted, “Down with the Swiss!” It was a continuation of the cry of the night before, “Down with the Germans!”

But the Swiss did not the less continue their guard, crossing the Invalides in their measured pacings up and down.

One of those who cried, “Down with the Swiss!” became impatient; he had a gun in his hand; he pointed the muzzle of his gun at the sentinel, and fired.

The ball struck the gray wall of the Bastille, one foot below the coping — stone of the tower, and immediately in front of the spot where the Swiss had passed. At the spot where the shot had struck, it left a white mark, but the sentinel did not stop, and did not even turn his head.

A loud murmur soon arose around the man who had fired, and thus was given the signal of attack, as unheard of as it was senseless, — a murmur more of terror than of anger. Many persons conceived that it was a crime punishable with death to fire a musket — shot at the Bastille.

Billot gazed upon the dark — green mass like to those fabulous monsters which in ancient legends are represented to us as covered with scales. He counted the embrasures at which the cannon might at any given moment be rolled back to their places. He counted the number of muskets the muzzles of which might be directed through the loop — holes at the assembled crowd.

And Billot shook his head, recalling to mind the words uttered by Flesselles.

“We shall never be able to get in there,” said he.

“And why shall we never be able to get in?” said a voice close beside him.

Billot turned round and saw a man with a savage countenance, dressed in rags, and whose eyes sparkled like two stars.

“Because it appears to me impossible to take such a mass as that by force.”

“The taking of the Bastille,” said the man, “is not a deed of war, but an act of faith. Believe, and thou shalt succeed.”

“Patience!” said Billot, feeling in his pocket for his passport.

The man was deceived as to his meaning. “Patience!” cried he, “oh, yes, I understand you! you are fat — you — you look like a farmer.”

“And I am one, in fact,” said Billot.

“Then I can well understand why you say patience! You have been always well fed; but look behind you for a moment and see those spectres who are now surrounding us. See their dried — up veins, count their bones through the rents in their garments, and then ask them whether they understand the word patience.”

“This is one who speaks well,” said Pitou, “but he terrifies me.”

“He does not terrify me,” said Billot; and turning again towards the man: — ”Yes, patience,” he said; “but only for another quarter of an hour, that’s all.”

“Ah, ah!” cried the man, smiling; “a quarter of an hour; that indeed is not too much. And what will you do in a quarter of an hour?”

“During that time I shall have visited the Bastille, I shall know the number of its garrison, I shall know the intentions of its governor! I shall know, in fine, the way into it.”

“Yes! if after that you could only find the way out of it?”

“Well, supposing that I do not get out of it. There is a man who will come and show me the way.”

“And who is this man?”

“Gonchon, the Mirabeau of the people.”

The man gave a start. His eyes emitted flashes of fire.

“Do you know him?” inquired he.

“No.”

“Well, what mean you, then?”

“Why, I am going to know him; for I was told that the first to whom I might speak on the square before the Bastille would lead me to him. You are on the square of the Bastille; take me to him.”

“What do you want with him?”

“To deliver to him this paper.”

“From whom is it?”

“From Marat, the physician.”

“From Marat! you know Marat!” exclaimed the man.

“I have just left him.”

“Where?”

“At the Hôtel de Ville.”

“What is he doing?”

“He has gone to arm twenty thousand men at the Invalides.”

“In that case, give me that paper. I am Gonchon.” Billot drew back a step.

“You are Gonchon?” cried he.

“My friends,” said the man in rags, “here is one who does not know me, and who is asking whether it is true that I am Gonchon.”

The crowd burst into a loud laugh. It appeared to all these men that it was impossible that any one could be so ignorant as not to know their favorite orator.

“Long live Gonchon!” cried two or three thousand voices.

“Take it,” said Billot, handing the paper to him.

“Friends,” cried Gonchon, after having read it, and laying his hand on Billot’s shoulder, “this is a brother. Marat recommends him. We can therefore rely upon him. What is your name” said he to the farmer.

“My name is Billot.”

“And mine,” rejoined Gonchon, “is Hache, and between us both I trust we shall be able to do something.”

The crowd smiled at this sanguinary jest.

“Yes, yes, we shall soon do something,” cried they.

“Well! what are we going to do?” asked several voices.

“Why, zounds!” cried Gonchon, “we are going to take the Bastille.”

“This is as it should be,” cried Billot; “that is what I call speaking. Listen to me, brave Gonchon. How many men have you to back you?”

“Thirty thousand, or somewhere near that.”

“Thirty thousand men you have at your disposal, twenty thousand will soon be here from the Invalides, and ten thousand are already here; why, ‘tis more than enough to insure our success, or we shall never succeed at all.”

“We shall succeed,” replied Gonchon.

“I believe so. Well, then, call together your thirty thousand men. I, in the mean time, will go to the governor, and summon him to surrender. If he surrenders,

so much the better; we shall avoid much bloodshed. If he will not surrender, the blood that will be spilled will fall upon his head; and in these days, blood that is spilled in an unjust cause brings down misfortunes with it. Ask the Germans if it be not so.”

“How long do you expect to remain with the governor?” asked Gonchon.

“As long as I possibly can, until the Bastille is completely invested. If it be possible, when I come out again, the attack will begin.”

“‘tis understood.”

“You do not mistrust me?” said Billot to Gonchon, holding out his hand to him.

“Who, I?” replied Gonchon, with a smile of disdain, at the same time pressing the hand of the stout farmer, and with a strength that could not have been expected from his emaciated appearance; “I mistrust you! and for what reason, pray? If it were my will, upon a word, a sign given by me, I could have you pounded like glass, even were you sheltered by those formidable towers, which to — morrow will no longer exist, — were you protected by these soldiers, who this evening will have espoused our party or will have ceased to exist. Go, then, and rely on Gonchon as he relies on Billot.”

Billot was convinced, and walked towards the entrance of the Bastille, while the strange person with whom he had been conversing darted down the faubourg, amid shouts, repeated a thousand times, of — ”Long live Gonchon! Long live the Mirabeau of the people!”

“I do not know what the Mirabeau of the nobles may be,” said Pitou to Billot, “but I think our Mirabeau a hideously ugly personage.”

Some time afterwards, Monsieur de Lafayette also made the observation that blue and red were likewise the colors of the House of Orleans and added to them a third color, white, saying to those who received it from him, “I give you a cockade that will make the tour of the whole world.”

Billot, in French, means block, — the block on which criminals heads are struck off. Hache means axe. — TRANSLATOR.

CHAPTER XVI.

The Bastille and it’s Governor

WE will not describe the Bastille; it would be useless.

It lives as an eternal image, both in the memory of the old and in the imagination of the young.

We shall content ourselves with merely stating that, seen from the Boulevard, it presented, in front of the square then called Place de la Bastille, two twin towers, while its two fronts ran parallel with the banks of the canal which now exists.

The entrance to the Bastille was defended, in the first place, by a guardhouse, then by two lines of sentinels, and besides these by two drawbridges.

After having passed through these several obstacles, you came to the courtyard of the government house, — that is to say, the residence of the governor.

From this courtyard a gallery led to the ditches of the Bastille.

At this other entrance, which opened upon the ditches, was a drawbridge, a guardhouse, and an iron gate.

At the first entrance they wished to stop Billot; but Billot shows the passport he received from Flesselles, and they allow him to pass on.

Billot then perceives that Pitou is following him. Pitou had no permission; but he would have followed the farmer’s steps down to the infernal regions, or would have ascended to the moon.

“Remain outside,” said Billot. “Should I not come out again, it would be well there should be some one to remind the people that I have come in.”

“That is perfectly right,” said Pitou. “How long am I to wait before I remind them of it?”

“One hour.”

“And the casket?” inquired Pitou.

“Ah, you remind me! Well, then, should I not get out again; should Gonchon not take the Bastille, or, in short, if, after having taken it, I should not be found, you must tell Doctor Gilbert, whom they will find perhaps, that men who came from Paris took from me the casket which he confided to my care five years ago; that I, on the instant, started off to inform him of what had happened; that, on arriving at Paris, I was informed that he was in the Bastille; that I attempted to take the Bastille, and that in the attempt I left my skin there, which was altogether at his service."

"'Tis well, Father Billot," said Pitou; "only 'tis rather a long story, and I am much afraid that I may forget it."

"Forget what I have said to you?"

"Yes."

"I will repeat it to you, then."

"No," said a voice close to Billot's ear; "it would be better to write it."

"I do not know how to write," said Billot.

"I do. I am an usher."

"Ah! you are an usher, are you?" inquired Billot.

"Stanislaus Maillard, usher in the Court of the Châtelet."

And he drew from his pocket a long ink — horn, in which there were pens, paper, and ink; in fine, all that was necessary for writing.

He was a man about forty — five years old, tall, thin, and grave — looking, dressed entirely in black, as became his profession.

"Here is one who looks confoundedly like an undertaker," muttered Pitou.

"You say," inquired the usher, with great calmness, "that men who came from Paris carried off a casket which Dr. Gilbert confided to you?"

"Yes."

"That is a punishable crime."

"These men belonged to the police of Paris."

"Infamous robbers!" muttered Maillard.

Then, handing the paper to Piton: — "Here, take this, young man," said he; "it is the memorandum you require; and should he be killed," — he pointed to Billot — "should you be killed, it is to be hoped that I shall not be killed too."

"And should you not be killed, what would you do?" asked Pitou.

"I would do that which you were to have done," replied Maillard.

"Thanks," said Billot.

And he held out his hand to the usher.

The usher grasped it with a vigor which could not have been anticipated from his lank meagre body.

“Then I may fully depend upon you?” said Billot.

“As on Marat — as on Gonchon.”

“Good!” said Pitou; “they form a trinity which I am sure I shall not find in paradise.”

Then, going up to Billot: —

“Tell me, Father Billot, you will be prudent, will you not?”

“Pitou,” replied the farmer, with an eloquence which sometimes astonished people, when proceeding from one who had always led a country life, “forget not what I say to you, — that the most prudent line of conduct now in France is to be courageous.”

And he passed the first line of sentinels, while Pitou returned towards the square.

At the drawbridge he was again obliged to parley.

Billot showed his passport. The drawbridge was let down, the iron — grated gate was opened.

Close beside the gate stood the governor.

This interior court, in which the governor was waiting for Billot, was the courtyard which served as a promenade to the prisoners. It was guarded by eight towers, — that is to say, by eight giants. No window opened into it. Never did the sun shine on its pavement, which was damp and almost muddy. It might have been taken for the bottom of an immense well.

In this courtyard was a clock, supported by figures representing enchained captives, which measured the hours, and from which fell the regular and slow sounds of the minutes as they passed by, as in a dungeon the droppings from the ceiling eat into the pavement slabs on which they fall.

At the bottom of this well the prisoner, lost amid the abyss of stone, for a moment contemplated its cold nakedness, and soon asked to be allowed to return to his cell.

Close beside the grated gate which opened on this courtyard stood, as we have said, Monsieur de Launay.

Monsieur de Launay was a man from forty — five to fifty years of age. On that day he was dressed in a gray coat. He wore the red ribbon of the order of Saint Louis, and in his hand he carried a sword — cane.

This Monsieur de Launay was a man of wicked disposition. The memoirs of Linguet had just bestowed upon him a sorrowful celebrity; he was almost as much detested as the prison itself.

In fact, the De Launays, like the Châteauneufs, the Levrillières, and the Saint Florentins, who held the *lettres de cachet* from father to son, also from father to son transmitted the Bastille to one another.

For, as is well known, it was not the minister of war who appointed the officers of this jail. At the Bastille, all the places were sold to the highest bidder, from that of the governor himself, down to that of the scullion. The governor of the Bastille was a jailer on a grand scale, an eating — house keeper wearing epaulettes, who added to his salary of sixty thousand livres, sixty thousand more which he extorted and plundered.

It was highly necessary that he should recover the capital and interest of the money he had invested.

Monsieur de Launay, in point of avarice, far surpassed his predecessors. This might, perhaps, have arisen from his having paid more for the place, and having foreseen that he would not remain in it so long as they did.

He fed his whole house at the expense of his prisoners. He had reduced the quantity of fuel, and doubled the hire of furniture in each room.

He had the right of bringing yearly into Paris a hundred pipes of wine, free of duty. He sold his right to a tavern — keeper, who brought in wines of excellent quality; then with a tenth part of this duty he purchased the vinegar with which he supplied his prisoners.

The unhappy prisoners in the Bastille had only one consolation; this was a small garden, which had been formed on one of the bastions. There they could walk; there for a few moments they could inhale pure air, the perfumes of the flowers, and enjoy the light.

He rented this little garden to a gardener, and for fifty livres a year which he received from him he had deprived the prisoners of this last enjoyment.

It is true that to rich prisoners his complaisance was extreme. He conducted one of them to the house of his own mistress, who had thus her apartments furnished, and was kept in luxury, without its costing a stiver to him, De Launay.

See the work entitled “The Bastille Unveiled,” and you will find in it this fact, and many others besides.

And, notwithstanding, this man was courageous.

Since the previous evening the storm had been threatening around him. Since the previous evening he perceived the waves of this great commotion, which was still ascending, beat against his walls.

And yet he was calm, though pale.

It is true that he had to support him four pieces of artillery, ready prepared to fire; around him, a garrison of Swiss and Invalides; before him, only an unarmed man.

For, on entering the Bastille, Billot had given Pitou his carbine to take care of.

He had understood that within that iron grating which he saw before him, a weapon would be more dangerous than useful to him.

Billot, at a single glance, observed all, — the calm and almost threatening attitude of the governor; the Swiss and Invalides in the several guard — houses and on the platforms; and the silent bustle of the artillerymen, who were stowing their cartridges into the magazines of their ammunition — wagons.

The sentinels held their muskets at the make — ready; the officers had their swords drawn.

The governor remained motionless; Billot was obliged to advance towards him; the iron — grated gate closed behind the bearer of the people’s flag of truce with a sinister noise of grating iron, which, brave as he was, made the marrow of his bones chill within him.

“What want you with me again?” said De Launay to him.

“Again!” reiterated Billot; “it appears to me, however, that this is the first time I have seen you, and consequently that you have yet no right to be wearied of seeing me.”

“It is because I have been told that you come from the Hôtel de Ville.”

“That is true. I came from there.”

“Well, then, only just now I received a deputation from the municipality.”

“And for what purpose did it come?”

“It came to obtain a promise from me that I would not be the first to fire.”

“And you promised that you would not?”

“Yes.”

“And was this all?”

“It also came to request that I would draw in my guns.”

“And you have them drawn in; I know that, for I was on the square of the Bastille when this manuvre was executed.”

“And you doubtless thought that I was yielding to the threats of the people?”

“Why, zounds! it did look very like it.”

“Did I not tell you so, gentlemen?” exclaimed De Launay, turning towards his officers; “did I not tell you that we should be thought capable of such cowardice?”

Then, turning to Billot, —

“And you, — from whom do you come?”

“I come on behalf of the people,” proudly replied

Billot.

“‘tis well,” said De Launay, smiling; “but you have some other recommendation, I suppose; for with that which you set forth, you would not have been allowed to pass the first line of my sentries.”

“Yes; I have a safe — conduct from Monsieur de Flesselles, your friend.”

“Flesselles! You say that he is my friend,” rejoined De Launay, looking intently at Billot, as if he would have read the inmost recesses of his heart. “Whence know you that Monsieur de Flesselles is my friend?”

“Why, I supposed him to be so.”

“Supposed! — oh, that is all! ‘tis well. Let us see your safe — conduct.”

Billot presented the paper to him.

De Launay read it once, then a second time, and turned and twisted it about to discover whether it did not contain some postscript between its pages; held it up to the light, to see whether there were not some lines written between the lines of the missive.

“And this is all he has to say to me?”

“All.”

“You are sure?”

“Perfectly sure.”

“Nothing verbal?”

“Nothing.”

“‘tis very strange!” exclaimed De Launay, darting through one of the loop — holes a glance at the crowd assembled in the square before the Bastille.

“But what would you have had him say to you?” said Billot.

De Launay made an impatient gesture.

“Oh nothing, nothing! Come, now, tell me what you want; but speak quickly, for I am pressed for time.”

“Well, then, what I want is, that you should surrender the Bastille to us.”

“What said you?” cried De Launay, quickly turning round, as if he thought he had misunderstood the farmer’s meaning. “You say — ?”

"I say that I have come in the name of the people, to demand that you surrender the Bastille."

De Launay shrugged his shoulders.

"The people are, in truth, very strange animals," said he.

"Hey!" cried Billot.

"And what do they want to do with the Bastille?"

"They want to demolish it."

"And what the devil has the Bastille to do with the people? Was ever a man of the people put into the Bastille? The people, on the contrary, ought to bless every stone of which the Bastille is formed. Who are they who are put into the Bastille? Philosophers, men of science, aristocrats, ministers, princes, — that is to say, the enemies of the people."

"Well, that proves that the people are not egotists." retorted Billot.

"My friend," said De Launay, with a shade of commiseration in his tone, "it is easy to perceive that you are not a soldier."

"You are quite right. I am a farmer."

"That you do not inhabit Paris."

"In fact, I am from the country."

"That you do not thoroughly know what the Bastille is."

"That is true. I only know what I have seen of it, — that is to say, the exterior walls."

"Well, then, come along with me, and I will show you what the Bastille is."

"Ho! ho!" muttered Billot to himself, "he is going to lead me over some villanous trap — door, which will suddenly open under my feet, and then, good — night, Father Billot."

But the intrepid farmer did not even blink, and showed himself ready to follow the governor of the Bastille.

"In the first place," said De Launay, "you must know that I have powder enough in my cellars to blow up, not only the Bastille itself, but with it at least half of the Faubourg St. Antoine."

"I know that," tranquilly replied Billot.

"Very well; but now look at those four pieces of artillery."

"I see them."

"They enfilade the whole of this gallery, as you can also see; and this gallery is defended, first, by a guardhouse; secondly, by two ditches, which only can be crossed with the assistance of two drawbridges; and lastly, by a grated iron gate.”

“Oh, I do not say that the Bastille is badly defended,” calmly observed Billot; “all that I say is, that it will be well attacked.”

“Let us go on,” said De Launay.

Billot gave an assenting nod.

“Here is a postern which opens on the ditches,” said the governor; “look at the thickness of the walls.”

“Somewhere about forty feet.”

“Yes; forty at the bottom, and fifteen at the top. You see that, although the people may have good nails, they would break them against these stones.”

“I did not say,” rejoined Billot, “that the people would demolish the Bastille before taking it. What I said was, that they would demolish it after having taken it.”

“Let us go up the steps,” said De Launay.

“Let us go up.”

They went up some thirty steps.

The governor stopped.

“See,” said he, “here is another embrasure, which opens on the passage by which you wish to enter; this is only defended by a rampart gun, but it has already acquired a certain reputation. You know the song —

‘O my tender Musette, —
Musette, my only love.’“

“Certainly,” said Billot; “I do know it; but I do not think that this is the time to sing it.”

“Wait a moment. Well, Marshal Saxe called this small cannon his Musette, because it sung correctly the air he best liked. That is an historical detail.”

“Oh!” ejaculated Billot.

“Let us go up higher;” and they continued to climb up the stairs.

They soon reached a platform on the tower called La
Compté.

“Ah! ah!” ejaculated Billot.

“What is it?” inquired De Launay. “You have not had the cannon dismounted.”

“I have had them drawn in, that’s all.”

“You know that I shall tell the people that cannon are still here.”

"Tell them so."

"You will not have them dismounted, then?"

"No."

"Decidedly?"

"The king's cannon are here by the king's order, sir; they can only be dismounted by an order from the king."

"Monsieur de Launay," said Billot, feeling his thoughts rise within him according to the importance of the moment, "the real king, whom I counsel you to obey, is yonder."

And he showed to the governor the gray crowd, some of whom were still covered with blood from the combat of the preceding evening, and whose undulating movements before the ditches made their arms gleam in the sunshine.

"Sir," said De Launay in his turn, throwing his head back with a haughty air, "you may perhaps acknowledge two kings; but I, the governor of the Bastille, know but one, and he is Louis, the Sixteenth of that name, who has affixed his name to a commission by virtue of which I command here, both men and things."

"You are not, then, a citizen!" cried Billot in anger.

"I am a French gentleman," said the governor.

"Ah! that is true; you are a soldier, and you speak as a soldier."

"You have said the word, sir," said De Launay, bowing. "I am a soldier, and I execute the orders I receive."

"And I, sir," said Billot, "am a citizen, and my duty as a citizen being in opposition with your orders as a soldier, one of us two will die, — whether it be the one who obeys his orders, or the one who fulfils his duty."

"It is probable, sir."

"Then you are determined to fire upon the people?"

"By no means — so long as they do not fire upon me.

I have pledged my word to the envoys of Monsieur de Flesselles. You see that the guns have been drawn in, but at the first shot fired from the square upon my castle — "

"Well, at the first shot?"

"I will run to one of these guns, — this one, for instance, — I will myself wheel it to the embrasure, I will point it with my own hands, and I will fire it with the match you see standing here."

"You?"

"Yes, I."

"Oh, if I believed that," said Billot, "before allowing you to commit such a crime — "

"I have told you that I am a soldier, sir, and that I know nothing but my orders."

"Well, then, look!" said Billot, drawing De Launay towards an embrasure, and pointing out to him alternately two different points, the Faubourg St. Antoine and the Boulevard, "yonder are those from whom in future you will receive your orders."

And he showed De Launay two dark, dense, and howling masses, who, compelled to take the form of the Boulevards, undulated like an immense serpent, of which the head and the body could be seen, but the last rings of which were lost to sight, from the unevenness of the ground on which it crawled; and all that could be seen of the gigantic reptile was refulgent with luminous scales.

It was the double troop, to which Billot had given rendezvous on the square of the Bastille, — the one led by Marat, and the other by Gonchon.

On both sides they advanced, brandishing their arms and uttering the most terrific cries.

De Launay turned pale at the sight, and raising his cane: —

"To your guns!" cried he.

Then, advancing towards Billot with a threatening gesture: —

"And you, wretch!" he exclaimed, "you who have come here under the pretext of parleying with me while the others are advancing to the attack, do you know that you deserve to die?"

And he half drew his sword from the cane which concealed it.

Billot saw the movement, and, rapid as the lightning, *seized De Launay by the collar and the waistband.*

"And you," said he, as he raised him from the ground, "you deserve that I should hurl you over the ramparts, to dash you in pieces against the sides of the ditch! But, God be thanked! I shall fight you in another manner!"

At that moment an immense and universal clamor, ascending from below, and rushing through the air like the wild howlings of the hurricane, reached their ears, and Monsieur de Losme, the major of the Bastille, appeared upon the platform.

"Sir," cried he, addressing himself to Billot, "sir, be pleased to show yourself; all those people yonder believe that some misfortune has befallen you, and they are calling for you."

And in fact the name of Billot, which had been spread among the crowd by Pitou, was heard amidst the clamor.

Billot had loosed his hold, and Monsieur de Launay sheathed his sword.

Then there was a momentary hesitation between these three men; while cries calling for vengeance, and threatening shouts were heard.

"Show yourself then, sir," said De Launay: "not that these clamors intimidate me, but that it may be known that I am a man who loyally keeps his word."

Then Billot put his head between the battlements, making a sign with his hand.

On seeing this, loud shouts of applause rose from the populace. It was, in a manner, the revolution rising from the forehead of the Bastille in the person of this man of the people, who was the first to trample on its platform as a conqueror.

"'tis well, sir," then said De Launay; "all is now terminated between us; you have nothing further to do here. You are called for yonder: go down."

Billot was sensible of this moderation in a man who had him completely in his power; he went down the same staircase by which he had ascended the ramparts, the governor following him.

As to the major, he had remained there; the governor had given him some orders in a whisper.

It was evident that Monsieur de Launay had but one desire, and this was that the bearer of the flag of truce should become his enemy, and that as quickly as possible.

Billot walked across the courtyard without uttering a word. He saw the artillerymen standing by their guns. The match was smoking at the end of a lance.

Billot stepped before them.

"My friends," said he, "remember that I came to request your chief to prevent the spilling of blood, and that he has refused."

"In the name of the king, sir," cried De Launay, stamping his foot "leave this place!"

"Beware!" said Billot; "if you order me out in the name of the king, I shall come in again in the name of the people."

Then, turning towards the guard — house, before which the Swiss were standing: —

“Come, now,” said he, “tell me for which side are you?”

The Swiss soldiers remained silent.

De Launay pointed with his finger to the iron gate.

Billot wished to make a last effort.

“Sir,” said he to De Launay, “in the name of the nation! in the name of your brothers!”

“Of my brothers! You call my brothers those men who are howling, ‘Down with the Bastille!’ ‘Death to its governor!’ They may be your brothers, sir, but most assuredly they are not mine!”

“In the name of humanity, then!”

“In the name of humanity, which urges you on to come here, with a hundred thousand men, to cut the throats of a hundred unfortunate soldiers shut up in these walls.”

“And by surrendering the Bastille you would be doing precisely that which would save their lives.”

“And sacrifice my honor.”

Billot said no more to him. This logic of the soldier completely overcame him; but turning to the Swiss and Invalides: —

“Surrender, my friends!” cried he; “it is still time.

In ten minutes it will be too late.”

“If you do not instantly withdraw, sir,” in his turn cried De Launay, “on the word of a gentleman, I will order you to be shot!”

Billot paused a moment, crossed his arms over his chest in token of defiance, exchanged a last threatening glance with De Launay, and passed through the gate.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Bastille

THE crowd was waiting; scorched by the burning July sun, they were trembling, mad with excitement. Gonchon's men had just joined those of Marat. The Faubourg St. Antoine had recognized and saluted its brother, the Faubourg St. Marceau.

Gonchon was at the head of his patriots. As to Marat, he had disappeared.

The aspect of the square was frightful.

On Billot's appearance the shouts redoubled.

"Well?" said Gonchon, going up to him.

"Well, the man is brave," said Billot.

"What mean you by saying 'The man is brave'?" inquired Gonchon.

"I mean to say that he is obstinate."

"He will not surrender the Bastille?"

"No."

"He will obstinately sustain the siege?"

"Yes."

"And you believe that he will sustain it long?"

"To the very death."

"Be it so! Death he shall have!"

"But what numbers of men we are about to expose to death!" exclaimed Billot, doubting assuredly that God had given him the right which generals arrogate to themselves, — as do kings and emperors, — men who have received commissions to shed blood.

"Pooh!" said Gonchon, "there are too many in this world, since there is not bread enough for half the population. Is it not so, friends?" he asked, turning towards the crowd.

"Yes, yes!" they responded, with sublime self — abnegation.

"But the ditch?" observed Billot, inquiringly.

"It is only necessary that it should be filled up at one particular spot," replied Gonchon, "and I have calculated that with the half of the bodies we have here we could fill it up completely; is it not so, friends?"

“Yes, yes!” repeated the crowd, with no less enthusiasm than before.

“Well, then, be it so!” said Billot, though completely overcome.

At that moment De Launay appeared upon the terrace, followed by Major De Losme and two or three officers.

“Begin!” cried Gonchon to the governor.

The latter turned his back without replying.

Gonchon, who would perhaps have endured a threat, could not endure disdain; he quickly raised his carbine to his shoulder, and a man in the governor’s suite fell to the ground.

A hundred shots, a thousand musket — shots, were fired at the same moment, as if they had only waited for this signal, and marbled with white the gray towers of the Bastille.

A silence of some seconds succeeded this discharge, as if the crowd itself had been alarmed at that which it had done.

Then a flash of fire, lost in a cloud of smoke, crowned the summit of a tower; a detonation resounded; cries of pain were heard issuing from the closely pressed crowd; the first cannon — shot had been fired from the Bastille; the first blood had been spilled. The battle had commenced.

What the crowd experienced, which just before had been so threatening, very much resembled terror. That Bastille, defending itself by this sole act, appeared in all its formidable impregnability. The people had doubtless hoped that in those days, when so many concessions had been made to them, the surrender of the Bastille would be accomplished without the effusion of blood.

The people were mistaken. The cannon — shot which had been fired upon them gave them the measure of the Titanic work which they had undertaken.

A volley of musketry, well directed, and coming from the platform of the Bastille, followed closely on the cannon shot.

Then all was again silent for a while, a silence which was interrupted only by a few cries, a few groans, a few wails uttered here and there.

A shuddering, anxious movement could then be perceived among the crowd; it was the people who were picking up their killed and wounded.

But the people thought not of flying, or if they did think of it, they were ashamed of the feeling when they considered their great numbers.

In fact, the Boulevards, the Rue St. Antoine, the Faubourg St. Antoine, formed but one vast human sea; every wave had a head, every head, two flashing eyes, a threatening mouth.

In an instant all the windows of the neighborhood were filled with sharpshooters, even those which were out of gunshot.

Whenever a Swiss soldier or an Invalide appeared upon the terraces or in one of the embrasures, a hundred muskets were at once aimed at him, and a shower of balls splintered the corners of the stones behind which the soldier was sheltered.

But they soon got tired of firing at insensible walls. It was against human flesh that their balls were directed. It was blood that they wished to see spout forth whereever the balls struck, and not dust.

Numerous opinions were emitted from amid the crowd.

A circle would then be formed around the speaker, and when the people thought the proposal was devoid of sense, they at once left him.

A blacksmith proposed to form a catapult upon the model of the ancient Roman machines, and with it to make a breach in the walls of the Bastille.

The firemen proposed to damp with their engines the priming of the cannon and extinguish the matches of the artillerymen, without reflecting that the most powerful of their engines could not throw water even to two — thirds the height of the walls of the Bastille.

A brewer who commanded the Faubourg St. Antoine, and whose name has since acquired a fatal celebrity, proposed to set fire to the fortress, by throwing into it a quantity of oil which had been seized the night before, and which they were to ignite with phosphorus.

Billot listened to all these mad — brained proposals one after the other. On hearing the last, he seized a hatchet from the hands of a carpenter, and advancing amid a storm of bullets, which struck down all around him numbers of men, huddled together as thickly as the ears in a field of wheat, he reached a small guard — house, near to the first drawbridge, and although the grape — shot was whizzing and cracking against the roof, he ascended it, and by his powerful and well — directed blows succeeded in breaking the chains, and the drawbridge fell with a tremendous crash.

During the quarter of an hour which this seemingly insensate enterprise had occupied, the crowd were breathless with excitement. At every report, they expected to see the daring workman fall from the roof. The people forgot the danger to which they were exposed, and thought only of the danger which this brave man was incurring. When the bridge fell, they uttered a loud, joyful cry, and rushed into the first courtyard.

The movement was so rapid, so impetuous, so irresistible, that the garrison did not even attempt to prevent it.

Shouts of frantic joy announced this first advantage to Monsieur de Launay.

No one even observed that a man had been crushed to atoms beneath the mass of wood — work. Then the four pieces of artillery which the governor had shown to Billot were simultaneously discharged with a frightful explosion, and swept the first courtyard of the fortress.

The iron hurricane traced through the crowd a long furrow of blood. Ten men shot dead, fifteen or twenty wounded, were the consequences of this discharge.

Billot slid down from the roof of the guard — house to the ground, on reaching which he found Pitou, who had come there he knew not how. Pitou’s eyes were quick, as are those of all poachers. He had seen the artillerymen preparing to put their matches to the touch — holes of their guns, and, seizing Billot by the skirts of his jacket, jerked him violently towards him, and thus they were both protected by the angle of the wall from the effects of the first discharge.

From that moment the affair became serious. The tumult was frightful, the combat mortal. Ten thousand muskets were at once fired round the Bastille, more dangerous in their effect to the besiegers than to the besieged.

At length a cannon served by the French Guards had mixed its thunder with the rattling of the musketry.

The noise was frightful, but the crowd appeared to be more and more intoxicated by it; and this noise began to terrify even the besieged, who, calculating their own small number, felt they could never equal the noise which was then deafening them.

The officers of the Bastille felt instinctively that their soldiers were becoming disheartened. They snatched their muskets from them, and themselves fired them at the crowd.

At this moment, and amid the noise of artillery and musketry, amid the howlings of the crowd, as some of them were rushing to pick up the dead bodies of their companions to form of them a new incitement, — for their gaping wounds would cry aloud for vengeance against the besieged, — there appeared at the entrance of the first courtyard a small group of unarmed, quiet citizens. They made their way through the crowd, and advanced, ready to sacrifice their lives, protected only by a white flag, which preceded them, and which intimated that they were the bearers of a message to the governor. It was a deputation from the Hôtel de Ville. The electors knew that hostilities had commenced, and, anxious to prevent the effusion of blood, had compelled Flesselles to send new proposals to the governor.

The deputies came, therefore, in the name of the city, to summon Monsieur de Launay to cease firing; and, in order to guarantee at once the lives of the citizens, his own, and those of the garrison, to propose that he should receive one hundred men of the civic guard into the interior of the fortress.

This was the rumor which was spread as the deputies advanced. The people, terrified at the enterprise they had undertaken, the people, who saw the dead bodies of their companions carried out in litters, were quite ready to support this proposal. Let De Launay accept a half defeat, and satisfy himself with half a victory.

At their approach the fire of the second courtyard ceased. A sign was made to them that they might approach; and they accordingly advanced, slipping on the ensanguined pavement, striding over carcasses, and holding out their hands to the wounded.

Under this protection the people form themselves into groups. The dead bodies and the wounded are carried out of the fortress; the blood alone remains, marbling with large purple spots the pavement of the courtyard.

The fire from the fortress had ceased. Billot was leaving it, in order to stop that of the besiegers. At the door he meets Gonchon, — Gonchon, altogether unarmed, exposing himself like one inspired, calm, as if he were invulnerable.

“Well,” inquired he of Billot, “what has become of the deputation?”

“It has gone into the fortress,” replied Billot; “order our men to cease firing.”

“It is useless,” said Gonchon, “they will not consent.”

“That matters not,” rejoined Billot; “it is our duty to make the attempt. Let us respect the usages of war, since we have become soldiers.”

“Be it so,” said Gonchon.

Then, addressing himself to two men in the crowd, who appeared to command under him the whole of the assembled mass, —

“Go, Elie, — go, Hullin,” said he, “and see that not a musket — shot be fired.”

The two aides — de — camp rushed out, and, obeying the orders of their chief, pressed through the crowded masses, and soon the firing of the musketry diminished, and then ceased altogether.

A momentary quiet was established. Advantage was taken of it to attend to the wounded, the number of whom had already amounted to thirty — five or forty.

During this respite the prison clock struck two. The attack had begun at noon; the combat had already lasted two hours.

Billot had returned to his post, and it was Gonchon in his turn who followed him.

His eyes were turned anxiously towards the gate. His impatience was visible.

“What is the matter with you?” inquired Billot.

“The matter is,” replied Gonchon, “that if the Bastille is not taken within two hours from this time all is lost.”

“And why so?”

“Because the court will be informed of the work we are about, and will despatch the Swiss to us, under Besenval, and Lambesq’s dragoons; so that we shall then be caught between three fires.”

Billot was compelled to acknowledge that there was some truth in what Gonchon was saying.

At length the deputies reappeared. From their countenances it was evident they had obtained no concession.

“Well,” cried Gonchon, whose eyes sparkled with delight, “what did I tell you? Things that are predicted must happen. The accursed fortress is condemned!”

Then, without waiting even to put a question to the deputation, he sprang out of the first courtyard, crying, —

“To arms, my children! — to arms! The commandant refuses.”

And, in fact, the governor had scarcely read the letter from Flesselles, when his countenance brightened; and instead of acceding to the proposals which had been made to him, he exclaimed, —

“Gentlemen Parisians, you have insisted on a battle: and now it is too late to speak of treating.”

The bearers of the flag of truce persisted in urging their suit. They represented to De Launay all the evils which his defending the castle might entail; but he would not listen to them, and he concluded by saying to the deputation what he had said two hours before to Billot, —

“Leave the fortress, or I will have you shot.”

And the bearers of the flag of truce were compelled to depart.

On this occasion it was De Launay who resumed the offensive. He appeared burning with impatience.

Before the deputies had reached the gate of the courtyard, the Musette of Marshal Saxe played a tune, and three persons fell, — one of them dead, two others wounded.

One of the wounded was a French Guard; the other, one of the deputies.

On seeing a man whose office should have rendered him sacred, carried forth covered with blood, the crowd became more enraged than ever.

Gonchon’s two aides — de — camp had returned to their places at his side; but each of them had had time to go home to change his dress.

It is true that one of them lived near the arsenal, the other in the Rue de Charonne.

Hullin, who had in the first place been a watchmaker at Geneva, then *chasseur* to the Marquis de Conflans, returned in his brilliant livery, which gave him the appearance of a Hungarian officer.

Elie, formerly an officer in the Queen’s Regiment, had put on his uniform, which inspired the people with greater confidence, as it made them believe that the army was for them and with them.

The firing recommended with greater fury than ever; and at that moment the major of the Bastille, Monsieur de Losme, approached the governor.

He was a brave and faithful soldier; but there were some remains of the citizen in him, and he saw with much regret what had taken place, and above all, what was likely to ensue.

“Sir,” said he to De Launay, “we have no provisions, and of this you must be aware.”

“I know it,” replied the governor.

“You also know that we have no orders.”

“I beg your pardon, Monsieur de Losme; my orders are to keep the gates of the Bastille closed, and it is for that purpose that the keys are intrusted to me.”

“Sir, the keys are used as well to open the gates as to close them. Beware that you do not cause the massacre of the whole of the garrison, without saving the castle, — two triumphs on the same day. Look at those men whom we are killing; they appear to spring up from beneath the pavement. This morning there were at first only five hundred of them; three hours ago there were ten thousand. They are more than sixty thousand now; to — morrow they will be a hundred thousand. When our guns shall be silenced, and it must at last end in that, they will be strong enough to take the Bastille with their hands."

"You speak not like a soldier, Monsieur de Losme."

"I speak like a Frenchman, sir. I say that his Majesty, not having given us any order, — I say that the Provost of the Merchants, having made us a proposal which was a very acceptable one, which was that of admitting a hundred men of the civil guard into the castle, you might, to avoid the evils which I foresee, accede to the proposal of Monsieur de Flesselles."

"In your opinion, then, Monsieur de Losme, the power which represents the city of Paris is a power which we ought to obey?"

"In the absence of the direct authority of his Majesty, yes, sir, it is my opinion."

"Well, then," said De Launay, leading the major into a corner of the courtyard, "read that, Monsieur de Losme."

And he handed him a small square piece of paper. The major read it.

Hold firm! I amuse the Parisians with cockades and promises. Before the close of the day, Monsieur de Besenval will send you a reinforcement.

DE FLESSELLES.

"How, then, did this note reach you, sir?" inquired the major.

"In the letter which the gentlemen of the deputation brought me. They thought they were delivering to me a request to surrender the Bastille, while they were delivering to me an order to defend it."

The major bowed his head.

"Go to your post, Monsieur de Losme, and do not leave it until I send for you."

Monsieur de Losme obeyed.

De Launay very quietly refolded the letter, and put it into his pocket. He then returned to his artillerymen and recommended them to fire low, and to take good aim.

The artillerymen obeyed, as Monsieur de Losme had obeyed.

But the fate of the fortress was predestined. No human power could delay its fulfilment.

To every cannon — shot the people replied by shouting, —

“We will have the Bastille!”

And while mouths were shouting, arms were vigorously acting.

Among the voices which shouted most energetically, among the arms which were acting the most efficaciously, were the voices and arms of Pitou and Billot.

Only each of them proceeded according to his different nature.

Billot, courageous and confident, had like a bull — dog, from the first rushed forward, defying balls and grapeshot.

Pitou, prudent and circumspect, like the fox, Pitou, endowed to a supreme degree with the instinct of self — preservation, made use of all his faculties to watch the danger and avoid it.

His eyes knew the embrasures which sent forth the most deadly fire; they distinguished the almost imperceptible movement of the brazen mouth which was about to be fired. He had learned to divine the precise moment when the battery gun was about to be fired across the drawbridge.

Then his eyes having performed their office, it was the turn of his limbs to work for their proprietor.

His shoulders were drawn in, his chest contracted, his whole body did not seem to offer a larger surface than a plank when seen edgeways.

In these movements of Pitou, of the chubby Pitou, — for Pitou was thin only in the legs, — there remained only a geometrical line, which had neither breadth nor thickness.

He had selected for his post a corner in the passage from the first drawbridge to the second, a sort of vertical parapet formed by jutting stones. His head was protected by one of these stones, his body by another, his knees by a third, and Pitou congratulated himself that nature and the art of fortification were thus so agreeably combined that a stone was given to him to protect each of the parts where a wound might have proved mortal.

From his corner, in which he was covered like a hare in its form, he now and then fired a shot, but merely for form’s sake, for he had before him only walls and pieces of timber; but this evidently pleased Billot, who from time to time called out, —

“Fire, you lazy fellow, fire!”

And he, in his turn, would cry to Billot, but in order to calm his exuberant ardor instead of exciting it, —

“Don’t expose yourself so much, Father Billot.”

Or else: —

“Take care of yourself, Monsieur Billot, there is a cannon pointed at you; there, I have just heard them cocking the Musette.”

And scarcely had Pitou uttered these words, so full of foresight, than the cannon belched forth its grape — shot, sweeping the passage between the bridges.

Notwithstanding all these injunctions, Billot performed prodigies of strength and activity, but of perfect inutility. Not being able to shed his blood, — and assuredly it was not his fault, — he shed large and abundant drops of perspiration.

Ten times did Pitou seize him by the skirts of his jacket, and pulled him to the ground in spite of his great strength, at the moment when a discharge would have assuredly swept him off.

But each time Billot jumped up again, not only like Antæus with renewed strength, but with some new idea.

At one time this idea consisted in venturing upon the platform of the bridge to hack at the beams which the chains upheld, as he had before done.

Then Pitou uttered fearful howls to restrain the farmer, and finding that his howling was of no avail, he would rush from his place of safety to him, crying, —

“Monsieur Billot, my dear Monsieur Billot, why, Madame Billot will be a widow if you go on in this way.”

And the Swiss soldiers could be seen, aiming their muskets obliquely through the embrasure of the Musette, to hit the audacious man who was endeavoring to reduce their bridge to chips.

At another time he called upon his men to bring up a cannon to destroy the head — work of the bridge; but then the Musette was fired, the gunners retreated, and Billot remained alone to load the gun and fire it, which again brought out Pitou from his retreat.

“Monsieur Billot,” cried he, “Monsieur Billot, in the name of Mademoiselle Catherine I conjure you, reflect a moment. Should you get yourself killed, Mademoiselle Catherine will be an orphan.”

And Billot yielded to this reason, which appeared to have much more influence on his mind than the first.

At length the fruitful imagination of the farmer gave birth to another idea.

He ran towards the square, crying, —

“A cart! Bring a cart here!”

Pitou considered that that which was good would be rendered excellent by being doubled. He followed Billot, vociferating, —

“Two carts! two carts!”

And immediately ten carts were brought.

“Some straw and some dry hay!” cried Billot.

“Some straw and some dry hay!” reiterated Pitou.

And almost instantly two hundred men came forward, each carrying a truss of straw or hay.

They were obliged to call out that they had ten times more than they wanted. In an hour there was a heap of forage which would have equalled the height of the Bastille.

Billot placed himself between the shafts of a cart loaded with straw, and instead of dragging it, he pushed it on before him.

Pitou did the same, without knowing what it could be for, but thinking that he could not do better than to imitate the farmer.

Elie and Hullin divined Billot’s intention. They each seized a cart and pushed it before them into the courtyard.

They had scarcely entered, when they were assailed by a discharge of grape — shot. They heard the balls strike with a whizzing sound among the straw or hay, or against the wood — work of the carts; but none of the assailants received a wound.

As soon as this discharge was over, two or three hundred men with muskets rushed on behind those who were pushing forward the carts, and, sheltered by those moving ramparts, they lodged themselves beneath the apron of the bridge itself.

There Billot drew from his pocket a flint, a steel, and some tinder, formed a match by rubbing gunpowder on paper, and set fire to it.

The powder ignited the paper, and the paper ignited the straw and hay.

Each formed a torch for himself, and the four carts were simultaneously set fire to.

The flames reached the apron, caught the timbers with their sharp teeth, and ran along the wood — work of the bridge.

A shout of joy then uttered from the courtyard was taken up by the crowd in the Square St. Antoine, and reiterated with deafening clamors. They saw the smoke rising above the walls, and they hence imagined that something fatal to the besieged was occurring.

In fact the red — hot chains detached themselves from the beams. The bridge fell half broken and half destroyed by fire, smoking and cracking. The firemen rushed forward with their engines, and soon extinguished the flames upon the bridge.

The governor ordered the Invalides to fire upon the people, but they refused.

The Swiss alone obeyed; but they were not artillerymen; they were therefore obliged to abandon the guns.

The French Guards, on the contrary, seeing that the artillery was silenced, brought up their gun and planted it before the gate; their third shot shivered it to pieces.

The governor had gone up to the platform of the castle to see whether the promised reinforcement was approaching, when he found himself suddenly enveloped in smoke. It was then that he precipitately descended and ordered the artillerymen to fire.

The refusal of the Invalides exasperated him. The breaking down of the gate made him at once comprehend that all was lost.

Monsieur de Launay knew that he was hated. He felt that there was no salvation for him. During the whole time that the combat had lasted, he had matured the idea of burying himself beneath the ruins of the Bastille.

At the moment he felt assured that all further defence was hopeless, he snatched a match from the hand of one of the artillerymen, and sprang towards the cellar which served as a powder — magazine.

“The powder! the powder!” cried twenty terrified voices; “the powder! the powder!”

They saw the burning match in the governor’s hand.

They guessed his purpose. Two soldiers rush forward and cross their bayonets before his breast just at the moment when he had opened the door.

“You may kill me,” said De Launay, “but you cannot kill me quick enough to prevent me letting this match fall among the powder — casks; and then besieged and besiegers will all be blown to atoms.”

The two soldiers stopped. Their bayonets remained crossed before De Launay’s breast, but De Launay was still their commander, for all felt that he had their lives in his power. His action had nailed every one to the spot on which he stood. The assailants perceived that something extraordinary was happening. They looked anxiously into the courtyard, and saw the governor threatened and threatening in his turn.

“Hear me,” cried De Launay to the besiegers; “as surely as I hold this match in my hand, with which I could exterminate you all, should any one of you make a single step to enter this courtyard, so surely will I set fire to the powder.”

Those who heard these words imagined that they already felt the ground tremble beneath their feet.

“What do you wish; what do you ask?” cried several voices with an accent of terror.

“I wish a capitulation,” replied De Launay, “an honorable capitulation.”

The assailants pay but little attention to what the governor said; they cannot credit such an act of despair; they wish to enter the courtyard. Billot is at their head. Suddenly Billot trembles and turns pale; he just remembers Dr. Gilbert.

As long as Billot had thought only of himself, it was a matter of little importance to him whether the Bastille was blown up, and he blown up with it; but Gilbert’s life must be saved at any cost.

“Stop!” exclaimed Billot, throwing himself before Elie and Hullin; “stop, in the name of the prisoners!”

And these men who feared not to encounter death themselves retreated, pale and trembling, in their turn.

“What do you demand?” they cried, renewing the question they had previously put to the governor by his own men.

“I demand that you should all withdraw,” replied De Launay, fiercely. “I will not accept any proposal, so long as there remains a single stranger in the Bastille.”

“But,” said Billot, “will you not take advantage of our absence to place yourself again in a state of defence?”

“If the capitulation is refused, you shall find everything in the state it now is, — you at that gate, I where I am now standing.”

“You pledge your word for that?”

“On the honor of a gentleman.”

Some of them shook their heads.

“On the honor of a gentleman,” reiterated De Launay.

“Is there any one here who can still doubt, when a gentleman has pledged his honor?”

“No, no, no!” repeated five hundred voices.

“Let paper, pen, and ink be brought here to me.”

The orders of the governor were instantly obeyed.

“‘tis well,” said De Launay.

XXVII. Then, turning towards the assailants: —

“And now you must retire.”

Billot, Hullin, and Elie set the example, and were the first to withdraw.

All the others followed them.

De Launay placed the match by his side, and began writing the capitulation on his knee.

The Invalides and the Swiss soldiers who felt that their existence depended on the result, gazed at him, while he was writing, with a sort of respectful terror.

De Launay looked round before allowing his pen to touch the paper. He saw that the courtyard was free of all intruders.

In an instant the people outside were informed of all that had happened within the fortress.

As Monsieur de Losme had said, the population seemed to spring up from beneath the pavement. One hundred thousand men surrounded the Bastille.

They were no longer merely laborers and artisans, but citizens of every class had joined them. They were not merely men in the prime of life, but children and old men had rushed forward to the fight.

And all of them had arms of some description, all of them shouted vehemently.

Here and there among the groups was to be seen a woman in despair, with hair dishevelled, wringing her hands, and uttering maledictions against the granite giant.

She is some mother whose son the Bastille has just annihilated, some daughter whose father the Bastille has just levelled with the ground, some wife whose husband the Bastille has just exterminated.

But during some moments no sounds had issued from the Bastille, no flames, no smoke. The Bastille had become as silent as the tomb.

It would have been useless to endeavor to count the spots made by the balls which had marbled its surface. Every one had wished to fire a ball at the stone monster, the visible symbol of tyranny.

Therefore, when it was rumored in the crowd that the Bastille was about to capitulate, that its governor had promised to surrender, they could scarcely credit the report.

Amid this general doubt, as they did not yet dare to congratulate themselves, as they were silently awaiting the result, they saw a letter pushed forth through a loophole on the point of a sword. Only between this letter and the besiegers there was the ditch of the Bastille, wide, deep, and full of water.

Billot calls for a plank. Three are brought and are pushed across the ditch, but, being too short, did not reach the opposite side. A fourth is brought, which lodges on either side of the ditch.

Billot had them lashed together as he best could, and then ventured unhesitatingly upon the trembling bridge.

The whole crowd remained breathlessly silent; all eyes were fixed upon the man who appears suspended above the ditch, whose stagnant waters resemble those of the river Cocytus.

Pitou tremblingly seated himself on the edge of the slope, and hid his head between his knees.

His heart failed him, and he wept.

When Billot had got about two thirds of the way over the plank, it twisted beneath his feet. Billot extends his arms, falls, and disappears in the ditch.

Pitou utters a cry of horror and throws himself into the ditch, like a Newfoundland dog anxious to save his master.

A man then approached the plank from which Billot had just before been precipitated.

Without hesitation he walked across the temporary bridge. This man is Stanislaus Maillard, the usher of the Châtelet.

When he had reached the spot below which Pitou and Billot were struggling in the muddy ditch, he for a moment cast a glance upon them, and seeing that there was no doubt they would regain the shore in safety, he continued to walk on.

Half a minute afterwards he had reached the opposite side of the ditch, and had taken the letter which was held out to him on the point of a sword.

Then, with the same tranquillity, the same firmness of step, he recrossed the ditch.

But at the moment when the crowd were pressing round him to hear the letter read, a storm of musketballs rained down upon them from the battlements, and a frightful detonation was heard.

One only cry, but one of those cries which announce the vengeance of a whole people, issues from every mouth.

“Trust, then, in tyrants!” exclaimed Gonchon.

And then, without thinking any more of the capitulation, without thinking any more of the powder — magazine, without thinking of themselves or of the prisoners, without desiring, without demanding anything but vengeance, the people rushed into the courtyard, no longer by hundreds of men, but by thousands.

That which prevents the crowd from entering is no longer the musketry, but the gates, which are too narrow to admit them.

On hearing the detonation we have spoken of, the two soldiers who were still watching Monsieur de Launay threw themselves upon him; a third seized the match and extinguished it under his foot.

De Launay drew the sword which was concealed in his cane, and would have turned it against his own breast, but the soldiers plucked it from him and snapped it in two.

He then felt that all he could do was to abide the result; he therefore tranquilly awaited it.

The people rush forward; the garrison open their arms to them, and the Bastille is taken by assault, — by main force, without a capitulation.

The reason for this was that for more than a hundred years the royal fortress had not merely imprisoned inert matter within its walls, it had imprisoned thought also. Thought had thrown down the walls of the Bastille, and the people entered by the breach.

As to the discharge of musketry, which had taken place amid the general silence, during the suspension of hostilities, — as to this unforeseen aggression, as impolitic as it was murderous, it was never known who had ordered it, who had excited it, how it was accomplished.

There are moments when the destiny of a whole nation is being weighed in the scales of Fate. One of them weighs down the other. Every one already thinks he has attained the proposed end. Suddenly some invisible hand lets fall into the other scale the blade of a poniard or a pistol ball.

Then all changes, and one only cry is heard: “Woe to the vanquished!”

CHAPTER XVIII.

Doctor Gilbert

WHILE the people were thus rushing into the fortress, howling at once with joy and rage, two men were struggling in the muddy waters of the ditch.

These men were Pitou and Billot.

Pitou was supporting Billot. No shot had struck him. He had not been wounded in any way; but his fall had somewhat confused the worthy farmer.

Ropes were thrown to them; poles were held out to them.

Pitou caught hold of a pole, Billot a rope.

Five minutes afterwards they were carried in triumph by the people, and eagerly embraced, notwithstanding their muddy state.

One man gives Billot a glass of brandy, another stuffs Pitou's mouth full of sausages, and gives him wine to wash them down.

A third rubs them down with straw, and wishes to place them in the sun to dry their clothes.

Suddenly an idea, or rather a recollection, shot through the mind of Billot. He tears himself away from their kind cares and rushes into the Bastille.

"To the prisoners!" cried he, "to the prisoners!"

"Yes, to the prisoners!" cried Pitou, in his turn, bounding after the farmer.

The crowd, which until then had thought only of the executioners, shuddered when thinking of their victims.

They with one shout repeated: "Yes, yes, yes, — to the prisoners!"

And a new flood of assailants rush through the barriers, seeming to widen the sides of the fortress by their numbers, and bearing liberty with them to the captives.

A dreadful spectacle then offered itself to the eyes of Billot and Pitou. The excited, enraged, maddened throng had precipitated themselves into the courtyard. The first soldier they had met was at once hacked to pieces.

Gonchon had quietly looked on. Doubtless he had thought that the anger of the people, like the currents of great rivers, does more harm when any impediment is thrown in its way to arrest it than if allowed tranquilly to flow on.

Elie and Hullin, on the contrary, had thrown themselves before the infuriated executioners. They prayed, they supplicated, uttering the sublime lie that they had promised life and safety to the whole garrison.

The arrival of Billot and Pitou was a reinforcement to them.

Billot, whom they were avenging, Billot was living, Billot was not even wounded. The plank had turned under his feet, and that was all; he had taken a mudbath, and nothing more.

It was, above all, against the Swiss that the people were particularly enraged; but the Swiss were nowhere to be found. They had had time to put on gray frocks, and they were taken either for servants or for prisoners.

The mob hurled large stones at the dial of the clock, and destroyed the figures of the two captives which supported it. They rushed to the ramparts to mutilate the cannon which had vomited forth death upon them. They even wreaked their vengeance on the stone walls, tearing their hands in endeavoring to displace them. When the first of the conquerors were seen upon the platform, all those who had remained without the fortress, that is to say, a hundred thousand men, shouted with clamorous joy, —

“The Bastille is taken!”

This cry resounded through Paris, and spread itself over the whole of France, as if borne with the rapidity of eagle’s wings.

On hearing this cry all hearts were softened, all eyes shed tears, all arms were extended. There were no longer any contending parties; there were no longer any inimical castes. All Parisians felt that they were brothers, all men felt that they were free.

A million of men pressed one another in a mutual embrace.

Billot and Pitou had entered the Bastille, following some and followed by others; what they wished for was, not to claim their share in the triumph; it was the liberty of the prisoners.

When crossing the courtyard of the government house, they passed near a man in a gray coat, who was standing calmly, his hand resting on a gold —headed cane.

This man was the governor. He was quietly waiting either that his friends should come to save him, or that his enemies should come to strike him down.

Billot, on perceiving him, recognized him, uttered a slight exclamation of surprise, and went straight to him.

De Launay also recognized Billot. He crossed his arms and waited, looking at the farmer with an expression that implied, — ”

Let us see: is it you that will give me the first blow?”

Billot at once divined the meaning of his look, and stopped.

“If I speak to him,” said he to himself, “I shall cause him to be recognized, and should he be recognized, his death is certain.”

And yet, how was he to find Doctor Gilbert amid this chaotic confusion? How could he drag from the Bastille the secret which its walls enclosed?

All this hesitation, these heroic scruples, were understood by De Launay.

“What is it that you wish?” asked De Launay, in an undertone.

“Nothing,” replied Billot, pointing with his finger to the gate, indicating to him that escape was yet possible; “nothing. I shall be able readily to find Doctor Gilbert.”

“Third Bertaudière,” replied De Launay, in a gentle and almost affectionate tone of voice.

But he stirred not from the place on which he stood.

Suddenly a voice from behind Billot pronounced these words: — ”Ah! there is the governor.”

This voice was so calm, so hollow, that it appeared not to be of this world, and yet each word it had uttered was a sharp poniard turned against the breast of De Launay.

He who had spoken was Gonchon.

These words, like the first sounds of an alarm — bell, excited a fearful commotion; all these men, drunk with revengeful feelings, started on hearing them; they looked around with flaming eyes, perceived De Launay, and at once darted upon and seized him.

“Save him,” said Billot, as he passed near Elie and Hullin, “or they will murder him.”

“Assist us to do so,” said the two men.

“I am obliged to remain here,” replied Billot, “for I also have some one to save.”

In an instant De Launay had been surrounded by a thousand men, who dragged him along, lifted him up, and were bearing him away.

Elie and Hullin bounded after him, crying, —

“Stop! stop! we promised him that his life should be saved.”

This was not true; but the thought of uttering this magnanimous falsehood had risen to the mind of these two generous men at the same moment.

In a second, De Launay, followed by Elie and Hullin, disappeared under the vaulted passage which led from the Bastille, amidst loud voices of, “To the Hôtel de Ville! To the Hôtel de Ville!”

It was a singular spectacle to see this mournful and silent monument, which for four centuries had been tenanted only by prisoners, their jailers, their guards, and a gloomy governor, now become the prey of the people, who ran through the courtyards, ascended and descended the staircases, buzzing like a swarm of flies, and filling this granite hive with noise and movement.

De Launay, a living prey, was to some of the victors of as great value as the dead prey, the captured Bastille.

Billot for a moment or two followed De Launay with his eyes, who was carried rather than led, and appeared to soar above the crowd.

But, as we have said, he soon disappeared. Billot heaved a sigh, looked around him, perceived Pitou, and rushed towards a tower, crying, —

“Third Bertaudière.”

A trembling jailer met him on his way.

“Third Bertaudière,” said Billot.

“This way, sir,” replied the jailer; “but I have not the keys.”

“Where are they?”

“They took them from me.”

“Citizen, lend me your hatchet,” said Billot, to one of the men from the Faubourg.

“I give it to you,” replied the latter; “I do not want it any more, since the Bastille is taken.”

Billot snatched the hatchet, and ran up a staircase, conducted by the jailer.

The jailer stopped before a door.

“Third Bertáudière?” asked Billot.

“Yes, this is it.”

“The prisoner confined in this room is Doctor Gilbert, is it not?”

“I do not know.”

“He was brought here only five or six days ago?”

“I do not know.”

“Well, then,” said Billot, “I shall soon know it.”

And he began chopping at the door with his hatchet.

The door was of oak, but it soon flew into splinters beneath the vigorous blows of the robust farmer.

In a few moments he had cut a hole through it and could look into the room.

Billot placed his eye at the opening. Through it he could see the interior of the cell.

In the line of sunshine which penetrated into the dungeon through its grated window a man was standing, his head thrown rather backwards, holding in his hand one of the posts of his bedstead, and in an attitude of defence.

This man had evidently prepared himself to knock down the first person who should enter his room.

Notwithstanding his long beard, notwithstanding his pallid countenance, notwithstanding his short — cut hair, Billot recognized him. It was Doctor Gilbert.

“Doctor! doctor!” cried Billot to him, “is it you?”

“Who is it that is calling me?” inquired the prisoner.

“It is I — I, Billot, your friend.”

“You, Billot?”

“Yes! yes! — he! he! — we! we!” cried the voices of twenty men, who had run into the passage on hearing the vigorous blows struck by Billot.

“But who are you?”

“We? — why, the conquerors of the Bastille. The Bastille is taken; you are free.”

“The Bastille is taken; I am free!” exclaimed the doctor.

And passing both his hands through the opening, he shook the door so violently that the hinges and the lock appeared nearly yielding to his powerful pressure, and part of a panel, already loosened by Billot, broke off, and remained in the prisoner’s hands.

“Wait, wait!” said Billot, who was afraid that a second effort of so violent a nature would exhaust his strength, which had been overtaxed; “wait.”

And he redoubled his blows.

And indeed, through the opening, which was every moment becoming wider, he could see the prisoner, who had seated himself upon his bench, pale as a spectre, and incapable of raising the bedpost which was lying near him, and who but a few moments before, another Samson, seemed strong enough to shake down the walls of the Bastille.

"Billot! Billot!" murmured he.

"Yes, yes! and I also, my good doctor — I, Pitou — you must remember poor Pitou, whom you placed at board with his aunt Angélique, — Pitou has come to liberate you."

"But I can get through that hole," cried the doctor.

"No! no!" cried all the voices; "wait."

All those present uniting their strength in one simultaneous effort, some slipping a crowbar between the door and the framework, others using a lever between the lock and doorpost, and the remainder pushing with all the might of their shoulders or their hands, the oak gave a last cracking sound, the wall gave way, and they all of them stumbled, one over the other, into the room.

In a moment Gilbert found himself in the arms of Pitou and Billot.

Gilbert, the little country lad of the Château de Taverney, Gilbert, whom we left bathed in his blood in a cavern of the Azores, was now a man from thirty — four to thirty — five years old, of pale complexion, though he was not sickly, with black hair, eyes penetrating and fixed; never did his gaze lose itself in vacuity; never did it wander; when it was not fixed on some exterior object worthy to attract, it was fixed on his own thought, and became only more profound and more gloomy; his nose was straight, being attached to his forehead in a direct line; it rose above a lip of rather scornful expression, which, in the slight space between it and the nether lip, allowed one to perceive the dazzling enamel of his teeth. In ordinary times his dress was simple and grave, like that of a Quaker; but this simplicity was closely allied to elegance, from its extreme neatness. His height was somewhat above the medium stature, and he was well formed; as to his strength, we have just seen the feats it could perform when in a state of over — excitement, whether caused by anger or enthusiastic feeling.

Although in prison for five or six days, the doctor had paid the same attention to his person; his beard, which had grown some few lines, caused the paleness of his complexion to contrast favorably with its darkness, and indicated only a negligence which certainly was not the prisoner's, but his jailer's, who had refused to give him a razor, or to allow him to be shaved.

When he had pressed Billot and Pitou in his arms, he turned towards the crowd who had filled his dungeon. Then, as if a moment had sufficed to restore all his self-possession: —

“The day which I had foreseen has then arrived,” said he. “Thanks to you, my friends, — thanks to the eternal genius which watches over the liberty of nations!”

And he held out both his hands to the men who had assisted Billot to break down the door, and who, recognizing in him, from the dignity of his demeanor and his proud look, a man of superior genius, hardly dared to touch them.

On leaving the dungeon, he walked before all these men, leaning on Billot’s shoulder, and followed by Pitou and his liberators.

The first moment had been devoted by Gilbert to friendship and to gratitude, the second had re — established the distance which existed between the learned doctor and the ignorant farmer, the warm — hearted Pitou, and the whole throng which had liberated him.

When he reached the door at the foot of the staircase Gilbert stopped, on perceiving the broad sunshine which beamed full upon him. He paused, crossing his arms over his breast and raising his eyes to heaven. “Hail to thee, lovely Liberty!” he exclaimed. “I saw thee spring to life in another world, and we are old friends. Hail to thee, lovely Liberty!”

And the smile of the doctor clearly said that the cries he then heard of a whole people, inebriated with independence, were no new thing to him.

Then, meditating for a few seconds: —

“Billot,” said he, “the people, then, have vanquished despotism?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And you came here to fight?”

“I came to liberate you.”

“You knew, then, of my arrest?”

“Your son informed me of it this morning.”

“Poor Sebastien! Have you seen him?”

“I have seen him.”

“And he remained quietly at his school?”

“I left him struggling with four of the attendants of the infirmary.”

“Is he ill — has he been delirious?”

“He wanted to come with us to fight.”

“Ah!” ejaculated the doctor, and a smile of triumph passed over his features. His son had proved himself to be what he had hoped.

“And what did you say to him?” inquired the doctor. “I said, since Doctor Gilbert is in the Bastille, let us take the Bastille; and now the Bastille is taken. But that is not all.”

“What is there, then, besides?” asked the doctor.

“The casket has been stolen.”

“The casket which I had confided to your care?”

“Yes.”

“Stolen! and by whom?”

“By some men dressed in black, who came into my house under the pretext of seizing your pamphlets: they arrested me, locked me up in a room; they searched the house all over, found the casket, and carried it off.”

“When did this happen?”

“Yesterday.”

“Ho! ho! there is an evident connection between my arrest and this robbery. The person who caused my arrest, at the same time had the casket stolen. Let me but know the persons who contrived my arrest, and I shall know who it was contrived the robbery. Where are the archives of the fortress” continued the doctor, turning to the jailer.

“In the courtyard of the government house, sir,” replied the jailer.

“Then to the archives, my friends — to the archives!” cried the doctor.

“Sir,” said the jailer, stopping him, “let me go with you, or speak a word in my favor to these worthy people, that no harm may happen to me.”

“Be it so,” said Gilbert.

Then, addressing the crowd who surrounded him, and gazed at him with curiosity mingled with respect: —

“My friends,” said he, “I recommend this worthy man to you; he only fulfilled his office in opening and shutting the prison doors; but he was kind towards the prisoners. Let no injury happen to him.”

“No, no!” cried the crowd with one accord, “no! — he need not fear; no harm shall be done to him. Let him come with us.”

“I thank you, sir,” said the jailer to the doctor; “but if you wish for anything in the archives, I advise you to move quickly, for I believe they are burning the papers.”

“Oh, then there is not an instant to be lost,” cried Gilbert; “to the archives!”

And he hastened towards the courtyard of the government house, followed by the crowd, at the head of which were still Billot and Pitou.

CHAPTER XIX.

The Triangle

ON reaching the door of the office in which the archives were kept, Gilbert perceived that a large heap of old papers was being burnt.

Unhappily, it is a general consequence that after having obtained a victory, the first desire the people have to gratify is that of destruction.

The archives of the Bastille had been invaded.

This office was a vast hall, heaped up with registry books and plans; the documents relating to all the prisoners who had been confined in the Bastille during the last hundred years were confusedly enclosed in it.

The people tore these papers to pieces with senseless rage; it doubtless appeared to them that, by destroying these registrations of imprisonment, they were legally bestowing freedom on the prisoners.

Gilbert went into the hall; seconded by Pitou, he began to examine the register books, which were still standing on the shelves; that of the current year was not to be found.

The doctor, a man who was always so cool and calm, turned pale, and stamped with impatience.

At that moment Pitou caught sight of one of those heroic urchins who are always to be found in popular triumphs, who was carrying off on his head, and running with it towards the fire, a volume similar in shape and binding to that which Dr. Gilbert had been examining.

He ran after him, and, with his long legs, speedily overtook him.

It was the register of the year 1789.

The negotiation did not occupy much time. Pitou was considered as one of the leaders of the conquerors, and explained to the boy that a prisoner had occasion to use that register, and the urchin yielded up his prey to him, consoling himself with the observation, —

“It is all the same to me; I can burn another.”

Pitou opened the book, turned over the leaves, hunted through it, and on the last page found the words: —

"This day, the 9th July, 1789, came in the Sieur G., a philosopher and political writer, a very dangerous person; to be kept in close and secret confinement."

He carried the book to the doctor.

"Here, Monsieur Gilbert," said he to him, "is not this what you are seeking for?"

"Oh!" cried the doctor, joyfully, and seizing hold of the book, "yes, that is it."

And he read the words we have given above.

"And now," said he, "let us see from whom the order emanated."

And he examined the margin.

"Necker!" he exclaimed; "the order for my arrest signed by Necker, my friend Necker! Oh, most assuredly there must have been some foul plot!"

"Necker is your friend?" cried the crowd with respect; for it will be remembered that this name had great influence with the people.

"Yes, yes, my friends," said the doctor; "I am convinced that Monsieur Necker did not know that I was in prison. But I will at once go to him."

"Go to him, — and where?" inquired Billot.

"To Versailles, to be sure."

"Monsieur Necker is not at Versailles; Monsieur Necker is exiled."

"And where?"

"At Brussels."

"But his daughter?"

"Ah! I know nothing of her," replied Billot.

"His daughter is at his country-house, at St. Ouen," said a voice from the crowd.

"I am obliged to you," replied Gilbert, not knowing even to whom his thanks were addressed.

Then, turning towards those who were occupied in burning the papers: —

"My friends," he said, "in the name of history, which in these archives would find matter for the condemnation of tyrants, let me conjure you not to pursue this work of destruction; demolish the Bastille, stone by stone, that not a vestige, not a trace of it may remain, but respect the papers, respect the registers; the enlightenment of the future is contained in them."

The crowd had scarcely heard these words, than, with its usual admirable intelligence, it duly weighed this reasoning.

“The doctor is right,” cried a hundred voices; “no more devastation of these papers. Let us remove all these papers to the Hôtel de Ville.”

A fireman who, with a number of his companions, had dragged an engine into the courtyard, on hearing the report that the governor was about to blow up the fortress, directed the pipe of his hose upon the burning pile, which, like to that of Alexandria, was about to destroy the archives of a world; in a few minutes it was extinguished.

“And at whose request were you arrested?” said Billot to Gilbert.

“Ah! that is precisely what I am endeavoring to discover and cannot ascertain, — the name is left in blank.”

Then, after a moment’s reflection: —

“But I will find it out,” said he.

And tearing out the leaf on which the entry was made regarding him, he folded it up, and put it into his pocket. Then, addressing himself to Billot and Pitou: —

“My friends,” said he, “let us leave this place; we have nothing further to do here.”

“Well, let us go,” replied Billot; “only it is a thing more easily said than done.”

And in fact the crowd, urged into the interior courtyards by curiosity, were so closely packed that egress was almost impossible. And, to add to the difficulty, the other liberated prisoners were standing close to the principal gate.

Eight prisoners, including Gilbert, had been liberated that morning.

Their names were: Jean Bechade, Bernard Laroche, Jean Lacaurège, Antoine Pujade, De White, Le Comte de Solage, and Tavernier.

The first four inspired but little interest. They were accused of having forged a bill of exchange, without any proof whatsoever being brought against them, and which led to the supposition that the charge against them was false; they had been only two years in the Bastille.

The Count de Solage was a man about thirty years of age, of joyous and expansive temperament; he embraced his liberators, congratulated them upon their victory, which he loudly extolled, and related to them the story of his captivity. He had been arrested in 1782, and imprisoned at Vincennes, his father having obtained a *lettre de cachet* against him, and was removed from that castle to the Bastille, where he had remained five years, without ever having seen a judge, or having been examined even once; his father had been dead two years, and no one had ever thought of him. If the Bastille had not been taken, it is probable that no one would have ever remembered that he was there.

De White was a man advanced in years, somewhere about sixty; he uttered strangely incoherent words, and with a foreign accent. To the questions which poured in upon him from all sides, he replied that he did not know how long he had been incarcerated, or what had been the cause of his arrest. He remembered that he was the cousin of Monsieur de Sartines, and that was all. One of the turnkeys, whose name was Guyon, said that he had seen Monsieur de Sartines, on one occasion, go into De White's cell, where he made him sign a power of attorney. But the prisoner had completely forgotten the circumstance.

Tavernier was the oldest of them all. He had been shut up for ten years in the Iles Ste. Marguerite; thirty years had he been immured in the Bastille. He was upwards of ninety years old, with white hair and long white beard; his eyes had become dimmed by remaining so long in a dark cell, and he saw everything as through a cloud. When the crowd broke open his door, he could not comprehend what they wanted with him; when they spoke to him of liberty, he shook his head; then afterwards, when they told him that the Bastille was taken:

"Ho! ho!" cried he, " what will Louis XV., Madame de Pompadour, and the Duke de la Vrillière say to all this?"

Tavernier was not even mad, like De White; he had become an idiot.

The joy of these men was frightful to behold, for it cried aloud for vengeance, so much did it resemble terror. Two or three of them seemed almost expiring in the midst of the clamor raised by a hundred thousand voices. Poor men! they who, during the whole time of their confinement in the Bastille, had never heard two human voices speaking at the same moment, — they who were no longer accustomed to any noises but the low and mysterious one of wood, when warping with the damp, that of the spider, when, unperceived, he weaves his net with a ticking similar to that of an invisible pendulum, or of the affrighted rat, which gnaws and flies at the least stir.

At the moment that Gilbert made his appearance, the most enthusiastic among the crowd proposed that the prisoners should be carried in triumph, — a proposal which was unanimously adopted.

Gilbert would have much desired to avoid this species of ovation; but there were no means of escaping it; he had been at once recognized, as well as Billot and Pitou.

Cries of “To the Hôtel de Ville! to the Hôtel de Ville!” resounded on all sides, and Gilbert was raised in an instant on the shoulders of twenty persons.

In vain did the doctor resist, in vain did Billot and Pitou distribute among their victorious brethren the most vigorous fisticuffs; joy and enthusiasm had hardened the skins of the populace. These, and even blows given with pike-handles and the butt-ends of muskets, appeared only gentle caresses to the conquerors, and only served to redouble their delight.

Gilbert was therefore compelled to mount the triumphal car.

This car was formed of a square table, in the middle of which was stuck a lance, to serve as a support to the victor, and enable him to preserve his balance.

The doctor, therefore, was raised above this sea of heads, which undulated from the Bastille to the Arcade St. Jean, a tempestuous sea, whose waves were bearing, in the midst of pikes and bayonets, and arms of every description, of every form, and of every age, the triumphant prisoners.

But at the same time this terrible and irresistible ocean was rolling on another group, so compact and closely formed that it appeared an island. This group was the one which was leading away De Launay as a prisoner.

Around this group arose cries not less tumultuous nor less enthusiastic than those which accompanied the prisoners; but they were not shouts of triumph, they were threats of death.

Gilbert, from his elevated position, did not lose a single detail of this frightful spectacle.

He was the only one among all the prisoners who had been restored to liberty, who was in the enjoyment of all his faculties. Five days of captivity were merely a dark spot in his life. His eyes had not been weakened or rendered dim by his short sojourn in the Bastille.

A combat, generally, does not have the effect of rendering the combatants pitiless excepting during the time that it continues. Men, generally, when issuing from a struggle in which they have risked their lives, without receiving injury, are full of kindly feelings towards their enemies.

But in great popular commotions, such as those of which France has seen so many from the times of the Jacquerie down to our own days, the masses whom fear has withheld from aiding in the fight, whom noise has irritated, the masses, at once ferocious and cowardly, endeavor, after the victory has been gained, to claim their share of the triumph which they had not dared to accelerate. They take their share in the vengeance.

From the moment of his leaving the Bastille, the procession was the commencement of the governor’s execution.

Elie, who had taken the governor’s life under his own responsibility, marched at the head of the group, protected by his uniform and by the admiration of the people, who had seen him one of the first to advance amid the enemy’s fire. He carried his sword above his head, on the point of which was the note which Monsieur de Launay had caused to be handed to the people through one of the loop-holes of the Bastille, and which had been brought by Maillard.

After him came the guard of the royal taxes, holding in his hand the keys of the fortress; then Maillard, bearing the standard; and after him a young man carrying the regulations of the Bastille on his bayonet, — an odious rescript by means of which so many bitter tears had flowed.

The governor walked next, protected by Hullin and two or three others, but disappeared amid the throng of threatening fists, of waving sabres, and of quivering lances.

By the side of this group, and rolling onward in an almost parallel line with it in the great artery of the Rue St. Antoine, which leads from the Boulevard to the river, another could be distinguished, not less threatening, not less terrible than the first. It was that which was dragging forward Major de Losme, whom we have seen for a moment combating the will of the governor, and who had at length been compelled to bow down his head before the determination which De Launay had taken to defend himself.

Major de Losme was a worthy, brave, and excellent young man. Since he had been in the Bastille he had alleviated the sorrows of many of the prisoners by his kind treatment of them. But the people were ignorant of this. The people, from his brilliant uniform, imagined that he was the governor. Whereas the governor, thanks to his gray coat, on which there was no embroidery whatsoever, and from which he had torn the ribbon of the order of St. Louis, was surrounded as it were by a protecting doubt which could be dispelled by those only who were acquainted with his person.

Such was the spectacle which offered itself to the grieved eyes of Doctor Gilbert. His face, even in the midst of dangers, bore always a calm and observing expression, — a quality which was inherent in his powerful organization.

Hullin, on leaving the Bastille, had called around him his most trusty and devoted friends, the most valiant of the popular soldiers of that day, and four or five had responded to his call, and endeavored to second him in his generous design of protecting the governor. Among them are three men of whom impartial history has consecrated the memory; their names were Arné, Chollat, and De Lépine.

These men, preceded as we have said by Hullin and Maillard, were therefore endeavoring to defend the life of one for whose death a hundred thousand men were clamorously calling.

Around them had ranged themselves some grenadiers of the French Guard, whose uniform, having become popular during the last two days, was an object of veneration to the people.

Monsieur de Launay had escaped receiving any blow as long as the arms of his generous defenders were able to ward them off; but he had not escaped insulting language and threats.

At the corner of the Rue de Jouy, of the five grenadiers of the French Guards who had joined the procession on leaving the Bastille, not one remained. They had one after the other been carried off on the way, by the enthusiasm of the crowd, and perhaps also by the calculation of assassins, and Gilbert had seen them disappear one after the other, like beads from a rosary of which the cord had been broken.

From that moment he had foreseen that the victory which had been gained was about to be tarnished by a sanguinary sacrifice; he had attempted to jump from the table which served him as a triumphal car, but arms of iron had riveted him to it. In his powerless position, he had directed Billot and Pitou to rush forward to defend the governor, and both of them, obedient to his voice, had made every effort to cleave through the human waves and get near to Monsieur de Launay.

And in fact the little group of his, defenders stood in great need of a reinforcement. Chollat, who had not tasted food since the previous evening, had felt his strength giving way, and at length had fainted; it was with great difficulty that he had been raised and saved from being trampled under foot.

But this was a breach made in the wall, a falling-in of the dyke.

A man rushed through this breach, and whirling the butt of his gun over his head, aimed a deadly blow at the uncovered head of the governor.

But De Lépine, who saw the terrific blow descending, had time enough to throw himself with outstretched arms between the governor and his assailant, and received on his forehead the blow intended for the governor.

Stunned by the shock, blinded with his own blood, which streamed into his eyes, he staggered, and covered his face with his hands, and when he could again see, the governor was twenty paces from him.

It was at this moment that Billot, dragging Pitou after him through the crowd, came up to him.

He perceived that what exposed Monsieur de Launay, above all, to observation, was his being the only man in the crowd who was bareheaded.

Billot took his hat, stretched out his arm, and placed it on the governor’s head.

De Launay turned round and recognized Billot.

“I thank you,” he said; “but whatever you may do, you will not save me.”

“Let us only reach the Hôtel de Ville,” said Hullin, “and I will answer for your safety.”

“Yes,” replied De Launay, “but shall we reach it?”

“With the help of God, we will attempt it,” rejoined Hullin.

And in fact there was some hope of succeeding, for they were just entering the square before the Hôtel de Ville; but this square was thronged with men with naked arms, brandishing pikes and sabres. The report, which had flown from street to street, had announced to them that the governor and the major of the Bastille were being brought to them; and like a pack of hungry hounds eager to be loosed upon their prey, they awaited, grinding their teeth and impatient for their approach.

As soon as they saw the procession approach they rushed towards the governor.

Hullin saw that this was the moment of extreme danger, of the last struggle; if he could only get the governor to the front steps, and get him to rush up the staircase, De Launay was saved.

“To me, Elie! — to me, Maillard! — to me, all men with hearts,” cried he: “our honor is at stake.”

Elie and Maillard heard the appeal; they made a rush into the centre of the mob, and the people seconded them but too well; they made way for them to pass, but closed in behind them.

In this manner Elie and Maillard were separated from the principal group, and were prevented returning to it.

The crowd saw the advantage it had gained, and made a furious effort. Like an enormous boa, it entwined its gigantic folds around the group. Billot was lifted off his feet and dragged away; Pitou, who thought only of Billot, allowed himself to be forced away in the same throng. Hullin, being hurried on by the crowd, stumbled against the first step of the Hôtel de Ville, and fell. He got up, but it was to fall again almost immediately, and this time De Launay fell with him.

The governor was constant to the last; up to the final moment, he uttered not a single complaint; he did not ask for mercy, but he cried out in a loud, shrill tone, —

“Tigers that you are, at all events do not allow me to remain thus in suspense; kill me at once!”

Never was order more promptly executed than this reproachful request of the poor governor. In an instant around the fallen De Launay every head was bowed down towards him. For a moment nothing could be seen but upraised and threatening hands, grasping poniards which as suddenly disappeared then was seen a head severed from the body, and which was raised, still streaming with blood, upon the end of a pike; the features had retained their livid and contemptuous smile.

This was the first.

Gilbert, from his elevated position, could see all that was passing; Gilbert had once more attempted to spring to the assistance of the governor, but two hundred arms prevented him.

He turned his head from the disgusting spectacle and sighed.

This head, with its staring eyes, was raised immediately in front, and as if to salute him with a last look, of the window in which De Flesselles was standing, surrounded and protected by the electors.

It would have been difficult to decide whether the face of the living or that of the dead man was the most pale and livid.

Suddenly an immense uproar arose from the spot on which was lying the mutilated body of De Launay. His pockets had been searched by his assassins, and in his breast-pocket had been found the note which the

Provost of the Merchants had addressed to him, and which he had shown to De Losme.

This note, our readers may remember, was couched in the following terms: —

Hold firm! — I amuse the Parisians with cockades and promises. Before the close of the day Monsieur de Besenval will send you a reinforcement.

DE FLESSELLES.

The most blasphemous imprecations rose from the pavement of the square to the window of the Hôtel de Ville in which De Flesselles was standing.

Without guessing the cause of this new tumult, he fully comprehended the threat, and hastily drew back from the window; but he had been seen; every one knew that he was there; the crowd rushed up the staircase, and this time the movement was so universal that the men who had been carrying Doctor Gilbert abandoned him to follow the living tide which in a tempest of passion was overflowing the great staircase.

Gilbert would also have gone into the Hotel de Ville, not to threaten but to protect Flesselles. He had already ascended three or four of the front steps, when he felt himself violently pulled back. He turned round to disengage himself from this new obstruction, but he recognized Billot and Pitou.

"Oh!" exclaimed Gilbert, who from his commanding position could glance over the whole square, "what can they be doing yonder?"

And he pointed with his convulsively clinched hand to the corner of the Rue de la Tixéranderie.

"Come with us, Doctor, come!" simultaneously cried Billot and Pitou.

"Oh, the assassins!" cried the doctor, "the assassins!"

And indeed at that moment Major de Losme fell, killed by a desperate blow from a hatchet, — the people confounding in their rage the egotistical and barbarous governor, who had been the persecutor of his prisoners, with the generous man who had been their friend and reliever.

"Oh, yes, yes," said he, "let us be gone, for I begin to be ashamed of having been liberated by such men."

"Doctor," said Billot, "be not uneasy on that score. The men who fought down yonder are not the same men who are committing these horrid massacres."

But at the moment when the doctor was about to descend the steps which he had gone up, to hasten to the assistance of Flesselles, the flood which had poured into the building was again vomited forth. Amid this torrent of men was one who was struggling furiously as they dragged him forward.

"To the Palais Royal! to the Palais Royal!" cried the crowd.

"Yes, my friends — yes, my good friends — to the Palais Royal!" repeated the man.

And they went towards the river, as if this human inundation had wished, not to bear him towards the Palais Royal, but to drag him towards the Seine.

"Oh!" cried Gilbert, "here is another they are about to murder! — let us endeavor to save him at least." But scarcely had he pronounced these words when a pistol-shot was heard, and De Flesselles disappeared amid the smoke.

Gilbert covered his eyes with both his hands, with a gesture of excessive anger; he cursed the people who, after having shown themselves so great, had not the firmness to remain pure, and had sullied the victory they had gained by a triple assassination.

Then, when he removed his hands from his eyes, he saw three heads raised above the crowd, on three pikes.

The first was that of De Flesselles, the second that of De Losme, the third that of De Launay.

The one rose above the front steps of the Hôtel de Ville, the other from the middle of the Rue de la Tixéranderie, the third on the Quai Pelletier.

From their relative positions they assumed the form of a triangle.

"Oh, Balsamo! Balsamo!" murmured the doctor, with a sigh; "is it then such a triangle as this that is to be symbolical of liberty!"

And he ran along the Rue de la Vannerie, Billot and Pitou accompanying him.

CHAPTER XX.

Sebastien Gilbert

AT the corner of the Rue Planche Mibray the doctor met a hackney coach, made a sign to the coachman to stop, and hastily got into it.

Billot and Pitou quickly followed him.

“To the College of Louis-le-Grand!” cried Gilbert, and threw himself into one corner of the vehicle, where he fell into a profound reverie, which was respected by Billot and Pitou.

They went over the Pont au Change by the Rue de la Cité, the Rue St. Jacques, and at length reached the College Louis-le-Grand.

All Paris was trembling with emotion. The news had spread rapidly throughout the city; rumors of the assassinations on the Place de la Grève were mingled with the glorious recital of the taking of the Bastille. On every face could be seen depicted the various emotions to which the news gave rise, according to the varied feelings they excited, — the lightning of the soul which thus betrayed themselves.

Gilbert had not once looked out of the coach window; Gilbert had not uttered a single word. There is always a ridiculous side in popular ovations, and Gilbert contemplated his ovation in that point of view.

And besides, it also appeared to him that notwithstanding all he had done to prevent it, some drops of the blood which had been shed would fall upon his head.

The doctor alighted from the hackney coach at the college gate, and made a sign to Billot to follow him.

As to Pitou, he discreetly remained in the coach.

Sebastien was still in the infirmary; the principal in person, on Doctor Gilbert’s being announced, conducted him thither.

Billot, who, although not a very acute observer, well knew the character of both father and son, — Billot attentively observed the scene which was passing before his eyes.

Weak, irritable, and nervous, as the boy had shown himself in the moment of despair, he evinced an equal degree of tranquillity and reserve in the moment of joy.

On perceiving his father he turned pale, and words failed him. His lips quivered, and then he ran and threw his arms round his father's neck, uttering a cry of joy, which resembled a cry of grief, and then held him silently clasped within his arms.

The doctor responded as silently to this mute pressure; only, after having embraced his son, he looked at him with an expression that was more sorrowful than joyous.

A more skilful observer than Billot would have said that some misfortune or some crime existed in the relations between that youth and that man.

The youth was less reserved in his conduct towards Billot. When he could observe any one excepting his father, who had in the first moment engrossed all his attention, he ran to the good farmer, and threw his arms round his neck, saying, —

"You are a worthy man, Monsieur Billot; you have kept your promise to me, and I thank you for it."

"Yes, yes," replied Billot, "and it was not without some trouble, I can assure you, Monsieur Sebastien. Your father was very nicely and safely locked up, and it was necessary to do a tolerable deal of damage before we could get him out."

"Sebastien," inquired the doctor with some anxiety, "you are in good health?"

"Yes, Father," replied the young man, "although you find me here in the infirmary."

Gilbert smiled.

"I know why it was you were brought here," said he.

The boy smiled in his turn.

"Have you everything you require here?" continued the doctor.

"Everything — thanks to you."

"I shall then, my dear boy, still recommend to you the same, the only line of conduct, — study assiduously."

"Yes, Father."

"I know that to you the word 'study' is not a vain and monotonous word; if I believed it to be so, I would no longer say it."

"Father, it is not for me to reply to you on that head. It is the province of Monsieur Bérardier, our excellent principal."

The doctor turned towards Monsieur Bérardier, who made a sign that he had something to say to him.

“I will speak to you again in a moment, Sebastien,” said the doctor.

And he went over to the principal.

“Sir,” said Sebastien, with anxious feeling, to Billot, “can anything unfortunate have happened to Pitou? The poor lad is not with you.”

“He is at the door in a hackney coach,” replied Billot.

“Father,” said Sebastien, “will you allow Monsieur Billot to fetch Pitou to me? I should be very glad to see him.”

Gilbert gave an affirmative nod; Billot left the room “What is it you would say to me?” inquired Gilbert of the Abbé Bérardier.

“I wished to tell you, sir, that it is not study that you should recommend to the young lad, but, on the contrary, to amuse himself.”

“And on what account, good abbé?”

“Yes, he is an excellent young man, whom everybody here loves as a son or as a brother, but — ”

The abbé paused.

“But what?” cried Gilbert, with anxiety.

“But if great care be not taken, Monsieur Gilbert, there is something that will kill him.”

“And what is that?” said Gilbert.

“The study which you so strongly recommend to him.”

“Study?”

“Yes, sir, study. If you could but see him seated at his desk, his arms crossed, poring over his dictionary, with eyes fixed — ”

“Studying, or dreaming?” asked Gilbert.

“Studying, sir; endeavoring to find a good expression the antique style, the Greek or Latin form — seeking for it for hours together; and see! even at this very moment! — look at him!”

And indeed the young man, although it was not five minutes since his father had been speaking to him, although Billot had scarcely shut the door after him, had fallen into a reverie which seemed closely allied to ecstasy.

“Is he often thus?” anxiously inquired Gilbert.

“Sir, I could almost say that this is his habitual state; only see how deeply he is meditating.”

“You are right, sir; and when you observe him in this state, you should endeavor to divert his thoughts.”

“And yet it would be a pity, for the results of these meditations are compositions which will one day do great honor to the College Louis-le-Grand. I predict that in three years from this time that youth yonder will bear off all the prizes at our examination.”

“Take care!” replied the doctor; “this species of absorption of thought, in which you see Sebastien now plunged, is rather a proof of weakness than of strength, a symptom rather of malady than of health. You are right, Monsieur Principal; it will not do to recommend assiduous application to that child; or, at least, we must know how to distinguish study from such a state of reverie.”

“Sir, I can assure you that he is studying.”

“What, as we see him now?”

“Yes; and the proof is that his task is always finished before that of the other scholars. Do you see how his lips move? He is repeating his lessons.”

“Well, then, whenever he is repeating his lessons in this manner, Monsieur Bérardier, divert his attention from them. He will not know his lessons the worse for it, and his health will be better for it.”

“Do you think so?”

“I am sure of it.”

“Well,” cried the good abbé, “you ought to understand these matters, — you, whom Messieurs de Condorcet and Cabanis proclaim to be one of the most learned men now existing in the world.”

“Only,” rejoined Gilbert, “when you wish to draw him out of such reveries, you must do it with much precaution. Speak to him very softly in the first instance, and then louder.”

“And why so?”

“To bring him gradually back to this world, which his mind has left.”

The abbé looked at the doctor with astonishment. It would not have required much to make him believe that he was mad.

“Observe,” continued the doctor; “you shall see the proof of what I am saying to you.”

Billot and Pitou entered the room at this moment. In three strides Pitou was at the side of the dreaming youth.

“You asked for me, Sebastien,” said Pitou to him; “that was very kind of you.”

And he placed his large head close to the pale face of the young lad.

“Look!” said Gilbert, seizing the abbé’s arm.

And indeed Sebastien, thus abruptly aroused from his reverie by the cordial affection of Pitou, staggered, his pale face became livid, his head fell on one side, as if his neck had not sufficient strength to support it, a painful sigh escaped his breast, and then the blood again rushed to his face.

He shook his head and smiled.

“Ah, it is you, Pitou. Yes; that is true: I asked for you.”

And then, looking at him: —

“You have been fighting, then?”

“Yes, and like a brave lad, too,” said Billot.

“Why did you not take me with you?” said the child, in a reproachful tone. “I would have fought also, and then I should at least have done something for my father.”

“Sebastien,” said Gilbert, going to his son, and pressing his head to his breast, “you can do much more for your father than to fight for him; you can listen to his advice, and follow it, — become a distinguished and celebrated man.”

“As you are?” said the boy, with proud emotion. “Oh, it is that which I aspire to.”

“Sebastien,” said the doctor, “now that you have embraced both Billot and Pitou, our good friends, will you come into the garden with me for a few minutes, that we may have a little talk together?”

“With great delight, Father. Only two or three times in my whole life have I been alone with you, and those moments, with all their details, are always present in my memory.”

“You will allow us, good Monsieur Principal “ said Gilbert.

“How can you doubt it?”

“Billot and Pitou, you must, my friends, stand in need of some refreshment?”

“Upon my word, I do,” said Billot. “I have eaten nothing since the morning, and I believe that Pitou has fasted as long as I have.”

“I beg your pardon,” replied Pitou: “I ate a crumb of bread and two or three sausages, just the moment before I dragged you out of the water; but a bath always makes one hungry.”

“Well, then, come to the refectory,” said the Abbé Bérardier, “and you shall have some dinner.”

“Ho, ho!” cried Pitou.

“You are afraid of our college fare!” cried the abbé; “but do not alarm yourselves; you shall be treated as invited guests. Moreover, it appears to me,” continued the abbé, “that it is not alone your stomach that is in a dilapidated state, my dear Monsieur Pitou.”

Pitou cast a look replete with modesty on his own person.

“And that if you were offered a pair of breeches as well as a dinner — ”

“The fact is, I would accept them, good Monsieur Bérardier,” replied Pitou.

“Well, then, come with me; both the breeches and the dinner are at your service.”

And he led off Billot and Pitou by one door, while Gilbert and his son, waving their hands to them, went out at another.

The latter crossed a yard which served as a playground to the young collegians, and went into a small garden reserved for the professors, a cool and shady retreat, in which the venerable Abbé Bérardier was wont to read his Tacitus and his Juvenal.

Gilbert seated himself upon a bench, overshadowed by an alcove of clematis and virgin vines; then, drawing Sebastien close to him, and parting the long hair which fell upon his forehead: —

“Well, my child,” said he, “we are, then, once more united.”

Sebastien raised his eyes to heaven.

“Yes, Father, and by a miracle performed by God.”

Gilbert smiled.

“If there be any miracle,” said Gilbert, “it was the brave people of Paris who have accomplished it.”

“My father,” said the boy, “set not God aside in all that has just occurred; for I, when I saw you come in, instinctively offered my thanks to God for your deliverance.”

“And Billot?”

“Billot I thanked after thanking God, as I thanked his carabine after Billot.”

Gilbert reflected.

“You are right, child,” said he; “God is in everything. But now let us talk of you, and let us have some little conversation before we again separate.”

“Are we, then, to be again separated, Father?”

“Not for a long time, I presume. But a casket, containing some very precious documents, has disappeared from Billot’s house, at the same time that I was arrested and sent to the Bastille. I must therefore endeavor to discover who it was that caused my imprisonment, — who has carried off the casket.”

“It is well, Father. I will wait to see you again, — till your inquiries shall be completed.”

And the boy sighed deeply.

“You are sorrowful, Sebastien?” said the doctor, inquiringly.

“Yes.”

“And why are you sorrowful?”

“I do not know. It appears to me that life has not been shaped for me in the way it has been for other children.”

“What are you saying there, Sebastien?”

“The truth.”

“Explain yourself.”

“They all have amusements, pleasures, while I have none.”

“You have no amusements, no pleasures?”

“I mean to say, Father, that I take no pleasure in those games which form the amusement of boys of my own age.”

“Take care, Sebastien; I should much regret that you should be of such a disposition. Sebastien, minds that give promise of a glorious future are like good fruits during their growth; they have their bitterness, their acidity, their greenness, before they can delight the palate by their matured full flavor. Believe me, my child, it is good to have been young.”

“It is not my fault if I am not so,” replied the young man, with a melancholy smile. Gilbert pressed both his son’s hands within his own, and fixing his eye intently upon Sebastien’s, continued: —

“Your age, my son, is that of the seed when germinating; nothing should yet appear above the surface of all that study has sown in you. At the age of fourteen, Sebastien, gravity is either pride, or it proceeds from malady. I have asked you whether your health was good, and you replied affirmatively. I am going to ask you whether you are proud; try to reply to me that you are not.”

“Father,” said the boy, “on that head you need not be alarmed. That which renders me so gloomy is neither sickness nor pride; no, it is a settled grief.”

“A settled grief, poor child! And what grief, good heaven, can you have at your age? Come, now, speak out.”

“No, Father, no; some other time. You have told me that you were in a hurry. You have only a quarter of an hour to devote to me. Let us speak of other things than my follies.”

“No, Sebastien; I should be uneasy were I to leave you so. Tell me whence proceeds your grief.”

“In truth, Father, I do not dare.”

“What do you fear?”

“I fear that in your eyes I shall appear a visionary, or perhaps that I may speak to you of things that will afflict you.”

“You afflict me much more by withholding your secret from me.”

“You well know that I have no secrets from you, Father.”

“Speak out, then.”

“Really, I dare not.”

“Sebastien, you who have the pretension of being a man, to — ”

“It is precisely for that reason.”

“Come, now, take courage.”

“Well, then, Father, it is a dream.”

“A dream which terrifies you?”

“Yes, and no; for when I am dreaming, I am not terrified, but as if transported into another world.”

“Explain yourself.”

“When still quite a child I had these visions. You cannot but remember that two or three times I lost myself in those great woods which surround the village in which I was brought up?”

“Yes, I remember being told of it.”

“Well, then, at those times I was following a species of phantom.”

“What say you?” cried Gilbert, looking at his son with an astonishment that seemed closely allied to terror.

“Well, then, Father, I will tell you all. I used to play, as did the other children in the village. As long as there were children with me, or near me, I saw nothing; but if I separated from them, or went beyond the last village garden, I felt something near, like the rustling of a gown. I would stretch out my arms to catch it, and I embraced only the air; but as the rustling sound became lost in distance, the phantom itself became visible. It was at first a vapor as transparent as a cloud; then the vapor became more condensed, and assumed a human form. The form was that of a woman gliding along the ground rather than walking, and becoming more and more visible as it plunged into the shady parts of the forest. Then an unknown, extraordinary, and almost irresistible power impelled me to pursue this form. I pursued her with outstretched arms, mute as herself, for often I attempted to call to her, and never could my tongue articulate a sound. I pursued her thus, although she never stopped, although I never could come up with her, until the same prodigy which announced her presence to me warned me of her departure. This woman vanished gradually from my sight, matter became once more vapor, the vapor became volatilized, and all was ended; and I, exhausted with fatigue, would fall down on the spot where she had disappeared. It was there that Pitou would find me, sometimes the same day, but sometimes only the next morning."

Gilbert continued gazing at his son with increasing anxiety. He had placed his fingers on his pulse. Sebastien at once comprehended the feeling which agitated the doctor.

"Oh, do not be uneasy, Father," said he. "I know that there was nothing real in all this. I know that it was a vision, and nothing more."

"And this woman," inquired the doctor, "what was her appearance?"

"Oh, as majestic as a queen."

"And her face; did you sometimes see it, child?"

"Yes."

"And how long ago " asked Gilbert, shuddering.

"Only since I have been here," replied the youth.

"But here in Paris you have not the forest of Villers-Cotterets, the tall trees forming a dark and mysterious arch of verdure. In Paris you have no longer that silence, that solitude, the natural element of phantoms."

"Yes, Father, I have all these."

"Where, then?"

"Here, in this garden."

"What mean you by saying here? Is not this garden set apart for the professors?"

"It is so, my father; but two or three times it appeared to me that I saw this woman glide from the courtyard into the garden, and each time I would have followed her, but the closed door always prevented me. Then one day the Abbé Bérardier, being highly satisfied with my composition, asked me if there was anything I particularly desired; and I asked him to allow me sometimes to walk in the garden with him. He gave me the permission. I came; and here, Father, the vision reappeared to me."

Gilbert trembled.

“Strange hallucination,” said he; “but, nevertheless, very possible in a temperament so highly nervous as his. And you have seen her face, then?”

“Yes, Father.”

“Do you remember it?”

The youth smiled.

“Did you ever attempt to go near her?”

“Yes.”

“To hold out your hand to her?”

“It was then that she would disappear.”

“And in your own opinion, Sebastien, who is this woman?”

“It appears to me that she is my mother.”

“Your mother!” exclaimed Gilbert, turning pale.

And he pressed his hand against his heart, as if to stop the bleeding of a painful wound.

“But this is all a dream,” cried he; “and really I am almost as mad as you are.”

The youth remained silent, and with pensive eye looked at his father.

“Well?” said the latter, in the accent of inquiry.

“Well,” replied Sebastien, “it is possible that it may be all a dream; but the reality of my dream is no less existing.”

“What say you?”

“I say that at the last Festival of Pentecost, when we were taken to walk in the wood of Satory, near Versailles, and that while there, as I was meditating under a tree, and separated from my companions — ”

“The same vision again appeared to you?”

“Yes; but this time in a carriage, drawn by four magnificent horses. But this time real, absolutely living. I very nearly fainted.”

“And why so?”

“I do not know.”

“And what impression remained upon your mind from this new vision?”

“That it was not my mother whom I had seen appearing to me in a dream, since this woman was the same I always saw in my vision, and my mother is dead.”

Gilbert rose and pressed his hand to his forehead. A strange swimming of the head had just seized him.

The young lad remarked his agitation, and was alarmed at his sudden paleness.

“Ah!” said he, “you see now, Father, how wrong I was to relate to you all my follies.”

“No, my child, no. On the contrary,” said the doctor, “speak of them often to me; speak of them to me every time you see me, and we will endeavor to cure you of them.”

Sebastien shook his head.

“Cure me! and for what?” asked he. “I am accustomed to this dream. It has become a portion of my existence. I love that vision, although it flies from me, and sometimes seems to repel me. Do not, therefore, cure me of it, Father. You may again leave me, travel once more, perhaps go again to America. Having this vision, I am not completely alone in the world.”

“In fine,” murmured the doctor, and pressing Sebastien to his breast, “till we meet again, my child,” said he, “and then I hope we shall no more leave each other; for should I again leave France, I will at least endeavor to take you with me.”

“Was my mother beautiful?” asked the child.

“Oh, yes, very beautiful!” replied the doctor, in a voice almost choked by emotion.

“And did she love you as much as I love you?”

“Sebastien! Sebastien! never speak to me of your mother!” cried the doctor.

And pressing his lips for the last time to the forehead of the youth, he rushed out of the garden.

Instead of following him, the child fell back, overcome by his feelings, on the bench.

In the courtyard Gilbert found Billot and Pitou, completely invigorated by the good cheer they had partaken of. They were relating to the Abbé Bérardier all the circumstances regarding the capture of the Bastille.

Gilbert again entered into conversation with the Abbé Bérardier, in which he pointed out to him the line of conduct he should observe with regard to Sebastien.

He then got into the hackney coach with his two companions.

CHAPTER XXI.

Madame de Staël

WHEN Gilbert resumed his place in the hackney coach by the side of Billot and opposite to Pitou, he was pale, and the perspiration was standing in large drops on his forehead.

But it was not in the nature of this man to remain for any time overwhelmed by any emotion whatsoever. He threw himself back into the corner of the carriage, pressed both his hands to his forehead as if he wished to repress the boiling thoughts which raged within it, and after remaining a few moments motionless, he withdrew his hands, and instead of an agitated countenance, he exhibited features which were particularly calm.

“You told me, I think, my dear Monsieur Billot, that the king had dismissed Monsieur de Necker?”

“Yes, indeed, Monsieur Gilbert.”

“And that the commotions in Paris originated in some measure from the disgrace of the minister?”

“Very much.”

“And you added that Monsieur de Necker had immediately left Versailles.”

“He received the king’s letter while at dinner. In an hour afterwards he was on the road to Brussels.”

“Where he is now?”

“Or ought to be.”

“Did you not hear it said that he had stopped somewhere on the road?”

“Oh, yes; he stopped at St. Ouen, in order to take leave of his daughter, the Baroness de Staël.”

“Did Madame de Staël go with him?”

“I was told that he and his wife alone set out for Brussels.”

“Coachman!” cried Gilbert, “stop at the first tailor’s shop you see.”

“You wish to change your coat?” said Billot.

“Yes. In good sooth, this one smells too much of its contact with the walls of the Bastille; and a man cannot in such a dress discreetly pay a visit to the daughter of an ex-minister in disgrace. Search your pockets, and see if you cannot find a few louis for me."

"Ho, ho!" cried the farmer, "it seems that you have left your purse in the Bastille."

"That is according to the regulations," said Gilbert, smiling. "All articles of value are deposited in the registry office."

"And they remain there," said the farmer.

And opening his huge fist, which contained about twenty louis: —

"Take these, Doctor," said he.

Gilbert took ten louis. Some minutes afterwards the hackney coach stopped at the door of a ready-made clothes shop.

It was still the usage in those days.

Gilbert changed his coat, soiled by the walls of the Bastille, for a very decent black one, such as was worn by the gentlemen of the Tiers État in the National Assembly.

A hair-dresser in his shop, a Savoyard shoe-cleaner in his cellar, completed the doctor's toilette.

The doctor then ordered the coachman to drive him to St. Ouen, by the exterior Boulevards, which they reached by going behind the walls of the park at Monceaux.

Gilbert alighted at the gate of Monsieur Necker's house, at the moment when the cathedral clock of Dagobert struck seven in the evening.

Around this house, which erewhile was so much sought, so much frequented, reigned the most profound silence, disturbed only by the arrival of Gilbert.

And yet there was none of that melancholy appearance which generally surrounds abandoned country-houses, — of that gloominess even generally visible in a mansion, the master of which has been disgraced.

The gates being closed, the garden-walks deserted, merely announced that the heads of the family were absent, but there was no trace of misfortune or of precipitation.

Besides this, one whole portion of the château, the east wing, had still its window-shutters open, and when Gilbert was advancing towards this side, a servant, wearing the livery of Monsieur de Necker, approached the visitor.

The following dialogue then took place through the iron gratings of the gate.

"Monsieur de Necker is not at home, my friend?" said Gilbert.

“No; the baron left St. Ouen last Saturday for Brussels.”

“And her ladyship, the baroness?”

“Went with Monsieur.”

“But Madame de Staël?”

“Madame de Staël has remained here; but I do not know whether madame will receive any one; it is her hour for walking.”

“Please to find out where she is, and announce to her Doctor Gilbert.”

“I will go and inquire whether madame is in the house or not. Doubtless she will receive you, sir; but should she be talking a walk, my orders are that she is not to be disturbed.”

“Very well; go quickly, I beg of you.”

The servant opened the gate, and Gilbert entered the grounds.

While relocking the gate, the servant cast an inquisitive glance on the vehicle which had brought the doctor, and on the extraordinary faces of his two travelling companions; then he went off, shaking his head, like a man who feels somewhat perplexed, but who defies any other intellect to see clearly into a matter where his own has been altogether puzzled.

Gilbert remained alone, waiting his return.

In about five minutes the servant reappeared.

“The Baroness de Staël is taking a walk,” said he, and he bowed in order to dismiss Gilbert.

But the doctor was not so easily got rid of.

“My friend,” said he, “be pleased to make a slight infraction in your orders, and tell the baroness, when you announce me to her, that I am a friend of the Marquis de Lafayette.”

A louis, slipped into the lackey’s hands, completely removed the scruples he had entertained, which the name of the marquis had nearly half dispelled.

“Come in, sir,” said the servant.

Gilbert followed him; but instead of taking him into the house he led him into the park.

“This is the favorite walk of the baroness,” said the lackey to Gilbert, pointing out to him the entrance to a species of labyrinth; “will you remain here a moment?”

Ten minutes afterwards he heard a rustling among the leaves, and a woman between twenty-three and twenty-four years of age, and of a figure rather noble than graceful, appeared to the eyes of Gilbert.

She seemed surprised on finding a man who still appeared young, when she had doubtless expected to meet one advanced in years.

Gilbert was a man of sufficiently remarkable appearance to strike at first sight so able an observer as Madame de Staël.

The features of few men were formed with such pure lines, and these lines had assumed, by the exercise of an all-powerful will, a character of extraordinary inflexibility. His fine black eyes, which were always so expressive, had become somewhat veiled by his literary labors and the sufferings he had undergone, and had lost a portion of that mobility which is one of the charms of youth.

A wrinkle, which was at once deep and graceful, hollowed out at the corner of his thin lips, that mysterious cavity in which physiognomists place the seat of circumspection. It appeared that time alone, and a precocious old age, had given to Gilbert that quality with which nature had neglected to endow him.

A wide and well-rounded forehead, slightly receding towards the roots of his fine black hair, which for years powder had no longer whitened, gave evidence at once of knowledge and of thought, of study and imagination. With Gilbert, as with his master, Rousseau, his prominent eyebrows threw a deep shade over his eyes, and from this shade glanced forth the luminous rays which revealed life.

Gilbert, notwithstanding his unassuming dress, presented himself before the future authoress of “Corinne,” with a remarkably dignified and distinguished air, — an air of which his well-shaped tapering white hands, his small feet, and his finely formed and muscular legs, completed the noble appearance.

Madame de Staël devoted some moments to examining Gilbert.

During this, Gilbert, on his side, had given a stiff sort of bow, which slightly recalled the modest civility of the American Quakers, who grant to women only the fraternity which protects instead of the respect which smiles.

Then, with a rapid glance, he, in his turn, analyzed the person of the already celebrated young woman, whose intelligent and expressive features were altogether devoid of beauty; it was the head of an insignificant and frivolous youth, rather than that of a woman, but which surmounted a form of voluptuous luxuriance.

She held in her hand a twig from a pomegranate-tree, from which, from absence of mind, she was biting off the blossoms.

"Is it you, sir," inquired the baroness, "who are Doctor Gilbert?"

"Yes, Madame, my name is Gilbert."

"You are very young, to have acquired so great a reputation, or rather, does not that reputation appertain to your father, or to some relative older than yourself?"

"I do not know any one of the name of Gilbert but myself, Madame. And if indeed there is, as you say, some slight degree of reputation attached to the name, I have a fair right to claim it."

"You made use of the name of the Marquis de Lafayette, in order to obtain this interview with me, sir; and, in fact, the marquis has spoken to us of you, of your inexhaustible knowledge — "

Gilbert bowed.

"A knowledge which is so much the more remarkable and so much the more replete with interest," continued the baroness, "since it appears that you are not a mere ordinary chemist, a practitioner, like so many others, but that you have sounded all the mysteries of the science of life."

"I clearly perceive, Madame, that the Marquis de Lafayette must have told you that I am somewhat of a sorcerer," replied Gilbert, smiling; "and if he has told you so, I know that he has talent enough to prove it to you, had he wished to do so."

"In fact, sir, he has spoken to us of the marvellous cures you often performed, whether on the field of battle, or in the American hospitals, upon patients whose lives were altogether despaired of; you plunged them, the general told us, into a factitious death, which so much resembled death itself, that it was difficult to believe it was not real."

"That factitious death, Madame, is the result of a science almost still unknown, now confided only to the hands of some few adepts, but which will soon become common."

"It is mesmerism you are speaking of, is it not?" asked Madame de Staël with a smile.

"Of mesmerism, yes, it is."

"Did you take lessons of the master himself?"

"Alas! Madame, Mesmer himself was only a scholar.

Mesmerism, or rather magnetism, was an ancient science, known to the Egyptians and the Greeks. It was lost in the ocean of the middle ages.

Shakespeare divined it in Macbeth. Urbain Grandier found it once more, and died for having found it. But the great master — my master — was the Count de Cagliostro."

"That mountebank!" cried Madame de Staël.

"Madame, Madame, beware of judging as do contemporaries, and not as posterity will judge. To that mountebank I owe my knowledge, and perhaps the world will be indebted to him for its liberty."

"Be it so," replied Madame de Staël, again smiling: "I speak without knowing, — you speak with full knowledge of the subject. It is probable that you are right and that I am wrong. But let us return to you. Why is it that you have so long kept yourself at so great a distance from France? Why have you not returned to take your place, your proper station, among the great men of the age, such as Lavoisier, Cabanis, Condorcet, Bailly, and Louis?"

At this last name Gilbert blushed, though almost imperceptibly.

"I have yet too much to study, Madame, to rank myself all at once among these great masters."

"But you have come at last, though at an unpropitious moment for us; my father, who would, I feel assured, have been happy to be of service to you, has been disgraced, and left here three days ago."

Gilbert smiled.

"Baroness," said he, bowing slightly, " only six days ago I was imprisoned in the Bastille, pursuant to an order from Baron Necker."

Madame de Staël blushed in her turn.

"Really, sir, you have just told me something that greatly surprises me. You in the Bastille!"

"Myself, Madame."

"What had you done to occasion your imprisonment?"

"Those alone who threw me into prison can tell that."

"But you are no longer in prison!"

"No, Madame, because the Bastille no longer exists."

"How can that be? — does the Bastille no longer exist?" cried Madame de Staël, feigning astonishment.

"Did you not hear the firing of cannon?"

"Yes; but cannons are only cannons, that is all."

"Oh, permit me to tell you, Madame, that it is impossible that Madame de Staël, the daughter of Monsieur de Necker, should not know, at this present time, that the Bastille has been taken by the people.”

“I assure you, sir,” replied the baroness, somewhat confused, “that being unacquainted with any of the events which have taken place since the departure of my father, I no longer occupy my time but in deploring his absence.”

“Madame! Madame!” said Gilbert, shaking his head, “the State messengers are so familiar with the road that leads to the château of St. Ouen, that at least one bearer of despatches must have arrived during the four hours that have elapsed since the capitulation of the Bastille.”

The baroness saw that it was impossible for her to deny it without positively lying. She abhorred a falsehood; she therefore changed the subject of the conversation.

“And to what lucky event do I owe your visit, sir?” asked she.

“I wished to have the honor of speaking to Monsieur de Necker, Madame.”

“But do you know that he is no longer in France?”

“Madame, it appeared to me so extraordinary that Monsieur de Necker should be absent, so impolitic that he should not have watched the course of events — ”

“That — ”

“That I relied upon you, I must confess, Madame, to tell me where I could find him.”

“You will find him at Brussels, sir.”

Gilbert fixed his searching gaze upon the baroness.

“Thank you, Madame,” said he, bowing; “I shall then set out for Brussels, as I have matters of the highest importance to communicate to him.”

Madame de Staël appeared to hesitate, then she rejoined: —

“Fortunately I know you, sir,” said she, “and I know you to be a man of serious character. ‘Tis true, important things might lose a great deal of their value by passing through other lips. But what can there be of importance to my father, after his disgrace — after what has taken place?”

“There is the future, Madame; and perhaps I shall not be altogether without influence over the future. But all these reflections are to no purpose. The most important thing for me, and for him, is, that I should see Monsieur de Necker. Thus, Madame, you say that he is at Brussels?”

“Yes, sir.”

"It will take me twenty hours to go there. Do you know what twenty hours are during a revolution, and how many important events may take place during twenty hours? Oh! how imprudent it was for Monsieur de Necker, Madame, to place twenty hours between himself and any event which might take place — between the hand and the object it desires to reach."

"In truth, sir, you frighten me," said Madame de Staël, "and I begin to think that my father has really been imprudent."

"But what would you have, Madame? Things are thus, are they not I have, therefore, merely to make you a most humble apology for the trouble that I have given you. Adieu, Madame."

But the baroness stopped him.

"I tell you, sir, that you alarm me," she rejoined; "you owe me an explanation of all this; you must tell me something that will reassure me."

"Alas! Madame," replied Gilbert, "I have so many private interests to watch over at this moment, that it is impossible for me to think of those of others; my life and honor are at stake, as would be the life and honor of Monsieur de Necker if he could take advantage of the words which I shall tell him in the course of twenty hours."

"Sir, allow me to remember something that I have too long forgotten; it is that grave subjects ought not to be discussed in the open air, in a park, within the reach of every ear."

"Madame," said Gilbert, "I am now at your house, and permit me to observe that consequently it is you who have chosen the place where we now are. What do you wish? I am entirely at your command."

"I wish you to do me the favor to finish this conversation in my cabinet."

"Ah! ah!" said Gilbert to himself, "if I did not fear to confuse her, I would ask her whether her cabinet is at Brussels."

But without further question he contented himself with following the baroness, who began to walk quickly toward the château.

The same servant who had admitted Gilbert was found standing in front of the house. Madame de Staël made a sign to him, and opening the doors herself, she led Gilbert into her cabinet, a charming retreat, more masculine, it is true, than feminine, of which the second door and the two windows opened into a small garden, which was not only inaccessible to others, but also beyond the reach of all strange eyes.

When they had gone in, Madame de Staël closed the door, and turning towards Gilbert: —

"Sir, in the name of humanity, I call upon you to tell me the secret which is so important to my father, and which has brought you to St. Ouen."

"Madame," said Gilbert, "if your father could now hear me, if he could but know that I am the man who sent the king the secret memoirs entitled, 'Of the State of Ideas and of Progress,' I am sure the Baron de Necker would immediately appear, and say to me, 'Doctor Gilbert, what do you desire of me? Speak; I am listening.'"

Gilbert had hardly pronounced these words when a secret door which was concealed by a panel painted by Vanloo was noiselessly slid aside, and the Baron de Necker, with a smiling countenance, suddenly appeared, standing at the foot of a small, winding staircase, at the top of which could be perceived the dim rays of a lamp.

Then the Baroness de Staël courtesied to Gilbert, and kissing her father's forehead, left the room by the same staircase which her father had just descended, and having closed the panel, she disappeared.

Necker advanced towards Gilbert, and gave him his hand, saying, —

"Here I am, Monsieur Gilbert; what do you desire of me? Speak, I am listening."

They both seated themselves.

"Monsieur le Baron," said Gilbert, "you have just heard a secret which has revealed all my ideas to you. It was I who, four years ago, sent an essay to the king on the general state of Europe; it is I who, since then, have sent him from the United States the various works he has received on all the questions of conciliation and internal administration which have been discussed in France."

"Works of which his Majesty," replied Monsieur de Necker, bowing, "has never spoken to me without expressing a deep admiration of them, though at the same time a profound terror at their contents."

"Yes, because they told the truth. Was it not because the truth was then terrible to hear, and, having now become a fact, it is still more terrible to witness?"

"That is unquestionably true, sir," said Necker.

"Did the king send these essays to you for perusal?" asked Gilbert.

"Not all of them, sir; only two: one on the subject of the finances — and you were of my opinion with a very few exceptions; but I nevertheless felt myself much honored by it.”

“But that is not all; there was one in which I predicted all the important events which have taken place.”

“Ah!”

“Yes.”

“And which of them, sir, I pray?”

“There were two in particular; one was that the king would find himself some day compelled to dismiss you, in consequence of some engagements he had previously entered into.”

“Did you predict my disgrace to him?”

“Perfectly.”

“That was the first event: what was the second?”

“The taking of the Bastille.”

“Did you predict the taking of the Bastille?”

“Monsieur le Baron, the Bastille was more than a royal prison, it was the symbol of tyranny. Liberty has commenced its career by destroying the symbol; the Revolution will do the rest.”

“Have you duly considered the serious nature of the words you have just uttered, sir?”

“Undoubtedly I have.”

“And you are not afraid to express such a theory openly?”

“Afraid of what?”

“Afraid lest some misfortune should befall you.”

“Monsieur de Necker,” said Gilbert, smiling, “ after once having got out of the Bastille, a man has nothing more to fear.”

“Have you, then, come out of the Bastille?”

“This very day.”

“And why were you thrown into the Bastille?”

“I ought to ask you that question.”

“Ask me?”

“You, undoubtedly.”

“And why should you ask me?”

“Because it was you who caused my imprisonment there.”

“I had you thrown into the Bastille?”

“Six days ago; the date, as you see, is not so very remote that you should not be able to recollect it.”

“It is impossible.”

"Do you recognize your own signature?"

And Gilbert showed the ex-minister the leaf of the jail-book of the Bastille, and the *lettre de cachet* which was annexed to it.

"Yes," said Necker, "that is doubtless the *lettre de cachet*. You know that I signed as few as possible, and that the smallest number possible was still four thousand annually; besides, at the moment of my departure, they made me sign several in blank. Your warrant of imprisonment, sir, must have been one of the latter."

"Do you mean to imply by this that I must in no way attribute my imprisonment to you?"

"Most certainly, I do."

"But still, Monsieur le Baron," said Gilbert, smiling, "you understand my motives for being so curious; it is absolutely necessary that I should know to whom I am indebted for my captivity. Be good enough, therefore, to tell me."

"Oh! there is nothing easier. I have always taken the precaution never to leave my letters at the ministry, and every evening I brought them back here. Those of this month are in the drawer B of this chiffonnier; let us look for the letter G in the bundle."

Necker opened the drawer, and looked over an enormous file, which might have contained some five or six hundred letters.

"I only keep those letters," said the ex-minister, "which are of such a nature as to cover my responsibility. Every arrest that I order insures me another enemy. I had therefore to guard myself against such a contingency. An omission to do so would surprise me greatly. Let us see — G — G, that is the one. Yes, Gilbert — your arrest was brought about by some one in the queen's household, my dear sir. Ah — ah! — in the queen's household — yes, here is a request for a warrant against a man named Gilbert. Profession not mentioned; black eyes, black hair. The description of your person follows. Travelling from Havre to Paris. That is all. Then the Gilbert mentioned in the warrant must have been you."

"It was myself. Can you trust me with that letter?"

"No; but I can tell you by whom it is signed."

"Please to do so."

"By the Countess de Charny."

"The Countess de Charny," repeated Gilbert. "I do not know her. I have done nothing to displease her."

And he raised his head gently, as if endeavoring to recall to mind the name of the person in question.

“There is, moreover, a small postscript,” continued Necker, “without any signature, but written in a hand I know.”

Gilbert stooped down and read in the margin of the letter: —

“Do what the Countess de Charny demands immediately.”

“It is strange,” said Gilbert. “I can readily conceive why the queen should have signed it, for I mentioned both her and the Polignacs in my essays. But Madame de Charny — ”

“Do you not know her?”

“It must be an assumed name. Besides, it is not at all to be wondered at that the notabilities of Versailles should be unknown to me. I have been absent from France for fifteen years, during which time I only came back twice; and I returned after my second visit to it, some four years ago. Who is this Countess de Charny?”

“The friend, the bosom companion of the queen; the much beloved wife of the Count de Charny; a woman who is both beautiful and virtuous, — a prodigy, in short.”

“Well, then, I do not know this prodigy.”

“If such be the case, doctor, be persuaded of this, that you are the victim of some political intrigue. Have you never spoken of Count Cagliostro?”

“Yes.”

“Were you acquainted with him?”

“He was my friend. He was even more than my friend; he was my master, my saviour.”

“Well, then, either Austria or the Holy See must have demanded your incarceration. You have published some pamphlets, have you not?”

“Alas! yes.”

“That is it, precisely. All their petty revenges point towards the queen, like the magnetic needle which points towards the pole, — the iron towards the loadstone. They have been conspiring against you; they have had you followed. The queen has ordered Madame de Charny to sign the letter, in order to prevent any suspicion; and now all the mystery is cleared up.”

Gilbert reflected for a moment. This moment of reflection reminded him of the box which had been stolen from Billot’s house; and with which neither the queen, nor Austria, nor the Holy See had any connection. This recollection led his mind to consider the matter in its right point of view.

“No,” said he, “it is not that; it cannot be that. But it matters not. Let us talk of something else.”

“Of what?”

“Of you.”

“Of me? What can you have to say of me?”

“Only what you know as well as any one else. It is that before three days have elapsed you will be reinstated in your ministerial capacity; and then you may govern France as despotically as you please.”

“Do you think so?” said Necker, smiling.

“And you think so, too, since you are not at Brussels.”

“Well then,” exclaimed Necker, “what will be the result? For it is the result I wish to come to.”

“Here it is. You are beloved by the French; you will soon be adored by them. The queen was already tired of seeing you beloved. The king will grow tired of seeing you adored. They will acquire popularity at your expense, and you will not suffer it. Then you will become unpopular in your turn. The people, my dear Monsieur de Necker is like a starving lion, which licks only the hand that supplies it with food, be it whose hand it may.”

“After that?”

“After that you will again be lost in oblivion.”

“I — lost in oblivion?”

“Alas! yes.”

“And what will cause me to be forgotten?”

“The events of the times.”

“My word of honor for it, you speak like a prophet.”

“It is my misfortune to be one to a certain extent.”

“Let us hear now what will happen?”

“Oh, it is not difficult to predict what will happen, for that which is to happen is already in embryo in the Assembly. A party will arise that is slumbering at this moment. I am mistaken; it is not slumbering, but it hides itself. This party has for its chief a principle, and its weapon is an idea.”

“I understand you; you mean the Orleanist party?”

“No. I should have said of that one that its chief was a man, and its weapon popularity. I speak to you of a party whose name has not even yet been pronounced. Of the republican party.”

“Of the republican party? Ah! that is too ridiculous.”

“Do you not believe in its existence?”

“A chimera.”

“Yes, a chimera, with a mouth of fire that will devour you all.”

“Well, then, I shall become a republican. I am one already.”

“A republican from Geneva, certainly.”

“But it seems to me that a republican is a republican.”

“There is your mistake, my good baron. Our republicans do not resemble the republicans of other countries. Our republicans will first have to devour all privileges, then the nobility, and after that the monarchy. You may start with our republicans, but they will reach the goal without you, for you will not desire to follow them so far. No, Monsieur de Necker, you are mistaken; you are not a republican.”

“Oh, if you understand it in that sense, no; I love the king.”

“And I too,” said Gilbert; “and everybody at this moment loves him as we do. If I were to say this to a mind of less calibre than yours, I should be hooted and laughed at; but believe what I tell you, Monsieur de Necker.”

“I would readily do so, indeed, if there were any probability of such an event; but — ”

“Do you know any of the secret societies?”

“I have heard them much spoken of.”

“Do you believe in their existence?”

“I believe in their existence, but I do not believe they are very extensively disseminated.”

“Are you affiliated to any one of them?”

“No.”

“Do you belong even to a Masonic lodge?”

“No.”

“Well, then, Monsieur de Necker, I do.”

“Are you affiliated to any of these societies?”

“Yes, to all of them. Beware, Monsieur de Necker; they form an immense net that surrounds every throne. It is an invisible dagger that threatens every monarchy. We form a brotherhood of about three millions of men, scattered abroad in every land, disseminated throughout all classes of society. We have friends among the people, among the citizens, among the nobility, among princes, among sovereigns themselves. Take care, Monsieur de Necker; the prince with whom you might be irritated is perhaps an affiliated member. The valet who humbles himself in your presence may be an affiliated member. Your life is not yours; your fortune is not your own; your honor even is not yours. All this is directed by an invisible power, which you cannot combat, for you do not know it, and which may crush you because it knows you. Well, these three millions of men, do you see, who have already made the American republic, these three millions of men will try to form a French republic; then they will try to make a European republic."

"But," said Necker, "their republic of the United States does not alarm me much, and I willingly accept such a form of government."

"Yes, but between America and ourselves there is a deep gulf. America is a new country, without prejudices, without aristocratic privileges, without monarchy. It has a fertile soil, productive land, and virgin forests; America, which is situated between a sea which serves as an outlet for its commerce, and an immense solitude which is a source of wealth to its population, while France, — just consider how much it would be necessary to destroy in France before France can resemble America!"

"But, in fine, what do you intend to prove by this?"

"I mean to point out to you the path into which we are inevitably forced. But I would endeavor to advance into it without causing any shock, by placing the king at the head of the movement."

"As a standard?"

"No, but as a shield."

"A shield!" observed Necker, smiling. "You know but little of the king if you wish to make him play such a part."

"Pardon me, — I know him well. Oh, gracious heaven! I know full well he is a man similar to a thousand others whom I have seen at the head of small districts in America; he is a good man without majesty, incapable of resistance, without originality of mind. But what would you have? Were it only for his sacred title, he would still be a rampart against those men of whom I was speaking to you a short time ago; and however weak the rampart may be, we like it better than no defence at all.

"I remember in our wars with the savage tribes of North America," continued Gilbert, "I remember having passed whole nights behind a clump of bulrushes, while the enemy was on the opposite bank of the river, and firing upon us.

"A bulrush is certainly no great defence. Still, I must frankly acknowledge to you, Monsieur de Necker, that my heart beat more freely behind those large green tubes, which were cut through by the bullets as if they were thread papers, than it did in the open field. Well, then, the king is my rush. It allows me to see the enemy, and it prevents the enemy from seeing me. That is the reason why I am a republican at New York or at Philadelphia, but a royalist in France. There our dictator was named Washington. Here, God knows what he will be named: either dagger or scaffold.”

“You seem to view things in colors of blood, Doctor.”

“You would see them in the same light as myself, if you had been, as I was, on the Place de Grève to-day.”

“Yes, that is true; I was told that a massacre had taken place there.”

“There is something magnificent, do you see, in the people; but it is when well disposed. Oh, human tempests!” exclaimed Gilbert, “how much do you surpass in fury all the tempests of the skies!”

Necker became thoughtful.

“Why can I not have you near me, Doctor?” said he; “you would be a useful counsellor in time of need.”

“Near you, Monsieur de Necker? I should not be so useful to you, nor so useful to France, as where I wish to go.”

“And where do you wish to go?”

“Listen to me, sir; near the throne itself there is a great enemy of the throne; near the king there is a great enemy of the king; it is the queen. Poor woman! who forgets that she is the daughter of Maria Theresa, or rather, who only remembers it in a vain-glorious point of view; she thinks to save the king, and ruins more than the king, for she destroys the monarchy. Well, it is necessary that we who love the king, we who love France, should unite together to neutralize her power, and to annihilate her influence.”

“Well, then, do as I said, sir: remain with me, assist me.”

“If I were to remain near you, we should have but one sphere of action; you would be I, and I should be you. We must separate our forces, sir, and then they will acquire a double weight.”

“And, with all that, what can we accomplish?”

“We may retard the catastrophe, perhaps, but certainly we cannot prevent it, although I can answer for the assistance of a powerful auxiliary, the Marquis de Lafayette.”

“Is not Lafayette a republican?”

“As far as a Lafayette can be a republican. If we are absolutely to submit to the level of equality, believe me, we had better choose the level of nobility. I like equality that elevates, and not that which lowers mankind."

"And you can answer for Lafayette?"

"Yes, so long as we shall require nothing of him but honor, courage, and devotedness."

"Well, then, speak; tell me what is it you desire?"

"A letter of introduction to his Majesty, Louis XVI."

"A man of your worth does not need a letter of introduction; he may present himself without it."

"No, it suits me that I should be your creature; it is part of my project to be presented by you."

"And what is your ambition?"

"To become one of the king's physicians in ordinary."

"Oh, there is nothing more easy. But the queen?"

"When I have once seen the king, that will be my own affair."

"But if she should persecute you?"

"Then I will make the king assert his will."

"The king assert his will? You will be more than a man if you accomplish that."

"He who can control the physical part of a man, must be a great simpleton indeed if he does not some day succeed in controlling the mind."

"But do you not think that having been imprisoned in the Bastille is but a sorry recommendation for you, who wish to become the king's physician."

"On the contrary, it is the very best. Have I not been, according to you, persecuted for the crime of philosophy?"

"I fear such is the case."

"Then the king will vindicate his reputation; the king will become popular by taking as his physician a pupil of Rousseau, a partisan of the new doctrines, — a prisoner who has left the Bastille, in short. The first time you see him, make him duly weigh the advantage of such a course."

"You are always in the right; but when once you are employed by the king, can I rely upon you?"

"Entirely, so long as you shall follow the line of politics which we shall adopt."

"What will you promise me?"

"To warn you of the precise moment when you must retreat."

Necker looked at Gilbert for a moment; then in a more thoughtful tone: —

"Indeed; that is the greatest service which a devoted friend can render to a minister, for it is the last one."

And he seated himself at his table to write to the king.

While he was thus occupied, Gilbert was again examining the letter demanding his arrest; he several times repeated, —

"The Countess de Charny? Who can she be?"

"Here, sir," said Necker, a few moments after, while he presented Gilbert with the letter he had just written.

Gilbert took the letter and read it.

It contained the following lines: —

SIRE, — Your Majesty needs the services of a trustworthy person, with whom you may converse upon your affairs. My last gift, my last service in leaving the king, is the present I make him of Doctor Gilbert.

It will be sufficient for me to tell your Majesty that Doctor Gilbert is not only one of the most skilful physicians living, but also the author of the works entitled "Administrations and Politics," which made so lively an impression upon your mind.

At your Majesty's feet,
BARON DE NECKER.

Necker did not date the letter, and gave it to Doctor Gilbert, closed only with an ordinary seal.

"And now," added he, "I am again at Brussels, am I not?"

"Yes, certainly, and more so than ever. To-morrow morning, at all events, you shall hear from me."

The baron struck against the panel in a peculiar manner. Madame de Staël again appeared; only this time, in addition to her branch of pomegranate, she held one of Doctor Gilbert's pamphlets in her hands.

She showed him the title of it with a sort of flattering coquetry.

Gilbert took leave of Monsieur de Necker, and kissed the hand of the baroness, who accompanied him to the door of the cabinet.

And he returned to his coach, where he found Pitou and Billot sleeping upon the front seat, the coachman sleeping on his box, and the horses sleeping upon their exhausted limbs.

CHAPTER XXII.

The King Louis XVI

THE interview between Gilbert, Madame de Staël, and Monsieur de Necker had lasted about an hour and a half. Gilbert re-entered Paris at a quarter-past nine o’clock, drove straight to the post-house, ordered horses and a post-chaise; and while Billot and Pitou were gone to rest themselves, after their fatigue, in a small hotel in the Rue Thiroux, where Billot generally put up when he came to Paris, Gilbert set off at a gallop on the road to Versailles.

It was late, but that mattered little to Gilbert. To men of his nature, activity is a necessity. Perhaps his journey might be a fruitless one. But he even preferred a useless journey to remaining motionless. For nervous temperaments, uncertainty is a greater torment than the most frightful reality.

He arrived at Versailles at half-past ten; in ordinary times, every one would have been in bed and wrapped in the profoundest slumber; but that night no eye was closed at Versailles. They had felt the counter-shock of the terrible concussion with which Paris was still trembling.

The French Guards, the body-guards, the Swiss, drawn up in platoons and grouped near the openings of all the principal streets, were conversing among themselves, or with those of the citizens whose fidelity to the monarchy inspired them with confidence.

For Versailles has, at all times, been a royalist city. Religious respect for the monarchy, if not for the monarch, is engrafted in the hearts of its inhabitants, as if it were a quality of its soil. Having always lived near kings, and fostered by their bounty, beneath the shade of their wonders, —having always inhaled the intoxicating perfume of the *fleurs-de-lys,* and seen the brilliant gold of their garments, and the smiles upon their august lips, the inhabitants of Versailles, for whom kings have built a city of marble and porphyry, feel almost kings themselves; and even at the present day, even now, when moss is growing round the marble, and grass is springing up between the slabs of the pavement, now that gold has almost disappeared from the wainscoting, and that the shady walks of the parks are more solitary than a graveyard, Versailles must either belie its origin, or must consider itself as a fragment of the fallen monarchy, and no longer feeling the pride of power and wealth, must at least retain the poetical associations of regret, and the sovereign charms of melancholy. Thus, as we have already stated, all Versailles, in the night between the 14th and 15th July, 1789, was confusedly agitated, anxious to ascertain how the King of France would reply to the insult offered to the throne, and the deadly wound inflicted on his power.

By his answer to Monsieur de Dreux Brézé, Mirabeau had struck royalty in the face.

By the taking of the Bastille, the people had struck royalty to the heart.

Still, to narrow-minded and short-sighted persons the question seemed easy of solution. In the eyes of military men in particular, who were accustomed to see nothing more than the triumph or defeat of brute-force in the result of events, it was merely necessary to march upon Paris. Thirty thousand men and twenty pieces of cannon would soon reduce to a nonentity the conceit and the victorious fury of the Parisians.

Never had monarchy so great a number of advisers, for everybody uttered his opinions loudly and publicly.

The most moderate said: —

“It is a very simple matter.”

This form of language, it will be observed, is nearly always applied, with us, to the most difficult circumstances.

“It is a very simple matter,” said they. “Let them begin by obtaining from the National Assembly a sanction which it will not refuse. Its attitude has, for some time, been reassuring to every one; it will not countenance violence committed by the lower classes, any more than abuses perpetrated by the upper.

“The Assembly will plainly declare that insurrection is a crime; that citizens who have representatives to explain their griefs to the king, and a king to do them justice, are wrong in having recourse to arms and in shedding blood.

“Being once armed with this declaration, which could certainly be obtained from the Assembly, the king could not avoid chastising Paris, like a good parent, that is to say, severely.

“And then the tempest would be allayed, and the monarchy would regain the first of its rights. The people would return to their duty, which is obedience, and things would go on in the usual way.”

It was thus that the people in general were settling this great question, upon the squares and the Boulevards.

But before the Place d’Armes, and in the vicinity of the barracks, they treated the subject very differently.

There could be seen men altogether unknown in the neighborhood, men with intelligent countenances and sinister looks, disseminating mysterious advice to all around them, exaggerating the news which was already sufficiently serious, and propagating, almost publicly, the seditious ideas which during two months had agitated Paris and excited the suburbs. Round these men groups were forming, some gloomy and hostile, some excited, composed of people whom these orators were reminding of their misery, their sufferings, the brutal disdain of the monarchy for the privations of the people. An orator said to them: —

“During eight centuries that the people have struggled, what have they obtained? Nothing. No social rights; no political rights. What is their fate? That of the farmer’s cow, from whom its calf is led to the shambles, its milk to be sold at the market, its meat to be taken to the slaughter-house, its skin to be dried at the tannery. In short, pressed by want, the monarchy has yielded, it has made an appeal to the States; but now that the States are assembled, what does the monarchy? Since the day of their convocation it weighs heavily upon them. If the National Assembly is formed, it is against the will of the monarchy. Well, then! since our brethren of Paris have just given us such vigorous assistance, let us urge the National Assembly onward. Each step which it takes in the political arena, where the battle has begun, is a victory for us: it is the extension of our field, it is the increase of our fortune, it is the consecration of our rights. Forward! forward, citizens! The Bastille is but the outwork of tyranny! The Bastille is taken; the citadel is before us!”

In remote corners other meetings were formed, and other words pronounced. Those who pronounced them were men evidently belonging to a superior class, who had sought in the costume of the vulgar a disguise with which their white hands and distinguished accent contrasted strangely.

“People,” exclaimed these men, “in truth, you are deceived on both sides! Some ask you to retrace your steps, while others urge you onward. Some speak to you of political rights, of social rights; but are you happier for having been permitted to vote through the medium of your delegates? Are you any the richer since you have been represented? Have you been less hungry, now that the National Assembly makes decrees? No. Leave politics, then, to those who can read. It is not a written phrase or maxim that you need. It is bread, and again bread; it is the well-being of your children, the tranquillity and security of your wives. Who will give you all that? A king, firm in character, young in mind, and of a generous heart. That king is not Louis XVI., — Louis XVI., who is ruled by his wife, the iron-hearted Austrian. It is — search carefully round the throne; search there for him who can render France happy, and whom the queen naturally detests, and that because he throws a shadow over the picture, because he loves the French, and is beloved by them."

Thus did public opinion manifest itself at Versailles; thus was civil war fomented everywhere.

Gilbert observed several of these groups, and then, having perceived the state of the public mind, he walked straight to the palace, which was guarded by numerous military posts, to protect it against whom no one knew.

Notwithstanding all these precautions, Gilbert, without the slightest difficulty, crossed the first courtyard, and reached the vestibule without having been asked by any one where he was going.

When he arrived at the Hall of the Œil-de-Bœuf, he was stopped by one of the body-guards. Gilbert drew from his pocket the letter of Monsieur de Necker, whose signature he showed.

The guard cast his eyes over it. The instructions he had received were very strict; and as the strictest instructions are precisely those which most need to be interpreted, the guard said to Gilbert: —

"The order, sir, to allow no one to visit the king is positive; but as the case of a person sent by Monsieur de Necker was evidently not foreseen, and as, according to all probability, you are the bearer of important information to his Majesty, go in. I will take the responsibility upon myself."

Gilbert entered.

The king was not in his apartments, but in the council-room. He was just receiving a deputation from the National Guard of Paris, which had come to request the dismissal of the troops, the formation of a guard of citizens, and his presence in the capital.

Louis had listened coldly; then he had replied that the situation of affairs required investigation; and that, moreover, he was about to deliberate on the subject with his council.

And, accordingly, he deliberated.

During this time the deputies were waiting in the gallery; and through the ground-glass windows of the doors they could observe the shadows of the royal councillors and the threatening attitude which they assumed.

By the study of this species of phantasmagoria they could foresee that the answer would be unfavorable.

In fact, the king contented himself with saying that he would appoint some officers for the national militia, and would order the troops at the Champ-de-Mars to fall back.

As to his presence in Paris, he would only show this favor when the rebellious city had completely submitted.

The deputation begged, insisted, and conjured. The king replied that his heart was grieved, but that he could do nothing more.

And satisfied with this momentary triumph and this manifestation of a power which he no longer possessed, the king returned to his apartment.

He there found Gilbert. The guard was standing near him.

“What is wanted of me?” asked the king.

The body-guard approached him, and while he was apologizing to the king for having disobeyed his orders, Gilbert, who for many years had not seen the king, was silently examining the man whom God had given to France as her pilot during the most violent tempest the country had ever experienced.

That stout, short body, in which there was neither elasticity nor majesty; that inexpressive and low-formed brow; that pallid youthfulness contending against premature old age; the unequal struggle between a powerful physical organization, and a mediocre intelligence, to which the haughtiness of rank alone gave a fitful importance, — all these to the physiognomist who had studied with Lavater, to the magnetizer who had read the future with Balsamo, to the philosopher who had dreamed with Jean Jacques, to the traveller, in short, who had passed all the human races in review, — all these implied degeneracy, dwindling, impotence, and ruin.

Gilbert was therefore struck dumb, not from a feeling of respect, but from grief, while contemplating this mournful spectacle.

The king advanced towards him.

"It is you," said he, "who bring me a letter from Monsieur de Necker?"

"Yes, Sire."

"Ah!" cried he, as if he had doubted it; "give it to me quickly."

And he pronounced these words in the tone of a drowning man who cries, "A rope!"

Gilbert presented the letter to the king.

Louis immediately grasped it, read it hurriedly, then, with a gesture which was not altogether wanting in nobleness of manner: —

"Leave us, Monsieur de Varicourt," said he to the body-guard.

Gilbert remained alone with the king. The room was lighted but by a single lamp. It might have been thought that the king had diminished the quantity of light, in order that no one should perceive on his wearied rather than careworn brow the anxious thoughts which crowded there.

"Sir," said he, fixing upon Gilbert a clearer and more penetrating gaze than the latter would have thought him capable of, — "Sir, is it true that you are the author of the memoirs which have so much struck me?"

"Yes, Sire."

"What is your age?"

"Thirty-two years, Sire; but study and misfortune double age. Treat me as if I were an old man."

"Why did you omit so long to present yourself to me?"

"Because, Sire, I did not wish to tell your Majesty aloud what I could write to you more freely and more easily."

Louis XVI. reflected.

"Had you no other reason?" said he, suspiciously.

"No, Sire."

"But still, either I am mistaken, or there were some peculiar circumstances which ought to have convinced you of my kindly feeling towards you."

"Your Majesty intends to speak of that sort of rendezvous which I had the temerity to give the king, when, after my first memoir, I begged him, five years ago, to place a light near his window, at eight o'clock in the evening, to indicate that he had read my work."

"And — ?" said the king, with an air of satisfaction.

"And on the day and at the hour appointed, the light was, in fact, placed where I had asked you to place it."

"And afterwards?"

"Afterwards I saw it lifted up and set down again three times."

"And then?"

"After that I read the following words in the 'Gazette:' —

"'He whom the light has called three times may present himself to him who has raised it three times, when he will be compensated.'"

"Those are, in fact, the very words of the advertisement," said the king.

"And there is the advertisement itself," said Gilbert, drawing from his pocket the number of the 'Gazette' in which the advertisement he had just alluded to had been published five years previously.

"Well — very well," said the king. "I have long expected you. You arrive at a moment I had quite ceased to expect you. You are welcome; for you come, like good soldiers, at the moment of battle."

Then, looking once more attentively at Gilbert: —

"Do you know, sir," said he to him, "that it is not an ordinary thing for a king to await the arrival of a person to whom he has said, 'Come to receive your reward,' and that that person should abstain from coming."

Gilbert smiled.

"Come now, tell me," said Louis XVI., "why did you not come?"

"Because I deserved no reward, Sire."

"For what reason?"

"Born a Frenchman, loving my country, anxious for its prosperity, confounding my individuality with that of thirty millions of men, my fellow-citizens, I labored for myself while laboring for them. A man is not worthy of reward when he labors for his own interest."

"That is a paradox, sir; you had another reason."

Gilbert did not reply.

"Speak, sir; I desire it."

"Perhaps, Sire, you have guessed rightly."

"Is not this it?" asked the king in an anxious tone. "You found the position a very serious one, and you kept yourself in reserve."

"For one still more serious. Yes, Sire, your Majesty has divined the truth."

"I like frankness," said the king, who could not conceal his agitation; for he was of a timid nature, and blushed easily.

"Then," continued Louis XVI., "you predicted the king's fall to him, and you feared to be placed too near the ruins."

"No, Sire, since it is just at the moment that danger is most imminent that I come to face the danger."

"Yes, yes; you have just left Necker, and you speak like him. The danger! — the danger! Without doubt it is dangerous at this moment to approach me. And where is Necker?"

"Quite ready, I believe, to obey the orders of your Majesty."

"So much the better; I shall want him," said the king, with a sigh. "In politics we must not be headstrong. We think to do good, and we do wrong. We even do good, and some capricious event mars our projects; and though the plans laid were in reality good, we are accused of having been mistaken."

The king sighed again. Gilbert came to his assistance.

"Sire," said he, "your Majesty reasons admirably; but what is desirable at the present moment is, to see into the future more clearly than has been done hitherto."

The king raised his head, and his inexpressive eyebrows slightly frowned.

"Sire, forgive me," said Gilbert; "I am a physician. When the danger is imminent, I speak briefly."

"Do you, then, attach much importance to the riot of to-day?"

"Sire, it is not a riot — it is a revolution."

"And you wish me to make terms with rebels and assassins? For, in fine, they have taken the Bastille by force: it is an act of rebellion; they have killed Monsieur de Launay, Monsieur de Losme, and Monsieur de Flesselles: it is murder."

"I wish you to distinguish more correctly, Sire. Those who, took the Bastille are heroes; those who assassinated Messieurs de Flesselles, de Losme, and de Launay are murderers."

The king colored slightly, and almost immediately this color disappeared, his lips became pale, and a few drops of perspiration trickled down his forehead.

"You are right, sir. You are a physician indeed, or a surgeon rather, for you cut to the quick. But let us return to the object of our interview. You are Doctor Gilbert, are you not, — or at least it is with this name that your memoirs are signed?"

“Sire, it does me great honor that your Majesty has so good a memory, although, taking it all in all, I have no great reason to be proud of my name.”

“How is that?”

“My name must, indeed, have been pronounced before your Majesty, and that not long ago.”

“I do not understand you.”

“Six days ago I was arrested and thrown into the Bastille. Now I have heard it said that no arrest of any importance was ever made without the king being aware of the fact.”

“You in the Bastille!” said the king, opening his eyes widely.

“Here is the registration of my imprisonment, Sire. Put in prison, as I have the honor to tell your Majesty, six days ago, by order of the king, I came out of it at three o’clock to-day, by the grace of the people.”

“To-day?”

“Yes, Sire. Did your Majesty hear the cannon?”

“Most undoubtedly.”

“Well, then, the cannon opened the gates for me.”

“Ah!” murmured the king, “I would willingly say that I am pleased at this event, had not the cannon of this morning been fired at the Bastille and the monarchy at the same time.”

“Oh, Sire, do not make a prison the symbol of a principle: say, on the contrary, Sire, that you rejoice that the Bastille is taken: for henceforward injustice will not be committed in the king’s name without his cognizance, — injustice similar to that of which I have just been the victim.”

“But surely, sir, your arrest must have had a cause?”

“None that I know of, Sire; I was arrested on my return to France, and imprisoned, that is all.”

“Really, sir,” said Louis XVI., kindly, “is there not some egotism on your part, in speaking to me thus of yourself, when I so much need to have my own position spoken of?”

“Sire, all I require is, that your Majesty will answer me one single question.”

“What is it?”

“Was or was not your Majesty concerned in my arrest?”

“I was not even aware of your return to France.”

“I rejoice at this answer, Sire; I shall then be enabled to declare openly that when your Majesty is supposed to do wrong, you are nearly always calumniated; and to those who doubt it, I can cite myself as an example.”

The king smiled.

“As a physician,” said he, “you pour balm into the wound.”

“Oh, Sire, I shall pour in the balm abundantly; and if you desire it I will cure the wound, that I will answer for.”

“I most assuredly desire it.”

“You must desire it very firmly, Sire.”

“I do desire it firmly.”

“Before going any farther, Sire,” said Gilbert, “will you read that line written in the margin of my jail-book entry?”

“What line?” asked the king in an anxious tone.

Gilbert presented the page to the king. The king read: “‘By request of the queen.’“

The king frowned.

“Of the queen!” said he; “can you have incurred her displeasure?”

“Sire, I am certain her Majesty knows me still less than did your Majesty.”

“But still, you must have committed some fault; a man is not sent to the Bastille for nothing.”

“It would seem that he may be, since I have just come out of it.”

“But Monsieur Necker has sent you to me, and the warrant of imprisonment was signed by him.”

“It was so undoubtedly.”

“Then explain yourself more clearly. Review your past life. See if you do not find some circumstance in it which you had yourself forgotten.”

“Review my past life! Yes, Sire; I shall do it, and aloud; do not fear, it will not occupy much time. I have labored without intermission since I attained the age of sixteen: the pupil of Jean Jacques, the companion of Balsamo, the friend of Lafayette and of Washington, I have never had cause to reproach myself, since the day that I left France, for a single fault, nor even an error. When acquired science permitted me to attend the wounded or the sick, I always thought myself responsible to God for every one of my thoughts, and every action. Since God has given me the care of human beings as a surgeon, I have shed blood for the sake of humanity, while ready to give my own to soothe or to save my patient; as a physician, I have always been a consoler, and sometimes a benefactor. Fifteen years have thus passed away. God has blessed my efforts: I have seen return to life the greater part of the afflicted, who have all kissed my hands. Those who have died, have been taken away by the will of God. No, I repeat, Sire, since the day when I left France, and that was fifteen years ago, I have done nothing with which I can reproach myself."

"You have in America associated with innovators, and your writings have propagated their principles."

"Yes, Sire; and I forgot this claim to the gratitude of kings and men."

The king was silent.

"Sire," continued Gilbert, "now my life is known to you; I have neither offended nor wounded any one, — neither a beggar nor a queen, — and I come to ask your Majesty why I have been punished."

"I shall speak to the queen, Monsieur Gilbert; but do you think the *lettre de cachet* comes directly from the queen?"

"I do not say that, Sire; I even think the queen merely recommended it."

"Ah! you see," cried Louis, quite joyfully.

"Yes; but you are aware, Sire, that what a queen recommends, she commands."

"At whose request was the *lettre de cachet* granted? May I see it?"

"Yes, Sire," said Gilbert. "Look at it."

And he presented him the entry in the jail-book.

"The Countess de Charny!" exclaimed the king. "How, it is she who caused your arrest? But what can you have done to this poor Charny?"

"I did not even know that lady by name this morning, Sire."

Louis passed his hand over his brow.

"Charny," murmured he, "Charny, — sweetness, virtue, chastity itself."

"You will see, Sire," said Gilbert, laughing, "that I was imprisoned in the Bastille at the request of the three theological virtues!"

"Oh, I will clear this up at once!" said the king.

And he pulled a bell.

An usher appeared.

"See if the Countess de Charny is with the queen," said Louis.

"Sire," said the usher, "the countess has this instant crossed the gallery; she is about stepping into her coach."

"Run after her," said Louis, eagerly, "and request her to come to my cabinet on an affair of importance."

Then, turning towards Gilbert: —

“Is that what you desire, sir?” said he.

“Yes, Sire,” answered Gilbert, “and I return a thousand thanks to your Majesty.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Countess de Charny

GILBERT, on hearing the order to send for Madame de Charny, had retired into the recess of a window.

As to the king, he was walking up and down in the room called the Œil-de-Bœuf, preoccupied at times with public affairs, at others with the pertinacity of this Gilbert, by whom, in spite of himself, he felt strangely influenced, and at a moment when nothing ought to have interested him but the affairs of Paris.

Suddenly the door of the cabinet was thrown open, the usher announced the Countess de Charny, and Gilbert, through the closed curtains, could perceive a woman, whose flowing and silken robes grazed the half-opened door.

This lady was dressed, according to the fashion of the times, in a déshabille of gray silk, striped with a variety of colors, with a petticoat of the same stuff, and a sort of shawl, which, after being crossed over the chest, was fastened behind her waist, and showed to great advantage the beauties of a full and well-developed bosom. A small bonnet, coquettishly fixed on the summit of a high head-dress, high-heeled shoes, which showed the exquisite shape of a beautiful instep, a small cane twirled by the gloved fingers of a slender and delicate hand, with tapering and perfectly aristocratic fingers: such was the person so anxiously expected by Gilbert.

The king stepped forward to meet her.

“You were just going out, Countess, I was told.”

“In truth, Sire,” replied the countess, “I was on the point of stepping into my carriage when I received your Majesty’s order.”

On hearing this firm-toned voice, the ears of Gilbert were suddenly assailed as with a rushing sound. The blood instantly suffused his cheeks, and a thousand shudders appeared to thrill through his whole system.

Despite himself, he made a step from the curtain, behind which he had secreted himself.

“She!” stammered he; “she — Andrée — ”

"Madame," continued the king, who, as well as the countess, had not observed the emotion of Gilbert, who was hidden in the shade, "I requested you to visit me, for the purpose of obtaining some information from you."

"I am ready to comply with your Majesty's wishes."

The king leaned in the direction of Gilbert as if to warn him.

The latter, perceiving that the moment to show himself had not yet arrived, gradually withdrew himself again behind the curtain.

"Madame," said the king, "it is now eight or ten days since a warrant of imprisonment was requested of Monsieur de Necker — "

Gilbert, through the almost imperceptible opening between the curtains, fastened his gaze upon Andrée. The young woman was pale, feverish, and anxious, and appeared borne down by the weight of a secret prepossession, for which even she herself could not account.

"You hear me, do you not, Countess?" asked Louis XVI., seeing that Madame de Charny hesitated before answering.

"Yes, Sire."

"Well, do you understand me, and can you answer my question?"

"I am endeavoring to remember," said Andrée.

"Permit me to assist your memory, Countess. The warrant of imprisonment was demanded by you, and the demand was countersigned by the queen."

The countess, instead of answering, appeared to abandon herself more and more to that feverish abstraction which seemed to lead her beyond the limits of real life.

"But answer me, then, Madame," said the king, who began to grow impatient.

"It is true," said she, trembling, "it is true. I wrote the letter, and her Majesty, the queen, countersigned it."

"Then," asked Louis, "tell me the crime which had been committed by the person against whom such a document was required."

"Sire," said Andrée, "I cannot tell you what crime he had committed; but what I can tell you is, that the crime was great."

"Oh, can you not confide that even to me?"

"No, Sire."

"Not to the king?"

"No. I hope your Majesty will forgive me; but I cannot."

“Then you shall tell it to him in person, Madame,” said the king;” for what you have refused to King Louis XVI., you cannot refuse to Doctor Gilbert.”

“To Doctor Gilbert!” exclaimed Andrée. “Great God! where is he then?”

The king stepped aside to allow Gilbert to advance; the curtains were thrown apart, and the doctor appeared, almost as pale as Andrée.

“Here he is, Madame,” said he.

At the sight of Gilbert, the countess staggered. Her limbs shook beneath her. She fell backwards, as does a person who is about to faint, and only maintained a standing position with the assistance of an arm-chair, on which she leaned in the sorrowful, motionless, and almost unconscious attitude of Eurydice at the moment when the serpent’s venom reaches her heart.

“Madame,” said Gilbert, bowing to her with mock politeness, “allow me to repeat the question which has just been put to you by his Majesty.”

The lips of Andrée could be seen to move, but no sound issued from them.

“What offence had I committed, Madame, that an order from you should have caused me to be thrown into a loathsome dungeon?”

On hearing this voice, Andrée bounded as if she had felt the tearing asunder of the fibres of her heart.

Then, on a sudden, casting upon Gilbert an icy look, like that of a serpent: —

“Me, sir?” said she. “I do not know you.”

But while she pronounced these words, Gilbert, on his side, had looked at her with such intentness, he had loaded the brightness of his gaze with so much invincible audacity, that the countess cast down her eyes, completely overpowered.

“Countess,” said the king, in a mild tone of reproach, “see where the abuse of a signature may lead you. Here is a gentleman whom you do not know, and you yourself confess it; a man who is a great practitioner, a profound physician, a man who can be reproached for nothing.”

Andrée raised her head, and almost petrified Gilbert by her contemptuous look.

He, however, remained calm and proud.

“I say, then,” continued the king, “that having no cause for complaint against Monsieur Gilbert, by thus persecuting him instead of another, it is on the head of an innocent man that punishment has fallen. Countess, this is wrong."

"Sire," said Andrée.

"Ah!" interrupted the king, who already trembled for fear of disobliging the favorite of his wife, "I know that you are kind-hearted, and that if you have punished some one through hatred, that person must have deserved it; but you see that it will be necessary, in future, to avoid the recurrence of such mistakes."

Then, turning towards Gilbert: —

"You see, Doctor, it is the fault of the times, rather than that of men. We are born in corruption, and we die in it; but we will endeavor at least to ameliorate the condition of posterity, and you will, I trust, assist me in this work, Doctor Gilbert."

And Louis ceased speaking, thinking he had said enough to satisfy both parties.

Poor king! had he pronounced those words before the National Assembly, not only would he have been applauded, but, moreover, he would have seen them reproduced in all the court journals.

But the two unrelenting enemies present at this interview appreciated but little his conciliating philosophy.

"With your Majesty's permission," said Gilbert, "I will request the countess to repeat what she has already stated, namely, that she does not know me."

"Countess," said the king, "will you do what the doctor requests of you?"

"I do not know Doctor Gilbert," repeated Andrée in a firm voice.

"But you know another Gilbert, my namesake, — the Gilbert whose crime has been visited on me."

"Oh," said Andrée, "I know that person, and I consider him an infamous wretch."

"Sire, it would not become me to interrogate the countess," said Gilbert; "but deign to ask her of what that infamous man has been guilty."

"Countess, you cannot refuse acceding to so just a request."

"What he has done" said Andrée. "Doubtless the queen knew of what crime he had been guilty, since with her own hand she authorized the letter by means of which I applied for his arrest."

"But," said the king, "it is not quite sufficient that the queen should be convinced; it is necessary that I too should be convinced. The queen is the queen, but I am the king.”

“Well then, Sire, the Gilbert mentioned in the warrant is a man who, sixteen years ago, committed a most fearful crime.”

“Will your Majesty ask the countess how old that man is at the present day?”

The king repeated the question.

“From thirty to thirty-two,” said Andrée.

“Sire,” rejoined Gilbert, “if the crime was committed sixteen years ago, it was not committed by a man, but by a child; and if, during these sixteen years, the man has deplored the crime committed by the child, does not that man deserve some little leniency?”

“But, sir,” asked the king, “you then know the Gilbert in question?”

“I know him, Sire,” said Gilbert.

“And has he committed no other fault except this one of his early youth?”

“I do not know that since the day on which he committed — I will not say that fault, Sire, for I am less indulgent than you — but that crime, I do not know that any one in this world has aught to reproach him with.”

“No, unless it is having dipped his pen in poison, and having composed the most odious libels,” cried Andrée.

“Sire, please to ask the countess,” said Gilbert, “if the real object of the arrest of this Gilbert was not to afford every facility to his enemies, or rather to his enemy, to obtain possession of a certain casket containing certain papers, which might have compromised a great lady, a lady of the court.”

Andrée trembled from head to foot.

“Monsieur,” faltered she.

“Countess, what is this casket?” asked the king, who had perceived the trembling and the pallor of the countess.

“Ah, Madame,” cried Gilbert, feeling that he was gaining the mastery, “no tergiversation, — no subterfuge. There have been misstatements enough on both sides. I am the Gilbert who committed the crime; I am the Gilbert of the libels; I am the Gilbert of the casket. You — you are the great lady, — the lady of the court. I call upon the King to be our judge; accept him, and we will tell to this judge, — to the King — to God, — we will tell all that has occurred between us; and the King shall decide, while we await the judgment of God.”

"Say what you will, sir," rejoined the Countess, "but I can say nothing; I do not know you."

"And you know nothing of this casket either?"

The countess convulsively closed her hands and bit her pale lips till they bled.

"No," said she, "I know no more of it than I do of you."

But the effort she made to pronounce these words was such, that her body trembled as does a statue on its pedestal during an earthquake.

"Madame, beware," said Gilbert. "I am, as you can hardly have forgotten, the pupil of a man called Joseph Balsamo. The power which he possessed over you, he has transmitted to me. For the last time, will you answer the question I put to you: My casket?"

"No," cried the countess, a prey to the most indescribable agitation, and making a movement to rush out of the room; "no, no, no!"

"Well, then," said Gilbert, in his turn becoming pale, and raising his threatening arm; "well then! thou iron nature, thou heart of adamant, bend, burst, and break beneath the irresistible pressure of my will. Wilt thou not speak, Andrée?"

"No, no," cried the countess; "help me Sire, help me!"

"Thou shalt speak," cried Gilbert; "and no one, were he the King, or even God himself, can withdraw thee from my power. Thou shalt speak, then; thou shalt reveal thy whole soul to the witness of this solemn scene; and all that is contained in the recesses of thy conscience, — all that which God alone can read in the depths of the deepest souls, you shall know, Sire, from the lips of her who refuses to reveal them. Sleep, Countess de Charny, sleep and speak. I will it!"

Hardly were the words pronounced, when the Countess stopped short in the midst of a suppressed cry, stretched forth her arms, and seeking support for her trembling limbs, fell, as if imploring a refuge, into the arms of the king, who, trembling himself, seated her upon an arm-chair.

"Oh!" said Louis XVI., "I have heard of things of this nature, but I never before witnessed anything to equal it. Is it not to a magnetic sleep that she has just succumbed, sir?"

"Yes, Sire; take the hand of the countess, and ask her why she caused me to be arrested," said Gilbert, as if the right to command belonged to him alone.

Louis XVI., quite thunderstruck by this marvellous scene, took two steps backwards to convince himself that he was not himself asleep, and that what was taking place before him was not a dream; then, like a mathematician who is interested in some new solution, he approached nearer to the countess, whose hand he took in his.

“Let us see, Countess,” said he; “it was then you who caused the arrest of Doctor Gilbert?”

Still, although asleep, the countess made one last effort, snatched her hand from that of the king, and gathering up all her strength: —

“No,” cried she, “I will not speak.”

The king looked at Gilbert, as if to ask him which of the two would overcome the other, — his will or that of Andrée.

Gilbert smiled.

“You will not speak?” said he.

And, his eyes fixed upon the sleeping Andrée, he advanced a step towards the arm-chair.

Andrée shuddered.

“Will you not speak?” added he, taking a second step, which diminished the distance that separated him from the countess.

Every muscle of Andrée’s frame became rigid in a supreme effort of resistance.

“Ah, you will not, speak, then” said he, taking a third stride, which placed him at the side of Andrée, over whose head he placed his outstretched hand; “ah, you will not speak?”

Andrée was writhing in the most fearful convulsions.

“But take care! take care!” cried Louis XVI., “you will kill her!”

“Fear nothing, Sire; it is with the soul alone that I have to contend; the soul is struggling, but it will yield.”

Then, lowering his hand: —

“Speak!” said he.

Andrée extended her arms, and made an effort to breathe, as if she had been under the pressure of a pneumatic machine.

“Speak!” repeated Gilbert, lowering his hand still more.

All the muscles of the young woman’s body seemed about to burst. A fringe of froth appeared upon her lips, and a commencement of epilepsy convulsed her from head to foot.

“Doctor! Doctor!” said the king, “take care!”

But he, without noticing the king, lowered his hand a third time, and touching the top of the countess's head with the palm of that hand: —

"Speak!" said he; "it is my will."

Andrée, on feeling the touch of that hand, heaved a sigh, her arms fell motionless to her side, her head, which had been thrown backwards, fell forward upon her breast, and a copious flood of tears oozed through her closed eyelids.

"My God! my God! my God!" faltered she.

"Invoke the Lord, — be it so; he who operates in the name of God does not fear God."

"Oh!" said the countess, "how I hate you!"

"Abhor me, if you will, but speak!"

"Sire, Sire," exclaimed Andrée, "tell him that he consumes me, that he devours me, that he kills me!"

"Speak!" said Gilbert.

Then he made a sign to the king that he might interrogate her.

"So that, Countess," said the king, again taking her hand, "he whom you wished to arrest, and whom you caused to be arrested, was really the doctor himself?"

"Yes."

"And there was no mistake, no misunderstanding?"

"None."

"And the casket?" said the king.

"Well," articulated the countess slowly, "could I allow that casket to remain in his possession?"

Gilbert and the king exchanged glances.

"And did you take it from him?" said Louis XVI.

"I had it taken from him."

"Oh! oh! tell me how that was managed, Countess," said the king, forgetful of all ceremony, and kneeling down before Andrée. "You had it taken?"

"Yes."

"When, and by what means?"

"I ascertained that this Gilbert, who during sixteen years has already made two voyages to France, was about to make a third one, and this last time with the intention of remaining here."

"But the casket?" asked the king.

“I ascertained by means of the lieutenant of police, Monsieur de Crosne, that during one of his journeys he had bought some lands in the neighborhood of Villers-Cotterets, that the farmer who tenanted his lands enjoyed his whole confidence; I suspected that the casket might be left at his residence.”

“What made you think so?”

“I went to see Mesmer. I made him put me to sleep, and I saw the casket while in that state.”

“It was — ”

“In a large linen wardrobe on the ground-floor, hidden under some linen.”

“This is wonderful!” said the king. “After that tell me what took place.”

“I returned to the house of Monsieur de Crosne, who having been recommended to do so by the queen, gave me one of his most skilful agents.”

“What was the name of this agent” asked Gilbert.

Andrée shuddered as if a hot iron had touched her.

“I ask you his name?” repeated Gilbert.

Andrée endeavored to resist.

“His name; I will know it!” said the doctor.

“Wolfsfoot,” she replied.

“After that?” asked the king.

“Well, then, yesterday morning this man got possession of the casket. That is all.”

“No, it is not all,” said Gilbert. “You must now tell the king where the casket is at this moment.”

“Oh,” said Louis XVI., “you ask too much of her.”

“No, Sire.”

“But by this Wolfsfoot, by means of Monsieur de Crosne, one might ascertain — ”

“Oh, we shall know everything quicker, and much better, through the Countess!”

Andrée, by a convulsive movement, the object of which was doubtless to prevent the words from escaping her lips, clinched her teeth with such violence as almost to break them.

The king pointed out this nervous convulsion to the doctor.

Gilbert smiled.

He touched with his thumb and forefinger the lower part of the face of Andrée, whose muscles were relaxed at the same moment.

“In the first place, Countess, tell the king clearly that this casket belonged to Doctor Gilbert.”

“Yes, yes, it belongs to him,” said the sleeping woman, angrily.

“And where is it at this moment?” asked Gilbert. “Make haste! the king has not time to wait.”

Andrée hesitated for a moment.

“At Wolfsfoot’s house,” said she.

Gilbert observed the hesitation, although it was scarcely perceptible.

“You are telling a falsehood!” said he, “or rather, you are endeavoring to tell one. Where is the casket I insist on knowing.”

“At my house at Versailles,” said Andrée, bursting into tears, with a nervous trembling which shook her whole frame, “at my house, where Wolfsfoot is waiting for me, as we had previously agreed to meet at eleven o’clock to-night.”

Midnight was heard to strike.

“Is he still waiting there?”

“Yes.”

“In which room is he?”

“They have just shown him into the drawing-room.”

“What place does he occupy in the drawing-room?”

“He is standing, and leaning against the chimney-piece.”

“And the casket?”

“It is on the table before him. Oh!”

“What is the matter?”

“Let us hasten to get him out of the house. Monsieur de Charny, who was not to return till to-morrow, will come back to-night, on account of the events that have taken place. I see him; he is at Sèvres. Make him go away, so that the count may not find him in the house.”

“Your Majesty hears that; in what part of Versailles does Madame de Charny reside?”

“Where do you reside, Countess?”

“On the Boulevard de la Reine, Sire.”

“Very well.”

“Sire, your Majesty has heard everything. That casket belongs to me. Does the king order it to be returned to me?”

“Immediately, sir.”

And the king, having drawn a screen before Madame de Charny, which prevented her from being seen, called the officer on duty, and gave him an order in a low voice.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Royal Philosophy

A STRANGE preoccupation for a king whose subjects were undermining his throne. The inquisitiveness of the erudite man applied to a physical phenomenon, while the most important political phenomenon was taking place that France had ever known, — that is to say, the transformation of a monarchy into a democracy. This sight, we say, of a king forgetting himself during the most terrible period of a tempest, would certainly have caused the great minds of the time to smile, bent, as they had been during three months, on the solution of their problem.

While riot was raging in all its fury without, Louis, forgetting the terrible events of the day, — the taking of the Bastille, the assassination of Flesselles, De Launay, and De Losme, the disposition of the National Assembly to revolt against the king, — Louis was concentrating his mind on this examination of a theory; and the revelations of this strange scene absorbed him no less than the most vital interests of his government.

And thus, as soon as he had given the order which we have mentioned to the captain of his guards, he returned to Gilbert, who was removing from the countess the excess of fluid with which he had charged her, in order that her slumber might be more tranquil than under the effects of this convulsive somnambulism.

For an instant the respiration of the countess became calm and easy as that of a sleeping child. Then Gilbert, with a single motion of his hand, reopened her eyes, and put her into a state of ecstasy.

It was then that one could see the extraordinary beauty of Andrée, in all its splendor. Being completely freed from all earthly agitations, the blood, which had for an instant rushed to her face, and which momentarily had colored her cheeks, redescended to her heart, whose pulsations had recovered their natural state. Her face had again become pale, but of that beautiful pallor of the women of the East; her eyes, opened rather more than usual, were raised towards heaven, and left the pupils floating, as it were, in the pearl-like whiteness of their eyeballs; the nose, slightly expanded, appeared to inhale a purer atmosphere; and her lips, which had preserved all their vermilion, although her cheeks had lost a little of theirs, were slightly separated, and discovered a row of pearls, of which the sweet moistness increased the brilliancy.

The head was gently thrown backwards with an inexpressible grace, almost angelic. It might have been said that this fixed look, increasing its scope of vision by its intensity, penetrated to the foot of the throne of God.

The king gazed at her as if dazzled. Gilbert turned away his head and sighed. He could not resist the desire to give Andrée this degree of superhuman beauty; and now, like Pygmalion — more unhappy even than Pygmalion, for he knew the insensibility of the beautiful statue he trembled at the sight of his own production.

He made a sign without even turning his head towards Andrée, and her eyes closed instantly.

The king desired Gilbert to explain to him that marvellous state, in which the soul separates itself from the body, and soars, free, happy, and divine, above all terrestrial miseries.

Gilbert, like all men of truly superior genius, could pronounce the words so much dreaded by mediocrity, “I do not know.” He confessed his ignorance to the king. He had produced a phenomenon which he could not explain. The fact itself existed, but the explanation of the fact could not be given.

“Doctor,” said the king, on hearing this avowal of Gilbert, “this is another of those secrets which Nature reserves for the learned men of another generation, and which will be studied thoroughly, like so many other mysteries which were thought insoluble. We call them mysteries; our fathers would have called them sorcery or witchcraft.”

“Yes, Sire,” answered Gilbert, smiling, “and I should have had the honor to be burned on the Place de Grève, for the greater glory of a religion which was not understood, by wise men without learning, and priests devoid of faith.”

“And under whom did you study this science?” rejoined the king; “was it with Mesmer?”

“Oh, Sire!” said Gilbert, smiling, “I had seen the most astonishing phenomena of the science ten years before the name of Mesmer was pronounced in France.”

“Tell me now; this Mesmer, who has revolutionized all France, was he, in your opinion, a charlatan? It seems to me that you operate much more simply than he. I have heard his experiments spoken of, and also those of Deslon and Puységur. You know all that has been said on the subject, whether idle stories or positive truths.”

“I have carefully observed all these discussions, Sire.”

“Well, then, what do you think of the famous vat or tub?”

“I hope your Majesty will excuse me if I answer doubtingly to all you ask me with regard to the magnetic art. Magnetism has not yet become an art.”

“Ah!”

“But it assuredly is a power, a terrific power, since it annihilates the will, since it isolates the soul from the body, and places the body of the somnambulist in the power of the magnetizer, while the soul does not retain the power, nor even the desire, to defend itself. As for me, Sire, I have seen strange phenomena produced. I have produced many myself. Well, I nevertheless still doubt.”

“How! you still doubt? You perform miracles, and yet you are in doubt?”

“No, I do not doubt — I do not doubt. At this moment even, I have a proof before my eyes of an extraordinary and incomprehensible power. But when that proof has disappeared, when I am at home alone in my library, face to face with all that human science has written during three thousand years; when science says no; when the mind says no; when reason says no, I doubt.”

“And did your master also doubt, Doctor?”

“Perhaps he did, but he was less sincere than I. He did not express his doubt.”

“Was it Deslon? Was it Puységur?”

“No, Sire, no. My master was a man far superior to all the men you have named. I have seen him perform the most marvellous things, especially with regard to wounds. No science was unknown to him. He had impregnated his mind with Egyptian theories. He had penetrated the arcana of ancient Assyrian civilization. He was a profound scholar, a formidable philosopher, having a great knowledge of human life, combined with a persevering will.”

“Have I ever known him?” asked the king.

Gilbert hesitated a moment.

“I ask you whether I ever knew him?”

“Yes, Sire.”

“And you call him — ”

“Sire,” said Gilbert, “to pronounce that name before the king would perhaps render me liable to his displeasure. Now, especially at this moment, when the majority of Frenchmen are contemning all royal authority, I would not throw a shade on the respect we all owe your Majesty.”

“Name that man boldly, Doctor Gilbert; and be persuaded that I too have my philosophy, — a philosophy of sufficiently good material to enable me to smile at all the insults of the present and all the threats of the future.”

Gilbert still continued to hesitate.

The king approached him.

“Sir,” said he to Gilbert, laughing, “call him Satan, if you will; I shall still find a shield to protect me from him, — the one which your dogmatizers do not possess, — one that they never will possess, one which I alone perhaps in this century possess, and bear without feeling shame, — religion.”

“Your Majesty believes as Saint Louis did. It is true,” said Gilbert.

“And in that lies all my strength, I confess, Doctor. I like science; I adore the results of materialism; I am a mathematician, as you well know; you know that the sum total of an addition or an algebraical formula fills my heart with joy; but when I meet people who carry algebra to atheism, I have in reserve my profound, inexhaustible, and eternal faith — a faith which places me a degree above and a degree below them, — above them in good, and beneath them in evil. You see, then, Doctor, that I am a man to whom everything may be said, a king who can hear anything.”

“Sire,” said Gilbert, with a sort of admiration, “I thank your Majesty for what you have just said to me; for you have almost honored me with the confidence of a friend.”

“Oh, I wish,” the timid Louis hastened to exclaim, “I wish all Europe could hear me speak thus. If Frenchmen could read in my heart all the energy of feeling, the tenderness which it contains, I think they would oppose me less.”

The last portion of the king’s sentence, which showed that the king was irritated by the attack the royal prerogative had been subjected to, lowered Louis XVI. in the estimation of Gilbert.

He hastened to say, without attempting to spare the king’s feelings, —

“Sire, since you insist upon it, my master was the Count de Cagliostro.”

“Oh!” cried Louis, coloring, “that empiric!”

"That empiric! — yes, Sire! Your Majesty is doubtless aware that the word you have just pronounced is one of the noblest used in science. *Empiric* means *the man who experiments:* the practitioner, the profound thinker,-the man, in short, who is incessantly investigating, — does all that God permits men to do that is glorious and beautiful. Let but a man *experiment* during his whole life, and his life will be well occupied."

"Ah, sir, this Cagliostro whom you defend was a great enemy of kings."

Gilbert recollected the affair of the necklace.

"Is it not rather the enemy of queens your Majesty intended to say?"

Louis shuddered at this sharp home-thrust.

"Yes," said he, "he conducted himself, in all the affair of Prince Louis de Rohan, in a manner which was more than equivocal."

"Sire, in that, as in other circumstances, Cagliostro carried out the human mission: he made his own researches. In science, in morals, in politics, there is neither good nor evil; there are only stated phenomena or accomplished facts. Nevertheless, I will not defend him, Sire. I repeat, the man may often have merited blame; perhaps some day this very blame may be considered as praise: posterity reconsiders the judgments of men. But I did not study under the man, Sire, but under the philosopher, under the great physician."

"Well, well," said the king, who still felt the double wound his pride and heart had received, "well; but we are forgetting the Countess de Charny, and perhaps she is suffering."

"I will wake her up, Sire, if your Majesty desires it; but I had wished that the casket might arrive here during her sleep."

Why?"

"To spare her a too harsh lesson."

"Here is somebody coming at this moment," said the king. "Wait."

In fact, the king's order had been punctually obeyed. The casket found at the hotel of the Countess de Charny, in the possession of the agent Wolfsfoot, was brought into the royal cabinet, under the very eyes of the Countess, who did not see it.

The king made a sign of satisfaction to the officer who brought the casket. The officer then left the room.

"Well!" said Louis XVI.

"Well, then, Sire, that is, in fact, the very casket which had been taken away from me."

“Open it,” said the king.

“Sire, I am willing to do so, if your Majesty desires it; but I have only to forewarn your Majesty of one thing.”

“What is that?”

“Sire, as I told your Majesty, this box contains only papers which are easily read, and might be taken, and on which depends the honor of a woman.”

“And that woman is the countess?”

“Yes, Sire. That honor will not be endangered while this matter is confined to the knowledge of your Majesty. Open it, Sire,” said Gilbert, approaching the casket, and presenting the key of it to the king.

“Sir,” replied Louis XVI. coldly, “take away this box; it belongs to you.”

“Thank you, Sire, but what are we to do with the countess?”

“Oh, do not, above all, wake her up here. I wish to avoid all recriminations and painful scenes.”

“Sire,” said Gilbert, “the countess will only awake in the place where you wish her to be carried.”

“Well, let her be taken to the queen’s apartment, then.”

Louis rang the bell. An officer entered the room.

“Captain,” said he, “the Countess de Charny has just fainted here, on hearing the news from Paris. Have her taken to the queen’s room.”

“How long will it take to carry her there?” asked Gilbert of the king.

“About ten minutes,” replied the latter.

Gilbert laid his hand on the countess.

“You will awake in three quarters of an hour,” said he.

Two soldiers entered, — the order having been given by the officer, — who carried her away in an arm-chair.

“Now, Monsieur Gilbert, what more do you desire?” asked the king.

“Sire, I desire a favor which would draw me nearer to your Majesty, and procure me at the same time an opportunity to be useful to you.”

The king endeavored to divine what he could mean.

“Explain yourself,” said he.

“I should like to be one of the physicians in ordinary to the king,” replied Gilbert; “I should be in the way of no one; it is a post of honor, but rather a confidential than a brilliant one.”

“Granted,” said the king. “Adieu, Monsieur Gilbert. Ah! by the bye, a thousand compliments to Necker. Adieu.”

Then, as he was leaving the room: —

“My supper!” cried Louis, whom no event, however important, could induce to forget his supper.

CHAPTER XXV.

In The Queen’s Apartments

WHILE the king was learning to oppose the revolution philosophically, by going through a course of occult sciences, the queen who was a much more substantial and profound philosopher, had gathered around her in her large cabinet all those who were called her faithful adherents, doubtless because there had been no opportunity afforded to any one of them either to prove or to try his fidelity.

In the queen’s circle, also, the events of that terrible day had been related in all their details.

She had even been the first to be informed of them, for, knowing her to be undaunted, they had not feared to inform her of the danger.

Around the queen were assembled generals, courtiers, priests, and ladies. Near the doors and behind the tapestries which hung before them might be seen groups of young officers, full of courage and ardor, who saw in all revolts a long desired opportunity to evince their prowess in presence of the fair sex, as in a tournament.

All of these, whether intimately connected with the court, or devoted servants of the monarchy, had listened with attention to the news from Paris, which had been related by Monsieur de Lambesq, who, having been present during those events, had hastened to Versailles with his regiment, still covered with the sand of the Tuileries, in order to state the real position of affairs to the affrighted courtiers, and thus afford them consolation; for many of them, although the misfortune was sufficiently serious, had greatly exaggerated it in their apprehension.

The queen was seated at a table. It was no longer the gentle and lovely bride, the guardian angel of France, whom we saw appear at the opening of this cycle, crossing the northern frontier, an olive-branch in her hand. It was no longer even that gracious and beautiful princess whom we saw one evening entering with the Princess de Lamballe into the mysterious dwelling of Mesmer, and seating herself, laughing and incredulous, near the symbolical vat, of which she had come to ask a revelation of the future.

No! it was the haughty and resolute queen, with frowning brow and scornful lip; it was a woman whose heart had allowed a portion of its love to escape from it, to harbor, instead of that sweet and vivifying element, the first drops of gall, which by constantly filtering into it was finally to reach her blood.

It was, in short, the woman represented by the third portrait in the gallery of Versailles, that is to say, no longer Marie Antoinette, no longer the Queen of France, but the woman who was now designated only by the name of the Austrian.

Behind her, in the shade, lay a motionless young woman, her head reclining on the cushion of a sofa, and her hand upon her forehead.

This was Madame de Polignac.

Perceiving Monsieur de Lambesq, the queen made one of those gestures indicative of unbounded joy, which mean, “At last we shall know all.”

Monsieur de Lambesq bowed, with a sign that asked pardon at the same time for his soiled boots, his dusty coat, and his sword, which, having been bent in his fall, could not be forced into its scabbard.

“Well, Monsieur de Lambesq,” said the queen, “have you just arrived from Paris?”

“Yes, your Majesty.”

“What are the people doing?”

“They are killing and burning.”

“Through maddening rage or hatred?”

“No; from sheer ferocity.”

The queen reflected, as if she had felt disposed to be of his opinion with regard to the people. Then, shaking her head: —

“No, prince,” said she, “the people are not ferocious; at least, not without a reason. Do not conceal anything from me. Is it madness? — is it hatred?”

“Well, I think it is hatred carried to madness, Madame.”

“Hatred of whom? Ah! I see you are hesitating again, Prince. Take care; if you relate events in that manner, instead of applying to you as I do, I shall send one of my outriders to Paris; he will require one hour to go there, one to acquire information, one to return; and in the course of three hours this man will tell me everything that has happened as accurately and as simply as one of Homer’s heralds.”

Monsieur de Dreux Brézé stepped forward, with a smile upon his lips.

"But, Madame," said he, "of what consequence to you is the hatred of the people? That can in no way concern you. The people may hate all, excepting you."

The queen did not even rebuke this piece of flattery.

"Come, come, Prince," said she to Monsieur de Lambesq, "speak out."

"Well, then, Madame, it is true the people are influenced by hatred."

"Hatred of me?"

"Of everything that rules."

"Well said! — that is the truth! I feel it," exclaimed the queen, resolutely.

"I am a soldier, your Majesty," said the prince.

"Well, well! speak to us then as a soldier. Let us see what must be done."

"Nothing, Madame."

"How — nothing?" cried the queen, taking advantage of the murmurs occasioned by these words among the wearers of embroidered coats and golden-sheathed swords of her company; "nothing! You, a Prince of Lorraine, — you can speak thus to the Queen of France at a moment when the people, according to your own confession, are killing and burning, and you can coolly say there is nothing to be done!"

A second murmur, but this time of approbation, followed the words of Marie Antoinette.

She turned round, fixed her gaze on all the circle which environed her, and among all those fiery eyes sought those which darted forth the brightest flames, as if she could read a greater proof of fidelity in them.

"Nothing!" continued the prince; "but allow the Parisian to become calm — and he will become so-for he is only warlike when he is exasperated. Why give him the honors of a struggle, and risk the chances of a battle? Let us keep quiet, and in three days there will no longer be a question of a commotion in Paris."

"But the Bastille, sir?"

"The Bastille! Its doors will be closed, and those who took it will be taken, that is all."

Some laughter was heard among the before silent group.

The queen continued, —

"Take care, Prince; you are now reassuring me too much." And thoughtfully, her chin resting on the palm of her hand, she advanced towards Madame de Polignac, who, pale and sad, seemed absorbed in thought.

The countess had listened to all the news with visible fear; she only smiled when the queen stopped opposite to her and smiled; although this smile was pale and colorless as a fading flower.

“Well, Countess,” said the queen, “what do you say to all this?”

“Alas! nothing,” she replied. “How, nothing!”

“No.”

And she shook her head with an indescribable expression of despair.

“Come, come,” said the queen in a very low voice, and stooping to the ear of the countess, “our friend Diana is terrified.”

Then she said aloud, —

“But where is Madame de Charny, the intrepid woman? We need her assistance to reassure us, I think.”

“The countess was about to go out,” said Madame de Misery, “when she was summoned to the king’s apartments.”

“Ah! the king’s,” absently answered Marie Antoinette.

And only then did the queen perceive the strange silence which pervaded all around her.

The truth was, these wonderful and incredible events, accounts of which had successively reached Versailles like repeated shocks, had prostrated the firmest hearts, perhaps more by astonishment than fear.

The queen understood that it was necessary to revive all these drooping spirits.

“Can no one advise me?” said she. “Be it so; I will advise myself.”

They all drew nearer to Marie Antoinette.

“The people,” said she, “are not bad at heart, they are only misled. They hate us because we are unknown to them; let us approach them more nearly.”

“To punish them, then,” said a voice, “for they have doubted their masters, and that is a crime.”

The queen looked in the direction from which the voice proceeded, and recognized Monsieur de Besenval.

“Oh, it is you, Monsieur le Baron,” said she; “do you come to give us your good counsel?”

“The advice is already given,” said Besenval, bowing.

“Be it so,” said the queen; “the king will punish only as a tender father.”

“Who loves well chastises well,” said the baron.

Then turning towards Monsieur de Lambesq: —

"Are you not of my opinion, Prince? The people have committed several murders — "

"Which they unfortunately call retaliation," said a sweet, low voice, at the sound of which the queen turned in her seat.

"You are right, princess; but it is precisely in that that their error consists, my dear Lamballe; we shall be indulgent."

"But," replied the Princess, in her mild manner, "before asking whether we must punish, I think we ought to ask whether we can conquer."

A general cry burst forth from those who were present, a cry of protestation against the truth which had just been spoken by those noble lips.

"Conquer! and where are the Swiss?" said one.

"And the Germans?" said another.

"And the body-guards?" said a third.

"Can doubts be entertained about the army and the nobility" exclaimed a young man wearing the uniform of a lieutenant in the Hussars of Bercheny. "Have we then deserved such a reproach? Do but consider, Madame, that no later than to-morrow, if he chose, the king could assemble forty thousand men, throw these forty thousand men into Paris, and destroy the city. Remember that forty thousand faithful troops are worth half a million of revolted Parisians."

The young man who had just spoken these words had without doubt a good many other similar reasons to advance; but he stopped short on seeing the eyes of the queen fixed upon him. He had spoken from the centre of a group of officers, and his zeal had carried him further than was consistent with etiquette and his rank.

He checked himself, accordingly, as we have already said, feeling quite ashamed at the impression his words had made.

But it was too late; the queen had already been struck with his enthusiasm.

"You understand the present condition of affairs, sir?" said she, kindly.

"Yes, your Majesty," said the young man, blushing; "I was at the Champs Elysées."

"Then, do not fear to speak; come nearer, sir."

The young man stepped forward, blushing, from the group which opened to let him pass, and advanced towards the queen.

At the same moment the Prince de Lambesq and Monsieur de Besenval retired a step or two, as if they considered it beneath their dignity to attend this sort of council.

The queen did not pay, or did not appear to pay any attention to this movement.

“You say, then, sir, that the king has forty thousand men?” asked she.

“Yes, your Majesty.”

“In the environs of Paris?”

“At St. Denis, at St. Mandé, at Montmartre, and at Grenelle.”

“Give me some details, sir, — some details,” exclaimed the queen.

“Madame, the Prince de Lambesq and Monsieur de Besenval can give you them with infinitely more accuracy than myself.”

“Go on, sir. It pleases me to hear these details from your lips. Under whose orders are these forty thousand men?”

“In the first place, under the orders of Monsieur de Besenval and Monsieur de Lambesq; then under those of the Prince de Condé, of Monsieur de Narbonne-Fritzlar, and Monsieur de Salkenaym.”

“Is this true, Prince?” asked the queen, turning towards Monsieur de Lambesq.

“Yes, your Majesty,” answered the prince, bowing.

“On the heights of Montmartre,” said the young man, “there is a complete park of artillery; in six hours the whole quarter of the town within the range of Montmartre could be laid in ashes. Let Montmartre give the signal to open fire; let it be answered by Vincennes; let ten thousand men debouch by the Champs Elysées, ten thousand more by the Barriére d’Enfer, ten thousand more by the Rue St. Martin, ten thousand more by the Bastille; make Paris hear our cannonading from the four cardinal points, and she cannot hold her ground for twenty-four hours.”

“Ah! here is a man who at all events explains his views frankly; here is at least a clear and regular plan. What do you think of it, Monsieur de Lambesq?”

“I think,” answered the prince, disdainfully, “that the lieutenant of hussars is a perfect general.”

“He is, at least,” said the queen, who saw the young officer turn pale with anger, “he is, at least, a soldier who does not despair.”

“I thank you, Madame,” said the young man, bowing.

"I do not know what your Majesty's decision will be, but I beg you to consider me among those who are ready to die for you; and in so doing, I should only do that, I beg your Majesty to believe, which forty thousand soldiers are ready to do, as well as all our chiefs."

And having said these words, the young man saluted courteously the prince, who had almost insulted him.

This act of courtesy struck the queen still more than the protestations of fidelity which had preceded it.

"What is your name, sir?" asked she of the young officer.

"I am the Baron de Charny, Madame," replied he, bowing.

"De Charny!" exclaimed Marie Antoinette, blushing in spite of herself; "are you then a relative of the Count de Charny?"

"I am his brother, Madame."

And the young man bowed gracefully, even lower than he had done before.

"I ought," said the queen, recovering from her confusion, and casting a firm look around her, "I ought to have recognized you, on hearing your first words, as one of my most faithful servants. Thank you, Baron. How is it that I now see you at court for the first time?"

"Madame, my elder brother, who is taking the place of my father, has ordered me to remain with the regiment, and during the seven years that I have had the honor of serving in the army of the king, I have only twice been at Versailles."

The queen looked for a considerable time at the young man's face.

"You resemble your brother," said she. "I shall reprimand him for having so long omitted to present you, and left you to present yourself at court."

And the queen turned in the direction of her friend the countess, who during all this scene had remained motionless and mute upon the sofa.

But it was not thus with the remainder of those present. The officers, electrified by the reception the queen had given to the young man, were exaggerating to the utmost among themselves their enthusiasm for the royal cause, and from every group expressions burst forth, evincing a heroism capable of subjugating the whole of France.

Marie Antoinette made the most of these manifestations, which evidently flattered her secret wishes.

She preferred to struggle rather than to submit, to die rather than to yield. With this view, as soon as the first news had reached her from Paris, she had determined upon a stubborn resistance to the rebellious spirit which threatened to swallow up all the prerogatives of French society.

If there is a blind and senseless degree of strength, it is that stimulated by figures and vain hopes.

A figure, followed by an agglomeration of zeros, will soon exceed all the resources of the universe.

The same may be said of the plans of a conspirator or a despot. On enthusiasm, which itself is based on imperceptible hope, gigantic conceptions are built, which are dissipated before the first breath of wind, in less time than was required to condense them into a mist.

After hearing these few words pronounced by the Baron de Charny, after the enthusiastic hurrahs of the bystanders, Marie Antoinette could almost imagine herself at the head of a powerful army; she could hear the rolling of her harmless artillery, and she rejoiced at the fear which they would doubtless occasion among the Parisians, and had already gained a victory which she thought decisive.

Around her, men and women, beaming with youth, with confidence and love, were reckoning the number of those brilliant hussars, those heavy dragoons, those terrible Swiss, those well-equipped artillerymen, and laughed at the vulgar pikes and their coarse wooden handles, little thinking that on the points of these vile weapons were to be borne the noblest heads of France.

“As for me,” murmured the Princess de Lamballe, “I am more afraid of a pike than of a gun.”

“Because it is much uglier, my dear Thérèse,” replied the queen, smiling. “But, at all events, compose yourself. Our Parisian pikemen are not a match for the famous Swiss pikemen of Morat; and the Swiss of the present day have something more than pikes; they have good muskets, with which they take good aim, thank Heaven!”

“Oh, as to that, I will answer for it!” said Monsieur de Besenval.

The queen turned round once more towards Madame de Polignac to see if all these assurances had restored her wonted tranquillity; but the countess appeared still paler and more trembling than before.

The queen, whose extreme tenderness of feeling often caused her to sacrifice her royal dignity for the sake of this friend, in vain seemed to solicit her to look more cheerful.

The young woman still continued gloomy, and appeared absorbed in the saddest thoughts. But this despondency only served to increase the queen’s sorrow. The enthusiasm among the young officers maintained itself at the same pitch, and all of them, with the exception of the superior officers, were gathered round the Baron de Charny, and drawing up their plans for battle.

In the midst of this febrile excitement the king entered alone, unaccompanied by an usher, and with a smile upon his lips.

The queen, still greatly excited by the warlike emotions which she had aroused, rushed forward to meet him.

At the sight of the king all conversation had ceased, and was followed by the most perfect silence; every one expected a kingly word, — one of those words which electrify and subjugate.

When clouds are sufficiently loaded with electricity, the least disturbance, as is well known, is sufficient to produce a flash.

To the eyes of the courtiers, the king and queen, advancing to meet each other, appeared like two electric bodies, from which the thunder must proceed.

They listened, and trembled, and eagerly waited to catch the first words which were to proceed from the royal lips.

“Madame,” said Louis XVI., “amid all these events, they have forgotten to serve up my supper in my own apartment; be so kind as to have it brought me here.”

“Here?” exclaimed the queen, with an air of stupefaction.

“If you will permit it.”

“But — Sire — ”

“You were conversing, it is true; but while at supper I shall converse also.”

The mere word “supper” had chilled the enthusiasm of every one present. But on hearing the king’s last words, — ”at supper I shall converse also,” the young queen herself could hardly help thinking that so much calmness concealed some small heroism. The king doubtless thought by his tranquillity to overcome all the terror occasioned by the events that had taken place. This must certainly be his design.

The daughter of Marie Thérèse could not conceive that at so critical a moment the son of Saint Louis could still remain subject to the material wants of ordinary life.

Marie Antoinette was mistaken; the king was hungry, that was all.

CHAPTER XXVI.

How the King supped on the 14th of July, 1789

ON a word from Marie Antoinette, the king’s supper was served on a small table in the queen’s own cabinet.

But the contrary of what the princess had hoped soon happened. Louis XVI. ordered every one to be silent, but it was only that he might not be disturbed while at supper.

While Marie Antoinette was endeavoring to revive enthusiasm, the king was devouring a Périgord pie.

The officers did not think this gastronomical performance worthy of a descendant of Saint Louis, and formed themselves into small groups, whose observations were not perhaps as respectful as circumstances ought to have demanded.

The queen blushed, and her impatience betrayed itself in all her movements. Her delicate, aristocratic, and nervous nature could not comprehend this domination of matter over mind.

She drew nearer to the king, with a view to bring those nearer to the table who had retired to a more distant part of the room.

“Sire,” said she, “have you no orders to give?”

“Ah! ah!” said the king, his mouth full, “what orders, Madame? Let us see; will you be our Egeria in this difficult moment?”

And while saying these words he bravely attacked a partridge stuffed with truffles.

“Sire,” said the queen, “Numa was a pacific king.

Now it is generally thought that what we need at present is a warlike king; and if you are going to take antiquity for your model, as your Majesty cannot become a Tarquin, you must be a Romulus.”

The king smiled with a tranquillity which almost seemed holy.

“Are these gentlemen warlike also?” asked he.

And he turned towards the group of officers, and his eyes being animated by the cheering influence of his meal, appeared to all present to sparkle with courage.

“Yes, Sire,” they all cried with one voice, “war! we only ask for war!”

“Gentlemen, gentlemen,” said the king, “you do me in truth the greatest pleasure, by proving to me that when occasion may require it I may rely upon you. But I have for the moment not only a council, but also a stomach; the former will advise me what I ought to do, the second advises me to do what I am now doing.”

And he laughed loudly, and handed his plate, full of fragments, to the officer in waiting, in exchange for a clean one.

A murmur of stupefaction and of rage passed like a shudder through the group of gentlemen, who only required a signal from the king to shed their last drop of blood.

The queen turned round and stamped her foot.

The Prince de Lambesq immediately came to her.

“You see, Madame,” said he, “his Majesty no doubt thinks, as I do, that it is better to wait. It is prudence — and although it is not one of mine, unfortunately, prudence is a necessary virtue in the times we live in.”

“Yes, sir, yes; it is a very necessary virtue,” said the queen, biting her lips till they bled.

With a death-like sadness she reclined against the chimney-piece, her eye lost in darkness, and her soul overwhelmed by despair.

The singular contrast between the disposition of the king and that of the queen struck every one with astonishment. The queen could hardly restrain her tears, while the king continued his supper with the proverbial appetite of the Bourbon family.

The room gradually became empty; the various groups melted away as does the snow in a garden before the rays of the sun, — the snow, beneath which the black and desolate earth soon makes its appearance here and there.

The queen, seeing this warlike group, upon which she relied so much, gradually disappear, imagined that all her power was vanishing; as in former times, the breath of the Lord had melted those vast armies of Assyrians or Amalekites, which one single night sufficed to swallow up in its darkness.

She was aroused from this species of torpor by the sweet voice of the Countess Jules, who approached her with Madame Diana de Polignac, her sister-in-law.

At the sound of this voice, the sweet future, with its flowers and palm-leaves, returned to the mind of this haughty woman. A sincere and devoted friend was to her of more value than ten kingdoms.

"Oh, thou, thou!" murmured she, clasping the Countess Jules in her arms; "I have then one friend left."

And the tears, which for so long a time had been restrained, burst forth from her eyelids, trickled down her cheeks, and inundated her bosom; but instead of being bitter, these tears were sweet, — instead of oppressing her, they disburdened her heart.

They both remained silent for a few moments, during which the queen continued to hold the countess in her arms.

It was the duchess who first broke this silence, while still holding her sister-in-law by the hand.

"Madame," said she, with a voice so timid that she almost appeared ashamed, "I do not think your Majesty will disapprove the project which I am about to submit to your notice."

"What project?" asked the queen attentively; "speak, Duchess, speak?"

And while preparing to listen to the Duchess Diana, the queen leaned upon the shoulder of her favorite, the countess.

"Madame," continued the duchess, "the opinion which I am about to pronounce comes from a person whose authority will not be doubted by your Majesty; it comes from her Royal Highness, Madame Adelaide, the queen's aunt."

"What a singular preamble, dear Duchess," said the queen, gayly, "come, let us hear this opinion."

"Madame, circumstances are disheartening; the favors which our family enjoy from your Majesty have been much exaggerated; calumny stains the august friendship which you deign to grant us in exchange for our respectful devotion."

"Well, then, Duchess," said the queen, with a commencement of astonishment, "do you not think I have evinced sufficient courage? Have I not valiantly sustained my friends against public opinion, against the court, against the people, against the king himself?"

"Oh, Madame, certainly! and your Majesty has so nobly sustained your friends, that you have opposed your breast to every blow, so that to-day when the danger has become great, terrible even, the friends so nobly defended by your Majesty would be cowardly and unfaithful servants, if they did not prove themselves grateful to their queen.”

“Ah, this is well, this is beautiful!” said Marie Antoinette, with enthusiasm, embracing the countess, whom she still pressed against her bosom, while holding the hand of Madame de Polignac in hers.

But both of them turned pale, instead of proudly raising their heads, after they had been thus caressed by their sovereign.

Madame Jules de Polignac made a movement to disengage herself from the arms of the queen; but the latter still pressed her to her heart, despite her efforts to disengage herself.

“But,” stammered Madame Diana de Polignac, “your Majesty does not perhaps well understand what we have the honor to make known to you, in order to enable you to ward off the blows which threaten your throne, your person, perhaps, on account of the very friendship with which you honor us. There is a painful means, a bitter sacrifice to our hearts, but we must endure it; necessity commands it.”

At these words it was the queen’s turn to become pale, for she no longer perceived courageous and faithful friendship, but fear, beneath this exordium, and under the veil of this reserve.

“Let us see,” said she; “speak, speak, Duchess; what is this sacrifice?”

“Oh, the sacrifice is entirely on our side, Madame!” replied the latter. “We are, God knows for what reason, execrated in France; by disencumbering your throne, we shall restore to it all the splendor, all the warmth of the popular love, a love either extinguished or intercepted by our presence.”

“You would leave me!” cried the queen, vehemently. “Who has said that? who has asked for that?”

And she cast a despairing look on the Countess Jules de Polignac, gently pushing her from her; the latter held down her head in great confusion.

“Not I,” said the Countess Jules; “I, on the contrary, ask but to remain.”

But these words were uttered in such a tone that they implied, “Order me to leave you, Madame, and I will leave you.”

O holy friendship, thou sacred chain which can link together the hearts of even a sovereign and her subject in indissoluble bonds! O holy friendship, thou engenderest more heroism than even love or ambition, those two noble maladies of the human heart! But thou canst not brook deceit. The queen at once shattered to atoms the adored altar she had raised to thee in her heart;

she required but a look, one only look, to reveal to her that which during ten years she had not perceived, she had not even surmised, — coldness and interested calculation, excusable, justifiable, legitimate perhaps; but what can excuse, justify, or legitimize, in the eyes of one who still fondly loves, the abandonment of the one who has ceased to love?

Marie Antoinette’s only revenge for the pain which was thus inflicted on her, was the icy coldness with which she gazed upon her friend.

“Ah, Duchess Diana! this, then, is your opinion?” cried she, compressing with her feverish hand the agitated pulsation of her heart.

“Alas! Madame,” answered the latter, “it is not my choice, it is not my will which dictates to me what I am to do: it is the law of destiny!”

“Yes, Duchess,” said Marie Antoinette. And turning to the Countess Jules: “And you, Countess: what say you to this?”

The countess replied by a burning tear, as if from a pang of remorse; but she had exhausted all her strength in the effort she had made.

“Well,” said the queen, “well, it is gratifying to my feelings to see how much I am beloved. Thank you, my dear Countess; yes, you incur great danger here; the anger of the people no longer knows any bounds; yes, you are all in the right, and I alone was foolish. You ask to remain, — that is pure devotedness; but I cannot accept such a sacrifice.”

The Countess Jules raised her beautiful eyes and looked at the queen. But the queen, instead of reading the devotedness of a friend in them, could only perceive the weakness of the woman.

“Thus, Duchess,” replied the queen, “*you* are resolved to leave me.” And she emphasized the word “you.”

“Yes, your Majesty.”

“Doubtless for some one of your estates — a distant — a very distant one?”

“Madame, in going away, in leaving you, it would be as painful to travel fifty leagues as one hundred and fifty.”

“But do you, then, intend to go abroad?”

“Alas, yes, Madame!”

A suppressed sigh tore the very depths of the queen’s heart, but it did not escape her lips.

“And where are you going?”

“To reside on the banks of the Rhine, Madame.”

"Well, you speak German, Duchess," said the queen, with a look of indescribable sadness, "and it was I who taught it you. The friendship of your queen will at least have been useful to you to that extent, and I rejoice at it."

Then, turning to the Countess Jules: —

"I do not wish to dismiss you, my dear Countess," said she. "You desire to remain here, and I deeply appreciate that desire. But I — I, who fear for you-I insist on your departure; I order you to leave me."

And having said these words, she suddenly stopped, overcome by emotions which, in spite of her heroism, she would perhaps not have had the power to control, had not she heard at that moment the voice of the king who had taken no part whatever in what we have just been relating.

The king was at his dessert.

"Madame," said the king, "there is somebody in your apartment; they are seeking you."

"But, Sire," exclaimed the queen, throwing aside every other feeling but that of royal dignity, "in the first place, you have orders to give! Only three persons remain here; but they are those with whom you have to deal: Monsieur de Lambesq, Monsieur de Besenval, and Monsieur de Broglie. Give your orders, Sire; give your orders."

The king raised his heavy eyes and appeared to hesitate.

"What do you think of all this, Monsieur de Broglie?" said he.

"Sire," replied the old marshal, "if you withdraw your army from the sight of the Parisians, it will be said that it was beaten by them. If you leave it in their presence, your army must beat them."

"Well said!" exclaimed the queen, grasping the marshal's hand.

"Well said!" cried Monsieur de Besenval.

The Prince de Lambesq was the only person present who shook his head.

"Well! and after that?" said the king.

"Command: march!" cried the old marshal.

"Yes — march!" cried the queen.

"Well, then, since you all wish it, march!" said the king.

At that moment a note was handed to the queen; its contents were as follows: —

"In the name of Heaven, Madame, no rashness! I await an audience of your Majesty."

"His writing!" murmured the queen.

Then, turning round, she said in a low tone to the woman who had brought the note: —

“Is Monsieur de Charny in my room?”

“He has just arrived, completely covered with dust, and I even think with blood,” answered the confidant.

“One moment, gentlemen!” exclaimed the queen, to Monsieur de Besenval and Monsieur de Broglie; “wait for me here; I shall return!”

And she passed into her own apartment in great haste.

The king did not even move his head.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Olivier de Charny

ON entering her dressing-room, the queen found the person there who had written the note brought by her waiting-woman.

He was a man thirty-five years of age, of lofty stature, with a countenance which indicated strength and resolution; his grayish-blue eye, sharp and piercing as that of the eagle, his straight nose, his prominent chin, gave a martial character to his physiognomy, which was enhanced by the elegance with which he wore the uniform of a lieutenant in the body-guards.

His hands were still trembling under his torn and ruffled cambric cuffs.

His sword had been bent, and could hardly be replaced in the scabbard.

On the arrival of the queen, he was pacing hurriedly up and down the dressing-room, absorbed by a thousand feverish and agitated thoughts.

Marie Antoinette advanced straight towards him.

“Monsieur de Charny!” she exclaimed, “Monsieur de Charny, you here?”

And seeing that the person whom she thus addressed bowed respectfully according to etiquette, she made a sign to her waiting-woman, who withdrew and closed the doors.

The queen scarcely waited for the door to be closed, when, seizing the hand of Monsieur de Charny with vehemence, —

“Count,” cried she, “why are you here?”

“Because I considered it my duty to come, Madame,” said the count.

“No; your duty was to fly Versailles; it was to do what we had agreed, — to obey me; it is, in fact, to do as all my friends are doing who fear to share my fate. Your duty is to sacrifice nothing to my destiny; your duty is to flee far from me!”

“To flee from you?” said he.

“Yes; to flee from me.”

“And who, then, flies from you, Madame?”

“Those who are prudent.”

"I think myself very prudent, Madame, and that is why I now come to Versailles."

"And from where do you come?"

"From Paris."

"From revolted Paris?"

"From boiling, intoxicated, and ensanguined Paris." The queen covered her face with her hands.

"Oh," said she, "no one, not even you, will then come to bring me good news."

"Madame, in the present circumstances, ask your messengers to tell you but one thing, — the truth."

"And is it the truth you have just told me?"

"I always tell you the truth, Madame."

"You have an honest soul, sir, and a stout heart."

"I am a faithful subject, Madame, that is all."

"Well, then, spare me for the moment, my friend; do not tell me a single word. You have arrived at a moment when my heart is breaking. My friends, to-day, for the first time overwhelm me with that truth which you have always told me. Oh, it is this truth, Count, which it was impossible for them to withhold from me any longer. It bursts forth everywhere: in the heavens which are red; in the air, which is filled with sinister noises; in the faces of the courtiers, who are pale and serious. No, no, Count; for the first time in your life, tell me not the truth."

The count looked at the queen with amazement.

"Yes, yes," said she; "you who know me to be courageous, you are astonished, are you not? Oh, you are not yet at the end of your astonishment!"

Monsieur de Charny allowed an inquiring gesture to escape him.

"You will see by-and-by," said the queen, with a nervous laugh.

"Does your Majesty suffer?" asked the count.

"No, no, sir. Come and sit down near me, and not a word more about those dreadful politics. Try to make me forget them."

The count obeyed with a sad smile. Marie Antoinette placed her hand upon his forehead.

"Your forehead burns," said she.

"Yes, I have a volcano in my head."

"Your hand is icy cold."

And she pressed the count’s hand between both hers.

“My heart is affected with a deathlike coldness,” said he. “Poor Olivier! I had told you so. Let us forget it. I am no longer queen; I am no longer threatened; I am no longer hated. No, I am no longer a queen. I am a woman, that is all. What is the whole universe to me? One heart that loves me would suffice me.”

The count fell on his knees before the queen, and kissed her feet with the respect the Egyptians had for the goddess Isis.

“Oh, Count, my only friend!” said the queen, trying to raise him up, “do you know what the Duchess Diana is about to do?”

“She is going to emigrate,” answered Charny, without hesitating.

“He has guessed the truth!” exclaimed Marie Antoinette. “He has guessed it. Alas! was it then possible to guess it?”

“Oh, certainly, Madame,” answered the count; “one can imagine anything at such a moment as this.”

“But you and your friends,” exclaimed the queen, “why do you not emigrate, if you consider it so natural a step?”

“In the first place, Madame, I do not emigrate because I am profoundly devoted to your Majesty, and because I have promised, not to you, but to myself, that I will not quit you for a single instant during the impending storm. My brothers will not emigrate, because my conduct will be the model on which they will regulate theirs. In fine, Madame de Charny will not emigrate, because she loves your Majesty sincerely; at least, so I believe.”

“Yes, Andrée has a very noble heart,” said the queen, with perceptible coldness.

“That is the reason why she will not leave Versailles,” answered De Charny.

“Then I shall always have you near me,” said the queen, in the same icy tone, which she varied so as to express either her jealousy or her disdain.

“Your Majesty has done me the honor to make me lieutenant of the guards,” said the Count de Charny; “my post is at Versailles. I should not have left my post if your Majesty had not intrusted me with the care of the Tuileries. ‘It is a necessary exile,’ said the queen to me, and I accepted that exile. Now, in all this, your Majesty well knows the Countess de Charny has neither reproved the step, nor was she consulted with regard to it.”

“It is true,” replied the queen, in the same freezing tone.

"To-day," continued the count, with intrepidity, "I think my post is no longer at the Tuileries, but at Versailles. Well, may it not displease the queen, I have violated my orders, thus selecting the service I prefer; and here I am. Whether Madame de Charny be alarmed or not at the complexion of events, whether it be her desire to emigrate or not, I will remain near the queen, unless, indeed, the queen breaks my sword; in which case, having no longer the right to fight and to die for her on the floor of Versailles, I shall still have that of sacrificing it on its threshold, on the pavement."

The young man pronounced these simple words so valiantly and so loyally, which emanated so evidently from the depths of his heart, that the queen appeared suddenly to lose her haughtiness, a retreat behind which she had just concealed feelings more human than royal.

"Count," said she, "never utter that word again. Do not say that you would die for me, for in truth I know that you would do as you say."

"Oh, on the contrary, I shall always say it!" exclaimed Monsieur de Charny. "I shall say it to every one, and in every place. I shall say it, and I shall do it, because the time has come, I fear, when all who have been attached to the kings of this earth must die."

"Count! Count! — what is it gives you this fatal forewarning?"

"Alas! Madame," replied De Charny, shaking his head, "and I too, during that fatal American war, I too was affected like the rest with that fever of independence which pervaded all society. I too wished to take an active part in the emancipation of the slaves, as it was customary to say in those days; and I was initiated into the secrets of masonry. I became affiliated with a secret society, with the Lafayettes and the Lameths. Do you know what the object of this society was, Madame? The destruction of thrones. Do you know what it had for its motto? Three letters, — L. P. D."

"And what did these letters signify?"

"*Lilia pedibus destrue!* — Trample the lilies underfoot!"

"Then, what did you do?"

"I withdrew with honor. But for one who withdrew from the society, there were twenty who applied to be admitted into it. Well, then, what is happening to-day, Madame, is the prologue to the grand drama which has been preparing in silence and in darkness for twenty years. At the head of the men who are stimulating Paris to resistance, who govern the Hôtel de Ville, who occupy the Palais-Royal, and who took the Bastille, I recognized the countenances of my former affiliated brethren. Do not deceive yourself, Madame; all the events which have just taken place are not the results of chance; they are outbreaks which had been planned for years.”

“Oh, you think so! — you think so, my friend!” exclaimed the queen, bursting into tears.

“Do not weep, Madame, but endeavor to comprehend the present crisis,” said the count.

“You wish me to comprehend it!” continued Marie Antoinette. “I, the queen, — I, who was born the sovereign of twenty-five millions of men, — you wish me to understand how these twenty-five millions of subjects, born to obey me, should revolt and murder my friends! No, — that I shall never comprehend.”

“And yet it is absolutely necessary for you to understand it, Madame; for the moment this obedience becomes a burden to these subjects, to these men born to obey you, you become their enemy; and until they have the strength to devour you, to do which they are sharpening their famished teeth, they will devour your friends, still more detested than you are.”

“And perhaps you will next tell me that they are right, most sage philosopher,” exclaimed the queen, imperiously, her eyes dilated, and her nostrils quivering with anger.

“Alas! yes, Madame, they are right,” said the count, in his gentle and affectionate voice; “for when I drive along the Boulevards, with my beautiful English horses, my coat glittering with gold, and my attendants bedecked with more silver than would be necessary to feed three families, your people, that is to say, those twenty-five millions of starving men, ask themselves of what use I am to them, — I, who am only a man like themselves.”

“You serve them with this, Marquis,” exclaimed the queen, seizing the hilt of the count’s sword; “you serve them with the sword that your father wielded so heroically at Foutenoy, your grandfather at Steinkirk, your great-grandfather at Lens and at Rocroi, your ancestors at Ivry, at Marignan, and at Agincourt. The nobility serves the French nation by waging war. By war, the nobility has earned, at the price of its blood, the gold which decks its garments, the silver which covers its liveries. Do not, therefore, ask yourself, Olivier, how you serve the people, you who wield in your turn, and bravely too, the sword which has descended to you from your forefathers.”

"Madame! — Madame!" said the count, shaking his head, "do not speak so much of the blood of the nobility: the people, too, have blood in their veins; go and see it running in streams on the Place de la Bastille; go and count their dead, stretched out on the crimsoned pavement, and consider that their hearts, which now no longer beat, throbbed with a feeling as noble as that of a knight, on the day when your cannon were thundering against them; on the day when, seizing a new weapon in their unskilful hands, they sang in the midst of grapeshot, — a thing which even our bravest grenadiers do not always. Ah! Madame, my sovereign, look not on me, I entreat you, with that frowning eye. What is a grenadier? It is a gilt blue coat, covering the heart of which I was speaking to you a moment since. Of what importance is it to the bullet which pierces and kills, that the heart be covered with blue cloth or with a linen rag? Of what importance is it to the heart which is pierced through, whether the cuirass which protected it was cloth or canvas? The time is come to think of all that, Madame. You have no longer twenty-five millions of slaves in France; you have no longer twenty-five millions of subjects; you have no longer even twenty-five millions of men. You have twenty-five millions of soldiers."

"Who will fight against me, Count?"

"Yes, against you; for they are fighting for liberty, and you stand between them and liberty."

A long silence followed the words of the count. The queen was the first to break it.

"In fine," said she, "you have told me this truth, which I had begged you not to tell me."

"Alas! Madame," replied De Charny, "under whatever form my devotion may conceal it, under whatever veil my respect disguises it, in spite of me, in spite of yourself, examine it, listen to it, think of it. The truth is there, Madame, is there forever, and you can no longer banish it from your mind, whatever may be your efforts to the contrary. Sleep! — sleep, to forget it, and it will haunt your pillow, will become the phantom of your dreams, a reality at your awakening."

"Oh, Count," said the queen, proudly, " I know asleep which it cannot disturb!"

"As for that sleep, Madame, I fear it no more than does your Majesty, and perhaps I desire it quite as much."

“Oh,” exclaimed the queen, in despair, “according to you, it is, then, our sole refuge?”

“Yes; but let us do nothing rashly, Madame. Let us go no faster than our enemies, and we shall go straight to that sleep by the fatigue which we shall have to endure during so many stormy days.”

And a new silence, still more gloomy than the first, weighed down the spirits of the two speakers.

They were seated, he near her, and she near him. They touched each other, and yet between them there was an immense abyss, for their minds viewed the future in a different light.

The queen was the first to return to the subject of their conversation, but indirectly. She looked fixedly at the count. Then: — “Let us see, sir,” said she. “One word as to ourselves, and you will tell me al — all — all. You understand me?”

“I am ready to answer you, Madame.”

“Can you swear to me that you came here only for my sake?”

“Oh, do you doubt it?”

“Will you swear to me that Madame de Charny had not written to you?”

“She?”

“Listen to me. I know that she was going out. I know that she had some plan in her mind. Swear to me, Count, that it was not on her account that you returned!”

At this moment a knock, or rather a scratch, at the door was heard.

“Come in,” said the queen.

The waiting-woman again appeared.

“Madame,” said she, “the king has just finished his supper.”

The count looked at Marie Antoinette with astonishment.

“Well,” said she, shrugging her shoulders, “what is there astonishing in that? Must not the king take his supper?”

Olivier frowned.

“Tell the king,” replied the queen, without at all disturbing herself, “that I am just receiving news from Paris, and that I shall communicate it to him when I have received it.

Then, turning towards Charny: — ”Go on,” said she; “now that the king has supped, it is but natural that he should digest his food.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Olivier de Charny

THIS interruption had only caused a momentary suspension in the conversation, but had changed in nothing the two-fold sentiment of jealousy which animated the queen at this moment, — jealousy of love as a woman, jealousy of power as a queen.

Hence it resulted that the conversation, which seemed exhausted during its first period, had, on the contrary, only been entered upon, and was about to be revived more sharply than ever; as in a battle, where, after the cessation of the first fire, which had commenced the action at a few points, the fire which decides the victory soon becomes general all along the line.

The count, moreover, as things had arrived at this point, seemed as anxious as the queen to come to an explanation; for which reason, the door being closed again, he was the first to resume the conversation.

“You asked me if it was for Madame de Charny that I had come back,” said he. “Has your Majesty then forgotten that engagements were entered into between us, and that I am a man of honor?”

“Yes,” said the queen, holding down her head, “yes, we have made engagements; yes, you are a man of honor; yes, you have sworn to sacrifice yourself to my happiness, and it is that oath which most tortures me, for in sacrificing yourself to my happiness, you immolate at the same time a beautiful woman and a noble character, — another crime!”

“Oh, Madame, now you are exaggerating the accusation! I only wish you to confess that I have kept my word as a gentleman.”

“It is true; I am insensate; forgive me — ”

“Do not call a crime that which originated in chance and necessity. We have both deplored this marriage, which alone could shield the honor of the queen. As for this marriage, there only remains for me to endure it, as I have done for many years.”

“Yes!” exclaimed the queen. “But do you think that I do not perceive your grief, that I do not understand your sorrow, which evince themselves in the shape of the highest respect? Do you think that I do not see all this?”

“Do me the favor, Madame,” said the count, bowing, “to communicate to me what you see, in order that if I have not suffered enough myself, and made others suffer enough, I may double the amount of suffering for myself, and for all those who surround me, as I feel certain of ever falling short of what I owe you.”

The queen held out her hand to the count. The words of the young man had an irresistible power, like everything that emanates from a sincere and impassioned heart.

“Command me, then, Madame,” rejoined he; “I entreat you, do not fear to lay your commands upon me.”

“Oh, yes, yes! I know it well. I am wrong; yes, forgive me; yes, it is true. But if you have anywhere some hidden idol, to whom you offer up mysterious incense, — if for you there is in some corner of the world an adored woman — oh! I no longer dare to pronounce that word, it strikes me with terror; and I fear lest the syllables which compose it should strike the air and vibrate in my ear, — well, then, if such a woman does exist, concealed from every one, do not forget that you have publicly, in the eyes of others as in your own, a young and beautiful wife, whom you surround with care and attentions, — a wife who leans upon your arm, and who, while leaning on your arm, leans at the same time on your heart.”

Olivier knit his brow, and the delicate lines of his face assumed for a moment a severe aspect.

“What do you ask, Madame?” said he; “do I separate myself from the Countess de Charny? You remain silent; is that the reason, then? Well, then, I am ready to obey this order, even; but you know that she is alone in the world — she is an orphan. Her father, the Baron de Taverney, died last year, like a worthy knight of the olden time, who wishes not to see that which is about to take place in ours. Her brother — you know that her brother, Maison-Rouge, makes his appearance once a year, at most — comes to embrace his sister, to pay his respects to your Majesty, and then goes away, without any one knowing what becomes of him.”

“Yes, I know all that.”

“Consider, Madame, that this Countess de Charny, were God to remove me from this world, could resume her maiden name, and the purest angel in heaven could not detect in her dreams, in her thoughts, a single unholy word or thought.”

“Oh, yes, yes,” said the queen. “I know that your Andrée is an angel upon earth; I know that she deserves to be loved. That is the reason why I think she has a brilliant future before her, while mine is hopeless! Oh, no, no! Come, Count, I beg of you, say not another word; I no longer speak to you as a queen — forgive me, I forget myself; but what would you have? there is in my soul a voice which always sings of happiness, joy, and love, although it is too often assailed by those sinister voices which speak of nothing but misfortune, war, and death. It is, the voice of my youth, which I have survived. Charny, forgive me, I shall no longer be young, I shall no longer smile, I shall no longer love!”

And the unhappy woman covered her burning eyes with her thin and delicate hands, and the tear of a queen filtered, brilliant as a diamond, between each of her fingers.

The count once more fell on his knees before her.

“Madame, in the name of Heaven!” said he, “order me to leave you, to fly from you, to die for you, but do not let me see you weep!”

And the count himself could hardly refrain from sobbing as he spoke.

“It is all over,” said Marie Antoinette, raising her head, and speaking gently, with a smile replete with grace.

And, with a beautiful movement, she threw back her thick powdered hair, which had fallen on her neck, white as the driven snow.

“Yes, yes, it is over!” continued the queen; “ I shall not afflict you any more; let us throw aside all these follies. Great God! it is strange that the woman should be so weak, when the queen so much needs to be firm. You come from Paris, do you not Let us converse about it. You told me some things that I have forgotten; and yet they were very serious, were they not, Monsieur de Charny?”

“Be it so, Madame; let us return to that fatal subject: for, as you observe, what I have to tell you is very serious. Yes, I have just arrived from Paris, and I was present at the downfall of the monarchy.”

“I was right to request you to return to *serious* matters, and most assuredly, Count, you make them more than sufficiently gloomy. A successful riot, — do you call that the downfall of the monarchy? What! is it because the Bastille has been taken, Monsieur de Charny, that you say the monarchy is abolished? Oh, you do not reflect that the Bastille was founded in France only in the fourteenth century, while monarchy has been taking root in the world during the last six thousand years.”

“I should be well pleased to deceive myself in this matter, Madame,” replied the count; “and then, instead of afflicting your Majesty’s mind, I should bring to you the most consoling news. Unfortunately, the instrument will not produce any other sounds but those for which it was intended.”

“Let us see, let us see; I will sustain you, — I who am but a woman; I will put you on the right path.”

“Alas! I ask for nothing better.”

“The Parisians have revolted, have they not?”

“Yes.”

“In what proportion?”

“In the proportion of twelve to fifteen.”

“How do you arrive at this calculation?”

“Oh, very easily: the people form twelve fifteenths of the body of the nation; there remain two fifteenths for the nobility and one for the clergy.”

“Your calculations are exact, Count, and you have them at your fingers’ ends. Have you read the works of Monsieur and Madame de Necker?”

“Those of Monsieur de Necker? Yes, Madame.”

“Well, the proverb holds good,” said the queen, gayly: “we are never betrayed but by our own friends. Well, then, here is my own calculation; will you listen to it?”

“With all respect.”

“Among these twelve fifteenths there are six of women, are there not?”

“Yes, your Majesty. But — ”

“Do not interrupt me. We said there were six fifteenths of women, so let us say six; two of indifferent or incapable old men, — is that too much?”

“No.”

“There still remain four fifteenths, of which you will allow that at least two are cowards or lukewarm individuals, — I flatter the French nation. But finally, there remain two fifteenths; I will grant you that they are furious, robust, brave, and warlike. These two fifteenths, let us consider them as belonging to Paris only, for it is needless to speak of the provinces, is it not? It is only Paris that requires to be retaken?”

“Yes, Madame. But — ”

“Always but; wait a moment. You can reply when I have concluded.”

Monsieur de Charny bowed.

“I therefore estimate,” continued the queen, “the two fifteenths of Paris at one hundred thousand men; is that sufficient?”

This time the count did not answer. The queen rejoined: —

“Well, then! to these hundred thousand men, badly armed, badly disciplined, and but little accustomed to battle, hesitating because they know they are doing wrong, I can oppose fifty thousand men, known throughout Europe for their bravery, with officers like you, Monsieur de Charny; besides that sacred cause which is denominated divine right, and in addition to all this, my own firm soul, which it is easy to move, but difficult to break.”

The count still remained silent.

“Do you think,” continued the queen, “that in a battle fought in such a cause, two men of the people are worth more than one of my soldiers?”

Charny said nothing.

“Speak, — answer me! — Do you think so?” exclaimed the queen, growing impatient.

“Madame,” answered the Count, at last, throwing aside, on this order from the Queen, the respectful reserve which he had so long maintained, “on a field of battle, where these hundred thousand men would be isolated, undisciplined and badly armed as they are, your fifty thousand soldiers would defeat them in half an hour.”

“Ah!” said the queen, “I was then right.”

“Wait a moment. But it is not as you imagine. And, in the first place, your hundred thousand insurgents in Paris are five hundred thousand.”

“Five hundred thousand?”

“Quite as many. You had omitted the women and children in your calculation! Oh, Queen of France! Oh, proud and courageous woman! consider them as so many men, these women of Paris; the day will perhaps come when they will compel you to consider them as so many demons.”

“What can you mean, Count?”

“Madame, do you know what part a woman plays in a civil war? No, you do not. Well, I will tell you; and you will see that two soldiers against each woman would not be too many.”

“Count, have you lost your senses?”

Charny smiled sadly.

“Did you see them at the Bastille?” asked he, “in the midst of the fire, in the midst of the shot, crying, ‘To arms!’ threatening with their fists your redoubtable Swiss soldiers, fully armed and equipped, uttering maledictions over the bodies of the slain, with that voice that excites the hearts of the living. Have we not seen them boiling the pitch, dragging cannon along the streets, giving cartridges to those who were eager for the combat, and to the timid combatants a cartridge and a kiss? Do you know that as many women as men trod the drawbridge of the Bastille, and that at this moment, if the stones of the Bastille are falling, it is by pickaxes wielded by women's hands? Ah! Madame, do not overlook the women of Paris; take them into consideration; think also of the children who cast bullets, who sharpen swords, who throw paving-stones from a sixth story; think of them, for the bullet which was cast by a child may kill your best general from afar off, for the sword which it has sharpened will cut the hamstrings of your war-horses, for the clouds of stones which fall as from the skies will crush your dragoons and your guards; consider the old men, Madame, for if they have no longer the strength to raise a sword, they have still enough to serve as shields. At the taking of the Bastille, Madame, there were old men; do you know what they did, — those aged men whom you affect to despise? They placed themselves before the young men, who steadied their muskets on their shoulders, that they might take sure aim, so that the balls of your Swiss killed the helpless aged man, whose body served as a rampart to the vigorous youth. Include the aged men, for it is they who for the last three hundred years have related to succeeding generations the insults suffered by their mothers, — the desolation of their fields, caused by the devouring of their crops by the noblemen's game; the odium attached to their caste, crushed down by feudal privileges; and then the sons seize a hatchet, a club, a gun, in short, any weapon within their reach, and sally out to kill, fully charged with the curses of the aged against all this tyranny, as the cannon is loaded with powder and iron. At Paris, at this moment, men, women, old men, and children are all crying, 'Liberty, deliverance!' Count everything that has a voice, Madame, and you may estimate the number of combatants in Paris at eight hundred thousand souls."

"Three hundred Spartans defeated the army of Xerxes, Monsieur de Charny."

"Yes; but to-day your three hundred Spartans have increased to eight hundred thousand, and your fifty thousand soldiers compose the army of Xerxes."

The queen raised her head, her hands convulsively clinched, and her face burning with shame and anger.

“Oh, let me fall from my throne,” said she, “let me be torn to pieces by your five hundred thousand Parisians, but do not suffer me to hear a Charny, a man devoted to me, speak to me thus.”

“If he speaks to you thus, Madame, it is because it is necessary; for this Charny has not in his veins a single drop of blood that is unworthy of his ancestors, or that is not all your own.”

“Then let him march upon Paris with me, and there we will die together.”

“Ignominiously,” said the count, “without the possibility of a struggle. We shall not even fight; we shall disappear like the Philistines or the Amalekites. March upon Paris! — but you seem to be ignorant of a very important thing, — that at the moment we shall enter Paris, the houses will fall upon us as did the waves of the Red Sea upon Pharaoh; and you will leave in France a name which will be accursed, and your children will be killed like the cubs of a wolf”

“How then, should I fall, Count “ said the queen, with haughtiness; “teach me, I entreat you.”

“As a victim, Madame,” respectfully replied Monsieur de Charny; “as a queen, smiling and forgiving those who strike the fatal blow. Ah! if you had five hundred thousand men like me, I should say: “Let us set out on our march! — let us march to-night! let us march this very instant! And to-morrow you would reign at the Tuileries; to-morrow you would have reconquered your throne.”

“Oh,” exclaimed the queen, “even you have given way to despair, — you in whom I had founded all my hopes!”

“Yes, I despair, Madame; because all France thinks as Paris does; because your army, if it were victorious in Paris, would be swallowed up by Lyons, Rouen, Lille, Strasbourg, Nantes, and a hundred other devouring cities. Come, come, take courage, Madame; return your sword into its scabbard.”

“Ah! was it for this,” cried the queen, “that I have gathered around me so many brave men? Was it for this that. I have inspired them with so much courage?”

“If that is not your opinion, Madame, give your orders, and we will march upon Paris this very night. Say what is your pleasure.”

There was so much devotion in this offer of the count, that it intimidated the queen more than a refusal would have done. She threw herself in despair on a sofa, where she struggled for a considerable time with her haughty soul.

At length, raising her head: —

“Count,” said she, “do you desire me to remain inactive?”

“I have the honor to advise your Majesty to remain so.”

“It shall be so, — come back.”

“Alas! Madame, have I offended you?” said the count, looking at the queen with a sorrowful expression but in which beamed indescribable love.

“No — your hand.”

The count bowed gracefully, and gave his hand to the queen.

“I must scold you,” said Marie Antoinette, endeavoring to smile.

“For what reason, Madame?”

“How! you have a brother in the army, and I have only been accidentally informed of it.”

“I do not comprehend — ”

“This evening, a young officer of the Hussars of
Bercheny — ”

“Ah! my brother George!”

“Why have you never spoken to me of this young man? Why has he not a high rank in a regiment?”

“Because he is yet quite young and inexperienced; because he is not worthy of command as a chief officer; because, in fine, if your Majesty has condescended to look so low as upon me who am called Charny, to honor me with your friendship, it is not a reason that my relatives should be advanced, to the prejudice of a crowd of brave noblemen more deserving than my brothers.”

“Have you then still another brother?”

“Yes, Madame; and one who is as ready to die for your Majesty as the two others.”

“Does he not need anything?”

“Nothing, Madame. We have the happiness to have not only our lives, but also a fortune to lay at the feet of your Majesty.”

While he was pronouncing these last words, — the queen being much moved by a trait of such delicate probity, and he himself palpitating with affection caused by the gracious kindness of her Majesty, — they were suddenly disturbed in their conversation by a groan from the adjoining room.

The queen rose from her seat, went to the door, and screamed aloud. She had just perceived a woman who was writhing on the carpet, and suffering the most horrible convulsions.

“Oh, the countess,” said she in a whisper to Monsieur de Charny; “she has overheard our conversation.”

“No, Madame,” answered he, “otherwise she would have warned your Majesty that we could be overheard.”

And he sprang towards Andrée and raised her in his arms.

The queen remained standing at two steps from her, cold, pale, and trembling with anxiety.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A Trio

ANDRÉE was gradually recovering her senses, without knowing from whom assistance came, but she seemed instinctively to understand that some one had come to her assistance.

She raised her head, and her hands grasped the unhoped-for succor that was offered her.

But her mind did not recover as soon as her body; it still remained vacillating, stupefied, somnolent, during a few minutes.

After having succeeded in recalling her to physical life, Monsieur de Charny attempted to restore her moral senses; but he was struggling against a terrible and concentrated unconsciousness.

Finally she fastened her open but haggard eyes upon him, and with her still remaining delirium, without recognizing the person who was supporting her, she gave a loud shriek, and abruptly pushed him from her.

During all this time the queen turned her eyes in another direction; she, a woman; she, whose mission it was to console, to strengthen this afflicted friend, — she abandoned her.

Charny raised Andrée in his powerful arms, notwithstanding the resistance she attempted to make, and turning round to the queen, who was still standing, pale and motionless: —

“Pardon me, Madame,” said he; “something extraordinary must doubtless have happened. Madame de Charny is not subject to fainting, and this is the first time I have ever seen her in this state.”

“She must then be suffering greatly,” said the queen, who still reverted to the idea that Andrée had overheard their conversation.

“Yes, without doubt she is suffering,” answered the count, “and it is for that reason that I shall ask your Majesty the permission to have her carried to her own apartment. She needs the assistance of her attendants.”

“Do so,” said the queen, raising her hand to the bell.

But scarcely had Andrée heard the ringing of the bell, when she wrestled fearfully, and cried out in her delirium, —

"Oh, Gilbert, that Gilbert!"

The queen trembled at the sound of this name, and the astonished count placed his wife upon a sofa.

At this moment a servant appeared, to answer the bell.

"It is nothing," said the queen, making a sign to him with her hand to leave the room.

Then, being once more left to themselves, the count and the queen looked at each other. Andrée had again closed her eyes, and seemed to suffer from a second attack.

Monsieur de Charny, who was kneeling near the sofa, prevented her from falling off it.

"Gilbert," repeated the queen, "what name is that?"

"We must inquire."

"I think I know it," said Marie Antoinette; "I think it is not the first time I have heard the countess pronounce that name."

But as if she had been threatened by this recollection of the queen, and this threat had surprised her in the midst of her convulsions, Andrée opened her eyes, stretched out her arms to heaven, and making a great effort, stood upright.

Her first look, an intelligent look, was this time directed at Monsieur de Charny, whom she recognized, and greeted with caressing smiles.

Then, as if this involuntary manifestation of her thought had been unworthy of her Spartan soul, Andrée turned her eyes in another direction, and perceived the queen. She immediately made a profound inclination.

"Ah! good Heaven, what then is the matter with you, Madame?" said Monsieur de Charny; "you have alarmed me, — you, who are usually so strong and so courageous, to have suffered from a swoon!"

"Sir," said she, "such fearful events have taken place at Paris, that when men are trembling, it is by no means strange that women should faint. Have you then left Paris? — oh! you have done rightly."

"Good God! Countess," said Charny, in a doubting tone, "was it then on my account that you underwent all this suffering!"

Andrée again looked at her husband and the queen, but did not answer.

"Why, certainly that is the reason, Count, — why should you doubt it?" answered Marie Antoinette. "The Countess de Charny is not a queen; she has the right to be alarmed for her husband's safety."

Charny could detect jealousy in the queen's language.

“Oh, Madame,” said he, “I am quite certain that the countess fears still more for her sovereign’s safety than for mine.”

“But, in fine,” asked Marie Antoinette, “why and how is it that we found you in a swoon in this room, Countess?”

“Oh, it would be impossible for me to tell you that, Madame; I cannot myself account for it; but in this life of fatigue, of terror, and painful emotions, which we have led for the last three days, nothing can be more natural, it seems to me, than the fainting of a woman.”

“This is true,” murmured the queen, who perceived that Andrée did not wish to be compelled to speak out.

“But,” rejoined Andrée, in her turn, with that extraordinary degree of calmness which never abandoned her after she had once become the mistress of her will, and which was so much the more embarrassing in difficult circumstances that it could easily be discerned to be mere affectation, and concealed feelings altogether human; “but even your Majesty’s eyes are at this moment in tears.”

And the count thought he could perceive in the words of his wife that ironical accent he had remarked but a few moments previously in the language of the queen.

“Madame,” said he to Andrée, with a degree of severity to which his voice was evidently not accustomed, “it is not astonishing that the queen’s eyes should be suffused with tears, for the queen loves her people, and the blood of the people has been shed.”

“Fortunately, God has spared yours, sir,” said Andrée, who was still no less cold and impenetrable.

“Yes; but it is not of her Majesty that we are speaking, Madame, but of you; let us then return to our subject; the queen permits us to do so.”

Marie Antoinette made an affirmative gesture with her head.

“You were alarmed, then, were you not?”

“Who, I?”

“You have been suffering; do not deny it; some accident has happened to you — what was it? — I know not what it can have been, but you will tell us.”

“You are mistaken, sir.”

“Have you had any reason to complain of any one-of a man?” Andrée turned pale.

"I have had no reason to complain of any one, sir; I have just come from the king's apartment."

"Did you come direct from there?"

"Yes, direct. Her Majesty can easily ascertain that fact."

"If such be the case," said Marie Antoinette, "the countess must be right. The king loves her too well, and knows that my own affection for her is too strong, for him to disoblige her in any way whatever."

"But you mentioned a name," said Charny, still persisting.

"A name?"

"Yes; when you were recovering your senses."

Andrée looked at the queen as if to ask her for assistance; but either because the queen did not understand her, or did not wish to do so: —

"Yes," said she, "you pronounced the name Gilbert."

"Gilbert! did I pronounce the name of Gilbert?" exclaimed Andrée, in a tone so full of terror that the count was more affected by this cry than he had been by her fainting.

"Yes!" exclaimed he, "you pronounced that name."

"Ah, indeed!" said Andrée, "that is singular."

And by degrees, as the clouds close again after having been rent asunder by the lightning, the countenance of the young woman, so violently agitated at the sound of that fatal name, recovered its serenity, and but a few muscles of her lovely face continued to tremble almost imperceptibly, like the last flashes of the tempest which vanish in the horizon.

"Gilbert!" she repeated; "I do not know that name."

"Yes, Gilbert," repeated the queen; "come, try to recollect, my dear Andrée."

"But, Madame," said the count to Marie Antoinette, "perhaps it is mere chance, and this name may be unknown to the countess."

"No," said Andrée, "no; it is not unknown to me. It is that of a learned man, of a skilful physician who has just arrived from America, I believe, and who became intimate while there with Monsieur de Lafayette."

"Well, then?" asked the count.

"Well, then!" repeated Andrée, with the greatest presence of mind; "I do not know him personally, but he is said to be a very honorable man."

"Then why all this emotion, my dear countess?" observed the queen.

"This emotion! Have I then been excited?"

“Yes; one would have said that when you pronounced the name Gilbert, you felt as if undergoing torture.”

“It is possible; I will tell you how it happened. I met a person in the king’s cabinet, who was dressed in black, a man of austere countenance, who spoke of gloomy and horrible subjects; he related with the most frightful reality the assassination of Monsieur de Launay and Monsieur de Flesselles. I became terrified on hearing this intelligence, and I fell into the swoon in which you saw me. It may be that I spoke at that time; perhaps I then pronounced the name of Monsieur Gilbert.”

“It is possible,” repeated Monsieur de Charny, who was evidently not disposed to push the questioning any further. “But now you feel recovered, do you not, Madame?”

“Perfectly.”

“I will then beg of you to do one thing, Monsieur de Charny,” said the queen.

“I am at the disposal of your Majesty.”

“Go and find out Messieurs de Besenval, de Broglie, and de Lambesq. Tell them to quarter their troops where they now are. The king will decide to-morrow in council what must be done.”

The count bowed; but before leaving the room, he cast a last look at Andrée.

That look was full of affectionate anxiety.

It did not escape the queen.

“Countess,” said she, “will you not return to the king’s apartment with me?”

“No, Madame, no,” replied Andrée, quickly.

“And why not?”

“I ask your Majesty’s permission to withdraw to my own apartment. The emotions I have undergone make me feel the want of rest.”

“Come now, Countess, speak frankly,” said the queen.

“Have you had any disagreement with his Majesty?”

“Oh, by no means, Madame! absolutely nothing.”

“Oh, tell me, if anything has happened! The king does not always spare my friends.”

“The king is, as usual, full of kindness to me, but — ”

“But you have no great wish to see him. Is it not so? There must positively be something at the bottom of all this, Count,” said the queen, with affected gayety.

At this moment Andrée directed so expressive, so supplicating a look at the queen, — a look so full of revelations, that the latter understood it was time to put an end to this minor war.

“In fact, Countess,” said she, “we will leave Monsieur de Charny to execute the commission I intrusted to him, and you can retire or remain here, according to your choice.”

“Thank you, Madame,” said Andrée.

“Go, then, Monsieur de Charny,” continued Marie Antoinette, while she noticed the expression of gratitude which was visible on the features of Andrée.

Either the count did not perceive, or did not wish to perceive it. He took the hand of his wife, and complimented her on the return of her strength and color.

Then, making a most respectful bow to the queen, he left the room.

But while leaving the room he exchanged a last look with Marie Antoinette.

The queen’s look meant to say, “Return quickly.” That of the count replied, “As soon as possible.”

As to Andrée, she followed with her eyes every one of her husband’s movements, her bosom palpitating, and almost breathless.

She seemed to accelerate with her wishes the slow and noble step with which he approached the door. She, as it were, pushed him out of the room with the whole power of her will.

Therefore was it that, as soon as he had closed the door, as soon as he had disappeared, all the strength that Andrée had summoned to assist her in surmounting the difficulties of her position abandoned her; her face became pale, her limbs failed beneath her, and she fell into an arm-chair which was within her reach, while she endeavored to apologize to the queen for her involuntary breach of etiquette.

The queen ran to the chimney-piece, took a smelling-bottle of salts, and making Andrée inhale them, she was soon restored to her senses, but more by the power of her own will than by the efficacy of the attentions she received at the royal hands.

In fact, there was something strange in the conduct of these two women. The queen seemed to love Andrée; Andrée respected the queen greatly, and nevertheless at certain moments they did not appear to be, the one an affectionate queen, the other a devoted subject, but two determined enemies.

As we have already said, the potent will of Andrée soon restored her strength. She rose up, respectfully removed the queen's hand, and, courtesying to her: —

"Your Majesty," said she, "has given me permission to retire to my own room."

"Yes, undoubtedly; and you are always free, dear Countess, and this you know full well. Etiquette is not intended for you. But before you retire, have you nothing to tell me?"

"I, Madame?" asked Andrée. "Yes, you, without doubt."

"No: what should I have to tell you?"

"In regard to this Monsieur Gilbert, the sight of whom has made so strong an impression upon you."

Andrée trembled; but she merely made a sign of denial.

"In that case, I will not detain you any longer, dear Andrée; you may go."

And the queen took a step towards the door of the dressing-room, which communicated with her bedroom.

Andrée, on her side, having made her obeisance to the queen in the most irreproachable manner, was going towards the door.

But at the very moment she was about to open it, steps were heard in the corridor, and a hand was placed on the external handle of the door.

At the same time the voice of Louis XVI. was heard, giving orders for the night to his valet.

"The king, Madame!" said Andrée, retreating several steps; "the king!"

"And what of that? Yes, it is the king," said Marie Antoinette. "Does he terrify you to such a degree as this?"

"Madame, in the name of Heaven," cried Andrée, "let me not see the king! Let me not meet the king face to face, at all events this evening. I should die of shame."

"But finally you will tell me — "

"Everything — yes, everything — if your Majesty requires it. But hide me!"

"Go into my boudoir," said Marie Antoinette. "You can leave it as soon as the king himself retires. Rest assured your captivity will not be of long duration; the king never remains here long."

“Oh, thanks! — thanks!” exclaimed the countess. And rushing into the boudoir, she disappeared at the very moment that the king, having opened the door, appeared upon the threshold of the chamber.

The king entered.

“Good-day, Mademoiselle Catherine.”

Catherine was a good, kind-hearted girl, and she welcomed Pitou as an old acquaintance. He was in point of fact an old acquaintance, for during two or three years she had seen him passing and repassing before the farmgate at least once a week; only that Catherine saw Pitou, and Pitou did not see Catherine. The reason was, that at first when Pitou used to pass by the farm in this manner Catherine was sixteen years old and Pitou but fourteen. We have just seen what happened when Pitou in his turn had attained his sixteenth year.

By degrees Catherine had learned to appreciate the talents of Pitou, for Pitou had given her evidence of his talents by offering to her his finest birds and his fattest rabbits. The result of this was that Catherine complimented him upon these talents, and that Pitou, who was the more sensible to compliments from his being so little habituated to receive them, allowed the charm of novelty to influence him, and instead of going on straightforward, as heretofore, to the Wolf’s Heath, he would stop half way, and instead of employing the whole of his day in picking up beech-mast and in laying his wires, he would lose his time in sauntering round Father Billot’s farm, in the hope of seeing Catherine, were it only for a moment.

The result of this was a very sensible diminution in the produce of rabbit-skins, and a complete scarcity of robin-redbreasts and thrushes.

Aunt Angélique complained of this. Pitou represented to her that the rabbits had become mistrustful, and that the birds, who had found out the secret of his lime-twigs, now drank out of hollows of trees, or out of leaves that retained the water.

There was one consideration which consoled Aunt Angélique for this increase in the intelligence of the rabbits and the cunning of the birds, which she attributed to the progress of philosophy, and this was that her nephew would obtain the purse, enter the seminary, pass three years there, and on leaving it would be an abbé. Now, being housekeeper to an abbé had been the constant aim of Mademoiselle Angélique’s ambition.

This ambition could not fail of being gratified; for Ange Pitou, having once become an abbé, could not do otherwise than take his aunt for housekeeper, and above all, after what his aunt had done for him.

The only thing which disturbed the golden dreams of the old maid was, when speaking of this hope to the Abbé Fortier, the latter replied, shaking his head: —

“My dear Demoiselle Pitou, in order to become an abbe, your nephew should give himself up less to the study of natural history, and much more to *De viris illustribus*, or to the *Selectæ è profanis scriptoribus*.”

“And which means?” said Mademoiselle Angélique, inquiringly.

“That he makes too many barbarisms and infinitely too many solecisms,” replied the Abbé Fortier.

An answer which left Mademoiselle Angélique in the most afflicting state of vagueness and uncertainty.

Beech-mast, we must inform our readers who are less acquainted with forest terms than we are, is the fruit of the beech-tree. This fruit, of which a very good sort of oil is made, is, to the poor, a species of manna, which during two months of the year falls for them from heaven.

[Dumas should also have told his readers that beech-mast is excellent for pigs, and that pheasants, and indeed most kinds of game, are very fond of it. — TRANSLATOR.]

CHAPTER XXX.

A King and a Queen

THE queen, after glancing round, exchanged friendly greetings with the king, who gave her his hand.

“To what good chance,” asked Marie Antoinette, “do I owe this visit?”

“Really to chance; you have spoken correctly, Madame. I have just met De Charny, who said he was commissioned by you to go and tell all our warriors to keep themselves quiet. It affords me much pleasure that you have taken so wise a resolution, and I was unwilling to pass your apartment without thanking you.”

“Yes,” said the queen, “I have in fact reconsidered the matter, and have come to the conclusion that it is decidedly the best course to leave the troops at rest, and thus to afford no pretext for intestine war.”

“Good! that is right!” said the king. “I am delighted to find you of that opinion. I knew very well that I should bring you over to it at last.”

“Your Majesty sees that you have gained your object without much trouble; since, uninfluenced by you, I have formed my decision.”

“Well done! that is a proof that you are almost reasonable, and when I have communicated to you some of my reflections, you will be so altogether.”

“But if we are of the same opinion, Sire, to impart to me these reflections would be useless.”

“Oh, calm yourself, Madame! I have no wish to enter upon discussion; you know well that I like it no more than you do. This will be a conversation. Come, now; are you not glad to talk with me occasionally about the affairs of France, as a good wife does with her spouse about domestic matters?”

These last words were uttered with that perfect good-nature which Louis XVI. invariably manifested towards his familiar friends.

“Oh, Sire,” answered the queen, “I am always happy to do so; but is the time well chosen?”

"I believe that it is. You desire that there should be no hostile demonstration. Did you not this moment say so?"

"I did."

"But you have not explained to me your reason."

"You did not ask me."

"Well, I now ask you."

"Impotence!"

"Ah! that is the reason, is it? If you thought yourself the stronger, you would make war."

"If I thought that I was the stronger, I should burn Paris."

"Oh, I was certain that your motives for not wishing war were not the same as mine."

"Well, let us hear yours."

" Mine?" asked the king. "Yes," answered Marie Antoinette, "yours."

"I have but one."

"Mention it."

"Oh, that is soon done! I do not wish to enter into war with the people, because I find that the people are right."

Marie Antoinette made a gesture of surprise.

"Right!" she exclaimed, "the people right in rebelling!"

"Certainly."

"Right in storming the Bastille, in killing the governor, in murdering the provost of the merchants, in exterminating your soldiers?"

"Yes, by Heaven, they were!"

"Oh," exclaimed the queen, "these are your reflections, and it was such reflections as these that you wished me to hear!"

"I have told you them as they occurred to me."

"At dinner?"

"Good!" said the king, "we are about to fall back on the subject of nourishment. You cannot pardon me for eating. You would have me poetic and ethereal. What do you wish! In my family we eat. Not only did Henry IV. eat, but he was also a hard drinker; the great and poetic Louis XIV. eat enough to make one blush; King Louis XV., to make sure of good eating and drinking, baked his biscuits with his own royal hands, and had his coffee made by Madame Dubarry. As for me, what would you have? When I am hungry, I cannot resist my appetite; I am compelled to follow the example of my ancestors, Louis XV., Louis XIV., and Henry IV. If this is a constitutional necessity, pray be lenient with me; if it is a fault, forgive me.”

“But, Sire, you must confess — ”

“That I ought not to eat when I am hungry; no,” said the king, tranquilly shaking his head.

“I am not talking of that: I speak of the people.”

“Ah!”

“You must confess that the people have been in the wrong.”

“In rebelling? Not at all. Come, let us review all our ministers. Since we began to reign, how many have really concerned themselves about the welfare of the people? Two, — Turgot and Monsieur de Necker. You and your coterie have banished them. For one of these gentlemen the people have raised a tumult; for the other they will perhaps raise a revolution. Let us speak a little of the others! Ah! they are charming fellows, are they not? Monsieur de Maurepas, that creature of my aunts, a song-writer! It is not the ministers who should sing, it is the people. Monsieur de Calonne? That epigrammatic answer he made you was admirable, I know well, — a sentence that will live. Once when you asked him for something, — I forget what, — he gallantly replied: ‘If it is possible, it is done: if it is impossible, it shall be done.’ That epigram cost the people to the tune of a hundred millions. You should not be astonished, therefore, if they find it a little less witty than you do. In truth, — pray understand me, Madame, — if I retain all those who fleece the people, and dismiss all those who love them, it will not be the best means of tranquillizing them and of making them more attached to our government.”

“Good! Then insurrection is a right. Proclaim this principle from the house-tops. In truth I am glad that it is to me alone that you have communicated such ideas. If others heard you!”

“Oh, yes, yes!” replied the king; “you tell me nothing new. Yes, I know well that if Polignac, Dreux-Brézé, Clermont-Tonnerre, and Coigny heard me, they would shrug their shoulders behind me, — I know it well; but in reality they pity me after a very different fashion. That Polignac, to whom one fine morning you made over the county of Fénestrange, which cost you twelve hundred thousand livres; Sartine, to whom I have already given a pension of eighty-nine thousand livres, and who has just received from you two hundred thousand livres ostensibly as a stipendiary fund; the prince of Deux-Ponts, to whom you compelled me to grant nine hundred and fortyfive thousand livres to clear off his debts; Marie de Laval and Madame de Magneville, who each finger a pension of eighty thousand livres; Coigny, who is loaded with all sorts of pensions, and who once, when I thought of making some reduction in his appointments, hedged me in between two doors, and would have beaten me, I believe, if I had not consented to give him all that he wished, — all these people are your friends, are they not? Well, speak about them. But this much I will say, and I know you will not believe it, because it is the truth; if instead of being at court, these friends of yours had been in the Bastille, the people would have fortified the place instead of demolishing it."

"Oh!" exclaimed the queen, with a gesture of anger she was unable to suppress.

"You may say what you please, but that is the case," said Louis, tranquilly.

"Oh, your beloved people! Ah, well! they will not have occasion much longer to hate my friends, for they are going into exile."

"They are going away!" exclaimed the king.

"Yes, they are going away."

"Polignac? the women?"

"Yes."

"So much the better," exclaimed the king, "so much the better! God be praised!"

"How so much the better? How God be praised? Are you not sorry?"

"No, indeed; far from it. Do they need money to take them away? I will give it them. That money at least will not be ill employed, I will warrant. I wish you a pleasant journey, gentlemen; and you also, ladies," said the king, all radiant.

"Yes," said the queen, "I can understand that you like cowardice."

"Well, let us understand each other; you are doing them justice at last."

"They are not dismissed; they are deserting."

"No matter, so that they take themselves off!"

"And to think that it is your family who have advised such despicable conduct!"

"My family advised your favorites to go away! I never gave my family credit for so much sense. And tell me which members of my family have done me this service, that I may thank them."

"Your aunt Adelaide; your brother D'Artois."

"My brother D'Artois! Do you believe he will follow the advice he gives? Do you think that he also will go away?"

"Why not?" exclaimed Marie Antoinette, trying to vex the king.

"Heaven grant it!" exclaimed Louis; "let Monsieur d'Artois take his departure; I should say to him what I have said to the others: A good journey to you, brother d'Artois! I wish you a very pleasant journey!"

"Ah! your brother!" exclaimed Marie Antoinette. "True; but what quality has he to make his presence desirable? A good little fellow enough, who lacks neither wit nor courage, I grant you; but who has no brains; who acts the French prince like a fop of the time of Louis XII., — a blundering blockhead, who has compromised even you, the wife of Cæsar."

"Cæsar!" muttered the queen, with cutting irony.

"Or Claudius, if you like it better," answered the king; "for you know, Madame, that Claudius, as well as Nero, was a Cæsar."

The queen looked down. This historical coolness confused her not a little.

"Claudius," continued the king, — "since you prefer the name of Claudius to that of Cæsar, — Claudius was obliged one evening, as you are aware, to shut the gate of Versailles, in order to give you a lesson when you stayed out too late. It was Monsieur d'Artois who got you that lesson. I shall not miss, therefore, the Count d'Artois. As for my aunt, ah, well! we know what we know about her. She is another who deserves to be enrolled in the family of the Cæsars. But I say no more; she is my aunt. Let her go in peace; I shall not miss her a whit more than I shall the others. Then, there is Monsieur de Provence; do you think I should feel sorry at his leaving? A good journey to him!"

"Oh, he does not speak of going!"

"So much the worse! You see, my dear, Monsieur de Provence knows Latin too well for me. I am obliged to speak English to be even with him. It was Monsieur de Provence who put Beaumarchais on our shoulders, thrusting him in at Bicêtre, For-Lévêque and I know not where, on his own private authority, and a fine return has been made us for all this by this same Monsieur de Beaumarchais. Ah, Monsieur de Provence will remain, will he? So much the worse, so much the worse! There is one thing of which I should like you to be aware, Madame, and it is this, — in your whole household, I know but one honest man, Monsieur de Charny."

The queen blushed and turned away.

"We were talking about the Bastille," continued the king, after a short silence, "and you were lamenting that it was taken."

"Be seated at least, Sire," replied the queen, "since it would appear that you have still many things to tell me."

"No, thank you, I like better to walk while speaking; by thus walking, I attend to my health, about which nobody else seems to take the slightest concern; for though my appetite is good, my digestion is bad. Do you know what they are saying at this moment? They are saying: 'The king has supped; the king sleeps.' Now you see how I sleep, — bolt upright, trying to aid my digestion while I talk on politics with my wife. Ah, Madame, I am expiating, — expiating!"

"Expiating what, if you please?"

"The sins of a century whose scapegoat I am; I am expiating the sins of Madame de Pompadour, Madame Dubarry, the Parc-aux-Cerfs; the sins of poor Latude, who for thirty years rotted in dungeons, and was immortalized by suffering, — one more victim who caused the Bastille to be detested. Poor fellow! Ah, Madame! what blunders I have made in giving effect to the stupid measures of others! Philosophers, political economists, scientists, men of letters, I have taken part in persecuting them all. Good Heavens! these men asked for nothing better than to love me. If they had loved me they would have at once constituted the glory and the happiness of my reign. Monsieur Rousseau, for example, that bugbear of Sartines and others — ah well! I saw him one day myself, that day you made him come to Trianon, you recollect. His clothes, it is true, were ill brushed, and it is also true that his beard was long; but he was nevertheless a good man. If I had donned my rough gray coat and thick stockings, and had said to Monsieur Rousseau, 'Let us go and gather mosses in the woods of Ville d'Avray — '"

"Ah, well! what then?" interrupted the queen, with supreme contempt.

"Well, then Monsieur Rousseau would not have written the 'Vicar of Savoy' nor the 'Social Contract.'"

"Yes, yes, I am well aware of that; that is the way you reason," said Marie Antoinette. "You are a prudent man; you fear your people as the dog does his master."

"Not so, but as the master fears his dog; it is something to be sure that one's dog will not bite him. Madame, when I walk with Médor, that Pyrenean hound of which the king of Spain made me a present, I feel quite proud of his friendship. Laugh if you will, but it is nevertheless true that

Médor, if he was not my friend, would chew me up with his great white teeth. You see I say to him: ‘Pretty Médor, good Médor,’ and he licks me. I prefer his tongue to his tusks.”

“Be it so, then; flatter the revolutionists, caress them, throw titbits to them.”

“Oh, the very thing I am going to do I have no other project, believe me. Yes, my decision is taken. I will lay up a little money, and then I will deal with these gentlemen as if they were so many Cerberi. Ah, but stay! There is Monsieur de Mirabeau — ”

“Oh, yes! tell me about that ferocious brute.”

“With fifty thousand livres a month he will be a Médor, whereas if we wait, he will not perhaps be satisfied with less than half a million.”

The queen laughed scornfully.

“Oh, the idea of flattering people like him!”

“Monsieur Bailly,” continued the king, “having become minister of arts — an office which I am going to institute for my amusement — will be another Médor. Pardon me, Madame, if I do not entertain the same views that you do, but I am of the same opinion as my ancestor Henry IV. He was a profound politician if there ever was one, and I remember well what he said.”

“What did he say?”

“‘Flies are not caught with vinegar.’“

“Sancho said that also, or something very like it.”

“Well, Sancho would have made the people of Barataria very happy, had there been such a place as Barataria.”

“Sire, your ancestor Henry IV., whom you bring forward, caught wolves as well as flies. Witness Marshal de Biron, whose throat he cut. He could say then what he pleased. By reasoning like Henry and acting as you do, you take all prestige from royalty, which can only exist by prestige. You degrade the principle, ‘What will majesty become?’ Majesty, I am aware, is but a word, but in this word centre all the royal virtues: ‘He who respects, loves; he who loves, obeys — ’“

“Ah! let us speak of majesty,” interrupted the king, with a smile; “yes, let us speak of it. You, for example, are as majestic as one can be; and I know of none in Europe, not even your mother, Marie Thérèse, who has promoted as you have the science of majesty.”

"I understand you; you mean that my majesty does not prevent my being abhorred by the French people."

"I do not say 'abhorred,' my dear Antoinette," said the king, gently; "but perhaps you are not so much loved as you deserve to be."

"Sir," said the queen, deeply wounded, "you only echo all that is said. I have, nevertheless, injured nobody; on the contrary, I have often benefited my sub- jets. Why should they hate me as you say? Why should they not love me, were it not that there are people who make it their business to repeat daily, 'The queen is not loved!' Are you aware, sir, that one voice alone is needed to say that, in order that a hundred voices should repeat it; a hundred voices evoke ten thousand. Then, in unison with these ten thousand voices everybody repeats: 'The queen is not loved!' And the queen is not loved simply because one person said: 'The queen is not loved!'"

"Good heavens!" muttered the king.

"Thank goodness," interrupted the queen, "I have but little faith in popularity; but I also believe that my unpopularity is exaggerated. Praises are not showered down upon me, it is true; but I was once the popular idol, and because they loved me too much, they now run to the opposite extreme and hate me."

"Stay, Madame," said the king; "you know not the whole truth, and are still laboring under a delusion; were we not talking of the Bastille?"

"Yes."

"Well, there was a large room in the Bastille full of all sorts of books written against you. They will surely have burned all that."

"With what did these books accuse me?"

"*Ah*, you very well know, Madame, that I take not upon me to be your accuser, and have no wish to be your judge. When these pamphlets appeared, I had the whole edition seized and buried in the Bastille. But sometimes these books fall into my own hands. For instance, I have one here now," said the king, striking his coat pocket, "and it is simply abominable."

"Show it me," cried the queen.

"I cannot," said the king; "it contains engravings."

"And have you come to that? Have you reached that point of blindness and imbecility that you do not even attempt to trace all these base slanders to their source?"

“That is just what I have done. I have traced them to their source; there is not one of my lieutenants of police who has not grown gray in that service.”

“Then you know the author of these indignities?”

“I know one of the authors, at least, — Monsieur Furth, the author of that one; there is his receipt for 22,500 livres. You see when the thing is worth the trouble, I do not regard the expense.”

“But the others, — the others!”

“Ah, they are often poor hungry wretches who vegetate in England or Holland. We are bitten, stung, irritated; we ferret them out, expecting to find a serpent, a crocodile, to crush, to kill. Nothing of the sort; but we find an insect, so mean, so base, so despicable, that we dare not dirty our hands by touching it, even to punish it.”

“That is all very fine! But if you care not to touch insects, why not accuse boldly the sun which calls them into existence. In truth, we may safely affirm that their sun is Philip of Orléans.”

“Ha!” exclaimed the king, clapping his hands, “are you there? Monsieur d’Orléans! nay, nay, seek not to embroil me with him.”

“Embroil you with your enemy, Sire! Oh, the idea is original!”

The king shrugged his shoulders.

“There now,” said he, “there is your system of interpreting matters. Monsieur d’Orléans! You attack Monsieur d’Orléans, who has just placed himself under my orders to fight the rebels, — who leaves Paris and hastens to Versailles! Monsieur d’Orléans my enemy! Truly, Madame, the hatred you bear to the house of Orléans surpasses all conception.”

“Oh, he has come, has he? and do you know the reason? He fears that his absence might be remarked in the general demonstration of loyalty. He has come because he is a coward.”

“Indeed! We are going to begin again. Whoever first imputed such motives to Orléans is a coward. You had it inserted in your gazette that he showed the white feather at Ushant, because you wished to dishonor him. Ah, well! it was a calumny, Madame. Philip was not afraid; Philip did not flee. Had he fled, he would not belong to the family. The Orléans are brave. The fact is indisputable. The chief of the family, who seemed rather to have descended from Henry III. than from Henry IV., was brave, in spite of D’Effiat and Chevalier de Lorraine. He braved death at the battle of Cassel. The regent had indeed some trifling things to say against him on the score of manners; but he exposed his life at Steinkerque, at Nerwinde, and at

Almanza like the meanest soldier in his army. Tell only half the truth, Madame, if you will; but tell not the evil that has no existence."

"Your Majesty is in the vein of whitewashing all the revolutionists. You will see, you will see what that fellow is worth. Oh, if I regret the destruction of the Bastille, it is on his account; yes, I repent that criminals were thrown into it, while he was at large."

"Ah, well!" said the king, "if Monsieur d'Orléans had been in the Bastille, we should be in a fine predicament to-day."

"In that case what would have happened, I should like to know?"

"You are aware, Madame, that his bust was prome- naded round, crowned with flowers, together with that of Monsieur de Necker."

"I am."

"Ah, well! once out of the Bastille, Monsieur d'Orléans would have been king of France."

"And perhaps you would have thought that just," said Marie Antoinette, in a tone of bitter irony.

"I' faith, yes; shrug your shoulders as much as you please. To judge others, I look at matters from their point of view. From the height of the throne we cannot well see the people; I descend to their level, and I ask myself if as a burgess or a clod-hopper I could suffer a noble to count me among his cows and poultry as a chattel! if, as a farmer, I could endure that my lord's ten thousand pigeons should daily eat ten grains each of wheat, oats, or buckwheat, that is to say, about two bushels, whilst his hares and rabbits browsed on my clover, whilst his wild boars rooted up my potatoes, whilst his tax-gatherers tithed my produce, whilst my lord himself kissed my wife and daughters, whilst the king pressed my sons into his army, and whilst the priest, in his moments of passion, condemned my soul to endless misery."

"Why, sir," interrupted the queen, whose eyes flashed thunderbolts, "you should take a pickaxe and go and aid in the demolition of the Bastille."

"You laugh," replied the king; "but, by my troth, I should go, were it not ridiculous for a king to handle a pickaxe, when he could have the same work done by a single dash of the pen. Yes, *I* should take the pickaxe, and they would applaud me, as I applauded those who accomplished the business. Nay, Madame, they did me a famous service in demolishing the Bastille, and to you they did a still greater; yes, to you, who can no longer throw, according to the whims of your friends, honest people into dungeons.”

“Honest people in the Bastille! I — I sent honest people there! Oh, perhaps Monsieur de Rohan is an honest man!”

“Oh, speak no more of him; I speak not of him myself. Our sending him there was not a success, seeing that the parliament set him at liberty. Besides, it was no place for a prince of the Church, since in our time forgers were sent to the Bastille; and, indeed, I ask what forgers and robbers were doing there. Have I not prisons in Paris which cost me dear enough for the entertainment of these gentry? But let the forgers and robbers pass; the evil is that honest men were sent there.”

“Honest men?”

“Undoubtedly; I have seen this very day an honest man who was incarcerated there, and who only got out a very short time since.”

“When was that?”

“This morning.”

“You have this evening seen a man who got out of the Bastille this morning?”

“I have just parted with him.”

“Who is it?”

“Faith, one of your acquaintance.”

“Of my acquaintance!”

“Yes.”

“Might I ask his name?”

“Doctor Gilbert.”

“Gilbert! Gilbert!” exclaimed the queen. “What! he whom Andrée named on returning to her senses?”

“Precisely so; it must have been he; I could swear to it.”

“Was that man in the Bastille?”

“Faith, Madame, one would suppose that you were ignorant of the fact.”

“I am entirely ignorant of it.”

And, perceiving that the king looked astonished: —

“Unless,” continued the queen, “for some reason I may have forgotten it.”

“Ah! there,” exclaimed the king, “for these acts of injustice there is always a reason which one forgets. But though you may have forgotten both the reason and the doctor, Madame de Charny has forgotten neither, I will answer for it.”

"Sire! Sire!" exclaimed Marie Antoinette.

"There must have been something between them," the king continued.

"Sire, please to refrain!" said the queen, looking anxiously towards the boudoir, where Andrée was concealed, and could hear all that was said.

"Oh, yes!" said the king, laughing; "you fear that De Charny may chance to learn. Poor De Charny!"

"Sire, I entreat you; Madame de Charny is one of the purest of women, and I should rather believe, I assure you, that this Doctor Gilbert — "

"Pshaw!" interrupted the king, "do you accuse that honest fellow? I know what I know; and the worst of it is that, knowing so much, I do not yet know all."

"Really, I am horrified that you should persist in entertaining such suspicions," said the queen, without removing her eyes from the cabinet.

"Oh," continued Louis, "I am in no hurry; I shall lose nothing by waiting a little. The beginning promises me an interesting conclusion, and I can learn the conclusion from Gilbert himself, he being now my doctor."

"Your doctor! that fellow your doctor! You can trust the life of the king to a stranger!"

"Oh," replied the king, coolly, "*I* have confidence in my first impressions, and I needed only a glance to read that man's inmost soul."

The queen uttered a groan, from mingled anger and disdain.

"You can sneer at me as you will," said the king, "but you can never shake my confidence in the learning and science of Doctor Gilbert."

"Infatuation!"

"I should like to see you in my place. I should like to know if Monsieur Mesmer was not able to make some impression on you and Madame de Lamballe."

"Monsieur Mesmer?" asked the queen, blushing.

"Yes; four years ago you went disguised to one of his meetings. Oh, my police are drilled thoroughly. You see I know all."

And the king, while uttering these words, smiled kindly on Marie Antoinette.

"You know all, Sire," answered the queen; "and you are a good dissembler, for you have never once spoken to me on the subject."

"Why should I have done so? I am sure the novelists and newspaper reporters abused you sufficiently on that score. But to return to Gilbert and at the same time to Mesmer. Monsieur Mesmer placed you round a vat, touched you with a steel rod, surrounded himself with a thousand phantasmagories, like the quack that he was. Gilbert uses no such illusions; he extends his hand over a woman; she sleeps, and sleeping, talks."

"Talks!" muttered the queen, terrified.

"Yes," replied the king, not unwilling to prolong somewhat his wife's little nervousness; "yes, put to sleep by Gilbert, she talks, and, believe me, says very strange things."

The queen grew pale.

"Madame de Charny may have said very strange things!" she muttered.

"Most strange," said the king. "It was very fortunate for her — "

"Hush! hush!" interrupted Marie Antoinette.

"Why hush? I say that it was very fortunate for her that I alone heard what she said in her sleep."

"Oh, for pity's sake, Sire, say not a word more!"

"Indeed, I had much rather talk no more. I feel ready to drop with weariness; and as I eat when I am hungry, so do I go to bed when I am sleepy. So good-night, Madame, and may our conversation leave upon you a salutary impression."

"In what way, Sire?"

"The people were right in undoing what we and our friends had done, witness my poor Doctor Gilbert. Adieu, Madame; trust me that after signalling the danger, I shall have the courage to prevent it. Pleasant dreams, Antoinette."

And the king moved towards the door.

"À *propos*," said he, turning round, "warn Madame de Charny that she has to make her peace with the doctor if it is not now too late. Adieu."

He slowly retired, shutting the doors himself with all the satisfaction of the mechanic when his locks work well under the pressure of his fingers.

The king had not taken half a dozen steps in the corridor, when the countess issued from the boudoir, ran to the doors and bolted them, and to the windows and drew the curtains. She seemed to be excited with all the energy of rage and madness. Then, having assured her- self that she could neither be seen nor heard, she returned to the queen with a heart-rending cry, fell on her knees, and exclaimed, — "Save me, Madame; for Heaven's sake, save me!" Then, after a pause followed by a long sigh, she added:

"And I will tell you all."

END OF VOL. I.

VOLUME II

CHAPTER I.

What the Queen’s Thoughts were, during the Night from July 14 to July 15, 1789

How long the interview between Andrée and the queen lasted, it would be impossible for us to say; but it was certainly of considerable duration, for at about eleven o’clock that night the door of the queen’s boudoir was seen to open, and on the threshold Andrée, almost on her knees, kissing the hand of Marie Antoinette. After which, having raised herself up, the young woman dried her eyes, red with weeping, while the queen, on her side, re-entered her room.

Andrée, on the contrary, walked away rapidly, as if she desired to escape from her own thoughts.

After this, the queen was alone. When the lady of the bedchamber entered the room, to assist her in undressing, she found her pacing the room with rapid strides, and her eyes flashing with excitement. She made a quick movement with her hand, which meant to say, “Leave me.”

The lady of the bedchamber left the room, without offering an observation.

The queen again found herself alone. She had given orders that no one should disturb her, unless it was to announce the arrival of important news from Paris.

Andrée did not appear again.

As for the king, after he had conversed with Monsieur de la Rochefoucault, who endeavored to make him comprehend the difference there was between a riot and a revolution, — he declared himself fatigued, went to bed, and slept as quietly as if he had returned from a hunt, and the stag (a well-trained courtier) had suffered himself to be taken in the grand basin of the fountain called the Swiss.

The queen, however, wrote several letters, went into an adjoining room, where her two children slept under the care of Madame de Tourzel, and then went to bed, not for the sake of sleeping, like the king, but merely to meditate more at ease.

But soon after, when silence reigned around Versailles, when the immense palace became plunged in darkness, when there could no longer be heard in the gardens aught but the tramp of the patrols upon the gravel-walks, and in the long passages nothing but the ringing of muskets on the marble pavement, Marie Antoinette, tired of repose, felt the want of air, got out of bed, and putting on her, velvet slippers and a long white dressing-gown, went to the window to inhale the ascending freshness of the cascades, and to seize in their flight those counsels which the night winds murmur to heated minds and oppressed hearts.

Then she reviewed in her mind all the astounding events which this strange day had produced.

The fall of the Bastille, that visible emblem of royal power, the uncertainties of Charny, her devoted friend, that impassioned captive who for so many years had been subjected to her yoke, and who during all those years had never breathed anything but love, now seemed for the first time to sigh from regret and feelings of remorse.

With that synthetic habit with which the knowledge of men and events endows great minds, Marie Antoinette immediately divided the agitation which oppressed her into two portions, the one being her political misfortunes, the other the sorrows of her heart.

The political misfortune was that great event, the news of which had left Paris at three o’clock in the afternoon, and was then spreading itself over the whole world, and weakening in every mind that sacred reverence which until then had always been accorded to kings, God’s mandatories upon earth.

The sorrow of her heart was the gloomy resistance of Charny to the omnipotence of his well-beloved sovereign. It appeared to her like a presentiment that, without ceasing to be faithful and devoted, his love would cease to be blind, and might begin to argue with itself on its fidelity and its devotedness.

This thought grieved the queen’s heart poignantly, and filled it with that bitter gall which is called jealousy, an acrid poison which ulcerates at the same instant a thousand little wounds in a wounded soul.

Nevertheless, grief in the presence of misfortune was logically of secondary importance.

Thus, rather from reasoning than from conscientious motives, rather from necessity than from instinct, Marie Antoinette first allowed her mind to enter into the grave reflections connected with the dangerous state of political affairs.

In which direction could she turn Before her lay hatred and ambition, — weakness and indifference at her side.

For enemies she had people who, having commenced with calumny, were now organizing a rebellion, — people whom, consequently, no consideration would induce to retreat.

For defenders — we speak of the greater portion at least of those men who, little by little, had accustomed themselves to endure everything, and who, in consequence, no longer felt the depth of their wounds, their degradation — people who would hesitate to defend themselves, for fear of attracting attention.

It was therefore necessary to bury everything in oblivion, — to appear to forget, and yet to remember; to feign to forgive, and yet not pardon.

This would be conduct unworthy of a queen of France; it was especially unworthy of the daughter of Maria Theresa — that high-minded woman.

To resist! — to resist! — that was what offended royal pride most strenuously counselled. But was it prudent to resist? Could hatred be calmed down by shedding blood? Was it not terrible to be surnamed “The Austrian”? Was it necessary, in order to consecrate that name, as Isabeau and Catherine de Médicis consecrated theirs, to give it the baptism of a universal massacre?

And then, if what Charny had said was true, success was doubtful.

To combat and to be defeated!

Such were the political sorrows of the queen, who during certain phases of her meditation felt a sensation like that which we experience on seeing a serpent glide from beneath the brambles, awakened by our advancing steps. She felt, on emerging from the depths of her sufferings as a queen, the despair of the woman who thinks herself but little loved, when in reality she had been loved too much.

Charny had said, what we have already heard him say, not from conviction, but from lassitude. He had, like many others, drunk calumny from the same cup that she had. Charny, for the first time, had spoken in such affectionate terms of his wife, Andrée being until then almost forgotten by her husband. Had Charny then perceived that his young wife was still beautiful? And at this single idea, which stung her like the envenomed bite of the asp, Marie Antoinette was astounded to find that misfortune was nothing in comparison with disappointed love.

For what misfortune had failed to do, unrequited love was gradually effecting within her soul. The woman sprang furiously from the chair in which the queen had calmly contemplated danger.

The whole destiny of this privileged child of suffering revealed itself in the condition of her mind during that night.

For how was it possible to escape misfortune and disappointment at the same time, she would ask herself, with constantly renewing anguish. Was it necessary to determine on abandoning a life of royalty, and could she live happily in a state of mediocrity? — was it necessary to return to her own Trianon, and to her Swiss cottage, to the quiet shores of the lake and the humble amusements of the dairy? — was it necessary to allow the people to divide among them the shreds of monarchy, excepting some few fragments which the woman might appropriate to herself from the imaginary indebtedness of the faithful few, who would still persist in considering themselves her vassals?

Alas! it was now that the serpent of jealousy began to sting still deeper.

Happy! Could she be happy with the humiliation of despised love?

Happy! Could she be happy by the side of the king, — that vulgar husband in whom everything was deficient to form the hero?

Happy! Could she be happy with Monsieur de Charny, who might be so with some woman whom he loved, — by the side of his own wife, perhaps?

And this thought kindled in the poor queen’s breast all those flaming torches which consumed Dido even more than her funeral pile.

But in the midst of this feverish torture, she saw a ray of hope; in the midst of this shuddering anguish, she felt a sensation of joy. God, in his infinite mercy, has he not created evil to make us appreciate good?

Andrée had intrusted the queen with all her secrets; she had unveiled the one shame of her life to her rival. Andrée, her eyes full of tears, her head bowed down to the ground, had confessed to the queen that she was no longer worthy of the love and the respect of an honorable man: therefore Charny could never love Andrée.

But Charny is ignorant of this. Charny will ever be ignorant of that catastrophe at Trianon, and its consequences. Therefore, to Charny it is as if the catastrophe had never taken place.

And while making these reflections the queen examined her fading beauty in the mirror of her mind, and deplored the loss of her gayety, the freshness of her youth.

Then she thought of Andrée, of the strange and almost incredible adventures which she had just related to her.

She wondered at the magical working of blind fortune, which had brought to Trianon, from the shade of a hut and the muddy furrows of a farm, a little gardener’s boy, to associate his destinies with those of a highly born young lady, who was herself associated with the destinies of a queen.

“Thus,” said she to herself, “the atom which was thus lost in the lowest regions, has come, by a freak of superior attraction, to unite itself, like a fragment of a diamond, with the heavenly light of the stars.”

This gardener’s boy, this Gilbert, was he not a living symbol of that which was occurring at that moment, — a man of the people, rising from the lowness of his birth to busy himself with the politics of a great kingdom; a strange comedian, in whom were personified, by a privilege granted to him by the evil spirit who was then hovering over France, not only the insult offered to the nobility, but also the attack made upon the monarchy by a plebeian mob?

This Gilbert, now become a learned man, — this Gilbert, dressed in the black coat of the Tiers État, the counsellor of Monsieur de Necker, the confidant of the king of France, would now find himself, thanks to the Revolution, on an equal footing with the woman whose honor, like a thief, he had stolen in the night.

The queen had again become a woman, and shuddering in spite of herself at the sad story related by Andrée, she was endeavoring to study the character of this Gilbert, and to learn by herself to read in human features what God had placed there to indicate so strange a character; and notwithstanding the pleasure she had experienced on seeing the humiliation of her rival, she still felt a lingering desire to attack the man who had caused a woman such intensity of suffering.

Moreover, notwithstanding the terror generally inspired by the sight of monsters, she felt a desire to look at, and perhaps even to admire, this extraordinary man, who by a crime had infused his vile blood into the most aristocratic veins in France, — this man who appeared to have organized the Revolution, in order that it should open the gates of the Bastille for him, in which, but for that Revolution, he would have remained immured forever, to teach him that a plebeian must remember nothing.

In consequence of this connecting link in her ideas, the queen reverted to her political vexations, and saw the responsibility of all she had suffered accumulate upon one single head.

Thus the author of the popular rebellion that had just shaken the royal power by levelling the Bastille was Gilbert, — he whose principles had placed weapons in the hands of the Billots, the Maillards, the Elies, and the Hullins.

Gilbert was therefore both a venomous and a terrible being, — venomous, because he had caused the loss of Andrée as a lover; terrible, because he had just assisted in overthrowing the Bastille as an enemy.

It was therefore necessary to know, in order to avoid him; or rather, to know him, in order to make use of him.

It was necessary, at any cost, to converse with this man, to examine him closely, and to judge him personally.

Two thirds of the night had already flown away, three o'clock was striking, and the first rays of the rising sun gilded the high tops of the trees in the park, and the summits of the statues of Versailles.

The queen had passed the whole night without sleeping; her eyes wandered vaguely up and down the avenues, where streaks of soft light began to appear.

A heavy and burning slumber gradually seized the unfortunate woman.

She fell back, with her neck overhanging the back of the arm-chair, near the open window.

She dreamed that she was walking in Trianon, and that there appeared to her eyes, at the extremity of a flowerbed, a grinning gnome, similar to those we read of in German ballads; that this sardonic monster was Gilbert, who extended his hooked fingers towards her.

She screamed aloud.

Another cry answered hers.

That cry roused her from her slumber.

It was Madame de Tourzel who had uttered it. She had just entered the queen's apartment, and seeing her exhausted and gasping in an arm-chair, she could not avoid giving utterance to her grief and surprise.

“The queen is indisposed!” she exclaimed.”The queen is suffering. Shall I send for a physician?”

The queen opened her eyes. This question of Madame de Tourzel coincided with the demands of her own curiosity.

“Yes, a physician!” she replied; “Doctor Gilbert! — send for Doctor Gilbert!”

“Who is Doctor Gilbert?” asked Madame de Tourzel.

“A new physician, appointed by the king only yesterday, I believe, and just arrived from America.”

“I know whom her Majesty means,” said one of the queen’s ladies-in-waiting.

“Well?” said the queen, inquiringly.

“Well, Madame, the doctor is in the king’s antechamber.”

“Do you know him, then?”

“Yes, your Majesty,” stammered the woman.

“But how can you know him? He arrived here from America some eight or ten days ago, and only came out of the Bastille yesterday.”

“I know him.”

“Answer me distinctly. Where did you know him?” asked the queen, in an imperious tone.

The lady cast down her eyes.

“Come, will you make up your mind to tell me how it happens that you know this man?”

“Madame, I have read his works; and his works having given me a desire to see the author, I had him pointed out to me.”

“Ah!” exclaimed the queen, with an indescribable look of haughtiness and reserve, — ”ah! it is well. Since you know him, go and tell him that I am suffering, and that I wish to see him.”

While waiting for the doctor’s arrival, the queen made her ladies in attendance enter the room; after which she put on a dressing-gown and adjusted her hair.

CHAPTER II.

The King’s Physician

A FEW moments after the queen had expressed the above desire, — a desire which the person to whom it had been mentioned had complied with, — Gilbert, who felt astonished, slightly anxious, and profoundly agitated, but still without showing any external marks of it, presented himself to Marie Antoinette.

The firm and noble carriage, the delicate pallor of the man of science and of thought, to whom study had given a second nature, — a pallor still more enhanced by the black dress which was not only worn by all the deputies of the Tiers État, but also by those who had adopted the principles of the Revolution; the delicate white hand of the surgical operator, surrounded by a plain muslin wristband; his slender though well-formed limbs, which none of those at court could surpass in symmetry, even in the estimation of the connoisseurs of the Œil-de-Bœuf (combined with all these, there was a mixture of respectful timidity towards the woman, and of calm courage towards the patient, but no signs of servility towards her as a queen), — such were the plainly written signs that Marie Antoinette, with her aristocratic intelligence, could perceive in the countenance of Gilbert at the moment when the door opened to admit him into her bedchamber.

But the less Gilbert was provoking in his demeanor, the more did the queen feel her anger increase. She had figured him to herself as a type of an odious class of men; she had considered him instinctively, though almost involuntarily, as one of those impudent heroes of whom she had so many around her. The author of the sufferings of Andrée, the bastard pupil of Rousseau, that miserable abortion who had grown up to manhood, that pruner of trees who had become a philosopher and a subduer of souls, — Marie Antoinette, in spite of herself, depicted him in her mind as having the features of Mirabeau; that is to say, of the man she most hated, after the Cardinal de Rohan and Lafayette.

It had seemed to her, before she saw Gilbert, that it required a gigantic physical development to contain so colossal a mind.

But when she saw a young, upright, and slender man, of elegant and graceful form, of sweet and amiable countenance, he appeared to her as having committed the new crime of belying himself by his exterior. Gilbert, a man of the people, of obscure and unknown birth! — Gilbert, the peasant, the clown, and the serf! — Gilbert was guilty, in the eyes of the queen, of having usurped the external appearance of a gentleman and a man of honor. The proud Austrian, the sworn enemy of lying and deception in others, became indignant, and immediately conceived a violent hatred for the unfortunate atom whom so many different motives combined to induce her to abhor.

For those who were intimate with her nature, for those who were accustomed to read in her eyes either serenity of temper or indications of an approaching storm, it was easy to discern that a tempest, full of thunder-claps and flashes of lightning, was raging in the depths of her heart.

But how was it possible for a human being, even a woman, to follow, in the midst of this hurricane of passions and anger, the succession of strange and contrasting feelings which clashed together in the queen’s brain, and filled her breast with all the mortal poisons described by Homer!

The queen with a single look dismissed all her attendants, even Madame de Misery.

They immediately left the room.

The queen waited till the door had been closed on the last person; then, casting her eyes upon Gilbert, she perceived that he had not ceased to gaze at her.

So much audacity offended her. The doctor’s look was apparently inoffensive; but as it was continual, and was full of meaning, it weighed so heavily upon her that Marie Antoinette felt compelled to repress its importunity.

“Well, then, sir,” said she, with the abruptness of a pistol-shot, “what are you doing there, standing before me and gazing at me, instead of telling me with what complaint I am suffering?”

This furious apostrophe, rendered more forcible by the flashing of her eyes, would have annihilated any of the queen’s courtiers; it would even have compelled a marshal of France, a hero, or a demi-god, to fall on his knees before her.

But Gilbert tranquilly replied: —

“It is by means of the eyes, Madame, that the physician must first examine his patient. By looking at your Majesty, who sent for me, I do not satisfy an idle curiosity; I exercise my profession: I obey your orders.”

“Then you must have studied me sufficiently.”

“As much as lay in my power, Madame.”

“Am I ill?”

“Not in the strict sense of the word. But your Majesty is suffering from great over-excitement.”

“Ah! ah!” said Marie Antoinette, ironically, “why do you not say at once that I am in a passion?”

“Let your Majesty allow me, since you have ordered the attendance of a physician, to express myself in medical terms.”

“Be it so. But what is the cause of my over-excitement?”

“Your Majesty has too much knowledge not to be aware that the physician discovers the sufferings of the body, thanks to his experience and the traditions of his studies; but he is not a sorcerer, who can discover at first sight the depths of the human soul.”

“By this you mean to imply, that the second or third time you could tell me not only from what I am suffering, but also what are my thoughts?”

“Perhaps so, Madame,” coldly replied Gilbert.

The queen appeared to tremble with anger: her words seemed to be hanging on her lips, ready to burst forth in burning torrents.

She, however, restrained herself.

“I must believe you,” said she, — ”you who are a learned man.”

And she emphasized these last words with so much contempt, that the eye of Gilbert appeared to kindle, in its turn, with the fire of anger.

But a struggle of a few seconds’ duration sufficed to this man to give him a complete victory.

Accordingly, with a calm brow and an unembarrassed expression he almost immediately rejoined: —

“It is too kind of your Majesty to give me the title of a learned man without having received any proofs of my knowledge.”

The queen bit her lip.

“You must understand that I do not know if you are a scientific man,” she replied; “but I have heard it said, and I repeat what everybody says.”

“Well, then,” said Gilbert, respectfully, and bowing still lower than he had done hitherto, “a superior mind, like that of your Majesty, must not blindly repeat what is said by the vulgar."

"Do you mean the people?" said the queen, insolently.

"The vulgar, Madame," repeated Gilbert, with a firmness which made the blood thrill in the queen's veins, and gave rise to emotions which were as painful to her as they had hitherto been unknown.

"In fine," answered she, "let us not discuss that point. You are said to be learned; that is all that is essential. Where have you studied?"

"Everywhere, Madame."

"That is not an answer."

"Nowhere, then."

"I prefer that answer. Have you studied nowhere?"

As it may please you, Madame," replied the doctor, bowing, "and yet it is less exact than to say everywhere."

"Come, answer me, then!" exclaimed the queen, becoming exasperated; "and above all, for Heaven's sake, Monsieur Gilbert, spare me such phrases."

Then, as if speaking to herself: —

"Everywhere! everywhere! what does that mean It is the language of a charlatan, a quack, of a physician who practises in the public squares! Do you mean to overawe me by your sonorous syllables?"

She stepped forward with ardent eyes and quivering lips.

"Everywhere! Mention some place; come, explain your meaning, Monsieur Gilbert."

"I said everywhere," answered Gilbert, coldly, "because in fact I have studied everywhere, Madame, — in the hut and in the palace, in cities and in the desert, upon our own species and upon animals, upon myself and upon others, in a manner suitable to one who loves knowledge, and studies it where it is to be found, that is to say, everywhere."

The queen, overcome, cast a terrible glance at Gilbert, while he, on his part, was eying her with terrible perseverance. She became convulsively agitated, and turning round, upset a small stand, upon which her chocolate had been served in a cup of Sèvres porcelain. Gilbert saw the table fall, saw the broken cup, but did not move a finger.

The color mounted to the cheeks of Marie Antoinette; she raised her cold, moist hand to her burning temples, but did not dare to raise her eyes again to look at Gilbert.

But her features assumed a more contemptuous, more insolent expression than before.

“Then, under what great master did you study?” continued the queen, again taking up the conversation at the point where she had left it off.

“I hardly know how to answer your Majesty, without running the risk of again wounding you.”

The queen perceived the advantage that Gilbert had given her, and threw herself upon it like a lioness upon her prey.

“Wound me — you wound me — you!” exclaimed she. “Oh, sir, what are you saying there? You wound a queen! You are mistaken, sir, I can affirm to you. Ah, Doctor Gilbert, you have not studied the French language in as good schools as you have studied medicine. People of my station are not to be wounded, Doctor Gilbert. You may weary them, that is all.”

Gilbert bowed, and made a step towards the door; but it was not possible for the queen to discover in his countenance the least show of anger, the least sign of impatience.

The queen, on the contrary, was stamping her feet with rage; she sprang towards Gilbert, as if to prevent him from leaving the room.

He understood her.

“Pardon me, Madame,” said he. “It is true I committed the unpardonable error to forget that, as a physician, I was called to see a patient. Forgive me, Madame; hereafter I shall remember it.”

He reflected for a moment.

“Your Majesty,” continued he, “is rapidly approaching a nervous crisis. I will venture to ask you not to give way to it; for in a short time it would be beyond your power to control it. At this moment your pulse must be imperceptible, the blood is rushing to the heart; your Majesty is suffering, your Majesty is almost suffocating, and perhaps it would be prudent for you to summon one of your ladies-in-waiting.”

The queen took a turn round the room, and seating herself: —

“Is your name Gilbert?” asked she.

“Yes, Gilbert, Madame.”

“Strange! I remember an incident of my youth, the strange nature of which would doubtless *wound* you much, were I to relate it to you. But it matters not; for if hurt, you will soon cure yourself, — you, who are no less a philosopher than a learned physician.”

And the queen smiled ironically.

“Precisely so, Madame,” said Gilbert; “you may smile, and little by little subdue your nervousness by irony. It is one of the most beautiful prerogatives of the intelligent will to be able thus to control itself. Subdue it, Madame, subdue it; but, however, without making a too violent effort.”

This prescription of the physician was given with so much suavity and such natural good-humor, that the queen, while feeling the bitter irony contained in his words, could not take offence at what Gilbert bad said to her.

She merely returned to the charge, recommencing her attack where she had discontinued it.

“This incident of which I spoke,” continued she, “is the following.”

Gilbert bowed, as a sign that he was listening.

The queen made an effort, and fixed her gaze upon him.

“I was the dauphiness at that time, and I inhabited Trianon. There was in the gardens a little dark-looking, dirty boy, covered with mud, a crabbed boy, a sort of sour Jean Jacques, who weeded, dug, and picked off the caterpillars with his little crooked fingers. His name was Gilbert.”

“It was myself, Madame,” said Gilbert, phlegmatically.

“You!” said Marie Antoinette, with an expression of hatred. “I was, then, right! but you are not, then, a learned man?”

“I think that, as your Majesty’s memory is so good, you must also remember dates,” rejoined Gilbert. “It was in 1772, if I am not mistaken, that the little gardener’s boy, of whom your Majesty speaks, weeded the flower-beds, of Trianon to earn his bread. We are now in 1789. It is therefore seventeen years, Madame, since the events to which you allude took place. It is more time than is necessary to metamorphose a savage into a learned man; the soul and the mind operate quickly in certain positions, like plants and flowers, which grow rapidly in hothouses. Revolutions, Madame, are the hotbeds of the mind. Your Majesty looks at me, and, notwithstanding the perspicacity of your scrutiny, you do not perceive that the boy of sixteen has become a man of thirty-three; you are therefore wrong to wonder that the ignorant, the ingenuous little Gilbert, should, after having witnessed these revolutions, have become a learned man and a philosopher.”

“Ignorant! be it so; but ingenuous, — ingenuous, did you say” furiously cried the queen. “I think you called that little Gilbert ingenuous.”

"If I am mistaken, Madame, or if I praised this little boy for a quality which he did not possess, I do not know how your Majesty can have ascertained more correctly than myself that he had the opposite defect."

"Oh, that is quite another matter!" said the queen, gloomily; "perhaps we shall speak of that some other time; but, in the mean time, let me speak of the learned man, of the man brought to perfection, of the perfect man I see before me."

Gilbert did not take up the word "perfect." He understood but too well that it was a new insult.

"Let us return to our subject, Madame," replied Gilbert. "Tell me for what purpose did your Majesty order me to come to your apartment?"

"You propose to become the king's physician," said she. "Now, you must understand, sir, that I attach too much importance to the health of my husband to trust it in the hands of a man whom I do not know perfectly."

"I offered myself to the king, Madame," said Gilbert, "and I was accepted without your Majesty having any just cause to conceive the least suspicion as to my capacity or want of zeal. I am, above all, a political physician, Madame, recommended by Monsieur Necker. As for the rest, if the king is ever in want of my science, I shall prove myself a good physical doctor, so far as human science can be of use to the Creator's works. But what I shall be to the king more particularly, besides being a good adviser and a good physician, is a good friend."

"A good friend!" exclaimed the queen, with a fresh outburst of contempt. "You, sir, a friend of the king!"

"Certainly," replied Gilbert, quietly; "why not, Madame?"

"Oh yes! all in virtue of your secret power, by the assistance of your occult science," murmured she; "who can tell? We have already seen the Jacqueses and the Maillotins; perhaps we shall go back to the dark ages! You have resuscitated philters and charms. You will soon govern France by magic; you will be a Faust or a Nicholas Flamel!"

"I have no such pretensions, Madame."

"And why have you not, sir?' How many monsters more cruel than those of the gardens of Armida, more cruel than Cerberus himself, would you not put to sleep on the threshold of our hell!"

When she had pronounced the words, "would you not put to sleep," the queen cast a scrutinizing look on the doctor.

This time Gilbert blushed in spite of himself.

It was a source of indescribable joy to Marie Antoinette; she felt that this time the blow she had struck had inflicted a real wound.

"For you have the power of causing sleep; you, who have studied everything and everywhere, you doubtless have studied magnetic science with the magnetizers of our century, who make sleep a treacherous instrument, and who read their secrets in the sleep of others."

"In fact, Madame, I have often, and for a long time, studied under the learned Cagliostro."

"Yes; he who practised and made his followers practise that moral theft of which I was just speaking; the same who, by the aid of that magic sleep which I call infamous, robbed some of their souls, and others of their bodies!"

Gilbert again understood her meaning, but this time he turned pale, instead of reddening. The queen trembled with joy, to the very depths of her heart.

"Ah, wretch" murmured she to herself: "I have wounded you, and I can see the blood."

But the profoundest emotions were never visible for any length of time on the countenance of Gilbert. Approaching the queen, therefore, who, quite joyful on account of her victory, was imprudently looking at him: —

"Madame," said he, "your Majesty would be wrong to deny the learned men of whom you have been speaking the most beautiful appendage to their science, which is the power of throwing, not victims, but *subjects*, into a magnetic sleep; you would be wrong, in particular, to contest the right they have to follow up, by all possible means, a discovery of which the laws, once recognized and regulated, are perhaps intended to revolutionize the world."

And while approaching the queen, Gilbert had looked at her, in his turn, with that power of will to which the nervous Andrée had succumbed.

The queen felt a chill run through her veins as he drew nearer to her.

"Infamy," said she, "be the reward of those men who make an abuse of certain dark and mysterious arts to ruin both the soul and body. May infamy rest upon the head of Cagliostro!"

"Ah!" replied Gilbert, with the accent of conviction, "beware, Madame, of judging the faults committed by human beings with so much severity."

"Sir — "

“Every one is liable to err, Madame; all human beings commit injuries on their fellow-creatures, and were it not for individual egotism, which is the foundation of general safety, the world would become but one great battle-field. Those are the best who are good; that is all. Others will tell you that those are best who are the least faulty. Indulgence must be the greater, Madame, in proportion to the elevated rank of the judge. Seated as you are on so exalted a throne, you have less right than any other person to be severe towards the faults of others. On your worldly throne, you should be supremely indulgent, like God, who upon his heavenly throne is supremely merciful.”

“Sir,” said the queen, “I view my rights in a different light from you, and especially my duties. I am on the throne to punish or reward.”

“I do not think so, Madame. In my opinion, on the contrary, you are seated on the throne, — you, a woman and a queen, to conciliate and to forgive.”

“I suppose you are not moralizing, sir.”

“You are right, Madame, and I was only replying to your Majesty. This Cagliostro, for instance, Madame, of whom you were speaking a few moments since, and whose science you were contesting, I remember, — and this is a remembrance of something anterior to your recollections of Trianon, — I remember that in the gardens of the Chateau de Taverney he had occasion to give the dauphiness of France a proof of his science; I know not what it was, Madame, but you must recollect it well, for that proof made a profound impression upon her, even so much as to cause her to faint.”

Gilbert was now striking blows in his turn; it is true that he was dealing them at random, but he was favored by chance, and they hit the mark so truly, that the queen became pale.

“Yes,” said she, in a hoarse voice, “yes, he made me see, as in a dream, a hideous machine; but I know not that, up to the present time, such a machine has ever really existed.”

“I know not what he made you see, Madame,” rejoined Gilbert, who felt satisfied with the effect he had produced; “but I do know that it is impossible to dispute the appellation of ‘learned’ to a man who wields such a power as that over his fellow-creatures.”

“His fellow-creatures,” murmured the queen, disdainfully.

“Be it so, — I am mistaken,” replied Gilbert; “and his power is so much the more wonderful, that it reduces to a level with himself, under the yoke of fear, the heads of monarchs and princes of the earth.”

“Infamy, infamy, I say again, upon those who take advantage of the weakness or the credulity of others!”

“Infamous! did you call infamous those who make use of science?”

“Their science is nothing but chimeras, lies, and cowardice.”

“What mean you by that, Madame?” asked Gilbert, calmly.

“My meaning is, that this Cagliostro is a cowardly mountebank, and that his pretended magnetic sleep is a crime.”

“A crime!”

“Yes, a crime,” continued the queen; “for it is the result of some potion, some philter, some poison; and human justice, which I represent, will be able to discover the mystery, and punish the inventor.”

“Madame, Madame,” rejoined Gilbert, with the same patience as before, “a little indulgence, I beg, for those who have erred.”

“Ah! you confess their guilt, then?”

The queen was mistaken, and thought from the mild tone of Gilbert’s voice, that he was supplicating pardon for himself.

She was in error, and Gilbert did not allow the advantage she had thus given him to escape.

“What?” said he, dilating his flashing eyes, before the gaze of which Marie Antoinette was compelled to lower hers, as if suddenly dazzled by the rays of the sun.

The queen remained confounded for a moment, and then, making an effort to speak: —

“A queen can no more be questioned than she can be wounded,” said she: “learn to know that also, you who have but so newly arrived at court. But you were speaking, it seems to me, of those who have erred, and you asked me to be indulgent towards them.”

“Alas! Madame,” said Gilbert, “where is the human creature who is not liable to reproach? Is it he who has ensconced himself so closely within the deep shell of his conscience that the look of others cannot penetrate it? It is this which is often denominated virtue. Be indulgent, Madame.”

“But according to this opinion, then,” replied the queen, imprudently, “there is no virtuous being in your estimation, sir, — you, who are the pupil of those men whose prying eyes seek the truth, even in the deepest recesses of the human conscience.”

“It is true, Madame.”

She laughed, and without seeking to conceal the contempt which her laughter expressed.

“Oh, pray, sir,” exclaimed she, “do remember that you are not now speaking on a public square, to idiots, to peasants, or to patriots.”

“I am aware to whom I am speaking; Madame; of this you may be fully persuaded,” replied Gilbert.

“Show more respect then, sir, or more adroitness; consider your past life; search the depths of that conscience which men who have studied everywhere must possess in common with the rest of mankind, notwithstanding their genius and their wisdom; recall to your mind all that you may have conceived that was vile, hurtful, and criminal, — all the cruelties, the deeds, the crimes even, you have committed. Do not interrupt me; and when you have summed up all your misdeeds, learned doctor, you will bow down your head, and become more humble. Do not approach the dwelling of kings with such insolent pride, who, until there is a new order of things, were established by Heaven to penetrate the souls of criminals, to examine the folds of the human conscience, and to inflict chastisement upon the guilty, without pity and without appeal.

“That, sir,” continued the queen, “is what you ought to do. You will be thought the better of, on, account of your repentance. Believe me, the best mode of healing a soul so diseased as yours, would be to live in solitude, far from the grandeurs which give men false ideas of their own worth. I would advise you, therefore, not to approach the court, and to abandon the idea of attending the king during sickness. You have a cure to accomplish, for which God will esteem you more than for any other, — the cure of yourself. Antiquity had a proverb, which expressed the following maxim, sir: *Medice, cura teipsum*.”

Gilbert, instead of being irritated at this proposal, which the queen considered as the most disagreeable of conclusions, replied with gentleness: —

“Madame, I have already done all that your Majesty advises.”

“And what have you done, sir?”

“I have meditated.”

“Upon yourself?”

“Yes, upon myself, Madame.”

“And in regard to your conscience?”

“Especially on the subject of my conscience, Madame.”

“Do you think, then, I am sufficiently well informed of what you saw in it?”

“I do not know what your Majesty means by those words, but I think I can discover their meaning, which is, ‘how many times a man of my age must have offended God!’“

“Really — you speak of God?”

“Yes.”

“You?”

“Why not?”

“A philosopher, — do philosophers believe in the existence of a God?”

“I speak of God, and I believe in him.”

“And you are still determined not to withdraw from court?”

“No, Madame, I remain.”

“Monsieur Gilbert, take heed.”

And the queen’s countenance assumed a threatening expression, which it would be impossible to describe.

“Oh, I have reflected much upon the subject, Madame, and my reflections have led me to know that I am not less worthy than another; every one has his faults. I learned this axiom not by pondering over books, but by searching the consciences of others.”

“You are universal and infallible, are you not?” said the queen, ironically.

“Alas, Madame, if I am not universal, if I am not infallible, I am nevertheless very learned in human misery, well versed in the greatest sorrows of the mind. And this is so true, that I could tell, by merely seeing the livid circle round your wearied eyes, by merely seeing the line which extends from one eyebrow to the other, by merely seeing at the corners of your mouth a contraction which is called by the prosaic name of wrinkle, — I can tell you, Madame, how many severe trials you have undergone, how many times your heart has palpitated with anguish, to how many secret dreams of joy your heart has abandoned itself, to discover its error on awaking.

“I will tell you all that, Madame, when you shall desire it; I will tell it you, for I am sure of not being contradicted. I will tell it you, by merely fastening upon you a gaze which can read and wishes to read your mind;

and when you have felt the power of that gaze, when you have felt the weight of this curiosity sounding to your inmost soul, like the sea that feels the weight of the lead that plunges into its depths, then you will understand that I am able to do much, Madame, and that if I pause awhile, you should be grateful to me for it, instead of provoking me on to war."

This language, supported by a terrible fixity of the will of provocation, exercised by the man upon the woman, this contempt for all etiquette in presence of the queen, produced an unspeakable effect upon Marie Antoinette.

She felt as if a mist were overshadowing her brow, and sending an icy chill through her ideas: she felt her hatred turning into fear; and letting her hands fall heavily by her side, retreated a step to avoid the approach of the unknown danger.

"And now, Madame," said Gilbert, who clearly perceived all that was passing in her mind, "do you understand that it would be very easy for me to discover that which you conceal from everybody, and that which you conceal even from yourself; do you understand that it would be easy for me to stretch you on that chair, which your fingers are now instinctively seeking as a support?"

"Ah!" exclaimed the queen, who was terrified, for she felt an unknown chill invading even her heart.

"Were I but to utter to myself a word which I will not utter," continued Gilbert, "were I but to summon up my will, which I renounce, you would fall as if thunder-stricken into my power. You doubt what I am telling you, Madame. Oh, do not doubt it; you might perhaps tempt me once, — and if once you tempted me! But no, you do not doubt it, do you?"

The queen, almost on the point of falling, exhausted, oppressed, and completely lost, grasped the back of her arm-chair with all the energy of despair and the rage of useless resistance.

"Oh," continued Gilbert, "mark this well, Madame: it is that if I were not the most respectful, the most devoted, the most humble of your subjects, I should convince you by a terrible experiment. Oh, you need fear nothing. I prostrate myself humbly before the woman rather than before-the queen. I tremble at the idea of entertaining any project which might, even in the slightest way, inquire into your thoughts; I would rather kill myself than disturb your soul."

“Sir! sir!” exclaimed the queen, striking the air with her arms, as if to repel Gilbert, who was standing more than three paces from her.

“And still,” continued Gilbert, “you caused me to be thrown into the Bastille. You only regret that it is taken, because the people, by taking it, reopened its gates for me. There is hatred visible in your eyes towards a man against whom personally you can have no cause of reproach. And see, now, I feel that since I have lessened the influence by means of which I have controlled you, you are perhaps resuming your doubts with your returning respiration.”

In fact, since Gilbert had ceased to control her with his eyes and gestures, Marie Antoinette had reassumed her threatening attitude, like the bird which, being freed from the suffocating influence of the air-pump, endeavors to regain its song and its power of wing.

“Ah! you still doubt; you are ironical; you despise my warnings. Well, then, do you wish me to tell you, Madame, a terrible idea that has just crossed my mind This is what I was on the point of doing. Madame, I was just about to compel you to reveal to me your most intimate troubles, your most hidden secrets. I thought of compelling you to write them down on the table which you touch at this moment, and afterwards, when you had awakened and come to your senses again, I should have convinced you by your own writing of the existence of that power which you seem to contest; and also how real is the forbearance, and shall I say it, — yes, I will say it, — the generosity of the man whom you have just insulted, whom you have insulted for a whole hour, without his having for a single instant given you either a reason or a pretext for so doing.”

“Compel me to sleep! — compel me to speak in my sleep! — me! — me!” exclaimed the queen, turning quite pale: “would you have dared to do it, sir? But do you know what that is? Do you know the grave nature of the threat you make? Why, it is the crime of high treason, sir. Consider it well. It is a crime which, after awakening from my sleep, I should have punished with death.”

“Madame,” said Gilbert, watching the feverish emotions of the queen, “be not so hasty in accusing, and especially in threatening. Certainly I should have possessed myself of all your secrets; but be convinced that it would not have been on an occasion like this; it would not have been during an interview between the queen and her subject, between a woman and a stranger. No: I should have put the queen to sleep, it is true, — and nothing would have been easier, — but I should not have ventured to put her to sleep, I should not have allowed myself to speak to her, without having a witness."

"A witness?"

"Yes, Madame, a witness who would faithfully note all your words, all your gestures, all the details, in short, of the scene which I should have brought about, in order that, after its termination, you could not doubt for a single moment longer."

"A witness, sir!" repeated the queen, terrified; "and who would that witness have been? But consider it maturely, sir, your crime would then have been doubled, for in that case you would have had an accomplice."

"And if this accomplice, Madame, had been none other than the king?" said Gilbert.

"The king!" exclaimed Marie Antoinette, with an expression of fear that betrayed the wife more energetically than the confession of the somnambulist could have done. "Oh, Monsieur Gilbert! — Monsieur Gilbert!"

"The king," continued Gilbert, calmly, — " the king is your husband, your supporter, your natural defender. The king would have related to you, when you were awakened from your slumber, how respectful and proud I was in being able to prove my science to the most revered of sovereigns."

And after having spoken these words, Gilbert allowed her Majesty sufficient time to meditate upon their importance.

The queen remained silent for several minutes, during which nothing was heard but the noise of her agitated breathing.

"Sir," replied she, after this pause, "from all that you have now told me, you must be a mortal enemy — "

"Or a devoted friend, Madame?"

"It is impossible, sir; friendship cannot exist in unison with fear or mistrust."

"The friendship, Madame, that exists between a subject and a queen cannot subsist except by the confidence which the subject may inspire her with. You will already have said to yourself that he is not an enemy whom, after the first word, we can deprive of the means of doing harm, especially when he is the first to denounce the use of his weapons."

"May I believe, sir, what you have been saying?" said the queen, looking thoughtfully at Gilbert.

"Why should you not believe me, Madame, when you have every proof of my sincerity?"

"Men change, sir, — men change."

"Madame, I have made the same vow that certain illustrious warriors made, before starting on an expedition, as to the use of certain weapons in which they were skilled. I shall never make use of my advantages but to repel the wrong that others may attempt to do me. *Not for offence, but for defence*. That is my motto."

"Alas!" said the queen, feeling humbled.

"I understand you, Madame. You suffer because you see your soul in the hands of a physician, — you who rebelled at times against the idea of abandoning the care of your body to him. Take courage; be confident. He wishes to advise you well who has this day given you proof of such forbearance as that you have received from me. I desire to love you, Madame; I desire that you should be beloved by all. The ideas I have already submitted to the king I will discuss with you."

"Doctor, take care!" exclaimed the queen, gravely. "You caught me in your snare; after having terrified the woman, you think to control the queen."

"No, Madame," answered Gilbert, "I am not a contemptible speculator. I have ideas of my own, and I can conceive that you have yours. I must from this very moment repel this accusation — one that you would forever make against me — that I had intimidated you in order to subjugate your reason. I will say more, that you are the first woman in whom I have found united all the passions of a woman and all the commanding qualities of a man. You may be at the same time a woman and a friend. All humanity might be concentred in you, were it necessary. I admire you, and I will serve you. I will serve you without any remuneration from you, merely for the sake of studying you, Madame. I will do still more for your service. In case I should seem to be a too inconvenient piece of palace furniture, or if the impression made by the scene of to-day should not be effaced from your memory, I shall ask you, I shall pray you, to dismiss me."

"Dismiss you!" exclaimed the queen, with a joyful air that did not escape Gilbert.

"Well, then, it is agreed, Madame," replied he, with admirable presence of mind. "I shall not even tell the king what I had intended, and I shall depart. Must I go to a great distance to reassure you, Madame?"

She looked at him, and appeared surprised at so much self-denial.

"I perceive," said he, "what your Majesty thinks. Your Majesty, who is better acquainted than is generally thought with the mysteries of the magnetic influence which so much alarmed you a few minutes since, — your Majesty says to herself that at a distance from her I shall be no less dangerous and troublesome."

"How is that?" exclaimed the queen.

"Yes, I repeat it, Madame. He who would be hurtful to any one by the moans you have reproached my masters and myself for employing, could practise his hurtful power equally well were the distance a hundred leagues, as at three paces. Fear nothing, Madame. I shall not attempt it."

The queen remained thoughtful for a moment, not knowing how to answer this extraordinary man, who made her waver even after she had formed the firmest resolutions.

On a sudden, the noise of steps coming from the end of the gallery made Marie Antoinette raise her head.

"The king," said she, — " the king is coming."

"In that case, Madame, answer me, I pray you — shall I remain here, or shall I leave you?"

"But — "

"Make haste, Madame. I can avoid seeing the king, if you desire it. Your Majesty may show me a door by which I can withdraw."

"Remain!" said the queen to him.

Gilbert bowed courteously, while Marie Antoinette endeavored to read in his features to what extent triumph would reveal more than either anger or anxiety.

Gilbert remained perfectly impassible.

"At least," said the queen to herself, "he ought to have manifested some slight satisfaction."

CHAPTER III.

The Council

THE king entered the room quickly and heavily, as was his custom. He had a busy, inquisitive air, that contrasted strangely with the icy rigidity of the queen’s demeanor.

The fresh complexion of the king had not abandoned him. Having risen early, and feeling quite proud of the sound health he enjoyed by inhaling the morning air, he was breathing noisily, and stepped out vigorously on the floor.

“The doctor,” said he, — ”what has become of the doctor?”

“Good-morning, Sire. How do you do this morning? Do you feel much fatigued?”

“I have slept six hours: that is my allowance. I am very well. My mind is clear. You look rather pale, Madame. I was told that you had sent for the doctor.”

“Here is Doctor Gilbert,” said the queen, stepping from before the recess of a window, in which the doctor had concealed himself till that moment.

The king’s brow at once cleared up. Then: —

“Ah! I forgot,” said he. “You sent for the doctor. Have you been unwell?”

The queen blushed.

“You blush!” exclaimed Louis XVI.

She turned crimson.

“Another secret,” said the king.

What secret, Sire?” exclaimed the queen haughtily.

“You do not understand me. I tell you that you, who have your own favorite physicians, — you would not have sent for Doctor Gilbert, unless you felt the desire, which I know — ”

“What desire?”

“You always have to conceal your sufferings from me.”

“Ah!” exclaimed the queen, regaining courage.

“Yes,” continued Louis XVI., “but take good care. Monsieur Gilbert is one of my confidential friends; and if you tell him anything he will be sure to tell it me.”

Gilbert smiled.

“As for that, no, Sire,” said he.

“Well, then, the queen is corrupting my people!”

Marie Antoinette gave one of those little stifled laughs which imply merely a wish to interrupt a conversation, or that the conversation is very tedious.

Gilbert understood her; but the king did not.

“Let us see, doctor,” said he; “as it seems to amuse the queen, tell me what she has been saying to you.”

“I was asking the doctor,” said Marie Antoinette, in her turn, “why you had sent for him so early. I must, indeed, confess that his presence at Versailles, at so unusual an hour perplexes me and makes me uneasy.”

“I was waiting for the doctor,” replied the king, looking gloomy, “to speak on politics with him.”

“Ah! very well,” said the queen.

And she seated herself as if to listen.

“Come, Doctor,” rejoined the king, taking a step towards the door.

Gilbert made a profound bow to the queen, and was about to follow Louis XVI.

“Where are you going?” exclaimed the queen. “What! are you going to leave me?”

“We are not going to talk on gay subjects, Madame. It would be as well for us to spare you so much care.”

“Do you call my sorrow care?” exclaimed the queen, majestically.

“A still better reason for doing so, my dear.”

“Remain here; I wish it,” said she. “Monsieur Gilbert, I imagine you will not disobey me.”

“Monsieur Gilbert I Monsieur Gilbert!” exclaimed the king, much vexed.

“Well, then, what is the matter?”

“Why, Monsieur Gilbert, who was to give me some advice, who was to talk freely to me according to his conscience, — Monsieur Gilbert will now no longer do so.”

“And why not?” exclaimed the queen.

“Because you will be present, Madame.”

Gilbert made a sort of gesture, to which the queen immediately attributed some important meaning.

“In what manner,” said she, to second it, “will Monsieur Gilbert risk displeasing me, if he speaks according to his conscience?”

“It is easily understood, Madame,” said the king. “You have a political system of your own. It is not always ours; so that — ”

“So that Monsieur Gilbert, you clearly say, differs essentially from me in my line of politics.”

“That must be the case, Madame,” replied Gilbert, “judging from the ideas which your Majesty knows me to entertain. Only your Majesty may rest assured that I shall tell the truth as freely in your presence as to the king alone.”

“Ah! that is already something,” exclaimed Marie Antoinette.

“The truth is not always agreeable,” hastily murmured Louis XVI.

“But if it is useful?” observed Gilbert.

“Or even uttered with good intention,” added the queen.

“In that view of the case, I agree with you,” interposed Louis XVI. “But if you were wise, Madame, you would leave the doctor entire freedom of speech, and which I need — ”

“Sire,” replied’ Gilbert, “since the queen herself calls for the truth, and as I know her Majesty’s mind is sufficiently noble and powerful not to fear it, I prefer to speak in presence of both my sovereigns.”

“Sire,” said the queen, “I request it.”

“I have full faith in your Majesty’s good sense,” said Gilbert, bowing to the queen. “The subject is the happiness and glory of his Majesty the king.”

“You are right to put faith in me,” said the queen. “Begin, sir.”

“All this is very well,” continued the king, who was growing obstinate, according to his custom; “but, in short, the question is a delicate one; and I know well that, as to myself, you will greatly embarrass me by being present.”

The queen could not withhold a gesture of impatience. She rose, then seated herself again, and darted a penetrating and cold look at the doctor, as if to divine his thoughts.

Louis XVI., seeing that there was no longer any means of escaping the ordinary and extraordinary inquisitorial question, seated himself in his arm-chair, opposite Gilbert, and heaved a deep sigh.

“What is the point in question?” asked the queen, as soon as this singular species of council had been thus constituted and installed.

Gilbert looked at the king once more, as if to ask him for his authority to speak openly.

“Speak! Good Heavens, go on, sir, since the queen desires it.”

“Well, then, Madame,” said the doctor, “I will inform your Majesty in a few words of the object of my early visit to Versailles. I came to advise his Majesty to proceed to Paris.”

Had a spark fallen among the eight thousand pounds of gunpowder at the Hôtel de Ville, it could not have produced the explosion which those words caused in the queen’s heart.

“The king proceed to Paris! The king! — ah!” and she uttered a cry of horror that made Louis XVI. tremble.

“There!” exclaimed the king, looking at Gilbert; “what did I tell you, Doctor?”

“The king!” continued the queen; “the king in the midst of a revolted city! — the king amidst pitchforks and scythes! — the king among the men who massacred the Swiss, and who assassinated Monsieur de Launay and Monsieur de Flesselles! — the king crossing the square of the Hôtel de Ville, and treading in the blood of his defenders! You must be deprived of your senses, sir, to speak thus. Oh, I repeat it; you are mad!”

Gilbert lowered his eyes like a man who is restrained by feelings of respect; but he did not answer a single word.

The king, who felt agitated to the bottom of his soul, turned about in his seat like a man undergoing torture on the gridiron of the Inquisition.

“Is it possible,” continued the queen, “that such an idea should have found a place in an intelligent mind,-in a French heart? What, sir? Do you not, then, know that you are speaking to the successor of St. Louis, — to the great-grandson of Louis XIV.?”

The king was beating the carpet with his feet.

“I do not suppose, however,” continued the queen, “that you desire to deprive the king of the assistance of his guards and his army, or that you are seeking to draw him out of his palace, which is a fortress, to expose him alone and defenceless to the blows of his infuriated enemies; you do not wish to see the king assassinated, I suppose, Mionsieur Gilbert?”

“If I thought that your Majesty for a single moment entertained an idea that I am capable of such treachery, I should not be merely a madman, but should look upon myself as a wretch. But Heaven be thanked, Madame!

you do not believe it any more than I do. No; I came to give my king this counsel, because I think the counsel good, and even superior to any other."

The queen clinched her hand upon her breast with so much violence as to make the cambric crack beneath its pressure.

The king shrugged up his shoulders with a slight movement of impatience.

"But for Heaven's sake!" cried he, "listen to him, Madame; there will be time enough to say, no when you have heard him."

"The king is right, Madame," said Gilbert, "for you do not know what I have to tell your Majesties. You think yourself surrounded by an army which is, firm, devoted to your cause, and ready to die for you; it is an error. Of the French regiments, one half are conspiring with the regenerators to carry out their revolutionary ideas."

"Sir," exclaimed the queen, "beware! You are insulting the army!"

"On the contrary, Madame," said Gilbert, "I am its greatest eulogist. We may respect our queen and be devoted to the king, and still love our country and devote ourselves to liberty."

The queen cast a flaming look, like a flash of lightning, at Gilbert. "Sir," said she to him, "this language — "

"Yes, this language offends you, Madame. I can readily understand that; for, according to all probability, your Majesty hears it now for the first time."

"We must, nevertheless, accustom ourselves to it," muttered Louis XVI., with the submissive good sense that, constituted his chief strength.

"Never!" exclaimed Marie Antoinette, "never!"

"Let us see; listen! listen! I think what the doctor says is full of reason."

The queen sat down, trembling with rage.

Gilbert continued: —

"I was going to say, Madame, that I have seen Paris, ay, and that you have not even seen Versailles. Do you know what Paris wishes to do at this moment?"

"No," said the king, anxiously.

"Perhaps it does not wish to take the Bastille a second time," said the queen, contemptuously.

"Assuredly not, Madame," continued Gilbert; "but Paris knows that there is another: fortress between the people and their sovereign. Paris proposes to assemble the deputies of’ the forty-eight districts of which it is composed, and send them to Versailles.”

“Let them come! let them come!” exclaimed the queen, in a tone of ferocious joy. “Oh, they will be well received here!”

“Wait, Madame,” replied Gilbert, “and beware; these deputies will not come alone.”

“And with whom will they come?”

“They will come supported by twenty thousand National Guards.”

“National Guards!” said the queen,” what are they?”

“Ah! Madame, do not speak lightly of that body; it will some day become a power; it will bind and loosen.”

“Twenty thousand men!” exclaimed the king.

“Well, sir,” replied the queen, in her turn, “you have here ten thousand men that are worth a hundred thousand rebels; call them, call them, I tell you; the twenty thousand wretches will here find their punishment, and the example needed by all this revolutionary slime which I would sweep away, ay, in a week, were I but listened to for an hour.”

Gilbert shook his head sorrowfully.

“Oh, Madame,” said he, “how you deceive yourself, or rather how you have been deceived! Alas! alas! Have you reflected on it? — a civil war, provoked by a queen. One only has done this, and she carried with her to the tomb a terrible epithet: she was called the foreigner.’“

“Provoked by me, sir How do you understand that? Was it I who fired upon the Bastille without provocation?”

“Ah! Madame,” cried the king, “instead of advocating violent measures, listen to reason.”

“To weakness!”

“Come, now, Antoinette, listen to the doctor,” said the king, austerely. “The arrival of twenty thousand men is not a trifling matter, particularly if we should have to fire grape-shot upon them.”

Then, turning towards Gilbert: —

“Go on, sir,” said he; “go on.”

“All these hatreds, which become more inveterate from estrangement — all these boastings, which become courage when opportunity is afforded for their realization — all the confusion of a battle, of which the issue is uncertain — oh! spare the king, spare yourself, Madame, the grief of witnessing them,” said the doctor; “you can perhaps by gentleness disperse the crowd which is advancing. The crowd wishes to come to the king, — let us forestall it; let the king go to the crowd; let him, though now surrounded by his army, give proof to-morrow of audacity and political genius. Those twenty thousand men of whom we are speaking might, perhaps, conquer the king and his army. Let the king go alone and conquer these twenty thousand men, Madame; they are the people."

The king could not refrain from giving a gesture of assent, which Marie Antoinette at once observed.

"Wretched man!" cried she to Gilbert; "but you do not then perceive what the king's presence in Paris would betoken under the conditions you require?"

"Speak, Madame."

"It would be saying, 'I approve;' it would be saying, 'You did right to kill my Swiss;' it would be saying, 'You have acted rightly in murdering my officers, in setting fire to and making my capital stream with blood; you have done rightly in dethroning me. I thank you, gentlemen, I thank you!"

And a disdainful smile rose to the lips of Marie Antoinette.

"No, Madame, your Majesty is mistaken."

"Sir!"

"It would be saying, 'There has been some justice in the grief of the people. I am come to pardon. It is I who am the chief of the nation, and the king. It is I who am at the head of the French Revolution, as in former days Henry III. placed himself at the head of the League. Your generals are my officers, your National Guards my soldiers, your magistrates are my men of business. Instead of urging me onward, follow me if you are able to do so. The greatness of my stride will prove to you once more that I am the king of France, the successor of Charlemagne.'"

"He is right," said the king, in a sorrowful tone.

"Oh!" exclaimed the queen, "for mercy's sake listen not to this man! — this man is your enemy."

"Madame," said Gilbert, "his Majesty himself is about to tell you what he thinks of the words I have spoken."

"I think, sir, that you are the first who up to this moment has dared to speak the truth to me."

"The truth!" cried the queen. "Gracious Heaven! what is it you are saying."

“Yes, Madame,” rejoined Gilbert, “and impress yourself fully with this fact, that truth is the only torch which can point out and save royalty from the dark abyss into which it is now being hurried.”

And while uttering, these words, Gilbert bowed humbly, as low as even to the knees of Marie Antoinette.

CHAPTER IV.

Decision

FOR the first time the queen appeared deeply moved. Was it from the reasoning, or from the humility, of the doctor?

Moreover, the king had risen from his seat with a determined air; he was thinking of the execution of Gilbert’s project.

However, from the habit which he had acquired of doing nothing without consulting the queen: —

“Madame,” said he to her, “do you approve it?”

“It appears it must be so,” replied the queen.

“I do not ask you for any abnegation,” said the king.

“What is it, then, you ask?”

“I ask you for the expression of a conviction which will strengthen mine.”

“You ask of me a conviction?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, if it be only that, I am convinced, sir.”

“Of what?”

“That the moment has arrived which will render monarchy the most deplorable and the most degrading position which exists in the whole world.”

“Oh,” said the king, “you exaggerate; deplorable, I will admit, but degrading, that is impossible.”

“Sir, the kings, your forefathers, have bequeathed to you a very mournful inheritance,” said the queen, sorrowfully.

“Yes,” said Louis XVI., “an inheritance which I have the grief to make you share, Madame.”

“Be pleased to allow me, Sire,” said Gilbert, who truly compassionate the great misfortunes of his fallen sovereigns; “I do not believe that there is any reason for your Majesty to view the future in such terrific colors as you have depicted it. A despotic monarchy has ceased to exist; a constitutional empire commences.”

"Ah, sir," said the king, "and am I a man capable of founding such an empire in France?"

"And why not, Sire?" cried the queen, somewhat comforted by the last words of Gilbert.

"Madame," replied the king, "I am a man of good sense and a learned man. I see clearly, instead of endeavoring to see confusedly, into things, and I know precisely all that is not necessary for me to know, to administer the government of this country. From the day on which I shall be precipitated from the height of the inviolability of an absolute prince — from the day on which it shall be allowed to be discovered that I am a mere plain man — I lose all the factitious strength which alone was necessary to govern France, since, to speak truly, Louis XIII., Louis XIV., and Louis XV. sustained themselves completely, thanks to this factitious strength. What do the French now require? A master. I feel that I am only capable of being a father. What do the revolutionists require? A sword. I do not feel that I have strength enough to strike."

"You do not feel that you have strength to strike!" exclaimed the queen, — "to strike people who are destroying the property of your children, and who would carry off, even from your own brow, one after the other, every gem that adorns the crown of France!"

"What answer can I make to this?" calmly said Louis XVI.; "would you have me reply NO? By doing so I should raise up in your mind one of those storms which are the discomfort of my life. You know how to hate. Oh, so much the better for you! You know how to be unjust, and I do not reproach you with it. It is a great quality in those who have to govern."

"Do you, perchance, consider me unjust towards the Revolution? Now tell me that."

"In good faith, yes."

"You say yes, Sire, — you say yes?"

"If you were the wife of a plain citizen, my dear Antoinette, you would not speak as you do."

"I am not one."

"And that is the reason for my excusing you; but that does not mean that I approve your course. No, Madame, no, you must be resigned; we succeeded to the throne of France at a period of storm and tempest. We ought to have strength enough to push on before us that car armed with scythes, and which is called Revolution; but our strength is insufficient."

“So much the worse,” said Marie Antoinette, “for it is over our children that it will be driven.”

“Alas! that I know; but at all events we shall not urge it forward.”

“We will make it retrograde, Sire!”

“Oh,” cried Gilbert, with a prophetic accent, “beware, Madame; in retrograding, it will crush you.”

“Sir,” said the queen, impatiently, “I observe that you can carry the frankness of your counsels very far.”

“I will be silent, Madame.”

“Oh, good Heaven! let him speak on,” said the king; “what he has now announced to you, if he has not read it in twenty newspapers during the last eight days, it is because he has not chosen to read them. You should, at least, be thankful to him that he does not convey the truths he utters in a bitter spirit.”

Marie Antoinette remained silent for a moment; then, with a deep-drawn sigh: —

“I will sum up,” she said, “or rather, I will repeat my arguments. By going to Paris voluntarily, it will be sanctioning all that has been done there.”

“Yes,” replied the king, “I know that full well.”

“Yes, it would be humiliating, — disowning your army which is preparing to defend you.”

“It is to spare the effusion of French blood,” said the doctor.

“It is to declare that henceforward tumultuous risings and violence may give such a direction to the will of the king as may best suit the views of insurgents and traitors.”

“Madame, I believe,” said Gilbert, “that you had just now the goodness to acknowledge that I had had the good fortune to convince you.”

“Yes, I just now did acknowledge it; one corner of the veil had been raised up before me. But now, sir, — oh, now that I am again becoming blind, as you have termed it, and I prefer looking into my own mind, to see reflected there those splendors to which education, tradition, and history have accustomed me, I prefer considering myself still a queen, than to feel myself a bad mother to this people, who insult and hate me.”

“Antoinette! Antoinette!” cried Louis XVI., terrified at the sudden paleness which pervaded the queen’s face, and which was nothing more than the precursor of a terrible storm of anger.

"Oh, no, no, Sire, I will speak," replied the queen.

"Beware, Madame!" said he.

And with a glance the king directed the attention of Marie Antoinette to the presence of the doctor.

"Oh, this gentleman knows all that I was about to say; he knows even everything I think," said the queen, with a bitter smile at the recollection of the scene which had just before occurred between her and the doctor; "and therefore why should I restrain myself? This gentleman, moreover, has been taken by us for our confidant, and I know not why I should have any fear of speaking. I know that you are carried, dragged away, like the unhappy prince in my dear old German ballads. Whither are you going? Of that I know nothing; but you are going whence you will never return."

"Why, no, Madame; I am going simply and plainly to Paris," replied Louis XVI.

Marie Antoinette raised her shoulders.

"Do you believe me to be insane?" said she, in a voice of deep irritation. "You are going to Paris? 'Tis well. Who tells you that Paris is not an abyss which I see not, but which I can divine? Who can say whether, in the tumultuous crowd by which you will necessarily be surrounded, you will not be killed? Who knows from whence a chance shot may proceed? Who knows, amid a hundred thousand upraised and threatening hands, which it is that has directed the murderous knife?"

"Oh, on that head you need not have the slightest apprehension. They love me!" exclaimed the king.

"Oh, say not that, Sire, or you will make me pity you. They love you, and they kill, they assassinate, they massacre those who represent you on the earth; you, a king, — you, the image of God! Well, the governor of the Bastille was your representative; he was the image of the king. Be well assured of this, and I shall not be accused of exaggeration when I say it. If they have killed De Launay, that brave and faithful servant, they would have killed you, Sire, had you been in his place, and much more easily than they killed him; for they know you, and know that instead of defending yourself, you would have bared your breast to them."

"Conclude," said the king.

"But I thought that I had concluded, Sire."

"They will kill me?"

"Yes, Sire."

“Well?”

“And my children!” exclaimed the queen.

Gilbert thought it time that he should interfere.

“Madame,” said he, “the king will be so much respected at Paris, and his presence will cause such transports, that if I have a fear, it is not for the king, but for those fanatics who will throw themselves to be crushed beneath his horse’s feet, like the Indian Fakirs beneath the car of their idol.”

“Oh, sir, sir!” cried Marie Antoinette.

“This march to Paris will be a triumph, Madame.”

“But, Sire, you do not reply.”

“It is because I agree somewhat with the doctor, Madame.”

“And you are impatient, are you not, to enjoy this great triumph?”

“And the king, in this case, would be right,” said Gilbert, “for this impatience would be a further proof of the profoundly just discrimination with which his Majesty judges men and things. The more his Majesty shall hasten to accomplish this, the greater will his triumph be.”

“Yes, you believe that, sir?”

“I am positive it will be so. For the king, by delaying it, would lose all the advantage to be derived from its spontaneousness. But reflect, Madame, reflect, that the initiative of this measure may proceed from another quarter, and such a request would change, in the eyes of the Parisians, the position of his Majesty, and would give him, in some measure, the appearance of acceding to an order.”

“There, hear you that?” exclaimed the queen. “The doctor acknowledges it — they would order you. Oh, Sire, think of that.”

“The doctor does not say that they have ordered, Madame.”

“Patience — patience! only delay a little, Sire, and the request, or rather the order, will arrive.”

Gilbert slightly compressed his lips with a feeling of vexation, which the queen instantly caught, although it was almost as evanescent as the lightning.

“What have I said?” murmured she. “Poor simpleton! I have been arguing against myself.”

“And in what, Madame?” inquired the king.

“In this, — that by a delay I should make you lose the advantage of your initiative; and, nevertheless, I have to ask for a delay.”

“Ah, Madame, ask everything, exact anything, excepting that.”

“Antoinette,” said the king, taking her hand, “you have sworn to ruin me.”

“Oh, Sire!” exclaimed the queen, in a tone of reproach, which revealed all the anguish of her heart. “And can you speak thus to me?”

“Why, then, do you attempt to delay this journey?” asked the king.

“Consider truly, Madame, that under such circumstances the fitting moment is everything; reflect on the importance of the hours which are flying past us at such a period, when an enraged and furious people are counting them anxiously as they strike.”

“Not to-day, Monsieur Gilbert; to-morrow, Sire, oh, to-morrow! Grant me till to-morrow, and I swear to you I will no longer oppose this journey.”

“A day lost,” murmured the king.

“Twenty-four long hours,” said Gilbert; “reflect on that, Madame.”

“Sire, it must be so,” rejoined the queen, in a supplicating tone.

“A reason — a reason!” cried the king.

“None, but my despair, Sire; none, but my tears; none, but my entreaties.”

“But between this and to-morrow what may happen? Who can tell this?” said the king, completely overcome by seeing the queen’s despair.

“And what is there that could happen?” said the queen, at the same time looking at Gilbert with an air of entreaty.

“Oh,” said Gilbert, “out yonder — nothing yet. A hope, were it even as vague as a cloud, would suffice to make them wait patiently till to-morrow; but — ”

“But it is here, is it not?” said the king.

“Yes, Sire, it is here that we have to apprehend.”

“It is the Assembly?”

Gilbert gave an affirmative nod.

“The Assembly,” continued the king, “with such men as Monsieur Monnier, Monsieur Mirabeau, and Monsieur Siéyès, is capable of sending me some address which would deprive me of all the advantage of my good intentions.”

“Well, then,” exclaimed the queen, with gloomy fury, “so much the better, because you would then refuse — because then you would maintain your dignity as a king — because then you would not go to Paris, and if we must here sustain a war, well, here will we sustain it — because, if we must die, we will die here, but as illustrious and unshrinking monarchs, which we are, as kings, as masters, as Christians who put their trust in God, from whom we hold the crown.”

On perceiving this feverish excitement of the queen, Louis XVI. saw that there was nothing to be done but to yield to it.

He made a sign to Gilbert, and advancing to Marie Antoinette, whose hand he took: —

“Tranquillize yourself, Madame,” said he to her; “all shall be done as you desire. You know, my dear wife, that I would not do anything which would be displeasing to you, for I have the most unbounded affection for a woman of your merit, and above all, of your virtue.”

And Louis XVI. accentuated these last words with inexpressible nobleness; thus exalting with all his power the so-much calumniated queen, and that in the presence of a witness capable, should it be requisite, of properly reporting all he had heard and seen.

This delicacy profoundly moved Marie Antoinette, who, grasping with both hands the hand which the king held out to her, said: —

“Well, then, only till to-morrow, Sire, no later; that shall be the last delay; but I ask you that as a favor on my knees. To-morrow, at the hour which may please you, I swear to you, you shall set out for Paris.”

“Take care, Madame, the doctor is a witness,” said the king, smiling.

“Sire, you have never known me to forfeit my word,” replied the queen.

“No; but there is only one thing I acknowledge — ”

“What is that?”

“It is, that I am anxious, resigned as you appear to be, to know why you have asked me for this delay of twenty-four hours. Do you expect some news from Paris, — some intelligence from Germany? Is there anything — ”

“Do not question me, Sire.”

The king was as inquisitive as Figaro was lazy; anything that excited his curiosity delighted him.

“Is there any question as to the arrival of troops, — of a reinforcement, — of any political combination?”

“Sire, Sire!” murmured the queen, in a reproachful tone.

“Is it a question of — ”

“There is no question in the matter,” replied the queen.

“Then it is a secret?”

“Well, then, yes! the secret of an anxious woman, that is all.”

"A caprice, is it not?"

"Caprice, if you will."

"The supreme law."

"That is true. Why does it not exist in politics as in philosophy? Why are kings not permitted to make their political caprices supreme laws?"

"It will come to that, you may rest assured. As to myself, it is already done," said the king, in a jocose tone. "Therefore, till to-morrow."

"Till to-morrow!" sorrowfully rejoined the queen.

"Do you keep the doctor with you?" asked the king.

"Oh, no, no!" cried the queen, with a sort of eagerness which made Gilbert smile.

"I will take him with me, then."

Gilbert bowed a third time to the Queen Marie Antoinette, who this time returned his salutation more as a woman than a queen.

Then, as the king was going towards the door, he followed the king.

"It appears to me," said the king, as they proceeded along the gallery, "that you are on good terms with the queen, Monsieur Gilbert."

"Sire," replied the doctor, "it is a favor for which I am indebted to your Majesty."

"Long live the king!" cried the courtiers who already thronged the antechambers.

"Long live the king!" repeated a crowd of officers and foreign soldiers in the courtyard, who were eagerly hastening towards the palace doors.

These acclamations, which became louder as the crowd increased, gave greater delight to the heart of Louis XVI. than any he had before received, although he had so frequently been greeted in the same manner.

As to the queen, still seated where the king had left her, near the window, and where she had just passed such agonizing moments, when she heard the cries of devotedness and love which welcomed the king as he passed by, and which gradually died away in the distance under the porticos, or beneath the thickets of the park: —

"Long live the king!" cried she; "yes, long live the king! The king will live, and that in despite of thee, infamous Paris! Thou odious gulf, thou sanguinary abyss, thou shalt not swallow up this victim! I will drag him from thee, and that with this little, this weak arm. It threatens thee at this moment, — it devotes thee to the execration of the world and to the vengeance of God!"

And pronouncing these words with a violence of hatred which would have terrified the most furious friends of the Revolution, could they have seen and heard her, the queen stretched forth towards Paris her weak arm, which shone from beneath the lace which surrounded it, like a sword starting from its scabbard.

Then she called Madame Campan, the lady-in-waiting in whom she placed the most confidence, and shutting herself up with her in her cabinet, ordered that no one should be admitted to her presence.

CHAPTER V.

The Shirt of Mail

THE following morning the sun rose brilliant and pure as on the preceding day. Its bright rays gilded the marble and the gravel walks of Versailles. The birds, grouped in thousands on the first trees of the park, saluted, with their deafening songs, the new and balmy day of joy thus promised to their love.

The queen had risen at five o’clock. She had given orders that the king should be requested to go to her apartment as soon as he should wake.

Louis XVI., somewhat fatigued from having received a deputation of the Assembly, which had come to the palace the preceding evening, and to which he had been obliged to reply, — this was the commencement of speechmaking, — Louis XVI. had slept somewhat later than usual to recover from his fatigue, and that it might not be said that he was not as vigorous as ever.

Therefore, he was scarcely dressed when the queen’s message was delivered to him; he was at that moment putting on his sword. He slightly knit his brow.

“What!” said he, “is the queen already up?”

“Oh, a long time ago, Sire.”

“Is she again ill?”

“No, Sire.”

“And what can the queen want at so early an hour in the morning?”

“Her Majesty did not say.”

The king took his first breakfast, which consisted of a bowl of soup and a little wine, and then went to the queen’s apartment.

He found the queen full dressed, as for a ceremonious reception, beautiful, pale, imposing. She welcomed her husband with that cold smile which shone like a winter’s sun upon the cheeks of the queen, as when in the grand receptions at court it was necessary she should cast some rays upon the crowd.

The king could not comprehend the sorrow which pervaded that smile and look. He was already preparing himself for one thing; that is to say, the resistance of Marie Antoinette to the project which had been proposed the day before.

“Again some new caprice,” thought he.

And this was the reason for his frowning. The queen did not fail, by the first words she uttered, to strengthen this opinion.

“Sire,” said she, “since yesterday I have been reflecting much — ”

“There now! now it is coming!” cried the king.

“Dismiss, if you please, all who are not our intimate friends,” said the queen.

The king, though much annoyed, ordered his officers to leave the room. One only of the queen’s women remained; it was Madame Campan.

Then the queen, laying both her beautiful hands on the king’s arm, said to him: —

“Why, are you dressed already? That is wrong.”

“How wrong? and why?”

“Did I not send word to you not to dress yourself until you had been here? I see you have already your coat on and your sword. I had hoped you would have come in your dressing-gown.”

The king looked at her, much surprised. This fantasy of the queen awakened in his mind a crowd of strange ideas, the novelty of which only rendered the improbability still stronger. His first gesture was one of mistrust and uneasiness.

“What is it that you wish?” said he. “Do you pretend to retard or prevent that which we had yesterday agreed upon?”

“In no way, Sire.”

“Let me entreat you not to jest on a matter of so serious a nature. I ought and I will go to Paris. I can no longer avoid it. My household troops are prepared. The persons who are to accompany me were summoned last night to be ready.”

“Sire, I have no pretensions of that nature, but — ”

“Reflect,” said the king, working himself up by degrees to gain courage, — ”reflect that the intelligence of my intended journey must have already reached the Parisians; that they have prepared themselves; that they are expecting me; that the very favorable feelings, as was predicted to us, that this journey has excited in the public mind, may be changed into dangerous hostility. Reflect, in fine — ”

"But, Sire, I do not at all contest what you have done me the honor to say to me. I resigned myself to it yesterday; this morning I am still resigned."

"Then, Madame; why all this preamble?"

"I do not make any."

"Pardon me, pardon me! then why all these questions regarding my dress, my projects?"

"As to your dress, that I admit," answered the queen, endeavoring again to smile; but that smile, from so frequently fading away, became more and more funereal.

"What observation have you to make upon my dress?"

"I wish, Sire, that you would take off your coat."

"Do you not think it becoming? It is a silk coat, of a violet color. The Parisians are accustomed to see me dressed thus; they like to see me in this, with which moreover, the blue ribbon harmonizes well. You have often told me so yourself."

"I have, Sire, no objection to offer to the color of your coat."

"Well, then?"

"But to the lining."

"In truth, you puzzle me with that eternal smile. The lining — what jest — "

"Alas! I no longer jest."

"There! now you are feeling my waistcoat; does that displease you too? White taffeta and silver, the embroidery worked by your own hand, — it is one of my favorite waistcoats."

"I have nothing to say against the waistcoat, either."

"How singular you are! Is it, then, the frill or the embroidered cambric shirt that offends you? Why must I not appear in full dress when I am going to visit my good city of Paris?"

A bitter smile contracted the queen's lips, — the nether lip particularly, that which the "Austrian" was so much reproached for; it became thicker, and advanced as if it were swelled by all the venom of hatred and of anger.

"No," said she, "I do not reproach you for being so well dressed, Sire; but it is the lining, — the lining, I say again and again."

"The lining of my embroidered shirt! Ah, will you at least explain yourself?"

"Well, then, I will explain. The king, hated, considered an encumbrance, who is about to throw himself into the midst of seven hundred thousand

Parisians, inebriated with their triumph and their revolutionary ideas, — the king is not a prince of the Middle Ages, and yet he ought to make his entry this day into Paris in a good iron cuirass, in a hemlet of good Milan steel; he should protect himself in such a way that no ball, no arrow, no stone, no knife, could reach his person."

"That is in fact true," said Louis XVI., pensively. "But, my good friend, as I do not call myself either Charles VIII., or Francis I., or even Henry IV.; as the monarchy of my day is one of velvet and of silk, — I shall go naked under my silken coat, or to speak more correctly, I shall go with a good mark at which they may aim their balls, for I wear the jewel of my orders just over my heart."

The queen uttered a stifled groan.

"Sire," said she, "we begin to understand each other. You shall see, — you shall see that your wife jests no longer."

She made a sign to Madame Campan, who had remained at the farther end of the room, and the latter took from a drawer of the queen's chiffonnier a wide oblong flat parcel, wrapped up in a silken cover.

"Sire," said the queen, "the heart of the king belongs, in the first place, to France, — that is true; but I fully believe that it belongs to his wife and children. For my part, I will not consent that this heart should be exposed to the balls of the enemy; I have adopted measures to save from every danger my husband, my king, the father of my children."

While saying this, she unfolded the silk which covered it, and displayed a waistcoat of fine steel mail, crossed with such marvellous art that it might have been thought an Arabian watered stuff, so supple and elastic was its tissue, so admirable the play of its whole surface.

"What is that?" said the king.

"Look at it, Sire."

"A waistcoat, it appears to me."

"Why, yes, Sire."

"A waistcoat that closes up to the neck."

"With a small collar, intended, as you see, to line the collar of the waistcoat or the cravat."

The king took the waistcoat in his hands and examined it very minutely.

The queen, on observing this eagerness, was perfectly transported.

The king, on his part, appeared delighted, counting the rings of this fairy net which undulated beneath his fingers with all the flexibility of knitted wool.

“Why,” exclaimed he, “this is admirable steel!”

“Is it not, Sire?”

“It is a perfect miracle of art.”

“Is it not?”

“I really cannot imagine where you can have procured this.”

I bought it last night, Sire, of a man who long since wished me to purchase it of him, in the event of your going out on a campaign.”

“It is admirable! admirable!” repeated the king, examining it as an artist.

“And it will fit you as well as a waistcoat made by your tailor, Sire.”

“Oh, do you believe that?”

“Try it on.”

The king said not a word, but took off his violet-colored coat. The queen trembled with joy; she assisted Louis XVI. in taking off his orders, and Madame Campan the rest. The king, however, unbuckled his sword and laid it on the table.

If any one at that moment had contemplated the face of the queen, they would have seen it lit up by one of those triumphant smiles which supreme felicity alone bestows.

The king allowed her to divest him of his cravat, and the delicate fingers of the queen placed the steel collar round his neck. Then Marie Antoinette herself fastened the hooks of his corselet, which adapted itself beautifully to the shape of the body, being lined throughout with a fine doe-skin, for the purpose of presenting any uncomfortable pressure from the steel.

This waistcoat was longer than an ordinary cuirass; it covered the whole body. With the waistcoat and shirt over it, it did not increase the volume of the body even half a line. It did not in the slightest degree inconvenience any movement of the wearer.

“Is it very heavy?” asked the queen.

“No.”

“Only see, my king, it is a perfect wonder, is it not?” said the queen, clapping her hands, and turning to Madame Campan, who was just buttoning the king’s ruffles.

Madame Campan manifested her joy in as artless a manner as did the queen.

“I have saved my king!” cried Marie Antoinette. “Test this invisible cuirass; prove it; place it upon a table; try if you can make any impression upon it with a knife; try if you can make a hole through it with a ball; try it! try it!”

“Oh!” exclaimed the king, with a doubting air.

“Only try it!” repeated she, with enthusiasm.

“I would willingly do so from curiosity,” replied the king.

“You need not do so; it would be superfluous, Sire.”

“How! it would be superfluous that I should prove to you the excellence of this marvel of yours?”

“Ah! thus it is with all the men. Do you believe that I would have given faith to the judgment of another, — of an indifferent person, when the life of my husband, the welfare of France, was in question?”

“And yet, Antoinette, it seems to me that this is precisely what you have done, — you have put faith in another.”

The queen shook her head with a delightfully playful obstinacy.

“Ask her!” said she, pointing to the woman who was present, — ”ask our good Campan there what we have done this morning?”

“What was it, then? Good Heaven!” ejaculated the king, completely puzzled.

“This morning — what am I saying? — this night, after dismissing all the attendants, we went, like two mad-brained women, and shut ourselves up in her room, which is at the far end of the wing occupied by the pages. Now, the pages were sent off last night to prepare the apartments at Rambouillet; and we felt well assured that no one could interrupt us before we had executed our project.”

“Good Heaven! you really alarm me! What were the designs, then, of these two Judiths?”

“Judith effected less, and certainly with less noise. But for that, the comparison would be marvellously appropriate. Campan carried the bag which contained this breast-plate; as for me, I carried a long hunting-knife which belonged to my father, — that infallible blade which killed so many wild boars.”

“Judith! still Judith!” cried the king, laughing.

“Oh, Judith had not the heavy pistol which I took from your armory, and which I made Weber load for me.”

“A pistol?”

“Undoubtedly. You ought to have seen us running in the dark, startled, agitated at the slightest noise, avoiding everybody for fear of their being indiscreet, creeping like two little mice along the deserted corridors. Campan locked three doors and placed a mattress against the last, to prevent our being overheard; we put the cuirass on one of the figures which they use to stretch my gowns on, and placed it against a wall. And I — with a firm hand, too, I can assure you — struck the breastplate with the knife; the blade bent, flew out of my hand, and bounding back, stuck into the floor, to our great terror."

"The deuce!" exclaimed the king.

"Wait a little."

"Did it not make a hole?" asked Louis XVI.

"Wait a little, I tell you. Campan pulled the knife out of the board. 'You are not strong enough, Madame,' she said, 'and perhaps your hand trembles. I am stronger, as you shall see.' She therefore raised the knife, and gave the figure so violent a blow, so well applied, that my poor German knife snapped off short against the steel mail."

"See, here are the two pieces, Sire. I will have a dagger made for you out of one of them."

"Oh, this is absolutely fabulous!" cried the king; "and the mail was not injured?"

"A slight scratch on the exterior ring, and there are three, one over the other."

"I should like to see it."

"You shall see it."

And the queen began to undress the king again with wonderful celerity, in order that he might the sooner admire her idea and her high feats in arms.

"Here is a place that is somewhat damaged, it would appear to me," said the king, pointing to a slight depression over a space of about an inch in circumference.

"That was done by the pistol-ball, Sire."

"How! you fired off a pistol loaded with ball? you?"

"Here is the ball completely flattened, and still black. Here, take it; and now do you believe that your life is in safety?"

"You are my tutelary angel," said the king, who began slowly to unhook the mailed waistcoat, in order to examine more minutely the traces left by the knife and the pistol-shot.

"Judge of my terror, dear king," said Marie Antoinette, "when on the point of firing the pistol at the breast-plate. Alas! the fear of the report —

that horrible noise which you know has so frightful an effect upon me — was nothing; but it appeared to me that in firing at the waistcoat destined to protect you, I was firing at you yourself. I was afraid of wounding you; I feared to see a hole in the mail, and then my efforts, my trouble, my hopes, were forever lost.”

“My dear wife,” said Louis XVI., having completely unhooked the coat of mail and placed it on the table, “what gratitude do I not owe you!”

“Well, now, what is it you are doing?” asked the queen.

And she took the waistcoat and again presented it to the king. But with a smile replete with nobleness and kindness: —

“No,” said he, “I thank you.”

“You refuse it?” said the queen.

“I refuse it.”

“Oh, but reflect a moment, Sire.”

“Sire,” cried Madame Campan, in a supplicating tone.

“But,” said the queen, “‘tis your salvation; ‘tis your life!”

“That is possible,” said the king.

“You refuse the succor which God himself has sent us.”

“Enough! enough!” said the king.

“Oh, you refuse! you refuse!”

“Yes, I refuse.”

“But they will kill you.”

“My dear Antoinette, when gentlemen in this eighteenth century are going out to battle, they wear a cloth coat, waistcoat, and shirt; this is all they have to defend them against musket-balls. When they go upon the field of honor to fight a duel, they throw off all but their shirt, — that is for the sword. As to myself, I am the first gentleman of my kingdom; I will do neither more nor less than my friends; and there is more than this, — while they wear cloth, I alone have the right to wear silk. Thanks, my good wife; thanks, my good queen; thanks.”

“Ah!” exclaimed the queen, at once despairing and delighted, “why cannot his army hear him speak thus?”

As to the king, he quietly completed his toilette, without even appearing to understand the act of heroism he had just performed.

“Is the monarchy then lost,” murmured the queen, “when we can feel so proudly at such a moment?”

CHAPTER VI.

The Departure

ON leaving the queen’s apartment, the king immediately found himself surrounded by all the officers and all the persons of his household, who had been appointed by him to attend him on his journey to Paris.

The principal personages were Messieurs de Beauvau, de Villeroy, de Nesle, and d’Estaing.

Gilbert was waiting in the middle of the crowd till Louis XVI. should perceive him, were it only to cast a look upon him in passing.

It could be easily perceived that the whole of the throng there present were still in doubt, and that they could not credit that the king would persist in following up the resolution he had come to.

“After breakfast, gentlemen,” said the king, “we will set out.”

Then, perceiving Gilbert: —

“Ah, you are there, Doctor,” he continued, “you know that I take you with me.”

“At your orders, Sire.”

The king went into his cabinet, where he was engaged two hours. He afterwards attended Mass with all his household; then, at about nine o’clock, he sat down to breakfast.

The repast was taken with the usual ceremonies, excepting that the queen, who, after attending Mass, was observed to be out of spirits, her eyes red and swollen, had insisted on being present at the king’s repast, but without partaking of it in the slightest manner, that she might be with him to the last moment.

The queen had brought her two children with her, who, already much agitated, doubtless by what the queen had said to them, were looking anxiously from time to time at their father’s face, and then at the crowd of officers of the guards, who were present.

The children, moreover, from time to time, by order of their mother, wiped away a tear, which every now and then would rise to their eyelids;

and the sight of this excited the pity of some and the anger of others, and filled the whole assembly with profound grief.

The king ate on stoically. He spoke several times to Gilbert, without taking his eyes off his plate; he spoke frequently to the queen, and always with deep affection.

At last he gave instructions to the commanders of his troops.

He was just finishing his breakfast, when an officer came in to announce to him that a compact body of men on foot, coming from Paris, had just appeared at the end of the grand avenue leading to the Place d'Armes.

On hearing this, the officers and guards at once rushed out of the room. The king raised his head and looked at Gilbert; but seeing that Gilbert smiled, he tranquilly continued eating.

The queen turned pale, and leaned towards Monsieur de Beauvau, to request him to obtain information.

Monsieur de Beauvau ran out precipitately.

The queen then drew near to the window.

Five minutes afterwards Monsieur de Beauvau returned.

"Sire," said he, on entering the room, "they are National Guards, from Paris, who, hearing the rumor spread yesterday in the capital, of your Majesty's intention to visit the Parisians, assembled to the number of some ten thousand, for the purpose of coming out to meet you on the road; and not meeting you so soon as they expected, they have pushed on to Versailles."

"What appear to be their intentions?" asked the king.

"The best in the world," replied Monsieur de Beauvau.

"That matters not," said the queen; "have the gates closed."

"Take good care not to do that," said the king; "it is quite enough that the palace-doors remain closed."

The queen frowned, and darted a look at Gilbert.

The latter was awaiting this look from the queen, for one half his prediction was already fulfilled. He had promised the arrival of twenty thousand men, and ten thousand had already come.

The king turned to Monsieur de Beauvau.

"See that refreshments be given to these worthy people," said he.

Monsieur de Beauvau went down a second time. He transmitted to the cellar-men the order he had received from the king.

After doing this, he went upstairs again.

"Well?" said the king, in a tone of inquiry.

"Well, Sire, your Parisians are in high discussion with the gentlemen of the Guards."

"How!" cried the king, "there is a discussion?"

"Oh! one of pure courteousness. As they have been informed that the king is to set out in two hours, they wish to await his departure, and march behind his Majesty's carriage."

"But," inquired the queen, in her turn, "they are on foot, I suppose?"

"Yes, Madame."

"But the king has horses to his carriage, and the king travels fast, very fast; you know, Monsieur de Beauvau, that the king is accustomed to travelling very rapidly."

These words, pronounced in the tone the queen pronounced them, implied: —

"Put wings to his Majesty's carriage."

The king made a sign with his hand to stop the colloquy.

"I will go at a walk."

The queen heaved a sigh which almost resembled a cry of anger.

"It would not be right," tranquilly added Louis XVI., "that I should make these worthy people run, who have taken the trouble to come so far to do me honor. My carriage shall be driven at a walk, and a slow walk too, so that everybody may be able to follow me."

The whole of the company testified their admiration by a murmur of approbation; but at the same time there was seen on the countenances of several persons the reflection of the disapproval which was expressed by the features of the queen, at so much goodness of soul, which she considered as mere weakness.

A window was opened.

The queen turned round, amazed. It was Gilbert, who, in his quality of physician, had only exercised the right which appertained to him of renewing the air of the dining-room, thickened by the odors of the viands and the breathing of two hundred persons.

The doctor stood behind the curtains of the open window, through which ascended the voices of the crowd assembled in the courtyard.

"What is that?" asked the king.

"Sire," replied Gilbert, "the National Guards are down there on the pavement, exposed to the heat of the sun, and they must feel it very oppressive.”

“Why not invite them upstairs to breakfast with the king?” sarcastically said one of her favorite officers to the queen.

“They should be taken to some shady place; put them into the marble courtyard, into the vestibules, wherever it is cool,” said the king.

“Ten thousand men in the vestibules!” exclaimed the queen.

“If they are scattered everywhere, there will be room enough for them,” said the king.

“Scattered everywhere!” cried Marie Antoinette, why, sir, you will teach them the way to your own bedchamber.”

This was the prophecy of terror which was to be realized at Versailles before three months had elapsed.

“They have a great many children with them, Madame,” said Gilbert, in a gentle tone.

“Children!” exclaimed the queen.

“Yes, Madame; a great many have brought their children with them, as if on a party of pleasure. The children are dressed as little National Guards, so great is the enthusiasm for this new institution.”

The queen opened her lips as if about to speak; but almost instantly she held down her head.

She had felt a desire to utter a kind word; but pride and hatred had stopped it ere it escaped her lips.

Gilbert looked at her attentively.

“Ah!” cried the king, “those poor children! When people bring children with them, it is plain that they have no intention to do harm to the father of a family, — another reason for putting them in a cooler place, poor little things! Let them in; let them in.”

Gilbert then, gently shaking his head, appeared to say to the queen, who had remained silent: —

“There, Madame; that is what *you* ought to have said; I gave you the opportunity. Your kind words would have been repeated, and you would have gained two years of popularity.”

The queen comprehended Gilbert’s mute language, and a blush suffused her face.

She felt the error she had committed, and immediately excused herself by a feeling of pride and resistance, which she expressed by a glance, as a reply to Gilbert. During this time Monsieur de Beauvau was following the king's orders relating to the National Guards.

Then were heard shouts of joy and benediction from that armed crowd, admitted by the king's order to the interior of the palace.

The acclamations, the fervent wishes, the loud hurrahs, ascended as a whirlwind to the hall in which the king and queen were seated, whom they reassured with regard to the disposition of the so-much-dreaded inhabitants of Paris.

"Sire," said Monsieur de Beauvau, "in what order is it that your Majesty determines the procession shall be conducted?"

"And the discussion between the National Guards and my officers?"

"Oh, Sire, it has evaporated, vanished; those worthy people are so happy that they now say, 'We will go wherever you may please to place us. The king is our king as much as he is everybody else's king. Wherever he may be, he is ours."

The King looked at Marie Antoinette, who curled, with an ironical smile, her disdainful lip.

"Tell the National Guards," said Louis XVI., "that they may place themselves where they will."

"Your Majesty," said the queen, "will not forget that your body-guards have the right of surrounding your carriage."

The officers, who perceived that the king was somewhat undecided, advanced to support the arguments of the queen.

"That is the case, undoubtedly," replied the king. "Well, we shall see."

Monsieur de Beauvau and Monsieur de Villeroy left the room to take their stations and to give the necessary orders.,

The clock of Versailles struck ten. "Well, well," said the king, "I shall put off my usual labors till to-morrow; these worthy people ought not to be kept waiting."

The king rose from table.

Marie Antoinette went to the king, clasped him in her arms, and embraced him. The children clung weeping to their father's neck. Louis XVI., who was much moved, endeavored gently to release himself from them; he wished to conceal the emotions which would soon have become overpowering.

The queen stopped all the officers as they passed her, seizing one by his arm, another by his sword.

“Gentlemen, gentlemen!” said she. And this eloquent exclamation recommended to them to be watchful for the safety of the king, who had just descended the staircase.

All of them placed their hands upon their hearts and upon their swords.

The queen smiled to thank them.

Gilbert remained in the room till almost the last.

“Sir,” said the queen to him, “it was you who advised the king to take this step. It was you who induced the king to come to this resolution, in spite of my entreaties. Reflect, sir, that you have assumed a fearful responsibility as regards the wife, as regards the children.”

“I am sensible of that,” coldly replied Gilbert.

“And you will bring the king back to me safe and unhurt?” she said with a solemn gesture.

“Yes, Madame.”

“Reflect that you will answer for his safety with your head.”

Gilbert bowed.

“Reflect that your head is answerable,” cried Marie Antoinette, with the menacing and pitiless authority of an absolute monarch.

“Upon my head be the risk,” said the doctor, again bowing. “Yes, Madame; and this pledge I should consider as a hostage of but little value, if I believed the king’s safety to be at all threatened. But I have said, Madame, that it is to a triumph that I this day conduct his Majesty.”

“I must have news of him every hour,” added the queen.

“You shall, Madame; and this I swear to you.”

“Go, sir; go at once. I hear the drums; the king is about to leave the palace.”

Gilbert bowed, and descending the grand staircase, found himself face to face with one of the king’s aides-de-camp, who was seeking him by order of his Majesty.

They made him get into a carriage which belonged to Monsieur de Beauvau; the grand master of the ceremonies not allowing, as he had not produced proofs of his nobility, that he should travel in one of the king’s carriages.

Gilbert smiled on finding himself alone in a carriage with arms upon its panels, Monsieur de Beauvau being on horseback, curvetting by the side of the royal carriage.

Then it struck him that it was ridiculous in him thus to be occupying a carriage on which was painted a princely coronet and armorial bearings.

This scruple was still annoying him when, from the midst of a crowd of National Guards, who were following the carriage, he heard the following conversation, though carried on in a half-whisper by men who were curiously stretching out their necks to look at him.

“Oh! that one, — that is the Prince de Beauvau.”

“Why,” cried a comrade, “you are mistaken.”

“I tell you it must be so, since the carriage has the prince’s arms upon it.”

“The arms! the arms! I say that means nothing.”

“Zounds!” said another, “what do the arms prove?”

“They prove that if the arms of Monsieur de Beauvau are upon the coach, it must be Monsieur de Beauvau who is inside of it.”

“Monsieur de Beauveau, — is he a patriot?” asked a woman.

“Pooh!” exclaimed the National Guard. Gilbert again smiled.

“But I tell you,” said the first contradictor, “that it is not the prince. The prince is stout; that one is thin. The prince wears the uniform of a commandant of the guards; that one wears a black coat, — it is his intendant.”

A murmur, which was by no means favorable to Gilbert, arose among the crowd, who had degraded him by giving him this title, which was not at all flattering.

“Why, no, by the devil’s horns!” cried a loud voice, the sound of which made Gilbert start. It was the voice of a man who with his elbows and his fists was clearing his way to get near the carriage. “No,” said he, “it is neither Monsieur de Beauvau nor his intendant. It is that brave and famous patriot, and even the most famous of all the patriots. Why, Monsieur Gilbert, what the devil are you doing in the carriage of a prince?”

“Ha! it is you, Father Billot!” exclaimed the doctor.

“By Heaven,” replied the farmer, “I took good care not to lose the opportunity!”

“And Pitou?” asked Gilbert.

“Oh, he is not far off. Hilloa, Pitou! where are you? Come this way; come quickly!”

And Pitou, on hearing this invitation, managed by a dexterous use of his shoulders to slip through the crowd till he reached Billot’s side, and then with admiration bowed to Gilbert.

“Good-day, Monsieur Gilbert,” said he.

“Good-day, Pitou; good-day, my friend.”

“Gilbert! Gilbert who is he?” inquired the crowd of one another.

“Such is fame,” thought the doctor, — ”well known at Villers-Cotterets; yes; but at Paris popularity is everything.”

He alighted from the carriage, which continued its onward progress at a walk, while Gilbert moved on with the crowd, on foot, leaning on Billot’s arm.

He in a few words related to the farmer his visit to Versailles, the good disposition of the king and the royal family; he in a few minutes preached such a propaganda of royalism to the group by which he was surrounded that, simple and delighted, these worthy people, who were yet easily induced to receive good impressions, uttered loud and continued shouts of “Long live the king!” which, taken up by those who preceded them, soon reached the head of the line, and deafened Louis XVI. in his carriage.

“I will see the king!” cried Billot, electrified. “I must get close to him, and see him well; I came all this way on purpose. I will judge him by his face; the eye of an honest man can always speak for itself. Let us get nearer to his carriage, Monsieur Gilbert, shall we not?”

“Wait a little, and it will be easy for us to do so,” replied Gilbert; “for I see one of Monsieur de Beauvau’s aides-de-camp, who is seeking for some one, coming this way.”

And, in fact, a cavalier, who, managing his horse with every sort of precaution, amid the groups of fatigued but joyous pedestrians, was endeavoring to get near the carriage which Gilbert had just left.

Gilbert called to him.

“Are you not looking, sir, for Doctor Gilbert” he inquired.

“Himself,” replied the aide-de-camp.

“In that case, I am he.”

“Monsieur de Beauvau sends for you, at the king’s request.”

These high-sounding words made Billot’s eyes open widely; and on the crowd they had the effect of making them open their ranks to allow Gilbert to pass. Gilbert glided through them, followed by Billot and Pitou, the aide-de-camp going before them, who kept on repeating:

“Make room, gentlemen, make room; let us pass, in the king’s name, let us pass!”

Gilbert soon reached the door of the royal carriage, which was moving onward as if drawn by Merovingian oxen.

CHAPTER VII.

The Journey

THUS pushing and thus pushed, but still following Monsieur de Beauvau’s aide-de-camp, Gilbert, Billot, and Pitou at length reached the carriage in which the king, accompanied by Messieurs d’Estaing and de Villequier, was slowly advancing amid the crowd, which continually increased.

Extraordinary, unknown, unheard-of spectacle! for it was the first time that such a one had been seen. All those National Guards from the surrounding villages — impromptu soldiers suddenly sprung up — hastened with cries of joy to greet the king in his progress, saluting him with their benedictions, endeavoring to gain a look from him, and then, instead of returning to their homes, taking place in the procession, and accompanying their monarch towards Paris.

And why? No one could have given a reason for it. Were they obeying an instinct? They had seen, but they wished again to see, this well-beloved king.

For it must he acknowledged that at this period Louis XVI. was an adored king, to whom the French would have raised altars, had it not been for the profound contempt with which Voltaire had inspired them for all altars.

Louis XVI. therefore had no altars raised to him, but solely because the thinkers of that day had too high an esteem for him to inflict upon him such a humiliation.

Louis XVI.perceived Gilbert leaning upon the arm of Billot; behind them marched Pitou, still dragging after him his long sabre.

“Ah, Doctor,” cried the king, “what magnificent weather, and what a magnificent people!”

“You see, Sire,” replied Gilbert. Then, turning towards the king: “What did I promise your Majesty?”

“Yes, sir, yes; and you have worthily fulfilled your promise.”

The king raised his head, and with the intention of being heard: —

“We move but slowly,” said he; “and yet it appears to me that we advance but too rapidly for all that we have to see.”

“Sire,” said Monsieur de Beauvau, “and yet, at the pace your Majesty is going, you are travelling about one league in three hours. It would be difficult to go more slowly.”

In fact, the horses were stopped every moment; harangues and replies were interchanged; the National Guards *fraternized* — the word was only then invented — with the body-guards of his Majesty.

“Ah!” said Gilbert to himself, who contemplated this singular spectacle as a philosopher, “if they fraternize with the body-guards, it was because before being friends they had been enemies.”

“I say, Monsieur Gilbert,” said Billot, in a half-whisper, “I have had a good look at the king; I have listened to him with all my ears. Well, my opinion is that the king is an honest man!”

And the enthusiasm which animated Billot was so overpowering that he raised his voice in uttering these last words to such a pitch that the king and his staff heard him.

The officers laughed outright. The king smiled, and then, nodding his head: —

“That is praise which pleases me,” said he.

These words were spoken loud enough for Billot to hear them.

“Oh, you are right, Sire, for I do not give it to everybody,” replied Billot, entering at once into conversation with his king, as Michaud, the miller, did with Henry IV.

“And that flatters me so much the more,” rejoined the king, much embarrassed at not knowing how to maintain his dignity as a king, and speak graciously as a good patriot.

Alas! the poor prince was not yet accustomed to call himself King of the French.

He thought that he was still called the King of France.

Billot, beside himself with joy, did not give himself the trouble to reflect whether Louis, in a philosophical point of view, had abdicated the title of king to adopt the title of a man. Billot, who felt how much this language resembled rustic plainness, — Billot applauded himself for having comprehended the king, and for having been comprehended by him.

Therefore from that moment Billot became more and more enthusiastic. He drank from the king’s looks, according to the Virgilian expression, deep draughts of love for constitutional royalty, and communicated it to Pitou, who, too full of his own love and the superfluity of Billot's, overflowed at first in stentorian shouts, then in more squeaking, and finally in less articulate ones of: —

"Long live the king! Long live the father of the people!"

This modification in the voice of Pitou was produced by degrees in proportion as he became more and more hoarse.

Pitou was as hoarse as a bull-frog when the procession reached the Point du Jour, where the Marquis de Lafayette, on his celebrated white charger, was keeping in order the undisciplined and agitated cohorts of the National Guard, who had from five o'clock that morning lined the road to receive the royal procession.

At this time it was nearly two o'clock.

The interview between the king and this new chief of armed France passed off in a manner that was satisfactory to all present.

The king, however, began to feel fatigued. He no longer spoke; he contented himself with merely smiling.

The general-in-chief of the Parisian militia could no longer utter a command; he only gesticulated.

The king had the satisfaction to find that the crowd as frequently cried: "Long live the king!" as "Long live Lafayette!" Unfortunately, this was the last time he was destined to enjoy this gratification of his self-love.

During this, Gilbert remained constantly at the door of the king's carriage, Billot near Gilbert, Pitou near Billot.

Gilbert, faithful to his promise, had found means, since his departure from Versailles, to despatch four couriers to the queen.

These couriers had each been the bearer of good news, for at every step of his journey the king had seen caps thrown up in the air as he passed, only on each of these caps shone the colors of the nation, a species of reproach addressed to the white cockade which the king's guards and the king himself wore in their hats.

In the midst of his joy and enthusiasm, this discrepancy in the cockades was the only thing which annoyed Billot.

Billot had on his cocked hat an enormous tricolored cockade.

The king had a white cockade in his hat; the tastes of the subject and the king were not therefore absolutely similar.

This idea so much perplexed him that he could not refrain from unburdening his mind upon the subject to Gilbert, at a moment when the latter was not conversing with the king.

“Monsieur Gilbert,” said he to him, “how is it that his Majesty does not wear the national cockade?”

“Because, my dear Billot, either the king does not know that there is a new cockade, or he considers that the cockade he wears ought to be the cockade of the nation.”

“Oh, no! oh, no! since his cockade is a white one, and our cockade — ours — is a tricolored one.”

“One moment,” said Gilbert, stopping Billot just as he was about to launch with heart and soul into the arguments advanced by the newspapers of the day; “the king’s cockade is white, as the flag of France is white. The king is in no way to blame for this. Cockade and flag were white long before he came into the world. Moreover, my dear Billot, that flag has performed great feats, and so has the white cockade. There was a white cockade in the hat of Admiral de Suffren, when he reestablished our flag in the East Indies. There was a white cockade in the hat of Assas, and it was by that the Germans recognized him in the night, when he allowed himself to be killed rather than that they should take his soldiers by surprise. There was a white cockade in the hat of Marshal Saxe, when he defeated the English at Fontenoy. There was, in fine, a white cockade in the hat of the Prince de Condé, when he beat the Imperialists at Rocroi, at Fribourg, and at Lens. The white cockade has done all this, and a great many other things, my dear Billot; while the national cockade, which will perhaps make a tour round the world, as Lafayette has predicted, has not yet had time to accomplish anything, seeing that it has existed only for the last three days. I do not say that it will rest idle, do you understand; but, in short, having as yet done nothing, it gives the king full right to wait till it has done something.”

“How? the national cockade has as yet done nothing?” cried Billot. “Has it not taken the Bastille?”

“It has,” said Gilbert, sorrowfully; “you are right, Billot.”

“And that is why,” triumphantly rejoined the farmer, — ”that is why the king ought to adopt it.”

Gilbert gave a furious nudge with his elbow into Billot’s ribs, for he had perceived the king was listening, and then, in a low tone: —

"Are you mad, Billot?" said he; "and against whom was the Bastille taken, then? Against royalty, it seems to me. And now you would make the king wear the trophies of your triumph and the insignia of his own defeat. Madman! the king is all heart, all goodness, all candor, and you would wish him to show himself a hypocrite!"

"But," said Billot, more humbly, without, however, giving up the argument altogether, "it was not precisely against the king that the Bastille was taken; it was against despotism."

Gilbert shrugged up his shoulders, but with the delicacy of the superior man, who will not place his foot on his inferior, for fear that he should crush him.

"No," said Billot, again becoming animated, "it is not against our good king that we have fought, but against his satellites."

Now, in those days they said, speaking politically, satellites instead of saying soldiers, as they said in the theatres, courser instead of horse.

"Moreover," continued Billot, and with some appearance of reason, "he disapproves them, since he comes thus in the midst of us; and if he disapproves them, he must approve us. It is for our happiness and his honor that we have worked, — we, the conquerors of the Bastille."

"Alas! alas!" murmured Gilbert, who did not know how to reconcile the appearance of the king's features with that which he knew must be passing in his heart.

As to the king, he began, amid the confused murmurs of the march, to understand some few words of the conversation entered into by his side.

Gilbert, who perceived the attention which the king was paying to the discussion, made every effort to lead Billot on to less slippery ground than that on which he had ventured.

Suddenly the procession stopped; it had arrived at the Cours la Reine, at the gate formerly called La Conférence, in the Champs Élysées.

There a deputation of electors and aldermen, presided over by the new mayor, Bailly, had drawn themselves up in fine array, with a guard of three hundred men, commanded by a colonel, besides at least three hundred members of the National Assembly, taken, as it will be readily imagined, from the ranks of the Tiers État.

Two of the electors united their strength and their address to hold in equilibrium a vast salver of gilt plate, upon which were lying two enormous keys, — the keys of the city of Paris during the days of Henry IV.

This imposing spectacle at once put a stop to all individual conversations; and every one, whether in the crowd or in the ranks, immediately directed their attention to the speeches about to be pronounced on the occasion.

Bailly, the worthy man of science, the admirable astronomer, who had been made a deputy in defiance to his own will, a mayor in spite of his objections, an orator notwithstanding his unwillingness, had prepared a long speech. This speech had for its exordium, according to the strictest laws of rhetoric, a laudatory encomium on the king, from the coming into power of Monsieur Turgot down to the taking of the Bastille. Little was wanting, such privilege has eloquence, to attribute to the king the initiative in the measures which the people had been compelled unwillingly to adopt.

Bailly was delighted with the speech he had prepared, when an incident (it is Bailly himself who relates this incident in his Memoirs) furnished him with a new exordium, very much more picturesque than the one he had prepared, — the only one, moreover, which remained engraved on the minds of the people, always ready to seize upon good and, above all, fine-sounding phrases, when founded upon a material fact.

While walking towards the place of meeting, with the aldermen and the electors, Bailly was alarmed at the weight of the keys which he was about to present to the king.

“Do you believe,” said he, laughingly, “that after having shown these to the king, I will undergo the fatigue of carrying them back to Paris?”

“What will you do with them, then?” asked one of the electors.

“What will I do with them?” said Bailly. Why, I will give them to you, or I will throw them into some ditch at the foot of a tree.”

“Take good care not to do that!” cried the elector, completely horrified. “Do you not know that these keys re the same which the city of Paris offered to Henry IV. after the siege? They are very precious; they are inestimable antiquities.”

“You are right,” rejoined Bailly; “the keys offered to Henry IV., the conqueror of Paris, and which are now to be offered to Louis XVI., heh? Why, I declare, now,” said the worthy mayor to himself, “this would be a capital antithesis in my speech.”

And instantly he took a pencil and wrote above the speech he had prepared the following exordium: —

"Sire, I present to your Majesty the keys of the good city of Paris. They are the same which were offered to Henry IV. He had re-conquered his people; to-day the people have re-conquered their king."

The phrase was well turned, and it was also true. It implanted itself in the memories of the Parisians; and all the speeches, all the works of Bailly, this only survived.

As to Louis XVI., he approved it by an affirmative d, but coloring deeply at the same time; for he felt epigrammatic irony which it conveyed, although concealed beneath a semblance of respect and oratorical flourishes.

"Oh! Marie Antoinette," murmured Louis XVI. to self, "would not allow herself to be deceived by this tended veneration of Monsieur Bailly, and would reply a very different manner from that which I am about to do to the untoward astronomer."

And these reflections were the cause why Louis XVI., who had paid too much attention to the commencement of the speech, did not listen at all to the conclusion of it, nor to that of the president of the electors, Monsieur Delavigne, of which he heard neither the beginning nor the end.

However, the addresses being concluded, the king, fearing not to appear sufficiently delighted with their efforts to say that which was agreeable to him, replied in a very noble tone, and without making any allusion to what the orators had said, that the *homage* of the city of Paris and of the electors was exceedingly gratifying to him.

After which he gave orders for the procession to move on towards the Hôtel de Ville.

But before it recommended its march, he dismissed his body-guard, wishing to respond by a gracious confidence to the half-politeness which had been evinced to him by the municipality through their organs, the president of the electors and Monsieur Bailly.

Being thus alone, amid the enormous mass of National Guards and spectators, the carriage advanced more rapidly.

Gilbert and his companion Billot still retained their posts on the right of the carriage.

At the moment when they were crossing the Place Louis XV., the report of a gun was heard, fired from the opposite side of the Seine; and a white smoke arose, like a veil of incense, towards the blue sky, where it as suddenly vanished.

As if the report of this musket-shot had found an echo within his breast, Gilbert had felt himself struck, as by a violent blow. For a second his breath failed him, and he hastily pressed his hand to his heart, where he felt a sudden and severe pain.

At the same instant a cry of distress was heard around the royal carriage; a woman had fallen to the ground, shot through the right shoulder.

One of the buttons of Gilbert's coat, a large steel button, cut diamond-fashion, as they were worn at the period, had just been struck diagonally by that same ball.

It had performed the office of a breastplate, and the ball had glanced off from it; this had caused the painful shock which Gilbert had experienced.

Part of his waistcoat and his frill had been torn off by the ball.

This ball, on glancing from the button, had killed the unfortunate woman, who was instantly removed from the spot, bleeding profusely.

The king had heard the shot, but had seen nothing.

He leaned towards Gilbert, and smiling, said: —

"They are burning gunpowder yonder, to do me honor."

"Yes, Sire," replied Gilbert.

But he was careful not to mention to his Majesty the nature of the ovation which they were offering to aim.

In his own mind, however, he acknowledged that the queen had some reason for the apprehensions she had expressed, since, but for him standing immediately before, and closing the carriage-door, as it were, hermetically, that ball, which had glanced off from his steel button, would have gone straight to the king's breast.

And now from what hand had proceeded this so well-aimed shot?

No one then wished to inquire, so that it will never now be known.

Billot, pale from what he had just seen, his eyes incessantly attracted to the rent made in Gilbert's coat, waistcoat, and frill, excited Pitou to shout as loudly as he could, "Long live the *Father of the French!*"

The event of the day was so great that this episode was quickly forgotten.

At last Louis XVI. arrived in front of the Hôtel de Ville, after having been saluted on the Pont Neuf by a discharge of cannon, which, at all events, were not loaded with ball.

Upon the facade of the Hôtel de Ville was an inscription, in large letters, black in the daylight, but which, when it was dark, were to form a brilliant transparency. This inscription was the result of the ingenious lucubrations of the municipal authorities.

The inscription was as follows: —

TO LOUIS XVI., FATHER OF THE FRENCH, AND KING OF A FREE PEOPLE.

Another antithesis, much more important than the one contained in Monsieur Bailly's speech, and which elicited shouts of admiration from all the Parisians assembled in the square.

The inscription attracted the attention of Billot.

But as Billot could not read, he made Pitou read the inscription to him.

Billot made him read it a second time, as if he had not understood it perfectly at first.

Then, when Pitou had repeated the phrase, without varying in a single word: —

"Is it that?" cried he, — "is it that?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Pitou.

"The municipality has written that the king is a king of a free people?"

"Yes, Father Billot."

"Well, then," exclaimed Billot, "since the nation is free, it has the right to offer its cockade to the king."

And with one bound, rushing before the king, who was then alighting from his carriage at the front steps of the Hôtel de Ville: —

"Sire," said he, "you saw on the Pont Neuf that the Henry IV. in bronze wore the national cockade."

"Well?" cried the king.

"Well, Sire, if Henry IV. wears the national cockade, you can wear it too."

"Certainly," said Louis XVI. much embarrassed; "and if I had one — "

"Well," cried Billot, in a louder tone, and raising his hand, "in the name of the people I offer you this one in the place of yours; accept it."

Bailly intervened.

The king was pale. He began to see the progressive encroachment. He looked at Bailly as if to ask his opinion.

“Sire,” said the latter, “it is the distinctive sign of every Frenchman.”

“In that case I accept it,” said the king, taking the cockade from Billot’s hands.

And putting aside his own white cockade, he placed the tricolored one in his hat.

An immense triumphant hurrah was echoed from the great crowd upon the square.

Gilbert turned away his head, much grieved.

He considered that the people were encroaching too rapidly, and that the king did not resist sufficiently.

“Long live the king!” cried Billot, who thus gave the signal for a second round of applause.

“The king is dead,” murmured Gilbert; “there is no longer a king in France.”

An arch of steel had been formed, by a thousand swords held up, from the place at which the king had alighted from his carriage, to the door of the hall in which the municipal authorities were waiting to receive him.

He passed beneath this arch, and disappeared in the gloomy passages of the Hôtel de Ville.

“That is not a triumphal arch,” said Gilbert, “but the Caudine Forks.”

Then, with a sigh: —

“Ah! what will the queen say to this?”

CHAPTER VIII.

Showing what was taking place at Versailles while the King was listening to the Speeches of the Municipality

IN the interior of the Hôtel de Ville the king received the most flattering welcome; he was styled the Restorer of Liberty.

Being invited to speak, — for the thirst for speeches became every day more intense, — and wishing, in short, to ascertain the feelings of all present, the king placed his hand upon his heart, and said: —

“Gentlemen, you may always calculate on my affection.”

While he was thus listening in the Hôtel de Ville to the communications from the government, — for from that day a real government was constituted in France, besides that of the throne and the National Assembly,-the people outside the building were admiring the beautiful horses, the gilt carriage, the lackeys, and the coachman of his Majesty.

Pitou, since the entry of the king into the Hôtel de Ville, had, thanks to a louis given by Father Billot, amused himself in making a goodly quantity of cockades of red and blue ribbons, which he had purchased with the louis, and with these, which were of all sizes, he had decorated the horses’ ears, the harness, and the whole equipage.

On seeing this, the imitative people had literally metamorphosed the king’s carriage into a cockade-shop.

The coachman and the footmen were profusely ornamented with them.

They had, moreover, slipped some dozens of them into the carriage itself.

However, it must be said that Monsieur de Lafayette, who had remained on horseback, had endeavored to restrain these honest propagators of the national colors, but had not been able to succeed.

And therefore, when the king came out: —

“Oh, oh!” cried he, on seeing this strange bedizenment of his equipage.

Then, with his hand he made a sign to Monsieur de Lafayette to approach him.

Monsieur de Lafayette respectfully advanced, lowering his sword as he came near the king.

“Monsieur de Lafayette,” said the king to him, “I was looking for you to say to you that I confirm your appointment to the command of the National Guards.”

And Louis XVI. got into his carriage amid a universal acclamation.

As to Gilbert, tranquillized henceforward as to the personal safety of the king, he had remained in the hall with Bailly and the electors.

The speechifying had not yet terminated.

However, on hearing the loud hurrahs which saluted the departure of the king, he approached a window, to cast a last glance on the square, and to observe the conduct of his two country friends.

They were both, or at least they appeared to be, still on the best terms with the king.

Suddenly Gilbert perceived a horseman advancing rapidly along the Quay Pelletier, covered with dust, and obliging the crowd, which was still docile and respectful, to open its ranks and let him pass.

The people, who were good and complaisant on this great day, smiled while repeating: —

“One of the king’s officers! — one of the king’s officers!”

And cries of “Long live the king!” saluted the officer as he passed on, and women patted his horse’s neck, which was white with foam.

This officer at last managed to reach the king’s carriage, and arrived there at the moment when a servant was closing the door of it.

“What! is it you, Charny?” cried Louis XVI.

And then, in a lower tone: —

“How are they all out yonder?” he inquired.

Then, in a whisper: —

“The queen?”

“Very anxious, Sire,” replied the officer, who had thrust his head completely into the carriage-window.

“Do you return to Versailles?”

“Yes, Sire.”

“Well, then, tell our friends they have no cause for uneasiness. All has gone off marvellously well.”

Charny bowed, raised his head, and perceived Monsieur de Lafayette, who made a friendly sign to him.

Charny went to him, and Lafayette shook hands with him; and the crowd, seeing this, almost carried both officer and horse as far as the quay, where, thanks to the vigilant orders given to the National Guards, a line was formed to facilitate the king’s departure.

The king ordered that the carriage should move out at a walking pace, till it reached the Place Louis XV. There he found his body-guards, who were awaiting the return of the king, and not without impatience; so that this impatience, in which every one participated, kept on increasing every moment, and the horses were driven on at a pace which increased in rapidity as they advanced upon the road to Versailles.

Gilbert, from the balcony of the window, had fully comprehended the meaning of the arrival of this horseman, although he did not know his person. He readily imagined the anguish which the queen must have suffered, and especially for the last three hours; for during that time he had not been able to despatch a single courier to Versailles, amid the throng by which he was surrounded, without exciting suspicion, or betraying weakness.

He had but a faint idea of all that had been occurring at Versailles.

We shall now return there with our readers, for we do not wish to make them read too long a course of history.

The queen had received the last courier from the king at three o’clock.

Gilbert had found means to despatch a courier just at the moment the king entered the Hôtel de Ville, under the arch formed by the swords of the National Guards.

The Countess de Charny was with the queen. The countess had only just left her bed, which from severe indisposition she had kept since the previous day.

She was still very pale. She had hardly strength to raise her eyes, the heavy lids of which seemed to be constantly falling, weighed down either with grief or shame.

The queen, on perceiving her, smiled, but with that habitual smile which appears, to those familiar with the court, to be stereotyped upon the lips of princes and of kings.

Then, as if overjoyed that her husband was in safety: —

“Good news again!” exclaimed the queen to those who surrounded her; “may the whole day pass off as well!”

“Oh, Madame!” said a courtier, “your Majesty alarms yourself too much. The Parisians know too well the responsibility which weighs upon them.”

“But, Madame,” said another courtier, who was not so confiding, “is your Majesty well assured as to the authenticity of this intelligence?”

“Oh, yes,” replied the queen. “The person who writes to me has engaged, at the hazard of his head, to be responsible for the safety of the king. Moreover, I believe him to be a friend.”

“Oh! if he is a friend,” rejoined the courtier, bowing, “that is quite another matter.”

Madame de Lamballe, who was standing at a little distance, approached.

“It is,” said she, “the lately appointed physician, is t not?”

“Yes, Gilbert,” unthinkingly replied the queen, without reflecting that she was striking a fearful blow at one who stood close beside her.

“Gilbert!” exclaimed Andrée, starting as if a viper had bit her to the heart; “Gilbert, your Majesty’s friend!”

Andrée had turned round with flashing eyes, her Lands clinched with anger and shame, and seemed proudly to accuse the queen, both by her looks and attitude.

“But still,” said the queen, hesitating.

“Oh, Madame, Madame!” murmured Andrée, in a tone of the bitterest reproach.

A deathlike silence pervaded the whole room after this mysterious incident.

In the midst of this silence, a light step was heard upon the tesselated floor of the adjoining room.

“Monsieur de Charny!” said the queen, in a half-whisper, as if to warn Andrée to compose herself.

Charny had heard — he had seen all — only he could not comprehend it.

He remarked the pallid countenance of Andrée, and the embarrassed air of Marie Antoinette.

It would have been a breach of etiquette to question the queen, but Andrée was his wife; he had the right to question her.

He therefore went to her, and in the most friendly tone —

“What is the matter, Madame?” said he.

Andrée made an effort to recover her composure.

“Nothing, Count,” she replied.

Charny then turned towards the queen, who, notwithstanding her profound experience in equivocal positions, had ten times essayed to muster up a smile, but could not succeed.

"You appear to doubt the devotedness of this Monsieur Gilbert," said he to Andrée. "Have you any motive for suspecting his fidelity?"

Andrée was silent.

"Speak, Madame; speak!" said Charny, insistingly.

Then, as Andrée still remained mute: —

"Oh, speak, Madame!" cried he. "This delicacy now becomes condemnable. Reflect that on it may depend the safety of our master."

"I do not know, sir, what can be your motive for saying that," replied Andrée.

"You said, and I heard you say it, Madame, — I appeal moreover to the princess," — and Charny bowed to the Princess de Lamballe, "you exclaimed with an expression of great surprise, 'Gilbert, your Majesty's friend!'"

"'Tis true, you did say that, my dear," said the Princess de Lamballe, with her habitual ingenuousness.

Then, going closer to Andre: —

"If you do know anything, Monsieur de Charny is right."

"For pity's sake, Madame! for pity's sake!" said Andrée, in an imploring tone, but so low that it could not be heard by any one but the princess.

The princess retired a few steps.

"Oh, good Heaven! it was but a trifling matter," said the queen, feeling that should she any longer delay to interfere, she would be betraying her trust. "The countess was expressing her apprehensions, which doubtless were but vague. She had said that it was difficult for a man who had taken part in the American Revolution, one who is the friend of Monsieur de Lafayette, to be our friend."

"Yes, vague," mechanically repeated Andrée, — "very vague."

"A fear of a similar nature to one which had been expressed by one of the gentlemen present before the countess had expressed hers," rejoined Marie Antoinette.

And with her eyes she pointed out the courtier whose doubts had given rise to this discussion.

But it required more than this to convince Charny. The great confusion which had appeared on his entering the room persuaded him that there was some mystery in the affair.

He therefore persisted.

“It matters not, Madame,” said he. “It seems to me that it is your duty not to express vain fears, but on the contrary, to state precise facts.”

“What, sir,” said the queen, with some asperity, “you are returning to that subject!”

“Madame!”

“Your pardon, but I find that you are still questioning the Countess de Charny.”

“Excuse me, Madame,” said Charny; “it is from interest for — ”

“For your self-love, is it not? Ah, Monsieur de Charny,” added the queen, with an ironical expression of which the count felt the whole weight, “acknowledge the thing frankly. You are jealous.”

“Jealous! jealous!” cried Charny, coloring, — ”but of what? I ask this of your Majesty.”

“Of your wife, apparently,” replied the queen, harshly.

“Madame!” stammered Charny, perfectly astounded at this unlooked-for attack.

“It is perfectly natural,” dryly rejoined Marie Antoinette; “and the countess assuredly is worth the trouble.”

Charny darted a look at the queen, to warn her that she was going too far.

But this was useless trouble, superfluous precaution. When this lioness was wounded, and felt the burning pain galling her heart, she no longer knew restraint.

“Yes, I can comprehend your being jealous, Monsieur de Charny, — jealous and uneasy; it is the natural state of every soul that loves, and which consequently is on the watch.”

“Madame!” repeated Charny.

“And therefore I,” pursued the queen, — ”I experience precisely the same feelings which you do at this moment, I am at once a prey to jealousy and anxiety.” She emphasized the word “jealousy.” “The king is at Paris and I no longer live.”

“But, Madame,” observed Charny, who could not at all comprehend the meaning of this storm, the thunder of which appeared to growl more fiercely and the lightnings to flash more vividly every moment, “you have just now received news of the king; the news was good, and you must feel more tranquil.”

“And did you feel tranquillized when the countess and myself, a moment ago, endeavored to reassure you?”

Charny bit his lip.

Andrée began to raise her head, at once surprised and alarmed, — surprised at what she heard, alarmed at what she thought she understood.

The silence which had ensued after the first question which Charny had addressed to Andrée was now renewed, and the company seemed anxiously awaiting Charny's answer to the queen. Charny remained silent.

"In fact," resumed the queen, with still increasing anger, "it is the destiny of people who love to think only of the object of their affection. It would be happiness to those poor hearts to sacrifice pitilessly everything — yes, everything — to the feeling by which they are agitated. Good Heaven! how anxious am I with regard to the king!"

One of the courtiers ventured to remark that other couriers would arrive.

"Oh, why am I not at Paris, instead of being here? I why am I not with the king?" said Marie Antoinette, who had seen that Charny had become agitated since she had been endeavoring to instil that jealousy into his mind which she so violently experienced.

Charny bowed.

"If it be only that, Madame," said he, "I will go there; and if, as your Majesty apprehends, the king is in any danger, if that valuable life be exposed, you may rely, Madame, that it shall not be from not having exposed mine in his defence."

Charny bowed and moved towards the door.

"Sir! sir!" cried Andrée, rushing between Charny and the door; "be careful of yourself!"

Nothing was wanting to the completion of this scene but this outburst of the fears of Andrée.

And therefore, as soon as Andrée had been thus impelled, in spite of herself, to cast aside her habitual coldness, no sooner had she uttered these imprudent words and evinced this unwonted solicitude, than the queen became frightfully pale.

"Why, Madame," she cried to Andrée, "how is this, that you here usurp the part of a queen?"

"Who, — I, Madame?" stammered Andrée, comprehending that she had, for the first time, allowed to burst forth from her lips the fire which for so long a period had consumed her soul.

"What!" continued Marie Antoinette, "your husband is in the king's service. He is about to set out to seek the king. If he is exposing his life, it is for the king; and when the question is the service of the king, you advise Monsieur de Charny to be careful of himself.”

On hearing these appalling words, Andrée was near fainting. She staggered, and would have fallen to the floor had not Charny rushed forward and caught her in his arms.

An indignant look, which Charny could not restrain, completed the despair of Marie Antoinette, who had considered herself an offended rival, but who, in fact, had been an unjust queen.

“The queen is right,” at length said Charny, with some effort, “and your emotion, Madame, was inconsiderate. You have no husband, Madame, when the interests of the king are in question; and I ought to be the first to request you to restrain your sensibility, if I presumed that you deigned to feel any alarm for me.”

Then, turning towards Marie Antoinette: —

“I am at the queen’s orders,” said he, coldly, “and I set out at once. It is I who will bring you news of the king, — good news, Madame, or I will not bring any.”

Then, having spoken these words, he bowed almost to the ground, and left the room before the queen, moved at once by terror and by anger, had thought of detaining him.

A moment afterwards the hoofs of a horse galloping at full speed rang over the pavement of the courtyard.

The queen remained motionless, but a prey to internal agitation, so much the more terrible from her making the most violent efforts to conceal it.

Some understood, while others could not comprehend the cause of this agitation; but they all showed that they respected their sovereign’s tranquillity.

Marie Antoinette was left to her own thoughts.

Andrée withdrew with the rest from the apartment, abandoning Marie Antoinette to the caresses of her two children, whom she had sent for, and who had been brought to her.

CHAPTER IX.

The Return

NIGHT had returned, bringing with it its train of fears and gloomy visions, when suddenly shouts were heard from the front of the palace.

The queen started and rose. She was not far from a window, which she opened.

Almost at the same instant, servants, transported with joy, ran into the queen’s room, crying: —

“A courier, Madame, a courier!”

Three minutes afterwards, a hussar rushed into the antechamber.

He was a lieutenant despatched by Monsieur de Charny. He had ridden at full speed from Sèvres.

“And the king?” said Marie Antoinette.

“His Majesty will be here in a quarter of an hour,” replied the officer, who was so much out of breath that he could scarcely articulate.

“Safe and well?” asked the queen.

“Safe, well, and smiling, Madame,” replied the officer.

“You have seen him, then?”

“No, Madame, but Monsieur de Charny told me so, when he sent me off.”

The queen started once more at hearing this name, which chance had thus associated with that of the king.

“I thank you, sir; you had better rest yourself,” said the queen to the young gentleman.

The young officer made his obedience and withdrew.

Marie Antoinette, taking her children by the hand, went towards the grand entrance of the palace, where were already assembled all the courtiers and the servants.

The penetrating eye of the queen perceived, on the first step, a female form attired in white, her elbow leaning upon the stone balustrade, and looking eagerly into the darkness, that she might first discern the approach of the king’s carriage.

It was Andrée, whom even the presence of the queen did not arouse from her fixed gaze.

She, who generally was so eager to fly to the side of her mistress, evidently had not seen her, or disdained to appear to have seen her.

Andrée, then, bore the queen ill-will for the levity which she had shown that afternoon, and from which cruel levity Andrée had so much suffered.

Or else, carried away by the deepest concern, she was with eager anxiety looking for the return of Charny, for whom she had manifested so much affectionate apprehension.

A twofold poniard-stab to the queen, which deepened a wound that was still bleeding.

She lent but an absent ear to the compliments and joyful congratulations of her other friends, and the courtiers generally.

She even felt for a moment her mind abstracted from the violent grief which had overwhelmed her all the evening. There was even a respite to the anxiety excited in her heart by the king’s journey, threatened by so many enemies.

But with her strong mind she soon chased all that was not legitimate affection from her heart. At the feet of God she cast her jealousy. She immolated her anger and her secret feelings to the holiness of her conjugal vow.

It was doubtless God who thus endowed her, for her quiet and support, with this faculty of loving the king, her husband, beyond every being in the world.

At that moment, at least, she so felt, or thought she felt it; the pride of royalty raised the queen above all terrestrial passions, — love of the king was her egotism.

She had therefore driven from her breast all the petty vengeance of a woman, and the coquettish frivolity of the lover, when the flambeaux of the escort appeared at the end of the avenue.

These lights increased in volume every moment, from the rapidity with which the escort advanced.

They could hear the neighing and the hard breathing of the horses. The ground trembled, amid the silence of the night, beneath the weight of the squadrons which surrounded and followed the king’s carriage.

The gates were thrown open; the guards rushed forth to receive the king with shouts of enthusiasm. The carriage rolled sonorously over the pavement of the great courtyard.

Dazzled, delighted, fascinated, strongly excited by the varied emotions she had experienced during the whole day, by those which she then felt, the queen flew down the stairs to receive the king.

Louis XVI., as soon as he had alighted from his carriage, ascended the staircase with all the rapidity which was possible, surrounded as he was by his officers, all agitated by the events of the day and their triumph; while in the courtyard, the guards, mixing unceremoniously with the grooms and equerries, tore from the carriages and the harness all the cockades which the enthusiasm of the Parisians had attached to them.

The king and the queen met upon a marble landing. The queen, with a cry of joy and love, several times pressed the king to her heart.

She sobbed as if, on thus meeting him, she had believed she was never again to see him.

Yielding thus to the emotions of an overflowing heart, she did not observe the silent pressure of their hands which Charny and Andrée had just exchanged.

This pressure of the hand was nothing; but Andrée was at the foot of the steps; she was the first Charny had seen and touched.

The queen, after having presented her children to the king, made him kiss them; and then the dauphin, seeing in his father's hat the new cockade, on which the torches cast an ensanguined light, exclaimed with childish astonishment: —

"Why, Papa, what have you on your cockade? Is it blood?"

It was the national red.

The queen uttered a cry, and examined it in her turn.

The king bent down his head, under the pretence of again kissing his little daughter, but in reality to conceal his shame.

Marie Antoinette, with profound disgust, tore the cockade from the hat, without seeing — the noble, furious woman — that she was wounding to the heart a nation that would one day know how to avenge itself.

"Throw it away, Sire," said she; "throw it away!"

And she threw the cockade down the stairs, upon which trampled the feet of the whole escort which accompanied the king to his apartments.

This strange transition had extinguished all conjugal enthusiasm in the queen's breast. She looked around, but without apparent intention, for

Monsieur de Charny, who was standing at his ordinary post near the king, with the stiff formality of a soldier.

“I thank you, sir,” she said to him, when their eyes met, after several moments of hesitation on the part of the count, — ”I thank you, sir. You have well fulfilled your promise.”

“To whom are you speaking?” inquired the king.

“To Monsieur de Charny,” said she, boldly.

“Yes, poor Charny! he had trouble enough to get near me. And Gilbert — what has become of him? I do not see him,” added Louis.

The queen, who had become more cautious since the lesson of the afternoon, called out: —

“Come in to supper, Sire,” in order to change the conversation. “Monsieur de Charny,” pursued she, “find the Countess de Charny, and bring her with you. We will have a family supper.”

In this she acted as a queen. But she sighed on observing that Charny, who till then had appeared gloomy, at once became smiling and joyful.

CHAPTER X.

Foulon

BILLOT was in a state of perfect ecstasy.

He had taken the Bastille; he had restored Gilbert to liberty; he had been noticed by Lafayette, who called him by his name; and finally, he had seen the burial of Foulon.

Few men in those days were as much execrated as Foulon. One only could in this respect have competed with him, and this was his son-in-law, Monsieur Berthier de Savigny.

They had both of them been singularly lucky the day following the capture of the Bastille.

Foulon died on that day, and Berthier had managed to escape from Paris.

That which had raised to its climax the unpopularity of Foulon, was that on the retirement of Monsieur Necker he had accepted the place of the "virtuous Genevese," as he was then called, and had been comptroller-general during three days.

And therefore was there much singing and dancing at his burial.

The people had at one time thought of taking the body out of the coffin and hanging it; but Billot had jumped upon a post, and had made a speech on the respect due to the dead, and the hearse was allowed to continue on its way.

As to Pitou, he had become a perfect hero.

Pitou had become the friend of Monsieur Elie and Monsieur Hullin, who deigned to employ him to execute their commissions.

He was, besides, the confidant of Billot, — of Billot, who had been treated with distinction by Monsieur de Lafayette, as we have already said, who sometimes employed him as a police guard about his person, on account of his brawny shoulders, his herculean fists, and his indomitable courage.

Since the journey of the king to Paris, Gilbert, who had been, through Monsieur Necker, put in communication with the principal members of the

National Assembly and the Municipality, was incessantly occupied with the education of the republic, still in its infancy.

He therefore neglected Billot and Pitou, who, neglected by him, threw themselves ardently into the meetings of the citizens, in the midst of which political discussions of transcendent interest were constantly agitated.

At length, one day, after Billot had employed three hours in giving his opinion to the electors as to the best mode of victualling Paris, and fatigued with his long speech, though proud of having played the orator, he was resting with delight, lulled by the monotonous voices of his successors, which he took good care not to listen to, Pitou came in, greatly agitated; and gliding like an eel through the Sessions Hall of the electors in the Hôtel de Ville, and in a palpitating tone, which contrasted greatly with the usual placidity of his enunciation: "Oh, Monsieur Billot!" said he, "dear Monsieur Billot!"

"Well, what is it?"

"Great news!"

"Good news?"

"Glorious news!"

"What is it, then?"

"You know that I had gone to the club of the Virtues, at the Fontainebleau barrier?"

"Yes, and what then?"

"Well, they spoke there of a most extraordinary event."

"What was it?"

"Do you know that that villain Foulon passed himself off for dead, and carried it so far as to allow himself to be buried?"

"How! passed himself for dead? How say you, — pretended to allow himself to be buried? Nonsense! He is dead enough; for was I not at his funeral?"

"Notwithstanding that, Monsieur Billot, he is still living."

"Living?"

"As much alive as you and I are."

"You are mad!"

"Dear Monsieur Billot, I am not mad. The traitor, Foulon, the enemy of the people, the leech of France, the peculator, is not dead."

"But since I tell you he was buried after an apoplectic fit, since I tell you that I saw the funeral go by, and even that I prevented the people from dragging him out of his coffin to hang him?”

“And I have just seen him alive. Ah, what do you say to that?”

“You?”

“As plainly as I now see you, Monsieur Billot. It appears that it was one of his servants who died, and the villain gave him an aristocratic funeral. Oh, all is discovered! It was from fear of the vengeance of the people that he acted thus.”

“Tell me all about it, Pitou.”

“Come into the vestibule for a moment, then, Monsieur Billot. We shall be more at our ease there.”

They left the hall and went into the vestibule.

“First of all, we must know whether Monsieur Bailly is here.”

“Go on with your story; he is here.”

“Good! Well I was at the club of the Virtues, listening to the speech of a patriot. Didn’t he make grammatical faults! It was easily seen that he had not been educated by the Abbé Fortier.”

“Go on, I tell you. A man may be a good patriot, and yet not be able to read or write.”

“That is true,” replied Pitou. “Well, suddenly a man came in, completely out of breath. ‘Victory!’ cried he. ‘Victory! Foulon was not dead! Foulon is still alive! I have found him! I have found him!’

“Everybody there was like you, Father Billot. No one would believe him. Some said, ‘How! Foulon?’ ‘Yes.’ Others said, ‘Pshaw! impossible!’ And others said, ‘Well, while you were at it, you might as well have discovered his son-in-law, Berthier.’“

“Berthier!” cried Billot.

“Yes, Berthier de Savigny. Don’t you recollect our intendant at Compiègne, the friend of Monsieur Isidore de Charny?”

“Undoubtedly! he who was always so proud with everybody, and so polite with Catherine?”

“Precisely,” said Pitou; “one of those horrible contractors, — a second leech to the French people; the execration of all human nature; the shame of the civilized world, as said the virtuous Loustalot.”

“Well, go on! go on!” cried Billot.

“That is true,” said Pitou; “*ad eventum festina,* — which means to say, Monsieur Billot, ‘Hasten to the winding up.’ I shall proceed, then. A man, out of breath, comes running to the club of the Virtues, and shouts: ‘I have found Foulon. I have found him.’

“You should have heard the vociferations that followed.”

“He was mistaken,” said Billot, obstinately.

“He was not, for I have seen Foulon.”

“You have seen him, Pitou?”

“With these two eyes. Wait a moment.”

“I am waiting; but you make my blood boil.”

“Ah, but listen. I am hot enough too. I tell you that he had given it out that he was dead, and had one of his servants buried in his place. Fortunately, Providence was watching.”

“Providence, indeed!” disdainfully exclaimed the Voltairean Billot.

“I intended to say the nation,” rejoined Pitou, with humility. “This good citizen, this patriot, out of breath, who announced the news to us, recognized him at Viry, where he had concealed himself.”

“Ah! ah!”

“Having recognized him, he denounced him, and the syndic, whose name is Monsieur Rappe, instantly arrested him.”

“ And what is the name of the brave patriot who had the courage to do all this?”

“Of informing against Foulon?”

“Yes.”

Well, his name is Monsieur Saint-Jean.”

“Saint-Jean! Why, that is a lackey’s name.”

“And he was precisely the lackey of the villain Foulon. Aristocrat, you are rightly served. Why had you lackeys?”

“Pitou, you interest me,” said Billot, going close to the narrator.

“You are very kind, Monsieur Billot. Well, then, here is Foulon denounced and arrested; they are bringing him to Paris. The informer had run on ahead to announce the news, and receive the reward for his denunciation; and sure enough, in a few moments afterwards Foulon arrived at the barrier.”

“And it was there that you saw him?”

“Yes. He had a very queer look, I can tell you. They had twisted a bunch of stinging-nettles round his neck, by way of cravat.”

“What say you? stinging-nettles? And what was that for?”

"Because it appears that he had said — rascal as he is! — that bread was for men, oats for horses, but that nettles were good enough for the people."

"Did he say that, the wretch?"

"Yes! by Heaven! he said so, Monsieur Billot."

"Good! there, now, you are swearing."

"Bah!" cried Pitou, with a swaggering air, "between military men! Well, they brought him along on foot, and the whole of the way they were giving him smashing blows on his back and head."

"Oh! oh!" cried Billot, somewhat less enthusiastic.

"It was very amusing," continued Pitou, "only that everybody could not get at him to give him a blow, seeing that there were ten thousand persons hooting after him."

"And after this?" asked Billot, who began to reflect.

"After that they took him to the president of the St. Marcel district, — a good patriot, you know."

"Yes, Monsieur Acloque."

"Cloque, — yes, that is it; who ordered him to be taken to the Hôtel de Ville, seeing that he did not know what to do with him; so that you will presently see him."

"But how happens it that it is you who have come to announce this, and not the famous Saint-Jean?"

"Why, because my legs are six inches longer than his. He had set off before me, but I soon came up with, and passed him. I wanted to inform you first, that you might inform Monsieur Bailly of it."

"What luck you have, Pitou!"

"I shall have much more than this to-morrow."

"And how can you tell that?"

"Because this same Saint-Jean, who denounced Monsieur Foulon, proposed a plan to catch Monsieur Berthier, who has run away."

"He knows, then, where he is?"

"Yes; it appears that he was their confidential man, — this good Monsieur Saint-Jean, — and that he received a great deal of money from Foulon and his son-in-law, who wished to bribe him."

"And he took the money?"

"Certainly, the money of an aristocrat is always good to take; but he said: 'A good patriot will not betray his nation for money.'"

"Yes," murmured Billot, "he betrays his masters, — that is all. Do you know, Pitou, that your Monsieur Saint-Jean appears to me to be a worthless vagabond?"

"That is possible, but it matters not; they will take Monsieur Berthier, as they have taken Master Foulon, and they will hang them nose to nose. What horrid wry faces they will make, looking at each other, — hey?"

"And why should they be hanged?"

"Why, because they are vile rascals, and I detest them."

"What! Monsieur Berthier, who has been at the farm, — Monsieur Berthier, who, during his tours into the Île-de-France, has drunk our milk, and eaten of our bread, and sent gold buckles to Catherine from Paris? Oh, no, no! they shall not hang him."

"Bah!" repeated Pitou, ferociously, "he is an aristocrat, — a wheedling rascal!"

Billot looked at Pitou with stupefaction. Beneath the gaze of the farmer, Pitou blushed to the very whites of his eyes.

Suddenly the worthy cultivator perceived Monsieur Bailly, who was going from the hall into his own cabinet; he rushed after him to inform him of the news.

But it was now for Billot in his turn to be treated with incredulity.

"Foulon! Foulon!" cried the mayor, "what folly!"

"Well, Monsieur Bailly, all I can say is, here is Pitou, who saw him."

"I saw him, Monsieur Mayor," said Pitou, placing his hand on his heart, and bowing.

And he related to Monsieur Bailly all he had before related to Billot.

They observed that poor Bailly turned very pale; he at once understood the extent of the catastrophe.

"And Monsieur Acloque sends him here?" murmured he.

"Yes, Monsieur Mayor."

"But how is he sending him?"

"Oh, there is no occasion to be uneasy," said Pitou, who misunderstood the anxiety of Bailly; "there are plenty of people to guard the prisoner. He will not be carried off."

"Would to God he might be carried off!" murmured Bailly.

Then turning to Pitou: —

"Plenty of people, — what mean you by that, my friend?"

"I mean plenty of people."

“People!”

“More than twenty thousand men, without counting the women,” said Pitou, triumphantly.

“Unhappy man!” exclaimed Bailly. “Gentlemen, gentlemen electors!”

And he related to the electors all he had just heard.

While he was speaking, exclamations and cries of anguish burst forth from all present.

The silence of terror pervaded the hall, during which a confused, distant, indescribable noise assailed the ears of those assembled, like that produced by the rushing of blood to the head in attacks upon the brain.

“What is that?” inquired an elector.

“Why, the noise of the crowd, to be sure,” replied another.

Suddenly a carriage was heard rolling rapidly across the square; it contained two armed men, who helped a third to alight from it, who was pale and trembling.

Foulon had at length become so exhausted by the ill usage he had experienced that he could no longer walk; and he had been lifted into a coach.

Behind the carriage, led on by Saint-Jean, who was more out of breath than ever, ran about a hundred young men, from sixteen to eighteen years of age, with haggard countenances and flaming eyes.

They cried, “Foulon! Foulon!” running almost as fast as the horses.

The two armed men were, however, some few steps in advance of them, which gave them the time to push Foulon into the Hôtel de Ville; and its doors were closed against the hoarse barkers from without.

“At last we have him here,” said his guards to the electors, who were waiting at the top of the stairs. “By Heaven! it was not without trouble!”

“Gentlemen! gentlemen” cried Foulon, trembling, “will you save me?”

“Ah, sir,” replied Bailly, with a sigh, “you have been very culpable.”

“And yet, sir,” said Foulon, entreatingly, his agitation increasing, “there will, I hope, be justice to defend me.”

At this moment the exterior tumult was redoubled.

“Hide him quickly!” cried Bailly to those around him, “or — ”

He turned to Foulon.

“Listen to me,” said he; “the situation is serious enough for you to be consulted. Will you — perhaps it is not yet too late — will you endeavor to escape from the back part of the Hôtel de Ville?”

“Oh, no,” exclaimed Foulon; “I should be recognized — massacred!”

“Do you prefer to remain here in the midst of us? I will do, and these gentlemen will do, all that is humanly possible to defend you; will you not, gentlemen?”

“We promise it,” cried all the electors, with one voice.

“Oh, I prefer remaining with you, gentlemen. Gentlemen, do not abandon me!”

“I have told you, sir,” replied Bailly, with dignity, “that we will do all that may be humanly possible to save you.”

At that moment a frightful clamor arose from the square, ascended into the air, and invaded the Hôtel de Ville through the open windows.

“Do you hear? Do you hear?” murmured Foulon, perfectly livid with terror.

In fact, the mob had rushed, howling and frightful to behold, from all the streets leading to the Hôtel de Ville, and above all from the Quay Pelletier, and the Rue de la Vannerie.

Bailly went to a window.

Knives, pikes, scythes, and muskets glistened in the sunshine. In less than ten minutes the vast square was filled with people. It was the whole of Foulon’s train, of which Pitou had spoken, and which had been increased by curious idlers, who, hearing a great noise, had run to the Place de Grève as towards a common centre.

All these voices, and there were more than twenty thousand, cried incessantly: “Foulon! Foulon!”

Then it was seen that the hundred young men who had been the precursors of this furious mob, pointed out to this howling mass the gate by which Foulon had entered the building; this gate was instantly threatened, and they began to beat it down with the butt-ends of their muskets, and with crowbars.

Suddenly it flew open.

The guards of the Hôtel de Ville appeared, and advanced upon the assailants, who, in their first terror, retreated, and left a large open space in the front of the building.

This guard stationed itself upon the front steps, and presented a bold front to the crowd.

The officers, moreover, instead of threatening, harangued the crowd in friendly terms, and endeavored to calm it by their protestations.

Bailly had become quite confused. It was the first time that the poor astronomer had found himself in opposition to the popular tempest.

“What is to be done?” demanded he of the electors, — ”what is to be done?”

“We must try him.”

“No trial can take place when under the intimidation of the mob,” said Bailly.

“Zounds!” exclaimed Billot, “have you not, then, men enough to defend you?”

“We have not two hundred men.”

“You must have a reinforcement, then.”

“Oh, if Monsieur de Lafayette were but informed of this!”

“Well, send and inform him of it.”

“And who would venture to attempt it? Who could make his way through such a multitude?”

“I would,” replied Billot.

And he was about to leave the hall.

Bailly stopped him.

“Madman!” cried he; “look at that ocean! You would be swallowed up even by one of its waves. If you wish to get to Monsieur de Lafayette, — and even then I would not answer for your safety, — go out by one of the back doors. Go!”

“‘Tis well!” tranquilly replied Billot.

And he darted out of the room with the swiftness of an arrow.

CHAPTER XI.

The Father-in-Law

THE clamor, which kept on constantly increasing from the square, clearly proved that the exasperation of the mob was becoming greater. It was no longer hatred that they felt; it was abhorrence. They no longer merely threatened; they foamed.

The cries of “Down with Foulon! Death to Foulon!” crossed each other in the air, like projectiles in a bombardment. The crowd, which was still augmenting, pressed nearer to the entrance of the Hôtel de Ville, till they, as it may be said, almost suffocated the civic guards at their posts.

And already there began to circulate among the crowd, and to increase in volume, those rumors which are the precursors of violence.

These rumors no longer threatened Foulon only, but the electors who protected him.

“They have let the prisoner escape!” said some.

“Let us go in! let us go in!” said others.

“Let us set fire to the Hôtel de Ville!”

“Forward! forward!”

Bailly felt that as Monsieur de Lafayette did not arrive, there was only one resource left to them.

And this was that the electors should themselves go down, mix in with the groups, and endeavor to pacify the most furious among them.

“Foulon! Foulon!”

Such was the incessant cry, the constant roaring of those furious waves.

A general assault was preparing; the walls could not have resisted it.

“Sir,” said Bailly to Foulon, “if you do not show yourself to the crowd, they will naturally believe that we have allowed you to escape. Then they will force the door, and will come in here; and when once here, should they find you, I can no longer be responsible for anything.”

“Oh, I did not know that I was so much execrated!” exclaimed Foulon.

And supported by Bailly, he dragged himself to the window.

A fearful cry resounded immediately on his presenting himself. The guards were driven back; the doors broken in; a torrent of men precipitated themselves up the staircase into the corridors, into the rooms, which were invaded in an instant.

Bailly threw around the prisoner all the guards who were within call, and then he began to harangue the crowd.

He wished to make these men understand that to assassinate might sometimes be doing justice, but that it was never an act of justice.

He succeeded, after having made the most strenuous efforts, after having twenty times perilled his own existence.

“Yes, yes,” cried the assailants, “let him be tried! let him be tried! but let him be hanged!”

They were at this point in the argument when General de Lafayette reached the Hôtel de Ville, conducted there by Billot.

The sight of his tricolored plume — one of the first which had been worn — at once assuaged their anger, and the tumult ceased.

The commander-in-chief of the National Guard had the way cleared for him, and addressing the crowd, repeated, though in more energetic terms, every argument that Bailly had endeavored to enforce.

His speech produced a great effect on all those who were near enough to hear it, and the cause of Foulon was completely gained in the electors’ hall.

But on the square were twenty thousand furious people who had not heard Monsieur de Lafayette, and who remained implacable in their frenzy.

“Come, now,” said Lafayette, at the conclusion of his oration, very naturally imagining that the effect he had produced on those who surrounded him had extended to all outside, — ”come, now, this man must be tried.”

“Yes,” cried the mob.

“And consequently I order that he be taken to prison,” added Lafayette.

“To prison! to prison!” howled the mob.

At the same time the general made a sign to the guards of the Hôtel de Ville, who led the prisoner forward.

The crowd outside understood nothing of all that was going on, excepting that their prey was about to appear. They had not even an idea that any one had the slightest hope of disputing it with them.

They scented, if we may be permitted the expression, the odor of the human flesh which was descending the staircase.

Billot had placed himself at the window with several electors, whom Bailly also joined in order to follow the prisoner with their eyes while he was crossing the square, escorted by the civic guards.

On the way, Foulon here and there addressed a few incoherent words to those around him, which, although they were protestations of confidence, clearly evinced the most profound and ill-disguised terror.

“Noble people,” said he, while descending the staircase, “I fear nothing; I am in the midst of my fellow-citizens.”

And already bantering laughs and insults were being uttered around him, when suddenly he found himself outside of the gloomy archway at the top of the stone steps which led into the square, and felt on his face the wind and sunshine.

Immediately one general cry — a cry of rage, a howling threat, a roar of hatred — burst from twenty thousand lungs. On this explosion of the public feeling, the guards conducting the prisoner are lifted from the ground, broken, dispersed; Foulon is seized by twenty powerful arms, raised above their shoulders, and carried into the fatal corner under the lamp-post, — ignoble and brutal executioner of the anger of the people, which they termed their justice.

Billot from his window saw all this, and cried out against it; the electors also did all they could to stimulate the guards, but they were powerless.

Lafayette, in despair, rushed out of the Hôtel de Ville, but he could not break through the first rank of that crowd, which spread out like an immense lake between him and the victim.

The mere spectators of this scene jumped upon posts, on window-sills, on every jutting part of a building, in order to gain a better view; and they encouraged by their savage shouts the frightful effervescence of the actors.

The latter were playing with their victim, as would a troop of tigers with an inoffensive prey.

They were disputing who should hang Foulon; at last they understood that if they wished to enjoy his agony, it was necessary that their several functions should be agreed upon.

But for that he would have been torn to pieces.

Some of them raised up Foulon, who had no longer strength enough to cry out.

Others, who had taken off his cravat and torn off his coat, placed a rope round his neck.

And others, who had climbed up the lamp-post, had handed to their companions below the rope which they put round the neck of the ex-minister.

For a moment they raised Foulon above their heads and showed him thus to the crowd, — a rope twined round his neck, and his hands tied behind him.

Then, when the crowd had had due time to contemplate the sufferer; when they had clapped their hands sufficiently, — the signal was given, and Foulon, pale and bleeding, was hoisted up to a level with the lantern, amid a hooting which was more terrible even than death.

All those who, up to that time, had not been able to see anything, then perceived the public enemy raised above the heads of the crowd.

New shouts were then heard; but these were against the executioners. Were they about to kill Foulon so expeditiously?

The executioners merely shrugged their shoulders, and pointed to the rope.

The rope was old; it could be seen to give way, strand by strand. The movements which Foulon made in his desperate agony at length broke the last strand; and Foulon, only half strangled, fell heavily upon the pavement.

He was only at the preface of his torments; he had only penetrated into the vestibule of death.

They all rushed towards the sufferer; they were perfectly secure with regard to him. There was no chance of his escaping them; in falling he had broken his leg a little below the knee.

And yet some imprecations arose, imprecations which were unintelligible and calumniatory. The executioners were accused; they were considered as clumsy and unskilful, — they who, on the contrary, had been so ingenious that they had expressly chosen an old worn-out rope, in the hope that it would break.

A hope which the event, as has been related, had fully realized.

They made a knot in the rope, and again fixed it round the neck of the unhappy man, who, half dead, with haggard eyes looked around, endeavoring to discover whether in that city which is called the centre of the civilized universe, — whether one of the bayonets of that king whose minister he had been, and who had a hundred thousand, would not be raised in his defence amid that horde of cannibals.

But there was nothing there to meet his eyes but hatred, but insult, but death.

“At least, kill me at once, without making me endure these atrocious torments!” cried the despairing Foulon.

“Well, now,” replied a jeering voice, “why should we abridge your torments? you have made ours last long enough.”

“And besides,” said another, “you have not yet had time enough to digest your nettles.”

“Wait, wait a little!” cried a third; “his son-in-law, Berthier, will be brought to him; there is room enough for him on the opposite lamp-post.”

“We shall see what wry faces the father-in-law and son-in-law will make at each other,” added another.

“Finish me; finish me at once!” cried the wretched man.

During this time, Bailly and Lafayette were begging, supplicating, exclaiming, and endeavoring to get through the crowd; suddenly, Foulon was again hoisted by the rope, which again broke, and their prayers, their supplications, their agony, no less painful than that of the sufferer himself, were lost, confounded, and extinguished amid the universal laugh which accompanied this second fall.

Bailly and Lafayette, who three days before had been the sovereign arbiters of the will of six hundred thousand Parisians, — a child now would not listen to them; the people even murmured at them; they were in their way; they were interrupting this great spectacle.

Billot had vainly given them all the aid of his uncommon strength; the powerful athlete had knocked down twenty men, but in order to reach Foulon it would be necessary to knock down fifty, a hundred, two hundred; and his strength is exhausted, and when he pauses to wipe from his brow the perspiration and the blood which is streaming from it, Foulon is raised a third time to the pulley of the lamp-post.

This time they had taken compassion upon him; the rope was a new one.

At last the condemned is dead; the victim no longer suffers.

Half a minute had sufficed to the crowd to assure itself that the vital spark was extinguished. And now that the tiger has killed, he may devour his prey.

The body, thrown from the top of the lamp-post, did not even fall to the ground. It was torn to pieces before it reached it.

The head was separated from the trunk in a second, and in another second raised on the end of a pike. It was very much in fashion in those days to carry the heads of one’s enemies in that way.

At this sanguinary spectacle Bailly was horrified. That head appeared to him to be the head of the Medusa of ancient days.

Lafayette, pale, his drawn sword in his hand, with disgust repulsed the guards who had surrounded him, to excuse themselves for not having been the strongest.

Billot, stamping his feet with rage, and kicking right and left, like one of own fiery Perche horses, returned into the Hôtel de Ville, that he might see no more of what was passing on that ensanguined square.

As to Pitou, his fieriness of popular vengeance was changed into a convulsive movement; and he had fled to the river’s bank, where he closed his eyes and stopped his ears, that he might neither see nor hear.

Consternation reigned in the Hôtel de Ville; the electors began to comprehend that they would never be able to direct the movements of the people, save in the manner which should suit the people.

All at once, while the furious mob were amusing themselves with dragging the mutilated remains of Foulon through the gutters, a new cry, a new shout, rolling like distant thunder, was heard, proceeding from the opposite side of the river.

A courier was seen galloping over the bridge. The news he was bringing was already known to the crowd. They had guessed it from the signs of their most skilful leaders, as a pack of hounds take up the scent from the inspiration of their finest-nosed and best-practised bloodhounds.

The crowd rush to meet this courier, whom they surround; they scent that he has touched their new prey; they feel that he is going to speak of Monsieur Berthier.

And it was true.

Interrogated by ten thousand voices, all howling at once, the courier is compelled to reply to them.

“Monsieur Berthier de Savigny has been arrested at Compiègne.”

Then he proceeds into the Hôtel de Ville, where he announces the same tidings to Lafayette and to Bailly.

“Good; good! I knew it,” said Lafayette.

“We knew it,” said Bailly, “and orders have been given that he should be kept there.”

“Kept there?” repeated the courier.

“Undoubtedly; I have sent two commissaries with an escort.”

“An escort of two hundred and fifty men, was it not?” said an elector; “it is more than sufficient.”

“Gentlemen,” replied the courier, “this is precisely what I was sent to tell you. The escort has been dispersed and the prisoner carried off by the multitude.”

“Carried off!” exclaimed Lafayette. “Has the escort allowed the prisoner to be carried off?”

“Do not blame them, General; all that it was possible to do, they did.”

“But Monsieur Berthier?” anxiously inquired Bailly.

“They are bringing him to Paris; and he is at Bourget by this time.”

“But should they bring him here,” cried Billot, “he is lost.”

“Quick! quick!” cried Lafayette, “five hundred men to Bourget. Let the commissioners and Monsieur Berthier stop there; let them sleep there! During the night we will consider what is to be done.”

“But who would venture to undertake such a commission?” said the courier, who was looking with terror at that waving sea of heads, every wave of which sent forth its threatening roar.

“I will!” cried Billot; “at least, I will save *him*.”

“But you would perish in the attempt,” cried the courier; “the road is black with people.”

“I will go, nevertheless,” said the farmer.

“It is useless now,” murmured Bailly, who had been listening to the noises from without. “Hush! Do you not hear that?”

They then heard, from the direction of the Porte St. Martin, a rushing noise like that of the sea when beating over the shingles on a beach.

This frenzied howl came to them over the roofs like steam over the sides of a boiling caldron.

“It is too late,” said Lafayette.

“They are coming! they are coming!” murmured the courier. “Do you not hear them?”

“A regiment! a regiment!” cried Lafayette, with that generous ebullition of humanity which was the most brilliant feature of his character.

“What! By God’s death!” exclaimed Bailly, who swore perhaps for the first time in his life, “you seem to forget that our army — ours! — is precisely that crowd whom you wish to fight.”

And he hid his face in his hands.

The shouts which had been heard in the distance were re-echoed by the people in the streets, and thus communicated to the crowd upon the square with the rapidity of a train of gunpowder.

CHAPTER XII.

The Son-in-Law

THEN those who were insulting the remains of Foulon left their sanguinary game, to rush forward in pursuit of a new vengeance.

The adjacent streets immediately disgorged a large proportion of that howling mob, who hurried from the square with upraised knives and menacing gestures, towards the Rue St. Martin, to meet the new funeral procession.

The junction having been accomplished, both parties were equally eager to return to the square.

A strange scene then ensued.

Some of those ingenious persons whom we have seen upon the Place de Grève presented to the son-in-law the head of Foulon on the end of a pike.

Monsieur Berthier was coming along the Rue St. Martin with the commissary. They were then just crossing the Rue St. Merry.

He was in his own cabriolet, — a vehicle which at that period was considered as eminently aristocratic; a vehicle which more than any other excited popular animadversion; for the people had so often complained of the reckless rapidity with which they were driven, either by young fops or dancing-girls who drove themselves, and which, drawn by a fiery horse, sometimes ran over, but always splashed, the unfortunate pedestrian.

Berthier, in the midst of all the shouts, the hootings, and the threats of the infuriate mob, was talking tranquilly with the elector Rivière, — the commissary sent to Compiègne to save him, but who, being abandoned by his colleague, had with much difficulty saved himself.

The people had begun with the cabriolet; they had turned off the head of it, so that Berthier and his companion were completely exposed, not only to the view, but to the blows of the populace.

As they moved onwards, his misdeeds were related to him, commented upon, and exaggerated by the popular fury.

“He wished to starve Paris,” cried one.

"He had the rye and wheat cut when it was green; and then, a rise in the price of corn having taken place, he realized enormous sums."

"Not only did he do that," said they, "which was enough in itself, but he was conspiring."

In searching him, they had found a pocket-book. In this pocket-book were incendiary letters, orders for massacre, proof that ten thousand cartridges had been distributed to his agents; so said the crowd.

These were all monstrous absurdities; but as is well known, the mob, when in a paroxysm of rage, gives out as positive facts the most absurd improbabilities.

The person whom they accused of all this was a man who was still young, not being more than from thirty to thirty-two years of age, elegantly dressed, almost smiling, though greeted every moment by injurious epithets and even blows. He looked with perfect indifference at the infamous placards which were held up to him, and without affectation continued his conversation with Rivière.

Two men, irritated at his assurance, had wished to terrify him, and to diminish this self-confidence. They had mounted on the steps, on each side of the cabriolet, and each of them placed the point of his bayonet on Berthier's breast.

But Berthier, brave even to temerity, was not to be moved by such a trifle. He had continued to converse with the elector as if those two muskets were but inoffensive accessories to the cabriolet.

The mob, profoundly exasperated by this disdain, which formed so complete a contrast to the terror of Foulon, — the mob roared around the vehicle, and waited with impatience for the moment when instead of a threat they might inflict a wound.

It was then that Berthier had fixed his eyes on a misshapen and bloody object, which was held up and danced before him, and which he suddenly recognized as the head of his father-in-law, and which the ruffians who bore it held down close to his lips.

They wished to make him kiss it.

Monsieur Rivière, indignant at this brutality, pushed the pike away with his hand.

Berthier thanked him by a gesture, and did not even deign to turn round to follow this hideous trophy with his eyes. The executioners carried it behind the cabriolet, holding it over Berthier's head.

They thus arrived on the Place de Grève; and the prisoner, after unheard-of efforts by the civic guards, who had been re-assembled in some order, was delivered into the hands of the electors of the Hôtel de Ville.

A dangerous charge, a fearful responsibility, which made Lafayette once more turn pale, and poor Bailly’s heart swell almost to breaking.

The mob, after having hacked away for a while at the cabriolet, which had been left at the foot of the front steps, again placed itself in the most advantageous positions, kept guard on all the issues from the building, made all its preparations, and placed new ropes in the pulleys of the lamp-posts.

Billot, at the sight of Berthier, who was tranquilly ascending the great staircase of the Hôtel de Ville, tore his hair, and could not restrain himself from weeping bitterly.

Pitou, who had left the river’s bank, and had come on the quay again when he thought that Foulon’s execution had been accomplished; Pitou, terrified, notwithstanding his hatred for Monsieur Berthier, guilty in his eyes not only of all the mob reproached him with, but also of having given gold buckles to Mademoiselle Catherine, — Pitou crouched down sobbing behind a bench.

During this time Berthier had entered the grand Hall of Council as coolly as if all the tumult had reference to some other person, and quietly conversed with the electors.

He knew the greater portion of them, and was even intimate with some of them.

The latter avoided him with the instinctive terror with which timid minds are inspired by the contact of an unpopular man.

Therefore Berthier soon found himself almost alone with Bailly and Lafayette.

He made them relate to him all the particulars of Foulon’s death. Then, shrugging his shoulders: —

“Yes,” said he, “I can understand it. They hate us, because we are the instruments with which royalty has tortured the people.”

“Great crimes are laid at your door, sir,” said Bailly, austerely.

“Sir,” replied Berthier, “if I had committed all the crimes with which I am reproached, I should be less or more than man, — a wild beast or a demon. But I shall be tried, I presume, and then the truth will be ascertained.”

“Undoubtedly,” said Bailly.

“Well, then,” rejoined Berthier, “that is all I desire. They have my correspondence, and it will be seen whose orders I have obeyed; and the responsibility will fall on those to whom it rightly appertains.”

The electors cast their eyes upon the square, from which arose the most frightful clamor.

Berthier understood this mute reply.

Then Billot, pushing through the throng which surrounded Bailly, went up to the intendant, and offering him his huge honest hand: —

“Good-day, Monsieur de Sauvigny,” said he to him.

“How! is that you, Billot?” cried Berthier, laughing, and grasping firmly the hand which was held out to him. “What! you have come to Paris to join in these disturbances, — you, my worthy farmer, who used to sell your wheat so well in the market at Villers-Cotterets, Crépy, and Soissons?”

Billot, notwithstanding his democratic tendencies, could not but admire the tranquillity of this man, who could thus smile at a moment when his life was hanging by a thread.

“Install yourselves, gentlemen,” said Bailly to the electors; “we must now proceed to the examination of the charges against the accused.”

“Be it so,” said Berthier; “but I must warn you of one thing, gentlemen, and that is, that I am perfectly exhausted. For the last two days I have not slept. Today, from Compiègne to Paris, I have been pushed about, beaten, dragged along. When I asked for something to eat, they offered me hay, which is not excessively refreshing. Therefore, give me some place where I can sleep, if it. be only for an hour.”

At that moment Lafayette left the room for a short time, to ascertain the state of matters outside. He returned more dispirited than ever.

“My dear Bailly,” said he to the mayor, “exasperation is at its height; to keep Monsieur Berthier here would be exposing ourselves to a siege. To defend the Hôtel de Ville would be giving these furious madmen the pretext which they wish. Not to defend the Hôtel de Ville would be acquiring the habit of yielding every time we are attacked.”

During this time, Berthier had sat down, and then stretched himself at full length upon a bench.

He was preparing himself to sleep.

The desperate howls from below were audible to him, for he was near an open window; but they did not disturb him. His countenance retained the serenity of a man who forgets all, to allow sleep to weigh down his eyelids.

Bailly was deliberating with the electors and Lafayette.

Billot had his eyes fixed upon Berthier.

Lafayette was rapidly taking the votes of the electors; after which, addressing the prisoner, who was beginning to slumber: —

“Sir,” said he, “be pleased to get ready.”

Berthier heaved a sigh; then, raising himself on his elbow: —

“Ready for what?” he inquired.

“These gentlemen have decided that you are to be transferred to the Abbaye.”

“To the Abbaye? Well, be it so,” said the intendant. “But,” continued he, looking at the confused electors, whose confusion he readily comprehended, — ”but, *one way or the other*, let us finish this.”

And an explosion of anger and furious impatience long restrained burst forth from the square.

“No, gentlemen, no,” exclaimed Lafayette; “we cannot allow him to depart at this moment.”

Bailly’s kind heart and undaunted courage impelled him to come to a sudden resolution. He went down into the square with two of the electors, and ordered silence.

The people knew as well as he did what he was about to say; but as they were fully bent on committing another crime, they would not even listen to a reproach; and as Bailly was opening his lips to speak, a deafening clamor arose from the mob, drowning his voice before a single word could be heard.

Bailly, seeing that it would be impossible for him to proffer even a syllable, returned into the Hôtel de Ville pursued by cries of “Berthier! Berthier!”

But other cries resounded in the midst of those, — cries similar to those shrill notes which suddenly are heard in the choruses of demons by Weber or by Meyerbeer, — and these were, “To the lamp-post! to the lamp-post!”

On seeing Bailly come back pale and disheartened, Lafayette rushed out in his turn. He is young; he is ardent; he is beloved. That which the old man could not effect, his popularity being but of yesterday, he, Lafayette — he, the friend of Washington and of Necker, — would undoubtedly obtain at the first word.

But in vain was it that the people’s general threw himself into the most furious groups. In vain did he speak in the name of justice and humanity. In vain was it that recognizing, or feigning to recognize, certain leaders of the people, did he supplicate them, grasping their hands, and endeavoring to allay their fury.

Not one of his words was listened to; not one or his gestures was understood; not one of the tears he shed was seen.

Repulsed step by step, he threw himself upon his knees on the front steps of the Hôtel de Ville, conjuring these tigers, whom he called his fellow-citizens, not to dishonor the nation, not to dishonor themselves, not to elevate to the rank of martyrs guilty men, to whom the law would award a degrading death, which degradation was a portion of their punishment.

As he persisted in his entreaties, he was at last personally threatened in his turn; but he defied all threats. Some of these furious wretches drew their knives, and raised them as if to strike.

He bared his breast to their blows, and their weapons were instantly lowered.

But if they thus threatened Lafayette, the threat was still more serious to Berthier.

Lafayette, thus overcome, re-entered the Hôtel de Ville as Bailly had done.

The electors had all seen Lafayette vainly contending against the tempest. Their last rampart was overthrown.

They decided that the guard of the Hôtel de Ville should at once conduct Berthier to the Abbaye.

It was sending Berthier to certain death.

“Come, then,” said Berthier, when this decision was announced.

And eying all these men with withering contempt, he took his station in the centre of the guards, after having thanked Bailly and Lafayette for their exertions, and in his turn, held out his hand to Billot.

Bailly turned away his face to conceal his tears, Lafayette to conceal his indignation.

Berthier descended the staircase with the same firm step with which he had ascended it.

At the moment that he appeared on the front steps, a furious howl assailed him, making even the stone step on which he had placed his foot tremble beneath him.

But he, disdainful and impassible, looked at all those flashing eyes calmly and unflinchingly, and shrugging his shoulders, pronounced these words: —

“What a fantastic people? What is there to make them howl thus?”

He had scarcely uttered these words, when he was seized upon by the foremost of the mob. They had rushed on to the front steps and clutched him, though surrounded by his guards. Their iron hands dragged him along. He lost his footing, and fell into the arms of his enemies, who in a second dispersed his escort.

Then an irresistible tide impelled the prisoner over the same path, stained with blood, which Foulon had been dragged over only two hours before.

A man was already seated astride the fatal lamp, holding a rope in his hand.

But another man had clung to Berthier, and this man was dealing out with fury and delirium blows and imprecations on the brutal executioners.

He continually cried: —

“You shall not have him! You shall not kill him!”

This man was Billot, whom despair had driven mad, and as strong as twenty men.

To some he shrieked: —

“I am one of the conquerors of the Bastille!”

And some of those who recognized him became less furious in their attack.

To others he said: —

“Let him be fairly tried. I will be responsible for him. If he is allowed to escape, you shall hang me in his stead.”

Poor Billot! poor worthy man! The whirlwind swept him away, — him and Berthier, — as the water-spout carries away a feather or a straw in its vast spirals.

He moved on without perceiving anything. He had reached the fatal spot.

The thunderbolt is less swift.

Berthier, who had been dragged along backwards, — Berthier, whom they had raised up, seeing that they stopped, raised his eyes and perceived the infamous, degrading halter swinging above his head.

By an effort as violent as it was unexpected, he tore himself from the grasp of those who held him, snatched a musket from the hands of a National Guard, and inflicted several wounds on his self-appointed executioners with his bayonet.

But in a second a thousand blows were aimed at him from behind. He fell, and a thousand other blows from the ruffians who encircled him rained down upon him.

Billot had disappeared beneath the feet of the assassins.

Berthier had not time to suffer. His life’s blood and his soul rushed at once from his body through a thousand gaping wounds.

Then Billot was witness to a spectacle more hideous than he had yet seen. He saw a fiend plunge his hand into the open breast of the corpse, and tear out the still smoking heart.

Then, sticking this heart, on the point of his sabre, he held it above the heads of the shouting mob, which opened before him as he advanced, carried it into the Hôtel de Ville, and laid it on the table of the grand council, where the electors held their sessions.

Billot, that man of iron nerve, could not support this frightful sight; he fell fainting against a post at about ten paces from the fatal lantern.

Lafayette, on seeing this infamous insult offered to his authority, — offered to the Revolution which he directed, or rather which he had believed he should direct, — Lafayette broke his sword, and threw it at the faces of the assassins.

Pitou ran to pick up the farmer, and carried him off in his arms, whispering into his ear: —

“Billot! Father Billot! take care; if they see that you are fainting, they will take you for his accomplice, and will kill you too. That would be a pity — so good a patriot!”

And thereupon he dragged him towards the river, concealing him as well as he was able from the inquisitive looks of some zealous patriots who were murmuring.

CHAPTER XIII.

Billot begins to perceive that all is not Roses in Revolutions

BILLOT, who, conjointly with Pitou, had been engaged in all the glorious libations, began to perceive that the cup was becoming bitter.

When he had completely recovered his senses, from the refreshing breezes on the river's banks: —

"Monsieur Billot," said Pitou to him, "I long for Villers-Cotterets, do not you?"

These words, like the refreshing balm of calmness and virtue, aroused the farmer, whose vigor returned to him, and he pushed through the crowd, to get away at once from the scene of butchery.

"Come," said he to Pitou, "you are right."

And he at once determined on going to find Gilbert, who was residing at Versailles, but who, without having revisited the queen after the journey of the king to Paris, had become the right hand of Necker, who had been reappointed minister, and was endeavoring to organize prosperity by generalizing poverty.

Pitou had as usual followed Billot.

Both of them were admitted into the study in which the doctor was writing.

"Doctor," said Billot, "I am going to return to my farm."

"And why so?" inquired Gilbert.

"Because I hate Paris."

"Ah, yes! I understand," coldly observed Gilbert; "you are tired."

"Worn out."

"You no longer like the Revolution?"

"I should like to see it ended."

Gilbert smiled sorrowfully.

"It is only now beginning," he rejoined.

"Oh!" exclaimed Billot.

"That astonishes you, Billot?" asked Gilbert.

"What astonishes me the most is your perfect coolness."

“My friend,” said Gilbert to him, “do you know whence my coolness proceeds?”

“It can only proceed from a firm conviction.”

“Precisely so.”

“And what is that conviction?”

“Guess.”

“That all will end well.”

Gilbert smiled still more gloomily than the first time.

“No; on the contrary, from the conviction that all will end badly.”

Billot cried out with astonishment.

As to Pitou, he opened his eyes to an enormous width; he thought the argument altogether illogical.

“Let us hear,” said Billot, rubbing his ear with his big hand, — ”let us hear; for it seems to me that I do not rightly understand you.”

“Take a chair, Billot,” said Gilbert, “and sit down close to me.”

Billot did as he was ordered.

“Closer, closer still, that no one may hear but yourself.”

“And I, Monsieur Gilbert?” said Pitou, timidly, making a move towards the door, as if he thought the doctor wished him to withdraw.

“Oh, no! stay here,” replied the Doctor. “You are young; listen.”

Pitou opened his ears, as he had done his eyes, to their fullest extent, and seated himself on the floor at Father Billot’s feet.

This council was a singular spectacle, which was thus held in Gilbert’s study, near a table heaped up with letters, documents, new pamphlets, and newspapers, and within four steps of a door which was besieged by a swarm of petitioners, or people having some grievance to complain of. These people were all kept in order by an old clerk, who was almost blind, and had lost an arm.

“I am all attention,” said Billot. “Now explain yourself, my master, and tell us how it is that all will finish badly.”

“I will tell you, Billot. Do you see what I am doing at this moment, my friend?”

“You are writing lines.”

“But the meaning of those lines, Billot?”

“How would you have me guess that, when you know that I cannot even read them?”

Pitou timidly raised his head a little above the table, and cast his eyes on the paper which was lying before the doctor.

"They are figures," said he.

"That is true," said Gilbert; "they are figures, which are at the same time the salvation and the ruin of France."

"Well, now!" exclaimed Billot.

"Well, now! well, now!" repeated Pitou.

"These figures, when they are presented to-morrow," continued the doctor, "will go to the king's palace, to the mansions of the nobility, and to the cottage of the poor man, to demand of all of them one quarter of their income."

"Hey?" ejaculated Billot.

"Oh, my poor Aunt Angélique!" cried Pitou; "what a wry face she will make!"

"What say you to this, my worthy friend?" said Gilbert. "People make revolutions, do they not? Well, they must pay for them."

"Perfectly just!" heroically replied Billot. "Well, be it so; it will be paid."

"Oh, you are a man who is already convinced, and there is nothing to astonish me in your answers; but those who are not convinced?"

"Those who are not so?"

"Yes; what will they do?"

"They will resist!" replied Billot, and in a tone which signified that he would resist energetically if he were required to pay a quarter of his income to accomplish a work which was contrary to his convictions.

"Then there would be a conflict," said Gilbert.

"But the majority," said Billot.

"Conclude your sentence, my friend."

"The majority is there to make known its will."

"Then there would be oppression."

Billot looked at Gilbert, at first doubtingly, and then a ray of intelligence sparkled in his eye.

"Hold, Billot!" said the doctor, "I know what you are about to say to me. The nobility and the clergy possess everything, do they not?"

"That is undoubted," replied Billot; "and therefore the convents — "

"The convents?"

"The convents overflow with riches."

"*Notum certumque*," grumbled Pitou.

"The nobles do not pay in proportion to their income. Thus I, a farmer, pay more than twice the amount of taxes paid by my neighbors, the three brothers De Charny, who have between them an income of two hundred thousand livres."

"But, let us see," continued Gilbert. "Do you believe that the nobles and the priests are less Frenchmen than you are?"

Pitou pricked up his ears at this proposition, which sounded somewhat heretical at the time, when patriotism was calculated by the strength of elbows on the Place de Grève.

"You do not believe a word of it, do you, my friend? You cannot imagine that these nobles and priests, who absorb everything, and give back nothing, are as good patriots as you are?"

"That is true."

"An error, my dear friend, an error. They are even better, and I will prove it to you."

"Oh! that, for example, I deny."

"On account of their privileges, is it not?"

"Zounds! yes."

"Wait a moment."

"Oh, I can wait."

"Well, then, I certify to you, Billot, that in three days from this time the person who will have the most privileges in France will be the man who possesses nothing."

"Then I shall be that person," said Pitou, gravely.

"Well, yes, it will be you."

"But how can that be?"

"Listen to me, Billot. These nobles and these ecclesiastics, whom you accuse of egotism, are just beginning to be seized with that fever of patriotism which is about to make the tour of France. At this moment they are assembled like so many sheep on the edge of the ditch; they are deliberating. The boldest of them will be the first to leap over it; and this will happen to-morrow, perhaps to-night; and after him, the rest will jump it."

"What is the meaning of that, Monsieur Gilbert?"

"It means to say that, voluntarily abandoning their prerogatives, feudal lords will liberate their peasants, proprietors of estates their farms and the rents due to them, the dovecot lords their pigeons."

“Oh, oh!” ejaculated Pitou, with amazement; “you think they will give up all that?”

“Oh,” cried Billot, suddenly catching the idea, “that will be splendid liberty indeed!”

“Well, then; arid after that, when we shall all be free, what shall we do next?”

“The deuce!” cried Billot, somewhat embarrassed; “what shall be done next? Why, we shall see!”

“Ah, there is the great word!” exclaimed Gilbert: *“we shall see*!”

He rose from his chair with a gloomy brow, and walked up and down the room for a few minutes; then, returning to the farmer, whose hand he seized with a violence which seemed almost a threat: —

“Yes,” said he, “we shall see! We shall all see, — you, as I shall; he, as you and I shall. And that is precisely what I was reflecting on just now, when you observed that composure which so much surprised you.”

“You terrify me. The people united, embracing each other, forming themselves into one mass to insure their general prosperity, — can that be a subject which renders you gloomy, Monsieur Gilbert?”

The latter shrugged his shoulders.

“Then,” said Billot, questioning in his turn, “what will you say of yourself if you now doubt, after having prepared everything in the Old World, by giving liberty to the New?”

“Billot,” rejoined Gilbert, “you have just, without at all suspecting it, uttered a word which is the solution of the enigma, — a word which Lafayette has uttered, and which no one, beginning with himself perhaps, fully understands. Yes, we have given liberty to the New World.”

“You! and Frenchmen, too! That is magnificent.”

“It is magnificent; but it will cost us dear,” said Gilbert, sorrowfully.

“Pooh! the money is spent; the bill is paid,” said Billot, joyously. “A little gold, a great deal of blood, and the debt is liquidated.”

“Blind enthusiast!” said Gilbert, “who sees not in this dawning in the west the germ of ruin to us all! Alas! why do I accuse them, when I did not see more clearly than they? The giving liberty to the New World, I fear, I fear greatly, is to prove the total ruin of the old one.”

“Rerum novus nascitur ordo!” exclaimed Pitou, with great Revolutionary self-possession.

“Silence, child!” said Gilbert.

“Was it, then, more difficult to overcome the English than it is now to quiet the French?” asked Billot.

“A new world,” repeated Gilbert; “that is to say, a vast open space, a clear table to work upon, — no laws, but no abuses; no ideas, but no prejudices. In France, thirty thousand square leagues of territory for thirty millions of people; that is to say, should the space be equally divided, scarcely room for a cradle or a grave for each. Out yonder, in America, two hundred thousand square leagues for three millions of persons; frontiers which are ideal, for they border on the desert, which is to say, immensity. In those two hundred thousand leagues, navigable rivers, having a course of a thousand leagues; virgin forests, of which God alone knows the limits, — that is to say, all the elements of life, of civilization, and of a brilliant future. Oh, how easy it is, Billot, when a man is called Lafayette, and is accustomed to wield a sword when a man is called Washington, and is accustomed to reflect deeply, — how easy is it to combat against walls of wood, of earth, of stone, of human flesh! But when, instead of founding, it is necessary to destroy; when we see in the old order of things that we are obliged to attack walls of bygone, crumbling ideas, and behind the ruins even of these walls, that crowds of people and of interests still take refuge; when, after having found the idea, we find that in order to make the people adopt it, it will be necessary, perhaps, to decimate that people, from the old who remember, down to the child who has still to learn; from the recollection which is the monument, down to the instinct which is the germ of it,-then, oh, then, Billot! it is a task which will make all those shudder who can see behind the horizon. I am far-sighted, Billot, and I shudder.”

“Pardon me, sir,” said Billot, with his sound good sense; “you accused me, a short time since, of hating the Revolution, and now you are making it execrable to me.”

“But have I told you that I renounce it?”

“*Errare humanum est*,” murmured Pitou; “*sed perseverare diabolicum*.”

And he drew his feet towards him with his hands.

“I shall, however, persevere,” continued Gilbert, “for although I see the obstacles, I can perceive the end; and that end is splendid, Billot. It is not only the liberty of France that I am dreaming of; but it is the liberty of the whole world. It is not physical equality; but it is equality before the laws, — equality of rights. It is not the fraternity of our own citizens, but fraternity between all nations. I may be losing my own soul; my body may perhaps perish in the struggle," continued Gilbert, in a melancholy tone; "but it matters not. The soldier who is sent to the assault of a fortress, sees the cannon on its ramparts, sees the balls with which they are loaded, sees the match placed near the touch-hole; he sees even more than this, — he sees the direction in which they are pointed, he feels that this piece of black iron may pass through his own breast, — but he still rushes onward; the fortress must be taken. Well, we are all soldiers, Father Billot. Forward, then! and over the heaps of our dead bodies may one day march the generations of which this boy now present is the advanced guard."

"I do not really know why you despair, Monsieur Gilbert. Is it because an unfortunate man was this day murdered on the Place de Grève?"

"And why were you, then, so much horrified? Go, then, Billot, and cut throats also."

"Oh, what are you now saying, Monsieur Gilbert?"

"Zounds! a man should be consistent. You came here, all pale, all trembling, — you, who are so brave, so strong, — and you said to me, 'I am tired out.' I laughed in your face, Billot; and now that I explain to you why you were pale, why you were worn out, it is you who laugh at me in turn."

"Speak! Speak! but first of all give me the hope that I shall return cured, consoled, to my fields."

"Your fields! Listen to me, Billot; all our hope is there. The country — a sleeping revolution, which wakes up once in a thousand years, and gives royalty the vertigo every time it awakens — the country will wake up in its turn, when the day snail come for purchasing or conquering those wrongly acquired territories of which you just now spoke, and with which the nobility and clergy are gorged, even to choking. But to urge on the country to a harvest of ideas, it will be necessary to urge on the countrymen to the conquest of the soil. Man, by becoming a proprietor, becomes free; and in becoming free, he becomes a better man. To us, then, privileged laborers, to whom God has consented that the veil of the future shall be raised; to us, then, the fearful work, which, after giving liberty to the people, shall give them the property of the soil! Here, Billot, will be a good work, and a sorry recompense perhaps; but an active, powerful work, full of joys and vexations, of glory and calumny. The country is still lulled in a dull, impotent slumber, but it waits only to be awakened by our summons, and that new dawn shall be our work. When once the country is awakened, the sanguinary portion of our labors will be terminated, and its peaceable labors, the labors of the country, will commence.”

“What, then, do you now advise that I should do, Monsieur Gilbert?”

“If you wish to be useful to your country, to the nation, to your brother men, to the world, remain here, Billot; take a hammer and work in this Vulcan’s furnace, which is forging thunders for the whole world.”

“Remain here to see men butchered, and perhaps at last learn to butcher them myself?”

“How so?” said Gilbert, with a faint smile. “You, Billot, become a murderer! What is it you are saying?”

“I say that should I remain here as you request me,” cried Billot, trembling with agitation, — ”I say that the first man whom I shall see attaching a rope to a lamp-post, I will hang that man with these my hands.”

Gilbert’s smile became more positive.

“Well, now,” said he, “I find you understand me, and now you also are a murderer.”

“Yes; a murderer of vile wretches.”

“Tell me, Billot, you have seen De Losme, De Launay, De Flesselles, Foulon, and Berthier slaughtered?”

“Yes.”

“What epithet did those who slaughtered them apply to them?”

“They called them wretches.”

“Oh! that is true,” said Pitou; “they did call them wretches.”

“Yes; but it is I who am right, and not they,” rejoined Billot.

“You will be in the right,” said Gilbert, “if you hang them; but in the wrong, if they hang you.”

Billot hung down his head under this heavy blow: then suddenly raising it again, with dignity: — -

“Will you venture to maintain,” said he, “that those who assassinate defenceless men, and who are under the safeguard of public honor, — will you maintain that they are as good Frenchmen as I am?”

“Ah!” said Gilbert, “that is quite another question. Yes, in France we have several sorts of Frenchmen. First of all, we have the people, to which Pitou belongs, to which you belong, to which I belong; then we have the French clergy, and then the French nobility, — three classes of Frenchmen in France, each French in its own point of view; that is to say, as regards its own interests, and this without counting the King of France, who is also a

Frenchman in his way. Ah, Billot, here you see, in these different modes of all these Frenchmen considering themselves French, the real secret of the Revolution. You will be a Frenchman in your own way; the Abbé Maury will be a Frenchman in his way; Mirabeau will be a Frenchman in a mode that differs from that of the Abbé Maury; and the king will be a Frenchman in another way than that of Mirabeau. Well, Billot, my excellent friend, thou man of upright heart and sound judgment, you have just entered upon the second part of the question which I am now engaged upon. Do me the pleasure, Billot, to cast your eyes on this."

And Gilbert presented a printed paper to the farmer.

"What is this?" asked Billot, taking the paper.

"Read."

"Why, you know full well that I cannot read."

"Tell Pitou to read it, then."

Pitou rose, and standing on tiptoe, looked at the paper over the farmer's shoulder.

"That is not French," said he, "it is not Latin, neither is it Greek."

"It is English," replied Gilbert.

"I do not know English," said Pitou, proudly.

"I do," said Gilbert, "and I will translate that paper to you; but in the first place, read the signature."

"PITT," spelled Pitou; "what does PITT mean?"

"I will explain it to you," replied Gilbert.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Pitts

“PITT,” rejoined Gilbert, “is the son of Pitt.”

“Well, now!” cried Pitou; “that is just as we have it in the Bible. There is then Pitt the First, and Pitt the Second?”

“Yes, and Pitt the First, my friends — listen attentively to what I am going to tell you — ”

“We are listening,” replied Billot and Pitou at the same moment.

“This Pitt the First was during thirty years the sworn enemy of France; he combated in the retirement of his cabinet, to which he was nailed by the gout, Montealm and Vaudreuil in America, the Bailly de Suffren and D’Estaing on the seas, Noailles and Broglie on the Continent. This Pitt the First made it a principle with him that it was necessary to destroy the influence which France had gained over the whole of Europe: during thirty years he reconquered from us, one by one, all our colonies; one by one, all our factories, the whole of our possessions in the East Indies, fifteen hundred leagues of territory in Canada; and then, when he saw that France was three fourths ruined, he brought up his son to ruin her altogether.”

“Ah! ah!” exclaimed Billot, evidently much interested, “so that the Pitt we have now — ”

“Precisely,” replied Gilbert, “he is the son of the Pitt whom we have had, and whom you already know, Father Billot, whom Pitou knows, whom all the universe knows; and this Pitt Junior was thirty years old this last May.”

“Thirty years old?”

“Yes; you see that he has well employed his time, my friends. Notwithstanding his youth he has now governed England for seven years; seven years has he put in practice the theory of his father.”

“Well, then, we are likely to have him for a long time yet,” said Billot.

“And it is the more probable because the vital qualities are very tenacious among the Pitts. Let me give you a proof of it.”

Pitou and Billot indicated by a motion of their heads that they were listening with the greatest attention.

Gilbert continued: —

“In 1778, the father of our enemy was dying; his physicians announced to him that his life was merely hanging by a thread, and that the slightest effort would break that thread. The English Parliament was then debating on the question of abandoning the American colonies and yielding to their desire for independence, in order to put a stop to the war, which threatened, fomented as it was by the French, to swallow up the riches and all the soldiers of Great Britain. It was at the moment when Louis XVI., our good king, — he on whom the whole nation has just conferred the title of ‘Father of French Liberty,’ — had solemnly recognized the independence of America; and on the fields of battle in that country, and in their councils, the swords and genius of the French had obtained the mastery. England had offered to Washington — that is to say, to the chief of the insurgents — the recognition of American nationality, on condition that the new nation should ally itself with England against France.”

“But,” said Billot, “it appears to me this proposition was not a decent one, to be either offered or accepted.”

“My dear Billot, this is what is called diplomacy; and in the political world ideas of this kind are much admired. Well, Billot, however immoral you may consider the matter, in spite of Washington, the most faithful of men, Americans would have been found to accede to this degrading concession to England. But Lord Chatham, the father of Pitt; the man who had been given over by the physicians, this dying man, this phantom who was already standing knee-deep in the grave, this Chatham, who it might be thought could have desired naught more on this earth but repose, — before sleeping beneath his monument, this feeble old man determined on appearing in the Parliament, where the question was about to be discussed.

“On entering the House of Lords, he was leaning on the one side on the arm of his son, William Pitt, then only nineteen years of age, and on the other on that of his son-in-law, Lord Mahon. He was attired in his magnificent robes, which formed a derisive contrast to his own emaciated form. Pale as a spectre, his eyes half-extinguished beneath his languishing eyelids, he desired his friends to lead him to his usual seat on the bench appropriated to earls; while all the lords rose at his entrance, astounded at the unexpected apparition, and bowed to him in admiration, as the Roman Senate might have done had Tiberius, dead and forgotten, returned among them. He listened in silence and with profound attention to the speech of the

Duke of Richmond, the mover of the proposition, and when he had concluded, Lord Chatham rose to reply.

"Then this dying man summoned up strength enough to speak for three whole hours; he found fire enough within his heart to lend lightning to his eyes; in his soul he found accents which stirred up the hearts of all who heard him.

"It is true that he was speaking against France; it is true that he was instilling into the minds of his countrymen the hatred which he felt; it is true that he had called up all his energies, all his fervent eloquence, to ruin and devour this country, — the hated rival of his own. He forbade that America should be recognized as independent; he forbade all sort of compromise; he cried, War! war! He spoke as Hannibal spoke against Rome, as Cato against Carthage! He declared that the duty of every loyal Englishman was to perish, ruined, rather than to suffer that a colony, even one single colony, should detach itself from the mother-country. Having concluded his peroration, having hurled his last threat, he fell to the ground as if thunder-stricken.

"He had nothing more to do in this world, — he was carried expiring from the house.

"Some few days afterwards he was dead."

"Oh! oh!" cried both Billot and Pitou, simultaneously, "what a man this Lord Chatham was!"

"He was the father of the young man of thirty who is now occupying our attention," pursued Gilbert. "Lord Chatham died at the age of seventy. If the son lives to the same age, we shall have to endure William Pitt for forty years longer. This is the man, Father Billot, with whom we have to contend; this is the man who now governs Great Britain; who well remembers the names of Lameth, of Rochambeau, and Lafayette; who at this moment knows the name of every man in the National Assembly; he who has sworn a deadly hatred to Louis XVI., the author of the treaty of 1778, — the man, in short, who will not breathe freely as long as there shall be a loaded musket in France and a full pocket. Do you begin to understand?"

"I understand that he has a great detestation of France; yes, that is true, but I do not altogether see your meaning."

"Nor I," said Pitou.

"Well, then, read these four words." And he presented a paper to Pitou.

"English again," cried Pitou.

“Yes; these are the words, — *Don’t mind the money*.”

“I hear the words, but I do not understand them,” rejoined Pitou.

Gilbert translated the words, and then: —

“But more than this: he farther on reiterates the same advice, for he says: ‘Tell them not to be sparing of money, and they need not send me any accounts.’“

“Then they are arming,” said Billot.

“No; they are bribing.”

“But to whom is this letter addressed?”

“To everybody and to nobody. The money which is thus given, thus strewn abroad, thus lavished, is given to peasants, to artisans, to wretches, — to men, in short, who will degrade our Revolution.”

Father Billot held down his head. These words explained many things.

“Would you have knocked down De Launay with the butt-end of a musket, Billot?”

“No.”

“Would you have killed Flesselles by firing a pistol at him?”

“No.”

“Would you have hanged Foulon?”

“No.”

“Would you have carried the still bleeding heart of Berthier and placed it on the table of the electors?”

“Infamy!” exclaimed Billot. “On the contrary, however guilty this man may have been, I would have allowed myself to be torn to pieces could I have saved him by it; and the proof of this is that I was wounded in defending him, and that but for Pitou, who dragged me to the riverside — ”

“Oh! that is true,” cried Pitou; “but for me, Father Billot would have had but a bad time of it.”

“Well, then, see you now, Billot, there are many men who would act as you have done, when they feel that they have some one to assist them near them, and who, on the contrary, if abandoned to bad examples, become wicked, then ferocious, then frenzied, — then, when the evil is done, why, ‘tis done.”

“But, in short,” observed Billot, objectingly, “admitting that Mr. Pitt, or rather his money, had something to do with the death of Flesselles, of Foulon, and of Berthier, what would he gain by it?”

Gilbert began to laugh with that inaudible laugh which astonishes the simple, but which makes the thinking shudder.

“What would he gain by it!” he exclaimed, “can you ask that?”

“Yes, I do ask it.”

“I will tell you. It is this; you were much pleased with the Revolution, were you not, — you who walked in blood to take the Bastille?”

“Yes, I was pleased with it.”

“Well! you now like it less; well! now you long for Villers-Cotterets, your farm, the quietude of your plain, the shades of your great forests.”

“*Frigida Tempe*,” murmured Pitou.

“Oh, yes, you are right,” sighed Billot.

“Well, then, you, Father Billot; you, a farmer; you, the proprietor of land; you, a child of the Île-de-France, and consequently a Frenchman of the olden time, — you represent the third order; you belong to that which is called the majority. Well, then, you are disgusted.”

“I acknowledge it.”

“Then the majority will become disgusted as you are.”

“And what then?”

“And you will one day open your arms to the soldiers of the Duke of Brunswick or of Mr. Pitt, who will come to you in the name of those two liberators of France to restore wholesome doctrine.”

“Never!”

“Pshaw! wait a little.”

“Flesselles, Berthier, and Foulon were at bottom villains,” observed Pitou.

“Assuredly, as Monsieur de Sartines and Monsieur de Maurepas were villains; as Monsieur d’Argenson and Monsieur de Philippeaux were before them; as Monsieur Law was; as the Leblancs, the De Paris, the Duverneys were villains; as Fouquet was; as Mazarin was also; as Semblancey, as Enguerrand de Marigny were villains; as Monsieur de Brieune is towards Monsieur de Calonne; as Monsieur de Calonne is towards Monsieur de Necker; as Monsieur de Necker will be to the administration which we shall have in two years.”

“Oh, oh, Doctor!” murmured Billot, “Monsieur de Necker a villain — never!”

“As you will be, my good Billot, a villain in the eyes of little Pitou here, in case one of Mr. Pitt’s agents should teach him certain theories, backed by the influence of a pint of brandy and ten livres per day for getting up disturbances. This word 'villain,' do you see, Billot, is the word by which in revolutions we designate the man who thinks differently from us; we are all destined to bear that name more or less. Some will bear it so far that their countrymen will inscribe it on their tombs, others so much farther that posterity will ratify the epithet. This, my dear Billot, is what I see, and which you do not see. Billot, Billot! people of real worth must therefore not withdraw."

"Bah!" cried Billot, "even were honest people to withdraw, the Revolution would still run its course; it is in full motion."

Another smile rose to the lips of Gilbert.

"Great child!" cried he, "who would abandon the handle of the plough, unyoke the horses from it, and then say: 'Good! the plough has no need of me; the plough will trace its furrow by itself.' But, my friends, who was it undertook the Revolution? honest people, were they not?"

"France flatters herself that it is so. It appears to me that Lafayette is an honest man; it appears to me that Bailly is an honest man; it appears to me that Monsieur de Necker is an honest man; it appears to me that Monsieur Elie, Monsieur Hullin, and Monsieur Maillard, who fought side by side with me, are honest people; it appears to me that you yourself — "

"Well, Billot, if honest people, if you, if I, if Maillard, if Hullin, if Elie, if Necker, if Bailly, if Lafayette should withdraw, who would carry on the work? Why, those wretches, those assassins, those villains whom I have pointed out to you, — the agents, the agents of Mr. Pitt!"

"Try to answer that, Father Billot," said Pitou, convinced of the justice of the doctor's argument.

"Well, then," replied Billot, "we will arm ourselves, and shoot these villains down as if they were dogs."

"Wait a moment; who will arm themselves?"

"Everybody."

"Billot, Billot! remember one thing, my good friend, and it is this, that what we are doing at this moment is called — what do you call what we are now doing, Billot?"

"Talking politics, Monsieur Gilbert."

"Well! in politics there is no longer any absolute crime; one is a villain or an honest man, as we favor or thwart the interests of the man who judges us. Those whom you call villains will always give some specious reasons for their crimes; and to many honest people, who may have had a direct or an indirect interest in the commission of these crimes, these very villains will appear honest men also. From the moment that we reach that point, Billot, we must beware. There will then be men to hold the plough-handle. It will move onward, Billot; it will move onward, and without us.”

“It is frightful,” said the farmer; “but if it moves onward without us, where will it stop?”

“God only knows!” exclaimed Gilbert; “as to myself, I know not.”

“Well, then, if you do not know, — you who are a learned man, Monsieur Gilbert, — I, who am an ignoramus, cannot be expected to know anything of the matter. I augur from it — ”

“Well, what do you augur from it? Let us hear.”

“I augur from it that what we had better do — I mean Pitou and myself — is to return to the farm. We will again take to the plough, the real plough, — that of iron and wood, with which we turn up the earth, and not the one of flesh and blood, called the French people, and which is as restive as a vicious horse. We will make our corn grow instead of shedding blood, and we shall live free, joyous, and happy as lords in our own domain. Come with us; come with us, Monsieur Gilbert I The deuce! I like to know where I am going!”

“One moment, my stout-hearted friend,” cried Gilbert. “No, I know not whither I am going. I have told you so, and I repeat it to you; however, I still go on, and I will continue to do so. My duty is traced out to me; my life belongs to God; but my works are the debt which I shall pay to my country. If my conscience says to me, ‘Go on, Gilbert, you are in the right road; go on,’ that is all that I require. If I am mistaken, men will punish me; but God will absolve me.”

“But sometimes men punish those who are not mistaken. You said so yourself just now.”

“And I say it again. It matters not, I persist, Billot; be it an error or not, I shall go on. To guarantee that the events will not prove my inability, God forbid that I should pretend to do so! But before all, Billot, the Lord has said, ‘Peace be to the man of good intentions!’ Therefore, be one of those to whom God has promised peace. Look at Monsieur de Lafayette, in America as well as France; this is the third white charger he has worn out, without counting those he will wear out in future. Look at Monsieur de Bailly, who wears out his lungs. Look at the king, who wears out his popularity. Come,

come, Billot, let us not be egotistical. Let us also wear ourselves out a little. Remain with me, Billot."

"But to do what, if we do not prevent evil being done?"

"Billot, remember never to repeat those words; for I should esteem you less. You have been trampled under foot, you have received hard fisticuffs, hard knocks from the butt-ends of muskets, and even from bayonets, when you wished to save Foulon and Berthier."

"Yes, and even a great many," replied the farmer, passing his hand over his still painful body.

"And as to me," said Pitou, "I had one eye almost put out."

"And all that for nothing," added Billot.

"Well, my children, if instead of there being only ten, fifteen, twenty of your courage, there had been a hundred, two hundred, three hundred, you would have saved the unhappy man from the frightful death which was inflicted on him; you would have spared the nation the blot which has sullied it. And that is the reason why, instead of returning to the country, which is tolerably tranquil, — that is why, Billot, I exact as far as I can exact anything of you, my friend, that you should remain at Paris; that I may have always near me a vigorous arm, an upright heart; that I may test my mind and my works on the faithful touchstone of your good sense and your pure patriotism; and, in fine, that we may strew around us, not gold, for that we have not, but our love of country and of the public welfare, in which you will be my agent with a multitude of misled, unfortunate men, — my staff, should my feet slip; my staff, should I have occasion to strike a blow."

"A blind man's dog," said Billot, with sublime simplicity.

"Precisely," said Gilbert, in the same tone.

"Well," said Billot, "I accept your proposal. I will be whatever you may please to make me."

"I know that you are abandoning everything, — fortune, wife, child, and happiness, — Billot. But you may be tranquil; it will not be for long."

"And I," said Pitou, "what am I to do?"

"You?" said Gilbert, looking at the ingenuous and hardy youth who boasted not much of his intelligence, — "you will return to the farm, to console Billot's family, and explain to them the holy mission he has undertaken."

“Instantly!” cried Pitou, trembling with joy at the idea of returning to Catherine.

“Billot,” said Gilbert, “give him your instructions.”

“They are as follows,” said Billot.

“I am all attention.”

“Catherine is appointed by me as mistress of the house. Do you understand?”

“And Madame Billot?” exclaimed Pitou, somewhat surprised at this slight offered to the mother, to the advancement of the daughter.

“Pitou,” said Gilbert, who had at once caught the idea of Billot, from seeing a slight blush suffuse the face of the honest farmer, “remember the Arabian proverb, ‘to hear is to obey.’“

Pitou blushed in his turn. He had almost understood, and felt the indiscretion of which he had been guilty.

“Catherine has all the judgment of the family,” added Billot, unaffectedly, in order to explain his idea.

Gilbert bowed in token of assent.

“Is that all?” inquired the youth.

“All that I have to say,” replied Billot.”

“But not as regards me,” said Gilbert.

“I am listening,” observed Pitou, well disposed to attend to the Arabian proverb cited by Gilbert.

“You will go with a letter I shall give you to the College Louis-le-Grand,” added Gilbert. “You will deliver that letter to the Abbé Bérardier; he will intrust Sebastien to you, and you will bring him here. After I have embraced him, you will take him to Villers-Cotterets, where you will place him in the hands of the Abbé Fortier, that he may not altogether lose his time. On Sunday and Thursdays he will go out with you. Make him walk frequently in the meadows and in the woods. It will be more conducible to my tranquillity and his health that he should be in the country yonder than here.”

“I have understood you perfectly,” said Pitou, delighted to be thus restored to the friend of his childhood, and to the vague aspirations of a sentiment somewhat more adult, which had been awakened within him by the magic name of Catherine.

He rose and took leave of Gilbert, who smiled, and of Billot, who was dreaming.

Then he set off, running at full speed, to fetch Sebastien Gilbert, his foster-brother, from the college.

“And now we,” said Gilbert to Billot, — ”we must set to work.”

CHAPTER XV.

Medea

A DEGREE of calmness had succeeded at Versailles to the terrible moral and political agitations which we have placed before the eyes of our readers.

The king breathed again, and although he could not help reflecting on the suffering his Bourbon pride had endured during his journey to Paris, he consoled himself with the idea of his reconquered popularity.

During this time Monsieur de Necker was organizing, and by degrees losing his.

As to the nobility, they were beginning to prepare their defection or their resistance.

The people were watching and waiting.

During this time the queen, thrown back as it were on the resources of her own mind, assured that she was the object of many hatreds, kept herself in the background, almost dissembled; for she also knew that although the object of hatred to many, she was at the same time the object of many hopes.

Since the journey of the king to Paris she had scarcely caught a glimpse of Gilbert.

Once, however, he had presented himself to her in the vestibule which led to the king's apartments.

And there, as he had bowed to her very humbly and respectfully, she was the first to begin a conversation with him.

"Good-day, sir," said she to him; "are you going to the king?"

And then she added, with a smile, in which there was a slight tinge of irony: —

"Is it as counsellor, or as physician?"

"It is as his physician, Madame," replied Gilbert." I have to-day an appointed service."

She made a sign to Gilbert to follow her. The doctor obeyed.

They both of them went into a small sitting-room, which led to the king's bedroom.

"Well, sir," said she, "you see that you were deceiving me when you assured me the other day, with regard to the journey to Paris, that the king was incurring no danger."

"Who, — I, Madame I" cried Gilbert, astonished.

"Undoubtedly! was not the king fired at?"

"Who has said that, Madame?"

"Everybody, sir; and above all, those who saw the poor woman fall almost beneath the wheels of the king's carriage. Who says that? Why, Monsieur de Beauvau and Monsieur d'Estaing, who saw your coat torn and your frill perforated by the ball."

"Madame!"

"The ball which thus grazed you, sir, might have killed the king, as it killed that unfortunate woman; for, in short, it was neither you nor that poor woman that the murderers wished to kill."

"I do not believe in such a crime," replied the doctor, hesitating.

"Be it so; but I believe in it, sir," rejoined the queen, fixing her eyes on Gilbert.

"At all events, if there was intentional crime, it ought not to be imputed to the people."

The queen gave Gilbert a searching look.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "to whom, then, must it be attributed Speak!"

"Madame," continued Gilbert, shaking his head, "for some time past I have been watching and studying the people. Well, then, the people, when they assassinate in Revolutionary times, — the people kill with their hands; they are then like the furious tiger, the irritated lion. The tiger and the lion use no intermediate agent between their fury and their victim; they kill for killing's sake: they spill blood to spill it; they like to dye their teeth, to steep their claws in it."

"Witness Foulon and Berthier, you would say. But was not Flesselles killed by a shot from a pistol? I was so told, at least; but after all," continued the queen, in a tone of irony, "perhaps it was not true; we crowned heads are so surrounded by flatterers."

Gilbert, in his turn, looked intently at the queen.

"Oh! as to him," said he, "you do not believe more than I do, Madame, that it was the people who killed him. There were people who were interested in bringing about his death."

The queen reflected.

"In fact," she replied, "that may be possible."

"Then?" said Gilbert, bowing, as if to ask the queen if she had anything more to say to him.

"I understand, sir," said the queen, gently, stopping the doctor with an almost friendly gesture; "however that may be, let me tell you that you will never save the king's life so effectually by your medical skill as you did three days ago with your own breast."

Gilbert bowed a second time.

But as he saw that the queen remained, he remained also.

"I ought to have seen you again, sir," said the queen, after a momentary repose.

"Your Majesty had no further need of me," said Gilbert.

"You are modest."

"I wish I were not so, Madame."

"And why?"

"Because, being less modest, I should be less timid, and consequently better able to serve my friends or to frustrate enemies."

"Why do you make that distinction? You say, *my* friends, but do not say *my* enemies."

"Because, Madame, I have no enemies; or rather, because I will not, for my part at least, admit that I have any."

The queen looked at him with surprise.

"I mean to say," continued Gilbert, "that those only are my enemies who hate me, but that I on myside hate no one."

"Because?"

"Because I no longer love any one, Madame."

"Are you ambitious, Monsieur Gilbert?"

"At one time I hoped to become so, Madame."

"And — "

"And that passion proved abortive, as did every other."

"There is one, however, that still remains in your heart," said the queen, with a slight shade of artful irony.

"In my heart? And what passion is that, good Heaven?"

"Your patriotism."

Gilbert bowed.

"Oh, that is true!" said he. "I adore my country, and for it I would make every sacrifice."

"Alas!" said the queen, with undefinable melancholy, "there was a time when a good Frenchman would not have expressed that thought in the terms you now have used."

"What does the queen mean to say?" respectfully inquired Gilbert.

"I mean to say, sir, that in the times of which I speak, it was impossible for a Frenchman to love his country, without at the same time loving his queen and king."

Gilbert blushed; he bowed, and felt within his heart one of those electric shocks, which, in her seducing intimacies, the queen produced on those who approached her.

"You do not answer, sir," she said.

"Madame!" cried Gilbert, "I may venture to boast that no one loves the monarchy more ardently than myself."

"Are we living in times, sir, when it is sufficient to say this; and would it not be better to prove it by our acts "

"But, Madame," said Gilbert, with surprise, "I beg your Majesty to believe that all the king or queen might command — "

"You would do, — is it not so?"

"Assuredly, Madame."

"In doing which, sir," said the queen, resuming, in spite of herself, a slight degree of her accustomed haughtiness, "you would only be fulfilling a duty."

"Madame — "

"God, who has given omnipotence to kings," continued Marie Antoinette, "has released them from the obligation of being grateful to those who merely fulfil a duty."

"Alas, alas, Madame," rejoined Gilbert, "the time is approaching when your servants will deserve more than your gratitude, if they will only fulfil their duty."

"What is it you say, sir?"

"I mean to say, Madame, that in these days of disorder and demolition, you will in vain seek for friends where you have been accustomed to find servants. Pray, pray to God, Madame, to send you other servants, other supporters, other friends than those you have."

"Do you know any such?"

"Yes, Madame."

"Then point them out to me."

" See now, Madame; I who now speak to you, — I was your enemy but yesterday."

"My enemy! and why were you so?"

"Because you ordered that I should be imprisoned."

"And to-day?"

"To-day, Madame," replied Gilbert, bowing, "I am your servant."

"And your object?"

"Madame — "

"The object for which you have become my servant. It is not in your nature, sir, to change your opinion, your belief, your affections, so suddenly. You are a man, Monsieur Gilbert, whose remembrances are deeply planted; you know how to perpetuate your vengeance. Come, now, tell me what was the motive of this change?"

"Madame, you reproached me but now with loving my country too passionately."

"No one can ever love it too much, sir; the only question is to know how we love it. For, myself, I love my country." (Gilbert smiled.) "Oh, no false interpretations, sir! my country is France. A German by blood, I am a Frenchwoman in my heart. I love France; but it is through the king. I love France from the respect due to God, who has given us the throne. And now to you, sir."

"To me, Madame?"

"Yes, it is now for you to speak. I understand you, do I not? To you it is quite another matter. You love France merely and simply for France herself."

"Madame," replied Gilbert, bowing, "I should fail in respect to your Majesty, should I fail in frankness."

"Oh," exclaimed the queen, "frightful, frightful period I when all people who pretend to be people of worth, isolate two things which have never been separated from each other; two principles which have always gone hand in hand, — France and her king. But have you not a tragedy of one of your poets, in which it is asked of a queen who has been abandoned by all, 'What now remains to you?' and to which she replies, 'Myself' Well, then, like Medea, I also will say, 'Myself!' and we shall see."

And she angrily left the room, leaving Gilbert in amazement.

She had just raised to his view, by the breath of her anger, one corner of the veil behind which she was combining the whole work of the counter-revolution.

“Come, come!” said Gilbert to himself, as he went into the king’s room, “the queen is meditating some project.”

“Well,” said the queen to herself, as she was returning to her apartment, “decidedly, there is nothing to be made of this man. He has energy, but he has no devotedness.”

Poor princes! with whom the word devotednesss” is synonymous with “servility.”

CHAPTER XVI.

What the Queen wished

GILBERT returned to Monsieur Necker after his professional visit to the king, whom he had found as tranquil as the queen was agitated.

The king was composing speeches; he was examining accounts; he was meditating reforms in the laws.

This well-intentioned man, whose look was so kind, whose soul was so upright, whose heart erred only from prejudices inherent to the royal condition, — this man was absolutely bent on producing trivial reforms in exchange for the serious inroads made on his prerogative. He was obstinately bent on examining the distant horizon with his short-sighted eyes, when an abyss was yawning beneath his feet. This man inspired Gilbert with a feeling of profound pity. As to the queen, it was not thus; and in spite of his impassibility, Gilbert felt that she was one of those women whom it was necessary to love passionately, or to hate even to the death.

When she had returned to her own apartment, Marie Antoinette felt as if an immense burden were weighing on her heart.

And in fact, whether as a woman or as a queen, she felt that there was nothing stable around her, — nothing which could aid her in supporting even a portion of the burden which was crushing her.

On whichever side she turned her eyes, she saw only hesitation and doubt.

The courtiers, anxious with regard to their fortunes, and realizing what they could.

Relatives and friends thinking of emigrating.

The proudest woman of them all, Andrée, gradually becoming estranged from her in heart and mind.

The noblest and the most beloved of all the men who surrounded her, De Charny, wounded by her caprice and a prey to doubt.

The position of affairs caused her great anxiety, — she, who was instinct and sagacity personified.

How could this man, who was purity itself, how could this heart without alloy have changed so suddenly?

“No, he has not yet changed,” said the queen to herself, sighing deeply, “but he is about to change.”

He is about to change! — frightful conviction to the woman who loves passionately, insupportable to the woman who loves with pride.

Now, the queen loved De Charny both passionately and proudly.

The queen was suffering therefore from two wounds.

And yet, at that very time, — at the time when she felt the consciousness of having acted wrongly, of the evil she had committed, — she had still time to remedy it.

But the mind of that crowned woman was not a flexible mind. She could not descend to waver, even though she knew she was acting unjustly; had it been towards an indifferent person, she might or would have wished to show some greatness of soul, and then she might perhaps have asked for forgiveness.

But to the man whom she had honored with an affection at once so tender and so pure, to him whom she had deigned to admit to a participation in her most secret thoughts, the queen considered it would be degrading to make the slightest concession.

The misfortune of queens who condescend to love a subject, is to love him always as queens, but never as women.

Marie Antoinette estimated herself at so high a price that she thought there was nothing human which could compensate her love, not even blood, not even tears.

From the moment she felt that she was jealous of Andrée, she had begun to dwindle morally.

The consequence of this inferiority was her caprice.

The consequence of her caprice was anger.

The consequence of her anger was evil thoughts, which always bring in their train evil actions.

De Charny did not enter into any of the considerations which we have just stated; but he was a man, and he had comprehended that Marie Antoinette was jealous of his wife.

Of his wife, towards whom he had never shown any affection.

There is nothing which so much revolts an upright heart, one altogether incapable of treachery, as to see that it is believed capable of treachery.

There is nothing which so much conduces to direct the attention towards a person as the jealousy with which that person is honored.

Above all, if that jealousy be really unjust.

Then the person who is suspected reflects.

He alternately considers the jealous heart and the person who has caused that jealousy.

The greater the soul of the jealous person, the greater is the danger into which it throws itself.

In fact, how is it possible to suppose that a person of expansive heart, of superior intelligence, of legitimate pride, could become agitated for a mere nothing, or for anything of trifling value Why should a woman who is beautiful be jealous? Why should a woman of the highest rank, power, and talent be jealous? How could it be supposed that, possessing all these advantages, a woman could be jealous for a mere nothing, or for anything of trifling value?

The jealous person is like the lime-hound, pointing out merits to the indifferent, which, left to himself, he would never have discovered.

De Charny knew that Mademoiselle Andrée de Taverney had been long a friend of the queen, — that in former days she had been well treated, always preferred by her. How then was it that she no longer loved her? How was it that Marie Antoinette had all at once become jealous of her?

She must therefore have discerned some secret and mysterious beauty which Monsieur de Charny had not discovered, and undoubtedly because he had not sought for it.

She had therefore felt that De Charny might have perceived something in this woman, and that she, the queen, had lost in the comparison.

Or again, she might have believed that she perceived that De Charny loved her less, without there being any extraneous cause for this diminution of his passion.

There is nothing more fatal to the jealous than the knowledge which they thus give to others of the temperature of that heart which they wish to keep in the most fervid degree of heat.

How often does it happen that the loved object is informed by reproaches of a coldness which he had begun to experience without being able to account for it?

And when he discovers that; when he feels the truth of the reproach, — say, Madame, how many times have you found that he has allowed your chains to be again thrown round him, that his languishing flame has been rekindled?

O unskilfulness of lovers! It is, however, true that where much art or adroitness is exercised, there scarcely ever exists a great degree of love.

Marie Antoinette had therefore herself taught De Charny to believe, by her own anger and injustice, that his heart was less full of love than formerly.

And as soon as he knew this, he endeavored to account for it, and looking around him, very naturally discovered the cause of the queen’s jealousy.

Andrée, the poor, abandoned Andrée, who had been a bride, but had never been a wife.

He pitied Andrée.

The scene of the return from Paris had unveiled the secret of this deep-rooted jealousy, so carefully concealed from all eyes.

The queen also clearly saw that all was discovered; and as she would not bend before De Charny, she employed another method, which in her opinion would lead to the same end.

She began to treat Andrée with great kindness.

She admitted her to all her excursions, to all her evening parties; she overwhelmed her with caresses; she made her the envy of all the other ladies of the court.

And Andrée allowed her to do all this, with some astonishment, but without feeling grateful for it. She had for years said to herself that she belonged to the queen, that the queen could do as she pleased with her, and therefore was it that she submitted to it.

But, on the other side, as it was necessary that the irritation of the woman should be vented on some one, the queen began to treat De Charny severely. She no longer spoke to him; she was absolutely harsh to him; she affected to pass evenings, days, weeks, without observing that he was present.

Only, when he was absent, the heart of the poor woman swelled with anxiety; her eyes wandered around eagerly, seeking him, from whom, the moment they perceived him, they were instantly averted.

Did she need the support of an arm, had she an order to give, had she a smile to throw away, it was bestowed on the first comer.

But this first comer never failed to be a handsome and distinguished man. The queen imagined she was curing her own wound by wounding De Charny.

The latter suffered, but was silent. Not an angry or impatient gesture escaped him. He was a man possessing great self-command; and although suffering frightful torture, he remained, to appearance, perfectly impassible.

Then was seen a singular spectacle, — a spectacle which women alone can furnish and fully comprehend.

Andrée felt all the sufferings of her husband; and as she loved him with that angelic love which never had conceived a hope, she pitied him, and allowed him to perceive she did so.

The result of this compassion was a sweet and tacit reconciliation. She endeavored to console De Charny without allowing him to perceive that she comprehended the need he had of consolation.

And all this was done with that delicacy which may be called essentially feminine, seeing that women alone are capable of it.

Marie Antoinette, who had sought to divide in order to reign, perceived that she had made a false move, and that she was only drawing together two souls by the very means which she had adopted to keep them separate.

Then the poor woman, during the silence and the solitude of night, endured the most frightful paroxysms of despair, such as would make us wonder that God had created beings of sufficient strength to support them.

And the queen would assuredly have succumbed to so many ills, but for the constant occupation given to her mind by political events. No one complains of the hardness of a bed when his limbs are exhausted by fatigue.

Such were the circumstances under which the queen had been living since the return of the king to Versailles, up to the day when she thought seriously of resuming the absolute exercise of her power.

For in her pride, she attributed to her decadence the species of depreciation to which for some time her feminine nature had been subjected.

To her energetic mind, to think was to act. She therefore commenced her combinations without losing a moment.

Alas! these combinations which she was then meditating were those which wrought out her perdition.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Flanders Regiment

UNFORTUNATELY, in the queen's opinion, all the facts which had occurred were merely accidents, which a firm and active hand might remedy. It was only necessary to concentrate her power.

The queen, seeing that the Parisians had so suddenly transformed themselves into soldiers, and appeared to wish for war, resolved on showing them what real war was actually.

"Up to this time, they have only had to deal with the Invalides, or with Swiss, but ill supported and wavering; we will show them what it is to have opposed to them two or three well-disciplined and royalist regiments.

"Perhaps there may be a regiment of this description which has already put to flight some of these rebellious rioters, and has shed blood in the convulsions of civil war. We will have the most celebrated of these regiments ordered here. The Parisians will then understand that their best policy will be to abstain from provocation."

This was after all the quarrel between the king and the National Assembly with regard to the veto. The king, during two months, had been struggling to recover some tattered shreds of sovereignty; he had, conjointly with the administration and Mirabeau, endeavored to neutralize the republican outburst which was endeavoring to efface royalty in France.

The queen had exhausted herself in this struggle, and was exhausted above all from having seen the king succumb.

The king in this contention had lost all his power and the remains of his popularity. The queen had gained an additional name, a nickname.

One of those words which were altogether foreign to the ears of the people, and from that reason more pleasing to the ears of the people, — a name which had not yet become an insult, but which was soon to become the most opprobrious of all; a witty saying, which afterwards was changed into a sanguinary rallying cry.

In short, she was called "Madame Veto."

This name was destined to be borne in Revolutionary songs beyond the banks of the Rhine, to terrify in Germany the subjects and the friends of those who, having sent to France a German queen, had some right to be astonished that she was insulted by the name of the “Autrichienne” (the Austrian woman).

This name was destined in Paris to accompany, in the insensate dancing-rings, on days of massacre, the last cries, the hideous agonies of the victims.

Marie Antoinette was thenceforth called “Madame Veto,” until the day when she was to be called the “Widow Capet.”

She had already changed her name three times. After having been called the “Autrichienne,” she was next called “Madame Deficit.”

After the contests in which the queen had endeavored to interest her friends by the imminence of their own danger, she had remarked that sixty thousand passports had been applied for at the Hôtel de Ville.

Sixty thousand of the principal families of Paris and of France had gone off to rejoin in foreign countries the friends and relatives of the queen, — a very striking example, and one which had forcibly struck the queen.

And therefore, from that moment she meditated a skilfully concerted flight, — a flight supported by armed force should it be necessary; a flight which had for its object safety, after which the faithful who remained in France might carry on the civil war; that is to say, chastise the Revolutionists.

The plan was not a bad one. It would assuredly have succeeded, but behind the queen the evil genius was also watching.

Strange destiny! that woman, who inspired so many with enthusiastic devotedness, yet could nowhere find discretion.

It was known at Paris that she wished to fly before she had even persuaded herself to adopt the measure.

Marie Antoinette did not perceive that from the moment her intention had become known, her plan had become impracticable.

However, a regiment, celebrated for its royalist sympathies, the Flanders regiment, arrived at Versailles by forced marches.

This regiment had been demanded by the municipal authorities of Versailles, who, tormented by the extraordinary guards, and by the strict watch it was necessary to keep around the palace, incessantly threatened by fresh demands for distributions of provisions, and successive disturbances, stood in need of some other military force than the National Guards and the Militia.

The palace had already quite enough to do to defend itself.

The Flanders regiment arrived, as we have said; and that it should at once assume all the importance with which it was intended to be invested, it was necessary that a brilliant reception should be given to it, that it might at once attract the attention of the people.

The Count d’Estaing assembled all the officers of the National Guard and all those of the corps then present at Versailles and went out to meet it.

The regiment made a solemn entry into Versailles, with its park of artillery and its ammunition-wagons.

Around this group, which then became central, assembled a crowd of young gentlemen, who did not belong to any regular corps.

They adopted a sort of uniform by which they could recognize one another, and were joined by all the officers unattached, all the chevaliers of the Order of Saint Louis, whom danger or interest had brought to Versailles.

After this they made excursions to Paris, where were seen these new enemies, fresh, insolent, and puffed up with a secret which was sure to escape them as soon as an opportunity should present itself.

At that moment the king might have escaped. He would have been supported, protected on his journey, and Paris perhaps, still ignorant and ill prepared, would have allowed his departure.

But the evil genius of the Autrichiefine was still watching.

Liége revolted against the emperor; and the occupation which this revolt gave to Austria prevented her from thinking of the queen of France.

The latter, on her side, thought that in delicacy she must abstain from asking any aid at such a moment.

Then events, to which impulsion had been given, continued to rush on with lightning-like rapidity.

After the ovation in honor of the Flanders regiment, the body-guards decided on giving a dinner to the officers of that regiment.

This banquet, this festival, was fixed for the 1st of October. Every important personage in the town was invited to it.

And what, then, was the object of this banquet? To fraternize with the Flanders soldiers. And why should not soldiers fraternize with one another, since the districts and the provinces fraternize?

Was it forbidden by the Constitution that gentlemen should fraternize?

The king was still the master of his regiments, and he alone commanded them; the palace of Versailles was his own property; he alone had a right to receive into it whomsoever he might please.

And why should he not receive brave soldiers and worthy gentlemen within it, — men who had just come from Douai, where they had *behaved well*.

Nothing could be more natural. No one thought of being astonished, and still less of being alarmed at it.

This repast, to be taken thus in union, was about to cement the affection which ought always to subsist between all the corps of a French army, destined to defend both liberty and royalty.

Besides, did the king even know what had been agreed upon?

Since the events of Paris, the king, free, thanks to his concessions, no longer occupied himself with public matters; the burden of affairs had been taken from him. He desired to reign no longer, since others reigned for him; but he did not think that he ought to weary himself by doing nothing all day long.

The king, while the gentlemen of the National Assembly were fraudulently cutting and contriving, — the king amused himself by hunting.

The king, while the nobility and the reverend bishops were abandoning, on the 4th of August, their dovecots and their feudal rights, their pigeons and their parchments, — the king, who was very willing, as all the world was doing it, to make some sacrifices, abolished all his hunting train; but he did not cease to hunt on that account.

Now, the king, while the officers of the Flanders regiment were to be dining with his body-guards, would be enjoying the pleasures of the chase, as he did every day; the tables would be cleared away before his return.

This would even inconvenience him so little, and he would so little inconvenience the banquet in question, that it was resolved to ask the queen to allow the festival to be given within the walls of the palace itself.

The queen saw no reason for refusing this hospitality to the Flanders soldiers.

She gave them the theatre for their banquet-room, in which she allowed them for that day to construct a flooring even with the stage, that there might be ample space for the guards and their guests.

When a queen wishes to be hospitable to French gentlemen, she is so to the full extent of her power. This was their dining-room, but they also required a drawing-room; the queen allowed them to use the salon of Hercules.

On a Thursday, the 1st of October, as we have already said, this feast was given, which was destined to fill so fatal a page in the history of the blindness and improvidence of royalty.

The king had gone out hunting.

The queen was shut up in her own apartments, sorrowful and pensive, and determined not to hear either the ringing of the glasses when the officers gave their toasts, or the sound of their enthusiastic cheers.

Her son was in her arms; Andrée was with her; two women were at work in one corner of the room; those were the only persons with her.

The brilliantly attired officers, with their waving plumes and bright gleaming arms, by degrees entered the palace. Their horses neighed before the grated gates of the royal stables; their clarions sounded as they approached; and the bands of the Flanders regiment and the guards filled the air with harmonious sounds.

Outside the gilded railings of the courtyard of the palace was a pale, inquisitive crowd, gloomily anxious, watching, analyzing, and commenting on the joyous festival within, and the airs played by the military bands.

In gusts, like the squalls of a distant tempest, there exhaled from the open portals of the palace the sounds of merriment with the odors of the savory viands.

It was very imprudent to allow this crowd of starving people to inhale the odors of the good cheer and wine,-to allow these morose people to hear these sounds of jovial festivity.

The festival was however continued, without anything disturbing its conviviality; for a time all was conducted with sobriety and order. The officers, full of respect for the uniform they wore, at first conversed in an undertone and drank moderately; during the first half hour, the programme which had been agreed upon was strictly adhered to.

The second course was put on the table.

Monsieur de Lusignan, the colonel of the Flanders regiment, rose and proposed four toasts.They were to the health of the king, the queen, the dauphin, and the royal family.

Four shouts of applause re-echoed from the vaulted roofs, and struck the ears of the sorrowful spectators outside the palace.

An officer rose; perhaps he was a man of judgment and of courage, — man of sound good sense, who foresaw the issue of all this; a man sincerely attached to that royal family whose health had just been drunk so noisily.

This man comprehended that among these toasts there was one which was omitted, which probably might present itself to their attention.

He therefore proposed this toast, “The Nation.”

A long murmur preceded a long shout.

“No, no!” cried every person present except the proposer of the toast.

And then the toast to the nation was contemptuously rejected.

The festival had just assumed its real character; the torrent had found its real course.

It has been said, and it is still repeated, that the person who proposed this toast was but an instigator of an opposing manifestation.

However this might be, his words produced an untoward effect. To forget the nation might have been but a trifle, but to insult it Was too much. It avenged itself.

As from this moment the ice was broken, as to the reserved silence succeeded boisterous cries and excited conversation, discipline became but a chimerical modesty; the dragoons, the grenadiers, the “hundred Swiss” were sent for, and even all the private soldiers in the palace.

The wine was pushed round quickly; ten times were the glasses filled; when the dessert was brought in, it was absolutely pillaged. Intoxication became general; the soldiers forgot that they were drinking with their officers; it was in reality a fraternal festival.

From all parts were heard shouts of “Long live the king! long live the queen!” So many flowers, so many lights, illuminating the brilliantly gilded arches, so many faces bright with happiness, so many loyal lightning darting from the eyes of these brave men, — was a spectacle which would have been grateful to the eyes of the queen, and reassuring to those of the king.

This so unfortunate king, this so sorrowful queen, why were they not present at such a festival I

Some officious partisans withdrew from the dining-room, and ran to Marie Antoinette’s apartments, and related, exaggerated to her what they had seen.

Then the sorrowing eyes of the queen become reanimated, and she rises from her chair. There is, then, some loyalty left, some affection in French hearts!

There is therefore something still to hope!

At the doors were soon assembled a crowd of courtiers; they entreat, they conjure the queen to pay a visit, merely to show herself for a moment in the festive hall, where two thousand enthusiastic subjects are consecrating, by their hurrahs, veneration for monarchical principles.

“The king is absent,” she sorrowfully replied. “I cannot go there alone.”

“But with Monseigneur the Dauphin,” said some imprudent persons who still insisted on her going.

“Madame! Madame!” whispered a voice into her ear, “remain here; I conjure you to remain.”

The queen turned round; it was the Count de Charny.

“What!” cried she; “are you not below with all those gentlemen?”

“I was there, Madame, but have returned. The excitement down yonder is so great that it may prejudice your Majesty’s interests more than may be imagined.”

Marie Antoinette was in one of her sullen, her capricious days, with regard to De Charny. It pleased her on that day to do precisely the contrary of everything that might have been agreeable to the count.

She darted at him a disdainful look, and was about to address some disagreeable words to him, when, preventing her by a respectful gesture: —

“For mercy’s sake, Madame,” added he, “at least await the king’s advice!”

He thought by this to gain time.

“The king! the king!” exclaimed several voices; “the king has just returned from hunting.”

And this was the fact.

Marie Antoinette rose and ran to meet the king, who, still booted and covered with dust, entered the room.

“Sire,” cried she, “there is below a spectacle worthy of the King of France Come with me! come with me!”

And she took the king’s arm and dragged him away without looking at De Charny, who could not conceal his distress.

Leading her son with her left hand, she descended the staircase. A whole flood of courtiers preceded or urged her on. She reaches the door of the theatre at the moment when for the twentieth time the glasses were being emptied with shouts of “Long live the king! long live the queen!”

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Banquet given by the Guards

AT the moment when the queen appeared with the king and their son on the stage of the theatre, an immense acclamation, as sudden and as loud as the explosion of a mine, was heard from the banqueting table and boxes. The inebriated soldiers, the officers delirious with wine and enthusiasm, waving their hats and sabres above their heads, shouted, “Long live the king I long live the queen! long live the dauphin!”

The bands immediately played, “Oh, Richard! oh, my king!”

The allusion of this air had become so apparent, it so well expressed the thoughts of all present, it so faithfully translated the meaning of this banquet, that all, as soon as the air began, immediately sang the words.

The queen, in her enthusiasm, forgot that she was in the midst of inebriated men; and the king, though surprised, felt, with his accustomed sound sense, that it was no place for him, and that it was going beyond his conscientious feelings; but weak, and flattered at once more finding a popularity and zeal which he was no longer habituated to meet from his people, he, by degrees, allowed himself to be carried away by the general hilarity.

De Charny, who during the whole festival had drunk nothing but water, followed the king and queen. He had hoped that all would have terminated without their being present, and then it would have been but of slight importance; they might have disavowed, have denied everything; but he turned pale at the thought that the presence of the king and queen would become an historical fact.

But his terror was increased greatly when he saw his brother George approach the queen, and encouraged by her smile, address some words to her.

Charny was not near enough to hear the words, but by his brother’s gestures he could comprehend that he was making some request.

To this request the queen made a sign of assent, and suddenly taking from her cap the cockade she wore upon it, gave it to the young man.

De Charny shuddered, stretched forth his arms, and uttered a cry.

It was not even the white cockade — the French cockade — which the queen presented to her imprudent knight; it was the black cockade, — the Austrian cockade; the cockade which was so hateful to French eyes.

What the queen then did was no longer a mere imprudence; it was an act of absolute treason.

And yet all these poor fanatics, whom God had doomed to ruin, were so insensate that when George de Charny presented to them this black cockade, those who wore the white cockade threw it from them; those who had the tricolored one trampled it beneath their feet.

And then the excitement became so great that unless they had wished to be stifled with their kisses, or to trample under foot those who threw themselves on their knees before them, the august hosts of the Flanders regiment felt obliged to retreat towards their apartments.

All this might have been considered as a sample of French folly, which the French are always ready enough to pardon, if these orgies had not gone beyond the point of enthusiasm; but they soon went much farther.

Good royalists, when eulogizing the king, must necessarily somewhat ill-treat the nation.

That nation, in whose name so much vexation had been offered to the king that the bands had undoubtedly the right to play: —

“Pent on affliger ce qu’on aime?”

“Can we afflict those whom we love?”

It was while this air was being played that the king, the queen, and the dauphin withdrew.

They had scarcely left the theatre when, exciting each other, the boon companions metamorphosed the banqueting-room into a town taken by assault.

Upon a signal given by Monsieur de Perseval, aide-de-camp to the Count d’Estaing, the trumpets sounded a charge.

A charge, and against whom Against the absent enemy.

Against the people!

A charge! music so enchanting to French ears that it had the effect of transforming the stage of the Opera-House at Versailles into a battle-field, and the lovely ladies who were gazing from the boxes at the brilliant spectacle were the enemy.

The cry “To the assault!” was uttered by a hundred voices, and the escalade of the boxes immediately commenced. It is true that the besiegers were in a humor which inspired so little terror that the besieged held out their hands to them.

The first who reached the balcony was a grenadier in the Flanders regiment. Monsieur de Perseval tore a cross from his own breast and decorated the grenadier with it.

It is true that it was a Limbourg cross, — one of those crosses which are scarcely considered crosses.

And all this was done under the Austrian colors, with oud vociferations against the national cockade.

Here and there some hollow and sinister sounds were uttered.

But, drowned by the howling of the singers, by the hurrahs of the besiegers, by the inspiring sounds of the trumpets, these noises were borne with threatening import to the ears of the people, who were, in the first place, astonished, and then became indignant.

It was soon known outside the palace, in the square, and afterwards in the streets, that the black cockade had been substituted for the white one, and that the tricolored cockade had been trampled under foot. It was also known that a brave officer of the National Guard, who had, in spite of threats, retained his tricolored cockade, had been seriously wounded even in the king’s apartments.

Then it was vaguely rumored that one officer alone had remained motionless, sorrowful, and standing at the entrance of that immense banqueting-room converted into a circus, wherein all these madmen had been playing their insensate pranks, and had looked on, listened to, and had shown himself, loyal and intrepid soldier as he was, submissive to the all-powerful will of the majority, taking upon himself the faults of others, accepting the responsibility of all the excesses committed by the army, represented on that fatal day by the officers of the Flanders regiment; but the name of this man, wise and alone amid so many madmen, was not even pronounced; and had it been, it would never have been believed that the Count de Charny, the queen’s favorite, was the man, who, although ready to die for her, had suffered more painfully than any other from the errors she had committed.

As to the queen, she had returned to her own apartments, completely giddy from the magic of the scene.

She was soon assailed by a throng of courtiers and flatterers.

“See,” said they to her, “what is the real feeling of your troops; judge from this whether the popular fury or anarchical ideas, which has been so much spoken of, would withstand the ferocious ardor of French soldiers for monarchical ideas.” And as all these words corresponded with the secret desires of the queen, she allowed herself to be led away by these chimeras, not perceiving that De Charny had remained at a distance from her.

By degrees, however, the noises ceased; the slumber f the mind extinguished all the ignes-fatui, the phantasmagoria of intoxication. The king, besides, paid a visit to the queen at the moment she was about to retire, and let fall these words, replete with profound wisdom: —

“We shall see to-morrow.”

The imprudent man! by this saying, which to any other person but the one to whom it was addressed would have been a warning and sage counsel, he had revivified in the queen’s mind feelings of provocation and resistance which had almost subsided.

“In fact,” murmured she, when the king had left her, this flame, which was confined to the palace this evening, will spread itself in Versailles during the night, and to-morrow will produce a general conflagration throughout France. All these soldiers, all these officers, who have this evening given me such fervent pledges of their devotedness, will be called traitors, rebels to the nation, murderers of their country. They will call the chiefs of these aristocrats the subalterns of the stipendiaries of Pitt and Coburg, of the satellites of power, of the barbarians, the savages of the North.

“Each of these heads which has worn the black cockade will be doomed to be fixed to the lamp-post on the Place de Grève.

“Each of those breasts from which so loyally escaped those shouts of ‘Long live the queen!’ will, on the first popular commotion, be pierced with ignoble knives and infamous pikes.

“And it is I, again — I, always I, who have been the cause of all this! I shall have condemned to death all these brave and faithful servants, — I, the inviolable sovereign. They are hypocritically left unassailed when near me, but when away from me will be insulted from hatred.

“Oh, no, rather than be ungrateful to such a degree as that, towards my only, my last friends, — rather than be so cowardly and so heartless, I will take the fault upon myself. It is for me that all this has been done; upon me let all their anger fall. We shall then see how far their anger will be carried; we shall see up to which step of my throne the impure tide will dare to ascend.”

And to the queen, animated by these thoughts, which drove sleep from her pillow, and on which she meditated during the greater part of the night, the result of the events of the next day was no longer doubtful.

The next day came, clouded over with gloomy regrets, and ushered in by threatening murmurs.

On that day the National Guards, to whom the queen had presented their colors, came to the palace with heads cast down and averted eyes, to thank her Majesty.

It was easy to divine from the attitude of these men that they did not approve what had occurred, but on the contrary, that they would have loudly disapproved it had they dared.

They had formed part of the procession, and had gone out to form part of the Flanders regiment; they had received invitations to the banquet, and had accepted them. Only, being more citizens than soldiers, it was they who during the debauch had uttered those disapproving words which had not been heeded.

These words on the following day had become a reproach, a blame.

When they came to the palace to thank the queen, they were escorted by a great crowd.

And taking into consideration the serious nature of the circumstances, the ceremony became an imposing one.

The parties on both sides were about to discover with whom they would have to deal.

On their side, all those soldiers and officers who had so compromised themselves the evening before, were anxious to ascertain how far they would be supported by the queen in their imprudent demonstrations, and had placed themselves before that people whom they had scandalized and insulted, that they might hear the first official words which should be uttered from the palace.

The weight of the whole counter-revolution was then hanging suspended over the head of the queen.

It was, however, still within her power to withdraw from this responsibility.

But she, proud as the proudest of her race, with great firmness cast her clear and penetrating gaze on all around her, whether friends or enemies, and addressing herself in a sonorous voice to the officers of the National Guards: —

"Gentlemen," said she, "I am much pleased at having presented you with your colors. The nation and the army ought to love the king as we love the nation and the army. *I was delighted with the events of yesterday*."

Upon these words, which she emphasized in her firmest tone of voice; a murmur arose from the crowd, and loud applause re-echoed from the military ranks:

"We are supported," said the latter.

"We are betrayed," said the former.

Thus, poor queen, that fatal evening of the 1st of October was not an accidental matter; thus, unfortunate woman, you do not regret the occurrences of yesterday; you do not repent. And so far from repenting, you are delighted with them.

De Charny, who was in the centre of a group, heard with a sigh of extreme pain this justification, — nay, more: than that, this glorification of the orgies of the king's guards.

The queen, on turning away her eyes from the crowd, met those of the count; and she fixed her looks on the countenance of her lover in order to ascertain the impression her words had produced upon him.

"Am I not courageous?" was the import of this look.

"Alas, Madame, you are far more mad than courageous," replied the gloomy countenance of the count.

CHAPTER XIX.

The Wowen begin to stir

AT Versailles the court was talking heroically against the people.

At Paris, they were becoming knights-errant against the court; only the knights-errant were running about the streets.

These knights of the people were wandering about in rags, their hands upon the hilt of a sabre or the butt-end of a pistol, questioning their empty pockets or their hollow stomachs.

While at Versailles they drank too much, at Paris, alas! they did not eat enough.

There was too much wine on the table-cloths of Versailles.

Not sufficient flour in the bakers' shops at Paris.

Strange circumstances! a melancholy blindness, which now that we are accustomed, to the fall of thrones, will excite a smile of pity from politicians.

To make a counter-revolution, and provoke to a combat people who are starving!

Alas! will say History, compelled to become a materialist philosopher, no people ever fight go desperately as those who have not dined.

It would however have been very easy to have given bread to the people, and then most assuredly, the bread of Versailles would have appeared less bitter.

But the flour of Corbeil ceased to arrive. Corbeil is so far from Versailles; who, then, living with the king and queen, could have thought of Corbeil?

Unhappily, from this forgetfulness of the court, Famine, that spectre which sleeps with so much difficulty, but which so easily awakens, — Famine had descended, pale and agitated, into the streets of Paris. She listens at all the corners of the streets; she recruits her train of vagabonds and malefactors; she glues her livid face against the windows of the rich and of the public functionaries.

The men remember those commotions which had cost so much blood; they recall to mind the Bastille; they recollect Foulon, Berthier, and

Flesselles; they fear to have the opprobrious name of assassins again attached to them, and they wait.

But the women, who have as yet done nothing but suffer! Where women suffer, the suffering is triple, — for the child, who cries and who is unjust, because it has not a consciousness of the cause; for the child who says to its mother, “Why do you not give me bread?” for the husband, who, gloomy and taciturn, leaves the house in the morning to return to it in the evening still more gloomy and taciturn; and finally, for herself, the painful echo of conjugal and maternal sufferings. The women burn to do something in their turn; they wish to serve their country in their own way.

Besides, was it not a woman who brought about the 1st of October at Versailles?

It was therefore for the women, in their turn, to bring about the 5th of October at Paris.

Gilbert and Billot were sitting in the Café de Foy, in the Palais Royal. It was at the Café de Foy that

motions were proposed. Suddenly the door of the coffeehouse is thrown open; and a woman enters it much agitated. She denounces the black and white cockades which from Versailles have invaded Paris; she proclaims the public danger.

It will be remembered that Charny had said to the queen: —

“Madame, there will be really much to apprehend when the women begin to stir themselves.”

This was also the opinion of Gilbert.

Therefore, on seeing that the women were actually bestirring themselves, he turned to Billot, uttering only these five words: —

“To the Hôtel de Ville!”

Since the conversation which had taken place between Billot, Gilbert, and Pitou, — and in consequence of which Pitou had returned to Villers-Cotterets with young Sebastien Gilbert, — Billot obeyed Gilbert upon a single word, a gesture, a sign; for he had fully comprehended that if he was strength, Gilbert was intelligence.

They both rushed out of the coffee-house, crossed the garden of the Palais Royal diagonally, and then through the Cour des Fontaines reached the Rue St. Honored.

When they were near the corn-market, they met a young girl coming out of the Rue Bourdonnais, who was beating a drum.

Gilbert stopped astonished.

"What can this mean?" said he.

"Zounds! Doctor, don't you see," said Billot, "it is a pretty girl who is beating a drum, — and really, not badly, on my faith."

"She must have lost something," said a passer-by.

"She is very pale," rejoined Billot.

"Ask her what she wants," said Gilbert.

"Ho, my pretty girl!" cried Billot, "what are you beating that drum for?"

"I am hungry," she replied in a weak but shrill voice.

And she continued on her way beating the drum.

Gilbert had waited.

"Oh, oh!" cried he, "this is becoming terrible."

And he looked more attentively at the women who were following the young girl with the drum.

They were haggard, staggering, despairing.

Among these women there were some who had not tasted food for thirty hours.

From among these women, every now and then, would break forth a cry which was threatening even from its very feebleness, for it could be divined that it issued from famished mouths.

"To Versailles!" they cried, "to Versailles!"

And on their way they made signs to all the women Whom they perceived in the houses, and they called to all the women who were at their windows.

A carriage drove by; two ladies were in that carriage. They put their heads out of the windows and began to laugh.

The escort of the drum-beater stopped. About twenty women seized the horses, and then, rushing to the coach-doors, made the two ladies alight and join their group, in spite of their recriminations and a resistance which two or three hard knocks on the head soon terminated.

Behind these women, who proceeded but slowly, on account of their stopping to recruit as they went along, walked a man with his hands in his pockets.

This man, whose face was thin and pale, of tall, lank stature, was dressed in an iron-gray coat, black waistcoat, and small-clothes; he wore a small shabby three-cornered hat, placed obliquely over his forehead.

A long sword beat against his thin but muscular legs.

He followed, looking, listening, devouring everything with his piercing eyes, which rolled beneath his black-eyelids.

"Hey! why, yes," cried Billot, "I certainly know that face; I have seen it at every riot."

"It is Maillard, the usher," said Gilbert.

"Ah, yes! that's he, — the man who walked over the plank after me at the Bastille; he was more skilful than I was, for he did not fall into the ditch."

Maillard disappeared with the women at the corner of a street.

Billot felt a great desire to do as Maillard had done; but Gilbert dragged him on to the Hôtel deVille.

It was very certain that the gathering would go there, whether it was a gathering of men or of women. Instead of following the course of the river, he went straight to its mouth.

They knew at the Hôtel de Ville what was going on in Paris; but they scarcely noticed it. Of what importance was it, in fact, to the phlegmatic Bailly, or to the aristocrat Lafayette, that a woman had taken it into her head to beat a drum? It was anticipating the carnival, and that was all.

But when at the heels of this woman who was beating the drum, they saw two or three thousand women; when at the sides of this crowd which was increasing. every minute, they saw advancing a no less considerable troop of men, smiling in a sinister manner, and carrying their hideous weapons; when they understood that these men were smiling at the anticipation of the evil which these women were about to commit, an evil the more irremediable from their knowing that the public forces would not attempt to stop the evil before it was committed, and that the legal powers would not punish afterwards, — they began to comprehend the serious nature of the circumstances.

These men smiled, because the ill they had not dared to commit, they would gladly see committed by the most inoffensive half of the human kind.

In about half an hour there were ten thousand women assembled on the Place de Grève.

These ladies, seeing that their numbers were sufficient, began to deliberate with their arms akimbo.

The deliberation was by no means a calm one; those who deliberated were for the most part porteresses, market-women, and prostitutes. Many of these women were royalists, and far from thinking of doing any harm to the king and queen, would have allowed themselves to be killed to serve them. The noise which was made by this strange discussion might have been heard across the river, and by the silent towers of Notre-Dame, which, after seeing so many things, were preparing themselves to see things still more curious.

The result of the deliberation was as follows: —

“Let us just go and burn the Hôtel de Ville, where so many musty papers are made out to prevent our eating our daily food.”

And in the Hôtel de Ville they were at that moment trying a baker who had sold bread to the poor under weight.

It will be easily comprehended that the dearer bread is, the more profitable is every operation of this nature; only the more lucrative it is, the more dangerous.

In consequence, the admirers of lamp-justice were only waiting for the baker with a new rope.

The guards of the Hôtel de Ville wished to save the unhappy culprit, and used all their strength to effect it. But for some time past it has been seen that the result but ill accorded with these philanthropic intentions.

The women rushed on these guards, dispersed them, made a forcible entry into the Hôtel de Ville; and the sack began.

They wished to throw into the Seine all they could find, and burn on the spot all that they could not carry away.

The men were therefore to be cast into the water, the building itself set fire to.

This was rather heavy work.

There was a little of everything in the Hôtel de Ville.

In the first place, there were three hundred electors.

There were also the assistants.

There were the mayors of the different districts.

“It would take a long time to throw all these men into the water,” said a sensible woman, who was in a hurry to conclude the affair.

“They deserve it richly, notwithstanding,” observed another.

“Yes; but we have no time to spare.”

“Well, then,” cried another, “the quickest way will be to burn them all, and everything with them.”

They ran about looking for torches, and to get fagots to set fire to the municipality. While this was doing, in order not to lose time, they caught an abbé, the Abbé Lefèvre d’Ormesson, and strung him up.

Fortunately for the abbé, the man in the gray coat was there; he cut the rope, and the poor abbé fell from a height of seventeen feet, sprained one of his feet, and limped away amid shouts of laughter from these Megæras.

The reason for the abbé being allowed to get away was that the torches were lighted, and the incendiaries had already these torches in their hands, and they were about to set fire to the archives; in two minutes the whole place would have been in a blaze.

Suddenly the man in the gray coat rushed forward and snatched torches and fagots out of the women’s hands; the women resisted. The man laid about him right and left with the lighted torches, setting fire to their petticoats; and while they were occupied in extinguishing them, he extinguished the papers which had already been ignited.

Who, then, is this man who thus opposes the frightful will of ten thousand furious creatures?

Why then, do they allow themselves to be governed by this man? They had half hanged the Abbé Lefèvre; they could hang that man more effectually, seeing that he would be no longer there to prevent them from hanging whom they pleased.

Guided by this reasoning, a frantic chorus arose from them, threatening him with death; and to these threats deeds were added.

The women surrounded the man with the gray coat, and threw a rope round his neck.

But Billot hastened forward. Billot was determined to render the same service to Maillard which Maillard had rendered the abbé.

He grasped the rope, which he cut into three pieces with a well-tempered and sharp knife, which at that moment served its owner to cut a rope, but which in an extremity, wielded as it was by a powerful arm, might serve him for another purpose.

And while cutting the rope and getting piece by piece of it as he could, Billot cried: —

“Why, you unfortunate wretches, you do not then recognize one of the conquerors of the Bastille, who passed over the plank to effect the capitulation, while I lay floundering in the moat Do you not recognize Monsieur Maillard?”

At that well-known and redoubtable name all these women at once paused; they looked at one another, and wiped the perspiration from their brows.

The work had been a difficult one; and although they were in the month of October, they might well perspire in accomplishing it.

"A conqueror of the Bastille! and that conqueror Maillard! Maillard, the usher of the Châtelet! Long live Maillard!"

Threats are immediately turned into caresses; they embrace Maillard, and all cry, "Long live Maillard!"

Maillard exchanged a hearty shake of the hand and a look with Billot.

The shake of the hand implied, "We are friends!"

The look implied, "Should you ever stand in need of me, you may calculate upon me."

Maillard had resumed an influence over these women, which was so much the greater from their reflecting that they had committed some trifling wrong towards him, and which he had to pardon.

But Maillard was an old sailor on the sea of popular fury; he knew the ocean of the faubourgs, which is raised by a breath, and calmed again by a word.

He knew how to speak to these human waves, when they allow you time enough to speak.

Moreover, the moment was auspicious for being heard. They had all remained silent around Maillard.

Maillard would not allow that Parisian women should destroy the municipal authorities, — the only power to protect them; he would not allow them to annihilate the civic registers, which proved that their children were not all bastards.

The harangue of Maillard was of so novel a nature, and delivered in so loud and sarcastic a tone, that it produced a great effect.

No one should be killed; nothing should be burned.

But they insist on going to Versailles. It is there that exists the evil. It is there that they pass their nights in orgies, while Paris is starving. It is Versailles that devours everything. Corn and flour are deficient in Paris, because, instead of coming to Paris, they are sent direct from Corbeil to Versailles.

It would not be thus if the "great baker," the "baker's wife," and the "baker's little boy" were at Paris.

It was under these nicknames that they designated the king, the queen, and the dauphin, — those natural distributors of the people's bread.

They would go to Versailles.

Since these women are organized into troops, since they have muskets, cannon, and gunpowder, — and those who have not muskets nor gunpowder, have pikes and pitchforks, — they ought to have a general.

“And why not? the National Guard has one.”

Lafayette is the general of the men.

Maillard is the general of the women.

Monsieur de Lafayette commands his do-little grenadiers, which appear to be an army of reserve, for they do so little when there is so much to be done.

Maillard will command the active army. Without a smile, without a wink, he accepts his appointment.

Maillard is general commandant of the women of Paris.

The campaign will not be a long one; but it will be decisive.

CHAPTER XX.

Maillard a General

IT was really an army that Maillard commanded.

It had cannon, deprived of carriages and wheels, it is true; but they had been placed on carts. It had muskets, many of which were deficient in locks and triggers, it is true; but every one had a bayonet.

It had a quantity of other weapons, very awkward ones, it is true; but they were weapons.

It had gunpowder, which was carried in pocket-handkerchiefs, in caps, and in pockets; and in the midst of these living cartouche-boxes walked the artillery-men with their lighted matches.

That the whole army was not blown into the air during this extraordinary journey, was certainly a perfect miracle.

Maillard at one glance appreciated the feelings of his army. He saw that it would be of no use to keep it on the square where it had assembled, nor to confine it within the walls of Paris, but to lead it on to Versailles, and once arrived there to prevent the harm which it might attempt to do.

This difficult, this heroic task, Maillard was determined to accomplish.

And in consequence, Maillard descends the steps and takes the drum which was hanging from the shoulders of the young girl.

Dying with hunger, the poor young girl has no longer strength to carry it. She gives up the drum, glides along a wall, and falls with her head against a post.

A gloomy pillow, — the pillow of hunger.

Maillard asks her name. She replies that it is Madeleine Chambry. Her occupation had been carving in wood for churches. But who now thinks of endowing churches with those beautiful ornaments in wood, those beautiful statues, those magnificent basso-relievos, the master-pieces of the fifteenth century?

Dying with hunger, she had become a flower-girl in the Palais Royal.

But who thinks of purchasing flowers when money is wanting to buy even bread? Flowers, those stars which shine in the heaven of peace and abundance, — flowers are withered by storms of wind and revolutions.

Being no longer able to sculpture her fruits in oak, being no longer able to sell her roses, her jessamines, and lilacs, Madeleine Chambry took a drum, and beat the terrible reveille of hunger.

She also must go to Versailles, — she who had assembled all this gloomy deputation; only, as she is too feeble to walk, she is to be carried there in a cart.

When they arrive at Versailles, they will ask that she may be admitted into the palace with twelve other women. She is to be the orator; famishing, she will there plead before the king the cause of all those that are starving.

This idea of Maillard was much applauded.

And thus by a word Maillard had at once changed every hostile feeling.

They did not before this know why they were going to Versailles; they did not know what they were going to do there.

But now they know; they know that a deputation of twelve women, with Madeleine Chambry at their head, is going to supplicate the king, in the name of hunger, to take compassion on his people.

Somewhere about seven thousand women were there assembled. They commence their march, going along the quays.

But on arriving at the Tuileries, loud shouts were heard.

Maillard jumped upon a post in order to be seen by the whole of his army.

“What is it that you want?” he asked them.

“We wish to pass through the Tuileries.”

“That is impossible,” replied Maillard.

“And why is it impossible?” cried seven thousand voices.

“Because the Tuileries is the king’s house and its gardens the king’s; because to pass through them without the king’s permission, would be to insult the king, — and more than that, it would be attacking, in the king’s person, the liberty of all.”

Maillard went to the Swiss, his cocked hat in his hand.

“My friend,” said he, “will you allow these ladies to go through the Tuileries? They will only go through the archway, and will not do any injury to the plants or trees.”

The only answer the Swiss gave was to draw his long rapier, and to rush upon Maillard.

Maillard drew his sword, which was full a foot shorter, and their weapons crossed.

While they were tilting at each other, a woman went behind the Swiss, and gave him a fearful blow upon the head with a broom-handle, and laid him at Maillard's feet.

At the same time another woman was about to run the Swiss through the body with a thrust of her bayonet.

Maillard sheathes his sword, takes that of the Swiss under one arm, the musket of the woman under the other, picks up his hat, which had fallen to the ground during the struggle, puts it upon his head, and then leads his victorious troops through the Tuileries, where, in fulfilment of the promise he had made, no sort of damage was committed by them.

Let us, therefore, allow them to continue their way quietly through the Cours la Reine, and go on towards Sèvres, where they separated into two bands, and let us return to what was going on at Paris.

These seven thousand women had not very nearly drowned the electors, hanged the Abbé Lefevre and Maillard, and burned the Hôtel de Ville, without making a certain degree of noise.

On hearing this noise, which had been re-echoed even in the most remote quarters of the capital, Lafayette had hastened towards the Hôtel de Ville.

He was holding a sort of review at the Champ de Mars. He had been on horseback from eight o'clock in the morning; he reached the square of the Hôtel de Ville just as the clock was striking twelve.

The caricatures of those days represented Lafayette as a centaur, the body of which was the famous white horse which had become proverbial. The head was that of the commandant of the National Guard.

From the commencement of the Revolution, Lafayette spoke on horseback, Lafayette eat on horseback, Lafayette gave all his orders on horseback.

It often even happened that he slept on horseback.

And therefore when by chance he could sleep on his bed, Lafayette slept soundly.

When Lafayette reached the Quay Pelletier, he was stopped by a man who had been riding at full gallop on a swift horse.

This man was Gilbert; he was going to Versailles; he was going to forewarn the king of the visit with which he was threatened, and to place himself at his orders.

In two words he related all that had happened to Lafayette.

After that he rode off again at full speed.

Lafayette went on towards the Hôtel de Ville.

Gilbert went towards Versailles; only as the women were going on the right bank of the Seine, he took the left side of the river.

The square before the Hôtel de Ville having been vacated by the women, was soon afterwards filled with men.

These men were National Guards, receiving pay or not receiving it; old French guards, above all, who, having gone over to the people, had lost their privileges of king's guards, — privileges which had been inherited by the Swiss and the body-guards.

To the noise made by the women had succeeded the noise of the alarm-bell and the drums, calling the people to arms.

Lafayette made his way through the crowd, alighted from his horse at the foot of the steps, and without paying any attention to the acclamations, mingled with threats, excited by his presence, he began to dictate a letter to the king upon the insurrection which had taken place that morning.

He had got to the sixth line of his letter, when the door of the secretary's office was violently thrown open.

Lafayette raised his eyes. A deputation of grenadiers demanded to be received by the general.

Lafayette made a sign to the deputation that they might come in.

They entered the room.

The grenadier who had been appointed spokesman of the deputation advanced to the table.

"General," said he, in a firm voice, "we are deputed by ten companies of grenadiers. We do not believe that you are a traitor; but we are betrayed by the Government. It is time that all this should come to an end. We cannot turn our bayonets against women who are asking us for bread. The Provisioning Committee is either peculating, or it is incompetent; in either case, it is necessary that it should be changed. The people are unhappy; the source of their unhappiness is at Versailles. It is necessary to go there to find the king and bring him to Paris. The Flanders regiment must be exterminated, as well as the body-guards, who have dared to trample under foot the national cockade. If the king be too weak to wear the crown, let him abdicate; we will crown his son. A council of regency will be nominated, and all will then go well."

Lafayette gazed at the speaker with astonishment. He had witnessed disturbances; he had wept over assassinations; but this was the first time that the breath of revolution had in reality been personally addressed to him.

This possibility that the people saw of being able to do without the king amazed him; it did more, it confounded him.

“How is this?” cried he.” Have you, then, formed the project of making war upon the king, and of thus compelling him to abandon us?”

“General,” replied the spokesman, “we love and we respect the king; we should be much hurt should he leave us, for we owe him much. But, in short, should he leave us, we have the dauphin.”

“Gentlemen! gentlemen!” cried Lafayette, “beware of what you are doing; you are attacking the crown, and it is my duty not to allow such a step!”

“General,” replied the National Guard, bowing, “we would for you shed the last drop of our blood. But the people are unhappy; the source of the evil is at Versailles. We must go to Versailles and bring the king to Paris. It is the people’s will.”

Lafayette saw that it was necessary to sacrifice his own feelings; and this was a necessity from which he never shrank.

He descends into the centre of the square, and wishes to harangue the people; but cries of “To Versailles! To Versailles!” drown his voice.

Suddenly a great tumult was heard proceeding from the Rue de la Vannerie. It is Bailly, who in his turn is coming to the Hôtel de Ville.

At the sight of Bailly, cries of “Bread! Bread! To Versailles!” burst from every side.

Lafayette, on foot, lost amid the crowd, feels that the tide continues rising higher and higher, and will completely swallow him up.

He presses through the crowd, in order to reach his horse, with the same ardor that a shipwrecked mariner swims to reach a rock.

At last he grasps his bridle, vaults on his charger’s back, and urges him on towards the entrance of the Hôtel de Ville; but the way is completely closed to him. Walls of men have grown up between him and it.

“Zounds, General!” cry these men, “you must remain with us.”

At the same time tremendous shouts are heard of “To Versailles! To Versailles!”

Lafayette wavers, hesitates. Yes, undoubtedly, by going to Versailles he may be very useful to the king; but will he be able to master and restrain this crowd who are urging him to Versailles? Will he be able to command these billows which have swept him from his feet, and against which he feels that he will now have to combat for his own safety?

Suddenly a man descends the steps, pushes through the crowd, a letter in his hand, and makes such good use of his feet and elbows, particularly the latter, that he at length reaches Lafayette.

This man was the ever indefatigable Billot.

“Here, General,” said he, “this comes from the Three Hundred.”

It was thus the electors were called.

Lafayette broke the seal, and began to read it to himself; but twenty thousand voices at once cried out:

“The letter! the letter!”

Lafayette was therefore compelled to read the letter aloud. He makes a sign to request that they will be silent. Instantaneously, and as by a miracle, silence succeeds to the immense tumult; and Lafayette reads the following letter, not one word of which was lost by the people: —

“Seeing the state of circumstances and the desire of the people, and on the *representation* of the commandant-general that it was impossible to refuse, the electors assembled in council authorize the commandant-general, and even order him, to repair to Versailles.

“Four commissaries of the district will accompany him.”

Poor Latayette had absolutely represented nothing to the electors, who were by no means disinclined to leave some portion of the responsibility of the events which were about to happen on his shoulders. But the people, — they believed that he had really made representations, and this coincided so precisely with their views that they made the air ring with their shouts of “Long live Lafayette!”

Lafayette turned pale, but in his turn repeated, “To Versailles”

Fifteen thousand men followed him, with a more silent enthusiasm, but which was at the same time more terrible than that of the women who had gone forward as the advanced guard.

All these people were to assemble again at Versailles, to ask the king for the crumbs which fell from the table of the body-guards during the orgies of the 1st of October.

CHAPTER XXI.

Versailles

AS usual, they were completely ignorant at Versailles of what was going on at Paris.

After the scenes which we have described, and on the occurrence of which the queen had openly congratulated herself, her Majesty was resting herself after her fatigue.

She had an army; she had her devotees; she had counted her enemies; she wished to begin the contest.

Had she not the defeat of the 14th of July to avenge? Had she not the king’s journey to Paris — a journey from which he had returned with the tricolored cockade in his hat — to forget, and to make her court forget it also?

Poor woman! she but little expected the journey which she herself would be shortly compelled to take.

Since her altercation with Charny, she had scarcely spoken to him. She affected to treat Andrée with her former friendliness, which had for a time been deadened in her heart, but which was forever extinguished in that of her rival.

As to Charny, she never turned towards or looked at him, but when she was compelled to address herself to him upon matters regarding his service, or to give him an order.

It was not a family disgrace; for on the very morning on which the Parisians were to leave Paris to come to Versailles, the queen was seen talking affectionately with young George de Charny, the second of the three brothers, who, in contradiction to Olivier, had given such warlike counsels to the queen on the arrival of the news of the capture of the Bastille.

And in fact, at nine in the morning, as the young officer was crossing the gallery to announce to the huntsman that the king intended going out, Marie Antoinette, returning from Mass in the chapel, saw him, and called him to her.

“Where are you running thus, sir?” said she to him.

“As soon as I perceived your Majesty I ran no longer,” replied George; “on the contrary, I instantly stopped, and I was waiting humbly for the honor you have done me in addressing me.”

“That does not prevent you, sir, from replying to my question, and telling me whither you are going.”

“Madame,” replied George, “I am on duty to-day, and form part of the escort. His Majesty hunts to-day; and I am going to the huntsman to make arrangements for the meet.”

“Ah! the king hunts again to-day,” said the queen, looking at the big dark clouds which were rolling on from Paris towards Versailles. “He is wrong to do so. The weather appears to be threatening; does it not, Andrée?”

“Yes, Madame,” absently replied the Countess de Charny.

“Are you not of that opinion, sir?”

“I am so, Madame; but such is the king’s will.”

“May the king’s will be done, in the woods and on the highroads!” replied the queen, with that gayety of manner which was habitual with her,and of which neither the sorrows of the heart nor political events could ever deprive her.

Then turning towards Andrée: —

“It is but just that he should have this amusement,” said the queen to her in a whisper.

And then aloud to George: —

“Can you tell me, sir, where the king intends hunting?”

“In the Meudon wood, Madame.”

“Well, then, accompany him, and watch carefully over his safety.”

At this moment the Count de Charny had entered the room. He smiled kindly at Andrée, and shaking his head, ventured to say to the queen: —

“That is a recommendation which my brother will not fail to remember, Madame, not in the midst of the king’s pleasures, but in the midst of his dangers.”

At the sound of the voice which had struck upon her ear, before her eyes had warned her of the presence of Charny, Marie Antoinette started, and turning round:

“I should have been much astonished,” said she, with disdainful harshness, “if such a saying had not proceeded from the Count Olivier de Charny.”

“And why so, Madame?” respectfully inquired the count.

"Because it prophesies misfortune, sir."

Andrée turned pale on seeing that the color fled from her husband's cheeks.

He bowed without offering a reply.

Then, on a look from his wife, who appeared to be amazed at his being so patient: —

"I am really extremely unfortunate," he said, "since I no longer know how to speak to the queen without offending her."

The "no longer" was emphasized in the same manner as a skilful actor would emphasize the more important syllables.

The ear of the queen was too well exercised not to perceive at once the stress which Charny had laid upon his words.

"No longer!" she exclaimed sharply, "*no longer;* what mean you by *no longer*?"

"I have again spoken unfortunately, it would appear," said De Charny, unaffectedly.

And he exchanged a look with Andrée, which the queen this time perceived.

She in her turn became pale, and then her teeth firmly set together with rage.

"The saying is bad," she exclaimed, "when the intention is bad."

"The ear is hostile," said Charny, "when the thought is hostile."

And after this retort, which was more just than respectful, he remained silent.

"I shall wait to reply," said the queen, "until the Count de Charny is more happy in his attacks."

"And I," said De Charny, "shall wait to attack until the queen shall be more fortunate than she has lately been in servants."

Andrée eagerly seized her husband's hand, and was preparing to leave the room with him.

A glance from the queen restrained her. She had observed this gesture.

"But, in fine, what has *your husband* to say to me?" asked the queen.

"He had intended telling your Majesty that having been sent to Paris yesterday by the King, he had found the city in a most extraordinary state of ferment."

"Again! cried the queen; "and on what account The Parisians have taken the Bastille, and are now occupied in demolishing it; what can they require more? Answer me, Monsieur de Charny."

"That is true, Madame," replied the count; "but as they cannot eat the stones, they are calling out for bread, — they say that they are hungry."

"That they are hungry! that they are hungry!" exclaimed the queen; "and what would they have us do in that respect?"

"There was a time," observed De Charny, "when the queen was the first to compassionate and assuage the sufferings of the people; there was a time when she would ascend even to the garrets of the poor, and the prayers of the poor ascended from the garrets to God with blessings on her head."

"Yes," bitterly replied the queen; "and I was well rewarded, was I not, for the compassion which I felt for the misery of others? One of the greatest misfortunes which ever befell me was in consequence of having ascended to one of these garrets."

"Because your Majesty was once deceived," said De Charny, "because she bestowed her favors and her grace upon a miserable wretch, ought she to consider all human nature upon a level with that infamous woman? Ah, Madame! Madame! how at that time were you beloved!"

The queen darted a furious glance at De Charny.

"But, finally," she said, "what did actually take place in Paris yesterday? Tell me only things that you have yourself seen, sir; I wish to be sure of the truth of your words."

"What I saw, Madame! I saw a portion of the population crowded together on the quays, vainly awaiting the arrival of flour. I saw others standing in long files at the bakers' doors, uselessly waiting for bread. What I saw was a starving people, — husbands looking sorrowfully at their wives, mothers looking sorrowfully at their children. What I saw! I saw clinched and threatening hands held up in the direction of Versailles. Ah, Madame! Madame! the dangers of which I just now spoke to you are approaching, — the opportunity of dying for your Majesty; a happiness which my brother and myself will be the first to claim. I fear the day is not far distant when it will be offered to us."

The queen turned her back to De Charny with an impatient gesture, and went to a window and placed her pale though burning face against a pane of glass. This window looked into the marble courtyard.

She had scarcely done this when she was seen to start.

"Andrée!" cried she, "come here and see who is this horseman coming towards us; he appears to be the bearer of very urgent news."

Andrée went to the window, but almost immediately recoiled a step from it, turning very pale.

"Ah, Madame!" cried she, in a tone of reproach.

De Charny hastened towards the window; he had minutely observed all that had passed.

"That horseman," said he, looking alternately at the queen and at Andrée, "is Doctor Gilbert."

"Ah, that is true," said the queen; and in a tone which rendered it impossible, even to Andrée, to judge whether the queen had drawn her to the window in one of those fits of feminine vengeance to which poor Marie Antoinette sometimes gave way, or whether her eyes, weakened by watching and the tears she had shed, could no longer recognize, at a certain distance, even those whom it was her interest to recognize.

An ice-like silence immediately ensued; and the three principal characters in this scene interrogated and replied to one another merely by looks.

It was in fact Gilbert who was coming, bringing with him the untoward news which De Charny had predicted.

Although he had hurriedly alighted from his horse, although he had rapidly ascended the staircase, although the three agitated faces of the queen, Andrée, and De Charny were turned towards the door which led to this staircase, and by which the doctor ought to have entered the room, this door did not open.

There was, then, on the part of these three persons an anxious suspense of some minutes.

Suddenly, a door on the opposite side of the room was opened, and an officer came in.

"Madame," said he, "Doctor Gilbert, who has come for the purpose of conversing with the king on important and urgent matters, demands to have the honor of being received by your Majesty, the king having set out for Meudon an hour ago."

"Let him come in!" said the queen, fixing on the door a look which was firm even to harshness; while Andrée, as if naturally she sought to find a supporter in her husband, drew back and supported herself on the count's arm.

Gilbert soon made his appearance on the threshold of the door.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Fifth October

GILBERT cast a glance on the several personages whom we have placed on the stage, and advancing respectfully towards Marie Antoinette: —

“Will the queen permit me,” said he, “in the absence of her august husband, to communicate to her the news of which I am the bearer?”

“Speak, sir!” said Marie Antoinette. “On seeing you coming at so rapid a pace, I summoned up all my fortitude, for I felt well assured that you were bringing me some fearful news.”

“Would the queen have preferred that I should have allowed her to be surprised Forewarned, the queen, with that sound judgment, that elevated mind by which she is characterized, would advance to meet the danger; and then perhaps the danger might retreat before her.”

“Let us see, sir; what is this danger?”

“Madame, seven or eight thousand women have set out from Paris, and are coming armed to Versailles.”

“Seven or eight thousand women?” cried the queen, with an air of contempt.

“Yes; but they will, most likely, have stopped on the way; and perhaps, on arriving here, their numbers will amount to fifteen or twenty thousand.”

“And for what purpose are they coming?”

“They are hungry, Madame, and they are coming to ask the king for bread.”

The queen turned towards De Charny.

“Alas, Madame,” said the count, “that which I predicted has now happened.”

“What is to be done?” asked Marle Antoinette.

“The king should, in the first place, be informed of it,” said Gilbert.

The queen turned quickly towards him.

“The king! oh, no!” she cried, “what good purpose would it answer to expose him to such a meeting?”

This cry burst forth from the heart of Marie Antoinette almost involuntarily. It was a convincing manifestation of the intrepidity of the queen, of her consciousness of possessing a firmness which was altogether personal to her, and at the same time of her consciousness of her husband's weakness, which she cared not to admit even to herself, and, more particularly, to reveal to strangers.

But was De Charny a stranger and Gilbert, was he a stranger?

No; did not those two men, on the contrary, appear to be elected by Providence, the one to be the safeguard of the queen, the other to protect the king?

De Charny replied at once to the queen and to Gilbert; he recovered all his self-control, for he had made the sacrifice of his pride.

"Madame," said he, "Monsieur Gilbert is right; it is necessary that the king should be informed of this occurrence. The king is still beloved; the king will present himself to these women. He will harangue them; he will disarm them."

"But," observed the queen, "who will undertake to give this information to the king? The road between this and Meudon is no doubt already intercepted, and it would be a dangerous enterprise."

"The king is in the forest of Meudon?"

"Yes; and it is probable the roads — "

"Your Majesty will deign to consider me as a military man," said De Charny, unostentatiously; "a soldier, and one whose duty it is to expose his life — "

And having said these words, he did not wait for a reply; he listened not to the sigh which escaped the queen, but ran rapidly down the staircase, jumped upon one of the guards' horses, and hastened towards Meudon, accompanied by two cavaliers.

He had scarcely disappeared, and had replied by a sign to a farewell gesture which Andrée addressed to him from the window, when a distant noise, which resembled the roaring of the waves in a storm, made the queen listen anxiously. This noise appeared to proceed from the farthest trees on the Paris road, which, from the apartment in which the queen was, could be seen towering above the fog at some distance from the last houses of Versailles.

The horizon soon became as threatening to the eye as it had been to the ear; a hail-shower began to checker the dark gray haze.

And yet notwithstanding the threatening state of the heavens, crowds of persons were entering Versailles.

Messengers arrived continually at the palace.

Every messenger brought intelligence of numerous columns being on their way from Paris; and every one thought of the joys and the easy triumphs of the preceding days, — some of them feeling at heart a regret that was akin to remorse, others an instinctive terror.

The soldiers were anxious, and, looking at one another, slowly took up their arms. Like drunken people, who demoralized by the visible uneasiness of their soldiers and the murmurs of the crowd, with difficulty breathed in this atmosphere, impregnated as it was with misfortunes which were about to be attributed to them.

On their side, the body-guards — somewhere about three hundred men — coldly mounted their horses, and with that hesitation which seizes men of the sword when they feel they have to deal with enemies whose mode of attack is unknown to them.

What could they do against women, who had set out threatening and with arms, but who had arrived disarmed, and who could no longer raise even their hands, so enervated were they with fatigue, so emaciated were they by hunger?

And yet, at all hazards, they formed themselves into line, drew their sabres, and waited.

At last the women made their appearance; they had come by two roads. Halfway between Paris and Versailles, they had separated, one party coming by St. Cloud, the other by Sèvres.

Before they separated, eight loaves had been divided among them; it was all that could be found at Sèvres.

Thirty-two pounds of bread for seven thousand persons!

On arriving at Versailles, they could scarcely drag themselves along. More than three fourths of them had scattered their weapons along the road. Maillard had induced the remaining fourth to leave their arms in the first houses they came to in Versailles.

Then, on entering into the town: —

“Come, now,” said he, “that they may not doubt that we are friends to royalty, let us sing, ‘Vive Henri Quatre!’“

And in a dying tone, and with voices that had not strength enough to ask for bread, they chanted the royal national air.

The astonishment was therefore great at the palace when, instead of shouts and threats, they heard them singing the loyal air; when, above all, they saw the female choristers staggering (for hunger has somewhat the effect of drunkenness) and these wretched women leaning their haggard, pale, and livid faces, begrimed with dirt, down which the rain and perspiration were streaming, against the gilded railings, — faces which appeared to be more than doubled by the number of hands which grasped those railings for support.

After a time, would now and then escape from these horribly fantastic groups lugubrious howling; in the midst of these agonized faces would appear eyes flashing lightning.

Also, from time to time, all these hands, abandoning the railings which sustained them, were thrust through the space between them, and stretched forth towards the palace.

Some of them were open and trembling; these were soliciting.

Others were clinched and nervously agitated; these were threatening.

Oh, the picture was a gloomy one!

The rain and mud, — so much for the heavens and earth.

Hunger and threatening gestures, — so much for the besiegers.

Pity and doubt, — such were the feelings of the defenders.

While waiting the return of Louis XVI., agitated but firmly resolved, the queen gave orders for the defence of the palace. By degrees, the courtiers, the officers, and the high dignitaries of the State grouped themselves around her.

In the midst of them she perceived Monsieur de Saint Priest, the minister for Paris.

“Go and inquire, sir,” said she to him, “what it is these people want.”

Monsieur de Saint-Priest immediately went down the staircase, crossed the courtyard, and approached the railing.

“What is it that you demand?” said he to the women.

“Bread! bread! bread!” simultaneously cried a thousand voices.

“Bread!” replied Monsieur de Saint-Priest, impatiently; “when you had but one master, you never were in want of bread. Now that you have twelve hundred, you see to what they have reduced you.”

And Monsieur de Saint-Priest withdrew amid the threatening shouts of these famished creatures, giving strict orders that the gates should be kept closed.

But a deputation advances, before which it is absolutely necessary that the gates should be thrown open.

Maillard had presented himself to the National Assembly in the name of the women; he had succeeded in persuading them that the president with a deputation of twelve women should proceed to the palace to make a statement to the king as to the position of affairs.

At the moment when the deputation, with Mounier at its head, left the Assembly, the king returned to the palace at full gallop, entering it by the stable-yard.

De Charny had found him in the forest of Mendon.

“Ah! it is you, sir,” cried the king, on perceiving him. “Is it I whom you are seeking?”

“Yes, Sire.”

“What, then, has happened? You seem to have ridden hard.”

“Sire, there are at this moment ten thousand women at Versailles, who have come from Paris, and who are crying for bread.”

The king shrugged his shoulders, but it was more from a feeling of compassion than of disdain.

“Alas!” said he, “if I had bread for them, I should not have waited their coming from Paris to ask it of me.”

But without making any farther observation, he cast a mournful look towards the place where the hounds were continuing their chase of the stag which he was obliged to abandon.

“Well, then, sir, let, us go to Versailles,” said he.

And he rode off towards Versailles.

He had just arrived there, as we have said, when frightful cries were heard proceeding from the Place d’Armes.

“What is the meaning of that?” inquired the king.

“Sire,” cried Gilbert, entering the room, pale as death, “they are your guards, who, led on by Monsieur George de Charny, are charging upon the president of the National Assembly, and a deputation which he is leading here,”

“Impossible!” exclaimed the king.

“Listen to the cries of those whom they are assassinating! Look! look at the people who are flying in terror!”

“Let the gates be thrown open!” cried the king. “I will receive the deputation.”

“But, Sire!” exclaimed the queen.

“Let the gates be opened,” said Louis XVI.; “the palaces of kings ought to be considered as asylums.”

“Alas! excepting perhaps for kings themselves,” said the queen.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Evening of the Fifth and Sixth of October

DE CHARNY and Gilbert rushed downstairs.

“In the name of the king!” cried the one.

“In the name of the queen!” cried the other.

And both of them added: —

“Open the gates!”

But this order was not executed quickly enough to prevent the president of the National Assembly from being thrown down in the courtyard and trampled under foot.

Two of the women forming the deputation were wounded close by his side.

Gilbert and De Charny threw themselves into the crowd. These two men — the one proceeding from the highest class of society, the other from the lowest-met, working in the same cause.

The one wishes to save the queen, from his ardent love for the queen; the other wishes to save the king, from his love for royalty.

On the gates being opened, the women rushed into the courtyard, and had thrown themselves into the ranks of the body-guards and those of the Flanders regiment. They threaten; they entreat; they caress. Who could resist women when they implore those whom they address in the name of their sisters, their mothers?

“Room, gentlemen, room for the deputation!” cried Gilbert.

And all the ranks immediately opened to allow Mounier to pass with the unhappy women he was about to present to the king.

The king, having been informed by De Charny, who had hastened to him, waited for the deputation in the room contiguous to the chapel.

It was Mounier who was to speak in the name of the Assembly.

It was Madeleine Chambry, the flower-girl, who had beaten the drum, who was to speak in the name of the women.

Mounier said a few words to the king, and presented to him the young flower-girl.

The latter stepped forward a pace or two and wished to speak, but could only utter these words: —

“Sire — bread!”

And she fell fainting to the ground.

“Help! help!” cried the king.

Andrée hurried forward, and handed her smelling-bottle to the king.

“Ah, Madame!” said De Charny to the queen, in a reproachful tone.

The queen turned pale and withdrew to her own apartment.

“Prepare the equipages,” said she; “the king and I are going to Rambouillet.”

During this time poor Madeleine Chambry was recovering her senses, and finding herself in the king’s arms, who was making her inhale the salts he held in his hand, she uttered a cry of shame, and wished to kiss his hand.

But the king prevented her.

“My lovely child,” said he, “allow me to embrace you; you are well worth the trouble.”

“Oh, Sire, Sire! since you are so kind,” said the young girl, “give an order — ”

“What order?” inquired the king.

“An order to have wheat sent to Paris, so that famine may cease.”

“My dear child,” said the king, “I will willingly sign the order you request, but in truth I am afraid it will not be of much service to you.”

The king seated himself at a table and began to write, when suddenly a single musket-shot was heard, followed by a tolerably brisk fire of musketry.

“Ah, good God! good God!” exclaimed the king, “what can have happened? See what it is, Monsieur Gilbert.”

A second charge upon another group of women had been made; and this charge had brought about the isolated musket-shot and the volley which had been heard.

The isolated musket-shot had been fired by a man in the crowd, and had broken the arm of Monsieur de Savonnière, a lieutenant in the guards, at the moment when that arm was raised to strike a young soldier, who was behind a sentry-box, and who, with uplifted and unarmed hands, was protecting a woman who was on her knees behind him.

This musket-shot was replied to on the part of the guards by five or six shots from their carbines.

Two of the shots told. A woman fell dead.

Another was carried off seriously wounded.

The people became irritated; and in their turn two of the body-guards fell from their horses.

At the same instant, cries of “Room! room!” are heard; they were the men from the Faubourg St. Antoine, who were arriving, dragging with them three pieces of artillery, with they formed a battery opposite to the principal gate of the palace.

Fortunately the rain was falling in torrents; the match is uselessly applied to the touch-holes of these guns; the priming, completely sodden by the rain, does not ignite.

At this moment a voice whispers into the ear of Gilbert: —

“Monsieur de Lafayette is coming; he cannot be more than half a league from Versailles.”

Gilbert in vain attempts to discover who has given him this information; but from whomsoever it might come, it was valuable.

He looks around him, and sees a horse without a rider; it belonged to one of the two guards who had just been killed.

He leaps into the saddle, and sets off at a gallop on the road towards Paris.

The second horse without a rider follows him; but he has scarcely gone twenty paces over the square when he is stopped by the bridle. Gilbert believes his intention has been divined, and that some one wishes to pursue him; he casts a look behind him as he rides off.

They were not thinking of him at all; but they were hungry. They think of nothing but obtaining food, and the poor horse is instantly butchered by a hundred knives.

In a moment it is cut into a hundred pieces.

During this time the king had been informed, as Gilbert had been, that General de Lafayette was about to arrive.

He had signed, at the request of Mounier, his acceptance of the Rights of Man.

He had signed, at the request of Madeleine Chambry, the order for corn to be sent to Paris.

Furnished with this decree and this order, which it was thought would have tranquillized all minds, Maillard, Madeleine Chambry, and a thousand of the women had set out on their return to Paris.

Just beyond the first houses of Versailles they met Lafayette, who, pressed by Gilbert, was riding at full speed, having ordered the National Guards to follow him as quickly as possible.

“Long live the king! “cried Maillard and the women, waving the decrees above their heads.

“What was it, then, you were saying to me of the dangers to which his Majesty is exposed?” said Lafayette, with astonishment.

“Come on, General, come on!” cried Gilbert, continuing to urge him onwards; “you shall yourself judge of them.”

And Lafayette spurred on his horse.

The National Guards entered Versailles with drums beating and colors flying.

At the first sounds of the drum which penetrated the palace, the king felt that some one was respectfully touching his arm.

He turned round; it was Andrée.

“Ah! is it you, Madame de Charny?” said he, “What is the queen doing?”

“Sire, the queen sends to entreat that you will leave Versailles, that you will not wait for the Parisians. At the head of your guards and the soldiers of the Flanders regiment, you can go anywhere.”

“Are you of that opinion, Monsieur de Charny?” inquired the king.

“Yes, Sire, if you at once determine on passing the frontier; but if not — ”

“If not?”

“It would be better to remain here.

“The king shook his head.

His Majesty remains, not because he has the courage to remain, but because he has not firmness to decide on going.

He murmured in a low tone: —

“A fugitive king! a fugitive king!”

Then, turning to Andrée: —

“Go and tell the queen to set out alone.”

Andrée left the room to execute her mission.

Ten minutes afterwards, the queen came in and seated herself by the king’s side.

“For what purpose have you come here, Madame?” asked Louis XVI.

“To die with you, Sire,” replied the queen.

“Ah!” murmured De Charny, “it is now that she is truly beautiful.”

The queen shuddered; she had heard him.

"I believe, indeed, it would be better that I should die than live," said she, looking at him.

At that moment the march of the National Guards was heard under the windows of the palace.

Gilbert rapidly entered the room.

"Sire," said he to the king, "you have nothing further to apprehend; Monsieur de Lafayette is below."

The king did not like Monsieur de Lafayette; but he did not carry his feelings farther than dislike.

With regard to the queen, it was a very different matter. She frankly hated him, and took no pains to conceal her hatred.

The result of this was that Gilbert received no reply, although he had believed that the intelligence he had communicated was the most favorable he could have brought at such a moment.

But Gilbert was not a man to allow himself to be intimidated by royal silence.

"Your Majesty has heard?" cried he to the king, in a firm tone. "Monsieur de Lafayette is below, and places himself at your Majesty's orders."

The queen continued silent.

The king made an effort to restrain his feelings.

"Let some one go and tell him that I thank him, and invite him, in my name, to come upstairs."

An officer bowed and left the room.

The queen drew back a step or two.

But the king, with a gesture that was almost imperative, made her resume her position.

The courtiers formed themselves into two groups.

De Charny and Gilbert, with two or three others, remained near the king.

All the rest retreated behind the queen's chair, and arranged themselves in a half-circle round her.

The footsteps of a man, ascending the staircase alone, were heard, and Monsieur de Lafayette appeared in the doorway.

In the midst of the silence which his appearance produced, a voice, issuing from the group surrounding the queen, pronounced these words: —

"There is Cromwell!"

Lafayette smiled.

“Cromwell would not have presented himself alone to Charles I.,” said he.

Louis XVI. turned frowningly towards these terrible friends who wished to make an enemy of a man who had hastened to his assistance.

Then, addressing De Charny: —

“Count,” said he, “I shall remain. Monsieur de Lafayette being here, I have nothing more to fear. Order the troops to withdraw to Rambouillet. The National Guards will be posted at the exterior ditches, the body-guards at those immediately near the palace.”

Then, turning to Lafayette: —

“Come with me, General; I have to speak with you.”

And as Gilbert was taking a step towards the door:

“No, Doctor,” cried the king, “you will not be one too many; come with us.”

And showing the way to Lafayette and Gilbert, he went into a cabinet, into which they both followed him.

The queen followed them with her eyes, and when the door had closed behind them: —

“Ah!” cried she, “it was to-day that we ought to have escaped from this. To-day there was still time. To-morrow, perhaps, it will be too late.”

And she, in her turn, left the room, to withdraw to her own apartments.

A great light, similar to that of an extensive conflagration, illuminated the windows of the palace.

It was an immense bonfire, at which the Parisians were roasting the different joints of the horse they had killed.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Night of the Fifth and Sixth of October

THE night was tolerably tranquil. The Assembly continued its sittings till three o’clock in the morning.

At three o’clock, and before the members separated, they sent two of their ushers, who took a round through Versailles, visited the environs of the palace, and then went round the park.

All was, or all appeared to be, quiet.

The queen had wished to leave the palace by the gate which communicated with Trianon; but the National Guards had refused to allow her to pass.

She had alleged her fears, and she had been answered that she was safer at Versailles than she could be elsewhere.

She had, in consequence, retired to her apartments; and she, in fact, felt reassured when she saw that she was protected by the most faithful of her guards.

At her door she had found George de Charny. He was armed, and leaning upon the small musketoon used by the guards as well as the dragoons. This was unusual; the guards in the interior of the palace stood sentry with their sabres only.

On perceiving him, the queen went up to him: —

“Ah! it is you, Baron,” she said.

“Yes, Madame.”

“Always faithful.”

“Am I not at my post?”

“Who placed you here?”

“My brother, Madame.”

“And where is your brother?”

“He is with the king.”

“And why with the king?”

“Because he is the head of the family,” he said; “and in that capacity has the right to die for the king, who is the head of the State.”

“Yes,” said Marie Antoinette, with a certain degree of bitterness, “while you have only the right of dying for the queen.”

“That would be a great honor for me,” said the young man, bowing, “should God ever permit me to fulfil that duty.”

The queen made a step to withdraw, but a suspicion was gnawing at her heart.

She stopped, and half turning her head: —

“And — the countess,” she inquired, “what has be come of her?”

“The countess, Madame, came in about ten minutes since; and she has ordered a bed to be prepared for her in your Majesty’s antechamber.”

The queen bit her lips.

Whenever she had occasion to make inquiry with regard to any of the De Charny family, she was always sure to find that they were rigidly attending to their duties, be they what they might.

“Thanks, sir,” said the queen, with a charming gesture of the head and hand at the same time, “thanks for your watching so carefully over the queen. You will, in my name, thank your brother for watching over the king so carefully.”

And after saying this, she went to her own room. In the antechamber she found Andrée, not lying down, but still sitting up and respectfully awaiting her return.

She could not prevent herself from holding out her hand to her.

“I have just been thanking your brother-in-law, George, Countess,” she said, “and I told him to thank your husband; and I now thank you, in turn.”

Andrée made a low courtesy, and stood aside to allow the queen to pass, who then went into her bedroom.

The queen did not tell her to follow her. This devotedness, from which she felt affection was withdrawn, and which, however icy cold it might be, she knew would exist till death, weighed heavily upon her feelings.

As we have before said, at three in the morning everything was quiet in the palace at Versailles.

Gilbert had left it with Monsieur de Lafayette, who had been on horseback for twelve hours, and who was so much fatigued that he could scarcely stand. On leaving the palace, he met Billot, who had accompanied the National Guards. He had seen Gilbert set off; he had thought that Gilbert might have occasion for him at Versailles, and he had therefore followed him like the dog who runs to rejoin his master who had left the house without him.

At three o'clock all was tranquil at Versailles. The Assembly, reassured by the report of its officers, had retired. It was believed that this tranquillity would not be troubled. This belief was ill-founded.

In almost all popular movements which prepare the way for great revolutions, there is a period of stagnation, during which it seems as if everything was finished, and the world might sleep in peace. These appearances are deceptive.

Behind the men who make the first movements there are others who wait till the first movements are over, when those who have taken the first steps rest themselves, either from fatigue or satisfaction, not wishing, either in one case or the other, to take a step farther.

Then it is that these unknown men take their turn, — these mysterious agents of fatal passions, — gliding through the darkness, taking up the cause where it has been abandoned, pushing it to the utmost limits, and appalling, in the outburst, those who have opened the way, and who, believing the end attained, the task accomplished, have retreated to their couches in the very middle of the race.

During this terrible night, very different effects had been produced by the arrival of two troops who had arrived at Versailles, — the one in the evening, the other during the night.

The first had come because it was hungry, and it asked for bread.

The second had come from hatred, and asked for vengeance.

We know who it was led on the first, — Maillard and Lafayette.

But now who was it that led on the second? History mentions not their names; but as history has failed in this, tradition names —

MARAT.

We already know him; we have seen him at the fetes given at the marriage of Marie Antoinette, cutting off legs and arms on the Place Louis XV.; we have seen him in the square before the Hôtel de Ville, urging on the citizens.

At length we see him gliding along in the night, like those wolves who prowl along the sheepfolds, waiting until the shepherds shall b**e** asleep, To venture on thier sanguinary work.

VERRIÈRE.

As to this one, we have mentioned his name for the first time. He was a deformed dwarf, a hideous hunchback, whose legs appeared immeasurably long in proportion to his body, which was a visible representation of the distorted passions which raged within him. At every storm which disturbed the depths of society, this sanguinary monster was seen to rise with the scum and agitate himself upon its surface. Two or three times during the most terrible tumults he was seen passing through Paris, huddled upon a black charger, and similar to one of the figures in the Apocalypse, or to one of those inconceivable demons to which the pencil of Callot has given birth in his picture of the temptations of Saint Anthony.

One day at a club, and mounted on the table, he was attacking, threatening, and accusing Danton. It was at the period when the popularity of the man of the 2d of September was vacillating. Danton felt that this venomous attack of Verriere would altogether complete his ruin. He felt that he was lost, — lost like the lion who perceives the hideous head of a serpent two inches from his lips.

He looked around him, seeking either a weapon or some one to back him. Fortunately, he caught sight of another little hunchback; he immediately caught him under the arms, raised him, and then placed him upon the table immediately opposite his humpbacked brother, Verrière.

“My friend,” said he to him, “reply to that gentleman; I yield the floor to you.”

The whole assembly roared with laughter, and Danton was saved, — for that time at least.

There were, then, according to tradition, Marat, Verriere, and besides them, —

THE DUKE D’AIGUILLON.

The Duke d’Aiguillon; that is to say, one of the most inveterate enemies of the queen.

The Duke d’Aiguillon disguised as a woman.

And who was it said this? Everybody.

The Abbé Delille and the Abbé Maury, — these two abbés who so little resemble each other.

To the first was attributed the famous line, —

“As a man, he’s a coward, as a woman, an assassin.”

As to the Abbé Maury, that is another affair.

A fortnight after the occurrence of the events we are relating, the Duke d’Aiguillon met him on the terrace of the Feuillans, and was about to accost him.

“Keep on your way, strumpet!” said the Abbé Maury; and he majestically left the duke perfectly astounded.

It was therefore said that these three men, Marat, Verrière, and the Duke d’Aiguillon arrived at Versailles at about four o’clock in the morning.

They were leading the second troop of which we have, spoken.

It was composed of men who follow in the wake of those who combat to conquer.

These men, on the contrary; come to pillage and to; assassinate.

They had undoubtedly assassinated a little at the Bastille, but they had not pillaged at all.

Versailles offered a delightful compensation.

About half-past five in the morning the palace was startled from its sleep.

A musket-shot had been fired in the marble courtyard.

Five or six hundred men had suddenly presented themselves at the gate; and exciting, animating, pushing on one another, some or them had climbed over the railings, while the others, by a united effort, at length forced open the gate.

It was then that a shot fired by the sentinel had given the alarm.

One of the assailants fell dead. His bleeding corpse was stretched upon the pavement.

This shot had divided this group of pillagers, whose aim was to obtain possession of the plate in the palace; and that of some of them, perhaps, to seize upon the king’s crown.

Separated as by the blow of an immense hatchet, the crowd is divided into two groups.

One of the groups goes to attack the queen’s apartments, the other ascends towards the chapel; that is to say, towards the apartments of the king.

Let us first follow the one proceeding towards the king’s apartments.

You have seen the waves rising when a high tide is setting in, have you not Well, then, the popular wave is similar to it, with this sole difference, that it keeps on advancing, without receding.

The whole of the king’s guards at that moment consisted of a sentinel, who was guarding the door, and an officer, who rushed precipitately out of the antechamber, armed with a halberd which he had snatched from the hand of a terrified Swiss.

“Who goes there?” cried the sentinel. “Who goes there?”

And as no answer was given, and as the flood of men still ascended: —

“Who goes there?” he cried for the third time.

And he levelled his musket.

The officer feels at once what would be the result of a shot fired in the apartments; he strikes up the sentinel’s gun, and rushing towards the assailants, he places his halberd across the top of the staircase, thus completely preventing any one from passing.

“Gentlemen! gentlemen!” cried he, “what do you want? What do you require?”

“Nothing, nothing,” said several voices, in mockery; “let us pass, we are good friends of his Majesty.”

“You are good friends of his Majesty, and you make war on him?”

This time there was no answer, — a sardonic laugh and nothing else.

A man seized the stock of the halberd that the officer would not let go. To make him quit his hold, the man bit his hand.

The officer snatched the halberd from the hands of his adversary, grasped the oaken stock with both of his, and dealing his adversary a blow on the head with all his strength, broke his skull.

The violence of the blow broke the halberd into two pieces.

The officer, consequently, had two arms instead of one, — a stick and a poniard.

He whirled the stick round, struck with the poniard. During this time the sentry had opened the door of the antechamber and called for assistance.

Five or six guards came out.

“Gentlemen! gentlemen!” said the sentinel, “assist Monsieur de Charny.”

The sabres sprang from the scabbard, glittered for an instant in the light of the lamp which burned above the staircase, and, to the right and left of De Charny, furiously attacked the assailants.

Cries of pain were heard; blood flowed; the wave of people retreated down the steps, leaving them red and slippery with blood.

The door of the antechamber opened again, and the sentinel cried: —

“Enter, gentlemen; the king orders it!”

The guards profited by this moment of confusion among the crowd. They rushed towards the door. De Charny entered last. The gate closes upon him;

and the two large bolts shoot into their places.

A thousand blows are struck at once on the door, but benches, tables, and stools are piled up behind it. It would hold good at least for ten minutes.

Ten minutes! during these ten minutes some assistance might arrive.

Let us see what is going on at the queen's quarters.

The second group has darted towards the small apartments; but the staircase is narrow, — scarce two people can pass at once.

George de Charny watches there.

At the third "Who goes there?" no answer being given, he fires.

At the report the queen's door opens.

Andrée comes out, pale but calm.

"What is it?" asked she.

"Madame," cried George, "save her Majesty! it is her life they want! I am opposed to a thousand, but I will hold out as long as possible! Quick! quick!" Then, as the' assailants precipitated themselves on him, he shut the door, crying, "Draw the bolt! draw the bolt! I shall live long enough to allow the queen to fly!" And turning, he pierced the first two he met in the corridor with his bayonet.

The queen had heard everything, and was up when Andrée entered the room.

Two of her women, Madame Hogue and Madame Thibault, were hastily dressing her. Then, half dressed, the two women conducted her through a corridor to the king; while, calm and indifferent to her danger, Andrée drew bolt after bolt, as she followed the footsteps of Marie Antoinette.

CHAPTER XXV.

The Morning

BETWIXT the two apartments a man waited for the queen.

This man was De Charny, covered with blood.

“The king!” cried Marie Antoinette, on seeing the blood on the dress of the young man; “the king! Monsieur, you promised to save the king!”

“The king is saved, Madame,” replied De Charny.

And looking towards the doors which the queen had left open, in order to reach the Œil de Bœuf, where at this time were assembled the queen, Madame Royale, the dauphin, and a few guards, De Charny was about to ask what had become of Andrée, when his eyes met those of the queen.

This look stopped the question which about to issue from his lips.

But the queen’s look pierced into the recesses of Charny’s heart.

There was no need for his speaking. Marie Antoinette had divined his thought.

“She is coming,” said the queen; “you need not be uneasy.”

And she ran to the dauphin, and clasped him in her arms.

Andrée immediately after this closed the last door, and in her turn entered the room called the Œil de Bœuf.

Andrée and De Charny did not exchange a word.

The smile of the one replied to the smile of the other, and that was all.

Strange to say, these two hearts, which had so long been severed, began to entertain feelings which responded to each other.

During this time the queen looked around her; and as if she felt delight in finding De Charny in fault: —

“The king,” she inquired, “where is the king?”

“The king is seeking for you, Madame,” tranquilly replied De Charny; “he went to your apartment by one corridor, while you were coming here by another.”

At the same instant loud cries were heard in the adjoining room.

They were the assassins, who were vociferating, “Down with the Austrian woman! Down with the Messalina! Down with the Veto! She must be strangled! She must be hanged!”

At the same time two pistol-shots were heard, and two balls pierced through the door at different heights.

One of these balls passed only a quarter of an inch above the head or the dauphin, and then buried itself in the opposite wainscoting.

“Oh, my God! my God!” cried the queen, falling upon her knees, “we shall all be killed!”

The five or six guards, upon a sign made to them by De Charny, then placed themselves before the queen and the two royal children, thus forming a rampart for them with their bodies.

At that moment the king appeared, his eyes full of tears, his face pale as death; he was calling for the queen as the queen had called for him.

He perceived her, and threw himself into her arms.

“Saved! saved!” exclaimed the queen.

“By him, Madame,” cried the king, pointing to De Charny; “and you are saved by him also, are you not?”

“By his brother,” replied the queen.

“Sir,” said Louis XVI. to the count, “we owe much to your family, so much that we shall never be able to repay the debt.”

The queen’s eyes met those of Andrdée, and she turned away her head, blushing deeply.

The blows of the assailants were heard endeavoring to destroy the door.

“Come, gentlemen,” said De Charny, “we must defend our position here for another hour. There are seven of us, and it will take them full an hour to kill us if we defend ourselves resolutely. Before an hour elapses a reinforcement must have arrived to the assistance of their Majesties.”

Saying these words, De Charny seized a large press which was standing in one of the corners of the royal room.

His example was instantly followed, and a heap of furniture was piled up against the door, between which the guards took care to leave loopholes, through which they could fire on the assailants.

The queen took her two children in her arms, and raising her hands above their heads, she prayed.

The children restrained their cries and tears.

The king went into the cabinet contiguous to the il de Buf, in order to burn some valuable papers which he did not wish to fall into the hands of the assassins.

The latter were attacking the door more desperately than ever. At every instant, splinters were seen flying before the blows given by a sharp hatchet, or wrenched out by large pincers.

By the openings which had been thus made, pikes with reddened points, bayonets reeking with blood were forced through, attempting to hurl death on those within.

At the same time, the balls pierced the framework above the barricades, and left long traces on the gilded plaster of the ceiling.

At length a bench rolls from the top of the press; the press itself was partly damaged. One whole panel of the door, which formed the front of the press, gave way, and they could see, in the place of the bayonets and pikes, arms covered with blood pass through it and grasp the sides of the opening, which every moment became wider.

The guards had discharged their last cartridge, and this they had not done uselessly, for through this increasing opening could be seen the floor of the gallery covered with the wounded and dead bodies.

On hearing the shrieks of the women, who believed that through this opening death was advancing upon them, the king returned.

“Sire,” said De Charny, “shut yourself up with the queen in the farthest room from this; close every door after you; place two of us behind the doors. I demand to be the last, and to guard the last door. I will answer for it that we hold out two hours; they have been more than forty minutes in breaking through this one.”

The king hesitated; it appeared to him to be humiliating to fly thus from room to room, to intrench himself thus behind every partition.

If the queen had not been there, he would not have retreated a single step.

If the queen had not her children with her, she would have remained as firmly as the king.

But alas! poor human beings, kings or subjects, we have always in our hearts some secret opening by which courage escapes and terror enters.

The king was about to give the order to fly to the remotest room, when suddenly the arms were withdrawn, the pikes and bayonets disappeared, the shouts and threats at once ceased.

A general silence ensued, every one remaining with distended lips, eagerly listening ears, and suppressed respiration.

They then heard the measured steps of regular troops advancing.

“They are the National Guards!” cried De Charny.

"Monsieur de Charny!" cried a voice, and at the same time the well-known face of Billot appeared at the opening.

"Billot!" cried De Charny, "is it you, my friend?"

"Yes, yes, 'tis I," replied the honest farmer; "and the king and queen, where are they?"

"They are here."

"Safe and sound?"

"Safe and sound."

"May God be praised! This way, Monsieur Gilbert, this way!" cried he, in his stentorian voice.

At the name of Gilbert, the hearts of two women bounded with very different feelings.

The heart of the queen and the heart of Andrée.

De Charny turned round instinctively. He saw both Andrée and the queen turn pale at this name.

He shook his head and sighed.

"Open the door, gentlemen," said the king.

The guards hastened to obey his orders, throwing aside the remains of the barricade.

During this time the voice of Lafayette was heard crying: —

"Gentlemen of the National Guard of Paris, I last night pledged my word to the king that no injury should be done to any one belonging to his Majesty. If you allow his guards to be massacred, you will make me forfeit my word of honor, and I shall no longer be worthy to be your chief."

When the door was opened, the two persons first perceived were General de Lafayette and Gilbert; while a little to their left Billot was standing, perfectly delighted at the share which he had taken in his Majesty's deliverance.

It was Billot who had gone to awaken Lafayette.

Behind Lafayette, Gilbert, and Billot, was Captain Gondran, commanding the company of the centre St. Philippe de Roule.

Madame Adelaide was the first who rushed forward to greet Lafayette, and throwing her arms round his neck with all the gratitude of terror: —

"Ah, sir!" she exclaimed, "it is you who have saved us!"

Lafayette advanced respectfully, and was about crossing the threshold of the Œil de Bœuf, when an officer stopped his progress.

"Your pardon, sir," said he to him; "but have you the right of admission?"

“If he has not,” said the king, holding out his hand to Lafayette, “I give it to him.”

“Long live the king! long live the queen!” cried Billot.

The king turned towards him.

“That is a voice I know,” said he, smiling.

“You are very kind, Sire,” replied the worthy farmer. “Yes, yes; you heard that voice on the journey to Paris. Ah, had you but remained in Paris instead of returning here!”

The queen knit her brows.

“Yes,” she said, “since you Parisians are so very amiable.”

“Well, sir?” said the king to Monsieur de Lafayette, as if he had been asking him the question, “In your opinion, what ought now to be done?”

“Sire,” respectfully replied Monsieur de Lafayette, “I think it would be well that your Majesty should show yourself on the balcony.”

The king asked Gilbert for his opinion, but merely by a look.

Louis XVI. then went straight to the window, and without hesitation opened it himself and appeared upon the balcony.

A tremendous shout, a unanimous shout, burst from the people, of: —

“Long live the king!”

Then a second cry followed the first: —

“The king to Paris!”

Between these two cries, and sometimes overwhelming them, some formidable voices shouted: —

“The queen! the queen!”

At this cry everybody shuddered; the king turned pale, De Charny turned pale, even Gilbert himself turned pale.

The queen raised her head.

She was also pale, but with compressed lips and frowning brow, she was standing near the window. Madame Royale was leaning against her. Before her was the dauphin, and on the fair head of the child reclined her convulsively clinched hand, white as the purest marble.

“The queen! the queen!” reiterated the voices, becoming more and more formidable.

“The people desire to see you, Madame,” said General de Lafayette.

“Oh, do not go, my mother!” said Madame Royale, in great agony, and throwing her arms round the queen’s neck.

The queen looked at Lafayette.

"Fear nothing, Madame," said he to her.

"What!" she exclaimed, "and quite alone?"

Lafayette smiled; and respectfully, and with the delightful manner which he retained even to his latest days, he took the two children from their mother and made them first ascend the balcony.

Then offering his hand to the queen: —

"If your Majesty will deign to confide in me," said he, "I will be responsible for all."

And he conducted the queen on to the balcony.

It was a terrible spectacle, and one likely to cause the vertigo; for the marble courtyard was transformed into a human sea, full of roaring waves.

At the sight of the queen, an immense cry was uttered by the whole of this crowd; and no one could have been positive whether it was a cry of menace or of joy.

Lafayette kissed the queen's hand; then loud applause burst forth.

In the noble French nation there is, even in the veins of the lowest-born, chivalric blood.

The queen breathed more freely.

"What a strange people!" she exclaimed.

Then, suddenly shuddering: —

"And my guards, sir," said she, "my guards, who have saved my life? Can you do nothing for them?"

"Let me have one of them, Madame," said Lafayette.

"Monsieur de Charny! Monsieur de Charny!" cried the queen.

But De Charny withdrew a step or two; he had understood what was required of him.

He did not wish to make an apology for the evening of the 1st of October.

Not having been guilty, he required no amnesty.

Andrée, on her side, was impressed with the same feeling. She had stretched out her hand to De Charny for the purpose of preventing him. Her hand met the hand of the count, and these two hands were pressed within each other.

The queen had observed this, notwithstanding she had so much to observe at that moment.

Her eyes flashed fire, and with a palpitating heart and broken accents: —

"Sir," said she to another guard, — "sir, come here, I command you."

The guard obeyed.

He had not, moreover, the same motives for hesitating as De Charny had.

Monsieur de Lafayette drew the guard on to the balcony, and taking his own tricolored cockade from his hat, placed it in that of the guard, after which he embraced him.

“Long live Lafayette! long live the body-guard!” shouted fifty thousand voices.

Some few wished to utter some hollow growling, the last threat of the disappearing tempest.

But these malcontents were overwhelmed by the universal acclamation.

“Come,” said Lafayette, “all is ended, and fine weather has returned.”

Then, stepping into the room: —

“But that it should not again be overcast, Sire, there still remains a sacrifice for you to make.”

“Yes,” said the king, pensively, “to leave Versailles, is it not?”

“And come to Paris, — yes, Sire.”

“Sir,” said the king, “you may announce to the people that at one o’clock I, the queen, and my children will set out for Paris.”

Then, turning to the queen: —

“Madame,” said he, “you had better retire to your own apartment, and prepare yourself.”

This order of the king appeared to remind De Charny of an event of importance which he had forgotten.

He rushed from the room, preceding the queen.

“Why are you going to my apartment, sir?” said the queen, harshly, to him; “you have no need to go there.”

“I earnestly trust it may be so, Madame,” replied De Charny. “But be not uneasy; if really I am not needed there, I shall not remain long enough to cause my presence to be displeasing to your Majesty.”

The queen followed him; traces of blood stained the floor, and the queen saw them. She closed her eyes, and seeking an arm to guide her, she took that of De Charny, and walked some steps in this way as a blind person.

Suddenly she felt that every nerve in De Charny’s body shuddered.

“What is the matter, sir?” she said, opening her eyes.

Then suddenly: —

“A dead body! a dead body!” she exclaimed.

“Your Majesty will excuse my withdrawing my arm,” said he. “I have found that which I came to seek in your apartment, — the dead body of my brother George.”

It was in fact the dead body of the unfortunate young man, whom his brother had ordered to allow himself to be killed rather than that the queen should be approached!

He had punctually obeyed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

George de Charny

THE circumstances we have just related have been recounted in a hundred different ways; for they were certainly the most interesting which occurred in the great period between 1789 and 1795, and which is called the French Revolution.

They will be related in a hundred various ways still; but we can affirm beforehand that no one will relate them with more impartiality than we have done.

After all these narratives, our own not excepted, there will still remain as much to tell; for history is never perfect. Each of a hundred thousand witnesses has his version; each of a hundred thousand details has its interest and its romance, and for the very reason that they are all different.

But of what service will all these narratives be, however true they are? Did ever a political lesson prove instructive to a political man?

The tears, the mournful stories, and the blood of kings, have they ever had the effect of the drop of water which hollows the rock?

No! queens have wept; no! kings have been murdered; and yet their successors have never profited by the cruel lesson which fate had given them.

Faithful subjects have been prodigal of their devotedness, without those whom fatality had destined to misfortune having derived any advantage from it.

Alas! we have seen the queen almost stumble over the body of one of those men whom kings, when they depart, leave bleeding upon the road which they have traversed in their fall.

A few hours after the cry of terror which the queen had uttered, and at the moment when, with the king and her children, she was about to leave Versailles, where she was never to return, the following scene took place in an interior courtyard, damp from the rain, and which a sharp autumnal wind had begun to dry.

A man dressed in black was leaning over a dead body.

A man dressed in the uniform of the royal guards was kneeling on the opposite side of this body.

At three paces from them a third person was standing, with clasped hands and fixed eyes, gazing intently at them.

The dead body was that of a young man of from twenty-two to twenty-three years of age, the whole of whose blood appeared to have escaped through large wounds in his head and chest.

His chest was scarred with frightful gashes; the skin surrounding them was of a livid white; it appeared still to heave with the disdainful breathing of a hopeless defence.

His half-opened mouth, his head thrown back with an expression of pain and anger, recalled to the mind the beautiful statue of the dying gladiator.

“And life with a long groan fled to the abode of shadows.”

The man dressed in black was Gilbert.

The officer on his knees was the Count de Charny.

The man standing near them was Billot.

The corpse was that of the Baron George de Charny.

Gilbert, leaning over the body, gazed at it with that sublime intentness which with the dying retains life when about to escape, and with the dead almost recalls the soul which has taken flight.

“Cold, stiff; he is dead, — positively dead!” said he at length.

The Count de Charny uttered a hoarse groan, and pressing in his arms the insensible body, burst into sobs so heart-rending that the doctor shuddered, and Billot ran to hide his head in a corner of the small courtyard.

Then suddenly the count raised the body, placed it against the wall, and slowly withdrew, still looking at it as if he expected that his dead brother would become reanimated and follow him.

Gilbert remained still kneeling on one knee, his head reclining on his hand, pensive and motionless.

Billot then left his dark corner and went up to Gilbert; he no longer heard the count’s sobs, which had torn his heart.

“Alas! alas! Monsieur Gilbert,” said he, “this, then, is really what we have to expect in civil war, and that which you predicted to me is now happening; only it is happening sooner than I expected, and even sooner than you yourself expected. I saw these *villains* murdering unworthy people; and now I see these *villains* murdering honest people. I saw them massacre Flesselles; I saw them massacre Monsieur de Launay; I saw

Foulon massacred; I saw Berthier massacred. I then shuddered in every limb, and I felt a horror for all men.

"And yet the men they were then killing were miserable wretches.

"It was then, Monsieur Gilbert, that you predicted the time would come when they would kill worthy people.

"They have killed the Baron de Charny. I no longer shudder, — I weep; I have no longer a horror of others, — I fear I may resemble them."

"Billot!" cried Gilbert.

But without listening, Billot continued: —

"Here is a young man whom they have assassinated, Monsieur Gilbert. He was a mere boy; he was fairly combating; he was not assassinating, but he has been assassinated."

Billot heaved a sigh, which seemed to issue from the bottom of his heart.

"Ah, the unhappy youth!" he cried. "I knew him when he was a child. I have seen him pass by when he was going from Boursonne to Villers-Cotterets on his little gray pony; he was carrying bread to the poor from his mother.

"He was a beautiful boy, with a fair, rosy complexion and large blue eyes; he was always smiling. Well! it is very extraordinary, since I saw him stretched out there, bloody and disfigured, it is not a corpse that I behold in him, but always the smiling child of former days, carrying a basket in his left hand and a purse in his right.

"Ah, Monsieur Gilbert, in truth I believe I have now had enough of it, and do not desire to see anything more; for you predicted this to me. The time will come when I shall also see you die, and then — "

Gilbert gently shook his head.

"Billot," said he, "be calm; my hour has not yet come."

"Be it so; but mine has come, Doctor. I have a harvest down yonder which has rotted, fields that are lying fallow, a family whom I love ten times more dearly on seeing this dead body, whose family are weeping for him."

"What do you mean to say, my dear Billot Do you believe, perchance, that I am going to afflict myself about you?"

"Oh, no!" replied Billot, ingenuously; "but as I suffer, I complain; and as complaining leads to nothing, I calculate on alleviating my own sufferings in my own way."

"Which means to say that — "

"It means that I desire to return to my farm, Monsieur Gilbert."

"Again, Billot?"

"Ah, Monsieur Gilbert, there is a voice down yonder which is calling for me."

"Take care, Billot; that voice is advising you to desert."

"I am not a soldier, and therefore there is no desertion, Monsieur Gilbert."

"What you are wishing to do would be a desertion far more culpable than that of a soldier."

"Explain that to me, Doctor."

"How! you have come to Paris to demolish; and you would fly as soon as the building is falling."

"Yes, that I may not crush my friends."

"Or rather that you may not be crushed yourself."

"Why, why!" replied Billot, "it is not forbidden that a man should think a little of himself."

"Ah! that is a magnificent calculation, indeed; as if stones did not roll; as if in rolling they did not crush, and even at a distance, the timid men who would fly from them."

"Oh, you are well aware that I am not a timid man, Monsieur Gilbert."

"Then you will remain, Billot; I have occasion for you here."

"My family also stands in need of me down yonder."

"Billot! Billot! I thought that you had agreed with me that a man who loves his country has no family."

"I should like to know whether you would use the same language if Sebastien lay there, as that young man lies."

And he pointed to the dead body.

"Billot," replied Gilbert, in a hollow tone, "the day will arrive when my son shall see me as I now see that body."

"So much the worse for him, Doctor, if on that day he should be as calm as you are now."

"I hope that he will be a better man than I am, Billot, and that he will be firmer still, and precisely because I shall have given him an example of firmness."

"Then you would have the child accustom himself to see blood flowing around him, that he should in his youthful years become inured to great conflagrations, to gibbets and riots, attacks in the dark; that he should see kings threatened, queens insulted; and then, when he has become as hard as his sword-blade, and quite as cold, you would still expect that he should love, that he should respect you?”

“No, I would not have him see all that, Billot; and that is the reason for my sending him back to Villers-Cotterets, and I now almost regret having done so.”

“How! you now regret it?”

“Yes.”

“And why do you now regret?”

“Because he would this day have seen exemplified the axiom of the lion and the rat, which to him is but a fable.”

“What do you mean to say, Monsieur Gilbert?”

“I say that he would have seen a poor farmer, whom chance has brought to Paris, a brave and honest man, who can neither read nor write, who never could have believed that his life could influence, either for good or evil the high destinies which he scarcely dared to raise his eyes to; I say that he would have seen this man who had already at one time wished to leave Paris, as he again wishes it, — I say that he would have seen this man contribute efficaciously to save the life of a king, a queen, and two royal children.”

Billot stared at Gilbert with astonished eyes.

“And how so, Monsieur Gilbert?” said he.

“How so! you sublimely ignorant fellow! I will tell you how. By waking at the first noise that was made; by guessing that this noise was a tempest ready to burst upon Versailles; by running to wake up Monsieur de Lafayette, — for Monsieur de Lafayette was asleep.”

“Zounds! that was perfectly natural, for he had been twelve hours on horseback, and for twenty-four hours he had not been in bed.”

“By leading him to the palace,” continued Gilbert, “and by bringing him at once into the midst of the assassins, and crying: ‘Stop, wretches, here is the avenger!’“

“Well, now, that is really true; I did all that.”

“Well, then, Billot, you see that this is a great compensation. If you did not prevent this young man being assassinated, you have perhaps prevented the assassination of the king, the queen, and the two children. Ungrateful man! and you ask to leave the service of the country at the very moment when the country recompenses you.”

“But who will ever know what I have done, since I myself even had no idea of it?”

“You and I, Billot; and is not that enough?”

Billot reflected for a moment, then, holding out his rough hand to the doctor: —

“I declare you are right, Monsieur Gilbert,” said he; “but you know that a man is but a weak, egotistical, inconstant creature. There is but you, Monsieur Gilbert, who are firm, generous, and constant. What is it that has made you so?”

“Misfortune,” said Gilbert, with a smile, in which there was more sorrow than in a sob.

“That is singular,” said Billot; “I had thought that misfortune made men wicked.”

“The weak, — yes.”

“Then if I should be unfortunate, I should become wicked.”

“You may perhaps be unfortunate; but you will never become wicked, Billot.”

“Are you sure of that?”

“I will answer for you.”

“In that case — ” said Billot, sighing.

“In that case — ” repeated Gilbert.

“Why, I will remain with you; but more than once I know I shall again be vacillating.”

“And every time it happens, Billot, I shall be near you to sustain your firmness.”

“Well, again I say, so be it,” sighed the farmer.

Then, casting a last look on the body of the Baron George de Charny, which the servants were about to remove on a bier: —

“It matters not!” said Billot; “he was a handsome boy, that little George de Charny, on his little gray pony, with a basket on his left arm and his purse in his right hand.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

Departure, Journey, and Arrival of Pitou and Sebastien Gilbert

WE have seen, under circumstances long anterior to those we have now related, the departure of Pitou and Sebastien Gilbert.

Our intention being, for the present, to abandon the principal personages of our history, to follow the two young travellers, we hope that our readers will allow us to enter into some details relating to their departure from Paris, their journey, and their arrival at Villers-Cotterets, where Pitou felt certain that they were both greatly missed.

Gilbert had commissioned Pitou to go to the College Louis-le-Grand and to bring Sebastien to him. For this purpose they put Pitou into a hackney-coach, and as they had confided Sebastien to Pitou, they confided Pitou to the care of the coachman.

In about an hour the coach brought back Pitou; Pitou brought back Sebastien.

Gilbert and Billot were waiting for them in an apartment which they had taken in the Rue St. Honoré, a little above the Church of the Assumption.

Gilbert explained to his son that he was to set out the same evening with Pitou, and asked him whether he would not be well pleased to return to the great woods he so much loved.

“Yes. Father,” replied the boy, “provided that you will come to see me at Villers-Cotterets, or that you allow me to come to see you at Paris.”

“You may be easy on that score, my child,” replied Gilbert, kissing his son’s forehead; “you know that now I shall never be happy when away from you.”

As to Pitou, he colored with delight at the idea of setting out the same evening.

He turned pale with happiness when Gilbert placed both Sebastien’s hands within one of Pitou’s, and in the other ten double louis, of the value of forty-eight livres each.

A long series of instructions, almost all regarding the health of his companion, were given by the doctor to Pitou, to which he religiously listened.

Sebastien cast down his large eyes to conceal his tears.

Pitou was weighing and jingling his louis in his immense pocket.

Gilbert gave a letter to Pitou, who was thus installed in his functions, *pro tem.*, of tutor.

This letter was for the Abbé Fortier.

The doctor’s harangue being terminated, Billot spoke in his turn.

“Monsieur Gilbert,” said he, “has confided to you the health of Sebastien; I will confide to you his personal safety. You have a pair of stout fists; in case of need, make good use of them.”

“Yes,” said Pitou; “and besides them, I have a sabre.”

“Do not make an abuse of that.”

“I will be merciful,” said Pitou; *“clemens ero.”*

“A hero, if you will,” repeated Billot, but not intending to say it jeeringly.

“And now,” said Gilbert, “I will point out to you the way in which you and Sebastien should travel.”

“Oh!” cried Pitou, “it is only eighteen leagues from Paris to Villers-Cotterets; we will talk all the way, Sebastien and I.”

Sebastien looked at his father, as if to ask him whether it would be very amusing to talk during the journey of eighteen leagues with Pitou.

Pitou caught this glance.

“We will speak Latin,” said he, “and we shall be taken for learned men.”

This was the dream of his ambition, the innocent creature.

How many others with ten double louis in their pocket, would have said: —

“We will buy gingerbread.”

Gilbert appeared for a moment to be in doubt.

He looked at Pitou, then at Billot.

“I understand you,” said the latter; “you are asking yourself whether Pitou is a proper guide, and you hesitate to confide your child to him.”

“Oh!” said Gilbert, “it is not to him that I confide him.”

“To whom, then?”

Gilbert looked up to heaven; he was still too much a Voltairean to dare to reply: —

“To God!”

And the affair was settled. They resolved, in consequence, not to make any change in Pitou’s plan, which promised, without exposing him to too much fatigue, a journey replete with amusement to Sebastien; but it was decided they should not commence it until the following morning.

Gilbert might have sent his son to Villers-Cotterets by one of the public conveyances which at that period were running between Paris and the frontiers, or even in his own carriage; but we know how much he feared the isolation of thought for young Sebastien, and nothing so much isolates dreaming people as the motion and rumbling noise of a carriage.

He therefore took the two young travellers as far as Bourget, and then, showing them the open road, on which a brilliant sun was shining, and bordered by a double row of trees, he embraced his son again, and said: —

“Now go!”

Pitou therefore set off, leading Sebastien, who several times turned round to blow kisses to his father, who was standing, his arms crossed, upon the spot where he had taken leave of his son, following him with his eyes as if he were following a dream.

Pitou raised himself to the full height of his extraordinary stature. Pitou was very proud of the confidence reposed in him by a person of Monsieur Gilbert’s importance, — one of the king’s physicians-in-ordinary.

Pitou prepared himself scrupulously to fulfil the task intrusted to him, which combined the functions of a tutor and almost those of a governess.

Moreover, it was with full confidence in himself that he was conducting little Sebastien; he travelled very quietly, passing through villages which were all in commotion and terror since the events at Paris, which had only just occurred, — for although we have brought up these events to the 5th and 6th of October, it must be remembered that it was towards the end of July or the beginning of August that Pitou and Sebastien left Paris.

Besides this, Pitou had retained his helmet for a headdress, and his long sabre as a defensive weapon.

These were all that he had gained by the events of the 13th and 14th of July; but this twofold trophy satisfied his ambition, and by giving him a formidable air, at the same time sufficed for his safety.

Moreover, this formidable air, to which indubitably the helmet and dragoon’s sabre greatly contributed, Pitou had acquired independently of them. A man has not assisted in taking the Bastille, he has not even merely been present at it, without having retained something heroic in his deportment.

Pitou had, in addition to this, become somewhat of an advocate.

No one could have listened to the resolutions passed at the Hôtel de Ville, to the orations of Monsieur Bailly, the harangues of Monsieur de Lafayette, without becoming somewhat of an orator; above all, if he had already studied the Latin *Conciones*, of which French eloquence at the close of the eighteenth century was rather a pale, though a tolerably correct, imitation.

Furnished with these two powerful modes of argument, to which two vigorous fists were no mean adjuncts, and possessing a rare amenity of smile and a most interesting appetite, Pitou journeyed on agreeably towards Villers-Cotterets.

For the curious in politics he had news, besides which he could manufacture them in case of need, having resided in Paris, where, from that period, their fabrication has been always remarkable.

He related how Monsieur Berthier had left immense buried treasures, which the Government would some day manage to dig up; how Monsieur de Lafayette, the paragon of all glory, the pride of provincial France, was no longer considered in Paris but as a half-used-up doll, whose white horse was a fertile subject for the concoction of jests and caricatures; how Monsieur Bailly, whom Monsieur de Lafayette honored with his most intimate friendship, as well as all the members of his family, was an aristocrat, and that people addicted to scandal said even worse things of him.

When he related all this, Pitou raised tempests of anger against him, but he possessed the *quos ego* of all these storms. He would then relate unpublished anecdotes of the “Austrian woman.”

His inexhaustible fancy procured for him an uninterrupted succession of excellent repasts, until he arrived at Vauciennes, — the last village on the road before reaching Villers-Cotterets.

As Sebastien, on the contrary, ate little or nothing; as he did not speak at all; as he was a pale and sickly-looking youth, — every one who felt interested in Sebastien, admired the vigilant and paternal care of Pitou towards him, who caressed, cosseted, attended on the boy, and into the bargain, ate his part of the dinners, without seeming to have any other motive than that of being agreeable to him.

When they arrived at Vauciennes, Pitou appeared to hesitate. He looked at Sebastien; Sebastien looked at Pitou.

Pitou scratched his head. This was his mode of expressing his embarrassment.

Sebastien knew enough of Pitou to be aware of this peculiarity.

"Well, what is the matter, Pitou?" asked Sebastien.

"The matter is, that if it were the same thing to you, and if you were not too tired, instead of continuing our way straight on, we would return to Villers-Cotterets through Haramont."

And Pitou, honest lad, blushed while expressing this wish, as Catherine would have blushed when expressing a less innocent desire.

Sebastien at once understood him.

"Ah, yes!" said he, "it was there our poor mother Pitou died."

"Come, my brother, come."

Pitou pressed Sebastien to his heart with an energy that almost suffocated him; and taking the boy's hand, he began running down the cross-road which leads along the valley of Wuala, and so rapidly that after going a hundred paces, poor Sebastien was completely out of breath, and was obliged to say: —

"Too fast, Pitou, too fast!"

Pitou stopped; he had not perceived that he was going too fast, it being his usual pace.

He saw that Sebastien was pale and out of breath.

He took him on his shoulders and carried him.

In this way Pitou might walk as fast as he pleased.

As it was not the first time that Pitou had carried Sebastien, Sebastien made no objection.

They thus reached Largny. There Sebastien, feeling that Pitou was panting, declared that he had rested long enough, and that he was ready to walk at any pace that might suit Pitou.

Pitou, being full of magnanimity, moderated his pace.

Half an hour after this, Pitou was at the entrance of Haramont, the pretty village where he first saw the light, as says the romance of a great poet, — a romance the music of which is of more value than the words.

When they reached it, the two boys cast a look around them to discover their old haunts.

The first thing which they perceived was the crucifix which popular piety habitually places at the entrance to all villages.

Alas! even at Haramont they felt the strange progression which Paris was making towards atheism. The nails which fastened the right arm and the feet of the figure of Christ had broken off, from rust having eaten through them. The figure was hanging, suspended only by the left arm; and no one had had the pious idea of replacing the symbol of that liberty, that equality, that fraternity which every one was in those days preaching.

Pitou was not devout, but he had the traditions of his childhood. That this holy symbol should have been thus neglected, wounded him to the heart. He searched the hedges for one of those creeping plants which are as thin and as tenacious as iron wire, laid his helmet and his sabre on the grass, climbed up the cross, refastened the right arm of the Divine Martyr to it, kissed the feet, and descended.

During this time Sebastien was praying on his knees at the foot of the cross. For whom was he praying Who can tell?

Perhaps for that vision of his childhood which he fondly hoped once more to find beneath the great trees; for that unknown mother who is never unknown; for if she has not nourished us from her breast, yet is she still our mother.

His holy action being accomplished, Pitou replaced his helmet on his head, and replaced his sabre in his belt.

When Sebastien had concluded his prayer, he made the sign of the cross, and again took Pitou’s hand.

Both of them then entered the village, and advanced towards the cottage in which Pitou had been born, in which Sebastien had been nursed.

Pitou knew every stone in Haramont, and yet he could not find the cottage. He was obliged to inquire what had become of it, and the person he applied to showed him a small house built of stone, with a slated roof.

The garden of this house was surrounded by a wall.

Aunt Angélique had sold her sister’s house, and the new proprietor, having full right to do so, had pulled down everything, — the old walls, which had again become dust; the old door, with a hole cut in it to allow ingress to the cat; the old windows, with their panes, half glass, half paper, upon which had appeared in strokes the elementary lessons Pitou had received in writing; the thatched roof with its green moss, and the plants which had grown and blossomed on its summit. The new proprietor had pulled down all this; all had disappeared.

The gate was closed, and lying on the threshold, was a big black dog, who showed his teeth to Pitou.

“Come,” said Pitou, the tears starting from his eyes; “let us be gone, Sebastien. Let us go to a place where at least I am sure that nothing will have changed."

And Pitou dragged Sebastien to the cemetery where his mother had been buried.

He was right, the poor boy! There nothing had been changed, only the grass had grown; it grows so rapidly in cemeteries that there was some chance even that he would not be able to recognize his mother's grave. Fortunately, at the same time that the grass had grown, a branch of a weeping-willow which Pitou had planted had, in three years, become a tree. He went straight to the tree and kissed the earth which it overshadowed, with the same instinctive piety with which he had kissed the feet of the figure of Christ.

When he rose from the ground, he felt the branches of the willow, agitated by the wind, waving around his head.

He then stretched out his arms, and clasping the branches, pressed them to his heart.

It was as if he was holding the hair of his mother, which he was embracing for the last time.

The two youths remained a considerable time by the side of this grave, and evening was approaching.

It was necessary that they should leave it, — the only thing that appeared to have any remembrance of Pitou.

When about to leave it, Pitou for a moment had the idea of breaking off a slip of the willow and placing it in his helmet; but just when he was raising his hand to do so, he paused.

It appeared to him that it would be giving pain to his poor mother to tear off a branch from a tree, the roots of which perhaps were entwined round the decaying deal coffin in which her remains reposed.

He again kissed the ground, took Sebastien by the hand, and left the cemetery.

All the inhabitants of the village were either in the fields or in the woods. Few persons, therefore, had seen Pitou; and disguised as he was by his helmet and his long sabre, among those persons no one had recognized him.

He therefore took the road to Villers-Cotterets, — a delightful road which runs through the forest for nearly three quarters of a league, — without meeting any living or animated object to divert his grief.

Sebastien followed, mute and pensive as himself.

They arrived at Villers-Cotterets at about five in the afternoon.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

How Pitou, after having been cursed and turned out of doors by his Aunt on account of a Barbarism and three Solecisms, was again cursed and turned out by her on account of a fowl cooked with rice

PITOU arrived at Villers-Cotterets by that part of the park which is called the Pheasantry. He walked across the dancing place, always abandoned during the week, and to which he had three weeks previously conducted Catherine.

What a number of things had happened to Pitou and to France during those three weeks!

Then, having followed the long avenue of chestnuttrees, he reached the square before the château, and knocked at the back door of the college presided over by the Abbé Fortier.

It was full three years since Pitou had left Haramont, while it was only three weeks since he had left Villers-Cotterets. It was therefore very natural that he should not have been recognized at Haramont, and that he should have been recognized at Villers-Cotterets.

In a moment a rumor ran through the town that Pitou had returned there with young Sebastien Gilbert; that both of them had gone into the house of the Abbé Fortier; that Sebastien looked much the same as when he had left them, but that Pitou had a helmet and a long sword.

The result of this was that a great crowd had assembled at the principal gate; for they calculated that if Pitou had gone into the chateau by the small private door, he would come out of it by the great gate in the Rue de Soissons.

This was his direct road for going to Pleux.

In fact, Pitou remained at the Abbé Fortier’s only long enough to deliver into the hands of the abbé’s sister the letter from the doctor, the young lad himself, and five double louis destined to pay his board.

The Abbé Fortier’s sister was at first much terrified when she saw so formidable a soldier advancing through the garden; but soon, beneath the dragoon’s helmet, she recognized the placid and honest face of Pitou, which somewhat tranquillized her.

And finally, the sight of the five double louis reassured her altogether.

This terror of the poor old maid can be the more readily explained, by informing our readers that the Abbé Fortier had gone out with his pupils to give them a walk, and that she was quite alone in the house.

Pitou, after having delivered the letter and the five double louis, embraced Sebastien, and left the house, clapping his helmet on his head with due military bravado.

Sebastien had shed some tears on separating from Pitou, although the separation was not to be of long duration, and notwithstanding that his society was not exceedingly amusing; but his hilarity, his mildness, his continued obligingness, had touched the heart of young Gilbert. Pitou had the disposition of those fine great Newfoundland dogs, who sometimes fatigue you very much, but who in the end disarm your anger by licking your hand.

There was one thing which diminished Sebastien’s grief, which was that Pitou promised that he would often go to see him. One thing diminished Pitou’s regret, and this was that Sebastien thanked him for his promise.

But now let us for a while follow our hero from the house of the Abbé Fortier to that of his Aunt Angélique, situated, as our readers already know, at the farther end of Pleux.

On leaving the Abbé Fortier’s house, Pitou found some twenty persons who were waiting for him. His strange equipment, a description of which had been given throughout the town, was in part known to those assembled. On seeing him thus return from Paris, where so much fighting was going on, they presumed that Pitou had been fighting too, and they wished to hear the news.

This news Pitou communicated with his accustomed majesty. The taking of the Bastille, the exploits of Monsieur Billot and of Monsieur Maillard, of Messieurs Elie and Hullin; how Billot had fallen into the ditch of the fortress, and how he, Pitou, had dragged him out of it; finally, how they had saved Monsieur Gilbert, who during six or seven days had been one of the prisoners confined there.

The auditors already knew most of the details that Pitou had related to them. They had read all these details in the newspapers of the day; but however faithful the editor of a newspaper may be in his writings, he is always less interesting than an ocular witness who relates the incidents, — who may be interrupted, and who resumes; who may be questioned, and replies.

Now Pitou resumed, replied, gave all the details, showing, when interrupted, the greatest obligingness, in all his answers the greatest possible amenity.

The result of all this was that in about an hour's conversation at the door of the Abbé Fortier, in which he gave a succinct narrative, the Rue de Soissons was crowded with auditors, when one of the persons present, observing some signs of anxiety in Pitou's countenance, took upon himself to say: —

"But he is fatigued, poor Pitou; and we are keeping him here upon his legs instead of allowing him to go to his Aunt Angélique's house, poor dear woman, who will be so delighted at seeing him again."

"It is not that I am fatigued," said Pitou, "but that I am hungry; I have never been fatigued, but I am hungry."

Then, and in consequence of this ingenuous declaration, the crowd, who highly respected the cravings of Pitou's stomach, respectfully made way for him to pass, and Pitou, followed by some persons more inveterately curious than the rest, was permitted to wend his way to Pleux; that is to say, to the house of his Aunt Angélique.

Aunt Angélique was not at home; she had gone doubtless to visit some neighbors, and the door was locked.

Several persons then invited Pitou to go to their houses and take the nourishment he stood in need of; but Pitou proudly refused.

"But," said they to him, "you see, dear Pitou, that your aunt's door is locked."

"The door of an aunt cannot remain locked before an obedient and hungry nephew," answered Pitou, majestically.

And drawing his long sabre, the sight of which made men and children start back with affright, he introduced the point of it between the bolt and the staple of the lock, gave a vigorous jerk, and the door flew open, to the great admiration of all present, who no longer doubted the great exploits of Pitou, since they saw him with so much audacity expose himself to the anger of the illtempered old maid.

The interior of the house was in precisely the same state as when Pitou had left it. The famous leather armchair royally held its state in the centre of the room; two or three other mutilated chairs and stools formed the lame court of the great armchair; at the end of the room was the kneading-trough; on the right, the cupboard, and on the left, the chimney.

Pitou entered the house with a bland smile. He had no quarrel with all these poor articles of furniture; on the contrary, they were the friends of his youth. They were, it is true, almost as hard in their nature as Aunt Angélique; but when they were opened, there was something good to be found in them; while had Aunt Angélique been opened, her inside would certainly have been found dryer and worse than her exterior.

Pitou, upon the instant, gave a proof of what we have advanced to the persons who had followed him, and who, seeing what was going on, were waiting outside the house, curious to see what would be the result when Aunt Angélique should return home.

It was, moreover, very perceptible that all these persons felt great sympathy for Pitou. We have said that Pitou was hungry, so hungry that it had been perceived by the change in his countenance.

Therefore he lost no time; he went straight to the kneading-trough and cupboard.

In former times — we say former times, although scarcely three weeks had elapsed since Pitou's departure; for in our opinion, time is to be measured, not by its duration, but by the events which have occurred; in former times, Pitou, unless urged on by the Evil Spirit, or by irresistible hunger, both of them infernal powers, and which much resemble each other — in former times Pitou would have seated himself upon the threshold of the closed door, and humbly waited the return of Aunt Angélique; when she had returned, would have bowed to her with a soft smile; then, standing aside, would have made room for her to pass, would have followed her into the house, would have gone for a loaf and a knife, that she might measure out his portion to him; then, his share being cut off, he would have cast a longing eye, a single look, tearful and magnetic, — he thought it so at least, — magnetic to such a degree as to call forth the cheese or any other dainty from the shelf of the cupboard.

Magnetism which rarely succeeded, but which, however, sometimes did succeed.

But now Pitou, having become a man, no longer acted thus; he tranquilly raised the lid of the bread-trough, drew from his pocket his long clasp-knife, took the loaf and angularly cut off a slice which might have weighed a good kilogram (two pounds), as is elegantly said since the adoption of the new-system weights.

Then he let fall the loaf into the trough again, and the cover on the loaf.

After which, without allowing his equanimity to be at all disturbed, he went to the cupboard.

It appeared to Pitou for an instant that he heard the growling voice of Aunt Angélique; but the cupboarddoor creaked upon its hinges, and this noise, which had all the power of reality, drowned the other, which had only the influence of imagination.

At the time when Pitou was one of the household, the avaricious aunt would provide only viands of a coarse description, such as Marolles cheese, or thin slices of highly salted bacon, surrounded by the verdant leaves of an enormous cabbage; but since this fabulous devourer had left the country, the aunt, despite of her avarice, would cook up for herself dishes that would last her for a whole week, and which were of a much more succulent description.

Sometimes it would be a good piece of beef à *la mode*, surrounded by carrots and onions, stewed in the gravy; sometimes a haricot of mutton with savory potatoes, big as a child’s head, or long as cucumbers; sometimes a calf’s foot, flavored with some shallots in vinegar, to give it more piquancy; sometimes it was a gigantic omelet made in the great frying-pan and variegated with a quantity of chives and parsley, or enamelled with slices of bacon, one of which sufficed for the dinner of the old woman, even on the days when she had the greatest appetite.

During the whole week Aunt Angélique would, with great discretion, enjoy the savory dish, making only such breaches in the precious morsel as the exigencies of the moment required.

Each day did she rejoice in being alone to consume such good things, and during the thrice happy week she thought of her nephew, Ange Pitou, as often as she placed her hand upon the dish or raised a mouthful to her lips.

Pitou was in great good luck.

He had fallen upon a day — it was Monday — when Aunt Angélique had cooked an old cock with rice, which had boiled so long, surrounded with its bland covering of paste, that the bones had left the flesh, and the flesh had become almost tender.

It was a formidable dish; it was served up in a deep wide porringer, which, though black externally, was resplendent and attractive to the eye.

The meat was placed above the rice, looking like small islands on the bosom of a vast lake; and the cock’s comb, rising above them all, looked like the crest of Ceuta in the Straits of Gibraltar.

Pitou had not even the courtesy to utter one word of admiration on seeing this great marvel.

Spoiled by good living, he forgot — the ungrateful fellow! — that such magnificence had never until then inhabited the cupboard of Aunt Angélique.

He held his great hunch of bread in his right hand.

He seized the vast dish in his left, and held it in equilibrium by the pressure of his immense square thumb, buried as far as the first joint in the unctuous mess, the odor of which was grateful to his olfactory organs. At this moment it appeared to Pitou that a shadow interposed between the light of the doorway and himself.

He turned round, smiling, for Pitou’s was one of those artless dispositions whose faces always give evidence of the satisfaction of their hearts.

The shadow was the body of Aunt Angélique.

Of Aunt Angélique, more miserly, more crabbed, and more skin-and-bone than ever.

In former days — we are obliged incessantly to return to the same figure of speech; that is to say, to the comparative, as comparison alone can express our thought — in former times, at the sight of Aunt Angélique, Pitou would have let fall the dish, and while Aunt Angélique would have bent forward in despair to pick up the fragments of her fowl and the grains of rice, he would have bounded over her head, and would have taken to his heels, carrying off his bread under his arm.

But Pitou was no longer the same; his helmet and his sabre had less changed him, physically speaking, than his having associated with the great philosophers of the day had changed him morally.

Instead of flying terrified from his aunt, he approached her with a gracious smile, opened wide his arms, and although she endeavored to escape the pressure, embraced her with all his might, squeezing the old maid energetically to his breast, while his hands, the one loaded with the dish containing the fowl and rice, and the other with the bread and knife, were crossed behind her back.

When he had accomplished this most nephew-like act, which he considered as a duty imposed upon him, and which it was necessary to fulfil, he breathed with all the power of his vast lungs, and said: —

"Aunt Angélique, you may well be surprised; but it is indeed your poor Pitou."

When he had clasped her so fervently in his arms, the old maid imagined that, having been surprised in the very act by her, Pitou had wished to suffocate her, as Hercules, in former days, had strangled Anttæus.

She, on her side, breathed more freely when she found herself relieved from this dangerous embrace.

Only Aunt Angélique had remarked that Pitou had not even manifested his admiration of the dish he was devouring.

Pitou was not only ungrateful, but he was also ill-bred.

But there was one thing which disgusted Aunt Angelique more than the rest; and this was that formerly, while she would be seated in state in her leather arm chair, Pitou would not even dare to sit down on one of the dilapidated chairs or one of the lame stools which surrounded it; but now instead of this, after having so cordially embraced her, Pitou had very coolly ensconced himself in her own armchair, had placed the dish between his knees, and was leisurely devouring its contents.

In his powerful right hand he held the knife already mentioned, the blade of which was wide and long, — a perfect spatula, with which Polyphemus himself might have eaten his pottage.

In the other hand he held a bit of bread three fingers wide and six inches long, — a perfect broom, with which he swept up the rice; while on its side, the knife, in seeming gratitude, pushed the meat upon the bread.

A learned, though pitiless manuvre, the result of which, in a few minutes, was that it caused the blue and white of the interior of the dish to become visible, as during the ebbing tide we gradually perceive the rings and marks upon the quays of a seaport.

We must renounce attempting to describe the frightful perplexity and despair of Aunt Angélique.

At one moment she imagined that she could call out.

Pitou, however, smiled at her with such a fascinating air that the words expired before Aunt Angélique could give them utterance.

Then she attempted to smile in her turn, hoping to exorcise that ferocious animal called hunger, which had taken up its abode in the stomach of her nephew.

But the proverb is right; the famished stomach of Pitou remained both deaf and dumb.

His aunt, instead of smiling, wept.

This somewhat incommoded Pitou, but it did not prevent his eating.

“Oh, oh! Aunt, how good you are,” said he, “to cry thus with joy on my arrival! Thanks, my good aunt, thanks.”

And he went on devouring.

Evidently the French Revolution had completely denaturalized this man.

He bolted three fourths of the fowl, and left a small quantity of the rice at the bottom of the dish, saying:

“You like the rice best, do you not, my dear aunt? It is softer for your teeth. I leave you the rice.”

This attention, which she no doubt imagined to be a sarcasm, almost suffocated Aunt Angélique. She resolutely advanced towards young Pitou, snatched the dish from his hands, uttering a blasphemous expression, which, twenty years subsequently, would have appeared admirably suitable to a grenadier of the old guard.

Pitou heaved a sigh.

“Oh, Aunt,” cried he, “you regret your fowl, do you not?”

“The villain!” cried Aunt Angélique, “I believe that he is jeering at me.”

Pitou rose from his chair.

“Aunt,” said he, majestically, “it was not my intention to eat without paying for what I ate. I have money. I will, if you please, board regularly with you; only I shall reserve to myself the right of choosing my own dinner.”

“Rascal!” exclaimed Aunt Angélique.

“Let us see; we will calculate each portion at four sous. I now owe you for one meal; four sous’ worth of rice and two sous’ of bread, — six sous.”

“Six sous!” cried the aunt, “six sous! why there is eight sous’ worth of rice and six sous’ of bread, without counting anything else.”

“Oh, I know I have not allowed anything for the fowl, my good aunt, knowing that it came from your poultryyard; he was an old acquaintance, — I knew him at once by his comb.”

“He was worth his price, however.”

“He was nine years old, at least; I stole him from under his mother’s wing for you. He was then barely as big as my fist; and I recollect even that you beat me, because when I brought him home to you I did not bring you corn enough to feed him the next day. Mademoiselle Catherine gave me some barley. He was my property, and I ate my property; I had good right to do so.”

His aunt, mad with anger, pulverized the Revolutionary hero with a look; she had no voice.

“Get out of this!” murmured she.

“What, at once, so soon after having dined, without even giving me time to digest my dinner? Ah! Aunt, Aunt, that is by no means polite.”

“Out with you!”

Pitou, who had again sat down, rose from the armchair. He found, and that with a most lively feeling of satisfaction, that his stomach could not have contained a single grain of rice more than he had swallowed.

“Aunt,” said he, majestically, “you are an unfeeling relative. I will demonstrate to you that you are now acting as wrongly towards me as you have always done; that you are still as harsh, still as avaricious as ever. Well! I will not allow you to go about telling every one that I have devoured your property.”

He placed himself on the threshold of the door, and in a stentorian voice which might be heard, not only by the inquisitive persons who had accompanied him, and had been present during the whole of this scene, but also by every one who was passing at a distance of five hundred paces: —

“I call these worthy people to witness that, having arrived from Paris, on foot, after having taken the Bastille, being tired and hungry, I seated myself in this house; that I ate my relative’s provisions; that I was so harshly reproached for the food of which I partook, that I was so pitilessly driven from the house, that I feel myself compelled to go.”

Pitou delivered this exordium in so pathetic a tone that the neighbors began to murmur against the old woman.

“A poor traveller,” continued Pitou, “who has walked nine leagues; a worthy lad, honored with the confidence of Monsieur Gilbert and Monsieur Billot, and who was charged by them to bring back Sebastien Gilbert to the Abbé Fortier; one of the conquerors of the Bastille; a friend of Monsieur Bailly and of General de Lafayette, — I call upon you all to witness that I have been turned out.”

The murmurs went on increasing.

“And,” pursued he, “as I am not a mendicant, as, when I am reproached for the bread I eat, I pay for it, here is half a crown which I lay down as payment for that which I have eaten in my aunt’s house!”

And saying this, Pitou proudly drew a half-crown from his pocket, and threw it on the table, from which in the sight of all it rebounded, hopped into the dish, and half buried itself in the remaining rice.

This last act completely confounded the old woman. She bent down, beneath the universal reprobation to which she had exposed herself, and which was testified by a long, loud murmur. Twenty hands were held out to Pitou, who left the hut, shaking the dust from his shoes on the threshold, and disappeared from his aunt’s eyes, escorted by a crowd of persons offering him his meals and lodging, happy to be the hosts of a conqueror of the Bastille, a friend of Monsieur Bailly and of General de Lafayette.

Aunt Angélique picked the half-crown out of the rice, wiped it, and put it into the saucer, where it was to wait, with many others, its transmigration into an old louis.

But while putting by This half-crown of which she had become possessed in so singular a manner, she sighed, reflecting that perhaps Pitou had had full right to eat the whole of the contents of the dish, since he had so amply paid for it.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Pitou a Revolutionist

PITOU wished, after having fulfilled the first duties of obedience, to satisfy the first feelings of his heart.

It is a very delightful feeling to obey, when the orders of the master are in perfect unison with the secret sympathies of the person who obeys.

He therefore made the best use of his legs; and going along the narrow alley which leads from Pleux to the Rue Lonnet, which forms a sort of green girdle to that portion of the town, he went straight across the fields that he might the sooner arrive at Billot’s farm.

But his rapid course was soon slackened; every step he took brought back some recollection to his mind.

When any one returns to the town or to the village in which he was born, he walks upon his youth, — he walks on his past days, which spread themselves, as the English poet says, like a carpet beneath the feet, to do honor to the traveller who returns.

He finds, at each step, a recollection in the beatings of his heart.

Here he has suffered; there he has been happy. Here he has sobbed with grief; there he has wept with joy.

Pitou, who was no analyzer, was compelled to be a man. He discovered traces of the past as he proceeded on his way; and he arrived with his soul replete with sensations at the farm of Dame Billot.

When he perceived at a hundred paces before him the long slated roofs; when he measured with his eyes the old elm-trees bending down over the moss-grown chimneys; when he heard the distant sound of the cattle, the barking of the dogs, the carts lumbering along the road, — he placed his helmet more proudly on his head, grasped his dragoon’s sabre with more firmness, and endeavored to give himself a martial appearance, such as was fitting to a lover and a soldier.

At first, no one recognized him, — a proof that his effort was attended with tolerable success.

A stable-boy was standing by the pond watering his horses, and hearing a noise, turned round; and through the tufted head of a withy tree he perceived Pitou, or rather a helmet and a sabre.

The stable-boy seemed struck with stupefaction.

Pitou, on passing him, called out: —

“Hilloa, Barnaut! good-day, Barnaut!”

The boy, astounded that the helmet and sabre knew his name, took off his small hat, and let fall the halter by which he held the horses.

Pitou passed on, smiling.

But the boy was by no means reassured; Pitou’s benevolent smile had remained concealed beneath his helmet.

At the same moment Dame Billot perceived the approach of this military man through the windows of the dining-room.

She immediately jumped up.

In country places, everybody was then on the alert; for alarming rumors were spread abroad, of brigands who were destroying the forest-trees, and cutting down fields of corn, though still unripe.

What did the arrival of this soldier portend? Was it an attack, or was it assistance?

Dame Billot had taken a general survey of Pitou as he approached. She asked herself what could be the meaning of such country-looking garments with so brilliant a helmet; and we must confess her suppositions tended as much towards suspicion as towards hope.

The soldier, whoever he might be, went straight to the kitchen.

Dame Billot advanced two steps towards the newcomer. Pitou, on his side, that he might not be behindhand in politeness, took off his helmet.

“Ange Pitou!” exclaimed Dame Billot; “you here, Ange?”

“Good-day, Ma’am Billot,” replied Pitou.

“Ange! Oh, good Heaven, whoever would have guessed it! Why, you have enlisted, then?”

“Oh! enlisted!” cried Pitou.

And he smiled somewhat disdainfully.

Then he looked around, seeking for one he did not find there.

Dame Billot smiled; she guessed the meaning of Pitou’s looks.

Then, with great simplicity: —

“You are looking for Catherine?” she said.

“To pay my respects to her,” replied Pitou; “yes, Madame Billot.”

“She is attending to the drying of the linen. Come, now, sit down; look at me; speak to me.”

“Very willingly,” said Pitou. “Good-day — good-day — good-day, Madame Billot.”

And Pitou took a chair.

Around him were soon grouped, both at the doors and on the steps of the staircases, all the servant-maids and the farm-laborers, to whom the stable-boy had quickly communicated the arrival of the soldier.

And as each of them came in, they might be heard whispering: —

“Why, it is Pitou!”

“Yes, ‘tis he indeed!”

“Really!”

Pitou cast a benign glance on all his former comrades. His smile to most of them was a caress.

“And you have come from Paris, Ange?” said the mistress of the house.

“Straight, Madame Billot.”

“And how is your master?”

“Very well, Madame Billot.”

“And how are things going on in Paris?”

“Very badly.”

“Ah!”

And the circle of auditors drew nearer.

“The king?” inquired the farmer’s wife.

Pitou shook his head, and gave a clacking sound with his tongue which was very humiliating for the monarchy.

“The queen?”

Pitou to this question made no reply at all.

“Oh!” exclaimed Madame Billot.

“Oh!” repeated all present.

“Come, now, speak on, Pitou,” said Madame Billot.

“Well, ask me anything you please,” replied Pitou, who did not wish to communicate all the interesting news he brought in the absence of Catherine.

“Why have you a helmet?” asked Madame Billot.

“It is a trophy,” said Pitou.

“And what is a trophy, my friend” inquired the good woman.

"Ah! that is true, Madame Billot," replied Pitou, with a protecting smile; "you cannot know what a trophy is. A trophy is when one has vanquished an enemy, Madame Billot."

"You have then vanquished an enemy, Pitou?"

"One!" replied Pitou, disdainfully. "Ah! my good Madame Billot, you do not know, then, that we two, Monsieur Billot and I, have taken the Bastille?"

This magic sentence electrified the audience. Pitou felt the breath of the astonished auditors upon his hair as they bent forward to gaze at him, and their hands on the back of his chair.

"Tell us, — tell us a little of what our man has done," said Madame Billot, with pride, but trembling with apprehension at the same time.

Pitou looked around to see if Catherine were coming; but she came not.

It appeared to him absolutely insulting that to hear such recent news, and brought by such a courier, Mademoiselle Billot did not at once leave her linen.

Pitou shook his head; he was beginning to be out of humor.

"Why, you see it would take a long time to tell it all," said he.

"And you are hungry?" inquired Madame Billot.

"It may be so."

"Thirsty?"

"I will not say no."

Instantly farm-laborers and servants hastened to procure him refreshment, so that Pitou soon had within his reach a goblet, bread, meats, and fruit of every description, before he had even reflected on the bearing of his answer.

Pitou had a warm liver, as they say in the country, — that is to say, he digested quickly; but however quick might be his digestion, it was still amply occupied with Aunt Angélique's fowl and rice, not more than half an hour having elapsed since he had absorbed the last mouthful.

What he had asked for, therefore, did not enable him to gain so much time as he had anticipated, so rapidly had he been served.

He saw that it was necessary for him to make a desperate effort, and he set himself to work to eat.

But whatever may have been his good-will, after a moment or two he was compelled to pause.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Madame Billot.

"Why, really, I must say — "

"Bring Pitou something to drink."

"I have cider here, Ma'am Billot."

"But perhaps you like brandy better?"

"Brandy!"

"Yes; perhaps you are accustomed to drink it in Paris?"

The worthy woman imagined that during twelve days' absence Pitou had had time enough to be corrupted.

Pitou indignantly repelled the supposition.

"Brandy!" cried he, again, "and for me — oh, never!"

"Well, then, speak."

"But if I now tell you the whole story," said Pitou, "I shall have to begin it again for Mademoiselle Catherine; and it is a very long one."

Two or three persons rushed out towards the laundry, to fetch Mademoiselle Catherine.

But while they were all running about in search of her, Pitou mechanically turned his head towards the staircase which led up to the first story of the house; and being seated precisely opposite this staircase, he saw Mademoiselle Catherine, through an open door, looking out of a window.

Catherine was looking in the direction of the forest; that is to say, towards Boursonne.

Catherine was so much absorbed in contemplation that the unusual movement in the house had not struck her; nothing within it had attracted her attention, which seemed to be wholly engrossed by what was happening without.

"Ah, ah!" cried he, sighing, "looking towards the forest, towards Boursonne, towards Monsieur Isidore de Charny. Yes, that is it."

And he heaved a second sigh, more melancholy than the first.

And at this moment the messengers returned, not only from the laundry, but from every place in which it was probable Mademoiselle Catherine might be found.

"Well?" inquired Madame Billot.

"We have not seen Mademoiselle."

"Catherine! Catherine!" cried Madame Billot.

The young girl did not hear her.

Pitou then ventured to speak.

"Madame Billot," said he, "I well know why they did not find Mademoiselle Catherine at the laundry."

“And why did they not find her?”

“Because she is not there.”

“You know, then, where she is?”

“Yes.”

“Where is she, then?”

“Yonder, — upstairs.”

And taking Dame Billot by the hand, he made her go up the first three or four steps of the staircase, and showed her Catherine, who was sitting on the sill of the window, half-hidden by ivy and convolvulus.

“She is dressing her hair,” said the good woman.

“Alas! no; her hair is already dressed,” replied Pitou, in a melancholy tone.

The farmer’s wife paid no attention to Pitou’s melancholy, but in a loud voice she called: —

“Catherine! Catherine!”

The young girl started with surprise, quickly closed her window, and said: —

“What is the matter?”

“Come down, then, Catherine!” cried Dame Billot, little doubting the joyful effect her words would produce upon her. “Come down here; here is Ange just arrived from Paris.”

Pitou, with great anxiety, listened for the answer which Catherine would make.

“Ah!” coldly replied Catherine.

So coldly that poor Pitou’s heart sank within him.

And she descended the staircase with all the phlegmatic manner of the Flemish women we see in the paintings of Van Ostade and Brauer.

“Well,” said she, when she reached the kitchen floor, “why, it is really Pitou!”

Pitou bowed, blushing deeply, and trembling in every nerve.

“He has a helmet,” said a servant-maid, whispering into her mistress’s ear.

Pitou overheard her, and watched the effect produced on Catherine’s countenance.

A lovely countenance, perhaps somewhat paler, but still full and peach-like.

But Catherine did not evince any admiration for Pitou’s helmet.

“Ah! he has a helmet,” she said; “and for what purpose?”

This time indignation mastered every other feeling in the mind of the bold youth.

“I have a helmet and a sabre,” said he, proudly, “because I have fought and killed German dragoons and Swiss soldiers; and if you doubt it, Mademoiselle Catherine, ask your father, and he will tell you.”

Catherine’s mind was so preoccupied that she heard only the last words uttered by Pitou.

“And how is my father?” inquired she. “How happens it that he did not return with you? Is there bad news from Paris?”

“Very bad,” replied Pitou.

“I thought that everything had been arranged,” observed Catherine.

“Yes, that is true; but everything is disarranged again,” rejoined Pitou.

“Was there not a reconciliation between the king and the people, and was not Monsieur Necker recalled?”

“But little is thought of Monsieur Necker,” said Pitou.

“And yet that satisfied the people, did it not?”

“It so well satisfied them that the people are now about to do themselves justice and to kill all their enemies.”

“All their enemies!” exclaimed Catherine, with astonishment; “who, then, are the enemies of the people?”

“The aristocrats, to be sure,” said Pitou.

Catherine turned pale.

“But whom do they call aristocrats?” she asked.

“Why, those who have large estates; those who have fine country-seats; those who starve the nation; those who have all while we have nothing.”

“Go on! go on!” impatiently cried Catherine.

“Those who have beautiful horses and fine carriages, when we are obliged to go on foot.”

“Great God!” exclaimed the young girl, becoming so pale as to be positively livid.

Pitou remarked this change in her countenance.

“I call aristocrats some persons of your acquaintance.”

“Of my acquaintance!”

“Of our acquaintance!” said Dame Billot.

“But who is it, then?” said Catherine, persistingly.

“Monsieur Berthier de Sauvigny, for instance.”

"Monsieur Berthier de Sauvigny?"

"Who gave you the gold buckles which you wore the day you danced with Monsieur Isidore!"

"Well?"

"Well; I saw people eating his heart, — I who am now speaking to you."

A cry of terror was uttered by all present. Catherine threw herself back in the chair which she had taken.

"You saw that?" cried Madame Billot, trembling with horror.

"And Monsieur Billot saw it too."

"Oh, good God!"

"Yes, and by this time they must have killed or burned all the aristocrats of Paris and Versailles."

"It is frightful!" murmured Catherine.

"Frightful! and why so? You are not an aristocrat, — you, Mademoiselle Billot?"

"Monsieur Pitou," said Catherine, with gloomy energy, "it appears to me that you were not so ferocious before you went to Paris."

"And I am not more so now, Mademoiselle," said Pitou, somewhat staggered; "but — "

"But, then, do not boast of the crimes committed by the Parisians, since you are not a Parisian, and you did not commit these crimes."

"I was so far from committing them," said Pitou, "that Monsieur Billot and myself narrowly escaped being murdered while defending Monsieur Berthier."

"Oh, my good father! my brave father! I recognize him there!" enthusiastically exclaimed Catherine.

"My good, my worthy man!" cried Madame Billot, her eyes streaming with tears. "Tell me, what did he do?"

Pitou then related the whole of the dreadful scene which had occurred on the Place de Grève, the despair of Billot, and his desire to return to VillersCotterets.

"Why did he not return, then?" cried Catherine, in an accent that, like a presentiment of evil, deeply moved Pitou's heart.

Dame Billot clasped her hands.

"Monsieur Gilbert would not allow it," replied Pitou.

"Does Monsieur Gilbert wish, then, that my husband should be killed?" said Madame Billot, sobbing.

“Does he wish, then, that my father’s house should be ruined?” added Catherine, in the same tone of gloomy melancholy.

“Oh, by no means!” cried Pitou; “Monsieur Billot and Monsieur Gilbert understand each other; Monsieur Billot will remain still some time at Paris, to finish the Revolution.”

“What! by themselves, — all alone?” cried Dame Billot.

“No, with Monsieur Bailly and Monsieur de Lafayette,” said Pitou.

“Ah!” cried the farmer’s wife, with admiration, “if he indeed is with Monsieur de Lafayette and Monsieur Bailly — ”

“When does he think of returning?” inquired Catherine.

“Oh, as to that, Mademoiselle, I cannot tell.”

“And you, Pitou, how happens it, then, that you have returned?”

“Who, — I? Why, I brought back Sebastien Gilbert to the Abbé Fortier, and I have come here to bring you Monsieur Billot’s instructions.”

Pitou, while saying these words, rose, not without a certain degree of diplomatic dignity, which was understood, if not by the servants, at all events by their mistresses.

Dame Billot rose, and at once dismissed all the laborers and servants.

Catherine, who had remained seated, studied the thoughts of Pitou, even in the depths of his soul, before they issued from his lips.

“What can he have told him to say to me?” she asked herself.

CHAPTER XXX.

Madame Billot Abdicates

THE two women summoned up all their attention to listen to the desires of this honored husband and father. Pitou was well aware that the task was a difficult one. He had seen both Dame Billot and Catherine filling their several stations at the farm; he knew the habit of command of the one and the firm independence of the other.

Catherine, who was so gentle a daughter, so laborious, so good, had acquired, by virtue of these very qualities, a very great ascendency over every person connected with the farm; and what is the spirit of domination, if it is not a firm will not to obey?

Pitou knew, in explaining his mission, how much pleasure he was about to cause to the one, and how much grief he would inflict upon the other.

Reducing Madame Billot to play a secondary part, appeared to him unnatural, absurd. It gave Catherine more importance with regard to Pitou, and under actual circumstances Catherine by no means needed this.

But at the farm he represented one of Homer’s heralds, — a mouth, a memory, but not an intellectual person; he expressed himself in the following terms: —

“Madame Billot, Monsieur Billot’s intention is that you should have the slightest possible annoyance.”

“And how so?” cried the good woman, much surprised.

“What is the meaning of the word ‘annoyance’?” said Catherine.

“It means to say,” replied Pitou, “that the management of a farm like yours is a species of government replete with cares and labor, that there are bargains to be made — ”

“And what of that?” said the worthy woman.

“Payments — ”

“Well?”

“Fields to plough — ”

“Go on.”

“Harvests — ”

"Who says the contrary?"

"No one, assuredly, Madame Billot; but in order to make bargains, it is necessary to travel about."

"I have my horse."

"In paying it is often necessary to dispute."

"Oh, I have a good tongue."

"To cultivate the fields."

"Am I not accustomed to agriculture?"

"And to get in the harvest! Ah! that is quite another matter; meals have to be cooked for the laborers; the wagoners must be assisted."

"For the welfare of my good man, to do all these would not frighten me!" cried the worthy woman.

"But, Madame Billot — in short — so much work-and — getting rather aged — "

"Ah!" cried Dame Billot, looking askance at Pitou.

"Come to my assistance, Mademoiselle Catherine," said the poor lad, finding his energy diminishing by degrees as his position became more and more difficult.

"I do not know what I am to do to assist you," replied Catherine.

"Well, then, this is the plain fact," rejoined Pitou. "Monsieur Billot does not desire that Madame Billot should be subjected to so much trouble — "

"And who, then?" cried Madame Billot, interrupting him, trembling at the same time with admiration and respect.

"He has chosen some one who is stronger, and who is both himself and yourself. He has appointed Mademoiselle Catherine."

"My daughter Catherine to govern the house!" exclaimed the wounded mother, with an accent of mistrust and inexpressible jealousy.

"Under your directions, my dear mother," the young girl hastened to say, blushing deeply.

"By no means! by no means!" cried Pitou, who, from the moment he had summoned up courage enough to speak out, was determined to go through with it; "it is not so! I must execute my commission to the letter. Monsieur Billot delegates and authorizes Mademoiselle Catherine in his stead and place to attend to all the work and all the affairs of the house."

Every one of these words, which bore the accent of truth, penetrated the heart of the housekeeper; and so excellent was her nature that instead of allowing the jealousy she had at first naturally felt to become more bitter, or her anger to become more violent, the certainty of her diminution in importance appeared to make her more resigned, more obedient, and more convinced of the infallibility of her husband's judgment.

Was it possible that Billot could be mistaken? Was it possible to disobey Billot?

These were the only two arguments which the worthy woman used to convince herself.

And her resistance at once ceased.

She looked at her daughter, in whose eyes she saw only modesty, confidence, the desire to succeed, unalterable tenderness and respect. She yielded absolutely.

"Monsieur Billot is right," she said; "Catherine is young; she has a good head, — she is even headstrong."

"Oh, yes," said Pitou, certain that he had flattered the self-love of Catherine at the same time that he indulged in an epigram at her expense.

"Catherine," continued Dame Billot, "will be more at her ease than I should be upon the road. She will better look after the laborers for whole days than I could. She will sell better; she will make more advantageous purchases; she will know how to make herself obeyed."

Catherine smiled.

"Well, then," continued the good woman, without even being compelled to make an effort to restrain a sigh, "here is our Catherine who is going to have all her own way: she will run about as she pleases; she will now have the command of the purse; now she will always be seen upon the roads; my daughter, in short, transformed into a lad!"

"You need be under no apprehension for Mademoiselle Catherine," said Pitou, with a self-sufficient air; "I am here, and I will accompany her wherever she goes."

This gracious offer, on which Ange perhaps calculated to produce an effect, produced so strange a look on the part of Catherine that he was quite confused.

The young girl blushed, — not as women do when anything agreeable has been said to them, but with a sort of double feeling of anger and impatience, evincing at once a desire to speak and the necessity of remaining silent.

Pitou was not a man of the world, and therefore could not appreciate these shades of feeling.

But having comprehended that Catherine’s blushing was not a perfect acquiescence: —

“What!” said he, with an agreeable smile, which displayed his powerful teeth under his thick lips, “what! you say not a word, Mademoiselle Catherine?”

“You are not aware, then, Monsieur Pitou, that you have uttered a stupidity?”

“A stupidity!” exclaimed the lover.

“Assuredly!” cried Dame Billot, “to think of my daughter Catherine going about with a body-guard.”

“But, in short, in the woods,” said Pitou, with an air so ingenuously conscientious that it would have been a crime to laugh at him.

“Is that also in the instructions of our good man?” continued Dame Billot, who thus evinced a certain disposition for epigram.

“Oh!” added Catherine, “that would be too indolent a profession, which neither my father would have advised Monsieur Pitou to adopt, nor would Monsieur Pitou have accepted it.”

Pitou rolled his large and terrified eyes from Catherine to Dame Billot; the whole scaffolding of his building was giving way.

Catherine, as a true woman, at once comprehended the painful disappointment of Pitou.

“Monsieur Pitou,” said she, “was it at Paris that you have seen young girls compromising their reputations in this way, by always dragging young men after them?”

“But you are not a young girl, you,” stammered Pitou, “since you are the mistress of the house.”

“Come, come! we have talked enough for to-night,” abruptly said Dame Billot; “the mistress of the house has much to do. Come, Catherine, let me install you in the management, according to your father’s orders.”

Then was commenced, before the astounded eyes of Pitou, a ceremony that was not deficient in grandeur nor in poetry, from its rustic simplicity.

Dame Billot drew her keys from off the bunch, one by one, and delivered them to Catherine, giving her a list of the linen, of the furniture, the provisions, and the contents of the cellars. She conducted her daughter to the old secretary, or bureau, made of mahogany inlaid with ivory and ebony, somewhere about the year 1738 or 1740, in the secret drawer of which

Father Billot locked up his most valuable papers, his golden louis, and all the treasures and archives of the family.

Catherine gravely allowed herself to be invested with the supreme command over everything, and took due note of the secret drawers; she questioned her mother with much intelligence, reflected on each answer, and the information she required being obtained, appeared to store it up in the depths of her memory as a weapon in reserve in case of any contest.

After the furniture and household articles had been examined, Dame Billot went on to the cattle, the lists of which were carefully made out.

Horses, oxen, and cows; sheep, whether in good order or sick; lambs, goats, fowls, and pigeons, — all were counted and noted down.

But this was merely for the sake of regularity.

Of this branch of the farm business the young girl had for a long time past been the special administratrix.

There was scarcely a hen in the barnyard of which she did not know the cackle; the lambs were familiar with her in a month; the pigeons knew her so well that they would frequently completely surround her in their flight; often even they would perch upon her shoulders, after having cooed at her feet.

The horses neighed when Catherine approached. She alone could make the most restive of then obey. One of them, a colt bred upon the farm, was so vicious as to allow no one to approach him; but he would break his halter and knock down his stall to get to Catherine, putting his nose into her hand, or into her pocket, to get at the crust of bread he was always sure of finding there.

Nothing was so beautiful or so smile-inspiring as this lovely fair-haired girl, with her large blue eyes, her white neck, her round arms, her small fat hands, when she came up with her apronful of corn to a spot near the pond, where the ground had been beaten and saltpetred to harden it for a feeding-place, and on which she would throw the grain she brought by handfuls.

Then would be seen all the young chickens, all the pigeons, all the young lambs, hurrying and scrambling towards the pond; the beaks of the birds soon made the flooring appear speckled; the red tongues of the young goats licked the ground, or picked up crisp buckwheat. This area, darkened by the layers of corn, in five minutes became as white and clean as the delft-plate of the laborer when he has finished his meal.

Certain human beings have in their eyes a fascination that subdues, or a fascination that terrifies, — two sensations so powerful over the brute creation that they never think of resisting them.

Which of us has not seen a savage bull looking for several minutes, with melancholy expression, at a child who smiles at him without comprehending the danger he is running? He pities him.

Which of us has not seen the same bull fix a sinister and affrighted look on a robust farmer, who masters him by the steadiness of his gaze, and by a mute threat? The animal lowers his head; he appears to be preparing for the combat, but his feet seem rooted in the ground; he shudders; he is terrified.

Catherine exercised one of these two influences on all that surrounded her; she was at once so calm and so firm, there was so much gentleness and yet so much decided will, so little mistrust, so little fear, that the animal standing near her did not feel even the temptation of an evil thought.

And this extraordinary influence she, with greater reason, exercised over thinking beings. She possessed a charm that was irresistible; not a man in the whole district had ever smiled when speaking of Catherine. No young man entertained an evil thought towards her. Those who loved her, wished to have her for their wife; those who did not love her, would have desired that she were their sister.

Pitou, with head cast down, his hands hanging listless by his side, his ideas wandering, mechanically followed the young girl and her mother while they were taking a list of the farm stock.

They had not addressed a word to him. He was there like a guard in a tragedy; and his helmet did not a little contribute to give that singular appearance.

After this, they passed in review all the male and female servants of the farm.

Dame Billot made them form a half-circle, in the centre of which she placed herself.

“My children,” said she, “our master is not yet coming back from Paris, but he has chosen a master for us in his place. It is my daughter Catherine, who is here; she is young and strong. As to myself, I am old, and my head is weak. Our master has done rightly. Catherine is now your mistress. She is to receive and give money. As to her orders, I shall be the first to receive and execute them; any of you who may be disobedient will have to deal with her.”

Catherine did not add a single word; she tenderly embraced her mother. The effect of this kiss was greater than that of any well-rounded phrase. Dame Billot wept; Pitou was much affected.

All the servants received the announcement of the new reign with acclamations.

Catherine immediately entered on her new functions, and allotted to all their several services. Each received her mandate, and set out immediately to execute it, with the good-will which every one manifests at the commencement of a reign.

Pitou was the only one remaining, and he at length, approaching Catherine, said to her: —

“And I?”

“Ah! you,” replied Catherine; “I have no orders to give you.”

“How! I am, then, to remain without having anything to do?”

“What do you wish to do?”

“Why, what I did before I went to Paris.”

“Before going there, you were received into the house by my mother.”

“But you are now the mistress; therefore, point out the work I am to do.”

“I have no work for you, Monsieur Ange.”

“And why?”

“Because you, — you are a learned man, a Parisian gentleman, to whom such rustic labors would not be suitable.”

“Can it be possible?” exclaimed Pitou.

Catherine made a sign, which implied, “It is even so.”

“I a learned man!” repeated Pitou.

“Undoubtedly.”

“But look at my arms, Mademoiselle Catherine.”

“That matters not.”

“But, in short, Mademoiselle Catherine,” said the poor lad, in despair, “why is it that under the pretext of my being a learned man, you would force me to die of hunger? You do not know, then, that the philosopher Epictetus became a menial servant that he might have bread to eat; that Æsop, the fable-writer, earned his bread by the sweat of his brow? They were, however, people much more learned than I am.”

“What would you have? As I have said before, it is even so.”

“But Monsieur Billot accepted me as forming part of his household, and he has sent me back from Paris that I may still be so.”

“That may be the case; for my father might have compelled you to undertake things which I, his daughter, would not venture to impose upon you.”

“Do not impose them upon me, Mademoiselle Catherine,” said Pitou.

“But then you would remain in idleness, and that I could not at all allow. My father had the right to do so, he being the master, and which I could not do, being merely his agent. I have charge of his property, and I must take care that his property be productive.”

“But since I am willing to work, I shall be productive; you must see clearly, Mademoiselle, that you keep swimming round in the same vicious circle.”

“What say you?” cried Catherine, who did not comprehend the grandiloquent phrases of Pitou; “what mean you by a vicious circle?”

“We call a bad argument a vicious circle, Mademoiselle. No; let me remain at the farm, and send me on your messages if you will. You will then see whether I am a learned man and an idle fellow. Besides which, you have books to keep, accounts to put in order. Arithmetic is my particular forte.”

“It is not, in my opinion, sufficient occupation for a man,” said Catherine.

“Why, then, it would seem I am fit for nothing,” said Pitou.

“Continue to live here,” said Catherine, in a gentler tone; “I will reflect upon it, and we will see.”

“You require to reflect, in order that you may know whether you ought to keep me here! But what have I done to you, then, Mademoiselle Catherine? Ah! you were not thus formerly.”

Catherine gave an almost imperceptible shrug of her shoulders.

She had no good reasons to give to Pitou, and nevertheless it was evident that his pertinacity fatigued her.

Therefore, breaking off the conversation: —

“Enough of this, Monsieur Pitou,” said she; “I am going to La Ferté-Milon.”

“Then I will run and saddle your horse, Mademoiselle Catherine.”

“By no means; on the contrary, remain where you are.”

“You refuse, then, to allow me to accompany you?”

“Remain here,” said Catherine, imperatively.

Pitou remained as if nailed to the spot, holding down his head and restraining a tear, which seared his eyelids as if it had been molten lead.

Catherine left Pitou where he was, went out, and ordered one of the farm-servants to saddle her horse.

“Ah!” murmured Pitou, “you think me changed, Mademoiselle Catherine; but it is you who are so, and much more changed than I am.”

CHAPTER XXXI.

What decided Pitou to leave the Farm and return to Haramont, his real and only Country

DAME BILLOT, resigned without affectation to undertake the functions of an upper servant, had, without ill-humor, and with good-will, resumed her occupations. Movement, which had for an instant been suspended throughout the agricultural hierarchy, soon returned; and the farm once more resembled the interior of a humming and industrious hive.

While they were getting her horse ready, Catherine re-entered the house; she cast a glance at Pitou, whose body remained motionless, but whose head turned like a weather-cock, following each movement which the young girl made until she went upstairs to her own room.

“What is it Catherine has gone to her room for?” said Pitou to himself.

Poor Pitou! what had she gone there for? She went there to dress her hair, to put on a clean cap and a pair of finer stockings.

Then, when this supplementary toilet was completed, as she heard her horse pawing the ground beneath the window, she came down, kissed her mother, and set out.

Reduced to positive idleness, and feeling but ill-assured from a slight glance, half-indifferent, half-compassionate, which Catherine had addressed to him as she left the door, Pitou could not endure to remain in such a state of anxious perplexity.

Since Pitou had once more seen Catherine, it appeared to him that the life of Catherine was absolutely necessary to him.

And besides, in the depths of his heavy and dreaming mind, something like a suspicion came and went with the regularity of the pendulum of a clock.

It is the peculiar property of ingenuous minds to perceive everything in equal degree. These sluggish natures are not less sensible than others; they feel, but they do not analyze.

Analysis is the habit of enjoying and suffering; a man must have become, to a certain degree, habituated to sensations to see their ebullition in the depth of that abyss which is called the human heart.

There are no old men who are ingenuous.

When Pitou had heard the horse’s footsteps at a certain distance from the house, he ran to the door. He then perceived Catherine, who was going along a narrow crossroad, which led from the farm to the high-road to La Ferté-Milon, and terminated at the foot of a hill, whose summit was covered by a forest.

From the threshold of the door, he breathed forth an adieu to the young girl, which was replete with regret and kindly feeling.

But this adieu had scarcely been expressed by his hand and heart when Pitou reflected on one circumstance.

Catherine might have forbidden him to accompany her, but she could not prevent him from following her.

Catherine could, if she pleased, say to Pitou, “I will not see you;” but she could not very well say to him, “I forbid your looking at me.”

Pitou therefore reflected that as he had nothing to do, there was nothing in the world to prevent him from gaining the wood and keeping along the road which Catherine was going; so that without being seen, he would see her from a distance through the trees.

It was only a league and a half from the farm to La Ferté-Milon. A league and a half to go there, and a league and a half to return. What was that to Pitou?

Moreover, Catherine would get to the high-road by a line which formed an angle with the forest. By taking a straight direction, Pitou would gain a quarter of a league, so that the whole distance for him would be only two leagues and a half for the whole journey.

Two leagues and a half was a mere nothing of a walk for a man who appeared to have robbed Tom Thumb or to have at least pilfered the seven-league-boots which Tom had taken from the ogre.

Pitou had scarcely imagined this project before he put it into execution.

While Catherine was going towards the high-road, he, Pitou, stooping down behind the high waving corn, stole across to the forest.

In an instant he had reached the border of the wood; and once there, he jumped across the wide ditch which bounded it, then rushed beneath the trees, less graceful, but as rapid as a terrified deer.

He ran for a quarter of an hour in this way, and at the end of that time he perceived the wood becoming lighter, for he had nearly reached the opposite edge near the road.

There he stopped, leaning against an enormous oak, which completely concealed him behind its knotted trunk. He felt perfectly sure that he had got ahead of Catherine.

He waited ten minutes, — even a quarter of an hour, — but saw no one.

Had she forgotten something that she should have taken with her, and returned to the farm for it? This was possible.

With the greatest possible precaution, Pitou crept near the road, stretched out his head from behind a great beechtree, which grew upon the very edge of the ditch, belonging, as it were, half to the road, half to the forest. From this he had a good view of the plain, and could have perceived anything that was moving upon it; he, however, could discern nothing.

He felt assured, therefore, that Catherine must have returned to the farm.

Pitou retraced his steps. Either she had not yet reached the farm, and he would see her return to it, or she had reached it, and he would see her come out again.

Pitou extended the compass of his long legs, and began to remeasure the distance which separated him from the plain.

He ran along the sandy part of the road which was softer to his feet, when he suddenly paused.

Pitou had raised his eyes, and at the opposite end of the road he saw at a great distance, blending as it were with the blue horizon of the forest, the white horse and the red jacket of Catherine.

The pace of Catherine’s horse was an amble.

The horse, ambling along, had left the high-road, having turned into a bridle-path, at the entrance of which was a direction-post, bearing the following inscription: —

“Path leading from the road of La Ferté-Milon to Boursonne.”

It was, as we have said, from a great distance that Pitou perceived this, but we know that distance was of no consequence to Pitou.

“Ah!” cried he, again darting into the forest, “it is not then to La Ferté-Milon that she was going, but to Boursonne! And yet I am not mistaken; she said La Ferté-Milon more than ten times; she had a commission given to her to make purchases at La Ferté-Milon. Dame Billot herself spoke of La Ferté-Milon.”

And while saying these words, Pitou continued running. Pitou ran faster and faster still. Pitou ran like a madman.

For Pitou, urged on by doubt, the first symptom of jealousy, was no longer biped. Pitou appeared to be one of those winged machines, which Dædalus in particular, and the great mechanicians of antiquity in general, imagined so well, but, alas! executed so badly.

He greatly resembled at that moment those figures stuffed with straw, with long reed arms, placed over toyshops, which the wind keeps turning in every direction.

Arms, legs, head, all are in motion; all are turning; all seem to be flying.

Pitou’s immensely long legs measured paces of at least five feet, so widely could he distend them; his hands, like two broad bats at the end of two long sticks, struck upon the air like oars. His head — all mouth, all nostrils, and all eyes — absorbed the air, which it sent forth again in noisy breathing.

No horse could have been animated to so great a fury of speed.

No lion could have had a more ferocious desire of coming up with his prey.

Pitou had more than half a league to run when he perceived Catherine; he did not give her time enough to go a quarter of a league, while he was running twice that distance.

His speed was therefore double that of a horse that was trotting.

At length he came to a line with the object of his pursuit.

The extremity of the forest was then not more than five hundred paces from him. He could see the light more clearly through the trees, and just beyond them was the estate of Boursonne.

It was no longer merely for the purpose of seeing Catherine that Pitou followed her; it was to watch her!

She had spoken that which was false. What could be her object?

That mattered not. In order to gain a certain degree of authority over her, it was necessary to surprise her, and prove that she had uttered a flagrant falsehood.

Pitou threw himself head foremost into the underwood and thorns, breaking through them with his helmet, and using his sabre to clear the way when it was necessary.

However, as Catherine was now only moving on at a walk, from time to time the crackling noise of a branch being broken reached her ear, which made both the horse and the mistress prick up their ears.

Then Pitou, whose eyes never for a moment lost sight of Catherine, stopped, which was of some advantage to him, as it enabled him to recover his breath, and it destroyed at the same time any suspicion that Catherine might entertain.

This, however, could not last long, nor did it.

Pitou suddenly heard Catherine's horse neigh, and this neighing was replied to by the neighing of another horse. The latter could not yet be seen.

But however this might be, Catherine gave hers a smart cut with her holly switch; and the animal, which had taken breath a few moments, set off again in full trot.

In about five minutes, thanks to this increase of speed, she had come up with a horseman, who had hastened towards her with as much eagerness as she had shown to reach him.

Catherine's movement had been so rapid and unexpected that poor Pitou had remained motionless, standing in the same place, only raising himself on his tiptoes that he might see as far as possible.

The distance was too great to enable him to see clearly.

But if he did not see, what Pitou felt, as if it had been an electric shock, was the delight and the blushing of the young girl. It was the sudden start which agitated her whole body. It was the sparkling of her eyes, usually so gentle, but which then became absolutely flashing.

Neither could he see who was the cavalier. He could not distinguish his features; but recognizing by his air, by his green velvet hunting-coat, by his hat with its broad loop, by the easy and graceful motion of his head, that he must belong to the very highest class of society, his memory at once reverted to the very handsome young man, the elegant dancer of Villers-Cotterets; his heart, his mouth, every fibre of his nerves, murmured the name of Isidore de Charny.

And it was he in fact.

Pitou heaved a sigh which was very much like a roar; and, rushing anew into the thicket, he advanced within twenty paces of the two young people, then too much occupied with each other to remark whether the noise they heard was caused by the rushing of a quadruped or of a biped through the underwood.

The young man, however, turned his head towards Pitou, raised himself up in his stirrups, and cast a vague look around him.

But at the same moment, and in order to escape this investigation, Pitou threw himself flat on his face.

Then, like a serpent, he glided along the ground about ten paces more, and having then got within hearing distance, he listened.

“Good-day, Monsieur Isidore,” said Catherine.

“Monsieur Isidore!” murmured Pitou; “I was sure of that.”

He then felt in all his limbs the immense fatigue of the race he had run, and which doubt, mistrust, and jealousy had urged him to during a whole hour.

The two young people had each let fall their bridle, and had grasped each other’s hands and remained thus, mute and smiling at each other, while the two horses, no doubt accustomed to each other, were rubbing their noses together, and pawing the green turf by the roadside.

“You are behind your time *to-day*,” said Catherine, who was the first to speak.

“To-day!” exclaimed Pitou to himself; “it seems that on other days he was not behind time.”

“It is not my fault, dear Catherine,” replied the young man, “for I was detained by a letter from my brother, which reached me only this morning, and to which I was obliged to reply by return of post. But fear nothing; to-morrow I will be more punctual.”

Catherine smiled, and Isidore pressed still more tenderly the hand which had been left in his.

Alas! all these proofs of affection were so many thorns which made poor Pitou’s heart bleed.

“You have then very late news from Paris” she asked.

“Yes.”

“Well, then,” continued she, smiling, “so have I. Did you not tell me the other day when similar things happened to two persons who loved each other, that it is called sympathy?”

“Precisely. And how did you receive your news, my lovely Catherine?”

“By Pitou.”

“And whom do you mean by Pitou?” asked the young nobleman, with a free and joyous air, which changed to scarlet the color which had already overspread Pitou’s cheeks.

“Why, you know full well,” said she. “Pitou is the poor lad whom my father took at the farm, and who gave me his arm one Sunday.”

“Ah, yes,” said the young gentleman, “he whose knees are like knots tied in a table-napkin.”

Catherine laughed. Pitou felt himself humiliated, and was in perfect despair. He looked at the knees, which were in fact like knots, raising himself on both hands and getting up; but he again fell flat on his face with a sigh.

“Come, now,” said Catherine, “you must not so sadly ill-treat my poor Pitou. Do you know what he proposed to me just now?”

“No; but tell me what it was, my lovely one.”

“Well, then, he proposed to accompany me to La Ferté-Milon.”

“Where you are not going?”

“No, because I thought you were waiting for me here; while, on the contrary, it was I who almost had to wait for you.”

“Ah! do you know you have uttered royal sentence, Catherine?”

“Really! well, I am sure I did not imagine I was doing so.”

“And why did you not accept the offer of this handsome cavalier? He would have amused us.”

“Not always, perhaps,” replied Catherine, laughing.

“You are right, Catherine,” said Isidore; fixing his eyes which beamed with love, on the beautiful girl.

And he caught the blushing face of the young girl in his arms, which he clasped round her neck.

Pitou closed his eyes that he might not see, but he had forgotten to shut his ears that he might not hear, and the sound of a kiss reached them.

Pitou clutched his hair in despair, as does the man afflicted with the plague in the foreground of Gros’ picture, representing Bonaparte visiting the soldiers attacked by the plague in the hospital at Jaffa.

When Pitou had somewhat recovered his equanimity, he found that the two young people had moved off to a little distance, and were proceeding on their way, walking their horses.

The last words which Pitou could catch were these:

“Yes, you are right, Monsieur Isidore; let us ride together for an hour; my horse’s legs shall make up the lost time. And,” added she, laughing, “it is a good animal, who will not mention it to any one.”

And this was all; the vision faded away. Darkness reigned in the soul of Pitou, as it began to reign over all Nature; and rolling upon the heather, the poor lad abandoned himself to the overwhelming feelings which oppressed his heart.

He remained in this state for some time; but the coolness of the evening at length restored him to himself.

“I will not return to the farm,” said he. “I should only be humiliated, scoffed at. I should eat the bread of a woman who loves another man, and a man, I cannot but acknowledge, who is handsomer, richer, and more elegant than I am. No, my place is no longer at the farm, but at Haramont, — at Haramont, my own country, where I shall perhaps find people who will not think that my knees are like knots made in a table-napkin.”

Having said this, Pitou trotted his good long legs towards Haramont, where, without his at all suspecting it, his reputation and that of his helmet and sabre had preceded him, and where awaited him, if not happiness, at least a glorious destiny.

But, it is well known, it is not an attribute of humanity to be perfectly happy.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Pitou an Orator

HOWEVER, on arriving at Villers-Cotterets, towards ten o’clock at night, after having had the long run we have endeavored to describe, Pitou felt that however melancholy he might be, it was much better to stop at the Dauphin Hotel and sleep in a good bed, than to sleep canopied by the stars, under some beech or oak in the forest.

For as to sleeping in a house at Haramont, arriving there at half-past ten at night, it was useless to think of it. For more than an hour and a half every light had been extinguished, and every door closed in that peaceful village.

Pitou therefore, put up at the Dauphin Hotel, where, for a thirty-sous piece, he had an excellent bed, a four-pound loaf, a piece of cheese, and a pot of cider.

Pitou was both fatigued and in love, tired out and in despair. The result of this was a struggle between his moral and physical feelings, in which the moral were in the first instance victorious, but at length succumbed.

That is to say, that from eleven o’clock to two in the morning, Pitou groaned, sighed, turned and twisted in his bed, without being able to sleep a wink; but at two o’clock, overcome by fatigue, he closed his eyes, not to open them again till seven.

As at Haramont every one was in bed at half-past ten at night, so at Villers-Cotterets everybody was stirring at seven in the morning.

Pitou, on leaving the Dauphin Hotel, again found that his helmet and sabre attracted public attention.

After going about a hundred paces, he consequently found himself the centre of a numerous crowd.

Pitou had decidedly acquired an enormous popularity.

There are few travellers who have such good luck. The sun, which, it is said, shines for the whole world, does not always shine with a favorable brilliancy for peoplewho return to their own native place with the desire of being considered prophets.

But also it does not happen to every one to have an aunt crabbed and avaricious to so ferocious a degree as Aunt Angélique; it does not happen to every Gargantua capable of swallowing an old cock boiled with rice, to be able to offer a half-crown to the proprietor of the victim.

But that which happens still less often to returning persons, whose origin and traditions can be traced back to the Odyssey, is to return with a helmet on their heads and a sabre by their sides; above all, when the rest of their accoutrements are far from being military.

For we must avow that it was, above all, this helmet and this sabre which recommended Pitou to the attention of his fellow-citizens.

But for the vexations which Pitou’s love encountered on his return, it has been seen that all sorts of good fortune awaited him. This was undoubtedly a compensation.

And immediately on seeing him, some of the inhabitants of Villers-Cotterets, who had accompanied Pitou from the Abbé Fortier’s door in the Rue de Soissons to Dame Angélique’s door at Pleux, resolved, in order to continue the ovation, to accompany him from Villers-Cotterets to Haramont.

And they did as they had resolved; on seeing which, the above-mentioned inhabitants of Haramont began to appreciate their compatriot at his just value.

It is, however, only justice to them to say that the soil was already prepared to receive the seed. Pitou’s first passage through Haramont, rapid as it had been, had left some traces in the minds of its inhabitants; his helmet and his sabre had remained impressed on the memories of those who had seen him appearing before them as a luminous apparition.

In consequence, the inhabitants of Haramont, seeing themselves favored by this second return of Pitou, which they no longer hoped for, received him with every manifestation of respect and consideration, entreating him to doff for a time his warlike accoutrements, and fix his tent under the four linden-trees which overshadowed the little village square, as the Thessalians used to entreat Mars on the anniversary of his great triumphs.

Pitou deigned the more readily to consent to this, from its being his intention to fix his domicile at Haramont. He therefore accepted the shelter of a bedroom which a warlike person of the village let to him ready furnished.

It was furnished with a deal bedstead, *a paillasse*, and a mattress, two chairs, a table, and a water-jug.

The rent of the whole of this was estimated by the proprietor himself at six livres per annum; that is to say, the value of two dishes of fowl and rice.

The rent being agreed upon, Pitou took possession of his domicile, and supplied those who had accompanied him with refreshments at his own charge; and as these events — without speaking of the cider he had imbibed — had somewhat excited his brain, he pronounced an harangue to them, standing on the threshold of his new residence.

This harangue of Pitou was a great event, and consequently all Haramont was assembled round the house.

Pitou was somewhat of a clerk, and knew what fine language was; he knew the eight words by which at that period the haranguers of nations — it was thus Homer called them — stirred up the popular masses.

Between Monsieur de Lafayette and Pitou there was undoubtedly a great distance, but between Haramont and Paris the distance was greater still; morally speaking, it will be clearly understood.

Pitou commenced by an exordium with which the Abbé Fortier, critical as he was, would not have been dissatisfied.

“Citizens,” said he, “citizens, — this word is sweet to pronounce, — I have already addressed other Frenchmen by it, for all Frenchmen are brothers; but on this spot I am using it, I believe, towards real brothers, and I find my whole family here in my compatriots of Haramont.”

The women — there were some few among the auditory, and they were not the most favorably disposed towards the orator, for Pitou’s knees were still too thick, and the calves of his legs too thin, to produce an impression in his favor on a feminine audience — the women, on hearing the word “family,” thought of that poor Pitou, the orphan child, the poor abandoned lad, who, since the death of his mother, had never had a meal that satisfied his hunger. And this word “family,” uttered by a youth who had none, moved in some among them that sensitive fibre which closes the reservoir of tears.

The exordium being finished, Pitou began the narrative, the second head of an oration.

He related his journey to Paris, the riots with regard to the busts, the taking of the Bastille, and the vengeance of the people; he passed lightly over the part he had taken in the combats on the Place Vendôme, the square before the Palais Royal, and in the Faubourg St. Antoine. But the less he boasted, the greater did he appear in the eyes of his compatriots; and at the end of Pitou's narrative, his helmet had become as large as the dome of the Invalides, and his sabre as long as the steeple of Haramont church.

The narrative being ended, Pitou then proceeded to the confirmation, that delicate operation by which Cicero recognized a real orator.

He proved that popular indignation had been justly excited against speculators; he said two words of Messieurs Pitt, father and son; he explained the Revolution by the privileges granted to the nobility and to the clergy; finally, he invited the people of Haramont to do that in particular which the people of France had done generally, — that is to say, to unite against the common enemy.

Then he went on from the confirmation to the peroration, by one of those sublime changes common to all great orators.

He let fall his sabre; and while picking it up, he accidentally drew it from its scabbard.

This accident furnished him with a text for an incendiary resolution, calling upon the inhabitants of Haramont to take up arms, and to follow the example of the revolted Parisians.

The people of Haramont were enthusiastic, and replied energetically.

The Revolution was proclaimed with loud acclamation throughout the village.

The men from Villers-Cotterets who had remained at the meeting, returned home, their hearts swelling with the patriotic leaven, singing in the most threatening tones towards the aristocrats, and with savage fury:

"Vive Henri Quatre,
Vive ce roi vaillant — "

Rouget de l'Isle had not then composed the "Marseillaise," and the Federalists of '90 had not yet re-awakened the old popular "Ça ira," seeing that they were then only in the year of grace 1789.

Pitou thought that he had merely made a speech. Pitou had made a revolution.

He re-entered his own house, regaled himself with a piece of brown bread and the remains of his cheese, from the Dauphin Hotel, which he had carefully stowed away in his helmet; then he went and bought some brass wire, made some snares, and when it was dark, went to lay them in the forest.

That same night Pitou caught a good-sized rabbit, and a young one about four months old.

Pitou would have much wished to have set his wires for hares, but he could not discern a single run, and this proved to him the correctness of the old sporting axiom, “Dogs and cats, hares and rabbits, live not together.”

It would have been necessary to go three or four leagues before reaching a country well-stocked with hares, and Pitou was rather fatigued; his legs had done their utmost the day before, for besides the distance they had performed, they had carried for the last four or five leagues a man worn out with grief, and there is nothing so heavy as grief to long legs.

Towards one in the morning he returned with his first harvest; he hoped to gather another after the passage in the morning.

He went to bed, retaining within his breast remains of so bitter a nature of that grief which had so much fatigued his legs the day before that he could only sleep six hours consecutively upon the atrocious mattress, which the proprietor himself called a shingle.

Pitou therefore slept from one o’clock to seven. The sun was therefore shining upon him through his open shutter while he was sleeping.

Through this open shutter, thirty or forty inhabitants of Haramont were looking at him as he slept.

He awoke as Turenne did, on his gun-carriage, smiled at his compatriots, and asked them graciously why they had come to him in such numbers and so early.

One of them had been appointed spokesman. We shall faithfully relate this dialogue. This man was a wood-cutter, and his name Claude Tellier.

“Ange Pitou,” said he, “we have been reflecting the whole night; citizens ought, in fact, as you said yesterday, to arm themselves in the cause of liberty.”

“I said so,” replied Pitou, in a firm tone, and which announced that he was ready to maintain what he had said.

“Only in order to arm ourselves the principal thing is wanting.”

“And what is that?” asked Pitou, with much interest.

“Arms!”

“Ah! yes, that is true,” said Pitou.

“We have, however, reflected enough not to allow our reflections to be lost; and we will arm ourselves, cost what it may.”

"When I went away," said Pitou, "there were five guns in Haramont, — three muskets, a single-barrelled fowling-piece, and a double-barrelled one."

"There are now only four," rejoined the orator; "one of the fowling-pieces burst from old age a month ago."

"That must have been the fowling-piece which belonged to Désiré Maniquet," said Pitou.

"Yes, and, by token when it burst, it carried off two of my fingers," said Désiré Maniquet, holding above his head his mutilated hand; "and as this accident happened to me in the warren of that aristocrat who is called Monsieur de Longpré, the aristocrats shall pay me for it."

Pitou nodded his head to show that he approved this just revenge.

"We therefore have only four guns left," rejoined Claude Tellier.

"Well, then, with four guns you have already enough to arm five men," said Pitou.

"How do you make that out?"

"Oh, the fifth will carry a pike! That is the way they do at Paris; for every four men armed with guns, there is always one man armed with a pike. Those pikes are very convenient things; they serve to stick the heads upon which have been cut off."

"Oh, oh!" cried a loud, joyous voice, "it is to be hoped that we shall not cut off heads."

"No," gravely replied Pitou; "if we have only firmness enough to reject the gold of Messieurs Pitt, father and son. But we were talking of guns; let us not wander from the question, as Monsieur Bailly says. How many men have we in Haramont capable of bearing arms? Have you counted them?"

"Yes."

"And how many are you?"

"We are thirty-two."

"Then there are twenty-eight muskets deficient?"

"Which we shall never get," said the stout man with the good-humored face.

"Ah," said Pitou, "it is necessary to know that, my friend Boniface."

"And how is it necessary to know?"

"Yes, I say it is necessary to know, because I know."

"What do you know?"

"I know where they are to be procured."

“To be procured?”

“Yes; the people of Paris had no arms either. Well, Monsieur Marat, a very learned doctor, but very ugly, told the people of Paris where arms were to be found; the people of Paris went where Monsieur Marat told them, and there they found them.”

“And where did Marat tell them to go?” inquired Désiré Maniquet.

“He told them to go to the Invalides.”

“Yes; but we have no Invalides at Haramont.”

“But I know a place in which there are more than a hundred guns,” said Pitou.

“And where is that?”

“In one of the rooms of the Abbé Fortier’s college.”

“The Abbé Fortier has a hundred guns He wishes, then, to arm his singing boys, the beggarly black cap!” cried Claude Tellier.

Pitou had not a deep-seated affection for the Abbé Fortier; however, this violent outburst against his former professor profoundly wounded him.

“Claude!” cried he, “Claude!”

“Well, what now?”

“I did not say that the guns belong to the Abbé Fortier.”

“If they are in his house, they belong to him.”

“That position is a false one. I am in the house of Bastien Godinet, and yet the house of Bastien Godinet does not belong to me.”

“That is true,” said Bastien, replying without giving Pitou occasion to appeal to him directly.

“The guns, therefore, do not belong to the Abbé Fortier,” continued Pitou.

“Whose are they, then?”

“They belong to the township.”

“If they belong to the township, how does it happen that they are in the Abbé Fortier’s house?”

“They are in the Abbé Fortier’s house, because the house in which the Abbé Fortier lives belongs to the township, which gives it to him rent free because he says Mass and teaches the children of poor citizens gratis. Now, since the Abbé Fortier’s house belongs to the township, the township has a right to reserve a room in the house that belongs to it, in which to put its muskets, — ah!”

“That is true,” said the auditors; “the township has the right.”

“Well, then, let us see; how are we to get hold of these guns, — tell us that?”

The question somewhat embarrassed Pitou, who scratched his ear.

“Yes, tell us quickly,” cried another voice, “for we must go to our work.”

Pitou breathed again; the last speaker had opened to him a door for escape.

“Work!” exclaimed Pitou. “You speak of arming yourselves for the defence of the country, and you think of work!”

And Pitou accompanied his words with a laugh, so ironical and so contemptuous that the Haramontese looked at one another, and felt humiliated.

“We would not mind sacrificing a few days more, should it be absolutely necessary,” said the other, “to gain our liberty.”

“To gain our liberty,” cried Pitou, “it will be necessary to sacrifice more than a day; we must sacrifice all our days.”

“Then,” said Boniface, “when people are working for liberty they are resting.”

“Boniface,” replied Pitou, with the air of Lafayette when irritated, “those will never know how to be free who do not know how to trample their prejudices under foot.”

“As to myself,” said Boniface, “I ask nothing better than not to work; but what is to be done, then, with regard to eating?”

“Do people eat?” cried Pitou, disdainfully.

“At Haramont they do so yet. Do they no longer eat at Paris?”

“They eat when they have vanquished the tyrants,” replied Pitou. “Did any one eat on the 14th of July? Did they even think of eating on that day? No; they had not time even to think of it.”

“Ah! ah!” cried some of the most zealous, “the takng of the Bastille must have been a fine sight.”

“But,” continued Pitou, disdainfully, “as to drinking, I will not say no; it was so hot, and gunpowder has so acrid a taste.”

“But what had they to drink?”

“What had the people to drink? Why, water, wine, and brandy. It was the women who had taken this in charge.”

“The women?”

“Yes, and handsome women, too, who had made flags of the front part of their dresses.”

“Can it be possible?” cried the auditors, with much astonishment.

“But at all events,” observed the sceptic, “they must have eaten the next day.”

“I do not say that they did not,” replied Pitou.

“Then,” rejoined Boniface, triumphantly, “if they ate, they must have worked.”

“Monsieur Boniface,” replied Pitou, “you are speaking of things without understanding them. Paris is not a hamlet. It is not composed of a heap of villagers accustomed to think only of their bellies, — *obedientia ventri,* as we say in Latin, we who are learned. No; Paris, as Monsieur de Mirabeau says, is the head of all nations; it is a brain which thinks for the whole world. The brain, sir, never eats.”

“That is true,” thought the auditors.

“And yet,” said Pitou, “the brain, though it does not eat, still feeds itself.”

“But then how does it feed itself?” answered Boniface.

“Invisibly, with the nutriment of the body.”

Here the Haramontese were quite at a loss; the question was too profound for them to understand.

“Explain this to us, Pitou,” said Boniface.

“That is easily done,” replied Pitou: “Paris is the brain, as I have said; the provinces are the members. The provinces will work, drink, eat; and Paris will think.”

“Then I will leave the provinces and go to Paris,” rejoined the sceptical Boniface. “Will you come to Paris with me, my friends?”

A portion of the audience burst into a loud laugh, and appeared to side with Boniface.

Pitou perceived that he would be discredited by this sarcastic railer.

“Go, then, to Paris,” cried he in his turn; “and if you find there a single face as ridiculous as yours, I will buy of you such young rabbits as this at a louis apiece.”

And with one hand Pitou held up the young rabbit he had caught, and with the other made the louis, which remained of Doctor Gilbert’s munificence jingle, in his pocket.

Pitou this time had the laugh in his favor.

Upon this, Boniface became positively purple with rage.

“Why, Master Pitou, you are playing the insolent to call us ridiculous.”

“*Ridiculus tu es*,” majestically replied Pitou.

“But look at yourself,” retorted Boniface.

“It would be but to little purpose,” replied Pitou. “I might see something as ugly as yourself, but never anything half so stupid.”

Pitou had scarcely said these words, when Boniface — at Haramont they are almost as passionate as in Picardy — struck at him with his fist, which Pitou adroitly parried, but to which he replied by a kick in the true Parisian fashion.

This kick was followed by a second, which sent the sceptic flying some few feet, when he fell heavily to the ground.

Pitou bent down over his adversary so as to give the victory the most fatal consequences, and all were already rushing to save poor Boniface, when, raising himself up, —

“Learn,” said Pitou, “that the conquerors of the Bastille do not fight with fists. I have a sabre; take another sabre, and let us end the matter at once.”

Upon this, Pitou drew his sword, forgetting, or perhaps not forgetting, that the only sabre in all Haramont was his own, with the exception of that of the rural guard, at least two feet shorter than his own.

It is true that to establish a more perfect equilibrium he put on his helmet.

This greatness of soul electrified the assembly. It was agreed by all that Boniface was a rascallion, a vile fellow, an ass unworthy of being admitted to share in any discussion on public affairs.

And consequently he was expelled.

“You see, then,” said Pitou, “the image of the Revolution of Paris; as Monsieur Prudhomme or Loustalot has said — I think it was the virtuous Loustalot who said it — yes, ‘twas he, I am now certain of it: —

“‘The great appear to us to be great, solely because we are upon our knees; let us stand up.’“

This epigram had not the slightest bearing on the question in dispute, but perhaps for that very reason it produced a prodigious effect.

The sceptic Boniface, who was standing at a distance of twenty paces, was struck by it, and he returned to Pitou, humbly saying to him: —

“You must not be angry with us, Pitou, if we do not understand liberty as well as you do.”

“It is not liberty,” said Pitou, “but the rights of man.”

This was another blow with the sledge-hammer, with which Pitou a second time felled the whole auditory.

“Decidedly,” said Boniface, “you are a learned man, and we pay homage to you.”

Pitou bowed.

“Yes,” said he,” education and experience have placed me above you; and if just now I spoke to you rather harshly, it was from my friendship for you.”

Loud applause followed this; Pitou saw that he could now give vent to his eloquence.

“You have just talked of work,” said he, “but do you know what work is? To you labor consists in splitting wood, in reaping the harvest, in picking up beech-mast, in tying up wheat-sheaves, in placing stones one above another, and consolidating them with cement. That is what you consider work. In your opinion I do not work at all. Well, then, you are mistaken, for I alone labor much more than you do all together, — for I am meditating your emancipation; for I am dreaming of your liberty, of your equality. A moment of my time is therefore of more value than a hundred of your days. The oxen who plough the ground do but one and the same thing; but the man who thinks surpasses all the strength of matter. I, by myself, am worth the whole of you. Look at Monsieur de Lafayette; he is a thin, fair man, not much taller than Claude Tellier. He has a pointed nose, thin legs, and arms as small as the back joints of this chair. As to his hands and feet, it is not worth while to mention them; a man might as well be without. Well! this man has carried two worlds on his shoulders, which is one more than Atlas did, and his little hands have broken the chains of America and France.

“Now, as his arms have done all this, arms not thicker than the back railing of a chair, only imagine to yourselves what arms like mine can do.”

And Pitou bared his arms, which were as knotty as the trunk of a holly-tree.

And having drawn this parallel, he paused, well assured that he had produced, without coming to a regular conclusion, an immense effect.

And he had produced it.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Pitou a Conspirator

THE greater portion of events which happen to man, and which confer on him great happiness or great honors, are almost always brought about from his having fervently desired or much disdained them.

If this maxim were duly applied to events and to men cited in history, it would be found that it possesses not only profundity, but also truth.

We shall, however, content ourselves, without having recourse to proofs, with applying it to Ange Pitou, our man and our history.

In fact, Pitou, if we are allowed to retrograde a few steps, and to return to the wound which he had received straight to the heart, — Pitou had, in fact, after the discovery he had made on the borders of the forest, been seized with a withering disdain for the things of this nether world.

He who had hoped to find blossom within his heart that rare and precious plant which mortals denominate Love; he who had returned to his own province with a helmet and a sabre, proud of thus associating Mars and Venus, as was said by his illustrious compatriot, Demonstier, in his “Letters to Emilie on Mythology,” — found himself completely taken aback and very unhappy on perceiving that there existed at Villers-Cotterets and its neighborhood more lovers than were necessary.

He who had taken so active a part in the crusade of the Parisians against the nobility, found himself but very insignificant in opposition to the country nobility represented by Monsieur Isidore de Charny.

Alas! so handsome a youth, a man likely to please even at first sight, a cavalier who wore buckskin breeches and a velvet riding-coat.

How would it be possible to contend against such a man?

With a man who had long riding-boots, and spurs on the heels of those boots, — with a man whose brother many people still called Monseigneur.

How was it possible to contend against such a rival How could he avoid at once feeling shame and admiration? — two feelings which, to the heart of a lover, inflict a double torture, — a torture so frightful that it has never yet been decided whether a jealous man prefers a rival of higher or lower condition than himself.

Pitou, therefore, but too well knew the pangs of jealousy, the wounds of which are incurable and fertile in agony, and of which up to this time the ingenuous heart of our hero had remained ignorant, — jealousy, a plant of marvellous and venomous growth, which sprang up without seed being sown, from a soil that had never seen germinate any noxious passion, not even self-love, that evil root which chokes up even the most sterile lands.

A heart thus tortured stands in need of much philosophy in order to regain its habitual calmness.

Was Pitou a philosopher, — he who the day following that on which he had experienced this sensation could think of waging war against the hares and rabbits of his Highness the Duke of Orléans, and the day after that, of making the long harangues we have reported?

Was his heart, then, as hard as flint, from which every fresh blow draws a spark? Or did it possess only the soft resistance of a sponge, which has the quality of absorbing tears, and of mollifying, without receiving a wound, the shock of every misfortune?

This the future will indubitably testify; therefore let us not prejudge, but go on with our story.

After having received the visit we have related, and his harangues being terminated, Pitou, compelled by his appetite to attend to minor matters, set to work and cooked his young rabbit, regretting that it was not a hare.

But, in fact, had the rabbit been really a hare, Pitou would not have eaten, but would have sold it.

That would not have been a very trifling concern. A hare, according to its size, is worth from eighteen to twenty-four sous; and although he was still the possessor of a few louis given to him by Doctor Gilbert, Pitou, without being as avaricious as his Aunt Angélique, had a good dose of economy, which he had inherited from his mother. Pitou would therefore have added eighteen sous to his treasure, which would thus have been increased instead of diminished.

For Pitou had justly reflected that it was not necessary for a man to make repasts which would cost him one day half a crown, another eighteen sous. He was not a Lucullus; and Pitou said that with the eighteen sous his hare would have brought him, he could have lived during a whole week.

Now, during that week, supposing that he had caught a hare on the first day, he might very well have taken three during the six following days, or rather, the six following nights. In a week, therefore, he would have gained food for a month.

Following up this calculation, forty-eight hares would have sufficed for a year's keep; all the rest would have been clear profit.

Pitou entered into this economical calculation while he was eating his rabbit, which, instead of bringing him anything, cost him a sous' worth of butter and a sous' worth of lard. As to the onions, he had gleaned them upon the common land.

"After a repast, the fireside or a walk," says the proverb. After his repast, Pitou went into the forest to seek a snug corner where he could take a nap.

It is scarcely necessary to say that as soon as the unfortunate youth had finished talking politics and found himself alone, he had incessantly before his eyes the spectacle of Monsieur Isidore making love to Mademoiselle Catherine.

The oaks and beech-trees trembled with his sighs; Nature, which always smiles on well-filled stomachs, made one exception in regard to Pitou, and appeared to him a vast dark desert, in which there remained only rabbits, hares, and deer.

Once hidden beneath the tall trees of his natal forest, Pitou, inspired by their cool and invigorating shade, became more firm in his heroic resolution, and this was to disappear from before the eyes of Catherine, — to leave her altogether free, and not to affect himself extravagantly as to her preference of another, that he might not be more humiliated than was necessary by invidious comparison.

It was a highly painful effort to abstain from seeing Mademoiselle Catherine; but a man ought to be a man.

Moreover, this was not precisely the case in question.

The question was not exactly that he should no more see Mademoiselle Catherine, but that he should not be seen by her.

Now, what was there to prevent the contemned lover from carefully concealing himself and catching a glance of the cruel fair one? Nothing.

From Haramont to the farm what was the distance Scarcely a league and a half; that is to say, a few strides, — that was all!

Although it would have been base on the part of Pitou to have continued his attentions to Catherine after what he had seen, it would be so much the more adroit in him to continue to ascertain her acts and conduct, thanks to a little exercise, which could not but be favorable to Pitou's health.

Moreover, that portion of the forest which was behind the farm and extended towards Boursonne abounded in hares.

Pitou would go at night to lay his wires; and the next morning, from the top of some high hillock, he would cast his eyes over the plain and watch Mademoiselle Catherine's doings. This he had the right to do; this, to a certain point, was his duty, being the authorized agent, as he undoubtedly was, of Father Billot.

Thus, having consoled himself, and, as it were, in spite of himself, Pitou thought that he might cease sighing. He dined off an enormous slice of bread he had brought with him; and when the evening had closed in, he laid a dozen wires and threw himself down upon the heather, still warm from the sun's rays.

There he slept like a man in utter despair; that is to say, his sleep was almost as undisturbed as that of death.

The coolness of the night awoke him; he went to examine his wires. Nothing had been taken; but Pitou calculated always more upon the morning passage; only, as his head felt somewhat heavy, he determined on returning to his lodgings and looking to his wires the following day.

But this day, which to him had passed by so devoid of events and intrigues, had been passed in a very different manner by the inhabitants of the hamlet, who had employed it in reflecting and in making combinations.

It might have been seen towards the middle of that day which Pitou had passed dreaming in the forest, — the wood-cutters, we say, might have been seen leaning contemplatively upon their hatchets; the threshers with their flails suspended in the air, meditating; the joiners stopping their planes upon a half-smoothed plank.

Pitou was the first great cause of all this loss of time; Pitou had been the breath of discord which had stirred these straws which began to whirl about confusedly.

And he, the occasion of all this agitation, had not even thought one moment on the subject.

But at the moment when he was going towards his own lodging, although the clock had struck ten, and usually at that hour not a single light was to be seen, not an eye was still open in the village, he perceived a very unaccustomed scene around the house in which he resided. He saw a number of men seated in groups, a number standing in groups, several groups walking up and down.

The aspect of these groups was altogether singular.

Pitou, without knowing why, imagined that all these people were talking of him.

And when he passed through the street, they all appeared as if struck by an electric shock, and pointed at him as he passed.

“What can the matter be with them all?” said Pitou to himself. “I have not my helmet on.”

And he modestly retired to his own lodging, after having exchanged salutations with a few of the villagers as he passed by them.

He had scarcely shut the door of his house when he thought he heard a slight knock upon the doorpost.

Pitou was not in the habit of lighting a candle to undress by. A candle was too great a luxury for a man who paid only six livres a year for his lodgings, and who, having no books, could not read.

But it was certain that some one was knocking at his door.

He raised the latch.

Two of the young inhabitants of the village familiarly entered his abode.

“Why, Pitou, you have not a candle!” said one of them.

“No,” replied Pitou; “of what use would it be?”

“Why, that one might see.”

“Oh! I see well at night; I am a nyctalops.”

And in proof of this, he added: —

“Good-evening, Claude! Good-evening, Désiré.”

“Well!” they both cried, “here we are, Pitou!”

“This is a kind visit; what do you desire of me, my friends?”

“Come out into the light,” said Claude.

“Into the light of what? There is no moon.”

“Into the light of heaven.”

“You have, then, something to say to me?”

“Yes, we would speak with you, Ange.”

And Claude emphasized these words with a singular expression.

“Well, let us go, then,” said Pitou.

And the three went out together.

They walked on until they reached the first open space in the road, where they stopped, Ange Pitou still not knowing what they wanted of him.

“Well?” inquired Pitou, seeing that his two companions stopped.

“You see now, Ange,” said Claude, “here we are, — Désiré Maniquet and myself. We manage to lead all our companions in the country. Will you be one of us?”

“To do what?”

“Ah! that is the question. It is to — ”

“To do what?” said Pitou, drawing himself up to his full height.

“To conspire!” murmured Claude, in Pitou’s ear.

“Ah, ah! as they do at Paris,” said Pitou, jeeringly.

The fact is that Pitou was fearful of the word, and indeed of the echo of the word, even in the midst of the forest.

“Come, now, explain yourself,” said Pitou to Claude, after a short pause.

“This is the case,” said the latter. “Come nearer. Désiré, — you who are a poacher to your very soul, and who know all the noises of the day and night, of the plain and of the forest, — look around and see if we have been followed; listen whether there be any one attempting to overhear us.”

Désiré gave an assenting nod, took a tolerably wide circuit round Pitou and Claude, and having peeped into every bush and listened to every murmur, returned to them.

“You may speak out,” said he; “there is no one near us.”

“My friends,” rejoined Claude, “all the townships of France, as Pitou has told us, desire to be armed, and on the footing of National Guards!”

“That is true!” said Pitou.

“Well, then, why should Haramont not be armed like the other townships?”

“You said why, only yesterday, Claude,” replied Pitou, “when I proposed my resolution that we should arm ourselves. Haramont is not armed because Haramont has no muskets!”

“Oh, as to muskets, we need not be uneasy about them, since you know where they are to be had.”

“I know! I know!” said Pitou, who saw at what Claude was aiming, and who felt the danger of the proceeding.

“Well,” continued Claude, “all the patriotic young fellows of the village have been consulting together to-day.”

“Good!”

“And there are thirty-three of us!”

“That is the third of a hundred, less one,” added Pitou.

“Do you know the manual exercise?” inquired Claude.

“Do I not?” exclaimed Pitou, who did not even know how to shoulder arms.

“Good! and do you know how to manuvre a company?”

“I have seen General de Lafayette manuvring forty thousand men at least ten times,” disdainfully replied Pitou.

“That is all right,” said Désiré, tired of remaining silent, and who, without intending to presume, wished to put in a word in his turn.

“Well, then, will you command us?” said Claude to Pitou.

“Who, — I?” exclaimed Pitou, starting with surprise.

“Yes, you, — yourself!”

And the two conspirators intently eyed Pitou.

“Oh, you hesitate!” cried Claude.

“Why — ”

“You are not, then, a good patriot?” said Désiré.

“Oh! that, for example — -”

“There is something, then, that you are afraid of?”

“What! I? I, a conqueror of the Bastille, — a man to whom a medal is awarded?”

“You have a medal awarded you?”

“I shall have one as soon as the medals have been struck. Monsieur Billot has promised to apply for mine in my name.”

“He will have a medal! We shall have a chief who has a medal!” exclaimed Claude, in a transport of joy.

“Come now, speak out;” said Désiré; “will you accept the appointment?”

“Do you accept?” asked Claude.

“Well, then, yes; I will accept it,” said Pitou, carried away by his enthusiasm, and also, perhaps, by a feeling which was awakening within him, and which is called pride.

“It is agreed; from to-morrow morning you will be our commander.”

“And what shall I command you to do?”

“Our exercise, to be sure.”

“And the muskets?”

“Why, since you know where there are muskets — ”

“Oh, yes! at the house of the Abbé Fortier.”

“Undoubtedly.”

“Only it is very likely the Abbé Fortier will refuse to let me have them.”

“Well, then, you will do as the patriots did at the Invalides, — you will take them.”

“What! I alone?”

“You will have our signatures, and should it be necessary, you shall have our hands too. We will cause a rising in Villers-Cotterets; but we will have them.”

Pitou shook his head.

“The Abbé Fortier is a very obstinate man,” said he.

“Pooh! you were his favorite pupil; he would not be able to refuse you anything.”

“It is easy to perceive that you do not know him!” cried Pitou, with a sigh.

“How! do you believe the old man would refuse?”

“He would refuse them even to a squadron of the Royal Germans. He is dreadfully obstinate, *injustum et tenacem*. But I forgot, — you do not even understand Latin,” added Pitou, with much compassion.

But the two Haramontese did not allow themselves to be dazzled either by the quotation or the apostrophe.

“Ah, in good truth,” said Désiré, “we have chosen an excellent chief, Claude; he is alarmed at everything.”

Claude shook his head.

Pitou perceived that he was compromising his high position; he remembered that fortune always favors the brave.

“Well, be it so,” said he; “I will consider it.”

“You, then, will manage the affair of the muskets?”

“I will promise to do all I can.”

An expression of satisfaction was uttered by his two friends, replacing the slight discontent they had before manifested.

“Ho! ho!” said Pitou to himself, “these men want to dictate to me even before I am their chief; what will they do, then, when I shall be so in reality?”

“Do all you can,” said Claude, shaking his head; “oh, oh! that is not enough.”

“If that is not enough,” replied Pitou, “try you to do more. I give up my command to you. Go and see what you can make of the Abbé Fortier and his cat-o’ nine-tails.”

“That would be well worth while,” said Maniquet, disdainfully. “It is a pretty thing, indeed, for a man to return from Paris with a helmet and a sabre, and then to be afraid of a cat-o’-nine-tails.”

“A helmet and a sabre are not a cuirass; and even if they were, the Abbé Fortier would still find a place on which to apply his cat-o’-nine-tails.”

Claude and Désiré appeared to comprehend this last observation.

“Come, now, Pitou, my son,” said Claude. (“My son” is a term of endearment much used in the country.)

“Well, then, it shall be so,” said Pitou; “but zounds! you must be obedient.”

“You will see how obedient we shall be,” said he, giving a wink to Désiré.

“Only,” added Désiré, “you must engage with regard to the muskets — ”

“Oh! that is agreed upon,” cried Pitou, interrupting him, who was in truth extremely uneasy at the task imposed upon him, but whom, however, ambition was counselling to venture on deeds which required great daring.

“You promise, then?” said Claude.

“I swear it.”

Pitou stretched forth his hand. His two companions did the same.

And thus it was, by the light of the stars, and in an opening of the forest, that the insurrection was declared in the department of the Aisne, by the three Haramontese, unwitting plagiarists of William Tell and his three companions.

The fact is that Pitou dimly foresaw that after all the perils and troubles he would have to encounter, he would have the happiness of appearing gloriously invested with the insignia of a commander of the National Guard before the eyes of Catherine; and the insignia appeared to him to be of a nature to cause her to feel, if not remorse, at least some regret for the conduct she had pursued.

Thus consecrated by the will of his electors, Pitou returned to his house, meditating on the ways and means by which he could procure arms for his thirty-three National Guards.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

In which will be seen opposed to each other the Monarchical Principle represented by the Abbé Fortier, and the Revolutionary Principle represented by Pitou

THE whole of that night Pitou was so absorbed in reflecting on the great honor which had befallen him that he forgot to visit his wires.

The next morning he donned his helmet, and buckled on his great sabre, and set out manfully towards Villers-Cotterets.

It was just striking six o’clock when Pitou reached the square before the château, and he modestly knocked at the small door which opened into the Abbé Fortier’s garden.

Pitou had knocked loud enough to satisfy his conscience, but gently enough not to be heard from the house.

He had hoped thus to gain a quarter of an hour’s respite, and during that time to summon up some flowers of oratory wherewith to adorn the speech he had prepared for the Abbé Fortier.

But his astonishment was great when, notwithstanding his having knocked so gently, he saw the gate at once opened; but his astonishment soon ceased, when in the person who had opened it he recognized Sebastien Gilbert.

The lad was walking in the garden studying his lesson by the sun’s first rays, — or rather, we should say, pretending to study; for the open book was hanging listlessly in his hand, and the thoughts of the youth were capriciously wandering after those whom he most loved in the world.

Sebastien uttered a joyous cry on perceiving Pitou.

They embraced each other. The boy’s first words were these: —

“Have you received news from Paris?”

“No; have you any?” inquired Pitou. “Oh! I have received some,” said Sebastien. “My father has written me a delightful letter.”

“Ah!” cried Pitou.

“And in which,” continued the lad, “there is a word for you.”

And taking the letter from his breast-pocket, he handed it to Pitou.

“P.S. — Billot recommends Pitou not to annoy or distract the attention of the people at the farm.”

“Oh!” said Pitou, “that is a recommendation which, as it regards me, is altogether useless. There is no one at the farm whom I can either annoy or amuse.”

Then he added to himself, sighing still more deeply:

“It was to Monsieur Isidore that these words ought to have been addressed.”

He, however, soon recovered his self-possession, and returned the letter to Sebastien.

“Where is the abbé?” he inquired.

Sebastien bent his ear towards the house, and, although the width of the courtyard and the garden separated him from the staircase, which creaked beneath the footsteps of the worthy priest: —

“Why,” said he, “he is just coming downstairs.”

Pitou went from the garden into the courtyard; and it was only then that he heard the heavy footsteps of the abbé.

The worthy professor was reading the newspaper as he came downstairs. His faithful cat-o’-nine tails was, as usual, hanging by his side.

With his nose close to the newspaper — for he knew by heart the number of steps and every inequality in the wall of his old house — the abbé almost ran against Ange Pitou, who had assumed the most majestic air he could put on, in order to contend with his political antagonist.

But we must first of all say a few words as to the position of the Abbé Fortier, which might have appeared tedious in any other page, but which here find their natural place.

They will explain how it was that the thirty or forty muskets which have been so much talked about happened to be in-the Abbé Fortier’s charge, — which muskets had become the object of the ambition of Pitou, and of his two accomplices, Claude and Désiré.

The Abbé Fortier, who had formerly been the almoner or sub-almoner of the château, as we have already had occasion to explain elsewhere, had, in course of time, and above all, with that patient fixity of ideas inherent in ecclesiastics, become sole intendant of what in theatrical language is called the *properties* of the château.

Besides the sacred vases, besides the library, he had received in charge all the hunting apparatus of the Duke of Orléans, Louis Philippe, the father of Philippe, who was afterwards called *Égalité.* Some of this apparatus had been in the family as far back as the reigns of Louis XIII. and Henri III. All these articles had been artistically arranged by him in one of the galleries of the chateau, which had been allotted to him for this express purpose. In order to give them a more picturesque appearance, he had formed them into stars, the centre being shields, surrounded by boar-spears, hunting-knives, and short muskets, richly inlaid, and manufactured during the time of the League.

The door of this gallery was formidably defended by two small cannon of plated bronze, given by Louis XIV. to his brother, Monsieur.

Besides these, there were about fifty musketoons, brought as trophies by Joseph Philippe from the battle of Ushant, and presented by him to the municipality of Villers-Cotterets; and the municipality, as we have said, having furnished the Abbé Fortier with a house free of rent, had placed these muskets, not knowing what to do with them, in the collegiate house.

Such was the treasure guarded by the Dragon, named Fortier, and threatened by the Jason, named Ange Pitou.

The little arsenal of the château was sufficiently celebrated in the country to make people desire to obtain possession of it at little cost.

But, as we have said, the abbé, being a vigilant Dragon, did not appear disposed willingly to give up, to any Jason whatsoever, the golden apples which his Hesperides contained.

Having said this much, let us return to Pitou.

He very gracefully bowed to the Abbé Fortier, accompanying his bow with a slight cough, such as we use to attract the attention of persons who are naturally absent, or who are preoccupied.

The Abbé Fortier raised his nose from the newspaper.

“Well, I declare,” said he, “‘t is Pitou.”

“To serve you, should I be capable of doing so,” courteously replied Ange.

The abbé folded up his newspaper, or rather closed it as he would have done a portfolio, for in those happy days the newspapers were still small pamphlets.

Then, having folded up his paper, he stuck it into his belt on the opposite side to his cat-o’-nine-tails.

"Ah, yes! but in that lies the misfortune," replied the abbé, jeeringly, "seeing that you are not capable."

"Oh, most worthy abbé."

"Do you hear me, Mr. Hypocrite?"

"Oh, good abbé!"

"Do you hear me, Mr. Revolutionist?"

"Come now, this is good; for before I have spoken even a single word, you get into a passion with me. This is but a bad beginning, Abbé."

Sebastien — who well knew what the Abbé Fortier had, for the last two days, been saying to every one who came near him about Pitou, and thinking it better not to be present during the quarrel which must necessarily ensue between his schoolmaster and his friend — stole away as quickly as he could.

Pitou observed Sebastien's escape with a certain degree of sorrow. He was not a very vigorous ally, but he was a youth of the same political communion with himself.

And therefore, when he perceived him stepping through the door, he could not avoid uttering a sigh; then turning to the abbé: —

"Come now, Monsieur Fortier," said he, "why do you call me a Revolutionist? Would you insinuate that I am the cause of the Revolution?"

"You have lived with those who are carrying it on."

"Good Monsieur Abbé," said Pitou, with supreme dignity, "the thoughts of every man are free."

"Ah! indeed."

"Est penes hominem arbitrium et ratio."

"Why, really," cried the abbé, "you know Latin, then, you clown?"

"I know what you taught me of it," modestly replied Pitou.

"Yes, revised, corrected, augmented, and embellished with barbarisms."

"Good again, Monsieur Abbé, — barbarisms! and who is there who does not commit them?"

"Vile fellow!" cried the abbé, evidently wounded by this apparent tendency of Pitou to generalize. "What! do you believe that I am guilty of barbarisms?"

"You would commit them in the eyes of a man who was a better Latin scholar than yourself."

"Only hear that!" cried the abbé, turning pale with anger, and yet struck with the reasoning, which was not devoid of point.

Then, in a melancholy tone: —

“There, in two words, is the system of these vile wretches; they destroy and degrade, and who profits by it? They know not even themselves; it is to the profit of the unknown. Come now, Monsieur Dunce, speak out freely; do you know any one who is a better Latin scholar than I am?”

“No; but there may be many, although I do not know them, — I do not know everything.”

“Zounds! I believe you.”

Pitou made the sign of the cross.

“What are you doing there, libertine?”

“You swore, Monsieur Abbé, and I crossed myself.”

“Why, rascal, have you come here to tympanize me?”

“To tympanize you!” repeated Pitou.

“Ah, good; now again you do not comprehend — ”

“Oh, yes! I understand it well enough. Ah! thanks to you, I know the roots of words — tympanize — *tympanum* — *drum;* it comes from the Greek *tympanon*, drum or bell.”

The abbé appeared perfectly astounded.

“Root, *typos*, mark, vestige; and as Lancelot says in his Garden of Greek Roots, *typos*, *the form which impresses itself*, which word evidently comes from *tupto* , *strike*. There you have it.”

“Ah! ah! rascallion!” cried the abbé, more and more dumfounded. “It seems that you yet know something, even what you did not know.”

“Pooh!” ejaculated Pitou, with affected modesty.

“How did it happen that during the whole time you were with me, you could not answer me as you have now done?”

“Because, during the time I was with you, Abbé Fortier, you brutalized me; because, by your despotism you repelled my intelligence, imprisoned within my memory all that liberty has since brought forth from it. Yes, liberty,” continued Pitou, becoming more energetic as he proceeded; “do you hear me? — liberty!”

“Ah! rascal!”

“Monsieur Professor,” said Pitou, with an air which was not exempt from threat, — ”Monsieur Professor, do not insult me. *Contumelia non argumentum*, says an orator; insult is not reasoning.”

“I think that the fellow,” cried the abbé, in great fury, — ”I think that the fellow imagines it necessary to translate his Latin to me.”

“It is not my Latin, Monsieur Abbé; it is Cicero’s, — that is to say, the Latin of a man who assuredly would have thought that you made as many barbarisms in comparison with him as I do in comparison with you.”

“You do not expect, I hope,” cried the Abbé Fortier, somewhat shaken on his pedestal, — ”you do not expect, I hope, that I should discuss with you?”

“And why not? If from the discussion light is to proceed, *abstrusa in venis silicis*.”

“How! how!” exclaimed the Abbé Fortier; “why, really, the fellow has been in the Revolutionary school.”

“How can that be, since you yourself have said that the Revolutionists are fools and ignoramuses?”

“Yes, I do say so.”

“Then you are making a false reasoning, my worthy abbé, and your syllogism is badly founded.”

“Badly founded! What say you? I have badly founded a syllogism?”

“Undoubtedly, Monsieur l’Abbé. Pitou reasons and speaks well; Pitou has been to the Revolutionary school, — the Revolutionists consequently reason and speak well. There is no getting out of that.”

“Animal! brute! simpleton!”

“Do not molest me by your words, Monsieur Abbé. *Objurgatio imbellem animum arguit*, weakness betrays itself by anger.”

The abbé shrugged his shoulders.

“Answer me,” said Pitou.

“You say that the Revolutionists speak well and reason well. But tell me the name of any one of those wretches who knows how to read and write.”

“That is blinking the point in discussion; but I will answer you, nevertheless. I can read and write,” cried Pitou, with assurance.

“Read; I will admit that, — and yet I know not,-but as to writing — ”

“Writing!” cried Pitou.

“Yes, you can write; but without orthography.”

“That is to be seen.”

“Will you lay a wager that you will write a page under my dictation without making four blunders?”

“Will you lay a wager, you, that you will write half a page under my dictation without making two?”

“Oh! that, for example — ”

“Well, let us to work. I will pick you out some participles and reflective verbs. I will season you up all these with a certain number of that’s which I know of; I accept the wager.”

“If I had time,” said the abbé.

“You would lose.”

“Pitou! Pitou! remember the proverb, *Pitoueus Angelus asinus est*.”

“Pooh! proverbs! — there are proverbs made for everybody. Do you know the one which was sung into my ears by the reeds of the Wualu as I passed by them?”

“No; but I should be curious to know it, Master Midas.”

“Fortierus Abbas forte fortis.”

“Sir!” exclaimed the abbé.

“A free translation; the Abbé Fortier is not in his forte every day.”

“Fortunately,” said the abbé, “accusing is of slight importance; it is the proof that condemns.”

“Alas! good Monsieur Abbé, that would be perfectly easy; let us see, what do you teach your pupils?”

“Why — ”

“Allow me to follow up the argument. What do you teach your pupils?”

“Why, what I know.”

“Good! remember that your answer was, ‘What I know.’

“Well, yes, what I know,” said the abbé, somewhat shaken; for he felt that during his absence this singular combatant had learned some unknown thrusts. “Yes, I did say so; and what then?”

“Well, then, since you teach your pupils what you know, tell me what it is that you do know?”

“Latin, French, Greek, history, geography, arithmetic, algebra, astronomy, botany, and numismatics — ”

“Anything more?” inquired Pitou.

“Why — ”

“Try to find something else.”

“Drawing.”

“Go on.”

“Architecture.”

“Go on.”

“Mechanics.”

“A branch of mathematics — but that matters not; go on.”

“But tell me, what are you aiming at?”

“Simply at this: you have stated pretty largely the account of what you do know; now state the account of what you do not know.”

The abbé shuddered.

“Ah!” said Pitou, “I clearly see that to do this I must assist you; well, then, you do not know either German or Hebrew or Arabic or Sanscrit — four mother languages. I speak not of the sub-divisions, which are innumerable. You know nothing of natural history, of chemistry, of physics — ”

“Monsieur Pitou — ”

“Do not interrupt me: you know nothing of rectilinear trigonometry; you are ignorant of medicine; you know nothing of acoustics, of navigation; you are ignorant of everything that regards the gymnastic sciences.”

“What say you?”

“I said gymnastics, from the Greek *exercitia gymntastica* , which comes from *gymnos*, naked, because the athletes were naked when they exercised.”

“And yet it was I who taught you all this!” cried the abbé, almost consoled at the victory of his pupil.

“That is true.”

“It is fortunate that you even acknowledge it.”

“And with gratitude; we were saying, then, that you are ignorant of — ”

“Enough. It is certain that I am ignorant of much more than I know.”

“Therefore you acknowledge that many men know more than you do.”

“That is possible.”

“It is certain; and the more a man knows, the more does he perceive that he knows nothing. It was Cicero who said this.”

“Conclude.”

“I conclude — ”

“Let us hear your conclusion; it will be a fine one.”

“I conclude that in virtue of your relative ignorance, you ought to be more indulgent as to the relative knowledge of other men. This constitutes a double virtue, — *virtus duplex*, which we are assured was that of Fénelon, who assuredly knew quite as much as you do; and that is Christian charity and humility.”

The abbé uttered a perfect roar of anger.

“Serpent!” he exclaimed; “you are a serpent!”

“You insult me, but do not answer me; this was the reply of one of the seven wise men of Greece. I would say it in Greek, but I have already said it, or something nearly to the same purpose, in Latin.”

“Good!” said the abbé, “this is another effect of Revolutionary doctrines.”

“And in what way?”

“They have persuaded you that you were my equal.”

“And even should they have persuaded me of that, it would not give you the right of making a grammatical error.”

“What say you?”

“I say that you have just made an enormous fault, master.”

“Ah! that is very polite indeed; and what fault did I commit?”

“It is this. You said, ‘Revolutionary principles have persuaded you that you *were* my equal.’“

“Well; and what then?”

“Well; *were* is in the imperfect tense.”

“Yes, undoubtedly.”

“It was the present you should have used.”

“Ah!” cried the abbé, blushing.

“Only translate the phrase into Latin and you will see what an enormous solecism the verb will give you in the imperfect tense.”

“Pitou! Pitou!” exclaimed the abbé, imagining that there was something supernatural in this astounding erudition, — ”Pitou! which of the demons is it that inspires you with all these attacks against an old man and against the Church?”

“Why, my good master,” replied Pitou, somewhat moved by the tone of real despair in which these words had been pronounced, “it is not a demon who inspires me, nor do I attack you. Only you treat me as if I were a perfect fool, and you forget that all men are equals.”

The abbé was again irritated.

“It is that which I never will permit; I cannot allow such blasphemies to be uttered in my presence. You, — you the equal of a man whom God and study have taken sixty years to form? never! never!”

“Well, then, ask Monsieur de Lafayette, who has proclaimed the rights of man.”

“Yes, yes! cite as an authority an unfaithful subject of the king, — the firebrand of all this discord; the traitor!”

"Hey!" cried Pitou, horrified. "Monsieur de Lafayette an unfaithful subject! Monsieur de Lafayette a firebrand of discord! Monsieur de Lafayette a traitor! Why, it is you, Abbé, who are blaspheming. Why, you must have lived shut up in a box during the last three months. You do not know, then, that this unfaithful subject of the king is the only one who serves the king; that this firebrand of discord is the pledge of public peace; that this traitor is the best of Frenchmen?"

"Oh!" exclaimed the abbé, "could I ever have believed that royal authority would fall so low? A worthless fellow like that" — and he pointed to Pitou — "to invoke the name of Lafayette as in ancient times they invoked the names of Aristides and of Phocion."

"It is very fortunate for you, Monsieur l'Abbé, that the people do not hear you," said Pitou, imprudently.

"Ah!" exclaimed the abbé, with triumph, "you at length reveal yourself, — you threaten. The people-yes, the people who basely murdered the king's officers — the people, who even tore out the entrails of their victims! Yes, Monsieur de Lafayette's people — Monsieur Bailly's people — Monsieur Pitou's people! Well, then, why do you not instantly denounce me to the Revolutionists of Villers-Cotterets Why do you not drag me to Pleux? Why do you not turn up your sleeves to hang me on the first post? Come now, Pitou; *macte animo*, Pitou. *Sursum*! *sursum*, Pitou! Come, come, where is your rope? Where is your gallows? There is the executioner; *macte animo*, *generose Pitoue*!"

"*Sic itur ad astra*!" added Pitou, muttering, but solely with the intention of finishing the line, and not perceiving that he was making a pun worthy of a cannibal.

But he was compelled to perceive it by the increased exasperation of the abbé.

"Ah! ah!" vociferated the latter; "ah! that is the way you take it! Ah, it is thus that you would send me to the stars, is it? Ah, you intend me for the gallows, do you?"

"Why, I did not say that," cried Pitou, beginning to be alarmed at the turn the conversation was taking.

"Ah! you promise me the heaven of the unfortunate Foulon, of the unhappy Berthier?"

"Why so, Monsieur l'Abbé?"

"Ah, you have the running-noose prepared, sanguinary executioner! It was you, was it not, who on the square before the Hôtel de Ville ascended the lamp-iron, and with your long, hideous, spider-like arms drew the victims to you?"

Pitou uttered a perfect roar of horror and indignation.

"Yes, it was you; and I recognize you," continued the *abbé*, in a transport of divination, which made him resemble Joab, — "I recognize thee; thou art Catiline."

"But really," exclaimed Pitou, "do you know that you are saying abominable things to me, Monsieur l'abbé Do you know that, in point of fact, you are insulting me?"

"I insult you?"

"Do you know that if this continues I will complain to the National Assembly? Ah! but — "

The abbé laughed with a sinister irony.

"Lay your information," said he.

"And that punishment is awarded to ill-disposed persons who insult the good?"

"The lamp-post!"

"You are a bad citizen."

"The rope! the rope!"

Then he exclaimed, as if suddenly enlightened and struck with a movement of generous indignation: —

"Ah, the helmet! the helmet! 't is he!"

"Well," said Pitou, "what is the matter with my helmet?"

"The man who tore out the still smoking heart of Berthier — the cannibal who carried it still bleeding, and laid it on the table of the electors — wore a helmet; that man with the helmet was you, Pitou! it was you, monster that you are! avaunt! avaunt! avaunt!"

And each time that the abbé pronounced the word "avaunt," which he did with much tragic emphasis, he advanced one step towards Pitou, who retreated in the same proportion.

But on hearing this accusation, of which the reader knows Pitou to be perfectly innocent, the poor lad threw far from him the helmet of which he was so proud, which rolled over upon the pavement of the courtyard, with the heavy, hollow sound of copper lined with pasteboard.

"You see, wretch!" cried the abbé, "you acknowledge it."

And he assumed the attitude of Lekain, in Orosmanes, at the moment when, after finding the letter, he accuses Zaïre.

“Come, now,” said Pitou, completely taken aback by so horrible an accusation, “you are exaggerating, Monsieur l’Abbé.”

“I exaggerate! that is to say, that you only hanged a little; that is to say, that you only ripped up a little; poor, weak child!”

“Monsieur Abbé, you know full well it was not I, you well know that it was Pitt.”

“And who is Pitt?”

“Pitt the Second, the son of Pitt the First, of Lord Chatham. He who has distributed money, saying, ‘Spend it; you need not give any account of it.’ If you understood English, I would tell it you in English, but you do not know that language.”

“You know it then, you?”

“Monsieur Gilbert taught it me.”

“In three weeks? Monsieur Impostor!”

Pitou saw that he had made a false step.

“Hear me, Monsieur Abbé,” said he, “I will not contend with you any farther. You have your own ideas — ”

“Really”

“That is but right.”

“You acknowledge that: Monsieur Pitou allows me to have my own ideas! Thanks, Monsieur Pitou”

“Good! There, you are getting angry again. You must comprehend that if this continues I shall not be able to tell you the object which brought me here.”

“Wretch! You had an object in coming here, then You were deputed, perhaps”

And the abbé laughed ironically.

“Sir,” said Pitou, placed by the abbé himself upon the, footing in which he wished to find himself since the commencement of the discussion, “you know the great respect I have always had for your character.”

“Ah, yes! let us talk of that.”

“And the admiration I have always entertained for your knowledge,” added Pitou.

“Serpent!” exclaimed the abbé.

“What! I?” cried Pitou; “that, for example!”

"Come, now, let us hear what you have to ask of me! That I should take you back here? No, no; I would not spoil my scholars. No; you would still retain the noxious venom; you would infect my young plants. *Infecit pabula tabo*."

"But, good Monsieur Abbé — "

"No, do not ask me that; if you must absolutely eat, — for I presume that the hangers of Paris eat as well as honest people. They eat — oh, God! In short, if you require that I should throw you your portion of raw meat, you shall have it, but at the door on the spatula, as at Rome the masters did to their dogs."

"Monsieur Abbé," cried Pitou, drawing himself up proudly, "I do not ask you for my food; I have wherewith to provide food, God be thanked; I will not be a burden to any one."

"Ah!" exclaimed the abbé, with surprise.

"I live as all living beings do, and that without begging, and by that industry which Nature has implanted in me; I live by my own labor; and more than that, I am so far from being chargeable on my fellowcitizens, that several among them have elected me their chief."

"Hey!" cried the abbé, with so much surprise, mingled with so much terror, that it might have been thought that he had trod upon a viper.

"Yes, yes; they have elected me their chief," repeated Pitou, complacently.

"Chief of what" inquired the abbé.

"Chief of a troop of freemen," said Pitou.

"Ah! good Heaven!" cried the abbé, "the unfortunate boy has gone mad."

"Chief of the National Guard of Haramont," concluded Pitou, affecting modesty.

The abbé leaned towards Pitou in order to gain from his features a confirmation of his words.

"There is a National Guard at Haramont" cried he.

"Yes, Monsieur Abbé."

"And you are the chief of it?"

"Yes, Monsieur Abbé."

"You, Pitou?"

"I, Pitou."

The abbé raised his outstretched arms towards heaven, like Phineas the high-priest.

“Abomination of desolation!” murmured he.

“You are not ignorant, Monsieur abbé,” said Pitou, with gentleness, “that the National Guard is an institution destined to protect the life, the liberty, and the property of the citizens.”

“Oh! oh!” continued the abbé, overwhelmed by his despair.

“And that,” continued Pitou, “too much vigor cannot be given to that institution, above all, in the country, on account of the very numerous bands — ”

“Bands of which you are the chief!” cried the abbé, — ”bands of plunderers, bands of incendiaries, bands of assassins!”

“Oh, do not confound things in this manner, dear Monsieur Abbé; you will see my soldiers, I hope, and never were there more honest citizens.”

“Be silent! be silent!”

“You must consider, on the contrary, that we are your natural protectors; and the proof of this is that I have come straight to you.”

“And for what purpose?” inquired the abbé.

“Ah! that is precisely it,” said Pitou, scratching his ear and looking anxiously at the spot where his helmet was lying, in order to ascertain whether in going to pick up this very necessary portion of his military equipment, he would not place himself at too great a distance from his line of retreat.

The helmet had rolled to within some few paces only of the great gate which opened on to the Rue de Soissons.

“I asked you for what purpose,” repeated the abbé.

“Well,” said Pitou, retreating backwards two steps towards his helmet, “this is the object of my mission, good Monsieur Abbé; permit me to develop it to your sagacity.”

“Exordium!” muttered the abbé.

Pitou backed two steps more towards his helmet.

But by a singular manæuvre, which did not fail to give Pitou some uneasiness, whenever he made two steps nearer to his helmet, the abbé, in order to remain at the same distance from him, advanced two steps towards Pitou.

“Well,” said Pitou, beginning to feel more courageous from his proximity to his defensive headpiece, “all soldiers require muskets, and we have not any.”

“Ah! you have no muskets!” cried the abbé, dancing with joy; “ah! they have no muskets! Soldiers without muskets! Ah! by my faith! they must be very pretty soldiers.”

“But, Monsieur Abbé,” said Pitou, taking again two steps nearer to his helmet, “when men have not muskets, they seek for them.”

“Yes,” said the abbé; “and you are in search of some?”

Pitou was able to reach his helmet, and brought it near him with his foot. Being thus occupied, he did not at once reply to the abbé.

“You look, then, for some?” repeated the latter.

Pitou picked up his helmet.

“Yes.”

“Where?”

“In your house,” said Pitou, placing the helmet on his head.

“Guns in my house?” asked the abbé. “Yes. You have many.”

“Ah! my museum; you come to rob my museum. Only fancy the cuirasses of old heroes on the backs of such creatures. Pitou, I told you just now that you were mad. The swords of the Spaniards of Almanza, the pikes of the Swiss of Marignan, were never made for such a troop as yours.”

The abbé laughed so scornfully that a cold shudder ran through Pitou’s veins.

“No, abbé!” said Pitou, “the Spanish swords and Swiss pikes would be of no use.”

“It is well you see it.”

“Not those arms, abbé, but those capital muskets I cleaned so often when I studied under you.

‘Dum me Galatea tenebat,’“

added Pitou, with a most insinuating smile.

“Indeed,” said the abbé; and he felt his few hairs stand erect as Pitou spoke; “you want my old marine muskets?”

“They are the only weapons you have without any historical interest, and really fit for service.”

“Indeed,” said the abbé, placing his hand on the handle of his lash, as the soldier would have seized his sword. “Back, now! the traitor unveils himself.”

“Abbé,” said Pitou, passing from menace to prayer,

“give me thirty muskets — ”

“Go back!” The abbé advanced towards Pitou.

“And you will have the glory of having contributed to rescue the country from its oppressors.”

“Furnish arms to be used against me and mine! Never!” said the abbé.

He took up his whip.

He wheeled it above his head.

“Never, never!”

“Monsieur,” said Pitou, “your name shall be placed in the journal of Monsieur Prudhomme.”

“My name in his paper!”

“Honorably mentioned.”

“I had rather be sent to the galleys.”

“What! you refuse?” asked Pitou.

“Yes, and tell you to go — ”

The abbé pointed to the door.

“That would be very wrong, for you would be accused of treason. Monsieur, I beg you not to expose yourself to that.”

“Make me a martyr, Nero! I ask but that.” And his eye glared so that he looked more like the executioner than the victim.

So Pitou thought, for he began to fall back.

“Abbé,” said he, stepping back, “I’m an ambassador of peace, a quiet deputy. I come — ”

“You come to rob my armory, as your accomplices did that of the Invalides.”

“Which was most laudable,” said Pitou.

“And which will here expose you to a shower of lashes from my cat-o’-nine-tails.”

“Monsieur,” said Pitou, who recognized an old acquaintance in the tool, “you will not thus violate the law of nations.”

“You will see. Wait.”

“I am protected by my character of ambassador.”

The abbé continued to advance.

“Abbé! Abbé! Abbé!” said Pitou.

He was at the street door, face to face with his dangerous enemy, and Pitou had either to fight or run.

To run he had to open the door, to open the door, turn.

If he turned, Pitou exposed to danger the part of his body the least protected by the cuirass.

“You want my guns? you want my guns, do you?” said the abbé, “and you say, ‘I will have them or you die!’“

“On the contrary, Monsieur, I say nothing of the kind.”

“Well, you know where they are; cut my throat and take them.”

“I am incapable of such a deed.”

Pitou stood at the door with his hand on the latch, and thought not of the abbé’s muskets, but of his whip.

“Then you will not give me the muskets?”

“No!”

“I ask you again!”

“No! no!”

“Again!”

“No! no! no!”

“Then keep them!” and he dashed through the halfopen door.

His movement was not quick enough to avoid the whip, which hissed through the air and fell on the small of the back of Pitou; and great as was the courage of the conqueror of the Bastille, he uttered a cry of pain.

On hearing the cry, many of the neighbors rushed out, and to their surprise saw Pitou running away with his sword and helmet, and the Abbé Fortier at the door brandishing his whip, as the angel of destruction wields his sword of flame.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Pitou a Diplomatist

WE have seen how Pitou was disappointed.

The fall was immense. Not even Satan had fallen from such an eminence when from heaven he was thrown to hell. Satan fell, but remained a king; while the Abbé Fortier’s victim was only Ange Pitou.

How could he appear before the persons who had sent him? How, after having testified such rash confidence, could he say that he was a boaster and a coward, who, armed with a sword and a helmet, had suffered an old abbé to whip him and put him to flight.

Pitou was wrong in having boasted that he would triumph over the abbé Fortier, and in failing.

The first time he found himself out of view, he put his hand on his head and thought.

He had expected to conciliate Fortier with his Latin and Greek. He thought that by the honeyed cake of classical expressions he would corrupt the old Cerberus; but he had been bitten, and all had been spoiled.

The abbé had great self-esteem, and Pitou had not regarded it. What most offended the abbé was Pitou’s finding fault with his French, — a thing he cared far more about than he did about the muskets which Pitou had sought to take from him.

Young people when good always think others as good as they are themselves.

The abbé was not only an extreme royalist, but also a devoted philologist.

Pitou was especially sorry that he had excited him, both on account of Louis XVI. and the verb “to be.” He knew and should have managed his old master. That was his error, and he regretted it, though too late.

What should he have done?

He should have used his eloquence to convince the abbé of his own royalism, and ignored his mistakes in grammar.

He should have convinced him that the National Guard of Haramont was opposed to the Revolution.

He should have said that it would sustain the king.

Above all, he never should have said a word about the confusion of tenses of the verb "to be."

There was no earthly doubt but that the abbé would have opened his arsenal for the purpose of securing to the cause of the king such a leader and such a company.

This falsehood is diplomacy. Pitou thought over all the stories of old times.

He thought of Philip of Macedon, who swore falsely so often, but who was called a great man.

Of Brutus, who to overcome his enemies pretended to be a fool, but who is thought a great man.

Of Themistocles, who served his fellow-citizens by deceiving them, but who is called a great man.

On the other hand, he remembered that Aristides would admit of no injustice, and that he too was esteemed a great man.

This contrast annoyed him.

He thought, though, that Aristides fortunately lived at a time when the Persians were so stupid that one could act honestly and yet conquer them.

He then remembered that Aristides had been exiled, and this circumstance decided him in favor of Philip of Macedon, Brutus, and Themistocles.

Descending to modern times, Pitou remembered how Gilbert, Bailly, Lameth, Barnave, and Mirabeau would have acted, had Louis XVI. been the abbé and they been Pitou.

What would they have done to have the king arm the five hundred thousand National Guards of France?

Exactly the contrary of what Pitou had done.

They would have persuaded Louis XVI. that they desired nothing more than to preserve the Father of the French; that to save him, from three to five hundred thousand guns were needed.

Mirabeau would have succeeded.

Pitou then remembered the two flowing lines: —

"When you to the Devil pray
Call him giver of all good."

He came to the conclusion that Ange Pitou was a perfect brute, and that to return to his electors with any sort of glory he ought to have done exactly what he had not.

Pitou determined, then, either by force or by stratagem to get possession of the arms.

The first resource was stratagem.

He could enter the abbé’s museum and steal the arms.

If he did it alone, the act would be theft. If with companions, it would be simply a removal.

The very word “theft” made Pitou uneasy.

As to the removal, there were yet many people in France who, used to the old laws, would call it burglarious robbery.

Pitou hesitated.

But Pitou’s self-love was excited, and to get out of the difficulty with honor he was forced to act alone.

He set to work most diligently to seek some mode of extricating himself.

At last, like Archimedes, he shouted “Eureka!” which in plain English means, “I have discovered!”

The following was his plan: —

Lafayette was Commander-in-Chief of the National

Guards of France.

Haramont was in France.

Haramont had a National Guard.

Lafayette then was Commander of the National Guard of Haramont.

He could not, therefore, consent that they should be destitute of arms while the rest of the militia of France was armed or about to be so.

To reach Lafayette he had to appeal to Gilbert, and Gilbert he would reach through Billot.

Pitou had then to write to Billot.

As Billot could not read, Gilbert would have to read the letter for him, and in this way Gilbert would learn the facts, thus saving the necessity of at least one letter.

His resolution being taken, Pitou waited till night, when he returned secretly to Haramont and took up the pen.

But notwithstanding the precautions he had taken that his return should be unobserved, he was seen by Claude Tellier and Désiré Maniquet.

They withdrew in silence, and each with a finger on his lips, as a token of silence.

Pitou now had entered upon the rôle of a practical politician.

The following is a copy of the letter which produced such an effect on Tellier and Maniquet: —

DEAR AND HONORABLE MONSIEUR BILLOT, — The Revolutionary cause in our part of the country every day gains

The people of Haramont has enrolled itself in the active National Guard.

It is, however, unarmed.

Arms may be procured. Certain persons have large quantities, the possession of which would prevent the expenditure of public money.

If General de Lafayette be pleased to order these to be seized and distributed, I will myself guarantee that thirty muskets will be placed in the arsenals of Haramont.

It is the only way to oppose the anti-Revolutionary action of the aristocrats and of the enemies of the nation.

Your fellow-citizen and servant,

ANGE PITOU.

When this was done, he remembered that he had forgotten to write to the farmer of his wife and family.

He had treated him too much as a Brutus; but if he were to give Billot the details about Catherine, he would have either to lie or to rend the father's heart; it would be also to reopen his own love-wounds.

Stifling a sigh, he added the following postscript: —

"P.S. — Madame Billot, Mademoiselle Catherine, and all are well, and send their love to Monsieur Billot."

He thus compromised neither himself nor any one.

He sent the letter, and the answer soon came.

Two days afterwards, a mounted express reached Haramont and asked for Monsieur Ange Pitou.

All the members of the militia were on the *qui vive*.

The horse was white with foam, and the rider wore the uniform of the Parisian National Guard.

From the excitement he produced all may fancy how great was Pitou's agitation.

He approached, and not without trembling received the package which the officer gave him.

It was the reply of Billot, written by Gilbert.

He advised Pitou to be both moderate and patriotic.

He enclosed an order of Lafayette, countersigned by the Minister of War, for the National Guard of Haramont to arm itself.

The order was thus written: —

“The possessors of muskets and sabres, in a greater number than one, will be required to place them in the hands of the commanders of the National Guards of the commune.

“The present order extends to all the province.”

Pitou thanked the officer and saw him at once set out.

Pitou had reached the acme of glory, having received a message directly from Lafayette and the ministry.

This message suited his ideas exactly.

To describe the effect of the messenger and official document on Pitou’s followers would be impossible, and we will not therefore attempt to do so. The sight, however, of the excited countenances of all the people, the great respect exhibited to him, would have made the most sceptical believe that henceforward our hero was going to be a most important personage.

All the electors requested to see and touch the ministerial seal, — a favor Pitou kindly granted.

When none but the initiated remained, Pitou said:

“Citizens, my plans have succeeded as I had foreseen.

I wrote to General de Lafayette that you wished to form a National Guard and had selected me as commander.

“Read the directions of this letter.”

The despatch had been directed: —

Citizen ANGE PITOU:

Commander of the National Guard of Haramont.

“I am then recognized in my rank, by Lafayette, as commander.

“You are recognized as guards.”

A loud shout of joy and admiration shook the roof of Pitou’s garret.

“I know where we can get arms,” said Pitou.

“You will at once appoint a lieutenant and a sergeant. Those two functionaries will accompany me in the execution of my project.”

All present seemed to hesitate.

“What is your opinion, Pitou?” said Maniquet.

“The matter does not concern me. Meet alone and appoint the two functionaries. But appoint capable ones.”

Pitou bade adieu to his soldiers, and remained, like Agamemnon, in a state of solemn grandeur.

He thus remained in his glory while the soldiers discussed the details of the military power which was to rule Haramont.

The election lasted an hour. The lieutenant and sergeant chosen were Tellier and Maniquet, the latter of whom was the subaltern. They returned and announced the fact to Pitou.

He then said: “Now there is no time to lose.”

“Yes,” said an enthusiast, “let us begin the manual.”

“Wait a moment; let us get guns first.”

“True.”

“But can we not practise with sticks?”

“Let us be military,” said Pitou, who watched the military order with anxiety, but who did not feel himself qualified to teach an art of which he was utterly ignorant.

“It is a difficult matter to teach a raw recruit how to shoot with a stick. Let us not be ridiculous.”

“True. We must have muskets.”

“Come with me, then, Lieutenant and Sergeant. The rest of you wait here.”

All acquiesced respectfully.

“We have six hours’ daylight yet left. That is more time than is needed to go to Villers-Cotterets.”

“Forward!” said Pitou.

The staff of the army of Haramont set off.

When Pitou, however, read again the letter he had received, to assure himself that so much honor was not a dream, he discovered that he had overlooked one phrase: —

“Why did Pitou forget to give Doctor Gilbert some information about Sebastien

“Why does not Sebastien write to his, father?”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Pitou Triumphs

THE Abbé Fortier was far from suspecting what danger He was in, prepared carefully for him by deep diplomacy. He had no idea of Pitou’s influence.

He was seeking to prove to Sebastien that bad company is the ruin of innocence; that Paris is a pit of perdition; that even angels would be corrupted there, — like those who went astray at Gomorrah, — and seriously impressed by Pitou’s visit, besought Sebastien always to remember to be a good and true loyalist.

By those words the abbé meant a very different thing from what Doctor Gilbert meant.

He forgot that as long as this difference existed, he was committing a very bad action; for he sought to excite the son’s opinions against the father.

He soon found, however, that his labor was lost.

Strange to say, at a period when the minds of most children are, so to say, mere potter’s clay, on which every pressure leaves a mark, Sebastien, in fixity of purpose was a man.

Was that to be attributed to that aristocratic nature which disdains everything plebeian

Or was it plebeianism pushed to stoicism?

The mystery was too deep for the Abbé Fortier. He knew the doctor was an enthusiastic patriot, and with the simplicity of mind peculiar to ecclesiastics, sought, for the glory of God, to reform the son.

Though Sebastien appeared to listen, he did not, but was musing on those strange visions which previously had taken possession of him under the tall trees of the park of Villers-Cotterets when the abbé took his pupils thither, and which had become, so to say, a kind of second life, running parallel with his natural life, — a life of fiction and poetic pleasure in comparison with the dull prosaic days of study and college routine.

All at once a loud knock was heard at the door in the Rue de Soissons, and it immediately opened and admitted several persons.

They were the maire, adjunct, and town clerk.

Behind them were the gendarmes, after whom came several curious persons.

The abbé went at once to the maire, and said:-”Monsieur Longpé, what is the matter?”

“Abbé, are you aware of the new order of the Minister of War?”

“I am not.”

“Be pleased to read this.”

As he read it, he grew pale. “Well?” said he.

“Well, the gendarmes of Haramont expect you to surrender your arms.”

The abbé sprang forward as if he would devour the National Guard.

Pitou, thinking it time to show himself, followed by his lieutenant and his sergeant, approached the abbé.

“Here are the gentlemen,” said the maire.

The abbé’s face was flushed.

“What! these vagabonds!”

The maire was a good-natured man, and as yet had no decided political opinions. He had no disposition to quarrel either with the Church or the National Guard.

The words of the abbé excited a loud laugh, and the maire said to Pitou: —

“Do you hear how he speaks of your command?”

“Because the abbé knew us when children, he fancies we can never grow old.”

“The children, however, have now grown men,” said Maniquet, reaching forth his mutilated hand towards the abbé.

“And these men are serpents,” cried the enraged abbé.

“Who will bite if they be trampled on,” said Sergeant Claude.

In these threats the maire saw all the future Revolution; and the abbé martyrdom.

“Some of your arms are needed,” said the maire, who sought to effect a reconciliation.

“They are not mine,” said the abbé. “Whose are they?”

“The Duke of Orléans’.”

“Well, that matters not,” said Pitou. “How so?” said the abbé.

“We desire you to deliver them up to us, all the same.”

“I will write to the duke,” said the abbé, majestically.

"The abbé forgets," said the maire, in a low tone, "that if the duke were written to, he would reply that not only the muskets of his English enemies, but the artillery of his grandfather, Louis XIV. must be surrendered to patriots."

The abbé knew that this was true.

"*Circumdedisti me hostibus meis*."

"True, Abbé! but by your political enemies only. We hate in you only the bad patriot."

"Fool!" said Fortier, with an excitement which inspired him with a certain kind of eloquence, — " fool, and dangerous tool! which is the patriot, — I, who would keep these arms for the peace of the country, or you, who would use them in rapine and civil war? Which is the better son, — I, who cultivate the olive of peace, or you, who would lacerate the bosom of France, our common mother, with war?"

The maire sought to conceal his emotion, and nodded to the abbé, as if to say: —

"Good!"

The adjunct, like Tarquin, cut down flowers with his cane.

Pitou was silenced.

The two subalterns saw it, and were surprised.

Sebastien, the young Spartan, alone was cool.]

He approached Pitou and said: —

"What is the matter, Pitou?"

Pitou told him in a few words.

"Is the order signed?" asked Sebastien.

"The order is signed," answered Pitou, and he showed the minister's, his father's, and Lafayette's signatures.

"Why, then, do you hesitate?"

Sebastien's flashing eye, his erect form, showed clearly the two indomitable races from which he sprang.

The abbé heard his words, shuddered, and said: —

"Three generations oppose me!"

"Abbé," said the maire, "the order must be obeyed."

The abbé put his hand on the keys which were in the girdle that from monastic habit he yet wore, and said:

"Never! they are not mine, and I will not surrender them till my master orders me."

“Abbé, Abbé!” said the maire, who felt compelled to disapprove.

“This is rebellion,” said Sebastien to the abbé. “Master, be careful!”

“*Tu quoque*,” said the abbé, like Cæsar folding his robe over his bosom.

“Be at ease, abbé,” said Pitou; “these arms will be in good hands for France.”

“Hush, Judas, you have betrayed your old master! Why will you not betray your country?”

Pitou felt his conscience prick him. What he had done was not at the instinct of a noble heart, though he had acted bravely.

He looked around, and saw his two subalterns apparently ashamed of his weakness.

Pitou felt that he was in danger of losing his influence.

Pride came to the assistance of this champion of the Revolution.

He looked up and said: —

“Abbé, submissive as I am to my old master, not unreplied to shall such comments be made.”

“Ah, you are going to reply,” said the Abbé Fortier, trusting to annihilate Pitou by raillery.

“Yes; and tell me if I am not right. You call me traitor, and refuse me the arms I asked you for peaceably, but which I now take in the name, and by the strong hand, of the law. Well, Abbé, I had rather be called traitor to my master than, like you, have opposed the liberty of my country. Our country forever!”

The maire nodded to Pitou as he previously had to the abbé.

The effect of this address ruined the abbé.

The maire disappeared.

So too would the adjunct, but the absence of the two chiefs would certainly have been remarked.

He then, with the gendarmes and Pitou, who was perfectly familiar with the locale in which he had grown up, proceeded to the museum.

Sebastian rushed after the patriots; the other children appeared amazed.

After the door was opened, the abbé sank, half-dead with mortification and rage, on the first chair.

When once in the museum, Pitou’s assistants wished to pillage everything, but the honesty of the commandant restrained them.

He took only thirty-three muskets, for he commanded thirty-three National Guards.

As it might be necessary for him some day to fire a shot, he took, as a thirty-fourth, an officer’s gun, lighter and shorter than the others, which was adapted for shooting hares and rabbits as well as for killing either a false Frenchman or a true Prussian.

He then selected a straight sword like Lafayette’s, which had perhaps been borne by some hero at Fontenoy or Philipsbourg. He buckled it on.

Each of his colleagues then placed twelve muskets on his shoulder, and both were so delighted that they scarcely felt the enormous weight.

Pitou took the rest.

They passed through the park, to avoid observation in going through the city.

It was also the shortest route.

Another advantage of this road was that they had no chance of meeting any of the partisans of the opposite faction. Pitou was not afraid of a battle, and the musket he had chosen inspired him with still greater courage; but Pitou had become a man of reflection, and he reflected that though one musket was a powerful weapon of defence for a man, a load of muskets could hardly be said to be so.

Our three heroes, loaded with their spoils, passed rapidly through the park, and reached the rendezvous. Exhausted and heated, they took their precious prize that night to Pitou’s house. It may be the country had been too hasty in confiding it to them.

There was a meeting of the guard that night, and Pitou gave them the muskets, saying, in the words of the Spartan mother: —

“With them or on them.”

Thus was the little commune, by the genius of Pitou, made to seem as busy as an ant-hill during an earthquake.

Delight at possessing a gun among a people poachers by nature, whom the long oppression of gamekeepers had incensed, could not but be great. Pitou consequently became a god on earth. His long legs and arms were forgotten. So too were his clumsy knees and his grotesque antecedents. He could not but be the tutelary god of the country.

The next day was passed by the enthusiasts in cleaning and repairing their arms. Some rejoiced that the cock worked well, and others repaired the springs of the lock or replaced the screws.

In the mean time, Pitou had retired to his room, as Agamemnon did to his tent, brightening his brains as others did their guns.

What was Pitou thinking of?

Pitou, become a leader of the people, was thinking of the hollowness of earthly grandeur.

The time had come when the whole edifice he had erected was about to crumble.

The guns had been issued on the evening before, and the day passed in putting them in order. On the next day he would have to drill his men, and Pitou did not know a single command of, “Load, in twelve times.”

What is the use of a commandant ignorant of the drill? The writer of these lines never knew but one so ignorant. He was, however, a countryman of Pitou.

Pitou thought with his head in his hands and his body prostrate.

Cæsar amid the thickets of Gaul, Hannibal wandering on the Alps, and Columbus drifting over the ocean, never thought more deeply, and never more fully devoted themselves *diis ignotis*, the fearful powers who hold the secrets of life and death, than did Pitou.

“Come,” said Pitou, “time speeds, and to-morrow I must appear in all my insignificance.

“To-morrow the captor of the Bastille, the god of war, will be called by all Haramont an idiot, as — I do not know who was by the Greeks.

“To-day I triumph, but to-morrow I shall be hooted.

“This cannot be. Catherine will know it, and will think me disgraced.”

Pitou paused.

“What will extricate me from this dilemma?

“Audacity.

“Not so. Audacity lasts a second. To load in the Prussian times requires half a minute.

“Strange idea, to teach the Prussian drill to Frenchmen! I am too much of a patriot to teach Frenchmen any of their inventions. I will make a national drill.

“But I may go astray.

“I saw a monkey once go through the manual at a fair. He probably though, being a monkey, had never served.

“Ah! I have an idea.”

He began to stride as fast as his long legs would permit, but was suddenly brought to a stand by the idea.

“My disappearance will astonish my men. I must inform them.”

He then sent for his subalterns and said: —

“Tell the men that the first drill will take place on the day after to-morrow.”

“Why not to-morrow?”

“You are fatigued, and before drilling the men I must instruct the officers. Be careful, too, to obey your superior officers, without asking questions.”

They saluted him *à la militaire*.

“Very well; the drill will be at half-past four on the day after to-morrow.”

The subalterns left, and as it was half after nine, went to bed.

Pitou let them go, and when they had turned the corner, went in an opposite direction, and soon was hidden in the thickest of the park.

Now let us see what Pitou was thinking of.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

How Pitou learned Tactics, and Acquired a Noble Bearing

PITOU hurried on for half an hour into the very depth of the wood.

There was in the undergrowth, beneath a huge rock, a hut built some thirty-five or forty years before, which was inhabited by a person who in his day had excited no little mystery.

This hut, half buried in the ground and surrounded by foliage, received light only by an oblique opening. Not unlike a gypsy hut, it was often to be detected only by the smoke which rose from it.

Otherwise none but gamekeepers, poachers, and sportsmen would ever have suspected its existence, or that it was inhabited.

For forty years, though, it had been the abode of a retired keeper whom the Duke of Orléans, father of Louis Philippe, had permitted to remain, with the privilege of killing a rabbit or a hare a day.

Fowl and large game were excepted.

At the time we speak of the old man was sixty-nine years old. His name was Clovis originally, to which, as he grew old, the title Father was annexed.

From his residence the rock took the name of Clovis’s Stone.

He had been wounded at Fontenoy, and consequently had lost a leg, and had therefore been treated kindly by the duke.

He never went into great cities, and visited VillersCotterets but once a year, for the purpose of buying three hundred and sixty-five loads of powder and ball. On leap years he bought three hundred and sixty-six.

On that day he took to the hatter, Monsieur Cornu, three hundred and sixty-five or three hundred and sixty-six rabbit and hare skins, for which he received seventy-five Tours livres. He never missed a shot, and we are therefore able to be so exact.

He lived on the flesh of the animals, though sometimes he sold it.

With the skins of the animals he bought powder and lead.

Once a year Father Clovis entered into a kind of speculation.

The rock which served as a support to his hut was in the form of an inclined plane, like the roof of a house, and at its widest part measured eighteen feet.

An object placed at the top slid gently down to the bottom.

He spread the report quietly through the neighboring villages, through the intervention of the old women who came to buy his hares and rabbits, that all the young women who on Saint Louis’s Day should let themselves slide from the top to the bottom of his rock would certainly be married within the year.

The first year many young women came, but none dared the attempt.

On the next year three tried to do so. Two were married during the course of the year, and Father Clovis said the third would have been married had she had as much faith as the others.

The next year all the young women of the neighborhood came and dared the attempt.

Father Clovis declared that enough men could not be found for so many young women, but that those who had most faith would be married. He had brilliant success. His matrimonial reputation was established.

Then, as people cannot slide all day without something to eat and drink, Father Clovis secured the monopoly of selling all kinds of viands to the male and female sliders; for the young men had persuaded the young ladies that in order that the efficacy of the rock should be infallible, both sexes should slide together and at the same time.

For thirty-five years Clovis lived in this manner. The country treated him as the Arabs do their marabouts. He had become a legend.

One thing, however, excited the jealousy of the guards on duty. It was said that Father Clovis fired but three hundred and sixty-five times yearly, and that at every shot, without fail, he killed either a hare or a rabbit.

More than once the nobles of Paris, invited by the Duke of Orléans, who had heard of Father Clovis, placed a louis or a crown in his broad hand, and sought to ascertain, how any one could never miss.

Old Clovis, however, told them nothing more than that with the same gun, in the army, he had never missed a man at a hundred yards. If he could kill a man with ball, it was far easier to kill a hare with shot.

If any smiled when Clovis spoke thus, he used to say: “Why do you fire when you are not sure of the mark?”

A saying which might have been worthy to have ranked among the boasts of Monsieur de Palisse, had it not been for the established reputation of the old marksman.

“But,” they would ask, “why did Monsieur d’ Orléans’s father, who was not at all mean, grant you permission to fire but once a day?”

“Because he knew that one shot would be enough.”

The curiosity of this spectacle, and the oddness of this theory, brought at least ten louis a year to the old anchorite.

Now, as he gained much money by the sale of his hare-skins and the holiday he had established, and he purchased only a pair of gaiters in every five years, and a coat every ten, he was not at all unhappy.

On the contrary, it was said that he had a concealed treasure, and that his heir would get a good thing.

Such was the singular person whom Pitou went to at midnight when the brilliant idea of which we have spoken entered his mind.

To fall in with Father Clovis, however, required much address.

Like Neptune’s old herdsman, he was not easily overtaken. He knew easily how to distinguish the useless man from one from whom he could make money.

Clovis was lying down on his aromatic bed of heath, which the woods afford in September, and which would not require to be changed until the same month of the next year.

It was eleven o’clock, and the night was calm and bright.

To reach the hut of Clovis, Pitou had to pass through thickets of oak and underbrush so dense that his arrival could not be unheard.

Pitou made four times as much noise as an ordinary person would have done, and old Clovis lifted up his head. He was not asleep, but was on that day in a terribly bad humor. An accident had happened which made him almost unapproachable. The accident was terrible.

His gun, which he had used for five years with balls, and for thirty-five years with shot, had burst when he was firing at a rabbit.

It was the first time ne had missed for thirty-five years.

The fact of the rabbit being safe and sound was not the greatest misfortune which had befallen Clovis. Two fingers of his left hand had been carried away. Clovis had bound up his fingers with bruised herbs and leaves, but he could not mend his gun.

Now to procure another gun Father Clovis would be under the necessity of appealing to his treasury, and even though he expended as much as two louis, who knew if with the new gun he would kill at every shot, as he had done with the one which had so unfortunately burst?

Pitou came, therefore, at an evil hour.

At the very moment Pitou placed his hand on the door, old Clovis uttered a grunt which amazed the commander of the National Guard of Haramont.

Was it a wolf or some one substituted for Father

Clovis

Pitou, who had read “Little Red Riding-Hood,” hesitated whether he should go in or not.

“Hey! Father Clovis!” cried he.

“What?” said the misanthropist.

Pitou was reassured. He recognized the voice of the worthy anchorite.

“I am glad you are in,” said he.

He then entered the hut and bowed to the occupant.

“Good-day, Father Clovis,” said Pitou, graciously.

“Who goes there?” asked the veteran.

“I.”

“Who are you?”

“I, Pitou.”

“Who is Pitou?”

“Ange Pitou of Haramont.”

“Well, what is it to me who you are?”

“Ah!” said Pitou, coaxingly, “Father Clovis is now in a bad humor. I was wrong to awake him.”

“Certainly you were.”

“What, then, must I do?”

“Begone as quickly as you can.”

“But let us talk a little.”

“About what?”

“Of a favor you can do me.”

“I want pay for all I do.”

“Well, I will pay for all I get.”

“Possibly; but I am no longer of use to any one.”

“How so?”

“I shall kill no more game.”

“How so? You never miss a shot, Clovis. It is impossible.”

“Begone, I tell you.”

“But, Father Clovis — ”

“You annoy me.”

“Listen to me, and you will not be sorry.”

“Well, then, what do you wish? Be brief!”

“You are an old soldier?”

“Well?”

“Well! I wish — ”

“To the point, blockhead!”

“Teach me the manual.”

“Are you a fool?”

“No; teach me the manual, and I will pay you.”

“The creature is certainly mad,” growled the old soldier, raising himself on his elbow.

“Father Clovis, will you teach me the manual or not? Do so, and I will pay you what you please.”

The old man arose, and looking fiercely at Pitou, said:

“What I please. Well, give me a gun.”

“The very thing! I have thirty-four guns.”

“Thirty-four!”

“Yes; and the thirty-fourth, which I had meant for myself, will just suit you. It is a sergeant’s musket with the king’s cipher in gold on the breech.”

“How came you by it? You did not steal it, I hope.”

Pitou told him the whole truth frankly and honestly.

“Good!” said the veteran; “I will teach you, but my fingers are hurt.”

He then told Pitou what accident had befallen him.

“Well,” said Pitou, “give yourself no concern about the gun; that is replaced. I cannot give you other fingers, for all I have I need myself.”

“Oh, as for the fingers, that’s nothing. If you will only promise that the gun will be here to-morrow, come on.”

He got up immediately.

The moon shed a torrent of white light on the little clearing in front of the hut.

Pitou and Father Clovis went to the clearing.

Any one who had seen these two dark forms gesticulating at midnight could not have repressed some mysterious terror.

Clovis took up the stump of his gun with a sigh. He then placed himself in a military position.

It was strange to see the old man again become erect, bent as he was from the habit of passing the bushes; but the recollection of his regiment and the excitement of the drill revived him, and he brushed back his long gray locks on his broad shoulders.

“Look at me!” said he; “look at me! That is the way to learn. Do as I do, and I will correct you.”

Pitou made the attempt.

“Draw back your knees! Shoulders back! Hold up your head! Turn out your toes! Give yourself a good foundation; your feet are large enough.”

Pitou did as well as he could.

“Very well!” said the old man. “You look noble enough.”

Pitou felt much flattered. He had not expected so much.

If he looked noble after an hour’s drill, what would he not be in a month? He would be majestic.

He wished to continue.

But this was enough for one lesson.

Besides, Father Clovis wished to make sure of the gun before giving any more instruction.

“No,” said he, “this is enough for once. Teach this at your first drill, and they will not learn it in four days; and in that time you will have had two lessons.”

“Four lessons!” cried Pitou.

“Ah!” replied Clovis, dryly, “I see you have zeal and legs enough. Well, four times be it. I must, however, tell you that there will be no moon.”

“We will go through the manual in your hut, then.”

“You will have to bring a candle.”

“Two pounds of candles, if you please.”

“Good! and the gun?”

“You shall have it to-morrow.”

“All right. Now let me see if you recollect what I told you.”

Pitou behaved so well that Clovis complimented him. He would have promised Clovis a six-pounder if he had asked for one.

When they had finished, it lacked but an hour of daylight, and he took leave of his teacher, going at a brisk pace towards Haramont, the whole population of which slept soundly.

Pitou sank to sleep, and dreamed that he commanded an army of many millions of men, and waged war on the whole world, his army obeying, in one rank, the word of command, “Carry arms!”

On the next day he drilled his soldiers with an insolence which they esteemed proof positive of his capacity.

Pitou became popular, and was admired by men, women, and children.

The women even became serious, when, in stentorian tones he cried out:—

“Be a soldier! look at me.”

He was a soldier.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Catherine becomes a Diplomatist

OLD Clovis had his gun; for what Pitou promised he did.

In ten visits Pitou became a perfect grenadier. But, unfortunately, when Clovis had taught him the manual, he had taught all he knew.

Pitou bought a copy of the “French Tactician,” and of the “Manual of the National Guard,” in which he expended a crown.

The Haramont battalion made, thanks to Pitou, very rapid progress. When he had reached the more complicated manæuvres, he went to Soissons, where in one hour, from observing real soldiers drilled by real officers, he learned in one day more than his books would have taught him in a month.

He thus toiled for two months.

Pitou was ambitious and in love. Pitou was unfortunate in his love. Often after his drill, which always followed midnight study, had Pitou crossed the plains of Largny, and now and then the whole forest, to watch Catherine, who always kept her appointment at Boursonne.

Catherine used every day to steal away from her household duty to a little cot near the warren of Boursonne, to meet her beloved Isidore, who seemed always happy and joyous, even though everything around seemed dark.

How great was Pitou’s unhappiness when he remembered how unequal a share of happiness was vouchsafed to different men!

He on whom the girls of Haramont, Taillefontaine, and Vivières looked with favor, who also might have had his rendezvous, was yet forced to weep, like a child, before the closed door of Monsieur Isidore’s pavilion.

Pitou loved Catherine the more devotedly because he saw that she was his superior. He also knew that she loved another; and though he ceased to be jealous of Isidore, who was noble, handsome, and worthy of love, Catherine, at least, sprung from the people, should not disgrace her family nor make him unhappy.

When he thought, therefore, he suffered very deeply.

“It was heartless,” said he, “to suffer me to go. When I did so, she never asked if I was dead or alive. What would Billot say if he knew his friends were treated thus, and his business thus neglected? What would he say if he knew that the housekeeper, instead of attending to his business, was making love with the aristocratic Monsieur de Charny? He would say nothing, but would kill Catherine.

"It is something, however, to have such a revenge in my grasp."

It was better, though, not to make use of it.

Pitou had observed that good actions, not understood, never benefit the actors.

Would it not be well to let Catherine know what he was about? Nothing was easier; he had only to speak to her some day at the dance, and let, fall something to inform her that three persons knew her secret. Was it not worth while to make her suffer a little, to quell her pride?

If, though, he went to the dance, he must appear as the equal of the nobleman, — a thing difficult to do when the object of comparison was one so well dressed.

The pavilion in which Catherine used to meet De Charny was in a kind of grove which was an appendant to the forest of Villers-Cotterets.

A simple ditch divided the property of the count from that of his neighbors.

Catherine, who was every day called for one reason or another to visit the neighbors, found no difficulty in leaping over this ditch. The rendezvous was certainly well selected.

The pavilion was so placed that through the loopholes, set with painted glass, she could overlook the whole grove, while it was itself so secluded that no one could see it, and three springs of a horse would put any one who sought to leave in the forest or in neutral ground.

Pitou had watched Catherine so carefully that he knew whither she went, and whence she came, as well as the poacher knows the track of the hare.

Catherine did not return to the forest with Isidore, who used always to remain some time in the pavilion, in order to see that she was not annoyed, and used then to go in a contrary direction.

Pitou hid himself on Catherine's pathway, and ascended an immense tree which completely overlooked the pavilion.

Before an hour had passed he saw Catherine come by. She tied her horse in the wood, sprang over the ditch, and went to the pavilion.

She dismounted just below the tree where Pitou was.

He had only to descend and lean against the trunk. He then took from his pocket the “Manual of the National Guard,” and began to read.

An hour atter, Pitou heard a door shut. He heard the rustling of a dress, and saw Catherine look anxiously around, as if to see if she was watched.

She stood within ten paces of Pitou.

Pitou did not move, and kept his book on his knees.

He no longer, however, pretended to read, and looked at Catherine so that she could not misunderstand him.

She uttered a half-stifled cry, and then became pale as death. After another brief moment of indecision, she rushed into the forest and became invisible.

Pitou had arranged matters well, and Catherine was caught in the snare.

Pitou returned half happy and half afraid to Haramont.

As soon as he thought of what he had done, he saw that it might have many consequences which previously had not suggested themselves to him.

The next day was appointed for a military parade.

Being sufficiently instructed, in their own opinion, the National Guards had requested to be assembled in the presence of the public.

Some neighboring villagers, excited by rivalry, who had also paid attention to tactics, were to come to Haramont for a kind of contest.

A deputation from these villagers was present under the command of an old sergeant.

The announcement of such a spectacle brought many persons together, and the parade-ground of Haramont early in the day was occupied by crowds of young children, and at a later hour by the fathers and mothers of the champions.

Four drums beat in four different directions, — those of Largny, Ver, Taillefontaine, and Vivières.

Haramont was a centre, and had its four cardinal points.

A fifth replied; it preceded the thirty-three National Guards of Haramont.

Among the spectators was a portion of the aristocracy and of the bourgeoisie of Villers-Cotterets come to be amused.

There were also many farmers who had come to see.

Soon Catherine and Madame Billot came. Just at this moment the National Guard of Haramont came from the village, headed by Pitou, a drum, and a fife. Pitou was on a great white horse, which Maniquet had lent him for the purpose of making a representation of Marquis de Lafayette *ad vivum* at Haramont.

Pitou grasped his sword and bestrode the huge horse.

If he did not represent the aristocracy, he at least represented the bone and sinew of the land.

The entrance of Pitou, and of those who had conferred so much honor on the province, was saluted by loud acclamations.

All had hats alike, with the national cockade, and marched in two ranks in the most perfect order.

When they reached the parade all approved of them.

Pitou caught a glance of Catherine and blushed. She trembled.

This was the most exciting portion of the review.

He put his men through the manual, and every command excited much attention and applause.

The other villagers appeared excited and irregular. Some were half armed, others half instructed, and they were completely demoralized by the comparison. Pitou’s men became vain of their excellence.

Both were uncertain, however, as to cause and effect.

From the manual they passed to the drill.

Here the sergeant expected to rival Pitou.

In consideration of his age, the sergeant had received the command, and marched his men back and forth by files.

He could do nothing more.

Pitou, with his sword under his arm, and his helmet on his brow, looked on with infinite superiority.

When the sergeant saw his heads of column become lost amid the trees, while the rear took the back track to Haramont; when he saw his squares disperse, and squads and platoons lose their commandants, — he was greeted by a disapproving sound from his own soldiers.

A cry was heard from Haramont: —

“Pitou! Pitou! Pitou!”

“Yes, Pitou!” echoed the men of the other villages, offended at an inferiority which they attributed to their instructors.

Pitou, on his white horse, placed himself at the head of his men, to whom he gave the right, and gave the command in such a tone that the very oaks trembled.

As if by miracle, the broken files united, the manæuvres were well executed, Pitou made such good use of his books and of Father Clovis's instructions.

The *army*, with one voice, saluted him *Imperator* on the field of battle.

Pitou dismounted, and covered with sweat, received the salutations of the crowd.

He did not, however, see Catherine.

All at once Pitou heard her voice. It was not necessary for him to seek her. She had sought him.

His triumph was immense.

"What!" said she, with an air in strange contrast with her pale face. "Have you become proud because you are a great general?"

"Oh, no!" replied Pitou. "Good-morning, Mademoiselle Billot."

Then to Madame Billot: —

"I am happy to salute you, Madame Billot."

Turning to Catherine, he said: —

"Mademoiselle, you are wrong. I am not a great general, but only a young man anxious to serve my country."

What he had said was borne through the crowd, and treated as a sublime sentiment.

"Ange," said Catherine, "I must speak to you."

"Ah! at last! at last!" thought he, and said: —

"When you please."

"Return to the farm with us."

"Very well."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Honey and Absinthe

CATHERINE contrived to be alone with Pitou in spite of her mother’s presence.

Old Mother Billot had some gossips, who walked by her and maintained conversation.

Catherine, who had left her horse, returned on foot with Pitou.

Such arrangements surprise no one in the country, where people are more indulgent than they are in great cities.

It seemed natural enough for Monsieur Pitou to talk to Mademoiselle Billot. It may be none ever noticed it.

On that day all enjoyed the silence and thickness of the woods. All glory and happiness seems to reside amid the primeval grandeur of the forests.

“Here I am, Mademoiselle Catherine,” said Pitou, when they were alone.

“Why have you for so long a time not visited our farm? That is wrong, Pitou.”

“But, Mademoiselle, you know the reason!”

“I do not. You are wrong.”

Pitou bit his lips. It annoyed him to hear Catherine tell a falsehood.

She saw and understood his expression.

“But, Pitou, I have something to tell you.”

“Ah!” said he. “The other day you saw me in the hut?”

“Yes, I did.”

“You saw me?”

“Yes.”

She blushed.

“What were you doing there?”

“You knew me?”

“At first I did not. I did afterwards.”

“What do you mean?”

“Sometimes one does not pay attention.”

“Certainly.”

Both were silent, for each had too much to think of.

Catherine said at last: “Then it was you? What were you doing there? Why did you hide yourself?”

“Hide myself? Why?”

“Curiosity might have made you.”

“I have no curiosity.”

She stamped the ground most impatiently with her little foot.

“You were,” said she, “in a place you do not visit often.”

“You saw I was reading.”

“I do not know.”

“If you saw me, you do.”

“I did see you very distinctly; but what were you reading?”

“My *tactics*.”

“What is that?”

“A book in which I learned what I have since taught my men. To study, Madame, one must be alone.”

“True; in the forest nothing disturbs you.”

“Nothing.”

They were again silent; the rest of the party rode before them.

“When you study thus,” said Catherine, “do you study long?”

“Whole days sometimes.”

“Then you had been long there?”

“Very long.”

“It is surprising that I did not see you when I came.”

Here she told an untruth, and Pitou felt disposed to expose her. But he was in love, and sorry for her. In his view her faults amounted to a virtue, — circumspection.

“I may have slept; I sometimes do when I study too much.”

“Well, while you slept I must have passed you. I went to the old pavilion.”

“Ah!” said Pitou, “what pavilion?”

Catherine blushed again. This time her manner was so affected that he could not believe her.

“Charny’s pavilion. There is the best balm in the country. I had hurt myself, and needed some leaves. I hurt my hand.”

As if he wished to believe her, Ange looked at her hands.

“Ah!” said she, “not my hands, but my foot.”

“Did you get what you wanted?”

“Ah, yes! You see I do not limp.”

Catherine fancied that she had succeeded; she fancied Pitou had seen and knew nothing. She said, and it was a great mistake: —

“Then Monsieur Pitou would have *cut* us. He is proud of his position, and disdains peasants since he has become an officer.”

Pitou was wounded. So great a sacrifice, even though feigned, demands another recompense; and as Catherine seemed to seek to mystify Pitou, and as she doubtless laughed at him when she was with Isidore de Charny, all Pitou’s good-humor passed away. Self-love is a viper asleep, on which it is never prudent to tread unless you crush it at once.

“Mademoiselle,” said he, “it seems rather that you cut me.”

“How so?”

“First, you refused me work, and drove me from the farm. I said nothing to Monsieur Billot, for, thank God! I yet have a heart and hands.”

“I assure you, Monsieur Pitou — ”

“It matters not; of course you can manage your own affairs. If, then, you saw me at the pavilion, you should have spoken to me, instead of running away, as if you were robbing an orchard.”

The viper had stung. Catherine was uneasy.

“I run away!” said she.

“As if your barn had been on fire. Mademoiselle, I had not the time to shut my book before you sprang on the pony and rode away. He had been tied long enough, though, to eat up all the bark of an oak.”

“Then a tree was destroyed; but why, Monsieur Pitou, do you tell me this?”

Catherine felt that all presence of mind was leaving her.

“Ah, you were gathering balm!” said Pitou. “A *horse* does much in an hour.”

Catherine said, “In an hour?”

“No horse, Mademoiselle, could strip a tree of that size in less time. You must have been collecting more balm than would suffice to cure all the wounds received at the Bastille.”

Catherine could not say a word.

Pitou was silent; he knew he had said enough.

Mother Billot paused at the cross-road to bid adieu to her friends.

Pitou was in agony, for he felt the pain of the wounds he had inflicted, and was like a bird just ready to fly away.

"Well! what says the officer?" said Madame Billot.

"That he wishes you good-day."

"Then good-day. Come, Catherine."

"Ah! tell me the truth," murmured Catherine.

"What?"

"Are you not yet my friend?"

"Alas!" said the poor fellow, who, as yet without experience, began to make love, through confessions which only the skilful know how to manage.

Pitou felt that his secret was rushing to his lips; he felt that the first word Catherine said would place him in her power.

He was aware, though, if he spoke he would die when Catherine confessed to him what as yet he only suspected.

He was silent as an old Roman, and bowed to Catherine with a respect which touched the young girl's heart, bowed to Madame Billot, and disappeared.

Catherine made a bound as if she would follow him.

Madame Billot said to her daughter: —

"He is a good lad, and has much feeling."

When alone, Pitou began a long monologue on the following theme: —

"This is what is called love; at certain times it is very sweet, but at others very bitter."

The poor lad did not know that in love there is both honey and absinthe, and that Monsieur Isidore had all the honey.

From this hour, during which she had suffered horribly, Catherine conceived a kind of respectful fear for Pitou, which a few days before she was far from feeling towards him.

When one cannot inspire love, it is not bad to inspire fear; and Pitou, who had great ideas of personal dignity, would have been not a little flattered had he discovered the existence even of such a sentiment.

As he was not, however, physiologist enough to see what the ideas of a woman a league and a half from him are, he wept and sang a countless number of songs, the theme of which was unfortunate love.

Pitou at last reached his own room, where he found his chivalric guard had placed a sentinel. The man, dead drunk, lay on a bench with his gun across his legs.

Pitou awoke him.

He then learned that his thirty men, good and true, had ordered an entertainment at old Father Tellier’s — the old man was the Vatel of Haramont — and that twelve ladies were to crown the Turenne who had overcome the Condé of the next canton.

Pitou was too much fatigued for his stomach not to have suffered.

Pitou, being led by his sentinel to the banquet-hall, was received with acclamations which made the very walls tremble.

He bowed, sat down in silence, and with his natural coolness attacked the veal and salad.

This state of feeling lasted until his stomach was filled and his heart relieved.

CHAPTER XL.

An Unexpected Dénouement

FEASTING after sorrow is either an increase of grief or an absolute consolation.

Pitou saw, after the lapse of two hours, that his grief was not increased.

He arose when his companions could not.

He made even an oration on Spartan sobriety to them, when they were all dead drunk.

He bade them go away when they were asleep under the table.

We must say that the ladies disappeared during the dessert.

Pitou thought; amid all his glory and honor, the prominent subject was his last interview with Catherine.

Amid the half hints of his memory, he recalled the fact that her hand had often touched his, and that sometimes her shoulder had pressed his own, and that he on certain occasions had known all her beauties.

He then looked around him like a man awaking from a drunken dream.

He asked the shadows why so much severity towards a young woman, perfect in grace, could have been in his heart.

Pitou wished to reinstate himself with Catherine.

But how?

A Lovelace would have said, “That girl laughs at and deceives me. I will follow her example.”

Such a character would have said: “I will despise her, and make her ashamed of her love as of so much disgrace.

“I will terrify and dishonor her, and make the path to her rendezvous painful.”

Pitou, like a good fellow, though heated with wine and love, said to himself, “Sometime I will make Catherine ashamed that she did not love me.”

Pitou’s chaste ideas would not permit him to fancy that Catherine did aught but coquet with Monsieur de Charny, and that she laughed at his laced boots and golden spurs.

How delighted Pitou was to think that Catherine was not in love with either a boot or a spur!

Some day Monsieur Isidore would go to the city and marry a countess. Catherine then would seem to him an old romance.

All these ideas occupied the mind of the commander of the National Guard of Haramont.

To prove to Catherine that he was a good fellow, he began to recall all the bad things he had heard during the day.

But Catherine had said some of them. He thought he would tell them to her.

A drunken man without a watch has no idea of time.

Pitou had no watch, and had not gone ten paces before he was as drunk as Bacchus or his son Thespis.

He did not remember that he had left Catherine three hours before, and that, half an hour later, she must have reached the farm.

To that place he hurried.

Let us leave him among the trees, bushes, and briers, threshing with his stick the great forest of Orléans, which returned blows with usury.

Let us return to Catherine, who went home with her mother.

There was a swamp behind the farm, and when there, they had to ride in single file.

The old lady went first.

Catherine was about to go when she heard a whistle.

She turned and saw in the distance the cap of Isidore’s valet.

She let her mother ride on; and the latter, being but a few paces from home, felt no uneasiness.

The servant came.

“Mademoiselle,” said he, “my master wishes to see you to-night, and begs you to meet him somewhere at eleven, if you please.”

“Has he met with any accident?” inquired Catherine, with much alarm.

“I do not know. He received to-night a letter with a black seal from Paris. I have already been here an hour.”

The clock of Villers-Cotterets struck ten.

Catherine looked around.

“Well, the place is dark; tell your master I will wait for him here.”

The man rode away.

Catherine followed her mother home.

What could Isidore have to tell her at such an hour?

Love-meetings assume more smiling forms.

That was not the question. Isidore wished to see her, and the hour was of no importance. She would have met him in the graveyard of Villers-Cotterets at midnight.

She would not then even think, but kissed her mother and went to her room.

Her mother went to bed.

She suspected nothing, and if she had, it mattered not, for Catherine was mistress there.

Catherine neither undressed nor went to bed.

She heard the chime of half after ten. At a quarter before eleven she put out the lamp and went into the dining-room. The windows opened into the yard. She sprang out.

She hurried to the appointed place with a beating heart, placing one hand on her bosom and the other on her burning head. She was not forced to wait long.

She heard the galloping of a horse.

She stepped forward.

Isidore was before her.

Without dismounting, he took her hand, lifted her on to his stirrup, embraced her, and said: —

“Catherine, yesterday my brother George was killed at Versailles. My brother Olivier has sent for me; I must go.”

Catherine uttered an exclamation of grief, and clasped De Charny in her arms.

“If,” said she, “they killed one brother, they will kill another.”

“Be that as it may, my eldest brother has sent for me; Catherine, you know I love you.”

“Stay, stay!” said the poor girl, who was only aware of the fact that Isidore was going.

“Honor and vengeance appeal to me.”

“Alas! alas!”

And she threw herself pale and trembling into his arms.

A tear fell from De Charny’s eyes on the young girl’s brow.

“You weep; thank God, you love me!”

“Yes; but my eldest brother has written to me, and you see I must obey.”

“Go, then; I will keep you no longer.”

“One last kiss.”

“Adieu!”

The young girl consented, knowing that nothing could keep Isidore from obeying this order of his brother. She slid from his arms to the ground.

The young man looked away, sighed, hesitated, but under the influence of the order he had received, galloped away, casting one long last look on Catherine.

A servant followed him.

Catherine lay alone where she fell, completely closing the narrow way.

Just then a man appeared on the top of the hill, coming from Villers-Cotterets, and rapidly advancing towards the farm; he was very near treading on the inanimate body that lay in the pathway.

He lost his balance, stumbled and fell, and was not aware of the body until he touched it.

“Catherine!” said he; “Catherine dead?”

He uttered a cry of such agony that he aroused the very dogs of the farm.

“Who, — who has killed her?” He sat pale, trembling, and inert, with the body on his knees.

THE END

THE COMTESSE DE CHARNY

Anonymous translation, 1893

This is the last novel in the *Memoirs of a Physician* series and was first published in 1853. The novel concerns the French Revolution up to the death of Louis XVI. *The Countess de Charny* begins where *Ange Pitou* left off, after the attack on Versailles and the Royal family's 'escort' back to Paris.

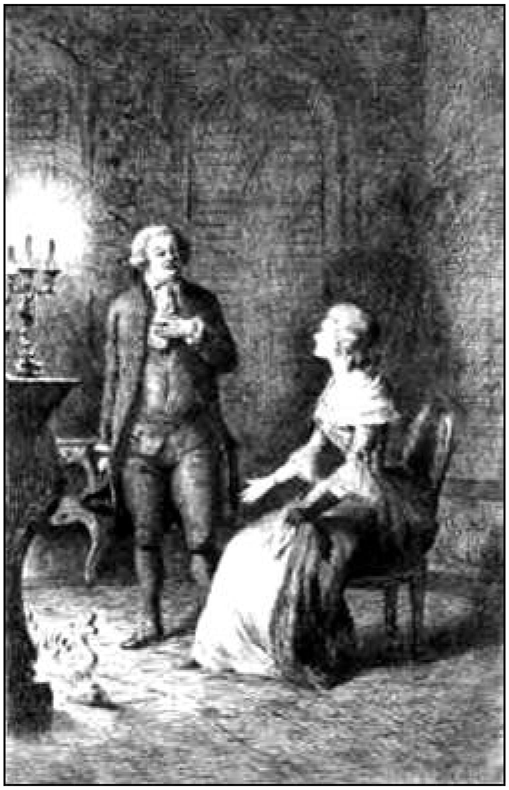

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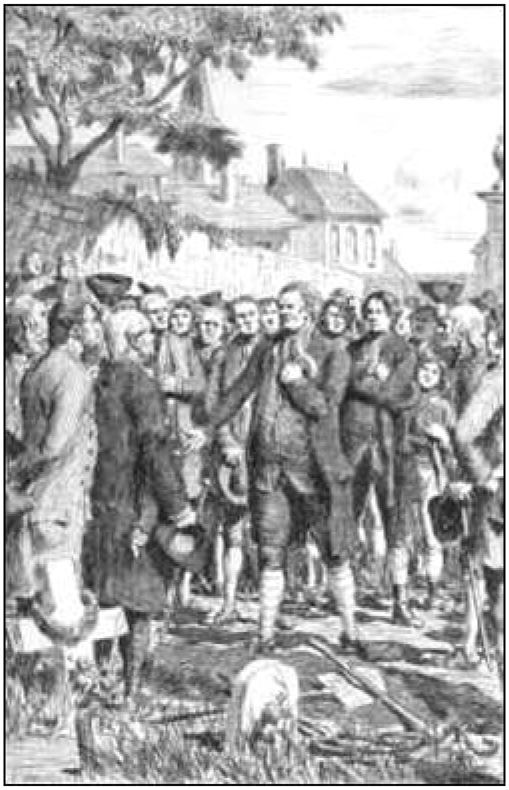

An illustration from the first English edition

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CHAPTER I.

The Inn of the Bridge of Sevres.

THE WELL-KNOWN manufacturing village of Sevres lies somewhere about half way between Paris and Versailles. At the door of the inn adjoining the bridge a personage was standing who is to play an important part in our narrative.

He was forty-five or forty-eight years of age. He was dressed as a workman, that is to say, had velvet breeches with leather facings at the pockets, like those worn by locksmiths and blacksmiths. He wore grey stockings, and shoes with copper buckles, and had on a woollen cap, like that of a lancer cut in half. A perfect forest of grey hair escaped from his cap and hung over his eyes, which were large, open, and intelligent, and flashed so wildly and so quickly that it was impossible to define their colour. The other features were a nose rather large than small, heavy lips, white teeth, and a bronzed complexion.

Though not large, his figure was admirable. He had delicate limbs, a small foot, and his hand would have seemed so too, had it not the bronze tint of that of all who work in iron.

Ascending from the hand to the elbow, and thence as far as the rolled-lip sleeve suffered it to be visible, it might have been seen, in spite of the volume of muscle, that the skin wag soft and fair.

This man had come an hour before from Versailles. In reply to questions asked by the innkeeper when he brought him a bottle of wine, he had said: the queen, with the king and dauphin, were coming; that they set out about noon; and they were about to occupy the Tuileries, the consequence of which would be that Paris, having in it “*the baker, his wife, and the baker’s boy,*” would not want bread.

He was waiting to see the cortege pass.

The assertion might be true, yet it was easier to see that he looked oftener towards Paris than towards Versailles.

After a few minutes he seemed satisfied, for a man clad almost as he was, and apparently of the same condition, was seen to approach the inn.

The new-comer walked heavily, like one who had made a long journey. His age might be that of the unknown man, that is to say, as people usually do, that he was on the wrong side of forty. His features betokened him to be a man of common inclinations and vulgar instincts.

The stranger looked curiously at the newcomer, as if he wished at one glance to measure all the impurity and wickedness of the heart of the man.

When the workman who came from Paris was about twenty paces from the man who awaited him, the latter poured out the first glass of wine into one of two glasses which stood on the table. “Ah! ha!” said he, “it is cold, and the journey is long. Let us drink, and warm ourselves up.”

The man from Paris looked around to see who gave him this invitation. “Do you speak to me?” said he.

“Whom else should I? There is no other person present,” was the reply.

“Why offer me wine?” — ” Why not?”

“Ah!”

“It is because we are of the same, or nearly the same trade.”

“Everybody may be of the same trade. It is necessary, however, to know whether one be companion or master.”

“Well, we will drink a glass of wine, chat, and find out which is the case.”

“Very well,” said the workman, advancing towards the door of the inn.

The stranger led the new-comer to the table and gave him the glass.

“Ah!” said he, “this is burgundy.”

“Yes, the brand was recommended to me, and I do not regret that I ordered it. There is yet wine in the bottle, and other bottles in the cave.”

“What are you about now?”

“I am from Paris, and await the coming of the royal cortege, which I intend to accompany to Paris.”

“What mean you?”

“The king, queen and dauphin return to Paris with the market women, two hundred members of the assembly, and the national guard under the command of Lafayette.”

“Le Bourgeois has then resolved to go to Paris?”

“He had to do so.”

“So I thought, at three last night, when I left for Paris.”

“Ah! I was curious to know what would become of the king, especially as I know him. This is no boast. A man who has a wife and three children must feed them, especially when there is no longer a royal forge.”

The stranger said only, “Then business took you to Paris?”

“Yes, and on my honour, I was well paid for it.” As he spoke, the man rattled several coins in his pocket. “The money, however,” said he, “was given me by a servant; what is worst of all, by a German servant. That was wrong.”

“Ah,” said the stranger, like a man who advances slowly, but yet advances, “you are on a business which is important, and well paid for?”

“Yes.”

“Because it is difficult?” — ” It is.”

“A secret lock? hey?” — ”An invisible door “

“An invisible door!” — ” I imagine a man in a house, who finds it necessary to hide himself. Well, the bell is rung. Where is monsieur? He is not in! no! he is! look for him! he is looked for! good evening! I defy any one to find monsieur. An iron door with oak panelling, you understand — few can tell the difference.”

“But if any one touch it?”

“Bah! just make the oak an inch thick, and no one can tell. I could not myself.”

“Where made you that?” — ”Aha!”

“Then you will not tell?” — ” I cannot, for I do not know.”

“You were then blind-folded?”

“Exactly. There was a carriage at the gate; they said, ‘Are you so and so?’ ‘Yes,’ said I. ‘Well, we awaited you. Get in.’ I did. When in, my eyes were bandaged, and the carriage was driven for nearly half an hour; at last, the door of a great house was opened; I stumbled at the first step, and then went up ten steps into the vestibule. There I found a German servant, who said to the others, ‘It is well! Go away, there is no longer any need of you.’ The others left, and the bandage was taken from my eyes, and I was told what I had to do. I set to work, and in one hour all was done. They paid me in good louis d’or. My eyes were again blind-folded; I was put in the carriage, and taken back to the place whence I was borne.”

“The bandage must have been very tight to prevent one from telling the right from the left.”

“Heu! heu!”

“Come, then,” said the stranger, “tell me what you really saw.”

“When I stumbled I took care in a slight degree to derange the bandage.”

“And when you had done so?” said the stranger with equal vivacity.

“I saw a row of trees on the right, which made me think the house was on the Boulevard; that was all I know.”

“Ah!” — ” On my word of honour.”

“That gives little information.”

“The Boulevards are long, and there are many houses with wide doors on them.”

“Then you would not recognize the house?”

The locksmith thought for a moment and said, “No, I would not.”

The stranger, though his face did not seem to say what he really wished to utter, appeared satisfied and said: “Well, then, it seems there are no locksmiths, since people send to Versailles for one to make a secret door.”

He then filled the glasses again, and knocked on the table with the empty bottle, that the innkeeper might bring a full one.

“Yes, there are locksmiths in Paris, but there are masters and professors.”

“Ah, I see; like St. Eloi, you are one of the latter.”

“I am. Do you belong to the trade?”

“Something of the sort.”

“What are you?” — ” A gunsmith.”

“Have you any of your work about you?”

“Do you see this gun?”

The locksmith took the gun, looked carefully at it, tried the lock, and approved of the click of the springs, then, reading the name on the breech, said, “Impossible, my friend! Leclerc cannot be older than twenty-eight. Do not be offended, but you and I are close on fifty.”

“True, I am not Leclerc, but I am just the same.”

“How so?” — ” I am his master.”

“Ah, that is just as if I had said I am not the king, but his master.”

“What mean you?” — ”Because I am the king’s master.”

“Ah! have I the honour to speak to M. Gamain?”

“You have, and if I could, I would serve you,” said the locksmith, delighted at the effect he had produced.

“Diable, I did not know I was talking to a mail of such consequence.”

“Ah!” — ”To a man of such consequence,” repeated the stranger. “Tell me, is it pleasant to be a king’s master?”

"Why?"

"I think it very humiliating for one man to be forced to call another 'your majesty.'"

"I did not have to do so. When at the forge, I called him Bourgeois, and he called me Gamain, when we spoke together familiarly."

"Yes, but when dinner time came, you were sent to eat with the servants."

"Not a bit of it; a table ready served was brought to me at the shop, and at breakfast he often said, 'Bah! I will not go to see the queen, for then I will not have to wash my hands.'"

"I do not see."

"Why, when the king worked in iron as we do, his hands were like ours. That does not, however, keep us from being honest people, but the queen used to say: 'Fie, sire, your hands are dirty.' Just if one could work in a shop and have clean hands! I tell you, he was never happy, except when in his geographical library, his study, or when he was with me. I think, though, he liked me best."

"Such a pupil as a king must have been a famous business for you."

"Not a bit: you arc mistaken. I wish devoutly it was so; for though the master of Louis XVI., the Restorer of France, while all the world thinks me as rich as Croesus, I am poor as Job."

"You poor? What on earth does he do with his money, then?"

"One half goes to the poor, the other half to the rich, so that he never has a penny. The Coigny, the Vaudreuil, and Polignac gnaw the poor fellow away. One day he wished to reduce Coigny's salary, and made Coigny come to the door of the shop, and after about five minutes, he came in as pale as possible, saying, 'On my honour I thought he would beat me.' 'But his salary, sire?' said I. 'Oh, I let it stand as it is. I could not help it.' A few days afterwards he sough t to make some remarks to the queen about the pension of Madame de Polignac; only think, three hundred thousand francs! a nice thing. Bah! it was not enough. For the queen made him give her five hundred thousand. Thus you see Polignacs, who a few years ago had not a sou, are about to leave France with millions. That would be nothing, had they any talent; but give the whole of them an anvil and sledge, and not one can shoe a horse or make a key. They, however, like knights, as they say they are, have urged the king forward, and now leave him to get on as he can with Bailly, Mirabeau, and Lafayette; while to me, who would have given him such good advice, Ins master, his friend, who first put the file in his hand, he has given only fifteen hundred crowns a year.”

“But you work with him, and something good falls in from day to day.”

“What! I work with him? No. It would compromise me. Since the taking of the Bastille I have not put my foot inside of the palace. Once or twice I met him; the street was full of people, and he bowed to me. The second time was on the Satory Road, and he stopped his carriage. ‘Well, poor Gamain,’ said he, ‘things do not go on as you wish them to. This will, however, teach you. But how are your wife and children?’ ‘Well, very well,’ said I. ‘Here!’ said the king, ‘make them this present for me.’ He searched his pockets, and all the money he could find was nine louis. ‘This is all I have!’ said he, ‘and I am ashamed to make you so poor a present.’ You will agree with me that a king who has nine louis only, and who makes his comrade so poor a present, must be badly off.”

“You did not take them?”

“Yes I did. You must always take, for somebody else would. It is, however, all right, for I will never go to Versailles, though he send for me again and again. He does not deserve it; and when I think that he had ten thousand bottles of wine, each of which was worth a dozen of this, and that he never said to one of his servants, ‘Take a basket to Gamain.’ Ah, he preferred that his Swiss, his body-guard, and his Flemish soldiers should have it.”

“Well,” said the stranger, “so it is with kings; they are ungrateful. We are, however, no longer alone.” At that moment two men and a fish-woman entered the room, and sat at a table near the one at which Gamain and the stranger were drinking the second bottle.

The locksmith looked at them with an attention which made the stranger smile.

The party, however, was worthy of attention.

One of the men was all torso: the other all legs. The woman it is not so easy to describe.

The torso was like a dwarf, for he was hardly five feet high. He perhaps lost an inch or two from the fact that he was knock-kneed. His face, instead of lessening this deformity, seemed to make it more apparent, for his straight and dirty hair was flattened on his head, and his badly-marked brow seemed to have grown Imp-hazard. His eyes were usually glassy, but, when irritated, flashed like those of a viper. His nose was fiat, and made his high cheek-bones the more apparent. To make everything more hideous, his yellow lips covered but half a dozen black and broken teeth.

The veins of this man seemed filled with mingled blood and poison.

The second, different from the first, who had short legs, looked like a crane on stilts. His resemblance was the more striking, since, hump-backed like the crane, with his head sunken between his shoulders, it was to be distinguished only by its red eyes and its long-pointed nose. Like the heron, too, it seemed to have the faculty of extending its neck at will, and picking out the eyes of any person it pleased. This, however, was nothing, for the arms seemed to have an equal elasticity, for seated as he was, he could at once pick up a handkerchief on the floor with which to wipe his brow.

The third was an amphibious being, the family, but not the sex of which could be recognized. It was either a man or woman of thirty, or of thirty-four years, and wore the dress of a fish-woman, with chains of gold, and ear-rings, with lace cape, etc. Her features, as far as they could be distinguished through the coating of rouge above them, were worn and faded. When one had once seen her, one awaited with anxiety until she should open her mouth, with the expectation that her voice, better than her appearance, would give some indication which might be definite. All this though, was nothing, for her soprano voice left the examiner in equal doubt, for the ear was not more positive than the eye.

The shoes and stockings of the woman and the two men indicated that they had walked in the mud long and far.

“Strange!” said Gamain, “but I think I know that woman.”

“Perhaps,” said the stranger; “but, my dear fellow, when you see three persons together, be sure they have business to attend to: let us not bore them.” He took up his gun, and proposed to go.

“Do you know them?”

“Yes, by sight. I swear I have seen that woman somewhere.”

“At court?” — ”Bah! she is a fish-woman.”

“They go to court sometimes.”

“If you know them, tell me the names of the men; it may enable me to remember the woman.”

“The men?” — ” Yes.”

“Which?” — ” The dwarf.”

“Jean Paul Marat.” — ”And the hunchback?”

“Prosper Vevrieres.” — ”Ah, all!”

“Does that put you on the track of the woman?” — ” No.”

“Look again.” — ”I give my tongue to the dogs.”

“But the fish-woman?” — ”Wait a bit no — yes.”

“Yes?” — ” It is — impossible.”

“Yes, at first it seems impossible.”

“It is — ”

“Ah, you will never name her. The fish-woman is the Duke d’Aiguillon.”

At the sound of the name, the apparent woman turned pale and looked around.

The stranger placed his fingers on his lips, and left. Gamain followed him, thinking that he was mistaken. At the door, ho knocked against a person who seemed to fly, pursued by persons who shouted out: “The queen’s hairdresser!” Among these pursuers were two, each of whom bore a bloody head on a pike.

“What is the matter?” said the locksmith to the stranger.

“Who knows? Perhaps they wish him to curl the hair of those two heads. People in revolutionary days take strange fancies.”

He mingled in the crowd, leaving Gamain, from whom perhaps he had extracted all he wished, to return to his shop at Versailles.

CHAPTER II.

Cagliostro.

THE STRANGER was able to hide himself easily in the crowd, especially as it was large.

It was the advance guard of the escort of the king, queen, and dauphin.

It was composed of miserable and ragged beggars half drunk, the floating foam of the population, like the froth which rises from water or lava.

All at once there was a great tumult. The bayonets of the National Guard and the white horse of Lafayette were seen.

The crowd shouted loudly, “Long live Lafayette!” who from time to time took off his hat, and saluted with his sword. “Vive Mirabeau!” too was heard, as the latter from time to time put his head through the carriage window, in which he, with five other members of the National Assembly, sat, to get fresh air.

Thus the unfortunate king, for whom all was silence, heard the popularity he had lost applauded. He also heard the quality in which he was deficient praised. Dr. Gilbert, us he accompanied the king, without any immediate companion, walked on the right side of the royal carriage, that is, close to the queen.

On the two sides of the carriage of the king and queen, beyond the kind of file of footmen, who had taken that position so as to be able to aid him in case of necessity, walked, pattering in the mud, six inches deep, the men and women of the market, who seemed every moment to make a more compact array of their ribbons and gaudy coloured dresses.

The king looked on with his sad heartbroken air. He had not slept on the night before, and had eaten a bad breakfast. He had not been allowed time to readjust and to powder his hair; his beard was long, his linen rumpled, and he looked wretched. Alas, the poor king was not a man for dangerous conjunctures — at all crises he hung down his head in dejection. Once only he looked up, and then it was when his head was about to fall on the scaffold.

At about a hundred paces from the cabaret, the crowd halted, and the cries down the whole line were increased.

The queen looked out of the window, and the motion, which seemed like a salute, increased the murmur.

“Gilbert,” said she. “what is it my people are singing? What are they crying?”

Gilbert uttered a sigh, which meant — She is unchanged. Then, with an expression of deep sadness, he said, “Madame, the people you call yours was once really so, when twenty years ago an elegant gentleman, whom I now look for in vain, introduced you to them on the balcony, and shouted, ‘Long live our dauphiness!’ adding, madame, ‘There you have two hundred thousand lovers.’“

The queen bit her lips, for she could find no fault with his answer.

“True,” said she, “but it only proves that people change.”

Gilbert bowed, and was silent.

“I asked you a question, M. Gilbert,” with an obstinacy she persisted in, even when aware that the answer would be unpleasant.

“Yes, madame, and as your majesty insists, I will reply. The people sing:

‘La Boulangere a des ecus,
Qui ne lui coutent guere.’

You know who the people call the baker’s wife.”

“Yes, sir, I know they do me that honour. I am, however, used to nicknames. They once called me Madame Deficit. Is there any connection between the first and the last name?”

“Yes, madame, and to be assured, you have only to think of one of the two verses I have repeated to you.”

The queen repeated them, and said:

“M. Gilbert, I do not understand.”

Gilbert was silent. The queen continued, “Well, did you bear rue? I do nut understand.”

“Does your majesty insist on an explanation?”

“Certainly.”

“They mean your majesty’s ministers, especially of finance, have been too complaisant — M. de Calonne for instance. The people knew that your majesty had only to ask that it ought to be given you, and as queens ask without much difficulty, for on asking they command, the people sing:

‘La Boulangere a des ecus,
Qui ne lui coutent guere.’

That is to say, which scarcely cost the trouble of asking.”

The queen grasped convulsively with her white hand the velvet of the carriage door.

“Well,” said she. “that is what it sings. Now. M. Gilbert, please, for you explain its thoughts well, tell me what it says.”

“It says, madame, ‘We will not want bread in Paris, for we have the baker, his wife, and the shop-boy.’“

“You can explain this second insolence distinctly as the first, can you not? I hope so.”

“Madame,” said Gilbert, with the same kind melancholy, “if you would reflect, not on the words, but on the intention of this people, you would see that you have not so much to complain of as you think.”

“Let us see,” said the queen. “You know, doctor, I wish for nothing so much as for information.”

“Whether correctly or not, madame, I cannot say, but it is said that a heavy trade in corn is carried on at Versailles, and that, therefore, none is brought to Paris. Who feed the poor? The baker and his wife. To whom, as father, mother, and son, turn their hands, when for want of money they die? To the baker and his wife. Whom does he beg, after that God who provides the harvests? Those who distribute bread. Are not you, madame, the king, this august child, all distributors of bread? Do not find fault then with the name, but thank. God for the hope entertained, that when once king, queen, and dauphin are amid 1,200,000 starving people, they will cease to want.”

“And should we thank the people while it shouts out but nicknames before, around, behind us, for such songs and insults?”

“Yes, madame, and the more sincerely that this is an expression of good-humour, for the nicknames are manifestations of hope, as its cries are an expression of desire.”

“Ah, ah! The people wish prosperity to Messieurs de Lafayette and de Mirabeau?”

“Yes, madame, for if they have it, being, as you see, separated from the abyss over which you hang, they may serve and preserve the monarchy.”

“Is then the monarchy so fallen that it may be preserved by two men?”

Gilbert was about to reply, when cries of terror, mingled with bursts of laughter, were heard, and a motion of the crowd was made, which, far from separating Gilbert from the carriage, drove him close to it. He clung to the door-string, thinking it might be necessary for him to defend and aid the queen.

They were two heads which, after having made Leonard dress the hair, they had come to present to the queen.

At the cries, and the sight of the heads, the crowd opened to let them pass.

“For mercy’s sake,” said Gilbert, “do not look to the right.”

The queen was not u woman to obey, she knew not why, such an injunction.

She consequently looked in the direction Gilbert had told her not. She uttered a terrible cry.

All at once her eyes became detached from the horrible spectacle, as if there were something yet more awful, and became riveted, as it were, to a Medusa’s head.

The queen took her hand from the door of the carriage, and placing it on Gilbert’s shoulders, drove her finger-nails almost into the flesh.

The Medusa’s head was that of the stranger whom we saw drinking in the inn with Gamain, who leaned with his arms folded against a tree.

Gilbert turned, and when he saw the pale quivering lips of the queen, and her fixed eyes, he attributed her excitement to the appearance of the two heads, but he saw she was looking in a horizontal direction.

Gilbert looked in the same direction, and at the same moment, uttering a cry of surprise, as the queen had of terror, both exclaimed, “Cagliostro.”

The man who leaned against the tree saw the queen perfectly well.

He made a sign to Gilbert, as if to say, “Hither!”

And then the carriages prepared to set out; mechanically, instinctively, and naturally, the queen pushed Gilbert to prevent his being hurt by the wheel.

He thought she meant him to go to the stranger.

If, too, the queen had not pushed him, he could not but have gone, for he was no longer master of himself.

Consequently he stood still, while the cortege defiled, and following the false workman, who from time to time looked back to see if he was followed, entered a narrow street, hurried at a rapid pace towards Bellevue, and disappeared behind a wall just at the moment when the cortege was hidden from sight in the direction of Paris, being completely hidden by the mountain behind which it was.

Gilbert followed the guide, who preceded him some twenty paces, until he was halfway up the ascent. Being then in front of a large and handsome house, the stranger took a key from his pocket and opened a little door, which enabled the master to leave the house when he pleased unseen by his servants. He left the door half open, a direct invitation for his companion to follow him.

Gilbert did so, and carefully closed the door, which turned quietly on its hinges, and closed without any noise.

When once in, Gilbert saw himself in a corridor, the walls on which were laid as high as a man, in the most marvellous manner, with bronze plates like those with which Ghiberti enriched the door of the baptistery of Florence.

His feet sank in a soft Turkey carpet.

On the left was an open door.

Gilbert thought this room, too, was intentionally kept open, and entered a room hung with India satin, and furniture covered with the same material — one of those fantastic birds, painted or embroidered in the fashion the Chinese are so fond of, was hung to the wall, and sustained in its beak a mirror, which, like the candelabra, was of most exquisite workmanship, and represented bunches of lilies.

There was but one single picture to ornament the room — Raphael’s Virgin. Gilbert was admiring this picture, when he heard, or rather discerned, that a door opened behind him. He turned, and saw Cagliostro coining from a kind of dressing-room. One moment had enabled him to efface the stains from his hands and arms, to give his dark hair the most aristocratic change, and to effect a perfect transformation.

His costume was covered with embroidery, his hands sparkled with diamonds, strangely contrasting with the black dress and simple gold ring which Gilbert had received from Washington.

Cagliostro, with an open and smiling face, advanced, and reached forth his hand.

Gilbert seized it.

“Wait a moment, dear Gilbert. Since we parted you have made such progress, especially in philosophy, that you are the master, and I scarcely worthy of being a scholar.”

“Thank you for the compliment,” said Gilbert, “but if I have made such progress, how do you know it? We have not met for eight years.”

“Think you, dear doctor, that you are one of those men unknown because you are unseen? I have not seen you for eight years, but I can nevertheless tell you every day what you have been about.”

“Indeed!”

“Will you still doubt my double sight?”

“You know that I am a mathematician!”

“And therefore incredulous. Let us see. You came first to France on account of family affairs. They did not concern me, and — ”

“No!” said Gilbert, who thought to annoy Cagliostro. “Tell me.”

“Well, you wished to attend to the education of your son, Sebastian, and to place him at a little city eighteen or twenty leagues from Paris, and to settle matters with your agent, a good fellow, whom, contrary to his inclinations, you keep in Paris, and who for many reasons should be with his wife.”

“Indeed, you are wonderful — ”

“Listen: you came the second time in consequence of political affairs, which brought you to France, as they have brought many others. Then you wrote various pamphlets, and sent them to Louis XVI., and as you have a little of the old man in you, you are prouder of the royal approbation than you would be of that of the master who preceded me in your education — Jean Jacques Rousseau, who, were he now alive, would be far greater than any king. You were desirous to know what the descendant of Louis XIV. and Henry IV. thought of Dr. Gilbert. Unfortunately, there existed a little matter of which you had not thought, yet which caused me one day to find you all bloody, with a ball in your breast, at the Azores, where my vessel chanced to touch. This little affair had relation to a certain Mademoiselle Andree de Taverney, who became Countess de Charny, and who esteems herself happy in being able to serve the queen. Now as the queen could refuse nothing to Charny’s wife, she asked and obtained a lettre-de-cachet; you were arrested at Havre, and taken thence to the Bastille, where, dear doctor, you would be yet, if the people one day had not torn it down. Then, like a good royalist as you are, you took sides with the king, the physician of whom you are. Yesterday, or rather this morning, you contributed greatly to the safety of the royal family, by hurrying to awaken Lafayette, who slept like an honest man, and just now, when you saw me, thinking that the queen, who by-the-bye detests you, was in danger, you were willing to make your body a defence for your sovereign. Is not this the case? But I forgot a thing of some importance, a magnetic exhibition in the presence of the king, the withdrawal of a certain casket seized by one Ras de Loup. Have I either forgotten or mistaken aught?"

"True, you are still the magician, sorcerer, and enchanter, Cagliostro."

Cagliostro smiled with satisfaction. He was rejoiced at having, contrary to Gilbert's wishes, produced the effects which the countenance of the latter exhibited.

Gilbert continued:

"Now," said he, "as I love you certainly as much as you love me, as my desire to know what has become of you since our separation is very great, and equal to that which impelled you to find out where I was, tell me in what part of the world your genius and power has been employed?"

"Six months ago I was in the castle of San Angelo, while you three months ago were in the Bastille."

"But I thought there was no escape from San Angelo?"

"Hah! remember Benvenuto Cellini."

"Did you too then make a pair of wings, as he did, and like a new Icarus fly over the Tiber?"

"I could not, by evangelical precaution. I was placed in a deep, dark dungeon."

"You did get out, though?" — " Yes; for here I am."

"You bribed the keeper?"

"Not so; I unfortunately had an incorruptible, but fortunately not immortal jailor: chance, or one less infidel than I would say Providence, contrived that he died one day after he had thrice refused to release me."

"Suddenly?"

"Yes. His successor was not incorruptible; the first time he brought me supper he said, 'Eat and get strong, for before to-morrow we have a journey to take.' He did not lie, for that night each of us used up three horses, and travelled a hundred miles."

"What said the government to your flight?"

“Nothing. They dressed the body of the dead jailor in my old clothes; fired a pistol ball in his face; laid the weapon beside him, and said that having procured arms, I had killed myself. An account of my death was published, and the poor devil was buried in ray place.

“You see, Gilbert, at last I am dead. If I say I am not dead, they will reply by producing the magistrate’s certificate to prove my burial at least. There was no need of that, however, for it became necessary for me for the time to disappear. I then, as Abbe Dutille said, made a plunge, and have appeared under another name.”

“And what is your name now, if I commit no indiscretion?”

“My name is Zanoni; I am a Genoese banker, and do a little discount business with princes. You know my heart and purse, as ever, are at your service. If you are ever in need of money, there is a private chest in my secretary, the other is at Saint Cloud, in Paris, and if you need money, and I am not at home, come hither, and I will show you the way to open the little door. Push the spring; this is the way, and you will always find about a million there.”

“You are indeed a wonderful man,” said Gilbert, with a smile, “but, you know, with my twenty thousand livres a year, I am richer than the king. And what are you about in Paris?”

“Who knows! establishing what you contributed to in the United States — a Republic!”

Gilbert shook his head.

“France has no tendency to Republicanism.”

“We will make it so.”

“The king will resist.” — ” Possibly.”

“The nobles will appeal to arms.” — ”Probably.”

“What then will you do?”

“We will not make a Republic then, but a Revolution.”

Gilbert let his head fall on his breast.

“Know you who destroyed the Bastille, my friend?”

“The people.”

“You do not understand, but take cause for effect. For five hundred years, counts, lords, princes, had been locked up in the Bastille, yet still it stood. One day, the king, in his folly, sought to imprison thought, which needs space and extent, in that place. Thought burst through the Bastille, and the people entered by the breach.”

“True,” murmured Gilbert. “You remember what Voltaire wrote to M. de Chauvelin, March 2, 1764, about twenty-six years since.”

“Tell me.”

“Voltaire wrote: ‘All I see announces the seeds of a revolution, which certainly will come, and which I will not be happy enough to see. The French are slow, but they always succeed. Light has been gradually diffused, and one day there will be an outbreak. There will be a fearful clatter. The young are very happy; they will see sights.’ What think you of things yesterday and to-day?” — ” Terrible!”

“What think you of what you saw?” — ”Awful!”

“Well, Gilbert, we are only at the beginning. All things in this old world march to the tomb — nobility, royalty, all will find a tomb in an abyss.”

“I guess the nobility may, for it has given itself to gain ever since the famous night of August 4. Let us save our royalty, which is the palladium of the nation.”

“Those are fine words, dear Gilbert. Tell me if the palladium saved Troy, though. Save royalty! Do you think royalty can be saved with ease when we have such a king?” “He is sprung from a great race.” “Yes, a race of eagles transformed into paroquets. Before Utopians like you, Gilbert, save royalty, kings must make an effort for themselves. Is the king a representation of your ideal of the sceptre-bearer? Think you Charlemagne, Saint Louis, Philippe-Augustus, Henry IV., Francis I., or Louis XIV. had those flabby cheeks, hanging lips, inexpressive eyes, and hesitating step? They had not, but were men with nerve, blood, life, beneath their royal robes, and were not bastardised by constant transmission in one strain. That is a good radical idea, which these short-sighted people have forgotten.

“To preserve animal and even vegetable life in vigour, Nature herself has prescribed the fusion of races — as the graft in the vegetable kingdom is the preserver of beauty and grace, marriage in man, between parents too closely connected, causes individuals to decay. Nature suffers, languishes, and degenerates, when several generations of the same blood succeed each other; but, on the contrary, becomes revived and invigorated by the infusion of a new element. Look at the heroes who found dynasties and the sluggards who end. Henry III., the last Valois, and Gaston, the last Medici, the Cardinal of York, the last Stuart, and Charles VI., the last Hapsbourg. Going back, Louis XV. and Marie de Medici; Henry IV. is four times his ancestor, and Mary de Medici five times his ancestress. Passing to Philip

III. of Spain, and Margaret of Parma, the former is three times his ancestor and the latter his ancestress. I, who had nothing better to do, have counted all this, and have come to this conclusion: out of thirty-two ancestors, there are, in Louis XV.'s case, six Bourbons, fire Medici, eleven Hapsbourgs, three Savois, three Stuarts, and a Danish princess. Subject the best horse or dog on earth to such treatment, and in the fourth generation you will have either a pony or a cur. How the devil can it be otherwise with us men? You are a mathematician, doctor, and how do you like my calculation?"

"I tell you, my dear wizard," said Gilbert, rising and taking his hat, "that your calculation reminds me that my place is with the king."

Gilbert advanced towards the door.

Cagliostro asked him to stop, and said, "Hear me, Gilbert; you know I lore you, and to spare you trouble, would expose myself to intense agony. Let me advise you."

"What?"

"Let the king escape and leave France, now, while he can. In three months, perhaps, in six, in a year, it will be too late."

"Count," said Gilbert, "would you advise a soldier to leave his post because it is dangerous?"

"Were the soldier so situated, hemmed in, surrounded, if his life, especially, compromised that of half a million of men, I would. You, even you, Gilbert, will tell the king so, when, alas, it will be too late. Wait not until to-morrow, but tell him to-day. Do not wait until evening, but tell him now."

"Count, you know that I am a fatalist. What will be, will be; as long as I have influence the king will remain in France. We will meet in the contest, and, perhaps, rest side by side on the battle-field. Well, then the world will say, no man, intelligent soever as he may be, can escape from his destiny."

"I sought you for the purpose of telling you this, and you have heard me. Like Cassandra's prediction, mine is vain. Adieu."

"Listen, count! Do you tell me here, as you did in America, that you are able to read the human fate in the face?" He stood at the threshold.

"Gilbert, certainly, as you read the course of the stars, while common men fancy they stray at hazard."

"Listen! some one knocks at the door."

"True."

"Tell me who knocks at that door? When and what death he will die?"

“I will; let us admit him.”

Gilbert went towards the end of the corridor, and his heart beat in a way he could not express, though he said’“ it was absurd for him to have faith in this charlatanism.”

The door opened. A man of distinguished bearing, tall, and with his face impressed with an expression of great kindness, entered the room, and looked at Gilbert with an expression not devoid of anxiety.

“Good morning, marquis,” said Cagliostro.

“Good morning, baron,” said the stranger.

As Cagliostro saw the latter looked anxiously at Gilbert, he said, “Marquis, this is a friend of mine. My dear Gilbert, this is one of my clients, the Marquis de Favras.”

They bowed — then, speaking to the stranger, he said, “Marquis, be pleased to await me a few moments only in that room.”

The marquis bowed again, and left.

“Well,” said Gilbert.

“You wish to know how he will die?”

“Did you not promise to tell me?”

Cagliostro gave a strange look, and glanced around to see that no one was listening.

“Have you ever seen a nobleman hung?”

“No.”

“Well, it is a curious spectacle, and you will be on the Place de Greve on the day of De Favras’ execution.”

Then, taking Gilbert to the gate, he said: “Listen! when you wish to see me without being seen or seeing, push this knob thus,” and he showed the secret. “Excuse me! those who have not long to live should not be kept waiting.”

He left, leaving Gilbert amazed at the statement which had excited his surprise but not conquered his incredulity.

CHAPTER III.

Fatality.

IN THE INTERIM the king, queen, and royal family continued the journey to Paris.

On the way, the dauphin became very hungry, and asked for bread. The queen looked around her, and nothing was more easy, for every bayonet had a loaf on its point. She looked for Gilbert. He, as we know, was with Cagliostro. Had he been there, the queen would not have hesitated to have asked for a piece of bread. She would not, however, ask one of the men of the people she hated so.

“My child,” said she, “wait until evening; we have none now, but to-night may perhaps.” She wept.

The dauphin reached his little hand towards one of the loaves the people had on the points of their bayonets, and said: “But those men have.”

“Yes, my child, it is theirs, and not ours. They got it at Versailles, for they say they have had none for three days at Paris.”

“For three days!” said the child. “Have they eaten nothing for three days, mamma?”

“No, my child,” said the queen.

“Then,” said the dauphin, “they must be very hungry.”

Ceasing his complaints, he sought to sleep. Poor prince! more than once before his death he begged in vain for bread. At the barrier there was another halt, to celebrate the arrival. After about half an hour of cries, clamour, and dances in the mud, an immense hurrah was given; every gun, whether borne by man, woman or child, was tired in the air, without any attention being paid to the fact that they were charged with ball, and after a second or two, the missiles were heard falling in every direction like hail.

The dauphin and his sister wept. They were so frightened that they forgot their hunger. The march was resumed, and the Place de 1’Hotel de Ville was reached. There a square was formed to keep back all the carriages except the king's, and all but the royal household, and the National Assembly, and the Hotel de Ville was entered.

The queen then saw Weber, her confidential valet, making every effort to enter the palace. Weber was an Austrian, and had come with her from Vienna. She called to him. He came.

Seeing at Versailles that the National Guard on that day had the post of honour, Weber, to give himself an importance which might unable him to be useful to the queen, had put on the uniform of the guard, and to the dress of the private had added the decorations of the staff. The equerry had left him a horse. Not to arouse suspicion, he kept out of the way, with the intention, however, of approaching if the queen needed him. Being called, he came.

"Why do you seek to force the lines, Weber?" said the queen, preserving her usual familiarity with him.

"To be of use to your majesty."

"You can do nothing in the Hotel du Ville, but elsewhere you may be very useful. On the Tuileries, where we are not expected, and whither you must go, or we shall find neither lights, supper, nor a bed."

Bailly, one of the three popular men of the day, whom we have seen appear during the first excursion of the king, now, when bayonets and cannon displaced the bouquets of flowers and garlands, awaited the king and queen at the foot of a throne prepared for them. It was badly made, and trembled beneath the velvet that covered it. It was appropriate.

The Mayor of Paris now almost echoed his previous address.

The king replied: "I always come with pleasure and confidence among the people of my good city of Paris."

The king spoke in a low tone, for he was faint with fatigue and hunger. Bailly repeated his words aloud, so that all might hear.

He, however, either voluntary or not, forgot the words "and confidence."

Her bitterness was delighted at an opportunity to give vent to itself.

She said, "Excuse me, Mr. Mayor, you either did not hear, or your memory is had."

"Madame?" said Bailly, with that stargazing eye which read heaven so well and earth so badly.

The queen said: "The king's remark was that he always came with pleasure and confidence among the people of his city of Paris. Now, as people may doubt if he came with pleasure, it is important that it be known that he came with confidence."

She ascended the steps of the throne, and sat down to hear the addresses of the electors.

In the meantime, “Weber reached the Tuileries.

About ten, the wheels of the royal carriages were heard, and Weber cried out: “Attend the king!”

The king, queen, dauphin, Madame Royale, the Princess Elizabeth, and Andree entered.

M. de Provence had gone to the Luxembourg.

The king looked gladly around, and as he entered the room, observed through a half open door that supper was ready.

At the same time an usher entered, and uttered the usual ceremonial phrase: “The king is served.”

“Ah, Weber is a man of great resources; madame, tell him for me, I am much pleased with him.”

“I will not fail to do so, sir.”

When the children had supped, the queen asked leave to retire to her room.

“Certainly, madame, for you must be fatigued. As, however, you will need food before to-morrow, have some prepared in time.”

The queen left with the children.

The king sat at table and finished his supper. Madame Elizabeth, the devotion of whom not even the vulgarity of Louis XVI. could change, remained with the king, to render him those little attentions which even the best domestics neglect.

The queen, when in her room, breathed freely. She had ordered all her ladies not to leave Versailles unordered, and she was alone.

She set about finding then a chair or sofa, purposing to put the children in her own bed; but entering an adjoining room, and seeing that it was comfortably warmed and lighted, was enchanted to observe two clean beds in it. The children being asleep, she sat down at a table, on which there was a candelabra with four lights.

The table had a red cover.

She looked through the fingers of the hand on which she rested her head, but saw nothing but the red cover.

Twice or thrice something in the red glare made her shake her head mechanically. She seemed to feel her eyes become filled with blood, and her ears to tingle.

Then like a tempest her past life swept before her.

She remembered that she was born November 8th, 1755, on the day of the Lisbon earthquake, when fifty thousand lives and two hundred churches were overthrown. ‘

She remembered that the first room she slept in at Strasbourg was hung with a tapestry representing the murder of the innocents, and amid the dense light of the fire she saw the blood streaming from their wounds, while the faces of the ruffians assumed so dread and terrible an expression, that she called for aid, and at dawn left a city which had given her so painful a reception in France. She remembered that on her way to Paris she paused at the house of the Baron de Taverney, where for the first time she met the wretch Cagliostro. He had shown her a terrible object, an unknown and terrible machine of death, and afterwards a head, her own, rolling from it.

She remembered that when Madame Lebrun painted her portrait, she was then a young and beautiful woman; by some accident she had given her the air of the Henrietta of England, wife of Charles I. She remembered that when she first came to Versailles and placed her foot on that marble pavement, which on the evening before she had seen running with blood, a terrible clap of thunder had been heard, preceded by a flash which divided the whole sky from right to left in so terrible a manner, that the Duc de Richelieu, not easily frightened, shook his head, and said, “The omen is bad.”

As she saw all this, she fancied that a reddish vapour rose before her, and became every moment more dense.

The darkening of the air became so apparent, that the queen looked up and saw that without any apparent cause one of the lights was out. She trembled; the light yet smoked, and she could not comprehend why it was out.

As she looked at the light with amazement, it seemed to her that the next one grew more and more pale, that the white blaze became red, and then burned blue. Then the light grew thinner and larger, and appeared about to leave the wick; at last it quivered for a moment as if under some invisible influence, and disappeared.

The queen gasped, as she saw the quivering light, and insensibly her hands approached more and more near the table. She saw it go out, and threw herself, back in a chair, and placed her hands on her brow, which was damped with perspiration.

She remained thus for about ten minutes, and when she looked around, saw that the blaze of the third light was being bedimmed as the others had been.

At first, Marie Antoinette thought she was dreaming, or under the influence of some fearful hallucination. She sought to rise, but felt herself chained to her seat. She sought to call her daughter, whom ten minutes before she would not have awakened for the world. Her voice, however, stuck in her throat. She sought to look away, but the third expiring light seemed to fascinate her. At last, as the second had changed colour, the third took different hues, floated to and fro from right to left, and went out.

The queen was so terrified that she regained her utterance, and sought, by talking to herself, to regain the courage she had lost.

All at once, without undergoing the changes of the others, as the queen was saying, “I do not make myself uneasy about the three, but if the fourth go out, woe! woe to me!” it went out.

She uttered a cry of agony, and rising from her seat in the dark, tossed her arms around, and fell on the floor.

As her body struck the floor, the door opened, and Andree appeared at the entrance.

She paused for a moment, as if, in this obscurity, she saw a kind of vapour, and as if she heard the rustling of a shroud in the air.

Looking about her, she saw the queen prostrate on the floor, and unconscious.

She stepped back, as if her first intention had been to retire. Soon, however, she controlled herself, and saying nothing, and asking no question (it would have been in vain to do so), with a strength of which she might have been supposed incapable, lifted her up, and without any other light than that of the two candles which shone from her room through the door, placed her on the bed.

Taking a flacon of salts from her pocket, she placed it to the nose of Marie Antoinette.

Notwithstanding this, the queen had fainted so completely, that not for ten minutes did she breathe.

A deep sigh announced that consciousness had returned. Andree felt inclined to go, but, as before, a sense of consciousness retained her.

She merely withdrew her arm from the head of Marie Antoinette, whom she had lifted up, that no portion of the corrosive liquid might get on the queen’s face or chest. She removed the salts also.

As soon as it was done, her head fell back on the pillow, and the queen seemed again plunged in a faint almost as profound as the one she had just recovered from.

A shudder pawed over the whole of the queen’s frame. She sighed, and opened her eyes, while Andree, cold, passionless as a statue, again attended her.

Gradually she recalled her ideas, and, seeing a woman near her, threw her arms around her neck. She cried out: “Ah! defend — save me.”

“Your majesty, surrounded by your friends, needs no defence, and you have now recovered from a fainting fit.”

“The Countess of Charny!” said the queen, when she saw whom she had em braced. She withdrew her arms and almost repelled Andree.

Andree did not fail to observe both the feeling and the action.

For a moment she remained in an almost impassible state.

Stepping back, she says: “Does the queen order me to assist in undressing her?”

“No, thank you, countess,” said the queen, in a tone of emotion, “I will do so alone. Return to your room; you must have need of sleep.”

“I will return to my room, not to sleep, however, but to watch your majesty.”

Having bowed respectfully, she retired with a step riot unlike that a statue would have.

CHAPTER IV.

Sebastian.

ON THE SAME evening, when the events we have spoken of took place, a not less strange affair took place in the college of the Abbe Portier.

Sebastian Gilbert disappeared at about six in the evening, and, notwithstanding every effort made, could not be found.

Every one was questioned, but none could tell.

Aunt Angelica alone, as she left the church, where she had been fixing the benches, had seen him go down the little street between the church and prison, apparently toward the fields.

This did not make the abbe less uneasy, but, on the contrary, more unhappy. He was not unaware that strange hallucinations sometimes seized young Gilbert whenever the woman he called his mother appeared. And more than once, the abbe had followed him, when under the influence of this vertigo he seemed inclined to go too far into the fields, where he was afraid he would be lost, and on such occasions would send the best runners of the college after him.

The child had always been found panting, and almost exhausted, leaning against some tree, or resting on some bank beside some beautiful hedge.

Sebastian, however, had never had this vertigo late in the day. No one had ever been obliged to run after him at night.

Something extraordinary, therefore, must nave happened. But the abbe could not fancy what.

To be more completely satisfied than the abbe, we will follow Sebastian Gilbert, and find out whither he went.

Aunt Angelica was not mistaken. She had seen Sebastian Gilbert hurrying in the shade, and seeking as rapidly as possible to reach the park. Thence he had gone to the pheasantry, and had proceeded down a lane which led towards Haramont.

He went to find Pitou.

But Piton went out of one side of the village, as Sebastian entered the other.

Pitou, in the simplicity of his nature, did not see the use of keeping a door closed, whether one be out or in. Sebastian knew Pitou’s room as well as he knew his own. He looked for a flint and steel, lighted the candle, and waited.

Sebastian was in too great agitation, however, to wait quietly or long.

As time passed, he went to a rickety table, on which was pen, ink and paper. Oil the first page were the names and surnames of the thirty-three men who formed the effective force of the national guard of Haramont, and who were under Pitou’s orders.

Gilbert carefully lifted this sheet, which was the chef d’oeuvre of the commandant’s writing, for he did not disdain, in order that things might be correctly done, to play the orderly sergeant.

On the second sheet he wrote:

“DEAR PITOU,

“I am about to tell you that eight days ago I overheard a conversation between the Abbe Fortier and the Vicar of Villers-Cotterets. It seems the Abbe Fortier connives with aristocrats at Paris, and told the vicar that a counter revolution was being prepared.

“So we heard about the queen who put on a black cockade and trampled the tricolour in the dust.

“This threat of a counter revolution, according to what we heard about the events that followed the banquet, made me uneasy on my father’s account, for as you know he is opposed to the aristocrats. Things now, though, are far worse.

“The vicar returned to see the curate, and, as I was anxious about my father, I thought I would hear all about what I got an inkling of by accident.

“It seems the people went to Versailles, and massacred many persons, among them M. Georges dc Charny.

“Portier added:

“‘Let us speak low, lest we annoy little Gilbert. His father was there, and may have been among the victims.’

“You see, Pitou, I heard no more.

“I slipped out of my hiding-place, unseen, went through the garden to the Castle Square, and hurried to ask you to take me back to Paris, which I know you would willingly do if you were here.

"As, however, you may not be back for some time, having gone probably to fix your nets in the forest, which will keep you till morning, I am too anxious to wait.

"I will then go alone. Be at ease, for I know the way. Besides, I have yet two louis left of the money my father sent me, and I will take a place in the first carriage I meet.

"Your loving

"SEBASTIAN.

"P. S. — I have written a long letter, first, to explain to you why I go, and in the second, because I hoped you would return before I finished.

"But you did not. Good-bye until we meet again. If my father be unhurt, I will return.

"Make the Abbe Fortier easy about me, or at least do not do so until to-morrow, lest he should pursue me.

"Well, as you will not come, adieu."

As Sebastian knew how economical his friend Pitou was, he put out the candle and left.

The lad then, entirely engrossed by his undertaking, set out for Lorgny. He passed the village and reached the broad ravine which led thence to Valenciennes, and which drains the ponds of Walue: at Valenciennes, he reached the high road, and when in the plain began to talk more rapidly. He did not slacken his pace or leave the centre until he came to a brief eminence where the two roads to Paris and Cressy divided.

When coming from Paris he had not noticed the separation, and now did not remember which he should take.

He paused undecided.

He looked around to see if anything would tell him which he should wake. This he could have done by day, but it was impossible at night. Just then he heard the gallop of two horses.

He prepared to stop and ask the wayfarers, and accordingly advanced to address the first.

The latter, seeing a man leave the roadside, put his hand in his holster.

Sebastian saw him do so.

"Sir," said he, "I am not a robber, but a poor lad, whom recent events at Versailles force to go to Paris to look for his father. I do not know which road to take. Tell me, and you will do me a great favour."

The servant came up.

"Sir," he said," do you recognise that lad?''

"No, yet it seems to me — "

"How, sir, do you not recognise young Sebastian Gilbert, who is at school with the Abbe Fortier?"

"Yes, who often goes with Pitou to the farm of Mademoiselle Catherine."

"You are right."

Turning round, he said, "It is you, Sebastian?"

"Yes, M. Isidor," said the child, who knew to whom he spoke.

"Tell me, then, why are you here at this hour?"

"I am on my way to Paris, to see if my father be dead or alive."

"Alas! child," said the gentleman sadly, "I go for the same purpose, but am certain of all."

"Yes! I know, your brother."

"One of my brothers, George, was killed yesterday, at Versailles."

"Ah! M. de Charny."

"Well, my child," said the latter, "since we go for the same purpose, we must not separate, for you, like me, must go to Paris."

"Yes, sir."

"Yon cannot go on foot."

"I will not go far, for to-morrow I will take a seat in the first carriage I find, and go as far as possible to Paris in it."

"But if you meet none?" — " Then I must go on foot."

"You can do something better than that; get down, Baptiste, and help Sebastian up."

"Thank you, it is useless," and, active as a boy, he sprang up behind the count.

The three men and the two horses galloped off, and disappeared behind the hill of Grand Ville.

They continued on to Daumartin, which they reached at six o'clock.

All needed refreshments, and, besides, it was necessary to find post-horses.

After having left Daumartin at noon, they reached the Tuileries at six in the afternoon.

There a delay took place. M. de Lafayette had posted the guards, and having taken charge of the king's safety, in these troublous times, punctiliously discharged his duty.

When Charny, however, mentioned his name, and his brother's, he was introduced into the Swiss court-yard with Sebastian, and thence they went into the central yard.

Sebastian wished at once to go to the house in the Rue St. Honore where he had left his father, but Charny told him that as the doctor was now royal physician, he would be found more probably in the palace than elsewhere.

Isidor was introduced by the state staircase, and an usher made him wait in a saloon hung with green cloth, dimly lighted by two candelabras.

The usher went at once to ask for the Count de Charny and the doctor. After about ten minutes he came back and said the Count de Charny was with the queen.

Nothing had happened to the doctor, and it was thought that he was with the king.

Sebastian breathed freely. He had net any occasion to dread anything, for his father was unhurt and safe.

"The Viscomte de Charny," said an usher.

Well. I am he."

"Is expected by the queen."

"Wait for me. Sebastian, at least until your father comes. Remember, I must be responsible to him for you."

Isidor followed the usher, and Sebastian again sat down.

At ease in relation to his father's health and about himself, for he was sure he would be forgiven by the doctor for what he had done, he began to think of the Abbe Fortier and of Pitou, and of the anxiety both would feel on account of his letter.

He did not see how, after all the great delay they met with on the road, it had happened that Pitou had not overtaken them with his long legs.

By the simple association of ideas with Pitou, he thought of his usual home, of the tall trees, the many pathways, the blue horizon, and then the strange visions he so often had had beneath the old trees of the vast forest.

He thought of her he had so often seen in his dreams, and but once only, he fancied, in reality, in the wood of Satory, where she appeared and disappeared, like a cloud borne away in a calash by a magnificent steed.

He remembered the deep emotion the apparition always caused, and, half lost in that dream, murmured, "Mother! mother! mother!"

Suddenly the door through which Isidor had gone opened again, and a female form appeared.

So perfectly was the figure in harmony with the thoughts that flitted by, that, seeing his dream realized, the lad trembled.

His feeling, however, was far more intense when he saw both the shadow and reality.

The shadow of dreamland, the reality of Satory.

He sprang at once to his feet.

His lips opened, his eyes rolled, and his pupils expanded.

He panted, but sought in vain to speak.

The woman passed proudly, majestically by, and seemed not to notice him.

She crossed the hall diagonally, opened the door opposite to that through which she had entered, and disappeared in the corridor.

Sebastian saw that he was about to lose, and hurried after, her. He looked carefully, as if to be sure that she had gone from the door she had entered to the one whence she passed, and overtook her before her silken robe had disappeared.

Hearing his steps, she had walked quickly, as if she feared pursuit.

Sebastian hurried, but the corridor was long and dark. He was afraid his vision would desert him.

She, hearing his footsteps approach, hurried away the more rapidly, but looked back.

Sebastian uttered an exclamation of joy. It was indeed she.

The woman, seeing the lad follow her, she knew not why, hurried to the ladder, and rushed down the steps.

Scarcely had she descended a single story, than Sebastian stood at the top, and cried, “Lady! Lady!”

The voice filled her heart with strange sensations: it seemed that a blow half pleasant, half painful, had struck her heart, and passing through her veins, had filled her bosom with emotion.

Understanding neither the appeal nor the emotion, she increased her gait, and finally ran.

The Lid was, however, too near for her to escape, and they reached a carriage together, the door of which a servant kept open. She sprang in, and sat down.

Before, however, the door could be shut, Sebastian got between her and the servant, seized her skirt, and kissing it passionately, exclaimed, “Ah, lady! lady!”

The woman then looked at the child who had first frightened her, said, in a gentler tone than usual, but yet maintaining something of fear: “Well, why do you follow me? why did you call me? tell me what you wish for me to do?”

“I wish, I wish to kiss you,” said our panting child; and low enough to be hoard only by her, added, “I wish to call you mother!”

The young woman uttered a cry, took the head of her child in her hands, and as if by a sudden revelation, which made her know some great mystery, pressed her burning lips on his brow.

Then, as if she feared some one would deprive her of the child she had so strangely found, she drew him into the carriage, put him on the other side of her, and closed the glass of the door, which she pulled to with her own hands.

“Drive to my house, No. 9, Rue Coq-Heron,” said she, “first door from Rue Platriere.”

Turning to the child, she said: “What is your name?”

“Sebastian.”

“Here, here, Sebastian, to my heart!”

Then, sinking back as if she were about to faint, she said: “Oh, what new sensation is this? Can it be happiness?”

The whole drive was but one exchange of kisses between mother and son.

This child, for never for a moment did she doubt that it was hers, which had been taken away on that fearful night of anguish and disgrace: this child, which had disappeared without the ravisher having left any trace but the print of his feet in the snow; this child, whom she had hated and cursed, because she had not heard its first cry, its first moan; whom she had sought, besought, and asked for everywhere; whom her brother had followed, with Gilbert, beyond the seas; whom for fifteen years she had regretted, and despaired ever meeting; of whom she thought no more, but as one loved and dead; at the moment she least expected, it was miraculously found, and, strange to say, himself recognised and pursued her, calling her mother, pressed her to his heart, without having ever seen her, loved her with true filial love as she him with a mother’s heart. Prom his lip, pure from the contamination of any kiss, she regains all the pleasures of a wasted life, and feels it when she first kisses him.

There is, then, above the head of men, something more than the void in which worlds revolve. There is in life something more than chance and fate.

She had said Rue Coq-Heron, No. 9, first door from Rue Platriere. It was a strange coincidence that after the lapse of so many years brought the child to the very spot where he was born, where he drew the first breath of life, and whence he had been taken by his father.

This little house, bought by old Taverney, when some ease had been engrafted in his family by the high favour with which the queen honoured him, was kept in order by an old porter, who apparently had been bought with the house. It was a resting — -place to the countess when in Paris.

Six o'clock struck as the porte cochere opened to the driver's call, and they were at the door of the house.

Giving the driver a piece of money twice the amount of his fare, she rushed, followed by the child, into the house, the door of which she closed carefully.

At the door of the saloon she paused. It was lighted cheerfully by a light which burned in the grate, and by two candles on the mantlepiece.

Andree drew her son to a kind of chaise longue, on which were concentrated the double light of the candles and of the fire.

With an explosion of joy, in which, however, there yet lingered something of doubt, she said: "My child, is it indeed you?"

"My mother!" said Sebastian, and his heart expanded into dew-like tenderness, as he leaned against Andree's beating bosom.

"And here! here!" as she looked around and saw that she was in the same room in which she gave birth to him, and saw with terror the door whence he had been taken.

"Here!" said Sebastian, "what means that, mother?"

"That you were born here, where we sit; and I thank the mercy of God, which, after fifteen years, has so miraculously restored you."

"Yes, miraculously; had I not feared for my father's life, I would not alone and at night have set out for Paris. I would not have doubted which of the two roads to take. I would not have waited on the high road and asked M. Isidor de Charny. He would not have known and taken me to the palace of the Tuileries. I would not have seen you as you crossed the greenroom, and run after and joined you. I would not, in fine, have called you mother. It is a pleasant word to say.”

At the words, “Had I not feared for my father’s life,” Andree felt a sharp pain run through her heart. She shut her eyes and drew back.

At the words, “M. Isidor would not have known and taken me to the palace,” her eyes opened, and she thanked God with them. That her husband’s brother should restore her child was indeed strangely miraculous.

At the words, “I would not have called you mother. It is a pleasant word to say,” she again remembered her happiness, and clasping Sebastian again to her heart, said: “Yes, you are right: there is, perhaps, but one more so, ‘My child, my child!’“

There was a moment of silence, during which she pressed her lips again and again on his brow.

Andree suddenly started up, and said, “It is impossible for all to be thus mysterious; you explained how you came hither, but have not told me how and why you knew and ran after me — why you called me mother?”

“Can I tell you that?” said Sebastian, looking at Andree with an ineffable expression. “I do not know myself. You talk of mystery; all that relates to me is mysterious.”

“But, then, something told you when I passed!”

“Yes, my heart.” — ”Your heart?”

“Listen, mother, I am about to tell something strange.”

Andree drew yet nearer to her child, and looked up to heaven in thankfulness for the child thus restored to her.

“I have known you ten years.”

Andree trembled.

“Do you not understand?”

She shook her head.

“Let me tell you. I sometimes have strange dreams, which my father calls hallucinations.”

The name of Gilbert on her child’s lips, pierced like a dagger through her heart.

“I have seen you twenty times, mother.”

“How so?” — ” In the dreams of which I spoke just now.”

Andree thought of those strange dreams which had endangered her life, and to one of which Sebastian owed his existence.

“Do you fancy, mother, that even when in childhood I played with village children my impressions were like those of the rest, and related to real palpable things? As soon as I left the village, passed the last gardens, and went into the wood, I heard by me the rustling of a robe. I reached forth to grasp it, but my fingers closed in air, and the phantom left. Then, though invisible, it gradually became distinct, and a transparent vapour, like that with which Virgil surrounds the mother of AEneas when she appeared to him in Carthage. The vapour grew dense, and assumed human form, which was that of a woman gliding, rather than walking, over the ground. Then a strange, unknown, and irresistible power took hold of me, and I was borne into the depths of the forest, where I followed this phantom with open hands, without its pursuing, or my being ever able to overtake it, until it vanished away by degrees.

“It seemed to suffer as much as I did, that the will of heaven separated us, for as the phantom left it looked back, and when no longer sustained by its presence I sank exhausted on the ground.”

This kind of second life of Sebastian, this waking dream, was too much like what And roe had herself experienced for her not to recognise her son.

“Poor child,” said she, embracing him. “It was in vain that hatred separated us; God insensibly brought us together. Less happy, though, than you, I saw you neither in dreams nor in reality. “When, though, I passed you in the green room, a cold shudder seized me. When I heard your steps behind me something like dizziness occupied both my heart and mind. When you nailed me madame, I had nearly stopped, and almost fainted when you said mother. When you touched me I knew you.”

“Mother, mother, mother!” said Sebastian, as if to console Andree for not having heard that word for such a time.

“Yes, your mother!” said she, with a transport which it was impossible to describe.

“And now that we are met,” said the child, “since you are satisfied, we will never part again.”

Andree trembled. She had seized the present, and half closing her eyes to the past, neglected the future.

“My poor child,” said she, with a sigh, “I would indeed bless you, if you could work a miracle.”

“Let me. I will arrange all.”

“And how?”

“I do not know. What circumstances separated you from my father?”

Andree grew pale.

“Whatever though they be, they will be effaced by my prayers, or, if need be, by my tears.”

Andree shook her head.

“Never, never,” said she.

“Listen,” said Sebastian. “One day my father said, ‘Child, never speak to me of your mother,’ and then I knew all the wrongs of the separation were on his side. Listen, my father adores me!”

The hands of Andree, which clasped her child’s, loosened. The child seemed, and probably did, not notice it.

He continued: “I will prepare him to see you. I will say how happy you have made me; and I will take you by the hand, and say,’ How beautiful she is!”‘

Andree pushed him away, and rose.

The child looked on with amazement.

She was so pale that he was frightened.

“Never!” said she, “never!”

The child now shrank back, for on her face were the terrible lines with which Raphael described fallen angels.

“And why not?’’

At those words, as when two clouds are driven together by the wind; the lightning fell.

“Why? you ask me why? Poor child, you know nothing!”

“Yes,” said Sebastian, firmly, “I ask why!”

“Well,” said Andree, who found it impossible to repress the pain of the serpent’s wounds in her heart, “because your father is a base villain.”

Sebastian sprang from his seat, and stood erect before Andree.

“Do you speak thus of my father, madame? Of Dr. Gilbert, who has educated me, and to whom I owe every tiling: whom alone I know? I was wrong, madame; you cannot be my mother.”

He rushed towards the door.

Andree made him pause.

“Listen: you can neither know, feel, nor judge.”

“No, no, I feel that I do not love you.”

Andree uttered a cry of agony.

Just then a noise was heard outside, the door opened, and a carriage stopped.

Such a shudder passed over Andree’s limbs, that it was transfused to his soul.

“Wait,” said she, “and be silent!”

Perfectly subdued, Sebastian waited.

The door of the antechamber opened, and footsteps were heard.

Without eyes, ears, or sound, Andree stood like a statue.

“Whom shall I announce to the countess?”

“The Count de Charny, and ask if the countess will see me.”

“Ah!” said Andree, “go into that room, child, into that room. He must not see you, or know that you live.”

She pushed the terrified boy into the next room, and shut the door.

As she did so she said: “Remain there. When he is gone I will tell you, — no, no, I will kiss you, and then you will really know I am your mother.”

Sebastian replied with a kind of sigh.

At that moment the door opened, and then the old porter appeared. The countess saw a human form behind him.

“Show the count in,” said she, in as firm a tone as she could.

The old man withdrew, and, hat in hand, the count appeared in the room.

As he was in mourning for his brother, who had been killed two days before, the count was dressed in black.

His mourning, like Hamlet’s, too, was not on his face, but in his heart, and his pale countenance attested the tears he had shed, and his suffering.

The countess saw all this at one glance. Handsome faces even look better in tears. Never had Charny looked so well.

She shut her eyes, and threw her head back, as if to give herself time to breathe, and placed her hand on her heart, which felt as if it would break.

When she opened her eyes, but a second after she had closed them, she saw Charny in the same place.

“Pardon me, madame, but is my unexpected presence an intrusion? I am ready, and, as the carriage waits, can go as I came.”

“Not so,” said Andree, quickly. “I knew you were safe, but am not the less rejoiced to see you after the terrible events that had occurred.”

“Then you were kind enough to ask about me?” said the count.

“Certainly. Yesterday, and this morning I heard you were at Versailles. They told me you were this evening with the queen.”

Were the last words intended as a reproach, or meant they nothing?

It was evident that the count himself did not know what they meant, and thought for a moment.

“Madame,” said he, “religious duty kept me yesterday and to-day at Versailles. I look on the duty as sacred, and that, in the queen’s situation, took me, as soon as I could reach Paris, to her presence.”

Andree now sought to distinguish the real significance of his words.

Thinking that she really owed an answer to his first words, she said, “Yes, sir, I knew the terrible loss.”

“Yes, madame, as you say, the death of my brother is a terrible blow to me. You, luckily, cannot understand it, having known poor George so slightly. One thing would console me, if anything could, that poor George has died as Isidor will, as I will die, probably, doing his duty.”

The words, “as I will die, probably,” touched Andree deeply.

“Alas, sir, and do you then think affairs so desperate that other sacrifices of blood are needed to appease divine wrath?”

“I think, madame, the final hour of kings, if not come, is near at hand, and that if the monarchy falls, it will be accompanied by all who have shared its splendour.”

“True, and when the day conies, sir, believe it will find me, like you, prepared for every devotion.”

“Ah! madame, you have, in by-gone days, given too strong proofs of devotion, that any, and least of all I, should doubt you in the future; and perhaps have I less reason to doubt yours than mine, which for the first time has hesitated to obey an order of the queen.”

“I do not understand you, sir.”

“When I came from Versailles, I received an order at once to present myself to the queen.”

“Ah!” said Andree, smiling sadly. “It is plain, like you, the queen sees the sad and mysterious future, and wishes to collect around her men on whom she can rely.”

“You are mistaken, madame; not to join me to, but to remove me from her, did she send for me.”

“To separate you from her?” said the countess, drawing a little nearer to the count.

“Excuse me,” said she, seeing that the count during the whole conversation yet stood at the door, “but I keep you standing.” She pointed to a chair.

As she spoke, she sunk back exhausted on the sofa Sebastian had left; she could stand no longer.

“Separate,” said she, with an emotion not devoid of joy, as she thought the queen and Charny about to be separated. “And why?”

“To go on a mission to the Count of Artois and the Duke of Bourbon, at Turin.”

“And you accepted?”

Charny looked fixedly at Andree, and said at once, “No, madame.”

Andree grew so pale that Charny advanced towards her to aid her, but she recalled her strength as she saw him come.

“No!” added she, “no! you said no to an order of the queen.”

“I replied that at this moment I thought my presence more useful at Paris than at Turin, where any one could discharge the mission proposed as an honour to me. That I had another brother just arrived, whom I proposed to place at her majesty’s service, and who was ready at once to set out in my place.”

“And certainly the queen was gratified at the proposition?” said Andree, with a degree of bitterness she could not conceal, and which did not escape Charny.

“No, madame; my refusal seemed to wound her deeply. I should have been forced to go, had not the king come in, and the matter been referred to him.”

“And the king sustained you!” said Andree, with an ironical smile. “The king is kind indeed, and, like you, thought you should remain at the Tuileries.”

Charny did not frown.

“The king said my brother Isidor was well calculated for the mission, especially as, having come to court for the first time, and being almost unknown, his presence was not likely to be missed, and required the queen to exact me not to leave you at such a crisis.”

“Leave me! The king said not leave me!”

“I repeat his own words, madame. Glancing from the queen to me, he said, ‘And where, too, is the Countess Charny?’

“‘Sire,’ said the queen, ‘Madame de Charny left the palace about an hour ago.’

"'How?' said the king, 'the countess left the palace? But to return soon?' added the king.

"The queen replied, 'I think not.'

"'So the countess has gone. Whither, madame, do you know?'

"'I do not,' said the queen. 'When my friends leave me, I let them go, and never ask them whither.'

"'Ah!' said the king, 'some woman's quarrel. M. de Charny, I would speak with the queen. Await me in my room, and present me to your brother. He will start for Turin this very evening. I agree with you, De Charny; I need you, and will keep you.'

"I sent for my brother, who had come, and who awaited me in the green saloon."

At the last word, Andree, who had almost forgotten Sebastian in her husband's story, remembered all that had passed between her son and herself, and looked sadly at the door of the room in which he was.

"Excuse me, madame," said Charny; "I annoy you with matters with which you do not feel interested, and you doubtless wonder why I am here."

"Not so, monsieur; what you have said interests me deeply: for your presence here, after all the fear I have felt for you, in thus proving you to be safe, cannot but please me. Go on then, sir; the king told you to await him, and you sent for your brother?"

"We went to the king, and as the mission was important, he spoke of that first. (He was not ten minutes behind us.) The object of the mission was to tell their royal highnesses what had taken place. A quarter of an hour after my brother was on the road. The king walked moodily about for awhile, and then pausing in front of me, said: 'Count, do you know what has taken place between the queen and countess?'

"'No, sire,' said I; 'something must have taken place, for I found the queen in a terrible humour towards her, and very unjustly, too, it seemed to me.'

"'At all events,' said the king, 'if the queen does not know where the countess is, you must find out.' I said I was hardly more informed than the queen, but that I knew you had a household in Rue Coq-Heron, whither you, without doubt, had gone. 'Go thither, count. I give you leave until tomorrow, provided you bring her back with you then.'"

Charny looked so fixedly at Andree, that, seeing she could not meet his glance, she closed her eyes.

"'Tell her,'" said Charny, continuing to speak in the king's name, "'that I will have her here, even if I go myself for her, and find rooms, certainly not so large as those she had at Versailles, but large enough for man and wife.' Thus it was that I came at the king's instance. You will, I know, excuse me."

"Ah! sir," said Andree, rising quickly, and placing her hands in his, "can you doubt it?"

Charny seized her hands, and placed them to his lips. Andree cried out as if his lips had been hot iron, and sank on the sofa. Her hands were locked in his, so that she could not extricate them, and, without intending it, he was beside her. Having heard some noise in the next room, she hurried to the door so rapidly that the count, not knowing to what movement to attribute the brusquerie of her conduct, arose, and again was before her.

Charny leaned on the back of the sofa and sighed. Andree let her head rest on her hands; the sigh of Charny had torched the very depth of her heart. What then passed in the heart of the young woman is indescribable. Having been married for rears to a man whom she adored, without that man constantly occupied by another woman, being aware of the terrible sacrifice she made in marrying, she had, with the denial inspired by the double duty of a wife and subject, seen and borne all, and concealed all. But, for some time, it had seemed to her that some words of her husband were gentler, and some glances of the queen more stern, so that the impression was not lost on her. During the days which had rolled by, the terrible days full of terror to so many, alone, perhaps, of all the terrified courtiers, Andree had experienced some pleasant emotions; Charny seemed anxious about her, looked uneasily for her, and met her with joy: a light pressure of the hand communicated a sympathy unseen by those who surrounded them, and established a community of thought between them. These were delicious sensations, unknown to the icy frame and diamond heart which had ever experienced only the pain of love, and its unrequitedness.

All at once, just as the poor creature had regained her child, and again become a mother, something like the dawn of love was awakened on the horizon of a heart previously obscure and clouded. It was a strange coincidence, and proved that true happiness was not for her. The two circumstances destroyed the effect of each other; the return of the child depriving her for ever of the husband's love, and the love of the husband making that of the child impossible.

Charny could not see this when the cry escaped from Andree’s lips, when she repelled his advances, and thrust him into an abyss, from which it seemed impossible for him to extricate himself. He thought it was produced by dislike. Not so, it was the effect of fear.

Charny sighed, and renewed the conversation where it had been abandoned.

“What, madame, must I say to the king?”

At the sound of his voice she quailed; then, lifting up her clear blue eyes, she said:

“Sir, tell his majesty that I have suffered so much since I belonged to the court, that the queen has had the kindness to permit me to retire, and I do so thankfully. I was not born to live in the world, and in solitude have always found rest, if not happiness. The happiest days of my life were those J passed as a girl in the Castle of Taverney, and later, those I spent in the convent of St. Denis, with that pure daughter of France known as Madame Louise. With your permission, sir, I will inhabit this pavilion, which is full of memories, which, though sad, have yet some soothing.”

The permission Andree asked was given by the count willingly, like a man not anxious to grant a prayer, but to obey an order.

“Then, madame, you have decided?’’

“Yes, sir,” said Andree, gently, but firmly.

Charny bowed again.

“And now, madame,” said he, “I have one favour to ask you, to be permitted to visit you here.”

Andree looked at Charny, with the clear blue eye ordinarily cold and impassive, but now full of surprise and amazement.

“Certainly, sir!” said she; “but as I see no one, when you are not required at the Tuileries, and have a few moments to spare, I shall always be happy to see you, if you will spare them to me.”

Charny had never seen so much charm in Andree’s eye. He had never heard so much tenderness in her voice. Something penetrated his veins like the velvet tremor of a first kiss. Charny would have given a whole year to have sat by Andree, though she had previously repulsed him. Timid as a child, however, he dared not, without encouragement, do so.

Andree would have given, not a year, but an existence, to have seen the one from whom she had so long been separated by her side. Unfortunately, they did not know each other, and each was motionless.

Charny was the first to break the silence, which one capable alone of reading the heart could have translated.

"You say you have suffered much at court, madame. Has not the king always treated you with respect amounting to admiration, and the queen almost idolized you?"

"Ah! yes, sir, the king has ever been very kind to me."

"Permit me to observe, madame, that you reply only to a part of my question; has the queen been less kind than the king?"

The lips of Andree closed, as if they would have refused an answer. She said:

"I make no charge against the queen, and would be unjust were I to refuse to do her full justice."

"I say this, madame," said Charny, "because I see that for some time the friendship she bore you has been somewhat diminished."

"Possibly, sir; and on that account, as I had the honour to say, I wished to leave the court."

"But, madame, you will be very lonely and isolated."

"Have I not always been, as a child, a girl, and as — "

She paused, seeing that she was going too far.

"Go on, madame," said Charny.

"You have seen my idea, sir; I was about to say as a wife."

"Am I so happy as to have you reproach me on that account?"

"Reproach, sir!" said Andree, quickly. "What right, great God, have I to reproach you? Think you, I forget the circumstances of our marriage? No; those who at the foot of the altar do not swear eternal love, but, as we did, eternal indifference and separation, have no right to reproach each other for violation of the marriage vow."

Andree's words wrung a sigh from the heart of Charny.

"I see, madame," said he, "that your determination is fixed, but, at least, let me ask you, how you are to live here?"

Andree smiled sadly.

"My father's household," said she, ‘‘was so poor, that, compared with it, this pavilion, naked as it seems, is more luxurious than anything I have been used to."

"But the charming retreat of Trianon, Versailles."

"Ah! I knew I would have to relinquish them."

"You will at least have here all you need."

"I shall find all I am used to."

"Let me see," said Charny, who wished to form an idea of the room she was to occupy, and who was examining everything.

"What do you wish to see, sir?" asked Andree, rising slowly, and looking anxiously in the direction of the chamber.

"But if you are not very humble in your wishes, madame, this pavilion is not a home. I have passed through one antechamber, and I am now in the saloon. This door" (he opened one on the side) "leads into a chamber, and that, I see, into a dining-room."

Andree rushed between the count and the door, and fancied that she saw Sebastian.

"Monsieur," said she, "I beg you not to go further."

And she closed the passage.

"Ah! I understand: this is the door of your bed-chamber."

"Yes, sir," muttered Andree, half stifled.

Charny looked at the countess, and saw that she was trembling and pale. Terror was never more evident than in the expression of her face.

"Ah! madame, I was aware that you did not love me, but was not aware that you hated me .'"

Unable to repress his feelings in Andree's presence any longer, he staggered for a moment like a drunken man, and rushed out of the room with a cry of agony which reached the depth of Andree's heart.

The young woman looked after him until he had disappeared. With outstretched ears she listened as long as she could to hear his carriage wheels, which gradually became more indistinct, and then, arousing all her power, though she felt that her heart would almost break, and that she had not too much maternal love to combat this other love, she rushed into the room crying, "Sebastian! Sebastian!"

No voice replied to her, and her cry of agony had no echo.

By the light of the lamp she looked around, and saw that the room was empty.

She could, however, scarcely believe her eyes.

She called Sebastian, again and again.

The silence was unbroken.

Then only did she see that the window was open, and that the current of air agitated the flame of the lamp.

The same window had been found open when, fifteen years before, her son had first disappeared.

"True," said she, "did he not say I was not his mother?"

Then she saw that at the moment she had regained them, she had lost both a husband and a child, and she threw herself on her bed with arms outstretched, and her fingers convulsively grasped. Her strength and resignation were exhausted.

She could but cry, weep, and appreciate her loss.

Nearly an hour passed in this state of profound annihilation, in a total oblivion of the whole world, and that wish for annihilation which the unhappy entertain — the hope that, returning to nothing, the world will with it hear them away.

All at once it seemed to Andree that something more terrible than grief coursed through her veins. A sensation she had experienced but twice or thrice before, and which had always preceded great crises of her life, took possession of her. By a slow motion, independent of will, she slowly lifted herself up. Her voice died in her throat; all her body, as if involuntarily attracted, became convulsed, and she fancied she could see that she was not alone. Her sight became fixed and clear; a man who seemed to have passed the window still stood before her; she wished to call, to reach out her hand to the bell-rope; she felt the same inexpressible stupor she before had experienced in the presence of Balsamo. The man who thus fascinated her was Gilbert.

Here came the father she hated, to replace the son she loved.

CHAPTER V.

What Became of Sebastian.

THE FIRST SENTIMENT of Andree, when she saw Gilbert, was not only that of profound terror, but of invincible repugnance.

Gilbert, on the contrary, entertained for Andree, in spite of her contempt, scorn, and persecutions, not the ardent love which led him when young to crime, but the deep passionate devotion which would have made a man do her a service, even at the peril of his life.

The reason is, that he saw that all Andree’s troubles were due to him, and that he owed her a sum of happiness equal to that of which he had deprived her.

Andree spoke first: she said, “What do you wish, sir? How came you here, and why? What wish you?”

“I came to demand a treasure which is valueless to you, but inestimable to me. What do I wish? To know how that child was borne away by you, and know what has become of him.”

“What has become of him?” said Andree. “How do I know? He fled from me. You have taught him thoroughly to hate his mother.”

“His mother!” said Gilbert. “Are you really such?”

“Ah!” said she, “he sees my distress, he hears my cries, and asks if I am really a mother!”

“You do not know where he is?”

“I tell you he fled from me. When I came to this room, in which I had left him, he was gone. The window was up, and he gone.”

“My God! what will become of him? How can he find his way through Paris? It is after twelve, too.”

“Oh!” said Andree, “think you that he is in danger?”

“We will know, and from you,” said he.

He stretched forth his hand.

“Monsieur!” said she, drawing back to avoid the magnetic influence.

"Madame, do not fear. I talk to a mother of her son, of the means to find him. To me you are sacred. Sleep, and read with your heart."

"I do sleep." — "Do you, with me, employ all the power of my will, or do you sleep voluntarily?"

"Will you again say that I am not Sebastian's mother?"

"As the case may be. Do you love him?"

"Can he ask if I love the child I bore? Yes, I love him deeply."

"Then you are his mother, madame, for you love him as I do."

"Yes!" said Andree, sighing.

"You will reply voluntarily?" — "Will you permit me to see him?"

"Have I not said that you were his mother, as I am his father? You love him as I do, and shall see him."

"Thanks," said Andree, with an expression of unutterable joy, and she clasped her hands. "Now ask — I see."

"What?"

"Follow him since he left, that I may not lose track of him."

"Well, where did you see him?" — " In the green room."

"Where did he follow you?" — " Down the corridor."

"Where did he join you?" — " At the carriage."

"Whither did you take him?" — "To the next room."

"Where did he sit?" — " By me."

"How long?" — " Half an hour."

"Why did he leave you?"

"Because the noise of a carriage was heard."

"Who was in the carriage?"

Andree hesitated.

"Who was in the carriage?" said Gilbert, in a firmer tone, and a positive expression of will.

"The Count de Charny."

"Where did you hide the child?" — " In that room."

"What did he say as he left you?"

"That I was not his mother."

"Why?" Andree was silent.

"Why? Speak, for I will have it so."

"Because I said — "

"What?" — " Because I said you were a vile rascal."

"Look at the heart of that poor child, madame, and see the wrong you have done."

"My God! my God! Forgive me, my child!"

"Did M. de Charny suspect the child was yours?" — " No."

"Are you sure?" — " Yes."

"Why did he not remain?"

"M. de Charny does not live with me."

Andree was silent for a moment. Her eyes became fixed, and she attempted to see into darkness.

"My God!" said she, "Charny, dear Charny!"

Gilbert looked at her with surprise.

"Alas!" said she, "it was for the purpose of returning to me that he refused this mission. He loves me."

Gilbert began to read confusedly the terrible drama he first penetrated.

"And do you love him?"

She sighed.

"Why do you ask me that question?" said Andree.

"Read my heart."

"Yes, your intention is good. You would make me forget the wrong you have done me, by conferring happiness on me. I would not, however, owe happiness to you. I hate, and will continue to do so for ever."

"Poor human nature," murmured Gilbert; "is so much happiness set aside for you that you can refuse this? You love him?"

"Yes."

"Since when?"

"Since I have known him. Since the day he came from Versailles in the carriage with the queen and myself."

"Then you know what love is?" said Gilbert, sadly.

"I do," said the young woman, "know that love is given us too as a measure of woe."

"True; you are now a woman. A rough diamond you have been, set by the hands of the terrible lapidary, grief. Let us return to Sebastian."

"Ah! yes, let us do so. Do not let me think of M. de Charny. The idea of him troubles my faculties, and, instead of my child, I will, perhaps, follow the count."

"True; wife forget the husband, mother remember the child alone."

A half gentle expression at once took possession of her face and whole frame, entirely displacing the one she usually bore.

“Where was he while you talked with your husband?”

“Here, at the door.”

“Did he hear the conversation?” — ” A part of it.”

“When did he resolve to leave the room?”

“At the moment when the count —

She paused.

“When M. de Charny kissed my hand, and I cried.”

“You see him, then?”

“Yes, with pleated brow, his lips fixed, and clenched hands.”

“What does he do?”

“Sees if there be no door opening into the garden. Seeing there is none, goes to the window, opens it, looks out, glances at the saloon, springs out and disappears.”

“Follow him.’’ — ” I cannot.”

Gilbert passed his hand in front of Andree’s eyes.

“You know that for you there is no darkness. Look!”

“Ah! ah! Runs down the alley by the wall, he opens the gate unseen, and gains the Rue Platriere. He stops, and speaks to a woman.”

“Listen; do you hear him?” — ” I do.”

“What does he ask?” — ” The way to Rue Saint Honore.”

“Yes; I live there. Poor lad: he awaits me there.”

“No!” said she, shaking her head with an expression of great sadness. “He did not go in. He did not wait.”

“Whither, then, did he go?”

“Let me follow him, or I shall lose him.”

“Follow him, follow him,” said Gilbert, who saw that Andree foretold some misfortune for him.

“I see him! I see him!”

“Well?” — ”He is in Rue Grenelli; he is at Rue St. Honore; he crosses the Place Palais Royal at full speed: he asks the road again; he hurries on; he is in Rue Richelieu, in Rue des Frondeurs, Rue New St. Roch. Stop, stop, my poor child! Sebastian, do you not see that carriage driven down Rue Sourdiere? I see, I see the horses!”

She muttered a terrible cry, rose up, and maternal agony was imprinted on her brow.

“Ah!” said Gilbert, “if anything happens to him, remember it will recoil on you.”

“Ah!” said Andree, without hearing or listening to anything said by Gilbert. “Thank the God of heaven, the horse has thrown him out of the way of the wheels! I see him senseless, but not dead. No, no, not dead! He has only fainted. Help, help! my child!”

With a cry of agony, Andree fell back again on the bed.

Great as was Gilbert’s wish to know more, he granted to the trembling woman the repose she needed so much.

He feared, if he excited her too much, a fibre of her heart would break, or that she would burst a blood-vessel.

As soon, however, as he thought he could question her safely he said, “Well?”

“Wait! wait! There is a crowd around him. Ah, for mercy’s sake let me go! It is my son, Sebastian. My God, is there no surgeon?”

“Oh, I will go!” said Gilbert.

“Wait!” said Andree, seizing his arm; “the crowd opens; here is one. Quick, sir, quick! You see he is not dead; you must save him!”

She uttered a cry of agony.

“What is the matter?” asked Gilbert.

“It is not a man, but a gnome, a dwarf, a vampire — hideous, hideous!”

“Madame, madame, do not lose sight of Sebastian.”

“Ah!” said she, with a fixed expression of the lip and eye, “do not be uneasy, I will not.”

“What does the man do?”

“He carries him away. He goes into Rue Sourdiere. He enters the lane of St. Hyacinthe. He approaches a low door which is half open. He ascends a stair-way, and places him on a table covered with papers, both printed and manuscript. He takes off Sebastian’s coat, rolls up the sleeve, and binds his arm with ligatures, which a woman, dirty and hideous as the man, is bringing him. He takes out a lancet, and is about to bleed him. Ah! I cannot bear to see my child’s blood.”

“Well?” said Gilbert, “look, and count the steps.”

“I have. Eleven.”

“Look at the door, and tell me what you see strange about it?”

“A little opened; closed by a cross-bar grating.”

“Well! that is all I need.”

“Hurry, and you will find him there.”

“Do you wish to awake at once and to remember? or not until to-morrow, after having forgotten all?”

“Arouse me now! Let me remember!”

Gilbert passed his hands in front of Andree’s eyes, breathed on her brow, and said, “Awake!’’

The eyes of the young woman immediately became bright, and her limbs lost their rigidity. She looked at Gilbert almost without fear, and continued when awake the advice given him in sleep.

“Hurry! hurry!” said she, “and take him from that man, of whom I am afraid.”

CHAPTER VI.

The Man of the Place Louis XV.

GILBERT'S ANXIETY required no stimulation. He remembered what Andree had told him of his son's route, and hurried after it, and reached the lane of St. Hyacinthe.

Here he began to inspect the locality, and in the third door, by the grated cross, recognised Andree's description, which was too exact to admit a doubt. He knocked, but no one answered. He knocked again.

He fancied that he heard a timid and suspicious step approach him, by the stair-way.

He knocked again.

"Who is there?" said a female voice.

"Open the door; I am the father of the wounded child whom you received."

"Open, Albertine!" said another voice. "It is Dr. Gilbert!"

"Father, father!" said a third voice, in which Gilbert recognised his son's.

He breathed freely.

The door was opened, and he ascended the steps, uttering his thanks as he went.

At the last step he found himself in a kind of cellar, lighted by a lamp, and covered with papers, as Andree had said.

In the dark, and on a kind of pallet, Gilbert saw his son, who appealed to him with outstretched hands. Powerful as Gilbert's self-control was, paternal love triumphed over philosophical decorum, and he clasped his child to his breast warmly, though he took care not to wound his bleeding arm or sore chest.

After a long paternal kiss, in which all was communicated, though unuttered, Gilbert turned to his host.

He stood erect, with his legs apart, one hand resting on the table, the other on his hip, looking by the light of the lamp at the scene which passed before him.

“Look, Albertine,” said he, “and thank the chance which has enabled me to be of service to one of my confreres.”

As the surgeon spoke, Gilbert looked around, and for the first time looked at the shapeless being before him.

A yellow and green light seemed to flash from his eyes, and declared that, like one of those persons pursued by Latona, if not human, he was not a toad.

Gilbert shuddered in spite of himself. He seemed in some dream to have already seen this man in a sea of carnage.

He approached Sebastian, and clasped him more tenderly than before.

He soon triumphed over this feeling, and going to the stranger, pressed his hand tenderly, saying,

“Receive my thanks, sir, for the preservation of my son’s life. Believe me, I speak truly, and from my heart.”

“Sir,” said the surgeon, “I have done only what feelings and science inspired and required. As Terence says:

‘Homo sum: humani nihil a me alienura puto.’

“My heart, too, is tender, and I cannot see even an insect suffer — certainly then I cannot see a man.”

“May I ask to what philanthropist I have the honour to speak?”

“You do not know me, brother?” said the surgeon, smiling with an air he wished to make insinuatory, but which was hideous. “Eh! well — I know you are Dr. Gilbert, the friend of Washington and Lafayette.” He laid particular stress upon the last name. “The men of America and France, the honest Utopians who made such magnificent theories about constitutional monarchy, addressed to his majesty Louis XVI., which his majesty Louis XVI. rewarded by sending you to the Bastille, directly you touched the soil of France. You wished to save him by sweeping away impediments in his future course. He sent you to prison as a reward. Royal gratitude!”

On this occasion the surgeon laughed terribly.

“As you know me, sir, it is another reason why I repeat my questions, and ask your name in return.”

“Ah, we became acquainted very long ago, sir. Twenty years ago, on a terrible night, you were then about as old as this child. You were brought dead, wounded and dying as he is. You were brought to me by Master Rousseau, and I bled you on a table covered with bodies and amputated limbs. On that terrible night, it is pleasant to remember, thanks to a knife that knows how far to enter, to cut, to cure, or to cicatrize, I saved many lives.”

“Oh!” said Gilbert, “you are Jean Paul Marat.”

In spite of himself, he drew back a pace.

“You see, Albertine, that my name has its influence!”

And he burst into a malicious laugh.

“But,” said Gilbert, quickly, “why are you here, in this cellar, lighted only by a smoky lamp? I thought you physician of Monsieur d’Artois.”

“I was his veterinary surgeon. The prince, however, has emigrated, and having no horses, needs no veterinary surgeon. Besides, I resigned, — I would not serve tyrants.”

“Why, though, are you here, in this cellar, — in this den?”

“Because I am a patriot, and denounce the ambitious in my writings. M. Bailly hates me, Necker fears me, Lafayette pursues me, and has put a price on my head. The ambitious dictator! From my cavern, I pursue, denounce, and brave the dictator. Do you know what has been done?”

“No,” naively said Gilbert.

“He has had made in the Faubourg Saint Antoine fifteen thousand snuff-boxes with his portrait. I beg all good citizens to break them wherever they find them. It is the password, this, of a royalist plot. You do not know, that while poor Louis weeps hot tears at the follies the Austrian makes him commit, Lafayette conspires with the queen.”

“With the queen?” said Gilbert, in thought.

“Yes, with the queen,” said Marat, sharply. “You will not say that she does not conspire. She distributed the other day so many ribands and white cockades, that white riband rose three cents a yard. The thing is certain; I heard it from one of the daughters of Madame Berlin, the queen’s marchande des modes, her prime minister. That lady said, ‘I have been all day at work with her majesty.’“

“And where do you denounce all that?”

“In my paper, a journal I have founded, ‘L’Ami du Peuple’ or ‘Le Publiciste Parisien,’ a political and impartial paper. To pay for the paper and printing of the first number. I sold even the covering of the bed in which your child lies.”

Gilbert did turn, and saw that Sebastian really lay on a perfectly bare mattress, and that, overcome by fatigue and pain, he slept.

The doctor approached him, to ascertain whether or no he had fainted. Reassured, however, by his regular respiration, he returned to Marat, who inspired the same interest called forth by a wild animal.

“And who assists you?”

“Ah! ha! turkeys fly in gangs, — eagles fly alone. I am assisted by my hand and head.

“See you that table? It is Vulcan’s forge, where thunderbolts are made. Every day I write eight pages, which are sold in the morning. Sometimes eight pages will not suffice, and then I write sixteen. What I begin with large type, generally ends in small. Other journalists relieve each other at intervals and then suspend; it is not my way: ‘The Friend of the People’ always appears. It is not merely a name but a person. It is myself.”

“But how do you accomplish all this work?”

“Ah, that is a secret between death and myself. I have given up ten years of my life, and she grants me days that need no rest, nights that need no repose. My life is simple. I write all day and all night. Lafayette’s police compels me to live in secret, and forces me to activity. At first it annoyed me, and was oppressive to me, — now I like it. I like to look at society through the miserable gratings of my cavern, through my dark cage. In the depth of night I reign over the living, and judge without appeal science and politics. With one hand I demolish Newton, Franklin, La Place, Monge, Lavoisier; with the other I make Bailly, Necker, and Lafayette tremble. I will overthrow all that. Yes, perhaps as Samson overthrew the Temple and buried himself beneath the ruins, I, too, may be crushed amid the fragments of the throne.”

This man repeated in a cavern, and in the rags of misery, nearly what Cagliostro had in embroidery said in the palace.

“But,” said he, “popular as you are, why have you not at least procured a nomination to the National Assembly?”

“Ah!” said Marat, almost at once, “were I sustained as tribune of the people, by some thousands of determined men, I promise you that in six weeks the constitution would be perfected, and the political machine proceed perfectly. Not a villain should dare to interfere with it — the nation would be free and happy, and in less than one year it would become flourishing, and remain so as long as I live.”

The vain-glorious creature became transformed beneath Gilbert’s eye. His own eyes became blood-shot, as his yellow skin shone with sweat. The monster was great on account of his ugliness, as others are on account of their beauty.

"Ah!" continued he, resuming his thought, which enthusiasm had interrupted. "I will not be tribune; I cannot find the thousands of men I need. I have, though, writing materials — pen, ink, and paper. I have readers and subscribers, who look on me as a prophet and an oracle. I have the people, the friend of whom I am, and whom I lead trembling from treason, from terror. In the first number of 'L'Ami du Peuple' I denounced the aristocrats, and said there were six hundred criminals in France, and that six hundred ropes were required. I was deceived nearly a month, for on the 5th and 6th of October I became enlightened, and saw that not six hundred, but ten thousand aristocrats should be destroyed."

Gilbert smiled. Fury which had reached this point surpassed folly.

"Take care," said he. "There is not hemp enough in France to make the ropes you think so necessary."

"I trust," said Marat, "that more expeditious means will be tried. Do you know whom I expect in ten minutes to knock at my door?"

"No."

"A person of our profession, a member of the National Assembly, whom you know by name, Citizen Guillotin."

"Yes," said Gilbert.

"Do you know what Guillotin has invented? A wonderful machine which kills without pain. Death should be a punishment, not a torture. He has invented this machine, and one of these days we will try it."

Gilbert shuddered. This was the second time he had heard of this machine. From the man in the cellar, and from Cagliostro in the palace.

"Ah!" said Marat, as a knock was just then heard. "It is he. Go, Albertine, arid open."

Amazed, terrified, a prey to something like swimming in the head, Gilbert went instinctively to Sebastian's side, intending to take him in his arms and carry him home.

"Look," said Marat, mechanically, "at a machine which is self-acting, and needs but one man to put it in motion, which by changing the knife three times, can cut off a hundred heads a day, without any other sensation than a slight coolness about the neck."

"Ah! is it you, doctor?" said Marat, turning to a little man who had a box of the form and size of those which contain children's toys in his hands.

"What have you there?"

"A model of my famous machine, dear Marat. I am not mistaken," said the little man. "Is that Doctor Gilbert I see?"

"It is," said Gilbert, bowing.

"I am delighted to see you; you are not in the way at all, and I shall be glad to have the opinion of so distinguished a man on my invention. I must tell you, Marat, I found a very skilful carpenter, Guidon, to make my large machine. He asks five thousand francs for it, but no sacrifice is too great, in my opinion, for the benefit of man. In two months it will be completed, and tried. Yes. I will, in the interim, propose the matter to the Assembly, and I hope they will approve the proposition, and that you will prepare the way in your excellent journal, though, indeed, my machine recommends itself, as you are about to see. A few lines in 'L'Ami du Peuple' will do no harm."

"Be easy about the matter," said Marat, "I will not only afford you a few lines, but an entire number."

"You are very good, dear Marat, but I wish you to judge for yourself," said Guillotin.

He drew from his pocket a second box, about the size of the first, and a noise inside denoted that it contained something alive, or rather something anxious to get out.

This noise was observed immediately by Marat's quick ear.

"Ah, ha!" said the latter. "What is that?"

"You shall see," said Guillotin.

Marat put his hand on the box.

"Be careful not to let them escape, for we cannot retake them. They are mice, whom we are about to decapitate. What are you going to do. Doctor Gilbert? Not go?"

"Alas! yes, sir," replied Gilbert, "to my great regret. But my son, wounded tins evening by being knocked down in the street, has been relieved, bled, and dressed by Doctor Marat, to whom, under similar circumstances, I am indebted for my own life, and whom I again thank. The child needs a fresh bed, rest and care. I cannot, then, witness your interesting experiment."

"But you will see the great experiment we will make two months hence? Will you not, doctor?"

"I will."

"I will remember your promise."

“Doctor,” said Marat, “I need not remind you to keep the place of my concealment a secret.”

“Oh! sir!”

“Your friend, Lafayette, if he knew it, would have me shot like a dog, or hung as a robber.”

“Shot! hung!” said Guillotin, “all that will be done away with. Shooting and hanging will disappear. There will be a quiet, easy, and instantaneous death established. A death so easy, that all men disgusted with life, and who wish to die like sages and philosophers, will prefer it to a natural one. Come, look at it, dear Marat, look at it.”

Without attending any longer to Dr. Gilbert, Guillotin opened the large box, and began to arrange his machine with equal curiosity and enthusiasm.

Gilbert took advantage of the opportunity to lift up Sebastian, who was yet asleep, and carried him away.

Albertine again escorted him to the gate, which she carefully closed behind him.

Once again in the street, he felt, by the cold on his face, that he was covered with perspiration, which the night wind was congealing.

“Oil, my God! what is about to befall this city, whose cellars conceal, perhaps, even now five hundred philanthropists, occupied and busy in such discoveries as that I was so near seeing just now, and which, one day, will burst forth beneath the light of heaven.”

From the Street de la Sourdiere to the house of Gilbert, Rue St. Honore, was but a step.

Cold and motion had awakened Sebastian. He wished to walk, but his father would not consent, and continued to carry him.

When the doctor came to the door, he placed Sebastian on his feet, for a moment, and knocked; he had not long to wait in the street.

A coarse, though quick voice, was heard on the other side of the door. “Is it you, M. Gilbert?” said the voice.

“That is Pitou’s voice.”

“Heaven be praised,” said Pitou as he opened the door. “Sebastian is found and unhurt, I trust, M. Gilbert.”

“At least, without any serious accident,” said the doctor. “Come, Sebastian.”

Leaving to Pitou the care of closing the door in the face of the drowsy porter, who appeared in chemise and nightcap, with Sebastian in his arms, he began to go upstairs.

Uneasy and afraid, Pitou followed. By his muddy and stained shoes, it was easy to see that he had just arrived, after a long journey.

Gilbert thanked Pitou as a brave fellow should be thanked — that is, by a pressure of the hand, and as he thought that after a journey of eighteen leagues, and anxiety for six hours, the traveller ought to have some rest, he wished him good-night, and sent him to his bed.

As for Gilbert, he did not wish to leave to another the care of watching and attending Sebastian. He himself examined the bruise on the breast of his child, and applied his ear to several places on his chest, and being assured that respiration was thoroughly free, he settled himself in an easy chair near the child, who, in spite of much fever, sank quickly to sleep.

But soon, remembering the uneasiness which Andree must feel, according to that which he had himself experienced, he called his valet, and directed him to put at once into the post, so that it should reach her address early in the morning, a letter in which were written the following words:

“Re-assure yourself; the child is found and is not injured.”

CHAPTER VII.

Truce.

A WEEK HAD rolled away between the events we have just related, and the day on which we again take the reader by the hand, and conduct him to the palace of the Tuileries, now the principal theatre of the great catastrophes about to be accomplished.

Oh! Tuileries! fatal heritage, bequeathed by the queen of Saint Barthelemy, the foreigner, Catherine de Medicis, to her descendants and to her successors. Palace of giddiness, which attracts but to destroy, what fascination dwells in your gates, where all the crowned fools who wish to be called kings lose themselves: who believe themselves only really sacred so long as they are within thy walls, and whom thou castest out, one after the other, these as bodies without heads, and those as fugitives without crowns.

Without doubt, there is in thy stones, chiselled even as the works of Benvenuto Cellini, some fatal malignancy; without doubt some fatal talisman hath found a refuge ‘neath thy roof. Look back on the last kings thou hast received, and say what thou hast done with them! Of these five kings, one only has been dismissed by you to the tomb where his ancestors awaited him; and of the four others whom history claims of time, one has been delivered to the scaffold, and the three others to exile.

One day a whole crowd wished to brave the danger and to establish itself in the place of the kings, a commissioner of the people, to station itself there, where the elect of monarchy had sat. From this moment giddiness seized it; from this moment it destroyed itself. The scaffold devoured some; exile swallowed up others; and a strange fraternity reunited Louis XVI. and Robespierre, Collot d’Herbois and Napoleon, Billeaud, Varennes and Charles X., Vadier and Louis Philippe.

Oh, Tuileries! Tuileries! mad indeed will he be who shall dare to cross thy threshold, and attempt to enter where Louis XVI., Napoleon, Charles

X., and Louis Philippe entered, for, sooner or later, he must pass out by the same door as they.

And yet, gloomy palace! each of them entered into thy bosom amid the acclamations of the people, and thy double balcony has seen them one after the other smile at these acclamations, confiding in the wishes and the vows that urged them on; this has made those who sat on the royal dais, each of them severally labour at his own work, and not at that of the people; one day the people, perceiving this, has caused them to he led to thy gates like unfaithful stewards, or has punished them like ungrateful commissioners.

It was thus that after the terrible 6th of October, in the midst of mud, blood and shrieks, the pale sun of the morning discovered, as he rose, the court of the Tuileries filled by a people, moved at the return of their king, and elated to see him.

All the day Louis XVI. received the constituted authorities; during this time the crowd awaited without, sought him, and gazed through the windows; he who thought he perceived him raised a cry of joy, and pointed him out to his neighbour, as he said, “Do you see him? Do you see him? there! there!”

At noon he showed himself on the balcony, and the cheers and the bravoes were unanimous.

In the evening he descended into the garden, and there were more than bravoes and cheers: there were emotions, there were tears.

Madame Elizabeth, pious and naive, pointed this people out to her brother, and said to him, “It seems to me it is not difficult to rule such men.”

Her lodging was on the ground floor. In the evening she caused the windows to be opened, and supped before the people.

Men and women looked on, applauded and saluted; the women especially. They caused their children to mount the window sills, ordering these little innocents to send kisses to the great lady, and to tell her how beautiful she was.

The little children repeated, ‘‘You are very, very beautiful, madame,” and with their little dimpled hands waved numberless kisses.

Every one said: “The revolution is over: the king is rescued from Versailles, his courtiers and counsellors. The enchantment which kept him in captivity beyond his capital, in that world of automata, of statues, and boxwood forests, called Versailles, is broken. Thank God! the king is restored to life, activity and truth, — to real life! Come, sire, among us;

until to-day surrounded as you were, aught but authority to err, — to-day, amid us, your people, you can do good.”

The two most popular men in France, Lafayette and Mirabeau, again became royalists.

Mirabeau had said to Lafayette, “Let us unite, and save the king.”

Lafayette was essentially an honest man, but had a narrow mind. He despised the character of Mirabeau, and did not comprehend his genius.

He went to see the Duke of Orleans.

.Much has been said of his royal highness; even that at night, in a slouched hat, hiding his eyes, he had been seen to excite, brandishing a switch, the crowd collected in the marble court, inducing them to pillage the castle, and trusting that the grand finale would be death.

To the Duke of Orleans Mirabeau was everything.

Instead of uniting with Mirabeau, Lafayette went to the duke and invited him to leave Paris. The duke hesitated, argued, contended, and became angry.

Lafayette was so much of a king, that it was necessary to obey.

“And when do I return?”

“When I think proper, prince, that you should.”

“But if, monsieur, I become weary, and return without your leave, what will be the consequence?”

“Then,” said Lafayette, “I shall expect your royal highness will fight with me the next day.”

The duke left, and did not return until he was sent for.

Lafayette was not much of a royalist before the 5th and 6th of October, when he really and sincerely changed his opinion. He had saved the king, and protected the queen.

We become bound to persons by services we render them, not by those we receive. The reason of this is, that men are rather proud than grateful. During the few days which passed, during which the new inmates of the Tuileries had become established and resumed their old habits, Gilbert, not having been sent for by the king, had not thought proper to visit him; at last, his day of visit having come, he thought his duty would be an excuse, which he did not feel his devotion would.

Louis XVI., too, knew in his own heart, in spite of the prejudices of the queen against Gilbert, that the doctor was his friend, if not absolutely the friend of royalty; the difference was unimportant.

He then remembered that it was Gilbert's day of visit, and had ordered him to be introduced as soon as he came.

Scarcely had he crossed the door of the palace, than the valet de chambre arose, went to him, and accompanied him to the presence of the king.

The king walked up and down, so immersed in thought that he paid no attention to the announcement.

Gilbert stood silent and motionless at the door, waiting for the king to observe his presence.

The object which interested him, and it was easily seen from his stopping from time to time to observe it, was the famous portrait of Charles I., by Vandyck, the same which is now at the Louvre, and which an Englishman proposed to cover with gold as its price.

Charles I. is on foot under some of those rough hardy trees found on downs. A page holds his horse. The sea is in the distance. The head of the king is expressive of sadness. Of what did the unlucky Stuart think? His predecessor was the beautiful and unfortunate Mary of Scotland, and his successor will be James II.

Often the king paused before the picture, and with a sigh resumed the walk, which always seemed ready to terminate in one place — the picture.

At last, Gilbert remembered that there are occasions when it is better to announce one's self than to stand still.

He moaned, the king trembled, and looked around.

"Ah, doctor, is it you? I am glad to see you. How long have you been here?"

"Some moments, sire."

"Ah," said the king, again becoming pensive.

After a pause, he took Gilbert before the picture.

"Do you know this picture?"

"Yes, sire."

"Where did you see it?"

"At the house of Madame du Barry."

"Madame du Barry! Yes, that is it," said the king.

After another pause of some moments: "Know you the history of this picture?"

"The subject, or the picture itself, does your majesty speak of?"

"I speak of the history of the picture."

“No, sire, I only know that it was painted in London, about 1645 or 1646. I know no more, and am ignorant how it came into France, and how it is now in your majesty’s rooms.”

“How it did pass into France, I know: how it came here, I know not.”

Gilbert looked at Louis XVI. with astonishment.

“Who has ordered it to be placed here? Why is it here, or rather, why does it pursue me, doctor?” said Louis XVI.; “lurks there no fatality beneath this?”

“A fatality certainly, if this portrait says nothing to you, sire, but a providence if it speaks to you.”

“How would you that such a portrait spoke not to a king in my situation, doctor?”

“After having permitted me to speak the truth to you, will your majesty allow me to question you?”

Louis XVI. seemed to hesitate a moment.

“Question me, doctor,” said he.

“What does this portrait say to your majesty, sire?”

“It tells me that Charles the First lost his head for having made war upon his people, and that James the Second lost his throne for having neglected his own.”

“In this case, the portrait is like myself, sire — it speaks the truth.”

“Well, then?” asked the king, soliciting Gilbert with a look.

“Since the king has permitted me to question him, I will ask him what answer he will make to a portrait that speaks so loyally?”

“M. Gilbert,” said the king, “I give you my word as a gentleman that I have resolved nothing as yet; I shall take counsel of circumstances.”

“The people fear, lest the king should think of making war on them.”

Louis XVI. shook his head.

“No, sir, no,” said he, “I could not make war on my people without employing foreign swords, and I know the state of Europe too well to tempt me to do that. The king of Prussia offered to enter France with a hundred thousand men, but I know the intriguing and ambitious spirit of this petty monarchy, which wishes to become a great kingdom, which pushes itself into every dispute, hoping that through some dispute she may acquire a part of new Silesia. Austria, on her side, placed a hundred thousand men at my disposal, but I loved not my brother-in-law, Leopold, a double-faced Janus, whose mother caused my father to be poisoned. My brother of Artois proposed to me the assistance of Sardinia and Spain, but I put no trust in these two powers led by my brother of Artois; he has about his person M. de Calonne, that is to say, the most cruel enemy of the queen. I know all that passes down there. In the last council, the question of deposing me and appointing a regent was discussed, who would probably be my other very dear brother, M. le Comte de Provence; in the last one, M. de Conde, my cousin, proposed to enter France, and to march upon Lyons, although he might himself, ultimately, ascend the throne. As for the great Catherine, that is another affair; she limits herself to advice, she — she gives me advice which seems perfect, and is after all ridiculous. ‘Above all, after what has passed during the last few days, kings,’ says she, ‘ought to pursue their way without troubling themselves with the cries of the people, as the moon pursues her path regardless of the bayings of dogs.’ It seems that Russian dogs are satisfied with merely barking; oh that she would send and ask at Deshuttes, and at Varicourt, if ours do not bite as well.”

“The people fear lest the king should think of flying, of leaving France.”

The king hesitated to reply.

“Sire,” continued Gilbert, smiling, ‘‘one is always wrong in taking in a literal sense a king’s permission. I see that I have been indiscreet, and merely express a fear. “

The king placed his hand on Gilbert’s shoulder.

“Monsieur,” said he, “I promised to tell you the truth, and I will. Yes, the suggestion was made, and I will tell you the whole truth. Yes, it is the opinion of many loyal subjects, who surround me, that I should escape, but on the night of the 6th of October, when, weeping in my arms, and clasping her children in hers, and all of us expecting to die, she made me swear that I would never fly alone, that we sit, escape, and live or die together. I gave my oath, and, sir, I will keep it; now, as I do not think we could all fly together, without being taken before we reached the frontier, again and again, we will not attempt to do so.”

“Sire, I am lost in admiration of the justness of your mind. Why cannot all France hear you, as I have done? How the hatred which pursues your majesty would be mollified! How all dangers would be removed!”

“Dangers!” said the king; “think you that my people hate me? Dangers! You attach too much importance to sombre thoughts with which that picture filled my mind. I think I could tell you of greater dangers I have undergone.”

Gilbert looked at the king with an expression of deep melancholy.

“Think you not so, M. Gilbert?” asked Louis XVI.

“My opinion is that your majesty is about to engage in a contest of great severity, and that the 14th of July and the 6th of October are but the two first acts of a terrible drama, to be played before the nations of the world by France.”

Louis XVI. became slightly pale, and said: “I trust, sir, you are mistaken.”

“I am not mistaken, sire.”

“How, on a point of this nature, can you be better informed than I, who have both my police and counter-police?”

“Sire, it is true I have neither police nor counter-police. My very profession, however, places me in contact both with the things of heaven and earth’s very core. Sire, what we have as yet experienced is but an earthquake. We have yet to face fire, lava, and the ashes of the volcano.”

“You said face? Had you not better say combat with?”

“I did, sire.”

“You know my opinion of foreign lands, I will never invite them into France. What matters my life? — I will sacrifice it, unless the lives of my wife and children be in real danger.”

“I thank God, sire, that you entertain similar sentiments. No, sire, we need no foreign power — what is the use of them as long as you have not exhausted your own resources? You fear that you have been excelled by the revolution?”

“I own I do.”

Well, there are two ways to save both Franco and the king.”

‘; Tell me, sir, and you will have deserved well of both.”

“The first is to place yourself at the head of the revolution, and to direct it.”

“They will drag me on with it, M. Gilbert. I do not wish to go.”

“The second, is to put a bit in its mouth strong enough to break it.”

“What bit is that, sir?”

“Popularity and genius.”

“And who shall forge that combination?”

“Mirabeau.”

He looked at Gilbert, as if he had misunderstood him.

Gilbert saw there was a battle to be fought.

The king turned towards the great Vandyck. “If you felt the earth tremble beneath you, and you were told to rely on Cromwell?”

“Charles Stuart would have refused, and rightly. There is no similarity between Cromwell and Mirabeau.”

“I do not know how you look at things, doctor, but to me there are no degrees of treason, and I find no difference between who is, and who is slightly a traitor.”

“Sire,” said Gilbert, with deep respect, but at the same time with invincible firmness, “neither Cromwell nor Mirabeau are traitors.”

“What, then, are they?” asked the king.

“Cromwell was a rebellious subject, Mirabeau a malcontent gentleman.”

“Why malcontent?”

“On every account. Because his father shut him up in the Chateau d’If, and the Donjon of Vincennes. He was dissatisfied with courts that sentenced him to death, with the king, who did not understand his genius and was mistaken in him.”

“The genius of a politician, M. Gilbert, is honesty.”

“The reply, sire, is most apt and worthy of Titus Trajan, or Marcus Aurelius. Unfortunately experience contradicts it.”

“How so?”

“Was Augustus, who divided the world with Lepidus and Anthony, killed Anthony to have it all himself, honest? Was Charlemagne, when he placed his brother Carloman in a cloister, and who to destroy Witikind, almost as great a man as himself, cut off the heads of all Saxons longer than his sword, honest? Was Louis XI. who revolted against his father, to dethrone him, and who inspired such terror to Charles VII., of poison, that the prince died of hunger, honest? Was Richelieu, who formed plots in the alcoves and galleries of the Place de Greve, and which had their denouement in the Place de Greve, honest? Was Mazarin, who signed a treaty with the protector, and who refused a half million and five hundred men to Charles II., and also drove him from France, honest? Was Colbert, who betrayed, accused and sold Fouquet, his protector, and who, having sent him to die in a dungeon, occupied his scarcely warm seat, honest? Yet none of them, thank God, ever injured either kings or royalty.”

“Doctor, you know very well that Mirabeau, being the friend of the Duke of Orleans, cannot be mine.”

“But, sire, the Duke of Orleans being exiled, Mirabeau belongs to no one.”

“Would you have me confide in a man who is in the market? How could I?”

“By buying him. Could you not pay more than any one else?”

“He is a cormorant, who would ask a million.”

“If M. Mirabeau, sire, sells himself for a million, he will give himself away. So, you think, he is worth two millions less than a male or female Polignac?”

“Doctor Gilbert!”

“The king withdraws his promise, and I am silent.”

“No; speak.” — ”I have spoken.”

“Let us argue.”

“I ask nothing better, sire. I know Mirabeau by heart.”

“You are his friend, unfortunately. I have not that honour. Besides, M. Mirabeau has but one friend, who is also the friend of the queen.”

“Yes! the Count de la Marck. I know it; we reproach him with the fact every day. Your majesty, on the contrary, should prohibit him, under pain of death, from ever quarrelling with him.”

“And of what earthly importance in politics, doctor, is a petty gentleman like M. Riquetti de Mirabeau?”

“First, sire, let me tell you, M. de Mirabeau is a nobleman, and not a petty gentleman. There are few nobles in France who date farther back than the eleventh century; since, to have yet a few around them, our kings exacted in requital of the honour of riding in their coaches no proof beyond 1399. Now, sire, a man descended from the Arrighetti of Florence is not a petty gentleman, even though, in consequence of the defeat of the Ghibellines, he should establish himself in France. A man is not a petty gentleman because he had an ancestor engaged in trade at Marseilles; the nobility of which city, like that of Venice, is not liable to derogation from having engaged in commerce.”

“A debauchee in reputation: a hangman; a gulfer of money.”

“Ah, sire! men must be taken according to their natures. The Mirabeaux have always been disorderly in their youth, but ripen in old age. When young, they are unfortunately what your majesty calls them, but when they become heads of houses, they are imperious, haughty, but austere. The king who did not reward them would be ungrateful; for they have furnished the army with gallant soldiers, and the navy with daring sailors. I know their provincial spirit makes them detest all centralization, and that in their half-feudal, half-republican pride they brave from the summit of their donjon keeps all ministerial orders. I know that more than once they have placed in restraint officers of the treasury who visited their estates, and equally disdained courtiers and clerks, farmers-general and clerks, valuing but two things on earth, their sword and farmers' wagons. I know that one of them wrote, 'Flunkeyism is the instinct of people of the court, with their plaster hearts and faces, just as ducks love the gutters.' All this, however, sire, does not make a man a petty gentleman, but, on the contrary, may be the highest token of true nobility, though not, perhaps, of the highest moral sense."

"Come, doctor," said the king, with something of mortification, for he fancied he knew men of importance better than any one else did; "you said you knew Mirabeau by heart. Go on, for I who know him not would learn."

"Yes, sire," said Gilbert, pricked by the kind of irony evinced by the king's intonation, "and I will tell you. That Bruno or Riquetti was a Mirabeau who, when M. de la Feuillade inaugurated the statue of Victory, in the square of Victory, with four chained nations, when marching by with his guards, paused and halted his regiment in front of the statue of Henry IV., taking off his hat, said,' Let us salute this statue, for it is worth as much as the other.' Francisco di Riquetti, who on his return from Malta, at the age of seventeen, found his mother, Anne de Poitiers, in mourning, asked her 'why?' his father having been dead sixteen years; and being told because she had been insulted — 'And did you not avenge yourself?' said he. The mother said, 'I wished to, and one day I placed a pistol at his head, and said I would avenge myself, but that I have a son who will do it for me.' 'You were right, mother,' said the young man. Without taking off his boots, he asked for his horse and cap, girded on his sword, and went in search of the Chevalier de Griasque, of whom his mother complained. He challenged him; took him to a garden; locked the gates, and threw the keys over the wall. He killed him, and returned quietly home. He, too, was a Mirabeau, as also was the Marquis Jean Antoine, who was six feet high, and beautiful as Antinous and strong as Milo; yet to him his mother said, in her Provencal accent, 'You are no longer men but dwarfs.'"

"Well," said Louis XVI., evidently captivated by this nervous and interesting anecdote; "you speak well," for he was evidently amazed by the recital of this and other anecdotes of the Mirabeaux. “Yon have not told me how the Marquis Jean Antoine was killed, nor how he died.”

“He died at the Castle of Mirabeau, after a sad retreat. The hold was on a strong rock, defending a double gorge, on which the north wind perpetually blew. He, too, had that stern and rugged exterior the Mirabeau family ever acquire as they grow old and educate their children, and keeping them at such a distance, that the eldest said, ‘I never had the honour to touch either hands, lips, or flesh of that excellent man.’ This eldest son was the father of the present Mirabeau. A hazard bird whose nest was made in four turrets, and who never would Versaillise themselves, which is the reason why your majesty neither knows, nor can do them justice.”

“Ah, sir! I know, on the contrary, better. He is one of the chiefs of the economical school. He took part in the revolution which is just over, by giving the signal for social reforms, and was especially guilty of his part in them, in having said, ‘Every woman now gives birth to an Artaveldt or to a Massaniello.’ He was not mistaken, and his own mother’s womb has proven it.”

“Sire, there is in the Mirabeaux something which offends and displeases your majesty. Let me tell you, paternal and royal despotism have effected this.”

“Royal despotism!” said Louis XVI.

“Certainly, sire, without the king, your father, being able to prevent it. For what great crime had the scion of this lofty and ancient race committed, to induce his father, at the age of fourteen, to send him to a school of correction, in which his name was registered, not Riquetti de Mirabeau, but De Buffieres? What had he done at eighteen, to make him the victim of a lettre de cachet? What had he done at twenty, that he should be made to serve in the ranks of a punishment battalion in Corsica? His father said, ‘He will on the 16th of April next embark on the plain which now alone is being ploughed. God grant he may not reap it some day.’

“What had he done, that after a year of marriage his father should exile him to Manosque? After six months, then, why was he transferred to Joux? Why, after his escape, was he arrested at Amsterdam, and imprisoned at Vincennes, where for ever to him, who was being strangled when at large, paternal love and royal clemency assigned to a dungeon of ten square feet, where for five years his youth was agitated, his passion inflamed, and his mind strengthened. “I will tell your majesty what he had done. He had won the heart of his master, Poisson, by the ease with which he learned everything. He had gnawed through political science. Having adopted the profession of, arms, he wished to persevere in it. He had, when reduced to six thousand livres a year, with his wife and child, contracted debts to the amount of thirty millions. He had broken his parole at Manosque, to cane a nobleman who had insulted his sister. He had, and that is the greatest of all offences, yielding to the charms of a pretty woman, carried her off from her old, morose, and worn-out husband."

"Yes, sir," said the king," and afterwards deserted her, so that the unfortunate Madame Monnier, left alone with her crime, committed suicide."

Gilbert looked up to heaven, and sighed. "What have you to say to that, and how will you defend your Mirabeau?"

"By truth, sire, by truth, which so rarely penetrates to kings, that you, who seek, look and ask for it, do not find it. No; Madame de Monnier did not die for Mirabeau, who immediately on his leaving Vincennes visited her first, disguised as a pedlar. He entered the convent of Gier, whither she had sought an asylum. He found Sophie cold and constrained. There was an explanation, and Mirabeau saw not only that Madame de Monnier did not love him, but even that she loved another, the Chevalier de Rancourt. She, made free by her husband's death, was about to marry this other. Mirabeau had left prison too soon; his captivity had been relied on, and it will be necessary to destroy his honour. Mirabeau gives place to his happy rival, and retires. Madame de Monnier is about to marry De Rancourt, who, however, dies suddenly. The poor woman, in this last passion, had expended all her soul and passion.

"One day, on the 9th of September, she killed herself with charcoal. Mirabeau's enemies then alleged that she died on his account, when she died for another. Ah, history, history, thus are you written!"

"Wherefore was it," said the king, "that he received the news with such indifference?"

"How did he receive it?" said the doctor. "I can assure your majesty he never did receive it, for it never was told him; for I know who told him. Ask that person. He will not dare to lie, for he is a priest-Cure of Gier, the Abbe Vallet, and sits in opposition to Mirabeau. He crossed the hall, and sat by his side. 'What the devil are you doing here?' asked Mirabeau. Without replying, the abbe gave him a letter, containing all the details. He opened it, and was long reading it, for in all probability he could not believe the fatal news. He read it again, and then grew pale, his face from time to time expressing deep emotion. He passed his hands across his brow. His countenance grew pale; he coughed, spat, and sought to restrain his feelings. At last, he had to yield. He arose and hurried out, and did not show himself again in the Assembly for three days. Sire, sire, forgive my entering into these details, for let a man have but ordinary talent, he will be slandered everywhere. What then must be the fate of a man of genius?”

“Why so, doctor? Why should any one slander Mirabeau to me?”

“Interest, sire, the interest of mediocrity to keep near the throne. Mirabeau is one who, if he enter the temple, will expel all the hucksters. Were Mirabeau near you sire, all petty intrigues would end. Were Mirabeau near you, genius would mark out the course of honesty. What is it to you, it Mirabeau ran away with Madame Monnier? If he was unhappy with his wife? If he owe half a million of money? Pay his debts, sire, and add to these five hundred thousand francs, one, two, ten million francs; what is the difference? Mirabeau is free; do not let him escape you. Make him a councilor and minister, and listen to his powerful voice. What it says, tell back to Europe and the world.”

“Mirabeau, who became a cloth merchant at Aix, to be elected by the people, cannot be false to his constituents, and desert them for the court.”

“Sire, I tell you, you do not know the Mirabeaux. He, like his family, is an aristocrat, noble, and royalist. He procured an election by the people because the nobility disdained him. The Mirabeaux have that sublime want of action, by any possible means, which torments men of genius. He was elected by neither the nobility nor the people to enter Parliament as Louis XIV. did, booted and spurred, arguing divine right. He did not desert the people for the court, you say. Why, then, do the two parties exist? Why do not the two coalesce? Well, Mirabeau will effect this. Take Mirabeau, sire, or else to-morrow, repelled by your disdain, he will turn against you. Then, sire, as the picture of Charles I. says, ‘All will be lost.’ I tell you so, sire.”

“Mirabeau will oppose me, doctor! Has he not already done so?”

“In appearance, perhaps, but in fact Mirabeau is your friend. Ask the Count de la Marck what he said at the famous session of June 21, — for Mirabeau reads the future with terrible wisdom.”

“Well, what did he say?”

"He wrings his hands with grief, sire, and says, 'Thus kings are lead to the scaffold. These people do not see the abyss they dig beneath the steps of monarchy. The king and queen will die, and the people will clap their hands over their carcasses.'"

The king trembled, grew pale, looked at the portrait of Charles I., appeared for a moment ready to decide, but all at once said: "I will talk of this with the queen. It may be she will decide to have an interview with Mirabeau. I will not speak to him. I like to clasp the hands of those with whom I talk, as now, Gilbert, I do yours. Not for my liberty or my throne would I clasp that of M. Mirabeau."

Gilbert was about to answer, and, perhaps, might have insisted, but just then an usher entered, and said —

"Sire, the person your majesty was to receive this morning awaits you in the antechamber."

Louis XVI. looked anxiously at Gilbert.

"Sire," said he, "if I should not see the person your majesty expects, I will go out by the other door."

"No, sir, go through this. You are aware that I look on you as my friend, and that from you I have no secret. The person I expect is a simple gentleman, once attached to my brother's household, and recommended by him. He is a faithful servant, and I wish to see if something may not be done, if not for him, at least for his wife and children. You, M. Gilbert, you know I am always glad to see you, — even when you talk to me of M. Riquetti de Mirabeau."

"Sire, must I then think I have utterly failed?"

"I said I would speak to the queen and think. We will meet at another time."

"Another time? Sire, I pray it may be soon."

"Think you, then, the danger so imminent?"

"Sire," said Gilbert, "never suffer them to take the picture of Charles I. from your room. It is a wise adviser."

Bowing, he left the room, just as the person the king expected appeared.

Gilbert uttered a cry of surprise. The nobleman was the Marquis de Favras, whom eight or ten days before he had met at Cagliostro's house, when his fatal and speedy death was foretold.

CHAPTER VIII.

Favras.

WHILE GILBERT withdrew, a prey to an unknown terror in relation, not to the revolution, but to the invisible and mysterious course of events, the Marquis de Favras was introduced, as we have said in the preceding chapter, to Louis XVI.

As Doctor Gilbert had done, he paused at the door; the king beckoned him to draw near.

Favras advanced and bowed, waiting respectfully to be spoken to.

Louis XVI. fixed on him that glance of anxious inquiry which seems to be a part of the education of kings, and which is measured in profundity by him that employs it.

“You are the Marquis de Favras, sir?” said the king.

“Yes, sire,” said the marquis.

“You wished to be presented to me?”

“I expressed to his royal highness the Count de Provence my warm desire to offer the king my homage to majesty.”

“My brother has great confidence in you?”

“I think he has, and I wish that good opinion to be shared by your majesty.”

“My brother has known you long, M. de Favras.”

“But your majesty does not, I understand. Interrogate me, however, but ten minutes, and your majesty will know me as well as your august brother.”

“Speak, marquis,” said Louis XVI., looking at the picture of Charles Stuart, which he could not entirely eradicate from his mind or from his glance. “Speak, marquis, I listen to you.”

“Your majesty wishes to know — ”

“Who you are and what you have done.”

“Who I am, sire, the announcement of my name tells you. I am Thomas Mahi, Marquis de Favras; I was born at Blois, in 1745; I entered the mousquetaires at fifteen, and served in that corps the campaign of 1761. I was then captain and aide-major in the regiment of Belzunce, and afterwards lieutenant of the Swiss of the guard of the Count de Provence."

"You left his service?"

"In 1775, sire, to go to Vienna to have my wife recognised as the only and legitimate daughter of the Prince of Anbalt-Schauenberg."

"Has your wife ever been presented?"

"No, sire; but at this moment she has the honour of being, with my eldest son, received by the queen."

The king made an uneasy movement which seemed to say, "Ah! the queen has something to do with it."

After a momentary silence, during which he walked up and down the room, and glanced again and again at the picture of Charles I., "And then?" said the king.

"Then, for three years during the insurrection against the Stadtholder, I commanded a legion, and, in a degree, contributed to the re-establishment of authority. Then, as I looked at France, and saw the evil spirit which appeared to pervade it, I returned to Paris to place my life and sword at the service of the king."

"You have indeed had trouble."

"Yes, sire; I saw the sad days of the 5th and 6th of October." The king seemed to wish to change the subject.

"And you say, marquis," continued he, "that my brother, the Count de Provence, had such confidence in you that he confided to your care the charge of a large sum of money?"

At this unexpected question a third person would have had his nerves severely shaken by witnessing the nervous tremor of a curtain which half closed the alcove of the room, as if some one were hidden behind it, and at the agitation of M. de Farms, like that of a man who, expecting one question, has another altogether different addressed to him.

"Yes, sire; if it be a mark of confidence to confide the charge of money to a nobleman, his royal highness has done so to me."

The king looked at Favras as if the direction the conversation had assumed offered his curiosity a greater interest than the course it had hitherto taken.

The marquis then continued, but like a man who has been disappointed: "His royal highness, being deprived of his revenues by the various measures of the Assembly, and thinking that the time was come when, for their own safety, it was necessary for the princes to have a large sum at their disposal, gave me the contracts."

"On which you borrowed, sir?"

"Yes, sire."

"A large sum, you say?"

"Yes, sire, two millions."

"From whom?"

De Favras hesitated to reply to the king: the conversation appeared to have assumed a scope widely different from that he expected — looking into private rather than general interests, and sinking from politics into police.

"I asked," said the king, "who lent the money?"

"Baron Zanoni."

"Ah!" said Louis XVI., "an Italian."

"A Genoese, sire."

"And he lives — "

"At Sevres, just opposite the place where," said Favras, who hoped by thus spurring his horse in the face of the king to excite the foundered animal to some vigour, — "where the coach of your majesty, stopped by the cut-throats under the conduct of Marat, Verriers, and the Duke d'Aiguillon, forced the hair-dresser of the queen to dress the heads of Varicourt and Deshuttes."

He grew pale, and had he at that moment looked towards the alcove, he would have seen that the curtain was more violently agitated than it had previously been.

It was evident that the conversation annoyed him, and that he wished he had not engaged in it. He resolved to end it as soon as possible. He said: "It is evident, sir, that you are a faithful subject of royalty, and when the time comes, I promise not to forget you."

He bowed, and when princes do that, it means, "You may go."

Favras understood him perfectly.

"Excuse me, sire, your majesty had one other thing to ask me."

"No," said the king, as if he wondered what the matter could be, or what new question he was expected to ask. "No, marquis, this is all I wished to know."

“You are mistaken, sire,” said a voice which made both the king and marquis turn towards the alcove. “You wished to know what course the ancestor of the marquis adopted to save King Stanislaus at Dantzic, and how he escorted him in safety to the frontier.”

They both uttered an exclamation of surprise. The third person who thus suddenly mingled in the conversation was the queen, pale, and with quivering lips, who, not satisfied with what Favras had told her, and fancying that the king, if left to himself, would dare to act decidedly, had come by the secret stairway and corridor to participate in the conversation.

Favras at once appreciated the means offered him to unfold his plan, and, though none of his ancestors had ever contributed to the escape of the Polish monarch, he hastened to bow, and replied: “Your majesty, doubtless, refers to my cousin, General Steinflicht, who owes the illustration of his name to the services he rendered his monarch; services which were doubly important, as, in the first place, he wrested him from the hands of his enemies, and, subsequently, by means of a lucky accident, made him one of your majesty’s progenitors.”

“That is true, sire,” said the queen, eagerly; while Louis XVI. looked at the portrait of Charles I. and sighed deeply.

“Well,” said Favras, “your majesty is aware that King Stanislaus, though nominally free in Dantzic, was strictly watched by the Muscovite army, and was almost lost, if he did not determine on a prompt escape.”

“He was entirely, you may say entirely lost, M. de Favras,” added the queen.

“Madame,” said Louis XVI., with severity, “Providence watches over kings, and they are never utterly lost.”

“Ah, sire,” said the queen, “I have as full, or as religious a faith in Providence as you have, but I think we should do something for ourselves.”

“Such was the opinion of the King of Poland, sire,” added De Favras, “for he publicly declared, that no longer thinking his position tenable, and knowing his life to be in danger, he wished various plans of escape to be submitted to him. In spite of the difficulty, three were proposed. I say in spite of the difficulty, because your majesty will remark that it was more difficult for the King of Poland to escape than for yourself. For instance, if your majesty should fancy to leave Paris with a post-carriage, if your majesty wished to do so quietly, you could, in a day or night, gain the frontier; or if your majesty wished to leave Paris as a king, give an order to some gentlemen to collect thirty thousand men and seize on the Tuileries, — in either case success would be sure.”

“Sire,” said the queen, “M. de Favras tells your majesty nothing but the truth.”

“Yes,” said the king; “but my situation is far from being desperate, as was that of my cousin Stanislaus. Dantzic was surrounded by the Muscovites, as the marquis says: the fort of Weichselmund, its last defence, had capitulated; while I — ”

“While you,” interrupted the queen, with impatience, “are surrounded by the people of Paris, who took the Bastille on the 14th of July, and who, on the night of the 5th and 6th of October, sought to murder you, and who on the 6th brought you with insults back to Paris. Ah! it is a far better condition than that of Stanislaus.”

“Yet, madame —

“King Stanislaus was exposed only to death or imprisonment, while we — ”

A glance from the king made her pause.

“But you are the master, and must decide.”

She, in her impatience, sat in front of the picture of Charles I.

“M. de Favras,” said she, “I have seen the marchioness and your eldest son. I found them both brave and full of courage, as the wife and son of a brave nobleman should be. And in case anything befall them, they may rely on the Queen of France, who will not abandon them. She is the daughter of Marie Therese, and can appreciate and reward courage.”

The king, as if he were excited by this boutade, said: “You say, sir, three modes of escape were proposed?”

“Yes, sire. The first, the disguise of a peasant. The Countess Chapoka, Palatine of Pomerania, who spoke German, her native tongue, offered, confiding in a man she knew to be well acquainted with the country, to disguise herself as a peasant woman, and pass him off as her husband. This was the method I just now spoke of to the King of France as so easy in case he wished to fly incognito, and at night.”

“The second?” said Louis XVI., impatiently, as if he disliked the situation of Stanislaus being compared with his own.

“The second was to take a thousand men and cut through the Muscovites; this I suggested just now to the King of France, observing that he had not one, but thirty thousand at his service.”

“You saw how valuable those thirty thousand men were on the 14th of July, M. de Favras. Now for the third.”

“The third, which Stanislaus decided on, was to disguise himself as a peasant, not with a woman, who might encumber him on the road, not with a thousand men, every one of whom might be killed without cutting through the enemy, but with two or three sure men who had travelled much. This last was suggested by M. Monsi, and approved by General Steinflicht.”

“Was it adopted?”

“Yes, sire; and if a king finding or thinking himself in the situation of the King of Poland should determine to adopt it, and grant me the confidence your kinsman granted General Steinflicht, I think I would answer with my head that, where the roads are free, as they are in France, and the king as bold a rider as your majesty —

“Certainly,” said the queen. “But on the night of the 5th and 6th of October the king swore never to form a plan of escape without me. He promised, sir, and will keep his word.”

“Madame,” said Favras, “that makes the journey more difficult, but not impossible; and had I the honour of conducting such an expedition, I would promise to carry the king and queen to Montmedy or Brussels, or lose my head.”

“Do you hear, sir? I think there is all to gain and nothing to lose with a man like M. de Favras.”

“So, too, do I, madame; but the moment is not yet favourable.”

“Very well, sire,” said the queen; “wait, as did he whose portrait you study so. The sight of that, I thought, would have given you better counsel. Wait until we are forced into a contest, until a battle shall have been lost, until a scaffold shall have been erected beneath your window, and then, instead of saying as you do to-day, ‘It is too soon,’ you will say, ‘It is too late.’“

“At all events, and under all circumstances, the first word of the king will find me ready,” said De Favras, bowing; for he was afraid that his presence, having brought on a kind of contest between the king and queen, fatigued the latter. “I can only offer my life to my king; and I should not say I offer, for the right of using it is his.”

“It is well, sir; and in case of need I renew to you the offer the queen made in relation to the marquise and your children.”

This was a real dismissal, which the marquis was forced to take, and finding no other encouragement than a glance from the queen he left the room.

The queen looked after him until the tapestry hid him.

“Ah, sire,” said she, and she pointed to wards the picture by Vandyck, “when I hang that picture hung in your room I fancied it would inspire you.”

Haughty, and disdaining to pursue the conversation, she advanced towards the door of the alcove; all at once, pausing, she said, “Sire, confess that the Marquis de Favras is not the only person you have seen to-day.”

“Yes, madame, I saw Doctor Gilbert.”

The queen trembled.

“Ah!” said she, “so I thought; and the doctor — ”

“Agrees with me, that we should not leave France.”

“Thinking, then, we should not leave it, he has suggested some way to enable us to live here.”

“Yes, one which, unfortunately, if not bad, is impracticable.”

“What is it?”

“That we purchase the services of Mirabeau for one year.”

The queen’s face was deeply pensive.

“Perhaps,” said she, “that might be a way.”

“Yes, but it is a thing you would refuse to do, madame.”

“I say neither yes nor no,” said the queen, with the expression the angel of evil might assume when sure of his triumph: “my advice is to think of it.” She added in a lower tone, as she left, “And I will think of it.”

The king was alone, on his feet, and for an instant motionless. Then, as if he feared that the retreat of the queen was feigned, he went to the door through which she had gone, opened it, and looked into the corridor and antechambers.

Seeing none of the servants, he said in a half voice, “Francois!”

A valet, who had risen when the door of the king’s apartments opened, was immediately told to draw near.

“Francois,” said Louis XVI., “do you know the rooms of M. de Charny?”

“Yes, sire.”

“Find M. de Charny; I wish to see him.”

The valet de chambre left, and closing the door behind him, went to the room of M. de Charny, whom he found with his head resting on his hand,

and his eyes gazing on that ocean of roofs which lost itself in an horizon of tiles and slates.

The valet knocked twice without succeeding in arousing the count. Charny was lost in reflection, and at last the valet determined, as the key was in the door, to enter.

The count looked around.

“Ah, M. Hue, is it you? Are you come to me from the queen?”

“No, count, from the king.”

“From the king!” echoed Charny, wondering what he could want with him. “Very well; say to his majesty that I obey,”

The valet de chambre retired with the formula prescribed by etiquette, while the count, with that courtesy which the old and true nobility entertained for any one coming from the king, whether wearing a gold chain or a livery, went with him to the door.

When alone, Charny for a moment rested his head on his hands, as if to arrange his ideas, put on his sword, which lay on a chair, took up his hat and went downstairs.

He found Louis XVI. in his chamber, sitting with his back to the picture by Vandyck, and awaiting him.

The desk was covered with charts, works on geography, English papers, and journals, among which were discovered manuscripts of Louis XVI., recognisable by the fact that he wrote so closely that scarcely any margin was to be seen.

Charny looked particularly at none of the objects which lay around, and waited respectfully for the king to speak.

The king, however, in spite of the confidence he had previously exhibited, seemed to experience a certain hesitation.

In the first place, and to acquire courage, he opened a drawer in his desk, and a secret compartment within this drawer, whence he extracted several papers in envelopes, which he placed on the table.

“M. de Charny,” said he, “I have observed one thing — ”

He paused, looking fixedly at Charny, who waited respectfully to hear what he had to say.

“On the night of the 5th and 6th of October, having to select between the care of the queen and myself, I saw that you placed her under the charge of your brother, while you remained by me.”

"Sire," said Charny, "I am the head of my family, as you are the chief of the state; I had, therefore, the right to die by your side."

"This made me think," said Louis XVI., "that if I had ever a secret mission, at once secret, difficult, and dangerous, I could trust it to your loyalty as a French noble, to your devotion as a friend."

"Oh, sire!" said Charny, "exalt me as high as you please, and I will ever be grateful. I cannot do more."

"M. de Charny, though scarcely thirty-six, you are a thoughtful man. You have not passed through the events which are transpiring around us without extracting profit from them. What think you of my situation, and were you prime minister, what would you suggest to improve it?"

"Sire," said Charny, with more hesitation than embarrassment, "I am a military man — a sailor; such questions I am incompetent to answer."

"Monsieur," said the king, giving Charny his hand, with a dignity which seemed suddenly to spring from the very situation in which they were placed, "you are a man, and I am another, who, thinking you his friend, asks you simply what, if you were in his situation, you would do."

"Sire," said Charny, "in a situation not less grave than the present, the queen did me the honour, as the king does now, to ask my opinion; I speak of the capture of the Bastille. She wished to use against the hundred thousand Parisians in arms, rolling like a hydra of fire and steel along the Boulevards, her eight or ten thousand foreign soldiers. Had I been less known to the queen, had she been less familiar with my devotion and respect, my reply would doubtless have made trouble between us. Alas, sire! may I not fear that my reply to-day will offend the king?"

"What did you say to the queen?"

"That, if not strong enough to enter Paris as a conqueror, you must enter it as a father!"

"Well, sir, did not I follow that advice?"

"Yes, sire."

"Now it remains to see whether I have acted correctly or not. Tell me, now, have I entered Paris as a king or as a prisoner?"

"Sire," said the count, "does the king permit me to speak to him frankly?"

"Do so, sir! When I ask your advice, I also ask your opinion."

"Sire, I disapproved of the banquet at Versailles, and begged the queen not to go to the theatre without you. Sire, I despaired when I saw the queen trample on the national cockade, and put on that of Austria."

“Think you, count, that was the true cause of the events of the 5th and 6th of October?”

“No, sire; it was at least the pretext. Sire, you are not unjust to the people; the people is good, and loves you, for it is royalist; the people, though, suffers; it is cold and hungry, and has in, around, and above it, bad counsellors, who urge it on. It advances, urges onward, overturning everything, and is ignorant of its own power. When once loosed, once released, turned forth and in motion, it is either a conflagration or a deluge. It either burns or overwhelms.”

“But, M. de Charny, suppose one wishes neither to be burned nor drowned. This is very natural; what then must I do?”

“Give no pretext for the inundation to burst, for the conflagration to spread. Sire, you have seen this people of Paris, so long without sovereigns, so anxious to see them again. You have seen it murdering, burning, and assassinating at Versailles, or rather you thought so; at Versailles you did not see the people; you saw it, at the Tuileries, saluting beneath the balcony, the queen, the royal family; penetrating into your apartments, by means of deputations, from the market, of the civic guard, of the municipal corps; those who had not the happiness of entering your apartments and exchanging words with you, pressed close around the windows of the dining-room, through which the women sent sweet kisses to their illustrious guests, the kisses of their children.”

“Yes,” said the king, “I saw all that, and thence comes my hesitation. I ask what is the true people, that which burns and caresses, or that which caresses and demands?”

“The last, sire, the last, sire. Confide in that which will defend you against the other.”

“Count, you say to me now, exactly what Doctor Gilbert said two hours ago.”

“Then, sire, how, having consulted a man so profound, so learned, so grave as the doctor, can you deign to consult a mere soldier like myself?”

“I will tell you, M. de Charny,” said Louis XVI.; “I think there is a great difference between you. You are the friend of the king, and Doctor Gilbert is only the friend of royalty.”

“I do not understand, sire.”

“I mean that if the principle of royalty were deserted, he would willingly abandon the king, that is to say, the man.”

"Then your majesty is right. For to me, sire, you will ever be both the king and the impersonation of royalty. Thus I wish you to use me."

"Some time since, M. de Charny, I wished to know to whom you would address yourself in this calm, which perhaps intervenes between two storms — to efface all memory of the past, and conjure up better prospects of the future."

"Had I the honour and misfortune, sire, of royalty, I would remember the shouting around my carriage on the return from Versailles, and I would give my right hand to Lafayette and my left to Mirabeau."

"Count, how can you say this, when you hate the one and detest the other?"

"Sire, feelings, now, we have nothing to do with. The fate of the king and kingdom are at stake."

"Just what Gilbert said," the king said to himself.

"Sire," said Charny, "I am happy to find so distinguished a person agree with me."

"Think you then, count, that the union of these two men would restore the nation to calm and to peace?"

"With God's aid, sire, I would expect much from the union of these two men."

"But if I lent myself to this union, if I consented to the compact, and if, in spite of my desire, the ministerial combination should fail, what then should I do?"

"Then, having exhausted all the means placed by Providence in your hands, having fulfilled all the duties imposed by your position, it would be time for you to think of your own safety,' and of that of your family."

"Then you propose that I should fly?"

"I would advise your majesty to retire, with those of your regiments on which you think you can rely, to some strong place, like Metz, Nancy, or Strasbourg."

The face of the king lighted up.

"Ah," said he; "and among all the generals who have given me proof of devotion, tell me, Charny — for you know them all — to whom would you confide the duty of carrying the king away?"

"Sire, it is a grave responsibility to guide a king in such a choice. I, however, recognise my ignorance, my weakness, my impotence. Sire, I cannot."

"Well, I will place you at ease. I have already made my choice, and I wish to send you to that man. Here is the letter I wish you to give him. Any name you may suggest will have no other influence on my determination than to point out one faithful servant more, who doubtless will have an opportunity to show his fidelity. M. de Charny, had you to confide your king to the prudence, valour, and fidelity of any one, whom would you select?"

"Sire," said Charny, after a moment's reflection, "not, I swear to your majesty, on account of friendship or family, which unite us, do I say this. In the army, however, there is a man known for his great devotion to the king; a man who, as governor of the Windward Isles, efficiently protected the Antilles, and even took several from the English, who since has had many important commands, and who is now, I think, governor of the city of Metz. This man, sir, is the Marquis de Bouille. If a father, I would trust my son to him; had I a father, I would confide him to Bouille; as a subject, I would confide my king to him."

So dull was Louis XVI., that he heard with evident anxiety the words of the count. One might have seen his face either lighten or become bedimmed, as he seemed to recognise or not the person of whom Charny spoke. "When he heard the name, he could not repress an exclamation of joy.

"Look, count, at the address of this letter: Does not Providence itself induced me to write to him?"

Charny took the letter, and read the address:

M. FRANCOIS CLAUDE-AMOUR,
"MARQUIS DE BOUILLE,
"General Commanding,
"Metz."

Tears of joy and pride gushed from Charny's eyes. He said: "Sire, after this, I have but one thing to say, that I will live and die for your majesty."

"And after what has passed, I will say, I do not think that I have any longer a right to keep any secrets from you, provided that you and I are placed on a good footing; now, to you alone I will confide my own person, that of my queen and my children. Listen to me, then; this has been proposed to me and rejected."

Charny bowed in deep attention to the king.

“This is not the first time, monsieur, that the idea of a plan like that we speak of has occurred to myself and those around me. Daring the night of the 5th and 6th, I had wished to effect the queen’s escape; a carriage was to have taken her to Rambouillet, where I would have joined her on horseback. Thence we easily could have reached the frontier, the surveillance which now surrounds us not haying then been awakened. The project failed, because the queen would not go without me.”

“Sire, I was present when the pious oath was exchanged between the king and the queen, or, rather, between the husband and wife.”

“Since, M. de Breteuil has opened negotiations with me through the Earl of Innisdale, and to-day I received a letter from Soleure.”

The king paused, when he saw the count was motionless.

“You do not answer, count,” said he.

“Sire, I know the Count de Breteuil is in the Austrian influence, and I am afraid to disturb his majesty’s legitimate sympathies with his wife, and the Emperor Joseph II., his brother-in-law.”

The king seized Charny’s hand, and, leaning towards him, said in a whisper: “Do not be afraid, count: I like Austria no better than you do. This was not the only plan of escape offered me. Do you know the Marquis de Favras?”

“The old captain of the regiment of Belzunce? The old lieutenant of the guards of Monsieur? Yes, sire.”

“That is it,” said the king, repeating, “‘the old lieutenant of the guards of Monsieur.’ What think you of him?”

“Well, he is a brave soldier and a gentleman, ruined by accidents, a thing which makes him the more unhappy, and implore him to mad attempts and foolish plans. He is, however, a man of honour, and will die rather than shrink from aught he has undertaken. He is a man on whom your majesty might rely for a coup-de-main, but whom I would fear to make the leader of an enterprise.”

“Then,” the king said, with something of bitterness, “the leader is not he, but Monsieur. Monsieur, the man who makes money, prepares everything. Monsieur, who purposes to remain in France when I shall have left it!”

Charny made a movement expressive of alarm.

“Well! what mean you, count? This is not an Austrian plot, but a movement of the princes, of the noblesse, of the emigres.”

“Sire, excuse me. I doubt neither the honour, nor the courage, nor the loyalty of M. de Favras. If he promised to take your majesty anywhere, he will do so, or will die in your defence. Why, though, does not Monsieur go with your majesty? Why docs he remain here?”

“From devotion, I tell you; and perhaps — if it should become necessary to depose one king and appoint a regent — the people, wean of the search for a king, would not have far to look for a regent.”

“Sire,” said Charny, “this says terrible things.”

“I tell you what everybody knows, dear count, what your brother wrote yesterday. In the last council of the princes at Turin, it was proposed to depose me and to appoint a regent; M. de Conde, my cousin, proposed to march upon Lyons. You see then, I can neither accept the offer of Breteuil nor of Favras, neither of Austria nor of the princes. This, count, I have told no one, and I wish no one, not even the queen, to know of it.” Louis XVI. emphasised the words we have italicised. “As in no one, not even the queen, have I reposed such confidence, you should be more devoted to me than to any one else.”

“Sire,” said Charny, “must the secret of my journey be kept from everyone?”

“It matters not, count, that the people know whither, if they do not know why you go-”

“And the object must be revealed to M. de Bouille alone?”

“To him alone, and not until you shall have ascertained his feelings. The letter I give is simply one of introduction. You know my position, my fears, better than either M. Necker, my minister, my counsellor. Act accordingly. I put the thread and shears in your hands. Untwine or cut.”

He then gave the count an open letter.

“Read,” said he.

Charny took it, and read:

“Palace of the Tuileries, Oct. 29.

“I trust, sir, you continue to be satisfied with your position as governor of the palace of Metz. The Count de Charny, who passes through Metz, will ask you if I can serve you in any other manner. If so, it would delight me to please you, and seize the opportunity to assure you of my esteem for you. — Louis.”

“And now, M. de Charny,” said the king, “go; you have full power to make any promise to M. de Bouille, if you think any necessary; only promise nothing that I cannot keep.”

He gave him his hand again.

Charny kissed it with an emotion which made all new protestations useless, and left the room, leaving the king convinced, as was the case, that he had by this confidence won the count’s heart more completely than if he had heaped on him all the riches and favours in his bestowal during his omnipotence.

CHAPTER IX.

Dark Prospects.

THE COUNT DE CHARNY proceeded to the royal post to have horses put to his carriage. While they were being harnessed, he went into the house of the agent, asked for pen, ink, and paper, and wrote to the countess a letter, which he bade the domestic who returned with his horses to give her.

The countess, half asleep on the sofa placed in the corner, and having a small stand before her, was occupied in reading this letter, when Weber entered.

“Monsieur Weber,” said the femme de chambre, opening the door.

The countess folded up her letter quickly, as if Weber had come to take it from her, and placed it in her bosom.

The purport of Weber’s message was that the queen wished to see the countess in the evening.

Andree simply replied that she would obey her majesty.

When Weber was gone, the countess closed her eyes for a moment, as if for the purpose of expelling all bad ideas and every evil thought, and not until she had succeeded in perfectly recovering herself did she think herself able to finish the letter.

When she had read it, she kissed it tenderly, and placed it on her heart.

“May God keep you, soul of my life! I do not know where you are, but only that my prayers will ascend to God.”

Then, as she could not possibly know why she was sent for, without impatience and without fear, she awaited the hour for her visit to the Tuileries.

This was not the case with the queen. A kind of prisoner in the palace, under the influence of impatience, she wandered from the pavilion of Flora to that of Warsaw.

Monsieur requested her to pass an hour. Monsieur had come to the Tuileries to ascertain how the king had received De Favras.

The queen, who was ignorant of the journey of Charny, and wished to keep this route of safety open, promised more for the king than he had promised for himself, and told Monsieur that when the time came it would be adopted.

Monsieur, too, was in high spirits. The loan he had effected from the Genoese banker amounted to two millions, of which he could only induce De Favras to accept one hundred louis, which De Favras needed to freshen the devotion of two persons on whom he could rely, and who were to aid in the royal escape.

De Favras wished to inform Monsieur about these two men, But Monsieur, ever prudent, refused either to see them or to hear their names.

Monsieur was to appear to be ignorant of what was going on. De Favras had belonged to his household, and therefore he gave him the money, but he did not care what he did with it.

Besides, as we have said, in ease of the king’s departure. Monsieur remained, and therefore could not be concerned in the plot. Monsieur declaimed against the flight of his family, and as he had contrived to make himself very popular in France, it was probable, as Louis XVI. said to the Count de Charny, that Monsieur would be appointed regent.

If the flight were abortive, Monsieur knew nothing, would deny everything, and remain in France, or, with the eighteen hundred thousand francs he retained of the money he had borrowed, would join the Count d’Artois and the Princess of Conde, at Turin.

The return of the baker, his wife, and the shop-boy to Paris had not had the expected effect. Flour and bread still were scarce. Every day there was a crowd around the baker’s doors, causing great disorders. How, though, was this to be prevented? The right of reunion was provided for in the declaration of the rights of man.

The Assembly was ignorant of all that. Its members were not obliged to make a part of the tail from the baker’s door; and when by accident one of the members became hungry daring the session, he was always sure to find within a hundred yards a nice white roll at the shop of a baker named Francois, who lived in the Rue du Marche-Palu, in the district of Notre Dame. He baked five or six times a day, and always reserved one baking for the Assembly.

The lieutenant of police was communicating to Louis XVI. his fears relative to these disorders, which some day might become an outbreak, when Weber at the door of the little cabinet, and in a low voice, said:

“Madame la Comtesse de. Charny.”

Though the queen herself had sent for Andree, and though she expected her to be announced, she trembled in every limb at Weber’s words; she hesitated a moment, not knowing by what name she should address the white apparition which passed from the shadow of the door into the half-lighted room. At last, giving her hand to her old friend, she said:

“Welcome, Andree, to-day as ever.”

“Is it necessary for me to tell your majesty,” said Andree, adopting the question with frankness, “to say that had she always spoken to me as she just has, it would not have been necessary to send for me out of the place she dwells in?”

“Alas!” said the queen, “Andree, you, so chaste and pure, whose heart has been corrupted by no hatred, should know that tempest clouds often may cover and cause a star to disappear, but which, when the wind sweeps the firmament, reappears more brilliant. All women, even in the most exalted ranks, have not your serenity — I, especially, who have asked of you assistance, which you have so generously granted.”

“The queen speaks of things and days I had forgotten, and I fancied so had she.”

“The reply is severe, Andree,” said the queen, “yet I have deserved it, and you were right to make it to me; not, it is true, because when I was happy I did not remember your devotion, though no royal, and, perhaps, not even divine power, could adequately reward you. Yon have thought me ungrateful, when, perhaps, I was only powerless.”

“I would have the right to accuse you, madame, if I had ever asked you anything, and if you had opposed my wish and refused my request. How can your majesty, though, expect me to complain when I have never asked for anything?”

“Well, let me tell you, dear Andree, it is just this kind of indifference to the things of the world which terrifies me in you. Yes, to me you seem a superhuman being, a creature of another world, borne hither by the wind, and cast among us, like stone purified by fire, coming none know whence. The consequence is, one becomes terrified at one’s own weakness, when in the face of one who has never failed. They say, though, that supreme indulgence is a quality of supreme perfection. The soul must he washed in the purest stream, and in a season of deep grief, before one does as I do —

seek out that super-human being whose censure we fear, but whose consolation we long for.”

“Alas, madame!” said Andree, “if you ask that of me, I fear you will be disappointed in your expectation.”

“Andree, you forget in what a terrible situation you once consoled me.”

Andree grew pale, visibly. The queen, seeing her tremble and close her eyes, as if she had lost her strength, moved her arms and hands to draw her to the same sofa with herself. Andree, however, resisted, and still stood erect.

“Madame,” said she, “if your majesty would but pity your faithful servant, and spare memories she has thought she had almost forgotten: one who does not ask for consolation, for she thinks God even unable to console certain griefs.”

The queen looked closely and long at Andree.

“Certain sorrows! Then,” said she, “have you any other sorrows than those you have confided to me?”

Andree was silent.

“Let us understand each other,” said the queen. “The time for a full explanation has come. You love M. de Charny?”

The countess became pale as death, but was silent.

“You love M. de Charny?” repeated the queen.

“Yes,” said Andree.

The queen uttered the cry of a wounded lioness. “Oh!” said she, “I thought so; and how long have you loved him?”

“Since the first time I ever saw him.”

The queen drew back in terror before this marble statue, which owned that it had a soul.

“Oh!” said she, “and you are dying.”

“You know that, madame, better than any one else.”

“How so?”

“Because I have seen that you love him.”

“Mean you to say that you love him better than I, because I have not seen anything?”

“Ah!” said Andree, with bitterness, “you saw nothing, because he loved you.”

“Yes, and you mean to say that I see now, because he loves me no more? Is that it?”

Andree remained silent.

"Answer me," said the queen, seizing, not her hand, but her arm; "own that he loves me no longer."

Andree neither spoke nor made the least expression, either with her eyes or with her hands.

"Indeed," said the queen, "this is death. Kill me, though, at once, by saying that he does not love me. Now he loves me not."

"The love or indifference of M. de Charny are his secrets. It is not for me to unveil them."

"His secrets! they are not his alone; for I presume he has made you his confidant."

"The Count de Charny never whispered a word, either of his love or indifference to me."

"Not even this morning?"

"I did not see M. de Charny this morning."

The queen looked at the countess with a penetrating glance, as if she would seek the very inmost part of her heart.

"Do you mean to say that you are ignorant of the count's departure?"

"I do not."

"How could you know, if you have not seen him?"

"He wrote to tell me of it."

"Ah," said the queen, "he wrote."

As Richard III. in an important moment exclaimed, "My kingdom for a horse!" Marie Antoinette was ready to say, "My kingdom for that letter!"

Andree saw the queen's anxiety, but could not resist the temptation of leaving her to revel for a time in anguish and vexation.

"I am sure you have the letter the count wrote at the very moment of his departure now upon your person?"

"Yes, madame, here it is."

Taking the letter, heated by the fever of her heart and embalmed by its perfume, from her bosom, she gave it to the queen.

Marie Antoinette trembled as she took it, clapped it for a moment in her fingers, and seemed to hesitate if she should read or return it. She looked at Andree between her eye-lashes, and at last, casting aside all hesitation, opened and read the following letter:

"MADAME,

"I quit Paris in an hour, in obedience, to the king's order. I cannot tell you whither I go, or why, nor how long I will be absent. These things concern you but little, vet I regret that I am not authorized to tell you.

"I at first intended to present myself to you to inform you, in person, of my departure. I did not dare to do so, however, without your leave."

The queen knew all that she wished to know, and was about to return the letter to Andree, but the latter, as if it were her part to obey and not to command, said: "Read, madame, to the end." The queen resumed her reading:

"I had refused, recently, the mission to Turin, because, fool as I was, I thought something of sympathy yet existed between us and retained me at Paris. I have proof to the contrary, and gladly accepted an occasion to tear myself from one who is indifferent to me.

"If, during my journey, I shall die, as my poor brother Georges did, all steps are taken to inform you first of the blow which has stricken me, and of the liberty restored to you. Then only, madame, you will know the deep admiration which your profound devotion, so badly rewarded by him to whom you have sacrificed youth, beauty, and happiness, has excited in my heart.

"Then, madame, all I ask of God and yourself, is that you will think sometimes of the unfortunate wretch who, too late, discovered the value of the treasure he possessed.

"With all the devotion of my heart,

"OLIVIER DE CHARNY."

The queen gave the letter to Andree, who took it, and suffered it to fall by her side. She uttered a deep and almost inanimate sigh.

"Well, madame," murmured Andree, "are you betrayed? I will not say, have I broken my promise, for I never made one, but the confidence reposed in me —

"Excuse me, Andree, but I have suffered so much."

"You have suffered? dare you, before me, say you have suffered? What, then, shall I say? I will not say I have suffered, for I will not use a word another woman has employed to convey the same idea — no, I must have a new, unheard of word, to express at once the sum of all agony and torture.

You have suffered, madame! — you have not seen the man you loved, indifferent to you, turn on his knees, with his heart in his hand, to another woman; you have not seen your brother, jealous of that other woman, whom he worshipped as a pagan worships his God, fight with the man you loved; you have not heard the man you loved, and who was wounded by your brother, it was thought fatally, in his hour of delirium call for that other woman, whose confidant you were; you have not seen her glide, like a phantom, down a corridor, where you yourself were, to catch the accents of that madness, which proved that if mad love does not survive life, at least it accompanies it to the tomb; you have not seen that man, restored to life by a miracle of nature and science, rise from his bed to cast himself at her feet — at the feet of your rival, madame — of your rival, madame, for in love, magnitude of love is the measure of rank. In your despair, you did not then, at the age of twenty-five, retire into a convent, and seek at the icy foot of the cross to extinguish the love which devoured you. One day, after a year passed in prayer, fasting and vigils, you hoped, if not to have extinguished, at least to have repressed the flame which devoured you; you have not seen your old friend, now your rival, who had known nothing of your feelings, seek out your retreat, to ask, what? — that in the name of old friendship, which suffering had not changed, in the name of her honour as a wife, of the safety of her sovereign's ruined honour, she would become, what? — the wife of the man whom for three years you had adored — become a wife without a husband, a veil between the eye of the public and another's happiness, like a pall to hide the coffin from the public gaze. You succeeded, madame, not from pity, for jealousy is pitiless, but from duty, and knowing this, you accepted the sacrifice. You have not heard the priest ask if you would take one to be your husband who never could be your husband; you have not felt that man press the ring over your finger, and make the symbol of eternal union an empty ornament; you did not leave your husband an hour after your marriage, never to see him again but as the lover of your rival. Madame, the three years that have passed have been three long years of agony."

The queen, with a trembling hand, felt for Andree's.

Andree put her own aside.

"I promised nothing, and have done all I should. You, madame," said the fair arraigner, "promised me two things."

"Andree! Andree!" said the queen.

“You promised me not to see M. de Charny again — a promise the more sacred as I did not ask it of you.

“Then you promised me, and this was in writing, that you would treat me as a sister. A promise the more sacred because it was not solicited.”

“Andree!”

“Must I remind you of the terms of the promise you made me, of the solemn promise, when I sacrificed to you my life, my love? that is to say, my happiness in this world, and my salvation in the next. Yes, my salvation in the next; for who can say if God will forgive my mad desires and wishes? Well, madame, at the moment I was about to sacrifice everything for you, this note was handed to me. I see now every letter glaring before my eyes. It runs thus:

“‘Andree! you have saved me; I owe you my life, my honour. In the name of that honour, which cost you so dearly, I swear you may call me sister. Do so, and I will not blush. I give you this note; it is the token of my gratitude, it is the dower I give you.

“Your heart is the noblest of hearts, and will appreciate the present I give you.

“‘MARIE ANTOINETTE.’“

The queen sighed sadly.

“Yes, I see, because I burnt this note you fancied I had forgotten it? No, madame; you see that I have remembered every word, every letter, though you might not seem to think of it. Ah! I remember more.”

“Pardon, pardon me, Andree; I thought he loved you.”

“You thought, then, it was a love of the human heart; that he loved another, because he loved you less.”

Andree had suffered so much, that she too became cruel.

“You, also, then, have seen that he loved me less?” said the queen, with an exclamation of grief.

Andree did not reply; she only looked at the despairing queen, and a smile played on her lips.

“But what must be done to retain this love, which is my very life? Oh! if you know that, Andree, my friend, my sister, tell me, I beg and conjure you.”

Andree drew back a step.

“Can I, whom he has never loved, madame, know that?”

“Hut he may love you. Some day, on his knees, he may make atonement for the past; ask your pardon for what he has made you suffer. Sufferings, too, are so soon forgotten in the arms of one we love; pardon is so soon granted him who has made us suffer.”

“Well! if such should be the case — if this misfortune befall, and it may be a misfortune to all — do you forget that before I become Charny’s wife I have a terrible secret, an awful confidence, to impart, which perhaps will turn his love into hate? Do you forget I must tell him what I have told you?”

“You will tell him that you were violated by Gilbert? Tell him that you have a child?’’

“Oh! madame, what do you take me to be, to entertain any doubt about the matter?”

The queen breathed again.

“Then,” said she, “you will do nothing to attract M. de Charny to you?”

“I will do no more, madame, in the future, than I have done in the past.”

“You will not tell him, nor let him suspect, that you love him?”

“Not until he tells me that he loves me.”

“And if he come to tell you so, if you tell him that you love him, swear — ”

“Madame .’“ said Andree, interrupting the queen.

“Oh!” said the queen, “Andree, my sister, my friend, you are right, and I am cruel, wrong, exacting. But oh, when all abandon me, friends, power, reputation, I would at least wish love to remain.”

“And now, madame,” said Andree, with the icy coldness which had never abandoned her, except during the few moments when she spoke of the tortures inflicted on her, “have you aught else to ask, any order to give?”

“No, thank you, none. I wished to restore you my friendship, but you reject it. Andree, adieu, and accept at least my gratitude.”

Andree made a gesture with her hand, which seemed to repel this sentiment, as she had repelled the offer of friendship, and left calmly and silently as a ghost.

“Oh! you are right, body of ice, heart of diamond, soul of fire, to accept neither my gratitude nor my friendship, for I feel it, and ask that God pardon me for it, that I hate you as I have hated none; for if he does not love you now, I am sure some, day he will.”

Then, calling Weber, she said: “Tell my ladies that I will go to bed to-night without them, and that, as I am suffering and fatigued, I wish to rest until ten o’clock. The first and only person I will see will he M. Gilbert.”

CHAPTER X.

The French Baker.

WE SHALL NOT attempt to say how this night passed for the two women. At nine o'clock in the morning only, we shall again seek the queen: her eyes are red with tears, her cheeks pale from want of sleep.

During some moments, although, after the orders given, no one dare enter her chamber, she heard around her apartment those comings and goings, those prolonged whisperings and murmurs, which announce that something unusual is passing without. In the midst of all these confused sounds, which seemed to flit along the corridor, she heard the voice of Weber, who ordered silence.

She summoned the faithful valet de chambre.

"What is it then, Weber?" asked the queen. "What is passing in the chateau? and what do these sounds mean?"

"Madame," said Weber, "there is a fight on the part of the Cite."

"A fight!" said the queen; "and to what purpose?"

"No one knows as yet, madame; they merely say that it is an emeute on account of the bread."

At another time he would not have broached the idea to the queen that there were people who were dying of hunger; but since, during the journey to Versailles, she had heard the dauphin ask her for bread, without being able to give him any, she understood now the misery of famine and hunger.

"Poor people!" murmured she, recalling the words which she had heard on the route, and the explanation which Gilbert had given to these words, "they see well now that it is not the fault of either the baker or the bakery, that they have not the bread."

Then aloud,

"And do they not fear that it may become a grave matter?" she asked.

"I cannot tell you, madame. There are no two reports alike," answered Weber.

“Well!” replied the queen, “run as far as the Cite, Weber; it is not far from here; see with your own eyes what is passing, and return to me here.”

Weber left the chateau, gained the passage of the Louvre, darted over the bridge, and guided by the shouts, and following the wave that rolled itself onwards towards the archiepiscopal palace, he arrived on the Place de Notre-Dame.

In proportion as he advanced towards the old part of Paris, the crowd became thicker and the shouts more vigorous.

In the midst of these cries, or rather of these shrieks, voices were heard, such as are only heard in the skies in days of tempest, and on the earth in the days of revolution. Voices cried out, “He is a forestaller! a mort! a mort! a la lanterne! a la lanterne!”

And thousands of voices which did not know what this all meant, and those of many women, boldly repeated, “He is a forestaller! a mort! a mort! a la lanterne! a la lanterne!”

All at once, Weber felt himself struck by one of those shocks which occur in great masses of men, when a stream establishes itself, and he perceived coming up the Rue Chanoinesse a human tide, a living cataract, in the midst of which struggled an unfortunate being, pale, and with torn clothes.

It was after him that all these people hurried: it was against him that they raised their lamentations, their shrieks, their menaces.

One single man defended him against this crowd; a single man only tried to dam this human current.

The man who had undertaken this labour of pity, in spite of ten, twenty, a hundred men, was Gilbert.

It is true that some amongst the crowd, having recognised him, commenced to cry out —

“It is Dr. Gilbert, a patriot, the friend of M. Lafayette and of M. Bailly. Listen to Dr. Gilbert.”

At these cries there was a halt for a moment, something like the calm that spreads itself over the waters betwixt two squalls. Weber profited by them to make his way to the doctor.

He accomplished this with great difficulty. “Dr. Gilbert .’“ said the valet de chambre.

“Ah!” said he, “is it you, Weber?”

And then he made him a sign to come nearer.

"Go," said he in a low tone, "and announce to the queen that I shall come to her perhaps later than she expects me. I am busy saving a man."

"Oh, yes! Yes!" said the unhappy hearer of these last words, "you will save me, will you not, doctor? Tell them I am innocent, tell them that my young wife is enceinte! I swear to you that I did not conceal any bread, doctor."

But as if the plea and the prayer of the wretched one had only added fuel to hatred and anger half smouldered out, the cries redoubled, and the menaces seemed about to be fulfilled.

"My friends!" cried Gilbert, opposing himself to the crowd with an almost superhuman force, "this man is a Frenchman, a citizen like yourselves; we must not, we cannot, destroy a man without hearing him. Conduct him to the court, and afterwards we'll see."

"Yes! yes!" cried some voices, belonging to those who had recognised the doctor.

"M. Gilbert," said the valet de chambre of the queen, "hold your own. I will go and warn the officers of the district; the Court is only a few paces off; in five minutes they shall be here."

And he slipped off and was lost in the crowd, without even waiting for the approbation of Gilbert.

Meanwhile, four or five people had come to assist the doctor, and had formed a rampart with their bodies round the unhappy one threatened with the anger of the crowd.

This rampart, weak as it was, restrained for a few moments the mutineers, who still continued to cry down the voice of Gilbert with their shouts, and those of the good citizens who had rallied round him.

Happily, at the end of five minutes a movement was perceptible in the crowd; a murmur succeeded this; and this murmur was followed by the words:

"The officers of the district! the officers of the district!" Before the officers of the ward-the threats lessened, the crowd opened. The assassins had not, as yet, the word of command.

They conducted the wretched prisoner to the Hotel de Ville. He kept fast hold of the doctor: he held him by the arm, he would not leave him.

Now, what about this man?

He is a poor baker, named Denis Francois, the same whose name we have already pronounced, and who furnishes the rolls to the Assembly.

This morning an old woman went into his shop in the Rue du Marche-Palu at the very moment when he was about to deliver his sixth baking of bread and begin to knead the seventh.

The old woman asked for bread.

Francois said he had none: “But wait until my seventh baking, and you shall be served first.”

“I wish for some directly,” said the woman; “here is the money.”

“But,” said the baker, “it is true, as I say, there is no more.”

“Let me see.”

“Oh,” said the baker, “enter, see for yourself, search everywhere — I should like nothing better.”

The old woman goes in, seeks all over, ferrets about, opens a cupboard, and in this cupboard finds three rolls of about four pounds each, that the boys had put away for themselves.

She took one of them, went out without paying, and when the baker claimed the bread, she roused the people by crying that Francois was a forestaller, and that he had concealed half his baking.

An ancient recruiter of dragoons, called Fleur d’Epine, who was drinking in a public-house opposite, rushed out of the house and took up the cry of the old woman.

At this double cry, the people ran together, shouting, seized him who is here now, repeated the forced cries, rushed to the shop of the baker, forced the guard of four men the police had stationed at his door, as at that of his neighbours, spread themselves about the shop, and, besides the two rasped rolls left and denounced by the old woman, found ten dozen small rolls, retained for the use of the deputies, who were holding a sitting at the archbishop’s palace, that is to say, a hundred steps from there.

The wretched baker is immediately condemned. One voice, a hundred voices, two hundred, a thousand voices cry out, “Down with the forestaller!”

There is quite a crowd, who howl, “a la lanterne! a la lanterne!”

At this moment the doctor, who was returning from making a visit to his son, whom he had again brought back to the Abbe Berardier, at the college of Louis le Grand, is attracted by the noise; he sees a lot of people who demand the death of this man, and he rushes forward to succour him.

There, in a few words, he learned from Francois of what he was accused. He knew the innocence of the baker, and so he had tried to defend him.

Then the crowd had pressed together, and threatened the poor baker and his defender. They anathematized both in the same words, and were ready to kill both with the same blow.

It was at this moment that Weber had arrived at the Place Notre Dame and had recognised Gilbert.

We have seen how, after the departure of Weber, the officers of the ward had arrived, and had conducted the unhappy baker, under their escort, to the Hotel de Ville.

Accused, officers, and the irritated people, all had entered pele-mele into the Hotel de Ville, whose every place was immediately filled by workmen without work, and poor devils dying with hunger, always ready to mix themselves up in any emeute, and to bestow a part of the evils which they were undergoing on any one whom they suspected of being the cause of the public suffering.

Scarcely had the miserable Francois disappeared through the doorway of the Hotel de Ville than the cries were redoubled.

Some individuals, with features quite sinister, threaded the crowd, saying in a whisper:

“He is a forestaller, paid by the court; see, then, why they wish to save him!”

And these words, “He is a forestaller! he is a forestaller!” wound, serpent-like, through the midst of the angry crowd.

Unfortunately, it was still morning; and none of the men who had power over the people, neither Bailly nor Lafayette, were there.

Those who kept repeating in the crowd, “He is a forestaller! he is a forestaller!” knew this well.

At length, when they did not see the accused reappear, the cries changed into one immense hurrah! the threats into one universal howl!

These men of whom we have spoken slid through the door, climbed along the galleries, and penetrated even as far as the room where was the unhappy baker, whom Gilbert was defending to the best he could.

On the other side, the neighbours of Francois, who had joined the tumult, persisted in declaring that he had given, since the commencement of the revolution, continual proofs of zeal; that he had kneaded us many as ten bakings a day: that as long as his brother bakers had wanted flour they had it from his own stock; and that in order to serve the public more promptly, besides his own oven, he had rented that of a pastrycook, whom he had made dry his wood for him.

When these depositions were at an end, it appeared that-instead of punishment the man deserved a reward.

But on the Place, on the galleries, and even in the saloon, they continued to cry, “Down with the forestaller!” and cried aloud for his death.

All at once, a sudden rush was made in the saloon, opening the circle of the National Guard, which environed Francois, and separating him from his protectors. Gilbert, crowded back to the side of the tribunal, saw twenty arms stretched out; seized, drawn, dragged by them, the accused cried for aid, for help — suppliantly stretched out his hands, but uselessly — as uselessly did Gilbert make a desperate effort to rejoin him. The opening by which Francois had disappeared, little by little closed upon him; as a swimmer drawn down by a whirlpool, he had struggled a moment, with clasped hand?, despair in his eyes, his voice gurgling in his throat, till the waves had covered him and the gulf had swallowed him up.

Deserted at this moment, he was lost.

Hurried down the staircase, at each step he had received a wound. When he arrived at the door, all his body was one vast sore.

It is no longer life which he begs — it is death!

In one second, the head of the unhappy Francois was separated from his body and raised on the end of a pike.

On hearing the cries in the street, the rioters in the galleries and in the chambers rush out. They must see the sight to the end.

It is curious sight, a head on the end of a pike! It is already the 21st, and they have never seen one since the 6th of October.

“Oh! Billot! Billot!” murmured Gilbert, as he passed from the hall, “how happy thou art to have left Paris!”

He traversed the Place de Greve, following the border of the Seine, and leaving afar off the bloody head and its howling convoy, by the bridge of Notre Dame, until he had got half across the Quai Pelletier, when he suddenly felt some one touch his arm.

lie raised his head — uttered a cry, and would have stopped and spoken; but the man, whom he had recognised, had slipped a note into his hand, placed a finger on his mouth, and drew off, going to the side of the archbishop’s palace.

Without doubt this person wished to preserve an incognito, but a woman of the Halle, having seen him, clapped her hands and cried:

“Ah! it is Mirabeau!”

“Vive Mirabeau!” cried immediately some five hundred voices; “vive the defender of the people, vive our patriotic orator!”

And the tail of the cortege which followed the head of the unfortunate Francois, hearing this cry, returned, and formed an escort for Mirabeau, who was accompanied by a large crowd, always cheering, until he reached the archbishop’s palace.

It was indeed Mirabeau, who, returning from the sitting in the Assembly, had met Gilbert, and had given him a note which he had just written on the counter of a shop, and which he supposed would make him come to his house.

CHAPTER XI.

The Advantage of Having the Deal.

GILBERT HAD rapidly read the letter put into his hands by Mirabeau, had read it over more slowly a second time, had put it into his waistcoat pocket, and, calling a coach, ordered himself to be driven to the Tuileries.

At the sight of Gilbert, the queen uttered a cry.

A part of the coat and ruffles of the doctor had been torn in the struggle which he had maintained in endeavouring to save Francois, and some drops of blood stained his shirt.

“Madame,” said he, “I crave pardon of your majesty in presenting myself thus before you, but I have already, in spite of myself, made you wait so long, that I was not willing that any further delay should take place.”

“And this unfortunate one, M. Gilbert Y’

“He is dead, madame; he has been assassinated, torn in pieces!”

“Was he in the least guilty?”

“He was innocent, madame.”

“Oh! monsieur, see the fruits of your revolution. After having satiated themselves with the grand seigneurs, all functionaries, the guards, see how they turn against each other; but there are, at any rate, means of executing justice on these assassins.”

“We are silent on that head, madame. But it would be better still to prevent the murders than to punish the murderers.”

“And how, my God, can that be done? The king and I would ask nothing better.”

“Madame, all these evils come from a defiance of the people expressed towards the agents of the powers; put at the head of the government men who have the confidence of the people, and nothing of the kind will happen.”

“Ah! yes! M. de Mirabeau and M. de Lafayette, is it not so?”

“I had hoped that the queen had sent for me to say that she had persuaded the king not to be hostile to the combination which I had proposed to him.”

“Doctor, will you tell me seriously that I might to trust myself to a man who caused the 5th and 6th of October, and make peace with an orator who has publicly insulted me at the tribune?”

“Madame, believe me, it was not M. de Mirabeau who caused the 5th and 6th of October. It was hunger, the high price of grain, and poverty, which commenced the work of the day; but it was an arm mysteriously powerful which did the work of the night. Perhaps, some day, I shall have to defend you from this side, and to struggle with this dark power, which pursues not only you, but all other crowned heads — not only the throne of France, but all the thrones of the earth. As true as I have the honour to lay my life at your majesty’s feet and the king’s, M. de Mirabeau had nothing to do with these terrible days, and he had learnt at the Assembly, even as others did, it might be a little time, perhaps, even before the others, by a note, that the people were marching on Versailles.”

“Then you believe, II. Gilbert, that this man would consent to become attached to us?”

“He is quite so, madame; when Mirabeau separates himself from royalty, he is like a horse that prances, and only requires to feel the bridle and spur of its rider to return into its right road.”

“But being already of the party of the Duke of Orleans, he cannot be a member of every party.”

“That is your mistake, madame.”

“Does not M. de Mirabeau belong to the party of the Duke of Orleans?” repeated the queen.

“He is so little attached to the Duke of Orleans, that when he discovered that that prince had withdrawn to England before the threats of M. de Lafayette, he said, as he crushed the note of M. de Lauzun which announced the duke’s departure, ‘People say that I am one of the party of this man; I would not have him as a lacquey.’“

“That speaks something in his favour,” said the queen, trying to smile; “and if I could believe that, we could really rely upon him.”

“Do you wish that I should repeat what he has said to me?”

“Yes, I shall be glad to hear it.”

“Here it is, then, word for word. I fixed his words in my memory, since I hoped at some time to have the opportunity of repeating them to your majesty: ‘If you have the means of making yourself heard by the king and queen, persuade them that they and we are lost if the royal family does not leave Paris. I am busied with a plan to enable them to get out. At any rate, you may assure them that they may reckon upon me.'“

The queen became thoughtful.

“Then the advice of M. de Mirabeau also is that we should quit Paris?”

“It was his advice at that time.”

“‘And he has changed since?”

“Yes, if I may trust to a note received within the last half hour.”

“May I see this note?”

“It is intended for your majesty.”

And Gilbert drew the paper from his pocket.

“Your majesty will excuse it,” said he, “but it is on common paper, and was written on the counter of a wine store.”

“Ah! that does not matter; paper and desk are quite in harmony with the politics of the present period.”

The queen took the paper and read:

“The events of to-day have changed the face of things.

“We can succeed well this deal.

“The Assembly will be afraid, and will establish martial law.

“M. de Mirabeau could sustain and carry the measure for establishing martial law.

“M. de Mirabeau could advocate the giving more power to the executive.

“M. de Mirabeau could attack M. de Necker upon the revenue and taxes.

“In place of a Necker ministry, it would be easy to make a Mirabeau one, and Lafayette will back Mirabeau.”

“But,” said the queen, “this letter is not signed.”

“Have I not had the honour to inform your majesty that it was Mirabeau himself who placed it in my hand?”

“What do you think of all this?”

“My opinion is that Mirabeau is perfectly right, and that the only thing that can save France is the coalition he proposes.”

“Well, let M. de Mirabeau send through you a list of the ministers he would support, and I will place it before the king.”

“And your majesty will support it?”

“I will. Then, in the meanwhile, and as a first proof of his loyalty, let M. de Mirabeau support the proposition for establishing martial law and giving greater power to the executive.”

“He shall do so. In return, whenever the fall of M. Necker becomes likely, a Mirabeau and Lafayette ministry will not be received unfavourably?” asked Gilbert.

“By me? No! I am anxious to prove that I am quite willing to sacrifice my private feelings for the good of the state. But you must remember I cannot answer for the king.”

“Your majesty will authorize me to tell M. de Mirabeau that this list of proposed ministers is asked for by yourself?”

“I will permit M. Gilbert to use his own discretion as to how far he trusts a man who is our friend to-day and may become our enemy to-morrow.”

“On this point you may confide in me, madame; only, as the circumstances are of great importance, there is no time to lose; allow me then to proceed to the Assembly, and endeavour to see M. de Mirabeau this very day.”

The queen made with her hand a sign of acquiescence, and Gilbert then took leave. A quarter of an hour later he was in the Assembly.

The Assembly was in a very excited state on account of the crime committed at its very gates, and upon a man in some sense a dependent of theirs. The members hurried betwixt the tribune and their seats; betwixt their seats and the corridor. Mirabeau alone remained immovably in his place. He sat with his eyes fixed on the public tribune. His countenance brightened on seeing Gilbert.

Gilbert made a sign, which he answered by nodding his head.

Gilbert then tore a leaf from his pocketbook and wrote:

“Your proposals are received; not by both, but by the one whom both you and I believe has the most power.

“They wish to have a list of the proposed members to-day.

“Cause more power to be given to the executive.”

When he had folded the paper into the form of a letter, and addressed it to M. de Mirabeau, he called an usher and bid him carry it to its destination.

Mirabeau read it with such an expression of perfect indifference, that his nearest neighbour could not have guessed that the letter which he had just received corresponded exactly with his most ardent wishes; and with the same indifference he traced a few lines upon a sheet of paper lying before him, and, carefully folding the paper, gave it to the usher.

“Carry this letter,” said he, “to the gentleman who gave you the one you just now brought me.”

Gilbert eagerly opened the paper.

It contained a few lines which would have altered the future state of France, perhaps, if its propositions had been fairly carried out.

“I will address the Assembly, and assist as far as I can in carrying out your views.

“To-morrow I will send you a memoir on the present crisis, which I hope will be satisfactory.

“I send you the list of the ministers I propose; but I should be quite willing to alter a few names if you should wish any change.”

Gilbert tore a new leaf from his pocket-book, and wrote three or four lines, and gave them to the usher, who was not very far off.

“I am going to our mistress to inform her of what we wish, and to tell her on what conditions you will act; send word to my house, Rue St. Honore, just below L’Assumption, just opposite the cabinet maker’s, Duplay, the result of the sitting as soon as it is terminated.”

Always anxious for excitement, and to struggle with political feelings, the queen awaited Gilbert’s return with some impatience, especially when listening to the narration of Weber.

This consisted of the terrible scene whose end Weber had arrived in time to witness.

Sent for information by the queen, he passed by one end of the bridge of Notre Dame while the other was occupied by the bloody cortege who bore the head of Francois.

Near the bridge a young woman, pale, frightened, with perspiration standing coldly on her brow, and who, in spite of a tendency to embonpoint already visible, was running at a tolerably quick pace towards the Hotel de Ville, stopped suddenly.

This head, whose features she could not as yet distinguish, produced upon her, even at that distance, the effect of the Medusa’s head upon the shield of Minerva.

And as the head approached her, it was easy to see by the expression of her face that she was all but changed into stone.

When the horrible trophy was not more than twenty paces from her, she uttered a cry, stretched out her hands with a desperate movement, and, as if the earth had fallen beneath her, she sank fainting on to the bridge.

It was the wife of Francois, already five months enceinte.

They carried her away without her knowing it. “Oh! my God!” said the queen, “it is a terrible testimony you have sent your servant, to teach her that if she is unhappy, there exist others still more so.”

Just at this moment Gilbert entered. He did not meet a queen, but a woman, that is to say, a wife, a mother. Her state of feeling could not have been better, and Gilbert, with advice at least, came to offer the means to put an end to these murmurs.

And the queen, looking into his eye, where tears were gathering, and on his brow, where perspiration stood in big heavy drops, seized Gilbert by the hands, and took from them the papers which they contained.

But before looking at this paper, important as it was, “Weber,” said she, “if this poor woman is not already dead, I will receive her to-morrow: if she be really enceinte, I will be the godmother of the child.”

“Ah! madame, madame,” cried Gilbert, “why cannot every Frenchman hear your voice broken with emotion, and see the hot tears run down your cheeks, as I do.”

The queen started: they were nearly the same words which in a crisis equally critical Charny had addressed to her.

She cast a hasty glance over the note of Mirabeau, but was too much troubled at this particular time to give an answer.

At seven o’clock in the evening, a valet without livery placed the following letter in Gilbert’s hands:

“The sitting has been a warm one.

“Martial law is carried.

“Bugot and Robespierre wished to have a still higher court at law.

“I have caused it to be decreed that lese-nation (a new word which we have created) shall be judged by the royal privilege of Chatelet.

“I rely with confidence for the safety of France on the royal power, and three quarters of the Assembly will support it.

“To-day is the 21st of October. I hope,. even as it is, that royalty has made some progress since the 6th instant.

“Vale et me ama.”

The note was not signed, but it was in the same handwriting as the one which referred to the ministerial changes, and that of the morning. It was truly the writing of Mirabeau.

Although one can easily understand all that Mirabeau had gained, and all that the royal family had consequently lost, we must inform our readers what the Chatelet really was.

One of its first judgments became the object of one of the most terrible scenes which occurred in the Greve in the year 1790; a scene which, since it is not foreign to our subject, we shall find best to weave into our narrative.

Le Chatelet had been of great historical importance in history, ever since the thirteenth century, and both as a tribunal and court had exercised great influences over the mighty ones during the five centuries succeeding the good King Louis IX. — another king who was a builder, if ever there was one. He built Notre Dame. He founded the hospitals De la Trinite, De Saint Catherine, and De Saint Nicholas, near the Louvre. Ho paved the streets of Paris. He had, in truth, a great bank to run to for all these expenses — the Jews, to wit. In 1189 he was tinctured with the follies of the time.

The folly of the time was the wish to take Jerusalem from the guardianship of the Soldan. He joined Richard Coeur de Lion, and started for the holy places. But before he went, in order that the good Parisians should not lose their time, and never dream in their leisure moments of revolting against him, as at his instigation they had revolted more than once, he left them a plan, and bid them execute it after his departure.

He left them a programme, and bid them build one of those thick walls of the twelfth century, ornamented with towers.

This wall was the third which surrounded Paris.

It contained, within its bounds, a number of small hamlets, which were destined, eventually, to become a portion of the great whole.

These hamlets and villages, however poor and small they might be, possessed each their justice seigneuriale. All these justice seigneuriales contradicting each other, from time to time, caused great confusion in this strange capital. There was, it seems, at the time a certain seigneur of Vincennes, who, having apparently more to complain of these contradictions than any of the others, determined to put an end to them.

This seigneur was Louis IX.

And it is easy to understand that when Louis IX. distributed justice under the oak, now become proverbial, he did it as a seigneur, not as a king.

He ordered, however, as king, that all the causes determined by these petty juges seigneurales should, by appeal, be brought before the Chatelet of Paris. The jurisdiction of the Chatelet, consequently, was all powerful.

The Chatelet was then the supreme court of justice, until the parliament took upon itself to determine even the appeals of the Chatelet. But the

Assembly was about to suspend these parliaments.

"We have buried them in a very lively fashion," said Lameth, in returning from the sitting.

And in place of parliament, upon the suggestion of Mirabeau, they were about to restore the privileges of the Chatelet, and with increased powers.

This was a great triumph for royalty, since the crime of lese nation would be brought before its own court.

The first crime that the Chatelet had to take cognisance of was the one which we are going to narrate.

The very day of the promulgation of the law authorizing the power of the Chatelet, two assassins of the unhappy Francois were hung in the Greve without any other trial than l'accusation and the notoriety of the crime.

Two cases remained for judgment — that of the farmer general, Augeard, and that of the inspector-general of the Suisses, Pierre Victor de Bezenval.

These were two men devoted to the court, and for this reason they hastened to transfer their causes to the Chatelet.

Augeard was accused of having furnished the funds with which the Camarilla of the queen paid, in July, the troops assembled in the Champ-de-Mars. The Chatelet acquitted him without much scandal.

Bezenval's name could not have been more popular — the wrong way. He it was who had commanded the Suisses at Reveillon, the Bastille, and the Champ-de-Mars. The people remembered these three circumstances, and were not indisposed to take their revenge.

Very precise orders were given to the court at Chatelet: under any pretence, the king and queen wished M. de Bezenval to escape condemnation.

He knew there was only this double protection to save him. As he entered the hall he was saluted, almost unanimously, with cries for his death. "Bezenval a la lanterne!" "Bezenval to the gallows!'' was bellowed forth from all sides.

With great trouble silence was obtained.

One of the spectators profited by it. "I demand!" cried he, in a loud strong voice, "that he be out into thirteen pieces, and a piece sent to each canton."

But in spite of the charges brought against him, and the animosity of the audience, Bezenval was acquitted.

Indignant at this double acquittal, one of the spectators wrote four verses on a piece of paper, which he rolled into a ball and sent to the president.

The stanza was signed. This was not all; the president turned in order to seek out the author. The author, seated on the end of a bench, solicited by his gesture the attention of the president. But before him, the countenance of the president fell. He did not dare to have him arrested. The author was Camille Desmoulins.

One of those who went out in the crowd, and who, to judge from his dress, was a simple bourgeois of the Marais, addressed one of his neighbours, and laying his hand on his shoulder, although he seemed to belong to a higher class, said to him: “Well, Doctor Gilbert, what do you think of these two acquittals?”

The one whom he had addressed turned round and looked at the questioner, and seemed as if he wished to recognise the form, the tones of whose voice he had recognised. “Of you, and not of me, my master, must that question be asked — of you who know everything, the present! the past! and the future!”

“Well, then, I think, after these two shameless acquittals, it will be best to pity the poor innocent fellow to be tried next in this court.”

“But why do you think,” asked Gilbert, “that the one who will succeed them will be innocent, and succeeding them, will be punished?”

“For the simple reason,” answered the other with the irony that seemed to be natural to him, “that it is customary, in this world, for the good to suffer for the bad.”

“Adieu, master,” said Gilbert, taking his hand off Cagliostro, for even in these few words the terrible sceptic will have been recognised.

“And why adieu?”

“Because I have something to attend to,” said Gilbert, smiling.

“You are going somewhere?” — ” Yes.”

“To whom? — to Mirabeau, to Lafayette, or to the queen?”

Gilbert stopped, and looked at Cagliostro with an uneasy air.

“Do you know that you frighten me?” said he.

“On the contrary, I should reassure,” observed Cagliostro.

“How so?”

“Am I not one of your friends?” — ”I believe so.”

“Be sure, and if you want any proof — ”

“Well!”

“Come with me, and I will give you information about these negotiations which you believe are so secret; information go secret, that even you, who seem to be conducting them, know nothing about them.”

“Listen!’’ said Gilbert; “perhaps you will summon to you some of those influences with which you are familiar. But never mind, things are so dark that I think I would accept a little light even if it came from Satan himself. I will follow you, or you may conduct me.”

“Oh! be easy; it won’t be far; and it shall be in a place where you are not known; only allow me to hail this coach that is passing; the style of dress in which I have come out prevented my bringing my carriage.” And he made a sign to a coach that was on the other side of the way. The coach drew up, and both got in.

“Where shall I take you, my jolly bourgeois?” asked the cabman of Cagliostro, as if he knew, in spite of his apparently simple dress, that the latter led the other, and moulded him to his will.

“Where thou knowest,” said Balsamo, making a kind of masonic sign.

The coachman looked at Balsamo with astonishment. “Pardon, monseigneur,” said he, “that I did not recognise you at once.”

“This is never my case,” said Cagliostro, in a firm, sonorous voice, “in spite of their number, I never forget any one, from the highest to the lowest, of my subjects.”

The driver shut the door to, mounted his box, and drove at a rapid rate to the corner of the Rue Saint-Claude.

The carriage stopped, and the porter saw the door opened with such rapidity as showed the zeal and respect of the driver.

Cagliostro made a sign to Gilbert to get out first, and then he himself descended from the carriage.

“Have you nothing to say to me?” asked he.

“Yes, monseigneur,” answered the driver; “I was to have made my report this evening, if I were lucky enough to meet you.”

“Speak then.”

“That which I have to say, monseigneur, ought not to be heard or listened to by profane ears.”

“Oh!’’ said Cagliostro, smiling, “he who listens to us is not quite one of the profane ears. “

This was Gilbert, who had moved some distance.

But still he could not prevent himself looking at them, and listening a little.

He saw a smile as the driver spoke flit across the countenance of Balsamo.

He heard the two names, Monsieur and Favras.

The report concluded, Cagliostro drew a double louis from his pocket, and wished to give it to the driver. But the latter shook his head. “Monseigneur knows well,” said he, “that it is forbidden to receive money for our reports.”

“It is not for thy report I wish to pay thee, it is for the drive.”

“For that I will accept it,” said the driver. And, in taking the louis, he added: “Thanks, monseigneur, my day’s work’s done.’“ And, jumping lightly on his box, he drove off at a round trot, and left Gilbert struck with amazement at what he had just heard.

“Come,” said Cagliostro, who was holding the door open for Gilbert, who never dreamt of entering; “will you not come in, my dear doctor?’’

“Yes,” said Gilbert, “excuse me.”

And he crossed the threshold, staggering like a drunken man.

In the antechamber he saw the same German servant whom he had met there sixteen years before. He was standing in the same place, and held in his hands a similar book; only, like himself, the count, and the very chamber itself, he had aged sixteen years.

Fritz guessed from his eye the passage down which his master intended to conduct Gilbert, and rapidly opening two doors, he stopped at the third, to see if Cagliostro had any further orders to give.

This third door was that of the saloon.

Cagliostro made a sign to Gilbert to enter the saloon, and another to Fritz to retire. Only he said, “I am not at home until further orders.” Then, turning towards Gilbert, “Now, sit down; I am quite at your service dear doctor.”

Gilbert sighed, and leant his head on his hand. The memories of the past had mastered, for a time, at least, his present curiosity.

Cagliostro looked at Gilbert as Mephistopheles might have looked at Faust, when that German philosopher imprudently let him go before him.

All at once, he said: “It seems, dear doctor, that you recognise this room again?”

“Yes!” said Gilbert; “and it recalls the many obligations I owe you.”

"Ah! bah! trifles!"

"In truth," said Gilbert, addressing himself as much as Cagliostro, "you are a strange man; and if all-powerful reason would permit me to place any faith in the magic stories of the middle ages, I should be tempted to believe that you were a sorcerer, like Merlin, or a melter of gold, like Nicholas Flamel."

"To the world I am so, but not to you. I have never endeavoured to deceive you by marvels. You know I have always made you understand everything, and if sometimes you have seen Truth at my summons issue forth from her well, better dressed and clad than is her wont, it is, true Sicilian as I am, that I have a taste for tinsel. But let the events of the past sleep quietly in the past, in their tomb; let us speak of the present — let us speak of the future, if you like."

"Count, you have called me back to realities! The future! What if this future were in your hands! What if your eyes could read the indistinct hieroglyphics!"

"Let us see, then, doctor, how we are as regards these ministerial arrangements."

"Ministerial arrangements?"

"Yes; of our Mirabeau and Lafayette ministry."

"That is one of those vague rumours you, like others, have heard repeated, and you wish, by questioning me, to ascertain its truth."

"Doctor, you are the very incarnation of doubt, and if there is anything terrible about you, it is that you doubt, not because you do not believe, but because you do not wish to believe. It will be best to tell you, at first, what you know as well as I do, and afterwards I will tell you what I know better than you."

"I listen, count."

"For the last fifteen days you have spoken to the king of M. de Mirabeau as the only man who can save the monarchy."

"It is my opinion, count; hence you will easily understand the present coalition."

"It is mine too, doctor; hence the coalition you have presented to the king will fail."

"Will fail?"

"The king, sufficiently struck by what you had told him — pardon me, but I am obliged to commence from the beginning, in order to show you that I am not ignorant of any one phase of the negotiation — the king, I say, sufficiently struck by what you had told him, has conversed with the queen concerning the combination, and the queen was less opposed to the project than the king even; she discussed with you the for and against, and finished by authorizing you to speak to M. de Mirabeau. Is not that the truth, doctor?” said Cagliostro, looking Gilbert in the face.

“I must confess that to this time you have kept on the right way.”

“Well, the queen yielded for two reasons; the first is, that she has suffered much, and to propose an intrigue to her is to assist her to forget; the second reason is, that the queen is a woman, and she has been told that M. de Mirabeau is like a lion, a tiger, a bear, and no woman knows how to resist the wish, so flattering to her vanity, to tame a bear, a tiger, a lion. She said, ‘It will be curious to bring to my feet the man who hates me, and cause him to apologise on the very tribune where he insulted me. I shall see him at my knees; this shall be my reward, my vengeance! And if from this genuflexion any good results to France and royalty, so much the better.’ But I tell you that Mirabeau, the man of genius, the man of wit, the great orator, will spend his life and sink into the tomb without ever arriving at what all the world would have him attain to — that is to say, he will never be minister. Ah! mediocrity, after all, dear Gilbert, is a great protection.”

“Then,” asked Gilbert, “the king opposes the arrangement?”

“Peste! he takes care; he must discuss the matter with the queen, when he has nearly pledged his word. You know, the politics of the king consist in that one word, nearly; he is nearly constitutional, he is nearly a philosopher, he is nearly popular. Go to-morrow to the Assembly, my dear doctor, and you will see what will happen.”

“Can you not tell me beforehand?”

“You shall have the pleasure of being surprised.”

“To-morrow? It is a long time.”

“Then do better. It is five o’clock; in another hour the Jacobin club will open. You know these Jacobins are night-birds: do you belong to the society?”

“No; Camille Desmoulins and Danton made me belong to the Cordeliers.”

“As I said, the Jacobin club will meet in an hour. It is a society well put together, and one in which you will not be out of place — be easy. We will dine together; after dinner we will take a carriage; we will go to the Rue St.

Honore, and then, forewarned twelve hours, you will have time, perhaps, to prepare for the blow."

"Monseigneur, dinner is served," said a valet, opening the two leaves of a door leading into the dining-room, splendidly lit and sumptuously furnished.

"Come," said Cagliostro, taking the arm of Gilbert.

Gilbert went with the enchanter, entertaining some hope that he might gain a little light from the conversation, to guide him through the dark night which seemed now to surround him.

Two hours after, a carriage without liveries and emblazonries stopped before the steps of the Eglise, St. Roch.

Two men dressed in black descended from the vehicle, and passed along the right side of the street, to the little gateway of the convent of the Jacobins.

The two new-comers had only to follow the crowd, for the crowd was great.

"Will you go into the nave, or take a place in the tribunes?" Cagliostro asked Gilbert.

"I believe," said Gilbert, "the nave is devoted solely to the members."

"Without doubt," said Cagliostro, smiling, "but do not I belong to all societies? and since I belong to them, do not my friends too? Here is a ticket for you, if you wish; as for me, I have only to speak one word."

"They will recognise us as strangers, and make us go out," observed Gilbert.

"The society of the Jacobins has been founded three months, there are already sixty thousand members in France, and there will be four hundred thousand before the year is out; moreover, my dear friend," said Cagliostro, smiling, "here is truly the Grand-Orient, the centre of all secret societies, and not with that imbecile Fauchet, as some think; and if you have not the right to enter here as a Jacobin, you have the right to a place as one of the Rose Cross."

"No matter," said Gilbert, "I like the tribunes best."

"To the tribunes, then," said Cagliostro. And he went to the right, up a staircase which conducted to the improvised tribunes.

The tribunes were full, but to the first one he addressed Cagliostro had only to make a sign, and speak one word in a low tone, and two men who were seated before him, as if they had been forewarned of his intended arrival, and were only there to guard the seats of himself and Doctor Gilbert, immediately rose and retired.

The sitting had not as yet commenced. The members of the Assembly were spread confusedly over the nave; some formed themselves into groups, and others promenaded in the narrow space left them by their numerous colleagues, while others sat alone in the shade, leaning against the massive pillars.

A few lights sprinkled here and there lessened the gloom, and lit up the countenances and figures of those who happened to be standing near them.

It was easy to see, in spite of the darkness, that in the midst an aristocratic reunion existed. Embroidered coats, and the naval and military uniforms of officers, mottled the crowd, reflecting the light from their gold and silver lacings.

For the lower class there was a second salle below the first, which opened at a different hour, so that the people and the aristocracy did not elbow each, other. For the instruction of the people they had founded a fraternal society.

As for the Jacobins, they were at this time a military society; aristocratic, intellectual and, above all, literary and artistic.

In reality, men of letters and artists were in a majority.

Gilbert cast a long look at this brilliant assembly, recognising each, and calculating in his mind all their different capacities.

Perhaps this loyal assembly comforted him somewhat.

“In one word,” said he to Cagliostro, “what man do you see among all these men who is really hostile to royalty?”

“Should I examine them with the eyes of all the world, with yours, with those of M. Necker, with those of the Abbe Maury, or with my own?”

“With your own,” said Gilbert. “Is it not fit that they should be examined by the eyes of a sorcerer?”

“Very well, then; there are two who are hostile to royalty.”

“Oh! that’s not many among four hundred men.”

“It is enough, if one of these two men is to be the slayer of Louis XVI. and the other his successor!”

Gilbert started. “Oh!” murmured he, “are there here a future Brutus and a future Caesar?”

“No less, my dear doctor.”

“You will point them out, will you not, count?” said Gilbert, with a smile of doubt upon his brow.

“Oh, unbeliever, whose eyes are covered with scales!” murmured Cagliostro. “I will do more if you wish; I will let you touch them with your finger: with which one will you begin?”

“I think with the destroyer. I have a great regard for chronology. Let us begin with Brutus.”

“Thou knowest,” said Cagliostro, becoming animated, as if he were inspired, “thou knowest that men do not always pursue the same end by the same means. Our Brutus will not resemble in any way the Brutus of old.”

“Only another reason why I should wish to see him.”

“Very well,” said Cagliostro, “look at him!”

And he stretched his arm in the direction of a man who leant against the pulpit, whose head only, just at this moment, stood forth in the light, the rest of the body being in the shade.

This head, pale and livid, seemed like a head nailed in the ancient days of proscription to the tribune.

The eyes alone seemed to sparkle with an expression of hatred almost disdainful, with the expression of a viper that knows its tooth contains a mortal venom. They followed in their numerous evolutions the fiery and wordy Barnave.

Gilbert felt a chill run through his whole body. “Really,” said he, “you have warned me beforehand; there is here neither the head of Brutus nor that of Cromwell.”

“No!” said Cagliostro, “but it is perhaps that of Cassius. You know, my dear fellow, what Caesar said: ‘I do not fear all these fat men, these bon-vivants, who pass their days at the table and their nights in orgies; no! those that I fear are the dreamers, with their thin bodies and pale visages.’“

“He whom you have pointed out certainly fulfils these last conditions.”

“Then do you not know him?” asked Cagliostro.

“Ay!” said Gilbert, looking at him with attention; “I know him, or rather I recognise him as a member of the National Assembly.”

“You are right!”

“For one of the most long-winded orators of the Left.”

“You are right!”

“No one listens when he speaks.”

“You are right!”

"A little lawyer of Arras, called Maximilien de Robespierre."

"Quite right! Now look at this head with attention."

"I do."

"What do you see?"

"Count, I am not a Lavater."

"No, but you may be a disciple."

"I see there is an expression of hatred to genius."

"That is to say, that you too judge him like the rest of the world. Yes, it is true, his voice, feeble and a little sharp; his thin and sad face; the skin of his forehead, which seems drawn tightly over his skull, like yellow and immovable parchment; his glassy eye, which only now and then lets a flash of greenish light escape, and then immediately grows dull; this continual discord of the muscles and the voice; this laborious physiognomy, fatigued through its very immobility; this invariable olive-coloured dress — yes, I can understand that all this ought not to make any very great impression on an Assembly so rich in orators; one which Has the right to be difficult to please, accustomed as it is to the lion-like face of Mirabeau, to the audacity of Barnave, to the sharp repartee of Maury, the warmth of Cazales, and the logic of Sieyes; but we cannot reproach him, as Mirabeau, with immorality; he is an honest man; he will not desert his principles, and if ever he deserts the law, it will be to destroy the old text with the new law."

"But then," asked Gilbert, "what is this Robespierre?"

"Well done, thou aristocrat of the seventeenth century. 'What, then, is this Cromwell?' asked Earl Stafford, whose head the Protector cut off. 'A brewer, I believe.'"

"Would you have me believe that my head runs the same risk as that of Sir Thomas Wentworth?" said Gilbert, forcing a smile, which froze on his lips.

"Who knows?" said Cagliostro.

"Then so much the more reason to take care," observed Gilbert.

"What is Robespierre? Well, perhaps no one in the whole of France knows except myself. I like to know whence come the elected of fate; it assists me to tell where they will go. The Robespierres were Irish; perhaps their ancestors formed part of those Irish colonies which, in the sixteenth century, came to inhabit the seminaries and monasteries of our southern coasts. There they received from our Jesuits the good educations they were accustomed to give to their pupils. From father to son they were notaries.

One branch of the family — that from which this man descends — established himself at Arras, a great centre, as you know, of noblesse and the Church. There were in the town two seigneurs, or rather, two kings; one was the Abbe of Saint Waast, the other was the Bishop of Arras, whose palace threw one half the town into the shade. It was in this town that he whom you see there was born in 1759. What he did as a child, what as a young man, and what he is doing at this moment, I will tell you in two words; what he will do, I have already told you in one word. There were four children in the house; the head of the family lost his wife; he was avocat aux conseils at Arras; he sank into a profound melancholy; he ceased to plead; started for a journey, and never returned. At eleven years old, this one, the eldest, found himself at the head of the family in his turn: — guardian of a brother and two sisters: at his age! strange! strange! The child undertook the task, and became a man at once; in twenty-four hours he became what he still remains — a countenance that seldom smiles, a heart that has never known joy. He was the best pupil of the college. One of the offices of the college of Louis le Grand, in the gift of the Abbe of Saint Waast, was obtained for him from that prelate. He arrived alone at Paris, with a recommendation to a canon of Notre Dame. In the same year the canon died; nearly at the same time, his youngest and best-loved sister died. The shadow of the Jesuits, whom they were about to expel from France, cast itself again upon the walls of Louis le Grand. You know this building, where, even now, your young Sebastian is studying; its courts, dark and melancholy as those of the Bastille, would cloud the happiest countenance — that of young Robespierre was already pale, they made it livid. Other children went out sometimes. For them, the year bad its Sundays and fete-days; for the orphan, without protection, every day was the same. While the others enjoyed the air of their family, he breathed that of solitude, sadness, and melancholy. Hatred and envy grew up in his heart, and took away the flower from his soul. This hatred destroyed the child, and made him a dull young man. Some day, they will not believe in the truth of a portrait of Robespierre at twenty-four, holding a rose in one hand and the other on his breast, with the device, ‘All for my friend!’“

Gilbert sighed sadly when he looked at Robespierre.

“It is true,” continued Cagliostro, “that when he took this device, and had himself painted thus, the girl swore that nothing on earth should separate their destiny; he also swore it, and he was a man to keep an oath. He travelled for three months, and returned to find her married. For the rest, the Abbe de Saint Waast was still his friend; he had given the office in the college of Louis le Grand to his brother, and made Robespierre one of the judges of the criminal courts. A case to be tried — an assassin to punish — came on. Robespierre, too full of remorse to dare to take the life of a man, although guilty, gave in his resignation. He became an avocat, because he wished to live with and maintain his young sister. The brother got on badly at Louis le Grand, but afterwards succeeded better. At last the peasants begged him to plead for them against the Bishop of Arras. The peasants were right: Robespierre was convinced of this by a strict examination of the evidence; pleaded, gained the cause of the peasants, and, still warm with success, was sent to the Assembly. At the National Assembly, Robespierre found himself placed betwixt powerful hatreds and profound contempt — hatred from the clergy for having dared to plead against a bishop; contempt from the nobles, since he had been brought up through charity."

"But tell me," interrupted Gilbert, "what has he done up till to-day?"

"Oh, my God! perhaps nothing to others — enough to me. If it did not coincide with my views, the fact of this man being poor, I would give him a million to-morrow."

"Once again I ask you, what has he done?"

"Do you remember the day when the clergy came to the Assembly to pray the state, kept in suspense by the royal veto, to commence their labours?"

"Yes."

"Then read the speech made by the little lawyer of Arras on that day, and you will see that if there is not a future shadowed forth in this sour vehemence, there is at least eloquence."

"But then?"

"Then? Ah! it is true we must skip from May to October, when, on the 5th, Maillard, the delegate of the women of Paris, came, in the name of his clients, to address the Assembly. Well, all the members of the Assembly remained immovable and silent. This little lawyer not only showed himself more cross and sour, but more audacious than any. All the pretending defenders of the public were silent; he rose twice — the first time in the midst of a tumult, the second time in the midst of silence. He assisted Maillard, who spoke in the name of the famine, and who asked for bread."

"Yes, in effect," said Gilbert, thoughtfully; "but perhaps he will change."

"Oh! my dear doctor, you do not know the Incorruptible, as they called him one day; otherwise, who could buy this little lawyer, who laughs at all the world? This man, who, a little later — listen, Gilbert, well to what I am now saying — will be the terror of the Assembly, is to-day the butt. It is agreed among the Jacobin nobles that M. de Robespierre is the ridiculous man of the Assembly — the one who amuses everybody, and one whom all may jeer. In the eyes of Lameth, of Cazales, of Maury, of Barnave, of Dupont, M. de Robespierre is a ninny. When he speaks, all the world talks; when he raises his voice, all cry out; and when he has pronounced — always in favour of right, and often to defend a principle — a discourse to which no one has listened, the orator fixes his eyes upon some member — no matter which — and asks ironically what impression his speech has made. One only of his colleagues understands him. Guess who that is: Mirabeau. 'This man will go great lengths,' he said to me the day before yesterday, 'because he believes what he says ' — a thing which you know well seems singular to Mirabeau."

"But," said Gilbert, "I have read the speeches of this man, and have found them flat and dull."

"Eh! mon Dieu, I never said he was a Demosthenes or a Cicero, a Mirabeau or a Barnave. No; M. de Robespierre is what one chooses to call him. And then they have treated his speeches at the printer's much in the same way as in the tribune — at the tribune they interrupted him, in the printing — -house they mutilated him. The journalists do not even name M. de Robespierre. No; the journalists do not know his name! They call him M. B — , M. N — or M — . God and myself alone, perhaps, only know what there is in that breast, in that heart. In his melancholy apartments of the triste Marais, in his cold lodging, poor, badly furnished, in the Rue Saintonge, where he lives carefully on his salary as deputy, he is as lonely as he was in the damp courts of Louis le Grand. Until the last year his countenance still looked young. He does not leave the Jacobins, and, from emotion which is invisible to all, he has suffered hemorrhage, which has left him senseless two or three times. You are a great algebraist, Gilbert, but I defy you to calculate the blood which it will cost this noblesse who insult him, these priests who persecute him, this king who ignores him, the blood which Robespierre loses."

"But why does he come to the Jacobin club?"

“It is that, hissed at at the Assembly, he is listened to at the Jacobin. Of the Jacobins Robespierre is the type; society abridges itself in him, and he is the expression of society — nothing more, nothing less; he walks in the same time as society does, without following it, without being in advance. I promised you, did I not, to let you ere a little instrument, which has for its object the taking off a head, perhaps two, in a minute? Well, of all the people here present, the one who will give most employment to this deadly machine is the little lawyer of Arras, M. de Robespierre.”

“In truth,” said Gilbert, “you are somewhat funereal, and if your Caesar does not make up for your Brutus, I am capable of forgetting the cause for which I came here. Pardon, but what about Caesar?”

“Look! you may see him down there. He speaks with a man whom he does not know as yet, but who will exert a great influence over his destiny. This man calls himself Barras; do you recollect this name, and recall it when necessary.”

“I do not know, count, whether you deceive yourself or not,” said Gilbert, “but in any case you have chosen your types well. Your Caesar has a good forehead to carry a crown on, and his eyes, though I cannot exactly catch their expression —

“Yes! because they are cast down. It is those very eyes which point out the future, doctor.”

“And what says he to Barras?”

“He says that if he had defended the Bastille, it would not have been taken.”

“Then he is not a patriot?”

“Men like him do not wish to be anything until they can be it completely.”

“And so you have the pleasantry to think so much of this little sous-lieutenant?”

“Gilbert,” said Cagliostro, as he stretched his hand towards Robespierre, “as surely as one shall reconstruct the scaffold of Charles the First, so surely shall that one” — and he pointed to the sous-lieutenant — ”so surely shall he reconstruct the throne of Charlemagne!”

“Then,” cried Gilbert, discouraged, “our struggle for liberty is useless?”

“And who has told you that the one will not do as much for it with the throne, as the other with the scaffold?”

"He will be, then, a Titus, a Marcus Aurelius — the god of peace, coming to console the world for the age of brass!"

"He will belong to the line of Alexander and Hannibal! Born in the midst of war, he will become great through war and fall by war! I have defied you to calculate how much blood the blood lost by Robespierre will cost the noblesse and the clergy; take the blood which will be lost by priests and nobles, multiply them time after time, and you will not have obtained a knowledge of the river of blood, the lake, the sea of blood, which this man, with his army of five hundred thousand men, and his battles lasting three days, will spill!"

"And what will be the result of all this?"

"That which results from all beginnings, Gilbert; we are charged to bury the old world; our children will see a new world born. This man is the giant who guards the door. Like Louis XIV., like Leo X. and Augustus, he will give his name to the age which he commences!"

"And what is his name?" asked Gilbert, in some measure controlled by the air of conviction evident in Cagliostro.

"He is only called Bonaparte at present," replied the prophet; "but some day he will call himself Napoleon."

Gilbert rested his head on his hand, and sank into a reverie so deep that he did not perceive at once that the seance was opened, and that an orator had mounted the tribune.

An hour passed, and the different noises of the Assembly had not power sufficient to draw Gilbert from his meditation; then he felt a hand, strong and powerful, laid upon his shoulder.

He turned; Cagliostro had disappeared, but in his place he found Mirabeau.

Mirabeau's countenance was filled with anger.

Gilbert looked at him with a questioning eye.

"So!" said Mirabeau.

"What is it?" asked Gilbert.

"It is that we are played with, baffled, betrayed; it is that the court does not wish my services; that it has taken me for a dupe, and you for a fool!"

"I do not understand you, count!"

"You have not heard, then?"

"What?"

"The resolution which has just been taken."

"Where?"

"Here."

"What resolution?"

"Then you have slept, have you?"

"No!" said Gilbert, "I dreamt."

"Well, to-day, in reply to my motion of yesterday, which proposes to invite the ministers to assist at the national deliberation, three friends of the king demanded that no member of the Assembly should be a minister during the session. Then this combination so laboriously constructed passed away before the capricious breath of his majesty Louis XVI. But," continued Mirabeau, in the meanwhile, like Ajax, his finger pointing heavenwards: "but, as sure as my name is Mirabeau, I will repay them; and if their breath can overturn a ministry, I will show them that mine can upset a throne!"

"But," said Gilbert," you will not go less to the Assembly? You will struggle to the end?"

"I will go to the Assembly; I will struggle to the end! I am one of those buried, but beneath ruins .'"

And Mirabeau, half exploding, became more beautiful and terrible from the divine furore which the thunder of his passion had stamped upon his face.

The very next day, indeed, upon the proposition of Lanjuinais, in spite of the efforts of the superhuman genius brought to bear on the question by Mirabeau, the National Assembly adopted the following motion by an immense majority: "That no member of the Assembly could be a minister during the session."

"And I," cried Mirabeau, when the decree was voted, "propose an amendment, which shall alter nothing — here it is: 'All the members of the present Assembly may hold office and become ministers, except M. le Comte de Mirabeau.'"

Deaf to this audacity, although spoken in the midst of universal silence, Mirabeau descended from his desk with that step with which he had marched to M. de Dreux Breze, when he said to him, "We are here by the will of the people, we shall not go out except with a bayonet in our stomach." He left the salle.

The defeat of Mirabeau resembled the triumph of another.

Gilbert had not even come to the Assembly. He had remained at home, and dreamt over the predictions of Cagliostro without believing them; but meanwhile he could not banish them from his mind. The present seemed to him very little when compared with the future!

CHAPTER XII.

Metz and Paris.

AS CAGLIOSTRO had said, as Mirabeau had foretold, it was the king who had caused all Gilbert’s plans to prove abortive. The queen, who in the offers made to Mirabeau had placed more reliance on the curiosity of a woman than the policy of a queen, saw without great regret the fall of the whole constitutional structure. As for the king, it was his policy to wait, to gain time and profit by circumstances. There were also the two intrigues for an escape from Paris and a retreat to some fortress; this was his favourite idea..

These two negotiations we know were those brought about on the one hand by M. de Favras, the agent of Monsieur, and that of Charny, emphatically the man of Louis XVI.

Charny had gone from Paris to Metz in two days. He had found M. de Bouille at Mete, and had given him a letter. This letter, be it remembered, was but a method of putting Charny in communication with M. de Bouille, who, though much discontented with the state of things, acted with great reserve.

Before he gave Charny an answer, Bouille determined, under the pretext that Charny’s powers were not extensive enough, to send to Paris and communicate directly with the king. For this mission he selected his son, Count Louis de Bouille.

Charny would, during these negotiations, remain at Metz. There was nothing to call him to Paris, and his almost exaggerated honour made him feel it obligatory on him to remain at Metz, as it were a hostage.

Count Louis reached Paris about the middle of November. At this time the king was watched by M. de Lafayette, and Count Louis de Bouille was his cousin.

He went to the house of one of his friends, whose patriotic sentiments were well known, and who then travelled in England.

To enter the Tuileries unknown to M. de Lafayette was then, if not impossible, at least very dangerous to the young man.

On the other hand, as Lafayette must necessarily be in total ignorance of the communications of the king to M. de Bouille, nothing was easier than for Count Louis to call on his cousin Lafayette.

Circumstances seemed to contribute to the young officer's wishes.

He had been three days in Paris without coming to any decision, and ever thinking on a way to reach the king, and asking himself if it was not better to call at once on Lafayette, when he received a letter, stating that his presence in Paris was known, and inviting him to the head-quarters of the staff of the guard, at the Hotel de Noailles.

The count went to head-quarters. The general had just gone to the Hotel de Ville, where he had business with Bailly. He, however, saw the general's aide-de-camp, Romoeuf.

Romoeuf had served in the same regiment with the young count, and though one belonged to the aristocracy and the other to the democracy, they were friends. Since then, Romoeuf had gone into one of the regiments disbanded after July 14th, and served only in the National Guard, where he was aide-de-camp of Lafayette. The two young men, though differing in other matters, each bore love and respect to the king. One loved him, however, as a patriot, provided he swore and maintained the constitution; while the other loved him as the aristocrats did, on condition that he would refuse the oath, and appeal, if necessary, to strangers to bring the people to their senses.

Romoeuf was twenty-six, Louis de Bouille twenty-two. They could not therefore talk politics long.

Count Louis, too, did not wish even to be suspected to have any serious idea.

As a great secret, he told Romoeuf that, on a simple leave, he had come to Paris to see a woman he adored.

While he thus confided in the aide-decamp, Lafayette appeared at the threshold of the door, which had remained open; though he perfectly saw the new-comer in the glass placed before him, M. de Bouille went on with his story; only, that in spite of the signs of Romoeuf, which he pretended not to understand, he raised his voice, so that the general did not lose a word of what was said.

The general heard all, precisely as young Bouille had intended he should.

He continued to advance behind the narrator, and put his hand on his shoulder. “Ah, ha! M. de Libertin. This is the reason why you hide yourself from your relations.”

The young general of thirty-two was not a very rigid monitor, for at that time he was much sought after by the women of fashion. Louis was not much afraid of the blowing-up he was to get.

“I did not conceal myself, my dear cousin, for on this very day I intended to have the honour to present myself to the most illustrious of them, and would have done so, had I not been anticipated by this message.”

He showed the letter he had just received.

“Well, then, do you country gentlemen say that the Parisian police is badly organized?” said the general, with an air of satisfaction, proving that on that head his self-esteem was interested.

“We know, general, that we can hide nothing from him who watches over the people’s liberty and the king’s life.”

Lafayette looked aside at his cousin, with an expression at once kind, spiritual, and mixed something with raillery, which we ourselves have seen him use. He knew that the safety of the king was a great matter of interest to this branch of the family, though popular liberty was of little importance in its eyes. Hence he only answered a portion of the last speech.

“And has the Marquis de Bouille, my cousin,” said he, emphatically, using a title he had renounced after the night of the 4th of August, “given his son no commission to his king relating to this safety and protection?”

“He bade me place at his feet the greatest protestations of respect,” said the young man, “if General Lafayette does not think me unworthy of being presented to my king.”

“Present you? and when?”

“As soon as possible, general.”

“Be it so.”

“I believe I have had the honour of telling you or Romoeuf that I am here without a leave.”

“You told Romoeuf; but, as I heard it, it is all the same. Well, good actions should not be retarded. It is eleven; I see the king every day at noon, and the queen also. Eat with me, if you have not breakfasted, and I will take you to the Tuileries.”

“But,” said the young man, looking at his uniform, “am I in costume?”

“In the first place, my child, I will tell you that the great question of etiquette, your nurse, is very sick, if not dead, since you left. When I look, though, your coat is irreproachable and your boots clean. What costume so becomes a gentleman ready to die for his king as his uniform? Come, Romoeuf, see if breakfast is ready. I will immediately after take M. de Bouille to the Tuileries.”

The proposition was too much in accordance with the young man’s wishes for him to make any real objection, so he bowed an assent at once, and thanked his kinsman.

Half an hour afterwards, the sentinels at the gates presented arms to General Lafayette and the young Count de Bouille, without suspecting that they were at once paying military compliments to both revolution and counter revolution.

Every door was opened to Monsieur de Lafayette. The sentinels saluted, the footmen bowed; the king of the king, the maise of the palace, was easily recognised, as Marat said.

Lafayette was first introduced into the rooms of the queen; the king was at his forge.

Three years had passed since M. Louis de Bouille had seen Marie Antoinette.

The queen had reached the age of thirty-four, as Michelet says, a touching age, which Vandyck so loved to paint; the age of a wife, the age of a mother, and, in the case of Marie Antoinette especially, the age of a queen.

During these three years, the queen had suffered much both in body and mind, and also in self-respect. Thirty-four years seemed, therefore, to be written on the cheeks of the poor woman, by those slight, changeable violet lines which speak of eyes full of tears and sleepless nights, which betray some deep sorrow in a woman’s heart, whether she be either woman or queen — sorrow incurable until it be extinguished.

This was the age of Marie Stuart when she was in prison. It was the age of her deepest passion, when Douglas, Mortimer, Norfolk, and Babington became enamoured of her, devoted themselves to, and died for her.

The sight of this royal prisoner, hated, calumniated, maligned — the 5th of October had proved those ligns not vain — made a deep impression on the chivalric heart of young Louis de Bouille.

Women are never mistaken in the influence they produce. It is a portion of the education of kings and queens to remember faces they have seen, and as soon as Marie Antoinette saw M. de Bouille, she recognised him; as soon as she saw him, she knew she saw a friend.

The result was, that even before the count was presented, before he was at the foot of the divan on which the queen lay, and as one speaks to an old friend who has long been absent and who is welcomed back, or to a servant on whose fidelity we may rely, she exclaimed at once, “Ah! M. de Bouille.”

Without paying any attention to Lafayette, she offered her hand to the young man.

This was one of the queen’s mistakes, and she committed many such. M. de Bouille was hers without this favour, and by this favour, granted in the presence of Lafayette, who had never been similarly honoured, she established a sign of demarcation which wounded the man of whom she had most need as a friend. Therefore, with a politeness which he never laid aside, but with some emotion in his voice:

“On my honour, dear cousin,” said Lafayette, “I offered to present you to her majesty, but it seems it had been better if you had presented me.”

The queen was so happy to meet a person in whom she could confide; the woman so proud of the effect she seemed to have produced on the count, that, feeling in her heart one of those rays of youth she had fancied extinguished, and around her those breezes of spring and youth she thought gone for ever, turned towards Lafayette, and, with one of those smiles of Trianon and Versailles, said:

“General, Count Louis is not a severe republican, as you are. He has come from Metz, and not from America; he has not come to Paris to establish a constitution, but to do homage. Do not, therefore, be surprised if I grant him, though a poor and half-dethroned queen, a favour which, to a country gentleman like him, deserves to be called so, while to you — ”

And the queen flirted almost as much as a young girl would, anxious to say, “While to you, Sir Scipio, while to you, Sir Cincinnatus, such things would be ridiculous.”

“Madame,” said Lafayette, “I have ever been kind and respectful to the queen, though she never understood my respect or appreciated my devotion; this is, to me, a great misfortune, but, perhaps, is a greater one for her.” He bowed.

The queen looked at him with her clear blue eye; more than once Lafayette had spoken to her thus, and more than once had she reflected on his words. It was, however, her misfortune to entertain a repulsive and intense dislike to the man. “Come, general,” said she, “be generous; excuse me, pardon me.”

“I pardon you, madame! for what?”

“My enthusiasm for these good De Bouilles, who love me with all their heart, and of whom this young man is an almost electric chain; I saw his father, his uncles, when he appeared and kissed my hand.”

Lafayette bowed again.

“Now,” said the queen, “having pardoned me, let there be peace. Let us shake hands, general, as Englishmen and Americans do.”

She gave him her hand; it was open, with the palm upwards, en carte. Lafayette touched, with a slow and cold hand, that of the queen, and said, “I regret that you will never remember, madame, that I am a Frenchman. The 6th of October, and 16th of November, however, are not very distant.”

“You are right, general,” said the queen, clasping his hand, “it is I who am ungrateful.” She sank back on the sofa, as if she were overcome by emotion.

“This should not surprise you,” she said; “you know the reproach is often made me.” Then, lifting up her head, she said, ‘‘Well, general, what news from Paris?”

Lafayette had a petty vengeance to appease, and took the present opportunity to do so.

“Ah, madame,” said he, “how sorry I am that you were not yesterday at the Assembly; you would have witnessed a touching scene, which certainly would have moved your heart: an old man came to thank the Assembly and the king, for the Assembly, you know, is powerless without the king, for the happiness he owed to it.”

“An old man!” said the queen.

“Yes, madame; and what an old man! He is one of the deans of humanity, an old peasant, subject to the capital jurisdiction of his lord — a hundred and twenty years old. He was brought from the Jura to the bar of the Assembly by five generations of descendants, to thank them for the decree of August the 4th. Can you fancy how a man looked, who was for fifty years a serf under Louis XIV., and for seventy years since?”

“And what did the Assembly do for this man?”

"It rose with one accord, and made him sit down and cover himself."

"Ah!" said the queen, with the tone peculiar to herself, "it must have been very touching; I am sorry I was not there; you, however, better than any one else, know that we cannot always be where we wish to be."

The general, by his motions, signified that he had nothing to say. The queen continued, though without the interruption of a moment:

"No, I was here, and received the wife of Francois, whom the National Assembly suffered to be killed at its very door. What was the Assembly doing then, M. de Lafayette?"

"Madame, you speak of one of the misfortunes which are most distressing to the representatives of France. They could not prevent the murder, but, at least, they punished the murderers."

"Yes; but that is a small consolation to the poor woman; she is almost crazy, and it is thought that she will give birth to a stillborn child. If the child live, I have promised to be its godmother, that the people may know that at least I am not insensible to its sorrows. I ask you, dear general, would it be inconvenient to christen the child at Notre Dame?"

"Madame, this is the second time you have alluded to the captivity in which it is pretended to your faithful servants I keep you.' Madame, I say before my cousin, before Paris, before Europe, before the world, I wrote yesterday to M. Monnier, who laments over your captivity in Dauphiny, that you are free. Madame, I have but one request to make, that the king resume his hunting parties, and his excursions, and that you, madame, accompany him."

The queen smiled, like a person unconvinced.

"As for becoming godmother to the poor orphan about to be born in mourning, in promising to do so, the queen has obeyed only the dictates of that excellent heart which makes all who approach love her; when the day appointed for the ceremony shall have come, the queen can select any church she pleases; she has but to order, and she will be obeyed. Now," said the general, "I await her majesty's orders for to-day."

"To-day, my dear general," said the queen, "I have no prayer to address you, but that you invite your cousin, if he remain long in Paris, to one of the circles of the Princess de Lamballe; you know she receives both for herself and me."

"I, madame," said Lafayette, "will take advantage of the invitation, both for him and myself. If your majesty has not seen me there before, I beg you believe it was because you had ceased to manifest any wish to do so."

The queen replied by a bow and a smile. This was a dismissal. Each one understood his own part of the scene. Lafayette took the dismissal to himself — Count Louis took the smile as his.

They both retired backwards, the one having acquired, from this scene, far more bitterness, and the other inspired with far more devotion.

At the door of the queen's room the two visitors found the valet de chambre of the king, Huet.

The king wished him to say to M. de Lafayette, that having begun a curious piece of locksmithing, he wished him to come to the forge.

A forge was the first thing Louis XVI. asked after, on his arrival at the Tuileries; and when he learned that this necessity had been forgotten by Catherine de Medici and Philibert de Lorraine, he selected, on the second story, just above his bedroom, a great garret with two stairways, one in his room and the other in the corridor, as his locksmith shop.

Amid all the troubles that had assailed him, during the five weeks he had been at the Tuileries, Louis XVI. had not forgotten his forge. His forge had been his fixed idea, and he had himself taken charge of the arrangement, prescribing a place for the bellows, the hearth, the anvil, the bench, and the vice. The forge being fixed sound, bastards, hooks, pincers of every variety, were soon in their places, and every other imaginable thing which locksmiths use was in reach. Louis XVI. had not been able to resist any longer, and, ever since morning, had been busy at that trade which distracted his attention so completely, and in which, if we believe Master Gamain, he would have been a proficient, had not certain idlers, like Turgot de Calonne and M. Necker, diverted him from his business by talking of the affairs of France, which Gamain might have submitted to, but also of the affairs of Brabant, Austria, England, America and Spain. This is the reason why, being busy with his work, Louis XVI., instead of coming to see Lafayette, had asked the general to come to him.

Perhaps, too, having shown the commandant of the National Guard his weakness as a king, he was not unwilling to exhibit himself in his majesty as a locksmith.

At the door of the forge, the valet bowed and said, as he was ignorant of De Bouille's name, "Whom shall I announce?"

"The General-in-Chief of the National Guard. I will present this gentleman to his majesty."

“The Commander-in-Chief of the National Guard,” said the valet.

The king turned round.

“Ah, ah, is it you, M. de Lafayette? I beg you excuse me for making you come hither, but the locksmith assures you that you are welcome to his forge. A charcoal-burner told Henri IV., my grandfather, that every charcoal-burner is lord of his kiln. I tell you, general, that you are master both of the smith and of the king.” Louis XVI., it will be seen, began the conversation in almost the same manner that Marie Antoinette had.

“Sire,” said Lafayette, “under whatever circumstances I may have the honour to present myself to you, in whatever story, or in whatever costume I find you, to me the king is ever the king, and I who now offer you my homage will ever be your true and devoted servant.”

“I do not doubt it, marquis. Have you, though, changed your aide-de-camp? — for I see that you are not alone. Does this young officer occupy the place of either M. Gouvion or of M. Romoeuf?”

“This young officer, sire, and I ask permission to present him to you, is my cousin, Count Louis de Bouille, captain of Monsieur’s regiment of dragoons.”

“Ah, ah!” said the king, exhibiting a slight emotion; “yes. Count Louis de Bouille, son of the Marquis de Bouille; excuse me for not having recognised you, but I am very shortsighted. Have you been long from Metz?”

“About five days, sire; I am in Paris without any official leave, but by permission of my father, and I came to ask General Lafayette, my kinsman, the honour of being presented to your majesty.”

“M. de la Fayette! you did well. No one was better calculated to present you at any time, and presentation by no one would be more agreeable to me.”

“Your majesty,” said Lafayette, not a little puzzled how to approach a king who had received him with his sleeves turned up, with a file in his hand, and wearing a leathern apron, “has undertaken an important work?”

“Yes, general, I have undertaken the great masterpiece of a locksmith, an entire lock. I tell you what I do, so that if Marat knew I had gone to work and should say that I forged chains for France, you might tell him you know better. You, M. de Bouille, are neither locksmith nor journeyman.”

“No, sire, hut I am an apprentice, and if I could in any way he useful to your majesty —

"Ah! true, my dear cousin, was not the husband of your nurse a locksmith? Your father used to say, that although no admirer of the advice of the author of 'Emile,' if he had to follow it with regard to you, he would make you a locksmith."

"Exactly, sir; and that is why I had the honour to tell his majesty that if he needed an apprentice —

"An apprentice would not be without his use to me, sir," said the king; "what I want, though, is a master."

"What kind of a lock is your majesty making, though?" asked young De Bouille. "Spring, double bolt, catch lock, or what?"

"Cousin," said Lafayette, "I do not know you to be a practical man, but as a man of theory, you seem to me quite en courant du jour — I will not say of the trade, for the king has ennobled it, but of the art."

Louis heard the young gentleman mention the different kind of locks with visible pleasure, and said:

"No, it is simply a secret lock, known as the Benarde lock, with bolts on both sides. I feel, though, that I have over-estimated my power. Ah! had I but Gamain; he used to call himself master over master, master over all."

"Is he dead, then, sire?"

"No," said the king, glancing at the young nobleman, with an expression, which seemed to say. "Do you not understand? — No: he is at Versailles, Rue des Reservoirs, No. 9. The old fellow would not dare to come to see me at the Tuileries."

"How so, sire?" said Lafayette.

"For fear of compromising himself. Just now a King of France is a very dangerous acquaintance, and the evidence is, that all my friends are either at London, Coblentz, or Turin. But, my dear general, if you do not think it inconvenient for him to come with one of his apprentices to give the finishing stroke, I will send for him."

"Sire," said M. de Lafayette, quickly, "your majesty knows perfectly well that you can order what you please, and send for whom you will."

"Yes, provided they submit to be felt and handled by your sentinels as if they were smugglers. Poor Gamain would think himself lost, if his files were considered poignards and his sack a cartouch box."

"I cannot, sire, excuse myself: but I answer to Paris, to France, to Europe, for the king's life, and I cannot take too much precaution to preserve that precious life. As far as the man you speak of is concerned, your majesty may give any orders you please."

"That is well; thank you, M. de Lafayette, but I shall not need him or his apprentice for ten days," added he, looking at M. de Bouille aside. "I will send my valet de chambre, Durey, who is one of his friends, for him."

"When he comes, sire, he will be admitted to his king. His name will be his passport. God protect me, sir, from bearing the reputation of a jailer, of a watch dog, or a turnkey. No king was ever more free than you are now. I have come even to beg your majesty to resume your hunting parties and your excursions."

"My hunting parties! no, thank you. Besides, just now I am thinking of other matters. My excursions, you see, are different. My last one, from Versailles to Paris, has cured me of all desire to wander — at least with so many persons."

The king again glanced at young De Bouille, who by a slight motion of the eyes showed that he understood his words.

"Sire," said young De Bouille, "in two or three days I leave Paris; not, however, for Metz, but for Versailles, where I have an old grand-mother, in the Rue des Reservoirs, whom I must see. Besides, I am authorised by my father to terminate an important family affair, and eight or ten days hence I am to see the person from whom I am to receive orders. I shall not, therefore, see my father until the early part of December, unless the king wishes me at once to go to Metz."

Lafayette smiled at hearing this allusion to his omnipotence.

"Sire, I would long ago have recommended both the Messieurs de Bouille to M. de Portail, had I not the honour of being their relation. The fear that it should be said I used the king's favour for the benefit of my family alone has prevented me."

"The king will permit me to say that my father would regard as an unkindness, as a disgrace, almost any promotion which would deprive him of the means of serving his king."

"Oh! that is well understood, and I will not permit the position of M. de Bouille to be touched, except to make it more consonant with his wishes and with mine. Let M. de Lafayette and myself attend to that, while you attend to pleasure without neglecting business. Go, gentlemen, go."

He dismissed the two nobles with an air of majesty which strangely contrasted with his vulgar dress. Then, when the door was shut, he said:

“Well, I think the young man understood me, and that in eight or ten days, I will find Master Gamain and his apprentice, to aid me in putting on my lock.”

CHAPTER XIII.

Old Acquaintances.

ON THE EVENING of the day when M. Louis de Bouille had the honour to be received by the queen first, and by the king afterwards, between five and six o'clock, there passed on the third and fourth story of an old, small and sombre house, of Rue de la Juiverie, a scene to which we beg our readers to permit us to introduce them all.

The interior of the room is miserable; it is occupied by three persons — a man, a woman, and a child.

The man wears an old uniform of a sergeant of the French Guards, venerated since July 14, when the French Guards joined the people, and exchanged shots with the Germans of M. de Lambesq and the Swiss of M. de Bezenval.

He has in his hand a full pack of cards, from the ace, deux, trois of the same colour, to king. He tries for the hundredth, for the thousandth, and for the ten thousandth time to effect a perfect martingale. A card with as many holes as there are stars lies by him.

The woman wears an old silk dress; misery seems in her case the more terrible, because it appears with the remnants of luxury. Her hair is supported by a copper comb, which once was gilt. Her hands are scrupulously clean, and from that cleanliness have acquired a certain aristocratic air. Her nails were carefully rounded; and her slippers, out of shape and with holes made in them here and there, were once brodes, with gold, were worn over the remnants of dress stockings.

Her face was that of a woman of thirty-four or five years, which if artistically managed according to the fashion of the day, would give the wearer a right to assume any age with lustrum, as the Abbe Celle said, and even two lustra; women ever cling closely to twenty-nine. That face, however, without rouge and Spanish white, deprived of all means of concealing grief and misery, the third and fourth wings of time, seemed four years older than it was in fact.

The child is five years old; his hair is frise an chertibui; his cheeks, are round; he has the devilish eyes of his mother, the gourmande mouth of the father, and the caprices and idleness of both.

He is clad in the remnants of an old mottled velvet habit: and while he eats a piece of bread covered with confits by the grocer at the next corner, tears to pieces the remnant of an old tri-coloured sash fringed with copper, and throws the fragments into an old grey felt hat.

The room is lighted by a candle with a huge wick, to which an empty bottle serves as a candlestick, and which, while it places the man in the light, leaves the rest of the room in total darkness.

If after all this, explained with our usual precision, the reader has learned nothing, listen.

The child speaks first; after having thrown down the last of his bread and butter, and thrown himself down on the bed, which is now reduced to a mere mattress:

“Mamma, I do not want any more bread and preserves, puh!”

“Well, Toussaint, what do you wish?”

“A piece of barley-sugar.”

“Do you hear, Beausire?” said the woman.

“He shall have some to-morrow.”

“I shall have it to-night!” cries the child, with an angry yell which betokens a stormy time.

“Toussaint, my child, you had best be silent, or I will have to settle with you!”

“You touch him, drunkard!” said the mother, “and you will have to settle with me,” and she stretched forth that white hand, which, thanks to the care taken with her nails, might on occasions become a claw.

“Who the devil wishes to touch him? You know very well what I mean, for though one sometimes beats the dresses of Eve, mother, one always respects the jacket of the child; come, kiss your dear Beausire, who in eight days will be rich as a king.”

“When you are rich as a king, my dear fellow, I will kiss you; but — now! no, no!”

“But I tell you, it is certain as if I had a million. Give me an advance for good luck, and then the baker will trust us.”

“Bah! the idea of a man who wants credit for four pounds of bread, talking about millions!”

"I want some barley-sugar," cried the child in a tone becoming more and more menacing.

"Come now, you man of millions, give the child some barley-sugar!"

"Well," said he, "yesterday I gave you my last piece of twenty-four sous."

"Since you have money," said the child, turning to her whom M. Beausire called Oliva, "give me a sou to buy some barley-sugar. "

"Here are two, you bad boy, and take care not to hurt yourself as you go down the steps."

"Thank you, dear mother," said the child, leaping up with joy, and now reaching her his hand.

The woman having looked after the child until the door closed on him, glanced at the father, and said:

"Ah! M. de Beausire! will your intelligence extract us from our miserable condition? Unless it do, I must have recourse to mine."

She pronounced these last words with the finniking air of a woman who looks in the glass and says, Do not be alarmed; with such a face one does not die of hunger.

"You know, dear Nicole, that I am very busy," said M. de Beausire.

"Yes, in shuffling cards and pricking a piece of paste-board."

"But since I have found it?"

"Found what?"

"My martingale!"

"There you begin again! M. de Beausire! I warn you that I shall go among my old acquaintances, and see if I can find no one who has influence, and who will be kind enough to lock you up as a madman at Charenton!"

"But if I tell you, it is infallible!"

"Ah! if M. de Richelieu were not dead!" murmured the woman in a low voice.

"What do you say?"

"If the Cardinal de Rohan were not ruined!"

"What then?"

"One might find resources, and one would not be forced to share the misery of an old rector like this!"

With the gesture of a queen, Mademoiselle Nicole Legay, called Madame Oliva, pointed disdainfully at Beausire.

"But I tell you.," said the man, "to-morrow we shall be rich!"

"Worth millions?"

"Worth millions."

"M. Beausire, show me the first ten louis of your millions, and I will believe the rest!"

"Well, you shall see this evening the ten first louis d'or. That is exactly the sum promised me."

"And you will give them to me, dear De Beausire?" said Nicole, eagerly.

"I will give you five to buy a silk dress for yourself and a velvet jacket for the young one. And with the other five I will win the millions!"

"You are going to play again?"

"Yes. I have found my martingale."

"Yes, like that one with which you lost the sixty thousand livres left of your Portuguese business!"

"Money idly earned never lasts," said Beausire, sententiously. "I always thought that from the manner that money was acquired, it would do us no good."

"Then this comes to you by inheritance? You had an uncle who died in the Indies, I presume, and he has left you these ten louis?"

"These ten louis, Mademoiselle Nicole Legay," said Beausire, with an air of great superiority, "will be gained honestly! do you understand? even honourably! The more so, as it is a cause in which I and all the nobility in France are interested."

"You are then noble, M. Beausire?" said Nicole, mockingly.

"Say De Beausire, if you please, Madame Legay de Beausire," added he; "as the certificate of your child's birth, in the register of the church of St. Paul, which your servant Jean Baptiste Toussaint de Beausire signed when he gave the boy his own name."

"A very pretty present," murmured Nicole.

"And my fortune," added De Beausire, emphatically.

"If you grant him nothing else, the poor child is certain to die in the almshouse or hospital."

"Indeed, Nicole," said the man. "This is insupportable, you are never satisfied."

"Then, do not hear it," said Nicole, letting loose the dyke of her long-repressed wrath. "Eh! good God! who asks you to hear it? Thank God I am not anxious either for myself or for my child, and am ready this very evening to seek my fortune elsewhere.” Nicole took three steps towards the door.

“Beausire advanced to the same door, which he barred with his arms. “But when you are told that this fortune — ”

“Well!” said Nicole.

“Will come this evening. Even if the martingale be lost, which is impossible, after all my calculations, we will only have lost five louis. That is all.”

“There are moments when five louis are a fortune, Mr. Spenthrift. You do not know that you have wasted the whole of our income.”

“That, Nicole, proves my merit. If I did waste, I wasted what I had gained. Besides, there is a god who watches over adroit people.”

“Ah yes! down there, perhaps.”

“Nicole,” said Beausire, seriously, “are you an atheist?”

Nicole shrugged her shoulders.

“Do you belong to the school of Voltaire, which denies a providence?”

“Beausire, you are a fool!”

“There is nothing astonishing in the fact that one sprung, like you, from the people, should have such ideas; but I inform you, that they do not suit my social caste, and my ideas of right and wrong.”

“M. de Beausire, you are insolent.”

“I, do you understand me, madame? have faith, and if any one should say that my son, Jean Baptiste Toussaint de Beausire, who went downstairs with two sous, to buy a piece of barley-sugar, will come up with a purse of gold in his hand, I would say, certainly, if it be the will of God.”

Beausire lifted his eyes piously to heaven.

“Beausire, you are a fool!”

Just then the voice of the young heir was heard on the stairway, shouting lustily, “Papa! mamma!” and the nearer he came, the louder he bellowed.

“What has happened?” said Nicole, as she opened the door anxiously, as even the worst mothers do for their children’s sake. “Come, child, come.”

“Papa! mamma!” said the voice, coming closer and closer, like that of ventriloquist, imitating sounds from the depth of a cave.

“I would not be surprised,” said Beausire, “if the miracle were accomplished, for the child’s voice is so joyous, that he may have found the purse spoken of.”

Just then the child appeared at the top step of the stairway, and rushed into the room, having in one hand a stick of barley-sugar, clasping a bundle of candy to hie breast, and showing in his right hand a louis d’or, which in the dimness of the candle shone like the star Aldebaran.

“My God!” said Nicole, suffering the door to close itself. “What has happened?” She covered the gelatinous face of the young vagabond with such kisses that nothing makes disgusting, for they are a mother’s.

“This is,” said Beausire, adroitly taking possession of the gold louis d’or, “good, and, is worth twenty-four livres.”

He then said to the child, “Tell me, my son, where you found this; for I wish to look for the others.”

“I did not find it, papa,” said the child. “It was given to me.”

“Who gave it to you?” said the mother.

“A gentleman, who came into the grocer’s while I was there,” and as he spoke, the young scamp crushed the barley-sugar in his teeth; “a gentleman—

Beausire echoed the words, “A gentleman?”

“Yes, papa, a gentleman, who came into the grocer’s while I was there, and said, ‘Monsieur, do you not now serve a nobleman named De Beausire?’“

Beausire looked up proudly, and Nicole shrugged her shoulders. “What said the grocer, my son?” asked Beausire.

“He replied: ‘I do not know if he be noble or not, but his name is Beausire.’ ‘Does he not live near here?’ asked the gentleman. ‘Here, in the house next door to the left, on the third story, at the head of the staircase. This is his son.’ ‘Give all sorts of good things to this child,’ said he, ‘I will pay.’ He then said to me, ‘Here, my lad, is a louis, to buy more when they are gone.’ He then put the money in my hand, the grocer gave me this package, and I left very well satisfied. Where is my louis?”

The child, who had not seen the sleight of hand by which Beausire took possession of his louis, began to look around for it everywhere.

“Awkward fellow,” said Beausire, “you have lost it.”

“No, no, no!” said the young one.

The discussion might have been serious, but for an event we are about to relate, and which necessarily terminated it.

While the child, though evidently in doubt himself, was hunting everywhere on the floor for the money, which was snugly ensconced in

Beausire's pocket, while Beausire admired the intelligence of young Toussaint, manifested by his relating the story we just told, while Nicole partook of her husband's admiration of the precocious eloquence, and asked who the bestower of bonbons and giver of gold possibly could be, the door opened, and a voice of exquisite softness exclaimed:

"Bon soir, M. de Beausire, bon soir, Toussaint, bon soir, Mdlle. Nicole."

All turned to the place whence the voice came. At the door, smiling on this family picture, was a man elegantly dressed.

"Ah! the gentleman who gave me the bonbons!" exclaimed Toussaint.

"Count Cagliostro!" said Nicole and Beausire.

"You have a charming child, M. de Beausire, and you should be proud of him."

After these gracious words of the count, there was a moment of silence, during which Cagliostro advanced to the middle of the chamber, and looked around him, without doubt, to form an idea of the moral and pecuniary condition of his old acquaintances.

"Ah! monsieur! what a misfortune, I have lost my louis!" exclaimed Toussaint.

Nicole was about to tell the truth, but she reflected that if she held her tongue, the child might get another louis, which she would inherit.

Nicole was not mistaken.

"You have lost your louis, my poor child?" said Cagliostro; "here are two more; try not to lose them this time."

"Here, mamma," said he, turning to Nicole, "here is one for me, and another for you."

The child divided his treasure with his mother.

Cagliostro had remarked the tenacity with which the false sergeant followed his purse. As he saw it disappear in the depth of his pocket, the lover of Nicole sighed.

"Eh! what, M. de Beausire," said Cagliostro, "always melancholy?"

"Yes, count, and you always a millionaire."

"Eh, my God! You, who are one of the greatest philanthropists I ever knew in all modern times and in antiquity, should be aware of an axiom, honoured in all times, 'Money does not bring happiness.' I have seen you comparatively rich."

"Yes, it is true. I had a hundred thousand francs. But what are a hundred thousand francs to the huge sums you expend?"

“Now tell me,” said Cagliostro, “would you change your position, even though you have not one louis, except that you took from the unfortunate Toussaint?”

“Monsieur!” said the old bailiff.

“Do not let us quarrel, M. de Beausire; we did so once, and you had to look on the other side of the window for your sword. You remember? See what a thing it is to have memory. Well, I ask you now, would you change your position, though you have only the unfortunate louis you took from poor Toussaint,” on this occasion the allegation passed without any recrimination, “for the precarious position from which I have sought to extricate you?”

“Indeed, count, you are right: I would not change. Alas, at that time I was separated from my dear Nicole.”

“And slightly pursued by the police, on account of your Portugal affair, M. de Beausire. It was a bad affair, as far as I can recollect.”

“It is forgotten, count,” said Beausire.

“Ah! so much the better, for it must have made you uneasy. Do not, however, be too confident that such is the case. Rude divers are found in the police, and it matters not how deep the waters of oblivion be, some of them might reach the bottom; a great crime is found as easy as a rich pearl.”

“But, count, for the misery to which we are reduced —

“You would be happy. You only need a thousand louis to be completely happy.”

The eyes of Nicole glittered; those of Beausire seemed a jet of flame.

Beausire said, “With the half we would buy, that is to say, had we twenty-four thousand livres, we would buy a farm, with the other, some little rent, and I would become a labourer.”

“Like Cincinnatus.”

“While Nicole would devote herself entirely to the education of her child.”

“Like Cornelia. Monsieur de Beausire, this would be beautiful; but you do not expect to earn that money in the affair you are at present engaged in.”

Beausire trembled. “What affair?”

“That in which you are to figure as a sergeant of the guards — the affair for which you have a rendezvous to-night under the arches of the Place Royale?”

Beausire became pale as death. “Count,” said he, clasping his hands in a supplicating manner.

“What?” — ”Do not ruin me.”

“Good! you digress already; am I a policeman?”

“Now I told you,” said Nicole, “that you were engaged in some wicked business.”

“Then you too, Mdlle. Legay, know about this business?”

“No, count, only this: whenever he conceals anything from me, the reason is, that it is bad, and I cannot be quiet.”

“Everything has a good and a bad side; good for some, bad for others; any operation cannot be good for all or bad for all. Well, it is important to be on the right side.”

“Well, and it appears that I am not to be on the right side?”

“Not at all, M. de Beausire, not at all; I will add even, that if you engage in it on this occasion, not your honour, but your life will be in danger; besides risking your fortune, you will certainly be hung.”

“Monsieur,” said De Beausire, trying to keep his countenance, but wiping away the sweat on his brow, “noblemen are not hung.”

“That is true; but to obtain the honour of decollation, it will be necessary to prove your pedigree, which probably is so long, that the court would become weary, and order you to be hung. But perhaps you will say, when the cause is good the mode matters little:

‘Tis not the axe that brings disgrace, but crime!’

as a great poet has said.”

Yet more and more terrified, De Beausire said: “Yes; one is not so much devoted to his opinions as to shed one’s life for them.”

“Diable, ‘one can live but once,’ as a great poet said, not so great as the first, however, but who yet had something of reason about him.”

“Count, in the course of the little intercourse I have had with you. I have observed that you have a way of talking which makes a man’s hair stand erect, especially if he be a timid man.”

“Diable, that is not my intention,” said Cagliostro: “besides, you are not a timid man.”

“No,” said Beausire, “not if it be necessary to be otherwise, but under certain circumstances.”

“Yes, I understand: where the galleys for theft are behind a man, and before him a gallows for high treason, lese-nation now, as it used to be called lese-majeste. It would be now lese-nation to carry away the king."

"Monsieur!" said Beausire, with terror.

"Unfortunate man!" said Oliva: "was it on this carrying away that you built all your hopes of gold?"

"And he was not altogether wrong, my dear, except as I had the honour just now to tell you, everything has a good and a bad side. Beausire was stupid enough to kiss the bad faces, to side with the wrong parties; he has but to change, and all will be right."

"Has he time?" — "Certainly."

"Count," cried Beausire, "what must I do?"

"Fancy one thing, my dear sir," said Cagliostro.

"What?"

"Suppose your plot fails; suppose the accomplices of the masked man, the man with the brown cloak, be arrested and condemned to death. Suppose — do not be offended by supposition; after supposition we will ultimately arrive at a fact — suppose yourself one of those accomplices — suppose the rope around your neck, and in reply to your lamentations you were told — for in such a situation a man always laments, more or less, be he ever so brave — "

"Go on, count, go on, for mercy's sake. It seems to me I am already strangled."

"Pardieu, it is not surprising, I suppose, to you to feel the rope around your neck, eh? Well, suppose they were to reply to all your lamentations, my dear M. de Beausire, 'It is your own fault'?"

"How so?" said Beausire.

"'How is this?' the voice will say; 'you might not only have escaped from the unpleasant fix in which you are, but also have gained a thousand louis, with which you could have bought the pretty house in which you were to have lived with Mademoiselle Oliva and little Toussaint, with the income of five hundred livres, derived from the twelve thousand not expended in the purchase of the house, you might live, as you say, like a farmer, wearing slippers in summer and wooden shoes in winter. Instead of this charming picture, however, we have before our eyes the Place de Greve, planted with two or three ugly-looking scaffolds, from the arm of the highest of which you hang. Pah! De Beausire, the prospect is bad.'"

"How, though, could I escape this evil exit? How else could I have gained the thousand louis, and assured the tranquillity of Nicole and Toussaint?"

"You still will ask questions. 'Nothing will be more facile,' the voice will reply. 'You had Count Cagliostro within two feet of you.' 'I know him,' you will say; 'a foreign nobleman living in Paris, and who is wearied to death when news is scarce.' 'That is it; well, you had only to go to him, and say, "Count."'"

"'I did not, though, know where he lived — I did not know that he was in Paris — I did not even know that he was alive.'

"'Then, my dear M. de Beausire,' the voice will answer, 'he came to you for the very purpose, and from that time confess that you had no excuse. Well, you had only to say to him: "Count, I know you are always anxious for news." "I am." "I have something rare: Monsieur, the brother of the king, conspires." — "Bah! yes." — "With the Marquis de Favras." — "Not possible!" — "Yes, I speak advisedly, for I am one of his agents." "Indeed! what is the object of the plot?" "To carry away the king, and carry him to Peronne. Well, count, to amuse you, I will come every day and every hour to inform you of the-state of affairs." Then the count, who is a generous nobleman, would have answered: "M. de Beausire, will you really do this?" "Yes." "Well, as every trouble deserves a salary, if you keep the promise you have made, I have in a certain place twenty-four thousand livres, which will be at your service: I will put them on this risk, that if you inform me of the day when the king is to be taken away by M. de Favras, when you come to tell me, on my honour as a gentleman, the twenty-four thousand livres will be given you, as are these ten louis, not as a loan to he repaid, but as a simple gift."'"

At these words, Cagliostro took the heavy purse from his pocket, and took ten louis, which, to tell the truth, Beausire advanced an open hand to receive.

Cagliostro put aside his hand.

"Excuse me, M. de Beausire, but I suppose we can return to suppositions?"

"Yes; but," said M. de Beausire, whose eyes shone like two pieces of burning coal, "did you not say, count, that from supposition to supposition, we would gradually reach the fact?"

"Have we reached it?"

Beausire hesitated; let us say that it was not poverty, fidelity to a promise, nor conscience, which caused this hesitation. No; he simply was afraid that the count would not keep his word.

"My dear Beausire, I know what is passing in your mind."

"Yes, count, you do; I hesitate to betray a confidence reposed in me."

Looking up to heaven, he shook his head, like a man who says, "Ah, it is very hard!"

"No, that is not it, and you are another proof of the truth of the proverb, 'No one knows himself.'"

"What then is it?" asked Beausire, a little put out by the facility with which the count read every heart.

"You are afraid that after having promised, I will not give you the thousand louis."

"Oh, count!"

"All is natural enough; but give me a security. For though I proposed the matter, I should be safe."

"Security; the count certainly needs none."

"A security, which satisfies me, body for body."

"What security?" asked De Beausire.

"Mademoiselle Nicole Oliva Legay."

"Oh!" said Nicole, "if the count promises, it is enough; it is as certain as if we had it, Beausire."

"See, monsieur, the advantage of fulfilling our promises scrupulously. One day, when Mdlle. Legay was much sought after by the police, I made her an offer, to find a refuge in my house. She hesitated. I promised, and in spite of every temptation I had to undergo, and you, sir, can understand them better than any other, I kept my promise, M. de Beausire. Is not that so, mademoiselle?"

"'Yes, by our little Toussaint, I swear it."

"Do you think, then, Mdlle. Nicole, that I will keep my word to M. de Beausire, to give him a thousand louis, if he will inform me of the day of the king's flight, or De Favras' arrest, without taking into consideration that I now loose the knot being woven around his neck, and you be for ever removed from danger of the cord and gallows. Apropos of that old affair. I do not promise for the future; for one moment let us talk. There are vocations."

"For my part, monsieur," said Nicole. "all is fixed as if the notary had already set his seal on it."

"Well, my dear lady," said Cagliostro, as he arranged on the table the ten louis, which he had not parted with, "infuse your convictions into the heart of M. de Beausire, and all is decided.” He by a gesture bade her talk to Beausire.

The conversation lasted only five minutes, but, it is proper to say, was very animated.

In the interim, Cagliostro looked at the pierced card, and shook his head, as if he recognised an old acquaintance.

“Ah, ah!” said he, “it is the famous martingale of M. Law, which you have discovered again. I have lost a million on it.”

This observation seemed to give a new activity to the conversation between Beausire and Nicole. At last Beausire decided. He advanced to Cagliostro, open-handed, like a man who had just made an indissoluble contract.

The count drew back his hand, and said, “Monsieur, among gentlemen, a word passes. I have given you mine, give me yours.”

“By my faith, sir, it is settled.”

“That is enough, sir,” said Cagliostro.

Taking from his pocket a watch, enriched with diamonds, on which was the portrait of King Frederick of Prussia, he said:

“It wants a quarter of nine, M. de Beausire; at nine exactly, you are expected under the arches of the Place Royale, on the side of Hotel Sully; take these louis, put them in your vest pocket, put on your coat, gird on your sword; you must not be waited for.”

Beausire did not wait to be told twice. He took the money, put it in his pocket, put on his coat, and left.

“Where shall I find you, count?”

“At the cemetery of St. Jean, if you please. When one wishes to talk of such things, without being heard, it must not be among the living.”

“And when?”

“As soon as you be disengaged. The first will wait for the second.”

CHAPTER XIV.

Oedipus and Lot.

IT WANTED BUT a few minutes of midnight, when a man coming from the Rue Royale into that of St. Antoine, followed the latter to the fountain of St. Catherine, and at last reached the gate of the Cemetery St. Jean.

There, as if his eyes had feared to see some spectre start from the ground, he waited, and with the sleeve of his coat, the uniform of a sergeant of the guards, he wiped the heavy drops of sweat from his brow.

Just as the clock struck twelve, something like a shadow appeared to glide amid the ivies, box-trees, and cypresses. This shadow approached the gate, and by the grating of the key in the lock, one might see that the spectre, if such it was, not only had the privilege of leaving the tomb, but, when once out, of leaving the cemetery.

When he heard the key turn, the soldier drew back.

“Why, M. de Beausire,” said the mocking voice of Cagliostro, “do you not know me, or have you forgotten our rendezvous?”

“Ah! is it you?” said Beausire, breathing like a man, the heart of whom is relieved from a heavy burden. “So much the better. These damned streets are so dark and deserted, that one does not know if it be better to travel alone, or to meet anybody.”

“Bah!” said Cagliostro, “for you to fear anything, at any hour, either of the day or night! You cannot make me believe that of a brave man who travels with his sword by his side! There,” said Cagliostro, “follow this little path, and about twenty paces hence we will find a kind of ruined altar, on the steps of which we will be able to talk at ease of our affairs.”

Beausire hurried to obey Cagliostro; but after a moment of hesitation, said:

“Where the devil is the path? I see only briars which wound my elbows, and grass which reaches to my knees.”

“The fact is, the cemetery is in worse order than any I know of, but that is not surprising. You know that none are buried here but criminals executed in the Greve, and nobody takes an interest in those poor devils. Yet, my dear M. de Beausire, we have many illustrious characters here. If it were day, I could show you where the Constable de Montmorency lies. He was executed for having fought a duel; the Chevalier de Rohan for having conspired against the government; the Count de Horn, who was broken on the wheel for having assassinated a Jew; Damiens, who was quartered because he sought to kill Louis XV.; and who knows who else? You are wrong to speak ill of the cemetery of St John. It is not kept well, but is very full. However," said Cagliostro, pausing near a kind of ruin, "here we are!"

Sitting on a broken stone, he pointed out to Beausire a stone which seemed designated by the first to spare Cinna the trouble of removing his seat to the side of that of Augustus.

"Now we are at our ease and able to talk, my dear M. de Beausire," said Cagliostro, "tell me what took place this evening under the arches of the Place Royale; was the meeting interesting?"

"Ma foi," said Beausire, "I own, count, that my head just now is a little bothered, and need I say each of us would gain if you adopted the system of questions and answers?"

"So be it," said Cagliostro; "I am easy, and provided I obtain ray end, do not care what means be adopted. How many were you, under the arches of the Place Royale?"

"Six, with myself."

"Six with yourself, dear M. de Beausire; let me see if they are the men I think. In the first place, yourself?"

Beausire uttered a sigh which indicated that he wished there was u possibility of doubt.

"Then there was your friend Trocarty?"

"Then a royalist, named Marquee, ci-devant sergeant in the Royal French Guards, and now sous-lieutenant of a company of the Centre?"

"Yes, count, Marquee was there."

"And M. de Favras?"

"And M. de Favras."

"Then the masked man?"

"Then the masked man."

"Can you give me any information about this masked man, M. de Beausire?"

"Well," said Beausire, "I think it was Monsieur — "

“Monsieur who?” said Cagliostro, sharply.

“Monsieur — Monsieur, the brother of the king.”

“Ah! dear M. de Beausire, the Marquis de Favras has a deep interest in creating the impression that, in all this affair, he has touched the prince’s head. That may be so; but a man who cannot lie, cannot conspire. But that you and your friend Trocarty, two recruiting officers, used to measure men by the eye, by feet, inches, and lines, is very improbable. Monsieur is five feet three high, the masked man was five feet six.”

“True, count, so I thought: but who was he?”

“Pardieu, my dear M. de Beausire, will I not be prettily engaged in teaching you, when I expected to be taught by you?”

“Then,” said Beausire, who gradually recovered his presence of mind, as he returned, little by little, to reality, “you know who this man is?”

“Parbleu.”

“Is there any indiscretion in asking?”

“His name?”

Beausire nodded that was what he wished.

“Do you know the play of OEdipus?”

“Not well; I have seen the play at the Comedie Francaise, but towards the end of the fourth act I sank to sleep.”

“I will, then, briefly tell you the story:

“I knew OEdipus; it was foretold that he would be the murderer of his father and the husband of his mother. Now, believing Polybius his father, he left him and set out, without assigning any reason, for Phocis. As he set out, I advised him, instead of taking the high road from Dantes to Delphi, to take a mountain path I was acquainted with. He, however, was obstinate, and as I could not tell him why I gave him this advice, all exhortation was vain. From this obstinacy resulted exactly what I expected. At the forks of the road, from Delphi to Thebes, he met a man followed by five slaves. The man was in a chariot, which crowded the whole road; all difficulty would have been obviated had the man in the car consented to have turned a little to the right, and OEdipus to the left; each, however, insisted on the centre of the road. The man in the chariot was choleric, and OEdipus not very patient. The five slaves rushed, one after the other, before their master, and one after the other was slain. OEdipus passed over six dead bodies, one of which was his father.”

“The devil!” said M. de Beausire.

“He then went to Thebes; now, on the road to Thebes was Mount Pincior, and in a yet more narrow road than that in which he had slain his father, a strange animal had a cavern. This animal had the wings of an eagle, the head and heart of a woman, the body and claws of a lion.”

“Oh, oh!” said Beausire, “are there any such monsters, in your opinion?”

“I cannot possibly affirm their existence, since, when I went to Thebes, a thousand years afterwards, and travelled the same road, during the time of Epaminondas, the Sphinx, at the time of OEdipus the Sphinx was alive; one of its passions was to place itself by the roadside, proposing enigmas to the passing travellers, and devouring all who could not answer them. Now, as this lasted for more than three centuries, travellers became more and more rare, and the Sphinx’s teeth rather long. When it saw OEdipus, it placed itself in the centre of the road, and lifted up its paw, to bid the young man stop. ‘Traveller,’ it said, ‘I am the Sphinx.’ ‘Well, what then?’ asked OEdipus. ‘Well, destiny has sent me to earth, to propose an enigma to men — if they do not guess it, they are mine; if they do, I am Death’s, and I must throw myself into the abyss where I have thrown the fragments of the bodies of those I have devoured.’ OEdipus looked over the precipice and saw the white bones. ‘Well,’ said the young man, ‘the enigma.’ ‘It is this: What animal walks on four legs in the morning, on two at noon, and on three at night?’ OEdipus thought for a moment with a smile of disdain, which could not but make the Sphinx uneasy. ‘If I guess it,’ said OEdipus, ‘will you precipitate yourself into the abyss?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Well,’ said OEdipus, ‘that animal is man.’“

“How so? man!” interrupted Beausire, who became interested in the conversation, as if it related to something contemporary.

“Yes, man! who in his childhood, that is to say, in the morning of life, crawls on his feet and hands, who in his prime, that is to say, at the noon of life, walks erect, and in his old age, that is to say, in the evening of life, uses a staff.”

“Ah!” said Beausire, “that is true. Fool that the Sphinx was!”

“Yes, my dear M. de Beausire, so foolish, that it threw itself into the cavern, without using its wings, and broke its head on the rocks. As for OEdipus, he pursued his journey, came to Thebes, found Jocasta a widow, married her, and thus fulfilled the oracle, that he would kill one parent and marry the other.”

"But, count," said De Beausire, "where is the analogy between the story of OEdipus and the mask?"

"Good! you desired to know his name just now?"

"Yes."

"And I told you that I was about to propose an enigma. True, I am of better material than the Sphinx, and will not devour you if you do not answer. Attention, I am about to lift up my hand: 'What part of the court is the grandson of his father, the brother of his mother, and the uncle of his sisters?'"

"Diable!" said Beausire, relapsing into a quandary, great as was that of OEdipus.

"Think, sir: study it out," said Cagliostro.

"Assist me a little, count?"

"Willingly; I asked you if you knew the story of OEdipus."

"You did me that honour."

"Now we will pass to sacred history. You know what is said of Lot — "

"And his daughters?"

"Exactly."

"Parbleu, I know. Wait, though, do you know what was said of Louis XV. and his daughter, Madame Adelaide?"

"You know, my dear sir."

"Then the masked man was Count Louis?"

"Well."

"It is true," murmured Beausire, "the grandson of his father, the brother of his mother, the uncle of his sisters, is Count Louis de Nar."

"Attention," said Cagliostro.

Beausire interrupted his monologue, and listened with all his ears.

"Now we no longer doubt who the conspirators are, either masked or not. Let us proceed to the plot."

Beausire nodded, as if to say that he was ready.

"The object is to convey the king away?"

"That is it exactly."

"To take him to Peronne?"

"To Peronne."

"What at present are the means?"

"Pecuniary?"

"Yes."

“Two millions.”

“Lent them by a Genoese banker. I know him. Have they none other?”

“I do not know.”

“They have money enough, but they need men.”

“M. Lafayette has authorised the raising of a legion, to aid Brabant, which has revolted against the empire.”

“Oh! kind Lafayette, I see your hand clearly there.” Then aloud, “So be it; but not a legion, but an army is needed for such an enterprise.”

“There is an army.”

“Let us see what!’“

“Two hundred horse will be collected at Versailles, and on the appointed day will leave Versailles at eleven p.m. At two o’clock in the morning they will reach Paris in three columns.”

“Good.”

“The first will enter Paris at the gate of Chaillot, the second at the Barriere du Roule, the third at Grenelle. The latter will murder Lafayette; the first M. Necker, and the other Bailly, the Maire of Paris.”

“Good,” said Cagliostro.

“The blow being struck, the guns will be spiked. They will meet at the Champs Elysees, and a march will be made on the Tuileries, which are ours.”

“What, yours! and the National Guard?”

“There the Brabanconne column will act, joined to four hundred Swiss, and three hundred people from the outside of Paris. Thanks to confederates in the palace, they will hurry to the king, and say, ‘Sire, the Faubourg St. Antoine is in a state of insurrection. A carriage is ready harnessed. You must go.’ If the king consent, the thing will be right; if he do not, he will be forcibly seized and taken to St. Denis.”

“Good!”

“There are twenty thousand infantry. They will set out on the appointed day, at eleven at night, with twelve hundred cavalry; the Brabanconne legion, the Swiss, the people from out of Paris, and ten or twenty thousand royalists, will escort the king to Peronne.”

“Better and better; and what will be done at Peronne?”

“At Peronne are expected twenty thousand men from the Flemish border, Picardy, Artois, Champagne, Burgundy, Lorraine, Alsace and Cambresis. They are in treaty for twenty thousand Swiss, twelve thousand Germans, and twelve thousand Sardinians, who, joined to the royal escort, will form an effective force of one hundred and fifty thousand men."

"A nice army."

"With these one hundred and fifty thousand men, it is proposed to march on Paris, to intercept water communication above and below the city, and cut off all supplies. Paris will be starved out, and will capitulate. The National Assembly will be dissolved, and the king restored to the throne of his fathers."

"Amen," said Cagliostro.

Arising, he said: "My dear M. de Beausire, you have a most agreeable knack of conversation; the case with you is like that of all great orators: when you have said all, there is nothing more to be said."

"Yes, count, at the time."

"Then, my dear M. de Beausire, when you need ten other louis, always on this condition, be it understood, come to my house at Bellevue."

"At Bellevue! and shall I ask for Count Cagliostro?"

"Cagliostro? No, they would not know whom you mean; ask for Baron Zanoni. And now," said Cagliostro, "whither, M. de Beausire, do you go?"

"Whither go you, count?"

"In the direction you do not go."

"I go to the Palais Royal, count."

"And I go to the Bastille, M. de Beausire."

CHAPTER XV.

In Which Gamain Shows That He Is Really Master of Masters, Master of All.

THE WISH THE king had expressed to Lafayette in the presence of the Count de Bouille, to have his old master Gamain to assist him in an important piece of locksmithing, will be recollected. He had even added, and we think it not unimportant to give the detail, that an apprentice would not be without use in the work. The number three, in which the gods delight, was not displeasing to Lafayette, and he therefore gave orders to admit Master Gamain and his apprentice freely, and that whenever they came they should be taken to the king.

It will not, therefore, surprise our readers to see M. Gamain, accompanied by an apprentice, in their working dress, present themselves at the gates of the Tuileries. After their admission, to which no objection was made, they went around the royal apartments by the common corridor, and up the stairway to the door of the forge, where they left their names with the valet de chambre.

Their names were Nicholas Claude Gamain and Louis Lecomte.

Though the names were not at all aristocratic, as soon as he heard them Louis XVI. himself went to the door and said: “Come in!”

“Here! here! here!” said Gamain, appearing, not only with the familiarity of a fellow workman, but of a fellow apprentice.

“Ah! Gamain, is it you? I am glad to see you, for I thought that you had forgotten me.”

“And that is the reason why you took an apprentice? You did well; you were right, for I was not here. Unfortunately,” said he, with a wiry expression, “the apprentice is not a master.”

“What else could I do, poor Gamain?” said Louis XVI.; “they told me you wished to have nothing to do with me under any circumstances, for fear of compromising yourself.”

"Ma foi, sir, you might have learned at Versailles that it is not a safe thing to be one of your friends, for I saw, in the little inn of the Pont de Sevres, the heads of two guardsmen, who grinned horribly, dressed by M. Leonard. They were killed because they chanced to be in your antechamber when you received the visits of your Parisian friends."

A cloud passed over the king's face, and the apprentice bowed his head.

"They say, though, that since your return to Paris things are much better, and that you now make the Parisians do all you wish. That is not wonderful, for the Parisians are such fools, and you and the queen have such winning ways about you."

Louis XVI. said nothing, but a faint flush passed over his cheeks.

"Now," said Gamain, "let us look at this famous lock, for I promised my wife to return to-night."

The king gave Gamain a lock three-quarters done.

Gamain pointed out a great many alterations, and the king said:

"But it will take a day's hard work to effect all this, Gamain?"

"Ah, yes, to another, but two hours will be enough for me; only you must not annoy me with questions, and say 'Gamain this, and Gamain that;' leave me alone. The shop seems to have tools enough, and in two hours, yes, two hours, come back, and all will be complete,'' said Gamain, with a smile.

Tins was exactly what the king wished. The solitude of Gamain would enable him to talk alone with Louis.

"If you want anything, Gamain?"

"If I do, I will call the valet de chambre, provided he be ordered to bring me what I wish."

"Volnay," said the king, after examining the alterations Gamain had suggested, "remain here, I pray you; Gamain, my old master, has come to correct a mistake in a lock I began. Give him all he wants, especially two or three bottles of excellent Bordeaux."

"Will your majesty please to remember that I like Burgundy best, sire. Damn Bordeaux, it is like drinking warm water."

"Ah, yes; true. I forgot, we have often trinquered together, my poor Gamain. Burgundy, you understand, Volnay."

"Ah, yes," said Gamain, wetting his lips, "I remember."

"And did it make the water come to your lips?"

“Do not talk to me about water; I do not know of what earthly use it is, except to temper metal with; all who use it for any other purpose divert it from its true destination.”

“Be easy; as long as you are here you will not hear water mentioned, and lest by accident the word escape from our lips, we will leave you; when you have done, send for us. The drawer for which this look is intended — ”

“Ah, that is the kind of work which suits you. Wish you joy.”

“So be it,” said the king.

Bowing familiarly to Gamain, the king left with the apprentice, Louis Lecomte, or Le Comte Louis, whom the reader has had sufficient perspicacity to have recognised as the son of the Marquis de Bouille.

Louis XVI. did not go from the shop by the outer stairway, but by the private one, intended for him alone. This led to his study. The table was covered by a vast map of France, which proved that the king had already studied the shortest and most feasible way to leave his kingdom.

Not until at the foot of the staircase did Louis XVI. appear to recognise the young apprentice, who, with his hat in his hand and his jacket over his arm, followed him. He then looked carefully around the room, and said: “Now, my dear count, that we are alone, let me compliment you on your address, and thank you for your devotion. But we have no time to lose; even the queen is ignorant of your business here; no one has heard us, so tell me quickly what brings you.”

“Did not your majesty do my father the honour to send an officer to his garrison?”

“Yes, the Count de Charny.”

“Yes, sire, that is the name; he had a letter.”

“Which meant nothing in words, and which was but an introduction to a verbal message.”

“This verbal message, sire, he delivered, and that its execution might be certain, at my father’s order, and with the hope of seeing your majesty, I set out for Paris.”

“Then you know all?”

“I know that the king wishes, at a certain given moment, to be able to quit France.”

“And thinks the Marquis de Bouille able to second him in his plan.”

“My father is proud and grateful for the honour you have done him.”

“But to the point, what says he of the plan?”

“That it is hazardous, demands great precaution, but is not impossible.”

“In the first place,” said the king, “that the co-operation of M. Bouille may have such full effect as his loyalty and devotion promise, would it not be better that the governments of several provinces were united to his command at Metz, especially the government of Tranche Comte?”

“So my father thinks, sire, and I am happy that your majesty has yourself first expressed the idea. The marquis feared your majesty would attribute it to personal ambition.”

“Go, go! do I not know your father’s personal abnegation? Come, tell me, did he explain himself to you as to the course to be adopted?”

“This is what my father proposes to your majesty.”

“Speak,” said the king, looking over the map of France, to follow the different routes the young count was about to propose.

“Sire, there are many points to which the king can retire.”

“Certainly, but I prefer Montmedy, which is in the centre of your father’s command. Tell the marquis that my choice is made, and that I prefer Montmedy.”

“Has the king resolved on the attempt, or is it but a project?” the young count dared to ask.

“My dear Louis,” replied Louis XVI., “nothing is as yet determined on. If I see the queen and my children exposed to new dangers, like those of the night of the 5th and 6th of October, I will decide; tell your father, my dear count, when I shall once have made up my mind, it will be irrevocable.”

“Now, sire,” said the young count, “if it were permitted to me to express an opinion in relation to the manner of the voyage, may I mention to your majesty my father’s advice?”

“Go on, go on.”

“He thinks that the dangers would be diminished by dividing them.”

“Explain.”

“Sire, your majesty should start with Madame Elizabeth and Madame Royale, while the queen, with the dauphin — so that — ”

“It is useless, my dear Louis, to discuss this point. In a solemn moment we decided, the queen and I, not to separate. If your father wishes to save us, he must save us all together, or not at all.”

The count bowed.

“Another thing, sire; there are two roads to Montmedy. I must ask your majesty which you will take, in order that it may be examined by a competent engineer.”

“We have a competent engineer — M. de Charny, who is devoted to us. The fewer persons we put in the secret, the better. In the count we have a servant intelligent and tried, and will make use of him. As I chose Montmedy, the two roads are marked out on this map.”

“There are three, sire,” said De Bouille, respectfully.

“I know, that from Paris to Metz, which I left beyond Verdun, to take the Stenop road along the Meuse, from which Montmedy is but three leagues distant.”

“There also is Rheims, l’Isle de Retter and de Stenay,” said the young count, anxious that the king should select that.

“Ah, ah!” said the king, “it seems that is the route you prefer.”

“Sire, it is not my opinion, but my father’s, and is founded on the fact that the country it passes is poor and almost a desert; consequently fewer precautions are required. He adds, that the Royal German, the best regiment in the service, the only one perhaps which has remained completely faithful, is stationed at Stenay, and can be your escort from Isle de Retter. Thus the danger of incurring suspicion by too great a movement of troops would be avoided.”

“Yes,” said the king, “we would have to pass Rheims, where. I was crowned, and where the first comer might recognise me. No, my dear count, on that point I am resolved.”

The king pronounced these words in so firm a voice, that Count Louis did not even dare to make another suggestion.

“Then the king is resolved?”

“On the road from Chalons to Verdun, there are troops in the little cities between Montmedy and Chalons. I do not see any inconvenience,” added the king, “even if the first detachment met me in this last city.”

“Sire, when there it will be time enough to decide how far the regiments can venture. The king is, however, aware that there is not a post-station at Varennes.”

“I am glad, count, to see that you are so well informed; it proves that you have seriously studied our plan. Do not be afraid, though, for we will contrive a way to find horses, both above and below that town — our engineer will decide on the spot.”

“And now, sire, that nearly all is decided, will your majesty permit me to quote in my father’s name a few lines, from an Italian author, which seemed to him so appropriate to the situation in which the king is, that he bade me commit them to memory, that I might repeat them to you?”

“What are they, sir?”

“These — ’Delay is always injurious, and there is no circumstance entirely favourable in any undertaking; he who waits an opportunity perfectly favourable will never undertake anything, or if he does, it will turn out badly.’“

“Yes, sir, the author is Machiavelli. I will pay attention, you may be sure, to the advice of the ambassador of the magnificent republic. But eh! I hear steps on the stairway. It is Gamain. Let us go to meet him, that he may not see that we have not been busied with aught but the drawer.”

As he spoke the king opened the door of the stairway.

It was high time, for with the lock in his hand Gamain stood on the last step.

CHAPTER XVI.

A Providence Watches Over Drunken Men.

ON THAT DAY, about eight o’clock p.m., a man clad as a workman, and keeping his hand carefully on his vest pocket, as if on that night it contained a sum of money larger than workmen usually carry, left the Tuileries by the turning bridge, and inclining to the left, went entirely down one of the long aisles of trees which towards the Seine prolong that portion of the Champs Elysees formerly called the marble post, or the stone post, and now called Cours-la-Reine.

At the first cabaret on the road, the man seemed to undergo a violent mental contest, whence he emerged victorious. The res in lite was whether he would enter the cabaret or not. He passed on.

The temptation was renewed at the second, and at this moment a man who followed him like a shadow, though unseen, might have fancied he was about to yield, so much did he deviate from the straight line and incline towards that temple of Bacchus.

This time, also, temperance triumphed, and it is probable that if a third cabaret had not been met with, the shadow would have had to return, and thus break a vow he seemed to have made. The workman continued his route, not fasting, for he seemed already to have taken a decent quantity of liquor, but yet had sufficient self-control for his legs to bear him in a line sufficiently straight for all ordinary purposes.

Unfortunately, however, there was not only a third, but a fourth, fifth, and twentieth cabaret. The result was that the temptation was too often renewed, and the force of resistance not being in harmony with the power of temptation, he gave way at the third test.

True it is, that by a kind of transaction with himself, the workman, who had so long and so fortunately combated the demon of wine, as he entered the cabaret, stood erect at the counter, and asked for but one chopin.

The demon of wine, with which he had so long contended, seemed to be victoriously represented by the stranger who had followed him in the distance, taking care to remain unseen, but, however, never losing sight of his quarry.

It was, without doubt, to enjoy this particularly agreeable prospect that he sat on the parapet, just opposite the tap where the man drank his chopin, and set out just five minutes after, having drunk his chopin, the man crossed the door to resume his journey.

Who, however, can say when the lips once damped by wine will be dried? and who has not seen, as drunkards always do, that nothing excites the thirst so much as drinking? Scarcely had the ouvrier gone a hundred paces, than he felt such a thirst that he had to stop again, and on this occasion called, not for a chopin, but for a half-bottle.

The shadow had followed him did not seem at all dissatisfied at the delay caused by this quenchless thirst, but stopped at the angle of the wall of the cabaret; and though the man sat down at his ease and drank a whole quart to settle the half-bottle and chopin, the benevolent shadow exhibited no impatience, contented, when he came out, to follow him as he had done before.

About a hundred paces further on he had a new temptation and a ruder test to submit to: the ouvrier made a third halt, and this time, as his thirst continued to increase, he again asked for a bottle.

The argus had again to wait half an hour, a thing he did with the greatest patience.

Certainly, these five minutes, this half hour, successively lost, awakened something of remorse in the heart of the drinker. He took the precaution, before he set out again, to provide himself with an uncorked bottle, as he evidently did not wish to halt, but to continue on his journey drinking.

It was a prudent resolution, and one which did not delay him much, taking into consideration the curves and zig-zags which were the result of every approach of the bottle to his lips.

By an adroitly combined curve, he passed the barrier of Passy without any trouble; vessels carrying liquids, it is well known, not being liable to any octroi out of Paris.

A hundred paces from the barrier our man had occasion to congratulate himself on his ingenious precaution, for from that place cabarets became rarer, until at last there were none.

What was that to our philosopher? Like the sage of old, he carried about with him, not only his fortune, but his joy.

We say his joy, since, after getting half through his bottle, our traveller began to sing, and no one will deny but that song and laughter are the great means by which man exhibits joy.

The shadow appeared fully satisfied with the music, which it seemed to repeat in a low tone, and with an expression of pleasure which showed that it took great interest in it. But, unfortunately, the joy was ephemeral and the song short. The joy lasted just as long as the wine did; and when at last the empty bottle was pressed again and again to no purpose, the song changed into growls, which, becoming more and more deep, ended in imprecations.

These imprecations were addressed to unknown persecutors, of whom, as he staggered, our traveller complained.

“Base people,” said he, “to give poisoned wine to an old friend and to a master-workman! Pah! let him but send to me to fix his locks, and I will tell him: ‘Bon soir, your majesty; let your majesty fix your own locks. Sire, you cannot make a lock as easily as you can a decree.’ Catch me doing any such thing again; I care nothing about your keys, springs, and tumblers, only catch me there again, that is all. The villain! They certainly have poisoned me.”

Having spoken these words, he was overcome by the force of the poison, and fell headlong, three times, on the road, which fortunately was covered with a soft cushion of mud.

Our friend, on the two first occasions, arose without assistance. The operation was difficult, but was accomplished safely. The third time, after desperate efforts, he was forced to confess that the effort was beyond his power, and with a sigh, not unlike a groan, he seemed determined for that night to sleep on our common mother, earth.

At this point of discouragement and weakness, the shadow which had accompanied him from the Place Louis XV. with so much perseverance, and which had, in the distance, witnessed those abortive efforts to rise which we have sought to describe, approached him, went around him, and called a fiacre which chanced to pass.

“My friend,” said he to the driver, “my companion is ill; take these six livres, and put the poor devil inside your carriage, and take him to the inn at the Pont de Sevres. I will ride with you.”

There was nothing strange in one of the two riding with the driver, as both seemed very common men. Therefore, with the touching confidence people of that class have in each other, the driver said, “Six francs, where are they?”

“Here they are, my friend,” said the other, who did not seem in the least annoyed, at the same time giving the coachman a crown.

“All right, sir,” said the Automedon, softened by a sight of the king’s effigy.

“Take up this poor devil, put him inside, shut the doors carefully, and try to make your two nags last until we reach the Pont de Sevres, and we will act then to you as you act to us.”

“Very well,” said the driver, “that is the way to talk. Be easy, I know what is what. Get on the box and keep our peacocks from cutting up capers. Dame! they already smell the stable, and are anxious to get into it.”

Without making any remark, the generous stranger did as he was directed, and the driver, carefully as he could, lifted up the drunken man and placed him between the seats, shut the door, got on the box, whipped up the horses, which at the melancholy gait hack horses acquire so easy passed the little hamlet of Pont de Jour, and in an hour reached the inn of the Pont de Sevres.

In the interior of this inn, after ten minutes devoted to the unpacking of Gamain, whom the reader has doubtless recognised before now, we will find the worthy locksmith, master over masters, seated at the same table with the same armourer we described in the opening of this history.

The host of the cabaret of the Pont de Sevres had gone to bed, and the least ray of light passed through the blinds, when the first knock of the philanthropist who had rescued Gamain sounded on the door.

The blows were so long and frequent that there was no possibility for the inmates of the cabaret, sleepy as they were, to resist so violent an attack.

Sleepy, and slumbering, and growling, the keeper of the house came to open the door himself, and in his own mind determined to give them a pretty scolding for so disturbing him, for, as he said, “the game was not worth the candle.”

It seemed, however, that the game was worth the candle, for at the first word spoken by the man who knocked so irreverently, the innkeeper took off his cap, and bowing in a most reverent, and in his costume most ridiculous manner, introduced Gamain and his escort into the little room where we previously have seen him, sipping his favourite vin de Burgogne.

Both driver and horses had done as well as they could, the one using his whip and the others their legs, which the stranger rewarded with a twenty-four sous piece for drink, in addition to the six livres he had already given.

Then, having seen Gamain firmly deposited in a chair, with his head on a table in front of him, he hastened to make the innkeeper bring two bottles of wine and a pitcher of water, and opened the blinds for the purpose of purifying the mephitic air of the house.

The host, after having himself brought two bottles of wine and a pitcher of water, the first promptly, but the latter after some delay, retired, and left his two guests together.

The stranger, as we have seen, had taken care to renew the air; then, before the window was closed, had placed a fiacon beneath the dilated nostrils of the locksmith, who snored as men do in that state of drunkenness, and who, could they hear themselves, would certainly be cured of their mad love of wine. The sovereign wisdom of the Most High does not, however, permit drunkards to hear themselves.

“The wretch — he has poisoned me — he has poisoned me.”

The armourer was pleased to see that Gamain was still under the influence of the same idea, and placed the flacon again beneath his nostrils, which, restoring some strength to the worthy son of Noah, permitted him to complete the last phrase, by adding to the words he had already pronounced two other words, which were the more horrible, as they signified a total abuse of confidence and want of heart:

“To poison a friend — a friend!”

“Fortunately,” said the armourer, “I was there with the antidote.”

“Yes, indeed,” murmured Gamain.

“But as one dose is not enough for such a person,” continued the stranger, “take another.’

He poured into half a glass of water four or five drops of the fluid in the flacon, which was only a solution of ammonia.

He then placed the glass close to Gamain’s lips.

“Ah!” said he, “this is to be drunken with the mouth; I like it better than with the nose.”

He swallowed the contents of the glass. Scarcely had he done so, however, than he opened his mouth wide, and sneezed violently twice.

“Robber! what have you given me? Puh! Puh!”

“I have given you a liquid which will save your life.”

"Ah!" said he, "if it saves my life, you were right to give it me. But if you call it liquor, you are damnably mistaken."

He sneezed again, opening his mouth and expanding his eyes, like a mute of old Greek tragedy.

The stranger took advantage of this pantomime to shut, not the window, but the blinds.

This was not without advantage, for Gamain began to open his eyes for the second or third time. During this movement, convulsive as it was, Gamain had looked around him, and with that sentiment of profound remembrance which drunkards have of the walls of a room, he recognised those which surrounded him.

In fact, in the many trips he was obliged to make to Paris, it was seldom that Gamain did not stop at the Pont de Sevres. This pause might almost be considered a necessity, the cabaret being half way. This recollection had a great effect. It restored the confidence of the locksmith, by proving to him that he was in the company of friends.

"Ah, ha!" said he, "I am half way, it seems."

"Yes, thanks to me," said the armourer.

"How, thanks to you?" said Gamain, looking from inanimate to living things, "thanks to you? who are you?"

"My dear Gamain, that proves to me that you have a bad memory."

"Wait a bit, wait a bit; it seems to me that I have seen you before. But where was it? That is the thing."

"Where? look around you, and the objects may, perhaps, arouse some recollections. When is another thing. Think, or it may he necessary to administer to you another dose of the antidote, to enable you to tell me."

"No, I thank you, I have had enough of your antidote, and since I am saved a little, I will he content with that. Where did I see you? — where did I see you? Why here."

"All right."

"When did I see you? — wait; on the morning when I came from doing some work in Paris. It really seems I have luck with those enterprises."

"Very well, and now what am I?"

"What are you? — a man who paid for my liquor. Consequently you are a good fellow. Give me your hand."

"With especial pleasure, as between a master locksmith and a master armourer there is but one step."

"Ah! well! There it is. I remember now. Yes, it was on the 6th of October, on the day of the king's return to Paris. We even talked of him on that day."

"And I found your conversation very interesting, Master Gamain; on that account I am anxious to enjoy it again, and since memory has returned to you, if I am not indiscreet, tell me what you were doing, about an hour ago, stretched at your length in the street, within twenty feet of a carriage, which would have cut you in two if I had not passed by. Have you any troubles that you wish thus to commit suicide?"

"I commit suicide? My God! What was I doing there in the middle of the road? Are you sure I was there?"

"Parbleu! look at yourself."

Gamain looked at his coat. "Ah!" said he, "Madame Gamain will scold not a little. She told me not to put on my new coat. "Put on your old jacket, it is good enough for the Tuileries.'"

"How, the Tuileries?" said the stranger; "had you come from the Tuileries when I saw you?"

Gamain scratched his head, as if to rake up his ideas, which were not yet in order.

"Yes, I came from the Tuileries; what of that, though? Everybody knows I was the king's master. All know I served M. Veto."

"How, M. Veto? Whom do you call M. Veto?"

"Ah! good: you know they give that name to the king. Where did you come from, anyhow? From China?"

"Bah! I attend to my business, and do not attend to politics."

"You are very lucky. I do busy myself in politics, or rather I am forced to do so." Gamain looked up to heaven and sighed.

"Bah!" said the stranger. "Have you been called to Paris to do some work for the person of whom you spoke when we first met?"

"Exactly. Only at that time I did not know whither I was going, for my eyes were bandaged; but this time I went with them opened."

"You had no trouble, then, in recognising the Tuileries?"

"The Tuileries!" said Gamain, echoing his words, "who told you I went to the Tuileries?"

"You, just now. How do I know you came from the Tuileries? Why, you told me so yourself."

"True," said Gamain, speaking to himself; "how could he know, unless I told him myself?"

Then, speaking to the stranger, he said:

"Perhaps I was wrong to tell you; but, ma foi, you are not everybody. Well, since I told you so, I will not contradict it; I did not contradict it. I was at the Tuileries."

"And," said the stranger, "you worked with the king, who gave you twenty-five louis."

"Yes; I have twenty-five louis now, in my pocket."

"Have you got them still?"

Gamain put his hand in his pocket, and pulled out a handful of gold, mingled with silver and some copper.

"Wait a bit — five, six, seven — good, and I forgot all this. Twelve, thirteen, fourteen; just twenty-five louis. This is a sum which, as times go, is not found in the road. Twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five. Ah!" continued he, breathing with more liberty; "thank God, all is right! How did you know I had this money?"

"My dear M. Gamain, I have already had the honour to tell you that I found you asleep across the road, about twenty feet from a carriage, which was passing. I took down one of the lanterns of this carriage, and by its light saw two or three louis on the ground. As they must have come from your pocket, I put them back again, and in doing so, felt some twenty more. The coachman then said, shaking his head, 'No, monsieur, I cannot take that man; he is too rich for his dress. Twenty-five louis in a cotton-velvet jacket will make a man smell a gallows a mile off.' 'How, think you he is a robber?' It seems the word struck you. 'Robber! robber! I a robber?' said you. 'Certainly; or how else would you have twenty-five louis in your pocket?' 'I have them, because my pupil, the King of France, has given them to me,' said you. In fact, at these words I fancied that I knew you. I placed the lantern close to your face. 'Ah!' said I, 'all is explained; it is Gamain, the locksmith of Versailles. He has been at work with the king, who has given him twenty-five louis for the trouble. Come, I will answer for him.' As soon as I said I would do so, the driver made no more difficulty. I then placed in your pocket the louis d'or which had escaped, seated you in the carriage, and got on the seat and brought you here, where you have nothing to complain of except the desertion of your apprentice."

"What, I spoke of an apprentice, and of his desertion?" said Gamain, more and more amazed.

"Now, only look! he no longer remembers what he has said."

"I?"

"How, did you not say so, just now? It was the fault of that fellow — I do not just now remember his name."

"Louis Lecomte?"

"That is it. How, did you not just now say it was the fault of that fellow, Louis Lecomte, who promised to return with you to Versailles, and who, instead, merely burned you up with politeness?"

"Well, I might have said all this, but it yet is true."

"Well, since it is true, why should you deny it? Do you know, my fine fellow, that it might be dangerous to talk in this way to another than myself?"

"Yes, but with you," said Gamain, fawning on the count.

"With me? what does this mean?"

"It means to say, with a friend."

"Ah, yes! you show great confidence to a friend. You say, 'it is true,' and then, 'it is not true.' The meaning of it is, that the other day you told me a story."

"What story?"

"The story of the secret door you had been sent to fix at the house of some great lord, even the address of whom you had forgotten."

"Well, you may believe me if you please, but on this time I also had to do with a door."

"At the king's?"

"At the king's; only, instead of the staircase, it was the door of a bureau."

"And you mean to say that the king, who is curious about locksmiths, sent for you to close a door for him. Bah!"

"Yet that is the truth. Poor man! he thought he could do without me, but it was of no use."

"He then sent for you, by some confidential valet? By Huet, Darcy, or Weber?"

"Now you are exactly wrong. To assist him, he had employed a young man who knew less than he did. So that one day that fellow came to Versailles and said: 'Look here, Master Gamain; the king and I wish you to make a look. The damned thing will not turn.' 'What do you wish me to do?' I replied. 'Come and correct it,' said he. Then I said, 'It is not true; you are not sent |by the king, and you wish to get me into some scrape.' He said, ‘Very well, the king has sent you these twenty-five louis to remove all suspicion.’ He gave them to me.”

“Then these are the twenty-five louis he gave you.”

“No, not these; these are others. The first twenty-five were only on account.”

“Peste! Fifty louis for mending a toy? There is something beneath all that, Master Gamain.”

“That is what I say. Besides, you see, the other.”

“What other?”

“Well, he looked to me like a pretender. I should have questioned him, and asked him details about his tour in France, etc.”

“Yet you are not a man to be deceived, when an apprentice offers himself.”

“I do not say he was a deceiver. He managed the file and chisel well enough, and I have seen him cut a hot bar of iron by a single blow, and with a rat-tail file cut a hole, just as if he had a bit and brace. But you see, he was more theoretical than practical. He had no sooner finished his work than he washed his hands, which at once became white; would the hands of a true locksmith, like myself, ever become white?”

Gamain put forth two callous hands, which really did seem likely to defy all the almond paste ever made.

“But,” said the stranger, leading the locksmith back to the matter under consideration, “what did you do when you saw the king?”

“At first it seemed as if we were expected, for we were taken to the forge; there the king gave me a lock begun wrong, and which would not work.” Few locksmiths, you see, are able to make a lock with three beards, and no king can. I looked at it, I saw the joint, and said, ‘Just leave me alone for an hour, and in that time I will fix it.’ Then the king said, ‘Well, Gamain, as you please; you are in your own shop; here are your files, pincers; work, my lad, work; we will go and fix the bureau for which the lock is intended.’ He left with the apprentice.”

“By the great stairway?” asked the count, carelessly.

“No; by the little secret stairway, which opens into the king’s study; when I had finished, I said, ‘The bureau is a humbug, and they are shut up concocting some plot.’ I sought to descend softly; I said to myself, ‘I will open the door of the library, when I will see what they are about.’“

“What were they about?”

"Ah, they probably heard me; you know I am no dancing master; tread lightly as I could, the infernal stairway would creak. They heard me, and came to me, and just as I was about to put my hand on the door, 'crack,' it opened."

"Then you know nothing?"

"Wait a bit. 'Ah, ha, Gamain,' said the king, 'is it you?' 'Yes, I have done.' 'And so too have we,' said he. 'Come, I now intend to give you another job.' He pushed me through the library, but not so quickly that I did not see, on the table, a great map of France, for it had fleurs-de-lis at one of the corners."

"You observed nothing particular on this map of France?"

"Yes, three long rows of pins stuck in, each at some distance from the other, reaching towards the sides of the map. One might have fancied them soldiers advancing by three different routes to the frontier."

"My dear Gamain, your perspicacity is so great that nothing escapes it. And you think, instead of attending to the doors of the drawers, the king and his companion were busied with the map?"

"I am sure of it," said Gamain.

"How so?"

"It is simple enough: the pins had wax heads — some were black, others red. Well, the king held in his hand, though he paid no attention to it, and occasionally picked his teeth with it, a pin with red wax on its head."

"Gamain," said the armourer, "if I ever discover any new system of locksmithing, I will not bring you into my room, nor will I suffer you even to pass through it. If I want you, I will bandage your eyes, as was done on the day you were taken to the great lord's; on that day, though, did you not perceive that the front entrance had ten steps, and that the house was on the Boulevard?"

"Wait a moment," said Gamain, enchanted with the eulogium heaped on him, "you have not come to the end yet. There really was an armoire in question."

"Ah, ha! where?"

"Ah, just guess; inserted in the wall, my friend."

"What wall?"

"The wall of the interior corridor, which leads from the king's bed-chamber to the dauphin's room."

“Do you know that fact is, to me, peculiarly interesting. “Was that armoire open?”

“Not a bit; I looked round on all sides, and saw nothing, and said, ‘Well, where is that armoire?’ The king then looked around, and said, ‘Gamain, I always had confidence in you, and therefore wished no one else to know my secret.’ As he spoke, while the apprentice held the light for us, for this corridor is dark, the king moved a panel of the wood-work, and I saw a round hole about two feet across; as he saw my surprise, he said, ‘See you that hole, my friend? I had it made to hide away money. This young man has assisted me during the three or four days he has been in the castle; now I must put the lock on in such a manner that the panel will resume its place and hide it as it hides the hole. Have you any need of assistance? this young man will assist you, as he assisted me. If not,’ said he, ‘I will employ him elsewhere.’ ‘Ah,’ said I, ‘you know that when I am at work I never want anybody with me. There are four hours’ work here for a competent man, and as I am a master, all will be done in three. Go about your business, young man, and do you go about yours, sire. If you have anything to conceal, come back in three hours, and all will be done.’ The king must have had something for the young man to do, for I never saw him again. After about three hours, the king came back, and said, ‘Eh! Gamain, how do we get on?’ ‘So, so, sire, it is done,’ and I showed him that the panel moved perfectly well — so well that it was a pleasure to hear it. There was not the least noise, and the lock worked like one of Vaucanson’s automata. ‘Come,’ said he, ‘Gamain, help me to count the money I place within there.’ Then I counted one million, and he another, after which there were twenty-five over, and he said to me: ‘There, Gamain, are twenty-five louis.’ As they came very convenient to a poor man, who has five children, and not much out of the way when he had counted a million, I took them. What do you say now?”

The stranger moved his lips. “The fact is, he is mean.”

“Wait, that is not all. I took the twenty-five louis, and put them in my pocket. ‘Thanks, sire,’ said I, ‘but with all this, I have eaten nothing to-day, and am dying of hunger and thirst.’ I had scarcely spoken, when the queen came in by a masked door, so suddenly, that all at once I found her in front of me. She had in her hand a salver, on which was a glass of wine and a biscuit. ‘Gamain,’ said she, ‘you must be hungry and thirsty, take this.” ‘Ah,’ said I to the queen,’ you need not have put yourself out for me, it was not worth while.' Tell me what you think of that. To give a glass of wine to a man who is thirsty, and a biscuit to one who is hungry? What was the queen about? Anybody might know that were I hungry and thirsty, one glass of wine, one biscuit — pah!"

"Then you refused it?"

"It would have been better if I had. No, I drank it. As for the biscuit, I wrapped it up in a handkerchief, and said, 'What is not good for the father, is good for the children;' I then thanked her majesty, and set out for Versailles, swearing they would never catch me at the Tuileries again."

"Why do you say it would have been better for you to have refused the wine?"

"Because they had put poison in it — scarcely had I passed the turning bridge, than I felt thirsty — and so thirsty! It was just where the river is on one side, and the wine-merchants on the other. Then I saw the bad properties of the wine they had given me. The more I drank, the more I wanted to drink, and thus it was till I lost all consciousness. They may rest assured, if ever I am called upon to give testimony against them, I will say they gave me twenty-five louis for working four hours and counting a million, and then, fearing lest I should tell where they hid the money, poisoned me like a dog.*"

* This was really the accusation made to the convention, by this ungrateful wretch, on the occasion of the trial of the queen.

"And I, my dear Gamain," said the armourer, rising, for he now knew what he wished, "I will rely on your evidence, as it was I who gave you the antidote which, thank God, saved your life."

Then Gamain, taking the hands of the stranger between his own, said, "Henceforth we are friends to the death."

Refusing, with almost Spartan sobriety, the glass of wine which had been three or four times offered him by the man to whom he had sworn eternal fidelity, Gamain, on whom the ammonia had produced the double effect of instantaneously sobering him, and of disgusting him for three or four days with wine, resumed the route to Versailles, which he reached at four or five in the morning, with the king's louis and the queen's biscuit in his pocket.

Having remained in the cabaret, the false armourer took his tablets from his pocket — they were inlaid with gold — and wrote: "Behind the alcove of the king, the dark corridor leading to the dauphin's room. Iron armoire.

“To ascertain if Louis Lecomte, a locksmith’s apprentice, be not Count Louis, son of the Marquis de Bouille, who came eleven days ago from Metz.”

CHAPTER XVII.

The Machine of M. Guillotin.

TWO DAYS AFTER, thanks to the strange ramifications Cagliostro possessed in all classes of society, and even in the royal service, he ascertained that Count Louis, son of the Marquis de Bouille, had come on the 15th or 16th of November, had been discovered by his cousin Lafayette on the 18th, and on the same day introduced himself to the king: that he had offered himself to the locksmith as an apprentice on the 22nd, had remained three days with him, and on the fourth day had gone to the Tuileries and been introduced to the king without any difficulty; that he had left the king two hours after Gamain, and having gone to the lodging of his friend, Achille du Chastillon, had immediately changed his dress, and on the same evening returned to Metz.

On the other hand, on the day after the nocturnal conference in the cemetery of Saint Jean between Beausire and Cagliostro, the former hurried out of breath to Bellevue, the house of the banker Zanoni. As he came from the gaming-table at seven in the morning, after losing his last sou, in spite of the certain martingale of Law, Beausire found the house empty, and that Oliva and Toussaint had disappeared.

He then remembered that Cagliostro had refused to leave with him, saying that he had something confidential to say to Oliva. This opened the door to suspicion. Cagliostro had carried Oliva off. Like a good dog, Beausire put his nose close on the track, and went to Bellevue, where he left his name, and was at once admitted to Baron Zanoni, or to Count Cagliostro, as the reader pleases to call him — if not the principal personage, at least the one on whom all the drama hinges.

Being introduced into the saloon with which we are already acquainted, from having seen Doctor Gilbert, Cagliostro and the Marquis de Favras there, Beausire when he saw the count hesitated. The count appeared such a great lord that he dared not even demand his mistress.

But as if he read the heart of hearts of the old soldier, Cagliostro said: “Beausire, I have observed that you have two real passions; gaming and Mademoiselle Oliva.”

“Ah! count, you know what I came for!”

“Yes, to ask Mademoiselle Oliva of me. She is in my house.”

“In your house!”

“Yes, at my house in the Rue St. Claude, where she has her old rooms, and if you be prudent, and I am satisfied with you, and you bring me news which amuses me, some day, M. de Beausire, we will put twenty-five louis in your pocket to enable you to play the gentleman in the Palais Royal, and a good coat on your back to enable you to play the lover in the Rue St. Claude.”

Beausire had a great desire to talk loudly, and to demand Mademoiselle Oliva, but Cagliostro said two words about that unfortunate affair of the Portuguese embassy, which always hung over his head like the sword of Damocles, and Beausire said nothing.

Some doubt having been manifested by him as to whether Mademoiselle Oliva really was at the house in the Rue St. Claude, the count ordered his carriage, and returned with Beausire to the house on the Boulevard, where he introduced him into the sanctum sanctorum, and displacing a picture, showed him, by a skilfully contrived opening, Mademoiselle Oliva dressed like a queen and lolling in a chair, while she read one of the bad books which at the time were so common, and which’, when she was fille de chambre of Madame de Taverney, she was so happy to get hold of. M. Toussaint, her son, was dressed like a prince, with white hat, role Henry IV., with plumes, and sky blue pantaloons, sustained by a tri-coloured sash, fringed with gold and magnificently embroidered.

Beausire felt his paternal and marital heart dilate. He promised all the count wished, and the count permitted him every day, as soon as he had brought him his news, and received his ten louis d’or, to enjoy the luxury of love in Oliva’s arms.

All progressed according to the count’s wishes, and we may say almost according to Beausire’s, when towards the end of the month of December, at a strange hour for that season, that is to say, six o’clock in the morning, Doctor Gilbert, who had already been three hours at work, heard three knocks on his door, and from their peculiar intonation recognized a brother mason. He opened — Count Cagliostro stood on the other side of the door.

Gilbert never met this mysterious man without something of terror. “Ah!” said he to the count, “is it you?” Then, making an effort over himself, and giving him his hand, he said: “You are welcome whenever you come, or for whatever purpose.”

“What brings me, dear Gilbert, is to enable you to be present at a philanthropical experiment, of which I have already spoken to you.”

Gilbert sought to recollect, but in vain, and finally said, “I do not remember.”

“Come though, dear Gilbert; I do not disturb you for nothing. Besides, you will meet many acquaintances of yours. Go with me.”

“Dear count, I will go anywhere that you please to take me. The place and persons are but secondary considerations.”

“Then come, for we have no time to lose.”

Gilbert was dressed, and had only to lay aside his pen, and put on his hat and cloak. A carriage was waiting. They entered it.

The carriage was driven rapidly away, there being not even an order given. The driver evidently knew whither he was going.

When he got out of the carriage, Gilbert saw that he was in the court of a prison, and at once recognised the Bicetre.

It was nearly a quarter after six; the worst hour of the twenty-four, for even the most vigorous constitutions then suffer from cold.

A small misty rain fell diagonal and stained the grey walls. In the middle of the court, five or six carpenters under the direction of a master workman, and a little man clad in black, who seemed to direct everybody, put up a machine of a strange and unknown form.

Gilbert shuddered; he had recognized Doctor Guillotin, whom he had met at Marat’s. The machine was the one, a model of which he had seen in the cellar of the editor of l’Ami du Peuple.

The little man recognised Cagliostro and Gilbert.

“Good baron,” said he, “it is kind in you to come first and to bring the doctor. You remember I invited you at Marat’s to come and see the experiment. I forgot, however, to ask you for your address. You will see something curious — the most philanthropic machine ever invented.”

All at once, turning to the machine, which to him was a perfect hobby, he said: “Eh! Guidon, what are you about? You are putting it hind part before.”

Rushing up the ladder, which two men had placed at one of the sides, he stood for a moment on the platform, when in a few moments he gave directions for the correction of an error which the workmen had committed, they being as yet ignorant of the secrets of this novel machine.

“There!” said Doctor Guillotin, seeing with satisfaction that, under his direction, all went right, “things go straight. It is now only necessary to put the knife in the groove.” “Guidon, Guidon,” said he, with an expression of terror, “why is not the groove faced with copper?”

“Doctor, I thought well-seasoned oak quite as good as copper,” said the carpenter.

“Ah, that is it!” said the doctor. “Petty economy! — economy! when the progress and good of humanity is concerned! Guidon, if the experiment fails to-day, I hold you responsible. Gentlemen,” said he to Cagliostro and Gilbert, “I call you to witness, that I wished the grooves for the knife to be faced with copper; therefore, if it stick or not slide easily, it is not my fault, and I wash my hands of it.”

Notwithstanding this difficulty, however, the machine was erected, and certainly had a kind of homicidal air which delighted its inventor, but which horrified Doctor Gilbert. This is the form of the machine: A platform reached by a simple staircase. It was fifteen feet square, and on two of the parallel sides of this platform, ten or twelve feet high, arose two uprights. In them was the famous groove, the copper facing of which M. Guidon had sought to save, and which had evoked the lamentations of the philanthropic Guillotin. Down these grooves slid, by means of a spring, which, when opened, suffered it to fall freely from its own weight, and much more fastened to it, a kind of crescent-shaped knife. A little opening was made between two beams, through which a man’s head could be passed, and which was contrived to seize the head as if it were a collar. A frame-work, long as the stature of an ordinary man, moved up and down on a hinge, and when let fall, was exactly level with the opening.

All this, it will be seen, was very ingenious.

While the carpenters, Master Guidon, and the doctor were finishing their work, while Cagliostro and Gilbert were discussing the novelty of the instrument, the invention of which by Doctor Guillotin the count disputed, by showing much that was analogous in the Italian mannaya, and the doloire of Toulouse, with which the Marshal Montmorenci was executed, new spectators began to come, called together, doubtless, by a desire to witness the experiment, and filled the court-yard.

As the rain continued to fall, not so intensely, perhaps, but more steadily, Doctor Guillotin, who doubtless feared lest “bad weather” should deprive him of some of his spectators, hurried to the most important group, which was composed of Gilbert, Cagliostro, Doctor Louis, and the architect Giraud, and like a manager aware of the impatience of the public, said: “Gentlemen, we await only one person — Doctor Cabanis; when he comes we will begin.”

He had scarcely finished speaking, when a carriage entered the yard, and a man of thirty-eight or forty years, with an open face and intelligent expression of features and eye, dismounted. It was Doctor Cabanis, the person they had waited for. He bowed affably to all, as a philosophic physician should do, gave Guillotin his hand, who from his platform exclaimed, “Welcome, doctor, we waited for no one but you.” He then joined the group in which Gilbert and Cagliostro were.

“Gentlemen,” said Guillotin, “all being here, we will begin.”

At a motion of his hand a door was opened, and two men, clad in a kind of gray uniform, were seen to leave it, bearing on their shoulders a sack, in which the outline of a human body was vaguely seen.

Behind the glass of the windows the pale faces of the criminals were seen, looking with an expression of terror, though uninvited, at the terrible spectacle, the object and reason of which they could not understand.

On the evening of the same day, that is to say, on the 24th of December, Christmas eve, there was a reception at Flora’s Pavilion.

The queen did not wish to receive company herself, so the Princess de Lamballe received for her, and was doing the honours of the circle when the queen arrived.

In the course of the morning the young Baron Isidor de Charny had returned from Turin, and immediately after his arrival he had been admitted to the king, and then at once had an audience of the queen.

He had been received with great courtesy by both; but two reasons rendered this courtesy on the part of the queen remarkable.

In the first place, Isidor was the brother of Charny, and since Charny was absent, the queen experienced some pleasure in seeing his brother.

And then Isidor brought despatches from M. le Comte d’Artois and M. le Prince de Conde, which were quite in accordance with, her own wishes.

The princes recommended the project of M. de Favras to the queen, and begged her to profit by the devotion of this generous gentleman to fly and rejoin them at Turin.

He was further charged to express to M. de Favras all the sympathy which they felt for his project, as well as the wishes they entertained for its success.

The queen kept Isidor more than an hour with her, invited him to join the evening circle of Madame de Lamballe, and would not even then have allowed him to go, if he had not himself asked leave, in order to acquit himself of his commission to M. de Favras.

The marquis had been forewarned of everything direct from Turin, and knew on whose behalf Isidor came.

The message which the queen had entrusted to the young man completed the joy of the conspirator. Everything, in fact, seconded his hopes; the plot was getting on wonderfully.

One thing only made the marquis uneasy. This was the silence of the king and queen on his account. This silence the queen had attempted to break through the intervention of Isidor, and however vague might be the expressions which Isidor brought with him from the queen for M. and Madame de Favras, they were of great importance, since they came from royal lips.

At nine in the evening, the baron went to Madame de Lamballe’s.

He had never been presented to that princess. She did not know him; but, forewarned by the queen in the course of the day, when his name was announced, the princess rose and welcomed him with a charming grace, and took him at once into her own little circle.

Neither the king nor the queen had yet arrived. Monsieur, who seemed sufficiently uneasy, was talking in a corner with two gentlemen of the most intimate of his acquaintance, M. de la Chatre and M. de Avary. Count Louis de Narbonne went from group to group with the ease of a man who feels himself to be one of the family.

“When the ushers had announced the king and queen, all conversation and bursts of laughter at once gave place to a respectful silence. Madame de Lamballe and Madame Elizabeth joined the queen.

Monsieur walked straight up to the king to pay his respects, and, bowing to his majesty, said: “Brother, cannot you manage to get up a private game of whist, composed of yourself, the queen, me, and some one of your intimate friends, so that, under the appearance of play, we may be able to enjoy some private conversation?”

“Willingly, brother,” replied the king; “go and arrange the matter with the queen.” Monsieur approached Marie Antoinette, to whom Charny was tendering his respects, and saying quite low, “Madame, I have seen M. de Favras, and I have a communication of the utmost importance to make to your majesty.”

“My dear sister,” said Monsieur, “the king wishes us to make up a party of four for whist; we challenge you, and beg you to choose your partner yourself.”

“Very well,” said the queen, who herself doubted that this game of whist was but a pretext, “my choice is made. M. le Baron do Charny, you shall join our game, and while we are playing you shall tell us the news you have brought with you from Turin.”

“Ah! you have just come from Turin, baron?” said Monsieur.

“Yes, monseigneur; and in returning from Turin I passed through the Place Royale, where I saw a man who is entirely devoted to the king, the queen, and to, your royal highness.”

Monsieur coloured, coughed, and passed on. He was a man of considerable circumspection.

He beckoned to M. de la Chatre, who approached him, and receiving his orders in a low voice, left at once. During this time the king addressed and received the ladies and gentlemen who still continued to visit the Tuileries.

The queen went and took him by the arm to lead him to the whist table. They played two or three hands, only speaking when necessary.

But after playing some time, and after observing that respect kept the crowd from the royal table, “Brother,” hazarded the queen to Monsieur, “the baron has told you that he has only just arrived from Turin?”

“Yes,” said Monsieur; “he said something about it.”

“He has told you, has he not, that M. le Comte d’Artois and M. le Prince de Conde advise us strongly to go and join them?”

The king seemed impatient.

“Brother,” whispered Madame Elizabeth, with the sweetness of an angel, “do listen, I beg.”

“And you, too, sister?” said the king.

“I more than anybody, my dear Louis; for I love you, and am more uneasy than any one else.”

“I was about to add,” hazarded Isidor, “that I passed through the Place Royale, and that I stopped nearly an hour at No. 21.”

“At No. 21?” said the king; “what is there there?”

“At No. 21,” replied Isidor, “there lives a gentleman entirely devoted to your majesty, ready, as we are, to die for you, but who, more active than all of us put together, has managed a project for your safety.”

“What is it, monsieur?” questioned the king, raising his head.

“If I could believe that I am displeasing the king by repeating to his majesty what I know of this matter, I would at once be silent.”

“No, no! monsieur!” said the queen quickly, “speak; sufficient people form projects against us; it is well that we should know those they make for our advantage. M. le Baron, tell us what they call this gentleman.”

“M. le Marque de Favras, madame.”

“Ah!” said the queen, “we know him; and you have faith in his devotion, M. le Baron?”

“Of his devotion? Yes, madame; I not only believe in it, but I am sure of it.”

“Take care, monsieur,” observed the king; “you promise much.”

“Heart judges heart, sire. I answer for the devotion of M. de Favras; as for the value of his project, and the chance of its succeeding, that is another thing. I am too young, and whilst he is working for the safety of the king and queen, I am too prudent, to dare to express my own opinions upon the matter.”

“And this project. What may it be?” said the queen.

“Madame, it is ready for execution; and if it pleases the king to say a word or make a sign this evening, to-morrow at the same hour he shall be at Peronne.”

The king was silent.

“Sire,” remarked the queen, addressing her husband, “did you hear what the baron said?”

“Certainly,” said the king, “I heard.”

“Well, brother,” asked Monsieur, “is not what the baron proposes very tempting?”

The king turned very quickly toward Monsieur, and fixing his look firmly on his countenance, said: “And if I go, will you go with me?”

Monsieur changed colour; his lips trembled, agitated by an emotion which he could not master.

“I?” said he.

"Yes! you, my brother," said Louis XVI, "you who wish me to quit Paris, you, I ask, if I go, will you go with me?"

"But," lisped Monsieur, "I am not prepared, not having been forewarned; nothing is consequently ready."

"What! you were never forewarned?" said the king; "and it is you who have furnished the money necessary to M. de Favras! None of your preparations are made, and yet you have known, from hour to hour, how the conspiracy got on!"

"The conspiracy!" repeated Monsieur, looking very pale.

"Without doubt, the conspiracy; for it is a conspiracy, a conspiracy so real, that if it is discovered, M. de Favras will be imprisoned, conducted to the Chatelet, and condemned to death! — at least, unless, by means of money and promises, you manage to save him, as we contrived to save M. de Bezenval."

"But if the king saved Bezenval, surely he will also rescue M. de Favras."

"No! because what I have done for one I may not be able to do for another. M. de Bezenval was my man, just as M. de Favras is yours. Let each one save his own, and then we shall each do our duty."

And as he uttered these words, the king rose.

The queen seized the skirt of his coat.

"Sire," said she, "whether you acceptor refuse, you must send an answer to M. de Favras."

"I must?"

"Yes; what reply shall the Baron de Charny make in the name of the king?"

"He will answer," said Louis XVI., as he loosened his dress from the hands of the queen — " he will answer that the king cannot permit himself to be carried off."

And he turned and left them.

"What he wished to say," continued Monsieur, "is, that if the Marquis de Favras carries the king off without any permission on his part, he will be heartily welcome, provided always the affair succeeds; because if it does not succeed he will seem a fool, and in politics fools deserve double punishment."

"M. le Baron," said the queen, "run to M. de Favras this very evening, without losing an instant, and tell him the very words of the king: 'the king cannot consent that they carry him off.’ It is for them to understand them, or for you to explain them. Go!”

The baron, who rightly regarded the answer of the king and the recommendation of the queen as a double acquiescence, seized his hat, and jumping into a carriage, ordered the driver to go to Place Royale, No. 21.

When the king arose from the whist table, he went towards a group of young men, whose joyous laughter had excited his attention before he entered the saloon. They were silent at his approach.

“Ah, gentlemen,” said he, “is the king so unfortunate as to bring sadness with him wherever he goes?”

“Sire!” murmured the young men.

“You were very lively, and laughing gaily, when the queen and I entered just now.”

Then, shaking his head, “Unhappy are the kings,” said he, “before whom others will not laugh.”

“Sire!” said M. de Lameth, “the respect — ”

“My dear Charles,” said the king, “when you leave your prison, on Sundays and Thursdays, and I make you come for amusement to Versailles, does my being there ever prevent you from laughing? I have just now said, ‘Unhappy are the kings before whom they all dare not laugh!’ I now say, ‘Happy indeed are the kings before whom all do laugh!’“

“Sire,” said M. le Castries, “perhaps the subject which excites our laughter might not seem in any way comical to you.”

“Of what are you talking then, gentlemen?”

“Sire, it was apropos to the National Assembly.”

“Oh! Ah! gentlemen, there were good reasons to become grave, then, on seeing me. I really cannot allow any one in my house to laugh at the National Assembly. It is true,” added the king, though he did not mean what he said, “I am not at home, but at the place of the Princess de Lamballe, so that whether you laugh any more or not at the Assembly, there can possibly be no harm in your telling me what it really was that made you laugh so loudly.”

“Does the king know what they have been discussing at the Assembly throughout the day’s sitting?”

“Yes! and I have been very much interested. Has there not been a discussion about a new machine for executing criminals, proposed by M. Guillotin and offered to the nation?”

“Yes!” said Suleau.

“Oh! oh! M. Suleau, and you jest with M. Guillotin — with a philosopher, a philanthropist! It’s all very well, but you forget I am a philanthropist myself.”

‘‘But, sire, there are two sorts of philanthropists. There is, for example, a philanthropist at the head of the French nation — a philanthropist who has abolished the question — him we respect, him we venerate; we do more — we love him, sire.”

All the young men bowed at once.

“But,” continued Suleau, “there are others, who, being already physicians — who, having in their hands a thousand means, both good, bad, and indifferent, to put the sick out of this world easily — endeavour to discover a means equally as satisfactory to them to carry off those in good health too — and, by my word! I beg your majesty will abandon them to me.”

“And what will you do with them, M. Suleau? Not behead them without pain?” asked the king, alluding to the declaration of M. Guillotin; “or shall they take their departure feeling an agreeable freshness about their necks, eh?”

“Sire, it is just what I wish them, but it is not what I will promise them,” replied Suleau.

“What!” said the king, “is it that you wish them?”

“Yes, sire; I like the people who invent this kind of machine to try them. I do not complain much of Master Aubriot trying the walls of the Bastille, nor Sir Enguerrand de Marigny trying the gibbet at Montfaucon. Unhappily, I have not the honour of being king — unhappily, I have not the honour of being a judge; it is probable, then, I shall be obliged to keep myself opposed to this very respectable doctor, and what I have promised him, I have already commenced to carry out.”

“And what have you promised him?” asked the king.

“It has come into my head, sire, that this great benefactor of humanity ought to be one of the first to experience its advantages. So, to-morrow morning, in the ‘Actes des Apotres,’ which we shall print in the course of the night, the baptism shall take place. It is only that the daughter of M. de Guillotin, recognised this very day in the National Assembly by her father, should be known by his name, and called Mademoiselle Guillotine.”

“I believe an experiment has already been made, this very morning, in fact; were any of you there? The experiment was at Bicetre.”

"No! sire! no, no, no!" said a dozen of them, all at once.

"I was there," said a grave voice.

The king turned and recognised Gilbert, who had entered during the discussion, and who was the only one who could answer the king.

"Ah! you were there, doctor, were you?" said the king, turning towards him.

"Yes, sire."

"And how do you think it succeeded?" asked his majesty.

"Perfectly on the two first, sire; but although the vertebrae of the third were cut, they were obliged to finish the cutting off of the head with a knife."

The young men listened with open mouths and open eyes.

"How, sire," said Charles Lameth, speaking evidently for the rest as well as for himself, "have they executed three men this morning?"

"Yes, gentlemen," said the king, "only the three men were three dead bodies furnished by the Hotel-Dieu. And your opinion, Gilbert?"

"Upon what, sire?"

"On the instrument."

"Sire, it is evidently an improvement upon all machines invented for the purpose of depriving our fellow creatures of life; but the accident which happened to the third body proves that this machine requires perfecting."

"And how does it act?" asked the king, in whom the genius of mechanism began to arise.

Gilbert then attempted to give an explanation; but as the king could not catch an exact idea of the instrument from the description of the doctor, he said:

"Come, come, doctor, here is a table, pen, ink, and paper. You draw, I think?"

"Yes, sire."

"Well, then, you shall make me a sketch; I shall understand it better."

And as the young men, restrained by respect, did not like to seek to mate the king.

"Come, come, gentlemen," said Louis XVI., "questions like this interest the whole of humanity."

"And who knows," said Suleau, half-aloud, "but one of us is destined to have the honour of marrying Mademoiselle Guillotine? Come, gentlemen, let us be made acquainted with our bride."

And all of them, following Gilbert and the king, collected round the table, at which Gilbert seated himself, in order to more conveniently make his sketch, at the invitation of the king.

Gilbert commenced a sketch of the machine, while Louis XVI. traced each line with great attention.

Nothing was wanting, neither the platform nor the steps which conducted to it, nor the little window, nor anything else.

He had nearly finished the last details, when the king interrupted him.

“Parbleu!” said he, “there is nothing astonishing in its failure, especially at the third experiment.”

“How so, sire?” asked Gilbert.

“That has the form of a hatchet,” said Louis XVI. “It is not necessary to know much of mechanics to be able to tell that the shape of anything intended to cut when falling from a height ought to approach to that of a crescent.”

“What form would your majesty then give the knife?”

“A very simple one, that of a triangle.”

Gilbert tried to alter the design.

“No! no! not so,” said the king, “just lend me your pencil.”

“Here is the pencil, sire,” said Gilbert.

“Wait, wait,” said Louis XVI., carried away by his love for mechanics; “look — thus and thus — and thus — and I will undertake that you shall cut off some five-and-twenty heads, one after another, without the edge twisting at all.”

He had scarcely said these words, when a piercing cry, one of terror, as much as grief, was uttered just behind him.

He turned quickly, and saw the queen fall fainting into Gilbert’s arms.

Urged, like the rest, by curiosity, she had approached the table, and leaning on the chair of the king, she had, looking over his shoulder at the very time he was engaged in correcting its details, recognised the machine that Cagliostro had made her look at twenty years before in the Chateau de Taverney Maison-Rouge.

At this sight she had only strength to utter the cry, and life seemingly had abandoned her, as if the fatal machine itself had operated on her; she had, in fact, fallen completely insensible into Gilbert’s arms.

One can easily understand that after such a circumstance the evening was soon brought to a close.

Her majesty had at once been taken to the bedroom of the princess and laid upon a bed; and the princess, who with that peculiar intuition belonging to females guessed there was some mystery, watched with the king, until, thanks to the skill of Doctor Gilbert, the queen recovered her senses.

But it was evident that life was going to awake before reason; for some moments she looked about the room with that vague and indifferent look with which people regard everything, when they do not know where they are and what has happened. But soon a slight trembling ran through her body; she uttered a short shrill cry, and covered her eyes with her hands, as if to shut out some painful sight.

She was coming round — the crisis was passed! Gilbert was about to depart, when the queen, as if she had already understood he was going, stretched out her hand, and in a nervous voice, accompanied by a gesture as well, "Remain!" said she.

Gilbert stopped, quite astonished, for he was not unaware of how little sympathetic feeling the queen entertained for him.

"I am at the orders of the queen," said he, "but I believe it will be the best to calm the excited feelings of the people in the saloons, and if your majesty will permit — "

"Therese,'' said the queen, addressing herself to the Princess de Lamballe; "go and announce to the king that I am rapidly recovering, and say that I wish to talk to Doctor Gilbert,"

The princess obeyed, with that sweet passiveness which was the characteristic of her temper, and even of her physiognomy.

The queen followed her with her eyes, and waited anxiously while she finished her commission. Then, free to talk with Doctor Gilbert, she turned round, and fixing her eyes upon him, said:

"Doctor, what do you think caused this to happen?"

"Madame," said Gilbert, "I am a man of science; have the goodness to put the question in a more precise form."

"I ask you, sir," said the queen, "whether the fainting fit I have experienced has been caused by one of those nervous crises to which we poor women, through feebleness of our constitutions, are particularly liable, or if you suspect this accident has been brought on by any cause more serious?"

"I shall answer to your majesty that the daughter of Maria Theresa, the woman whom I saw so calm and courageous during the night of the 5th and

6th of October, is not an ordinary woman, and consequently is not capable of being moved by what ordinarily affects a woman."

"You are right, doctor. Do you believe in presentiments?"

"Science herself sets aside all those phenomena which have a tendency to change the common course of things."

"I ought to have said, Do you believe in predictions?"

"I believe that Providence has concealed the future from us with an impenetrable veil. Some, by severely studying the past, are able to lift the corner and catch some idea of the future; but these instances are very rare, and since religion has abolished fatality, since philosophy has put limits to faith, prophets have lost fully three quarters of their mystical powers. And yet — -" added Gilbert.

"And yet — ?" replied the queen, looking thoughtful.

"And yet, madame," continued he, as if he were making an effort over himself, to avoid coming in contact with questions which he considered to lie within the region of doubt, — " and yet, madame, there is a man — "

"A man?" said the queen, who followed Gilbert's words with great interest.

"He is a man who has often confounded all my arguments by most unaccountable deeds."

"And this man is — ?"

"I dare not name him before your majesty."

"This man is your master, is he not, Gilbert? the man all-powerful! the immortal, divine Cagliostro!"

"Madame, my only true master is Nature; Cagliostro is only my saviour. Pierced by a ball which had traversed the whole length of my breast, and which, after having studied medicine twenty years, I considered incurable, thanks to a salve of whose composition I am still ignorant, he cured me in the course of a few days — hence my gratitude; I had almost said my admiration."

"And this man has predicted to you things that have come to pass?"

"Strange, incredible things! Madame, this man walks so firmly through the present, that it is easy to believe he has some knowledge of the future."

"How far, if this man had predicted a certain thing to you, would you believe in its coming to pass?"

"I should act at least as if I expected it to be realized."

"If he had foretold that you would meet a terrible, premature, infamous death, would you prepare for such a death?"

Gilbert looked profoundly at the queen, and said, "After having tried all possible means to escape from such a death, I should certainly prepare myself for it."

"To escape from it? No, doctor, no! I see well I am condemned," said the queen. "This revolution is a whirlpool which will swallow up the throne; this people is a lion which will devour me."

"Ah, madame," said Gilbert, "it only depends upon you, and you may see this very lion, so terrible now, come and lie at your feet like a lamb. "Did you not see this lion at Versailles? — have you not seen it at the Tuileries? It is like an ocean, madame, which beats incessantly — until it has destroyed it — against any rock which opposes itself to its strength; but it caresses the barque which trusts to it."

"Doctor, all connection between this people and me has been broken for a long time now; they hate me, I despise them."

"Because you do not really understand each other. Cease to be their queen — be their mother. Forget that you are the daughter of Maria Theresa — our ancient foe — the sister of Joseph II. — our false friend. Be French, and you shall hear the voice of this people rise only to bless you, and you shall see the arms of this great people stretched out but to bless you."

Marie Antoinette shrugged up her shoulders.

"Yes, I know that — yesterday the people blessed; to-day they caress, and to-morrow they will strangle those they have blessed and caressed."

"Ah! madame," cried Gilbert, "be not deceived! It is not the people that would rebel against the king and queen — it is they who have rebelled against the people, who continue to address them in a language full of the privileges of royalty, when they ought to speak the words of fraternity and love! Yes! Italy, Poland, Ireland, Spain, will look at this France, born yesterday, and cry, stretching forth their bauds — chained! chained! — 'France, France! we are free in thee!' Madame, madame! there is yet time; take the young one, born yesterday, take it into your lap and be its mother!"

"Doctor," said the queen, "you forget that I have other children — children of my womb — and that I should disinherit them by adopting this little strange child."

"If it be so, madame," said Gilbert, in a tone of great sadness, "wrap these children up in the royal mantle, in the mantle of war, of Maria

Theresa, and carry them away from France, for you spoke truly when you said the people would devour you; but there is no time to lose — you must be quick, madame, very quick!”

“And you will not oppose this departure?”

“Far from it,” answered Gilbert; “now I know your intentions, I will assist you.”

“That is well,” said the queen, “for there is a gentleman quite ready to devote himself to this object.”

“Ah! madame,” said Gilbert, with alarm, “you do not mean M. de Favras?”

“Who told you his name? who revealed his project to you?’’

“Oh! madame, take care! a fatal prediction follows him too.”

“And from the same prophet?”

“Yes, madame.”

“And — according to this prophet, what fate awaits the marquis?”

“A terrible death! premature! infamous! such a one as you spoke of just now.”

“Then you indeed spoke truth; there is no time to lose in order to prevent the fulfilment of the prophecies.”

“You have sent to announce to M. de Favras that you accept his assistance?”

“Some one is with him now. I am expecting his answer every moment.”

At this moment, as Gilbert, frightened at the circumstances in which he found himself, passed his hand over his face to shut out the light, Madame de Lamballe entered, and whispered one or two words in the ear of the queen.

“Let him come in,” said the queen, “let him come in; the doctor knows all. Doctor,” continued she, “M. Isidor de Charny brings me the answer of M. le Marquis de Favras. To-morrow the queen will have left Paris; after to-morrow, the queen will be out of France. Come, baron, come. Great God! what’s the matter, and why are you so pale?”

“Madame la Princesse de Lamballe has told me that I may speak before Doctor Gilbert,” observed Isidor.

“Yes, yes; speak! You have seen the Marquis do Favras? The marquis is ready — we accept his offer — we leave Paris — we leave France?”

“The Marquis de Favras was arrested an hour ago in the Rue Beaurepaire and carried to the Chatelet,” said Isidor.

The eyes of the queen crossed those of Gilbert; they were luminous, desperate, full of anger. But all the strength of Marie Antoinette seemed to be exhausted by this flash.

Gilbert approached her, and in a tone expressive of great pity said: “Madame, if I can be of any use to you, dispose of me as you like; my intelligence, my devotion, my life, I lay at once at your feet.”

The queen raised her eyes slowly towards the doctor.

Then, in a voice gentle and resigned: “M. Gilbert,” said she, “you, who are a learned man, and have assisted at the experiment of this morning, can you tell me whether the death caused by this frightful machine is as easy as the inventor declares it to be?”

Gilbert heaved a sigh, and covered his eyes with his hands.

At this moment Monsieur, who knew all he wished to know, for the news of M. de Favras’ arrest spread like wild-fire through the palace, at this moment Monsieur ordered his carriage in a loud voice, and took his departure without taking leave of the king.

Louis XVI. stopped up the passage before him.

“Brother, I suppose you are not,” said he, “in such a hurry to enter the Luxembourg, as not to be able to give me some counsel. What ought I to do, in your opinion?”

“You would ask what, if I were in your place, I should do?”

“Yes.”

“I should abandon M. de Favras, and swear fidelity to the constitution.”

“What? would you recommend me to swear fidelity to a constitution which is not as yet made?”

“So much the greater reason,” said Monsieur, with a cunning look, “so much the greater reason, my dear brother, you should do so, for then there is no occasion to keep the oath.”

The king stood thoughtfully for a moment.

“Let it be so,” said he; “that will not prevent my writing to M. de Bouille that our project still holds, but is adjourned, put off. This delay will allow the Count de Charny to collect together all who should follow us.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

Monsieur Disavows Favras, and the King Takes the Oath of the Constitution.

ON THE MORNING of the arrest of M. de Favras this singular paper circulated through Paris:

“The Marquis de Favras (Place Royale) has been arrested, together with his wife, during the night between the 24th and 25th, for a plan which he had of raising thirty thousand men to assassinate Lafayette and the mayor of the city.

“Monsieur, the brother to the king, was at the head.

(Signed) “BARAUZ.”

One can easily understand the strange revolution such a paper made in the Paris of 1790. A train of powder fired could scarcely have produced a flame more rapid than that which passed along with this circular. At length it was in the hands of all. Two hours afterwards every one knew it by heart.

On the evening of the 26th, the “Mandataires de la Commune” were reassembled at the Hotel de Ville in council, when an usher announced that Monsieur demanded to be admitted to them.

“Monsieur!” repeated the good Bailly, who presided over the Assembly; “what monsieur?”

“Monsieur, the brother of the king,” replied the usher.

At these words the members of the Commune looked at one another. The name of Monsieur had been in everybody’s mouth since break of day.

Bailly cast an inquiring glance round the Assembly, and since the silent answers he gathered from the faces of his companions were unanimous, he said:

“Go, announce to Monsieur that, however much astonished at the honour he is conferring upon us, we are ready to receive him.”

Some moments after Monsieur was introduced.

He was alone; his face was pale, and his walk, generally slovenly, this evening was more so than usual.

By good luck for Monsieur, the lights were so placed as to leave a small space partially in the dark. This circumstance did not escape the observation of Monsieur. As yet he looked timidly on this immense reunion, where he found, at least respect, if not sympathy, and with a voice trembling at first, but which acquired firmness by degrees:

“Gentlemen,” said he, “the desire to contradict a vile calumny has brought me amongst you. M. de Favras was arrested by your Committee of Inquiry, and they spread the report to-day that I was leagued with him.”

Some smiles flitted across the faces of his auditors.

He continued: “In my quality of citizen of the City of Paris, I thought it was my duty to let you know from myself the relations in which I stand to M. de Favras.”

As we may easily imagine, the attention of messieurs the members of the Commune redoubled; they were about to hear, from the very lips of Monsieur himself, what relations his highness had with M. de Favras.

His highness continued in these terms:

“In 1772 M. de Favras entered my Swiss guard; he left them in 1775. I have never spoken to him since that time.”

A murmur of incredulity passed through the audience, but a glance from Bailly repressed this murmur, and Monsieur remained in doubt as to whether his speech was approved or disapproved.

Monsieur went on: “Deprived for now many mouths of the enjoyment of my revenues, rendered uneasy by certain payments which I have to make in January, I wished to be able to meet my engagements without having to apply to the public treasury. I had resolved, consequently, to obtain money on mortgage. Fifteen days ago M. de Favras was pointed out to me by M. de la Chatre as a man likely to be able to effect it through a banker of Genes. I therefore signed a bill for two millions, the sum necessary to meet my engagements at the beginning of the year and to pay for my house. This matter was purely a financial one and I told my steward to look after it. I have not seen M. de Favras, I have not written to him; what he has done in other matters is wholly unknown to me.”

A sneer passed through the ranks of the Commune, which showed that they were not disposed to believe, on Monsieur’s word alone, that he had placed bills for two millions in the hands of another without seeing him, and through an agent, and, above all, that agent one of his old guard.

Monsieur blushed, and without doubt urged on by the consciousness of being in a false position, said, in a lively manner, “And yet, gentlemen, I heard that there was distributed yesterday, throughout the capital, a paper conceived in these terms.”

And Monsieur read — which was useless, since all there knew it by heart — the letter which we have before given.

At the words, “Monsieur, the brother to the king, was at the head,” all the members of the Commune bowed.

Did they wish to imply that they were of the same opinion as the circular: Did they simply mean they were listening?

Monsieur continued: “You do not expect that I should defend myself against a charge like this; but at a time when calumnies of which every one must see the absurdity may easily confound the best citizens with the enemies of the revolution, I have thought it my duty, gentlemen, both to the king, to you, and myself, to enter into the details which you have just heard, in order that public opinion may recognise the truth at once. Since the day when, in the second assembly of great men, I declared myself on the great questions which still cause some division of opinion, I have not ceased to believe that a great revolution was ready, and that the king, through his virtues and superior rank, ought to be at the head of it, since it could not be of advantage to the nation without being equally so to the monarch.”

Although the sense was not very clear in these last expressions, yet the habit they had acquired of applauding some forms of words caused them to applaud these.

Encouraged by this, Monsieur raised his voice, and added, addressing the Assembly with a little more assurance:

“Until they can bring forward one of my actions, one of my speeches, which contradicts, in any way, the principles I have professed — until they can show that the happiness of both king and people has not been my constant thought, my every wish — I have the right to be believed. I have changed neither sentiments nor principles, and I never shall change!”

The Mayor of Paris replied: “Monsieur, it is a matter of great satisfaction to the representatives of the Commune of Paris to see amongst them the brother of a cherished king, and of a king who is the restorer of French liberty! August brothers! the same sentiment unites you! Monsieur showed himself the first citizen ready to vote fur the Third Estate in the second Assembly: he was nearly the only one of this opinion, save a few friends of the people. Monsieur, then, is the first author of civil equality. In coming to mix with the representatives of the Commune, he has shown, to-day, that he only wishes to be known through his patriotic sentiments. These sentiments consist of the explanation which Monsieur has just made to the Assembly. The prince comes before public opinion, and citizens value the opinion of their fellow-citizens. I offer Monsieur, then, in the name of the Assembly, the tribute and respect which it owes to the sentiments and the presence of his royal highness, and particularly to the value he attaches to men being free."

Then, when Monsieur understood, without doubt, that in spite of the praise bestowed on his conduct by Bailly, it would be differently judged afterwards, he replied, with that paternal air which he knew so well how to assume, whenever he thought it would answer:

"Gentlemen, the duty I have just fulfilled has been a painful one for a virtuous heart, but I am sufficiently compensated by the sentiments which the Assembly have so kindly expressed towards me, and my mouth ought only to be opened to ask pardon for those who have offended me."

Monsieur had thus performed his part of the counsel which he had given to his brother Louis XVI.

He had thrown off M. de Favras, and as we have seen, owing to the praises of the virtuous Bailly, the scheme had been successful.

Louis XVI., or hearing this, determined, on his side, to swear fidelity to the constitution.

One fine morning the usher came and told the President of the Assembly, who on this day was M. Bureaux de Pusey, just as the usher had reported Monsieur to the mayor — that the king, with one or two ministers and three or four officers, knocked at the door of the manege as Monsieur had knocked at the door of the Hotel de Ville.

The representatives of the people looked astonished. What could the king have to say to them, after being for so long separated from them?

They caused Louis XVI. to be introduced, and the president gave him up his arm-chair.

All at once the saloon resounded with acclamations! All France, except Petion, Camille Desmoulins and Marat, believed that it was once more loyal. The king had wished to come and felicitate the Assembly upon what it had effected — to praise this beautiful division of France into departments; but what he could no longer suppress was the great love he entertained for the constitution.

The commencement of the discourse caused some uneasiness, the middle was gratifying, but the end — the end brought out all the enthusiasm of the Assembly.

The king could not resist expressing his love for this little constitution of 1791, which was not as yet even born; what would he do, then, when he saw it some day full grown?

We cannot give the discourse of the king; there are six pages of it; it is quite enough to have quoted that of Monsieur. As much as there is, however, Louis XVI. did not seem too wordy to the Assembly, which was often moved to tears.

When we say that it was moved to tears, we do not say so metaphorically — Barnave, Lameth, Dupont, Mirabeau, Barrere, all wept. It was quite a deluge.

The king left — but the king and the Assembly could not part so; it came out after him and hastened to the Tuileries, where the queen received it.

The queen, the stern daughter of Maria Theresa, was no enthusiast — she did not weep; she presented her son to the deputies of the nation.

“Gentlemen,” said she, “I share all the sentiments of the king. Here is my son! I shall not neglect to teach him, in good time, to imitate the virtues of the best of fathers, to respect public liberty, and to maintain the laws, of which I hope he will be the most firm pillar.”

Now there was a real enthusiasm. They proposed to take the oaths that very instant. They formed themselves into a sitting of the Assembly. First of all the president pronounced the following words:

“I swear to be faithful to the nation, and to uphold with all my power the constitution decreed by the National Assembly, and accepted by the king.”

And all the members of the Assembly accepted the oath at once, and raising his hand, each in turn said, “I swear!”

For the ten days following, the pence of Paris expended itself in balls, fetes, and fireworks. From all parts came news of oaths being taken; all over they were busy swearing; people swore on the Greve, at the Hotel de Ville, in the churches, in the streets, in the public squares: altars were erected to La Patrie — to these they conducted all scholars, and they took the oath, just as if they had been men and understood what was meant by it.

The Assembly directed a Te Deum to be sung, and there, on the altar, before God, they renewed their oath.

The king only was not present at Notre Dame, and so did not swear again.

His absence was remarked, but all were so pleased, so confident, that they were quite satisfied with the first excuse he pleased to give them.

“Why have you not been to the Te Deum? why have you not sworn like the rest, on the altar of God?” the queen asked, ironically.

“Because,” was the answer of Louis XVI., “I wish to lie well, and not to forswear myself.”

The queen breathed. Until then, like the rest, she had believed in the good faith of the king.

CHAPTER XIX.

A Gentleman.

THIS VISIT of the king to the Assembly took place on the 4th of February, 1790.

Twelve days later — that is to say, in the course of the night of the 17th of the same month, in the absence of the governor of the Chatelet, who had leave to go to Soissons, where his mother was dying — a man presented himself at the gate of the prison, bearing an order signed by the lieutenant of police authorising the visitor to speak, without a witness, to M. de Favras.

We cannot say whether the order was a forgery or not; but, at any rate, the sub-governor, whom they awoke in order to submit it to him, considered it was all right, and directed him, in spite of the lateness of the hour, to be admitted into the cell of M. de Favras.

After having issued the proper orders, he returned to his bed to complete the night's rest which had thus been broken.

The visitor, under the pretence that in drawing the order from his pocket-book he had dropped an important paper, took the lamp and looked on the floor, just as he saw M. le Sous Directeur of the Chatelet enter his apartment. Then he said he believed he had left it on his dressing-table, and he begged them, in any case, to give it to him before his departure.

Then, giving the lamp to the chief turnkey, he invited him to conduct him to the cell of M. de Favras.

The turnkey opened a door, allowed the unknown to pass, and in his turn followed, and shut the last door behind him.

He seemed to look at the unknown with curiosity as he attended him.

They descended twelve steps, and found themselves in a subterraneous corridor.

Then a second door presented itself; it was opened and relocked like the first by the jailer.

The unknown and his guide found themselves now on a kind of landing, having before them a second flight of steps to descend. The unknown stopped, gazed into the dark corridor, and when he was assured that the obscurity was as solitary as silent:

"Yon are the chief turnkey, Louis?" asked he.

"Yes," replied the jailer.

"A brother of the American lodge?"

"Yes."

"You have been placed here for these last eight days by a mysterious hand to effect something unknown?"

"Yes."

"You are ready to accomplish this work?"

"I am ready."

"You were to receive your orders from a man?"

"Yes, of the anointed."

"How were you to recognise this man?"

"By three letters, embroidered on a plastron."

"I am that man, look at the three letters."

On saying these words, the visitor opened his coat, and showed embroidered on its breast the three letters L. P. D.

"Master," said the jailer, bowing, "I am at your service."

"Very well; open the cell of M. de Favras, and he ready to obey me."

The jailer bowed without answering, and passing on in front, in order to light the way, he stopped before a door.

"This is it," he murmured in a low voice.

The unknown made a sign with his head; the key, already in the lock, turned twice, and the door stood open.

Although they had taken every precaution to prevent the prisoner's escape, by putting him in a cell twenty feet under ground, they had not been careless of his comfort. He had a good bed with white curtains. Near this bed was a table, covered with books, pens, ink, and paper, intended, no doubt, to assist him to prepare his defence.

A lamp crowned all.

Upon a second table, in a corner, glittered the articles of the toilet, such as had been taken from the dressing-case of the marquis himself.

M. de Favras slept so soundly, that the door was opened, the unknown approached his bed, and a second lamp was placed on table by the jailer, who withdrew at a gesture of the visitor, without awaking him.

For a moment the unknown regarded the sleeping man with a profound melancholy, and then, as if remembering that time was precious, he shook the sleeper by the shoulder.

The prisoner turned, and was at once thoroughly awake, with eyes wide open, like those who are in the habit of sleeping always expecting to be waked to hear bad news.

“Be composed, M. de Favras,” said the unknown, “it is a friend.”

For an instant M. de Favras looked at the visitor with an air of doubt which expressed his astonishment that any friend should come to seek him at some eighteen or twenty feet under ground. Then, all at once, recalling his recollections: “Ah!” said he, “the Baron Zanoni.”

“Myself, dear marquis.”

Favras smiled, and looking round him, pointed out with his finger a stool which held neither books nor clothes. “Will you sit down?” said he to the baron.

“My dear marquis, I come to propose a thing that admits of no long discussion, and since we have no time to lose — ”

“What are you going to propose, my dear baron?”

“You know they will try you to-morrow.”

“Yes, I have heard something like that,” replied Favras.

“You know that the judges before whom you will appear are the same as those who acquitted Augeard and Bezenvul?” “Yes.”

“Do you know that neither was acquitted except through the intervention of the court?”

A third time. Favras replied, “Yes,” without there being any perceptible alteration in his voice.

“Without doubt, you hope the court will do for you what it has done for your predecessors?”

“Those who have had the honour to assist me in relation to the enterprise that has brought me here ought surely to do something for my sake, M. le Baron. Let what they do be well done.”

“They have already determined what to do; and I can instruct you as to what course they intend to pursue.”

Favras did not exhibit any curiosity to know.

“Monsieur,” continued the visitor, “‘has presented himself at the Hotel de Ville and declared that he did not know you now, that in 1772 you had entered into the guards, and that in 1775 you had left them, and since that time he had never seen you once.”

Favras bowed his head as a token of acquiescence.

“As far as regards the king, he not only no more thinks of flying, but on the fourth of the present month he went to the National Assembly and swore to the constitution!”

A smile passed over Favras’ lips.

“Do you doubt the truth of this?” asked the baron.

“I did not say so,” said Favras.

“Then you will see at once, marquis, that it will not do to reckon on Monsieur, nor on the king either.”

“Eight! M. le Baron.”

“You will go before the judges.”

“You have told me so before.”

“Yon will be condemned I”

“It is very likely.”

“And to death.”

“It is very possible.”

And Favras stretched himself out like a man about to receive the last stroke.

“But,” said the baron, “do you know to what death, my dear marquis?”

“Are there two kinds of death, dear baron?”

“There are ten: there are the wheel, hunting, pieces, etc., and for more than a week there has been one which combines them all; as you say, there is but one now — the pillows!’“

“The gallows!”

“Yes, the Assembly, having proclaimed equality before the law, have found it but just to proclaim equality in death. Nobles and peasants must now go out of the world through the same gate. You will be hung, my dear marquis.”

“Ah!” said Favras.

“Condemned to death, you will be hung: a very disagreeable thing, I am sure, to a gentleman who does not fear death, but only dislikes the mode of it.”

“M. le Baron,” said Favras. “have you only come here to inform me of this bad news, or have you something else better left to tell me?”

"I came to tell you that all is ready for your escape, and to assure you that in ten minutes, if you wish, you can be out of your prison, and in twenty-four hours out of France."

Favras reflected a moment, without letting the baron see that it caused him any emotion; then, addressing his questioner: "Does this offer come from the king, or his royal highness?"

"No, sir! it comes from me."

Favras looked at the baron.

"From you, sir," said he, "and why from you?"

"From the interest I take in you, marquis."

"What interest can you have in me?" asked Favras; "you have seen me but twice."

"One does not require to see a man twice in order to know him, my dear marquis. True gentlemen are rare, and I wish to save one, I will not say for France, but for humanity."

"You have no other reason, then?"

"There is another reason. Having negotiated a bill of two millions for you, money which has been spent in promoting the affair which brought you here to-day, I feel myself implicated in your death — that I have contributed to it."

Favras smiled. "If you have not committed a worse crime than that, you may sleep easily," said he, "I pardon you."

"What?" cried the baron, "you refuse to fly?"

Favras stretched out his hand to him. "I thank you from the bottom of my heart, M. le Baron," replied he; "I thank you in the names of my wife and my children, but I refuse."

"Because, perhaps, you think our measures ill-taken, and you are afraid to trust to an escape which, if discovered, would aggravate your offence?"

"I believe, sir, that you are a prudent man. I will say more — that you are adventurous, since you yourself come to propose this escape to me; but I repeat, I do not wish to fly."

"Without doubt, you think, monsieur, that forced to fly from France, you will leave your wife and children in misery there. I have foreseen that, and offer you this pocketbook, in which you will find one hundred | thousand francs in bank notes."

Favras looked at the baron with a kind of admiration. Then, shaking his head: "It is not that, monsieur," said he, "upon my word, and without your having had to offer me this pocket-book, if it had been my intention to leave France, I should have fled. But once more, my mind is made up; I will not fly."

The baron looked at him who gave this firm refusal, as if he doubted whether he possessed his senses.

"This astonishes you," said Favras, with a singular degree of serenity, "and you ask yourself, without daring to ask me, whence arises this strange determination to wait to the end, and to meet death, if necessary, whatever that death may be."

"I confess so, monsieur."

"I will tell you. I am a royalist, monsieur, but not of that kind who emigrate, or remain dissimulating at Paris. My opinion is not founded upon a sordid calculation of interest — it is a faith, a religion, and kings are no more to me than a bishop or a pope; that is to say, it is of the visible representatives of this faith, this religion, I am speaking now. If I fly, it will be said that the king or Monsieur have caused me to escape; if they have let me escape, they were my accomplices. Religions fall, my dear baron, when there are no longer any martyrs; I will rouse up mine by dying for it! This shall be a reproach cast upon the past, an advertisement offered to the future!"

"But think of the kind of death which awaits you!" urged the baron.

"The more infamous the death, the more meritorious will be the sacrifice. Christ died on a cross between thieves."

"I could understand that, monsieur," said the baron, "if your death would have the same influence on royalty as that of Christ had on the world. But the sins of kings are so great, that so far from thinking that the blood of a simple gentleman will wash them away, I do not think that even the blood of a king can do it!"

"That will be as God pleases, M. le Baron; but at a time when so many are wanting in their duty, I shall die with the consolation of having fulfilled mine."

"Ah, no, monsieur!" said the baron, with an air of impatience; "you may die with the simple regret that your death is of no use."

"When the disarmed soldier will not fly, when he awaits the enemy, when he braves death, when he receives it, he knows perfectly well that his death is useless — he can only say that flight were cowardly, and that he had rather die!"

“Monsieur,” said the baron, “I cannot stay to argue.”

He drew out his watch; it was three o’clock in the morning.

“We have yet one hour,” continued he. “I will sit at this table and read for half-an-hour; during this time reflect. In half-an-hour you will give me a definite answer.”

And taking a chair, he sat down against the table, his back turned to the prisoner, and began to read.

“Good-night, monsieur,” said Favras.

And he turned his face to the wall, without doubt to reflect more undisturbedly.

The reader drew his watch from his pocket two or three times; more impatient than the prisoner, when the half hour was gone, he rose and went toward the bed. But he had waited in vain — Favras did not turn.

The baron leant over him, and discovered from his regular and calm breathing that the prisoner slept.

“Aliens!” said he, speaking to himself, “I am conquered, but judgment is not yet pronounced; perhaps he still doubts.”

And not wishing to awake the unhappy marquis again, he seized a pen and wrote upon a sheet of white paper the following:

“When sentence is passed, and M. de Favras is condemned to death, when he has no hope either in the judges or Monsieur, should he change his opinion, M. de Favras has only to call the jailer, Louis, and say to him: ‘I am decided to fly’ and means will be provided to assist his flight.

“When M. de Favras is in the fatal wagon, when M. de Favras begs pardon in front of Notre-Dame, when M. de Favras traverses, with naked feet and bound hands, the short space that separates the steps of the Hotel de Ville from the gallows on the Greve, he has only to pronounce the words: ‘I wish to be saved!’“ and he shall be saved.

“CAGLIOSTRO.”

When he had written the above, the visitor took the lamp, and advanced to the bed a second time to see if Favras still slept. He then regained the door of the cell, but not without returning several times, behind which, with the imperturbable resignation of those disciples who are ready to sacrifice everything to gain their end, Louis, the jailer, was standing immovable.

“Well, master,” he asked, “what shall I do?”

"Remain in the prison, and do whatever M. de Favras commands thee."

The jailer bowed his assent, took the lamp from the hand of Cagliostro, and walked respectfully before him, as a valet who lights his master.

The same day the chief jailer, about an hour after mid-day, descended with four armed men into the prison of M. de Favras and announced to him that he must prepare to appear before his judges. M. de Favras had been forewarned of this during the night by Cagliostro, and at nine in the morning by the sub-lieutenant to the Chatelet. The general hearing of the trial commenced at nine, and was still proceeding at three o'clock. Since before nine in the morning the Salle had been crowded with persons curious to see him whose sentence was about to be pronounced.

Forty judges were arranged in a circle at the end of the salle, the president upon a dais, a painting representing the crucifixion of our Saviour was immediately behind him, and at the other end of the hall, just opposite, was the portrait of the king.

A number of the Grenadiers of the National Guard guarded the Hall of Justice, both within and without. Four men kept watch at the door.

At a quarter to three the judges ordered the accused to be brought. A detachment of a dozen grenadiers, who waited in the middle of the salle for this order, immediately marched off.

After this, every head, even including those of the judges, was turned towards the door through which M. de Favras would enter. At the end of about ten minutes, four of the grenadiers re-appeared. Behind them marched the Marquis de Favras. The other eight grenadiers followed after him.

The prisoner's face was perfectly calm; his toilet had been attended to with evident care: he wore an embroidered coat, a white satin vest, a culotte of the same material and workmanship as his coat, silk stockings, and buckled shoes, with the cross of St. Louis in his hat. His hair was carefully dressed and powdered.

During the short time it took M. de. Favras to pass from the door to the place which the prisoners generally occupied, every breath in the hall was suspended. Some moments elapsed between the arrival of the accused in his place and the first words being addressed to him. At last the judges made with their heads their useless but habitual sign for silence.

"Who are you?" asked the president.

"I am the prisoner," answered Favras with the greatest calmness.

“What is your name?”

“Thomas Mahi, Marquis de Favras.”

“Where do you come from?”

“From Blois.”

“What is your station?”

“Colonel in the service of the king.”

“Where do you live?”

“Place Royal, No. 21.”

“How old are you?”

“Forty-six.”

“Sit down.”

The marquis obeyed.

Then only did respiration return to the spectators, and it seemed like a respiration of vengeance.

The prisoner looked round him: every eye was full of hate, every finger threatening; one felt that he must fall.

In the midst of all these angry countenances, the accused recognised the calm face and friendly eye of his visitor on the previous night. He saluted him with an imperceptible nod, and continued his review. “Accused,” said the president, “be ready to answer.”

Favras bowed. “I am at your orders, M. le President,” said he.

Then commenced the second examination, which the prisoner went through as calmly as he had done the first. Then the witnesses were summoned. Favras, who refused to save his life by flight, wished to do so by discussion and argument; he had summoned fourteen witnesses to answer the charge. The witnesses to prove the charge were heard, and he expected his own to be brought forward now, when, all at once, he heard the following words pronounced by the president: “Gentlemen, the case is closed.”

“Pardon, monsieur,” said Favras, with his habitual courtesy, “you have forgotten one thing — of little importance, it is true, — but you have forgotten to examine the fourteen witnesses summoned at my request.”

“The court,” replied the president, “has decided that they will not hear them.”

A slight cloud passed over the face of the accused. “I thought I was to be tried at the Chatelet of Paris,” said he, “but I was wrong — I am tried, it appears, by a Spanish Inquisition.”

“Remove the prisoner,” said the president.

Favras was reconducted to his prison. His calmness, courtesy, and courage had made some impression upon those spectators who had come to this trial without prejudice. But these were but a small number. The departure of Favras was accompanied with cries, menaces, and howls.

“No pardon! no pardon!” cried five hundred voices, as he passed along.

Such cries accompanied him from the court to his prison.

Then, as if speaking to himself, he murmured, “See what it is to plot with princes.”

As soon as their prisoner had gone, the judges commenced their deliberations.

At his usual hour Favras went to bed. Towards one in the morning somebody entered his prison and awoke him — this was the turnkey, Louis. He had seized the opportunity to bring a bottle of wine to the marquis. “M. de Favras,” said he, “the judges have this moment pronounced your sentence.”

“My friend,” said the marquis, “was it simply to tell me that that you awoke me? You might have let me sleep.”

“No, monsieur, I roused you to inquire whether you had nothing to say to the person who visited you last night.”

“Nothing.”

“Reflect, M. le Marquis; when judgment is pronounced, you will be more strictly guarded, and however powerful that person may be, yet he may not afterwards be able to effect your escape.”

“Thanks, my friend,” said Favras; “but neither now, nor at any time, shall I have to ask him for anything.”

“Then I am sorry,” said the jailer, “that I disturbed you; but you would have been roused in another hour’s time.”

“Well,” said Favras, “according to your opinion, it’s scarcely worth while going to sleep again, then?”

“Listen,” said the turnkey; “judge for yourself.”

There was a great noise in the corridors above: doors opened and shut — arms were presented.

“Ah! ah!” said Favras, “all this bother is for me, then?”

“They are coming to read the sentence, M. le Marquis.”

“Diable! they must give me time to dress.”

The jailer immediately went out, fastening the door behind him.

During this time M. de Favras hurriedly dressed himself.

He was still at his toilet when the door opened.

He looked well — his head thrown back, his hair half dressed, his lace shirt open at the breast.

At the moment the clerk of the court entered his cell he was turning down the collar of his shirt on to his shoulders.

“You see, monsieur,” said he to the clerk, “I am prepared for you, and ready for the combat.”

And he passed his hand over his uncovered neck — ready for the aristocratic sword or plebeian cord.

“Speak, monsieur,” he said; “I listen.”

The clerk read, or rather lisped out, the sentence.

The marquis was condemned to death, he was to make the amende honorable in front of Notre-Dame and immediately to be hanged at the Greve.

Favras listened with the greatest calmness, and did not even raise an eyebrow at the word hanged, a word that grates on the ear of a gentleman.

He said, only after a minute’s silence, and looking the clerk in the face:

“Oh! monsieur, how sorry I am you have been compelled to condemn a man upon such slight proof.”

The clerk avoided answering.

“Monsieur,” said he, “you are aware that there is no hope for you, except what religion offers — shall I send you a confessor?”

“A confessor at the hands of those who are about to assassinate me? No, sir, I should be suspicious of him. I am quite willing to give you my life, but I set some value on my safety hereafter. I should like to see the priest of Saint Paul’s.”

Two hours afterwards this venerable priest was seated with the Marquis de Favras.

A tumbril, surrounded by a numerous guard, was waiting at the gate of the Chatelet. A lighted torch was in the tumbril. When they saw the condemned, the multitude clapped their hands. Since six o’clock in the morning, when the sentence had been made known, the people had been collecting together.

Favras got into the tumbril with a firm step. He sat down on the side where the torch was, for he knew that the torch was meant for him. The priest of Saint Paul’s got in directly afterwards, and sat on the left. The executioner mounted last, and sat behind him. Before sitting down, the executioner passed the rope around Favras' neck. He held the other end in his hand.

Just as the tumbril commenced to move, there was a movement in the crowd. Favras naturally turned his head and looked in that direction. He saw some people pushing their way into the front rank, and getting better places. All at once he started, in spite of himself; for, in the first rank, and in the midst of five or six of his companions, who were about to make a rush through the crowd, he recognised the visitor who had said that to the very last moment he would watch over him.

The condemned made him a sign with his head — one only, a sign of acknowledgment.

The tumbril continued on its way, and did not stop until it reached Notre Dame. The road through the middle of the crowd was open, and the principal altar, brilliantly lit by wax candles, could be seen for some distance.

"It is necessary to descend here in order to make the amende honorable," said the executioner.

Favras obeyed, without answering.

The priest descended first, then the prisoner, and lastly the executioner, always retaining the end of the cord in his hands.

His arms were bound at the elbow: this left the hands of the marquis free. In his right hand they placed the torch, in his left the judgment. He then walked to the porch of the church, and knelt down.

In the front rank of those that surrounded him he recognised the same men who had startled him when he first mounted the tumbril. This perseverance seemed to touch him, but no word escaped from his mouth.

A jailer of the Chatelet seemed to be waiting for him there. "Read, monsieur," said he, in a loud voice. Then, in a low tone, he added: "M. le Marquis, you know if you wish to be saved you have only one word to say!"

Without answering, the condemned began reading.

He read in a loud voice, and nothing in tone or manner showed the least emotion. When he had done reading, he addressed those around him:

"Ready to appear before my God," said he, "I pardon the men who, against their conscience, have found me guilty. I love my king; I die faithful to him. I am setting an example which I hope will be followed by other noble hearts. The people ask for my death; they want a victim. I had rather that the fatal choice should fall upon me than upon another, who might not be able to undergo unmerited punishment without despair. And now, if there is nothing else to be done, let us be proceeding, gentlemen."

And so they went on.

It is not very far from the porch of Notre Dame to the Place de Greve, and yet the tumbril took a full hour to go there.

With a firm step Favras descended and walked towards the scaffold.

At the very moment that he placed his foot on the first step, a voice cried out, "Jump, marquis!"

The grave and sonorous voice of the criminal replied, "Citizens, I die innocent, pray for me!"

At the eighth step, that is to say, the one from which he would be thrown, he repeated a third time, "Citizens! I die innocent, pray for me!"

But one of the assistants of the hangman immediately said:

"Then you do not wish to be saved?"

"Thanks, my good friend," said Favras; "God will reward you for your good intentions."

Then, raising his head towards the hang — -man, "Do your duty," said he.

He had scarcely pronounced the words before the hangman pushed him off and his body swung in the air.

CHAPTER XX.

The Monarchy Is Saved.

SOME DAYS after the execution which we have narrated, a horseman slowly paced the avenue of St. Cloud.

This slowness could be attributed to neither the fatigue of the rider nor the weariness of the horse; both had taken it gently. The foam made by the champing of the bit showed that the horse had been restrained.

The deep thought into which the rider had fallen seemed to retard him, or else he was taking care to arrive only at a certain hour, which had not yet struck.

He was a man of about forty, whose powerful lineaments did not want character: his head was large, his cheeks were puffed out, his face was covered with little wrinkles, he had two quick sharp eyes, and a mouth always ready to express satire. Such was the man who, at first sight, one felt must occupy a high position and make a great noise in the world.

Arrived at the top of the avenue, he leaped without any hesitation over the gate leading to the court of the palace.

Betwixt two buildings to the right another man was waiting. He made a sign to the cavalier to come on. A door was opened, and the cavalier, following the other, found himself in a secret court. There the man stopped. He was dressed in black. Then, looking round him, and observing that the court was empty, he approached the cavalier hat in hand.

The cavalier, by leaning over the neck of his horse, brought himself in some measure opposite him.

“M. Weber,” said he, in a low tone.

“M. le Comte de Mirabeau,” answered the latter.

“The same,” said the cavalier; and more lightly than one could have supposed, he alighted on the ground.

“Enter,” said Weber; “but will you wait a moment until I myself put the horse into a stable.”

At the same time he opened the door of a saloon whose windows and other door opened upon the park.

Mirabeau entered into the saloon, and employed the few moments he was left alone by Weber in taking off the large boots which had preserved him from the mud during his ride.

Weber, as he promised, entered in the course of five minutes. “Come, M. le Comte,” said he, “the queen expects you.”

Weber opened a door opening on the garden, and plunged into a labyrinth of alleys, which led to the most solitary part of the park. There, in the midst of gloomy trees, appeared a pavilion, known by the name of the kiosque. The Venetian blinds of this pavilion were closed, with the exception of two, which, just resting one against the other, allowed a small quantity of light to illumine the interior. A great fire was burning on the hearth, and two branches were lit on the chimney-piece.

“M. le Comte Riquetti de Mirabeau,” said Weber, on opening the door of the kiosque, and then drew aside to allow his companion to enter the chamber.

If he had listened, as the count passed him, he might have heard the beating of his heart against his large chest.

When the presence of the count was announced, a woman in the most distant corner of the kiosque rose, and advanced tow aids him with some hesitation and even terror.

This woman was the queen.

Her heart also beat violently. She had before her this hated, decried, fatal man; this man who was accused of having caused the 5th and 6th of October; this man towards whom they had turned for a moment, but who had been repulsed by the court, and who, since then, had made them feel the necessity of treating with him again, by two flashes of lightning, as it were, which had even approached the sublime.

The first was his apostrophe to the clergy.

The second was the speech in which he explained how it was that the representatives of the people had constituted themselves into a National Assembly.

Having advanced a few paces, he bowed and waited.

The queen spoke, and said, “M. de Mirabeau, M. Gilbert assured us you were disposed to join us.”

Mirabeau bowed in assent.

The queen continued: “Then an overture was made, to which you replied by proposing a ministry.”

Mirabeau again bowed assentingly.

The queen continued: “It is not our fault if this do not succeed.”

“I think so, madame, especially your majesty’s. It may, however, be the fault of the people who say they are devoted to the monarchy.”

“Alas! count, that is one of the perils of our position. We can choose neither our friends nor our foes, and we are often forced to accept these unfortunate friendships. We are surrounded by men who wish to serve, but who ruin us. Their conduct in keeping members of the present from the next legislature is a fair instance. Shall I name one? You would scarcely believe it, but one of our most devoted friends, a man whom I am sure would die for us, took to our public dinner the widow and children of M. de Favras, all in mourning. My first emotion, when I saw them, was to rise, hurry to them, and place the family of a man who died for us by my side, for I am not one of those who forget their friends. Every eye was fixed on me, all waited to see what we would do. Know you who stood behind my chair? Sauterre, the man of the Faubourg. I sank back weeping with rage, and did not dare to look at the widow and orphans. The royalists will blame me for not having noticed the widow and children, the revolutionists will be furious because they will think they came with my permission. Monsieur,” said the queen, shaking her head sadly, “one can but perish when one is attacked by men of genius, and defended by people who certainly are very estimable, but who have no idea of our position.”

The queen sighed, and placed her handkerchief to her eyes.

“Madame,” said Mirabeau, touched by this great misfortune, which he was not ignorant of, and which, either by the shrewd skill of the queen, or from her womanly weakness, exhibited to him her tears and sufferings, “when you speak of men who attack you, I trust you do not refer to me. I professed monarchical principles when I saw nothing but weakness in the court, and when I knew nothing of the heart and feelings of the august daughter of Maria Theresa; I fought for the rights of the throne when my every step excited suspicion, and every act was misrepresented and maligned; I served the king when I knew that, just and august as he was, I had from him to expect neither honour nor reward; what will I not do now, madame, when confidence sustains my courage, and gratitude for your majesty’s reception makes obedience a duty? It is late, madame, I know, very late," said Mirabeau, shaking his head; "perhaps, in proposing to me to save monarchy, you propose to me to perish with it. Had I reflected, I would perhaps have chosen another time than one immediately preceding that on which his majesty is about to deliver the famous red book, that is the honour of his friends, to the Chamber."

"Ah, sir," said the queen, "think you the king is an accomplice of this treason, and are you ignorant how that occurred? The red book was surrendered to the committee by the king, only on condition that they would keep it strictly secret. The committee caused it to be printed, thus breaking their word. They, not the king, are guilty."

"Alas, madame, you know what made them determine on the publication of that, which, as a man of honour, I disapprove. At the very moment when the king was swearing fidelity to the constitution, he had a permanent agent at Turin, amid the mortal enemies of the constitution. At the hour he spoke of pecuniary reforms, and seemed disposed to accept those proposed to him by the Assembly, there was, at Treves, paid and sustained by him, his grand and petty stable, under the orders of the Prince de Lambesq, a person so peculiarly obnoxious to the Parisians, that every day they demand that he be hung in effigy. To the Count d'Artois, to the Prince de Conde, to all the emigres, vast pensions are paid, in violation of a decree, passed several months since, suppressing pensions. True, the king forgot to sanction this decree. For two months, madame, there has been an attempt to discover what became of 60,000,000 of money; yet none can tell. The king was begged, besought to explain what had been done with it; he refused to reply, and the committee felt itself relieved of its promise and printed the book. Why does the king put arms into the hands of others to be used so dangerously against him?"

"Ah, sir!" said the queen, "were you of the king's counsel, you would not recommend him to adopt these follies with which — I must speak the word — he dishonours himself!"

"Had I, madame, the honour of being the king's counsellor, I would be the defender of royal powers regulated by law, and the apostle of liberty guaranteed by monarchical power. This liberty, madame, has three enemies — the clergy, the nobility, and the parliament. The clergy does not belong to parliament. The clergy does not belong to this century, and was crushed by Talleyrand; the nobility belongs to all centuries, and I think we must put up with it, for there can be no monarchy without a nobility — it must, however, be repressed, and this can only be done by making it a link of union between the people and royalty. Royalty can never coalesce with the people, so long as parliaments exist, for the latter keep the nobility in hope that the old order of things will be restored. Then it is necessary, after the annihilation of the clergy, the destruction of parliaments, to revive the executive, to regenerate royal power, and make it accord with liberty. That, madame, is the sum of my politics. If it is that of the king, let him adopt it; if not, let him reject it."

"Count," said the queen, amazed by the light shed at once over the past, present and future by the radiation of the mind of Mirabeau, "I do not know if the king will agree with you, but had I the power it would be my course. Tell me then, count, what means are to be adopted to attain this course? I listen, I do not say with attention, but with thanks."

Mirabeau glanced rapidly at the queen; his eagle eye sounded her very heart, and he saw that if he had not convinced her he had at least made an impression on her.

This triumph over so superior a woman as Marie Antoinette flattered in the highest degree Mirabeau's vanity.

"Madame," said he, "we have nearly lost Paris; we yet have in the country, however, vast masses disposed to serve us, of whom we can make fascines. I advise, madame, that the king leave Paris, not France — that he join the army at Rouen, and thence publish orders more popular than the Assembly's decrees; then there will be no civil war, for the king will have surpassed the revolution."

"But is not this revolution, whether exceeded or followed, a thing to be feared?" asked the queen.

"Alas, madame! better than any one else I know something must be thrown to it. I have already told the queen that it surpasses human power to rebuild the monarchy on the basis this revolution has shattered. All Prance has consented to this revolution, from the king to the peasant, either by act or by omission. I do not, madame, seek to defend the ancient monarchy, but to modify and regenerate it; to establish a form of government more or less like that of England, which led that country to its apogee of power and glory. After having, as Gilbert tells me, beheld and studied the prison and scaffold of Charles I., will not the king be satisfied with a throne like that of William III. or George I.?"

"Oh, count," said the queen, to whom what Mirabeau had said recalled with shuddering horror the vision of the castle of Taverney, and the design of Guillotin's instrument, "restore us the monarchy, and you will see that we are not so ungrateful as they call us."

"Well," cried Mirabeau, "that, madame, is what I will do! Let the king sustain and the queen encourage me, and here at your feet I swear, as a gentleman, to keep the promise I make your majesty or die!"

"Count, count! do not forget that not a mere woman, but a dynasty of five centuries, hears your oath. Seventy kings of France, from Pharamont to Louis XV., sleep in their tombs, and will he dethroned with us when we fall!"

"I know the engagement I take, madame; it is immense, I know, though it is not greater than my will, or stronger than my devotion. Let me but be sure of the confidence of my king and queen, and I will accept the task."

"If that be all, M. de Mirabeau, I promise you both the one and the other."

And the queen bowed to Mirabeau with that serene smile which seemed to conquer every heart.

Mirabeau saw that the audience was over.

The pride of the politician was satisfied, but something was needed to satisfy the vanity of the noble.

"Madame," said he, with a respectful and bold courtesy, "when your august mother, Maria Theresa, admitted one of the nobles to her presence, he never left her without having had the honour of kissing her hand."

He stood erect and waited.

The queen looked at the chained lion, who asked only to be permitted to cast himself at her feet, and with a smile of triumph on her lips gave him slowly her beautiful hand, which was white as alabaster, and almost as transparent.

Mirabeau knelt, kissed her hand, and looking up proudly, said:

"Madame, this kiss has saved the monarchy!"

He left the room, moved, excited, and joyous, thinking to himself, poor man! that his genius would enable him to maintain and to fulfil the prophecy he had made.

Mirabeau had commenced the struggle trusting in his own powers, not ever dreaming that after so many imprudences and three intercepted plots the struggle had become impossible.

Had Mirabeau — and this would have been more prudent — been able to have worked beneath a mask for some time longer, it might have been different, but the day after he had been to the queen, on entering the Assembly, he saw groups of people and heard cries.

He approached these groups, and listened to the cries.

They handed little pamphlets about.

From time to time some one cried: “The great treachery of M. de Mirabeau! The great treachery of M. de Mirabeau!”

“Ah, ah!” said he, drawing a piece of money from his pocket, “methinks this concerns me. My friend,” continued he, to the one distributing the pamphlet, and who had several in his baskets, which an ass carried quietly wherever he wished him to go, “how much for ‘“ The great treachery of M. de Mirabeau ‘?”

The seller looked Mirabeau in the face. “M. le Comte, I give it away for nothing.” And then he added, in a lower tone, “And the pamphlet has already reached a hundred thousand.”

Mirabeau withdrew thoughtfully.

“This pamphlet had reached a hundred thousand! This pamphlet they gave for nothing! This colporteur, who knew him?”

But without doubt this pamphlet was one of those stupid publications of which such numbers appeared at this time.

Mirabeau cast his eye on the first page and turned pale.

The first page contained a list of the debts of Mirabeau, and strange! the list was correct. Two hundred and eight thousand francs!

Below this list was the date of the day when these sums had been paid to the different creditors of Mirabeau by the almoner of the queen. M. de Fontanges.

Then came the amount of the sum paid him monthly by the court — six thousand francs.

And lastly, an account of his interview with the queen.

This was difficult to be understood; the anonymous pamphleteer had not mistaken a single sum, one might also say he had not mistaken a single word.

What terrible enemy, skilled in his secrets, could follow him thus, and through him the monarchy?

The colporteur who had spoken to him, who had recognized and addressed him as M. le Comte, struck Mirabeau as if he had seen him before. He retraced his steps. The ass with his basket three parts empty was still there, but the first colporteur had disappeared, and another had taken his place. This one was wholly unknown to Mirabeau, but he did not follow up the distribution with less eagerness.

It so happened that at this moment Doctor Gilbert, who went nearly every day to listen to the debates in the Assembly, above all when the debates were likely to be of any importance, passed by the place where the colporteur was stationed.

Preoccupied, as he generally was, he would not, perhaps, have stopped, but Mirabeau, with his usual audacity, went straight to him, took him by the arm, and led him to the distributor of the pamphlets, who did the same to Gilbert as he had done to the others — that is, he stretched out his hands towards him, saying: "'The great treachery of M. de Mirabeau,' citizen?"

But at the sight of Gilbert his tongue and arms stopped as if paralyzed. Gilbert looked at him in his turn, and letting the pamphlet fall with disgust, turned away, saying: "This is villainous work you are at, M. de Beausire!" And taking the arm of Mirabeau, he continued his way to the Assembly, which had removed from the Episcopal Palace to the Manege.

"Do you know this man, then?" asked Mirabeau.

"I know him as I know such people," said Gilbert; "he is a gamester — everything; he is ready as a calumniator, or anything."

"Ah!" murmured Mirabeau, putting hi hand where his heart had been, but where there was now only the pocket-book containing the money of the chateau; and the great orator went on his way gloomily.

"What?" said Gilbert; "are you so little of a philosopher as to let such a little attack as this dash you?"

"I?" cried Mirabeau. "Ah, doctor, you do not know me! They say I am bought, when they should simply say I am paid! Well, to-morrow I purchase an hotel; tomorrow I have a carriage, horses, servants; to-morrow I have a cook and well covered table. And how do the popularity of yesterday and the unpopularity of to-day concern me? Is there not the future? No, doctor; what dashes me is that I have promised what I may not probably be able to keep; these are the faults, I had better say treacheries, of the court on my account. I have seen the queen, have I not? She seemed full of confidence in me. For a moment I dreamed — a mad dream with such a woman — for a moment I dreamed, not of being minister to the king, as Richelieu was, but let us say better — and the policy of the world would not have been worse conducted — the lover of the queen, like Mazarin. Well, what did she do? On the very day of our interview, after I had left her, I have proof that she wrote thus to her agent in Germany, M. de Flachlanden: ‘Tell my brother Leopold I am of his opinion — that I make use of M. de Mirabeau, but there is nothing serious in my relation with him.’“

“Are you sure?” asked Gilbert.

“Positive. But this is not all: you know what the discussion is about to-day in the Chamber?”

“I know it is on a question of war, but I am badly informed on the cause of this war.”

“Oh, mon Dieu!” said Mirabeau, “it is very simple. The whole of Europe is split into two parties: Austria and Russia on one side, England and Prussia on the other, swayed by the same hatred — hatred of revolutions. For Russia and Austria the manifestation is not difficult — it is their own true opinion; but it requires time for liberal England and philosophic Prussia to pass from one pole to the other, and to avow themselves what they are in reality — enemies to liberty. For her part, England has seen Brabant stretch out her hand to France; this has hastened her decision. Our revolution, my dear doctor, is contagious; it is more than a national revolution — it is a revolution of mankind. Burke, a pupil of the Jesuits of Saint Ouen, a bitter enemy of Pitt, is about to attack France in a work which he has been paid for in good gold by Pitt. England will not make war on France. “No, she dare not yet; but she abandons Belgium to the Emperor Leopold, and she is going to the end of the world to pick a quarrel with our ally, Spain. Louis XVI. made known to the Assembly yesterday that he was arming fourteen vessels on this account; there will be a great discussion today. To whom does the initiative of the war belong? This is the question. The king has already lost the Ministry of the Interior, the king has already lost Justice; if he loses War, what will become of him? On the other side, let us frankly, between you and me, doctor, touch on what we dare not mention in the Chamber. On the other side the king is mistrusted; the revolution can only be completed — and I have contributed to this more than any one — the revolution can only now be completed by breaking the sword in the hands of the king; of all powers, the most dangerous to leave in his hands is that of making war. Well, faithful to the promise I have made, I must go and ask them to leave him this power. I risk my popularity, my life perhaps, in supporting this demand. I am about to ask them to adopt a decree which will make the king victorious, triumphant! And now, what has the king done? He has caused the whole formulas of protestation to be fetched from the archives of the Parliament, doubtless to issue a secret protestation against the Assembly. See the evil, my dear doctor, of doing so many things secretly, instead of frankly, openly, publicly; and learn why I wish — I, Mirabeau, do you hear — that they should know what I am to the queen, to the king, since I am so. You told me that this infamy against me vexed and troubled me — not so, doctor, it assists me; with me, as with the storms, it is necessary there should be dark clouds and contrary winds. Come, come, doctor! and you shall see a good sitting, I promise you!"

Mirabeau was not wrong; his courage was tried as soon as he entered the Assembly. Everyone cried out "Treachery!" and one showed him a rope, another a pistol.

Mirabeau shrugged his shoulders and passed on.

The cries followed him to the hall, and seemed to call forth new cries. He had scarcely appeared, when a hundred voices exclaimed, "See, see the traitor!"

Barnave was at the tribune — he was speaking against Mirabeau. Mirabeau looked fixedly at him. "Yes!" said Barnave, "it is you I call a traitor, against you I speak!"

"Then," said Mirabeau, "if you are speaking about me, I'll take a walk round the Tuileries. I shall be back before you've done."

And with his head high, and a threatening air, he walked through the midst of the howlings and imprecations, reached the terrace, and descended into the Tuileries.

A third of the way from the great alley, a young woman, holding a sprig of vervain in her hand, was collecting a circle round her. A place on her left was empty; Mirabeau took a chair and sat himself down.

The half of those who surrounded her got up and left. Mirabeau watched them go and smiled. The young woman gave him her hand.

"Ah! baronne," said he, "you are not afraid of catching the plague?"

"My dear count," replied the young woman, "they say you have left our side. I draw you to us."

Mirabeau smiled, and talked three-quarters of an hour with the young woman, who was no other than Anne Louise Germaine Necker, Baronne de Stael.

At the end of that time, taking out his watch, “Ah, baronne!” said he, “I ask your pardon; Barnave was speaking against me — he had spoken an hour when I left the Assembly, and for three-quarters of an hour I have had the pleasure of conversing with you; my accuser, consequently, has been talking for nearly two hours — his discourse ought to be near its end. I must answer him.”

“Go!” said the baronne, “answer him, and with good courage.”

“Give me, madame, this sprig of vervain; it shall serve me as a talisman.”

“Take care, my dear count, vervain is worn at funerals.”

“Give it me, nevertheless; it is good to be crowned as a martyr when one descends into the circle.”

“The fact is,” said Madame de Stael, “it is impossible to be more stupid than the Assembly yesterday was.”

“Ah, baronne!” said Mirabeau, “why do you put the date?”

And as he took the sprig of vervain from her hand, which she gave him without doubt for this last speech, Mirabeau saluted her gallantly, mounted the steps which conducted to the terrace, and regained the Assembly.

Barnave descended from the tribune in the midst of acclamation which filled the salle: he had pronounced a discourse of that kind which pleases all parties.

Mirabeau was scarcely in the tribune before a complete hurricane of cries and imprecations was showered upon him.

But, raising his powerful hand, and profiting by one of those intervals of silence which there always are in storms and emeutes:

“I know well,” said he, “that it is but a step from the Capitol to the Tarpeian rock.”

Such is the majesty of genius, that this single sentence made the most irritated silent.

From the moment when Mirabeau had obtained silence, his victory was half gained. He demanded that the initiative of the war should be given to the king; this was asking too much — they refused. Then the struggle commenced on the amendments. The principal motion had been negatived. It was necessary to recover himself by partial changes. He ascended the tribune five times.

Barnave had spoken two hours; during three hours Mirabeau spoke, and at length obtained the following:

That the king had the right to make the preparations and direct the forces as he wished; that he should propose war to the Assembly, and the latter should do nothing until sanctioned by the king.

At the end of the sitting Mirabeau escaped being cut in pieces.

Barnave was carried in triumph by the people.

Poor Barnave! the day is not distant when you shall hear the cries in your turn: “Great treachery of M. Barnave!”

CHAPTER XXI.

The Elixir Vita.

MIRABEAU left the Assembly; when he found himself in the face of danger, the strong athlete thought of neither the peril nor his strength.

When he reached home, he laid himself down on cushions in the midst of flowers.

Mirabeau had two passions: women and flowers.

Since the commencement of the session his health had altered perceptibly; although of a vigorous temperament, he had suffered so much, both physically and morally, from his persecutions and imprisonments, that he was never in a perfect state of health.

This time it seemed to be something more than ordinary, and he only feebly resisted his valet, who spoke of going for a physician, when Doctor Gilbert rang and was immediately admitted.

Mirabeau gave his hand to the doctor, and drew him down on to the cushions where he lay, in the midst of flowers.

“So! my dear count,” said Gilbert, “I thought I would not go home without congratulating you: you promised me a victory; you have succeeded better than that — you gained a triumph.”

“Yes, but you see it is a triumph like that of Pyrrhus — another such victory as that and I am lost!”

Gilbert looked at Mirabeau.

“In fine,” said he, “you are ill.”

Mirabeau shrugged his shoulders.

“That is to say, in doing what I have done, any one else but me would have died a hundred times. I have two secretaries: they are always at work, and are ill; Pelline, above all, who has to copy my manuscripts — and he is the only one who can read and understand my illegible scrawl — has been in bed these three days. Doctor, tell me, then, I do not say something that will make me live, but something that will give me strength as long as I live.”

“What do you want?” said Gilbert, after feeling his pulse; “for an organization like yours there is no advice to give — advise repose to a man who puts all his strength into motion, temperance to a genius which glories in excess! You have made a necessity of flowers, and their absence makes you suffer more than their presence, and yet they throw out oxygen in the day and carbonic acid gas at night. Should I tell you to treat the women as the flowers, and keep away from them, especially at night, you would tell me you would rather die. Live, then, my dear count, as you have lived, only contrive to have flowers without any perfume, and amours without any passion.”

“In this last particular, my dear doctor, you are admirably served. Amours of passion have succeeded too poorly for me to commence any again. Three years of imprisonment, a condemnation to death, and the suicide of the woman I loved, and that too for another, have cured me of these kind of amours. For a moment, I have told you, I dreamt something great: I had dreamt of the alliance of Elizabeth and Essex, of Anne of Austria and Mazarin, of Catharine the Second and Potemkin; but it was a dream. I have not again seen the woman for whom I struggle, and probably never shall. Believe me, Gilbert, there is no greater burden than to feel that on us depends the success of great projects, the prosperity of a kingdom, the triumph of its friends, the abasement of its enemies, and that by an unfortunate roll of the dice, by a caprice of fate, all may escape us! Oh! how the follies of my youth make me expiate them as they will expiate themselves! But why do they defy me! But have I not on two or three occasions been completely for them, and for them to the end? Was I not for the absolute right of veto when M. Necker even was only for the suspending veto? Was I not opposed to the 4th of August, a night in which I took no part, when the noblesse were deprived of their privileges? Did I not protest against the declaration of the rights of man? — Not because I did not believe in it, but because I thought the day for it had not arrived. To-day, to-day indeed, have I not served them more than they could have hoped? Have I not obtained for them, at the expense of honour, popularity, and life, more than any mind, be he minister or prince, could hare gained? And when I think — reflect well, thou great philosopher, on what I am going to tell you, for the fall of the monarchy perhaps lurks in this — and when I think that I, who ought to esteem it a great favour, so great that I have only been allowed to do so once, have seen the queen; when I remember that my father died through the taking of the Bastille, and that if decency had not forbid me pointing this out the day after the day on which Lafayette was named General of the National Guard, and Bailly Mayor of Paris, that I should have been named mayor in the place of Bailly! — oh! then things changed: the king found it necessary to enter into connection with me; I inspired him with other ideas; I obtained his confidence, and I brought him, before the evil had become too great, to pursue decisive measures; instead of a simple deputy, a man mistrusted, feared, hated, they have driven me from the king, calumniated me with the queen! Do you believe one thing, doctor? — when she saw me at Saint Cloud she turned pale! Ah! it is quite simple; they made her believe that it was I who caused the 5th and 6th of October. During this year I have done all they have tempted me to do; and to-day, ah! to-day, for the health of the monarchy as well as my own, I have much fear lest it be too late."

And Mirabeau, with an expression of suppressed pain over his whole countenance, seized with his hand the flesh of his breast above his stomach.

"Are you in pain, count?" asked Gilbert.

"As one of the damned! There are days, on my honour, when what they do to my character with calumny I believe they do to my body with arsenic! Do you believe in the poisons of Borgia, in the aqua tofana of Perouse, doctor?" asked Mirabeau, smiling.

"No! but I believe the flame that burns in this blazing lamp so ardent as to crack the glass."

Gilbert drew from his pocket a small crystal bottle, containing, perhaps, two teaspoonfuls of a green liquid.

"Here, count," said he, "we will try an experiment."

"What?" said Mirabeau, looking at the bottle with curiosity.

"One of my friends, whom I should like to see yours too, and who is very skilled in the natural sciences — nay, even pretends to a knowledge of the occult ones as well — has given me the recipe of a beverage which is almost like the elixir vitae. Often when I am troubled with those sad thoughts which lead our neighbours in England to melancholy, spleen, and even death, I take a few drops of this liquid, and I ought to tell you that the effect has always been salutary and prompt. Will you taste a little in your turn?"

"From your hands, doctor, I would receive anything, even the hemlock, much more the elixir of life. Is there any preparation, or must one drink it pure?’’

“No; for this liquid in reality possesses great power. Order your valet to bring you a few drops of brandy or spirits of wine in a cup.”

“Diable! brandy or spirits of wine! so you want to dilute your potion? — it must be a fire-liquid. I do not know a man who could drink it, unless Prometheus came on earth again. I will tell you, however, that I do not believe my servant will find six drops of brandy in the whole house. I am not like Pitt, and I do not seek my eloquence in the bottle.”

The servant, however, returned a few moments afterwards with a cup holding the five or six drops of brandy necessary.

Gilbert added to the brandy an equal quantity of the liquid in the phial; when the two liquids combined, the mixture became the colour of absinthe, and Mirabeau, seizing the cup, drank what it contained.

“Morbleu! doctor,” said he to Gilbert, “you did well to warn me that your drug was strong — it seemed literally like a draught of lightning.”

Gilbert smiled, and seemed to await its effects with confidence.

Mirabeau remained for an instant as if burnt up by jets of flame, his head laid on his chest, and his hand holding his stomach; but all at once, raising his head: “Ah! doctor,” said he, “that is indeed an elixir vita you have given me to drink.”

Then he rose, his respiration clear, his forehead bright, his arms extended.

“Overset the monarchy now,” said he; “I feel I am myself able to sustain it.”

Gilbert smiled.

“You feel better, then?” he asked.

“Doctor,” said Mirabeau, “tell me where they sell this liquid, and if I must pay for each drop with a diamond as large — must I renounce every luxury but that of strength and life — I tell you I will have that liquid flame, and then — and then I shall look on myself as invincible.”

“Count,” said Gilbert, “promise me never to take this liquid more than twice a week, and to address yourself only to me to provide you with more, and this phial is yours.”

“Give it to me,” said Mirabeau, “and I promise you all you wish.”

“There,” said Gilbert; “but now this is not all. You are going to have horses and a carriage, are you not?”

“Yes.”

“Well, live in the country. These flowers that vitiate the air of a chamber make the air of a garden pure. The drive which you will have to Paris every day will do you much good. Choose, if possible, a residence near a height, in a wood, or near a river — Bellevue, St. Germain, or Argenteuil.”

“Argenteuil!” replied Mirabeau; “I have just sent a servant to take a house there. Teisch, did you not say you had found something there that would suit me?”

“Yes, M. le Comte,” replied the valet, who had assisted at the cure that Gilbert had effected, “yes, a charming house, which my compatriot Fritz mentioned to me. He has inhabited it, it seems, with his master, who is a foreign banker. It is empty, and M. le Comte can have it when he will.”

“Whereabouts is the house?”

“Beyond Argenteuil; it is called the chateau of the Marais.”

“Oh! I know it,” said Mirabeau; “very well, Teisch. When my father drove me from him with his curse, and beatings with his cane,.... you know, doctor, my father lived at Argenteuil?”

“Yes,”

“Well, I said when my father drove me from him, I used often to go and promenade round the exterior walls of this beautiful habitation, and to say like Horace, pardon me if the quotation is false, ‘O rus quando te aspiciam?’“

“Then, my dear count, the moment has come when you can realize your dream. Go, visit the chateau of the Marais — transport your family there — the sooner the better.”

Mirabeau reflected an instant, and then, turning himself towards Gilbert: “It is your duty, doctor,” said he, “to watch over the patient you have restored to health: it is only five o’clock, and we are in the long days of the year; it is very fine, so let us get into a carriage and go to Argenteuil.”

“Let it be so,” said Gilbert; “when one undertakes to cure a health so valuable as yours, one ought to take every care. Come, let us see your future country house.”

Mirabeau had not kept house as yet, and therefore kept no carriage. A servant went to fetch a hackney coach.

Why had Mirabeau chosen Argenteuil? Was it as he had just told the doctor, that certain souvenirs of his life attached him to this little town?

It was at Argenteuil that his father, the Marquis de Mirabeau, died on the 11th of July, 1789, as became a true gentleman to die who would not assist at the taking of the Bastille.

At the foot of the bridge of Argenteuil Mirabeau directed the carriage to stop.

“Are we there?” asked the doctor.

“Yes and no: we are not quite at the chateau of the Marais, which is a quarter of a league beyond Argenteuil. But what we are making to-day, doctor, I had forgotten to tell you, is not a simple visit, but a pilgrimage — a pilgrimage to three stations.”

“A pilgrimage!” said Gilbert, smiling, “and to what saint?”

“To Saint Riquette, my dear doctor, a saint whom you do not know, but one whom men have canonized. It is certain that here is buried Saint Riquette’’, Marquis de Mirabeau, friend of man, put to death like a martyr by the agitations and debaucheries of his unworthy son, Honore Gabriel Victor Riquette, Comte de Mirabeau.”

“Ah! it is true,” said the doctor; “it was at Argenteuil that your father died. Pardon me, my dear count, that I had forgotten that. And where did your father live?”

At the very moment Gilbert put this question, Mirabeau stopped before the gate of a house situated on the quay, in front of the river, from which it was separated by a lawn of perhaps some three hundred paces and a cluster of trees.

An enormous dog, of the race of those of the Pyrenees, on perceiving a man stop before the gate, darted out and growled, and thrusting his head between the bars, tried to catch hold of Mirabeau’s flesh, or at least the lapel of his coat.

“Pardieu, doctor,” said he, “nothing is changed, and they receive me here as if my father were living.”

While he spoke, a young man appeared on the steps, silenced the dog, called it to him, and advanced towards the strangers.

“Pardon, gentlemen,” said he; “many promenaders stop before this house, which was inhabited by the Marquis de Mirabeau, and as poor Cartouche does not understand the historic interest which is attached to the house of his humble masters, he growls eternally. To your kennel. Cartouche!”

The young man made a threatening gesture, and the dog went, still growling, and hid himself in his kennel, through whose open bars there soon passed two paws, on which he leant his head.

During this time Mirabeau and Gilbert exchanged a look.

“Gentlemen,” exclaimed the young man, “there is nothing now behind this gate but a host ready to open it and receive you if your curiosity is not satisfied with the exterior.”

Gilbert nudged Mirabeau as a sign that he would willingly visit the interior of the mansion. Mirabeau understood him; moreover, his wishes coincided with those of Gilbert.

“Monsieur,” said he, “you have fathomed our thoughts. We knew that this house had been inhabited by the ‘Friend of Mankind,’ and we were curious to visit it.”

“And your curiosity will redouble, gentlemen,” said the young man,” when you know that two or three times, while the father lived here, it was honored by the presence of his illustrious son, who, it is said, was not always received as he deserved to be, and as we would receive him if he should take it into his head ever to have the same curiosity as yourselves.” And bowing, the young man opened the gate to the two visitors, and walked before them.

But Cartouche did not seem disposed to let them thus enjoy the hospitality which had been offered to them; he darted again out of his kennel, growling horribly.

The young man threw himself betwixt the dog and that one of his guests against whom the animal seemed principally irritated.

But Mirabeau drew the young man aside with his hand.

“Monsieur,” said he, “both dogs and men have growled at me; men have bit me sometimes, dogs never. They say that the human eye is all powerful in its influence on animals. Let me, I beg, make an experiment.”

“Monsieur,” said the young man, quickly, “Cartouche is bad tempered. I must beg you to be very careful.”

“Never mind, monsieur,” Mirabeau replied, “I have to do with worse subjects than he is, every day, and to-day, even, with one quite as savage.”

“Yes, but to this savage,” said Gilbert, “you could talk, and no one will deny the power of your eloquence.”

“Doctor, I believe you are an adept at magnetism.”

“Without doubt; what then?”

“Then you ought to know the power of the eye. Let me magnetize Cartouche.”

“Do so,” said Gilbert.

“Oh, monsieur!” said the young man, “do not run any risk.”

“Not the slightest,” answered Mirabeau.

The young man bowed his consent, and drew off to the left, while Gilbert went to the right, as do the witnesses of a duel.

The young man ascended two or three of the steps leading to the door, and held himself ready to stop Cartouche, if the word and eye of the unknown should prove not to be sufficient under the circumstances.

The dog turned its head to the right and left, as if to see whether he against whom it seemed to have an implacable hatred was really without help. Then, seeing him without arms and assistance, it came slowly out of its kennel, more like a serpent than a quadruped, and all at once sprang forward, and at the first bound cleared one-third of the distance between its adversary and itself.

Mirabeau crossed his arms, and with that look which made him the Jupiter Tonans of the tribune, fixed his eye upon the animal.

At the same time all the electricity that his body seemed capable of containing mounted to his face. His hair stood up like the mane of a lion, and if it had been midnight instead of day, without doubt each one of his hairs would have shown a feeble electrical light. The dog stopped short and looked at him. Mirabeau stooped, and taking a handful of sand, threw it in its face. The dog growled, and took another bound, which brought it within three or four paces of its antagonist; but now it was the latter that advanced.

The animal remained a moment immovable as the stone dog of the chasseur cephale; but made uneasy by the approach of Mirabeau, it seemed to hesitate between fear and rage, and threatening with its teeth and eyes, retreated backwards. At last, Mirabeau raised his arms with a threatening gesture, and the dog, conquered and trembling in every limb, recoiled, and turning round, hastily entered its kennel. Mirabeau joyously turned round. “Ah! doctor,” said he, “old M. de Mirabeau was right when he declared that dogs were candidates for humanity. You have seen this cowardly fellow insolent, now you see him servile as a man!”

And then, with a tone of command, he said: “Cartouche, come here!”

The dog hesitated, but with a gesture of impatience, pushed its head a second time out of the kennel, fixed its eyes upon Mirabeau, and bounded across the space separating them, and arrived at the feet of its conquerer, raised its head slowly and timidly, and with its tongue licked Mirabeau’s hand. “Good dog!” said he, “to your kennel!” He made a gesture, and the dog went and laid himself down.

Then, turning to Gilbert, while the young man, half frozen with fear and mute with astonishment, stood on the steps:

“Do you know what I was thinking of, my dear doctor,” said he, “as I was acting this folly which you have just witnessed?”

“No; but tell me. You did not do it by simple bravado!”

“I thought of the famous night of the 5th of October. Doctor! doctor! I would give the life left me, if the king, Louis XVI., had seen this dog dart upon me, return to the kennel, and then come and lick my hand.”

Then he added to the young man: “You will pardon me, monsieur, I hope, for having so humiliated Cartouche? Come, let us see the house of the ‘Friend of Mankind,’ since you are so kind as to show it us.”

The young man drew aside to let Mirabeau pass, who for that matter did not seem to require a guide, but appeared to know the house as well as if he had been there before.

Without stopping on the ground floor, he mounted the staircase quickly, and with his usual dominating habit, Mirabeau, from a mere spectator, became an actor — from a simple visitor, master of the house. Gilbert followed him.

During this time the young man went to call his father, a man of fifty or five-and-fifty, and his two sisters, young girls of fifteen to eighteen, to tell them what a strange guest they were about to receive.

While he was narrating the history of the taming of the dog, Mirabeau occupied himself with showing Gilbert the working room, chamber and saloon of the late Marquis de Mirabeau; and each room made him tell anecdote after anecdote in that pleasing manner which belonged especially to him.

The proprietor and his family listened to this eloquent cicerone, who told them the history of their own house, with open ears.

The rooms above having been visited, and seven o’clock ringing from the church-tower of Argenteuil, Mirabeau, who doubtless feared to be too late to accomplish his object, pressed Gilbert to descend, setting the example by jumping down the first four steps.

“Monsieur,” said the proprietor of the house, “you, who know so much of the history of M. de Mirabeau and his illustrious son, may be able to relate of these first four steps a story which will be equally as curious as those you have already narrated.”

“I intended that to have remained untold,” said Mirabeau.

“And why so, count?” asked Gilbert.

“I’faith, you shall judge. When Mirabeau left the dungeons of Vincennes, where he had been eighteen mouths, he came to see his father. There were two reasons why Mirabeau was badly received in the paternal mansion; firstly, he left Vincennes against his father’s wishes, and secondly, he came to ask for money. It happened that the marquis was engaged in giving the last touch to a philosophical work, and raising his eyes, he saw his son, and at the first words about money which he pronounced, he darted on his son with his cane. The count knew his father well, and yet he thought that his age, thirty-seven, would save him from the threatened correction. The count soon found he was wrong, as the blows showered down upon him.”

“What! blows with the cane?” asked Gilbert.

“Yes, and good heavy blows, too — not such as those which are administered at the Comedie Francaise in Moliere’s plays.”

“And what did the Count de Mirabeau do?” asked Gilbert.

“Parbleu! he did what Horace did in his first battle, he fled. Unfortunately, he had not, like Horace, a shield to throw away, so he ran at once, and jumped down the first four steps, as I did but just now, but a little quicker, perhaps. Arrived there, he turned about, and raising his walking-stick in his turn, ‘Stop, sir,’ said he, ‘we are no longer relations:!’ It was but a poor reply — all, what a pity the seneschal is dead; I could have written out that for him. ‘Mirabeau,’ continued the narrator, ‘was too good a strategy not to make his retreat at once. He ran down the rest of the steps almost as fast as he had descended the first four, and, to his great grief, never entered the house again.’ This Count de Mirabeau was a beggerly fellow, don’t you think so, doctor?”

“Oh, monsieur!” said the young man, approaching Mirabeau, with clasped hands, as if he asked pardon of his guest for entertaining a different opinion, “rather say a very great man!”

Mirabeau looked the young man in the face.

“Ah, ah!” said he, “then there are people who do think so of the Count de Mirabeau?”

“Yes, sir,” said the young man, “and at the risk of displeasing you, I amongst the first.”

“Oh!” replied Mirabeau, smiling, “you must not say so so loudly in this house, or the walls may fall in upon you.”

And then, saluting the old man and the two girls respectfully, he passed through the garden, making a friendly sign to Cartouche.

Gilbert followed Mirabeau, who ordered the coachman to drive into the town and pull up opposite the church.

At the corner of the first street he stopped the carriage, and drawing a card from his pocket: “Teisch,” said he to his servant, “take this card to the young man, who is not aware that I am M. de Mirabeau.”

Then with a sigh: “Ah! doctor,” said he, “there is one who has not yet read ‘The Great Treachery of M. de Mirabeau.’“

Teisch returned. He was followed by the young man. “Oh! M. le Comte,” said the latter, with an accent of great admiration, “allow me the honour which you have already permitted Cartouche, of kissing your hand.”

Mirabeau opened both his arms, and pressed the young man to his breast.

“M. le Comte,” said he, “I am called Mormais: if ever you want any one that is ready to die for you, think of me.”

Tears came to the eyes of Mirabeau. “Doctor,” said he, “such are the men who will succeed us. I think, on my honour, they will be better than us.”

The carriage stopped opposite the church.

“I have told you that I have never been at Argenteuil since my father struck me: I was mistaken; I was here when I placed his body in this church.”

And Mirabeau descended from the carriage, and, hat in hand, with slow and solemn step entered into the church.

Gilbert followed a few paces after him. He saw Mirabeau traverse all the church, and near the altar of the Virgin go behind a column whose Roman capital seemed to denote that it was of the twelfth century. .

Bending his head, he fixed his eyes upon a black tablet in the centre of the chapel. The doctor’s eyes followed those of Mirabeau and read the following inscription:

Here rests
Francoise de Castellane, Marquise de Mirabeau,
A model of purity and virtue; a happy wife
And happy mother.
She was born in Dauphine in 1681, and died at Paris,
in 1769,
First buried at Saint Surplice,

And then transported here to be re-united with her worthy son in the same tomb.

Victor Riquette. Marquis de Mirabeau,
Surnamed the “Friend of Men,”
Born at Pertuis, in Provence, 4th of October, 1715,
Died at Argenteuil, the 11th July, 1789.
Pray for their souls.

The influence of death is so powerful, that Gilbert bent his head, and sought in his memory for a prayer, in order to obey the invitation which the sepulchre addressed to every Christian beholder.

But if Gilbert had ever in his fancy known the language of humility and faith, doubt and philosophy had written in its place sophisms and paradoxes.

Finding his heart hard and his lips dumb, he raised his eyes and saw two tears coursing down the cheeks of Mirabeau.

These two tears of Mirabeau seemed strange to Gilbert — he went and took him by the hand.

Mirabeau understood him.

The tears wept by Mirabeau in remembrance of the father who had imprisoned and tortured him would seem incomprehensible or trivial.

He would not, consequently, express the true cause of his sensibility to Gilbert.

“This Francoise de Castellane, mother of my father, was a worthy woman,” said he. “When all the world declared me hideous, she was satisfied to find me ugly. When all the world hated me so, she loved me still. But what she loved was his son! and so, you see, my dear Gilbert, I have united them. Who will bury me with them? By whose bones will mine be laid? I have not even a dog to love me!” And he laughed bitterly.

“Monsieur,” said a voice, with something of that reproach which only belongs to devotees, “people never laugh in a church!”

“Monsieur,” he replied with unusual sweetness, “are you the priest that serves this chapel?”

“Yes, — what would you?”

“Have you many poor in your parish?”

“More than there are people to give.

“You know some charitable hearts, however — some philanthropists?”

The priest began to laugh.

"Monsieur," observed Mirabeau, "I thought you had done me the honour of informing me that no one laughed in churches."

"Monsieur," said the priest, half-angrily, "has the pretension to give me a lesson!"

"No, monsieur, I only wished to show you that the people who think it their duty to correct others are not so rare as you thought. Now, monsieur, I am going in all probability to inhabit the Chateau Marais. Well, every man wanting work shall find it there, and good pay; every hungry old man shall there find food; every sick man, whatever his politics, whatever his religion, shall there meet with assistance; and, monsieur, to commence today, I beg your acceptance, for charitable uses, of a thousand francs per month."

And taking a leaf from his pocket-book, he wrote with a pencil:

"Good for the sum of twelve thousand francs, for which M. le Cure of Argenteuil can draw on me, being one thousand francs per month, to be employed by him in good works, to commence from the day I take possession of the Chateau Marais.

"Written in the church of the Marais, and signed on the altar of the Virgin,

"MIRABEAU, Senior."

Mirabeau wrote this letter of credit and signed it on the altar. Written and signed, he gave it to the cure, stupefied before he saw the signature, more so afterwards.

He then left the church, making a sign to Doctor Gilbert to follow. The carriage followed the principal street to the end; then it left Argenteuil and turned into the road leading to Bezons. It had not gone a hundred yards before Mirabeau described through the trees of the park the pointed gables of the chateau and its dependencies. This was Marais.

Five minutes afterwards, Teisch rang the bell at the gate of the chateau.

Mirabeau, as we have already said, knew it of old, but he had never had the opportunity of examining it so closely as he did now. The gate opened, and he found himself in the first court, which was nearly square. To the right was a place inhabited by the gardener, to the left was a similar lodge.

Heliotropes and fuchsias were climbing about the windows, and a bed of lilies, cactus, and narcissus spread the whole length of I this court. It seemed to be covered by a carpet worthy of being wove by the hand of Penelope.

In looking at the lodges, lost almost amongst the roses and other flowers, Mirabeau uttered a cry of joy.

“Oh!” said he to the gardener, “is this little place to let or sell?”

“Without doubt, monsieur,” he replied, “since it belongs to the chateau, which is either to be let or sold. It is let just now, but as there is no lease, if monsieur takes the chateau it will be easy to arrange the matter.”

“And who is the inhabitant?” asked Mirabeau.

“A lady.”

“Young?”

“Of thirty or so.”

“Beautiful?”

“Very beautiful.”

“Well,” said Mirabeau, “we will see: a beautiful neighbour is never in the way. Let me see the chateau, mon ami.”

The gardener went before Mirabeau crossed a bridge which separated the first court from the second, and which was built over a small river, and then stopped.

“If monsieur,” said he, “should not wish to disturb the lady in the pavilion, it will be very easy, as this river separates the garden round the pavilion from the rest of the park of the chateau, and thus she would be by herself and monsieur alone too.”

“Good, good!” said Mirabeau; “and the chateau is here?”

And he slowly ascended the five steps leading to it.

The gardener opened the principal door.

This door opened into a vestibule in stucco, with niches containing statues and vases, on columns, according to the fashion of the time.

A door at the end of this vestibule, and opposite the entrance door, led into a garden.

To the right were the billiard and dining — -rooms.

To the left two saloons, a large and a small one.

This first arrangement pleased Mirabeau, who otherwise seemed impatient and uncomfortable. They passed on to the first floor. It consisted of a great saloon, admirably adapted for study, and three or four bedchambers. The windows of the saloon and the chambers were shut. Mirabeau went and opened one of them himself. The gardener would have opened the others; but Mirabeau made a sign with his hand, and the gardener stopped.

Just below the window which Mirabeau had opened, at the foot of an immense weeping willow, sat a woman reading, while a child of some five or six years played among the flowers.

Mirabeau understood at once that this was the lady of the pavilion. It was impossible to be dressed more gracefully and elegantly than this lady. Her hands were small and long, her nails beautiful.

The child, dressed entirely in white satin, wore a strange mixture — but sufficiently common at that time — hat a la Henri Quatre, with one of those three-coloured bindings which were called national ribbons.

Such was the costume that the young Dauphin wore the last time he had appeared on the balcony of the Tuileries with his mother.

The sign made by Mirabeau expressed his wish not to disturb the fair reader.

It was the lady of the Pavilion aux Fleurs; it was indeed the queen of the garden of lilies, cactus, and narcissus; it was indeed the beautiful neighbour that chance had given to the voluptuous Mirabeau.

Immovable as a statue, he watched this charming creature for some time, ignorant as she was of the ardent gaze fixed on her. But whether by accident, or some magnetic influence, she left off reading and looked up to the window.

She perceived Mirabeau, uttered a slight cry of surprise, called her child, and taking him by the hand, walked off, but not without turning her head two or three times, and disappeared amongst the trees, between the openings of which Mirabeau watched her appear from time to time, for her white dress was easily distinguished in the twilight, which had already commenced.

To the beautiful unknown’s cry of surprise Mirabeau answered by one of astonishment.

This woman had not only the royal step, but as her lace veil flew aside, her features seemed those of Marie Antoinette.

The child increased the resemblance; he was just the age of the second son of the queen. The gait, the countenance, the least movement of the queen, had remained so firmly fixed in the mind of Mirabeau, ever since his first and last interview, that he believed he should have been able to have recognised her if she had come surrounded by a cloud similar to that which encircled Venus when she visited her son AEneas, near Carthage.

How strange that in the park of the house Mini beau was about to rent, there should be a woman who, if she were not the queen, was so nearly her living portrait!

Next day Mirabeau bought the chateau.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Lodge Ix the Rue Platriere.

WE SHALL NOW introduce the reader to the masonic lodge in the Rue Platriere.

A low door was surmounted by three letters in red chalk, which doubtless indicated the place of a meeting, and which before morning will be effaced.

These three letters are L. P. D.

The low door seems an alley-way: a few steps are descended, and a dark passage threaded.

Certainly, the second indication would confirm the first, for after having looked at the three letters, Farmer Billot descended the steps, counting them as he went, and at last stepped from the eighth; he then went boldly down the alley.

At the extremity of this alley burned a pale light, before which sat a man pretending to read a paper.

Billot advanced, and as he did so, the man arose, and with one finger pressed on his chest, waited for him to speak.

Billot made the same answer, and then placed his finger on his lip.

This was probably the passport expected by the mysterious porter, who at once opened a perfectly invisible door, and when it was shut, showed Billot a stairway with narrow, coarse steps, leading yet farther below the ground.

Billot entered, and the door rapidly but silently closed behind him.

On this occasion the farmer counted seventeen steps, and when he had reached the eighteenth, in spite of the dumbness to which he seemed to have condemned himself, he said, “Good! here I am.”

A curtain hung a few steps before the door, and Billot, going straight to it, lifted it up and found himself in a vast circular hall, in which some fifty persons were already collected. The nulls were hung with red and white curtains, on which were worked the square and compass and level. A platform, which was ascended by four steps, was prepared for the orators and recipiendaries, and on this platform, in the part nearest the wall, was a solitary desk and chair for the president.

In a few moments the hall was so filled as to make motion impossible. The crowd was composed of men of every rank and condition, from the peasant to the prince, who came one by one, as Billot had done, and who, without knowing each other, took their places as chance dictated or according to their sympathies.

Each of these men bore under his coat his ovat, the apron of the craft, if he was a simple mason, or if he was one of the illuminati also, both the apron and the scarf of the higher order.

A single lamp hung from the roof cast a circle of light around, but not sufficient to render visible those who wished to remain unknown.

Three men alone did not wear the scarf of the illuminati, but only the masonic apron.

One was Billot, the other a young man scarcely twenty, and the third a man about forty-five, who from his manners appeared to belong to the higher classes of society.

A few seconds after the last had entered, no more attention being paid to him than to the simplest member of the association, a masked door was opened, and the president appeared, bearing the insignia of the Grand Orient and the Grand Copht.

He slowly ascended the platform, and turning towards the assembly, said: "Brethren, to-day we have two things to do. We have to receive three new members, and I have to render you an account of my work, from the day I began to the present time. That work becomes every hour more difficult, and you must know if I am yet worthy of your confidence. Only by receiving light from you, and diffusing it, can I march on the dark and terrible journey I have undertaken. Let, then, the chiefs of the order alone remain in this hall, that we may proceed to the reception or rejection of the three new members who present themselves before us. These three members being accepted or rejected, all will enter the hall, from the first to the last, for to all, not alone to the supreme circle, do I wish to exhibit my conduct and receive praise or censure."

At these words, a door opposite to the one already unmasked opened. Vast vaulted rooms, like the crypts of an ancient basilica, became open, and the crowd passed into them, like a procession of spectres, through dimly lighted arcades, in which lamps of copper were placed here and there, barely sufficient, as the poet says, “to make darkness visible.”

Three men alone remained — the recipiendaries. It chanced that they leaned against the wall at almost equal distances apart. They looked curiously at each other, but did not discover who and what they were.

At that moment the door through which the president had entered again re-opened, and six masked men appeared and placed themselves three on each side of the president.

“Let numbers two and three disappear for a moment. None but the supreme chiefs may know the secrets of the reception or rejection of a masonic brother into the order of the illuminati.”

The young man and the man of aristocratic bearing withdrew to the corridor whence they had entered.

Billot remained.

“Approach,” said the president, after a brief silence, during which the others had withdrawn. Billot drew near.

“How are you known among the profane?”

“Francis Billot.”

“Among the elect?”

“Force.”

“Where saw you the light?”

“In the Lodge of the Friends of Truth of Soissons.”

“How old are you?”

“Seven years.”

Billot made a sign to show that he was a master of his order.

“Why do you wish to ascend a degree, and to be received among us?”

“Because I have been told that it is a step towards universal light.”

“Have you sponsors?”

“I have none but him who came to me alone, and unsolicited, and offered to receive me.” Billot looked fixedly at the president.

“With what feeling will you tread the path that shall be opened to you?”

“Hatred to the powerful and love of equality.”

“Who will answer to us for your love of equality and hatred of oppression?”

“The word of a man who never has broken his word.”

“What inspires you with this love of equality?”‘

“The inferior condition of my birth.”

“What inspires you with hatred of the powerful?”

“That is my secret: that secret you know. Why make me utter aloud what I would not even whisper?”

“Will you advance according to your power, and make all around you advance towards equality?”

“Yes.”

The president turned towards the chiefs in masks. “Brothers,” said he, “this man speaks the truth. A great sorrow unites him to our cause, by the fraternity of hatred. Already he has contributed much to the revolution, and may do much more. I am his sponsor, and will be answerable for him in the present, past and future.”

“Let him be received,” said the six unanimously.

“You hear? Are you ready to take the oath?”

“Dictate, and I will repeat it.”

The president lifted up his hand, and with a slow solemn voice said:

“In the name of the crucified Son, I swear to break the carnal bonds which unite me yet to father, mother, brothers, sisters, wife, kindred, friends, mistresses, kings, benefactors, or any one else, or to any being to whom I have promised faith, obedience, gratitude, or service.”

Billot repeated in a voice firmer even than that of the president, the same words.

“Good!”said the president. “Henceforth you are freed from oaths to your country and its laws. Swear to reveal to the new chief you have recognised all you shall hear, learn or guess, and even to seek and spy out what may not come before your eyes.”

“I swear!” said Billot.

“Swear,” continued the president, “to honour and respect poison, steel, and fire, as prompt, pure, and necessary means to purge the globe by the death of those who seek to defile truth and wrest it from our hands.”

“I swear!” repeated Billot.

“Swear to avoid Naples, Rome, Spain, and every accursed land. Swear to avoid the temptation to reveal aught you may hear in our assemblies, for thunder is not more prompt than the invisible knife to reach and slay you wherever you may be.”

“I swear!” repeated Billot.

“Now,” said the president, “live in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.”

A brother hidden in the dark opened the door of the crypt, where, until the conclusion of the triple reception, the brothers waited. The president made a sign to Billot, who bowed and joined those to whom the oath he had taken had assimilated him.

“Number 2!” said the president in a loud voice, and the closed door opened again, and the young man appeared.

“Draw near,” said the president.

The young man did so.

We have already said that he was a young man of twenty or twenty-two, who, thanks to his fine white skin, might have passed for a woman. The huge cravat worn at that time might induce one to believe that the dazzling transparency of that skin was not to be attributed to purity of blood, but, on the contrary, to some secret and concealed malady.

In spite of his high stature and great cravat, his neck was short, his forehead low, and the whole front of the head depressed.

The result was that his hair, without being longer than it was usually worn at that time, touched the shoulders behind, and in front hung over his forehead. There was in the whole bearing of this man, as yet on the threshold of life, something of automatic harshness which made him look like an envoy of the other world — a deputy from the tomb.

The president looked for a moment at him with attention, and then began to question him. His glance, though exceedingly fixed, could not make the young man look away. He waited and listened.

“Your name among the profane?”

“Antoine St. Just.”

“Among the elect?”

“Humility.”

“Where saw you light?”

“In the Lodge of the Humanitarians of Laon.”

“How old are you?”

“Five years old.”

The president made a sign to show that he was a free and accepted mason.

“Why do you wish to ascend a degree and to be one of us?”

“Because it is man’s nature to aspire to elevations, and that on the heights the air is purer and the light more brilliant.”

“Have you a model?”

“The philosopher of Genera, the man of nature, the immortal Rousseau.”

“Have you sponsors?”

“Two.”

“Who are they?”

“The two Robespierres.”

“With what feeling will you march in the path we open to you?”

“With faith.”

“Whither will that faith conduct France and the world?”

“France to liberty, the world to freedom.”

“What would you give to have France and the world reach that liberty?”

“My life is all I have, my fortune I have already given.”

“Then, if received, you will advance with all your force and power, and cause all around you to advance in the path that leads to liberty and freedom?”

“I will, and will urge all others.”

“Then in proportion to your power you will overturn every obstacle you meet with in your journey?”

“I will.”

“Are you free from all obligation, or if any obligation contrary to our laws has been assumed by you, will you break it?”

“I am free.”

“Brothers, have you heard him?”

“Yes,” said they.

“Has he spoken the truth?”

“Yes,” said they again.

“Are you ready to take the oath?”

“I am.”

And the president repeated the same oaths he had administered to Billot.

When the door of the crypt had closed on St. Just, in a loud tone the president called, “Number 3!”

This was, as we hare said, a man of forty or forty-two, flushed in his face, almost bloated, but very tall, and in every lineament showing an aristocratic air, which at the first glance revealed Anglomania. His dress, though elegant, bore something of that simplicity just begun to be adopted in France, the true origin of which was the relations of Prance with America.

His step, though it did not tremble, was not firm like St. Just’s, nor heavy like Billot’s.

“Draw near.” The candidate obeyed.

“Your name among the profane?”

“Louis Philippe, Duke of Orleans.”

“Your name among the elect?”

“Equality.”

“Where saw you the light?”

“In the Lodge of the Freemen of Paris.”

“How old are you?”

“I have no age,” — and the duke made a masonic sign, showing that he had reached the dignity of rose cross.

“Why do you wish to be received by us?”

“Because, having till now lived with the great, I now wish to live with men. Because, having ever lived with my enemies, I would now live with my brothers.”

“Have you sponsors?’’

“Two.”

“How call you them?”

“Hatred and Disgust.”

“With what feeling will you walk the path we will open to you?”

“The desire to avenge myself.”

“On whom?”

“Him who mistook; and on her who humiliated me.”

“Are you free from all engagement, or will you renounce any engagement contrary to our laws?”

“Every engagement was broken yesterday.”

“Brothers, have you heard?” said the president, turning to the masked men.

“Yes.”

“You know him who presents himself to finish the work with us.”

“Yes.”

“And knowing, will you receive him in our ranks?”

“Yes, if he swear.”

“Do you know the oath you have to take?”

“No; but repeat it, and I will pronounce it.”

“It is terrible, especially to you!”

“Not more terrible than the outrages I have received.”

"So terrible, that when you shall have heard it, we declare you at liberty to depart, if you feel unable to keep it rigidly."

"Tell it me."

The president fixed his piercing eye on the recipiendary; then, as if he wished to prepare him for the bloody promise, inverted the order of the paragraphs, and began by the second instead of the first:

"Swear," said he, "to honour poison, steel and fire, as sure means to purge the earth, by the death of those who seek to defile truth, or wrest it from our hands."

"I swear," said the prince firmly.

"Swear to break the carnal links which bind you yet to father, mother, brothers, sisters, friends, wife, mistress, kings, benefactors, and all persons whatever, to whom you have promised faith, obedience, and gratitude."

For a moment the duke was silent, and a pearly sweat stood on his brow.

"I told you the oath," said the president.

Instead of simply saying "I swear," the duke repeated every word of the oath.

The president looked towards the masked men, who looked at each other, and the twinkling of their eyes was seen behind their masks.

Then, speaking to the prince, he said. "Louis Philippe Joseph, Duke of Orleans, from this moment you are freed from every obligation you have taken to your country and to the law. Forget not, though, one thing, that if you betray us, thunder will not be so quick to strike, than will be, wherever you be concealed, the inevitable and invisible knife; now live in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."

The president pointed to the crypt, which opened before the prince.

He, like a man who has thrown down a burden too heavy for him, passed his hand over his brow, breathed deeply, and moved away.

"Ah!" said he, as he rushed into the crypt, "how I will avenge myself!"

When alone, the president and six masked men exchanged a few words.

He then said aloud, "Admit all; I am ready, as I promised, to receive my account."

The door opened — the members of the association who were in the crypt, walking and talking, entered the hall, filling it again.

Scarcely was the door shut behind the last of the affiliated, than Cagliostro, reaching forth his hand like a man who knows the value of time, and is unwilling to lose a second, said aloud:

"Brothers! some of you, perhaps, were present at the reunion which took place just twenty years ago, five miles from the Rhine, two miles from the village of Danenfels, in one of the caverns of Donnensberg: if any were there, let those venerable supporters of the great cause we have embraced lift up their hands and say, 'I was there.'"

Five or six hands were lifted. Five or six voices repeated, as the president had asked: "I was there!"

"This is all that is needed. The rest are dead or dispersed over the surface of the globe, toiling at the common work, which is made holy by the fact that it is the work of humanity. Twenty years ago this work, the different periods of which we are about to trace, was scarcely begun. Then the day which illumines us had scarcely broken, and the firmest eyes could not see through the clouds which enwrapped the future. At this meeting I will explain by what miracle death, which to man is only an oblivion of past times and ages, does not exist for me — or rather, how it is that thirty-two times I have slept in the tomb during twenty centuries, without the ephemeral heirs of my immortal soul having known Lethe, the only death.

"I have, then, been able to follow through centuries the development of Christ's word, and seen people pass slowly, but surely, from savage life to serfdom, and thence to that state of aspiration which is the forerunner of liberty. Like the stars of the night which hurry even before the setting of the sun, to shine in the sky, we have seen at various times various small people of Europe attempt liberty. Rome, Venice. Florence, Switzerland, Genoa, Pisa, Lucca and Arezzo — these cities of the south, where the flowers open first, and the fruits ripen soonest, at an earlier day established republics, one or two of which yet exist, and brave the line of kings; but all were so sullied with original sin that some were aristocratic, others oligarchic, and others despotic. Genoa, for instance, one of those which survive, is a marquisate, and the inhabitants, though simple citizens within the walls, are all noble beyond them. Switzerland alone has democratic institutions, but its imperceptible cantons, lost amid the Alps, are neither an example nor an assistance to humanity. This was not what we needed. We required a great country, not to receive but to give an impulse, which should so rotate that, like a blazing planet, it might light up the world."

A murmur of approbation pervaded the whole crowd.

"I asked of God, Creator of earth, Author of all motion, for that country, and he showed me France. In France, which from the second century had been Catholic, national from the eleventh, Unitarian from the sixteenth. France, which the Lord himself called his eldest daughter, doubtless had the right in this Hue of great devotion to place herself at the foot of the cross of humanity, as she did at that of Christ. In fact, France, having used every form of monarchical, feudal, seigneurial, and aristocratic government, seemed most apt to feel and submit to our government, and we decided, conducted like the Jews of old by the celestial ray, that France should first be free. Consider what France was twenty years ago, and you will see the sublime audacity, or rather sublime faith, which induced us to undertake so much. France twenty years ago was within the weak hands of Louis XV. The France of Louis XIV., that is to say, the great aristocratic kingdom, where all rights belonged to the noble, all privileges to the rich. At its head was a man who at one and the same time was the exponent of all that was lofty and base, great and petty — of God and the people. A word of this man could make you rich or poor, happy or miserable, free or captive, living or dead. He had three grandsons called to succeed him. Chance decided that he whom nature called to the throne was the one the people prayed for he was said to be good, just, disinterested, well-informed, and almost a philosopher. To crush forever the disastrous wars kindled in Europe by the fatal succession of Charles II., the daughter of Maria Theresa was selected for his wife. The two great nations which are the counterpoise of Europe, France on the Atlantic, and Austria on the Black Sea, were indissolubly united. This had been foreseen by Maria Theresa, the deepest politician of Europe. At that time France, sustained by Austria, Spain, and Italy, was about entering into a new reign, and we selected it not to make it the first of kingdoms but the first of nations. The only question asked was who would enter the lion’s den? What Christian Theseus, guided by the light of faith, would thread the Daedalian labyrinth and face the Minotaur? I said, ‘I will.’ Then, as some ardent minds, some uneasy organizations, asked me how much time would be required to complete the first portion of my work, I replied, ‘Twenty years.’ They objected. Listen to me. These men had for twenty centuries been serfs, but objected when I proposed to free them in twenty years.”

Cagliostro glanced for a moment round the Assembly, whom his last words had provoked into an ironical smile.

He continued: “At last I obtained these twenty years. I gave my followers the famous device: Lilia pedibus destrue, and set to work, advising all to follow my example. I entered France in the midst of a triumph. Laurels and roses made one long pathway of flowers from Strasbourg to Paris. All cried, ‘Long live the dauphiness!’ ‘Long live our future queen!’ The hopes of the kingdom hung on the fecundity of the marriage. I do not wish to take to myself the credit of the attempt, nor the glory of the effect — God was with me, and I saw that his divine hand held the reins of his car of fire. God be praised. I removed the stones from its road — I bridged the rivers — I levelled precipices, and the car rolled on. That was all. Now, brethren, see what has been accomplished in twenty years.

“Parliaments are gone.

“Louis XV., called the Well-beloved, is dead, amidst general contempt.

“The queen, after seven years of sterility, bore children, the birth of whom is contested. She was openly attacked by charges of the dauphin’s illegitimacy, and was dishonoured as a mother on account of the diamond necklace.

“The king, under the title of Louis the Long-wished-for, is powerless in politics as in love, and has rushed from Utopia to Utopia, to bankruptcy, and from minister to minister, to M. de Calonne.

“The nobility and clergy have been overpowered by the third estate.

“The Bastille has been taken — the foreign troops driven from Paris and Versailles.

“The 14th of July, 1790, exhibited the unity of the world in France.

“The princes have been depopularised by emigration, and Monsieur by De Favras’ trial.

“In fine, the constitution has been sworn to on the altar of the country. The President of the National Assembly sits on a throne high as that of the king; the law and the nation are above them. All Europe hangs over us with anxiety, and is silent and applauds, or if not, trembles.

“Brothers, was I not right when I said that France would be a glowing planet to illuminate the world?”

“Yes! yes!” cried every voice.

“Now, my brothers,” said Cagliostro, “do you think the work far enough advanced for us to leave it to itself? Do you think that we can trust in the oath taken by the king to maintain the constitution?”

“No! no!” cried every voice.

“Then,” said Cagliostro, “the second revolutionary period of the great work is to come. In your eyes, as in mine, I see with joy that the federation of 1790 is not ended but halted. So be it. The halt is made, the rest is taken: the court has begun the work of counter revolution. Let us gird up our loins and set out again. Without doubt, timid hearts will have moments of misgiving and terror; the ray which lights us will often seem almost ready to fail, the hand which guides us will tremble and seem to desert us. More than once during the long period which remains for us to fulfil, the party will seem lost, almost destroyed; by some accident, unfavourable circumstances, the triumph of our enemies, the ingratitude of our fellow-citizens, all will appear to go wrong. Many, and perhaps the most conscientious of you, will ask yourselves, after so much real fatigue, and so much apparent impotence, if they have not followed the false road, and engaged in a bad way. No, brothers, no, no! I tell you now — and let my words sound eternally in your ears, in victory like a trumpet, in defeat like a tocsin of terror — no, the people who lead the way have a holy mission to fulfil — the accomplishment of which Providence watches over. The Lord who guides them, in his mysterious way, revealing himself only in the splendour of the fulfilment, is often by a cloud hidden from our sight, and thought absent. Often an idea draws back and seems to retreat, when, like the ancient knights in the tourneys of old, it simply gains ground to place its lance in rest, and rush again on the adversary, refreshed and more ardent. Brothers, brothers, the end to which we tend is a beacon lighted on a lofty mountain. Twenty times during every journey the inequalities of the ground hide it from our view, and we think it extinguished. Then the weak halt, murmur, and complain, saying, ‘We have no guide, and will advance no more in the night; let us remain where we are; why lose ourselves?’ The strong continue, smiling and confident, and the beacon reappears, to fade and vanish again, each time more bright and visible, because it is nearer. Striving and persevering thus, believing especially the elect of the world will reach the foot of the beacon, the light of which will some day not only light up France, but all other nations, let us swear then, brothers, for ourselves and our descendants — for sometimes the eternal principle uses many generations — let us swear, for ourselves and our descendants, not to pause until we shall have established on earth the holy device of Christ, of which we have already conquered the first part — liberty, equality, fraternity.”

The words of Cagliostro were followed by loud applause. Amid, however, all these cries and bravoes, falling on the general enthusiasm like drops of water dripping from a rock of ice on a sweating brow, these words were heard, pronounced by a harsh and piercing voice:

“Let us swear: but first tell us how you understand these words, that we, your apostles, may understand you!”

A piercing glance from Cagliostro overran the whole crowd like a light refracted from a mirror, and lighted upon the pale face of the deputy from Arras.

“So be it,” said he. “Hear, Maximilien.”

Then, raising both his hand and voice, he said: “Listen all of you I”

Then a solemn silence pervaded the assembly — a silence which gauged the importance attached to the measures under discussion.

“Yes, you are right to ask what Liberty is, what Equality is, what Fraternity is. I will tell you. Let us begin with liberty. Above all, my brothers, do not confound liberty with independence. They are two sisters who resemble each other — they are two enemies who hate each other. Almost all nations inhabiting mountains are independent. I do not know one except Switzerland that is free. None will deny that the Corsican, the Calabrian, and the Scot are independent; none will dare to call them free. Let the Calabrian be wounded in his whims, the Corsican in his honour, and the Scot in his interests — the Calabrian, who cannot appeal to justice, for there is no justice in oppressed lauds, will appeal to his dagger, the Corsican to his stiletto, and the Scot to his dirk. He strikes, and his enemy falls! The mountains offer him a refuge, and instead of the liberty vainly invoked by the men of cities, he finds independence in the dark caverns, the deep woods and high places of the mountains — that is to say, the independence of the fox, chamois, and eagle. The eagle, chamois, and fox, however, are impassible, invariable, indifferent spectators of the great drama of life unfolded before them, and are animals devoted to instinct and to solitude. Primitive, ancient, and maternal civilization, such as that of India, Egypt, Etruria, Asia Minor, Greece, and Latium, by a union of their sciences, like a wreath of lights shining over the world to light in its cradle and development modern civilization, have left the foxes in their holes, the chamois on their cliffs, and the eagles in their clouds. To them time has passed, but been unmeasured: the sciences have nourished, but there has been no progress; to them nations have arisen, flourished and decayed, and taught nothing. Providence has restricted all their faculties to individual preservation, while God has given man the knowledge of good and evil, the sentiment of the just and unjust, a horror of isolation, and a love of society. Thus it is that man, born solitary like the fox, wild like the chamois, isolated like the eagle, has collected into families, agglomerated into tribes, and formed peoples. The individual who isolates himself, as I told you, my brethren, has only a right to independence — men in communities have a right to liberty.

“Liberty.

“This is not a primitive and universal substance, like gold, but a fruit, an art, a production. Liberty is the right every one has to follow his own interests, satisfaction, amusement, glory, everything that does not injure another. It is the relinquishment of a portion of individual independence to establish a fund of general liberty, into which each one contributes an equal quota. Liberty, in fine, is more than all this: it is an obligation assumed, in the face of the world, not to close the paths of progress, light, or privilege to all but one egotistic circle of one race or nation, but, on the contrary, to spread them openly, either as individuals or as a society, to any who are needy and ask them of you. Pear not to exhaust this treasure, for liberty has this privilege, that it multiplies it-”If by prodigality, like to those immense streams which water the earth, and which are pure at the fountain in proportion to the volume they emit. Such is liberty, a heavenly manna in which all have a right, and which the chosen people to whom it falls must share with all nations who ask their portion. Such is liberty as I understand it,” said Cagliostro. “Now, let us pass to equality.”

A murmur of approbation filled the room, enwrapping the orator in that caress which is certainly most grateful to the pride, if not to the heart of the man — popularity.

Used, though, to orations of this kind, he reached forth his hand to command silence.

“Brothers, time passes! Time is valuable: every minute we lose is used by the enemies of our holy cause to dig an abyss for us or raise an obstacle in our way. Let me, then, tell you what equality is.”

At these words there were many cries for silence, amid which the voice of Cagliostro arose clearly and distinctly.

He began by stating that none would think that he promulgated the idea of absolute equality, but only social and legal. It would be as vain to seek by a decree to level Himalaya and Chimboraza to the grade of the Pontine Marshes, as to lift all men to the intellectual superiority of Dante, Shakespeare, and Homer. He would speak of social equality.

"Equality!"

"It is the abolition of all privileges transmissible from father to son, free access of all grades, of all ranks, to all offices, a reward to merit, genius and virtue, and not the appanage of a caste. Thus the throne, supposing even the throne remain, is or rather will be, only an exalted position to be reached by the most worthy; while the inferior degrees, according to their merit, will hold secondary posts, without being in the least anxious for kings, ministers, councillors, judges, as far as the source whence they come is concerned. Thus royalty or magistracy, the monarchical throne or president's chair, will not be inherited as the appanage of a family. Election to the council, to the army, to the bench, will do away with family privilege; aptitude — thus science and art will no longer depend on patronage; rivalry — this is social equality. Slowly, with the advance of education, which shall not only be gratuitous and in every one's reach, but compulsory, ideas will increase and equality will advance with them. Equality, instead of remaining with its feet in the mud, will ascend the loftiest summits, and a great nation like France can recognise only an equality which exalts, not that which degrades. The latter is not that of the Titan, but of the bandit — it is the Procrustean bed, the Caucasian couch of Prometheus."

Such a definition could not fail to excite approbation amid a society of men of exalted ideas, every one of whom, with a few exceptions, saw the degrees of his own elevation. Hurrahs, bravoes, and clappings followed, proving that even there and then were some in the assembly, who, when the time came, would put a different interpretation on equality from Cagliostro, yet as a theory accepted it as the powerful genius of the strange chief interpreted it.

Cagliostro, who was more ardent, more enlightened, and more resplendent, asked again for silence, in a voice which gave token of no fatigue or of any hesitation.

"Brothers," said he, "we have now come to the third word of the device, to that which men will be the last to understand, and which for that reason has doubtless been placed last. We have come to

“Fraternity!

“Great word when understood! God keep me from saying that he who takes it in its narrow sense, and applies it to the citizens of a village, town, or kingdom, has a bad heart. No, brother, he has but a weak mind. Let us pity the poor soul, and try to strip his feet of the leaden sandals of mediocrity. Let us unfold our wings and sail above all vulgar ideas. When Satan wished to tempt Jesus, he transported him to the loftiest mountain (if the world, and showed him all the kingdoms of the earth, not to the mountain of Nazareth, whence he could see but the petty cities of Judea. Brothers, the word fraternity must not be applied to a kingdom, but to the world. Brothers, a day will come, when the word country, which now seems sacred to us, and nationality, which seems holy, will disappear like the canvas scenes which are let down for the time being to enable the carpenters and painters to prepare others. Brothers, the day will come when those who conquered the world will conquer fire and water, when the elements will be subjected to man’s will, and when, thanks to rapidity of communication, all nations will be as brothers. Then, brethren, a magnificent sight will be unrolled in the face of God. Every ideal frontier will disappear; every limit of space will disappear; the rivers will be no longer an obstacle, the mountains a hindrance; people will clasp each other’s hands across rivers, and on every mountaintop the altar of fraternity will arise. Brothers, brothers, I tell you, this is the true fraternity of the apostle.

“Christ died to ransom all the nations of the world. Do not therefore make these three words, liberty, equality, and fraternity, simply the device of France, but write them on the labarum of humanity as the device of the world.

“Now, my brethren, go. Your task is great — so great that through whatever valley of tears and blood you pass, your children will envy your holy mission, and like the crusaders, who always become more numerous and anxious to view the holy land, they will not pause, though they find their road by bleaching bones on the way-side. Courage then, apostles! pilgrims! soldiers! Apostles, make converts! pilgrims, onward! soldiers, fight!” Cagliostro paused, but not until general and universal applause had interrupted him.

Thrice hushed, thrice again this applause rose beneath the arches of the vault, like the sound of the tempest.

The six masked men then bowed before him, kissed his hand, and retired.

Each of the brothers then bowed before the platform, where, like another Peter the Hermit, this new apostle preached the crusade of liberty, and passed away uttering the words, “Lilia pedibus destrue!”

The last lamp went out, and Cagliostro remained alone, in silence and darkness, like those Indian gods in whose mysteries he pretended to have been initiated a thousand years before.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Women and Flowers.

A FEW MONTHS after the events we have related, towards the end of March, 1791, a carriage coming rapidly from Argenteuil to Besson made a detour of a quarter of a league from the latter city, and advanced towards the Chateau du Marais, the gate of which opened before it, and stopped in the inner court-yard immediately in front of the door.

The clock in front of the building announced the hour to be eight a.m.

An old servant, who seemed to await the arrival of this carriage most anxiously, went to the door and opened it, and a man dressed in black got out.

“Ah, M. Gilbert! here you are at last!”

“What is the matter, Teisch?”

“Alas, sir, you will see.”

Going before the doctor, he took him through the billiard-room — the lamps of which, doubtless lighted at a late hour of the night, yet burned — thence to the dining — -room, whose table, covered with flowers, uncorked bottles, fruits, and pastry, betokened that supper had been prolonged later than usual.

Gilbert looked at this scene of disorder, which showed how his prescriptions had been followed, with sadness. He then shrugged his shoulders with a sigh, and went up the stairway which led to Mirabeau’s room.

“Count,” the servant said, ‘‘here is M. Gilbert.”

“What, the doctor?’’ said Mirabeau. “You did not go for him for such a trifle?”

“Trifle!” said Teisch; “judge for yourself, doctor.”

“Doctor,” said Mirabeau, rising from his bed, “believe me, I am sorry that without my consent you have been so disturbed.”

“Count, I am never disturbed when I have an opportunity to see you. You know that I only attend a few friends, to whom I belong entirely. Tell me what has happened? — above all, have no secrets from your physician. Teisch, draw the curtains aside and open the window.”

This order having been obeyed, light shone on Mirabeau. The doctor was able to see the change which a month had wrought in the celebrated orator. “Ah, ha!” said he involuntarily.

“Yes!” said Mirabeau, “am I not changed? I am going to tell you why.”

Gilbert smiled sadly. But as a skilful physician always profits by what his patient says, even though he lie to him, he listened.

“You know what question was considered yesterday?”

“Yes, the mines.”

“The matter is not at all understood or measured; the interests of the owners and of the government are not sufficiently distinct. The Count de la Marck, my intimate friend, is very deeply interested in the matter, and the half of his fortune depends upon it. His purse has always been mine, and I must be grateful. I spoke, or rather I charged, three times; at the last charge, I routed the enemies, but was myself taken a little aback. When I came home I resolved to celebrate the victory. I had a few friends to supper, and we laughed and jested until three in the morning. At five I was taken with a violent pain in my bowels, and I cried like an imbecile. Teisch, like a fool, became terrified, and sent for you. Now you know as much as I do. Here is my pulse, here is my tongue; cure me if you can, for I tell you I know nothing of the mutter.”

Gilbert was too shrewd a physician not to be able to see, without looking at pulse or tongue, the peril of Mirabeau’s condition. He seemed in danger of suffocation, and his face was swollen from the stoppage of blood in his lungs. He complained of excessive cold in the extremities, and from time to time pain wrung from him a sigh or a cry. His pulse was convulsive and intermittent.

“Come,” said Gilbert, “this time it will be nothing, but, my dear count, I came only just in time.”

He took his book from his pocket with the rapidity and calmness which tire the distinguishing traits of true genius.

“Ah-ha!” said Mirabeau, “you are going to bleed me?”

“At once.”

“In the right or left arm?”

“In neither. Your lungs are too full. I intend to open a vein in the foot, and Teisch must go to Argenteuil for mustard and cantharides — you must be blistered. Take my carriage, Teisch."

"Diable," said Mirabeau, "then you were just in time."

Gilbert at once bled him, and soon black thick blood, which at first did not flow freely, gushed from the patient's foot. He was relieved instantly.

"Morbleu, doctor," said he, "you are a great man."

"And you are worse than a fool, to risk a life so valuable to your friends and to all Frenchmen, for the sake of a few hours of false enjoyment."

Mirabeau smiled sadly, almost ironically. "Bah, doctor! you exaggerate the number of my friends, and the condition of France," said he.

"On my honour; great men always complain of the ingratitude of others, but it is they who really are ungrateful. Be really sick, and to-morrow all Paris will be beneath your window. Die the next day, and all France will wear mourning."

"Do you know, doctor, what you say is very consoling?" said Mirabeau, with a smile.

"The reason that I say this is, that you may see the one case without risking the other. You need some great demonstration to reinstate you, in a moral point of view. Let me take you back to Paris in two hours; let me but tell the policeman at the first corner that you are sick, and you will see."

"Think you I could go to Paris?"

"Yes, at once! Where do you suffer?"

"I breathe more freely, my head is clear, the mist before my eyes is gone, but my bowels — "

"Ah! the blisters will correct that. The bleeding was well, and the blisters will do their duty. Ah! here is Teisch."

The valet came in with the ingredients he had been sent for. In a quarter of an hour the improvement the doctor had predicted was perceptible.

"Now," said Gilbert, "sleep for an hour, and then I will take you to Paris."

"Doctor," said Mirabeau, "suffer me not to leave until evening, and give me a rendezvous at my hotel in the Chaussee d'Antin at eleven."

Gilbert looked at Mirabeau. The patient saw that his physician wished to know why he desired this delay.

"Why!" said Mirabeau, "I have a visit to receive.

"My dear count, I saw many flowers on the table of your dining-room. You did not give a supper yesterday merely to your friends."

"You know I cannot do without flowers: it is a passion."

"Yes, but you had not flowers alone."

"Dame! if flowers be required, I must at least submit to their consequences."

"Count, you will kill yourself."

"At least, doctor, in a pleasant manner."

"I leave you for to-day."

"Doctor, I have given you my word, and will not break it."

"You will come to Paris this evening?"

"I told you I would expect you at eleven. Is that enough?"

"Not quite."

"Have I not made a conquest of Juliet, Talma's wife? Doctor, I feel perfectly well."

"Then you drive me off."

"Oh! fy, fy."

"Well, you are right! I live in the Quartier des Tuileries."

"Ah! you will see the queen?" said Mirabeau, growing moody.

"Probably. Have you any message for her?"

"Why?"

"Because she will ask if I have saved your life, as I promised to, for I will have to say it was more your fault than mine. You do not wish me to say that your labour and toil are killing you?"

Mirabeau reflected for an instant. "Yes," said he, "say that — make me, if you please, sicker than I really am."

"Why?"

"Nothing — curiosity — to say something."

"So be it."

"Do you promise this, doctor?"

"I do."

"And you will tell me what she says?"

"Her very words."

"Adieu then, doctor! a thousand good wishes!" and he gave his hand to Gilbert.

Gilbert looked fixedly at Mirabeau, whom his glance appeared to disturb.

"Apropos! Before you go, your prescription."

"Warm, soothing drinks. No wine — not a drop; and above all — "

"What?"

"No nurse under fifty. Do you understand, count?"

"Doctor, rather than violate your orders, I will take two of twenty-five."

At the door Gilbert met Teisch. The poor man wept. “Monsieur,” said he, “why do you go?”

“Because, my dear Teisch, your master has driven me away,” said Gilbert, smiling.

“All this is for a woman,” said the old man; “and because the woman looks like the queen! A man who, they say, has so much genius, my God! must he be a brute?”

He opened the door to Gilbert, who got in, saying: “What on earth has he to do with that woman who is so like the queen?” He took Teisch by the arm, as if to question him, but let it go, saying: “What was I about to do? It is Mirabeau’s secret, not mine — driver, to Paris.”

Gilbert scrupulously discharged the promise he had made to Mirabeau. As he entered Paris he met Camille Desmoulins, the living journal, the incarnation of a newspaper. He told him of the illness of Mirabeau, which he did gravely as possible, for he did not know if Mirabeau might not commit some new indiscretion, though he thought him then in no danger.

He then went to the Tuileries and informed the king of Mirabeau’s condition. The king said: “Poor count! Has he lost his appetite?”

“Yes, sire.”

“Then he is in a bad way,” said the king.

His majesty then talked of other matters.

Gilbert left the king and went into the queen’s apartments, where he repeated what he had told the king. The haughty Austrian brow was lighted up, and she said: “Why was he not thus attacked on the day he made his fine address about the national tricolor?”‘

Then, as if she regretted having suffered these words to escape her — expressive as they were of hatred to French nationality — she said: “It matters not. It would be most unfortunate for us and for France if he should be really sick.”

“I had the honour to tell the queen that he was not indisposed, but ill.”

“But you will cure him, doctor?”

“I will do my best, madame.”

“Doctor, I rely on you, you know, to give me news of M. de Mirabeau.”

And then she spoke of other things.

That night, at the appointed hour, Gilbert went to Mirabeau’s hotel. Mirabeau was waiting for him, and sat on a couch. As the doctor had been made to wait a moment, under the pretext of informing the count of his presence, he had an opportunity to look around the room into which he was shown. The first thing that met his eyes was a cashmere shawl.

As if to divert Gilbert’s attention, or because he attached great importance to the first words interchanged between himself and the doctor, Mirabeau said: “Ah! is it you? I know you have already kept a portion of your promise. Paris knows that I am sick, and for two hours poor Teisch has had, every ten minutes, to tell somebody how I am. That was your first promise; now about the second?”

“What mean you?”

“You know.”

Gilbert shrugged his shoulders to say he did not.

“Have you been to the Tuileries?”

“Yes.”

“You saw the king?”

“Yes.”

“The queen?”

“Yes.”

“And you told them they would soon be rid of me?”

“I told them you were dangerously ill.”

“What said they?”

“The king asked how your appetite was.”

“You told him it was gone?”

“And he pitied you sincerely.”

“Kind king! ‘Like Leonidas,’ he will say, when he dines to-night, ‘he sups with Pluto.’ But the queen?”

“Pitied, and asked kindly after you.”

“How, though?” said Mirabeau, who evidently attached much importance to the question. “Kindly? — you promised to repeat her words verbatim.”

“I cannot.”

“Doctor! you have not forgotten our syllable?”

“I swear — !”

“Doctor! you gave me your word, and you would not have me treat you as a faithless man.”

“You are exacting, count.”

“I am.”

“Do you insist that I repeat what the queen said?”

“Verbatim.”

Gilbert repeated the conversation between himself and the queen, and looked at Mirabeau, to see the influence it had on him.

“Kings are ungrateful,” said he. “This speech sufficed to make her forget the civil list of eighty millions for the king over her dower of four millions.”

Mirabeau ran over the long series of his triumphs in the cause of the queen, and sank back in his chair exhausted.

Ten minutes after, Mirabeau was in a bath, and as usual, Teisch escorted Gilbert down.

Mirabeau arose from his bath to look after the doctor, and when he was out of sight, listened to hear his footsteps. He then stood motionless until he heard the door open and close.

He then rang violently, and said: “Jean, have a table fixed in my room, and ask Mdlle. Oliva if she will sup with me.”

As he left, Mirabeau said: “Flowers! flowers! You know how I love them.”

At four o’clock Dr. Gilbert was awakened by a violent ringing of the bell. “Ah!” said he, “I am sure Mirabeau is worse.”

The doctor was not wrong. After supper Mirabeau had sent Jean and Teisch to bed. He had then closed all the doors except the one which admitted the unknown woman whom he called his evil genius. The servants, however, did not go to bed, for Jean slept in the antechamber, in a chair, and Teisch kept awake.

At a quarter before four the bell rang violently. Both rushed to Mirabeau’s rooms. The doors were fastened. They went round to the room of the unknown woman, and thus reached his bed-chamber. Mirabeau, on the floor, half-fainting, held this woman in his arms, doubtless to keep her from calling for aid. She had rung the bell on the table, being unable to get hold of the bellrope. When she saw the servants, she begged them to assist her as well as Mirabeau. In his convulsions Mirabeau was strangling her. Thanks to the efforts of the two servants, the dying man’s grasp was torn apart. Mirabeau fell on a chair, and, all in tears, she entered her room.

Jean then went for Doctor Gilbert, while Teisch attended to his master.

Gilbert did not wait to send for a carriage. It was not far from his house to the Chaussee d’Antin, and in ten minutes he was at Mirabeau’s house.

Teisch was in the vestibule. “Ah, sir!” said he, “that woman! That cursed woman! You will see, you will see!”

Gilbert was at the foot of the stairway, when something like a sob was heard, and a door opposite Mirabeau's opened. A woman, in a white veil, appeared and fell at the doctor's feet. "Gilbert! Gilbert!" said she, folding her arms. "for mercy's sake save him."

"Nicole!" said Gilbert, "is it you?"

Gilbert paused a moment. A terrible idea flitted across him. "Ah!" murmured he, "Beausire sells pamphlets against him, and Nicole is his mistress. All is lost, for Cagliostro's finger is visible."

He hurried into Mirabeau's room, being aware there was not a moment to be lost. It is not our intention to follow all the various phases of this terrible disease. In the morning a report of it got into the city, and — this time more seriously than before — he had a relapse, it was said, and this relapse threatened death.

It was then that one could judge of the great space occupied by one man in the midst of a nation. All Paris was moved as if a general calamity threatened the community. All the day, as before, the street was guarded by the people, in order that the noise of carriages might not disturb him. From hour to hour the groups assembled under the windows asked the news. Bulletins were issued, which passed at once from the Chausee d'Antin to the extremities of Paris. The door was besieged by citizens in every station, of every opinion, as if every party, however opposed to each other, had something to lose in losing Mirabeau. During all this time the relations and particular friends of the great orator filled the hall and chambers without his knowing anything about the matter.

On the evening of this first day of the relapse, a deputation, with Barnave at the head, came from the Society of the Jacobins, to inquire as to the health of their ex-president.

Doctor Gilbert never quitted Mirabeau for twenty-four hours. On Wednesday evening, he was sufficiently well for Gilbert to consent to seek a few hours' repose in a neighbouring chamber.

Before going to bed, the doctor ordered that at the least change he should be called at once. At break of day he awoke; no one had disturbed his sleep, and yet he rose half afraid; for he thought it impossible some change had not taken place.

On going downstairs, Teisch announced to the doctor, with his eyes full of tears, that Mirabeau was worse, but had forbidden any one disturbing Doctor Gilbert.

The patient had suffered severely; the pulse had become bad again, the pains had developed themselves with greater ferocity — in fine, the spasms had returned.

"My dear doctor," he said to Gilbert, "I shall die to-day. When one is as I am, one has nothing to do but to perfume and crown one's self with flowers, so as to enter on the last sleep as agreeably as possible. — May I do as I like?"

Gilbert made a sign implying that he was his own master.

He then called his two domestics. "Jean," said he, "get me the most beautiful flowers you can find, while Teisch dresses me as well as he can."

Teisch seemed to ask permission with his eyes of Gilbert, who nodded his head in assent. He went out. As for Teisch, who had been very ill from watching, he began to shave and dress his master.

When Jean, on whom, as he left the hotel, everybody rushed to learn the news, had said that he was going to fetch flowers, men rushed down the streets calling for flowers for M. de Mirabeau; and every door opened, each offering what he had, whether in the house or conservatory. By nine o'clock in the morning, M. de Mirabeau's chamber was transformed into a beautiful bed of flowers, and Teisch had finished his toilet.

"My dear doctor," said Mirabeau, "I ask you for a quarter of an hour to bid good-bye to some one who ought to leave the hotel before I do. If any one should wish to insult this person, I recommend her to your care."

Gilbert understood. "Good!" said he, "I will leave you."

"Yes, but you will wait in the adjoining chamber, and this person once gone, you will not leave me until death?" Gilbert signed his assent.

"Give me your word," said Mirabeau. Gilbert gave it, sobbing. This stoic was quite astonished to find himself in tears; he had believed himself, through force of philosophy, to be insensible. He then went toward the door. Mirabeau stopped him.

"Before going out," said he, "open my secretary and give me the little casket you will find there."

Gilbert did as Mirabeau wished. This casket was heavy. Gilbert thought it contained gold. Mirabeau made him a sign to put it on the toilet-table. He then gave him hold of his hand.

"Will you have the goodness to send Jean to me?" he asked. "Jean, not Teisch. It fatigues me to call or ring."

Gilbert went out. Jean was waiting in the next chamber, and entered as Gilbert left. Gilbert heard the door bolted behind him. The half hour that followed was employed by Gilbert in giving information to those who were in the house. A carriage stopped before the gate of the hotel. For a moment his idea was that a carriage of the court had been allowed to pass. He ran to the window. It would have been a sweet consolation to the dying man to know that the queen had thought of him. It was a hackney coach, which Jean had been to fetch. The doctor guessed for whom. In fact, some minutes afterwards, Jean came out, conducting a lady, veiled in a large mantle. The lady got into the carriage. The crowd, without troubling themselves as to who the lady was, respectfully retired. Jean went into the hotel.

A moment after, the door of the chamber opened, and the feeble voice of the invalid was heard inquiring for the doctor. Gilbert ran to him.

“Look!” said Mirabeau. “Put this casket in its place, my dear doctor.” Then, as he seemed astonished to find it as heavy as at first, “Yes,” said Mirabeau: “it is curious, is it not? Where the devil will disinterestedness come from at last?”

In approaching the bed, Gilbert found a handkerchief on the ground, embroidered and trimmed with lace. It was wet with tears. “Ah!” said he to Mirabeau, “if she has not taken anything, she has left something.”

Mirabeau took the handkerchief, and feeling it was wet, applied it to his forehead.

“Oh!” murmured he, “she is the only one who has a heart!” He fell hack on the bed; his eyes closed as if he were already dead; but the rattle in his chest showed that he was still on his way to the grave.

From this time the few hours that Mirabeau had still to live were painful and agonizing. Gilbert kept his word, and remained near his bed till the last minute.

He took a glass, poured in a few drops of that green liquid of which he had already given a phial to Mirabeau, arid without mixing it this time with any brandy, he put it to the lips of the invalid.

“Oh, dear doctor,” said the latter, smiling, “if you wish the elixir to have any effect upon me, give me a glassful, or the whole phial.”

“Why so?” asked Gilbert, looking fixedly at Mirabeau.

“Do you believe that I, who have abused every treasure through life, would have this in my hands and not abuse it too? No! I caused your liquor, my dear sir, to be analysed, and I learned that it was drawn from the root of the Indian hemp; and I have taken it not by drops, but by glassfuls — not to live alone, but to dream."

"Unhappy one!" murmured Gilbert, "without doubt I have poisoned you!"

"Sweet poison, dear doctor, by whose aid I have doubled, quadrupled the last hours of my existence — by which, in dying at forty-two, I have lived the life of a century. Oh, doctor, doctor! do not repent, but rather be glad! God gave me but a life, sad, discoloured, unhappy, deserving of little regret, and which man ought always to be ready to give up. Doctor, do you know I doubt whether I ought to thank God for my life, but I am sure I ought you for presenting me with your poison? Fill the glass, doctor, and give it me!"

The doctor did as Mirabeau wished, and presenting him the liquid, he drank it with pleasure.

"Thanks!" murmured he. And he sank again on his pillow.

This time Gilbert no longer doubted his death. The abundant dose of hashish which Mirabeau had taken, like the effects of the voltaic pile, had given the invalid, with speech, the play of his muscles; but now that he had ceased to speak, the muscles grew stiff, and death already began to show itself in his face.

During three hours his cold hand remained between Gilbert's. During these three hours, that is, from four to seven o'clock, the agony was calm; so calm that one could easily have thought he slept.

But towards eight o'clock, Gilbert felt his cold hand start in his. The starting was violent. He could no longer deceive himself. "Allons," said he, "now the struggle, the true agony begins."

And indeed the face of the invalid was covered with sweat. He made a motion as if he would drink. They hastened to offer him brandy, orangeade, water; but he shook his head. He wished for none of these. He made a sign, and they brought him pen, ink and paper.

He took the pen, and in a scarcely legible hand wrote — "Fly! fly! fly!"

He would have signed it; but he could only write the first two or three letters of his name, and stretching his arms towards Gilbert, " For her," he murmured. And he fell back on his pillow without a motion, without a look, without a groan. He was dead!

Gilbert came to his bedside, looked at him, felt his pulse, put his hand on his heart, then, turning to the spectators of this last scene, "Gentlemen," said he, "Mirabeau no longer breathes."

And putting his lips for the last time on the forehead of the dead, he took the paper, whose destination he only knew, folded it carefully, put it in his breast, and went — not thinking it right to detain a single instant longer than necessary to go from Chaussee d'Antin to the Tuileries, the recommendation of the illustrious departed.

Some seconds after the doctor left the chamber of death, a great clamour was raised in the street. This was the report of the death of Mirabeau, which was beginning to spread.

Soon a sculptor entered; he was sent by Gilbert, to preserve for posterity the features of this great orator. Some minutes of eternity had already given serenity to those features. Mirabeau was not dead. Mirabeau seemed to sleep — a sleep full of life and pleasant dreams.

The grief was immense — universal. In one moment it spread from the Chaussee d'Antin to the barriers of Paris. It was eight o'clock in the morning. The people raised one terrible cry. They ran to the theatres, they tore down the affiches, they shut the doors.

A ball had taken place the same evening in an hotel of the Rue Chaussee d'Antin. They went to the hotel, dispersed the dancers, and broke the instruments.

The loss which had just happened was announced to the National Assembly by the president.

Barrere immediately ascended the tribune, and demanded the Assembly should record, in the minutes of the day, its regret for the loss of this great man, and insisted, in the name of the country, that all the members of the Assembly should assist at his funeral.

The next day, the 3rd of April, the Department of Paris presented itself to the National Assembly, and demanded and obtained that the church of Sainte Genevieve should be erected into a pantheon, and consecrated as a sepulchre for great men, and that the first one buried there should be Mirabeau.

Let us give here the magnificent decree of the Assembly:

“ARTICLE I. The new edifice of Genevieve shall be destined to receive the ashes of great men, and date from the epoch of French liberty.

“ARTICLE II. The legislature shall decide to whom this honour shall be decreed.

“ARTICLE III. The honoured Riquetti Mirabeau is judged worthy of this honour.

"ARTICLE IV. The legislature cannot confer this honour on one of its members; it can only be bestowed by the following one.

"ARTICLE V. The exceptions for those great men, who died before the revolution, can only be determined by the legislature.

"ARTICLE VI. The directory of the city of Paris shall be charged to put the edifice of Sainte Genevieve into a proper state for this object, and cause to be engraved on the front these words: 'Our country dedicates this to her great men.'

"ARTICLE VII. Meanwhile, the body of Riquetti Mirabeau shall be deposited by the side of the ashes of Descartes, in the vaults of the church of Sainte Genevieve."

The next day, at four in the evening, the National Assembly left the salle of the Manege and went to the hotel of Mirabeau. It was attended by the directors of the departments, by all the ministers, and two hundred thousand people.

But of these two hundred thousand people, no one had come on behalf of the queen.

The cortege commenced to move.

Lafayette marched at its head, as Commander-General of the National Guard. Then the President of the National Assembly — Tronchet. Then the ministers. Then the Assembly, without any party distinctions, Sicyes giving his arm to Charles de Lameth. After the Assembly, the Jacobin club, like a second assembly, which had decreed eight days of mourning, and Robespierre, too poor to buy a dress, had hired one, as he had already done for the death of Franklin. And last came the entire population of Paris.

A funeral march in which, for the first time, until then unknown instruments were heard — the trombone and the tomtom marked the time for this numerous cortege.

When they reached Saint Eustache it was eight o'clock. The funeral oration was pronounced by Cerutti; at the last word ten thousand National Guards discharged their muskets.

They continued their route with flambeaux. Darkness had fallen, and not only on to the streets, but on to the hearts that passed through them.

The death of Mirabeau, in effect, was a political obscurity. Mirabeau dead — who knew whither things would tend? All felt that he had carried with him something that was wanting in the Assembly. The spirit of peace watched even in the midst of war, the goodness of the heart lay concealed under the violence of the mind. All the world had lost by this death: the royalists no longer had a rallying point, the revolutionists no curb. Besides, the carriage would roll more rapidly, and the descent be longer. Who could say towards what it rolled — whether to triumph or an abyss?

Three years afterwards, on a dark day in autumn, not in the salle of the Manege, but in the salle of the Tuileries — when the Convention, after having killed the king, killed the queen; after having killed the Girondists, after having killed the Jacobins, the Montagnards, after having killed itself, had nothing left to kill — it killed the dead. This was when, with a savage joy, it declared that in the judgment it had rendered upon Mirabeau it had been mistaken, and that in its eyes corruption could not be pardoned to genius.

A new decree was made, which excluded Mirabeau from the Pantheon.

An usher came, and from the steps of the temple read the decree which declared Mirabeau unworthy to share the sepulchre of Voltaire, Rousseau, and Descartes, and summoned the guardian of the church to deliver up the body.

Then a voice, more terrible than that which will be heard in the valley of Jehosbaphat, cried:

“Pantheon! deliver up the dead!”

The Pantheon obeyed. The body of Mirabeau was handed over to the usher, who caused it, as he said, to be taken and deposited in the usual place of burial.

The usual place of burial was Clamart, the cemetery of the executed.

And, without doubt to render the punishment which pursued him even after death more terrible, he was buried without cross, stone, or inscription.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Messenger.

ON THIS SAME morning of the second of April, an hour perhaps before Mirabeau breathed his last, a superior naval officer, clothed in the full uniform of a captain, and coming from the Rue Saint Honore, hastened towards the Tuileries.

Arrived there, he ascended, like a man who was familiar with the way, a little staircase which communicated by a long winding corridor with the apartments of the king.

On perceiving him, the valet de chambre uttered a cry of surprise, almost of joy, but he, putting a finger on his mouth, asked:

“Can the king receive me at once?”

“The king is with General Lafayette, to whom he is giving the orders of the day,” answered the valet, “but as soon as the general has gone —

“You will announce me,” said the officer.

“Oh! that is useless. His majesty expects you; since yesterday evening orders were that you should be introduced as soon as you arrived.”

At this moment a bell rung in the cabinet of the king. “There!” said the valet de chambre, “the king is probably ringing to inquire about you.”

“Go, then, M. Huet, and do not lose any time if the king is at liberty to see me.”

The valet de chambre opened the door, and almost immediately — proof that the king was alone — announced, “M. le Comte de Charny.”

“Oh, let him come in! let him come in! I have waited for him since yesterday.”

Charny advanced quickly, and approaching the king, “Sire,” said he, “I am, as it seems, late by some hours, but I hope that when I have informed your majesty of the causes of this delay you will pardon me.”

“Come, come, M. de Charny. I was expecting you with impatience, it is true, but I acknowledged at once that it could only be something of importance that could make your journey less rapid than it has been — so now you are welcome.” And he gave the count his hand, which the latter kissed respectfully.

“Sire,” continued Charny, who saw the impatience of the king, “I received your order the day before yesterday, in the middle of the night, and I left Montmedy yesterday, at three o’clock in the morning.”

“How did you come?”

“By post.”

“That explains the few hours you are late,” said the king, smiling.

“Sire,” said Charny, “I could have come back on horseback, it is true, and in this way I should have been here by ten or eleven o’clock in the evening, and even sooner, by taking the direct route; but I wanted to know the chances, good and bad, of the route your majesty has chosen — what posts were well or badly served. I wished to know, too, the time to a minute, almost to a second, it took to go from Montmedy to Paris, and consequently from Paris to Montmedy. I have noted all, and am now able to answer all your questions.”

“Bravo, M. de Charny!” said the king, “you are an admirable servant; only let me tell you how we are here, and then you shall tell me how you get on down there at Montmedy.”

“Oh, sire!” said Charny, “if I may judge by what I have already seen, things go on very badly.”

“To such a point that I am a prisoner in the Tuileries, my dear count. I just now said to this dear M. Lafayette, my jailer, ‘I should like better to be King of Metz than King of France’; but happily you see me!”

“His majesty will do me honour by putting me au courant with the situation things are in.”

“Yes, in two words. You have heard of the flight of my aunts?”

“Like all the world, sire; but without any details.”

“Ah, mon Dieu! it is very simple. You know that the Assembly would only allow us sworn priests. Well, the poor women got frightened at the approach of Easter. They believed they were risking their souls by confessing to a priest of the constitution, and — on my advice, I admit — they started for Rome. There was no law against this journey, and they could not be afraid that two poor old women could strengthen the party of emigrants much. Narbonne arranged the whole matter, but I do not know how he managed; everything was ready, when they were visited on the evening of their departure, at Bellevue, in the same way that we were at

Versailles on the 5th of October. Fortunately, they got out of one door while all the canaille arrived by another. Do you understand? No carriage was ready! Three ought to have been there, near the stables. They were obliged to go to Meudon on foot; there they found carriages at last, and started. Three hours afterwards, there was a great uproar in Paris. Those who had wished to stop this flight had found the nest warm, but empty. The press was very fierce next day. Marat declared they had run off with millions, Desmoulins that they had taken the dauphin away. Nothing of all this was true; the poor women had some three or four hundred thousand francs in their purse, and they were troubled enough with this, without having to take care of a child that would have at once betrayed them. As it was, they were recognised: first at Moret — they let them pass; then at Arnay le Due, where they were stopped. I wrote of this to the Assembly, and in spite of my letter they were discussing the matter the whole day. At last, however, they were permitted to proceed, but on the condition that a committee presented a law against all such emigration."

"Yes," said Charny, "but I thought that, owing to a magnificent speech of M. de Mirabeau, the Assembly had rejected the law proposed by the committee?"

"Without doubt it was rejected. But along with this little triumph there was a great humiliation. Some devoted friends — and I have more than I thought, my dear count — when they saw the racket which the departure of the two ladies made, hastened to the Tuileries and offered me their lives. Soon a rumour spread that there was a plot on foot to carry me off. Lafayette, whom they had sent to the Faubourg Saint Antoine, under the pretence that the Bastille would be attacked, furious at being duped, returned to the Tuileries, entered it with sword and bayonet, and arresting our poor friends, disarmed them. Some had pistols, some small swords. Each had taken whatever he could lay his hands on. Good; the day will be known in history under a new name — it will be called 'La Journee des Chevaliers du Poinard' ('The Day of the Knights of the Dagger ')."

"Oh, sire, sire! what dreadful times we live in!" said Charny, shaking his head.

"But listen. We go every year to Saint Cloud. The day before yesterday we ordered the carriages, descended, and found fifteen hundred persons around the carriages. We got in; it was impossible: the people, seizing the reins, declared that I wished to fly. After trying uselessly for an hour, we were obliged to return. The queen wept with anger."

"But was not General Lafayette there to maintain order, and make them respect your majesty?"

"Lafayette! Do you know what he did? He caused the tocsin at Saint Roch to be rung; he ran to the Hotel de Ville, and asked for the red flag to declare the country in danger! The country in danger, forsooth, because the king and queen wished to go to Saint Cloud! Do you know who refused to give him the red flag? who tore it from his hands? — Danton; he then pretended that Danton was bought — that I had given him a hundred thousand francs. You see now, my dear count, how we are fixed, letting alone that Mirabeau is dying, nay, at this very moment may be dead."

"so much the more reason that we should quicken our movements, sire."

"That is what we will do. Let us see what you have determined with Bouille? The affair at Nancy has given me the opportunity of increasing his command and putting new troops under his orders."

"Yes, sire; but unfortunately the orders of the Minister of War have run counter to yours. He has withdrawn a regiment of hussars, and he has refused to allow any of the Swiss guards to go there. It has been only with great trouble that Bouille has been able to keep the regiment of Bouillon infantry."

"Then he is still doubtful?"

"No, sire; there are a few chances less, but no matter! In such enterprises we must always stand the hazard of the die, and we have still, if the enterprise is well conducted, ninety chances out of the hundred."

"Well, then, let us see."

"Sire, your majesty is still determined to follow the route through Chalons, Sainte Menehould, Clermont, and Stenay, although this route is at least twenty leagues further than the other, and there is no post at Varennes?"

"I have already told M. de Bouille the reason why I prefer this road."

"Yes, sire, and on this subject he has transmitted us the orders of your majesty. After these orders the route was thoroughly examined by me, bush by bush, stone by stone; the result ought to be in the hands of your majesty."

"And it is a model of clearness. I know the road as well as if I had made it myself."

“Now, sire, see what the researches of my last journey have added to the rest.”

“Speak, M. de Charny, I listen; and for greater clearness, here is the map drawn by yourself.” And saying these words, the king drew a map from a portfolio and spread it out on the table. This map was not traced, but designed by the hand, and as Charny had said, scarce a tree, a stone was wanting; it was the result of more than eight months’ labour.

Charny and the king leant over the map. “Sire,” said Charny, “the real danger will commence at Sainte Menehould, and terminate at Stenay. It is over these eighteen leagues that we must station our detachment.”

“Could we not let them come nearer Paris, M. de Charny? As far as Chalons, for instance?”

“Sire,” said Charny, “that would be difficult. Chalons is too strong a town for forty, fifty, a hundred men even, to effect anything for your majesty’s safety, if that safety were menaced; and besides, all that M. de Bouille can do is to place a detachment at Pont de Someville, here, your majesty, at the first post after Chalons.” And Charny pointed with his finger to the place on the map.

“Let it be so,” said the king; “in ten or eleven hours we can be at Chalons. How many hours has it taken you to come the eighty-six leagues?”

“Thirty-six hours, sire.”

“But in a light carriage, where there were only you and a single servant.”

“Sire, I lost three hours in examining whereabouts at Varennes the relay should be placed, whether on this side of the town, near Sante Menehould, or on the other, near Dun. These three hours will compensate for the extra weight of the carriage. My opinion is that your majesty can go from Paris to Montmedy in thirty-five or thirty-six hours.”

“And what have you decided about the relay at Varennes? It is an important point — we must never want horses.”

“Yes, sire, and my advice is that the relay ought to be placed beyond the town, near Dun.”

“On what do you found your opinion?”

“Upon the situation of the town itself, sire.”

“Explain to me this situation, count.”

“The thing is very easy, sire. I have passed five or six times through Varennes since I left Paris, and yesterday I was there three hours. Varennes is a little town of about six hundred inhabitants, divided by a river into two parts; one the High Town, the other the Low Town; these communicate with each other by a bridge over the river Aire. This bridge is commanded by a high tower. There the least thing could stop the passage. It would be better, then, to cross the bridge with the horses coming from Clermont, than to run the risk of your majesty being recognised while we changed. The bridge could be burred by three or four men."

"You are right, count," said the king; "besides, in case of hesitation, you will be there."

"This will be at once a duty and an honour, if the king should deem me worthy."

The king again stretched his hand toward Charny.

"So," said the king, "M. de Bouille has already marked the stages and chosen the men to superintend my route?"

"If your majesty approves, yes, sire."

"Have you made any note on the subject?"

Charny took a folded paper from his pocket and presented it to the king.

"It seems good," said the king, after having read it. "But if these detachments should be obliged to stay three or four days in these towns and villages, what excuse will be made?"

"Sire, the excuse is already formed. They will have to attend on an escort bearing money from the minister to the army of the North."

"Allons," said the king, with lively satisfaction, "all is foreseen!"

Charny bowed.

At that moment the door opened. The king turned round quickly, for the opening of this door was an infraction of the rules of etiquette, which was a great insult if it was not excused by a great necessity.

It was the queen; she was pale, and held a paper in her hand. But, at the sight of the count, she uttered a cry of astonishment.

Charny arose and saluted the queen respectfully, who muttered between her teeth: "M. de Charny! M. de Charny! — here! — with the king! — at the Tuileries!" and then she added, in a low voice: "And I not know it!"

There was so much grief in the eyes of the poor woman, that although Charny had not heard the last words, he guessed them, and advanced two steps towards her.

She held out her hands as if she were going to him, but almost immediately put one on her heart, which doubtless beat violently.

Charny saw all. The king had, in the meanwhile, taken up the paper that had escaped from the queen’s hands. He read what was written on this paper, but without being able to understand it.

“What do these three words mean — ’Fly! Fly! Fly!’ — and this signature half written?”

“Sire,” replied the queen, “they mean that M. de Mirabeau has been dead for the last ten minutes, and that this is the last advice he gives us.”

“Madame,” said the king, “the advice which he gives shall be followed, for it is good, and the moment is approaching when we must-put it into execution.”

Then, turning to Charny; “Count,” he continued, “you can follow the queen to her apartments, and tell her all.”

The queen rose, looking now at the king, now at Charny, and addressed the latter: “Come, M. le Comte,” said she.

And she went out as quickly as possible, for she could not have suppressed the various emotions within her a minute longer. Charny bowed to the king, and followed Marie Antoinette.

The queen entered her apartments, and sank down on a sofa as she made a sign to Charny to fasten the door.

Scarcely was she seated before she sobbed.

She wept for weeping’s sake. Her tears would have choked her else. She wept without speaking a word. Was it joy or grief? Something of each, perhaps.

Then, without saying anything, with more love than respect, Charny approached the queen, and drawing one of her hands from her face, covered it with kisses, saying, “Madame, I assure you that since the day I took leave of you, a day has not passed but that I have occupied myself with you one hour.”

“Oh, Charny! Charny!” replied the queen, “there was a time when you were less occupied with me, but thought more.”

“Madame,” said Charny, “a great responsibility was laid on me by the king. This responsibility imposed silence on me until all was completed. It is finished to-day only. To day I can see you again — can halt with you. Until to-day I could not even write to you.”

“It is a great instance of loyalty, this which you have given, but I regret that you have done it at the expense of another sentiment.”

“Madame,” said Charny, “since I have received the permission of the king, allow me to inform you of all I have done for your safety.”

He related all to her; how he had been sent to M. de Bouille; how Count Louis had come to Paris; how he, Charny, had examined the route by which the queen must fly, and finally, how he came to announce to the king that there was nothing to prevent them putting the project at once into execution.

The queen heard Charny with great attention, and at the same time with profound gratitude. It seemed to her that devotion only could go so far. Love, an ardent and burning love, could only overcome these obstacles, and invent the means by which they were surmounted.

She let him speak to the end. Then, when he had finished, looking at him with a profound expression of tenderness, “You will then be very glad to save me, Charny?” she asked.

“Oh!” cried the count, “can you ask me that, madame? It is the dream of my ambition, and if I succeed it shall be the glory of my life.”

“I had rather it should be the recompense of your love,” said the queen sadly. “But n’importe! You wish, do you not, that this great work of saving the king, the queen, and the dauphin of France should be accomplished by you?”

“I only wait your assent to devote myself to it.”

“Yes, I understand, my friend,” said the queen, “this devotion ought to be free from every foreign sentiment, and every material affection. It is impossible that my husband, my children, can be saved by a hand which dare not extend itself to them to sustain them, if they should slip in this route we are about to travel together. I place their life and mine in your hands, my brother; but in your turn, will you not have pity on me?”

“Pity on you, madame?” said Charny.

“Yes, you would not that at this time, when I require all my strength, all my courage, all my presence of mind, you would not, I say, that all this should be lost, perhaps for want of a pledged word? You would not, would you?”

Charny interrupted the queen. “Madame,” said he, “I wish your majesty to be safe; I wish the good of France: I wish the glory of perfecting the work I have commenced; and, I avow it to you, I am grieved to have such a small sacrifice only to offer you: I swear not to see Madame de Charny save with your permission.”

And respectfully and coldly saluting the queen, he withdrew, without the latter, numbed by the accent with which he had pronounced these words, attempting to detain him.

But Charny had scarcely shut the door behind him, than, stretching out her arms, she cried painfully:

“Oh! I had rather it had been I that he had sworn never to see, and that he had loved me as he loves her!”

CHAPTER XXV.

Double Sight.

ON THE 19TH of June following, towards eight in the morning, Gilbert was walking at a great rate backwards and forwards in his rooms in the Rue St. Honore, going from time to time to the window, and looking out like a man who expects some one with impatience, and wishes to see him arrive.

He held in his hand a paper folded in four, with the letters and seals shining through on to the other side from that on which they were printed. It was without doubt a paper of great importance, for two or three times during these anxious minutes of waiting, Gilbert unfolded it, read it, and re-folded it; unfolded it again, re-read it, and again re-folded it, only, however, to open it and read it again.

At length the sound of a carriage stopping at the door made him run quickly to the window, but he was too late: he who had got out of the carriage was already in the passage.

“Bastien!” said he, ‘‘open the door for M. le Comte de Charny, for whom I wait.”

And a last time he unfolded the paper, which he was in the act of reading, when Bastien, instead of announcing the Comte de Charny, announced M. le Comte de Cagliostro.

This name was at the time so far from the thoughts of Gilbert, that he started as if thunderstruck.

He quickly refolded the paper, which he concealed in his side coat-pocket.

“M. le Comte de Cagliostro!” he repeated, quite astonished.

“Eh, mon Dieu! yes, myself, my dear Gilbert,” said the count. “I am not the one you expect, I know well, for that is M. de Charny; but M. de Charny is engaged — I will tell you in what directly — so that he cannot manage to be here within less than half an hour, and knowing this I said, ‘Since I am in this quarter, I will just step up and see Doctor Gilbert.’ I hope, however, although not expected, that I am welcome.”

“Dear master,” said Gilbert, “yon know that night and morning, at every hour, two doors are open to you here: that of the house and that of the heart.”

“Thanks, Gilbert! I, too, perhaps, shall be called upon to show how much I love you, and should such a day ever come, the proof shall not be wanting. Now let us talk.”

“And of what?” asked Gilbert, smiling; for Cagliostro’s presence always brought something astonishing with it.

“Of what?” repeated Cagliostro, “of that great topic of discussion, the king’s departure.”

Gilbert felt himself freeze from head to foot; but the smile did not disappear for a single moment from his lips.

“And as we shall have some time of it, let us sit down,” continued Cagliostro.

And Cagliostro sat down.

The first moment of terror past, Gilbert reflected, that if it were chance that had brought Cagliostro to see him, it was at least a fortunate one. Cagliostro, not being in the habit of keeping secrets to himself, would without doubt relate all that he knew about the departure of the king and queen, which he had just mentioned.

“Well!” continued Cagliostro, seeing Gilbert waiting, “it is then decided to start tomorrow?”

“My dear master,” said Gilbert, “you know I am in the habit of letting you talk to the end, and even if you err there is always something for me to learn.”

“And when have I been mistaken, up to now, Gilbert?” said Cagliostro. “Was it when I predicted the death of Favras, whom, up to the very last moment, I tried to save? Was it when I told you that the king himself was intriguing against Mirabeau, and that Mirabeau would not be minister? Was it when I told you that Robespierre would re-erect the scaffold of Charles the First, and Bonaparte the throne of Charlemagne? As to this last, you can accuse me of no error, because the time has not yet passed by, and, moreover, these things belong to the next century; and to-day, more than any one else, you know that I speak the truth when I say that during to-morrow night the king will fly — for you are one of the agents.”

“If it be so,” said Gilbert, “you do not expect that I should avow it, do you?”

“And what need have I of your avowal? You know well that I am not only he who is, but more, that I am he who knows.”

“But if you are he who knows,” said Gilbert, “you know what the queen said yesterday, apropos of the refusal of Madame to attend the Fete Dieu next Sunday, to M. de Montmorin: ‘I am sorry she will not go with us to Saint Germain 1’Auxerrois — she might well sacrifice her opinions for the king.” So if the queen goes on Sunday with the king to the church of Saint Germain 1’Auxerrois, they cannot go to-night, nor go on a long journey.”

“Yes, but I know also,” said Cagliostro., “that a great philosopher has said, ‘Speech was given to man to conceal his thoughts;’ and God is not so exclusive as to have given to man alone a gift so precious.”

“My dear master,” said Gilbert, “you know the history of the incredulous apostle?’

“Who began to believe when Christ allowed him his feet, his hands, and side. Well, my dear Gilbert, the queen, who is in the habit of considering her ease, and who does not wish to undergo any deprivation during the journey, however short it may be, if the calculation of M. de Charny is correct, the queen has ordered at Desbrosses, Rue Notre Dame des Victoires, a charming necessaire in silver-gilt, which is thought to be intended for her sister, the Archduchess Christine. The necessaire, bought yesterday morning only, was sent yesterday evening to the Tuileries. They are going in a large, roomy travelling carriage, which will hold six people. It has been ordered of Louis, the first builder in the Champs Elysees, by M. de Charny, who is with him at this very moment, paying him twenty-five louis, that is to say, the half of the sum agreed for. The report, also, of M. Isidor de Charny was not bad. M. de Montmorin, without knowing what it was, signed this morning a passport for Madame la Baronne de Korff, her two children, her two maids, her steward, and three servants. Madame de Korff is Madame de Tourzel, governess of the children of France; her two children are Madame Royale, and Monsieur the Dauphin; her two women are the queen and Madame Elizabeth; her steward is the king; lastly, her three domestics, who, habited as couriers, intend to precede and accompany the carriage, are M. Isidor de Charny, M. de Maiden, and M. de Valory. That passport is the paper you held in your hand when I entered, which you folded and put in your pocket, and which is conceived in these terms:

“On behalf of the king. “We command all to let pass Madame la Baronne de Korff, with her two children, one woman, one valet de chambre, and three servants.

“The Minister of Foreign Affairs,

“MONTMORIN.”

“Am I well informed, my dear Gilbert?”

“Except a little contradiction between your words and the passport.”

“Which?”

“You said that the queen and Madame Elizabeth represented the two femmes de chambre of Madame de Tourzel, and I see but a single woman mentioned in the passport.”

“Ah! I see! Arrived at Boudy, Madame de Tourzel, who thinks to go to Montmedy; will be asked to descend. The queen will then become Madame de Korff, and then, as there will be only one woman, and she Madame Elizabeth, it would be useless to put two on the passport. Now, would you like more details? I will give you some. The journey ought to have taken place before the 1st of June; M. de Bouille wished it much — he even wrote to the king about it in a very pressing letter, adding that the they were being corrupted from day to day. By these words, being corrupted, he meant that the army was beginning to understand its having to choose between a monarchy which had for three centuries sacrificed the people to the nobility, the soldier to the officer, and a constitution which proclaimed equality before the law, which recognised merit and courage. But the carriage and other things were not ready, and it was therefore impossible to start on the 1st of June. This was a great misfortune, for since the 1st of June the army has become more corrupted, and the troops are ready to swear to the constitution. The departure was then fixed for the eighth; but M. de Bouille received notice of this date too late, and in his turn he was obliged to answer that he was not ready. Then the twelfth was chosen. They would have preferred the eleventh, but a woman, very democratic, and, moreover, mistress of M. de Gouvoin, aide-decamp to M. de Lafayette, Madame de Rochereul, if you would know her name, was in close attendance on the dauphin, and they feared she would see something and denounce them. On the twelfth the king perceived he had only six days to wait to get possession of a quarter of his yearly civil list — six millions. Peste! you understand well the trouble of waiting those six days, my dear Gilbert. In brief, the departure was put off until Sunday; the nineteenth, at midnight; but on the eighteenth a despatch arrived putting off this departure until Monday the twentieth, at the same hour, that is to say, to-morrow evening. This, too, may have its own inconveniences. M. de Bouille had already sent his orders to the detachments, and now he must send counter orders. Take care, my dear Gilbert, take care; all this wearies the soldiers, and makes the people think."

"Count," said Gilbert, "I shall not deceive you: all that you have said is true. Now, considering his personal danger, and that of the queen and his children, if the king would remain, tell me frankly whether as king, man, husband, father, you do not think him justified in flying?"

"Well, do you wish me to tell you one thing, my dear Gilbert? It is not as a father, it is not as a husband, it is not as a man, that Louis XVI. flies. It is not on account of the 5th of October that he leaves France. No; he is a Bourbon, and the Bourbons know how to look danger in the face. No; he leaves France on account of this Constitution, which, at the instance of the United States, the National Assembly is about to form, without reflecting that the model it follows is adapted for a republic, and applied to a monarchy does not leave the king breathing room. No! he leaves France on account of that famous affair of the Knights of the Poniard, in which your friend Lafayette acted so irreverently towards the king. No, my dear Gilbert, you are honestly, frankly, a constitutional royalist — you believe in that sweet, consoling Utopia of a monarchy tempered by liberty. You should know one thing, and that is this: kings, in imitation of God, whom they pretend to represent on the earth, have a religion of their own — the religion of royalty; and the day on which the people prevented the king from going to Saint Cloud, and that on which they expelled the Knights of the Poniard from the Tuileries, this religion was touched — was broken in upon — and this is what the king cannot bear; that is the true abomination; this is why the king, who had refused! to be carried off by M. de Favras, and to save himself with his aunt, consents to fly to-morrow with a passport of M. de Montmorin, who knows not for whom he signed it, under the name of Durand and in the dress of a domestic; always reminding them, however — kings will be kings to the end — to put the red coat embroidered with gold that he wore at Cherbourg into the portmanteaus."

Gilbert resolved to speak frankly on the matter.

“Count,” observed he, “all you say is true, I admit. Now, why have you come to tell me this? Under what title do you present yourself to me? Do you come as a loyal enemy inviting me to battle, or do you come as a friend to aid me?”

“I come, my dear Gilbert, in the first place,” said Cagliostro, kindly, “as the master comes to the pupil, to say: ‘My friend, you were wrong in attaching yourself to this falling ruin called monarchy. Men like you do not belong to the past or even to the present; they are the property of the future. Abandon what you do not believe in for what you know. Do not let fall the reality for the shadow; and if you do not become an active soldier of the revolution, let it pass by and do not attempt to check it.’ Mirabeau was a giant, but he failed.”

“Count,” said Gilbert, “I will reply to that on the day that the king, who has confided in me, shall be safe. Louis XVI. has taken me as a confidant, as an auxiliary, as an accomplice, if you please — I have accepted this mission, and will fulfil it openly. I am a physician, my friend, and to me the material health of my patient is an object of primary consideration. Now answer me: in your mysterious plans and dark combinations, is it necessary that this succeed or fail? If you wish it to fail, say so, for it will be useless to go. Say ‘Do not go,’ and we will remain, bend our heads, and await the blow.”

“Brother,” said Cagliostro, “if impelled by the God who has placed me on the route, it were necessary for me to strike those whom your heart loves, I would remain in the shadow and ask but one thing of the superhuman power I obey: that you might be ignorant whence the blow was winged. No; if I do not come as a friend — I cannot be the friend of kings, whose victim I have been — I do not come as an enemy. I come with a balance in my hand, and say I have weighed the fortunes of the last Bourbon, and I do not believe his death is important to the cause. Now, God forbid that I, who like Pythagoras think I have no right to take away the life of the merest insect, should destroy that of a lord of creation. There is none. But I come not only to say I will be neuter, but to offer you my aid, if you need it.”

Gilbert tried a second time to read the heart of Cagliostro.

“Good,” said the latter, in resuming his tone of raillery; “now you doubt. Let us see, thou man of letters, dost thou not remember the story of Achilles’ spear, that wounded and cured? I possess this lance. The woman who has passed as the queen in the shrubberies of Versailles, cannot she also pass for the queen in the apartments of the Tuileries, or on some route in the opposite direction to that which the true fugitive follows? Now, what I have just offered you is not to be despised, my dear Gilbert.”

“Be frank, count, even to the end with what object you have made me this offer.”

“Why, my dear doctor, it is a very simple one; in order that the king may quit France — that he may go — and so that we may be able to proclaim the republic.”

“The republic?” said Gilbert, astonished.

“Why not?” said Cagliostro.

“But, my dear count, I look around me in France, north and south, east and west, and I do not see a single republican.”

“There you are mistaken. I see three. Petion, Camille Desmoulins, and your humble servant. Those you can see, as I do; but I see those you do not see, but whom you will see when the time appears. Then rely upon me to produce a theatrical effect which will surprise you. I desire only that in the changes there may be no serious accident. Accidents always happen to the machinist.”

Gilbert reflected for an instant. He then gave his hand to Cagliostro. “Count,” said he. “were I only concerned — were my life, my honour, reputation, and memory only at stake — I would accept at once. But as a kingdom, a king, a queen, a race, a monarchy are at stake, I cannot undertake to act for them. Remain neuter, my dear count, that is all I ask.”

Cagliostro smiled. “Yes,” said he, “I understand. Well, Gilbert, the man of the necklace is about to give you advice.”

“Silence!” said Gilbert, “some one rings.”

“What of that? You know that person is the Count de Charny. Both he and you may profit by my advice. Enter, count.”

Charny, in fact, appeared at the door. Seeing a stranger, when he had expected to see only Gilbert, he paused for a moment. “This advice,” said Cagliostro, “is this. Do without two heavy carriages and two striking likenesses. Adieu, Gilbert; adieu, count; and to use a common phrase, I wish you a pleasant journey. May God keep you in his holy charge!”

The prophet bowed kindly and courteously to Charny, and retired. The count looked anxiously after him.

“Who is that man, doctor?” asked Charny, as soon as his steps were no longer heard.

“One of my friends, a man who knows, and who has promised not to betray me.”

“What is his name?”

Gilbert hesitated a moment. “He is the Baron Zanoni.”

“Strange! I do not know the name, but it seems to me I remember the face. Have you a passport?”

“Here it is, count.”

Charny took the passport, and becoming completely absorbed by the attention this important document required, for the moment, at least, forgot Zanoni.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The Evening of June the Twentieth.

NOT WITHOUT reason had distrust of Madame Rochereul been exhibited. Though her service had ceased on the 11th, she had continued, somehow or other, to return to the capital, and she had discovered, though the jewel cases of the queen were in their places, that the diamonds were gone: they had, in fact, been given by the queen to her hairdresser, Leonard, who was to set out on the 20th, a few hours before his august mistress, with M. de Choiseul, commander of the first detachment of soldiers, posted at the bridge of Someville, who also had charge of the relays at Varennes, composed of six good horses, awaiting the final orders of the queen and king. It was, perhaps, indiscreet to trouble De Choiseul with Leonard, and imprudent to take a hairdresser with her. But who abroad could have dressed her hair as Leonard did? A hairdresser who is a man of genius is not easily given up.

The consequence was, that the chambermaid of the dauphin, not doubting but that the escape would be made on Monday, the 20th, at eleven o’clock, not only informed M. de Gouvion of the matter, but Bailly also.

Lafayette had gone to find the king, and to have a frank explanation of the matter with him, simply shrugging up his shoulders.

Bailly had done better. While Lafayette became blind as an astronomer, Bailly became courteous as a knight; he even sent the queen the letter of Madame Rochereul.

M. de Gouvion, who was much interested, was very suspicious. Having learned all from his mistress, under the pretext of a military reunion, he had assembled a dozen officers of the National Guard, placed five or six as videttes at each door, and himself with five majors, undertook the surveillance of the doors of M. de Villequier, which had been specially pointed out to him.

About the same hour, at No. 9, Rue Coq Heron, in a room we are all acquainted with, sat on a sofa a young and beautiful woman, apparently calm, but in fact deeply excited, who talked with a young man of twenty-three or four, clad in a courier's vest of chamois, pantaloons of leather, a pair of boots, and armed with a couteau de chasse.

The young woman insisted on something which the young man denied.

"But, vicomte, why, during the last two months, since he has come to Paris, has he not come himself?"

"My brother, madame, has often sent you messages."

"I know he has, and am grateful to him for doing so. It seems to me, though, that now he might have come himself."

"Madame, it was impossible, and therefore he sent me."

"And will your journey be long?"

"I do not know, madame."

"I say so to you, count, because from your costume I think you are about to set out."

"In all probability, madame, I shall have left Paris at midnight."

"Do you go with your brother, or in an opposite direction?"

"I think, madame, that we go in an opposite direction."

"Will you tell him that you have seen me?"

"Yes, madame, for from the anxiety he exhibited when he sent me to you, and his reiterated orders not to return until I had spoken to you, he would not pardon me for any act of omission."

The young woman passed her hands over her eyes and said, after a moment's reflection:

"Vicomte, you are a gentleman, and will understand all I say to you. Tell me, will you answer me as if I were really your sister, and answer me as if you spoke to God? Does M. de Charny incur any serious danger in the journey he undertakes?"

"Who can, tell, madame?" said Isidor, seeking to elude the question, "where danger does and does not exist? On the morning of the 5th of October, our poor brother George, had he been questioned, would have been confident that he saw no danger. On the next day he lay pale and dead at the queen's door. Danger, madame, in the age we are in, springs from the earth, and we often stand face to face with death, without knowing why."

Andree grew pale.

"Then his life is in danger, count?"

"I did not say so, madame."

"But you think so?"

"I think, madame, that if you have anything important to say to my brother, the enterprise we are engaged in is serious enough for you to transmit viva voce, by me, your thought or wish."

"It is well, count; I ask but five minutes of you." She entered the chamber and closed the door behind her.

The young man looked anxiously at his watch. "A quarter past nine," said he. "The king awaits us at half-past. Happily it is but a step to the Tuileries."

The countess did not, however, use as much time as she asked. After a few moments she entered with a sealed letter in her hand. "Vicomte, I confide this to your honour."

Isidor reached forth his hand to take the letter.

"Wait a moment," said Andree, "and understand what I say. If your brother meet with no accident in the journey he meditates, nothing need be said but what I have told you, that I sympathize with his loyalty, respect his devotion, and admire his character. If he be wounded," Andree's voice changed noticeably, "ask him to permit me to join him, and if he grant me that favour, send me a message so that I may certainly know where to find him, for I will set out at once. If he be mortally wounded," emotion almost stifled Andree's voice, "give him this letter; if he cannot read it, do so for him, for before he dies I wish him to know the contents of this letter. Give me your word, vicomte, that you will do what I ask you."

Isidor, deeply moved as the countess was, gave her his hand. "On my honour, madame," said he.

"Then take this letter, and go."

Isidor took the letter, pressed the countess's hand, and left.

Just as Isidor read this letter and placed it in his bosom, two men, dressed precisely as he was, passed him at the corner of the Rue Coquilliere, and seemed to be going in the same direction — that is, towards the boudoir of the queen.

Both were introduced, and almost at the same time, by two different doors; the first introduced was M. de Valory.

A few seconds after, another door was opened, and M. de Valory saw another person enter. The two officers were unacquainted. Presuming, however, they were both called for the same purpose, they approached and bowed. Just then a third door opened, and Isidor de Charny appeared. He was the third courier, also unknown to the other two, but knowing who they were, and he alone knew why they were sent for.

He was preparing himself to answer any questions which might be put to him, when the door opened and the king appeared.

"Messieurs," said Louis XVI., speaking to M. de Maiden and M. de Valory, "excuse my having used you without permission, but I thought, belonging to my guards, you were faithful subjects. I wished you to go to a tailor, the address of whom I gave you, and each get a courier's dress, and to be at the Tuileries to-night at half-past nine. Your presence satisfies me that whatever be the question at stake, you will undertake what I request of you."

The two gardes de corps bowed.

"Sire, your majesty knows you may command your nobles without consulting them, and dispose of their courage, life and fortune."

"Sire," said De Maiden, "my colleague, in replying for himself, has replied or me, and I presume for this gentleman also."

"The third gentleman, to whom I would introduce you, is the Vicomte de Charny, brother of him who was killed in the defence of Versailles at the queen's door. "We are used to the devotion of families, and the thing is now so common that we often forget even to give thanks for it."

"From what the king says, I presume the Count de Charny is aware of the motive of our union. I am ignorant of it, and am anxious to learn it, sire."

"Messieurs, you are not ignorant that I am a prisoner of the Commandant of the National Guard, of the Maire of Paris, and of the National Assembly. Well, sirs, I have relied on you to rescue me from this humiliation, and enable me to resume my liberty. My life, the lives of the queen and her children, are in your hands. All is ready for our flight — contrive only to extricate us from this place."

"Sire," said the three young men, "give your orders."

"We cannot go out together, messieurs, as you see. Our common rendezvous is the corner of the Rue Saint Nicaise, where the Count de Charny awaits us with a carriage. You, vicomte, will take charge of the queen, and answer to the name of Melchior. You, M. de Maiden, will take charge of Madame Elizabeth and Madame Royule, and will be called Jean. You, M. de Valory, will take charge of Madame de Tourzel and the dauphin, and will be called Francois. Do not forget your new names, and await other instructions."

The king gave his hand to each of the three young men, and left in the room three men ready to die for him.

M. de Choiseul had on the previous night told the king, from M. de Bouille, that it would be impossible to wait later than twenty minutes after twelve for him, and that he had resolved, on the 21st, if he had no news, to set out at 4 a.m., taking all the detachments with him to Dun, Stenay, and Montmedy. Choiseul was in his own house in the Rue d’Artois, where he awaited the final orders of the king, and as it was nine o’clock, he had begun to despair, when the only servant he had kept, who thought his master just about to set out for Metz, came to say that a messenger from the queen wished to speak to him. He bade him come up.

A man entered with a round hat pulled over his eyes, and wrapped in an immense pelisse.

“Is it you, Leonard? I awaited you anxiously.”

“If I made you wait, duke, it was not my fault, but the queen’s, for she told me only ten minutes ago that I had to come to your house.”

“Did she say nothing more?”

“Yes, duke. She bade me take these diamonds and bring you this letter.”

“Now,” said the duke, “arouse yourself, and tell me what the queen said.”

“The queen said, in a low voice, ‘Take these diamonds and hide them in your pockets. Take this letter to M. de Choiseul, in the Rue d’Artois, but give it to him alone. If not, you will find him at the house of the Duchesse de Grammont.’ As I was leaving, the queen called me back. ‘Put on a broad-brimmed hat and a large pelisse, that you may not be known, and obey M. de Choiseul as if he were myself.’ I went to my room, prepared myself, and came.”

“Then,” said M. de Choiseul, “the queen bade you obey me as herself.”

“Those were the august words of her majesty.”

Just then a servant came in and said the carriage was ready, and the Duke de Choiseul made the hairdresser get into his cabriolet, and set out at post-haste for the barrier of Petite Villette.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The Departure.

AT ELEVEN O’CLOCK, at the very time when Mesdames de Tourzel and Brennier, after having undressed and put Madame Royale and the dauphin to bed, awoke and dressed them again, much to the mortification of the dauphin, who insisted on putting on boy’s clothes instead of petticoats, the king and queen and Madame Elizabeth received Lafayette and his aides-de-camp, Gouvion and Romoeuf. This visit was most annoying, especially when they took into consideration the suspicions they entertained of Madame Rochereul.

The queen and Madame Elizabeth had, during the evening, gone into the Bois de Boulogne, and had returned at eight o’clock. Lafayette asked the queen if her promenade had been pleasant; but added that she was wrong to return so late, as the evening mists might hurt her.

“Mists in June!” said the queen, with a smile; “but unless one be manufactured expressly to conceal our flight, I do not know where, at this season, I could find a mist. I presume there is a report that we are about to fly.”

“The fact is, madame, the report is more current than ever; and I have even been told that it is to take place to-night.”

“Ah! I bet that you received that intelligence from M. Gouvion,” said the queen.

“Why from me, madame?” said the young officer, blushing.

“Because you have acquaintances in the palace. M. de Romoeuf has none; and I am not sure he would he answerable for me.”

“There would be no great merit in it, madame, as the king has given his word to the National Assembly not to leave Paris.”

It was the queen’s turn to blush.

The subject of the conversation changed.

At half past eleven Lafayette and his two aides took leave of the king. Gouvion, yet unsatisfied, returned to his room in the chateau, where he found his friends on duty, and instead of relieving them, urged double diligence. Lafayette went to the Hotel de Ville to make M. Bailly easy, in case he should have felt any fear.

Lafayette having gone, the king and queen rang for their servants, had the usual services rendered them, and then dismissed everybody.

The queen and Madame Elizabeth dressed each other. Their dresses were as plain as possible; their hats w-ere very large, and concealed their faces.

“When they were dressed, the king entered. He was clad in a grey coat, and one of those little bag-wigs called a la Rousseau. He wore short breeches, grey stockings, and shoes with buckles.

Bight days before, Huet, the valet, had, in precisely such a dress, left the door of M. de Villequier, who had emigrated six months before, and had gained the square of the Corvuses, and the street of St. Nicaise. This precaution had been taken in order that people might be used to the dress, and that, if seen in the Tuileries, it might occasion no remark.

The three courtiers were taken from the queen’s boudoir, where they had been waiting, and were taken through the saloon into the room of Madame Royale, who was there with the dauphin.

Once in M. Villequier’s room it was easy to leave the palace. No one knew that the king had the keys, and there was no sentinel there. Besides, after eleven o’clock the sentinels in the courtyard were used to see many people pass.

There all arrangements were made.

The Vicomte de Charny, who had gone over the road with his brother, and knew the difficult and dangerous places, was to ride ahead and prepare the postilions, that there might be as little delay as possible.

M. de Maiden and M. de Valory were on the seat, and were ordered to pay the postilion thirty sous: ordinarily twenty-five was the price, but in consideration of the heaviness of the carriage five were added.

The Count de Charny would be in the coach ready to provide against all accidents. He would be well armed, and each of the couriers would find a pair of pistols in the carriage.

By paying well, it was hoped to reach Chalons in thirteen hours.

All this had been decided on between Charny and De Choiseul.

De Maiden and De Valory would pay. Charny from the inside would talk, if there were anything to be said.

All promised obedience. The lights were blown out, and they went to the room of M. Villequier.

It struck twelve as they passed the room of Madame Royale. The Count de Charny must have been at his post an hour.

The king put the key in the door.

Steps and whisperings were heard in the corridor. Something strange was going on. Madame de Tourzel, who lived in the chateau, and who passed to and fro so frequently that her presence would cause no surprise, offered to see what was the matter.

They waited motionless. Madame de Tourzel returned and reported that .-he had seen M. de Gouvion and several uniforms. It was impossible to leave this room unless it had some other outlet.

They had no light. A lamp was in the room of Madame Royale, and Madame de Tourzel lighted the candle, which had been blown out. For a long time the search was thought useless, but at last a little stairway was found leading to a small room on the ground floor. The door was locked. The king tried all his keys, but in vain. Charny tried to open it with his hunting knife; but the bolt would not move. They had found an outlet, but were as closely confined as ever. The king took the lamp from Madame de Tourzel's hands, and leaving all the rest in darkness, went back to his bedchamber and thence to the forge. He took a bundle of picklocks and came down. When he had reached the group he had already made his choice. The picklock the king had selected grated, and slipped twice from the wards. The third time, however, the bolt turned, and all breathed freely.

Now the order of departure was to be regulated. Madame Elizabeth went first, with Madame Royale. Twenty paces after followed Madame de Tourzel with the dauphin. Between them was M. de Maiden, prepared, if necessary, to aid them. Trembling and timidly, these few grains detached from the royal chaplet, looking behind them for those they loved, descended and went into the circle of light formed by the lamp at the palace door. They passed the sentinel, who did not even seem to notice them.

"Good!" said Madame Elizabeth, "we have already passed one difficulty."

When at the wicket on the Carousel, they saw the sentinel crossing their path. When he saw them approach, he paused. "Aunt," said Madame Royale, "we are lost. That man sees us."

"It matters not; we will certainly be lost if we hesitate." They continued to advance. When about four paces from them, the sentinel turned his back, and they passed on. Did this man know them? Did he know what fugitives he suffered to escape? The princesses thought so, and mentally gave a thousand thanks to their unknown preserver.

On the other side of the wicket they saw the uneasy face of the Count de Charny. He was wrapped in a full blue cloak, and wore a hat of oiled cloth.

"Ah!" said he, "here you are at last! And the king and queen?"

"Are behind us."

"Come," said Charny. He took them rapidly to a carriage which was waiting them in Rue Nicaise.

A hack drove up by the side of the remire, as if to watch it.

"Well, comrade," said the hackman, as he saw Charny come up, "it seems you have a fare."

"Yes," said Charny.

He then said, in a low tone, to M. de Maiden, "Take this carriage, and go at once to Porte St. Martin. You will recognise the vehicle that waits you without trouble." M. de Maiden understood, and got into the hack.

The driver thought his customer was some courier going to meet his master at the opera, and set out at once, making no remark, except about the price. He said, "You know, sir, it is after midnight."

"Yes, be easy."

As, at that epoch, servants were sometimes more generous than their masters, the driver set out at a full trot, and without any observation but that about the price.

Scarcely had he turned the corner of the Rue de Rohan, than by the same wicket which had given a passage to Madame Royale, to Madame Elizabeth, the dauphin, and Madame de Tourzel, there advanced at a slow pace, like a clerk who had just left his office after a long and laborious day's work, a man in a great coat, with the corner of his hat over his eyes, and his hands in his pockets. It was the king, followed by M. de Valory.

Charny advanced a few paces towards him. He had recognised the king, not by himself, but by his being accompanied by M. de Valory. He sighed with grief and almost with shame. "Come, sire," murmured he.

Then, in a low tone, he said to M. de Valory, "Where is the queen?"

"The queen follows with the vicomte."

“Come: take the shortest road and await us at Porte St. Martin. I will take the longest; the rendezvous is the carriage.”

We will not attempt to describe the anxiety of the fugitives. Charny, on whom the responsibility rested, was almost mad.

The terror increased as they passed the carriage of General Lafayette all lighted up. It was entering the Carousel.

At the door of the court, the Vicomte de Charny gave his arm to the queen, and wished to turn to the left. The queen made him stop.

“Whither go you?” said she.

“To the corner of Rue Nicaise, where my brother awaits us.”

“Is the Nicaise on the river?” asked the queen.

“No, madame.”

“Then your brother awaits you at the wicket towards the water.” Isidor would have insisted, but the queen appeared so sure of what she said that doubts entered his mind. “My God, madame,” said he, “every mistake is fatal.”

“By the river-side, I am sure I heard by the river-side.”

“Let us go thither, then, madame, but if we find no carriage, we will go at once to Rue Nicaise.”

The queen and Isidor crossed the openings one after the other, and also the three lines of sentinels. None thought of stopping them. What reason was there to believe that this young woman, dressed like a servant of a good house, and giving her arm to a young man in the livery of the Prince de Condi, was the Queen of France? They came to the river; the quay was deserted.

“It is, then, on the other side,” said the queen. Isidor wished to retrace his steps. She seemed mad, though, and insisted on going to the other wicket. She dragged Isidor to the Port Royal. The bridge being crossed, the other side was found deserted as the first.

“Let us look down the street.”

She forced him to go down the Rue de Bac. After going a hundred yards, she saw her error, and all panting, said: “My strength begins to fail.”

“Well, madame, do you still insist?”

“No,” said the queen, “take me where you will.”

“Madame, for heaven’s sake, have courage.”

“Ah! I do not need courage, but strength.” Then, turning back, she said: “It seems to me I shall never regain my breath. My God! my God I”

Isidor knew that breath was as much needed by the queen at this hour, as it is to a wolf pursued by hounds. He paused. “Get your breath, madame. We have time. I will answer for my brother; he will wait until morning.”

She resumed walking, and retraced the previous unnecessary course she had taken.

Instead of returning to the Tuileries, Isidor passed through the gate into the Carousel; the immense square was crossed; until midnight it was always covered with pedlars’ stalls and with hackney coaches. It was nearly deserted and dark. The sound of wheels and of horses’ feet, however, was heard. They had reached the gate at the head of the Rue des Echelles. It was evident that the horses, whose steps they heard, were about to pass in that direction. A light was seen, which doubtless was caused by the torches which accompanied the carriage. Isidor wished to pause; the queen hurried him on. Isidor rushed to the wicket to protect her, just as the torch-bearers appeared on the opposite side. He placed her in the darkest place, and stood before her. Even that, though, was for a moment inundated with the light of the torches. Amid them, in the rich uniform of General of the National Guard, was Lafayette.

At the moment the carriage passed, Isidor felt that a strong arm pushed him aside. This was the left arm of the queen. In the right hand she had a little bamboo cane with a gold head, such as was usually carried at that time by women. She struck the carriage wheels sharply, and said, “So, jailer, I am out of your prison.”

“What are you doing, madame? why expose yourself to such danger?”

“I avenge myself. For that one would incur much danger.”

When the last torch had passed, she rushed out radiant as a child.

The queen had not gone ten steps from the wicket when a man in a blue cloak, with his face hidden by an old cloth hat, seized her arm convulsively and dragged her towards a carriage which stood at the corner of Rue Nicaise. This man was the Count de Charny. The vehicle was the one in which the royal family had been waiting for an hour.

All expected to see the queen arrive terrified, downcast, and overcome; she came joyous and happy. The dangers she had run, the fatigue she had undergone, the time she had lost, all the consequences were forgotten in pleasure at the blow with the cane she had given the carriage of Lafayette, and which she felt as if she had given the general himself.

Ten paces from the vehicle a servant held a horse. Charny pointed the horse to Isidor, who mounted and galloped away. He hurried on to Bondy to order post-horses.

The queen got into the carriage, in which the whole royal family already were. She sat down, took the dauphin on her knee, and the king sat by her; the rest of the family occupied the front seat.

Charny shut the door and got on the box; and to divert the attention of spies, in case there should be any, went up Saint Honore, down the Boulevards to the Madeleine, and thence to Porte Saint Martin. The carriage was there in waiting, on a road leading to what was called La Voirie. The road was deserted.

The count sprang from the box and opened the door. In one moment the six persons in the one carriage were put into the other. Charny took the useless vehicle and upset it in a ditch, and then returned to the carriage.

De Maiden got up behind; M. de Valory sat with Charny on the seat. The carriage had four horses, and a clack of the tongue made them break into a trot. The driver moved rapidly. A quarter of an hour after the clock of Saint Lawrence struck one, they set out for Bondy. The horses were harnessed, and waited outside of the stable.

On the other side of the road was a hired cabriolet all ready. In this were the two femmes de chambre of the dauphin and of Madame Royale.

It had been agreed between the king and queen and Charny, that at Bondy he would get inside of the carriage, and that Madame de Tourzel would return thence to Pans. In this change, though, they had forgotten to consult Madame de Tourzel. The king proposed the question. Madame de Tourzel was devoted to the royal family, but, as far as etiquette was concerned, was a perfect pendant to old Madame de Noailles.

“Sire,” said she, “it is my duty to watch over the children of France, and not to leave them for a moment without the express orders of your majesty. As the order has no precedent, I will not leave them.”

The queen trembled with impatience. Two reasons excited her. She wished to have Charny in the carriage; as a queen he assured her safety, as a woman she delighted to have him by her.

“My dear Madame de Tourzel,” said the queen, “we are very grateful; but you suffer and exaggerate devotion. Remain at Bondy, and rejoin us wherever we be.”

“Madame,” said the old lady, “let the king order and I will obey, even though he place me on the roadside. An order of the king alone, however, can induce me to do this, and thus not only fail in my duty, but renounce my right.”

“Sire,” said the queen.

Louis XVI. did not dare to decide in so important a matter. He sought some exit, some mode of escape. “M. de Charny,” said he, “can you not remain on the seat?’’

“I can do anything the king wishes,” said M. de Charny, “but I should have to remain there in my uniform of an officer in which I have for four months travelled up and down this road. If I did not do that, I would have to wear my coat and hat, a dress which by no means suits so elegant an equipage.”

“Get into the carriage, M. de Charny, get in; I will hold the dauphin, and Madame Elizabeth will take Marie Therese, and all will be right. We will only be a little crowded, that is all.”

Charny awaited the king’s decision. “It is impossible, my dear,” said Louis XVI. “Remember that we have ninety leagues to go.”

Madame de Tourzel stood up ready to obey the king’s order, if he should order her to get out. The king, however, did not venture to give it, so important do even the most trivial prejudices seem to people of courts.

“Monsieur de Charny, can you not replace your brother, and ride in advance to order the horses?”

“I have already told your majesty that I am willing to do anything, but would suggest to the king that post-horses are usually ordered by a courier, and not by a captain of the navy. Such a thing might awake the suspicions of the post-agents and give occasion to much trouble.”

“True,” said the king.

“My God! my God!” murmured the queen, impatient to the last degree. Then; turning to the count, she said: “Settle matters as you please, sir, but you must not leave me.”

“It is my wish, madame, not to do so, but I see no way to avoid it but one.”

“What is that? Speak quickly,” said the queen.

“Instead of getting either on the box or in the carriage, instead of riding in advance, to return to Paris, and then ride back in the simple dress of a man riding post. Go on, madame, and before you have gone ten leagues, I will be within a hundred yards of your carriage.”

“Then you return to Paris.”

“Certainly, but till you reach Chalons your majesty has nothing to fear, and ere then I will have rejoined you.”

“How, though, will you return to Paris?”

“On the horse my brother rode; he is very swift, and has had time to blow; in less than half an hour I will be there.”

“Then?”

“Then, madame, I will put on a suitable dress, take a fast horse, and hurry on till I overtake you.”

“Is there no other way?” said Marie Antoinette, in despair.

“None,” said the king, “that I see.”

“Then,” said Charny, “let us lose no time.”

The importance of the discussion made all forget to give to Isidor, De Maiden, and De Valory, the loaded pistols which were in the coach.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The Route.

ABOUT EIGHT in the morning the royal party reached a long ascent; on the right and left of the road was a wood in which the birds sang, and which the rays of a beautiful spring sun pierced with golden light. The postilion let his horses walk.

"Jean!" said the king, "open the door. I wish to walk, and I think the queen and children will not be sorry to do likewise."

The postilion stopped. The door was opened, and the king, queen, and Madame Elizabeth and children got out. Madame de Tourzel was too feeble, and remained in the carriage.

The royal emigrants at once spread themselves along the road. The dauphin set to work to pursue butterflies, and Madame Royale to gather flowers.

Madame Elizabeth took the king's arm; the queen walked alone.

Presently a horseman appeared, a quarter of a league distant, wrapped in the dust raised by the horse's feet.

Marie Antoinette dared not say, "This is the Count de Charny;" but a cry escaped from her, and she said: "We will have news from Paris."

All turned round except the dauphin: the careless child had just taken a butterfly, and cared nothing for the news.

The king, who was a little near-sighted, used his glasses. "Ah! it is, I think, M. de Charny. Let us go on, he will overtake us, and we have no time to lose."

The queen did not dare to say that the news brought by M. de Charny, at least, was worth waiting for, and that it was only a delay of a few seconds. The postman evidently rode at speed.

He himself, as he drew near, evidently looked with great attention, and seemed not to understand why the huge carriage had placed its inmates on the road-side. He reached them just as the carriage reached the top of the rising, and paused. "It is indeed Charny!" He wore a little green frock with a full collar, a broad brimmed hat, with a steel buckle; a white vest, coated leather breeches, and military boots which reached the knee.

He sprang from his horse, and bowed before the king, and then turned and saluted the queen.

All grouped around him, except the two guards, who remained discreetly out of hearing.

“In the first place, sire, at two o’clock your flight was not suspected.”

All breathed freely.

The king said to the guardsmen, “Draw near, gentlemen, and listen to M. de Charny’s news.”

Many questions were asked.

Charny told how he had reached Paris and met a patrol, how he had been interrogated by it, and had left it fully convinced that the king was in bed and asleep.

He then told how, once in the interior of the Tuileries, calm as usual, he had gone to his room, changed his dress, and passed through the royal corridor, to satisfy himself that none suspected the escape; not even De Gouvion, who had withdrawn the line of sentinels he had established around the king’s room, and had sent away the officers and majors.

Charny had then taken his horse, which one of the servants, on duty for the night, had held in the court-yard, and thinking at that hour it would be difficult for him to find a post-horse, had set out for Bondy. The unfortunate animal was almost broken down, but reached Bondy, and that was all the count cared for. He there got a fresh horse and rode on. Nothing else had occurred on the route.

They resumed their places, and Charny galloped by the side of the door.

At the next post station the horses were all ready, except one for Charny. Isidor had not ordered one, for he did not know that his brother was on horseback. They did not wait for the horse, but set out, and fire minutes after, Charny was in the saddle.

He had taken a relay at Montmirail, and thought that the carriage was a quarter of an hour in advance of him, when, at the turning of the street, his horse came directly on the carriage and the two guardsmen, who were seeking to mend a broken trace.

The count leaped from his horse, passed the door, and advised the king to conceal himself, and the queen not to be uneasy. He then opened a kind of box, forward, in which were placed all things likely to be made necessary by an accident on the road; he found there a pair of traces, one of which he took.

The two guardsmen took advantage of the delay to ask for their arms, but the king positively objected. It was suggested that the carriage might be stopped, to which he said that even in that case he would not have blood shed for him.

The trace was mended — the box shut, the guards and Charny were in their places, and they set out again. They had, however, lost half an hour, and at a time when the loss of a minute might be irreparable. At two they were at Chalons.

The king showed himself for a moment. Amid the groups formed around the door were two men who looked fixedly at him. One of the men left. The other approached the door, and said in a low tone: “Sire! do not expose yourself thus, or you are lost.”

Then, speaking to the postilions, he said: “Come, lazybones, be quick; is it thus you delay travellers who pay you thirty sous a station?” He set to work himself — he was the post agent. The horses at length were harnessed, and the postilions mounted.

In the interim, the man who had disappeared had gone to the maire, and told him that the king and all his family were at the post-house, and asked authority to arrest them.

The maire luckily was not much of a republican, and did not, besides, wish to assume so much responsibility. Instead of ascertaining the fact, he asked for all kinds of explanations, denied that it could be so, and reached the hotel just as the carriage drove off.

They had, however, lost twenty minutes.

There much alarm in the equipage. The horses kicking so unnecessarily recalled to the queen the sudden extinction of the four lights. As, however, they left the city, the king, queen, and Madame Elizabeth said, “We are saved!”

A hundred paces farther, a man appeared, rushed to the door and said: “Your measures are badly taken. You will be arrested.”

The queen uttered a cry. The man rushed into a little wood, and disappeared.

Fortunately, they were but four leagues from the bridge of Someville, where Choiseul was with his dragoons. It was, however, three in the afternoon, and they were four hours behind time.

When M. de Choiseul reached the bridge of Someville, he found that his hussars had not yet arrived, but shortly after the trumpets and tramp of horses were heard. M. de Goquelot appeared. Choiseul had the horses picketed out — had bread and wine given to the hussars, and then sat down himself with the colonel to dinner.

The news of M. Goquelot was not flattering. He had observed great excitement everywhere. For more than a year reports of the king's flight had been circulated, not only in Paris, but in the country, and the detachments of different arms stationed at Sainte Menehould had excited suspicion. He had even heard the tocsin in a village near the road.

This was enough to take away even De Choiseul's appetite. After passing an hour at the table, he arose, and leaving the command of the detachment to M. Boudet, went to an eminence beyond the bridge, which permitted him to see the road for half a league.

He saw neither courier nor carriage. There was, however, nothing surprising in that, for De Choiseul could allow for petty accidents. He expected the courier in an hour, or an hour and a half, and the king in two or two and a half hours.

Nine passed, and he saw on the road nothing like the things he expected.

At half-past two there was no carriage. It will be remembered they had left Chalons only at three.

While, however, De Choiseul was thus waiting on the road, fatality had prepared at the bridge of Someville an event which had the greatest influence on the drama we relate.

Fatality had willed that a few days previous the peasants of an estate belonging to Madame Elboeuf had refused to pay duties not redeemable. They had been menaced with troops. The federation, however, had borne its fruits, and the peasants of the villages in the vicinity had vowed to assist those of Elboeuf, if the threats were realised.

When they saw the hussars take their position, therefore, the peasants thought they came with evil intentions. Couriers were sent to the neighbouring villages, and about three the tocsin sounded throughout the whole city.

When he returned to the bridge, which he did immediately, Choiseul found his sublieutenant, M. Boudet, very uneasy. Muttered threats had been heard by the hussars, and the regiment at that time was one of the most detested of the French army. The peasants made mouths at them, and sang under their very noses tin’s improvised song:

“Les hussards sont des Geux;
Mais nous nous moquous d’eux.”*
*The hussars are beggars, but we laugh at them.

Other persons, too, who were more clear-sighted, began to say that the hussars were there not to enforce obedience from the peasants, but to await the arrival of the king and queen.

Four o’clock came without news. Do Choiseul resolved, however, to remain; but he ordered the horses to be put to his carriage, and took charge of the diamonds, sending Leonard to Varennes, and bidding him report at St. Menehould to M. Daudoins, at Clermont to M. Damas, and at Varennes to M. de Bouille, the state of affairs.

Then, to soothe the excitement, he stated that he and the hussars were there not to repress the peasantry of Elboeuf, but to escort a large treasure which the Minister of War had sent to the army.

The word treasure, though it soothed excitement on one score, raised on the other much difficulty. The king and queen were also a treasure, and M. de Choiseul evidently waited for them.

After a quarter of an hour, M. de Choiseul and his troops were so pressed up that he could not keep his position, and if the royal party came, he, with his forty hussars, would be unable to protect them.

His orders were to keep the king’s journey free from obstacle. Instead of protecting, however, his presence was an obstacle.

The best thing he could do would be to retire, as he would thus leave the road free; but he needed a pretext.

The post-agent stood in the midst of a crowd of five or six hundred persons whom a trifle would make enemies of. He, like the others, stood looking with folded arms at M. de Choiseul.

“Monsieur,” said the duke, “are you aware of any convoy of money having gone lately to the army at Metz?”

“Yes; this morning a hundred thousand crowns were sent, escorted by two gendarmes.”

“Indeed!” said De Choiseul, amazed at his good fortune in receiving the news.

“Parbleu! it is true,” said a gendarme: “Robin and I escorted it.”

“Then,” said the duke, turning to M. Goquelot, “the minister must have preferred another mode of escort, and our presence here is useless. I think we had best start — hussars, bridle up.”

The hussars, who were uneasy enough, asked nothing better, and in a moment were bridled and mounted. M. de Choiseul placed himself in front, looked towards Chalons and with a sigh said: “Hussars by fours, break!”

He left Someville with his trumpets sounding, just as the clock struck four.

Two hundred paces from the village De Choiseul took the cross-road to avoid St. Menehould, which he heard was in a great state of excitement.

Just then Isidor de Charny rode into the village, on a horse which had borne him four leagues in two hours. He inquired at the post-house, and learned that a detachment of dragoons had departed only a few minutes before. He ordered the horses, and hoping to overtake De Choiseul, galloped rapidly after him.

The duke had left the main road and taken the cross-road just as Isidor entered the village; and the consequence was, the vicomte did not overtake him.

The carriage of the king came ten minutes after.

As De Choiseul had seen, the crowd was nearly dissipated.

The Count de Charny, aware that the first detachment of troops should be at the bridge of Someville, had been perfectly confident, and had not urged on the postilions, who seemed to have received the order to make the journey at a slow trot.

When he reached the bridge, and did not see the cavalry of De Choiseul, the king put his head anxiously out of the carriage.

“For heaven’s sake, sire, do not show yourself! I will inquire.”

He went into the post-house. In five minutes he returned, having learned all. The king saw that De Choiseul had retired to leave him a free passage. It was important to reach St. Menehould, on which place De Choiseul had, doubtless, fallen back, and where he would find both the hussars and dragoons.

At the moment of departure Charny approached the carriage. “What does the queen order?” said he; “must I go in advance, or follow?”

“Do not leave us.”

Charny bowed, and rode by the side of the carriage.

Isidor rode on, being unable to account for the solitude of the road, which was so straight that sometimes it could be seen for the distance of a league, or more, in advance.

He urged on his horse, and gained on the carriage more rapidly than he had done, fearing that the people of St. Menehould should suspect the presence of the hussars. He was not wrong. The first thing he saw was a great number of Rational Guards in the streets. They were the first he had met since he left Paris. The whole city seemed in motion, and on the opposite side of the town he hoard the drums beat.

The vicomte rode rapidly through the streets, without appearing in the least uneasy about what was going on. He crossed the great square, and stopped at the posthouse.

As he crossed the square, he noticed about a dozen dragoons, in police caps, seated on a fence. At a few paces from them, he saw, at a window of the ground floor, the Marquis Dandoins, also in fatigue, and with a whip in his hand.

Isidor did not pause, and appeared to observe nothing. He presumed that M. Dandoins, aware of the king’s couriers, would know him and need no other hint.

A young man of twenty, with his hair cut a la Titus — as the patriots of that time wore it — with whiskers meeting under his chin, was at the door of the post-house.

Isidor looked for some one to speak to.

“What do you wish, sir?” said the man with the whiskers.

“To speak to the agent of the post.”

“He is now absent, sir, but I, Jean Baptiste Drouet, am his son. If I can replace him, speak.”

The young man laid an emphasis on his name, as if he were aware what a terrible celebrity it would obtain in history.

“I want six post-horses for two carriages which follow me — also a saddle horse.”

Drouet nodded an assent, went into the yard. “Postilions,” said he, “six post-horses and a saddle horse.”

Just then the Marquis Dandoins came in. “Monsieur,” said he, “you precede the king’s coach?”

“Yes, sir, and I am amazed to see you and your men in fatigue dress.”

“We had not been warned, sir; and besides, very dangerous demonstrations have taken place around us. An attempt has been made to debauch my men. What must be done?”

“The king will soon pass. Watch his equipage, and be guided by circumstances, and set out half an hour after the royal family has gone, acting as a rear guard.”

Then, interrupting himself, Isidor said: “Silence! we are watched, and perhaps even heard. Go to your squadron, and do your best to keep your men faithful.”

Drouet, in fact, stood at the door where this conversation took place. Dandoins left. Just then the sound of whips was heard at the door. The king’s carriage had come. Curiosity attracted all the population around it.

Dandoins wished at once to tell the king why he and his troops were in fatigue uniform at the moment of his arrival, and advanced, cap in hand, and apologised with all possible respect.

The king showed himself twice or thrice.

Isidor, with his foot in the stirrup, stood by Drouet, who looked with profound attention into the carriage. During the previous year he had attended the federation, hail seen the king, and recognised him.

On that day he had received a considerable sum in assignats: he had examined them one after the other (they all had the king’s likeness) to see if they were good, and he remembered the royal features. Something within him seemed to say, “That man is the king.”

He took an assignat from his pocket, looked at it, and said: “It is certainly he.”

Isidor went to the other side of the carriage, and his brother covered the door at which the queen was sitting.

“The king is known,” said he; “hurry the departure of the carriage, and look at that tall dark man. He has recognized the king, and is named Jean Baptiste Drouet.”

“Very well,” said Olivier, “I will take care. Go.”

Isidor set out at a gallop to order horses at Clermont.

As soon as they were outside the city, excited by the promises of MM. de Maiden and de Valory, of a crown apiece, the postilions set out at a full trot.

The count had not lost sight of Drouet.

Drouet had not moved, but had spoken in a low voice to a stable-boy.

Charny drew near, and said, “Monsieur, is there no horse for me?”

“One was ordered. But there are none.”

“How — no horses? But that one which I see in the yard, monsieur?”

“That is mine.”

“Can you not let me have it, sir?”

“It is impossible. I have a journey of importance to make, which cannot be postponed.”

To insist would arouse suspicions; to attempt to take a horse by force would be very dangerous.

Charny, however, thought of a way to arrange matters.

M. Dandoins had looked after the carriage until it turned the corner. He looked back.

“Eh,” said Olivier, “I am the Count de Charny — I can get no horse — dismount a dragoon, and give me his charger. I must follow the king and queen; I only know De Choiseul’s relay, and if I am not with them the king must stop at Varennes.”

“Count,” said the marquis, “I will not give you a dragoon’s horse, but one of my own.”

“I will take it. The fate of the whole royal family depends on the merest accident. The better the horse, the better the chance,” They crossed the street and went to the marquis’ quarters. Before he left, Charny bade a sergeant watch Drouet. The marquis unfortunately lived five hundred yards from the post-house. Before the horses could be saddled at least a quarter of an hour would be lost. “We say horses, for M. Dandoins had received an order to saddle up, and serve as a rear guard.

All at once Charny fancied that he heard voices shout, “The queen! the queen!”

He hurried out of the house, ordering Dandoins to send the horses to the posthouse. The whole town was in a ferment; it seemed that it only waited for the king to leave to burst forth.

“The carriage which has just left is the king’s!” exclaimed Drouet, hurrying off. “The king, queen, and princess are in it.” He mounted his horse. Many of his friends sought to retain him. Where goes he? what is he about? what is his plan?

“The colonel of the detachment of dragoons being there,” he replied in a low tone, “it was impossible to detain him without a collision, in which we might have been second best. What I did not do here, I will do at Clermont. Retain the dragoons, that is all.”

He galloped after the king.

Then the report was spread that the king and queen were in the carriage which had just passed, and the noise arose which Charny heard.

The maire and municipality collected, and the dragoons were ordered to retire to their barracks until eight o’clock.

Charny had heard all. Drouet had gone, and he quivered with impatience.

Just then Dandoins came up.

“The horses? the horses? where are they?”

“They will be here directly.”

“Are there pistols in the holsters?”

“Yes.”

“Loaded?”

“I loaded them myself.”

“Good; now all depends on your horse’s speed! I must overtake a man who is a quarter of an hour in advance, and whom I must kill.”

“How! kill him?”

“Yes! or all is lost.”

“Mordieu! to horse then.”

“Do not take any trouble about me, but mind your dragoons. Look, the maire harangues them; you have no time to lose.”

Just then the servant came with the two horses, Charny sprang on the first, took the bridle from the servant, and rode away after Dronet, without hearing Dandoins’ adieu.

Those last words, however, were most important. They were, “You have taken my horse, count, and the pistols in the holsters are not loaded.”

In the meantime, the carriage, preceded by Isidor, moved rapidly from St. Menehould to Clermont.

The day was declining; it had struck eight, and the carriage was on the high road through the forest of Argonne.

The queen now saw that Charny was not by her side, but there was no way either to slacken or to quicken the pace.

To explain events and to illustrate every point of this terrible journey, we must flit from one character to another. During this time, while Isidor preceded the carriage a quarter of an hour as a courier on the route to Sainte Menehould, and entered the forest of Argonne, and Drouet followed the coach with Charny at his heels, Dandoins ordered boot and saddle to be sounded.

Among the crowd were three hundred armed National Guards. To risk a battle — and all promised that it would be severe — would be to destroy the king. It would be better to remain, and thus restrain the people. Daudoins had a parley with them, and asked the leaders what they wanted, what they wished, and what was the meaning of these hostile demonstrations. In the meantime, the king would reach Clermont, and find Damas with a hundred and forty dragoons.

Had he one hundred and forty dragoons he would attempt something, but he had but thirty. What avail would they be against three or four hundred men?

He did parley. At half-past nine the carriage, preceded by Isidor only a few hundred paces, reached Clermont.

It had been but an hour and a quarter going four leagues.

Outside of the city, Damas, who had been warned by Leonard, awaited them. He recognised Isidor's livery, and said: "Excuse me; do you precede the king?"

"Are you, sir, Count Charles do Damas?"

"Yes."

"I do. Assemble your dragoons and prepare to escort the royal carriage."

"Monsieur," said the Count de Damas, "there are rumours of insurrection which terrify me, and I own frankly that I cannot answer for the fidelity of my men if they recognise the king. All that I can promise is, when the carriage has passed, to follow it and close the road."

"Do your best, sir. Here is the king."

In the distance the royal carriage might be recognised by the sparks the horses' feet knocked from the stones of the road.

It was his duty to ride ahead and order the relays. Five minutes after, he was at the post-house. Almost at the same time came Damas and five or six dragoons. Then came the king.

The carriage followed Isidor so quickly that he had scarcely time to mount. The carriage, without being rich, was so remarkable that many persons began to collect.

Damas stood by the door of the house, pretending not to know the illustrious party.

Neither the king nor queen, however, could resist the desire to obtain information.

The king called Damas; the queen Isidor.

"Is it you, M. Damas?" said the king.

"Yes, sire."

"Why are not your dragoons under arms?"

"Sire, your majesty is five hours behind the time. My squadron was mounted at four o'clock. I kept it waiting as long as possible, but the city began to get excited, and my men began to make some very troublesome conjectures. If the fermentation broke out before your majesty's arrival, the tocsin would have been sounded and the road closed. I then kept only a dozen men mounted, and made the others go to their quarters. I kept the trumpeters, though, at my own quarters, so that I could sound boot-and-saddle as soon as possible, if necessary. Your majesty sees I was right, for the road is now free."

"Very well, sir. You have acted prudently. When I am gone, sound the boot-and-saddle and overtake me."

"Sire," said the queen, "will you hear what the vicomte says?"

"What does he say?" asked the king impatiently.

"That you were recognised by the son of the post-agent at Sainte Menehould; that he saw this young man, with an assignat in his hand, examine your countenance and your likeness; that he told his brother, who is behind, of the matter; that something serious has certainly taken place, or Count de Charny would be here."

"Then, if we have been recognised, there is the more reason for haste. M. Isidor, hurry up the postilions."

Isidor's horse was ready. The young man leaped into the saddle and cried out: "Quick, to Varennes!"

M. Damas stepped back, and bowed respectfully to the king: the postilions started.

The horses had been changed in the twinkling of an eye, and they went like lightning.

As they left the city they passed a sergeant of hussars.

M. Damas had at first felt disposed to follow the carriage with the few men who were ready; the king, however, had given him other orders, to which he thought it his duty to conform. Some excitement also was observable in the city; the citizens going from house to house, the windows opening, and heads and lights being visible everywhere. Damas sought to prevent but one thing — the sounding of the tocsin. Besides, he expected Dandoins every moment with his thirty men, which would reinforce him.

All, however, appeared to grow calm; about a quarter of an hour after, he went to the square, where he found his chief of squadron, M. de Norville, and asked him to get the men under arms. Just then they came to tell him that a noncommissioned officer sent by Dandoins waited with a message.

The message was that he must not expect M. Dandoins, who with his troops was retained by the municipality of St. Menehould, and also, which Damas knew already, that Dronet had set out to overtake the carriages, which he probably had not been able to overtake, as he had not been seen.

This was the state of things when a noncommissioned officer of Lauzun’s regiment was announced.

The message had been sent by the commander, M. de Rohrig, who with young De Bouille and Raigecourt commanded at Varennes. Uneasy at the lapse of hours without news, these gentlemen had sent to Damas for information.

“What was the condition of things at Varennes?” asked Damas.

“Perfectly quiet.”

“Where are the hussars?”

“In quarters, with their horses saddled.”

“Did you meet any carriages on the road?”

“Yes; one with four and another with two horses.”

“Those were the carriages you looked for; all is right,” said Damas.

He went to his quarters and ordered boot-and-saddle. He prepared to follow the king, and defend him if necessary. Five minutes after, the trumpets sounded. All was well, except the incident which detained the troops of Dandoins. With his hundred and forty dragoons, however, he could do without his subordinate.

The royal equipage had turned to the left towards Varennes. It had been determined to change horses on the side towards Dun, and to reach it, it was necessary to leave the road over the hills, and take the one which led to the bridge. That being passed, to go beneath the tower to the place where De Choiseul’s relays were, which were to be guarded by De Bouille and De Raigecourt.

When at this difficult point, they remembered that Charny was to guide the party through the streets to the post-house. The count had been there some days and he had made himself familiar with every stone. Unfortunately, he was not there.

The anxiety of the queen was doubled. Charny would have joined the carriage, had not some terrible accident befallen him.

As he approached Varennes, the king himself became uneasy. Relying on Charny, he had not even brought a map of the city. The night, too, was intensely dark, and lighted by the stars alone. It was one of those nights in which it was easy to become lost, even in known localities, and for a better reason in strange places.

The order Isidor had received from Charny was to halt in front of the city. There his brother would relay, and as we have said, resume charge.

As the queen, and perhaps Isidor as well, was uneasy about his brother, they had no hope but that either De Bouille or De Raigecourt would meet the king outside of Varennes. They had been two or three days in the city, knew it, and would be guides. When, therefore, they reached the foot of the hill, and saw but two or three lights, Isidor halted, and looked around him, not knowing what to do. He saw nothing. He then called in a low, and then in a loud voice, for MM. de Bouille and de Raigecourt. He heard the sound of the carriage wheels as they approached, like distant thunder in sound. An idea occurred to him: perhaps they were on the edge of the forest. He entered and explored. He saw nobody. He had then one thing or the other to do; he must either go on or wait.

In five minutes the carriage had come. All asked at once, “You have not seen the count?”

“Sire,” said Isidor, “I have not; as he is not here, he must, while in pursuit of Drouet, have met with some accident.”

The queen sighed.

“What must be done?” asked the king.

Speaking to the two guardsmen, he said, “Gentlemen, do you know the city?”

No one did, and the answer was negative.

“Sire,” said Isidor, “all is silent and quiet; if it please your majesty to wait here ten minutes, I will enter the city, and find either MM. de Bouille and de Raigecourt or the relays of M. de Choiseul. Does your majesty remember the name of the inn where the horses were?”

“Alas, no!” said the king. “I did, but have forgotten. It matters not — go, and we will in the meantime search out some information.”

Isidor hurried towards the city, and soon disappeared among the houses.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Jean Baptiste Drouet.

THE WORDS OF the king: “We get some information here,” were explained by the appearance of two or three houses on the right-hand side of the road. The nearest of these houses was opened at the sound of the approaching carriages, as they perceived by the light that shone through the doorway.

The queen descended, took the arm of M. de Maiden, and went towards the house. But at their approach the door was closed, yet not so quickly but that M. de Maiden had time to dart forward before it was quite shut. Under the pressure of M. de Maiden, although there was some resistance, the door opened.

Behind the door, and making an effort to close it, was a man about fifty, with his legs bare, and dressed in a robe-de-chambre and slippers. He cast a rapid look at the queen, whose countenance was visible by the light he held in his hand, and started. “What do you want, sir?” he asked of M. de Maiden.

“Monsieur,” was the reply, “we do not know Varennes, and we beg you to be so good as to point out the way to Stenay.”

“And if I do so,” said the unknown, “and if they ascertain that I have given you the information, then for giving it to you I should be lost.”

“Ah, monsieur, should you run some risk in rendering us this service, you are too courteous not to oblige a lady who finds herself in a dangerous position.”

“Monsieur!” replied the man, “the person who is behind you is the queen!”

“Monsieur!”

“I have recognised her!”

The queen, who had heard or guessed what had just passed, touched M. de Maiden behind. “Before going further,” said she, “tell the king that I am recognised.”

M. de Maiden, in one second, had accomplished this commission.

“Well!” said the king, “beg this man to come and speak with me.”

M. de Maiden returned; and thinking it useless to dissimulate, he said: “The king wishes to speak to you, monsieur.”

The man sighed, threw off his slippers, and with naked feet, in order to make less noise, advanced towards the door.

“Your name, monsieur?” asked the king at once.

“M. de Prefontaine, sire,” he replied hesitatingly.

“What are you?”

“A major of cavalry, and knight of the royal order of Saint Louis.”

“In your double quality as major and knight of the order of Saint Louis, you have twice taken the oath of fidelity to me; it is consequently your duty to assist me in the embarrassment I find myself in.”

“Certainly,” replied the major; “but I beg your majesty to make haste — I may be seen.”

“And, monsieur, if you are seen,” said M. de Maiden, “so much the better. You will never have so good an opportunity again to do your duty.”

The major, with whom this seemed no argument, uttered a kind of groan.

The queen shrugged her shoulders in pity, and stamped her foot with impatience.

The king made a sign to her, and then, addressing the major: “Monsieur,” he continued, “have you, by chance, heard speak of some horses that were waiting for a carriage, and have you seen any hussars stationed in the town since yesterday?”

“Yes, sire, horses and hussars are on the other side of the town: the horses at the Hotel du Grand Monarque, the hussars probably in the barracks.”

“Thanks, sir. Now go in; no one has seen you, and nothing will happen to you.”

“Sire — ”

The king, without listening any further, reached his hand to the queen to assist her into the carriage, and addressing the guards, who waited for his orders: “Gentlemen,” said he, “forward to the Grand Monarque!”

The two officers resumed their places, and cried to the postilions: “To the Grand Monarque!”

But at the same instant, a kind of shadow on horseback darted from the wood, and riding across the road, “Postilions,” said he, “not a step further!”

“Why so?” asked the postilions, astonished.

"Because you are conducting the king, who is flying from France, and in the name of the nation I order you not to stir."

The postilions, who had already made a movement forward, stopped, muttering, "The king!"

Louis XVI. saw the danger was great. "Who are you, sir," cried he, "who give your orders here?"

"A simple citizen; but I represent the law, and I speak in the name of the nation. Postilion, stir not. I order it a second time. You know me well — I am Jean Baptiste Drouet, son of the postmaster of St. Menehould."

"Oh! the miserable fellow!" cried the two guards, jumping down from their seats, with their couteaus de chasse in their hands, "it is he!" But before they had reached the ground, Drouet had darted into the streets of the lower town.

"Ah! Charny, Charny!" murmured the queen, "what has happened to you?" She sank into the bottom of the carriage, indifferent to whatever might happen.

What had happened to Charny, and how had he let Drouet pass? — Fatality!

The horse of M. Dandoins was swift, but Drouet had already twenty minutes' start of the count. He failed in recovering these twenty minutes.

Charny drove the spurs into his horse; the horse bounded and went off at a gallop. Drouet on his side, without knowing whether he was followed or not, went as hard as he could. He, however, had only a post-horse, Charny a thorough-bred. At the end of a league Charny had shortened the distance by a third. Then Drouet perceived he was pursued, and redoubled his efforts to escape. He had left so rapidly that he was without arms.

The young patriot did not fear death, but he feared to be stopped. He feared the king would escape; he feared that this opportunity to render his name illustrious for ever would escape him.

He had still two leagues to go before reaching Clermont, and it was evident that he would be overtaken at the end of the third league from St. Menehould. And yet to stimulate his ardour he heard the carriage of the king before him. He redoubled his spurring and whipping.

He was only three-quarters of a league from Clermont, but Charny was not more than two hundred paces behind him. Without doubt, Drouet knew there was no post-house at Varennes; without doubt the king was going on to Verdun.

Drouet began to despair. Before he could reach the king he would be overtaken himself. At half a league from Clermont he heard the gallop of Charny’s horse nearly as well as that of his own.

All at once, as Charny was not more than fifty paces behind him, some returning postilions crossed before Drouet. Drouet knew that they were those who had conducted the king’s carriage.

“Ah!” said he, “it is you. On to Verdun, aye?”

“What? On to Verdun?” asked the postilion.

“I said,” repeated Drouet, “that the carriages you had just left have gone on to Verdun.” And he passed, pressing his horse for a last effort.

“No!” cried the postilions, “on to Varennes.”

Drouet gave a cry of joy. He is safe! and the king is lost! He darted into the forest of Argonne, all the paths of which he knew. In crossing the wood he would gain on the king. Besides, the darkness of the wood would protect him. Charny, who knew the country almost as well as Drouet, understood that Drouet would escape, and uttered a cry of anger. Nearly at the same time as Drouet, he pushed his horse into the open country that separated the road from the forest, calling out: “Stop! stop!”

But Drouet took care not to answer. He leant over on the neck of his horse, exciting him with his spurs, whip and voice. If he reached the wood he was safe.

He reached the wood, but when he reached it he was only ten paces from Charny.

Charny seized one of his pistols, and pointing it at Drouet, “Stop!” said he, “or thou diest!”

Drouet stooped still more over the neck of his horse, and pressed on. Charny drew the trigger, but it missed fire.

Furious, Charny launched the pistol at Drouet, seized the second, dashed into the wood in pursuit of the fugitive, aimed at him betwixt the trees, but a second time the pistol missed fire.

Then it was that he remembered as he galloped away from M. Dandoins that he had heard him cry out something which he had not understood.

“Ah!” said he, “I have mistaken the horse, and, without doubt, he cried to me that the pistols were not charged. N’importe! I’ll overtake this fellow, and if necessary will kill him with my hands.” And he continued the pursuit. But he had scarcely gone a hundred yards before his horse fell into a ditch. Charny rolled over his head, got up, and jumped into the saddle again, but Drouet had disappeared.

And so Drouet escaped from Charny. So it happened that he crossed the high-road, like a threatening phantom, and commanded the postilions who were driving the king not to go a step further.

The postilions had stopped, for Drouet had ordered them in the name of the nation, which had already commenced to be more powerful than the king.

Drouet had scarcely got into the streets of the lower town before the galloping of an approaching horse was heard.

By the same street that Drouet had taken, Isidor appeared. His information was the same as that given by M. de Prefontaine.

The horses of M. de Choiseul and M. de Bouille and de Raigecourt were at the other end of the town, at the Grand Monarque. The third officer, M. de Rohrig, was at the garrison with the hussars. A waiter at a cafe, who was shutting up his establishment, had given him the information. But instead of finding the travellers, as he expected, full of joy, he found them plunged in the deepest grief.

M. de Prefontaine wept; the two guards threatened something invisible and unknown. Isidor stopped in the midst of his recital.

“What has happened, gentlemen?” said he.

“Did you not meet in the street a man who passed you at full gallop?”

“Yes, sire,” said Isidor.

“Well, that man was Drouet,” said the king.

“Drouet!” said Isidor, with profound grief; “then my brother is dead!”

The queen shrieked, and buried her head in her hands.

There was a moment of inexpressible depression among these unfortunates, threatened with a danger unknown but terrible, and stopped upon the highway. Isidor recovered himself first.

“Sire,” said he, “dead or living, do not think any longer of my brother. Think of your majesty. There is not a moment to lose. The postilions know the hotel of the Grand Monarque. At a gallop, to the hotel of the Grand Monarque!”

But the postilions did not stir.

“Don’t you hear?” asked Isidor.

“Yes.”

“Well then, why do you not start?”

“Because M. Drouet has forbidden us.”

“What! M. Drouet has forbidden you? And when the king commands and M. Drouet forbids, you obey M. Drouet?”

“We obey the nation.”

“Allons, gentlemen,” said Isidor to his two companions, “there are moments when the life of a man is nothing. Each of you charge one of these men: I will charge this one. We will drive ourselves.”

And he seized the nearest postilion by the collar, and put the point of his hunting-knife to his breast.

The queen saw the three knives sparkle, and uttered a cry.

“Gentlemen,” said she, “gentlemen, pardon!” and then to the postilions: “My friends,” said she, “you shall have fifty louis to divide amongst you now, and a pension of five hundred francs each, if you will save the king.”

Whether they were frightened by the warlike demonstrations of the three young men, or whether they were seduced by the queen’s offer, the postilions recommenced their journey.

M. de Prefontaine went into his house, trembling, and locked the door.

Isidor galloped before the carriage. He traversed the town and passed the bridge. In five minutes they would be at the Grand Monarque. The carriage descended the hill that conducted to the low town at a good rate: but on reaching the entrance to the bridge they found one of the gates closed. They opened the gate; two or three wagons barred the passage.

“Come!” said Isidor, jumping from his horse and pulling the wagons aside.

At this moment they heard the first beat of the drum, and the first clang of the tocsin. Drouet had done his work.

“Ah, fellow!” said Isidor, grinding his teeth, “if I find you.” And by a great effort he pushed one of the wagons aside, as M. de Maiden and M. de Valory did the other.

A third still remained in the way.

“Come! the last one!” said Isidor; and at the same time the wheels moved.

All at once, between the spokes of the third wagon, they saw the barrels of four or five muskets thrust.

“A step further and you die, gentlemen!” said a voice.

“Gentlemen, gentlemen!” said the king, “do not attempt to force a passage. I order you not.”

The two officers and Isidor drew back a step.

"What is it you wish?" asked the king.

At the same moment a cry of terror was heard from the carriage. Besides the men who intercepted the passage of the bridge, two or three others had glided behind the carriage, and the guns of several appeared at the door. One of these was directed against the breast of the queen.

Isidor saw all, and seized the barrel and knocked it up.

"Fire, fire!" cried several voices. One of the men obeyed, but happily his gun snapped.

Isidor raised his arm, and would have poniarded the young man, but the queen caught his arm.

"Ah, madame!" cried Isidor furiously, "let me charge these ruffians."

"No, monsieur. Put up your sword! Listen!"

Isidor half obeyed. He let his hunting — -knife fall half-way down the scabbard.

"Ah, if I could meet Drouet!" he murmured.

"As for him," said the queen, in a low tone, and grasping his arm firmly, "as for him, I give you leave."

"Now, messieurs," repeated the king, "what is it you wish?"

"We wish to see the passports," replied two or three voices.

"The passports?" said the king; "go and fetch the authorities of the town, and we will show them to them."

"Ay, by my faith! good manners!" cried the man whose gun had already snapped, throwing himself towards the king. But the two guards threw themselves between him and the king and seized him. In the struggle, the gun went off, but the ball struck no one.

"Halloa!" cried a voice, "who fired?"

The man whom the guards had seized cried: "Help! help!" Five or six other armed men ran to his assistance.

The two guards bared their hunting-knives, and prepared to fight.

The king and the queen made useless efforts to stop both parties. The struggle was about to commence — terrible, mortal — when two men suddenly threw themselves into the midst of the melee, one girdled with a tricoloured scarf, the other dressed in a uniform.

The man with the tricoloured scarf was Sausse, the procureur of the commune; the other, in the uniform, was Hannonet, commander of the National Guards. Behind them, lit up by torches, were twenty guns.

The king saw, in these two men, if not assistance, at least a guarantee of his safety.

"Gentlemen," said he, "I am ready to trust myself, and those with me, to you, but defend us from the brutality of these people." And he pointed to the men armed with guns.

"Ground your arms, gentlemen!" said Hannonet. The men grumblingly obeyed.

"You will excuse us, monsieur," said the procureur of the commune, addressing the king, "but the report is spread that his majesty Louis XVI. is fled, and it is our duty to see for ourselves if it is true."

"To see if it is true!" cried Isidor. "If it were true that this carriage contained the king, you ought to be at his feet. If, on the contrary, it only contains a private gentleman, why do you stop us?"

"Monsieur!" said Sausse, continuing to address the king, "it is to you I speak; will you do me the honour of answering?"

"Sire," said Isidor, in a whisper, "gam time; M. de Damas and his dragoons follow us, without doubt, and it will not be long before they arrive."

"You are right," said the king. Then, answering M. Sausse, "And if our passports are correct, you will let us continue our route, monsieur?"

"Without doubt," said Sausse.

"Well, then, Madame la Baronne," said the king, addressing himself to Madame de Tourzel, "have the goodness to seek for your passport, and give it to these gentlemen."

Madame de Tourzel complied with what the king meant to say, by the words, "have the goodness to seek for your passport." She commenced immediately to hunt up the passport, but in the pockets where it certainly was not.

"Ah!" said an impatient threatening voice, "you know well you have no passports."

"Pardon, gentlemen," said the queen, "we have one, but ignorant that we were going to be asked for it, Madame de Korff does not know where she put it."

A kind of humming went through the crowd, implying that they were not to be duped by any subterfuge.

"There is something more simple than all this," said Sausse. "Postilions, drive the carriage to my store. These ladies and gentlemen will come into my house, and there all can be put right. Forward! gentlemen of the National Guard, escort the carriage!"

This invitation resembled an order too much for any one to gainsay it, and if they had attempted they would probably not have succeeded. The tocsin continued to ring, the drum to beat, and the crowd to increase at each step.

More than a hundred persons, accompanying the carriage, remained on the outside of the house of M. Sausse, which was situated in a little square.

"Well," said the king, as he entered.

"Well, monsieur," replied Sausse, "we were speaking of the passport; if the lady who is said to be the mistress of the carriage will show hers, I will carry it to the municipality, where the council is sitting, and see if it is correct."

As in any case the passport given by Madame de Korff to Count Charny and by Count Charny to the queen, was quite correct, the king made a sign to Madame de Tourzel to give it up.

She drew this precious paper from her pocket and put it into the hands of M. Sausse, who bade his wife do the honours of his house to his mysterious guests, and left for the municipality.

As Drouet was present at the sitting, every one there was very excited. M. Sausse entered with the passport. Each knew that the travellers had been conducted to his house, and on his arrival curiosity made them silent. He deposited the passport before the mayor.

We have already given the contents of this passport. After having read it: "Gentlemen," said the mayor, "the passport is perfectly good."

"Good!" repeated eight or ten voices with astonishment, and at the same time their hands stretched out to receive it.

"Without doubt, good," said the mayor, "for the king's signature is there." And he shoved the passport towards the stretched-out hands, which seized it immediately. But Drouet nearly tore it from the hands that held it: "Signed by the king?" said he, "well, so it may be; but is he one of the National Assembly?"

"Yes," said one of his neighbours, who was reading the passport at the same time as himself, and by the light of the candle, "I see the signature of a member of one of the committees."

"But," replied Drouet, "is it that of the president? And, besides all that," went on the young patriot, "the travellers are not Madame Korff, a Russian lady, her children, her steward, her woman, and three servants, but the king, the queen, the dauphin, Madame Royale, Madame Elizabeth, some great lady of the palace, three couriers — the royal family, in fact! Will you, or will you not, permit the royal family to leave France?"

The question was placed in its proper light; but, place it as you would, it was a very difficult one for the authorities of a third-rate town like Varennes to determine.

Then they deliberated, and the deliberation promised to be so long that the procureur determined to leave them to it and returned home.

The king advanced three steps to meet him. "Well," he asked, with an anxiety that he strove in vain to conceal, "the passport?"

"The passport," replied M. Sausse, "at this moment, I ought to say, has raised a great discussion at the municipality."

"And why?" demanded Louis XVI.; "they doubt its validity, perhaps?"

"No — but they doubt its belonging really to Madame de Korff; and the rumour goes that it is in reality the king and his family that we have the honour to have in our walls."

Louis XVI. hesitated replying for a moment; then, determining all at once what to do —

"Yes, monsieur," said he, "I am the king, that is the queen, those are my children! and I beg you to treat us with that respect which the French have always shown their kings."

A great number of the curious surrounded the door. The words of the king were heard, not only within, but without too.

Unfortunately, if he who had just pronounced these words had said them with a certain dignity, the grey coat in which he was dressed, and the little peruke, a la Jean Jacques, that ornamented his head, would not have corresponded with his dignity. To find a King of France in such an ignoble disguise! The queen felt the impression produced on the multitude, and coloured to the very temples.

"Let us accept the offer of Madame Sausse," said she, quickly, "and go upstairs."

M. Sausse took a light and went towards the stairs, to show the way to his illustrious guests.

During this time, the news that it was really the king who was at Varennes, and that he had said so with his own lips, flew through every street in the town. A man rushed into the municipality. "Gentlemen," said he, “the travellers stopping at M. Sausse’s really are the royal family! I heard the confession from the king’s own mouth!”

“Eh bien! gentlemen,” cried Drouet, “‘what did I tell you?”

At the same time a great hubbub was heard in the streets, and the tocsin continued to clang and the drums to beat.

A deputation of the commune soon arrived, who said to Louis XVI.:

“Since it is no longer doubtful that the inhabitants of Varennes have the happiness to possess their king, they come to take his orders.”

“My orders?” replied the king, “direct my carriages, then, to be got ready, so that I may continue my route.”

None of the municipal deputation knew what to reply to this demand. Just then the gallop of the horses of De Choiseul was heard, and the hussars were seen to draw up with bare blades in the square.

The queen became highly excited, and a ray of joy passed across her eyes. “We are saved!” murmured she, in the ear of Madame Elizabeth.

“God grant it to be so!” said the pure-hearted, lamb-like woman, who appealed to God under all circumstances.

The king arose and listened.

The municipal officers seemed uneasy.

Just then a loud noise was heard in the ante-chamber, which was guarded by peasants armed with scythes: a few words were interchanged, and then a contest ensued, and De Choiseul, bare-headed and hat in hand, appeared at the door.

Behind him appeared the pale head and resolute face of M. Damas.

In the expression of the two officers’ faces there was such an air of menace, that the members of the commune separated, leaving an open space between the new-comers and the royal family.

When she saw De Choiseul, the queen crossed the whole length of the room and gave him her hand: “Ah, sir! is it you? You are welcome.”

“Alas! madame, I have come very late.”

“It matters not; you have come in good company.”

“Madame, we are almost alone. M. Dandoins has been detained with his dragoons at St. Menehould, and M. Damas has been deserted by his men.”

The queen shook her head.

“But,” said De Choiseul, “where is M. de Bouille? where is De Raigecourt?” and he looked anxiously around him.

“I have not seen those gentlemen,” said the king, who had approached.

"Sire," said Damas, "I give you my word of honour I believed they were killed in front of your carriage."

"What must be done?" said Louis XVI.

"Sire, I have forty hussars here. They have marched forty leagues to-day, but will go much farther to serve you."

"But how?" asked the king.

"Listen, sire," said De Choiseul. "This is all that can be done: I have, as I said, forty hussars. I will dismount seven. You will mount one of the horses, with the dauphin in your arms, the queen will take a second, Madame Elizabeth a third, and Madame Royale a fourth. Mesdames de Tourzel, de Neuville, and Breunier, whom you will not leave, will mount the others. We will surround you with the thirty-three hussars, and cut our way through. Thus we shall have a chance of escape. Reflect, though, sire. If you adopt this course, you must do it at once, for in an hour, or half-hour, the soldiers will have left me."

M. de Choiseul awaited the king's order. The queen appeared to like the project, and looked at Louis XVI., as if to question him. But he, on the contrary, seemed to shun the eyes of the queen, and the influence which she could exert over him. At last, looking M. de Choiseul in the face: "Yes," said he, "I know well that there is a way, and only one, perhaps; but can you answer me that in this unequal contest of thirty-three men against seven or eight hundred, some shots will not kill my son, my daughter, the queen, or my sister?"

"Sire," replied Choiseul, "if such a misfortune happened, and happened because you had yielded to my counsel, I should kill myself before your majesty's eyes."

"Well, then," said the king, "instead of yielding to these wild projects, let us reason coolly."

The queen sighed, and moved two or three steps away. In this she did not feign regret. She met Isidor, who, attracted by the noise in the street, and still hoping that it was occasioned by the arrival of his brother, had approached the window. They exchanged two or three words, and Isidor left the room.

The king seemed not to have noticed what passed between Isidor and the queen, and said: "The municipality refuses to let me pass. It wishes that I should wait here until the break of day. I do not speak of the Count de Charny, who is so sincerely devoted to us, and of whom we have no news, but the Chevalier de Bouille and M. de Raigecourt left, as I am assured, ten minutes after my arrival, to warn the Marquis de Bouille, and cause the troops to march, which were surely ready. If I were alone, I would follow your counsel and pass on; but the queen, my two children, my sister, and these two ladies, it is impossible to risk, especially with the few people you have, for I would not certainly go leaving my three guards here.” He took out his watch. “It is near three o’clock. Young De Bouille left at half-past twelve. His father had certainly formed his troops in echelons, one before the other. The first will be advised by the chevalier. They will arrive successively. It is only eight leagues from here to Stenay. In two hours, or three hours and a half, a man may easily get over the distance on horseback. Detachments will continue then to arrive throughout the night. Towards five or six o’clock, the Marquis de Bouille will be here in person, and then, without any danger to my family, without any violence, we will leave Varennes and continue on our way.”

M. de Choiseul assented to the logic of this reasoning, and yet his instinct told him that there are certain moments when it is not necessary to listen to logic.

He turned then towards the queen, and by his looks seemed to supplicate her to give him other orders, or at least get the king to revoke those that he had already given. But she shook her head.

“I do not wish to take anything on myself,” said she; “it is for the king to command, my duty is to obey. Besides, I am of the opinion of the king. It cannot be long before M. de Bouille arrives.”

M. de Choiseul bowed, and drew some steps back, taking M. de Damas with him, with whom he wished to concert measures, and making a sign to the two guards to come and share in their councils, when a second deputation arrived, consisting of M. Sausse, M. Hannonet, commander of the National Guard, and of three or four municipal officers.

They caused their names to be announced, and the king, thinking that they came to say the carriages were ready, ordered them to be admitted.

The young officers, who interpreted every sign, every movement, every gesture, fancied they saw in Sausse’s face something of hesitation, and in that of Hannonet a determined will, which seemed to them a good augury.

The king looked anxiously at the envoys of the commune, and awaited until they spoke to him. They did not speak, but bowed. Louis XVI. did not seem to mistake them. “Messieurs,” said he, “the French people have only gone astray, for their love of their sovereigns is real. Weary of the perpetual outrages I have been subjected to in my capital, I have decided to withdraw into the provinces, where the holy fire of devotion yet burns. There, I am sure, I shall find the love the people of France are wont to bear their rulers."

The envoys bowed again.

"I am willing to give my people a proof of my confidence. I have come to take hence a force, composed one half of troops of the line, one half of the National Guard, with which I will go to Montmedy, where I have determined to fix myself. The consequence is, M. Hannonet, as commander of the National Guard, I wish you to select the troops who are to accompany me, and to have the horses put to my carriage."

There was a moment of silence, during which Sausse expected Hannonet to speak, and when Hannonet thought Sausse would speak.

Hannonet at last bowed. He said: "Sire, I would obey the orders of your majesty, but for a clause which forbids the king to leave France, and all Frenchmen to aid him in doing so."

The king trembled.

"Consequently," said Hannonet, making a gesture to beseech the king to let him finish, "and consequently, the municipality of Varennes has resolved, before it suffers the king to pass, to send a courier to Paris, to ask the will of the National Assembly."

The king felt the sweat roll from his brow, and the queen bit her lips with impatience. Madame Elizabeth clasped her hands and looked to heaven.

"So, so, gentlemen," said the king, with that dignity which always came to his aid when forced to an extremity; "am I no longer able to go whither I please? if so, I am a more abject slave than the humblest of my subjects."

"Sire," said Hannonet, "you are still our master, but the humblest of all men, king or citizen, is bound by his oath. You made an oath. Sire, obey the law. This is not only a great example to follow, but to give."

The king saw that if, without resistance, he submitted to this rebellion — and such he thought it — of a village municipality, he was lost.

"Gentlemen," said he, "this is violence. I am not, though, so isolated as I seem. Before my door are forty faithful men, and around Varennes I have ten thousand soldiers. I order you, then, M. Hannonet, commander of the National Guard, to have the horses at once put to my carriage. I order, and will have it so."

The queen drew near, and in a low tone said: “Very well, sire! let us risk our lives, but not our honour.”

“And if we refuse to obey your majesty, what will be the result?”

“The result will be that I will appeal to force, and that you will be responsible for the blood that will be shed, and which you really will have spilled.”

“So be it, sire,” said Hannonet. “Call your hussars — I will appeal to the National Guard.”

He left the room. The king and queen looked at each other in terror, and the latter, seeing the danger of their position, hastily taking the dauphin, who was yet asleep, from his bed, went to the window, and throwing it open, said:

“Monsieur, let us show ourselves to the people, and ascertain if they be entirely gangrened. Let us appeal to the soldiers, and encourage them with our voices. That is as little as those who are ready to die for us can expect.”

The king followed mechanically, and appeared with her on the balcony.

The square into which Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette looked seemed a prey to the greatest agitation.

One half of the hussars of M. de Choiseul were mounted, and the others on foot. Those who were on foot were pulled about, lost, drowned amid the people, and suffered themselves, with their horses, to be taken anywhere. They were already won over by the nation. The others, who were on horseback, seemed submissive to M. de Choiseul, who spoke to them in German: but they informed him that half of the troop had mutinied.

The cry of “The king! the king!” was at once uttered by five hundred mouths.

De Choiseul was desperate, and wished to die. He made one effort. “Hussars!” said he, “in honour’s name save the king!”

Just at that moment, surrounded by twenty armed men, a new actor appeared on the stage. Drouet came from the municipality, where he had resolved to stop the king’s journey. “Ah!” said he, as he passed De Choiseul, “you would convey the king away! I tell you, that if you do, you will take away only his body.”

Choiseul advanced with his drawn sword. The commander of the National Guard was there, and said: “M. de Choiseul, if you come a foot nearer, I will kill you!”

Just then a man advanced whom no threat or menace could induce to pause. It was Isidor de Charny. The man he looked for was Drouet.

"Back, back!" said he, driving his spurs into his horse, "that man belongs to me!"

He rushed on Drouet with his couteau de chasse.

When he was just within reach, two shots were fired, one from a pistol, and the other from a gun. The ball from the latter struck him in the breast.

The two shots were fired so near to him that the unfortunate young man was literally wrapped in flame and smoke. He readied out his arms, and, as he fell, exclaimed, "Poor Catherine!"

Letting the couteau de chasse fall, he sank back on the crupper of his horse, and thence to the ground.

The queen uttered a terrible cry, and nearly let the dauphin fall from her arms: but as she was dropping into a chair she saw another horseman coming down the pathway Isidor had made in the crowd.

The king, when the queen had retired, turned and shut the window.

Not a few voices only cried, "Vive la Nation!" — not a few hussars; the whole crowd did so. Only twenty hussars remained faithful, and they were the hope of the French monarchy.

The queen threw herself in a chair, and with her hands over her face saw Isidor de Charny die, as she had seen George.

All at once a loud noise was heard, and she looked up.

We will not seek to tell what passed in the mind of the woman and the queen. Olivier de Charny, pale and bloody with the last embrace of his brother, stood at the door.

Sombre and calm, he made a sign to the persons who were present, and said:

"Excuse me, messieurs, I must speak to their majesties."

The National Guards sought to make him understand that they were there to keep his majesty from having any communication with any one else.

Charny, however, folded his pale lips, knit his brow, opened his frock, and showed a pair of pistols, repeating, at the same time, in a gentler but more positive voice than he had before:

"Gentlemen, I had the honour to tell you that I wished to speak to the king and queen alone!"

He at the same time made with his hand a gesture for all strangers to leave the room.

The voice, the power of Charny, exercised on himself and others, animated Damas and the guardsmen, who resumed all their energy, and at once they drove the National Guards from the room.

Then the queen saw how useful such a man would have been in the carriage, had not etiquette demanded that Madame de Tourzel should have been his substitute.

Charny looked around to see that none but the queen's faithful servitors were present, and, approaching, said, "Madame, I have seventy hussars at the gates, and can rely on them. What orders do you give?"

"Tell me first, dear Charny," said the queen in German, "what has happened?"

The count made a gesture, which told the queen that De Maiden, who was there, also spoke German.

"Alas!" said the queen, "we did not see you, and thought you dead."

"Unfortunately, madame," said Charny, "I am not dead, but," and he spoke in deep sadness, "my poor brother is." He could not restrain a tear; but he added, in a low tone, "My time will come."

"Charny! Charny! I ask what is the matter? Why did you leave me thus?" asked the queen; adding, in German, "You treated us badly, especially ourselves."

Charny bowed.

"I fancied," he said, "that my brother had told you why."

"Yes, I know; you pursued that wretch Drouet, and we at once saw trouble in the fact."

"I did meet with a great misfortune. In spite of every effort, I could not overtake him in time. A returning postilion told him that your majesty's carriage, which he had intended to follow to Verdun, had gone to Varennes, and he then went in the wood of Argonne. I followed, and sought twice to shoot him, but the weapons were not loaded. I did not get my horse at St. Menehould, but used Dandoins' instead. Ah, madame! about all this there was fatality. I followed him through the forest, but did not know the roads, while he was familiar with every by-path. The darkness became every hour more intense, and as long as I could see him or hear him I followed. At last light and the sound of his horse's heels passed away, and I found myself lost in the darkness of the forest. Madame, I am a man — you know me; I do not weep now, but then I wept tears of rage."

The queen gave him her hand.

Charny bowed, and touched it with the tip of his lips.

"No one replied to my cries. I wandered all night, and at dawn I was at Genes, on the road from Varennes to Dun. Had you escaped Drouet, as he had me? But that was impossible: you had passed Varennes, and it was useless to go for you thither. Not far from the city I met M. Deslon and a hundred hussars. He was uneasy, but had no news except that not long before, he had seen MM. de Bouille and de Raigecourt flying across the bridge to tell the general what had gone on. I told M. Deslon all; I besought him to come with me, with his hussars, which he did at once, leaving only thirty to guard the bridge over the Meuse. In half an hour we were at Varennes, and have come the whole distance, four leagues, in one hour. I wished to begin the attack at once, to charge everything, even if we found barricade on barricade. At Varennes, however, we found some so high that it would have been madness to seek to pass them. I then tried to parley. There was an advance of the National Guards thrown out, and I asked leave to join my hussars with those who were in the city. This was refused. I then asked to send to the king for orders, and as they would have refused this, as they did the first request, I leaped my horse over the first barricade and also the second. Guided by the noise, I galloped up, and reached the square just when your majesty had left the balcony. Now," said Charny, "I await your majesty's orders."

The queen clasped Charny's hand in her own.

She then turned to the king, who seemed plunged into a perfect state of torpor.

"Sire," said she, "have you heard what our faithful friend, the Count de Charny, has said?"

The king did not reply.

The queen then arose and went to him.

"Sire," said she, "there is no time to be lost, for unfortunately we have already lost too much. M. de Charny has seventy safe men, and asks for orders."

The king shook his head.

"Sire, for heaven's sake give your orders!"

Charny looked imploringly while the queen besought him.

"My orders!" said the king. "I have none to give. I am a prisoner. Do all you can."

"Very well," said the queen, "that is all we ask."

She took Charny aside. “You have a carte-blanche,” said she. “Do as the king told you — all you can.” She then said, in a low tone: “Be quick, however; act with vigour, or we are lost.”

“Very well, madame. Let me confer for a moment with these gentlemen, and what we decide on will be done at once.”

De Choiseul came in. He had in his hand a bundle of papers wrapped up in a bloody handkerchief. He said nothing, but gave them to Charny.

The count at once understood that they were the papers found upon his brother. He took the bloody inheritance in his hand and kissed it. The queen could not but sob. Charny did not change, but placed the relics on his heart.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “will you aid me in the last effort I shall make?”

“We are ready to sacrifice our lives,” said all.

“Think you twelve men are yet faithful?”

“Here stand nine, at least.”

“Well, I have sixty or seventy hussars. While I attack the barricades in front, do you make a diversion in the rear. I will then force the barricades, and with our united forces we shall be able to carry off the king.”

In reply, the young men gave Charny their hands.

He then turned to the queen and said, “Madame, in an hour I shall be dead or your majesty free.”

“Count,” said the queen, “say not so. Liberty would be too dear.”

Olivier bowed a reiteration of his promise, and without paying any attention to the fresh rumours and clamours which broke out, advanced to the door.

But just as he advanced his hand to the key, the door opened and admitted a new personage, who was already about to mingle in the complicated intrigue of the drama.

He was a man of about fifty or fifty-two years of age, with a dark, stern look. His collar was turned back, his neck bare, and his eyes were flushed with fatigue. His dusty apparel showed that some great exertion had urged him to attempt a mad journey. He had a pair of pistols, and a sabre hung to his belt. Panting and almost breathless, when he opened the door, he seemed to be satisfied when he recognised the king and queen. A smile of gratified vengeance passed over his face, and without paying any attention to the minor personages who stood in the back part of the room, he reached forth his hand and said:

“In the name of the National Assembly, all of you are my prisoners.”

With a gesture, rapid as thought, M. de Choiseul rushed forward with a cocked pistol, and seemed ready to kill the new-comer, who exceeded in insolence and resolution all they had yet seen.

By a movement yet more rapid, the queen seized his hand, and said in a low tone: “Do not be too hasty, M. de Choiseul. All the time we gain is gained, for M. de Bouille cannot be far off.”

“You are right, madame,” said De Choiseul, and he replaced his weapon.

The queen glanced at Charny, amazed that in this new danger he had not thrown himself forward. Strange though it was, Charny did not wish the new-comer to see him, and, to escape his eye, retired to the darkest corner of the room.

The queen, however, knew the count, and did not doubt but that, as soon as he was wanted, he would emerge from that recess.

CHAPTER XXX.

Another Enemy.

ALL THIS SCENE of M. de Choiseul menacing the man who spoke in the name of the Assembly passed without his even seeming to remark that he had but narrowly escaped death. He seemed also to be occupied by a far more powerful sentiment than that of fear. There was no mistaking the expression of his face. He had the bearing of the hunter who sees before him the lion and lioness who had devoured his young.

The word “prisoners,” however, had aroused De Choiseul, and the king had sprung to his feet.

“Prisoners! prisoners! in the name of the National Assembly. I do not understand you.”

“It is, however, easy to be understood,” said the man. “In spite of the oath you took not to leave France, you fled in the night, broke your word, betrayed the nation, and insulted the people. The nation has now appealed to arms, the people have risen, and through the mouth of one of the humblest, though not on that account the least powerful, says: ‘Sire, in the name of the people and the National Assembly, you are my prisoner.’“

In the next room sounds of applause, accompanied by mad bravoes, were heard.

“Madame,” said De Choiseul, whispering to the queen, “you will not forget that you stopped me. Otherwise you would not be exposed to such an offence.”

“All this will be nothing,” said she, “if we can but avenge ourselves.”

“Yes,” said De Choiseul, “but if we do not?”

The queen uttered a sad and melancholy sigh.

The hand of Charny passed over De Choiseul’s hand, and touched the queen’s.

Marie Antoinette turned quickly round.

“Let that man do and say what he will. I will take charge of him.”

In the meantime the king, completely overcome with the new blow which had been dealt him, looked with amazement at the sombre personage who, in the name of the nation and the king, spoke so energetically to him. There was also some curiosity mingled with this feeling, for it seemed to Louis XVI., though he could not recall having seen him before, he knew that he had not met him for the first time.

"What do you want?" said he.

"Sire, I wish that neither you nor your family should leave France."

"And you have doubtless come with thousands of men to oppose my march?" said the king, who put on all his dignity.

"No, sire; but two have come — myself and the aide-de-camp of Lafayette; I am a mere peasant. The Assembly, however, has published a decree, and confided its execution to me. It will be executed."

"Give me the decree," said the king.

"It is not in my possession; my companion has been sent by Lafayette and the Assembly to have the orders of the king executed. I am sent by M. Bailly, and also have come, on my own account, to blow out the brains of my companion if he should quail at all."

The queen, M. de Damas, and the others who were present, looked on with amazement. They had never seen the people, either oppressed or furious, except asking mercy when being murdered, and now for the first time saw it with folded arms, and heard it demand its rights.

Louis XVI. at once saw nothing was to be expected from a man of that temper, and wished to have done with him.

"Well!" said he, "where is your companion?"

"Here, behind me."

As he spoke, he threw open the door, behind which stood a young man in the uniform of an officer of the staff, leaning against a window.

He also seemed to suffer much; but he suffered from want of strength, not from want of mental power. He wept, and had a paper in his hands.

It was De Romoeuf, the young aide-de-camp of Lafayette, whom our readers will remember to have seen when Louis de Bouille arrived in Paris.

De Romoeuf, as may be deemed from the conversation he then had with the young royalist, was a true and sincere patriot; during the dictatorship, however, of Lafayette at the Tuileries, he had been assigned the care of the queen and the charge of her excursions. He had always treated her with a respectful delicacy which had often won the queen's thanks.

“Ah, sir!” said the queen, painfully surprised, “is it you?”

With that painful sigh, which indicated that a power almost invincible was falling, she said:

“Oh, I never would have believed it.”

“It is well,” said the other delegate. “It seems that I was right to come.”

De Romoeuf advanced slowly, with downcast eyes, holding his order in His hand. The king did not, however, permit the young man to present the decree; he advanced rapidly, and took it from his hands. Having read it, he said: “France now has no king!” The man who came in with De Romoeuf said: “I know that well enough.”

The king and the queen looked around, as if they would question him.

He said: “Here, madame, is the decree the National Assembly has dared to pass.”

With a voice trembling with indignation, he read the following words: “The National Assembly orders the Minister of the Interior to send out, at once, couriers to the different departments, with orders to all civil functionaries, and the officers of the National Guard, troops of the line, and the empire, to arrest anyone, whoever he may be, seeking to leave the kingdom, and to prevent all exportation of property, arms, munitions, gold, and silver. In case these couriers overtake the king, or any members of the royal family, or those who have contributed to their escape, the said National Guards and troops of the line are ordered to use every effort to prevent the said escape, and cause the fugitives to cease their journey, and return, to submit themselves to the Legislative Assembly.”

The queen heard all this with a kind of torpor: when he had finished, she shook her head, as if to arouse herself, and said, “Give it to me!” As she reached forth her hand to receive the fatal decree, she said, “Impossible!”

While this was going on, the companion of M. de Romoeuf, by a bitter smile, infused confidence into the National Guards and the patriots of Varennes.

The word “impossible,” pronounced by the queen, had made them uneasy, though they had heard every letter of the decree.

“Read, madame!” said the king, bitterly; “if you doubt me, read, for it is signed by the President of the National Assembly.”

“Who dared to write and sign such a document?”

“A noble, madame,” said the king, “the Marquis de Beauharnais.”

Is it not a strange thing, proving the mysterious union of the past with the present, that this decree, which arrested the flight of the king, queen, and royal family, emanated from a man who, until then obscure, was about to unite himself in the most brilliant manner to the history of the nineteenth century?

The queen took the decree, and with wrinkled brows and contracted lips read it again.

The king then took it and re-read it. Having done so, he threw it on the bed, where, insensible to all that was going on, slept the dauphin and Madame Royale. That document, however, was decisive of their fate.

When she saw them, the queen could not restrain herself, but sprang up, and crushing the paper, threw it from her. “Take care, sire!” said she, “I will not have this paper sully my children!”

A loud cry was heard in the ante-chamber, the National Guards sought to enter the room occupied by the royal fugitives. The aide-de-camp of Lafayette uttered a cry of terror — his companion one of rage.

“Oh!” said the latter between his teeth, “the National Assembly — the nation is insulted! This is well!” Turning towards the crowd, already excited to the very acme of strife, and who stood around, armed with guns, scythes, and sabres, he said: “Here, citizens! here!”

The latter, to enter the chamber, made a second movement which was but the completion of the first. God only knows what would have resulted from this contest had not Charny, who from the commencement of the scene had said only the few words we have recorded, rushed forward and seized the arm of the unknown National Guard, and said, just as the latter was about to place his hand on his sabre: “A word with you, M. Billot, if you please!”

“Very well! M. de Charny; I also would speak to you.”

Advancing towards the door, he said: “Citizens! go for a moment. I have something to say to this officer; be easy, though, for neither the wolf, dam, nor cubs will escape us — I will be answerable for them.”

As if this man, who was unknown to them, as he was — except to Charny — to king, queen, and all, had a right to give them orders, they withdrew, and left the room free.

Each one also was anxious to tell his companions what had taken place, and to advise them to be on their guard.

In the meantime Charny said, in a low tone, to the queen, “M. de Romoeuf, madame, is your friend. Do the best you can with him.” This he rendered the more easy, when he came to the next room, by shutting the door and keeping all, even Billot, from entering it. He stood with his back against it.

The two men, on finding themselves tete-a-tete, looked at each other a few moments; but the look of the gentleman could not make the democrat lower his eyes — nay, more, it was Billot who first began to speak.

"M. le Comte has done me the honour to announce that he has something to say to me. I will listen to anything he wishes to say."

"Billot!" asked Charny, "how is it that I here find you charged with a mission of vengeance? I had thought you our friend — a friend to the other nobles, and, moreover, a good and faithful subject of the king's."

"I have been a good and faithful subject of the king's, and I have been not your friend — for such an honour was not reserved for a poor farmer like me — but I have been your bumble servant."

"Well!"

"Well, M. le Comte, you see I am no longer anything of the kind."

"I do not understand you, Billot," replied the count.

"Why do you wish to understand me, count? Do I ask you the cause of your fidelity to the king, and the reasons for your great devotion to the queen? No; I presume that you have your reasons for acting thus, and that you are an honest and a wise man — that your reasons are good, or at least according to your conscience. I have not your high position in society, M. le Comte; I have not either your knowledge, but yet you know me to be, or have known me to have been, an honest and prudent man, too. Suppose, then, that like you, I have my reasons, equally as good, and equally according to my conscience."

"Billot!" said Charny, who was ignorant completely of any motives of hatred the farmer could possibly have against nobility or royalty, "I have known you — and it is not so very long since — very different from what you are to-day."

"Oh, certainly! I do not deny it!" said Billot, with a bitter smile. "Yes, you have known me very different from what I am now. I am about to tell you, M. le Comte, what I was — I was a true patriot, devoted thoroughly to two men and one thing. These two men were Doctor Gilbert and the king — this thing was my country. One day the agents of the king — and I confess to you," said the farmer, shaking his head, "that that first began the quarrel betwixt the king and myself — one day the agents of the king came to my house, and half by force and half by surprise, carried off a casket from me, which had been trusted to my care by M. Gilbert. As soon as I was at liberty, I started for Paris. I arrived there on the evening of the 13th of July, right in the midst of the commotions about the busts of the Duke of Orleans and M. Necker — they carried these busts through the streets, crying, ‘Vive the Duke of Orleans! vive M. Necker!’ This was doing no great harm to the king, and yet all at once the soldiers of the king charged us. I saw poor devils who had committed no other crime than the crying long life to two men whom they probably did not know, fall around me, some with their heads cut through with the sabres, and others with their breasts pierced by balls. I saw M. de Lambesq, a friend of the king, pursue — even into the Tuileries — women and children who had never uttered a word, and trample down under his horse’s feet an old man of at least seventy, This made me quarrel with the king still more. Next day I called at the school of little Sebastian, and I learned from the poor child that his father had been sent to the Bastille by an order of the king’s, obtained from his majesty by a lady of the court; and I continued to say to myself that the king, who they pretended was so good, had, in the midst of this goodness, many moments of error, ignorance, and forgetfulness; and to correct, as far as in me lay, one of these faults that the king had committed in those moments of forgetfulness, ignorance, or error, I contributed all in my power to take the Bastille. We arrived there; it was not without trouble. The soldiers of the king fired at us, and killed nearly two hundred men amongst us, and this gave me a fresh reason for not being of the opinion of all the world about this great goodness of the king. But at length the Bastille was taken, and in one of the cells I found M. Gilbert, for whom I had risked my life twenty times, and the joy of finding him again made me forget all these things. Besides, M. Gilbert told me amongst the first that the king was good, that he was ignorant of a great many of the shameful things that were done in his name, and that it was not to him they ought to be attributed, but to his ministers. And all that M. Gilbert told me at this time was like Gospel — I believed M. Gilbert: and seeing the Bastille taken, M. Gilbert free, and Pitou and I safe and sound, I forgot the firing in the Rue Saint Honore, the charging into the Tuileries, the hundred and fifty or two hundred men killed by the musketry of M. le Prince de Saxe, and the imprisonment of M. Gilbert on the simple asking of a lady of the court. But pardon, M. le Comte,” said Billot, interrupting himself, “all this does not concern you, and you have not asked to speak with me alone to listen merely to the thoughts of a peasant without education — you who are at the same time a great lord and a wise and learned man.” And Billot made a movement in order to put his hand on the lock and enter into the king’s chamber again; but Charny stopped him.

Charny had two reasons for stopping him. The first was to learn the causes of this enmity of Billot, which, in such a situation, was not without its importance; the second was that he might gain time. “No,” said he, “tell me all, my dear Billot; you know the friendship that my poor brothers and I bore you; and that which you have already told me has interested me in the highest degree.”

At the words “my poor brothers,” Billot smiled bitterly.

“Well, then!” he replied, “I will tell you all, M. de Charny. I especially regret that ‘your poor brothers,’ above all one — M. Isidor — are not here to hear what I say.”

Billot had pronounced the words “above all M. Isidor,” with such a singular expression, that Charny understood the emotions of grief that the name of his dearly loved brother awoke in his soul; and without answering anything to Billot, who was evidently ignorant of the misfortune which had happened to this brother of Charny, whose presence he desired, he made him a sign to continue.

Billot continued.

“So,” said he, “when the king was on the way to Paris, I saw but a father returning to the midst of his children. I marched with M. Gilbert, near to the royal carriage, making a rampart about those who were in it with my body, and crying at the very top of my voice, ‘Long live the king!’ That was the first journey of the king, that was! Blessings and flowers were showered around him, before, behind, on the road, under the feet of the horses, on the wheels of his carriage. On arriving at the Place of the Hotel de Ville, the people perceived that he wore no longer the white cockade, and that he had not as yet the tricoloured one. They cried out, ‘The cockade! the cockade!’ I took the one that was in my hat, and gave it him; he thanked me, and put it on his own, with great acclamation on the part of the people. I was drunk with joy at seeing my cockade on the hat of this good king, and I cried, ‘Long live the king!’ more loudly than ever. I was so enthusiastic about this good king, that I remained in Paris. My harvest was on hand, and required my presence, but bah! what did I care about my harvest? I was sufficiently rich to lose one season, and if my presence was useful in any way to this good king, to this father of the people, to the restorer of French liberty, as, like ninnies, we called him at this time, it was better that I should remain at Paris than return to Pipelen. My harvest, that I had entrusted to the care of Catherine, was nearly lost. Catherine had, as it appeared, something else to attend to besides the harvest.

"Let us not speak any more of that. Yet they said that the king did not so very frankly accept the revolution; that he was constrained and compelled; that it was not the tricoloured cockade that he would have liked to have worn in his hat, but the white one. Those who said this were calumniators, as was sufficiently well proved at the banquet of the body-guards, where the queen wore neither the tricoloured cockade, nor the white cockade, nor the national cockade, nor the French cockade, but simply the cockade of her brother, Joseph II. — the Austrian cockade, the black cockade.

"Ah! I confess it, this time my doubts recommenced, but as M. Gilbert had said to me, 'Billot, it is not the king who has done that, it is the queen, and the queen is a woman, and towards women we ought to be indulgent!" — I believe it so well, that when they came from Paris to attack the chateau, although I discovered at the bottom of my heart that those who came to attack the chateau were not altogether wrong, I ranged myself on the side of those who defended it, so that it was I who went to wake M. de Lafayette, who slept, poor dear man, which was a blessing, and who brought him to the castle just in time to save the king.

"Ah! on that day I saw Madame Elizabeth press M. de Lafayette in her arms, I saw the queen give her hand for him to kiss, I heard the king call him his friend, and I said to myself, 'Upon my word, it seems M. Gilbert was right after all. Certainly it cannot be from fear that a king, a queen, and a royal princess make such demonstrations as these, and if they do not share the opinions of this man, of what use can he be to them at this time; three personages like these would not condescend to lie.' This time again I pitied the poor queen, who was only imprudent, and the poor king, who was only weak. I left them to return to Paris without me. I was engaged at Versailles — you know in what, M. de Charny."

Charny sighed.

"They said," continued Billot, "that this second voyage was not quite so gay as the first; they said that instead of blessings there were curses; that instead of vivats there were cries for death; that instead of bouquets of flowers being thrown under the feet of the horses, and on to the wheels of the carriage, there were heads stuck on pikes! I knew nothing of all that — I was not there. I remained at Versailles. I still left the farm without a master. Bah! I was sufficiently rich, after having lost the harvest of 1789, to lose that of 1790 too. But one fine morning Pitou arrived, and told me that I was on the point of losing a thing which a father is never sufficiently rich to lose — this was my daughter!"

Charny started.

Billot looked kindly at Charny, and continued:

"It is necessary to tell you, M. le Comte, there is close by us, at Boursonnes, a noble family, a family of great lords, a family powerful and rich. This family consisted of three brothers. When they were children, and they came from Boursonnes to Villers-Cotterets, the youngest of these three brothers almost always did me the honour to stop at my farm; they said they had never tasted such good milk as the milk of my cows, and never such bread as the bread of my wife, and from time to time they added — I believed, poor simple ninny that I was, that it was in return for my hospitality — that they had never seen such a beautiful child as my daughter Catherine. And I! — I thanked them for drinking my milk, for eating my bread, and for discovering my daughter Catherine to be beautiful! What would you? I trusted in the king, who is half German by his mother. I could easily, then, trust to them. Also, when the cadet, who had quitted the country for a long time, and who was called Georges, was killed at Versailles at the door of the queen, while bravely doing his duty, during the night of the 5th of October, God only knows how much I was wounded by the blow that killed him! Ah, M. le Comte! his brother has seen me, his eldest brother, he who did not come to the house — not because he was too proud, but because he had left the country at an earlier age even than his brother Georges — he has seen me on my knees before the body, shedding as many tears as it had shed drops of blood!... at the bottom of a little green and humid court, where I had carried him in my arms. I believed him still alive, for, poor young man! he was not mutilated, as his companions, MM. de Varicourt and Deshuttes, had been; I had as much of his blood on my clothes as there was on yours, M. le Comte! Oh! it was the fine fellow whom I always saw going to the college of Villers-Cotterets on his little grey horse, with his satchel in his hand... and it is true, that in thinking of that time, if I could think of him, I should weep even now as you weep, M. le Comte. But I think of another," added Billot, "and I cannot weep."

"Of another? and will you say then — ?" asked Charny.

"Wait," said Billot, "we shall arrive at that. Pitou had come to Paris, and he spoke two words that proved to me that it was no longer my harvest that was being risked, but my child — that it was not my fortune that was being destroyed, but my happiness! I left the king, then, at Paris, although it was in good faith, from what M. Gilbert had told me, that everything would go well, whether I was in Paris or not, and so I returned to the farm. I believed at first that Catherine was only in danger of death; she had the brain fever, was delirious — what could I know? I! The state in which I found her rendered me very uneasy, and I became more so when told by the doctor I must not enter her chamber until she was cured. Not enter her chamber! Poor father! — I believed that I might listen at her door, and I listened! Then I learned that she had nearly died, that she had the brain fever, that she was nearly mad, because her lover had gone away. A year before I had gone away too, and instead of becoming crazed because her father left her, she smiled at my departure. But my leaving her left her free to see her lover. Catherine recovered her health, but not her joy, her spirits. One month, two, three, six months passed, without a single smile lighting up her countenance, on which my eyes were always fixed: one morning I saw her smile, and I trembled; her lover was about to return, since she could smile. In fact, next day a shepherd, who had seen him pass, announced to me that he had returned that very morning! I doubted not but that that very evening he would come to see me, or rather Catherine; so, when evening came, I loaded my gun, and laid myself in ambush — "

"Billot, Billot!" cried Charny, "did you do that?"

"Why not?" said Billot. "I put myself in ambush to kill the wild boar that comes to turn up my potatoes, the wolf that would feed on my flocks, the fox that would devour my fowls, and why should I not lay in ambush to kill the man who comes to steal my happiness — the lover who comes to dishonour my child?"

"But arrived there, your heart failed you, did it not, Billot?" asked the count, quickly.

"No," said Billot, "not the heart, but both eye and hand; a trace of blood, however, showed me that I had not quite failed. Only, you understand well," added Billot, with bitterness, “between a lover and a father my daughter did not hesitate. When I entered Catherine’s room, Catherine had disappeared.”

“And you have not seen her since?” asked Charny.

“No!” replied Billot, “but why should I see her? She knows well that if I did see her I should kill her!”

Charny made a motion which expressed both terror and admiration of the powerful nature thus exhibited before him.

“I went back,” said Billot, “to my agricultural labors — what cared I for domestic troubles, if France were happy? Was not the king treading in the footsteps of the revolution? Did he not participate in the festival of the federation? Did I not see again the good king to whom I had given my cockade on the 16th of July, and the life of whom I had nearly saved on the 6th of October? How he would rejoice to see all France collected at the Champ de Mars, swearing like one man to the unity of the country. For a moment I forgot all, even Catherine. No, no! I never forgot her. He too swore. I thought he took the oath with a bad grace, and that he swore from the throne instead of the altar of the country. Bah, though, he swore, and that was all that was essential; for an oath is an oath, without regard to locality, and honest men always keep them. The king then said, ‘I will keep my oath.’ True, when I returned to Villers-Cotterets, as I had no longer anything to occupy me, my child being gone, I heard that the king wished to escape through M. de Favras, but that the affair was a failure; that the king wished to escape with his aunts, but in that he failed; that he wished to go to St. Cloud, and thence to Rouen. The people, however, opposed it. I heard all this, but I did not believe it. Had I not with my own eyes seen the king at the Champ de Mars reach forth his hand — had I not with my own ears heard him take his oath to the nation! Could I not believe that a king who in the face of three hundred thousand citizens had taken an oath would keep it? Was it not probable? When, therefore, I went to the market of Meaux, I was amazed. I must tell you I had slept at the post-house with one of my friends, to whom I had brought a heavy load of grain. I was awaked while the horses were being put to the carriage to see the king, queen, and dauphin. I could not have been mistaken, for I had been used to see him in a carriage since the 16th of July, when I accompanied him from Versailles to Paris. Then I heard those gentlemen in yellow say, ‘To Chalons.’ I looked, and saw whom? The man who had carried Catherine away, a nobleman who played the lackey, by preceding the king’s carriage.”

As he spoke, Billot looked anxiously at the count to see if he knew that he spoke of his brother Isidor. Charny, however, wiped away the sweat which stood on his brow, and was silent.

Billot resumed:

“I wished to follow him; he was already far ahead, he had a good horse, was armed, I was not. One moment I ground my teeth at the idea of the king, who would escape from France, and the ravisher who had escaped from me. But all at once I caught an idea. ‘Hold!’ said I, ‘I also will take the oath to the nation, and now the king has broken his, shall I keep mine? My word! Yes, keep it! I am only ten leagues from Paris. It is three o’clock in the morning; on a good horse, it is a matter of two hours. I will talk this over with M. Bailly, who appears to me to be of the party of those who keep their oaths instead of those who do not keep them!’ This point determined, in order not to lose time, I begged my friend, the post-agent at Meaux — without, be it understood, telling him what I wanted to do — to lend me his uniform of the National Guard, his sabre and pistols. I took the best horse in his stable, and instead of setting out for Villers-Cotterets, I went to Paris. I came just in time, for they had just heard of the flight of the king, and did not know whither he had gone. M. de Romoeuf had been sent out by Lafayette towards Valenciennes. See, though, what chance effects. He had been arrested at the barrier, and had obtained permission to be sent back to the National Assembly, whither he came just as M. Bailly, who had been informed by me, described his majesty’s itinerary, with all the particulars. There was then only an order to write, and the route to change. The thing was done in an instant. M. de Romoeuf set out to Chalons, and I was directed to accompany him, a mission which, as you see, I have fulfilled. Now,” said Billot with a moody air, “I have overtaken the king, who deceived me as a Frenchman, and I am easy; he will not, however, escape me now. I have now, count, to meet him who deceived me as a father, and I swear he shall not escape me.”

“Alas, dear Billot!” said Charny with a sigh, “you are mistaken now.”

“How so?”

“The unfortunate man of whom you speak, has escaped you.”

“Has he fled?” said Billot, with an expression of intense rage.

“No,” said Charny, “he is dead!”

“Dead!” said Billot, trembling, and wiping away the sweat from his brow.

"He is dead. This blood which you see, and which you just now compared to that which covered you at Versailles, is his. If you doubt me, go below, and you will see his body in a little court-yard, like the one at Versailles in which you saw another who died for the same cause."

Billot looked at Charny, who spoke to him in the mildest voice, while two great tears stole down his haggard cheeks. He then exclaimed:

"Ah! then, that is the justice of God," and he rushed from the room saying, "Count, I believe your words, but I wish to see for myself if justice be done or not."

Charny saw him go, and, stopping a sigh, wiped away a tear. Then, seeing that not a moment was to be lost, he rushed to the queen and said:

"What about De Romoeuf?"

"He is our friend."

"So much the better, for nothing is to be expected from the other person."

"What is to be done?"

"Gain time until De Bouille conies."

"Bat will he come?"

"Yes, for I will go for him."

"Oh!" said she, "the streets are full; you are known, and will not be able to pass. They will kill you. Olivier! Olivier!"

Charny did not answer, but with a smile opened the window, which looked into the garden, bade the queen a last adieu, and sprang to the ground.

The height was fifteen feet, and the queen uttered a cry of terror, hiding her face in her hands. The young men ran to the window, and replied to the queen's alarm by a cry of joy. Charny had leaped over the garden wall, and was hidden by it.

It was high time, for Billot just then appeared at the door of the room.

CHAPTER XXXI.

M. De. Bouille.

LET US SEE WHAT, during this time of agony, the Marquis de Bouille was doing.

At nine o’clock, that is to say, at the moment the fugitives approached Clermont, the marquis left Stenay with his son, and advanced towards Dun to be nearer the king.

When just a quarter of a league from that city, he feared lest his presence should be remarked, and hurried with his companions off the road-side, establishing himself in a ditch. He waited there. It was the hour when, in all probability, the courier of the king would appear.

In such circumstances moments seemed hours, and hours centuries. They heard the clock strike slowly, and with an impassivity which they would fain have attuned to the pulsation of their own hearts, ten — eleven — twelve — one — two — and three.

Day dawned between two and three, during which time the slightest sound was observable, whether any one either approached or left them, and brought hope or despair.

The little band began to despair.

M, de Bouille fancied that some grave accident had occurred, but being ignorant what, he resolved to regain Stenay, that, being in the centre of his command, he might provide against it as well as possible. He was only a quarter of a league distant, when M. de Bouille looked back and saw the dust raised by the rapid approach of many horses.

They paused and waited.

As they came, they doubted no longer. The persons were Jules de Bouille and De Raigecourt.

The little troop advanced to meet them.

Every mouth then asked in each troop the same question, and each made the same reply.

“What had happened?”

"The king had been arrested at Varennes."

The news was terrible. It was especially terrible, as the two young men who were at the Hotel Grand Monarque, awaiting the king with the bags, suddenly found themselves in the midst of an insurrection, and compelled to fly without any exact news.

Terrible as it was, though, all hope was not lost. M. de Bouille, like all old officers who rely on discipline, fancied that every order had been executed.

If the king had been arrested at Varennes, the different posts which had been ordered to follow him had reached that city.

These were composed of thirty of Lauzun's hussars, commanded by De Choiseul.

The thirty dragoons of Clermont, commanded by Damas.

The sixty hussars of Varennes, commanded by MM. de Bouille and de Raigecourt, whom the young men had not been able to inform of their departure, but who had remained under the command of De Rohrig.

True, they had not confided everything to De Rohrig, who was but twenty; but he would receive orders either from De Choiseul, Dandoins, or Damas, and would join his men to those who came to aid the king.

The king would then have with him sixty hussars and a hundred and sixty or eighty dragoons.

Tin's was force enough to repress the insurrections of a little town of eighteen hundred souls.

We have seen how events had marred the strategic calculations of M. de Bouille. The security he felt was about to he attacked seriously. While De Bouille and De Raigecourt were talking to the general, a horse approached at full gallop. All looked and recognised De Rohrig.

The general rode rapidly towards him. He was in one of those happy humours when a man is glad to have some one to find fault with.

"What does this mean, sir?" asked the general. "Why have you left your post?"

"Excuse me, general! — by order of M. Damas."

"Well, is Damas at Varennes with his dragoons?"

"He is at Varennes without any force but an officer, an adjutant, and three or four men."

"The others, though?"

"Would not march."

"And where is Dandoins, with his men?"

"They are prisoners at St. Menehould."

"But Choiseul and his men are there with his troops and yours?"

"The hussars of Choiseul have joined the people, and now shout, 'Vive la Nation!' My hussars are shut up in their barracks by the National Guard at Varennes."

"And you did not place yourself at their head, and charge that rabble? you did not hurry to your king?"

"You forget, general, that I had no orders; that MM. de Bouille and De Raigecourt were my superiors, and that I was utterly ignorant that the king was expected."

"That is true," said De Bouille and De Raigecourt, thus doing homage to truth.

"The first noise I heard," said the young subaltern, "I went into the street and inquired, and heard that a carriage, said to contain the royal family, had been arrested a quarter of an hour before, and that the inmates had been taken to the house of the procureur. There was a great crowd. The drums beat and the tocsin was sounded. Amid all this tumult, some one touched my shoulder, and I looked round. It was Damas, with a frock over his uniform. 'Are you in command of the hussars of Varennes?' said he. 'Yes,' I replied. — 'You know me?' — 'You are Count Charles de Damas.' — 'Well, get on horseback at once, and ride to Dun — to Stenay, and find the Marquis de Bouille. Say that Dandoins and his men are prisoners at St. Menehould, and that my dragoons have mutinied. Say that Choiseul's men threaten to join the people, and that the king and royal family are prisoners, and that there is no hope but in him.' I thought that I could say nothing to such an order, but that it was my duty to obey it blindly. I got on my horse, and rode as rapidly as I could to this place."

"Did Damas say nothing more?"

"Yes, that he would use every means to gain time to enable you, general, to reach Varennes."

"Forward!" said the general; each, I see, has done the best he could. Let us do our best, also."

Turning to Count Louis, he said:

"Louis, I remain here. These gentlemen will take the different orders I give. The detachments at Mouza and Dun will march at once on Varennes, and, taking possession of the passage of the Meuse, will commence the attack. Rohrig, give this order, and say they will soon be sustained.”

The young man rode rapidly towards Dun.

M. de Bouille continued:

“Raigecourt, go to the Swiss regiment of Castello, which is en route for Stenay. Wherever you find it, tell the state of affairs and urge it on. Tell the commandant he must double its pace.”

Having seen the young officer ride in an opposite direction to that De Rohrig had taken, he turned to his son:

“Jules,” said he, “change your horse at Stenay, and go to Montmedy. Tell Klenglin to march his regiment of Nassau infantry to Dun, and to go himself to Stenay.”

The young man saluted and left.

“Louis,” said De Bouille, “the royal Germans are at Stenay?”

“Yes, father.”

“They were ordered to be ready at dawn?”

“I gave the order to the colonel myself.”

“Bring them to me. I will await them on the roadside. Perhaps I may have other news. The regiment is true, think you?”

“Yes, father.”

“It is enough, then — we will march on Varennes.”

Count Louis set out. Ten minutes after he re-appeared.

“The Royal Germans follow me!” said he.

“You found them, then, ready to march?”

“No — to my great surprise. The commandant must have misunderstood my order, for I found him in bed. He got up, however, and promised to go to the barracks himself to hurry their departure. Fearing that you would become impatient, I came to account for the delay.”

“Very well,” said the general, “he will come?”

“He said that he would follow me.”

They waited ten minutes — a quarter of an hour — and then twenty minutes, but no one came. The general became impatient, and looked at his son.

“I will go back, father,” said he.

Forcing his horse into a gallop, he returned to the city. Long as the time appeared to General de Bouille, it had been badly used by the commandant. Only a very few men were ready, and the young officer, complaining bitterly, renewed the general's order, and on a positive promise of the commandant that the regiment would follow in ten minutes, he returned to his father.

As he returned, he observed that the gate, which he had passed four times, was in charge of the National Guard.

He waited again for five minutes — ten minutes — a quarter of an hour — but no one came. Nearly an hour had passed, and M. de Bouille ordered his son to go the third time to Stenay, and not to come back without the regiment. Count Louis left in a perfect rage. When he reached the square, his ill-temper increased. Scarcely fifty men were mounted.

He took those fifty men and occupied the gate, thus assuring himself free ingress and egress. He then went to the general, who yet waited for him, saying he was followed by the commandant and his soldiers.

He thought so: but not until he was about to enter the city for the fourth time did he see the head of the Royal Germans.

Under any other circumstances, M. de Bouille would have had the commandant arrested by his own men, but now he feared to offend the officers and soldiers. He therefore simply reproved the colonel for his dilatoriness, and harangued the soldiers. He told them for what an honourable duty they were intended, as not only the liberty, but the life of the king and royal family were at stake. He promised the officers honours, the soldiers rewards, and distributed a hundred louis to the latter.

The discourse and peroration produced the intended effect. An immense cry of "Vive le roi!" was heard, and the regiment at full trot set out for Varennes.

At Dun, guarding the bridge over the Mense, was a detachment of thirty men, which M. Deslon, when he left Charny, had posted there. The men were rallied, and they moved on.

They had to travel eight leagues through a mountainous country, and they could not march as rapidly as they wished; it was also necessary that the soldiers should be in a condition to stand a shock or a charge.

It was, however, evident that they were in a hostile country, for in the villages, on either side, the tocsin was heard, and in advance something like a fusilade.

They still advanced.

At Grange le Bois, a horseman, bareheaded, seemed to devour the road, and made frequent tokens of anxiety to meet them.

The regiment quickened its pace.

This person was the Count de Charny.

“To the king! gentlemen; to the king!” said he, lifting his hand and rising in his saddle.

“To the king!” cried the officers and soldiers.

Charny took his place in the ranks, and briefly explained the state of affairs. The king, when the count left, was at Varennes.

All then was not lost.

The horses are very much fatigued, but it matters not. The horses have had hay; the men are heated with the hundred louis of M. de Bouille.

The regiment advances like a hurricane and cries “Long live the king!”

At Cressy they meet a priest.

This priest is constitutional. He sees this regiment rushing towards Varennes.

“Go! go!” says he. “Fortunately, however, you will come too late.”

The Count de Bouille hears, and rushes on him with his sabre uplifted.

“Boy! boy!” says his father,” what would you do?”

The young count sees that he is about to kill an unarmed man, and that man, too, a priest. The crime would be double. He takes his foot from the stirrup and kicks the priest.

“You come too late,” says the priest, as he rolls in the dust.

They continue their journey, cursing this prophet of misfortune.

In the meantime they gradually approached the place where the shots were fired. M. Deslon and his seventy hussars were skirmishing with nearly the same number of National Guards. These the guard charged, dispersed them and passed through.

There they learned from M. Deslon that the king left Varennes at eight in the morning. M. Bouille took out his watch. It wanted five minutes of nine.

“Well, all hope is not lost. We must not attempt to go through the city. The streets will be barricaded. We will go around Varennes.”

They turn to the right — the situation of the country makes the left impossible; they have the river to cross, but it is fordable.

They leave Varennes on the right, and ride through the fields. On the road to Clermont they will attack the escort, whatever be its force, and rescue the king or die.

Two-thirds of the distance from the city, they come to the river. Charny dashes into it, followed by the De Bouilles. The officers come next, and then the troopers. The stream is hidden by the uniforms. In ten minutes all have crossed. The cool water has refreshed officers and men; and they gallop on towards Clermont.

All at once Charny, who had preceded the regiment, paused. He was on the brink of a masked canal, the top of the wall being level with the ground. This canal he had forgotten, though it was laid down in the map. It is several leagues long, and everywhere presents the same difficulties.

Unless crossed at once, it could not be crossed at all. Charny set the example. He first rushed into the water. The canal was not fordable, but the count’s horse swam towards the other shore. The bank, though, was steep, and the horse’s shoes could not take hold.

Two or three times Charny sought to ascend, but in spite of all the skill of the rider, his horse, after desperate efforts, which were so intelligent as to seem almost human, slid back for want of a foothold into the water, panting and nearly drowning. Charny saw that what his horse, a thorough-bred animal, could not do, four hundred troop-horses dare not attempt.

He had failed, therefore. Fatality was too powerful. The king and queen were lost, and he had but one thing left to do — die with them.

He made a last effort; but, like the others, it was useless. He contrived, however, to bury his sabre half its length in the glacis.

This sabre remained there as a point d’appui, useless for his horse, but valuable to himself.

In fact, Charny deserted his stirrup and swam towards the sabre — grasping it, after a few efforts, he obtained a foothold.

He looked back and saw Bouille and his son weeping with rage; the soldiers moody and motionless, seeing, after Charny’s effort, how vain it would be for them to seek to cross what he could not.

M. de Bouille wrung his hands in despair. He, who had hitherto succeeded in every enterprise, all of whose deeds were crowned with success, who had acquired in the army the name of the “happy Bouille,” said sadly:

“Oh, gentlemen, tell me now if I am happy!”

“No, general,” said Charny, from the other bank, “but I will say that you have done all that man could do; when I say so, I shall be believed. Adieu, general!”

On foot across the fields, covered with mud, dripping with water, unarmed, for his pistols were wet, Charny took his way and disappeared among the trees which, like advanced sentinels, appeared here and there on the road.

This road was that by which the king and royal family were being taken. He had only to follow to overtake them.

Before he did so, he looked back, and on the banks of the accursed canal saw Bouille and his troop, who though unable to advance, would not retreat. He made them one last signal, and then, rapidly turning a corner, disappeared.

He had to guide him only the immense noise proceeding from the cries, shouts, and menaces of ten thousand men.

CHAPTER XXXII.

The Departure.

LET US RETURN to the house of M. Sausse.

Charny had scarcely touched the step, when the door of the room opened, and Billot entered.

His face was dark; his eyes, the brows of which were corrugated by thought, were anxious and deep. He passed in review all the characters of the drama, but he could make hut two observations:

Charny had flown — that was evident. The count was not there, and Damas was closing the window. Billot looked out and fancied he saw Charny leap over the garden wall.

The agreement concluded between the queen and De Romoeuf, to which the latter had pledged himself, was that he would remain neuter.

The room behind Billot was filled with many people, armed with guns, scythes, or sabres, whom one gesture of the farmer had driven out.

These men, by some magnetic influence, seemed impelled to obey the plebeian chief, in whom they saw a patriotism equal to their own — or rather, a hatred not less intense.

Billot looked around him; as his eye met those of the armed men, he saw he could rely on them, even if things came to extremities.

“Well!” said he to De Romoeuf, “are they decided to go?”

The queen cast on Billot one of those oblique glances which would have pulverised those to whom she addressed them, had she, as she wished, been able to infuse into them the power of lightning.

Without a reply she sat down, taking hold of the arms of her chair, as if she wished to keep herself steady.

“The king requests a delay of a few moments,” said De Romoeuf; “no one has slept during the whole night.”

“M. de Romoeuf,” said Billot, “you know well enough that their majesties are fatigued — that they ask for delay — because they expect M.

de Bouille to arrive. Let, however, their majesties beware, for if they do not come willingly, they will be dragged by force."

"Villain!" said Damas, rushing towards Billot with his drawn sword.

Billot folded his arms. The fact was, there was no necessity for his defending himself. Eight or ten men rushed from the first to the second room, and Damas at once had ten different weapons at his breast.

The king saw that one word alone was necessary to ensure the death of De Choiseul, Damas, the guardsmen, and the two or three officers and sub-officers with him.

"Very well!" said he, "put horses to the carriage, and we will go."

Madame Brennier, one of the queen's ladies, shrieked and fainted. The dauphin began to cry.

"Monsieur!" said the queen to Billot, "you have no children, or you would not be so cruel to a mother."

Billot trembled, and, with a bitter smile, said:

"No, madame, I have none."

He then said to the king:

"There is no need for your order; the horses are already harnessed."

"Well, bring them up."

"The carriage is at the door."

The king went to the window and saw that Billot told the truth. The uproar in the street had drowned the sound of the wheels.

The people saw the king. A loud cry, or rather menace, arose. The king grew pale.

De Choiseul approached the queen.

"What does his majesty order? Myself and my companions had rather die than witness what passes here."

"Do you think M. de Charny is safe?" asked the queen in a low but anxious voice.

"Yes: I am sure of that," said M. de Choiseul.

"Then let us go, for heaven's sake! — though, both on your account and on ours, do not leave us."

The king understood the queen's fears. "M. de Choiseul and M. de Damas accompany us, but I do not see their horses."

"True," said De Romoeuf, "we cannot keep those gentlemen from following the king and queen."

“These gentlemen can accompany the king and queen if they can.. Our orders relate to the king and queen, but have no relation to them.”

“I will not go until these gentlemen have their horses,” said the king, with more firmness than might have been expected from him. “What say you to that?” said Billot, turning to his men. “The king will not go until these gentlemen have their horses.” The men laughed.

“I will send for them,” said De Romoeuf. Choiseul stepped in front of him, and said: “M. de Romoeuf, do not leave their majesties, Your mission gives you some power over the people, and it will reflect credit on you if not a hair of the heads of their majesties be injured.”

De Romoeuf paused. Billot shrugged his shoulders. “Very well, I am going,” said he.

He advanced first. When at the door he turned. “You will follow me, will you not?”

“Be easy,” said the men, with a burst of laughter which indicated that in case of resistance no pity was to be expected from them.

They were so irritated, that they certainly would have employed force against the royal family, had any attempt to escape been made.

Billot did not have the trouble to come upstairs again. One of the men stood at the window, and watched what was going on in the street.

“All is ready,” said he, “come!” “Come!” said his companions, with an accent which admitted of no discussion.

The king went first. Then came De Choiseul with the queen. Then came Damas, who gave his arm to Madame Elizabeth. Madame de Tourzel came next with the children, and after them the rest of the faithful group.

Romoeuf, as the envoy of the National Assembly, was particularly charged with the care of the royal cortege.

It must, however, be said, that De Romoeuf himself needed looking after. It had been said that he had executed with great gentleness the orders of the Assembly, and that he had covertly, if not openly, favoured the escape of one of the king’s most faithful servants, who had left, it was said, only to summon Bouille to their aid.

The result was that when at the door, while the conduct of Billot was glorified by all the people, who seemed to recognise him as their chief, Romoeuf heard around him on all sides the words “aristocrat” and “traitor.”

They got into the carriage in the same order in which they descended the stairway. The guardsmen resumed their places on the seat.

Just as they came down M. de Valory approached the king.

“Sire,” said he, “my comrade and myself have come to ask a favour of your majesty.”

“What is it?” said the king, amazed that he had yet any favour to dispose of.

“Sire, the favour, since we have no longer the honour of serving you as soldiers, is that we may be near you as servants.”

“Servants, gentlemen! the thing is impossible!” said the king.

M. de Valory bowed. “Sire,” said he, “in the situation in which your majesty is, it is our opinion that such a duty would do honour to a prince of the blood; for so much better reason does it do honour to poor gentlemen like ourselves.”

“Well, gentlemen,” said the king, with tears in his eyes, “remain with us and never leave us.”

Thus these two young men, making a reality of their livery, and their factitious duties as couriers, resumed their places on the seats.

“Gentlemen,” said the king, “I wish to go to Montmedy. Postilions, take me thither.”

A cry, not from a single voice, but from the whole population was heard. It shouted:

“To Paris!”

After a moment’s silence, Billot, with his sabre, pointed out the road he wished them to follow, and shouted:

“To Clermont!”

The carriage began to move.

“I call you to witness that violence is used against me,” said the king.

The unfortunate king, exhausted by this exertion, which exceeded any one he had yet made, sank back in the carriage between the queen and Madame Elizabeth, and the coach rolled on.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

The Journey of Sorrow.

THE ROYAL FAMILY continued on to Paris, making what we may call the journey of sorrow.

They advanced slowly, for the horses could not walk but as fast as the escort, which was in chief composed of men armed with scythes, forks, guns, sabres, pikes and flails, the whole number being completed by an indefinite number of women and children. The women lifted their children above their heads to show them the king who was being brought back by force to his capital, and whom none had ever expected to see so situated.

They reached Clermont without seeing, though the distance was four leagues, any diminution in the terrible escort, those of the men who composed it whose occupations called them homeward being replaced by others in the environs, who wished to enjoy a spectacle with which others had been satisfied.

Among all the captives of this travelling prison, two were most exposed to the anger of the crowd, and more completely the butts of its menaces — these were the unfortunate guardsmen on the box. Every moment, and this was one way to strike at the royal family, their persons having been declared by the National Assembly invincible, at every moment bayonets were directed against their breasts, or some scythe, which might well have been that of death, was elevated above their heads, or else some lance glided like a serpent between the intervals to prick them, and was brought back quick as lightning to gratify its master, by showing by its point that it had not been misdirected.

All at once they saw, with surprise, a man bare-headed, without a hat, without arms and with his dress all mud-stained, pierce the crowd, after having simply spoken respectfully to the king and queen, rush towards the box of the carriage, and take his place between the guardsmen.

The queen uttered a cry of joy. She had recognised Charny.

They reached St. Menehould at about two in the afternoon. The loss of sleep during the night of their departure, and the excitement they had gone through, had its effect on all, especially on the dauphin, who, at that place, had a violent fever. The king ordered a halt.

Perhaps of all the cities on the road St. Menehould was the one most excited against the unfortunate family of prisoners. No attention was paid to the king's order, which was superseded by one from Billot to put horses to the carriage. He was obeyed.

The passage through the city was cruel. The enthusiasm excited by the appearance of Drouet, to whom the apprehension of the prisoners was due, would have been a terrible lesson to Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette, if kings could learn anything; but in these cries they only saw a blind fury, and in these patriots anxious to save France they only saw rebels.

At the entrance into St. Menehould, the crowd, like an inundation, covered the whole plain, and could not cross the narrow street.

It burst around the two sides of the city, following the exterior contour; but as they only stopped at St. Menehould long enough to change the horses, at the other side of the city it crowded around the carriages more orderly than ever.

The king had fancied, and this idea, perhaps, alone had excited him to adopt a wrong course, that the people of Paris alone were enraged, and had relied on the provinces. He had not only alienated the country, but it was perfectly pitiless towards him. The country people had terrified De Choiseul at the bridge of Someville, had imprisoned Dandoins at St. Menehould, had tired on Damas at Clermont, and had killed Isidor beneath the king's eyes. All protested against his flight, even the priest whom the Count de Bouille had kicked into the dust.

They reached Chalons at a late hour. The carriage drove into the court-yard of the intendant, where preparations had been ordered by a courier.

The court-yard was filled by the National Guard of the city, and by spectators.

At the door where the tumultuous cortege had paused, cries had ceased, and a kind of murmur of compassion was heard when the royal family left the carriage. They found a supper as sumptuous as possible, and served with an elegance which astonished them. Servants were in attendance, but Charny claimed the privilege for himself and the guardsmen to wait at table. Such a humiliation, which to-day would seem strange, was an excuse for

Charny not to lose sight of the king and to be prepared for any conjuncture. The queen understood, though she had not even looked towards him, nor thanked him with her hand, eyes, or mouth.

Charny knew the state of feeling in every village. Now, Chalons was an old commercial town, with a population of bourgeoisie, land-holders, and nobles. It was aristocratic.

The result was, that while at the table their host, the intendant of the department, bowed to the queen, who, expecting nothing favourable, looked anxiously at him.

“Madame,” said he, “the young girls of Chalons wish to offer your majesty flowers.” The queen, in surprise, looked towards Madame Elizabeth and the king.

“Flowers?” said she.

“Madame,” said the intendant, “if the hour be inconvenient and badly chosen, I will order that they be not admitted.”

“No, no! do not say so! Girls — flowers — let them come!”

The intendant withdrew, and a moment after, twelve girls, of from fourteen to sixteen years of age, the most beautiful that could be found, passed the ante-chamber and stopped at the door.

“Come in! come in, my children!” said the queen, extending her arms to them.

One of the young girls, the interpreter, not only of her companions, but of their parents and the city, had committed to memory an address. She was about to repeat it, but when the queen offered her arms, and she saw the emotion of the royal family, she could but weep, and utter these words, which came from her lips in the deepest distress:

“Ah, your majesty, what a misfortune!”

The queen took the bouquet, and kissed the young girl.

Charny whispered in the king’s ear:

“Perhaps, your majesty, this city may be turned to advantage. Perhaps all is not lost, and with your leave given, I will descend, and will report to you what I have seen and perhaps done.”

“Go,” said the king, “but be prudent. Did anything happen to you, I should never be consoled. Two deaths in one family, alas! are more than enough.”

“Sire, my life, like the lives of my brothers, is your own!”

He left; but as he did so he wiped away a tear.

The presence of the royal family alone retained the apparent calmness of this firm-hearted man, and made him seem so much a stoic. “Poor Isidor!” said he. He placed his hand on his breast to see if he had still in his pocket the papers which De Choiseul had found on his brother, and which he purposed to read, at the first quiet moment, religiously, as if they had been a will.

Behind the young girls, whom Madame Royale kissed like sisters, were the parents, almost all of whom were bourgeois or nobles. They came humbly and timidly to salute their sovereign.

In about half an hour Charny returned.

Tim queen had seen him go out and return, and her eye could not possibly read the reasons.

“Well?” asked the king, leaning towards Charny.

“All, sire, is well. The National Guard offers, to-morrow, to escort your majesty to Montmedy.”

“Then you have decided on something?”

“Yes, sire — with the principal men. Tomorrow, before leaving, the king will ask to hear mass, and they cannot refuse permission. It is a festival day. The king will find his carriage at the door of the church, and will enter it. Vivats will be heard, and the king will then order the carriage to be driven to Montmedy.”

“It is well,” said Louis XVI., “and if the state of things does not change, all will be as you say; only do you and your companions go to sleep, for you will additionally need it to-morrow,”

The reception of the young girls and their parents was not prolonged, and the king and royal family retired at nine o’clock.

When they retired, the sentinel at the door recalled to them that they were yet prisoners.

An hour afterwards, having been relieved, the sentinel asked leave to speak to the chief of the escort, Billot.

He was supping in the street with the men who had come from the different villages on the route, and sought to induce them to remain until morning.

The majority of these men had seen what they wished — that is, the king — and each wished to keep the approaching holiday (Fete Dieu) in his own village. Billot sought to retain them, for he was uneasy at the feeling displayed by the aristocratic city.

They replied: “If we do not return tomorrow, who will make preparations for the festivals, and place hangings before our houses?”

The sentinel surprised him in the midst of this conversation. They talked together in au animated manner. Billot sent for Drouet. The same whispered conversation was continued. Billot and Drouet then went together to the post-house, the master of which was a friend to the latter. Two horses were at once saddled, and ten minutes after, Billot galloped towards Rheims, and Drouet to Vitry-le-Francais.

Day came, and not more than six hundred men remained of the escort. Those who did remain were the most furious, or the meanest. They had slept in the street on bales of straw, which had been brought to them, and when morning came, they saw half a dozen men in uniform enter the intendancy, and immediately after leave in haste.

There was a station of the Guards of Villeroy in Chalons, and about a dozen of those gentlemen were in the city. They came for orders to Charny.

Charny bade them put on their uniforms and be at the church when the king should leave it. They went to prepare themselves.

As we have said, some of the peasants who the previous evening had escorted the king had not retired at night because they were worn out: in the morning, however, they began to reckon up the leagues. Some were ten, others fifteen from home. Two or three hundred set out, in spite of the persuasion of their comrades.

Now they might rely on at least an equal number of National Guards devoted to the king, leaving out the officers, who were to be united into a kind of sacred battalion, ready to set an example of exposure to all dangers.

At six in the morning, the inhabitants who were most zealous were out and in the courtyard of the intendancy. Charny and the guardsmen were with them. The king arose at seven, and said that he wished to attend mass. Nothing seemed to oppose the accomplishment of the wish.

The king seemed pleased; Charny, though, shook his head. Though he did not know Dronet, he knew Billot.

All seemed favourable, however. The streets were crowded, but it was easy to see that the population sympathised with the king. While the blinds of the room of the king and queen were closed, the crowd, not to disturb them, had moved about quietly and calmly, lifting up its hands to heaven, and the four or five hundred peasants of the escort, who would not return home, were scarcely observable in its masses.

As soon, though, as the blinds of the royal chambers were opened, cries of “Vive le roi!” and “Vive la reine!” were uttered so energetically, that the king and queen appeared at the balcony.

The cries were then unanimous, and for a last time the captive sovereigns seemed condemned to disappointment.

“Well,” said Louis XVI. to Marie Antoinette, “all goes well.”

She lifted her eyes to heaven, but made no reply.

Just then the ringing of the clock was heard. Charny tapped lightly at the door.

“Very well,” said the king; “I am ready.”

Charny glanced at the king, who seemed calm, and almost firm. He had suffered so much, that by suffering he seemed to have lost his irresolution.

The carriage was at the door. The king and queen were surrounded by a crowd at, least as considerable as that of the previous evening. Instead, however, of insults, it demanded no favour but a word, a glance, or permission to touch the apparel of the king, or leave to kiss the queen’s hand.

The three officers got on the box; the driver was ordered to proceed to the church, and did not hesitate. Who was to give a counter-order? — the chiefs were absent. Charny looked round, and saw neither Drouet nor Billot. They reached the church.

Every moment the number of National Guards increased at the corner of every street: they joined the cortege by companies. At the church-door Charny saw that he had six hundred men.

Places had been kept for the royal family beneath a kind of dais, and though but eight o’clock, the priests began high mass. Charny saw it. He feared nothing so much as delay, which might be fatal to his hopes. He sent word to the priest that mass must last but a quarter of an hour. “I understand,” said the minister, “and I shall pray God to grant his majesty a prosperous journey.”

The mass lasted just a quarter, and yet Charny more than twenty times looked at his watch. The king could not hide his impatience, whilst the queen leaned her head on the prie-Dieu. At length the priest turned and said, “Ite, missa est.”

As he left the altar, he turned and blessed the royal family, who bowed and answered, in response to the formula used by the priest, “ Amen.”

They went to the door; those who had come to hear mass knelt and moved their lips, though no audible sound was uttered. It was easy to guess the prayers that trembled on their mute lips.

At the door were ten or a dozen mounted guardsmen. The royal escort had begun to assume colossal proportions; yet it was evident that the peasants, with their rude will, with their arms, less mortal, perhaps, than those of the citizens, but more terrible in appearance — a third had guns, and the rest pikes and scythes — might be a dangerous enemy.

Not without something of fear did Charny lean towards the king, and ask his orders, saying, to encourage him: "Let us on, sire."

The king was decided. He looked out of the window, and speaking to those who surrounded him, said:

"Gentlemen, yesterday, at Varennes, I was seized. I ordered them to take me to Montmedy, yet I was dragged towards a revolted capital. I was then amid rebels; to-day, faithful subjects surround me, and I order you to escort me to Montmedy."

"To Montmedy!" said Charny.

"To Montmedy!" said the guardsmen of Villeroy.

"To Montmedy!" shouted the National Guards of Chalons, with one voice. A chorus of "Vive le Roi!" was heard. Charny looked at the peasants, who seemed, in the absence of Drouet and Billot, to be commanded by the Garde Francaise who had been on guard at the king's door. He followed, and made his men silently seem to obey, suffering the whole National Guard to pass, and forming his rude masses in the rear. Charny became uneasy, but, situated as he was, he could not prevent it, nor ask for any explanation.

The explanation was soon given. As they advanced towards the gate of the city, it seemed to him that in spite of the sound of the wheels and the murmurs of the crowd, a dull murmur was heard in the distance. He placed his hand on the knee of the guardsman by his side, and said: "All is lost!"

Just then they turned the angle of the wall. Two roads ended there, one of which led to Vitry-le-Francais, and the other to Rheims. Down each of these roads, with drums beating and colours flying, advanced large bodies of the National Guards. One seemed to be composed of eighteen hundred, and the other of twenty-five hundred or three thousand men. Each seemed commanded by a mounted man. These horsemen were Billot and Drouet.

Charny had but to glance at them to see all. The absence of Billot and Drouet, hitherto inexplicable, was now plain enough.

They must have learned what was going on at Chalons, and had set out to Rheims and Vitry-le-Francais to bring up the National Guards of those cities. Their measures had been so well arranged that they both arrived at once. They halted their men on the square, closing it entirely. The cortege paused.

The king looked out of the window; he saw Charny standing, pale and with his teeth clenched, in the road.

"What is the matter?" asked the king.

"Our enemies, sire, have obtained a reinforcement, and now load their arms, while behind the National Guards of Chalons, the peasants stand already loaded."

"What think you of that, M. de Charny?"

"That, sire, we are between two fires. This is no reason why, however, you cannot pass, if you wish to do so; but, sire, whither your majesty will go, I know not."

"Well," said the king, "let us return."

The young men on the seat sprang to the door, around which the Guards of Villeroy collected. These brave and gallant officers asked nothing better than an opportunity to enter into a contest with their opponents.

The king, however, repeated more positively the order he had given before.

"Gentlemen," said Charny, "let us return — the king will have it so," and taking one of the horses by the bridle, he turned the heavy carriage round.

The royal carriage was driven sadly enough towards Paris, under the surveillance of those two men who had forced it to resume its direction, until, when between Stenay and Dormans, Charny — thanks to his stature and the elevation of his seat — saw a carriage, drawn by four post-horses, advancing rapidly. He perceived at once that this carriage either brought some important news or some distinguished individual.

When it had joined the advance guard of the escort, after the exchange of a few words, the ranks of the advance guard opened, and the men who composed it respectfully presented arms.

Three men descended from the carriage.

Two of them were utter strangers to the royal escort and prisoners.

The third had scarcely put his foot on the ground, when the queen whispered to the king:

"Latour-Maubourg — the scapegoat of Lafayette!"

Shaking her head, she said: "This presages nothing good!"

The oldest of the three men advanced, and, opening the door of the carriage, rudely said:

"I am Petion, and those two gentlemen are Barnave and Latour-Maubourg. We are sent by the National Assembly to escort the king, and to prevent popular anger from anticipating justice. Sit closer together, and make room for us."

The queen cast on the deputy from Chartres and his two companions one of those disdainful glances of which the daughter of Maria Theresa was so prodigal.

Latour-Maubourg, a courtier of the school of Lafayette, could not support her eye.

"Their majesties," said he, "are much crowded, and I will get into the next carriage."

"Go where you please," said Petion; "my place is in the queen's carriage, and thither I will go."

He got into the carriage.

The king, queen, and Madame Elizabeth occupied the back seat. Petion looked at them and said:

"As delegate of the National Assembly, the post of honour belongs to me. Be pleased to sit on the other side."

Madame Elizabeth arose and gave her seat, to Petion, casting a look of perfect resignation on the king and queen.

Barnave stood outside, hesitating to enter a carriage in which seven persons were already crowded.

"Well, Barnave," said Petion, "will you get in?"

"Where shall I sit?" said Barnave, evidently much annoyed.

"Do you wish a seat?" said the queen, bitterly.

"I thank you, madame, but I will find a place with those gentlemen on the box."

Madame Elizabeth drew Madame Royale close to her, and the queen took the dauphin on her knees. Thus room was made for Barnave, who sat opposite to the queen, with his knees close to her.

"Forward!" said Petion, without asking the king's consent.

The procession started amid loud cries of “Long live the National Assembly!”

As soon as Barnave took his place opposite the queen, the king said:

“Gentlemen, I assure you I never intended to leave the kingdom!”

Barnave, who was seated, arose and said to the king:

“Monsieur, is that so? That word will preserve France.”

He sat down.

Then something strange passed between that man, sprung from the bourgeoisie of a provincial city, and that woman, descended from one of the greatest thrones of the world.

They sought to read the hearts of each other, not as two political enemies who wish to search out state secrets, but like a man and woman who would penetrate the mysteries of love. Whence arose in the heart of Barnave that sentiment which the piercing eye of Marie Antoinette discovered, after the lapse of a few minutes?

Barnave claimed to be the successor of Mirabeau. In his opinion he had already occupied his place in the tribune. There was one thing besides, however. In the opinion of all — we know how — Mirabeau had seemed to enjoy the confidence of the king and the favours of the queen. The one and only conference Mirabeau had ever enjoyed had been exaggerated into many, and from the known audacity of the great tribune, the queen had been represented as having yielded even to weakness. At this time it was the fashion not only to slander Marie Antoinette, but to also believe the slanders.

Barnave was anxious to be the complete successor of Mirabeau; that was his reason for being so anxious to be one of the envoys. He was appointed, and went with the assurance of a man who knows that if he cannot win a woman’s love, he has the power at least to make himself hated.

All this the queen, with one rapid glance, at once saw. She also saw that Barnave paid! great attention to her. Five or six times during the quarter of an hour, when Barnave sat in front of her, the young deputy looked carefully on the three men who were on the seat of the carriage, and from it he looked each time more bitterly at the queen.

Barnave knew that one of the three, he did not know which, was the Count de Charny, whom public rumour represented as the queen’s lover. The queen saw this. At once she acquired great power. She had detected the weak point in the cuirass of her adversary: she had only to strike, and strike firmly.

"Monsieur," said she, to the king, "you heard what the leader of our guard said?"

"About what, madame?"

"About the Count de Charny."

Barnave trembled. The queen did not fail to notice this tremor, for his knee touched hers.

"Did he not say that he was responsible for the life of the count?" said the king.

"Yes, sire; to the countess, too."

"Well!" said the king.

"Well, sir, the Countess de Charny is my old friend. Do you not think that on my return to Paris I had best give De Charny a leave, so that he may visit his wife! He has run great risk, and his brother has been killed for us. I think to ask him to continue his services would be cruel."

Barnave stared.

"You are right, madame," said the king, "but I doubt if the count will consent."

"Well then, each of us will have done what is right; we will have offered, and De Charny refused. We have additional reasons to congratulate ourselves, as we did not bring the count with us. I fancied him safe in Paris, when all at once I saw him at the carriage door."

"True!" said the king, "but it proves that the count needs a stimulus to induce him to do his duty."

Barnave was in one of those states of mind, when to contend with an attractive woman one would undertake an Herculean task with the certainty of being overcome. He asked the Supreme Being (in 1791 people did not ask God) to grant him some opportunity to attract the eyes of the royal scorner on him; and all at once, as if the Supreme Being had heard the prayer addressed him, a poor priest who had watched by the roadside drew near to obtain a better view, and lifting his eyes to heaven, said:

"Sire! God bless your majesties!" The bearing of the old man, the prayer he pronounced, was replied to by the people with a roar, and before Barnave had aroused himself from his reverie, the old priest was thrown down and would have been murdered, had not the queen in terror said:

"Monsieur! see you not what is going on?"

Barnave looked up, and at once saw the ocean beneath which the old man had disappeared, and which in tumultuous waves rolled around the coach.

“Wretches!” said he. He threw himself against the door, burst it open, and would have fallen, had not Madame Elizabeth, by one of those motions of the heart, which were to her so prompt, seized his skirts.

“Tigers!’’ said he; “you are not Frenchmen, or France, the home of the brave, has become the abode of murderers.”

The people fell back, and the old man was saved.

He arose, saying:

“You are right to save me, young man; I will pray for you.”

Making the sign of the cross, he withdrew.

The people suffered him to pass, overcome by the bearing and glance of Barnave, who seemed the statue of command.

When the old man had gone, the young deputy sat down simply and naturally, without showing any evidence that he believed he had saved a life.

“Monsieur,” said the queen, “I thank you.”

These words awakened an emotion in all Barnave’s body. Beyond all doubt, never since he knew Marie Antoinette, had she been so attractive and beautiful.

He was ready to fall at her feet, but the young dauphin uttered a cry of pain. The child had annoyed the virtuous Petion by some trick, and the patriot had pulled his ear very sharply.

The king grew red with rage, the queen grew pale with shame. She reached out her arms and took the child from Petion’s knees, and placed him on Barnave’s.

Marie Antoinette wished to take him herself. “No!” said the dauphin, “I am very comfortable here.”

Barnave had changed his position, so as to enable the queen to take the child if she pleased, but either from coquetry or policy, she suffered him to remain where he was.

Just then there passed through Barnave’s mind something untranslatable: he was at once proud and happy.

The child began to play with Barnave’s ruffles, with his sash and the buttons of his coat as a deputy. The buttons bore an engraved device, and occupied the dauphin’s attention. He called the letters one by one, and then, uniting them, read these four words: “Live free or die.”

“What, monsieur, does that mean?”

“It means, my fine fellow, that Frenchmen have sworn to have a master no longer. Do you understand that?”

“Petion!” said Barnave.

“Well,” said Petion, as naturally as possible, “give another explanation, of the device if you can.”

Barnave was silent. The device on the night before seemed sublime — now it was cruel.

The queen wiped a tear from her eyes.

The carriage continued to roll through the crowd. They soon came to the city of Dormans.

Nothing had been prepared for the royal family. It was forced to descend at an inn.

Either by order of Petion, or because the inn was really full, meagre accommodations were found for the royal family, who were installed in three garrets.

When he left the carriage, Charny, according to custom, wished to approach the king and queen to receive their orders. A glance of the queen, however, bade him keep away. Though he did not understand the motive, the count obeyed it.

Petion had gone into the inn, and taken charge of the arrangements. He did not take the trouble to come downstairs again, and a waiter came to say that the rooms of the royal family were ready.

Barnave was in a terrible state; he felt the greatest anxiety to offer the queen his arm, but he feared lest she who had so insisted on etiquette in the case of Madame de Noailles would apply the same ideas to him. He waited therefore.

The king got out first, leaning on the arms of the two guardsmen, De Maiden and De Valory.

The queen got out and reached her arms for the dauphin, but as if the poor child felt how necessary the flattery was to his mother, he said:

“No, I will remain with my friend Barnave.”

Marie Antoinette made a sign of assent, accompanied by a sweet smile. Barnave suffered Madame Royale and Madame Elizabeth to get out, and then followed with the dauphin in his arms.

The queen ascended the tortuous and difficult stairway, leaning on her husband’s arm. At the first story she paused, thinking that twenty steps were high enough. The voice of the waiter, however, was heard, saying: “Higher! higher!”

She continued to ascend.

The sweat of shame hung on Barnave’s brow. “What, higher?” said he.

“Yes,” said the waiter. “This story contains the dining room and the rooms of the gentlemen of the Assembly.”

Barnave became dizzy. Petion had taken rooms for himself and his colleague on the first story, and had sent the royal family to the garret. The young deputy, however, said nothing; hearing, however, without doubt, the first outbreak of the queen when she saw the rooms of the second story had been occupied by Petion, while she had been sent to the third, he placed the dauphin on the landing.

“Mother,” said the young prince to his mother, “my friend Barnave is going.”

“He is right,” said the queen, glancing around the room.

A moment after, they announced to their majesties that dinner was served. The king came down, and saw six covers on the table. He asked why there were six.

“One,” said the waiter, “is for the king, one for the queen, one for Madame Elizabeth, one for Madame Royale, one for the dauphin, and another for M. Petion.”

“Why not for MM. Barnave and de Latour-Maubourg?”

“They were prepared, sir, but M. Barnave ordered them to be removed.”

“And left Petion’s?”

“M. Petion insisted on it.”

At this moment the grave, more than grave — austere — face of the deputy of Chartres appeared at the door.

The king acted as if he were not there, and said to the boy: “I sit at the table only with my family, and with those we invite. We will not sit down.”

“1 was aware,” said Petion, “that your majesty had forgotten the first article of the rights of man. I thought, though, you would pretend to remember it.”

The king seemed not to hear Petion, as he had not to see him, and bade the boy takeaway the plate. The servant obeyed, and Petion left in a perfect rage.

“M. de Maiden,” said the king, “close the door, that we may be alone.” De Maiden obeyed, and Petion heard the door closed behind him.

The king thus dined en famille. The two guardsmen served as usual.

When the supper was over, and the king was about to rise from his chair, the door of the room opened, and their majesties were requested by Barnave to take the rooms on the first floor instead of their own.

Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette looked at each other. They thought to assume dignity and repulse courtesy from one of the delegates was the best way to punish the insolence of the other. That would have been the king's wish, but the dauphin ran forward and cried:

"Where is my friend Barnave?"

The queen followed the dauphin, and the king the queen. Barnave was not there.

Twice or thrice on the road the queen had remarked the profusion of flowers in the garden. The room of the queen was filled with the most magnificent spring flowers, and at the same time the open windows brought perfumes too strong to escape. The mousseline curtains only prevented any indiscreet eye from watching the august prisoners. This was Barnave's work.

In the meantime, what had become of Charny?

Charny, we have seen, in obedience to a sign from the queen, had withdrawn, and had not reappeared.

Charny, whose duty bound him to the king and queen, was pleased to receive this order, the cause of which he did not ask, for it gave him time to think. For three days he had lived so rapidly, he had, so to say, lived so much for others, that he was not sorry to leave their griefs and think of himself.

Charny was a noble of other days. He was, above all things, a man of family. He worshipped his brothers, the lather of whom he really was. When George died, his grief had been intense; he had, however, been able to kneel by his body in the dark and sombre court-yard of Versailles, and expend his grief in tears; at least he had another brother, Isidor, to whom all his affection took wing — Isidor, who, if possible, had become dearer to him than ever, during the three or four months which preceded his departure, and since he had been the means of communication between himself and Andree.

We have sought, if not to explain, at least to describe, the singular mystery of the separation of certain hearts which absence seems to animate rather than cool, and which, in separation, find a new aliment to sustain them. The less Charny saw of Andree, the more he thought of her, and to think of Andree was to love her.

When he saw Andree — when he was by her — he seemed to be by a statue of ice, which the least ray would melt, and which, when in the shade, feared, as a statue really of ice might, the approach of a ray. He was in contact with her cold icy bearing — with her grave and veiled words, beyond which he saw nothing.

As soon, however, as he left her, distance produced its ordinary effect, by extinguishing the two rare tints, and dimming the outlines, which were too defined. Then the cold bearing of Andree became animated — her regular, measured voice became sonorous and animated — the drooping eye was uplifted, and shed a humid and devouring flame — a secret fire seemed to animate the statue, and through her alabaster bosom he saw the circulation of the blood and the beating of the heart.

Ah, in these moments of absence and solitude Andree was really the queen's rival! In the darkness of those nights Charny fancied that the door of his room opened, and the tapestry uplifted, while, with murmuring lips, she approached his door with opened arms. Charny then opened his arms, and called to the sweet vision. Charny then sought to press the phantom to his heart, but, alas! it escaped him. He embraced only a void, and from his dream sank back into cold and sad reality!

Isidor then became dearer than George had ever been. Both had died for that fatal woman, for a cause full of abysses. For the same woman, into the same abyss, Charny, too, would certainly fall.

Well, for two days since the death of his brother — since the last embrace of his bloodstained arms — since he had pressed his pale lips, warm with his last sigh — M. de Choiseul had given him the papers he had found on Isidor's person, yet he had scarcely had time to think of his own sorrow.

The signal of the queen to keep away he had received as a favour, and accepted with pleasure. He at once sought for some place aside, where, in reach of the royal family, if they should will, he might yet be alone with his sorrow and isolated with his tears. He found a garret vacant near the stairway, where De Maiden and De Valory watched.

There he eat alone. He took the bloody papers from his pocket, the only relics of his brother. With his head resting on his hands — with his eyes fixed on the letters in which the thoughts of one no more continued to live — he suffered, for a long time, silent tears to course down his cheeks. He sighed, looked up, shook his head, and opened a letter. It was from Catherine.

For several months Charny had suspected a liaison between Isidor and the farmer’s daughter. When at Varennes Billot undertook to tell him all the details. Not until that time did he suffer it to assume its due importance in his mind. This importance was increased by reading the letter. Then he saw the mistress’ claim was sanctified by that of the mother, and Catherine expressed her love in such simple terms, that the whole life of the woman could not be but an expiation of the fault of the girl.

He opened a second and a third, all of which spoke of the future — of happiness — of maternal joy — of the fears of a loving heart — of the same regrets, griefs, and contrition.

All at once, amid these letters, one struck him. The writing was Andree’s. It was addressed to him. To the letter, a sheet of paper, folded square, was fastened by a wax seal, which bore Isidor’s arms.

This letter of Andree’s, addressed to him, and found among Isidor de Charny’s papers, appeared so strange that he opened the note before he touched the letter itself. The note had been written by Isidor in pencil, on some inn table while his horse was being saddled, beyond doubt, and was as follows: —

“This letter is addressed, not to me, but to my brother Count Olivier de Charny. It is from his wife, the countess. Should any misfortune befall me, the person who finds this paper is requested either to send it to the count, or return it to the countess.

“I received it from her with the request that, if in the enterprise he was engaged in no accident should befall him, I would restore the letter to her.

“If he were wounded severely, but without danger, to beg him to permit his wife to join him.

“If he were mortally wounded, to give him the letter, if he could read it, or, if not, to read it myself to him, that he might know the secret it contained.

“If this letter be sent to my brother, as doubtless it will be, he will act as his sense of propriety directs.

“I bequeath to his care Catherine Billot, who is living with my child in the Ville d’Avray.

“ISIDOR DE CHARNY.”

At first the count seemed entirely absorbed by the letter. His tears, checked for a moment, began to flow again, until at last he looked at the letter of his wife. He looked long at it — kissed and placed it to his heart, as if it could thus communicate the secret it contained. He then read, twice or thrice, his brother’s letter.

He shook his head, and said in a low tone:

“Have I the right to read it? I will, however, ask her to permit me to do so.”

As if to encourage himself in this resolution, he said, two or three times, “No, I will not.”

He did not; but day found him seated at the table devouring with his eyes that letter, which was quite humid, so often had he pressed it to his lips.

All at once, amid the noise which always precedes a departure, he heard the voice of Do Maiden calling for the Count de Charny.

“Here I am,” said the count.

Placing the letter of poor Isidor in his pocket, he kissed the sealed one, again placed it on his heart, and descended rapidly. He met Barnave on the stairway, who asked after the queen, and who was looking for De Valory to obtain orders in relation to the departure.

It was easy to see that Barnave had not slept any more than Charny had.

As they entered the carriage, the king and queen saw that they had around them only the population of the city come to see them set out, and an escort of cavalry.

For this they were indebted to Barnave. He knew that on the previous day, the queen, forced to travel slowly, had suffered with heat, with dust, and been annoyed by the menaces uttered against the guardsmen and the faithful subjects who came to pay their respects to her. He pretended to have received news of an invasion, that De Bouille had entered France with fifty thousand Austrians, and that every man with a gun, pike, scythe, or other weapon should march against him. The whole population heard this and retraced its steps.

In France, at that time, foreigners were really hated so intensely, that all this animosity was transferred to the queen merely because she was a stranger.

Marie Antoinette guessed whence came this new kindness; we use the word kindness, and there is no exaggeration in doing so. She glanced her thanks at Barnave.

Just as she was about to take her seat, she looked around for Charny. He was already in his seat; but instead of sitting as he had done between the guardsmen, he insisted on yielding to De Maiden the less dangerous place he had previously occupied. Charny longed for a wound to permit him to open the letter of Andree. He did not see that the queen sought to catch his eye.

The queen sighed deeply. Barnave heard her. Anxious to know why, he paused on the steps.

“Madame,” said he. “I observed yesterday that you were crowded in this berlin. One less will accommodate you. If you wish, madame, I will get into the next carriage with Latour-Maubourg, or accompany you on horseback.”

When Barnave made this offer, he would have given half of his life, and it was not long, to have it refused. It was.

“No,” said the queen, “remain where you are.”

The dauphin just then reached out his little hand to the young deputy.

“My friend, Barnave! Barnave! You must not go.”

Barnave, perfectly delighted, resumed his seat. When in the carriage, the dauphin went from the queen’s knees to his.

As the queen put him down she kissed his cheeks. The humid touch of her lips yet remained on the velvet cheek of the child. Barnave looked at them as Tantalus did at the fruits which hung before him.

“Madame,” said he to the queen, “will your majesty deign to permit me to kiss the cheek of the prince, who, guided by the instinct of childhood, deigns to call me his friend?”

The queen smiled, and nodded an assent. The lips of Barnave were then so ardently imprinted on the trace which the lips of the queen had left that the child uttered a cry.

The queen did not lose one item of all this.

Thanks to Barnave, the carriage now travelled two leagues an hour.

They paused at Chateau-Thierry for dinner.

The house at which they stopped was near the river, in a charming position, and belonged to a wealthy female dealer in wood, who on the previous night had sent one of her clerks, on horseback, to offer hospitality to the delegates of the National Assembly, and to the king and queen.

Her offer was accepted.

The moment the carriage stopped, a crowd of eager servants pointed out to the august prisoners an altogether different reception from that they experienced at Dormans. The king, queen, Madame Royale and Madame Elizabeth, were each conducted to different rooms, as also were the dauphin and Madame de Tourzel, and every arrangement was made for all to be able to pay the most minute attention to their toilet.

Since she left Paris, the queen had met with nothing like this. The most delicate habits of the women were caressed by this aristocratic attention, and Marie Antoinette, who appreciated such cares, asked to be permitted to thank her hostess.

About four o’clock in the afternoon they reached Meaux, and stopped in front of an episcopal palace, which was occupied by a constitutional bishop who had taken the oaths. This they saw later from the manner in which he received the royal family.

At first the queen was surprised at the sombre appearance of the building she was about to enter. Nowhere could a princely or religious palace be found, from its melancholy appearance, more calculated to afford a shelter for the misery that sought for a refuge in it.

She glanced across this lugubrious place, and finding it attuned to her own feelings, looked around for some arm to lean on while she visited the palace.

Barnave was there alone.

The queen smiled.

“Give me your arm, monsieur, and deign to be my guide through you old palace.”

Barnave approached rapidly, and gave his arm to the queen, with mingled respect and anxiety.

She hurried Barnave through the rooms of the palace. One who looked after her floating form might imagine that she fled, for she looked neither to the right nor to the left. Almost panting, she at last paused in the chamber of the great preacher, and saw, to her surprise, a female picture before her.

She looked up mechanically, and read these words, “Madame Henriette.”

Barnave felt her tremble, though he did not know why.

“Does your majesty suffer?” asked he.

“No!” said the queen; “but that picture, Madame Henriette.”

Barnave saw what passed in the poor woman’s heart.

“Yes,” said he; “poor Madame Henriette of England, not the widow of the unfortunate Charles I., but the wife of the careless Duke of Orleans. Not she who nearly died of cold in the Louvre, but the one who died at Saint Cloud and sent Bossuet this picture.”

After a moment of hesitation, he said:

“I wish it were the portrait of the other.”

“And why so?” asked the queen.

“Because certain mouths alone can give certain advice, and those mouths are those which death has closed.”

“Can you not tell me, sir, what the mouth of the widow of Charles I. would advise?” asked the queen.

“If your majesty order, I will try.”

“Do so.”

“‘Ah! sister,’ that mouth would say, ‘see you not the resemblance between our fates? I come from France, you from Austria. To the English, I was a stranger, as you are to France; I might have given my husband good advice; but I kept silence or advised him wrongly; instead of uniting the people, I urged him to war, and besought him to march on London with the Irish Protestants; I not only kept up a correspondence with the enemy of England, but went twice into France to bring foreign soldiers into the kingdom. At last — ’“

Barnave paused.

“Go oil,” said the queen, with a dark brow and compressed lip.

“Why should I continue, madame?” said he, shaking his head sadly. “You know the end of that bloody story as well as I do. Yes; I will continue, and tell you what this portrait of Madame Henriette says to me, and you shall tell me if I am mistaken. ‘The Scotch betrayed their king; the king was seized as he was about to cross to Paris. A tailor took him, a butcher conducted him to prison, and a publican presided at the court of justice, and that nothing might be wanting, a disguised hangman struck off the head of the victim before the judge who reviewed the whole trial.’ This is what the portrait of Madame Henriette says to me; am I right? My God, I know that as well as any one; I know more, I know that nothing is wanting in the resemblance. We have our seller of beer of the Faubourgs, only instead of calling him Cromwell, we call him Sauterre; we have our butcher, instead of Hamilton, he is called what... Legendre, I believe; instead of calling him Pridge, they call him... that I do not know! The man is so insignificant that I do not eve a know his name, nor do you either, I am sure; but ask him, he will tell you — the man I mean, who conducted our escort — a peasant, a villein. This, this is what Madame Henriette tells me. And what is your answer?"

"I answer, 'Poor dear princess, it is not advice you give me, it is history, a history completed. Now, now, let me hear your advice.'"

"Oh! this advice, madame," said Barnave, "if you will only not refuse to follow, it shall be given by the living as well as the dead."

"Living or dead, let those speak who ought to speak. Who says if the advice is good we shall refuse to follow it?"

"Eh, mon Dieu! living or dead have but one advice to give."

"What?"

"Make the people love you!''

"And it is an easy thing to make the people love you!"

"Ah! madame, this people are more yours than mine; as a proof, when you first came to France they adored you."

"Oh! monsieur, you are speaking of that very fragile thing — popularity!"

"Madame, madame!" said Barnave, "if I, unknown, leaving an obscure sphere, have obtained this popularity, how much easier must it have been for you to preserve it, how much easier to reconquer it! But no!'' continued Barnave, growing animated, "no; to what have you trusted your cause, the cause of monarchy, the most holy, the most beautiful of causes? What voice, what arm, has defended it? Never was seen such ignorance of the times, never such complete forgetfulness of the genius of France. I! I who have solicited the mission of going before you on your return, I whom you see, I who speak to you, how many times, mon Dieu! how many times have I been on the point of opening myself to you, to devote myself to..."

"Silence," said the queen, "some one comes; we will talk of all this some other time, M. Barnave. I am ready to see you, to hear you, and follow your counsels."

"Ah! madame! madame!" cried Barnave, transported.

"Silence!" repeated the queen.

"Your majesty is served," said the domestic whose step they had heard, appearing on the threshold.

They passed into the salle a manger. The king had arrived there by another door. He had conversed with Petion during the time Barnave had been speaking to the queen, and he seemed in better spirits. The two guards waited, claiming, as always, the privilege of attending on their majesties. Charny, the most distant of all, was in the embrasure of a window.

The king looked round, and making good use of the time he was alone with his family, the two guards and the count, “Gentlemen,” said he to the latter, “after supper I wish to speak with you. You will follow me, if you please, to my apartment.”

The three officers bowed.

The dinner commenced as usual. But though dressed, this time, in the palace of one of the first bishops of the kingdom, the table was as badly served this evening at Meaux as it had been well served in the morning at the Chateau Thierry.

The king, as usual, had a good appetite, and eat a good dinner, in spite of the poorness of the fare. The queen only took two fresh eggs. The dauphin, who had been ill since the evening, had asked for some strawberries. Since the evening, all those to whom he had addressed himself had answered, “There are none!” or “We cannot find any!”

And yet, on the road, he had seen the children of the peasants eating quantities which they had gathered in the woods.

This desire, which the queen was unable to satisfy, had made her sad, so that when the child, refusing everything that was offered to him, asked again for strawberries, the powerless mother’s eyes filled with tears.

But at this moment the door opened, and Barnave appeared with a plate of fresh strawberries in his hand.

“The queen will excuse me,” said he, “if I enter thus, and the king will also be so good as to pardon me, I hope, but many times during the journey I have heard M. le Dauphin ask for strawberries. I found this plateful on the bishop’s table, and brought them for him.”

“Thanks, my dear Barnave,” said the young dauphin.

“M. Barnave,” said the king, “our dinner is not very tempting, but if you will take some, you will give both the queen and myself great pleasure.”

“Sire,” said Barnave, “the invitation of the king is an order; where does your majesty wish me to sit?”

“Between the queen and the dauphin,” said the king.

Barnave sat himself down, mad at the same time with love and pride.

Charny looked on this scene without the least jealousy rising in his heart; looking at the poor butterfly that was about to burn his wings at the royal light, he said:

“Another one lost! it is a pity! he is worth more than the rest.”

And then, reverting to his incessant thought:

“This letter! this letter!” murmured he, “what can there be in this letter?”

After supper the three officers, according to the orders they had received, ascended to the chamber of the king.

When the young men had entered: “M. de Charny,” said the king, “will you shut the door, so that we may not be disturbed? I have something of the utmost importance to communicate to you. Here, gentlemen, at Dormans, M. Pet ion has proposed to me to let you escape in disguise; but the queen and I are both opposed to it, fearing lest it be a trap, and that they would only separate you from us in order to assassinate you, or deliver you up to some military commission which would condemn you to be shot. We, the queen and I, have taken upon ourselves to reject this proposal, but to-day M. Petion has returned to the charge, pledging his honour as a deputy, and I thought it best to let you know what he fears and what he proposes.

“Here are the words of M. Petion: ‘Sire, there is not, at the time of your re-entrance into Paris, any security for the three officers who accompany you. Neither I, M. Barnave, nor M. de Latour-Maubourg, can answer for their safety, even at the risk of our lives.’“

Charny looked at his two companions; a smile of contempt passed over their lips.

“Afterwards,” said the king, “hear what M. Petion proposes. He proposes to procure for you three dresses as National Guards, to cause the doors to be left open for you to-night, and give each of you an opportunity to fly.”

Charny consulted his companions again, but the same smile was the response.

“Sire,” said he, addressing the king, “our days have been consecrated to your majesties; you have accepted them, and it will be easier for us to die for you than to be separated; do us the honour, then, to treat us to-morrow as you did yesterday, neither more nor less. Of all your court, of all your army, of all your guards, you still have three faithful hearts left; do not take away the only glory of their ambition, that of being faithful to the end.”

“It is well, gentlemen,” said the queen; “we agree; only you understand from this moment that all is common with us; you are no longer servants, but friends. I will not ask you to give your names — I know them — but,” she drew her tablets from her pocket, “but give me those of your fathers, your mothers, your brothers, and your sisters; it may happen that we may have the misfortune to lose you without sinking ourselves; then it shall be my duty to tell their misfortune to these cherished beings, and to offer, at the same time, to relieve it as much as lies in my power. Allons, M. de Maiden, aliens, M. de Valory, say boldly, in case of death, and we are all so near the reality that we ought not to shudder at the word, who are the relations, who are the friends, whom you would recommend to my care?"

M. de Maiden mentioned his mother, an elderly infirm dame, dwelling on a small property in the neighbourhood of Blois; M. de Valory recommended his sister, a young orphan, who was a pupil in a convent at Soissons.

Certainly the hearts of these two men were strong and full of courage, and yet, while the queen was writing down the addresses of Madame de Maiden and Mademoiselle de Valory, neither could restrain his tears.

The queen, also, was obliged to stop writing, and draw out her handkerchief and dry her eyes.

Then, when she had written the addresses down, she turned to Charny.

"Alas, M. le Comte!" said she, "I know that you have no one to recommend to my care; your father, your mother, are dead, and your two brothers."

The queen's voice failed her.

"My two brothers have had the good fortune to die for your majesty, madame," added Charny, "but the last one who died left a poor child, whom he confided to me by a testament I found upon him. This young girl he took from her own family, whence she can expect no pardon. As long as I live neither she, nor her child, shall want for anything; but your majesty has said, with an admirable courage, that we are all confronting death, and if death should strike me, the poor-girl and her child would be without resources. Madame, deign to put on your tablets the name of an unfortunate peasant, and if I have, like my two brothers, the happiness to die for my august master and noble mistress, bestow your gratitude on Catherine Billot and her child. They will both be found in the little village of Ville d'Avray."

Without doubt, the picture of Charny dying in his turn, as had already died his two brothers, was a spectacle too terrible for the imagination of Marie Antoinette, for she turned back with a feeble cry, let her tablets fall, and went tottering towards a chair.

The two guards started towards her, while Charny, taking up the royal tablets, wrote on them the name and address of Catherine Billot, and placed them on the chimney-piece.

The queen made an effort to recover herself.

The young men, then, knowing the necessity there was for her being alone after such emotion, drew back in order to leave the room.

But she, stretching her hand towards them:

“Gentlemen,” said she, “you will not leave me without kissing my hand.”

The two guards advanced in the same order that they had given their names and addresses. M. de Maiden first, then M. de Valory. Charny approached her last.

The hand of the queen trembled as she awaited the kiss for which certainly she had offered the two others.

Next day, at the very moment of departure, M. de Latour-Maubourg and Barnave, ignorant, without doubt, of what had passed the previous evening betwixt the young men and the king, renewed their arguments in favour of dressing these two young men as National Guards; but they refused, saying that their place was on the seat of his majesty’s carriage, and that they could put on no other dress than that which they had dressed themselves in at his command.

Then Barnave wished that a plank, passing from the right to the left of the seat of the carriage, should be attached to that seat, so that two grenadiers could sit on this plank and guarantee, so far as in them lay, the safety of these two obstinate servants of the king.

At ten in the morning they quitted Means; they were about to enter Paris, from which they had been absent five days.

Five days! what a great deal had passed in these five days.

They were scarcely a league from Means, when the cortege assumed an aspect more terrible that it had ever had before. All the population of the neighbourhood of Paris joined it; Barnave had wished to make the postilions go at a trot, but the National Guard of Claye barred the road, presenting the points of their bayonets.

Soon the crowd was such that the carriage could hardly move. The insolent curiosity of the people followed the king and queen even into the corners of the carriage, where they had retreated. Men mounted up the steps, and thrust their heads into the carriage: some hung on in front, and others behind.

It was a miracle that Charny and his companions were not killed twenty times. The two grenadiers could not parry all the blows; they begged, they prayed, they commanded even, in the name of the Assembly; but their voices were lost in the midst of the tumult and noise.

An advance-guard of more than two thousand men preceded the carriage; more than four thousand followed it. At its sides the crowd increased at every instant.

The carriage drove along under a burning sun, and through a cloud of dust, of which each particle seemed of glass. Two or three times the queen turned round and cried.

They reached Villette. The sidewalks were covered so thickly that it was impossible to move on them. The doors, the windows, and roofs of houses were crowded with spectators.

The trees bent down under the weight of their living fruit. Every one kept his hat on.

Since the previous evening, the following notice had been placed on the walls of Paris:

“If any one salutes the king he will be beaten.

“If any one insults him he shall be hanged.”

All this was so terrible that the commissioners did not dare to pass through the Faubourg Saint-Martin. They resolved then to enter by the Champs Elysees, and the cortege, going round Paris, passed along the outer Boulevards.

This would make the punishment three hours longer, and this punishment was so insupportable that the queen begged they would take the shortest way, even if it were the most dangerous.

Twice had she attempted to draw down the blinds, and twice had the groanings of the crowd made her raise them.

On arriving at the barrier, the king and queen saw an immense mass of men, stretching as far as the eye could reach, silent, gloomy, threatening, with their hats on their heads. What was more dreadful, certainly more painful, than all this was a double rank of National Guards, with arms reversed in sign of grief, at the gates of the Tuileries.

It was a day of grief, great grief, mourning for a monarchy of seven centuries.

They took an hour to go from the barrier to the Place Louis XV. The horses bent under their burdens — each carried a grenadier.

On debouching into the Place Louis XV., the king perceived that they had bandaged the eyes of his ancestor.

“What do you mean by that?” the king asked Barnave.

“I do not know, sire,” answered the latter.

“I know,” said Petion; “they wish to express the blindness of monarchy.”

During the progress, in spite of the escort, the commissioners, the placards forbidding the king being insulted under pain of being hanged, the people three or four times broke through the line of grenadiers — a feeble barrier to this element, to which God had forgotten to say, as to the sea, “Thus far and no farther shalt thou go!”

Once the crowd pressed so that they broke one of the windows of the carriage.

“Why are you breaking the glass?” cried ten furious voices.

“Look, gentlemen!” said the queen, “look at the state my poor children are in!” and wiping the perspiration from their faces, “We choke,” said she.

“Bah!” replied a voice, “that is nothing: we shall choke you in another way! be quiet!”

And a stone broke the window into shivers.

Yet in the midst of this terrible spectacle, some episodes would have consoled the king and queen if their minds had been as impressible for what was good for them as for that which was evil.

In spite of the placard which forbade the king being saluted, M. Guilhenny, member of the Assembly, uncovered when the king passed, and as they wished to make him put on his hat again, he said, “Who dare reprove what I have done?”

At the entrance of the bridge twenty deputies were assembled to protect the king and royal family. Then came Lafayette and his staff.

“Oh! M. de Lafayette!” cried the queen, as soon as she saw him, “save the guards!” This cry was not useless, for danger was approaching, and the peril was great.

During this time, a scene in which there is some poetry was passing at the doors of the chateau.

Five or six ladies of the queen, who, after the flight of their mistress, had quitted the Tuileries, believing that the queen herself had left them for ever, wished to re-enter to receive her majesty.

“Away!” cried the sentinels, presenting the points of their bayonets at them. “Slaves of the Austrians!” growled some, showing their poniards.

Then, crossing before the bayonets of the soldiers, and braving the threats of the women, the sister of Madame Campau made some steps forward.

"Listen!" said she, "I have been attached to the service of the queen since I was fifteen. I served her while she was powerful: she is unhappy now — should I abandon her?"

"She is right!" cried the people; "soldiers! let her pass!"

And at this order, given by a master whom none could resist, the ranks opened, and the ladies passed. A moment afterwards the queen could see them waving their handkerchiefs from the windows.

And still the carriage went, pushing before it a crowd of people and a cloud of dust, even as a vessel drives through the waves of the ocean and a cloud of foam.

At last the carriage stopped. They had arrived at the steps of the great terrace.

"Oh, gentlemen!" said the queen again, but this time addressing herself to Petion and Barnave, "the guards, the guards!''

"Have you no one, madame, to recommend more particularly to me than these gentlemen?" said Barnave.

The queen looked at him fiercely with her clear eyes.

"No one!" said she.

And she allowed the king and the children to go out first.

The ten minutes which passed next — we do not except even those in going to the scaffold — were certainly the most unhappy of her life.

She was convinced, not that she should be assassinated — to die was nothing to her — but that she should either be delivered up to the people as a laughing-stock, or that she should be shut up in a prison, the door of which would only open through an infamous action.

As she put her foot on the steps of the carriage, protected by the arch of iron that was formed above her head by the order of Barnave, the guns and bayonets of the National Guard dazzled her so that she believed she was about to fall backwards.

But as her eyes were about to close, in that last look of agony when one sees all, she thought she saw immediately in front of her that man, that terrible man, who at the chateau of Taverney had in so mysterious a way raised for her the veil that shrouded the future — that man that she had only seen once since, in returning from Versailles on the 6th of October — that man, finally, who only appeared but to foretell great and sudden catastrophes, or at the very hour when these great catastrophes were accomplished.

After she was perfectly certain that she was not mistaken, she closed her eyes, which as yet had hesitated, strong in opposing realities, but inert and powerless before this sinister vision, and uttered a loud shriek and fell down.

It seemed to her as if the earth had gone from under her feet, and then the crowd, the trees, the burning sky, the immovable chateau, seemed to turn with her; vigorous arms, however, seized her, and she felt herself borne off amid the cries, growlings, and noise. At this moment she believed she heard the voice of the guards, who cried out, trying to turn the anger of the people upon them, hoping thus to turn it aside from its true inclination. For an instant she reopened her eyes and saw the unhappy occupants of the seat of the carriage, Charny pale and beautiful as ever, struggling alone against ten men, the lightning of the martyr in his eyes, the smile of disdain upon his lips. The looks of Charny were fixed upon the man who had raised her up from the midst of the crowd; she recognised with terror the mysterious being of Taverney and of Sevres.

“You, you!” she cried, trying at the same time to repulse him with her rigid hands.

“Yes, I!” he murmured in her ear. “I have need of thee yet to push monarchy down into its last abyss, and so I save thee!”

This time it was more than she really could support; she uttered a piercing cry and fainted.

During this time the crowd was trying to cut MM. de Charny, de Maiden and de Valory in pieces, and to carry Drouet and Billot in triumph.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

The Chalice.

WHEN THE QUEEN revived, she found herself in her bed-chamber in the palace of the Tuileries. Madame de Misere, and Madame Campan, her two ladies in waiting, were at her side. Her first expressed wish was to see the dauphin.

He was in his chamber and in bed, watched by Madame de Tourzel, his governess.

This assurance did not suffice the queen; she arose immediately, and all in disorder as she was, ran to the apartment of her son, where she remained a long time with her eyes fixed upon him, leaning on the post of the bedstead, and looking at him through her tears.

The terrible words that that mysterious being had said to her, in his low but sweet voice, murmured incessantly through her ear. “I have need of thee to push monarchy down into its last abyss, and so I save thee.”

Was it then true? Was it really she who was pushing monarchy towards the abyss?

It seemed that it must be so, since her enemies watched over her class, leaving her to work out its destruction, which she was accomplishing better than themselves.

At last she shook her head and returned to her own apartments.

Barnave had been twice to bring her news.

Since their arrival at the barrier, Charny and his companions had formed a plan. This plan had for its object the taking away, in relieving themselves from them, a part of the dangers, too, that threatened the king and queen. It was arranged, consequently, that as soon as the carriage, stopped, one should cast himself to the right, the other to the left, and the one seated in the middle should go forward; dividing in this fashion the crowd of assassins, and making them follow in three opposite directions; perhaps, they thought, there might thus be a way left clear for the king and queen to reach their apartments.

We have said that the carriage stopped near the great terrace of the castle. The haste of the murderers was so great, that in throwing themselves before the carriage two of them were dreadfully wounded. For an instant longer the two grenadiers stationed on the seat were able to guard the three young officers, but being themselves soon torn to the ground, they left them to their own resources.

This was the moment that they selected. All three darted off, but not so rapidly, nevertheless, as not to overturn five or six men who had mounted on the wheels and steps in order to tear them down from their seats. Then, as they had imagined, the anger of the people was divided in three directions.

When scarcely on the ground, M. de Maiden found himself under the axes of two sappers. The two axes were raised, and only sought for means to strike him. He made a violent and rapid movement, by which he escaped from the two men who held him by the collar, and in a second be stood alone.

Then, crossing his arms, “Strike!” said he.

One of the axes remained raised. The courage of the victim paralysed the assassin. The other fell, thirsting for blood, but in falling it encountered a musket, which turned it aside, and the point only reached M. de Maiden’s neck, making a slight wound.

Then the multitude opened, and he passed along with head hung down; but after a few paces he was received by a group of officers, who, wishing to save him, conducted him towards the National Guards, who had made the way safe for the royal family from the carriage to the chateau. At this moment General Lafayette perceived him, and pushing his horse towards him, he seized him by the collar and drew him towards his stirrups, so as in some measure to cover him with his popularity; but M. de Maiden recognised him, and cried:

“Leave me, sir; give all your attention to the royal family, and leave me to the mob.”

M. de Lafayette left him, perceiving a man who was seizing the queen, and rushed to her aid.

M. de Maiden had then been tossed about in every direction, attacked by some, defended by others, and at length had reached, covered with bruises, wounds, and blood, the gate of the chateau; there an officer, seeing him about to yield, seized him by the collar, and drawing him towards him, cried:

"It would be a pity that such a miserable being should die so pleasant a death; it will be necessary to invent some punishment for a brigand of this kind. Deliver him up to me, then; I'll take him in charge."

And continuing to insult M. de Maiden, saying to him: "Come, rascal! come here! You'll have to deal with me now!" he had got him by this time drawn to a darker entrance into the palace, where he said to him: "Save yourself, sir, and pardon the stratagem I was obliged to use to get you out of the hands of these wretched fellows."

M. de Maiden had glided up the staircases of the chateau, and had disappeared.

Something of the same kind had happened to M. de Valory; he had received two severe wounds upon his head. But at the very moment when twenty bayonets, twenty sabres, were raised to kill him, Petion had darted forward, and thrusting the assassins back with all his strength, "In the name of the National Assembly," said he, "I declare you unworthy of the name of Frenchmen — if you do not disperse at once, and if you do not deliver up this man! I am Petion!"

And Petion, who, under a rude exterior, concealed great honesty of purpose, a courageous and loyal heart, presented, as he said these words, such a glorious appearance in the eyes of the murderers, that they had drawn back and abandoned M. de Valory. He sustained him, for, stunned by the blows he had received, M. de Valory could hardly support himself; conducted him to the National Guards, and placed him under the care of the aide-de-camp, Mathieu Dumas, who answered for his safety, and assisted him to the chateau.

At this moment Petion heard the voice of Barnave. Barnave was calling him, to his assistance, finding he could not protect Charny. The count, seized by twenty men, cast down, dragged in the dust, had got up again, snatched a baronet from a gun, and assailed the crowd around him. But he would have fallen in this unequal contest if Barnave and then Petion had not run to his assistance.

Half-an-hour had scarcely elapsed since the queen had been put in possession of these details, when the valet de chambre announced M. le Comte de Charny, and the, latter appeared in the entrance of the doorway, lit up by the reflection of the golden rays of the setting sun.

He, like the queen, had employed the time which had elapsed since his entrance into the chateau in removing the traces of his long journey, and the terrible conflict in which he had been engaged. He had put on his old uniform — that of a captain of a frigate.

Never had he been so elegant, calm and handsome, and the queen could scarcely believe that this was the same man who but one short hour before had barely escaped being cut to pieces by the people.

“Oh, monsieur!” cried the queen, “it is necessary to tell you how uneasy I hare been about you, and how I have sent in every direction to obtain some news of you.”

“Yes, madame,” said Charny, bowing, “but believe that I did not retire before being assured, by some of your ladies, that you yourself were safe and well.”

“They say you owe your life to M. Petion and M. Barnave, and do I owe to the last this new obligation?”

“It is true, madame, and I owe double thanks to M. Barnave; for not wishing to leave me when I had reached my chamber, he has had the goodness to inform me that you were anxious about me on the way hither.”

“About you, count? and in what way?”

“But in exposing to the king the inquietudes you chose to think your ancient friend would experience at my absence — I am far from believing, like you, madame, in the earnestness of these inquietudes — but yet — ’’

he stopped, for it seemed to him that the queen, already very pale, had become paler still.

“But — yet — ” repeated the queen.

“Yet,” continued Charny, “without accepting, in every sense, the permission which your majesty had the intention to offer to me, I believed that, assured as I am of the safety of the king and yourself, madame, and that of the august children, it is right I should bear the news of my safety to Mai lame la Comtesse de Charny in person.”

The queen placed her left hand on her heart, as if she wished to assure herself that her heart had not ceased to beat, and in a voice nearly choked by the dryness of her throat, said:

“But it is just, monsieur, that I am only surprised that you have waited so long before fulfilling this duty.”

“The queen forgets that I pledged my word not to see the countess without her permission.”

"And you have come to ask for this permission?"

"Yes, madame," said Charny, "and beg your majesty to give it me."

"Without which, in the anxiety you are in to see Madame de Charny, you will even go, will you not?'"

"I believe the queen is unjust to me," said Charny. "At the time I left Paris I thought I was leaving it for a long time, if not for ever. During the journey, I did all that it was in my power to do for the success of the journey. It is not my fault, your majesty must remember, if I have not, like my brother, left my life at Varennes, been cut to pieces on the road, or in the gardens of the Tuileries. If I had had the joy of conducting your majesty beyond the frontier, or the honour of dying for you, I should have exiled myself, or have died, without seeing the countess. But I repeat to your majesty, on my return to Paris, I cannot put on the woman who bears my name — and you know how she bears it, madame — the mark of indifference implied in not giving her some intelligence of myself; above all, my brother is no longer there to take my place. For the rest, M. Barnave has deceived himself, or it was your majesty's opinion the day before yesterday."

"You love this woman, then, sir," said the queen, "about whom you make such a complaint so coolly?"

"Madame," said Charny, "it will soon be six years since you yourself — at a moment when I did not dream of such a thing, because for me there existed but one woman on earth, and this woman God had placed in so high a position that I could not obtain her — it is six years since you gave me in marriage Mademoiselle de Taverney, since you made her my wife. During these six years my hand has not twice touched hers; without necessity, I have not addressed her ten times — and ten times we have not certainly interchanged a look. My life has been occupied, filled — filled with another love, occupied with a thousand cares, a thousand labours. I have lived at the court, traversed the world — blindfold on my part — with the thread that the king has been willing to confide to me, and I have neither counted the days, months, nor years; the time has passed so much the more rapidly, owing to my being so much occupied with all these affections, cares and intrigues I have just mentioned. But it has not been thus with the Countess de Charny, madame, since, having had, without doubt, the misfortune of displeasing you, she has lived alone, isolated, lost in her pavilion of the Rue Coq Heron. This solitude, this isolation, this abandonment, she has accepted without complaint, because, with heart free from love, she feels not the want of the same affections as other women do; but what she will not accept, perhaps, without complaint, will be my forgetfulness of duties and attentions so very simple."

"Eh! mon Dieu! monsieur," cried the queen, "you are pretty well preoccupied with what Madame de Charny will think or not think of you, according as she sees you or not. Before taking all this trouble, it would be as well, perhaps, to ascertain whether she thought of you at the time of your departure, or whether she dreams of you in the hour of your return."

"I do not know whether the countess dreams of the hour of my return or not; but I am sure she thought anxiously of the hour of my departure."

"You saw her then before you left?"

"I had the honour to tell your majesty that I have never seen the Countess de Charny since I pledged my word to the queen not to see her."

"Then she has written to you?"

Charny kept silent.

"Let us see?" cried Marie Antoinette, "she has written to you; say so, if she has?"

"She sent a letter for me to my brother Isidor."

"And you have read this letter? What did she say, what could she write? Ah! she has spoken against me? Well, in this letter she says? Speak, then! you see I am impatient!"

"I cannot repeat to your majesty what she has said to me in this letter. I have not read it."

"You have torn it up?" cried the queen joyously. "You threw it into the fire without reading it? Charny, Charny! if you have done so, you are the most loyal of men, and I am wrong, and have lost nothing!"

And the queen stretched out both her arms towards Charny, to call him to her. But Charny remained in his place.

"I have not torn it, I have not thrown it in the fire."

"But then," said the queen, falling again into her chair, "how is it that you have not read it?"

"The letter was not to have been given to me by my brother unless I was mortally wounded. Alas, it was not I who was about to die — it was he. When he was dead, they brought me his papers: amongst these papers was the letter of the countess, with this note. Take it, madame."

And Charny presented to the queen the billet written by Isidor and annexed to the letter.

During this scene which we have just related, night had come on.

“Lights!” said she, “at once!”

The valet de chambre went out: there was a moment of silence, when nothing was heard but the loud breathing of the queen, and the beatings of her heart.

The valet de chambre entered with two candelabras, which he placed on the chimney-piece.

The queen would not even give him time to retire, and while he withdrew and shut the door, she approached the chimney-piece with the billet in her hand. But she looked at the paper twice without seeing anything.

“Oh!” murmured she, “it is not paper — it is flame.” And passing her hand over her eyes, as if to restore to them the faculty of seeing, which they seemed to have lost, “My God! my God!” said she, stamping her foot with impatience.

At length, by strength of will her hand ceased to tremble, and her eyes began to see. She read in a rough voice, which had nothing in common with her usual voice:

“‘This letter is addressed not to me but to my brother, Comte Olivier de Charny; it is written by his wife, the Countess de Charny.’“

The queen stopped some seconds, and then continued:

“‘If anything should happen to me, those into whose hands this paper may fall are begged to hand it to the Comte de Charny or send it to the countess.’“

The queen stopped a second time, shook her head and continued:

“‘Add to this the following recommendation.’ Ah! the recommendation,” murmured the queen; and she passed her hand again over her eyes.

“‘If the enterprise in which the count is engaged should succeed without any accident, return the letter to the countess.’“

The voice of the queen panted more and more as she read.

She continued: “‘If he should be grievously wounded, but without danger of death, beg him to accord the favour to his wife of answering it.’ Oh! it is clear!” lisped the queen. Then, in a verse nearly unintelligible: “‘Lastly, if he should be so severely wounded that death is certain, give him this letter, and, if he cannot read it himself, read it for him, that before he expires he may know the secret that it contains.’ Well! do you deny it now?” cried Marie Antoinette, gazing at the count with a vexed look.

“What?”

“My God! That she loves you?”

“Who? I? — the countess love me? What do you say, madame?” cried Charny, in his turn.

“Oh! unhappy one that I am, I speak the truth!”

“The countess love me? I? Impossible!”

“And why? I love you well — I!”

“Bat if the countess has loved me for six years, the countess would have told me — would have let me perceive it.”

The moment had come for poor Marie Antoinette in which she suffered so much, that she felt the need of driving away, like a poniard, the sufferings from her heart.

“No!” cried she, “she could not let you perceive anything. She would not say anything to you; but if she had said nothing — let you perceive nothing — it was because she knew well she could not be as your wife.”

“The Countess de Charny could not be as my wife?” repeated Olivier.

“It was,” said the queen, intoxicated more and more with her own grief, “it was that she knew well that there was between you a secret that would destroy your love.”

“A secret that would destroy our love?”

“It was that she knew well, at the very moment she spoke, you would despise her.”

“I despise the countess?’’

“In proportion as we despise the young girl who is a woman without spouse, a mother without husband.”

It was Charny’s turn to become pale, and to seek a shelter behind the nearest chair.

“Oh, madame, madame!” said he, “you have said either too much or too little; and I have the right to ask an explanation of you.”

“An explanation, monsieur, of me — of the queen — an explanation?”

“Yes, madame,” said Charny, “and I demand it.”

At this moment the door opened.

“Who wants me?” asked the queen, impatiently.

“Your majesty,” replied the valet-de-chambre, “said that you always wished to see Dr. Gilbert.”

“Well?”

“Doctor Gilbert has the honour to present his humble respects to your majesty.”

“Doctor Gilbert?” said the queen; “are you sure it is Doctor Gilbert?’’

“Yes, madame.”

“Oh! let him come in! let him come in, then!” said the queen.

Then, turning towards Charny:

“You wish for an explanation about Madame de Charny,” said she, raising her voice, “look! ask Dr. Gilbert for the explanation; he is the best person to give it to you.”

During this time Gilbert had entered. He had heard the words Marie Antoinette had just spoken, and he remained immovable at the threshold of the door.

As for the queen, throwing back to Charny the note of his brother, she made some steps towards her dressing-room; but more rapid than she was, the count barred the passage, and seized her by the robe.

“Pardon, madame,” said he, “but this explanation — it ought to take place before you.”

“Monsieur,” said Marie Antoinette, with set teeth, “you forget, I believe, that I am the queen!”

“You are an ungrateful friend who calumniates her friend; you are a jealous woman who insults another woman, the wife of a man who, for the last three days, has riskedt his life twenty times for you; the wife of the Count de Charny. It is before you, who have calumniated her, who have insulted her, that justice shall be done her. Sit down, then, there, and listen!”

“Well! let it be so!” said the queen; “M. Gilbert,” continued she, making a bad attempt to smile, “you see what monsieur wishes?”

“M. Gilbert,” said Charny, in a tone full of courtesy and dignity, “you hear what the queen orders?”

Gilbert stepped forwards, and looked sadly at Marie Antoinette.

“Oh, madame, madame!” murmured he.

Then, turning towards Charny:

“M. le Comte, what I have to tell you is the shame of a man — the glory of a woman. An unhappy man, a peasant, loved Mademoiselle de Taverney. One day he found her — she had fainted — and without respect for her youth, her beauty, her innocence, the miserable being violated her; and it was then that the young girl was a woman without spouse — mother without husband. Mademoiselle de Taverney is an angel! Madame de Charny is a martyr!”

Charny wiped away the perspiration that trickled down his face.

“Thanks, M. Gilbert!” said he.

Then, turning to the queen:

“Madame!” said he, “I was ignorant that Mademoiselle de Taverney had been so unfortunate — I was ignorant that Madame de Charny was so much to be respected — or I beg you will believe me, I should not have been six years without falling on my knees before her, and adoring her as she deserves to be adored!”

And bowing before the stupefied queen, he left, without the unhappy woman daring to make a movement to detain him. He heard only her cry of grief as she saw the door shut between him and her.

Then she understood that it was upon this door that the hand of the demon of jealousy would come and write, as upon that of hell, these terrible words:

LASCIATE OGNI SPERANZA!

CHAPTER XXXV.

Andree.

LET US tell what became of the Countess de Charny, while the scene we have described took place between the count and the queen — that scene which crushed so painfully a long series of griefs.

In the first place, to us who know the secrets of her heart, it is easy to see what she suffered on account of the absence of Isidor.

She trembled, because the great project would be either an escape or a failure. If it succeeded, she knew well enough the devotion of the count to his sovereigns, to be aware that, when they were in exile, he would never quit them. If it failed, she knew Charny's courage well enough to be sure that he would struggle to the last moment, as long as hope remained, and even when it was gone, against any imaginable obstacles.

As soon as Isidor had bade her adieu, the countess had her eye constantly open to seize every light, her ear constantly attentive to perceive every noise.

On the next day, she, with the rest of the people of Paris, learned that the king and royal family had left the city during the night. No accident had made the departure remarkable. As there was a flight, Charny knew of it, and had therefore left her.

She uttered a profound sigh — knelt, and prayed for a happy return.

Then, for two days, all Paris remained mute and silent, and without an echo. On the morning of the third day an echo pervaded all Paris. The king had been arrested at Varennes.

M. de Bouille, it was said, had followed and attacked the royal escort, and after the contest had retired, leaving the king in the hands of the people.

Charny had participated in this contest, she knew. He would be the last to retire, if he had not remained on the field of battle.

Then it was said that one of the three guardsmen who had accompanied the king had been killed.

Then the name transpired; hut none knew if it were Count Isidor or Olivier de Charny.

For the two days during which this question was undecided she suffered inexpressible anguish.

At last the return of the king and royal family was announced for Saturday the 26th.

Calculating time and space by the ordinary measure, the king should be in Paris before noon. If he came by the most direct route, he would enter Paris through the Faubourg St. Martin.

At eleven o’clock, Madame de Charny, in a costume of the greatest simplicity, and with a veil over her face, went to the harrier.

She waited until three.

At that hour, the first waves of the crowd passing before her announced that the king was going around Paris, and would enter the city through the Champs Elysees.

She had to pass through the whole city, and pass through it on foot. None dared to drive through the compact crowd which filled the streets. Never since the taking of the Bastille had the Boulevard been so encumbered.

Andree did not hesitate, but crossing the Champs Elysees, was one of the first to reach the barrier.

She waited there three hours! — three mortal hours!

At last the cortege appeared: we have described how and in what order it marched.

Andree saw the carriage pass. She uttered a cry of joy, for she saw Charny on the seat. A cry which seemed an echo to her own, had it not been a cry of grief, replied.

Andree hurried towards the side whence came the cry. A young girl was struggling in the arms of three or four persons who sought to assist her. She seemed the prey of violent despair.

Perhaps Andree would have bestowed more attention to the young girl if she had not heard muttered around her all possible imprecations against the three men who sat on the royal coach.

The wrath of the people would be expended on them. They would be the rams to replace the great royal sacrifice; they would be torn to pieces as soon as the carriage approached and halted.

Charny was one of the three men.

Andree resolved to find out what she should do in order to enter the garden of the Tuileries. She had to pass around the whole crowd to go to the bank of the river — that is to say, along the Quai de la Conference, and, if possible, reach that of the Tuileries.

After many attempts, and running the risk of being crushed twenty times, she passed the gate. Such a crowd, however, pressed round the place where the carriage was to stop, that she could not reach the front rank.

Andree thought that from the terrace above the water she would be able to see everything, though the distance would be too great to enable her to distinguish anything certainly and surely. It mattered not; she would see and hear as well as she could; and that was better than not seeing or hearing at all.

She then ascended the terrace on the bank of the river. She could see the seat of the coach, Charny and the two guardsmen.

Had she but known that at that very moment Charny pressed her letter to his bosom, and his thought offered her the last sigh which he would ever exhale!

At last the carriage paused amid cries, howlings, and clamours. Almost immediately there was a loud cry around the carriage, a great motion and tumult. Bayonets, pikes, and sabres were lifted: one might almost think a harvest of steel was rising after a storm. The three men were thrown from the sent, and disappeared as if they had been cast into a gulf. There was such an excitement in this multitude that its outer ranks were pushed back and broke against the wall sustaining the terrace.

Andree was wrapped in a veil of anguish; she saw and heard nothing. She cast herself panting, with outstretched arms and inarticulate sounds, amid the terrible concert composed of maledictions, cries, and blasphemies.

She could no longer render an account of what passed; the earth turned, the heavens became red, a murmur like that of the sea sounded in her ears. She then fell half fainting, knowing that she lived only by her sufferings.

An impression of freshness recalled her to consciousness. A woman applied a handkerchief dipped in the water of the Seine to her brow, while another applied a bottle of Seine water to her lips.

She remembered that the second woman was the one whom, like herself, she had seen dying at the barrier, and by the unknown bonds of grief seemed attached to her.

When she returned to herself, the first word was, “Are they dead?”

Compassion is quick-sighted. Those who surrounded Andree at once understood that she referred to the three men, the lives of whom had been so cruelly menaced.

“No!” said they, “they are saved!”

“All three?”

“Yes.”

“Oh Lord, be praised! where are they?”

“They are at the palace.”

“At the palace? Thanks.”

And lifting herself up, shaking her head with a wild eye, the young woman left by the gate on the bank to re-enter by the wicket of the Louvre.

She fancied that on that side the crowd would be less compact, and she was right. The Rue des Orties was almost empty. She crossed the corner of the Place du Carousel, and hurried to the gate. The porter knew the countess, for he had seen her go in and out during the two or three days after the return from Versailles. He had then seen her leave to return no more, on the day she had taken away Sebastian.

The keeper of the gate promised to obtain information for her. Passing through the interior corridors, he soon reached the centre of the castle. The three officers were saved, and M. de Charny had gone safely to his room. A quarter of an hour after, he left his room in the uniform of a naval officer, and had gone to the queen, where he still was.

Andree gave her purse to the man who had given her such news, and panting and overcome, asked for a glass of water.

Charny was saved!

She thanked the good man, and returned to Rue Coq Heron.

When there, she sank, not on a chair or a sofa, but on her prie-Dieu.

She did not pray with her month. There are moments when gratitude to God is so great that words fail us — then the arms, eyes, body and heart all rush to heaven.

She was plunged in that happy ecstasy when she heard the door open; she returned slowly, not understanding this earthly noise which came to seek her in the depth of her reverie.

Her femme de chambre was standing lost in obscurity. Beside the woman stood a shadow of undecided form, but to which her instinct at once gave a name.

“M. le Comte de Charny, “said the femme de chambre.

Andree wished to look up, but her strength failed her, and she sank again on the cushion, and, half turning round, rested her arm on the front of the prie-Dieu.

Andree made a sign which the woman understood. She got out of the doorway to suffer Charny to pass, and closed the door.

Charny and the countess were alone.

“They told me that you had come home, madame; am I indiscreet in having followed you so closely?”

“No,” said she, with a trembling voice, “no, sir, you are welcome. I was so uneasy, that I went out to ascertain what was going on.”

“You went out long since?”

“In the morning. I went first to the Barriere St. Martin, and to the Champs Elysees; there I saw — I saw — ”she hesitated — ”I saw the king and royal family; I saw you, and I was for the time comforted; I was afraid that you would be in danger in your descent from the carriage. I then went into the garden of the Tuileries. Oh! I thought I should die.”

“Yes,” said Charny, “the crowd was very great; you must have been almost crushed and stifled.”

“No,” said Andree, shaking her head, “it was not that! At last I inquired and learned that you were saved; I returned here, and you see, I was thanking God on my knees.”

“As you are on your knees, madame, I beg you will not rise until you have prayed God for my poor brother.”

“Isidor! Ah!” said Andree, “then it was him, poor young man.”

She let her head fall on her two hands.

Charny advanced, and looked with an expression of deep sadness and melancholy at this chaste and tearful creature. His heart was also filled with commiseration, mildness, and pity. He felt, also, something like a repressed desire to explain himself. Had not the queen said, or rather suffered to escape her, that she loved him?

Her prayer being finished, the countess turned around. “He is dead?” said she.

“Dead; yes, madame, like poor Georges, for the same cause, and discharging the same duty.”

“And amid the great grief caused by a brother’s death, you had yet time to think of me?” said Andree, in a voice so feeble that her words were scarcely intelligible.

"Madame," said he, "did you not charge my brother with a commission for me — with a letter?"

"Monsieur?" said Andree, shuddering.

"After the death of poor Isidor, his papers were given me, and among them your letter."

"You read it," said Andree, hiding her face in her hands; "ah!"

"Madame, I was to know its contents only in case I was wounded, and you see I am safe and sound."

"Then the letter?"

"Is here untouched, as you gave it to Isidor."

"Oh," murmured Andree, taking the letter, "you have acted well, or rather cruelly."

Charny opened his arms, and took the hand of Andree with both of his. Andree sought to withdraw hers. Charny insisted, and uttered a sigh almost of terror. Powerless, however, herself, she left her damp, humid hands in Charny's.

Then, embarrassed, not knowing how to extricate herself from the glance of Charny, which was fixed on her as she knelt at the prie-Dieu:

"Yes, I understand," said she, "and you have come to give me the letter."

"For that purpose, madame, and also for another; I have, countess, to beseech you to pardon me."

Andree's heart beat quickly; it was the first time he had preceded the word countess by madame.

He pronounced the whole phrase with an intonation of infinite sweetness.

"Pardon from me, count? — why? for what?"

"For the way I have acted towards you for six years."

Andree looked at him with great surprise. "Did I ever complain, monsieur?" she said.

"No, madame; because you are an angel."

Andree's eyes became suffused, in spite of herself, and the tears quivered on her lids.

"You weep, Andree?" said Charny.

"Ah!" said Andree, bursting into tears, "forgive me, sir, but I am not used to hear you speak thus."

She threw herself on a sofa, and hid her face. After a moment, she withdrew her hands, shook her head, and said, "Really, I am mad!"

She paused; while her hands were before her face, Charny had knelt before her.

“You at my feet? you on your knees to me?” said she.

“Did I not say, Andree, that I had come to beg your pardon?’’

“On your knees! — at my feet!” said she, as if she could not believe the impressions received from her own senses.

“Andree,” said Charny, “you withdrew your hands.”

He reached out his hand again to the young woman. She shrank back, however, with an expression of terror. “What means this?’’ said she.

Andree placed her hand on her heart, and uttered a ci-y. Then, rising as if a spring had been beneath her feet, and clasping her temples in her hands, she said: “He loves me! — he loves me!” repeated she; “it is impossible!”

“Say, Andree, that it is impossible for you to love me, but not for me to worship you.”

She looked down on Charny, as if to be sure that he spoke the truth; the great black eyes of the count told much more than his words had said. Andree, who might have doubted his words, could not doubt his looks.

“Ah,” murmured she, “my God! my God! was ever any one so unhappy as I am?”

“Andree,” said Charny, “tell me that you love me, or if not, say at least that you do not hate me.”

“I! hate you!” said Andree.

And then her calm limpid eyes suffered a double light to escape them.

“Oh, sir, you would not be unjust, to take for hatred the feeling you inspire me with.”

“If it be not hatred, Andree, if it be not love, what is it?”

“It is not love, for you will not suffer me to love you. Did you not hear me say just now that I was the most unfortunate being alive? And why is it not permitted you to love me? Did you not hear me say, just now, that I was the most unfortunate woman on earth?”

“And why may you not love me, Andree, when I love you with all my heart?”

“Ah! I would not have you do that, because I dare not say why,” said Andree, wringing her hands.

“But,” said Charny, speaking in a yet kinder tone, “if what you will not and cannot, another person has told me?”

Andree placed her hands on Charny’s shoulder.

“Ah!” said she, frightened.

“What if I knew?” said Charny.

“My God!”

“And if, on account of that very misfortune, I thought you more interesting — if that very misfortune made you more attractive, and induced me to tell you that I loved you’(“

“If so, sir, you would be the noblest and most interesting of men!”

“I love you, And rue,” said Charny. “I love you! I love you!”

“Oh!” said Andree, looking to heaven, “I did not know there could be such joy in the world!”

“But tell me, Andree, that you love me!” said Charny.

“No! no! I dare not! but read this letter, which was to be given you only at your death!”

She gave him the letter he had returned to her.

Andrew covered her face with her Lands, while Charny broke the seal of the letter, read the first lines, uttered a cry, and then clasped Andree to his heart.

“Since the day you saw me, for six years; how, oh! blessed creature! can I atone for the sufferings I have caused you?”

“My God!” said Andree, bending like a reed beneath the weight of such happiness, “if this be a dream, let me never awake, or die when I do!”

And now let us forget the happy, to return to those who suffer, who struggle, or who hate; perhaps their evil fate will forget them, as we have forgotten them.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

The Ground-floor of the Tuileries.

BEHIND A DOOR of a dark room opening on a dark corridor, on the ground-floor of the Tuileries, a woman stood with a key in her hand, apparently fearful lest her step should awaken an echo.

Did we not know this woman, it would be difficult for us to recognise her, for besides the obscurity which even in broad daylight pervades a corridor, it is now night, and, either intentionally or not, the wick of the only lamp has almost disappeared, and seems ready to become extinct.

The second room of the suite only is lighted, and the woman leans against the door nearest the corridor.

Who is that woman? Marie Antoinette.

Whom does she wait for? Barnave.

Proud child of Maria Theresa, who would have told you, on the day of your arrival in France, when you were crowned queen of France, that a time would come when, hidden behind the door of your chambermaid, you would await with anxiety the coming of a little Grenoble lawyer, after having caused Mirabeau to wait so long, and deigned to receive him only once.

Let us not, however, be mistaken, for merely from motives of policy did you receive Barnave; your suspended respiration, your nervous motions, your trembling hand cannot be referred to the heart. Pride alone is concerned.

We say pride, for in spite of the countless persecutions to which the king and queen have been subjected during their return, it is clear that life is sweet, and that the question is summed up hi these two words: “Will the fugitives lose the remnant of their power, or will what they retain be swept away?”

Barnave was coming to tell the queen all that had taken place on the 5th.

All seemed to anticipate some great event.

The king also had awaited Barnave in the second of Madame Cam pan’s rooms — and had been informed of Gilbert’s coming: and to hear more at ease, had retired to his room, leaving Barnave with the queen.

About nine, a step was heard in the passage, a voice exchanged a few words with the sentinel, and a young man appeared at the end of the corridor, in the uniform of a subaltern of the National Guard. It was Barnave.

The queen opened the door, and Barnave, after having very carefully looked behind it, glided into the room.

The door closed, and without a word having been exchanged, the sound of the turning of a key in the wards of the lock was heard.

The heart of each beat with equal violence, though from very different sentiments. The heart of the queen from the hope of vengeance, that of Barnave from the desire of love.

The queen hurried into the second room, in search, so to say, of light. When there, she sank on a chair.

Barnave paused at the door and looked round the room. He expected to find the king, who had been present at all the other interviews of the queen and himself.

The room was unoccupied except by the pair, and for the first time since his walk in the garden of the palace of the Bishop of Means, Barnave was tete-a-tete with Marie Antoinette.

“Monsieur Barnave,” said the queen, “I have been waiting two hours for you.”

“I wished, madame, to come at seven; then, however, it was too early, and I met M. Marat: how can such a man dare to approach your palace?”

“M. Marat,” said the queen, as if she looked into her memory. “Is he not a man who writes against us?”

“Who writes against everybody. His vipers’ eyes followed me until I disappeared behind the grating of the Feuillants.”

“I heard that to-day we won a victory in the Assembly?”

“Yes, madame, we won a victory in the Assembly, but were defeated in the Jacobins.”

“My God,’’ said the queen, “I do not understand this. I thought the Jacobins belonged to you, to Lameth and Dupont, and did what you wished ‘?’

Barnave shook his head sadly. “Once,” said he, “that was the case; a new spirit, however, now influences the Assembly.”

“Orleans?” asked the queen.

“Yes, madame, the present danger is from that source.”

“Danger? Have we not avoided it by to-day’s vote?”

“Understand me, madame — for to understand our danger it is necessary to avoid it. The vote of to-day declares ‘if a king retracts his oath, if he attacks or neglects to defend his people, he abdicates and becomes a simple citizen, liable to be accused for all that occurs after his abdication.’“

“Well,” said the queen, “the king will not retract his oath, he will not attack his people, and if it be attacked he will defend it.”

“Yes, madame, but this vote gives an opening to the Orleanists and revolutionists. The Assembly did not act against the king, but merely took preventive measures against a second desertion, leaving the first. Do you not know what Laclos, the agent of the duke, proposed this evening, at the Jacobins?”

“Something terrible! What else could be expected from the author of ‘Liaisons Dangereuses’?”

“He requested that a petition be circulated in Paris, and throughout France, in favour of deposing his majesty, and promised to obtain ten million signatures.”

“Ten million! Good God! are we so hated that ten million Frenchmen would reject us?”

“Madame, majorities are easily had.”

“Was the proposition successful?”

“It creates some discussion. Danton sustained it.”

“Danton? I thought he was our friend. Montmorin speaks of a place of avocat to the king, given or sold to this man.”

“Montmorin is deceived. If Danton belongs to anyone, it is to the Duke of Orleans.”

“And did Robespierre speak? He, I am told, is beginning to acquire great influence.”

“Yes; he did not approve of the petition, but of an address to the people of the provinces.”

“But Robespierre must be disposed of, as he begins to acquire such influence.”

“No one can ruin him, madame. He is for himself. He has some idea, some Utopia, a phantom, an ambition, perhaps.”

“What ambition can we not gratify? Does he wish to be rich?”

“No.”

“To be minister?”

“He may wish to be more.”

The queen looked at Barnave with terror.

“It ever seemed to me that the post of minister was the highest to which any of our subjects could pretend.”

“If Robespierre looks on the king as deposed, he no longer regards himself as a subject.”

“What does he desire, then?” asked the queen with terror.

“These are times, madame, when men aspire to new political titles in place of old ones, which have been effaced.”

“Oh, yes! I can understand that the Duke of Orleans aspires to be regent. His birth calls him to such a post: but a little country lawyer — ”

The queen forgot Barnave occupied exactly that position.

Barnave did not notice the slight, either because he did not remark it, or had the courage to pretend not to do so.

“Marius and Cromwell, madame, emerged from the people.”

“Marius and Cromwell! alas!” said the queen, “when I heard those names, in my childhood, I never fancied they would be so terrible in my ears. But let us return to the subject we have left. Robespierre, you say, opposed the scheme of Laclos, which Danton sustained.”

“Yes; but at that moment there came in a band of the every-day bathers of the Palais Royal, a troop of women controlled by Laclos, and the vote was not only passed, but at eleven to-morrow the Jacobins are to hear the petition at the Palais Royal, and will proceed to sign it on the altar of the country, thence to be sent to the provincial societies, to be signed by them.”

“And who is to draw up the petition?”

“Danton, Laclos, and Brissot.”

“Three enemies?”

“Yes, madame.”

‘‘But what are the Constitutionalists about?”

“Well! madame, they have resolved tomorrow to risk all for all.”

“They cannot act with the Jacobins.”

"Your wonderful comprehension of men and things, madame, shows you the state of affairs. Yes, guided by Dupont and Lameth, your friends will to-morrow leave your enemies. They will oppose the Feuillants to the Jacobins."

"What are the Feuillants? Excuse me, but so many new words are introduced into politics, that each demands a question."

"Madame, the Feuillants is a great building near the riding-school, and therefore near the Assembly, and which gives the name to the terrace of the Tuileries."

"Who compose the club?"

"Lafayette and the National Guards — Bailly and the municipality."

"Lafayette! Do you think you can rely on him?"

"I believe him sincerely devoted to the king."

"Devoted as the woodman is to the oak he fells. Bailly — go on! I have no cause of complaint against him. I will even say more, he gave me the name of the woman who informed of our intention to escape. But Lafayette?"

"Your majesty will have an opportunity of judging."

"Yes, it is true," said the queen, looking painfully back, "Versailles! Well! This club — what will it propose? — what will it do? — what is its power?"

"An enormous power, since, as I told you, it controls the National Guard, the municipality, and the majority of the Assembly which vote with us. What will remain to the Jacobins? Five or six deputies, perhaps Robespierre, Petion, Laclos, the Duke of Orleans, three heterogeneous elements, who will only be able to disturb the new members, and a herd of noisy barkers who will make a noise, but who have no influence."

"I trust so. But what will the Assembly do?"

"Reprove Bailly for his hesitation and delay. The consequence will be that Bailly, like a good clock, being well wound up, will keep time. But I see it is time for me to retire, yet it seems that I have much more to tell your majesty."

"I, M. Barnave, can do nothing more than tell you how grateful we and our friends are for your goodness in exposing yourself to so much danger for us."

"Madame, danger is a game by which I profit, whether beaten or successful in it, if the queen but reward me with a smile."

“Alas, sir!” said the queen, “I have forgotten how to smile, almost. But you have been so kind, that I will try to recall the time when I could, and promise that my first smile shall be yours.”

Barnave placed his hand on his heart and bowed. He then begged to retire.

“When shall I see you again?”

“To-morrow,” said Barnave, seeming to calculate, “is the petition, and the first vote on it. In the evening, madame, I will come to tell you what has taken place in the Champ de Mars.”

He left.

The queen returned sadly to the king, whom she found pensive as herself. Dr. Gilbert had left him, and given him the same information Barnave had imparted to the queen.

They had but to exchange a glance, to know that each saw how sombre things were.

The king had just written a letter. Without speaking, he gave it to the queen. It was one to Monsieur, authorising him to ask the intervention of Austria and Prussia.

“Monsieur,” said the queen, “has done me much harm, and would do more wrong; as he has the king’s confidence, however, he has mine.”

Taking a pen, she heroically wrote her name by the side of the king’s.

Let us now follow Dr. Gilbert to the Tuileries.

The queen expects him, and as he is not Barnave, she is not in Madame Campan’s room on the ground-floor, but in her own apartments — seated on a chair, with her head leaning on her hand.

She awaits Weber, whom she sent to the Champ de Mars upon hearing a discharge of musketry there, which caused her great uneasiness. The journey to Versailles had taught her much; until then the revolution had seemed to her only a manoeuvre of Pitt, and an intrigue of Orleans. She thought Paris immoral and under bad conduct, but used to say, “the honest country.” She had seen the country; it was more revolutionary than Paris.

The assembly was old, decrepit, and stupid in adhering to the promises Barnave bad made in its name. Besides, was it not about to die? The embraces of a dying thing are not healthy.

The queen waited for Weber most anxiously. The door — she looked anxiously to it; but instead of the broad Austrian figure of her foster-brother, she saw the austere face of Gilbert.

The queen did not like him, for his royalism was accompanied by such well defined constitutional theories, that she thought him a republican; she had, though, a certain respect for him. She would send for him neither in a physical nor moral crisis., but on this occasion she felt his influence.

As she saw him she trembled. They had not met since the return from Varennes.

“Is it you, doctor?” murmured she.

Gilbert bowed.

“Yes, madame, it is I. I knew that you expected Weber, and I can give you the news he would bring more precisely than he can. He was on the bank of the Seine, where there was no murder. I was on the other.”

“Murder? What has happened, sir?” asked the queen.

“A great misfortune. The court party has triumphed.”

“The court party has triumphed? Call you that a misfortune, Doctor Gilbert?”

“Yes; because it has triumphed by one of those fearful measures which destroy the conqueror, and which result to the benefit of the conquered.”

“What has happened?”

“Lafayette and Bailly have fired on the people, and consequently can no longer be of use to you.”

“Why?”

“They have lost their popularity.”

“What did the people on whom they fired?”

“Signed a petition for the deposing —

“Of whom?”

“Of the king.”

“And you think to fire en them was wrong?” asked the queen, with a sparkling eye.

“I think it would have been better to convince than to shoot them.”

“Of what would you convince them?”

“Of the king’s sincerity.”

“The king is sincere!”

“Excuse me, madame. Three days ago I left the king. All the evening had been passed in an effort to make him understand that his true enemies are his brothers, M. de Conde and the emigres. On my knees I besought him to break off all connection with them, to adopt the constitution frankly, except those articles which are impossible. The king was convinced — at least I thought so — and was good enough to promise to have done with the emigration; yet behind my back, madame, the king signed, and caused you to sign, a letter to Monsieur, in which he was authorised to say to the Emperor of Austria and the King of Prussia — ”

The queen blushed like a child taken flagrante delicto, and looked down. She, however, recovered herself soon.

“Have our enemies then spies in the king’s cabinet?”

“Yes, madame, and it is this which makes every error on the king’s part as dangerous as it is.”

“But the letter was written by the king’s own hand, and as soon as it was signed by me was sealed and given to the courier who was to bear it.”

“True, madame.”

“The letter was read.”

“The courier was arrested!”

“We are then surrounded by traitors?”

“All men are not like the Charnys.”

“What mean you?”

“Alas! madame, I wish to tell you one of the fatal auguries of the fall of kings is when they drive from them men they should attach to their fortunes by chains of adamant.”

“M. de Charny was not driven away; he left us. When kings become unfortunate, no tie suffices to retain men as friends.”

Gilbert looked at the queen, shook his head, and said:

“Do not let us thus calumniate Charny, madame, or the blood of his brothers will shout from the tomb that the Queen of France is ungrateful.”

“Monsieur!”

“Madame, you know I speak the truth; that in the time of real danger, M. de Charny will be where duty calls him — where the peril is greatest.”

The queen looked down. At last she said:

“You did not, I suppose, come to talk to me about M. de Charny?”

“No, madame, but ideas, like events, are sometimes so linked together by invisible threads, that those are exposed which should remain in the secret places of the heart. No, I came to speak to the queen; excuse me if I spoke to the woman — I am ready to repair my fault.”

“What have you, monsieur, to say to the queen?”

“I wished to show her the situation she, France and Europe occupy. Madame, in your hands is the future of the world. You play with it as with cards. You lost the first trick, October 6th; your courtiers think you have won the second. The next trick will be la belle, and the stakes, which are throne, liberty, perhaps life, all are lost.”

“And,” said the queen, haughtily, “think you, sir, such a fear would induce us to pause?”

“I know the king is brave: he is the descendant of Henry IV. I know the queen is heroic; she is the grand-daughter of Maria Theresa. I will, therefore, seek only to convince them; unfortunately, I fear I shall never be able to impart my ideas to either.”

“Why take such trouble then, sir, if you think it will be useless?”

“To do my duty, madame. Believe me, it is pleasant in stormy days like ours, at every effort, to say, ‘I did my duty.’“

The queen looked Gilbert in the face.

“Monsieur, first of all, do you think it yet possible to save the king?”

“I do.”

“And royalty?”

“I hope so.”

“Well, sir,” said the queen, with a sigh of intense sadness, “you are more happy than I, for I fear both are lost, and I contend only to fulfil my ideas of duty.”

“Yes, madame, I see, but because you wish a despotic monarchy, and an absolute king; like a miser who does not know, even when in sight of a shore which will restore him more than he loses, how to sacrifice a portion of his treasures, you sink yours, being borne down by their weight. Do as the prudent sailor does — throw the past aside, and strive for the future.”

“To do so would be to break with the kings of Europe.”

“True, but it is to make an alliance with the French people.”

“The French people cannot contend against a coalition.”

“Suppose you have at its head a king. With a king really attached to the constitution, the French people would conquer Europe.”

“An army of a million of men would be needed for that.”

“Europe, madame, is not to be conquered by a million of men, but by an idea. Plant on the Rhine and on the Alps two tri-coloured flags with the inscription, ‘War to tyrants, and liberty to peoples,’ and Europe is conquered!”

“Really, there are days when I am inclined to think the wisest become mad.”

"Madame, you do not know what France now is in the eyes of nations: France, with some individual crimes — some local excesses, which do not, however, sully her white robe, or her purity — virgin France is the goddess of liberty. The whole world loves her. The Pays Has, the Rhine, Italy with her millions, invoke a blessing on her. She has but to cross the frontier, and millions will fall down before her. France, with liberty in her hands, ceases to be a nation, but is immutable justice, eternal reason. Madame, madame, take advantage of the fact that it has not yet entered upon violence; for if you hesitate too long, those hands she extends to you will be turned against herself.

"Belgium, Germany, Italy, watch each of her movements with joy. Belgium says, 'Come!' Germany says, 'I follow!' Italy exclaims, 'Save me!' Far in the north, an unknown hand wrote in the cabinet of the great Gustavus, 'No war with France.' None of those whom you call to your aid are prepared for war. Two empires hate us deeply. When I say empires, I mean an empress — Catherine — and a minister — Pitt. They are powerless, though. At this moment Russia holds Turkey under one of her claws and Poland under the other. Two or three years will be required to digest one and devour the other. She urges the Germans on, and offers them France. She shames the inactivity of your brother Leopold, and points to the occupation of Holland by the king of Prussia, on account of a simple insult to his sister. 'Forward!' says Russia; but Leopold does not obey. Mr. Pitt is now swallowing India, and, like a boa-constrictor, suffers from laborious indigestion. If we wait, he will attack us, not by foreign, but by civil war. I am aware that you fear this Mr. Pitt dreadfully — that when you think of him, you grow pale. Would you strike him to the heart? Make France a republic with a king. What are you doing, though, madame? What does your friend, the Princess de Lamballe? She tells England, where she represents you, that the only ambition of France is to obtain the magna charta and that the revolution, guided by the king, is reacting. What says Pitt to these advances? That he will not suffer France to be a republic; that he will save the monarchy. All the caresses and persuasions of Madame de Lamballe have not induced him to promise that he will save the monarch, for he hates him — he hates the constitutional and philosophic Louis XVI., who contended with him for India, and wrested America from his grasp. Pitt desires only that history may make a pendant to Charles I."

"Monsieur," said the queen in terror, "who unfolds all this to you?"

“The men who tell me what the letters of your majesty contain!”

“Have we then no thought not theirs?”

“I have told you, madame, that the kings of Europe are wrapped in a net in which those who would resist strive in vain. Do you, madame, but advance the ideas you seek to repress, and that net will become your armour. Those who hate, will become your defenders, and the invisible poniards that menace you, will become sabres to strike your enemies.”

“But those whom you call our enemies are kings, and our brothers!”

“Madame, call the French your children, and see what the value of your diplomatic brethren is. Does not some fatal stain, too, seem to rest on all these kings? Let us begin with your brother Leopold. Is he not worn out at forty by the Tuscan harem he transported to Vienna? and does he not reanimate his expiring faculties by the murderous excitements he prepares for himself? Look at Frederic! look at Gustavus! — the one died, the other will die, without posterity; for in the eyes of all, the prince royal of Sweden is the son of Monk, and not of Gustavus. Look at the King of Portugal, with three hundred nuns! at the King of Saxony, with his three hundred and fifty bastards! Look at Catharine, the northern Pasiphae, whom a bull would not satisfy, and who has three armies of lovers! Madame! madame! do you not see that all these kings rush to suicidal ruin? You, instead of going with them, should advance to universal empire!”

“Why, then, M. Gilbert, do you not say this to the king?”

“I do! I do! He, though, like you, has his evil genii, which come to undo all that I accomplish.”

Then, with profound melancholy, he continued: “You had Mirabeau — you have Barnave; you will use me after them, and like them, and all will be said.”

“M. Gilbert,” said the queen, “I will seek the king, and return.”

Gilbert bowed. The queen passed through the door which led into the king’s room.

The doctor waited ten minutes, a quarter of an hour, half-an-hour, and at last a door on the other side opened.

An usher, having looked carefully around, advanced towards Gilbert, made a masonic sign, and handed him a letter. He left at once.

Gilbert opened the letter and read:

“You lose time, Gilbert, for at this moment the queen and king listen to M. de Breteuil, who brings them this advice from Vienna:

“To treat Barnave as they did Mirabeau, to gain time, to swear to the constitution, and execute it literally, so as to show that it cannot be executed. France will grow cold, and become tired. The French are volatile; some new whim will seize them, and the Revolution be forgotten.

“If liberty does not pass away, we will have gained a year or two, and will be ready for war.

“Leave, then, those two beings called in derision King and Queen of France, and hurry to the hospital of Gros Caillon. You will find there a dying man less fatally affected than they, for you may save him, while without doing them any good you may be borne down by their fall.”

The note had no signature, but Gilbert recognised Cagliostro’s hand.

At that moment, Madame de Campan entered from the door of the queen’s room and handed Gilbert this note:

“The king asks Dr. Gilbert to write down his political plan as he explained it to the queen.

“The queen, being detained by a matter of importance, regrets that she will not be able to return to M. Gilbert. It is useless then for him to wait longer.”

Gilbert thought for a moment and shook his head. “Mad, mad!” said he.

“Have you nothing to say to their majesties, monsieur?” said Madame de Campan.

Gilbert gave her the unsigned letter that he had just received, and said “Only this,” and left.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

No Master! No Mistress.

ON THE NEXT DAY, the Assembly received a report from the Maire of Paris and from the Commandant of the National Guard. All were anxious to be deceived, and the comedy was easily played.

The Assembly thanked them for an energy they had no idea they had employed, and congratulated them for a victory each deplored from the bottom of his heart, and thanked God from the bottom of its heart that at one blow both the insurrection and the insurgents had been crushed.

According to these felicitations, the revolution was terminated. It was just beginning.

In the meantime, the old Jacobins, judging the morrow by the yesterday, fancied they were attacked and pursued, and prepared to find pardon for their real importance in a feigned humility. Robespierre, yet alarmed at having been nominated as king, instead of Louis XVI., drew up an address in the name of the present and absent.

In this address he thanked the Assembly for its generous efforts, its wisdom, firmness, vigilance and impartial and incorruptible justice.

How was it possible for the Feuillants not to regain courage, and think themselves powerful, when they thus saw the humility of their adversaries?

For a time they thought themselves masters, not only of Paris, but of France.

Alas! the Feuillants did not understand the state of things. When they left the Jacobins, they had merely formed an assembly which was a double of the real one. The similitude between the two was such, that in the Feuillants, as in the chamber, none were admitted except on condition of paying taxes, being an active citizen, and eligible of voting for electors.

The people then had two chambers instead of one. This was not what it wanted. It wished a popular chamber, to be not the ally, but the enemy of the Assembly, which would not reconstruct, but destroy royalty.

The Feuillants did not then in any respect satisfy the public. The public, therefore, at once abandoned them.

By crossing the street, they lost all popularity.

In July, there were out of Paris four hundred societies. Three hundred corresponded with both Jacobins and Feuillants, one hundred with the Jacobins alone.

As the Feuillants grew weak, the Jacobins rebuilt themselves under the guidance of Robespierre — the most popular man of France.

What Cagliostro had prophesied to Gilbert about the little lawyer of Arras was accomplished.

Perhaps we shall also see it fulfilled in relation to the little Ajaccio Corsican.

The time for the termination of the National Assembly came. It struck slowly, it is true, like the life of an old man which slowly drops away.

Having taken three thousand votes, the Assembly had finished the revision of the constitution.

This constitution was an iron cage, in which, it knew not how, the king Lad been shut up. The fact that the bars were gilded did not make it the less a prison.

The royal will was powerless, for it had become a wheel which received instead of giving motion. All the power of resistance which Louis XVI. had, was his veto, which suspended for three years the execution of any decrees which did not please the king. The wheel then ceased to turn, and the whole machine was stopped.

This vis inertice being left aside, the royalty of Henri IV., of Louis XIV., all the power of action of those great monarchs, was gone.

The day on which the king was to swear to the constitution drew near England and the emigres wrote to him: “Die if it be needed; but do not degrade yourself by that oath.”

Leopold and Barnave said: “Swear, and let any one keep his oath who can.”

The king terminated the discussion by this phrase: “I declare that I do not see consistency or amity enough in the constitution; as an expression of opinions, however, I will consent to it, and experience shall decide.”

It remained to be determined where the constitution should be presented to the king — at the Tuileries or in the Assembly. The king said he would swear to the constitution where it was voted.

The appointed day was the 13th September.

The Assembly received this communication with unanimous applause. The king went thither.

In an outburst of enthusiasm, Lafayette proposed an amnesty to all who were accused of having favoured the king’s flight. It was acceded to by acclamation. The cloud which had darkened the prospects of Andree and Charny was dissipated.

A deputation of sixty members was appointed to thank the king for his letter.

The keeper of the seals hurried to tell the king of the vote.

On the same morning, the Assembly had abolished the order of the Saint Esprit, authorising the king alone to wear the cordon, which was the evidence of the high nobility.

The deputation found the king wearing only the star of St. Louis, and as Louis XVI. knew the effect which the absence of the cordon bleu would produce, he said:

“Gentlemen, this morning you abolished the order of the Saint Esprit, preserving it for me alone. As an order to me has no value except that it gives me the power of communication, henceforth I look on it as abolished for me also.”

The queen, dauphin, and Madame Royale, stood near the door. The queen was pale, and quivered in every nerve. Madame Royale, already proud, passionate, and violent, was haughty, and seemed not only to be aware of what passed, but to foresee future indignities. The dauphin was careless as a child, and looked like a human being inserted in a group of statuary.

The king, a few days before, had said to Montmorin: ‘-’I know I am lost; all that is now done for royalty is for my son.”

Louis XVI. replied, with apparent sincerity, to the reply of the deputation; when he had done, he turned to the dauphin and royal family: “My wife and children,” said he, “partake of my sentiments.”

Yes, they did; for when the deputation retired they drew together, and when they had looked after it anxiously, Marie Antoinette placed her white and marble-cold hand on the king’s arm, and said:

“These people will have no more kings. Stone by stone, they tear down the monarchy, and of those stones build a tomb for us.”

She was mistaken, poor woman. She was to have a paupers grave — not even a tomb. She was not, however, wrong about the attacks on the royal prerogative.

M. de Malouet was President of the Assembly, and was a royalist. He, however, thought it necessary to consult the Assembly as to the manner in which the oath should be administered, and whether it would be seated or stand during the ceremony.

“Seated,” was heard from all sides.

“And the king?” said De Malouet.

“Standing and uncovered,” said a voice.

The Assembly trembled.

This voice was isolated, but clear, strong, and vibrating. It seemed the voice of the people, uttered alone for greater distinctness. The president grew pale.

Who pronounced those words? Came they from the hall, or from the galleries? It mattered not; they were so powerful that he had to reply.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “there is no circumstance in which the Assembly of the nation does not recognise the king as its chief. If the king stand, I propose that the Assembly hear the oath in the same attitude.”

The voice then said:

“I propose an amendment which will suit everybody. Let us order that it be permitted to M. de Malouet, and those who prefer it, to hear the king kneeling; let us, though, maintain the proposition.” The proposition was lost.

On the next day the king was to swear.

The hall was full and the galleries crowded with spectators. At noon the king was announced.

He spoke erect, and the Assembly heard him standing. The discourse having been pronounced, the constitution was signed, and all sat down.

The president, Thouret, arose to pronounce his discourse, but after the two or three first phrases, seeing that the king did not rise, he resumed his seat. The galleries applauded, and the king evidently grew pale.

He took his handkerchief from his pocket, and wiped the perspiration from his brow. The queen, in a closed box, witnessed the ceremonial. She could bear no more, but arose, went out, closed the door, and returned to the Tuileries.

She returned without speaking a word even to her most intimate friends. Since Charny had gone her heart absorbed poison but did not emit it.

The king returned half an hour after.

“The queen?” asked he.

They told him where she was.

An usher wished to walk before him. He put him aside by a sign, and appeared at the door of the room where she was.

He was so pale, so overcome, that the perspiration hung in large drops on his brow. The queen, when she saw him, arose and shrieked:

“Sire!” said she, “what has happened?”

Without speaking, the king sank into an arm-chair and sobbed.

“Madame, madame!” at last said he, “why would you be present at this session? Why would you be a witness of my humiliation? Was it for this, under the pretext of being a queen, that I brought you to France?”

Such an explosion from Louis XVI. was the more painful because it was rare. The queen could not resist, and running to the king, threw herself at his feet. Just then the door opened, and she turned round. Madame Campan had come in.

The queen reached out her hand, and said:

“Leave us, Campan, leave us.”

Madame de Campan did not misconceive why the queen wished her to go. She retired respectfully, but standing behind the door, heard the unfortunate couple long exchanging phrases, broken by sobs. At last they calmed their sobs, and were silent. After half an hour, the door opened, and the queen herself called Madame de Campan.

“Campan,” said she, “give this letter to M. de Maiden. It is addressed to my brother Leopold. Let him set out at once for Vienna, which he must reach before the news of today. If he need two or three hundred louis, give them to him. I will return them.”

Madame de Campan took the letter and left. Two hours after M. de Maiden set out for Vienna.

The worst feature of all this was that they had to seem happy and joyous.

During the rest of the day a tremendous crowd filled the Tuileries; at night the whole city was illuminated. The king and queen were invited to show themselves in the Champs Elysees, escorted by the aides-decamp and chiefs of the Parisian army.

Scarcely had they appeared, than cries of “Vive le roi!” “Vive la reine!” arose. After an interval the cries ceased. It was where the carriage had halted.

“Do not believe them, madame,” said a stern looking man of the people, who stood by with folded arms. “Vive la nation!”

The carriage was slowly driven on, but the man who had spoken placed his hand on the carriage-door, and whenever the cry of “Vive le roi!” was heard, or “Vive la reine!” shouted “Vive la nation!”

The queen returned with her heart crushed by the constant and heavy blows which were lanced on her by anger and hatred.

Representations were organized at the different theatres, at the opera, the Comedie Francaise and the Italiens.

At the two first the king and queen were received with unanimous applause; but at the last the people had taken all the pit, and they saw that at that place things would not go on well, and that there would probably be trouble during the evening. The fear became certain when they saw who filled the pit.

Danton, Desmoulins, Legendre, Sauterre, occupied paramount seats. When the queen entered the box the galleries sought to applaud. The pit hissed..

The queen looked with terror at the gaping crater before her. She saw the flame of eyes flashing with hatred and menace.

“What have I done?” said she, seeking to hide her trouble with a smile. “Why do they detest me so violently?”

All at once her eye rested with horror on a man who leaned against one of the columns on which the boxes rested.

It was he of Taverney, of Sevres, of the garden of the Tuileries. It was he of the menacing words, and mysterious and terrible actions.

When her eyes had once rested on him, she could not look away. He exerted the fascination of the serpent over her.

The play began. The queen made an effort, and broke the charm, so as to be able to turn away and look at the stage.

“Evenements Imprevus” of Gretry were played.

All the efforts of Marie Antoinette to divert her attention, however, were vain, for the mysterious man used a magnetic power, more mighty than her will, and she could not but turn and look in one direction.

The stare — motionless, sardonic, and mocking. It was a painful impression, internal and fatal. It was to one awake what the nightmare is to one asleep.

A kind of electricity floated through the hall. These two influences could not but meet and crash, as in an August day two clouds come together, and hurl forth lightning, if not bolts. The occasion came.

Madame Dagazon, a charming woman, who gave her name to a peculiar line of business, had a duo to sing with the tenor, in which were these verses:

“Ah! comme ‘aime ma maitresse.”

The brave woman rushed to the front of the stage and opened her arms, reached them forth to the queen, sang the verses, and gave the fatal challenge.

The queen knew the tempest was come; terror-stricken, she turned aside, and her eyes fell involuntarily on the man who leaned against the column. She saw him make a sign, which the whole pit obeyed as an order.

With one voice it cried: “No master! no mistress! Liberty!”

To this the galleries and boxes replied:

“Vive le roi! Vive la reine! Long live our master and mistress!”

“No master! no mistress! Liberty! Liberty! Liberty!” howled the pit.

After this double declaration of war, the strife began.

The queen shrieked with terror, and closed her eyes. She could no longer look at this demon, who seemed the god of disorder, the spirit of destruction.

The officers of the National Guard then surrounded her, making a rampart of their bodies, and took her away.

In the corridor she heard the same cries.

“No master! no mistress! no king! no queen!”

They took her to her coach. She had fainted away.

She never went to the theatre again.

Sept. 30. The Constitutional Assembly declared that it had fulfilled its functions and closed its sessions.

The following is the result of its labours, during a session of two years and four months:

The complete disorganization of the monarchy.

The organization of popular power.

The destruction of all ecclesiastical and military privileges.

The issue of 100,000,000 of assignats.

The mortgage of the national property.
The recognition of freedom of worship.
Abolition of monastic vows.
Abolition of lettres de cachet.
Equality of right of office.
Suppression of internal custom-houses.
The establishment of the National Guard.
The adoption and ratification of the king.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

The Farewell of Barnave.

ON THE SECOND of October — that is to say, two days after the dissolution of the Assembly, at the hour of his usual rendezvous with the queen — Barnave was introduced, not on the ground-floor of Madame de Campan, but in the room called the great cabinet.

On the evening of the day when the king swore to the constitution, the sentinel and aide-de-camp of Lafayette disappeared from the interior of the castle, and if the king had not regained his power, he had at least regained his liberty.

This was small compensation for the humiliation of which he had complained so bitterly to the queen.

Without being received publicly, and with all the preparation of a public audience, Barnave was not on this occasion subjected to the precautions which hitherto his presence at the Tuileries had made necessary.

He was pale, and seemed very sad, and his sadness and pallor struck the queen.

She received him standing, though she knew the respect the young lawyer held her in, and that if she sat down, he would not do what the President Thouret had done when he saw that the king did not rise.

“Well, M. Barnave, arc you satisfied?” said she; “the king has followed your advice, and sworn to the constitution.”

“The queen is very kind,” said Barnave, bowing, “to say my advice. Had it not been both the advice of the Emperor Leopold and of Prince Kaunitz, perhaps your majesty had hesitated to accomplish this great act — the only one which, perhaps, can save the king, if the king — ”

Barnave paused.

“Can be saved. Is not that, monsieur, what you wished to say?” said the queen, meeting the doubt courageously, and we may add with the daring which was peculiar to her.

“God grant, madame, that I may never be the prophet of such misfortune. Yet, on the point of leaving Paris, of being separated for ever from the queen, I would neither have her majesty despair nor yield too much to illusion.”

“You leave Paris, M. Barnave? You leave us?”

“The Assembly, madame, to which I belonged is over, and as it has been determined that no member of the Assembly which established the constitution can belong to the Legislative Assembly, I have no longer a motive to remain in Paris.”

“Not even if you could be useful to us, M. Barnave?”

Barnave smiled sadly.

“Not even for that purpose, for from yesterday I shall be able to do you no good.”

“Sir,” said the queen, “you have too lowly an estimate of yourself.”

“Alas, madame, I have tried, and found myself weak. I have weighed, and found myself light. What was my power, which I wished the monarchy to use as a lever? My influence was my power over the Jacobins — it was a popularity laboriously, painfully acquired. The Assembly, though, is dissolved; the Jacobins are Feuillants; and I am afraid the latter made a great mistake when they left the old club; in fine, madame, popularity — ”

Barnave smiled more sadly than he had at first.

“In fine, my popularity is gone.”

The queen looked at Barnave, and a strange glance, like one of triumph, passed over her eyes.

“Well, sir,” said she, “you see that popularity may be lost.”

Barnave sighed.

The queen saw that she had committed one of those little cruelties which were habitual to her.

The fact was, Barnave had so completely lost his popularity, that he had been forced to bend his head to Robespierre; and to whom was the fault of this to be attributed? Was it not to that fatal monarchy, which dragged all that it touched into an abyss, into which it was itself hurrying, to that terrible destiny which made of Marie Antoinette, as it had done of Mary Stuart, an angel of death, devoting all those to whom she appeared to the tomb;’

Then, to a degree, she retraced her steps, and regretting that Barnave had replied by a simple sigh when he might have said, “For whom have I lost my popularity, unless for you?” she resumed:

“But, Monsieur Barnave, you will not go.”

“Certainly,” said Barnave, “if the queen bid me stay, I will, as the soldier remains under the flag, though he have permission to go and guard it in battle. But if I remain, madame, do you know what will happen? — instead of being weak, I shall be a traitor.”

“How so, sir?” said the queen, slightly wounded. “Explain; I do not understand.”

“Will the queen permit me to show her not only the situation in which she is, but in which she will be:”

“Do so, sir; I am accustomed to measure abysses, and had I been liable to vertigo, would long ago have cast myself headlong.”

“The queen, perhaps, looks on the Assembly which has just expired as an enemy.”

“Let us make a distinction, M. Barnave; in that Assembly I had friends. You will not, however, deny that the majority of the Assembly was hostile to royalty.”

“‘Madame,” said Barnave, “the Assembly never attacked either you or the king but once. That was when it declared that none of its members could belong to the Corps Legislative.”

“I do not understand this, sir. Explain it to me,” said the queen, with a doubt.

“Easily enough; it wrested a buckler from the arm of your friends.”

“And it seems to me almost a sword from the hand of my enemies.”

“Alas, madame, you are mistaken! The shaft was winged by Robespierre, and all that comes from him is terrible. He throw — you unknown into the first Assembly. You knew in the old one whom to contend with; in the Corps Legislative you have a new body to make. Observe, too, madame, in excluding all of us, Robespierre forced France into the alternative of receiving our superiors or our inferiors. There is nothing above us; the emigration has disorganised everything, and if there were a noblesse in France, the people would not select its representatives from it. The new assembly, then, will be democratic; there will be shades in that democracy, that is all.”

The queen’s countenance showed that she followed with attention what Barnave had said, and, beginning to understand, she began to be afraid.

"Listen," said Barnave; "I have seen these deputies, for during the last three or four days, they have begun to collect at Paris: I saw those from Bordeaux. They are almost men of unknown names, but who are anxious to be conspicuous — apart from Condorcet, Brissot, and some others, the oldest is scarcely thirty years old. Age is driven away by youth, which dethrones tradition. Away with white hairs: new France will be ruled by black."

"Think you, sir, we have more to fear from those who are about to come, than from those who have gone?"

"Yes, madame; the new-comers have instructions to make war on nobles and on priests. They say nothing as yet about the king, but time will show. If he be content with the executive, however, perhaps all will be pardoned that has passed."

"How!" said the queen, "pardon the past? I presume the king has the right to pardon."

"That is exactly what people will never understand again — especially the people who are coming, madame, and you will have evidence of it. They will not even keep up the hypocritical pretences of those who are going. They, like one of my confreres, Vergniaud, a deputy from La Gironde, will look on the king as an enemy."

"An enemy!" said the queen in amazement.

"Yes, madame," repeated Barnave, "an enemy: that is to say, the voluntary or involuntary centre of all our internal and external enemies. Alas! yes; it must he owned that the new-comers are not altogether wrong, who believe they have discovered a truth, and who utter aloud what your bitterest adversaries dare not whisper."

"Enemy?" repeated the queen, "the king the enemy of his people? That is a thing, M. Barnave, you not only never can convince me of, but you cannot make me understand."

"Yet it is true, madame; he is an enemy by nature, and by temperament: yet three days ago he accepted the constitution. Did be not?"

"Yes; well?"

"Well, when he returned hither, the king had almost died of anger, and this evening he wrote to the emperor."

"But how, think you, can we bear such humilities?"

"Ah, madame, he is an enemy, and fatally an enemy. He is a voluntary enemy, for, educated by M. de la Vauguyon, the general of the Jesuitical party, the heart of the king is in the hands of the priests, who are the enemies of the nation; an involuntary enemy, because he is the compulsory chief of the reaction. Suppose, even, that he remains in Paris: he is at Coblentz with the emigration, in La Vendee with the priests, in Prussia with his allies Leopold and Frederic. The king does nothing. I admit, madame," said Barnave, sadly, "that he does nothing. Not being able to use him, however, they use his name. In the cottage, in the pulpit, in the castle, he is the poor, good king, the holy king; so that a terrible revolt to the reign of revolution is threatened. Madame, it is the revolt of pity!"

"Indeed, Monsieur Barnave, do you tell me these things? and were you not the first to pity us?"

"Yes, madame, yes, I did and do pity you sincerely. There is, however, a difference between me and the persons of whom I speak. They, by their pity, destroy; I would save you!"

"But, sir, among those, as you say, who come to wage war on, and to destroy us, is there aught predetermined on?"

"No, madame, and I have, as yet, only heard of vague expressions. The suppression of the title of 'majesty,' in the first session; instead of a throne, an arm chair, on the seat of the president."

"See you in that anything worse than M. Thouret taking his seat because the king did?"

"It is, at least, one step forward, instead of in the rear. This then, madame, is alarming; Lafayette and Bailly will be dismissed."

"Well," said the queen, "I do not regret them."

"You are wrong, madame; they are both your friends."

The queen smiled bitterly.

"Your friends, madame-'; perhaps your best friends. Be careful of them. If they have preserved any popularity, be not slow to use it; for it will pass away, madame, as mine has."

"And beyond all that, monsieur, you show me ruin. You conduct me to the very crater, make me measure its depths, but do not tell me how to avoid it."

For a moment Barnave was silent.

Then, uttering a sigh:

"Madame," said he, "why were you arrested at Montmedy?"

"Good," said the queen, "M. Barnave approves of my flight to Varennes."

"I do not, madame; for the situation in which you are now is the natural consequence of it. As its results, though, have been such, I am sorry that it did not succeed."

"Then to-day, M. Barnave, a member of the National Assembly, delegate of that Assembly with Petion and Latour-Maubourg, to bring back the king and queen to Paris, deplores that they are not in a foreign land."

"Let us understand each other, madame. He who deplores that, is not a member of the Assembly, not the colleague of Petion and of Latour-Maubourg, but poor Barnave, your humble servant, ready to sacrifice his life for you, and life is all that he possesses."

"Thanks, sir!" said the queen; "the accent in which you speak proves that you would keep your word. I hope, though, such devotion never will be necessary!"

"So much the worse for me, madame," said Barnave.

"How? so much the worse?"

"Yes, fall, or fall. I had rather have died fighting, as I see I shall, than in the depths of Dauphiny, where I shall be useless to you, but yet will make vows and prayers for the most beautiful woman that ever lived — for the most tender and devoted mother — for the queen. The same faults which have created the past will prepare the future. You will rely on an assistance which will never come, or which will come too late. The Jacobins will seize on the power of the Legislative Assembly; your friends will leave France to avoid persecution, and those who remain will be arrested and imprisoned. I shall be one of them, for I shall not fly. I shall be judged — condemned. Perhaps my death will be useless to you, or even unknown; should you hear of it, I shall have been of little use to you, and you will have forgotten the few hours during which I hoped to serve you."

"M. Barnave," said the queen, with great dignity, "I am ignorant what fate is in store for the king and myself. All I know is, that the names of those who have served us are scrupulously inscribed in my memory, and that neither their good nor ill fortune will be a matter of indifference to us. What, though, M. Barnave, can we do for you?"

"You, madame, personally, can do much. You can show that I have not been entirely without value to you."

"What can I do thus?"

Barnave knelt.

"Give me, madame, your hand to kiss!"

A tear rushed to Marie Antoinette’s dry eyelids. She gave the young man her white, cold hand, which had been kissed by the lips of the two most eloquent men of the Assembly, Mirabeau and Barnave.

Barnave merely touched it. The poor madman was afraid that if he kissed, he would never be able to tear his lips away.

Then, rising, he said:

“Madame, I have not pride enough to tell you, ‘The monarchy is safe;’ but I say, if it be lost, one who will never forget this kindness will fall with it!”

He bowed and withdrew.

Marie Antoinette looked after him with a sigh, and when the door was closed, said:

“Poor hollow nut! it needed but a little time to reduce you to a mere shell!”

THE END

CATHERINE BLUM

Translated by Alfred Allinson

First published in 1854, this novel is located in Villers-Cotterêts, Dumas' home town. Set in 1829, the principal characters are foresters and the wife and niece of one of the head keepers. Dumas had no collaborator for this work ; although it was inspired by German dramatist August Wilhelm Iffland's *Die Jaeger*.

The novel introduces William Watrin, the chief game warden of the Duke of Orleans, and Marianne, who have a son, Bernard. However, they also raise Catherine, daughter of Rose Watrin, sister of William, and a wounded German prisoner, who was rescued by the family in 1808. Bernard and Catherine love each other, first as a brother and sister, then as lovers. But a jealous rival plots to wreck the proposed marriage…

AUJOURD'HUI
DONNONS NOTRE SANG

The main square in Villers-Cotterêts, with a statue of Dumas

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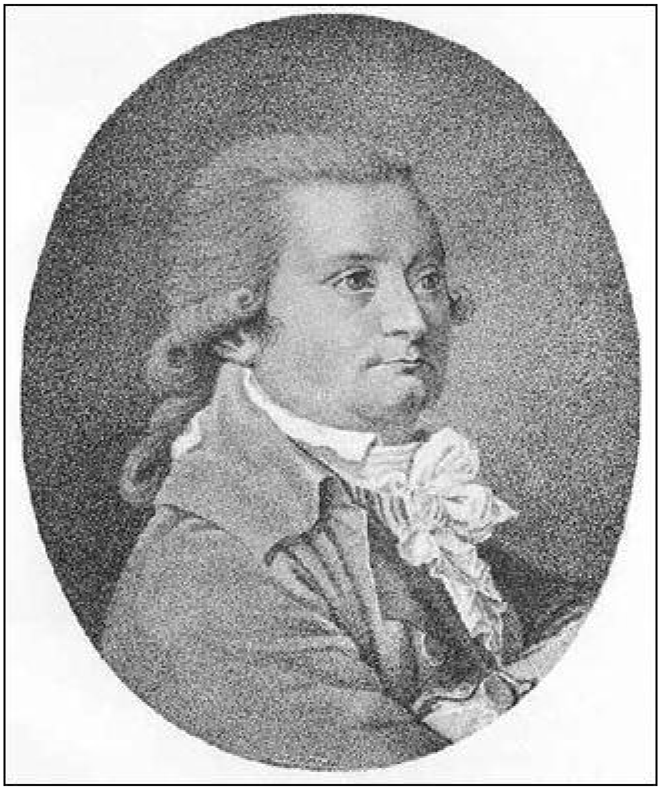

August Wilhelm Iffland, whose play ‘Die Jäger’ inspired this novel

INTRODUCTION.

ALEXANDRE DUMAS is never more charming than when, having some simple story to tell, for which it suits his purpose to find a setting amongst the rustic scenes of his youth, he takes his readers by the hand, and chatting at his ease, leisurely leads them in fancy over the fields, across the stream, and into the woods of Villers-Cotterets. He does not merely see and describe, he actually reconstructs and presents to the reader as vividly as it first appeared to him any scene or incident which attracted him. And what attracted Dumas was frequently that which, if all saw, few noted or appreciated. Wandering with keen curiosity about the village on the morning of a fête long before there was any chance of the happening of the first event of the day, he drinks in every sight and sound, and a quarter of a century afterwards is able to recount how "the fiddlers swept and trod smooth the appointed dancing-place, and how the plaster dolls intended to be broken by the cross-bow bolts were set in line on their stakes, and the rabbits waited dolefully, frightened, and with ears dropped on their necks, for the hour when a ring cunningly threaded on a stake would decide their fate, and send them from the dealer's basket into the saucepan of the happy winner." Passages of this nature abound in "Catherine Blum" — a fresh and pleasing story, the merit of which has been testified to by Mr. Swinburne — and give it a truth and value which are inestimable when the object of the writer is to *convince.*

As the owner of a fine garden when surveying its treasures remembers the grafting and transplanting that make them his own, so Alexandre Dumas, when in old age his mind ranged over the thousand volumes which bore his name, recalled that for one he was much indebted to a friend who had furnished its plot; that for another his son had suggested one of the chief characters; that a third had grown from a few words spoken by an actor in a play which he had witnessed and which had ignominiously failed. A stranger visiting Dumas' garden might well be excused for failing to discriminate between the native and imported plants. All are so well grown or so cunningly grafted that they pass for Dumas' own. Carefully examined, however, some would be found to exhale a foreign perfume. "Catherine

Blum “has long passed as one of Dumas’ own flowers, yet the parent stem grew in Germany. Let as see how it came to be transplanted.

One morning at Brussels, in the little house occupied by him in the Boulevard Waterloo, Dumas heard himself asked for and went out. A young man of remarkable appearance was endeavouring to gain an audience. From him the author of “Monte Cristo “presently heard a most lamentable history. Suffice it to say that the stranger was, or averred that he was, the Comte Max de Goritz, a political exile of noble birth, and at the last stage of destitution. Being acquainted with several languages, the idea had occurred to him to offer his services to Dumas. “All the world,” said he, addressing our author in a final appeal, “knows that you have an excellent heart. If you refuse to employ me, or if you cannot do so, it only remains for me to blow out my brains. To-morrow morning all the Belgian papers will announce that there has been another suicide.”

“To-morrow, my dear sir,” replied Dumas, “all the Belgian papers will announce that you are my translator. Shake hands! From to-day I give you 350 francs a month.”

What did the exile do in return? For one thing he ransacked the plays of the German comedian Iffland, and translating his *Die Jaeger,* placed it before the Master. It so happened that Alexandre, gratified with the success of his pastoral novel “Conscience l’Innocent,” was meditating the composition of another story in the same *genre.*

It would have been easy enough to invent a plot, but here in the exile’s translation lay one pat to his hand. Dumas, at once the laziest and most industrious of men, laid hold of it, and commenced the composition of “Catherine Blum.” Yes, this tale, apparently so French, is in its framework the *Jaeger* of the German dramatist Iffland. In its framework only! for none of Dumas’ books are more characteristic of him.

As for the translator, around whom hung an impenetrable mystery, he continued to flourish more or less well on his 350 francs a month. When Dumas at the end of a year or two returned to Paris, the industrious assimilator of German plays travelled with him to assist at the birth of and to feed the journal *Le Mousquetaire.* Somewhat, it would appear, to the disgust of his fellow contributors, his name in all its splendour figured on the huge posters which decorated the walls of the city. One fine morning, as if by enchantment, the Count disappeared. The same day his benefactor was invited by the police to inspect a formidable *dossier*, to which these words served as a summary: —

"The man calling himself Comte Max de Goritz is a German Jew, whose real name is Mayer. He lives with a prostitute, who gives herself out as the daughter of a certain Sieur de Richmont, one of the impostors who pretended to be Louis XVII. Mayer is a criminal of the most dangerous class, his crimes ranging from petty larceny to housebreaking, and not stopping short of murder. He is wanted by the police of Vienna."

Dumas was astounded. Then recovering himself, —

"*Ma foi!* gentlemen," he said, "this man presented himself one day at my house in Brussels, in the character of a political exile. He seemed clever, energetic, and reliable, and I employed him without a suspicion that at bottom he was a scoundrel (*bandit)* or worse. Just before you came I was told that he had run away from Paris, and I fear you will have difficulty in catching him as long as he has a leg left."

"Catherine Blum "was published in 1854 by Cadot (Paris). Some four years later, Dumas being hard pressed for a play, wanted at a few days' notice, bethought himself of *Die Jaeger* and "Catherine Blum," and put a version of them on the stage under the title *Les Forestiers*. The drama was played with very great success, and has been frequently revived.

One day, in 1850, Dumas found himself the guest of Lord and Lady Holland at Holland House. At night he was conducted to the poets' room — so called from its having at different times been occupied by Samuel Rogers, Lord Byron, and other bards; — here, with his head on the pillow, he read Thomas Moore's "Life of Byron." Dawn filtered into the chamber, the birds awoke and sang; by and by it was broad daylight, but Alexandre, fascinated, still read on. When at length he rose, instead of leaving for Paris as he had intended to do, he journeyed to Newstead Abbey. Byron, of whose works he was a great admirer, now absorbed his thoughts, and a company of actors in Paris in need of his assistance at the rehearsals of a new play expected him in vain.

Moore's quotation from the account of the wreck of the *Juno* affected Dumas as deeply as it had affected Byron. He greatly desired to read the whole narrative, and when, some two years later, he discovered it in Sir G. Dalzell's "Shipwrecks and Disasters at Sea "(1812),. he could not resist the pleasure of making it known in France by recasting and publishing it.

Finding that this shipwreck, now somewhat inaccessible in English, is very little known, and believing that its perusal will produce no less effect upon our readers than it produced upon the authors of “Don Juan “and of “Antony,” we have had it translated from the Frenchman’s excellent version, and now in our turn present it.

“The Scourge of Naples “with which the present volume concludes, is a brilliant bit of journalism produced, or rather fired off, by Dumas from his Neapolitan home at a time when prolonged residence there had made him familiar not only with its diminishing oysters of Lake Fusaro, but with its increasing army of mendicants. His residence at Naples would be considered by every beggar as a real piece of good fortune, while his remarkable appearance, accentuated by his careless attire (a suit of white canvas), would ensure his being sighted from afar by all — except such as were really blind beggars. Add to this his habit of careless giving, and it is plain that Dumas and the mendicants had very much to say to one another.

Dumas’ treatment of his painful subject is entirely characteristic. He dashes at it, and with a few strokes of his pen places before the reader a vivid impressionist sketch of Naples which makes him see, feel, and hear the colour, atmosphere, and sounds of that city. One has to inhale some of the fog of Bloomsbury or of the vapours of the Underground Railway, or some other distinctive local odour, to feel at home and not at Naples while reading him. Observe, too, that Dumas lays the whole blame of the situation he describes upon the mendicants themselves. He depicts the visitor throwing one silver coin among a group of them to gratify his own vanity; then throwing another when the group has become a struggling crowd; and he evidently considers that the beggars are blameworthy for the disturbance, and not the visitor. Nor does it occur to him to inquire into the real origin of so much misery, or to suggest a remedy for it. It is enough for him to note its existence, and to describe it in such a way that no one who reads is likely to forget it. A whole treatise on mendicancy might be less convincing.

R. S. G.

CATHERINE BLUM

CHAPTER I.

PRELIMINARY.

YOU were telling me only yesterday, my boy: “Father, you don’t write enough books like ‘Conscience.’ “To which I replied: “Give your orders; you know quite well I do anything you want. Tell me the sort of book you wish, and you shall have it.”

Then you went on: “Well, I should like one of those tales of your boyhood, one of those little dramas of country life, whose scene is laid under the shadow of the giant trees of that noble Forest that made you a dreamer by its mystery and a poet by its charm of melancholy, one of those stories you sometimes tell at the fireside at home when you are fain of a respite from the long, romantic epics you weave for the world’s delight, — trifles you do not deem worthy of pen and ink. I love your native countryside, father, though I have never been there in the body, though I have only seen it from afar as through the mist of your reminiscences, as we behold a landscape through the vapours of a dream.”

Yes! I love the home of my fathers too, I love the village so dear to us all. I say *village,* for indeed it is no more, though it calls itself a market town. I love it so, I could bore you to extinction by mere dint of talking of it, — well not perhaps you, my own familiar friends, but other people to a certainty, — people less keenly interested in the subject. Villers-Cotterets is to me what Colmar is to my good friend Rusconi. For him Colmar is the centre of the world, the axis of the globe, the hub of the universe! It was at Colmar he met so many celebrities. Carrel! “Where did you first meet Carrel, Rusconi? “ — ” I conspired with him at Colmar, in 1821.” Talma! “When did you first meet Talma, Rusconi? “ — ” I saw him play at Colmar, in 1816.” Napoleon! “Where did you first meet Napoleon, Rusconi? “ — ” I saw him pass through Colmar, in 1808.” Well, everything dates for me from Villers-Cotterets just as everything dates for Rusconi from Colmar.

One advantage (or disadvantage) Rusconi has over me, — he was not born at Colmar; he was born at Mantua, the ducal town, the birthplace of Virgil and Sordello, whereas I was born at Villers-Cotterets.

So you see, my dear lad, I don’t need much pressing to talk about my beloved little town, whose white houses grouped together in the hollow of the horse-shoe formed by its huge forest look like birds in *A* nest, over which the old Church with its long-necked steeple keeps watch and ward like a mother. You have but to take from my lips the seal that imprisons and confines my thoughts and words, for thoughts and words to escape alive and sparkling like the foam from the flagon of beer that makes us start and cry and jump at our exiles’ table here, like the froth of champagne that wins a smile from us and brings us closer together as we recall the sunshine of our far-off home.

After all, isn’t it there that I really lived, since it is there that I waited for life to begin? We live by hope more than by reality. What is it colours our horizon with gold and azure? Alas, my boy, you will know one day; it is Hope.

There I was born; there I uttered my first cry of pain; there under my mother’s eye my first smile opened out like a flower on my face; there I ran, a yellow-haired boy with rosy cheeks, after those youthful illusions that so easily escape us, and if caught, leave behind on our fingers nothing but a pinch of velvety dust — butterflies their name. Alas! what I am going to say is both true and strange. It is only when we are young that we see beautiful butterflies; later come the wasps which sting; then the bats which foretell death.

The three periods of life can be summed up thus: youth, manhood, old age, — butterflies, wasps, bats!

There my father died. I was at the age when one does not know what death is — when one hardly knows what a father means.

Thither I brought my dead mother; there, in that charming graveyard, more like a children’s flower-decked playing-ground than a burial place, she sleeps side by side with the war-worn hero of the Pyramids, the General who fought so well in Egypt. A tombstone that the hand of a woman who loved them both laid there covers them.

To right and left lie the grandparents, the father and the mother of my mother; aunts too whose names I remember, but whose faces I only see athwart the grey veil of many years.

It is there I shall go and sleep in my turn — but as late as possible, please God, for I shall be very loth to leave you, my darling lad.

On that day I shall find beside the mother who suckled me, the loving nurse who rocked me in my cradle, — dear good mother Zine, whom I speak of in my “Memoirs,” and near whose bed the spirit of my father came and bade me adieu.

How should I not love to speak of that immense cradle of greenery so full of fond memories? I knew everything there, not only the townsfolk, not only the stones and the houses, but the very trees of the forest. As one by one those reminiscences of my youth disappeared, I have wept for them. 0! good white heads of the little town, dear Abbé Grégoire, good Captain Fontaine, worthy old Niguet, dear cousin Deviolaine, I have sometimes tried to make you live again; but you only startled me, poor ghosts, I found you so pale and dumb in spite of my gentle and kindly summons. I have wept for you, ye sombre stones of the cloister of St. Rémy, ye colossal gates, ye gigantic staircases, ye narrow cells, ye cyclopean kitchens, that I have seen falling layer by layer, until the pick and shovel laid bare amid the ruins your foundations, broad as the base of a city wall, your cellars, gaping wide as abysmal chasms! I have wept for you more especially, ye fine trees of the park, ye giants of the forest, ye families of rugged oaks, beeches with smooth silvery bark, trembling poplars and chestnuts with your pyramids of blossoms, round which there hummed in May and June swarms of bees, their brown bodies swollen with honey, and their feet all clogged with wax. You all fell suddenly in a few months, you who had so many years still to live, so many generations to shelter under your shade, so many loves to behold passing mysteriously and noiselessly over the mossy carpet which the ages had stretched at your feet! You had known François I. and Madame d’Etampes, Henri II. and Diane de Poitiers, Henri IV. and Gabrielle d’Estrelles; you spoke of those illustrious dead by the letters graven on your bark; you had hoped that those thrice enlaced crescents, those initials amorously twined with one another, those crowns of laurels and roses, would protect you from a commonplace death and from that mercantile God’s acre called a timber-yard. Alas, you were mistaken, beautiful trees! One day you heard the resounding ring of the axe and the dull hiss of the saw... destruction was come upon you... death cried aloud to you: “Your hour has come, your pride is laid in the dust!”

And I have seen you lying on the ground, stripped from roots to topmost twig, your branches scattered round you; and it seemed to me that I had grown five thousand years younger and was walking over that immense battle-field which spreads between Pelion and Ossa, and that I was beholding stretched at my feet those three-headed hundred-armed Titans who strove to scale Olympus and whom Jupiter consumed with his lightning.

If ever you take a walk with me, leaning on my arm, dear child, in the midst of those mighty woods, if you cross through those scattered villages, if you sit down on those moss-covered stones, if you bow your head over those tombs, all will seem to you at first silent and dumb; but I will teach you the language of all those old friends of my youth, and then you will understand how sweet a murmur they make in my ear alive or dead.

We will begin from the East — that's the simplest way. For you the sun of life has hardly risen; its first rays are still making your blue eyes blink, your blue eyes that reflect the heavens. Then moving towards the South a little, we will go and see the charming Château of Villers-Hellon where I played as a child, seeking amidst the tree-clumps and through the green hedges those living flowers our games scattered hither and thither and which were called Louise, Augustine, Caroline, Henriette and Hermine. Alas, to-day two or three of these fair supple stalks have been broken by the wind of death; the others are mothers and some are grandmothers. All this was forty years ago, dear boy, and it is not till twenty long years hence you will know what forty means.

Continuing our course we go through Lorcy. Do you see that steep slope sprinkled with apple-trees which shoots its base into yonder pond with its green water and green weeds. One day three young fellows who had been run away with in a shay by a horse, gone imbecile or crazy (it was never precisely known which) were rolling down like an avalanche headlong into these abysmal depths! By a lucky chance one of the wheels caught against an apple-tree, which was almost torn up by the roots! Two of the three men were flung over the horse's head! The other, like Absalom, remained hanging to a branch — not by his hair, although his hair would have done very well for the purpose — but by his hand! The two young fellows who were thrown over the horse's head were my cousins Hippolyte Leury, of whom you have heard me speak sometimes, and the other my friend Adolphe de Leuven, of whom you are always hearing me speak; the third was myself.

What would have happened to my life and consequently to yours, my poor child, if that apple-tree had not been there just in the right place to stop us?

About half a league further on as we travel from east to south we should come upon a large farm-house. Ah, there it is, its main-building covered with red tiles and its outhouses with thatch. Its name is Vouty.

There still lives, at least I hope so (though he must be more than eighty years old nowadays), a man who has been to my moral life — if I may so put it — what that good apple-tree which I spoke of a moment ago and which stopped our shay, was to my material life. Have a look through my “Memoirs “and you will find his name; it is that old friend of my father’s who came into our house one day on his return from shooting with one half of his left hand blown away by the bursting of his gun. When the wild desire seized upon me to leave Villers-Cotterets and to come to Paris, instead of putting leading-strings to my shoulders and fetters round my legs, he said to me: “Go! Fate is urging you,” and he gave me that famous letter of introduction to General Foy which opened to me the general’s house and the offices of the Duc d’Orléans.

We shall give this dear old man a hasty embrace; for we owe him much. Then we shall continue our journey along a broad road which will take us to the top of a big hill.

From this hill-top behold yonder valley and river and town. They are the valley and river of Ourcq; the town La Ferté-Milon, where Racine was born.

We need not go down the hill and enter the town; nobody could show us the house which was inhabited by the rival of Corneille, the ungrateful friend of Molière, the poet who was sent away in disgrace by Louis XIV.

His works are in every library; his statue — the work of our great sculptor David — stands in the public square; but his house is nowhere — or rather the whole town that owes its fame to him is his house.

At any rate we know that Racine was born at La Ferté-Milon, whereas we do not know where Homer was born.

And now we are walking from the south to the west. That pretty village which seems to have just run out of the forest to come and warm itself in the sunshine is Boursonne. Do you remember “La Comtesse de Charny,” one of my books that you like the best, dear lad? Well then, the name of Boursonne must be familiar to you. Yonder little Château inhabited by my old friend Hutin is Widow Charny’s; thence the young gallant used to issue secretly at night leaning over the neck of his English horse, and in a few minutes he was on the other side of the forest, under the shade cast by yonder poplars. Thence he could see Catherine’s window open and shut. One night he came back streaming with blood; one of old Billot’s balls had gone through his arm; another had ripped up his side. Finally one day he went out never to return. He was going to escort the king to Montmédy and was left lying on the public square of Varennes opposite the house of Sausse the grocer.

We have now crossed the forest from south to west, passing through Plessy-au-Bois, La Chapelle-aux-Auvergnats and Coyolles; a few steps more and we are at the top of the hill of Vauciennes.

It was a hundred yards behind where we stand that one day, or rather one night, on my way back from Crépy, I found the dead body of a lad of sixteen. I have related this grim and mysterious drama in my “Memoirs.” The windmill which rises on the left of the road and which turns its great wings so slowly and so sadly, it alone — and God — knows how things happened there. Both remained voiceless. Man’s justice struck at haphazard. Fortunately the murderer confessed at his death that it had struck true.

The watershed which we are going to follow and which commands that great plain on our right, and that beautiful valley on our left, is the scene of my hunting exploits. There I made my first essay in the Nimrod and Levaillant line. (I hear these are the two greatest huntsmen of ancient and modern times.) On my right was the realm of hares, partridges and quails; on my left that of wild duck, teal and snipe. Do you see that place which is greener than the rest and which looks like a delightful bit of green sward painted by Watteau? It is a peat-bog where I came very near to losing my life.

I was gently and gradually sinking down into it, when fortunately I bethought me of slipping my gun between my legs; the butt on one side, the muzzle on the other, met rather solider ground than that wherein I was beginning to sink; I stopped myself in this vertical plunge which could not have failed to take me right to the regions below. I shouted. The miller of the mill you see yonder, standing beside the sluice of that great pond, ran towards me on hearing my cries. He flung me the leash of his dog; I caught hold of it. I was saved. As for my gun, of which I was very fond, and which killed at a long distance, I had but to squeeze my legs together, and it was saved along with me — which was a good thing, as I was not rich enough to have bought another.

Let us continue our journey. We are now going from the West towards the North. That ruin yonder, of which a fragment stands up like the Keep of Vincennes, is the tower of Vez, the only relic of an ancient feudal manor long since vanished and gone by. The tower is the spectre in granite of passed ages; it belongs to my friend Paillet. You remember that kindly head clerk who used to accompany me on shooting expeditions from Crépy to Paris, and whose horse, whenever we saw a *garde champêtre* or private individual, had the kindly habit of carrying off the sportsman, his gun, his hares, his partridges and his quails, whilst the other shooter like an inoffensive tourist walked about with his hands in his pockets, admiring the landscape and studying botany.

Yonder country house is the *Château des Fossés.* There my earliest sensations made themselves known; from there my earliest recollections date. It was at *Les Fossés* that I beheld my father coming out of the water from which, with the help of Hippolyte — that intelligent blackamoor who for fear of frost used to fling away the flowers and bring in the flowerpots under shelter — he had just dragged three drowning lads. The one of the three whom my father had saved was called Dupuy; that is the only name I remember. Hippolyte, an excellent swimmer, had saved the two others. There lived Moquet the *garde champêtre* who had been *nightmared,* and who set a trap on his chest to catch old mother Durand, and Pierre the gardener who used to take his spade and cut the snakes in two, from whose insides live frogs would sally forth; there too flourished and waxed in years and honour old Truff, a quadruped not classed by Monsieur de Buffon, half dog, half bear, on whose back they used to perch me straddle-legged, there to take my first lessons in equitation.

And now towards the North-West there is Haramont, a delightful village lost in the midst of its apple-trees, right in the centre of a clearing in the forest and made illustrious by the birth of honest Ange Pitou, the nephew of Aunt Angélique, the pupil of the Abbé Fortier, the fellow pupil of young Gilbert and the companion-in-arms of the patriot Billot. This claim to distinction — which is disputed by some people, who maintain (rightly enough perhaps) that Pitou never existed except in my imagination — being the only one that Haramont can boast of, let us continue our journey to the double pond between the Campiègne and the Vivières roads near which I received Boudoux’s hospitality on the day I ran away from my mother’s house in order to avoid going to the school at Soissons. Had I gone there, I should probably have been killed two or three years afterwards by the blowing up of the powder magazine, as some of my young comrades were.

Come to the middle of this wide alley which runs north and south. Half a league behind us lies the massive Donjon built by François I. and on which the hero of Marignan and Pavia set his salamander seal, and in front of us on the horizon a high hill covered with whin and fern. One of the most terrible of my youthful memories is connected with this hill. One winter’s night when the snow had stretched its white carpet over this long wide alley, I observed that I was being followed silently by a beast twenty yards away. It was the size of a big dog, its eyes shone like two live coals.

I did. not need to look twice at the brute to recognize it. It was an enormous wolf. If I had only had my gun or my carbine or only a bit of tinder and a flint! But I had not even a pistol, a big knife or a pen-knife. Fortunately I had been a sportsman for five years, though I was only fifteen at the time, and knew the ways of the night-prowler with whom I had to deal. I knew that so long as I should remain on my feet and did not run I had nothing to fear. But look, my boy, the hillside is all pitted with quagmires. I might fall into one of these, and then the wolf would be on me with one bound, and we should have to see which had the better claws and teeth.

My heart beat violently; but I began to sing. At all times I have sung abominably out of tune. Had the wolf been the least bit musical he would have fled. My wolf was not. On the contrary the music seemed to please him. He chimed in with a plaintive second on a lower note which was wonderfully suggestive of the pangs of hunger. I stopped singing, and went jogging on in silent horror like one of those damned souls whose neck Satan had twisted round, and whom Dante meets in the third circle of hell, walking forwards and looking backwards. But I soon perceived that I was doing an imprudent thing. While looking in the wolf’s direction I did not look at my feet. I stumbled; the wolf bounded forward. By good luck I did not fall down completely; but the wolf was only ten yards off now. For a few seconds my legs refused to move. In spite of ten degrees of cold the sweat was pouring from my brow. I stopped; the wolf stopped also. It took me five minutes to regain my strength. These five minutes seemed long apparently to my travelling companion: he sat down on his rump and uttered another howl — a still hungrier and more plaintive one than the first. That howl made me shiver to the marrow of my bones. I set out again, keeping my eyes on my feet, stopping each time that I wanted to see whether the wolf was following me, and whether he was getting nearer or keeping farther away. The wolf had started off at the same moment as I had, stopping when I stopped, walking when I walked, but always keeping as close as before — in fact rather coming closer than sheering farther off. At the end of a quarter of an hour he was only five yards from me. I was getting near the park, that is to say I was at that moment hardly a kilometre away from Villers-Cotterets; but my road was cut at this place by a wide ditch, that famous ditch which I jumped in order to give pretty Laurence from Paris an idea of my agility, and where I was so unlucky as to split my nankeen breeches which I had had made for my first communion — do you remember? I could easily have jumped that ditch and with more agility than on the day in question, I assure you; but in order to jump it I should have had to run and I knew that before I had got a quarter of the way I should have the wolf on my shoulders. I was therefore obliged to make a détour and to go through a turnstile. All that would have been nothing if the turnstile had not been situated in the shade cast by the great trees of the park. What was going to happen whilst I was under the trees? Would not the gloom have just the opposite effect on the wolf from what it had on me? It frightened me; would it not embolden him? The thicker the darkness, the better a wolf can see.

However hesitation was impossible. I am not exaggerating when I say that there was not a hair of my head that had not its drop of sweat, not a thread of my shirt that was not soaked. As I passed through the turnstile I cast a glance behind me. The darkness was such that the wolf’s form had disappeared. One could only see two glowing coals of fire in the darkness. Once I had got through, I twisted the turnstile violently round; the noise it made frightened the wolf who paused for a second: but almost immediately he leapt so lightly over the stile that I did not hear the snow crackle under his paws. And there he was at the same distance from me. I made for the middle of the forest drive by the shortest cut. I found myself in the light again and I beheld not only those terrible eyes which made holes in the darkness with their flaming pupils, but my friend the wolf’s whole body. As I got nearer the town and his instinct warned him that I was going to escape from him he drew nearer. He was only three yards away from me and yet I neither heard the sound of his footsteps nor of his breathing. You would have said it was a beast of the imagination, a phantom wolf. Nevertheless I kept on my way. I crossed the tennis ground, I entered what is called the *Parterre,* a huge smooth and open lawn where I had no fear of quagmires. The wolf was so near me that if I had suddenly stopped he would have run his nose against my legs. I was dying with desire to stamp my feet, to clap my hands and swear loudly; but I did not dare. Had I dared to do so, without doubt he would have fled or at least for a moment have sheered off. I took ten minutes to cross the greensward and I reached the corner of the castle wall. Then the wolf stopped. He was hardly a hundred and fifty paces from the town. I continued walking as before without hastening my steps. He, as he had done before, sat down on his rump and watched me moving oil. When I was a hundred yards from him, he uttered a third howl still hungrier and more plaintive than the two others, which the fifty dogs of the Duc de Bourbon’s pack answered in one common voice. This howl was an expression of regret at not having been able to have a bite of my flesh. There was no mistaking that. I do not know whether he passed the night where he halted; for no sooner did I feel myself in safety than I set out at a furious run and arrived pale and half dead at my mother’s shop. You did not know my poor mother, or I should not need to tell you that she was more frightened by my story than I had been by the event. She undressed me, changed my shirt, aired my bed and put me in it as she used to do ten years before. Then she brought me a bowl of hot wine in my bed. As the fumes mounted into my head I felt twice as much remorse as before for not having essayed some of those doughty deeds which had been passing through my mind all the way home as a means of ridding myself of my enemy.

And now, my boy, let me pause at this episode like a good story-teller. I could not tell you anything more exciting. Besides, the preface has been as long as it ought to be — and longer. Among all the stories I have told *you* ten times over, choose the one which I should tell the public. But choose well, you understand; for if you choose ill, it is not I so much as you who will be blamed, if folks are bored instead of being amused.

“Well then, father, tell us the story of Catherine Blum.”

“Is that the only one you really want?”

“Yes! it is my favourite of them all.”

“Good! then we will choose your favourite, my boy! “So I give you, dear readers one and all, the story of Catherine Blum. I can refuse my dear lad nothing, my blue-eyed laddie, and he has chosen this one.

CHAPTER II.

THE NEW HOUSE ON THE SOISSONS ROAD.

RIGHT across the stretch of ground, the northeastern borders of the forest of Villers-Cotterets — a Bpace which we omitted to traverse, since we began our journey at the Château of Villers-Hellon and ended it at the hill of Vivières — stretches like a great undulating serpent the high road from Paris to Soissons.

This road having crossed the forest for a mile to Gondreville and cut off a corner at the Croix-Blanche; having left the Crépy Road on its left and skirted the quarries of the Fontaine-Eau-Claire; having plunged into the valley of Vauciennes and come out again; having made straight for Villers-Cotterets, then leaves the town at the opposite extremity and goes at right angles to the foot of the hill of Dampleux, passing on one side the forest and on the other the plain where long ago stood the noble Abbey of Saint-Denis, amidst whose ruins I ran so gaily as a child and which to-day is only a pretty little country house with white walls, a slate roof, green shutters, lost amid flowers, apple-trees and the quivering leaves of aspens.

Then it boldly enters the forest which it crosses in its whole width, emerging two leagues and a half farther on at the posting house called Vertefeuille.

In all this distance only one house is met with, standing on the right side of the road; it was built in the time of Philippe-Egalité as a residence for a head-keeper. It was then named the *Maison Neuve*, and though seventy years have passed since it sprang up like a mushroom at the foot of the beeches and gigantic oaks which shelter it, like an old coquette who insists on being called by her Christian name, it clings to the juvenile name by which it was first known.

Why not? Is not the Pont-Neuf, built in 1577, in the reign of Henry III. by the architect Ducerceau, still called the Pont-Neuf?

Let us return to the *Maison Neuve*, which is the centre of the simple yet startling events we are about to relate, and let us make the reader acquainted with it by a detailed description.

The *Maison Neuve* stands, as one goes from Villers-Cotterets to Soissons, a little beyond the Stag's Leap, a place where the road narrows between two high banks and which got the name because at a hunting party of the Duc d'Orléans (Philippe-Egalité, I mean — Louis-Philippe was not a sportsman, as we all know), a terrified stag jumped from one bank to the other, that is to say leapt a space of more than thirty feet!

It is as you leave this sort of defile that you perceive about five hundred paces farther on the *Maison Neuve,* a building of two storeys, having a roof pierced with storm-windows, two ordinary windows on the ground floor and two up above.

The windows on one side of the house look towards the west, that is to say towards Villers-Cotterets, whilst the front, facing the north, opens straight into the road by the door which gives admittance into the ground floor room and by a window which lets the light into a room above. The window is immediately above the door.

At this place, as at Thermopylae (where there was only room for two chariots to drive abreast), the road narrows to the width of the paved cart road in the middle, confined as it is on one side by the house, on the other by the garden of that same house which instead of being situated as is usually the case, behind the building or on one of its flanks, is situated in front of it.

The house bears a very different look according to the seasons.

In the spring, clothed with its green vines as with an April robe, it warms itself lovingly in the sun; one might say then that it had come out of the forest to settle by the roadside. Its windows, and especially one of the windows of the first floor, are enlivened with charlock, convolvulus and all kinds of flowers, which form as it were blinds of greenery embroidered with silver sapphire and golden blossoms. The smoke that rises from its chimney is but a bluish and transparent vapour which hardly leaves a trace in the atmosphere. The two dogs that live in the two compartments of the kennel built on the right of the door have come out of their wooden shelter; one is lying peacefully asleep with its muzzle extended between its two paws; the other, who has doubtless slept enough during the night, is gravely seated on its rump, and with its wrinkled face is blinking at the sun. These two dogs, which belong (of course) to the venerable breed of wry-legged bassets — a breed that has had the honour of having my illustrious friend, Decamp, for painter-in-ordinary, are (of course again) a female and a male.

The bitch is called *Ravaude* and the male, *Barbaro*. On this last point, however, that of the names, it would be pedantic to be too absolute.

In summer it is another business. The house takes a nap and shuts its eyelids of wood. No daylight enters in. Its chimney remains without a breath of smoke. Only the door, towards the north, remains open to watch the road. The two basset-hounds are either inside their kennel, in the depth of which the traveller only perceives a shapeless mass, or else stretched alongside the wall, at the foot of which they seek the coolness of shade and the dampness of the stone.

In autumn the vine has turned red; the green robe of spring has taken on warm and gleaming tones like those of worn velvet and satin. The windows stand half open; but the charlock has now been succeeded by chrysanthemums. The chimney begins once more to scatter white wreaths of smoke into the air, and when you pass in front of the door, the fire burning on the hearth, although half hidden by the pot in which the soup is boiling and by the pan in which the rabbit is stewing, attracts the traveller’s eye.

Ravaude and *Barbaro* have shaken off the somnolence of April and the sleep of July; they are full of ardour and even of impatience; they are tugging at their chains and barking and howling. They feel that the hour of activity has come for them, that the shooting season has opened, and that they must make war, and serious war, on their eternal enemies, rabbits, foxes, and even wild boars.

In winter the aspect becomes mournful; the house is cold and shivers. No more green or red-shot dress; the vine has dropt its leaves one by one with the sad murmur of falling leaves; it stretches out its bare branches on the wall. The windows are close shut; every flower has disappeared; all you can see now is the strings, slack like those of a harp unstrung, up which the convolvulus used to climb.

A mighty shower of dense smoke escaping from the chimney in spiral wreaths proclaims that, wood being one of the perquisites of the ranger, wood is not economized. As for *Ravaude* and *Barbaro*, one might look in vain for them in the empty kennel; but if by chance the house door opens at the moment when the traveller passes, and were he to plunge a curious look into the interior of the house, he would see them standing out staidly against the flame of the fireplace. From there the master or mistress kicks them every now and again, but they as obstinately return to enjoy a heat of fifty degrees, fierce enough to burn their paws and muzzles, and which they only manage to fight by turning their head mournfully to right or to left and by raising alternately one foot or the other with a plaintive cry.

That was and still is what the New House on the Soissons Road is like externally, except perhaps for the flowers which betoken the presence of a girl with a tender and restless heart.

Seen from the inside, it offered first on the ground floor the great entrance-hall which we have had a glimpse of, furnished with a table, a dresser, and six wooden chairs. The walls were adorned with five or six engravings, representing, according to the different government epochs, which succeeded one another, Napoleon, Josephine, Marie-Louise, the King of Rome, Prince Eugène and the death of Poniatowski — or else the Duc d'Angoulême, the Duchesse d'Angoulême, Louis the XVIII., his brother *Monsieur,* the Duc de Berry — or again the Duc d'Orléans and a group of light and dark haired children, to wit, the Duc de Nemours, the Prince de Joinville, the Due d'Aumale and the Princesses Louise, Clementine and Marie.

Above the chimney-piece three double-barrelled guns hang drying in greased linen wrappings, recovering from their last exposure to rain and mist. Behind the hearth lies a bakehouse, opening on to the forest through a little window.

Built on to the east side of the house is a rambling kitchen which was added to the building when it was found that the dwelling was too small for the inhabitants and the old kitchen had to be transformed into a bedroom.

This bedroom, once a kitchen, is usually that of the son of the house. On the first storey are two other bedrooms, that of the master and mistress (the keeper and his wife), and that of their daughter or niece, if they have a daughter or a niece.

Five or six generations of rangers have succeeded one another in this house, and it was at the door and in the first room that the bloody drama took place which brought about the death of the head-ranger Choron in 1829.

But at the time when the story which we are going to relate opens — that is to say in the early days of May, 1829, the *Maison Neuve* was inhabited by Guillaume Watrin, head-ranger of the Chavigny district, by Marianne Charlotte Choron, his wife, commonly known as "Mother "for short, and by Bernard Watrin, their son, generally known only by the name of Bernard.

A young girl, the heroine of this tale, called Catherine Blum, had also lived in this house, but had not done so for the last eighteen months.

However, we shall duly mention the reasons for the absence, the presence, the age, the appearance, and the character of the personages, as is our custom, just as they happen to come on the scene.

So let us transport ourselves without more ado to the epoch we have spoken of, to wit the 12th of May, 1829.

It is half-past three in the morning; the first gleams of daylight are filtering through the leaves of the trees which are still green with that virginal green that only lasts a few weeks; the slightest wind causes a frozen dew to rain down from the tips of the branches where it hangs trembling and besprinkle the tall grasses like a hail of diamonds.

A young man of twenty-three or twenty-four, light-haired, with bright and intelligent eyes, walking with that rhythmical gait familiar to those who are accustomed to walking long distances, clothed in the neat uniform of the rangers, that is to say the blue jacket with the silver oak leaf on the collar, with a cap to match on his head, with his ribbed velvet breeches, his great leather gaiters with copper buckles, holding in one hand his gun slung over his shoulder, and in the other a sleuth-hound in a leash, was crossing the park-wall through a gap, and keeping carefully the middle of the road more from habit than to avoid the dew, with which he was soaked as if with rain, was advancing by the forest path of the Houchard lands towards the New House on the Soissons Road, whose west front he had been looking at for a considerable time from the other side of the road, the front that is on which there are the four windows..

Having reached the end of the path he saw that door and windows were shut. Every soul was still fast asleep in the Watrins’ house.

“Good,” muttered the young man, “they are taking it easy in old Guillaume’s house. I understand the father and mother — but Bernard, a lover! Should a lover ever sleep?”

And he crossed the road, drawing near to the house with the evident intention of remorselessly disturbing the slumbers of its inhabitants.

At the sound of his steps the two dogs came out of their kennel, ready to bark both at the man and at the bloodhound, but doubtless they recognized their old friend, for their mouths opened immediately not for a threatening bark but for a friendly fawn. At the same time their tails swept the ground gaily as the newcomers drew nearer. Evidently they did not consider them as strangers, though not exactly belonging to the house.

Having reached the threshold, the bloodhound fraternized with the two bassets, whilst the ranger resting the butt end of his gun on the ground knocked with his fist against the door. There was no reply to this first summons.

“Halloa! Père Watrin,” growled the young man, striking a second time with more energy than the first. “Are you deaf, I wonder! “And he applied his ear to the door. “At last,” said he, after a moment’s attention, “that’s a good thing.”

This expression of satisfaction was wrung from him by a slight sound he heard inside. This sound which was softened by distance and by the thickness of the door was caused by the staircase creaking under the step of the old head-ranger. The young man had too practised an ear to mistake this noise and take the step of a man of fifty for that of a lad of twenty-five. “So,” he muttered, “So, it’s old Guillaume “; then aloud: “Good day,” he cried, “open the door, Père Guillaume — it’s me.”

“Ah, ah!” said a voice coming from inside, “it’s you, François? Why, of course. Who else should it be? Coming, coming.”

“All right. Put on your breeches — there is no hurry, although it is not over warm, to be sure. Ugh! “And the young man beat his feet alternately on the ground while the bloodhound sat down shivering and all steeped in dew like his master. At that moment the door opened and he saw the grey head of the old ranger already adorned, early as it was, with a cutty pipe, though it is true the pipe was not yet alight. The said cutty, which had begun by being a pipe and which had become a cutty as the result of a series of accidents which had one after another shortened its stem, never left Guillaume Watrin’s lips for more than the time strictly necessary for its owner to knock out the old ashes and put in the fresh tobacco. Then it took once more its accustomed place in the left corner of his mouth between two teeth hollowed out like a pair of pincers. There was yet another occasion on which the cutty smoked in the hand of old Guillaume instead of between his lips; and this was when his inspector did him the honour of addressing him. Then old Guillaume drew his cutty respectfully from his mouth, wiped his lips on the sleeve of his coat, passed the hand that held the pipe behind his back and answered.

Père Guillaume seemed to have been brought up in the school of Pythagoras; when he opened his mouth to put a question, the question was always put in the shortest possible way; when he opened his mouth to answer one, the answer was always as concise as possible. We are wrong in saying when he *opened* his mouth. Guillaume’s mouth never opened except to yawn — that is supposing he ever had yawned, which is not likely. For the rest of the time Père Guillaume’s jaw, accustomed to keep between his teeth a bit of pipe which often had no more than the tenth of an inch of stem, never unlocked; the result was a whistling which had some analogy with that of a serpent, his words being obliged to escape through the chink of his two jaws — a chink produced by the thickness of the pipe-stem, but which offered barely enough space to slide a five sou piece through. When the pipe had left old Guillaume’s mouth to allow its master to empty it or fill it, or to allow him to answer some high and mighty personage, the words instead of being easier, became more strident; the whistling instead of diminishing, increased. The reason was simple. The pipe stem no longer keeping the jaws apart, the teeth of the upper jaw weighed down on those of the lower with all their customary weight. And then he was a clever fellow who could hear what Père Guillaume said. This salient characteristic in old Guillaume’s physiognomy being established, let us proceed to complete his portrait.

He was, as we have said, a man about fifty. His height was above the average. He was erect and wiry, with thin grey hair, heavy eyebrows, bushy whiskers that made a frame to his face, little piercing eyes, a long nose, a sarcastic mouth and a pointed chin. Without appearing to listen or see, he kept his eye always on the watch, and both saw and heard in a marvellous way either what went on between his wife, his son and his niece in his own house, or what went on in the forest among the partridges, rabbits, hares, foxes, polecats and weasels, animals which since the beginning of the world have made war on one another as ferociously and as persistently as the Messenians and the Spartans did from 774 to 370 B.C.

Watrin had a great veneration for my father and some partiality for myself. He had preserved under a globe the glass from which General Dumas used to drink when he went shooting with him, and from which ten, fifteen and twenty years afterwards he never failed to make me drink when we went out together.

Such was the man who, pipe in mouth, put his mocking face through the open door of the *Maison Neuve* on the Soissons Road to welcome at 4 o’clock in the morning the young ranger whom he had called François, and who complained of cold, albeit for a month and twenty-seven days, according to Mathieu Laensberg, that charming season of the year called Spring had been with us. Seeing whom he had to do with, Guillaume Watrin opened the door wide and the young man walked in.

CHAPTER III.

MATHIEU GOGUELUE.

FRANÇOIS walked straight to the fireplace and put down his gun in the corner, whilst the bloodhound, which answered to the characteristic name of *Louchonneau,* went and sat unceremoniously down among the ashes yet warm from yesterday's fire.

What had caused the name of *Louchonneau* (Squint-eye) to be given to the bloodhound was a tuft of reddish hair — a sort of beauty-spot — which had grown in the corner of his eyelid, and which made him occasionally squint by dragging his eye down.

Louchonneau had for three leagues round the reputation of being the best bloodhound in Villers-Cotterets. Although still very young to have made his mark in the great art of venery, François on his side was regarded as one of the cleverest trackers of the district. When there was some plan of campaign to study on the spot, some wild boar to head off, it was always François who was charged with the ticklish job. For him the forest, no matter how black the night, had no mysteries; a broken blade of grass, a turned leaf, a tuft of hair caught in a bramble revealed to him from the first scene to the last a whole nocturnal drama, which one would have thought had had no theatre but the grass, no witnesses but the trees and no lights but the stars.

As the *fête* of Corey was to take place the ensuing Sunday, the rangers of the forests surrounding that pretty village had received from the Inspector, M. Deviolaine, the authorization to kill a wild boar on the occasion. In order to be sure that this wild boar should not escape and so cause the hunters to draw a blank, François had been the man commissioned to head it off. He had just accomplished this task with his usual conscientiousness when we met him in the forest path of the Houchard lands, followed him to Père Guillaume's door and heard him say to this latter, stamping with his feet the while: "Put on your breeches. There is no hurry, though it's not over warm. Ugh!"

"What!" answered old Guillaume, when François had deposited his gun near the fireplace and *Louchonneau* had sat down with his rump in the ashes — ” not warm in the month of May?... What would you have said if you had served in the Prussian campaign, you softy?”

“One moment! When I say ‘not warm,’ you understand, Père Guillaume, it’s only a manner of speaking.... I say it’s not warm o’ nights.... The nights don’t go so fast as the days — you must have observed that, probably because they can’t see clear. Well, by day, one is in May, by night one is in February.... So I won’t unsay what I have said; it is not warm! Ugh!”

Guillaume stopped in the act of striking a light, and looking at François out of the corner of his eye and in the manner of *Louchonneau*: “Look here, my boy,” he said, “shall I tell you something?”

“Say away, Père Guillaume,” answered François, looking at the old ranger with that mocking air so characteristic of the Picardy peasant and of his neighbour the peasant of the Ile-de-France: “say away, you can talk first-rate, when you choose.”

“Well, you are playing the ass in order to have some bran-mash.”

“I don’t understand.”

“You don’t understand.”

“No, on my word of honour.”

“Yes, you say you are cold only to get me to offer you a dram.”

“Good Lord! No, I never thought of it. Which does not mean that I should refuse it, if you did offer me one, — oh no, not I; I know too well the respect I owe you for that.” And he remained with his head on one side, continuing to look at old Guillaume with a mocking eye.

Guillaume, without saying a word except *hum!* which indicated doubts about the disinterestedness and respect of François, struck his flint and steel together again. At the third blow the tinder took fire and began to crackle. Guillaume, with a finger which seemed perfectly insensible to heat, pressed the tinder down on the mouth of his pipe stuffed with tobacco and began to breathe in the smoke, which he puffed out at first in an imperceptible vapour, then soon in wreaths which got thicker and thicker until, judging that his pipe was sufficiently lighted and being no longer afraid of its going out, he restored to his inhalations their wonted calm and regularity. All the time he had been employed over this serious task the face of the worthy head-ranger had only expressed a sincere and concentrated preoccupation; but the feat once accomplished, a smile reappeared on his countenance and, going towards the sideboard, out of which he pulled a bottle and two glasses, he said “Well, we will have a word with the brandy bottle first and then we will discuss our little affairs.” Only a word! He is not much of a conversationalist, is old Guillaume! As if not to disprove what François had said, old Guillaume filled the two glasses standing together; then bringing his beside the young man’s and gently clinking them together — ” Here’s your health,” he said. “Here’s yours and your wife’s! And may heaven make her less pig-headed!”

“Good,” said old Guillaume, with a grimace, which was meant for a smile. And taking his cutty in his left hand, he passed it behind his back according to custom and carried the right with the glass to his mouth, swallowing the contents at a single gulp.

“Wait a bit!” said François, laughing. “I have not finished and we shall be obliged to begin again. Here’s to the health of your son Bernard! “And he in turn drained the little glass, tasting it however with more refinement and pleasure than the old ranger had. But at the last drop, stamping his foot as if in despair. “Ah,” said he, “I have forgotten somebody.”

“Whom have you forgotten?” asked Guillaume, puffing vehemently two mouthfuls of smoke from his pipe, which during the journey it had made had almost gone out. “Whom have I forgotten!” cried François. “*Pardieu,* Mademoiselle Catherine, your niece — oh it’s not right to forget the absent — but my glass is empty, Père Guillaume.” And pouring out the last drop of clear spirit on the nail of his thumb — ” See,” said he, “there is a topaz on my nail! “Guillaume made a grimace as much as to say, “You humbug, I know your plan, but considering your good intentions, I excuse it.” Père Guillaume talked little, as we have said; but to make up, he had carried the science of pantomime to its highest pitch. His grimace over, he took the bottle and poured in such a way that the glass overflowed into the saucer. “Look!” said he. “Oh,” replied François, “Père Guillaume has not played the curmudgeon this time. One can see he loves his pretty little niece! “Then lifting the glass to his lips with an enthusiasm in which the girl and the liquor might each claim their share. — ” Oh, who would not love her,” said he, “the dear little *demoiselle* Catherine? She’s like brandy.” And this time, following the example given him by old Guillaume, he emptied his glass at a single gulp. The old ranger performed the same movement and the same action with a thoroughly military regularity; only each expressed in a different way the satisfaction the liquor gave him as it passed down his throat. “*Hum!*” said one; “*houch!”* said the other. “Are you still cold?” asked Father Guillaume. “No,” said François; “on the contrary, I am warm.”

“Well, then, you feel better?”

“Rather; I am set fair now, like your barometer!”

“That being so,” said Father Guillaume, plunging into the question which neither had touched as yet, “we are going to talk wild-boar a little.”

“Oh, the wild boar,” said François, winking, “we’ve got him this time, Père Guillaume, I do think.”

“Yes, like the last time!” said a sharp and mocking voice, which suddenly rasping behind the two rangers, made them both start violently. Both turned round simultaneously and with a single movement, though they had quite well recognized the individual to whom the voice belonged. But this latter, with the manner of one of the household, passed behind the two rangers, contenting himself with adding to the few words he had said — ” Good-day to you, Père Guillaume, and to your friend.” And he went and sat down beside the hearth, which he brightened up by throwing on the ashes a bit of faggot, which took fire with a crackle at the touch of the first match he applied to it. Then drawing out of the pocket of his coat two or three potatoes, he plunged them side by side into the ashes, with which he covered them over again with all an epicure’s precaution. The man who had just arrived in time to interrupt at the very first phrase the story which François was going to begin, deserves, on account of the part which he is going to play in this tale, to have his physical and moral portrait given.

He was a lad of from twenty to twenty-two, with reddish hair flattened down on his head, a low brow, squinting eyes, a snub nose, a protruding mouth, a retreating chin, a scant and dirty beard. His neck, hardly hidden by the torn collar of his shirt, let one see that sort of hideous wen (so common in the Valais of Switzerland, but fortunately so rare with us) which is called a *goitre*. His arms were awkwardly fitted on to his body and seemed absurdly long, and gave to his dragging, sleepy gait the sort of appearance of those great apes that M. Geoffrey Saint-Hilaire, the great naturalist, has termed, I think, chimpanzees. When he huddled on his heels or sat on a stool, the resemblance between the half-developed man and the complete monkey became yet more striking, for at such times he could — like these Simian caricatures of the human biped — with the aid of his hands or feet pick up from the ground or draw to him all the different things he required, and that almost without any movement of his trunk, which was as badly moulded as the rest of his person. Lastly, the whole of this ungraceful person was supported by feet which rivalled Charlemagne’s in size and width, and which, but for the name, might have set the standard of that measure which is called a “King’s foot,” after the illustrious chief of the Carlovingian race.

As for the moral side, the share of favours bestowed on him by nature was even more restricted than on the physical side. Unlike those ugly dirty scabbards which sometimes enclose a beautiful and excellently finished rapier, the body of Mathieu Goguelue (that was the name of the person we are dealing with) — his body, I say, enclosed a bad, spiteful soul. Was he thus by nature, or had he tried to make others suffer, because others made him suffer? That is a point we leave to wiser heads than ours to debate and resolve with regard to the philosophical question of the reaction of the physical on the moral. However that may be, this at any rate is true, that every being weaker than Mathieu uttered a cry the moment Mathieu touched it; a bird, because he tore its feathers out; a dog because he trod on its toe; a child because he pulled its hair. On the other hand, in the case of the strong, Mathieu, without ceasing to jibe, was humble; did he receive an insult, an outrage, a blow, however sharp the insult, however grave the outrage, however violent the blow, and however keen the moral or physical pain, the face of Mathieu continued to smile with the same foolish, half idiotic expression. But insult, outrage and blow were registered in the depths of Mathieu’s heart in indelible letters; one day or another the injury was repaid a hundred-fold without anyone being able to guess the quarter from which the retribution came, and Mathieu felt in the depths of his being a gleam of sombre and sinister joy which often made him say within himself that he was glad of the hurt that had been done him because of the satisfaction he felt in returning it.

Still, in excuse for his evil nature, one had to admit that his life had always been precarious and unhappy. One day he had been seen coming out of a kind of ravine where some of the gipsy vagrants who wander through the forest had abandoned him. He was three years old, half-naked and could hardly speak. The peasant who had met him was called Mathieu; the ravine whence he issued was called Goguelue, and so the child got the name of Mathieu Goguelue. There was no question of baptism; Mathieu had not been able to say whether he was baptized or no. Besides, who would have taken care of the soul when the body was in such a wretched plight that he could only live on charity or on theft. And in this way he reached man’s estate. Although ill-built and ugly, Mathieu was vigorous; although in appearance idiotic, Mathieu was sharp and cunning. Had he been born in Oceania, on the banks of Senegal or in the seas of Japan, the savages might have said of him what they say of the monkeys: “They do not talk for fear they should be taken for men and forced to work.” Mathieu pretended to be weak; he pretended to be imbecile; but if an occasion presented itself in which he was obliged to show his strength or to give proof of his intelligence, he displayed either the brute force of the bear or the deep cunning of the fox; and the danger once passed or the desire satisfied, Mathieu became Mathieu again, the Mathieu everybody knew, the Mathieu who was the familiar laughing-stock of all, a peevish, imbecile, impotent figure. Abbé Grégoire, that excellent man whom I have spoken of in my “Memoirs “and who is called upon to play a part in this book, had had pity on the unhappy cerebral organization; regarding himself as the natural guardian of the wretched orphan, he had desired to make him advance a degree in the chain of being and make a vertebrate animal out of this polypus; in consequence for a year he had strained body and soul to teach him to read and write. At the end of a year Mathieu had left the worthy priest’s hands with the reputation of a double distilled ass. The common opinion, that is to say that of the fellow pupils of Mathieu, the private opinion, that is to say that of his master, was that Mathieu did not know an 0 when he saw one and could not write an L; but fellow pupils and master alike were wrong. Both public and private opinion were at fault. Mathieu could not read as well as M. de Fontanes — who was considered the best reader of his day — but Mathieu could read and pretty fluently too. Mathieu could not write like M. Prudhomme, the pupil of Brard and St. Orner, but Mathieu could write and pretty legibly too. Only, nobody had ever seen Mathieu reading or writing. On his side old Guillaume had endeavoured to draw Mathieu out of his physical brutishness from the same sentiment which had urged the Abbé Grégoire to draw him out of his moral brutishness, that is to say from that gentle pity for one’s fellow-creature and that instinct of self-respect which exist in all good hearts. He had observed in Mathieu a certain capacity for imitating the song of birds, parodying the cry of wild beasts and following a trail; he had recognized that with his squint eye Mathieu could quite well see a rabbit or a hare in its form; he had perceived more than once that there was a deficit of powder in his flask and bullets in his bag, and he had drawn the conclusion that, as it is not absolutely necessary to be built on the model of Apollo or Antinous to make a good ranger, he might succeed in utilizing the talents of Mathieu and make a decent under-keeper of him. With this intention he had spoken about Mathieu to M. Deviolaine, who had authorized Père Guillaume to put a gun in the hands of his protégé. So the gun had been put in Mathieu's hands, but at the end of six months' practice in his new apprenticeship, Mathieu had killed two dogs and wounded a beater without having touched a single head of game. Then Guillaume, convinced that Mathieu had all the instincts of a poacher but none of the qualities of a keeper, had taken away the gun of which he had made such unskilful use, and Mathieu, heedless of this affront which yet closed the brilliant perspective which for a moment had been opened up before him and which would have dazzled eyes less careless and less philosophical than his, had resumed without a sense of shame his life of wandering and thieving.

In this roaming life the *Maison Neuve* on the Soissons Road and old Guillaume's hearth were one of his favourite halting places in spite of the hatred or rather instinctive disgust which old Madeleine felt towards him — for she was too good a housewife not to see the harm done her garden and larder by the presence of Mathieu Goguelue — and Bernard, the son of the house, whom we only know by the toast drunk in his honour by François, and who seemed somehow to divine the fatal influence which this vagabond guest at his hearth was to have one day on his destiny.

It remains to be said that just as everybody was ignorant of the secret progress that Mathieu had made with the good Abbé Grégoire in reading and writing, so everybody was also unaware that this want of skill was feigned and that, when Mathieu chose, he could discharge his shot at a partridge or his bullet at a wild boar with as much accuracy as any of the Forest sportsmen.

Now why did Mathieu hide his talents from the eyes of his companions and the admiration of the public? It was because Mathieu had come to the conclusion that it might be useful for him not only to read, write and shoot, but still more useful in certain circumstances that he should be considered clumsy and illiterate.

So we see that it was an odious and wicked lad who, coming in just at the moment when François was beginning his story, had interrupted this story by words of doubt concerning the wild boar which the young keeper thought he had as good as in the hollow of his hand.

"Yes, like the last time!"

“Oh, the last time was enough,” answered François. “We will talk about that presently.”

“And where is the boar?” asked old Guillaume, whose tongue was for the moment set free by the necessity of introducing a new fill into his pipe.

“He’s already in the salting tub, now that François has got his hand on him,” said Mathieu.

“No, not yet,” answered François, “but before the cuckoo clock strikes seven he will be there. Won’t he, *Louchonneau*? “The dog, whom the fire rekindled by Mathieu was steeping in evident bliss and beatitude, turned round at his master’s call and, sweeping the ash of the hearth the while with his long tail, he uttered a little friendly growl which seemed to reply in the affirmative to the question which this latter had just asked him.

Satisfied with the answer of *Louchonneau,* François turned his eyes away from Mathieu Goguelue with a disgust which he did not trouble to conceal, and resumed his conversation with old Guillaume, who, delighted at having a fresh pipe to smoke, made ready to listen to his young companion with complaisance and serenity.

“Well, I mean to say, Père Guillaume,” François continued, “that the animal is only a quarter of a league from here in the Têtes de Salmon covert near the Meutart meadows. The rascal set out at half-past two in the morning from the wood on the Damplieu road.”

“Oh, how do you know that?” interrupted Goguelue, “seeing you only started at three o’clock?”

“Ah, there’s a poser, Père Guillaume. He asks me how I know that. Well, Squinty, I’ll tell you. It may serve you in good stead some day.” François had a bad habit which annoyed Mathieu immensely, and that was to apply the name of *Louchonneau* (Squinty) to the man and to the beast indiscriminately, on the ground that both being subject to the same infirmity — although to his way of thinking the bloodhound squinted in a much nicer way than the man — the same name could serve to designate both biped and quadruped. At first sight dog and man seemed equally indifferent to this, but we are bound to say that in the manifestation of this indifference the dog only was sincere. So François continued, never imagining that he had just increased by a new grievance the sum of ancient grudges which embittered the heart of Mathieu Goguelue against him.

“What o’clock does the dew fall?” said the young keeper. “At three o’clock, isn’t it? Well, if he had set out after the dewfall he would have crushed the wet earth, and there would be no water in the hoof-marks; whereas on the contrary he has poached up the dry earth, then the dew has fallen and made drinking troughs for the robins all along the road. That is what happened.”

“How old is the beast?” asked Guillaume, considering that Mathieu’s observation had only slight importance or that after François’ explanation Mathieu must be sufficiently edified.

“Oh! six or seven,” said François; “a regular plump one.”

“Halloa,” said Mathieu, “he seems to have shown you his birth-certificate!”

“He did. And signed it with his claws. That’s more than most could do! And unless he has reasons for keeping his age a secret I can answer for it that I am not out of it by three months. That’s so, *Louchonneau,* isn’t it? Look, Père Guillaume, *Lotichonneau* says I am not making a mistake!”

“Is he all by himself?”

“No, he’s with his sow, and she’s big with young.”

“Ah! ha! ha!” interrupted Mathieu, with a coarse laugh, quite unable to allow François to go quietly on with his story.

“Is it a new animal?” asked old Guillaume, who wanted to know whether the number of wild boars in his district was increasing, diminishing or remaining stationary.

“The sow is,” answered François, with his usual assurance, “the boar is not. I never saw her traces; but I know *him* well. And that’s what I was saying to you a moment ago when that wretched Goguelue came in; that I was going to renew acquaintance with my wild boar of the other day. It is the same beast I shot in the shoulder a fortnight ago, away by the Ivors coverts.”

“And what makes you think it is the same?”

“Oh, must I tell *you* that, you old bloodhound, that could give *Louchonneau* points. Look here, *Louchonneau,* here’s Père Guillaume asking.... I knew right enough I had touched him; only instead of putting a bullet into his heart, I put one into his shoulder.”

“Hum!” said old Guillaume, shaking his head, “he has not bled at all.”

“I dare say not, because the bullet stuck there between flesh and hide in the fat. To-day the wound you see is setting about healing; so the poor beast is itching and has rubbed himself against the third oak on the left of the Sarrazins well... he rubbed and rubbed himself so that a tuft of hair remained behind on the tree bark. Look here! “And François drew out from the pocket of his waistcoat a tuft of hair, which, damp with clotted blood, supported his statement.

Guillaume took it, cast a connoisseur’s eye over it, and handing back the tuft of hair as if it had been the most precious thing in the world:

“Faith, yes, my boy, he’s there right enough,” said he, “and I can as good as see him at this moment.”

“Ah, you’ll see him better still when we have settled his score.”

“You make my mouth water. I’ve a good mind to go for a stroll in that direction.”

“Oh, I’m easy enough in my mind, you’ll find everything as I said. As for him he has his den in the great thicket of the Têtes de Salmon. Do not put yourself about for the gentleman; go as close as you like, my gentleman will not budge. His wife is ill and my gentleman *is* a gentleman.”

“Well, I *will* go,” said old Guillaume with a gesture of resolution, which made him close his teeth tight and shortened the cutty-stem (already short enough) by above an inch more.

“Do you want *Louchonneau?”*

“Why, what for!”

“Well that’s true enough. You have eyes; you will look and see; you will seek, and you will find.... As for Master Mathieu’s namesake, he shall be put into his kennel after he has had a good slice of bread, for he worked to-day like an angel.”

“Ah, Mathieu,” said old Guillaume, looking sadly at the vagabond who was quietly eating his potatoes at the fireside, “do you hear that? He will tell me what oak a squirrel has climbed, and when a weasel has crossed the road. That’s what *you’ll* never know.”

“Moreover it’s what I don’t care about knowing or not knowing. What the devil would you have me make of that?”

Guillaume shrugged his shoulders at this heedlessness of Mathieu’s, unintelligible to an old keeper; then he put on his shooting coat, buckled his half-gaiters, took his gun through force of habit and because he would not have known what to do with his right arm if he had not had his gun, gave a friendly handshake to François and set off.

As for this latter, faithful to the promise he had just made to *Louchonneau,* though keeping old Guillaume in his eye as he followed the

Têtes de Salmon road, he went to the cupboard, opened it and cut a hunk of black bread of about half a pound, murmuring:

"Oh, the old bloodhound? While I was making my report, his feet were itching. Come, *Louchonneau,* my friend, have a nice crust! Now that you have worked so well, off with you to your kennel; and sharp's the word, my lad!"

Then, going out by the bakehouse door, against the exterior walls of which Master *Louchonneau's* kennel was fixed, he disappeared, followed by this latter — who felt that the crust of bread mitigated the necessity of the return to the kennel — and leaving Mathieu Goguelue alone with his potatoes.

CHAPTER IV.

A BIRD OF ILL OMEN.

HARDLY had François got out of his sight when Mathieu raised his head and an expression of intelligence which one would have thought his heavy physiognomy incapable of passed like a flash of lightning over his face.

Then he listened to the noise of the steps of the young keeper who was departing, the sound of his voice which was getting fainter, and on tip-toe he moved towards the brandy bottle, watching (thanks to his squint eyes) on one side the door through which old Guillaume had gone out, on the other that through which François had just disappeared.

Then raising the bottle and putting it in the ray of daylight which crossed the house like a golden arrow, in order to see how much liquor had been taken out and consequently how much he might absorb without getting into trouble: “Ah! the old curmudgeon,” he exclaimed. “To think he didn’t offer me any! “And in order to repair the omission of Père Guillaume, Mathieu put the neck of the bottle to his lips and swallowed rapidly three or four mouthfuls of the fiery beverage, as if it had been the most harmless liquid, and that without uttering either the *hum* of Father Guillaume or the *houch* of François.

Then as the steps of the latter drew near the room, the vagabond went with the same soft step and resumed his seat on the stool in the chimney-nook, beginning to sing with an air of innocence which would have deceived François himself, a song of which the regiment of the Queen’s Dragoons who had long been in barracks in the Castle of Villers-Cotterets had left the tradition in the town.

Mathieu had reached the second verse of his song when François reappeared on the threshold of the bakehouse. Doubtless in order to show of how little interest the presence or the absence of François was to him, Mathieu Goguelue was going on with the interminable ditty, and was about to attack the second couplet, but François, stopping in front of him, said: “Halloa! you’re singing now, are you?”

“Is singing forbidden?” asked Mathieu. “In that case the Maire should proclaim the fact by sound of trumpet, and there will be no more singing.”

“No,” answered François, “it’s not forbidden, but it will bring me ill luck!”

“Why so?”

“Because when the first bird I hear singing in the morning is a screech-owl, I say to myself, ‘bad luck.’”

“That is to say I’m a screech-owl. All right. I’m a screech-owl, am I? Well, well, I’ll be anything anybody likes.”

And bringing his two hands close together after taking the indispensable precaution of spitting into them, Mathieu Goguelue uttered a cry which imitated to perfection the sad monotonous cry of the bird of night. François himself shuddered. “Will you hold your noise, you bird of ill omen!” he said.

“Hold my peace?”

“Yes.”

“And if I have something to sing to you, what would you say?”

“I should say I have not the time to listen to you.... Look here! do me a service instead, will you?”

“Do you a service?”

“Yes, me. Do you think you cannot do anybody a good turn?”

“Oh, yes.... What do you want?”

“I want you to hold my gun in front of the fire to dry while I change my gaiters.”

“Change your gaiters! So Monsieur François is afraid of catching cold.”

“I’m not afraid of catching cold, but I am going to put on my regulation gaiters, for the inspector might come to the hunt and I want him to find me with my full kit.... Well! You don’t like the idea of drying my gun.”

“Neither yours nor anybody else’s.... May my head be crushed between two stones, like a stinking beast’s, if from to-day onward to the day when I shall be shoved into the ground, I ever touch a gun.”

“Well, that would not be much loss, seeing how you use it,” said François, opening a sort of cupboard which contained a collection of all kinds of gaiters and looking for his leggings amongst those of the Watrin family.

Mathieu followed him with his left eye, while his right eye seemed to be exclusively occupied with his last potato, which he was peeling slowly and clumsily; then he grumbled as he followed him with his eye, “Well, and why should I use it better when I use it for other people? Just let the chance offer for using it for my own benefit, and you’ll see I’m no more awkward-handed than yourself!”

“And what will you put your hand to if not to a gun?” asked François, with his foot on a chair and beginning to buckle his long gaiters on. “I’ll put my hand to my wages! Monsieur Watrin had proposed to get me appointed as under-keeper; but as one has to serve His Highness a year, two years, and sometimes three years all for nothing — no, thank you. I’m not on for *that* job. I much prefer to be manservant at the Maire’s.”

“What! servant at the Maire’s! Servant in the house of M. Raisin, the wood-merchant?”

“Yes, just so; in the house of M. Raisin, the Maire, the wood-merchant.”

“Oh,” said François, buckling his gaiters and with a shrug of his shoulders which showed the contempt he felt for a domestic.

“Are you annoyed?”

“Not I,” answered François, “it’s all one to me! All I want to know is what’s to become of old Pierre in all this business.”

“Ecod!” said Mathieu, carelessly. “It seems that he is going to leave.”

“Going to leave!” replied François, with a touch of interest concerning the old servant they were talking of.

“Of course, since I am taking his place, he must be going,” continued Mathieu.

“But it’s impossible,” rejoined François, “he has been in the Raisin’s house for the last twenty years!”

“All the more reason for another having a look in,” said Mathieu with his evil smile.

“Look here, you are a bad fellow, *Louchonneau,”* cried François.

“To begin with,” answered Mathieu, with that stolid air he knew so well how to put on, “my name is not *Louchonneau*; that is the name of the dog you have just taken to his kennel; it is not mine.”

“Yes, you are right,” said François; “and when he learned that sometimes you were called by the same name, he objected, poor dog, saying that *he,* the bloodhound of old Watrin, would never dream of trying to get the berth of Monsieur Deviolaine’s bloodhound, though of course a Chief Inspector’s house is more desirable than a mere head-keeper’s, and since he lodged his complaint you may squint as much as you like, but you are no longer *Louchonneau.”*

“Just think of that! So I am a bad lot in your opinion, eh, François?”

“Yes, in my opinion, and in everybody else’s.”

“Why?”

“Are you not ashamed to take the bread out of the mouth of a poor old chap like Pierre? He’ll be obliged to beg his wife and children’s bread.”

“Well, you can make him an allowance out of the 500 francs that you get from the administration as deputy-keeper.”

“I shall not make him an allowance,” answered François, “because with these 500 francs I support my mother, and she comes first. But he will always find at our house, when he chooses to come, a plate of onion soup and a bit of rabbit stew — the keeper’s usual dinner. A servant in the Maire’s house!” continued François, who had finished fastening on his second gaiter; “how like you to turn servant!”

“Oh, livery for livery,” said Mathieu, “I prefer the one which has money in the waistcoat pocket to one which has empty pockets.”

“One moment, my friend,” cried François, then correcting himself — ” No, you are not my friend — our dress is a uniform, not a livery.”

“An oak-leaf embroidered on the collar is not much different from a stripe sewn on to the sleeve,” said Mathieu with a jerk of his head which established by gesture at the same time as his words the slightness of the distinction he made between them.

“Yes,” continued François, who did not want his interlocutor to have the last word; “only when one has the oak-leaf on one’s collar one works, whereas with the stripe on the sleeve one does nothing.... That’s what made you prefer the stripe to the oak-leaf, isn’t it, lazybones?”

“It’s like enough,” answered Mathieu. Then passing suddenly from one idea to another, as if that idea had suddenly presented itself to his mind: “Talking of that, I hear that Catherine is coming back from Paris to-day.”

“Who’s Catherine?” asked François. “Catherine — oh, she’s just Catherine, old Guillaume’s niece, and Monsieur Bernard’s cousin, who has finished her apprenticeship as a seamstress and milliner in Paris, and who is going to take the shop of Mademoiselle Rigolot in the *Place de la Fontaine* at Villers-Cotterets.”

“Well, and what of that?” asked François. “Well, if she came back to-day, I should not go away till to-morrow.... There will be a jollification here for the return of this mirror of virtue!”

“Listen, Mathieu,” said François in a more serious way than he had done till then. “When you speak before others than myself about Mademoiselle Catherine in this house, you must pay attention in whose presence you speak.”

“Why so?”

“Because Mademoiselle Catherine is the daughter of Monsieur Guillaume Watrin’s own sister.”

“Yes, and Monsieur Bernard’s sweetheart, is she not?”

“As for that, if you are asked, Mathieu,” rejoined François, “I advise you to say that you know nothing about it, do you see?”

“Well, that’s your mistake; I’ll say what I know — I have seen what I have seen, and heard what I have heard.”

“Ah,” said François, looking at Mathieu with an expression of disgust, and contempt, so mingled together that it was impossible to say which feeling dominated, “you are quite right to become a flunkey; it was your calling, Mathieu, the spy and informer.... Good luck to you in your new calling! If Bernard comes down, tell him I shall await him a hundred paces from here at the rendezvous, that is to say the Stag’s Leap, do you hear?”

And flinging his gun over his shoulder with that movement which only belongs to those who have a fully developed habit of wielding that weapon, he went out repeating, “Yes, I won’t unsay what I have said. Mathieu, you are a horrid, nasty fellow!”

Mathieu saw him depart and smiled his eternal smile; then when the young keeper had disappeared, that bright light of intelligence which had only gleamed for a moment before, once more shone out on his brow, and with a voice full of threatening and getting louder as the object threatened got farther away, he exclaimed:

“Ah, you won’t unsay what you have said, eh? I am a nasty fellow, am I? I shoot badly, do I? Bernard’s dog protested because I was called *Louchonneau* like him, eh? I am a spy, a lazybones, an informer! Oh, patience, patience, patience! The world will not come to an end to-day, and perhaps I shall wipe off that score before the end of the world.”

At that moment the planks of the staircase leading to the first floor creaked, a door opened, and a fine, healthy-looking and powerfully-built young man of five and twenty, equipped from head to foot as a ranger, but for the gun, appeared on the threshold. This was Bernard Watrin, the son of the house, who has been mentioned twice or thrice in the preceding chapters.

The accoutrement of the young keeper was irreproachable. His blue coat with silver buttons, closed from top to bottom, showed off a figure admirably moulded; velveteen trousers that fitted tight, and leather gaiters coming above the knee, displayed a thigh and a leg magnificently modelled; lastly his dark yellow hair, and his whiskers of a warmer tint than his hair harmonized perfectly with cheeks from which exposure and sunshine had not been able to take the youthful freshness.

There was something so perfectly sympathetic in the man we have just brought on the scene, that in spite of the firmness of his light blue eyes and the rather hard outline of his chin — the sign of strength of will pushed to the extent of obstinacy, it was impossible not to feel oneself drawn to him.

But Mathieu was not one of those who yield to that sort of attraction. The physical beauty of Bernard which made so complete a contrast with his own ugliness had always caused the vagabond envy and hate, and assuredly if he had had only to wish for a misfortune twice as great to fall on Bernard, he would not have hesitated to wish to lose an eye in order that Bernard should lose both his, or to break a leg in order that Bernard’s two legs should be broken.

This feeling was so strong with him that, however he might try to smile at Bernard, he could never manage to smile at him except with the wrong side of his face.

On that day his smile was greener and more vinegary than ever. There was a sort of constrained and impatient joy in that smile — the smile of Caliban at the first peal of thunder that heralded a storm.

Bernard paid no attention to the smile. He on the other hand seemed to have a joyful concert singing of youth and life and love in the depths of his heart.

His look ranged with astonishment, almost with disquietude, around him.

“Halloa,” said he, “I thought I heard François’ voice. Was he not here a moment ago?”

“Yes, he was here right enough; but he got impatient at waiting for you and went away.”

“All right, we shall meet at the rendezvous.” And Bernard went to the chimney-piece, unhooked his gun, blew down the barrels to make sure they were empty and clean, primed the two touch-holes, poured a charge of powder into each barrel and extracted from his game-bag a couple of felt wads.

"Halloa," said Mathieu, "you still use stamped-out wads?"

"Yes; I find they press down the powder more evenly. Halloa, what have I done with my knife?"

Bernard felt in all his pockets, but could not find the object he had need of.

"Will you have mine?" asked Mathieu.

"Yes, give it me."

Bernard took the knife, marked two crosses on the bullets and slipped the two bullets into the barrel of his gun.

"What are you doing, Monsieur Bernard?" asked Mathieu.

"I am marking my bullets, in order to be able to recognize them if there is a discussion. When two people fire at the same wild boar, and the wild boar has only one bullet in him, it is just as well to know who killed it."

And Bernard advanced towards the door, Mathieu following him with his squinting eye; and that eye had at that moment an incredible expression of ferocity in it.

Then, when the young man was all but on the threshold of the door, he exclaimed:

"Monsieur Bernard, just a word. Seeing it is your favourite François who has marked down the boar, you know you will not draw a blank... besides, so early in the morning the dogs have no nose."

"Well, what is it you want to say to me?"

"What is it I want to say to you?"

"Yes."

"Is it true that the world's wonder comes to-day?"

"Whom are you talking about?" said Bernard, knitting his brows.

"Why, of Catherine."

Hardly had Mathieu uttered that name, when a vigorous box on the ear resounded through the room. He drew back two paces, without the expression of his countenance changing.

"Halloa, halloa, what's the matter with you this morning, Monsieur Bernard?"

"Nothing," replied the Forester; "only I want to teach you henceforward to pronounce that name with the respect that everybody has for it, — and I especially."

“Oh,” said Mathieu, keeping one of his hands on his cheek and rummaging with the other in his pocket; “when you know what is in this paper you will be sorry for that blow you have just given me.”

“In that paper?” repeated Bernard.

“Yes.”

“Let me see it, then.”

“Wait a bit.”

“Let me see it, I tell you! “And stepping towards Mathieu he tore the paper out of his hands.

It was a letter having this address:

“To Mademoiselle Catherine Blum, “*Rue Bourg l’Abbé,* No. 15.

“Paris.”

CHAPTER V.

CATHERINE BLUM.

THE mere touch of the paper, the mere reading of the address, sent a shudder through Bernard’s whole body, as if he had divined that this letter enclosed for him a whole period of new existence, a whole series of unknown misfortunes.

The girl to whom the letter was addressed and whom we have already said a few words about, was the daughter of Père Guillaume’s sister and consequently first cousin to Bernard.

Now, how came it to pass that this girl had a German name? How had she been brought up by others than her father and mother? How did she find herself at this moment at No. 15, *Rue Bourg l’Abbé*, Paris? That is what we shall proceed to unfold.

In 1808 a column of German prisoners who came from the battlefields of Friedland and Eylau crossed through France, billeting themselves on private individuals as the French soldiers themselves did.

A young Badener, who had been severely wounded at the first of those two battles, found himself billeted at the house of Guillaume Watrin, who had been married for four or five years and in whose house lived Rose Watrin, his sister, a pretty girl of seventeen or eighteen.

The stranger’s wound, grave enough at the time he had come out of the ambulance, had been so inflamed by marches, fatigue and want of attention that, on a certificate of the doctor and the surgeon of Villers-Cotterets, Messieurs Lécosse and Raynal, he was obliged to remain in the native town of the narrator of this story.

They wanted to take him to the hospital, but the young soldier showed such a repugnance to this change that Père Guillaume (who at this epoch was simply called Guillaume as he was then a young fellow of from twenty-eight to thirty) was the first to propose that he should remain at the *Faisanderie.*

This was the name of Guillaume’s residence in 1808, situated about quarter of a league at most from the town, under the finest and tallest trees of that part of the forest that is called the Park.

What had above all things inspired Friedrich Blum (that was the name of the wounded man) with this lively repugnance to the hospital was not only the cleanliness of his host and his young wife, the excellent air of the *Faisanderie* and the delicious view from the little room over the garden-plots of the keepers and the green trees of the forest, but also and more especially the sight of that charming flower which one would have thought had been plucked in one of those plots and which was called Rose Watrin.

She on her part, when she saw the young man, so handsome, so pale and so ill, about to be put on the stretcher of the poor and transferred to the hospital, had felt such a painful shock that her heart failed her and she went and entreated her brother with clasped hands and tears in her eyes, not daring to utter a single word, but much more eloquent by her silence than she could have been by the most urgent words in the world.

Watrin had understood all that was going on in his sister's soul, and moved less by the girl's desire than by that deep-seated pity which one is always sure to find in men who live in isolation and solitude, he had consented to the young Badener remaining at the *Faisanderie.* From that moment, by a tacit convention, Watrin's wife had resumed all the cares of her household and of her son Bernard, at that time three years of age; while Rose, the lovely forest flower, had consecrated herself exclusively to the care of the wounded man.

The wound had been made (the reader must pardon the half dozen scientific words which we can hardly avoid using) — the wound had been made, we repeat, by a bullet which had struck the *condyle* of *the femur,* had penetrated through the *aponeurosis* of the *fescia lata* and lodged in the deep layers of flesh in that part, where it had remained and set up violent irritation. At first the surgeon had thought the thigh-bone was broken and had wished to amputate the limb; but this operation had terrified the young man, not so much because of the pain involved, as from the idea of lasting mutilation. He declared that he preferred to die; and as he had to do with French surgeons who did not care much whether he died or not, they left him in the ambulance, where gradually — to use the scientific term again — the bullet had become encysted in the muscular tissues by reason of an aponeurotic secretion.

Meantime the order had come to make the prisoners march to France. The prisoners, wounded or not, had been put on carts and sent off to their destination; Friedrich Blum like the rest and with the rest. He had travelled two hundred leagues in this way; but on reaching Villers-Cotterets his sufferings had been so intolerable that he had not been able to go further.

Fortunately what might have been regarded as an aggravation had proved, on the contrary, a beginning of convalescence. The bullet, whether it had been driven by some violent effort or carried by its own weight, had burst through its abnormal envelope and slipped down between the muscles, the interstitial tissue of which it had torn in its descent.

Now, one can understand that this miracle of nature, this strange cure that the body undertakes on its own account, is not performed instantly and without violent pains. The wounded man remained three months stretched on his bed of fever, then gradually a marked improvement declared itself; he was able to get up and walk, first to the window and then to the door, then go out, then walk about, leaning on Rose Watrin’s arm, under the great trees that are close to the *Faisanderie,* and finally one day he felt a foreign body roll between the flexors of his left leg. He summoned a surgeon; the surgeon made a slight incision and the bullet, which had almost been mortal, fell harmless into the hands of the operator. Friedrich Blum was cured.

But as the result of this cure it turned out that there were two wounded people in the Watrin household instead of one.

Happily the peace of Tilsit occurred. A new kingdom had been created in 1807; it took from the ancient duchy of Westphalia the bishopric of Paderborn, Horn and Bielefeld; it joined to it a portion of the Upper Rhine circles and lower Saxony; it included moreover the south of Hanover, Hesse-Cassel and the Principalities of Magdeburg and of Verden.

This kingdom was called the kingdom of Westphalia. Remaining in a mythical state so long as the great question which was put to the ordeal of battle was not settled by the victories of Friedland and Eylau, it was recognized by Alexander at the peace of Tilsit and thenceforward among European kingdoms, among which it was only to figure for six years.

One morning Friedrich Blum awoke a Westphalian for good, and consequently an ally of the French instead of their enemy. Then there was a serious question of realizing the idea which had been occupying the minds of the young people for six months, namely that of marrying them. The real difficulty had disappeared; Guillaume Watrin was too good a Frenchman to give his sister to a man liable to serve against France and fire shots one day against Bernard, whom his father already saw clothed in a uniform and charging the enemies of his country; but Friedrich Blum having become a Westphalian and consequently a Frenchman, the marriage of the two young folks was the simplest affair in the world.

Friedrich gave his word as a good and brave German to come back within three months, and departed. Many were the tears shed at the leave-taking; but good faith was so clearly marked on the man's face that his return was never doubted for a moment. He had a project of which he said nothing to anybody, and that was to go and find the new king at Cassel and to present him with a petition in which he recounted all his story and asked for the post of keeper in that forest of eighty leagues long by fifteen broad which stretches from the Rhine to the Danube and which is called the Black Forest.

The plan was simple and straightforward, and succeeded from the very fact of its childish naïveté. One day from the balcony of the Palace the king saw a soldier who, a paper in his hand, seemed to be soliciting some favour; he was in a kindly humour, as kings always are when on the first step of the throne; instead of sending for the petition he sent for the soldier. This latter declared to him in pretty good French what the petition contained. The king wrote the word "granted "under the report and Friedrich Blum found himself keeper of a district in the Black Forest.

A month's holiday in order to give the new guard the time to go for his betrothed, and an advance of 500 florins to help him make the journey, were joined to the brevet which assured the future of our two young people. Fried-rich Blum had asked for three months. He returned at the end of six weeks. This was a proof of his love which spoke for itself and that so loudly that Guillaume Watrin had no objection to offer. But Marianne had, and a serious one. Marianne was a good Catholic who went every Sunday to her Mass at the church of Villers-Cotterets and took the communion at the four great festivals of the year under the direction of the Abbé Grégoire. Now Friedrich Blum was a Protestant and in the eyes of Marianne the soul of Friedrich Blum was inevitably lost, and that of her sister-in-law seriously compromised.

The Abbé Grégoire was summoned.

The Abbé Grégoire was an excellent man, purblind as a mole, as to his bodily eyes; but this external and material short-sightedness had made the sight of his soul only the keener and more piercing. It was impossible to have a juster and truer notion of the things of this world and those of the next than the worthy Abbé had, and no priest, ever since vow of abjuration was pronounced by man, had remained more faithful to his vows.

The Abbé Grégoire replied that there was a religion which should be followed before all and that was the religion of the soul; now the souls of the two young people had made a mutual oath. Friedrich Blum would follow his religion, Rose Watrin hers, the children would be brought up in the religion of the country which they would live in and on the Day of Judgment, God, who is all merciful, would be satisfied by the separation not of Protestants and Catholics (that was the good Abbé's hope) but merely of the good and the bad.

This decision of the Abbé Grégoire being supported by the two lovers and by Guillaume Watrin, and having three votes in its favour, whereas the contrary proposition, that of Marianne, had only one, it was agreed that the marriage should take place as soon as the religious formalities were accomplished. These formalities took three weeks, after which Rose Watrin and Friedrich Blum were married at the *Mairie* of Villers-Cotterets, in the register of which one can see their names under date of the 12th September, 1809, and also in the church of the same town. The absence of a Protestant pastor caused the marriage in the Protestant church to be deferred till the couple arrived in Westphalia. A month afterwards, exactly, they were married again by the pastor of Verdeck, and all the ceremonies that bound the followers of two different sects together were finally accomplished. Ten months later a child of the female sex was born, which received the name of Catherine, and she was brought up a Protestant, that being the religion of the country in which she was born. Three and a half years of perfect felicity passed for the young couple; then came the campaign of 1812, which brought about the no less fatal campaign of 1813. The "*Grande Armée* "disappeared under the snows of Russia and the ice of the Beresina. A new army had to be raised; every man that had already figured on the lists and every one that was under thirty was summoned to take arms. Friedrich Blum by this decree found himself doubly a soldier, once for having formerly figured on the army list, twice because he was only twenty-nine and four months. He might perhaps have pleaded this reason for exemption to the King of Westphalia that he sometimes suffered cruelly from his old wound; he never thought of doing so. He set out for Cassel, presented himself to the King, was recognized by him, asked to serve as before in the cavalry, commended his wife and child to the Prince, and set off as a brigadier in the Westphalian *chasseurs*. He was among the victors at Lutzen and at Bautzen; among the vanquished and the dead at Leipzig. This time a Saxon bullet had gone through his breast and he lay down never to rise again among the 60,000 casualties of that day — a day on which 117,000 cannon shots were fired, which was 111,000 more than at Malphaquet — a fine example of the progress that comes with successive centuries!

The King of Westphalia did not forget the promise he had made. A pension of 300 florins was granted to the widow of Friedrich Blum, and reached her amid her grief and her tears; but from the beginning of 1814 the kingdom of Westphalia no longer existed and King Jerome had ceased to count among crowned heads. Friedrich Blum had been killed in the French ranks; in this reactionary epoch it was enough to cause his widow to be looked at askance in this new Germany which had just risen *en masse* against the French; so she set out with the remainder of the French army which was crossing the frontier, and one morning, with her baby in her arms, she came and knocked at her brother Guillaume's door. Mother and child were received by this great-heart as though they were the messengers of God. The little girl — she was three years old — became the sister of Bernard, who was nine; the mother took her place on Blum's bed of suffering in the little room from which one could see the forest gardens. Poor woman, she was more dangerously ill than her husband had been; weariness and sorrow had determined an attack of double pneumonia, which degenerated into pulmonary consumption, and in spite of all the care with which she was tended by her brother and sister-in-law, occasioned her death. So that towards the end of 1814, that is to say at the age of four, little Catherine Blum found herself an orphan. Orphan in name only, of course, for she would have found a father and mother in Watrin and his wife if a father and mother ever could be replaced. But what she did find was a brother in young Bernard, a brother as tender and devoted as if he had had the same father and mother as herself. The two children grew up without being the least disturbed by the political vicissitudes which agitated France, and which twice or thrice put the material existence of their relatives in jeopardy. Napoleon abdicated at Fontainebleau, re-entered Paris a year later, fell a second time at Waterloo, embarked at Rochefort, was chained up and died on his rock at St. Helena, and yet none of these great catastrophes took anything like the importance in their eyes that history was destined to give them. What was important to this family lost under the thick forest leaves, where the life and death of the great ones of the world roused so feeble an echo, was the fact that the Duke of Orleans, whose apanage the forest of Villers-Cotterets had become, kept Guillaume Watrin on in his position as head-keeper.

This position was preserved for him and had even been improved. On the tragic death of Choron, Watrin had been summoned from the *garderie* of *la Pépinière* to that of Chavigny, and had had to leave his residence the *Faisanderie* for the New House on the Soissons Road. Now 100 francs additional had been assigned to this keeper’s place and an increase of 100 francs was a notable improvement in the salary of the old head-ranger.

Bernard for his part had grown up and had been appointed deputy-keeper at eighteen, then keeper with 500 francs on the day he was twenty-one. The result was 1,400 francs united in the same house, which taken along with free lodging and shooting perquisites had brought comfort to the family. Everybody felt the effect of this comfort. Catherine Blum had been sent to school at Villers-Cotterets and had thus received an education which had gradually made a town young lady out of the erstwhile peasant girl. Her beauty had grown along with her education and at sixteen Catherine Blum was one of the most charming girls of Villers-Cotterets and the neighbourhood. It was then that the brotherly love that Bernard had borne all his young life towards Catherine gradually changed its nature and became a lover’s love.

However, neither of the two young people had been able clearly to analyse this feeling; each understood that the other was dearer than before as they passed from childhood to adolescence, but neither of them understood the state of their heart until the time when a circumstance happened which proved to them that their existence had only one spring, as two flowers have one stalk.

On her leaving school, that is to say at the age of thirteen or fourteen, Catherine Blum had been apprenticed to Mademoiselle Rigolot, the leading milliner of Villers-Cotterets; she had remained there two years, and had given such proof of intelligence and taste that Mademoiselle Rigolot had declared that if Catherine Blum were to pass a year or eighteen months in Paris in order to acquire the taste of the metropolis, she would not hesitate, even without ready money down, but for 2,000 francs a year for six years, to deliver up her business to her former apprentice in preference to anyone else. This offer was too serious not to rouse grave reflections between Guillaume Watrin and his wife. It was decided that, furnished with a letter from Mademoiselle Rigolot for her Paris correspondent, Catherine should set out from Villers-Cotterets and take up her abode for a year or eighteen months in the capital. The *Rue Bourg l Abbé* was not perhaps one of the streets where fashion showed her newest and most elegant creations, but it was in *Rue Bourg l'Abbé* that the correspondent of Mademoiselle Rigolot lived, and they trusted in Catherine to correct what might be too old-fashioned in the taste of the inhabitants of this middle-class street.

It was only when Bernard and Catherine had to take leave of one another that they perceived really and truly how far their love had gone, and that this love possessed all the concentration and egoism of that of a lover for his mistress, and none of the loose texture of a brother's affection for a sister.

Promises to think eternally of one another, to write at least three times a week, and to preserve an unshakeable fidelity were exchanged between the two young people, who kept close within their two hearts the secret of their love, of which they themselves perhaps had but a dim idea.

During Catherine's eighteen months of absence, Bernard had enjoyed two holidays of four-and-twenty hours each; these two holidays, due to the special protection of his Inspector, who liked as men and appreciated as servants the two Watrins, were naturally employed by Bernard in making two journeys to Paris, which only united closer the bonds which held the two young folk.

At length the hour of return arrived, and in order to celebrate this return the Inspector had given permission for a wild boar to be killed. It was with this intention that François had got up at three in the morning, headed off the beast, and made his report to old Guillaume, that the latter had gone in person to verify the report, that the keepers of the sub-district of Chavigny, the natural helpers and sworn allies of the inhabitants of the *Maison Neuve*, had arranged a meeting at the *Saut du Cerf,* and that Bernard, dreaming the sweetest dream at the idea of this return, had come down combed, curled, titivated and a glad smile on his face when the letter placed before his eyes by Mathieu Goguelue had suddenly changed this smile into a frown and this joy into disquietude.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PARISIAN.

AS a matter of fact Bernard had recognized in the address of the letter the writing of a young man called Louis Chollet, the son of a wood-merchant in Paris, who had come to dwell two years before this date in the house of a Monsieur Raisin, the leading timber-merchant of Villers-Cotterets, and at the same time Maire of the town.

He was there learning the practical side of his trade, that is to say he was filling the post of first salesman with Monsieur Raisin; just as in Germany, and more especially on the banks of the Rhine, the sons of the most important hotel-keepers take the position of head-waiters in the establishments of their father's colleagues in other cities.

Chollet senior was very rich, and allowed his son for pocket money 500 francs a month. With 500 francs a month at Villers-Cotterets one can keep a tilbury, a riding horse and a carriage-horse. Moreover, and more especially when one gets one's clothes made in Paris, and one can have one's tailor paid out of the paternal till, one becomes the king of provincial fashion. That was what had occurred in the case of Louis Chollet. Young, rich, a handsome fellow, accustomed to Parisian life, whose facile amours had given him that notion of women which young men acquire who have never known anything else but *grisettes* or *cocottes*, Chollet had come to think that nothing in petticoats could by any manner of means resist his fascinations.

So on his arrival and on the very first Sunday, thinking that, thanks to his coat cut in the latest fashion, his trousers of a tender and delicate hue, his open-worked shirt and his gold watch with its countless trinkets, he would only have, like another Soliman, to fling his handkerchief, he had presented himself in the dancing saloon, and having made an examination of all the young ladies, had flung the handkerchief to Catherine Blum.

Unfortunately he had met the same rebuff as had three centuries before befallen the illustrious Soldan to whom we have had the honour to compare him; the handkerchief was not lifted up any more by the modern Roxana than by the Roxana of the middle ages, and the Parisian (such was the nickname with which the new-comer had been baptized) had been labouring in vain.

Moreover, as the Parisian had paid marked attention to Catherine, Catherine had not appeared at the dance on the following Sunday. And this was done in quite a natural way. She had read in Bernard's eyes the disquietude which the assiduity of the budding salesman had caused Bernard, and she had proposed to her cousin to go and pass the next Sunday at the *Maison Neuve* — a proposal that he accepted with enthusiasm — her cousin remaining at home, instead of spending that day at Villers-Cotterets, as he had been accustomed to do ever since Catherine had come to town. But the Parisian had not regarded himself as beaten; he had ordered shirts from Mademoiselle Rigolot, then handkerchiefs, then collars, and this had given him many occasions of seeing her — occasions on which she displayed the utmost politeness as first saleswoman, and the utmost coldness as a woman. These visits of the Parisian to Mademoiselle Rigolot's — visits which were obvious in their intent — had much alarmed Bernard. But how to prevent them? The future wood-merchant was the sole and unique judge of the number of shirts, handkerchiefs, and collars that he needed, and if it was his pleasure to have twenty-four dozen shirts, forty-eight dozen handkerchiefs and six hundred collars, that was no business of Bernard Watrin's.

Besides it was his right to order his shirts one by one and his handkerchiefs and his collars one by one, a fact which allowed of entering Mademoiselle Rigolot's shop 365 times a year!

From this number of days however we must subtract the Sundays, not that Mademoiselle Rigolot shut her shop on Sundays, but every Saturday at eight o'clock at night Bernard came for his cousin, whom he brought back every Monday at eight in the morning. And it was noteworthy that the moment this custom was known by the Parisian, the latter had never once had the idea of ordering anything on Sunday from Mademoiselle Rigolot, or so much as inquiring on that day whether the articles ordered by him during the week were ready.

It was during this time that the proposal to send Catherine to Paris had proceeded from Mademoiselle Rigolot — a proposal which, as was said before, had been favourably received by Guillaume and his wife and to which Bernard would have offered much more resistance, had he not considered that the execution of this project put seventy-two kilometres between the detested Louis Chollet and the beloved Catherine Blum.

This idea had so far as Bernard was concerned softened the pain of separation.

But although there was no railway at that epoch, seventy-two kilometres were no hindrance for a lover, more especially when that lover, being an amateur salesman, had no need to ask leave of his employer and possessed 500 francs a month of pocket money.

The result was that for the two journeys that Bernard had made to Paris in the space of eighteen months, Chollet, who was master of his own actions and who cashed every 30th of the month the same sum as poor Bernard pocketed on the 365th day of the year, the result was, I say, that for these two journeys Chollet made twelve. Another remarkable thing was that ever since Catherine's departure for Paris Ghollet had ceased to buy shirts at Mademoiselle Rigolot's, *Place de la Fontaine* at Villers-Cotterets, and bought them in Paris from Madame Cretté and Company, 15, *Rue Bourg l'Abbé.*

Of course Catherine had immediately put Bernard in possession of this knowledge, which had considerable importance for Mademoiselle Rigolot, but much more for him. Now the human heart is so made that though he was sure of the feeling which his cousin had vowed him, this courtship of the Parisian did not fail to alarm him. A score of times he had had the idea of picking a good quarrel with Louis Chollet — one of those differences which are ended by a sword-thrust or a pistol-shot; and as, thanks to his special opportunities of practice, Bernard wielded a pistol in first-class style, and as, thanks to one of his chums who had been fencing master in a line regiment, and who in a neighbourly way had given him as many lessons as he chose to take, he handled the rapier very prettily, the matter pushed to its final consequences would only have moderately disquieted him. But how to pick a quarrel with a man with whom he had had no disagreement; a man who was polite towards everybody and more particularly with him? The thing was impossible.

He had to bide his time. Bernard had bided it for eighteen months and during these eighteen months it had never offered. But now on the very day on which Catherine Blum was to return he was given a letter addressed to the girl and he recognized that the address was written in his rival's hand. One can therefore understand the excitement and paleness which had seized

Bernard at the mere sight of this letter. He turned it over and over, as we have said, in his hand, drew out his handkerchief and mopped his brow. Then, as if thinking he might have need once more of his handkerchief, he kept it under his left arm instead of putting it in his pocket and with the air of a man who takes a great resolution he unsealed the letter. Mathieu looked at him doing so with his wicked smile and, perceiving that he became paler and paler as he read on, he cried:

"Look you, Monsieur Bernard, that is just what I told myself when I took that letter out of Pierre's pocket.... I said: 'Well, well, now I must be off and enlighten Monsieur Bernard as to the goings on of this Parisian and at the same time I shall get Pierre dismissed his place,' and so it happened, when Pierre came and said he had lost the letter — the ass, as if he could not have said he had put it in the post, eh? That would have had this advantage, that the Parisian thinking that the first had gone would not have written a second and consequently Mademoiselle Catherine would not have received it, and not having received it would not have answered it!"

At that moment, Bernard, who was reading the letter through for the second time, interrupted himself and shouted: "How do you mean, 'answered,' you wretch! Catherine answered the Parisian's letter?"

"Oh, oh," said Mathieu, protecting his cheek with his hand for fear of a sound box on the ear. "I don't exactly say that."

"What do you say, then?"

"I say that Mademoiselle Catherine is a woman and that sin always tempts a daughter of Eve."

"I ask you positively if Catherine answered, do you understand, Mathieu?"

"Perhaps yes, and perhaps no. But you know, don't you, that silence gives consent."

"Mathieu!" cried the young man, making a threatening gesture.

"In any case he was to have started this morning to meet her with the tilbury."

"Did he start?"

"How do I know," said Mathieu, "since I slept in the bakehouse! But would you like to know?"

"Yes, certainly I should."

"Well. That's easy. If you inquire at Villers-Cotterets of the first person you meet: 'Has Louis Chollet been seen going in the direction of

Gondreville with his tilbury? ‘you will get the answer, yes.”

“Yes! Then he has been?”

“Yes and no. I am an imbecile, as you know — I tell you he was to have gone. I don’t say he went.”

“But how can you know that? “(As a matter of fact the letter had been unsealed and resealed.)

“Oh, I don’t know. Perhaps the Parisian opened it again to write a P.S.”

“So it wasn’t you who unsealed the letter and then resealed it?”

“What would have been the use? Can I read? Am I not a brute beast that could never for the life of him learn his A B C?”

“That’s true,” muttered Bernard; “but tell me, how do you know he was to go and meet her?”

“Oh! he told me, you know; ‘Mathieu,’ said he, ‘we must have the nag dressed down bright and early; I’m off at six o’clock in the morning in the tilbury, to meet Catherine.’”

“Did he say *Catherine* right out, like that?”

“Oh! he made no bones about that, I warrant you.”

“Ha!” growled Bernard, “I only wish I’d been there, to hear the brute say it!”

“Yes indeed! you would have given him a clout on the head, as you did me... or rather, you wouldn’t have, — not you!”

“Why not?”

“Because you shoot straight, that’s true enough, but then there are plenty of trees in Monsieur Raisin’s wood-yard all pitted with pistol-balls to prove he’s not a bad hand neither... because you are a tidy swordsman, true for you, but he had a bout the other day with the Sub-Inspector, an old Lifeguardsman, and he gave him a fine dance, they do tell me!”

“So!” cried Bernard, “so you think that would have stopped me, eh?”

“I don’t say that, no! but you would have thought twice before you struck the Parisian; he’s not like poor Mathieu Goguelue, just as defenceless as a child.”

A good-natured impulse, a feeling of compassion and almost of shame, stirred in Bernard’s heart, and holding out his hand to Mathieu, “Forgive me,” he said, “I did wrong.” Mathieu put his chilly, trembling hand in Bernard’s. “And yet... and yet...” resumed Bernard, “and yet you don’t like me, you know you don’t, Mathieu!”

“God Almighty!” protested the vagabond, “how *can* you say such a thing, Monsieur Bernard?”

“Not to mention that you tell a lie every time you open your mouth.”

“Well, well!” retorted Mathieu, “granted I told a lie... What is it to *me*, after all, whether the Parisian is, or is not, Mademoiselle Catherine’s sweetheart, and whether he goes to meet her in his tilbury, or whether he doesn’t, now that Monsieur Raisin, who does whatever Monsieur Chollet tells him, in hopes the man will marry his daughter Euphrosine, has sent old Pierre about his business, and taken me on in his place?... It will be just as well for me, I own freely, if they don’t find” out it was I who, out of devotion to you, took the letter out of the old chap’s pocket. He has a vile temper, has master Pierre, the sly old devil! — and when the hunt is up, why! you know, Monsieur Bernard, we must ware the boar’s tushes!”

Bernard, buried in his own thoughts and crumpling the letter meantime between his fingers, nevertheless heard plainly enough what Mathieu was saying, though no one would have supposed so. Suddenly, turning upon him and slapping the letter against his thigh:

“Well, Mathieu, I must say, you are a...”

“Oh! out with it, Monsieur Bernard,” put in Mathieu, “out with it; it’s always bad to keep a thing in!”

“You are a scoundrel!” said Bernard; “get out of the house with you!”

And he took a step towards the vagabond to push him out by main force. But as his way was, Mathieu made no sort of resistance; Bernard’s one step in advance he answered by two in the opposite direction.

Then retiring backwards, glancing over his shoulder the while so as not to miss the door.

“Maybe, it would pay you better to thank me differently; but there! it is your way.... Every man to his taste, as they say. Till we meet again, Monsieur Bernard! till we meet again...!”

Then having finally reached the door, he cried in a tone in which was concentrated all the bitterness of hi3 hatred, old and new alike:

“Do you hear, I say? *Till we meet again!* “And quickening his gait, usually so slow and heavy, he jumped the ditch dividing the high road from the forest, and diving under the shade of the great trees, disappeared from view.

CHAPTER VII.

JEALOUSY.

BUT the eye of Bernard, instead of following Mathieu, as he thus retreated with threats and menaces, had already returned to the letter.

"Yes," he muttered, "I quite understand his writing the letter; those Parisians, they stick at nothing. But that she should come back exactly the way he points out or accept a place in his tilbury is what I cannot believe. Ah! *pardieu!* so there you are, François! Welcome! welcome!"

These words were addressed to the young keeper who now opened Père Guillaume's door, as he opened the commencement of the present story.

"Yes, it is I," said he, "Faith, I came to see whether you were not dead of a stroke by now."

"No, not yet," said Bernard, a smile curling his lip.

"Then let us be off," said François. "Bobineau, La Feuille, Lajeunesse and Berthelin are at the Stag's Leap by now, and if Daddy Grumbler finds us here when he comes home, it is we shall catch it worse than the boar."

"Meanwhile come here!" said Bernard.

These words were uttered in a harsh and imperious tone which was so little Bernard's way that François looked at him in wonder. But noting at once the pallor of his face, the disturbance of his countenance and the letter he held in his hand and which seemed to be the cause of the alteration that had taken place in the look and manners of the young man, he came forward, half smiling, half uneasy, and putting his hand to his cap like a soldier saluting his superior officer, said, "Here, sir!"

Bernard, seeing his eyes fixed on the letter, hastily put the hand that held it behind his back, and laying the other on François' shoulder said, "What do you think of the Parisian?"

"The young man who is at M. Raisin, the timber-merchant's?"

"Yes."

François tossed his head and gave an approving click of the tongue.

"I say that he is well dressed, and always in the latest fashion apparently."

"His clothes are not the question."

“His looks, then? Well, he is a good-looking fellow, I cannot say otherwise.” And he made a gesture of appreciation.

“I am not speaking of him from the physical point of view,” said Bernard impatiently. “I am speaking of his morals.”

“His morals?” cried François, showing by his tone of voice that as soon as it was a question of morality his opinion would be totally changed.

“Yes, his morals,” repeated Bernard.

“Well,” replied François, “I think that in point of morals he would never put himself out to find the trail of Mother Watrin’s cow, if she was lost in Meutard meadows. And yet a cow leaves a fine trail behind her.”

“Yes, but he is quite good for marking down a doe, putting her up and following her till she is caught, especially if the said pretty doe wears a bonnet and a petticoat!”

François’ face at this suggestion assumed an expression of approving jocularity which there was no mistaking.

“Oh, upon my word, he has the name of being a rare sportsman in that line!”

“Be it so,” rejoined Bernard, clenching his fist, “but don’t let him come trespassing on my land, or let the poacher beware!”

He had spoken these words so menacingly that François glanced at him in alarm.

“Why,” said he, “what is the matter?”

“Come nearer,” said Bernard.

The young man complied. Bernard put his right arm round his companion’s neck, and placing Chollet’s letter before his eyes with his left hand asked, “What do you say to that letter?”

François looked first at him, then at the letter, and at last read:

“‘Dear Catherine,’ — Oh, your cousin, I suppose?”

“Yes,” said Bernard.

“Well, it seems to me it would not skin his mouth to call her Mademoiselle Catherine, like other people.”

“Yes, to begin with. But wait, you have not finished.”

François went on, beginning to understand how matters stood.

“DEAR CATHERINE, —

“I hear that you are coming back after eighteen months’ absence, during which I have scarcely seen you in my short excursions to Paris and have not got to speak to you. I need not tell you that during those eighteen months your charming little face has constantly been running in my head, and that I have thought only of you night and day. As I am in a hurry to repeat to you in words what I am here writing, I will go as far as Gondreville to meet you. I hope I shall find you more reasonable on your return than you were when you left, and that the air of Paris will have made you forget that clodhopper, Bernard Watrin.

“Your adorer till death,

“Louis CHOLLET”

“Oh,” commented François, “he wrote that, did he, the Parisian?”

“Unfortunately he did... ‘That clodhopper, Bernard Watrin.’ You see.”

“Ah! well... and Mademoiselle Catherine?”

“Yes, as you say, François, — and Mademoiselle Catherine?”

“Do you think he has gone to meet her?”

“Why not? These townspeople stop at nothing. And besides, why trouble about a clodhopper like me?”

“But now to come to you.”

“Me! Go on.”

“Bless my soul, you know how you stand with Mademoiselle Catherine, I suppose.”

“I knew before she went away, but after her being eighteen months at Paris, who can tell?”

“But you have been to see her?”

“Twice; and I have not seen her for eight months. In that time all sorts of things will happen in a young girl’s mind.”

“Come, come, for shame, that’s a wicked notion!” cried François. “Well now, I know Mademoiselle Catherine, and will answer for her.”

“François, François, the best woman is, if not false, at least a coquette. Those eighteen months at Paris Ah!”

“And I tell you that you will find her come back, as she went away, a good girl and a kind one.”

“Oh, but if she goes driving in his tilbury, look you!” cried Bernard with a fierce and angry gesture.

“Well, what?” asked François in affright.

“These two bullets,” he replied, drawing from his pocket the two on which he had made a cross with Mathieu’s knife, “these two bullets with my sign-manual which I put on them for the benefit of the boar...”

“Well?”

“Well, there would be one of them for him and the other for me.”

He dropped them into the barrels of his gun and securing them with two wads cried, “Come, François.”

“Oh, Bernard, Bernard!” said the young man, bracing himself to resist.

“I tell you to come, François,” cried he vehemently.

“Come along.”

And he dragged him along, but stopped suddenly, for between him and the door he found his mother.

“Mother!” he murmured.

“Good! The old lady,” said François, rubbing his hands, for he hoped the mother’s presence would make some difference in Bernard’s terrible intentions.

The old woman came in with a smiling face, carrying a cup of coffee on a plate with the usual accompaniment of two pieces of toast. She had only to glance at her son to realize with a mother’s instinct that something unusual was happening to him.

However she did not let it show, but said with her usual, smile, “A very good day to you, my child.”

“Many thanks, mother.”

He made as if to leave the room, but she held him back.

“How did you sleep, boy?” she asked.

“Splendidly.”

Then seeing him still making for the door, “Are you going already?” she said.

“They are waiting for me yonder at the Stag’s Leap and François has come to fetch me.”

“Oh, there is no hurry,” said the latter, “they must wait. Ten minutes more or less can make no difference.”

But Bernard kept moving forward.

“One moment,” said Mother Watrin, “I have scarcely said good day to you, and have not kissed you.” Then, glancing at the sky, “One would say it was dark weather to-day.”

“Bah, it will clear up,” said Bernard. “Good-bye, mother.”

“Wait!”

“What?”

“Do take something before going out.” And she offered the young man the cup of coffee she had just got ready for herself.

“Thank you, mother, I am not hungry,” said he.

“It is that nice coffee you like so much, and Catherine too,” persisted the old woman. “Come, drink it up!”

Bernard shook his head.

“No? Well, put your lips to it at any rate. It will seem better to me when you have tasted it.”

“Dear mother!” he murmured.

And taking the cup he dipped his lips in it, and put it back on the plate, saying “Thank you.”

“Anyone would say you were shaking, Bernard,” exclaimed the old woman, more and more uneasy.

“No, on the contrary, my hand has never been so steady. Only look.”

And with a gesture common among sportsmen he threw his gun from his right hand into his left.

Then, as if to break the chain which he was beginning to feel about him, “Come, come,” he said, “good-bye! this time, mother, I must be off.”

“Well then, go, since you really must, but come back soon. You know Catherine will be here this morning.”

“Yes, I know,” said the young man in a tone impossible to reproduce. “Come, François!” and Bernard sprang forward to go out, but on the very threshold of the door he met Guillaume.

“Good, here’s my father now,” cried he, falling back a step.

Père Guillaume came back, as he had left, with his pipe in his mouth, only his little grey eyes shone with evident satisfaction. He did not even see Bernard, or made believe not to see him, and spoke to François.

“Bravo, lad, bravo! You know I cannot pay compliments, don’t you?”

“No, far from it!” rejoined François truly, too much preoccupied as he was to repress a smile.

“Well!” repeated the old keeper, “bravo!”

“Oh!” cried François.” all is as I told you, then?”

“All.”

Bernard again made as if to go out, taking advantage of his father apparently not noticing him, but François stopped him.

“See now, listen a moment, Bernard. It is about the boar.”

“The boars, you mean,” corrected Guillaume.

“Yes.”

“Well, they are all there, as you said, in the Têtes de Salmon covert lying side by side, the sow big to bursting, the boar wounded in the shoulder; a six-year-old — one might think you had weighed him. I saw both as plain as I see you, you and Bernard. If I had not been afraid the others would have said, ‘Oh, so that’s all you disturbed us for, is it, eh, Father Guillaume? ‘my word! I would have settled their business for them there and then, I would.”

“So,” said Bernard, “you see very well that no time must be lost; good-bye, father.”

“My boy,” said his mother, “do not run into danger, whatever you do!”

The old keeper looked at his wife with that silent laugh which seemed unable to make its way. between his set teeth.

“Right!” he said, “if you want to go and kill the boar instead of him, mother, he can stay here and do the cooking.”

Then turning round and putting his gun in the chimney-corner, with a shrug of the shoulders peculiar to him, he added, “If that is not enough to make you sweat, from a forester’s wife!”

Bernard meanwhile had gone close up to François. “François,” he said, “you will excuse me to the others, won’t you?”

“Why?”

“Because at the first turning, I am going to leave you.”

“You don’t say so!”

“You are going to the Tètes de Salmon thicket, the rest of you.”

“Yes.”

“Well, I am going to the heath of Gondreville. Each to his own quarry.”

“Bernard!” cried François, seizing the young man by the arm.

“Come, that’s enough, I am of age, and at liberty to do what I like.”

Then, feeling a hand weighing on his shoulder, and seeing that it was Guillaume’s, he asked, “What is it, father?”

“Is your gun loaded?”

“Rather!”

“With ball, as a good marksman’s should be?”

“Yes.”

“Then you understand, behind the shoulder?,”

“I know the spot, thank you,” replied Bernard. And holding out his hand to the old forester he added, “A shake of the hand, father? “Then moving towards Marianne, “And you, mother, embrace me.”

Then after clasping the good woman in his arms he cried, “Good-bye, good-bye! “And he darted out of the house while Guillaume, looking at his wife, asked somewhat uneasily, “Tell me, mother, what is the matter with your son this morning? He seems to me quite queer.”

“And so he does to me,” cried the good woman eagerly. “You ought to call him back, father!”

“Bah! What for?” was the reply. “To know whether he has had bad dreams? “Then going to the doorway with his pipe in his mouth and his hands in his pockets he called after him, “Hi, Bernard! You understand; behind the shoulder!”

But Bernard had abruptly left François, who was pursuing his way to the Stag’s Leap by himself.

Nevertheless a voice which was unmistakeably the young man’s answered, ringing over the intervening space with a sinister tone that made the old man shudder. “Yes, father, we know, thank God, where to plant a bullet, don’t we? Never fear!”

“God protect the poor lad!” murmured Marianne, crossing herself.

CHAPTER VIII.

FATHER AND MOTHER.

THUS left alone, Guillaume and Marianne looked at each other. Then speaking to himself as if under the circumstances the presence of his wife could throw no light on the question he was putting to himself, he asked, “What the devil is Bernard going to do town-way?”

“Town-way I “cried Marianne; “is he going towards town?”

“Yes. He has gone the shortest way too, that is to say, instead of keeping to the road he has cut across the forest.”

“Across the forest? Are you sure?”

“Certainly. There are the others going into the glade at Houchard Bottom and Bernard is not with them. Hi, you others!”

And Father Guillaume moved, half to call the foresters to him, half to go to them himself, but his wife stopped him.

“Stay, father,” she said. “I want to talk to you.”

Guillaume looked at her sideways. She nodded affirmatively.

“Why,” cried he, “if one was to listen to you, you have always something to say. Only what one wants to know is whether what you have to say is worth hearing.”

And he again made as if to go out and ask of François or one of his companions the reason Bernard had left them. But Marianne stopped him again.

“Here, stay,” said she, “since I tell you to!”

Guillaume stayed, but with obvious impatience. “See now,” he said, “what do you want with me? Out with it, quick.”

“Have a little patience! You’d have folks finish before they begin, you would.”

“Me?”

“Yes, you. You begin with *Louchonneau* and you end up with the Grand Turk.”

“Well, this time I will begin and end with Bernard. Does that satisfy you?”

"Go on, anyway," he replied, folding his arms with an air of resignation, "and I will tell you afterwards."

"Well, look here. You said yourself that Bernard has gone towards the town?"

"Yes."

"And that he has cut across the forest as the nearest way?"

"What then?"

"And in fact that he has not gone up with the others towards the Têtes de Salmon?"

"Yes. Well, do you know where he is gone? If you do, tell me and let's have an end of it. You see I am listening. If you don't know, there's no occasion to keep me waiting here."

"You will observe that it is you who are talking now, and not I."

"I won't say another word," retorted Guillaume. "Well, then," went on the mother, "he went to town...."

"To meet Catherine the quicker. Sly dog! If that's your news, keep it for last year's almanack."

"Where you make the mistake is that he did not go that way to meet Catherine the sooner."

"Oh! and who did he go to town after?"

"He went after Mademoiselle Euphrosine."

"The daughter of the wood-merchant, the Maire's daughter, M. Raisin's daughter? That's all right."

"Yes, for the wood-merchant's daughter, the Maire's daughter, M. Raisin's daughter."

"Hold your tongue."

"Why so?"

"Hold your tongue!"

"Well..."

"Hold your tongue, I tell you!"

"Oh, I never saw such a man!" cried she, lifting her hands to heaven in desperation. "Never right! I do a thing this way and I am wrong. I do it in another way and I am wrong. If I speak, 'silence! 'I should not have spoken. If I hold my tongue, why I ought to have spoken. Why in the Lord's name what is one's tongue for if not to say what one has on one's mind?"

"Why, it seems to me," retorted Père Guillaume, looking slyly at his wife, "that you let it run pretty freely, your tongue."

Then as if he had learnt what he wanted to know, he proceeded to fill his pipe, whistling softly a little hunting tune the while as a polite hint to his wife to let their talk end there.

But Marianne was not so easily beaten. “Well now,” she went on, “what if I told you that it was the girl herself who was the first to tell me about it?”

“When?” asked Guillaume laconically. “Last Sunday, coming out from Mass.”

“What did she say to you?”

“She said... do you mean to listen, yes or no?”

“Eh? I am listening.”

“She said to me, ‘Do you know, Madame Watrin, that M. Bernard is a very enterprising young man? ‘“

“What, Bernard?”

“I am telling you what she said. ‘When I go by, he looks at me — oh well, if I had not a fan, I should not know which way to look.’”

“Did she tell you that Bernard had spoken to her?”

“No, she did not say that.”

“Well?”

“Wait a bit. Lord, what a hurry you are in! ‘Well,’ she went on, ‘Madame Watrin, we shall come and see you one day with my brother. But try and let M. Bernard not be there, I should feel too awkward, for my part. I find him very nice, your son.’”

“Aye,” said Guillaume, shrugging his shoulders, “and that pleases you, eh? That flattered your vanity for a pretty young lady in town, the Maire’s daughter, to tell you she thought Bernard a good-looking fellow?”

“Why, of course.”

“And then you lost your head, and your imagination made all sorts of plans on the strength of it.”

“Why not?”

“And you saw your Bernard the Maire’s son-in-law?”

“Faith, if he married his daughter....”

“Why,” cried Guillaume, taking off his cap with one hand and grasping a handful of his grey hair with the other, as if he meant to tear it out: “Why, look you, I have known woodcock, geese, cranes, with more sense than you have. Oh my God, but it hurts a man to hear such things! But I must. There, there, as it’s my fate, I’ve got to put up with it.”

“But what,” went on the mother, just as if Guillaume had not spoken, “what if I were to tell you besides that M. Raisin himself stopped me no longer ago than yesterday, as I was coming back from my marketing and said to me, ‘Madame Watrin, I have heard of your game stew and I shall come in one day without ceremony and take pot luck with you and father Guillaume ‘?”

“What, don’t you see the meaning of all that?” cried the old man, puffing at his pipe as his way was when he was getting angry, and beginning to disappear like Jupiter Tonans in a cloud.

“No,” replied Marianne, not realizing that anyone could see anything in the words she had repeated except what was on the surface. “Well, I am going to explain it to you.” And as the explanation was to be a long one, Father Guillaume, as he did on all solemn occasions, took his pipe from his mouth, put his hand behind his back, and with his teeth more tightly set than usual began:

“He is a sly fellow, look you, the Maire, half Norman, half Picard, with just enough honesty not to be hanged. Well, he hopes that if his daughter talks to you about your son, and if he talks about your game stews himself, you will pull my woollen cap down over my eyes, so that if he cuts down a beech or fells an oak that isn’t just on his land, I shall pay no heed to it. Oh, none of that, Monsieur le Maire! Cut the hay of your township to feed your horses, that is no concern of mine; you may pay me as many compliments as you like, but you will not cut a log more on your plot than has been sold you.”

Though not beaten Marianne shook her head in a way which meant that there might after all be some truth in what her old man was saying.

“As you like, let us say no more about it then,” she said with a sigh, “but at any rate you will not deny that the Parisian is in love with Catherine?”

“There now!” cried he, making as if to break his pipe against the floor, “here we are out of the frying-pan into the fire!”

“Why so?” asked the old woman.

“Have you done?”

“No.”

“Well,” said Guillaume, putting his hand into his fob, “I will give a crown for what you have to say — on condition that you will not say it.”

“Why, have you anything against him?”

He drew the coin mentioned from his pocket.

“Is it a bargain?” he asked.

“A good-looking fellow!” went on the old woman with that obstinacy of which François, when drinking her health, had wished she might be cured.

“Too good-looking by half!” rejoined he.

“Rich!” insisted Marianne.

“Too rich!”

“Gallant!”

“Too gallant, by God, too gallant! It might cost him the tips of his ears, not to say the whole of them, that gallantry of his.”

“I don’t understand you.”

“No matter, that is nothing to me. As long as I understand, that’s enough for me.”

“Admit at any rate,” said Marianne, turning round, “that it would be a good match for Catherine.”

“For Catherine?” cried the father. “In the first place nothing is too good for Catherine.”

The old lady shook her head almost scornfully.

“Yet she is not very easy to get rid of!”

“Good, now you are going to say she is not handsome.”

“Jesus!” cried the mother, “she is as handsome as the day.”

“Then is she not well-behaved?”

“The Holy Virgin is not purer than she.”

“She is not rich, then?”

“Save us, with Bernard’s good leave, she will have the half of what we have.”

“Oh,” said Guillaume, laughing his noiseless laugh, “make yourself easy about that, Bernard will not refuse his consent.”

“But,” said she, shaking her head, “that is not all.”

“What is it then, now?”

“It is a question of religion,” said Marianne with a sigh.

“Oh yes, because Catherine is a Protestant like her father. Always the same tale!”

“Lord, there are not many people who like to see a heretic come into their family.”

“A heretic such as Catherine? Well, then, I am just the contrary of others. I thank God every morning that she belongs to ours.”

“There is no difference between heretics!” went on Marianne with a conviction that would have done credit to a theologian of the sixteenth century.

“Ah; you are sure of that, are you?”

“In his last sermon, which I heard, my Lord Bishop of Soissons said that all heretics were damned.”

“Bah, I care as little for what the Bishop of Soissons says as I do for the ashes of this tobacco,” rejoined Guillaume, tapping his short pipe against his thumb-nail to empty it. “Did not Père Grégoire tell us, not in his last sermon only but in every one of ‘em, that good people are all chosen?”

“Yes,” rejoined the old woman obstinately, “but the Bishop must know more about it than he, since he is a Bishop, and the other is only a plain *Abbé.”*

“Ah!” said Guillaume, who meanwhile had emptied and refilled his pipe and seemed to want to smoke it in peace, “have you said all you had to say?”

“Yes, though that does not prevent me from loving Catherine, do you see?”

“I know it.”

“Like my own daughter.”

“I do not doubt it.”

“And anyone who came and spoke ill of her to me or tried to do her the least annoyance in the world, would meet with little good at my hands.”

“Bravo! And now a bit of advice, mother.”

“What is it?”

“You have talked enough.”

“*I* have?”

“Yes, to my thinking. So do not talk any more, unless I ask you a question, or by all I hold sacred...”

“It is just because I love Catherine just as I love Bernard that I have done what I have,” went on the old woman, who seemed like Mademoiselle de Sévigné to have kept for her postscript the most interesting thing she had to say.

“Oh, deuce take me!” cried Guillaume, almost frightened, “now you are not content to speak, you have acted too. Well, let us see what you have done.”

And replacing his pipe, unlit but crammed to the muzzle, in the dental arch which served him for pincers, he crossed his arms and waited.

“Because, if Bernard could marry Mademoiselle Euphrosine, and the Parisian Catherine...” resumed the old lady, then breaking off with an oratorical skill of which one would not have thought her capable, leaving the meaning still in suspense.

“Come, what have you done?” asked Guillaume, who seemed determined not to let himself be surprised by tricks of language.

“That day,” she ended, “Father Guillaume would have to own that I am not just a booby, a wild goose, a crane.”

“Oh, as for that I own it at once; all these are birds of passage, whereas you have driven me wild for twenty-six years, spring, summer, autumn and winter. Come, out with it! What have you done?”

“I said to the Maire, when he complimented me on my game stew, ‘Well, Mr. Maire, to-morrow is a double holiday at our house, first for the fête of Corey, which parish we belong to, and then to celebrate the home-coming of my niece Catherine. So do you come and eat a dish of stew at our house along with Mademoiselle Euphrosine and Monsieur Louis Chollet, and after dinner, well, if it is fine, we will all go together and take a turn round the fair.”

“And he accepted, did he not?” cried her lord and master with a grinding of the jaws that made the stem of his cutty pipe crack and curtailed another good inch.

“Without any pride.”

“Oh, you old stork!” cried the head-keeper desperately. “She knows that I do not want to see her Maire; she knows that I cannot bear her sanctimonious Euphrosine; she knows that I can wind her Parisian a league off! And she asks them to dine with me! And when? On a holiday.”

“Anyhow,” said the old woman, vastly relieved at having confessed the misdeed which weighed upon her mind, “they are asked.”

“Yes, they are asked!” said he furiously. “And we cannot put them off, eh?”

“No, unfortunately. But I know some one who will digest his dinner badly, or rather not digest it at all.”

“Good-bye!”

“Where are you going?” cried she.

“I heard François’ gun; I am going to see if the boar is dead.”

"Father!" cried Marianne, with a look of entreaty.

"Nonsense."

"If I have done wrong..." And the poor woman clasped her hands.

"You have."

"Forgive me, Guillaume, I acted with a good intention."

"A good intention?"

"Yes."

"Good intentions! Why, Hell is paved with them!"

"Do listen!"

"Let me alone, or..." And he raised his hand.

"Oh," cried Marianne, quite determined, "that does not matter at all. I do not mean you to go out like that; I do not want you to leave me in anger. At your age, when people part, Lord knows if they will ever meet again."

And two big tears rolled down her cheeks. Guillaume saw them. Tears were rare in the old forester's house.

He shrugged his shoulders and moving a step towards his wife said, "Anger! what nonsense! I am angry with the Maire and not with my old woman."

"Ah!" cried she.

"See now, kiss me," he went on, pressing his wife to his breast, but raising his head so as not to endanger his pipe.

"All the same," murmured she, satisfied at bottom, but not sorry to hold forth a little about details, "you called me old stork!"

"Well, what of it? Is not the stork a bird of good omen? Does she not bring luck to the houses where she makes her nest? Well, you made your nest in this house, and you bring luck to it. That is what I meant."

"Here, what is that?"

Sure enough the noise of a carriage leaving the paved road and proceeding to pull up at the door of the *Maison Neuve* caught the ear of the old forester at the same time that a young and blithe voice called out, "Father Guillaume! Mammy Marianne! It's I, here I am!"

And at these words a pretty girl of nineteen jumped down from the step of the carriage and alighted at the threshold of the house.

"Catherine!" cried the head-keeper and his wife in a breath, coming forward to the new-comer with open arms.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HOME-COMING.

IT was indeed Catherine Blum back from Paris. As we have just said, she was a pretty girl of nineteen, slender and supple as a reed, with that look of charming soft gentleness we associate with German maidenhood impressed on her whole person. Her fair hair, her blue eyes, her red lips, her white teeth, her velvet cheeks made her one of those nymphs of the woods that the Greeks called Glycera or Aglaë.

Of the two pairs of arms opened to receive her the one she chose first was Père Guillaume’s; no doubt she knew that there lay the most entire sympathy with her.

Then Marianne was hugged in her turn. While the girl was embracing her adopted mother, Père Guillaume was looking about him. It seemed impossible to him that Bernard should not be there, since Catherine was.

For the first few moments nothing was heard but those broken words which escape from people who are really moved. But almost immediately other voices, mingled with blasts of triumph, became audible; it was François and his companions coming back from their victory over the new Calydonian Boar.

The old forester hesitated for a moment between the desire to embrace his niece again and ask her news, and his curiosity to see the animal, the shouts and the fanfares not permitting him to doubt that the latter was on its way to the pickling-tub. But just at the moment when he was inclining towards the boar, the hunters appeared on the threshold, and came in carrying the beast suspended from a pole by the four feet tied together.

This apparition made a momentary diversion from the reception of Catherine in the case both of Guillaume and Marianne, while on the other hand at the sight of the girl, the sportsmen gave vent to a cheer in her honour.

But it must be owned when the first moment of curiosity was past and Guillaume had examined the old and the new wound and congratulated François, who at sixty yards had bowled over the old boar like a rabbit; and when lastly he had advised them to put aside the harslet, and asked each keeper to take a part of the animal in fair proportion, all the attention of the head-keeper was given once more to the new arrival.

For his part, François delighted once more to see Catherine, whom he heartily liked, and above all to see her smiling, a sure proof that nothing unpleasant had happened — for his part, I say, François declared that he had done enough for the company in killing the boar and that in order to devote all his time to Mademoiselle Catherine, he left to his comrades the work of cutting up the carcase.

The consequence was that the conversation which had scarcely begun at Catherine's arrival, broke out ten minutes later with a volubility that was rendered more noisy by the curiosity that had accumulated during those ten minutes.

For the rest it was Père Guillaume who first introduced a little order into the questioning. He saw that Catherine had arrived not by the high road but by the Fleury track.

"How do you get here so soon and by the way from La Ferté-Milon, my child?" he asked.

François pricked up his ears at the question; it taught him something that he did not know, namely that Catherine had not come by the Gondreville road.

"Yes," echoed Marianne, "how do you come that way and at six in the morning instead of ten?"

"I am going to tell you, dear father, and you, dear mother," answered the girl. "It was because, instead of taking the Villers-Cotterets coach, I came by the Meaux and La Ferté one, which leaves Paris at five instead of ten like the other."

"Ah, that's right," muttered François, with obvious satisfaction; "the Parisian will have had his tilbury out for nothing."

And why did you take that route?" asked Guillaume, who could not understand that anyone should leave a straight line for a crooked one or go four leagues farther without being obliged to.

"Why," answered Catherine, blushing at her falsehood, harmless as it was, "because there was no room in the other coach."

"Yes," remarked François in an undertone, "and Bernard will thank you for the thought, you angel of God!"

“Why, look at her!” cried Mother Watrin, passing from the general question to details, “she has grown a whole *head.”*

“And why not a neck as well?” said Guillaume, shrugging his shoulders.

“Oh, as for that,” persisted the old woman, with that obstinacy which was engrained in her nature and which she applied to small things as well as great, “it is very easy to verify: when she went away I measured her — the mark is on the jamb of the door. Look, there it is! I used to look at it every day. Come and see, Catherine.”

“We have not forgotten the poor old man, then?” said Guillaume, keeping Catherine back to embrace her.

“Oh, can you ask that, dear father?” cried she.

“But come, do, and see the mark, Catherine,” insisted the old woman.

“Here!” cried he, stamping his foot, “will you be quiet there with your nonsense?”

“Ah, well, yes,” muttered François, who knew the old woman by heart, “see that she holds her tongue.”

“Have I really grown so much?” asked Catherine of the father.

“Come to the door and you will see,” cried the mother.

“Obstinate she-devil!” cried the old keeper, “she will not let go. Here now, go to the door, Catherine, or we shall have no peace all day.”

She went with a smile and put herself against the mark, which disappeared behind the upper part of her head.

“There, I told you so,” cried the old dame, triumphantly, “more than an inch.”

“That does not quite make a head, but no matter.”

And as Catherine, glad to have satisfied her aunt, went back to beside Guillaume, the latter asked, “So you travelled all night?”

“All night, yes, father.”

“Why, in that case,” cried Marianne, “poor child, you must be broken down with fatigue, you must be starving! What would you like? Coffee, wine, broth? Why, coffee would be best. I will go and make it for you myself. That’s right.”

Here she fumbled in all her pockets.

“*Where* are my keys, *eh? Now I don’t know what I* have done with them. Here are my keys lost. Where can I have put them? Wait, wait!”

“But I tell you, mother dear, I want nothing.”

“Want nothing after spending a night in a coach and a fly? Oh, if I only knew where my keys are!”

And she turned her pockets out in a sort of frenzy.

“But there is no occasion,” said Catherine.

“Why, here are my keys,” cried Marianne. “No occasion? I know more about that than you, maybe; when you travel, and that at night, in the morning you want to refresh yourself. Night is a friend to nobody. And besides the nights are always cool. And nothing warm yet in your stomach at eight in the morning. You shall have your coffee directly, child, that you shall.”

And the good old dame went out at a run.

“At last!” said Guillaume, looking after her. “Egad, she has a fine mill to grind your coffee with, the mother has, and she grinds her words with it into the bargain!”

“Oh, my dear, good little daddy!” cried Catherine, giving free play to her affection for the old forester without further fear of exciting the jealousy of his wife. “Just fancy, that stupid postilion spoiled all my pleasure by going at a walk, and taking three hours to come from La Ferté here!”

“And what pleasure then was it you planned to do yourself, or rather us, little one?”

“I wanted to get here at six in the morning, go into the kitchen without saying a word to anybody, and then, when you called ‘Wife, my breakfast! ‘it would have been I who brought it in to you and said as I used to in the old days, ‘Here it is, dear father.’”

“Oh, you wanted to do that, you sweet, good child, did you,” said Father Guillaume. “Let me hug you as if you had done it. Oh, the wretch of a postilion! You must not give him any pourboire!”

“I said the same, but unfortunately it is done.”

“How done?”

“Why, when I saw the dear home of my youth showing white all along the road, I forgot everything; I pulled five francs out of my pocket and said to the driver, ‘Here, this is for you, my friend, and God bless you.’”

“Dear child, dear child, dear child!” cried Guillaume.

“Now tell me, father,” said Catherine, who since her arrival had been looking for some one and had not the heart to content herself any longer with this silent and fruitless search.

"Yes, isn't it so?" asked he, understanding the reason of the girl's uneasiness.

"It seems to me..." murmured she.

"That the one who ought to have been here before all the others has kept away!" completed the old man.

"Bernard!"

"Yes, but do not be alarmed, he was here just now and cannot be far. I am going to hurry as far as the Stag's Leap: from there I can see half a league down the road, and if I catch sight of him I will signal to him."

"Then you do not know where he is now?"

"No, but if he is within a quarter of a league round about, he will know my way of calling him."

And the old man, who could not understand any more than she why Bernard was not there, left the house and at his best speed, as he had said, proceeded towards the Stag's Leap.

Left alone with François, Catherine went nearer to the young man who, as we have seen, had remained all but silent during the preceding scene and looking at him in a way to read his heart to the bottom if he tried to hide anything from her, asked, "And you, François, do you know where he is?"

"Yes," answered he with both lips and head.

"Well, where is he?"

"On the road to Gondreville," he replied.

"On the road to Gondreville? My God!"

"Yes," he went on, emphasizing his words to give them all the significance they really had, "he went to meet you."

"My God!" said Catherine again with increasing emotion, "I thank you, it is you who prompted me to come home by La Ferté and not by Villers-Cotterets."

"Hush, here is mother coming back. Good, she has forgotten the sugar."

"So much the better," cried the girl.

Then, glancing at Mother Watrin who, after setting down her coffee on the walnut dresser, was making off rapidly, as François had said, to look for the sugar, she went nearer the young man and taking his hand said, "François, my friend, a favour!"

"A favour? Ten, twenty, thirty, forty! At your orders, night as well as day."

“Well, then, my dear François, go and meet him and warn him that I have come, and by the La Ferté road.”

“Is that all?” cried he.

And he started to leave the house at a run by the door towards the highway. But Catherine stopped him with a smile. “No, not that way!” said she.

“You are right and I am a fool. If Father Grumbler saw me he would ask ‘where are you going?’

And instead of going out at that door he jumped out of the window that looked on the forest. It was time; Marianne was coming in again with the sugar.

“Ah!” said he, “just in time, there’s the mother.” And making a last sign to Catherine before disappearing among the trees, added, “Don’t be afraid, Mademoiselle Catherine, I will bring him back to you.”

Sure enough Madame Watrin came in again, sugared Catherine’s coffee as she would have done for a child, and handing it to her said, “Here, take your coffee. Wait, perhaps it is too hot; I will blow on it.”

“Thank you, little mother!” said the girl smiling as she took the cup. “I assure you that since I left you last, I have learned to blow on my coffee myself.”

Marianne looked at her with an affection mingled with admiration, folding her hands and nodding her head gaily. Then after a moment’s contemplation: “Were you very sorry to say good-bye to the great city?”

“Oh, Lord, no! I know no one there.”

“What, do you not miss the handsome gentlemen, the fine sights, the fashionable promenades?”

“I regretted nothing, mother.”

“Did you care for nobody there?”

“Where?”

“In Paris.”

“In Paris? No, nobody.”

“So much the better!” said the old woman, following up her idea, which had been so ill received an hour before by Guillaume. “For I have an idea myself for getting you settled.”

“Getting me settled?”

“Yes, Bernard, you know.”

“Oh, dear good mother,” cried she joyously, deceived by this beginning.

“Well, Bernard...”

“Bernard?” echoed the girl, beginning to be alarmed.

“Well,” went on the mother confidentially. “Bernard is in love with Mademoiselle Euphrosine.”

Catherine uttered a cry and turning frightfully pale stammered in a shaking voice, “Bernard, Bernard in love with Mademoiselle Euphrosine? Gracious Heavens, what is this you tell me, little mother?”

And laying on the table her cup of coffee which she had barely touched she fell back on a chair.

When Mother Watrin was following upon an idea she had the deliberate short-sightedness of obstinate folks, that is she saw nothing but her idea.

“Yes,” she went on, “Bernard loves Mademoiselle Euphrosine, and she loves him too, so much so that he has only to say ‘I agree ‘and the matter will be settled.”

Catherine sighed and passed her handkerchief over her brow, which was wet with perspiration.

“Only,” added the mother, “my old man does not wish it.’

“Oh, really?” murmured Catherine, to some extent recovering her self-possession.

“Yes, he declares that it is not true, that I am as blind as a mole, and that Bernard does not care an atom for Mademoiselle Euphrosine.”

“Oh!” ejaculated Catherine, breathing a little more freely.

“Yes, he declares so — he says he is sure of it.”

“My dear uncle,” murmured Catherine.

“But here you are, thank the Lord, my child, and you will help me to persuade him.”

“I?”

“And when you marry,” went on the mother by way of advice, “always endeavour to keep up your authority over your husband, or else the same fate will happen to you as has befallen me.”

“And what is that?”

“I mean, you will cease to count for anything in the house.”

“Mother,” cried Catherine, raising her eyes heavenwards with an ineffable aspect of devotion, “at the end of my life I shall say that God has loaded me with benefits if He has given me such a life as yours.”

“Oh! oh!”

“Never, never complain. Heavens! my uncle loves you so well and truly.”

“To be sure he loves me,” replied the old dame awkwardly, “but...”

“No buts, my dear aunt! You love him and he loves you. Heaven has granted you to be united; the happiness of life lies in those two words.”

And Catherine rose and took a step towards the staircase.

“Where are you going?” asked the mother.

“I am going up to my little room,” was the reply.

“Oh yes, true, we are expecting company and you are going to beautify yourself, you flirt.”

“Company?”

“Yes, M. Raisin, Mademoiselle Euphrosine and M. Louis Chollet, the Parisian. I fancy you know him.” And the old dame accompanied this last clause with a knowing smile, adding: “Make yourself nice, make yourself nice, my child!”

But Catherine shook her head sadly. “Oh, Lord knows it is not for that I am going up,” said she.

“And why are you going up, then?”

“Because my room looks on the road by which Bernard is to come back, and Bernard is the only one in this dear house who has not yet bid me welcome.” And she went slowly up the staircase that wound along the wall and the wooden steps of which creaked under her feet, light and dainty as they were.

At the moment she was entering her room a long sigh escaped from her heart and reached the ear of Marianne, who looking at her in astonishment seemed from that time to begin to have a glimpse of the truth.

No doubt the old woman, whose mind did not readily pass from one idea to another, would have remained absorbed in the search for the luminous spark which was being born in the depths of her brain if a voice had not rung out behind her.

“Hi, look here, Mother Watrin!” it said.

She turned round and recognized Mathieu, dressed in a shabby overcoat which had pretensions to having once been a livery.

“Oh, it is you, you rascal!” she said.

“Thanks!” answered he, taking off his hat, on which was some old imitation gold lace turning black. “Only take notice that from to-day I take the place of old Pierre and am in the Maire’s service, so that to insult me is to insult him.”

“Well, there you are. And what do you come for?”

“I come as a courier — there has not been time to get me into training yet, that is why I get out of breath — I come as a courier to tell you that Mademoiselle Euphrosine and her good father are coming this very moment in a chaise.”

“In a chaise?” cried the old woman, quite dazzled at being visited by people who came in such an aristocratic conveyance.

“Yes, in a chaise, neither more nor less.”

“Lord, Lord!” cried she, “where are they?”

“The papa and M. Guillaume are talking over their business together.”

“And Mademoiselle Euphrosine?”

“Look,” said Mathieu, “there she is! “Then dropping back suddenly into his part as a servant: “Mademoiselle Euphrosine Raisin,” he announced, “M. Raisin, the Maire’s daughter!”

CHAPTER X.

MADEMOISELLE EUPHROSINE RAISIN.

THE young girl thus pompously announced entered the home of the old forester majestically, looking as if she did not doubt for an instant the great honour she was doing this poor house in crossing its humble threshold.

She was undeniably a handsome girl, but with the sort of hard, defiant beauty that appeals to us but little, compounded as it is of about equal parts of pride and vulgarity, flavoured with that freshness of youth which the young folks of the lower orders so happily style *beauté du diable.*

She was dressed with all the profusion of ornaments which marks the provincial belle. She came in and cast a glance around her, evidently looking for two persons who were not there, — Bernard and Catherine.

Mère Watrin stood as though entranced by this dazzling beauty, who appeared at nine in the morning as much bedizened as she would have been of an evening at a ball by the light of five hundred wax candles.

Then rushing at a chair which she pushed towards her fair visitor, she cried, “Oh, my dear young lady!”

“Good day, dear Madame Watrin,” answered Mademoiselle with a patronizing air, motioning to show that she would remain standing.

“What, it is you,” went on the old dame, “you in our poor little house! But do sit down. For sure, the chairs are not padded as they are with you. Never mind, sit down all the same, pray do. And I not dressed! Upon my word, I did not expect you so early.”

“You will excuse us,” replied Euphrosine, “my dear Madame Watrin, but one is always in a hurry to see people one likes.”

“Oh, you are too good. To be sure, I am quite confused.”

“Bah!” remarked Mademoiselle, throwing back her mantle and showing a regular Court costume, “you know I do not care about ceremony, and you see how plainly dressed I am myself.”

“I see,” said Mère Watrin, dazzled, “that you are beautiful as an angel and decked out like a holy shrine. But it is not my fault if I *am* behindhand. My little girl has come back to us from Paris this morning.”

“It is not your niece, little Catherine, you mean?” asked Mademoiselle Euphrosine carelessly.

“Yes, she and none other. But we make a mistake in calling her *little girl* and *little Catherine;* she is really a big girl, a head taller than I am.”

“Oh, so much the better,” cried Mademoiselle Euphrosine; “I am very fond of your niece, do you know.”

“That’s a great honour for her, Mademoiselle,” replied Mère Watrin, dropping a curtsey.

“What terribly bad weather!” went on the young lady, passing lightly from one subject to another, as befitted a town-bred young lady, educated as she had been. “You know, for a May day, I mean.” Then, as if incidentally, “By the bye,” she added, “where is Monsieur Bernard?”

“Out shooting, I suppose.”

“Hasn’t the Inspector been pleased to grant you permission to kill a boar on the occasion of the fête of Corey?”

“Yes, and to celebrate Catherine’s home-coming too.”

“Oh, so you think that the Inspector troubled himself about that?”

And Mademoiselle Raisin made a little *moue,* which signified, “the Inspector cannot be very busy if he has time to think of such follies.”

The old woman instinctively felt Mademoiselle Raisin’s animosity, and caught at the side of the conversation which she guessed would be most agreeable to her.

“Bernard, you said? You asked where Bernard is? Really I don’t know at all. He ought to be here since you are. Do you know where he is, Mathieu?”

“I?” replied Mathieu. “How should I know?”

“Why, no doubt he is with his cousin,” said Mademoiselle Euphrosine, acidly. “Oh no, no, no!” cried the old woman emphatically.

“And — has she improved in looks, your niece?” queried Mademoiselle.

“My niece?”

“Yes.”

“Improved in looks?”

“That is what I am asking.”

“She is — she is very nice-looking,” answered Mère Watrin, awkwardly.

“I am so delighted she has come back,” went on Mademoiselle Raisin, resuming her patronizing airs. “I only hope Paris has not given her habits that are above her station.”

"Oh no, there is no fear. You know that she was at Paris to learn the business of milliner and dressmaker?"

"And you think she has learnt nothing else at Paris? Well, well! so much the better. But what is wrong with you, Madame Watrin? You seem uneasy."

"Oh, nothing, nothing, Mademoiselle. However, if you would allow me, I could call Catherine to keep you company while I go..."

And she cast a despairing glance at her unpretending costume, which was her workaday one.

"Do just as you like," replied Mademoiselle Euphrosine, with a mixture of indifference and condescension. "As for me I should be charmed to see her, the dear little thing."

Scarcely had Mother Watrin received this permission, when turning towards the staircase, she cried, "Catherine, Catherine, come down quickly, my dear, come down! Mademoiselle Euphrosine is here."

Catherine appeared instantly on the landing.

"Come down, my dear, come down!" cried Mère Watrin, for the second time; and the girl came downstairs without a word.

"Now, Mademoiselle, may I be excused?" asked old Marianne, turning to the Maire's daughter.

"Why, of course, of course. Off with you!"

Then she turned a furtive glance at Catherine while the old woman was in the act of withdrawing with a profusion of curtsies.

"Why," cried Mademoiselle Raisin, aside and frowning, "she is something a great deal more than pretty, the child is! Whatever was Mere Watrin thinking of?"

Catherine, meanwhile, came forward, without embarrassment or affected modesty and stopping before Mademoiselle Euphrosine, who looked at her with a most dignified air, said, with perfect simplicity, "Pray excuse me, Mademoiselle, but I was not aware you were here, else I should have hastened to come down and pay my respects to you."

"Oh," muttered Mademoiselle Euphrosine, talking to herself, but loud enough for Catherine not to lose a word of her monologue, "'I was not aware, else I should have hastened to pay my respects! 'Why, really, she is quite the Parisian, and she must marry M. Chollet. They will make a pair! "Then turning to Catherine, "Mademoiselle," she said, with a mocking accent, "I have the honour to give you good day."

“Did my aunt remember to ask if you wanted anything, Mademoiselle?” asked Catherine, without appearing to notice the least in the world the spiteful significance the Maire’s daughter had put into her words.

“Yes, but I wanted nothing.”

Then with an air of putting an end to their present relations, which were on a footing of equality, she went on, “Have you brought any new patterns from Paris?”

“Yes, for the last month before I came away, I have been trying my best to get together whatever was new and pretty, Mademoiselle.”

“You learned to make bonnets there?”

“Bonnets and hats.”

“Whom were you with? Bladame Baudraud or Madame Barenne?”

“I was in a more humble house than either of those, Mademoiselle, but I hope, nevertheless, that I know my business none the less well.”

“Well, we shall see that presently,” answered Ma*demoi*selle Raisin with a patronizing air. “As soon as you are installed in your shop in the Place de La Fontaine, I will send you some old bonnets to re-make and a last year’s hat to do up”.

“Thank you, Mademoiselle,” said Catherine, bowing. But suddenly the girl raised her head, listened and trembled. She thought she had heard her name spoken. And, in fact, a voice that was well known to her heart was calling from outside, coming rapidly nearer. “Catherine! Where is Catherine?”

At the same time Bernard rushed into the room, covered with dust and his brow running with sweat.

“Ah!” he cried, catching sight of her, in the tone of a man who has long been under water, and comes to the top and gets his breath again. “So it is you, it is really you? At last, at last!”

And he fell on a chair, holding the girl’s hands in his the while.

“Bernard! dear Bernard!” cried she, offering him her cheek.

At the cry uttered by her son, Mère Watrin had come in, and seeing on the one side Mademoiselle Euphrosine standing alone, her face contorted, and on the other this group oblivious of the world and all else but its own happiness, she realized her mistake as to the amorous feelings of her son towards Mademoiselle Raisin, and much hurt at finding her perspicacity so totally at fault, cried, “Well, Bernard, well! Is that a way to behave?”

But he, without listening to his mother or noticing the presence of Mademoiselle Euphrosine, went on, “Ah, Catherine, if you knew how I have suffered! I thought... I was afraid... but no matter, you are here! You came by Meaux and La Ferté-Milon, did you not? I know that, François told me so, so that you must have travelled all night and come three leagues in a fly. Poor, dear child! Oh! how glad I am, how happy to see you again!”

“Why, boy, why,” cried the mother indignantly, “you are taking no notice of Mademoiselle Euphrosine.”

“Oh, beg pardon!” said Bernard, looking up in astonishment in the direction of the girl; “true, excuse me; I did not see you. Your servant!”

Then coming back to Catherine, “How tall she is and how pretty! Why, look, mother, do look!”

“Have you had good sport, Monsieur Bernard?” asked Euphrosine.

Her voice reached his ear like a vague sound of which he nevertheless managed to grasp the sense.

“I... no... yes... I don’t know,” he replied. “Has any one been shooting? Here now, excuse me, I am losing my head, so delighted am I. I went to meet Catherine, that’s what I did.”

“And you did not find her, it appears?”

“No, luckily!”

“Luckily?”

“Oh, yes, yes. This time I know what I am saying.”

“If you know what you are saying, Monsieur Bernard,” resumed Euphrosine, putting out her arm as if in search of support, “for my part, I do not know what is the matter with me. I am not well!”

But Bernard was so taken up with Catherine, she was smiling so tenderly at him. She was thanking him with such sweet pressures of the hand for the emotion of which he had just given such proofs that he did not hear what Euphrosine said, nor see how pale she was and how she trembled or made believe to do so.

It was not so with Mère Watrin, who never took her eyes off Mademoiselle Euphrosine’s face.

“Oh! Bernard! Bernard!” she cried breathlessly, “don’t you see that Mademoiselle feels unwell.”

“Oh yes, no doubt,” said he, “it is too hot here. Mother, give the young lady your arm, and you, François, carry an arm-chair outside.”

“Here is the arm-chair you ask for,” said the latter.

"No, no," said Mademoiselle Euphrosine, "it will be nothing."

"Oh, but it is," persisted the old woman. "You are quite pale, dear young lady, and one would say you were going to faint."

"It's air," cried Bernard, "air that the young lady wants."

"Do at any rate give me your arm, Monsieur Bernard," said she. with a languishing air.

Bernard saw that there was no drawing back.

"Why, young lady," he said, "with the greatest pleasure."

Then in an undertone to Catherine, "Stay there, I am coming back."

Taking Euphrosine by the arm, he drew her along more hastily than her apparent weakness seemed quite to warrant, while François, in obedience to the order he had received, followed. Then he said, "Here is the arm-chair," to which Mère Watrin added, "And some vinegar to rub her temples."

Catherine was left alone. What had just taken place, Bernard's genuine cordiality, Euphrosine's feigned collapse, had spoken more clearly to her eyes and yet more to her heart than all the explanations and speeches in the world could have done.

"Ah, now," she thought, "Mère Marianne may say what she pleases, I am quite assured."

Scarcely had she ended these words when Bernard came in again and threw himself at her feet. At the same time François, pulling the door to on the outside, shut them in with their love and their happiness.

"Oh, Catherine!" cried Bernard, clasping the girl's knees, "how I love you! How happy I am!"

Catherine drooped her head and the eyes of the two young people spoke so eloquently what they had to say, that without a single word being uttered, their breath mingled and their lips met. Their two breasts gave vent to two simultaneous cries of joy which were as one, and they remained with dim eyes plunged in such a sweet ecstasy that they did not see Mathieu's malevolent head thrust through the partly opened door of the kitchen, nor hear his harsh voice muttering, "Ah, Monsieur Bernard, you gave me a slap on the head; that slap shall cost you dear, my lad!"

CHAPTER XI.

DREAMS OF LOVE.

AN hour later, like birds that have taken flight, carried away on a breeze of morning, a sunbeam, a murmur of the trees, the two young people had disappeared and in their stead, in the low-roofed parlour of the *Maison Neuve,* were two men bending over a map of the forest of Villers-Cotterets, tracing an outline that one of them had a great tendency to enlarge, but that the other at every extension brought back within the limits agreed on.

These two men were Anastase Raisin, Maire of Villers, and our old friend, Guillaume Watrin.

The bounds that the wood-merchant was always wanting to enlarge and the head-keeper pitilessly restricted to the line traced by the Inspector’s compasses were those of the “lot “bought by Monsieur Raisin at the last adjudication.

At last Watrin, nodding his head approvingly and knocking his short pipe against his nail to get rid of the ashes, said to the wood-merchant, “Do you know that it is a fine lot you have there and not at all dear?”

Monsieur Raisin rose in his turn.

“Not dear at 200,000 francs?” cried he. “Egad! it seems money is easy for you to come by, Père Guillaume.”

“Oh yes, that’s very fine talking!” was the reply. “Nine hundred livres a year, house and firing, every day a brace of rabbits in the pot, and on high days and holidays a bit of boar, a man cannot but become a millionaire on all that, can he?”

“Bah!” said the timber-merchant, looking at Watrin and smiling that subtle smile which one may call the smile of trade, “you always get to be a millionaire if you choose — relatively, of course.”

“Then tell me something of your secret,” rejoined Guillaume. “That will please me, on my honour.”

The timber-merchant again looked at the keeper with a steady and shining eye. Then as if he thought that the moment for making so important an overture was not yet come, he replied, “Why, yes, you will be told the secret after dinner when we are alone, glass in hand, drinking the health of our respective children, and if there is a way to manage, well, you know, Père Guillaume, we will do a deal together.”

The latter looked up in his turn, pursing his lips and shaking his head; and it was difficult enough to guess what answer he was going to make to this half-overture on the Maire’s part when Marianne entered in a thorough fright.

“Oh, M. le Maire,” she cried, “there’s a calamity!”

“Good gracious, what is it, Madame Watrin?” asked he, somewhat uneasy.

As for Watrin, accustomed to the ways of his wife, he seemed less impressed than his guest, the wood-merchant.

“What is it, eh?” said the latter again.

“What has happened, old lady?” asked Watrin.

“What has happened is, that here’s poor Mademoiselle Euphrosine saying she is indisposed.”

“Bah! That is nothing,” said the Maire, who probably knew his daughter as well as the other knew his wife.

“Oh, stuff and nonsense!” muttered the Forester, who for his part seemed to have arrived at a pretty correct estimate of Mademoiselle Euphrosine.

“But,” went on the mother, “she wants absolutely to go back to town.”

“Come, all right!” cried Raisin. “Is Chollet there? If he is, he can drive her home.”

“No, he has not been seen yet, and that, I believe, is what has added to the young lady’s ailment.”

“Where is she, Euphrosine I mean?”

“She has got into the carriage again and is asking for you.”

“Well, all right. Wait, that’s it. Till we meet, Père Watrin. We have to have a long talk. I will drive her back and in an hour — the horses are good — in an hour I shall be here again, and if you are a good fellow — Well, shake hands: I’ll say no more to you now. See you again, Père Guillaume. See you again, Mère Watrin. Look well to the stew, and there will be pins in plenty to fasten your cooking apron with.”

And as the Maire departed at these words the old lady saw him out, making many curtsies and saying, “See you again, M. le Maire! Make many excuses for me to Mademoiselle Euphrosine.”

Guillaume had remained where he was, shaking his head. Decidedly he had not made a mistake as to the reason of the Maire's amiability. It was a question, as he had said, of pulling a cotton cap over his eyes.

So when Marianne came back crestfallen at the young lady's departure and saying, "Ah! my poor man, I hope you will scold Bernard?"

"And what should I scold him for?" inquired the Forester gruffly.

"What? Why, for having no eyes but for Catherine and scarcely so much as saying 'How d'ye do? 'to Mademoiselle Raisin."

"Oh! That was only because he had seen Mademoiselle Raisin almost every day these eighteen months, while he has only seen his cousin twice in the same time."

"All the same... Oh dear! oh dear!" muttered Marianne miserably.

Père Guillaume remained not only insensible to this despair, but it even seemed to inspire him with some impatience.

He looked at his wife.

"Tell me now, mother," he asked.

"Well, what?"

"Did you hear what M. le Maire said to you?"

"What about?"

"About the game stew which he advised you to be careful of."

"Yes."

"Well, it's good advice, wife, that he gave to you there."

"But what I wanted to tell you is..."

"And then there is the tart that ought to be put in the oven."

"Oh, yes, I understand, you are sending me away."

"I am not sending you away. I only tell you to go to the kitchen and see if I am there."

"Very well," said she, with wounded dignity, "I am going to the kitchen; I am going."

"Look!" said the Forester, following his wife with his eyes, "to think that it is no harder than that to be pleasant, and that you so seldom are."

"Oh, I am pleasant because I am going away then. That's a pretty thing to say."

He went to a window, pulled his pipe out of his pocket, and began to whistle a tune.

"Oh yes," said the mother, "that's all very fine, what you are doing now; whistle away, do!"

Then as she reached the kitchen door, “At last!” she said. And out she went.

“Yes,” muttered Guillaume, left alone, “yes, I whistle because I see the poor dear children, and because it makes me happy to see them! Look you,” he added, although there was no one to share his pleasure with, “would not anyone say that they were two angels, so beautiful and smiling are they? They are coming this way; don’t let us disturb them.”

And Father Guillaume, still whistling, went up to his room, lowering the pitch as they came nearer so that at the moment he opened his room door, they appeared on the threshold of the parlour downstairs.

But from the top of the staircase where he had stopped so as to see them as long as possible he murmured these words, “God bless you, my children! They do not hear me; so much the better. It is because they are listening to another voice which sings more softly than mine.”

He was not mistaken; this voice which did not reach him but which he guessed at, was the heavenly voice of youth and love. And this is what it said by the mouth of the two young people.

“Will you always love me?” asked Catherine.

“Always,” answered Bernard.

“Well, it is strange,” said she, “this promise which ought to fill my heart with joy makes me feel quite sad instead.”

“Poor, dear Catherine!” murmured he in his softest tone, “if I make you sad by telling you that I love you, I don’t know what to say to make you gay.”

“Bernard,” went on the girl, answering her lover’s thought rather than his words, “your parents have been married for twenty-six years and excepting some little differences of no consequence live as happily as the day of their wedding. Every time I look at them, I ask myself if we shall be as happy, and above all, if we shall be happy as long as they have been.”

“And why not?” said Bernard.

“The question I ask you,” replied Catherine, “my mother, if I had one, would ask you herself in her solicitude for the happiness of her daughter: I am an orphan and all my happiness, as all my love, is in your hands. Listen, Bernard, if you think it possible that you may some day love me less than you do now, let us part at once! I should die of it, I know, but if you were to cease to love me some day! Oh, I would rather die while you still love me than live to see that day.”

“Look at me, Catherine,” answered Bernard, “and you will find my answer written in my eyes.”

“But have you tried yourself, Bernard, are you sure that it is not the affection of a brother rather than the passion of a lover that you have for me?”

“I have not tried myself,” said the young man, “but you have tried me.”

“I! And how so?”

“By your eighteen months of absence. Do you think that those eighteen months of separation are not test enough? Apart from my two short journeys to Paris and some days of happiness, since you left I have not lived, for it is not living to live without a heart in your bosom, to love nothing, to enjoy nothing, to be in a bad humour all day long. My God! all who know me will tell you the same; my forest, this beautiful forest where I was born, my great oaks that rustle in the wind, my beautiful beeches, with their silver bark, well, since your going away, all these things have ceased to give me any pleasure. In old days, when I started in the morning, in the voices of all the wakening birds that sang their matins to the Lord of Heaven, I heard your voice. In the evening when I came back and leaving my companions to follow the path I plunged into the wood, it was because there was a fair white phantom that summoned me, gliding among the trees and showing me the way, and which vanished when I drew near the house, and which I found standing waiting for me at the door. Since you went away, Catherine, there has not been a morning that I have not said to the others, ‘Where are the birds? I no longer hear them sing as I used! ‘And there has not been an evening when instead of arriving before all the rest, gay, brisk and joyous, I have not come last, tired, doleful and weary!”

“Dear Bernard!” murmured Catherine, offering her fair brow to the young man to kiss.

“But since you have been here, Catherine,” he went on with that youthful enthusiasm which belongs only to the first beatings of the heart, to the first dreams of imagination, “since you have been here, all is changed. The birds have come back to the branches, my beautiful phantom, I am sure, is waiting for me yonder under the tall trees to make me leave the path and guide me towards the house, and on the threshold of that house, oh! on the threshold I am assured of finding again, no longer the ghost of love, but the reality of happiness.”

“Oh, my Bernard, how I love you!” cried Catherine.

"And then... and then..." he continued, frowning and passing his hand over his forehead, "and then... But no, I will not speak to you of that."

"Speak to me of everything. Tell me all! I want to know all."

"And then, this morning, Catherine, when that scamp of a Mathieu showed me the Parisian's letter — the letter in which that man spoke to you, you, my Catherine, to whom I speak as I should to the Virgin, in which that man spoke to you, my fair lily of the woods, as he does to his town girls, — well, I felt such a pang I thought I was going to die, and at the same time such fury that I said to myself, 'I am going to die it may be, but before dying I will kill him first, anyway! '"

"Yes," said she, in her most caressing tone, "and that is why you went off along the Gondreville road with your gun loaded, instead of waiting quietly for your Catherine here. That is why you covered six leagues in two hours and a half at the risk of dying of fatigue and heat. But you were punished — you saw your Catherine an hour the later for it. It is true the innocent was punished with the guilty, jealous boy!"

"Yes, yes, jealous!" murmured he, with clenched teeth, '"that is the word. Oh, you don't know what jealousy is, you don't."

"I do. For an instant I was jealous," said she, laughing. "But don't be afraid, I am so no longer."

"That is to say, look you," he went on, putting his closed fist to his forehead, "that is to say that if ill-luck had so willed it that you had not received that letter, or having received it had not altered your route; if, in fact, you had come by Villers-Cotterets, and had met that fool — dear, dear, dear! at the very thought of it, Catherine, my hand goes out towards my gun and...".

"Hush!" cried she, alarmed at the look on the young man's face, and at the same time, as it were, startled by an apparition. "I be quiet? And why should I be quiet?"

"There, there, there!" murmured she, putting her mouth near his ear, "there, he is there, at the door!"

"He!" cried Bernard, "and what can he want here?"

"Silence," said Catherine, pressing the young man's arm, "it was your mother herself who asked him to come with the Maire and Mademoiselle Euphrosine. Bernard, he is your guest."

In sooth, at that moment a young man, elegantly dressed in morning frock-coat and a light-coloured cravat with a whip in his hand, had just made his appearance in the doorway, and seeing the young people almost in each other's arms, seemed to be asking himself whether he ought to go in or out.

Bernard's glance met his for a moment. The eyes of the young keeper darted lightning. The Parisian realized instinctively that he had just fallen into the lion's den.

"Excuse me, Monsieur Bernard," he murmured, "but I was looking for..."

"Yes," was the answer, "and in looking you have found what you did not look for, eh?"

"Bernard!" said Catherine, quite low, "Bernard!"

"Let be," said the young keeper, trying to free himself from Catherine's embrace, "I have a few words to say to M. Chollet. When they are said, when the question is clearly and distinctly set forth between us, all will be done."

"Bernard!" pleaded she, "be calm, keep your temper."

"Do not be afraid. Only let me say two words to... this gentleman, or faith, I will say four instead of two."

"Very well, but..."

"But I tell you to be quiet."

And with a movement, the violence of which could not be mistaken, he pushed Catherine towards the door. The girl realized that physical or moral obstacle would only augment the anger of her lover. She withdrew with her hands clasped, contenting herself with beseeching looks.

The door of the kitchen having closed on her, the two young men were alone. Bernard convinced himself that the door was properly shut by going himself and settling the latch in its socket. Then coming back to the Parisian, "Well, sir," he said, "I too was looking for something or rather some one. I was looking for you, M. Chollet!"

"Me?"

"Yes, you."

The young man smiled. As soon as a man began to attack him he would answer him manfully.

"You were looking for me?"

"Yes."

"Yet I am not difficult to find, I fancy."

"Except when you start off in the morning in your tilbury to wait for the coach from Paris on the Gondreville road."

The young man drew himself up, and with a scornful smile, said, “I go out in the morning at what hour I please, and I go where I please, Monsieur Bernard. That is my business.”

“You are perfectly right, sir. Every one is free to act as he will. But there is a truth which you will not dispute, I hope, although it comes from me, any more than I did your maxim.”

“And that is?”

“That every one is master of his own.”

“I do not dispute it, Monsieur Bernard.”

“Now you understand, Monsieur Chollet. My property is my field, if I am a farmer; my sheepfold if I raise stocks; my homestead if I am a yeoman. Well, if a boar comes out of the forest and damages my field, I lie in ambush and shoot the boar. A wolf comes out of the wood to kill my sheep; I send a bullet at him and that is for his pains. A fox comes into my farmyard and kills my fowls; I catch the fox in a trap and break his head with kicks from my booted heel. As long as the field was not mine, as the sheep were not owned by me, as the fowls belonged to others I did not claim this right; but directly field, sheep and poultry are mine, it is another matter.

“Oh, by the bye, Monsieur Chollet, I have the honour to inform you that, granting the consent of my father and mother, I am going to marry Catherine and in a fortnight she will be my wife, my very own, my property and my possession consequently. Which means, ‘let the boar who should come and root up my field beware! Let the wolf who would prowl round my sheep take care! Woe to the fox who covets my poultry! ‘Now if you have any objections to make to all this, make them, Monsieur Chollet, make them to me at once. I am listening.”

“Unfortunately,” rejoined the Parisian who, brave though he was, was probably not sorry to be saved from an awkward predicament, “unfortunately you are not the only one listening.”

“Not the only one?”

“No. Do you wish me to answer in presence of a woman and a priest?”

Bernard turned round and saw sure enough the Abbé Grégoire and Catherine on the doorstep. “No, you are right; do not speak,” he said.

“.Then we shall meet to-morrow?” asked Chollet.

“To-morrow, the day after, when you will, where you will, how you will.”

“Well and good!”

“My friend,” put in Catherine, only too pleased that the coming of the good priest had supplied her with this means of intervening, “here is our dear Abbé Grégoire, whom we love with our whole hearts and whom I for my part have not seen for eighteen months.”

“Good day, my children, good day!” said the Abbé.

The two young men exchanged a last look which amounted to a mutual defiance, and while Louis Chollet withdrew, bowing to Catherine and the priest, Bernard came forward with smiling brow and lips to kiss the hand of the good priest, saying, “Welcome to you, man of peace! to this house, where we ask no better than to live in peace.”

CHAPTER XII.

THE ABBÉ GRÉGOIRE.

THERE are in the most ordinary lives events which seem providential. The appearance of Abbé Grégoire just at the right point, at the moment when the young men would probably have exchanged defiances, was one of these incidents.

So as it was a long journey for the good Abbé to come between Low Mass and Vespers to the *Maison Neuve,* where he had only been once before, and as nothing accounted for his being there at the time of the day when he appeared, Bernard, after kissing his hand, raised his head and asked him laughingly, “What do you come here for, your Reverence?”

“I?”

“Yes. I bet,” went on Bernard, “that you do not guess what you came to do, or rather what you are going to do, at the New House.”

The Abbé did not even try to solve the species of riddle which was asked him.

“Man proposes and God disposes,” he said. “I hold myself at the disposal of God.” Then he added, “As for me, I intended merely to pay a visit to your father.”

“Have you seen him?” asked Bernard.

“No, not yet,” was the reply.

“YOUR Reverence,” went on Bernard, looking tenderly at Catherine while speaking to the priest, “you are always welcome, but more welcome to-day than any other.”

“Yes, I can fancy so because of the arrival of this dear child.”

“To some extent on that account, dear Abbé, but a good deal on account of something else.”

“Well, my children,” said he, looking round for a chair, “tell me about it.”

Bernard ran for an easy-chair and putting it within reach of the priest, who, tired by his walk, was nothing loth to sit down, said, “Listen, your Reverence, I ought perhaps to make you a long speech, but I prefer to tell you the thing in two words. We want to get married, Catherine and I.”

“Ah! ah! So you love Catherine, boy?” asked the Abbé.

“I should think I do love her.”

“And you, do you love Bernard, my child?”

“Oh, with my whole soul!”

“But it seems to me that you ought to make this avowal to your parents!”

“Yes, your Reverence, but you are the friend of my father, you are the confessor of my mother, you are to all of us our Abbé. Well, talk it over with Father Guillaume, who will speak of it to Mother Marianne. Try to obtain their consent for us, which I hope will not be difficult, and you will see two young people made very happy. Oh look,” and he placed his hand on the Abbé’s shoulder “there is Père Guillaume coming out of his room. You know the redoubt that has to be carried, charge home! Meanwhile we will take a walk, Catherine and I, and sing your praises. Come, Catherine.”

And the two, joyous and light as two birds, took their flight towards the door and from the door struck off through the woods. Meanwhile Père Guillaume had stopped on the landing, and the Abbé, turning towards him, greeted him with a wave of the hand.

“I saw you coming a long way off,” began Father Guillaume, “and said to myself ‘It’s the Abbé! Why, my word, it’s the Abbé,’ only I could not believe it. What luck! and to-day of all days. I bet you have not come for us, but to see Catherine.”

“Oh no, you are mistaken, for I did not know she had come.”

“Then you must have been all the more delighted to find her here, eh? There, how pretty she has grown. You are staying to dinner, I hope? Oh, I warn you, your Reverence, every one that comes into this house to-day does not leave it before two in the morning.”

And Père Guillaume proceeded to come down, holding out his two open hands to the Abbé.

“Two o’clock in the morning!” repeated the Abbé. “Why, that has never happened to me before to get to bed at such a time.”

“Bah, how about the midnight Mass?”

“How shall I get away?”

“M. le Maire will drive you home in his chaise. “T*he Abbé shook his head.*

“Hum! We are none too friendly, the Maire and I.”

“That’s your fault,” said Guillaume. “How my fault?” asked the priest, astonished that his old friend the Forester should say he was in the wrong so at the first go off.

“Oh yes, you have had the misfortune to repeat in his presence, ‘Thou shalt not steal thy neighbour’s goods, nor keep aught stolen wittingly.’”

“Well,” said the Abbé, “I do not say that at the risk of *going back on foot at night I will not join you. For that matter I guessed when I came here that I should stay longer than I ought, and I begged the Curé to take my place* at vespers and evensong.”

“Bravo! Why, you give me back all my good temper, Abbé!”

“So much the better,” replied he, leaning on the Forester’s arm, “for I want to find you in that frame of mind.”

“Me,” said the old man astonished. “Yes. You are a bit surly at times.”

“Go on.”

“And to-day in particular.”

The Abbé paused and looked at Guillaume in a peculiar way.

“What?” asked the Forester.

“Well, to-day, I have here and there two or three things to ask you.”

“Me! Two or three things?”

“Well, let us call it two, not to frighten you.”

“For whom?”

“You must, for that matter, be used to it, Père Guillaume; every time I hold out my hand to you, it is to say, my dear Monsieur Watrin, charity, if you please.”

“Well what is it? Let us see,” asked the old man, laughing.

“In the first place about old Pierre.”

“Oh yes, poor devil. I know his misfortune. That vagabond of a Mathieu has managed to get him sent away *from M. Raisin’s.”*

“He had been there twenty years and because of a letter lost the day before yesterday...”

“Monsieur Raisin was in the wrong,” said Guillaume. “I have told him so already this morning and you must tell him the same, when he comes back. You do not turn away a servant of twenty years’ standing: such a servant is part of the family. I should not turn away a dog that had been ten years in my yard.”

“Oh, I know your good heart, Père Guillaume. So I started out early in the morning to make a collection for *the man. Some gave me ten sous,* others twenty. Then *I thought of you. I said to myself I will go to the Maison Neuve on the SOISSONS Road: it is a league and a half* there and a league and a half *back, three altogether. I* will rate Guillaume at twenty sous the league, which will make three francs. Not to mention that I shall have the pleasure of shaking him by the hand.”

“Lord reward you, reverend sir. For you have a good heart.”

And feeling in his pocket he brought out two five-franc pieces and gave them to the Abbé.

“Oh,” said the latter, “ten francs! It’s a deal for your income, dear Monsieur Watrin.”

“I owe something more than other people, since it was I who picked up that whelp of a Mathieu, and it was to some extent from my house that he started out to do the mischief.”

“I should prefer,” said the Abbé, turning the five-franc pieces over in his fingers, as if he felt compunction in depriving the poor household of such a sum, “I should prefer, dear Father Guillaume, for you to give me only three francs, or even nothing at all, and instead let him have leave to pick up a little wood in your beat.”

Père Guillaume looked the Abbé straight between the eyes, as they say, then with a fine look of simple-minded uprightness said, “The wood belongs to his Highness, the Duke of Orleans, my dear Abbé, whereas the money is mine. So take the money and let Pierre take care not to touch the wood. Now that matter is settled, let us go on to the other. Come, what else have you to ask me?”

“I have taken charge of a petition.”

“To whom?”

“To you.”

“A petition to me? Well, let us see it.”

“It is verbal.”

“Who is it from?”

“Bernard.”

“What does he want?”

“He wants...”

“Well, do finish!”

“Well, he wants to get married.”

“Oh, oh, oh!” cried his father.

“Why, ‘oh, oh ‘? Is he not old enough?”

“Oh yes! But whom does he want to marry?”

“A good girl whom he loves and who loves him.”

“If only it is not Mademoiselle Euphrosine that he loves, I will let him take what wife he likes, if it were my grandmother.”

“Set your mind at rest, my worthy friend. The woman that he loves is Catherine.”

“Really? really?” cried the old man joyously. “Bernard loves Catherine and Catherine him?”

“Had you no idea of it?”

“Aye, but I was afraid I might be mistaken.”

“You consent, then?”

“With all my heart,” cried Guillaume. Then suddenly checking himself, added, “But...”

“But what?”

“Why only that I must speak to the old woman about it. All that we have done for twenty-six years has been done by common consent. Bernard is her son as well as mine. So the old woman must be told. Yes, yes, that is so; it must be done.”

Then going and opening the kitchen door he called, “Hi, mother, come here.”

He then went back to the Abbé, grasping his pipe between his teeth and rubbing his hands, which with him was a sign of the greatest satisfaction.

“Ah, that rascal of a Bernard. It is quite the slyest trick he has played in his life.”

At this moment Madame Watrin appeared at the door of her kitchen, wiping her forehead with her white apron.

“Well, come, what is it?” she asked.

“Come here, I tell you,” rejoined Guillaume.

“Oh, how stupid of you to disturb me like that just as I was making my paste.”

Then suddenly catching sight of the visitor, whom she had not noticed, “What, the Abbé Grégoire!” she cried. “Your servant, your Reverence. I did not know you were there, but for that there could have been no occasion for calling me.”

“Good,” said Guillaume to him, “you hear, you hear. There she is off.”

“Are you well?” she went on. “And your niece, Mademoiselle Alexandrine, is she well? You know that every one in the house is delighted over Catherine coming home?”

“Well, well, well! You will help me to put a martingale on her, won’t you, your Reverence, if I cannot manage her alone?”

“Why did you call me, then,” rejoined Marianne, with a remnant of bitterness from her late outbursts, “if you keep me from paying my respects to his Reverence and asking him his news?”

“I called you to give you the chance of doing me a favour, my dear.”

“And what’s that?”

“The favour of giving me your opinion in two words and plainly on an important matter. Bernard wants to marry.”

“Bernard! marry? And whom?”

“His cousin.”

“What, Catherine?”

“Yes, Catherine. And now, your opinion. Come, quick, out with it.”

“Catherine,” she replied, “is a good child, an excellent girl.”

“That sounds well. Go on.”

“Who could not put us to shame...”

“Get along! Get along!”

“Only, she has nothing.”

“Nothing?”

“Absolutely nothing.”

“Woman, do not weigh in the balance a few miserable crowns and the lifelong misery of these poor children.”

“But all the same, father, it is ill living without money.”

“Yet ‘tis still worse for folk living without love.”

“Ah, that’s true,” murmured she.

“When we married,” went on the father, ““had we any money? No, we were as poor as a couple of Church mice, not to mention that to-day we are not yet very rich. Well, what would you have said then if our relatives had wished to separate us on the pretext that we lacked some hundreds of crowns to set up house with?”

“Yes, all that is very well,” replied the mother, “But that is not the only obstacle.”

And she uttered these words in a tone which made Guillaume understand that if he thought all was done he was mistaken, and that difficulty was going to arise as serious as unexpected.

“Good,” said he, bracing himself too for the struggle. “What is this obstacle? Come, now.”

“Oh, you understand me quite well.”

“No matter. Do as if I did not understand you.”

“Guillaume, Guillaume,” said she, shaking her head, “we cannot put this marriage on our conscience.”

“And why so?”

“Good Lord, why because she is a heretic.”

“Oh, wife, wife,” cried he, stamping his foot, “I guessed that would be the stone of stumbling, and yet I would not believe it.”

“What would you have, father? As I was twenty years ago, so I am to-day. I opposed as much as I could the marriage of her poor mother to Friedrich Blum. Unfortunately she was your sister. She was free and did not need my consent. Only I said, ‘Rose, remember my prophecy. It will bring you ill luck to marry a heretic.’ She did not listen to me and married him and my prediction has come true. The father was killed, the mother is dead, and the little girl was left an orphan.”

“Well, you are not going to reproach her with that, surely?”

“No, but I reproach her with being a heretic.”

“Why, wretched woman!” cried he, “do you know what a heretic is?”

“It is a creature that will be damned.”

“Even if she is virtuous?”

“Yes, even if she is virtuous.”

“But if she is a good mother, a good wife, a good girl?”

“Even if she is all that.”

“Even if she had all the virtues?”

“All the virtues put together make no difference, once she is a heretic.”

“A thousand million devils!” cried the exasperated old man.

“Swear if you like,” said Marianne. “But swearing will not change it.”

“You are right. So I will have no more to do with it.”

Then turning towards the worthy priest, who had listened to all this discussion without uttering a single word, he said, “And now, your Reverence, you have heard: I have no more to do with it. Now it is your turn.”

Then darting out of the room like a man in a hurry to breathe the open air, he cried, “Oh, woman, woman! You must have been created and sent into the world to damn the human race!”

But meanwhile, shaking her head, she was muttering to herself, “No, it’s no use his talking; it is impossible. Bernard shall never marry a heretic.

Anything people like, but not that. No, no, no, not that!”

CHAPTER XIII.

FATHER AND SON.

FATHER GUILLAUME having gone out, the ABBE
Grégoire and Madame Watrin remained facing each other.
There is no need to say that the Abbé had accepted the mission which the old Forester had entrusted to him when he left the scene of action, not like a man beaten, but as one who hesitates to employ, in order to conquer, arms which he would feel ashamed to use.

Unhappily, for thirty years past Marianne had been his penitent, and he knew well the woman with whom he would have to deal. And as Madame Watrin's besetting sin was obstinacy, he had no great hopes of succeeding where Guillaume had failed.

So in spite of his air of confidence it was with a certain internal misgiving that he entered on the question.

"Dear Madame Watrin," said he, going closer to her, "have you no other objection to this marriage than the difference of religion?"

"I, Monsieur l'Abbé?" she replied. "None! But it seems to me that is enough."

"Come, come! in all conscience, Mother Watrin, instead of saying 'no,' you ought to say 'yes.'"

"Oh, Monsieur l'Abbé," cried Marianne, raising her eyes to heaven, "is it you who urge me to give my consent to such a marriage?"

"Certainly it is I."

"Well, then I tell you that on the contrary it should be your duty to oppose it."

"My duty, dear Madame Watrin, is in the narrow path which I walk to give to those that follow me as much happiness as possible. My duty is to console the unhappy and above all to help those to be happy who have the chance of being so."

"This marriage would be the ruin of my child's soul. I refuse!"

"Come, let us be reasonable, dear Madame Watrin," insisted the Abbé. "Catherine, although she is a Protestant, has always loved and respected you as a mother, has she not?”

“Oh, on that head I have nothing to say. Always! and it is only fair to say so.”

“She is gentle, good, charitable?”

“She is all that.”

“Pious, sincere and modest?”

“Yes.”

“Well then, dear Madame Watrin, let your conscience be at rest. The religion which gives Catherine all these virtues will never destroy your son’s soul.”

“No, no, Monsieur l’Abbé. No, that cannot be!” repeated Marianne, plunging farther and farther into her blind obstinacy.

“I beg of you to do it,” said the Abbé.

“No.”

“I entreat you.”

“No, no, no!”

The Abbé raised his eyes to heaven.

“Oh, my God, my God!” he murmured, “You that are so good, so clement, so merciful, You that need but a look to judge of men, oh, God! You see in what error this mother is, who gives to her blindness the name of piety; my God, enlighten her!”

But the good woman continued to make signs of refusal.

At this moment Guillaume, who no doubt had been listening at the door, came in again.

“Well, Monsieur l’Abbé,” he asked, throwing a side glance at his wife, “has she grown more reasonable, this old woman of mine?”

“Madame Watrin will think it over, I hope,” replied the Abbé.

“Ah!” cried Guillaume, shaking his head and clenching his fists. The gesture was seen by the mother, but in her imperturbable persistence she said: “Do what you like; I know you are master, but if you let them marry it will be against my will.”

“A thousand demons! You hear her, Monsieur l’Abbé?” said Watrin.

“Patience, dear Monsieur Guillaume, patience!” replied the Abbé, seeing that the good man was getting hot.

“Patience, you say?” cried the old man. “Why, the man who would have patience in such circumstances would be no man! He would be a brute not worth a charge of powder and shot.”

“Bah!” said the Abbé in a low voice, “she has a good heart; never fear, she will go back on herself.”

“Yes, you are right, I do not want her to accept my opinion as if constrained and forced to do so; I do not want her to act the sorrowing mother, the martyred wife. I give her the whole day to consider, and if this evening she does not come of her own accord and say, ‘Well, Father, we must let the children marry after all...”‘Guillaume threw a side glance at his wife, but the latter shook her head, a gesture which redoubled the exasperation of the old head-keeper.

“If she does not come and say that to me,” he went on, “well, listen, Monsieur l’Abbé, we have been together six-and-twenty years... yes, six-and-twenty years next 15th of June... well, Monsieur l’Abbé, on the faith of a man of honour we shall part as if it had only been yesterday, and we shall finish the few days that remain to us to live, she in her place and I in mine.”

“What is that he is saying?” cried the old woman.

“Monsieur Watrin!” said the Abbé.

“I am saying — I am saying the truth. Do you hear, woman, do you hear?”

“Yes, yes, I hear. Oh, wretched, wretched woman that I am!”

And Mère Watrin plunged sobbing into her kitchen, yet without taking, desperate as she appeared to be and really and truly was, any step in the way of reconciliation.

Left together the Forester and the Abbé looked at each other. It was the latter that first broke the silence.

“My dear Guillaume,” he said, “come, take courage and, above all, be calm.”

“But did you ever see such a thing?” cried Watrin, furious. “Did you ever, ever, see such a thing?”

“I have still good hopes,” resumed the Abbé, but evidently more with a view to consoling the worthy man than out of conviction; “the children must see her, the children must speak to her.”

“She will not see them, she will not speak to them! It shall not be said that she was kind out of pity; no, she shall be kind out of kindness or I will have nothing to do with her? Let the children see her, let them speak to her? No, I should be ashamed of it. I do not want them to know that they have such a fool for a mother.”

At this moment Bernard thrust an anxious head through the half-open door; Guillaume saw him, and turning to the Abbé said, “Say nothing about the old mule’s obstinacy, I beg of you, Monsieur l’Abbé, I beg of you.”

Bernard had noticed his father’s look, and his subsequent silence by no means lessened the young man’s uneasiness.

“Well, father?” he brought himself to ask in a timid voice.

“Who called you here?” said Guillaume.

“Father!” murmured the lad, almost beseechingly.

His son’s tone went to old Watrin’s heart; but he steeled that heart, and in a voice as rough as Bernard’s had been soft and persuasive, said again, “I ask you, who called you here? Answer me that!”

“No one, I know, but I hoped.”

“Be off! you were a fool to hope.”

“Father! dear father!” said Bernard, “one kind word! only one!”

“Be off, I say!”

“For God’s sake, father!”

“Go away, I tell you!” cried Father Guillaume. “There is nothing for you to do here.”

Indeed in the Watrin family every member had his dose of obstinacy.

Instead of allowing the cloud that was over his father’s brow to disperse and coming back later on, as the latter advised him, somewhat brutally, it may be, Bernard came a step more forward in the room and continuing to insist, said in a firmer voice, “Father, mother is crying and will not answer; you are crying and you send me away....”

“You are mistaken, I am not crying.”

“Be calm, Bernard, be calm!” said the Abbé, “all may come right yet.”

But instead of listening to the Abbé’s voice, Bernard hearkened to the voice of despair, which began to ring in his heart.

“Alas, alas!” he muttered, thinking that his mother consented to the marriage and that it was his father who opposed it, “wretched man that I am! Twenty-five years have I loved my father and he does not love me.”

“Wretched! Yes, wretched you are indeed,” cried the Abbé, “for you are blaspheming now.”

“But you see plainly that my father does not love me, Monsieur l’Abbé,” replied Bernard, “since he refuses me the one and only thing that can make me happy.”

“You hear him?” cried Guillaume, carried away by his old anger even more than any fresh resentment. “That is how you judge things! Oh youth! youth!”

“But,” resumed Bernard, “it shall not be said that in obedience to an incredible caprice I abandon the poor girl; if she has only one friend here, at least that friend will stand her in stead of all others.”

“Oh, I have already told you three times to go away, Bernard!” cried Guillaume.

“I am going away,” said the young man. “But I am five-and-twenty, five-and-twenty past; I am free to act, and what is refused me so cruelly, well the law gives me the right to take it and I will take it.”

“The law!” cried Guillaume, exasperated. “I do believe, God forgive me, that a son has spoken of ‘the law ‘to his father!”

“Is it my fault!”

“The law...”

“You drive me to extremities.”

“The *law!* Out of the house! The *law* to your father! Out of the house, wretch, and never let me set eyes on you again!... the *law!”*

“Father,” said Bernard, “I will go, since you turn me out; but remember the hour when you said to your son, ‘Child, go out of my house! ‘and may all ill that results recoil on you! “And Bernard, taking his gun, dashed out of the house like a madman.

Père Guillaume was ready to spring forward and seize his weapon; but the Abbé held him back.

“What are you doing, Monsieur l’Abbé?” cried the old man. “Did you not hear what that scoundrel said just now?”

“Father, father!” murmured the Abbé, “you have been too hard on your son.”

“Too hard,” cried Guillaume, “do *you* say so too? Was it I who was too hard or his mother? You know which it was, and God knows. *Too hard*, when I had my eyes full of tears, as I talked to him: for I love him, or rather loved him, as one does an only child! But now,” went on the old Forester in a choking voice, “let him go where he pleases, provided he does go! Let what may become of him, provided I do not see him again.”

“Injustice breeds injustice, Guillaume,” said the Abbé solemnly. “Beware, after having been severe in your anger of being unjust in cold blood. God has already forgiven you the anger and your violence; he will not forgive you injustice.”

The Abbé had scarcely finished when Catherine in her turn came pale and frightened into the parlour. Her large blue eyes were fixed, and from them fell great tears which rolled like pearls down her cheeks.

“0 dear father!” said she, looking in alarm at the Abbé’s sad face and the gloomy countenance of the Forester, “What is the matter; what has happened?”

“Good! here’s the other come now!” muttered Guillaume, taking his pipe from his mouth and putting it back in his pocket, which with him was a sign of intense emotion.

“Bernard hugged me three times, crying,” she went on; “he took his hat and his hunting-knife and made off, running like a maniac.”

The Abbé turned round and wiped his wet eyes with his handkerchief.

“Bernard... Bernard is a scoundrel,” retorted Guillaume, “and you — you.”

No doubt he was going to include Catherine in his maledictions, but his angry glance met the girl’s soft and beseeching eyes, and what remained in him of anger melted like snow before an April sunbeam.

Then gently pushing his niece away and turning to the Abbé, “Monsieur Grégoire,” he said, “it is true, I was harsh, it is the mother’s fault. Go and try to put that right with her. As for me... as for me, I am going to take a turn in the forest. I have always noticed that shade and solitude are full of good counsels.” And giving the Abbé a shake of the hand, but without daring to look in Catherine’s direction, he left the house, crossed the road diagonally and plunged into the woodland opposite.

The Abbé, to avoid an explanation, would have much liked to do the same, and was proceeding towards the kitchen, went in, for he was almost sure to find Mother Watrin there, desperate as she might be, but Catherine stopped him.

“In the name of heaven, Monsieur l’Abbé, have pity on me,” she said, “and tell me what has happened.”

“My child,” replied the worthy vicar, taking both the girl’s hands, “you are so good, so pious, so devoted that you cannot have other than friends here and in heaven. Abide in hope therefore, accuse no one, and leave it to the goodness of God, to the prayers of the angels and the love of your kinsfolk the care of putting matters right.”

“But I — I — what am I to do?” asked Catherine.

“Pray that a father and a son who have parted in anger and tears may meet again in pardon and joy.”

And, leaving Catherine a little calmer, if not more reassured, he went into the kitchen where Mother Watrin, shaking her head and reiterating, “No, no, no!” all the time and crying withal, was skinning a couple of young rabbits and rolling her paste.

Catherine watched the Abbé Grégoire go away as she had watched her adopted father, understanding as little of the advice of the one as of the silence of the other.

“Oh, God!” she asked herself, “Will no one tell me what has happened? No one?”

“Yes, I will, with your permission, Mademoiselle Catherine,” said Mathieu, suddenly coming into sight, his two elbows leaning on the window ledge.

This apparition of Mathieu was almost a joy to poor Catherine. Coming in some sort in the name of Bernard and to give her some news of Bernard, the vagabond seemed to lose half his repulsiveness in her eyes, and to be merely ugly.

“Oh, yes, yes,” cried the girl, “tell me where Bernard is and why he has gone away.”

“Bernard?”

“Yes, yes, my dear Mathieu, tell me, tell me! I am listening.”

“Well, he has gone away... ha, ha!”

And Mathieu began to laugh his horselaugh while Catherine turned an anxious ear towards him.

“He has gone away,” resumed the vagabond. “But there! had I better tell you ‘(“

“Yes, yes, tell me; I beg you to.”

“Well, he has gone far away because Monsieur Watrin turned him out of the house.”

“Turned him out of the house! The father drove the son away? And why?”

“Why? Because he wanted to marry you in spite of every one, the madman!”

“Driven away? Driven away, because of me? Driven from his father’s house?”

"Yes. Oh, I should think so. There were high words. Look you, I was in the bakehouse and heard everything. Oh, without listening. I did not listen, no, I didn't; but they were shouting so loud that I could not help hearing. There was even a moment when Monsieur Bernard said to Father Guillaume, 'It is on you the misfortunes will recoil, the calamities that are coming.' There was even a moment when I thought the old man was going to snatch up his gun. Oh, that would have been terrible, terrible! For you know Père Guillaume is not like me who cannot put a bullet into a house-door at twenty-five paces."

"Oh, Bernard! poor, poor Bernard!"

"Oh yes, what he risked for you well deserves that you should see him once more, does it not? if only to prevent his doing something."

"Oh yes, yes, see him again! I ask no better, but how?"

"He will be waiting for you this evening."

"Waiting for me?"

"Yes, that is what he told me to say."

"Who told you?"

"Who? why! he of course."

"And where will he wait for me?"

"By the Prince's spring."

"At what time?"

"At nine o'clock."

"I shall be there, Mathieu, I shall be there."

"Do not fail, whatever you do!"

"I will not fail."

"Else I should catch it. He's not soft-handed, you know, is friend Bernard. This morning he reached me such a cuff my cheek smarts still. But I am a good-natured lad, I am, and do not bear malice."

"Never mind, my good Mathieu," said Catherine as she went up again to her room. "Oh, God will reward you for it."

"I hope so, indeed," said Mathieu, following her with his eyes till the door closed on her.

Then, indeed, with the smile of a fiend who sees a poor innocent soul falling into his trap, he turned in the direction of the forest, which he entered, with long strides, making signals all the time.

In reply to these signals a horseman, standing some distance off, hurried up.

“Well?” he asked Mathieu, pulling up his horse short opposite the vagabond.

“Well, all is going famously, the other has done such a lot of foolish things that it appears we have had enough of it as it is; and then we regret Paris.”

“What am I to do?”

“What had you better do?”

“Yes.”

“Will you do it?”

“Of course.”

“Well, go quickly to Villers-Cotterets and stuff your pockets with money. At eight o’clock be at the Corey fête, and at nine...”

“At nine?”

“Well, some one who was not able to speak to you this morning, some one who did not come back by Gondreville simply for fear of a scandal, that some one will be waiting for you at the Prince’s spring.”

“Then she consents to go away with me?” asked the Parisian, overjoyed.

“She consents to everything,” said the vagabond.

“Mathieu,” rejoined the young man, “there are twenty-five louis for you if you have not lied to me. Till this evening at nine.”

And driving his spurs into his horse’s sides he went off at a gallop in the direction of Villers-Cotterets.

“Twenty-five louis,” muttered Mathieu, watching him vanish among the trees, “it’s a pretty penny, without counting my revenge! Oh, I am an owl, and the owl is a bird of ill omen! Monsieur Bernard, the owl wishes you good evening.”

And putting his two hands to his mouth he gave the owl’s cry and voice. “Good evening, Monsieur Bernard!”

And he plunged into the thickest of the forest in the direction of the village of Corey.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE VILLAGE FÊTE.

TWENTY-FIVE years ago, at the period that is when the events occurred which we have undertaken to relate, the fêtes of the various villages in the neighbourhood of Villers-Cotterets were true red-letter days, not only for those villages themselves, but likewise for the town from which they radiate like satellites round their parent planets.

It was particularly in the early part of the year, when the earliest fêtes coincided with the first fine days, when by the young beams of a May sun one or other of these villages awoke chattering and singing under the forest leaves like a brood of field-warblers or tomtits just hatched, — it was more particularly at that moment, we say, that the fête offered a special charm, a double attraction.

Then, a fortnight beforehand in the village, for a week before in the town, began preparations of coquetry on the part of all those to whom fell, whether for interest, speculation or pleasure, a share of any kind in the celebration.

The taverns polished their tables, scoured their window-panes, furbished up their pewter tankards and put new bushes at their doors.

The fiddlers swept, weeded, and trod smooth the appointed dancing place. Improvised booths arose under the trees,’ like the tents, not of a field of battle, but of a pleasure-camp. Lastly, young men and maidens looked to their toilettes, just as before a grand review the soldiers who are to take part in it look to their arms.

Oil the morning of this famous day all were awake early, all were astir and moving and making ready from dawn.

The tilting rings fixed their revolving mechanism; the open air merry-go-rounds were secured on their four j halting feet; the plaster dolls intended to be broken by the cross-bow bolts were set in line on their stakes; the rabbits waited dolefully, frightened and with ears dropped on their necks, for the hour when a ring cunningly threaded on a stake would decide their fate and send them from the dealer’s basket into the saucepan of the happy winner.

Thus for the village folk the fête was a holiday indeed from earliest dawn. Not so with the representatives the town was to send to the festival. These did not set out till towards three or four in the afternoon, unless private invitations or ties of kinship with the farmers or principal inhabitants of the village changed their usual customs.

Towards three or four in the afternoon then, according as the village was more or less far from the town, a long procession began to wind along the road. It was composed of “fashionables “on horseback, aristocrats in carriages, and members of the Third Estate on foot.

These members of the Third Estate were lawyers’ clerks, shopmen or superior working-men, each having on his arm a pretty girl in a hat with pink or blue ribbons, defying with her smart muslin skirts, her bright eyes and her white teeth, fine ladies who dashed so disdainfully past her in their carriages.

At five o’clock every one was at the meeting-place and the festival had its true significance, for it contained the three constituent elements, aristocrats, townspeople and peasants. All these danced in the same enclosure, it is true, yet without mingling; each caste formed its own quadrille, and if one of these was enviable and envied, it was that of the *grisettes* with their pink and blue ribbons.

Towards nine o’clock in the evening the dancers began to thin out. All who belonged to the town took the road to the town again, the aristocrats in carriages, clerks, shopmen, workmen and girls on foot. It was these long homeward wendings under the shade of the great trees, the sifted beams of the moon, the first warm breezes of the year, that were so charming and so delightful.

These fêtes, of course, were more or less frequented according to the importance of the villages or their more or less picturesque situation. In this respect Corey was in the first rank. Nothing was more delightful than this little village, lying at the mouth of the Nadon valleys and forming an acute angle with the ponds of La Ramée and Javaye. At ten minutes’ walk from the Corey road in particular there is a spot of a very special beauty, at once lovely and wild; it is called the Prince’s spring.

Let us recall here, by the bye, that it was beside this fountain that Mathieu had arranged a double meeting with the Parisian and Catherine, and then go back to Corey.

From four in the afternoon then Corey was in full holiday. Let us carry our readers not exactly into the middle of the fête, but to the door of one of the improvised taverns of which we spoke just now. This *cabaret,* which came to life again every year for three days of a short, ephemeral activity, was an old keeper's house now deserted, and which in consequence of this abandonment remained closed three hundred and sixty days in the year.

During the three days' holiday the Inspector placed the house at the disposal of a good woman known as Mother Tellier, a tavern-keeper at Corey by trade, who made a branch of her establishment of it. The fête lasted three days, we say. Of the five days that we have deducted from the year the first forms the eve and the last the day after, that is to say the first represents the preparations for the fête and the last the necessary tidying-up which follows the same festive occasion. As long as the fête lasted the tavern lived and drank and sang, as if it were to go on doing so for ever. Then it reclosed for three hundred and sixty days to come, during which it remained sombre, silent, asleep, lethargic, to all appearance dead. It lay half-way between Corey and the Prince's spring, so that it afforded a natural stopping-place to such as were going to the latter. And between the country dances, owing to the charm of the site and that need of solitude 60 natural to lovers, everybody walked from the village to the fountain, and stopped at Mother Tellier's wineshop to drink a glass and eat a wedge of cream cake. Towards five, six and seven o'clock, then, Mother Tellier's establishment was at the zenith of its splendour, then little by little it emptied, became more and more deserted, and generally towards ten in the evening closed its wooden eyelids and fell asleep under the watch of a girl named Babet, who took Mother Tellier's place and was honoured with all her confidence.

Next day from daybreak on it yawned at first at the door, then one after the other opened its two shutters and the same as the day. before waited calmly for customers. The said customers preferred to take their places under a sort of rustic *pergola* formed outside the house by ivy vines and bind-weed, climbing all up the pillars which supported this projecting roof of verdure. Opposite, at the foot of a beech, a giant of a bygone age surrounded by his children, rose a bower of foliage under which the wine cooled during the day, being brought in at evening, the confidence of Mother Tellier in the sobriety and probity of her countrymen not going so far as to let the tempting liquor pass the night in the open air, cooling as it was compared with the air in the day-time.

Now towards seven in the evening, the very time when the fête itself presented its most animated appearance, Mother Tellier’s tavern was likewise thronged with an animated gathering. This was composed of customers drinking wine at ten, twelve and fifteen sous the bottle (for Mother Tellier had three prices), and consumers of cream cakes and almond rock. Some that were more famished, however, went as far as bacon omelette, salad or sausage. Five tables out of six were occupied, and Mother Tellier and Mademoiselle Babet were scarcely sufficient to deal with the frequent calls of the customers.

At one of these tables were seated two of the keepers who had taken part in the morning in the hunting of the boar marked down by our friend François. The two were Bobineau and Lajeunesse.

Bobineau, a stout man and rotund, with eyes flush with his head and a full-blown face, a native of Aix-en-Provence, very merry, passing his life in chaffing others and being chaffed by them, and speaking thickly like a true Provençal as he was, full of fire both in attack and defence, and in either case hitting on speeches which are quoted to this day, though he has been dead this fifteen years.

Lajeunesse, tall, dry and lean, christened by this juvenile name in 1784 by Duke Philippe Egalité of Orleans, because at that time he was the youngest of the keepers, had kept his nickname, although he had come to be nearly the oldest; he was as grave as Bobineau was laughter-loving, and as chary of words as the other was talkative.

To the left of the house on its east side were the remains of a hedge which perhaps had once formed a square as a sort of enclosure to the house, but which nowadays only extended five or six feet back as far as the leafy arbour, beyond which it disappeared, leaving access to the house perfectly free and open. Behind this hedge, in which was a gate, the solid portion being absent and only the two posts remaining, a sort of hillock, crowned by a great oak whose foot was hidden in moss, dominated the little valley where the Prince’s spring rises.

Farther on, under the mysterious shade of the forest, on the carpet of moss which deadens all but the nearest footsteps, in the twilight which was now beginning to fall, passed, more and more dimly seen according to their greater or less degree of distance, a series of merry-makers, some walking singly, some in couples. Then as an accompaniment to the voices of the drinkers, eaters, skittle-players or loungers you heard the sound of the violins and the shrill pipe of clarionets which died down of one accord just enough to give time for the cavaliers to lead their ladies back to their seats, choose another lady and take their places again for another quadrille.

And now that our curtain is raised, that our scenery is rendered intelligible by explanation, let us take our readers under Mother Tellier’s trellis-work. At this moment she is engaged in serving a Sybarite who has asked for a bacon omelette and wine at twelve sous, while Babet is carrying to Bobineau and Lajeunesse a piece of cheese of the size of a brick which will help them to finish their second bottle of wine.

“Well, that is what it is,” said Lajeunesse with his serious air to Bobineau, who, bending as far back as the other was projected forward, was listening to him with his most quizzical look. “And if you doubt it, you can go and see it with your own eyes. When I say your own, you understand that it is a way of speaking. The man you speak of is a new-comer, he is come from Germany, the country of Catherine’s father, and is called Mildet.”

“And where is he going to live, this fine fellow?” asked Bobineau with that charming Provençal accent which we have already said was peculiar to him.

“At the other end of the forest, at Montaigu; he has a little rifle no higher than that. Fifteen inches of barrel with a thirty bore and bullets like small shot. He will take a horse-shoe, nail it to the wall, and at fifty paces he will put a bullet into each of the holes, one after the other.”

“Saints in Paradise,” said Bobineau, uttering his usual oath, and laughing as he always did. “Why don’t he turn farrier, that fine fellow; he would shoe his nags, and never fear a kick. When I see it, I’ll believe it, eh, Molicar?”

This interpellation was addressed to a new-comer who, after knocking about Mathieu’s skittles, made his entrance accompanied by the curses of the players, who threatened to kick his legs, which were pretty unsteady already, from under him as a finish to their game.

At his name the disciple of Bacchus turned round, and recognizing as through a mist the man who had so addressed him, “Ah,” he mumbled, opening his eyes and rounding his mouth, “so it’s you, Bobineau, is it?”

“Yes, it is I.”

“And you were saying? Repeat a bit what you said, if you will be so kind.”

“Nothing, a lot of rot; that funny fellow, Lajeunesse, is trying to pull my leg, that’s all.”

"But," put in Lajeunesse, his vanity as a story-teller wounded, "what I tell you..."

"By the bye, Molicar," resumed Bobineau, "what has become of your lawsuit with neighbour Lafarge?"

"My lawsuit?" asked Molicar, who in the somewhat confused state of mind in which he was had some difficulty in stepping from one idea to another. "Yes, your lawsuit."

"With Lafarge, the periwig-maker?"

"Yes."

"Oh! I lost it."

"How did you lose it?"

"I lost it because I was cast in a fine."

"By whom?"

"By Monsieur Bassinot, the magistrate?"

"And what was your fine, eh?"

"Three francs."

"But what had you done to this Lafarge, the wig-maker?"

"What had I done to him?" asked Molicar, oscillating to and fro on his legs like a pendulum. "I damaged his nose. But without any bad intention, on my honour. You know Lafarge the wig-maker's nose well enough, don't you, Bobineau?"

"In the first place, please let us be accurate," said the merry Provençal; "it is not a nose, it's a handle."

"That's what it is! He has found the very word. Devil of a Bobiné. No, no; I mean to say, devil of a Bobineau. It's my tongue that's gone crooked."

"Well?" asked Lajeunesse.

"Well, what?" asked Molicar in his turn, whose wits were already wandering a hundred leagues from the conversation.

"He's asking for the history of Father Lafarge's nose."

"True, true. It was just a fortnight ago," went on Molicar, endeavouring by a gesture obstinately repeated to drive away a fly which did not exist, "we were coming out of the *cabaret* together."

"Then you were tipsy," remarked Bobineau. "No, as true as I am a man," rejoined Molicar. "I tell you, you *were* tipsy."

"And I tell you we were not: we were *drunk.*" And Molicar burst out laughing; he had made a point too for once.

"That's all right!" remarked Bobineau.

"But you will never cure yourself?" queried Lajeunesse.

"Of what?"

"Of getting tipsy."

"Cure myself! What is the good?"

"This man is full of reason," said Bobineau. "A glass of wine, Molicar."

Molicar shook his head.

"What, you refuse?"

"Yes."

"You refuse a glass of wine, you!"

"Two or none at all."

"Bravo!"

"Why two?" asked Lajeunesse whose mind, more mathematical than Bobineau's, required a positive solution for everything.

"Because one only," said Molicar, "would make the thirteenth this evening."

"Oh, aye!" exclaimed Bobineau, "and thirteen glasses of wine would certainly bring me ill luck."

"Superstitious fellow, get out! Go on, you shall have two glasses."

"Well, we were coming out of the wine-shop," resumed Molicar, accepting Bobineau's invitation.

"What time was it?"

"Oh, quite early."

"Well anyhow?"

"It might be one o'clock or half-past one in the morning. I wanted to get home, as an honest man should who has three wives and a child."

"Three wives?"

"Three wives and a child."

"What a Bashaw to be sure!"

"Eh? No, no! a wife and three children; how stupid that Bobineau is. How can you have three wives? If I had had three, I should not have gone home. Often I do not go as it is because I find one too many."

"Well, then the foolish idea came into my head to say to Lafarge the wigmaker, who lives in the Place de la Fontaine, whilst, as you know, I live at the top of the Rue de Largny, the silly idea took hold of me to say to him, 'Neighbour, let's see each other home. You will see me home first, I will see you home afterwards, then it will be your turn, then mine again, and on each trip we will stop at Mother Moreau’s to drink a mug.” Ah,’ said he, ‘that’s a good idea, that.’”

“Yes,” put in Bobineau, “you had probably, like to-day, only taken thirteen glasses and you were afraid it might be unlucky.”

“No, that day I had not counted them, and that is wrong, it will never happen again. We went off, then, together like two good friends, like two real neighbours, when on reaching Mademoiselle Chapins’ door, you know, the postmistress.”

“Yes.”

“There was a big stone and it *was* dark! You have good eyes, haven’t you, Lajeunesse? Well, that night you would have taken a cat for a keeper.”

“Never,” said Lajeunesse solemnly.

“Never? You say, never?”

“No, no, he says nothing.”

“If he says nothing that’s different and I am wrong.”

“Yes, you are wrong, go on.”

“When, on reaching Mademoiselle Chapins’ door, the postmistress, I came across the stone. Poor wretch that I was, I never saw it. How should I see it? Neighbour Lafarge could not see his own nose, which is certainly nearer his eyes than my eyes ever were to the stone. I stumble, I put out my hand and save myself by whatever I could lay hold on. Good, it was neighbour Lafarge’s nose. Lord, you know when you are drowning in water, you squeeze pretty tight, but when you are drowning in wine, it’s ten times worse. Egad, sir! the same thing followed as when you draw your hunting-knife out of its sheath. Neighbour Lafarge drew his nose out of my hand, but as for the skin of his nose it remained in my hand. You see, of course, this was no fault of mine; and more by token I never refused to give it him back, his confounded skin. Well, the magistrate, he sentenced me to three francs damage and compensation for that.”

“And neighbour Lafarge was mean enough to take them, the three francs?”

“Yes, but we have just been playing for them at bowls. I won them back and we drank them. My fourteenth glass, Bobineau?”

“Tell me, Father Bobineau,” cried Mathieu, interrupting the talkers, “did not you say you were looking out for the Inspector?”

“No,” replied Bobineau.

"I thought you did; and as he is coming this way I told you, that you might not have the trouble of going to look for him."

"In that case..." said Father Lajeunesse, putting his hand in his pocket. "Well," said Bobineau, "what are you doing there?"

"I am paying for both. You will give it me back later on, it is just as well that the Inspector should not see us at a tavern table; because of a glass of wine that one takes by chance he would think that we made a habit of it. It is thirty-four sous, isn't it, Mother Tellier?"

"Yes, gentlemen," said she. "Well, there they are. See you again."

"Oh, the cowards!" said Molicar, sitting down at the table which they had just vacated, and holding up to the setting 'sun a third bottle scarcely broached; "the cowards to leave the field of battle while there are enemies left." And filling the two glasses to the brim and chinking them against each other he cried, "Your health, Molicar!"

Meanwhile the two keepers, in a hurry as they were to get out of sight, had propped themselves against each other and were looking in stupefaction at a new personage who had just come on the scene.

The new-comer was Bernard, but Bernard pale and dishevelled, his neck-tie flying and his brow covered with sweat.

CHAPTER XV.

A SNAKE IN THE GRASS.

THE young man was so changed that his two comrades looked at him for a moment before they recognized him. Then at last Lajeunesse chanced it and said, “Why, it’s Bernard. Good day, Bernard!”

“Good day,” replied he shortly, visibly annoyed at finding them there.

“So you are here, are you?” ventured Bobineau in his turn.

“And why not? May not a fellow come to the fête when he wants a little amusement?”

“Oh, I don’t say he may not come,” rejoined Bobineau, “only, Saints above! I *am* astonished to see you alone.”

“Alone?”

“Yes.”

“And whom do you expect me to be with?”

“Why, I fancy when one has a sweetheart, a young and pretty sweetheart...”

“Say no more about it,” said Bernard frowning. Then striking a table with the butt of his gun, “Wine!” he cried.

“Hush!” said Lajeunesse. “Why hush?”

“The Inspector is here.”

“Well, what of it?”

“I tell you, be careful, the Inspector is here, that’s all.”

“Well, what does it matter to me whether he is here or not, the Inspector?”

“Oh, in that case it’s another matter.”

“There is trouble in the household,” said Bobineau to Lajeunesse, touching him on the arm.

Lajeunesse signed to him that that was his opinion too, then turning towards Bernard:

“What I was saying, look you, Bernard,” he went on, “was not to lecture you or make myself disagreeable. But you know the Inspector does not like to see us in the wine-shop.”

“And how if I like to go there?” rejoined Bernard. “Do you think it is the Inspector that will keep me from doing what I wish.” Then knocking a second time on the table, yet more violently than the first, “Wine!” he cried, “wine!”

The two keepers now saw that he had made up his mind.

“Come, come!” said Bobineau, “you must not prevent a fool from acting after his folly. Come along, Lajeunesse.”

“Let us say no more,” said Lajeunesse. “Good-bye, Bernard!”

The two keepers went off in the opposite direction to that in which the Inspector was coming, who besides was so absorbed in his conversation, and was so short-sighted that he passed the wine-shop without seeing either them or Bernard.

“Well, is anybody coming?” cried the latter, giving the table a blow with the butt which almost made it fly in pieces.

Mère Tellier came running, a bottle in each hand, and not knowing yet what impatient customer was calling for wine so violently.

“Here! here! here!” said she, “our stock of wine in bottle is run out, and it took time to draw fresh from the cask.” Then, at last recognizing with whom she had to deal, “Ah, it’s you,” she said. “Dear Monsieur Bernard. Gracious! how pale you are!”

“You think so, Mother?” said the young man. “Well, that’s why I want to drink. Wine gives one colour.”

“But you are ill, Monsieur Bernard,” insisted she.

Bernard shrugged his shoulders and snatching one of the bottles from her hand said, “Give it here.”

And putting the bottle to his lips he took a long drink from it.

“Good Lord!” cried the worthy woman, watching this act of his in bewilderment, so unlike his usual ways, “you will do yourself harm, my child.”

“No,” replied he, sitting down and putting the bottle violently on the table, “let me drink that one. Who knows if you will ever serve me with another?”

Mother Tellier’s stupefaction went on increasing, she forgot all her other customers to attend only to the young man. “Why, what has happened, dear Monsieur Bernard?” she insisted.

“Nothing; only give me pen, ink and paper.”

“Pen, ink and paper?”

"Yes, get on."

Mother Tellier hastened to comply.

"Pen, ink and paper," echoed Molicar, more and more drunk, and finishing Lajeunesse and Bobineau's third bottle.

"Excuse me, Mr. Notary. Do people come to a wineshop to ask for pens, ink and paper? They come here to call for wine."

Then adding example to precept, "Wine, Mother Tellier, bring me some wine!" he cried.

Meanwhile Mother Tellier, leaving Babet to serve Molicar, had come back to Bernard and put before him the three things asked for. Bernard looked up at her and noticed she was dressed in black.

"Why are you in mourning?" asked he.

The good woman turned pale in her turn, and in a half stifled voice said, "Ah, God, have you forgotten the great calamity that befell me?"

"I don't remember anything about it," was the reply. "Why are you in mourning?"

"Why, you know quite well, my good Monsieur Bernard; you came to his funeral yourself. I am in mourning for my poor child Antoine, who died a month ago."

"Oh, poor woman."

"I had none but him, Monsieur Bernard, an only son, and yet the Lord took him from me all the same. Oh, I miss him sadly. When a mother has had her boy twenty years under her eyes, and suddenly he is gone, what can she do? Weep? Yes! but what is the good of weeping? Lost is lost."

And the good woman burst into sobs.

Molicar chose the moment to strike up a song: it was his favourite song and the test of how much liquor the good man had on board. When he began that song, it showed he was really drunk.

He began:

"Had I but in my orchard
A single square of vines."

This song, breaking in to insult Mother Tellier's grief, a grief for which Bernard felt deeply beneath his assumed indifference, made him spring up as if grief had struck him with a spur as new as unexpected.

"Will you be quiet?" cried he.

But Molicar, paying no heed to Bernard's prohibition, resumed:

“Had I but in my orchard...”

“Hold your tongue, I tell you,” said the young man with a threatening gesture.

“And why should I hold my tongue?” asked Molicar.

“Don’t you hear what this woman is saying? Don’t you see that there is a mother here weeping, and weeping for her son?”

“That’s true,” said Molicar, “I will sing quite low.” And he began again in an undertone:

“Had I...”

“Neither low nor high!” shouted Bernard. “Stop or be off.”

“Oh,” says the other, “very well, I will go away. I like taverns where people laugh and not where they cry. Mother Tellier, Mother Tellier,” cried he, beating on the table, “come and fetch your due.”

“All right,” says Bernard, “I will settle your account. Leave us!”

“Good!” cried Molicar, staggering, “I ask no better.”

And he went away, holding on by the trees and singing more loudly the farther away he got:

“Had I but in my orchard
A single square of vines.”

Bernard watched him depart with profound disgust, then coming back to the landlady, who was still weeping, “Yes, you are right,” he said, “what is lost is lost; look, Mother Tellier, I would like to be in the place of your son and for your son not to be dead.”

“Oh, God keep you!” cried the worthy woman, “you, Monsieur Bernard?”

“Yes I, on my word of honour.”

“You who have such good, kind relatives!” went on she. “Ah, if you knew how it hurts a mother to lose her child, you would not venture on such a wish.”

Meanwhile Bernard was trying to write, but in vain his hand shook so much that he could not form a letter.

“Oh, I cannot, I cannot,” cried he, crushing the pen against the table.

“Sure enough, “said the good woman, “you are trembling as if you had the fever.”

“Here,” said Bernard, “do me a service, Mother Tellier.”

“Oh, very willingly, Monsieur Bernard!” cried she. “What is it?”

“It is only a step from here to the *Maison Neuve* on the Soissons Road, is it not?”

“A quarter of an hour’s smart walk, that’s all.”

“Then do me a friendly turn. I am very sorry to give you the trouble.”

“Tell me, never mind.”

“Do me the kindness to go over there and ask for Catherine.”

“Has she come back, then?”

“Yes, this morning. And to tell her that I will write to her soon.”

“That you will write to her soon?”

“To-morrow, as soon as I’ve mastered this trembling.”

“You are leaving the neighbourhood, then?”

“They say we are going to have war with the Algerians.”

“What is that to you, war, to you who have drawn in the conscription and got a lucky number?”

“You will go where I asked you, will you not, Mother Tellier?”

“Yes, directly, Monsieur Bernard, but.. “But what?”

“To your parents?”

“Well, what of my parents?”

“What do you wish me to say to them?”

“To them?”

“Yes.”

“Nothing.”

“What? Nothing?”

“No, nothing, unless that I passed this way, that they won’t see me again, and that I bid them good-bye.”

“Good-bye!” echoed Mère Tellier.

“Tell them also to keep Catherine with them, that I shall be grateful to them for any kindness they may show her, and then besides that if by chance I should die, like your poor Antoine, I beg them to make Catherine their heiress.”

And the young man, at the end of his fever-fit and therefore of his strength, with a sigh that was much like a sob, let his head fall between his two hands.

Mother Tellier looked at him with deep pity.

"Well, well, no need to say any more, Monsieur Bernard," she went on. "Here is the night quite fallen; I shall not have many more people now; Babet will be equal to the serving, and I will run to the *Maison Neuve."*

Then to herself she added, "I think it is the best servies I can do him, poor boy!"

In the distance was still heard the vinous voice of Molicar singing:

"Had I but in my orchard
A single square of vines."

Bernard remained for some moments plunged in his reflections, reflections painful and deep which betrayed themselves by the convulsive heaving of his shoulders, then at last lifting his face he shook his head and said to himself, "Come, courage, another glass of wine and let us be off."

"Oh, but, all the same," exclaimed a voice behind Bernard, the sound of which made him start, "I should not go away like that if I were you."

Bernard turned round, though strictly speaking he had no occasion to do so. He had recognized the voice.

"It's you, Mathieu?" he said.

"Yes, it is I," replied the other. "What were you saying?"

"You did not hear? Well, your ear is dull."

"I heard, but I did not understand."

"Well then, I will repeat it."

"Do so."

"I said that if I were you I should not go away like that."

"You would not go away?"

"No, at least without... That'll do, I know what I mean."

"Without what? Let us hear."

"Well, without having my revenge on one or the other. There, the big word is out."

"Who? What? One or the other?"

"Yes, one or the other, him or her."

"Can I take revenge on my father or my mother?" cried Bernard, shrugging his shoulders.

"Come now! Your father or your mother! What have they to do with all this?"

"But of whom are you talking then?"

"Well, of the Parisian and Mademoiselle Catherine."

"Catherine and Monsieur Chollet!" said Bernard, springing to his feet as if a viper had stung him. "Why, yes."

"Mathieu! Mathieu!"

"Good, that warns me to say nothing."

"Why so?"

"Why, because what I might say would recoil on myself."

"No, no, Mathieu: no, I swear to you. Speak!"

"But do you not guess then?" replied he. "What do you expect me to guess? Come, I say it again, speak!"

"Oh, faith," went on the vagabond, "it is not worth while having brains and education if you are to be deaf and blind."

"Mathieu!" said Bernard, "have you seen or heard anything?"

"The owl sees plainly at night," said Mathieu, "she has her eyes open when others have them shut. She watches while others sleep."

"Here now," repeated Bernard, trying to moderate his voice, "what have you seen and heard? Do not keep me in suspense any longer, Mathieu."

"Well then," rejoined the other, "the hindrance to your marriage, — for there is a hindrance, is there not?"

"Yes, what then?"

"Do you know where it comes from?"

The sweat ran from Bernard's brow.

"From my father," he said.

"From your father? Oh, yes, to be sure. He would ask no better than to see you happy. He loves you, poor dear man."

"Oh! So then the obstacle comes from some one who does not love me?"

"Ecod!" went on Mathieu without his wall-eye losing a single one of the varied emotions which chased each other over Bernard's countenance, "Ecod! you know there are sometimes people who only make believe to love you, who say, 'my dear Bernard, this, my dear Bernard, that,' and who at bottom deceive you."

"Come now, whom does the hindrance come from, my good Mathieu, whom does it come from? Say."

"Yes, that you may spring at my throat and throttle me.

"No, no, as sure as my name is Bernard, I swear it."

"Meanwhile," said Mathieu, "let me get a little away from you."

And he took two steps backward. Then feeling himself more secure at that distance, "Well," he said, "don't you see that the hindrance comes from

Mademoiselle Catherine?”

Bernard turned livid, but did not move.

“From Catherine?” he rejoined. “You said there was some one who did not love me; do you want to make out that Catherine does not love me, by any chance?”

“I make out,” Arid Mathieu, becoming emboldened by Bernard’s assumed calm, “that there are girls, especially when they have had a taste of Paris, who prefer to be the mistress of a rich young man at Paris rather than the wife of a poor young man in a country village.”

“You are not saying that about Catherine and the Parisian, I hope?”

“Ho, ho!” said Mathieu, “who knows?”

“Wretch!” cried Bernard, flinging himself on Mathieu at a single bound and seizing him by the throat with both hands.

“There, what did I tell you?” cried he, in a stifled voice, and making vain efforts to shake off the grip of iron. “There, you are choking me, Monsieur Bernard. Monsieur Bernard, by all that’s holy, I will tell you no more.”

Bernard wanted to know all.

Whoever has dipped his lips in the bitter cup of jealousy, is fain to drink it out from froth to dregs.

So he let Mathieu go and his two arms fell inert.

“Mathieu,” he said, “I beg your pardon. Speak, peak, — but if you lie!”

And his fists clenched and his arms stiffened.

“Well, if I lie, then it will be time for you to get into a rage. But as you get savage to begin with, I shall not speak another word.”

“I was wrong,” rejoined Bernard, forcing his features to express calm, though all the vipers of jealousy were biting at his heart.

“Well, that is right, you are reasonable now,” said Mathieu.

“Yes.”

“But no matter,” went on the vagabond.

“How, no matter?”

“Yes, I would show you; I prefer to make you touch the thing. Ah, you are of the breed of St. Thomas the doubter, you are.”

“Yes, you are right; show me, Mathieu, show me.”

“Very well, I am willing.”

“You are willing?”

“But on one condition.”

“What is it?”

“That you give me your word of honour to see it out to the end.”

“To the end. Yes, on my word of honour. But when shall I know that I am at the end? When shall I know that I have seen all?”

“Faith, when you have seen Mademoiselle Catherine and Monsieur Chollet at the Prince’s spring.”

“Catherine and Monsieur Chollet at the Prince’s spring!” cried Bernard.

“Yes.”

“And when shall I see that, Mathieu?”

“It is eight o’clock. Eight and how much past? Look at your watch, Monsieur Bernard.”

Bernard drew out his watch with a hand that had become firm. As the struggle came close, the strong man recovered his nerve and strength.

“A quarter to nine,” he said.

“Well then, in a quarter of an hour,” rejoined Mathieu. “It is not very long, is it?”

“At nine o’clock, then,” replied Bernard, passing his hand over his forehead covered with sweat.

“At nine o’clock, yes.”

“Catherine and the Parisian at the Prince’s spring?” said Bernard, in a low tone, remaining incredulous in spite of Mathieu’s asseveration. “What should they be doing there?”

“Lord, I know nothing about it,” replied he, for he did not miss a word of Bernard’s, not a change of his countenance, not a quiver of his heart, “arranging their departure, maybe.”

“Their departure?” cried Bernard, pressing his head between his hands as if he were going out of his senses.

“Yes,” said Mathieu. “This evening at Villers-Cotterets the Parisian was getting together all the gold he could collect.”

“All the gold he could collect?”

“Yes, he was asking everybody for it.”

“Mathieu,” muttered Bernard, “you make me suffer terribly; if it is for the pleasure of making me suffer, look out for yourself.” \

“Hush!” said Mathieu.

“The sound of horse-hoofs,” said Bernard.

Mathieu laid one hand on Bernard’s arm, and extending the other in the direction of the noise, said, “Look!”

And Bernard saw through the trees and the dim light a horseman approaching, whom his instinctive hatred made him instantly recognize as his rival. An impulse as instinctive made him spring behind the tree that stood nearest.

CHAPTER XVI.

OPPORTUNITY MAKES THE THIEF.

THE young man pulled up some fifty yards from Mère Tellier’s wine-shop, looked about him, and seeing nothing to alarm him jumped off his horse and tied him to a tree. Then, after again casting a scrutinizing glance into the darkness, he advanced towards the wine-shop.

“Ah, there he is,” muttered Bernard. “He is coming.”

And he made as if to throw himself in his path. But Mathieu stopped him. “Take care,” he said, “if he sees you, you will see nothing.”

“Oh, yes, yes, you are right,” replied Bernard, and he moved round the tree to get to the side where it threw its shadow, while Mathieu glided under the arbour like the serpent whose part he had just been playing.

The young man continued to go forward, and soon was within the circle of light thrown by the candles still standing on the different tables, though the customers of these had gradually dispersed. The wine-shop was or seemed to be deserted. Louis Chollet could thus believe himself quite alone.

“Faith,” he said, noting the different objects which met his view, “I am almost sure that this is Mère Tellier’s wine-shop, but devil take me if I know where the Prince’s spring is!”

Bernard was so close to him that, low as he spoke, he had heard all.

“The Prince’s spring,” he repeated. And he looked about him in search of Mathieu. But he had vanished, from his sight at least. He was under the trellis-work.

“Hi, Mother Tellier!” called Chollet, “Mother Tellier!”

The girl whom we have seen helping Mère Tellier in serving in the wine-shop, and who we said was called Babet, came out at his summons.

“You are calling Mother Tellier, Monsieur Chollet?” she asked.

“Yes, my girl,” replied he.

“Bless us, she is not here. She is gone to the *Maison Neuve,* on the Soissons Road, to the Watrins’.”

“The deuce,” exclaimed the young man. “If only she does not go and come across Catherine and prevent her from coming.”

“Meet Catherine and prevent her from coming!” echoed Bernard, who lost not a word of what the Parisian said.

“Oh, bah!” added the young man, “there is not much chance of it.”

Then calling Babet, “Come here, child,” he said.

“What can I do for you, sir?”

“Perhaps you can direct me to what I am looking for.”

“Tell me, Monsieur.”

“The Prince’s spring, is it far from here now?”

“Oh, no. It is there, Monsieur,” replied the girl. “A hundred paces at most from here.”

“A hundred paces!’

The girl pointed to the oak which stood outside the gate. “See,” she said, “from the foot of that oak you can see it.”

“Show it me, my girl.”

The girl mounted the hillock on the summit of which stood a magnificent oak, of the time of Francis I., which had remained standing while twelve generations of trees had passed away.

“Look,” said she, “yonder under the moonlight, that thread of water which shines like a skein of silver, that is the Prince’s spring.”

“Thank you, my girl,” said the young man.

“There is no occasion for it.”

“Oh, but there is, and to prove it here is something for your trouble.”

And Louis Chollet, whom happiness made generous, drew out his purse all swelling with gold to take a piece of money from it. But the overloaded purse escaped from his hands and falling to the ground let out a part of the sum it contained.

“Good,” said Chollet, “here I am letting my purse fall!”

“Wait,” said Babet, “you shall have a light; there’s no need to sow your money about, Monsieur Chollet; it does not give a crop.”

“Oh,” murmured Bernard, who had started at the noise made by the purse in falling, “it was the truth then!”

At this moment Babet came back with a candle and lowering it towards the ground set a hundred gold pieces scattered on the sand sparkling, whilst through the meshes of the long purse you could see double that sum glittering.

Chollet knelt down and began picking up the gold. If he had been less absorbed in this occupation, he might have seen Mathieu’s frog-like head emerging from the shed, the eyes fixed and glowing.

“0h; there’s gold for you!” he muttered. “When one thinks there are people who have all that money, while there are others..

Chollet made a movement and Mathieu’s head went back under the shed as a tortoise’s goes back into his shell.

The young man had finished his golden gleaning. He took the last twenty-franc piece, and instead of putting it back in the purse with the others, gave it to Babet.

“Thank you, my lass,” he said, “this is for you.”

“A twenty-franc?” cried the girl, delighted. “But you are making a mistake, all that is not for me.”

“But it is, it will be a beginning to your dowry.”

The vibrations of the village clock were now heard.

“What o’clock is that?” asked the Parisian.

“Nine,” replied the child.

“Oh, good, I thought I was behindhand.”

And laying his hand on his chest to make sure that the purse was all right in the breast pocket of his coat, for the waistcoat pocket would not have been large enough to hold it, he ascended the little eminence, leant a moment against the oak to look about him and, descending towards the little glen where the fountain flows, vanished.

“Ah,” muttered the young girl, admiring the gold piece by the light of her candle. “There’s luck! Those are the people for me that are rich and generous too!”

And she went back into the house. Then as if there was no chance of seeing any more custom come, she closed the two shutters one after another and after them the door, of which the lock and the two bolts could be heard successively creaking.

Bernard remained alone in the darkness or, rather, thought himself so. He had forgotten about Mathieu. He stood there leaning his shoulder against a beech, his brows frowning painfully, one hand on his heart, the other gripping the barrel of his gun.

Mathieu surveyed him through an opening that he had made in the branches of the shed. You would have said he was turned into a statue, so motionless and still did he remain for a moment or two.

Then at last he appeared to rouse himself and, looking about him, murmured, “Mathieu! Mathieu!”

The vagabond took care not to answer him. Only, since the change in Bernard’s voice told him what trouble he was a prey to, his watchfulness redoubled.

“Ah!” said Bernard presently, “he is gone. He must have been frightened by what he saw was likely to happen. If Catherine comes to the rendezvous, he will be proved right.”

And leaving the shadow of the beech-tree he took hastily several steps in the direction followed by his rival.

But, checking himself all of a sudden, he said, “After all, there are others besides Catherine that this young man may be in love with. How do I know that Mathieu is not mistaken and that the girl he has appointed to meet is not some one from Villers-Hellon, Corey or Longpont? At any rate we shall see for certain: I am here for that.”

Then as his legs began to fail him, “Come,” he said to himself, “courage, Bernard! It is better to know how things really are than to be in doubt. Oh, Catherine,” he went on as he reached the oak in his turn, “oh, if you are false to that extent, if you have deceived me so vilely, I shall cease to believe in anything, anything whatever in the world. Oh God! I who loved her so, I who loved her so deeply, so sincerely, I who would have given my life for her if she had asked it of me!”

And looking about him with an unspeakable air of menace, he went on, “Happily everybody is gone away, the lights are out, and if anything happens, it will be between the night, them and myself.”

Then with a noiseless step, the step of the wolf as he approaches the sheepfold, he softly made his way to the foot of the oak and creeping over the roots reached the trunk. Once there he drew a long breath.

The Parisian was still alone. Bernard, with his gun ready, like a sportsman on the look-out, alert, his glance fixed, let not a movement of his rival escape him.

“Good,” he said to himself, casting his eyes round as much of the horizon as he could command, “the girl he is waiting for must come, it would seem, from the direction of the Soissons Road. How if I went to meet her? If I shamed her? No, I should learn nothing; she would lie.”

Then suddenly turning his head in the opposite direction, “A noise that way,” he said. “No, it is his horse getting restive and stamping his foot. Besides,” he added indifferently, “what does a noise that comes from that quarter matter to me? No, it is the other way that my eyes must watch, that my ears must listen. My God! I see something like a shadow through the trees! But no."

Bernard wiped his bedimmed eyes.

"Why, yes," he went on with an intonation so deep and sombre it evidently came from the very depths of his chest, "yes, it is a woman. She stops and hesitates! No, she comes on. She is going to cross a clearing and then I shall see her plainly."

.There was a moment's silence, then a sort of roar was heard.

"Oh, it is Catherine," gnashed Bernard. "I saw her. He is getting up. Oh, he shall not get as far as her!"

At these words he raised himself on his knee, muttering, "Catherine! Catherine! May the blood I am about to shed fall back on your head!"

And he slowly brought the piece to his shoulder. Thrice the cheek of the young keeper sank onto the butt of the weapon, thrice his finger was on the trigger, but each time finger and cheek were withdrawn.

Then at last, the sweat upon his brow, a veil of blood over his eyes, his breast panting, he murmured, "No I no! I am not a murderer! I am Bernard Watrin, that is to say an honourable man. Help! My God, my God, help me!"

And throwing his gun far from him he fled frantically through the wood without knowing where he was going.

Then once more there was silence for a moment and the demon who inspired the project might see Mathieu put his head out of the trellis-work, creep with bated breath to the foot of the oak, peer in his turn in the direction of the Prince's spring, stretch out his hand in search of the gun that Bernard had thrown away, and seizing it with a convulsive hand, murmur, "Well, faith, so much the worse for him! Why does he carry so much gold? Opportunity makes the thief."

And in his turn Mathieu took aim at the young Parisian.

A flash illumined the night, a detonation rang out, and Louis Chollet fell with a cry. Another cry answered his; it was uttered by Catherine, who had halted in confusion on finding the Parisian where she expected to find her lover, and who fled in consternation on seeing Bernard's rival fall.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT PÈRE WATRIN'S.

WHILE this nocturnal tragedy, which the eye of God alone saw, was being played out by the Prince's spring, the dinner which was intended to display before the eyes of the Maire the culinary talents of Mère Watrin was drawing to a close, saddened by the absence of Bernard.

Half-past eight struck by the cuckoo-clock. The Abbé Grégoire, who had already two or three times made as if to depart, made as if to rise for the last time.

But it was not Père Watrin's way to let his guest go away like that.

"Oh, no, no, Monsieur l'Abbé," said he, "not before you have drunk a last health!"

"But," said the mother, who was uneasy and whose moist eyes had not for an instant lost sight of Bernard's vacant place, "Catherine and François ought to be here."

She did not venture to speak of Bernard, though it was of him she was thinking all the time.

"Well now, where are they?" asked Watrin, "they were here just now."

"Yes, but they went out one after the other and they say it is unlucky to clink glasses at the end of a meal in the absence of those who were present when it began."

"Well, Catherine cannot be far off: call her, wife."

Mère Watrin shook her head.

"I *have* called her," said she, "and she did not answer."

"It is nearly ten minutes since she went away," said the Abbé.

"Have you looked in her room?" asked Mathieu.

"Yes, she is not there."

"And François?"

"Oh, as for François," said the Maire, "we know where to find him. He has gone to help put the chaise to."

"Monsieur Guillaume," said the Abbé, "we will pray God to forgive us for having proposed a toast in the absence of two of the guests. But it is getting late and I must leave you.”

“Wife,” said Watrin, “fill M. le Maire’s glass and let us all do justice to our dear Abbé.”

The Abbé raised his glass one-third full and in that gentle and soft voice in which he addressed God and the poor said, “to internal concord, to the unity of father and mother, husband and wife, the only unity from which the happiness of the children can result!”

“Bravo, Abbé!” cried the Maire.

“Thank you, sir,” said Père Guillaume, “and may the heart that you desire to touch not remain deaf to your voice!” And a look cast at Marianne showed that this wish was uttered for her behalf.

“And now, my dear Guillaume,” said the Abbé, “you will not take it amiss if I look for my cloak, hat and stick, and urge M. le Maire to take me back to town. Nine o’clock is going to strike.”

“Yes, look for your traps, Abbé,” said the Maire, “and while you are looking for them, I will say a last word of my own to Father Watrin.”

“Come, Monsieur l’Abbé,” said Marianne, whom the worthy priest’s toast had rendered pensive, “I believe your belongings are in the next room.”

“I follow you, Madame Watrin,” replied he.

And he went out after her. At that moment nine o’clock struck. Guillaume and the Maire remained alone together.

A moment of silence ensued; each of them seemed to be waiting for the other to venture on the first word. It was Guillaume who risked it.

“Well, M. le Maire,” he said, “let’s have a look at your recipe for becoming a millionaire.”

“First,” replied the Maire, “a grip of the hand in token of good friendship, dear Monsieur Guillaume.”

“Oh, that with pleasure.”

And the two men who were on either side of the table reached out their hands which met over the remains of the famous pie that had so exercised Père Watrin.

“And now,” said Guillaume, “I am waiting for your proposal.”

The Maire coughed.

“You get already seven hundred and fifty-six livres salary a year, do you not?”

“And a hundred and fifty livres in perquisites, or nine hundred in all.”

"So that it takes you ten years to receive nine thousand francs."

"You count like an Arithmetic book, Monsieur Raisin."

"Well then, Père Guillaume," went on the Maire, "what you earn in ten years I offer to make you earn in three hundred and sixty-five days."

"Ah! Let us see a bit how that is," said Père Guillaume, resting his two elbows on the table and supporting his head with his two hands.

"Well," went on the Maire with a sly laugh, "all that you have to do is to shut alternatively the right eye and the left as you pass by certain trees that stand to the right or left of my lot. It is very easy, look you, that is all that has to be done."

And sure enough with an extreme facility the honest wood-merchant closed the one and the other eye successively.

"Oh, I see!" said Guillaume, looking at him steadily, "so that is your method, is it?"

"Why," replied the timber-merchant, "it seems to me it is as good as another."

"And you will give me nine thousand francs for that?"

"Four thousand five hundred francs for the right eye and four thousand five hundred for the left."

"And in the meantime you..." And Père Guillaume made the motion of a man felling a tree.

"And in the meantime I..." replied the timber-merchant, going through the same motion.

"In the meantime, you will be robbing the Duke of Orleans."

"Oh, robbing, robbing," said Raisin, grinning in spite of the gravity of the word, "there are so many trees in the forest nobody knows the number of them."

"Yes," said Guillaume with a certain gravity that was almost threatening, "except Him who knows not only the number of the trees, but that of the leaves as well, except Him who sees and hears everything, and knows already, though we are alone here, that you have just made me an infamous proposition."

"Monsieur Guillaume!" cried the Maire, thinking by raising his voice to impress the old head-keeper.

But Guillaume rose and resting his hand on the table, while with the other he pointed the wood-merchant to the window, said, "Do you see that window?"

“What then?” asked the Maire, turning pale, partly with fear, partly with anger.

“Well,” replied Guillaume, “if this was not my house, if we had not just been eating at the same table, you would have been head-first through that window by this time!”

“Monsieur Guillaume!”

“Wait!” said the old Forester, unmoved.

“Well?”

“You see that door, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Well, the sooner you are on the other side of it, the better it will be for you.”

“Monsieur Guillaume!”

“Only, when you leave my threshold, say good-bye to it; for you won’t cross it again!”

“Sir!”

“Silence! People are coming, there is no need for folks to know that I have received a scoundrel at my table.”

And Guillaume, turning his back on the Maire, set to whistle a little hunting tune with which our readers have already made acquaintance and which he kept for great occasions.

The people before whom Guillaume was anxious not to tell the wood-merchant that he thought him a scoundrel proved to be the Abbé Grégoire and Mère Watrin.

“Here I am, M. le Maire,” said the former, looking for the wood-merchant with his short-sighted eyes. “Are you ready?”

“So much ready,” said Guillaume, “that M. le Maire, as you see, is waiting for you on the other side of the door.”

And he pointed to the wood-merchant who, following his advice, had got out into the open.

The Abbé neither saw nor understood anything of what had taken place, and passing out in his turn without noticing the warmth of the conversation said, “Good evening, Monsieur Guillaume. May the peace of the Lord descend on this house with the blessing that I give you!”

“Your servant, Monsieur l’Abbé; your servant, Monsieur le Maire,” said Madame Watrin, following her two guests and making a curtsey at every step. Guillaume’s eyes followed them as long as he could see them, then turning his back on the door with a fling of his shoulders which was habitual with him, he pulled out his pipe, which he filled tightly to the brim, placed it between his two jaws and while he struck the tinder-box, "Good!" he muttered between his teeth, which were so tightly set that his words could scarcely pass between them, "here I am with another enemy; but no matter, there's no alternative, either one is an honest man or one is not. If you are, some one comes and puts you in a fix, and you can only do as I have done. Good, here is the old woman coming in again; attention, Guillaume!"

And pressing down with the flint the ignited tinder on the bowl of his pipe, he proceeded to draw from it clouds of smoke, a symbol of the dull anger which darkened his heart and his brow.

Mère Watrin needed only to cast a glance at her husband to perceive that something exceptional had happened.

She went and came, turned round and passed before and behind him, but could draw nothing from him but a rather thicker cloud of smoke. At last she determined to be the first to break the silence.

"Tell me," she said.

"What?" rejoined Watrin with a brevity of speech that would have done honour to a Pythagorean.

Marianne hesitated for a moment. "What is the matter with you?" she asked.

"Nothing."

"Why don't you speak?"

"Because I have nothing to say."

Mère Watrin moved away from the old Forester and again drew near him several times.

If her husband had nothing to say, evidently she was not in the same frame of mind.

"Hum!" she ejaculated.

Watrin took no notice.

"Guillaume!"

"Yes?" rejoined the latter.

"When is the wedding to be?" asked she.

"What wedding?"

"Why, Catherine and Bernard's, to be sure."

Watrin felt himself relieved of a great burden, but nevertheless did not let it appear at all.

“Oh!” he said, resting his hands on his hips and looking her in the face, “so you have come to your senses again?”

“Tell me now,” she went on, not answering his question, “I think the sooner it is the better.”

“You don’t say so!”

“Suppose we fixed it for next week?”

“And the banns?”

“We could go to Soissons and get a dispensation.”

“Good, now you are more in a hurry than I am.”

“Why, you see,” she said, “it is... it is...”

“It is? It is? What?”

“It is that I have never passed such a day before.”

“Bah!”

“To part from one another, to die each by ourselves!” and her breast heaved distressingly. “And that after twenty six years of married life!” she added.

And she burst out sobbing.

“Your hand, mother,” said Guillaume.

“Oh, here it is,” cried she, “and with all my heart.”

Guillaume drew the good old woman to him. “And now,” he said, “kiss me.” Then looking at her, “Why,” he added, “you are the best wife on earth!”

But he qualified it in a way which our reader himself will not find too severe, “When you choose, I mean, of course.”

“Oh,” replied the old lady, “I promise you, Guillaume, that from this day on I shall always choose.”

“Amen!” said Guillaume.

At this moment François came in again. Any one who had looked at the worthy fellow more closely than did Père Watrin would have seen that he was not in his habitual state of calm self-possession.

“There!” he ejaculated with the evident intention of making Guillaume notice his presence.

And in fact the latter turned round.

“Well,” he asked, “are they packed in and away?”

“Don’t you hear them?”

Just at that moment a carriage could be heard rolling along the road.

“That is they going away.”

Then, while Guillaume stood listening to the rumbling, which gradually got further and further away, François went and took his gun from the chimney corner. Guillaume saw the action.

“Why,” he asked, “where are you going?”

“I am going. Here, I must tell you something; but it is for your own ear alone.” Guillaume toned towards his wife.

“Wife!” said he. “Eh?”

“You might as well clear the table; it will be all the more got over before to-morrow.”

“Why, what am I doing then?” asked she, with an empty bottle under her arm and half a dozen plates in each hand, and going off in the direction of the kitchen, the door of which closed on her.

Guillaume kept his eyes on her and when she vanished, asked, “What is it?”

François went close to him and said in a low tone, “It is this; while I was at work putting M. le Maire’s horse to, I heard a gunshot.”

“In what direction?”

“In the direction of Corey, as it might be near the Prince’s spring.”

“And you think it’s some poacher, eh?” asked Guillaume.

François shook his head.

“No?”

“No,” echoed François.

“Well then, what is it?”

“Father,” said he, lowering his voice another tone, “I recognized the report of Bernard’s gun.”

“Are you sure?” asked Watrin in some alarm, for he could not understand for what reason Bernard could have fired a gun at such a time of night.

“I should know it among fifty,” rejoined François. “You know he loads with rounds of felt or cardboard and that makes a different report from wads of paper.”

“Bernard’s gun,” Guillaume asked himself, more and more alarmed. “What can that mean?”

“Ah, yes, what can that mean? That is what I asked myself too.”

“Listen!” said Guillaume, starting, “I hear a noise.”

François listened. “It is a woman’s footstep,” he murmured.

“Catherine’s, perhaps?”

François nodded a negation.

“It is an old woman’s step,” he said. “Mademoiselle Catherine walks more lightly than that. That is the step of some one past forty.”

At the same moment two sharp knocks on the door reached their ears.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FRANÇOIS TO THE RESCUE.

THE two men exchanged glances; there was in the air something like a presage of disaster. During this moment of silence and alarm the name of Monsieur Watrin was heard twice, spoken by some one. Mère Watrin came in at this moment.

“What is wrong, and who can be calling the old man?” she asked.

“It is Mother Tellier’s voice,” said Guillaume.

“Open, wife.”

Marianne went quickly to the door, opened it and sure enough Mother Tellier, quite out of breath from the pace at which she had come, appeared on the threshold.

“Good evening, Monsieur Watrin and the company,” said she. “A chair if you please, a chair. I have run every bit of the way from the Prince’s spring.”

The two men at the mention of the fountain exchanged glances again.

“And what procures us the pleasure of seeing you at such an hour, Mother Tellier?” asked Guillaume first, in a changed voice.

But for all answer Mère Tellier put her hand to her throat.

“Water, for the love of God!” she said. “I am choking.”

Mère Watrin hastened to fetch the good woman what she asked for. She drank eagerly.

“Mother,” she said, “now that I can speak, I will tell you what brought me here.”

“Speak, Mother, speak,” urged Guillaume and Marianne in one breath, while François stood apart, shaking his head sadly.

“Well,” went on Mother Tellier, “I come on behalf of your son.”

“On behalf of Bernard?” and “On behalf of my son?” said Guillaume and Marianne together.

“What has happened to the poor young man?” asked the messenger; “he came into my place an hour ago as pale as death.”

“Wife!” cried Guillaume, looking at Marianne.

“Hush, hush!” murmured she, understanding what there was of reproach in this one word.

“He drank two or three glasses of wine, one after the other. When I say one after the other, I say wrong, he drank them at one go, for he drank from the bottle.”

This detail alone was enough to frighten Guillaume: to drink from the bottle was a thing so unlike Bernard that to do so indicated a considerable derangement in the balance of his mind.

“Bernard drank from the bottle!” repeated Guillaume. “Impossible!”

“And he drank like that without saying a word?” asked Marianne.

“No,” replied the good woman, “he spoke to me on the contrary like this: ‘Mother Tellier, do me the favour of going as far as the house; you will tell Catherine that I shall write to her soon.’”

“What, he said that?” cried Mother Watrin.

“Write to Catherine! And why write to Catherine?” asked Guillaume, more and more alarmed.

“Oh, the gunshot! the gunshot!” murmured François.

“And he said that and no more?” questioned Marianne.

“Oh yes, wait, do.”

Never had narrator a more attentive audience.

Mother Tellier went on, “Then I asked him, ‘And your father? Is there nothing for him? Is there nothing for your mother? ‘“

“Ah! you did well!” cried the pair, breathing like people who are at last going to learn something.

“Then he answered, ‘My father and mother, you may tell them that I came by here, and wish them good-bye from me.’”

“Good-bye?” echoed three voices, simultaneously, but with different intonations. Then Guillaume added alone, “He charged you to bid us good-bye?”

And turning to his wife with a tone of unutterable reproach, “Oh, wife! wife!” he cried, putting his hand over his eyes.

“But that is not all,” went on the messenger.

A unanimous movement brought Guillaume, Marianne and François near her.

“What did he say besides?” asked Guillaume.

“He said, ‘Tell them besides to keep Catherine with them, and I shall be grateful to them for all kindness they may show her, if I should happen to die like your poor Antoine.’”

“To die!” broke in the two old people together, turning pale.

“‘Tell them,’ “went on Mère Tellier, ‘to make Catherine their heiress.’”

“Wife! wife! wife!” cried Guillaume, throwing about his arms.

“Oh, that wretched gunshot,” murmured François.

Marianne had fallen on to a chair and burst into sobs, for she felt, poor mother, that she was the first cause of all that had befallen, and in addition to the alarm her husband felt, she was a prey to remorse as well.

At this moment an anguished cry was heard outside.

“Help! help!” cried a muffled voice.

Muffled as was the voice all knew it and all four cried in unison, “Catherine!”

But of them all, Guillaume was first at the door.

It opened and showed Catherine, pale, with haggard eyes, dishevelled, almost crazy.

“Murdered!” she cried. “Murdered!”

“Murdered?” cried the witnesses of these two scenes, during which the horror had gone on increasing.

“Murdered! murdered!” repeated Catherine, fainting and quivering in Père Guillaume’s arms.

“Murdered! Who is murdered?”

“Monsieur Louis Chollet.”

“The Parisian!” cried François, almost as pale now as Catherine.

“What? What are you telling us? Come, speak,” urged Guillaume.

“Murdered! Where, dear Mademoiselle Catherine?” asked François.

“At the Prince’s spring,” she faltered.

Guillaume who was supporting her almost let her fall.

“But who by?” asked Madame Tellier and Madame Watrin in concert. Not having the same reasons as Guillaume and François to fear a terrible disaster, they were still able to ask questions.

“Who by?”

“I don’t know,” replied Catherine.

The two men breathed more freely.

“But to come to the point,” asked Guillaume, “how did it happen? How came you to be there?”

“I thought I was going to meet Bernard at the spring.”

“Meet Bernard?”

"Yes, Mathieu had made an appointment with me in is name."

"Oh, if Mathieu has any hand in the matter," muttered François, "we are not out of the bush yet."

"And so," went on Guillaume, "you have been to the Prince's spring?"

"I thought Bernard was waiting for me there; I thought he wanted to say good-bye to me. It was not true, it was not he at all."

"It was not he!" cried Guillaume, clinging to every straw of hope.

"It was another man."

"The Parisian?" cried François.

"Yes. When he caught sight of me he came towards me, for by this splendid moonlight he could see me across the clearing at more than fifty yards. When we were no more than ten yards from each other I recognized him. Then I understood that I had fallen into a trap. I was going to cry out, to call for help when suddenly a flash came from the direction of the great oak which shelters Madame Tellier's wine-shop. A gunshot rang out, Monsieur Chollet uttered a cry, put his hand to his breast and fell. Then, as you can understand, I fled like a mad thing; I ran all the way and here I am: but if the house had only been twenty steps farther off I should have fainted, I should have died by the way."

"A gunshot!" repeated Guillaume.

"It is the one that I heard," murmured François.

Suddenly a terrible idea which seemed to have left her revived in Catherine's mind: she looked about her with growing dread, and seeing that he whom she was looking for was not there, "Where is Bernard?" she cried. "Where is he? In the name of Heaven, where is he? Who has seen him?"

The most mournful silence would have been the only answer to this painful inquiry, had not a yapping voice from the doorway, which had remained half open since Catherine came in, said, "Where is he? poor Monsieur Bernard, where is he? I am going to tell you, I am. He is arrested."

"Arrested!" stammered Guillaume heavily.

"Arrested! Bernard, my child," cried the mother.

"Oh, Bernard! Bernard! That is what I feared," murmured Catherine, letting her head drop on her shoulder as if she was going to faint.

"What a misfortune! oh, God! oh, God!" exclaimed Mère Tellier, clasping her hands.

François alone, his eye fixed on the vagabond as if he meant to read him and all that he would say and still more what he would not say, growled between his teeth, “Mathieu! Mathieu!”

“Arrested!” repeated Guillaume, “how and why?”

“Lord, I cannot tell you over well,” replied Mathieu, crossing slowly and painfully the parlour from end to end to go and sit in the chimney corner, his usual place. “It appears some one fired at the Parisian. The gendarmes from Villers-Cotterets, who were coming back from the Corey fête, saw Bernard making off, so they ran after him, caught him by the collar, pinioned him and took him away.”

“But where are they taking him?” asked Guillaume.

“Oh, I know nothing about that, where they take folks that have committed murder. Only I said this to myself: I love Monsieur Bernard, I love Monsieur Guillaume, I love all the Watrin household, which has been kind to me, has fed me and warmed me. I must tell them the mishap that has befallen poor Monsieur Bernard, because anyhow if there is any way of saving him....”

“Oh, God! oh, God!” cried the mother, “and to think that it is I, I with my obstinacy, my miserable obstinacy, who have caused all this.”

As for Father Guillaume, he appeared calmer and stronger, but perhaps none the less he was suffering even more than his wife.

“And you say, François,” he asked in a low tone, “that you recognized the sound of his gun?”

“Yes, I told you so; I will answer for that, mind you.”

“Bernard a murderer!” muttered Guillaume. “Impossible! impossible!”

“Listen,” said François, as if struck by a sudden inspiration.

“What?” asked the old Forester.

“I ask you for three-quarters of an hour.”

“For what purpose?”

“To ascertain for you whether Bernard is or is not the murderer of M. Louis Chollet.”

And without taking either hat or gun François darted out of the house and disappeared at a run in the thick wood.

Guillaume was so much taken up with what François had just said to him and was trying so eagerly to explain his plan to himself that he barely took notice of two things. The first was that his wife had fainted, and the second that the Abbé Grégoire had come in again.

It was Catherine who first noticed the worthy priest, whom his black attire prevented from being seen in the dim light. “Oh,” cried she, running to him, “it is you, M. l’Abbé, it is you!”

“Yes,” he said, “I thought that there were tears to be wiped away here and I came back.”

“Oh, God! oh, God! It is my fault,” cried the old woman, slipping from her chair to her knees, “it is my fault, it is my very grievous fault!”

And the poor repentant sinner beat her maternal breast with all the strength of her fists.

“Alas! my dear Guillaume, he said, as he left you, ‘Let the evil recoil on you,’ and it is on you that it has in fact recoiled!”

“Oh, M. l’Abbé,” cried the old man, “are you too going to say like the others that he is guilty?”

“We shall soon know that,” said the Abbé.

“Why, yes, we shall know it,” rejoined Guillaume. “Bernard is hasty, hot-blooded and quick-tempered, but he is not a liar.”

And Father Watrin took his hat.

“Where are you going?”

“I am going to the prison.”

“It is no good, we came up with him on the high road between his two gendarmes, and M. le Maire gave orders to bring him back here to proceed in your presence to the first examination; he hopes you will have enough influence over Bernard who loves you to make him tell the truth.”

At this moment, as if he had only waited for the moment when the Abbé announced his coming, the Maire entered. On catching sight of him Guillaume shuddered instinctively. He felt plainly enough that he was face to face with an enemy.

“Faith, Monsieur Watrin,” he said with a malicious smile, “you forbade me to cross the threshold of your door, but you will understand that there *are* circumstances...”

Guillaume had seen his smile.

“And you are not sorry for the circumstances, are you, M. le Maire?” said he.

At this moment the trampling of horses was heard at the door; the noise relieved the Maire of his quandary by making it unnecessary for him to answer.

He turned his back on Guillaume and calling to the gendarmes, who had not as yet put in an appearance, “Bring the prisoner in and keep the door.”

Scarcely had this order been given when Bernard, pale and with a brow covered with sweat, but calm and self-possessed, appeared in the doorway, his two thumbs tied together.

On seeing him Madame Watrin came to herself and with a mother’s impulse, cried, “My child! my dear child!” and made as if to rush into his arms, while Catherine veiled her face with both hands.

But Guillaume caught her by the wrist. “One moment,” said he; “we must first know whether we are talking to our son or a murderer.”

And addressing himself to the Maire while the constables took Bernard to the far side of the parlour, he said, “M. le Maire, I ask to look Bernard in the face, to say two words to him, and then it will be I to tell you whether he is guilty or not guilty.”

The permission was one which could not easily be refused altogether. The Maire gave vent to a grunt which might be taken as granting it. Then Guillaume, as they say at the theatre, took the stage and while a semicircle was formed, of which Bernard and his captors made the central point, he put out his hand, and in a voice that was not wanting in a certain solemnity, said, “Bear witness all of you that are here to what I am going to ask and what he will answer. In presence of this woman who is your mother and of this other woman who is your betrothed; in presence of this worthy priest who made a Christian of you, Bernard, I, your father, I who bred you to the love of truth, and the hatred of falsehood, Bernard, I ask you here as God will ask you one day, are you guilty or are you innocent?”

And he fixed on the young man a glance which seemed intended to read the very depths of his heart.

“Father,” replied the young man in a calm and gentle tone. But Guillaume interrupted. “Take your time, Bernard, be in no hurry to answer, that your heart may not plunge into the abyss; your eyes on my eyes, Bernard, and do you all look carefully and listen heedfully. Now, answer, Bernard!”

“I am innocent, father,” said he in a voice as calm as if it was a matter of the greatest indifference to him.

A cry of joy issued from the mouths of one and all, with the exception of Mathieu, the Maire, and the constables. Guillaume put out his hand and laying it on Bernard’s shoulder, said, “To your knees, my son! “Bernard obeyed. Then with an expression of implicit faith impossible to describe, he said, “Bless you, my child; you are innocent, that is all I want to know. As for the proof of your innocence, it will come when God pleases. It is now a matter between men and you. Embrace me, and let justice take its course. “Bernard rose and threw himself into his father’s arms. “Now,” said the latter, stepping aside so as to let Bernard be seen, “your turn, wife!”

“Oh, my child, my dear child,” cried Mère Watrin, “so I am to be allowed to embrace you! “And she threw her arms around his neck.

“My kind, good, dear mother!” exclaimed Bernard. Catherine was waiting, but when she made as if to come forward to the prisoner, he waved her back.

“Later on,” said he, “later on. I too, Catherine, have a question to ask you, on your everlasting salvation.”

Catherine drew back with a gentle smile, for she too was by now as sure of Bernard’s innocence as of her own. What she thought to herself his mother said out plainly.

“Oh, I too,” she cried after embracing him, “will answer for it that he is innocent.”

“Good!” said the Maire with a sneer, “you are surely not going to believe that, if he is guilty, he will be quite so simple as to say, ‘Well, yes there, it was I that killed Monsieur Chollet? ‘Not such a fool as all that, surely! “Bernard fixed on the Maire his clear and almost commanding eye and with great simplicity in his tone, “I will say, not for you, M. le Maire, but for those yonder who love me, I will say, and God who hears me knows whether I lie or speak the truth, yes, my first impulse was to kill Monsieur Chollet when I saw Catherine appear and when I saw him get up to go and meet her. Yes, I sprang forward with that intention; with that intention I put the butt of my gun to my shoulder. But then God came to my help; He gave me strength to resist the temptation. I threw my gun far from me and fled. It was while I was fleeing that I was arrested. Only I was fleeing not because I had committed a crime, but in order not to commit it.”

The Maire made a sign and a gendarme showed him a gun.

“Do you recognize this gun?” he asked Bernard.

“Yes, it is mine,” answered the young keeper, simply.

“The right barrel has been discharged, as you see.”

“Quite true.”

“And it was found at the foot of the oak which rises above the little dell in which lies the Prince’s spring.”

“That was exactly where I threw it,” said Bernard.

At this moment Mathieu rose with an effort, put his hand to his hat, and a voice was heard, the scanty confidence of which was ascribed to modesty, saying, “Pardon me! excuse me, M. le Maire, but I have perhaps a reason to urge that would prove poor Monsieur Bernard innocent. It may be that by looking carefully the wads might be found; Bernard does not load like the other keepers with paper, but with rounds of felt cut out with a stamp.”

An applauding murmur greeted this unexpected opening: for a quarter of an hour past Mathieu had been totally forgotten.

“Officers,” said the Maire, “one of you will go to the scene of the murder and try to find the wads.”

“To-morrow morning at daybreak some one will go there,” replied one of the officers.

Bernard cast an open glance at Mathieu and met the dull glance of the latter. He seemed to see the eye of a serpent gleam suddenly in the darkness. He turned away in disgust. Under the ray of flame which the eye of the young man darted, Mathieu would perhaps have remained silent, but Bernard having turned away, as we have said, the scamp plucked up courage and went on:

“And then,” he said, “there is another thing which will be still more conclusive as to the innocence of Monsieur Bernard.”

“What is it?” said the Maire.

“I was there this morning,” replied Mathieu, “when M. Bernard loaded his gun to go to the boar hunt; well, just to be sure of his own bullets, he had marked them with a cross.”

“Oh, indeed,” said the Maire; “he had marked them with a cross?”

“That I am sure of,” said Mathieu. “It was I that lent him my knife to make the cross, is it not so, M. Bernard?”

Under the benevolent appearance Bernard so instinctively realized the sharp and cruel tooth of the viper that he did not even answer.

The Maire waited a moment and seeing that Bernard remained silent, said, “Prisoner, are these two circumstances correct?”

“Yes, sir,” he replied, “it is the truth.”

“Faith,” resumed Mathieu, “you can well understand, M. le Maire, that if the bullet could be found and it had no cross, I could then quite answer for it that it was not M. Bernard who fired the shot; just as if for instance the bullet bore a cross and the wads were of felt I should then not know what to say."

A constable came near the Maire and putting his hand to his hat, said, "Beg pardon, excuse me, M. le Maire..."

"What is it, officer?"

"It is, M. le Maire, that this lad has told the truth." And he pointed to Mathieu.

"How do you know that, officer?" asked the Mayor.

"This way; while the young man was speaking, I drew the charge from the left barrel of the gun. The bullet has a cross, and the wads are of felt. Look!"

The Maire turned towards Mathieu.

"My friend," he said, "all that you have just said with a view to Bernard's benefit, unhappily goes against him, seeing that is *his* gun and the gun has been fired."

"Oh!" resumed Mathieu, "as for the gun having been fired, that proves nothing, M. le Maire. Only if the bullet and the felt wads are found, faith! then it *would* look black, very black indeed!"

The Maire turned to the prisoner.

"So," he asked, "you have nothing else to say in your defence?"

"Nothing," replied Bernard, "except that appearances are against me, but yet I am innocent."

"I had hoped," said the Maire solemnly, "that the sight of your parents, your betrothed and " — here he pointed to the Abbé Grégoire — " of this worthy priest would inspire you to tell the truth, that is why I brought you here. I was mistaken, it has done nothing of the sort."

"I can only say what is the case, M. le Maire, I am guilty of an evil intention, I am not guilty of a bad action."

"It is quite settled?"

"What?" asked Bernard.

"You do not mean to confess."

"I shall not lie to myself, sir, and as little shall I lie against myself."

"Come, constables!" cried the Maire.

The officers made a motion of the head and taking Bernard by the arm, said, "Come, march!"

But hereupon Mère Watrin, recovering from her stupor, darted between the door and her son.

“Why, what are you doing, M. le Maire?” cried she. “You are taking him away?”

“Of course I am taking him away,” was the reply.

“But where to?”

“To prison, to be sure!”

“To prison! Why, have you not heard that he is innocent?”

“The truth is,” muttered Mathieu, “that as long as they have not found the ball marked with a cross and the felt wads...”

“My dear Madame Watrin, my dear young lady,” said the Maire, “it is my bounden duty to act as I am doing. I am a magistrate. A crime has been committed. I do not trouble myself as to how. This crime must affect me, whose protégé the victim was, a young man placed with me by his parents, a young man who was dear to me, a young man I was specially charged to watch over. No, Chollet and your son are equally in my impartial eyes merely two strangers. But justice must take its course. A man’s life has been taken. The matter is most serious. Officers, proceed!”

The gendarmes again pushed Bernard towards the door.

“Good-bye, father; good-bye, mother,” said the young man.

Bernard, followed by Mathieu’s burning glance which seemed literally to push him towards the door, took two or three steps in that direction.

But this time it was Catherine who blocked his way.

“And I, Bernard, is there nothing for me?” she asked.

“Catherine,” said the young man in a choking voice, “when I die and die innocent, perhaps I shall forgive you. But at the present moment I have not the strength to.”

“Oh, the ingratitude of it!” cried Catherine, turning away. “I believe him innocent and he believes me guilty.”

“Bernard! Bernard!” said Mère Watrin, “before leaving her, for mercy’s sake, my child, tell your poor mother that you-are not angry with her.”

“Mother,” said Bernard with a resignation full of sadness and dignity, “if I am to die I shall die as a grateful and dutiful son, thanking the Lord for having given me such good and tender parents.”

Then he too turned to the constables, saying, “Come, gentlemen, I am ready.”

And amid stifled cries, tears and sobs he waved a last good-bye and moved towards the door. But on the threshold he found François panting, the sweat pouring from his brow, without a tie and with his coat on his arm, barring his passage.

CHAPTER XIX.

MATHIEU BROUGHT TO BAY.

AT the sight of the young man, signing imperatively to everybody to move not a step farther, every one felt that François was the bearer of some important news. So except Bernard everybody went back a step. Mathieu could not fall back, the wall of the chimney preventing him, but though he appeared to find some difficulty in keeping his feet, yet he did not sit down.

“Phew!” cried François, throwing his coat or rather letting it fall against the wall and leaning against the doorpost like a man on the point of falling.

“Well,” asked the Maire, “what is it now? Shall we not get done to-day? Officers, to Villers-Cotterets!”

But the Abbé Grégoire knew that it was help that was coming.

“M. le Maire,” said he, coming a step forward, “this young man has something important to tell us, listen to him. Is it not so, François, you have something new and important to say?”

“Oh, never mind me,” said the latter to Mère Tellier and Catherine, who were bustling round him, while the Abbé, Madame Watrin and Guillaume watched him as shipwrecked mariners on a raft in mid-ocean and tempest watch on the horizon the ship which is to rescue them.

Then, addressing the Maire and the constables, “Here now, where are you going, you?” he asked.

“François, François!” cried Mother Watrin, “they are taking away my child, my son, my poor Bernard, to prison.”

‘‘Oh,” said François, “that’s right, he is not in prison yet and it is a league and a half from here to Villers-Cotterets, to say nothing of the fact that old Père Sylvestre is a-bed and that he would not care to get up at such an hour as this.”

“Ah!” cried Guillaume, breathing freely, for he felt that as soon as François adopted that tone he was no longer alarmed, and he filled his pipe, which he had forgotten for more than half-an-hour.

As for Mathieu, he performed a manoeuvre which no one noticed, slipping from the chimney to the window, on the sill of which he seated himself.

"Oh," said the Maire, "so we are M. François' servants here. Start officers, start!"

"Excuse me, M. le Maire," put in François, "but I have something to say against that."

"Against what?"

"Against the order you have just given."

"And is what you have to say worth listening to?" asked the Maire.

"Faith that is just what you must judge for yourself. Only I warn you it will take rather a long time."

"Oh, if what you are going to say is so long, that's right. It will keep till to-morrow."

"Oh, no, M. le Maire," said François, "for it to be right it should be this evening."

"My friend," rejoined the Maire in a tone of patronizing importance, "since only positive information can be admitted in criminal matters, you will not object if I move on. Officers, take the prisoner away."

"Well then," said François, becoming serious again, "you will hear me, M. le Maire, for the information I bring is positive."

"M. le Maire!" cried the Abbé Grégoire, "in the name of religion and humanity I conjure you to hear this young man."

"And I, Monsieur," said Guillaume, "in the name of justice I bid you pause."

The Maire stopped almost in alarm in face of the imperious authority of this fatherly love. But not wishing to appear to yield he said, "Gentlemen, as soon as there is a man dead, there is a murderer."

"Excuse me, M. le Maire," broke in François, "there is a murderer, it is true, but no dead man."

"No one dead?" echoed all present.

"What is he saying?" cried Mathieu.

"The Lord be praised," ejaculated the priest.

"Well now," went on François, "if I had only that to tell you, it seems to me it is a fine piece of news of itself."

"Explain yourself, young man," exclaimed the Maire pompously, delighted to have this good news as a pretext for the delay accorded to Bernard.

“M. Chollet was knocked down by the force of the discharge, he fell fainting from the shock, but the bullets flattened against a purse full of gold which he had in his coat pocket, and it glanced along his ribs.”

“Oh dear!” cried the Maire, “what are you saying, my friend? The bullet flattened against the purse?”

“That was money well placed, eh, M. le Maire,” said François.

“No matter! Dead or alive,” rejoined he. “There has been an attempt at murder.”

“Oh,” replied François, “who says otherwise?”

“Let us come to the point,” declared the magistrate. “Faith!” cried François, “I ask no better. But you interrupt me every moment.”

“Come, speak, speak, François,” cried all present. Two only of them remained silent, but with very different expectations, Bernard and Mathieu.

“Well,” said François, “listen, M. le Maire, this is how the thing happened.”

“But,” questioned the magistrate, “how can you know how things happened when you were with us in this room at table when it took place nearly half a league from here, and you never left us?”

“Well, no, I did not leave you, but what of that? Now when I say there is a wild boar in such and such a covert; it is a male or a female; it is a thirdling, a youngster or a ‘rogue.’ Have I seen the animal, eh? Not I; but I have seen its trail, and that’s all I require!”

François had not even looked in Mathieu’s direction, but the latter none the less felt a shudder pass all over his body.

“I resume then,” went on François. “This is how things happened. M. Bernard arrived first at Mère Tellier’s *cabaret*. Is that so, Madame Tellier?”

“Quite true,” said the good woman. “What then?”

“He was very excited?”

“Oh,” said she, “that is true too.”

“Silence!” cried the Maire.

“He walked about like this,” went on François, taking long strides, “and two or three times out of impatience stamped his foot near the table which is opposite the door?”

“Calling for wine, that’s true again,” cried Mère Tellier, raising her hands to heaven by way of expressing her admiration for François’ almost miraculous perspicacity.

Mathieu wiped with his sleeve the sweat that came out on his forehead.

"Oh," said François, answering the good woman's exclamation, "that is not very difficult to see; there are prints of shoes in the sand, three or four nails deeper than the others."

"How could you see that by night?"

"Why, how about the moon? Do you think that shines up there merely for dogs to bay at? Then M. Chollet came on horseback from the direction of Villers-Cotterets. He dismounted thirty paces from Mère Tellier's *cabaret*, tied his beast to a tree, and then passed in front of M. Bernard. I even fancy that he lost and searched for something like money, for there was tallow on the ground, which proves that some one had looked on the ground with a candle. During this time M. Bernard was hidden behind the beech which is opposite the house, and he went on raging savagely. The proof is that there were two or three places where the moss had been torn away from the tree trunks at the level of a man's hand. After finding what he was looking for, the Parisian struck off in the direction of the Prince's spring, then sat down four steps from the fountain, then he got up again. Then he went twenty steps or so towards the Soissons Road. Then he received the discharge and fell."

"Oh, that is just it, that is just it!" cried Catherine.

"To-morrow," said the Maire, "we shall know who fired the shot; the wad will be found and the bullet looked for."

"Oh, there is no need to wait till to-morrow for that, I have brought them, I have."

A gleam of joy illumined the livid brow of Mathieu.

"What?" said the Maire, "you have brought them? You have got the wads and the bullet?"

"Yes. The wads, you understand, were in the direction of the discharge, and it was quite easy to find them, but the bullet there was more trouble about, that devil of a purse and also maybe to some extent the ribs had made it go astray; but no matter, I found it in a beech-tree. Look, here it is."

And François presented to the Maire in the hollow of his hand the two wads and the flattened bullet.

The Maire made one of the constables show him a light.

"You see, gentlemen," he said, "that the wads are of felt, and as for the ball, although flattened and knocked out of shape, it still bears the mark of a cross."

“Egad!” said François, “that is indeed surprising, seeing they are Bernard’s wads and the cross was made by him on the bullet this morning.”

“What is that, what is he saying?” cried Père Watrin, hastily gripping his pipe, which was on the point of slipping from his trembling jaws.

“Oh, he is ruining him, the wretch!” cried Catherine.

“Ah, that is what I was afraid of,” stammered Mathieu, with a pretence of pity. “Poor M. Bernard!”

“Then you admit that the shot was fired from Bernard’s gun?”

“Certainly I acknowledge it,” said François. “It is M. Bernard’s gun, it is his bullet, and they are his wads: but all that does not prove that he fired the shot.”

“Oh!” said Mathieu, “does he suspect anything?”

“Only, as I told you, M. Bernard was storming a great deal; he stamped his foot, he tore the moss. Then when M. Chollet went away he followed him to the foot of the oak, there he took aim, then all of a sudden he changed his mind, he went several steps backwards, then he threw his gun on the ground. The hammer, which was cocked, and the muzzle have left their mark in the road. Then he fled!”

“Oh, dear Lord!” cried Mère Watrin, “this is a miracle, a miracle!”

“What did I tell you, M. le Maire?”

“Hush! Bernard,” put in Père Guillaume, “and let François speak. Do you not see that he is on the scent, the keen sleuth-hound?”

“Oh, oh!” muttered Mathieu, “this begins to grow alarming.”

“Then,” went on François, “another man came.”

“What other?” asked the Maire.

“Oh, that I do not know,” said Francois, winking his eye at Bernard, “another, that is all I could see.”

“Good! I breathe more freely now,” said Mathieu.

“He picked up the gun, he put one knee to the ground, which shows he is not a good shot like Bernard, and fired. It is then, as I told you, that M. Chollet fell.”

“But what object could the new-comer have in killing M. Chollet?”

“Ah, that I don’t know. Perhaps in order to rob him.”‘

“How did he know that he had money?”

“Have I not told you that I thought the Parisian had let his purse fall in the arbour where Madame Tellier puts her wine to cool? Well, I should not be astonished if the murderer was hidden in the arbour at that moment. I saw the marks of a man lying flat on his stomach, and who had scooped out the sand with his hands."

"But has M. Chollet been robbed?" asked Guillaume.

"I should think so, two hundred louis were taken from him; nothing but that."

"Oh, forgive me, my poor Bernard!" said Père Guillaume, "I did not know the Parisian had been robbed when I asked you whether you were his murderer."

"Thank you, dear father," replied Bernard.

"But now, who is the thief?" asked the Maire.

"Why, I tell you I do not know him. Only in running from the spot to where M. Chollet fell, he tripped in a rabbit burrow and twisted his left foot."

"Oh, the fiend!" muttered Mathieu, who felt his hair rise on his head.

"Oh, come, come! that's a bit too strong," cried the Maire. "How can you know that he twisted his foot?"

"Ah, that is not so difficult! For thirty paces the two feet left even traces. All the rest of the way only one of them bears all the weight of the body. That one is the right; the other, which scarcely shows, is the left. Therefore he sprained his left foot, and when he weighs on it, 'gad, that hurts him!"

"Ah!" muttered Mathieu.

"That is why he did not make off," went on François.

"No, if he had fled, he would have been five or six leagues from here, all the more that with such feet as he has he must be a good walker. No, he went and buried his two hundred louis twenty paces from the road and a hundred paces from here between two big bushes at the foot of a birch. It is easily recognized, for it is the only one of its kind — the birch, of course, I mean."

Here, Mathieu, wiping his brow for the second time, put one of his legs the other side of the window.

"And from there," asked the Maire, "where did he go?"

"Oh, from there he went along the high road, and the high road is paved, as you know. I can tell you nothing of his movements there."

"And the silver?"

"Excuse me, it is gold, M. le Maire, all in twenty and forty-franc pieces."

"Well, this gold, did you take it and bring it as a material proof?"

"Bah!" said François, "I took good care not to. Stolen gold, that burns."

And he shook his fingers as if he had in fact burned himself.

“Well, come to the point.”

“And then,” went on François, “I said to myself, ‘Better make a descent on the scene with the Law, and as the thief does not expect I know his hiding-place, the swag will surely be found.’”

“You are wrong,” said Mathieu, getting through the window, and casting a glance of hatred at Bernard and François, “the swag will not be found.” And he made off without a soul except François noticing his departure.

“Is that all, my friend?” asked the Maire.

“Faith yes, or very nearly, M. Raisin,” was the answer.

“So far, so good. The law will value your deposition. In the meanwhile understand clearly that as you give no names and all this rests upon conjecture, the accusation continues to lie on Bernard.”

“Oh, as to that I have nothing to say,” rejoined François.

“In consequence to my great regret, M. Guillaume, with great reluctance, Madame Watrin, I must have Bernard go with the constables and proceed to prison.”

“Well, be it so, M. le Maire. Wife, give me two shirts and what I want besides to stay in prison with Bernard.”

“And I, too! And I, too!” cried the mother. “I will go with my son wherever he goes.”

“Do as you please, but get under way.”

And the Maire motioned to the officers who forced Bernard to go a pace toward the door. But François did what he had done before and putting himself in the prisoner’s way said, “One moment more, M. le Maire.”

“If you have nothing to add to what you have said...” replied the Maire.

“Oh, nothing, nothing of course! See now, suppose...” He seemed to be trying to think of something.

“Supposing what?” asked the Maire.

“Supposing, a mere supposition, supposing that I know the guilty man.”

All gave vent to a cry.

“Suppose, for instance,” went on François, lowering his voice, “that he was here just now.”

“Why then,” cried the Maire, “the proof would escape us and we should relapse into doubt again.”

“Yes, that is true. But one last supposition, M. le Maire. Let us suppose that I have placed Bobineau in ambush in the shrubs to the right and

Lajeunesse in those to the left, and that at the moment the thief puts his hand on his treasure, they will lay hands on the thief, eh?”

At this moment a noise was heard on the high road like that made by a man who does not want to move and is being forced to move in spite of himself.

“Ah! there now,” said François with a burst of laughter which crowned his period, “they have got him, he does not want to come back and they are obliged to shove him.”

At the same time Lajeunesse and Bobineau, holding Mathieu by the collar, appeared in the doorway.

“Saints in Paradise!” swore Bobineau, “will you use your legs, vagabond!”

“Come, you rascal, no sulking or skulking here!” cried Lajeunesse.

“Mathieu!” exclaimed all in the room with one voice.

“Look, M. le Maire,” said Lajeunesse, “here is the purse.”

“And here is the thief,” added Bobineau. “Let us come and have a little talk with M. le Maire, my jewel.”

And he shoved forward Mathieu, who, obeying the propulsion in spite of himself, went limpingly a few steps on.

“There,” cried François, “did not I tell you that he was lame on the left leg? Will you accept my prophecies another time, M. le Maire?”

Mathieu saw that there was no denying it; he was caught and there was nothing left for him but to show a bold front to fortune.

“Well, yes,” he said. “What then? It was I that fired the shot, I don’t deny it. I only wanted to make M. Bernard and Mademoiselle Catherine fall out, because M. Bernard clouted my head. When I saw the gold, that turned my brain. M. Bernard had thrown down his gun; the Devil tempted me, I picked it up and there you are. But not a shred of premeditation, and as the Parisian is not dead, I shall get off with ten years at the galleys.”

All breasts expanded, all arms were stretched out towards Bernard, but the first to fall on the young man’s bosom was Catherine. He made a vain movement to press her to his own, his hands were tied.

The Abbé Grégoire saw the sorrowful smile that passed over the young man’s lips “M. le Maire,” he said, “I hope you are going to order Bernard to be set free at once.”

“Officers, this young man is free,” said the Maire. “Unbind his hands.”

The officers obeyed.

Thereupon there was a moment of confusion in which father, mother, child and betrothed formed a group without form as without name from which came cries of happiness, sobs of joy.

Everybody wept, even the Maire wiped away a tear.

But Mathieu made a discordant element in the picture.

“Take this man away to the prison at Villers-Cotterets,” said he to the constables, indicating Mathieu, “and lock him up securely.”

“Oh, ho! Père Sylvestre,” said Mathieu, “won’t he be disgusted just at being woke up at such a time of night!”

And freeing his hands from those of the constables who wanted to put the handcuffs on him, for the last time he gave out the call of an owl.

After which he yielded his hands, let himself be pinioned and went out between the constables.

CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION.

SO Mathieu was taken to the gaol at Villers-Cotterets and locked up under the charge of Père Sylvestre in the stead of Bernard Watrin.

Once the real culprit was arrested and dragged off by the constables along the high road, once the Maire had left the house, his head bowed and throwing behind him a glance of penitence and regret, once the worthy inmates of the *Maison Meuve* were left to themselves and rid of strangers (for Mère Tellier, the worthy housewife, the good Abbé Grégoire, Lajeunesse and Bobineau, those two clever players who had contributed so much to the successful winding up of the drama, and friend François, who had followed up the trail with a sagacity that would have done credit to the Last of the Mohicans, none of these could be called strangers), nothing any longer interfered with the frantic explosion of joy that burst out in the family circle.

First there was a warm handshake exchanged between father and son. The son's clasp said, "You see I did not deceive you, father," while the father's replied, "Did I ever seriously suspect you, Bernard?"

Then came a long embrace of son and mother, an embrace in -which the mother muttered low, "And to think it was all my fault!"

"Hush! Let's say no more about it," replied Bernard. "That it was I who by my obstinacy was the cause of all the trouble!"

"Please, please don't say that."

"Will you forgive me, my poor, dear child?"

"Oh, mother! dear, kind mother!"

"In any case I have been well punished, there!"

"And you will be well rewarded, I hope." Next Bernard went and took the Abbé Grégoire by both hands, and looking the excellent priest in the face said, "And you did not doubt me either, did you, M. l'Abbé?"

"Did I not know you better than your father and mother did?"

"Yes, better, M. l'Abbé," said the mother. "Oh, indeed better!" echoed the father. "Oh, as for that," cried the old woman, ready to start an argument, "I should much like to know who can know a child better than his own mother.”

“He who made the soul after the mother had made the body,” said Watrin. “Do I make any protest? Do as I do, old woman, and hold your tongue.”

“Not I, indeed; I shall never hold my tongue when I am told there is some one knows my son better than I do.”

“Yes, mother, yes, you will,” said Bernard. “And for that I shall need only to say one word to a woman as religious as you are.” Then he added with a laugh, “Do you forget that the Abbé is my confessor?”

Then came Catherine’s turn: Bernard had kept her to the last. Selfish fellow! It was that he might keep her the longer. So when he came to her, “Catherine!” he cried in a stifled voice, “dear Catherine!”

“Bernard! my kind Bernard!” murmured she with her eyes and her voice full of tears.

“Oh, come, come!” said he, drawing her away through the still open door.

“Why, where are they going?” cried Mère Watrin with a movement so swift and impetuous that it savoured of jealousy.

The father shrugged his shoulders.

“To their own business, I suppose,” said he, cramming his pipe. “Let them go, do, wife.”

“But...”

“Look here, at their age and under the circumstances should we not have had something to say to each other?”

“Hum!” said the mother, throwing a last look towards the door.

But even if the door had been open she would have seen nothing; the two young people had already reached the trees and were lost under the thickest shade.

As for Bobineau, Lajeunesse, François and Père Watrin, they had proceeded to examine by the light of the candles the bottles that remained on the table and ascertain conscientiously what remained in their insides.

The Abbé Grégoire took advantage of this occupation in which the four cronies were absorbed silently to take his hat and stick, slip noiselessly through the doorway and as noiselessly resume his way to Villers-Cotterets, where he found his sister, Mademoiselle Adelaide Grégoire, waiting for him in the greatest anxiety.

The two women, Mère Watrin and Mère Tellier, crouched in the great chimney and proceeded to wind off a skein of words which was not less long or less entangled for being run off in a low tone.

At the first rays of dawn Bernard and Catherine reappeared at the door like two birds of passage who go away together and come back together. Catherine with a smile on her lips and keeping her eyes on her lover as much as possible, went and embraced the mother and father and prepared to go up to her room. But scarcely had she gone the first step on the way from the table where the four men were seated to the staircase door when Bernard stopped her as if she were forgetting something.

“Well?” he said in a tone of gentle reproach. Catherine had no need to ask for an explanation; Bernard was understood by this kindred spirit. She went to François and offered her two cheeks to him.

“‘What?” asked François, quite astonished at such a generous guerdon.

“She is kissing you for thanks to be sure!” said Bernard. “I think we owe you that at least.”

“Oh,” cried François, “oh, Mademoiselle Catherine!” and he wiped his mouth with his napkin and put a great smacking kiss on each of the girl’s blushing cheeks.

Then Catherine, giving Bernard her hand for the last time, went up to her room.

“Come, come, my children,” said the latter, “I think it is time we went on our rounds. Being happy is not everything, the Duke of Orleans’ work must be done.”

And with a look that cannot be described he picked up his gun, which the constable had brought back, with one barrel discharged.

“Just to think...” he muttered.

“However.”

Then clapping his hat on his head, “Let us be off,” he said, “let us be off.”

As he went out he raised his head. Catherine was at her window, smiling at this rising sun which was going to shine on one of her good days. She saw Bernard, picked a carnation, kissed the flower and threw it to him.

Bernard did not let the blossom fall to the ground. He caught it on the wing, took the kiss which was hidden between its perfumed leaves and put it in his breast.

Then followed by his three comrades he plunged into the forest.

The day recalled Mère Tellier to her canteen. She bade farewell to her friends the Watrins and took her way towards the *cabaret* at the Prince’s spring at the same hasty pace at which she had come. She carried away with her a budget of news which would furnish food for conversation all through the day.

Bernard innocent, Mathieu guilty, Catherine's and Bernard's wedding fixed to take place in a fortnight's time. It was long since such a subject for chatter had been granted to the village gossips.

Then there was a contest of self-sacrifice between Father and Mother Watrin, each of them wanting to send the other to bed and insisting on going without sleep so as to guard the house. As thanks to the old woman's obstinacy this bout of abnegation threatened to degenerate into a quarrel, Père Watrin took his hat, plunged his hands into his pockets, and went off for a walk down the Villers-Cotterets road. On reaching the Stag's Leap he saw M. Raisin coming back in his little chaise with his old servant, Pierre.

At sight of the Maire Watrin was making for the forest, but he had been recognized.

M. Raisin stopped the chaise, jumped down and ran towards the good man, crying, "Hi, M. Watrin! dear M. Watrin! "Watrin stopped. What made him avoid the Maire was that feeling of shame which every decent man has at the bottom of his conscience, which extends from him to others and which makes him blush for others when the latter do things which are not exactly honourable.

Now it will be remembered that the proposals that the wood-merchant had made the night before to Père Watrin were not exactly honourable. As he stopped Watrin asked himself what the Maire could want of him.

He waited with his back turned and only when the Maire was close to him did he wheel round.

"Well," he asked sharply of M. Raisin, "what is it now?"

"It is, M. Watrin," said the Maire, feeling embarrassed enough and speaking with his hat off to the old keeper while the latter listened with his hat on his head, "it is that since I left you this morning I have thought a great deal."

"Oh, really," said Père Watrin, "and what about?"

"Everything, dear M. Watrin, and more particularly this, that it is neither well nor good to wish to get hold of your neighbour's goods, even if that neighbour is a Prince."

"In what connection do you say that to me, sir, and what goods have I ever wished to purloin?" asked the old man.

“My dear M. Watrin, in what I have just said,” went on the Maire with a certain humility, “believe me that you are not in question at all.”

“And who is in question then?”

“Why, only myself, M. Watrin, and the crooked proposals I made to you last night about any balks or joists of timber that might happen to be near the limits of my purchase.”

“Well, and that is what brings you back?”

“Why not, since I have realized that I was wrong and that I owed apologies to a worthy and honourable man whom I had insulted?”

“Me? You did not insult me, M. le Maire.”

“But I did. One insults an upright man when one makes him proposals that he cannot accept without giving the lie to his whole life.”

“Well, it was not worth while to put yourself out for so little, M. Raisin.”

“So you call it ‘so little ‘to blush before one’s fellows and not to venture to give them one’s hand when one meets them! I call that a great deal, sir, I do. So I beg you to forgive me, M. Watrin.”

“Me!” asked the old Forester.

“Yes, you.”

“I am not the Abbé Grégoire to absolve you,” said the old man, half touched, half laughing.

‘No, but you are M. Watrin and all upright men are one family. I passed out of it for a moment; give me your hand, M. Watrin, to enter it again.”

The Maire uttered these words in a tone that spoke of such sincerity that it made the tears come into the old man’s eyes. He took off his hat with his left hand as he would have done in the presence of his inspector, M. Deviolaine, and held out his hand to the Maire.

The latter took it and squeezing it fit to break it, if the old Forester’s hand had not itself been of a very solid order, “Now, M. Watrin,” he said to him, “That is not all.”

“What I that is not all?” asked the Forester.

“No.”

“What is there besides, Monsieur Raisin?”

“Well, I have acted wrongly this past night towards others as well as you.”

“Oh, yes, you are speaking of your accusation against Bernard. You see, M. le Maire, it does not do to be in a hurry to accuse people.”

"I see, sir, that my anger against you made me unjust and made me all but commit an act which I shall feel remorse for all my life if Monsieur Bernard does not forgive me."

"Oh, never mind about that. Rest assured, M. le Maire, Bernard is so happy that he has already forgotten everything."

"Yes, dear M. Watrin, but at certain moments he may remember and at those moments shake his head and say between his teeth, 'No matter, M. le Maire is a bad man all the same.'"

"Ah!" said Père Watrin, laughing, "I will not answer for it that in a moment of ill-humour the matter will not come back to his thoughts."

"There is a way, not to prevent the matter coming back to his thoughts, for no one can control his memory, but that when it does so come back he may drive it away."

"What is it?"

"It is for him to forgive me heartily and sincerely as you have just done."

"Oh, as for that, I answer for him as I would for myself. Bernard, look you, has no more gall than a chicken. So look upon the matter as settled; and if necessary, not to disturb you, and since after all he is the younger man, he will come and see you."

"I certainly hope he will come to my house, and stay there sometimes, and you also, Madame Watrin, Catherine and François, and all the keepers in your district."

"Very well. And when shall it be?"

"Coming out from the wedding mass."

"And what for?"

"Why! for the wedding feast."

"Oh, M. Raisin, no, thank you."

"Do not say no, M. Watrin, it is settled that way. Unless, faith, you are quite determined to bear me malice, you and your son. I have taken it into my head that it is to be I who will give the wedding dinner, and why not? I had scarcely gone to bed on my return from your house last night when that began running in my head to such an extent as to keep me from my sleep. I have made out the menu."

"But M. Raisin..."

"First, there will be a ham of the boar that you killed yesterday, or rather that François killed. Then doubtless the Inspector will give us leave to knock over a buck. I will go myself to the La Ramée ponds to choose the fish. Mère Watrin will make the game stew, seeing that she makes it, begad, as nobody else can. Then we have a nice brand of champagne which comes straight from Epernay, and an old Burgundy which only asks to be drunk."

"All the same, M. Raisin..."

"No 'ifs,' no 'buts,' no 'all the sames,' Père Guillaume, or really I shall say, 'Come, Raisin, it seems you are really a bad man, since here you are at enmity to the death with the most upright folks upon earth."

"M. le Maire, I cannot answer for anything."

"Oh, if you can answer for nothing, then it will go ill with the women, for it is the women, look you, Madame Raisin and Mademoiselle Euphrosine, who stuffed a lot of foolish and jealous ideas into my head. Oh, how right M. l'Abbé is in saying that in all times woman has been the ruin of man!"

Old Watrin would perhaps have gone on resisting, when he felt himself being pulled by the coat tails. He turned round. It was old Pierre.

"Ah! M. Watrin," said the good man, "do not refuse M. le Maire what he asks you, in the name... in the name..."

And old Pierre cast about in the name of what he could best appeal to the compassion of Père Guillaume.

"Ah!" said he, "in the name of the two five-franc pieces you gave the Abbé Grégoire for me when you heard that M. le Maire had discharged me and taken on Mathieu."

"Another foolish idea those confounded women stuffed into my head. Ah, the women, the women! There is none but your wife that is a saint, M. Watrin."

"What, the mother!" cried Watrin. "Oh! oh! it is easy to see..."

Père Watrin was going to say, "It is easy to see you do not know her," but lie checked himself in time and finished his sentence with a laugh thus, "It is easy to see that you know her."

Then looking at the Maire, who was waiting for his decisive answer with anxiety, "Come," said he, "that is agreed. We shall dine with you on the wedding-day."

"And the wedding will take place a week earlier than you think," cried M. Raisin.

"How so?" asked the old Forester.

"Guess where I am going."

"When?"

"This moment."

“Where you are going?”

“Yes. Well, I am going to Soissons to buy the special licence of my Lord Bishop.”

And the Maire mounted into the chaise with old Pierre.

“Well,” said Père Watrin, laughing, “then I will answer to you for Bernard. You might have done ten times worse to him and he would forgive you all the same.”

M. Raisin whipped up his chaise, which old Guillaume followed with his eyes so intently that he let his pipe go out.

Then, when the chaise had disappeared, “My faith,” said he, “I did not think he was such a decent man as that,” and striking the tinder, “He is right,” he went on, “it is the women. Oh, the women, the women!” murmured Père Watrin between the puffs of smoke from his pipe.

Then suddenly shaking his head he turned slowly and pensively towards the *Maison Neuve.*

A fortnight later, thanks to the licence bought by M. Raisin of my Lord Bishop of Soissons, the organ sounded gaily in the little church of Villers-Cotterets while Bernard and Catherine, kneeling before the Abbé Grégoire, smiled at the practical jokes of François and other wags, who insisted upon throwing a perfect shower of old shoes at the heads of the young couple.

Madame Raisin and her daughter, Mademoiselle Euphrosine, kneeling on superior chairs covered in velvet and marked with their monogram, took part in the ceremony, a little apart from the other guests. Mademoiselle Euphrosine watched out of the corner of her eye the good-looking Parisian still pale from his wound, but already sufficiently recovered to be present at the wedding.

But it was clear that M. Chollet was much more concerned with the fair bride, all blushing under her wreath of orange-blossom, than with Mademoiselle Euphrosine.

The Inspector and all his family were present at the ceremony with his thirty or forty Foresters about him as a guard of honour. The Abbé Grégoire delivered an address, which did not last more than ten minutes, but which made all present dissolve in tears.

As they were leaving the church, a stone thrown with great force fell in the midst of the wedding party, but luckily without hurting anybody. It came from the direction of the prison which is only separated from the church by a narrow lane.

Mathieu was discovered behind the bars of a window. It was he who had just thrown the stone. Seeing that he was being looked at, he put his hands together and imitated the cry of the owl.

“Hullo, M. Bernard,” he cried, “you know the owl’s cry brings ill-luck.”

“Yes,” replied François, “but when the prophet is bad, the prophecy is falsified.”

And the party moved away, leaving the prisoner to gnash his teeth.

Next day Mathieu was transferred from the prison of Villers-Cotterets to that of Lâon, where the assizes of the Department are held. As he had foreseen, he was sentenced to ten years at the galleys.

Eighteen months later the papers under the head of *miscellaneous intelligence* contained the following piece of news.

“We read in the ‘Semaphore of Marseilles ‘that an attempt at escape has just been made at the hulks at Toulon, which turned out very ill for the poor wretch who tried to get away.

“A convict, after having obtained a file, no one knows how, had succeeded in sawing through the ring of his chain and hiding himself under a heap of wood in the yard where the galley-slaves work.

“When the evening came he made for the beach, crawling and escaping the eyes of the sentry. But at the noise he made in jumping into the water the sentry turned round and made ready to fire at the fugitive when he should come to the surface again to take breath. After some seconds he reappeared and the soldier’s shot followed immediately on his appearance. The fugitive dived, and this time not to reappear.

“The report of the weapon at once brought a party of soldiers and officials of the hulks on the scene of the occurrence. Two or three boats put out, but they searched in vain whether for the fugitive or his corpse.

“It was not till the next day, towards ten in the morning, that a lifeless body floated up to the surface of the water; it was that of the convict who had tried to escape the night before.

“This poor wretch, sentenced to ten years’ hard labour for attempted murder with premeditation, but accompanied by extenuating circumstances, was registered at the hulks by the single name of MATHIEU!”

THE END

THE COMPANIONS OF JEHU

Anonymous translation, 1894

This novel was first published in 1857. *The Companions of Jehu* is set in the 1800s, during Napoleon’s rise to power. The title refers to a secret organisation of young aristocrats-turned-highwaymen, who steal the money of the Directoire in order to finance the restoration of the monarchy.

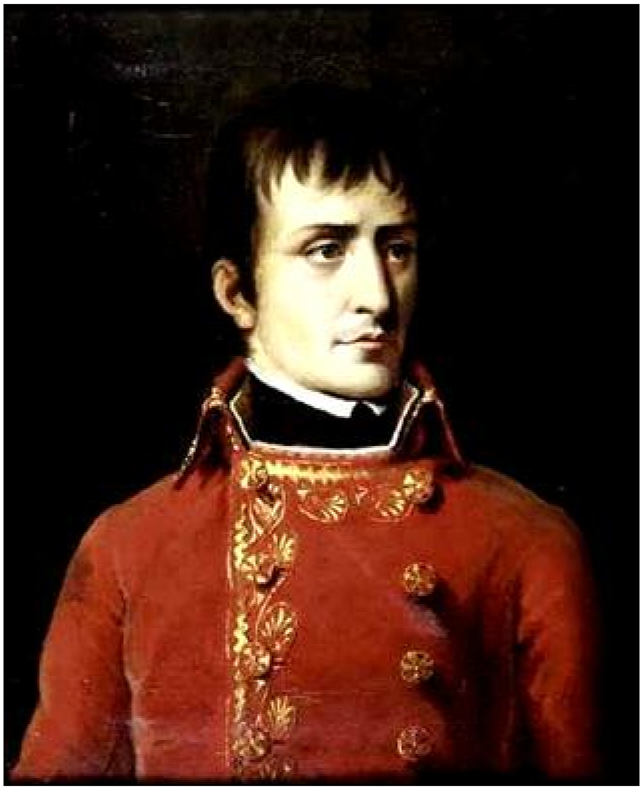

The young Bonaparte

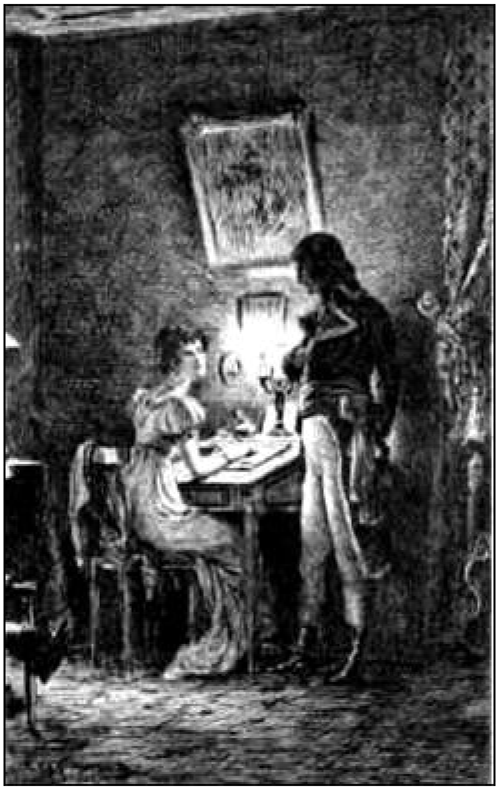

An original illustration

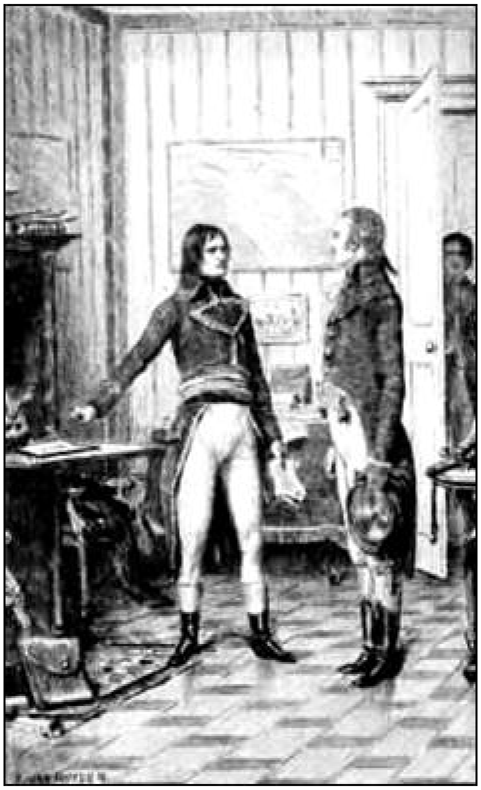

Another original illustration

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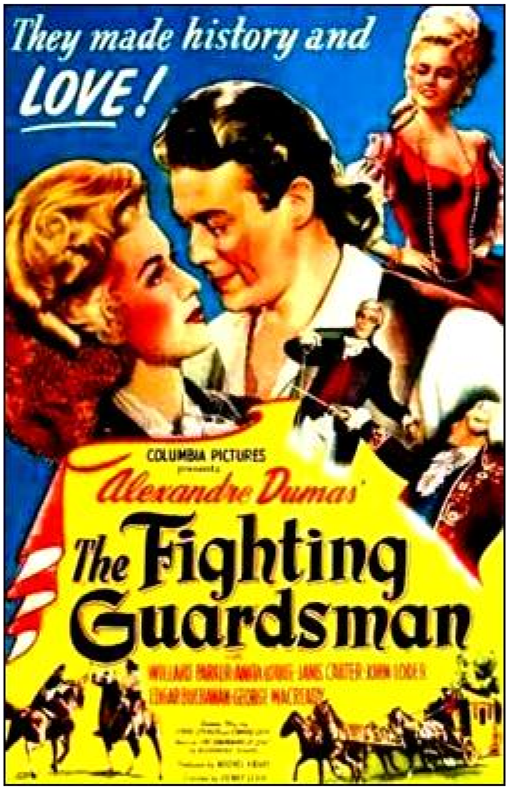
They made history and LOVE!
COLUMBIA PICTURES
presents
Alexandre Dumas'
The Fighting Guardsman
WILLARD PARKER · ANITA LOUISE · JANIS CARTER · JOHN LODER
EDGAR BUCHANAN · GEORGE MACREADY

The 1945 film adaptation

The 1966 television adaptation

AN INTRODUCTORY WORD TO THE READER

Just about a year ago my old friend, Jules Simon, author of “Devoir,” came to me with a request that I write a novel for the “Journal pour Tous.” I gave him the outline of a novel which I had in mind. The subject pleased him, and the contract was signed on the spot.

The action occurred between 1791 and 1793, and the first chapter opened at Varennes the evening of the king’s arrest.

Only, impatient as was the “Journal pour Tous,” I demanded a fortnight of Jules Simon before beginning my novel. I wished to go to Varennes; I was not acquainted with the locality, and I confess there is one thing I cannot do; I am unable to write a novel or a drama about localities with which I am not familiar.

In order to write “Christine” I went to Fontainebleau; in writing “Henri III.” I went to Blois; for “Les Trois Mousquetaires” I went to Boulogne and Béthune; for “Monte-Cristo” I returned to the Catalans and the Château d’If; for “Isaac Laquedem” I revisited Rome; and I certainly spent more time studying Jerusalem and Corinth from a distance than if I had gone there.

This gives such a character of veracity to all that I write, that the personages whom I create become eventually such integral parts of the places in which I planted them that, as a consequence, many end by believing in their actual existence. There are even some people who claim to have known them.

In this connection, dear readers, I am going to tell you something in confidence — only do not repeat it. I do not wish to injure honest fathers of families who live by this little industry, but if you go to Marseilles you will be shown there the house of Morel on the Cours, the house of Mercédès at the Catalans, and the dungeons of Dantès and Faria at the Château d’If.

When I staged “Monte-Cristo” at the Theâtre-Historique, I wrote to Marseilles for a plan of the Château d’If, which was sent to me. This drawing was for the use of the scene painter. The artist to whom I had recourse forwarded me the desired plan. He even did better than I would have dared ask of him; he wrote beneath it: “View of the Château d’If, from the side where Dantès was thrown into the sea.”

I have learned since that a worthy man, a guide attached to the Château d’If, sells pens made of fish-bone by the Abbé Faria himself.

There is but one unfortunate circumstance concerning this; the fact is, Dantès and the Abbé Faria have never existed save in my imagination; consequently, Dantès could not have been precipitated from the top to the bottom of the Château d’If, nor could the Abbé Faria have made pens. But that is what comes from visiting these localities in person.

Therefore, I wished to visit Varennes before commencing my novel, because the first chapter was to open in that city. Besides, historically, Varennes worried me considerably; the more I perused the historical accounts of Varennes, the less I was able to understand, topographically, the king’s arrest.

I therefore proposed to my young friend, Paul Bocage, that he accompany me to Varennes. I was sure in advance that he would accept. To merely propose such a trip to his picturesque and charming mind was to make him bound from his chair to the tram. We took the railroad to Châlons. There we bargained with a livery-stable keeper, who agreed, for a consideration of ten francs a day, to furnish us with a horse and carriage. We were seven days on the trip, three days to go from Châlons to Varennes, one day to make the requisite local researches in the city, and three days to return from Varennes to Châlons.

I recognized with a degree of satisfaction which you will easily comprehend, that not a single historian had been historical, and with still greater satisfaction that M. Thiers had been the least accurate of all these historians. I had already suspected this, but was not certain. The only one who had been accurate, with absolute accuracy, was Victor Hugo in his book called “The Rhine.” It is true that Victor Hugo is a poet and not a historian. What historians these poets would make, if they would but consent to become historians!

One day Lamartine asked me to what I attributed the immense success of his “Histoire des Girondins.”

“To this, because in it you rose to the level of a novel,” I answered him. He reflected for a while and ended, I believe, by agreeing with me.

I spent a day, therefore, at Varennes and visited all the localities necessary for my novel, which was to be called “René d’Argonne.” Then I returned. My son was staying in the country at Sainte-Assise, near Melun; my room awaited me, and I resolved to go there to write my novel.

I am acquainted with no two characters more dissimilar than Alexandre's and mine, which nevertheless harmonize so well. It is true we pass many enjoyable hours during our separations; but none I think pleasanter than those we spend together.

I had been installed there for three or four days endeavoring to begin my "René d'Argonne," taking up my pen, then laying it aside almost immediately. The thing would not go. I consoled myself by telling stories. Chance willed that I should relate one which Nodier had told me of four young men affiliated with the Company of Jehu, who had been executed at Bourg in Bresse amid the most dramatic circumstances. One of these four young men, he who had found the greatest difficulty in dying, or rather he whom they had the greatest difficulty in killing, was but nineteen and a half years old.

Alexandre listened to my story with much interest. When I had finished: "Do you know," said he, "what I should do in your place?"

"What?"

"I should lay aside 'René d'Argonne,' which refuses to materialize, and in its stead I should write 'The Companions of Jehu.'"

"But just think, I have had that other novel in mind for a year or two, and it is almost finished."

"It never will be since it is not finished now."

"Perhaps you are right, but I shall lose six months regaining my present vantage-ground."

"Good! In three days you will have written half a volume."

"Then you will help me."

"Yes, for I shall give you two characters."

"Is that all?"

"You are too exacting! The rest is your affair; I am busy with my 'Question d'Argent.'"

"Well, who are your two characters, then?"

"An English gentleman and a French captain."

"Introduce the Englishman first."

"Very well." And Alexandre drew Lord Tanlay's portrait for me.

"Your English gentleman pleases me," said I; "now let us see your French captain."

“My French captain is a mysterious character, who courts death with all his might, without being able to accomplish his desire; so that each time he rushes into mortal danger he performs some brilliant feat which secures him promotion.”

“But why does he wish to get himself killed?”

“Because he is disgusted with life.”

“Why is he disgusted with life?”

“Ah! That will be the secret of the book.”

“It must be told in the end.”

“On the contrary, I, in your place, would not tell it.”

“The readers will demand it.”

“You will reply that they have only to search for it; you must leave them something to do, these readers of yours.”

“Dear friend, I shall be overwhelmed with letters.”

“You need not answer them.”

“Yes, but for my personal gratification I, at least, must know why my hero longs to die.”

“Oh, I do not refuse to tell you.”

“Let me hear, then.”

“Well, suppose, instead of being professor of dialectics, Abelard had been a soldier.”

“Well?”

“Well, let us suppose that a bullet — ”

“Excellent!”

“You understand? Instead of withdrawing to Paraclet, he would have courted death at every possible opportunity.”

“Hum! That will be difficult.”

“Difficult! In what way?”

“To make the public swallow that.”

“But since you are not going to tell the public.”

“That is true. By my faith, I believe you are right. Wait.”

“I am waiting.”

“Have you Nodier’s ‘Souvenirs de la Révolution’? I believe he wrote one or two pages about Guyon, Leprêtre, Amiet and Hyvert.”

“They will say, then, that you have plagiarized from Nodier.”

“Oh! He loved me well enough during his life not to refuse me whatever I shall take from him after his death. Go fetch me the ‘Souvenirs de la

Révolution.'"

Alexandre brought me the book. I opened it, turned over two or three pages, and at last discovered what I was looking for. A little of Nodier, dear readers, you will lose nothing by it. It is he who is speaking:

The highwaymen who attacked the diligences, as mentioned in the article on Amiet, which I quoted just now, were called Leprêtre, Hyvert, Guyon and Amiet.

Leprêtre was forty-eight years old. He was formerly a captain of dragoons, a knight of St. Louis, of a noble countenance, prepossessing carriage and much elegance of manner. Guyon and Amiet have never been known by their real names. They owe that to the accommodating spirit prevailing among the vendors of passports of those days. Let the reader picture to himself two dare-devils between twenty and thirty years of age, allied by some common responsibility, the sequence, perhaps of some misdeed, or, by a more delicate and generous interest, the fear of compromising their family name. Then you will know of Guyon and Amiet all that I can recall. The latter had a sinister countenance, to which, perhaps, he owes the bad reputation with which all his biographers have credited him. Hyvert was the son of a rich merchant of Lyons, who had offered the sub-officer charged with his deportation sixty thousand francs to permit his escape. He was at once the Achilles and the Paris of the band. He was of medium height but well formed, lithe, and of graceful and pleasing address. His eyes were never without animation nor his lips without a smile. His was one of those countenances which are never forgotten, and which present an inexpressible blending of sweetness and strength, tenderness and energy. When he yielded to the eloquent petulance of his inspirations he soared to enthusiasm. His conversation revealed the rudiments of an excellent early education and much natural intelligence. That which was so terrifying in him was his tone of heedless gayety, which contrasted so horribly with his position. For the rest, he was unanimously conceded to be kind, generous, humane, lenient toward the weak, while with the strong he loved to display a vigor truly athletic which his somewhat effeminate features were far from indicating. He boasted that he had never been without money, and had no enemies. That was his sole reply to the charges of theft and assassination. He was twenty-two years old.

To these four men was intrusted the attack upon a diligence conveying forty thousand francs of government money. This deed was transacted in broad daylight, with an exchange of mutual courtesy almost; and the travellers, who were not disturbed by the attack, gave little heed to it. But a child of only ten years of age, with reckless bravado, seized the pistol of the conductor and fired it into the midst of the assailants. As this peaceful weapon, according to the custom, was only charged with powder, no one was injured; but the occupants of the coach quite naturally experienced a lively fear of reprisals. The little boy's mother fell into violent hysterics. This new disturbance created a general diversion which dominated all the preceding events and particularly attracted the attention of the robbers. One of them flew to the woman's side, reassuring her in the most affectionate manner, while complimenting her upon her son's precocious courage, and courteously pressed upon her the salts and perfumes with which these gentlemen were ordinarily provided for their own use. She regained consciousness. In the excitement of the moment her travelling companions noticed that the highwayman's mask had fallen off, but they did not see his face.

The police of those days, restricted to mere impotent supervision, were unable to cope with the depredations of these banditti, although they did not lack the means to follow them up. Appointments were made at the cafés, and narratives relating to deeds carrying with them the penalty of death circulated freely through all the billiard-halls in the land. Such was the importance which the culprits and the public attached to the police.

These men of blood and terror assembled in society in the evening, and discussed their nocturnal expeditions as if they had been mere pleasure-parties.

Leprêtre, Hyvert, Amiet and Guyon were arraigned before the tribunal of a neighboring department. No one save the Treasury had suffered from their attack, and there was no one to identify them save the lady who took very good care not to do so. They were therefore acquitted unanimously.

Nevertheless, the evidence against them so obviously called for conviction, that the Ministry was forced to appeal from this decision. The verdict was set aside; but such was the government's vacillation, that it hesitated to punish excesses that might on the morrow be regarded as virtues. The accused were cited before the tribunal of Ain, in the city of Bourg, where dwelt a majority of their friends, relatives, abettors and accomplices. The Ministry sought to propitiate the one party by the return of its victims, and the other by the almost inviolate safeguards with which it surrounded the prisoners. The return to prison indeed resembled nothing less than a triumph.

The trial recommenced. It was at first attended by the same results as the preceding one. The four accused were protected by an alibi, patently false, but attested by a hundred signatures, and for which they could easily have obtained ten thousand. All moral convictions must fail in the presence of such authoritative testimony. An acquittal seemed certain, when a question, perhaps involuntarily insidious, from the president, changed the aspect of the trial.

“Madam,” said he to the lady who had been so kindly assisted by one of the highwaymen, “which of these men was it who tendered you such thoughtful attention?”

This unexpected form of interrogation confused her ideas. It is probable that she believed the facts to be known, and saw in this a means of modifying the fate of the man who interested her.

“It was that gentleman,” said she, pointing to Leprêtre. The four accused, who were included in a common alibi, fell by this one admission under the executioner’s axe. They rose and bowed to her with a smile.

“Faith!” said Hyvert, falling back upon his bench with a burst of laughter, “that, Captain, will teach you to play the gallant.”

I have heard it said that the unhappy lady died shortly after of chagrin.

The customary appeal followed; but, this time, there was little hope. The Republican party, which Napoleon annihilated a month later, was in the ascendency. That of the Counter-Revolution was compromised by its odious excesses. The people demanded examples, and matters were arranged accordingly, as is ordinarily the custom in strenuous times; for it is with governments as with men, the weakest are always the most cruel. Nor had the Companies of Jehu longer an organized existence. The heroes of these ferocious bands, Debeauce, Hastier, Bary, Le Coq, Dabri, Delbourbe and Storkenfeld, had either fallen on the scaffold or elsewhere. The condemned could look for no further assistance from the daring courage of these exhausted devotees, who, no longer capable of protecting their own lives, coolly sacrificed them, as did Piard, after a merry supper. Our brigands were doomed to die.

Their appeal was rejected, but the municipal authorities were not the first to learn of this. The condemned men were warned by three shots fired beneath the walls of their dungeon. The Commissioner of the Executive

Directory, who had assumed the rôle of Public Prosecutor at the trial, alarmed at this obvious sign of connivance, requisitioned a squad of armed men of whom my uncle was then commander. At six o'clock in the morning sixty horsemen were drawn up before the iron gratings of the prison yard.

Although the jailers had observed all possible precautions in entering the dungeon where these four unfortunate men were confined, and whom they had left the preceding day tightly pinioned and heavily loaded with chains, they were unable to offer them a prolonged resistance. The prisoners were free and armed to the teeth. They came forth without difficulty, leaving their guardians under bolts and bars, and, supplied with the keys, they quickly traversed the space that separated them from the prison yard. Their appearance must have been terrifying to the populace awaiting them before the iron gates.

To assure perfect freedom of action, or perhaps to affect an appearance of security more menacing even than the renown for strength and intrepidity with which their names were associated, or possibly even to conceal the flow of blood which reveals itself so readily beneath white linen, and betrays the last agonies of a mortally wounded man, their breasts were bared. Their braces crossed upon the chest — their wide red belts bristling with arms — their cry of attack and rage, all that must have given a decidedly fantastic touch to the scene. Arrived in the square, they perceived the gendarmerie drawn up in motionless ranks, through which it would have been impossible to force a passage. They halted an instant and seemed to consult together. Leprêtre, who was, as I have said, their senior and their chief, saluted the guard with his hand, saying with that noble grace of manner peculiar to him:

"Very well, gentlemen of the gendarmerie!"

Then after a brief, energetic farewell to his comrades, he stepped in front of them and blew out his brains. Guyon, Amiet and Hyvert assumed a defensive position, their double-barrelled pistols levelled upon their armed opponents. They did not fire; but the latter, considering this demonstration as a sign of open hostility, fired upon them. Guyon fell dead upon Leprêtre's body, which had not moved. Amiet's hip was broken near the groin. The "Biographie des Contemporains" says that he was executed. I have often heard it said that he died at the foot of the scaffold. Hyvert was left alone, his determined brow, his terrible eye, the pistol in each practiced and vigorous hand threatening death to the spectators. Perhaps it was involuntary admiration, in his desperate plight, for this handsome young man with his waving locks, who was known never to have shed blood, and from whom the law now demanded the expiation of blood; or perhaps it was the sight of those three corpses over which he sprang like a wolf overtaken by his hunters, and the frightful novelty of the spectacle, which for an instant restrained the fury of the troop. He perceived this and temporized with them for a compromise.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “I go to my death! I die with all my heart! But let no one approach me or I shall shoot him — except this gentleman,” he continued, pointing to the executioner. “This is an affair that concerns us alone and merely needs a certain understanding between us.”

This concession was readily accorded, for there was no one present who was not suffering from the prolongation of this horrible tragedy, and anxious to see it finished. Perceiving their assent, he placed one of his pistols between his teeth, and drawing a dagger from his belt, plunged it in his breast up to the hilt. He still remained standing and seemed greatly surprised. There was a movement toward him.

“Very well, gentlemen!” cried he, covering the men who sought to surround him with his pistols, which he had seized again, while the blood spurted freely from the wound in which he had left his poniard. “You know our agreement; either I die alone or three of us will die together. Forward, march!” He walked straight to the guillotine, turning the knife in his breast as he did so.

“Faith,” said he, “my soul must be centred in my belly! I cannot die. See if you can fetch it out.”

This last was addressed to his executioner. An instant later his head fell. Be it accident or some peculiar phenomenon of the vitality, it rebounded and rolled beyond the circle of the scaffolding, and they will still tell you at Bourg, that Hyvert’s head spoke.

Before I had finished reading I had decided to abandon René d’Argonne for the Companions of Jehu. On the morrow I came down with my travelling bag under my arm.

“You are leaving?” said Alexandre to me.

“Yes.”

“Where are you going?”

“To Bourg, in Bresse.”

“What are you going to do there?”

“Study the neighborhood and consult with the inhabitants who saw Leprêtre, Amiet, Guyon and Hyvert executed.”

There are two roads to Bourg — from Paris, of course; one may leave the train at Mâcon, and take stage from Mâcon to Bourg, or, continuing as far as Lyons, take train again from Lyons to Bourg.

I was hesitating between these two roads when one of the travellers who was temporarily occupying my compartment decided me. He was going to Bourg, where he frequently had business. He was going by way of Lyons; therefore, Lyons was the better way.

I resolved to travel by the same route. I slept at Lyons, and on the morrow by ten in the morning I was at Bourg.

A paper published in the second capital of the kingdom met my eye. It contained a spiteful article about me. Lyons has never forgiven me since 1833, I believe, some twenty-four years ago, for asserting that it was not a literary city. Alas! I have in 1857 the same opinion of Lyons as I had in 1833. I do not easily change my opinion. There is another city in France that is almost as bitter against me as Lyons, that is Rouen. Rouen has hissed all my plays, including Count Hermann.

One day a Neapolitan boasted to me that he had hissed Rossini and Malibran, “The Barbiere” and “Desdemona.”

“That must be true,” I answered him, “for Rossini and Malibran on their side boast of having been hissed by Neapolitans.”

So I boast that the Rouenese have hissed me. Nevertheless, meeting a full-blooded Rouenese one day I resolved to discover why I had been hissed at Rouen. I like to understand these little things.

My Rouenese informed me: “We hiss you because we are down on you.”

Why not? Rouen was down on Joan of Arc. Nevertheless it could not be for the same reason. I asked my Rouenese why he and his compatriots were ill-disposed to me; I had never said anything evil of apple sugar, I had treated M. Barbet with respect during his entire term as mayor, and, when a delegate from the Society of Letters at the unveiling of the statue of the great Corneille, I was the only one who thought to bow to him before beginning my speech. There was nothing in that which could have reasonably incurred the hatred of the Rouenese.

Therefore to this haughty reply, “We hiss you because we have a grudge against you,” I asked humbly:

“But, great Heavens! why are you down on me?”

“Oh, you know very well,” replied my Rouenese.

“I?” I exclaimed.

“Yes, you.”

“Well, never mind; pretend I do not know.”

“You remember the dinner the city gave you, in connection with that statue of Corneille?”

“Perfectly. Were they annoyed because I did not return it?”

“No, it is not that.”

“What is it then?”

“Well, at that dinner they said to you: ‘M. Dumas, you ought to write a play for Rouen based upon some subject taken from its own history.’“

“To which I replied: ‘Nothing easier; I will come at your first summons and spend a fortnight in Rouen. You can suggest the subject, and during that fortnight I will write the play, the royalties of which I shall devote to the poor.’“

“That is true, you said that.”

“I see nothing sufficiently insulting in that to incur the hatred of the Rouenese.”

“Yes, but they added: ‘Will you write it in prose?’ To which you replied — Do you remember what you answered?”

“My faith! no.”

“You replied: ‘I will write it in verse; it is soonest done.’“

“That sounds like me. Well, what then?”

“Then! That was an insult to Corneille, M. Dumas; that is why the Rouenese are down on you, and will be for a long time.”

Verbatim!

Oh, worthy Rouenese! I trust that you will never serve me so ill as to forgive and applaud me.

The aforesaid paper observed that M. Dumas had doubtless spent but one night in Lyons because a city of such slight literary standing was not worthy of his longer sojourn. M. Dumas had not thought about this at all. He had spent but one night at Lyons because he was in a hurry to reach Bourg. And no sooner had M. Dumas arrived at Bourg than he asked to be directed to the office of its leading newspaper.

I knew that it was under the management of a distinguished archeologist, who was also the editor of my friend Baux’s work on the church of Brou.

I asked for M. Milliet. M. Milliet appeared. We shook hands and I explained the object of my visit.

"I can fix you perfectly," said he to me. "I will take you to one of our magistrates, who is at present engaged upon a history of the department."

"How far has he got in this history?"

"1822."

"Then that's all right. As the events I want to relate occurred in 1799, and my heroes were executed in 1800, he will have covered that epoch, and can furnish me with the desired information. Let us go to your magistrate."

On the road, M. Milliet told me that this same magisterial historian was also a noted gourmet. Since Brillat-Savarin it has been the fashion for magistrates to be epicures. Unfortunately, many are content to be gourmands, which is not at all the same thing.

We were ushered into the magistrate's study. I found a man with a shiny face and a sneering smile. He greeted me with that protecting air which historians deign to assume toward poets.

"Well, sir," he said to me, "so you have come to our poor country in search of material for your novel?"

"No, sir; I have my material already. I have come simply to consult your historical documents."

"Good! I did not know that it was necessary to give one's self so much trouble in order to write novels."

"There you are in error, sir; at least in my instance. I am in the habit of making exhaustive researches upon all the historical events of which I treat."

"You might at least have sent some one else."

"Any person whom I might send, sir, not being so completely absorbed in my subject, might have overlooked many important facts. Then, too, I make use of many localities which I cannot describe unless I see them."

"Oh, then this is a novel which you intend writing yourself?"

"Yes, certainly, sir. I allowed my valet to write my last; but he had such immense success that the rogue asked so exorbitant an increase of wages that, to my great regret, I was unable to keep him."

The magistrate bit his lips. Then, after a moment's silence, he said:

"Will you kindly tell me, sir, how I can assist you in this important work?"

“You can direct my researches, sir. As you have compiled the history of the department, none of the important event which have occurred in its capital can be unknown to you.”

“Truly, sir, I believe that in this respect I am tolerably well informed.”

“Then, sir, in the first place, your department was the centre of the operations of the Company of Jehu.”

“Sir, I have heard speak of the Companions of Jesus,” replied the magistrate with his jeering smile.

“The Jesuits, you mean? That is not what I am seeking, sir.”

“Nor is it of them that I am speaking. I refer to the stage robbers who infested the highroads from 1797 to 1800.”

“Then, sir, permit me to tell you they are precisely the ones I have come to Bourg about, and that they were called the Companions of Jehu, and not the Companions of Jesus.”

“What is the meaning of this title ‘Companions of Jehu’? I like to get at the bottom of everything.”

“So do I, sir; that is why I did not wish to confound these highwaymen with the Apostles.”

“Truly, that would not have been very orthodox.”

“But it is what you would have done, nevertheless, sir, if I, a poet, had not come here expressly to correct the mistake you, as historian, have made.”

“I await your explanation, sir,” resumed the magistrate, pursing his lips.

“It is short and simple. Elisha consecrated Jehu, King of Israel, on condition that he exterminate the house of Ahab; Elisha was Louis XVIII.; Jehu was Cadoudal; the house of Ahab, the Revolution. That is why these pillagers of diligences, who filched the government money to support the war in the Vendée, were called the Companions of Jehu.”

“Sir, I am happy to learn something at my age.”

“Oh, sir! One can always learn, at all times and at all ages; during life one learns man; in death one learns God.”

“But, after all,” my interlocutor said to me with a gesture of impatience, “may I know in what I can assist you?”

“Thus, sir. Four of these young men, leaders of the Companions of Jehu, were executed at Bourg, on the Place du Bastion.”

“In the first place, sir, in Bourg executions do not take place at the Bastion; they execute on the Fair grounds.”

“Now, sir — these last fifteen or twenty years, it is true — since Peytel. But before, especially during the Revolution, they executed on the Place du Bastion.”

“That is possible.”

“It is so. These four young men were called Guyon, Leprêtre, Amiet, and Hyvert.”

“This is the first time I have heard those names.”

“Yet their names made a certain noise at Bourg.”

“Are you sure, sir, that these men were executed here?”

“I am positive.”

“From whom have you derived your information?”

“From a man whose uncle, then in command of the gendarmerie, was present at the execution.”

“Will you tell me this man’s name?”

“Charles Nodier.”

“Charles Nodier, the novelist, the poet?”

“If he were a historian I would not be so insistent, sir. Recently, during a trip to Varennes, I learned what dependence to place upon historians. But precisely because he is a poet, a novelist, I do insist.”

“You are at liberty to do so; but I know nothing of what you desire to learn, and I dare even assert that, if you have come to Bourg solely to obtain information concerning the execution of — what did you call them?”

“Guyon, Leprêtre, Amiet, and Hyvert.”

“You have undertaken a futile voyage. For these last twenty years, sir, I have been searching the town archives, and I have never seen anything relating to what you have just told me.”

“The town archives are not those of the registrar, sir; perhaps at the record office I may be able to find what I am seeking.”

“Ah! sir, if you can find anything among those archives you will be a very clever man! The record office is a chaos, a veritable chaos. You would have to spend a month here, and then — then — ”

“I do not expect to stay here more than a day, sir; but if in that day I should find what I am seeking will you permit me to impart it to you?”

“Yes, sir; yes, sir; and you will render me a great service by doing so.”

“No greater than the one I asked of you. I shall merely give you some information about a matter of which you were ignorant, that is all.”

You can well understand that on leaving my magistrate, my honor was piqued. I determined, cost what it might, to procure this information about the Companions of Jehu. I went back to Milliet, and cornered him.

“Listen,” he said. “My brother-in-law is a lawyer.”

“He’s my man! Let’s go find the brother-in-law.”

“He’s in court at this hour.”

“Then let us go to court.”

“Your appearance will create a sensation, I warn you.”

“Then go alone — tell him what we want, and let him make a search. I will visit the environs of the town to base my work on the localities. We will meet at four o’clock at the Place du Bastion, if you are agreed.”

“Perfectly.”

“It seems to me that I saw a forest, coming here.”

“The forest of Seillon.”

“Bravo!”

“Do you need a forest?”

“It is absolutely indispensable to me.”

“Then permit me — ”

“What?”

“I am going to take you to a friend of mine, M. Leduc, a poet who in his spare moments is an inspector.”

“Inspector of what?”

“Of the forest.”

“Are there any ruins in the forest?”

“The Chartreuse, which is not in the forest, but merely some hundred feet from it.”

“And in the forest?”

“There is a sort of hermitage which is called La Correrie, belonging to the Chartreuse, with which it communicates by a subterranean passage.”

“Good! Now, if you can provide me with a grotto you will overwhelm me.”

“We have the grotto of Ceyzeriat, but that is on the other side of the Reissouse.”

“I don’t mind. If the grotto won’t come to me, I will do like Mahomet — I will go to the grotto. In the meantime let us go to M. Leduc.”

Five minutes later we reached M. Leduc’s house. He, on learning what we wanted, placed himself, his horse, and his carriage at my disposal. I accepted all. There are some men who offer their services in such a way that they place you at once at your ease.

We first visited the Chartreuse. Had I built it myself it could not have suited me better. A deserted cloister, devastated garden, inhabitants almost savages. Chance, I thank thee!

From there we went to the Correrie; it was the supplement of the Chartreuse. I did not yet know what I could do with it; but evidently it might be useful to me.

“Now, sir,” I said to my obliging guide, “I need a pretty site, rather gloomy, surrounded by tall trees, beside a river. Have you anything like that in the neighborhood?”

“What do you want to do with it?”

“To build a château there.”

“What kind of a château?”

“Zounds! of cards! I have a family to house, a model mother, a melancholy young girl, a mischievous brother, and a poaching gardener.”

“There is a place called Noires-Fontaines.”

“In the first place the name is charming.”

“But there is no château there.”

“So much the better, for I should have been obliged to demolish it.”

“Let us go to Noires-Fontaines.”

We started; a quarter of an hour later we descended at the ranger’s lodge.

“Shall we take this little path?” said M. Leduc; “it will take us where you want to go.”

It led us, in fact, to a spot planted with tall trees which overshadowed three or four rivulets.

“We call this place Noires-Fontaines,” M. Leduc explained.

“And here Madame de Montrevel, Amélie and little Edouard will dwell. Now what are those villages which I see in front of me?”

“Here, close at hand, is Montagnac; yonder, on the mountain side, Ceyzeriat.”

“Is that where the grotto is?”

“Yes. But how did you know there was a grotto at Ceyzeriat?”

“Never mind, go on. The name of those other villages, if you please.”

“Saint-Just, Tréconnas, Ramasse, Villereversure.”

“That will do.”

“Have you enough?”

"Yes."

I drew out my note-book, sketched a plan of the locality and wrote about in their relative positions the names of the villages which M. Leduc had just pointed out to me.

"That's done!" said I.

"Where shall we go now?"

"Isn't the church of Brou near this road?"

"Yes."

"Then let us go to the church of Brou."

"Do you need that in your novel?"

"Yes, indeed; you don't imagine I am going to lay my scene in a country which contains the architectural masterpiece of the sixteenth century without utilizing that masterpiece, do you?"

"Let us go to the church of Brou."

A quarter of an hour later the sacristan showed us into this granite jewel-case which contains the three marble gems called the tombs of Marguerite of Austria, Marguerite or Bourbon, and of Philibert le Beau.

"How is it," I asked the sacristan, "that all these masterpieces were not reduced to powder during the Revolution?"

"Ah! sir, the municipality had an idea."

"What was it?"

"That of turning the church into a storage house for fodder."

"Yes, and the hay saved the marble; you are right, my friend, that *was* an idea."

"Does this idea of the municipality afford you another?" asked M. Leduc.

"Faith, yes, and I shall have poor luck if I don't make something out of it."

I looked at my watch. "Three o'clock! Now for the prison. I have an appointment with M. Milliet at four on the Place du Bastion."

"Wait; there is one thing more."

"What is that?"

"Have you noticed Marguerite of Austria's motto?"

"No; where is it?"

"Oh, all over. In the first place, look above her tomb."

"'Fortune, infortune, fort'une.'"

"Exactly."

"Well, what does this play of words mean?"

"Learned men translate it thus: 'Fate persecutes a woman much.'"

"Explain that a little."

"You must, in the first place, assume that it is derived from the Latin."

"True, that is probable."

"Well, then: 'Fortuna infortunat — '"

"Oh! Oh! 'Infortunat.'"

"Bless me!"

"That strongly resembles a solecism!"

"What do you want?"

"An explanation."

"Explain it yourself."

"Well; 'Fortuna, infortuna, forti una.' 'Fortune and misfortune are alike to the strong.'"

"Do you know, that may possibly be the correct translation?"

"Zounds! See what it is not to be learned, my dear sir; we are endowed with common-sense, and that sees clearer than science. Have you anything else to tell me?"

"No."

"Then let us go to the prison."

We got into the carriage and returned to the city, stopping only at the gate of the prison. I glanced out of the window.

"Oh!" I exclaimed, "they have spoiled it for me."

"What! They've spoiled it for you?"

"Certainly, it was not like this in my prisoners' time. Can I speak to the jailer?"

"Certainly."

"Then let us consult him."

We knocked at the door. A man about forty opened it. He recognized M. Leduc.

"My dear fellow," M. Leduc said to him, "this is one of my learned friends — "

"Come, come," I exclaimed, interrupting him, "no nonsense."

"Who contends," continued M. Leduc, "that the prison is no longer the same as it was in the last century?"

"That is true, M. Leduc, it was torn down and rebuilt in 1816."

"Then the interior arrangements are no longer the same?"

"Oh! no, sir, everything was changed."

"Could I see the old plan?"

"M. Martin, the architect, might perhaps be able to find one for you."

"Is he any relation to M. Martin, the lawyer?"

"His brother."

"Very well, my friend, then I can get my plan."

"Then we have nothing more to do here?" inquired M. Leduc.

"Nothing."

"Then I am free to go home?"

"I shall be sorry to leave you, that is all."

"Can you find your way to the Bastion without me?"

"It is close by."

"What are you going to do this evening?"

"I will spend it with you, if you wish."

"Very good! You will find a cup of tea waiting for you at nine."

"I shall be on hand for it."

I thanked M. Leduc. We shook hands and parted.

I went down the Rue des Lisses (meaning Lists, from a combat which took place in the square to which it leads), and skirting the Montburon Garden, I reached the Place du Bastion. This is a semicircle now used as the town marketplace. In the midst stands the statue of Bichat by David d'Angers. Bichat, in a frockcoat — why that exaggeration of realism? — stands with his hand upon the heart of a child about nine or ten years old, perfectly nude — why that excess of ideality? Extended at Bichat's feet lies a dead body. It is Bichat's book "Of Life and of Death" translated into bronze. I was studying this statue, which epitomizes the defects and merits of David d'Angers, when I felt some one touch my shoulder. I turned around; it was M. Milliet. He held a paper in his hand.

"Well?" I asked.

"Well, victory!"

"What is that you have there?"

"The minutes of the trial and execution."

"Of whom?"

"Of your men."

"Of Guyon, Leprêtre, Amiet — !"

"And Hyvert."

"Give it to me."

"Here it is."

I took it and read:

REPORT OF THE DEATH AND EXECUTION OF LAURENT GUYON, ETIENNE HYVERT, FRANÇOIS AMIET, ANTOINE LEPRÊTRE. Condemned the twentieth Thermidor of the year VIII., and executed the twenty-third Vendemiaire of the year IX.

To-day, the twenty-third Vendemiaire of the year IX., the government commissioner of the tribunal, who received at eleven of the evening the budget of the Minister of Justice, containing the minutes of the trial and the judgment which condemns to death Laurent Guyon, Etienne Hyvert, François Amiet and Antoine Leprêtre; — the decision of the Court of Appeals of the sixth inst., rejecting the appeal against the sentence of the twenty-first Thermidor of the year VIII., I did notify by letter, between seven and eight of the morning, the four accused that their sentence of death would take effect to-day at eleven o'clock. In the interval which elapsed before eleven o'clock, the four accused shot themselves with pistols and stabbed themselves with blows from a poinard in prison. Leprêtre and Guyon, according to public rumor, were dead; Hyvert fatally wounded and dying; Amiet fatally wounded, but still conscious. All four, in this state, were conveyed to the scaffold, and, living or dead, were guillotined. At half after eleven, the sheriff, Colin, handed in the report of their execution to the Municipality for registration upon the death roll:

The captain of gendarmerie remitted to the Justice of the Peace a report of what had occurred in the prison, of which he was a witness. I, who was not present, do certify to what I have learned by hearsay only.

(Signed) DUBOST, *Clerk*.

Bourg, 23d Vendemiaire of the year IX.

Ah! so it was the poet who was right and not the historian! The captain of gendarmerie, who remitted the report of the proceedings in the prison to the Justice of the Peace, at which he was present, was Nodier's uncle. This report handed to the Justice of the Peace was the story which, graven upon the young man's mind, saw the light some forty years later unaltered, in that masterpiece entitled "Souvenirs de la Révolution." The entire series of papers was in the record office. M. Martin offered to have them copied for me; inquiry, trial and judgment.

I had a copy of Nodier's "Souvenirs of the Revolution" in my pocket. In my hand I held the report of the execution which confirmed the facts therein stated.

"Now let us go to our magistrate," I said to M. Milliet.

"Let us go to our magistrate," he repeated.

The magistrate was confounded, and I left him convinced that poets know history as well as historians — if not better.

ALEX. DUMAS.

PROLOGUE. THE CITY OF AVIGNON

We do not know if the prologue we are going to present to our readers’ eyes be very useful, nevertheless we cannot resist the desire to make of it, not the first chapter, but the preface of this book.

The more we advance in life, the more we advance in art, the more convinced we become that nothing is abrupt and isolated; that nature and society progress by evolution and not by chance, and that the event, flower joyous or sad, perfumed or fetid, beneficent or fatal, which unfolds itself to-day before our eyes, was sown in the past, and had its roots sometimes in days anterior to ours, even as it will bear its fruits in the future.

Young, man accepts life as it comes, enamored of yestereen, careless of the day, heeding little the morrow. Youth is the springtide with its dewy dawns and its beautiful nights; if sometimes a storm clouds the sky, it gathers, mutters and disperses, leaving the sky bluer, the atmosphere purer, and Nature more smiling than before. What use is there in reflecting on this storm that passes swift as a caprice, ephemeral as a fancy? Before we have discovered the secret of the meteorological enigma, the storm will have disappeared.

But it is not thus with the terrible phenomena, which at the close of summer, threaten our harvests; or in the midst of autumn, assail our vintages; we ask whither they go, we query whence they come, we seek a means to prevent them.

To the thinker, the historian, the poet, there is a far deeper subject for reflection in revolutions, these tempests of the social atmosphere which drench the earth with blood, and crush an entire generation of men, than in those upheavals of nature which deluge a harvest, or flay the vineyards with hail — that is to say, the fruits of a single harvest, wreaking an injury, which can at the worst be repaired the ensuing year; unless the Lord be in His days of wrath.

Thus, in other days, be it forgetfulness, heedlessness or ignorance perhaps — (blessed he who is ignorant! a fool he who is wise!) — in other days in relating the story which I am going to tell you to-day I would, without pausing at the place where the first scene of this book occurs, have accorded it but a superficial mention, and traversing the Midi like any other province, have named Avignon like any other city.

But to-day it is no longer the same; I am no longer tossed by the flurries of spring, but by the storms of summer, the tempests of autumn. To-day when I name Avignon, I evoke a spectre; and, like Antony displaying Cæsar’s toga, say:

“Look! in this place ran Cassius’ dagger through;
See what a rent the envious Casca made;
Through this the well-beloved Brutus stabbed — ”

So, seeing the bloody shroud of the papal city, I say: “Behold the blood of the Albigenses, and here the blood of the Cevennais; behold the blood of the Republicans, and here the blood of the Royalists; behold the blood of Lescuyer; behold the blood of Maréchal Brune.”

And I feel myself seized with a profound sadness, and I begin to write, but at the first lines I perceive that, without suspecting it, the historian’s chisel has superseded the novelist’s pen in my hand.

Well, let us be both. Reader, grant me these ten, fifteen, twenty pages to the historian; the novelist shall have the rest.

Let us say, therefore, a few words about Avignon, the place where the first scene of the new book which we are offering to the public, opens. Perhaps, before reading what we have to say, it would be well to cast a glance at what its native historian, François Nouguier, says of it.

“Avignon,” he writes, “a town noble for its antiquity, pleasing in its site, superb for its walls, smiling for the fertility of its soil, charming for the gentleness of its inhabitants, magnificent for its palace, beautiful in its broad streets, marvellous in the construction of its bridge, rich because of its commerce, and known to all the world.”

May the shade of François Nouguier pardon us if we do not at first see his city with the same eyes as he does. To those who know Avignon be it to say who has best described it, the historian or the novelist.

It is but just to assert in the first place that Avignon is a town by itself, that is to say, a town of extreme passions. The period of religious dissensions, which culminated for her in political hatreds, dates from the twelfth century. After his flight from Lyons, the valleys of Mont Ventoux sheltered Pierre de Valdo and his Vaudois, the ancestors of those Protestants who, under the name of the Albigenses, cost the Counts of Toulouse, and transferred to the papacy, the seven châteaux which Raymond VI. possessed in Languedoc.

Avignon, a powerful republic governed by podestats, refused to submit to the King of France. One morning Louis VIII., who thought it easier to make a crusade against Avignon like Simon de Montfort, than against Jerusalem like Philippe Auguste; one morning, we say, Louis VIII. appeared before the gates of Avignon, demanding admission with lances at rest, visor down, banners unfurled and trumpets of war sounding.

The bourgeois refused. They offered the King of France, as a last concession, a peaceful entrance, lances erect, and the royal banner alone unfurled. The King laid siege to the town, a siege which lasted three months, during which, says the chronicler, the bourgeois of Avignon returned the French soldiers arrow for arrow, wound for wound, death for death.

The city capitulated at length. Louis VIII. brought the Roman Cardinal-Legate, Saint-Angelo, in his train. It was he who dictated the terms, veritable priestly terms, hard and unconditional. The Avignonese were commanded to demolish their ramparts, to fill their moats, to raze three hundred towers, to sell their vessels, and to burn their engines and machines of war. They had moreover to pay an enormous impost, to abjure the Vaudois heresy, and maintain thirty men fully armed and equipped, in Palestine, to aid in delivering the tomb of Christ. And finally, to watch over the fulfillment of these terms, of which the bull is still extant in the city archives, a brotherhood of penitents was founded which, reaching down through six centuries, still exists in our days.

In opposition to these penitents, known as the “White Penitents,” the order of the “Black Penitents” was founded, imbued with the spirit of opposition of Raymond of Toulouse.

From that day forth the religious hatreds developed into political hatreds. It was not sufficient that Avignon should be the land of heresy. She was destined to become the theatre of schisms.

Permit us, in connection with this French Rome, a short historical digression. Strictly speaking, it is not essential to the subject of which we treat, and we were perhaps wiser to launch ourselves immediately into the heart of the drama; but we trust that we will be forgiven. We write more particularly for those who, in a novel, like occasionally to meet with something more than fiction.

In 1285 Philippe le Bel ascended the throne.

It is a great historical date, this date of 1285. The papacy which, in the person of Gregory VII., successfully opposed the Emperor of Germany; the papacy which, vanquished in matters temporal by Henry IV., yet vanquished him morally. This papacy was slapped by a simple Sabine gentleman, and the steel gauntlet of Colonna reddened the cheek of Boniface VIII. But the King of France, whose hand had really dealt this blow, what happened to him under the successor of Boniface VIII.?

This successor was Benedict XI., a man of low origin, but who might perhaps have developed into a man of genius, had they allowed him the time. Too weak for an open struggle with Philippe le Bel, he found a means which would have been the envy of the founder of a celebrated order two hundred years later. He pardoned Colonna openly.

To pardon Colonna was to declare Colonna culpable, since culprits alone have need of pardon. If Colonna were guilty, the King of France was at least his accomplice.

There was some danger in supporting such an argument; also Benedict XI. was pope but eight months. One day a veiled woman, a pretended lay-sister of Sainte-Petronille at Perugia, came to him while he was at table, offering him a basket of figs. Did it conceal an asp like Cleopatra’s? The fact is that on the morrow the Holy See was vacant.

Then Philippe le Bel had a strange idea; so strange that it must, at first, have seemed an hallucination.

It was to withdraw the papacy from Rome, to install it in France, to put it in jail, and force it to coin money for his profit.

The reign of Philippe le Bel was the advent of gold. Gold! that was the sole and unique god of this king who had slapped a pope. Saint Louis had a priest, the worthy Abbé Suger, for minister; Philippe le Bel had two bankers, two Florentines, Biscio and Musiato.

Do you expect, dear reader, that we are about to fall into the philosophical commonplace of anathematizing gold? You are mistaken.

In the thirteenth century gold meant progress. Until then nothing was known but the soil. Gold was the soil converted into money, the soil mobilized, exchangeable, transportable, divisible, subtilized, spiritualized, as it were.

So long as the soil was not represented by gold, man, like the god Thermes, that landmark of the fields, had his feet imprisoned by the earth.

Formerly the earth bore man, to-day man bears the earth.

But this gold had to be abstracted from its hiding-place, and it was hidden far otherwise than in the mines of Chile or Mexico. All the gold was in the possession of the churches and the Jews. To extract it from this double mine it needed more than a king; it required a pope.

And that is why Philippe le Bel, that great exploiter of gold, resolved to have a pope of his own. Benedict XI. dead, a conclave was held at Perugia; at this conclave the French cardinals were in the majority. Philippe le Bel cast his eyes upon the Archbishop of Bordeaux, Bertrand de Got, and to him he gave rendezvous in a forest near Saint-Jean d'Angely.

Bertrand de Got took heed not to miss that appointment.

The King and the Archbishop heard mass there, and at the moment when the Host was elevated, they bound themselves by this God they glorified to absolute secrecy. Bertrand de Got was still ignorant of the matter in question. Mass over, Philippe le Bel said:

"Archbishop, I have it in my power to make thee pope."

Bertrand de Got listened no longer, but cast himself at the King's feet, saying:

"What must I do to obtain this?"

"Accord me the six favors which I shall ask of thee," replied Philippe le Bel.

"It's for thee to command and for me to obey," said the future Pope.

The vow of servitude was taken.

The King raised Bertrand de Got, and, kissing him on the mouth, said:

"The six favors which I demand of thee are these: First, thou shalt reconcile me completely with the Church, and grant me pardon for the misdeed that I committed toward Boniface VIII. Second, thou shalt restore to me and mine the right of communion of which the Court of Rome deprived me. Third, thou shalt grant me the clergy's tithe in my kingdom for the next five years, to help defray the expenses of the war in Flanders. Fourth, thou shalt destroy and annul the memory of Pope Boniface VIII. Fifth, thou shalt bestow the dignity of cardinal upon Messires Jacopo and Pietro de Colonna. As to the sixth favor and promise, that I shall reserve to speak to thee thereof in its time and place."

Bertrand de Got swore to the promises and favors known, and to the promise and favor unknown. This last, which the King had not dared to mention in connection with the others, was the abolition of the Knights

Templar. Besides the promises made on the Corpus Domini, Bertrand de Got gave as hostages his brother and two of his nephews. The King swore on his side that he should be elected pope.

This scene, set in the deep shadows of a crossroad in the forest, resembled rather an evocation between magician and demon than an agreement entered upon between king and pope.

Also the coronation of the King, which took place shortly afterward at Lyons, and which began the Church's captivity, seemed but little agreeable to God. Just as the royal procession was passing, a wall crowded with spectators fell, wounding the King and killing the Duc de Bretagne. The Pope was thrown to the ground, and his tiara rolled in the mud.

Bertrand de Got was elected pope under the name of Clement V.

Clement V. paid all that Bertrand de Got had promised. Philippe was absolved, Holy Communion restored to him and his, the purple again descended upon the shoulders of the Colonna, the Church was obliged to defray the expenses of the war in Flanders and Philippe de Valois's crusade against the Greek Empire. The memory of Pope Boniface VIII. was, if not destroyed and annulled, at least besmirched; the walls of the Temple were razed, and the Templars burned on the open space of the Pont Neuf.

All these edicts — they were no longer called bulls from the moment the temporal power dictated them — all these edicts were dated at Avignon.

Philippe le Bel was the richest of all the kings of the French monarchy; he possessed an inexhaustible treasury, that is to say, his pope. He had purchased him, he used him, he put him to the press, and as cider flows from apples, so did this crushed pope bleed gold. The pontificate, struck by the Colonna in the person of Boniface VIII., abdicated the empire of the world in the person of Clement V.

We have related the advent of the king of blood and the pope of gold. We know how they ended. Jacques de Molay, from his funeral pyre, adjured them both to appear before God within the year. *Ae to geron sithullia*, says Aristophanes. “Dying hoary heads possess the souls of sibyls.”

Clement V. departed first. In a vision he saw his palace in flames. “From that moment,” says Baluze, “he became sad and lasted but a short time.”

Seven months later it was Philippe's turn. Some say that he was killed while bunting, overthrown by a wild boar. Dante is among their number. “He,” said he, “who was seen near the Seine falsifying the coin of the realm shall die by the tusk of a boar." But Guillaume de Nangis makes the royal counterfeiter die of a death quite otherwise providential.

"Undermined by a malady unknown to the physicians, Philippe expired," said he, "to the great astonishment of everybody, without either his pulse or his urine revealing the cause of his malady or the imminence of the danger."

The King of Debauchery, the King of Uproar, Louis X., called the Hutin, succeeded his father, Philippe le Bel; John XXII. to Clement V.

Avignon then became in truth a second Rome. John XXII. and Clement VI. anointed her queen of luxury. The manners and customs of the times made her queen of debauchery and indulgence. In place of her towers, razed by Romain de Saint-Angelo, Hernandez de Héredi, grand master of Saint-Jean of Jerusalem, girdled her with a belt of walls. She possessed dissolute monks, who transformed the blessed precincts of her convents into places of debauchery and licentiousness; her beautiful courtesans tore the diamonds from the tiara to make of them bracelets and necklaces; and finally she possessed the echoes of Vaucluse, which wafted the melodious strains of Petrarch's songs to her.

This lasted until King Charles V., who was a virtuous and pious prince, having resolved to put an end to the scandal, sent the Maréchal de Boucicaut to drive out the anti-pope, Benedict XIII., from Avignon. But at sight of the soldiers of the King of France the latter remembered that before being pope under the name of Benedict XIII. he had been captain under the name of Pierre de Luna. For five months he defended himself, pointing his engines of war with his own hands from the heights of the château walls, engines otherwise far more murderous than his pontifical bolts. At last forced to flee, he left the city by a postern, after having ruined a hundred houses and killed four thousand Avignonese, and fled to Spain, where the King of Aragon offered him sanctuary.

There each morning, from the summit of a tower, assisted by the two priests who constituted his sacred college, he blessed the whole world, which was none the better for it, and excommunicated his enemies, who were none the worse for it. At last, feeling himself nigh to death, and fearing lest the schism die with him, he elected his two vicars cardinals on the condition that after his death one of the two would elect the other pope. The election was made. The new pope, supported by the cardinal who made him, continued the schism for awhile. Finally both entered into negotiations with Rome, made honorable amends, and returned to the fold of Holy

Church, one with the title of Arch bishop of Seville, the other as Archbishop of Toledo.

From this time until 1790 Avignon, widowed of her popes, was governed by legates and vice-legates. Seven sovereign pontiffs had resided within her walls some seven decades; she had seven hospitals, seven fraternities of penitents, seven monasteries, seven convents, seven parishes, and seven cemeteries.

To those who know Avignon there was at that epoch — there is yet — two cities within a city: the city of the priests, that is to say, the Roman city, and the city of the merchants, that is to say, the French city. The city of the priests, with its papal palace, its hundred churches, its innumerable bell-towers, ever ready to sound the tocsin of conflagration, the knell of slaughter. The town of the merchants, with its Rhone, its silk-workers, its crossroads, extending north, east, south and west, from Lyons to Marseilles, from Nimes to Turin. The French city, the accursed city, longing for a king, jealous of its liberties, shuddering beneath its yoke of vassalage, a vassalage of the priests with the clergy for its lord.

The clergy — not the pious clergy, tolerantly austere in the practice of its duty and charity, living in the world to console and edify it, without mingling in its joys and passions — but a clergy such as intrigue, cupidity, and ambition had made it; that is to say, the court abbés, rivalling the Roman priests, indolent, libertine, elegant, impudent, kings of fashion, autocrats of the salon, kissing the hands of those ladies of whom they boasted themselves the paramours, giving their hands to kiss to the women of the people whom they honored by making their mistresses.

Do you want a type of those abbés? Take the Abbé Maury. Proud as a duke, insolent as a lackey, the son of a shoemaker, more aristocratic than the son of a great lord.

One understands that these two categories of inhabitants, representing the one heresy, the other orthodoxy; the one the French party, the other the Roman party; the one the party of absolute monarchy, the other that of progressive constitutionalism, were not elements conducive to the peace and security of this ancient pontifical city. One understands, we say, that at the moment when the revolution broke out in Paris, and manifested itself by the taking of the Bastille, that the two parties, hot from the religious wars of Louis XIV., could not remain inert in the presence of each other.

We have said, Avignon, city of priests; let us add, city of hatreds. Nowhere better than in convent towns does one learn to hate. The heart of the child, everywhere else free from wicked passions, was born there full of paternal hatreds, inherited from father to son for the last eight hundred years, and after a life of hate, bequeathed in its turn, a diabolical heritage, to his children.

Therefore, at the first cry of liberty which rang through France the French town rose full of joy and hope. The moment had come at last for her to contest aloud that concession made by a young queen, a minor, in expiation of her sins, of a city and a province, and with it half a million souls. By what right had she sold these souls in æternum to the hardest and most exacting of all masters, the Roman Pontiff?

All France was hastening to assemble in the fraternal embrace of the Federation at the Champ de Mars. Was she not France? Her sons ejected delegates to wait upon the legate and request him respectfully to leave the city, giving him twenty-four hours in which to do so.

During the night the papists amused themselves by hanging from a gibbet an effigy of straw wearing the tri-color cockade.

The course of the Rhone has been controlled, the Durance canalled, dikes have been built to restrain the fierce torrents, which, at the melting of the snows, pour in liquid avalanches from the summits of Mt. Ventoux. But this terrible flood, this living flood, this human torrent that rushed leaping through the rapid inclines of the streets of Avignon, once released, once flooding, not even God Himself has yet sought to stay it.

At sight of this manikin with the national colors, dancing at the end of a cord, the French city rose upon its very foundations with terrible cries of rage. Four papist, suspected of this sacrilege, two marquises, one burgher, and a workman, were torn from their homes and hung in the manikin’s stead. This occurred the eleventh of June, 1790.

The whole French town wrote to the National Assembly that she gave herself to France, and with her the Rhone, her commerce, the Midi, and the half of Provence.

The National Assembly was in one of its reactionary moods. It did not wish to quarrel with the Pope; it dallied with the King, and the matter was adjourned. From that moment the rising became a revolt, and the Pope was free to do with Avignon what the court might have done with Paris, if the Assembly had delayed its proclamation of the Rights of Man. The Pope ordered the annulment of all that had occurred at the Comtat Venaissin, the re-establishment of the privileges of the nobles and clergy, and the reinstallation of the Inquisition in all its rigor. The pontifical decrees were affixed to the walls.

One man, one only, in broad daylight dared to go straight to the walls, in face of all, and tear down the decree. His name was Lescuyer. He was not a young man; and therefore it was not the fire of youth that impelled him. No, he was almost an old man who did not even belong to the province. He was a Frenchman from Picardy, ardent yet reflective, a former notary long since established at Avignon.

It was a crime that Roman Avignon remembered; a crime so great that the Virgin wept!

You see Avignon is another Italy. She must have her miracles, and if God will not perform them, so surely will some one be at hand to invent them. Still further, the miracle must be a miracle pertaining to the Virgin. La Madonna! the mind, the heart, the tongue of the Italians are full of these two words.

It was in the Church of the Cordeliers that this miracle occurred. The crowd rushed there. It was much that the Virgin should weep; but a rumor spread at the same time that brought the excitement to a climax. A large coffer, tightly sealed, had been carried through the city; this chest had excited the curiosity of all Avignon. What did it contain? Two hours later it was no longer a coffer; but eighteen trunks had been seen going toward the Rhone. As for their contents, a porter had revealed that; they contained articles from the Mont-de-Piété that the French party were taking with them into exile. Articles from the Mont-de-Piété, that is to say, the spoils of the poor! The poorer the city the richer its pawn-shops. Few could boast such wealth as those of Avignon. It was no longer a factional affair, it was a theft, an infamous theft. Whites and Reds rushed to the Church of the Cordeliers, shouting that the municipality must render them an accounting.

Lescuyer was the secretary of the municipality. His name was thrown to the crowd, not for having torn down the pontifical decrees — from that moment he would have had defenders — but for having signed the order to the keeper of the Mont-de-Piété permitting the removal of the articles in pawn.

Four men were sent to seize Lescuyer and bring him to the church. They found him in the street on his way to the municipality. The four men fell upon him and dragged him to the church with the most ferocious cries. Once there, Lescuyer understood from the flaming eyes that met his, from the clinched fists threatening him, the shrieks demanding his death; Lescuyer understood that instead of being in the house of the Lord he was in one of those circles of hell forgotten by Dante.

The only idea that occurred to him as to this hatred against him was that he had caused it by tearing down the pontifical decrees. He climbed into the pulpit, expecting to convert it into a seat of justice, and in the voice of a man who not only does not blame himself, but who is even ready to repeat his action, he said:

“Brothers, I consider the revolution necessary; consequently I have done all in my power — ”

The fanatics understood that if Lescuyer explained, Lescuyer was saved. That was not what they wanted. They flung themselves upon him, tore him from the pulpit, and thrust him into the midst of this howling mob, who dragged him to the altar with that sort of terrible cry which combines the hiss of the serpent and the roar of the tiger, the murderous zou! zou! peculiar to the people of Avignon.

Lescuyer recognized that fatal cry; he endeavored to gain refuge at the foot of the altar. He found none; he fell there.

A laborer, armed with a stick, dealt him such a blow on the head that the stick broke in two pieces. Then the people hurled themselves upon the poor body, and, with that mixture of gayety and ferocity peculiar to Southern people, the men began to dance on his stomach, singing, while the women, that he might better expiate his blasphemies against the Pope, cut or rather scalloped his lips with their scissors.

And out of the midst of this frightful group came a cry, or rather a groan; this death groan said: “In the name of Heaven! in the name of the Virgin! in the name of humanity! kill me at once.”

This cry was heard, and by common consent the assassins stood aside. They left the unfortunate man bleeding, disfigured, mangled, to taste of his death agony.

This lasted five hours, during which, amid shouts of laughter, insults, and jeers from the crowd, this poor body lay palpitating upon the steps of the altar. That is how they kill at Avignon.

Stay! there is yet another way. A man of the French party conceived the idea of going to the Mont-de-Piété for information. Everything was in order there, not a fork or a spoon had been removed. It was therefore not as an accomplice of theft that Lescuyer had just been so cruelly murdered, it was for being a patriot.

There was at that time in Avignon a man who controlled the populace. All these terrible leaders of the Midi have acquired such fatal celebrity that it suffices to name them for every one, even the least educated, to know them. This man was Jourdan. Braggart and liar, he had made the common people believe that it was he who had cut off the head of the governor of the Bastille. So they called him Jourdan, Coupe-tête. That was not his real name, which was Mathieu Jouve. Neither was he a Provencal; he came from Puy-en-Velay. He had formerly been a muleteer on those rugged heights which surround his native town; then a soldier without going to war — war had perhaps made him more human; after that he had kept a drink-shop in Paris. In Avignon he had been a vendor of madder.

He collected three hundred men, carried the gates of the town, left half of his troop to guard them, and with the remainder marched upon the Church of the Cordeliers, preceded by two pieces of cannon. These he stationed in front of the church and fired them into it at random. The assassins fled like a flock of frightened birds, leaving some few dead upon the church steps. Jourdan and his men trampled over the bodies and entered the holy precincts. No one was there but the Virgin, and the wretched Lescuyer, still breathing. Jourdan and his comrades took good care not to despatch Lescuyer; his death agony was a supreme means of exciting the mob. They picked up this remnant of a sentient being, three-quarters dead, and carried it along, bleeding, quivering, gasping, with them.

Every one fled from the sight, closing doors and windows. At the end of an hour, Jourdan and his three hundred men were masters of the town.

Lescuyer was dead, but what of that; they no longer needed his agony. Jourdan profited by the terror he had inspired to arrest or have arrested eighty people, murderers, or so-called murderers of Lescuyer. Thirty, perhaps, had never even set foot within the church. But when one has such a good opportunity to be rid of one’s enemies, one must profit by it; good opportunities are rare.

These eighty people were huddled into the Trouillas Tower. Historically it is known as the Tower de la Glacière; but why change this name of the Trouillas Tower? The name is unclean and harmonizes well with the unclean deed which was now to be perpetrated there.

It had been the scene of the inquisitorial tortures. One can still see on the walls the greasy soot which rose from the smoke of the funeral pyre where human bodies were consumed. They still show you to-day the instruments of torture which they have carefully preserved — the caldron, the oven, the wooden horse, the chains, the dungeons, and even the rotten bones. Nothing is wanting.

It was in this tower, built by Clement V., that they now confined the eighty prisoners. These eighty men, once arrested and locked up in the Trouillas Tower, became most embarrassing. Who was to judge them? There were no legally constituted courts except those of the Pope. Could they kill these unfortunates as they had killed Lescuyer?

We have said that a third, perhaps half of them, had not only taken no part in the murder, but had not even set foot in the church. How should they kill them? The killing must be placed upon the basis of reprisals. But the killing of these eighty people required a certain number of executioners.

A species of tribunal was improvised by Jourdan and held session in one of the law-courts. It had a clerk named Raphel; a president, half Italian, half French; an orator in the popular dialect named Barbe Savournin de la Roua, and three or four other poor devils, a baker, a pork butcher — their names are lost in the multitude of events.

These were the men who cried: “We must kill all! If one only escapes he will be a witness against us.”

But, as we have said, executioners were wanting. There were barely twenty men at hand in the courtyard, all belonging to the petty tradesfolk of Avignon — a barber, a shoemaker, a cobbler, a mason, and an upholsterer — all insufficiently armed at random, the one with a sabre, the other with a bayonet, a third with an iron bar, and a fourth with a bit of wood hardened by fire. All of these people were chilled by a fine October rain. It would be difficult to turn them into assassins.

Pooh! Is anything too difficult for the devil?

There comes an hour in such crises when God seems to abandon the earth. Then the devil’s chance comes.

The devil in person entered this cold, muddy courtyard. Assuming the features, form and face of an apothecary of the neighborhood named Mendes, he prepared a table lighted by two lanterns, on which he placed glasses, jugs, pitchers and bottles.

What infernal beverage did these mysterious and curiously formed receptacles contain? No one ever knew, but the result is well known. All those who drank that diabolical liquor were suddenly seized with a feverish rage, a lust of blood and murder. From that moment it was only necessary to show them the door; they hurtled madly into the dungeon.

The massacre lasted all night; all night the cries, the sobs, the groans of the dying sounded through the darkness. All were killed, all slaughtered, men and women. It was long in doing; the killers, we have said, were drunk and poorly armed. But they succeeded.

Among these butchers was a child remarked for his bestial cruelty, his immoderate thirst for blood. It was Lescuyer's son. He killed and then killed again; he boasted of having with his childish hand alone killed ten men and four women.

"It's all right! I can kill as I like," said he. "I am not yet fifteen, so they can do nothing to me for it."

As the killing progressed, they threw their victims, the living, dead and wounded, into the Trouillas Tower, some sixty feet, down into the pit. The men were thrown in first, and the women later. The assassins wanted time to violate the bodies of those who were young and pretty. At nine in the morning, after twelve hours of massacre, a voice was still heard crying from the depths of the sepulchre:

"For pity's sake, come kill me! I cannot die."

A man, the armorer Bouffier, bent over the pit and looked down. The others did not dare.

"Who was that crying?" they asked.

"That was Lami," replied Bouffier. Then, when he had returned, they asked him:

"Well, what did you see at the bottom?"

"A queer marmalade," said he. "Men and women, priests and pretty girls, all helter-skelter. It's enough to make one die of laughter."

"Decidedly man is a vile creature," said the Count of Monte-Cristo to M. de Villefort.

Well, it is in this town, still reeking with blood, still warm, still stirred by these last massacres, that we now introduce two of the principal personages of our story.

CHAPTER I.

A TABLE D'HÔTE

The 9th of October, 1799, on a beautiful day of that meridional autumn which ripens the oranges of Hyères and the grapes of Saint-Peray, at the two extremities of Provence, a travelling chaise, drawn by three post horses, galloped at full speed over the bridge that crosses the Durance, between Cavailhon and Château-Renard, on its way to Avignon, the ancient papal city which a decree, issued the 25th of May, 1791, eight years earlier, had reunited to France — a reunion confirmed by the treaty signed in 1797, at Tolentino, between General Bonaparte and Pope Pius VI.

The carriage entered by the gate of Aix and, without slackening speed, traversed the entire length of the town, with its narrow, winding streets, built to ward off both wind and sun, and halted at fifty paces from the Porte d'Oulle, at the Hotel du Palais-Egalité, which they were again beginning to quietly rename the Hotel du Palais-Royal, a name which it bore formerly and still bears to-day.

These few insignificant words about the name of the inn, before which halted the post-chaise which we had in view, indicate sufficiently well the state of France under the government of the Thermidorian reaction, called the Directory.

After the revolutionary struggle which had occurred between the 14th of July, 1789, and the 9th Thermidor, 1794; after the days of the 5th and 6th of October, of the 21st of June, of the 10th of August, of the 2d and 3d of September, of the 21st of May, of the 29th Thermidor and the 1st Prairial; after seeing fall the heads of the King and his judges, and the Queen and her accusers, of the Girondins and the Cordeliers, the Moderates and the Jacobins, France experienced that most frightful and most nauseous of all lassitudes, the lassitude of blood!

She had therefore returned, if not to a need of monarchy, at least to a desire for a stable government, in which she might place her confidence, upon which she might lean, which would act for her, and which would permit her some repose while it acted.

In the stead of this vaguely desired government, the country obtained the feeble and irresolute Directory, composed for the moment of the voluptuous Barrès, the intriguing Sièyes, the brave Moulins, the insignificant Roger Ducos, and the honest but somewhat too ingenuous Gohier. The result was a mediocre dignity before the world at large and a very questionable tranquillity at home.

It is true that at the moment of which we write our armies, so glorious during those epic campaigns of 1796 and 1797, thrown back for a time upon France by the incapacity of Scherer at Verona and Cassano, and by the defeat and death of Joubert at Novi, were beginning to resume the offensive. Moreau had defeated Souvarow at Bassignano; Brune had defeated the Duke of York and General Hermann at Bergen; Masséna had annihilated the Austro-Russians at Zurich; Korsakof had escaped only with the greatest difficulty; the Austrian, Hotz, with three other generals, were killed, and five made prisoners. Masséna saved France at Zurich, as Villars, ninety years earlier, had saved it at Denain.

But in the interior, matters were not in so promising a state, and the government of the Directory was, it must be confessed, much embarrassed between the war in the Vendée and the brigandages of the Midi, to which, according to custom, the population of Avignon were far from remaining strangers.

Beyond doubt the two travellers who descended from the carriage at the door of the Hotel du Palais-Royal had reason to fear the state of mind in which the always excitable papal town might be at that time; for just before reaching Orgon, at a spot where three crossroads stretched out before the traveller — one leading to Nimes, the second to Carpentras, the third to Avignon — the postilion had stopped his horses, and, turning round, asked:

“Will the citizens go by way of Avignon or Carpentras?”

“Which of the two roads is the shorter?” asked the elder of the two travellers in a harsh, strident voice. Though visibly the elder, he was scarcely thirty years of age.

“Oh, the road to Avignon, citizen, by a good four miles at least.”

“Then,” he had replied, “go by way of Avignon.”

And the carriage had started again at a gallop, which proclaimed that the citizen travellers, as the postilion called them, although the title of Monsieur was beginning to reappear in conversation, paid a fee of at least thirty sous.

The same desire to lose no time manifested itself at the hotel entrance. There, as on the road, it was the elder of the two travellers who spoke. He asked if they could dine at once, and the way this demand was made indicated that he was ready to overlook many gastronomical exigencies provided that the repast in question be promptly served.

“Citizens,” replied the landlord, who, at the sound of carriage wheels hastened, napkin in hand, to greet the travellers, “you will be promptly and comfortably served in your room; but if you will permit me to advise — ” He hesitated.

“Oh, go on! go on!” said the younger of the travellers, speaking for the first time.

“Well, it would be that you dine at the table d’hôte, like the traveller for whom this coach, already harnessed, is waiting. The dinner is excellent and all served.”

The host at the same time indicated a comfortably appointed carriage, to which were harnessed two horses who were pawing the ground, while the postilion sought patience in the bottle of Cahors wine he was emptying near the window-ledge. The first movement of him to whom this proposal was made was negative; nevertheless, after a second’s reflection, the elder of the two travellers, as if he had reconsidered his first decision, made an interrogative sign to his companion, who replied with a look which signified, “You know that I am at your orders.”

“Very well, so be it,” said the other, “we will dine at the table d’hôte.” Then, turning to the postilion, who, hat in hand, awaited his order, he added, “Let the horses be ready in a half hour, at the latest.”

And the landlord pointing out the way, they both entered the dining-room, the elder of the two walking first, the other following him.

Everyone knows the impression generally produced at a table d’hôte by new-comers. All eyes were bent upon them and the conversation, which seemed to be quite animated, stopped.

The guests consisted of the frequenters of the hotel, the traveller whose carriage was waiting harnessed at the door, a wine merchant from Bordeaux, sojourning temporarily at Avignon for reasons we shall shortly relate, and a certain number of travellers going from Marseilles to Lyons by diligence.

The new arrivals greeted the company with a slight inclination of the head, and sat down at the extreme end of the table, thereby isolating themselves from the other guests by three or four empty places. This seemingly aristocratic reserve redoubled the curiosity of which they were the object; moreover, they were obviously people of unquestionable distinction, although their garments were simple in the extreme. Both wore hightop boots and breeches, long-tailed coats, travelling overcoats and broad-brimmed hats, the usual costume of the young men of that day. But that which distinguished them from the fashionables of Paris, and even of the provinces, was their long straight hair, and their black stocks buckled round the neck, military fashion. The Muscadins — that was the name then given to young dandies — the Muscadins wore dogs' ears puffing at the temples, the rest of the hair combed up tightly in a bag at the back, and an immense cravat with long floating ends, in which the chin was completely buried. Some had even extended this reaction to powder.

As to the personality of the two young men, they presented two diametrically opposite types.

The elder of the two, he who, as we have already remarked, had taken the initiative several times, and whose voice, even in its most familiar intonations, denoted the habit of command, was about thirty years of age. His black hair was parted in the middle, falling straight from his temples to his shoulders. He had the swarthy skin of a man who has travelled long in southern climes, thin lips, a straight nose, white teeth, and those hawk-like eyes which Dante gives to Cæsar. He was short rather than tall, his hand was delicate, his foot slender and elegant. His manner betrayed a certain awkwardness, suggesting that he was at the moment wearing a costume to which he was not accustomed, and when he spoke, his hearers, had they been beside the Loire instead of the Rhone, would have detected a certain Italian accent in his pronunciation.

His companion seemed to be some three or four years younger than he. He was a handsome young man with a rosy complexion, blond hair and light blue eyes, a straight, firm nose and prominent but almost beardless chin. He was perhaps a couple of inches taller than his companion, and though his figure was somewhat above medium height, he was so well proportioned, so admirably free in his movements, that he was evidently if not extraordinarily strong, at least uncommonly agile and dexterous. Although attired in the same manner and apparently on a footing of equality, be evinced remarkable deference to the dark young man, which, as it could not result from age, was doubtless caused by some inferiority of position. Moreover, he called his companion citizen, while the other addressed him as Roland.

These remarks which we make to initiate the reader more profoundly into our story, were probably not made as extensively by the guests at the table d’hôte; for after bestowing a few seconds of attention upon the new-comers, they turned their eyes away, and the conversation, interrupted for an instant, was resumed. It must be confessed that it concerned a matter most interesting to the travellers — that of the stoppage of a diligence bearing a sum of sixty thousand francs belonging to the government. The affair had occurred the day before on the road from Marseilles to Avignon between Lambesc and Pont-Royal.

At the first words referring to this event, the two young men listened with unmistakable interest. It had taken place on the same road which they had just followed, and the narrator, the wine merchant of Bordeaux, had been one of the principal actors in the scene on the highroad. Those who seemed the most curious to hear the details were the travellers in the diligence which had just arrived and was soon to depart. The other guests, who belonged to the locality, seemed sufficiently conversant with such catastrophes to furnish the details themselves instead of listening to them.

“So, citizen,” said a stout gentleman against whom a tall woman, very thin and haggard, was crowding in her terror. “You say that the robbery took place on the very road by which we have just come?”

“Yes, citizen, between Lambesc and Pont-Royal. Did you notice the spot where the road ascends between two high banks? There are a great many rocks there.”

“Yes, yes, my friend,” said the wife, pressing her husband’s arm, “I noticed it; I even said, as you must remember, ‘Here is a bad place; I would rather pass here by day than at night.’“

“Oh! madame,” said a young man whose voice affected to slur his r’s after the fashion of the day, and who probably assumed to lead the conversation at the table d’hôte, on ordinary occasions, “you know the Companions of Jehu know no day or night.”

“What! citizen,” asked the lady still more alarmed, “were you attacked in broad daylight?”

“In broad daylight, citizeness, at ten o’clock in the morning.”

“And how many were there?” asked the stout gentleman.

“Four, citizen.”

“Ambushed beside the road?”

“No; they were on horseback, armed to the teeth and masked.”

“That’s their custom,” said the young frequenter of the table d’hôte, “and they said, did they not: ‘Do not defend yourself, we will not harm you. We only want the government money.’“

“Word for word, citizen.”

“Then,” continued this well-informed young man, “two dismounted from their horses, flinging their bridles to their comrades, and commanded the conductor to deliver up the money.”

“Citizen,” said the stout man astonished, “you describe the thing as if you had seen it.”

“Monsieur was there, perhaps,” said one of the travellers, half in jest, half in earnest.

“I do not know, citizen, whether in saying that you intend a rudeness,” carelessly observed the young man who had so pertinently and obligingly come to the narrator’s assistance, “but my political opinions are such that I do not consider your suspicion an insult. Had I had the misfortune to be among those attacked, or the honor to be one of those who made the attack, I should admit it as frankly in the one case as in the other. But yesterday at ten o’clock, at precisely the moment when the diligence was stopped, twelve miles from here, I was breakfasting quietly in this very seat. And, by-the-bye, with the two citizens who now do me the honor to sit beside me.”

“And,” asked the younger of the two travellers who had lately joined the table, whom his companion called Roland, “how many men were you in the diligence?”

“Let me think; we were — yes, that’s it — we were seven men and three women.”

“Seven men, not including the conductor?” repeated Roland.

“Yes.”

“And you seven men allowed yourselves to be plundered by four brigands? I congratulate you, gentlemen.”

“We knew with whom we had to deal,” replied the wine merchant, “and we took good care not to defend ourselves.”

“What! with whom you had to deal?” retorted the young man. “Why, it seems to me, with thieves and bandits.”

“Not at all. They gave their names.”

"They gave their names?"

"They said, 'Gentlemen, it is useless to defend yourselves; ladies, do not be alarmed, we are not bandits, we are Companions of Jehu.'"

"Yes," said the young man of the table d'hôte, "they warned you that there might be no misunderstanding. That's their way."

"Ah, indeed!" exclaimed Roland; "and who is this Jehu who has such polite companions? Is he their captain?"

"Sir," said a man whose dress betrayed somewhat the secularized priest, and who seemed also to be, not only an habitual guest at the table d'hôte, but also an initiate into the mysteries of the honorable company whose merits were then under discussion, "if you were better versed than you seem to be in the Holy Scriptures, you would know that this Jehu died something like two thousand six hundred years ago, and that consequently he cannot at the present time stop coaches on the highways."

"Monsieur l'Abbé," replied Roland, who had recognized an ecclesiastic, "as, in spite of the sharp tone in which you speak, you seem a man of learning, permit a poor ignoramus to ask you a few details about this Jehu, dead these two thousand six hundred years, who, nevertheless, is honored by followers bearing his name."

"Jehu!" replied the churchman, in the same sour tone, "was a King of Israel anointed by Elisha, on condition that he punish the crimes of the house of Ahab and Jezbel, and put to death the priests of Baal."

"Monsieur l'Abbé," replied the young man laughing, "I thank you for the explanation. I don't doubt it is correct, and, above all, very learned. But I must admit it doesn't tell me much."

"What, citizen!" exclaimed the abbé, "don't you understand that Jehu is his Majesty Louis XVIII., anointed on condition that he punish the crimes of the Revolution and put to death all the priests of Baal; that is to say, all those who had taken any part whatsoever in the abominable state of things which, for these last seven years, has been called the republic?"

"Yes, indeed!" exclaimed the young man; "of course I understand. But among those whom the Companions of Jehu are appointed to fight, do you reckon the brave soldiers who have repulsed the enemy along the frontiers of France, and the illustrious generals who have commanded the armies of the Tyrol, the Sambre-and-Meuse, and of Italy?"

"Why, beyond doubt, those foremost and before all."

The young man’s eyes flashed lightning; his nostrils quivered and his lips tightened. He rose from his chair, but his comrade touched his coat and forced him to sit down again, while with a single glance he silenced him. Then he who had thus given proof of his power, speaking for the first time, addressed the young man of the table d’hôte.

“Citizen, excuse two travellers who are just arrived from the end of the earth, from America, or India as it were. Absent from France these last two years; we are completely ignorant of all that has occurred here, and most desirous to obtain information.”

“Why, as to that,” replied the young man, to whom these words were addressed, “that is but fair, citizen. Question us and we will answer you.”

“Well,” continued the dark young man with the eagle eye, the straight black hair, and the granite complexion, “now that I know who Jehu is, and to what end his company was instituted, I should like to know what his companions do with the money they take.”

“Oh I that is very simple, citizen. You know there is much talk of the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy?”

“No, I did not know it,” replied the dark young man, in a tone which he vainly strove to render artless; “I am but just arrived, as I told you, from the end of the earth.”

“What! you did not know that? Well, six months hence it will be an accomplished fact.”

“Really!”

“I have the honor to tell you so, citizen.”

The two soldier-like young men exchanged a glance and a smile, though the young blond one was apparently chafing under the weight of his extreme impatience.

Their informant continued: “Lyons is the headquarters of the conspiracy, if one can call conspiracy a plot which was organized openly. ‘The provisional government’ would be a more suitable word.”

“Well, then, citizen,” said the dark young man with a politeness not wholly exempt from satire, “let us call it ‘provisional government.’“

“This provisional government has its staff and its armies.”

“Bah! its staff perhaps — but its armies — ”

“Its armies, I repeat.”

“Where are they?”

“One is being organized in the mountains of Auvergne, under the orders of M. de Chardon; another in the Jura Mountains, under M. Teyssonnet; and, finally, a third is operating most successfully at this time, in the Vendée, under the orders of Escarboville, Achille Leblond and Cadoudal.”

“Truly, citizen, you render me a real service in telling me this. I thought the Bourbons completely resigned to their exile. I supposed the police so organized as to suppress both provisional royalist committees in the large towns and bandits on the highways. In fact, I believed the Vendée had been completely pacificated by Hoche.”

The young man to whom this reply was addressed burst out laughing.

“Why, where do you come from?” he exclaimed.

“I told you, citizen, from the end of the earth.”

“So it seems.” Then he continued: “You understand, the Bourbons are not rich, the émigrés whose property was confiscated are ruined. It is impossible to organize two armies and maintain a third without money. The royalists faced an embarrassing problem; the republic alone could pay for its enemies’ troops and, it being improbable that she would do so of her own volition, the shady negotiation was abandoned, and it was adjudged quicker to take the money without permission than to ask her for it.”

“Ah! I understand at last.”

“That’s very fortunate.”

“Companions of Jehu then are the intermediaries between the Republic and the Counter-Revolution, the tax-collectors of the royalist generals?”

“Yes. It is not robbery, but a military operation, rather a feat of arms like any other. So there you are, citizen, and now you are as well informed on this point as ourselves.”

“But,” timidly hazarded the wine merchant of Bordeaux, “if the Companions of Jehu — observe that I say nothing against them — want the government money — ”

“The government money, no other. Individual plunder on their part is unheard of.”

“How does it happen, then, that yesterday, in addition to the government money, they carried off two hundred louis of mine?”

“My dear sir,” replied the young man of the table d’hôte, “I have already told you that there is some mistake. As surely as my name is Alfred de Barjols, this money will be returned to you some day.”

The wine merchant heaved a sigh and shook his head, as if, in spite of that assurance, he still retained some doubts. But at this moment, as if the promise given by the young noble, who had just revealed his social position by telling his name, had stirred the delicacy of those whom he thus guaranteed, a horse stopped at the entrance, steps were heard in the corridor, the dining-room door opened, and a masked man, armed to the teeth, appeared on the threshold.

“Gentlemen,” said he, in the profound silence occasioned by his apparition, “is there a traveller here named Jean Picot, who was in the diligence that was held up yesterday between Lambesc and Pont-Royal?”

“Yes,” said the wine merchant, amazed.

“Are you he?” asked the masked man.

“I am.”

“Was anything taken from you?”

“Oh, yes, two hundred louis, which I had intrusted to the conductor.”

“And I may add,” said the young noble, “that the gentleman was speaking of it at this very moment. He looked upon it as lost.”

“The gentleman was wrong,” said the masked unknown, “we war upon the government and not against individuals. We are partisans and not robbers. Here are your two hundred Louis, sir, and if a similar mistake should occur in the future, claim your loss, mentioning the name of Morgan.”

So saying, the masked individual deposited a bag of gold beside the wine merchant, bowed courteously to the other guests, and went out, leaving some terrified and others bewildered by such daring.

CHAPTER II.

AN ITALIAN PROVERB

Although the two sentiments which we have just indicated were the dominant ones, they did not manifest themselves to an equal degree in all present. The shades were graduated according to the sex, age, character, we may almost say, the social positions of the hearers. The wine merchant, Jean Picot, the principal personage in the late event, recognizing at first sight by his dress, weapons, mask, one of the men who had stopped the coach on the preceding day, was at first sight stupefied, then little by little, as he grasped the purport of this mysterious brigand’s visit to him, he had passed from stupefaction to joy, through the intermediate phases separating these two emotions. His bag of gold was beside him, yet he seemingly dared not touch it; perhaps he feared that the instant his hand went forth toward it, it would melt like the dream-gold which vanishes during that period of progressive lucidity which separates profound slumber from thorough awakening.

The stout gentleman of the diligence and his wife had displayed, like their travelling companions, the most absolute and complete terror. Seated to the left of Jean Picot, when the bandit approached the wine merchant, the husband, in the vain hope of maintaining a respectable distance between himself and the Companion of Jehu, pushed his chair back against that of his wife, who, yielding to the pressure, in turn endeavored to push back hers. But as the next chair was occupied by citizen Alfred de Barjols, who had no reason to fear these men whom he had just praised so highly, the chair of the stout man’s wife encountered an obstacle in the immovability of the young noble; so, as at Marengo, eight or nine months later, when the general in command judged it time to resume the offensive, the retrograde movement was arrested.

As for him — we are speaking of the citizen Alfred de Barjols — his attitude, like that of the abbé who had given the Biblical explanation about Jehu, King of Israel, and his mission from Elisha, his attitude, we say, was that of a man who not only experiences no fear, but who even expects the event in question, however unexpected it may be. His lips wore a smile as he watched the masked man, and had the guests not been so preoccupied with the two principal actors in this scene, they might have remarked the almost imperceptible sign exchanged between the eyes of the bandit and the young noble, and transmitted instantly by the latter to the abbé.

The two travellers whom we introduced to the table d’hôte, and who as we have said sat apart at the end of the table, preserved an attitude conformable to their respective characters. The younger of the two had instinctively put his hand to his side, as if to seek an absent weapon, and had risen with a spring, as if to rush at the masked man’s throat, in which purpose he had certainly not failed had he been alone; but the elder, who seemed to possess not only the habit but the right of command, contented himself by regrasping his coat, and saying, in an imperious, almost harsh tone: “Sit down, Roland!” And the young man had resumed his seat.

But one of the guests had remained, in appearance at least, the most impassible during this scene. He was a man between thirty-three and thirty-four years of age, with blond hair, red beard, a calm, handsome face, with large blue eyes, a fair skin, refined and intelligent lips, and very tall, whose foreign accent betrayed one born in that island of which the government was at that time waging bitter war against France. As far as could be judged by the few words which had escaped him, he spoke the French language with rare purity, despite the accent we have just mentioned. At the first word he uttered, in which that English accent revealed itself, the elder of the two travellers started. Turning to his companion, he asked with a glance, to which the other seemed accustomed, how it was that an Englishman should be in France when the uncompromising war between the two nations had naturally exiled all Englishmen from France, as it had all Frenchmen from England. No doubt the explanation seemed impossible to Roland, for he had replied with his eyes, and a shrug of the shoulders: “I find it quite as extraordinary as you; but if you, mathematician as you are, can’t solve the problem, don’t ask me!”

It was evident to the two young men that the fair man with the Anglo-Saxon accent was the traveller whose comfortable carriage awaited him harnessed in the courtyard, and that this traveller hailed from London, or, at least, from some part of Great Britain.

As to his remarks, they, as we have stated, were infrequent, so laconic, in reality, that they were mere exclamations rather than speech. But each time an explanation had been asked concerning the state of France, the

Englishman openly drew out a note-book and requested those about him, the wine merchant, the abbé, or the young noble to repeat their remarks; to which each had complied with an amiability equal to the courteous tone of the request. He had noted down the most important, extraordinary and, picturesque features of the robbery of the diligence, the state of Vendée, and the details about the Companions of Jehu, thanking each informant by voice and gesture with the stiffness peculiar to our insular cousins, replacing his note-book enriched each time by a new item in a side pocket of his overcoat.

Finally, like a spectator enjoying an unexpected scene, he had given a cry of satisfaction at sight of the masked man, had listened with all his ears, gazed with all his eyes, not losing him from sight until the door closed behind him. Then drawing his note-book hastily from his pocket —

“Ah, sir,” he said to his neighbor, who was no other than the abbé, “will you be so kind, should my memory fail me, as to repeat what that gentleman who has just gone out said?”

He began to write immediately, and the abbé’s memory agreeing with his, he had the satisfaction of transcribing literally and verbatim the speech made by the Companion of Jehu to citizen Jean Picot. Then, this conversation written down, he exclaimed with an accent that lent a singular stamp of originality to his words:

“Of a truth! it is only in France that such things can happen; France is the most curious country in the world. I am delighted, gentlemen, to travel in France and become acquainted with Frenchmen.”

The last sentence was said with such courtesy that nothing remained save to thank the speaker from whose serious mouth it issued, though he was a descendant of the conquerors of Crecy, Poitiers and Agincourt. It was the younger of the two travellers who acknowledged this politeness in that heedless and rather caustic manner which seemed habitual to him.

“‘Pon my word! I am exactly like you, my lord — I say my lord, because I presume you are English.”

“Yes, sir,” replied the gentleman, “I have that honor.”

“Well! as I was saying,” continued the young man, “I am delighted to travel in France and see what I am seeing. One must live under the government of citizens Gohier, Moulins, Roger Ducos, Sièyes and Barras to witness such roguery. I dare wager than when the tale is told, fifty years hence, of the highwayman who rode into a city of thirty thousand inhabitants in broad day, masked and armed with two pistols and a sword at his belt, to return the two hundred louis which he had stolen the day previous to the honest merchant who was then deploring their loss, and when it is added that this occurred at a table d'hôte where twenty or twenty-five people were seated, and that this model bandit was allowed to depart without one of those twenty or twenty-five people daring to molest him; I dare wager, I repeat, that whoever has the audacity to tell the story will be branded as an infamous liar."

And the young man, throwing himself back in his chair, burst into laughter, so aggressive, so nervous, that every one gazed at him in wonderment, while his companion's eyes expressed an almost paternal anxiety.

"Sir," said citizen Alfred de Barjols, who, moved like the others by this singular outburst, more sad, or rather dolorous, than gay, had waited for its last echo to subside. "Sir, permit me to point out to you that the man whom you have just seen is not a highwayman."

"Bah! Frankly, what is he then?"

"He is in all probability a young man of as good a family as yours or mine."

"Count Horn, whom the Regent ordered broken on the wheel at the Place de Grève, was also a man of good family, and the proof is that all the nobility of Paris sent their carriages to his execution."

"Count Horn, if I remember rightly, murdered a Jew to steal a note of hand which he was unable to meet. No one would dare assert that a Companion of Jehu had ever so much as harmed the hair of an infant."

"Well, be it so. We will admit that the Company was founded upon a philanthropic basis, to re-establish the balance of fortunes, redress the whims of chance and reform the abuses of society. Though he may be a robber, after the fashion of Karl Moor, your friend Morgan — was it not Morgan that this honest citizen called himself?"

"Yes," said the Englishman.

"Well, your friend Morgan is none the less a thief."

Citizen Alfred de Barjols turned very pale.

"Citizen Morgan is not my friend," replied the young aristocrat; "but if he were I should feel honored by his friendship."

"No doubt," replied Roland, laughing. "As Voltaire says: 'The friendship of a great man is a blessing from the gods.'"

“Roland, Roland!” observed his comrade in a low tone.

“Oh! general,” replied the latter, letting his companion’s rank escape him, perhaps intentionally, “I implore you, let me continue this discussion, which interests me in the highest degree.”

His friend shrugged his shoulders.

“But, citizen,” continued the young man with strange persistence, “I stand in need of correction. I left France two years ago, and during my absence so many things have changed, such as dress, morals, and accents, that even the language may have changed also. In the language of the day in France what do you call stopping coaches and taking the money which they contain?”

“Sir,” said the young noble, in the tone of a man determined to sustain his argument to its end, “I call that war. Here is your companion whom you have just called general; he as a military man will tell you that, apart from the pleasure of killing and being killed, the generals of all ages have never done anything else than what the citizen Morgan is doing?”

“What!” exclaimed the young man, whose eyes flashed fire. “You dare to compare — ”

“Permit the gentleman to develop his theory, Roland,” said the dark traveller, whose eyes, unlike those of his companion, which dilated as they flamed, were veiled by long black lashes, thus concealing all that was passing in his mind.

“Ah!” said the young man in his curt tone, “you see that you, yourself, are becoming interested in the discussion.” Then, turning to the young noble, whom he seemed to have selected for his antagonist, he said: “Continue, sir, continue; the general permits it.”

The young noble flushed as visibly as he had paled a moment before. Between clinched teeth, his elbow on the table, his chin on his clinched hand, as if to draw as close to his adversary as possible, he said with a Provençal accent, which grew more pronounced as the discussion waxed hotter: “Since *the general* permits” — emphasizing the two words — ”I shall have the honor to tell him and you, too, citizen, that I believe I have read in Plutarch that Alexander the Great, when he started for India, took with him but eighteen or twenty talents in gold, something like one hundred or one hundred and twenty thousand francs. Now, do you suppose that with these eighteen or twenty talents alone he fed his army, won the battle of Granicus, subdued Asia Minor, conquered Tyre, Gaza, Syria and Egypt, built Alexandria, penetrated to Lybia, had himself declared Son of Jupiter by the oracle of Ammon, penetrated as far as the Hyphases, and, when his soldiers refused to follow him further, returned to Babylon, where he surpassed in luxury, debauchery and self-indulgence the most debauched and voluptuous of the kings of Asia? Did Macedonia furnish his supplies? Do you believe that King Philip, most indigent of the kings of poverty-stricken Greece, honored the drafts his son drew upon him? Not so. Alexander did as citizen Morgan is doing; only, instead of stopping the coaches on the highroads, he pillaged cities, held kings for ransom, levied contributions from the conquered countries. Let us turn to Hannibal. You know how he left Carthage, don't you? He did not have even the eighteen or twenty talents of his predecessor; and as he needed money, he seized and sacked the city of Saguntum in the midst of peace, in defiance of the fealty of treaties. After that he was rich and could begin his campaign. Forgive me if this time I no longer quote Plutarch, but Cornelius Nepos. I will spare you the details of his descent from the Pyrenees, how he crossed the Alps and the three battles which he won, seizing each time the treasures of the vanquished, and turn to the five or six years he spent in Campania. Do you believe that he and his army paid the Capuans for their subsistence, and that the bankers of Carthage, with whom he had quarrelled, supplied him with funds? No; war fed war — the Morgan system, citizen. Let us pass on to Cæsar. Ah, Cæsar! That's another story. He left for Spain with some thirty millions of debt, and returned with practically the same. He started for Gaul, where he spent ten years with our ancestors. During these ten years he sent over one hundred millions to Rome, repassed the Alps, crossed the Rubicon, marched straight to the Capitol, forced the gates of the Temple of Saturn, where the treasury was, seized sufficient for his private needs — and not for those of the Republic — three thousand pounds of gold in ingots; and died (he whom creditors twenty years earlier refused to allow to leave his little house in the Suburra) leaving two or three thousand sesterces per head to the citizens, ten or twelve millions to Calpurnia, and thirty or forty millions to Octavius; always the Morgan system, save that Morgan, I am sure, would die sooner than subvert to his personal needs either the silver of the Gauls or the gold of the capital. Now let us spring over eighteen centuries and come to the General Buonaparté." And the young aristocrat, after the fashion of the enemies of the Conqueror of Italy, affected to emphasize the *u*, which Bonaparte had eliminated from his name, and the *e*, from which he had removed the accent.

This affectation seemed to irritate Roland intensely. He made a movement as if to spring forward, but his companion stopped him.

“Let be,” said he, “let be, Roland. I am quite sure that citizen Barjols will not say the General Buonaparté, as he calls him, is a thief.”

“No, I will not say it; but there is an Italian proverb which says it for me.”

“What is the proverb?” demanded the general in his companion’s stead, fixing his calm, limpid eye upon the young noble.

“I give it in all its simplicity: ‘Francesi non sono tutti ladroni, ma buona parte’; which means: ‘All Frenchmen are not thieves, but — ”

“A good part are?” concluded Roland.

“Yes, ‘Buonaparté,’“ replied Alfred de Barjols.

Scarcely had these insolent words left the young aristocrat’s lips than the plate with which Roland was playing flew from his hands and struck De Barjols full in the face. The women screamed, the men rose to their feet. Roland burst into that nervous laugh which was habitual with him, and threw himself back in his chair. The young aristocrat remained calm, although the blood was trickling from his brow to his cheek.

At this moment the conductor entered with the usual formula:

“Come! citizen travellers, take your places.”

The travellers, anxious to leave the scene of the quarrel, rushed to the door.

“Pardon me, sir,” said Alfred de Barjols to Roland, “you do not go by diligence, I hope?”

“No, sir, I travel by post; but you need have no fear; I shall not depart.”

“Nor I,” said the Englishman. “Have them unharness my horses; I shall remain.”

“I must go,” sighed the dark young man whom Roland had addressed as general. “You know it is necessary, my friend; my presence yonder is absolutely imperative. But I swear that I would not leave you if I could possibly avoid it.”

In saying these words his voice betrayed an emotion of which, judging from its usual harsh, metallic ring, it had seemed incapable. Roland, on the contrary, seemed overjoyed. His belligerent nature seemed to expand at the approach of a danger to which he had perhaps not given rise, but which he at least had not endeavored to avoid.

“Good! general,” he said. “We were to part at Lyons, since you have had the kindness to grant me a month’s furlough to visit my family at Bourg. It is merely some hundred and sixty miles or so less than we intended, that is all. I shall rejoin you in Paris. But you know if you need a devoted arm, and a man who never sulks, think of me!”

“You may rest easy on that score, Roland,” exclaimed the general. Then, looking attentively at the two adversaries, he added with an indescribable note of tenderness: “Above all, Roland, do not let yourself be killed; but if it is a possible thing don’t kill your adversary. Everything considered, he is a gallant man, and the day will come when I shall need such men at my side.”

“I shall do my best, general; don’t be alarmed.” At this moment the landlord appeared upon the thresh-hold of the door.

“The post-chaise is ready,” said he.

The general took his hat and his cane, which he had laid upon the chair. Roland, on the contrary, followed him bareheaded, that all might see plainly he did not intend to leave with his friend. Alfred de Barjols, therefore, offered no opposition to his leaving the room. Besides, it was easy to see that his adversary was of those who seek rather than avoid quarrels.

“Just the same,” said the general, seating himself in the carriage to which Roland had escorted him, “my heart is heavy at leaving you thus, Roland, without a friend to act as your second.”

“Good! Don’t worry about that, general; seconds are never lacking. There are and always will be enough men who are curious to see how one man can kill another.”

“Au revoir, Roland. Observe, I do not say farewell, but au revoir!”

“Yes, my dear general,” replied the young man, in a voice that revealed some emotion, “I understand, and I thank you.”

“Promise that you will send me word as soon as the affair is over, or that you will get some one to write if you are disabled.”

“Oh, don’t worry, general. You will have a letter from me personally in less than four days,” replied Roland, adding, in a tone of profound bitterness: “Have you not perceived that I am protected by a fatality which prevents me from dying?”

“Roland!” exclaimed the general in a severe tone, “Again!”

“Nothing, nothing,” said the young man, shaking his head and assuming an expression of careless gayety which must have been habitual with him before the occurrence of that unknown misfortune which oppressed his youth with this longing for death.

“Very well. By the way, try to find out one thing.”

“What is that, general?”

“How it happens that at a time when we are at war with England an Englishman stalks about France as freely and as easily as if he were at home.”

“Good; I will find out.”

“How?”

“I do not know; but when I promise you to find out I shall do so, though I have to ask it of himself.”

“Reckless fellow! Don’t get yourself involved in another affair in that direction.”

“In any case, it would not be a duel. It would be a battle, as he is a national enemy.”

“Well, once more — till I see you again. Embrace me.”

Roland flung himself with passionate gratitude upon the neck of the personage who had just given him this permission.

“Oh, general!” he exclaimed, “how happy I should be — if I were not so unhappy!”

The general looked at him with profound affection, then asked: “One day you will tell me what this sorrow is, will you not, Roland?”

Roland laughed that sorrowful laugh which had already escaped his lips once or twice.

“Oh! my word, no,” said he, “you would ridicule me too much.”

The general stared at him as one would contemplate a madman.

“After all,” he murmured, “one must accept men as they come.”

“Especially when they are not what they seem to be.”

“You must mistake me for OEdipe since you pose me with these enigmas, Roland.”

“Ah! If you guess this one, general, I will herald you king of Thebes! But, with all my follies, I forgot that your time is precious and that I am detaining you needlessly with my nonsense.”

“That is so! Have you any commissions for Paris?”

“Yes, three; my regards to Bourrienne, my respects to your brother Lucien, and my most tender homage to Madame Bonaparte.”

“I will deliver them.”

“Where shall I find you in Paris?”

“At my house in the Rue de la Victoire, perhaps.”

“Perhaps — ”

“Who knows? Perhaps at Luxembourg!” Then throwing himself back as if he regretted having said so much, even to a man he regarded as his best friend, he shouted to the postilion, “Road to Orange! As fast as possible.”

The postilion, who was only waiting for the order, whipped up his horses; the carriage departed rapidly, rumbling like a roll of thunder, and disappeared through the Porte d’Oulle.

CHAPTER III.

THE ENGLISHMAN

Roland remained motionless, not only as long as he could see the carriage, but long after it had disappeared. Then, shaking his head as if to dispel the cloud which darkened his brow, he re-entered the inn and asked for a room.

"Show the gentleman to number three," said the landlord to a chambermaid.

The chambermaid took a key hanging from a large black wooden tablet on which were arranged the numbers in white in two rows, and signed to the young traveller to follow her.

"Send up some paper, and a pen and ink," Roland said to the landlord, "and if M. de Barjols should ask where I am tell him the number of my room."

The landlord promised to obey Roland's injunctions and the latter followed the girl upstairs whistling the Marseillaise. Five minutes later he was seated at a table with the desired paper, pen and ink before him preparing to write. But just as he was beginning the first line some one knocked, three times at the door.

"Come in," said he, twirling his chair on one of its hind legs so as to face his visitor, whom he supposed to be either, M. de Barjols or one of his friends.

The door opened with a steady mechanical motion and the Englishman appeared upon the threshold.

"Ah!" exclaimed Roland, enchanted with this visit, in view of his general's recommendation; "is it you?"

"Yes," said the Englishman, "it is I."

"You are welcome."

"Oh! if I am welcome, so much the better! I was not sure that I ought to come."

"Why not?"

"On account of Aboukir."

Roland began to laugh.

“There are two battles of Aboukir,” said he; “one which we lost; the other we won.”

“I referred to the one you lost.”

“Good!” said Roland, “we fight, kill, and exterminate each other on the battlefield, but that does not prevent us from clasping hands on neutral ground. So I repeat, you are most welcome, especially if you will tell me why you have come.”

“Thank you; but, in the first place, read that.” And the Englishman drew a paper from his pocket.

“What is that?” asked Roland.

“My passport.”

“What have I to do with your passport?” asked Roland, “I am not a gendarme.”

“No, but I have come to offer you my services. Perhaps you will not accept them if you do not know who I am.”

“Your services, sir?”

“Yes; but read that first.”

Roland read:

> In the name of the French Republic — The Executive Directory hereby
> orders that Sir John Tanlay, Esq., be permitted to travel freely
> throughout the territory of the Republic, and that both assistance
> and protection be accorded him in case of need.
>
> (Signed) FOUCHÉ.

And below:

> To whom it may concern — I recommend Sir John Tanlay particularly
> as a philanthropist and a friend of liberty.
>
> (Signed) BARRAS.

“Have you read it?”

“Yes; what of it?”

“What of it? Well, my father, Lord Tanlay, rendered M. Barras some services; that is why M. Barras permits me to roam about France. And I am very glad to roam about; it amuses me very much.”

“Oh, I remember, Sir John; you did us the honor to say so at dinner.”

“I did say so, it is true; I also said that I liked the French people heartily.”

Roland bowed.

“And above all General Bonaparte,” continued Sir John.

“You like General Bonaparte very much?”

"I admire him; he is a great, a very great, man."

"By Heavens! Sir John, I am sorry he is not here to hear an Englishman say that of him."

"Oh! if he were here I should not say it."

"Why not?"

"I should not want him to think I was trying to please him. I say so because it is my opinion."

"I don't doubt it, my lord," said Roland, who did not see what the Englishman was aiming at, and who, having learned all that he wished to know through the passport, held himself upon his guard.

"And when I heard," continued the Englishman with the same phlegm, "you defend General Bonaparte, I was much pleased."

"Really?"

"Much pleased," repeated the Englishman, nodding his head affirmatively.

"So much the better!"

"But when I saw you throw a plate at M. Alfred de Barjols' head, I was much grieved."

"You were grieved, my lord, and why?"

"Because in England no gentleman would throw a plate at the head of another gentleman."

"My lord," said Roland, rising with a frown, "have you perchance come here to read me a lecture?"

"Oh, no; I came to suggest that you are perhaps perplexed about finding a second?"

"My faith, Sir John! I admit that the moment when you knocked at the door I was wondering of whom I could ask this service."

"Of me, if you wish," said the Englishman. "I will be your second."

"On my honor!" exclaimed Roland, "I accept with all my heart."

"That is the service I wished to render you!"

Roland held out his hand, saying: "Thank you!"

The Englishman bowed.

"Now," continued Roland, "as you have had the good taste, my lord, to tell me who you were before offering your services, it is but fair that, since I accept them, I should tell you who I am."

"Oh! as you please."

“My name is Louis de Montrevel; I am aide-de-camp to General Bonaparte.”

“Aide-de-camp to General Bonaparte. I am very glad.”

“That will explain why I undertook, rather too warmly perhaps, my general’s defence.”

“No, not too warmly; only, the plate — ”

“Oh, I know well that the provocation did not entail that plate. But what would you have me do! I held it in my hand, and, not knowing what to do with it, I threw it at M. de Barjols’ head; it went of itself without any will of mine.”

“You will not say that to him?”

“Reassure yourself; I tell you to salve your conscience.”

“Very well; then you will fight?”

“That is why I have remained here, at any rate.”

“What weapons?”

“That is not our affair, my lord.”

“What! not our affair?”

“No; M. de Barjols is the one insulted; the choice is his.”

“Then you will accept whatever he proposes?”

“Not I, Sir John, but you in my name, since you do me the honor to act as my second.”

“And if he selects pistols, what is the distance to be and how will you fight?”

“That is your affair, my lord, and not mine. I don’t know how you do in England, but in France the principals take no part in the arrangements. That duty devolves upon the seconds; what they decide is well decided!”

“Then my arrangements will be satisfactory?”

“Perfectly so, my lord.”

The Englishman bowed.

“What hour and what day?”

“Oh! as soon as possible; I have not seen my family for two years, and I confess that I am in a hurry to greet them.”

The Englishman looked at Roland with a certain wonder; he spoke with such assurance, as if he were certain that he would not be killed. Just then some one knocked at the door, and the voice of the innkeeper asked: “May I come in?”

The young man replied affirmatively. The door opened and the landlord entered, holding a card in his hand which he handed his guest. The young man took the card and read: “Charles du Valensolle.”

“From M. Alfred de Barjols,” said the host.

“Very well!” exclaimed Roland. Then handing the card to the Englishman, he said: “Here, this concerns you; it is unnecessary for me to see this monsieur — since we are no longer citizens — M. de Valensolle is M. de Barjols’ second; you are mine. Arrange this affair between you. Only,” added the young man, pressing the Englishman’s hand and looking fixedly at him, “see that it holds a chance of certain death for one of us. Otherwise I shall complain that it has been bungled.”

“Don’t worry,” said the Englishman, “I will act for you as for myself.”

“Excellent! Go now, and when everything is arranged come back. I shall not stir from here.”

Sir John followed the innkeeper. Roland reseated himself, twirled his chair back to its former position facing the table, took up his pen and began to write.

When Sir John returned, Roland had written and sealed two letters and was addressing a third. He signed to the Englishman to wait until he had finished, that he might give him his full attention. Then, the address finished, he sealed the letter, and turned around.

“Well,” he asked, “is everything arranged?”

“Yes,” said the Englishman, “it was an easy matter. You are dealing with a true gentleman.”

“So much the better!” exclaimed Roland, waiting.

“You will fight two hours hence by the fountain of Vaucluse — a charming spot — with pistols, advancing to each other, each to fire as he pleases and continuing to advance after his adversary’s fire.”

“By my faith! you are right, Sir John. That is, indeed, excellent. Did you arrange that?”

“I and M. de Barjols’ second, your adversary having renounced his rights of the insulted party.”

“Have you decided upon the weapons?”

“I offered my pistols. They were accepted on my word of honor that you were as unfamiliar with them as was M. de Barjols. They are excellent weapons. I can cut a bullet on a knife blade at twenty paces.”

“Peste! You are a good shot, it would seem, my lord.”

"Yes, I am said to be the best shot in England."

"That is a good thing to know. When I wish to be killed, Sir John, I'll pick a quarrel with you."

"Oh! don't pick a quarrel with me," said the Englishman, "it would grieve me too much to have to fight you."

"We will try, my lord, not to cause you such grief. So it is settled then, in two hours."

"Yes, you told me you were in a hurry."

"Precisely. How far is it to this charming spot?"

"From here to Vaucluse?"

"Yes."

"Twelve miles."

"A matter of an hour and a half. We have no time to lose, so let us rid ourselves of troublesome things in order to have nothing but pleasure before us."

The Englishman looked at the young man in astonishment. Roland did not seem to pay any attention to this look.

"Here are three letters," said he; "one for Madame de Montrevel, my mother; one for Mlle. de Montrevel, my sister; one for the citizen, Bonaparte, my general. If I am killed you will simply put them in the post. Will that be too much trouble?"

"Should that misfortune occur, I will deliver your letters myself," said the Englishman. "Where do your mother and sister live?"

"At Bourg, the capital of the Department of Ain."

"That is near here," observed the Englishman. "As for General Bonaparte, I will go to Egypt if necessary. I should be extremely pleased to meet General Bonaparte."

"If you take the trouble, as you say, my lord, of delivering my letters yourself, you will not have to travel such a distance. Within three days General Bonaparte will be in Paris."

"Oh!" said the Englishman, without betraying the least surprise, "do you think so?"

"I am sure of it," replied Roland.

"Truly, he is a very extraordinary man, your General Bonaparte. Now, have you any other recommendations to make to me, M. de Montrevel?"

"One only, my lord."

"Oh! as many as you please."

“No, thank you, one only, but that is very important.”

“What is it?”

“If I am killed — but I doubt if I be so fortunate.”

Sir John looked at Roland with that expression of wonder which he had already awakened three or four times.

“If I am killed,” resumed Roland; “for after all one must be prepared for everything — ”

“Yes, if you are killed, I understand.”

“Listen well, my lord, for I place much stress on my directions being carried out exactly in this matter.”

“Every detail shall be observed,” replied Sir John, “I am very punctilious.”

“Well, then, if I am killed,” insisted Roland, laying his hand upon his second’s shoulder, to impress his directions more firmly on his memory, “you must not permit any one to touch my body, which is to be placed in a leaden coffin without removing the garments I am wearing; the coffin you will have soldered in your presence, then inclosed in an oaken bier, which must also be nailed up in your presence. Then you will send it to my mother, unless you should prefer to throw it into the Rhone, which I leave absolutely to your discretion, provided only that it be disposed of in some way.”

“It will be no more difficult,” replied the Englishman, “to take the coffin, since I am to deliver your letter.”

“Decidedly, my lord,” said Roland, laughing in his strange way. “You are a capital fellow. Providence in person brought us together. Let us start, my lord, let us start!”

They left Roland’s room; Sir John’s chamber was on the same floor. Roland waited while the Englishman went in for his weapons. He returned a few seconds later, carrying the box in his hand.

“Now, my lord,” asked Roland, “how shall we reach Vaucluse? On horseback or by carriage?”

“By carriage, if you are willing. It is much more convenient in case one is wounded. Mine is waiting below.”

“I thought you had given the order to have it unharnessed?”

“I did, but I sent for the postilion afterward and countermanded it.”

They went downstairs.

“Tom! Tom!” called Sir John at the door, where a servant, in the severe livery of an English groom, was waiting, “take care of this box.”

“Am I going with you, my lord?” asked the servant.

“Yes!” replied Sir John.

Then showing Roland the steps of his carriage, which the servant lowered, he said:

“Come, M. de Montrevel.”

Roland entered the carriage and stretched himself out luxuriously.

“Upon my word!” said he. “It takes you English to understand travelling. This carriage is as comfortable as a bed. I warrant you pad your coffins before you are put in them!”

“Yes, that is a fact,” said Sir John, “the English people understand comfort, but the French people are much more curious and amusing — postilion, to Vaucluse!”

CHAPTER IV.

THE DUEL

The road was passable only from Avignon to l’Isle. They covered the nine miles between the two places in an hour. During this hour Roland, as he resolved to shorten the time for his travelling companion, was witty and animated, and their approach to the duelling ground only served to redouble his gayety. To one unacquainted with the object of this drive, the menace of dire peril impending over this young man, with his continuous flow of conversation and incessant laughter, would have seemed incredible.

At the village of l’Isle they were obliged to leave the carriage. Finding on inquiry that they were the first to arrive, they entered the path which led to the fountain.

“Oh! oh!” exclaimed Roland, “there ought to be a fine echo here.” And he gave one or two cries to which Echo replied with perfect amiability.

“By my faith!” said the young man, “this is a marvellous echo. I know none save that of the Seinonnetta, at Milan, which can compare with it. Listen, my lord.”

And he began, with modulations which revealed an admirable voice and an excellent method, to sing a Tyrolean song which seemed to bid defiance to the human throat with its rebellious music. Sir John watched Roland, and listened to him with an astonishment which he no longer took the trouble to conceal. When the last note had died away among the cavities of the mountain, he exclaimed:

“God bless me! but I think your liver is out of order.”

Roland started and looked at him interrogatively. But seeing that Sir John did not intend to say more, he asked:

“Good! What makes you think so?”

“You are too noisily gay not to be profoundly melancholy.”

“And that anomaly astonishes you?”

“Nothing astonishes me, because I know that it has always its reason for existing.”

“True, and it’s all in knowing the secret. Well, I’m going to enlighten you.”

“Oh! I don’t want to force you.”

“You’re too polite to do that; still, you must admit you would be glad to have your mind set at rest about me.”

“Because I’m interested in you.”

“Well, Sir John, I am going to tell you the secret of the enigma, something I have never done with any one before. For all my seeming good health, I am suffering from a horrible aneurism that causes me spasms of weakness and faintness so frequent as to shame even a woman. I spend my life taking the most ridiculous precautions, and yet Larrey warns me that I am liable to die any moment, as the diseased artery in my breast may burst at the least exertion. Judge for yourself how pleasant for a soldier! You can understand that, once I understood my condition, I determined incontinently to die with all the glory possible. Another more fortunate than I would have succeeded a hundred times already. But I’m bewitched; I am impervious alike to bullets and balls; even the swords seem to fear to shatter themselves upon my skin. Yet I never miss an opportunity; that you must see, after what occurred at dinner. Well, we are going to fight. I’ll expose myself like a maniac, giving my adversary all the advantages, but it will avail me nothing. Though he shoot at fifteen paces, or even ten or five, at his very pistol’s point, he will miss me, or his pistol will miss fire. And all this wonderful luck that some fine day when I least expect it, I may die pulling on my boots! But hush I here comes my adversary.”

As he spoke the upper half of three people could be seen ascending the same rough and rocky path that Roland and Sir John had followed, growing larger as they approached. Roland counted them.

“Three!” he exclaimed. “Why three, when we are only two?”

“Ah! I had forgotten,” replied the Englishman. “M. de Barjols, as much in your interest as in his own, asked permission to bring a surgeon, one of his friends.”

“What for?” harshly demanded Roland, frowning.

“Why, in case either one of you was wounded. A man’s life can often be saved by bleeding him promptly.”

“Sir John,” exclaimed Roland, ferociously, “I don’t understand these delicacies in the matter of a duel. When men fight they fight to kill. That they exchange all sorts of courtesies beforehand, as your ancestors did at

Fontenoy, is all right; but, once the swords are unsheathed or the pistols loaded, one life must pay for the trouble they have taken and the heart beats they have lost. I ask you, on your word of honor, Sir John, to promise that, wounded or dying, M. de Barjols' surgeon shall not be allowed to touch me."

"But suppose, M. Roland — "

"Take it or leave it. Your word of honor, my lord, or devil take me if I fight at all."

The Englishman again looked curiously at the young man. His face was livid, and his limbs quivered as though in extreme terror. Sir John, without understanding this strange dread, passed his word.

"Good!" exclaimed Roland. "This, you see, is one of the effects of my charming malady. The mere thought of surgical instruments, a bistoury or a lance, makes me dizzy. Didn't I grow very pale?"

"I did think for an instant you were going to faint."

"What a stunning climax!" exclaimed Roland with a laugh. "Our adversaries arrive and you are dosing me with smelling salts like a hysterical woman. Do you know what they, and you, first of all, would have said? That I was afraid."

Meantime, the three new-comers having approached within earshot, Sir John was unable to answer Roland. They bowed, and Roland, with a smile that revealed his beautiful teeth, returned their greeting. Sir John whispered in his ear:

"You are still a trifle pale. Go on toward the fountain; I will fetch you when we are ready."

"Ah! that's the idea," said Roland. "I have always wanted to see that famous fountain of Vaucluse, the Hippocrene of Petrarch. You know his sonnet?

"'Chiari, fresche e dolci acque
Ove le belle membra
Pose colei, che sola a me perdona.'

This opportunity lost, I may never have another. Where is your fountain?"

"Not a hundred feet off. Follow the path; you'll find it at the turn of the road, at the foot of that enormous bowlder you see."

"My lord," said Roland, "you are the best guide I know; thanks!"

And, with a friendly wave of the hand, he went off in the direction of the fountain, humming the charming pastoral of Philippe Desportes beneath his breath:

“‘Rosette, a little absence
Has turned thine heart from me;
I, knowing that inconstance,
Have turned my heart from thee.
No wayward beauty o’er me
Such power shall obtain;
We’ll see, my fickle lassie,
Who first will turn again.’“

Sir John turned as he heard the modulations of that fresh sweet voice, whose higher notes had something at a feminine quality. His cold methodical mind understood nothing of that nervous impulsive nature, save that he had under his eyes one of the most amazing organisms one could possibly meet.

The other two young men were waiting for him; the surgeon stood a little apart. Sir John carried his box of pistols in his hands. Laying it upon a table-shaped rock, he drew a little key from his pocket, apparently fashioned by a goldsmith rather than a locksmith, and opened the box. The weapons were magnificent, although of great simplicity. They came from Manton’s workshop, the grandfather of the man who is still considered one of the best gunsmiths in London. He handed them to M. de Barjols’ second to examine. The latter tried the triggers and played with the lock, examining to see if they were double-barrelled. They were single-barrelled. M. de Barjols cast a glance at them but did not even touch them.

“Our opponent does not know these weapons?” queried M. Valensolle.

“He has not even seen them,” replied Sir John, “I give you my word of honor.”

“Oh!” exclaimed M. de Valensolle, “a simple denial suffices.”

The conditions of the duel were gone over a second time to avoid possible misunderstanding. Then, these conditions determined, the pistols were loaded. They were then placed, loaded, in the box, the box left in the surgeon’s charge, and Sir John, with the key in his pocket, went after Roland.

He found him chatting with a little shepherd boy who was herding three goats on the steep rocky slope of the mountain, and throwing pebbles into the fountain. Sir John opened his lips to tell Roland that all was ready; but the latter, without giving the Englishman time to speak, exclaimed:

“You don’t know what this child has been telling me, my lord! A perfect legend of the Rhine. He says that this pool, whose depth is unknown, extends six or eight miles under the mountain, and a fairy, half woman half serpent, dwells here. Calm summer nights she glides over the surface of water calling to the shepherds of the mountains, showing them, of course, nothing more than her head with its long locks and her beautiful bare shoulders and arms. The fools, caught by this semblance of a woman, draw nearer, beckoning to her to come to them, while she on her side signs to them to go to her. The unwary spirits advance unwittingly, giving no heed to their steps. Suddenly the earth fails them, the fairy reaches out her arms, and plunges down into her dripping palaces, to reappear the next day alone. Where the devil did these idiots of shepherds get the tale that Virgil related in such noble verse to Augustus and Mecænas?”

He remained pensive an instant, his eyes bent upon the azure depths, then turning to Sir John:

“They say that, no matter how vigorous the swimmer, none has ever returned from this abyss. Perhaps were I to try it, my lord, it might be surer than M. de Barjols’ bullet. However, it always remains as a last resort; in the meantime let us try the bullet. Come, my lord, come.”

Then turning to the Englishman, who listened, amazed by this mobility of mind, he led him back to the others who awaited them. They in the meantime had found a suitable place.

It was a little plateau, perched as it were on a rocky proclivity, jutting from the mountain side, exposed to the setting sun, on which stood a ruined castle where the shepherds were wont to seek shelter when the mistral overtook them. A flat space, some hundred and fifty feet long, and sixty wide, which might once have been the castle platform, was now to be the scene of the drama which was fast approaching its close.

“Here we are, gentlemen,” said Sir John.

“We are ready, gentlemen,” replied M. de Valensolle.

“Will the principals kindly listen to the conditions of the duel?” said Sir John. Then addressing M. de Valensolle, he added: “Repeat them, monsieur; you are French and I am a foreigner, you will explain them more clearly than I.”

"You belong to those foreigners, my lord, who teach us poor Provençals the purity of our language; but since you so courteously make me spokesman, I obey you." Then exchanging bows with Sir John, he continued: "Gentlemen, it is agreed that you stand at forty paces, that you advance toward each other, that each will fire at will, and wounded or not will have the right to advance after your adversary's fire."

The two combatants bowed in sign of assent, and with one voice, and almost at the same moment, they said:

"The pistols!"

Sir John drew the little key from his pocket and opened the box. Then approaching M. de Barjols he offered it to him open. The latter wished to yield the choice of weapons to his opponent; but with a wave of his hand Roland refused, saying in a tone almost feminine in its sweetness:

"After you, M. de Barjols. Although you are the insulted party, you have, I am told, renounced your advantages. The least I can do is to yield you this one, if for that matter it is an advantage."

M. de Barjols no longer insisted. He took one of the two pistols at random. Sir John offered the other to Roland, who took it, and, without even examining its mechanism, cocked the trigger, then let it fall at arm's-length at his side.

During this time M. de Valensolle had measured forty paces, staking a cane as a point of departure.

"Will you measure after me?" he asked Sir John.

"Needless, sir," replied the latter: "M. de Montrevel and myself rely entirely upon you."

M. de Valensolle staked a second cane at the fortieth pace.

"Gentlemen," said he, "when you are ready."

Roland's adversary was already at his post, hat and cloak removed. The surgeon and the two seconds stood aside. The spot had been so well chosen that neither had any advantage of sun or ground. Roland tossed off hat and coat, stationed himself forty paces from M. de Barjols, facing him. Both, one to right the other to the left, cast a glance at the same horizon. The aspect harmonized with the terrible solemnity of the scene about to take place.

Nothing was visible to Roland's right and to M. de Barjols' left, except the mountain's swift incline and gigantic peak. But on the other side, that is to say, to M. de Barjols' right and Roland's left, it was a far different thing.

The horizon stretched illimitable. In the foreground, the plain, its ruddy soil pierced on all sides by rocks, like a Titan graveyard with its bones protruding through the earth. Then, sharply outlined in the setting sun, was Avignon with its girdle of walls and its vast palace, like a crouching lion, seeming to hold the panting city in its claws. Beyond Avignon, a luminous sweep, like a river of molten gold, defined the Rhone. Beyond the Rhone, a deep-hued azure vista, stretched the chain of hills which separate Avignon from Nimes and d'Uzes. And far off, the sun, at which one of these two men was probably looking for the last time, sank slowly and majestically in an ocean of gold and purple.

For the rest these two men presented a singular contrast. One, with his black hair, swarthy skin, slender limbs and sombre eyes, was the type of the Southern race which counts among its ancestors Greeks, Romans, Arabs and Spaniards. The other, with his rosy skin, large blue eyes, and hands dimpled like a woman's, was the type of that race of temperate zones which reckons Gauls, Germans and Normans among its forebears.

Had one wished to magnify the situation it were easy to believe this something greater than single combat between two men. One might have thought it was a duel of a people against another people, race against race, the South against the North.

Was it these thoughts which we have just expressed that filled Roland's mind and plunged him into that melancholy revery.

Probably not; the fact is, for an instant he seemed to have forgotten seconds, duel, adversary, lost as he was in contemplation of this magnificent spectacle. M. de Barjols' voice aroused him from this poetical stupor.

"When you are ready, sir," said he, "I am."

Roland started.

"Pardon my keeping you waiting, sir," said he. "You should not have considered me, I am so absent-minded. I am ready now."

Then, a smile on his lips, his hair lifted by the evening breeze, unconcerned as if this were an ordinary promenade, while his opponent, on the contrary, took all the precaution usual in such a case, Roland advanced straight toward M. de Barjols.

Sir John's face, despite his ordinary impassibility, betrayed a profound anxiety. The distance between the opponents lessened rapidly. M. de Barjols halted first, took aim, and fired when Roland was but ten paces from him.

The ball clipped one of Roland’s curls, but did not touch him. The young man turned toward his second:

“Well,” said he, “what did I tell you?”

“Fire, monsieur, fire!” said the seconds.

M. de Barjols stood silent and motionless on the spot where he had fired.

“Pardon me, gentlemen,” replied Roland; “but you will, I hope, permit me to be the judge of the time and manner of retaliating. Since I have felt M. de Barjols’ shot, I have a few words to say to him which I could not say before.” Then, turning to the young aristocrat, who was pale and calm, he said: “Sir, perhaps I was somewhat too hasty in our discussion this morning.”

And he waited.

“It is for you to fire, sir,” replied M. de Barjols.

“But,” continued Roland, as if he had not heard, “you will understand my impetuosity, and perhaps excuse it, when you hear that I am a soldier and General Bonaparte’s aide-de-camp.”

“Fire, sir,” replied the young nobleman.

“Say but one word of retraction, sir,” resumed the young officer. “Say that General Bonaparte’s reputation for honor and delicacy is such that a miserable Italian proverb, inspired by ill-natured losers, cannot reflect discredit on him. Say that, and I throw this weapon away to grasp your hand; for I recognize in you, sir, a brave man.”

“I cannot accord that homage to his honor and delicacy until your general has devoted the influence which his genius gives him over France as Monk did — that is to say, to reinstate his legitimate sovereign upon the throne.”

“Ah!” cried Roland, with a smile, “that is asking too much of a republican general.”

“Then I maintain what I said,” replied the young noble. “Fire! monsieur, fire!” Then as Roland made no haste to obey this injunction, he shouted, stamping his foot: “Heavens and earth! will you fire?”

At these words Roland made a movement as if he intended to fire in the air.

“Ah!” exclaimed M. de Barjols. Then with a rapidity of gesture and speech that prevented this, “Do not fire in the air, I beg, or I shall insist that we begin again and that you fire first.”

“On my honor!” cried Roland, turning as pale as if the blood had left his body, “this is the first time I have done so much for any man. Go to the devil! and if you don't want to live, then die!"

At the same time he lowered his arm and fired, without troubling to take aim.

Alfred de Barjols put his hand to his breast, swayed back and forth, turned around and fell face down upon the ground. Roland's bullet had gone through his heart.

Sir John, seeing M. de Barjols fall, went straight to Roland and drew him to the spot where he had thrown his hat and coat.

"That is the third," murmured Roland with a sigh; "but you are my witness that this one would have it."

Then giving his smoking pistol to Sir John, he resumed his hat and coat. During this time M. de Valensolle picked up the pistol which had escaped from his friend's hand, and brought it, together with the box, to Sir John.

"Well?" asked the Englishman, motioning toward Alfred de Barjols with his eyes.

"He is dead," replied the second.

"Have I acted as a man of honor, sir?" asked Roland, wiping away the sweat which suddenly inundated his brow at the announcement of his opponent's death.

"Yes, monsieur," replied M. de Valensolle; "only, permit me to say this: you possess the fatal hand."

Then bowing to Roland and his second with exquisite politeness, he returned to his friend's body.

"And you, my lord," resumed Roland, "what do you say?"

"I say," replied Sir John, with a sort of forced admiration, "you are one of those men who are made by the divine Shakespeare to say of themselves:

"'Danger and I —
We were two lions littered in one day,
But I the elder.'"

CHAPTER V.

ROLAND

The return was silent and mournful; it seemed that with the hopes of death Roland's gayety had disappeared.

The catastrophe of which he had been the author played perhaps a part in his taciturnity. But let us hasten to say that in battle, and more especially during the last campaign against the Arabs, Roland had been too frequently obliged to jump his horse over the bodies of his victims to be so deeply impressed by the death of an unknown man.

His sadness was, due to some other cause; probably that which he confided to Sir John. Disappointment over his own lost chance of death, rather than that other's decease, occasioned this regret.

On their return to the Hotel du Palais-Royal, Sir John mounted to his room with his pistols, the sight of which might have excited something like remorse in Roland's breast. Then he rejoined the young officer and returned the three letters which had been intrusted to him.

He found Roland leaning pensively on a table. Without saying a word the Englishman laid the three letters before him. The young man cast his eyes over the addresses, took the one destined for his mother, unsealed it and read it over. As he read, great tears rolled down his cheeks. Sir John gazed wonderingly at this new phase of Roland's character. He had thought everything possible to this many-sided nature except those tears which fell silently from his eyes.

Shaking his head and paying not the least attention to Sir John's presence, Roland murmured:

"Poor mother! she would have wept. Perhaps it is better so. Mothers were not made to weep for their children!"

He tore up the letters he had written to his mother, his sister, and General Bonaparte, mechanically burning the fragments with the utmost care. Then ringing for the chambermaid, he asked:

"When must my letters be in the post?"

"Half-past six," replied she. "You have only a few minutes more."

"Just wait then."

And taking a pen he wrote:

> My DEAR GENERAL — It is as I told you; I am living and he is dead. You must admit that this seems like a wager. Devotion to death.
>
> Your Paladin
>
> ROLAND.

Then he sealed the letter, addressed it to General Bonaparte, Rue de la Victoire, Paris, and handed it to the chambermaid, bidding her lose no time in posting it. Then only did he seem to notice Sir John, and held out his hand to him.

"You have just rendered me a great service, my lord," he said. "One of those services which bind men for all eternity. I am already your friend; will you do me the honor to become mine?"

Sir John pressed the hand that Roland offered him.

"Oh!" said he, "I thank you heartily. I should never have dared ask this honor; but you offer it and I accept."

Even the impassible Englishman felt his heart soften as he brushed away the tear that trembled on his lashes. Then looking at Roland, he said: "It is unfortunate that you are so hurried; I should have been pleased and delighted to spend a day or two with you."

"Where were you going, my lord, when I met you?"

"Oh, I? Nowhere. I am travelling to get over being bored. I am unfortunately often bored."

"So that you were going nowhere?"

"I was going everywhere."

"That is exactly the same thing," said the young officer, smiling. "Well, will you do something for me?"

"Oh! very willingly, if it is possible."

"Perfectly possible; it depends only on you."

"What is it?"

"Had I been killed you were going to take me to my mother or throw me into the Rhone."

"I should have taken you to your mother and not thrown you into the Rhone."

"Well, instead of accompanying me dead, take me living. You will be all the better received."

"Oh!"

"We will remain a fortnight at Bourg. It is my natal city, and one of the dullest towns in France; but as your compatriots are pre-eminent for originality, perhaps you will find amusement where others are bored. Are we agreed?"

"I should like nothing better," exclaimed the Englishman; "but it seems to me that it is hardly proper on my part."

"Oh! we are not in England, my lord, where etiquette holds absolute sway. We have no longer king nor queen. We didn't cut off that poor creature's head whom they called Marie Antoinette to install Her Majesty, Etiquette, in her stead."

"I should like to go," said Sir John.

"You'll see, my mother is an excellent woman, and very distinguished besides. My sister was sixteen when I left; she must be eighteen now. She was pretty, and she ought to be beautiful. Then there is my brother Edouard, a delightful youngster of twelve, who will let off fireworks between your legs and chatter a gibberish of English with you. At the end of the fortnight we will go to Paris together."

"I have just come from Paris," said the Englishman.

"But listen. You were willing to go to Egypt to see General Bonaparte. Paris is not so far from here as Cairo. I'll present you, and, introduced by me, you may rest assured that you will be well received. You were speaking of Shakespeare just now — "

"Oh! I am always quoting him."

"Which proves that you like comedies and dramas."

"I do like them very much, that's true."

"Well, then, General Bonaparte is going to produce one in his own style which will not be wanting in interest, I answer for it!"

"So that," said Sir John, still hesitating, "I may accept your offer without seeming intrusive?"

"I should think so. You will delight us all, especially me."

"Then I accept."

"Bravo! Now, let's see, when will you start?"

"As soon as you wish. My coach was harnessed when you threw that unfortunate plate at Barjols' head. However, as I should never have known you but for that plate, I am glad you did throw it at him!”

“Shall we start this evening?”

“Instantly. I’ll give orders for the postilion to send other horses, and once they are here we will start.”

Roland nodded acquiescence. Sir John went out to give his orders, and returned presently, saying they had served two cutlets and a cold fowl for them below. Roland took his valise and went down. The Englishman placed his pistols in the coach box again. Both ate enough to enable them to travel all night, and as nine o’clock was striking from the Church of the Cordeliers they settled themselves in the carriage and quitted Avignon, where their passage left a fresh trail of blood, Roland with the careless indifference of his nature, Sir John Tanlay with the impassibility of his nation. A quarter of an hour later both were sleeping, or at least the silence which obtained induced the belief that both had yielded to slumber.

We shall profit by this instant of repose to give our readers some indispensable information concerning Roland and his family.

Roland was born the first of July, 1773, four years and a few days later than Bonaparte, at whose side, or rather following him, he made his appearance in this book. He was the son of M. Charles de Montrevel, colonel of a regiment long garrisoned at Martinique, where he had married a creole named Clotilde de la Clémencière. Three children were born of this marriage, two boys and a girl: Louis, whose acquaintance we have made under the name of Roland, Amélie, whose beauty he had praised to Sir John, and Edouard.

Recalled to France in 1782, M. de Montrevel obtained admission for young Louis de Montrevel (we shall see later how the name of Louis was changed to Roland) to the Ecole Militaire in Paris.

It was there that Bonaparte knew the child, when, on M. de Keralio’s report, he was judged worthy of promotion from the Ecole de Brienne to the Ecole Militaire. Louis was the youngest pupil. Though he was only thirteen, he had already made himself remarked for that ungovernable and quarrelsome nature of which we have seen him seventeen years later give an example at the table d’hôte at Avignon.

Bonaparte, a child himself, had the good side of this character; that is to say, without being quarrelsome, he was firm, obstinate, and unconquerable. He recognized in the child some of his own qualities, and this similarity of sentiments led him to pardon the boy’s defects, and attached him to him. On the other hand the child, conscious of a supporter in the Corsican, relied upon him.

One day the child went to find his great friend, as he called Napoleon, when the latter was absorbed in the solution of a mathematical problem. He knew the importance the future artillery officer attached to this science, which so far had won him his greatest, or rather his only successes.

He stood beside him without speaking or moving. The young mathematician felt the child’s presence, and plunged deeper and deeper into his mathematical calculations, whence he emerged victorious ten minutes later. Then he turned to his young comrade with that inward satisfaction of a man who issues victorious from any struggle, be it with science or things material.

The child stood erect, pale, his teeth clinched, his arms rigid and his fists closed.

“Oh! oh!” said young Bonaparte, “what is the matter now?”

“Valence, the governor’s nephew, struck me.”

“Ah!” said Bonaparte, laughing, “and you have come to me to strike him back?”

The child shook his head.

“No,” said he, “I have come to you because I want to fight him — ”

“Fight Valence?”

“Yes.”

“But Valence will beat you, child; he is four times as strong as you.”

“Therefore I don’t want to fight him as children do, but like men fight.”

“Pooh!”

“Does that surprise you?” asked the child.

“No,” said Bonaparte; “what do you want to fight with?”

“With swords.”

“But only the sergeants have swords, and they won’t lend you one.”

“Then we will do without swords.”

“But what will you fight with?”

The child pointed to the compass with which the young mathematician had made his equations.

“Oh! my child,” said Bonaparte, “a compass makes a very bad wound.”

“So much the better,” replied Louis; “I can kill him.”

“But suppose he kills you?”

“I’d rather that than bear his blow.”

Bonaparte made no further objections; he loved courage, instinctively, and his young comrade's pleased him.

"Well, so be it!" he replied; "I will tell Valence that you wish to fight him, but not till to-morrow."

"Why to-morrow?"

"You will have the night to reflect."

"And from now till to-morrow," replied the child, "Valence will think me a coward." Then shaking his head, "It is too long till to-morrow." And he walked away.

"Where are you going?" Bonaparte asked him.

"To ask some one else to be my friend."

"So I am no longer your friend?"

"No, since you think I am a coward."

"Very well," said the young man rising.

"You will go?"

"I am going."

"At once?"

"At once."

"Ah!" exclaimed the child, "I beg your pardon; you are indeed my friend." And he fell upon his neck weeping. They were the first tears he had shed since he had received the blow.

Bonaparte went in search of Valence and gravely explained his mission to him. Valence was a tall lad of seventeen, having already, like certain precocious natures, a beard and mustache; he appeared at least twenty. He was, moreover, a head taller than the boy he had insulted.

Valence replied that Louis had pulled his queue as if it were a bell-cord (queues were then in vogue) — that he had warned him twice to desist, but that Louis had repeated the prank the third time, whereupon, considering him a mischievous youngster, he had treated him as such.

Valence's answer was reported to Louis, who retorted that pulling a comrade's queue was only teasing him, whereas a blow was an insult. Obstinacy endowed this child of thirteen with the logic of a man of thirty.

The modern Popilius to Valence returned with his declaration of war. The youth was greatly embarrassed; he could not fight with a child without being ridiculous. If he fought and wounded him, it would be a horrible thing; if he himself were wounded, he would never get over it so long as he lived.

But Louis’s unyielding obstinacy made the matter a serious one. A council of the Grands (elder scholars) was called, as was usual in serious cases. The Grands decided that one of their number could not fight a child; but since this child persisted in considering himself a young man, Valence must tell him before all his schoolmates that he regretted having treated him as a child, and would henceforth regard him as a young man.

Louis, who was waiting in his friend’s room, was sent for. He was introduced into the conclave assembled in the playground of the younger pupils.

There Valence, to whom his comrades had dictated a speech carefully debated among themselves to safeguard the honor of the Grands toward the Petits, assured Louis that he deeply deplored the occurrence; that he had treated him according to his age and not according to his intelligence and courage, and begged him to excuse his impatience and to shake hands in sign that all was forgotten.

But Louis shook his head.

“I heard my father, who is a colonel, say once,” he replied, “that he who receives a blow and does not fight is a coward. The first time I see my father I shall ask him if he who strikes the blow and then apologizes to avoid fighting is not more of a coward than he who received it.”

The young fellows looked at each other. Still the general opinion was against a duel which would resemble murder, and all, Bonaparte included, were unanimously agreed that the child must be satisfied with what Valence had said, for it represented their common opinion. Louis retired, pale with anger, and sulked with his great friend, who, said he, with imperturbable gravity, had sacrificed his honor.

The morrow, while the Grands were receiving their lesson in mathematics, Louis slipped into the recitation-room, and while Valence was making a demonstration on the blackboard, he approached him unperceived, climbed on a stool to reach his face, and returned the slap he had received the preceding day.

“There,” said he, “now we are quits, and I have your apologies to boot; as for me, I shan’t make any, you may be quite sure of that.”

The scandal was great. The act occurring in the professor’s presence, he was obliged to report it to the governor of the school, the Marquis Tiburce Valence. The latter, knowing nothing of the events leading up to the blow his nephew had received, sent for the delinquent and after a terrible lecture informed him that he was no longer a member of the school, and must be ready to return to his mother at Bourg that very day. Louis replied that his things would be packed in ten minutes, and he out of the school in fifteen. Of the blow he himself had received he said not a word.

The reply seemed more than disrespectful to the Marquis Tiburce Valence. He was much inclined to send the insolent boy to the dungeon for a week, but reflected that he could not confine him and expel him at the same time.

The child was placed in charge of an attendant, who was not to leave him until he had put him in the coach for Mâcon; Madame de Montrevel was to be notified to meet him at the end of the journey.

Bonaparte meeting the boy, followed by his keeper, asked an explanation of the sort of constabulary guard attached to him.

“I’d tell you if you were still my friend,” replied the child; “but you are not. Why do you bother about what happens to me, whether good or bad?”

Bonaparte made a sign to the attendant, who came to the door while Louis was packing his little trunk. He learned then that the child had been expelled. The step was serious; it would distress the entire family, and perhaps ruin his young comrade’s future.

With that rapidity of decision which was one of the distinctive characteristics of his organization, he resolved to ask an audience of the governor, meantime requesting the keeper not to hasten Louis’s departure.

Bonaparte was an excellent pupil, beloved in the school, and highly esteemed by the Marquis Tiburce Valence. His request was immediately complied with. Ushered into the governor’s presence, he related everything, and, without blaming Valence in the least, he sought to exculpate Louis.

“Are you sure of what you are telling me, sir?” asked the governor.

“Question your nephew himself. I will abide by what he says.”

Valence was sent for. He had already heard of Louis’s expulsion, and was on his way to tell his uncle what had happened. His account tallied perfectly with what you Bonaparte had said.

“Very well,” said the governor, “Louis shall not go, but you will. You are old enough to leave school.” Then ringing, “Bring me the list of the vacant sub-lieutenancies,” he said.

That same day an urgent request for a sub-lieutenancy was made to the Ministry, and that same night Valence left to join his regiment. He went to bid Louis farewell, embracing him half willingly, half unwillingly, while Bonaparte held his hand. The child received the embrace reluctantly.

"It's all right now," said he, "but if ever we meet with swords by our sides — " A threatening gesture ended the sentence.

Valence left. Bonaparte received his own appointment as sub-lieutenant October 10, 1785. His was one of fifty-eight commissions which Louis XVI. signed for the Ecole Militaire. Eleven years later, November 15, 1796, Bonaparte, commander-in-chief of the army of Italy, at the Bridge of Arcola, which was defended by two regiments of Croats and two pieces of cannon, seeing his ranks disseminated by grapeshot and musket balls, feeling that victory was slipping through his fingers, alarmed by the hesitation of his bravest followers, wrenched the tri-color from the rigid fingers of a dead color-bearer, and dashed toward the bridge, shouting: "Soldiers! are you no longer the men of Lodi?" As he did so he saw a young lieutenant spring past him who covered him with his body.

This was far from what Bonaparte wanted. He wished to cross first. Had it been possible he would have gone alone.

Seizing the young man by the flap of his coat, he drew him back, saying: "Citizen, you are only a lieutenant, I a commander-in-chief! The precedence belongs to me."

"Too true," replied the other; and he followed Bonaparte instead of preceding him.

That evening, learning that two Austrian divisions had been cut to pieces, and seeing the two thousand prisoners he had taken, together with the captured cannons and flags, Bonaparte recalled the young man who had sprung in front of him when death alone seemed before him.

"Berthier," said he, "tell my aide-de-camp, Valence, to find that young lieutenant of grenadiers with whom I had a controversy this morning at the Bridge of Arcola."

"General," stammered Berthier, "Valence is wounded."

"Ah! I remember I have not seen him to-day. Wounded? Where? How? On the battlefield?"

"No, general," said he, "he was dragged into a quarrel yesterday, and received a sword thrust through his body."

Bonaparte frowned. "And yet they know very well I do not approve of duels; a soldier's blood belongs not to himself, but to France. Give Muiron the order then."

"He is killed, general."

"To Elliot, in that case."

"Killed also."

Bonaparte drew his handkerchief from his pocket and passed it over his brow, which was bathed with sweat.

"To whom you will, then; but I want to see that lieutenant."

He dared not name any others, fearing to hear again that fatal "Killed!"

A quarter of an hour later the young lieutenant was ushered into his tent, which was lighted faintly by a single lamp.

"Come nearer, lieutenant," said Bonaparte.

The young man made three steps and came within the circle of light.

"So you are the man who wished to cross the bridge before me?" continued Bonaparte.

"It was done on a wager, general," gayly answered the young lieutenant, whose voice made the general start.

"Did I make you lose it?"

"Maybe, yes; maybe, no."

"What was the wager?"

"That I should be promoted captain to-day."

"You have won it."

"Thank you, general."

The young man moved hastily forward as if to press Bonaparte's hand, but checked himself almost immediately. The light had fallen full on his face for an instant; that instant sufficed to make the general notice the face as he had the voice. Neither the one nor the other was unknown to him. He searched his memory for an instant, but finding it rebellious, said: "I know you!"

"Possibly, general."

"I am certain; only I cannot recall your name."

"You managed that yours should not be forgotten, general."

"Who are you?"

"Ask Valence, general."

Bonaparte gave a cry of joy.

"Louis de Montrevel," he exclaimed, opening wide his arms. This time the young lieutenant did not hesitate to fling himself into them.

"Very good," said Bonaparte; "you will serve eight days with the regiment in your new rank, that they may accustom themselves to your captain’s epaulets, and then you will take my poor Muiron’s place as aide-de-camp. Go!”

“Once more!” cried the young man, opening his arms.

“Faith, yes!” said Bonaparte, joyfully. Then holding him close after kissing him twice, “And so it was you who gave Valence that sword thrust?”

“My word!” said the new captain and future aide-de-camp, “you were there when I promised it to him. A soldier keeps his word.”

Eight days later Captain Montrevel was doing duty as staff-officer to the commander-in-chief, who changed his name of Louis, then in ill-repute, to that of Roland. And the young man consoled himself for ceasing to be a descendant of St. Louis by becoming the nephew of Charlemagne.

Roland — no one would have dared to call Captain Montrevel Louis after Bonaparte had baptized him Roland — made the campaign of Italy with his general, and returned with him to Paris after the peace of Campo Formio.

When the Egyptian expedition was decided upon, Roland, who had been summoned to his mother’s side by the death of the Brigadier-General de Montrevel, killed on the Rhine while his son was fighting on the Adige and the Mincio, was among the first appointed by the commander-in-chief to accompany him in the useless but poetical crusade which he was planning. He left his mother, his sister Amélie, and his young brother Edouard at Bourg, General de Montrevel’s native town. They resided some three-quarters of a mile out of the city, at Noires-Fontaines, a charming house, called a château, which, together with the farm and several hundred acres of land surrounding it, yielded an income of six or eight thousand livres a year, and constituted the general’s entire fortune. Roland’s departure on this adventurous expedition deeply afflicted the poor widow. The death of the father seemed to presage that of the son, and Madame de Montrevel, a sweet, gentle Creole, was far from possessing the stern virtues of a Spartan or Lacedemonian mother.

Bonaparte, who loved his old comrade of the Ecole Militaire with all his heart, granted him permission to rejoin him at the very last moment at Toulon. But the fear of arriving too late prevented Roland from profiting by this permission to its full extent. He left his mother, promising her — a promise he was careful not to keep — that he would not expose himself unnecessarily, and arrived at Marseilles eight days before the fleet set sail.

Our intention is no more to give the history of the campaign of Egypt than we did that of Italy. We shall only mention that which is absolutely necessary to understand this story and the subsequent development of Roland’s character. The 19th of May, 1798, Bonaparte and his entire staff set sail for the Orient; the 15th of June the Knights of Malta gave up the keys of their citadel. The 2d of July the army disembarked at Marabout, and the same day took Alexandria; the 25th, Bonaparte entered Cairo, after defeating the Mamelukes at Chebreïss and the Pyramids.

During this succession of marches and battles, Roland had been the officer we know him, gay, courageous and witty, defying the scorching heat of the day, the icy dew of the nights, dashing like a hero or a fool among the Turkish sabres or the Bedouin bullets. During the forty days of the voyage he had never left the interpreter Ventura; so that with his admirable facility he had learned, if not to speak Arabic fluently, at least to make himself understood in that language. Therefore it often happened that, when the general did not wish to use the native interpreter, Roland was charged with certain communications to the Muftis, the Ulemas, and the Sheiks.

During the night of October 20th and 21st Cairo revolted. At five in the morning the death of General Dupey, killed by a lance, was made known. At eight, just as the revolt was supposedly quelled, an aide-de-camp of the dead general rode up, announcing that the Bedouins from the plains were attacking Bab-el-Nasr, or the Gate of Victory.

Bonaparte was breakfasting with his aide-de-camp Sulkowsky, so severely wounded at Salahieh that he left his pallet of suffering with the greatest difficulty only. Bonaparte, in his preoccupation forgetting the young Pole’s condition, said to him: “Sulkowsky, take fifteen Guides and go see what that rabble wants.”

Sulkowsky rose.

“General,” interposed Roland, “give me the commission. Don’t you see my comrade can hardly stand?”

“True,” said Bonaparte; “do you go!”

Roland went out and took the fifteen Guides and started. But the order had been given to Sulkowsky, and Sulkowsky was determined to execute it. He set forth with five or six men whom he found ready.

Whether by chance, or because he knew the streets of Cairo better than Roland, he reached the Gate of Victory a few seconds before him. When Roland arrived, he saw five or six dead men, and an officer being led away by the Arabs, who, while massacring the soldiers mercilessly, will sometimes spare the officers in hope of a ransom. Roland recognized Sulkowsky; pointing him out with his sabre to his fifteen men, he charged at a gallop.

Half an hour later, a Guide, returning alone to head-quarters, announced the deaths of Sulkowsky, Roland and his twenty-one companions.

Bonaparte, as we have said, loved Roland as a brother, as a son, as he loved Eugene. He wished to know all the details of the catastrophe, and questioned the Guide. The man had seen an Arab cut off Sulkowsky's head and fasten it to his saddle-bow. As for Roland, his horse had been killed. He had disengaged himself from the stirrups and was seen fighting for a moment on foot; but he had soon disappeared in a general volley at close quarters.

Bonaparte sighed, shed a tear and murmured: "Another!" and apparently thought no more about it. But he did inquire to what tribe belonged these Bedouins, who had just killed two of the men he loved best. He was told that they were an independent tribe whose village was situated some thirty miles off. Bonaparte left them a month, that they might become convinced of their impunity; then, the month elapsed, he ordered one of his aides-de-camp, named Crosier, to surround the village, destroy the huts, behead the men, put them in sacks, and bring the rest of the population, that is to say, the women and children, to Cairo.

Crosier executed the order punctually; all the women and children who could be captured were brought to Cairo, and also with them one living Arab, gagged and bound to his horse's back.

"Why is this man still alive?" asked Bonaparte. "I ordered you to behead every man who was able to bear arms."

"General," said Crosier, who also possessed a smattering of Arabian words, "just as I was about to order his head cut off, I understood him to offer to exchange a prisoner for his life. I thought there would be time enough to cut off his head, and so brought him with me. If I am mistaken, the ceremony can take place here as well as there; what is postponed is not abandoned."

The interpreter Ventura was summoned to question the Bedouin. He replied that he had saved the life of a French officer who had been grievously wounded at the Gate of Victory, and that this officer, who spoke a little Arabic, claimed to be one of General Bonaparte's aides-de-camp. He had sent him to his brother who was a physician in a neighboring tribe, of which this officer was a captive; and if they would promise to spare his life, he would write to his brother to send the prisoner to Cairo.

Perhaps this was a tale invented to gain time, but it might also be true; nothing was lost by waiting.

The Arab was placed in safe keeping, a scribe was brought to write at his dictation. He sealed the letter with his own seal, and an Arab from Cairo was despatched to negotiate the exchange. If the emissary succeeded, it meant the Bedouin's life and five hundred piastres to the messenger.

Three days later he returned bringing Roland. Bonaparte had hoped for but had not dared to expect this return.

This heart of iron, which had seemed insensible to grief, was now melted with joy. He opened his arms to Roland, as on the day when he had found him, and two tears, two pearls — the tears of Bonaparte were rare — fell from his eyes.

But Roland, strange as it may seem, was sombre in the midst of the joy caused by his return. He confirmed the Arab's tale, insisted upon his liberation, but refused all personal details about his capture by the Bedouins and the treatment he had received at the hands of the doctor. As for Sulkowsky, he had been killed and beheaded before his eyes, so it was useless to think more of him. Roland resumed his duties, but it was noticeable his native courage had become temerity, and his longing for glory, desire for death.

On the other hand, as often happens with those who brave fire and sword, fire and sword miraculously spared him. Before, behind and around Roland men fell; he remained erect, invulnerable as the demon of war. During the campaign in Syria two emissaries were sent to demand the surrender of Saint Jean d'Acre of Djezzar Pasha. Neither of the two returned; they had been beheaded. It was necessary to send a third. Roland applied for the duty, and so insistent was he, that he eventually obtained the general's permission and returned in safety. He took part in each of the nineteen assaults made upon the fortress; at each assault he was seen entering the breach. He was one of the ten men who forced their way into the Accursèd Tower; nine remained, but he returned without a scratch. During the retreat, Bonaparte commanded his cavalry to lend their horses to the wounded and sick. All endeavored to avoid the contagion of the pest-ridden sick. To them Roland gave his horse from preference. Three fell dead from the saddle; he mounted his horse after them, and reached Cairo safe and sound. At Aboukir he flung himself into the mélée, reached the Pasha by forcing his way through the guard of blacks who surrounded him; seized him by the beard and received the fire of his two pistols. One burned the wadding only, the other ball passed under his arm, killing a guard behind him.

When Bonaparte resolved to return to France, Roland was the first to whom the general announced his intention. Another had been overjoyed; but he remained sombre and melancholy, saying: “I should prefer to remain here, general. There is more chance of my being killed here.”

But as it would have appeared ungrateful on his part to refuse to follow the general, he returned with him. During the voyage he remained sad and impenetrable, until the English fleet was sighted near Corsica. Then only did he regain his wonted animation. Bonaparte told Admiral Gantheaume that he would fight to the death, and gave orders to sink the frigate sooner than haul down the flag. He passed, however, unseen through the British fleet, and disembarked at Frejus, October 8, 1799.

All were impatient to be the first to set foot on French soil. Roland was the last. Although the general paid no apparent attention to these details, none escaped him. He sent Eugène, Berthier, Bourrienne, his aides-de-camp and his suite by way of Gap and Draguignan, while he took the road to Aix strictly incognito, accompanied only by Roland, to judge for himself of the state of the Midi. Hoping that the joy of seeing his family again would revive the love of life in his heart crushed by its hidden sorrow, he informed Roland at Aix that they would part at Lyons, and gave him three weeks’ furlough to visit his mother and sister.

Roland replied: “Thank you, general. My sister and my mother will be very happy to see me.” Whereas formerly his words would have been: “Thank you, general. I shall be very happy to see my mother and sister again.”

We know what occurred at Avignon; we have seen with what profound contempt for danger, bitter disgust of life, Roland had provoked that terrible duel. We heard the reason he gave Sir John for this indifference to death. Was it true or false? Sir John at all events was obliged to content himself with it, since Roland was evidently not disposed to furnish any other.

And now, as we have said, they were sleeping or pretending to sleep as they were drawn by two horses at full speed along the road of Avignon to Orange.

CHAPTER VI.

MORGAN

Our readers must permit us for an instant to abandon Roland and Sir John, who, thanks to the physical and moral conditions in which we left them, need inspire no anxiety, while we direct our attention seriously to a personage who has so far made but a brief appearance in this history, though he is destined to play an important part in it.

We are speaking of the man who, armed and masked, entered the room of the table d’hôte at Avignon to return Jean Picot the two hundred louis which had been stolen from him by mistake, stored as it had been with the government money.

We speak of the highwayman, who called himself Morgan. He had ridden into Avignon, masked, in broad daylight, entered the hotel of the Palais-Egalité leaving his horse at the door. This horse had enjoyed the same immunity in the pontifical and royalist town as his master; he found it again at the horse post, unfastened its bridle, sprang into the saddle, rode through the Porte d’Oulle, skirting the walls, and disappeared at a gallop along the road to Lyons. Only about three-quarters of a mile from Avignon, he drew his mantle closer about him, to conceal his weapons from the passers, and removing his mask he slipped it into one of the holsters of his saddle.

The persons whom he had left at Avignon who were curious to know if this could be the terrible Morgan, the terror of the Midi, might have convinced themselves with their own eyes, had they met him on the road between Avignon and Bédarides, whether the bandit’s appearance was as terrifying as his renown. We do not hesitate to assert that the features now revealed would have harmonized so little with the picture their prejudiced imagination had conjured up that their amazement would have been extreme.

The removal of the mask, by a hand of perfect whiteness and delicacy, revealed the face of a young man of twenty-four or five years of age, a face that, by its regularity of feature and gentle expression, had something of the character of a woman’s. One detail alone gave it or rather would give it at certain moments a touch of singular firmness. Beneath the beautiful fair hair waving on his brow and temples, as was the fashion at that period, eyebrows, eyes and lashes were black as ebony. The rest of the face was, as we have said, almost feminine. There were two little ears of which only the tips could be seen beneath the tufts of hair to which the Incroyables of the day had given the name of “dog’s-ears”; a straight, perfectly proportioned nose, a rather large mouth, rosy and always smiling, and which, when smiling, revealed a double row of brilliant teeth; a delicate refined chin faintly tinged with blue, showing that, if the beard had not been carefully and recently shaved, it would, protesting against the golden hair, have followed the same color as the brows, lashes and eyes, that is to say, a decided black. As for the unknown’s figure, it was seen, when he entered the dining-room, to be tall, well-formed and flexible, denoting, if not great muscular strength, at least much suppleness and agility.

The manner he sat his horse showed him to be a practiced rider. With his cloak thrown back over his shoulders, his mask hidden in the holster, his hat pulled low over his eyes, the rider resumed his rapid pace, checked for an instant, passed through Bédarides at a gallop, and reaching the first houses in Orange, entered the gate of one which closed immediately behind him. A servant in waiting sprang to the bit. The rider dismounted quickly.

“Is your master here?” he asked the domestic.

“No, Monsieur the Baron,” replied the man; “he was obliged to go away last night, but he left word that if Monsieur should ask for him, to say that he had gone in the interests of the Company.”

“Very good, Baptiste. I have brought back his horse in good condition, though somewhat tired. Rub him down with wine, and give him for two or three days barley instead of oats. He has covered something like one hundred miles since yesterday morning.”

“Monsieur the Baron was satisfied with him?”

“Perfectly satisfied. Is the carriage ready?”

“Yes, Monsieur the Baron, all harnessed in the coach-house; the postilion is drinking with Julien. Monsieur recommended that he should be kept outside the house that he might not see him arrive.”

“He thinks he is to take your master?”

“Yes, Monsieur the Baron. Here is my master’s passport, which we used to get the post-horses, and as my master has gone in the direction of Bordeaux with Monsieur the Baron’s passport, and as Monsieur the Baron goes toward Geneva with my master's passport, the skein will probably be so tangled that the police, clever as their fingers are, can't easily unravel it."

"Unfasten the valise that is on the croup of my saddle, Baptiste, and give it to me."

Baptiste obeyed dutifully, but the valise almost slipped from his hands. "Ah!" said he laughing, "Monsieur the Baron did not warn me! The devil! Monsieur the Baron has not wasted his time it seems."

"Just where you're mistaken, Baptiste! if I didn't waste all my time, I at least lost a good deal, so I should like to be off again as soon as possible."

"But Monsieur the Baron will breakfast?"

"I'll eat a bite, but quickly."

"Monsieur will not be delayed. It is now two, and breakfast has been ready since ten this morning. Luckily it's a cold breakfast."

And Baptiste, in the absence of his master, did the honors of the house to the visitor by showing him the way to the dining-room.

"Not necessary," said the visitor, "I know the way. Do you see to the carriage; let it be close to the house with the door wide open when I come out, so that the postilion can't see me. Here's the money to pay him for the first relay."

And the stranger whom Baptiste had addressed as Baron handed him a handful of notes.

"Why, Monsieur," said the servant, "you have given me enough to pay all the way to Lyons!"

"Pay him as far as Valence, under pretext that I want to sleep, and keep the rest for your trouble in settling the accounts."

"Shall I put the valise in the carriage-box?"

"I will do so myself."

And taking the valise from the servant's hands, without letting it be seen that it weighed heavily, he turned toward the dining-room, while Baptiste made his way toward the nearest inn, sorting his notes as he went.

As the stranger had said, the way was familiar to him, for he passed down a corridor, opened a first door without hesitation, then a second, and found himself before a table elegantly served. A cold fowl, two partridges, a ham, several kinds of cheese, a dessert of magnificent fruit, and two decanters, the one containing a ruby-colored wine, and the other a yellow-topaz, made a breakfast which, though evidently intended for but one person, as only one place was set, might in case of need have sufficed for three or four.

The young man’s first act on entering the dining-room was to go straight to a mirror, remove his hat, arrange his hair with a little comb which he took from his pocket; after which he went to a porcelain basin with a reservoir above it, took a towel which was there for the purpose, and bathed his face and hands. Not until these ablutions were completed — characteristic of a man of elegant habits — not until these ablutions had been minutely performed did the stranger sit down to the table.

A few minutes sufficed to satisfy his appetite, to which youth and fatigue had, however, given magnificent proportions; and when Baptiste came in to inform the solitary guest that the carriage was ready he found him already afoot and waiting.

The stranger drew his hat low over his eyes, wrapped his coat about him, took the valise under his arm, and, as Baptiste had taken pains to lower the carriage-steps as close as possible to the door, he sprang into the post-chaise without being seen by the postilion. Baptiste slammed the door after him; then, addressing the man in the top-boots:

“Everything is paid to Valence, isn’t it, relays and fees?” he asked.

“Everything; do you want a receipt?” replied the postilion, jokingly.

“No; but my master, the Marquise de Ribier, don’t want to be disturbed until he gets to Valence.”

“All right,” replied the postilion, in the same bantering tone, “the citizen Marquis shan’t be disturbed. Forward, hoop-la!” And he started his horses, and cracked his whip with that noisy eloquence which says to neighbors and passers-by: “‘Ware here, ‘ware there! I am driving a man who pays well and who has the right to run over others.”

Once in the carriage the pretended Marquis of Ribier opened the window, lowered the blinds, raised the seat, put his valise in the hollow, sat down on it, wrapped himself in his cloak, and, certain of not being disturbed till he reached Valence, slept as he had breakfasted, that is to say, with all the appetite of youth.

They went from Orange to Valence in eight hours. Our traveller awakened shortly before entering the city. Raising one of the blinds cautiously, he recognized the little suburb of Paillasse. It was dark, so he struck his repeater and found it was eleven at night. Thinking it useless to go to sleep again, he added up the cost of the relays to Lyons and counted out the money. As the postilion at Valence passed the comrade who replaced him, the traveller heard him say:

"It seems he's a ci-devant; but he was recommended from Orange, and, as he pays twenty sous fees, you must treat him as you would a patriot."

"Very well," replied the other; "he shall be driven accordingly."

The traveller thought the time had come to intervene. He raised the blind and said:

"And you'll only be doing me justice. A patriot? Deuce take it! I pride myself upon being one, and of the first calibre, too! And the proof is — Drink this to the health of the Republic." And he handed a hundred-franc assignat to the postilion who had recommended him to his comrade. Seeing the other looking eagerly at this strip of paper, he continued: "And the same to you if you will repeat the recommendation you've just received to the others."

"Oh! don't worry, citizen," said the postilion; "there'll be but one order to Lyons — full speed!"

"And here is the money for the sixteen posts, including the double post of entrance in advance. I pay twenty sous fees. Settle it among yourselves."

The postilion dug his spurs into his horse and they were off at a gallop. The carriage relayed at Lyons about four in the afternoon. While the horses were being changed, a man clad like a porter, sitting with his stretcher beside him on a stone post, rose, came to the carriage and said something in a low tone to the young Companion of Jehu which seemed to astonish the latter greatly.

"Are you quite sure?" he asked the porter.

"I tell you that I saw him with my own eyes!" replied the latter.

"Then I can give the news to our friends as a positive fact?"

"You can. Only hurry."

"Have they been notified at Servas?"

"Yes; you will find a horse ready between Servas and Sue."

The postilion came up; the young man exchanged a last glance with the porter, who walked away as if charged with a letter of the utmost importance.

"What road, citizen?" asked the postilion.

"To Bourg. I must reach Servas by nine this evening; I pay thirty sous fees."

"Forty-two miles in five hours! That's tough. Well, after all, it can be done."

"Will you do it."

“We can try.”

And the postilion started at full gallop. Nine o’clock was striking as they entered Servas.

“A crown of six livres if you’ll drive me half-way to Sue without stopping here to change horses!” cried the young man through the window to the postilion.

“Done!” replied the latter.

And the carriage dashed past the post house without stopping.

Morgan stopped the carriage at a half mile beyond Servas, put his head out of the window, made a trumpet of his hands, and gave the hoot of a screech-owl. The imitation was so perfect that another owl answered from a neighboring woods.

“Here we are,” cried Morgan.

The postilion pulled up, saying: “If we’re there, we needn’t go further.”

The young man took his valise, opened the door, jumped out and stepped up to the postilion.

“Here’s the promised ecu.”

The postilion took the coin and stuck it in his eye, as a fop of our day holds his eye-glasses. Morgan divined that this pantomime had a significance.

“Well,” he asked, “what does that mean?”

“That means,” said the postilion, “that, do what I will, I can’t help seeing with the other eye.”

“I understand,” said the young man, laughing; “and if I close the other eye — ”

“Damn it! I shan’t see anything.”

“Hey! you’re a rogue who’d rather be blind than see with one eye! Well, there’s no disputing tastes. Here!”

And he gave him a second crown. The postilion stuck it up to his other eye, wheeled the carriage round and took the road back to Servas.

The Companion of Jehu waited till he vanished in the darkness. Then putting the hollow of a key to his lips, he drew a long trembling sound from it like a boatswain’s whistle.

A similar call answered him, and immediately a horseman came out of the woods at full gallop. As he caught sight of him Morgan put on his mask.

“In whose name have you come?” asked the rider, whose face, hidden as it was beneath the brim of an immense hat, could not be seen.

“In the name of the prophet Elisha,” replied the young man with the mask.

“Then you are he whom I am waiting for.” And he dismounted.

“Are you prophet or disciple?” asked Morgan.

“Disciple,” replied the new-comer.

“Where is your master?”

“You will find him at the Chartreuse of Seillon.”

“Do you know how many Companions are there this evening?”

“Twelve.”

“Very good; if you meet any others send them there.”

He who had called himself a disciple bowed in sign of obedience, assisted Morgan to fasten the valise to the croup of the saddle, and respectfully held the bit while the young man mounted. Without even waiting to thrust his other foot into the stirrup, Morgan spurred his horse, which tore the bit from the groom’s hand and started off at a gallop.

On the right of the road stretched the forest of Seillon, like a shadowy sea, its sombre billows undulating and moaning in the night wind. Half a mile beyond Sue the rider turned his horse across country toward the forest, which, as he rode on, seemed to advance toward him. The horse, guided by an experienced hand, plunged fearlessly into the woods. Ten minutes later he emerged on the other side.

A gloomy mass, isolated in the middle of a plain, rose about a hundred feet from the forest. It was a building of massive architecture, shaded by five or six venerable trees. The horseman paused before the portal, over which were placed three statues in a triangle of the Virgin, our Lord, and St. John the Baptist. The statue of the Virgin was at the apex of the triangle.

The mysterious traveller had reached his goal, for this was the Chartreuse of Seillon. This monastery, the twenty-second of its order, was founded in 1178. In 1672 a modern edifice had been substituted for the old building; vestiges of its ruins can be seen to this day. These ruins consist externally of the above-mentioned portal with the three statues, before which our mysterious traveller halted; internally, a small chapel, entered from the right through the portal. A peasant, his wife and two children are now living there, and the ancient monastery has become a farm.

The monks were expelled from their convent in 1791; in 1792 the Chartreuse and its dependencies were offered for sale as ecclesiastical property. The dependencies consisted first of the park, adjoining the buildings, and the noble forest which still bears the name of Seillon. But at Bourg, a royalist and, above all, religious town, no one dared risk his soul by purchasing property belonging to the worthy monks whom all revered. The result was that the convent, the park and the forest had become, under the title of state property, the property of the republic; that is to say, they belonged to nobody, or were at the best neglected. The republic having, for the last seven years, other things to think of than pointing walls, cultivating an orchard and cutting timber.

For seven years, therefore, the Chartreuse had been completely abandoned, and if by chance curious eyes peered through the keyhole, they caught glimpses of grass-grown courtyards, brambles in the orchard, and brush in the forest, which, except for one road and two or three paths that crossed it, had become almost impenetrable. The Correrie, a species of pavilion belonging to the monastery and distant from it about three-quarters of a mile, was mossgrown too in the tangle of the forest, which, profiting by its liberty, grew at its own sweet will, and had long since encircled it in a mantle of foliage which hid it from sight.

For the rest, the strangest rumors were current about these two buildings. They were said to be haunted by guests invisible by day, terrifying at night. The woodsmen and the belated peasants, who went to the forest to exercise against the Republic the rights which the town of Bourg had enjoyed in the days of the monks, pretended that, through the cracks of the closed blinds, they had seen flames of fire dancing along the corridors and stairways, and had distinctly heard the noise of chains clanking over the cloister tilings and the pavement of the courtyards. The strong-minded denied these things; but two very opposite classes opposed the unbelievers, confirming the rumors, attributing these terrifying noises and nocturnal lights to two different causes according to their beliefs. The patriots declared that they were the ghosts of the poor monks buried alive by cloister tyranny in the In-pace, who were now returned to earth, dragging after them their fetters to call down the vengeance of Heaven upon their persecutors. The royalists said that they were the imps of the devil, who, finding an empty convent, and fearing no further danger from holy water, were boldly holding their revels where once they had not dared show a claw. One fact, however, left everything uncertain. Not one of the believers or unbelievers — whether he elected for the souls of the martyred monks or for the Witches’ Sabbath of Beelzebub — had ever had the courage to venture among the shadows, and to seek during the solemn hours of night confirmation of the truth, in order to tell on the morrow whether the Chartreuse were haunted, and if haunted by whom.

But doubtless these tales, whether well founded or not, had no influence over our mysterious horseman; for although, as we have said, nine o’clock had chimed from the steeples of Bourg, and night had fallen, he reined in his horse in front of the great portal of the deserted monastery, and, without dismounting, drew a pistol from his holster, striking three measured blows with the butt on the gate, after the manner of the Freemasons. Then he listened. For an instant he doubted if the meeting were really there; for though he looked closely and listened attentively, he could perceive no light, nor could he hear a sound. Still he fancied he heard a cautious step approaching the portal from within. He knocked a second time with the same weapon and in the same manner.

“Who knocks?” demanded a voice.

“He who comes from Elisha,” replied the traveller.

“What king do the sons of Isaac obey?”

“Jehu.”

“What house are they to exterminate?”

“That of Ahab.”

“Are you prophet or disciple?”

“Prophet.”

“Welcome then to the House of the Lord!” said the voice.

Instantly the iron bars which secured the massive portal swung back, the bolts grated in their sockets, half of the gate opened silently, and the horse and his rider passed beneath the sombre vault, which immediately closed behind them.

The person who had opened the gate, so slow to open, so quick to close, was attired in the long white robe of a Chartreuse monk, of which the hood, falling over his face, completely concealed his features.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CHARTREUSE OF SEILLON

Beyond doubt, like the first affiliated member met on the road to Sue by the man who styled himself prophet, the monk who opened the gate was of secondary rank in the fraternity; for, grasping the horse’s bridle, he held it while the rider dismounted, rendering the young man the service of a groom.

Morgan got off, unfastened the valise, pulled the pistols from the holsters, and placed them in his belt, next to those already there. Addressing the monk in a tone of command, he said: “I thought I should find the brothers assembled in council.”

“They are assembled,” replied the monk.

“Where?”

“At La Correrie. Suspicious persons have been seen prowling around the Chartreuse these last few days, and orders have been issued to take the greatest precautions.”

The young man shrugged his shoulders as if he considered such precautions useless, and, always in the same tone of command, said: “Have some one take my horse to the stable and conduct me to the council.”

The monk summoned another brother, to whom he flung the bridle. He lighted a torch at a lamp, in the little chapel which can still be seen to the right of the great portal, and walked before the new-comer. Crossing the cloister, he took a few steps in the garden, opened a door leading into a sort of cistern, invited Morgan to enter, closed it as carefully as he had the outer door, touched with his foot a stone which seemed to be accidentally lying there, disclosed a ring and raised a slab, which concealed a flight of steps leading down to a subterraneous passage. This passage had a rounded roof and was wide enough to admit two men walking abreast.

The two men proceeded thus for five or six minutes, when they reached a grated door. The monk, drawing a key from his frock, opened it. Then, when both had passed through and the door was locked again, he asked: “By what name shall I announce you?”

“As Brother Morgan.”

“Wait here; I will return in five minutes.”

The young man made a sign with his head which showed that he was familiar with these precautions and this distrust. Then he sat down upon a tomb — they were in the mortuary vaults of the convent — and waited. Five minutes had scarcely elapsed before the monk reappeared.

“Follow me,” said he; “the brothers are glad you have come. They feared you had met with some mishap.”

A few seconds later Morgan was admitted into the council chamber.

Twelve monks awaited him, their hoods drawn low over their eyes. But, once the door had closed and the serving brother had disappeared, while Morgan was removing his mask, the hoods were thrown back and each monk exposed his face.

No brotherhood had ever been graced by a more brilliant assemblage of handsome and joyous young men. Two or three only of these strange monks had reached the age of forty. All hands were held out to Morgan and several warm kisses were imprinted upon the new-comer’s cheek.

“‘Pon my word,” said one who had welcomed him most tenderly, “you have drawn a mighty thorn from my foot; we thought you dead, or, at any rate, a prisoner.”

“Dead, I grant you, Amiet; but prisoner, never! citizen — as they still say sometimes, and I hope they’ll not say it much longer. It must be admitted that the whole affair was conducted on both sides with touching amenity. As soon as the conductor saw us he shouted to the postilion to stop; I even believe he added: ‘I know what it is.’ ‘Then,’ said I, ‘if you know what it is, my dear friend, our explanations needn’t be long.’ ‘The government money?’ he asked. ‘Exactly,’ I replied. Then as there was a great commotion inside the carriage, I added: ‘Wait! first come down and assure these gentlemen, and especially the ladies, that we are well-behaved folk and will not harm them — the ladies; you understand — and nobody will even look at them unless they put their heads out of the window.’ One did risk it; my faith! but she was charming. I threw her a kiss, and she gave a little cry and retired into the carriage, for all the world like Galatea, and as there were no willows about, I didn’t pursue her. In the meantime the guard was rummaging in his strong-box in all expedition, and to such good purpose, indeed, that with the government money, in his hurry, he passed over two hundred louis belonging to a poor wine merchant of Bordeaux.”

“Ah, the devil!” exclaimed the brother called Amiet — an assumed name, probably, like that of Morgan — ”that is annoying! You know the Directory, which is most imaginative, has organized some bands of chauffeurs, who operate in our name, to make people believe that we rob private individuals. In other words, that we are mere thieves.”

“Wait an instant,” resumed Morgan; “that is just what makes me late. I heard something similar at Lyons. I was half-way to Valence when I discovered this breach of etiquette. It was not difficult, for, as if the good man had foreseen what happened, he had marked his bag ‘Jean Picot, Wine Merchant at Fronsac, Bordeaux.’“

“And you sent his money back to him?”

“I did better; I returned it to him.”

“At Fronsac?”

“Ah! no, but at Avignon. I suspected that so careful a man would stop at the first large town to inquire what chance he had to recover his two hundred louis. I was not mistaken. I inquired at the inn if they knew citizen Jean Picot. They replied that not only did they know him, but in fact he was then dining at the table d’hôte. I went in. You can imagine what they were talking about — the stoppage of the diligence. Conceive the sensation my apparition caused. The god of antiquity descending from the machine produced a no more unexpected finale than I. I asked which one of the guests was called Jean Picot. The owner of this distinguished and melodious name stood forth. I placed the two hundred louis before him, with many apologies, in the name of the Company, for the inconvenience its followers had occasioned him. I exchanged a friendly glance with Barjols and a polite nod with the Abbé de Rians who were present, and, with a profound bow to the assembled company, withdrew. It was only a little thing, but it took me fifteen hours; hence the delay. I thought it preferable to leaving a false conception of us in our wake. Have I done well, my masters?”

The gathering burst into bravos.

“Only,” said one of the participants, “I think you were somewhat imprudent to return the money yourself to citizen Jean Picot.”

“My dear colonel,” replied the young man, “there’s an Italian proverb which says: ‘Who wills, goes; who does not will, sends.’ I willed — I went.”

“And there’s a jolly buck who, if you ever have the misfortune to fall into the hands of the Directory, will reward you by recognizing you; a recognition which means cutting off your head!”

“Oh! I defy him to recognize me.”

“What can prevent it?”

“Oh! You seem to think that I play such pranks with my face uncovered? Truly, my dear colonel, you mistake me for some one else. It is well enough to lay aside my mask among friends; but among strangers — no, no! Are not these carnival times? I don’t see why I shouldn’t disguise myself as Abellino or Karl Moor, when Messieurs Gohier, Sieyès, Roger Ducos, Moulin and Barras are masquerading as kings of France.”

“And you entered the city masked?”

“The city, the hotel, the dining-room. It is true that if my face was covered, my belt was not, and, as you see, it is well garnished.”

The young man tossed aside his coat, displaying his belt, which was furnished with four pistols and a short hunting-knife. Then, with a gayety which seemed characteristic of his careless nature, he added: “I ought to look ferocious, oughtn’t I? They may have taken me for the late Mandrin, descending from the mountains of Savoy. By the bye, here are the sixty thousand francs of Her Highness, the Directory.” And the young man disdainfully kicked the valise which he had placed on the ground, which emitted a metallic sound indicating the presence of gold. Then he mingled with the group of friends from whom he had been separated by the natural distance between a narrator and his listeners.

One of the monks stooped and lifted the valise.

“Despise gold as much as you please, my dear Morgan, since that doesn’t prevent you from capturing it. But I know of some brave fellows who are awaiting these sixty thousand francs, you so disdainfully kick aside, with as much impatience and anxiety as a caravan, lost in the desert, awaits the drop of water which is to save it from dying of thirst.”

“Our friends of the Vendée, I suppose?” replied Morgan. “Much good may it do them! Egotists, they are fighting. These gentlemen have chosen the roses and left us the thorns. Come! don’t they receive anything from England?”

“Oh, yes,” said one of the monks, gayly; “at Quiberon they got bullets and grapeshot.”

“I did not say from the English,” retorted Morgan; “I said from England.”

“Not a penny.”

“It seems to me, however,” said one of those present, who apparently possessed a more reflective head than his comrades, “it seems to me that our princes might send a little gold to those who are shedding their blood for the monarchy. Are they not afraid the Vendée may weary some day or other of a devotion which up to this time has not, to my knowledge, won her a word of thanks.”

“The Vendée, dear friend,” replied Morgan, “is a generous land which will not weary, you may be sure. Besides, where is the merit of fidelity unless it has to deal with ingratitude? From the instant devotion meets recognition, it is no longer devotion. It becomes an exchange which reaps its reward. Let us be always faithful, and always devoted, gentlemen, praying Heaven that those whom we serve may remain ungrateful, and then, believe me, we shall bear the better part in the history of our civil wars.”

Morgan had scarcely formulated this chivalric axiom, expressive of a desire which had every chance of accomplishment, than three Masonic blows resounded upon the door through which he had entered.

“Gentlemen,” said the monk who seemed to fill the rôle of president, “quick, your hoods and masks. We do not know who may be coming to us.”

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW THE MONEY OF THE DIRECTORY WAS USED

Every one hastened to obey. The monks lowered the hoods of their long robes over their faces, Morgan replaced his mask.

"Enter!" said the superior.

The door opened and the serving-brother appeared.

"An emissary from General Georges Cadoudal asks to be admitted," said he.

"Did he reply to the three passwords?"

"Perfectly."

"Then let him in."

The lay brother retired to the subterranean passage, and reappeared a couple of minutes later leading a man easily recognized by his costume as a peasant, and by his square head with its shock of red hair for a Breton. He advanced in the centre of the circle without appearing in the least intimidated, fixing his eyes on each of the monks in turn, and waiting until one of these twelve granite statues should break silence. The president was the first to speak to him.

"From whom do you come?" he asked him.

"He who sent me," replied the peasant, "ordered me to answer, if I were asked that question, that I was sent by Jehu."

"Are you the bearer of a verbal or written message?"

"I am to reply to the questions which you ask me, and exchange a slip of paper for some money."

"Very good; we will begin with the questions. What are our brothers in the Vendée doing?"

"They have laid down their arms and are awaiting only a word from you to take them up again."

"And why did they lay down their arms?"

"They received the order to do so from his Majesty Louis XVIII."

"There is talk of a proclamation written by the King's own hand. Have they received it?"

"Here is a copy."

The peasant gave a paper to the person who was interrogating him. The latter opened it and read:

> The war has absolutely no result save that of making the monarchy odious and threatening. Monarchs who return to their own through its bloody succor are never loved; these sanguinary measures must therefore be abandoned; confide in the empire of opinion which returns of itself to its saving principles. "God and the King," will soon be the rallying cry of all Frenchmen. The scattered elements of royalism must be gathered into one formidable sheaf; militant Vendée must be abandoned to its unhappy fate and marched within a more pacific and less erratic path. The royalists of the West have fulfilled their duty; those of Paris, who have prepared everything for the approaching Restoration, must now be relied upon —

The president raised his head, and, seeking Morgan with a flash of the eye which his hood could not entirely conceal, said: "Well, brother, I think this is the fulfilment of your wish of a few moments ago. The royalists of the Vendée and the Midi will have the merit of pure devotion." Then, lowering his eyes to the proclamation, of which there still remained a few lines to read, he continued:

> The Jews crucified their King, and since that time they have wandered over the face of the earth. The French guillotined theirs, and they shall be dispersed throughout the land.
>
> Given at Blankenbourg, this 25th of August, 1799, on the day of St. Louis and the sixth year of our reign.
>
> (Signed) LOUIS.

The young men looked at each other.

"'Quos vult perdere Jupiter dementat!'" said Morgan.

"Yes," said the president; "but when those whom Jupiter wishes to destroy represent a principle, they must be sustained not only against Jupiter but against themselves. Ajax, in the midst of the bolts and lightning, clung to a rock, and, threatening Heaven with his clinched hand, he cried, 'I will escape in spite of the gods!'" Then turning toward Cadoudal's envoy, "And what answer did he who sent you make to this proclamation?"

"About what you yourself have just answered. He told me to come and inform myself whether you had decided to hold firm in spite of all, in spite of the King himself."

"By Heavens! yes," said Morgan.

"We are determined," said the President.

"In that case," replied the peasant, "all is well. Here are the real names of our new chiefs, and their assumed names. The general recommends that you use only the latter as far as is possible in your despatches. He observes that precaution when he, on his side, speaks of you."

"Have you the list?" asked the President.

"No; I might have been stopped, and the list taken. Write yourself; I will dictate them to you."

The president seated himself at the table, took a pen, and wrote the following names under the dictation of the Breton peasant:

"Georges Cadoudal, Jehu or Roundhead; Joseph Cadoudal, Judas Maccabeus; Lahaye Saint-Hilaire, David; Burban-Malabry, Brave-la-Mort; Poulpiquez, Royal-Carnage; Bonfils, Brise-Barrière; Dampherné, Piquevers; Duchayla, La Couronne; Duparc, Le Terrible; La Roche, Mithridates; Puisaye, Jean le Blond."

"And these are the successors of Charette, Stoffiet, Cathelineau, Bonchamp, d'Elbée, la Rochejaquelin, and Lescure!" cried a voice.

The Breton turned toward him who had just spoken.

"If they get themselves killed like their predecessors," said he, "what more can you ask of them?"

"Well answered," said Morgan, "so that — "

"So that, as soon as our general has your reply," answered the peasant, "he will take up arms again."

"And suppose our reply had been in the negative?" asked another voice.

"So much the worse for you," replied the peasant; "in any case the insurrection is fixed for October 20."

"Well," said the president, "thanks to us, the general will have the wherewithal for his first month's pay. Where is your receipt?"

"Here," said the peasant, drawing a paper from his pocket on which were written these words:

> Received from our brothers of the Midi and the East, to be employed for the good of the cause, the sum of....

GEORGES CADOUDAL,
General commanding the Royalist army of Brittany.

The sum was left blank.

“Do you know how to write?” asked the president.

“Enough to fill in the three or four missing words.”

“Very well. Then write, ‘one hundred thousand francs.’“

The Breton wrote; then extending the paper to the president, he said: “Here is your receipt; where is the money?”

“Stoop and pick up the bag at your feet; it contains sixty thousand francs.” Then addressing one of the monks, he asked: “Montbard, where are the remaining forty thousand?”

The monk thus interpellated opened a closet and brought forth a bag somewhat smaller than the one Morgan had brought, but which, nevertheless, contained the good round sum of forty thousand francs.

“Here is the full amount,” said the monk.

“Now, my friend,” said the president, “get something to eat and some rest; to-morrow you will start.”

“They are waiting for me yonder,” said the Breton. “I will eat and sleep on horseback. Farewell, gentlemen. Heaven keep you!” And he went toward the door by which he had entered.

“Wait,” said Morgan.

The messenger paused.

“News for news,” said Morgan; “tell General Cadoudal that General Bonaparte has left the army in Egypt, that he landed at Fréjus, day before yesterday, and will be in Paris in three days. My news is fully worth yours, don’t you think so? What do you think of it?”

“Impossible!” exclaimed all the monks with one accord.

“Nevertheless nothing is more true, gentlemen. I have it from our friend the Priest (Leprêtre), [Footnote: The name Leprêtre is a contraction of the two words “le prêtre,” meaning the priest; hence the name under which this man died.] who saw him relay at Lyons one hour before me, and recognized him.”

“What has he come to France for?” demanded several voices.

“Faith,” said Morgan, “we shall know some day. It is probable that he has not returned to Paris to remain there incognito.”

“Don’t lose an instant in carrying this news to our brothers in the West,” said the president to the peasant. “A moment ago I wished to detain you;

now I say to you: ‘Go!’“

The peasant bowed and withdrew. The president waited until the door was closed.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “the news which our brother Morgan has just imparted to us is so grave that I wish to propose a special measure.”

“What is it?” asked the Companions of Jehu with one voice.

“It is that one of us, chosen by lot, shall go to Paris and keep the rest informed, with the cipher agreed upon, of all that happens there.”

“Agreed!” they replied.

“In that case,” resumed the president, “let us write our thirteen names, each on a slip of paper. We put them in a hat. He whose name is first drawn shall start immediately.”

The young men, one and all, approached the table, and wrote their names on squares of paper which they rolled and dropped into a hat. The youngest was told to draw the lots. He drew one of the little rolls of paper and handed it to the president, who unfolded it.

“Morgan!” said he.

“What are my instructions?” asked the young man.

“Remember,” replied the president, with a solemnity to which the cloistral arches lent a supreme grandeur, “that you bear the name and title of Baron de Sainte-Hermine, that your father was guillotined on the Place de la Révolution and that your brother was killed in Condé’s army. Noblesse oblige! Those are your instructions.”

“And what else?” asked the young man.

“As to the rest,” said the president, “we rely on your royalist principles and your loyalty.”

“Then, my friends, permit me to bid you farewell at once. I would like to be on the road to Paris before dawn, and I must pay a visit before my departure.”

“Go!” said the president, opening his arms to Morgan. “I embrace you in the name of the Brotherhood. To another I should say, ‘Be brave, persevering and active’; to you I say, ‘Be prudent.’“

The young man received the fraternal embrace, smiled to his other friends, shook hands with two or three of them, wrapped himself in his mantle, pulled his hat over his eyes and departed.

CHAPTER IX.

ROMEO AND JULIET

Under the possibility of immediate departure, Morgan's horse, after being washed, rubbed down and dried, had been fed a double ration of oats and been resaddled and bridled. The young man had only to ask for it and spring upon its back. He was no sooner in the saddle than the gate opened as if by magic; the horse neighed and darted out swiftly, having forgotten its first trip, and ready for another.

At the gate of the Chartreuse, Morgan paused an instant, undecided whether to turn to the right or left. He finally turned to the right, followed the road which leads from Bourg to Seillon for a few moments, wheeled rapidly a second time to the right, cut across country, plunged into an angle of the forest which was on his way, reappeared before long on the other side, reached the main road to Pont-d'Ain, followed it for about a mile and a half, and halted near a group of houses now called the Maison des Gardes. One of these houses bore for sign a cluster of holly, which indicated one of those wayside halting places where the pedestrians quench their thirst, and rest for an instant to recover strength before continuing the long fatiguing voyage of life. Morgan stopped at the door, drew a pistol from its holster and rapped with the butt end as he had done at the Chartreuse. Only as, in all probability, the good folks at the humble tavern were far from being conspirators, the traveller was kept waiting longer than he had been at the monastery. At last he heard the echo of the stable boy's clumsy sabots. The gate creaked, but the worthy man who opened it no sooner perceived the horseman with his drawn pistol than he instinctively tried to, close it again.

"It is I, Patout," said the young man; "don't be afraid."

"Ah! sure enough," said the peasant, "it is really you, Monsieur Charles. I'm not afraid now; but you know, as the curé used to tell us, in the days when there was a good God, 'Caution is the mother of safety.'"

"Yes, Patout, yes," said the young man, slipping a piece of silver into the stable boy's hand, "but be easy; the good God will return, and M. le Curé also."

“Oh, as for that,” said the good man, “it is easy to see that there is no one left on high by the way things go. Will this last much longer, M. Charles?”

“Patout, I promise, in my honor, to do my best to be rid of all that annoys you. I am no less impatient than you; so I’ll ask you not to go to bed, my good Patout.”

“Ah! You know well, monsieur, that when you come I don’t often go to bed. As for the horse — Goodness! You change them every day? The time before last it was a chestnut, the last time a dapple-gray, now a black one.”

“Yes, I’m somewhat capricious by nature. As to the horse, as you say, my dear Patout, he wants nothing. You need only remove his bridle; leave him saddled. Oh, wait; put this pistol back in the holsters and take care of these other two for me.” And the young man removed the two from his belt and handed them to the hostler.

“Well,” exclaimed the latter, laughing, “any more barkers?”

“You know, Patout, they say the roads are unsafe.”

“Ah! I should think they weren’t safe! We’re up to our necks in regular highway robberies, M. Charles. Why, no later than last week they stopped and robbed the diligence between Geneva and Bourg!”

“Indeed!” exclaimed Morgan; “and whom do they accuse of the robbery?”

“Oh, it’s such a farce! Just fancy; they say it was the Companions of Jesus. I don’t believe a word of it, of course. Who are the Companions of Jesus if not the twelve apostles?”

“Of course,” said Morgan, with his eternally joyous smile, “I don’t know of any others.”

“Well!” continued Patout, “to accuse the twelve apostles of robbing a diligence, that’s the limit. Oh! I tell you, M. Charles, we’re living in times when nobody respects anything.”

And shaking his head like a misanthrope, disgusted, if not with life, at least with men, Patout led the horse to the stable.

As for Morgan, he watched Patout till he saw him disappear down the courtyard and enter the dark stable; then, skirting the hedge which bordered the garden, he went toward a large clump of trees whose lofty tops were silhouetted against the darkness of the night, with the majesty of things immovable, the while their shadows fell upon a charming little country house known in the neighborhood as the Château des Noires-Fontaines. As Morgan reached the château wall, the hour chimed from the belfry of the village of Montagnac. The young man counted the strokes vibrating in the calm silent atmosphere of the autumn night. It was eleven o’clock. Many things, as we have seen, had happened during the last two hours.

Morgan advanced a few steps farther, examined the wall, apparently in search of a familiar spot, then, having found it, inserted the tip of his boot in a cleft between two stones. He sprang up like a man mounting a horse, seized the top of the wall with the left hand, and with a second spring seated himself astride the wall, from which, with the rapidity of lightning, he lowered himself on the other side. All this was done with such rapidity, such dexterity and agility, that any one chancing to pass at that instant would have thought himself the puppet of a vision. Morgan stopped, as on the other side of the wall, to listen, while his eyes tried to pierce the darkness made deeper by the foliage of poplars and aspens, and the heavy shadows of the little wood. All was silent and solitary. Morgan ventured on his path. We say ventured, because the young man, since nearing the Château des Noires-Fontaines, revealed in all his movement a timidity and hesitation so foreign to his character that it was evident that if he feared it was not for himself alone.

He gained the edge of the wood, still moving cautiously. Coming to a lawn, at the end of which was the little château, he paused. Then he examined the front of the house. Only one of the twelve windows which dotted the three floors was lighted. This was on the second floor at the corner of the house. A little balcony, covered with virgin vines which climbed the walls, twining themselves around the iron railing and falling thence in festoons from the window, overhung the garden. On both sides of the windows, close to the balcony, large-leafed trees met and formed above the cornice a bower of verdure. A Venetian blind, which was raised and lowered by cords, separated the balcony from the window, a separation which disappeared at will. It was through the interstices of this blind that Morgan had seen the light.

The young man’s first impulse was to cross the lawn in a straight line; but again, the fears of which we spoke restrained him. A path shaded by lindens skirted the wall and led to the house. He turned aside and entered its dark leafy covert. When he had reached the end of the path, he crossed, like a frightened doe, the open space which led to the house wall, and stood for a moment in the deep shadow of the house. Then, when he had reached the spot he had calculated upon, he clapped his hands three times.

At this call a shadow darted from the end of the apartment and clung, lithe, graceful, almost transparent, to the window.

Morgan repeated the signal. The window was opened immediately, the blind was raised, and a ravishing young girl, in a night dress, her fair hair rippling over her shoulders, appeared in the frame of verdure.

The young man stretched out his arms to her, whose arms were stretched out to him, and two names, or rather two cries from the heart, crossed from one to the other.

“Charles!”

“Amélie!”

Then the young man sprang against the wall, caught at the vine shoots, the jagged edges of the rock, the jutting cornice, and in an instant was on the balcony.

What these two beautiful young beings said to each other was only a murmur of love lost in an endless kiss. Then, by gentle effort, the young man drew the girl with one hand to her chamber, while with the other he loosened the cords of the blind, which fell noisily behind them. The window closed behind the blind. Then the lamp was extinguished, and the front of the Château des Noires-Fontaines was again in darkness.

This darkness had lasted for about a quarter of an hour, when the rolling of a carriage was heard along the road leading from the highway of Pont-d’Ain to the entrance of the château. There the sound ceased; it was evident that the carriage had stopped before the gates.

CHAPTER X.

THE FAMILY OF ROLAND

The carriage which had stopped before the gate was that which brought Roland back to his family, accompanied by Sir John.

The family was so far from expecting him that, as we have said, all the lights in the house were extinguished, all the windows in darkness, even Amélie’s. The postilion had cracked his whip smartly for the last five hundred yards, but the noise was insufficient to rouse these country people from their first sleep. When the carriage had stopped, Roland opened the door, sprang out without touching the steps, and tugged at the bell-handle. Five minutes elapsed, and, after each peal, Roland turned to the carriage, saying: “Don’t be impatient, Sir John.”

At last a window opened and a childish but firm voice cried out: “Who is ringing that way?”

“Ah, is that you, little Edouard?” said Roland. “Make haste and let us in.”

The child leaped back with a shout of delight and disappeared. But at the same time his voice was heard in the corridors, crying: “Mother! wake up; it is Roland! Sister! wake up; it is the big brother!”

Then, clad only in his night robe and his little slippers, he ran down the steps, crying: “Don’t be impatient, Roland; here I am.”

An instant later the key grated in the lock, and the bolts slipped back in their sockets. A white figure appeared in the portico, and flew rather than ran to the gate, which an instant later turned on its hinges and swung open. The child sprang upon Roland’s neck and hung there.

“Ah, brother! Brother!” he exclaimed, embracing the young man, laughing and crying at the same time. “Ah, big brother Roland! How happy mother will be; and Amélie, too! Every body is well. I am the sickest — ah! except Michel, the gardener, you know, who has sprained his leg. But why aren’t you in uniform? Oh! how ugly you are in citizen’s clothes! Have you just come from Egypt? Did you bring me the silver-mounted pistols and the beautiful curved sword? No? Then you are not nice, and I won’t kiss you any more. Oh, no, no! Don’t be afraid! I love you just the same!”

And the boy smothered the big brother with kisses while he showered questions upon him. The Englishman, still seated in the carriage, looked smilingly through the window at the scene.

In the midst of these fraternal embraces came the voice of a woman; the voice of the mother.

“Where is he, my Roland, my darling son?” asked Madame de Montrevel, in a voice fraught with such violent, joyous emotion that it was almost painful. “Where is he? Can it be true that he has returned; really true that he is not a prisoner, not dead? Is he really living?”

The child, at her voice, slipped from his brother’s arms like an eel, dropped upon his feet on the grass, and, as if moved by a spring, bounded toward his mother.

“This way, mother; this way!” said he, dragging his mother, half dressed as she was, toward Roland. When he saw his mother Roland could no longer contain himself. He felt the sort of icicle that had petrified his breast melt, and his heart beat like that of his fellowmen.

“Ah!” he exclaimed, “I was indeed ungrateful to God when life still holds such joys for me.”

And he fell sobbing upon Madame de Montrevel’s neck without thinking of Sir John, who felt his English phlegm disperse as he silently wiped away the tears that flowed down his cheeks and moistened his lips. The child, the mother, and Roland formed an adorable group of tenderness and emotion.

Suddenly little Edouard, like a leaf tossed about by the wind, flew from the group, exclaiming: “Sister Amélie! Why, where is she?” and he rushed toward the house, repeating: “Sister Amélie, wake up! Get up! Hurry up!”

And then the child could be heard kicking and rapping against a door. Silence followed. Then little Edouard shouted: “Help, mother! Help, brother Roland! Sister Amélie is ill!”

Madame de Montrevel and her son flew toward the house. Sir John, consummate tourist that he was, always carried a lancet and a smelling bottle in his pocket. He jumped from the carriage and, obeying his first impulse, hurried up the portico. There he paused, reflecting that he had not been introduced, an all-important formality for an Englishman.

However, the fainting girl whom he sought came toward him at that moment. The noise her brother had made at the door brought Amélie to the landing; but, without doubt, the excitement which Roland’s return had occasioned was too much for her, for after descending a few steps in an almost automatic manner, controlling herself by a violent effort, she gave a sigh, and, like a flower that bends, a branch that droops, like a scarf that floats, she fell, or rather lay, upon the stairs. It was at that moment that the child cried out.

But at his exclamation Amélie recovered, if not her strength, at least her will. She rose, and, stammering, “Be quiet, Edouard! Be quite, in Heaven’s name! I’m all right,” she clung to the balustrade with one hand, and leaning with the other on the child, she had continued to descend. On the last step she met her mother and her brother. Then with a violent, almost despairing movement, she threw both arms around Roland’s neck, exclaiming: “My brother! My brother!”

Roland, feeling the young girl’s weight press heavily upon his shoulder, exclaimed: “Air! Air! She is fainting!” and carried her out upon the portico. It was this new group, so different from the first, which met Sir John’s eyes.

As soon as she felt the fresh air, Amélie revived and raised her head. Just then the moon, in all her splendor, shook off a cloud which had veiled her, and lighted Amélie’s face, as pale as her own. Sir John gave a cry of admiration. Never had he seen a marble statue so perfect as this living marble before his eyes.

We must say that Amélie, seen thus, was marvelously beautiful. Clad in a long cambric robe, which defined the outlines of her body, molded on that of the Polyhymnia of antiquity, her pale face gently inclined upon her brother’s shoulder, her long golden hair floating around her snowy shoulders, her arm thrown around her mother’s neck, its rose-tinted alabaster hand drooping upon the red shawl in which Madame de Montrevel had wrapped herself; such was Roland’s sister as she appeared to Sir John.

At the Englishman’s cry of admiration, Roland remembered that he was there, and Madame de Montrevel perceived his presence. As for the child, surprised to see this stranger in his mother’s home, he ran hastily down the steps of the portico, stopping on the third one, not that he feared to go further, but in order to be on a level with the person he proceeded to question.

“Who are you, sir!” he asked Sir John; “and what are you doing here?”

“My little Edouard,” said Sir John, “I am your brother’s friend, and I have brought you the silver-mounted pistols and the Damascus blade which he promised you.”

“Where are they?” asked the child.

“Ah!” said Sir John, “they are in England, and it will take some time to send for them. But your big brother will answer for me that I am a man of my word.”

“Yes, Edouard, yes,” said Roland. “If Sir John promises them to you, you will get them.” Then turning to Madame de Montrevel and his sister, “Excuse me, my mother; excuse me, Amélie; or rather, excuse yourselves as best you can to Sir John, for you have made me abominably ungrateful.” Then grasping Sir John’s hand, he continued: “Mother, Sir John took occasion the first time he saw me to render me an inestimable service. I know that you never forget such things. I trust, therefore, that you will always remember that Sir John is one of our best friends; and he will give you the proof of it by saying with me that he has consented to be bored for a couple of weeks with us.”

“Madame,” said Sir John, “permit me, on the contrary, not to repeat my friend Roland’s words. I could wish to spend, not a fortnight, nor three weeks, but a whole lifetime with you.”

Madame de Montrevel came down the steps of the portico and offered her hand to Sir John, who kissed it with a gallantry altogether French.

“My lord,” said she, “this house is yours. The day you entered it has been one of joy, the day you leave will be one of regret and sadness.”

Sir John turned toward Amélie, who, confused by the disorder of her dress before this stranger, was gathering the folds of her wrapper about her neck.

“I speak to you in my name and in my daughter’s, who is still too much overcome by her brother’s unexpected return to greet you herself as she will do in a moment,” continued Madame de Montrevel, coming to Amélie’s relief.

“My sister,” said Roland, “will permit my friend Sir John to kiss her hand, and he will, I am sure, accept that form of welcome.”

Amélie stammered a few words, slowly lifted her arm, and held out her hand to Sir John with a smile that was almost painful.

The Englishman took it, but, feeling how icy and trembling it was, instead of carrying it to his lips he said: “Roland, your sister is seriously indisposed. Let us think only of her health this evening. I am something of a doctor, and if she will deign to permit me the favor of feeling her pulse I shall be grateful.”

But Amélie, as if she feared that the cause of her weakness might be surmised, withdrew her hand hastily, exclaiming: “Oh, no! Sir John is mistaken. Joy never causes illness. It is only joy at seeing my brother again which caused this slight indisposition, and it has already passed over.” Then turning to Madame de Montrevel, she added with almost feverish haste: “Mother, we are forgetting that these gentlemen have made a long voyage, and have probably eaten nothing since Lyons. If Roland has his usual good appetite he will not object to my leaving you to do the honors of the house, while I attend to the unpoetical but much appreciated details of the housekeeping.”

Leaving her mother, as she said, to do the honors of the house, Amélie went to waken the maids and the manservant, leaving on the mind of Sir John that sort of fairy-like impression which the tourist on the Rhine brings with him of the Lorelei on her rock, a lyre in her hand, the liquid gold of her hair floating in the evening breezes.

In the meantime, Morgan had remounted his horse, returning at full gallop to the Chartreuse. He drew rein before the portal, pulled out a note-book, and pencilling a few lines on one of the leaves, rolled it up and slipped it through the keyhole without taking time to dismount.

Then pressing in both his spurs, and bending low over the mane of the noble animal, he disappeared in the forest, rapid and mysterious as Faust on his way to the mountain of the witches’ sabbath. The three lines he had written were as follows:

> “Louis de Montrevel, General Bonaparte’s aide-de-camp, arrived
> this evening at the Château des Noires-Fontaines. Be careful,
> Companions of Jehu!”

But, while warning his comrades to be cautious about Louis de Montrevel, Morgan had drawn a cross above his name, which signified that no matter what happened the body of the young officer must be considered as sacred by them.

The Companions of Jehu had the right to protect a friend in that way without being obliged to explain the motives which actuated them. Morgan used that privilege to protect the brother of his love.

CHAPTER XI.

CHÂTEAU DES NOIRES-FONTAINES

The Château of Noires-Fontaines, whither we have just conducted two of the principal characters of our story, stood in one of the most charming spots of the valley, where the city of Bourg is built. The park, of five or six acres, covered with venerable oaks, was inclosed on three sides by freestone walls, one of which opened in front through a handsome gate of wrought-iron, fashioned in the style of Louis XV.; the fourth side was bounded by the little river called the Reissouse, a pretty stream that takes its rise at Journaud, among the foothills of the Jura, and flowing gently from south to north, joins the Saône at the bridge of Fleurville, opposite Pont-de-Vaux, the birthplace of Joubert, who, a month before the period of which we are writing, was killed at the fatal battle of Novi.

Beyond the Reissouse, and along its banks, lay, to the right and left of the Château des Noires-Fontaines, the village of Montagnac and Saint-Just, dominated further on by that of Ceyzeriat. Behind this latter hamlet stretched the graceful outlines of the hills of the Jura, above the summits of which could be distinguished the blue crests of the mountains of Bugey, which seemed to be standing on tiptoe in order to peer curiously over their younger sisters’ shoulder at what was passing in the valley of the Ain.

It was in full view of this ravishing landscape that Sir John awoke. For the first time in his life, perhaps, the morose and taciturn Englishman smiled at nature. He fancied himself in one of those beautiful valleys of Thessaly celebrated by Virgil, beside the sweet slopes of Lignon sung by Urfé, whose birthplace, in spite of what the biographers say, was falling into ruins not three miles from the Château des Noires-Fontaines. He was roused by three light raps at his door. It was Roland who came to see how he had passed the night. He found him radiant as the sun playing among the already yellow leaves of the chestnuts and the lindens.

“Oh! oh! Sir John,” cried Roland, “permit me to congratulate you. I expected to find you as gloomy as the poor monks of the Chartreuse, with their long white robes, who used to frighten me so much in my childhood;

though, to tell the truth, I was never easily frightened. Instead of that I find you in the midst of this dreary October, as smiling as a morn of May.”

“My dear Roland,” replied Sir John, “I am an orphan; I lost my mother at my birth and my father when I was twelve years old. At an age when children are usually sent to school, I was master of a fortune producing a million a year; but I was alone in the world, with no one whom I loved or who loved me. The tender joys of family life are completely unknown to me. From twelve to eighteen I went to Cambridge, but my taciturn and perhaps haughty character isolated me from my fellows. At eighteen I began to travel. You who scour the world under the shadow of your flag; that is to say, the shadow of your country, and are stirred by the thrill of battle, and the pride of glory, cannot imagine what a lamentable thing it is to roam through cities, provinces, nations, and kingdoms simply to visit a church here, a castle there; to rise at four in the morning at the summons of a pitiless guide, to see the sun rise from Rigi or Etna; to pass like a phantom, already dead, through the world of living shades called men; to know not where to rest; to know no land in which to take root, no arm on which to lean, no heart in which to pour your own! Well, last night, my dear Roland, suddenly, in an instant, in a second, this void in my life was filled. I lived in you; the joys I seek were yours. The family which I never had, I saw smiling around you. As I looked at your mother I said to myself: ‘My mother was like that, I am sure.’ Looking at your sister, I said: ‘Had I a sister I could not have wished her otherwise.’ When I embraced your brother, I thought that I, too, might have had a child of that age, and thus leave something behind me in the world, whereas with the nature I know I possess, I shall die as I have lived, sad, surly with others, a burden to myself. Ah! you are happy, Roland! you have a family, you have fame, you have youth, you have that which spoils nothing in a man — you have beauty. You want no joys. You are not deprived of a single delight. I repeat it, Roland, you are a happy man, most happy!”

“Good!” said Roland. “You forget my aneurism, my lord.”

Sir John looked at Roland incredulously. Roland seemed to enjoy the most perfect health.

“Your aneurism against my million, Roland,” said Lord Tanlay, with a feeling of profound sadness, “providing that with this aneurism you give me this mother who weeps for joy on seeing you again; this sister who faints with delight at your return; this child who clings upon your neck like some fresh young fruit to a sturdy young tree; this château with its dewy shade, its river with its verdant flowering banks, these blue vistas dotted with pretty villages and white-capped belfries graceful as swans. I would welcome your aneurism, Roland, and with death in two years, in one, in six months; but six months of stirring, tender, eventful and glorious life!”

Roland laughed in his usual nervous manner.

“Ah!” said he, “so this is the tourist, the superficial traveller, the Wandering Jew of civilization, who pauses nowhere, gauges nothing, judges everything by the sensation it produces in him. The tourist who, without opening the doors of these abodes where dwell the fools we call men, says: ‘Behind these walls is happiness!’ Well, my dear friend, you see this charming river, don’t you? These flowering meadows, these pretty villages? It is the picture of peace, innocence and fraternity; the cycle of Saturn, the golden age returned; it is Eden, Paradise! Well, all that is peopled by beings who have flown at each other’s throats. The jungles of Calcutta, the sedges of Bengal are inhabited by tigers and panthers not one whit more ferocious or cruel than the denizens of these pretty villages, these dewy lawns, and these charming shores. After lauding in funeral celebrations the good, the great, the immortal Marat, whose body, thank God! they cast into the common sewer like carrion that he was, and always had been; after performing these funeral rites, to which each man brought an urn into which he shed his tears, behold! our good Bressans, our gentle Bressans, these poultry-fatteners, suddenly decided that the Republicans were all murderers. So they murdered them by the tumbrelful to correct them of that vile defect common to savage and civilized man — the killing his kind. You doubt it? My dear fellow, on the road to Lons-le-Saulnier they will show you, if you are curious, the spot where not six months ago they organized a slaughter fit to turn the stomach of our most ferocious troopers on the battlefield. Picture to yourself a tumbrel of prisoners on their way to Lons-le-Saulnier. It was a staff-sided cart, one of those immense wagons in which they take cattle to market. There were some thirty men in this tumbrel, whose sole crime was foolish exaltation of thought and threatening language. They were bound and gagged; heads hanging, jolted by the bumping of the cart; their throats parched with thirst, despair and terror; unfortunate beings who did not even have, as in the times of Nero and Commodus, the fight in the arena, the hand-to-hand struggle with death. Powerless, motionless, the lust of massacre surprised them in their fetters, and battered them not only in life but in death; their bodies, when their hearts had ceased to beat, still resounded beneath the bludgeons which mangled their flesh and crushed their bones; while women looked on in calm delight, lifting high the children, who clapped their hands for joy. Old men who ought to have been preparing for a Christian death helped, by their goading cries, to render the death of these wretched beings more wretched still. And in the midst of these old men, a little septuagenarian, dainty, powdered, flicking his lace shirt frill if a speck of dust settled there, pinching his Spanish tobacco from a golden snuff-box, with a diamond monogram, eating his “amber sugarplums” from a Sevres bonbonnière, given him by Madame du Barry, and adorned with the donor’s portrait — this septuagenarian — conceive the picture, my dear Sir John — dancing with his pumps upon that mattress of human flesh, wearying his arm, enfeebled by age, in striking repeatedly with his gold-headed cane those of the bodies who seemed not dead enough to him, not properly mangled in that cursed mortar! Faugh! My friend, I have seen Montebello, I have seen Arcole, I have seen Rivoli, I have seen the Pyramids, and I believe I could see nothing more terrible. Well, my mother’s mere recital, last night, after you had retired, of what has happened here, made my hair stand on end. Faith! that explains my poor sister’s spasms just as my aneurism explains mine.”

Sir John watched Roland, and listened with that strange wonderment which his young friend’s misanthropical outbursts always aroused. Roland seemed to lurk in the niches of a conversation in order to fall upon mankind whenever he found an opportunity. Perceiving the impression he had made on Sir John’s mind, he changed his tone, substituting bitter raillery for his philanthropic wrath.

“It is true,” said he, “that, apart from this excellent aristocrat who finished what the butchers had begun, and dyed in blood the red heels of his pumps, the people who performed these massacres belonged to the lower classes, bourgeois and clowns, as our ancestors called those who supported them. The nobles manage things much more daintily. For the rest, you saw yourself what happened at Avignon. If you had been told that, you would never have believed it, would you? Those gentlemen pillagers of stage coaches pique themselves on their great delicacy. They have two faces, not counting their mask. Sometimes they are Cartouche and Mandrin, sometimes Amadis and Galahad. They tell fabulous tales of these heroes of the highways. My mother told me yesterday of one called Laurent. You understand, my dear fellow, that Laurent is a fictitious name meant to hide the real name, just as a mask hides the face. This Laurent combined all the qualities of a hero of romance, all the accomplishments, as you English say, who, under pretext that you were once Normans, allow yourselves occasionally to enrich your language with a picturesque expression, or some word which has long, poor beggar! asked and been refused admittance of our own scholars. This Laurent was ideally handsome. He was one of seventy-two Companions of Jehu who have lately been tried at Yssen-geaux. Seventy were acquitted; he and one other were the only ones condemned to death. The innocent men were released at once, but Laurent and his companion were put in prison to await the guillotine. But, pooh! Master Laurent had too pretty a head to fall under the executioner’s ignoble knife. The judges who condemned him, the curious who expected to witness him executed, had forgotten what Montaigne calls the corporeal recommendation of beauty. There was a woman belonging to the jailer of Yssen-geaux, his daughter, sister or niece; history — for it is history and not romance that I am telling you — history does not say which. At all events the woman, whoever she was, fell in love with the handsome prisoner, so much in love that two hours before the execution, just as Master Laurent, expecting the executioner, was sleeping, or pretending to sleep, as usually happens in such cases, his guardian angel came to him. I don’t know how they managed; for the two lovers, for the best of reasons, never told the details; but the truth is — now remember; Sir John, that this is truth and not fiction — that Laurent was free, but, to his great regret, unable to save his comrade in the adjoining dungeon. Gensonné, under like circumstances, refused to escape, preferring to die with the other Girondins; but Gensonné did not have the head of Antinous on the body of Apollo. The handsomer the head, you understand, the more one holds on to it. So Laurent accepted the freedom offered him and escaped; a horse was waiting for him at the next village. The young girl, who might have retarded or hindered his flight, was to rejoin him the next day. Dawn came, but not the guardian angel. It seems that our hero cared more for his mistress than he did for his companion; he left his comrade, but he would not go without her. It was six o’clock, the very hour for his execution. His impatience mastered him. Three times had he turned his horse’s head toward the town, and each time drew nearer and nearer. At the third time a thought flashed through his brain. Could his mistress have been taken, and would she pay the penalty for saving him? He was then in the suburbs. Spurring his horse, he entered the town with face uncovered, dashed through people who called him by name, astonished to see him free and on horseback, when they expected to see him bound and in a tumbrel on his way to be executed. Catching sight of his guardian angel pushing through the crowd, not to see him executed, but to meet him, he urged his horse past the executioner, who had just learned of the disappearance of one of his patients, knocking over two or three bumpkins with the breast of his Bayard. He bounded toward her, swung her over the pommel of his saddle, and, with a cry of joy and a wave of his hat, he disappeared like M. de Condé at the battle of Lens. The people all applauded, and the women thought the action heroic, and all promptly fell in love with the hero on the spot."

Roland, observing that Sir John was silent, paused and questioned him by a look. "Go on," replied the Englishman; "I am listening. And as I am sure you are telling me all this in order to come to something you wish to say, I await your point."

"Well," resumed Roland, laughing, "you are right, my dear friend, and, on my word, you know me as if we had been college chums. Well, what idea do you suppose has been cavorting through my brain all night? It is that of getting a glimpse of these gentlemen of Jehu near at hand."

"Ah, yes, I understand. As you failed to get yourself killed by M. de Barjols, you want to try your chance of being killed by M. Morgan."

"Or any other, my dear Sir John," replied the young officer calmly; "for I assure you that I have nothing in particular against M. Morgan; quite the contrary, though my first impulse when he came into the room and made his little speech — don't you call it a speech — ?"

Sir John nodded affirmatively.

"Though my first thought," resumed Roland, "was to spring at his throat and strangle him with one hand, and to tear off his mask with the other."

"Now that I know you, my dear Roland, I do indeed wonder how you refrained from putting such a fine project into execution."

"It was not my fault, I swear! I was just on the point of it when my companion stopped me."

"So there are people who can restrain you?"

"Not many, but he can."

"And now you regret it?"

“Honestly, no! This brave stage-robber did the business with such swaggering bravado that I admired him. I love brave men instinctively. Had I not killed M. de Barjols I should have liked to be his friend. It is true I could not tell how brave he was until I had killed him. But let us talk of something else; that duel is one of my painful thoughts. But why did I come up? It was certainly not to talk of the Companions of Jehu, nor of M. Laurent’s exploits — Ah! I came to ask how you would like to spend your time. I’ll cut myself in quarters to amuse you, my dear guest, but there are two disadvantages against me: this region, which is not very amusing, and your nationality, which is not easily amused.”

“I have already told you, Roland,” replied Lord Tanlay, offering his hand to the young man, “that I consider the Château des Noires-Fontaines a paradise.”

“Agreed; but still in the fear that you may find your paradise monotonous, I shall do my best to entertain you. Are you fond of archeology — Westminster and Canterbury? We have a marvel here, the church of Brou; a wonder of sculptured lace by Colonban. There is a legend about it which I will tell you some evening when you cannot sleep. You will see there the tombs of Marguerite de Bourbon, Philippe le Bel, and Marguerite of Austria. I will puzzle you with the problem of her motto: ‘Fortune, infortune, fort’une,’ which I claim to have solved by a Latinized version: ‘Fortuna, in fortuna, forti una.’ Are you fond of fishing, my dear friend? There’s the Reissouse at your feet, and close at hand a collection of hooks and lines belonging to Edouard, and nets belonging to Michel; as for the fish, they, you know, are the last thing one thinks about. Are you fond of hunting? The forest of Seillon is not a hundred yards off. Hunting to hounds you will have perforce to renounce, but we have good shooting. In the days of my old bogies, the Chartreuse monks, the woods swarmed with wild boars, hares and foxes. No one hunts there now, because it belongs to the government; and the government at present is nobody. In my capacity as General Bonaparte’s aide-de-camp I’ll fill the vacancy, and we’ll see who dares meddle with me, if, after chasing the Austrians on the Adige and the Mamelukes on the Nile, I hunt the boars and deer and the hares and foxes on the Reissouse. One day of archeology, one day of fishing, and one of hunting, that’s three already. You see, my dear fellow, we have only fifteen or sixteen left to worry about.”

"My dear Roland," said Sir John sadly, and without replying to the young officer's wordy sally, "won't you ever tell me about this fever which sears you, this sorrow which undermines you?"

"Ah!" said Roland, with his harsh, doleful laugh. "I have never been gayer than I am this morning; it's your liver, my lord, that is out of order and makes you see everything black."

"Some day I hope to be really your friend," replied Sir John seriously; "then you will confide in me, and I shall help you to bear your burden."

"And half my aneurism! — Are you hungry, my lord?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I hear Edouard on the stairs, coming up to tell us that breakfast is ready."

As Roland spoke, the door opened and the boy burst out: "Big brother Roland, mother and sister Amélie are waiting breakfast for Sir John and you."

Then catching the Englishman's right hand, he carefully examined the first joint of the thumb and forefinger.

"What are you looking at, my little friend?" asked Sir John.

"I was looking to see if you had any ink on your fingers."

"And if I had ink on my fingers, what would it mean?"

"That you had written to England, and sent for my pistols and sword."

"No, I have not yet written," said Sir John; "but I will to-day."

"You hear, big brother Roland? I'm to have my sword and my pistols in a fortnight!"

And the boy, full of delight, offered his firm rosy cheek to Sir John, who kissed it as tenderly as a father would have done. Then they went to the dining-room where Madame de Montrevel and Amélie were awaiting them.

CHAPTER XII.

PROVINCIAL PLEASURES

That same day Roland put into execution part of his plans for his guest’s amusement. He took Sir John to see the church of Brou.

Those who have seen the charming little chapel of Brou know that it is known as one of the hundred marvels of the Renaissance; those who have not seen it must have often heard it said. Roland, who had counted on doing the honors of this historic gem to Sir John, and who had not seen it for the last seven or eight years, was much disappointed when, on arriving in front of the building, he found the niches of the saints empty and the carved figures of the portal decapitated.

He asked for the sexton; people laughed in his face. There was no longer a sexton. He inquired to whom he should go for the keys. They replied that the captain of the gendarmerie had them. The captain was not far off, for the cloister adjoining the church had been converted into a barrack.

Roland went up to the captain’s room and made himself known as Bonaparte’s aide-de-camp. The captain, with the placid obedience of a subaltern to his superior officer, gave him the keys and followed behind him. Sir John was waiting before the porch, admiring, in spite of the mutilation to which they had been subjected, the admirable details of the frontal.

Roland opened the door and started back in astonishment. The church was literally stuffed with hay like a cannon charged to the muzzle.

“What does this mean?” he asked the captain of the gendarmerie.

“A precaution taken by the municipality.”

“A precaution taken by the municipality?”

“Yes.”

“For what?”

“To save the church. They were going to demolish it; but the mayor issued a decree declaring that, in expiation of the false worship for which it had served, it should be used to store fodder.”

Roland burst out laughing, and, turning to Sir John, he said: “My dear Sir John, the church was well worth seeing, but I think what this gentleman has just told us is no less curious. You can always find — at Strasburg, Cologne, or Milan — churches or cathedrals to equal the chapel of Brou; but where will you find an administration idiotic enough to destroy such a masterpiece, and a mayor clever enough to turn it into a barn? A thousand thanks, captain. Here are your keys.”

“As I was saying at Avignon, the first time I had the pleasure of seeing you, my dear Roland,” replied Sir John, “the French are a most amusing people.”

“This time, my lord, you are too polite,” replied Roland. “Idiotic is the word. Listen. I can understand the political cataclysms which have convulsed society for the last thousand years; I can understand the communes, the pastorals, the Jacquerie, the maillotins, the Saint Bartholomew, the League, the Fronde, the dragonnades, the Revolution; I can understand the 14th of July, the 5th and 6th of October, the 20th of June, the 10th of August, the 2d and 3d of September, the 21st of January, the 31st of May, the 30th of October, and the 9th Thermidor; I can understand the egregious torch of civil wars, which inflames instead of soothing the blood; I can understand the tidal wave of revolution, sweeping on with its flux, that nothing can arrest, and its reflux, which carries with it the ruins of the institution which it has itself shattered. I can understand all that, but lance against lance, sword against sword, men against men, a people against a people! I can understand the deadly rage of the victors, the sanguinary reaction of the vanquished, the political volcanoes which rumble in the bowels of the globe, shake the earth, topple over thrones, upset monarchies, and roll heads and crowns on the scaffold. But what I cannot understand is this mutilation of the granite, this placing of monuments beyond the pale of the law, the destruction of inanimate things, which belong neither to those who destroy them nor to the epoch in which they are destroyed; this pillage of the gigantic library where the antiquarian can read the archeological history of a country. Oh! the vandals, the barbarians! Worse than that, the idiots! who revenge the Borgia crimes and the debauches of Louis XV. on stone. How well those Pharaohs, Menæs, and Cheops knew man as the most perversive, destructive and evil of animals! They who built their pyramids, not with carved traceries, nor lacy spires, but with solid blocks of granite fifty feet square! How they must have laughed in the depths of those sepulchres as they watched Time dull its scythe and pashas wear out their nails in vain against them. Let us build pyramids, my dear Sir John. They are not difficult as architecture, nor beautiful as art, but they are solid; and that enables a general to say four thousand years later: ‘Soldiers, from the apex of these monuments forty centuries are watching you!’ On my honor, my lord, I long to meet a windmill this moment that I might tilt against it.”

And Roland, bursting into his accustomed laugh, dragged Sir John in the direction of the château. But Sir John stopped him and asked: “Is there nothing else to see in the city except the church?”

“Formerly, my lord,” replied Roland, “before they made a hay-loft of it, I should have asked you to come down with me into the vaults of the Dukes of Savoy. We could have hunted for that subterranean passage, nearly three miles long, which is said to exist there, and which, according to these rumors, communicates with the grotto of Ceyzeriat. Please observe, I should never offer such a pleasure trip except to an Englishman; it would have been like a scene from your celebrated Anne Radcliffe in the ‘Mysteries of Udolpho.’ But, as you see, that is impossible, so we will have to be satisfied with our regrets. Come.”

“Where are we going?”

“Faith, I don’t know. Ten years ago I should have taken you to the farms where they fatten pullets. The pullets of Bresse, you must know, have a European reputation. Bourg was an annex to the great coop of Strasburg. But during the Terror, as you can readily imagine, these fatteners of poultry shut up shop. You earned the reputation of being an aristocrat if you ate a pullet, and you know the fraternal refrain: ‘Ah, ça ira, ça ira — the aristocrats to the lantern!’ After Robespierre’s downfall they opened up again; but since the 18th of Fructidor, France has been commanded to fast, from fowls and all. Never mind; come on, anyway. In default of pullets, I can show you one thing, the square where they executed those who ate them. But since I was last in the town the streets have changed their names. I know the way, but I don’t know the names.”

“Look here!” demanded Sir John; “aren’t you a Republican?”

“I not a Republican? Come, come! Quite to the contrary. I consider myself an excellent Republican. I am quite capable of burning off my hand, like Mucius Scævola, or jumping into the gulf like Curtius to save the Republic; but I have, unluckily, a keen sense of the ridiculous. In spite of myself, the absurdity of things catches me in the side and tickles me till I nearly die of laughing. I am willing to accept the Constitution of 1791; but when poor Hérault de Séchelles wrote to the superintendent of the National Library to send him a copy of the laws of Minos, so that he could model his constitution on that of the Isle of Crete, I thought it was going rather far, and that we might very well have been content with those of Lycurgus. I find January, February, and March, mythological as they were, quite as good as Nivose, Pluviose, and Ventose. I can't understand why, when one was called Antoine or Chrystomome in 1789, he should be called Brutus or Cassius in 1793. Here, for example, my lord, is an honest street, which was called the Rue des Halles (Market Street). There was nothing indecent or aristocratic about that, was there? Well, now it is called — Just wait (Roland read the inscription). Well, now it is called the Rue de la Révolution. Here's another, which used to be called Notre Dame; it is now the Rue du Temple. Why Rue du Temple? Probably to perpetuate the memory of that place where the infamous Simon tried to teach cobbling to the heir of sixty-three kings. Don't quarrel with me if I am mistaken by one or two! Now here's a third; it was named Crèvecoeur, a name famous throughout Bresse, Burgundy and Flanders. It is now the Rue de la Federation. Federation is a fine thing, but Crèvecoeur was a fine name. And then you see to-day it leads straight to the Place de la Guillotine, which is, in my opinion, all wrong. I don't want any streets that lead to such places. This one has its advantages; it is only about a hundred feet from the prison, which economized and still economizes the tumbrel and the horse of M. de Bourg. By the way, have you noticed that the executioner remains noble and keeps his title? For the rest, the square is excellently arranged for spectators, and my ancestor, Montrevel, whose name it bears, doubtless, foreseeing its ultimate destiny, solved the great problem, still unsolved by the theatres, of being able to see well from every nook and corner. If ever they cut off my head, which, considering the times in which we are living, would in no wise be surprising, I shall have but one regret: that of being less well-placed and seeing less than the others. Now let us go up these steps. Here we are in the Place des Lices. Our Revolutionists left it its name, because in all probability they don't know what it means. I don't know much better than they, but I think I remember that a certain Sieur d'Estavayer challenged some Flemish count — I don't know who — and that the combat took place in this square. Now, my dear fellow, here is the prison, which ought to give you some idea of human vicissitudes. Gil Blas didn’t change his condition more often than this monument its purposes. Before Cæsar it was a Gaelic temple; Cæsar converted it into a Roman fortress; an unknown architect transformed it into a military work during the Middle Ages; the Knights of Baye, following Cæsar’s example, re-made it into a fortress; the princes of Savoy used it for a residence; the aunt of Charles V. lived here when she came to visit her church at Brou, which she never had the satisfaction of seeing finished. Finally, after the treaty of Lyons, when Bresse was returned to France, it was utilized both as a prison and a court-house. Wait for me a moment, my lord, if you dislike the squeaking of hinges and the grating of bolts. I have a visit to pay to a certain cell.”

“The grating of bolts and the squeaking of hinges is not a very enlivening sound, but no matter. Since you were kind enough to undertake my education, show me your dungeon.”

“Very well, then. Come in quickly. I see a crowd of persons who look as if they want to speak to me.”

In fact, little by little, a sort of rumor seemed to spread throughout the town. People emerged from the houses, forming groups in the streets, and they all watched Roland with curiosity. He rang the bell of the gate, situated then where it is now, but opening into the prison yard. A jailer opened it for them.

“Ah, ah! so you are still here, Father Courtois?” asked the young man. Then, turning to Sir John, he added: “A fine name for a jailer, isn’t it, my lord?”

The jailer looked at the young man in amazement.

“How is it,” he asked through the grating, “that you know my name, when I don’t know yours?”

“Good! I not only know your name, but also your opinions. You are an old royalist, Père Courtois.”

“Monsieur,” said the jailer, terrified, “don’t make bad jokes if you please, and say what you want.”

“Well, my good Father Courtois, I would like to visit the cell where they put my mother and sister, Madame and Mademoiselle Montrevel.”

“Ah!” exclaimed the gatekeeper, “so it’s you, M. Louis? You may well say that I know you. What a fine, handsome young man you’ve grown to be!”

“Do you think so, Father Courtois? Well, I can return the compliment. Your daughter Charlotte is, on my word, a beautiful girl. Charlotte is my sister’s maid, Sir John.”

“And she is very happy over it. She is better off there than here, M. Roland. Is it true that you are General Bonaparte’s aide-de-camp?”

“Alas! I have that honor, Courtois. You would prefer me to be Comte d’Artois’s aide-de-camp, or that of M. le Duc of Angoulême?”

“Oh, do be quiet, M. Louis!” Then putting his lips to the young man’s ear, “Tell me, is it true?”

“What, Father Courtois?”

“That General Bonaparte passed through Lyons yesterday?”

“There must be some truth in the rumor, for this is the second time that I have heard it. Ah! I understand now. These good people who were watching me so curiously apparently wanted to question me. They were like you, Father Courtois: they want to know what to make of General Bonaparte’s arrival.”

“Do you know what they say, M. Louis?”

“Still another rumor, Father Courtois?”

“I should think so, but they only whisper it.”

“What is it?”

“They say that he has come to demand the throne of his Majesty Louis XVIII. from the Directory and the king’s return to it; and that if Citizen Gohier as president doesn’t give it up of his own accord he will take it by force.”

“Pooh!” exclaimed the young officer with an incredulous air bordering on irony. But Father Courtois insisted on his news with an affirmative nod.

“Possibly,” said the young man; “but as for that, it’s news for me. And now that you know me, will you open the gate?”

“Of course I will. I should think so. What the devil am I about?” and the jailer opened the gate with an eagerness equalling his former reluctance. The young man entered, and Sir John followed him. The jailer locked the gate carefully, then he turned, followed by Roland and the Englishman in turn. The latter was beginning to get accustomed to his young friend’s erratic character. The spleen he saw in Roland was misanthropy, without the sulkiness of Timon or the wit of Alceste.

The jailer crossed the yard, which was separated from the law courts by a wall fifteen feet high, with an opening let into the middle of the receding wall, closed by a massive oaken door, to admit prisoners without taking them round by the street. The jailer, we say, crossed the yard to a winding stairway in the left angle of the courtyard which led to the interior of the prison.

If we insist upon these details, it is because we shall be obliged to return to this spot later, and we do not wish it to be wholly unfamiliar to our readers when that time comes.

These steps led first to the ante-chamber of the prison, that is to say to the porter’s hall of the lower court-room. From that hall ten steps led down into an inner court, separated from a third, which was that of the prisoners, by a wall similar to the one we have described, only this one had three doors. At the further end of the courtyard a passage led to the jailer’s own room, which gave into a second passage, on which were the cells which were picturesquely styled cages. The jailer paused before the first of these cages and said, striking the door:

“This is where I put madame, your mother, and your sister, so that if the dear ladies wanted either Charlotte or myself, they need but knock.”

“Is there any one in the cell?”

“No one”

“Then please open the door. My friend, Lord Tanlay, is a philanthropic Englishman who is travelling about to see if the French prisons are more comfortable than the English ones. Enter, Sir John.”

Père Courtois having opened the door, Roland pushed Sir John into a perfectly square cell measuring ten or twelve feet each way.

“Oh, oh!” exclaimed Sir John, “this is lugubrious.”

“Do you think so? Well, my dear friend, this is where my mother, the noblest woman in the world, and my sister, whom you know, spent six weeks with a prospect of leaving it only to make the trip to the Place de Bastion. Just think, that was five years ago, so my sister was scarcely twelve.”

“But what crime had they committed?”

“Oh! a monstrous crime. At the anniversary festival with which the town of Bourg considered proper to commemorate the death of the ‘Friend of the People,’ my mother refused to permit my sister to represent one of the virgins who bore the tears of France in vases. What will you! Poor woman, she thought she had done enough for her country in giving it the blood of her son and her husband, which was flowing in Italy and Germany. She was mistaken. Her country, as it seems, claimed further the tears of her daughter. She thought that too much, especially as those tears were to flow for the citizen Marat. The result was that on the very evening of the celebration, during the enthusiastic exaltation, my mother was declared accused. Fortunately Bourg had not attained the celerity of Paris. A friend of ours, an official in the record-office, kept the affair dragging, until one fine day the fall and death of Robespierre were made known. That interrupted a good many things, among others the guillotinades. Our friend convinced the authorities that the wind blowing from Paris had veered toward clemency; they waited fifteen days, and on the sixteenth they told my mother and sister that they were free. So you understand, my friend — and this involves the most profound philosophical reflection — so that if Mademoiselle Teresa Cabarrus had not come from Spain, if she had not married M. Fontenay, parliamentary counsellor; had she not been arrested and brought before the pro-consul Tallien, son of the Marquis de Bercy's butler, ex-notary's clerk, ex-foreman of a printing-shop, ex-porter, ex-secretary to the Commune of Paris temporarily at Bordeaux; and had the ex-pro-consul not become enamored of her, and had she not been imprisoned, and if on the ninth of Thermidor she had not found means to send a dagger with these words: 'Unless the tyrant dies to-day, I die to-morrow'; had not Saint-Just been arrested in the midst of his discourse; had not Robespierre, on that day, had a frog in his throat; had not Garnier de l'Aube exclaimed: 'It is the blood of Danton choking you!' had not Louchet shouted for his arrest; had he not been arrested, released by the Commune, recaptured in spite of this, had his jaw broken by a pistol shot, and been executed next day — my mother would, in all probability, have had her head cut off for refusing to allow her daughter to weep for citizen Marat in one of the twelve lachrymal urns which Bourg was desirous of filling with its tears. Good-by, Courtois. You are a worthy man. You gave my mother and sister a little water to put with their wine, a little meat to eat with their bread, a little hope to fill their hearts; you lent them your daughter that they might not have to sweep their cell themselves. That deserves a fortune. Unfortunately I am not rich; but here are fifty louis I happen to have with me. Come, my lord."

And the young man carried off Sir John before the jailer, recovered from his surprise and found time either to thank Roland or refuse the fifty louis; which, it must be said, would have been a remarkable proof of disinterestedness in a jailer, especially when that jailer's opinions were opposed to those of the government he served.

Leaving the prison, Roland and Sir John found the Place des Lices crowded with people who had heard of General Bonaparte's return to France, and were shouting "Vive Bonaparte!" at the top of their lungs — some because they really admired the victor of Arcola, Rivoli, and the Pyramids, others because they had been told, like Père Courtois, that this same victor had vanquished only that Louis XVIII. might profit by his victories.

Roland and Sir John, having now visited all that the town of Bourg offered of interest, returned to the Château des Noires-Fontaines, which they reached before long. Madame de Montrevel and Amélie had gone out. Roland installed Sir John in an easy chair, asking him to wait a few minutes for him. At the end of five minutes he returned with a sort of pamphlet of gray paper, very badly printed, in his hand.

"My dear fellow," said he, "you seemed to have some doubts about the authenticity of that festival which I just mentioned, and which nearly cost my mother and sister their lives, so I bring you the programme. Read it, and while you are doing so I will go and see what they have been doing with my dogs; for I presume that you would rather hold me quit of our fishing expedition in favor of a hunt."

He went out, leaving in Sir John's hands a copy of the decree of the municipality of the town of Bourg, instituting the funeral rites in honor of Marat, on the anniversary of his death.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WILD-BOAR

Sir John was just finishing that interesting bit of history when Madame de Montrevel and her daughter returned. Amélie, who did not know how much had been said about her between Roland and Sir John, was astounded by the expression with which that gentleman scrutinized her.

To him she seemed more lovely than before. He could readily understand that mother, who at the risk of life had been unwilling that this charming creature should profane her youth and beauty by serving as a mourner in a celebration of which Marat was the deity. He recalled that cold damp cell which he had lately visited, and shuddered at the thought that this delicate white ermine before his eyes had been imprisoned there, without sun or air, for six weeks. He looked at the throat, too long perhaps, but swan-like in its suppleness and graceful in its exaggeration, and he remembered that melancholy remark of the poor Princesse de Lamballe, as she felt her slender neck: “It will not give the executioner much trouble!”

The thoughts which succeeded each other in Sir John’s mind gave to his face an expression so different from its customary aspect, that Madame de Montrevel could not refrain from asking what troubled him. He then told her of his visit to the prison, and Roland’s pious pilgrimage to the dungeon where his mother and sister had been incarcerated. Just as Sir John had concluded his tale, a view-halloo sounded without, and Roland entered, his hunting-horn in his hands.

“My dear friend,” he cried, “thanks to my mother, we shall have a splendid hunt to-morrow.”

“Thanks to me?” queried Madame de Montrevel.

“How so?” added Sir John.

“I left you to see about my dogs, didn’t I?”

“You said so, at any rate.”

“I had two excellent beasts, Barbichon and Ravaude, male and female.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Sir John, “are they dead?”

"Well, yes; but just guess what this excellent mother of mine has done?" and, tilting Madame de Montrevel's head, he kissed her on both cheeks. "She wouldn't let them drown a single puppy because they were the dogs of my dogs; so the result is, that to-day the pups, grand-pups, and great-grand-pups of Barbichon and Ravaude are as numerous as the descendant of Ishmael. Instead of a pair of dogs, I have a whole pack, twenty-five beasts, all as black as moles with white paws, fire in their eyes and hearts, and a regiment of cornet-tails that would do you good to see."

And Roland sounded another halloo that brought his young brother to the scene.

"Oh!" shouted the boy as he entered, "you are going hunting to-morrow, brother Roland. I'm going, too, I'm going, too!"

"Good!" said Roland, "but do you know what we are going to hunt?"

"No. All I know is that I'm going, too."

"We're going to hunt a boar."

"Oh, joy!" cried the boy, clapping his little hands.

"Are you crazy?" asked Madame de Montrevel, turning pale.

"Why so, madame mother, if you please?"

"Because boar hunts are very dangerous."

"Not so dangerous as hunting men. My brother got back safe from that, and so will I from the other."

"Roland," cried Madame de Montrevel, while Amélie, lost in thought, took no part in the discussion, "Roland, make Edouard listen to reason. Tell him that he hasn't got common-sense."

But Roland, who recognized himself again in his young brother, instead of blaming him, smiled at his boyish ardor. "I'd take you willingly," said he, "only to go hunting one must at least know how to handle a gun."

"Oh, Master Roland," cried Edouard, "just come into the garden a bit. Put up your hat at a hundred yards, and I'll show you how to handle a gun."

"Naughty child," exclaimed Madame de Montrevel, trembling, "where did you learn?"

"Why, from the gunsmith at Montagnac, who keeps papa's and Roland's guns. You ask me sometimes what I do with my money, don't you? Well, I buy powder and balls with it, and I am learning to kill Austrians and Arabs like my brother Roland."

Madame de Montrevel raised her hands to heaven.

“What can you expect, mother?” asked Roland. “Blood will tell. No Montrevel could be afraid of powder. You shall come with us to-morrow, Edouard.”

The boy sprang upon his brother’s neck.

“And I,” said Sir John, “will equip you to-day like a regular huntsman, just as they used to arm the knights of old. I have a charming little rifle that I will give you. It will keep you contented until your sabre and pistols come.”

“Well,” asked Roland, “are you satisfied now, Edouard?”

“Yes; but when will he give it to me? If you have to write to England for it, I warn you I shan’t believe in it.”

“No, my little friend, we have only to go up to my room and open my gun-case. That’s soon done.”

“Then, let’s go at once.”

“Come on,” said Sir John; and he went out, followed by Edouard.

A moment later, Amélie, still absorbed in thought, rose and left the room. Neither Madame de Montrevel nor Roland noticed her departure, so interested were they in a serious discussion. Madame de Montrevel tried to persuade Roland not to take his young brother with him on the morrow’s hunt. Roland explained that, since Edouard was to become a soldier like his father and brother, the sooner he learned to handle a gun and become familiar with powder and ball the better. The discussion was not yet ended when Edouard returned with his gun slung over his shoulder.

“Look, brother,” said he, turning to Roland; “just see what a fine present Sir John has given me.” And he looked gratefully at Sir John, who stood in the doorway vainly seeking Amélie with his eyes.

It was in truth a beautiful present. The rifle, designed with that plainness of ornament and simplicity of form peculiar to English weapons, was of the finest finish. Like the pistols, of which Roland had had opportunity to test the accuracy, the rifle was made by the celebrated Manton, and carried a twenty-four calibre bullet. That it had been originally intended for a woman was easily seen by the shortness of the stock and the velvet pad on the trigger. This original purpose of the weapon made it peculiarly suitable for a boy of twelve.

Roland took the rifle from his brother’s shoulder, looked at it knowingly, tried its action, sighted it, tossed it from one hand to the other, and then, giving it back to Edouard, said: “Thank Sir John again. You have a rifle fit for a king’s son. Let’s go and try it.”

All three went out to try Sir John’s rifle, leaving Madame de Montrevel as sad as Thetis when she saw Achilles in his woman’s garb draw the sword of Ulysses from its scabbard.

A quarter of an hour later, Edouard returned triumphantly. He brought his mother a bit of pasteboard of the circumference of a hat, in which he had put ten bullets out of twelve. The two men had remained behind in the park conversing.

Madame de Montrevel listened to Edouard’s slightly boastful account of his prowess. Then she looked at him with that deep and holy sorrow of mothers to whom fame is no compensation for the blood it sheds. Oh! ungrateful indeed is the child who has seen that look bent upon him and does not eternally remember it. Then, after a few seconds of this painful contemplation, she pressed her second son to her breast, and murmured sobbing: “You, too! you, too, will desert your mother some day.”

“Yes, mother,” replied the boy, “to become a general like my father, or an aide-de-camp like Roland.”

“And to be killed as your father was, as your brother perhaps will be.”

For the strange transformation in Roland’s character had not escaped Madame de Montrevel. It was but an added dread to her other anxieties, among which Amélie’s pallor and abstraction must be numbered.

Amélie was just seventeen; her childhood had been that of a happy laughing girl, joyous and healthy. The death of her father had cast a black veil over her youth and gayety. But these tempests of spring pass rapidly. Her smile, the sunshine of life’s dawn, returned like that of Nature, sparkling through that dew of the heart we call tears.

Then, one day about six months before this story opens, Amélie’s face had saddened, her cheeks had grown pale, and, like the birds who migrate at the approach of wintry weather, the childlike laughter that escaped her parted lips and white teeth had fled never to return.

Madame de Montrevel had questioned her, but Amélie asserted that she was still the same. She endeavored to smile, but as a stone thrown into a lake rings upon the surface, so the smiles roused by this maternal solicitude faded, little by little, from Amélie’s face. With keen maternal instinct Madame de Montrevel had thought of love. But whom could Amélie love? There were no visitors at the Château des Noires-Fontaines, the political troubles had put an end to all society, and Amélie went nowhere alone. Madame de Montrevel could get no further than conjecture. Roland's return had given her a moment's hope; but this hope fled as soon as she perceived the effect which this event had produced upon Amélie.

It was not a sister, but a spectre, it will be recalled, who had come to meet him. Since her son's arrival, Madame de Montrevel had not lost sight of Amélie, and she perceived, with dolorous amazement, that Roland's presence awakened a feeling akin to terror in his sister's breast. She, whose eyes had formerly rested so lovingly upon him, now seemed to view him with alarm. Only a few moments since, Amélie had profited by the first opportunity to return to her room, the one spot in the château where she seemed at ease, and where for the last six months she had spent most of her time. The dinner-bell alone possessed the power to bring her from it, and even then she waited for the second call before entering the dining-room.

Roland and Sir John, as we have said, had divided their time between their visit to Bourg and their preparations for the morrow's hunt. From morn until noon they were to beat the woods; from noon till evening they were to hunt the boar. Michel, that devoted poacher, confined to his chair for the present with a sprain, felt better as soon as the question of the hunt was mooted, and had himself hoisted on a little horse that was used for the errands of the house. Then he sallied forth to collect the beaters from Saint-Just and Montagnac. He, being unable to beat or run, was to remain with the pack, and watch Sir John's and Roland's horse, and Edouard's pony, in the middle of the forest, where it was intersected by one good road and two practicable paths. The beaters, who could not follow the hunt, were to return to the château with the game-bags.

The beaters were at the door at six the following morning. Michel was not to leave with the horses and dogs until eleven. The Château des Noires-Fontaines was just at the edge of the forest of Seillon, so the hunt could begin at its very gates.

As the battue promised chiefly deer and hares, the guns were loaded with balls. Roland gave Edouard a simple little gun which he himself had used as a child. He had not enough confidence as yet in the boy's prudence to trust him with a double-barrelled gun. As for the rifle that Sir John had given him the day before, it could only carry cartridges. It was given into Michel's safe keeping, to be returned to him in case they started a boar for the second part of the hunt. For this Roland and Sir John were also to change their guns for rifles and hunting knives, pointed as daggers and sharp as razors, which formed part of Sir John’s arsenal, and could be suspended from the belt or screwed on the point of the gun like bayonets.

From the beginning of the battue it was easy to see that the hunt would be a good one. A roebuck and two hares were killed at once. At noon two does, seven roebucks and two foxes had been bagged. They had also seen two boars, but these latter had only shaken their bristles in answer to the heavy balls and made off.

Edouard was in the seventh heaven; he had killed a roebuck. The beaters, well rewarded for their labor, were sent to the château with the game, as had been arranged. A sort of bugle was sounded to ascertain Michel’s whereabout, to which he answered. In less than ten minutes the three hunters had rejoined the gardener with his hounds and horses.

Michel had seen a boar which he had sent his son to head off, and it was now in the woods not a hundred paces distant. Jacques, Michel’s eldest son, beat up the woods with Barbichon and Ravaude, the heads of the pack, and in about five minutes the boar was found in his lair. They could have killed him at once, or at least shot at him, but that would have ended the hunt too quickly. The huntsmen launched the whole pack at the animal, which, seeing this troop of pygmies swoop down upon him, started off at a slow trot. He crossed the road, Roland giving the view-halloo, and headed in the direction of the Chartreuse of Seillon, the three riders following the path which led through the woods. The boar led them a chase which lasted until five in the afternoon, turning upon his tracks, evidently unwilling to leave the forest with its thick undergrowth.

At last the violent barking of the dogs warned them that the animal had been brought to bay. The spot was not a hundred paces distant from the pavilion belonging to the Chartreuse, in one of the most tangled thickets of the forest. It was impossible to force the horses through it, and the riders dismounted. The barking of the dogs guided them straight along the path, from which they deviated only where the obstacles they encountered rendered it necessary.

From time to time yelps of pain indicated that members of the attacking party had ventured too close to the animal, and had paid the price of their temerity. About twenty feet from the scene of action the hunters began to see the actors. The boar was backed against a rock to avoid attack in the rear; then, bracing himself on his forepaws, he faced the dogs with his ensanguined eyes and enormous tusks. They quivered around him like a moving carpet; five or six, more or less badly wounded, were staining the battlefield with their blood, though still attacking the boar with a fury and courage that might have served as an example to the bravest men.

Each hunter faced the scene with the characteristic signs of his age, nature and nation. Edouard, at one and the same time, the most imprudent and the smallest, finding the path less difficult, owing to his small, stature, arrived first. Roland, heedless of danger of any kind, seeking rather than avoiding it, followed. Finally Sir John, slower, graver, more reflective, brought up the rear. Once the boar perceived his hunters he paid no further attention to the dogs. He fixed his gleaming, sanguinary eyes upon them; but his only movement was a snapping of the jaws, which he brought together with a threatening sound. Roland watched the scene for an instant, evidently desirous of flinging himself into the midst of the group, knife in hand, to slit the boar's throat as a butcher would that of a calf or a pig. This impulse was so apparent that Sir John caught his arm, and little Edouard exclaimed: "Oh! brother, let me shoot the boar!"

Roland restrained himself, and stacking his gun against a tree, waited, armed only with his hunting-knife, which he had drawn from its sheath.

"Very well," said he, "shoot him; but be careful about it."

"Oh! don't worry," retorted the child, between his set teeth. His face was pale but resolute as he aimed the barrel of his rifle at the animal's head.

"If he misses him, or only wounds him," observed Sir John, "you know that the brute will be upon us before we can see him through the smoke."

"I know it, my lord; but I am accustomed to these hunts," replied Roland, his nostrils quivering, his eyes sparkling, his lips parted: "Fire, Edouard!"

The shot followed the order upon the instant; but after the shot, with, or even before it, the beast, swift as lightning, rushed upon the child. A second shot followed the first, but the animal's scarlet eyes still gleamed through the smoke. But, as it rushed, it met Roland with his knee on the ground, the knife in his hand. A moment later a tangled, formless group, man and boar, boar and man, was rolling on the ground. Then a third shot rang out, followed by a laugh from Roland.

"Ah! my lord," cried the young man, "you've wasted powder and shot. Can't you see that I have ripped him up? Only get his body off of me. The beast weighs at least four hundred pounds, and he is smothering me."

But before Sir John could stoop, Roland, with a vigorous push of the shoulder, rolled the animal’s body aside, and rose to his feet covered with blood, but without a single scratch. Little Edouard, either from lack of time or from native courage, had not recoiled an inch. True, he was completely protected by his brother’s body, which was between him and the boar. Sir John had sprung aside to take the animal in the flank. He watched Roland, as he emerged from this second duel, with the same amazement that he had experienced after the first.

The dogs — those that were left, some twenty in all — had followed the boar, and were now leaping upon his body in the vain effort to tear the bristles, which were almost as impenetrable as iron.

“You will see,” said Roland, wiping the blood from his face and hands with a fine cambric handkerchief, “how they will eat him, and your knife too, my lord.”

“True,” said Sir John; “where is the knife?”

“In its sheath,” replied Roland.

“Ah!” exclaimed the boy, “only the handle shows.”

He sprang toward the animal and pulled out the poniard, which, as he said, was buried up to the hilt. The sharp point, guided by a calm eye and a firm hand, had pierced the animal’s heart.

There were other wounds on the boar’s body. The first, caused by the boy’s shot, showed a bloody furrow just over the eye; the blow had been too weak to crush the frontal bone. The second came from Sir John’s first shot; it had caught the animal diagonally and grazed his breast. The third, fired at close quarters, went through the body; but, as Roland had said, not until after the animal was dead.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN UNPLEASANT COMMISSION

The hunt was over, darkness was falling, and it was now a question of returning to the château. The horses were nearby; they could hear them neighing impatiently. They seemed to be asking if their courage was so doubted that they were not allowed to share in the exciting drama.

Edouard was bent upon dragging the boar after them, fastening it to the saddle-bow, and so carrying it back to the château; but Roland pointed out that it was simpler to send a couple of men for it with a barrow. Sir John being of the same opinion, Edouard — who never ceased pointing to the wound in the head, and saying, “That’s my shot; that’s where I aimed” — Edouard, we say, was forced to yield to the majority. The three hunters soon reached the spot where their horses were tethered, mounted, and in less than ten minutes were at the Château des Noires-Fontaines.

Madame de Montrevel was watching for them on the portico. The poor mother had waited there nearly an hour, trembling lest an accident had befallen one or the other of her sons. The moment Edouard espied her he put his pony to a gallop, shouting from the gate: “Mother, mother! We killed a boar as big as a donkey. I shot him in the head; you’ll see the hole my ball, made; Roland stuck his hunting knife into the boar’s belly up to the hilt, and Sir John fired at him twice. Quick, quick! Send the men for the carcass. Don’t be frightened when you see Roland. He’s all covered with blood — but it’s from the boar, and he hasn’t a scratch.”

This was delivered with Edouard’s accustomed volubility while Madame de Montrevel was crossing the clearing between the portico and the road to open the gate. She intended to take Edouard in her arms, but he jumped from his saddle and flung himself upon her neck. Roland and Sir John came up just then, and Amélie appeared on the portico at the same instant.

Edouard left his mother to worry over Roland, who, covered as he was with blood, looked very terrifying, and rushed to his sister with the tale he had rattled off to his mother. Amélie listened in an abstracted manner that probably hurt Edouard’s vanity, for he dashed off to the kitchen to describe the affair to Michel, who was certain to listen to him.

Michel was indeed interested; but when, after telling him where the carcass lay, Edouard gave him Roland’s order to send a couple of men after the beast, he shook his head.

“What!” demanded Edouard, “are you going to refuse to obey my brother?”

“Heaven forbid! Master Edouard. Jacques shall start this instant for Montagnac.”

“Are you afraid he won’t find any body?”

“Goodness, no; he could get a dozen. But the trouble is the time of night. You say the boar lies close to the pavilion of the Chartreuse?”

“Not twenty yards from it.”

“I’d rather it was three miles,” replied Michel scratching his head; “but never mind. I’ll send for them anyway without telling them what they’re wanted for. Once here, it’s for your brother to make them go.”

“Good! Good! Only get them here and I’ll see to that myself.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Michel, “if I hadn’t this beastly sprain I’d go myself. But to-day’s doings have made it worse. Jacques! Jacques!”

Jacques came, and Edouard not only waited to hear the order given, but until he had started. Then he ran upstairs to do what Roland and Sir John were already doing, that is, dress for dinner.

The whole talk at table, as may be easily imagined, centred upon the day’s prowess. Edouard asked nothing better than to talk about it, and Sir John, astounded by Roland’s skill, courage, and good luck, improved upon the child’s narrative. Madame de Montrevel shuddered at each detail, and yet she made them repeat it twenty times. That which seemed most clear to her in all this was that Roland had saved Edouard’s life.

“Did you thank him for it?” she asked the boy. “Thank whom?”

“Your brother.”

“Why should I thank him?” retorted Edouard. “I should have done the same thing.”

“Ah, madame, what can you expect!” said Sir John; “you are a gazelle who has unwittingly given birth to a race of lions.”

Amélie had also paid the closest attention to the account, especially when the hunters spoke of their proximity to the Chartreuse. From that time on she listened with anxious eyes, and seemed scarcely to breathe, until they told of leaving the woods after the killing.

After dinner, word was brought that Jacques had returned with two peasants from Montagnac. They wanted exact directions as to where the hunters had left the animal. Roland rose, intending to go to them, but Madame de Montrevel, who could never see enough of her son, turned to the messenger and said: “Bring these worthy men in here. It is not necessary to disturb M. Roland for that.”

Five minutes later the two peasants entered, twirling their hats in their hands.

“My sons,” said Roland, “I want you to fetch the boar we killed in the forest of Seillon.”

“That can be done,” said one of the peasants, consulting his companion with a look.

“Yes, it can be done,” answered the other.

“Don’t be alarmed,” said Roland. “You shall lose nothing by your trouble.”

“Oh! we’re not,” interrupted one of the peasants. “We know you, Monsieur de Montrevel.”

“Yes,” answered the other, “we know that, like your father, you’re not in the habit of making people work for nothing. Oh! if all the aristocrats had been like you, Monsieur Louis, there wouldn’t have been any revolution.”

“Of course not,” said the other, who seemed to have come solely to echo affirmatively what his companion said.

“It remains to be seen now where the animal is,” said the first peasant.

“Yes,” repeated the second, “remains to be seen where it is.”

“Oh! it won’t be hard to find.”

“So much the better,” interjected the peasant.

“Do you know the pavilion in the forest?”

“Which one?”

“Yes, which one?”

“The one that belongs to the Chartreuse of Seillon.”

The peasants looked at each other.

“Well, you’ll find it some twenty feet distant from the front on the way to Genoud.”

The peasants looked at each other once more.

“Hum!” grunted the first one.

“Hum!” repeated the other, faithful echo of his companion.

“Well, what does this ‘hum’ mean?” demanded Roland.

“Confound it.”

“Come, explain yourselves. What’s the matter?”

“The matter is that we’d rather that it was the other end of the forest.”

“But why the other end?” retorted Roland, impatiently; “it’s nine miles from here to the other end, and barely three from here to where we left the boar.”

“Yes,” said the first peasant, “but just where the boar lies — ” And he paused and scratched his head.

“Exactly; that’s what,” added the other.

“Just what?”

“It’s a little too near the Chartreuse.”

“Not the Chartreuse; I said the pavilion.”

“It’s all the same. You know, Monsieur Louis, that there is an underground passage leading from the pavilion to the Chartreuse.”

“Oh, yes, there is one, that’s sure,” added the other.

“But,” exclaimed Roland, “what has this underground passage got to do with our boar?”

“This much, that the beast’s in a bad place, that’s all.”

“Oh, yes! a bad place,” repeated the other peasant.

“Come, now, explain yourselves, you rascals,” said Roland, who was growing angry, while his mother seemed uneasy, and Amélie visibly turned pale.

“Beg pardon, Monsieur Louis,” answered the peasant; “we are not rascals; we’re God-fearing men, that’s all.”

“By thunder,” cried Roland, “I’m a God-fearing man myself. What of that?”

“Well, we don’t care to have any dealings with the devil.”

“No, no, no,” asserted the second peasant.

“A man can match a man if he’s of his own kind,” continued the first peasant.

“Sometimes two,” said the second, who was built like a Hercules.

“But with ghostly beings phantoms, spectres — no thank you,” continued the first peasant.

“No, thank you,” repeated the other.

“Oh, mother, sister,” queried Roland, addressing the two women, “in Heaven’s name, do you understand anything of what these two fools are saying?”

“Fools,” repeated the first peasant; “well, possibly. But it’s not the less true that Pierre Marey had his neck twisted just for looking over the wall. True, it was of a Saturday — the devil’s sabbath.”

“And they couldn’t straighten it out,” affirmed the second peasant, “so they had to bury him with his face turned round looking the other way.

“Oh!” exclaimed Sir John, “this is growing interesting. I’m very fond of ghost stories.”

“That’s more than sister Amélie is it seems,” cried Edouard.

“What do you mean?”

“Just see how pale she’s grown, brother Roland.”

“Yes, indeed,” said Sir John; “mademoiselle looks as if she were going to faint.”

“I? Not at all,” exclaimed Amélie, wiping the perspiration from her forehead; “only don’t you think it seems a little warm here, mother?”

“No,” answered Madame de Montrevel.

“Still,” insisted Amélie, “if it would not annoy you, I should like to open the window.”

“Do so, my child.”

Amélie rose hastily to profit by this permission, and went with tottering steps to a window opening upon the garden. After it was opened, she stood leaning against the sill, half-hidden by the curtains.

“Ah!” she said, “I can breathe here.”

Sir John rose to offer her his smelling-salts, but Amélie declined hastily: “No, no, my lord. Thank you, but I am better now.”

“Come, come,” said Roland, “don’t bother about that; it’s our boar.”

“Well, Monsieur Louis, we will fetch your boar tomorrow.”

“That’s it,” said the second peasant, “to-morrow morning, when it’s light.”

“But to go there at night — ”

“Oh! to go there at night — ”

The peasant looked at his comrade and both shook their heads.

“It can’t be done at night.”

“Cowards.”

“Monsieur Louis, a man’s not a coward because he’s afraid.”

“No, indeed; that’s not being a coward,” replied the other.

“Ah!” said Roland, “I wish some stronger minded men than you would face me with that argument; that a man is not a coward because he’s afraid!”

“Well, it’s according to what he’s afraid of, Monsieur Louis. Give me a good sickle and a good cudgel, and I’m not afraid of a wolf; give me a good gun and I’m not afraid of any man, even if I knew he’s waiting to murder me.”

“Yes,” said Edouard, “but you’re afraid of a ghost, even when it’s only the ghost of a monk.”

“Little Master Edouard,” said the peasant, “leave your brother to do the talking; you’re not old enough to jest about such things — ”

“No,” added the other peasant, “wait till your beard is grown, my little gentleman.”

“I haven’t any beard,” retorted Edouard, starting up, “but just the same if I was strong enough to carry the boar, I’d go fetch it myself either by day or night.”

“Much good may it do you, my young gentleman. But neither my comrade nor myself would go, even for a whole louis.”

“Nor for two?” said Roland, wishing to corner them.

“Nor for two, nor four, nor ten, Monsieur de Montrevel. Ten louis are good, but what could I do with them if my neck was broken?”

“Yes, twisted like Pierre Marey’s,” said the other peasant.

“Ten louis wouldn’t feed my wife and children for the rest of my life, would they?”

“And besides, when you say ten louis,” interrupted the second peasant, “you mean really five, because I’d get five, too.”

“So the pavilion is haunted by ghosts, is it?” asked Roland.

“I didn’t say the pavilion — I’m not sure about the pavilion — but in the Chartreuse — ”

“In the Chartreuse, are you sure?”

“Oh! there, certainly.”

“Have you seen them?”

“I haven’t; but some folks have.”

“Has your comrade?” asked the young officer, turning to the second peasant.

“I haven’t seen them; but I did see flames, and Claude Philippon heard chains.”

“Ah! so they have flames and chains?” said Roland.

“Yes,” replied the first peasant, “for I have seen the flames myself.”

“And Claude Philippon on heard the chains,” repeated the other.

“Very good, my friends, very good,” replied Roland, sneering; “so you won’t go there to-night at any price?”

“Not at any price.”

“Not for all the gold in the world.”

“And you’ll go to-morrow when it’s light?”

“Oh! Monsieur Louis, before you’re up the boar will be here.”

“Before you’re up,” said Echo.

“All right,” said Roland. “Come back to me the day after tomorrow.”

“Willingly, Monsieur Louis. What do you want us to do?”

“Never mind; just come.”

“Oh! we’ll come.”

“That means that the moment you say, ‘Come,’ you can count upon us, Monsieur Louis.”

“Well, then I’ll have some information for you.”

“What about?”

“The ghosts.”

Amélie gave a stifled cry; Madame de Montrevel alone heard it. Louis dismissed the two peasants, and they jostled each other at the door in their efforts to go through together.

Nothing more was said that evening about the Chartreuse or the pavilion, nor of its supernatural tenants, spectres or phantoms who haunted them.

CHAPTER XV.

THE STRONG-MINDED MAN

At ten o’clock everyone was in bed at the Château des Noires-Fontaines, or, at any rate, all had retired to their rooms.

Three or four times in the course of the evening Amélie had approached Roland as if she had something to say to him; but each time the words died upon her lips. When the family left the salon, she had taken his arm, and, although his room was on the floor above hers, she had accompanied him to his very door. Roland had kissed her, bade her good-night, and closed his door, declaring himself very tired.

Nevertheless, in spite of this assertion, Roland, once alone, did not proceed to undress. He went to his collection of arms, selected a pair of magnificent pistols, manufactured at Versailles, and presented to his father by the Convention. He snapped the triggers, and blew into the barrels to see that there were no old charges in them. They were in excellent condition. After which he laid them side by side on the table; then going to the door, looking out upon the stairs, he opened it softly to see if any one were watching. Finding the corridor and stairs empty, he went to Sir John’s door and knocked.

“Come in,” said the Englishman. Sir John, like himself, was not prepared for bed.

“I guessed from the sign you made me that you had something to say to me,” said Sir John, “so I waited for you, as you see.”

“Indeed, I have something to say to you,” returned Roland, seating himself gayly in an armchair.

“My kind host,” replied the Englishman, “I am beginning to understand you. When I see you as gay as you are now, I am like your peasants, I feel afraid.”

“Did you hear what they were saying?”

“I heard them tell a splendid ghost story. I, myself, have a haunted castle in England.”

“Have you ever seen the ghosts, my lord?”

"Yes, when I was little. Unfortunately, since I have grown up they have disappeared."

"That's always the way with ghosts," said Roland gayly; "they come and go. How lucky it is that I should return just as the ghosts have begun to haunt the Chartreuse of Seillon."

"Yes," replied Sir John, "very lucky. Only are you sure that there are any there?"

"No. But I'll know by the day after to-morrow."

"How so?"

"I intend to spend to-morrow night there."

"Oh!" said the Englishmen, "would you like to have me go with you?"

"With pleasure, my lord. Only, unfortunately, that is impossible."

"Impossible, oh!"

"As I have just told you, my dear fellow."

"But why impossible?"

"Are you acquainted with the manners and customs of ghosts, Sir John?" asked Roland gravely.

"No."

"Well, I am. Ghosts only show themselves under certain conditions."

"Explain that."

"Well, for example, in Italy, my lord, and in Spain, the most superstitious of countries, there are no ghosts, or if there are, why, at the best, it's only once in ten or twenty years, or maybe in a century."

"And to what do you attribute their absence?"

"To the absence of fogs."

"Ah! ah!"

"Not a doubt of it. You understand the native atmosphere of ghosts is fog. Scotland, Denmark and England, regions of fog, are overrun with ghosts. There's the spectre of Hamlet, then that of Banquo, the shadows of Richard III. Italy has only one spectre, Cæsar, and then where did he appear to Brutus? At Philippi, in Macedonia and in Thessaly, the Denmark of Greece, the Scotland of the Orient; where the fog made Ovid so melancholy he named the odes he wrote there Tristia. Why did Virgil make the ghost of Anchises appear to Eneas? Because he came from Mantua. Do you know Mantua? A marsh, a frog-pond, a regular manufactory of rheumatism, an atmosphere of vapors, and consequently a nest of phantoms."

"Go on, I'm listening to you."

“Have you seen the Rhine?”

“Yes.”

“Germany, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“Still another country of fairies, water sprites, sylphs, and consequently phantoms (‘for whoso does the greater see, can see the less’), and all that on account of the fog. But where the devil can the ghosts hide in Italy and Spain? Not the least bit of mist. And, therefore, were I in Spain or Italy I should never attempt to-morrow’s adventure.”

“But all that doesn’t explain why you refuse my company,” insisted Sir John.

“Wait a moment. I’ve just explained to you that ghosts don’t venture into certain countries, because they do not offer certain atmospheric conditions. Now, let me explain the precautions we must take if we wish to see them.”

“Explain! explain!” said Sir John, “I would rather hear you talk than any other man, Roland.”

And Sir John, stretching himself out in his easy-chair, prepared to listen with delight to the improvisations of this fantastic mind, which he had seen under so many aspects during the few days of their acquaintance.

Roland bowed his head by way of thanks.

“Well, this is the way of it, and you will grasp it readily enough. I have heard so much about ghosts in my life that I know the scamps as if I had made them. Why do ghosts appear?”

“Are you asking me that?” inquired Sir John.

“Yes, I ask you.”

“I own that, not having studied ghosts as you have, I am unable to give you a definitive answer.”

“You see! Ghosts show themselves, my dear fellow, in order to frighten those who see them.”

“That is undeniable.”

“Of course! Now, if they don’t frighten those to whom they appear, they are frightened by them; witness M. de Turenne, whose ghosts proved to be counterfeiters. Do you know that story?”

“No.”

“I’ll tell it to you some day; don’t let’s get mixed up. That is just why, when they decide to appear — which is seldom — ghosts select stormy nights, when it thunders, lightens and blows; that’s their scenery.”

“I am forced to admit that nothing could be more correct.”

“Wait a moment! There are instances when the bravest man feels a shudder run through his veins. Even before I was suffering with this aneurism it has happened to me a dozen times, when I have seen the flash of sabres and heard the thunder of cannon around me. It is true that since I have been subject to this aneurism I rush where the lightning flashes and the thunder growls. Still there is the chance that these ghosts don’t know this and believe that I can be frightened.”

“Whereas that is an impossibility, isn’t it?” asked Sir John.

“What will you! When, right or wrong, one feels that, far from dreading death, one has every reason to seek it, what should he fear? But I repeat, these ghosts, who know so much, may not know that only ghosts know this; they know that the sense of fear increases or diminishes according to the seeing and hearing of exterior things. Thus, for example, where do phantoms prefer to appear? In dark places, cemeteries, old cloisters, ruins, subterranean passages, because the aspect of these localities predisposes the soul to fear. What precedes their appearance? The rattling of chains, groans, sighs, because there is nothing very cheerful in all that? They are careful not to appear in the bright light, or after a strain of dance music. No, fear is an abyss into which you descend step by step, until you are overcome by vertigo; your feet slip, and you plunge with closed eyes to the bottom of the precipice. Now, if you read the accounts of all these apparitions, you’ll find they all proceed like this: First the sky darkens, the thunder growls, the wind howls, doors and windows rattle, the lamp — if there is a lamp in the room of the person the ghosts are trying to frighten — the lamp flares, flickers and goes out — utter darkness! Then, in the darkness, groans, wails and the rattling of chains are heard; then, at last, the door opens and the ghost appears. I must say that all the apparitions that I have not seen but read about have presented themselves under similar circumstances. Isn’t that so, Sir John?”

“Perfectly.”

“And did you ever hear of a ghost appearing to two persons at the same time?”

“I certainly never did hear of it.”

“It’s quite simple, my dear fellow. Two together, you understand, have no fear. Fear is something mysterious, strange, independent of the will, requiring isolation, darkness and solitude. A ghost is no more dangerous than a cannon ball. Well, a soldier never fears a cannon ball in the daytime, when his elbows touch a comrade to the right and left. No, he goes straight for the battery and is either killed or he kills. That's not what the phantoms want. That's why they never appear to two persons at the same time, and that is the reason I want to go to the Chartreuse alone, my lord. Your presence would prevent the boldest ghost from appearing. If I see nothing, or if I see something worth the trouble, you can have your turn the next day. Does the bargain suit you?"

"Perfectly! But why can't I take the first night?"

"Ah! first, because the idea didn't occur to you, and it is only just that I should benefit by my own cleverness. Besides, I belong to the region; I was friendly with the good monks in their lifetime, and there may be a chance of their appearing to me after death. Moreover, as I know the localities, if it becomes necessary to run away or pursue I can do it better than you. Don't you see the justice of that, my dear fellow?"

"Yes, it couldn't be fairer; but I am sure of going the next night."

"The next night, and the one after, and every day and night if you wish; I only hold to the first. Now," continued Roland rising, "this is between ourselves, isn't it? Not a word to any one. The ghosts might be forewarned and act accordingly. It would never do to let those gay dogs get the best of us; that would be too grotesque."

"Oh, be easy about that. You will go armed, won't you?"

"If I thought I was only dealing with ghosts, I'd go with my hands in my pockets and nothing in my fobs. But, as I told you, M. de Turenne's ghosts were counterfeiters, so I shall take my pistols."

"Do you want mine?"

"No, thanks. Though yours are good, I am about resolved never to use them again." Then, with a smile whose bitterness it would be impossible to describe, he added: "They brought me ill-luck. Good-night! Sir John. I must sleep soundly to-night, so as not to want to sleep to-morrow night."

Then, shaking the Englishman's hand vigorously a second time, he left the room and returned to his own. There he was greatly surprised to find the door, which he was sure he had left closed, open. But as soon as he entered, the sight of his sister explained the matter to him.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, partly astonished, partly uneasy; "is that you, Amélie?"

“Yes, it is I,” she said. Then, going close to her brother, and letting him kiss her forehead, she added in a supplicating voice: “You won’t go, will you, dear Roland?”

“Go where?” asked Roland.

“To the Chartreuse.”

“Good! Who told you that?”

“Oh! for one who knows, how difficult it is to guess!”

“And why don’t you want me to go to the Chartreuse?”

“I’m afraid something might happen to you.”

“What! So you believe in ghosts, do you?” he asked, looking fixedly into Amélie’s eyes.

Amélie lowered her glance, and Roland felt his sister’s hand tremble in his.

“Come,” said Roland; “Amélie, at least the one I used to know, General de Montrevel’s daughter and Roland’s sister, is too intelligent to yield to these vulgar terrors. It’s impossible that you can believe these tales of apparitions, chains, flames, spectres, and phantoms.”

“If I did believe them, Roland, I should not be so alarmed. If ghosts do exist, they must be souls without bodies, and consequently cannot bring their material hatred from the grave. Besides, why should a ghost hate you, Roland; you, who never harmed any one?”

“Good! You forget all those I have killed in war or in duels.”

Amélie shook her head. “I’m not afraid of them.”

“Then what are you afraid of?”

The young girl raised her beautiful eyes, wet with tears, to Roland, and threw herself in his arms, saying: “I don’t know, Roland. But I can’t help it, I am afraid.”

The young man raised her head, which she was hiding in his breast, with gentle force, and said, kissing her eyelids softly and tenderly: “You don’t believe I shall have ghosts to fight with to-morrow, do you?”

“Oh, brother, don’t go to the Chartreuse!” cried Amélie, eluding the question.

“Mother told you to say this to me, didn’t she?”

“Oh, no, brother! Mother said nothing to me. It is I who guessed that you intended to go.”

“Well, if I want to go,” replied Roland firmly, “you ought to know, Amélie, that I shall go.”

“Even if I beseech you on my knees, brother?” cried Amélie in a tone of anguish, slipping down to her brother’s feet; “even if I beseech you on my knees?”

“Oh! women! women!” murmured Roland, “inexplicable creatures, whose words are all mystery, whose lips never tell the real secrets of their hearts, who weep, and pray, and tremble — why? God knows, but man, never! I shall go, Amélie, because I have resolved to go; and when once I have taken a resolution no power on earth can make me change it. Now kiss me and don’t be frightened, and I will tell you a secret.”

Amélie raised her head, and gazed questioningly, despairingly, at Roland.

“I have known for more than a year,” replied the young man, “that I have the misfortune not to be able to die. So reassure yourself, and don’t be afraid.”

Roland uttered these words so dolefully that Amélie, who had, until then, kept her emotion under control, left the room sobbing.

The young officer, after assuring himself that her door was closed, shut his, murmuring: “We’ll see who will weary first, Fate or I.”

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GHOST

The next evening, at about the same hour, the young officer, after convincing himself that every one in the Château des Noires-Fontaines had gone to bed, opened his door softly, went downstairs holding his breath, reached the vestibule, slid back the bolts of the outer door noiselessly, and turned round to make sure that all was quiet. Reassured by the darkened windows, he boldly opened the iron gate. The hinges had probably been oiled that day, for they turned without grating, and closed as noiselessly as they had opened behind Roland, who walked rapidly in the direction of Pont d'Ain at Bourg.

He had hardly gone a hundred yards before the clock at Saint-Just struck once; that of Montagnac answered like a bronze echo. It was half-past ten o'clock. At the pace the young man was walking he needed only twenty minutes to reach the Chartreuse; especially if, instead of skirting the woods, he took the path that led direct to the monastery. Roland was too familiar from youth with every nook of the forest of Seillon to needlessly lengthen his walk ten minutes. He therefore turned unhesitatingly into the forest, coming out on the other side in about five minutes. Once there, he had only to cross a bit of open ground to reach the orchard wall of the convent. This took barely another five minutes.

At the foot of the wall he stopped, but only for a few seconds. He unhooked his cloak, rolled it into a ball, and tossed it over the wall. The cloak off, he stood in a velvet coat, white leather breeches, and top-boots. The coat was fastened round the waist by a belt in which were a pair of pistols. A broad-brimmed hat covered his head and shaded his face.

With the same rapidity with which he had removed his garment that might have hindered his climbing the wall, he began to scale it. His foot readily found a chink between the stones; he sprang up, seizing the coping, and was on the other side without even touching the top of the wall over which he bounded. He picked up his cloak, threw it over his shoulder, hooked it, and crossed the orchard to a little door communicating with the cloister. The clock struck eleven as he passed through it. Roland stopped, counted the strokes, and slowly walked around the cloister, looking and listening.

He saw nothing and heard no noise. The monastery was the picture of desolation and solitude; the doors were all open, those of the cells, the chapel, and the refectory. In the refectory, a vast hall where the tables still stood in their places, Roland noticed five or six bats circling around; a frightened owl flew through a broken casement, and perched upon a tree close by, hooting dismally.

“Good!” said Roland, aloud; “I’ll make my headquarters here; bats and owls are the vanguards of ghosts.”

The sound of that human voice, lifted in the midst of this solitude, darkness and desolation, had something so uncanny, so lugubrious about it, that it would have caused even the speaker to shudder, had not Roland, as he himself said, been inaccessible to fear. He looked about for a place from which he could command the entire hall. An isolated table, placed on a sort of stage at one end of the refectory, which had no doubt been used by the superior of the convent to take his food apart from the monks, to read from pious books during the repast, seemed to Roland best adapted to his needs. Here, backed by the wall, he could not be surprised from behind, and, once his eye grew accustomed to the darkness, he could survey every part of the hall. He looked for a seat, and found an overturned stool about three feet from the table, probably the one occupied by the reader or the person dining there in solitude.

Roland sat down at the table, loosened his cloak to insure greater freedom of movement, took his pistols from his belt, laid one on the table, and striking three blows with the butt-end of the other, he said, in a loud voice: “The meeting is open; the ghosts can appear!”

Those who have passed through churches and cemeteries at night have often experienced, without analyzing it, the supreme necessity of speaking low and reverently which attaches to certain localities. Only such persons can understand the strange impression produced on any one who heard it by that curt, mocking voice which now disturbed the solitude and the shadows. It vibrated an instant in the darkness, which seemed to quiver with it; then it slowly died away without an echo, escaping by all the many openings made by the wings of time.

As he had expected, Roland's eyes had accustomed themselves to the darkness, and now, by the pale light of the rising moon, whose long, white rays penetrated the refectory through the broken windows, he could see distinctly from one end to the other of the vast apartment. Although Roland was as evidently without fear internally as externally, he was not without distrust, and his ear caught the slightest sounds.

He heard the half-hour strike. In spite of himself the sound startled him, for it came from the bell of the convent. How was it that, in this ruin where all was dead, a clock, the pulse of time, was living?

"Oh! oh!" said Roland; "that proves that I shall see something."

The words were spoken almost in an aside. The majesty of the place and the silence acted upon that heart of iron, firm as the iron that had just tolled the call of time upon eternity. The minutes slowly passed, one after the other. Perhaps a cloud was passing between earth and moon, for Roland fancied that the shadows deepened. Then, as midnight approached, he seemed to hear a thousand confused, imperceptible sounds, coming no doubt from the nocturnal universe which wakes while the other sleeps. Nature permits no suspension of life, even for repose. She created her nocturnal world, even as she created her daily world, from the gnat which buzzes about the sleeper's pillow to the lion prowling around the Arab's bivouac.

But Roland, the camp watcher, the sentinel of the desert, Roland, the hunter, the soldier, knew all those sounds; they were powerless to disturb him.

Then, mingling with these sounds, the tones of the clock, chiming the hour, vibrated above his head. This time it was midnight. Roland counted the twelve strokes, one after the other. The last hung, quivering upon the air, like a bird with iron wings, then slowly expired, sad and mournful. Just then the young man, thought he heard a moan. He listened in the direction whence it came. Again he heard it, this time nearer at hand.

He rose, his hands resting upon the table, the butt-end of a pistol beneath each palm. A rustle like that of a sheet or a gown trailing along the grass was audible on his right, not ten paces from him. He straightened up as if moved by a spring.

At the same moment a shade appeared on the threshold of the vast hall. This shade resembled the ancient statues lying on the tombs. It was wrapped in an immense winding-sheet which trailed behind it.

For an instant Roland doubted his own eyes. Had the preoccupation of his mind made him see a thing which was not? Was he the dupe of his senses, the sport of those hallucinations which physicians assert, but cannot explain? A moan, uttered by the phantom, put his doubts to flight.

“My faith!” he cried in a burst of laughter, “now for a tussle, friend ghost!”

The spectre paused and extended a hand toward the young officer. “Roland! Roland!” said the spectre in a muffled voice, “it would be a pity not to follow to the grave those you have sent there.”

And the spectre, without hastening its step, continued on its way.

Roland, astounded for an instant, came down from the stage, and resolutely followed the ghost. The path was difficult, encumbered with stones, benches awry, and over-turned tables. And yet, through all these obstacles, an invisible channel seemed open for the spectre, which pursued its way unchecked.

Each time it passed before a window, the light from with out, feeble as it was, shone upon the winding-sheet and the ghost, outlining the figure, which passed into the obscurity to reappear and vanish again at each succeeding one, Roland, his eyes fixed upon the figure, fearing to lose sight of it if he diverted his gaze from it, dared not look at the path, apparently so easy to the spectre, yet bristling with obstacles for him. He stumbled at every step. The ghost was gaining upon him. It reached the door opposite to that by which it had entered. Roland saw the entrance to a dark passage. Feeling that the ghost would escape him, he cried: “Man or ghost, robber or monk, halt or I fire!”

“A dead body cannot be killed twice, and death has no power over the spirit,” replied the ghost in its muffled voice.

“Who are you?”

“The Shade of him you tore violently from the earth.”

The young officer burst into that harsh, nervous laugh, made more terrible by the darkness around him.

“Faith!” said he, “if you have no further indications to give me, I shall not trouble myself to discover you.”

“Remember the fountain at Vaucluse,” said the Shade, in a voice so faint the words seemed to escape his lips like a sigh rather than articulate speech.

For an instant Roland felt, not his heart failing him, but the sweat pouring from his forehead. Making an effort over himself, he regained his voice and cried, menacingly: “For a last time, apparition or reality, I warn you that, if you do not stop, I shall fire!”

The Shade did not heed him, but continued on its way.

Roland paused an instant to take aim. The spectre was not ten paces from him. Roland was a sure shot; he had himself loaded his pistols, and only a moment before he had looked to the charge to see that it was intact.

As the spectre passed, tall and white, beneath the gloomy vault of the passage, Roland fired. The flash illumined the corridor like lightning, down which the spectre passed with unfaltering, unhastening steps. Then all was blacker than before. The ghost vanished in the darkness. Roland dashed after him, changing his other pistol from the left hand to the right. But short as his stop had been, the ghost had gained ground. Roland saw him at the end of the passage, this time distinctly outlined against the gray background of the night. He redoubled his pace, and as he crossed the threshold of the passage, he fancied that the ghost was plunging into the bowels of the earth. But the torso still remained visible.

“Devil or not,” cried Roland, “I follow you!”

He fired a second shot, which filled the cavernous space, into which the ghost had disappeared, with flame and smoke.

When the smoke had cleared away, Roland looked vainly around. He was alone. He sprang into the cistern howling with rage. He sounded the walls with the butt-end of his pistol, he stamped on the ground; but everywhere, earth and stone gave back the sound of solid objects. He tried to pierce the darkness, but it was impossible. The faint moonlight that filtered into the cistern died out at the first steps.

“Oh!” cried Roland, “a torch! a torch!”

No one answered. The only sound to be heard was the spring bubbling close at hand. Realizing that further search would be useless, he emerged from the cavern. Drawing a powder-horn and two balls from his pocket, he loaded his pistols hastily. Then he took the path along which he had just come, found the dark passage, then the vast refectory, and again took his place at the end of the silent hall and waited.

But the hours of the night sounded successively, until the first gleam of dawn cast its pallid light upon the walls of the cloister.

“Well,” muttered Roland, “it’s over for to-night. Perhaps I shall be more fortunate the next time.”

Twenty minutes later he re-entered the Château des Noires-Fontaines.

CHAPTER XVII.

INVESTIGATIONS

Two persons were waiting for Roland’s return; one in anguish, the other with impatience. These two persons were Amélie and Sir John. Neither of them had slept for an instant. Amélie displayed her anguish only by the sound of her door, which was furtively closed as Roland came up the staircase. Roland heard the sound. He had not the courage to pass before her door without reassuring her.

“Be easy, Amélie, I am here,” he said. It did not occur to him that his sister might be anxious for any one but him.

Amélie darted from her room in her night-dress. It was easy to see from her pallor and the dark circles which spread nearly to the middle of her cheeks that she had not closed her eyes all night.

“Has nothing happened to you, Roland?” she cried, clasping her brother in her arms and feeling him over anxiously.

“Nothing.”

“Nor to any one else?”

“No.”

“And you saw nothing?”

“I didn’t say that,” answered Roland.

“Good God! What did you see?”

“I’ll tell that to you later. Meantime, there is no one either killed or wounded.”

“Ah! I breathe again!”

“Now, let me give you a bit of advice, little sister. Go to bed and sleep, if you can, till breakfast. I am going to do the same thing, and can assure you I won’t need any rocking. Good-night, or rather good-morning.”

Roland kissed his sister tenderly. Then affecting to whistle a hunting-air carelessly, he ran up the next flight of steps. Sir John was frankly waiting for him in the hall. He went straight to the young man.

“Well?” he asked.

“Well, I didn’t roll my stone entirely for nothing.”

“Did you see any ghosts?”

“At any rate I saw something that resembled one very closely.”

“Come, tell me all about it.”

“I see you won’t be able to sleep, or at best only fitfully, if I don’t. Here’s what happened, in a nutshell.”

And Roland gave him a minute account of the night’s adventure.

“Excellent,” said Sir John, when Roland had finished. “I hope you have left something for me to do.”

“I am even afraid,” answered Roland, “that I have left you the hardest part.”

Then, as Sir John went over each detail, asking many questions about the localities, he said:

“Listen, Sir John. We will pay the Chartreuse a visit in broad daylight after breakfast, which will not interfere in the least with your night-watch. On the contrary, it will acquaint you with the localities. Only you must tell no one.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Sir John, “do I look like a gabbler?”

“No, that’s true,” cried Roland laughing, “you are not a gabbler, but I am a ninny.” So saying, he entered his bedchamber.

After breakfast the two young men sauntered down the slopes of the garden, as if to take a walk along the banks of the Reissouse. Then they bore to the left, swung up the hill for about forty paces, struck into the highroad, and crossed the woods, till they reached the convent wall at the very place where Roland had climbed over it on the preceding night.

“My lord,” said Roland, “this is the way.”

“Very well,” replied Sir John, “let us take it.”

Slowly, with a wonderful strength of wrist, which betokened a man well trained in gymnastics, the Englishman seized the coping of the wall, swung himself to the top, and dropped down on the other side. Roland followed with the rapidity of one who is not achieving a feat for the first time. They were both on the other side, where the desertion and desolation were more visible by night than by day. The grass was growing knee high in the paths; the espaliers were tangled with vines so thick that the grapes could not ripen in the shadow of the leaves. The wall had given way in several places, and ivy, the parasite rather than the friend of ruins, was spreading everywhere.

As for the trees in the open space, plums, peaches and apricots, they had grown with the freedom of the oaks and beeches in the forest, whose breadth and thickness they seemed to envy. The sap, completely absorbed by the branches which were many and vigorous, produced but little fruit, and that imperfect. By the rustle of the tall grass, Sir John and Roland divined that the lizards, those crawling offsprings of solitude, had established their domicile there, from which they fled in amazement at this disturbance.

Roland led his friend straight to the door between the orchard and the cloister, but before entering he glanced at the clock. That clock, which went at night, was stopped in the day time. From the cloister he passed into the refectory. There the daylight showed under their true aspect the various objects which the darkness had clothed with such fantastic forms the night before. Roland showed Sir John the overturned stools, the table marked by the blow of the pistol, the door by which the phantom had entered. Accompanied by the Englishman, he followed the path he had taken in pursuit of the spectre. He recognized the obstacles which had hindered him, and noted how easily one who knew the locality might cross or avoid them.

At the spot where he had fired, he found the wad, but he looked in vain for the bullet. The arrangement of the passage, which ran slanting, made it impossible for the bullet, if its marks were not on the walls, to have missed the ghost. And yet if the ghost were hit, supposing it to be a solid body, how came it to remain erect? How had it escaped being wounded, and if wounded, why were there no bloodstains on the ground? And there was no trace of either blood or ball.

Sir John was almost ready to admit that his friend had had to do with a veritable ghost.

“Some one came after me,” said Roland, “and picked up the ball.”

“But if you fired at a man, why didn’t the ball go into him?”

“Oh! that’s easily explained. The man wore a coat of mail under his shroud.”

That was possible, but, nevertheless, Sir John shook his head dubiously. He preferred to believe in a supernatural occurrence; it gave him less trouble.

Roland and he continued their investigations. They reached the end of the passage which opened on the furthest extremity of the orchard. It was there that Roland had seen his spectre for an instant as it glided into the dark vault. He made for the cistern, and so little did he hesitate that he might still have been following the ghost. There he understood how the darkness of the night had seemed to deepen by the absence of all exterior reflection. It was even difficult to see there by day.

Roland took two torches about a foot long from beneath his cloak, took a flint, lighted the tinder, and a match from the tinder. Both torches flared up.

The problem was now to discover the way by which the ghost had disappeared. Roland and Sir John lowered their torches and examined the ground. The cistern was paved with large squares of limestone, which seemed to fit perfectly. Roland looked for his second ball as persistently as for the first. A stone lay loose at his feet, and, pushing it aside, he disclosed an iron ring screwed into one of the limestone blocks.

Without a word Roland seized the ring, braced his feet and pulled. The square turned on its pivot with an ease which proved that it was frequently subjected to the same manipulation. As it turned, it disclosed a subterranean passage.

“Ah!” exclaimed Roland, “this is the way my spectre went.”

He entered the yawning cavern, followed by Sir John. They traversed the same path that Morgan took when he returned to give an account of his expedition. At the end of the passage they came upon an iron gate opening into the mortuary vaults. Roland shook the gate, which yielded to his touch. They crossed this subterranean cemetery, and came to a second gate; like the first, it was open. With Roland still in front, they went up several steps, and found themselves in the choir of the chapel, where the scene we have related between Morgan and the Company of Jehu took place. Only now the stalls were empty, the choir was deserted, and the altar, degraded by the abandonment of worship, was no longer covered by the burning tapers or the sacred cloth.

It was evident to Roland that this was the goal of the false ghost, which Sir John persisted in believing a real one. But, real or false, Sir John admitted that its flight had brought it to this particular spot. He reflected a moment and then remarked: “As it is my turn to watch tonight, I have the right to choose my ground; I shall watch here.”

And he pointed to a sort of table formed in the centre of the choir by an oaken pedestal which had formerly supported the eagle lectern.

“Indeed,” said Roland, with the same heedlessness he showed in his own affairs, “you’ll do very well there, only as you may find the gates locked and the stone fastened tonight, we had better look for some more direct way to get here.”

In less than five minutes they had found an outlet. The door of the old sacristy opened into the choir, and from the sacristy a broken window gave passage into the forest. The two men climbed through the window and found themselves in the forest thicket some twenty feet from the spot where they had killed the boar.

"That's what we want," said Roland; "only, my dear Sir John, as you would never find your way by night in a forest which, even by day, is so impenetrable, I shall accompany you as far as this."

"Very well. But once I am inside, you are to leave me," said the Englishman. "I remember what you told me about the susceptibility of ghosts. If they know you are near, they may hesitate to appear, and as you have seen one, I insist on seeing at least one myself."

"I'll leave you, don't be afraid," replied Roland, adding, with a laugh, "Only I do fear one thing."

"What is that?"

"That in your double capacity of an Englishman and a heretic they won't feel at ease with you."

"Oh," replied Sir John, gravely, "what a pity I shall not have time to abjure before this evening."

The two friends, having seen all there was to see, returned to the chateau. No one, not even Amélie, had suspected that their walk was other than an ordinary one. The day passed without questions and without apparent anxiety; besides, it was already late when the two gentlemen returned.

At dinner, to Edouard's great delight, another hunt was proposed, and it furnished a topic for conversation during dinner and part of the evening. By ten o'clock, as usual, all had retired to their rooms, except Roland, who was in that of Sir John.

The difference of character showed itself markedly in the preparations of the two men. Roland had made them joyously, as if for a pleasure trip; Sir John made his gravely, as if for a duel. He loaded his pistols with the utmost care and put them into his belt English fashion. And, instead of a cloak, which might have impeded his movements, he wore a top-coat with a high collar put on over his other coat.

At half-past ten the pair left the house with the same precautions that Roland had observed when alone. It was five minutes before eleven when they reached the broken window, where the fallen stones served as a stepping-block. There, according to agreement, they were to part. Sir John, reminded Roland of this agreement.

“Yes,” said Roland, “an agreement is an agreement with me. Only, let me give you a piece of advice.”

“What is it?”

“I could not find the bullets because some one had been here and carried them off; and that was done beyond doubt to prevent me from seeing the dents on them.”

“What sort of dent do you mean?”

“Those of the links of a coat of mail; my ghost was a man in armor.”

“That’s too bad!” said Sir John; “I hoped for a ghost.” Then, after a moment’s silence and a sigh expressive of his deep regret in resigning the ghost, he asked: “What was your advice?”

“Fire at his face!”

Sir John nodded assent, pressed the young officer’s hand, clambered through the window and disappeared in the sacristy.

“Good-night!” called Roland after him. Then with the indifference to danger which a soldier generally feels for himself and his companions, Roland took his way back to the Château des Noires-Fontaines, as he had promised Sir John.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TRIAL

The next day Roland, who had been unable to sleep till about two in the morning, woke about seven. Collecting his scattered wits, he recalled what had passed between Sir John and himself the night before, and was astonished that the Englishman had not wakened him. He dressed hastily and went to Sir John’s room at the risk of rousing him from his first sleep.

He knocked at the door. Sir John made no answer. Roland knocked again, louder this time. The same silence. This time some uneasiness mingled with Roland’s curiosity. The key was on the outside; the young officer opened the door, and cast a rapid glance around the room. Sir John was not there; he had not returned. The bed was undisturbed. What had happened?

There was not an instant to lose, and we may be sure that, with that rapidity of decision we know in Roland, he lost not an instant. He rushed to his room, finished dressing, put his hunting knife into his belt, slung his rifle over his shoulder and went out. No one was yet awake except the chambermaid. Roland met her on the stairs.

“Tell Madame de Montrevel,” said he, “that I have gone into the forest of Seillon with my gun. She must not worry if Sir John and I are not on time for breakfast.”

Then he darted rapidly away. Ten minutes later he reached the window where he had left Sir John the night before. He listened, not a sound came from within; the huntsman’s ear could detect the morning woodland sounds, but no others. Roland climbed through the window with his customary agility, and rushed through the choir into the sacristy.

One look sufficed to show him that not only the choir but the entire chapel was empty. Had the spectres led the Englishman along the reverse of the way he had come himself? Possibly. Roland passed rapidly behind the altar, into the vaults, where he found the gate open. He entered the subterranean cemetery. Darkness hid its depths. He called Sir John three times. No one answered.

He reached the second gate; it was open like the first. He entered the vaulted passage; only, as it would be impossible to use his gun in such darkness, he slung it over his shoulder and drew out his hunting-knife. Feeling his way, he continued to advance without meeting anybody, but the further he went the deeper became the darkness, which indicated that the stone in the cistern was closed. He reached the steps, and mounted them until his head touched the revolving stone; then he made an effort, and the block turned. Roland saw daylight and leaped into the cistern. The door into the orchard stood open. Roland passed through it, crossed that portion of the orchard which lay between the cistern and the corridor at the other end of which he had fired upon the phantom. He passed along the corridor and entered the refectory. The refectory was empty.

Again, as in the funereal passageway, Roland called three times. The wondering echo, which seemed to have forgotten the tones of the human voice, answered stammering. It was improbable that Sir John had come this way; it was necessary to go back. Roland retraced his steps, and found himself in the choir again. That was where Sir John had intended to spend the night, and there some trace of him must be found.

Roland advanced only a short distance, and then a cry escaped him. A large spot of blood lay at his feet, staining the pavement. On the other side of the choir, a dozen feet from the blood, was another stain, not less large, nor less red, nor less recent. It seemed to make a pendant for the first.

One of these stains was to the right, the other to the left of that sort of pedestal intended, as we have said, to support the eagle lectern — the pedestal which Sir John had selected for his place of waiting. Roland went up to it. It was drenched with blood! Evidently the drama had taken place on that spot; a drama which, if all the signs were true, must have been terrible.

Roland, in his double capacity of huntsman and soldier, was keen at a quest. He could calculate the amount of blood lost by a man who was dead, or by one who was only wounded. That night three men had fallen, either dead or wounded. What were the probabilities?

The two stains in the choir to the right and left of the pedestal were probably the blood of Sir John’s two antagonists. That on the pedestal was probably his own. Attacked on both sides, right and left, he had fired with both hands, killing or wounding a man with each shot. Hence these two bloodstains which reddened the pavement. He himself must have been struck down beside the pedestal, on which his blood had spurted.

After a few seconds of examination, Roland was as sure of this as if he had witnessed the struggle with his own eyes. Now, what had been done with the bodies? He cared little enough about two of them; but he was determined to know what had become of that of Sir John.

A track of blood started from the pedestal and led straight to the door. Sir John's body had been carried outside. Roland shook the massive door. It was only latched, and opened at the first pressure. Outside the sill the tracks of blood still continued. Roland could see through the underbrush the path by which the body had been carried. The broken branches, the trampled grass, led Roland to the edge of the wood on the road leading from Pont d'Ain to Bourg. There the body, living or dead, seemed to have been laid on the bank of the ditch. Beyond that no traces whatever.

A man passed just then, coming from the direction of the Château des Noires-Fontaines. Roland went up to him.

"Have you seen anything on the road? Did you meet any one?" he inquired.

"Yes," replied the man, "I saw two peasants carrying a body on a litter."

"Ah!" cried Roland, "was it that of a living man?"

"The man was pale and motionless; he looked as if he were dead."

"Was the blood flowing?"

"I saw some drops on the road."

"In that case, he is living."

Then taking a louis from his pocket he said: "There's a louis for you. Run for Dr. Milliet at Bourg; tell him to get a horse and come at full speed to the Château des Noires-Fontaines. You can add that there is a man there in danger of dying."

While the peasant, stimulated by the reward, made all haste to Bourg, Roland, leaping along on his vigorous legs, was hurrying to the château.

And now, as our readers are, in all probability, as curious as Roland to know what had happened to Sir John, we shall give an account of the events of the night.

A few minutes before eleven, Sir John, as we have seen, entered what was usually known as La Correrie, or the pavilion of the Chartreuse, which was nothing more than a chapel erected in the woods. From the sacristy he entered the choir. It was empty and seemed solitary. A rather brilliant moon, veiled from time to time by a cloud, sent its bluish rays through the stained glass, cracked and broken, of the pointed windows. Sir John advanced to the middle of the choir, where he paused and remained standing beside the pedestal.

The minutes slipped away. But this time it was not the convent clock which marked the time, it was the church at Péronnaz; that is to say, the nearest village to the chapel where Sir John was watching.

Everything happened up to midnight just as it had to Roland. Sir John heard only the vague rustling and passing noises of the night.

Midnight sounded; it was the moment he awaited with impatience, for it was then that something would happen, if anything was to happen. As the last stroke died away he thought he heard footsteps underground, and saw a light appear behind the iron gate leading to the mortuary vault. His whole attention was fixed on that spot.

A monk emerged from the passage, his hood brought low over his eyes, and carrying a torch in his hand. He wore the dress of a Chartreux. A second one followed, then a third. Sir John counted twelve. They separated before the altar. There were twelve stalls in the choir; six to the right of Sir John, six to his left. The twelve monks silently took their places in the twelve stalls. Each one placed his torch in a hole made for that purpose in the oaken desk, and waited.

A thirteenth monk appeared and took his stand before the altar.

None of the monks affected the fantastic behavior of ghosts or shades; they all belonged undoubtedly to the earth, and were living men.

Sir John, a pistol in each hand, stood leaning against the pedestal in the middle of the choir, and watched with the utmost coolness this manoeuvre which tended to surround him. The monks were standing, like him, erect and silent.

The monk at the altar broke the silence.

“Brothers,” he asked, “why are the Avengers assembled?”

“To judge a blasphemer!” replied the monks.

“What crime has this blasphemer committed?” continued the interlocutor.

“He has tried to discover the secrets of the Companions of Jehu.”

“What penalty has he incurred?”

“Death.”

The monk at the altar waited, apparently, to give time for the sentence which had just been pronounced to reach the heart of him whom it concerned. Then turning to the Englishman, who continued as calm as if he were at a comedy, he said: “Sir John Tanlay, you are a foreigner and an Englishman — a double reason why you should leave the Companions of Jehu to fight their own battles with the government, whose downfall they have sworn. You failed in wisdom, you yielded to idle curiosity; instead of keeping away, you have entered the lion’s den, and the lion will rend you.”

Then after an instant’s silence, during which he seemed to await the Englishman’s reply, he resumed, seeing that he remained silent: “Sir John Tanlay, you are condemned to death. Prepare to die!”

“Ah! I see that I have fallen into the hands of a band of thieves. If so, I can buy myself off with a ransom.” Then turning to the monk at the altar he asked, “How much do you demand, captain?”

A threatening murmur greeted these insolent words. The monk at the altar stretched out his hand.

“You are mistaken, Sir John. We are not a band of thieves,” said he in a tone as calm and composed as Sir John’s, “and the proof is, that if you have money or jewels upon you, you need only give me your instructions, and they will be remitted either to your family or the person whom you designate.”

“And what guarantee shall I have that my last wishes will be carried out?”

“My word.”

“The word of the leader of assassins! I don’t trust it.”

“This time, as before, you are mistaken, Sir John. I am no more the leader of assassins than I am a captain of thieves.”

“Who are you, then?”

“The elect of celestial vengeance. I am the envoy of Jehu, King of Israel, who was anointed by the prophet Elisha to destroy the house of Ahab.”

“If you are what you say, why do you veil your faces? Why do you wear armor under your robes? The elect strike openly; they risk death in giving death. Throw back your hoods, show me your naked breasts, and I will admit that you are what you pretend to be.”

“Brothers, you have heard him,” said the monk at the altar.

Then, stripping off his gown, he opened his coat, waistcoat and even his shirt. Each monk did the same, and stood with face exposed and bared breast. They were all handsome young men, of whom the eldest was apparently not more than thirty-five. Their dress was elegant, but, strange fact, none was armed. They were judges and nothing more.

"Be satisfied, Sir John Tanlay," said the monk at the altar. "You will die, but in dying, you can, as you wished just now, recognize and kill your judges. Sir John, you have five minutes to prepare your soul for death!"

Sir John, instead of profiting by this permission to think of his eternal salvation, coolly cocked his pistols to see that the triggers were all right, and passed a ramrod down the barrels to make sure that the balls were there. Then, without waiting for the five minutes to expire, he said: "Gentlemen, I am ready. Are you?"

The young men looked at each other; then, on a sign from their chief, they walked straight to Sir John, and surrounded him on all sides. The monk at the altar stood immovable, commanding with his eye the scene that was about to take place.

Sir John had only two pistols, consequently he could only kill two men. He selected his victims and fired. Two Companions of Jehu rolled upon the pavement, which they reddened with their blood. The others, as if nothing had happened, still advanced with outstretched hands upon Sir John. Sir John seized his pistols by the muzzle, using them like hammers. He was vigorous and the struggle was long. For ten minutes, a confused group tussled in the centre of the choir; then this violent commotion ceased, and the Companions of Jehu drew away to right and left, and regained their stalls, leaving Sir John bound with their girdles and lying upon the pedestal in the choir.

"Have you commended your soul to God?" asked the monk at the altar.

"Yes, assassin," answered Sir John; "you may strike."

The monk took a dagger from the altar, advanced with uplifted arm, and, standing over Sir John, levelled the dagger at his breast: "Sir John Tanlay," he said, "you are a brave man, and doubtless a man of honor. Swear that you will never breathe a syllable of what you have seen; swear that under no circumstances, whatever they may be, you will recognize us, and we will spare your life."

"As soon as I leave here," replied Sir John, "I shall denounce you. The moment I am free I will trail you down."

"Swear," repeated the monk a second time.

"No," said Sir John.

"Swear," said the monk for the third time.

“Never,” replied Sir John.

“Then die, since you will it!”

And he drove his dagger up to the hilt in Sir John’s breast; who, whether by force of will, or because the blow killed him at once, did not even sigh. Then the monk in a loud sonorous voice, like a man conscious of having done his duty, exclaimed: “Justice is done!”

Then he returned to the altar, leaving the dagger in the wound and said: “Brothers, you are invited to the ball of the Victims, which takes place in Paris on the 21st of January next, at No. 35 Rue du Bac, in memory of the death of King Louis XVI.”

So saying, he re-entered the subterranean passage, followed by the remaining ten monks, each bearing his torch in his hand. Two torches remained to light the three bodies.

A moment later four serving brothers entered, and raised first the bodies of the two monks, which they carried into the vault. Then they returned, lifted that of Sir John, placed it on a stretcher, and carried it out of the chapel by the entrance door, which they closed after them. Two of the monks walked in front of the stretcher, carrying the two torches left in the chapel.

And now, if our readers ask why there was this difference between the treatment received by Roland and that administered to Sir John, why this mansuetude toward one and this rigor toward the other, we reply: Remember that Morgan enjoined on his brethren the safety of Amélie’s brother, and thus safeguarded, under no circumstances could Roland die by the hand of a Companion of Jehu.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LITTLE HOUSE IN THE RUE DE LA VICTOIRE

While they are bearing Sir John Tanlay's body to the Château des Noires-Fontaines; while Roland is hurrying in the same direction; while the peasant, despatched by him, is hastening to Bourg to notify Dr. Milliet of the catastrophe which necessitated his immediate presence at Madame de Montrevel's home, let us jump over the distance which separates Bourg from Paris, and the time which elapsed between the 16th of October and the 7th of November; that is to say, between the 24th of Vendemiaire and the 16th Brumaire, and repair to that little house in the Rue de la Victoire rendered historically famous by the conspiracy of the 18th Brumaire, which issued from it fully armed.

It is the same house which stands there to-day on the right of the street at No. 60, apparently astonished to present to the eye, after so many successive changes of government, the consular fasces which may still be seen on the panels of its double oaken doors.

Let us follow the long, narrow alley of lindens that leads from the gate on the street to the door of the house; let us enter the antechamber, take the hall to the right, ascend the twenty steps that lead to a study hung with green paper, and furnished with curtains, easy chairs and couches of the same color. The walls are covered with geographical charts and plans of cities. Bookcases of maple are ranged on either side of the fireplace, which they inclose. The chairs, sofas, tables and desks are piled with books; there is scarcely any room on the chairs to sit down, or on the desks and tables to write.

In the midst of this encumbering mass of reports, letters, pamphlets and books, a man had cleared a space for himself where he was now seated, clutching his hair impatiently from time to time, as he endeavored to decipher a page of notes, compared to which the hieroglyphics on the obelisk of Luxor, would have been transparently intelligible. Just as the secretary's impatience was approaching desperation, the door opened and a young officer wearing an aide's uniform entered.

The secretary raised his head, and a lively expression of satisfaction crossed his face.

“Oh! my dear Roland,” said he; “you here at last! I am delighted to see you, for three reasons. First, because I am wearying for you; second, because the general is impatient for your return, and keeps up a hullaballoo about it; and third, because you can help me to read this, with which I have been struggling for the last ten minutes. But first of all, kiss me.”

And the secretary and the aide-de-camp embraced each other.

“Well,” said the latter, “let us see this word that is troubling you so, my dear Bourrienne!”

“Ah! my dear fellow, what writing! I get a white hair for every page I decipher, and this is my third to-day! Here, read it if you can.”

Roland took the sheet from the secretary, and fixing his eyes on the spot indicated, read quite fluently: “Paragraph XI. The Nile, from Assouan to a distance of twelve miles north of Cairo, flows in a single stream” — ”Well,” said he, interrupting himself, “that’s all plain sailing. What did you mean? The general, on the contrary, took pains when he wrote that.”

“Go on, go on,” said Bourrienne.

The young man resumed: “‘From that point, which is called’ — ah! Ah!”

“There you are! Now what do you say to that?”

Roland repeated: “‘Which is called’ — The devil! ‘Which is called — ’“

“Yes, ‘Which is called’ — after that?”

“What will you give me, Bourrienne,” cried Roland, “if I guess it?”

“The first colonel’s commission I find signed in blank.”

“By my faith, no! I don’t want to leave the general; I’d rather have a good father than five hundred naughty children. I’ll give you the three words for nothing.”

“What! are there three words there?”

“They don’t look as if they were quite three, I admit. Now listen, and make obeisance to me: ‘From the point called Ventre della Vacca.’“

“Ha! Ventre de la Vache! Confound it! He’s illegible enough in French, but if he takes it into his head to go off in Italian, and that Corsican patois to boot! I thought I only ran the risk of going crazy, but then I should become stupid, too. Well, you’ve got it,” and he read the whole sentence consecutively: “‘The Nile, from Assouan to a distance of twelve miles north of Cairo, flows in a single stream; from that point, which is called Ventre de la Vache, it forms the branches of the Rosetta and the Damietta.’ Thank you, Roland," and he began to write the end of the paragraph, of which the first lines were already committed to paper.

"Tell me," said Roland; "is he still got his hobby, the dear general, of colonizing Egypt?"

"Yes; and then, as a sort of offset, a little governing in France; we will colonize from a distance."

"Well, my dear Bourrienne, suppose you post me a little on matters in this country, so that I won't seem to have just arrived from Timbuctoo."

"In the first place, did you come back of your own accord, or were you recalled?"

"Recalled? I should think so!"

"By whom?"

"The general himself."

"Special despatch?"

"Written by himself; see!"

The young man drew a paper from his pocket containing two lines, not signed, in the same handwriting as that which Bourrienne had before him. These two lines said: "'Start. Be in Paris 16th Brumaire. I need you."

"Yes," said Bourrienne, "I think it will be on the eighteenth."

"What will be on the eighteenth?"

"On my word, Roland, you ask more than I know. That man, as you are aware, is not communicative. What will take place on the 18th Brumaire? I don't know as yet; but I'll answer for it that something will happen."

"Oh! you must have a suspicion!"

"I think he means to make himself Director in place of Sièyes, or perhaps president in Gohier's stead."

"Good! How about the Constitution of the year III.?"

"The Constitution of the year III. What about that?"

"Why, yes, a man must be forty years old to be a Director; and the general lacks just ten of them."

"The deuce! so much the worse for the Constitution. They must violate it."

"It is rather young yet, Bourrienne; they don't, as a rule, violate children of seven."

"My dear fellow, in Barras' hands everything grows old rapidly. The little girl of seven is already an old prostitute."

Roland shook his head.

“Well, what is it?” asked Bourrienne.

“Why, I don’t believe the general will make himself a simple Director with four colleagues. Just imagine it — five kings of France! It wouldn’t be a Directory any longer, but a four-in-hand.”

“Anyway, up to the present, that is all he has allowed any one to perceive; but you know, my dear friend, if we want to know the general’s secrets we must guess them.”

“Faith! I’m too lazy to take the trouble, Bourrienne. Besides, I’m a regular Janissary — what is to be, will be. Why the devil should I bother to form an opinion and battle for it. It’s quite wearisome enough to have to live.” And the young man enforced his favorite aphorism with a long yawn; then he added: “Do you think there will be any sword play?”

“Probably.”

“Then there will be a chance of getting killed; that’s all I want. Where is the general?”

“With Madame Bonaparte. He went to her about fifteen minutes ago. Have you let him know you are here?”

“No, I wanted to see you first. But I hear his step now.”

Just then the door was opened abruptly, and the same historical personage whom we saw playing a silent part incognito at Avignon appeared on the threshold, in the picturesque uniform of the general-in-chief of the army of Egypt, except that, being in his own house, he was bare-headed. Roland thought his eyes were more hollow and his skin more leaden than usual. But the moment he saw the young man, Bonaparte’s gloomy, or rather meditative, eye emitted a flash of joy.

“Ah, here you are, Roland!” he said. “True as steel! Called, you come. Welcome, my dear fellow.” And he offered Roland his hand. Then he asked, with an imperceptible smile, “What were you doing with Bourrienne?”

“Waiting for you, general.”

“And in the meantime gossiping like two old women.”

“I admit it, general. I was showing him my order to be here on the 16th Brumaire.”

“Did I write the 16th or the 17th?”

“Oh! the 16th, general. The 17th would have been too late.”

“Why too late?”

“Why, hang it, Bourrienne says there are to be great doings here on the 18th.”

“Capital,” muttered Bourrienne; “the scatter-brain will earn me a wigging.”

“Ah! So he told you I had planned great doings for the 18th?” Then, approaching Bourrienne, Bonaparte pinched his ear, and said, “Tell-tale!” Then to Roland he added: “Well, it is so, my dear fellow, we have made great plans for the 18th. My wife and I dine with President Gohier; an excellent man, who was very polite to Josephine during my absence. You are to dine with us, Roland.”

Roland looked at Bonaparte. “Was it for that you brought me here, general?” he asked, laughing.

“For that, and something else, too, perhaps. Bourrienne, write — ”

Bourrienne hastily seized his pen.

“Are you ready?”

“Yes, general.”

“‘My dear President, I write to let you know that my wife and I, with one of my aides-de-camp, will dine with you the day after to-morrow. This is merely to say that we shall be quite satisfied with a family dinner.’“

“What next?”

“How do you mean?”

“Shall I put, ‘Liberty, equality, fraternity’?”

“Or death,” added Roland.

“No,” said Bonaparte; “give me the pen.”

He took the pen from Bourrienne’s hands and wrote, “Ever yours, Bonaparte.” Then, pushing away the paper, he added: “Address it, Bourrienne, and send an orderly with it.”

Bourrienne wrote the address, sealed it, and rang the bell. An officer on duty entered.

“Send an orderly with that,” said Bourrienne.

“There is an answer,” added Bonaparte.

The officer closed the door.

“Bourrienne,” said Bonaparte, pointing to Roland, “look at your friend.”

“Well, general, I am looking at him.”

“Do you know what he did at Avignon?”

“I hope he didn’t make a pope.”

“No, he threw a plate at a man’s head.”

“Oh, that was hasty!”

“That’s not all.”

“That I can well imagine.”

“He fought a duel with that man.”

“And, most naturally, he killed him.”

“Exactly. Do you know why he did it?”

“No.”

The general shrugged his shoulders, and said: “Because the man said that I was a thief.” Then looking at Roland with an indefinable expression of raillery and affection, he added: “Ninny!” Then suddenly he burst out: “Oh! by the way, and the Englishman?”

“Exactly, the Englishman, general. I was just going to speak to you about him.”

“Is he still in France?”

“Yes, and for awhile even I thought he would remain here till the last trumpet blew its blast through the valley of Jehosaphat.”

“Did you miss killing him?”

“Oh! no, not I. We are the best friends in the world. General, he is a capital fellow, and so original to boot that I’m going to ask a bit of a favor for him.”

“The devil! For an Englishman?” said Bonaparte, shaking his head. “I don’t like the English.”

“Good! As a people, but individually — ”

“Well, what happened to your friend?”

“He was tried, condemned, and executed.”

“What the devil are you telling us?”

“God’s truth, general.”

“What do you mean when you say, ‘He was tried, condemned, and guillotined’?”

“Oh! not exactly that. Tried and condemned, but not guillotined. If he had been guillotined he would be more dangerously ill than he is now.”

“Now, what are you gabbling about? What court tried and condemned him?”

“That of the Companions of Jehu!”

“And who are the Companions of Jehu?”

“Goodness! Have you forgotten our friend Morgan already, the masked man who brought back the wine-merchant’s two hundred louis?”

“No,” replied Bonaparte, “I have not forgotten him. I told you about the scamp’s audacity, didn’t I, Bourrienne?”

“Yes, general,” said Bourrienne, “and I answered that, had I been in your place, I should have tried to find out who he was.”

“And the general would know, had he left me alone. I was just going to spring at his throat and tear off his mask, when the general said, in that tone you know so well: ‘Friend Roland!’“

“Come back to your Englishman, chatterbox!” cried the general. “Did Morgan murder him?”

“No, not he himself, but his Companions.”

“But you were speaking of a court and a trial just now.”

“General, you are always the same,” said Roland, with their old school familiarity; “you want to know, and you don’t give me time to tell you.”

“Get elected to the Five Hundred, and you can talk as much as you like.”

“Good! In the Five Hundred I should have four hundred and ninety-nine colleagues who would want to talk as much as I, and who would take the words out of my mouth. I’d rather be interrupted by you than by a lawyer.”

“Will you go on?”

“I ask nothing better. Now imagine, general, there is a Chartreuse near Bourg — ”

“The Chartreuse of Seillon; I know it.”

“What! You know the Chartreuse of Seillon?” demanded Roland.

“Doesn’t the general know everything?” cried Bourrienne.

“Well, about the Chartreuse; are there any monks there now?”

“No; only ghosts — ”

“Are you, perchance, going to tell me a ghost-story?”

“And a famous one at that!”

“The devil! Bourrienne knows I love them. Go on.”

“Well, we were told at home that the Chartreuse was haunted by ghosts. Of course, you understand that Sir John and I, or rather I and Sir John, wanted to clear our minds about it. So we each spent a night there.”

“Where?”

“Why, at the Chartreuse.”

Bonaparte made an imperceptible sign of the cross with his thumb, a Corsican habit which he never lost.

“Ah!” he exclaimed, “did you see any ghosts?”

“One.”

“And what did you do to it?”

“Shot at it.”

“And then?”

“It walked away.”

“And you allowed yourself to be baffled?”

“Good! How well you know me! I followed it, and fired again. But as he knew his way among the ruins better than I, he escaped me.”

“The devil!”

“The next day it was Sir John’s turn; I mean our Englishman.”

“Did he see your ghost?”

“He saw something better. He saw twelve monks enter the church, who tried him for trying to find out their secrets, condemned him to death, and who, on my word of honor, stabbed him.”

“Didn’t he defend himself?”

“Like a lion. He killed two.”

“Is he dead?”

“Almost, but I hope he will recover. Just imagine, general; he was found by the road, and brought home with a dagger in his breast, like a prop in a vineyard.”

“Why, it’s like a scene of the Sainte-Vehme, neither more nor less.”

“And on the blade of the dagger, that there might be no doubt as to who did the deed, were graven the words: ‘Companions of Jehu.’“

“Why, it isn’t possible that such things can happen in France, in the last year of the eighteenth century. It might do for Germany in the Middle Ages, in the days of the Henrys and the Ottos.”

“Not possible, general? But here is the dagger. What do you say to that? Attractive, isn’t it?”

And the young man drew from under his coat a dagger made entirely of steel, blade and handle. The handle was shaped like a cross, and on the blade, sure enough, were engraved the words, “Companions of Jehu.”

Bonaparte examined the weapon carefully.

“And you say they planted that plaything in your Englishman’s breast?”

“Up to the hilt.”

“And he’s not dead?”

“Not yet, at any rate.”

“Have you been listening, Bourrienne?”

“With the greatest interest.”

“You must remind me of this, Roland.”

“When, general?”

“When? — when I am master. Come and say good-day to Josephine. Come, Bourrienne, you will dine with us, and be careful what you say, you two, for Moreau is coming to dinner. Ah! I will keep the dagger as a curiosity.”

He went out first, followed by Roland, who was, soon after, followed by Bourrienne. On the stairs they met the orderly who had taken the note to Gohier.

“Well?” asked the general.

“Here is the President’s answer.”

“Give it to me.”

Bonaparte broke the seal, and read:

> The President Gohier is enchanted the good fortune promised him by General Bonaparte. He will expect him to dinner the day after to-morrow, the 18th Brumaire, with his charming wife, and the aide-de-camp, whoever he may be. Dinner will be served at five o’clock.
>
> If the hour does not suit General Bonaparte, will he kindly make known the one he would prefer.
>
> The President, GOHIER.
> 16th Brumaire, year VII.

With an indescribable smile, Bonaparte put the letter in his pocket. Then turning to Roland, he asked: “Do you know President Gohier?”

“No, general.”

“Ah! you’ll see; he’s an excellent man.”

These words were pronounced in a tone no less indescribable than the smile.

CHAPTER XX.

THE GUESTS OF GENERAL BONAPARTE

Josephine, in spite of her thirty-four years, or possibly because of them (that enchanting age when woman hovers between her passing youth and her corning age), Josephine, always beautiful, more graceful than ever, was still the charming woman we all know. An imprudent remark of Junot's, at the time of her husband's return, had produced a slight coolness between them. But three days had sufficed to restore to the enchantress her full power over the victor of Rivoli and the Pyramids.

She was doing the honors of her salon, when Roland entered the room. Always incapable, like the true Creole she was, of controlling her emotions, she gave a cry of joy, and held out her hand to him. She knew that Roland was devoted to her husband; she knew his reckless bravery, knew that if the young man had twenty lives he would willingly have given them all for Bonaparte. Roland eagerly took the hand she offered him, and kissed it respectfully. Josephine had known Roland's mother in Martinique; and she never failed, whenever she saw Roland, to speak to him of his maternal grandfather, M. de la Clémencière, in whose magnificent garden as a child she was wont to gather those wonderful fruits which are unknown in our colder climates.

A subject of conversation was therefore ready at hand. She inquired tenderly after Madame de Montrevel's health, and that of her daughter and little Edouard. Then, the information given, she said: "My dear Roland, I must now pay attention to my other guests; but try to remain after the other guests, or else let me see you alone to-morrow. I want to talk to you about *him*" (she glanced at Bonaparte) "and have a thousand things to tell you." Then, pressing the young man's hand with a sigh, she added, "No matter what happens, you will never leave him, will you?"

"What do you mean?" asked Roland, amazed.

"I know what I mean," said Josephine, "and when you have talked ten minutes with Bonaparte you will, I am sure, understand me. In the meantime watch, and listen, and keep silence."

Roland bowed and drew aside, resolved, as Josephine had advised, to play the part of observer.

But what was there to observe? Three principal groups occupied the salon. The first, gathered around Madame Bonaparte, the only woman present, was more a flux and reflux than a group. The second, surrounding Talma, was composed of Arnault, Parseval-Grandmaison, Monge, Berthollet, and two or three other members of the Institute. The third, which Bonaparte had just joined, counted in its circle Talleyrand, Barras, Lucien, Admiral Bruix, [Footnote: AUTHOR'S NOTE. — Not to be confounded with Rear-Admiral de Brueys, who was killed at Aboukir, August 1, 1798. Admiral Bruix, the negotiator with Talleyrand of the 18th Brumaire, did not die until 1805.] Roederer, Regnaud de Saint-Jean-d'Angely, Fouché, Réal, and two or three generals, among whom was Lefebvre.

In the first group they talked of fashions, music, the theatre; in the second, literature, science, dramatic art; in the third, they talked of everything except that which was uppermost in their minds. Doubtless this reserve was not in keeping with Bonaparte's own feeling at the moment; for after sharing in this commonplace conversation for a short time, he took the former bishop of Autun by the arm and led him into the embrasure of the window.

"Well?" he asked.

Talleyrand looked at Bonaparte with that air which belonged to no one but him.

"What did I tell you of Sièyes, general?"

"You told me to secure the support of those who regarded the friends of the Republic as Jacobins, and to rely, upon it that Sièyes was at their head."

"I was not mistaken."

"Then he will yield?"

"Better, he has yielded."

"The man who wanted to shoot me at Fréjus for having landed without being quarantined!"

"Oh, no; not for that."

"But what then?"

"For not having looked at him or spoken to him at Gohier's dinner."

"I must confess that I did it on purpose. I cannot endure that unfrocked monk."

Bonaparte perceived, too late, that the speech he had just made was like the sword of the archangel, double-edged; if Sièyes was unfrocked, Talleyrand was unmitred. He cast a rapid glance at his companion’s face; the ex-bishop of Autun was smiling his sweetest smile.

“Then I can count upon him?”

“I will answer for him.”

“And Cambacérès and Lebrun, have you seen them?”

“I took Sièyes in hand as the most recalcitrant. Bruix saw the other two.”

The admiral, from the midst of the group, had never taken his eyes off of the general and the diplomatist. He suspected that their conversation had a special importance. Bonaparte made him a sign to join them. A less able man would have done so at once, but Bruix avoided such a mistake. He walked about the room with affected indifference, and then, as if he had just perceived Talleyrand and Bonaparte talking together, he went up to them.

“Bruix is a very able man!” said Bonaparte, who judged men as much by little as by great things.

“And above all very cautious, general!” said Talleyrand.

“Yes. We will need a corkscrew to pull anything out of him.”

“Oh, no; on the contrary, now that he has joined us, he, will broach the question frankly.”

And, indeed, no sooner had Bruix joined them than he began in words as clear as they were concise: “I have seen them; they waver!”

“They waver! Cambacérès and Lebrun waver? Lebrun I can understand — a sort of man of letters, a moderate, a Puritan; but Cambacérès — ”

“But it is so.”

“But didn’t you tell them that I intended to make them each a consul?”

“I didn’t get as far as that,” replied Bruix, laughing.

“And why not?” inquired Bonaparte.

“Because this is the first word you have told me about your intentions, Citizen General.”

“True,” said Bonaparte, biting his lips.

“Am I to repair the omission?” asked Bruix.

“No, no,” exclaimed Bonaparte hastily; “they might think I needed them. I won’t have any quibbling. They must decide to-day without any other conditions than those you have offered them; to-morrow it will be too late. I feel strong enough to stand alone; and I now have Sièyes and Barras.”

“Barras?” repeated the two negotiators astonished.

“Yes, Barras, who treated me like a little corporal, and wouldn’t send me back to Italy, because, he said, I had made my fortune there, and it was useless to return. Well, Barras — ”

“Barras?”

“Nothing.” Then, changing his mind, “Faith! I may as well tell you. Do you know what Barras said at dinner yesterday before me? That it was impossible to go on any longer with the Constitution of the year III. He admitted the necessity of a dictatorship; said he had decided to abandon the reins of government, and retire; adding that he himself was looked upon as worn-out, and that the Republic needed new men. Now, guess to whom he thinks of transferring his power. I give it you, as Madame de Sévigné says, in a hundred, thousand, ten thousand. No other than General Hedouville, a worthy man, but I have only to look him in the face to make him lower his eyes. My glance must have been blasting! As the result, Barras came to my bedside at eight o’clock, to excuse himself as best he could for the nonsense he talked the night before, and admitted that I alone could save the Republic, and placed himself at my disposal, to do what I wished, assume any rôle I might assign him, begging me to promise that if I had any plan in my head I would count on him — yes, on him; and he would be true to the crack of doom.”

“And yet,” said Talleyrand, unable to resist a play upon words, “doom is not a word with which to conjure liberty.”

Bonaparte glanced at the ex-bishop.

“Yes, I know that Barras is your friend, the friend of Fouché and Réal; but he is not mine, and I shall prove it to him. Go back to Lebrun and Cambacérès, Bruix, and let them make their own bargain.” Then, looking at his watch and frowning, he added: “It seems to me that Moreau keeps us waiting.”

So saying, he turned to the group which surrounded Talma. The two diplomatists watched him. Then Admiral Bruix asked in a low voice: “What do you say, my dear Maurice, to such sentiments toward the man who picked him out, a mere lieutenant, at the siege of Toulon, who trusted him to defend the Convention on the 13th Vendémiaire, and who named him, when only twenty-six, General-in-Chief of the Army in Italy?”

“I say, my dear admiral,” replied M. de Talleyrand, with his pallid mocking smile, “that some services are so great that ingratitude alone can repay them.”

At that moment the door opened and General Moreau was announced. At this announcement, which was more than a piece of news — it was a surprise to most of those present — every eye was turned toward the door. Moreau appeared.

At this period three men were in the eyes of France. Moreau was one of these three men. The two others were Bonaparte and Pichegru. Each had become a sort of symbol. Since the 18th Fructidor, Pichegru had become the symbol of monarchy; Moreau, since he had been christened Fabius, was the symbol of the Republic; Bonaparte, symbol of war, dominated them both by the adventurous aspect of his genius.

Moreau was at that time in the full strength of his age; we would say the full strength of his genius, if decision were not one of the characteristics of genius. But no one was ever more undecided than the famous cunctator. He was thirty-six years old, tall, with a sweet, calm, firm countenance, and must have resembled Xenophon.

Bonaparte had never seen him, nor had he, on his side, ever seen Bonaparte. While the one was battling on the Adige and the Mincio, the other fought beside the Danube and the Rhine. Bonaparte came forward to greet him, saying: “You are welcome, general!”

“General,” replied Moreau, smiling courteously, while all present made a circle around them to see how this new Cæsar would meet the new Pompey, “you come from Egypt, victorious, while I come, defeated, from Italy.”

“A defeat which was not yours, and for which you are not responsible, general. It was Joubert’s fault. If he had rejoined the Army of Italy as soon as he had been made commander-in-chief, it is more than probable that the Russians and Austrians, with the troops they then had, could not have resisted him. But he remained in Paris for his honeymoon! Poor Joubert paid with his life for that fatal month which gave the enemy time to gather its reinforcements. The surrender of Mantua gave them fifteen thousand men on the eve of the battle. It was impossible that our poor army should not have been overwhelmed by such united forces.”

“Alas! yes,” said Moreau; “it is always the greater number which defeats the smaller.”

“A great truth, general,” exclaimed Bonaparte; “an indisputable truth.”

“And yet,” said Arnault, joining in the conversation, “you yourself, general, have defeated large armies with little ones.”

"If you were Marius, instead of the author of 'Marius,' you would not say that, my dear poet. Even when I beat great armies with little ones — listen to this, you young men who obey to-day, and will command to-morrow — it was always the larger number which defeated the lesser."

"I don't understand," said Arnault and Lefebvre together.

But Moreau made a sign with his head to show that he understood. Bonaparte continued: "Follow my theory, for it contains the whole art of war. When with lesser forces I faced a large army, I gathered mine together, with great rapidity, fell like a thunderbolt on a wing of the great army, and overthrew it; then I profited by the disorder into which this manoeuvre never failed to throw the enemy to attack again, always with my whole army, on the other side. I beat them, in this way, in detail; and the victory which resulted was always, as you see, the triumph of the many over the few."

As the able general concluded his definition of his own genius, the door opened and the servant announced that dinner was served.

"General," said Bonaparte, leading Moreau to Josephine, "take in my wife. Gentlemen, follow them."

On this invitation all present moved from the salon to the dining-room.

After dinner, on pretence of showing him a magnificent sabre he had brought from Egypt, Bonaparte took Moreau into his study. There the two rivals remained closeted more than an hour. What passed between them? What compact was signed? What promises were made? No one has ever known. Only, when Bonaparte returned to the salon alone, and Lucien asked him: "Well, what of Moreau?" he answered: "Just as I foresaw; he prefers military power to political power. I have promised him the command of an army." Bonaparte smiled as he pronounced these words; then added, "In the meantime — "

"In the meantime?" questioned Lucien.

"He will have that of the Luxembourg. I am not sorry to make him the jailer of the Directors, before I make him the conqueror of the Austrians."

The next day the following appeared in the "Moniteur":

> PARIS, 17th Brumaire. Bonaparte has presented Moreau with a magnificent Damascus sword set with precious stones which he brought from Egypt, the value of which is estimated at twelve thousand francs.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SCHEDULE OF THE DIRECTORY

We have said that Moreau, furnished no doubt with instructions, left the little house in the Rue de la Victoire, while Bonaparte returned alone to the salon. Everything furnished an object of comment in such a company as was there assembled; the absence of Moreau, the return of Bonaparte unaccompanied, and the visible good humor which animated his countenance, were all remarked upon.

The eyes which fastened upon him most ardently were those of Josephine and Roland. Moreau for Bonaparte added twenty chances to the success of the plot; Moreau against Bonaparte robbed him of fifty. Josephine's eyes were so supplicating that, on leaving Lucien, Bonaparte pushed his brother toward his wife. Lucien understood, and approached Josephine, saying: "All is well."

"Moreau?"

"With us."

"I thought he was a Republican."

"He has been made to see that we are acting for the good of the Republic."

"I should have thought him ambitious," said Roland.

Lucien started and looked at the young man.

"You are right," said he.

"Then," remarked Josephine, "if he is ambitious he will not let Bonaparte seize the power."

"Why not?"

"Because he will want it himself."

"Yes; but he will wait till it comes to him ready-made, inasmuch as he doesn't know how to create it, and is afraid to seize it."

During this time Bonaparte had joined the group which had formed around Talma after dinner, as well as before. Remarkable men are always the centre of attraction.

“What are you saying, Talma?” demanded Bonaparte. “It seems to me they are listening to you very attentively.”

“Yes, but my reign is over,” replied the artist.

“Why so?”

“I do as citizen Barras has done; I abdicate?”

“So citizen Barras has abdicated?”

“So rumor says.”

“Is it known who will take his place?”

“It is surmised.”

“Is it one of your friends, Talma?”

“Time was,” said Talma, bowing, “when he did me the honor to say I was his.”

“Well, in that case, Talma, I shall ask for your influence.”

“Granted,” said Talma, laughing; “it only remains to ask how it can serve you.”

“Get me sent back to Italy; Barras would not let me go.”

“The deuce!” said Talma; “don’t you know the song, general, ‘We won’t go back to the woods when the laurels are clipped’?”

“Oh! Roscius, Roscius!” said Bonaparte, smiling, “have you grown a flatterer during my absence?”

“Roscius was the friend of Cæsar, general, and when the conqueror returned from Gaul he probably said to him about the same thing I have said to you.”

Bonaparte laid his band on Talma’s shoulder.

“Would he have said the same words after crossing the Rubicon?”

Talma looked Bonaparte straight in the face.

“No,” he replied; “he would have said, like the augur, ‘Cæsar, beware of the Ides of March!’“

Bonaparte slipped his hand into his breast as if in search of something; finding the dagger of the Companions of Jehu, he grasped it convulsively. Had he a presentiment of the conspiracies of Arena, Saint-Regent, and Cadoudal?

Just then the door opened and a servant announced: “General Bernadotte!”

“Bernadotte,” muttered Bonaparte, involuntarily. “What does he want here?”

Since Bonaparte’s return, Bernadotte had held aloof from him, refusing all the advances which the general-in-chief and his friends had made him. The fact is, Bernadotte had long since discerned the politician beneath the soldier’s greatcoat, the dictator beneath the general, and Bernadotte, for all that he became king in later years, was at that time a very different Republican from Moreau. Moreover, Bernadotte believed he had reason to complain of Bonaparte. His military career had not been less brilliant than that of the young general; his fortunes were destined to run parallel with his to the end, only, more fortunate than that other — Bernadotte was to die on his throne. It is true, he did not conquer that throne; he was called to it.

Son of a lawyer at Pau, Bernadotte, born in 1764 — that is to say, five years before Bonaparte — was in the ranks as a private soldier when only eighteen. In 1789 he was only a sergeant-major. But those were the days of rapid promotion. In 1794, Kléber created him brigadier-general on the field of battle, where he had decided the fortunes of the day. Becoming a general of division, he played a brilliant part at Fleurus and Juliers, forced Maestricht to capitulate, took Altdorf, and protected, against an army twice as numerous as his own, the retreat of Joubert. In 1797 the Directory ordered him to take seventeen thousand men to Bonaparte. These seventeen thousand men were his old soldiers, veterans of Kléber, Marceau and Hoche, soldiers of the Sambre-et-Meuse; and yet Bernadotte forgot all rivalry and seconded Bonaparte with all his might, taking part in the passage of the Tagliamento, capturing Gradiska, Trieste, Laybach, Idria, bringing back to the Directory, after the campaign, the flags of the enemy, and accepting, possibly with reluctance, an embassy to Vienna, while Bonaparte secured the command of the army of Egypt.

At Vienna, a riot, excited by the tri-color flag hoisted above the French embassy, for which the ambassador was unable to obtain redress, forced him to demand his passports. On his return to Paris, the Directory appointed him Minister of War. An underhand proceeding of Sièyes, who was offended by Bernadotte’s republicanism, induced the latter to send in his resignation. It was accepted, and when Bonaparte landed at Fréjus the late minister had been three months out of office. Since Bonaparte’s return, some of Bernadotte’s friends had sought to bring about his reinstatement; but Bonaparte had opposed it. The result was a hostility between the two generals, none the less real because not openly avowed.

Bernadotte's appearance in Bonaparte's salon was therefore an event almost as extraordinary as the presence of Moreau. And the entrance of the conqueror of Maestricht caused as many heads to turn as had that of the conqueror of Rastadt. Only, instead of going forward to meet him, as he had Moreau, Bonaparte merely turned round and awaited him.

Bernadotte, from the threshold of the door, cast a rapid glance around the salon. He divided and analyzed the groups, and although he must have perceived Bonaparte in the midst of the principal one, he went up to Josephine, who was reclining on a couch at the corner of the fireplace, like the statue of Agrippina in the Pitti, and, addressing her with chivalric courtesy, inquired for her health; then only did he raise his head as if to look for Bonaparte. At such a time everything was of too much importance for those present not to remark this affectation of courtesy on Bernadotte's part.

Bonaparte, with his rapid, comprehensive intellect, was not the last to notice this; he was seized with impatience, and, instead of awaiting Bernadotte in the midst of the group where he happened to be, he turned abruptly to the embrasure of a window, as if to challenge the ex-minister of war to follow him. Bernadotte bowed graciously to right and left, and controlling his usually mobile face to an expression of perfect calmness, he walked toward Bonaparte, who awaited him as a wrestler awaits his antagonist, the right foot forward and his lips compressed. The two men bowed, but Bonaparte made no movement to extend his hand to Bernadotte, nor did the latter offer to take it.

"Is it you?" asked Bonaparte. "I am glad to see you."

"Thank you, general," replied Bernadotte. "I have come because I wish to give you a few explanations."

"I did not recognize you at first."

"Yet I think, general, that my name was announced by your servant in a voice loud enough to prevent any doubt as to my identity."

"Yes, but he announced General Bernadotte."

"Well?"

"Well, I saw a man in civilian's dress, and though I recognized you, I doubted if it were really you."

For some time past Bernadotte had affected to wear civilian's dress in preference to his uniform.

"You know," said he, laughing, "that I am only half a soldier now. I was retired by citizen Sièyes."

“It seems that it was lucky for me that you were no longer minister of war when I landed at Fréjus.”

“How so?”

“You said, so I was told, that had you received the order to arrest me for violating quarantine you would have done so.”

“I said it, and I repeat it, general. As a soldier I was always a faithful observer of discipline. As a minister I was a slave to law.”

Bonaparte bit his lips. “And will you say, after that, that you have not a personal enmity to me?”

“A personal enmity to you, general?” replied Bernadotte. “Why should I have? We have always gone together, almost in the same stride; I was even made general before you. While my campaigns on the Rhine were less brilliant than yours on the Adige, they were not less profitable for the Republic; and when I had the honor to serve under you, you found in me, I hope, a subordinate devoted, if not to the man, at least to the country which he served. It is true that since your departure, general, I have been more fortunate than you in not having the responsibility of a great army, which, if one may believe Kléber’s despatches, you have left in a disastrous position.”

“What do you mean? Kléber’s last despatches? Has Kléber written?”

“Are you ignorant of that, general? Has the Directory not informed you of the complaints of your successor? That would be a great weakness on their part, and I congratulate myself to have come here, not only to correct in your mind what has been said of me, but to tell you what is being said of you.”

Bonaparte fixed an eye, darkling as an eagle’s, on Bernadotte. “And what are they saying of me?” he asked.

“They say that, as you must come back, you should have brought the army with you.”

“Had I a fleet? Are you unaware that De Brueys allowed his to be burned?”

“They also say, general, that, being unable to bring back the army, it would have been better for your renown had you remained with it.”

“That is what I should have done, monsieur, if events had not recalled me to France.”

“What events, general?”

“Your defeats.”

“Pardon me, general; you mean to say Schérer’s defeats.

“Yours as well.”

“I was not answerable for the generals commanding our armies on the Rhine and in Italy until I was minister of war. If you will enumerate the victories and defeats since that time you will see on which side the scale turns.”

“You certainly do not intend to tell me that matters are in a good condition?”

“No, but I do say that they are not in so desperate state as you affect to believe.”

“As I affect! — Truly, general, to hear you one would think I had some interest in lowering France in the eyes of foreigners.

“I don’t say that; I say that I wish to settle the balance of our victories and defeats for the last three months; and as I came for that, and am now in your house, and in the position of an accused person — ”

“Or an accuser.”

“As the accused, in the first instance — I begin.”

“And I listen,” said Bonaparte, visibly on thorns.

“My ministry dates from the 30th Prairial, the 8th of June if you prefer; we will not quarrel over words.”

“Which means that we shall quarrel about things.”

Bernadotte continued without replying.

“I became minister, as I said, the 8th of June; that is, a short time after the siege of Saint-Jean-d’Acre was raised.”

Bonaparte bit his lips. “I did not raise the siege until after I had ruined the fortifications,” he replied.

“That is not what Kléber wrote; but that does not concern me.” Then he added, smiling: “It happened while Clark was minister.”

There was a moment’s silence, during which Bonaparte endeavored to make Bernadotte lower his eyes. Not succeeding, he said: “Go on.”

Bernadotte bowed and continued: “Perhaps no minister of war — and the archives of the ministry are there for reference — ever received the portfolio under more critical circumstances: civil war within, a foreign enemy at our doors, discouragement rife among our veteran armies, absolute destitution of means to equip new ones. That was what I had to face on the 8th of June, when I entered upon my duties. An active correspondence, dating from the 8th of June, between the civil and military authorities, revived their courage and their hopes. My addresses to the armies — this may have been a mistake — were those, not of a minister to his soldiers, but of a comrade among comrades, just as my addresses to the administrators were those of a citizen to his fellow-citizens. I appealed to the courage of the army, and the heart of the French people; I obtained all that I had asked. The National Guard reorganized with renewed zeal; legions were formed upon the Rhine, on the Moselle. Battalions of veterans took the place of old regiments to reinforce the troops that were guarding our frontiers; to-day our cavalry is recruited by a remount of forty thousand horses, and one hundred thousand conscripts, armed and equipped, have received with cries of 'Vive la Republique!' the flags under which they will fight and conquer — "

"But," interrupted Bonaparte bitterly, "this is an apology you are making for yourself."

"Be it so. I will divide my discourse into two parts. The first will be a contestable apology; the second an array of incontestable facts. I will set aside the apology and proceed to facts. June 17 and 18, the battle of the Trebbia. Macdonald wished to fight without Moreau; he crossed the Trebbia, attacked the enemy, was defeated and retreated to Modena. June 20, battle of Tortona; Moreau defeated the Austrian Bellegarde. July 22, surrender of the citadel of Alexandria to the Austro-Russians. So far the scale turns to defeat. July 30, surrender of Mantua, another check. August 15, battle of Novi; this time it was more than a check, it was a defeat. Take note of it, general, for it is the last. At the very moment we were fighting at Novi, Masséna was maintaining his position at Zug and Lucerne, and strengthening himself on the Aar and on the Rhine; while Lecourbe, on August 14 and 15, took the Saint-Gothard. August 19, battle of Bergen; Brune defeated the Anglo-Russian army, forty thousand strong, and captured the Russian general, Hermann. On the 25th, 26th and 27th of the same month, the battles of Zurich, where Masséna defeated the Austro-Russians under Korsakoff. Hotze and three other generals are taken prisoners. The enemy lost twelve thousand men, a hundred cannon, and all its baggage; the Austrians, separated from the Russians, could not rejoin them until after they were driven beyond Lake Constance. That series of victories stopped the progress the enemy had been making since the beginning of the campaign; from the time Zurich was retaken, France was secure from invasion. August 30, Molitor defeated the Austrian generals, Jellachich and Luiken, and drove them back into the Grisons. September 1, Molitor attacked and defeated General Rosenberg in the Mutterthal. On the 2d, Molitor forced Souvaroff to evacuate Glarus, to abandon his wounded, his cannon, and sixteen hundred prisoners. The 6th, General Brune again defeated the Anglo-Russians, under the command of the Duke of York. On the 7th, General Gazan took possession of Constance. On the 8th you landed at Fréjus. — Well, general," continued Bernadotte, "as France will probably pass into your hands, it is well that you should know the state in which you find her, and in place of receipt, our possessions bear witness to what we are giving you. What we are now doing, general, is history, and it is important that those who may some day have an interest in falsifying history shall find in their path the denial of Bernadotte."

"Is that said for my benefit, general?"

"I say that for flatterers. You have pretended, it is said, that you returned to France because our armies were destroyed, because France was threatened, the Republic at bay. You may have left Egypt with that fear; but once in France, all such fears must have given way to a totally different belief."

"I ask no better than to believe as you do," replied Bonaparte, with sovereign dignity; "and the more grand and powerful you prove France to be, the more grateful am I to those who have secured her grandeur and her power."

"Oh, the result is plain, general! Three armies defeated; the Russians exterminated, the Austrians defeated and forced to fly, twenty thousand prisoners, a hundred pieces of cannon, fifteen flags, all the baggage of the enemy in our possession, nine generals taken or killed, Switzerland free, our frontiers safe, the Rhine our limit — so much for Masséna's contingent and the situation of Helvetia. The Anglo-Russian army twice defeated, utterly discouraged, abandoning its artillery, baggage, munitions of war and commissariat, even to the women and children who came with the British; eight thousand French prisoners; effective men, returned to France; Holland completely evacuated — so much for Brune's contingent and the situation in Holland. The rearguard of General Klénau forced to lay down its arms at Villanova; a thousand prisoners and three pieces of cannon fallen into our hands, and the Austrians driven back beyond Bormida; in all, counting the combats at la Stura and Pignerol, four thousand prisoners, sixteen cannon, Mondovi, and the occupation of the whole region between la Stura and

Tanaro — so much for Championnet’s contingent and the situation in Italy. Two hundred thousand men under arms, forty thousand mounted cavalry; that is my contingent, mine, and the situation in France.”

“But,” asked Bonaparte satirically, “if you have, as you say, two hundred thousand soldiers under arms, why do you want me to bring back the fifteen or twenty thousand men I have in Egypt, who are useful there as colonizers?”

“If I ask you for them, general, it is not for any need we may have of them, but in the fear of some disaster over taking them.”

“What disaster do you expect to befall them, commanded by Kléber?”

“Kléber may be killed, general; and who is there behind Kléber? Menou. Kléber and your twenty thousand men are doomed, general!”

“How doomed?”

“Yes, the Sultan will send troops; he controls by land. The English will send their fleet; they control by sea. We, who have neither land nor sea, will be compelled to take part from here in the evacuation of Egypt and the capitulation of our army.

“You take a gloomy view of things, general!”

“The future will show which of us two have seen things as they are.”

“What would you have done in my place?”

“I don’t know. But, even had I been forced to bring them back by way of Constantinople, I should never have abandoned those whom France had intrusted to me. Xenophon, on the banks of the Tigris, was in a much more desperate situation than you on the banks of the Nile. He brought his ten thousand back to Ionia, and they were not the children of Athens, not his fellow citizens; they were mercenaries!”

From the instant Bernadotte uttered the word Constantinople, Bonaparte listened no longer; the name seemed to rouse a new train of ideas in his mind, which he followed in solitary thought. He laid his hand on the arm of the astonished Bernadotte, and, with eyes fixed on space, like a man who pursues through space the phantom of a vanished project, he said: “Yes, yes! I thought of it. That is why I persisted in taking that hovel, Saint-Jean-d’Acre. Here you only thought it obstinacy, a useless waste of men sacrificed to the self-love of a mediocre general who feared that he might be blamed for a defeat. What should I have cared for the raising of the siege of Saint-Jean-d’Acre, if Saint-Jean-d’Acre had not been the barrier in the way of the grandest project ever conceived. Cities! Why, good God! I could take as many as ever did Alexander or Cæsar, but it was Saint-Jean-d'Acre that had to be taken! If I had taken Saint-Jean-d'Acre, do you know what I should have done?"

And he fixed his burning eyes upon Bernadotte, who, this time, lowered his under the flame of this genius.

"What I should have done," repeated Bonaparte, and, like Ajax, he seemed to threaten Heaven with his clinched fist; "if I had taken Saint-Jean-d'Acre, I should have found the treasures of the pasha in the city and three thousand stands of arms. With that I should have raised and armed all Syria, so maddened by the ferocity of Djezzar that each time I attacked him the population prayed to God for his overthrow. I should have marched upon Damascus and Aleppo; I should have swelled my army with the malcontents. Advancing into the country, I should, step by step, have proclaimed the abolition of slavery, and the annihilation of the tyrannical government of the pashas. I should have overthrown the Turkish empire, and founded a great empire at Constantinople, which would have fixed my place in history higher than Constantine and Mohammed II. Perhaps I should have returned to Paris by way of Adrianople and Vienna, after annihilating the house of Austria. Well, my dear general, that is the project which that little hovel of a Saint-Jean-d'Acre rendered abortive!"

And he so far forgot to whom he was speaking, as he followed the shadows of his vanished dream, that he called Bernadotte "my dear general." The latter, almost appalled by the magnitude of the project which Bonaparte had unfolded to him, made a step backward.

"Yes," said Bernadotte, "I perceive what you want, for you have just betrayed yourself. Orient or Occident, a throne! A throne? So be it; why not? Count upon me to help you conquer it, but elsewhere than in France. I am a Republican, and I will die a Republican."

Bonaparte shook his head as if to disperse the thoughts which held him in the clouds.

"I, too, am a Republican," said he, "but see what has come of your Republic!"

"What matter!" cried Bernadotte. "It is not to a word or a form that I am faithful, but to the principle. Let the Directors but yield me the power, and I would know how to defend the Republic against her internal enemies, even as I defended her from her foreign enemies."

As he said these words, Bernadotte raised his eyes, and his glance encountered that of Bonaparte. Two naked blades clashing together never sent forth lightning more vivid, more terrible.

Josephine had watched the two men for some time past with anxious attention. She saw the dual glance teeming with reciprocal menace. She rose hastily and went to Bernadotte.

“General,” said she.

Bernadotte bowed.

“You are intimate with Gohier, are you not?” she continued.

“He is one of my best friends, madame,” said Bernadotte.

“Well, we dine with him the day after to-morrow, the 18th Brumaire; dine there yourself and bring Madame Bernadotte. I should be so glad to know her better.”

“Madame,” said Bernadotte, “in the days of the Greeks you would have been one of the three graces; in the Middle Ages you would have been a fairy; to-day you are the most adorable woman I know.”

And making three steps backward, and bowing, he contrived to retire politely without including Bonaparte in his bow. Josephine followed him with her eyes until he had left the room. Then, turning to her husband, she said: “Well, it seems that it was not as successful with Bernadotte as with Moreau, was it?”

“Bold, adventurous, disinterested, sincere republican, inaccessible to seduction, he is a human obstacle. We must make our way around him, since we cannot overthrow him.”

And leaving the salon without taking leave of any one, he went to his study, whither Roland and Bourrienne followed. They had hardly been there a quarter of an hour when the handle of the lock turned softly, the door opened, and Lucien appeared.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE OUTLINE OF A DECREE

Lucien was evidently expected. Bonaparte had not mentioned his name once since entering the study; but in spite of this silence he had turned his head three or four times with increasing impatience toward the door, and when the young man appeared an exclamation of contentment escaped his lips.

Lucien, the general's youngest brother, was born in 1775, making him now barely twenty-five years old. Since 1797, that is, at the age of twenty-two and a half, he had been a member of the Five Hundred, who, to honor Bonaparte, had made him their president. With the projects he had conceived nothing could have been more fortunate for Bonaparte.

Frank and loyal, republican to the core, Lucien believed that, in seconding his brother's plans, he was serving the Republic better than the future First Consul. In his eyes, no one was better fitted to save it a second time than he who had saved it the first. It was with these sentiments in his heart that he now came to confer with his brother.

"Here you are," said Bonaparte. "I have been waiting for you impatiently."

"So I suspected. But I was obliged to wait until I could leave without being noticed."

"Did you manage it?"

"Yes; Talma was relating a story about Marat and Dumouriez. Interesting as it was, I deprived myself of the pleasure, and here I am."

"I have just heard a carriage driving away; the person who got in it couldn't have seen you coming up my private stairs, could he?"

"The person who drove off was myself, the carriage was mine. If that is not seen every one will think I have left."

Bonaparte breathed freer.

"Well," said he, "let us hear how you have spent your day."

"Oh! I haven't wasted my time, you may be sure."

"Are we to have a decree or the Council?"

“We drew it up to-day, and I have brought it to you — the rough draft at least — so that you can see if you want anything added or changed.”

“Let me see it,” cried Bonaparte. Taking the paper hastily from Lucien’s hand, he read:

> Art. I. The legislative body is transferred to the commune of Saint-Cloud; the two branches of the Council will hold their sessions in the two wings of the palace.

“That’s the important article,” said Lucien. “I had it placed first, so that it might strike the people at once.”

“Yes, yes,” exclaimed Bonaparte, and he continued:

> Art. II. They will assemble there to-morrow, the 20th Brumaire —

“No, no,” said Bonaparte, “to-morrow the 19th. Change the date, Bourrienne;” and he handed the paper to his secretary.

“You expect to be ready for the 18th?”

“I shall be. Fouché said day before yesterday, ‘Make haste, or I won’t answer for the result.’“

“The 19th Brumaire,” said Bourrienne, returning the paper to the general.

Bonaparte resumed:

> Art. II. They will assemble there to-morrow, the 19th Brumaire, at noon. All deliberations are forbidden elsewhere and before the above date.

Bonaparte read the article a second time.

“Good,” said he; “there is no double meaning there.” And he continued:

> Art. III. General Bonaparte is charged with the enforcement of this decree; he will take all necessary measures for the safety of the National Legislature.

A satirical smile flickered on the stony lips of the reader, but he continued almost immediately.

> The general commanding the 17th military division, the guard of the Legislature, the stationary national guard the troops of the line within the boundaries of the Commune of Paris, and those in the constitutional arrondissement, and throughout the limits of the said 17th division, are placed directly under his orders, and are directed to regard him as their commanding officer.

“Bourrienne, add: ‘All citizens will lend him assistance when called upon.’ The bourgeois love to meddle in political matters, and when they really can help us in our projects we ought to grant them this satisfaction.”

Bourrienne obeyed; then he returned the paper to the general, who went on:

> Art. IV. General Bonaparte is summoned before the Council to receive a copy of the present decree, and to make oath thereto. He will consult with the inspecting commissioners of both branches of the Council.
>
> Art. V. The present decree shall be transmitted immediate, by messenger, to all the members of the Council of Five Hundred and to the Executive Directory. It shall be printed and posted, and promulgated throughout the communes of the Republic by special messengers.
>
> Done at Paris this....

“The date is left blank,” said Lucien.

“Put ‘the 18th Brumaire,’ Bourrienne; the decree must take everybody by surprise. It must be issued at seven o’clock in the morning, and at the same hour or even earlier it must be posted on all the walls of Paris.”

“But suppose the Ancients won’t consent to issue it?” said Lucien.

“All the more reason to have it posted, ninny,” said Bonaparte. “We must act as if it had been issued.”

“Am I to correct this grammatical error in the last paragraph?” asked Bourrienne, laughing.

“Where?” demanded Lucien, in the tone of an aggrieved author.

“The word ‘immediate,’“ replied Bourrienne. “You can’t say ‘transmitted immediate’; it ought to be ‘immediately.’“

“It’s not worth while,” said Bonaparte. “I shall act, you may be sure, as if it were ‘immediately.’“ Then, after an instant’s reflection, he added: “As to what you said just now about their not being willing to pass it, there’s a very simple way to get it passed.”

“What is that.”

“To convoke the members of whom we are sure at six o’clock in the morning, and those of whom we are not sure at eight. Having only our own men, it will be devilishly hard to lose the majority.”

“But six o’clock for some, and eight for the others — ” objected Lucien.

“Employ two secretaries; one of them can make a mistake.” Then turning to Lucien, he said: “Write this.”

And walking up and down, he dictated without hesitating, like a man who has long thought over and carefully prepared what he dictates; stopping occasionally beside Bourrienne to see if the secretary's pen were following his every word:

> CITIZENS — The Council of the Ancients, the trustee of the nation's wisdom, has issued the subjoined decree: it is authorized by articles 102 and 103 of the Constitution.
>
> This decree enjoins me to take measures for the safety of the National Legislature, and its necessary and momentary removal.

Bourrienne looked at Bonaparte; *instantaneous* was the word the latter had intended to use, but as the general did not correct himself, Bourrienne left *momentary*.

Bonaparte continued to dictate:

> The Legislature will find means to avoid the imminent danger into which the disorganization of all parts of the administration has brought us.
>
> But it needs, at this crisis, the united support and confidence of patriots. Rally around it; it offers the only means of establishing the Republic on the bases of civil liberty, internal prosperity, victory and peace.

Bonaparte perused this proclamation, and nodded his head in sign of approval. Then he looked at his watch.

"Eleven o'clock," he said; "there is still time."

Then, seating himself in Bourrienne's chair, he wrote a few words in the form of a note, sealed it, and wrote the address: "To the Citizen Barras."

"Roland," said he, when he had finished, "take a horse out of the stable, or a carriage in the street, and go to Barras' house. I have asked him for an interview tomorrow at midnight. I want an answer."

Roland left the room. A moment later the gallop of a horse resounded through the courtyard, disappearing in the direction of the Rue du Mont-Blanc.

"Now, Bourrienne," said Bonaparte, after listening to the sound, "to-morrow at midnight, whether I am in the house or not, you will take my carriage and go in my stead to Barras."

"In your stead, general?"

"Yes. He will do nothing all day, expecting me to accept him on my side at night. At midnight you will go to him, and say that I have such a bad headache I have had to go to bed, but that I will be with him at seven o'clock in the morning without fail. He will believe you, or he won't believe you; but at any rate it will be too late for him to act against us. By seven in the morning I shall have ten thousand men under my command."

"Very good, general. Have you any other orders for me?"

"No, not this evening," replied Bonaparte. "Be here early to-morrow."

"And I?" asked Lucien.

"See Sièyes; he has the Ancients in the hollow of his hand. Make all your arrangements with him. I don't wish him to be seen here, nor to be seen myself at his house. If by any chance we fail, he is a man to repudiate. After tomorrow I wish to be master of my own actions, and to have no ties with any one."

"Do you think you will need me to-morrow?"

"Come back at night and report what happens."

"Are you going back to the salon?"

"No. I shall wait for Josephine in her own room. Bourrienne, tell her, as you pass through, to get rid of the people as soon as possible."

Then, saluting Bourrienne and his brother with a wave of the hand, he left his study by a private corridor, and went to Josephine's room. There, lighted by a single alabaster lamp, which made the conspirator's brow seem paler than ever, Bonaparte listened to the noise of the carriages, as one after the other they rolled away. At last the sounds ceased, and five minutes later the door opened to admit Josephine.

She was alone, and held a double-branched candlestick in her hand. Her face, lighted by the double flame, expressed the keenest anxiety.

"Well," Bonaparte inquired, "what ails you?"

"I am afraid!" said Josephine.

"Of what? Those fools of the Directory, or the lawyers of the two Councils? Come, come! I have Sièyes with me in the Ancients, and Lucien in the Five Hundred."

"Then all goes well?"

"Wonderfully so!"

"You sent me word that you were waiting for me here, and I feared you had some bad news to tell me."

"Pooh! If I had bad news, do you think I would tell you?"

“How reassuring that is!”

“Well, don’t be uneasy, for I have nothing but good news. Only, I have given you a part in the conspiracy.”

“What is it?”

“Sit down and write to Gohier.”

“That we won’t dine with him?”

“On the contrary, ask him to come and breakfast with us. Between those who like each other as we do there can’t be too much intercourse.”

Josephine sat down at a little rosewood writing desk “Dictate,” said she; “I will write.”

“Goodness! for them to recognize my style! Nonsense; you know better than I how to write one of those charming notes there is no resisting.”

Josephine smiled at the compliment, turned her forehead to Bonaparte, who kissed it lovingly, and wrote the following note, which we have copied from the original:

> To the Citizen Gohier, President of the Executive Directory of the
> French Republic —

“Is that right?” she asked.

“Perfectly! As he won’t wear this title of President much longer, we won’t cavil at it.”

“Don’t you mean to make him something?”

“I’ll make him anything he pleases, if he does exactly what I want. Now go on, my dear.”

Josephine picked up her pen again and wrote:

> Come, my dear Gohier, with your wife, and breakfast with us
> to-morrow at eight o’clock. Don’t fail, for I have some very
> interesting things to tell you.
>
> Adieu, my dear Gohier! With the sincerest friendship,
> Yours, LA PAGERIE-BONAPARTE.

“I wrote to-morrow,” exclaimed Josephine. “Shall I date it the 17th Brumaire?”

“You won’t be wrong,” said Bonaparte; “there’s midnight striking.”

In fact, another day had fallen into the gulf of time; the clock chimed twelve. Bonaparte listened gravely and dreamily. Twenty-four hours only separated him from the solemn day for which he had been scheming for a month, and of which he had dreamed for years.

Let us do now what he would so gladly have done, and spring over those twenty-four hours intervening to the day which history has not yet judged, and see what happened in various parts of Paris, where the events we are about to relate produced an overwhelming sensation.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ALEA JACTA EST

At seven in the morning, Fouché, minister of police, entered the bedroom of Gohier, president of the Directory.

“Oh, ho!” said Gohier, when he saw him. “What has happened now, monsieur le ministre, to give me the pleasure of seeing you so early?”

“Don’t you know about the decree?” asked Fouché.

“What decree?” asked honest Gohier.

“The decree of the Council of the Ancients.”

“When was it issued?”

“Last night.”

“So the Council of the Ancients assembles at night now?”

“When matters are urgent, yes.”

“And what does the decree say.”

“It transfers the legislative sessions to Saint-Cloud.”

Gohier felt the blow. He realized the advantage which Bonaparte’s daring genius might obtain by this isolation.

“And since when,” he asked Fouché, “is the minister of police transformed into a messenger of the Council of the Ancients?”

“That’s where you are mistaken, citizen president,” replied the ex-Conventional. “I am more than ever minister of police this morning, for I have come to inform you of an act which may have the most serious consequences.”

Not being as yet sure of how the conspiracy of the Rue de la Victoire would turn out, Fouché was not averse to keeping open a door for retreat at the Luxembourg. But Gohier, honest as he was, knew the man too well to be his dupe.

“You should have informed me of this decree yesterday, and not this morning; for in making the communication now you are scarcely in advance of the official communication I shall probably receive in a few moments.”

As he spoke, an usher opened the door and informed the president that a messenger from the Inspectors of the Council of the Ancients was there, and asked to make him a communication.

“Let him come in,” said Gohier.

The messenger entered and handed the president a letter. He broke the seal hastily and read:

> CITIZEN PRESIDENT — The Inspecting Commission hasten to inform
> you of a decree removing the residence of the legislative body
> to Saint-Cloud.
>
> The decree will be forwarded to you; but measures for public
> safety are at present occupying our attention.
>
> We invite you to meet the Commission of the Ancients. You will
> find Sièyes and Ducos already there.
>
> Fraternal greetings
> BARILLON,
> FARGUES,
> CORNET,

“Very good,” said Gohier, dismissing the messenger with a wave of his hand.

The messenger went out. Gohier turned to Fouché.

“Ah!” said he, “the plot is well laid; they inform me of the decree, but they do not send it to me. Happily you are here to tell me the terms of it.”

“But,” said Fouché, “I don’t know them.”

“What! do you the minister of police, mean to tell me that you know nothing about this extraordinary session of the Council of the Ancients, when it has been put on record by a decree?”

“Of course I knew it took place, but I was unable to be present.”

“And you had no secretary, no amanuensis to send, who could give you an account, word for word, of this session, when in all probability this session will dispose of the fate of France! Ah, citizen Fouché, you are either a very deep, or a very shallow minister of police!”

“Have you any orders to give me, citizen president?” asked Fouché.

“None, citizen minister,” replied the president. “If the Directory judges it advisable to issue any orders, it will be to men whom it esteems worthy of its confidence. You may return to those who sent you,” he added, turning his back upon the minister.

Fouché went, and Gohier immediately rang his bell. An usher entered.

“Go to Barras, Sièyes, Ducos, and Moulins, and request them to come to me at once. Ah! And at the same time ask Madame Gohier to come into my study, and to bring with her Madame Bonaparte’s letter inviting us to breakfast with her.”

Five minutes later Madame Gohier entered, fully dressed, with the note in her hand. The invitation was for eight o’clock. It was then half-past seven, and it would take at least twenty minutes to drive from the Luxembourg to the Rue de la Victoire.

“Here it is, my dear,” said Madame Gohier, handing the letter to her husband. “It says eight o’clock.”

“Yes,” replied Gohier, “I was not in doubt about the hour, but about the day.”

Taking the note from his wife’s hand, he read it over:

> Come, my dear Gohier, with your wife, and breakfast with me
> to-morrow at eight o’clock. Don’t fail, for I have some very
> interesting things to tell you.

“Ah,” said Gohier, “there can be no mistake.”

“Well, my dear, are we going?” asked Madame Gohier.

“You are, but not I. An event has just happened about which the citizen Bonaparte is probably well-informed, which will detain my colleagues and myself at the Luxembourg.”

“A serious event?”

“Possibly.”

“Then I shall stay with you.”

“No, indeed; you would not be of any service here. Go to Madame Bonaparte’s. I may be mistaken, but, should anything extraordinary happen, which appears to you alarming, send me word some way or other. Anything will do; I shall understand half a word.”

“Very good, my dear; I will go. The hope of being useful to you is sufficient.”

“Do go!”

Just then the usher entered, and said:

"General Moulins is at my heels; citizen Barras is in his bath, and will soon be here; citizens Sièyes and Ducos went out at five o'clock this morning, and have not yet returned."

"They are the two traitors!" said Gohier; "Barras is only their dupe." Then kissing his wife, he added: "Now, go."

As she turned round, Madame Gohier came face to face with General Moulins. He, for his character was naturally impetuous, seemed furious.

"Pardon me, citizeness," he said. Then, rushing into Gohier's study, he cried: "Do you know what has happened, president?"

"No, but I have my suspicions."

"The legislative body has been transferred to Saint-Cloud; the execution of the decree has been intrusted to General Bonaparte, and the troops are placed under his orders."

"Ha! The cat's out of the bag!" exclaimed Gohier.

"Well, we must combine, and fight them."

"Have you heard that Sièyes and Ducos are not in the palace?"

"By Heavens! they are at the Tuileries! But Barras is in his bath; let us go to Barras. The Directory can issue decrees if there is a majority. We are three, and, I repeat it, we must make a struggle!"

"Then let us send word to Barras to come to us as soon as he is out of his bath."

"No; let us go to him before he leaves it."

The two Directors left the room, and hurried toward Barras' apartment. They found him actually in his bath, but they insisted on entering.

"Well?" asked Barras as soon as he saw them.

"Have you heard?"

"Absolutely nothing."

They told him what they themselves knew.

"Ah!" cried Barras, "that explains everything."

"What do you mean?"

"Yes, that is why he didn't come last night."

"Who?"

"Why, Bonaparte."

"Did you expect him last evening?"

"He sent me word by one of his aides-de-camp that he would call on me at eleven o'clock last evening."

"And he didn't come?"

“No. He sent Bourrienne in his carriage to tell me that a violent headache had obliged him to go to bed; but that he would be here early this morning.”

The Directors looked at each other.

“The whole thing is plain,” said they.

“I have sent Bollot, my secretary, a very intelligent fellow, to find out what he can,” continued Barras.

He rang and a servant entered.

“As soon as citizen Bollot returns,” said Barras, “ask him to come here.”

“He is just getting out of his carriage.”

“Send him up! Send him up!”

But Bollot was already at the door.

“Well?” cried the three Directors.

“Well, General Bonaparte, in full uniform, accompanied by Generals Beurnonville, Macdonald and Moreau, are on their way to the Tuileries, where ten thousand troops are awaiting them.”

“Moreau! Moreau with him!” exclaimed Gohier.

“On his right!”

“I always told you that Moreau was a sneak, and nothing else!” cried Moulins, with military roughness.

“Are you still determined to resist, Barras?” asked Gohier.

“Yes,” replied Barras.

“Then dress yourself and join us in the council-room.”

“Go,” said Barras, “I follow you.”

The two Directors hastened to the council-room. After waiting ten minutes Moulins said: “We should have waited for Barras; if Moreau is a sneak, Barras is a knave.”

Two hours later they were still waiting for Barras.

Talleyrand and Bruix had been admitted to Barras’ bathroom just after Gohier and Moulins had left it, and in talking with them Barras forgot his appointment.

We will now see what was happening in the Rue de la Victoire.

At seven o’clock, contrary to his usual custom, Bonaparte was up and waiting in full uniform in his bedroom. Roland entered. Bonaparte was perfectly calm; they were on the eve of a battle.

“Has no one come yet, Roland?” he asked.

“No, general,” replied the young man, “but I heard the roll of a carriage just now.”

"So did I," replied Bonaparte.

At that minute a servant announced: "The citizen Joseph Bonaparte, and the citizen General Bernadotte."

Roland questioned Bonaparte with a glance; was he to go or stay? He was to stay. Roland took his stand at the corner of a bookcase like a sentinel at his post.

"Ah, ha!" exclaimed Bonaparte, seeing that Bernadotte was still attired in civilian's clothes, "you seem to have a positive horror of the uniform, general!"

"Why the devil should I be in uniform at seven in the morning," asked Bernadotte, "when I am not in active service?"

"You will be soon."

"But I am retired."

"Yes, but I recall you to active service."

"You?"

"Yes, I."

"In the name of the Directory?"

"Is there still a Directory?"

"Still a Directory? What do you mean?"

"Didn't you see the troops drawn up in the streets leading to the Tuileries as you came here?"

"I saw them, and I was surprised."

"Those soldiers are mine."

"Excuse me," said Bernadotte; "I thought they belonged to France."

"Oh, to France or to me; is it not all one?"

"I was not aware of that," replied Bernadotte, coldly.

"Though you doubt it now, you will be certain of it tonight. Come, Bernadotte, this is the vital moment; decide!"

"General," replied Bernadotte, "I am fortunate enough to be at this moment a simple citizen; let me remain a simple citizen."

"Bernadotte, take care! He that is not for me is against me."

"General, pay attention to your words! You said just now, 'Take care.' If that is a threat, you know very well that I do not fear them."

Bonaparte came up to him, and took him by both hands.

"Oh, yes, I know that; that is why I must have you with me. I not only esteem you, Bernadotte, but I love you. I leave you with Joseph; he is your brother-in-law. Between brothers, devil take it, there should be no quarrelling."

"Where are you going?"

"In your character of Spartan you are a rigid observer of the laws, are you not? Well, here is a decree issued by the Council of Five Hundred last night, which confers upon me the immediate command of the troops in Paris. So I was right," he added, "when I told you that the soldiers you met were mine, inasmuch as they are under my orders."

And he placed in Bernadotte's hands the copy of the decree which had been sent to him at six o'clock that morning. Bernadotte read it through from the first line to the last.

"To this," said he, "I have nothing to object. Secure the safety of the National Legislature, and all good citizens will be with you."

"Then be with me now."

"Permit me, general, to wait twenty-four hours to see how you fulfil that mandate."

"Devil of a man!" cried Bonaparte. "Have your own way." Then, taking him by the arm, he dragged him a few steps apart from Joseph, and continued, "Bernadotte, I want to play above-board with you."

"Why so," retorted the latter, "since I am not on your side?"

"Never mind. You are watching the game, and I want the lookers-on to see that I am not cheating."

"Do you bind me to secrecy?"

"No."

"That is well, for in that case I should have refused to listen to your confidences."

"Oh! my confidences are not long! Your Directory is detested, your Constitution is worn-out; you must make a clean sweep of both, and turn the government in another direction. You don't answer me."

"I am waiting to hear what you have to say."

"All I have to say is, Go put on your uniform. I can't wait any longer for you. Join me at the Tuileries among our comrades."

Bernadotte shook his head.

"You think you can count on Moreau, Beurnonville, and Lefebvre," resumed Bonaparte. "Just look out of that window. Who do you see there, and there? Moreau and Beurnonville. As for Lefebvre, I do not see him, but

I am certain I shall not go a hundred steps before meeting him. Now will you decide?”

“General,” replied Bernadotte, “I am not a man to be swayed by example, least of all when that example is bad. Moreau, Beurnonville, and Lefebvre may do as they wish. I shall do as I ought!”

“So you definitively refuse to accompany me to the Tuileries?”

“I do not wish to take part in a rebellion.”

“A rebellion! A rebellion! Against whom? Against a parcel of imbeciles who are pettifogging from morning till night in their hovels.”

“These imbeciles, general, are for the moment the representatives of the law. The Constitution protects them; they are sacred to me.”

“At least promise me one thing, iron rod that you are.”

“What is it?”

“To keep quiet.”

“I will keep quiet as a citizen, but — ”

“But what? Come, I made a clean breast of it to you; do you do likewise.”

“But if the Directory orders me to act, I shall march against the agitators, whoever they may be.”

“Ah! So you think I am ambitious?” asked Bonaparte.

“I suspect as much,” retorted Bernadotte, smiling.

“Faith,” said Bonaparte, “you don’t know me. I have had enough of politics, and what I want is peace. Ah, my dear fellow! Malmaison and fifty thousand a year, and I’d willingly resign all the rest. You don’t believe me. Well, I invite you to come and see me there, three months hence, and if you like pastorals, we’ll do one together. Now, au revoir! I leave you with Joseph, and, in spite of your refusal, I shall expect you at the Tuileries. Hark! Our friends are becoming impatient.”

They were shouting: “Vive Bonaparte!”

Bernadotte paled slightly. Bonaparte noticed this pallor.

“Ah, ha,” he muttered. “Jealous! I was mistaken; he is not a Spartan, he is an Athenian!”

As Bonaparte had said, his friends were growing impatient. During the hour that had elapsed since the decree had been posted, the salon, the anterooms, and the courtyard had been crowded. The first person Bonaparte met at the head of the staircase was his compatriot, Colonel Sebastiani, then commanding the 9th Dragoons.

“Ah! is that you, Sebastiani?” said Bonaparte. “Where are your men?”

“In line along the Rue de la Victoire, general.”

“Well disposed?”

“Enthusiastic! I distributed among them ten thousand cartridges which I had in store.”

“Yes; but you had no right to draw those cartridges out without an order from the commandant of Paris. Do you know that you have burned your vessels, Sebastiani?”

“Then take me into yours, general. I have faith in your fortunes.”

“You mistake me for Cæsar, Sebastiani!”

“Faith! I might make worse mistakes. Besides, down below in the courtyard there are forty officers or more, of all classes, without pay, whom the Directory has left in the most complete destitution for the last year. You are their only hope, general; they are ready to die for you.”

“That’s right. Go to your regiment, and take leave of it.”

“Take leave of it? What do you mean, general?”

“I exchange it for a brigade. Go, go!”

Sebastiani did not wait to be told twice. Bonaparte continued his way. At the foot of the stairs he met Lefebvre.

“Here I am, general!” said Lefebvre.

“You? And where is the 17th military division?”

“I am waiting for my appointment to bring it into action.”

“Haven’t you received your appointment?”

“From the Directory, yes. But as I am not a traitor, I have just sent in my resignation, so that they may know I am not to be counted on.”

“And you have come for me to appoint you, so that I may count on you, is that it?”

“Exactly.”

“Quick, Roland, a blank commission; fill in the general’s name, so that I shall only have to put my name to it. I’ll sign it on the pommel of my saddle.”

“That’s the true sort,” said Lefebvre.

“Roland.”

The young man, who had already started obediently, came back to the general.

“Fetch me that pair of double-barrelled pistols on my mantel-piece at the same time,” said Bonaparte, in a low tone. “One never knows what may happen.”

"Yes, general," said Roland; "besides, I shan't leave you."

"Unless I send you to be killed elsewhere."

"True," replied the young man, hastening away to fulfil his double errand.

Bonaparte was continuing on his way when he noticed a shadow in the corridor. He recognized Josephine, and ran to her.

"Good God!" cried she, "is there so much danger?"

"What makes you think that?"

"I overheard the order you gave Roland."

"Serves you right for listening at doors. How about Gohier?"

"He hasn't come."

"Nor his wife?"

"She is here."

Bonaparte pushed Josephine aside with his hand and entered the salon. He found Madame Gohier alone and very pale.

"What!" said he, without any preamble, "isn't the President coming?"

"He was unable to do so, general," replied Madame Gohier.

Bonaparte repressed a movement of impatience. "He absolutely must come," said he. "Write him that I await him, and I will have the note sent."

"Thank you, general," replied Madame Gohier; "my servants are here, and they can attend to that."

"Write, my dear friend, write," said Josephine, offering her paper and pen and ink.

Bonaparte stood so that he could see over her shoulder what she wrote. Madame Gohier looked fixedly at him, and he drew back with a bow. She wrote the note, folded it, and looked about her for the sealing-wax; but, whether by accident or intention, there was none. Sealing the note with a wafer, she rang the bell. A servant came.

"Give this note to Comtois," said Madame Gohier, "and bid him take it to the Luxembourg at once."

Bonaparte followed the servant, or rather the letter, with his eyes until the door closed. Then, turning to Madame Gohier, he said: "I regret that I am unable to breakfast with you. But if the President has business to attend to, so have I. You must breakfast with my wife. Good appetite to you both."

And he went out. At the door he met Roland.

"Here is the commission, general," said the young man, "and a pen."

Bonaparte took the pen, and using the back of his aide-de-camp’s hat, he signed the commission. Roland gave him the pistols.

“Did you look; to them?” asked Bonaparte.

Roland smiled. “Don’t be uneasy,” said he; “I’ll answer for them.”

Bonaparte slipped the pistols in his belt, murmuring as he did so: “I wish I knew what she wrote her husband.”

“I can tell you, word for word, what she wrote, general,” said a voice close by.

“You, Bourrienne?”

“Yes. She wrote: ‘You did right not to come, my dear; all that is happening here convinces me that the invitation was only a snare. I will rejoin you shortly.’“

“You unsealed the letter?”

“General, Sextus Pompey gave a dinner on his galley to Antony and Lepidus. His freedman said to him: ‘Shall I make you emperor of the world?’ ‘How can you do it?’ ‘Easily. I will cut the cable of your galley, and Antony and Lepidus are prisoners.’ ‘You should have done so without telling me,’ replied Sextus. ‘Now I charge you on your life not to do it.’ I remembered those words, general: ‘*You should have done so without telling me*.’“

Bonaparte thought an instant; then he said: “You are mistaken; it was Octavius and not Antony who was on Sextus’ galley with Lepidus.” And he went on his way to the courtyard, confining his blame to the historical blunder.

Hardly had the general appeared on the portico than cries of “Vive Bonaparte!” echoed through the courtyard into the street, where they were taken up by the dragoons drawn up in line before the gate.

“That’s a good omen, general,” said Roland.

“Yes. Give Lefebvre his commission at once; and if he has no horse, let him take one of mine. Tell him to meet me in the court of the Tuileries.”

“His division is already there.”

“All the more reason.”

Glancing about him, Bonaparte saw Moreau and Beurnonville, who were waiting for him, their horses held by orderlies. He saluted them with a wave of his hand, already that of a master rather than that of a comrade. Then, perceiving General Debel out of uniform, he went down the steps and approached him.

“Why are you in civilian’s dress?” he asked.

“General, I was not notified. I chanced to be passing along the street, and, seeing the crowd before your house, I came in, fearing you might be in danger.”

“Go and put on your uniform quickly.”

“But I live the other side of Paris; it would take too long.” But, nevertheless, he made as if to retire.

“What are you going to do?”

“Don’t be alarmed, general.”

Debel had noticed an artilleryman on horseback who was about his size.

“Friend,” said he, “I am General Debel. By order of General Bonaparte lend me your uniform and your horse, and I’ll give you furlough for the day. Here’s a louis to drink the health of the commander-in-chief. To-morrow, come to my house for your horse and uniform. I live in the Rue Cherche-Midi, No. 11.”

“Will nothing be done to me?”

“Yes, you shall be made a corporal.”

“Good!” said the artilleryman; and he quickly handed over his uniform and horse to General Debel.

In the meantime, Bonaparte heard talking above him. He raised his head and saw Joseph and Bernadotte at a window.

“Once more, general,” he said to Bernadotte, “will you come with me?”

“No,” said the latter, firmly. Then, lowering his tone, he continued: “You told me just now to take care.”

“Yes.”

“Well, I say to you, take care.”

“Of what?”

“You are going to the Tuileries?”

“Of course.”

“The Tuileries are very near the Place de la Révolution.”

“Pooh!” retorted Bonaparte, “the guillotine has been moved to the Barrière du Trône.”

“Never mind. The brewer Santerre still controls the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, and Santerre is Moulins’ friend.”

“Santerre has been warned that at the first inimical movement he attempts I will have him shot. Will you come?”

“No.”

“As you please. You are separating your fortunes from mine; I do not separate mine from yours.” Then, calling to his orderly, he said: “My horse!”

They brought his horse. Seeing an artillery private near him, he said: “What are you doing among the epaulets?”

The artilleryman began to laugh.

“Don’t you recognize me, general?” he asked.

“Faith, it’s Debel! Where did you get that horse and the uniform?”

“From that artilleryman you see standing there in his shirt. It will cost you a corporal’s commission.”

“You are wrong, Debel,” said Bonaparte; “it will cost me two commissions, one for the corporal, and one for the general of division. Forward, march, gentlemen! We are going to the Tuileries.”

And, bending forward on his horse, as he usually did, his left hand holding a slack rein, his right resting on his hip, with bent head and dreamy eyes, he made his first steps along that incline, at once glorious and fatal, which was to lead him to a throne — and to St. Helena.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE EIGHTEENTH BRUMAIRE

On entering the Rue de la Victoire, Bonaparte found Sebastiani’s dragoons drawn up in line of battle. He wished to address them, but they interrupted him at the first words, shouting: “We want no explanations. We know that you seek only the good of the Republic. Vive Bonaparte!”

The cortège followed the streets which led from the Rue de la Victoire to the Tuileries, amid the cries of “Vive Bonaparte!”

General Lefebvre, according to promise, was waiting at the palace gates. Bonaparte, on his arrival at the Tuileries, was hailed with the same cheers that had accompanied him. Once there, he raised his head and shook it. Perhaps this cry of “Vive Bonaparte!” did not satisfy him. Was he already dreaming of “Vive Napoleon?”

He advanced in front of the troop, surrounded by his staff, and read the decree of the Five Hundred, which transferred the sessions of the Legislature to Saint-Cloud and gave him the command of the armed forces.

Then, either from memory, or offhand — Bonaparte never admitted any one to such secrets — instead of the proclamation he had dictated to Bourrienne two days earlier, he pronounced these words:

“Soldiers — The Council of Ancients has given me the command of the city and the army.

“I have accepted it, to second the measures to be adopted for the good of the people.

“The Republic has been ill governed for two years. You have hoped for my return to put an end to many evils. You celebrated it with a unanimity which imposes obligations that I now fulfil. Fulfil yours, and second your general with the vigor, firmness and strength I have always found in you.

“Liberty, victory, and peace will restore the French Republic to the rank it occupied in Europe, which ineptitude and treason alone caused her to lose!”

The soldiers applauded frantically. It was a declaration of war against the Directory, and soldiers will always applaud a declaration of war.

The general dismounted, amid shouts and bravos, and entered the Tuileries. It was the second time he had crossed the threshold of this palace of the Valois, whose arches had so ill-sheltered the crown and head of the last Bourbon who had reigned there. Beside him walked citizen Roederer. Bonaparte started as he recognized him, and said:

"Ah! citizen Roederer, you were here on the morning of August 10."

"Yes, general," replied the future Count of the Empire.

"It was you who advised Louis XVI. to go before the National Assembly."

"Yes."

"Bad advice, citizen Roederer! I should not have followed it."

"We advise men according to what we know of them. I would not give General Bonaparte the same advice I gave King Louis XVI. When a king has the fact of his flight to Varennes and the 20th of June behind him, it is difficult to save him."

As Roederer said these words, they reached a window opening on the garden of the Tuileries. Bonaparte stopped, and, seizing Roederer by the arm, he said: "On the 20th of June I was there," pointing with his finger to the terrace by the water, "behind the third linden. Through the open window I could see the poor king, with the red cap on his head. It was a piteous sight; I pitied him."

"What did you do?"

"Nothing, I could do nothing; I was only a lieutenant of artillery. But I longed to go in like the others, and whisper: 'Sire, give me four cannon, and I'll sweep the whole rabble out.'"

What would have happened if Lieutenant Bonaparte had followed his impulse, obtained what he wanted from Louis XVI., and *swept the rabble out*, that is to say the people of Paris? Had his cannon made a clean sweep on June 20th, would he have had to make another the 13th Vendemiaire for the benefit of the Convention?

While the ex-Syndic; who had grown grave, was outlining in his mind the opening pages of his future "History of the Consulate," Bonaparte presented himself at the bar of the Council of the Ancients, followed by his staff, and by all those who chose to do likewise. When the tumult caused by this influx of people had subsided, the president read over the decree which invested Bonaparte with the military power. Then, after requesting him to take the oath, the president added:

“He who has never promised his country a victory which he did not win, cannot fail to keep religiously his new promise to serve her faithfully.”

Bonaparte stretched forth his hand and said solemnly:

“I swear it!”

All the generals repeated after him, each for himself:

“I swear it!”

The last one had scarcely finished, when Bonaparte recognized Barras’ secretary, that same Bollot of whom Barras had spoken that morning to his two colleagues. He had come there solely to give his patron an account of all that was happening there, but Bonaparte fancied he was sent on some secret mission by Barras. He resolved to spare him the first advance, and went straight to him, saying:

“Have you come on behalf of the Directors?” Then, without giving him time to answer, he continued: “What have they done with that France I left so brilliant? I left peace; I find war. I left victories; I find reverses. I left the millions of Italy, and I find spoliation and penury. What have become of the hundred thousand Frenchmen whom I knew by name? They are dead!”

It was not precisely to Barras’ secretary that these words should have been said; but Bonaparte wished to say them, needed to say them, and little he cared to whom he said them. Perhaps even, from his point of view, it was better to say them to some one who could not answer him. At that moment Sièyes rose.

“Citizens,” said he, “the Directors Moulins and Gohier ask to be admitted.”

“They are no longer Directors,” said Bonaparte, “for there is no longer a Directory.”

“But,” objected Sièyes, “they have not yet sent in their resignation.”

“Then admit them and let them give it,” retorted Bonaparte.

Moulins and Gohier entered. They were pale but calm. They knew they came to force a struggle, but behind their resistance may have loomed the Sinnamary. The exiles they sent there the 18th of Fructidor pointed the way.

“I see with satisfaction,” Bonaparte hastened to say, “that you have yielded to our wishes and those of your two colleagues.”

Gohier made a step forward and said firmly: “We yield neither to your wishes, nor to those of our two colleagues, who are no longer our colleagues, since they have resigned, but to the Law. It requires that the decree transferring the legislative body to Saint-Cloud shall be proclaimed without delay. We have come here to fulfil the duty which the law imposes on us, fully determined to defend it against all factious persons, whoever they may be, who attempt to attack it."

"Your zeal does not astonish us," replied Bonaparte; "and because you are a man who loves his country you will unite with us."

"Unite with you! And why?"

"To save the Republic."

"To save the Republic! There was a time, general, when you had the honor to be its prop. But to-day the glory of saving it is reserved for us."

"You save it!" retorted Bonaparte. "How will you do that? With the means your Constitution gives you? Why, that Constitution is crumbling on all sides, and even if I did not topple it over, it could not last eight days."

"Ah!" cried Moulins, "at last you avow your hostile intentions."

"My intentions are not hostile!" shouted Bonaparte, striking the floor with the heel of his boot. "The Republic is in peril; it must be saved, and I shall do it."

"You do it?" cried Gohier. "It seems to me it is for the Directory, not you, to say, 'I shall do it!'"

"There is no longer a Directory."

"I did indeed hear that you said so just a moment before we came in."

"There is no longer a Directory, now that Sièyes and Ducos have resigned."

"You are mistaken. So long as there are three Directors, the Directory still exists. Neither Moulins, Barras nor myself, have handed in our resignations."

At that moment a paper was slipped in Bonaparte's hand, and a voice said in his ear: "Read it." He did so; then said aloud: "You, yourself, are mistaken. Barras has resigned, for here is his resignation. The law requires three Directors to make a Directory. You are but two, and, as you said just now, whoever resists the law is a rebel." Then handing the paper to the president, he continued: "Add the citizen Barras' resignation to that of citizens Sièyes and Ducos, and proclaim the fall of the Directory. I will announce it to my soldiers."

Moulins and Gohier were confounded. Barras' resignation sapped the foundations of all their plans. Bonaparte had nothing further to do at the Council of Ancients, but there still remained much to be done in the court of the Tuileries. He went down, followed by those who had accompanied him up. His soldiers no sooner caught sight, of him than they burst into shouts of “Vive Bonaparte!” more noisily and more eagerly than ever. He sprang into his saddle and made them a sign that he wished to speak to them. Ten thousand voices that had burst into cries were hushed in a moment. Silence fell as if by enchantment.

“Soldiers,” said Bonaparte, in a voice so loud that all could hear it, “your comrades in arms on the frontiers are denuded of the necessaries of life. The people are miserable. The authors of these evils are the factious men against whom I have assembled you to-day. I hope before long to lead you to victory; but first we must deprive those who would stand in the way of public order and general prosperity of their power to do harm.”

Whether it was weariness of the government of the Directory, or the fascination exercised by the magic being who called them to victory — so long forgotten in his absence — shouts of enthusiasm arose, and like a train of burning powder spread from the Tuileries to the Carrousel, from the Carrousel to the adjacent streets. Bonaparte profited by this movement. Turning to Moreau, he said:

“General, I will give you proof of the immense confidence I have in you. Bernadotte, whom I left at my house, and who refused to follow us, had the audacity to tell me that if he received orders from the Directory he should execute them against whosoever the agitators might be. General, I confide to you the guardianship of the Luxembourg. The tranquillity of Paris and the welfare of the Republic are in your hands.”

And without waiting for a reply he put his horse to a gallop, and rode off to the opposite end of the line.

Moreau, led by military ambition, had consented to play a part in this great drama; he was now forced to accept that which the author assigned him. On returning to the Louvre, Gohier and Moulins found nothing changed apparently. All the sentries were at their posts. They retired to one of the salons of the presidency to consult together. But they had scarcely begun their conference, when General Jubé, the commandant of the Luxembourg, received orders to join Bonaparte at the Tuileries with the guard of the Directory. Their places were filled by Moreau and a portion of the soldiers who had been electrified by Bonaparte. Nevertheless the two Directors drew up a message for the Council of the Five Hundred, in which they protested energetically against what had been done. When this was finished Gohier handed it to his secretary, and Moulins, half dead with exhaustion, returned to his apartments to take some food.

It was then about four o'clock in the afternoon. An instant later Gohier's secretary returned in great perturbation.

"Well," said Gohier, "why have you not gone?"

"Citizen president," replied the young man, "we are prisoners in the palace."

"Prisoners? What do you mean?"

"The guard has been changed, and General Jubé is no longer in command."

"Who has replaced him?"

"I think some one said General Moreau."

"Moreau? Impossible! And that coward, Barras, where is he?"

"He has started for his country-place at Grosbois."

"Ah! I must see Moulins!" cried Gohier, rushing to the door. But at the entrance he found a sentry who barred the door. Gohier insisted.

"No one can pass," said the sentry.

"What! not pass?"

"No."

"But I am President Gohier!"

"No one can pass," said the sentry; "that is the order."

Gohier saw it would be useless to say more; force would be impossible. He returned to his own rooms.

In the meantime, General Moreau had gone to see Moulins; he wished to justify himself. Without listening to a word the ex-Director turned his back on him, and, as Moreau insisted, he said: "General, go into the ante-chamber. That is the place for jailers."

Moreau bowed his head, and understood for the first time into what a fatal trap his honor had fallen.

At five o'clock, Bonaparte started to return to the Rue de la Victoire; all the generals and superior officers in Paris accompanied him. The blindest, those who had not understood the 13th Vendemiaire, those who had not yet understood the return from Egypt, now saw, blazing over the Tuileries, the star of his future, and as everybody could not be a planet, each sought to become a satellite.

The shouts of "Vive Bonaparte!" which came from the lower part of the Rue du Mont Blanc, and swept like a sonorous wave toward the Rue de la

Victoire, told Josephine of her husband’s return. The impressionable Creole had awaited him anxiously. She sprang to meet him in such agitation that she was unable to utter a single word.

“Come, come!” said Bonaparte, becoming the kindly man he was in his own home, “calm yourself. We have done to-day all that could be done.”

“Is it all over?”

“Oh, no!” replied Bonaparte.

“Must it be done all over again to-morrow?”

“Yes, but to-morrow it will be merely a formality.”

That formality was rather rough; but every one knows of the events at Saint-Cloud. We will, therefore, dispense with relating them, and turn at once to the result, impatient as we are to get back to the real subject of our drama, from which the grand historical figure we have introduced diverted us for an instant.

One word more. The 20th Brumaire, at one o’clock in the morning, Bonaparte was appointed First Consul for ten years. He himself selected Cambacérès and Lebrun as his associates under the title of Second Consuls, being firmly resolved this time to concentrate in his own person, not only all the functions of the two consuls, but those of the ministers.

The 20th Brumaire he slept at the Luxembourg in president Gohier’s bed, the latter having been liberated with his colleague Moulins.

Roland was made governor of the Luxembourg.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN IMPORTANT COMMUNICATION

Some time after this military revolution, which created a great stir in Europe, convulsing the Continent for a time, as a tempest convulses the ocean — some time after, we say, on the morning of the 30th Nivoise, better and more clearly known to our readers as the 20th of January, 1800, Roland, in looking over the voluminous correspondence which his new office entailed upon him, found, among fifty other letters asking for an audience, the following:

> MONSIEUR THE GOVERNOR-I know your loyalty to your word, and you will see that I rely on it. I wish to speak to you for five minutes, during which I must remain masked.
>
> I have a request to make to you. This request you will grant or deny. In either case, as I shall have entered the Palace of the Luxembourg in the interest of the First Consul, Bonaparte, and the royalist party to which I belong, I shall ask for your word of honor that I be allowed to leave it as freely as you allow me to enter.
>
> If to-morrow, at seven in the evening, I see a solitary light in the window over the clock, I shall know that Colonel Roland de Montrevel has pledged me his word of honor, and I shall boldly present myself at the little door of the left wing of the palace, opening on the garden. I shall strike three blows at intervals, after the manner of the free-masons.
>
> In order that you may know to whom you engage or refuse your word, I sign a name which is known to you, that name having been, under circumstances you have probably not forgotten, pronounced before you.

MORGAN,
Chief of the Companions of Jehu.

Roland read the letter twice, thought it over for a few moments, then rose suddenly, and, entering the First Consul’s study, handed it to him silently. The latter read it without betraying the slightest emotion, or even surprise; then, with a laconism that was wholly Lacedæmonian, he said: “Place the light.”

Then he gave the letter back to Roland.

The next evening, at seven o’clock, the light shone in the window, and at five minutes past the hour, Roland in person was waiting at the little door of the garden. He had scarcely been there a moment when three blows were struck on the door after the manner of the free-masons; first two strokes and then one.

The door was opened immediately. A man wrapped in a cloak was sharply defined against the grayish atmosphere of the wintry night. As for Roland, he was completely hidden in shadow. Seeing no one, the man in the cloak remained motionless for a second.

“Come in,” said Roland.

“Ah! it is you, colonel!”

“How do you know it is I?” asked Roland.

“I recognize your voice.”

“My voice! But during those few moments we were together in the dining-room at Avignon I did not say a word.”

“Then I must have heard it elsewhere.”

Roland wondered where the Chief of the Companions of Jehu could have heard his voice, but the other said gayly: “Is the fact that I know your voice any reason why we should stand at the door?”

“No, indeed,” replied Roland; “take the lapel of my coat and follow me. I purposely forbade any lights being placed in the stairs and hall which lead to my room.”

“I am much obliged for the intention. But on your word I would cross the palace from one end to the other, though it were lighted *à giorno*, as the Italians say.”

“You have my word,” replied Roland, “so follow me without fear.”

Morgan needed no encouragement; he followed his guide fearlessly. At the head of the stairs Roland turned down a corridor equally dark, went twenty steps, opened a door, and entered his own room. Morgan followed him. The room was lighted by two wax candles only. Once there, Morgan took off his cloak and laid his pistols on the table.

"What are you doing?" asked Roland.

"Faith! with your permission," replied Morgan, gayly, "I am making myself comfortable."

"But those pistols you have just laid aside — "

"Ah! did you think I brought them for you?"

"For whom then?"

"Why, that damned police! You can readily imagine that I am not disposed to let citizen Fouché lay bold of me, without burning the mustache of the first of his minions who lays hands on me."

"But once here you feel you have nothing to fear?"

"The deuce!" exclaimed the young man; "I have your word."

"Then why don't you unmask?"

"Because my face only half belongs to me; the other half belongs to my companions. Who knows if one of us being recognized might not drag the others to the guillotine? For of course you know, colonel, we don't hide from ourselves that that is the price of our game!"

"Then why risk it?"

"Ah! what a question. Why do you venture on the field of battle, where a bullet may plow through your breast or a cannon-ball lop off your head?"

"Permit me to say that that is different. On the battlefield I risk an honorable death."

"Ah! do you suppose that on the day I get my head cut off by the revolutionary triangle I shall think myself dishonored? Not the least in the world. I am a soldier like you, only we can't all serve our cause in the same way. Every religion has its heroes and its martyrs; happy the heroes in this world, and happy the martyrs in the next."

The young man uttered these words with a conviction which moved, or rather astonished, Roland.

"But," continued Morgan, abandoning his enthusiasm to revert to the gayety which seemed the distinctive trait of his character, "I did not come here to talk political philosophy. I came to ask you to let me speak to the First Consul."

"What! speak to the First Consul?" exclaimed Roland.

“Of course. Read my letter over; did I not tell you that I had a request to make?”

“Yes.”

“Well, that request is to let me speak to General Bonaparte.”

“But permit me to say that as I did not expect that request — ”

“It surprises you; makes you uneasy even. My dear colonel, if you don’t believe my word, you can search me from head to foot, and you will find that those pistols are my only weapons. And I haven’t even got them, since there they are on your table. Better still, take one in each hand, post yourself between the First Consul and me, and blowout my brains at the first suspicious move I make. Will that suit you?”

“But will you assure me, if I disturb the First Consul and ask him to see you, that your communication is worth the trouble?”

“Oh! I’ll answer for that,” said Morgan. Then, in his joyous tones, he added: “I am for the moment the ambassador of a crowned, or rather discrowned, head, which makes it no less reverenced by noble hearts. Moreover, Monsieur Roland, I shall take up very little of your general’s time; the moment the conversation seems too long, he can dismiss me. And I assure you he will not have to say the word twice.”

Roland was silent and thoughtful for a moment.

“And it is to the First Consul only that you can make this communication?”

“To the First Consul only, as he alone can answer me.”

“Very well. Wait until I take his orders.”

Roland made a step toward the general’s room; then he paused and cast an uneasy look at a mass of papers piled on his table. Morgan intercepted this look.

“What!” he said, “you are afraid I shall read those papers in your absence? If you only knew how I detest reading! If my death-warrant lay on that table, I wouldn’t take the trouble to read it. I should consider that the clerk’s business. And every one to his own task. Monsieur Roland, my feet are cold, and I will sit here in your easy-chair and warm them. I shall not stir till you return.”

“Very good, monsieur,” said Roland, and he went to the First Consul.

Bonaparte was talking with General Hedouville, commanding the troops of the Vendée. Hearing the door open, he turned impatiently.

“I told Bourrienne I would not see any one.”

“So he told me as I came in, but I told him that I was not any one.”

“True. What do you want? Be quick.”

“He is in my room.”

“Who?”

“The man of Avignon.”

“Ah, ha! And what does he want?”

“To see you.”

“To see me?”

“Yes, you, general. Does that surprise you?”

“No. But what can he want to say to me?”

“He refused obstinately to tell me. But I dare answer for it that he is neither importunate nor a fool.”

“No, but he may be an assassin.”

Roland shook his head.

“Of course, since you introduce him — ”

“Moreover, he is willing that I should be present at the conference and stand between you and him.”

Bonaparte reflected an instant.

“Bring him in,” he said.

“You know, general, that except me — ”

“Yes, General Hedouville will be so kind as to wait a second. Our conversation is of a nature that is not exhausted in one interview. Go, Roland.”

Roland left the room, crossed Bourrienne’s office, reentered his own room, and found Morgan, as he had said, warming his feet.

“Come, the First Consul is waiting for you,” said the young man.

Morgan rose and followed Roland. When they entered Bonaparte’s study the latter was alone. He cast a rapid glance on the chief of the Companions of Jehu, and felt no doubt that he was the same man he had seen at Avignon.

Morgan had paused a few steps from the door, and was looking curiously at Bonaparte, convincing himself that he was the man he had seen at the table d’hôte the day he attempted the perilous restoration of the two hundred louis stolen by an oversight from Jean Picot.

“Come nearer,” said the First Consul.

Morgan bowed and made three steps forward. Bonaparte partly returned the bow with a slight motion of the head.

“You told my aide-de-camp, Colonel Roland, that you had a communication to make me.”

“Yes, citizen First Consul.”

“Does that communication require a private interview?”

“No, citizen First Consul, although it is of such importance — ”

“You would prefer to be alone.”

“Beyond doubt. But prudence — ”

“The most prudent thing in France, citizen Morgan, is courage.”

“My presence here, general, proves that I agree with you perfectly.”

Bonaparte turned to the young colonel.

“Leave us alone, Roland,” said he.

“But, general — ” objected Roland.

Bonaparte went up to him and said in a low voice: “I see what it is. You are curious to know what this mysterious cavalier of the highroad has to say to me. Don’t worry; you shall know.”

“That’s not it. But suppose, as you said just now, he is an assassin.”

“Didn’t you declare he was not. Come, don’t be a baby; leave us.”

Roland went out.

“Now that we are alone, sir,” said the First Consul, “speak!”

Morgan, without answering, drew a letter from his pocket and gave it to the general. Bonaparte examined it. It was addressed to him, and the seal bore the three fleurs-de-lis of France.

“Oh!” he said, “what is this, sir?”

“Read it, citizen First Consul.”

Bonaparte opened the letter and looked at the signature: “Louis,” he said.

“Louis,” repeated Morgan.

“What Louis?”

“Louis de Bourbon, I presume.”

“Monsieur le Comte de Provençe, brother of Louis XVI.”

“Consequently Louis XVIII., since his nephew, the Dauphin, is dead.”

Bonaparte looked at the stranger again. It was evident that Morgan was a pseudonym, assumed to hide his real name. Then, turning his eyes on the letter, he read:

January 3, 1800.

> Whatever may be their apparent conduct, monsieur, men like you never inspire distrust. You have accepted an exalted post, and

> I thank you for so doing. You know, better than others, that force and power are needed to make the happiness of a great nation. Save France from her own madness, and you will fulfil the desire of my heart; restore her king, and future generations will bless your memory. If you doubt my gratitude, choose your own place, determine the future of your friends. As for my principles, I am a Frenchman, clement by nature, still more so by judgment. No! the conqueror of Lodi, Castiglione and Arcola, the conqueror of Italy and Egypt, cannot prefer an empty celebrity to fame. Lose no more precious time. We can secure the glory of France. I say we, because I have need of Bonaparte for that which he cannot achieve without me. General, the eyes of Europe are upon you, glory awaits you, and I am eager to restore my people to happiness.
>
> LOUIS.

Bonaparte turned to the young man, who stood erect, motionless and silent as a statue.

“Do you know the contents of this letter?” he asked.

The young man bowed. “Yes, citizen First Consul.”

“It was sealed, however.”

“It was sent unsealed under cover to the person who intrusted it to me. And before doing so he made me read it, that I might know its full importance.”

“Can I know the name of the person who intrusted it to you?”

“Georges Cadoudal.”

Bonaparte started slightly.

“Do you know Georges Cadoudal?” he asked.

“He is my friend.”

“Why did he intrust it to you rather than to another?”

“Because he knew that in telling me to deliver the letter to you with my own hand it would be done.”

“You have certainly kept your promise, sir.”

“Not altogether yet, citizen First Consul.”

“How do you mean? Haven’t you delivered it to me?”

“Yes, but I promised to bring back an answer.”

“But if I tell you I will not give one.”

“You will have answered; not precisely as I could have wished, but it will be an answer.”

Bonaparte reflected for a few moments. Then shaking his shoulders to rid himself of his thoughts, he said: “They are fools.”

“Who, citizen?” asked Morgan.

“Those who write me such letters — fools, arch fools. Do they take me for a man who patterns his conduct by the past? Play Monk! What good would it do? Bring back another Charles II.? No, faith, it is not worth while. When a man has Toulon, the 13th Vendemiaire, Lodi, Castiglione, Arcola, Rivoli and the Pyramids behind him, he’s no Monk. He has the right to aspire to more than a duchy of Albemarle, and the command by land and sea of the forces of his Majesty King Louis XVIII.”

“For that reason you are asked to make your own conditions, citizen First Consul.”

Bonaparte started at the sound of that voice as if he had forgotten that any one was present.

“Not counting,” he went on, “that it is a ruined family, a dead branch of a rotten trunk. The Bourbons have so intermarried with one another that the race is depraved; Louis XIV. exhausted all its sap, all its vigor. — You know history, sir?” asked Bonaparte, turning to the young man.

“Yes, general,” he replied; “at least as well as a *ci-devant* can know it.”

“Well, you must have observed in history, especially in that of France, that each race has its point of departure, its culmination, and its decadence. Look at the direct line of the Capets; starting from Hugues Capet, they attained their highest grandeur in Philippe Auguste and Louis XI., and fell with Philippe V. and Charles IV. Take the Valois; starting with Philippe VI., they culminated in François I. and fell with Charles IX. and Henry III. See the Bourbons; starting with Henry IV., they have their culminating point in Louis XIV. and fall with Louis XV. and Louis XVI. — only they fall lower than the others; lower in debauchery with Louis XV., lower in misfortune with Louis XVI. You talk to me of the Stuarts, and show me the example of Monk. Will you tell me who succeeded Charles II.? James II. And who to James II.? William of Orange, a usurper. Would it not have been better, I ask you, if Monk had put the crown on his own head? Well, if I was fool enough to restore Louis XVIII. to the throne, like Charles II. he would have no children, and, like James II., his brother Charles X. would succeed him, and like him would be driven out by some William of Orange. No, no! God has not put the destiny of this great and glorious country we call France into my hands that I should cast it back to those who have gambled with it and lost it."

"Permit me, general, to remark that I did not ask you for all this."

"But I, I ask you — "

"I think you are doing me the honor to take me for posterity."

Bonaparte started, turned round, saw to whom he was speaking, and was silent.

"I only want," said Morgan, with a dignity which surprised the man whom he addressed, "a yes or a no."

"And why do you want that?"

"To know whether we must continue to war against you as an enemy, or fall at your feet as a savior."

"War," said Bonaparte, "war! Madmen, they who war with me! Do they not see that I am the elect of God?"

"Attila said the same thing."

"Yes; but he was the elect of destruction; I, of the new era. The grass withered where he stepped; the harvest will ripen where I pass the plow. War? Tell me what has become of those who have made it against me? They lie upon the plains of Piedmont, of Lombardy and Cairo!"

"You forget the Vendée; the Vendée is still afoot."

"Afoot, yes! but her leaders? Cathelineau, Lescure, La Rochejaquelin, d'Elbée, Bonchamps, Stoffiet, Charette?"

"You are speaking of men only; the men have been mown down, it is true; but the principle is still afoot, and for it are fighting Autichamp, Suzannet, Grignon, Frotté, Châtillon, Cadoudal. The younger may not be worth the elder, but if they die as their elders died, what more can you ask?"

"Let them beware! If I determine upon a campaign against the Vendée I shall send neither Santerre nor Rossignol!"

"The Convention sent Kléber, and the Directory, Hoche!"

"I shall not send; I shall go myself."

"Nothing worse can happen to them than to be killed like Lescure, or shot like Charette."

"It may happen that I pardon them."

"Cato taught us how to escape the pardon of Cæsar."

"Take care; you are quoting a Republican!"

"Cato was one of those men whose example can be followed, no matter to what party they belong."

"And suppose I were to tell you that I hold the Vendée in the hollow of my hand?"

"You!"

"And that within three months, she will lay down her arms if I choose?"

The young man shook his head.

"You don't believe me?"

"I hesitate to believe you."

"If I affirm to you that what I say is true; if I prove it by telling you the means, or rather the men, by whom I shall bring this about?"

"If a man like General Bonaparte affirms a thing, I shall believe it; and if that thing is the pacification of the Vendée, I shall say in my turn: 'Beware! Better the Vendée fighting than the Vendée conspiring. The Vendée fighting means the sword, the Vendée conspiring means the dagger.'"

"Oh! I know your dagger," said Bonaparte. "Here it is."

And he drew from a drawer the dagger he had taken from Roland and laid it on the table within reach of Morgan's hand.

"But," he added, "there is some distance between Bonaparte's breast and an assassin's dagger. Try."

And he advanced to the young man with a flaming eye.

"I did not come here to assassinate you," said the young man, coldly. "Later, if I consider your death indispensable to the cause, I shall do all in my power, and if I fail it will not be because you are Marius and I the Cimbrian. Have you anything else to say to me, citizen First Consul?" concluded the young man, bowing.

"Yes. Tell Cadoudal that when he is ready to fight the enemy, instead of Frenchmen, I have a colonel's commission ready signed in my desk for him."

"Cadoudal commands, not a regiment, but an army. You were unwilling to retrograde from Bonaparte to Monk; why should you expect him to descend from general to colonel? Have you nothing else to say to me, citizen First Consul?"

"Yes. Have you any way of transmitting my reply to the Comte de Provençe?"

"You mean King Louis XVIII.?"

"Don't let us quibble over words. To him who wrote to me."

"His envoy is now at the camp at Aubiers."

"Well, I have changed my mind; I shall send him an answer. These Bourbons are so blind that this one would misinterpret my silence."

And Bonaparte, sitting down at his desk, wrote the following letter with a care that showed he wished to make it legible:

> I have received your letter, monsieur. I thank you for the good opinion you express in it of me. You must not wish for your return to France; it could only be over a hundred thousand dead bodies. Sacrifice your own interests to the repose and welfare of France. History will applaud you. I am not insensible to the misfortunes of your family, and I shall hear with pleasure that you are surrounded with all that could contribute to the tranquillity of your retreat. BONAPARTE.

Then, folding and sealing the letter, he directed it to "Monsieur le Comte de Provençe," and handed it to Morgan. Then he called Roland, as if he knew the latter were not far off.

"General?" said the young officer, appearing instantly.

"Conduct this gentleman to the street," said Bonaparte. "Until then you are responsible for him."

Roland bowed in sign of obedience, let the young man, who said not a word, pass before him, and then followed. But before leaving, Morgan cast a last glance at Bonaparte.

The latter was still standing, motionless and silent, with folded arms, his eyes fixed upon the dagger, which occupied his thoughts far more than he was willing to admit even to himself.

As they crossed Roland's room, the Chief of the Companions of Jehu gathered up his cloak and pistols. While he was putting them in his belt, Roland remarked: "The citizen First Consul seems to have shown you a dagger which I gave him."

"Yes, monsieur," replied Morgan.

"Did you recognize it?"

"Not that one in particular; all our daggers are alike."

"Well," said Roland, "I will tell you whence it came."

"Ah! where was that?"

"From the breast of a friend of mine, where your Companions, possibly you yourself, thrust it."

"Possibly," replied the young man carelessly. "But your friend must have exposed himself to punishment."

"My friend wished to see what was happening at night in the Chartreuse."

"He did wrong."

"But I did the same wrong the night before, and nothing happened to me."

"Probably because some talisman protects you."

"Monsieur, let me tell you something. I am a straight-forward man who walks by daylight. I have a horror of all that is mysterious."

"Happy those who can walk the highroads by daylight, Monsieur de Montrevel!"

"That is why I am going to tell you the oath I made, Monsieur Morgan. As I drew the dagger you saw from my friend's breast, as carefully as possible, that I might not draw his soul with it, I swore that henceforward it should be war to the death between his assassins and myself. It was largely to tell you that that I gave you a pledge of safety."

"That is an oath I hope to see you forget, Monsieur de Montrevel."

"It is an oath I shall keep under all circumstances, Monsieur Morgan; and you would be most kind if you would furnish me with an opportunity as soon as possible."

"In what way, sir?"

"Well, for example, by accepting a meeting with me, either in the Bois de Boulogne or at Vincennes. We don't need to say that we are fighting because you or one of your friends stabbed Lord Tanlay. No; we can say anything you please." (Roland reflected a moment.) "We can say the duel is on account of the eclipse that takes place on the 12th of next month. Does the pretext suit you?"

"The pretext would suit me," replied Morgan, in a tone of sadness of which he seemed incapable, "if the duel itself could take place. You have taken an oath, and you mean to keep it, you say. Well, every initiate who enters the Company of Jehu swears that he will not expose in any personal quarrel a life that belongs to the cause and not to himself."

"Oh! So that you assassinate, but will not fight."

"You are mistaken. We sometimes fight."

"Have the goodness to point out an occasion when I may study that phenomenon."

“Easily enough. If you and five or six men, as resolute as yourself, will take your places in some diligence carrying government money, and will defend it against our attack, the occasion you seek will come. But, believe me, do better than that; do not come in our way.”

“Is that a threat, sir?” asked the young man, raising his head.

“No,” replied Morgan, in a gentle, almost supplicating voice, “it is an entreaty.”

“Is it addressed to me in particular, or would you include others?”

“I make it to you in particular;” and the chief of the Companions of Jehu dwelt upon the last word.

“Ah!” exclaimed the young man, “then I am so fortunate as to interest you?”

“As a brother,” replied Morgan, in the same soft, caressing tone.

“Well, well,” said Roland, “this is decidedly a wager.”

Bourrienne entered at that moment.

“Roland,” he said, “the First Consul wants you.”

“Give me time to conduct this gentleman to the street, and I’ll be with him.”

“Hurry up; you know he doesn’t like to wait.”

“Will you follow me, sir?” Roland said to his mysterious companion.

“I am at your orders, sir.”

“Come, then,” And Roland, taking the same path by which he had brought Morgan, took him back, not to the door opening on the garden (the garden was closed), but to that on the street. Once there, he stopped and said: “Sir, I gave you my word, and I have kept it faithfully, But that there may be no misunderstanding between us, have the goodness to tell me that you understand it to have been for this one time and for to-day only.”

“That was how I understood it, sir.”

“You give me back my word then?”

“I should like to keep it, sir; but I recognize that you are free to take it back.”

“That is all I wish to know. Au revoir! Monsieur Morgan.”

“Permit me not to offer you the same wish, Monsieur de Montrevel.”

The two young men bowed with perfect courtesy, Roland re-entered the Luxembourg, and Morgan, following the line of shadow projected by the walls, took one of the little streets to the Place Saint-Sulpice.

It is he whom we are now to follow.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE BALL OF THE VICTIMS

After taking about a hundred steps Morgan removed his mask. He ran more risk of being noticed in the streets of Paris as a masked man than with uncovered face.

When he reached the Rue Taranne he knocked at the door of a small furnished lodging-house at the corner of that street and the Rue du Dragon, took a candlestick from a table, a key numbered 12 from a nail, and climbed the stairs without exciting other attention than a well-known lodger would returning home. The clock was striking ten as he closed the door of his room. He listened attentively to the strokes, the light of his candle not reaching as far as the chimney-piece. He counted ten.

“Good!” he said to himself; “I shall not be too late.”

In spite of this probability, Morgan seemed determined to lose no time. He passed a bit of tinder-paper under the heater on the hearth, which caught fire instantly. He lighted four wax-candles, all there were in the room, placed two on the mantel-shelf and two on a bureau opposite, and spread upon the bed a complete dress of the Incroyable of the very latest fashion. It consisted of a short coat, cut square across the front and long behind, of a soft shade between a pale-green and a pearl-gray; a waistcoat of buff plush, with eighteen mother-of-pearl buttons; an immense white cravat of the finest cambric; light trousers of white cashmere, decorated with a knot of ribbon where they buttoned above the calves, and pearl-gray silk stockings, striped transversely with the same green as the coat, and delicate pumps with diamond buckles. The inevitable eye-glass was not forgotten. As for the hat, it was precisely the same in which Carle Vernet painted his dandy of the Directory.

When these things were ready, Morgan waited with seeming impatience. At the end of five minutes he rang the bell. A waiter appeared.

“Hasn’t the wig-maker come?” asked Morgan.

In those days wig-makers were not yet called hair-dressers.

“Yes, citizen,” replied the waiter, “he came, but you had not yet returned, so he left word that he’d come back. Some one knocked just as you rang; it’s probably — ”

“Here, here,” cried a voice on the stairs.

“Ah! bravo,” exclaimed Morgan. “Come in, Master Cadenette; you must make a sort of Adonis of me.”

“That won’t be difficult, Monsieur le Baron,” replied the wig-maker.

“Look here, look here; do you mean to compromise me, citizen Cadenette?”

“Monsieur le Baron, I entreat you, call me Cadenette; you’ll honor me by that proof of familiarity; but don’t call me citizen. Fie; that’s a revolutionary denomination! Even in the worst of the Terror I always called my wife Madame Cadenette. Now, excuse me for not waiting for you; but there’s a great ball in the Rue du Bac this evening, the ball of the Victims (the wig-maker emphasized this word). I should have thought that M. le Baron would be there.”

“Why,” cried Morgan, laughing; “so you are still a royalist, Cadenette?”

The wig-maker laid his hand tragically on his heart.

“Monsieur le Baron,” said he, “it is not only a matter of conscience, but a matter of state.”

“Conscience, I can understand that, Master Cadenette, but state! What the devil has the honorable guild of wigmakers to do with politics?”

“What, Monsieur le Baron?” said Cadenette, all the while getting ready to dress his client’s hair; “you ask me that? You, an aristocrat!”

“Hush, Cadenette!”

“Monsieur le Baron, we *ci-devants* can say that to each other.”

“So you are a *ci-devant*?”

“To the core! In what style shall I dress M. le Baron’s hair?”

“Dog’s ears, and tied up behind.”

“With a dash of powder?”

“Two, if you like, Cadenette.”

“Ah! monsieur, when one thinks that for five years I was the only man who had an atom of powder ‘*à la maréchale*.’ Why, Monsieur le Baron, a man was guillotined for owning a box of powder!”

“I’ve known people who were guillotined for less than that, Cadenette. But explain how you happen to be a *ci-devant*. I like to understand everything.”

"It's very simple, Monsieur le Baron. You admit, don't you, that among the guilds there were some that were more or less aristocratic."

"Beyond doubt; accordingly as they were nearer to the higher classes of society."

"That's it, Monsieur le Baron. Well, we had the higher classes by the hair of their head. I, such as you see me, I have dressed Madame de Polignac's hair; my father dressed Madame du Barry's; my grandfather, Madame de Pompadour's. We had our privileges, Monsieur; we carried swords. It is true, to avoid the accidents that were liable to crop up among hotheads like ourselves, our swords were usually of wood; but at any rate, if they were not the actual thing, they were very good imitations. Yes, Monsieur le Baron," continued Cadenette with a sigh, "those days were the good days, not only for the wig-makers, but for all France. We were in all the secrets, all the intrigues; nothing was hidden from us. And there is no known instance, Monsieur le Baron, of a wig-maker betraying a secret. Just look at our poor queen; to whom did she trust her diamonds? To the great, the illustrious Leonard, the prince of wig-makers. Well, Monsieur le Baron, two men alone overthrew the scaffolding of a power that rested on the wigs of Louis XIV., the puffs of the Regency, the frizettes of Louis-XV., and the cushions of Marie Antoinette."

"And those two men, those levellers, those two revolutionaries, who were they, Cadenette? that I may doom them, so far as it lies in my power, to public execration."

"M. Rousseau and citizen Talma: Monsieur Rousseau who said that absurdity, 'We must return to Nature,' and citizen Talma, who invented the Titus head-dress."

"That's true, Cadenette; that's true."

"When the Directory came in there was a moment's hope. M. Barras never gave up powder, and citizen Moulins stuck to his queue. But, you see, the 18th Brumaire has knocked it all down; how could any one friz Bonaparte's hair! Ah! there," continued Cadenette, puffing out the dog's ears of his client — "there's aristocratic hair for you, soft and fine as silk, and takes the tongs so well one would think you wore a wig. See, Monsieur le Baron, you wanted to be as handsome as Adonis! Ah! if Venus had seen you, it's not of Adonis that Mars would have been jealous!"

And Cadenette, now at the end of his labors and satisfied with the result, presented a hand-mirror to Morgan, who examined himself complacently.

“Come, come!” he said to the wig-maker, “you are certainly an artist, my dear fellow! Remember this style, for if ever they cut off my head I shall choose to have it dressed like that, for there will probably be women at my execution.”

“And M. le Baron wants them to regret him,” said the wig-maker gravely.

“Yes, and in the meantime, my dear Cadenette, here is a crown to reward your labors. Have the goodness to tell them below to call a carriage for me.”

Cadenette sighed.

“Monsieur le Baron,” said he, “time was when I should have answered: ‘Show yourself at court with your hair dressed like that, and I shall be paid.’ But there is no court now, Monsieur le Baron, and one must live. You shall have your carriage.”

With which Cadenette sighed again, slipped Morgan’s crown in his pocket, made the reverential bow of wig-makers and dancing-masters, and left the young man to complete his toilet.

The head being now dressed, the rest was soon done; the cravat alone took time, owing to the many failures that occurred; but Morgan concluded the difficult task with an experienced hand, and as eleven o’clock was striking he was ready to start. Cadenette had not forgotten his errand; a hackney-coach was at the door. Morgan jumped into it, calling out: “Rue du Bac, No. 60.”

The coach turned into the Rue de Grenelle, went up the Rue du Bac, and stopped at No. 60.

“Here’s a double fare, friend,” said Morgan, “on condition that you don’t stand before the door.”

The driver took the three francs and disappeared around the corner of the Rue de Varennes. Morgan glanced up the front of the house; it seemed as though he must be mistaken, so dark and silent was it. But he did not hesitate; he rapped in a peculiar fashion.

The door opened. At the further end of the courtyard was a building, brilliantly lighted. The young man went toward it, and, as he approached, the sound of instruments met his ear. He ascended a flight of stairs and entered the dressing-room. There he gave his cloak to the usher whose business it was to attend to the wraps.

“Here is your number,” said the usher. “As for your weapons, you are to place them in the gallery where you can find them easily.”

Morgan put the number in his trousers pocket, and entered the great gallery transformed into an arsenal. It contained a complete collection of arms of all kinds, pistols, muskets, carbines, swords, and daggers. As the ball might at any moment be invaded by the police, it was necessary that every dancer be prepared to turn defender at an instant's notice. Laying his weapons aside, Morgan entered the ballroom.

We doubt if any pen could give the reader an adequate idea of the scene of that ball. Generally, as the name "Ball of the Victims" indicated, no one was admitted except by the strange right of having relatives who had either been sent to the scaffold by the Convention or the Commune of Paris, blown to pieces by Collot d'Herbois, or drowned by Carrier. As, however, the victims guillotined during the three years of the Terror far outnumbered the others, the dresses of the majority of those who were present were the clothes of the victims of the scaffold. Thus, most of the young girls, whose mothers and older sisters had fallen by the hands of the executioner, wore the same costume their mothers and sisters had worn for that last lugubrious ceremony; that is to say, a white gown and red shawl, with their hair cut short at the nape of the neck. Some added to this costume, already so characteristic, a detail that was even more significant; they knotted around their necks a thread of scarlet silk, fine as the blade of a razor, which, as in Faust's Marguerite, at the Witches' Sabbath, indicated the cut of the knife between the throat and the collar bone.

As for the men who were in the same case, they wore the collars of their coats turned down behind, those of their shirt wide open, their necks bare, and their hair, cut short.

But many had other rights of entrance to this ball besides that of having Victims in their families; some had made victims themselves. These latter were increasing. There were present men of forty or forty-five years of age, who had been trained in the boudoirs of the beautiful courtesans of the seventeenth century — who had known Madame du Barry in the attics of Versailles, Sophie Arnoult with M. de Lauraguais, La Duthé with the Comte d'Artois — who had borrowed from the courtesies of vice the polish with which they covered their ferocity. They were still young and handsome; they entered a salon, tossing their perfumed locks and their scented handkerchiefs; nor was it a useless precaution, for if the odor of musk or verbena had not masked it they would have smelled of blood.

There were men there twenty-five or thirty years old, dressed with extreme elegance, members of the association of Avengers, who seemed possessed with the mania of assassination, the lust of slaughter, the frenzy of blood, which no blood could quench — men who, when the order came to kill, killed all, friends or enemies; men who carried their business methods into the business of murder, giving their bloody checks for the heads of such or such Jacobins, and paying on sight.

There were younger men, eighteen and twenty, almost children, but children fed, like Achilles, on the marrow of wild beasts, like Pyrrhus, on the flesh of bears; here were the pupil-bandits of Schiller, the apprentice-judges of the Sainte-Vehme — that strange generation that follows great political convulsions, like the Titans after chaos, the hydras after the Deluge; as the vultures and crows follow the carnage.

Here was the spectre of iron impassible, implacable, inflexible, which men call Retaliation; and this spectre mingled with the guests. It entered the gilded salons; it signalled with a look, a gesture, a nod, and men followed where it led. It was, as says the author from whom we have borrowed these hitherto unknown but authentic details, “a merry lust for extermination.”

The Terror had affected great cynicism in clothes, a Spartan austerity in its food, the profound contempt of a barbarous people for arts and enjoyments. The Thermidorian reaction was, on the contrary, elegant, opulent, adorned; it exhausted all luxuries, all voluptuous pleasures, as in the days of Louis XV.; with one addition, the luxury of vengeance, the lust of blood.

Fréron’s name was given to the youth of the day, which was called the jeunesse Fréron, or the *jéunesse dorée* (gilded youth). Why Fréron? Why should he rather than others receive that strange and fatal honor?

I cannot tell you — my researches (those who know me will do me the justice to admit that when I have an end in view, I do not count them) — my researches have not discovered an answer. It was a whim of Fashion, and Fashion is the one goddess more capricious than Fortune.

Our readers will hardly know to-day who Fréron was. The Fréron who was Voltaire’s assailant was better known than he who was the patron of these elegant assassins; one was the son of the other. Louis Stanislas was son of Elie-Catherine. The father died of rage when Miromesnil, Keeper of the Seals, suppressed his journal. The other, irritated by the injustices of which his father had been the victim, had at first ardently embraced the revolutionary doctrines. Instead of the “Année Littéraire,” strangled to death in 1775, he created the “Orateur du Peuple,” in 1789. He was sent to the Midi on a special mission, and Marseilles and Toulon retain to this day the memory of his cruelty. But all was forgotten when, on the 9th Thermidor, he proclaimed himself against Robespierre, and assisted in casting from the altar the Supreme Being, the colossus who, being an apostle, had made himself a god. Fréron, repudiated by the Mountain, which abandoned him to the heavy jaws of Moise Bayle; Fréron, disdainfully repulsed by the Girondins, who delivered him over to the imprecations of Isnard; Fréron, as the terrible and picturesque orator of the Var said, “Fréron naked and covered with the leprosy of crime,” was accepted, caressed and petted by the Thermidorians. From them he passed into the camp of the royalists, and without any reason whatever for obtaining that fatal honor, found himself suddenly at the head of a powerful party of youth, energy and vengeance, standing between the passions of the day, which led to all, and the impotence of the law, which permitted all.

It was to the midst of this *jeunesse* Fréron, mouthing its words, slurring its r’s, giving its “word of honor” about everything, that Morgan now made his way.

It must be admitted that this *jeunesse*, in spite of the clothes it wore, in spite of the memories these clothes evoked, was wildly gay. This seems incomprehensible, but it is true. Explain if you can that Dance of Death at the beginning of the fifteenth century, which, with all the fury of a modern galop, led by Musard, whirled its chain through the very Cemetery of the Innocents, and left amid its tombs fifty thousand of its votaries.

Morgan was evidently seeking some one.

A young dandy, who was dipping into the silver-gilt comfit-box of a charming victim, with an ensanguined finger, the only part of his delicate hand that had escaped the almond paste, tried to stop him, to relate the particulars of the expedition from which he had brought back this bloody trophy. But Morgan smiled, pressed his other hand which was gloved, and contented himself with replying: “I am looking for some one.”

“Important?”

“Company of Jehu.”

The young man with the bloody finger let him pass. An adorable Fury, as Corneille would have called her, whose hair was held up by a dagger with a blade as sharp as a needle, barred his way, saying: “Morgan, you are the handsomest, the bravest, the most deserving of love of all the men present. What have you to say to the woman who tells you that?"

"I answer that I love," replied Morgan, "and that my heart is too narrow to hold one hatred and two loves." And he continued on his search.

Two young men who were arguing, one saying, "He was English," the other, "He was German," stopped him.

"The deuce," cried one; "here is the man who can settle it for us."

"No," replied Morgan, trying to push past them; "I'm in a hurry."

"There's only a word to say," said the other. "We have made a bet, Saint-Amand and I, that the man who was tried and executed at the Chartreuse du Seillon, was, according to him, a German, and, according to me, an Englishman."

"I don't know," replied Morgan; "I wasn't there. Ask Hector; he presided that night."

"Tell us where Hector is?"

"Tell me rather where Tiffauges is; I am looking for him."

"Over there, at the end of the room," said the young man, pointing to a part of the room where the dance was more than usually gay and animated. "You will recognize him by his waistcoat; and his trousers are not to be despised. I shall have a pair like them made with the skin of the very first hound I meet."

Morgan did not take time to ask in what way Tiffauges' waistcoat was remarkable, or by what queer cut or precious material his trousers had won the approbation of a man as expert in such matters as he who had spoken to him. He went straight to the point indicated by the young man, saw the person he was seeking dancing an été, which seemed, by the intricacy of its weaving, if I may be pardoned for this technical term, to have issued from the salons of Vestris himself.

Morgan made a sign to the dancer. Tiffauges stopped instantly, bowed to his partner, led her to her seat, excused himself on the plea of the urgency of the matter which called him away, and returned to take Morgan's arm.

"Did you see him," Tiffauges asked Morgan.

"I have just left him," replied the latter.

"Did you deliver the King's letter?"

"To himself."

"Did he read it?"

"At once."

“Has he sent an answer?”

“Two; one verbal, one written; the second dispenses with the first.”

“You have it?”

“Here it is.”

“Do you know the contents?”

“A refusal.”

“Positive?”

“Nothing could be more positive.”

“Does he know that from the moment he takes all hope away from us we shall treat him as an enemy?”

“I told him so.”

“What did he answer?”

“He didn’t answer; he shrugged his shoulders.”

“What do you think his intentions are?”

“It’s not difficult to guess.”

“Does he mean to keep the power himself?”

“It looks like it.”

“The power, but not the throne?”

“Why not the throne?”

“He would never dare to make himself king.”

“Oh! I can’t say he means to be absolutely king, but I’ll answer for it that he means to be something.”

“But he is nothing but a soldier of fortune!”

“My dear fellow, better in these days to be the son of his deeds, than the grandson of a king.”

The young man thought a moment.

“I shall report it all to Cadoudal,” he said.

“And add that the First Consul said these very words: ‘I hold the Vendée in the hollow of my hand, and if I choose in three months not another shot will be fired.’“

“It’s a good thing to know.”

“You know it; let Cadoudal know it, and take measures.”

Just then the music ceased; the hum of the dancers died away; complete silence prevailed; and, in the midst of this silence, four names were pronounced in a sonorous and emphatic voice.

These four names were Morgan, Montbar, Adler and d’Assas.

“Pardon me,” Morgan said to Tiffauges, “they are probably arranging some expedition in which I am to take part. I am forced, therefore, to my great regret, to bid you farewell. Only before I leave you let me look closer at your waistcoat and trousers, of which I have heard — curiosity of an amateur; I trust you will excuse it.”

“Surely!” exclaimed the young Vendéan, “most willingly.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE BEAR’S SKIN

With a rapidity and good nature that did honor to his courtesy, he went close to the candelabra, which were burning on the chimney-piece. The waistcoat and trousers seemed to be of the same stuff; but what was that stuff? The most experienced connoisseur would have been puzzled.

The trousers were tight-fitting as usual, of a light tint between buff and flesh color; the only remarkable thing about them was the absence of the seam, and the closeness with which they clung to the leg. The waistcoat, on the other hand, had two characteristic signs which attracted attention; it had been pierced by three balls, which had the holes gaping, and these were stained a carmine, so like blood, that it might easily have been mistaken for it. On the left side was painted a bloody heart, the distinguishing sign of the Vendéans. Morgan examined the two articles with the closest attention, but without result.

“If I were not in such a hurry,” said he, “I should like to look into the matter for myself. But you heard for yourself; in all probability, some news has reached the committee; government money probably. You can announce it to Cadoudal; only we shall have to take it first. Ordinarily, I command these expeditions; if I delay, some one may take my place. So tell me what your waistcoat and trousers are made of.”

“My dear Morgan,” replied the Vendéan, “perhaps you have heard that my brother was captured near Bressure, and shot by the Blues?”

“Yes, I know that.”

“The Blues were retreating; they left the body at the corner of the hedge. We were pursuing them so closely that we arrived just after them. I found the body of my brother still warm. In one of his wounds a sprig was stuck with these words: ‘Shot as a brigand by me, Claude Flageolet, corporal of the Third Battalion of Paris.’ I took my brother’s body, and had the skin removed from his breast. I vowed that this skin, pierced with three holes, should eternally cry vengeance before my eyes. I made it my battle waistcoat.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Morgan, with a certain astonishment, in which, for the first time, was mingled something akin to terror — ”Ah! then that waistcoat is made of your brother’s skin? And the trousers?”

“Oh!” replied the Vendéan, “the trousers, that’s another matter. They are made of the skin of Claude Flageolet, corporal of the Third Battalion of Paris.”

At that moment the voice again called out, in the same order, the names of Morgan, Montbar, Adler and d’Assas.

Morgan rushed out of the study, crossed the dancing-hall from end to end, and made his way to a little salon on the other side of the dressing-room. His three companions, Montbar, Adler and d’Assas, were there already. With them was a young man in the government livery of a bearer of despatches, namely a green and gold coat. His boots were dusty, and he wore a visored cap and carried the despatch-box, the essential accoutrements of a cabinet courier.

One of Cassini’s maps, on which could be followed the whole lay of the land, was spread on the table.

Before saying why this courier was there, and with what object the map was unfolded, let us cast a glance at the three new personages whose names had echoed through the ballroom, and who are destined to play an important part in the rest of this history.

The reader already knows Morgan, the Achilles and the Paris of this strange association; Morgan, with his blue eyes, his black hair, his tall, well-built figure, graceful, easy, active bearing; his eye, which was never without animation; his mouth, with its fresh lips and white teeth, that was never without a smile; his remarkable countenance, composed of mingling elements that seemed so foreign to each other — strength and tenderness, gentleness and energy; and, through it all, that bewildering expression of gayety that was at times alarming when one remembered that this man was perpetually rubbing shoulders with death, and the most terrifying of all deaths — that of the scaffold.

As for d’Assas, he was a man from thirty-five to thirty-eight years of age, with bushy hair that was turning gray, and mustaches as black as ebony. His eyes were of that wonderful shade of Indian eyes, verging on maroon. He was formerly a captain of dragoons, admirably built for struggle, whether physical or moral, his muscles indicating strength, and his face, obstinacy. For the rest, a noble bearing, great elegance of manners, scented like a dandy, carrying, either from caprice or luxury, a bottle of English smelling-salts, or a silver-gilt vinaigrette containing the most subtle perfumes.

Montbar and Adler, whose real names were unknown, like those of d’Assas and Morgan, were commonly called by the Company “the inseparables.” Imagine Damon and Pythias, Euryalus and Nisus, Orestes and Pylades at twenty-two — one joyous, loquacious, noisy, the other melancholy, silent, dreamy; sharing all things, dangers, money, mistresses; one the complement of the other; each rushing to all extremes, but forgetting self when in peril to watch over the other, like the Spartan youths on the sacred legions — and you will form an idea of Montbar and Adler.

It is needless to say that all three were Companions of Jehu. They had been convoked, as Morgan suspected, on business of the Company.

On entering the room, Morgan went straight to the pretended bearer of despatches and shook hands with him.

“Ah! the dear friend,” said the latter, with a stiff movement, showing that the best rider cannot do a hundred and fifty miles on post-hacks with impunity. “You are taking it easy, you Parisians. Hannibal at Capua slept on rushes and thorns compared to you. I only glanced at the ballroom in passing, as becomes a poor cabinet courier bearing despatches from General Masséna to the citizen First Consul; but it seemed to me you were a fine lot of victims! Only, my poor friends, you will have to bid farewell to all that for the present; disagreeable, unlucky, exasperating, no doubt, but the House of Jehu before all.”

“My dear Hastier — ” began Morgan.

“Stop!” cried Hastier. “No proper names, if you please, gentlemen. The Hastiers are an honest family in Lyons, doing business, it is said, on the Place des Terreaux, from father to son, and would be much humiliated to learn that their heir had become a cabinet courier, and rode the highways with the national pack on his back. Lecoq as much as you please, but not Hastier. I don’t know Hastier; and you, gentlemen,” continued the young man, addressing Montbar, Adler and d’Assas, “do you know him?”

“No,” replied the three young men, “and we ask pardon for Morgan, who did wrong.”

“My dear Lecoq,” exclaimed Morgan.

“That’s right,” interrupted Hastier. “I answer to that name! Well, what did you want to tell me?”

“I wanted to say that if you are not the antipodes of the god Harpocrates, whom the Egyptians represent with a finger on his lips, you will, instead of indulging in a lot of declamations, more or less flowery, tell us why this costume, and why that map?”

“The deuce!” retorted the young man. “If you don’t know already, it’s your fault and not mine. If I hadn’t been obliged to call you twice, caught as you doubtless were in the toils of some beautiful Eumenides imploring vengeance of a fine young man for the death of her old parents, you’d know as much as these gentlemen, and I wouldn’t have to sing an encore. Well, here’s what it is: simply of the remaining treasure of the Berne bears, which General Lecourbe is sending to the citizen First Consul by order of General Masséna. A trifle, only a hundred thousand francs, that they don’t dare send over the Jura on account of M. Teysonnet’s partisans, who, they pretend, are likely to seize it; so it will be sent by Geneva, Bourg, Mâcon, Dijon, and Troyes; a much safer way, as they will find when they try it.”

“Very good!”

“We were informed of this by Renard, who started from Gex at full speed, and transmitted the news to l’Hirondelle, who is at present stationed at Châlon-sur-Saône. He transmitted it to me, Lecoq, at Auxerre, and I have done a hundred and fifty miles to transmit it in turn to you. As for the secondary details, here they are. The treasure left Berne last octodi, 28th Nivôse, year VIII. of the Republic triple and indivisible. It should reach Genoa to-day, duodi, and leave to-morrow, tridi, by the diligence from Geneva to Bourg; so that, by leaving this very night, by the day after to-morrow, quintide, you can, my dear sons of Israel, meet the treasure of messires the bears between Dijon and Troyes, near Bar-sur-Seine or Châtillon. What say you?”

“By heavens!” cried Morgan, “we say that there seems to be no room for argument left; we say we should never have permitted ourselves to touch the money of their Highnesses the bears of Berne so long as it remained in their coffers; but as it has changed hands once, I see no objection to its doing so a second time. Only how are we to start?”

“Haven’t you a post-chaise?”

“Yes, it’s here in the coach-house.”

“Haven’t you horses to get you to the next stage?”

“They are in the stable.”

“Haven’t you each your passports.”

"We have each four."

"Well, then?"

"Well, we can't stop the diligence in a post-chaise. We don't put ourselves to too much inconvenience, but we don't take our ease in that way."

"Well, and why not?" asked Montbar; "it would be original. I can't see why, if sailors board from one vessel to another, we couldn't board a diligence from a post-chaise. We want novelty; shall we try it, Adler?"

"I ask nothing better," replied the latter, "but what will we do with the postilion?"

"That's true," replied Montbar.

"The difficulty is foreseen, my children," said the courier; "a messenger has been sent to Troyes. You will leave your post-chaise at Delbauce; there you will find four horses all saddled and stuffed with oats. You will then calculate your time, and the day after to-morrow, or rather to-morrow, for it is past midnight, between seven and eight in the morning, the money of Messires Bruin will pass an anxious quarter of an hour."

"Shall we change our clothes?" inquired d'Assas.

"What for?" replied Morgan. "I think we are very presentable as we are. No diligence could be relieved of unnecessary weight by better dressed fellows. Let us take a last glance at the map, transfer a pâté, a cold chicken, and a dozen of champagne from the supper-room to the pockets of the coach, arm to the teeth in the arsenal, wrap ourselves in warm cloaks, and — clack! postilion!"

"Yes!" cried Montbar, "that's the idea."

"I should think so," added Morgan. "We'll kill the horses if necessary, and be back at seven in the evening, in time to show ourselves at the opera."

"That will establish an alibi," observed d'Assas.

"Precisely," said Morgan, with his imperturbable gayety. "How could men who applaud Mademoiselle Clotilde and M. Vestris at eight o'clock in the evening have been at Bar and Chatillon in the morning settling accounts with the conductor of a diligence? Come, my sons, a last look at the map to choose our spot."

The four young men bent over Cassini's map.

"If I may give you a bit of topographical advice," said the courier, "it would be to put yourselves in ambush just beyond Massu; there's a ford opposite to the Riceys — see, there!"

And the young man pointed out the exact spot on the map.

"I should return to Chacource, there; from Chacource you have a department road, straight as an arrow, which will take you to Troyes; at Troyes you take carriage again, and follow the road to Sens instead of that to Coulommiers. The donkeys — there are plenty in the provinces — who saw you in the morning won't wonder at seeing you again in the evening; you'll get to the opera at ten instead of eight — a more fashionable hour — neither seen nor recognized, I'll warrant you."

"Adopted, so far as I am concerned," said Morgan.

"Adopted!" cried the other three in chorus.

Morgan pulled out one of the two watches whose chains were dangling from his belt; it was a masterpiece of Petitot's enamel, and on the outer case which protected the painting was a diamond monogram. The pedigree of this beautiful trinket was as well established as that of an Arab horse; it had been made for Marie-Antoinette, who had given it to the Duchesse de Polastron, who had given it to Morgan's mother.

"One o'clock," said Morgan; "come, gentlemen, we must relay at Lagny at three."

From that moment the expedition had begun, and Morgan became its leader; he no longer consulted, he commanded.

D'Assas, who in Morgan's absence commanded, was the first to obey on his return.

Half an hour later a closed carriage containing four young men wrapped in their cloaks was stopped at the Fontainebleau barrier by the post-guard, who demanded their passports.

"Oh, what a joke!" exclaimed one of them, putting his head out of the window and affecting the pronunciation of the day. "Passpawts to dwive to Gwobois to call on citizen *Ba-as*? 'Word of fluted honor!' you're cwazy, fwend! Go on, dwiver!"

The coachman whipped up his horses and the carriage passed without further opposition.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FAMILY MATTERS

Let us leave our four *hunters* on their way to Lagny — where, thanks to the passports they owed to the obligingness of certain clerks in citizen Fouché’s employ, they exchanged their own horses for post-horses and their coachman for a postilion — and see why the First Consul had sent for Roland.

After leaving Morgan, Roland had hastened to obey the general’s orders. He found the latter standing in deep thought before the fireplace. At the sound of his entrance General Bonaparte raised his head.

“What were you two saying to each other?” asked Bonaparte, without preamble, trusting to Roland’s habit of answering his thought.

“Why,” said Roland, “we paid each other all sorts of compliments, and parted the best friends in the world.”

“How does he impress you?”

“As a perfectly well-bred man.”

“How old do you take him to be?”

“About my age, at the outside.”

“So I think; his voice is youthful. What now, Roland, can I be mistaken? Is there a new royalist generation growing up?”

“No, general,” replied Roland, shrugging his shoulders; “it’s the remains of the old one.”

“Well, Roland, we must build up another, devoted to my son — if ever I have one.”

Roland made a gesture which might be translated into the words, “I don’t object.” Bonaparte understood the gesture perfectly.

“You must do more than not object,” said he; “you must contribute to it.”

A nervous shudder passed over Roland’s body.

“In what way, general?” he asked.

“By marrying.”

Roland burst out laughing.

“Good! With my aneurism?” he asked.

Bonaparte looked at him, and said: “My dear Roland, your aneurism looks to me very much like a pretext for remaining single.”

“Do you think so?”

“Yes; and as I am a moral man I insist upon marriage.”

“Does that mean that I am immoral,” retorted Roland, “or that I cause any scandal with my mistresses?”

“Augustus,” answered Bonaparte, “created laws against celibates, depriving them of their rights as Roman citizens.”

“Augustus — ”

“Well?”

“I’ll wait until you are Augustus; as yet, you are only Cæsar.”

Bonaparte came closer to the young man, and, laying his hands on his shoulders, said: “Roland, there are some names I do not wish to see extinct, and among them is that of Montrevel.”

“Well, general, in my default, supposing that through caprice or obstinacy I refuse to perpetuate it, there is my little brother.”

“What! Your brother? Then you have a brother?”

“Why, yes; I have a brother! Why shouldn’t I have brother?”

“How old is he?”

“Eleven or twelve.”

“Why did you never tell me about him?”

“Because I thought the sayings and doings of a youngster of that age could not interest you.”

“You are mistaken, Roland; I am interested in all that concerns my friends. You ought to have asked me for something for your brother.”

“Asked what, general?”

“His admission into some college in Paris.”

“Pooh! You have enough beggars around you without my swelling their number.”

“You hear; he is to come to Paris and enter college. When he is old enough, I will send him to the Ecole Militare, or some other school which I shall have founded before then.”

“Faith, general,” said Roland, “just as if I had guessed your good intentions, he is this very day on the point of, starting for Paris.”

“What for?”

“I wrote to my mother three days ago to bring the boy to Paris. I intended to put him in college without mentioning it, and when he was old enough to tell you about him — always supposing that my aneurism had not carried me off in the meantime. But in that case — ”

“In that case?”

“Oh! in that case I have left a bit of a will addressed to you, and recommending to your kindness my mother, and the boy and the girl — in short, the whole raft.”

“The girl! Who is she?”

“My sister.”

“So you have a sister also?”

“Yes.”

“How old is she?”

“Seventeen.”

“Pretty?”

“Charming.”

“I’ll take charge of her establishment.”

Roland began to laugh.

“What’s the matter?” demanded the First Consul.

“General, I’m going to put a placard over the grand entrance to the Luxembourg.”

“What will you put on the placard?”

“‘Marriages made here.’“

“Why not? Is it any reason because you don’t wish to marry for your sister to remain an old maid? I don’t like old maids any better than I do old bachelors.”

“I did not say, general, that my sister should remain an old maid; it’s quite enough for one member of the Montrevel family to have incurred your displeasure.”

“Then what do you mean?”

“Only that, as the matter concerns my sister, she must, if you will allow it, be consulted.”

“Ah, ha! Some provincial love-affair, is there?”

“I can’t say. I left poor Amélie gay and happy, and I find her pale and sad. I shall get the truth out of her; and if you wish me to speak to you again about the matter, I will do so.”

“Yes, do so — when you get back from the Vendée.”

“Ah! So I am going to the Vendée?”

“Why, is that, like marriage, repugnant, to you?”

"Not in the least."

"Then you are going to the Vendée."

"When?"

"Oh, you need not hurry, providing you start to-morrow."

"Excellent; sooner if you wish. Tell me what I am to do there."

"Something of the utmost importance, Roland."

"The devil! It isn't a diplomatic mission, I presume?"

"Yes; it is a diplomatic mission for which I need a man who is not a diplomatist."

"Then I'm your man, general! Only, you understand, the less a diplomatist I am, the more precise my instructions must be."

"I am going to give them to you. Do you see that map?"

And he showed the young man a large map of Piedmont stretched out on the floor, under a lamp suspended from the ceiling.

"Yes, I see it," replied Roland, accustomed to follow the general along the unexpected dashes of his genius; "but it is a map of Piedmont."

"Yes, it's a map of Piedmont."

"So there is still a question of Italy?"

"There is always a question of Italy."

"I thought you spoke of the Vendée?"

"Secondarily."

"Why, general, you are not going to send me to the Vendée and go yourself to Italy, are you?"

"No; don't be alarmed."

"All right; but I warn you, if you did, I should desert and join you."

"I give you permission to do so; but now let us go back to Mélas."

"Excuse me, general; this is the first time you have mentioned him."

"Yes; but I have been thinking of him for a long time. Do you know where I shall defeat him?"

"The deuce! I do."

"Where?"

"Wherever you meet him."

Bonaparte laughed.

"Ninny!" he said, with loving familiarity. Then, stooping over the map, he said to Roland, "Come here."

Roland stooped beside him. "There," resumed Bonaparte; "that is where I shall fight him."

“Near Alessandria?”

“Within eight or nine miles of it. He has all his supplies, hospitals, artillery and reserves in Alessandria; and he will not leave the neighborhood. I shall have to strike a great blow; that’s the only condition on which I can get peace. I shall cross the Alps” — he pointed to the great Saint-Bernard — ”I shall fall upon Mélas when he least expects me, and rout him utterly.”

“Oh! trust you for that!”

“Yes; but you understand, Roland, that in order to quit France with an easy mind, I can’t leave it with an inflammation of the bowels — I can’t leave war in the Vendée.”

“Ah! now I see what you are after. No Vendée! And you are sending me to the Vendée to suppress it.”

“That young man told me some serious things about the Vendée. They are brave soldiers, those Vendéans, led by a man of brains, Georges Cadoudal. I have sent him the offer of a regiment, but he won’t accept.”

“Jove! He’s particular.”

“But there’s one thing he little knows.”

“Who, Cadoudal?”

“Yes, Cadoudal. That is that the Abbé Bernier has made me overtures.”

“The Abbé Bernier?”

“Yes.”

“Who is the Abbé Bernier?”

“The son of a peasant from Anjou, who may be now about thirty-three or four years of age. Before the insurrection he was curate of Saint-Laud at Angers. He refused to take the oath and sought refuge among the Vendéans. Two or three times the Vendée was pacificated; twice she was thought dead. A mistake! the Vendée was pacificated, but the Abbé Bernier had not signed the peace; the Vendée was dead, but the Abbé Bernier was still alive. One day the Vendée was ungrateful to him. He wished to be appointed general agent to the royalist armies of the interior; Stofflet influenced the decision and got his old master, Comte Colbert de Maulevrier, appointed in Bernier’s stead. When, at two o’clock in the morning, the council broke up, the Abbé Bernier had disappeared. What he did that night, God and he alone can tell; but at four o’clock in the morning a Republican detachment surrounded the farmhouse where Stofflet was sleeping, disarmed and defenceless. At half-past four Stofflet was captured; eight days later he was executed at Angers.

The next day Autichamp took command, and, to avoid making the same blunder as Stofflet, he appointed the Abbé Bernier general agent. Now, do you understand?”

“Perfectly.”

“Well, the Abbé Bernier, general agent of the belligerent forces, and furnished with plenary powers by the Comte d’Artois — the Abbé Bernier has made overtures to me.”

“To you, to Bonaparte, to the First Consul he deigns to — ? Why, that’s very kind of the Abbé Bernier? Have you accepted them?”

“Yes, Roland; if the Vendée will give me peace, I will open her churches and give her back her priests.”

“And suppose they chant the *Domine, salvum fac regem?*”

“That would be better than not singing at all. God is omnipotent, and he will decide. Does the mission suit you, now that I have explained it?”

“Yes, thoroughly.”

“Then, here is a letter for General Hédouville. He is to treat with the Abbé Bernier as the general-in-chief of the Army of the West. But you are to be present at all these conferences; he is only my mouthpiece, you are to be my thought. Now, start as soon as possible; the sooner you get back, the sooner Mélas will be defeated.”

“General, give me time to write to my mother, that’s all.”

“Where will she stop?”

“At the Hôtel des Ambassadeurs.”

“When do you think she will arrive?”

“This is the night of the 21st of January; she will be here the evening of the 23d, or the morning of the 24th.”

“And she stops at the Hôtel des Ambassadeurs?”

“Yes, general.”

“I take it all on myself.”

“Take it all on yourself, general?”

“Certainly; your mother can’t stay at a hotel.”

“Where should she stay?”

“With a friend.”

“She knows no one in Paris.”

“I beg your pardon, Monsieur Roland; she knows citizen Bonaparte, First Consul, and his wife.”

“You are not going to lodge my mother at the Luxembourg. I warn you that that would embarrass her very much.”

“No; but I shall lodge her in the Rue de la Victoire.”

“Oh, general!”

“Come, come; that’s settled. Go, now, and get back as soon as possible.”

Roland took the First Consul’s hand, meaning to kiss it; but Bonaparte drew him quickly to him.

“Embrace me, my dear Roland,” he said, “and good luck to you.”

Two hours later Roland was rolling along in a post-chaise on the road to Orleans. The next day, at nine in the morning, he entered Nantes, after a journey of thirty-three hours.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE GENEVA DILIGENCE

About the hour when Roland was entering Nantes, a diligence, heavily loaded, stopped at the inn of the Croix-d'Or, in the middle of the main street of Châtillon-sur-Seine.

In those days the diligences had but two compartments, the coupé and the interior; the rotunda is an adjunct of modern times.

The diligence had hardly stopped before the postilion jumped down and opened the doors. The travellers dismounted. There were seven in all, of both sexes. In the interior, three men, two women, and a child at the breast; in the coupé, a mother and her son.

The three men in the interior were, one a doctor from Troyes, the second a watchmaker from Geneva, the third an architect from Bourg. The two women were a lady's maid travelling to Paris to rejoin her mistress, and the other a wet-nurse; the child was the latter's nursling, which she was taking back to its parents.

The mother and son in the coupé were people of position; the former, about forty years of age, still preserving traces of great beauty, the latter a boy between eleven and twelve. The third place in the coupe was occupied by the conductor.

Breakfast was waiting, as usual, in the dining-room; one of those breakfasts which conductors, no doubt in collusion with the landlords, never give travellers the time to eat. The woman and the nurse got out of the coach and went to a baker's shop nearby, where each bought a hot roll and a sausage, with which they went back to the coach, settling themselves quietly to breakfast, thus saving the cost, probably too great for their means, of a meal at the hotel.

The doctor, the watchmaker, the architect and the mother and son entered the inn, and, after warming themselves hastily at the large kitchen-fire, entered the dining-room and took seats at the table.

The mother contented herself with a cup of coffee with cream, and some fruit. The boy, delighted to prove himself a man by his appetite at least, boldly attacked the viands. The first few moments were, as usual, employed in satisfying hunger. The watchmaker from Geneva was the first to speak.

"Faith, citizen," said he (the word citizen was still used in public places), "I tell you frankly I was not at all sorry to see daylight this morning."

"Cannot monsieur sleep in a coach?" asked the doctor.

"Oh, yes, sir," replied the compatriot of Jean-Jacques; "on the contrary, I usually sleep straight through the night. But anxiety was stronger than fatigue this time."

"Were you afraid of upsetting?" asked the architect.

"No. I'm very lucky in that respect; it seems enough for me to be in a coach to make it unupsettable. No, that wasn't it."

"What was it, then?" questioned the doctor.

"They say in Geneva that the roads in France are not safe."

"That's according to circumstances," said the architect.

"Ah! how's that?" inquired the watchmaker.

"Oh!" replied the architect; "if, for example, we were carrying government money, we would surely be stopped, or rather we would have been already."

"Do you think so?" queried the watchmaker.

"That has never failed. I don't know how those devils of Companions of Jehu manage to keep so well posted; but they never miss an opportunity."

The doctor nodded affirmatively.

"Ah!" exclaimed the watchmaker, addressing the doctor; "do you think so, too?"

"I do."

"And if you knew there was government money in the coach, would you be so imprudent as to take passage in it?"

"I must admit," replied the doctor, "that I should think twice about it."

"And you, sir?" said the questioner to the architect.

"Oh, I," replied the latter — "as I am on important business, I should have started anyway."

"I am tempted," said the watchmaker "to take off my valise and my oases, and wait for to-morrow's diligence, because my boxes are filled with watches worth something like twenty thousand francs. We've been lucky so far, but there's no use tempting Providence."

"Did you not hear these gentlemen say," remarked the lady, joining in the conversation for the first time, "that we run the risk of being stopped only when the coach carries government money?”

“That’s exactly it,” replied the watchmaker, looking anxiously around. “We are carrying it.”

The mother blanched visibly and looked at her son. Before fearing for herself every mother fears for her child.

“What! we are carrying it?” asked the doctor and the architect in varying tones of excitement. “Are you sure of what you are saying?”

“Perfectly sure, gentlemen.”

“Then you should either have told us before, or have told us in a whisper now.”

“But perhaps,” said the doctor, “the gentleman is not quite sure of what he says.”

“Or perhaps he is joking,” added the architect.

“Heaven forbid!”

“The Genevese are very fond of a laugh,” persisted the doctor.

“Sir,” replied the Genevese, much hurt that any one should think he liked to laugh, “I saw it put on the coach myself.”

“What?”

“The money.”

“Was there much?”

“A good many bags.”

“But where does the money come from?”

“The treasury of the bears of Berne. You know, of course, that the bears of Berne received an income of fifty or even sixty thousand francs.”

The doctor burst out laughing.

“Decidedly, sir, you are trying to frighten us,” said he.

“Gentlemen,” said the watchmaker, “I give you my word of honor — ”

“Take your places gentlemen,” shouted the conductor, opening the door. “Take your places! We are three-quarters of an hour late.”

“One moment, conductor, one moment,” Said the architect; “we are consulting.”

“About what?”

“Close the door, conductor, and come over here.”

“Drink a glass of wine with us, conductor.”

“With pleasure, gentlemen; a glass of wine is never to be refused.”

The conductor held out his glass, and the three travellers touched it; but just as he was lifting it to his lips the doctor stopped his arm.

“Come, conductor, frankly, is it true?”

“What?”

“What this gentleman says?” And he pointed to the Genevese.

“Monsieur Féraud?”

“I don’t know if that is his name.”

“Yes, sir, that is my name — Féraud & Company, No. 6 Rue du Rempart, Geneva, at your service,” replied the watchmaker, bowing.

“Gentlemen,” repeated the conductor, “take your places!”

“But you haven’t answered.”

“What the devil shall I answer? You haven’t asked me anything.”

“Yes, we asked you if it is true that you are carrying a large sum of money belonging to the French Government?”

“Blabber!” said the conductor to watchmaker, “did you tell that?”

“Confound it, my worthy fellow — ”

“Come, gentlemen, your places.”

“But before getting in we want to know — ”

“What? Whether I have government money? Yes I have. Now, if we are stopped, say nothing and all will be well.”

“Are you sure?”

“Leave me to arrange matters with these gentry.”

“What will you do if we are stopped?” the doctor asked the architect.

“Faith! I shall follow the conductor’s advice.”

“That’s the best thing to do,” observed the latter.

“Well, I shall keep quiet,” repeated the architect.

“And so shall I,” added the watchmaker.

“Come, gentlemen, take your seats, and let us make haste.”

The boy had listened to this conversation with frowning brow and clinched teeth.

“Well,” he said to his mother, “if we are stopped, I know what I’ll do.”

“What will you do?” she asked.

“You’ll see.”

“What does this little boy say?” asked the watchmaker.

“I say you are all cowards,” replied the child unhesitatingly.

“Edouard!” exclaimed his mother, “what do you mean?”

“I wish they’d stop the diligence, that I do!” cried the boy, his eye sparkling with determination.

“Come, come, gentlemen, in Heaven’s name, take your places,” called the conductor once more.

“Conductor,” said the doctor, “I presume you have no weapons!”

“Yes, I have my pistols.”

“Unfortunate!”

The conductor stooped to the doctor’s ear and whispered: “Don’t be alarmed, doctor; they’re only loaded with powder.”

“Good!”

“Forward, postilion, forward!” shouted the conductor, closing the door of the interior. Then, while the postilion snapped his whip and started the heavy vehicle, he also closed that of the coupé.

“Are you not coming with us, conductor?” asked the lady.

“Thank you, no, Madame de Montrevel,” replied the conductor; “I have something to do on the imperial.” Then, looking into the window, he added: “Take care the Monsieur Edouard does not touch the pistols in the pocket of the carriage; he might hurt himself.”

“Pooh!” retorted the boy, “as if I didn’t know how to handle a pistol. I have handsomer ones than yours, that my friend Sir John had sent me from England; haven’t I, mamma?”

“Never mind, Edouard,” replied Madame de Montrevel, “I entreat you not to touch them.”

“Don’t worry, little mother.” Then he added softly, “All the same, if the Companions of Jehu stop us, I know what I shall do.”

The diligence was again rolling heavily on its way to Paris.

It was one of those fine winter days which makes those who think that nature is dead at that season admit that nature never dies but only sleeps. The man who lives to be seventy or eighty years of age has his nights of ten or twelve hours, and often complains that the length of his nights adds to the shortness of his days. Nature, which has an everlasting existence; trees, which live a thousand years; have sleeping periods of four or five months, which are winters for us but only nights for them. The poets, in their envious verse, sing the immortality of nature, which dies each autumn and revives each spring. The poets are mistaken; nature does not die each autumn, she only falls asleep; she is not resuscitated, she awakens. The day when our globe really dies, it will be dead indeed. Then it will roll into space or fall into the abysses of chaos, inert, mute, solitary, without trees, without flowers, without verdure, without poets.

But on this beautiful day of the 23d of February, 1800, sleeping nature dreamed of spring; a brilliant, almost joyous sun made the grass in the ditches on either side of the road sparkle with those deceptive pearls of the hoarfrost which vanish at a touch, and rejoice the heart of a tiller of the earth when he sees them glittering at the points of his wheat as it pushes bravely up through the soil. All the windows of the diligence were lowered, to give entrance to this earliest smile of the Divine, as though all hearts were saying: "Welcome back, traveller long lost in the clouds of the West, or beneath the heaving billows of Ocean!"

Suddenly, about an hour after leaving Châtillon, the diligence stopped at a bend of the river without any apparent cause. Four horsemen quietly approached, walking their horses, and one of them, a little in advance of the others, made a sign with his hand to the postilion, ordering him to draw up. The postilion obeyed.

"Oh, mamma!" cried Edouard, standing up and leaning out of the window in spite of Madame de Montrevel's protestations; "oh, mamma, what fine horses! But why do these gentlemen wear masks? This isn't carnival."

Madame de Montrevel was dreaming. A woman always dreams a little; young, of the future; old, of the past. She started from her revery, put her head out of the window, and gave a little cry.

Edouard turned around hastily.

"What ails you, mother?" he asked.

Madame de Montrevel turned pale and took him in her arms without a word. Cries of terror were heard in the interior.

"But what is the matter?" demanded little Edouard, struggling to escape from his mother's encircling arms.

"Nothing, my little man," said one of the masked men in a gentle voice, putting his head through the window of the coupé; "nothing but an account we have to settle with the conductor, which does not in the least concern you travellers. Tell your mother to accept our respectful homage, and to pay no more heed to us than if we were not here." Then passing to the door of the interior, he added: "Gentlemen, your servant. Fear nothing for your money or jewels, and reassure that nurse — we have not come here to turn her milk." Then to the conductor: "Now, then, Père Jérôme, we have a hundred thousand francs on the imperial and in the boxes, haven't we?"

"Gentlemen, I assure you — "

“That the money belongs to the government. It did belong to the bears of Berne; seventy thousand francs in gold, the rest in silver. The silver is on the top of the coach, the gold in the bottom of the coupé. Isn’t that so? You see how well informed we are.”

At the words “bottom of the coupe” Madame de Montrevel gave another cry of terror; she was about to come in contact with men who, in spite of their politeness, inspired her with the most profound terror.

“But what is the matter, mother, what is the matter?” demanded the boy impatiently.

“Be quiet, Edouard; be quiet!”

“Why must I be quiet?”

“Don’t you understand?”

“No.”

“The coach has been stopped.”

“Why? Tell me why? Ah, mother, I understand.”

“No, no,” said Madame de Montrevel, “you don’t understand.”

“Those gentlemen are robbers.”

“Take care you don’t say so.”

“What, you mean they are not robbers? Why, see they are taking the conductor’s money.”

Sure enough, one of the four was fastening to the saddle of his horse the bags of silver which the conductor threw down from the imperial.

“No,” repeated Madame de Montrevel, “no, they are not robbers.” Then lowering her voice, she added: “They are Companions of Jehu.”

“Ah!” cried the boy, “they are the ones who assassinated my friend, Sir John.”

And the child turned very pale, and his breath came hissing through his clinched teeth.

At that moment one of the masked men opened the door of the coupé, and said with exquisite politeness: “Madame la Comtesse, to our great regret we are obliged to disturb you; but we want, or rather the conductor wants, a package from the bottom of the coupé. Will you be so kind as to get out for a moment? Jérôme will get what he wants as quickly as possible.” Then, with that note of gayety which was never entirely absent from that laughing voice, he added, “Won’t you, Jérôme?”

Jérôme replied from the top of the diligence, confirming these words.

With an instinctive movement to put herself between the danger and her son, Madame de Montrevel, while complying with that request, pushed Edouard behind her. That instant sufficed for the boy to seize the conductor's pistols.

The young man with the laughing voice assisted Madame de Montrevel from the coach with the greatest care, then signed to one of his companions to give her an arm, and returned to the coach.

But at that instant a double report was heard. Edouard had fired a pistol with each hand at the Companion of Jehu, who disappeared in the smoke.

Madame de Montrevel screamed, and fainted away. Various cries, expressive of diverse sentiments, echoed that of the mother.

From the interior came one of terror; they had all agreed to offer no resistance, and now some one had resisted. From the three young men came a cry of surprise — it was the first time such a thing had happened.

They rushed to their companion, expecting to find him reduced to pulp; but they found him safe and sound, laughing heartily, while the conductor, with clasped hands, was exclaiming: "Monsieur, I swear there were no balls; monsieur, I protest, they were only charged with powder."

"The deuce," said the young man, "don't I see that? But the intention was good, wasn't it, my little Edouard?" Then, turning to his companions, he added: "Confess, gentlemen, that he is a fine boy — a true son of his father, and brother of his brother. Bravo, Edouard! you'll make a man some day!"

Taking the boy in his arms, he kissed him, in spite of his struggles, on both cheeks.

Edouard fought like a demon, thinking no doubt that it was very humiliating to be embraced by a man at whom he had just fired two pistols.

In the meantime one of the Companions had carried Edouard's mother to the bank by the roadside a little distance from the diligence. The man who had kissed Edouard with so much affection and persistence now looked around for her.

"Ah!" cried he, on perceiving her, "Madame de Montrevel still unconscious? We can't leave a woman in that condition, gentlemen. Conductor, take Master Edouard." Placing the boy in Jérôme's arms, he turned to one of his companions: "Man of precautions," said he, "haven't you smelling salts or a bottle of essence with you?"

"Here!" said the young man he had addressed, pulling a flask of toilet vinegar from his pocket.

“Good,” said the other, who seemed to be the leader of the band. “Do you finish up the matter with Master Jérôme; I’ll take charge of Madame de Montrevel.”

It was indeed time. The fainting fit was giving place to a violent nervous attack; spasmodic movements shook her whole body and strangled cries came from her throat. The young man leaned over her and made her inhale the salts.

Madame de Montrevel presently opened her frightened eyes, and called out: “Edouard! Edouard!” With an involuntary movement she knocked aside the mask of the man who was supporting her, exposing his face.

The courteous, laughing young man — our readers have already recognized him — was Morgan.

Madame de Montrevel paused in amazement at sight of those beautiful blue eyes, the lofty brow, and the gracious lips smiling at her. She realized that she ran no danger from such a man, and that no harm could have befallen Edouard. Treating Morgan as a gentleman who had succored her, and not as a bandit who had caused her fainting-fit, she exclaimed: “Ah, sir! how kind you are.”

In the words, in the tones in which she uttered them, there lay a world of thanks, not only for herself, but for her child.

With singular delicacy, entirely in keeping with his chivalric nature, Morgan, instead of picking up his fallen mask and covering his face immediately, so that Madame de Montrevel could only have retained a fleeting and confused impression of it — Morgan replied to her compliment by a low bow, leaving his features uncovered long enough to produce their impression; then, placing d’Assas’ flask in Madame de Montrevel’s hand — and then only — he replaced his mask. Madame de Montrevel understood the young man’s delicacy.

“Ah! sir,” said she, “be sure that, in whatever place or situation I see you again, I shall not recognize you.”

“Then, madame,” replied Morgan, “it is for me to thank you and repeat, ‘How kind you are.’“

“Come, gentlemen, take your seats!” said the conductor, in his customary tone, as if nothing unusual had happened.

“Are you quite restored, madame, or should you like a few minutes more to rest?” asked Morgan. “The diligence shall wait.”

“No, that is quite unnecessary; I feel quite well, and am much indebted to you.”

Morgan offered Madame de Montrevel his arm, and she leaned upon it to reach the diligence. The conductor had already placed little Edouard inside. When Madame de Montrevel had resumed her seat, Morgan, who had already made his peace with the mother, wished to do so with the son.

“Without a grudge, my young hero,” he said, offering his hand.

But the boy drew back.

“I don’t give my hand to a highway robber,” he replied. Madame de Montrevel gave a start of terror.

“You have a charming boy, madame,” said Morgan; “only he has his prejudices.” Then, bowing with the utmost courtesy, he added, “A prosperous voyage, madame,” and closed the door.

“Forward!” cried the conductor.

The carriage gave a lurch.

“Oh! pardon me, sir!” exclaimed Madame de Montrevel; “your flask!”

“Keep it, madame,” said Morgan; “although I trust you are sufficiently recovered not to need it.”

But Edouard, snatching the flask from his mother’s hands, flung it out of the window, crying: “Mamma doesn’t receive presents from robbers.”

“The devil!” murmured Morgan, with the first sigh his Companions had ever heard him give. “I think I am right not to ask for my poor Amélie in marriage.” Then, turning to his Companions, he said: “Well, gentlemen, is it finished?”

“Yes,” they answered with one voice.

“Then let us mount and be off. Don’t forget we have to be at the Opera at nine o’clock this evening.”

Springing into his saddle, he was the first to jump the ditch, reach the river, and there unhesitatingly took the ford which the pretended courier had pointed out on Cassini’s map.

When he reached the opposite bank, followed by the other young men, d’Assas said to him: “Say, didn’t your mask falloff?”

“Yes; but no one saw my face but Madame de Montrevel.”

“Hum!” muttered d’Assas. “Better no one had seen it.”

Putting their horses to a gallop, all four disappeared across the fields in the direction of Chacource.

CHAPTER XXX.

CITIZEN FOUCHÉ’S REPORT

On arriving the next day, toward eleven in the morning, at the Hôtel des Ambassadeurs, Madame de Montrevel was astonished to find, instead of Roland, a stranger awaiting her. The stranger approached her.

“Are you the widow of General de Montrevel, madame?” he asked.

“Yes, monsieur,” replied Madame de Montrevel, not a little astonished.

“And you are looking for your son?”

“Yes; and I do not understand, after the letter he wrote me — ”

“Man proposes, the First Consul disposes,” replied the stranger, laughing. “The First Consul has disposed of your son for a few days, and has sent me to receive you in his stead.”

Madame de Montrevel bowed.

“To whom have I the honor of speaking?” she asked.

“To citizen Fauvelet de Bourrienne, his first secretary,” replied the stranger.

“Will you thank the First Consul for me,” replied Madame de Montrevel, “and have the kindness to express to him the profound regret I feel at not being able to do so myself?”

“But nothing can be more easy, madame.”

“How so?”

“The First Consul has ordered me to bring you to the Luxembourg.”

“Me?”

“You and your son.”

“Oh! I am going to see General Bonaparte; I am going to see General Bonaparte!” cried the child, jumping for joy and clapping his hands. “What happiness!”

“Edouard, Edouard!” exclaimed Madame de Montrevel. Then, turning to Bourrienne, “You must excuse him, sir; he is a little savage from the Jura Mountains.”

Bourrienne held out his hand to the boy.

“I am a friend of your brother’s,” said he. “Will you kiss me?”

“Oh! willingly, sir,” replied Edouard. “You are not a thief, I know.”

“Why, no; I trust not,” replied the secretary, laughing.

“You must excuse him once again, sir. Our diligence was stopped on the way.”

“Stopped?”

“Yes.”

“By robbers?”

“Not exactly.”

“Monsieur,” asked Edouard, “when people take other people’s money, are they not thieves?”

“That is what they are generally called, my dear child.”

“There, you see, mamma.”

“Come, Edouard, be quiet, I beg of you.”

Bourrienne glanced at Madame de Montrevel, and saw clearly from the expression of her face that the subject was disagreeable to her; he therefore dropped it.

“Madame,” said he, “may I remind you that I have I orders to take you to the Luxembourg, and to add that Madame Bonaparte is expecting you?”

“Pray give me time to change my gown and to dress Edouard, sir.”

“How long will that take, madame?”

“Is half an hour too much to ask?”

“No, indeed; if half an hour really suffices I shall think you most reasonable.”

“Be easy, sir; it will be sufficient.”

“Well, madame,” said the secretary, bowing, “I will attend to an errand, and return in half an hour to place myself at your orders.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Don’t be annoyed if I should be punctual.”

“I shall not keep you waiting.”

Bourrienne left. Madame de Montrevel dressed Edouard first, then herself, and was ready five minutes before Bourrienne reappeared.

“Take care, madame,” said Bourrienne laughing, “lest I tell the First Consul of your extreme punctuality.”

“What should I have to fear if you did?”

“He would keep you near him to give lessons in punctuality to Madame Bonaparte.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Madame de Montrevel, “you must forgive unpunctuality in a Creole.”

“But I believe you are a Creole also, madame.”

“Madame Bonaparte sees her husband every day,” said Madame de Montrevel, laughing, “whereas I am to see the First Consul for the first time.”

“Come, mother, let us go!” said Edouard.

The secretary drew aside to allow Madame de Montrevel to pass out. Fifteen minutes later they had reached the Luxembourg.

Bonaparte occupied the suite of rooms on the ground floor to the right. Josephine’s chamber and boudoir were on the first floor; a stairway led from the First Consul’s study to her room.

She was expecting Madame de Montrevel, for as soon as she saw her she opened her arms as to a friend. Madame de Montrevel had stopped respectfully at the door.

“Oh! come in, come in, madame!” said Josephine. “To-day is not the first that I know you; I have long known you through your excellent son, Roland. Shall I tell you what comforts me when Bonaparte leaves me? It is that Roland goes with him; for I fancy that, so long as Roland is with him, no harm will befall him. Well, won’t you kiss me?”

Madame de Montrevel was confused by so much kindness.

“We are compatriots, you know,” continued Josephine. “Oh! how well I remember M. de la Clémencière, and his beautiful gardens with the splendid fruit. I remember having seen a young girl who seemed its queen. You must have married very young, madame?”

“At fourteen.”

“Yes, you could not have been older to have a son of Roland’s age. But pray sit down.”

She led the way, making a sign to Madame de Montrevel to sit beside her.

“And that charming boy,” she said, pointing to Edouard, “is he also your son?” And she gave a sigh. “God has been prodigal to you, madame, and as He has given you all you can desire, will you not implore Him to send me a son.”

She pressed her lips enviously to Edouard’s forehead.

“My husband will be delighted to see you, he is so fond of your son, madame! You would not have been brought to me in the first instance, if he were not engaged with the minister of police. For that matter," she added, laughing, "you have arrived at an unfortunate moment; he is furious!"

"Oh!" cried Madame de Montrevel, frightened; "if that is so, I would rather wait."

"No, no! On the contrary, the sight of you will calm him. I don't know just what is the matter; but it seems a diligence was stopped on the outskirts of the Black Forest in broad daylight. Fouché will find his credit in danger if the thing goes on."

Madame de Montrevel was about to answer when the door opened and an usher appeared.

"The First Consul awaits Madame de Montrevel," he said.

"Go," said Josephine; "Bonaparte's time is so precious that he is almost as impatient as Louis XV., who had nothing to do. He does not like to wait."

Madame de Montrevel rose hastily and turned to take Edouard with her.

"No," said Josephine; "leave this beautiful boy with me. You will stay and dine with us, and Bonaparte can see him then. Besides, if my husband takes a fancy to see him, he can send for him. For the time, I am his second mamma. Come, what shall we do to amuse ourselves?"

"The First Consul must have a fine lot of weapons, madame," replied the boy.

"Yes, very fine ones. Well, I will show you the First Consul's arms."

Josephine, leading the child, went out of one door, and Madame de Montrevel followed the usher through the other.

On the way the countess met a fair man, with a pale face and haggard eye, who looked at her with an uneasiness that seemed habitual to him. She drew hastily aside to let him pass. The usher noticed her movement.

"That is the minister of police," he said in a low voice. Madame de Montrevel watched him as he disappeared, with a certain curiosity. Fouché was already at that time fatally celebrated. Just then the door of Bonaparte's study opened and his head was seen through the aperture. He caught sight of Madame de Montrevel.

"Come in, madame," he said; "come in."

Madame de Montrevel hastened her steps and entered the study.

"Come in," said Bonaparte, closing the door himself. "I have kept you waiting much against my will; but I had to give Fouché a scolding. You know I am very well satisfied with Roland, and that I intend to make a general of him at the first opportunity. When did you arrive?"

“This very moment, general.”

“Where from? Roland told me, but I have forgotten.”

“From Bourg.”

“What road?”

“Through Champagne.”

“Champagne! Then when did you reach Châtillon?”

“Yesterday morning at nine o’clock.”

“In that case, you must have heard of the stoppage of the diligence.”

“General — ”

“Yes, a diligence was stopped at ten in the morning, between Châtillon and Bar-sur-Seine.”

“General, it was ours.”

“Yours?”

“Yes.”

“You were in the diligence that was stopped?”

“I was.”

“Ah! now I shall get the exact details! Excuse me, but you understand my desire for correct information, don’t you? In a civilized country which has General Bonaparte for its chief magistrate, diligences can’t be stopped in broad daylight on the highroads with impunity, or — ”

“General, I can tell you nothing, except that those who stopped it were on horseback and masked.”

“How many were there?”

“Four.”

“How many men were there in the diligence?”

“Four, including the conductor.”

“And they didn’t defend themselves?”

“No, general.”

“The police report says, however, that two shots were fired.”

“Yes, general, but those two shots — ”

“Well?”

“Were fired by my son.”

“Your son? Why, he is in Vendée!”

“Roland, yes; but Edouard was with me.”

“Edouard! Who is Edouard?”

“Roland’s brother.”

“True, he spoke of him; but he is only a child.”

"He is not yet twelve, general."

"And it was he who fired the two shots?"

"Yes, general."

"Why didn't you bring him with you?"

"I did."

"Where is he?"

"I left him with Madame Bonaparte."

Bonaparte rang, and an usher appeared.

"Tell Josephine to bring the boy to me." Then, walking up and down his study, he muttered, "Four men! And a child taught them courage! Were any of the robbers wounded?"

"There were no balls in the pistols."

"What I no balls?"

"No; they belonged to the conductor, and he had taken the precaution to load them with powder only."

"Very good; his name shall be known."

Just then the door opened, and Madame Bonaparte entered, leading the boy by the hand.

"Come here," Bonaparte said to him.

Edouard went up to him without hesitation and made a military salute.

"So you fired at the robbers twice, did you?"

"There, you see, mamma, they were robbers!" interrupted the child.

"Of course they were robbers; I should like to hear any one declare they were not! Was it you who fired at them, when the men were afraid?"

"Yes, it was I, general. But unfortunately that coward of a conductor had loaded his pistols only with powder; otherwise I should have killed their leader."

"Then you were not afraid?"

"I?" replied the boy. "No, I am never afraid."

"You ought to be named Cornelia, madame," exclaimed Bonaparte, turning to Madame de Montrevel, who was leaning on Josephine's arm. Then he said to the child, kissing him: "Very good; we will take care of you. What would you like to be?"

"Soldier first."

"What do you mean by first?"

"Why, first a soldier, then later a colonel like my brother, and then a general like my father."

“It won’t be my fault if you are not,” answered the First Consul.

“Nor mine,” retorted the boy.

“Edouard!” exclaimed Madame de Montrevel, timidly.

“Now don’t scold him for answering properly;” and Bonaparte, lifting the child to the level of his face, kissed him.

“You must dine with us,” said he, “and to-night Bourrienne, who met you at the hotel, will install you in the Rue de la Victoire. You must stay there till Roland gets back; he will then find you suitable lodgings. Edouard shall go to the Prytanée, and I will marry off your daughter.”

“General!”

“That’s all settled with Roland.” Then, turning to Josephine, he said: “Take Madame de Montrevel with you, and try not to let her be bored. — And, Madame de Montrevel, if *your friend* (he emphasized the words) wishes to go to a milliner, prevent it; she can’t want bonnets, for she bought thirty-eight last month.”

Then, giving Edouard a friendly tap, he dismissed the two women with a wave of the hand.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SON OF THE MILLER OF LEGUERNO

We have said that at the very moment when Morgan and his three companions stopped the Geneva diligence between Bar-sur-Seine and Châtillon, Roland was entering Nantes.

If we are to know the result of his mission we must not grope our way, step by step, through the darkness in which the Abbé Bernier wrapped his ambitious projects, but we must join him later at the village of Muzillac, between Ambon and Guernic, six miles above the little bay into which the Vilaine River falls.

There we find ourselves in the heart of the Morbihan; that is to say, in the region that gave birth to the Chouannerie. It was close to Laval, on the little farm of the Poiriers, that the four Chouan brothers were born to Pierre Cottereau and Jeanne Moyné. One of their ancestors, a misanthropical woodcutter, a morose peasant, kept himself aloof from the other peasants as the *chat-huant* (screech-owl) keeps aloof from the other birds; hence the name Chouan, a corruption of *chat-huant*.

The name became that of a party. On the right bank of the Loire they said Chouans when they meant Bretons, just as on the left bank they said brigands when they meant Vendéans.

It is not for us to relate the death and destruction of that heroic family, nor follow to the scaffold the two sisters and a brother, nor tell of battlefields where Jean and René, martyrs to their faith, lay dying or dead. Many years have elapsed since the executions of Perrine, René and Pierre, and the death of Jean; and the martyrdom of the sisters, the exploits of the brothers have passed into legends. We have now to do with their successors.

It is true that these gars (lads) are faithful to their traditions. As they fought beside la Rouërie, Bois-Hardy and Bernard de Villeneuve, so did they fight beside Bourmont, Frotté, and Georges Cadoudal. Theirs was always the same courage, the same devotion — that of the Christian soldier, the faithful royalist. Their aspect is always the same, rough and savage; their weapons, the same gun or cudgel, called in those parts a “ferte.” Their garments are the same; a brown woollen cap, or a broad-brimmed hat scarcely covering the long straight hair that fell in tangles on their shoulders, the old *Aulerci Cenomani*, as in Cæsar's day, *promisso capillo*; they are the same Bretons with wide breeches of whom Martial said:

Tam laxa est...
Quam veteres braccoe Britonis pauperis.

To protect themselves from rain and cold they wore goatskin garments, made with the long hair turned outside; on the breasts of which, as countersign, some wore a scapulary and chaplet, others a heart, the heart of Jesus; this latter was the distinctive sign of a fraternity which withdrew apart each day for common prayer.

Such were the men, who, at the time we are crossing the borderland between the Loire-Inférieure and Morbihan, were scattered from La Roche-Bernard to Vannes, and from Quertemberg to Billiers, surrounding consequently the village of Muzillac.

But it needed the eye of the eagle soaring in the clouds, or that of the screech-owl piercing the darkness, to distinguish these men among the gorse and heather and underbrush where they were crouching.

Let us pass through this network of invisible sentinels, and after fording two streams, the affluents of a nameless river which flows into the sea near Billiers, between Arzal and Dangau, let us boldly enter the village of Muzillac.

All is still and sombre; a single light shines through the blinds of a house, or rather a cottage, which nothing distinguishes from its fellows. It is the fourth to the right on entering the village.

Let us put our eye to one of these chinks and look in.

We see a man dressed like the rich peasants of Morbihan, except that gold lace about a finger wide stripes the collar and buttonholes of his coat and also the edges of his hat. The rest of his dress consists of leathern trousers and high-topped boots. His sword is thrown upon a chair. A brace of pistols lies within reach of his hand. Within the fireplace the barrels of two or three muskets reflect the light of a blazing fire.

The man is seated before a table; a lamp lights some papers which he is reading with great attention, and illuminates his face at the same time.

The face is that of a man of thirty. When the cares of a partisan warfare do not darken it, its expression must surely be frank and joyous. Beautiful blond hair frames it; great blue eyes enliven it; the head, of a shape peculiarly Breton, seems to show, if we believe in Gall’s system, an exaggerated development of the organs of self-will. And the man has two names. That by which he is known to his soldiers, his familiar name, is Round-head; and his real name, received from brave and worthy parents, Georges Cadudal, or rather Cadoudal, tradition having changed the orthography of a name that is now historic.

Georges was the son of a farmer of the parish of Kerléano in the commune of Brech. The story goes that this farmer was once a miller. Georges had just received at the college of Vannes — distant only a few leagues from Brech — a good and solid education when the first appeals for a royalist insurrection were made in Vendée. Cadoudal listened to them, gathered together a number of his companions, and offered his services to Stofflet. But Stofflet insisted on seeing him at work before he accepted him. Georges asked nothing better. Such occasions were not long to seek in the Vendéan army. On the next day there was a battle; Georges went into it with such determination and made so desperate a rush that M. de Maulevrier’s former huntsman, on seeing him charge the Blues, could not refrain from saying aloud to Bonchamp, who was near him:

“If a cannon ball doesn’t take off that *Big Round Head*, it will roll far, I warrant you.”

The name clung to Cadoudal — a name by which, five centuries earlier, the lords of Malestroit, Penhoël, Beaumanoir and Rochefort designated the great Constable, whose ransom was spun by the women of Brittany.

“There’s the Big Round Head,” said they; “now we’ll exchange some good sword-play with the English.”

Unfortunately, at this time it was not Breton sword-thrusts against English, but Frenchmen against Frenchmen.

Georges remained in Vendée until after the defeat of Savenay. The whole Vendéan army was either left upon the battlefield or vanished in smoke. For three years, Georges had performed prodigies of valor, strength and dexterity; he now crossed the Loire and re-entered Morbihan with only one man left of all who had followed him.

That man became his aide-de-camp, or rather his brother-in-arms. He never left him, and in memory of the hard campaign they had made together he changed his name from Lemercier to Tiffauges. We have seen him at the ball of the Victims charged with a message to Morgan.

As soon as Cadoudal returned to his own part of the country, he fomented insurrection on his own responsibility. Bullets respected that big round head, and the big round head justified Stofflet's prediction. He succeeded La Rochejacquelin, d'Elbée, Bonchamp, Lescure, even Stofflet himself, and became their rival for fame, their superior in power; for it happened (and this will give an idea of his strength) that Cadoudal, almost single-handed, had been able to resist the government of Bonaparte, who had been First Consul for the last three months. The two leaders who continued with him, faithful to the Bourbon dynasty, were Frotté and Bourmont.

At the time of which we are now speaking, that is to say, the 26th of January, 1800, Cadoudal commanded three or four thousand men with whom he was preparing to blockade General Hatry in Vannes.

During the time that he awaited the First Consul's answer to the letter of Louis XVIII. he had suspended hostilities; but Tiffauges had arrived a couple of days before with it.

That letter was already on the way to England, whence it would be sent to Mittau; and since the First Consul would not accept peace on the terms dictated by Louis XVIII., Cadoudal, commander-in-chief of Louis XVIII. in the West, renewed his warfare against Bonaparte, intending to carry it on alone, if necessary, with his friend Tiffauges. For the rest, the latter was at Pouancé, where conferences were being held between Châtillon, d'Autichamp, the Abbé Bernier, and General Hédouville.

He was reflecting — this last survivor of the great warriors of the civil war — and the news he had just received was indeed a matter for deep reflection.

General Brune, the conqueror of Alkmaar and Castricum, the savior of Holland, had just been appointed to the command of the Republican forces in the West. He had reached Nantes three days previous, intending, at any cost, to annihilate Cadoudal and his Chouans.

At any cost, therefore, Cadoudal and his Chouans must prove to the commander-in-chief that they knew no fear, and had nothing to expect from intimidation.

Just then the gallop of a horse was heard; the rider no doubt had the countersign, for he passed without difficulty the various patrols stationed along the toad to La Roche-Bernard, and entered the village of Muzillac, also without difficulty.

He stopped before the door of the cottage in which Georges was sitting. The latter raised his head, listened, and, by way of precaution, laid his hands on his pistols, though it was probable that the new-comer was a friend.

The rider dismounted, strode up the path, and opened the door of the room where Georges was waiting.

“Ah! it’s you, Coeur-de-Roi,” said Cadoudal. “Where do you come from?”

“From Pouancé, general.”

“What news?”

“A letter from Tiffauges.”

“Give it to me.”

Georges snatched the letter hastily from Coeur-de-Roi’s hand and read it.

“Ah!” he exclaimed.

Then he read it a second time,

“Have you seen the man whose coming he speaks of?” inquired Cadoudal.

“Yes, general,” replied the courier.

“What sort of a man is he?”

“A handsome young fellow of twenty-six or seven.”

“What manner?”

“Determined.”

“That’s it. When does he arrive?”

“Probably to-night.”

“Did you safe-guard him along the road?”

“Yes; he’ll come safely.”

“Do it again. Nothing must happen to him; he is protected by Morgan.”

“That’s understood, general.”

“Anything more to say?”

“The advanced guard of the Republicans has reached La Roche-Bernard.”

“How many men?”

“About a thousand. They have a guillotine with them, and the commissioner of the executive power, Millière.”

“Are you sure?”

“I met them on the road. The commissioner was riding near the colonel, and I recognized him perfectly. He executed my brother, and I have sworn he shall die by my own hand."

"And you'll risk your life to keep your oath?"

"At the first opportunity."

"Perhaps it won't be long coming."

The gallop of a horse echoed through the street.

"Ah!" said Coeur-de-Roi, "that is probably the man you expect."

"No," replied Cadoudal, "this rider comes from the direction of Vannes."

The sound became more distinct, and it proved that Cadoudal was right.

The second horseman, like the first, halted at the gate, dismounted, and came into the room. The royalist leader recognized him at once, in spite of the large cloak in which he was wrapped.

"Is it you, Bénédicité?" he asked.

"Yes, general."

"Where do you come from?"

"From Vannes, where you sent me to watch the Blues.

"Well, what are the Blues doing?"

"Scaring themselves about dying of hunger if you blockade the town. In order to procure provisions General Hatry intends to carry off the supplies at Grandchamp. The general is to command the raid in person; and, to act more quickly, only a hundred men are to go."

"Are you tired, Bénédicité?"

"Never, general."

"And your horse?"

"He came fast, but he can do twelve or fifteen miles more without killing himself."

"Give him two hours' rest, a double feed of oats, and make him do thirty."

"On those conditions he can do them."

"Start in two hours. Be at Grandchamp by daybreak. Give the order in my name to evacuate the village. I'll take care of General Hatry and his column. Is that all you have to say?"

"No, I heard other news."

"What is it?"

"That Vannes has a new bishop."

"Ha! so they are giving us back our bishops?"

"So it seems; but if they are all like this one, they can keep them."

"Who is he?"

"Audrein!"

"The regicide?"

"Audrein the renegade."

"When is he coming?"

"To-night or to-morrow."

"I shall not go to meet him; but let him beware of falling into my men's hands."

Bénédicité and Coeur-de-Roi burst into a laugh which completed Cadoudal's thought.

"Hush!" cried Cadoudal.

The three men listened.

"This time it is probably he," observed Georges.

The gallop of a horse could be heard coming from the direction of La Roche-Bernard.

"It is certainly he," repeated Coeur-de-Roi.

"Then, my friends, leave me alone. You, Bénédicité, get to Grandchamp as soon as possible. You, Coeur-de-Roi, post thirty men in the courtyard; I want messengers to send in different directions. By the way, tell some one to bring the best that can be got for supper in the village."

"For how many, general?"

"Oh! two."

"Are you going out?"

"No, only to meet the man who is coming."

Two or three men had already taken the horses of the messengers into the courtyard. The messengers themselves disappeared.

Georges reached the gate on the street just as a horseman, pulling up his horse, looked about him and seemed to hesitate.

"He is here, sir," said Georges.

"Who is here?"

"He whom you seek."

"How do you know whom I am seeking?"

"I presume it is Georges Cadoudal, otherwise called Round-head."

"Exactly."

"Then I bid you welcome, Monsieur Roland de Montrevel, for I am the person you seek."

"Ah, ah!" exclaimed the young man, amazed.

Then, dismounting, he looked about as if for some one to take his mount.

“Throw the bridle over your horse’s neck, and don’t be uneasy about him. You will find him when you want him. Nothing is ever lost in Brittany; you are in the land of honesty.”

The young man made no remark, threw the bridle over his horse’s neck as he had been told, and followed Cadoudal, who walked before him.

“Only to show you the way, colonel,” said the leader of the Chouans.

They both entered the cottage, where an invisible hand had just made up the fire.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WHITE AND BLUE

Roland entered, as we have said, behind Georges, and as he entered cast a glance of careless curiosity around him. That glance sufficed to show him that they were alone.

“Are these your quarters, general?” asked Roland with a smile, turning the soles of his boots to the blaze.

“Yes, colonel.”

“They are singularly guarded.”

Georges smiled in turn.

“Do you say that because you found the road open from La Roche-Bernard here?” he asked.

“I did not meet a soul.”

“That does not prove that the road was not guarded.”

“Unless by the owls, who seemed to fly from tree to tree, and accompanied me all the way, general. In that case, I withdraw my assertion.”

“Exactly,” replied Cadoudal. “Those owls were my sentinels, sentinels with good eyes, inasmuch as they have this advantage over the eyes of men, they can see in the dark.”

“It is not the less true that I was fortunate in having inquired my way at La Roche-Bernard; for I didn’t meet even a cat who could have told me where to find you.”

“But if you had raised your voice at any spot on the road and asked: ‘Where shall I find Georges Cadoudal?’ a voice would have answered: ‘At the village of Muzillac, fourth house to the right.’ You saw no one, colonel; but at that very moment fifteen hundred men, or thereabout, knew that Colonel Roland, the First Consul’s aide-de-camp, was on his way to a conference with the son of the miller of Leguerno.”

“But if they knew that I was a colonel in the Republican service and aide-de-camp to the First Consul, how came they to let me pass?”

“Because they were ordered to do so.”

“Then you knew that I was coming?”

“I not only knew that you were coming, but also why you have come.”

Roland looked at him fixedly.

“Then it is useless for me to tell you; and you will answer me even though I say nothing?”

“You are about right.”

“The deuce! I should like to have a proof of this superiority of your police over ours.”

“I will supply it, colonel.”

“I shall receive it with much satisfaction, especially before this excellent fire, which also seems to have been expecting me.”

“You say truer than you know, colonel; and it is not the fire only that is striving to welcome you warmly.”

“Yes, but it does not tell me, any more than you have done, the object of my mission.”

“Your mission, which you do me the honor to extend to me, was primarily intended for the Abbé Bernier alone. Unhappily the Abbé Bernier, in the letter he sent his friend Martin Duboys, presumed a little on his strength. He offered his mediation to the First Consul.”

“Pardon me,” interrupted Roland, “you tell me something I did not know; namely that the Abbé Bernier had written to General Bonaparte.”

“I said he wrote to his friend Martin Duboys, which is very different. My men intercepted the letter and brought it to me. I had it copied, and forwarded the original, which I am certain reached the right hands. Your visit to General Hédouville proves it.”

“You know that General Hédouville is no longer in command at Nantes. General Brune has taken his place.”

“You may even say that General Brune commands at La Roche-Bernard, for a thousand Republican soldiers entered that town to-night about six o’clock, bringing with them a guillotine and the citizen commissioner-general Thomas Millière. Having the instrument, it was necessary to have the executioner.”

“Then you say, general, that I came to see the Abbé Bernier?”

“Yes; the Abbé Bernier had offered his mediation. But he forgot that at the present there are two Vendées — the Vendée of the left bank, and the Vendée of the right bank — and that, after treating with d’Autichamp, Châtillon, and Suzannet at Pouancé, it would still be necessary to negotiate with Frotté, Bourmont and Cadoudal — and where? That no one could tell — ”

“Except you, general.”

“So, with the chivalry that is the basis of your nature, you undertook to bring me the treaty signed on the 25th. The Abbé Bernier, d’Autichamp, Châtillon, and Suzannet signed your pass, and here you are.”

“On my word, general, I must admit that you are perfectly well-informed. The First Consul desires peace with all his heart. He knows that in you he has a brave and honorable adversary, and being unable to meet you himself, since you were not likely to come to Paris, he expedited me to you in his behalf.”

“That is to say, to the Abbé Bernier.”

“That can hardly matter to you, general, if I bind myself to make the First Consul ratify what may be agreed upon between you and me. What are your conditions of peace?”

“They are very simple, colonel: that the First Consul shall restore his Majesty Louis XVIII. to the throne; that he himself be constable, lieutenant-general, general-in-chief by land and sea, and I his first subordinate.”

“The First Consul has already replied to that demand.”

“And that is why I have decided to reply myself to his response.”

“When?”

“This very night, if occasion offers.”

“In what way?”

“By resuming hostilities.”

“But are you aware that Châtillon, d’Autichamp and Suzannet have laid down their arms?”

“They are the leaders of the Vendéans, and in the name of the Vendéans they can do as they see fit. I am the leader of the Chouans, and in the name of the Chouans I shall do what suits me.”

“Then you condemn this unhappy land to a war of extermination, general!”

“It is a martyrdom to which I summon all Christians and royalists.”

“General Brune is at Nantes with the eight thousand prisoners just returned to us by the English after their defeats at Alkmaar and Castricum.”

“That is the last time they will have the chance. The Blues have taught us the bad habit of not making prisoners. As for the number of our enemies, we don’t care for that; it is a mere detail.”

“If General Brune with his eight thousand men, joined to the twenty thousand he has received from General Hédouville, is not sufficient, the First Consul has decided to march against you in person with one hundred thousand men.”

Cadoudal smiled.

“We will try to prove to him,” he said, “that we are worthy to fight against him.”

“He will burn your towns.”

“We shall retire to our huts.”

“He will burn your huts.”

“We will live in the woods.”

“Reflect, general.”

“Do me the honor to remain here forty-eight hours, colonel, and you will see that my reflections are already made.”

“I am tempted to accept.”

“Only, colonel, don’t ask for more than I can give; a night’s sleep beneath a thatched roof or wrapped in a cloak under an oak tree, a horse to follow me, and a safe-guard when you leave me.”

“I accept.”

“Have I your word, colonel, that you will not interfere with any orders I give, and will do nothing to defeat the surprises I may attempt?”

“I am too curious to see for that. You have my word, general.”

“Whatever takes place before your eyes?”

“Whatever takes place before my eyes, I renounce the rôle of actor and confine myself wholly to that of spectator. I wish to say to the First Consul: ‘I have seen.’“

Cadoudal smiled.

“Well, you shall see,” said he.

At that moment the door opened, and two peasants brought in a table all laid, on which stood a smoking bowl of cabbage-soup and a piece of lard; an enormous pot of cider, just drawn from the cask, was foaming over the edges of the jug between two glasses. A few buckwheat cakes served as a desert to this modest repast. The table was laid for two.

“You see, Monsieur de Montrevel, that my lads hoped you would do me the honor to sup with me.”

“Faith! they were not far wrong. I should have asked for supper, had you not invited me; and I might have been forced to seize some had you not invited me."

"Then fall to!"

The young colonel sat down gayly.

"Excuse the repast I offer you," said Cadoudal; "unlike your generals, I don't make prize money; my soldiers feed me. Have you anything else for us, Brise-Bleu?"

"A chicken fricassee, general."

"That's your dinner, Monsieur de Montrevel."

"A feast! Now, I have but one fear, general."

"What is it?"

"All will go well for the eating, but when it comes to drinking — "

"Don't you like cider? The devil! I'm sorry; cider or water, that's my cellar."

"Oh! that's not it; but whose health are we going to drink?"

"Is that all, sir?" said Cadoudal, with great dignity. "We will drink to the health of our common mother, France. We are serving her with different minds, but, I hope, the same hearts. To *France*, Monsieur," said Cadoudal, filling the two glasses.

"To *France*, general!" replied Roland, clinking his glass against that of Georges.

And both gayly reseated themselves, their consciences at rest, and attacked the soup with appetites that were not yet thirty years old.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE LAW OF RETALIATION

“Now, general,” said Roland, when supper was over and the two young men, with their elbows on the table and their legs stretched out before the blazing fire, began to feel that comfortable sensation that comes of a meal which youth and appetite have seasoned. “Now for your promise to show me things which I can report to the First Consul.”

“You promised, remember, not to object to them.”

“Yes, but I reserve the right, in case you wound my conscience too severely, to withdraw.”

“Only give time to throw a saddle on the back of your horse, or of mine, if yours is too tired, colonel, and you are free.”

“Very good.”

“As it happens,” said Cadoudal, “events will serve you. I am here, not only as general, but as judge, though it is long since I have had a case to try. You told me, colonel, that General Brune was at Nantes; I knew it. You told me his advanced guard was only twelve miles away, at La Roche-Bernard; I knew that also. But a thing you may not know is that this advanced guard is not commanded by a soldier like you and me, but by citizen Thomas Millière, Commissioner of the Executive authorities. Another thing of which you may perhaps be ignorant is that citizen Thomas Millière does not fight like us with cannon, guns, bayonets, pistols and swords, but with an instrument invented by your Republican philanthropists, called the guillotine.”

“It is impossible, sir,” cried Roland, “that under the First Consul any one can make that kind of war.”

“Ah! let us understand each other, colonel. I don’t say that the First Consul makes it; I say it is made in his name.”

“And who is the scoundrel that abuses the authority given him, to make war with a staff of executioners?”

“I have told you his name; he is called Thomas Millière. Question whom you please, colonel, and throughout all Vendée and Brittany you’ll hear but one voice on that man. From the day of the rising in Vendée and Brittany, now six years ago, Millière has been, always and everywhere, the most active agent of the Terror. For him the Terror did not end with Robespierre. He denounced to his superiors, or caused to be denounced to himself, the Breton and Vendéan soldiers, their parents, friends, brothers, sisters, wives, even the wounded and dying; he shot or guillotined them all without a trial. At Daumeray, for instance, he left a trail of blood behind him which is not yet, can never be, effaced. More than eighty of the inhabitants were slaughtered before his eyes. Sons were killed in the arms of their mothers, who vainly stretched those bloody arms to Heaven imploring vengeance. The successive pacifications of Brittany and Vendée have never slaked the thirst for murder which burns his entrails. He is the same in 1800 that he was in 1793. Well, this man — ”

Roland looked at the general.

“This man,” continued the general, with the utmost calmness, “is to die. Seeing that society did not condemn him, I have condemned him.”

“What! Die at La Roche-Bernard, in the midst of the Republicans; in spite of his bodyguard of assassins and executioners?”

“His hour has struck; he is to die.”

Cadoudal pronounced these words with such solemnity that no doubt remained in Roland’s mind, not only as to the sentence, but also the execution of it. He was thoughtful for an instant.

“And you believe that you have, the right to judge and condemn that man, guilty as he is?”

“Yes; for that man has judged and condemned, not the guilty but the innocent.”

“If I said to you: ‘On my return to Paris I will demand the arrest and trial of that man,’ would you not trust my word?”

“I would trust your word; but I should say to you: ‘A maddened wild beast escapes from its cage, a murderer from his prison; men are men, subject to error. They have sometimes condemned the innocent, they might spare the guilty.’ My justice is more certain than yours, colonel, for it is the justice of God. The man will die.”

“And by what right do you claim that your justice, the justice of a man liable to error like other men, is the justice of God?”

“Because I have made God a sharer in that justice. Oh! my condemnation of that man is not of yesterday.”

“How do you mean?”

“In the midst of a storm when thunder roared without cessation, and the lightning flashed from minute to minute, I raised my arms to heaven, and I said to God: ‘O God! whose look is that lightning, whose voice is that thunder, if this man ought to die, extinguish that lightning, still the thunder for ten minutes. The silence of the skies, the darkness of the heavens shall be thy answer!’ Watch in hand, I counted eleven minutes without a flash or a sound. I saw at the point of a promontory a boat, tossed by a terrible tempest, a boat with but one man in it, in danger every minute of sinking; a wave lifted it as the breath of an infant lifts a plume, and cast it on the rocks. The boat flew to pieces; the man clung to the rock, and all the people cried out: ‘He is lost!’ His father was there, his two brothers were there, but none dared to succor him. I raised my arms to the Lord and said: ‘If Millière is condemned by Thee as by me, O God, let me save that man; with no help but thine let me save him!’ I stripped, I knotted a rope around my arm, and I swam to the rock. The water seemed to subside before my breast. I reached the man. His father and brothers held the rope. He gained the land. I could have returned as he did, fastening the rope to the rocks. I flung it away from me; I trusted to God and cast myself into the waves. They floated me gently and surely to the shore, even as the waters of the Nile bore Moses’ basket to Pharaoh’s daughter. The enemy’s outposts were stationed around the village of Saint-Nolf; I was hidden in the woods of Grandchamp with fifty men. Recommending my soul to God, I left the woods alone. ‘Lord God,’ I said, ‘if it be Thy will that Millière die, let that sentry fire upon me and miss me; then I will return to my men and leave that sentry unharmed, for Thou wilt have been with him for an instant.’ I walked to the Republican; at twenty paces he fired and missed me. Here is the hole in my hat, an inch from my head; the hand of God had aimed that weapon. That happened yesterday. I thought that Millière was at Nantes. To-night they came and told me that Millière and his guillotine were at La Roche-Bernard. Then I said: ‘God has brought him to me; he shall die.’“

Roland listened with a certain respect to the superstitious narrative of the Breton leader. He was not surprised to find such beliefs and such poetry in a man born in face of a savage sea, among the Druid monuments of Karnac. He realized that Millière was indeed condemned, and that God, who had thrice seemed to approve his judgment, alone could save him. But one last question occurred to him.

“How will you strike him?” he asked.

“Oh!” said Georges, “I do not trouble myself about that; he will be executed.”

One of the two men who had brought in the supper table now entered the room.

“Brise-Bleu,” said Cadoudal, “tell Coeur-de-Roi that I wish to speak to him.”

Two minutes later the Breton presented himself.

“Coeur-de-Roi,” said Cadoudal, “did you not tell me that the murderer Thomas Millière was at Roche-Bernard?”

“I saw him enter the town side by side with the Republican colonel, who did not seem particularly flattered by such companionship.”

“Did you not add that he was followed by his guillotine?”

“I told you his guillotine followed between two cannon, and I believe if the cannon could have got away the guillotine would have been left to go its way alone.”

“What precautions does Millière take in the towns he visits?”

“He has a special guard about him, and the streets around his house are barricaded. He carries pistols always at hand.”

“In spite of that guard, in spite of that barricade and the pistols, will you undertake to reach him?”

“I will, general.”

“Because of his crimes, I have condemned that man; he must die.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Coeur-de-Roi, “the day of justice has come at last!”

“Will you undertake to execute my sentence, Coeur-de-Roi?”

“I will, general.”

“Go then, Coeur-de-Roi. Take the number of men you need; devise what stratagem you please, but reach the man, and strike.”

“If I die, general — ”

“Fear not; the curate of Leguerno shall say enough masses in your behalf to keep your poor soul out of purgatory. But you will not die, Coeur-de-Roi.”

“That’s all right, general. Now that I am sure of the masses, I ask nothing more. I have my plan.”

“When will you start?”

“To-night.”

“When will he die?”

"To-morrow."

"Go. See that three hundred men are ready to follow me in half an hour."

Coeur-de-Roi went out as simply as he had entered.

"You see," said Cadoudal, "the sort of men I command. Is your First Consul as well served as I, Monsieur de Montrevel?"

"By some, yes."

"Well, with me it is not some, but all."

Bénédicité entered and questioned Georges with a look.

"Yes," replied Georges, with voice and nod.

Bénédicité went out.

"Did you see any one on your way here?" asked Cadoudal.

"Not one."

"I asked for three hundred men in half an hour, and they will be here in that time. I might have asked for five hundred, a thousand, two thousand, and they would have responded as promptly."

"But," said Roland, "you have, in number at least, a limit you cannot exceed."

"Do you want to know my effective? It is easily told, I won't tell you myself, for you wouldn't believe me. Wait. I will have some one tell you."

He opened the door and called out: "Branche-d'Or!"

Two seconds later Branche-d'Or appeared.

"This is my major-general," said Cadoudal, laughing. "He fulfils the same functions for me that General Berthier does for the First Consul. Branche-d'Or — "

"General."

"How many men are stationed along the road from here to La Roche-Bernard, which the gentleman followed in coming to see me?"

"Six hundred on the Arzal moor, six hundred among the Marzan gorse, three hundred at Péaule, three hundred at Billiers."

"Total, eighteen hundred. How many between Noyal and Muzillac?"

"Four hundred."

"Two thousand two hundred. How many between here and Vannes?"

"Fifty at Theix, three hundred at the Trinité, six hundred between the Trinité and Muzillac."

"Three thousand two hundred. And from Ambon to Leguerno?"

"Twelve hundred."

"Four thousand four hundred. And in the village around me, in the houses, the gardens, the cellars?"

"Five to six hundred, general."

"Thank you, Bénédicité."

He made a sign with his head and Bénédicité went out.

"You see," said Cadoudal, simply, "about five thousand. Well, with those five thousand men, all belonging to this country, who know every tree, every stone, every bush, I can make war against the hundred thousand men the First Consul threatens to send against me."

Roland smiled.

"You think that is saying too much, don't you?"

"I think you are boasting a little, general; boasting of your men, rather."

"No; for my auxiliaries are the whole population. None of your generals can make a move unknown to me; send a despatch without my intercepting it; find a retreat where I shall not pursue him. The very soil is royalist and Christian! In default of the inhabitants, it speaks and tells me: 'The Blues passed here; the slaughterers are hidden there!' For the rest, you can judge for yourself."

"How?"

"We are going on an expedition about twenty-four miles from here. What time is it?"

Both young men looked at their watches.

"Quarter to twelve," they said together.

"Good!" said Georges, "our watches agree; that is a good sign. Perhaps some day our hearts will do the same."

"You were saying, general?"

"I was saying that it was a quarter to twelve, colonel; and that at six o'clock, before day, we must be twenty miles from here. Do you want to rest?"

"I!"

"Yes; you can sleep an hour."

"Thanks; it's unnecessary."

"Then we will start whenever you are ready."

"But your men?"

"Oh! my men are ready."

"Where?"

"Everywhere."

“I should like to see them.”

“You shall.”

“When?”

“Whenever agreeable to you. My men are very discreet, and never show themselves till I make the signal.”

“So that whenever I want to see them — ”

“You will tell me; I shall give the signal and they’ll appear.”

“Let us start, general.”

“Yes, let us start.”

The two young men wrapped themselves in their cloaks and went out. At the door Roland collided against a small group of five men. These five men wore Republican uniforms; one of them had sergeant stripes on his sleeve.

“What is all this?” asked Roland.

“Nothing,” replied Cadoudal, laughing.

“But who are these men?”

“Coeur-de-Roi and his party; they are starting on that expedition you know of.”

“Then they expect by means of this uniform — ”

“Oh! you shall know all, colonel; I have no secrets from you.” Then, turning to the little group, Cadoudal called: “Coeur-de-Roi!”

The man with the stripes on his sleeves left the group, and came to Cadoudal.

“Did you call me, general?” asked the pretended sergeant.

“Yes, I want to know your plan.”

“Oh! general, it is very simple.”

“Let me judge of that.”

“I put this paper in the muzzle of my gun.” Coeur-de-Roi showed a large envelope with an official red seal, which had once, no doubt, contained some Republican despatch intercepted by the Chouans. “I present myself to the sentries, saying: ‘Despatch from the general of division.’ I enter the first guardhouse and ask to be shown the house of the citizen-commissioner; they show me, I thank them; always best to be polite. I reach the house, meet a second sentry to whom I tell the same tale as to the first; I go up or down to citizen Millière accordingly as he lives in the cellar or the garret. I enter without difficulty, you understand — ’Despatch from the general of division’. I find him in his study or elsewhere, present my paper, and while he opens it, I kill him with this dagger, here in my sleeve.”

“Yes, but you and your men?”

“Ah, faith! In God’s care; we are defending his cause, it is for him to take care of us.”

“Well, you see, colonel,” said Cadoudal, “how easy it all is. Let us mount, colonel! Good luck, Coeur-de-Roi!”

“Which of these two horses am I to take?” asked Roland.

“Either; one is as good as the other; each has an excellent pair of English pistols in its holsters.”

“Loaded?”

“And well-loaded, colonel; that’s a job I never trust to any one.”

“Then we’ll mount.”

The two young men were soon in their saddles, and on the road to Vannes; Cadoudal guiding Roland, and Branche-d’Or, the major-general of the army, as Georges called him, following about twenty paces in the rear.

When they reached the end of the village, Roland darted his eyes along the road, which stretches in a straight line from Muzillac to the Trinité. The road, fully exposed to view, seemed absolutely solitary.

They rode on for about a mile and a half, then Roland said: “But where the devil are your men?”

“To right and left, before and behind us.”

“Ha, what a joke!”

“It’s not a joke, colonel; do you think I should be so rash as to risk myself thus without scouts?”

“You told me, I think, that if I wished to see your men I had only to say so.”

“I did say so.”

“Well, I wish to see them.”

“Wholly, or in part?”

“How many did you say were with you?”

“Three hundred.”

“Well, I want to see one hundred and fifty.”

“Halt!” cried Cadoudal.

Putting his hands to his mouth he gave the hoot of the screech-owl, followed by the cry of an owl; but he threw the hoot to the right and the cry to the left.

Almost instantly, on both sides of the road, human forms could be seen in motion, bounding over the ditch which separated the bushes from the road, and then ranging themselves beside the horses.

“Who commands on the right?” asked Cadoudal.

“I, Moustache,” replied a peasant, coming near.

“Who commands on the left?” repeated the general.

“I, Chante-en-hiver,” replied another peasant, also approaching him.

“How many men are with you, Moustache?”

“One hundred.”

“How many men are with you, Chante-en-hiver?”

“Fifty.”

“One hundred and fifty in all, then?” asked Georges.

“Yes,” replied the two Breton leaders.

“Is that your number, colonel?” asked Cadoudal laughing.

“You are a magician, general.”

“No; I am a poor peasant like them; only I command a troop in which each brain knows what it does, each heart beats singly for the two great principles of this world, religion and monarchy.” Then, turning to his men, Cadoudal asked: “Who commands the advanced guard?”

“Fend-l’air,” replied the two Chouans.

“And the rear-guard?”

“La Giberne.”

The second reply was made with the same unanimity as the first.

“Then we can safely continue our way?”

“Yes, general; as if you were going to mass in your own village.”

“Let us ride on then, colonel,” said Cadoudal to Roland. Then turning to his men he cried: “Be lively, my lads.”

Instantly every man jumped the ditch and disappeared. For a few seconds the crackling of twigs on the bushes, and the sound of steps among the underbrush, was heard. Then all was silent.

“Well,” asked Cadoudal, “do you think that with such men I have anything to fear from the Blues, brave as they may be?”

Roland heaved a sigh; he was of Cadoudal’s opinion.

They rode on. About three miles from Trinité they caught sight of a black spot approaching along the road with great rapidity. As it became more distinct this spot stopped suddenly.

“What is that?” asked Roland.

“As you see, a man,” replied Cadoudal.

“Of course; but who is this man?”

“You might have guessed from the rapidity of his coming; he is a messenger.”

“Why does he stop?”

“Because he has seen us, and does not know whether to advance or retreat.”

“What will he do?”

“Wait before deciding.”

“For what?”

“A signal.”

“Will he answer the signal?”

“He will not only answer but obey it. Will you have him advance or retreat; or will you have him step aside.”

“I wish him to advance; by that means we shall know the news he brings.”

Cadoudal gave the call of the cuckoo with such perfection that Roland looked about him for the bird.

“It was I,” said Cadoudal, “you need not look for it.”

“Is the messenger going to come?”

“Not-going to, he is coming.”

The messenger had already started, and was rapidly approaching; in a few seconds he was beside his general.

“Ah!” said the latter, “is that you, Monte-à-l’assaut?”

The general stooped, and Monte-à-l’assaut said a few words in his ear.

“Bénédicité has already warned me,” said Georges. Then turning to Roland, he said, “Something of importance is to happen in the village of the Trinité in a quarter of an hour, which you ought to see. Come, hurry up.”

And, setting the example, he put his horse to a gallop. Roland did the same.

When they reached the village they could see from a distance, by the light of some pine torches, a tumultuous mob in the market square. The cries and movements of this mob bespoke some grave occurrence.

“Fast, fast!” cried Cadoudal.

Roland asked no better; he dug his spurs in his horse’s belly.

At the clatter of horses’ hoofs the peasants scattered. There were five or six hundred of them at least, all armed.

Cadoudal and Roland found themselves in a circle of light in the midst of cries and agitation.

The crowd was pressing more particularly toward the opening of a street which led to the village of Tridon. A diligence was coming down that street escorted by a dozen Chouans; two on either side of the postilion, ten others guarding the doors. The carriage stopped in the middle of the market-square. All were so intent upon the diligence that they paid but scant attention to Cadoudal.

"Hola," shouted Georges. "What is all this?"

At this well known voice, everyone turned round, and heads were uncovered.

"The Big Round Head!" they murmured.

"Yes," said Cadoudal.

A man went up to Georges.

"Didn't Bénédicité and Monte-à-l'assaut notify you?" he inquired.

"Yes. Is that the diligence from Ploermel to Vannes that you are bringing back?"

"Yes, general. It was stopped between Tréfléon and Saint-Nolf."

"Is he in it?"

"We think so."

"Act according to your consciences; if it is a crime toward God, take it on yourselves; I take only the responsibility toward men. I will be present at what takes place; but I will not share in it — either to hinder or help."

"Well," demanded a hundred voices, "what does he say, Sabre-tout?"

"He says we must act according to our consciences, and that he washes his hands of it."

"Long live the Big Round Head!" cried all the people, rushing toward the diligence.

Cadoudal remained motionless in the midst of this crowd. Roland stood near him, also motionless, but full of curiosity; for he was completely ignorant of who, or what, was in question.

The man who had just spoken to Cadoudal, and whom his companions called Sabre-tout, opened the door. The travellers were huddled together and trembling in the darkness within.

"If you have nothing to reproach yourselves with against God or the king," said Sabre-tout in a full sonorous voice, "descend without fear. We are not brigands, we are Christians and royalists."

This declaration no doubt reassured the travellers, for a man got out, then two women, then a mother pressing her child in her arms, and finally another man. The Chouans examined them attentively as they came down the carriage steps; not finding the man they wanted, they said to each traveller, “Pass on.”

One man alone remained in the coach. A Chouan thrust a torch in the vehicle, and by its light they could see he was a priest.

“Minister of the Lord,” said Sabre-tout, “why did you not descend with the others? Did you not hear me say we were Christians and royalists?”

The priest did not move; but his teeth chattered.

“Why this terror?” continued Sabre-tout. “Does not your cloth plead for you? The man who wears a cassock can have done nothing against royalty or religion.”

The priest crouched back, murmuring: “Mercy! mercy!”

“Why mercy?” demanded Sabre-tout, “do you feel that you are guilty, wretch?”

“Oh! oh!” exclaimed Roland, “is that how you royalists and Christians speak to a man of God!”

“That man,” said Cadoudal, “is not a man of God, but a man of the devil.”

“Who is he, then?”

“Both an atheist and a regicide; he denied his God and voted for the death of the king. That is the Conventional Audrein.”

Roland shuddered. “What will they do?” he asked.

“He gave death, he will receive death,” answered Cadoudal.

During this time the Chouans had pulled Audrein out of the diligence.

“Ha! is it you, bishop of Vannes?” cried Sabre-tout.

“Mercy!” begged the bishop.

“We were informed of your arrival, and were waiting for you.”

“Mercy!” repeated the bishop for the third time.

“Have you your pontifical robes with you?”

“Yes, my friends, I have.”

“Then dress yourself as a prelate; it is long since we have seen one.”

A trunk marked with the prelate’s name was taken from the diligence and opened. They took the bishop’s robes from it, and handed them to Audrein, who put them on. Then, when every vestment was in its place, the peasants ranged themselves in a circle, each with his musket in his hand. The glare of the torches was reflected on the barrels, casting evil gleams.

Two men took the priest and led him into the circle, supporting him beneath his arms. He was pale as death. There was a moment of lugubrious silence.

A voice broke it. It was that of Sabre-tout.

“We are about to judge you,” said the Chouan. “Priest of God, you have betrayed the Church; child of France, you have condemned your king to death.”

“Alas! alas!” stammered the priest.

“Is it true?”

“I do not deny it.”

“Because it is impossible to deny. What have you to say in justification?”

“Citizens — ”

“We are not citizens,” cried Sabre-tout, in a voice thunder, “we are royalists.”

“Gentlemen — ”

“We are not gentlemen; we are Chouans.”

“My friends — ”

“We are not your friends; we are your judges. You judges are questioning you; answer.”

“I repent of what I did, and I ask pardon of God and men.”

“Men cannot pardon you,” replied the same implacable voice; “for, pardoned to-day, you would sin to-morrow. You may change your skin, but never your heart. You have nothing to expect from men but death; as for God, implore his mercy.”

The regicide bowed his head; the renegade bent his knee. But suddenly drawing himself up, he cried: “I voted the king’s death, it is true, but with a reservation — ”

“What reservation?”

“The time of the execution.”

“Sooner or later, it was still the king’s death which you voted, and the king was innocent.”

“True, true,” said the priest, “but I was afraid.”

“Then you are not only a regicide, and an apostate, but also a coward. We are not priests, but we are more just than you. You voted the death of the innocent; we vote the death of the guilty. You have ten minutes in which to prepare to meet your God.”

The bishop gave a cry of terror and fell upon both knees; the church bells rang, as if of their own impulse, and two of the men present, accustomed to the offices of the church, intoned the prayers for the dying. It was some time before the bishop found words with which to respond. He turned affrighted glances in supplication to his judges one after the other, but, not one face met his with even the consolation of mere pity. The torches, flickering in the wind, lent them, on the contrary, a savage and terrible expression. Then at last he mingled his voice with the voices that were praying for him.

The judges allowed him time to follow the funeral prayer to its close. In the meantime others were preparing a pile of wood.

“Oh!” cried the priest, beholding these preparations with growing terror; “would you have the cruelty to kill me thus?”

“No,” replied his inflexible accuser, “flames are the death of martyrs; you are not worthy of such a death. Apostate, the hour has come!”

“Oh, my God! my God!” cried the priest, raising his arms to heaven.

“Stand up!” said the Chouan.

The priest tried to obey, but his strength failed him, and he fell again to his knees.

“Will you let that murder be done before your eyes?” Roland asked Cadoudal.

“I said that I washed my hands of it,” replied the latter.

“Pilate said that, and Pilate’s hands are to this day red with the blood of Jesus Christ.”

“Because Jesus Christ was a righteous man; this man is a Barabbas.”

“Kiss your cross! kiss your cross!” cried Sabre-tout.

The prelate looked at him with a terrified air, but without obeying. It was evident that he no longer saw, no longer heard.

“Oh!” cried Roland, making an effort to dismount, “it shall never be said that I let a man be murdered before me, and did not try to, save him.”

A threatening murmur rose around him; his words had been overheard. That was all that was needed to excite the young man.

“Ah! is that the way of it?” he cried, carrying his hand to one of his holsters.

But with a movement rapid as thought, Cadoudal seized his hand, and, while Roland struggled vainly to free himself from this grip of iron, he shouted: “Fire!”

Twenty shots resounded instantly, and the bishop fell, an inert mass.

“Ah!” cried Roland. “What have you done?”

“Forced you to keep your promise,” replied Cadoudal; “you swore to see all and hear all without offering any opposition.”

“So perish all enemies of God and the king,” said Sabre-tout, in a solemn voice.

“Amen!” responded the spectators with one voice of sinister unanimity.

Then they stripped the body of its sacerdotal ornaments, which they flung upon the pile of wood, invited the other travellers to take their places in the diligence, replaced the postilion in his saddle, and, opening their ranks to give passage to the coach, cried: “Go with God!”

The diligence rolled rapidly away.

“Come, let us go,” cried Cadoudal, “we have still twelve miles to do, and we have lost an hour here.” Then, addressing the executioners, he said: “That man was guilty; that man is punished. Human justice and divine justice are satisfied. Let prayers for the dead be said over his body, and give him Christian burial; do you hear?” And sure of being obeyed, Cadoudal put his horse to a gallop.

Roland seemed to hesitate for a moment whether to follow him or not; then, as if resolving to accomplish a duty, he said: “I will go to the end.”

Spurring his horse in the direction taken by Cadoudal he reached the Chouan leader in a few strides. Both disappeared in the darkness, which grew thicker and thicker as the men left the place where the torches were illuminating the dead priest’s face and the fire was consuming his vestments.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE DIPLOMACY OF GEORGES CADOUDAL

The feeling that Roland experienced as he followed Georges Cadoudal resembled that of a man half-awakened, who is still under the influence of a dream, and returns gradually from the confines which separate night from day. He strives to discover whether the ground he walks on is that of fiction or reality, and the more he burrows in the dimness of his brain the further he buries himself in doubt.

A man existed for whom Roland felt a worship almost divine. Accustomed to live in the atmosphere of glory which surrounded that man, to see others obey his orders, and to obey them himself with a promptness and abnegation that were almost Oriental, it seemed amazing to him to encounter, at the opposite ends of France, two organized powers, enemies of the power of that man, and prepared to struggle against it. Suppose a Jew of Judas Maccabeus, a worshipper of Jehovah, having, from his infancy, heard him called the King of kings, the God of strength, of vengeance, of armies, the Eternal, coming suddenly face to face with the mysterious Osiris of the Egyptians, or the thundering Jupiter of the Greeks.

His adventures at Avignon and Bourg with Morgan and the Company of Jehu, his adventures in the villages of Muzillac and the Trinité with Cadoudal and his Chouans, seemed to him some strange initiation in an unknown religion; but like those courageous neophytes who risk death to learn the secrets of initiation, he resolved to follow to the end.

Besides he was not without a certain admiration for these exceptional characters; nor did he measure without a certain amazement these revolted Titans, challenging his god; he felt they were in no sense common men — neither those who had stabbed Sir John in the Chartreuse of Seillon, nor those who had shot the bishop of Vannes at the village of the Trinité.

And now, what was he to see? He was soon to know, for they had ridden five hours and a half and the day was breaking.

Beyond the village of Tridon they turned across country; leaving Vannes to the left, they reached Tréfléon. At Tréfléon, Cadoudal, still followed by his major-general, Branche-d’Or, had found Monte-à-l’assaut and Chante-en-hiver. He gave them further orders, and continued on his way, bearing to the left and skirting the edges of a little wood which lies between Grandchamp and Larré. There Cadoudal halted, imitated, three separate times in succession, the cry of an owl, and was presently surrounded by his three hundred men.

A grayish light was spreading through the sky beyond Tréfléon and Saint-Nolf; it was not the rising of the sun, but the first rays of dawn. A heavy mist rose from the earth and prevented the eye from seeing more than fifty feet beyond it.

Cadoudal seemed to be expecting news before risking himself further.

Suddenly, about five hundred paces distant, the crowing of a cock was heard. Cadoudal pricked up his ears; his men looked at each other and laughed.

The cock crowed again, but nearer.

“It is he,” said Cadoudal; “answer him.”

The howling of a dog came from within three feet of Roland, but so perfectly imitated that the young man, although aware of what it was, looked about him for the animal that was uttering such lugubrious plaints. Almost at the same moment he saw a man coming rapidly through the mist, his form growing more and more distinct as he approached. The new-comer saw the two horsemen, and went toward them.

Cadoudal rode forward a few paces, putting his finger to his lips, as if to request the man to speak low. The latter, therefore, did not pause until he was close beside his general.

“Well, Fleur-d’épine,” asked Georges, “have we got them?”

“Like a mouse in a trap; not one can re-enter Vannes, if you say the word.”

“I desire nothing better. How many are there?”

“One hundred men, commanded by the general himself.”

“How many wagons?”

“Seventeen.”

“When did they start?”

“They must be about a mile and three-quarters from here.”

“What road have they taken?”

“Grandchamp to Vannes.”

“So that, if I deploy from Meucon to Plescop — ”

"You'll bar the way."

"That's all."

Cadoudal called his four lieutenants, Chante-en-hiver, Monte-à-l'assaut, Fend-l'air, and La Giberne, to him, gave each of them fifty men, and each with his men disappeared like shadows in the heavy mist, giving the well-known hoot, as they vanished. Cadoudal was left with a hundred men, Branche-d'Or and Fleur-d'épine. He returned to Roland.

"Well, general," said the latter, "is everything satisfactory?"

"Yes, colonel, fairly so," replied the Chouan; "but you can judge for yourself in half an hour."

"It will be difficult to judge of anything in that mist."

Cadoudal looked about him.

"It will lift in half an hour," said he. "Will you utilize the time by eating a mouthful and drinking a glass?"

"Faith!" said the young man, "I must admit that the ride has hollowed me."

"I make a point," said Georges, "of eating the best breakfast I can before fighting."

"Then you are going to fight?"

"I think so."

"Against whom?"

"Why, the Republicans, and as we have to do with General Hatry, I doubt if he surrenders without resistance."

"Do the Republicans know they are going to fight you?"

"They haven't the least idea."

"So it is to be a surprise?"

"Not exactly, inasmuch as when the fog lifts they will see us as soon as we see them." Then, turning to the man who seemed to be in charge of the provisions, Cadoudal added, "Brise-Bleu, is there anything for breakfast?"

Brise-Bleu nodded affirmatively, went into the wood, and came out dragging after him a donkey loaded with two baskets. He spread a cloak on a rise of the ground, and placed on it a roast chicken, a bit of cold salt pork, some bread and buckwheat cakes. This time Brise-Bleu had provided luxury in the shape of a bottle of wine and a glass.

Cadoudal motioned Roland to the table and the improvised repast. The young man sprang from his horse, throwing the bridle to a Chouan. Cadoudal did likewise.

“Now,” said the latter, turning to his men, “you have half an hour to do as we do. Those who have not breakfasted in half an hour are notified that they must fight on empty stomachs.”

The invitation seemed equivalent to an order, so promptly and precisely was it executed. Every man pulled from his bag or his pocket a bit of bread or a buckwheat cake, and followed the example of his general, who had already divided the chicken between Roland and himself. As there was but one glass, both officers shared it.

While they were thus breakfasting, side by side, like two friends on a hunt, the sun rose, and, as Cadoudal had predicted, the mist became less and less dense. Soon the nearest trees could be distinguished; then the line of the woods, stretching to the right from Meucon to Grand-champ, while to the left the plain of Plescop, threaded by a rivulet, sloped gradually toward Vannes. This natural declivity of the ground became more and more perceptible as it neared the ocean.

On the road from Grandchamp to Plescop, a line of wagons were now visible, the tail of which was still hidden in the woods. This line was motionless; evidently some unforeseen obstacle had stopped it.

In fact, about a quarter of a mile before the leading wagon they perceived the two hundred Chouans, under Monte-à-l’assaut, Chante-en-hiver, Fend-l’air, and Giberne, barring the way.

The Republicans, inferior in number — we said that there were but a hundred — had halted and were awaiting the complete dispersion of the fog to determine the number and character of the men they were about to meet. Men and wagons were now in a triangle, of which Cadoudal and his hundred men formed one of the angles.

At sight of this small number of men thus surrounded by triple forces, and of the well-known uniform, of which the color had given its name to the Republican forces, Roland sprang hastily to his feet. As for Cadoudal, he remained where he was, nonchalantly finishing his meal. Of the hundred men surrounding the general, not one seemed to perceive the spectacle that was now before their eyes; it seemed almost as if they were waiting for Cadoudal’s order to look at it.

Roland had only to cast his eyes on the Republicans to see that they were lost. Cadoudal watched the various emotions that succeeded each other on the young man’s face.

“Well,” asked the Chouan, after a moment’s silence, “do you think my dispositions well taken?”

“You might better say your precautions, general,” replied Roland, with a sarcastic smile.

“Isn’t it the First Consul’s way to make the most of his advantages when he gets them?” asked Cadoudal.

Roland bit his lips; then, instead of replying to the royalist leader’s question, he said: “General, I have a favor to ask which I hope you will not refuse.”

“What is it?”

“Permission to let me go and be killed with my comrades.”

Cadoudal rose. “I expected that request,” he said.

“Then you will grant it?” cried Roland, his eyes sparkling with joy.

“Yes; but, first, I have a favor to ask of you,” said the royalist leader, with supreme dignity.

“Ask it, sir.”

“To bear my flag of truce to General Hatry.”

“For what purpose?”

“I have several proposals to make to him before the fight begins.”

“I presume that among those proposals which you deign to intrust to me you do not include that of laying down his arms?”

“On the contrary, colonel, you understand that that is the first of my proposals.”

“General Hatry will refuse it.”

“That is probable.”

“And then?”

“Then I shall give him his choice between two others, either of which he can, I think, accept without forfeiting his honor.”

“What are they?”

“I will tell you in due time. Begin with the first.”

“State it.”

“General Hatry and his hundred men are surrounded by a triple force. I offer them their lives; but they must lay down their arms, and make oath not to serve again in the Vendée for five years.”

Roland shook his head.

“Better that than to see his men annihilated.”

“Maybe so; but he would prefer to have his men annihilated, and be annihilated with them.”

“Don’t you think,” asked Cadoudal, laughing, “that it might be as well, in any case, to ask him?”

“True,” said Roland.

“Well, colonel, be so good as to mount your horse, make yourself known to him, and deliver my proposal.”

“Very well,” replied Roland.

“The colonel’s horse,” said Cadoudal, motioning to the Chouan who was watching it. The man led it up. The young man sprang upon it, and rapidly covered the distance which separated him from the convoy.

A group of men were gathered on its flank, evidently composed of General Hatry and his officers. Roland rode toward them, scarcely three gunshots distant from the Chouans. General Hatry’s astonishment was great when he saw an officer in the Republican uniform approaching him. He left the group and advanced three paces to meet the messenger.

Roland made himself known, related how he came to be among the Whites, and transmitted Cadoudal’s proposal to General Hatry.

As he has foreseen, the latter refused it. Roland returned to Cadoudal with a proud and joyful heart. “He refuses!” he cried, as soon as his voice could be heard.

Cadoudal gave a nod that showed he was not surprised by the refusal.

“Then, in that case,” he answered, “go back with my second proposition. I don’t wish to have anything to reproach myself with in answering to such a judge of honor as you.”

Roland bowed. “What is the second proposition?”

“General Hatry shall meet me in the space that separates the two troops, he shall carry the same arms as I — that is, his sabre and pistols — and the matter shall be decided between us. If I kill him, his men are to submit to the conditions already named, for we cannot take prisoners; if he kills me his men shall pass free and be allowed to reach Vannes safely. Come, I hope that’s a proposition you would accept, colonel?”

“I would accept it myself,” replied Roland.

“Yes,” exclaimed Cadoudal, “but you are not General Hatry. Content yourself with being a negotiator this time, and if this proposition, which, if I were he, I wouldn’t let escape me, does not please him, come to me. I’m a good fellow, and I’ll make him a third.”

Roland rode off a second time; his coming was awaited by the Republicans with visible impatience. He transmitted the message to General Hatry.

“Citizen,” replied the general, “I must render account of my conduct to the First Consul. You are his aide-de-camp, and I charge you on your return to Paris to bear testimony on my behalf to him. What would you do in my place? Whatever you would do, that I shall do.”

Roland started; his face assumed the grave expression of a man who is arguing a point of honor in his own mind. Then, at the end of a few seconds, he said: “General, I should refuse.”

“Your reasons, citizen?” demanded the general.

“The chances of a duel are problematic; you cannot subject the fate of a hundred brave men to a doubtful chance. In an affair like this, where all are concerned, every man had better defend his own skin as best he can.”

“Is that your opinion, colonel?”

“On my honor.”

“It is also mine; carry my reply to the royalist general.”

Roland galloped back to Cadoudal, and delivered General Hatry’s reply.

Cadoudal smiled. “I expected it,” he said.

“You couldn’t have expected it, because it was I who advised him to make it.”

“You thought differently a few moments ago.”

“Yes; but you yourself reminded me that I was not General Hatry. Come, what is your third proposition?” said Roland impatiently; for he began to perceive, or rather he had perceived from the beginning, that the noble part in the affair belonged to the royalist general.

“My third proposition,” said Cadoudal, “is not a proposition but an order; an order for two hundred of my men to withdraw. General Hatry has one hundred men; I will keep one hundred. My Breton forefathers were accustomed to fight foot to foot, breast to breast, man to man, and oftener one to three than three to one. If General Hatry is victorious, he can walk over our bodies and tranquilly enter Vannes; if he is defeated, he cannot say it is by numbers. Go, Monsieur de Montrevel, and remain with your friends. I give them thus the advantage of numbers, for you alone are worth ten men.”

Roland raised his hat.

“What are you doing, sir?” demanded Cadoudal.

“I always bow to that which is grand, general; I bow to you.”

“Come, colonel,” said Cadoudal, “a last glass of wine; let each of us drink to what we love best, to that which we grieve to leave behind, to that we hope to meet in heaven.”

Taking the bottle and the one glass, he filled it half full, and offered it to Roland. “We have but one glass, Monsieur de Montrevel; drink first.”

“Why first?”

“Because, in the first place, you are my guest, and also because there is a proverb that whoever drinks after another knows his thought.” Then, he added, laughing: “I want to know your thought, Monsieur de Montrevel.”

Roland emptied the glass and returned it to Cadoudal. The latter filled his glass half full, as he had done for Roland, and emptied it in turn.

“Well,” asked Roland, “now do you know my thought, general?”

“My thought,” said Roland, with his usual frankness, “is that you are a brave man, general. I shall feel honored if, at this moment when we are going to fight against each other, you will give me your hand.”

The two young men clasped hands, more like friends parting for a long absence than two enemies about to meet on the battlefield. There was a simple grandeur, full of majesty, in this action. Each raised his hat.

“Good luck!” said Roland to Cadoudal; “but allow me to doubt it. I must even confess that it is from my lips, not my heart.”

“God keep you, sir,” said Cadoudal, “and I hope that my wish will be realized. It is the honest expression of my thoughts.”

“What is to be the signal that you are ready?” inquired Roland.

“A musket shot fired in the air, to which you will reply in the same way.”

“Very good, general,” replied Roland. And putting his horse to a gallop, he crossed the space between the royalist general and the Republican general for the third time.

“Friends,” said Cadoudal, pointing to Roland, “do you see that young man?”

All eyes were bent upon Roland. “Yes,” came from every mouth.

“He came with a safe-guard from our brothers in the Midi; his life is sacred to you; he may be captured, but it must be living — not a hair of his head must be touched.”

“Very good, general,” replied the Chouans.

“And now, my friends, remember that you are the sons of those thirty Bretons who fought the thirty British between Ploermel and Josselin, ten leagues from here, and conquered them.” Then, in a low voice, he added with a sigh, “Unhappily we have not to do with the British this time.”

The fog had now lifted completely, and, as usually happens, a few rays of the wintry sun tinged the plain of Plescop with a yellow light.

It was easy therefore to distinguish the movements of the two troops. While Roland was returning to the Republicans, Branche-d’Or galloped toward the two hundred men who were blocking the way. He had hardly spoken to Cadoudal’s four lieutenants before a hundred men were seen to wheel to the right and a hundred more to wheel to the left and march in opposite directions, one toward Plumergat, the other toward Saint-Ave, leaving the road open. Each body halted three-quarters of a mile down the road, grounded arms and remained motionless. Branche-d’Or returned to Cadoudal.

“Have you any special orders to give me, general?” he asked.

“Yes, one,” answered Cadoudal, “take eight men and follow me. When you see the young Republican, with whom I breakfasted, fall under his horse, fling yourself upon him, you and your eight men, before he has time to free himself, and take him prisoner.”

“Yes, general.”

“You know that I must have him safe and sound.”

“That’s understood, general”

“Choose your eight men. Monsieur de Montrevel once captured, and his parole given, you can do as you like.”

“Suppose he won’t give his parole?”

“Then you must surround him so that he can’t escape, and watch him till the fight is over.”

“Very well,” said Branche-d’Or, heaving a sigh; “but it’ll be a little hard to stand by with folded arms while the others are having their fun.”

“Pooh! who knows?” said Cadoudal; “there’ll probably be enough for every body.”

Then, casting a glance over the plain and seeing his own men stationed apart, and the Republicans massed for battle, he cried: “A musket!”

They brought one. Cadoudal raised it above his head and fired in the air. Almost at the same moment, a shot fired in the same manner from the midst of the Republicans answered like an echo to that of Cadoudal.

Two drums beating the advance and a bugle were heard. Cadoudal rose in his stirrups.

“Children,” he cried, “have you all said your morning prayers?”

“Yes, yes!” answered almost every voice. “If any of you forgot them, or did not have time, let them pray now.”

Five or six peasants knelt down and prayed.

The drums and bugle drew nearer.

“General, general,” cried several voices impatiently, “they are coming.”

The general motioned to the kneeling peasants.

“True,” replied the impatient ones.

Those who prayed rose one by one, according as their prayers had been long or short. By the time they were all afoot, the Republicans had crossed nearly one-third of the distance. They marched, bayonets fixed, in three ranks, each rank three abreast.

Roland rode at the head of the first rank, General Hatry between the first and second. Both were easily recognized, being the only men on horseback. Among the Chouans, Cadoudal was the only rider, Branche-d’Or having dismounted to take command of the eight men who were to follow Georges.

“General,” said a voice, “the prayer is ended, and every one is standing.”

Cadoudal looked around him to make sure it was true; then he cried in a loud voice: “Forward! Enjoy yourselves, my lads!”

This permission, which to Vendéans and Chouans, was equivalent to sounding a charge, was scarcely given before the Chouans spread over the fields to cries of “Vive le roi!” waving their hats with one hand and their guns with the other.

Instead of keeping in rank like the Republicans, they scattered like sharpshooters, forming an immense crescent, of which Georges and his horse were the centre.

A moment later the Republicans were flanked and the firing began. Cadoudal’s men were nearly all poachers, that is to say, excellent marksmen, armed with English carbines, able to carry twice the length of the army musket. Though the first shots fired might have seemed wide of range, these messengers of death nevertheless brought down several men in the Republican ranks.

“Forward!” cried the general.

The soldiers marched on, bayonets fixed; but in a few moments there was no enemy before them. Cadoudal’s hundred men had turned skirmishers; they had separated, and fifty men were harassing both of the enemy’s flanks. General Hatry ordered his men to wheel to the right and left. Then came the order: “Fire!”

Two volleys followed with the precision and unanimity of well disciplined troops; but they were almost without result, for the Republicans were firing upon scattered men. Not so with the Chouans, who fired on a mass; with them every shot told.

Roland saw the disadvantage of the position. He looked around and, amid the smoke, distinguished Cadoudal, erect and motionless as an equestrian statue. He understood that the royalist leader was waiting for him.

With a cry he spurred his horse toward him. As if to save him part of the way, Cadoudal put his horse to a gallop. But a hundred feet from Cadoudal he drew rein. “Attention!” he said to Branche-d’Or and his companions.

“Don’t be alarmed, general; here we are,” said Branche-d’Or.

Cadoudal drew a pistol from his holster and cocked it. Roland, sabre in hand, was charging, crouched on his horse’s neck. When they were twenty paces apart, Cadoudal slowly raised his hand in Roland’s direction. At ten paces he fired.

The horse Roland was riding had a white star on its forehead. The ball struck the centre of that star, and the horse, mortally wounded, rolled over with its rider at Cadoudal’s feet.

Cadoudal put spurs to his own horse and jumped both horse and rider.

Branche-d’Or and his men were ready. They sprang, like a pack of jaguars, upon Roland, entangled under the body of his horse. The young man dropped his sword and tried to seize his pistols, but before he could lay hand upon the holsters two men had him by the arms, while the four others dragged his horse from between his legs. The thing was done with such unanimity that it was easy to see the manoeuvre had been planned.

Roland roared with rage. Branche-d’Or came up to him and put his hat in his hand.

“I do not surrender!” shouted Roland.

“Useless to do so, Monsieur de Montrevel,” replied Branche-d’Or with the utmost politeness.

“What do you mean?” demanded Roland, exhausting his strength in a struggle as desperate as it was useless.

“Because you are captured, sir.”

It was so true that there could be no answer.

“Then kill me!” cried Roland.

"We don't want to kill you, sir," replied Branche-d'Or.

"Then what do you want?"

"Give us your parole not to fight any more, and you are free."

"Never!" exclaimed Roland.

"Excuse me, Monsieur de Montrevel," said Branche-d'Or, "but that is not loyal!"

"What!" shrieked Roland, in a fury, "not loyal! You insult me, villain, because you know I can't defend myself or punish you."

"I am not a villain, and I didn't insult you, Monsieur de Montrevel; but I do say that by not giving your word, you deprive the general of nine men, who might be useful to him and who are obliged to stay here to guard you. That's not the way the Big Round Head acted toward you. He had two hundred men more than you, and he sent them away. Now we are only eighty-nine against one hundred."

A flame crossed Roland's face; then almost as suddenly he turned pale as death.

"You are right, Branche-d'Or," he replied. "Succor or no succor, I surrender. You and your men can go and fight with your comrades."

The Chouans gave a cry of joy, let go their hold of Roland, and rushed toward the Republicans, brandishing their hats and muskets, and shouting: "Vive le roi!"

Roland, freed from their grip, but disarmed physically by his fall, morally by his parole, went to the little eminence, still covered by the cloak which had served as a tablecloth for their breakfast, and sat down. From there he could see the whole combat; not a detail was lost upon him.

Cadoudal sat erect upon his horse amid fire and smoke, like the Demon of War, invulnerable and implacable.

Here and there the bodies of a dozen or more Chouans lay stretched upon the sod. But it was evident that the Republicans, still massed together, had lost double that number. Wounded men dragged themselves across the open space, meeting, rearing their bodies like mangled snakes, to fight, the Republicans with their bayonets, and the Chouans with their knives. Those of the wounded Chouans who were too far off to fight their wounded enemies hand to hand, reloaded their guns, and, struggling to their knees, fired and fell again.

On either side the struggle was pitiless, incessant, furious; civil war — that is war without mercy or compassion — waved its torch above the battlefield.

Cadoudal rode his horse around these living breastworks, firing at twenty paces, sometimes his pistols, sometimes a musket, which he discharged, cast aside, and picked up again reloaded. At each discharge a man fell. The third time he made this round General Hatry honored him with a fusillade. He disappeared in the flame and smoke, and Roland saw him go down, he and his horse, as if annihilated. Ten or a dozen Republicans sprang from the ranks and met as many Chouans; the struggle was terrible, hand to hand, body to body, but the Chouans, with their knives, were sure of the advantage.

Suddenly Cadoudal appeared, erect, a pistol in each hand; it was the death of two men; two men fell. Then through the gap left by these ten or twelve he flung himself forward with thirty men. He had picked up an army musket, and, using it like a club, he brought down a man with each blow. He broke his way through the battalion, and reappeared at the other side. Then, like a boar which returns upon the huntsman he has ripped up and trampled, he rushed back through the gaping wound and widened it. From that moment all was over.

General Hatry rallied a score of men, and, with bayonets down, they fell upon the circle that enveloped them. He marched at the head of his soldiers on foot; his horse had been killed. Ten men had fallen before the circle was broken, but at last he was beyond it. The Chouans wanted to pursue them, but Cadoudal, in a voice of thunder, called them back.

“You should not have allowed him to pass,” he cried, “but having passed he is free to retreat.”

The Chouans obeyed with the religious faith they placed in the words of their chief.

“And now,” said Cadoudal, “cease firing; no more dead; make prisoners.”

The Chouans drew together and surrounded the heaps of dead, and the few living men, more or less wounded, who lay among the dead.

Surrendering was still fighting in this fatal war, where on both sides the prisoners were shot — on the one side, because Chouans and Vendéans were considered brigands; on the other, because they knew not where to put the captives.

The Republicans threw their guns away, that they might not be forced to surrender them. When their captors approached them every cartridge-box was open; every man had fired his last shot.

Cadoudal walked back to Roland.

During the whole of this desperate struggle the young man had remained on the mound. With his eyes fixed on the battle, his hair damp with sweat, his breast heaving, he waited for the result. Then, when he saw the day was lost, his head fell upon his hands, and he still sat on, his forehead bowed to the earth.

Cadoudal reached him before he seemed to hear the sound of footsteps. He touched the young man's shoulder. Roland raised his head slowly without attempting to hide the two great tears that were rolling down his cheeks.

"General," said Roland, "do with me what you will. I am your prisoner."

"I can't make the First Consul's ambassador a prisoner," replied Cadoudal, laughing, "but I can ask him to do me a service."

"Command me, general."

"I need a hospital for the wounded, and a prison for prisoners; will you take the Republican soldiers, wounded and prisoners, back to Vannes."

"What do you mean, general?" exclaimed Roland.

"I give them, or rather I confide them to you. I regret that your horse was killed; so is mine. But there is still that of Brise-Bleu; accept it."

The young man made a motion of rejection.

"Until you can obtain another, of course," added Cadoudal, bowing.

Roland felt that he must put himself, at least in simplicity, on a level with the man with whom he was dealing.

"Shall I see you again, general?" he asked, rising.

"I doubt it, sir. My operations call me to the coast near Port-Louis; your duty recalls you to the Luxembourg."

"What shall I tell the First Consul, general?"

"What you have seen, sir. He must judge between the Abbé Bernier's diplomacy and that of Georges Cadoudal."

"After what I have seen, sir, I doubt if you ever have need of me," said Roland; "but in any case remember that you have a friend near the First Consul."

And he held out his hand to Cadoudal. The royalist took it with the same frankness and freedom he had shown before the battle.

"Farewell, Monsieur de Montrevel," said he, "I need not ask you to justify General Hatry. A defeat like that is fully as glorious as a victory."

During this time Brise-Bleu’s horse had been led up for the Republican colonel.

He sprang into the saddle.

“By the bye,” said Cadoudal, “as you go through La Roche-Bernard, just inquire what has happened to citizen Thomas Millière.”

“He is dead,” said a voice.

Coeur-de-Roi and his four men, covered with mud and sweat, had just arrived, but too late for the battle.

Roland cast a last glance at the battlefield, sighed, and, waving a last farewell to Cadoudal, started at a gallop across the fields to await, on the road to Vannes, the wagon-load of wounded and the prisoners he was asked to deliver to General Hatry.

Cadoudal had given a crown of six sous to each man.

Roland could not help reflecting that the gift was made with the money of the Directory sent to the West by Morgan and the Companions of Jehu.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE

Roland’s first visit on arriving in Paris was to the First Consul. He brought him the twofold news of the pacification of the Vendée, and the increasingly bitter insurrection in Brittany.

Bonaparte knew Roland; consequently the triple narrative of Thomas Millière’s murder, the execution of Bishop Audrein, and the fight at Grandchamp, produced a deep impression upon him. There was, moreover, in the young man’s manner a sombre despair in which he could not be mistaken.

Roland was miserable over this lost opportunity to get himself killed. An unknown power seemed to watch over him, carrying him safe and sound through dangers which resulted fatally to others. Sir John had found twelve judges and a death-warrant, where he had seen but a phantom, invulnerable, it is true, but inoffensive.

He blamed himself bitterly for singling out Cadoudal in the fight, thus exposing himself to a pre-arranged plan of capture, instead of flinging himself into the fray and killing or being killed.

The First Consul watched him anxiously as he talked; the longing for death still lingered in his mind, a longing he hoped to cure by this return to his native land and the endearments of his family.

He praised and defended General Hatry, but, just and impartial as a soldier should be, he gave full credit to Cadoudal for the courage and generosity the royalist general had displayed.

Bonaparte listened gravely, almost sadly; ardent as he was for foreign war with its glorious halo, his soul revolted at the internecine strife which drained the life-blood of the nation and rent its bowels. It was a case in which, to his thinking, negotiation should be substituted for war. But how negotiate with a man like Cadoudal?

Bonaparte was not unaware of his own personal seductions when he chose to exercise them. He resolved to see Cadoudal, and without saying anything on the subject to Roland, he intended to make use of him for the interview when the time came. In the meantime he wanted to see if Brune, in whose talent he had great confidence, would be more successful than his predecessors.

He dismissed Roland, after telling him of his mother’s arrival and her installation in the little house in the Rue de la Victoire.

Roland sprang into a coach and was driven there at once. He found Madame de Montrevel as happy and as proud as a woman and a mother could be. Edouard had gone, the day before, to the Prytanée Français, and she herself was preparing to return to Amélie, whose health continued to give her much anxiety.

As for Sir John, he was not only out of danger, but almost well again. He was in Paris, had called upon Madame de Montrevel, and, finding that she had gone with Edouard to the Prytanée, he had left his card. It bore his address, Hôtel Mirabeau, Rue de Richelieu.

It was eleven o’clock, Sir John’s breakfast hour, and Roland had every chance of finding him at that hour. He got back into his carriage, and ordered the coachman to stop at the Hôtel Mirabeau.

He found Sir John sitting before an English breakfast, a thing rarely seen in those days, drinking large cups of tea and eating bloody chops.

As soon as the Englishman saw Roland he gave a cry of joy and ran to meet him. Roland himself had acquired a deep affection for that exceptional nature, where the noblest qualities of the heart seemed striving to hide themselves beneath national eccentricities.

Sir John was pale and thin, but in other respects he was well. His wound had completely healed, and except for a slight oppression, which was diminishing daily and would soon disappear altogether, he had almost recovered his former health. He now welcomed Roland with a tenderness scarcely to be expected from that reserved nature, declaring that the joy he felt in seeing him again was all he wanted for his complete recovery.

He begged Roland to share the meal, telling him to order his own breakfast, a la Française. Roland accepted. Like all soldiers who had fought the hard wars of the Revolution, when bread was often lacking, Roland cared little for what he ate; he had acquired the habit of eating whatever was put before him as a precaution against the days when there might be nothing at all. Sir John’s attention in asking him to make a French breakfast was scarcely noticed by him at all.

But what Roland did notice was Sir John's preoccupation of mind. It was evident that Sir John had something on his lips which he hesitated to utter. Roland thought he had better help him.

So, when breakfast was nearly over, Roland, with his usual frankness, which almost bordered upon brutality at times, leaned his elbows on the table, settled his chin in his hands, and said: "Well, my dear Sir John, you have something to say to your friend Roland that you don't dare put into words."

Sir John started, and, from pale as he was, turned crimson.

"Confound it!" continued Roland, "it must be hard to get out; but, Sir John, if you have many things to ask me, I know but few that I have the right to refuse you. So, go on; I am listening."

And Roland closed his eyes as if to concentrate all his attention on what Sir John was about to say. But the matter was evidently, from Sir John's point of view, so extremely difficult to make known, that at the end of a dozen seconds, finding that Sir John was still silent, Roland opened his eyes.

The Englishman was pale again; but this time he was paler than before. Roland held out his hand to him.

"Why," he said, "I see you want to make some compliment about the way you were treated at the Château des Noires-Fontaines."

"Precisely, my friend; for the happiness or misery of my life will date from my sojourn at the château."

Roland looked fixedly at Sir John. "The deuce!" he exclaimed, "can I be so fortunate — " Then he stopped, remembering that what he was about to say was most unconventional from the social point of view.

"Oh!" exclaimed Sir John, "my dear Roland, finish what you were saying."

"You wish it?"

"I implore you."

"But if I am mistaken; if I should say something nonsensical."

"My friend, my friend, go on."

"Well, as I was saying, my lord, can I be so fortunate as to find your lordship in love with my sister?"

Sir John gave a cry of joy, and with a rapid movement, of which so phlegmatic a man might have been thought incapable, he threw himself in Roland's arms.

"Your sister is an angel, my dear Roland," he exclaimed, "and I love her with all my heart."

"Are you entirely free to do so, my lord?"

"Entirely. For the last twelve years, as I told you, I have had my fortune under my own control; it amounts to twenty-five thousand pounds sterling a year."

"Too much, my dear fellow, for a woman who can only bring you fifty thousand francs."

"Oh!" said the Englishman, with that national accent that returned to him occasionally in moments of strong excitement, "if I must get rid of a part of it, I can do so."

"No," replied Roland, laughing, "that's not necessary. You're rich; it's unfortunate, but what's to be done? — No, that's not the question. Do you love my sister?"

"I adore her."

"And she," resumed Roland, "does she love you?"

"Of course you understand," returned Sir John, "that I have not asked her. I was bound, my dear Roland, to speak to you first, and if the matter were agreeable, to beg you to plead my cause with your mother. After I have obtained the consent of both, I shall make my offer. Or rather, you will make it for me, for I should never dare."

"Then I am the first to receive your confidence?"

"You are my best friend, and it ought to be so."

"Well, my dear friend, as far as I am concerned, your suit is won — naturally."

"Your mother and sister remain."

"They will be one. You understand that my mother will leave Amélie free to make her own choice; and I need not tell you that if it falls upon you she will be delighted. But there is a person whom you have forgotten."

"Who is that?" said Sir John, in the tone of a man who, having weighed all chances for and against, believes he knows them all, and is met by an obstacle he has never thought of.

"The First Consul," said Roland.

"God — " ejaculated the Englishman, swallowing the last words of the national oath.

"He spoke to me just before I left for the Vendée of my sister's marriage," continued Roland; "saying that it no longer concerned my mother and myself, for he would take charge of it.”

“Then,” said Sir John, “I am lost.”

“Why so?”

“The First Consul does not like the English.”

“Say rather that the English do not like the First Consul.”

“But who will present my wishes to the First Consul?”

“I will.”

“And will you speak of them as agreeable to yourself?”

“I’ll turn you into a dove of peace between the two nations,” said Roland, rising.

“Oh! thank you,” cried Sir john, seizing the young man’s hand. Then he added, regretfully, “Must you leave me?”

“My friend, I have only a few hours’ leave. I have given one to my mother, two to you, and I owe one to your friend Edouard. I want to kiss him and ask his masters to let him scuffle as he likes with his comrades. Then I must get back to the Luxembourg.”

“Well, take him my compliments, and tell him I have ordered another pair of pistols for him, so that the next time he is attacked by bandits he needn’t use the conductor’s.”

Roland looked at Sir John.

“Now, what is it?” he asked.

“What! Don’t you know?”

“No. What is it I don’t know?”

“Something that nearly killed our poor Amélie?”

“What thing?”

“The attack on the diligence.”

“But what diligence?”

“The one which your mother was in.”

“The diligence my mother was in?”

“Yes.”

“The diligence my mother was in was attacked?”

“You have seen Madame de Montrevel, and she didn’t tell you?”

“Not a word about that, anyway.”

“Well, my dear Edouard proved a hero; as no one else defended the coach, he did. He took the conductor’s pistols and fired.”

“Brave boy!” exclaimed Roland.

“Yes, but, unluckily or luckily the conductor had taken the precaution to remove the bullets. Edouard was praised and petted by the Companions of Jehu as the bravest of the brave; but he neither killed nor wounded them.”

“Are you sure of what you are telling me?”

“I tell you your sister almost died of fright.”

“Very good,” said Roland.

“How very good?” exclaimed Sir John.

“I mean, all the more reason why I should see Edouard.”

“What makes you say that.”

“A plan.”

“Tell me what it is.”

“Faith! no. My plans don’t turn out well for you.”

“But you know, my dear Roland, that if there are any reprisals to make —”

“I shall make them for both. You are in love, my dear fellow; live in your love.”

“You promise me your support?”

“That’s understood! I am most anxious to call you brother.”

“Are you tired of calling me friend?”

“Faith, yes; it is too little.”

“Thanks.”

They pressed each other’s hands and parted.

A quarter of an hour later Roland reached the Prytanée Français, which stood then on the present site of the Lyceum of Louis-le-Grand — that is to say, at the head of the Rue Saint-Jacques, behind the Sorbonne. At the first words of the director, Roland saw that his young brother had been especially recommended to the authorities. The boy was sent for. Edouard flung himself into the arms of his “big brother” with that passionate adoration he had for him.

After the first embraces were over, Roland inquired about the stoppage of the diligence. Madame de Montrevel had been chary of mentioning it; Sir John had been sober in statement, but not so Edouard. It was his Iliad, his very own. He related it with every detail — Jérôme’s connivance with the bandits, the pistols loaded with powder only, his mother’s fainting-fit, the attention paid to her by those who had caused it, his own name known to the bandits, the fall of the mask from the face of the one who was restoring his mother, his certainty that she must have seen the man’s face.

Roland was above all struck with this last particular. Then the boy related their audience with the First Consul, and told how the latter had kissed and petted him, and finally recommended him to the director of the Prytanée Français.

Roland learned from the child all that he wished to know, and as it took but five minutes to go from the Rue Saint Jacques to the Luxembourg, he was at the palace in that time.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SCULPTURE AND PAINTING

When Roland returned to the Luxembourg, the clock of the palace marked one hour and a quarter after mid-day.

The First Consul was working with Bourrienne.

If we were merely writing a novel, we should hasten to its close, and in order to get there more expeditiously we should neglect certain details, which, we are told, historical figures can do without. That is not our opinion. From the day we first put pen to paper — now some thirty years ago — whether our thought were concentrated on a drama, or whether it spread itself into a novel, we have had a double end — to instruct and to amuse.

And we say instruct first, for amusement has never been to our mind anything but a mask for instruction. Have we succeeded? We think so. Before long we shall have covered with our narratives an enormous period of time; between the “Comtesse de Salisbury” and the “Comte de Monte-Cristo” five centuries and a half are comprised. Well, we assert that we have taught France as much history about those five centuries and a half as any historian.

More than that; although our opinions are well known; although, under the Bourbons of the elder branch as under the Bourbons of the younger branch, under the Republic as under the present government, we have always proclaimed them loudly, we do not believe that that opinion has been unduly manifested in our books and dramas.

We admire the Marquis de Posa in Schiller’s “Don Carlos”; but, in his stead, we should not have anticipated the spirit of that age to the point of placing a philosopher of the eighteenth century among the heroes of the sixteenth, an encyclopedist at the court of Philippe II. Therefore, just as we have been — in literary parlance — monarchical under the Monarchy, republican under the Republic, we are to-day reconstructionists under the Consulate.

That does not prevent our thought from hovering above men, above their epoch, and giving to each the share of good and evil they do. Now that share no one, except God, has the right to award from his individual point of view. The kings of Egypt who, at the moment they passed into the unknown, were judged upon the threshold of their tombs, were not judged by a man, but by a people. That is why it is said: “The judgment of a people is the judgment of God.”

Historian, novelist, poet, dramatic author, we are nothing more than the foreman of a jury who impartially sums up the arguments and leaves the jury to give their verdict. The book is the summing up; the readers are the jury.

That is why, having to paint one of the most gigantic figures, not only of modern times but of all times; having to paint the period of his transition, that is to say the moment when Bonaparte transformed himself into Napoleon, the general into an emperor — that is why we say, in the fear of becoming unjust, we abandon interpretations and substitute facts.

We are not of those who say with Voltaire that, “no one is a hero to his valet.”

It may be that the valet is near-sighted or envious — two infirmities that resemble each other more closely than people think. We maintain that a hero may become a kind man, but a hero, for being kind, is none the less a hero.

What is a hero in the eyes of the public? A man whose genius is momentarily greater than his heart. What is a hero in private life? A man whose heart is momentarily greater than his genius.

Historians, judge the genius!

People, judge the heart!

Who judged Charlemagne? The historians. Who judged Henri IV.? The people. Which, in your opinion, was the most righteously judged?

Well, in order to render just judgment, and compel the court of appeals, which is none other than posterity, to confirm contemporaneous judgments, it is essential not to light up one side only of the figure we depict, but to walk around it, and wherever the sunlight does not reach, to hold a torch, or even a candle.

Now, let us return to Bonaparte.

He was working, as we said, with Bourrienne. Let us inquire into the usual division of the First Consul’s time.

He rose at seven or eight in the morning, and immediately called one of his secretaries, preferably Bourrienne, and worked with him until ten. At ten, breakfast was announced; Josephine, Hortense and Eugène either waited or sat down to table with the family, that is with the aides-de-camp on duty and Bourrienne. After breakfast he talked with the usual party, or the invited guests, if there were any; one hour was devoted to this intercourse, which was generally shared by the First Consul’s two brothers, Lucien and Joseph, Regnault de Saint-Jean-d’Angely, Boulay (de la Meurthe), Monge, Berthollet, Laplace and Arnault. Toward noon Cambacérès arrived. As a general thing Bonaparte devoted half an hour to his chancellor; then suddenly, without warning, he would rise and say: “Au revoir, Josephine! au revoir, Hortense! Come, Bourrienne, let us go to work.”

This speech, which recurred almost regularly in the same words, was no sooner uttered than Bonaparte left the salon and returned to his study. There, no system of work was adopted; it might be some urgent matter or merely a caprice. Either Bonaparte dictated or Bourrienne read, after which the First Consul went to the council.

In the earlier months of the Consulate, he was obliged to cross the courtyard of the little Luxembourg to reach the council-chamber, which, if the weather were rainy, put him in bad humor; but toward the end of December he had the courtyard covered; and from that time he almost always returned to his study singing. Bonaparte sang almost as false as Louis XV.

As soon as he was back he examined the work he had ordered done, signed his letters, and stretched himself out in his armchair, the arms of which he stabbed with his penknife as he talked. If he was not inclined to talk, he reread the letters of the day before, or the pamphlets of the day, laughing at intervals with the hearty laugh of a great child. Then suddenly, as one awakening from a dream, he would spring to his feet and cry out: “Write, Bourrienne!”

Then he would sketch out the plan for some building to be erected, or dictate some one of those vast projects which have amazed — let us say rather, terrified the world.

At five o’clock he dined; after dinner the First Consul ascended to Josephine’s apartments, where he usually received the visits of the ministers, and particularly that of the minister of foreign affairs, M. de

Talleyrand. At midnight, sometimes earlier, but never later, he gave the signal for retiring by saying, brusquely: “Let us go to bed.”

The next day, at seven in the morning, the same life began over again, varied only by unforeseen incidents.

After these details of the personal habits of the great genius we are trying to depict under his first aspect, his personal portrait ought, we think, to come.

Bonaparte, First Consul, has left fewer indications of his personal appearance than Napoleon, Emperor. Now, as nothing less resembles the Emperor of 1812 than the First Consul of 1800; let us endeavor, if possible, to sketch with a pen those features which the brush has never fully portrayed, that countenance which neither bronze nor marble has been able to render. Most of the painters and sculptors who flourished during this illustrious period of art — Gros, David, Prud’hon, Girodet and Bosio — have endeavored to transmit to posterity the features of the Man of Destiny, at the different epochs when the vast providential vistas which beckoned him first revealed themselves. Thus, we have portraits of Bonaparte, commander-in-chief, Bonaparte, First Consul, and Napoleon, Emperor; and although some painters and sculptors have caught more or less successfully the type of his face, it may be said that there does not exist, either of the general, the First Consul, or the emperor, a single portrait or bust which perfectly resembles him.

It was not within the power of even genius to triumph over an impossibility. During the first part of Bonaparte’s life it was possible to paint or chisel Bonaparte’s protuberant skull, his brow furrowed by the sublime line of thought, his pale elongated face, his granite complexion, and the meditative character of his countenance. During the second part of his life it was possible to paint or to chisel his broadened forehead, his admirably defined eyebrows, his straight nose, his close-pressed lips, his chin modelled with rare perfection, his whole face, in short, like a coin of Augustus. But that which neither his bust nor his portrait could render, which was utterly beyond the domain of imitation, was the mobility of his look; that look which is to man what the lightning is to God, namely, the proof of his divinity.

In Bonaparte, that look obeyed his will with the rapidity of lightning; in one and the same minute it dared from beneath his eyelids, now keen and piercing as the blade of a dagger violently unsheathed, now soft as a sun ray or a kiss, now stern as a challenge, or terrible as a threat.

Bonaparte had a look for every thought that stirred his soul. In Napoleon, this look, except in the momentous circumstances of his life, ceased to be mobile and became fixed, but even so it was none the less impossible to render; it was a drill sounding the heart of whosoever he looked upon, the deepest, the most secret thought of which he meant to sound. Marble or painting might render the fixedness of that look, but neither the one nor the other could portray its life — that is to say, its penetrating and magnetic action. Troubled hearts have veiled eyes.

Bonaparte, even in the days of his leanness, had beautiful hands, and he displayed them with a certain coquetry. As he grew stouter his hands became superb; he took the utmost care of them, and looked at them when talking, with much complacency. He felt the same satisfaction in his teeth, which were handsome, though not with the splendor of his hands.

When he walked, either alone or with some one, whether in a room or in a garden, he always bent a little forward, as though his head were heavy to carry, and crossed his hands behind his back. He frequently made an involuntary movement with the right shoulder, as if a nervous shudder had passed through it, and at the same time his mouth made a curious movement from right to left, which seemed to result from the other. These movements, however, had nothing convulsive about them, whatever may have been said notwithstanding; they were a simple trick indicative of great preoccupation, a sort of congestion of the mind. It was chiefly manifested when the general, the First Consul, or the Emperor, was maturing vast plans. It was after such promenades, accompanied by this twofold movement of the shoulders and lips, that he dictated his most important notes. On a campaign, with the army, on horseback, he was indefatigable; he was almost as much so in ordinary life, and would often walk five or six hours in succession without perceiving it.

When he walked thus with some one with whom he was familiar, he commonly passed his arm through that or his companion and leaned upon him.

Slender and thin as he was at the period when we place him before our readers’ eyes, he was much concerned by the fear of future corpulence; it was to Bourrienne that he usually confided this singular dread.

“You see, Bourrienne, how slim and abstemious I am. Well, nothing can rid me of the idea that when I am forty I shall be a great eater and very fat. I foresee that my constitution will undergo a change. I take exercise enough, but what will you! — it’s a presentiment; and it won’t fail to happen.”

We all know to what obesity he attained when a prisoner at Saint Helena.

He had a positive passion for baths, which no doubt contributed not a little to make him fat; this passion became an irresistible need. He took one every other day, and stayed in it two hours, during which time the journals and pamphlets of the day were read to him. As the water cooled he would turn the hot-water faucet until he raised the temperature of his bathroom to such a degree that the reader could neither bear it any longer, nor see to read. Not until then would he permit the door to be opened.

It has been said that he was subject to epileptic attacks after his first campaign in Italy. Bourrienne was with him eleven years, and never saw him suffer from an attack of this malady.

Bonaparte, though indefatigable when necessity demanded it, required much sleep, especially during the period of which we are now writing. Bonaparte, general or First Consul, kept others awake, but he slept, and slept well. He retired at midnight, sometimes earlier, as we have said, and when at seven in the morning they entered his room to awaken him he was always asleep. Usually at the first call he would rise; but occasionally, still half asleep, he would mutter: “Bourrienne, I beg of you, let me sleep a little longer.”

Then, if there was nothing urgent, Bourrienne would return at eight o’clock; if it was otherwise, he insisted, and then, with much grumbling, Bonaparte would get up. He slept seven, sometimes eight, hours out of the twenty-four, taking a short nap in the afternoon. He also gave particular instruction for the night.

“At night,” he would say, “come in my room as seldom as possible. Never wake me if you have good news to announce — good news can wait; but if there is bad news, wake me instantly, for then there is not a moment to be lost in facing it.”

As soon as Bonaparte had risen and made his morning ablutions, which were very thorough, his valet entered and brushed his hair and shaved him; while he was being shaved, a secretary or an aide-de-camp read the newspapers aloud, always beginning with the “Moniteur.” He gave no real attention to any but the English and German papers.

“Skip that,” he would say when they read him the French papers; “*I know what they say, because they only say what I choose.*”

His toilet completed, Bonaparte went down to his study. We have seen above what he did there. At ten o’clock the breakfast as announced, usually by the steward, in these words: “The general is served.” No title, it will be observed, not even that of First Consul.

The repast was a frugal one. Every morning a dish was served which Bonaparte particularly liked — a chicken fried in oil with garlic; the same dish that is now called on the bills of fare at restaurants “Chicken à la Marengo.”

Bonaparte drank little, and then only Bordeaux or Burgundy, preferably the latter. After breakfast, as after dinner, he drank a cup of black coffee; never between meals. When he chanced to work until late at night they brought him, not coffee, but chocolate, and the secretary who worked with him had a cup of the same. Most historians, narrators, and biographers, after saying that Bonaparte drank a great deal of coffee, add that he took snuff to excess.

They are doubly mistaken. From the time he was twenty-four, Bonaparte had contracted the habit of taking snuff: but only enough to keep his brain awake. He took it habitually, not, as biographers have declared, from the pocket of his waistcoat, but from a snuff-box which he changed almost every day for a new one — having in this matter of collecting snuff-boxes a certain resemblance to the great Frederick. If he ever did take snuff from his waistcoat pocket, it was on his battle days, when it would have been difficult, while riding at a gallop under fire, to hold both reins and snuff-box. For those days he had special waistcoats, with the right-hand pocket lined with perfumed leather; and, as the sloping cut of his coat enabled him to insert his thumb and forefinger into this pocket without unbuttoning his coat, he could, under any circumstances and at any gait, take snuff when he pleased.

As general or First Consul, he never wore gloves, contenting himself with holding and crumpling them in his left hand. As Emperor, there was some advance in this propriety; he wore one glove, and as he changed his gloves, not once, but two or three times a day, his valet adopted the habit of giving him alternate gloves; thus making one pair serve as two.

Bonaparte had two great passions which Napoleon inherited — for war and architectural monuments to his fame.

Gay, almost jolly in camp, he was dreamy and sombre in repose. To escape this gloom he had recourse to the electricity of art, and saw visions of those gigantic monumental works of which he undertook many, and completed some. He realized that such works are part of the life of peoples; they are history written in capitals, landmarks of the ages, left standing long after generations are swept away. He knew that Rome lives in her ruins, that Greece speaks by her statues, that Egypt, splendid and mysterious spectre, appeared through her monuments on the threshold of civilized existence.

What he loved above everything, what he hugged in preference to all else, was renown, heroic uproar; hence his need of war, his thirst for glory. He often said:

“A great reputation is a great noise; the louder it is, the further it is heard. Laws, institutions, monuments, nations, all fall; but sound remains and resounds through other generations. Babylon and Alexandria are fallen; Semiramis and Alexander stand erect, greater perhaps through the echo of their renown, waxing and multiplying through the ages, than they were in their lifetimes.” Then he added, connecting these ideas with himself: “My power depends on my fame and on the battles I win. Conquest has made me what I am, and conquest alone can sustain me. A new born government must dazzle, must amaze. The moment it no longer flames, it dies out; once it ceases to grow, it falls.”

He was long a Corsican, impatient under the conquest of his country; but after the 13th Vendemiaire he became a true Frenchman, and ended by loving France with true passion. His dream was to see her great, happy, powerful, at the head of the nations in glory and in art. It is true that, in making France great, he became great with her, and attached his name indissolubly to her grandeur. To him, living eternally in this thought, actuality disappeared in the future; wherever the hurricane of war may have swept him, France, above all things else, above all nations, filled his thoughts. “What will my Athenians think?” said Alexander, after Issus and Arbela. “I hope the French will be content with me,” said Bonaparte, after Rivoli and the Pyramids.

Before battle, this modern Alexander gave little thought to what he should do in case of victory, but much in case of defeat. He, more than any man, was convinced that trifles often decide the greatest events; he was therefore more concerned in foreseeing such events than in producing them. He watched them come to birth, and ripen; then, when the right time came, he appeared, laid his hand on them, mastered and guided them, as an able rider roasters and guides a spirited horse.

His rapid rise in the midst of revolutions and political changes he had brought about, or seen accomplished, the events which he had controlled, had given him a certain contempt for men; moreover, he was not inclined by nature to think well of them. His lips were often heard to utter the grievous maxim — all the more grievous because he personally knew its truth — ”There are two levers by which men are moved, fear and self-interest.”

With such opinions Bonaparte did not, in fact, believe in friendship.

“How often,” said Bourrienne, “has he said to me, ‘Friendship is only a word; I love no one, not even my brothers — Joseph a little possibly; but if I love him it is only from habit, and because he is my elder. Duroc, yes, I love him; but why? Because his character pleases me; because he is stern, cold, resolute; besides, Duroc never sheds a tear. But why should I love any one? Do you think I have any true friends? As long as I am what I am, I shall have friends — apparently at least; but when my luck ceases, you’ll see! Trees don’t have leaves in winter. I tell you, Bourrienne, we must leave whimpering to the women, it’s their business; as for me, no feelings. I need a vigorous hand and a stout heart; if not, better let war and government alone.’“

In his familiar intercourse, Bonaparte was what schoolboys call a tease; but his teasings were never spiteful, and seldom unkind. His ill-humor, easily aroused, disappeared like a cloud driven by the wind; it evaporated in words, and disappeared of its own will. Sometimes, however, when matters of public import were concerned, and his lieutenants or ministers were to blame, he gave way to violent anger; his outbursts were then hard and cruel, and often humiliating. He gave blows with a club, under which, willingly or unwillingly, the recipient had to bow his head; witness his scene with Jomini and that with the Duc de Bellune.

Bonaparte had two sets of enemies, the Jacobins and the royalists; he detested the first and feared the second. In speaking of the Jacobins, he invariably called them the murderers of Louis XVI.; as for the royalists, that was another thing; one might almost have thought he foresaw the Restoration. He had about him two men who had voted the death of the king, Fouché and Cambacérès.

He dismissed Fouché, and, if he kept Cambacérès, it was because he wanted the services of that eminent legist; but he could not endure him, and he would often catch his colleague, the Second Consul, by the ear, and say: "My poor Cambacérès, I'm so sorry for you; but your goose is cooked. If ever the Bourbons get back they will hang you."

One day Cambacérès lost his temper, and with a twist of his head he pulled his ear from the living pincers that held it.

"Come," he said, "have done with your foolish joking."

Whenever Bonaparte escaped any danger, a childish habit, a Corsican habit, reappeared; he always made a rapid sign of the cross on his breast with the thumb.

Whenever he met with any annoyance, or was haunted with a disagreeable thought, he hummed — what air? An air of his own that was no air at all, and which nobody ever noticed, he sang so false. Then, still singing, he would sit down before his writing desk, tilting in his chair, tipping it back till he almost fell over, and mutilating, as we have said, its arms with a penknife, which served no other purpose, inasmuch as he never mended a pen himself. His secretaries were charged with that duty, and they mended them in the best manner possible, mindful of the fact that they would have to copy that terrific writing, which, as we know, was not absolutely illegible.

The effect produced on Bonaparte by the ringing of bells is known. It was the only music he understood, and it went straight to his heart. If he was seated when the vibrations began he would hold up his hand for silence, and lean toward the sound. If he was walking, he would stop, bend his head, and listen. As long as the bell rang he remained motionless; when the sound died away in space, he resumed his work, saying to those who asked him to explain this singular liking for the iron voice: "It reminds me of my first years at Brienne; I was happy then!"

At the period of which we are writing, his greatest personal interest was the purchase he had made of the domain of Malmaison. He went there every night like a schoolboy off for his holiday, and spent Sunday and often Monday there. There, work was neglected for walking expeditions, during which he personally superintended the improvements he had ordered. Occasionally, and especially at first, he would wander beyond the limits of the estate; but these excursions were thought dangerous by the police, and given up entirely after the conspiracy of the Aréna and the affair of the infernal machine.

The revenue derived from Malmaison, calculated by Bonaparte himself, on the supposition that he should sell his fruits and vegetables, did not amount to more than six thousand francs.

"That's not bad," he said to Bourrienne; "but," he added with a sigh, "one must have thirty thousand a year to be able to live here."

Bonaparte introduced a certain poesy in his taste for the country. He liked to see a woman with a tall flexible figure glide through the dusky shrubberies of the park; only that woman must be dressed in white. He hated gowns of a dark color and had a horror of stout women. As for pregnant women, he had such an aversion for them that it was very seldom he invited one to his soirées or his fêtes. For the rest, with little gallantry in his nature, too overbearing to attract, scarcely civil to women, it was rare for him to say, even to the prettiest, a pleasant thing; in fact, he often produced a shudder by the rude remarks he made even to Josephine's best friends. To one he remarked: "Oh! what red arms you have!" To another, "What an ugly headdress you are wearing!" To a third, "Your gown is dirty; I have seen you wear it twenty times"; or, "Why don't you change your dressmaker; you are dressed like a fright."

One day he said to the Duchesse de Chevreuse, a charming blonde, whose hair was the admiration of everyone:

"It's queer how red your hair is!"

"Possibly," replied the duchess, "but this is the first time any man has told me so."

Bonaparte did not like cards; when he did happen to play it was always vingt-et-un. For the rest, he had one trait in common with Henry IV., he cheated; but when the game was over he left all the gold and notes he had won on the table, saying:

"You are ninnies! I have cheated all the time we've been playing, and you never found out. Those who lost can take their money back."

Born and bred in the Catholic faith, Bonaparte had no preference for any dogma. When he re-established divine worship it was done as a political act, not as a religious one. He was fond, however, of discussions bearing on the subject; but he defined his own part in advance by saying: "My reason makes me a disbeliever in many things; but the impressions of my childhood and the inspirations of my early youth have flung me back into uncertainty."

Nevertheless he would never hear of materialism; he cared little what the dogma was, provided that dogma recognized a Creator. One beautiful evening in Messidor, on board his vessel, as it glided along between the twofold azure of the sky and sea, certain mathematicians declared there was no God, only animated matter. Bonaparte looked at the celestial arch, a hundred times more brilliant between Malta and Alexandria than it is in Europe, and, at a moment when they thought him unconscious of the conversation, he exclaimed, pointing to the stars: "You may say what you please, but it was a God who made all that."

Bonaparte, though very exact in paying his private debts, was just the reverse about public expenses. He was firmly convinced that in all past transactions between ministers and purveyors or contractors, that if the minister who had made the contract was not a dupe, the State at any rate was robbed; for this reason he delayed the period of payment as long as possible; there were literally no evasions, no difficulties he would not make, no bad reasons he would not give. It was a fixed idea with him, an immutable principle, that every contractor was a cheat.

One day a man who had made a bid that was accepted was presented to him.

"What is your name?" he asked, with his accustomed brusqueness.

"Vollant, citizen First Consul."

"Good name for a contractor."

"I spell it with two l's, citizen."

"To rob the better, sir," retorted Bonaparte, turning his back on him.

Bonaparte seldom changed his decisions, even when he saw they were unjust. No one ever heard him say: "I was mistaken." On the contrary, his favorite saying was: "I always believe the worst" — a saying more worthy of Simon than Augustus.

But with all this, one felt that there was more of a desire in Bonaparte's mind to seem to despise men than actual contempt for them. He was neither malignant nor vindictive. Sometimes, it is true, he relied too much upon necessity, that iron-tipped goddess; but for the rest, take him away from the field of politics and he was kind, sympathetic, accessible to pity, fond of children (great proof of a kind and pitying heart), full of indulgence for human weakness in private life, and sometimes of a good-humored heartiness, like that of Henri IV. playing with his children in the presence of the Spanish ambassador.

If we were writing history we should have many more things to say of Bonaparte without counting those which — after finishing with Bonaparte — we should still have to say of Napoleon. But we are writing a simple narrative, in which Bonaparte plays a part; unfortunately, wherever Bonaparte shows himself, if only for a moment, he becomes, in spite of himself, a principal personage.

The reader must pardon us for having again fallen into digression; that man, who is a world in himself, has, against our will, swept us along in his whirlwind.

Let us return to Roland, and consequently to our legitimate tale.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE AMBASSADOR

We have seen that Roland, on returning to the Luxembourg, asked for the First Consul and was told that he was engaged with Fouché, the minister of police.

Roland was a privileged person; no matter what functionary was with Bonaparte, he was in the habit, on his return from a journey, or merely from an errand, of half opening the door and putting in his head. The First Consul was often so busy that he paid no attention to this head. When that was the case, Roland would say “General!” which meant, in the close intimacy which still existed between the two schoolmates: “General, I am here; do you need me? I’m at your orders.” If the First Consul did not need him, he replied: “Very good.” If on the contrary he did need him, he said, simply: “Come in.” Then Roland would enter, and wait in the recess of a window until the general told him what he wanted.

On this occasion, Roland put his head in as usual, saying: “General!”

“Come in,” replied the First Consul, with visible satisfaction; “come in, come in!”

Roland entered. Bonaparte was, as he had been told, busy with the minister of police. The affair on which the First Consul was engaged, and which seemed to absorb him a great deal, had also its interest for Roland.

It concerned the recent stoppages of diligences by the Companions of Jehu.

On the table lay three *procès-verbaux* relating the stoppage of one diligence and two mail-coaches. Tribier, the paymaster of the Army of Italy, was in one of the latter. The stoppages had occurred, one on the highroad between Meximieux and Montluel, on that part of the road which crosses the commune of Bellignieux; the second, at the extremity of the lake of Silans, in the direction of Nantua; the third, on the highroad between Saint-Etienne and Bourg, at a spot called Les Carronnières.

A curious fact was connected with these stoppages. A sum of four thousand francs and a case of jewelry had been mixed up by mistake with the money-bags belonging to the government. The owners of the money had thought them lost, when the justice of the peace at Nantua received an unsigned letter telling him the place where these objects had been buried, and requesting him to return them to their rightful owners, as the Companions of Jehu made war upon the government and not against private individuals.

In another case; that of the Carronnières — where the robbers, in order to stop the mail-coach, which had continued on its way with increased speed in spite of the order to stop, were forced to fire at a horse — the Companions of Jehu had felt themselves obliged to make good this loss to the postmaster, who had received five hundred francs for the dead horse. That was exactly what the animal had cost eight days before; and this valuation proved that they were dealing with men who understood horses.

The *procès-verbaux* sent by the local authorities were accompanied by the affidavits of the travellers.

Bonaparte was singing that mysterious tune of which we have spoken; which showed that he was furious. So, as Roland might be expected to bring him fresh information, he had called him three times to come in.

“Well,” said he, “your part of the country is certainly in revolt against me; just look at that.”

Roland glanced at the papers and understood at once.

“Exactly what I came to speak to you about, general,” said he.

“Then begin at once; but first go ask Bourrienne for my department atlas.”

Roland fetched the atlas, and, guessing what Bonaparte desired to look at, opened it at the department of the Ain.

“That’s it,” said Bonaparte; “show me where these affairs happened.”

Roland laid his finger on the edge of the map, in the neighborhood of Lyons.

“There, general, that’s the exact place of the first attack, near the village of Bellignieux.”

“And the second?”

“Here,” said Roland, pointing to the other side of the department, toward Geneva; “there’s the lake of Nantua, and here’s that of Silans.”

“Now the third?”

Roland laid his finger on the centre of the map.

"General, there's the exact spot. Les Carronnières are not marked on the map because of their slight importance."

"What are Les Carronnières?" asked the First Consul.

"General, in our part of the country the manufactories of tiles are called *carronnières*; they belong to citizen Terrier. That's the place they ought to be on the map."

And Roland made a pencil mark on the paper to show the exact spot where the stoppage occurred.

"What!" exclaimed Bonaparte; "why, it happened less than a mile and a half from Bourg!"

"Scarcely that, general; that explains why the wounded horse was taken back to Bourg and died in the stables of the Belle-Alliance."

"Do you hear all these details, sir!" said Bonaparte, addressing the minister of police.

"Yes, citizen First Consul," answered the latter.

"You know I want this brigandage to stop?"

"I shall use every effort — "

"It's not a question of your efforts, but of its being done."

The minister bowed.

"It is only on that condition," said Bonaparte, "that I shall admit you are the able man you claim to be."

"I'll help you, citizen," said Roland.

"I did not venture to ask for your assistance," said the minister.

"Yes, but I offer it; don't do anything that we have not planned together."

The minister looked at Bonaparte.

"Quite right," said Bonaparte; "you can go. Roland will follow you to the ministry."

Fouché bowed and left the room.

"Now," continued the First Consul, "your honor depends upon your exterminating these bandits, Roland. In the first place, the thing is being carried on in your department; and next, they seem to have some particular grudge against you and your family."

"On the contrary," said Roland, "that's what makes me so furious; they spare me and my family."

"Let's go over it again, Roland. Every detail is of importance; it's a war of Bedouins over again."

"Just notice this, general. I spend a night in the Chartreuse of Seillon, because I have been told that it was haunted by ghosts. Sure enough, a ghost appears, but a perfectly inoffensive one. I fire at it twice, and it doesn't even turn around. My mother is in a diligence that is stopped, and faints away. One of the robbers pays her the most delicate attentions, bathes her temples with vinegar, and gives her smelling-salts. My brother Edouard fights them as best he can; they take him in their arms, kiss him, and make him all sorts of compliments on his courage; a little more and they would have given him sugar-plums as a reward for his gallant conduct. Now, just the reverse; my friend Sir John follows my example, goes where I have been; he is treated as a spy and stabbed, as they thought, to death."

"But he didn't die."

"No. On the contrary, he is so well that he wants to marry my sister."

"Ah ha! Has he asked for her?"

"Officially."

"And you answered?"

"I answered that the matter depended on two persons."

"Your mother and you; that's true."

"No; my sister herself — and you."

"Your sister I understand; but I?"

"Didn't you tell me general, that you would take charge of marrying her?"

Bonaparte walked up and down the room with his arms crossed; then, suddenly stopping before Roland, he said: "What is your Englishman like?"

"You have seen him, general."

"I don't mean physically; all Englishmen are alike — blue eyes, red hair, white skin, long jaws."

"That's their *th*," said Roland, gravely.

"Their *th*?"

"Yes. Did you ever learn English, general?"

"Faith! I tried to learn it."

"Your teacher must have told you that the *th* was sounded by pressing the tongue against the teeth. Well, by dint of punching their teeth with their tongues the English have ended by getting those elongated jaws, which, as you said just now, is one of the distinctive characteristics of their physiognomy."

Bonaparte looked at Roland to see if that incorrigible jester were laughing or speaking seriously. Roland was imperturbable.

"Is that your opinion?" said Bonaparte.

"Yes, general, and I think that physiologically it is as good as any other. I have a lot of opinions like it, which I bring to light as the occasion offers."

"Come back to your Englishman."

"Certainly, general."

"I asked you what he was like."

"Well, he is a gentleman; very brave, very calm, very impassible, very noble, very rich, and, moreover — which may not be a recommendation to you — a nephew of Lord Grenville, prime minister to his Britannic Majesty."

"What's that?"

"I said, prime minister to his Britannic Majesty."

Bonaparte resumed his walk; then, presently returning to Roland, he said: "Can I see your Englishman?"

"You know, general, that you can do anything."

"Where is he?"

"In Paris."

"Go find him and bring him here."

Roland was in the habit of obeying without reply; he took his hat and went toward the door.

"Send Bourrienne to me," said the First Consul, just as Roland passed into the secretary's room.

Five minutes later Bourrienne appeared.

"Sit down there, Bourrienne," said the First Consul, "and write."

Bourrienne sat down, arranged his paper, dipped his pen in the ink, and waited.

"Ready?" asked the First Consul, sitting down upon the writing table, which was another of his habits; a habit that reduced his secretary to despair, for Bonaparte never ceased swinging himself back and forth all the time he dictated — a motion that shook the table as much as if it had been in the middle of the ocean with a heaving sea.

"I'm ready," replied Bourrienne, who had ended by forcing himself to endure, with more or less patience, all Bonaparte's eccentricities.

"Then write." And he dictated:

Bonaparte, First Consul of the Republic, to his Majesty the King

> of Great Britain and Ireland.
>
> Called by the will of the French nation to the chief magistracy of the Republic, I think it proper to inform your Majesty personally of this fact.
>
> Must the war, which for two years has ravaged the four quarters of the globe, be perpetuated? Is there no means of staying it?
>
> How is it that two nations, the most enlightened of Europe, more powerful and strong than their own safety and independence require; how is it that they sacrifice to their ideas of empty grandeur or bigoted antipathies the welfare of commerce, eternal prosperity, the happiness of families? How is it that they do not recognize that peace is the first of needs and the first of a nation’s glories?
>
> These sentiments cannot be foreign to the heart of a king who governs a free nation with the sole object of rendering it happy.
>
> Your Majesty will see in this overture my sincere desire to contribute efficaciously, for the second time, to a general pacification, by an advance frankly made and free of those formalities which, necessary perhaps to disguise the dependence of feeble states, only disclose in powerful nations a mutual desire to deceive.
>
> France and England can, for a long time yet, by the abuse of their powers, and to the misery of their people, carry on the struggle without exhaustion; but, and I dare say it, the fate of all the civilized nations depends on the conclusion of a war which involves the universe.

Bonaparte paused. “I think that will do,” said he. “Read it over, Bourrienne.”

Bourrienne read the letter he had just written. After each paragraph the First Consul nodded approvingly; and said: “Go on.”

Before the last words were fairly uttered, he took the letter from Bourrienne’s hands and signed it with a new pen. It was a habit of his never to use the same pen twice. Nothing could be more disagreeable to him than a spot of ink on his fingers.

“That’s good,” said he. “Seal it and put on the address: ‘To Lord Grenville.’“

Bourrienne did as he was told. At the same moment the noise of a carriage was heard entering the courtyard of the Luxembourg. A moment later the door opened and Roland appeared.

“Well?” asked Bonaparte.

“Didn’t I tell you you could have anything you wanted, general?”

“Have you brought your Englishman?”

“I met him in the Place de Buci; and, knowing that you don’t like to wait, I caught him just as he was, and made him get into the carriage. Faith! I thought I should have to drive round to the Rue Mazarine, and get a guard to bring him. He’s in boots and a frock-coat.”

“Let him come in,” said Bonaparte.

“Come in, Sir John,” cried Roland, turning round.

Lord Tanlay appeared on the threshold. Bonaparte had only to glance at him to recognize a perfect gentleman. A trifling emaciation, a slight pallor, gave Sir John the characteristics of great distinction. He bowed, awaiting the formal introduction, like the true Englishman he was.

“General,” said Roland, “I have the honor to present to you Sir John Tanlay, who proposed to go to the third cataract for the purpose of seeing you, but who has, to-day, obliged me to drag him by the ear to the Luxembourg.”

“Come in, my lord; come in,” said Bonaparte. “This is not the first time we have seen each other, nor the first that I have expressed the wish to know you; there was therefore positive ingratitude in trying to evade my desire.”

“If I hesitated,” said Sir John, in excellent French, as usual, “it was because I could scarcely believe in the honor you do me.”

“And besides, very naturally, from national feeling, you detest me, don’t you, like the rest of your countrymen?”

“I must confess, general,” answered Sir John, smiling, “that they have not got beyond admiration.”

"And do you share the absurd prejudice that claims that national honor requires you to hate to-day the enemy who may be a friend to-morrow?"

"France has been almost a second mother country to me, and my friend Roland will tell you that I long for the moment when, of my two countries, the one to which I shall owe the most will be France."

"Then you ought to see France and England shaking hands for the good of the world, without repugnance."

"The day when I see that will be a happy day for me."

"If you could contribute to bring it about would you do so?"

"I would risk my life to do it."

"Roland tells me you are a relative of Lord Grenville."

"His nephew."

"Are you on good terms with him?"

"He was very fond of my mother, his eldest sister."

"Have you inherited the fondness he bore your mother?"

"Yes; only I think he holds it in reserve till I return to England."

"Will you deliver a letter for me?"

"To whom?"

"King George III."

"I shall be greatly honored."

"Will you undertake to say to your uncle that which cannot be written in a letter?"

"Without changing a syllable; the words of General Bonaparte are history."

"Well, tell him — " but, interrupting himself, he turned to Bourrienne, saying: "Bourrienne, find me the last letter from the Emperor of Russia."

Bourrienne opened a box, and, without searching, laid his hand on a letter that he handed to Bonaparte.

The First Consul cast his eye over the paper and then gave it to Lord Tanlay.

"Tell him," said he, "first and before all, that you have read this letter."

Sir John bowed and read as follows:

> CITIZEN FIRST CONSUL — I have received, each armed and newly clothed in the uniform of his regiment, the nine thousand Russians, made prisoners in Holland, whom you have returned to me without ransom, exchange, or condition of any kind.

> This is pure chivalry, and I boast of being chivalrous.
>
> I think that which I can best offer you in exchange for this magnificent present, citizen First Consul, is my friendship. Will you accept it?
>
> As an earnest of that friendship, I am sending his passports to Lord Whitworth, the British Ambassador to Saint Petersburg.
>
> Furthermore, if you will be, I do not say my second, but my witness, I will challenge personally every king who will not take part against England and close his ports to her.
>
> I begin with my neighbor the King of Denmark, and you will find in the "Gazette de la Cour" the ultimatum I have sent him.
>
> What more can I say to you? Nothing, unless it be that you and I together can give laws to the world.
>
> I am your admirer and sincere friend, PAUL.

Lord Tanlay turned to the First Consul. "Of course you know," said he, "that the Emperor of Russia is mad."

"Is it that letter that makes you think so, my lord?" asked Bonaparte.

"No; but it confirms my opinion."

"It was a madman who gave Henry VI. of Lancaster the crown of Saint-Louis, and the blazon of England still bears — until I scratch them out with my sword — the fleur-de-lis of France."

Sir John smiled; his national pride revolted at this assumption in the conqueror of the Pyramids.

"But," said Bonaparte, "that is not the question to-day; everything in its own time."

"Yes," murmured Sir John, "we are too near Aboukir."

"Oh, I shall never defeat you at sea," said Bonaparte; "it would take fifty years to make France a maritime nation; but over there," and he motioned with his hand to the East, "at the present moment, I repeat, that the question is not war but peace. I must have peace to accomplish my dream, and, above all, peace with England. You see, I play aboveboard; I am strong enough to speak frankly. If the day ever comes when a diplomatist tells the truth, he will be the first diplomatist in the world; for no one will believe him, and he will attain, unopposed, his ends."

"Then I am to tell my uncle that you desire peace."

"At the same time letting him know that I do not fear war. If I can't ally myself with King George, I can, as you see, do so with the Emperor Paul; but Russia has not reached that point of civilization that I desire in an ally."

"A tool is sometimes more useful than an ally."

"Yes; but, as you said, the Emperor is mad, and it is better to disarm than to arm a madman. I tell you that two nations like France and England ought to be inseparable friends or relentless enemies; friends, they are the poles of the world, balancing its movements with perfect equilibrium; enemies, one must destroy the other and become the world's sole axis."

"But suppose Lord Grenville, not doubting your genius, still doubts your power; if he holds the opinion of our poet Coleridge, that our island needs no rampart, no bulwark, other than the raucous murmur of the ocean, what shall I tell him?"

"Unroll the map of the world, Bourrienne," said Bonaparte.

Bourrienne unrolled a map; Bonaparte stepped over to it.

"Do you see those two rivers?" said he, pointing to the Volga and the Danube. "That's the road to India," he added.

"I thought Egypt was, general," said Sir John.

"So did I for a time; or, rather, I took it because I had no other. But the Czar opens this one; your government can force me to take it. Do you follow me?"

"Yes; citizen; go on."

"Well, if England forces me to fight her, if I am obliged to accept this alliance with Catherine's successor, this is what I shall do: I shall embark forty thousand Russians on the Volga; I shall send them down the river to Astrakhan; they will cross the Caspian and await me at Asterabad."

Sir John bowed in sign of deep attention. Bonaparte continued: "I shall embark forty thousand Frenchmen on the Danube."

"Excuse me, citizen First Consul, but the Danube is an Austrian river."

"I shall have taken Vienna."

Sir John stared at Bonaparte.

"I shall have taken Vienna," continued the latter. "I shall then embark forty thousand Frenchmen on the Danube; I find Russian vessels at its mouth ready to transport them to Taganrog; I march them by land along the course of the Don to Pratisbianskaïa, whence they move to Tzaritsin; there they descend the Volga in the same vessels that have transported the forty thousand Russians to Asterabad; fifteen days later I have eighty thousand men in western Persia. From Asterabad, these united corps will march to the Indus; Persia, the enemy of England, is our natural ally."

"Yes; but once in the Punjab, the Persian alliance will do you no good; and an army of eighty thousand men cannot drag its provisions along with it."

"You forget one thing," said Bonaparte, as if the expedition were already under way, "I have left bankers at Teheran and Caboul. Now, remember what happened nine years ago in Lord Cornwallis' war with Tippo Saïb. The commander-in-chief fell short of provisions, and a simple captain — I forget his name."

"Captain Malcolm," said Lord Tanlay.

"That's it!" cried Bonaparte. "You know the story! Captain Malcolm had recourse to the Brinjaries, those Bohemians of India, who cover the whole Hindostan peninsula with their encampments, and control the grain supplies. Well, those Bohemians are faithful to the last penny to those who pay them; they will feed me."

"You must cross the Indus."

"What of that!" exclaimed Bonaparte, "I have a hundred and eighty miles of bank between Déra-Ismaël-Khan and Attok to choose from. I know the Indus as well as I do the Seine. It is a slow current flowing about three miles an hour; its medium depth is, I should say, at the point I mentioned, from twelve to fifteen feet, and there are ten or more fords on the line of my operations."

"Then your line is already traced out?" asked Sir John smiling.

"Yes, in so far as it follows a broad uninterrupted stretch of fertile, well-watered provinces; that I avoid the sandy deserts which separate the lower valley of the Indus from Rajputana; and also that I follow the general bases of all invasions of India that have had any success, from Mahmoud of Ghazni, in the year 1000, to Nadir Shah, in 1739. And how many have taken the route I mean to take between the two epochs! Let us count them. After Mahmoud of Ghazni came Mohammed Ghori, in 1184, with one hundred and twenty thousand men; after him, Timur Tang, or Timur the Lame, whom we call Tamerlane, with sixty thousand men; after Tamerlane, Babar; after Babar, Humajan, and how many more I can't remember. Why, India is there for whoever will go and take it!"

"You forget, citizen First Consul, that all the conquerors you have named had only the aboriginal populations to deal with, whereas you have the English. We hold India — "

"With from twenty to twenty-two thousand men."

"And a hundred thousand Sepoys."

"I have counted them all, and I regard England and India, the one with the respect, the other with the contempt, they merit. Wherever I meet European infantry, I prepare a second, a third, and if necessary, a fourth line of reserves, believing that the first three might give way before the British bayonets; but wherever I find the Sepoys, I need only the postilion's whip to scatter the rabble. Have you any other questions to put to me, my lord?"

"One, citizen First Consul: are you sincerely desirous of peace?"

"Here is the letter in which I ask it of your king, my lord, and it is to be quite sure that it reaches his Britannic Majesty that I ask Lord Grenville's nephew to be my messenger."

"It shall be done as you desire, citizen; and were I the uncle, instead of the nephew, I should promise more."

"When can you start?"

"In an hour I shall be gone."

"You have no wish to express to me before leaving?"

"None. In any case, if I have any, I leave my affairs to my friend, Roland."

"Shake hands with me, my lord; it will be a good omen, as you represent England and I France."

Sir John accepted the honor done him by Bonaparte, with the exact measure of cordiality that indicated both his sympathy for France, and his mental reserves for the honor of his own nation.

Then, having pressed Roland's hand with fraternal effusion, he bowed again to the First Consul and went out. Bonaparte followed him reflectively with his eyes; then he said suddenly: "Roland, I not only consent to your sister's marriage with Lord Tanlay, but I wish it. Do you understand? *I wish it*."

He laid such emphasis upon those three words, that to any one who knew him they signified plainly, not "I wish," but "I will."

The tyranny was sweet to Roland, and he accepted it with grateful thanks.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE TWO SIGNALS

Let us now relate what happened at the Château des Noires-Fontaines three days after the events we have just described took place in Paris.

Since the successive departures of Roland, then Madame de Montrevel and her son, and finally Sir John — Roland to rejoin his general, Madame de Montrevel to place Edouard in school, and Sir John to acquaint Roland with his matrimonial plans — Amélie had remained alone with Charlotte at the Château des Noires-Fontaines. We say *alone*, because Michel and his son Jacques did not live in the house, but in the little lodge at the gate where he added the duties of porter to those of gardener.

It therefore happened that at night all the windows, excepting those of Amélie, which, as we have said, were on the first floor overlooking the garden, and that of Charlotte in the attic, were left in darkness.

Madame de Montrevel had taken the second chambermaid with her. The two young girls were perhaps rather isolated in their part of the house, which consisted of a dozen bedrooms on three floors, especially at a time when so many rumors of robberies on the highroads reached them. Michel, therefore, proposed to his young mistress that he sleep in the main building, so as to be near her in case of need. But she, in a firm voice, assured him that she felt no fear, and desired no change in the customary routine of the château.

Michel did not insist, and retired, saying that Mademoiselle might, in any case, sleep in peace, for he and Jacques would make the rounds of the house during the night.

Amélie at first seemed anxious about those rounds; but she soon noticed that Michel and Jacques contented themselves with watching on the edge of the forest of Seillon, and the frequent appearance of a jugged hare, or a haunch of venison on the table, proved to her that Michel kept his word regarding the promised rounds.

She therefore ceased to trouble about Michel's rounds, which were always on the side of the house opposite to that where she feared them.

Now, as we have said, three days after the events we have just related, or, to speak more correctly, during the night following the third day, those who were accustomed to see no light save in Amélie’s windows on the first floor and Charlotte’s on the third, might have observed with surprise that, from eleven o’clock until midnight, the four windows on the first floor were illuminated. It is true that each was lighted by a single wax-candle. They might also have seen the figure of a young girl through the shades, staring in the direction of the village of Ceyzeriat.

This young girl was Amélie, pale, breathing with difficulty, and seeming to watch anxiously for a signal.

At the end of a few minutes she wiped her forehead and drew a joyous breath. A fire was lighted in the direction she had been watching. Then she passed from room to room, putting out the three candles one after the other, leaving only the one which was burning in her own room. As if the fire awaited this return signal, it was now extinguished.

Amélie sat down by her window and remained motionless, her eyes fixed on the garden. The night was dark, without moon or stars, and yet at the end of a quarter of an hour she saw, or rather divined, a shadow crossing the lawn and approaching the window. She placed her single candle in the furthest corner of her room, and returned to open her window.

He whom she was awaiting was already on the balcony.

As on the first night when we saw him climb it, the young man put his arm around the girl’s waist and drew her into the room. She made but slight resistance; her hand sought the cord of the Venetian blind, unfastened it from the hook that held it, and let it fall with more noise than prudence would have counselled.

Behind the blind, she closed the window; then she fetched the candle from the corner where she had hidden it. The light illuminated her face, and the young man gave a cry of alarm, for it was covered with tears.

“What has happened?” he asked.

“A great misfortune!” replied the young girl.

“Oh, I feared it when I saw the signal by which you recalled me after receiving me last night. But is it irreparable?”

“Almost,” answered Amélie.

“I hope, at least, that it threatens only me.”

“It threatens us both.”

The young man passed his hand over his brow to wipe away the sweat that covered it.

“Tell me,” said he; “you know I am strong.”

“If you have the strength to hear it,” said she, “I have none to tell it.” Then, taking a letter from the chimney-piece, she added: “Read that; that is what I received by the post to-night.”

The young man took the letter, opened it, and glanced hastily at the signature.

“From Madame de Montrevel,” said he.

“Yes, with a postscript from Roland.”

The young man read:

> MY DEAREST DAUGHTER — I hope that the news I announce will give you as much joy as it has already given our dear Roland and me. Sir John, whose heart you doubted, claiming that it was only a mechanical contrivance, manufactured in the workshops at Vaucanson, admits that such an opinion was a just one until the day he saw you; but he maintains that since that day he has a heart, and that that heart adores you.
>
> Did you suspect it, my dear Amélie, from his aristocratic and polished manners, when your mother’s eyes failed to discern this tenderness.
>
> This morning, while breakfasting with your brother, he formally asked your hand. Your brother received the offer with joy, but he made no promises at first. The First Consul, before Roland’s departure for the Vendée, had already spoken of making himself responsible for your establishment. But since then he has asked to see Lord Tanlay, and Sir John, though he maintained his national reserve, was taken into the first Consul’s good graces at once, to such a degree that he received from him, at their first interview, a mission to his uncle, Lord Grenville. Sir John started for England immediately.
>
> I do not know how many days Sir John will be absent, but on his return he is certain to present himself to you as your betrothed.

> Lord Tanlay is still young, pleasing in appearance, and immensely rich; he is highly connected in England, and Roland's friend. I do not know a man who has more right, I will not say to your love, but to your profound esteem.
>
> The rest of my news I can tell you in two words. The First Consul is still most kind to me and to your two brothers, and Madame Bonaparte has let me know that she only awaits your marriage to place you near her.
>
> There is talk of leaving the Luxembourg, and removing to the Tuileries. Do you understand the full meaning of this change of domicile?
>
> Your mother, who loves you,
> CLOTILDE DE MONTREVEL.

Without pausing, the young man turned to Roland's postscript. It was as follows:

> You have read, my dear little sister, what our good mother has written. This marriage is a suitable one under all aspects. It is not a thing to be childish about; the First Consul *wishes* you to become Lady Tanlay; that is to say, he *wills* it.
>
> I am leaving Paris for a few days. Though you may not see me, you will hear of me.
>
> I kiss you, ROLAND.

"Well, Charles," asked Amélie, when the young man had finished reading, "what do you think of that?"

"That it is something we had to expect from day to day, my poor angel, but it is none the less terrible."

"What is to be done?"

"There are three things we can do."

"Tell me."

"In the first place, resist if you have the strength; it is the shortest and surest way."

Amélie dropped her head.

“You will never dare, will you?”

“Never.”

“And yet you are my wife, Amélie; a priest has blessed our union.”

“But they say that marriage before a priest is null before the law.”

“Is it not enough for you, the wife of a proscribed man?” asked Morgan, his voice trembling as he spoke.

Amélie flung herself into his arms.

“But my mother,” said she; “our marriage did not have her presence and blessing.”

“Because there were too many risks to run, and we wished to run them alone.”

“But that man — Did you notice that my brother says he *wills* it?”

“Oh, if you loved me, Amélie, that man would see that he may change the face of the State, carry war from one end of the world to the other, make laws, build a throne, but that he cannot force lips to say yes when the heart says no.”

“If I loved you!” said Amélie, in a tone of soft reproach. “It is midnight, you are here in my room, I weep in your arms — I, the daughter of General de Montrevel and the sister of Roland — and you say, ‘If you loved me.’“

“I was wrong, I was wrong, my darling Amélie. Yes, I know that you were brought up in adoration of that man; you cannot understand that any one should resist him, and whoever does resist him is a rebel in your eyes.”

“Charles, you said there were three things that we could do. What is the second?”

“Accept apparently the marriage they propose to you, and gain time, by delaying under various pretexts. The man is not immortal.”

“No; but is too young for us to count on his death. The third way, dear friend?”

“Fly — but that is a last resource, Amélie; there are two objections: first, your repugnance.”

“I am yours, Charles; I will surmount my repugnance.”

“And,” added the young man, “my engagements.”

“Your engagements?”

“My companions are bound to me, Amélie; but I, too, am bound to them. We also have a man to whom we have sworn obedience. That man is the future king of France. If you accept your brother’s devotion to Bonaparte, accept ours to Louis XVIII.”

Amélie let her face drop into her hands with a sigh.

“Then,” said she, “we are lost.”

“Why so? On various pretexts, your health above all, you can gain a year. Before the year is out Bonaparte will probably be forced to begin another war in Italy. A single defeat will destroy his prestige; in short, a great many things can happen in a year.”

“Did you read Roland’s postscript, Charles?”

“Yes; but I didn’t see anything in it that was not in your mother’s letter.”

“Read the last sentence again.” And Amélie placed the letter before him. He read:

> I am leaving Paris for a few days; though you may not see me,
> you will hear of me.

“Well?”

“Do you know what that means?”

“No.”

“It means that Roland is in pursuit of you.”

“What does that matter? He cannot die by the hand of any of us.”

“But you, unhappy man, you can die by his!”

“Do you think I should care so very much if he killed me, Amélie?”

“Oh! even in my gloomiest moments I never thought of that.”

“So you think your brother is on the hunt for us?”

“I am sure of it.”

“What makes you so certain?”

“Because he swore over Sir John’s body, when he thought him dead, to avenge him.”

“If he had died,” exclaimed the young man, bitterly, “we should not be where we are, Amélie.”

“God saved him, Charles; it was therefore good that he did not die.”

“For us?”

“I cannot fathom the ways of the Lord. I tell you, my beloved Charles, beware of Roland; Roland is close by.”

Charles smiled incredulously.

“I tell you that he is not only near here, but he has been seen.”

“He has been seen! Where? Who saw him?”

“Who saw him?”

“Yes.”

“Charlotte, my maid, the jailer’s daughter. She asked permission to visit her parents yesterday, Sunday; you were coming, so I told her she could stay till this morning.”

“Well?”

“She therefore spent the night with her parents. At eleven o’clock the captain of the gendarmerie brought in some prisoners. While they were locking them up, a man, wrapped in a cloak, came in and asked for the captain. Charlotte thought she recognized the new-comer’s voice. She looked at him attentively; his cloak slipped from his face, and she saw that it was my brother.”

The young man made a movement.

“Now do you understand, Charles? My brother comes to Bourg, mysteriously, without letting me know; he asks for the captain of the gendarmerie, follows him into the prison, speaks only to him, and disappears. Is that not a threatening outlook for our love? Tell me, Charles!”

As Amélie spoke, a dark cloud spread slowly over her lover’s face.

“Amélie,” said he, “when my companions and I bound ourselves together, we did not deceive ourselves as to the risks we ran.”

“But, at least,” said Amélie, “you have changed your place of refuge; you have abandoned the Chartreuse of Seillon?”

“None but our dead are there now.”

“Is the grotto of Ceyzeriat perfectly safe?”

“As safe as any refuge can be that has two exit.”

“The Chartreuse of Seillon had two exits; yet, as you say, you left your dead there.”

“The dead are safer than the living; they are sure not to die on the scaffold.”

Amélie felt a shudder go through her.

“Charles!” she murmured.

“Listen,” said the young man. “God is my witness, and you too, that I have always put laughter and gayety between your presentiments and my fears; but to-day the aspect of things has changed; we are coming face to face with the crisis. Whatever the end brings us, it is approaching. I do not ask of you, my Amélie, those selfish, unreasonable things that lovers in danger of death exact from their mistresses; I do not ask you to bind your heart to the dead, your love to a corpse — ”

"Friend," said the young girl, laying her hand on his arm, "take care; you are doubting me."

"No; I do you the highest honor in leaving you free to accomplish the sacrifice to its full extent; but I do not want you to be bound by an oath; no tie shall fetter you."

"So be it," said Amélie.

"What I ask of you," continued the young man, "and I ask you to swear it on our love, which has been, alas! so fatal to you, is this: if I am arrested and disarmed, if I am imprisoned and condemned to death, I implore you, Amélie, I exact of you, that in some way you will send me arms, not only for myself, but for my companions also, so that we may still be masters of our lives."

"But in such a case, Charles, may I not tell all to my brother? May I not appeal to his tenderness; to the generosity of the First Consul?"

Before the young girl had finished, her lover seized her violently by the wrist.

"Amélie," said he, "it is no longer one promise I ask of you, there are two. Swear to me, in the first place, and above all else, that you will not solicit my pardon. Swear it, Amélie; swear it!"

"Do I need to swear, dear?" asked the young girl, bursting into tears. "I promise it."

"Promise it on the hour when I first said I loved you, on the hour when you answered that I was loved!"

"On your life, on mine, on the past, on the future, on our smiles, on our tears."

"I should die in any case, you see, Amélie, even though I had to beat my brains out against the wall; but I should die dishonored."

"I promise you, Charles."

"Then for my second request, Amélie: if we are taken and condemned, send me arms — arms or poison, the means of dying, any means. Coming from you, death would be another joy."

"Far or near, free or a prisoner, living or dead, you are my master, I am your slave; order and I obey."

"That is all, Amélie; it is simple and clear, you see, no pardon, and the means of death."

"Simple and clear, but terrible."

"You will do it, will you not?"

"You wish me to?"

"I implore you."

"Order or entreaty, Charles, your will shall be done."

The young man held the girl, who seemed on the verge of fainting, in his left arm, and approached his mouth to hers. But, just as their lips were about to touch, an owl's cry was heard, so close to the window that Amélie started and Charles raised his head. The cry was repeated a second time, and then a third.

"Ah!" murmured Amélie, "do you hear that bird of ill-omen? We are doomed, my friend."

But Charles shook his head.

"That is not an owl, Amélie," he said; "it is the call of our companions. Put out the light."

Amélie blew it out while her lover opened the window.

"Even here," she murmured; "they seek you even here!"

"It is our friend and confidant, the Comte de Jayat; no one else knows where I am." Then, leaning from the balcony, he asked: "Is it you, Montbar?"

"Yes; is that you, Morgan?"

"Yes."

A man came from behind a clump of trees.

"News from Paris; not an instant to lose; a matter of life and death to us all."

"Do you hear, Amélie?"

Taking the young girl in his arms, he pressed her convulsively to his heart.

"Go," she said, in a faint voice, "go. Did you not hear him say it was a matter of life and death for all of you?"

"Farewell, my Amélie, my beloved, farewell!"

"Oh! don't say farewell."

"No, no; au revoir!"

"Morgan, Morgan!" cried the voice of the man waiting below in the garden.

The young man pressed his lips once more to Amélie's; then, rushing to the window, he sprang over the balcony at a bound and joined his friend.

Amélie gave a cry, and ran to the balustrade; but all she saw was two moving shadows entering the deepening shadows of the fine old trees that adorned the park.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE GROTTO OF CEYZERIAT

The two young men plunged into the shadow of the trees. Morgan guided his companion, less familiar than he with the windings of the park, until they reached the exact spot where he was in the habit of scaling the wall. It took but an instant for both of them to accomplish that feat. The next moment they were on the banks of the Reissouse.

A boat was fastened to the foot of a willow; they jumped into it, and three strokes of the oar brought them to the other side. There a path led along the bank of the river to a little wood which extends from Ceyzeriat to Etrez, a distance of about nine miles, and thus forms, on the other side of the river, a pendant to the forest of Seillon.

On reaching the edge of the wood they stopped. Until then they had been walking as rapidly as it was possible to do without running, and neither of them had uttered a word. The whole way was deserted; it was probable, in fact certain, that no one had seen them. They could breathe freely.

“Where are the Companions?” asked Morgan.

“In the grotto,” replied Montbar.

“Why don’t we go there at once?”

“Because we shall find one of them at the foot of that beech, who will tell us if we can go further without danger.”

“Which one?”

“D’Assas.”

A shadow came from behind the tree.

“Here I am,” it said.

“Ah! there you are,” exclaimed the two young men.

“Anything new?” inquired Montbar.

“Nothing; they are waiting for you to come to a decision.”

“In that case, let us hurry.”

The three young men continued on their way. After going about three hundred yards, Montbar stopped again, and said softly: “Armand!”

The dry leaves rustled at the call, and a fourth shadow stepped from behind a clump of trees, and approached his companions.

"Anything new?" asked Montbar.

"Yes; a messenger from Cadoudal."

"The same one who came before?"

"Yes."

"Where is he?"

"With the brothers, in the grotto."

"Come."

Montbar rushed on ahead; the path had grown so narrow that the four young men could only walk in single file. It rose for about five hundred paces with an easy but winding slope. Coming to an opening, Montbar stopped and gave, three times, the same owl's cry with which he had called Morgan. A single hoot answered him; then a man slid down from the branches of a bushy oak. It was the sentinel who guarded the entrance to the grotto, which was not more than thirty feet from the oak. The position of the trees surrounding it made it almost impossible of detection.

The sentinel exchanged a few whispered words with Montbar, who seemed, by fulfilling the duties of leader, desirous of leaving Morgan entirely to his thoughts. Then, as his watch was probably not over, the bandit climbed the oak again, and was soon so completely blended with the body of the tree that those he had left might have looked for him in vain in that aerial bastion.

The glade became narrower as they neared the entrance to the grotto. Montbar reached it first, and from a hiding-place known to him he took a flint, a steel, some tinder, matches, and a torch. The sparks flew, the tinder caught fire, the match cast a quivering bluish flame, to which succeeded the crackling, resinous flames of the torch.

Three or four paths were then visible. Montbar took one without hesitation. The path sank, winding into the earth, and turned back upon itself, as if the young men were retracing their steps underground, along the path that had brought them. It was evident that they were following the windings of an ancient quarry, probably the one from which were built, nineteen hundred years earlier, the three Roman towns which are now mere villages, and Cæsar's camp which overlooked them.

At intervals this subterraneous path was cut entirely across by a deep ditch, impassable except with the aid of a plank, that could, with a kick, be precipitated into the hollow beneath. Also, from place to place, breastworks could still be seen, behind which men could intrench themselves and fire without exposing their persons to the sight or fire of the enemy. Finally, at five hundred yards from the entrance, a barricade of the height of a man presented a final obstacle to those who sought to enter a circular space in which ten or a dozen men were now seated or lying around, some reading, others playing cards.

Neither the readers nor the players moved at the noise made by the new-comers, or at the gleam of their light playing upon the walls of the quarry, so certain were they that none but friends could reach this spot, guarded as it was.

For the rest, the scene of this encampment was extremely picturesque; wax candles were burning in profusion (the Companions of Jehu were too aristocratic to make use of any other light) and cast their reflection upon stands of arms of all kinds, among which double-barrelled muskets and pistols held first place. Foils and masks were hanging here and there upon the walls; several musical instruments were lying about, and a few mirrors in gilt frames proclaimed the fact that dress was a pastime by no means unappreciated by the strange inhabitants of that subterranean dwelling.

They all seemed as tranquil as though the news which had drawn Morgan from Amélie's arms was unknown to them, or considered of no importance.

Nevertheless, when the little group from outside approached, and the words: "The captain! the captain!" were heard, all rose, not with the servility of soldiers toward their approaching chief, but with the affectionate deference of strong and intelligent men for one stronger and more intelligent than they.

Then Morgan shook his head, raised his eyes, and, passing before Montbar, advanced to the centre of the circle which had formed at his appearance, and said:

"Well, friends, it seems you have had some news."

"Yes, captain," answered a voice; "the police of the First Consul does us the honor to be interested in us."

"Where is the messenger?" asked Morgan.

"Here," replied a young man, wearing the livery of a cabinet courier, who was still covered with mud and dust.

"Have you any despatches?"

"Written, no, verbal, yes."

“Where do they come from?”

“The private office of the minister of police.”

“Can they be trusted?”

“I’ll answer for them; they are positively official.”

(“It’s a good thing to have friends everywhere,” observed Montbar, parenthetically.)

“Especially near M. Fouché,” resumed Morgan; “let us hear the news.”

“Am I to tell it aloud, or to you privately?”

“I presume we are all interested, so tell it aloud.”

“Well, the First Consul sent for citizen Fouché at the Louvre, and lectured him on our account.”

“Capital! what next?”

“Citizen Fouché replied that we were clever scamps, very difficult to find, and still more difficult to capture when we had been found, in short, he praised us highly.”

“Very amiable of him. What next?”

“Next, the First Consul replied that that did not concern him, that we were brigands, and that it was our brigandage which maintained the war in Vendée, and that the day we ceased sending money to Brittany there would be no more Brittany.”

“Excellent reasoning, it seems to me.”

“He said the West must be fought in the East and the Midi.”

“Like England in India.”

“Consequently he gave citizen Fouché full powers, and, even if it cost a million and he had to kill five hundred men, he must have our heads.”

“Well, he knows his man when he makes his demand; remains to be seen if we let him have them.”

“So citizen Fouché went home furious, and vowed that before eight days passed there should not be a single Companion of Jehu left in France.”

“The time is short.”

“That same day couriers started for Lyons, Mâcon, Sons-le-Saulnier, Besançon and Geneva, with orders to the garrison commanders to do personally all they could for our destruction; but above all to obey unquestioningly M. Roland de Montrevel, aide-de-camp to the First Consul, and to put at his disposal as many troops as he thought needful.”

“And I can add,” said Morgan, “that M. Roland de Montrevel is already in the field. He had a conference with the captain of the gendarmerie, in the prison at Bourg, yesterday."

"Does any one know why?" asked a voice.

"The deuce!" said another, "to engage our cells."

"Do you still mean to protect him?" asked d'Assas.

"More than ever."

"Ah! that's too much!" muttered a voice.

"Why so," retorted Morgan imperiously, "isn't it my right as a Companion?"

"Certainly," said two other voices.

"Then I use it; both as a Companion and as your leader."

"But suppose in the middle of the fray a stray ball should take him?" said a voice.

"Then, it is not a right I claim, nor an order that I give, but an entreaty I make. My friends, promise me, on your honor, that the life of Roland de Montrevel will be sacred to you."

With unanimous voice, all stretching out their hands, they replied: "We swear on our honor!"

"Now," resumed Morgan, "let us look at our position under its true aspect, without deluding ourselves in any way. Once an intelligent police force starts out to pursue us, and makes actual war against us, it will be impossible for us to resist. We may trick them like a fox, or double like a boar, but our resistance will be merely a matter of time, that's all. At least that is my opinion."

Morgan questioned his companions with his eyes, and their acquiescence was unanimous, though it was with a smile on their lips that they recognized their doom. But that was the way in those strange days. Men went to their death without fear, and they dealt it to others without emotion.

"And now," asked Montbar, "have you anything further to say?"

"Yes," replied Morgan, "I have to add that nothing is easier than to procure horses, or even to escape on foot; we are all hunters and more or less mountaineers. It will take us six hours on horse back to get out of France, or twelve on foot. Once in Switzerland we can snap our fingers at citizen Fouché and his police. That's all I have to say."

"It would be very amusing to laugh at citizen Fouché," said Montbar, "but very dull to leave France."

"For that reason, I shall not put this extreme measure to a vote until after we have talked with Cadoudal's messenger."

“Ah, true,” exclaimed two or three voices; “the Breton! where is the Breton?”

“He was asleep when I left,” said Montbar.

“And he is still sleeping,” said Adler, pointing to a man lying on a heap of straw in a recess of the grotto.

They wakened the Breton, who rose to his knees, rubbing his eyes with one hand and feeling for his carbine with the other.

“You are with friends,” said a voice; “don’t be afraid.”

“Afraid!” said the Breton; “who are you, over there, who thinks I am afraid?”

“Some one who probably does not know what fear is, my dear Branche-d’Or,” said Morgan, who recognized in Cadoudal’s messenger the same man whom they had received at the Chartreuse the night he himself arrived from Avignon. “I ask pardon on his behalf.”

Branche-d’Or looked at the young men before him with an air that left no doubt of his repugnance for a certain sort of pleasantry; but as the group had evidently no offensive intention, their gayety having no insolence about it, he said, with a tolerably gracious air: “Which of you gentlemen is captain? I have a letter for him from my captain.”

Morgan advanced a step and said: “I am.”

“Your name?”

“I have two.”

“Your fighting name?”

“Morgan.”

“Yes, that’s the one the general told me; besides, I recognize you. You gave me a bag containing sixty thousand francs the night I saw the monks. The letter is for you then.”

“Give it to me.”

The peasant took off his hat, pulled out the lining, and from between it and the felt he took a piece of paper which resembled another lining, and seemed at first sight to be blank. Then, with a military salute, he offered the paper to Morgan, who turned it over and over and could see no writing; at least none was apparent.

“A candle,” he said.

They brought a wax light; Morgan held the paper to the flame. Little by little, as the paper warmed, the writing appeared. The experience appeared familiar to the young men; the Breton alone seemed surprised. To his naive mind the operation probably seemed like witchcraft; but so long as the devil was aiding the royalist cause the Chouan was willing to deal with him.

“Gentlemen,” said Morgan, “do you want to know what the master says?”

All bowed and listened, while the young man read:

> MY DEAR MORGAN — If you hear that I have abandoned the cause, and am in treaty with the government of the First Consul and the Vendéan leaders, do not believe it. I am a Breton of Brittany, and consequently as stubborn as a true Breton. The First Consul sent one of his aides-de-camp to offer me an amnesty for all my men, and the rank of colonel for myself. I have not even consulted my men, I refused for them and for me.
>
> Now, all depends on us; as we receive from the princes neither money nor encouragement, you are our only treasurer; close your coffers, or rather cease to open those of the government for us, and the royalist opposition, the heart of which beats only in Brittany, will subside little by little, and end before long.
>
> I need not tell you that my life will have ended first.
>
> Our mission is dangerous; probably it will cost us our heads; but what can be more glorious than to hear posterity say of us, if one can hear beyond the grave: “All others despaired; but they, never!”
>
> One of us will survive the other, but only to succumb later. Let that survivor say as he dies: *Etiamsi omnes, ego non.*
>
> Count on me as I count on you. CADOUDAL.
>
> P.S. — You know that you can safely give Branche-d’Or all the money you have for the Cause. He has promised me not to let himself be taken, and I trust his word.

A murmur of enthusiasm ran through the group, as Morgan finished the last words of the letter.

“You have heard it, gentlemen?” he said.

“Yes, yes, yes,” repeated every voice.

“In the first place, how much money have we to give to Branche-d’Or?”

“Thirteen thousand francs from the Lake of Silans, twenty-two thousand from Les Carronnières, fourteen thousand from Meximieux, forty-nine thousand in all,” said one of the group.

“You hear, Branche-d’Or?” said Morgan; “it is not much — only half what we gave you last time, but you know the proverb: ‘The handsomest girl in the world can only give what she has.’“

“The general knows what you risk to obtain this money, and he says that, no matter how little you send, he will receive it gratefully.”

“All the more, that the next will be better,” said a young man who had just joined the group, unperceived, so absorbed were all present in Cadoudal’s letter. “More especially if we say two words to the mail-coach from Chambéry next Saturday.”

“Ah! is that you, Valensolle?” said Morgan.

“No real names, if you please, baron; let us be shot, guillotined, drawn and quartered, but save our family honor. My name is Adler; I answer to no other.”

“Pardon me, I did wrong — you were saying?”

“That the mail-coach from Paris to Chambéry will pass through Chapelle-de-Guinchay and Belleville next Saturday, carrying fifty thousand francs of government money to the monks of Saint-Bernard; to which I may add that there is between those two places a spot called the Maison-Blanche, which seems to me admirably adapted for an ambuscade.”

“What do you say, gentlemen?” asked Morgan, “Shall we do citizen Fouché the honor to worry about his police? Shall we leave France? Or shall we still remain faithful Companions of Jehu?”

There was but one reply — ”We stay.”

“Right!” said Morgan. “Brothers, I recognize you there. Cadoudal points out our duty in that admirable letter we have just received. Let us adopt his heroic motto: *Etiamsi omnes, ego non.*” Then addressing the peasant, he said, “Branche-d’Or, the forty-nine thousand francs are at your disposal; you can start when you like. Promise something better next time, in our name, and tell the general for me that, wherever he goes, even though it be to the scaffold, I shall deem it an honor to follow, or to precede him. Au revoir, Branche-d’Or.” Then, turning to the young man who seemed so anxious to preserve his incognito, “My dear Adler,” he said, like a man who has recovered his gayety, lost for an instant, “I undertake to feed and lodge you this night, if you will deign to accept me as a host.”

“Gratefully, friend Morgan,” replied the new-comer. “Only let me tell you that I could do without a bed, for I am dropping with fatigue, but not without supper, for I am dying of hunger.”

“You shall have a good bed and an excellent supper.”

“Where must I go for them.”

“Follow me.”

“I’m ready.”

“Then come on. Good-night, gentlemen! Are you on watch, Montbar?”

“Yes.”

“Then we can sleep in peace.”

So saying, Morgan passed his arm through that of his friend, took a torch in his other hand, and passed into the depths of the grotto, where we will follow him if our readers are not too weary of this long session.

It was the first time that Valensolle, who came, as we have said, from the neighborhood of Aix, had had occasion to visit the grotto of Ceyzeriat, recently adopted as the meeting-place of the Companions of Jehu. At the preceding meetings he had occasion to explore only the windings and intricacies of the Chartreuse of Seillon, which he now knew so well that in the farce played before Roland the part of ghost was intrusted to him. Everything was, therefore, curious and unknown to him in this new domicile, where he now expected to take his first sleep, and which seemed likely to be, for some days at least, Morgan’s headquarters.

As is always the case in abandoned quarries — which, at the first glance, partake somewhat of the character of subterranean cities — the different galleries excavated by the removal of the stone end in a cul de sac; that is to say, at a point in the mine where the work stops. One of these streets seemed to prolong itself indefinitely. Nevertheless, there came a point where the mine would naturally have ended, but there, in the angle of the tunnelled way, was cut (For what purpose? The thing remains a mystery to this day among the people of the neigbborhood) an opening two-thirds the width of the gallery, wide enough, or nearly so, to give passage to two men abreast.

The two friends passed through this opening. The air there became so rarefied that their torch threatened to go out at every step. Vallensolle felt drops of ice-cold water falling on his hands and face.

"Bless me," said he, "does it rain down here?"

"No," replied Morgan, laughing; "only we are passing under the Reissouse."

"Then we are going to Bourg?"

"That's about it."

"All right; you are leading me; you have promised me supper and a bed, so I have nothing to worry about — unless that light goes out," added the young man, looking at the paling flame of the torch.

"That wouldn't matter; we can always find ourselves here."

"In the end!" said Valensolle. "And when one reflects that we are wandering through a grotto under rivers at three o'clock in the morning, sleeping the Lord knows where, with the prospect of being taken, tried, and guillotined some fine morning, and all for princes who don't even know our names, and who if they did know them one day would forget them the next — I tell you, Morgan, it's stupid!"

"My dear fellow," said Morgan, "what we call stupid, what ordinary minds never do understand in such a case, has many a chance to become sublime."

"Well, well," said Valensolle, "I see that you will lose more than I do in this business; I put devotion into it, but you put enthusiasm."

Morgan sighed.

"Here we are," said he, letting the conversation drop, like a burden too heavy to be carried longer. In fact, his foot had just struck against the first step of a stairway.

Preceding Valensolle, for whom he lighted the way, Morgan went up ten steps and reached the gate. Taking a key from his pocket, he opened it. They found themselves in the burial vault. On each side of the vault stood coffins on iron tripods: ducal crowns and escutcheons, blazoned azure, with the cross argent, indicated that these coffins belonged to the family of Savoy before it came to bear the royal crown. A flight of stairs at the further end of the cavern led to an upper floor.

Valensolle cast a curious glance around him, and by the vacillating light of the torch, he recognized the funereal place he was in.

"The devil!" said he, "we are just the reverse of the Spartans, it seems."

"Inasmuch as they were Republicans and we are royalists?" asked Morgan.

“No; because they had skeletons at the end of their suppers, and we have ours at the beginning.”

“Are you sure it was the Spartans who proved their philosophy in that way?” asked Morgan, closing the door.

“They or others — what matter?” said Vallensolle. “Faith! My citation is made, and like the Abbé Vertot, who wouldn’t rewrite his siege, I’ll not change it.”

“Well, another time you had better say the Egyptians.”

“Well,” said Valensolle, with an indifference that was not without a certain sadness, “I’ll probably be a skeleton myself before I have another chance to display my erudition. But what the devil are you doing? Why did you put out the torch? You’re not going to make me eat and sleep here I hope?”

Morgan had in fact extinguished the torch at the foot of the steps leading to the upper floor.

“Give me your hand,” said the young man.

Valensolle seized his friend’s band with an eagerness that showed how very slight a desire he had to make a longer stay in the gloomy vaults of the dukes of Savoy, no matter what honor there might be in such illustrious companionship.

Morgan went up the steps. Then, by the tightening of his hand, Valensolle knew he was making an effort. Presently a stone was raised, and through the opening a trembling gleam of twilight met the eyes of the young men, and a fragrant aromatic odor came to comfort their sense of smell after the mephitic atmosphere of the vaults.

“Ah!” cried Valensolle, “we are in a barn; I prefer that.”

Morgan did not answer; he helped his companion to climb out of the vault, and then let the stone drop back in its place.

Valensolle looked about him. He was in the midst of a vast building filled with hay, into which the light filtered through windows of such exquisite form that they certainly could not be those of a barn.

“Why!” said Valensolle, “we are not in a barn!”

“Climb up the hay and sit down near that window,” replied Morgan.

Valensolle obeyed and scrambled up the hay like a schoolboy in his holidays; then he sat down, as Morgan had told him, before a window. The next moment Morgan placed between his friend’s legs a napkin containing a paté, bread, a bottle of wine, two glasses, two knives and two forks.

“The deuce!” cried Valensolle, “‘Lucullus sups with Lucullus.’“

Then gazing through the panes at a building with numberless windows, which seemed to be a wing of the one they were in, and before which a sentry was pacing, he exclaimed: “Positively, I can’t eat my supper till I know where we are. What is this building? And why that sentry at the door?”

“Well,” said Morgan, “since you absolutely must know, I will tell you. We are in the church of Brou, which was converted into a fodder storehouse by a decree of the Municipal Council. That adjoining building is now the barracks of the gendarmerie, and that sentry is posted to prevent any one from disturbing our supper or surprising us while we sleep.”

“Brave fellows,” said Valensolle, filling his glass; “their health, Morgan!”

“And ours!” said the young man, laughing; “the devil take me if any one could dream of finding us here.”

Morgan had hardly drained his glass, when, as if the devil had accepted the challenge, the sentinel’s harsh, strident voice cried: “*Qui vive!*”

“Hey!” exclaimed the two young men, “what does this mean?”

A body of thirty men came from the direction of Pont d’Ain, and, after giving the countersign to the sentry, at once dispersed; the larger number, led by two men, who seemed to be officers, entered the barracks; the others continued on their way.

“Attention!” said Morgan.

And both young men, on their knees, their ears alert, their eyes at the window, waited.

Let us now explain to the reader the cause of this interruption of a repast which, though taken at three o’clock in the morning, was not, as we have seen, over-tranquil.

CHAPTER XL.

A FALSE SCENT

The jailer’s daughter had not been mistaken; it was indeed Roland whom she had seen in the jail speaking to the captain of the gendarmerie. Neither was Amélie wrong in her terror. Roland was really in pursuit of Morgan.

Although he avoided going to the Château des Noires-Fontaines, it was not that he had the slightest suspicion of the interest his sister had in the leader of the Companions of Jehu; but he feared the indiscretion of one of his servants. He had recognized Charlotte at the jail, but as the girl showed no astonishment, he believed she had not recognized him, all the more because, after exchanging a few words with the captain, he went out to wait for the latter on the Place du Bastion, which was always deserted at that hour.

His duties over, the captain of gendarmerie joined him. He found Roland impatiently walking back and forth. Roland had merely made himself known at the jail, but here he proceeded to explain the matter, and to initiate the captain into the object of his visit.

Roland had solicited the First Consul, as a favor to himself, that the pursuit of the Companions of Jehu be intrusted to him personally, a favor he had obtained without difficulty. An order from the minister of war placed at his disposal not only the garrison of Bourg, but also those of the neighboring towns. An order from the minister of police enjoined all the officers of the gendarmerie to render him every assistance.

He naturally applied in the first instance to the captain of the gendarmerie at Bourg, whom he had long known personally as a man of great courage and executive ability. He found what he wanted in him. The captain was furious against the Companions of Jehu, who had stopped diligences within a mile of his town, and on whom he was unable to lay his hand. He knew of the reports relating to the last three stoppages that had been sent to the minister of police, and he understood the latter’s anger. But Roland brought his amazement to a climax when he told him of the night he had spent at the

Chartreuse of Seillon, and of what had happened to Sir John at that same Chartreuse during the succeeding night.

The captain had heard by common rumor that Madame de Montrevel's guest had been stabbed; but as no one had lodged a complaint, he did not think he had the right to investigate circumstances which it seemed to him Roland wished to keep in the dark. In those troublous days more indulgence was shown to officers of the army than they might have received at other times.

As for Roland, he had said nothing because he wished to reserve for himself the satisfaction of pursuing the assassins and sham ghosts of the Chartreuse when the time came. He now arrived with full power to put that design into execution, firmly resolved not to return to the First Consul until it was accomplished. Besides, it was one of those adventures he was always seeking, at once dangerous and picturesque, an opportunity of pitting his life against men who cared little for their own, and probably less for his. Roland had no conception of Morgan's safe-guard which had twice protected him from danger — once on the night he had watched at the Chartreuse, and again when he had fought against Cadoudal. How could he know that a simple cross was drawn above his name, and that this symbol of redemption guaranteed his safety from one end of France to the other?

For the rest, the first thing to be done was to surround the Chartreuse of Seillon, and to search thoroughly into its most secret places — a thing Roland believed himself perfectly competent to do.

The night was now too far advanced to undertake the expedition, and it was postponed until the one following. In the meantime Roland remained quietly in hiding in the captain's room at the barracks that no one might suspect his presence at Bourg nor its cause. The following night he was to guide the expedition. In the course of the morrow, one of the gendarmes, who was a tailor, agreed to make him a sergeant's uniform. He was to pass as a member of the brigade at Sons-le-Saulnier, and, thanks to the uniform, could direct the search at the Chartreuse without being recognized.

Everything happened as planned. Roland entered the barracks with the captain about one o'clock, ascended to the latter's room, where he slept on a bed on the floor like a man who has just passed two days and two nights in a post-chaise. The next day he restrained his impatience by drawing a plan of the Chartreuse of Seillon for the captain's instruction, with which, even without Roland's help, that worthy officer could have directed the expedition without going an inch astray.

As the captain had but eighteen men under him, and it was not possible to surround the monastery completely with that number, or rather, to guard the two exits and make a thorough search through the interior, and, as it would have taken three or four days to bring in all the men of the brigade scattered throughout the neighborhood, the officer, by Roland's order, went to the colonel of dragoons, garrisoned at Bourg, told him of the matter in hand, and asked for twelve men, who, with his own, made thirty in all.

The colonel not only granted the twelve men, but, learning that the expedition was to be commanded by Colonel Roland de Montrevel, aide-de-camp to the First Consul, he proposed that he himself should join the party at the head of his twelve men.

Roland accepted his co-operation, and it was agreed that the colonel (we employ the words colonel and chief of brigade indifferently, both being interchangeable terms indicating the same rank) and his twelve dragoons should pick up Roland, the captain, and his eighteen men, the barracks being directly on their road to the Chartreuse. The time was set for eleven that night.

At eleven precisely, with military punctuality, the colonel of dragoons and his twelve men joined the gendarmes, and the two companies, now united in one, began their march. Roland, in his sergeant's uniform, made himself known to his brother colonel; but to the dragoons and gendarmes he remained, as agreed upon, a sergeant detached from the brigade at Sons-le-Saulnier. Only, as it might otherwise have seemed extraordinary that a sergeant, wholly unfamiliar with these localities, should be their guide, the men were told that Roland had been in his youth a novice at Seillon, and was therefore better acquainted than most persons with the mysterious nooks of the Chartreuse.

The first feeling of these brave soldiers had been a slight humiliation at being guided by an ex-monk; but, on the other hand, as that ex-monk wore the three-cornered hat jauntily, and as his whole manner and appearance was that of a man who has completely forgotten that he formerly wore a cowl, they ended by accepting the humiliation, and reserved their final judgment on the sergeant until they could see how he handled the musket he carried on his arm, the pistols he wore in his belt, and the sword that hung at his side.

The party was supplied with torches, and started in perfect silence. They were divided into three squads; one of eight men, led by the captain of gendarmerie, another of ten, commanded by the colonel, and the third of twelve men, with Roland at its head. On leaving the town they separated.

The captain of the gendarmerie, who knew the localities better than the colonel of dragoons, took upon himself to guard the window of La Correrie, giving upon the forest of Seillon, with his eight men. The colonel of dragoons was commissioned by Roland to watch the main entrance of the Chartreuse; with him were five gendarmes and five dragoons. Roland was to search the interior, taking with him five gendarmes and seven dragoons.

Half an hour was allowed each squad to reach its post; it was more than was needed. Roland and his men were to scale the orchard wall when half-past eleven was ringing from the belfry at Péronnaz. The captain of gendarmerie followed the main road from Pont d'Ain to the edge of the woods, which he skirted until he reached his appointed station. The colonel of dragoons took the crossroad which branches from the highway of Pont d'Ain and leads to the great portal of the Chartreuse. Roland crossed the fields to the orchard wall which, as the reader will remember, he had already climbed on two occasions.

Punctually at half-past eleven he gave the signal to his men to scale the wall. By the time they reached the other side the men, if they did not yet know that Roland was brave, were at least sure that he was active.

Roland pointed in the dusk to a door — the one that led from the orchard into the cloister. Then he sprang ahead through the rank grasses; first, he opened the door; first, he entered the cloister.

All was dark, silent and solitary. Roland, still guiding his men, reached the refectory. Absolute solitude; utter silence.

They crossed the hall obliquely, and returned to the garden without alarming a living creature except the owls and the bats. There still remained the cistern, the mortuary vault, and the pavilion, or rather, the chapel in the forest, to be searched. Roland crossed the open space between the cistern and the monastery. After descending the steps, he lighted three torches, kept one, and handed the other two, one to a dragoon, the other to a gendarme; then he raised the stone that concealed the stairway.

The gendarmes who followed Roland began to think him as brave as he was active.

They followed the subterranean passage to the first gate; it was closed but not locked. They entered the funereal vault. Here was more than solitude, more than silence; here was death. The bravest felt a shiver in the roots of their hair.

Roland went from tomb to tomb, sounding each with the butt of the pistol he held in his hand. Silence everywhere. They crossed the vault, reached the second gate, and entered the chapel. The same silence, the same solitude; all was deserted, as it seemed, for years. Roland went straight to the choir; there lay the blood on the stones; no one had taken the trouble to efface it. Here was the end of his search, which had proved futile. Roland could not bring himself to retreat. He fancied he was not attacked because of his numerous escort; he therefore left ten men and a torch in the chapel, told them to put themselves in communication, through the ruined window, with the captain of the gendarmerie, who was ambushed in the forest within a few feet of the window, while he himself, with two men, retraced his steps.

This time the two men who followed Roland thought him more than brave, they considered him foolhardy. But Roland, caring little whether they followed or not, retraced his own steps in default of those of the bandits. The two men, ashamed, followed him.

Undoubtedly the Chartreuse was deserted. When Roland reached the great portal, he called to the colonel of dragoons; he and his men were at their post. Roland opened the door and joined them. They had seen nothing, heard nothing. The whole party entered the monastery, closing and barricading the door behind them to cut off the bandits’ retreat, if they were fortunate enough to meet any. Then they hastened to rejoin their comrades, who, on their side, had united with the captain and his eight men, and were waiting for them in the choir.

There was nothing for it but to retire. Two o’clock had just struck; nearly three hours had been spent in fruitless search. Roland, rehabilitated in the estimation of the gendarmes and the dragoons, who saw that the ex-novice did not shirk danger, regretfully gave the signal for retreat by opening the door of the chapel which looked toward the forest.

This time Roland merely closed the door behind him, there being no longer any hope of encountering the brigands. Then the little troop returned to Bourg at a quick step. The captain of gendarmerie, with his eighteen men and Roland, re-entered the barracks, while the colonel and his twelve men continued on their way toward the town.

It was the sentinel’s call, as he challenged the captain and his party, which had attracted the attention of Morgan and Valensolle; and it was the noise of their return to the barracks which interrupted the supper, and caused Morgan to cry out at this unforeseen circumstance: “Attention!”

In fact, in the present situation of these young men, every circumstance merited attention. So the meal was interrupted. Their jaws ceased to work to give the eyes and ears full scope. It soon became evident that the services of their eyes were alone needed.

Each gendarme regained his room without light. The numerous barrack windows remained dark, so that the watchers were able to concentrate their attention on a single point.

Among those dark windows, two were lighted. They stood relatively back from the rest of the building, and directly opposite to the one where the young men were supping. These windows were on the first floor, but in the position the watchers occupied at the top of bales of hay, Morgan and Valensolle were not only on a level, but could even look down into them. These windows were those of the room of the captain of gendarmes.

Whether from indifference on the worthy captain’s part, or by reason of State penury, the windows were bare of curtains, so that, thanks to the two candles which the captain had lighted in his guest’s honor, Morgan and Valensolle could see everything that took place in this room.

Suddenly Morgan grasped Valensolle’s arm, and pressed it with all his might.

“Hey” said Valensolle “what now?”

Roland had just thrown his three-cornered hat on a chair and Morgan had recognized him.

“Roland de Montrevel!” he exclaimed, “Roland in a sergeant’s uniform! This time we are on his track while he is still seeking ours. It behooves us not to lose it.”

“What are you going to do?” asked Valensolle, observing that his friend was preparing to leave him.

“Inform our companions. You stay here and do not lose sight of him. He has taken off his sword, and laid his pistols aside, therefore it is probable he intends to spend the night in the captain’s room. To-morrow I defy him to take any road, no matter which, without one of us at his heels.”

And Morgan sliding down the declivity of the hay, disappeared from sight, leaving his companion crouched like a sphinx, with his eyes fixed on

Roland de Montrevel.

A quarter of an hour later Morgan returned. By this time the officer’s windows were dark like all the others of the barracks.

“Well?” asked Morgan.

“Well,” replied Valensolle, “it ended most prosaically. They undressed themselves, blew out the candles, and lay down, the captain on his bed, Roland on a mattress. They are probably trying to outsnore each other at the present moment.”

“In that case,” said Morgan, “good-night to them, and to us also.”

Ten minutes later the wish was granted, and the two young men were sleeping, as if they did not have danger for a bed-fellow.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE HÔTEL DE LA POSTE

That same morning, about six o’clock, at the cold gray breaking of a February day, a rider, spurring a post-hack and preceded by a postilion who was to lead back the horse, left Bourg by the road to Mâcon or Saint-Julien.

We say Mâcon *or* Saint-Julien, because about three miles from the capital of Bresse the road forks; the one to the right keeping straight on to Saint-Julien, the other, which deviates to the left, leading to Mâcon.

When the rider reached this bifurcation, he was about to take the road leading to Mâcon, when a voice, apparently coming from beneath an upset cart, implored his pity. The rider called to the postilion to see what the matter was.

A poor market-man was pinned down under a load of vegetables. He had evidently attempted to hold up the cart just as the wheel, sinking into the ditch, overbalanced the vehicle. The cart had fallen on him, but fortunately, he said, he thought no limbs were broken, and all he wanted was to get the cart righted, and then he could recover his legs.

The rider was compassionate to his fellow being, for he not only allowed the postilion to stop and help the market-man, but he himself dismounted, and with a vigor one would hardly have expected from so slight a man, he assisted the postilion not only to right the cart, but to replace it on the roadbed. After which he offered to help the man to rise; but the latter had said truly; he really was safe and sound, and if there were a slight shaking of the legs, it only served to prove the truth of the proverb that God takes care of drunkards. The man was profuse in his thanks, and took his horse by the bridle, as much, it was evident, to hold himself steady as to lead the animal.

The riders remounted their homes, put them to a gallop, and soon disappeared round a bend which the road makes a short distance before it reaches the woods of Monnet.

They had scarcely disappeared when a notable change took place in the demeanor of our market-man. He stopped his horse, straightened up, put the mouthpiece of a tiny trumpet to his lips, and blew three times. A species of groom emerged from the woods which line the road, leading a gentleman's horse by the bridle. The market-man rapidly removed his blouse, discarded his linen trousers, and appeared in vest and breeches of buckskin, and top boots. He searched in his cart, drew forth a package which he opened, shook out a green hunting coat with gold braidings, put it on, and over it a dark-brown overcoat; took from the servant's hands a hat which the latter presented him, and which harmonized with his elegant costume, made the man screw his spurs to his boots, and sprang upon his horse with the lightness and skill of an experienced horseman.

"To-night at seven," he said to the groom, "be on the road between Saint-Just and Ceyzeriat. You will meet Morgan. Tell him that he *whom he knows of* has gone to Mâcon, but that I shall be there before him."

Then, without troubling himself about his cart and vegetables, which he left in his servant's charge, the ex-marketman, who was none other than our old acquaintance Montbar, turned his horse's head toward the Monnet woods, and set out at a gallop. His mount was not a miserable post hack, like that on which Roland was riding. On the contrary, it was a blooded horse, so that Montbar easily overtook the two riders, and passed them on the road between the woods of Monnet and Polliat. The horse, except for a short stop at Saint-Cyr-sur-Menthon, did the twenty-eight or thirty miles between Bourg and Mâcon, without resting, in three hours.

Arrived at Mâcon, Montbar dismounted at the Hôtel de la Poste, the only one which at that time was fitted to receive guests of distinction. For the rest, from the manner in which Montbar was received it was evident that the host was dealing with an old acquaintance.

"Ah! is it you, Monsieur de Jayat?" said the host. "We were wondering yesterday what had become of you. It's more than a month since we've seen you in these parts."

"Do you think it's as long as that, friend?" said the young man, affecting to drop his r's after the fashion of the day. "Yes, on my honor, that's so! I've been with friends, the Trefforts and the Hautecourts. You know those gentlemen by name, don't you?"

"By name, and in person."

"We hunted to hounds. They're finely equipped, word of honor! Can I breakfast here this morning?"

"Why not?"

“Then serve me a chicken, a bottle of Bordeaux, two cutlets, fruit — any trifle will go.”

“At once. Shall it be served in your room, or in the common room?”

“In the common room, it’s more amusing; only give me a table to myself. Don’t forget my horse. He is a fine beast, and I love him better than I do certain Christians, word of honor!”

The landlord gave his orders. Montbar stood before the fire, his coat-tails drawn aside, warming his calves.

“So you still keep to the posting business?” he said to the landlord, as if desirous of keeping up the conversation.

“I should think so!”

“Then you relay the diligences?”

“Not the diligences, but the mail-coaches.”

“Ah! tell me — I want to go to Chambéry some of these days — how many places are there in the mail-coach?”

“Three; two inside, and one out with the courier.”

“Do I stand any chance of finding a vacant seat?”

“It may happen; but the safest way is to hire your own conveyance.”

“Can’t I engage a place beforehand?”

“No; for don’t you see, Monsieur de Jayat, that if travellers take places from Paris to Lyons, they have the first right.”

“See, the aristocrats!” said Montbar, laughing. “Apropos of aristocrats, there is one behind me posting here. I passed him about a mile the other side of Polliat. I thought his hack a little wind-broken.”

“Oh!” exclaimed the landlord, “that’s not astonishing; my brothers in the business have a poor lot of horses.”

“Why, there’s our man!” continued Montbar; “I thought I had more of a lead of him.”

Roland was, in fact, just passing the windows at a gallop.

“Do you still want chamber No. 1, Monsieur de Jayat?” asked the landlord.

“Why do you ask?”

“Because it is the best one, and if you don’t take it, I shall give it to that man, provided he wants to make any stay.”

“Oh! don’t bother about me; I shan’t know till later in the day whether I go or stay. If the new-comer means to remain give him No. l. I will content myself with No. 2.”

“The gentleman is served,” said the waiter, looking through the door which led from the kitchen to the common room.

Montbar nodded and accepted the invitation. He entered the common room just as Roland came into the kitchen. The dinner was on the table. Montbar changed his plate and sat down with his back to the door. The precaution was useless. Roland did not enter the common room, and Montbar breakfasted without interruption. When dessert was over, however, the host himself brought in his coffee. Montbar understood that the good man was in talkative humor; a fortunate circumstance, for there were certain things he was anxious to hear about.

“Well,” said Montbar, “what became of our man? Did he only change horses?”

“No, no, no,” said the landlord; “as you said, he’s an aristocrat. He ordered breakfast in his own room.”

“His room or my room?” asked Montbar; “for I’m certain you put him in that famous No. 1.”

“Confound it! Monsieur de Jayat, it’s your own fault. You told me I could do as I liked.”

“And you took me at my word; that was right. I shall be satisfied with No. 2.”

“You’ll be very uncomfortable. It’s only separated from No. 1 by a partition, and you can hear everything that happens from one room to the other.”

“Nonsense, my dear man, do you think I’ve come here to do improper things, or sing seditious songs, that you are afraid the stranger should hear or see what I do?”

“Oh! that’s not it.”

“What is it then?”

“I’m not afraid you’ll disturb others. I’m afraid they’ll disturb you.”

“So your new guest is a roisterer?”

“No; he looks to me like an officer.”

“What makes you think so?”

“His manner, in the first place. Then he inquired what regiment was in garrison at Mâcon; and when I told him it was the 7th mounted Chasseurs, he said: ‘Good! the colonel is a friend of mine. Can a waiter take him my card and ask him to breakfast with me?’“

“Ah, ha!”

"So you see how it is. When officers get together they make so much racket and noise. Perhaps they'll not only breakfast, but dine and sup together."

"I've told you already, my good man, that I am not sure of passing the night here. I am expecting letters from Paris, *paste restante*, which will decide me. In the meantime, light a fire in No. 2, and make as little noise as possible, to avoid annoying my neighbors. And, at the same time, send me up pen and ink, and some paper. I have letters to write."

Montbar's orders were promptly executed, and he himself followed the waiter to see that Roland was not disturbed by his proximity.

The chamber was just what the landlord had said. Not a movement could be made, not a word uttered in the next room, that was not heard. Consequently Montbar distinctly heard the waiter announce Colonel Saint-Maurice, then the resounding steps of the latter in the corridor, and the exclamations of the two friends, delighted to meet again.

On the other hand, Roland, who had been for a moment disturbed by the noise in the adjoining room, forgot it as soon as it had ceased, and there was no danger of its being renewed. Montbar, left alone, seated himself at the table, on which were paper, pen and ink, and remained perfectly motionless.

The two officers had known each other in Italy, where Roland was under the command of Saint-Maurice, the latter being then a captain and Roland a lieutenant. At present their rank was equal, but Roland had beside a double commission from the First Consul and the minister of police, which placed all officers of his own rank under his command, and even, within the limits of his mission, those of a higher rank.

Morgan had not been mistaken in supposing that Amélie's brother was in pursuit of the Companions of Jehu. If Roland's nocturnal search at the Chartreuse of Seillon was not convincing, the conversation between the young officer and his colleague was proof positive. In it, it developed that the First Consul was really sending fifty thousand francs as a gift to the monks of Saint-Bernard, by post; but that this money was in reality a trap devised for the capture of the Companions of Jehu, if all means failed to surprise them in the Chartreuse of Seillon or some other refuge.

It now-remained to be seen how these bandits should be captured. The case was eagerly debated between the two officers while they had breakfast. By the time dessert was served they were both agreed upon a plan.

That same evening, Morgan received the following letter:

> Just as Adler told us, next Friday at five o’clock the mail-coach will leave Paris with fifty thousand francs for the fathers of Saint-Bernard.
>
> The three places, the one in the coupé and the two in the interior, are already engaged by three travellers who will join the coach, one at Sens, the other two at Tonnerre. The travellers are, in the coupé, one of citizen Fouché’s best men: in the interior M. Roland de Montrevel and the colonel of the 7th Chasseurs, garrisoned at Mâcon. They will be in civilians’ clothes not to excite suspicion, but armed to the teeth.
>
> Twelve mounted Chasseurs, with muskets, pistols, and sabres, will escort the coach, but at some distance behind it, so as to arrive during the fray. The first pistol fired will be the signal for putting their horses to a gallop and falling upon us.
>
> Now my advice is that, in spite of these precautions, in fact because of these precautions, the attack should be made at the place agreed upon, namely the Maison-Blanche. If that is also the opinion of the comrades, let me know it. I will myself take the coach, as postilion, from Mâcon to Belleville. I will undertake to settle the colonel, and one of you must be responsible for Fouché’s agent.
>
> As for M. Roland de Montrevel, no harm will befall him, for I have a means, known to me alone and by me invented, by which he can be prevented from leaving the coach.
>
> The precise day and hour at which the mail to Chambéry will pass the Maison-Blanche is Saturday at six in the evening. Answer in these words, “Saturday, six of the evening,” and all will go on rollers. MONTBAR.

At midnight Montbar, who had complained of the noise his neighbor made, and had removed to a room at the opposite end of the inn, was awakened by a courier, who was none other than the groom who had brought him his horse ready bridled and saddled in the morning. The letter contained only these words, followed by a postscript:

> Saturday, six of the evening. MORGAN.
>
> P.S. — Do not forget, even when fighting, above all when fighting, that Roland de Montrevel’s life is safeguarded.

The young man read this reply with visible satisfaction. The matter was no longer a mere stoppage of a diligence, but a species of affair of honor among men of differing opinions, with clashes of courage and bravery. It was no longer a matter of gold spilled upon the highroad, but of blood to be shed — not of pistols loaded with powder, and wielded by a child’s hands, but of deadly weapons handled by soldiers accustomed to their use.

For the rest, as Montbar had all the day that was dawning and the morrow before him in which to mature his plans, he contented himself with asking his groom to inquire which postilion would take the coach at Mâcon at five o’clock for the two stages between Mâcon and Belleville. He also sent him to buy four screw-rings and two padlocks fastening with keys.

He already knew that the mail was due at Mâcon at half past four, waited for the travellers to dine, and started again punctually at five. No doubt all his plans were previously laid, for, after giving these directions, Montbar dismissed his servant and went to sleep like a man who has long arrears of slumber to make up.

The next morning he did not wake, or rather did not come downstairs until nine o’clock. He asked casually what had become of his noisy neighbor, and was told that he had started in the Lyons mail at six in the morning, with his friend the colonel of the Chasseurs; but the landlord thought they had only engaged places as far as Tonnerre.

If Monsieur de Jayat had interested himself in the young officer, the latter, in turn, had made inquiries about him, asking who he was, whether he came habitually to the hotel, and whether he would be willing to sell his horse. The landlord had replied that he knew Monsieur de Jayat well, for he was in the habit of coming to the hotel whenever business brought him to Mâcon, and that, as for the horse, he did not believe, considering the affection the young gentleman showed for the animal, that he would consent to part with him for any price. On which the traveller had departed without saying any more.

After breakfast M. de Jayat, who seemed to find time hanging heavily on his hands, ordered his horse, mounted it, and rode out from Mâcon by the Lyons road. As long as he was in the town he allowed his horse to take the pace his fancy dictated, but once beyond it, he gathered up the reins and pressed the animal with his knees. The hint sufficed, and the animal broke into a gallop.

Montbar passed through the villages of Varennes, La Crèche, and Chapelle-de-Guinchay, and did not stop until he reached the Maison-Blanche. The spot was exactly as Valensolle had described it, and was admirably adapted for an ambuscade.

The Maison-Blanche stood in a tiny valley between a sharp declivity and a rise in the ground. A little rivulet without a name flowed past the corner of the garden and made its way to the Saône just above Challe. Tall bushy trees followed the course of the little stream, and described a half-circle, inclosing the house on three sides. The house itself was formerly an inn which proved unproductive to the innkeeper. It had been closed for seven or eight years, and was beginning to fall into decay. Before reaching it, the main road coming from Mâcon made a sharp turn.

Montbar examined the locality with the care of an engineer choosing his ground for a battlefield. He drew a pencil and a note-book from his pocket and made an accurate plan of the position. Then he returned to Mâcon.

Two hours later his groom departed, carrying the plan to Morgan, having informed his master that Antoine was the name of the postilion who was to take the coach from Mâcon to Belleville. The groom also gave him the four screw-rings and the two padlocks he had purchased.

Montbar ordered up a bottle of old Burgundy, and sent for Antoine.

Ten minutes later Antoine appeared. He was a fine, handsome fellow, twenty-five or six years of age, about Montbar’s height; a fact which the latter, in looking him over from head to foot, remarked with satisfaction. The postilion paused at the threshold, and, carrying his hand to his hat in a military salute, he said: “Did the citizen send for me?”

“Are you the man they call Antoine?” asked Montbar.

“At your service, and that of your company.”

“Well, you can serve me, friend. But close the door and come here.”

Antoine closed the door, came within two steps of Montbar, saluted again, and said: “Ready, master.”

“In the first place,” said Montbar, “if you have no objections, we’ll drink a glass of wine to the health of your mistress.”

“Oh! oh! My mistress!” cried Antoine. “Can fellows like me afford mistresses? They’re all very well for gentlemen such as you.”

“Come, you scamp!” said Montbar. “You can’t make me believe that, with your make-up, you’ve made a vow of chastity.”

“Oh! I don’t say I’m a monk in that particular. I may have a bit of a love-affair here and there along the high-road.”

“Yes, at every tavern; and that’s why we stop so often with our return horses to drink a drop or fill a pipe.”

“Confound it!” said Antoine, with an indescribable twist of the shoulders. “A fellow must have his fun.”

“Well, taste the wine, my lad. I’ll warrant it won’t make you weep.” And filling a glass, Montbar signed to the postilion to fill the other.

“A fine honor for me! To your health and that of your company!”

This was an habitual phrase of the worthy postilion, a sort of extension of politeness which did not need the presence of others to justify it in his eyes.

“Ha!” said he, after drinking and smacking his lips, “there’s vintage for you — and I have gulped it down at a swallow as if it were heel-taps!”

“That was a mistake, Antoine.”

“Yes, it was a mistake.”

“Luckily,” said Montbar, refilling his glass, “you can repair it.”

“No higher than my thumb, citizen,” said the facetious postilion, taking care that his thumb touched the rim of the glass.

“One minute,” said Montbar, just as Antoine was putting his glass to his lips.

“Just in time,” said the postilion; “it was on its way. What is it?”

“You wouldn’t let me drink to the health of your mistress, but I hope you won’t refuse to drink to mine.”

“Oh! that’s never refused, especially with such wine. To the health of your mistress and her company.”

Thereupon citizen Antoine swallowed the crimson liquor, tasting and relishing it this time.

“Hey!” exclaimed Montbar, “you’re in too much of a hurry, my friend.”

“Pooh!” retorted the postilion.

“Yes. Suppose I have several mistresses. If I don’t name the one we drink to what good will it do her?”

“Why, that’s true!”

“Sad; but you’ll have to try again, my friend.”

“Ha! Try again, of course! Can’t do things half-way with a man like you. The sin’s committed; we’ll drink again.” And Antoine held out his glass. Montbar filled it to the brim.

“Now,” said Antoine, eying the bottle, and making sure it was empty, “there must be no mistake. Her name?”

“To the beautiful Josephine!” said Montbar.

“To the beautiful Josephine!” repeated Antoine.

And he swallowed the Burgundy with increasing satisfaction. Then, after drinking, and wiping his lips on his sleeve, he said, as he set the glass on the table: “Hey! one moment, citizen.”

“What now?” exclaimed Montbar. “Anything wrong this time?”

“I should say so. We’ve made a great blunder but it’s too late now.”

“Why so?”

“The bottle is empty.”

“That one, yes; but not this one.”

So saying, Montbar took from the chimney corner another bottle, already uncorked.

“Ah! ah!” exclaimed Antoine, a radiant smile lighting his face.

“Is there any remedy for it?” asked Montbar.

“There is,” replied Antoine, holding out his glass.

Montbar filled it as scrupulously full as he had the first three.

“Well,” said the postilion, holding the ruby liquid to the light and admiring its sparkle, “as I was saying, we drank to the health of the beautiful Josephine — ”

“Yes,” said Montbar.

“But,” said Antoine, “there are a devilish lot of Josephines in France.”

“True. How many do you suppose there are, Antoine?”

“Perhaps a hundred thousand.”

“Granted. What then?”

“Well, out of that hundred thousand a tenth of them must be beautiful.”

“That’s a good many.”

“Say a twentieth.”

“All right.”

“That makes five thousand.”

“The devil! You’re strong in arithmetic!”

"I'm the son of a schoolmaster."

"Well?"

"Well, to which of those five thousand did we drink, hey?"

"You're right, Antoine. The family name must follow. To the beautiful Josephine — "

"Stop. This glass was begun; it won't do. If the health is to do her any good, we'll have to empty it and fill it again."

He put the glass to his lips.

"There, it's empty," he said.

"And full," added Montbar, putting the bottle to the glass.

"I'm ready. To the beautiful Josephine — "

"To the beautiful Josephine — Lollier!"

And Montbar emptied his glass.

"By the Lord!" exclaimed Antoine. "Wait a moment. Josephine Lollier! Why, I know her."

"I didn't say you didn't."

"Josephine Lollier! Why, she's the daughter of the man who keeps the post-horses at Belleville."

"Exactly."

"Damn it!" exclaimed the postilion, "you're not to be pitied — a pretty slip of a girl! To the health of beautiful Josephine Lollier."

And he swallowed his fifth glass of Burgundy.

"Now," asked Montbar, "do you understand why I had you sent up here, my lad?"

"No; but I don't bear you any grudge for it, all the same."

"That's very kind of you."

"Oh! I'm a pretty good devil."

"Well, I'll tell you why I sent for you."

"I'm all ears."

"Wait. You'll hear better if your glass is full than if it's empty."

"Are you a doctor for deaf folk?" asked the postilion, banteringly.

"No; but I've lived a good deal among drunkards," replied Montbar, filling Antoine's glass again.

"A man is not a drunkard because he likes wine," said Antoine.

"I agree with you, my good fellow," replied Montbar. "A man is only a drunkard when he can't carry his liquor."

“Well said,” cried Antoine, who seemed to carry his pretty well. “I’m listening.”

“You told me that you didn’t understand why I had sent for you.”

“That’s what I said.”

“Still, you must have suspected that I had an object?”

“Every man has an object, good or bad, according to our priest,” observed Antoine, sententiously.

“Well, my friend,” resumed Montbar, “mine is to make my way by night, without being recognized, into the courtyard of Master Nicolas-Denis Lollier, postmaster at Belleville.”

“At Belleville,” repeated Antoine, who had followed Montbar’s words with all the attention he was capable of. “You wish to make your way by night, without being recognized, into the courtyard of Master Nicolas-Denis Lollier, postmaster at Belleville, in order to see the beautiful Josephine? Ah, ha! my sly dog!”

“You have it, my dear Antoine; and I wish to get in without being recognized, because Father Lollier has discovered everything, and has forbidden his daughter to see me.”

“You don’t say so. Well, what can I do about it?”

“Your wits are still muddled, Antoine. Drink another glass of wine to brighten them up.”

“Right you are,” exclaimed Antoine.

And he swallowed his sixth glass of wine.

“You ask what you can do, Antoine?”

“Yes, what can I do? That’s what I ask.”

“Everything, my friend.”

“I?”

“You.”

“Ha! I’m curious to know what. Clear it up, clear it up!” And he held out his glass.

“You drive the mail to Chambéry to-morrow, don’t you?”

“Yes; at six o’clock.”

“Well, suppose that Antoine is a good fellow?”

“No supposing about it; he is!”

“Well, this is what Antoine does — ”

“Go on; what does he do?”

“In the first place, he empties his glass.”

“Done! that’s not difficult.”

“Then he takes these ten louis.”

Montbar spread ten louis on the table.

“Ah, ha!” exclaimed Antoine, “yellow boys, real ones. I thought those little devils had all emigrated.”

“You see there are some left.”

“And what is Antoine to do to put them in his pocket?”

“Antoine must lend me his best postilion’s suit.”

“To you?”

“And let me take his place to-morrow night.”

“Ah, yes; so that you can see the beautiful Josephine to-morrow night.”

“Of course. I reach Belleville at eight, drive into the courtyard, and say the horses are tired and must rest from eight till ten, and from eight to ten — ”

“You can fool Père Lollier.”

“Well, there you are, Antoine!”

“There I am! When a fellow’s young he goes with the young ‘uns; when he’s a bachelor he’s in with the bachelors; when he’s old and a papa, he can go with the papas, and cry, ‘Long live the papas.’“

“Then, my good Antoine, you’ll lend me your best jacket and breeches?”

“I’ve just got a new jacket and breeches that I’ve never worn.”

“And you’ll let me take your place?”

“With pleasure.”

“Then I’ll give you five louis for earnest money.”

“And the rest?”

“Tomorrow, when I pull on the boots; only — there’s one precaution you must take.”

“What is it?”

“There’s talk of brigands robbing diligences; you’ll be careful to put the holsters on the saddle.”

“What for?”

“For pistols.”

“No, no! Don’t you go and shoot those fine young fellows.”

“What! do you call robbers who pillage diligences fine young men?”

“A man’s not a robber because he takes government money.”

“Is that your opinion?”

“I should say so; besides, it’s the opinion of a good many other people, too. As for me, if I were a judge, I’d never in the world condemn them.”

“Perhaps you would drink to their health?”

“Of course, if the wine was good.”

“I dare you to do it,” said Montbar, emptying the last of the second bottle into Antoine’s glass.

“You know the proverb?” said the postilion.

“What is it?”

“Never defy a fool to commit his folly. To the health of the Companions of Jehu.”

“Amen!” responded Montbar.

“And the five louis?” asked Antoine, putting his glass on the table.

“There they are.”

“Thank you; you shall have the holsters on your saddle; but take my advice and don’t put pistols in ‘em; or if you do, follow Père Jérôme’s example — he’s the conductor of the Geneva diligence — and put powder and no balls in ‘em.”

And with that philanthropic advice, the postilion took his leave, and went down the stairway singing a postilion’s song in a vinous voice.

Montbar followed the song conscientiously through two verses, then, as the voice died away in the distance, he was obliged to forego the rest of the song, however interesting he may have found it.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE CHAMBÉRY MAIL-COACH

The next day, at five in the afternoon, Antoine, anxious, no doubt, not to be late, was in the courtyard of the Hôtel de la Poste, harnessing the three horses which were to relay the mail-coach.

Shortly after, the coach rumbled into the courtyard at a gallop, and was pulled up under the windows of a room close to the servants' stairway, which had seemed greatly to occupy Antoine's attention. If any one had paid attention to so slight a detail it might have been observed that the window-curtain was somewhat imprudently drawn aside to permit the occupant of the room to see the persons who got out of the coach. There were three men, who, with the haste of famished travellers, made their way toward the brilliantly lighted windows of the common room.

They had scarcely entered, when a smart postilion came down the kitchen staircase, shod simply with thin pumps over which he intended to pull his heavy riding-boots, These he received from Antoine, slipping five louis into his hand at the same time, and turned for the man to throw his riding cape over his shoulders, a protection rendered necessary by the severity of the weather.

This completed, Antoine returned hastily to the stables and hid in the darkest corner. As for the man who had taken his place, reassured no doubt by the high collar of the cape that concealed half of his face, he went straight to the horses which stood ready harnessed, slipped his pistols into the holsters, and, profitting by the moment when the other horses were being led into the stable by their postilion, he took a gimlet, which might in case of need serve as a dagger, from his pocket, and screwed the four rings into the woodwork of the coach, one into each door, and the other two into the body of the coach. After which he put the horses to with a rapidity and skill which bespoke in him a man familiar from childhood with all the details of an art pushed to extremes in our day by that honorable class of society which we call “gentlemen riders.”

That done, he waited, quieting his restless horses by voice and whip, judiciously combined, or used in turn.

Everyone knows the rapidity with which the meals of the unhappy beings condemned to travel by mail are hurried through. The half-hour was not up, when the voice of the conductor was heard, calling:

“Come, citizen travellers, take your places.”

Montbar placed himself close to the carriage door and recognized Roland and the colonel of the 7th Chasseurs, perfectly, in spite of their disguise, as they jumped into the coach, paying no attention whatever to the postilion.

The latter closed the door upon them, slipped the padlock through the two rings and turned the key. Then, walking around the coach, he pretended to drop his whip before the other door, and, in stooping for it, slipped the second padlock through the rings, deftly turned the key as he straightened up, and, assured that the two officers were securely locked in, he sprang upon his horse, grumbling at the conductor who had left him to do his work. In fact the conductor was still squabbling with the landlord over his bill when the third traveller got into his place in the coupé.

“Are you coming this evening, to-night, or to-morrow morning, Père François?” cried the pretended postilion, imitating Antoine as best he could.

“All right, all right, I’m coming,” answered the conductor; then, looking around him: “Why, where are the travellers?” he asked.

“Here,” replied the two officers from the interior and the agent from the coupé.

“Is the door properly closed?” persisted Père François.

“I’ll answer for that,” said Montbar.

“Then off you go, baggage!” cried the conductor, as he climbed into the coupé and closed the door behind him.

The postilion did not wait to be told twice; he started his horses, digging his spurs into the belly of the one he rode and lashing the others vigorously. The mail-coach dashed forward at a gallop.

Montbar drove as if he had never done anything else in his life; as he crossed the town the windows rattled and the houses shook; never did real postilion crack his whip with greater science.

As he left Mâcon he saw a little troop of horse; they were the twelve chasseurs told off to follow the coach without seeming to escort it. The colonel passed his head through the window and made a sign to the sergeant who commanded them.

Montbar did not seem to notice anything; but after going some four or five hundred yards, he turned his head, while executing a symphony with his whip, and saw that the escort had started.

“Wait, my babes!” said Montbar, “I’ll make you see the country.” And he dug in his spurs and brought down his whip. The horses seemed to have wings, and the coach flew over the cobblestones like the chariot of thunder rumbling past. The conductor became alarmed.

“Hey, Master Antoine,” cried he, “are you drunk?”

“Drunk? fine drinking!” replied Montbar; “I dined on a beetroot salad.”

“Damn him! If he goes like that,” cried Roland, thrusting his head through the window, “the escort can’t keep up.”

“You hear what he says!” shrieked the conductor.

“No,” replied Montbar, “I don’t.”

“Well, he says that if you keep this up the escort can’t follow.”

“Is there an escort?” asked Montbar.

“Of course; we’re carrying government money.”

“That’s different; you ought to have said so at first.”

But instead of slacking his pace the coach was whirled along as before; if there was any change, it was for greater velocity than before.

“Antoine, if there’s an accident, I’ll shoot you through the head,” shouted the conductor.

“Run along!” exclaimed Montbar; “everybody knows those pistols haven’t any balls in them.”

“Possibly not; but mine have!” cried the police agent.

“That remains to be seen,” replied Montbar, keeping on his way at the same pace without heed to these remonstrances.

On they went with the speed of lightning through the village of Varennes, then through that of La Crêche and the little town of Chapelle-de-Guinchay; only half a mile further and they would reach the Maison-Blanche. The horses were dripping, and tossed the foam from their mouths as they neighed with excitement.

Montbar glanced behind him; more than a mile back the sparks were flying from the escort’s horses. Before him was the mountainous declivity. Down it he dashed, gathering the reins to master his horses when the time came.

The conductor had ceased expostulating, for he saw that the hand which guided the horses was firm and capable. But from time to time the colonel thrust his head through the window to look for his men.

Half-way down the slope Montbar had his horses under control, without, however, seeming to check their course. Then he began to sing, at the top of his voice, the “Réveil du Peuple,” the song of the royalists, just as the “Marseillaise” was the song of the Jacobins.

“What’s that rogue about?” cried Roland, putting his head through the window. “Tell him to hold his tongue, conductor, or I’ll put a ball through his loins.”

Perhaps the conductor might have repeated Roland’s threat to Montbar, but he suddenly saw a black line blocking the road. “Halt, conductor!” thundered a voice the next moment.

“Postilion, drive over the bellies of those bandits!” shouted the police agent.

“Drive on yourself!” said Montbar. “Do you suppose I’m going over the stomachs of friends? Who-o-ah!”

The mail coach stopped as if by magic.

“Go on! go on!” cried Roland and the colonel, aware that the escort was too far behind to help them.

“Ha! You villain of a postilion,” cried the police agent, springing out of the coupé, and pointing his pistol at Montbar, “you shall pay for this.”

The words were scarcely uttered when Montbar, forestalling him, fired, and the agent rolled, mortally wounded, under the wheels of the coach. His fingers, convulsed by death, touched the trigger and the pistol went off, but the ball touched no one.

“Conductor,” shouted the two officers, “by all the powers of heaven, open, open, open quickly!”

“Gentlemen,” said Morgan, advancing, “we are not attacking your persons, we merely want the government money. Conductor! that fifty thousand francs, and quickly too!”

Two shots from the interior made answer for the officers, who, after vainly shaking the doors, were still more fruitlessly attempting to force themselves through the windows. No doubt one of their shots took effect, for a cry of rage was heard and a flash illuminated the road. The colonel gave a sigh, and fell back against Roland. He was killed outright.

Roland fired again, but no one replied to him. His pistols were both discharged; locked in as he was he could not use his sabre, and he howled with rage.

Meantime the conductor was forced, with a pistol at his throat, to give up the money. Two men took the bags containing the fifty thousand francs, and fastened them on Montbar’s horse, which his groom had brought ready saddled and bridled, as if to a meet. Montbar kicked off his heavy boots and sprang into the saddle.

“My compliments to the First Consul, Monsieur de Montrevel!” cried Morgan. Then, turning to his companions, he cried: “Scatter which way you will, you know the rendezvous for to-morrow night.”

“Yes, yes,” replied ten or a dozen voices.

And the band dispersed like a flock of birds, disappearing down the valley into the shadow of the trees that lined the banks of the little river and surrounded the Maison-Blanche.

At that moment the gallop of horses was heard, and the escort, alarmed by the pistol shots, appeared on the crest of the hill and came down the slope like an avalanche. But it came too late; it found only the conductor sitting dazed by the roadside, the bodies of the colonel and of Fouché’s agent, and Roland a prisoner, roaring like a lion gnawing at the bars of its cage.

CHAPTER XLIII.

LORD GRENVILLE’S REPLY

While the events we have just recorded were transpiring, and occupying the minds and newspapers of the provinces, other events, of very different import, were maturing in Paris, which were destined to occupy the minds and newspapers of the whole world.

Lord Tanlay had returned, bringing the reply of his uncle, Lord Grenville. This reply consisted of a letter addressed to M. de Talleyrand, inclosing a memorandum for the First Consul. The letter was couched in the following terms:

> DOWNING STREET, February 14, 1800
>
> Sir — I have received and placed before the King the letter which you transmitted to me through my nephew, Lord Tanlay. His Majesty, seeing no reason to depart from the long-established customs of Europe in treating with foreign states, directs me to forward you in his name the official reply which is herewith inclosed.
>
> I have the honor to be, with the highest esteem, your very humble and obedient servant, GRENVILLE.

The letter was dry; the memorandum curt. Moreover, the First Consul’s letter to King George was autographic, and King George, not “departing from the long-established customs of Europe in treating with foreign States,” replied by a simple memorandum written by a secretary.

True, the memorandum was signed “Grenville.” It was a long recrimination against France; against the spirit of disorder, which disturbed the nation; against the fears which that spirit of disorder inspired in all Europe; and on the necessity imposed on the sovereigns of Europe, for the sake of their own safety, to repress it. In short, the memorandum was virtually a continuation of the war.

The reading of such a dictum made Bonaparte’s eyes flash with the flame which, in him, preceded his great decisions, as lightning precedes thunder.

“So, sir,” said he, turning to Lord Tanlay, “this is all you have obtained?”

“Yes, citizen First Consul.”

“Then you did not repeat verbally to your uncle all that I charged you to say to him?”

“I did not omit a syllable.”

“Did you tell him that you had lived in France three years, that you had seen her, had studied her; that she was strong, powerful, prosperous and desirous of peace while prepared for war?”

“I told him all that.”

“Did you add that the war which England is making against France is a senseless war; that the spirit of disorder of which they speak, and which, at the worst, is only the effervescence of freedom too long restrained, which it were wiser to confine to France by means of a general peace; that that peace is the sole *cordon sanitaire* which can prevent it from crossing our frontiers; and that if the volcano of war is lighted in France, France will spread like lava over foreign lands. Italy is delivered, says the King of England; but from whom? From her liberators. Italy is delivered, but why? Because I conquered Egypt from the Delta to the third Cataract; Italy is delivered because I was no longer in Italy. But — I am here: in a month I can be in Italy. What do I need to win her back from the Alps to the Adriatic? A single battle. Do you know what Masséna is doing in defending Genoa? Waiting for me. Ha! the sovereigns of Europe need war to protect their crowns? Well, my lord, I tell you that I will shake Europe until their crowns tremble on their heads. Want war, do they? Just wait — Bourrienne! Bourrienne!”

The door between the First Consul’s study and the secretary’s office opened precipitately, and Bourrienne rushed in, his face terrified, as though he thought Bonaparte were calling for help. But when he saw him highly excited, crumpling the diplomatic memorandum in one hand and striking with the other on his desk, while Lord Tanlay was standing calm, erect and silent near him, he understood immediately that England’s answer had irritated the First Consul.

“Did you call me, general?” he asked.

“Yes,” said the First Consul, “sit down there and write.”

Then in a harsh, jerky voice, without seeking his words, which, on the contrary, seemed to crowd through the portal of his brain, he dictated the following proclamation:

> SOLDIERS! — In promising peace to the French people, I was your mouthpiece; I know your power.
>
> You are the same men who conquered the Rhine, Holland and Italy, and granted peace beneath the walls of astounded Vienna.
>
> Soldiers, it is no longer our own frontiers that you have to defend; it is the enemy's country you must now invade.
>
> Soldiers, when the time comes, I shall be among you, and astounded Europe shall remember that you belong to the race of heroes!

Bourrienne raised his head, expectant, after writing the last words.

"Well, that's all," said Bonaparte.

"Shall I add the sacramental words: 'Vive la République!'?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Because we have issued no proclamation during the last four months, and something may be changed in the ordinary formulas."

"The proclamation will do as it is," said Bonaparte, "add nothing to it."

Taking a pen, he dashed rather than wrote his signature at the bottom of the paper, then handing it to Bourrienne, he said: "See that it appears in the 'Moniteur' to-morrow."

Bourrienne left the room, carrying the proclamation with him.

Bonaparte, left alone with Lord Tanlay, walked up and down the room for a moment, as though he had forgotten the Englishman's presence; then he stopped suddenly before him.

"My lord," he asked, "do you think you obtained from your uncle all that another man might have obtained in your place?"

"More, citizen First Consul."

"More! more! Pray, what have you obtained?"

"I think that the citizen First Consul did not read the royal memorandum with all the attention it deserves."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Bonaparte, "I know it by heart."

“Then the citizen First Consul cannot have weighed the meaning and the wording of a certain paragraph.”

“You think so?”

“I am sure of it; and if the citizen First Consul will permit me to read him the paragraph to which I allude — ”

Bonaparte relaxed his hold upon the crumpled note, and handed it to Lord Tanlay, saying: “Read it.”

Sir John cast his eyes over the document, with which he seemed to be familiar, paused at the tenth paragraph, and read:

> The best and surest means for peace and security, and for their continuance, would be the restoration of that line of princes who for so many centuries have preserved to the French nation its internal prosperity and the respect and consideration of foreign countries. Such an event would have removed, and at any time will remove, the obstacles which are now in the way of negotiations and peace; it would guarantee to France the tranquil possession of her former territory, and procure for all the other nations of Europe, through a like tranquillity and peace, that security which they are now obliged to seek by other means.

“Well,” said Bonaparte, impatiently, “I have read all that, and perfectly understood it. Be Monk, labor for another man, and your victories, your renown, your genius will be forgiven you; humble yourself, and you shall be allowed to remain great!”

“Citizen First Consul,” said Lord Tanlay, “no one knows better than I the difference between you and Monk, and how far you surpass him in genius and renown.”

“Then why do you read me that?”

“I only read that paragraph,” replied Sir John, “to lead you to give to the one following its due significance.”

“Let’s hear it,” said Bonaparte, with repressed impatience.

Sir John continued:

> But, however desirable such an event may be for France and for the world, it is not to this means alone that his Majesty restricts the possibility of a safe and sure pacification.

Sir John emphasized the last words.

“Ah! ah!” exclaimed Bonaparte, stepping hastily to Sir John’s side.

The Englishman continued:

> His Majesty does not presume to prescribe to France her form of government, nor the hands into which she may place the necessary authority to conduct the affairs of a great and powerful nation.

“Read that again, sir,” said Bonaparte, eagerly.

“Read it yourself,” replied Sir John.

He handed him the note, and Bonaparte re-read it.

“Was it you, sir,” he asked, “who added that paragraph?”

“I certainly insisted on it.”

Bonaparte reflected.

“You are right,” he said; “a great step has been taken; the return of the Bourbons is no longer a condition *sine quâ non*. I am accepted, not only as a military, but also as a political power.” Then, holding out his hand to Sir John, he added: “Have you anything to ask of me, sir?”

“The only thing I seek has been asked of you by my friend Roland.”

“And I answered, sir, that I shall be pleased to see you the husband of his sister. If I were richer, or if you were less so, I would offer to dower her” — Sir John made a motion — ”but as I know your fortune will suffice for two,” added Bonaparte, smiling, “or even more, I leave you the joy of giving not only happiness, but also wealth to the woman you love. Bourrienne!” he called.

Bourrienne appeared.

“I have sent it, general,” he said.

“Very good,” replied the First Consul; “but that is not what I called you for.”

“I await your orders.”

“At whatever hour of the day or night Lord Tanlay presents himself, I shall be happy to receive him without delay; you hear me, my dear Bourrienne? You hear me, my lord?”

Lord Tanlay bowed his thanks.

“And now,” said Bonaparte, “I presume you are in a hurry to be off to the Château des Noires-Fontaines. I won’t detain you, but there is one condition I impose.”

“And that is, general?”

“If I need you for another mission — ”

“That is not a condition, citizen First Consul; it is a favor.”

Lord Tanlay bowed and withdrew.

Bourrienne prepared to follow him, but Bonaparte called him back. “Is there a carriage below?” he asked.

Bourrienne looked into the courtyard. “Yes, general.”

“Then get ready and come with me.”

“I am ready, general; I have only my hat and overcoat to get, and they are in the office.”

“Then let us go,” said Bonaparte.

He took up his hat and coat, went down the private staircase, and signed to the carriage to come up. Notwithstanding Bourrienne’s haste, he got down after him. A footman opened the door; Bonaparte sprang in.

“Where are we going, general?” asked Bourrienne.

“To the Tuileries,” replied Bonaparte.

Bourrienne, amazed, repeated the order, and looked at the First Consul as if to seek an explanation; but the latter was plunged in thought, and the secretary, who at this time was still the friend, thought it best not to disturb him.

The horses started at gallop — Bonaparte’s usual mode of progression — and took the way to the Tuileries.

The Tuileries, inhabited by Louis XVI. after the days of the 5th and 6th of October, and occupied successively by the Convention and the Council of Five Hundred, had remained empty and devastated since the 18th Brumaire. Since that day Bonaparte had more than once cast his eyes on that ancient palace of royalty; but he knew the importance of not arousing any suspicion that a future king might dwell in the palace of the abolished monarchy.

Bonaparte had brought back from Italy a magnificent bust of Junius Brutus; there was no suitable place for it at the Luxembourg, and toward the end of November, Bonaparte had sent for the Republican, David, and ordered him to place the bust in the gallery of the Tuileries. Who could suppose that David, the friend of Marat, was preparing the dwelling of a future emperor by placing the bust of Cæsar’s murderer in the gallery of the Tuileries? No one did suppose, nor even suspect it.

When Bonaparte went to see if the bust were properly placed, he noticed the havoc committed in the palace of Catherine of Medicis. The Tuileries were no longer the abode of kings, it is true, but they were a national palace, and the nation could not allow one of its palaces to become dilapidated. Bonaparte sent for citizen Lecomte, the architect, and ordered him to *clean* the Tuileries. The word might be taken in both senses — moral and physical.

The architect was requested to send in an estimate of the cost of the cleaning. It amounted to five hundred thousand francs. Bonaparte asked if for that sum, the Tuileries could be converted into a suitable "palace for the government." The architect replied that the sum named would suffice not only to restore the Tuileries to their former condition, but to make them habitable.

A habitable palace, that was all Bonaparte wanted. How should he, a Republican, need regal luxury? The "palace of the government" ought to be severely plain, decorated with marbles and statues only. But what ought those statues to be? It was the First Consul's duty to select them.

Accordingly, Bonaparte chose them from the three great ages and the three great nations: from the Greeks, from the Romans, from France and her rivals. From the Greeks he chose Alexander and Demosthenes; the genius of conquest and the genius of eloquence. From the Romans he chose Scipio, Cicero, Cato, Brutus and Cæsar, placing the great victim side by side with the murderer, as great almost as himself. From the modern world he chose Gustavus Adolphus, Turenne, the great Condé, Duguay-Trouin, Marlborough, Prince Eugene, and the Maréchal de Saxe; and, finally, the great Frederick and George Washington — false philosophy upon a throne, and true wisdom founding a free state.

To these he added warlike heroes — Dampierre, Dugommier, Joubert — to prove that, while he did not fear the memory of a Bourbon in the great Condé, neither was he jealous of his brothers-in-arms, the victims of a cause already no longer his.

Matters were in this state at the period of which we are now speaking; that is, the last of February, 1800. The Tuileries had been cleaned, the busts were in their niches, the statues were on their pedestals; and only a favorable occasion was wanting.

That occasion came when the news of Washington's death was received. The founder of the liberty of the United States had ceased to breathe on the 14th of December, 1799.

It was that event of which Bonaparte was thinking, when Bourrienne saw by the expression of his face that he must be left entirely to the reflections which absorbed him.

The carriage stopped before the Tuileries. Bonaparte sprang out with the same haste with which he had entered it; went rapidly up the stairs, and through the apartments, examining more particularly those which had been inhabited by Louis XVI. and Marie-Antoinette. In the private study of Louis XVI. he stopped short.

“Here’s where we will live, Bourrienne,” he said, suddenly, as if the latter had followed him through the mental labyrinth in which he wandered, following the thread of Ariadne which we call thought. “Yes, we will lodge here; the Third Consul can have the Pavilion of Flora, and Cambacérès will remain at the Chancellerie.”

“In that way,” said Bourrienne, “when the time comes, you will have only one to turn out.”

“Come, come,” said Bonaparte, catching Bourrienne by the ear, “that’s not bad.”

“When shall we move in, general?” asked Bourrienne.

“Oh, not to-morrow; it will take at least a week to prepare the Parisians to see me leave the Luxembourg for the Tuileries.”

“Eight days,” exclaimed Bourrienne; “that will do.”

“Especially if we begin at once. Come, Bourrienne, to the Luxembourg.”

With the rapidity that characterized all his movements when serious matters were in question, he passed through the suites of apartments he had already visited, ran down the stairs, and sprang into the carriage, calling out: “To the Luxembourg!”

“Wait, wait,” cried Bourrienne, still in the vestibule; “general, won’t you wait for me?”

“Laggard!” exclaimed Bonaparte. And the carriage started, as it had come, at a gallop.

When Bonaparte re-entered his study he found the minister of police awaiting him.

“Well, what now, citizen Fouché? You look upset. Have I, perchance, been assassinated?”

“Citizen First Consul,” said the minister, “you seemed to attach the utmost importance to the destruction of those bands who call themselves the Companions of Jehu.”

“Evidently, since I sent Roland himself to pursue them. Have you any news of them?”

“We have.”

"From whom?"

"Their leader himself."

"Their leader?"

"He has had the audacity to send me a report of their last exploit."

"Against whom?"

"The fifty thousand francs you sent to the Saint-Bernard fathers."

"What became of them?"

"The fifty thousand francs?"

"Yes."

"They are in the possession of those brigands, and their leader informs me he will transfer them shortly to Cadoudal."

"Then Roland is killed?"

"No."

"How do you mean, no?"

"My agent is killed; Colonel Maurice is killed; but your aide-de-camp is safe and sound."

"Then he will hang himself," said Bonaparte.

"What good would that do? The rope would break; you know his luck."

"Or his misfortune, yes — Where is the report?"

"You mean the letter?"

"Letter, report, thing — whatever it was that told you this news."

The minister handed the First Consul a paper inclosed in a perfumed envelope.

"What's this?"

"The thing you asked for."

Bonaparte read the address: "To the citizen Fouché, minister of police. Paris." Then he opened the letter, which contained the following.

> CITIZEN MINISTER — I have the honor to inform you that the fifty thousand francs intended for the monks of Saint-Bernard came into our hands on the night of February 25, 1800 (old style), and that they will reach those of citizen Cadoudal within the week.
>
> The affair was well-managed, save for the deaths of your agent and Colonel Saint-Maurice. As for M. Roland de Montrevel, I have the satisfaction of informing you that nothing distressing has befallen him. I did not forget that he was good enough to receive

> me at the Luxembourg.
>
> I write you, citizen minister, because I presume that M. Roland de Montrevel is just now too much occupied in pursuing us to write you himself. But I am sure that at his first leisure moment you will receive from him a report containing all the details into which I cannot enter for lack of time and facilities for writing.
>
> In exchange for the service I render you, citizen minister, I will ask you to do one for me; namely, inform Madame de Montrevel, without delay, that her son is in safety. MORGAN.
>
> Maison-Blanche, on the road from Mâcon to Lyons, Saturday, 9 P.M.

“Ha, the devil!” said Bonaparte; “a bold scamp!” Then he added, with a sigh: “What colonels and captains those men would make me!”

“What are your orders, citizen First Consul?” asked the minister of police.

“None; that concerns Roland. His honor is at stake; and, as he is not killed, he will take his revenge.”

“Then the First Consul will take no further notice of the affair?”

“Not for the present, at any rate.” Then, turning to his secretary, he added, “We have other fish to fry, haven’t we, Bourrienne?”

Bourrienne nodded affirmatively.

“When does the First Consul wish to see me again?” asked the minister.

“To-night, at ten o’clock. We move out in eight days.”

“Where are you going?”

“To the Tuileries.”

Fouché gave a start of amazement.

“Against your opinion, I know,” said the First Consul; “but I’ll take the whole business on myself; you have only to obey.”

Fouché bowed, and prepared to leave the room.

“By the way!” exclaimed Bonaparte.

Fouché turned round.

“Don’t forget to notify Madame de Montrevel that her son is safe and sound; that’s the least you can do for citizen Morgan after the service he has rendered you.”

And he turned his back on the minister of police, who retired, biting his lips till the blood came.

CHAPTER XLIV.

CHANGE OF RESIDENCE

That same day, the First Consul, left alone with Bourrienne, dictated the following order, addressed to the Consulate guard and to the army at large:

> Washington is dead! That great man fought against tyranny. He consolidated the liberty of America. His memory will ever be dear to the French people, to all free men in both hemispheres, but especially to the French soldiers, who, like Washington and his soldiers, have fought for Liberty and Equality. Consequently, the First Consul orders that the flags and banners of the Republic shall be hung with crape for ten days.

But the First Consul did not intend to confine himself to this order of the day.

Among the means he took to facilitate his removal from the Luxembourg to the Tuileries was one of those fêtes by which he knew, none better, how to amuse the eyes and also direct the minds of the spectator. This fête was to take place at the Invalides, or, as they said in those days, the Temple of Mars. A bust of Washington was to be crowned, and the flags of Aboukir were to be received from the hands of General Lannes.

It was one of those combinations which Bonaparte thoroughly understood — a flash of lightning drawn from the contact of contrasting facts. He presented the great man of the New World, and a great victory of the old; young America coupled with the palms of Thebes and Memphis.

On the day fixed for the ceremony, six thousand cavalry were in line from the Luxembourg to the Invalides. At eight o’clock, Bonaparte mounted his horse in the main courtyard of the Consular palace; issuing by the Rue de Tournon he took the line of the quays, accompanied by a staff of generals, none of whom were over thirty-five years of age.

Lannes headed the procession; behind him were sixty Guides bearing the sixty captured flags; then came Bonaparte about two horse’s-lengths ahead of his staff.

The minister of war, Berthier, awaited the procession under the dome of the temple. He leaned against a statue of Mars at rest, and the ministers and councillors of state were grouped around him. The flags of Denain and Fontenoy, and those of the first campaign in Italy, were already suspended from the columns which supported the roof. Two centenarian “Invalids” who had fought beside Maréchal Saxe were standing, one to the right and one to the left of Berthier, like caryatides of an ancient world, gazing across the centuries. To the right, on a raised platform, was the bust of Washington, which was now to be draped with the flags of Aboukir. On another platform, opposite to the former, stood Bonaparte’s armchair.

On each side of the temple were tiers of seats in which was gathered all the elegant society of Paris, or rather that portion of it which gave its adhesion to the order of ideas then to be celebrated.

When the flags appeared, the trumpets blared, their metallic sounds echoing through the arches of the temple,

Lannes entered first. At a sign from him, the Guides mounted two by two the steps of the platform and placed the staffs of the flags in the holders prepared for them. During this time Bonaparte took his place in the chair,

Then Lannes advanced to the minister of war, and, in that voice that rang out so clearly on the battlefield, crying “Forward!” he said:

“Citizen minister, these are the flags of the Ottoman army, destroyed before your eyes at Aboukir. The army of Egypt, after crossing burning deserts, surviving thirst and hunger, found itself before an enemy proud of his numbers and his victories, and believing that he saw an easy prey in our troops, exhausted by their march and incessant combats. He had yet to learn that the French soldier is greater because he knows how to suffer than because he knows how to vanquish, and that his courage rises and augments in danger. Three thousand Frenchmen, as you know, fell upon eighteen thousand barbarians, broke their ranks, forced them back, pressed them between our lines and the sea; and the terror of our bayonets is such that the Mussulmans, driven to choose a death, rushed into the depths of the Mediterranean.

“On that memorable day hung the destinies of Egypt, France and Europe, and they were saved by your courage,

“Allied Powers! if you dare to violate French territory, and if the general who was given back to us by the victory of Aboukir makes an appeal to the nation — Allied Powers! I say to you, that your successes would be more fatal to you than disasters! What Frenchman is there who would not march to victory again under the banners of the First Consul, or serve his apprenticeship to fame with him?"

Then, addressing the "Invalids," for whom the whole lower gallery had been reserved, he continued in a still more powerful voice:

"And you, brave veterans, honorable victims of the fate of battles, you will not be the last to flock under the orders of him who knows your misfortunes and your glory, and who now delivers to your keeping these trophies won by your valor. Ah, I know you, veterans, you burn to sacrifice the half of your remaining lives to your country and its freedom!"

This specimen of the military eloquence of the conqueror of Montebello was received with deafening applause. Three times the minister of war endeavored to make reply; and three times the bravos cut him short. At last, however, silence came, and Berthier expressed himself as follows:

"To raise on the banks of the Seine these trophies won on the banks of the Nile; to hang beneath the domes of our temples, beside the flags of Vienna, of Petersburg, of London, the banners blessed in the mosques of Byzantium and Cairo; to see them here, presented by the same warriors, young in years, old in glory, whom Victory has so often crowned — these things are granted only to Republican France.

"Yet this is but a part of what he has done, that hero, in the flower of his age covered with the laurels of Europe, he, who stood a victor before the Pyramids, from the summits of which forty centuries looked down upon him while, surrounded by his warriors and learned men, he emancipated the native soil of art and restored to it the lights of civilization.

"Soldiers, plant in this temple of the warrior virtues those ensigns of the Crescent, captured on the rocks of Canopus by three thousand Frenchmen from eighteen thousand Ottomans, as brave as they were barbarous. Let them bear witness, not to the valor of the French soldier — the universe itself resounds to that — but to his unalterable constancy, his sublime devotion. Let the sight of these banners console you, veteran warriors, you, whose bodies, gloriously mutilated on the field of honor, deprive your courage of other exercise than hope and prayer. Let them proclaim from that dome above us, to all the enemies of France, the influence of genius, the value of the heroes who captured them; forewarning of the horrors of war all those who are deaf to our offers of peace. Yes, if they will have war, they shall have it — war, terrible and unrelenting!

“The nation, satisfied, regards the Army of the East with pride.

“That invincible army will learn with joy that the First Consul is watchful of its glory. It is the object of the keenest solicitude on the part of the Republic. It will hear with pride that we have honored it in our temples, while awaiting the moment when we shall imitate, if need be, on the fields of Europe, the warlike virtues it has displayed on the burning sands of Africa and Asia.

“Come, in the name of that army, intrepid general, come in the name of those heroes among whom you now appear, and receive an embrace in token of the national gratitude.

“And in the moment when we again take up our arms in defence of our independence (if the blind fury of kings refuses the peace we offer), let us cast a branch of laurel on the ashes of Washington, that hero who freed America from the yoke of our worst and most implacable enemy. Let his illustrious shade tell us of the glory which follows a nation’s liberator beyond the grave!”

Bonaparte now came down from his platform, and in the name of France was embraced by Berthier.

M. de Fontanes, who was appointed to pronounce the eulogy on Washington, waited courteously until the echoes of the torrent of applause, which seemed to fall in cascades through the vast amphitheatre, had died away. In the midst of these glorious individualities, M. de Fontanes was a curiosity, half political, half literary. After the 18th Fructidor he was proscribed with Suard and Laharpe; but, being perfectly hidden in a friend’s house, and never going out except at night, he managed to avoid leaving France. Nevertheless, an accident, impossible to foresee, had betrayed him. He was knocked down one night on the Place du Carrousel by a runaway horse, and was recognized by a policeman, who ran to his assistance. But Fouché, who was at once informed, not only of his presence in France, but also of his actual hiding-place, pretended to know nothing of him.

A few days after the 18th Brumaire, Maret, who became later the Duc de Bassano, Laplace, who continued to be simply a man of science, and Regnault de Saint-Jean-d’Angely, who died mad, spoke to the First Consul of M. de Fontanes and of his presence in Paris,

“Present him to me,” replied the First Consul simply.

M. de Fontanes was presented to Bonaparte, who, recognizing his supple nature and the unctuous flattery of his eloquence, chose him to deliver the eulogy on Washington, and perhaps something of his own at the same time.

M. de Fontanes' address was too long to be reported here; all that we shall say about it is, that it was precisely what Bonaparte desired.

That evening there was a grand reception at the Luxembourg. During the ceremony a rumor was spread that the First Consul contemplated removing to the Tuileries. Persons who were either bold or curious ventured on a few words to Josephine. She, poor woman, who still saw before her the tumbrel and the scaffold of Marie Antoinette, had an instinctive horror of all that might connect her with royalty; she therefore hesitated to reply and referred all questions to her husband.

Then another rumor began to be bruited about which served as a counterpoise to the former. Murat, it was said, had asked the hand of Mademoiselle Caroline Bonaparte in marriage. But this marriage was not without its obstacles; Bonaparte had had a quarrel, lasting over a year, with the man who aspired to the honor of becoming his brother-in-law. The cause of this quarrel will seem rather strange to our readers.

Murat, the lion of the army; Murat, whose courage had become proverbial; Murat, who might well have been taken by a sculptor as a model for the god of war; Murat, on one occasion, when he must have slept ill or breakfasted badly, had a moment of weakness.

It happened before Mantua, in which city Wurmser, after the battle of Rivoli, was forced to shut himself up with twenty-eight thousand men; General Miollis, with four thousand only, was investing the place. During a sortie attempted by the Austrians, Murat, at the head of five hundred men, received an order to charge three thousand. Murat charged, but feebly. Bonaparte, whose aide-de-camp he then was, was so irritated that he would not suffer him to remain about him. This was a great blow to Murat, all the more because he was at that time desirous of becoming the general's brother-in-law; he was deeply in love with Caroline Bonaparte.

How had that love come about? It can be told in two words. Perhaps those who read our books singly are surprised that we sometimes dwell on certain details which seem somewhat long drawn out for the book in which they appear. The fact is, we are not writing isolated books, but, as we have already said, we are filling, or trying to fill, an immense frame. To us, the presence of our characters is not limited to their appearance in one book. The man you meet in one book may be a king in a second volume, and exiled or shot in a third.

Balzac did a great and noble work with a hundred aspects, and he called it the “Comédie Humaine.” Our work, begun at the same time as his — although, be it understood, we do not praise it — may fitly be called “The Drama of France.”

Now, let us return to Murat, and tell how this love, which had so glorious and, possibly, so fatal an influence on his destiny, came to him.

In 1796, Murat was sent to Paris, charged with the duty of presenting to the Directory the flags and banners taken by the French army at the battles of Dego and Mondovi. During this voyage he made the acquaintance of Madame Bonaparte and Madame Tallien. At Madame Bonaparte’s house he again met Mademoiselle Caroline Bonaparte. We say *again*, for that was not the first time he had met the woman who was to share the crown of Naples with him. They had met in Rome, at her brother’s house, and, in spite of the rivalry of a young and handsome Roman prince, she had shown him a marked preference.

The three women combined to obtain for him the rank of general of brigade from the Directory. Murat returned to the Army of Italy, more in love than ever, and, in spite of his new rank, he solicited and obtained the favor of remaining with the general-in-chief as aide-de-camp. Unhappily, the fatal sortie took place soon after, in consequence of which he fell in disgrace with Bonaparte. This disgrace had for awhile all the characteristics of actual enmity. Bonaparte dismissed him from his service as aide-de-camp, and transferred him to Neille’s division, and then to that of Baraguey-d’Hilliers. The result was, that when Bonaparte returned to Paris after the treaty of Tolentino, Murat did not accompany him.

This did not at all suit the female triumvirate, who had taken the young general under its direction. The beautiful intriguers entered into the campaign, and as the expedition to Egypt was then preparing, they induced the minister of war to send Murat with it. He embarked in the same ship as Bonaparte, namely the “Orient,” but the latter did not address a single word to him during the voyage. After they reached Alexandria, Murat was at first unable to break the icy barrier opposed to him by the general, who, more to put him at a distance from his own person than to give him an opportunity to distinguish himself, confronted him with Mourad Bey. But, during that campaign, Murat performed such prodigies of valor that he effaced, by such bravery, the memory of that momentary weakness; he charged so intrepidly, so madly at Aboukir, that Bonaparte had not the heart to bear him further malice.

Consequently Murat had returned to France with Bonaparte. He had powerfully co-operated with him on the 18th and especially on the 19th Brumaire. He was, therefore, restored to full favor, and, as a proof of that favor, had received the command of the Consular guard.

He thought this the moment to declare his love, a love already well-known to Josephine, who favored it; for which she had two reasons. In the first place, she was a woman in the most charming acceptation of the word; that is to say, all the gentler passions of women were attractive to her. Joachim loved Caroline, Caroline loved Joachim; that was enough to make her wish to protect their love. In the second place, Bonaparte’s brothers detested Josephine; Joseph and Lucien were her bitterest enemies, and she was not sorry to make herself two ardent friends in Caroline and Murat. She therefore encouraged the latter to approach Bonaparte on the subject.

Three days before the ceremony we have just described, Murat had entered Bonaparte’s study, and, after endless hesitation and circumlocution, had proffered his request.

It is probable that the love of the young pair was no news to Bonaparte, who, however, received it with stern gravity, and contented himself with replying that he would think it over. The matter, in fact, required thinking over. Bonaparte came of a noble family, Murat was the son of an innkeeper. The alliance at such a moment might have great significance. Was the First Consul, in spite of his noble birth, in spite of the exalted rank to which he had raised himself, not only sufficiently republican, but also sufficiently democratic to mingle his blood with that of the common people.

He did not reflect long; his strong, good sense, and his logical mind, told him that he had every interest in allowing the marriage, and he gave his consent to it the same day.

The double news of this marriage and of the removal to the Tuileries was launched on the public at the same time; the one was to counterpoise the other. The First Consul was about to occupy the palace of the former kings, to sleep in the bed of the Bourbons, as they said at that time, but he gave his sister to the son of an innkeeper!

And now, it may be asked, what dowry did the future Queen of Naples bring to the hero of Aboukir? Thirty thousand francs and a diamond necklace, which the First Consul took from his wife, being too poor to buy one. Josephine, who was very fond of her necklace, pouted a little; but the gift, thus obtained, was a triumphant reply to those who claimed that Bonaparte had made a fortune in Italy; besides, why had she taken the interests of the young couple so to heart? She had insisted on marrying them, and she ought to contribute to the dowry.

The result of this clever combination was that on the day when the Consuls left the Luxembourg for the “palace of the government,” escorted by the *son of an innkeeper,* soon to be Bonaparte’s brother-in-law, it did not occur to those who saw the procession pass to do otherwise than admire and applaud. And, in truth, what could be more admirable and worthy of applause than those processions, which had at their head such men as Murat, Moreau, Junot, Duroc, Augereau, and Masséna?

A grand review had been ordered to take place that same day in the square of the Carrousel. Madame Bonaparte was to be present — not, to be sure, in the balcony of the clock-tower, that being evidently too royal, but at the window of Lebrun’s apartment in the Pavilion of Flora.

Bonaparte started at one o’clock precisely from the Luxembourg, escorted by three thousand picked men, among them the splendid regiment of the Guides, created three years earlier as a bodyguard to Bonaparte during the Italian campaign, in consequence of a great danger he had escaped on one occasion. He was resting in a small château, after the exhaustion attendant upon the passage of the Mincio, and was preparing to take a bath, when a retreating Austrian detachment, losing its way, invaded the château, which had no other guard than the sentries. Bonaparte had barely time to escape in his shirt.

A curious difficulty, which deserves to be recorded, arose on the morning of this removal, which took place the 30th Pluviose, year VIII. The generals, of course, had their horses and the ministers their carriages, but the other functionaries had not yet judged it expedient to go to such an expense. Carriages were therefore lacking. They were supplied from the hackney coach-stands, and slips of paper of the same color as the carriages were pasted over their numbers.

The carriage of the First Consul alone was harnessed with six white horses, but as the three consuls were in the same carriage, Bonaparte and Cambacérès on the front seat, and Lebrun on the back, it was, after all, but two horses apiece. Besides, were not these six white horses given to the commander-in-chief by the Emperor Francis himself, after the treaty of Campo-Formio, a trophy in themselves?

The carriage crossed a part of Paris, following the Rue de Thionville, the Quai Voltaire, and the Pont-Royal. From the archway of the Carrousel to the great portal of the Tuileries the Consular guard lined the way. As Bonaparte passed through the archway, he raised his head and read the inscription it bore. That inscription was as follows:

AUGUST 10, 1792.
ROYALTY IS ABOLISHED IN FRANCE
AND SHALL NEVER RISE AGAIN.

An almost imperceptible smile flickered on the First Consul’s lips.

At the door of the Tuileries, Bonaparte left the carriage and sprang into the saddle to review the troops. When he appeared on his war-horse the applause burst forth wildly on all sides.

After the review was over, he placed himself in front of the clock-tower, with Murat on his right, Lannes at his left, and the glorious staff of the Army of Italy behind him. Then began the march past.

And now it was that one of those inspirations came to him which engrave themselves forever on the hearts of soldiers. As the flags of the 30th, the 96th, and the 33d demi-brigades were borne past him, and he saw that, of those banners, there remained but a stick and a few rags, riddled with balls and blackened with powder, he took his hat from his head and bowed.

Then, when the march was over, he dismounted from his horse, and, with a firm step, he walked up the grand stairway of the Valois and the Bourbons.

That night, when he was alone with Bourrienne, the latter asked: “Well, general, are you satisfied?”

“Yes,” replied Bonaparte, dreamily, “everything went off nicely, didn’t it?”

“Wonderfully well.”

“I saw you standing near Madame Bonaparte at the ground-floor window of the Pavilion of Flora.”

“I saw you, too, general; you were reading the inscription on the arch of the Carrousel.”

“Yes,” said Bonaparte, “‘August 10,1792. Royalty is abolished in France, and shall never rise again.’“

“Shall I have it removed?” asked Bourrienne.

“Useless,” replied the First Consul, “it will fall of itself.” Then, with a sigh, he added: “Bourrienne, do you know whom I missed to-day?”

“No, general.”

“Roland. What the devil is he doing that he doesn’t give me any news of himself?”

We are about to see what Roland was doing.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE FOLLOWER OF TRAILS

The reader will not have forgotten the situation in which the escort of chasseurs found the Chambéry mail-coach.

The first thing they did was to look for the obstacle which prevented Roland from getting out. They found the padlock and wrenched off the door.

Roland bounded from the coach like a tiger from its cage. We have said that the ground was covered with snow. Roland, hunter and soldier, had but one idea — to follow the trail of the Companions of Jehu. He had seen them disappear in the direction of Thoissy; but he believed they were not likely to continue in that direction because, between them and the little town ran the Saône, and there were no bridges across the river between Belleville and Mâcon. He ordered the escort and the conductor to wait for him on the highroad, and alone and on foot, without even waiting to reload his pistols, he started on the tracks of Morgan and his companions.

He was not mistaken. A mile from the highroad the fugitives had come to the river; there they had halted, probably deliberating, for the trampling of their horses' hoofs was plainly visible; then they had separated into two troops, one going up the river to Mâcon, and the other descending it in the direction of Belleville.

This separation was doubtless intended to puzzle their pursuers, if they were pursued. Roland had heard the parting call of the leader: "To-morrow night, you know where!" He had no doubt, therefore, that whichever trail he followed, whether up or down — if the snow did not melt too fast — would lead him to the rendezvous, where, either together or singly, the Companions of Jehu were certain to assemble.

He returned upon his own tracks, ordered the conductor to put on the boots thrown aside by the pretended postilion, mount the horse and take the coach to the next relay, namely Belleville. The sergeant of chasseurs and four of his men, who knew how to write, were to accompany the conductor and sign his report of what had occurred. Roland forbade all mention of himself and where he had gone, lest the brigands should get word of his future plans. The rest of the escort were to carry back their colonel's body, and make deposition on their own account, along the same lines as the conductor, to the authorities, and equally without mention of Roland.

These orders given, the young man dismounted a chasseur and took his horse, selecting the one he thought most serviceable. Then he reloaded his pistols, and put them in the holsters in place of the regulation weapons of the dismounted chasseur. Having done this, and promised the conductor and the chasseurs a speedy vengeance, conditioned, however, on their keeping his present proceedings secret, he mounted the horse and rode off in the direction he had already investigated.

When he reached the spot where the two troops had separated, he had to decide between the different trails. He chose that which descended the Saône toward Belleville. He had excellent reason for making this choice, although it might possibly take him out of his way for six or eight miles. In the first place he was nearer Belleville than Mâcon; then he had spent twenty-four hours at Mâcon, and might be recognized there, whereas he had never stopped at Belleville longer than the time required to change horses when accident brought him there by post.

The events we have just recorded had taken barely an hour to happen. Eight o'clock was striking from the church clock at Thoissy when Roland started in pursuit of the fugitives. The way was plain; five or six horses had left their imprint on the snow; one of these horses had paced.

Roland jumped the two or three brooks which watered the space he had to cross to reach Belleville. A hundred yards from the town he paused, for here the trail separated again; two of the six travellers had turned to the right, that is to say, they had struck away from the river, the four others to the left, continuing on their way to Belleville. At the outskirts of the town, another secession had taken place; three of the riders had gone round the town, one had entered it.

Roland followed the latter, sure that he could recover the traces of the others. The one who had entered the town and followed the main street had stopped at a pretty house between court and garden, numbered 67. He had rung and some one had let him in; for through the iron grating could be seen traces of footsteps, and beside them the tracks of a horse being led to the stable.

It was quite evident that one, at least, of the Companions of Jehu had stopped there. By going to the mayor of the town, exhibiting his authority, and asking for gendarmes, Roland could have arrested him at once. But that was not his object; he did not wish to arrest a solitary individual; he wanted to catch the whole company in a trap.

He made a note in his mind of No. 67, and continued on his way. He crossed the entire town and rode a few hundred paces beyond it without meeting any fresh traces. He was about to return, when it occurred to him that, if the tracks of the three riders reappeared anywhere, it would be at the head of the bridge. And there, sure enough, he found the hoof-prints of three horses, which were undoubtedly those he sought, for one of them paced.

Roland galloped in pursuit. On reaching Monceaux — same precaution, the riders had skirted the village; but Roland was too good a scout to trouble himself about that. He kept on his way, and at the other end of Monceaux he recovered the fugitives’ tracks. Not far from Châtillon one of the three horses had left the highroad, turning to the right toward a little château, standing on a hill a short distance from the road between Châtillon and Trévoux. This time the three remaining riders, evidently believing they had done enough to mislead any one who might be following, had kept straight on through Châtillon and taken the road to Neuville.

The direction taken by the fugitives was eminently satisfactory to Roland; they were undoubtedly on their way to Bourg; if they had not intended to go there they would have taken the road to Marlieux. Now, Bourg was the headquarters Roland had himself chosen for the centre of his own operations; it was his own town, and he knew, with the minuteness of boyish knowledge, every bush, every ruin, every cavern in the neighborhood.

At Neuville the riders had skirted the village. Roland did not trouble himself about a ruse, already known and thwarted; but on the other side he found but one trail. He could not be mistaken in that horse, however; it was the pacer. Certain of recovering the trail again, Roland retraced his steps. The two riders had separated at a road leading off to Vannes; one had taken that road, the other had skirted the village, which, as we have said, was on the road to Bourg. This was the one to follow; besides, the gait of the horse made it easier, as it could not be confused with any other. Moreover, he was on his way to Bourg, and between Neuville and Bourg there was but one other village, that of Saint-Denis. For the rest, it was not probable that the solitary rider intended to go further than Bourg.

Roland continued on his way with more eagerness than ever, convinced that he was nearing the end. In fact the rider had not skirted Bourg, but had boldly entered the town. There, it seemed to Roland that the man had hesitated, unless this hesitation were a last ruse to hide his tracks. But after ten minutes spent in following his devious tracks Roland was sure of his facts; it was not trickery but hesitation.

The print of a man's steps came from a side street; the traveller and the pedestrian had conferred together for a moment, and then the former had evidently employed the latter as a guide. From that point on, the footsteps of a man went side by side with those of the horse. Both came to an end at the hôtel de la Belle-Alliance. Roland remembered that the horse wounded in the attack at Les Carronnières had been brought to this inn. In all probability there was some connivance between the inn-keeper and the Companion of Jehu. For the rest, in all probability the rider would stay there until the next evening. Roland felt by his own fatigue that the man he was following must need rest. And Roland, in order not to force his horse and the better to reconnoitre the tracks he was following, had taken six hours to do thirty miles.

Three o'olock was striking from the truncated bell-tower of Nôtre-Dame. Roland debated what to do. Should he stop at some inn in the town? Impossible, he was too well known in Bourg; besides, his horse with its cavalry saddle-cloth would excite suspicion. It was one of the conditions of success that his presence at Bourg should remain unknown.

He could hide at the Château des Noires-Fontaines and keep on the watch, but could he trust the servants? Michel and Jacques would hold their tongues, Roland was sure of them; but Charlotte, the jailer's daughter, she might gossip. However, it was three o'clock in the morning, every one was asleep, and the safest plan was certainly to put himself in communication with Michel. Michel would find some way of concealing his presence.

To the deep regret of his horse, who had no doubt scented a stable, Roland wheeled about and rode off in the direction of Pont-d'Ain. As he passed the church of Brou he glanced at the barrack of the gendarmes, where, in all probability, they and their captain were sleeping the sleep of the righteous.

Roland cut through the little strip of forest which jutted into the road. The snow deadened the sound of his horse's hoofs. Branching into the road from the other side, he saw two men slinking along in the ditch, carrying a deer slung by its forelegs to a sapling. He thought he recognized the cut of the two men, and he spurred his horse to overtake them. The men were on the watch; they turned, saw the rider, who was evidently making for them, flung the animal into the ditch, and made for the shelter of the forest of Seillon.

"Hey, Michel!" cried Roland, more and more convinced that he had to do with his own gardener.

Michel stopped short; the other man kept on his way across the fields.

"Hey, Jacques!" shouted Roland.

The other man stopped. If they were recognized, it was useless to fly; besides, there was nothing hostile in the call; the voice was friendly, rather than threatening.

"Bless me!" said Jacques, "it sounds like M. Roland."

"I do believe it is he," said Michel.

And the two men, instead of continuing their flight, returned to the highroad.

Roland had not heard what the two poachers had said, but he had guessed.

"Hey, the deuce! of course it is I," he shouted.

A minute more and Michel and Jacques were beside him. The questions of father and son were a crossfire, and it must be owned they had good reason for amazement. Roland, in civilian's dress, on a cavalry horse, at three in the morning, on the road from Bourg to the château! The young officer cut short all questions.

"Silence, poachers!" said he, "put that deer behind me and be off at trot to the château. No one must know of my presence there, not even my sister."

Roland spoke with military precision, and both men knew that when he gave an order there was no replying. They picked up the deer, put it behind his saddle, and followed the gentle trot of the horse at a run. There was less than a mile to do, and it took but ten minutes. At a short distance from the château, Roland pulled up. The two men went forward as scouts to see if all were quiet. Satisfied on that point, they made a sign to Roland to advance.

Roland came, dismounted, found the door of the lodge open, and entered. Michel took the horse to the stable and carried the deer to the kitchen; for

Michel belonged to that honorable class of poachers, who kill game for the pleasure of killing, and not for the selfish interest of sale. There was no need for precaution, either for horse or deer; for Amélie took no more notice of what went on in the stable than of what they served her to eat.

During this time Jacques lighted the fire. When Michel returned he brought the remains of a leg of mutton and some eggs for an omelet. Jacques made up a bed in the office.

Roland warmed himself and ate his supper without saying a word. The two men looked at each other with an astonishment that was not devoid of a certain degree of anxiety. A rumor of the expedition to Seillon had got about, and it was whispered that Roland had led it. Apparently, he had returned for another similar expedition.

When Roland had finished his supper he looked up and saw Michel.

“Ah! so there you are?” he exclaimed.

“I am waiting for Monsieur’s orders.”

“Here they are; listen carefully.”

“I’m all ears.”

“It’s a question of life or death; of more than that, of my honor.”

“Speak, Monsieur Roland.”

Roland pulled out his watch.

“It is now five o’clock. When the inn of the Belle-Alliance opens, be there, as if you were just sauntering by; then stop a minute to chat with whoever opens it.”

“That will probably be Pierre.”

“Pierre or another; find out from him who the traveller is who arrived last night on a pacing horse. You know what pacing is, don’t you?”

“The deuce! You mean a horse that goes like a bear, both feet forward at the same time.”

“Bravo! You can also find out whether the traveller is leaving this morning, or whether he proposes to spend the day at the hotel, can’t you?”

“Of course I can find that out.”

“Well, when you have found out all that, come and tell me; but remember, not a word about my being here. If any one asks about me, say that they had a letter from me yesterday, and that I was in Paris with the First Consul.”

“That’s understood.”

Michel departed. Roland went to bed and to sleep, leaving Jacques to guard the building.

When Roland awoke Michel had returned. He had found out all that his master desired to know. The horseman who had arrived in the night was to leave the next morning, and on the travellers' register, which every innkeeper was obliged by law to keep in those days, was entered: "Saturday, 30th Pluviose, *ten at night*; the citizen Valensolle, from Lyons going to Geneva." Thus the alibi was prepared; for the register would prove that the citizen Valensolle had arrived at ten o'clock, and it was impossible that he could have assisted in robbing the mail-coach near the Maison-Blanche at half-past eight and yet have reached the Hotel de la Belle-Alliance at ten.

But what impressed Roland the most was that the man he had followed through the night, and whose name and retreat he had just discovered, was none other than the second of Alfred de Barjols, whom he himself had killed in a duel near the fountain of Vaucluse; and that that second was, in all probability, the man who had played the part of ghost at the Chartreuse of Seillon.

So, then, the Companions of Jehu were not mere thieves, but, on the contrary, as rumor said, gentlemen of good family, who, while the noble Bretons were laying down their lives for the royalist cause in the West, were, here in the East, braving the scaffold to send to the combatants the money they took from the government.

CHAPTER XLVI.

AN INSPIRATION

We have seen that during the pursuit of the preceding night Roland could have arrested one or two of the men he was pursuing. He could now do the same with M. de Valensolle, who was probably, like Roland himself, taking a day's rest after a night of great fatigue.

To do it he had only to write a line to the captain of gendarmes, or to the colonel of dragoons, who had assisted him during that ineffectual search at Seillon. Their honor was concerned in the affair. They could instantly surprise M. de Valensolle in bed, and at the cost of two pistol shots — two men killed or wounded — he would be taken.

But M. de Valensolle's arrest would give warning to the rest of the band, who would instantly put themselves in safety beyond the frontier. It was better, therefore, to keep to his first idea; to go slowly, to follow the different trails which must converge to one centre, and, at the risk of a general engagement, throw a net over the whole company.

To do that, M. de Valensolle must not be arrested. It was better to follow him on his pretended journey to Geneva, which was probably but a blind to foil investigation. It was therefore agreed that Roland, whose disguise, however good, was liable to be penetrated, should remain at the lodge, and Michel and Jacques should head off the game. In all probabilities, M. de Valensolle would not set out from the inn before nightfall.

Roland made inquiries of Michel about the life his sister had led since her mother's departure. He learned that she had never once left the grounds during that time. Her habits were still the same, except for the walks and visits she had made with Madame de Montrevel.

She rose at seven or eight in the morning, sketched or practiced her music till breakfast, and afterward read or employed herself at some kind of embroidery, or took advantage of the sunshine to go out with Charlotte to the river. Sometimes she bade Michel unfasten the little boat, and then, well wrapped in furs, would row up the Reissouse as far as Montagnac or down to Saint-Just. During these trips she spoke to no one. Then she dined. After dinner, she retired to her bedroom and did not appear again.

By half-past six, therefore, Michel and Jacques could decamp without arousing any suspicion as to their where-about; and, accordingly, at that hour they took their blouses, game-bags and guns, and started. Roland had given them their instructions. They were to follow the pacing horse until they had ascertained his destination, or until they had lost all trace of him. Michel was to lie in wait opposite the inn of the Belle-Alliance; Jacques was to station himself outside of Bourg, just where the main road divides into three branches, one going to Saint-Amour, another to Saint-Claude, and the third to Nantua. This last was at the same time the highroad to Geneva. It was evident that unless M. de Valensolle returned upon his steps, which was not probable, he would take one or another of these three roads.

The father started in one direction, the son in another. Michel went toward the town by the road to Pont-d’Ain, passing the church of Brou. Jacques crossed the Reissouse, followed the right bank of the little river, and found himself, after walking a few hundred yards beyond the town, at the sharp angle made by the parting of the three roads. Father and son reached their separate posts at about the same time.

At this particular moment, that is to say, about seven o’clock, the stillness and solitude surrounding the Château des Noires-Fontaines was broken by the arrival of a post-chaise, which stopped before the iron gate. A servant in livery got off the box and pulled the chain of the bell.

It was Michel’s business to open the gate, but Michel was away, as we know. Amélie and Charlotte probably counted on him, for the bell was rung three times before any one answered it. At last the maid appeared at the head of the stairs calling Michel. Michel made no reply. Finally, protected by the locked gates, Charlotte ventured to approach them. In spite of the obscurity she recognized the servant.

“Ah, is it you, Monsieur James?” she cried, somewhat reassured. James was Sir John’s confidential valet.

“Yes, mademoiselle, it is I, or rather it is Sir John.”

The carriage door opened at this moment, and his master’s voice was heard saying: “Mademoiselle Charlotte, will you tell your mistress that I have just arrived from Paris, that I have called to leave my card, and to ask permission, not to be received this evening, but to be allowed to call to-morrow, if she will grant me that favor. Ask her at what hour I shall least inconvenience her."

Mademoiselle Charlotte had a high opinion of Sir John, consequently she acquitted herself of the commission with the utmost alacrity. Five minutes later she returned to announce that Sir John would be received the next day between twelve and one o'clock.

Roland knew what the Englishman had come for. In his mind the marriage was an accomplished fact, and he regarded Sir John already as his brother-in-law. He hesitated a moment as to whether he should or should not make himself known to Sir John, and tell his friend about his projects; but he reflected that Sir John was not a man to let him work them out alone. He, too, had a revenge to take on the Companions of Jehu; he would certainly insist on taking part in the expedition, whatever it was. And that expedition, however it might result, was certain to be dangerous, and another disaster might befall him. Roland's luck, as Roland well knew, did not extend to his friends. Sir John, grievously wounded, had barely escaped with his life, and the colonel of dragoons had been killed outright. He therefore allowed Sir John to drive away without giving any sign of his own proximity.

As for Charlotte, she did not seem in the least surprised that Michel was not there to open the gate. Evidently they were accustomed to his absences, and they did not disturb either the mistress or the maid. For the rest, Roland knew his sister well enough to understand this indifference. Amélie, feeble under a moral suffering wholly unsuspected by Roland, who attributed to simple nervous crises the fluctuations of his sister's character, Amélie was strong and brave before real danger. That was no doubt why she felt no fear about remaining with Charlotte alone in the lonely house, without other protection than that afforded by the two gardeners, who spent their nights in poaching.

As for ourselves, we know that Michel and his son did really serve their mistress' desire more in absenting themselves thus frequently from the château than in staying [near] it. Their absence left the coast clear for Morgan, [and that] was all Amélie really cared about.

That evening and part of the night went by without bringing Roland any news. He tried to sleep, but succeeded ill. He fancied every minute that he heard some one at the door. The day was just beginning to glimmer through the shutters when the door did actually open. Michel and Jacques were returning, and this is what had happened to them:

They had each gone to his post, Michel at the inn door, Jacques to the junction of the roads. Twenty paces from the door Michel had met Pierre, and three words sufficed to show him that M. de Valensolle was still at the inn. The latter had announced that, as he had a long journey before him, he would let his horse rest and would not start until nightfall. Pierre did not doubt that he was going to Geneva, as he said.

Michel proposed a glass of wine to Pierre. Pierre accepted. After that, Michel was sure of being warned of any change. Pierre was the hostler, and nothing could be done in the stable without his knowledge. A lad attached to the inn promised to convey the news to Michel, in return for which Michel gave him three charges of powder with which to make firecrackers.

At midnight the traveller had not yet started; they had drunk four bottles of wine, but Michel had partaken sparingly of them. He had found means to pour three of the four bottles into Pierre’s glass, where they did not long remain. At midnight the wine-shop closed, and Michel having nowhere to go for the four hours that still remained until daybreak, Pierre offered him a bed of straw in the stable. Michel accepted. The two friends went back arm-in-arm; Pierre staggering, Michel pretending to stagger.

At three o’clock in the morning the servant of the hotel awakened Michel. The traveller wanted his horse. Michel, pretending that he must be off to see to his game, also rose. His toilet was not long in making; he had only to shake the straw from his hair, game-bag, and blouse, after which he took leave of his friend Pierre and hid himself at the corner of the street.

Fifteen minutes later the gate opened and a man rode out on a pacing horse. It was M. de Valensolle. He took the street that led to the Geneva road. Michel followed without concealment, whistling a hunting air. Only, as Michel could not run for fear of attracting the rider’s notice, he lost sight of him before long. But Jacques was there, thought he, waiting at the fork of the roads. Yes, Jacques had been there, but he had been there for over six hours of a winter’s night, in five degrees of cold. Had he the courage to stand six hours in the snow and kick his soles against a tree?

Thinking thus, Michel took a short cut through the streets and lanes, running at full speed; but horse and rider, in spite of his haste, had gone faster than he. He reached the fork of the roads. All was silent and solitary. The snow, trampled the day before, a Sunday, no longer showed distinct tracks. The steps of the horse were lost in the mud of the road. Nor did he waste further time in vain searching. He wondered what had become of Jacques; but his poacher's eye soon told him.

Jacques had stood on watch at the foot of a tree. For how long? It was difficult to say, but long enough to become very cold. The snow was well beaten down by his heavy hunting-boots. He had evidently tried to keep warm by walking up and down. Then suddenly he must have remembered a little mud hut on the other side of the road, such as the road-menders build as a shelter against the rain. He had gone down the ditch and crossed the road. His trail, lost for a moment in the centre of the road, was visible on the snow at either side. This trail formed a diagonal line, making straight for the hut. It was evidently in the hut that Jacques had passed the night. But when had he left it? And why had he left it? The first question was unanswerable. But to the most inexperienced scout the second was plain enough. He had left it to follow M. de Valensolle. The same footsteps that had approached the hut were to be seen going, as they left it, in the direction of Ceyzeriat.

The traveller had really taken the road to Geneva. Jacques' footsteps showed it plainly. The stride was long, like that of a man running, and he had followed the road behind the trees, evidently to conceal himself from the rider. At a wretched tavern, one of those with the legend inscribed over its door: "Here we give food and drink, equestrian and pedestrian lodgings," the trail stopped. It was clear that the rider had stopped before this inn, for Jacques had also paused behind a tree some twenty feet distant, where the snow was-trampled. Then, probably after the gate had closed on horse and rider, Jacques had left his tree, crossed the road, this time with hesitation, his short steps leading, not to the door, but to the window.

Michel put his own feet in his son's footprints and reached the window. Through the chinks in the shutter the interior, when lighted, could be seen; but now all was dark, and Michel could see nothing. But Jacques had certainly looked through the window; no doubt it was then lighted, and he had been able to see something.

Where had he gone on leaving the window? Round the house, close to the wall. This excursion was easy to follow. The snow was virgin. As for his purpose in going round the house that was not difficult to make out. Jacques, like a lad of sense, had concluded that the traveller had not left a good hotel, saying that he was going to Geneva, to put up at a miserable tavern a mile from the town.

He must have ridden through the yard and gone out by some other exit. Jacques had, therefore, skirted the house in the hope of recovering the trail, if not of the horse, at least of the rider on the other side.

Sure enough, from a small gate in the rear, opening toward the forest that extends from Coterz to Ceyzeriat, footsteps could be seen advancing in a straight line to the edge of the woods. They were those of a man elegantly shod, wearing spurs on his heels, for the spurs had left their marks upon the snow.

Jacques had not hesitated to follow these marks. The track of his heavy shoes could be seen near the prints of the delicate boot — the large foot of the peasant near the slender foot of the city man.

It was now five o’clock. Day was breaking, and Michel resolved to go no further. Jacques was on the trail, and the young poacher was worth as much as the old one. Michel circled the open as if he were returning from Ceyzeriat, resolving to enter the inn and wait for Jacques’ return; certain that his son would know he had followed him and had stopped short at this isolated house.

Michel knocked on the window-shutter and was soon admitted. He knew the landlord, who was well accustomed to his nocturnal habits, asked for a bottle, complaining bitterly of his poor luck, and asked permission to wait for his son, who was in the woods on the other side, and who, he hoped, had been more successful in tracking the game. It goes without saying that this permission was readily accorded. Michel opened the window-shutters, in order to look out on the road.

It was not long before some one knocked on the glass. It was Jacques. His father called him.

Jacques had been as unfortunate as his father. No game; and he was frozen. An armful of wood was thrown on the fire and a second bottle of wine was brought. Jacques warmed himself and drank.

Then, as it was necessary that the two poachers should be back at the château before daylight, that their absence might not be noticed, Michel paid for the wine and the wood, and the pair departed.

Neither had said one word before the landlord of the subject that filled their minds. He was not to suspect that they were on other trail than that of game. But no sooner were they outside of the house than Michel drew close to his son. Jacques recounted how he had followed the tracks until they had reached a crossroad in the forest. There a man, armed with a gun, had suddenly appeared and asked him what he was doing in the forest at that hour. Jacques replied that he was watching for game. “Then go further,” said the man; “don’t you see that this place is taken?”

Jacques admitted the justice of this claim, and went on about a hundred rods further, but, just as he was slanting to the left to return to the crossroad, another man, armed like the first, had suddenly started up with the same inopportune question. Jacques gave him the same answer: “Watching for game.” The man had then pointed to the edge of the woods, saying in a threatening manner: “If I have any advice to give you, my young friend, it is to go over there. It will be safer for you than here.”

Jacques had taken this advice, or at least had pretended to take it, for as soon as he had reached the edge of the woods he had crept along in the ditch, until, convinced that it would be impossible to recover M. de Valensolle’s track, he had struck into the open, and returned by fields and the highroad to the tavern, where he hoped to, and in fact did, find his father.

They reached the Château des Noires-Fontaines, as we have seen, just as day was breaking.

All that we have related was repeated to Roland with a multiplicity of detail which we must omit, and convinced the young officer that the two armed men, who had warned off Jacques, were not poachers as they seemed, but Companions of Jehu. But where was their haunt located?

There was no deserted convent, no ruin, in that direction.

Suddenly Roland clapped his hand to his head. “Idiot that I am!” he cried, “why did I never think of that?”

A smile of triumph crossed his lips, and addressing the two men, who were mortified at having brought him no more definite news, he cried: “My lads, I know all I want to know. Go to bed and sleep sound; my word, you deserve to!” He himself, setting the example, slept like a man whose brain has solved a problem of the utmost importance which has long harassed it.

The thought had just flashed through his mind that the Companions of Jehu had abandoned the Chartreuse of Seillon for the grottoes of Ceyzeriat; and at the same time he recalled the subterranean passage leading from these grottoes to the church of Brou.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A RECONNOISSANCE

That same day, Sir John, making use of the permission accorded him the night before, presented himself at the Château des Noires-Fontaines between twelve and one o’clock.

Everything occurred as Morgan had advised. Sir John was received as the friend of the family, Lord Tanlay as a suitor whose attentions were most flattering. Amélie made no opposition to the wishes of her mother and brother, and to the commands of the First Consul, further than to dwell on the state of her health and to ask for delay on that account. Sir John bowed and submitted; he had obtained more than he had hoped to obtain. He was accepted.

He felt that his presence in Bourg, if prolonged, would be an impropriety, Amélie being (still on the plea of ill-health) parted from her mother and brother. He therefore announced that he would pay her a second visit on the morrow, and leave Bourg that same evening. He would delay further visits until Amélie came to Paris, or until Madame de Montrevel returned to Bourg. The latter arrangement was the more probable of the two, for Amélie assured him she needed the country air and the spring-like weather to assist her in recovering her health.

Thanks to Sir John’s considerate delicacy, the plan arranged between Amélie and Morgan was thus carried out, and the two lovers had before them a period of solitude and a respite in which to form their plans.

Michel learned these details from Charlotte and imparted them in turn to Roland. The latter determined to await Sir John’s departure before he took any decisive steps against the Companions of Jehu. But this did not prevent him from endeavoring to set at rest any remaining doubts.

When night came he put on a hunting-suit, and over it Michel’s blouse, concealed his face beneath a broad-brimmed hat, slipped a pair of pistols in his knife-belt, hidden by the blouse, and boldly took the road from Noires-Fontaines to Bourg. He stopped at the barracks of the gendarmerie and asked to see the captain.

The captain was in his room. Roland went up and made himself known. Then, as it was only eight o'clock, and some one passing might recognize him, he blew out the light, and the two men talked in the dark. The captain knew already what had happened on the Lyons road three days earlier, and, certain that Roland was not killed, was expecting him. To his great astonishment, Roland asked him for only one, or rather for two things: the key of the church of Brou and a crowbar.

The captain gave him the required articles, and offered to accompany him, but Roland refused. It was evident to his mind that he had been betrayed by some one connected with the affair of the Maison-Blanche, and he would not expose himself to a second defeat. He therefore begged the captain to tell no one of his presence in Bourg, and to await his return, even if it were delayed some hours. The captain agreed.

Roland, the key in his right hand, the crowbar in his left, reached the side door of the church without making any noise. This he unlocked, entered, relocked it behind him, and found himself facing a wall of hay. He listened. The most profound silence reigned.

He remembered his boyish habits, took his bearings, put the key in his pocket, and scrambled up the wall of hay, which was about fifteen feet high and formed a sort of platform. When he reached the top he slid down on the other side, as though he were descending the scarp of a fortification, and reached the flooring of the church, which was almost wholly composed of mortuary stones.

The choir was empty, thanks to a rood-screen which protected it on one side, and also to the walls which inclosed it to right and left. The door of the screen was open and Roland entered the choir without difficulty. He came face to face with the monument of Philippe le Beau. At the head of the tomb was a large square flagstone. It covered the steps which led to the burial vaults.

Roland must have known the way, for as soon as he reached the stone he knelt down and felt with his hand for the edge of it. When he found it he stood up, inserted his lever and raised the slab. With one hand he held it up while he went down the steps. Then he lowered it slowly. It seemed as though this nocturnal visitor were voluntarily separating himself from the land of the living, and descending into the world of the dead. And strange indeed to him, who sees by night as by day, on the earth and beneath it, must the impassibility of this young man have seemed, who passed among the dead in search of the living, and who, in spite of darkness and solitude, did not shudder at the touch of the mortuary marbles.

He walked on, feeling his way among the tombs, until he came to the iron gate leading to the subterranean passage. He looked for the lock. It was only bolted. He inserted the end of his lever between the bolt and the staple, and pushed it gently. The gate opened. He drew it close after him, but did not lock it, so as to avoid delay on his return. The crowbar he left at the corner of the gate.

Then, with straining ears, dilated pupils, every sense tense with this effort to hear, the need to breathe, the impossibility of seeing, he advanced slowly, a pistol in one hand, touching the wall with the other to guide himself. He walked thus for fifteen minutes. A few drops of ice-cold water fell through the roof on his hands and shoulders, and told him he was passing under the river.

At the end of this time he found the door which opened from the passage into the quarry. There he halted a moment. He could now breathe more freely, and, moreover, he fancied that he heard distant sounds, and could see flickering lights, like will-o’-the-wisps, on the pillars that supported the roof. An observer might have thought, not distinguishing the face of the silent listener, that he showed hesitation; but the moment his countenance was seen, no one could have mistaken its expression of hope.

He then resumed his way, heading toward the light he thought he had seen. As he advanced, the lights and the noises grew more distinct. It was evident that the quarry was inhabited. By whom? He did not yet know, but he would know.

He was already within ten feet of that open clearing in the midst of the granite walls which we described on our first visit to the grotto of Ceyzeriat. Roland clung closely to the wall, and moved forward almost imperceptibly. In the dim half-light he looked like a gliding bass-relief.

At last his head passed beyond an angle of the wall, and his glance rested upon what we may call the camp of the Companions of Jehu.

A dozen or more of the members sat there at supper. Roland was seized with a wild desire to precipitate himself into their midst, attacking them singly, and fighting until he died. But he repressed the insensate thought, withdrew his head as slowly as he had advanced it, and, with beaming eyes and heart full of joy, returned, unseen and unsuspected, along the way he had come. Everything was now explained; the deserted Chartreuse, M. de

Valensolle's disappearance, and the counterfeit poachers near the entrance to the grotto of Ceyzeriat.

This time he was sure of his vengeance, his deadly, terrible vengeance — deadly, because, in like manner as he had been spared (he suspected intentionally), he meant to spare others; with this difference that, whereas he had been spared for life, he would order these men spared for death, death on the scaffold.

Half-way back he thought he heard a noise behind him. He turned and was certain he saw a gleam of light. He quickened his steps. The gate once passed, there was no danger of losing his way. It was no longer a quarry with a thousand windings; it was a straight and narrow vaulted passage leading to the mortuary grating. At the end of ten minutes he again passed under the river; a couple of minutes later, his outstretched hand touched the iron gate.

He took the crowbar from the place where he had left it, entered the vault, pulled the gate to, closed it gently and noiselessly, and, guiding himself by the tombs, he regained the staircase, pushed up the flagstone with his head, and stood once more in the land of the living.

There it was comparative daylight. He left the choir, closed the door of the screen as he had found it, scaled the hay, crossed the platform, and slid down the other side. The key was still in his pocket. He unlocked the door and stepped out into the street.

The captain of gendarmerie was anxiously awaiting him. They conferred together for a few moments, and then they returned to Bourg by the outer road to avoid being seen. Here they entered the town through the market-gate, and followed the Rue de la Révolution, the Rue de la Liberté, and the Rue d'Espagne, since called the Rue Simonneau. There Roland ensconced himself in a corner of the Rue du Greffe and waited. The captain continued on his way alone. He went down the Rue des Ursules (for the last seven years called the Rue des Casernes). This was where the colonel of dragoons lived. He had just gone to bed when the captain of the gendarmerie entered his room; in two words the latter told all, and he rose at once and dressed in haste.

When the colonel of dragoons and the captain of gendarmerie appeared in the square, a shadow detached itself from the opposite wall and came up to them. That shadow was Roland. The three men stood talking for about ten minutes, Roland giving his orders, the other two listening and approving.

Then they separated. The colonel returned home. Roland and the captain followed the Rue de l'Etoile, climbed the steps of the Jacobins, passed down the Rue du Bourgneuf, and reached the outer road once more. Then they struck diagonally across to the highroad of Pont-d'Ain. The captain stopped at the barracks, which were on the way, and Roland continued alone to the château.

Twenty minutes later — in order not to awaken Amélie — instead of ringing the bell he knocked on Michel's window-blind. Michel opened, and with one bound Roland, devoured by that fever which took possession of him whenever he incurred, or merely dreamed of some danger, sprang into the room.

He would not have awakened Amélie had he rung, for Amélie was not asleep. Charlotte had been into town ostensibly to see her father, but really to take a letter from her mistress to Morgan. She had seen Morgan and brought back his answer.

Amélie was reading that answer, which was as follows:

> DEAR LOVE OF MINE — Yes, all goes well on your side, for you are an angel; but I greatly fear that all may go ill on mine, for I am the demon.
>
> I must see you, I must hold you in my arms and press you to my Heart. I know not what presentiment hangs over me; but I am sad, sad as death.
>
> Send Charlotte to-morrow to make sure that Sir John is gone, and then, if you are certain, make the accustomed signal. Do not be alarmed; do not talk to me of the snow, or tell me that my footsteps will be seen. This time it is not I who will go to you, but you who must come to me. Do you understand? You can safely walk in the park, and no one will notice your footsteps.
>
> Put on your warmest shawl and your thickest furs. Then we will spend an hour in the boat under the willows together, and change our roles for once. Usually I tell you of my hopes and you tell me of your fears; but to-morrow, you will tell me of your hopes and I will tell you of my fears, my darling Amélie.

Only, be sure to come out as soon as you have made the signal. I will await it at Montagnac, and from Montagnac to the Reissouse it will not take a love like mine five minutes to reach you.

Au revoir, my poor Amélie; had you never met me you would have been the happiest of the happy. Fatality placed me in your path, and I have made a martyr of you.

Your CHARLES.

P.S. — To-morrow without fail, unless some insurmountable obstacle prevents.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

IN WHICH MORGAN'S PRESENTIMENTS ARE VERIFIED

It often happens that the skies are never so calm or so serene as before a storm. The day was beautiful and still; one of those glorious days of February when, in spite of the tingling cold of the atmosphere, in spite of a winding-sheet of snow covering the earth, the sun smiles down upon mankind with a promise of spring.

Sir John came at noon to make his farewell visit to Amélie. He had, or thought he had, her promise, and that satisfied him. His impatience was altogether personal; but Amélie, in accepting his suit, even though she relegated the period of her marriage to the vaguest possible future, had crowned his hopes. He trusted to the First Consul and to Roland's friendship for the rest. He therefore returned to Paris to do much of his courting with Madame de Montrevel, not being able to remain at Bourg and carry it on with Amélie.

A quarter of an hour after he had left the Château des Noires-Fontaines, Charlotte was also on her way to Bourg. At four o'clock she returned, bringing word that she had seen Sir John with her own eyes getting into his travelling carriage, and that he had taken the road to Mâcon.

Amélie could therefore feel perfectly at ease on that score. She breathed freer. She had tried to inspire Morgan with a peace of mind which she herself did not share. Since the day that Charlotte had brought back the news of Roland's presence at Bourg, she had had a presentiment, like that of Morgan himself, that they were approaching some terrible crisis. She knew all that had happened at the Chartreuse of Seillon. She foresaw the struggle between her brother and her lover, and, with her mind at rest about her brother, thanks to Morgan's protection, she, knowing Roland's character, trembled for her lover's life.

Moreover, she had heard of the stoppage of the Chambéry mail-coach and the death of the colonel of Chasseurs. She also knew that her brother had escaped, but that he had disappeared since that time. She had received no letter from him herself. This disappearance and silence, to her who knew her brother so well, was even worse than open and declared war.

As for Morgan, she had not seen him since the scene we have narrated, when she promised to send him arms wherever he might be, in case he were condemned to death. Amélie therefore awaited this interview, for which Morgan had asked, with as much impatience as he who had asked it. As soon as she thought Michel and his son were in bed, she lighted the four windows with the candles which were to summon Morgan to her.

Then, following her lover’s injunctions, she wrapped herself in a cashmere shawl, which Roland had brought her from the battlefield of the Pyramids, and which he had unwound from the head of a chieftain whom he had killed. Over this she flung a fur mantle, left Charlotte behind to keep her informed in case of eventualities, which she trusted would not be forthcoming, opened the park gate, and hastened toward the river.

During the day she had gone to the Reissouse and back several times to trace a line of footsteps, among which the nocturnal ones would not be noticed. She now descended, if not tranquilly at least boldly, the slope leading to the river. Once there, she looked about her for the boat beneath the willows. A man was waiting in it — Morgan. With two strokes of the oar he reached a spot where Amélie could come to him. The young girl sprang down and he caught her in his arms.

The first thing the young girl noticed was the joyous radiance which illuminated, if we may say so, the face of her lover.

“Oh!” she cried, “you have something nice to tell me.” “What makes you think so, dearest?” asked Morgan with his tenderest smile.

“There is something in your face, my darling Charles, something more than the mere happiness of seeing me.”

“You are right,” said Morgan, throwing the boat-chain around a willow and letting the oars float idly beside the boat. Then, taking Amélie in his arms, he said, “You were right, my Amélie. Oh! blind weak beings! It is at the very moment that happiness knocks at our door that we despair and doubt.”

“Oh, speak, speak!” said Amélie, “tell me what has happened.”

“Do you remember, my Amélie, how you answered me the last time we met, when I asked you to fly and spoke to you of your probable repugnance to the step?”

“Yes, I remember, Charles. I said that I was yours, and that, though I felt that repugnance, I would conquer it for your sake.”

“And I replied that I had engagements which would prevent my leaving the country; that I was bound to others, and they to me; that our duty was to one man to whom we owed absolute obedience — the future King of France, Louis XVIII.”

“Yes, you told me that.”

“Well, we are now released from our pledges, Amélie, not only by the King, but by our general, Georges Cadoudal.”

“Oh! my friend, then you will be as other men, only above all others.”

“I shall become a simple exile, Amélie. There is no hope of our being included in the Breton or Vendéan amnesty.”

“Why not?”

“We are not soldiers, my darling child. We are not even rebels. We are Companions of Jehu.”

Amélie sighed.

“We are bandits, brigands, highwaymen,” said Morgan, dwelling on the words with evident intention.

“Hush!” said Amélie, laying her hand on her lover’s lips. “Hush! don’t let us speak of that. Tell me how it is that your king has released you, and your general also.”

“The First Consul wished to see Cadoudal. In the first place, he sent your brother to him with certain proposals. Cadoudal refused to come to terms; but, like ourselves, he received orders from Louis XVIII. to cease hostilities. Coincident with that order came another message from the First Consul to Cadoudal. It was a safeguard for the Vendéan general, and an invitation to come to Paris; an overture from one power to another power. Cadoudal accepted, and is now on his way to Paris. If it is not peace, it is at least a truce.”

“Oh, what joy, my Charles!”

“Don’t rejoice too much, my love.”

“Why not?”

“Do you know why they have issued this order to suspend hostilities?”

“No.”

“Because M. Fouché is a long-headed man. He realized that, since he could not defeat us, he must dishonor us. He has organized false companies of Jehu, which he has set loose in Maine and Anjou, who don’t stop at the government money, but pillage and rob travellers, and invade the châteaux and farms by night, and roast the feet of the owners to make them tell where their treasure is hidden. Well, these men, these bandits, these *roasters*, have taken our name, and claim to be fighting for the same principles, so that M. Fouché and his police declare that we are not only beyond the pale of the law, but beyond that of honor."

"Oh!"

"That is what I wished to tell you before I ask you to fly with me, my Amélie. In the eyes of France, in the eyes of foreigners, even in the eyes of the prince we have served, and for whom we have risked the scaffold, we shall be hereafter, and probably are now, dishonored men worthy of the scaffold."

"Yes; but to me you are my Charles, the man of devoted convictions, the firm royalist, continuing to struggle for a cause when other men have abandoned it. To me you are the loyal Baron de Sainte-Hermine, or, if you like it better, you are to me the noble, courageous, invincible Morgan."

"Ah! that is what I longed to hear, my darling. If you feel thus, you will not hesitate, in spite of the cloud of infamy that hangs over our honor, you will not hesitate — I will not say to give yourself to me, for that you have already done — but to become my wife."

"Hesitate! No, not for an instant, not for a second! To do it is the joy of my soul, the happiness of my life! Your wife? I am your wife in the sight of God, and God will have granted my every prayer on the day that he enables me to be your wife before men."

Morgan fell on his knees.

"Then," he said, "here at your feet, with clasped hands and my whole heart supplicating, I say to you, Amélie, will you fly with me? Will you leave France with me? Will you be my wife in other lands?"

Amélie sprang erect and clasped her head in her hands, as though her brain were bursting with the force of the blood that rushed to it. Morgan caught both her hands and looked at her anxiously.

"Do you hesitate?" he asked in a broken, trembling voice.

"No, not an instant!" she cried resolutely. "I am yours in the past, in the present, in the future, here, everywhere. Only the thought convulses me. It is so unexpected."

"Reflect well, Amélie. What I ask of you is to abandon country and family, all that is dear to you, all that is sacred. If you follow me, you leave the home where you were born, the mother who nurtured you, the brother who loves you, and who, perhaps, when he hears that you are the wife of a brigand, will hate you. He will certainly despise you."

As he spoke, Morgan's eyes were anxiously questioning Amélie's face. Over that face a tender smile stole gradually, and then it turned from heaven to earth, and bent upon Morgan, who was still on his knees before her.

"Oh, Charles!" she murmured, in a voice as soft as the clear limpid river flowing at her feet, "the love that comes direct from the Divine is very powerful indeed, since, in spite of those dreadful words you have just uttered, I say to you without hesitation, almost without regret: Charles, I am here; Charles, I am yours. Where shall we go?"

"Amélie, our fate is not one to discuss. If we go, if you follow me, it must be at once. To-morrow we must be beyond the frontier."

"How do we go?"

"I have two horses, ready saddled at Montagnac, one for you, Amélie, and one for me. I have letters of credit for two hundred thousand francs on London and Vienna. We will go wherever you prefer."

"Wherever you are, Charles. What difference does it make so long as you are there?"

"Then come."

"Can I have five minutes, Charles; is that too much?"

"Where are you going?"

"To say good-by to many things, to fetch your precious letters and the ivory chaplet used at my first communion. Oh! there are many sacred cherished souvenirs of my childhood which will remind me over there of my mother, of France. I will fetch them and return."

"Amélie!"

"What is it?"

"I cannot leave you. If I part with you an instant now I feel that I shall lose you forever. Amélie, let me go with you."

"Yes, come. What matter if they see your footsteps now? We shall be far enough away to-morrow. Come!" The young man sprang from the boat and gave his hand to Amélie to help her out. Then he folded his arm about her and they walked to the house.

On the portico Charles stopped.

"Go on alone," said he; "memory is a chaste thing. I know that, and I will not embarrass you by my presence. I will wait here and watch for you. So long as I know you are close by me I do not fear to lose you. Go, dear, and come back quickly.”

Amélie answered with a kiss. Then she ran hastily up to her room, took the little coffer of carved oak clamped with iron, her treasury, which contained her lover’s letters from first to last, unfastened from the mirror above her bed the white and virginal chaplet that hung there; put into her belt a watch her father had given her, and passed into her mother’s bedchamber. There she stooped and kissed the pillow where her mother’s head had lain, knelt before the Christ at the foot of the bed, began a thanksgiving she dared not finish, changed it to a prayer, and then suddenly stopped — she fancied she heard Charles calling her.

She listened and heard her name a second time, uttered in a tone of agony she could not understand. She quivered, sprang to her feet, and ran rapidly down the stairs.

“What is it?” cried Amélie, seizing the young man’s hand.

“Listen, listen!” said he.

Amélie strained her ears to catch the sound which seemed to her like musketry. It came from the direction of Ceyzeriat.

“Oh!” cried Morgan, “I was right in doubting my happiness to the last. My friends are attacked. Adieu, Amélie, adieu!”

“Adieu!” cried Amélie, turning pale. “What, will you leave me?”

The sound of the firing grew more distinct.

“Don’t you hear them? They are fighting, and I am not there to fight with them.”

Daughter and sister of a soldier, Amélie understood him and she made no resistance.

“Go!” she said, letting her hands drop beside her. “You were right, we are lost.”

The young man uttered a cry of rage, caught her to his breast, and pressed her to him as though he would smother her. Then, bounding from the portico, he rushed in the direction of the firing with the speed of a deer pursued by hunters.

“I come! I come, my friends!” he cried. And he disappeared like a shadow beneath the tall trees of the park.

Amélie fell upon her knees, her hands stretched toward him without the strength to recall him, or, if she did so, it was in so faint a voice that Morgan did not stop or even check his speed to answer her.

CHAPTER XLIX.

ROLAND’S REVENGE

It is easy to guess what had happened. Roland had not wasted his time with the captain of gendarmerie and the colonel of dragoons. They on their side did not forget that they had their own revenge to take.

Roland had informed them of the subterranean passage that led from the church of Brou to the grotto of Ceyzeriat. At nine in the evening the captain and the eighteen men under his command were to go to the church, descend into the burial vault of the Dukes of Savoy, and prevent with their bayonets all communication between the subterranean passage and the quarry.

Roland, at the head of twenty men, was to inclose the woods in a semicircle, drawing in upon it until the two ends should meet at the grotto of Ceyzeriat. The first movement of the party was to be made at nine o’clock, in conjunction with the captain of the gendarmerie.

We have seen, from what Morgan told Amélie, the nature of the present intentions of the Companions of Jehu. The news brought from Mittau and from Brittany had put them at ease. Each man felt that he was free, and, knowing that the struggle had been a hopeless one, he rejoiced in his liberty.

There was therefore a full meeting at the grotto of Ceyzeriat, almost a fête. At twelve o’clock the Companions of Jehu were to separate, and each one, according to his facilities, was to cross the frontier and leave France.

We know how their leader employed his last moments. The others, who had not the same ties of the heart, were supping together in the broad open space of the quarry, brilliantly illuminated — a feast of separation and farewell; for, once out of France, the Vendée and Brittany pacificated, Condé’s army destroyed, who knew when and where they should meet again in foreign lands.

Suddenly the report of a shot fell upon their ears.

Every man sprang to his feet as if moved by an electric shock. A second shot, and then through the depths of the quarry rang the cry, quivering on the wings of the bird of ill-omen, “To arms!”

To the Companions of Jehu, subjected to all the vicissitudes of life of an outlaw, the occasional rest they snatched was never that of peace. Pistols, daggers, carbines, were ever near at hand. At the cry, given no doubt by the sentinel, each man sprang to his weapons and stood with panting breast and strained ears, waiting.

In the midst of the silence a step as rapid as well could be in the darkness was heard. Then, within the circle of light thrown by the torches and candles, a man appeared.

“To arms!” he cried again, “we are attacked!”

The two shots the Companions of Jehu had heard were from the double-barrelled gun of the sentry. It was he who now appeared, his smoking gun in his hand.

“Where is Morgan?” cried twenty voices.

“Absent,” replied Montbar; “consequently I command. Put out the lights and retreat to the church. A fight is useless now. It would only be waste of blood.”

He was obeyed with an alacrity that showed that every one appreciated the danger. The little company drew together in the darkness.

Montbar, who knew the windings of the subterranean passage almost as well as Morgan, directed the troop, and, followed by his companions, he plunged into the heart of the quarry. Suddenly, as he neared the gate of the passage, he fancied he heard an order given in a low tone not fifty feet away, then a sound like the cocking of guns. He stretched out both arms and muttered in a low voice:

“Halt!” At the same instant came the command, this time perfectly audible: “Fire!”

It was hardly given before the cavern was lighted with a glare, followed by a frightful volley. Ten carbines had been discharged at once into the narrow passage. By their light Montbar and his companions recognized the uniform of the gendarmes.

“Fire!” cried Montbar in turn.

Seven or eight shots answered the command. Again the darkness was illuminated. Two of the Companions of Jehu lay upon the ground, one killed outright, the other mortally wounded.

“Our retreat is cut off, my friends,” cried Montbar. “To the right-about! If we have a chance, it is through the forest.”

The movement was executed with the precision of a military manoeuvre. Montbar, again at the head of his companions, retraced his steps. At that moment the gendarmes fired again. But no one replied. Those who had discharged their guns reloaded them. Those who had not, reserved their fire for the real struggle which was to come. One or two sighs alone told that the last volley of the gendarmes had not been without result.

At the end of five minutes Montbar stopped. The little party had reached the open space of the quarry.

“Are your pistols and guns all loaded?” he asked.

“Yes,” answered a dozen voices.

“Remember the order for those who fall into the hands of the police. We belong to the army of M. de Teyssonnet, and we are here to recruit men for the royalist cause. If they talk to us of mail-coaches and diligences, we don’t know what they mean.”

“Agreed.”

“In either case it will be death. We know that well enough; but the death of a soldier is better than that of thieves — the volley of a platoon rather than the guillotine.”

“Yes, yes,” cried a mocking voice, “we know what that is — Vive la fusillade!”

“Forward, friends!” said Montbar, “and let us sell our lives for what they are worth; that is to say, as dearly as possible.”

“Forward!” they all cried.

Then, as rapidly as was possible in the profound darkness, the little troop resumed its march, still under the guidance of Montbar. As they advanced, the leader noticed a smell of smoke which alarmed him. At the same time gleams of light began to flicker on the granite walls at the angles of the path, showing that something strange was happening at the opening of the grotto.

“I believe those scoundrels are smoking us out,” exclaimed Montbar.

“I fear so,” replied Adler.

“They think we are foxes.”

“Oh!” replied the same voice, “they shall know by our claws that we are lions.”

The smoke became thicker and thicker, the light more and more vivid.

They turned the last corner. A pile of dried wood had been lighted in the quarry about fifty feet from the entrance, not for the smoke, but for the light it gave. By the blaze of that savage flame the weapons of the dragoons could be seen gleaming at the entrance of the grotto.

Ten steps in advance of the men stood an officer, waiting. He was leaning on his carbine, not only exposed to attack, but apparently courting it. It was Roland. He was easily recognized. He had flung his cap away, his head was bare, and the fitful light of the flames played upon his features. But that which should have cost him his life saved him. Montbar recognized him and stepped backward.

“Roland de Montrevel!” he said. “Remember Morgan’s injunction.”

“Yes,” replied the other Companions, in muffled tones.

“And now,” said Montbar, “let us die, but dearly!”

And he sprang forward into the space illuminated by the fire, and discharged one barrel of his gun at the dragoons, who replied with a volley.

It would be impossible to relate all that followed. The grotto was filled with smoke, which the flame of each weapon pierced like a flash of lightning. The two bands clinched and fought hand to hand, pistols and daggers serving them in turn. At the noise of the struggle, the gendarmes poured in from the rear — few more demons added to this fight of devils — but the groups of friends and enemies were so confused they dared not fire. They struggled in the red and lurid atmosphere, fell down and rose again; a roar of rage was heard, then a cry of agony — the death sigh of a man. The survivor sought another man, and the struggle was renewed.

This work of death lasted fifteen minutes, perhaps twenty. At the end of those twenty minutes twenty corpses could be counted in the grotto of Ceyzeriat. Thirteen were those of the gendarmes and the dragoons, nine belonged to the Companions of Jehu. Five of the latter were still living; overwhelmed by numbers, crippled by wounds, they were taken alive. The gendarmes and the dragoons, twenty-five in number, surrounded them.

The captain of gendarmes had his arm shattered, the colonel of dragoons was wounded in the thigh. Roland alone, covered with blood that was not his own, had not a scratch. Two of the prisoners were so grievously wounded that it was impossible for them to walk, and the soldiers were obliged to carry them on an improvised litter. Torches were lighted, and the whole troop, with the prisoners, took the road to the town.

As they were leaving the forest to branch into the high-road, the gallop of a horse was heard. It came on rapidly. “Go on,” said Roland; “I will stay here and find out what this means.”

It was a rider, who, as we have said, was advancing at full speed.

“Who goes there?” cried Roland, raising his carbine when the rider was about twenty paces from him.

“One more prisoner, Monsieur de Montrevel,” replied the rider, “I could not be in at the fight, but I will at least go to the scaffold. Where are my friends?”

“There, sir,” replied Roland, who had recognized, not the face, but the voice of the rider, a voice which he now heard for the third time. As he spoke, he pointed to the little group in the centre of the soldiers who were making their way along the road from Ceyzeriat to Bourg.

“I am glad to see that no harm has befallen you, M. de Montrevel,” said the young man, with great courtesy; “I assure you it gives me much happiness.” And spurring his horse, he was beside the soldiers and gendarmes in a few strides. “Pardon me, gentlemen,” he said, springing from his horse, “I claim a place among my three friends, the Vicomte de Jayat, the Comte de Valensolle, and the Marquis de Ribier.”

The three prisoners gave a cry of admiration and held out their hands to their friend. The two wounded men lifted themselves up on their litters, and murmured: “Well done, Sainte-Hermine, well done!”

“I do believe, God help me!” cried Roland, “that those brigands will have the nobler side of the affair!”

CHAPTER L.

CADOUDAL AT THE TUILERIES

The day but one after the events which we have just related took place, two men were walking side by side up and down the grand salon of the Tuileries. They were talking eagerly, accompanying their words with hasty and animated gestures. These men were the First Consul, Bonaparte, and Cadoudal.

Cadoudal, impelled by the misery that might be entailed by a prolonged struggle in Brittany, had just signed a peace with Brune. It was after this signing of the peace that he had released the Companions of Jehu from their obligations. Unhappily, this release had reached them, as we have seen, twenty-four hours too late.

When treating with Brune, Cadoudal had asked nothing for himself save the liberty to go immediately to England. But Brune had been so insistent, that he had consented to an interview with the First Consul. He had, in consequence, come to Paris. The very morning of his arrival he went to the Tuileries, sent in his name, and had been received. It was Rapp who, in Roland's absence, introduced him. As the aide-de-camp withdrew, he left both doors open, so as to see everything from Bourrienne's room, and to be able to go to the assistance of the First Consul if necessary.

But Bonaparte, who perfectly understood Rapp's motive, closed the door. Then, returning hastily to Cadoudal's side, he said: "Ah! so it is you at last! One of your enemies, my aide-de-camp, Roland de Montrevel, has told me fine things of you."

"That does not surprise me," replied Cadoudal. "During the short time I saw M. de Montrevel, I recognized in him a most chivalrous nature."

"Yes; and that touched you?" asked the First Consul, fixing his falcon eye on the royalist chief. "Listen, Georges. I need energetic men like you to accomplish the work I have undertaken. Will you be one of them? I have already offered you the rank of colonel, but you are worth more than that. I now offer you the rank of general of division."

"I thank you from the bottom of my heart, citizen First Consul," replied Cadoudal; "but you would despise me if I accepted."

"Why so?" queried Bonaparte, hastily.

"Because I have pledged myself to the House of Bourbon; and I shall remain faithful to it under all circumstances."

"Let us discuss the matter," resumed the First Consul. "Is there no way to bind you?"

"General," replied the royalist leader, "may I be permitted to repeat to you what has been said to me?"

"Why not?"

"Because it touches upon the deepest political interests."

"Pooh! some nonsense," said the First Consul, smiling uneasily.

Cadoudal stopped short and looked fixedly at his companion.

"It is said that an agreement was made between you and Commodore Sidney Smith at Alexandria, the purport of which was to allow you to return to France on the condition, accepted by you, of restoring the throne to our former kings."

Bonaparte burst out laughing.

"How astonishing you are, you plebeians!" he said, "with your love for your former kings! Suppose that I did re-establish the throne (a thing, I assure you, I have not the smallest desire to do), what return will you get, you who have shed your blood for the cause? Not even the confirmation of the rank you have won in it, colonel. Have you ever known in the royalist ranks a colonel who was not a noble? Did you ever hear of any man rising by his merits into that class of people? Whereas with me, Georges, you can attain to what you will. The higher I raise myself, the higher I shall raise those who surround me. As for seeing me play the part of Monk, dismiss that from your mind. Monk lived in an age in which the prejudices we fought and overthrew in 1789 were in full force. Had Monk wished to make himself king, he could not have done so. Dictator? No! It needed a Cromwell for that! Richard could not have maintained himself. It is true that he was the true son of a great man — in other words a fool. If I had wished to make myself king, there was nothing to hinder me; and if ever the wish takes me there will be nothing to hinder. Now, if you have an answer to that, give it."

"You tell me, citizen First Consul, that the situation in France in 1800 is not the same as England in 1660. Charles I. was beheaded in 1649, Louis

XVI. in 1793. Eleven years elapsed in England between the death of the king and the restoration of his son. Seven years have already elapsed in France since the death of Louis XVI. Will you tell me that the English revolution was a religious one, whereas the French revolution was a political one? To that I reply that a charter is as easy to make as an abjuration.”

Bonaparte smiled.

“No,” he said, “I should not tell you that. I should say to you simply this: that Cromwell was fifty years old when Charles I. died. I was twenty-four at the death of Louis XVI. Cromwell died at the age of fifty-nine. In ten years’ time he was able to undertake much, but to accomplish little. Besides, his reform was a total one — a vast political reform by the substitution of a republican government for a monarchical one. Well, grant that I live to be Cromwell’s age, fifty-nine; that is not too much to expect; I shall still have twenty years, just the double of Cromwell. And remark, I change nothing, I progress; I do not overthrow, I build up. Suppose that Cæsar, at thirty years of age, instead of being merely the first roué of Rome, had been its greatest citizen; suppose his campaign in Gaul had been made; that his campaign in Egypt was over, his campaign in Spain happily concluded; suppose that he was thirty years old instead of fifty — don’t you think he would have been both Cæsar and Augustus?”

“Yes, unless he found Brutus, Cassius, and Casca on his path.”

“So,” said Bonaparte, sadly, “my enemies are reckoning on assassination, are they? In that case the thing is easy, and you, my enemy, have the first chance. What hinders you at this moment, if you feel like Brutus, from striking me as he struck Cæsar? I am alone with you, the doors are shut; and you would have the time to finish me before any one could reach you.”

Cadoudal made a step backward.

“No,” said he, “we do not count upon assassination, and I think our extremity must be great indeed before any of us would become a murderer; but there are the chances of war. A single reverse would destroy your prestige. One defeat would bring the enemy to the heart of France. The camp-fires of the Austrians can already be seen from the frontiers of Provence. A cannon-ball may take off your head, as it did that of Marshal Berwick, and then what becomes of France? You have no children, and your brothers — ”

“Oh!” cried Bonaparte, “from that point of view you are right enough; but, if you don’t believe in Providence, I do. I believe that nothing happens by chance. I believe that when, on the 15th of August, 1769 (one year, day for day, after Louis XV. issued the decree reuniting Corsica to France), a child was born in Ajaccio, destined to bring about the 13th Vendémiaire and the 18th Brumaire, and that Providence had great designs, mighty projects, in view for that child. I am that child. If I have a mission, I have nothing to fear. My mission is a buckler. If I have no mission, if I am mistaken, if, instead of living the twenty-five or thirty years I need to accomplish my work, I am stabbed to the heart like Cæsar, or knocked over by a cannon-ball like Berwick, Providence will have had its reasons for acting so, and on Providence will devolve the duty of providing for France. We spoke just now of Cæsar. When Rome followed his body, mourning, and burned the houses of his murderers, when the Eternal City turned its eyes to the four quarters of the globe, asking whence would come the genius to stay her civil wars, when she trembled at the sight of drunken Antony and treacherous Lepidus, she never thought of the pupil of Apollonius, the nephew of Cæsar, the young Octavius. Who then remembered that son of the Velletri banker, whitened with the flour of his ancestors? No one; not even the far-sighted Cicero. ‘*Orandum et tollendum,*’ he said. Well, that lad fooled all the graybeards in the Senate, and reigned almost as long as Louis XIV. Georges, Georges! don’t struggle against the Providence which created me, or that Providence will destroy you.”

“Then I shall be destroyed while following the path and the religion of my fathers,” replied Cadoudal, bowing; “and I hope that God will pardon my error, which will be that of a fervent Christian and a faithful son.”

Bonaparte laid his hands on the shoulders of the young leader.

“So be it,” said he; “but at least remain neuter. Leave events to complete themselves. Watch the thrones as they topple, the crowns as they fall. Usually spectators pay for a show; I will pay you to look on.”

“And what will you pay me for that, citizen First Consul?” asked Cadoudal, laughing.

“One hundred thousand francs a year,” replied Bonaparte.

“If you would give a hundred thousand francs to one poor rebel leader,” said Cadoudal, “what would you give to the prince for whom he fought?”

“Nothing, sir. I pay you for your courage, not for the principle for which you fought. I prove to you that I, man of my own works, judge men solely by theirs. Accept, Georges, I beg of you.”

“And suppose I refuse?”

“You will do wrong.”

“Will I still be free to depart when I please?”

Bonaparte went to the door and opened it.

“The aide-de-camp on duty,” he said.

He waited, expecting to see Rapp. Roland appeared.

“Ah, is it you!” he cried. Then, turning to Cadoudal, he said: “Colonel, I do not need to present to you my aide-de-camp, M. Roland de Montrevel. He is already one of your acquaintances. Roland, tell the colonel that he is as free in Paris as you were in his camp at Muzillac, and that if he wishes a passport for any country in the world, Fouché has orders to give it to him.”

“Your word suffices, citizen First Consul,” replied Cadoudal, bowing. “I leave to-night.”

“May I ask where you are going?”

“To London, general.”

“So much the better.”

“Why so much the better?”

“Because there you will be near the men for whom you have fought.”

“And then?”

“Then, when you have seen them — ”

“What?”

“You will compare them with those against whom you have fought. But, once out of France, colonel — ”

Bonaparte paused.

“I am waiting,” said Cadoudal.

“Do not return without warning me, or, if you do, do not be surprised if I treat you as an enemy.”

“That would be an honor, general. By treating me so you will show that you consider me a man to be feared.”

So saying, Georges bowed to the First Consul, and retired.

“Well, general,” asked Roland, after the door had closed on the Breton leader, “is he the man I represented him to be?”

“Yes,” responded Bonaparte, thoughtfully; “only he sees things awry. But the exaggeration of his ideas arises from noble sentiments, which must give him great influence over his own people.” Then he added, in a low voice, "But we must make an end of him. And now what have you been doing, Roland?"

"Making an end of my work," replied Roland.

"Ah, ha! Then the Companions of Jehu — "

"No longer exist, general. Three-fourths are dead, the rest prisoners."

"And you are safe and sound?"

"Don't speak of it, general. I do verily believe I have a compact with the devil."

That same evening Cadoudal, as he said, left Paris for England. On receiving the news that the Breton leader was in London, Louis XVIII. wrote him the following letter:

> I have learned with the greatest satisfaction, general, that you have at last *escaped* from the bands of the tyrant who misconceived you so far as to offer you service under him. I deplore the unhappy circumstances which obliged you to treat with him; but I did not feel the slightest uneasiness; the heart of my faithful Bretons, and yours in particular, are too well known to me. To-day you are free, you are near my brother, all my hopes revive. I need not say more to such a Frenchman as you.
>
> LOUIS.

To this letter were added a lieutenant-general's commission and the grand cordon of Saint-Louis.

CHAPTER LI.

THE ARMY OF THE RESERVES

The First Consul had reached the point he desired. The Companions of Jehu were destroyed and the Vendée was pacificated.

When demanding peace from England he had hoped for war. He understood very well that, born of war, he could exist only by war. He seemed to foresee that a poet would arise and call him “The Giant of War.”

But war — what war? Where should he wage it? An article of the constitution of the year VIII. forbade the First Consul to command the armies in person, or to leave France.

In all constitutions there is inevitably some absurd provision. Happy the constitutions that have but one! The First Consul found a means to evade this particular absurdity.

He established a camp at Dijon. The army which occupied this camp was called the Army of the Reserves. The force withdrawn from Brittany and the Vendée, some thirty thousand men in all, formed the nucleus of this army. Twenty thousand conscripts were incorporated in it; General Berthier was appointed commander-in-chief. The plan which Bonaparte explained to Roland in his study one day was still working in his mind. He expected to recover Italy by a single battle, but that battle must be a great victory.

Moreau, as a reward for his co-operation on the 18th Brumaire, received the command he had so much desired. He was made commander-in-chief of the Army of the Rhine, I with eighty thousand men under him. Augereau, with twenty-five thousand more, was on the Dutch frontier. And Masséna, commanding the Army of Italy, had withdrawn to the country about Genoa, where he was tenaciously maintaining himself against the land forces of the Austrian General Ott, and the British fleet under Admiral Keith.

While the latter movements were taking place in Italy, Moreau had assumed the offensive on the Rhine, and defeated the enemy at Stockach and Moeskirch. A single victory was to furnish an excuse to put the Army of Reserves under waiting orders. Two victories would leave no doubt as to the necessity of co-operation. Only, how was this army to be transported to Italy?

Bonaparte’s first thought was to march up the Valais and to cross the Simplon. He would thus turn Piedmont and enter Milan. But the operation was a long one, and must be done overtly. Bonaparte renounced it. His plan was to surprise the Austrians and to appear with his whole army on the plains of Piedmont before it was even suspected that he had crossed the Alps. He therefore decided to make the passage of the Great Saint-Bernard. It was for this purpose that he had sent the fifty thousand francs, seized by the Companions of Jehu, to the monks whose monastery crowns that mountain. Another fifty thousand had been sent since, which had reached their destination safely. By the help of this money the monastery was to be amply provisioned for an army of fifty thousand men halting there for a day.

Consequently, toward the end of April the whole of the artillery was advanced to Lauzanne, Villeneuve, Martigny, and Saint-Pierre. General Marmont, commanding the artillery, had already been sent forward to find a means of transporting cannon over the Alps. It was almost an impracticable thing to do; and yet it must be achieved. No precedent existed as a guide. Hannibal with his elephants, Numidians, and Gauls; Charlemagne with his Franks, had no such obstacles to surmount.

During the campaign in Italy in 1796, the army had not crossed the Alps, but turned them, descending from Nice to Cerasco by the Corniche road. This time a truly titanic work was undertaken.

In the first place, was the mountain unoccupied? The mountain without the Austrians was in itself difficult enough to conquer! Lannes was despatched like a forlorn hope with a whole division. He crossed the peak of the Saint-Bernard without baggage or artillery, and took possession of Châtillon. The Austrians had left no troops in Piedmont, except the cavalry in barracks and a few posts of observation. There were no obstacles to contend with except those of nature. Operations were begun at once.

Sledges had been made to transport the guns; but narrow as they might be, they were still too wide for the road. Some other means must be devised. The trunks of pines were hollowed and the guns inserted. At one end was a rope to pull them, at the other a tiller to guide them. Twenty grenadiers took the cables. Twenty others carried the baggage of those who drew them. An artilleryman commanded each detachment with absolute power, if need be, over life and death. The iron mass in such a case was far more precious than the flesh of men.

Before leaving each man received a pair of new shoes and twenty biscuits. Each put on his shoes and hung his biscuits around his neck. The First Consul, stationed at the foot of the mountain, gave to each cannon detachment the word to start.

A man must traverse the same roads as a tourist, on foot or on mule-back, he must plunge his eye to the depth of the precipice, before he can have any idea of what this crossing was. Up, always up those beetling slopes, by narrow paths, on jagged stones, which cut the shoes first, the feet next!

From time to time they stopped, drew breath, and then on again without a murmur. The ice-belt was reached. Before attempting it the men received new shoes; those of the morning were in shreds. A biscuit was eaten, a drop of brandy from the canteen was swallowed, and on they went. No man knew whither he was climbing. Some asked how many more days it would take; others if they might stop for a moment at the moon. At last they came to the eternal snows. There the toil was less severe. The gun-logs slid upon the snow, and they went faster.

One fact will show the measure of power given to the artilleryman who commanded each gun.

General Chamberlhac was passing. He thought the advance not fast enough. Wishing to hasten it, he spoke to an artilleryman in a tone of command.

“You are not in command here,” replied the man; “I am. I am responsible for the gun; I direct its march. Pass on.”

The general approached the artilleryman as if to take him by the throat. But the man stepped back, saying: “General, don’t touch me, or I will send you to the bottom of that precipice with a blow of this tiller.”

After unheard-of toil they reached the foot of the last rise, at the summit of which stands the convent. There they found traces of Lannes’ division. As the slope was very steep, the soldiers had cut a sort of stairway in the ice. The men now scaled it. The fathers of Saint-Bernard were awaiting them on the summit. As each gun came up the men were taken by squads into the hospice. Tables were set along the passage with bread and Gruyere cheese and wine.

When the soldiers left the convent they pressed the hands of the monks and embraced the dogs.

The descent at first seemed easier than the ascent, and the officers declared it was their turn to drag the guns. But now the cannon outstripped the teams, and some were dragged down faster than they wished. General Lannes and his division were still in the advance. He had reached the valley before the rest of the army, entered the Aosta, and received his orders to march upon Ivrea, at the entrance to the plains of Piedmont. There, however, he encountered an obstacle which no one had foreseen.

The fortress of Bard is situated about twenty-four miles from Aosta. On the road to Ivrea, a little behind the village, a small hill closes the valley almost hermetically. The river Dora flows between this hill and the mountain on the right. The river, or rather, the torrent, fills the whole space. The mountain on the left presents very much the same aspect; only, instead of the river, it is the highroad which passes between the hill and the mountain. It is there that the fortress of Bard stands. It is built on the summit of the hill, and extends down one side of it to the highroad.

How was it that no one had thought of this obstacle which was well nigh insurmountable? There was no way to assault it from the bottom of the valley, and it was impossible to scale the rocks above it.

Yet, by dint of searching, they did find a path that they were able to level sufficiently for the cavalry and the infantry to pass; but they tried in vain to get the artillery over it, although they took the guns apart as at the Mont Saint-Bernard.

Bonaparte ordered two cannon levelled on the road, and opened fire on the fortress; but it was soon evident that these guns made no effect. Moreover, a cannon ball from the fortress struck one of the two cannon and shattered it. The First Consul then ordered an assault by storm.

Columns formed in the village, and armed with ladders dashed up at a run and reached the fortress at several points; but to insure success, not only celerity, but silence was needed. It ought to have been a surprise; but Colonel Dufour, who commanded one column, ordered the advance to be sounded, and marched boldly to the assault. The column was repulsed, and the colonel received a ball through his body.

Then a company of picked marksmen were chosen. They were supplied with provisions and cartridges, and crept between the rocks until they reached a ledge, from which they commanded the fort. From this ledge they discovered another, not quite so high, but which also overlooked the fort. To this they contrived, with extreme difficulty, to hoist two guns, with which they formed a battery. These two pieces on one side, and the sharpshooters on the other, began to make the enemy uneasy.

In the meantime, General Marmont proposed a plan to the First Consul, so bold that the enemy could not suspect it. It was nothing less than to move the artillery along the highroad, notwithstanding that the enemy could rake it.

Manure and wool from the mattresses were found in the villages and were spread upon the road. The wheels and chains, and all the jingling portions of the gun-carriages were swathed in hay. The horses belonging to the guns and caissons were taken out, and fifty men supplied their places. This latter precaution had two advantages: first, the horses might neigh, while the men had every interest in keeping dead silence; secondly, a dead horse will stop a whole convoy, whereas a dead man, not being fastened to the traces, can be pushed aside and his place taken without even stopping the march. An officer and a subordinate officer of artillery were placed in charge of each carriage or caisson, with the promise of six hundred francs for the transport of each gun or wagon beyond the range of the fort.

General Marmont, who had proposed the plan, superintended the first operation himself. Happily, a storm prevailed and made the night extremely dark. The first six cannon and the first six caissons passed without a single shot from the fortress. The men returned, picking their steps silently, one after another, in single file; but this time the enemy must have heard some noise, and, wishing to knew the cause, threw hand-grenades. Fortunately, they fell beyond the road.

Why should these men, who had once passed, return? Merely to get their muskets and knapsacks. This might have been avoided had they been stowed on the caissons; but no one can think of everything, and, as it happened, no one in the fort at Bard had thought at all.

As soon as the possibility of the passage was demonstrated, the transport of the artillery became a duty like any other; only, now that the enemy were warned, it was more dangerous. The fort resembled a volcano with its belching flames and smoke; but, owing to the vertical direction in which it was forced to fire, it made more noise than it did harm. Five or six men were killed to each wagon; that is to say, a tenth of each fifty; but the cannon once safely past, the fate of the campaign was secure.

Later it was discovered that the pass of the Little Saint-Bernard would have been practicable, and that the whole artillery could have crossed it without dismounting a gun or losing a man. It is true, however, that the feat would have been less glorious because less difficult.

The army was now in the fertile plains of Piedmont. It was reinforced on the Ticino by a corps of twelve thousand men detached from the Army of the Rhine by Moreau, who, after the two victories he had just won, could afford to lend this contingent to the Army of Italy. He had sent them by the Saint-Gothard. Thus strengthened, the First Consul entered Milan without striking a blow.

By the bye, how came the First Consul, who, according to a provision of the constitution of the year VIII., could not assume command of the army, nor yet leave France, to be where he was? We shall now tell you.

The evening before the day on which he left Paris — that is to say, the 15th of May, or, according to the calendars of the time, the 15th Floreal — he had sent for the two other consuls and all the ministers, saying to Lucien: “Prepare a circular letter to the prefects to-morrow.” Then he said to Fouché: “You will publish the circular in all the newspapers. You are to say that I have left for Dijon to inspect the Army of the Reserves. Add, but without affirming it positively, that I may go as far as Geneva. In any case, let it be well impressed on everyone that I shall not be absent more than a fortnight. If anything unusual happens I shall return like a thunderclap. I commend to your keeping all the great interests of France; and I hope you will soon hear of me by way of Vienna and London.”

On the 6th he started. From that moment his strong determination was to make his way to the plains of Piedmont, and there to fight a decisive battle. Then, as he never doubted that he would conquer, he would answer, like Scipio, to those who accused him of violating the constitution: “On such a day, at such an hour, I fought the Carthagenians; let us go to the capitol, and render thanks to the gods.”

Leaving France on the 6th of May, the First Consul was encamped with his whole army between Casale and Turin on the 26th of the same month. It had rained the whole day; but, as often happens in Italy, toward evening the sky had cleared, changing in a few moments from murky darkness to loveliest azure, and the stars came sparkling out.

The First Consul signed to Roland to follow him, and together they issued from the little town of Chivasso and walked along the banks of the river. About a hundred yards beyond the last house a tree, blown down by the wind, offered a seat to the pedestrians. Bonaparte sat down and signed to Roland to join him. He apparently had something to say, some confidence to make to his young aide-de-camp.

Both were silent for a time, and then Bonaparte said: “Roland, do you remember a conversation we had together at the Luxembourg?”

“General,” said Roland, laughing, “we had a good many conversations together at the Luxembourg; in one of which you told me we were to cross into Italy in the spring, and fight General Mélas at Torre di Gallifolo or San-Guiliano. Does that still hold good?”

“Yes; but that is not the conversation I mean.”

“What was it, general?”

“The day we talked of marriage.”

“Ah, yes! My sister’s marriage. That has probably taken place by this time, general.”

“I don’t mean your sister’s marriage; I mean yours.”

“Good!” said Roland, with a bitter smile. “I thought that had been disposed of, general.” And he made a motion as if to rise. Bonaparte caught him by the arm.

“Do you know whom I meant you to marry at that time, Roland?” he said, with a gravity that showed he was determined to be heard.

“No, general.”

“Well, my sister Caroline.”

“Your sister?”

“Yes. Does that astonish you?”

“I had no idea you had ever thought of doing me that honor.”

“Either you are ungrateful, Roland, or you are saying what you do not mean. You know that I love you.”

“Oh! my general!”

He took the First Consul’s two hands and pressed them with the deepest gratitude.

“Yes, I should have liked you for my brother-in-law.”

“Your sister and Murat love each other, general,” said Roland. “It is much better that the plan should have gone no further. Besides,” he added, in muffled tones, “I thought I told you that I did not care to marry.”

Bonaparte smiled. “Why don’t you say offhand that you intend becoming a Trappist father?”

“Faith, general, re-establish the cloisters and remove these opportunities for me to try to get myself killed, which, thank God! are not lacking, and you have guessed what my end will be."

"Are you in love? Is this the result of some woman's faithlessness?"

"Good!" said Roland, "so you think I am in love! That is the last straw!"

"Do you complain of my affection when I wished to marry you to my sister?"

"But the thing is impossible now! Your three sisters are all married — one to General Leduc, one to Prince Bacciocchi, and the third to Murat."

"In short," said Bonaparte, laughing, "you feel easy and settled in your mind. You think yourself rid of my alliance."

"Oh, general!" exclaimed Roland.

"You are not ambitious, it seems?"

"General, let me love you for all the good you have done to me, and not for what you seek to do."

"But suppose it is for my own interests that I seek to bind you to me, not by the ties of friendship alone, but also by those of matrimony. Suppose I say to you: In my plans for the future I cannot rely upon my two brothers, whereas I could never for one instant doubt you?"

"In heart, yes, you are right."

"In all respects! What can I do with Leclerc — a commonplace man; with Bacciocchi — who is not French; with Murat — lion-hearted and feather-brained? And yet some day I shall have to make princes of them because they are my sisters' husbands. When that time comes, what can I make of you?"

"A marshal of France."

"And afterward?"

"Afterward? I should say that was enough."

"And then you would be one of twelve, and not a unity of your own."

"Let me be simply your friend. Let me always thresh out the truth with you, and then I'll warrant I shall be out of the crowd."

"That may be enough for you, Roland, but it is not enough for me," persisted Bonaparte. Then, as Roland said nothing, he continued, "I have no more sisters, Roland, it is true; but I have dreamed that you might be something more to me than a brother." Then, as Roland still said nothing, he went on: "I know a young girl, Roland, a charming child, whom I love as a daughter. She is just seventeen. You are twenty-six, and a brigadier-general *de facto*. Before the end of the campaign you will be general of division. Well, Roland, when the campaign is over, we will return together to Paris, and you shall marry her — ”

“General,” interrupted Roland, “I think I see Bourrienne looking for you.”

And in fact the First Consul’s secretary was already within two feet of the friends.

“Is that you, Bourrienne?” asked Bonaparte, somewhat impatiently.

“Yes, general, a courier from France.”

“Ah!”

“And a letter from Madame Bonaparte.”

“Good!” said the First Consul, rising eagerly, “give it to me.” And he almost snatched the letter from Bourrienne’s hand.

“And for me?” asked Roland. “Nothing for me?”

“Nothing.”

“That is strange,” said the young man, pensively.

The moon had risen, and by its clear, beautiful light Bonaparte was able to read his letters. Through the first two pages his face expressed perfect serenity. Bonaparte adored his wife; the letters published by Queen Hortense bear witness to that fact. Roland watched these expressions of the soul on his general’s face. But toward the close of the letter Bonaparte’s face clouded; he frowned and cast a furtive glance at Roland.

“Ah!” exclaimed the young man, “it seems there is something about me in the letter.”

Bonaparte did not answer and continued to read. When he had finished, he folded the letter and put it in the side pocket of his coat. Then, turning to Bourrienne, he said: “Very well, we will return. I shall probably have to despatch a courier. Go mend some pens while you are waiting for me.”

Bourrienne bowed and returned to Chivasso.

Bonaparte then went up to Roland and laid his hand on his shoulder, saying: “I have no luck with the marriages I attempt to make.”

“How so?” asked Roland.

“Your sister’s marriage is off.”

“Has she refused?”

“No; she has not.”

“She has not? Can it be Sir John?”

“Yes.”

"Refused to marry my sister after asking her of me, of my mother, of you, of herself?"

"Come, don't begin to get angry. Try to see that there is some mystery in all this."

"I don't see any mystery, I see an insult!"

"Ah! there you are, Roland. That explains why your mother and sister did not write to you. But Josephine thought the matter so serious that you ought to be informed. She writes me this news and asks me to tell you of it if I think best. You see I have not hesitated."

"I thank you sincerely, general. Does Lord Tanlay give any reason for this refusal?"

"A reason that is no reason."

"What is it?"

"It can't be the true one."

"But what is it?"

"It is only necessary to look at the man and to talk with him for five minutes to understand that."

"But, general, what reason does he give for breaking his word?"

"That your sister is not as rich as he thought she was."

Roland burst into that nervous laugh which was a sign with him of violent agitation.

"Ha!" said he, "that was the very first thing I told him."

"What did you tell him?"

"That my sister hadn't a penny. How can the children of republican generals be rich?"

"And what did he answer?"

"That he was rich enough for two."

"You see, therefore, that that was not the real reason for his refusal."

"And it is your opinion that one of your aides-de-camp can receive such an insult, and not demand satisfaction?"

"In such situations the person who feels affronted must judge of the matter for himself, my dear Roland."

"General, how many days do you think it will be before we have a decisive action?"

Bonaparte calculated.

"Not less than fifteen days, or three weeks," he answered.

"Then, general, I ask you for a furlough of fifteen days."

“On one condition.”

“What is it?”

“That you will first go to Bourg and ask your sister from which side the refusal came.”

“That is my intention.”

“In that case you have not a moment to lose.”

“You see I lose none,” said the young man, already on his way to the village.

“One moment,” said Bonaparte; “you will take my despatches to Paris, won’t you?”

“Ah! I see; I am the courier you spoke of just now to Bourrienne.”

“Precisely.”

“Come then.”

“Wait one moment. The young men you arrested — ”

“The Companions of Jehu?”

“Yes. Well, it seems that they were all of noble families. They were fanatics rather than criminals. It appears that your mother has been made the victim of some judicial trick or other in testifying at their trial and has called their conviction.”

“Possibly. My mother was in the coach stopped by them, as you know, and saw the face of their leader.”

“Well, your mother implores me, through Josephine, to pardon those poor madmen — that is the very word she uses. They have appealed their case. You will get there before the appeal can be rejected, and, if you think it desirable, tell the minister of Justice for me to suspend matters. After you get back we can see what is best to be done.”

“Thank you, general. Anything more?”

“No,” said Bonaparte, “except to think over our conversation.”

“What was it about?”

“Your marriage.”

CHAPTER LII.

THE TRIAL

"Well, I'll say as you did just now, we'll talk about it when I return, if I do."

"Bless me!" exclaimed Bonaparte, "I'm not afraid; you'll kill him as you have the others; only this time, I must admit, I shall be sorry to have him die."

"If you are going to feel so badly about it, general, I can easily be killed in his stead."

"Don't do anything foolish, ninny!" cried Bonaparte; hastily; "I should feel still worse if I lost you."

"Really, general, you are the hardest man to please that I know of," said Roland with his harsh laugh.

And this time he took his way to Chivasso without further delay.

Half an hour later, Roland was galloping along the road to Ivrae in a post-chaise. He was to travel thus to Aosta, at Aosta take a mule, cross the Saint-Bernard to Martigny, thence to Geneva, on to Bourg, and from Bourg to Paris.

While he is galloping along let us see what has happened in France, and clear up the points in the conversation between Bonaparte and his aide-de-camp which must be obscure to the reader's mind.

The prisoners which Roland had made at the grotto of Ceyzeriat had remained but one night in the prison at Bourg. They had been immediately transferred to that of Besançon, where they were to appear before a council of war.

It will be remembered that two of these prisoners were so grievously wounded that they were carried into Bourg on stretchers. One of them died that same night, the other, three days after they reached Besançon. The number of prisoners was therefore reduced to four; Morgan, who had surrendered himself voluntarily and who was safe and sound, and Montbar, Adler, and d'Assas, who were more or less wounded in the fight, though none of them dangerously. These four aliases hid, as the reader will remember, the real names of the Baron de Sainte-Hermine, the Comte de Jayat, the Vicomte de Valensolle, and the Marquis de Ribier.

While the evidence was being taken against the four prisoners before the military commission at Besançon, the time expired when under the law such cases were tried by courts-martial. The prisoners became accountable therefore to the civil tribunals. This made a great difference to them, not only as to the penalty if convicted, but in the mode of execution. Condemned by a court-martial, they would be shot; condemned by the courts, they would be guillotined. Death by the first was not infamous; death by the second was.

As soon as it appeared that their case was to be brought before a jury, it belonged by law to the court of Bourg. Toward the end of March the prisoners were therefore transferred from the prison of Besançon to that of Bourg, and the first steps toward a trial were taken.

But here the prisoners adopted a line of defence that greatly embarrassed the prosecuting officers. They declared themselves to be the Baron de Sainte-Hermine, the Comte de Jayat, the Vicomte de Valensolle, and the Marquis de Ribier, and to have no connection with the pillagers of diligences, whose names were Morgan, Montbar, Adler, and d’Assas. They acknowledged having belonged to armed bands; but these forces belonged to the army of M. de Teyssonnet and were a ramification of the army of Brittany intended to operate in the East and the Midi, while the army of Brittany, which had just signed a peace, operated in the North. They had waited only to hear of Cadoudal’s surrender to do likewise, and the despatch of the Breton leader was no doubt on its way to them when they were attacked and captured.

It was difficult to disprove this. The diligences had invariably been pillaged by masked, men, and, apart from Madame de Montrevel and Sir John Tanlay, no one had ever seen the faces of the assailants.

The reader will recall those circumstances: Sir John, on the night they had tried, condemned, and stabbed him; Madame de Montrevel, when the diligence was stopped, and she, in her nervous struggle, had struck off the mask of the leader.

Both had been summoned before the preliminary court and both had been confronted with the prisoners; but neither Sir John nor Madame de Montrevel had recognized any of them. How came they to practice this deception? As for Madame de Montrevel, it was comprehensible. She felt a double gratitude to the man who had come to her assistance, and who had also forgiven, and even praised, Edouard's attack upon himself. But Sir John's silence was more difficult to explain, for among the four prisoners he must have recognized at least two of his assailants.

They had recognized him, and a certain quiver had run through their veins as they did so, but their eyes were none the less resolutely fixed upon him, when, to their great astonishment, Sir John, in spite of the judge's insistence, had calmly replied: "I have not the honor of knowing these gentlemen."

Amélie — we have not spoken of her, for there are sorrows no pen can depict — Amélie, pale, feverish, almost expiring since that fatal night when Morgan was arrested, awaited the return of her mother and Sir John from the preliminary trial with dreadful anxiety. Sir John arrived first. Madame de Montrevel had remained behind to give some orders to Michel. As soon as Amélie saw him she rushed forward, crying out: "What happened?"

Sir John looked behind him, to make sure that Madame de Montrevel could neither see nor hear him, then he said: "Your mother and I recognized no one."

"Ah! how noble you are I how generous! how good, my lord!" cried the young girl, trying to kiss his hand.

But he, withdrawing his hand, said hastily: "I have only done as I promised you; but hush — here is your mother."

Amélie stepped back. "Ah, mamma!" she said, "so you did not say anything to compromise those unfortunate men?"

"What!" replied Madame de Montrevel; "would you have me send to the scaffold a man who had helped me, and who, instead of punishing Edouard, kissed him?"

"And yet," said Amélie, trembling, "you recognized him, did you not?"

"Perfectly," replied Madame de Montrevel. "He is the fair man with the black eyebrows who calls himself the Baron de Sainte-Hermine."

Amélie gave a stifled cry. Then, making an effort to control herself, she said: "Is that the end of it for Sir John and you? Will you be called to testify again?"

"Probably not," replied Madame de Montrevel.

"In any case," observed Sir John, "as neither your mother nor I recognized any one, she will persist in that declaration."

“Oh I most certainly,” exclaimed Madame de Montrevel. “God keep me from causing the death of that unhappy young man. I should never forgive myself. It is bad enough that Roland should have been the one to capture him and his companions.”

Amélie sighed, but nevertheless her face assumed a calmer expression. She looked gratefully at Sir John, and then went up to her room, where Charlotte was waiting for her. Charlotte had become more than a maid, she was now Amélie’s friend. Every day since the four young men had returned to the prison at Bourg she had gone there to see her father for an hour or so. During these visits nothing was talked of but the prisoners, whom the worthy jailer, royalist as he was, pitied with all his heart. Charlotte made him tell her everything, even to their slightest words, and later reported all to Amélie.

Matters stood thus when Madame de Montrevel and Sir John arrived at Noires-Fontaines. Before leaving Paris, the First Consul had informed Madame de Montrevel, both through Josephine and Roland, that he approved of her daughter’s marriage, and wished it to take place during his absence, and as soon as possible. Sir John had declared to her that his most ardent wishes were for this union, and that he only awaited Amélie’s commands to become the happiest of men. Matters having reached this point, Madame de Montrevel, on the morning of the day on which she and Sir John were to give their testimony, had arranged a private interview between her daughter and Sir John.

The interview lasted over an hour, and Sir John did not leave Amélie until the carriage came to the door which was to take Madame de Montrevel and himself to the court. We have seen that his deposition was all in the prisoners’ favor, and we have also seen how Amélie received him on his return.

That evening Madame de Montrevel had a long conversation with her daughter. To her mother’s pressing inquiries, Amélie merely replied that the state of her health was such that she desired a postponement of her marriage, and that she counted on Sir John’s delicacy to grant it.

The next day Madame de Montrevel was obliged to return to Paris, her position in Madame Bonaparte’s household not admitting of longer absence. The morning of her departure she urged Amélie to accompany her; but again the young girl dwelt upon the feebleness of her health. The sweetest and most reviving months in the year were just opening, and she begged to be allowed to spend then in the country, for they were sure, she said, to do her good.

Madame de Montrevel, always unable to deny Amélie anything, above all where it concerned her health, granted her request.

On her return to Paris, Madame de Montrevel travelled as before, with Sir John. Much to her surprise, during the two days' journey he did not say anything to her about his marriage to Amélie. But Madame Bonaparte, as soon as she saw her friend, asked the usual question: "Well, when shall we marry Amélie and Sir John? You know how much the First Consul desires it."

To which Madame de Montrevel replied: "It all depends on Sir John."

This response furnished Madame Bonaparte with much food for reflection. Why should a man who had been so eager suddenly grow cold? Time alone could explain the mystery.

Time went by, and the trial of the prisoners began. They were confronted with all the travellers who had signed the various depositions, which, as we have seen, were in the possession of the minister of police. No one had recognized them, for no one had seen their faces uncovered. Moreover, the travellers asserted that none of their property, either money or jewels, had been taken. Jean Picot testified that the two hundred louis which had been taken from him by accident had been returned.

These preliminary inquiries lasted over two months. At the end of that time the accused, against whom there was no evidence connecting them with the pillage of the coaches, were under no accusation but that of their own admissions; that is to say, of being affiliated with the Breton and Vendéan insurrection. They were simply one of the armed bands roaming the Jura under the orders of M. de Teyssonnet.

The judges delayed the final trial as long as possible, hoping that some more direct testimony might be discovered. This hope was balked. No one had really suffered from the deeds imputed to these young men, except the Treasury, whose misfortunes concerned no one. The trial could not be delayed any longer.

The prisoners, on their side, had made the best of their time. By means, as we have seen, of an exchange of passports, Morgan had travelled sometimes as Ribier, and Ribier as Sainte-Hermine, and so with the others. The result was a confusion in the testimony of the innkeepers, which the entries in their books only served to increase. The arrival of travellers, noted on the registers an hour too early or an hour too late, furnished the prisoners with irrefutable alibis. The judges were morally convinced of their guilt; but their conviction was impossible against such testimony.

On the other hand, it must be said that public sympathy was wholly with the prisoners.

The trial began. The prison at Bourg adjoins the courtroom. The prisoners could be brought there through the interior passages. Large as the hall was, it was crowded on the opening day. The whole population of Bourg thronged about the doors, and persons came from Mâcon, Sons-le-Saulnier, Besançon, and Nantua, so great was the excitement caused by the stoppages, and so popular were the exploits of the Companions of Jehu.

The entrance of the four prisoners was greeted by a murmur in which there was nothing offensive. Public sentiment seemed equally divided between curiosity and sympathy. Their presence, it must be admitted, was well calculated to inspire both. Very handsome, dressed in the latest fashion of the day, self-possessed without insolence, smiling toward the audience, courteous to their judges, though at times a little sarcastic, their personal appearance was their best defence.

The oldest of the four was barely thirty. Questioned as to their names, Christian and family, their age, and places of birth, they answered as follows:

"Charles de Sainte-Hermine, born at Tours, department of the Indre-et-Loire, aged twenty-four."

"Louis-André de Jayat, born at Bage-le-Château, department of the Ain, aged twenty-nine."

"Raoul-Frederic-Auguste de Valensolle, born at Sainte-Colombe, department of the Rhone, aged twenty-seven."

"Pierre-Hector de Ribier, born at Bollène, department of Vaucluse, aged twenty-six."

Questioned as to their social condition and state, all four said they were of noble rank and royalists.

These fine young men, defending themselves against death on the scaffold, not against a soldier's death before the guns — who asked the death they claimed to have merited as insurrectionists, but a death of honor — formed a splendid spectacle of youth, courage, and gallant bearing.

The judges saw plainly that on the accusation of being insurrectionists, the Vendée having submitted and Brittany being pacificated, they would have to be acquitted. That was not a result to satisfy the minister of police. Death awarded by a council of war would not have satisfied him; he had determined that these men should die the death of malefactors, a death of infamy.

The trial had now lasted three days without proceeding in the direction of the minister's wishes. Charlotte, who could reach the courtroom through the prison, was there each day, and returned each night to Amélie with some fresh word of hope. On the fourth day, Amélie could bear the suspense no longer. She dressed herself in a costume similar to the one that Charlotte wore, except that the black lace of the head-dress was longer and thicker than is usual with the Bressan peasant woman. It formed a veil and completely hid her features.

Charlotte presented Amélie to her father as one of her friends who was anxious to see the trial. The good man did not recognize Mademoiselle de Montrevel, and in order to enable the young girls to see the prisoners well he placed them in the doorway of the porter's room, which opened upon the passage leading to the courtroom. This passage was so narrow at this particular point that the four gendarmes who accompanied the prisoners changed the line of march. First came two officers, then the prisoners one by one, then the other two officers. The girls stood in the doorway.

When Amélie heard the doors open she was obliged to lean upon Charlotte's shoulder for support, the earth seemed to give way under her feet and the wall at her back. She heard the sound of feet and the rattle of the gendarmes' sabres, then the door of the prison opened.

First one gendarme appeared, then another, then Sainte-Hermine, walking first, as though he were still Morgan, the captain of the Companions of Jehu.

As he passed Amélie murmured: “Charles!”

The prisoner recognized the beloved voice, gave a faint cry, and felt a paper slip into his hand. He pressed that precious hand, murmured her name, and passed on.

The others who followed did not, or pretended not to, notice the two girls. As for the gendarmes, they had seen and heard nothing.

As soon as the party stepped into the light, Morgan unfolded the note and read as follows:

> Do not be anxious, my beloved Charles; I am and ever will be your faithful Amélie, in life or death. I have told all to Lord

> Tanlay. He is the most generous man on earth; he has promised me
> to break off the marriage and to take the whole responsibility
> on himself. I love you.

Morgan kissed the note and put it in his breast. Then he glanced down the corridor and saw the two Bressan women leaning against the door. Amélie had risked all to see him once more. It is true, however, that at this last session of the court no additional witnesses were expected who could injure the accused, and in the absence of proof it was impossible to convict them.

The best lawyers in the department, those of Lyons and Besançon, had been retained by the prisoners for their defence. Each had spoken in turn, destroying bit by bit the indictment, as, in the tournaments of the Middle Ages, a strong and dexterous knight was wont to knock off, piece by piece, his adversary's armor. Flattering applause had followed the more remarkable points of their arguments, in spite of the usher's warnings and the admonitions of the judge.

Amélie, with clasped hands, was thanking God, who had so visibly manifested Himself in the prisoners' favor. A dreadful weight was lifted from her tortured breast. She breathed with joy, and looked through tears of gratitude at the Christ which hung above the judge's head.

The arguments were all made, and the case about to be closed. Suddenly an usher entered the courtroom, approached the judge, and whispered something in his ear.

"Gentlemen," said the judge, "the court is adjourned for a time. Let the prisoners be taken out."

There was a movement of feverish anxiety among the audience. What could have happened? What unexpected event was about to take place? Every one looked anxiously at his neighbor. Amélie's heart was wrung by a presentiment. She pressed her hand to her breast; it was as though an ice-cold iron had pierced it to the springs of life.

The gendarmes rose. The prisoners did likewise, and were then marched back to their cells. One after the other they passed Amélie. The hands of the lovers touched each other; those of Amélie were as cold as death.

"Whatever happens, thank you," said Charles, as he passed.

Amélie tried to answer, but the words died on her lips.

During this time the judge had risen and passed into the council-chamber. There he found a veiled woman, who had just descended from a carriage at the door of the courthouse, and had not spoken to any one on her way in.

“Madame,” said the judge, “I offer you many excuses for the way in which I have brought you from Paris; but the life of a man depends upon it, and before that consideration everything must yield.”

“You have no need to excuse yourself, sir,” replied the veiled lady, “I know the prerogatives of the law, and I am here at your orders.”

“Madame,” said the judge, “the court and myself recognize the feeling of delicacy which prompted you, when first confronted with the prisoners, to decline to recognize the one who assisted you when fainting. At that time the prisoners denied their identity with the pillagers of the diligences. Since then they have confessed all; but it is our wish to know the one who showed you that consideration, in order that we may recommend him to the First Consul’s clemency.”

“What!” exclaimed the lady, “have they really confessed?”

“Yes, madame, but they will not say which of their number helped you, fearing, no doubt, to contradict your testimony, and thus cause you embarrassment.”

“What is it you request of me, sir?”

“That you will save the gentleman who assisted you.”

“Oh! willingly,” said the lady, rising; “what am I to do?”

“Answer a question which I shall ask you.”

“I am ready, sir.”

“Wait here a moment. You will be sent for presently.”

The judge went back into the courtroom. A gendarme was placed at each door to prevent any one from approaching the lady. The judge resumed his seat.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “the session is reopened.”

General excitement prevailed. The ushers called for silence, and silence was restored.

“Bring in the witness,” said the judge.

An usher opened the door of the council-chamber, and the lady, still veiled, was brought into court. All eyes turned upon her. Who was she? Why was she there? What had she come for? Amélie’s eyes fastened upon her at once.

“O my God!” she murmured, “grant that I be mistaken.”

“Madame,” said the judge, “the prisoners are about to be brought in. Have the goodness to point out the one who, when the Geneva diligence was stopped, paid you those attentions.”

A shudder ran through the audience. They felt that some fatal trap had been laid for the prisoners.

A dozen voices began to shout: “Say nothing!” but the ushers, at a sign from the judge, cried out imperatively: “Silence!”

Amélie’s heart turned deadly cold. A cold sweat poured from her forehead. Her knees gave way and trembled under her.

“Bring in the prisoners,” said the judge, imposing silence by a look as the usher had with his voice. “And you, madame, have the goodness to advance and raise your veil.”

The veiled lady obeyed.

“My mother!” cried Amélie, but in a voice so choked that only those near her heard the words.

“Madame de Montrevel!” murmured the audience.

At that moment the first gendarme appeared at the door, then the second. After him came the prisoners, but not in the same order as before. Morgan had placed himself third, so that, separated as he was from the gendarmes by Montbar and Adler in front and d’Assas behind, he might be better able to clasp Amélie’s hand.

Montbar entered first.

Madame de Montrevel shook her head.

Then came Adler.

Madame de Montrevel made the same negative sign.

Just then Morgan passed before Amélie.

“We are lost!” she said.

He looked at her in astonishment as she pressed his hand convulsively. Then he entered.

“That is he,” said Madame de Montrevel, as soon as she saw Morgan — or, if the reader prefers it, Baron Charles de Sainte-Hermine — who was now proved one and the same man by means of Madame de Montrevel’s identification.

A long cry of distress burst from the audience. Montbar burst into a laugh.

“Ha! by my faith!” he cried, “that will teach you, dear friend, to play the gallant with fainting women.” Then, turning to Madame de Montrevel, he added: “With three short words, madame, you have decapitated four heads.”

A terrible silence fell, in the midst of which a groan was heard.

“Usher,” said the judge, “have you warned the public that all marks of approbation or disapproval are forbidden?”

The usher inquired who had disobeyed the order of the court. It was a woman wearing the dress of a Bressan peasant, who was being carried into the jailer’s room.

From that moment the accused made no further attempt at denial; but, just as Morgan had united with them when arrested, they now joined with him. Their four heads should be saved, or fall together.

That same day, at ten in the evening, the jury rendered a verdict of guilty, and the court pronounced the sentence of death.

Three days later, by force of entreaties, the lawyers obtained permission for the accused to appeal their case; but they were not admitted to bail.

CHAPTER LIII.

IN WHICH AMÉLIE KEEPS HER WORD

The verdict rendered by the jury of the town of Bourg had a terrible effect, not only in the courtroom, but throughout the entire town. The four prisoners had shown such chivalric brotherhood, such noble bearing, such deep conviction in the faith they professed, that their enemies themselves admired the devotion which had made robbers and highwaymen of men of rank and family.

Madame de Montrevel, overwhelmed by the part she had been made to play at the crucial point of this drama, saw but one means of repairing the evil she had done, and that was to start at once for Paris and fling herself at the feet of the First Consul, imploring him to pardon the four condemned men. She did not even take time to go to the Château des Noires-Fontaines to see Amélie. She knew that Bonaparte’s departure was fixed for the first week in May, and this was already the 6th. When she last left Paris everything had been prepared for that departure.

She wrote a line to Amélie explaining by what fatal deception she had been instrumental in destroying the lives of four men, when she intended to save the life of one. Then, as if ashamed of having broken the pledge she had made to Amélie, and above all to herself, she ordered fresh post-horses and returned to Paris.

She arrived there on the morning of the 8th of May. Bonaparte had started on the evening of the 6th. He said on leaving that he was only going to Dijon, possibly as far as Geneva, but in any case he should not be absent more than three weeks. The prisoners’ appeal, even if rejected, would not receive final consideration for five or six weeks. All hope need not therefore be abandoned.

But, alas! it became evident that the review at Dijon was only a pretext, that the journey to Geneva had never been seriously thought of, and that Bonaparte, instead of going to Switzerland, was really on his way to Italy.

Then Madame de Montrevel, unwilling to appeal to her son, for she had heard his oath when Lord Tanlay had been left for dead, and knew the part he had played in the capture of the Companions of Jehu — then Madame de Montrevel appealed to Josephine, and Josephine promised to write to the First Consul. That same evening she kept her promise.

But the trial had made a great stir. It was not with these prisoners as with ordinary men. Justice made haste, and thirty-five days after the verdict had been rendered the appeal was rejected. This decision was immediately sent to Bourg with an order to execute the prisoners within twenty-four hours. But notwithstanding the haste of the minister of police in forwarding this decision, the first intimation of the fatal news was not received by the judicial authorities at Bourg. While the prisoners were taking their daily walk in the courtyard a stone was thrown over the outer wall and fell at their feet. Morgan, who still retained in relation to his comrades the position of leader, picked it up, opened the letter which inclosed the stone, and read it. Then, turning to his friends, he said: “Gentlemen, the appeal has been rejected, as we might have expected, and the ceremony will take place in all probability to-morrow.”

Valensolle and Ribier, who were playing a species of quoits with crown-pieces and louis, left off their game to hear the news. Having heard it they returned to their game without remark.

Jayat, who was reading “La Nouvelle Héloise,” resumed his book, saying: “Then, I shall not have time to finish M. Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s masterpiece, and upon my word I don’t regret it, for it is the most utterly false and wearisome book I ever read in my life!”

Sainte-Hermine passed his hand over his forehead, murmuring: “Poor Amélie!” Then observing Charlotte, who was at the window of the jailer’s room overlooking the courtyard, he went to her. “Tell Amélie that she must keep the promise she made me, to-night.”

The jailer’s daughter closed the window, kissed her father, and told him that in all probability he would see her there again that evening. Then she returned to Noires-Fontaines, a road she had taken twice every day for the last two months, once at noon on her way to the prison, once in the evening on returning to the château.

Every night she found Amélie in the same place, sitting at the window which, in happier days, had given admittance to her beloved Charles. Since the day she had fainted in the courtroom she had shed no tears, and, we may almost add, had uttered no word. Unlike the marble of antiquity awakening into life, she might have been compared to a living woman petrifying into stone. Every day she grew paler.

Charlotte watched her with astonishment. Common minds, always impressed by noisy demonstrations, that is to say, by cries and tears, are unable to understand a mute sorrow. Dumbness to them means indifference. She was therefore astonished at the calmness with which Amélie received the message she was charged to deliver. She did not see in the dimness of the twilight that Amélie's face from being pale grew livid. She did not feel the deadly clutch which, like an iron wrench, had seized her heart. She did not know that as her mistress walked to the door an automatic stiffness was in her limbs. Nevertheless she followed her anxiously. But at the door Amélie stretched out her hand.

"Wait for me there," she said.

Charlotte obeyed. Amélie closed the door behind her, and went up to Roland's room.

Roland's room was veritably that of a soldier and a huntsman, and its chief adornments were trophies and weapons. Arms of all kinds were here, French and foreign, from the blue-barrelled pistol of Versailles to the silver-handled pistol of Cairo, from the tempered blade of Catalonia to the Turkish cimeter.

Amélie took down from this arsenal four daggers, sharp-edged and pointed, and eight pistols of different shapes. She put balls in a bag and powder in a horn. Thus supplied she returned to her own room. There Charlotte assisted her in putting on the peasant gown. Then she waited for the night.

Night comes late in June. Amélie stood motionless, mute, leaning against the chimney-piece, and looking through the open window at the village of Ceyzeriat, which was slowly disappearing in the gathering shades of night. When she could no longer distinguish anything but the lights which were being lighted one by one, she said:

"Come, it is time to go."

The two young girls went out. Michel paid no attention to Amélie, supposing her to be some friend of Charlotte's, who had called to see her and whom the jailer's daughter was now escorting home.

Ten o'clock was striking as they passed the church of Brou. It was quarter past when Charlotte knocked at the prison door. Old Courtois opened it.

We have already shown the political opinions of the worthy jailer. He was a royalist. He therefore felt the deepest sympathy for the four condemned men, and had hoped, like nearly every one in Bourg — like Madame de Montrevel, whose despair at what she had done was known to him — that the First Consul would pardon them. He had therefore mitigated their captivity as much as possible, without failing in his duty, by relieving them of all needless restrictions. On the other hand, it is true that he had refused a gift of sixty thousand francs (a sum which in those days was worth nearly treble what it is now) to allow them to escape.

We have seen how, being taken into confidence by his daughter, he had allowed Amélie, disguised as a Bressan peasant, to be present at the trial. The reader will also remember the kindness the worthy man had shown to Amélie and her mother when they themselves were prisoners. This time, as he was still ignorant of the rejection of the appeal, he allowed his feelings to be worked upon. Charlotte had told him that her young mistress was to start that night for Paris to endeavor to hasten the pardon, and that she desired before leaving to see the Baron de Sainte-Hermine and obtain his last instructions.

There were five doors to break through to reach the street, a squad of guards in the courtyard, and sentinels within and without the prison. Consequently Père Courtois felt no anxiety lest his prisoners escape. He therefore consented that Amélie should see Morgan.

We trust our readers will excuse us if we use the names Morgan, Charles, and the Baron de Sainte-Hermine, interchangeably, since they are aware that by that triple appellation we intend to designate the same man.

Courtois took a light and walked before Amélie. The young girl, as though prepared to start by the mail-coach at once on leaving the prison, carried a travelling bag in her hand. Charlotte followed her mistress.

“You will recognize the cell, Mademoiselle de Montrevel,” said Courtois. “It is the one in which you were confined with your mother. The leader of these unfortunate young men, the Baron Charles de Sainte-Hermine, asked me as a favor to put them in cage No. 1. You know that’s the name we give our cells. I did not think I ought to refuse him that consolation, knowing how the poor fellow loved you. Oh, don’t be uneasy, Mademoiselle Amélie, I will never breathe your secret. Then he questioned me, asking which had been your mother’s bed, and which yours. I told him, and then he wanted his to stand just where yours did. That wasn’t hard, for the bed was not only in the same place, but it was the very one you had used. So, since the poor fellow entered your cell, he has spent nearly all his time lying on your bed.”

Amélie gave a sigh that resembled a groan. She felt — and it was long since she had done so — a tear moisten her eyelids. Yes! she was loved as she loved, and the lips of a disinterested stranger gave her the proof of it. At this moment of eternal separation this conviction shone like a diamond of light in its setting of sorrow.

The doors opened one by one before Père Courtois. When they reached the last one, Amélie laid her hand on the jailer’s shoulder. She thought she heard a chant. Listening attentively, she became aware that it was a voice repeating verses.

But the voice was not Morgan’s; it was unknown to her. Here is what it said:

I have bared all my heart to the God of the just,
  He has witnessed my penitent tears;
He has stilled my remorse, He has armed me with trust,
  He has pitied and calmed all my fears.

My enemies, scoffing, have said in their rage:
  “Let him die, be his mem’ry accursed!”
Saith the merciful Father, my grief to assuage,
  “Their hatred hath now done its worst.

“I have heard thy complaints, and I know that the ban
  Of remorse hath e’en brought thee so low;
I can pity the soul of the penitent man
  That was weak in this valley of woe;

“I will crown thy lost name with the just acclaim
  Of the slow-judging righteous years;
Their pity and justice in time shall proclaim
  Thine honor; then layoff thy fears!”

I bless thee, O God! who hast deigned to restore
  Mine honor that Thou hast made whole
From shame and remorse; as I enter Death’s door
  To Thee I commend my poor soul!

To the banquet of life, an unfortunate guest,
  I came for a day, and I go —
I die in my vigor; I sought not to rest
  In the grave where the weary lie low.

Farewell to thee, earth! farewell, tender verdure
  Of woodland! Farewell, sunny shore!
Green fields that I love, azure skies, smiling Nature,
  Farewell! I shall see thee no more.

May thy beauty still gladden the friends that I love,
  Whom I long for — but stern fate denies;
May they pass full of years, though I wait them above;
  May a last loving hand close their eyes.

The voice was silent; no doubt the last verse was finished. Amélie, who would not interrupt the last meditations of the doomed men, and who had recognized Gilbert’s beautiful ode written on a hospital bed the night before his death, now signed to the jailer to open the door. Père Courtois, jailer as he was, seemed to share the young girl’s emotion, for he put the key in the lock and turned it as softly as he could. The door opened.

Amélie saw at a glance the whole interior of the cell, and the persons in it.

Valensolle was standing, leaning against the wall, and still holding the book from which he had just read the lines that Amélie had overheard. Jayat was seated near a table with his head resting on his hands. Ribier was sitting on the table itself. Near him, but further back, Sainte-Hermine, his eyes closed as if in sleep, was lying on the bed. At sight of the young girl, whom they knew to be Amélie, Ribier and Jayat rose. Morgan did not move; he had heard nothing.

Amélie went directly to him, and, as if the love she felt for him were sanctified by the nearness of death, she gave no heed to the presence of his friends, but pressed her lips to his, murmuring: “Awake, my Charles, it is I, Amélie. I have come to keep my promise.”

Morgan gave a cry of joy and clasped her in his arms.

“Monsieur Courtois,” said Montbar, “you are a worthy man. Leave those poor young people alone. It would be sacrilege to trouble their last moments together on earth by our presence.”

Père Courtois, without a word, opened the door of the adjoining cell. Valensolle, Jayat and Ribier entered it, and the door was closed upon them. Then, making a sign to Charlotte, Courtois himself went away. The lovers were alone.

There are scenes that should not be described, words that must not be repeated. God, who sees and hears them from his immortal throne, alone knows what sombre joys, what bitter pleasures they contain.

At the end of an hour the two young people heard the key turn once more in the lock. They were sad but calm. The conviction that their separation would not be for long gave them a sweet serenity. The worthy jailer seemed more grieved and distressed at his second appearance than at his first; but Morgan and Amélie thanked him with a smile.

He went to the cell where the others were locked up and opened it, murmuring to himself: “Faith! It would have been hard if they couldn’t have been alone together on their last night.”

Valensolle, Jayat and Ribier returned. Amélie, with her left arm wound around Morgan, held out her right hand to them. All three, one after the other, kissed that cold, damp hand. Then Morgan led her to the door.

“Au revoir!” he said.

“Soon!” she answered.

And then this parting at the gates of death was sealed by a long kiss, followed by a groan so terrible that it seemed to rend their hearts in twain.

The door closed again, the bolts and bars shot into their places.

“Well?” cried Valensolle, Jayat and Ribier with one accord.

“Here!” replied Morgan, emptying the travelling bag upon the table.

The three young men gave a cry of joy as they saw the shining pistols and gleaming blades. It was all that they desired next to liberty — the joy, the dolorous precious joy of knowing themselves masters of their own lives, and, if need be, that of others.

During this time the jailer led Amélie to the street. When they reached it he hesitated a moment, then he touched Amélie’s arm, saying as he did so: “Mademoiselle de Montrevel, forgive me for causing you so much pain, but it is useless for you to go to Paris.”

“Because the appeal has been rejected and the execution takes place to-morrow, I suppose you mean,” said Amélie.

The jailer in his astonishment stepped back a pace.

“I knew it, my friend,” said Amélie. Then turning to Charlotte, she said: “Take me to the nearest church and come for me to-morrow after all is over.”

The nearest church was not far off. It was that of Sainte-Claire. For the last three months it had been opened for public worship under the decree of the First Consul. As it was now nearly midnight, the doors were closed; but Charlotte knew where the sexton lived and she went to wake him. Amélie waited, leaning against the walls as motionless as the marble figures that adorned its frontal.

The sexton arrived at the end of half an hour. During that time the girl had seen a dreadful sight. Three men had passed her, dragging a cart, which she saw by the light of the moon was painted red. Within this cart she perceived shapeless objects, long planks and singular ladders, all painted the same color. They were dragging it toward the bastion Montrevel, the place used for the executions. Amélie divined what it was, and, with a cry, she fell upon her knees.

At that cry the men in black turned round. They fancied for a moment that one of the sculptured figures of the porch had descended from its niche and was kneeling there. The one who seemed to be the leader stepped close to the young girl.

“Don’t come near me!” she cried. “Don’t come near me!”

The man returned humbly to his place and continued on his way. The cart disappeared round the corner of the Rue des Prisons; but the noise of its wheels still sounded on the stones and echoed in the girl’s heart.

When the sacristan and Charlotte returned they found the young girl on her knees. The man raised some objections against opening the church at that hour of the night; but a piece of gold and Mademoiselle de Montrevel’s name dispelled his scruples. A second gold piece decided him to light a little chapel. It was the one in which Amélie had made her first communion. There, kneeling before the altar, she implored them to leave her alone.

Toward three in the morning she saw the colored window above the altar of the Virgin begin to lighten. It looked to the east, so that the first ray of light came direct to her eyes as a messenger from God.

Little by little the town awoke. To Amélie the noise seemed louder than ever before. Soon the vaulted ceiling of the church shook with the tramp of a troop of horsemen. This troop was on its way to the prison.

A little before nine the young girl heard a great noise, and it seemed to her that the whole town must be rushing in the same direction. She strove to lose herself in prayer, that she might not hear these different sounds that spoke to her in an unknown language of which her anguish told her she understood every word.

In truth, a terrible thing was happening at the prison. It was no wonder that the whole town had rushed thither.

At nine o’clock Père Courtois entered the jail to tell the prisoners at one and the same time that their appeal had been rejected and that they must prepare for immediate death. He found the four prisoners armed to the teeth.

The jailer, taken unawares, was pulled into the cell and the door locked behind him. Then the young men, without any defence on his part, so astonished was he, seized his keys, and passing through the door opposite to the one by which he had entered they locked it on him. Leaving him in their cell, they found themselves in the adjoining one, in which he had placed three of them during Amélie’s interview with Morgan.

One of the keys on the jailer’s bunch opened the other door of this cell, and that door led to the inner courtyard of the prison. This courtyard was closed by three massive doors, all of which led to a sort of lobby, opening upon the porter’s lodge, which in turn adjoined the law-courts. From this lodge fifteen steps led down into a vast courtyard closed by an iron gate and railing. Usually this gate was only locked at night. If it should happen to be open on this occasion it would offer a possibility of escape.

Morgan found the key of the prisoners’ court, opened the door, and rushed with his companions to the porter’s lodge and to the portico, from which the fifteen steps led down into the courtyard. From there the three young men could see that all hope was lost.

The iron gate was closed, and eighty men, dragoons and gendarmes, were drawn up in front of it.

When the four prisoners, free and armed to the teeth, sprang from the porter’s lodge to the portico, a great cry, a cry of astonishment and terror, burst from the crowd in the street beyond the railing.

Their aspect was formidable, indeed; for to preserve the freedom of their movements, perhaps to hide the shedding of blood, which would have shown so quickly on their white linen, they were naked to the waist. A handkerchief knotted around their middle bristled with weapons.

A glance sufficed to show them that they were indeed masters of their own lives, but not of their liberty. Amid the clamoring of the crowd and the clanking of the sabres, as they were drawn from their scabbards, the young men paused an instant and conferred together. Then Montbar, after shaking hands with his companions, walked down the fifteen steps and advanced to the gate.

When he was within four yards of the gate he turned, with a last glance at his comrades, bowed graciously to the now silent mob, and said to the soldiers: “Very well, gentlemen of the gendarmerie! Very well, dragoons!”

Then, placing the muzzle of his pistol to his mouth, he blew out his brains.

Confused and frantic cries followed the explosion, but ceased almost immediately as Valensolle came down the steps, holding in his hand a dagger with a straight and pointed blade. His pistols, which he did not seem inclined to use, were still in his belt.

He advanced to a sort of shed supported on three pillars, stopped at the first pillar, rested the hilt of his dagger upon it, and, with a last salutation to his friends, clasped the column with one arm till the blade had disappeared in his breast. For an instant he remained standing, then a mortal pallor overspread his face, his arm loosened its hold, and he fell to the ground, stone-dead.

The crowd was mute, paralyzed with horror.

It was now Ribier’s turn. He advanced to the gate, and, once there, aimed the two pistols he held at the gendarmes. He did not fire, but the gendarmes did. Three or four shots were heard, and Ribier fell, pierced by two balls.

Admiration seized upon the spectators at sight of these successive catastrophes. They saw that the young men were willing to die, but to die with honor, and as they willed, and also with the grace of the gladiators of antiquity. Silence therefore reigned when Morgan, now left alone, came smiling down the steps of the portico and held up his hand in sign that he wished to speak. Besides, what more could it want — this eager mob; watching for blood?

A greater sight had been given to it than it came to see. Four dead men had been promised to it; four heads were to be cut off; but here was variety in death, unexpected, picturesque. It was natural, therefore, that the crowd should keep silence when Morgan was seen to advance.

He held neither pistols nor daggers in his hands; they were in his belt. He passed the body of Valensolle, and placed himself between those of Jayat and Ribier.

"Gentlemen," said he, "let us negotiate."

The hush that followed was so great that those present seemed scarcely to breathe. Morgan said: "There lies a man who has blown out his brains [he pointed to Jayat]; here lies one who stabbed himself [he designated Valensolle]; a third who has been shot [he indicated Ribier]; you want to see the fourth guillotined. I understand that."

A dreadful shudder passed through the crowd.

"Well," continued Morgan, "I am willing to give you that satisfaction. I am ready, but I desire to go to the scaffold in my own way. No one shall touch me; if any one does come near me I shall blow out his brains — except that gentleman," continued Morgan, pointing to the executioner. "This is his affair and mine only."

The crowd apparently thought this request reasonable, for from all sides came the cry, "Yes, yes, yes."

The officer saw that the quickest way to end the matter was to yield to Morgan's demand.

"Will you promise me," he asked, "that if your hands and feet are not bound you will not try to escape?"

"I give my word of honor," replied Morgan.

"Then," said the officer; "stand aside, and let us take up the bodies of your comrades."

"That is but right," said Morgan, and he turned aside to a wall about ten paces distant and leaned against it.

The gate opened. Three men dressed in black entered the courtyard and picked up the bodies one after the other. Ribier was not quite dead; he opened his eyes and seemed to look for Morgan.

"Here I am," said the latter. "Rest easy, dear friend, I follow."

Ribier closed his eyes without uttering a word.

When the three bodies had been removed, the officer of the gendarmerie addressed Morgan.

"Are you ready, sir?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Morgan, bowing with exquisite politeness.

"Then come."

"I come."

And he took his place between a platoon of gendarmerie and a detachment of dragoons.

“Will you mount the cart, sir, or go on foot?” asked the captain.

“On foot, on foot, sir. I am anxious that all shall see it is my pleasure to be guillotined, and that I am not afraid.”

The sinister procession crossed the Place des Lisses and skirted the walls of the Hôtel Montbazon. The cart bearing the three bodies came first, then the dragoons, then Morgan walking alone in a clear space of some ten feet before and behind him, then the gendarmes. At the end of the wall they turned to the left.

Suddenly, through an opening that existed at that time between the wall and the market-place, Morgan saw the scaffold raising its two posts to heaven like two bloody arms.

“Faugh!” he exclaimed, “I have never seen a guillotine, and I had no idea it was so ugly.”

Then, without further remark, he drew his dagger and plunged it into his breast up to the hilt.

The captain of the gendarmerie saw the movement without being in time to prevent it. He spurred his horse toward Morgan, who, to his own amazement and that of every one else, remained standing. But Morgan, drawing a pistol from his belt and cocking it, exclaimed: “Stop! It was agreed that no one should touch me. I shall die alone, or three of us will die together.”

The captain reined back his horse.

“Forward!” said Morgan.

They reached the foot of the guillotine. Morgan drew out his dagger and struck again as deeply as before. A cry of rage rather than pain escaped him.

“My soul must be riveted to my body,” he said.

Then, as the assistants wished to help him mount the scaffold on which the executioner was awaiting him, he cried out: “No, I say again, let no one touch me.”

Then he mounted the three steps without staggering.

When he reached the platform, he drew out the dagger again and struck himself a third time. Then a frightful laugh burst from his lips; flinging the dagger, which he had wrenched from the third ineffectual wound, at the feet of the executioner, he exclaimed: “By my faith! I have done enough. It is your turn; do it if you can.”

A minute later the head of the intrepid young man fell upon the scaffold, and by a phenomenon of that unconquerable vitality which he possessed it rebounded and rolled forward beyond the timbers of the guillotine.

Go to Bourg, as I did, and they will tell you that, as the head rolled forward, it was heard to utter the name of Amélie.

The dead bodies were guillotined after the living one; so that the spectators, instead of losing anything by the events we have just related, enjoyed a double spectacle.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE CONFESSION

Three days after the events we have just recited, a carriage covered with dust and drawn by two horses white with foam stopped about seven of the evening before the gate of the Château des Noires-Fontaines. To the great astonishment of the person who was in such haste to arrive, the gates were open, a crowd of peasants filled the courtyard, and men and women were kneeling on the portico. Then, his sense of hearing being rendered more acute by astonishment at what he had seen, he fancied he heard the ringing of a bell.

He opened the door of the chaise, sprang out, crossed the courtyard rapidly, went up the portico, and found the stairway leading to the first floor filled with people.

Up the stairs he ran as he had up the portico, and heard what seemed to him a murmured prayer from his sister’s bedroom. He went to the room. The door was open. Madame de Montrevel and little Edouard were kneeling beside Amélie’s pillow; Charlotte, Michel, and his son Jacques were close at hand. The curate of Sainte-Claire was administering the last sacraments; the dismal scene was lighted only by the light of the wax-tapers.

The reader has recognized Roland in the traveller whose carriage stopped at the gate. The bystanders made way for him; he entered the room with his head uncovered and knelt beside his mother.

The dying girl lay on her back, her hands clasped, her head raised on her pillows, her eyes fixed upon the sky, in a sort of ecstasy. She seemed unconscious of Roland’s arrival. It was as though her soul were floating between heaven and earth, while the body still belonged to this world.

Madame de Montrevel’s hand sought that of Roland, and finding it, the poor mother dropped her head on his shoulder, sobbing. The sobs passed unnoticed by the dying girl, even as her brother’s arrival had done. She lay there perfectly immovable. Only when the viaticum had been administered, when the priest’s voice promised her eternal blessedness, her marble lips appeared to live again, and she murmured in a feeble but intelligible voice: “Amen!”

Then the bell rang again; the choir-boy, who was carrying it, left the room first, followed by the two acolytes who bore the tapers, then the cross-bearer, and lastly the priest with the Host. All the strangers present followed the procession, and the family and household were left alone. The house, an instant before so full of sound and life, was silent, almost deserted.

The dying girl had not moved; her lips were closed, her hands clasped, her eyes raised to heaven. After a few minutes Roland stooped to his mother’s ear, and whispered: “Come out with me, mother, I must speak to you.” Madame de Montrevel rose. She pushed little Edouard toward the bed, and the child stood on tiptoe to kiss his sister on the forehead. Then the mother followed him, and, leaning over, with a sob she pressed a kiss upon the same spot. Roland, with dry eyes but a breaking heart — he would have given much for tears in which to drown his sorrow — kissed his sister as his mother and little brother had done. She seemed as insensible to this kiss as to the preceding ones.

Edouard left the room, followed by Madame de Montrevel and Roland. Just as they reached the door they stopped, quivering. They had heard the name of Roland, uttered in a low but distinct tone.

Roland turned. Amélie called him a second time.

“Did you call me, Amélie?” he asked.

“Yes,” replied the dying girl.

“Alone, or with my mother?”

“Alone.”

That voice, devoid of emphasis, yet perfectly intelligible, had something glacial about it; it was like an echo from another world.

“Go, mother,” said Roland. “You see that she wishes to be alone with me.”

“O my God!” murmured Madame de Montrevel, “can there still be hope?”

Low as these words were, the dying girl heard them.

“No, mother,” she said. “God has permitted me to see my brother again; but to-night I go to Him.”

Madame de Montrevel groaned.

“Roland, Roland!” she said, “she is there already.”

Roland signed to her to leave them alone, and she went away with little Edouard. Roland closed the door, and returned to his sister's bedside with unutterable emotion.

Her body was already stiffening in death; the breath from her lips would scarcely have dimmed a mirror; the eyes only, wide-open, were fixed and brilliant, as though the whole remaining life of the body, dead before its time, were centred, there. Roland had heard of this strange state called ecstasy, which is nothing else than catalepsy. He saw that Amélie was a victim of that preliminary death.

"I am here, sister," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"I knew you would come," she replied, still without moving, "and I waited for you."

"How did you know that I was coming?" asked Roland.

"I saw you coming."

Roland shuddered.

"Did you know why I was coming?" he asked.

"Yes; I prayed God so earnestly in my heart that He gave me strength to rise and write to you."

"When was that?"

"Last night."

"Where is the letter?"

"Under my pillow. Take it, and read it."

Roland hesitated an instant. Was his sister delirious?

"Poor Amélie!" he murmured.

"Do not pity me," she said, "I go to join him."

"Whom?" asked Roland.

"Him whom I loved, and whom you killed."

Roland uttered a cry. This was delirium; or else — what did his sister mean?

"Amélie," said he, "I came to question you — "

"About Lord Tanlay; yes, I know," replied the young girl.

"You knew! How could you know?"

"Did I not tell you I saw you coming, and knew why you came?"

"Then answer me."

"Do not turn me from God and from him, Roland. I have written it all; read my letter."

Roland slipped his hand beneath the pillow, convinced that his sister was delirious.

To his great astonishment he felt a paper, which he drew out. It was a sealed letter; on it were written these words: “For Roland, who will come to-morrow.”

He went over to the night-light in order to read the letter, which was dated the night before at eleven o’clock in the evening.

> My brother, we have each a terrible thing to forgive the other.

Roland looked at his sister; she was still motionless. He continued to read:

> I loved Charles de Sainte-Hermine; I did more than love him, he was my lover.

“Oh!” muttered the young man between his teeth, “he shall die.”

“He is dead,” said Amélie.

The young man gave a cry of astonishment. He had uttered the words to which Amélie had replied too low even to hear them himself. His eyes went back to the letter.

> There was no legal marriage possible between the sister of Roland de Montrevel and the leader of the Companions of Jehu: that was the terrible secret which I bore — and it crushed me.
>
> One person alone had to know it, and I told him; that person was Sir John Tanlay.
>
> May God forever bless that noble-hearted man, who promised to break off an impossible marriage, and who kept his word. Let his life be sacred to you, Roland; he has been my only friend in sorrow, and his tears have mingled with mine.
>
> I loved Charles de Saint-Hermine; I was his mistress; that is the terrible thing you must forgive.
>
> But, in exchange, you caused his death; that is the terrible thing I now forgive you.

> Oh I come fast, Roland, for I cannot die till you are here.
>
> To die is to see him again; to die is to be with him and never to leave him again. I am glad to die.

All was clearly and plainly written; there was no sign of delirium in the letter.

Roland read it through twice, and stood for an instant silent, motionless, palpitating, full of bitterness; then pity got the better of his anger. He went to Amélie, stretched his hand over her, and said: “Sister, I forgive you.”

A slight quiver shook the dying body.

“And now,” she said, “call my mother, that I may die in her arms.”

Roland opened the door and called Madame de Montrevel. She was waiting and came at once.

“Is there any change?” she asked, eagerly.

“No,” replied Roland, “only Amélie wishes to die in your arms.”

Madame de Montrevel fell upon her knees beside her daughter’s bed.

Then Amélie, as though an invisible hand had loosened the bonds that held her rigid body to the bed, rose slowly, parted the hands that were clasped upon her breast, and let one fall slowly into those of her mother.

“Mother,” she said, “you gave me life and you have taken it from me; I bless you. It was a mother’s act. There was no happiness possible for your daughter in this life.”

Then, letting her other hand fall into that of Roland, who was kneeling on the other side of the bed, she said: “We have forgiven each other, brother?”

“Yes, dear Amélie,” he replied, “and from the depths of our hearts, I hope.”

“I have still one last request to make.”

“What is it?”

“Do not forget that Lord Tanlay has been my best friend.”

“Fear nothing,” said Roland; “Lord Tanlay’s life is sacred to me.”

Amélie drew a long breath; then in a voice which showed her growing weakness, she said: “Farewell, mother; farewell, Roland; kiss Edouard for me.”

Then with a cry from her soul, in which there was more of joy than sadness, she said: “Here I am, Charles, here I am!”

She fell back upon her bed, withdrawing her two hands as she did so, and clasping them upon her breast again.

Roland and his mother rose and leaned over her. She had resumed her first position, except that her eyelids were closed and her breath extinguished. Amélie’s martyrdom was over, she was dead.

CHAPTER LV.

INVULNERABLE

Amélie died during the night of Monday and Tuesday, that is to say, the 2d and 3d of June. On the evening of Thursday, the 5th of June, the Grand Opera at Paris was crowded for the second presentation of “Ossian, or the Bards.”

The great admiration which the First Consul professed for the poems of Macpherson was universally known; consequently the National Academy, as much in flattery as from literary choice, had brought out an opera, which, in spite of all exertions, did not appear until a month after General Bonaparte had left Paris to join the Army of the Reserves.

In the balcony to the left sat a lover of music who was noticeable for the deep attention he paid to the performance. During the interval between the acts, the door-keeper came to him and said in a low voice:

“Pardon me, sir, are you Sir John Tanlay?”

“I am.”

“In that case, my lord, a gentleman has a message to give you; he says it is of the utmost importance, and asks if you will speak to him in the corridor.”

“Oh!” said Sir John, “is he an officer?”

“He is in civilian’s dress, but he looks like an officer.”

“Very good,” replied Sir John; “I know who he is.”

He rose and followed the woman. Roland was waiting in the corridor. Lord Tanlay showed no surprise on seeing him, but the stern look on the young man’s face repressed the first impulse of his deep affection, which was to fling himself upon his friend’s breast.

“Here I am, sir,” said Sir John.

Roland bowed.

“I have just come from your hotel,” he said. “You have, it seems, taken the precaution to inform the porter of your whereabout every time you have gone out, so that persons who have business with you should know where to find you.”

"That is true, sir."

"The precaution is a good one, especially for those who, like myself, come from a long distance and are hurried and have no time to spare."

"Then," said Sir John, "was it to see me that you left the army and came to Paris?"

"Solely for that honor, sir; and I trust that you will guess my motives, and spare me the necessity of explaining them."

"From this moment I am at your service, sir," replied Sir John.

"At what hour to-morrow can two of my friends wait upon you?"

"From seven in the morning until midnight; unless you prefer that it should be now."

"No, my lord; I have but just arrived, and I must have time to find my friends and give them my instructions. If it will not inconvenience you, they will probably call upon you to-morrow between ten and eleven. I shall be very much obliged to you if the affair we have to settle could be arranged for the same day."

"I believe that will be possible, sir; as I understand it to be your wish, the delay will not be from my side."

"That is all I wished to know, my lord; pray do not let me detain you longer."

Roland bowed, and Sir John returned the salutation. Then the young man left the theatre and Sir John returned to his seat in the balcony. The words had been exchanged in such perfectly well modulated voices, and with such an impassible expression of countenance on both sides, that no one would have supposed that a quarrel had arisen between the two men who had just greeted each other so courteously.

It happened to be the reception day of the minister of war. Roland returned to his hotel, removed the traces of his journey, jumped into a carriage, and a little before ten he was announced in the salon of the citizen Carnot.

Two purposes took him there: in the first place, he had a verbal communication to make to the minister of war from the First Consul; in the second place, he hoped to find there the two witnesses he was in need of to arrange his meeting with Sir John.

Everything happened as Roland had hoped. He gave the minister of war all the details of the crossing of the Mont Saint-Bernard and the situation of the army; and he himself found the two friends of whom he was in search.

A few words sufficed to let them know what he wished; soldiers are particularly open to such confidences.

Roland spoke of a grave insult, the nature of which must remain a secret even to his seconds. He declared that he was the offended party, and claimed the choice of weapons and mode of fighting — advantages which belong to the challenger.

The young fellows agreed to present themselves to Sir John the following morning at the Hôtel Mirabeau, Rue de Richelieu, at nine o’clock, and make the necessary arrangements with Sir John’s seconds. After that they would join Roland at the Hôtel de Paris in the same street.

Roland returned to his room at eleven that evening, wrote for about an hour, then went to bed and to sleep.

At half-past nine the next morning his friends came to him. They had just left Sir John. He admitted all Roland’s contentions; declared that he would not discuss any of the arrangements; adding that if Roland regarded himself as the injured party, it was for him to dictate the conditions. To their remark that they had hoped to discuss such matters with two of his friends and not with himself, he replied that he knew no one in Paris intimately enough to ask their assistance in such a matter, and that he hoped, once on the ground, that one of Roland’s seconds would consent to act in his behalf. The two officers were agreed that Lord Tanlay had conducted himself with the utmost punctiliousness in every respect.

Roland declared that Sir John’s request for the services of one of his two seconds was not only just but suitable, and he authorized either one of them to act for Sir John and to take charge of his interests. All that remained for Roland to do was to dictate his conditions. They were as follows!

Pistols were chosen. When loaded the adversaries were to stand at five paces. At the third clap of the seconds’ hands they were to fire. It was, as we see, a duel to the death, in which, if either survived, he would be at the mercy of his opponent. Consequently the young officers made many objections; but Roland insisted, declaring that he alone could judge of the gravity of the insult offered him, and that no other reparation than this would satisfy him. They were obliged to yield to such obstinacy. But the friend who was to act as Sir John’s second refused to bind himself for his principal, declaring that unless Sir John ordered it he would refuse to be a party to such a murder.

"Don't excite yourself, dear friend," said Roland, "I know Sir John, and I think he will be more accommodating than you."

The seconds returned to Sir John; they found him at his English breakfast of beefsteak, potatoes and tea. On seeing them he rose, invited them to share his repast, and, on their refusing, placed himself at their disposal. They began by assuring him that he could count upon one of them to act as his second. The one acting for Roland announced the conditions. At each stipulation Sir John bowed his head in token of assent and merely replied: "Very good!"

The one who had taken charge of his interests attempted to make some objections to a form of combat that, unless something impossible to foresee occurred, must end in the death of both parties; but Lord Tanlay begged him to make no objections.

"M. de Montrevel is a gallant man," he said; "I do not wish to thwart him in anything; whatever he does is right."

It only remained to settle the hour and the place of meeting. On these points Sir John again placed himself at Roland's disposal. The two seconds left even more delighted with him after this interview than they had been after the first. Roland was waiting for them and listened to what had taken place.

"What did I tell you?" he asked.

They requested him to name the time and place. He selected seven o'clock in the evening in the Allée de la Muette. At that hour the Bois was almost deserted, but the light was still good enough (it will be remembered that this was in the month of June) for the two adversaries to fight with any weapon.

No one had spoken of the pistols. The young men proposed to get them at an armorer's.

"No," said Roland, "Sir John has an excellent pair of duelling pistols which I have already used. If he is not unwilling to fight with those pistols I should prefer them to all others."

The young man who was now acting as Sir John's second went to him with the three following questions: Whether the time and place suited him, and whether he would allow his pistols to be used.

Lord Tanlay replied by regulating his watch by that of his second and by handing him the box of pistols.

"Shall I call for you, my lord?" asked the young man.

Sir John smiled sadly.

“Needless,” he replied; “you are M. de Montrevel’s friend, and you will find the drive pleasanter with him than with me. I will go on horseback with my servant. You will find me on the ground.”

The young officer carried this reply to Roland.

“What did I tell you?” observed Roland again.

It was then mid-day, there were still seven hours before them, and Roland dismissed his friends to their various pleasures and occupations. At half-past six precisely they were to be at his door with three horses and two servants. It was necessary, in order to avoid interference, that the trip should appear to be nothing more than an ordinary promenade.

At half-past six precisely the waiter informed Roland that his friends were in the courtyard. Roland greeted them cordially and sprang into his saddle. The party followed the boulevards as far as the Place Louis XV. and then turned up the Champs Elysées. On the way the strange phenomenon that had so much astonished Sir John at the time of Roland’s duel with M. de Barjols recurred. Roland’s gayety might have been thought an affectation had it not been so evidently genuine. The two young men acting as seconds were of undoubted courage, but even they were bewildered by such utter indifference. They might have understood it had this affair been an ordinary duel, for coolness and dexterity insure their possessor a great advantage over his adversary; but in a combat like this to which they were going neither coolness nor dexterity would avail to save the combatants, if not from death at least from some terrible wound.

Furthermore, Roland urged on his horse like a man in haste, so that they reached the end of the Allée de la Muette five minutes before the appointed time.

A man was walking in the allée. Roland recognized Sir John. The seconds watched the young man’s face as he caught sight of his adversary. To their great astonishment it expressed only tender good-will.

A few more steps and the four principal actors in the scene that was about to take place met.

Sir John was perfectly calm, but his face wore a look of profound sadness. It was evident that this meeting grieved him as deeply as it seemed to rejoice Roland.

The party dismounted. One of the seconds took the box of pistols from the servants and ordered them to lead away the horses, and not to return until they heard pistol-shots. The principals then entered the part of the woods that seemed the thickest, and looked about them for a suitable spot. For the rest, as Roland had foreseen, the Bois was deserted; the approach of the dinner hour had called every one home.

They found a small open spot exactly suited to their needs. The seconds looked at Roland and Sir John. They both nodded their heads in approval.

"Is there to be any change?" one of the seconds asked Sir John.

"Ask M. de Montrevel," replied Lord Tanlay; "I am entirely at his disposal."

"Nothing," said Roland.

The seconds took the pistols from the box and loaded them. Sir John stood apart, switching the heads of the tall grasses with his riding-whip.

Roland watched him hesitatingly for a moment, then taking his resolve, he walked resolutely toward him. Sir John raised his head and looked at him with apparent hope.

"My lord," said Roland, "I may have certain grievances against you, but I know you to be, none the less, a man of your word."

"You are right," replied Sir John.

"If you survive me will you keep the promise that you made me at Avignon?"

"There is no possibility that I shall survive you, but so long as I have any breath left in my body, you can count upon me."

"I refer to the final disposition to be made of my body."

"The same, I presume, as at Avignon?"

"The same, my lord."

"Very well, you may set your mind at rest."

Roland bowed to Sir John and returned to his friends.

"Have you any wishes in case the affair terminates fatally?" asked one of them.

"One only."

"What is it?"

"That you permit Sir John to take entire charge of the funeral arrangements. For the rest, I have a note in my left hand for him. In case I have not time to speak after the affair is over, you are to open my hand and give him the note."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"The pistols are loaded, then."

"Very well, inform Sir John."

One of the seconds approached Sir John. The other measured off five paces. Roland saw that the distance was greater than he had supposed.

"Excuse me," he said, "I said three paces."

"Five," replied the officer who was measuring the distance.

"Not at all, dear friend, you are wrong."

He turned to Sir John and to the other second questioningly.

"Three paces will do very well," replied Sir John, bowing.

There was nothing to be said if the two adversaries were agreed. The five paces were reduced to three. Then two sabres were laid on the ground to mark the limit. Sir John and Roland took their places, standing so that their toes touched the sabres. A pistol was then handed to each of them.

They bowed to say that they were ready. The two seconds stepped aside. They were to give the signal by clapping their hands three times. At the first clap the principals were to cock their pistols; at the second to take aim; at the third to fire.

The three claps were given at regular intervals amid the most profound silence; the wind itself seemed to pause and the rustle of the trees was hushed. The principals were calm, but the seconds were visibly distressed.

At the third clap two shots rang out so simultaneously that they seemed but one. But to the utter astonishment of the seconds the combatants remained standing. At the signal Roland had lowered his pistol and fired into the ground. Sir John had raised his and cut the branch of a tree three feet behind Roland. Each was clearly amazed — amazed that he himself was still living, after having spared his antagonist.

Roland was the first to speak.

"Ah!" he cried, "my sister was right in saying that you were the most generous man on earth."

And throwing his pistol aside he opened his arms to Sir John, who rushed into them.

"Ah! I understand," he said. "You wanted to die; but, God be thanked, I am not your murderer."

The two seconds came up.

"What is the matter?" they asked together.

"Nothing," said Roland, "except that I could not die by the hand of the man I love best on earth. You saw for yourselves that he preferred to die rather than kill me.”

Then throwing himself once more into Sir John’s arms, and grasping the hands of his two friends, he said: “I see that I must leave that to the Austrians. And now, gentlemen, you must excuse me. The First Consul is on the eve of a great battle in Italy, and I have not a moment to lose if I am to be there.”

Leaving Sir John to make what explanations he thought suitable to the seconds, Roland rushed to the road, sprang upon his horse, and returned to Paris at a gallop.

CHAPTER LVI.

CONCLUSION

In the meantime the French army continued its march, and on the 5th of June it entered Milan.

There was little resistance. The fort of Milan was invested. Murat, sent to Piacenza, had taken the city without a blow. Lannes had defeated General Ott at Montebello. Thus disposed, the French army was in the rear of the Austrians before the latter were aware of it.

During the night of the 8th of June a courier arrived from Murat, who, as we have said, was occupying Piacenza. Murat had intercepted a despatch from General Melas, and was now sending it to Bonaparte. This despatch announced the capitulation of Genoa; Masséna, after eating horses, dogs, cats and rats, had been forced to surrender. Melas spoke of the Army of the Reserves with the utmost contempt; he declared that the story of Bonaparte’s presence in Italy was a hoax; and asserted that he knew for certain that the First Consul was in Paris.

Here was news that must instantly be imparted to Bonaparte, for it came under the category of bad news. Consequently, Bourrienne woke him up at three o’clock in the morning and translated the despatch. Bonaparte’s first words were as follows:

“Pooh! Bourrienne, you don’t understand German.”

But Bourrienne repeated the translation word for word. After this reading the general rose, had everybody waked up, gave his orders, and then went back to bed and to sleep.

That same day he left Milan and established his headquarters at Stradella; there he remained until June 12th, left on the 13th, and marched to the Scrivia through Montebello, where he saw the field of-battle, still torn and bleeding after Lannes’ victory. The traces of death were everywhere; the church was still overflowing with the dead and wounded.

“The devil!” said the First Consul to the victor, “you must have made it pretty hot here.”

“So hot, general, that the bones in my division were cracking and rattling like hail on a skylight.”

Desaix joined the First Consul on the 11th of June, while he was still at Stradella. Released by the capitulation of El-Arish, he had reached Toulon the 6th of May, the very day on which Bonaparte left Paris. At the foot of the Mont Saint-Bernard Bonaparte received a letter from him, asking whether he should march to Paris or rejoin the army.

“Start for Paris, indeed!” exclaimed Bonaparte; “write him to rejoin the army at headquarters, wherever that may be.”

Bourrienne had written, and, as we have seen, Desaix joined the army the 11th of June, at Stradella. The First Consul received him with twofold joy. In the first place, he regained a man without ambition, an intelligent officer and a devoted friend. In the second place, Desaix arrived just in the nick of time to take charge of the division lately under Boudet, who had been killed. Through a false report, received through General Gardannes, the First Consul was led to believe that the enemy refused to give battle and was retiring to Genoa. He sent Desaix and his division on the road to Novi to cut them off.

The night of the 13th passed tranquilly. In spite of a heavy storm, an engagement had taken place the preceding evening in which the Austrians had been defeated. It seemed as though men and nature were wearied alike, for all was still during the night. Bonaparte was easy in his mind; there was but one bridge over the Bormida, and he had been assured that that was down. Pickets were stationed as far as possible along the Bormida, each with four scouts.

The whole of the night was occupied by the enemy in crossing the river. At two in the morning two parties of scouts were captured; seven of the eight men were killed, the eighth made his way back to camp crying: “To arms!”

A courier was instantly despatched to the First Consul, who was sleeping at Torre di Galifo. Meanwhile, till orders could be received, the drums beat to arms all along the line. A man must have shared in such a scene to understand the effect produced on a sleeping army by the roll of drums calling to arms at three in the morning. The bravest shuddered. The troops were sleeping in their clothes; every man sprang up, ran to the stacked arms, and seized his weapons.

The lines formed on the vast plains of Marengo. The noise of the drums swept on like a train of lighted powder. In the dim half-light the hasty movements of the pickets could be seen. When the day broke, the French troops were stationed as follows:

The division Gardannes and the division Chamberlhac, forming the extreme advance, were encamped around a little country-place called Petra Bona, at the angle formed by the highroad from Marengo to Tortona, and the Bormida, which crosses the road on its way to the Tanaro.

The corps of General Lannes was before the village of San Giuliano, the place which Bonaparte had pointed out to Roland three months earlier, telling him that on that spot the fate of the campaign would be decided.

The Consular guard was stationed some five hundred yards or so in the rear of Lannes.

The cavalry brigade, under General Kellermann, and a few squadrons of chasseurs and hussars, forming the left, filled up, along the advanced line, the gap between the divisions of Gardannes and Chamberlhac.

A second brigade, under General Champeaux, filled up the gap on the right between General Lannes' cavalry.

And finally the twelfth regiment of hussars, and the twenty-first chasseurs, detached by Murat under the orders of General Rivaud, occupied the opening of the Valley of Salo and the extreme right of the position.

These forces amounted to about twenty-five or six thousand men, not counting the divisions Monnet and Boudet, ten thousand men in all, commanded by Desaix, and now, as we have said, detached from the main army to cut off the retreat of the enemy to Genoa. Only, instead of making that retreat, the enemy were now attacking.

During the day of the 13th of June, General Melas, commander-in-chief of the Austrian army, having succeeded in reuniting the troops of Generals Haddich, Kaim and Ott, crossed the Tanaro, and was now encamped before Alessandria with thirty-six thousand infantry, seven thousand cavalry, and a numerous well-served and well-horsed artillery.

At four o'clock in the morning the firing began and General Victor assigned all to their line of battle. At five Bonaparte was awakened by the sound of cannon. While he was dressing, General Victor's aide-de-camp rode up to tell him that the enemy had crossed the Bormida and was attacking all along the line of battle.

The First Consul called for his horse, and, springing upon it, galloped off toward the spot where the fighting was going on. From the summit of the hill he could overlook the position of both armies.

The enemy was formed in three columns; that on the left, comprising all the cavalry and light infantry, was moving toward Castel-Ceriolo by the Salo road, while the columns of the right and centre, resting upon each other and comprising the infantry regiments under Generals Haddich, Kaim and O’Reilly, and the reserve of grenadiers under command of General Ott, were advancing along the Tortona road and up the Bormida.

The moment they crossed the river the latter columns came in contact with the troops of General Gardannes, posted, as we have said, at the farmhouse and the ravine of Petra Bona. It was the noise of the artillery advancing in this direction that had brought Bonaparte to the scene of battle. He arrived just as Gardannes’ division, crushed under the fire of that artillery, was beginning to fall back, and General Victor was sending forward Chamberlhac’s division to its support. Protected by this move, Gardannes’ troops retreated in good order, and covered the village of Marengo.

The situation was critical; all the plans of the commander-in-chief were overthrown. Instead of attacking, as was his wont, with troops judiciously massed, he was attacked himself before he could concentrate his forces. The Austrians, profiting by the sweep of land that lay before them, ceased to march in columns, and deployed in lines parallel to those of Gardannes and Chamberlhac — with this difference, that they were two to the French army’s one. The first of these lines was commanded by General Haddich, the second by General Melas, the third by General Ott.

At a short distance from the Bormida flows a stream called the Fontanone, which passes through a deep ravine forming a semicircle round the village of Marengo, and protecting it. General Victor had already divined the advantages to be derived from this natural intrenchment, and he used it to rally the divisions of Gardannes and Chamberlhac.

Bonaparte, approving Victor’s arrangements, sent him word to defend Marengo to the very last extremity. He himself needed time to prepare his game on this great chess-board inclosed between the Bormida, the Fontanone, and Marengo.

His first step was to recall Desaix, then marching, as we have said, to cut the retreat to Genoa. General Bonaparte sent off two or three aides-de-camp with orders not to stop until they had reached that corps. Then he waited, seeing clearly that there was nothing to do but to fall back in as orderly a manner as possible, until he could gather a compact mass that would enable him, not only to stop the retrograde movement, but to assume the offensive.

But this waiting was horrible.

Presently the action was renewed along the whole line. The Austrians had reached one bank of the Fontanone, of which the French occupied the other. Each was firing on the other from either side of the ravine; grape-shot flew from side to side within pistol range. Protected by its terrible artillery, the enemy had only to extend himself a little more to overwhelm Bonaparte's forces. General Rivaud, of Gardannes' division, saw the Austrians preparing for this manoeuvre. He marched out from Marengo, and placed a battalion in the open with orders to die there rather than retreat, then, while that battalion drew the enemy's fire, he formed his cavalry in column, came round the flank of the battalion, fell upon three thousand Austrians advancing to the charge, repulsed them, threw them into disorder, and, all wounded as he was by a splintered ball, forced them back behind their own lines. After that he took up a position to the right of the battalion, which had not retreated a step.

But during this time Gardannes' division, which had been struggling with the enemy from early morning, was driven back upon Marengo, followed by the first Austrian line, which forced Chamberlhac's division to retreat in like manner. There an aide-de-camp sent by Bonaparte ordered the two divisions to rally and retake Marengo at any cost.

General Victor reformed them, put himself at their head, forced his way through the streets, which the Austrians had not had time to barricade, retook the village, lost it again, took it a third time, and then, overwhelmed by numbers, lost it for the third time.

It was then eleven o'clock. Desaix, overtaken by Bonaparte's aide-de-camp, ought at that hour to be on his way to the battle.

Meanwhile, Lannes with his two divisions came to the help of his struggling comrades. This reinforcement enabled Gardannes and Chamberlhac to reform their lines parallel to the enemy, who had now debouched, through Marengo, to the right and also to the left of the village.

The Austrians were on the point of overwhelming the French.

Lannes, forming his centre with the divisions rallied by Victor, deployed with his two least exhausted divisions for the purpose of opposing them to the Austrian wings. The two corps — the one excited by the prospect of victory, the other refreshed by a long rest — flung themselves with fury into the fight, which was now renewed along the whole line.

After struggling an hour, hand to hand, bayonet to bayonet, General Kaim’s corps fell back; General Champeaux, at the head of the first and eighth regiments of dragoons, charged upon him, increasing his disorder. General Watrin, with the sixth light infantry and the twenty-second and fortieth of the line, started in pursuit and drove him nearly a thousand rods beyond the rivulet. But this movement separated the French from their own corps; the centre divisions were endangered by the victory on the right, and Generals Watrin and Champeaux were forced to fall back to the lines they had left uncovered.

At the same time Kellermann was doing on the left wing what Champeaux and Watrin had done on the right. Two cavalry charges made an opening through the enemy’s line; but behind that first line was a second. Not daring to go further forward, because of superior numbers, Kellermann lost the fruits of that momentary victory.

It was now noon. The French army, which undulated like a flaming serpent along a front of some three miles, was broken in the centre. The centre, retreating, abandoned the wings. The wings were therefore forced to follow the retrograde movement. Kellermann to the left, Watrin to the right, had given their men the order to fall back. The retreat was made in squares, under the fire of eighty pieces of artillery which preceded the main body of the Austrian army. The French ranks shrank visibly; men were borne to the ambulances by men who did not return.

One division retreated through a field of ripe wheat; a shell burst and fired the straw, and two or three thousand men were caught in the midst of a terrible conflagration; cartridge-boxes exploded, and fearful disorder reigned in the ranks.

It was then that Bonaparte sent forward the Consular guard.

Up they went at a charge, deployed in line of battle, and stopped the enemy’s advance. Meantime the mounted grenadiers dashed forward at a gallop and overthrew the Austrian cavalry.

Meanwhile the division which had escaped from the conflagration received fresh cartridges and reformed in line. But this movement had no other result than to prevent the retreat from becoming a rout.

It was two o’clock.

Bonaparte watched the battle, sitting on the bank of a ditch beside the highroad to Alessandria. He was alone. His left arm was slipped through his horse's bridle; with the other he flicked the pebbles in the road with the tip of his riding-whip. Cannon-balls were plowing the earth about him. He seemed indifferent to this great drama on which hung all his hopes. Never had he played so desperate a game — six years of victory against the crown of France!

Suddenly he roused from his revery. Amid the dreadful roar of cannon and musketry his ear caught the hoof-beats of a galloping horse. He raised his head. A rider, dashing along at full speed, his horse covered with white froth, came from the direction of Novi. When he was within fifty feet, Bonaparte gave one cry:

"Roland!"

The latter dashed on, crying: "Desaix! Desaix! Desaix!"

Bonaparte opened his arms; Roland sprang from his horse, and flung himself upon the First Consul's neck.

There was a double joy for Bonaparte in this arrival — that of again seeing a plan whom he knew would be devoted to him unto death, and because of the news he brought.

"And Desaix?" he questioned.

"Is within three miles; one of your aides met him retracing his steps toward the cannon."

"Then," said Bonaparte, "he may yet come in time."

"How? In time?"

"Look!"

Roland glanced at the battlefield and grasped the situation in an instant.

During the few moments that had elapsed while they were conversing, matters had gone from bad to worse. The first Austrian column, the one which had marched on Castel-Ceriolo and had not yet been engaged, was about to fall on the right of the French army. If it broke the line the retreat would be flight — Desaix would come too late.

"Take my last two regiments of grenadiers," said Bonaparte. "Rally the Consular guard, and carry it with you to the extreme right — you understand? in a square, Roland! — and stop that column like a stone redoubt."

There was not an instant to lose. Roland sprang upon his horse, took the two regiments of grenadiers, rallied the Consular guard, and dashed to the right. When he was within fifty feet of General Elsnitz’s column, he called out: “In square! The First Consul is looking at us!”

The square formed. Each man seemed to take root in his place.

General Elsnitz, instead of continuing his way in the movement to support Generals Melas and Kaim — instead of despising the nine hundred men who present no cause for fear in the rear of a victorious army — General Elsnitz paused and turned upon them with fury.

Those nine hundred men were indeed the stone redoubt that General Bonaparte had ordered them to be. Artillery, musketry, bayonets, all were turned upon them, but they yielded not an inch.

Bonaparte was watching them with admiration, when, turning in the direction of Novi, he caught the gleam of Desaix’s bayonets. Standing on a knoll raised above the plain, he could see what was invisible to the enemy.

He signed to a group of officers who were near him, awaiting orders; behind stood orderlies holding their horses. The officers advanced. Bonaparte pointed to the forest of bayonets, now glistening in the sunlight, and said to one of the officers: “Gallop to those bayonets and tell them to hasten. As for Desaix, tell him I am waiting for him here.”

The officer galloped off. Bonaparte again turned his eyes to the battlefield. The retreat continued; but Roland and his nine hundred had stopped General Elsnitz and his column. The stone redoubt was transformed into a volcano; it was belching fire from all four sides. Then Bonaparte, addressing three officers, cried out: “One of you to the centre; the other two to the wings! Say everywhere that the reserves are at hand, and that we resume the offensive.”

The three officers departed like arrows shot from a bow, their ways parting in direct lines to their different destinations. Bonaparte watched them for a few moments, and when he turned round he saw a rider in a general’s uniform approaching.

It was Desaix — Desaix, whom he had left in Egypt, and who that very morning had said, laughing: “The bullets of Europe don’t recognize me; some ill-luck is surely impending over me.”

One grasp of the hand was all that these two friends needed to reveal their hearts.

Then Bonaparte stretched out his arm toward the battlefield.

A single glance told more than all the words in the world.

Twenty thousand men had gone into the fight that morning, and now scarcely more than ten thousand were left within a radius of six miles — only nine thousand infantry, one thousand cavalry, and ten cannon still in condition for use. One quarter of the army was either dead or wounded, another quarter was employed in removing the wounded; for the First Consul would not suffer them to be abandoned. All of these forces, save and excepting Roland and his nine hundred men, were retreating.

The vast space between the Bormida and the ground over which the army was now retreating was covered with the dead bodies of men and horses, dismounted cannon and shattered ammunition wagons. Here and there rose columns of flame and smoke from the burning fields of grain.

Desaix took in these details at a glance.

“What do you think of the battle?” asked Bonaparte.

“I think that this one is lost,” answered Desaix; “but as it is only three o’clock in the afternoon, we have time to gain another.”

“Only,” said a voice, “we need cannon!”

This voice belonged to Marmont, commanding the artillery.

“True, Marmont; but where are we to get them?”

“I have five pieces still intact from the battlefield; we left five more at Scrivia, which are just coming up.”

“And the eight pieces I have with me,” said Desaix.

“Eighteen pieces!” said Marmont; “that is all I need.” An aide-de-camp was sent to hasten the arrival of Desaix’s guns. His troops were advancing rapidly, and were scarcely half a mile from the field of battle. Their line of approach seemed formed for the purpose at hand; on the left of the road was a gigantic perpendicular hedge protected by a bank. The infantry was made to file in a narrow line along it, and it even hid the cavalry from view.

During this time Marmont had collected his guns and stationed them in battery on the right front of the army. Suddenly they burst forth, vomiting a deluge of grapeshot and canister upon the Austrians. For an instant the enemy wavered.

Bonaparte profited by that instant of hesitation to send forward the whole front of the French army.

“Comrades!” he cried, “we have made steps enough backward; remember, it is my custom to sleep on the battlefield!”

At the same moment, and as if in reply to Marmont’s cannonade, volleys of musketry burst forth to the left, taking the Austrians in flank. It was

Desaix and his division, come down upon them at short range and enfilading the enemy with the fire of his guns.

The whole army knew that this was the reserve, and that it behooved them to aid this reserve by a supreme effort.

“Forward!” rang from right to left. The drums beat the charge. The Austrians, who had not seen the reserves, and were marching with their guns on their shoulders, as if at parade, felt that something strange was happening within the French lines; they struggled to retain the victory they now felt to be slipping from their grasp.

But everywhere the French army had resumed the offensive. On all sides the ominous roll of the charge and the victorious Marseillaise were heard above the din. Marmont’s battery belched fire; Kellermann dashed forward with his cuirassiers and cut his way through both lines of the enemy.

Desaix jumped ditches, leaped hedges, and, reaching a little eminence, turned to see if his division were still following him. There he fell; but his death, instead of diminishing the ardor of his men, redoubled it, and they charged with their bayonets upon the column of General Zach.

At that moment Kellermann, who had broken through both of the enemy’s lines, saw Desaix’s division struggling with a compact, immovable mass. He charged in flank, forced his way into a gap, widened it, broke the square, quartered it, and in less than fifteen minutes the five thousand Austrian grenadiers who formed the mass were overthrown, dispersed, crushed, annihilated. They disappeared like smoke. General Zach and his staff, all that was left, were taken prisoners.

Then, in turn, the enemy endeavored to make use of his immense cavalry corps; but the incessant volleys of musketry, the blasting canister, the terrible bayonets, stopped short the charge. Murat was manoeuvring on the flank with two light-battery guns and a howitzer, which dealt death to the foe.

He paused for an instant to succor Roland and his nine hundred men. A shell from the howitzer fell and burst in the Austrian ranks; it opened a gulf of flame. Roland sprang into it, a pistol in one hand, his sword in the other. The whole Consular guard followed him, opening the enemy’s ranks as a wedge opens the trunk of an oak. Onward he dashed, till he reached an ammunition wagon surrounded by the enemy; then, without pausing an instant, he thrust the hand holding the pistol through the opening of the wagon and fired. A frightful explosion followed, a volcano had burst its crater and annihilated those around it.

General Elsnitz’s corps was in full flight; the rest of the Austrian army swayed, retreated, and broke. The generals tried in vain to stop the torrent and form up for a retreat. In thirty minutes the French army had crossed the plain it had defended foot by foot for eight hours.

The enemy did not stop until Marengo was reached. There they made a vain attempt to reform under fire of the artillery of Carra-Saint-Cyr (forgotten at Castel-Ceriolo, and not recovered until the day was over); but the Desaix, Gardannes, and Chamberlhac divisions, coming up at a run, pursued the flying Austrians through the streets.

Marengo was carried. The enemy retired on Petra Bona, and that too was taken. Then the Austrians rushed toward the bridge of the Bormida; but Carra-Saint-Cyr was there before them. The flying multitudes sought the fords, or plunged into the Bormida under a devastating fire, which did not slacken before ten that night.

The remains of the Austrian army regained their camp at Alessandria. The French army bivouacked near the bridge. The day had cost the Austrian army four thousand five hundred men killed, six thousand wounded, five thousand prisoners, besides twelve flags and thirty cannon.

Never did fortune show herself under two such opposite aspects as on that day. At two in the afternoon, the day spelt defeat and its disastrous consequences to Bonaparte; at five, it was Italy reconquered and the throne of France in prospect.

That night the First Consul wrote the following letter to Madame de Montrevel:

> MADAME — I have to-day won my greatest victory; but
> it has cost me the two halves of my heart, Desaix and
> Roland.
>
> Do not grieve, madame; your son did not care to live,
> and he could not have died more gloriously.
>
> BONAPARTE.

Many futile efforts were made to recover the body of the young aide-de-camp: like Romulus, he had vanished in a whirlwind.

None ever knew why he had pursued death with such eager longing.

THE END

THE WOLF LEADER

Translated by Alfred Allinson

This 1857 fantasy novel is set in Dumas' native town of Villers-Cotterêts in 1780, and is based on a local folk-tale the author heard as a child. The story concerns Thibault, a shoe-maker, who is beaten by the gamekeeper of the Lord of Vez for interfering with his hunting. Afterwards he encounters an enormous wolf, walking on hind legs like a man, who offers him vengeance. Thibault is granted the wish to harm any person in return for one of his own hairs for each wish. To seal the agreement, the two exchange rings. As a result of this bargain he also finds himself able to command the local wolves, and hence gradually gains the reputation of being a werewolf.

Dumas, close to the time of publication

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Although the introductory chapters were not signed until May 31st, 1856, The Wolf-Leader is to be associated in conception with the group of romances which Dumas wrote at Brussels between the years 1852 and 1854, that is to say, after his financial failure and the consequent defection of his collaborator Maquet, and before his return to Paris to found his journal Le Mousquetaire. Like Conscience V Innocent and Catherine Blum, which date from that period of exile, the present story was inspired by reminiscences of our author's native place Villers-Cotterets, in the department of the Aisne.

In *The Wolf-Leader* Dumas, however, allows his imagination and fancy full play. Using a legend told to him nearly half a century before, conjuring up the scenes of his boyhood, and calling into requisition his wonderful gift of improvisation, he contrives in the happiest way to weave a romance in which are combined a weird tale of diablerie and continual delightful glimpses of forest life. Terror, wood-craft, and humour could not be more felicitously intermingled. The reader, while kept under the spell of the main theme of the story, experiences all the charm of an open-air life in the great forest of Villers-Cotterets the forest in which the little town seemed to occupy a small clearing, and into which the boy Alexandre occasionally escaped for days together from the irksome routine of the school or from the hands of relatives who wanted to make a priest of him.

Thus Dumas, the most impressionable of men, all his life remained grateful to the forest for the poetic fancies derived from its beauty and the mysteries of its recesses, as well as for the hiding-places it afforded him, and for the game and birds which he soon learnt to shoot and snare there. Listen to his indignation at the destruction of the trees in the neighbouring park. We quote from his Memoires: "That park, planted by Francois I., was put down by Louis Philippe. Beautiful trees under whose shade once reclined Francois I. and Madame d'Etarrpes, Henri II. and Diana of Poitiers, Henri IV. and Gabrielle you had a right to believe that a Bourbon would have respected you, that you would have lived your long life the life of beech trees and oaks; that the birds would have warbled on your branches when green and leafy. But over and above your inestimable value of poetry and memories, you had, unhappily, a material value. You beautiful beeches with your polished silvery cases! you beautiful oaks with your sombre wrinkled bark! you were worth a hundred thousand crowns. The King of France, who, with his six millions of private revenue, was too poor to keep you the King of France sold you. For my part, had you been my sole fortune, I would have preserved you; for, poet as I am, there is one thing that I would set before all the gold of the earth, and that is the murmur of the wind in your leaves; the shadow that you made to flicker beneath my feet; the sweet visions, the charming phantoms which, at evening time, betwixt the day and night, in twilight's doubtful hour would glide between your age-long trunks as glide the shadows of the ancient Abencerrages amid the thousand columns of Cordova's royal mosque."

The Wolf-Leader was published in 1857, in three volumes (Paris: Cadot). Dumas reprinted it in his journal Le Monte-Crisio in 1860.

R. S. G.

INTRODUCTION

WHO MOCQUET WAS, AND HOW THIS TALE BECAME KNOWN TO THE NARRATOR

Why, I ask myself, during those first twenty years of my literary life, from 1827 to 1847, did I so rarely turn my eyes and thoughts towards the little town where I was born, towards the woods amid which it lies embowered, and the villages that cluster round it? How was it that during all that time the world of my youth seemed to me to have disappeared, as if hidden behind a cloud, whilst the future which lay before me shone clear and resplendent, like those magic islands which Columbus and his companions mistook for baskets of flowers floating on the sea?

Alas! simply because during the first twenty years of our life, we have Hope for our guide, and during the last twenty, Reality.

From the hour when, weary with our journey, we ungird ourselves, and dropping the traveller’s staff, sit down by the way side, we begin to look back over the road that we have traversed; for it is the way ahead that now is dark and misty, and so we turn and gaze into the depths of the past.

Then with the wide desert awaiting us in front, we are astonished, as we look along the path which we have left behind, to catch sight of first one and then another of those delicious oases of verdure and shade, beside which we never thought of lingering for a moment, and which, in deed we had passed by almost without notice.

But, then, how quickly our feet carried us along in those days! we were in such a hurry to reach that goal of happiness, to which no road has ever yet brought any one of us.

It is at this point that we begin to see how blind and ungrateful we have been; it is now that we say to ourselves, if we could but once more come across such a green and wooded resting-place, we would stay there for the rest of our lives, would pitch our tent there, and there end our days.

But the body cannot go back and renew its existence, and so memory has to make its pious pilgrimage alone; back to the early days and fresh beginnings of life it travels, like those light vessels that are borne upward by their white sails against the current of a river. Then the body once more pursues its journey; but the body without memory is as the night without stars, as the lamp without its flame ... And so body and memory go their several ways.

The body, with chance for its guide, moves towards the unknown.

Memory, that bright will-o'-the-wisp, hovers over the landmarks that are left behind; and memory, we may be sure, will not lose her way. Every oasis is revisited, every association recalled, and then with a rapid flight she returns to the body that grows ever more and more weary, and like the humming of a bee, like the song of a bird, like the murmur of a stream, tells the tale of all that she has seen.

And as the tired traveller listens, his eyes grow bright again, his mouth smiles, and a light steals over his face. For Providence in kindness, seeing that he cannot return to youth, allows youth to return to him. And ever after he loves to repeat aloud what memory tells, him in her soft, low voice.

And is our life, then, bounded by a circle like the earth? Do we, unconsciously, continue to walk towards the spot from which we started? And as we travel nearer and nearer to the grave, do we again draw closer, ever closer, to the cradle?

II

I can not say. But what happened to myself, that much at any rate I know. At my first halt along the road of life, my first glance backwards, I began by relating the tale of Bernard and his uncle Berthelin, then the story of Ange Pitou, his fair fiance, and of Aunt Angelique; after that I told of Conscience and Mariette; and lastly of Catherine Blum and Father Vatrin.

I am now going to tell you the story of Thibault and his wolves, and of the Lord of Vez. And how, you will ask, did I become acquainted with the events which I am now about to bring before you? I will tell you.

Have you read my Memoires, and do you remember one, by name Mocquet, who was a friend of my father's?

If you have read them, you will have some vague recollection of this person age. If you have not read them, you will not remember anything about him at all.

In either case, then, it is of the first importance that I should bring Mocquet clearly before your mind's eye.

As far back as I can remember, that is when I was about three years of age, we lived, my father and mother and I, in a little Chateau called Les Fosses, situated on the boundary that separates the departments of Aisne and Oise, between Haramont and Longpre. The little house in question had doubtless been named Les Fosses on account of the deep and broad moat, filled with water, with which it was surrounded.

I do not mention my sister, for she was at school in Paris, and we only saw her once a year, when she was home for a month's holiday.

The household, apart from my father, mother and myself, consisted firstly: of a large black dog, called Truffe, who was a privileged animal and made welcome wherever he appeared, more especially as I regularly went about on his back; secondly: of a gardener, named Pierre, who kept me amply provided with frogs and snakes, two species of living creatures in which I was particularly interested; thirdly: of a negro, a valet of my father's, named Hippolyte, a sort of black merry-andrew, whom my father, I believe, only kept that he might be well primed with anecdotes wherewith to gain the advantage in his encounters with Brunei and beat his wonderful stories; fourthly: of a keeper named Mocquet, for whom I had a great admiration, seeing that he had magnificent stories to tell of ghosts and were-wolves, to which I listened every evening, and which were abruptly broken off the instant the General as my father was usually called appeared on the scene; fifthly: of a cook, who answered to the name of Marie, but this figure I can no longer recall, it is lost to me in the misty twilight of life; I remember only the name, as given to someone of whom but a shadowy outline remains in my memory, and about whom, as far as I recollect, there was nothing of a very poetic character.

Mocquet, however, is the only person that need occupy our attention for the present. Let me try to make him known to you, both as regards his personal appearance and his character.

III

Mocquet was a man of about forty years of age, short, thick-set, broad of shoulder, and sturdy of leg. His skin was burnt brown by the sun, his eyes were small and piercing, his hair grizzled, and his black whiskers met under his chin in a half circle.

As I look back, his figure rises before me, wearing a three-cornered hat, and clad in a green waistcoat with silver buttons, velveteen cord breeches, and high leathern gaiters, with a game-bag over his shoulder, his gun in his hand, and a cutty-pipe in his mouth.

Let us pause for a moment to consider this pipe, for this pipe grew to be, not merely an accessory, but an integral part of Mocquet. Nobody could remember ever having seen Mocquet without it. If by any chance Mocquet did not happen to have it in his mouth, he had it in his hand.

This pipe, having to accompany Mocquet into the heart of the thickest coverts, it was necessary that it should be of such a kind as to offer the least possible opportunity to any other solid body of bringing about its destruction; for the destruction of his old, well-coloured cutty would have been to Mocquet a loss that years alone could have repaired. Therefore the stem of Mocquet’s pipe was not more than half-an-inch long; moreover you might always wager that half that half inch at least was supplied by the quill of a feather.

This habit of never being without his pipe, which, by causing the almost entire disappearance of both canines, had hollowed out a sort of vice for itself on the left side of his mouth, between the fourth incisor and the first molar, had given rise to another of Mocquet’s habits; this was to speak with his teeth clenched, whereby a certain impression of obstinacy was conveyed by all he said. This became even more marked if Mocquet chanced at any moment to take his pipe out of his mouth, for there was nothing then to prevent the jaws closing and the teeth coming together in a way which prevented the words passing through them at all except in a sort of whistle, which was hardly intelligible.

Such was Mocquet with respect to outward appearance. In the following pages I will endeavour to give some idea of his intellectual capacity and moral qualities.

IV

Early one morning, before my father had risen, Mocquet walked into his room, and planted himself at the foot of the bed, stiff and upright as a sign-post.

“Well, Mocquet,” said my father, “what’s the matter now? what gives me the pleasure of seeing you here at this early hour?”

“The matter is, General,” replied Mocquet with the utmost gravity, “the matter is that I am nightmared.”

Mocquet had, quite unawares to himself, enriched the language with a double verb, both active and passive.

“You are nightmared?” responded my father, raising himself on his elbow. “Dear, dear, that’s a serious matter, my poor Mocquet.”

“You are right there, General.”

And Mocquet took his pipe out of his mouth, a thing he did rarely, and only on the most important occasions.

“And how long have you been nightmared?” continued my father compassionately.

“For a whole week, General.”

“And who by, Mocquet?”

“Ah! I know very well who by,” answered Mocquet, through his teeth, which were so much the more tightly closed that his pipe was in his hand, and his hand behind his back.

“And may I also know by whom?”

“By Mother Durand, of Haramont, who, as you will have heard, is an old witch.”

“No, indeed, I assure you I had no idea of such a thing.”

“Ah! but I know it well enough; I’ve seen her riding past on her broomstick to her Witches’ Sabbath.”

“You have seen her go by on her broomstick?”

“As plainly as I see you, General; and more than that, she has an old black billy-goat at home that she worships.”

“And why should she come and nightmare you?”

“To revenge herself on me, because I came upon her once at midnight on the heath of Gondreville, when she was dancing round and round in her devil's circle."

"This is a most serious accusation which you bring against her, my friend; and before repeating to anyone what you have been telling me in private, I think it would be as well if you tried to collect some more proofs."

"Proofs! What more proofs do I want! Does not every soul in the village know that in her youth she was the Mistress of Thibault, the wolf-leader?"

"Indeed! I must look carefully into this matter, Mocquet."

"I am looking very carefully into it myself, and she shall pay for it, the old mole!"

Old mole was an expression that Mocquet had borrowed from his friend Pierre, the gardener, who, as he had no worse enemies to deal with than moles, gave the name of mole to everything and everybody that he particularly detested.

"I *must* look carefully into this matter" these words were not said by my father by reason of any belief he had in the truth of Mocquet's tale about his nightmare; and even the fact of the nightmare being admitted by him, he gave no credence to the idea that it was Mother Durand who had nightmared the keeper. Far from it; but my father was not ignorant of the superstitions of the people, and he knew that belief in spells was still widespread among the peasantry in the country districts. He had heard of terrible acts of revenge carried out by the victims on some man or woman who they thought had bewitched them, in the belief that the charm would thus be broken; and Mocquet, while he stood denouncing Mother Durand to my father, had had such an accent of menace in his voice, and had given such a grip to his gun, that my father thought it wise to appear to agree with everything he said, in order to gain his confidence and so prevent him doing anything without first consulting him.

V

So, thinking that he had so far gained an influence over Mocquet, my father ventured to say:

"But before you make her pay for it, my good Mocquet, you ought to be quite sure that no one can cure you of your nightmare."

"No one can cure me, General," replied Mocquet in a tone of conviction.

"How! No one able to cure you?"

"No one; I have tried the impossible."

"And how did you try?"

"First of all, I drank a large bowl of hot wine before going to bed."

"And who recommended that remedy? was it Monsieur Lecosse?" Monsieur Lecosse was the doctor in repute at Villers-Cotterets.

"Monsieur Lecosse?" exclaimed Mocquet. "No, indeed! What should he know about spells! By my faith, no! it was not Monsieur Lecosse."

"Who was it, then?"

"It was the shepherd of Longpre."

"But a bowl of wine, you dunderhead! Why, you must have been dead drunk."

"The shepherd drank half of it."

"I see; now I understand why he prescribed it. And did the bowl of wine have any effect?"

"Not any, General; she came trampling over my chest that night, just as if I had taken nothing."

"And what did you do next? You were not obliged, I suppose, to limit your efforts to your bowl of hot wine?"

"I did what I do when I want to catch a wily beast."

Mocquet made use of a phraseology which was all his own; no one had ever succeeded in inducing him to say a wild beast; every time my father said wild beast, Mocquet would answer, "Yes, General, I know, a wily beast"

"You still stick to your wily beast, then?" my father said to him on one occasion.

"Yes, General, but not out of obstinacy."

"And why then, may I ask?"

"Because, General, with all due respect to you, you are mistaken about it."

"Mistaken? I? How?"

"Because you ought not to say a wild beast, but a wily beast."

"And what is a wily beast, Mocquet?"

"It is an animal that only goes about at night; that is, an animal that creeps into the pigeon-houses and kills the pigeons, like the pole-cat, or into the chicken-houses, to kill the chickens, like the fox; or into the folds, to kill the sheep, like the wolf; it means an animal which is cunning and deceitful, in short, a wily beast.”

It was impossible to find anything to say after such a logical definition as this. My father, therefore, remained silent, and Mocquet, feeling that he had gained a victory, continued to call wild beasts, wily beasts, utterly unable to understand my father’s obstinacy in continuing to call wily beasts, wild beasts.

So now you understand why, when my father asked him what else he had done, Mocquet answered, “I did what I do when I want to catch a wily beast.”

We have interrupted the conversation to give this explanation; but as there was no need of explanation between my father and Mocquet, they had gone on talking, you must understand, without any such break.

VI

“*And* what is it you do, Mocquet, when you want to catch this animal of yours?” asked my father.

“I set a trarp, General.” Mocquet always called a trap a trarp.

“Do you mean to tell me you have set a trap to catch Mother Durand?”

My father had of course said trap; but Mocquet did not like anyone to pronounce words differently from himself, so he went on:

“Just so, General; I have set a trarp for Mother Durand.”

“And where have you put your trarp? Outside your door?”

My father, you see, was willing to make concessions.

“Outside my door! Much good that would be! I only know she gets into my room, but I cannot even guess which way she comes.”

“Down the chimney, perhaps?”

“There is no chimney, and besides, I never see her until I feel her.”

“And you do see her, then?”

“As plainly I see you, General.”

“And what does she do?”

“Nothing agreeable, you may be sure; she tramples all over my chest: thud, thud! thump, thump!”

“Well, where have you set your trap, then?”

“The trarp, why, I put it on my own stomach.”

“And what kind of a trarp did you use?”

“Oh! a first-rate trarp!”

“What was it?”

“The one I made to catch the grey wolf with, that used to kill M. Destournelles sheep.”

“Not such a first-rate one, then, for the grey wolf ate up your bait, and then bolted.”

“You know why he was not caught, General.”

“No, I do not.”

“Because it was the black wolf that belonged to old Thibault, the sabot-maker.”

“It could not have been Thibault’s black wolf, for you said yourself just this moment that the wolf that used to come and kill M. Destournelles sheep was a grey one.”

“He is grey now, General; but thirty years ago, when Thibault the sabot-maker was alive, he was black; and, to assure you of the truth of this, look at my hair, which was black as a raven’s thirty years ago, and now is as grey as the Doctor’s.”

The Doctor was a cat, an animal of some fame, that you will find mentioned in my Memoires and known as the Doctor on account of the magnificent fur which nature had given it for a coat.

“Yes,” replied my father, “I know your tale about Thibault, the sabot-maker; but, if the black wolf is the devil, Mocquet, as you say he is, he would not change colour.”

“Not at all, General; only it takes him a hundred years to become quite white, and the last midnight of every hundred years, he turns black as a coal again.”

“I give up the case, then, Mocquet: all I ask is, that you will not tell my son this fine tale of yours, until he is fifteen at least.”

“And why, General?”

“Because it is no use stuffing his mind with nonsense of that kind, until he is old enough to laugh at wolves, whether they are white, grey or black.”

“It shall be as you say, General; he shall hear nothing of this matter.”

“Go on, then.”

“Where had we got to, General?”

"We had got to your trarp, which you had put on your stomach, and you were saying that it was a first-rate trarp"

"By my faith, General, that was a first-rate trarp!" It weighed a good ten pounds. What am I saying! fifteen pounds at least with its chain!

I put the chain over my wrist.

"And what happened that night?"

"That night? why, it was worse than ever! Generally, it was in her leather overshoes she came and kneaded my chest, but that night she came in her wooden sabots."

"And she comes like this...?"

"Every blessed one of God's nights, and it is making me quite thin; you can see for yourself, General, I am growing as thin as a lath. However, this morning I made up my mind."

"And what did you decide upon, Mocquet?"

"Well, then, I made up my mind I would let fly at her with my gun."

"That was a wise decision to come to. And when do you think of carrying it out?"

"This evening, or to-morrow at latest, General."

"Confound it! And just as I was wanting to send you over to Villers-Hellon."

"That won't matter, General. Was it something that you wanted done at once?"

"Yes, at once."

"Very well, then, I can go over to Villers-Hellon, it's not above a few miles, if I go through the wood and get back here this evening; the journey both ways is only twenty-four miles, and we have covered a few more than that before now out shooting, General."

"That's settled, then; I will write a letter for you to give to M. Collard, and then you can start."

"I will start, General, without a moment's delay."

My father rose, and wrote to M. Collard; the letter was as follows:

"My *dear Collard*,

"I am sending you that idiot of a keeper of mine, whom you know; he has taken into his head that an old woman nightmares him every night, and, to rid himself of this vampire, he intends nothing more nor less than to kill her.

"Justice, however, might not look favourably on this method of his for curing himself of indigestion, and so I am going to start him off to you on a pretext of some kind or other. Will you, also, on some pretext or other, send him on, as soon as he gets to you, to Danre, at Vouty, who will send him on to Dulauloy, who, with or without pretext, may then, as far as I care, send him on to the devil?

"In short, he must be kept going for a fortnight at least. By that time we shall have moved out of here and shall be at Antilly, and as he will then no longer be in the district of Haramont, and as his nightmare will probably have left him on the way, Mother Durand will be able to sleep in peace, which I should certainly not advise her to do if Mocquet were remaining anywhere in her neighbourhood."

"He is bringing you six brace of snipe and a hare, which we shot while out yesterday on the marshes of Vallue.

"A thousand-and-one of my tenderest remembrances to the fair Herminie, and as many kisses to the dear little Caroline.

"Your friend,

"ALEX. *Dumas*."

An hour later Mocquet was on his way, and, at the end of three weeks, he rejoined us at Antilly.

"Well," asked my father, seeing him reappear in robust health, "well, and how about Mother Durand?"

"Well, General," replied Mocquet cheerfully, "I've got rid of the old mole; it seems she has no power except in her own district."

VII

TWELVE years had passed since Mocquet's nightmare, and I was now over fifteen years of age. It was the winter of sixty-six; ten years before that date I had, alas! lost my father.

We no longer had a Pierre for gardener, a Hippolyte for valet, or a Mocquet for keeper; we no longer lived at the Chateau of Les Fosses or in the villa at Antilly, but in the market-place of Villers Cotterets, in a little house opposite the fountain, where my mother kept a bureau de tabac, selling powder and shot as well over the same counter.

As you have already read in my Memoires" although still young, I was an enthusiastic sportsman. As far as sport went, however, that is according to the usual acceptation of the word, I had none, except when my cousin, M.

Deviolaine, the ranger of the forest at Villers-Cotterets, was kind enough to ask leave of my mother to take me with him. I filled up the remainder of my time with poaching.

For this double function of sportsman and poacher I was well provided with a delightful single-barrelled gun, on which was engraven the monogram of the Princess Borghese, to whom it had originally belonged. My father had given it me when I was a child, and when, after his death, everything had to be sold, I implored so urgently to be allowed to keep my gun, that it was not sold with the other weapons, and the horses and carriages.

The most enjoyable time for me was the winter; then the snow lay on the ground, and the birds, in their search for food, were ready to come wherever grain was sprinkled for them. Some of my father's old friends had fine gardens, and I was at liberty to go and shoot the birds there as I liked. So I used to sweep the snow away, spread some grain, and, hiding myself within easy gun-shot, fire at the birds, sometimes killing six, eight, or even ten at a time.

Then, if the snow lasted, there was another thing to look forward to, the chance of tracing a wolf to its lair, and a wolf so traced was everybody's property. The wolf, being a public enemy, a murderer beyond the pale of the law, might be shot at by all or anyone, and so, in spite of my mother's cries, who dreaded the double danger for me, you need not ask if I seized my gun, and was first on the spot ready for sport.

The winter of 1817 to 1818 had been long and severe; the snow was lying a foot deep on the ground, and so hard frozen that it had held for a fortnight past, and still there were no tidings of anything.

Towards four o'clock one afternoon Mocquet called upon us; he had come to lay in his stock of powder. While so doing, he looked at me and winked with one eye. When he went out, I followed.

"What is it, Mocquet?" I asked, "tell me."

"Can't you guess, Monsieur Alexandre?"

"No, Mocquet."

"You don't guess, then, that if I come and buy powder here from Madame, your mother, instead of going to Haramont for it, in short, if I walk three miles instead of only a quarter that distance, that I might possibly have a bit of a shoot to propose to you?"

"Oh, you good Mocquet! and what and where?"

“There’s a wolf, Monsieur Alexandre.”

“Not really?”

“He carried off one of M. Destournelles’ sheep last night, I have traced him to the Tillet woods.”

“And what then?”

“Why then, I am certain to see him again to-night, and shall find out where his lair is, and to-morrow morning we’ll finish his business for him.”

“Oh, this is luck!”

“Only, we must first ask leave...”

“Of whom, Mocquet?”

“Leave of Madame.”

“All right, come in, then, we will ask her at once.”

My mother had been watching us through the window; she suspected that some plot was hatching between us.

“I have no patience with you, Mocquet,” she said, as we went in, “you have no sense or discretion.”

“In what way, Madame?” asked Mocquet.

“To go exciting him in the way you do; he thinks too much of sport as it is.”

“Nay, Madame, it is with him, as with dogs of breed; his father was a sports man, he is a sportsman, and his son will be a sportsman after him; you must make up your mind to that.”

“And supposing some harm should come to him?”

“Harm come to him with me? With Mocquet? No, indeed! I will answer for it with my own life, that he shall be safe. Harm happen to him, to him, the General’s son? Never, never, never!”

But my poor mother shook her head; I went to her and flung my arms round her neck.

“Mother, dearest,” I cried, “please let me go.”

“You will load his gun for him, then, Mocquet?”

“Have no fear, sixty grains of powder, not a grain more or less, and a twenty to the pound bullet.”

“And you will not leave him?”

“I will stay by him like his shadow.”

“You will keep him near you?”

“Between my legs.”

“I give him into your sole charge, Mocquet.”

“And he shall be given back to you safe and sound. Now, Monsieur Alexandre, gather up your traps, and let us be off; your mother has given her permission.”

“You are not taking him away this evening, Mocquet.”

“I must, Madame, to-morrow morning will be too late to fetch him; we must hunt the wolf at dawn.”

“The wolf! it is for a wolf-hunt that you are asking for him to go with you?”

“Are you afraid that the wolf will eat him?”

“Mocquet! Mocquet!”

“But when I tell you that I will be answerable for everything!”

“And where will the poor child sleep?”

“With father Mocquet, of course, he will have a good mattress laid on the floor, and sheets white as those which God has spread over the fields, and two good warm coverlids; I promise you that he shall not catch cold.”

“I shall be all right, mother, you may be sure! Now then, Mocquet, I am ready.”

“And you don’t even give me a kiss, you poor boy, you!”

“Indeed, yes, dear mother, and a good many more than one!”

And I threw myself on my mother’s neck, stifling her with my caresses as I clasped her in my arms.”

“And when shall I see you again?”

“Oh, do not be uneasy if he does not return before to-morrow evening.”

“How, to-morrow evening! and you spoke of starting at dawn!”

“At dawn for the wolf; but if we miss him, the lad must have a shot or two at the wild ducks on the marshes of Vallue.”

“I see! you are going to drown him for me!”

“By the name of all that’s good, Madame, if I was not speaking to the General’s widow I should say”

“What Mocquet? What would you say?”

“That you will make nothing but a wretched milksop of your boy ... If the General’s mother had been always behind him, pulling at his coat-tails, as you are behind this child, he would never even have had the courage to cross the sea to France.”

“You are right, Mocquet! take him away! I am a poor fool.”

And my mother turned aside, to wipe away a tear.

A mother's tear, that heart's diamond, more precious than all the pearls of Ophir! I saw it running down her cheek. I ran to the poor woman, and whispered to her, "Mother, if you like, I will stay at home."

"No, no, go, my child," she said, "Mocquet is right; you must, sooner or later, learn to be a man."

I gave her another last kiss; then I ran after Mocquet, who had already started.

After I had gone a few paces, I looked round; my mother had run into the middle of the road, that she might keep me in sight as long as possible; it was my turn now to wipe away a tear.

"How now?" said Mocquet," you crying too, Monsieur Alexandre!"

"Nonsense, Mocquet! it's only the cold makes my eyes run."

But Thou, O God, who gavest me that tear, Thou knowest that it was not because of the cold that I was crying.

VIII

It was pitch dark when we reached Mocquet's house. We had a savoury omelette and stewed rabbit for supper, and then Mocquet made my bed ready for me. He kept his word to my mother, for I had a good mattress, two white sheets and two good warm coverlids.

"Now," said Mocquet, "tuck yourself in there, and go to sleep; we may probably have to be off at four o'clock to-morrow morning."

"At any hour you like, Mocquet."

"Yes, I know, you are a capital riser over night, and to-morrow morning I shall have to throw a jug of cold water over you to make you get up."

"You are welcome to do that, Mocquet, if you have to call me twice."

"Well, we'll see about that."

"Are you in a hurry to go to sleep, Mocquet?"

"Why, whatever do you want me to do at this hour of the night?"

"I thought, perhaps, Mocquet, you would tell me one of those stories that I used to find so amusing when I was a child."

"And who is going to get up for me at two o'clock to-morrow, if I sit telling you tales till midnight? Our good priest, perhaps?"

"You are right, Mocquet."

"It's fortunate you think so!"

So I undressed and went to bed. Five minutes later Mocquet was snoring like a bass viol.

I turned and twisted for a good two hours before I could get to sleep. How many sleepless nights have I not passed on the eve of the first shoot of the season! At last, towards midnight fatigue gained the mastery over me. A sudden sensation of cold awoke me with a start at four o'clock in the morning; I opened my eyes. Mocquet had thrown my bed-clothes off over the foot of the bed, and was standing beside me, leaning both hands on his gun, his face beaming out upon me, as, at every fresh puff of his short pipe, the light from it illuminated his features.

"Well, how have you got on, Mocquet?"

"He has been tracked to his lair."

"The wolf? and who tracked him?"

"This foolish old Mocquet."

"Bravo!"

"But guess where he has chosen to take covert, this most accommodating of good wolves!"

"Where was it then, Mocquet?"

"If I gave you a hundred chances you wouldn't guess! in the Three Oaks Covert."

"We've got him, then?"

"I should rather think so."

The Three Oaks Covert is a patch of trees and undergrowth, about two acres in extent, situated in the middle of the plain of Largny, about five hundred paces from the forest.

"And the keepers?" I went on.

"All had notice sent them," replied Mocquet; "Moynat, Mildet, Vatrin, Lafeuille, all the best shots in short, are waiting in readiness just outside the forest. You and I, with Monsieur Charpentier, from Vallue, Monsieur Hochedez, from Largny, Monsieur Destournelles, from Les Fosses, are to surround the Covert; the dogs will be slipped, the field-keeper will go with them, and we shall have him, that's certain."

"You'll put me in a good place, Mocquet?"

"Haven't I said that you will be near me; but you must get up first."

"That's true Brrou!"

"And I am going to have pity on your youth and put a bundle of wood in the fire-place.";

"I didn't dare ask for it; but, on my word of honour, it will be kind of you if you will."

Mocquet went out and brought in an armful of wood from the timber-yard, and threw it on to the hearth, poking it down with his foot; then he threw a lighted match among the twigs, and in another moment the clear bright flames were dancing and crackling up the chimney. I went and sat on the stool by the fireside, and there dressed myself; you may be sure that I was not long over my toilette; even Mocquet was astonished at my celerity.

"Now, then," he said, "a drop of this, and then off!" And saying this, he filled two small glasses with a yellowish coloured liquor, which did not require any tasting on my part to recognize.

"You know I never drink brandy, Mocquet."

"Ah, you are your father's son, all over! What will you have, then?"

"Nothing, Mocquet, nothing."

"You know the proverb: 'Leave the house empty; the devil will be there.' Believe me, you had better put something into your stomach, while I load your gun, for I must keep my promise to that poor mother of yours."

"Well, then, I will have a crust of bread and a glass of pignolet." Pignolet is a light wine made in non-winegrowing districts, generally said to require three men to drink it, one to drink, and two to hold him; I was, however, pretty well accustomed to pigrolet, and could drink it up without help. So I swallowed my glass of wine while Mocquet loaded my gun.

"What are you doing, Mocquet?" I asked him.

"Making a cross on your bullet," he replied. "As you will be near me, we shall probably let fly together, and, although I know you would give me up your share, still, for the glory of it, it will be as well to know which of us killed him, if the wolf falls. So, mind you aim straight."

"I'll do my best, Mocquet."

"Here's your gun, then, loaded for bird-shooting; and now, gun over your shoulder, and off we start."

IX

The meeting-place was on the road leading to Chavigny. Here we found the keepers and some of the huntsmen, and within another ten minutes those who were missing had also joined us. Before five o'clock struck, our number was complete, and then we held a council of war to decide our further proceedings. It was finally arranged that we should first take up our position round the Three Oaks Covert at some considerable distance from it, and then gradually advance so as to form a cordon round it. Everything was to be done with the utmost silence, it being well known that wolves decamp on hearing the slightest noise. Each of us was ordered to look carefully along the path he followed, to make quite sure that the wolf had not left the covert. Meanwhile the field-keeper was holding Mocquet's hounds in leash.

One by one we took our stand facing the covert, on the spot to which our particular path had conducted us. As it happened, Mocquet and I found ourselves on the north side of the warren, which was parallel with the forest.

Mocquet had rightly said that we should be in the best place, for the wolf would in all probability try and make for the forest, and so would break covert on our side of it.

We took our stand, each in front of an oak tree, fifty paces apart from one another, and then we waited, without moving, and hardly daring to breathe. The dogs on the farther side of the warren were now uncoupled; they gave two short barks, and were then silent. The keeper followed them into the covert, calling halloo as he beat the trees with his stick. But the dogs, their eyes starting out of their heads, their lips drawn back, and their coats bristling, remained as if nailed to the ground. Nothing would induce them to move a step further.

"Halloa, Mocquet!" cried the keeper, "this wolf of yours must be an extra plucky one, Rocador and Tombelle refuse to tackle him."

But Mocquet was too wise to make any answer, for the sound of his voice would have warned the wolf that there were enemies in that direction.

The keeper went forward, still beating the trees, the two dogs after him cautiously advancing step by step, without a bark, only now and then giving a low growl.

All of a sudden there was a loud exclamation from the keeper, who called out, "I nearly trod on his tail! the wolf! the wolf! Look out, Mocquet, look out!"

And at that moment something came rushing towards us, and the animal leapt out of the covert, passing between us like a flash of lightning. It was an enormous wolf, nearly white with age. Mocquet turned and sent two bullets after him; I saw them bound and rebound along the snow.

“Shoot, shoot!” he called out to me.

Only then did I bring my gun to the shoulder; I took aim, and fired; the wolf made a movement as if he wanted to bite his shoulder.

“We have him! we have him!” cried Mocquet, “the lad has hit his mark! Success to the innocent!”

But the wolf ran on, making straight for Moynat and Mildet, the two best shots in the country round.

Both their first shots were fired at him in the open; the second, after he had entered the forest.

The two first bullets were seen to cross one another, and ran along the ground, sending up spurts of snow; the wolf had escaped them both, but he had no doubt been struck down by the others; that the two keepers who had just fired should miss their aim, was an un-heard of thing. I had seen Moynat kill seventeen snipe one after the other; I had seen Mildet cut a squirrel in two as he was jumping from tree to tree.

The keepers went into the forest after the wolf; we looked anxiously towards the spot where they had disappeared. We saw them reappear, dejected, and shaking their heads.

“Well?” cried Mocquet interrogatively.

“Bah!” answered Mildet, with an impatient movement of his arm, “he’s at Taille-Fontaine by this time.”

“At Taille-Fontaine!” exclaimed Mocquet, completely taken aback. “What! the fools have gone and missed him, then!”

“Well, what of that? you missed him yourself, did you not?”

Mocquet shook his head.

“Well, well, there’s some devilry about this,” he said. “That I should miss him was surprising, but it was perhaps possible; but that Moynat should have shot twice and missed him is not possible, no, I say, no.”

“Nevertheless, so it is, my good Mocquet.”

“Besides, you, you hit him,” he said to me.

“I... are you sure?”

“We others may well be ashamed to say it. But as sure as my name is Mocquet, you hit the wolf.”

“Well, it’s easy to find out if I did hit him, there would be blood on the snow. Come, Mocquet, let us run and see.” And suiting the action to the word, I set off running.

“Stop, stop, do not run, whatever you do,” cried Mocquet, clenching his teeth and stamping. “We must go quietly, until we know better what we have to deal with.”

“Well, we will go quietly, then; but at any rate, let us go!”

Mocquet then began to follow the wolfs track, step by step.

“There’s not much fear of losing it,” I said.

“It’s plain enough.”

“Yes, but that’s not what I am looking for.”

“What are you looking for, then?”

“You will know in a minute or two.”

The other huntsmen had now joined us, and as they came along after us, the keeper related to them what had taken place. Meanwhile, Mocquet and I continued to follow the wolfs footprints, which were deeply indented in the snow. At last we came to the spot where he had received my fire.

“There, Mocquet,” I said to him, “you see I did miss him after all!”

“How do you know that you missed him?”

“Because there are no blood marks.”

“Look for the mark of your bullet, then, in the snow.”

I looked to see which way my bullet would have sped if it had not hit the wolf, and then went in that direction; but I tracked for more than a quarter of a mile to no purpose, so I thought I might as well go back to Mocquet. He beckoned to the keepers to approach, and then turning to me, said:

“Well, and the bullet?”

“I cannot find it.”

“I have been luckier than you, then, for I have found it.”

“What, you found it?”

“Right about and come behind me.”

I did as I was told, and the huntsmen having come up, Mocquet pointed out a line to them beyond which they were not to pass. The keepers Mildet and Moynat now joined us. “Well?” said Mocquet to them in their turn.

“Missed,” they both answered at once.

“I saw you had missed him in the open, but when he had reached covert...?”

“Missed him there too.”

“Are you sure?”

“Both the bullets have been found, each of them in the trunk of a tree.”

"It is almost past belief," said Vatrin.

"Yes," rejoined Mocquet, "it is almost past belief, but I have something to show you which is even more difficult to believe."

"Show it us, then."

"Look there, what do you see on the snow?"

"The track of a wolf; what of that?"

"And close to the mark of the right foot there what do you see?"

"A little hole."

"Well, do you understand?"

The keepers looked at each other in astonishment.

"Do you understand now?" repeated Mocquet.

"The thing's impossible!" exclaimed the keepers.

Nevertheless it is so, and I will prove it to you."

And so saying, Mocquet plunged his hand into the snow, felt about a moment or two, and then, with a cry of triumph, pulled out a flattened bullet.

"Why, that's my bullet," I said.

"You recognise it, then?"

"Of course I do, you marked it for me."

"And what mark did I put on it?"

"A cross."

"You see, sirs," said Mocquet.

"Yes, but explain how this happened."

"This is it; he could turn aside the ordinary bullets, but he had no power over the youngster's, which was marked with a cross; it hit him in the shoulder, I saw him make a movement as if to try and bite himself."

"But," I broke in, astonished at the silence and amazement which had fallen on the keepers, "if my bullet hit him in the shoulder, why did it not kill him?"

"Because it was made neither of gold nor of silver, my dear boy; and because no bullets but those that are made of gold or silver can pierce the skin of the devil, or kill those who have made a compact with him."

"But, Mocquet," said the keepers, shuddering, "do you really think...?"

"Think? Yes, I do! I could swear that we have had to do this morning with Thibault, the sabot-maker's wolf."

The huntsman and keepers looked at one another; two or three of them made the sign of the cross; and they all appeared to share Mocquet's opinion, and to know quite well what he meant by Thibault’s wolf. I, alone, knew nothing about it, and therefore asked impatiently, “What is this wolf, and who is this Thibault, the sabot-maker?”

Mocquet hesitated before replying, then, “Ah! to be sure!” he exclaimed,” the General told me that I might let you know about it when you were fifteen. You are that age now, are you not?”

“I am sixteen,” I replied with some pride.

“Well, then, my dear Monsieur Alexandre, Thibault, the sabot-maker’s wolf, is the devil. You were asking me last night for a tale, were you not?”

“Yes.”

“Come back home with me this morning, then, and I will tell you a tale, and a fine one too.”

The keepers and huntsmen shook hands with one another in silence and separated, each going his own way; I went back with Mocquet, who then told me the tale which you shall now hear.

Perhaps you will ask me why, having heard it so long ago, I have not told it before. I can only answer you by saying it has remained hidden away in a drawer of my memory, which has remained closed ever since, and which I only opened again three days ago. I would tell you what induced me to do this, but you might, I fear, find the recital somewhat tedious, and as it would take time, I prefer starting at once upon my tale.

I say my tale; I ought perhaps to call it Mocquet’s tale but, upon my word! when you have been sitting on an egg for thirty-eight years, you may be excused for coming to believe at last that you’ve laid it yourself!

CHAPTER I

THE GRAND MASTER OF HIS HIGHNESS' WOLF HOUNDS

The Seigneur Jean, Baron of Vez, was a hardy and indefatigable sportsman. If you follow the beautiful valley which runs between Berval and Longpre, you will see, on your left hand, an old tower, which by reason of its isolated position will appear doubly high and formidable to you.

At the present moment it belongs to an old friend of the writer of this tale, and everyone is now so accustomed to its for bidding aspect, that the peasant passing that way in summer has no more fear of seeking shelter from the heat beneath its walls than the martins with their long, black wings and shrill cries, and the swallows with their soft chirrupings, have of building their nests under its eaves.

But at the time we are now speaking of, somewhere about 1780, this lordly dwelling of Vez was looked upon with different eyes, and, it must be confessed, it did not then offer so safe a place of retreat. It was a building of the twelfth or thirteenth century, rugged and gloomy, its terrifying exterior having assumed no kindlier aspect as the years rolled by. True, the sentinel with his measured tread and flashing steel-cap no longer paced its ramparts, the archer with his shrill-sounding horn no longer kept watch and ward on the battlements; true the postern was no longer guarded by true men at arms, ready at the least signal of danger to lower the portcullis and draw up the bridge; but the solitude alone which surrounded this grim giant of granite was sufficient to inspire the feeling of awe-inspiring majesty awakened by all mute and motionless things.

The lord of this old fortress, however, was by no means so much to be dreaded; those who were more intimately acquainted with him than were the peasants, and could do him more justice, asserted that his bark was worse than his bite, and that he caused more fear than harm that is, among his fellow Christians. With the animals of the forest it was different, for he was avowedly their mortal and implacable enemy.

He was chief wolf-hunter to his Royal Highness Louis Philippe of Orleans, the fourth of that name, a post which allowed him to gratify the inordinate passion he had for the chase. Although it was not easy, it was yet possible to bring the Baron to listen to reason in other matters; but as regards the chase, if once he had got a fixed idea in his head, nothing would satisfy him until he had carried it out and had achieved his purpose.

His wife, according to report, was the natural daughter of the Prince, which, in conjunction with his title of chief wolf-hunter, gave him almost absolute power throughout the domains of his illustrious father-in-law, a power which no one dared to contest with him, especially after the re-marriage of his Royal Highness with Madame de Montesson. This had taken place in 1773, since which date he had almost abandoned his castle at Villers-Cotterets for his delightful residence at Bagnolet, where he entertained all the first wits of the day and amused himself with play-acting.

And so, whether the sun was shining to rejoice the earth, or the rain was saddening it, whether the winter fields lay hidden beneath a shroud of snow, or the spring had spread her fresh green carpet over the meadows, it was rare, on any day of the year, not to see the great gates of the Castle thrown wide open between eight and nine o'clock in the morning, and first the Baron come forth, and immediately after him his chief pricker, Marcotte, followed by the other prickers. Then appeared the dogs, coupled and held in leash by the keepers of the hounds, under the superintendence of Engoulevent, who aspired to become a pricker. Even as the German executioner walks alone, behind the nobles and in front of the citizens, to show that he is the least of the former and the first of the latter, so he walked immediately after the prickers and ahead of the keepers of the hounds, as being the chief of the whippers-in and least of the prickers.

The whole procession filed out of the castle court in full hunting array, with the English horses and the French hounds; twelve horses, and forty dogs.

Before we go any farther, let me say that with these twelve horses and forty dogs the Baron hunted every sort of quarry, but more especially the wolf, in order no doubt to do honour to his title.

No further proof will be needed by the genuine sportsman of the fine faith he had in the general quality of his hounds, and in their keenness of scent, than the fact that next to the wolf he gave preference to the boar, then to the red deer, then to the fallow-deer, and lastly to the roebuck; finally, if the keepers of the pack failed to sight the animal they had tracked, he uncoupled at random, and went after the first hare that crossed his path.

For, as we have already stated, the worthy Baron went out hunting every day, and he would sooner have gone for four-and-twenty hours without food or drink, although he was often thirsty, than have spent that time without seeing his hounds run.

But, as everybody knows, however swift the horses, and however keen the dogs, hunting has its bad times as well as its good.

One day, Marcotte came up to where the Baron was awaiting him, with a crestfallen expression of countenance.

“How now, Marcotte,” asked the Baron frowning, “what is the matter this time? I see by your face we are to expect bad sport to-day.”

Marcotte shook his head.

“Speak up, man,” continued the Baron with a gesture of impatience.

“The matter is, my Lord, that the black wolf is about.”

“Ah! ah!” exclaimed the Baron, his eyes sparkling; for you must know that this made the fifth or sixth time that the worthy Baron had started the animal in question, but never once had he been able to get within gun-shot of him or to run him down.

“Yes,” Marcotte went on, “but the damned beast has employed himself so well all night crossing his track and doubling, that after having traced him over half the forest, I found myself at the place from which I started.”

“You think then, Marcotte, that there is no chance of getting near him.”

“I am afraid not.”

“By all the devils in hell! exclaimed the Lord of Vez, who had not had his equal in swearing since the mighty Nimrod, “however, I am not feeling well to-day, and I must have a burst of some kind, to get rid of these bad humours. What do you think we can hunt, Marcotte, in place of this damned black wolf?”

“Well, having been so taken up with the wolf,” answered Marcotte, “I have not traced any other animal. Will my Lord uncouple at random and hunt the first animal that we come across?”

The Baron was about to express his willingness to agree to this proposal when he caught sight of little Engoulevent coming towards them cap in hand.

“Wait a moment,” he said, “here comes Engoulevent, who, I fancy, has some advice to give us.”

“I have no advice to give to a noble Lord like yourself,” replied Engoulevent, assuming an expression of humility on his sly and crafty face;

"it is, however, my duty to inform you that there is a splendid buck in the neighbourhood."

"Let us see your buck, Engoulevent," replied the chief wolf-hunter, "and if you are not mistaken about it, there will be a new crown for you."

"Where is this buck of yours?" asked Marcotte, "but look to your skin, if you make us uncouple to no purpose."

"Let me have Matador and Jupiter, and then we shall see." Matador and Jupiter were the finest among the hounds belonging to the Lord of Vez. And indeed, Engoulevent had not gone a hundred paces with them through the thicket, before, by the lashing of their tails, and their repeated yelping, he knew that they were on the right scent. In another minute or two a magnificent ten-tined stag came into view. Marcotte cried Tally-ho, sounded his horn, and the hunt began, to the great satisfaction of the Lord of Vez, who, although regretting the black wolf, was willing to make the best of a fine buck in its stead. The hunt had lasted two hours, and the quarry still held on. It had first led its pursuers from the little wood of Haramont to the Chemin du Pendu, and thence straight to the back of Oigny, and it still showed no sign of fatigue; for it was not one of those poor animals of the flat country who get their tails pulled by every wretched terrier.

As it neared the low grounds of Bourg-Fontaine, however, it evidently decided that it was being run rather hard, for it gave up the bolder measures which had hitherto enabled it to keep ahead, and began to double.

Its first manoeuvre was to go down to the brook which joins the ponds of Baisemont and Bourg, then to walk against stream with the water up to its haunches, for nearly half a mile; it then sprang on to the right bank, back again into the bed of the stream, made another leap to the left, and with a succession of bounds, as vigorous as its failing strength allowed, continued to out-distance its pursuers. But the dogs of my lord Baron were not animals to be put out by such trifles as these. Being both sagacious and well-bred, they, of their own accord, divided the task between themselves, half going up stream, and half down, these hunting on the right those on the left, and so effectually that they ere long put the animal off its changes, for they soon recovered the scent, rallying at the first cry given by one of the pack, and starting afresh on the chase, as ready and eager as if the deer had been only twenty paces in front of them.

And so with galloping of horses, with cry of hounds and blare of horn, the Baron and his huntsmen reached the ponds of Saint Antoine, a hundred paces or so from the Confines of Oigny. Between these and the Osier-beds stood the hut of Thibault, the sabot-maker.

We must pause to give some description of this Thibault, the shoe-maker, the real hero of the tale.

You will ask why I, who have summoned kings to appear upon the stage, who have obliged princes, dukes, and barons to play secondary parts in my romances, should take a simple shoe-maker for the hero of this tale.

First, I will reply by saying that, in my dear home country of Villers-Cotterets, there are more sabot-makers than barons, dukes and princes, and that, as soon as I decided to make the forest the scene of the events I am about to record, I was obliged to choose one of the actual inhabitants of this forest as hero, unless I had wished to represent such fantastic persons as the Incas of Marmontel or the Abencerages of M. de Florian.

More than that, it is not the author who decides on the subject, but the subject which takes possession of the author, and, good or bad, this particular subject has taken possession of me. I will therefore endeavour to draw Thibault's portrait for you, plain shoe-maker as he was, as exactly as the artist paints the portrait which a prince desires to send to his lady-love.

Thibault was a man between twenty-five and twenty-seven years of age, tall, well made, physically robust, but by nature melancholy and sad of heart. This depression of spirits arose from a little grain of envy, which, in spite of himself, perhaps unconsciously to himself, he harboured towards all such of his neighbours as had been more favoured by fortune than himself.

His father had committed a fault, a serious one at all times, but more especially in those days of absolutism, when a man was not able to rise above his station as now-a-days, when with sufficient capacity he may attain to any rank. Thibault had been educated above his position; he had been at school under the Abbe Fortier, at Villers-Cotterets, and had learnt to read, write, and cypher; moreover he knew a little Latin, which made him inordinately proud of himself. Thibault had spent a great part of his time in reading, and his books had been chiefly those which were in vogue at the close of the preceding century. But he had not been a sufficiently clever analyst to know how to separate the good from the bad, or rather he had separated what was bad, and swallowed it in large doses, leaving the good to precipitate itself at the bottom of the glass.

At twenty years of age Thibault had certainly had dreams of being something other than a sabot-maker. He had, for instance, for a very little while, cast his eyes towards the army. But his comrades who had worn the double livery of king and country, had left the service as they entered it, mere soldiers of the ranks, having failed during five or six years of slavery to obtain promotion, even to the not very exalted grade of corporal.

Thibault had also thought of becoming a sailor. But a career in the navy was as much forbidden to the plebeian as one in the army. Possibly after enduring danger, and storm and battle for fifteen or twenty years, he might be made a boatswain's mate, that was all, and then! besides, it was by no means Thibault's ambition to wear a short vest and sail-cloth trousers, but the blue uniform of the king with red vest and gold epaulettes. He had moreover known of no single case in which the son of a mere shoe-maker had become Master of a Frigate, or even Lieutenant. So he was forced to give up all idea of joining the King's Navy.

Thibault would not have minded being a Notary, and at one time thought of apprenticing himself to the Royal Scrivener, Maitre Niquet, as a stepping-stone, and of making his way up on the strength of his own legs and with the help of his pen. But supposing him to have risen to the position of head clerk with a salary of a hundred crowns, where was he to find the thirty thousand francs which would be required for the purchase of the smallest village practice.

There was, therefore, no better chance of his becoming a scrivener than of be coming an officer on sea or land. Meanwhile, Thibault's father died, leaving very little ready money. There was about enough to bury him, so he was buried, and this done, there remained some thirty or forty francs over for Thibault.

Thibault knew his trade well; indeed, he was a first-rate workman; but he had no inclination to handle either auger or parer. It ended, therefore, by his leaving all his father's tools in the care of a friend, a remnant of prudence still remaining to him, and selling every vestige of furniture; having thus realised a sum of five hundred and forty livres, he determined to make what was then called the tour of France.

Thibault spent three years in travelling; he did not make his fortune during that time, but he learnt a great many things in the course of his journey of which he was previously ignorant, and acquired certain accomplishments which he had previously been without.

He learned amongst other things that, although it was as well to keep one's word on matters of business with a man, it was no use whatever keeping love vows made to a woman.

So much for his character and habits of mind. As to his external accomplishments, he could dance a jig beautifully, could hold his own at quarter-staff against four men, and could handle the boar-spear as cleverly as the best huntsman going. All these things had not a little served to increase Thibault's natural self-esteem, and, seeing himself handsomer, stronger, and cleverer than many of the nobles, he would exclaim against Providence, crying, "Why was I not nobly born? why was not that noble man yonder born a peasant?"

But as Providence took care not to make any answer to these apostrophes, and as Thibault found that dancing, playing at quarter-staff, and throwing the boar-spear only fatigued the body, without procuring him any material advantage, he began to turn his thoughts towards his ancient trade, humble though it was, saying to himself, if it enabled the father to live, it would also enable the son. So Thibault went and fetched away his tools; and then, tools in hand, he went to ask permission of the Steward of his Royal Highness Louis Philippe of Orleans, to build a hut in the forest, in which to carry on his trade. He had no difficulty in obtaining this, for the steward knew by experience that his master was a very kind-hearted man, expending as much as two hundred and forty thousand francs a year on the poor; he felt sure, therefore, that one who gave away a sum like this, would be willing to let an honest workman who wished to ply his trade, have thirty or forty feet of ground.

As he had leave to establish himself in whatever part of the forest he liked best, Thibault chose the spot near the osier-beds, where the roads crossed, one of the most beautiful parts of the woods, less than a mile from Oigny and about three times that distance from Villers-Cotterets. The shoemaker put up his work-shop, built partly of old planks given him by M. Panisis, who had been having a sale in the neighbourhood, and partly of the branches which the steward gave him leave to cut in the forest.

When the building of the hut, which consisted of a bedroom, cosily shut in, where he could work during the winter, and of a lean-to, open to the air, where he could work in the summer, was completed, Thibault began to think of making himself a bed. At first, a layer of fern had to serve for this purpose; but after he had made a hundred pairs of wooden shoes and had sold these to Bedeau, who kept a general shop at Villers-Cotterets, he was able to pay a sufficient deposit to get a mattress, to be paid for in full by the end of three months. The framework of the bed was not difficult to make; Thibault was not the shoe-maker he was without being a bit of a carpenter in to the bargain, and when this was finished he plaited osiers to take the place of sacking, laid the mattress upon them, and found himself at last with a bed to lie upon.

Little by little came the sheets, and then in their turn the coverlids; the next purchase was a chafing-dish, and earthenware pots to cook in, and finally some plates and dishes. Before the year was out Thibault had also made additions to his furniture of a fine oak chest and a fine walnut-wood cupboard, both, like the bed, his own handiwork. All the while he was driving a brisk trade, for none could beat Thibault in turning a block of beech into a pair of shoes, and in converting the odd chips into spoons, salt-cellars and natty little bowls.

He had now been settled in his work shop for three years, that is, ever since his return after the completion of his tour round France, and there was nothing for which anyone could have reproached him during this interval except the failing we have already mentioned that he was rather more envious of the good fortune of his neighbour than was altogether conducive to the welfare of his soul. But this feeling was as yet so inoffensive, that his confessor had no need to do more than awaken in him a sense of shame for harbouring thoughts which had, so far, not resulted in any active crime.

CHAPTER II

THE SEIGNEUR JEAN AND THE SABOT-MAKER

As already said, the buck began to dodge and double on reaching Oigny, turning and twisting round Thibault's hut, and the weather being fine although the autumn was well advanced, the shoemaker was sitting at his work in his open lean-to. Looking up, he suddenly espied the trembling animal, quivering in every limb, standing a few paces in front of him, gazing at him with intelligent and terrified eyes.

Thibault had been for a long time aware that the hunt was circling around Oigny, at one time drawing near to the village, and then receding, only to draw near again.

There was nothing therefore very surprising to him in the sight of the buck, yet he stayed his hand, although he was busy at work, and contemplated the animal.

"Saint Sabot!" he exclaimed I should explain, that the festival of Saint Sabot is the wooden-shoe fete "Saint Sabot! but that is a dainty morsel and would taste as fine, I warrant, as the chamois late at Vienne once at the grand banquet of the Jolly Shoemakers of Dauphine. Lucky folk who can dine on the like every day. I tasted such once, it is now nearly four years ago, and my mouth waters now when I think of it. Oh! these lords! these lords! with their fresh meats and their old wines at every meal, while I have to be satisfied with potatoes to eat and water to drink from one week's end to the other; and it is a chance if even on Sunday, I can feast myself with a lump of rusty bacon and an old cabbage, and a glass of pignolet fit to make my old goat stand on her head.

It need scarcely be said, that as soon as Thibault began this monologue, the buck had turned and disappeared. Thibault had finished rounding his periods, and had just declaimed his peroration, when he heard himself roughly accosted in forcible terms:

"Ho, there, you scoundrel! answer me."

It was the Baron, who seeing his dogs wavering, was anxious to make sure that they were not on the wrong scent.

“Ho, there, you scoundrel!” repeated the wolf-hunter, “have you seen the beast?”

There was evidently something in the manner of the Baron’s questioning which did not please our philosophical shoe-maker, for although he was perfectly aware what was the matter, he answered: “what beast?”

“Curse you! why, the buck we are hunting! He must have passed close by here, and standing gaping as you do, you must have seen him. It was a fine stag of ten, was it not? Which way did he go? Speak up, you blackguard, or you shall have a taste of my stirrup-leather!”

“The black plague take him, cub of a wolf!” muttered the shoe-maker to himself.

Then, aloud, with a fine air of pretended simplicity, “Ah, yes!” he said, “I did see him.”

“A buck, was it not? a ten-tiner, eh? With great horns.”

“Ah, yes to be sure, a buck, with great horns, or great corns, was it? yes, I saw him as plain as I see you, my Lord. But there, I can’t say if he had any corns, for I did not look at his feet, anyhow,” he added, with the air of a perfect simpleton, “if he had corns, they did not prevent him running.”

At any other time the Baron would have laughed at what he might have taken for genuine stupidity; but the doublings of the animal were beginning to put him into a regular huntsman’s fever.

“Now, then, you scoundrel, a truce to this jesting! If you are in a humour for jokes, it is more than I am!”

“I will be in whatever humour it may please your Lordship I should be.”

“Well, then, answer me.”

“Your Lordship has asked me nothing as yet.”

“Did the deer seem tired?”

“Not very.”

“Which way did he come?”

“He did not come, he was standing still.”

“Well, but he must have come from one side or the other.”

“Ah, very likely, but I did not see him come.”

“Which way did he go?”

“I would tell you directly; only I did not see him go.”

The Lord of Vez cast an angry look at Thibault.

“Is it some while ago the buck passed this way, Master Simpleton?”

“Not so very long, my Lord.”

"About how long ago?"

Thibault made as if trying to remember; at last he replied:

"It was, I think, the day before yesterday," but in saying this, the shoe-maker, unfortunately, could not suppress a grin. This grin did not escape the Baron, who, spurring his horse, rode down on Thibault with lifted whip.

Thibault was agile, and with a single bound he reached the shelter of his lean-to, whither the wolf-hunter could not follow, as long as he remained mounted; Thibault was therefore in momentary safety.

"You are only bantering and lying!" cried the huntsman, "for there is Marcassino, my best hound, giving cry not twenty yards off, and if the deer passed by where Marcassino is, he must have come over the hedge, and it is impossible, therefore, that you did not see him."

"Pardon, my Lord, but according to our good priest, no one but the Pope is infallible, and Monsieur Marcassino may be mistaken."

"Marcassino is never mistaken, do you hear, you rascal! and in proof of it I can see from here the marks where the animal scratched up the ground."

"Nevertheless, my Lord, I assure you, I swear..." said Thibault, who saw the Baron's eyebrows contracting in a way that made him feel uneasy.

"Silence, and come here, blackguard!" cried my lord.

Thibault hesitated a moment, but the black look on the sportsman's face became more and more threatening, and fearing to increase his exasperation by disobeying his command, he thought he had better go forward, hoping that the Baron merely wished to ask a service of him.

But it was an unlucky move on his part, for scarcely had he emerged from the protection of the shed, before the horse of the Lord of Vez, urged by bit and spur, gave a leap, which brought his rider swooping down upon Thibault, while at the same moment a furious blow from the butt end of the Baron's whip fell upon his head.

The shoe-maker, stunned by the blow, tottered a moment, lost his balance and was about to fall face downwards, when the Baron, drawing his foot out of the stirrup, with a violent kick in the chest, not only straightened him again, but sent the poor wretch flying in an opposite direction, where he fell with his back against the door of his hut.

"Take that" said the Baron, as he first felled Thibault with his whip, and then kicked him, "take that for your lie, and that for your banter!"

And then, without troubling himself any further about the man, whom he left lying on his back, the Lord of Vez, seeing that the hounds had rallied on hearing Marcassino's cry, gave them a cheery note on his horn, and cantered away.

Thibault lifted himself up, feeling bruised all over, and began feeling himself from head to foot to make sure that no bones were broken.

Having carefully passed his hand over each limb in succession, "that's all right," he said, "there is nothing broken either above or below, I am glad to find. So, my Lord Baron, that is how you treat people, because you happen to have married a Prince's bastard daughter! But let me tell you, my fine fellow, it is not you who will eat the buck you are hunting to-day; it will be this blackguard, this scoundrel, this simpleton of a Thibault who will eat it. Yes, it shall be I who eat it, that I vow!" cried Thibault, confirming himself more and more in his bold resolution, and it is no use being a man if having once made a vow, one fails to keep it.

So without further delay, Thibault thrust his bill-hook into his belt, seized his boar-spear, and after listening for a moment to the cry of the hounds to ascertain in which direction the hunt had gone, he ran off with all the speed of which a man's legs are capable to get the start of them, guessing by the curve which the stag and its pursuers were following what would be the straight line to take so as to intercept them.

There were two ways of doing his deed open to Thibault; either to hide himself beside the path which the buck must take and kill him with his boar-spear, or else to surprise the animal just as he was being hunted down by the dogs, and collar him there and then.

And as he ran, the desire to revenge himself on the Baron for the latter's brutality, was not so uppermost in Thibault's mind as the thoughts of the sumptuous manner in which he would fare for the next month, on the shoulders, the back, and the haunches of the deer, either salted to a turn, roasted on the spit, or cut in slices and done in the pan. And these two ideas, moreover, of vengeance and gluttony, were so jumbled up in his brain, that while still running at the top of his speed he laughed in his sleeve, as he pictured the dejected mien of the Baron and his men returning to the castle after their fruitless day's hunt, and at the same time saw himself seated at table, the door securely fastened, and a pint of wine beside him, tete-a-tete with a haunch of the deer, the rich and delicious gravy escaping as the knife returned for a third or fourth cut.

The deer, as far as Thibault could calculate, was making for the bridge which crosses the Ourcq, between Noroy and Troesne. At the time of which we are now speaking there was a bridge spanning the river, formed of two joists and a few planks. As the river was very high and very rapid, Thibault decided that the deer would not attempt to ford it; so he hid himself behind a rock, within reach of the bridge, and waited.

It was not long before he saw the graceful head of the deer appear above the rock at some ten paces' distance; the animal was bending its ears to the wind, in the endeavour to catch the sound of the enemy's approach as it was borne along the breeze. Thibault, excited by this sudden appearance, rose from behind the rock, poised his boar-spear and sent it flying towards the animal.

The buck, with a single bound, reached the middle of the bridge, a second carried him on to the opposite bank, and a third bore him out of sight.

The boar-spear had passed within a foot of the animal, and had buried itself in the grass fifteen paces from where Thibault was standing. Never before had he been known to make such an unskilful throw; he, Thibault, of all the company who made the tour of France, the one known to be surest of his aim! Enraged with himself, therefore, he picked up his weapon, and bounded across the bridge with an agility equal to that of the deer.

Thibault knew the country quite as well as the animal he was pursuing, and so got ahead of the deer and once more concealed himself, this time behind a beech-tree, half-way up, and not too far from a little footpath.

The deer now passed so close to him, that Thibault hesitated as to whether it would not be better to knock the animal down with his boar-spear than to throw the weapon at it; but his hesitation did not last longer than a flash of lightning, for no lightning could be quicker than the animal itself, which was already twenty paces off when Thibault threw his boar-spear, but without better luck than the time before.

And now the baying of the hounds was drawing nearer and nearer; another few minutes, and it would, he felt, be impossible for him to carry out his design. But in honour to his spirit of persistence, be it said, that in proportion as the difficulty increased, the greater became Thibault's desire to get possession of the deer.

"I must have it, come what will," he cried, "I must! and if there is a God who cares for the poor, I shall have satisfaction of this confounded Baron, who beat me as if I were a dog, but I am a man notwithstanding, and I am quite ready to prove the same to him." And Thibault picked up his boar-spear and once more set off running. But it would appear that the good God whom he had just invoked, either had not heard him, or wished to drive him to extremities, for his third attempt had no greater success than the previous ones.

“By Heaven!” exclaimed Thibault, “God Almighty is assuredly deaf, itseems Let the Devil then open his ears and hear me! In the name of God or of the Devil, I want you and I will have you, cursed animal!”

Thibault had hardly finished this double blasphemy when the buck, doubling back, passed close to him for the fourth time, and disappeared among the bushes, but so quickly and unexpectedly, that Thibault had not even time to lift his boar-spear.

At that moment he heard the dogs so near him, that he deemed it would be imprudent to continue his pursuit. He looked round him, saw a thickly-leaved oak tree, threw his boar-spear into a bush, swarmed up the trunk, and hid himself among the foliage. He imagined, and with good reason, that since the deer had gone ahead again, the hunt would only pass by following on its track. The dogs had not lost the scent, in spite of the quarry’s doublings, and they were not likely to lose it now. Thibault had not been seated among the branches for above five minutes, when first the hounds came into sight, then the Baron, who in spite of his fifty-five years, headed the chase as if he had been a man of twenty. It must be added that the Lord of Vez was in a state of rage that we will not even endeavour to describe.

To lose four hours over a wretched deer and still to be running behind it! Such a thing had never happened to him before.

He stormed at his men, he whipped his dogs, and had so ploughed his horse’s sides with his spurs, that the thick coating of mud which covered his gaiters was reddened with blood.

On reaching the bridge over the Ourcq, however, there had been an interval of alleviation for the Baron, for the hounds had so unanimously taken up the scent, that the cloak which the wolf-hunter carried behind him would have sufficed to cover the whole pack as they crossed the bridge.

Indeed the Baron was so pleased, that he was not satisfied with humming a tirra-la, but, unslinging his hunting-horn he sounded it with his full lung-power, a thing which he only did on great occasions.

But, unfortunately, the joy of my Lord of Vez was destined to be short lived.

All of a sudden, just as the hounds, that were crying in concert in a way which more and more delighted the Baron’s ears, were passing under the tree where Thibault was perched, the whole pack came to a standstill, and every tongue was silenced as by enchantment. Marcotte, at his master's command, dismounted to see if he could find any traces of the deer, the whippers-in ran up, and they and Marcotte looked about, but they could find nothing.

Then Engoulevent, who had set his heart on a view-halloo being sounded for the animal he had tracked down, joined the others, and he too began to search. Everyone was searching, calling out and trying to rouse the dogs, when above all the other voices, was heard, like the blast of a tempest, the voice of the Baron.

"Ten thousand devils!" he thundered.

"Have the dogs fallen into a pit-hole, Marcotte?"

"No, my Lord, they are here, but they are come to a check."

"How! come to a standstill!" exclaimed the Baron.

"What is to be done, my Lord? I cannot understand what has happened, but such is the fact."

"Come to a check!" again exclaimed the Baron, "come to a standstill, here, in the middle of the forest, here where there is no stream where the animal could have doubled, or rock for it to climb. You must be out of your mind, Marcotte!"

"I, out of my mind, my Lord?"

"Yes, you, you fool, as truly as your dogs are all worthless trash!"

As a rule, Marcotte bore with admirable patience the insults which the Baron was in the habit of lavishing upon everybody about him at critical moments of the chase, but this word trash, applied to his dogs, was more than his habitual long-suffering could bear, and drawing himself up to his full height, he answered vehemently, "Trash, my Lord? my dogs worthless trash! dogs that have brought down an old wolf after such a furious run that the best horse in your stable was foundered! my dogs trash!"

"Yes, trash, worthless trash, I say it again, Marcotte. Only trash would stop at a check like that, after hunting one wretched buck so many hours on end."

"My Lord," answered Marcotte, in a tone of mingled dignity and sorrow, "My Lord, say that it is my fault, call me a fool, a blockhead, a scoundrel, a blackguard, an idiot; insult me in my own person, or in that of my wife, of my children, and it is nothing to me; but for the sake of all my past services to you, do not attack me in my office of chief pricker, do not insult your dogs."

"How do you account for their silence, then? tell me that! How do you account for it? I am quite willing to hear what you have to say, and I am listening."

"I cannot explain it any more than you can, my Lord; the damned animal must have flown into the clouds or disappeared in the bowels of the earth."

"What nonsense are you talking!" exclaimed the Baron "do you want to make out that the deer has burrowed like a rabbit, or risen from the ground like a grouse?"

"My Lord, I meant it only as a manner of speech. What is a truth, what is the fact, is that there is some witchcraft behind all this. As sure as it is now daylight, my dogs, every one of them, lay down at the same moment, suddenly, without an instant hesitation. Ask anybody who was near them at the time. And now they are not even trying to recover the scent, but there they lie flat on the ground like so many stags in their lair. I ask you, is it natural?"

"Thrash them, man! thrash them, then," cried the Baron, "flay the skin off their backs; there is nothing like it for driving out the evil spirit."

And the Baron was going forward to emphasise with a few blows from his own whip the exorcisims which Marcotte, according to his orders, was distributing among the poor beasts, when Engoule went, hat in hand, drew near to the Baron and timidly laid his hand on the horse's bridle.

"My Lord," said the keeper of the kennel, "I think I have just discovered a cuckoo in that tree who may perhaps be able to give us some explanation of what has happened."

"What the devil are you talking about, with your cuckoo, you ape?" said the Baron.

"If you wait a moment, you scamp, I will teach you how to come chaffing your master like that!"

And the Baron lifted his whip. But with all the heroism of a Spartan, Engoulevent lifted his arm above his head as a shield and continued:

"Strike, if you will, my Lord, but after that look up into this tree, and when your Lordship has seen the bird that is perched among the branches, I think you will be more ready to give me a crown than a blow."

And the good man pointed to the oak tree in which Thibault had taken refuge on hearing the huntsmen approach. He had climbed up from branch to branch and had finally hoisted himself on to the topmost one.

The Baron shaded his eyes with his hand, and, looking up, caught sight of Thibault.

"Well, here's something mighty queer!" he cried, "It seems that in the forest of Villers-Cotterets the deer burrow like foxes, and men perch on trees like crows. However," continued the worthy Baron, "we will see what sort of creature we have to deal with." And putting his hand to his mouth, he halloed:

"Ho, there, my friend! would it be particularly disagreeable for you to give me ten minutes' conversation?"

But Thibault maintained the most profound silence.

"My Lord" said Engoulevent "if you like...," and he made a sign to show that he was ready to climb the tree.

"No, no," said the Baron, at the same time putting out his hand to hold him back.

"Ho, there, my friend!" repeated the Baron still without recognising Thibault, "will it please you to answer me, yes or no."

He paused a second.

"I see, it is evidently, no; you pretend to be deaf, my friend; wait a moment, and I will get my speaking-trumpet," and he held out his hand to Marcotte, who, guessing his intention, handed him his gun.

Thibault, who wished to put the huntsmen on the wrong scent, was meanwhile pretending to cut away the dead branches, and he put so much energy into this feigned occupation that he did not perceive the movement on the part of the Baron, or, if he saw, only took it as a menace, without attaching the importance to it which it merited.

The wolf-hunter waited for a little while to see if the answer would come, but as it did not, he pulled the trigger; the gun went off, and a branch was heard to crack!

The branch which cracked was the one on which Thibault was poised; the Baron was a fine shot and had broken it just between the trunk and the shoemaker's foot.

Deprived of his support, Thibault fell, rolling from branch to banch. Fortunately the tree was thick, and the branches strong, so that his fall was broken and less rapid than it might have been, and he finally reached the ground, after many rebounds, without further ill consequences than a feeling of great fear and a few slight bruises on that part of his body which had first come in contact with the earth.

"By Beelzebub's horns!" exclaimed the Baron, delighted with his own skill, "if it is not my joker of the morning! Ah! so, you scamp! did the discourse you had with my whip seem too short to you, that you are so anxious to take it up again where we left off?"

"Oh, as to that, I assure you it is not so, my Lord" answered Thibault in a tone of the most perfect sincerity.

"So much the better for your skin, my good fellow. Well, and now tell me what you were doing up there, perched on the top of that oak-tree?"

"My Lord can see himself," answered Thibault, pointing to a few dry twigs lying here and there on the ground, "I was cutting a little dry wood for fuel."

"Ah! I see. Now then, my good fellow, you will please tell us, without any beating about the bush, what has become of our deer."

"By the devil, he ought to know, seeing that he has been perched up there so as not to lose any of its movements," put in Marcotte.

"But I swear, my Lord," said Thibault, "that I don't know what it is you mean about this wretched buck."

"Ah, I thought so," cried Marcotte, delighted to divert his master's ill-humour from himself, "he has not seen it, he has not seen the animal at all, he does not know what we mean by this wretched buck! But look here, my Lord, see, the marks on these leaves where the animal has bitten; it was just here that the dogs came to a full stop, and now, although the ground is good to shew every mark, we can find no trace of the animal, for ten, twenty, or a hundred paces even?"

"You hear?" said the Baron, joining his words on to those of the pricker, "you were up there, and the deer here at your feet. It did not go by like a mouse without making any sound, and you did not see or hear. You must needs have seen or heard it!"

"He has killed the deer," said Marcotte "and hidden it away in a bush, that's as clear as the day."

"Oh, my Lord," cried Thibault, who knew better than anybody else how mistaken the pricker was in making this accusation, "My Lord, by all the saints in paradise, I swear to you that I have not killed your deer; I swear it to you on the salvation of my soul, and, may I perish on the spot if I have given him even the slightest scratch. And besides, I could not have killed him without wounding him, and if I had wounded him, blood would have flowed; look, I pray you, sir," continued Thibault turning to the pricker "and God be thanked, you will find no trace of blood. I, kill a poor beast! and, my God, with what? Where is my weapon? God knows I have no other weapon than this bill-hook. Look yourself, my Lord."

But unfortunately for Thibault, he had hardly uttered these words, before Maitre Engoulevent, who had been prowling about for some minutes past, re-appeared, carrying the boar-spear which Thibault had thrown into one of the bushes before climbing up the tree.

He handed the weapon to the Baron.

There was no doubt about it Engoulevent was Thibault's evil genius.

CHAPTER III

AGNELETTE

The Baron took the weapon which Engoulevent handed him, and deliberately examined the boar-spear from point to handle, without saying a word. On the handle had been carved a little wooden shoe, which had served as Thibault's device while making the tour of France, as thereby he was able to recognise his own weapon. The Baron now pointed to this, saying to Thibault as he did so:

"Ah, ah, Master Simpleton! there is something which witnesses terribly against you! I must confess this boar-spear smells to me uncommonly of venison, by the devil it does! However, all I have now to say to you is this: You have been poaching, which is a serious crime; you have perjured yourself, which is a great sin; I am going to enforce expiation from you for the one and for the other, to help towards the salvation of that soul by which you have sworn."

Whereupon turning to the pricker, he continued: "Marcotte, strip off that rascal's vest and shirt, and tie him up to a tree with a couple of the dog leashes and then give him thirty-six strokes across the back with your shoulder belt, a dozen for his perjury, and two dozen for his poaching; no, I make a mistake, a dozen for poaching and two dozen for perjuring himself, God's portion must be the largest."

This order caused great rejoicing among the menials, who thought it good luck to have a culprit on whom they could avenge themselves for the mishaps of the day.

In spite of Thibault's protestations, who swore by all the saints in the calender, that he had killed neither buck, nor doe, neither goat nor kidling, he was divested of his garments and firmly strapped to the trunk of a tree; then the execution commenced.

The pricker's strokes were so heavy that Thibault, who had sworn not to utter a sound, and bit his lips to enable himself to keep his resolution, was forced at the third blow to open his mouth and cry out.

The Baron, as we have already seen, was about the roughest man of his class for a good thirty miles round, but he was not hard-hearted, and it was a distress to him to listen to the cries of the culprit as they became more and more frequent As, however, the poachers on His Highness's estate had of late grown bolder and more troublesome, he decided that he had better let the sentence be carried out to the full, but he turned his horse with the intention of riding away, determined no longer to remain as a spectator.

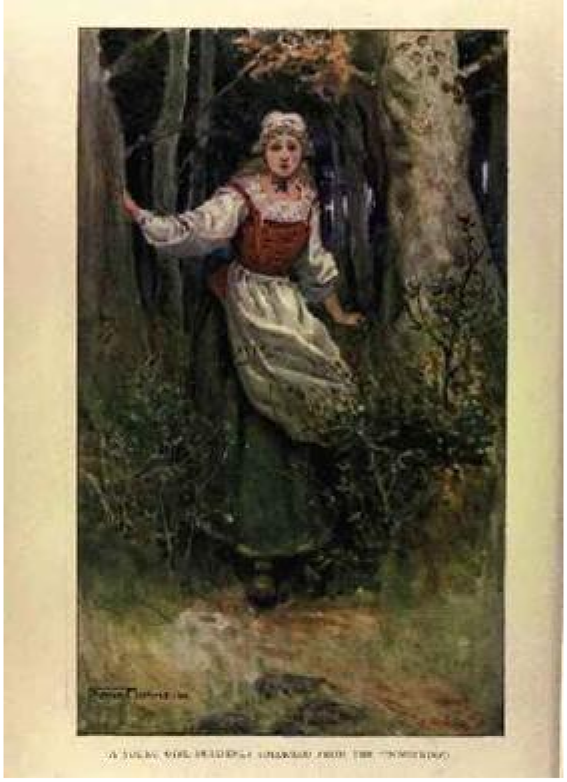

As he was on the point of doing this, a young girl suddenly emerged from the underwood, threw herself on her knees beside the horse, and lifting her large, beautiful eyes, all wet with tears, to the Baron, cried:

"In the name of the God of mercy, my Lord, have pity on that man!"

The Lord of Vez looked down at the young girl. She was indeed a lovely child; hardly sixteen years of age, of a slender and exquisite figure, with a pink and white complexion, large blue eyes, soft and tender in expression, and a crown of fair hair, which fell in luxuriant waves over neck and shoulders, escaping from underneath the shabby little grey linen cap, which endeavoured in vain to imprison them.

All this the Baron took in with a glance, in spite of the humble clothing of the beautiful suppliant, and as he had no dislike to a pretty face, he smiled down on the charming young peasant girl, in response to the pleading of her eloquent eyes.

But, as he looked without speaking, and all the while the blows were still falling, she cried again, with a voice and gesture of even more earnest supplication.

“Have pity, in the name of Heaven, my Lord! Tell your servants to let the poor man go, his cries pierce my heart.”

“Ten thousand fiends!” cried the Grand Master; “you take a great interest in that rascal over there, my pretty child. Is he your brother?”

“No, my Lord.”

“Your cousin?”

“No, my Lord.”

“Your lover?”

“My lover! My Lord is laughing at me.”

“Why not? If it were so, my sweet girl, I must confess I should envy him his lot.”

The girl lowered her eyes.

“I do not know him, my Lord, and have never seen him before to-day.”

“Without counting that now she only sees him wrong side before” Engoulevent ventured to put in, thinking that it was a suitable moment for a little pleasantry.

“Silence, sirrah!” said the Baron sternly. Then, once more turning to the girl with a smile.

“Really!” he said. “Well, if he is neither a relation nor a lover, I should like to see how far your love for your neighbour will let you go. Come, a bargain, pretty girl!”

“How, my Lord?”

“Grace for that scoundrel in return for a kiss.”

“Oh! with all my heart!” cried the young girl. “Save the life of a man with a kiss! I am sure that our good Cure himself would say there was no sin in that.”

And without waiting for the Baron to stoop and take himself what he had asked for, she threw off her wooden-shoe, placed her dainty little foot on the tip of the wolf-hunter’s boot, and taking hold of the horse’s mane, lifted herself up with a spring to the level of the face of the hardy huntsman, and there of her own accord offered him her round cheek, fresh, and velvety as the down of an August peach.

The Lord of Vez had bargained for one kiss, but he took two; then, true to his sworn word, he made a sign to Marcotte to stay the execution.

Marcotte was religiously counting his strokes; the twelfth was about to descend when he received the order to stop, and he did not think it expedient to stay it from falling. It is possible that he also thought it would be as well to give it the weight of two ordinary blows, so as to make up good measure and give a thirteenth in; however that may be, it is certain that it furrowed Thibault's shoulders more cruelly than those that went before. It must be added, however, that he was unbound immediately after.

Meanwhile the Baron was conversing with the young girl.

"What is your name, my pretty one?"

"Georgine Agnelette, my Lord, my mother's name! but the country people are content to call me simply Agnelette."

"Ah, that's an unlucky name, my child," said the Baron.

"In what way my Lord?" asked the girl.

"Because it makes you a prey for the wolf, my beauty. And from what part of the country do you come, Agnelette?"

"From Preciamont, my Lord."

"And you come alone like this into the forest, my child? that's brave for a lambkin."

"I am obliged to do it, my Lord, for my mother and I have three goats to feed."

"So you come here to get grass for them?"

"Yes, my Lord."

"And you are not afraid, young and pretty as you are?"

"Sometimes, my Lord, I cannot help trembling."

"And why do you tremble?"

"Well, my Lord, I hear so many tales, during the winter evenings, about were-wolves, that when I find myself all alone among the trees, and can hear no sound but the west wind, and the branches creaking as it blows through them, I feel a kind of shiver run through me, and my hair seems to stand on end; but when I hear your hunting horn and the dogs crying, then I feel at once quite safe again."

The Baron was pleased beyond measure with this reply of the girl's, and stroking his beard complaisantly, he said:

"Well, we give Master Wolf a pretty rough time of it; but, there is a way, my pretty one, whereby you may spare yourself all these fears and tremblings.”

“And how, my Lord?”

“Come in future to the Castle of Vez; no were-wolf, or any other kind of wolf, has ever crossed the moat there, except when slung by a cord on to a hazel-pole.”

Agnelette shook her head.

“You would not like to come? and why not?”

“Because I should find something worse there than the wolf.”

On hearing this, the Baron broke into a hearty fit of laughter, and, seeing their Master laugh, all the huntsmen followed suit and joined in the chorus. The fact was, that the sight of Agnelette had entirely restored the good humour of the Lord of Vez, and he would, no doubt, have continued for some time laughing and talking with Agnelette, if Marcotte, who had been recalling the dogs, and coupling them, had not respectfully reminded my Lord that they had some distance to go on their way back to the Castle. The Baron made a playful gesture of menace with his finger to the girl, and rode off followed by his train.

Agnelette was left alone with Thibault. We have related what Agnelette had done for Thibault’s sake, and also said that she was pretty.

Nevertheless, for all that, Thibault’s first thoughts on finding himself alone with the girl, were not for the one who had saved his life, but were given up to hatred and the contemplation of vengeance.

Thibault, as you see, had, since the morning, been making rapid strides along the path of evil.

“Ah! if the devil will but hear my prayer this time,” he cried, as he shook his fist, cursing the while, after the retiring huntsmen, who were just out of view, “if the devil will but hear me, you shall be paid back with usury for all you have made me suffer this day, that I swear.”

“Oh, how wicked it is of you to behave like that!” said Agnelette, going up to him.

“The Baron is a kind Lord, very good to the poor, and always gently behaved with women.”

“Quite so, and you shall see with what gratitude I will repay him for the blows he has given me.”

“Come now, frankly, friend, confess that you deserved those blows,” said the girl, laughing.

"So, so!" answered Thibault, "the Baron's kiss has turned your head, has it, my pretty Agnelette?"

"You, I should have thought, would have been the last person to reproach me with that kiss, Monsieur Thibault. But what I have said, I say again; my Lord Baron was within his rights."

"What, in belabouring me with blows!"

"Well, why do you go hunting on the estates of these great lords?"

"Does not the game belong to everybody, to the peasant just as much as to the great lords?"

"No, certainly not; the game is in their woods, it is fed on their grass, and you have no right to throw your boar-spear at a buck which belongs to my lord the Duke of Orleans."

"And who told you that I threw a boar-spear at his buck?" replied Thibault, advancing towards Agnelette in an almost threatening manner.

"Who told me? why, my own eyes, which, let me tell you, do not lie. Yes, I saw you throw your boar-spear, when you were hidden there, behind the beech-tree."

Thibault's anger subsided at once before the straightforward attitude of the girl, whose truthfulness was in such contrast to his falsehood.

"Well, after all," he said, "supposing a poor devil does once in a way help himself to a good dinner from the super-abundance of some great lord! Are you of the same mind, Mademoiselle Agnelette, as the judges who say that a man ought to be hanged just for a wretched rabbit? Come now, do you think God created that buck for the Baron more than for me?"

"God, Monsieur Thibault, has told us not to covet other men's goods; obey the law of God, and you will not find yourself any the worse off for it!"

"Ah, I see, my pretty Agnelette, you know me then, since you call me so glibly by my name?"

"Certainly I do; I remember seeing you at Boursonnes, on the day of the fete; they called you the beautiful dancer, and stood round in a circle to watch you."

Thibault, pleased with this compliment, was now quite disarmed.

"Yes, yes, of course," he answered, "I remember now having seen you; and I think we danced together, did we not? but you were not so tall then as you are now, that's why I did not recognise you at first, but I recall you distinctly now. And I remember too that you wore a pink frock, with a pretty little white bodice, and that we danced in the dairy. I wanted to kiss you, but you would not let me, for you said that it was only proper to kiss one's vis-a-vis, and not one's partner."

"You have a good memory, Monsieur Thibault!"

"And do you know, Agnelette, that during these last twelve months, for it is a year since that dance, you have not only grown taller, but grown prettier too; I see you are one of those people who understand how to do two things at once."

The girl blushed and lowered her eyes, and the blush and the shy embarrassment only made her look more charming still.

Thibault's eyes were now turned towards her with more marked attention than before, and, in a voice, not wholly free from a slight agitation, he asked:

"Have you a lover, Agnelette?"

"No, Monsieur Thibault," she answered, "I have never had one, and do not wish to have one."

"And why is that? Is Cupid such a bad lad that you are afraid of him?"

"No, not that, but a lover is not at all what I want."

"And what do you want?"

"A husband."

Thibault made a movement, which Agnelette either did not, or pretended not to see.

"Yes," she repeated, "a husband. Grandmother is old and infirm, and a lover would distract my attention too much from the care which I now give her; whereas, a husband, if I found a nice fellow who would like to marry me, a husband would help me to look after her in her old age, and would share with me the task which God has laid upon me, of making her happy and comfortable in her last years."

"But do you think your husband," said Thibault, "would be willing that you should love your grandmother more than you loved him? and do you not think he might be jealous at seeing you lavish so much tenderness upon her?"

"Oh," replied Agnelette, with an adorable smile, "there is no fear of that, for I will manage so as to let him have such a large share of my love and attention that he will have no cause to complain; the kinder and the more patient he is for the dear old thing, the more I shall devote myself to him, the harder shall I work that there may be nothing wanting to our little household. You see me looking small and delicate, and you doubt that I should have strength for this; but I have plenty of spirit and energy for work, and then, when the heart gives consent, one can work day and night without fatigue. Oh! how I should love the man who loved my grandmother! I promise you, that she, and my husband, and I, we should be three happy folks together."

"You mean that you would be three very poor folks together, Agnelette!"

"And do you think the loves and friendships of the rich are worth a farthing more than those of the poor? At times, when I have been loving and caressing my grandmother, Monsieur Thibault, and she takes me on her lap and clasps me in her poor weak trembling arms, and puts her dear old wrinkled face against mine, and I feel my cheek wet with the loving tears she sheds, I begin to cry myself, and, I tell you, Monsieur Thibault, so soft and sweet are my tears, that there is no woman or girl, be she queen or princess, who has ever, I am sure, even in her happiest days, known such a real joy as mine. And, yet, there is no one in all the country round who is so destitute as we two are."

Thibault listened to what Agnelette was saying without answering; his mind was occupied with many thoughts, such thoughts as are indulged in by the ambitious; but his dreams of ambition were disturbed at moments by a passing sensation of depression and disillusionment.

He, the man who had spent hours at a time watching the beautiful and aristocratic dames belonging to the Court of the Duke of Orleans, as they swept up and down the wide entrance stairs; who had often passed whole nights gazing at the arched windows of the Keep at Vez, when the whole place was lit up for some festivity, he, that same man, now asked himself, if what he had so ambitiously desired to have, a lady of rank and a rich dwelling, would, after all, be so much worth possessing as a thatched roof and this sweet and gentle girl called Agnelette. And it was certain that if this dear and charming little woman were to become his, that he would be envied in turn by all the earls and barons in the countryside.

"Well, Agnelette," said Thibault "and suppose a man like myself were to offer himself as your husband, would you accept him?"

It has been already stated that Thibault was a handsome young fellow, with fine eyes and black hair, and that his travels had left him something better than a mere workman. And it must further be borne in mind that we readily become attached to those on whom we have conferred a benefit, and

Agnelette had, in all probability, saved Thibault's life; for, under such strokes as Marcotte's, the victim would certainly have been dead before the thirty-sixth had been given.

"Yes," she said, "if it would be a good thing for my grandmother?"

Thibault took hold of her hand.

"Well then, Agnelette," he said "we will speak again about this, dear child, and that as soon as may be."

"Whenever you like, Monsieur Thibault."

"And you will promise faithfully to love me if I marry you, Agnelette?"

"Do you think I should love any man besides my husband?"

"Never mind, I want you just to take a little oath, something of this kind, for instance; Monsieur Thibault, I swear that I will never love anyone but you."

"What need is there to swear? the promise of an honest girl should be sufficient for an honest man."

"And when shall we have the wedding, Agnelette?" and in saying this, Thibault tried to put his arm round her waist.

But Agnelette gently disengaged her self.

"Come and see my grandmother," she said, "it is for her to decide about it; you must content yourself this evening with helping me up with my load of heath, for it is getting late, and it is nearly three miles from here to Preciamont."

So Thibault helped her as desired, and then accompanied her on her way home as far as the Forest-fence of Billemont, that is until they came in sight of the village steeple. Before parting, he so begged of pretty Agnelette to give him one kiss as an earnest of his future happiness, that at last she consented, and then, far more agitated by this one kiss than she had been by the Baron's double embrace, Agnelette hastened on her way, in spite of the load which she was carrying on her head, and which seemed far too heavy for so slender and delicate a creature.

Thibault stood for some time looking after her as she walked away across the moor. All the flexibility and grace of her youthful figure were brought into relief as the girl lifted her pretty rounded arms to support the burden upon her head, and thus silhouetted against the dark blue of the sky she made a delightful picture. At last, having reached the outskirts of the village, the land dipping at that point, she suddenly disappeared, passing out of sight of Thibault's admiring eyes. He gave a sigh, and stood still, plunged in thought; but it was not the satisfaction of thinking that this sweet and good young creature might one day be his that had caused his sigh. Quite the contrary; he had wished for Agnelette, because Agnelette was young and pretty, and because it was part of his unfortunate disposition to long for every thing that belonged or might belong to another. His desire to possess Agnelette had been quickened by the innocent frankness with which she had talked to him; but it had been a matter of fancy rather than of any deeper feeling, of the mind, and not of the heart. For Thibault was incapable of loving as a man ought to love, who, being poor himself, loves a poor girl; in such a case there should be no thought, no ambition on his part beyond the wish that his love may be returned. But it was not so with Thibault; on the contrary, I repeat, the farther he walked away from Agnelette, leaving it would seem his good genius farther behind him with every step, the more urgently did his envious longings begin again as usual to torment his soul. It was dark when he reached home.

CHAPTER IV

THE BLACK WOLF

Thibault's first thought was to get himself some supper, for he was terribly tired. The past day had been an eventful one for him, and certain things which had happened to him had evidently been calculated to produce a craving for food. The supper, it must be said, was not quite such a savoury one as he had promised himself, when starting to kill the buck; but the animal, as we know, had not been killed by Thibault, and the ferocious hunger which now consumed him made his black bread taste almost as delicious as venison.

He had hardly, however, begun his frugal repast, when he became conscious that his goat of which I think we have already spoken was uttering the most plaintive bleatings. Thinking that she, too, was in want of her supper, he went into the lean-to for some fresh grass, which he then carried to her, but as he opened the little door of the shed, out she rushed with such precipitancy that she nearly knocked Thibault over, and without stopping to take the provender he had brought her, ran towards the house. Thibault threw down the bundle of grass and went after her, with the intention of re-installing her in her proper place; but he found that this was more than he was able to do. He had to use all his force to get her along, for the goat, with all the strength of which a beast of her kind is capable, resisted all his efforts to drag her back by the horns, arching her back, and stubbornly refusing to move. At last, however, being vanquished in the struggle, it ended by the goat being once more shut up in her shed, but, in spite of the plentiful supper which Thibault left her with, she continued to utter the most lamentable cries. Perplexed, and cross at the same time, the shoemaker again rose from his supper and went to the shed, this time opening the door so cautiously that the goat could not escape. Once inside he began feeling about with his hands in all the nooks and corners to try and discover the cause of her alarm. Suddenly his fingers came in contact with the warm, thick coat of some other animal. Thibault was not a coward, far from it, none the less, he drew back hastily. He returned to the house and got a light, but it almost fell from his hand, when, on re-entering the shed, he recognised in the animal that had so frightened the goat, the buck of the Lord of Vez; the same buck that he had followed, had failed to kill, that he had prayed for in the devil's name, if he could not have it in God's; the same that had thrown the hounds out; the very same in short which had cost him such hard blows. Thibault, after assuring himself that the door was fastened, went gently up to the animal; the poor thing was either so tired, or so tame, that it did not make the slightest attempt to move, but merely gazed out at Thibault with its large dark velvety eyes, rendered more appealing than ever by the fear which agitated it.

"I must have left the door open," muttered the shoe-maker to himself, "and the creature, not knowing where to hide itself, must have taken refuge here." But on thinking further over the matter, it came back to him that when he had gone to open the door, only ten minutes before, for the first time, he had found the wooden bolt pushed so firmly into the staple that he had had to get a stone to hammer it back; and then, besides, the goat, which, as we have seen, did not at all relish the society of the new-comer, would certainly have run out of the shed before, if the door had been open. What was, however, still more surprising was that Thibault, looking more closely at the buck, saw that it had been fastened up to the rack by a cord.

Thibault, as we have said, was no coward, but now a cold sweat began to break out in large drops on his brow, a curious kind of a shiver ran through his body, and his teeth chattered violently. He went out of the shed, shutting the door after him, and began looking for his goat, which had taken advantage of the moment when the shoe-maker had gone to fetch a light, and ran again into the house, where she was now lying beside the hearth, having evidently quite made up her mind this time not to forsake a resting place, which, for that night at least, she found preferable to her usual abode.

Thibault had a perfect remembrance of the unholy invocation he had addressed to Satan, and although his prayer had been miraculously answered, he still could not bring himself to believe that there was any diabolic intervention in the matter.

As the idea, however, of being under the protection of the spirit of darkness filled him with an instinctive fear, he tried to pray; but when he wished to raise his hand to make the sign of the cross on his forehead, his arm refused to bend, and although up to that time he had never missed a day saying his Ave Maria, he could not remember a single word of it.

These fruitless efforts were accompanied by a terrible turmoil in poor Thibault's brain; evil thoughts came rushing in upon him, and he seemed to hear them whispering all around him, as one hears the murmur of the rising tide, or the laughing of the winter wind through the leafless branches of the trees.

"After all," he muttered to himself, as he sat pale, and staring before him, "the buck is a fine windfall, whether it comes from God or the Devil, and I should be a fool not to profit by it. If I am afraid of it as being food sent from the nether regions, I am in no way forced to eat it, and what is more, I could not eat it alone, and if I asked anyone to partake of it with me, I should be betrayed; the best thing I can do is to take the live beast over to the Nunnery of Saint-Remy, where it will serve as a pet for the Nuns and where the Abbess will give me a good round sum for it. The atmosphere of that holy place will drive the evil out of it, and I shall run no risk to my soul in taking a handful of consecrated crown pieces.

What days of sweating over my work, and turning my auger, it would take, to earn even the quarter of what I shall get by just leading the beast to its new fold! The devil who helps one is certainly better worth than the angel who forsakes one. If my lord Satan wants to go too far with me, it will then be time enough to free myself from his claws: bless me! I am not a child, nor a young lamb like Georgine, and I am able to walk straight in front of me and go where I like. He had forgotten, unhappy man, as he boasted of being able to go where and how he liked, that only five minutes before he had tried in vain to lift his hand to his head.

Thibault had such convincing and excellent reasons ready to hand, that he quite made up his mind to keep the buck, come whence it might, and even went so far as to decide that the money he received for it should be devoted to buying a wedding dress for his betrothed. For, strange to say, by some freak of memory, his thoughts would keep returning to wards Agnelette; and he seemed to see her clad in a long white dress with a crown of white lilies on her head and a long veil. If, he said to himself, he could have such a charming guardian angel in his house, no devil, however strong and cunning he might be, would ever dare to cross the threshold. "So," he went on, "there is always that remedy at hand, and if my lord Satan begins to be too troublesome, I shall be off to the grandmother to ask for Agnelette; I shall marry her, and if I cannot remember my prayers or am unable to make the sign of the cross, there will be a dear pretty little woman, who has had no traffic with Satan, who will do all that sort of thing for me."

Having more or less re-assured himself with the idea of this compromise, Thibault, in order that the buck should not run down in value, and might be as fine an animal as possible to offer to the holy ladies, to whom he calculated to sell it, went and filled the rack with fodder and looked to see that the litter was soft and thick enough for the buck to rest fully at its ease. The remainder of the night passed without further incident, and without even a bad dream.

The next morning, my lord Baron again went hunting, but this time it was not a timid deer that headed the hounds, but the wolf which Marcotte had tracked the day before and had again that morning traced to his lair.

And this wolf was a genuine wolf, and no mistake; it must have seen many and many a year, although those who had that morning caught sight of it while on Its track, had noted with astonishment that it was black all over. Black or grey, however, it was a bold and enterprising beast, and promised some rough work to the Baron and his huntsmen. First started near Vertefeuille, in the Dargent covert, it had made over the plain of Meutard, leaving Fleury and Dampleux to the left, crossed the road to Ferte-Milou, and finally begun to run cunning in the Ivors coppices. Then, instead of continuing in the same direction, it doubled, returning along the same track it had come, and so exactly retracing its own steps, that the Baron, as he galloped along, could actually distinguish the prints left by his horse's hoofs that same morning.

Back again in the district of Bourg-Fontaine, he ranged the country, leading the hunt right to the very spot where the mis-adventures of the previous day had had their start, the vicinity of the shoe-maker's hut.

Thibault, we know, had made up his mind what to do in regard to certain matters, and as he intended going over to see Agnelette in the evening, he had started work early.

You will naturally ask why, instead of sitting down to a work which brought in so little, as he himself acknowledged, Thibault did not start off at once to take his buck to the ladies of Saint-Remy. Thibault took very good care to do nothing of the sort; the day was not the time to be leading a buck through the forest of Villers-Cotterets; the first keeper he met would have stopped him, and what explanation could he have given? No, Thibault had arranged in his own mind to leave home one evening about dusk, to follow the road to the right, then go down the sandpit lane which led into the Chemin du Pendu, and he would then be on the common of Saint-Remy, only a hundred paces or so from the Convent.

Thibault no sooner caught the first sound of the horn and the dogs, than he immediately gathered together a huge bundle of dried heather, which he hastily piled up in front of the shed, where his prisoner was confined, so as to hide the door, in case the huntsmen and their master should halt in front of his hut, as they had the day before. He then sat down again to his work, applying to it an energy unknown even to himself before, bending over the shoe he was making with an intentness which prevented him from even lifting his eyes. All at once he thought ha detected a sound like something scratching at the door; he was just going through from his lean-to to open it when the door fell back, and to Thibault's great astonishment an immense black wolf entered the room, walking on its hind legs. On reaching the middle of the floor, it sat down after the fashion of wolves, and looked hard and fixedly at the sabot-maker.

Thibault seized a hatchet which was within reach, and in order to give a fit reception to his strange visitor, and to terrify him, he flourished the weapon above his head.

A curious mocking expression passed over the face of the wolf, and then it began to laugh.

It was the first time that Thibault had ever heard a wolf laugh. He had often heard tell that wolves barked like dogs, but never that they laughed like human beings. And what a laugh it was! If a man had laughed such a laugh, Thibault would verily and indeed have been scared out of his wits.

He brought his lifted arm down again.

"By my lord of the cloven foot," said the wolf, in a full and sonorous voice, "you are a fine fellow! At your request, I send you the finest buck from His Royal Highness's forests, and in return, you want to split my head open with your hatchet; human gratitude is worthy to rank with that of wolves." On hearing a voice exactly like his own coming forth from a beast's mouth, Thibault's knees began to shake under him, and the hatchet fell out of his hand.

"Now then," continued the wolf, "let us be sensible and talk together like two good friends. Yesterday you wanted the Baron's buck, and I led it myself into your shed, and for fear it should escape, I tied it up myself to the rack. And for all this you take your hatchet to me!"

“How should I know who you were?” asked Thibault.

“I see, you did not recognise me! A nice sort of excuse to give.”

“Well, I ask you, was it likely I should take you for a friend under that ugly coat?”

“Ugly coat, indeed!” said the wolf, licking his fur with a long tongue as red as blood. “Confound you! You are hard to please. However, it’s not a matter of my coat; what I want to know is, are you willing to make me some return for the service I have done you?”

“Certainly,” said the shoe-maker, feeling rather uncomfortable! “but I ought to know what your demands are. What is it? What do you want? Speak!”

“First of all, and above all things, I should like a glass of water, for those confounded dogs have run me until I am out of breath.”

“You shall have it in a moment, my lord wolf.”

And Thibault ran and fetched a bowl of fresh, clear water from a brook which ran some ten paces from the hut. The eager readiness with which he complied with the wolf’s request betrayed his feeling of relief at getting out of the bargain so cheaply.

As be placed the bowl in front of the wolf, he made the animal a low bow. The wolf lapped up the contents with evident delight, and then stretched himself on the floor with his paws straight out in front of him, looking like a sphinx.

“Now,” he said, “listen to me.”

“There is something else you wish me to do” asked Thibault, inwardly quaking,

“Yes, a very urgent something,” replied the wolf. “Do you hear the baying of the dogs?”

“Indeed I do, they are coming nearer and nearer, and in five minutes they will be here.”

“And what I want you to do is to get me out of their way.”

“Get you out of their way! and how?” cried Thibault, who but too well remembered what it had cost him to meddle with the Baron’s hunting the day before.

“Look about you, think, invent some way of delivering me!”

“The Baron’s dogs are rough customers to deal with, and you are asking neither more nor less than that I should save your life; for I warn you, if they once get hold of you, and they will probably scent you out, they will make short work of pulling you to pieces. And now supposing I spare you this disagreeable business," continued Thibault, who imagined that he had now got the upper hand, "what will you do for me in return?"

"Do for you in return?" said the wolf, "and how about the buck?"

"And how about the bowl of water?" said Thibault.

"We are quits there, my good sir. Let us start a fresh business altogether; if you are agreeable to it, I am quite willing."

"Let it be so then; tell me quickly what you want of me."

"There are folks," proceeded Thibault, "who might take advantage of the position you are now in, and ask for all kinds of extravagant things, riches, power, titles, and what not, but I am not going to do anything of the kind; yesterday I wanted the buck, and you gave it me, it is true; to-morrow, I shall want something else. For some time past I have been possessed by a kind of mania, and I do nothing but wish first for one thing and then for another, and you will not always be able to spare time to listen to my demands. So what I ask for is, that, as you are the devil in person or someone very like it, you will grant me the fulfilment of every wish I may have from this day forth."

The wolf put on a mocking expression of countenance. "Is that all?" he said, "Your peroration does not accord very well with your exordium."

"Oh!" continued Thibault, "my wishes are honest and moderate ones, and such as become a poor peasant like myself. I want just a little corner of ground, and a few timbers, and planks; that's all that a man of my sort can possibly desire."

"I should have the greatest pleasure in doing what you ask," said the wolf, "but it is simply impossible, you know."

"Then I am afraid you must make up your mind to put up with what the dogs may do to you."

"You think so, and you suppose I have need of your help, and so you can ask what you please?"

"I do not suppose it, I am sure of it."

"Indeed! well then, look."

"Look where," asked Thibault.

"Look at the spot where I was," said the wolf. Thibault drew back in horror. The place where the wolf had been lying was empty; the wolf had disappeared, where or how it was impossible to say. The room was intact, there was not a hole in the roof large enough to let a needle through, nor a crack in the floor through which a drop of water could have filtered.

“Well, do you still think that I require your assistance to get out of trouble,” said the wolf.

“Where the devil are you?”

“If you put a question to me in my real name,” said the wolf with a sneer in his voice, “I shall be obliged to answer you. I am still in the same place.”

“But I can no longer see you!”

“Simply because I am invisible.”

“But the dogs, the huntsmen, the Baron, will come in here after you?”

“No doubt they will, but they will not find me.”

“But if they do not find you, they will set upon me.”

“As they did yesterday; only yesterday you were sentenced to thirty-six strokes of the strap, for having carried off the buck; to-day, you will be sentenced to seventy-two, for having hidden the wolf, and Agnelette will not be on the spot to buy you off with a kiss.”

“Phew! what am I to do?”

“Let the buck loose; the dogs will mistake the scent, and they will get the blows instead of you.”

“But is it likely such trained hounds will follow the scent of a deer in mistake for that of a wolf?”

“You can leave that to me,” replied the voice, “only do not lose any time, or the dogs will be here before you have reached the shed, and that would make matters unpleasant, not for me, whom they would not find, but for you, whom they would.”

Thibault did not wait to be warned a second time, but was off like a shot to the shed. He unfastened the buck, which, as if propelled by some hidden force, leapt from the house, ran round it, crossing the track of the wolf, and plunged into the Baisemont coppice. The dogs were within a hundred paces of the hut; Thibault heard them with trepidation; the whole pack came full force against the door, one hound after the other.

Then, all at once, two or three gave cry and went off in the direction of Baisemont, the rest of the hounds after them.

The dogs were on the wrong scent; they were on the scent of the buck, and had abandoned that of the wolf.

Thibault gave a deep sigh of relief; he watched the hunt gradually disappearing in the distance, and went back to his room to the full and joyous notes of the Baron’s horn.

He found the wolf lying composedly on the same spot as before, but how it had found its way in again was quite as impossible to discover as how it had found its way out.

CHAPTER V

THE PACT WITH SATAN

Thibault stopped short on the threshold, overcome with astonishment at this re-apparition. “I was saying,” began the wolf, as if nothing had happened to interrupt the conversation, “that it is out of my power to grant you the accomplishment of all the wishes you may have in future for your own comfort and advancement.”

“Then I am to expect nothing from you?”

“Not so, for the ill you wish your neighbour can be carried out with my help.”

“And, pray, what good would that do me personally?”

“You fool! has not a moralist said, ‘There is always something sweet to us in the misfortune of our friends, even the dearest.’”

“Was it a wolf said that? I did not know wolves could boast of moralists among their number.”

“No, it was not a wolf, it was a man.”

“And was the man hanged?”

“On the contrary, he was made Governor of part of Poitou; there are, to be sure, a good many wolves in that province. Well then, if there is something pleasant in the misfortune of our best friend, can not you understand what a subject of rejoicing the misfortune of our worst enemy must be!”

“There is some truth in that, certainly,” said Thibault.

“Without taking into consideration that there is always an opportunity of profiting by our neighbour’s calamity, whether he be friend or foe.”

Thibault paused for a minute or two to consider before he answered:

“By my faith, you are right there, friend wolf, and suppose, then, you do me this service, what shall you expect in exchange? I suppose it will have to be a case of give and take, eh?”

“Certainly. Every time that you express a wish that is not to your own immediate advantage, you will have to repay me with a small portion of your person.”

Thibault drew back with an exclamation of fear.

“Oh! do not be alarmed! I shall not demand a pound of flesh, as a certain Jew of my acquaintance did from his debtor.”

“What is it then you ask of me?”

“For the fulfilment of your first wish, one of your hairs; two hairs for the second wish, four for the third, and so on, doubling the number each time.”

Thibault broke into a laugh: “If that is all you require, Master Wolf, I accept on the spot; and I shall try to start with such a comprehensive wish, that I shall never need to wear a wig. So let it be agreed between us!” and Thibault held out his hand. The black wolf lifted his paw, but he kept it raised.

“Well?” said Thibault.

“I was only thinking,” replied the wolf, “that I have rather sharp claws, and, without wishing to do so, I might hurt you badly; but I see a way whereby to clinch the bargain without any damage done to you. You have a silver ring, I have a gold one; let us exchange; the barter will be to your advantage, as you see.” And the wolf held out its paw, Thibault saw a ring of the purest gold shining under the fur of what corresponded to the ring finger, and accepted the bargain without hesitation; the respective rings then changed ownership.

“Good!” said the wolf, “now we two are married.”

“You mean betrothed, Master Wolf,” put in Thibault. “Plague upon you! you go too fast.”

“We shall see about that, Master Thibault. And now you go back to your work, and I’ll go back to mine.”

“Good-bye, my lord Wolf.”

“Till we meet again, Master Thibault.”

The wolf had hardly uttered these last words, on which it had laid an unmistakeable emphasis, ere it disappeared like a pinch of lighted gun-powder, and like the gun-powder, left behind a strong smell of sulphur.

Thibault again stood for a moment dumbfounded. He had not yet grown accustomed to this manner of making one’s exit, to use a theatrical expression; he looked round him on every side, but the wolf was not there.

At first he thought the whole thing must have been a dream, but, looking down, he saw the devil’s ring on the third finger of his right hand; he drew it off and examined it. He saw a monogram engraved on the inner side, and looking more closely, perceived that it was formed of two letters, T. and S.

“Ah!” he exclaimed, in a cold sweat, “Thibault and Satan, the family names of the two contracting parties. So much the worse for me! but when one gives oneself to the devil, one has to do it without reserve.”

And Thibault began humming a song, trying to drown his thoughts, but his voice filled him with fear, for there was a new and curious sound in it, even to his own ears. So he fell silent, and went back to his work as a distraction.

He had only just begun, however, to shape his wooden shoe, when, some distance off, from the direction of Baisemont, he again heard the baying of the hounds, and the notes of the Baron’s horn. Thibault left off working to listen to these various sounds.

“Ah, my fine Lord, you may chase your wolf as long as you like; but I can tell you, you won’t get this one’s paw to nail up over the door of your castle, What a lucky beggar I am! here am I, almost as good as a magician, and while you ride on, suspecting nothing, my brave dispenser of blows, I have but to say the word, and a spell will be cast over you whereby I shall be amply avenged.” And in thinking thus, Thibault suddenly paused.

“And, after all,” he went on, “why shouldn’t I revenge myself on this damned Baron and Master Marcotte? Pshaw! with only a hair at stake I may well gratify myself on this score.” And so saying Thibault passed his hand through the thick, silky hair which covered his head like a lion’s mane.

“I shall have plenty of hairs left to lose,” he continued. “Why bother about one! And, besides, it will be an opportunity for seeing whether my friend the devil has been playing false with me or not. Very well then, I wish a serious accident to be fall the Baron, and as for that good-for-nothing of a Marcotte, who laid on to me so roughly yesterday, it is only fair that something as bad again should happen to him.”

While expressing this double wish, Thibault felt anxious and agitated to the last degree; for in spite of what he had already seen of the wolfs power, he still feared the Devil might only have been playing on his credulity. After uttering his wish, he tried in vain to return to his work, he took hold of his parer, wrong side up, and took the skin off his ringers, and still going on with his paring he spoilt a pair of shoes worth a good twelve sous. As he was lamenting over this misfortune, and wiping the blood off his hand, he heard a great commotion in the direction of the valley; he ran into the Chretiennelle road and saw a number of men walking slowly two and two in his direction. These men were the prickers and kennelmen of the Lord of

Vez. The road they were traversing was about two miles long, so that it was some time before Thibault could distinguish what the men were doing, who were walking as slowly and solemnly as if forming part of a funeral procession. When, however, they got to within five hundred paces of him, he saw that they were carrying two rough litters, on which were stretched two lifeless bodies, those of the Baron and of Marcotte. A cold sweat broke out over Thibault's forehead. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "What do I see here?"

What had happened was this: Thibault's expedient for putting the dogs on the wrong scent had succeeded, and all had gone well as long as the buck remained in covert; but it doubled, when near Marolle, and while crossing the heath passed within ten paces of the Baron. The latter thought at first that the animal had been startled by hearing the hounds, and was trying to hide itself. But at that moment, not more than a hundred paces behind him, the whole pack of hounds appeared, forty dogs, running, yelping, yelling, crying, some in a deep bass like great cathedral bells, others with the full sound of a gong, and again others in a falsetto key, like clarionettes out of tune, all giving cry at the top of their voices, as eagerly and merrily as if they had never followed the scent of any other beast.

Then the Baron gave way to one of his wild fits of rage, fits only worthy of Polichinello tearing a passion to tatters in a puppet-show. He did not shout, he yelled; he did not swear, he cursed. Not satisfied with lashing his dogs, he rode them down, trampling them beneath his horse's hoofs, flinging himself about in his saddle like a devil in a stoup of hot water."

All his maledictions were hurled at his chief pricker, whom he held responsible for the stupid blunder that had occurred.

This time Marcotte had not a word to say either in explanation or excuse, and the poor man was terribly ashamed of the mistake his hounds had made, and mighty uneasy at the towering passion into which it had thrown my lord. He made up his mind therefore to do everything in the power of man, if possible more, to repair the one and calm the other, and so started off at full gallop, dashing among the trees and over the Drushwood, crying out at the top of his voice, while he slashed right and left with such vigour, that every stroke of his whip cut into the flesh of the poor animals. "Back, dogs! back!" But in vain he rode, and whipped, and called aloud, the dogs only seemed to become more wildly anxious to follow up the new found scent, as if they recognised the buck of the day before, and were determined that their wounded self-esteem should have its revenge. Then Marcotte grew desperate, and determined on the only course that seemed left. The river Ourcq was close by, the dogs were already on the point of crossing the water, and the one chance of breaking up the pack was to get across himself and whip back the dogs as they began to climb the opposite bank. He spurred his horse in the direction of the river, and leaped with it into the very middle of the stream, both horse and rider arriving safely in the water; but, unfortunately, as we have already mentioned, the river just at this time was terribly swollen with the rains, the horse was unable to stand against the violence of the current, and after being swept round two or three times finally disappeared. Seeing that it was useless trying to save his horse, Marcotte endeavoured to disengage himself, but his feet were so firmly fixed in the stirrups that he could not draw them out, and three seconds after his horse had disappeared, Marcotte himself was no longer to be seen.

Meanwhile, the Baron, with the remainder of the huntsmen, had ridden up to the water's edge, and his anger was in an instant converted into grief and alarm as soon as he became aware of the perilous situation of his pricker; for the Lord of Vez had a sincere love towards those who ministered to his pleasure, whether man or beast. In a loud voice he shouted to his followers: "By all the powers of hell! Save Marcotte five and twenty louis, fifty louis, a hundred louis, to anyone who will save him!" And men and horses, like so many startled frogs, leaped into the water, vying with each other who should be first. The Baron was for riding into the river himself, but his henchmen held him back, and so anxious were they to prevent the worthy Baron from carrying out his heroic intention, that their affection for their master was fatal to the poor pricker. For one moment he was for gotten, but that last moment meant his death. He appeared once more above the surface, just where the river makes a bend; he was seen to battle against the water, and his face for an instant rose into view, as with one last cry he called to his hounds, "Back! dogs, back!" But the water again closed over him, stifling the last syllable of the last word, and it was not till a quarter of an hour later that his body was found lying on a little beach of sand on to which the current had washed him. Marcotte was dead; there was no doubt about it! This accident was disastrous in its effect on the Lord of Vez. Being the noble lord he was, he had somewhat of a liking for good wine; and this predisposed him ever so little to apoplexy, and now, as he came face to face with the corpse of his good servitor, the emotion was so great, that the blood rushed to his head and brought on a fit.

Thibault felt appalled as he realised with what scrupulous exactness the black wolf had fulfilled his part of the contract, and not without a shudder did he think of the right Master Isengrin now had to claim an equal punctuality of payment in return. He began to wonder uneasily whether the wolf, after all, was the kind of being that would continue to be satisfied with a few hairs and this the more that both at the moment of his wish and during the succeeding minutes during which it was being accomplished, he had not been conscious of the slightest sensation any where about the roots of his hair, not even of the least little tickling... He was far from being pleasantly affected by the sight of poor Marcotte's corpse; he had not loved him, it was true, and he had felt that he had good reason for not doing so; but his dislike to the defunct had never gone so far as to make him wish for his death, and the wolf had certainly gone far beyond his desires. At the same time, Thibault had never precisely said what he did wish, and had left the wolf a wide margin for the exercise of his malice; evidently he would have to be more careful in future in stating exactly what he wanted, and above all, more circumspect as regards any wish he might formulate.

As to the Baron, although still alive, he was almost as good as dead. From the moment when, as the result of Thibault's wish, he had been struck down as it were by lightning, he had remained unconscious. His men had laid him on the heap of heather which the shoe-maker had piled up to hide the door of the shed, and troubled and frightened, were ransacking the place to try and find some restorative which might bring their master back to life. One asked for vinegar to put on his temples, another for a key to put down his back, this one for a bit of board to slap his hands with, that for some sulphur to burn under his nose. In the the midst of all this confusion was heard the voice of little Engoulevent, calling out: "In the name of all that's good, we don't want all this truck, we want a goat. Ah! if only we had a goat!"

"A goat?" cried Thibault, who would have rejoiced to see the Baron recover, for it would lift at least part of the burden now weighing on his conscience, and would also rid his dwelling of these marauders. "A goat? I have a goat!"

"Really! you have a goat?" cried Engoulevent, "oh! my friends! now our dear master is saved!"

And so overcome with joy was he, that he flung his arms round Thibault's neck, saying, "Bring out your goat, my friend! bring out your goat!”

Thibault went to the shed and led out the goat, which ran after him bleating.

“Hold it firmly by the horns,” said the huntsman, “and lift up one of its front feet.” And as he gave the word, the second huntsman drew from its sheath a little knife which he carried in his belt, and began carefully sharpening it on the grind stone which Thibault used for his tools. “What are you going to do?” asked the shoe-maker, feeling somewhat uneasy about these preparations.”

“What! don’t you know,” said Engoulevent, “that there is a little bone in the shape of a cross inside a goat’s heart, which, if crushed into powder, is a sovereign remedy for apoplexy?”

“You intend to kill my goat?” exclaimed Thibault, at the same time leaving hold of the goat’s horns, and dropping its foot, “but I will not have it killed.”

“Fie, fie!” said Engoulevent, “that is not at all a becoming speech, Monsieur Thibault, “would you value the life of our good master as of no more worth than that of your wretched goat? I am truly ashamed for you.”

“It’s easy for you to talk. This goat is all I have to depend upon, the only thing I possess. She gives me milk, and I am fond of her.”

“Ah! Monsieur Thibault, you cannot be thinking of what you are saying it is fortunate that the Baron does not hear you for he would be broken-hearted to know that his precious life was being bargained for in that miserly way.”

“And besides” said one of the prickers with a sneering laugh, “if Master Thibault values his goat at a price which he thinks only my lord can pay, there is nothing to prevent him coming to the castle of Vez to claim this payment. The account can be settled with what was left over as due to him yesterday.”

Thibault knew that he could not get the better of these men, unless he again called the devil to his aid; but he had just received such a lesson from Satan, that there was no fear of his exposing himself, at all events for a second time the same day, to similar good offices. His one desire for the time being was not to wish any sort of ill to anyone of those present.

One man dead, another nearly so Thibault found this lesson enough. Consequently, he kept his eyes turned away from the menacing and jeering countenances around him, for fear of being aggravated beyond control.

While his back was turned, the poor goat’s throat was cut, her piteous cry alone informing him of the fact; and it was no sooner killed than its heart, which had hardly ceased throbbing, was opened in search of the little bone of which Engoulevent had spoken. This found, it was ground into powder, mixed with vinegar diluted with thirteen drops of gall from the bladder containing it, the whole stirred together in a glass with the cross of a rosary, and then poured gently down the Baron’s threat, after his teeth had been forced apart with the blade of a dagger.

The effect of the draught was immediate and truly miraculous. The Lord of Vez sneezed, sat up, and said in a voice, intelligible though still a little husky: “Give me something to drink.”

Engoulevent handed him some water in a wooden drinking-cup, a family possession, of which Thibault was very proud. But the Baron had no sooner put his lips to it and become aware of what the vile, abominable liquid was, which they had had the impudence to offer him, than, with an exclamation of disgust, he flung the vessel and its contents violently against the wall, and the cup fell, smashed into a thousand pieces. Then in a loud and sonorous voice, which left no doubt of his perfect recovery, he called out: “Bring me some wine.” One of the prickers mounted and rode at full speed to the castle of Oigny, and there requested the lord of the place to give him a flask or two of sound old Burgundy; ten minutes after he was back again. Two bottles were uncorked, and there being no glasses at hand, the Baron put them in turn to his mouth, draining each at a single draught.

Then he turned himself round with his face to the wall, and murmuring “Macon, 1743” fell into a profound slumber.

CHAPTER VI

THE BEDEVILLED HAIR

The huntsmen, being reassured with regard to their master’s health, now went in search of the dogs, which had been left to carry on the chase alone. They were found lying asleep, the ground around them stained with blood. It was evident that they had run down the buck and eaten it; if any doubt on the matter remained, it was done away with by the sight of the antlers, and a portion of the jaw bone, the only parts of the animal which they could not crunch up, and which had therefore not disappeared. In short, they were the only ones who had cause to be satisfied with the day’s work. The huntsmen, after shutting up the hounds in Thibault’s shed, seeing that their master was still sleeping, began to turn their thoughts to getting some supper. They laid hands on everything they could find in the poor wretch’s cup board, and roasted the goat, politely inviting Thibault to take a share in the meal towards the cost of which he had not a little contributed. He refused, giving as a plausible excuse, the great agitation he still was under, owing to Marcotte’s death and the Baron’s accident.

He gathered up the fragments of his beloved drinking-cup, and seeing that it was useless to think of ever being able to put it together again, he began turning over in his mind what it might be possible for him to do, so as to free himself from the miserable existence which the events of the last two days had rendered more insupportable than ever. The first image that appeared to him, was that of Agnelette. Like the beautiful angels that pass before the eyes of children in their dreams, he saw her figure, dressed all in white, with large white wings, floating across a blue sky. She seemed happy and beckoned to him to follow, saying the while “Those who come with me will be very happy.” But the only answer which Thibault vouchsafed to this charming vision was a movement of the head and shoulders, which interpreted, meant, “Yes, yes, Agnelette, I see you, and recognise you; yesterday, it would have been all very well to follow you; but to-day I am, like a king, the arbiter of life and death, and I am not the man to make foolish concessions to a love only born a day ago, and which has hardly learnt to stammer out its first words. To marry you, my poor child, far from lessening the bitter hard ships of our lives, would only double or treble the burden under which we are both borne down. No, Agnelette, no! You would make a charming mistress; but, a wife she must be in a position to bring money to support the household, equal in proportion to the power which I should contribute."

His conscience told him plainly that he was engaged to marry Agnelette; but he quieted it with, the assurance that if he broke the engagement, it would be for the good of that gentle creature.

"I am an upright man," he murmured to himself, "and it is my duty to sacrifice my personal pleasure to the welfare of the dear child. And more than that, she is sufficiently young and pretty and good, to find a better fate than what would await her as the wife of a plain sabot maker. And the end of all these fine reflections was, that Thibault felt himself bound to allow his foolish promises of the day before to melt away into air, and to forget the betrothal, of which the only witnesses had been the quivering leaves of the birch trees, and the pink blossom of the heather. It should be added that there was another mental vision, not wholly irresponsible for the resolution at which Thibault had arrived, the vision of a certain young widow, owner of the mill at Croyolles, a woman between twenty-six and twenty-eight, fresh and plump, with fine, rolling eyes, not devoid of mischief. Moreover, she was credibly supposed to be the richest match in all the country side, for her mill was never idle, and so, for all reasons, as one can clearly see, it was the very thing for Thibault.

Formerly, it would never have occurred to Thibault to aspire to anyone in the position of the rich and beautiful Madame Polet, for such was the name of the owner of the mill; and this will explain why her name is introduced here for the first time. And, in truth, it was the first time that she had ever occurred as a subject of serious consideration to our hero. He was astonished at himself for not having thought of her before, but then, as he said to himself, he had often thought about her, but without hope, while now, seeing that he was under the protection of the wolf, and that he had been endowed with a supernatural power, which he had already had occasion to exercise, it seemed to him an easy matter to get rid of all his rivals and achieve his purpose. True there were evil tongues that spoke of the owner of the mill as having something of an ill-temper and a hard heart; but the shoe-maker came to the conclusion that, with the devil up his sleeve, he need not trouble himself about any wicked spirit, any petty little second-class demon that might find a corner in Widow Polet's disposition. And so, by the time the day broke, he had decided to go to Croyolles, for all these visions had of course visited him during the night.

The Lord of Vez awoke with the first song of the birds; he had entirely recovered from his indisposition of the day before, and woke up his followers with loud slashings of his whip. Having sent off Marcotte's body to Vez, he decided that he would not return home without having killed something, but that he would hunt the boar, just as if nothing out of the way had taken place on the previous day. At last, about six o'clock in the morning, they all went off, the Baron assuring Thibault that he was most grateful to him for the hospitality that he himself and his men and dogs had met with under his poor roof, in consideration of which he was quite willing, he swore, to forget all the grievances which he had against the shoe-maker.

It will be easily guessed that Thibault experienced little regret at the departure of lord, dogs, and huntsmen. All these having at last disappeared, he stood a few moments contemplating his ransacked home, his empty cupboard, his broken furniture, his empty shed, the ground scattered with fragments of his belongings. But, as he told himself, all this was the ordinary thing to happen whenever one of the great lords went through a place, and the future, as it appeared to him, was far too brilliant to allow him to dwell long on this spectacle. He dressed himself in his Sunday attire, smartening himself as best he could, ate his last bit of bread with the last morsel left of his goat, went to the spring and drank a large glass of water, and started off for Croyolles. Thibault was determined to try his fortune with Madame Polet before the day was over, and therefore set out about nine o'clock in the morning.

The shortest way to Croyolles was round by the rear of Oigny and Pisseleu. Now Thibault knew every in and out of the forest of Villers-Cotterets as well as any tailor knows the pockets he has made; why, therefore, did he take the Chretiennelle track, seeing that it lengthened his journey by a good mile and a half? Reader, it was because this lane would ... bring him near to the spot where he had first seen Agnelette, for, although practical considerations were carrying him in the direction of Croyolles Mill, his heart was drawing him towards Preciamont. And there, as fate would have it, just after crossing the road that runs to La Ferte-Milou, he came upon Agnelette, cutting grass by the way-side for her goats. He might easily have passed her without being seen, for her back was turned towards him; but the evil spirit prompted him, and he went straight up to her. She was stooping to cut the grass with her sickle, but hearing someone approaching she lifted her head, and blushed as she recognised that it was Thibault. With the blush a happy smile rose to her face, which showed that the rising colour was not due to any feeling of hostility towards him.

"Ah! there you are," she said. "I dreamt much of you last night, and prayed many prayers for you also." And as she spoke, the vision of Agnelette passing along the sky, with the dress and wings of an Angel, and her hands joined in supplication, as he had seen her the previous night, returned to him.

"And what made you dream of me and pray for me, my pretty child?" asked Thibault with as unconcerned an air as a young lord at Court. Agnelette looked at him with her large eyes of heavenly blue.

"I dreamed of you, Thibault, because I love you," she said, "and I prayed for you, because I saw the accident that happened to the Baron and his huntsmen, and all the trouble that you were put to in consequence ... Ah! if I had been able to obey the dictates of my heart, I should have run to you at once to give you help."

It is a pity you did not come; you would have found a merry company, I can tell you?"

"Oh! it was not for that I should have liked to be with you, but to be of use to you in receiving the Baron and his train. Oh! what a beautiful ring you have, Monsieur Thibault, where did you get it?"

And the girl pointed to the ring which had been given to Thibault by the wolf. Thibault felt his blood run cold. "This ring?" he said.

"Yes, that ring," and seeing that Thibault appeared unwilling to answer her, Agnelette turned her head aside, and sighed. "A present from some fine lady, I suppose," she said in a low voice.

"There you are mistaken, Agnelette," replied Thibault with all the assurance of a consummate liar, "it is our betrothal ring, the one I have bought to put on your finger the day we are married."

"Why not tell me the truth, Monsieur Thibault?" said Agnelette, shaking her head sadly.

"I am speaking the truth, Agnelette."

"No," and she shook her head more sadly than before.

“And what makes you think that I am telling a lie.”

“Because the ring is large enough to go over two of my fingers.” And Thibault’s finger would certainly have made two of Agnelettes.

“If it is too large, Agnelette,” he said, “we can have it made smaller.”

“Good-bye, Monsieur Thibault.”

“What! Good-bye?”

“Yes.”

“You are going to leave me.”

“Yes, I am going.”

“And why, Agnelette.”

“Because I do not love liars.”

Thibault tried to think of some vow he could make to reassure Agnelette, but in vain.

“Listen,” said Agnelette, with tears in her eyes, for it was not without a great effort of self-control that she was turning away, “if that ring is really meant for me...”

“Agnelette, I swear to you that it Is.”

“Well then, give it me to keep till our wedding day, and on that day I will give it back to you, that you may have it blessed.”

“I will give it you with all my heart” replied Thibault, “but I want to see it on your pretty hand. You were right in saying that it was too large for you, and I am going into Villers-Cotterets to-day, we will take the measure of your finger, and I will get Monsieur Dugue, the gold smith there, to alter it for us.”

The smile returned to Angelette’s face and her tears were dried up at once. She put out her little hand; Thibault took it between his own, turned it over and looked at it, first on the back and then on the palm, and stooping, kissed it.

“Oh!” said Angelette “you should not kiss my hand, Monsieur Thibault, it is not pretty enough.”

“Give me something else then to kiss.” And Agnelette lifted her face that he might kiss her on the forehead.

“And now” she said joyously, and with childish eagerness, “let me see the ring.”

Thibault drew off the ring, and laughing, tried to put it on Agnelette’s thumb; but, to his great astonishment, he could not get it over the joint. “Well, well,” he exclaimed “who would ever have thought such a thing?”

Agnelette began to laugh. “It is funny, isn’t it!” she said.

Then Thibault tried to pass it over the first finger, but with the same result as when he put it on the thumb. He next tried the middle finger, but the ring seemed to grow smaller and smaller, as if fearing to sully this virgin hand; then the third finger, the same on which he wore it himself, but it was equally impossible to get it on. And as he made these vain attempts to fit the ring, Thibault felt Agnelette’s hand trembling more and more violently within his own, while the sweat fell from his own brow, as if he were engaged in the most arduous work; there was something diabolic at the bottom of it, as he knew quite well. At last he came to the little finger and endeavoured to pass the ring over it. This little finger, so small and transparent, that the ring should have hung as loosely upon it as a bracelet on one of Thibault’s, this little finger, in spite of all Agnelette’s efforts, refused to pass through the ring. “Ah! my God, Monsieur Thibault” cried the child “what does this mean?”

“Ring of the Devil, return to the Devil!” cried Thibault, flinging the ring against a rock, in the hope that it would be broken. As it struck the rock, it emitted flame; then it rebounded, and in rebounding, fitted itself on to Thibault’s finger. Agnelette who saw this strange evolution of the ring, looked at Thibault in horrified amazement. “Well” he said, trying to brave it out, “what is the matter?”

Agnelette did not answer, but as she continued to look at Thibault, her eye grew more and more wild and frightened. Thibault could not think what she was looking at, but slowly lifting her hand and pointing with her finger at Thibault’s head, she said. “Oh! Monsieur Thibault, Monsieur Thibault, what have you got there?”

“Where?” asked Thibault.

“There! there!” cried Agnelette, growing paler and paler.

“Well, but where?” cried the shoe-maker, stamping with his foot. “Tell me what you see.”

But instead of replying, Agnelette covered her face with her hands, and uttering a cry of terror, turned and fled with all her might.

Thibault, stunned by what had happened, did not even attempt to follow her; he stood rooted to the spot, unable to move or speak, as if thunderstruck.

What had Agnelette seen that had alarmed her so? What was it that she pointed to with her finger? Had God branded him, as He branded the first murderer? And why not? Had not he, like Cain, killed a man? and in the last sermon he had heard at Oigny had not the preacher said that all men were brothers? Thibault felt wild with misgivings; what had so terrified Agnelette? That he must find out without delay. At first he thought he would go into the town of Bourg-Fontaine and look at himself in a glass. But then, supposing the fatal mark was upon him, and others, besides Agnelette, were to see it! No, he must think of some other way of finding out. He could, of course, pull his hat over his brow, and run back to Oigny, where he had a fragment of mirror in which he could see himself; but Oigny was a long way off. Then he remembered that only a few paces from where he stood, there was a spring as transparent as crystal, which fed the pond near Baisemont, and those at Bourg; he would be able to see himself in that as clearly as in the finest mirror from Saint-Gobain. So Thibault went to the side of the stream and, kneeling down, looked at himself. He saw the same eyes, the same nose, and the same mouth, and not even the slightest little mark upon the forehead he drew a breath of relief. But still, there must have been something. Agnelette had certainly not taken fright as she had, for nothing Thibault bent over closer to the crystal water; and now he saw there was some thing bright that shone amid the dark curls on his head and fell over his forehead. He leaned closer still it was red hair. A red hair, but of a most peculiar red not sandy coloured or carrotty; neither of a light shade nor dark; but a red of the colour of blood with a brightness of the most vivid flame. Without stopping to consider how a hair of such a phenomenal colour could possibly have grown there, he began trying to pull it out. He drew for ward the curl where gleamed the terrible red hair, that it might hang over the water, and then taking hold of it carefully between his finger and thumb gave it violent pull; but the hair refused to come away. Thinking that he had not go sufficient hold of it, he tried another way, winding the hair round his finger and again giving it a vigorous jerk the hair cut into his fingers but remained as firmly rooted as ever. Thibault then turned it round two of his fingers and pulled again; the hair lifted a little bit of his scalp, but as to moving, Thibault might as well have tried to move the oak that threw its shady branches across the stream. Thibault began to think that he would do better to continue his walk to Croyolles; after all, as he remarked to limself, the questionable colour of a single hair would not hardly upset his plans of marriage. Nevertheless, the wretched hair caused him a great deal of worry; he could not get it out of his mind, it seemed to dance before his eyes, dazzling him like flames of running fire, until at last, out of all patience, he stamped his foot, exclaiming, “By all the devils in hell! I am not far from home yet, and I’ll get the better of this confounded hair somehow.” Whereupon he set off running back towards his hut, went in and found his fragment of mirror, got hold of his hair again, seized a carpenter’s chisel, placed it so as to cut off the hair as close to the head as possible, and keeping hair and tool in this position, leant over his bench, and dug the chisel down with as much force as possible. The tool cut deeply into the wood of the bench, but the hair remained intact. He tried the same plan again, only this time he armed himself with a mallet, which he swung over his head and brought down with redoubled blows on the handle of the chisel but he was as far as ever from carrying out his purpose. He noticed, however, that there was a little notch in the sharp edge of the chisel, just the width of a hair. Thibault sighed; he understood now that this hair, the price he had paid in return for his wish, belonged to the black wolf, and he gave up all further attempts to get rid of it.

CHAPTER VII

THE BOY AT THE MILL

Finding it impossible either to cut off or pull out the accursed hair, the only thing left for Thibault to do was to hide it as well as he could, by bringing the other hair over it; everybody would not, he hoped, have such eyes as Agnelette.

As we have already said, Thibault had a fine head of black hair, and by parting it down the side, and giving a certain turn to the front lock, he trusted that the one hair would pass unobserved.

He recalled with envy the young lords whom he had seen at the court of Madame de Maintenon, for, with their powdered wigs to cover it, the colour of their hair, whatever it might be, was of no moment. He, unfortunately, could not make use of powder to hide his, being prohibited from doing so by the sumptuary laws of the period.

However, having successfully managed, by an adroit turn of the comb, to hide his one red hair artistically under the others, Thibault decided to start again on his premeditated visit to the fair owner of the mill. He was careful this time, instead of inclining to the left, to verge towards the right, fearing to meet Agnelette if he followed the same path as he had taken that morning.

Emerging, therefore, on to the road leading to La Ferte-Milou, he then took the footpath which runs direct to Pisseleu across the fields. Arriving at Pisseleu, he continued along the valley in the direction of Croyolles, but had scarcely pursued this lower road for more than a few minutes, when, walking just ahead of him, he saw two donkeys being driven by a tall youth, whom he recognised as a cousin of his, named Landry. Cousin Landry was head boy at the mill, in the service of the owner whom Thibault was on his way to visit, and as the latter had but an indirect acquaintance with the widow Polet, he had counted on Landry to introduce him. It was a lucky chance therefore to come across his cousin like this, and Thibault hastened to overtake him.

Hearing footsteps behind him echoing his own, Landry turned and recognised Thibault. Thibault had always found Landry a pleasant and cheerful companion, and he was therefore very much astonished to see him looking sad and troubled. Landry waited for Thibault to come up to him, letting his donkeys go on alone. Thibault was the first to speak:

"Why, Cousin Landry," he asked, "what's the meaning of this? Here am I, putting myself out and leaving my work to come and shake hands with a friend and relation that I have not seen for more than six weeks, and you greet me with a face like that!"

"Ah, my dear Thibault," replied Landry, "what would you have of me! I may greet you with a gloomy face, but, believe me or not as you will, I am truly delighted to see you."

"That may be as you say, but you do not appear so."

"What do you mean?"

"You tell me you are delighted to see me in a tone of voice fit to bring on the blue-devils. Why, my dear Landry, you are generally as bright and lively as the click-clack of your mill, and singing songs to accompany it, and to-day you are as melancholy as the crosses in the cemetery. How now then! has the mill stopped for want of water?"

"Oh! not that! there is no want of water; on the contrary, there is more than usual, and the sluice is kept constantly at work. But, you see, instead of corn, it is my heart that is in the mill, and the mill works so well and so incessantly, and my heart is so ground between the stones that there is nothing left of it but a little powder."

"Indeed! Are you so miserable then at the mill?"

"Ah! would to God I had been dragged under the wheel the first day I put my foot inside it!"

"But what is it? you frighten me, Landry! ... tell me all your troubles, my dear lad."

Landry gave a deep sigh.

"We are cousins," continued Thibault, "and if I am too poor to give you a few crowns to help you out of any money trouble you are in, well, I can at least give you some words of good advice if it is a matter of the heart that is causing you grief."

"Thank you, Thibault; but neither money nor advice can do me any good."

"Well, anyhow, tell me what is the matter; it eases trouble to speak of it."

"No, no; it would be useless; I will say nothing."

Thibault began to laugh.

"You laugh?" said Landry, both angry and astonished, "my trouble makes you laugh?"

"I am not laughing at your trouble, Landry, but at your thinking that you can hide the cause of it from me, when it is as easy as anything to guess what it is."

"Guess then."

"Why, you are in love; nothing more difficult than that to guess, I can swear."

"I, in love!" exclaimed Landry; "why who has been telling you lies like that?"

"It is not a lie, it is the truth."

Landry again drew a deep sigh, more laden with despair even than his former one.

"Well, yes!" he said, "it is so, I am in love!"

"Ah! that's right! you have spoken out at last!" said Thibault, not without a certain quickening of the pulse, for he foresaw a rival in his cousin, "and with whom are you in love?"

"With whom?"

"Yes, I ask you with whom?"

"As to that, Cousin Thibault, you will have to drag the heart out of my breast before I tell you."

"You have told me already."

"What? I have told you who it is?" cried Landry, staring at Thibault with astonished eyes.

"Certainly you have."

"Surely you cannot mean it!"

"Did you not say that it would have been better for you to have been dragged under by the mill wheel the first day you entered into the service of Madame Polet, than to have been taken on by her as chief hand? You are unhappy at the mill, and you are in love; therefore, you are in love with the mistress of the mill, and it is this love which is causing your unhappiness."

"Ah, Thibault, pray hush! what if she were to overhear us!"

"How is it possible that she can over hear us; where do you imagine her to be, unless she is able to make herself in visible, or to change herself into a butterfly or a flower?"

"Never mind, Thibault, you keep quiet."

"Your mistress of the mill is hard hearted then, is she? and takes no pity on your despair, poor fellow?" was Thibault's rejoinder; but his words, though seemingly expressive of great commiseration, had a shade of satisfaction and amusement in them.

"Hard-hearted! I should think so indeed!" said Landry. "In the beginning, I was foolish enough to fancy that she did not repulse my love ... All day long I was devouring her with my eyes, and now and then, she too would fix her eyes on me, and after looking at me a while, would smile ... Alas! my dear Thibault, what happiness those looks and smiles were to me! ... Ah! why did I not content myself with them?"

"Well, there it is," said Thibault philosophically. "Man is so insatiable."

"Alas! yes; I forgot that I had to do with someone above me in position, and I spoke. Then Madame Polet flew into a great rage; called me an insolent beggar, and threatened to turn me out of doors the very next week."

"Phew!" said Thibault, "and how long ago is that?"

"Nearly three weeks."

"And the following week is still to come?" The shoemaker as he put the question began to feel a revival of the uneasiness which had been momentarily allayed, for he understood women better than his cousin Landry. After a minute's silence, he continued: "Well, well, you are not so unhappy after all as I thought you."

"Not so unhappy as you thought me?"

"No."

"Ah! if you only knew the life I lead! never a look, or a smile! When she meets me she turns away, when I speak to her on matters concerning the mill, she listens with such a disdainful air, that instead of talking of bran and wheat and rye, of barley and oats, of first and second crops, I begin to cry, and then she says to me, Take care! in such a menacing tone, that I run away and hide myself behind the bolters."

"Well, but why do you pay your addresses to this mistress of yours? There are plenty of girls in the country round who would be glad to have you for their wooer."

"Because I love her in spite of myself, I cannot help it, so there!"

"Take up with some one else; I'd think no more about her."

"I could not do it."

“At any rate, you might try. It’s just possible that if she saw you transferring your affections to another, the mistress of the Mill might grow jealous, and might then run after you, as you are now running after her. Women are such curious creatures?”

“Oh, if I was sure of that, I would begin to try at once ... although now ...” and Landry shook his head.

“Well, what about ... now?”

“Although now, after all that has happened, it would be of no use.”

“What has happened then?” asked Thibault, who was anxious to ascertain all particulars.

“Oh! as to that, nothing, “replied Landry, “and I do not even dare speak of it.”

“Why?”

“Because, as they say with us, ‘Best let sleeping dogs lie.’”

Thibault would have continued to urge Landry to tell him what the trouble was to which he referred, but they were now near the Mill, and their explanation would have to remain unfinished, even if once begun. What was more, Thibault thought that he already knew enough; Landry was in love with the fair owner of the Mill, but the fair owner of the Mill was not in love with Landry. And, in truth, he feared no danger from a rival such as this. It was with a certain pride and self-complacency that he compared the timid, boyish looks of his cousin, a mere lad of eighteen, with his own five feet six and well-set figure, and he was unliturally led into thinking, that, however little of a woman of taste Madame Polet might be, Landry’s failure was a good reason for believing that his own success was assured. The Mill at Croyolles is charmingly situated at the bottom of a cool green valley; the stream that works it forms a little pond, which is shaded by pollard willows, and slender poplars; and between these dwarfed and giant trees stand magnificent alders, and immense walnut trees with their fragrant foliage. After turning the wheel of the mill, the foaming water runs off in a little rivulet, which never ceases its hymn of joy as it goes leaping over the pebbles of its bed, starring the flowers that lean coquettishly over to look at themselves in its clear shallows with the liquid diamonds that are scattered by its tiny water falls.

The Mill itself lies so hidden in a bower of shrubs, behind the sycamores and weeping willows, that until one is within a short distance of it, nothing is to be seen but the chimney from which the smoke rises against the background of trees like a column of blue tinted alabaster. Although Thibault was familiar with the spot, the sight of it filled him, as he now looked upon it, with a feeling of delight which he had not hitherto experienced; but then he had never before gazed on it under the conditions in which he now found himself, for he was already conscious of that sense of personal satisfaction which the proprietor feels on visiting an estate which has been obtained for him by proxy. On entering the farm yard, where the scene was more animated, he was moved to even greater ecstasy of enjoyment.

The blue and purple-throated pigeons were cooing on the roofs, the ducks quacking, and going through sundry evolutions in the stream, the hens were clucking on the dung-heap, and the turkey cocks bridling and strutting as they courted the turkey-hens, while the brown and white cows came slowly in from the fields, their udders full of milk. Here, on one side, a cart was being unloaded, there, as they were being unharnessed, two splendid horses neighed and stretched their necks, now freed from the collar, towards their mangers; a boy was carrying a sack up into the granary, and a girl was bringing another sack filled with crusts and the refuse water to an enormous pig, that lay basking in the sun waiting to be transformed into salt-pork, sausages, and black puddings; all the animals of the ark were there, from the braying donkey to the crowing cock, mingling their discordant voices in this rural concert, while the mill with its regular click-clack, seemed to be beating time.

Thibault felt quite dazzled; he saw himself the owner of all that he now looked upon, and he rubbed his hands together with such evident pleasure, that Landry, if he had not been so absorbed in his own trouble, which grew ever greater as they drew nearer to the house, would certainly have noticed this apparently causeless emotion of joy on his cousin’s part. As they entered the farm-yard, the widow, who was in the dining-room, became aware of their presence, and seemed very inquisitive to know who the stranger was who had returned with her head boy. Thibault, with an easy and confident sort of manner, went up to the dwelling-house, gave his name, and explained to her, that, having a great wish to see his cousin Landry, he had decided to come over and introduce himself to her.

The mistress of the Mill was extremely gracious, and invited the new comer to spend the day at the Mill, accompanying her invitation with a smile that Thibault took as a most favourable augury.

Thibault had not come unprovided with a present. He had unhooked some, thrushes which he had found caught in a snare set with rowan-berries, as he came through the forest; and the widow sent them at once to be plucked, saying as she did so, that she hoped Thibault would stay to eat his share of them. But he could not help noticing that ‘all the while she was speaking to him, she kept on looking over his shoulder at something which seemed to attract her attention, and turning quickly, he saw that the pre-occupation of the fair owner of the Mill had evidently been caused by watching Landry, who was unloading his asses. Becoming conscious that Thibault had noticed the wandering of her looks and attention, Madame Polet turned as red as a cherry, but, immediately recovering herself she said to her new acquaintance;

“Monsieur Thibault, it would be kind of you, who appear so robust, to go and help your cousin; you can see that the job is too heavy a one for him alone” and so saying, she went back into the house.

“Now, the devil!” muttered Thibault, as he looked first after Madame Polet and then at Landry, “is the fellow after all more fortunate than he suspects himself, and shall I be forced to call the black wolf to my assistance to get rid of him?”

However, he went as the owner of the mill had asked him, and gave the required assistance. Feeling quite sure that the pretty widow was looking at him through some chink or other of the curtain, he put forth all his strength, and displayed to the full his athletic grace, in the accomplishment of the task in which he was sharing. The unloading finished, they all assembled in the dining-room where a waiting-maid was busy setting the table. As soon as dinner was served, Madame Polet took her place at the head of the table, with Thibault to her right. She was all attention and politeness to the latter, so much so indeed that Thibault, who had been temporarily crestfallen, took heart again, filled with hope. In order to do honour to Thibault’s present, she had herself dressed the birds with juniper-berries, and so prepared, no more delicate or appetising dish could well have been provided. While laughing at Thibault’s sallies, however, she cast stealthy glances now and again at Landry, who she saw had not touched what she herself had placed on the poor boy’s plate, and also that great tears were rolling down his cheeks, and falling into the untasted juniper sauce. This mute sorrow touched her heart; a look almost of tenderness came into her face, as she made a sign to him with her head, which seemed to say, so expressive was it, “Eat, Landry, I beg of you.” There was a whole world of loving promises in this little pantomime. Landry understood the gesture, for he nearly choked himself trying to swallow the bird at one mouthful, so eager was he. to obey the orders of his fair mistress.

Nothing of all this escaped Thibault’s eye.

He swore to himself, using an oath that he had heard in the mouth of the Seigneur Jean, and which, now that he was the friend of the devil, he fancied he might use like any other great lord: “Can it be possible,” he thought, “that she is really in love with this slip of a youth? Well, if so, it does not say much for her taste, and more than that, it does not suit my plans at all. No, no, my fair mistress, what you need is a man who will know how to look well after the affairs of the mill, and that man will be myself or the black wolf will find himself in the wrong box.”

Noticing a minute later that Madame Polet had finally gone back to the earlier stage of side-long glances and smiles which Landry had described to him, he continued, “I see I shall have to resort to stronger measures, for lose her I will not; there is not another match in all the countryside that would suit me equally well. But then, what am I to do with Cousin Landry? his love, it is true, upsets my arrangements; but I really cannot for so small a thing send him to join the wretched Marcotte in the other world. But what a fool I am to bother my brains about finding a way to help myself! It’s the wolfs business, not mine?” Then in a low voice: “Black wolf,” he said, “arrange matters in such a way, that without any accident or harm happening to my Cousin Landry, I may get rid of him.” The prayer was scarcely uttered, when he caught sight of a small body of four or five men in military uniform, walking down the hill-side and coming towards the mill. Landry also saw them; for he uttered a loud cry, got up as if to run away, and then fell back in his chair, as if all power of movement had forsaken him.

CHAPTER VIII

THIBAULT’S WISHES

The widow, on perceiving the effect which the sight of the soldiers advancing towards the mill had upon Landry, was almost as frightened as the lad himself.

“Ah, dear God!” she cried, “what is the matter, my poor Landry?”

“Say, what is the matter?” asked Thibault in his turn.

“Alas!” replied Landry, “last Thursday, in a moment of despair, meeting the recruiting-sergeant at the Dauphin Inn, I enlisted,”

“In a moment of despair!” exclaimed the mistress of the mill, “and why were you in despair?”

“I was in despair,” said Landry, with a mighty effort, “I was in despair because I love you.”

“And it is because you loved me, unhappy boy! that you enlisted?”

“Did you not say that you would turn me away from the mill?”

“And have I turned you away?” asked Madame Polet, with an expression which it was impossible to misinterpret.

“Ah! God! then you would not really have sent me away?” asked Landry.

“Poor boy!” said the mistress of the mill, with a smile and a pitying movement of the shoulders, which, at any other time, would have made Landry almost die of joy, but, as it was, only doubled his distress.

“Perhaps even now I might have time to hide,” he said.

“Hide!” said Thibault, “that will be of no use, I can tell you.”

“And why not?” said Madame Polet, “I am going to try, anyhow. Come, dear Landry.”

And she led the young man away, with every mark of the most loving sympathy.

Thibault followed them with his eyes: “It’s going badly for you, Thibault, my friend,” he said; “fortunately, let her hide him as cleverly as she may, they have a good scent, and will find him out.”

In saying this, Thibault was unconscious that he was giving utterance to a fresh wish.

The widow had evidently not hidden Landry very far away, for she returned after a few seconds of absence; the hiding-place was probably all the safer for being near. She had scarcely had time to take breath when the recruiting-sergeant and his companions appeared at the door. Two remained outside, no doubt to catch Landry if he should attempt to escape, the sergeant and the other soldier walked in with the confidence of men who are conscious of acting under authority. The Sergeant cast a searching glance round the room, brought back his right foot into the third position and lifted his hand to the peak of his cap. The mistress of the Mill did not wait for the Sergeant to address her, but with one of her most fascinating smiles, asked him if he would like some refreshment, an offer which no recruiting-sergeant is ever known to refuse. Then, thinking it a favourable moment to put the question, she asked them while they were drinking their wine, what had brought them to Croyolles Mill. The Sergeant replied that he had come in search of a lad, belonging to the Mill, who, after drinking with him to his Majesty's health and signed his engagement, had not re-appeared. The lad in question, interrogated as to his name and dwelling-place, had declared himself to be one Landry, living with Madame Polet, a widow, owner of the Mill at Croyolles. On the strength of this declaration, he had now come to Madame Polet, widow, of Croyolles Mill, to reclaim the defaulter.

The widow, quite convinced that it was permissible to lie for a good cause, assured the Sergeant that she knew nothing of Landry, nor had any one of that name ever been at the Mill.

The Sergeant in reply said that Madame had the finest eyes and the most charming mouth in the world, but that was no reason why he should implicitly believe the glances of the one or the words of the other. He was bound, therefore, he continued, "to ask the fair widow to allow him to search the Mill."

The search was begun, in about five minutes the Sergeant came back into the room and asked Madam Polet for the key of her room. The widow appeared very much surprised and shocked at such a request, but the Sergeant was so persistent and determined that at last she was forced to give up the key. A minute or two later, and the Sergeant walked in again, dragging Landry in after him by the collar of his coat. When the widow saw them both enter, she turned deadly pale. As for Thibault, his heart beat so violently, that he thought it would burst, for without the black wolfs assistance, he was sure the Sergeant would never have gone to look for Landry where he had found him.

"Ah! ah! my good fellow!" cried the Sergeant in a mocking voice, "so we prefer the service of beauty to the King's service? That is easy to understand; but when one has the good fortune to be born in his Majesty's domains and to have drunk his health, one has to give him a share of service, when his turn comes. So you must come along with us, my fine fellow, and after a few years in the King's uniform, you can come back and serve under your old flag. So, now then, march!"

"But," cried the widow, "Landry is not yet twenty, and you have not the right to take him under twenty."

"She is right," added Landry, "I am not twenty yet."

"And when will you be twenty?"

"Not until to-morrow."

"Good," said the Sergeant, "we will put you tonight on a bed of straw, like a medlar, and by to-morrow, at daybreak when we wake you up, you will be ripe."

Landry wept. The widow prayed, pleaded, implored, allowed herself to be kissed by the soldiers, patiently endured the coarse pleasantry excited by her sorrow, and at last offered a hundred crowns to buy him off. But all was of no avail. Landry's wrists were bound, and then one of the soldiers taking hold of the end of the cord, the party started off, but not before the lad of the mill had found time to assure his dear mistress, that far or near, he would always love her, and that, if he died, her name would be the last upon his lips. The beautiful widow, on her side, had lost all thought of the world's opinion in face of this great catastrophe, and before he was led away, she clasped Landry to her heart in a tender embrace.

When the little party had disappeared behind the willows, and she lost sight of them, the widow's distress became so overpowering that she became insensible, and had to be carried and laid on her bed. Thibault lavished upon her the most devoted attention. He was somewhat taken aback at the strong feeling of affection which the widow evinced for his cousin; however, as this only made him applaud himself the more for having cut at the root of the evil, he still cherished the most sanguine hopes.

On coming to herself, the first name the widow uttered was that of Landry, to which Thibault replied with a hypocritical gesture of commiseration. Then the mistress of the mill began to sob. “Poor lad!” she cried, while the hot tears flowed down her cheeks, “what will become of him, so weak and delicate as he is? The mere weight of his gun and knapsack will kill him!”

Then turning to her guest, she continued:

“Ah! Monsieur Thibault, this is a terrible trouble to me, for you no doubt have perceived that I love him? He was gentle, he was kind, he had no faults; he was not a gambler, nor a drinker; he would never have opposed my wishes, would never have tyrannised over his wife, and that would have seemed very sweet to me after the two cruel years that I lived with the late M. Polet. Ah! Monsieur Thibault, Monsieur Thibault! It is a sad grief indeed for a poor miserable woman to see all her anticipations of future happiness and peace thus suddenly swallowed up!”

Thibault thought this would be a good moment to declare himself; whenever he saw a woman crying, he immediately thought, most erroneously, that she only cried because she wished to be consoled. He decided, however, that he would not be able to attain his object without a certain circumlocution.

“Indeed,” he answered, “I quite understand your sorrow, nay, more than that, I share it with you, for you cannot doubt the affection I bear my cousin. But we must resign ourselves, and without wishing to deny Landry’s good qualities, I would still ask you, Madame, to find someone else who is his equal.”

“His equal!” exclaimed the widow, “there is no such person. Where shall I find so nice and so good a youth? It was a pleasure to me to look at his smooth young face, and with it all, he was so self-composed, so steady in his habits! he was working night and day, and yet I could with a glance make him shrink away and hide. No, no, Monsieur Thibault, I tell you frankly, the remembrance of him will prevent me ever wishing to look at another man, and I know that I must resign myself to remaining a widow for the rest of my life.”

“Phew!” said Thibault; “but Landry was very young!”

“There is no disadvantage in that,” replied the widow.

“But who knows if he would always have retained his good qualities. Take my advice, Madame, do not grieve anymore, but, as I say, look out for some one who will make you forget him. What you really need is not a baby-face like that, but a grown man, possessing all the qualities that you admire and regret in Landry, but, at the same time sufficiently mature to prevent the chance of finding one fine day that all your illusions are dispersed, and that you are left face to face with a libertine and a bully.”

The mistress of the Mill shook her her head; but Thibault went on;

“In short, what you need, is a man who while earning your respect, will, at the same time make the Mill work profitably. You have but to say the word, and you would not have to wait long before you found yourself well provided for, my fair Madame, a good bit better than you were just now.”

“And where am I to find this miracle of a man?” asked the widow, as she rose to her feet, looking defiantly at the shoe-maker, as if throwing down a challenge. The latter, mistaking the tone in which these last words were said, thought it an excellent occasion to make known his own proposals, and accordingly hastened to profit by it.

“Well, I confess,” he answered, “that when I said that a handsome widow like you would not have to go far before finding the man who would be just the very husband for her, I was thinking of myself, for I should reckon myself fortunate, and should feel proud, to call myself your husband. Ah! I assure you” he went on, while the mistress of the Mill stood looking at him with ever-increasing displeasure in her eyes, “I assure you that with me you would have no occasion to fear any opposition to your wishes: I am a perfect lamb in the way of gentleness, and I should have but one law and one desire, my law would be to obey you, my desire to please you! and as to your fortune, I have means of adding to it which I will make known to you later on ... it

But the end of Thibault’s sentence remained unspoken.

“What!” cried the widow, whose fury was the greater for having been kept in check until then, “What! you, whom I thought my friend, you dare to speak of replacing him in my heart! you try to dissuade me from keeping my faith to your cousin. Get out of the place, you worthless scoundrel! out of the place, I say! or I will not answer for the consequences; I have a good mind to get four of my men to collar you and throw you under the Mill-wheel.”

Thibault was anxious to make some sort of response, but, although ready with an answer on ordinary occasions, he could not for the moment think of a single word whereby to justify himself. True, Madame Polet, gave him no time to think, but seizing hold of a beautiful new jug that stood near her, she flung it at Thibault's head. Luckily for him, Thibault dodged to the left and escaped the missile, which flew past him, crashing to pieces against the chimney-piece. Then the mistress of the house took up a stool, and aimed it at him with equal violence; this time Thibault dodged to the right, and the stool went against the window, smashing two or three panes of glass. At the sound of the falling glass, all the youths and maids of the Mill came running up. They found their mistress flinging bottler, water-jugs, salt-cellars, plates, everything in short that came to hand, with all her might at Thibault's head. Fortunately for him widow Polet was too much incensed to be able to speak; if she had been able to do so, she would have called out; "Kill him! Strangle him! Kill the rascal! the scoundrel! the villain!"

On seeing the reinforcements arriving to help the widow, Thibault endeavoured to escape by the door that had been left open by the recruiting party, but just as he was running out, the good pig, that we saw taking its siesta in the sun, being roused out of its first sleep by all this hullabaloo, and thinking the farm people were after it, made a dash for its stye, and in so doing charged right against Thibault's legs. The latter lost his balance, and went rolling over and over for a good ten paces in the dirt and slush. "Devil take you, you beast!" cried the shoe-maker, bruised by his fall, but even more furious at seeing his new clothes covered with mud. The wish was hardly out of his mouth, when the pig was suddenly taken with a fit of frenzy, and began rushing about the farm-yard like a mad animal, breaking, shattering, and turning over everything that came in its way. The farm hands, who had run to their mistress on hearing her cries, thought the pig's behaviour was the cause of them and started off in pursuit of the animal. But it eluded all their attempts to seize hold of it, knocking over boys and girls, as it had knocked Thibault over, until, at last, coming to where the mill was separated from the sluice by a wooden partition, it crashed through the latter as easily as if it were made of paper, threw itself under the mill wheel ... and disappeared as if sucked down by a whirlpool. The mistress of the mill had by this time recovered her speech. "Lay hold of Thibault!" she cried, for she had heard Thibault's curse, and had been amazed and horrified at the instantaneous way in which it had worked. "Lay hold of him! knock him down! he is a wizard, a sorcerer! a were wolf!" applying to Thibault with this last word, one of the most terrible epithets that can be given to a man in our forest lands. Thibault, who scarcely knew where he was, seeing the momentary stupefaction which took possession of the farm people on hearing their mistress’s final invective, made use of the opportunity to dash past them, and while one went to get a pitch-fork and another a spade, he darted through the farm-yard gate, and began running up an almost perpendicular hill-side at full speed, with an ease which only confirmed Madame Polet’s suspicions, for the hill had always hitherto been looked upon as absolutely inaccessible, at any rate by the way Thibault had chosen to climb it.

“What!” she cried, “what! you give in like that! you should make after him, and seize hold of him, and knock him down!” But the farm servants shook their heads.

“Ah! Madame!” they said, “what is the use, what can we do against a were wolf?”

CHAPTER IX

THE WOLF-LEADER

Thibault, fleeing from before Madame Polet's threats and her farm servants' weapons, turned instinctively towards the forest, thinking to take shelter within it, should he chance to come across one of the enemy, for he knew that no one would venture to follow him there, for tear of any lurking dangers. Not that Thibault had much to fear, whatever kind of enemy he met, now that he was armed with the diabolical power which he had received from the wolf. He had only to send them where he had sent the widow's pig, and he was sure of being rid of them. Nevertheless, conscious of a certain tightening of the heart when from time to time the thought of Marcotte came back to him, he acknowledged to himself that, however anxious to be rid of them, one could not send men to the devil quite as readily as one sent pigs.

While thus reflecting on the terrible power he possessed, and looking back at intervals to see if there were any immediate need to put it into use, Thibault, by the time night fell, had reached the rear of Pisseleu. It was an autumn night, dark and stormy, with a wind that tore the yellowing leaves from the trees, and wandered through the forest ways with melancholy sighs and meanings.

These funereal voices of the wind were interrupted from time to time by the hooting of the owls, which sounded like the cries of lost travellers, hailing one another. But all these sounds were familiar to Thibault and made very little impression upon him. Moreover he had taken the precaution, on first entering the forest, of cutting a stick, four feet long, from a chestnut tree, and adept as he was with the quarterstaff, he was ready, armed thus, to withstand the attack of any four men. So he entered the forest with all boldness of heart, at the spot which is known to this day as the Wolfs' Heath. He had been walking for some minutes along a dark and narrow glade, cursing as he went the foolish whims of women, who, for no reason whatever, preferred a weak and timid child to a brave, strong, full grown man, when all of a sudden, at some few paces behind him, he heard a crackling among the leaves. He turned and the first thing he could distinguish in the darkness was the glowing light in a pair of eyes which shone like live coals. Then, looking more closely, and forcing his eyes, so to speak, to penetrate the gloom, he saw that a great wolf was following him, step by step. But it was not the wolf that he had entertained in his hut; that was black, while this was a reddish-brown. There was no mistaking one for the other, either as to colour or size. As Thibault had no reason to suppose that all the wolves he came across would be animated with such benevolent feelings towards him as the first with which he had had dealings, he grasped his quarter-staff in both hands, and began twirling it about to make sure he had not forgotten the knack of using it. But to his great surprise the wolf went on trotting quietly behind him, without evincing any hostile intention, pausing when he paused, and going on again when he did, only now and then giving a howl as if to summon re-inforcements. Thibault was not altogether without uneasiness as regards these occasional howls, and presently he became aware of two other bright spots of light in front of him, shining at intervals through the darkness which was growing thicker and thicker. Holding his stick up in readiness to hit, he went forward towards these two lights, which remained station ary, and as he did so, his foot seemed to stumble against something lying across the path it was another wolf. Not pausing to reflect whether it might not be unwise now to attack the first wolf, Thibault brought down his staff, giving the fellow a violent blow on the head. The animal uttered a howl of pain, then shaking his ears like a dog that has been beaten by its master, began walking on in front of the shoemaker. Thibault then turned to see what had become of the first wolf: it was still following him, still keeping step with him. Bringing his eyes back again to the front, he now perceived that a third wolf was walking alongside to the right, and turning instinctively to the left, saw a fourth flanking him on that side too. Before he had gone a mile, a dozen of the animals had formed a circle round him. The situation was critical, and Thibault was fully conscious of its gravity. At first he tried to sing, hoping that the sound of the human voice might frighten away the animals; but the expedient was vain. Not a single animal swerved from its place in the circle, which was as exactly formed as if drawn with compasses. Then he thought he would climb up into the first thick-leaved tree he came to, and there wait for daylight; but on further deliberation, he decided that the wisest course was to try to get home, as the wolves, in spite of their number, still appeared as well intentioned as when there was only one. It would be time enough to climb up into a tree when they began to show signs of any change of behaviour towards him.

At the same time we are bound to add that Thibault was so disquieted in mind and that he had reached his own door before he knew where he was, he did not at first recognise his own house. But a still greater surprise awaited him, for the wolves who were in front now respectfully drew back into two lines, sitting up on their hind legs and making a lane for him to pass along. Thibault did not waste time in stopping to thank them for this act of courtesy, but dashed into the house, banging the door to after him. ... Having firmly shut and bolted the door, he pushed the great chest against it, that it might be better able to resist any assault that might be made upon it. Then he flung himself into a chair, and began at length to find himself able to breathe more freely.

As soon as he was somewhat recovered, he went and peeped through the little window that looked out on the forest. A row of gleaming eyes assured him that far from having retired, the wolves had arranged themselves symmetrically in file in front of his dwelling.

To anyone else the mere proximity of the animals would have been most alarming, but, Thibault who shortly before, had been obliged to walk escorted by this terrible troop, found comfort in the thought that a wall, however thin, now separated him from his formidable companions.

Thibault lit his little iron lamp and put it on the table; drew the scattered wood-ashes of his hearth together and threw on them a bundle of chips, and then made a good fire, hoping that the reflection of the blaze would frighten away the wolves. But Thibault’s wolves were evidently wolves of a special sort, accustomed to fire, for they did not budge an inch from the post they had taken up. The state of uneasiness he was in prevented Thibault from sleeping, and directly dawn broke, he was able to look out and count them. They seemed, just as on the night before, to be waiting, some seated, some lying down, others sleeping or walking up and down like sentinels. But at length, as the last star melted away, drowned in the waves of purple light ebbing up from the east, all the wolves with one accord rose, and uttering the mournful howl with which animals of darkness are wont to salute the day, they dispersed in various directions and disappeared. Thibault was now able to sit down and think over the misadventure of the previous day, and he began by asking himself how it was that the mistress of the Mill had not preferred him to his cousin Landry. Was he no longer the handsome Thibault, or had some disadvantageous change come over his personal appearance? There was only one way of ascertaining whether this was so or not, namely, by consulting his mirror. So he took down the fragment of looking-glass hanging over the chimney-piece, and carried it towards the light, smiling to himself the while like a vain woman. But he had hardly given the first glance at himself in the mirror, before he uttered a cry, half of astonishment, half of horror. True, he was still the handsome Thibault, but the one red hair, thanks to the hasty wishes which had so imprudently escaped him, had now grown to a regular lock of hair, of colour and brilliancy that vied with the brightest flames upon his hearth.

His forehead grew cold with sweat. Knowing, however, that all attempts to pluck it out or cut it off would be futile, he made up his mind to make the best of the matter as it stood, and in future to forbear as far as possible from framing any wishes. The best thing was to put out of his mind all the ambitious desires that had worked so fatally for him, and go back to his humble trade. So Thibault sat down and tried to work, but he had no heart for the job. In vain he tried to remember the carols he had been in the habit of singing in the happier days when the beech and the birch shaped themselves so quickly beneath his fingers; his tools lay untouched for hours together. He pondered over matters, asking himself whether it was not a miserable thing to be sweating one’s heart out merely for the privilege of leading a painful and wretched existence, when, by judiciously directing one’s wishes one might so easily attain to happiness. Formerly, even the preparation of his frugal meal had been an agreeable distraction, but it was so no longer; when hunger seized him and he was forced to eat his piece of black bread, he did it with a feeling of repugnance, and the envy, which had hitherto been nothing more than a vague aspiration after ease and comfort, was now developed into a blind and violent hatred towards his fellow creatures.

Still the day, long as it seemed to Thibault, passed away like all its fellows. When twilight fell, he went outside and sat down on the bench which he had made himself and placed in front of the door, and there he remained, lost in gloomy reflections. Scarcely had the shadows be gun to darken, before a wolf emerged from the underwood, and, as on the previous evening, went and lay down at a short distance from the house. As on the evening before, this wolf was followed by a second, by a third, in short by the whole pack, and once more they all took up their respective posts preparatory to the night's watch. As soon as Thibault saw the third wolf appear, he went indoors and barricaded himself in as carefully as the evening before; but this evening he was even more unhappy and low spirited, and felt that he had not the strength to keep awake all night. So he lighted his fire, and piled it up in such a way that it would last till the morning, and throwing himself on his bed, fell fast asleep. When he awoke, it was broad daylight, the sun having risen some hours before. Its rays fell in many colours on the quivering autumn leaves, dyeing them with a thousand shades of gold and purple.

Thibault ran to the window, the wolves had disappeared, leaving behind only the mark of where their bodies had lain on the dew-covered grass.

Next evening they again congregated before his dwelling; but he was now growing gradually accustomed to their presence, and had come to the conclusion that his relations with the large black wolf had somehow awakened sympathetic feelings towards him in all other individuals of the same species, and he determined to find out, once for all, what their designs towards him really were. Accordingly, thrusting a freshly sharpened bill-hook into his belt, and taking his boar-spear in his hand, the shoemaker opened his door and walked resolutely out to face them. Having half expected that they would spring upon him, he was greatly surprised to see them begin to wag their tails like so many dogs on seeing their master approach. Their greetings were so expressive of friendliness, that Thibault even ventured to stroke one or two of them on the back, which they not only allowed him to do, but actually gave signs of the greatest pleasure at being thus noticed.

"Oh! ho!" muttered Thibault, whose wandering imagination always went ahead at a gallop, "if these queer friends of mine are as obedient as they are gentle, why, here I am, the owner of a pack unequalled by any my Lord Baron has ever possessed, and I shall have no difficulty whatever now in dining on venison whenever the fancy so takes me."

He had hardly said the words, when four of the strongest and most alert of the four-footed beasts separated themselves from the others and galloped off into the forest. A few minutes later a howl was heard, sounding from the depths of the underwood, and half an hour afterwards one of the wolves reappeared dragging with it a fine kid which left behind it a long trail of blood on the grass. The wolf laid the animal at Thibault's feet, who delighted beyond measure at seeing his wishes, not only accomplished, but forestalled, broke up the kid, giving each of the wolves an equal share, and keeping the back and haunches for himself. Then with the gesture of an Emperor, which showed that he now at last understood the position he held, he ordered the wolves away until the morrow.

Early next morning, before the day broke, he went off to Villers-Cotterets, and at the price of a couple of crowns, the Innkeeper of the Boule-d'Or, took the two haunches off his hands.

The following day, it was half of a boar that Thibault conveyed to the Innkeeper, and it was not long before he became the latter's chief purveyor.

Thibault, taking a taste for this sort of business, now passed his whole day hanging about the taverns, and gave no more thought to the making of shoes. One or two of his acquaintances began to make fun of his red lock, for however assiduously he covered it with the rest of his hair, it always found a way of getting through the curls that hid it, and making itself visible. But Thibault soon gave it plainly to be understood that he would take no joking about the unfortunate disfigurement.

Meanwhile, as ill luck would have it, the Duke of Orleans and Madame de Montesson came to spend a few days at Villers-Cotterets. This was a fresh incentive to Thibault's madly ambitious spirit. All the fine and beautiful ladies and all the gay young lords from the neighbouring estates, the Montbretons, the Montesquious, the Courvals, hastened to Villers-Cotterets. The ladies brought their richest attire, the young lords their most elegant costumes. The Baron's hunting-horn resounded through the forest louder and gayer than ever. Graceful amazons and dashing cavaliers, in red coats laced with gold, passed like radiant visions, as they were borne along on their magnificent English horses, illuminating the sombre depths of the wood like brilliant flashes of light.

In the evening it was different; then all this aristocratic company assembled for feasting and dancing, or at other times drove out in beautiful gilt carriages bedizened with coats of arms of every colour.

Thibault always took his stand in the front rank of the lookers-on, gazing with avidity on these clouds of satin and lace, which lifted now and then to disclose the delicate ankles encased in their fine silk stockings, and the little shoes with their red heels. Thus the whole cavalcade swept past in front of the astonished peasantry, leaving a faint exhalation of scent and powder and delicate perfumes. And then Thibault would ask himself why he was not one of those young lords in their embroidered coats; why he had not one of these beautiful women in their rustling satins for his mistress. Then his thoughts would turn to Agnelette and Madame Polet, and he saw them just as they were, the one a poor little peasant girl, the other nothing more than the owner of a rustic mill.

But it was when he was walking home at night through the forest, accompanied by his pack of wolves, which, from the moment the night fell and he set foot inside the forest, no more thought of leaving him than the King's bodyguard would dream of leaving their Royal master, that his broodings took their most disastrous turn. Surrounded by the temptations which now assailed him, it was only what was to be expected that Thibault who had already gone so far in the direction of evil, should break away from what little good was still left in him, losing even the very remembrance of having once led an honest life. What were the few paltry crowns that the Land lord of the Boule-d'Or gave him in payment for the game which his good friends the wolves procured for him? Saved up for months, even for years, they would still be insufficient to satisfy a single one of the humblest of the desires which kept tormenting his brain. It would be scarcely safe to say that Thibault, who had first wished for a haunch of the Baron's buck, then for Agnelette's heart, and then for the widow Polet's mill, would now be satisfied even with the Castle at Oigny or Longpont, to such extravagant issues had his ambition been excited by those dainty feet, those trim ankles, those exquisite scents exhaled from all those velvet and satin gowns.

At last one day he said to himself definitely that it would be the veriest folly to go on living his poor life when a power so tremendous as he now possessed, was at his disposal. From that moment he made up his mind that, no matter if his hair should grow as red as the crown of fire which is seen at night hanging over the great chimney at the glass works of Saint Gobain, he would exercise this power of his to the accomplishing of the most high-flown of his ambitions.

CHAPTER X

MAITRE MAGLOIRE

In this reckless state of mind Thibault, who had not as yet decided on any special course of action, spent the last days of the old year and the first of the new. Still, remembering the heavy expenses entailed on each and all by New Year’s Day, he had exacted double rations from his usual purveyor’s, as the trying time drew nearer and nearer, simultaneously, drawing double profits from the landlord of the Boule-d’Or.

Thus it came about that, apart from the disquieting fact that his mesh of red hair was getting larger and larger almost every day, Thibault entered upon the New Year in a better condition as to material matters than he had ever known before. Observe, I say, as to material matters, and material matters only; for albeit the body might seem in good plight, the soul was already alarmingly compromised. The body, at any rate was well clothed, and ten crowns or more made a merry jingling in his waistcoat pocket; and so dressed, and so accompanied by this silvery music, Thibault no longer appeared like a wooden shoe-maker’s apprentice, but like some well-to-do farmer, or even a comfortable citizen, carrying on a trade maybe, but simply for his own pleasure. Looking such as he now did, Thibault went to one of those village functions, which are fete-days for the whole province. The magnificent ponds of Berval and Poudron were to be drawn. Now the drawing of a pond is a grand affair for the owner, or for the one who farms it, not to mention the great pleasure it affords to the spectators. Such an event therefore is advertised a month in advance, and people come from thirty miles round to enjoy this fine entertainment. And to those of my readers who are not accustomed to the manners and customs of the provinces, let me explain that the fishing which takes place is not a fishing with the line, baited with worms, or scented wheat, or with the cast-net, or the sweep-net, nothing of the kind; this fishing consists in emptying a pond, sometimes nearly a mile, or even three miles long, of every fish from the largest pike to the smallest minnow. This is how the thing is managed. In all probability, not a single one of my readers has ever seen the kind of pond to which I refer. I will describe it; to begin with, it always has two issues, that by which the water flows in, that by which the water flows out; that by which, the water enters has no particular name, that by which it is let out is called the sluice. The water as it leaves the sluice falls into a large reservoir whence it escapes through the meshes of a strong net; the water flows away, but the fish remain. Everyone knows that it takes several days to empty a pond, therefore those who wish to take a share in the fishing, and the onlookers, are not summoned to attend before the second, third, or fourth day, according to the volume of water which the pond has to disgorge before it is ready for the final act, and this takes place as soon as the fish appear at the sluice.

At the hour announced for the fishing, a crowd assembles, varying in number according to the size and the celebrity of the pond, but comparatively as large and as fashionable as that to be seen at the Champ de Mars or Chantilly on race days when favourite horses are to run and favourite jockeys to ride. Only here the spectators do not look on from grand stands and carriages; on the contrary, they come as they can, or as they like, in gigs, pleasure vans, phaetons, carts, on horse-back, on donkey-back, but once on the spot everyone rushes to find a place, stationing him or herself either in order of arrival, or according to the amount of elbowing and pushing of which each is capable, always, however, with that due respect for authority which is observed even in the least civilised districts. A sort of stout trellis-work, however, firmly sunk into the ground, prevents the on lookers from falling into the reservoir.

The colour and the smell of the water betoken the arrival of the fish. Every kind of show has its drawbacks: the larger and grander the audience at the opera house, the more carbonic acid is there to draw into the lungs; at the drawing of a pond, the nearer the supreme moment approaches, the more marsh-gas is there to inhale.

When the sluice is first opened, the water that pours through is beautifully clear, and slightly green in colour, like the water of a brook; this is the upper layer, which, carried along by its weight, is the first to appear. By degrees the water becomes less transparent, and takes on a greyish hue; this is the second layer, emptying itself in turn, and every now and then, more frequently as the water becomes muddier, a ray of silver is seen to dart through it; it is some fish, too small and weak to resist the current, which flashes past as if acting as scout for its stronger brethren. Nobody troubles to pick it up; it is allowed to lie gasping, and trying to find some little stagnant puddle of water at the bottom of the pond, flapping, floundering and capering like an acrobat going through his antics.

Then the black water comes pouring through; this is the last act, the final catastrophe.

Each fish, according to its power of resistance, struggles against the current which is bearing it along in this unusual manner. Instinctively they feel there is danger, and each strives its hardest to swim in an opposite direction; the pike struggles beside the carp which it was yesterday pursuing so hard; the perch is reconciled to the tench, and as they swim side by side, does not so much as think of taking a bite out of the flesh he finds so palatable at other times. So the Arabs at times find huddled together in the pits they dig to catch game, gazelles and jackals, antelopes and hyenas, the jackals and hyenas having grown as gentle and as timid as the gazelles and antelopes.

But the strength of the struggling and dying fish begins at last to fail. The scouts that we noticed a few minutes ago become more numerous; the size of the fish becomes more respectable, which is proved to them by the attention they receive from the pickers-up. These pickers-up are men, clad in plain linen trousers and cotton shirts; the trousers are rolled up to above the knee, and the shirt sleeves turned up to the shoulders. The fish are gathered up in baskets; those destined to be sold alive, or kept for re-stocking the pond, are poured off into tanks; those condemned to death are simply spread out on the grass, and will be sold before the day is out. As the fish grow more and more abundant the cries of delight from the spectators become louder and more frequent; for these onlookers are not like the audiences in our theatres; they have no idea of stifling their feelings, or showing good taste by appearing indifferent. No, they come to amuse themselves, and every fine tench, or fine carp, or fine pike, calls forth loud, undisguised and delighted applause. As in a well-ordered review, the troops file past in order, according to their weight, if we may use the expression, first the light sharp-shooters, then the somewhat heavier dragoons, and finally the ponderous cuirassiers and heavy artillery to bring up the rear, so the fish sweep by according to their several species; the smallest, that is the weakest, first, the heaviest, that is the strongest, last.

At last the moment comes when the water ceases to flow; the passage is literally obstructed by the remainder of the fish, the big-wigs of the pond, and the pickers-up have veritable monsters to fight with. This is the supreme moment. Now comes the climax of applause, the last vociferous bravos. Then, the play being over, everyone goes to examine the actors; the latter are mostly lying gasping to death on the grass of the field, while a certain number are recovering themselves in the water. You look about for the eels; where are the eels you ask? Then three or four eels, about as big round as your thumb and half the length of your arm, are pointed out to you; for the eels, thanks to their peculiar organization, have momentarily at least, escaped the general carnage. The eels have taken a header into the mud and disappeared; and this is the reason why you may see men with guns walking up and down at the edge of the pond, and hear a report from time to time. If you ask the reason for this shooting, you will be told that it is to bring the eels out of their hiding-places. But why do eels come out of the mud when they hear the report of a gun? Why do they make for the water which still runs in little rivulets at the bottom of the pond? Why, in short, being safe at the bottom of the mud, like other good friends of our acquaintance who have the good sense to remain there, do the eels not stay there, instead of wriggling back into a stream of water, which carries them along with it, and finally lands them in the reservoir, that is in the common grave? The College de France would find nothing easier than to answer this question, under existing circumstances; so I put this question to its learned members: Is not the idea of the gun a pure superstition, and is not the following solution the right and simple one? The mud in which the eel takes refuge is at first liquid, but gradually becomes drier and drier, like a sponge when squeezed, and so becomes more and more uninhabitable for it, and so, in the long run, it is obliged to get back to its natural element the water. The water once reached, the eel is lost; but it is not till the fifth or sixth day after the emptying of the pond, that the eels are caught.

It was to a fete of this kind that every one at Villers-Cotterets, at Crespy, at Mont-Gobert, and in the surrounding villages had been invited. Thibault went like everybody else; he had now no need to work, finding it simpler to allow the wolves to work for him. From a workman he had risen to be a man at ease, it now only remained to make himself a gentleman, and Thibault counted upon being able to do this. He was not a man to allow himself to remain in the rear, and he therefore made good use of his arms and legs so as to secure a place in the front row. In the course of this manoeuvre he happened to rumple the dress of a tall, fine woman, next to whom he was trying to install himself. The lady was fond of her clothes, and no doubt, also, she was in the habit of commanding, which naturally produces an attitude of disdain, for, turning to see who had brushed past her, she let fall the uncompromising word, “lout!” Notwithstanding the rudeness of the remark, the mouth that uttered the words was so beautiful, the lady so pretty, and her momentary anger in such ugly contrast to the charming expression of her face, that Thibault, instead of retorting in similar, or even more objectionable style, only drew back, stammering some sort of excuse.

There is no need to remind the reader that of all aristocracies, beauty is still the chief. If the woman had been old and ugly, she might have been a Marquise, but Thibault would certainly have called her by some opprobrious title. It is possible also that Thibault’s ideas were somewhat distracted by the strange appearance of the man who served as knight to this lady. He was a stout man of about sixty years of age, dressed entirely in black, and of a perfectly dazzling exactness of toilet; but therewith, so extremely short, that his head scarcely reached the lady’s elbow, and as she would have been unable to take his arm, without positive torture to herself, she was content to lean majestically upon his shoulder. Seeing them thus together, one might have taken her for an ancient Cybele leaning on one of those grotesque little modern figures of Chinese idols. And what a fascinating idol it was with those short legs, that bulgy stomach, those little fat podgy arms, those white hands under the lace ruffles, that plump, rubicund head and face, that well-combed, well-powdered, well-curled head of hair, and that tiny pig tail, which with every movement of its wearer’s, went bobbing up and down with its neat bow of ribbon against the coat collar. It reminded one of those black beetles of which the legs seem so little in harmony with the body, that the insects seem rather to roll than to walk. And with it all, the face was so jovial, the little eyes level with the forehead, were so full of kindness, that one felt involuntarily drawn towards him; one could be sure that the pleasant little man was too intent on giving himself a good time, by every means in his power, to think of quarrelling with that vague and indefinite person known as one’s neighbour. Wherefore, on hearing his companion speak so cavalierly to Thibault, the good fat little man appeared to be in despair.

“Gently, Madame Magloire! gently, Madame Bailiff!” he said, contriving in these few words to let his neighbours know what and who he was;

"gently! those were ugly words to use to the poor fellow, who is more sorry than you are for the accident."

"And may I ask, Monsieur Magloire," replied the lady, "if I am not at liberty to thank him for so nicely crumpling my beautiful blue damask dress, which is now entirely spoilt, not taking into consideration that he also trod on my little toe?"

"I beg you, Madame, to pardon my clumsiness," replied Thibault; "when you turned your face towards me, its wonderful beauty dazzled me like a ray of May sunshine, so that I could not see where I was treading."

It was not a badly turned compliment for a man who for three months past had been in the daily society of a pack of wolves; nevertheless it did not produce any great effect upon the lady, who only responded with a haughty little pouting of the mouth. The truth was, that in spite of Thibault being so decently dressed, she had, with the curious insight which women of all ranks possess in these matters, detected at once to what class he belonged.

Her stout little companion however, was more indulgent, for he clapped loudly with his podgy hands, which the pose adopted by his wife left him free to use as he liked.

"Ah! bravo, bravo!" he said, "you have hit the mark, Monsieur; you are a clever young fellow, and seem to have studied the style to address women in. My love, I hope you appreciated the compliment as I did, and to prove to this gentlemen that we are good Christians and bear no ill-will towards him, he will, I hope, if he is living in this neighbourhood and it would not be too far out of his way, accompany us home, and we will drink a bottle of old wine together, if Perrine will get one out for us from the back of the wood shed."

"Ah! there I know you, Master Nepomucene; any excuse serves you to be clinking glasses with somebody, and when no genuine occasion offers, you are very clever at ferreting out one, it does not matter where. But you know, Monsieur Magloire, that the doctor has expressly forbidden you to drink between meals."

"True, Madame Bailiff, true," replied her husband, "but he did not forbid me to show politeness to an agreeable young fellow such as Monsieur appears to me to be. Be lenient, I pray, Suzanne; give up this surly manner, which suits you so ill. Why, Madame, those who do not know you, would think, to hear you, that we had nearly got to quarrelling over a gown.

However, to prove the contrary to Monsieur, I promise that if you can get him to go back with us, I will, the very minute we get home, give you the money to buy that figured silk dress, which you have been wishing for so long.

The effect of this promise was like magic. Madame Magloire was instantly mollified, and as the fishing was now drawing to a close, she accepted with less ungraciousness the arm which Thibault, somewhat awkwardly we must confess, now offered her.

As to Thibault himself, struck with the beauty of the lady, and gathering from words which had fallen from her and her husband, that she was the wife of a magistrate, he parted the crowd before him with an air of command, holding his head high the while, and making his way with as much determination as if he were starting on the conquest of the Golden Fleece.

And in truth, Thibault, the bridegroom elect of Agnelette, the lover who had been so ignominiously expelled her house by the mistress of the mill, was thinking not only of all the pleasure he could enjoy, but of the proud position he would hold as the beloved of a bailiffs wife, and of all the advantages to be drawn from the good fortune which had so unexpectedly befallen him, and which he had so long desired.

As on her side also, Madame Magloire was not only very much preoccupied with her own thoughts, but also paid very little attention to him, looking to right and left, first in front of her and then behind, as if in search of some one, the conversation would have lagged terribly as they walked along if their excellent little companion had not been at the expense of the best part of it, as he jogged along now beside Thibault and now beside Suzanne, waddling like a duck jogging home after a big feed.

And so with Thibault engaged in his calculations, and the Bailiff’s wife with her dreams, the Bailiff trotting beside them talking and wiping his forehead with a fine cambric pocket-handkerchief, they arrived at the village of Erneville which is situated about a mile and a hall from the Poudron ponds. It was here, in this charming village, which lies half-way between Haramont and Bonneuil, within a stone’s throw or two of the Castle o Vez, the dwelling of my lord the Baron that Monsieur Magloire sat as magistrate

CHAPTER XI

DAVID AND GOLIATH.

After walking the whole length of the village, they stopped before an imposing looking house at the junction of the roads leading to Longpre and Haraniont. As they neared the house the little host, with all the gallantry of a preux chevalier, went on ahead, mounted the flight of five or six steps with an agility which one could not have expected, and, by dint of standing on tip-toe, managed to reach the bell with the tips of his fingers. It should be added, that having once got hold of it, he gave it a pull which unmistakeably announced he return of the master. It was, in short, no ordinary return, but a triumphal one, for the Bailiff was bringing home a guest.

A maid, neatly dressed in her best clothes, opened the door. The Bailiff gave her an order in a low voice, and Thibault, whose adoration of beautiful women did not prevent him from liking a good dinner, gathered that these few whispered words referred to the menu which Perrine was to prepare. Then turning round, his lost addressed Thibault:

"Welcome, my dear guest, to the house of Bailiff Nepomucene Magloire."

Thibault politely allowed Madame to pass in before him, and was then introduced into the drawing-room.

But the shoemaker now made a slip. Unaccustomed as yet to luxury, the man of the forest was not adroit enough to hide the admiration which he felt on beholding the bailiff's home. For the first time in his life he found himself in the midst of damask curtains and gilt armchairs; he had not imagined that any one save the King, or at least his Highness the Duke of Orleans, had curtains and armchairs of this magnificence. He was unconscious that all the while Madame Magloire was closely watching him, and that his simple astonishment and delight did not escape her detective eye. However, she appeared now, after mature reflexion, to look with greater favour on the guest whom her husband had imposed upon her, and endeavoured to soften for him the glances of her dark eyes. But her affability did not go so far as to lead her to comply with the request of Monsieur Magloire, who begged her to add to the flavour and bouquet of the champagne by pouring it out herself for her guest. Notwithstanding the entreaties of her august husband, the Bailiff's wife refused, and under the pretext of fatigue from her walk, she retired to her own room. Before leaving the room, however, she expressed a hope to Thibault, that, as she owed him some expiation, he would not forget the way to Erneville, ending her speech with a smile which displayed a row of charming teeth. Thibault responded with so much lively pleasure in his voice that it rendered any roughness of speech less noticeable, swearing that he would sooner lose the power to eat and drink than the remembrance of a lady who was as courteous as she was beautiful.

Madame Magloire gave him a curtsey which would have made her known as the Bailiff's wife a mile off, and left the room.

She had hardly closed the door behind her, when Monsieur Magloire went through a pirouette in her honour, which though less light, was not less significant than the caper a school-boy executes when once he has got rid of his master.

"Ah! my dear friend," he said, "now that we are no longer hampered by a woman's presence, we will have a good go at the wine! Those women, they are delightful at mass or at a ball; but at table, heaven defend me, there is nobody like the men! What do you say, old fellow?"

Perrine now came in to receive her master's orders as to what wine she was to bring up. But the gay little man was far too fastidious a judge of wines to trust a woman with such a commission as this. Indeed, women never show that reverential respect for certain old bottles which is their due, nor that delicacy of touch with which they love to be handled. He drew Perrine down as if to whisper some thing in her ear; instead of which he gave a good sound kiss to the cheek which was still young and fresh, and which did not blush sufficiently to lead to the belief that the kiss was a novelty to it.

"Well, sir," said the girl laughing, "What is it?"

"This is it, Perrinette, my love," said the Bailiff, "that I alone know the good brands, and as they are many in number, you might get lost among them, and so I am going to the cellar myself." And the good man disappeared trundling off on his little legs, cheerful, alert and fantastic as those Nuremberg toys mounted on a stand, which you wind up with a key, and which, once set going, turn round and round, or go first one way and then the other, till the spring has run down; the only difference being, that this dear little man seemed wound up by the hand of God himself, and gave no sign of ever coming to a standstill.

Thibault was left alone. He rubbed his lands together, congratulating himself on laving chanced upon such a well-to-do house, with such a beautiful wife, and such an amiable husband for host and hostess. Five minutes later the door again opened, and in came the bailiff, with a bottle in either hand, and one under each arm. The two under his arms were bottles of sparkling Sillery, of the first quality, which, not being injured by shaking, were safe to be carried in a horizontal position. The two which he carried in his hands, and which he held with a respectful care which was a pleasure to behold, were, one a bottle of very old Chambertin, the other a bottle of Hermitage.

The supper hour had now come; for it must be remembered, that at the period of which we are. writing, dinner was at mid-day, and supper at six. Moreover, it had already been dark for some time before six o’clock, in this month of January, and whether it be six, or twelve o’clock at night, if one has to eat one’s meal by candle or lamp-light, it always seems to one like supper.

The Bailiff put the bottles tenderly down on the table and rang the bell. Perrinette came in.

“When will the table be ready for us, my pretty?” asked Magloire.

“Whenever Monsieur pleases,” replied Perrine. “I know Monsieur does not like waiting; so I always have everything ready in good time.”

“Go and ask Madame, then, if she is not coming; tell her, Perrine, that we do not wish to sit down without her.”

Perrine left the room.

“We may as well go into the dining-room to wait,” said the little host; “you must be hungry, my dear friend, and when I am hungry, I like to feed my eyes before I feed my stomach.”

“You seem to me to be a fine gourmand, you,” said Thibault.

“Epicure, epicure, not gourmand you must not confuse the two things. I go first, but only in order to show you the way.”

And so saying, Monsieur Magloire led his guest into the dining-room.

“Ah!” he exclaimed gaily as he went in, patting his corporation, “tell me now, do you not think this girl of mine is a capital cook, fit to serve a

Cardinal? Just look now at this little supper she has spread for us; quite a simple one, and yet it pleases me more, I am sure, than would have Belshazzar's feast."

"On my honour, Bailiff," said Thibault, "you are right; it is a sight to rejoice one's heart." And Thibault's eyes began to shine like carbuncles.

And yet it was, as the Bailiff described it, quite an unpretentious little supper, but withal so appetising to look upon, that it was quite surprising. At one end of the table was a fine carp, boiled in vinegar and herbs, with the roe served on either side of it on a layer of parsley, dotted about with cut carrots. The opposite end was occupied by a boar-ham, mellow-flavoured, and deliciously reposing on a dish of spinach, which lay like a green islet surrounded by an ocean of gravy.

A delicate game-pie, made of two part ridges only, of which the heads appeared above the upper crust, as if ready to attack one another with their beaks, was placed in the middle of the table; while the intervening spaces were covered with side-dishes holding slices of Aries sausage, pieces of tunny-fish, swimming in beautiful green oil from Provence, anchovies sliced and arranged in all kinds of strange and fantastic patterns on a white and yellow bed of chopped eggs, and pats of butter that could only have been churned that very day. As accessories to these were two or three sorts of cheese, chosen from among those of which the chief quality is to provoke thirst, some Reims biscuits, of delightful crispness, and pears just fit to eat, showing that the master himself had taken the trouble to preserve them, and to turn them about on the store-room shelf.

Thibault was so taken up in the contemplation of this little amateur supper, that he scarcely heard the message which Perrine brought back from her mistress, who sent word that she had a sick-headache, and begged to make her excuses to her guest, with the hope that she might have the pleasure of entertaining him when he next came.

The little man gave visible signs of rejoicing on hearing his wife's answer, breathed loudly and clapped his hands, exclaiming:

"She has a headache! she has a headache! Come along then, sit down! sit down!" And thereupon, besides the two bottles of old Macon, which had already been respectively placed within reach of the host and guest, as vin ordinaire, between the Hors-d'oeuvres and the dessert plates, he introduced the four other bottles which he had just brought up from the cellar.

Madame Magloire had, I think, acted not unwisely in refusing to sup with these stalwart champions of the table, for such was their hunger and thirst, that half the carp and the two bottles of wine disappeared without a word passing between them except such exclamations as:

“Good fish! isn’t it?”

“Capital!”

“Fine wine! isn’t it?”

“Excellent!”

The carp and the Macon being consumed, they passed on to the game pie and the Chambertin, and now their tongues began to be unloosed, especially the Bailiff’s.

By the time half the game pie, and the first bottle of Chambertin were finished, Thibault knew the history of Nepomucene Magloire; not a very complicated one, it must be confessed.

Monsieur Magloire was son to a church ornament manufacturer who had worked for the chapel belonging to his Highness the Duke of Orleans, the latter, in his religious zeal having a burning desire to obtain pictures by Albano and Titian for the sum of four to five thousand francs.

Chrysostom Magloire had placed his son Nepomucene Magloire, as head-cook with Louis’ son, his Highness the Duke of Orleans.

The young man had, from infancy almost, manifested a decided taste for cooking; he had been especially attached to the Castle at Villers-Cotterets, and for thirty years presided over his Highness’s dinners, the latter introducing him to his friends as a thorough artist, and from time to time, sending for him to come up stairs to talk over culinary matters with Marshal Richelieu.

When fifty-five years of age, Magloire found himself so rounded in bulk, that it was only with some difficulty he could get through the narrow doors of the passages and offices. Fearing to be caught some day like the weasel of the fable, he asked permission to resign his post.

The Duke consented, not without regret, but with less regret than he would have felt at any other time, for he had just married Madame de Montesson, and it was only rarely now that he visited his castle at Villers-Cotterets.

His Highness had fine old-fashioned ideas as regards superannuated retainers. He, therefore, sent for Magloire, and asked him how much he had been able to save while in his service. Magloire replied that he was happily able to retire with a competence; the Prince, however, insisted upon knowing the exact amount of his little fortune, and Magloire confessed to an income of nine thousand livres.

"A man who has provided me with such a good table for thirty years," said the Prince, "should have enough to live well upon himself for the remainder of his life." And he made up the income to twelve thousand, so that Magloire might have a thousand livres a month to spend. Added to this, he allowed him to choose furniture for the whole of his house from his own old lumber-room; and thence came the damask curtains and gilt armchairs, which, although just a little bit faded and worn, had nevertheless preserved that appearance of grandeur which had made such an impression on Thibault.

By the time the whole of the first partridge was finished, and half the second bottle had been drunk, Thibault knew that Madame Magloire was the host's fourth wife, a fact which seemed in his own eyes to add a good foot or two to his height.

He had also ascertained that he had married her not for her fortune, but for her beauty, having always had as great a predilection for pretty faces and beautiful statues, as for good wines and appetising victuals, and Monsieur Magloire further stated, with no sign of faltering, that, old as he was, if his wife were to die, he should have no fear in entering on a fifth marriage.

As he now passed from the Chambertin to the Hermitage, which he alternated with the Sillery, Monsieur Magloire began to speak of his wife's qualities. She was not the personification of docility, no, quite the reverse; she was somewhat opposed to her husband's admiration for the various wines of France, and did every thing she could, even using physical force, to prevent his too frequent visits to the cellar; while, for one who believed in living without ceremony, she on her part was too fond of dress, too much given to elaborate head-gears, English laces, and such like gewgaws, which women make part of their arsenal; she would gladly have turned the twelve hogsheads of wine, which formed the staple of her husband's cellar, into lace for her arms, and ribands for her throat, if Monsieur Magloire had been the man to allow this metamorphosis. But, with this exception, there was not a virtue which Suzanne did not possess, and these virtues of hers, if the Bailiff was to be believed, were carried on so perfectly shaped a pair of legs, that, if by any misfortune she were to lose one, it would be quite impossible through out the district to find another that would match the leg that remained. The good man was like a regular whale, blowing out self-satisfaction from all his air-holes, as the former does sea-water. But even before all these hidden perfections of his wife had been revealed to him by the Bailiff, like a modern King Candaules ready to confide in a modern Gyges, her beauty had already made such a deep impression on the shoemaker, that, as we have seen, he could do nothing but think of it in silence as he walked beside her, and since he had been at tale, he had continued to dream about it, listening to his host, eating the while of course, without answering, as Monsieur Magloire, delighted to have such an accommodating audience, poured forth his tales, linked one to another like a necklace of beads.

But the worthy Bailiff, having made a second excursion to the cellar, and this second excursion having produced, as the saying is, a little knot at the tip of his tongue, he began to be rather less appreciative of the rare quality which was required in his disciples by Pythagons. He, therefore, gave Thibault to understand that he had now said all that he wished to tell him concerning himself and his wife, and that it was Thibault's turn to give him some information as regards his own circumstances, the amiable little man adding that wishing often to visit him, he wished to know more about him. Thibault felt that it was very necessary to disguise the truth; and accordingly gave himself out as a man living at ease in the country, on the revenues of two farms and of a hundred acres of land, situated near Vertefeuille.

There was, he continued, a splendid warren on these hundred acres, with a wonderful supply of red and fallow deer, boars, partridges, pheasants and hares, of which the bailiff should have some to taste. The bailiff was astonished and delighted. As we have seen, by the menu for his table, he was fond of venison, and he was carried away with joy at the thought of obtaining his game without having recourse to the poachers, and through the channel of this new friendship.

And now, the last drop of the seventh bottle having been scrupulously divided between the two glasses, they decided that it was time to stop.

The rosy champagne prime vintage of Ai, and the last bottle emptied had brought Nepomucene Magloire's habitual good nature to the level of tender affection. He was charmed with his new friend, who tossed off his bottle in almost as good style as he did himself; he addressed him as his bosom friend, he embraced him, he made him promise that there should be a morrow to their pleasant entertainment; he stood a second time on tiptoe to give him a parting hug as he accompanied him to the door, which Thibault on his part, bending down, received with the best grace in the world.

The church clock of Erneville was striking midnight as the door closed behind the shoemaker. The fumes of the heady wine he had been drinking had begun to give him a feeling of oppression before leaving the house, but it was worse when he got into the open air. He staggered, overcome with giddiness, and went and leant with his back against a wall. What followed next was as vague and mysterious to him as the phantasmagoria of a dream. Above his head, about six or eight feet from the ground, was a window, which, as he moved to lean against the wall, had appeared to him to be lighted, although the light was shaded by double curtains. He had hardly taken up his position against the wall when he thought he heard it open. It was, he imagined, the worthy bailiff, unwilling to part with him without sending him a last farewell, and he tried to step forward so as to do honour to this gracious intention, but his attempt was unavailing. At first he thought he was stuck to the wall like a branch of ivy, but he was soon disabused of this idea. He felt a heavy weight planted first on the right shoulder and then on the left, which made his knees give way so that he slid down the wall as if to seat himself. This manoeuvre on Thibault's part appeared to be just what the individual who was making use of him as a ladder wished him to do, for we can no longer hide the fact that the weight so felt was that of a man. As Thibault made his forced genuflexion, the man was also lowered; "That's right, I'Eveilli! that's right!" he said, "So!" and with this last word, he jumped to the ground, while overhead was heard the sound of a window being shut.

Thibault had sense enough to understand two things: first, that he was mistaken for someone called L'Eveille, who was probably asleep somewhere about the premises; secondly, that his shoulders had just served some lover as a climbing ladder; both of which things caused Thibault an undefined sense of humiliation.

Accordingly, he seized hold mechanically of some floating piece of stuff which he took to be the lover's cloak, and, with the persistency of a drunken man, continued to hang on to it.

"What are you doing that for, you scoundrel?" asked a voice, which did not seem altogether unfamiliar to the shoe-maker. "One would think you were afraid of losing me."

"Most certainly I am afraid of losing you," replied Thibault, "because I wish to know who it is has the impertinence to use my shoulders for a ladder."

"Phew!" said the unknown, "it's not you then, l'Eveille?"

"No, it is not," replied Thibault.

"Well, whether it is you or not you, I thank you."

"How, thank you? Ah! I dare say! thank you, indeed! You think the matter is going to rest like that, do you?"

"I had counted upon it being so, certainly."

"Then you counted without your host."

"Now, you blackguard, leave go of me! you are drunk!"

"Drunk! What do you mean? We only drank seven bottles between us, and the Bailiff had a good four to his share."

"Leave go of me, you drunkard, do you hear!"

"Drunkard! you call me a drunkard, a drunkard for having drunk three bottles of wine!"

"I don't call you a drunkard because you drank three bottles of wine, but because you let yourself get tipsy over those three unfortunate bottles."

And, with a gesture of commiseration, and trying for the third time to release his cloak, the unknown continued:

"Now then, are you going to let go my cloak or not, you idiot?"

Thibault was at all times touchy as to the way people addressed him, but in his present state of mind his susceptibility amounted to extreme irritation.

"By the devil!" he exclaimed, "let me tell you, my fine sir, that the only idiot here is the man who gives insults in return for the services of which he has made use, and seeing that is so, I do not know what prevents me planting my fist in the middle of your face."

This menace was scarcely out of his mouth, when, as instantly as a cannon goes off once the flame of the match has touched the powder, the blow with which Thibault had threatened his unknown adversary, came full against his own cheek.

"Take that, you beast" said the voice, which brought back to Thibault certain recollections in connection with the blow he received. "I am a good Jew, you see, and pay you back your money before weighing your coin."

Thibault's answer was a blow in the chest; it was well directed, and Thibault felt inwardly pleased with it himself. But it had no more effect on his antagonist than the fillip from a child's finger would have on an oak tree. It was returned by a second blow of the fist which so far exceeded the former in the force with which it was delivered, that Thibault felt certain if the giant's strength went on increasing in the same ratio, that a third of the kind would level him with the ground.

But the very violence of his blow brought disaster on Thibault's unknown assailant. The latter had fallen on to one knee, and so doing, his hand, touching the ground, came in contact with a stone. Rising in fury to his feet again, with the stone in his hand, he flung it at his enemy's head. The colossal figure uttered a sound like the bellowing of an ox, turned round on himself, and then, like an oak tree cut off by the roots, fell his whole length on the ground, and lay there in sensible.

Not knowing whether he had killed, or only wounded his adversary, Thibault took to his heels and fled, not even turning to look behind him.

CHAPTER XII

WOLVES IN THE SHEEP FOLD

The forest was not far from the Bailiff's house, and in two bounds Thibault found himself on the further side of Les Fosses, and in the wooded path leading to the brickyard. He had no sooner entered the forest than his usual escort surrounded him, fawning and blinking with their eyes and wagging their tails to show their pleasure. Thibault, who had been so alarmed the first time he found himself in company with this strange body guard, took no more notice of them now than if they had been a pack of poodles. He gave them a word or two of caress, softly scratched the head of the one that was nearest him, and continued on his way, thinking over his double triumph.

He had beaten his host at the bottle, he had vanquished his adversary at fisticuffs, and in this joyous frame of mind, he walked along, saying aloud to himself:

"You must acknowledge, friend Thibault, that you are a lucky rascal! Madame Suzanne is in every possible respect just what you want! A Bailiff's wife! my word! that's a conquest worth making! and if he dies first, what a wife to get! But in either case, when she is walking beside me, and taking my arm, whether as wife or mistress, the devil take it, if I am mistaken for anything but a gentleman! And to think that unless I am fool enough to play my cards badly, all this will be mine! For she did not deceive me by the way she went off: those who have nothing to fear have no need to take flight. She was afraid to show her feelings too plainly at first meeting; but how kind she was after she got home! Well, well, it is all working itself out, as I can see; I have only got to push matters a bit; and some fine morning she will find herself rid of her fat little old man, and then the thing is done. Not that I do, or can, wish for the death of poor Monsieur Magloire. If I take his place after he is no more, well and good; but to kill a man who has given you such good wine to drink! to kill him with his good wine still hot in your mouth! why, even my friend the wolf would blush for me if I were guilty of such a deed."

Then with one of his most roguish smiles, he went on:

"And besides, would it not be as well to have already acquired some rights over Madame Suzanne, by the time Monsieur Magloire passes, in the course of nature, into the other world, which, considering the way in which the old scamp eats and drinks, cannot be a matter of long delay?"

And then, no doubt because the good qualities of the Bailiff's wife which had been so highly extolled to him came back to his mind:

"No, no," he continued, "no illness, no death! but just those ordinary disagreeables which happen to everybody; only, as it is to be to my advantage, I should like rather more than the usual share to fall to him; one cannot at his age set up for a smart young buck; no, every one according to their dues ... and when these things come to pass, I will give you more than a thank you, Cousin Wolf."

My readers will doubtless not be of the same way of thinking as Thibault, who saw nothing offensive in this pleasantry of his, but on the contrary, rubbed his hands together smiling at his own thoughts, and indeed so pleased with them that he had reached the town, and found himself at the end of the Rue de Largny before he was aware that he had left the Bailiff's house more than a few hundred paces behind him.

He now made a sign to his wolves, for it was not quite prudent to traverse the whole town of Villers-Cotterets with a dozen wolves walking alongside as a guard of honour; not only might they meet dogs by the way, but the dogs might wake up the inhabitants.

Six of his wolves, therefore, went off to the right, and six to the left, and although the paths they took were not exactly of the same length, and although some of them went more quickly than the others, the whole dozen nevertheless managed to meet, without one missing, at the end of the Rue de Lormet. As soon as Thibault had reached the door of his hut, they took leave of him and disappeared; but, before they dispersed, Thibault requested them to be at the same spot on the morrow, as soon as night fell.

Although it was two o'clock before Thibault got home, he was up with the dawn; it is true, however, that the day does not rise very early in the month of January.

He was hatching a plot. He had not forgotten the promise he had made to the Bailiff to send him some game from his warren; his warren being, in fact, the whole of the forest-land which belonged to his most serene Highness the Duke of Orleans. This was why he had got up in such good time. It had snowed for two hours before day-break; and he now went and explored the forest in all directions, with the skill and cunning of a bloodhound.

He tracked the deer to its lair, the wild boar to its soil, the hare to its form; and followed their traces to discover where they went at night.

And then, when darkness again fell on the Forest, he gave a howl, a regular wolfs howl, in answer to which came crowding to him the wolves that he had invited the night before, followed by old and young recruits, even to the very cubs of a year old.

Thibault then explained that he expected a more than usually fine night's hunting from his friends, and as an encouragement to them, announced his intention of going with them himself and giving his help in the chase.

It was in very truth a hunt beyond the power of words to describe. The whole night through did the sombre glades of the forest resound with hideous cries.

Here, a roebuck pursued by a wolf, fell, caught by the throat by another wolf hidden in ambush; there, Thibault, knife in hand like a butcher, was running to the assistance of three or four of his ferocious companions, that had already fastened on a fine young boar of four years old, which he now finished off.

An old she-wolf came along bringing with her half-a-dozen hares which she had surprised in their love frolics, and she had great difficulty in preventing her cubs from swallowing a whole covey of young partridges which the young marauders had come across with their heads under their wings, without first waiting for the wolf-master to levy his dues,

Madame Suzanne Magloire little thought what was taking place at this moment in the forest of Villers-Cotterets, and on her account.

In a couple of hours' time the wolves had heaped up a perfect cart-load of game in front of Thibault's hut.

Thibault selected what he wanted for his own purposes, and left over sufficient to provide them a sumptuous repast. Borrowing a mule from a charcoal-burner, on the pretext that he wanted to convey his shoes to town, he loaded it up with the game and started for Villers-Cotterets. There he sold a part of this booty to the gamedealer, reserving the best pieces and those which had been least mutilated by the wolves' claws, to present to Madame Magloire.

His first intention had been to go in person with his gift to the Bailiff; but Thibault was beginning to have a smattering of the ways of the world, and thought it would, therefore, be more be coming to allow his offering of game to precede him. To this end he employed a peasant on payment of a few coppers, to carry the game to the Bailiff of Erneville, merely accompanying it with a slip of paper, on which he wrote: “From Monsieur Thibault.” He, himself, was to follow closely on the message; and, indeed, so closely did he do so, that he arrived just as Maitre Magloire was having the game he had received spread out on a table.

The Bailiff, in the warmth of his gratitude, extended his arms towards his friend of the previous night, and tried to embrace him, uttering loud cries of joy. I say tried, for two things prevented him from carrying out his wish; one, the shortness of his arms, the other, the rotundity of his person.

But thinking that where his capacities were insufficient, Madame Magloire might be of assistance, he ran to the door, calling at the top of his voice: “Suzanne, Suzanne!”

There was so unusual a tone in the Bailiff’s voice that his wife felt sure some thing extraordinary had happened, but whether for good or ill she was unable to make sure: and downstairs she came, therefore, in great haste, to see for herself what was taking place.

She found her husband, wild with delight, trotting round to look on all sides at the game spread on the table, and it must be confessed, that no sight could have more greatly rejoiced a gourmand’s eye. As soon as he caught sight of Suzanne, “Look, look, Madame!” he cried, clapping his hands together. “See what our friend Thibault has brought us, and thank him for it. Praise be to God! there is one person who knows how to keep his promises! He tells us he will send a hamper of game, and he sends us a cart-load. Shake hands with him, embrace him at once, and just look here at this.”

Madame Magloire graciously followed out her husband’s orders; she gave Thibault her hand, allowed him to kiss her, and cast her beautiful eyes over the supply of food which elicited such exclamations of admiration from the Bailiff. And as a supply, which was to make such an acceptable addition to the ordinary daily fare, it was certainly worthy of all admiration.

First, as prime pieces, came a boar’s head and ham, firm and savoury morsels; then a fine three year old kid, which should have been as tender as the dew that only the evening before beaded the grass at which it was nibbling; next came hares, fine fleshy hares from the heath of Gondreville, full fed on wild thyme; and then such scented pheasants, and such delicious red-legged partridges, that once on the spit, the magnificence of their plumage was forgotten in the perfume of their flesh. And all these good things the fat little man enjoyed in advance in his imagination; he already saw the boar broiled on the coals, the kid dressed with sauce piquante, the hares made into a pasty, the pheasants stuffed with truffles, the partridges dressed with cabbage, and he put so much fervour and feeling into his orders and directions, that merely to hear him was enough to set a gourmand's mouth watering.

It was this enthusiasm on the part of the Bailiff which no doubt made Madame Suzanne appear somewhat cold and unappreciative in comparison. Nevertheless she took the initiative, and with much graciousness assured Thibault that she would on no account allow him to return to his farms until all the provisions, with which, thanks to him, the larder would now overflow, had been consumed. You may guess how delighted Thibault was at having his cherished wishes thus met by Madame herself. He promised himself no end of grand things from this stay at Erneville, and his spirits rose to the point of himself proposing to Maitre Magloire that they should indulge in a preparatory whack of liquor to prepare their digestions for the savoury dishes that Mademoiselle Perrine was preparing for them.

Maitre Magloire was quite gratified to see that Thibault had forgotten nothing, not even the cook's name. He sent for some vermouth, a liqueur as yet but little known in France, having been imported from Holland by the Duke of Orleans and of which a present had been made by his Highness's head cook to his predecessor.

Thibault made a face over it; he did not think this foreign drink was equal to a nice little glass of native Chablis; but when assured by the Bailiff that, thanks to the beverage, he would in an hour's time have a ferocious appetite, he made no further remark, and affably assisted his host to finish the bottle. Madame Suzanne, meanwhile, had returned to her own room to smarten herself up a bit, as women say, which generally means an entire change of raiment.

It was not long before the dinner-hour sounded, and Madame Suzanne came down stairs again. She was perfectly dazzling in a splendid dress of grey damask trimmed with pearl, and the transports of amorous admiration into which Thibault was thrown by the sight of her prevented the shoemaker from thinking of the awkwardness of the position in which he now unavoidably found himself, dining as he was for the first time with such handsome and distinguished company. To his credit, be it said, he did not make bad use of his opportunities. Not only did he cast frequent and unmistakable sheep's eyes at his fair hostess, but he gradually brought his knee nearer to hers, and finally went so far as to give it a gentle pressure. Suddenly, and while Thibault was engaged in this performance, Madame Suzanne, who was looking sweetly towards him, opened her eyes and stared fixedly a moment. Then she opened her mouth, and went off into such a violent fit of laughter, that she almost choked, and nearly went into hysterics Maitre Magloire, taking no notice of the effect, turned straight to the cause, and he now looked at Thibault, and was much more concerned and alarmed with what he thought to see, than with the nervous state of excitement into which his wife had Deen thrown by her hilarity.

"Ah! my dear fellow!" he cried, stretching two little agitated arms towards Thibault, "you are in flames. you are in flames!"

Thibault sprang up hastily.

"Where? How?" he asked.

"Your hair is on fire," answered the Bailiff, in all sincerity; and so genuine was his terror, that he seized the water Dottle that was in front of his wife in order to put out the conflagration blazing among Thibault's locks.

The shoe-maker involuntarily put up his hand to his head, but feeling no heat, he at once guessed what was the matter, and fell back into his chair, turning horribly pale. He had been so preoccupied during the last two days, that he had quite for gotten to take the same precaution he had done before visiting the owner of the mill, and had omitted to give his hair that particular twist whereby he was able to hide the hairs of which the black wolf had acquired the proprietorship under his others. Added to this, he had during this short period given vent to so many little wishes, one here, and one there, all more or less to the detriment of his neighbour, that the flame-coloured hairs had multiplied to an alarming extent, and at this moment, any one of them could vie in brilliancy with the light from the two wax candles which lit the room.

"Well, you did give me a dreadful fright, Monsieur Magloire," said Thibault, trying to conceal his agitation.

"But, but..." responded the Bailiff, still pointing with a certain remains of fear at Thibault's flaming lock of hair.

"That is nothing," continued Thibault, "do not be uneasy about the unusual colour of some of my hair; it came from a fright my mother had with a pan of hot coals, that nearly set her hair on fire before I was born."

"But what is more strange still," said Madame Suzanne, who had swallowed a whole glassful of water in the effort to control her laughter, "that I have remarked this dazzling peculiarity for the first time to-day."

"Ah! really!" said Thibault, scarcely knowing what to say in answer.

"The other day," continued Madame Suzanne, "it seemed to me that your hair was as black as my velvet mantle, and yet, believe me, I did not fail to study you most attentively, Monsieur Thibault."

This last sentence, reviving Thibault's hopes, restored him once more to good humour.

"Ah! Madame," he replied, "you know the proverb: 'Red hair, warm heart,' and the other: 'Some folks are like ill-made sabots, smooth outside, but rough to wear?'"

Madame Magloire made a face at this low proverb about wooden shoes, but, as was often the case with the Bailiff, he did not agree with his wife on this point.

"My friend Thibault utters words of gold," he said, "and I need not go far to be able to point the truth of his proverbs ... See for example, this soup we have here, which has nothing much in its appearance to commend it, but never have I found onion and bread fried in goose-fat more to my taste."

And after this there was no further talk of Thibault's fiery head. Nevertheless, it seemed as if Madame Suzanne's eyes were irresistibly attracted to this unfortunate lock, and every time that Thibault's eyes met the mocking look in hers, he thought he detected on her face a reminiscence of the laugh which had not long since made him feel so uncomfortable. He was very much annoyed at this, and, in spite of himself, he kept putting up his hand to try and hide the unfortunate lock under the rest of his hair. But the hairs were not only unusual in colour, but also of a phenomenal stiffness it was no longer human hair, but horse-hair. In vain Thibault endeavoured to hide the devil's hairs beneath his own, nothing, not even the hair-dresser's tongs could have induced them to lie otherwise than in the way which seemed natural to them. But although so occupied with thinking of his hair, Thibault's legs still continued their tender manoeuvres; and although Madame Magloire made no response to their solicitations, she apparently had no wish to escape from them, and Thibault was presumptuously led to believe that he had achieved a conquest.

They sat on pretty late into the night, and Madame Suzanne, who appeared to find the evening drag, rose several times from the table and went backwards and forwards to other parts of the house, which afforded the Bailiff opportunities of frequent visits to the cellar.

He hid so many bottles in the lining of his waistcoat, and once on the table, he emptied them so rapidly, that little by little his head sank lower and lower on to his chest, and it was evidently high time to put an end to the bout, if he was to be saved from falling under the table.

Thibault decided to profit by this condition of things, and to declare his love to the Bailiff's wife without delay, judging it a good opportunity to speak while the husband was heavy with drink; he therefore expressed a wish to retire for the night. Whereupon they rose from table, and Perrine was called and bidden to show the guest to his room. As he followed her along the corridor, he made enquiries of her concerning the different rooms.

Number one was Maitre Magloire's, number two that of his wife, and number three was his. The Bailiff's room, and his wife's, communicated with one another by an inner door; Thibault's room had access to the corridor only.

He also noticed that Madame Suzanne was in her husband's room; no doubt some pious sense of conjugal duty had taken her there. The good man was in a condition approaching to that of Noah when his sons took occasion to insult him, and Madame Suzanne's assistance would seem to have been needed to get him into his room.

Thibault left his own room on tiptoe, carefully shut his door behind him, listened for a moment at the door of Madame Suzanne's room, heard no sound within, felt for the key, found it in the lock, paused a second, and then turned it.

The door opened; the room was in total darkness. But having for so long consorted with wolves, Thibault had acquired some of their characteristics, and, among others, that of being able to see in the dark.

He cast a rapid glance round the room; to the right was the fireplace; facing it a couch with a large mirror above it; behind him, on the side of the fire-place, a large bed, hung with figured silk; in front of him, near the couch, a dressing table covered with a profusion of lace, and, last of all, two large draped windows. He hid himself behind the curtains of one of these, instinctively choosing the window that was farthest removed from the husband's room. After waiting a quarter of an hour, during which time Thibault's heart beat so violently that the sound of it, fatal omen! reminded him of the click-clack of the mill-wheel at Croyolles, Madame Suzanne entered the room.

Thibault's original plan had been to leave his hiding place as soon as Madame Suzanne came in and the door was safely shut behind her, and there and then to make avowal of his love. But on consideration, fearing that in her surprise, and before she recognised who it was, she might not be able to suppress a cry which would betray them, he decided that it would be better to wait until Monsieur Magloire was asleep beyond all power of being awakened.

Perhaps, also, this procrastination may have been partly due to that feeling which all men have, however resolute of purpose they may be, of wishing to put off the critical moment, when on this moment depend such chances as hung on the one which was to decide for or against the happiness of the shoemaker. For Thibault, by dint of telling himself that he was madly in love with Madame Magloire, had ended by believing that he really was so, and, in spite of being under the protection of the black wolf, he experienced all the timidity of the genuine lover. So he kept himself concealed behind the curtains.

The Bailiff's wife, however, had taken up her position before the mirror of her Pompadour table, and was decking herself out as if she were going to a festival or preparing to make one of a procession.

She tried on ten veils before making choice of one.

She arranged the folds of her dress.

She fastened a triple row of pearls round her neck.

Then she loaded her arms with all the bracelets she possessed.

Finally she dressed her hair with the minutest care.

Thibault was lost in conjectures as to the meaning of all this coquetry, when all of a sudden a dry, grating noise, as if some hard body coming in contact with a pane of glass, made him start. Madame Suzanne started too, and immediately put out the lights. The shoemaker then heard her step softly to the window, and cautiously open it; whereupon there followed some whisperings, of which Thibault could not catch the words, but, by drawing the curtain a little aside, he was able to distinguish in the darkness the figure of a man of gigantic stature, who appeared to be climbing through the window.

Thibault instantly recalled his adventure with the unknown combatant, whose mantle he had clung to, and whom he had so triumphantly disposed of by hitting him on the forehead with a stone. As far as he could make out, this would be the same window from which the giant had descended when he made use of Thibault's two shoulders as a ladder. The surmise of identity was, undoubtedly, founded on a logical conclusion. As a man was now climbing in at the window, a man could very well have been climbing down from it; and if a man did climb down from it — unless, of course, Madam Magloire's acquaintances were many in number, and she had a great variety of tastes — if a man did climb down from it, in all probability, it was the same man who, at this moment was climbing in.

But whoever this nocturnal visitor might be, Madame Suzanne held out her hand to the intruder, who took a heavy jump into the room, which made the floor tremble and set all the furniture shaking. The apparition was certainly not a spirit, but a corporeal body, and moreover one that came under the category of heavy bodies.

"Oh! take care, my lord," Madame Suzanne's voice was heard to say, "heavily as my husband sleeps, if you make such a noise as that, you will wake him up."

"By the devil and his horns! my fair friend," replied the stranger. "I cannot alight like a bird!" and Thibault recognised the voice as that of the man with whom he had had the altercation a night or two before. "Although while I was waiting under your window for the happy moment, my heart was so sick with longing that I felt as if wings must grow ere long, to bear me up into this dear wished-for little room."

"And I too, my lord," replied Madame Magloire with a simper, "I too was troubled to leave you outside to freeze in the cold wind, but the guest who was with us this evening only left us half an hour ago."

"And what have you been doing, my dear one, during this last half hour?"

"I was obliged to help Monsieur Magloire, my lord, and to make sure that he would not come and interrupt us."

"You were right as you always are, my heart's love."

"My lord is too kind," replied Suzanne or, more correctly, tried to reply, for her last words were interrupted as if by some foreign body being placed upon her lips, which prevented her from finishing the sentence; and at the same moment, Thibault heard a sound which was remarkably like that of a kiss. The wretched man was beginning to understand the extent of the disappointment of which he was again the victim. His reflections were interrupted by the voice of the newcomer, who coughed two or three times.

"Suppose we shut the window, my love," said the voice, after this preliminary coughing.

"Oh! my lord, forgive me," said Madame Magloire, "it ought to have been closed before." And so saying she went to the window, which she first shut close, and then closed even more hermetically by drawing the curtains across it. The stranger meanwhile, who made himself thoroughly at home, had drawn an easy chair up to the fire, and sat with his legs stretched out, warming his feet in the most luxurious fashion. Reflecting no doubt, that for a man half frozen, the most immediate necessity is to thaw himself, Madame Suzanne seemed to find no cause of offence in this behaviour on the part of her aristocratic lover, but came up to his chair and leant her pretty arms over the back in the most fascinating posture Thibault had a good view of the group from behind, well thrown up by the light of the fire, and he was overcome with inward rage. The stranger appeared for a while to have no thought beyond that of warming himself; but at last the fire having performed its appointed task, he asked:

"And this stranger, this guest of yours who was he?"

"Ah! my lord!" answered Madame Magloire, "you already know him I think only too well."

"What!" said the favoured lover, "do you mean to say it was that drunken lout of the other night, again?"

"The very same, my lord."

"Well, all I can say is, if ever I get him into my grip again!..."

"My lord," responded Suzanne, in a voice as soft as music, "you must not harbour evil designs against your enemies; on the contrary, you must forgive them as we are taught to do by our Holy Religion."

"There is also another religion which teaches that, my dearest love, one of which you are the all-supreme goddess, and I but a humble neophyte ... And I am wrong in wishing evil to the scoundrel, for it was owing to the treacherous and cowardly way in which he attacked and did for me, that I had the opportunity I had so long wished for, of being introduced into this house. The lucky blow on my forehead with his stone, made me faint; and because you saw I had fainted, you called your husband; it was on account of your husband finding me without consciousness beneath your window, and believing I had been set upon by thieves, that he had me carried indoors; and lastly, because you were so moved by pity at the thought of what I had suffered for you, that you were willing to let me in here. And so, this good-for-nothing fellow, this contemptible scamp, is after all the source of all good, for all the good of life for me is in your love; nevertheless if ever he comes within reach of my whip, he will not have a very pleasant time of it."

"It seems then," muttered Thibault, swearing to himself, "that my wish has again turned to the advantage of someone else! Ah! my friend, black wolf, I have still something to learn, but, confound it all! I will in future think so well over my wishes before expressing them that the pupil will become master ... but to whom does that voice, that I seem to know, belong?" Thibault continued, trying to recall it, "for the voice is familiar to me, of that I am certain!"

"You would be even more incensed against him, poor wretch, if I were to tell you something."

"And what is that, my love?"

"Well, that good-for-nothing fellow, as you call him, is making love to me."

"Phew!"

"That is so, my lord," said Madame Suzanne, laughing.

"What! that boor, that low rascal! Where is he? Where does he hide himself? By Beelzebub! I'll throw him to my dogs to eat!"

And then, all at once, Thibault recognised his man. "Ah! my lord Baron," he muttered, "it's you, is it?"

"Pray do not trouble yourself about it, my lord," said Madame Suzanne, laying her two hands on her lover's shoulders, and obliging him to sit down again, "your lordship is the only person whom I love, and even were it not so, a man with a lock of red hair right in the middle of his forehead is not the one to whom I should give away my heart." And as the recollection of this lock of hair, which had made her laugh so at dinner, came back to her, she again gave way to her amusement.

A violent feeling of anger towards the Bailiff's wife took possession of Thibault.

"Ah! traitress!" he exclaimed to himself, "what would I not give for your husband, your good, upright husband, to walk in at this moment and surprise you.”

Scarcely was the wish uttered, when the door of communication between Suzanne’s room and that of Monsieur Magloire was thrown wide open, and in walked her husband with an enormous night-cap on his head, which made him look nearly five feet high, and holding a lighted candle in his hand.

“Ah! ah!” muttered Thibault. “Well done! It’s my turn to laugh now, Madame Magloire.”

CHAPTER XIII

WHERE IT IS DEMONSTRATED THAT A WOMAN NEVER SPEEKS MORE ELOQUENTLY THAN WHEN SHE HOLDS HER TONGUE

As Thibault was talking to himself he did not catch the few hurried words which Suzanne whispered to the Baron; and all he saw was that she appeared to totter, and then fell back into her lover's arms, as if in a dead faint.

The Bailiff stopped short as he caught sight of this curious group, lit up by his candle. He was facing Thibault, and the latter endeavoured to read in Monsieur Magloire's face what was passing in his mind.

But the Bailiff's jovial physiognomy was not made by nature to express any strong emotion, and Thibault could detect nothing in it but a benevolent astonishment on the part of the amiable husband.

The Baron, also, evidently detected nothing more, for with a coolness and ease of manner, which produced on Thibault a surprise beyond expression, he turned to the Bailiff, and asked:

"Well, friend Magloire, and how do you carry your wine this evening?"

"Why, is it you, my lord?" replied the Bailiff opening his fat little eyes.

"Ah! pray excuse me, and believe me, had I known I was to have the honour of seeing you here, I should not have allowed myself to appear in such an unsuitable costume."

"Pooh-pooh! nonsense!"

"Yes, indeed, my lord; you must permit me to go and make a little toilette."

"No ceremony, I pray!" rejoined the Baron. "After curfew, one is at least free to receive one's friends in what costume one likes. Besides, my dear friend, there is something which requires more immediate attention."

"What is that, my lord?"

"To restore Madame Magloire to her senses, who, you see, has fainted in my arms."

“Fainted! Suzanne fainted! Ah! my God!” cried the little man, putting down his candle on the chimney-piece, “how ever did such a misfortune happen?”

“Wait, wait, Monsieur Magloire!” said my lord, “we must first get your wife into a more comfortable position in an armchair; nothing annoys women so much as not to be at their ease when they are unfortunate enough to faint.”

“You are right, my lord; let us first put her in the armchair... Oh Suzanne! poor Suzanne! How can such a thing as this have happened?”

“I pray you at least, my dear fellow, not to think any ill of me at finding me in your house at such a time of night!”

“Far from it, my lord,” replied the Bailiff, “the friendship with which you honour us, and the virtue of Madame Magloire are sufficient guarantees for me to be glad at any hour to have my house honoured by your presence.”

“Triple dyed idiot!” murmured the shoemaker, “unless I ought rather to call him a doubly clever dissembler... No matter which, however! we have yet to see how my lord is going to get out of it.”

“Nevertheless,” continued Maitre Magloire, dipping a handkerchief into some aromatic water, and bathing his wife’s temples with it, “nevertheless, I am curious to know how my poor wife can have received such a shock.”

“It’s a simple affair enough, as I will explain, my dear fellow. I was returning from dining with my friend, de Vi vie res, and passing through Erneville on my way to Vez, I caught sight of an open window, and a woman inside making signals of distress.”

“Ah! my God!”

“That is what I exclaimed, when I realised that the window belonged to your house; and can it be my friend the Bailiff’s wife, I thought, who is in danger and in need of help?”

“You are good indeed, my lord,” said the Bailiff quite overcome. “I trust it was nothing of the sort.”

“On the contrary, my dear man.”

“How! on the contrary?”

“Yes, as you will see.”

“You make me shudder, my lord! And do you mean that my wife was in need of help and did not call me?”

“It had been her first thought to call you, but she abstained from doing so, for, and here you see her delicacy of feeling, she was afraid that if you came, your precious life might be endangered."

The Bailiff turned pale and gave an exclamation.

"My precious life, as you are good enough to call it, is in danger?"

"Not now, since I am here."

"But tell me, I pray, my lord, what had happened? I would question my wife, but as you see she is not yet able to answer."

"And am I not here to answer in her stead?"

"Answer then, my lord, as you are kind enough to offer to do so; I am listening."

The Baron made a gesture of assent, and went on:

"So I ran to her, and seeing her all trembling and alarmed, I asked, "What is the matter, Madame Magloire, and what is causing you so much alarm?"

"Ah! my lord," she replied, "just think what I feel, when I tell you that yesterday and to-day, my husband has been entertaining a man about whom I have the worst suspicions. Ugh! A man who has introduced himself under the pretence of friendship to my dear Magloire, and actually makes love to me, to me."

"She told you that?"

"Word for word, my dear fellow! She cannot hear what we are saying, I hope?"

"How can she, when she is insensible?"

"Well, ask her yourself when she comes to, and if she does not tell you exactly to the letter what I have been telling you, call me a Turk, an infidel and a heretic."

"Ah! these men! these men!" murmured the Bailiff.

"Yes, race of vipers!" continued my lord of Vez, "do you wish me to go on?"

"Yes, indeed!" said the little man, forgetting the scantiness of his attire in the interest excited in him by the Baron's tale.

"'But Madame,' I said to my friend Madame Magloire, 'How could you tell that he had the audacity to love you?'"

"Yes," put in the Bailiff, "how did she find it out? I never noticed anything myself."

"You would have been aware of it, my dear friend, if only you had looked under the table; but, fond of your dinner as you are, you were not likely to be looking at the dishes on the table and underneath it at the same time."

“The truth is, my lord, we had the most perfect little supper! just you think now cutlets of young wild-boar ...”

“Very well,” said the Baron, “now you are going to tell me about your supper, instead of listening to the end of my tale, a tale which concerns the life and honour of your wife!”

“True, true, my poor Suzanne! My lord, help me to open her hands, that I may slap them on the palms.”

The Lord of Vez gave all the assistance in his power to Monsieur Magloire, and by dint of their united efforts they forced open Madame Magloire’s hands.

The good man, now easier in his mind, began slapping his wife’s palms with his chubby little hands, all the while giving his attention to the remainder of the Baron’s interesting and veracious story.

“Where had I got to?” he asked.

“You had got just to where my poor Suzanne, whom one may indeed call the chaste Suzanne...”

“Yes, you may well say that!” interrupted the lord of Vez.

“Indeed, I do! You had just got to where my poor Suzanne began to be aware...”

“Ah, yes that your guest like Paris of old was wishing to make another Menelaus of you; well, then she rose from table ... You remember that she did so?”

“No ... I was perhaps a little just a little overcome.”

“Quite so! Well then she rose from table, and said it was time to retire.”

“The truth is, that the last hour I heard strike was eleven,” said the jovial Bailiff.

“Then the party broke up.”

“I don’t think I left the table,” said the Bailiff.

“No, but Mndame Magloire and your guest did. She told him which was his room, and Perrine showed him to it; after which, kind and faithful wife as she is, Madame Magloire tucked you into bed, and went into her own room.”

“Dear little Suzanne!” said the bailiff in a voice of emotion.

“And it was then, when she found herself in her room, and all alone, that she got frightened; she went to the window and opened it; the wind, blowing into the room, put out her candle. You know what it is to have a sudden panic come over you, do you not?”

“Oh! yes,” replied the Bailiff naively, “I am very timid myself.”

“After that she was seized with panic, and not daring to wake you, for fear any harm should come to you, she called to the first horseman she saw go by and luckily, that horseman was myself.”

“It was indeed fortunate, my lord.”

“Was it not?... I ran, I made myself known.”

“‘Come up, my lord, come up,’ she cried. ‘Come up quickly I am sure there is a man in my room.’”

“Dear! dear!...” said the bailiff, “you must indeed have felt terribly frightened.”

“Not at all! I thought it was only losing time to stop and ring; I gave my horse to l’Eveille, I stood up on the saddle, climbed from that to the balcony, and, so that the man who was in the room might not escape, I shut the window. It was just at that moment that Madame Magloire, hearing the sound of your door opening, and overcome by such a succession of painful feelings, fell fainting into my arms.”

“Ah! my lord!” said the Bailiff, “how frightful all this is that you tell me.”

“And be sure, my dear friend, that I have rather softened than added to its terror; anyhow, you will hear what Madame Magloire has to tell you when she comes to.”

“See, my lord, she is beginning to move.”

“That’s right! burn a feather under her nose.”

“A feather?”

“Yes, it is a sovereign anti-spasmodic; burn a feather under her nose, and she will revive instantly.”

“But where shall I find a feather?” asked the bailiff.

“Here! take this, the feather round my hat.” And the lord of Vez broke off a bit of the ostrich feather which ornamented his hat, gave it to Monsieur Magloire, who lighted it at the candle and held it smoking under his wife’s nose.

The remedy was a sovereign one, as the Baron had said; the effect of it was instantaneous; Madame Magloire sneezed.

“Ah!” cried the bailiff delightedly, “now she is coming to! my wife! my dear wife! my dear little wife!”

Madame Magloire gave a sigh.

“My lord! my lord!” cried the bailiff, “she is saved! saved!”

Madame Magloire opened her eyes, looked first at the Bailiff and then at the Baron, with a bewildered gaze, and then finally fixing them on the Bailiff:

"Magloire! dear Magloire!" she said, "is it really you? Oh! how glad I am to see you again after the bad dream I have had!"

"Well!" muttered Thibault, "she is a brazen-faced huzzy, if you like! If I do not get all that I want from the ladies I run after, they, at least, afford me some valuable object lessons by the way!"

"Alas! my beautiful Suzanne," said the Bailiff, "it is no bad dream you have had, but, as it seems, a hideous reality."

"Ah! I remember now," responded Madame Magloire. Then, as if noticing for the first time that the lord of Vez was there:

"Ah! my lord," she continued, "I hope you have repeated nothing to my husband of all those foolish things I told you?"

"And why not, dear lady?" asked the Baron.

"Because an honest woman knows how to protect herself, and has no need to keep on telling her husband a lot of nonsense like that."

"On the contrary, Madame," replied the Baron, "I have told my friend every thing."

"Do you mean that you have told him that during the whole of supper time that man was fondling my knee under the table?"

"I told him that, certainly."

"Oh! the wretch!" exclaimed the Bailiff.

"And that when I stooped to pick up my table napkin, it was not that, but his hand, that I came across."

"I have hidden nothing from my friend Magloire."

"Oh! the ruffian!" cried the Bailiff.

"And that Monsieur Magloire having a passing giddiness which made him shut his eyes while at table, his guest took the opportunity to kiss me against my will?"

"I thought it was right for a husband to know everything."

"Oh! the knave!" cried the Bailiff.

"And did you even go so far as to tell him that having come into my room, and the wind having blown out the candle, I fancied I saw the window curtains move, which made me call to you for help, believing that he was hidden behind them?"

"No, I did not tell him that! I was going to when you sneezed."

"Oh! the vile rascal!" roared the Bailiff, taking hold of the Baron's sword which the latter had laid on a chair, and drawing it out of the scabbard, then, running to ward the window which his wife had indicated, "He had better not be behind these curtains, or I will spit him like a woodcock," and with this he gave one or two lunges with the sword against the window hangings.

But all at once the Bailiff stayed his hand, and stood as if arrested like a school boy caught trespassing out of bounds; his hair rose on end beneath his cotton night-cap, and this conjugal head-dress became agitated as by some convulsive movement. The sword dropped from his trembling hand, and fell with a clatter on the floor. He had caught sight of Thibault behind the curtains, and as Hamlet kills Polonius, thinking to slay his father's murderer, so he, believing that he was thrusting at nothing, had nearly killed his crony of the night before, who had already had time enough to prove himself a false friend. Moreover as he had lifted the curtain with the point of the sword, the Bailiff was not the only one who had seen Thibault. His wife and the Lord of Vez had both been participators in the unexpected vision, and both uttered a cry of surprise. In telling their tale so well, they had had no idea that they were so near the truth. The Baron, too, had not only seen that there was a man, but had also recognised that the man was Thibault.

"Damn me!" he exclaimed, as he went nearer to him, "if I mistake not, this is my old acquaintance, the man with the boar-spear!"

"How! how! man with the boar-spear?" asked the Bailiff, his teeth chattering as he spoke. "Anyway I trust he has not his boar-spear with him now!" And he ran behind his wife for protection.

"No, no, do not be alarmed," said the Lord of Vez, "even if he has got it with him, I promise you it shall not stay long in his hands. So, master poacher," he went on, addressing himself to Thibault, "you are not content to hunt the game belonging to his Highness the Duke of Orleans, in the forest of Villers-Cotterets, but you must come and make excursions in the open and poach on the territory of my friend Maitre Magloire?"

"A poacher! do you say?" exclaimed the Bailiff. "Is not Monsieur Thibault a landowner, the proprietor of farms, living in his country house on the income from his estate of a hundred acres?"

"What, he?" said the Baron, bursting into a loud guffaw, "so he made you believe all that stuff, did he? The rascal has got a clever tongue. He! a landowner! that poor starveling! why, the only property he possesses is what my stable-boys wear on their feet the wooden shoes he gets his living by making.”

Madame Suzanne, on hearing Thibault thus classified, made a gesture of scorn and contempt, while Maitre Magloire drew back a step, while the colour mounted to his face. Not that the good little man was proud, but he hated all kinds of deceit; it was not because he had clinked glasses with a shoe-maker that he turned red, but because he had drunk in company with a liar and a traitor.

During this avalanche of abuse Thibault had stood immovable with his arms folded and a smile on his lips. He had no fear but that when his turn came to speak, he would be able to take an easy revenge. And the moment to speak seemed now to have come. In a light, bantering tone of voice which showed that he was gradually accustoming himself to conversing with people of a superior rank to his own he then exclaimed; “By the Devil and his horns! as you yourself remarked a little while ago, you can tell tales of other people, my lord, without much compunction, and I fancy if every one followed your example, I should not be at such a loss what to say, as I choose to appear!”

The lord of Vez, perfectly aware, as was the bailiffs wife, of the menace conveyed in these words, answered by looking Thibault up and down with eyes that were starting with anger.

“Oh!” said Madame Magloire, some what imprudently, “you will see, he is going to invent some scandalous tale about me.”

“Have no fear, Madame,” replied Thibault, who had quite recovered his self-possession, “you have left me nothing to invent on that score.”

“Oh! the vile wretch!” she cried, “you see, I was right; he has got some malicious slander to report about me; he is determined to revenge himself because I would not return his sheep’s-eyes, to punish me because I was not willing to warn my husband that he was paying court to me.” During this speech of Madame Suzanne’s the lord of Vez had picked up his sword and advanced threateningly towards Thibault. But the Bailiff threw himself between them, and held back the Baron’s arm. It was fortunate for Thibault that he did so, for the latter did not move an inch to avoid the blow, evidently prepared at the last moment to utter some terrible wish which would avert the danger from him; but the Bailiff interposing, Thibault had no need to resort to this means of help.

"Gently, my lord!" said the Maitre Magloire, "this man is not worthy our anger. I am but a plain citizen myself, but you see, I have only contempt for what he says, and I readily forgive him the way in which he has endeavoured to abuse my hospitality."

Madame Magloire now thought that her moment had come for moistening the situation of affairs with her tears, and burst into loud sobs.

"Do not weep, dear wife!" said the Bailiff, with his usual kind and simple good-nature. "Of what could this man accuse you, even suppose he had some thing to bring against you! Of having deceived me? Well, I can only say, that made as I am, I feel I still have favours to grant you and thanks to render you, for all the happy days which I owe to you. Do not fear for a moment that this apprehension of an imaginary evil will alter my behaviour towards you. I shall always be kind and indulgent to you, Suzanne, and as I shall never shut my heart against you, so will I never shut my door against my friends. When one is small and of little account it is best to submit quietly and to trust; one need have no fear then but of cowards and evil-doers, and I am convinced, I am happy to say, that they are not so plentiful as they are thought to be. And, after all, by my faith! if the bird of misfortune should fly in, by the door or by the window, by Saint Gregory, the patron of drinkers, there shall be such a noise of singing, such a clinking of glasses, that he will soon be obliged to fly out again by the way he came in!"

Before he had ended, Madame Suzanne had thrown herself at his feet, and was kissing his hands. His speech, with its mingling of sadness and philosophy, had made more impression upon her than would have a sermon from the most eloquent of preachers. Even the lord of Vez did not remain unmoved; a tear gathered in the corner of his eye, and he lifted his finger to wipe it away, before holding out his hand to the Bailiff, saying as he did so:

"By the horn of Beelzebub! my dear friend, you have an upright mind and a kind heart, and it would be a sin indeed to bring trouble upon you; and if I have ever had a thought of doing you wrong, may God forgive me for it! I can safely swear, whatever happens, that I shall never have such another again."

While this reconciliation was taking place between the three secondary actors in this tale, the situation of the fourth, that is of the principal character in it, was becoming more and more embarrassing.

Thibault's heart was swelling with rage and hatred; himself unaware of the rapid growth of evil within him, he was fast growing, from a selfish and covetous man, into a wicked one. Suddenly, his eyes flashing, he cried aloud: "I do not know what holds me back from putting a terrible end to all this!"

On hearing this exclamation, which had all the character of a menace in it, the Baron and Suzanne understood it to mean that some great and unknown and unexpected danger was hanging over everybody's heads. But the Baron was not easily intimidated, and he drew his sword for the second time and made a movement towards Thibault. Again the Bailiff interposed.

"My lord Baron! my lord Baron!" said Thibault in a low voice, "this is the second time that you have, in wish at least, passed your sword through my body; twice therefore you have been a murderer in thought! Take care! one can sin in other ways besides sinning in deed."

"Thousand devils!" cried the Baron, beside himself with anger, "the rascal is actually reading me a moral lesson! My friend, you were wanting a little while ago to spit him like a woodcock, allow me to give him one light touch, such as the matador gives the bull, and I will answer for it, that he won't get up again in a hurry."

"I beseech you on my knees, as a favour to your humble servant, my lord," replied the Bailiff, "to let him go in peace; and deign to remember, that, being my guest, there should no hurt nor harm be done to him in this poor house of mine."

"So be it!" answered the Baron, "I shall meet him again. All kinds of bad reports are about concerning him, and poaching is not the only harm reported of him; he has been seen and recognised running the forest along with a pack of wolves and astonishingly tame wolves at that. It's my opinion that the scoundrel does not always spend his midnights at home, but sits astride a broom-stick oftener than becomes a good Catholic; the owner of the mill at Croyolles has made complaint of his wizardries. However, we will not talk of it any more now; I shall have his hut searched, and if everything there is not as it should be, the wizard's hole shall be destroyed, for I will not allow it to remain on his Highness's territory. And now, take yourself off, and that quickly!"

The shoemaker's exasperation had come to a pitch during this menacing tirade from the Baron; but, nevertheless, he profited by the passage that was cleared for him, and went out of the room. Thanks to his faculty of being able to see in the dark, he walked straight to the door, opened it, and passed over the threshold of the house, where he had left behind so many fond hopes, now lost forever, slamming the door after him with such violence that the whole house shook. He was obliged to call to mind the useless expenditure of wishes and hair of the preceding evening, to keep himself from asking that the whole house, and all within it, might be devoured by the flames. He walked on for ten minutes before he became conscious that it was pouring with rain, but the rain, frozen as it was, and even because it was so bitterly cold, seemed to do Thibault good. As the good Magloire had artlessly remarked, his bead was on fire.

On leaving the Bailiff's house, Thibault had taken the first road he came to; he had no wish to go in one direction more than another, all he wanted was space, fresh air and movement. His desultory walking brought him first of all on to the Value lands; but even then he did not notice where he was until he saw the mill of Croyolles in the distance. He muttered a curse against its fair owner as he passed, rushed on like a madman between Vauciennes and Croyolles, and seeing a dark mass in front of him, plunged into its depths. This dark mass was the forest.

The forest-path to the rear of Ham, which leads from Croyolles to Preciamont, was now ahead of him, and into this he turned, guided solely by chance.

CHAPTER XIV

A VILLAGE WEDDING

He had made but a few steps within the forest, when he found himself surrounded by his wolves. He was pleased to see them again; he slackened his pace; he called to them; and the wolves came crowding round him. Thibault caressed them as a shepherd might his sheep, as a keeper of the hounds his dogs. They were his flock, his hunting pack; a flock with flaming eyes, a pack with looks of fire. Overhead, among the bare branches, the screech-owls were hopping and fluttering, making their plaintive calls, while the other owls uttered their melancholy cries in concert. The eyes of these night-birds shone like winged coals flying about among the trees, and there was Thibault in the middle of it all, the centre of the devilish circle.

Even as the wolves came up to fawn upon him and crouch at his feet, so the owls appeared to be attracted towards him. The tips of their silent wings brushed against his hair; some of them alighted to perch upon his shoulder.

“Ah!” murmured Thibault, “I am not then the enemy of all created things; if men hate me, the animals love me.”

He forgot what place the animals, who loved him, held in the chain of created beings. He did not remember that these animals which loved him, were those which hated mankind, and which man kind cursed.

He did not pause to reflect that these animals loved him, because he had become among men, what they were among animals; a creature of the night! a man of prey! With all these animals together, he could not do an atom of good; but, on the other hand, he could do a great deal of harm. Thibault smiled at the thought of the harm he could do.

He was still some distance from home, and he began to feel tired. He knew there was a large hollow oak somewhere near, and he took his bearings and made for it; but he would have missed his way if the wolves, who seemed to guess his thoughts, had not guided him to it. While flocks of owls hopped along from branch to branch, as if to illuminate the way, the wolves trotted along in front to show it him. The tree stood about twenty paces back from the road; it was, as I have said, an old oak, numbering not years, but centuries. Trees which live ten, twenty, thirty times the length of a man's life, do not count their age by days and nights, but by seasons. The autumn is their twilight, the winter, their night; the spring is their dawn, the summer their day. Man envies the tree, the butterfly envies man. Forty men could not have encircled the trunk of the old oak with their arms.

The hollow made by time, that daily dislodged one more little piece of wood with the point of its scythe, was as large as an ordinarily sized room; but the entrance to it barely allowed a man to pass through. Thibault crept inside; there he found a sort of seat cut out of the thickness of the trunk, as soft and comfortable to sit in as an arm chair. Taking his place in it, and bidding good night to his wolves and his screech owls, he closed his eyes and fell asleep, or at least appeared to do so.

The wolves lay down in a circle round the tree; the owls perched in the branches. With these lights spread around its trunk, with these lights scattered about its branches, the oak had the appearance of a tree lit up for some infernal revel.

It was broad daylight when Thibault awoke; the wolves had long ago sought their hiding-places, the owls flown back to their ruins. The rain of the night before had ceased, and a ray of sunlight, one of those pale rays which are a harbinger of spring, came gliding through the naked branches of the trees, and having as yet none of the short-lived verdure of the year to shine upon, lit up the dark green of the mistletoe.

From afar came a faint sound of music, gradually it grew nearer, and the notes of two violins and a hautboy could be distinguished.

Thibault thought at first that he must be dreaming. But as it was broad daylight, and he appeared to be in perfect possession of his senses, he was obliged to acknowledge that he was wide awake, the more so, that having well rubbed his eyes, to make quite sure of the fact, the rustic sounds came as distinctly as ever to his ear. They were drawing rapidly nearer; a bird sang, answering the music of man with the music of God; and at the foot of the bush where it sat and made its song, a flower, only a snowdrop it is true was shining like a star. The sky above was as blue as on an April day. What was the meaning of this spring like festival, now, in the heart of winter?

The notes of the bird as it sang in salutation of this bright, unexpected day, the brightness of the flower that shone as if with its radiance to thank the sun for coming to visit it, the sounds of merry making which told the lost and unhappy man that his fellow-creatures were joining with the rest of nature in their rejoicings under the azure canopy of heaven, all the aroma of joy, all this up-springing of happiness, brought no calmer thoughts back to Thibault, but rather increased the anger and bitterness of his feelings. He would have liked the whole world to be as dark and gloomy as was his own soul. On first detecting the sounds of the approaching rural band, he thought of running away from it; but a power, stronger than his will, as it seemed to him, held him rooted to the spot; so he hid himself in the hollow of the oak and waited. Merry voices and lively songs could be heard mingling with the notes of the violins and hautboy; now and again a gun went off, or a cracker exploded; and Thibault felt sure that all these festive sounds must be occasioned by some village wedding. He was right, for he soon caught sight of a procession of villagers, all dressed in their best, with long ribands of many colours floating in the breeze, some from the women’s waists, some from the men’s hats or button-holes. They emerged into view at the end of the long lane of Ham.

They were headed by the fiddlers; then followed a few peasants, and among them some figures, which by their livery, Thibault recognised as keepers in the service of the lord of Vez. Then came Engoulevent, the second huntsman, giving his arm to an old blind woman, who was decked out with ribands like the others; then the major-domo of the Castle of Vez, as representative probably of the father of the little huntsman, giving his arm to the bride.

And the bride herself Thibault stared at her with wild fixed eyes; he endeavoured, but vainly, to persuade himself that he did not recognise her. It was impossible not to do so when she came within a few paces from where he was hiding. The bride was Agnelette.

Agnelette!

And to crown his humiliation, as if to give a final blow to his pride, no pale and trembling Agnelette dragged reluctantly to the altar, casting looks behind her of regret or remembrance, but an Agnelette as bright and happy as the bird that was singing, the snowdrop that flowered, the sunlight that was shining; an Agnelette, full of delighted pride in her wreath of orange flowers, her tulle veil and muslin dress; an Agnelette, in short, as fair and smiling as the virgin in the church at Villers-Cotterets, when dressed in her beautiful white dress at Whitsuntide.

She was, no doubt, indebted for all this finery to the Lady of the Castle, the wife of the lord of Vez, who was a true Lady Bountiful in such matters.

But the chief cause of Agnelette's happiness and smiles was not the great love she felt towards the man who was to become her husband, but her contentment at having found what she so ardently desired, that which Thibault had wickedly promised to her without really wishing to give her, someone who would help her to support her blind old grandmother.

The musicians, the bride and bride groom, the young men and maidens, passed along the road within twenty paces of Thibault, without observing the head with its flaming hair and the eyes with their fiery gleam, looking out from the hollow of the tree. Then, as Thibault had watched them appear through the undergrowth, so he watched them disappear. As the sounds of the violins and hautboy has gradually become louder and louder, so now they became fainter and fainter, until in another quarter of an hour the forest was as silent and deserted as ever, and Thibault was left alone with his singing bird, his flowering snow drop, his glittering ray of sunlight. But a new fire of hell had been lighted in his heart, the worst of the fires of hell; that which gnaws at the vitals like the sharpest serpent's tooth, and corrodes the blood like the most destructive poison: the fire of jealousy.

On seeing Agnelette again, so fresh and pretty, so innocently happy, and, worse still, seeing her at the moment when she was about to be married to another, Thibault, who had not given a thought to her for the last three months, Thibault, who had never had any intention of keeping the promise which he made her, Thibault now brought himself to believe that he had never ceased to love her.

He persuaded himself that Agnelette was engaged to him by oath, that Engoulevent was carrying off what be longed to him, and he almost leaped from his hiding place to rush after her and reproach her with her infidelity. Agnelette, now no longer his, at once appeared to his eyes as endowed with all the virtues and good qualities, all in short that would make it advantageous to marry her, which, when he had only to speak the word and everything would have been his, he had not even suspected.

After being the victim of so much deception, to lose what he looked upon as his own particular treasure, to which he had imagined that it would not be too late to return at any time, simply because he never dreamed that anyone would wish to take it from him, seemed to him the last stroke of ill fortune. His despair was no less profound and gloomy that it was a mute despair. He bit his fists, he knocked his head against the sides of the tree, and finally began to cry and sob. But they were not those tears and sobs which gradually soften the heart and are often kindly agents in dispersing a bad humour and reviving a better one; no, they were tears and sobs arising rather from anger than from regret, and these tears and sobs had no power to drive the hatred out of Thibault's heart. As some of his tears fell visibly adown his face, so it seemed that others fell on his heart within like drops of gall.

He declared that he loved Agnelette; he lamented at having lost her; nevertheless, this furious man, with all his tender love, would gladly have been able to see her fall dead, together with her bride groom, at the foot of the altar when the priest was about to join them. But happily, God, who was reserving the two children for other trials, did not allow this fatal wish to formulate itself in Thibault's mind. They were like those who, surrounded by storm, hear the noise of the thunder and see the forked flashes of the lightning, and yet remain untouched by the deadly fluid.

Before long the shoemaker began to feel ashamed of his tears and sobs; he forced back the former, and made an effort to swallow the latter.

He came out of his lair, not quite knowing where he was, and rushed off in the direction of his hut, covering a league in a quarter of an hour; this mad race, however, by causing him to perspire, somewhat calmed him down. At last he recognised the surroundings of his home; he went into his hut as a tiger might enter its den, closed the door behind him, and went and crouched down in the darkest corner he could find in his miserable lodging. There, his elbows on his knees, his chin on his hands, he sat and thought. And what thoughts were they which occupied this unhappy, desperate man? Ask of Milton what were Satan's thoughts after his fall.

He went over again all the old questions which had upset his mind from the beginning, which had brought despair upon so many before him, and would bring despair to so many that came after him.

Why should some be born in bondage and others be born to power?

Why should there be so much inequality with regard to a thing which takes place in exactly the same way in all classes namely birth?

By what means can this game of nature's, in which chance forever holds the cards against mankind, be made a fairer one?

And is not the only way to accomplish this, to do what the clever gamester does get the devil to back him up? he had certainly thought so once.

To cheat? He had tried that game himself. And what had he gained by it? Each time he had held a good hand, each time he had felt sure of the game, it was the devil after all who had won.

What benefit had he reaped from this deadly power that had been given him of working evil to others?

None.

Agnelette had been taken from him; the owner of the mill had driven him away; the Bailiff's wife had made game of him.

His first wish had caused the death of poor Marcotte, and had not even procured him a haunch of the buck that he had been so ambitious to obtain, and this had been the starting point of all his disappointed longings, for he had been obliged to give the buck to the dogs so as to put them off the scent of the black wolf.

And then this rapid multiplication of devil's hairs was appalling! He recalled the tale of the philosopher who asked for a grain of wheat, multiplied by each of the sixty-four squares of the chess board the abundant harvests of a thousand years were required to fill the last square. And he how many wishes yet remained to him? seven or eight at the outside. The unhappy man dared not look at himself either in the spring which lurked at the foot of one of the trees in the forest, or in the mirror that hung against the wall. He feared to render an exact account to himself of the time still left to him in which to exercise his power; he preferred to remain in the night of uncertainty than to face that terrible dawn which must rise when the night was over.

But still, there must be a way of continuing matters, so that the misfortunes of others should bring him good of some kind. He thought surely that if he had received a scientific education, instead of being a poor shoemaker, scarcely knowing how to read or cypher, he would have found out, by the aid of science, some combinations which would infallibly have procured for him both riches and happiness.

Poor fool! If he had been a man of learning, he would have known the legend of Doctor Faust. To what did the omnipotence conferred on him by Mephistopheles lead Faust, the dreamer, the thinker, the pre-eminent scholar? To the murder of Valentine! to Margaret’s suicide! to the pursuit of Helen of Troy, the pursuit of an empty shadow!

And, moreover, how could Thibault think coherently at all of ways and means while jealousy was raging in his heart, while he continued to picture Agnelette at the altar, giving herself for life to another than himself.

And who was that other? That wretched little Engoulevent, the man who had spied him out when he was perched in the tree, who had found his boar-spear in the bush, which had been the cause of the stripes he had received from Marcotte.

Ah! if he had but known! to him and not to Marcotte would he have willed that evil should befall! What was the physical torture he had undergone from the blows of the strap compared to the moral torture he was enduring now!

And if only ambition had not taken such hold upon him, had not borne him on the wings of pride above his sphere, what happiness might have been his, as the clever workman, able to earn as much as six francs a day, with Agnelette for his charming little housekeeper! For he had certainly been the one whom Agnelette had first loved; perhaps, although marrying another man, she still loved him. And as Thibault sat pondering over these things, he became conscious that time was passing, that night was approaching.

However modest might be the fortune of the wedded pair, however limited the desires of the peasants who had followed them, it was quite certain that bride, bridegroom and peasants were all at this hour feasting merrily together.

And he, he was sad and alone. There was no one to prepare a meal for him; and what was there in his house to eat or drink? A little bread! a little water! and solitude! in place of that blessing from heaven which we call a sister, a mistress, a wife.

But, after all, why should not he also dine merrily and abundantly? Could he not go and dine wheresoever he liked? Had he not money in his pocket from the last game he had sold to the host of the Boule-d’Or? And could he not spend on himself as much as the wedded couple and all their guests together? He had only himself to please.

“And, by my faith!” he exclaimed, “I am an idiot indeed to stay here, with my brain racked by jealousy, and my stomach with hunger, when, with the aid of a good dinner and two or three bottles of wine, I can rid myself of both torments before another hour is over. I will be off to get food, and better still, to get drink!”

In order to carry this determination into effect, Thibault took the road to Ferte-Milon, where there was an excellent restaurant, known as the Dauphin d’Or, able it was said to serve up dinners equal to those provided by his head cook for his Highness, the Duke of Orleans.

CHAPTER XV

THE LORD OF VAUPARFOND

Thibault, on arriving at the Dauphin d’Or, ordered himself as fine a dinner as he could think of. It would have been quite easy for him to have engaged a private room, but he would not then have enjoyed the personal sense of superiority. He wished the company of ordinary diners to see him eat his pullet, and his eel in its delicate sauce. He wished the other drinkers to envy him his three different wines, drunk out of three different shaped glasses. He wished everybody to hear him give his orders in a haughty voice, to hear the ring of his money.

As he gave his first order, a man in a grey coat, seated in the darkest corner of the room with a half bottle of wine before him, turned round, as if recognising a voice he knew. And, as it turned out, this was one of Thibault’s acquaintances it is scarcely necessary to add, a tavern acquaintance.

Thibault, since he had given up making shoes by day and, instead, had his wolves about at night, had made many such acquaintances. On seeing that it was Thibault, the other man turned his face away quickly, but not so quickly but that Thibault had time to recognise Auguste Francois Levasseur, valet to Raoul the Lord of Vauparfond.

“Halloa! Francois!” Thibault called out, “what are you doing sitting there in the corner, and sulking like a Monk in Lent, instead of taking your dinner openly and cheerfully as I am doing, in full view of everybody?”

Francois made no reply to this interrogation, but signed to Thibault to hold his tongue.

“I am not to speak? not to speak?” said Thibault, “and supposing it does not suit me to hold my tongue, supposing I wish to talk, and that I am bored at having to dine alone? and that it pleases me to say; ‘Friend Francois, come here; I invite you to dine with me?!’ You will not? no? very well, then I shall come and fetch you.” And Thibault rose from his seat, and followed by all eyes, went up to his friend and gave him a slap on the shoulder vigorous enough to dislocate it.

"Pretend that you have made a mistake, Thibault, or you will lose me my place; do you not see that I am not in livery, but am only wearing my drab great-coat! I am here as proxy in a love affair for my master, and I am waiting for a letter from a lady to carry back to him."

"That's another matter altogether, and I understand now and am sorry for my indiscretion. I should like, however, to have dined in your company."

"Well, nothing is easier; order your dinner to be served in a separate room, and I will give word to our host, that if another man dressed in grey like me comes in, he is to show him upstairs; he and I are old cronies, and understand one an other."

"Good," said Thibault; and he there with ordered his dinner to be taken up to a room on the first floor, which looked out upon the street.

Francois seated himself so as to be able to see the person he was expecting, while some distance off, as he came down the hill of Ferte-Milon. The dinner which Thibault had ordered was quite sufficient for the two; all that he did was to send for another bottle or so of wine. Thibault had only taken two lessons from Maitre Magloire, but he had been an apt pupil, and they had done their work; moreover Thibault had something which he wished to forget, and he counted on the wine to accomplish this for him. It was good fortune, he felt, to have met a friend with whom he could talk, for, in the state of mind and heart in which he was, talking was as good a help towards oblivion as drinking. Accordingly, he was no sooner seated, and the door shut, and his hat stuck well down on to his head so that Francois might not notice the change in the colour of his hair, than he burst at once into conversation, boldly taking the bull by the horns.

"And now, friend Francois," he said, "you are going to explain to me some of your words which I did not quite understand."

"I am not surprised at that," replied Francois, leaning back in his chair with an air of conceited impertinence, "we attendants on fashionable lords learn to speak court language, which everyone of course does not understand."

"Perhaps not, but if you explain it to your friends, they may possibly understand."

"Quite so! ask what you like and I will answer."

"I look to your doing so the more, that I will undertake to supply you with what will help to loosen your tongue. First, let me ask, why do you call yourself a grey coat? I thought grey-coat another name for a jack-ass."

“Jack-ass yourself, friend Thibault,” said Francois, laughing at the shoemaker’s ignorance. “No, a grey-coat is a liveried servant, who puts on a grey overall to hide his livery, while he stands sentinel behind a pillar, or mounts guard inside a doorway.”

“So you mean that at this moment then, my good Francois, you are on sentry go? And who is coming to relieve you?”

“Champagne, who is in the Comtesse de Mont-Gobert’s service.”

“I see; I understand exactly. Your master, the Lord of Vauparfond, is in love with the Comtesse de Mont-Gobert, and you are now awaiting a letter which Champagne is to bring from the lady.”

“Optime! as the tutor to Monsieur Raoul’s young brother says.”

“My Lord Raoul is a lucky fellow!”

“Yes indeed,” said Francois, drawing himself up.

“And what a beautiful creature the Countess is!”

“You know her then?”

“I have seen her out hunting with his Highness the Duke of Orleans and Madame de Montesson.”

Thibault in speaking had said out hunting.

“My friend, let me tell you that in society we do not say hunting and shooting, but huntin and shootin.”

“Oh!” said Thibault, “I am not so particular to a letter as all that. To the health of my Lord Raoul!”

As Francois put down his glass on the table, he uttered an exclamation; he had that moment caught sight of Champagne.

They threw open the window and called to this third comer, and Champagne, with all the ready intuition of the well-bred servant, understood at once, and went up stairs. He was dressed, like Francois, in a long grey coat, and had brought a letter with him.

“Well,” asked Francois, as he caught sight of the letter in his hand, “and is there to be a meeting to-night?”

“Yes,” answered Champagne, with evident delight.

“That’s all right,” said Francois cheerfully.

Thibault was surprised at these expressions of apparent sympathy on the part of the servants with their master’s happiness.

“Is it your master’s good luck that you are so pleased about?” he asked of Francois.

“Oh, dear me no!” replied the latter, “but when my master is engaged, I am at liberty!”

“And do you make use of your liberty?”

“One may be a valet, and yet have one’s own share of good luck, and also know how to spend the time more or less profitably,” answered Francois, bridling as he spoke.

“And you, Champagne?”

“Oh, I,” replied the last comer, holding his wine up to the light, “yes, I too hope to make good use of it.”

“Well, then, here’s to all your love affairs! since everybody seems to have one or more on hand,” said Thibault.

“The same to yours!” replied the two other men in chorus.

“As to myself,” said the shoe-maker, a look of hatred to his fellow creatures passing over his face, “I am the only person who loves nobody, and whom nobody loves.”

His companion looked at him with a certain surprised curiosity,

“Ah! ah!” said Francois, “is the report that is whispered abroad about you in the country-side a true tale then?”

“Report about me?”

“Yes, about you,” put in Champagne.

“Oh, then they say the same thing about me at Mont-Gobert as they do at Vauparfond?”

Champagne nodded his head.

“Well, and what is it they do say?”

“That you are a were-wolf,” said Francois.

Thibault laughed aloud. “Tell me, now, have I a tail?” he said, “have I a wolf’s claws, have I a wolf’s snout?”

“We only repeat what other people say,” rejoined Champagne, “we do not say that it is so.”

“Well, anyhow, you must acknowledge,” said Thibault, “that were-wolves have excellent wine.”

“By my faith, yes!” exclaimed both the valets.

“To the health of the devil who provides it, gentlemen.”

The two men who were holding their glasses in their hand, put both glasses down on the table.

“What is that for?” asked Thibault.

"You must find someone else to drink that health with you," said Francois, "I won't, that's flat!"

"Nor I," added Champagne.

"Well and good then! I will drink all three glasses myself," and he immediately proceeded to do so.

"Friend Thibault," said the Baron's valet, "it is time we separated."

"So soon?" said Thibault.

"My master is awaiting me, and no doubt with some impatience ... the letter, Champagne?"

"Here it is."

"Let us take farewell then of your friend Thibault, and be off to our business and our pleasures, and leave him to his pleasures and business." And so saying, Francois winked at his friend, who responded with a similar sign of understanding between them.

"We must not separate," said Thibault, "without drinking a stirrup-cup together."

"But not in those glasses," said Francois, pointing to the three from which Thibault had drunk to the enemy of mankind.

"You are very particular, gentlemen; better call the sacristan and have them washed in holy water."

"Not quite that, but rather than refuse the polite invitation of a friend, we will call for the waiter, and have fresh glasses brought."

"These three, then," said Thibault, who was beginning to feel the effects of the wine he had drunk, "are fit for nothing more than to be thrown out of window? To the devil with you!" he exclaimed as he took up one of them and sent it flying. As the glass went through the air it left a track of light behind it, which blazed and went out like a flash of lightning. Thibault took up the two remaining glasses and threw them in turn, and each time the same thing happened, but the third flash was followed by a loud peal of thunder.

Thibault shut the window, and was thinking, as he turned to his seat again, how he should explain this strange occurrence to his companions; but his two companions had disappeared.

"Cowards!" he muttered. Then he looked for a glass, but found none left.

"Hum! that's awkward," he said. "I must drink out of the bottle, that's all!"

And suiting the action to the word, Thibault finished up his dinner by draining the bottle, which did not help to steady his brain, already somewhat shaky.

At nine o’clock, Thibault called the innkeeper, paid his account, and departed.

He was in an angry disposition of enmity against all the world; the thought from which he had hoped to escape possessed him more and more. Agnelette was being taken farther and farther from him as the time went by; every one, wife or mistress, had someone to love them. This day which had been one of hatred and despair to him, had been one full of the promise of joy and happiness for everybody else; the lord of Vauparfond, the two wretched valets, Francois and Champagne, each of them had a bright star of hope to follow; while he, he alone, went stumbling along in the darkness. Decidedly there was a curse upon him. “But,” he went on thinking to himself, “if so, the pleasures of the damned belong to me, and I have a right to claim them.”

As these thoughts went surging through his brain, as he walked along cursing aloud, shaking his fist at the sky, he was on the way to his hut and had nearly reached it, when he heard a horse coming up behind him at a gallop.

“Ah!” said Thibault, “here comes the Lord of Vauparfond, hastening to the meeting with his love. I should laugh, my fine Sir Raoul, if my Lord of Mont-Gobert managed just to catch you! You would not get off quite so easily as if it were Maitre Magloire; there would be swords out, and blows given and received!”

Thus engaged in thinking what would happen if the Comte de Mont-Gobert were to surprise his rival, Thibault, who was walking in the road, evidently did not get out of the way quickly enough, for the horseman, seeing a peasant of some kind barring his passage, brought his whip down upon him in a violent blow, calling out at the same time: “Get out of the way, you beggar, if you don’t wish to be trampled under the horse’s feet!”

Thibault, still half drunk, was conscious of a crowd of mingled sensations, of the lashing of the whip, the collision with the horse, and the rolling through cold water and mud, while the horseman passed on.

He rose to his knees, furious with anger, and shaking his fist at the retreating figure:

“Would the devil,” he exclaimed, “I might just for once have my turn at being one of you great lords, might just for twenty-four hours take your place, Monsieur Raoul de Vauparfond, instead of being only Thibault, the shoe-maker, so that I might know what it was to have a fine horse to ride, instead of tramping on foot; might be able to whip the peasants I met on the road, and have the opportunity of paying court to these beautiful women, who deceive their husbands, as the Comtesse de Mont-Gobert does!”

The words were hardly out of his mouth, when the Baron’s horse shied, throwing the rider over its head.

CHAPTER XVI

MY LADY'S LADY

Thibault was delighted at seeing what had happened to the young Baron, whose hand, anything but light, had so shortly before made use of his whip on Thibault's shoulders, which still smarted with the blow. The latter now ran at full speed to see how far Monsieur Raoul de Vauparfond was injured; he found a body lying insensible, stretched across the road, with the horse standing and snorting beside it.

But Thibault could hardly believe his senses on perceiving that the figure lying in the road was not the same as had but five minutes previously, ridden past him and given him the lash with the whip. In the first place, this figure was not in the dress of a gentleman, but clothed like a peasant, and, what was more, the clothes he had on seemed to Thibault to be the same as he himself had been wearing only a moment before His surprise increased more and more and amounted almost to stupefaction on further recognising, in the inert, unconscious figure, not only his own clothes but his own face. His astonishment naturally led him to turn his eyes from this second Thibault to his own person when he became aware that an equally remarkable change had come over his costume. Instead of shoes and gaiters his legs were now encased in an elegant pair of hunting boots, reaching to the knee, as soft and smooth as a pair of stockings, with a roll over the instep, and finished off with a pair of fine silver spurs. The knee-breeches were no longer of corduroy, but of the most beautiful buckskin, fastened with little gold buckles. His long coarse olive-coloured coat was replaced by a handsome green hunting-coat, with gold lace facings, thrown open to display a waistcoat of fine white jean, while over the artistically pleated shirt hung the soft wavy folds of a cambric cravat. Not a single article of dress about him but had been transformed, even to his old lantern-shaped hat, which was now a three-cornered one, trimmed with gold lace to match the coat. The tick also, such as workmen carry partly for walking and partly for self-defence, and which he had been holding in his land a minute before, had now given place to a light whip, with which he gave a cut through the air, listening with a sense of aristocratic pleasure to the whistling sound it made. And finally, his slender figure was drawn in at the waist by a belt, from which hung a hunting-knife, half-sword, half-dagger.

Thibault was pleased beyond measure at finding himself clothed in such a delightful costume, and with a feeling of vanity, natural under the circumstances, he was overcome with the desire to ascertain without delay how the dress suited his face. But where could he go to look at himself, out there in the midst of pitch darkness? Then, looking about him, he saw that he was only a stone's throw from his own hut.

"Ah! to be sure!" he said, "nothing easier, for I have my glass there."

And he made haste towards his hut, intending, like Narcissus, to enjoy his own beauty in peace and all to himself. But the door of the hut was locked, and Thibault felt vainly for the key. All he could find in his pockets was a well-filled purse, a sweet-meat box containing scented lozenges, and a little mother-of-pearl and gold penknife. What could he have done then with his door-key? Then suddenly a bright thought occurred to him possibly the key was in the pocket of that other Thibault who was lying out there in the road. He went back and felt in the breeches pocket, where he discovered the key at once, in company with a few sous. Holding the rough clumsy thing in the tips of his fingers, he returned to open the door. The inside of the hut was even darker that the night outside, and Thibault groped about to find the steel, the tinder and flint, and the matches, and then proceeded to try and light the candle, which consisted of an end stuck into an empty bottle. In a second or two this was accomplished, but in the course of the operation Thibault was obliged to take hold of the candle with his fingers.

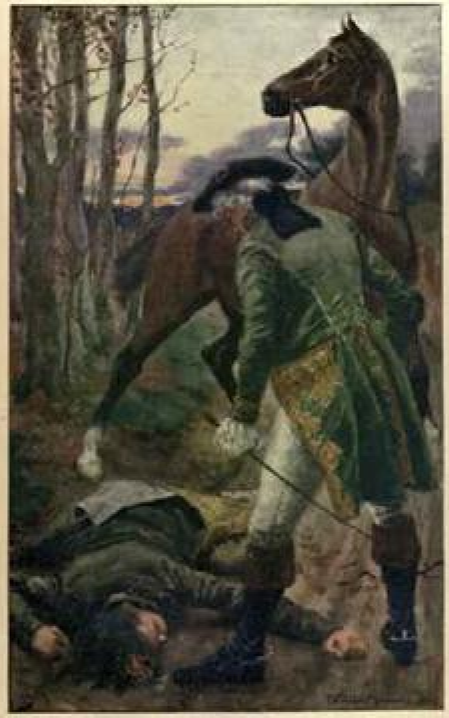

THE BARON'S HORSE ROSE, THROWING THE RIDER OVER ITS HEAD

"Pah!" he said, "what pigs these peasants are! I wonder how they can live in this dirty sort of way!"

However, the candle was alight, which was the chief matter, and Thibault now took down his mirror, and bringing it to the light, looked at himself in it. His eye had scarcely caught sight of the reflected image, than he uttered a cry of astonishment, it was no longer himself that he saw, or rather, although it was still Thibault in spirit, it was no longer Thibault in body. His spirit had entered into the body of a handsome young man of twenty-five or twenty-six years of age, with blue eyes, pink fresh cheeks, red lips, and white teeth; in short, it had entered into the body of the Baron Raoul de Vauparfond. Then Thibault re-called the wish that he had uttered in his moment of anger after the blow from the whip and his collision with the horse. His wish had been that for four and twenty hours he might be the Baron de Vauparfond, and the Baron de Vauparfond be Thibault, which now explained to him what had at first seemed inexplicable, why the unconscious man now lying in the road was dressed in his clothes and had his face.

"But I must not forget one thing," he said, "that is, that although I seem to be here, I am not really here, but lying out there, so I must be careful to see that during the twenty-four hours, during which I shall be imprudent enough to be away from myself, no irreparable harm comes to me. Come now, Monsieur de Vauparfond, do not be so fastidious; carry the poor man in, and lay him gently on his bed here." And, although with his aristocratic instincts Monsieur de Vauparfond found the task very repugnant to him, Thibault, nevertheless, courageously took up his own body in his arms and carried himself from the road to the bed. Having thus placed the body in safety, he blew out the light, for fear that any harm should come to this other self before he came to; then, carefullv locking the door, he hid the key in the hollow of a tree, where he was in the habit of leaving it when not wishing to take it with him.

The next thing to do was to get hold of the. horse's bridle and mount into the saddle. Once there, Thibault had a preliminary moment of some uneasiness, for, having travelled more on foot than on horseback, he was not an accomplished rider, and he naturally feared that he might not be able to keep his seat when the horse began to move. But it seemed, that, while inheriting Raoul's body, he also inherited his physical qualities, for the horse, being an intelligent beast, and perfectly conscious of the momentary want of assurance on the part of his rider, made an effort to throw him, whereupon Thibault instinctively gathered up the reins, pressed his knees against the horse's sides, dug his spurs into them, and gave the animal two or three cuts of the whip, which brought it to order on the spot.

Thibault, perfectly unknown to himself, was a past master in horsemanship. This little affair with the horse enabled Thibault more fully to realise his duality. As far as the body was concerned, he was the Baron Raoul de Vauparfond from top to toe; but as far as the spirit was concerned, he was still Thibault. It was, therefore, certain that the spirit of the young lord who had lent him his body was now sleeping in the form of the unconscious Thibault which he had left behind in the hut.

The division of substance and spirit between himself and the Baron, however, left him with a very vague idea of what he was going, or would have, to do. That he was going to Mont-Gobert in answer to the Countess's letter, so much he knew. But what was in the letter? At what hour was he expected? How was he to gain admission to the Castle? Not one of these questions could he answer, and it only remained for him to discover what to do, step by step, as he proceeded. Suddenly it flashed across him that probably the Countess's letter was somewhere on his person. He felt about his dress, and, sure enough, inside the side pocket of his coat was something, which by its shape, seemed to be the article he wanted. He stopped his horse, and putting his hand into his pocket, drew out a little scented leather case lined with white satin. In one side of the case were several letters, in the other only one; no doubt the latter would tell him what he wanted to know, if he could once get to read it. He was now only a short distance from the village of Fleury, and he galloped on hoping that he might find a house still lighted up. But villagers go to bed early, in those days even earlier than they do now, and Thibault went from one end of the street to the other without seeing a single light. At last, thinking he heard some kind of movement in the stables of an Inn, he called. A stable boy sallied out with a lantern, and Thibault, forgetting for the moment that he was a lord, said: "Friend, could you show me a light for a moment? You would be doing me a service."

"And that's what you go and call a chap out of bed for?" answered the stable-boy rudely. "Well, you are a nice sort of young'un, you are!" and turning his back on Thibault he was just going to re-enter the stable, when Thibault, perceiving that he had gone on a wrong tack, now raised his voice, calling out:

"Look here, sirrah, bring your lantern here and give me a light, or I'll lay my whip across your back!"

"Ah! pardon, my lord!" said the stable-boy. "I did not see who it was I was speaking to." And he immediately stood on tip-toe holding the lantern up as Thibault directed him:

Thibault unfolded the letter and read:

"*My dear Raoul,*

"The goddess Venus has certainly taken us under her protection. A grand hunt of some kind is to take place to morrow out in the direction of Thury; I know no particulars about it, all I do know is, that he is going away this evening. You, therefore, start at nine o'clock, so as to be here at half-past ten. Come in by the way you know; someone whom you know will be awaiting you, and will bring you, you know where. Last time you came, I don't mean to upbraid you, but it did seem to me you stayed a long time in the corridors.

"Devil take it!" muttered Thibault.

"I beg your pardon, my lord?" said the stable-boy.

"Nothing, you lout, except that I do not require you any longer and you can go."

"A good journey to you, my lord!" said the stable-boy, bowing to the ground, and he went back to his stable.

"Devil take it!" repeated Thibault, "the letter gives me precious little information, except that we are under the protection of the Goddess Venus, that he goes away this evening, that the Comtesse de Mont-Gobert expects me at half-past ten, and that her Christian name is Jane. As for the rest, I am to go in by the way I know, I shall be awaited by someone I know, and taken where I know." Thibault scratched his ear, which is what everybody does, in every country of the world, when plunged into awkward circumstances. He longed to go and wake up the Lord of Vauparfond's spirit, which was just now sleeping in Thibault's body on Thibault's bed; but, apart from the loss of time which this would involve, it might also cause considerable inconvenience, for the Baron's spirit, on seeing its own body so near to it, might be taken with the desire of re-entering it. This would give rise to a struggle in which Thibault could not well defend himself without doing serious harm to his own person; some other way out of the difficulty must therefore be found. He had heard a great deal about the wonderful sagacity of animals, and had himself, during his life in the country, had occasion more than once to admire their instinct, and he now determined to trust to that of his horse. Riding back into the main road, he turned the horse in the direction of Mont-Gobert, and let it have its head. The horse immediately started off at a gallop; it had evidently understood. Thibault troubled himself no further, it was now the horse's affair to bring him safely to his destination. On reaching the corner of the park wall the animal stopped, not apparently because it was in doubt as to which road to take, but something seemed to make it uneasy, and it pricked its ears. At the same time, Thibault also fancied that he caught sight of two shadows; but they must have been only shadows, for although he stood up in his stirrups and looked all around him, he could see absolutely nothing. They were probably poachers he thought, who had reasons like himself for wishing to get inside the park. There being no longer anything to bar his passage, he had only, as before, to let the horse go its own way, and he accordingly did so. The horse followed the walls of the park at a quick trot, carefully choosing the soft edge of the road, and not uttering a single neigh;

the intelligent animal seemed as if it knew that it must make no sound or at least as little sound as possible.

In this way, they went along the whole of one side of the park, and on reaching the corner, the horse turned as the wall turned, and stopped before a small breach in the same. "It's through here, evidently," said Thibault, "that we have to go."

The horse answered by sniffing at the breach, and scraping the ground with its foot; Thibault gave the animal the rein, and it managed to climb up and through the breach, over the loose stones which rolled away beneath its hoof. Horse and rider were now within the park. One of the three difficulties had been successfully overcome: Thibault had got in by the way he knew; it now remained to find the person whom he knew, and he thought it wisest to leave this also to his horse. The horse went on for another five minutes, and then stopped at a short distance from the Castle, before the door of one of those little huts of rough logs and bark and clay, which are built up in parks, as painters introduce buildings into their landscapes, solely for the sake of ornament.

On hearing the horse's hoofs, someone partly opened the door, and the horse stopped in front of it.

A pretty girl came out, and asked in a low voice, "Is it you, Monsieur Raoul?"

"Yes, my child, it is I," answered Thibault, dismounting.

"Madame was terribly afraid that drunken fool of a Champagne might not have given you the letter."

"She need not have been afraid; Champagne brought it me with the most exemplary punctuality."

"Leave your horse then and come."

"But who will look after it?"

"Why Cramoisi, of course, the man who always does."

"Ah, yes, to be sure," said Thibault, as if these details were familiar to him, "Cramoisi will look after it."

"Come, come," said the maid, "we must make haste or Madame will complain again that we loiter in the corridors." And as she spoke these words, which recalled a phrase in the letter which had been written to Raoul, she laughed, and showed a row of pearly white teeth, and Thibault felt that he should like to loiter in the park, before waiting to get into the corridors.

Then the maid suddenly stood still a moment with her head bent, listening.

"What is it?" asked Thibault.

"I thought I heard the sound of a branch creaking under somebody's foot."

"Very likely," said Thibault, "no doubt Cramoisi's foot."

"All the more reason that you should be careful what you do ... at all events out here."

"I don't understand."

"Do you not know that Cramoisi is the man I am engaged to?"

"Ah! to be sure! But when I am alone with you, my dear Rose, I always forget that."

"I am called Rose now, am I! I never knew such a forgetful man as you are, Monsieur Raoul."

"I call you Rose, my pretty one, because the rose is the queen of flowers, as you are the queen of waiting-maids."

"In good truth, my Lord," said the maid, "I have always found you a lively, witty gentleman, but you surpass yourself this evening."

Thibault drew himself up, flattered by this remark really a letter addressed to the Baron, but which it had fallen to the shoe-maker to unseal.

"Let us hope your mistress will think the same!" he said.

"As to that," said the waiting maid, "any man can make one of these ladies of fashion think him the cleverest and wittiest in the world, simply by holding his tongue."

"Thank you," he said, "I will remember what you say."

"Hush!" said the woman to Thibault, "there is Madame behind the dressing-room curtains; follow me now staidly."

For they had now to cross an open space that lay between the wooded part of the park and the flight of steps leading up to the Castle. Thibault began walking towards the latter.

"Now, now," said the maid, catching hold of him by the arm, "what are you doing, you foolish man?"

"What am I doing? well, I confess Suzette, I don't know in the least what I am doing!"

"Suzette! so that's my name now, is it? I think Monsieur does me the honour of calling me in turn by the name of all his mistresses. But come, this way! You are not dreaming I suppose of going through the great reception rooms. That would give a fine opportunity to my lord the Count, truly!"

And the maid hurried Thibault towards a little door, to the right of which was a spiral staircase.

Half-way up, Thibault put his arm round his companion's waist, which was as slender and supple as a snake.

"I think we must be in the corridors, now, eh?" he asked, trying to kiss the young woman's pretty cheek.

"No, not yet," she answered; "but never mind that."

"By my faith," he said, "if my name this evening were Thibault instead of Raoul, I would carry you up with me to the garrets, instead of stopping on the first floor!"

At that moment a door was heard grating on its hinges.

"Quick, quick, Monsieur!" said the maid, "Madame is growing impatient."

And drawing Thibault after her, she ran up the remaining stairs to the corridor, opened a door, pushed Thibault into a room, and shut the door after him, firmly believing that it was the Baron Raoul de Vauparfond or, as she herself called him, the most forgetful man in the world, whom she had thus secured.

CHAPTER XVII

THE BARON DE MONT-GOBERT

Thibault found himself in the Countess’s room. If the magnificence of Bailiff Magloire’s furniture rescued from the lumber-room of his Highness the Duke of Orleans, had astonished Thibault, the daintiness, the harmony, the taste of the Countess’s room filled him with intoxicating delight. The rough child of the forest had never seen anything like it, even in dreams; for one cannot even dream of things of which we have no idea.

Double curtains were drawn across the two windows, the one set of white silk trimmed with lace, the other of pale china blue satin, embroidered with silver flowers. The bed and the toilet table were draped to match the windows, and were nearly smothered in clouds of Valenciennes lace. The walls were hung with very light rose-coloured silk, over which thick folds of Indian muslin, delicate as woven air, undulated like waves of mist at the slightest breath of air from the door. The ceiling was composed of a medallion painted by Boucher, and representing the toilet of Venus; she was handing her cupids the various articles of a woman’s apparel, and these were now all distributed, with the exception of the goddess’s girdle.

The central medallion was surrounded by a series of panels, on which were painted supposed views of Cnidos, Paphos, and Amathus. All the furniture, chairs, armchairs, settees, sociables, was covered with China satin similiar to that of the curtains; over the groundwork of the carpet, of the colour of pale green water, were scattered bouquets of blue corn-flowers, pink poppies, and white daisies. The tables were of rose-wood; the corner-pieces of Indian lacquer; and the whole room was softly lighted by pink wax candles held in two candelabra. A vague and indescribably delicate perfume pervaded the air, one could not say from what sweet essence, for it was scarcely even a perfume, but rather an emanation, the same kind of odorous exhalation whereby Eneas, in the Eneid, recognised the presence of his mother.

Thibault pushed into the room by the waiting-maid, made one step forward, and then stopped. He had taken everything in at a glance, inhaled everything at a breath. For a second there passed before his mind's eye like a vision, Agnelette's little cottage, Madame Polet's dining-room, the bed-chamber of the Bailiff's wife; but they disappeared as quickly to give place to this delicious paradise of love into which he had been transported as by magic. He could scarcely believe that what he looked upon was real. Were there really men and women in the world, so blessed by fortune as to live in such surroundings as these? Had he not been carried to some wizard's castle, to some fairy's palace? And those who enjoyed such favour as this, what special good had they done? what special evil had they done, who were deprived of these advantages? Why, instead of wishing to be the Baron for four and twenty hours, had he not wished to be the Countess's lap-dog all his life? How would he bear to be Thibault again after having seen all this? He had just reached this point in his reflections, when the dressing-room door opened and the Countess herself appeared, a fit bird for such a nest, a fit flower for such a sweet scented garden.

Her hair, fastened only by four diamond pins, hung down loosely to one side, while the rest was gathered into one large curl that hung over the other shoulder and fell into her bosom. The graceful lines of her lithe and well-formed figure, no longer hidden by puffings of dress, were clearly indicated beneath her loose pink silk gown, richly covered with lace; so fine and transparent was the silk of her stockings, that it was more like pearl-white flesh than any texture, and her tiny feet were shod in little slippers made of cloth of silver, with red heels. But not an atom of jewellery no bracelets on the arms, no rings on the fingers; just one row of pearls round the throat, that was all, but what pearls! worth a king's ramsom!

As this radiant apparition came towards him, Thibault fell on his knees; he bowed himself, feeling crushed at the sight of this luxury, of this beauty, which to him seemed inseparable.

"Yes, yes, you may well kneel kneel lower, lower yet kiss my feet, kiss the carpet, kiss the floor, but I shall not any the more forgive you ... you are a monster!"

"In truth, Madame, if I compare myself with you, I am even worse than that!"

"Ah! yes, pretend that you mistake my words and think I am only speaking of your outward appearance, when you know I am speaking of your behaviour ... and, indeed, if your perfidious soul were imaged in your face, you would verily and indeed be a monster of ugliness. But yet it is not so, for Monsieur, for all his wickedness and infamous doings, still remains the handsomest gentleman in all the country round. But, come now, Monsieur, ought you not to be ashamed of yourself?"

"Because I am the handsomest gentleman in the neighbourhood?" asked Thibault, detecting by the tone of the lady's voice that his crime was not an irremediable one.

"No, Monsieur, but for having the blackest soul and the falsest heart ever hidden beneath such a gay and golden exterior. Now, get up, and come and give an account of yourself to me."

And the Countess so speaking held out a hand to Thibault which offered pardon at the same time that it demanded a kiss.

Thibault took the soft, sweet hand in his own and kissed it; never had his lips touched anything so like satin. The Countess now seated herself on the settee and made a sign to Raoul to sit down be side her.

"Let me know something of your doings, since you were last here," said the Countess to him.

"First tell me, dear Countess," replied Thibault, "when I last was here."

"Do you mean you have forgotten? One does not generally acknowledge things of that kind, unless seeking for a cause of quarrel."

"On the contrary, dear friend, it is because the recollection of that last visit is so present with me, that I think it must have been only yesterday we were together, and I try in vain to recall what I have done, and I assure you I have committed no other crime since yesterday but that of loving you."

"That's not a bad speech; but you will not get yourself out of disgrace by paying compliments."

"Dear Countess," said Thibault, "supposing we put off explanations to another time,"

"No, you must answer me now; it is five days since I last saw you; what have you been doing all that time?"

"I am waiting for you to tell me, Countess. How can you expect me, conscious as I am of my innocence, to accuse myself?"

"Very well then! I will not begin by saying anything about your loitering in the corridors."

"Oh, pray, let us speak of it! how can you think, Countess, that knowing you, the diamond of diamonds, was waiting for me, I should stop to pick up an imitation pearl?"

"Ah! but I know how fickle men are, and Lisette is such a pretty girl!"

"Not so, dear Jane, but you must understand that she being our confidante, and knowing all our secrets, I cannot treat her quite like a servant."

"How agreeable it must be to be able to say to one's-self 'I am deceiving the Comtesse de Mont-Gobert and I am the rival of Monsieur Cramoisi!'"

"Very well then, there shall be no more loiterings in the corridors, no more kisses for poor Lisette, supposing of course there ever have been any!"

"Well, after all, there is no great harm in that."

"Do you mean that I have done some thing even worse?"

"Where had you been the other night, when you were met on the road between Erneville and Villers-Cotterets?"

"Someone met me on the road?"

"Yes, on the Erneville Road; where were you coming from?"

"I was coming home from fishing."

"Fishing! what fishing?"

"They had been drawing the Berval ponds."

"Oh! we know all about that; you are such a fine fisher, are you not, Monsieur? And what sort of an eel were you bringing back in your net, returning from your fishing at two o'clock in the morning!"

"I had been dining with my friend, the Baron, at Vez."

"At Vez? ha! I fancy you went there mainly to console the beautiful recluse, whom the jealous Baron keeps shut up there a regular prisoner, so they say. But even that I can forgive you."

"What, is there a blacker crime still," said Thibault, who was beginning to feel quite reassured, seeing how quickly the pardon followed on the accusation; how ever serious it appeared at first.

"Yes, at the ball given by his Highness the Duke of Orleans."

"What ball?"

"Why, the one yesterday! it's not so very along ago, is it?"

"Oh, yesterday's ball? I was admiring you."

"Indeed; but I was not there."

"Is it necessary for you to be present, Jane, for me to admire you; cannot one admire you in remembrance as truly as in person? and if, when absent, you triumph by comparison, the victory is only so much the greater."

"I daresay, and it was in order to carry out the comparison to its utmost limits that you danced four times with Madame de Bonneuil; they are very pretty, are they not, those dark women who cover themselves with rouge, and have eyebrows like the Chinese mannikins on my screens and moustaches like a grenadier.”

“Do you know what we talked about during those four dances.”

“It is true then, that you danced four times with her?”

“It is true, no doubt, since you say so.”

“Is that a proper sort of answer?”

“What other could I give? could any one contradict what was said by so pretty a mouth? not I certainly, who would still bless it, even though it were pronouncing my sentence of death.”

And, as if to await this sentence, Thibault fell on his knees before the Countess, but at that moment, the door opened, and Lisette rushed in full of alarm.

“Ah! Monsieur, Monsieur,” she cried, “save yourself! here comes my master the Count!”

“The Count!” exclaimed the Countess.

“Yes, the Count in person, and his huntsman Lestocq, with him.”

“Impossible!”

“I assure you, Madame, Cramoisi saw them as plain as I see you; the poor fellow was quite pale with fright.”

“Ah! then the meet at Thury was all a pretence, a trap to catch me?”

“Who can tell, Madame? Alas! alas! men are such deceiving creatures!”

“What is to be done?” asked the Countess.

“Wait for the Count and kill him,” said Thibault resolutely, furious at again seeing his good fortune escaping from him, at losing what above all things it had been his ambition to possess.

“Kill him! kill the Count? are you mad, Raoul? No, no, you must fly, you must save yourself ... Lisette! Lisette! take the Baron through my dressing-room. And in spite of his resistance, Lisette by dint of pushing got him safely away. Only just in time! steps were heard coming up the wide main staircase. The Countess, with a last word of love to the supposed Raoul, glided quickly in to her bedroom, while Thibault followed Lisette: She led him rapidly along the corridor, where Cramoisi was keeping guard at the other end; then into a room, and through this into another, and finally into a smaller one which led into a little tower; here, the fugitives came again on to a staircase corresponding with the one by which they had gone up, but when they reached the bottom they found the door locked. Lisette, with

Thibault still following, went back up a few steps into a sort of office in which was a window looking over the garden; this she opened. It was only a few feet from the ground, and Thibault jumped out, landing safely below.

"You know where your horse is," called Lisette, "jump on its back, and do not stop till you get to Vauparfond."

Thibault would have liked to thank her for all her kindly warnings, but she was some six feet above him and he had no time to lose. A stride or two brought him to the clump of trees under which stood the little building which served as stable for his horse. But was the horse still there? He heard a neigh which reassured him: only the neigh sounded he thought more like a cry of pain. Thibault went in, put out his hand, felt the horse, gathered up the reins, and leaped on to its back without touching the stirrups; Thibault, as we have already said, had suddenly become a consummate horseman. But the horse no sooner felt the weight of the rider on its back than the poor beast began to totter on its legs. Thibault dug his spurs in savagely, and the horse made a frantic effort to stand. But in another instant, uttering one of those pitiful neighs which Thibault had heard when he approached the stable, it rolled helplessly over on its side. Thibault quickly disengaged his leg from under the animal, which, as the poor thing struggled to rise, he had no difficulty in doing, and he found himself again on his feet. Then it became clear to him, that in order to prevent his escape, Monsieur le Comte de Mont-Gobert had hamstrung his horse.

Thibault uttered an oath: "If I ever meet you, Monsieur Comte de Mont-Gobert," he said, "I swear that I will hamstring you, as you have hamstrung this poor beast."

Then he rushed out of the little building, and remembering the way he had come, turned in the direction of the breach in the wall, and walking quickly towards it, found it, climbed over the stones, and was again outside the park. But his further passage was barred, for there in front of him was the figure of a man, who stood waiting, with a drawn sword in his hand. Thibault recognised the Comte de Mont-Gobert, the Comte de Mont-Gobert thought he recognised Raoul de Vauparfond.

"Draw, Baron!" said the Count; further explanation was unnecessary. Thibault, on his side, equally enraged at having the prey, on which he had already set tooth and claw, snatched away from him, was as ready to fight as the Count. He drew, not his sword, but his hunting-knife, and the two men crossed weapons.

Thibault, who was something of an adept at quarter-staff, had no idea of fencing; what was his surprise therefore, when he found, that he knew by instinct how to handle his weapon, and could parry and thrust according to all the rules of the art. He parried the first two or three of the Count's blows with admirable skill.

"Ah, I heard, I remember," muttered the Count between his clenched teeth, "that at the last match you rivalled Saint-Georges himself at the foils."

Thibault had no conception who Saint-Georges might be, but he was conscious of a strength and elasticity of wrist, thanks to which he felt he might have rivalled the devil himself.

So far, he had only been on the defensive; but the Count having aimed one or two unsuccessful lunges at him, he saw his opportunity, struck out, and sent his knife clean through his adversary's shoulder. The Count dropped his sword, tottered, and falling on to one knee, cried "Help, Lestocq!"

Thibault ought then to have sheathed his knife and fled; but, unfortunately, he remembered the oath he had taken as regards the Count, when he had found that his horse had been hamstrung. He slipped the sharp blade of his weapon under the bent knee and drew it towards him; the Count uttered a cry; but as Thibault rose from his stooping posture, he too felt a sharp pain between his shoulder-blades, followed by a sensation as of extreme cold over the chest, and finally the point of a weapon appeared above his right breast. Then he saw a loud of blood, and knew no more. Lestocq, called to his master's aid as the latter fell, had run to the spot, and, as Thibault rose from hamstringing the Count, had seized that moment to dig his hunting knife into his back.

CHAPTER XVIII

DEATH AND RESURRECTION

The cold morning air brought Thibault back to consciousness; he tried to rise, but the extremity of his pain held him bound. He was lying on his back, with no remembrance of what had happened, seeing only the low grey sky above him. He made another effort, and turning managed to lift himself on his elbow. As he looked around him, he began to recall the events of the previous night; he recognised the breach in the wall; and then there came back to him the memory of the love meeting with the Countess and the desperate duel with the Count. The ground near him was red with blood, but the Count was no longer there; no doubt, Lestocq, who had given him this fine blow that was nailing him to the spot, had helped his master indoors; Thibault they had left there, to die like a dog, as far as they cared. He had it on the tip of his tongue to hurl after them all the maledictory wishes wherewith one would like to assail one's cruellest enemy. But since Thibault had been no longer Thibault, and indeed during the remainder of the time that he would still be the Baron Raoul, or at least so in outward appearance, his demoniacal power had been and would continue in abeyance.

He had until nine o'clock that evening; but would he live till then? This question gave rise in Thibault to a very uneasy state of mind. If he were to die before that hour, which of them would die, he or the Baron? It seemed to him as likely to be one as the other. What, however, disturbed and angered him most was his consciousness that the misfortune which had befallen him was again owing to his own fault. He remembered now that before he had expressed the wish to be the Baron for four and twenty hours, he had said some such words as these:

"I should laugh, Raoul, if the Comte de Mont-Gobert were to take you by surprise; you would not get off so easily as if he were the Bailiff Magloire; there would be swords drawn, and blows given and received."

At last, with a terrible effort, and suffering the while excruciating pain, Thibault succeeded in dragging himself on to one knee. He could then make out people walking along a road not far off on their way to market, and he tried to call to them, but the blood filled his mouth and nearly choked him. So he put his hat on the point of his knife and signalled to them like a shipwrecked mariner, but his strength again failing, he once more fell back unconscious. In a little while, how ever, he again awoke to sensation; he appeared to be swaying from side to side as if in a boat. He opened his eyes; the peasants, it seemed, had seen him, and although not knowing who he was, had had compassion on this handsome young man lying covered with blood, and had concocted a sort of hand-barrow out of some branches, on which they were now carrying him to Villers-Cotterets. But by the time they reached Puiseux, the wounded man felt that he could no longer bear the movement, and begged them to put him down in the first peasant's hut they came to, and to send a doctor to him there. The carriers took him to the house of the village priest, and left him there, Thibault before they parted, distributing gold among them from Raoul's purse, accompanied by many thanks for all their kind offices. The priest was away saying mass, but on returning and finding the wounded man, he uttered loud cries of lamentation.

Had he been Raoul himself, Thibault could not have found a better hospital. The priest had at one time been Cure of Vauparfond, and while there had been engaged to give Raoul his first schooling. Like all country priests, he knew, or thought he knew, something about doctoring; so he examined his old pupil's wound. The knife had passed under the shoulder-blade, through the right lung, and out between the second and third ribs.

He did not for a moment disguise to himself the seriousness of the wound, but he said nothing until the doctor had been to see it. The latter arrived and after his examination, he turned and shook his head.

"Are you going to bleed him?" asked the priest.

"What would be the use?" asked the doctor. "If it had been done at once after the wound was given, it might perhaps have helped to save him, but it would be dangerous now to disturb the blood in any way."

"Is there any chance for him?" asked the priest, who was thinking that the less there was for the doctor to do, the more there would be for the priest.

"If his wound runs the ordinary course," said the doctor, lowering his voice, "he will probably not last out the day."

"You give him up then?"

“A doctor never gives up a patient, or at least if he does so, he still trusts to the possibility of nature mercifully interfering on the patient’s behalf; a clot may form and stop the hemorrhage; a cough may disturb the clot, and the patient bleed to death.”

“You think then that it is my duty to prepare the poor young man for death,” asked the curate.

“I think,” answered the doctor, shrugging his shoulders, “you would do better to leave him alone; in the first place because he is, at present, in a drowsy condition and cannot hear what you say; later on, because he will be delirious, and unable to understand you.” But the doctor was mistaken; the wounded man, drowsy as he was, overheard this conversation, more reassuring as regards the salvation of his soul than the recovery of his body. How many things people say in the presence of sick persons, believing that they cannot hear, while all the while, they are taking in every word! In the present case, this extra acuteness of hearing may perhaps have been due to the fact that it was Thibault’s soul which was awake in Raoul’s body; if the soul belonging to it had been in this body, it would probably have succumbed more entirely to the effects of the wound.

The doctor now dressed the wound in the back, but left the front wound uncovered, merely directing that a piece of linen soaked in iced water should be kept over it. Then, having poured some drops of a sedative into a glass of water, and telling the priest to give this to the patient whenever he asked for drink, the doctor departed, saying that he would come again the following morning, but that he much feared he should take his journey for nothing.

Thibault would have liked to put in a word of his own, and to say himself what he thought about his condition, but his spirit was as if imprisoned in this dying body, and, against his will, was forced to submit to lying thus within its cell. But he could still hear the priest, who not only spoke to him, but endeavoured by shaking him to arouse him from his legthargy. Thibault found this very fatiguing, and it was lucky for the priest that the wounded man, just now, had no superhuman power, for he inwardly sent the good man to the devil, many times over.

Before long it seemed to him that some sort of hot burning pan was being inserted under the soles of his feet, his loins, his head; his blood began to circulate, then to boil, like water over a fire. His ideas became confused, his clenched jaws opened; his tongue which had been bound became loosened; some disconnected words escaped him.

“Ah, ah!” he thought to himself, “this no doubt is what the good doctor spoke about as delirium; and, for the while at least, this was his last lucid idea.

His whole life and his life had really only existed since his first acquaintance with the black wolf passed before him. He saw himself following, and failing to hit the buck; saw himself tied to the oak-tree, and the blows of the strap falling on him; saw himself and the black wolf drawing up their compact; saw himself trying to pass the devil’s ring over Agnelette’s finger; saw himself trying to pull out the red hairs, which now covered a third of his head. Then he saw himself on his way to pay court to the pretty Madame Polet of the mill, meeting Landry, and getting rid of his rival; pursued by the farm servants, and followed by his wolves. He saw himself making the acquaintance of Madame Magloire, hunting for her, eating his share of the game, hiding behind the curtains, discovered by Maitre Magloire, flouted by the Baron of Vez, turned out by all three. Again he saw the hollow tree, with his wolves couching around it and the owls perched on its branches, and heard the sounds of the approaching violins and hautboy and saw himself looking, as Agnelette and the happy wedding party went by. He saw himself the victim of angry jealousy, endeavouring to fight against it by the help of drink, and across his troubled brain came the recollection of Francois, of Champagne, and the Inn-keeper; he heard the galloping of Baron Raoul’s horse, and he felt himself knocked down and rolling in the muddy road. Then he ceased to see himself as Thibault; in his stead arose the figure of the handsome young rider whose form he had taken for a while. Once more he was kissing Lisette, once more his lips were touching the Countess’s hand; then he was wanting to escape, but he found himself at a cross-road where three ways only met, and each of these was guarded by one of his victims: the first, by the spectre of a drowned man, that was Marcotte; the second, by a young man dying of fever on a hospital bed, that was Landry; the third, by a wounded man, dragging himself along on one knee, and trying in vain to stand up on his mutilated leg, that was the Comte de Mont-Gobert.

He fancied that as all these things passed before him, he told the history of them one by one, and that the priest, as he listened to this strange confession, looked more like a dying man, was paler and more trembling than the man whose confession he was listening to; that be wanted to give him absolution, but that he, Thibaubt, pushed him away, shaking his head, and that he cried out with a terrible laugh: "I want no absolution! I am damned! damned! damned!"

And in the midst of all this hallucination, this delirious madness, the spirit of Thibault could hear the priest's clock striking the hours, and as they struck he counted them. Only this clock seemed to have grown to gigantic proportions and the face of it was the blue vault of heaven, and the numbers on it were flames; and the clock was called eternity, and the monstrous pendulum, as it swung back wards and forwards called out in turn at every beat: "Never! Forever!" And so he lay and heard the long hours of the day pass one by one; and then at last the clock struck nine. At half past nine, he, Thibault, would have been Raoul, and Raoul would have been Thibault, for just four and twenty hours. As the last stroke of the hour died away, Thibault felt the fever passing from him, it was succeeded by a sensation of coldness, which almost amounted to shivering. He opened his eyes, all trembling with cold, and saw the priest at the foot of the bed saying the prayers for the dying, and the hands of the actual clock pointing to a quarter past nine.

His senses had become so acute, that, imperceptible as was their double move ment, he could yet see both the larger and smaller one slowly creeping along; they were gradually nearing the critical hour; half past nine! Although the face of the clock was in darkness, it seemed illuminated by some inward light. As the minute hand approached the number 6, a spasm becoming every instant more and more violent shook the dying man; his feet were like ice, and the numbness slowly, but steadily, mounted from the feet to the knees, from the knees to the thighs, from the thighs to the lower part of the body. The sweat was running down his forehead, but he had no strength to wipe it away, nor even to ask to have it done. It was a sweat of agony which he knew every moment might be the sweat of death. All kinds of strange shapes, which had nothing of the human about them, floated before his eyes; the light faded away; wings as of bats seemed to lift his body and carry it into some twilight region, which was neither life nor death, but seemed a part of both. Then the twilight itself grew darker and darker; his eyes closed, and like a blind man stumbling in the dark, his heavy wings seemed to flap against strange and unknown things. After that he sank away into unfathomable depths, into bottomless abysses, but still he heard the sound of a bell.

The bell rang once, and scarcely had it ceased to vibrate when the dying man uttered a cry. The priest rose and went to the side of the bed; with that cry the Baron Raoul had breathed his last: it was exactly one second after the half hour after nine.

CHAPTER XIX

THE DEAD AND THE LIVING

At the same moment that the trembling soul of the young Baron passed away, Thibault, awaking as if from an agitated sleep full of terrible dreams, sat up in his bed. He was surrounded by fire, every corner of his hut was in flames; at first he thought it was a continuation of his nightmare, but then he heard cries of, "Death to the wizard! death to the sorcerer! death to the were-wolf!" and he understood that some terrible attack was being made upon him.

The flames came nearer, they reached the bed, he felt their heat upon him; a few seconds more and he would be burned alive in the midst of the flaming pile. Thibault leaped from his bed, seized his boar-spear, and dashed out of the back door of his hut. No sooner did his enemies see him rush through the fire and emerge from the smoke than their cries of "death to him!" "death!" were redoubled. One or two shots were fired at him; Thibault heard the bullets whizz past; those who shot at him wore the livery of the Grand Master, and Thibault recalled the menace of the lord of Vez, uttered against him a few days before.

He was then beyond the pale of the law; he could be smoked out of his hole like a fox; he could be shot down like a buck. Luckily for Thibault, not one of the bullets struck him, and as the circle of fire made by the burning hut was not a large one, he was soon safely beyond it, and once again in shelter of the vast and gloomy forest, where, had it not been for the cries of the menials who were burning down his house, the silence would have been as complete as the darkness. He sat down at the foot of a tree and buried his head in his hands. The events of the last forty-eight hours had succeeded each other with such rapidity, that there was no lack of matter to serve as subjects of reflection to the shoemaker.

The twenty-four hours, during which he had lived another existence than his own, seemed to him like a dream, so much so, that he would not have dared to take his oath that all this recent affair between the Baron, and the Countess Jane, and the Comte de Mont-Gobert had really taken place. The church clock of Oigny struck ten, and he lifted his head. Ten o'clock! and only half-an-hour before he had been still in the body of the Baron Raoul, as he lay dying in the house of the Curb of Puiseux.

"Ah!" he exclaimed "I must find out for certain what has happened! It is not quite three miles to Puiseux and I shall be there in half-an-hour; I should like to ascertain if the Baron is really dead." A melancholy howl made answer to his words; he looked round; his faithful body-guards were back again; he had his pack about him once more.

"Come, wolves! come, my only friends!" he cried, "let us be off!" And he started with them across the forest in the direction of Puiseux. The huntsmen of the Lord of Vez, who were poking up the remaining embers of the ruined hut, saw a man pass, as in a vision, running at the head of a dozen or more wolves. They crossed themselves, and became more convinced than ever that Thibault was a wizard. And anybody else who had seen Thibault, flying along as swiftly as his swiftest wolf, and covering the ground between Oigny and Puiseux in less than a quarter of an hour, would certainly have thought so too.

He stopped at the entrance to the village, and turning to his wolves, he said:

"Friend wolves, I have no further need of you to-night, and indeed, I wish to be alone. Amuse yourselves with the stables in the neighbourhood, I give you leave to do just what you like; and if you chance to come across one of those two-footed animals, called men, forget, friend wolves, that they claim to be made in the image of their Creator, and never fear to satisfy your appetite." Whereupon the wolves rushed off in different directions, uttering howls of joy, while Thibault went on into the village. The Cure's house adjoined the church, and Thibault made a circuit so as to avoid passing in front of the Cross. When he reached the presbytery, he looked in through one of the windows, and there he saw a bed with a lighted wax candle beside it; and over the bed itself was spread a sheet, and beneath the sheet could be seen the out lines of a figure lying rigid in death. There appeared to be no one in the house; the priest had no doubt gone to give notice of the death to the village authorities. Thibault went inside, and called the priest, but no one answered. He walked up to the bed, there could be no mistake about the body under the sheet being that of a dead man; he lifted the sheet, there could be no mistaking that the dead body was that of Raoul de Vauparfond. On his face lay the still, unearthly beauty which is born of eternity. His features, which in life had been somewhat too feminine for those of a man, had now assumed the sombre grandeur of death. At the first glance you might have thought he only slept; but on gazing longer you recognised in that immovable calm something more profound than sleep. The presence of one who carries a sickle for sceptre, and wears a shroud for mantle was unmistakeable, and you knew King Death was there.

Thibault had left the door open, and he heard the sound of light footsteps approaching; at the back of the alcove hung a serge curtain, which masked a door by which he could retreat, if necessary, and he now went and placed himself behind it. A woman dressed in black, and covered with a black veil, paused in some hesitation at the door. The head of another woman passed in front of her's and looked carefully round the room.

"I think it is safe for Madame to go in; I see no one about, and besides, I will keep watch."

The woman in black went in, walked slowly towards the bed, stopped a moment to wipe the perspiration from her forehead, then, without further hesitation, lifted the sheet which Thibault had thrown back over the face of the dead man; Thibault then saw that it was the Countess.

"Alas!" she said, "what they told me was true!"

Then she fell on her knees, praying and sobbing. Her prayer being ended, she rose again, kissed the pale forehead of the dead, and the blue marks of the wound through which the soul had fled.

"O my well-beloved, my Raoul;" she murmured, "who will tell me the name of your murderer? who will help me to avenge your death?" As the Countess finished speaking, she gave a cry and started back; she seemed to hear a voice that answered, "I will!" and something had shaken the green serge curtain.

The Countess however was no chicken-hearted woman; she took the candle that was burning at the head of the bed and went and looked behind the curtain; but no creature was to be seen, a closed door was all that met her eye. She put back the candle, took a pair of gold scissors from a little pocket case, cut off a curl of the dead man's hair, placed the curl in a black velvet sachet which hung over her heart, gave one last kiss to her dead lover, laid the sheet over his face, and left the house. Just as she was crossing the threshold, she met the priest, and drawing back, drew her veil more closely over her face.

"Who are you?" asked the priest.

"I am Grief," she answered, and the priest made way for her to pass.

The Countess and her attendant had come on foot, and were returning in the same manner, for the distance between Puiseux and Mont-Gobert was not much more than half-a-mile. When about half way along their road, a man, who had been hiding behind a willow tree, stepped forward and barred their further passage. Lisette screamed, but the Countess, without the least sign of fear, went up to the man, and asked: "Who are you?"

"The man who answered 'I will' just now, when you were asking who would denounce the murderer to you."

"And you can help me to revenge myself on him?"

"Whenever you like."

"At once?"

"We cannot talk here very well."

"Where can we find a better place?"

"In your own room for one."

"We must not enter the castle together."

"No; but I can go through the breach in the park wall: Mademoiselle Lisette can wait for me in the hut where Monsieur Raoul used to leave his horse, she can take me up the winding-stair and into your room. If you should be in your dressing-room, I will wait for you, as Monsieur Raoul waited the night before last."

The two women shuddered from head to foot.

"Who are you to know all these details?" asked the Countess.

"I will tell you when the time comes for me to tell you."

The Countess hesitated a moment, then, recovering her resolution, she said:

"Very well then; come through the breach; Lisette will wait for you in the stable."

"Oh! Madame," cried the maid, "I shall never dare to go and bring that man to you!"

"I will go myself then," said the Countess.

"Well said!" put in Thibault, "there spoke a woman worth calling one!" And so saying he slid down into a kind of ravine beside the road, and disappeared. Lisette very nearly fainted.

"Lean on me, Mademoiselle," said the Countess, "and let us walk on; I am anxious to hear what this man has to say to me."

The two women entered the castle by way of the farm; no one had seen them go out, and no one saw them return. On reaching her room, the Countess waited for Lisette to bring up the stranger. Ten minutes had elapsed when the maid hurried in with a pale face.

"Ah! Madame," she said, "there was no need for me to go to fetch him."

"What do you mean?" asked the Countess.

"Because he knew his way up as well as I did! And oh! Madame! if you knew what he said to me! That man is the devil, Madame, I feel sure!"

"Show him in," said the Countess.

"I am here!" said Thibault.

"You can leave us now, my girl," said the Countess to Lisette. The latter quitted the room and the Countess remained alone with Thibault. Thibault's appearance was not one to inspire confidence. He gave the impression of a man who had once and for all made up his mind, but it was also easy to see that it was for no good purpose; a Satanic smile played about his mouth, and there was a demoniacal light in his eyes. He had made no attempt to hide his red hairs, but had left them defiantly uncovered, and they hung over his forehead like a plume of flame. But still the Countess looked him full in the face without changing colour.

"My maid says that you know the way to my room; have you ever been here before?"

"Yes, Madame, once."

"And when was that?"

"The day before yesterday."

"At what time?"

"From half-past ten till half-past twelve at night."

The Countess looked steadily at him and said:

"That is not true."

"Would you like me to tell you what took place?"

"During the time you mention?"

"During the time I mention."

"Say on," replied the Countess, laconically.

Thibault was equally laconic.

"Monsieur Raoul came in by that door," he said, pointing to the one leading into the corridor, "and Lisette left him here alone. You entered the room by that one," he continued, indicating the dressing-room door, "and you found him on his knees. Your hair was unbound, only fastened back by three diamond pins, you wore a pink silk dressing-gown, trimmed with lace, pink silk stockings, cloth-of-silver slippers and a chain of pearls round your neck.”

“You describe my dress exactly,” said the Countess, “continue.”

“You tried to pick a quarrel with Monsieur Raoul, first because he loitered in the corridors to kiss your waiting-maid; secondly, because someone had met him late at night on the road between Erneville and Villers-Cotterets; thirdly, because, at the ball given at the Castle, at which you yourself were not present, he danced four times with Madame de Bonneuil.”

“Continue.”

“In answer to your accusations, your lover made excuses for himself, some good, some bad; you, however, were satisfied with them for you were just forgiving him when Lisette rushed in full of alarm calling to Monsieur Raoul to escape, as your husband had just returned.”

“Lisette was right, you can be nothing less than the devil,” said the Countess with a sinister laugh, “and I think we shall be able to do business together ... Finish your account.”

“Then you and your maid together pushed Monsieur Raoul, who resisted, into the dressing-room; Lisette forced him along the corridors and through two or three rooms; they then went down a winding staircase, in the wing of the Castle opposite to the one by which they had gone up. On arriving at the foot of the staircase, the fugitives found the door locked; then they ran into a kind of office where Lisette opened the window, which was about seven or eight feet above the ground. Monsieur Raoul leaped down out of this window, ran to the stable, found his horse still there, but hamstrung; then he swore that if he met the Count at any time he would hamstring him as the Count had hamstrung his horse, for he thought it a cowardly act to injure a poor beast so unnecessarily. Then he went on foot to the breach, climbed it, and found the Count awaiting him outside the park, with his sword drawn. The Baron had his hunting-knife with him; he drew it, and the duel began.”

“Was the Count alone?”

“Wait ... the Count appeared to be alone; after the fourth or fifth pass the Count was wounded in the shoulder, and sank on one knee, crying: ‘help, Lestocq!’ Then the Baron remembered his oath, and hamstrung the Count as he had hamstrung the horse; but as the Baron rose, Lestocq drove his knife into his back; it passed under the shoulder blade and out through the chest. I need not tell you where ... you kissed the wound yourself."

"And after that?"

"The Count and his huntsman returned to the Castle, leaving the Baron lying helpless; when the latter came to, he made signs to some passing peasants, who put him on a litter, and bore him away, with the intention of taking him to Villers-Cotterets; but he was in such pain, that they could not carry him farther than Puiseux; there they laid him on the bed where you found him, and on which he breathed his last a second after the half hour after nine in the evening."

The Countess rose, and without speaking, went to her jewel-case and took out the pearls she had worn two nights before. She handed them to Thibault.

"What are they for?" he asked.

"Take them," said the Countess, "they are worth fifty thousand livres."

"Are you still anxious for revenge?"

"Yes," replied the Countess.

"Revenge will cost more than that."

"How much will it cost?"

"Wait for me to-morrow night," said Thibault, "and I will tell you."

"Where shall I await you?" asked the Countess."

"Here," said Thibault, with the leer of a wild animal.

"I will await you here," said the Countess.

"Till to-morrow then."

"Till to-morrow."

Thibault went out. The Countess went and replaced the pearls in her dressing case; lifted up a false bottom, and drew from underneath it a small bottle containing an opal-coloured liquid, and a little dagger with a jewelled handle and case, and a blade inlaid with gold. She hid both beneath her pillow, knelt at her prie-dieu, and, her prayer finished, threw herself dressed on to her bed.

CHAPTER XX

TRUE TO TRYST

On quitting the Countess's room, Thibault had left the castle by the way which he had described to her, and soon found himself safe beyond its walls and outside the park. And now, for the first time in his life, Thibault had really nowhere to go. His hut was burnt, he was without a friend, and like Cain, he was a wanderer on the face of the earth. He turned to the unfailing shelter of the forest, and there made his way to the lower end of Chavigny; as the day was breaking he came across a solitary house, and asked if he could buy some bread. The woman belonging to it, her husband being away, gave him some, but refused to receive payment for it; his appearance frightened her. Having now food sufficient for the day, Thibault returned to the forest, with the intention of spending his time till evening in a part which he knew between Fleury and Longpont, where the trees were especially thick and tall. As he was looking for a resting place behind a rock, his eye was attracted by a shining object lying at the bottom of a slope, and his curiosity led him to climb down and see what it was. The shining object was the silver badge belonging to a huntsman's shoulder-belt; the shoulder-belt was slung round the neck of a dead body, or rather of a skeleton, for the flesh had been entirely eaten off the bones, which were as clean as if prepared for an anatomist's study or a painter's studio. The skeleton looked as if it had only lain there since the preceding night.

"Ah! ah!" said Thibault, "this is probably the work of my friends, the wolves; they evidently profited by the permission which I gave them."

Curious to know if possible who the victim was, he examined it more closely; his curiosity was soon satisfied, for the badge, which the wolves had no doubt rejected as less easily digestible than the rest, was lying on the chest of the skeleton, like a ticket on a bale of goods.

J. B. *Lestocq,*

Head Keeper to the Comte de Mont-Gobert.

"Well done!" laughed Thibault, "here is one at least who did not live long to enjoy the result of his murderous act." Then, contracting his brow, he muttered to himself, in a low voice, and this time without laughing:

"Is there perhaps, after all, what people call a Providence?"

Lestocq's death was not difficult to account for. He had probably been executing some order for his master that night, and on the road between Mont-Gobert and Longpont, had been attacked by wolves. He had defended himself with the same knife with which he had wounded the Baron, for Thibault found the knife a few paces off, at a spot where the ground showed traces of a severe struggle; at last, being disarmed, the ferocious beasts had dragged him into the hollow, and there devoured him.

Thibault was becoming so indifferent to everything that he felt neither pleasure nor regret, neither satisfaction nor remorse, at Lestocq's death; all he thought was, that it simplified matters for the Countess, as she would now only have her husband upon whom she need revenge herself. Then he went and found a place where the rocks afforded him the best shelter from the wind, and prepared to spend his day there in peace. Towards mid-day, he heard the horn of the Lord of Vez, and the cry of his hounds; the mighty huntsman was after game, but the chase did not pass near enough to Thibault to disturb him.

At last the night came. At nine o'clock Thibault rose and set out for the Castle of Mont-Gobert. He found the breach, followed the path he knew, and came to the little hut where Lisette had been awaiting him on the night when he had come in the guise of Raoul. The poor girl was there this evening, but alarmed and trembling. Thibault wished to carry out the old traditions and tried to kiss her but she sprang back with visible signs of fear.

"Do not touch me," she said, "or I shall call out."

"Oh, indeed! my pretty one," said Thibault, "you were not so sour-tempered the other day with the Baron Raoul."

"May be not," said the girl, "but great many things have happened since the other day."

"And many more to happen still," said Thibault in a lively tone.

"I think," said the waiting-maid in a mournful voice, "that the climax is already reached."

Then, as she went on in front, "If you wish to come," she added, "follow me."

Thibault followed her; Lisette, without the slightest effort at concealment, walked straight across the open space that lay between the trees and the castle.

“You are courageous to-day,” said Thibault, “and supposing some one were to see us...”

“There is no fear now,” she answered, “the eyes that could have seen us are all closed.”

Although he did not understand what the young girl meant by these words, the tone in which they were spoken made Thibault shiver.

He continued to follow her in silence as they went up the winding-stairs to the first floor. As Lisette laid her hand on the key of the door, Thibault suddenly stopped her. Something in the silence and solitude of the castle filled him with fear; it seemed as if a curse might have fallen on the place.

“Where are we going?” said Thibault, scarcely knowing himself what he said.

“You know well enough, surely.”

“Into the Countess’s room?”

“Into the Countess’s room.”

“She is waiting for me?”

“She is waiting for you.”

And Lisette opened the door. “Go in,” she said.

Thibault went in, and Lisette shut the door behind him and waited outside.

It was the same exquisite room, lighted in the same manner, filled with the same sweet scent. Thibault looked round for the Countess, he expected to see her appear at the dressing-room door, but the door remained closed. Not a sound was to be heard in the room, except the ticking of the Sevres clock, and the beating of Thibault’s heart. He began to look about him with a feeling of shuddering fear for which he could not account; then his eyes fell on the bed; the Countess was lying asleep upon it. In her hair were the same diamond pins, round her neck the same pearls; she was dressed in the same pink silk dressing-gown, and had on the same little slippers of cloth of silver which she had worn to receive the Baron Raoul. Thibault went up to her; the Countess did not stir.

“You are sleeping, fair Countess?” he said, leaning over to look at her.

But all at once, he started upright, staring before him, his hair standing on end, the sweat breaking out on his fore head. The terrible truth was beginning to dawn upon him; was the Countess sleeping the sleep of this world or of eternity?

He fetched a light from the mantel piece, and with trembling hand, held it to the face of the mysterious sleeper. It was pale as ivory, with the delicate veins traced over the temples, and the lips still red. A drop of pink burning wax fell on this still face of sleep; it did not awake the Countess.

"Ah!" cried Thibault, "what is this?" and he put down the candle, which his shaking hand could no longer hold, on the night-table.

The Countess lay with her arms stretched out close to her sides; she appeared to be clasping something in either hand. With some effort, Thibault was able to open the left one; within it he found the little bottle, which she had taken from her dressing case the night before. He opened the other hand; within it lay a piece of paper on which were written these few words: "True to tryst," yes, true and faithful unto death, for the Countess was dead!

All Thibault's illusions were fading one after the other, like the dreams of the night which gradually fade away, as the sleeper becomes more and more thoroughly awake. There was a difference, however, for other men find their dead alive again in their dreams; but with Thibault, his dead did not arise and walk, but remained lying forever in their last sleep.

He wiped his forehead, went to the door leading into the corridor, and opened it, to find Lisette on her knees, praying.

"Is the Countess dead then?" asked Thibault.

"The Countess is dead, and the Count is dead."

"From the effect of the wounds given him by the Baron Raoul?"

"No, from the blow with the dagger given him by the Countess."

"Ah!" said Thibault, grimacing hideously, in his effort to force a laugh in the midst of this grim drama, "all this tale you hint at is new to me."

Then Lisette told him the tale in full. It was a plain tale, but a terrible one.

The Countess had remained in bed part of the day, listening to the village bells of Puiseux, which were tolling as the Baron's body was being borne from thence to Vauparfond, where he was to be laid in the family grave. Towards four o'clock the bells ceased; then the Countess rose, took the dagger from under her pillow, bid it in her breast, and went towards her husband's room. She found the valet in attendance in good spirits; the doctor had just left, having examined the wound, and declared the Count's life out of danger.

"Madame will agree that it is a thing to rejoice at!" said the valet.

“Yes, to rejoice at indeed.”

And the Countess went on into her husband’s room. Five minutes later she left it again.

“The Count is sleeping,” she said, “do not go in until he calls.”

The valet bowed and sat down in the ante-room to be in readiness at the first call from his master. The Countess went back to her room.

“Undress me, Lisette, “she said to her waiting maid, “and give me the clothes that I had on the last time he came.”

The maid obeyed; we have already seen how every detail of toilet was arranged exactly as it had been on that fatal night. Then the Countess wrote a few words on a piece of paper, which she folded and kept in her right hand. After that, she lay down on her bed.

“Will Madame not take anything,” asked the maid.

The Countess opened her left hand, and showed her a little bottle she was holding inside it.

“Yes, Lisette,” she said, “I am going to take what is in this bottle.”

“What, nothing but that!” said Lisette.

“It will be enough, Lisette; for after I have taken it, I shall have need of nothing more.”

And as she spoke, she put the bottle to her mouth and drank the contents at a draught. Then she said:

“You saw that man, Lisette, who waited for us in the road; I have a meeting with him this evening, here in my room, at half past nine. You know where to go and wait for him, and you will bring him here. I do not wish that any one should be able to say that I was not true to my word, ever after I am dead.”

Thibault had nothing to say; the agreement made between them had been kept. Only the Countess had accomplished her revenge herself, single-handed, as every-one understood, when the valet feeling uneasy about his master, and going softly into his room to look at him, found him lying on his back with a dagger in his heart; and then hurrying to tell Madame what had happened, found the Countess dead also.

The news of this double death soon spread through the Castle, and all the servants had fled, saying that the exterminating Angel was in the Castle; the waiting-maid alone remained to carry out her dead mistress’s wishes.

Thibault had nothing more to do at the castle, so he left the Countess on her bed, with Lisette near her, and went down stairs. As Lisette had said, there was no fear now of meeting either master or servants; the servants had run away, the master and mistress were dead. Thibault once more made for the breach in the wall. The sky was dark, and if it had not been January, you might have imagined a thunder storm was brewing; there was barely light enough to see the footpath, as he went along. Once or twice Thibault paused; he fancied he had detected the sound of the dry branches cracking under someone's footsteps keeping pace with his, both to right and left.

Having come to the breach, Thibault distinctly heard a voice say: "that's the man!" and at the same moment, two gendarmes, concealed on the farther side of the wall, seized Thibault by the collar, while two others came up behind.

It appeared that Cramoisi, jealous with regard to Lisette, had been prowling about at nights on the watch, and had, only the evening before, noticed a strange man come in and go out of the park along the more secluded paths, and he had reported the fact to the head of the police. When the recent serious events that had taken place at the Castle became generally known, orders were given to send four men and take up any suspicious looking person seen prowling about. Two of the men, with Cramoisi for guide, had ambushed on the farther side of the breach, and the two others had dogged Thibault through the park. Then as we have seen, at the signal given by Cramoisi, they had all four fallen upon him as he issued from the breach.

There was a long and obstinate struggle; Thibault was not a man that even four others could overcome without difficulty; but he had no weapon by him, and his resistance was therefore useless. The gendarmes had been more bent on securing him, on account of having recognised that it was Thibault, and Thibault was beginning to earn a very bad name, so many misfortunes having become associated with it; so Thibault was knocked down, and finally bound and led off between two mounted men. The other two gendarmes walked one in front, and one behind. Thibault had merely struggled out of a natural feeling of self-defence and pride, for his power to inflict evil was, as we know, unlimited, and he had but to wish his assailants dead, and they would have fallen lifeless at his feet. But he thought there was time enough for that; as long as there still remained a wish to him, he could escape from man's justice, even though he were at the foot of the scaffold.

So, Thibault, securely bound, his hands tied, and fetters upon his feet, walked along between his four gendarmes, apparently in a state of resignation. One of the gendarmes held the end of the rope with which he was bound, and the four men made jokes and laughed at him, asking the wizard Thibault, why, being possessed of such power, he had allowed himself to be taken. And Thibault replied to their scoffings with the well-known Proverb: "He laughs best who laughs last," and the gendarmes expressed a wish that they might be the ones to do so.

On leaving Puiseux behind, they came to the forest. The weather was growing more and more threatening; the dark clouds hung so low that the trees looked as if they were holding up a huge black veil, and it was impossible to see four steps ahead. But he, Thibault saw; saw lights swiftly passing, and crossing one another, in the darkness on either side. Closer and closer drew the lights, and pattering footfalls were heard among the dry leaves. The horses became restive, shied and snorted, sniffing the air and trembling beneath their riders, while the coarse laughter of the men themselves died down. It was Thibault's turn to laugh now.

"What are you laughing at?" asked one of the gendarmes. "I am laughing at your having left off laughing," said Thibault.

The lights drew nearer, and the footfalls became more distinct, at the sound of Thibault's voice. Then a more ominous sound was heard, a sound of teeth striking together, as jaws opened and shut.

"Yes, yes, my friends," said Thibault, "you have tasted human flesh, and you found it good."

He was answered by a low growl of approbation, half like a dog's, and half like a hyena's.

"Quite so," said Thibault, "I understand; after having made a meal of a keeper, you would not mind tasting a gendarme."

The gendarmes themselves were beginning to shudder with fear. "To whom are you talking?" they asked him.

"To those who can answer me," said Thibault; and he gave a howl. Twenty or more howls responded, some from close at hand, some from farther off.

"H'm!" said one of the gendarmes, "what are these beasts that are following us? this good-for-nothing seems to understand their language?"

"What!" said the shoemaker, "you take Thibault the wolf-master prisoner, you carry him through the forest at night, and then you ask what are the lights and the howls that follow him! ... Do you hear, friends?" cried Thibault, "these gentlemen are asking who you are. Answer them, all of you together, that they may have no further doubt on the matter."

The wolves, obedient to their master's voice, gave one prolonged, unanimous howl. The horses panted and shivered, and one or two of them reared. The gendarmes endeavoured to calm their animals, patting and gentling them.

"That is nothing," said Thibault, "wait till you see each horse with two wolves hanging on to its hind-quarters and another at its throat."

The wolves now came in between the horses' legs, and began caressing Thibault; one of them stood up, and put its front paws on Thibault's chest, as if asking for orders.

"Presently, presently," said Thibault, "there is plenty of time; do not be selfish, give your comrades time to come up."

The men could no longer control their horses, which were rearing and shying, and although going at a foot's pace, were streaming with sweat.

"Do you not think," said Thibault, "you would do best now to come to terms with me? That is, if you were to let me free on condition that you all sleep in your beds to-night."

"Go at a walking pace," said one of the gendarmes, "as long as we do that, we have nothing to fear."

Another one drew his sword. A second or two later there was a howl of pain; one of the wolves had seized hold of this gendarme's boot, and the latter had pierced him through with his weapon.

"I call that a very imprudent thing to do," said Thibault; "the wolves eat each other, whatever the proverb may say, and once having tasted blood, I do not know that even I shall have the power to hold them back."

The wolves threw themselves in a body on their wounded comrade, and in five minutes there was nothing left of its carcase but the bare bones. The gendarmes had profited by this respite to get on ahead, but without releasing Thibault, whom they obliged to run alongside of them; what he had foreseen, however, happened. There was a sudden sound as of an approaching hurricane the whole pack was in pursuit, following them up at full gallop. The horses, having once started trotting, refused to go at a walking pace again, and frightened by the stamping, the smell, and the howls, now set off galloping, in spite of their riders' efforts to hold them in. The man who had hold of the rope, now requiring both hands to master his horse, let go of Thibault; and the wolves leaped on to the horses, clinging desperately to the cruppers and withers and throats of the terrified animals. No sooner had the latter felt the sharp teeth of their assailants, than they scattered, rushing in every direction.

"Hurrah, wolves! hurrah!" cried Thibault. But the fierce animals had no need of encouragement, and soon each horse had six or seven more wolves in pursuit of him.

Horses and wolves disappeared, some one way some the other, and the men's cries of distress, the agonised neighings of the horses, and the furious howls of the wolves became gradually fainter and fainter as they travelled farther away.

Thibault was left free once more, and alone. His hands however were still bound, and his feet fettered. First he tried to undo the cord with his teeth, but this he found impossible. Then he tried to wrench his bonds apart by the power of his muscles, but that too was unavailing; the only result of his efforts was to make the cord cut into his flesh. It was his turn to bellow with pain and anger. At last, tired of trying to wrest his hands free, he lifted them, bound as they were, to heaven, and cried:

"Oh! black wolf! friend, let these cords that bind me be loosened; thou knowest well that it is only to do evil that I wish for my hands to be free."

And at the same moment his fetters were broken and fell to the ground, and Thibault beat his hands together with another roar, this time of joy.

CHAPTER XXI

THE GENIUS OF EVIL

The next evening, about nine o’clock, a man might be seen walking along the Puits-Sarrasin road and making for for the Osieres forest-path.

It was Thibault, on his way to pay a last visit to the hut, and to see if any remains of it had been left by the fire. A heap of smoking cinders alone marked the place where it had stood; and as Thibault came in sight of it, he saw the wolves, as if he had appointed them to meet him there, forming an immense circle round the ruins, and looking upon them with an expression of mournful anger. They seemed to understand that by destroying this poor hut, made of earth and branches, the one who, by the compact with the black wolf, had been given them for master, had been made a victim. As Thibault entered the circle, all the wolves gave simultaneously a long and sinister sounding howl, as if to make him understand that they were ready to help in avenging him.

Thibault went and sat down on the spot where the hearth had stood; it was recognisable from a few blackened stones still remaining, which were otherwise uninjured, and by a higher heap of cinders just at that spot. He stayed there some minutes, absorbed in his unhappy thoughts. But he was not reflecting that the ruin which he saw around him was the consequence and the punishment of his jealous and covetous desires, which had gone on gathering strength. He felt neither repentance nor regret. That which dominated all other feeling in him was his satisfaction at the thought of being henceforth able to render to his fellow-creatures evil for evil, his pride in having, thanks to his terrible auxiliaries, the power to fight against those who persecuted him.

And as the wolves continued their melancholy howling: “Yes, my friends,” said Thibault, “yes, your howls answer to the cry of my heart ... My fellow-creatures have destroyed my hut, they have cast to the winds the ashes of the tools wherewith I earned my daily bread; their hatred pursues me as it pursues you, I expect from them neither mercy nor pity. We are their enemies as they are ours; and I will have neither mercy nor compassion on them. Come then, let us go from this hut to the Castle, and carry thither the desolation which they have brought home to me."

And then the master of the wolves, like a chief of banditti followed by his desperadoes, set off with his pack in quest of pillage and carnage.

This time it was neither red-deer, nor fallow-deer, nor any timid game of which they were in pursuit. Sheltered by the darkness of the night Thibault first directed his course to the Chateau of Vez, for there was lodged his chief enemy. The Baron had three farms belonging to the estate, stables filled with horses, and others filled with cows, and the park was full of sheep. All these places were attacked the first night, and on the morrow two horses, four cows, and ten sheep were found killed.

The Baron was doubtful at first if this could be the work of the beasts against which he waged so fierce a warfare; there seemed something partaking rather of intelligence and revenge in it than of the mere unreasoning attacks of a pack of wild animals. Still it seemed manifest that the wolves must have been the aggressors, judging by the marks of teeth on the carcases and the footprints left on the ground. Next night the Baron set watchers to lie in wait, but Thibault and his wolves were at work on the farther side of the forest. This time it was the stables and parks of Soucy and of Vivieres which were decimated, and the following night those of Boursonnes and Yvors. The work of annihilation, once begun, must be carried out with desperate determination, and the master never left his wolves now; he slept with them in their dens, and lived in the midst of them, stimulating their thirst for blood.

Many a woodman, many a heath-gatherer, came face to face in the thickets with the menacing white teeth of a wolf, and was either carried off and eaten, or just saved his life by the aid of his courage and his bill-hook. Guided by a human intelligence, the wolves had become organised and disciplined, and were far more formidable than a band of discontented soldiery let loose in a conquered country.

The terror of them became general; no one dared go beyond the towns and villages unarmed; horses and cattle were all fed inside the stables, and the men themselves, their work done, waited for one another, so as not to go about singly. The Bishop of Soissons ordered public prayer to be made, asking God to send a thaw, for the unusual ferocity of the wolves was attributed to the great quantity of snow that had fallen. But the report also went about that the wolves were incited to their work, and led about by a man; that this man was more indefatigable, more cruel and insatiable than the wolves themselves; that in imitation of his companions he ate raw flesh and quenched his thirst in blood. And the people went further and said that this man was Thibault.

The Bishop pronounced sentence of excommunication against the former shoe-maker. The Lord of Vez, however, had little faith in the thunders of the Church being of much effect, unless supported by some well-conducted hunting. He was somewhat cast down at so much blood being spilt, and his pride was sorely hurt that his, the Grand Master's, own cattle should have suffered so heavily from the very wolves he was especially appointed to destroy.

At the same time, he could not but feel a secret delight, at the thought of the triumphant view-halloos in store for him, and of the fame which he could not fail to win among all sportsmen of repute. His passion for the chase, excited by the way in which his adversaries the wolves had so openly entered upon the struggle, became absolutely overpowering; he allowed neither respite nor repose; he took no sleep himself and ate his meals in the saddle. All night long he scoured the country in company with l'Eveille and Engoulevent, who, in consideration of his marriage had been raised to the rank of pricker; and the dawn had no sooner appeared before he was again in the saddle, ready to start and chase the wolf until it was too dark to distinguish the hounds. But alas! all his knowledge of the art of Venery, all his courage, all his perseverance, were lost labour. He occasionally brought down some wretched cub, some miserable beast eaten with mange, some imprudent glutton which had so gorged itself with carnage that its breath would not hold out after an hour or two's run; but the larger, well-grown wolves, with their thick dark coats, their muscles like steel springs and their long slender feet not one of these lost a hair in the war that was being made upon them. Thanks to Thibault they met their enemies in arms on nearly equal ground.

As the Baron of Vez remained forever with his dogs, so did Thibault with his wolves; after a night of sack and pillage, he kept the pack awake on the watch to help the one that the Baron had started. This wolf again, following Thibault's instructions, had recourse at first to stratagem. It doubled, crossed its tracks, waded in the streams, leaped up into the bending trees so as to make it more difficult still for huntsmen and hounds to follow the scent, and finally when it felt its powers failing, it adopted bolder measures and went straight ahead. Then the other wolves and their master intervened; at the least sign of hesitation on the part of the hounds, they managed so cleverly to put them on the wrong scent, that it required an experienced eye to detect that the dogs were not all following up the same track, and nothing less than the Barons' profound knowledge could decide which was the right one. Even he some times was mistaken.

Again, the wolves in their turn followed the huntsmen; it was a pack hunting a pack; only the one hunted in silence, which made it far the more formidable of the two. Did a tired hound fall behind, or another get separated from the main body, it was seized and killed in an instant, and Engoulevent, whom we have had occasion to mention several times before and who had taken poor Marcotte's place, having hastened one day to the help of one of his hounds that was uttering cries of distress, was himself attacked and only owed his life to the swiftness of his horse.

It was not long before the Baron's pack was decimated; his best hounds were nearly dead with fatigue, and his more second-rate ones had perished by the wolves' teeth. The stable was in no better condition than the kennel; Bayard was foundered, Tancred had sprained a tendon leaping over a ditch, and a strained fetlock had placed Valourous on the list of invalids. Sultan, luckier than his three companions had fallen honourably on the field of battle, having succumbed to a sixteen hours' run under the weight of his gigantic master, who never for a moment lost courage notwithstanding the fact that the dead bodies of his finest and most faithful servitors lay heaped around him.

The Baron, following the example of the noble-hearted Romans who exhausted the resources of military art against the Carthaginians who were forever re-appearing as enemies, the Baron, I repeat, changed his tactics and tried what battues could accomplish. He called on all available men among the peasants, and beat up the game throughout the forest with such a formidable number of men, that not so much as a hare was left in its form near any spot which they had passed.

But Thibault made it his business to find out beforehand where these battues were going to take place, and if he ascertained that the beaters were on the side of the forest towards Viviers or Soucy, he and his wolves made an excursion to Boursonnes or Yvors; and if the Baron and his men were busy near Haramont or Longpre, the people of Corey and Vertefeuille were made painfully aware of Thibault and his wolves.

In vain the Lord of Vez drew his cordon at night round the suspected enclosures, so as to begin the attack with daylight; never once did his men succeed in starting a wolf, for not once did Thibault make a mistake in his calculations. If by chance he had not been well informed, and was uncertain in what direction the Baron and his men were going, he called all his wolves together, sending express couriers after them as the night set in; he then led them unobserved down the wooded lane leading to Lisart l'Abbesse, which at that time ran between the forest of Compiegne and the forest of Villers-Cotterets, and so was able to pass from one to the other. This state of things went on for several months. Both the Baron and Thibault carried out the task each had set before himself, with equally passionate energy; the latter, like his adversary, seemed to have required some supernatural power, whereby he was able to resist fatigue and excitement; and this was the more remarkable seeing that during the short intervals of respite accorded by the Lord of Vez, the Wolf-leader was by no means at peace in himself.

It was not that the terrible deeds in which he was an active agent, and at which he presided, filled him exactly with horror, for he thought them justifiable; he threw the responsibility of them, he said, on to those who had forced him to commit them; but there were moments of failing spirit, for which he could not account, when he went about in the midst of his ferocious companions, feeling gloomy, morose and heavy hearted. Again the image of Agnelette would rise before him, seeming to him like the personification of his own past life, honest and laborious, peaceful and innocent. And more than that, he felt he loved her more than he had ever thought it possible for him to love anybody. At times he would weep at the thought of all his lost happiness, at others he was seized with a wild fit of jealousy against the one to whom she now belonged, she, who at one time, might if he had liked, have been his.

One day, the Baron in order to prepare some fresh means of destruction, had been forced for the while to leave the wolves in peace. Thibault, who was in one of the moods we have just described, wandered forth from the den where he lived in company with the wolves. It was a splendid summer's night, and he began to rove about the woodlands, where the moon was lighting up the trunks of the trees, dreaming of the time when he trod the mossy carpet underfoot free from trouble and anxiety, until at last the only happiness which was now left him, forgetfulness of the present, stole over his senses. Lost in this sweet dream of his earlier life, he was all of a sudden aroused by a cry of distress from somewhere near at hand. He was now so accustomed to such sounds, that, ordinarily, he would have paid no attention to it, but his heart was for the moment softened by the recollection of Agnelette, and he felt more disposed than usual to pity; as it happened also he was near the place where he had first seen the gentle child, and this helped to awaken his kinder nature.

He ran to the spot whence the cry had come, and as he leaped from the under wood into the deep forest-lane near Ham, he saw a woman struggling with an immense wolf which had thrown her on the ground. Thibault could not have said why he was so agitated at this sight, nor why his heart beat more violently than usual; he rushed forward and seizing the animal by the throat hurled it away from its victim, and then lifting the woman in his arms, he carried her to the side of the lane and laid her on the slope. Here a ray of moonlight, breaking through the clouds, fell on the face of the woman he had saved, and Thibault saw that it was Agnelette. Near to the spot was the spring in which Thibault had once gazed at himself, and had seen the first red hair; he ran to it, took up water in his hands, and threw it into the woman's face. Agnelette opened her eyes, gave a cry of terror, and tried to rise and flee.

"What!" cried the Wolf-leader, as if he were still Thibault the shoemaker, "you do not know me again, Agnelette?"

"Ah! yes indeed, I know you, Thibault; and it is because I know who you are," cried the young woman, "that I am afraid!"

Then throwing herself on her knees, and clasping her hands: "Oh do not kill me, Thibault!" she cried, "do not kill me! it would be such dreadful trouble for the poor old grandmother! Thibault, do not kill me!"

The Wolf-leader stood overcome with consternation; up to this hour he had not fully realised the hideous renown which he had gained; but the terror which the sight of him inspired in the woman who had loved him and whom he still loved, filled him with a horror of himself.

"I, kill you, Agnelette!" he said, "just when I have snatched you from death! Oh! how you must hate and despise me for such a thought to enter your head."

"I do not hate you, Thibault," said the young woman, "but I hear such things about you, that I feel afraid of you."

"And do they say nothing of the infidelity which has led Thibault to commit such crimes?"

"I do not understand you," said Agnelette looking at Thibault with her large eyes, blue as the heavens.

"What!" exclaimed Thibault, "you do not understand that I loved you that I adored you Agnelette, and that the loss of you sent me out of my mind?"

"If you loved me, if you adored me, Thibault, what prevented you from marrying me?"

"The spirit of evil," muttered Thibault.

"I too loved you," continued the young woman, "and I suffered cruelly waiting for you."

Thibault heaved a sigh.

"You loved me, Agnelette?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the young woman with her soft voice and gentle eyes.

"But now, all is over," said Thibault, "and you love me no more."

"Thibault," answered Agnelette, "I no longer love you, because it is no longer right to love you; but one cannot always forget one's first love as one would wish."

"Agnelette!" cried Thibault, trembling all over, "be careful what you say!"

"Why should I be careful what I say, since it is the truth," said the girl with an innocent shake of the head. "The day you told me that you wished to make me your wife, I believed you, Thibault; for why should I think that you would lie to me when I had just done you a service? Then, later I met you, but I did not go in search of you; you came to me, you spoke words of love to me, you were the first to refer to the promise that you had made me. And it was not my fault either, Thibault, that I was afraid of that ring which you wore, which was large enough for you and yet, oh, it was horrible! not big enough for one of my fingers."

"Would you like me not to wear this ring any more?" said Thibault. "Would you like me to throw it away?" And he began trying to pull it off his finger, but as it had been too small to go on Agnelette's finger, so now it was too small to be taken off Thibault's. In vain he struggled with it, and tried to move it with his teeth; the ring seemed rivetted to his finger for all eternity.

Thibault saw that it was no use trying to get rid of it; it was a token of compact between himself and the black wolf, and with a sigh he let his arms fall hopelessly to his sides.

“That day,” went on Agnelette, “I ran away; I know that I was wrong to do so, but I was no longer mistress of myself after seeing that ring and more still...” She lifted her eyes as she spoke, looking timidly up at Thibault’s hair. Thibault was bare-headed, and, by the light of the moon Agnelette could see that it was no longer a single hair that shone red as the flames of hell, but that half the hair on Thibault’s head was now of this devil’s colour.

“Oh!” she exclaimed, drawing back, “Thibault! Thibault! What has happened to you since I last saw you?”

“Agnelette!” cried Thibault throwing himself down with his face to the ground, and holding his head between his hands, “I could not tell any human creature, not even a priest what has happened to me since then; but to Agnelette, all I can say is: Agnelette! Agnelette! have pity on me, for I have been most unhappy!”

Agnelette went up to him and took his hands in hers.

“You did love me then? You did love me?” he cried.

“What can I do, Thibault!” said the girl with the same sweetness and innocence as before. “I took you at your word, and every time I heard someone knocking at our hut door, I thought it was you come to say to the old grandmother, “Mother, I love Agnelette, Agnelette loves me; will you give her to me for my wife?”

“Then when I went and opened the door, and found that it was not you, I used to go into a corner and cry.”

“And now, Agnelette, now?”

“Now,” she answered. “Now, Thibault, it may seem strange, but in spite of all the terrible tales that are told about you, I have not been really frightened; I was sure that you could not wish any harm to me, and I was walking boldly through the forest, when that dreadful beast from which you saved me, suddenly sprang upon me.”

“But how is it that you are near your old home? do you not live with your husband?”

“We lived together for a while at Vez, but there was no room there for the grandmother; and so I said to my husband, ‘the grandmother must be thought of first; I must go back to her; when you wish to see me you will come.’”

“And he consented to that arrangement?”

“Not at first, but I pointed out to him that the grandmother is seventy years of age; that if she were only to live another two or three years, God grant it may be more! it would only be two or three years of some extra trouble for us, whereas, in all probability we had long years of life before us. Then he understood that it was right to give to those that had least.”

But all the while that Agnelette was giving this explanation, Thibault could think of nothing but that the love she once had for him was not yet dead.”

“So,” said Thibault, “you loved me? and so, Agnelette you could love me again?”

“That is impossible now because I belong to another.”

“Agnelette, Agnelette! only say that you love me!”

“No, Thibault, if I loved you, I should do everything in the world to hide it from you.”

“And why?” cried Thibault. “Why? you do not know my power. I know that I have only a wish or two left, but with your help, by combining these wishes together, I could make you as rich as a queen... We could leave the country, leave France, Europe; there are large countries, of which you do not even know the names, Agnelette, called America and India. They are paradises, with blue skies, tall trees and birds of every kind. Agnelette, say that you will come with me; nobody will know that we have gone off together, nobody will know where we are, nobody will know that we love one another, nobody will know even that we are alive.”

“Fly with you, Thibault!” said Agnelette, looking at the wolf-leader as if she had but half understood what he said, “do you forget that I no longer belong to myself? do you not know that I am married?”

“What does that matter,” said Thibault, “if it is I whom you love, and if we can live happily together!”

“Oh! Thibault! Thibault! what are you saying!”

“Listen,” went on Thibault, “I am going to speak to you in the name of this world and the next. Do you wish to save me, Agnelette, body and soul? If so, do not resist my pleading, have pity on me, come with me; let us go somewhere together, where we shall no longer hear these bowlings, or breathe this atmosphere of reeking flesh; and, if it scares you to think of being a rich, grand lady, somewhere then where I can again be Thibault the workman, Thibault, poor but beloved, and, therefore, Thibault happy in his hard work, some place where Agnelette will have no other husband but me.”

“Ah! Thibault! I was ready to become your wife, and you scorned me!”

“Do not remember my sins, Agnelette, which have been so cruelly punished.”

“Thibault, another has done what you were not willing to do. He took the poor young girl; he burdened himself with the poor old blind woman; he gave a name to the one and bread to the other; he had no ambition beyond that of gaining my love; he desired no dowry beyond my marriage vow; can you think of asking me to return evil for good? Do you dare to suggest that I should leave the one who has given me such proof of his love for the one who has given me proof only of his indifference?”

“But what matter still, Agnelette, since you do not love him and since you do love me?”

“Thibault, do not turn and twist my words to make them appear to say what they do not. I said that I still preserved my friendship for you, I never said that I did not love my husband. I should like to see you happy, my friend; above all I should like to see you abjure your evil ways and repent of your sins; and last of all, I wish that God may have mercy upon you, and that you may be delivered from that spirit of evil, of which you spoke just now. For this I pray night and morning on my knees; but even that I may be able to pray for you, I must keep myself pure; if the voice that supplicates for mercy is to rise to God’s throne, it must be an innocent one; above all, I must scrupulously keep the oath which I swore at His altar.”

On hearing these decisive words from Agnelette, Thibault again became fierce and morose.

“Do you not know, Agnelette, that it is very imprudent of you to speak to me here like that?”

“And why, Thibault?” asked the young woman.

“We are alone here together; it is dark, and not a man of the open would dare to come into the forest at this hour; and know, the King is not more master in his kingdom than I am here?”

“I do not understand you, Thibault?”

“I mean that having prayed, implored, and conjured, I can now threaten.”

“You, threaten?”

“What I mean is,” continued Thibault, paying no heed to Agnelette’s words, “that every word you speak does not excite my love for you more than it rouses my hatred towards him; in short, I mean that it is imprudent of the lamb to irritate the wolf when the lamb is in the power of the wolf."

"I told you, Thibault, before, that I started to walk through the forest without any feeling of fear at meeting you. As I was coming to, I felt a momentary terror, remembering involuntarily what I had heard said about you; but at this moment, Thibault, you will try in vain to make me turn pale."

Thibault flung both hands up to his head.

"Do not talk like that," he said, "you cannot think what the devil is whispering to me, and what an effort I have to make to resist his voice."

"You may kill me if you like," replied Agnelette, "but I will not be guilty of the cowardice which you ask of me; you may kill me, but I shall remain faithful to my husband; you may kill me, but I shall pray to God to help him as I die."

"Do not speak his name, Agnelette; do not make me think about that man."

"You can threaten me as much as you like, Thibault, for I am in your hands; but, happily, he is far from you, and you have no power over him."

"And who told you that, Agnelette? do you not know that, thanks to the diabolical power I possess and which I can hardly fight against, I am able to strike as well far as near?"

"And if I should become a widow, Thibault, do you imagine that I should be vile enough to accept your hand when it was stained with the blood of the one whose name I bear?"

"Agnelette," said Thibault falling on his knees, "Agnelette, save me from committing a further crime."

"It is you, not I, who will be responsible for the crime. I can give you my life, Thibault, but not my honour."

"Oh," roared Thibault, "love flies from the heart when hatred enters; take care, Agnelette! take heed to your husband! The devil is in me, and he will soon speak through my mouth. Instead of the consolation which I had hoped from your love, and which your love refuses, I will have vengeance. Stay my hand, Agnelette, there is yet time, stay it from cursing, from destroying; if not, understand that it is not I, but you, who strike him dead! Agnelette, you know now Agnelette, you do not stop me from speaking? Let it be so then, and let the curse fall on all three of us, you and him and me! Agnelette, I wish your husband to die, and he will die!"

Agnelette uttered a terrible cry; then, as if her reason reasserted itself, protesting against this murder at a distance which seemed impossible to her, she exclaimed:

"No, no; you only say that to terrify me, but my prayers will prevail against your maledictions."

"Go then, and learn how heaven answers your prayers. Only, if you wish to see your husband again alive, Agnelette, you had better make haste, or you will but stumble against his dead body."

Overcome by the tone of conviction with which these last words were pronounced, and yielding to an irresistible feeling of terror, Agnelette, without responding to Thibault, who stood on the further side of the lane with his hand held out and pointing towards Preciamont, set off running in the direction which it seemed to indicate, and soon disappeared into the night as she turned out of sight at the corner of the road. As she passed from his view, Thibault uttered a howl, which might have been taken for the howling of a whole pack of wolves, and plunging into the thicket, "Ah! now," he cried aloud to himself, "I am indeed a lost and accursed soul!"

CHAPTER XXII

THIBAULT’S LAST WISH

Urged in her flight by a hideous terror, and anxious to reach the village where she had left her husband with all speed possible, Agnelette, for the very reason that she was running so hastily, was forced by her failing breath, to pause at intervals along the way. During these short spaces of rest, she endeavoured to reason with herself, trying to convince herself of the folly of attaching importance to words which could have no power in themselves, and which were dictated by jealousy and hatred, words which had by now been scattered to the winds; but notwithstanding all her mental arguments, she had no sooner regained her breath than she started off again at the same precipitate pace, for she felt she should know no peace until she had seen her husband again. Best part of her way led through the forest, and near the wildest and most solitary enclosures, but she gave no thought to the wolves, which were the terror of every town and village within ten miles round. Only one fear possessed her, that of coming across her husband’s dead body. More than once, as her foot struck against a stone or a branch, her heart stopped beating, and she felt as if her last breath had been drawn, while a sharp cold seemed to enter her very vitals, her hair stood on end and her face grew wet with perspiration. At last, at the end of the long path she had been traversing, arched over by the trees, she saw ahead of her, a vista of open country lying bathed in the soft silver light of the moon. As she emerged from the gloom into the light, a man, who had been concealed behind a bush in the hollow lying between the forest and the open country, sprang in front of her and took her in his arms.

“Ah! ah!” he said, laughing, “and where are you off to, Madame, at this hour of the night, and at this pace too?” Agnelette recognised her husband.

“Etienne! dear, dear Etienne,” cried the young woman, throwing her arms round his neck. “How thankful I am to see you again, and to find you alive and well! Oh, my God, I thank Thee!”

“What, did you think, you poor little Agnelette,” said Engoulevent, “that Thibault and his wolves had been making their dinner of me?”

“Ah! do not even speak of Thibault, Etienne! let us fly, dear one, fly to where there are houses!”

The young huntsman laughed again. “Well, now then, you will make all the gossips of Preciamont and Vez declare that a husband is of no use at all, not even to restore his wife’s courage.”

“You are right, Etienne; but although I have just had the courage to come through these great dreadful woods, now that I have you with me and should feel reassured, I tremble with fear, and yet I know not why.”

“What has happened to you? Come, tell me all about it,” said Etienne, giving his wife a kiss. Then Agnelette told him how she had been attacked by the wolf, how Thibault had rescued her from its claws, and what had passed between them afterwards. Engoulevent listened with the greatest attention.

“Listen,” he said to Agnelette, “I am going to take you home and shut you up carefully with the grandmother, so that no harm may come to you; and then I shall ride over and tell my lord of Vez where Thibault has taken up his quarters.”

“Oh! no, no!” cried Agnelette, “you would have to ride through the forest, and there is no knowing what danger you might run.”

“I will make a detour” said Etienne, “I can go round by Croyolles and Value instead of crossing the forest.”

Agnelette sighed and shook her head, but made no further resistance; she knew that Engoulevent would not give in on this matter, and she reserved her strength wherewith to renew her entreaties when she was once indoors.

And in truth, the young huntsman only considered that he was doing his duty, for a great battue had been arranged for the next day in a part of the forest on the further side from that on which Agnelette had met Thibault. Etienne, therefore, was bound to go without delay and report to his master the whereabouts of the Wolf-leader. There was not too much of the night left for the work of re-arranging for the morrow’s battue.

As they drew near Preciamont, Agnelette, who had not spoken for a while, decided that she had, during her silence, amassed a sufficient number of reasons to justify her in beginning her solicitations afresh, which she did with even more earnestness than she had put into her former arguments. She reminded Etienne that Thibault, even though he might be a were-wolf, bad, so far from hurting her, actually saved her life; and that after all, he had not abused his power when he had her in it, but had allowed her to leave him and rejoin her husband. And after that, to betray where he was to his mortal enemy, the Lord of Vez, was not performing a duty, but committing an act of treachery; and Thibault, who would certainly get wind of this treachery, would never under similar circumstances show mercy to any one again. Agnelette became quite eloquent as she pleaded Thibault's cause. But, when marrying Engoulevent, she had made no more secret of her former engagement to the shoe-maker than she had of this last interview with him, and however perfect a confidence he had in his wife, Engoulevent was nevertheless not unsusceptible to jealousy. More than that, there existed an old grudge between the two men, ever since the day when Engoulevent had spied out Thibault in his tree, and his boar-spear in a neighbouring bush. So he stood his ground, and though listening to Agnelette, continued to walk briskly towards Preciamont. And so arguing together, and each insisting that he or she was in the right, they came to within a stone's throw of the first forest-fences. To protect themselves as far as possible from Thibault's sudden and unexpected assaults, the peasants had instituted patrol parties, who mounted guard at night as in times of war. Etienne and Agnelette were so pre-occupied with their discussion, that they did not hear the call of "Who goes there!" from the sentinel behind the hedge, and went walking on in the direction of the village. The sentinel, seeing something moving in the darkness which to his prepossessed imagination appeared to be a monstrous form of some kind, and hearing no answer to his challenge, he prepared to shoot. Looking up at that moment, the young huntsman suddenly caught sight of the sentinel, as the moon light shone on the barrel of his gun. Calling out "Friend," he threw himself in front of Agnelette, flinging his arms round her, so as to make a shield of his body. But at the same instant the gun went off, and the unfortunate Etienne, giving one last sigh, fell forward without a groan against the wife he was clasping in his arms. The bullet had pierced his heart. When the people of Peciamont, on hearing the gun shot, came running up to the spot, they found Engoulevent dead, and Agnelette lying unconscious beside her husband. They carried her to her grandmother's, but she only came to her senses to fall into a state of despair which bordered on delirium, and which at last became almost madness. She accused herself of her husband's death, called him by name, begged the invisible spirits, which seemed to haunt her, even in the short intervals of slumber which her excited state of brain made possible, to have mercy upon him. She called Thibault's name, and addressed such heart broken supplications to him that those about her were moved to tears. By degrees, in spite of the incoherence of her words, the real facts became evident, and it grew to be generally understood that the Wolf-leader was in some way accountable for the unhappy accident which had caused poor Etienne's death. The common enemy was therefore accused of having cast a spell over the two unfortunate youg creatures, and the animosity felt towards the former shoe-maker became intensified.

In vain doctors were sent for from Villers-Cotterets and Ferte-Milon, Agnelette became worse and worse; her strength was rapidly failing; her voice, after the first few days, grew feebler, her breath shorter, although her delirium was as violent as ever, and everything, even the silence on the doctors' part, led to the belief that poor Agnelette would soon follow her husband to the grave. The voice of the old blind woman alone seemed to have any power to allay the fever. When she heard her grandmother speaking, she grew calmer, the haggard staring eyes grew softer and suffused with tears; she would pass her hand over her forehead as if to drive away some haunting thought, and a sorrowful wandering smile would pass across her lips.

One evening, towards night, her slumber seemed to be more agitated and distressed than usual. The hut, feebly lit by a little copper lamp, was in semi-darkness; the grandmother sat by the hearth, with that immobility of countenance under which peasants and savages hide their strongest feelings. At the foot of the bed on which Agnelette lay, so worn and white that, had it not been for the regular rise and fall of her bosom with its troubled breathing, you might have taken her for dead, knelt one of the women, whom the Baron was paying to attend upon the widow of his young huntsman, engaged in telling her beads; the other was silently spinning with her distaff. All at once, the sick woman, who for some minutes past had been shivering at intervals, seemed to be fighting against some horrible dream, and gave a piercing cry of anguish. At that moment the door burst open, a man seemingly encircled by flames, rushed into the room, leapt to Agnelette's bed, clasped the dying woman in his arms, pressed his lips upon her forehead, uttering cries of sorrow, then, rushing to another door which gave on to the open country, opened it and disappeared. The apparition had come and gone so quickly that it seemed almost like an hallucination, and as if Agnelette were endeavouring to repulse some invisible object as she cried out, “Take him away! take him away!” But the two watchers had seen the man and had recognised Thibault, and there was a clamouring out side, in the midst of which the name of Thibault could be distinguished. Soon the clamour came nearer to Agnelette's hut, and those who were uttering the cries ere long appeared on the threshold; they were in pursuit of the Wolf-leader. Thibault had been seen prowling in the neighbourhood of the hut, and the villagers, warned of this by their sentinels, had armed themselves with pitch-forks and sticks preparatory to giving him chase. Thibault, hearing of the hopeless condition in which Agnelette was, had not been able to resist his longing to see her once again, and at the risk of what might happen to him, he had passed through the village, trusting to the rapidity of his movements, had opened the door of the hut and rushed in to see the dying woman.

The two women showed the peasants the door by which Thibault had escaped, and like a pack that has recovered the scent they started afresh on his track with renewed cries and threats. Thibault, it need hardly be said, escaped from them and disappeared in the forest.

Agnelette's condition, after the terrible shock given her by Thibault's presence and embrace, became so alarming that before the night was over the priest was sent for; she had evidently now but a few hours longer to live and suffer. Towards midnight the priest arrived, followed by the sacristan carrying the cross, and the choir-boys bearing the holy water. These went and knelt at the foot of the bed, while the priest took his place at the head beside Agnelette. And now, some mysterious power seemed to re-animate the dying woman. For a long time she spoke in a low voice with the priest, and as the poor child had no need of long prayers for herself, it was certain that she must be praying for another. And who was that other? God, the priest, and Agnelette alone knew.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE ANNIVERSARY

As soon as Thibault ceased to hear the furious cries of his pursuers Behind him, he slackened his pace, and the usual silence again reigning through out the forest, he paused and sat down on a heap of stones. He was in such a troubled state of mind that he did not recognise where he was, until he began to notice that some of the stones were blackened, as if they had been licked by flames; they were the stones of his own former hearth.

Chance had led him to the spot where a few months previously his hut had stood.

The shoemaker evidently felt the bitterness of the comparison between that peaceful past and this terrible present, for large tears rolled down his cheeks and fell upon the cinders at his feet. He heard midnight strike from the Oigny church clock, then one after the other from the other neighbouring village towers. At this moment the priest was listening to Agnelette's dying prayers.

"Cursed be the day!" cried Thibault, "when I first wished for anything beyond what God chooses to put within the reach of a poor workman! Cursed be the day when the black wolf gave me the power to do evil, for the ill that I have done, instead of adding to my happiness, has destroyed it forever!"

A loud laugh was heard behind Thibault's back.

He turned; there was the black wolf himself, creeping noiselessly along, like a dog coming to rejoin its master. The wolf would have been invisible in the gloom but for the flames shot forth from his eyes, which illuminated the darkness; he went round the hearth and sat down facing the shoemaker.

"What is this!" he said. "Master Thibault not satisfied? It seems that Master Thibault is difficult to please."

"How can I feel satisfied," said Thibault. "I, who since I first met you, have known nothing but vain aspirations and endless regrets? I wished for riches, and here I am in despair at having lost the humble roof of bracken under shelter of which I could sleep in peace without anxiety as to the morrow, without troubling myself about the rain or the wind beating against the branches of the giant oaks.

"I wished for position, and here I am, stoned and hunted down by the lowest peasants, whom formerly I despised. I asked for love, and the only woman, who loved me and whom I loved became the wife of another, and she is at this moment cursing me as she lies dying, while I, notwithstanding all the power you have given me, can do nothing to help her!"

"Leave off loving anybody but yourself, Thibault."

"Oh! yes, laugh at me, do!"

"I am not laughing at you. But did you not cast envious eyes on other people's property before you had set eyes on me?"

"Yes, for a wretched buck, of which there are hundreds just as good browsing in the forest!"

"You thought your wishes were going to stop at the buck, Thibault; but wishes lead on to one another, as the night to the day, and the day to night. When you wished for the buck, you also wished for the silver dish on which it would be served; the silver dish led you on to wish for the servant who carries it and for the carver who cuts up its contents. Ambition is like the vault of heaven; it appears to be bounded by the horizon, but it covers the whole earth. You disdained Agnelette's innocence, and went after Madame Poulet's mill; if you had gained the mill, you would immediately have wanted the house of the Bailiff Magloire; and his house would have had no further attraction for you when once you had seen the Castle of Mont-Gobert.

You are one in your envious disposition with the fallen Angel, your master and mine; only, as you were not clever enough to reap the benefit that might have accrued to you from your power of inflicting evil, it would perhaps have been more to your interest to continue to lead an honest life."

"Yes, indeed," replied the shoemaker, "I feel the truth of the proverb, 'Evil to him who evil wishes' "But", he continued, "can I not become an honest man again?"

The wolf gave a mocking chuckle.

"My good fellow, the devil can drag a man to hell," he said, "by a single hair. Have you ever counted how many of yours now belong to him?"

"No."

"I cannot tell you that exactly either, but I know how many you have which are still your own. You have one left! You see it is long past the time for repentance."

"But if a man is lost when but one of his hairs belongs to the devil," said Thibault, "why cannot God likewise save a man in virtue of a single hair?"

"Well, try if that is so!"

"And, besides, when I concluded that unhappy bargain with you, I did not understand that it was to be a compact of this kind."

"Oh, yes! I know all about the bad faith of you men! Was it no compact then to consent to give me your hairs, you stupid fool? Since men invented baptism, we do not know how to get hold of them, and so, in return for any concessions we make them, we are bound to insist on their relinquishing to us some part of their body on which we can lay hands. You gave us the hairs of your head; they are firmly rooted, as you have proved yourself and will not come away our grasp... No, no, Thibault, you have belonged to us ever since, standing on the threshold of the door that was once there, you cherished within you thoughts of deceit and violence."

"And so," cried Thibault passionately, rising and stamping his foot, "and so I am lost as regards the next world without having enjoyed the pleasures of this!"

"You can yet enjoy these."

"And how, I pray."

"By boldly following the path that you have struck by chance, and resolutely determining on a course of conduct which you have adopted as yet only in a half hearted way; in short, by frankly owning yourself to be one of us."

"And how am I to do this?"

"Take my place."

"And what then?"

"You will then acquire my power, and you will have nothing left to wish for."

"If your power is so great, if it can give you all the riches that I long for, why do you give it up?"

"Do not trouble yourself about me. The master for whom I shall have won a retainer will liberally reward me."

"And if I take your place, shall I also have to take your form?"

"Yes, in the night-time; by day you will be a man again."

"The nights are long, dark, full of snares; I may be brought down by a bullet from a keeper, or be caught in a trap, and then good-bye riches, good-bye position and pleasure.”

“Not so; for this skin that covers me is impenetrable by iron, lead or steel. As long as it protects your body, you will be not only invulnerable, but immortal; once a year, like all were-wolves, you will become a wolf again for four and twenty hours, and during that interval, you will be in danger of death like any other animal. I had just reached that dangerous time a year ago to-day, when we first met.”

“Ah!” said Thibault, “that explains why you feared my Lord Baron’s dogs.”

“When we have dealings with men, we are forbidden to speak anything but the truth, and the whole truth; it is for them to accept or refuse.”

“You have boasted to me of the power that I should acquire; tell me, now, in what that power will consist?”

“It will be such that even the most powerful king will not be able to withstand it, since his power is limited by the human and the possible.”

“Shall I be rich?”

“So rich, that you will come in time to despise riches, since, by the mere force of your will, you will obtain not only what men can only acquire with gold and silver, but also all that superior beings get by their conjurations.”

“Shall I be able to revenge myself on my enemies?”

“You will have unlimited power over everything which is connected with evil.”

“If I love a woman, will there again be a possibility of my losing her?”

“As you will have dominion over all your fellow creatures, you will be able to do with them what you like.”

“There will be no power to enable them to escape from the trammels of my will?”

“Nothing, except death, which is stronger than all.”

“And I shall only run the risk of death myself on one day out of the three hundred and sixty-five?”

“On one day only; during the remaining days nothing can harm you, neither iron, lead, nor steel, neither water, nor fire.”

“And there is no deceit, no trap to catch me, in your words?”

“None, on my honour as a wolf!”

“Good,” said Thibault, “then let it be so; a wolf for four and twenty hours, for the rest of the time the monarch of creation! What am I to do? I am ready.”

“Pick a holly-leaf, tear it in three pieces with your teeth, and throw it away from you, as far as you can.”

Thibault did as he was commanded.

Having torn the leaf in three pieces, he scattered them on the air, and although the night till then had been a peaceful one, there was immediately heard a loud peal of thunder, while a tempestuous whirlwind arose, which caught up the fragments and carried them whirling away with it.

“And now, brother Thibault,” said the wolf, “take my place, and good luck be with you! As was my case just a year ago, so you will have to become a wolf for four and twenty hours; you must endeavour to come out of the ordeal as happily as I did, thanks to you, and then you will see realised all that I have promised you. Meanwhile, I will pray the lord of the cloven hoof that he will protect you from the teeth of the Baron’s hounds, for, by the devil himself, I take a genuine interest in you, friend Thibault.”

And then it seemed to Thibault that he saw the black wolf grow larger and taller, that it stood up on its hind legs and finally walked away in the form of a man, who made a sign to him with his hand as he disappeared.

We say it seemed to him, for Thibault’s ideas, for a second or two, became very indistinct. A feeling of torpor passed over him, paralysing his power of thought. When he came to himself, he was alone. His limbs were imprisoned in a new and unusual form; he had, in short, become in every respect the counterpart of the black wolf that a few minutes before had been speaking to him. One single white hair on his head alone shone in contrast to the remainder of the sombre coloured fur; this one white hair of the wolf was the one black hair which had remained to the man.

Thibault had scarcely had time to recover himself when he fancied he heard a rustling among the bushes, and the sound of a low, muffled bark... He thought of the Baron and his hounds, and trembled. Thus metamorphosed into the black wolf, he decided that he would not do what his predecessor had done, and wait till the dogs were upon him. It was probably a bloodhound he had heard, and he would get away before the hounds were uncoupled. He made off, striking straight ahead, as is the manner of wolves, and it was a profound satisfaction to him to find that in his new form he had tenfold his former strength and elasticity of limb.

“By the devil and his horns!” the voice of the Lord of Vez was now heard to say to his new huntsman a few paces off, “you hold the leash too slack, my lad; you have let the bloodhound give tongue, and we shall never head the wolf back now."

"I was in fault, I do not deny it, my Lord; but as I saw it go by last evening only a few yards from this spot, I never guessed that it would take up its quarters for the night in this part of the wood and that it was so close to us as all that."

"Are you sure it is the same one that has got away from us so often?"

"May the bread I eat in your service choke me, my lord, if it is not the same black wolf that we were chasing last year when poor Marcotte was drowned."

"I should like finely to put the dogs on its track," said the Baron, with a sigh.

"My lord has but to give the order, and we will do so, but he will allow me to observe that we have still two good hours of darkness before us, time enough for every horse we have to break its legs."

"That may be, but if we wait for the day, l'Eveille, the fellow will have had time to get ten leagues away."

"Ten leagues at least," said l'Eveille, shaking his head.

"I have got this cursed black wolf on my brain," added the Baron, "and I have such a longing to have its skin, that I feel sure I shall catch an illness if I do not get hold of it."

"Well then, my lord, let us have the dogs out without a moment's loss of time."

"You are right, l'Eveille; go and fetch the hounds."

L'Eveille went back to his horse, that he had tied to a tree outside the wood, and went off at a gallop, and in ten minutes' time, which seemed like ten centuries to the Baron, he was back with the whole hunting train. The hounds were immediately uncoupled.

"Gently, gently, my lads!" said the Lord of Vez, "you forget you are not handling your old well-trained dogs; if you get excited with these raw recruits, they'll merely kick up a devil of a row, and be no more good than so many turnspits; let 'em get warmed up by degrees."

And, indeed, the dogs were no sooner loose, than two or three got at once on to the scent of the were-wolf, and began to give cry, whereupon the others joined them. The whole pack started off on Thibault's track, at first quietly following up the scent, and only giving cry at long intervals, then more excitedly and of more accord, until they had so thoroughly imbibed the odour of the wolf ahead of them, and the scent had become so strong, that they tore along, baying furiously, and with unparalleled eagerness in the direction of the Yvors coppice.

“Well begun, is half done!” cried the Baron. “You look after the relays, l’Eveille; I want them ready whenever needed! I will encourage the dogs... And you be on the alert, you others,” he added, addressing himself to the younger keepers, “we have more than one defeat to avenge, and if I lose this view halloo through the fault of anyone among you, by the devil and his horns! he shall be the dogs’ quarry in place of the wolf!”

After pronouncing these words of encouragement, the Baron put his horse to the gallop, and although it was still pitch dark and the ground was rough, he kept the animal going at top speed so as to come up with the hounds, which could be heard giving tongue in the low lands about Bourg-Fontaine.

CHAPTER XXIV

HUNTING DOWN THE WERE-WOLF

Thibault had got well ahead of the dogs, thanks to the precaution he had taken of making good his escape at the first note of the bloodhound. For some time he heard no further sound of pursuit; but, all at once, like distant thunder, the baying of the hounds reached his ears, and he began to feel some anxiety. He had been trotting, but he now went on at greater speed, and did not pause till he had put a few more leagues between himself and his enemies. Then he stood still and took his bearings; he found himself on the heights at Montaigue. He bent his head and listened the dogs still seemed a long way off, somewhere near the Tillet coppice.

It required a wolfs ear to distinguish them so far off. Thibault went down the hill again, as if to meet the dogs; then, leaving Erneville to the left, he leaped into the little stream which rises there, waded down its course as far as Grimau-court, dashed into the woods of Lessart-Abbesse, and finally gained the forest of Compiegne. He was somewhat reassured to find that, in spite of his three hours' hard running, the steel-like muscles of his wolf legs were not in the least fatigued. He hesitated, however, to trust himself in a forest which was not so familiar to him as that of Villers-Cotterets.

After another dash of a mile or so, he decided that by doubling boldly he would be most likely to put the dogs off the scent. He crossed at a gallop all the stretch of plain between Pierrefond and Mont-Gobert, took to the woods at the Champ Meutard, came out again at Vauvaudrand, regained the stream by the Sanceres timber floatage, and once more found himself in the forest near Long-Font. Unfortunately for him, just as he reached the end of the Route du Pendu, he came across another pack of twenty dogs, which Monsieur de Montbreton's huntsman was bringing up as a relay, for the Baron had sent his neighbour news of the chase. Instantly the hounds were uncoupled by the huntsman as he caught sight of the wolf, for seeing that the latter kept its distance, he feared it would get too far ahead if he waited for the others to come up before loosing his dogs. And now began the struggle between the were-wolf and the dogs in very earnest. It was a wild chase, which the horses, in spite of their skilled riders, had great difficulty in following, a chase over plains, through woods, across heaths, pursued at a headlong pace. As the hunt flew by, it appeared and disappeared like a flash of lightning across a cloud, leaving behind a whirlwind of dust, and a sound of horns and cries which echo had hardly time to repeat. It rushed over hill and dale, through torrents and bogs, and over precipices, as if horses and dogs had been winged like Hippogriffs and Chimeras. The Baron had come up with his huntsmen, riding at their head, and almost riding on the tails of his dogs, his eye flashing, his nostrils dilated, exciting the pack with wild shouts and furious blasts, digging his spurs into his horse's sides whenever an obstacle of any kind caused it to hesitate for a single instant. The black wolf, on his side, still held on at the same rapid pace; although sorely shaken at hearing the fresh pack in full pursuit only a short way behind him, just as he had got back to the forest, he had not lost an inch of ground. As he retained to the full all his human consciousness, it seemed to him impossible, as he still ran on, that he should not escape in safety from this ordeal; he felt that it was not possible for him to die before he had taken vengeance for all the agony that others made him suffer, before he had known those pleasures that had been promised him, above all for at this critical moment his thoughts kept on running on this before he had gained Agnelette's love. At moments he was possessed by terror, at others by anger. He thought at times that he would turn and face this yelling pack of dogs, and, forgetting his present form, scatter them with stones and blows. Then, an instant after, feeling mad with rage, deafened by the death-knell the hounds were ringing in his ears, he fled, he leaped, he flew with the legs of a deer, with the wings of an eagle. But his efforts were in vain; he might run, leap, almost fly, the sounds of death still clung to him, and if for a moment they became more distant, it was only to hear them a moment after nearer and more threatening still. But still the instinct of self-preservation did not fail him; and still his strength was undiminished; only, if by ill luck, he were to come across other relays, he felt that it might give way. So he determined to take a bold course so as to out-distance the dogs, and to get back to his lairs, where he knew his ground and hoped to evade the dogs. He therefore doubled for the second time. He first ran back to Puiseux, then skirted past Viviers, regained the forest of Compiegne, made a dash into the forest of Largue, returned and crossed the Aisne at Attichy, and finally got back to the forest of Villers-

Cotterets at the low lands of Argent. He trusted in this way to baffle the strategical plans of the Lord of Vez, who had, no doubt, posted his dogs at various likely points.

Once back in his old quarters Thibault breathed more freely. He was now on the banks of the Ourcq between Norroy and Trouennes, where the river runs at the foot of deep rocks on either side; he leaped up on to a sharp-pointed crag overhanging the water, and from this high vantage ground he sprang into the waves below, then swam to a crevice at the base of the rock from which he had leapt, which was situated rather below the ordinary level of the water, and here, at the back of this cave, he waited. He had gained at least three miles upon the dogs; and yet, scarcely another ten minutes had elapsed, when the whole pack arrived and stormed the crest of the rock. Those who were leading, mad with excitement, did not see the gulf in front of them, or else, like their quarry they thought they would leap safely into it, for they plunged, and Thibault was splashed, far back as he was hidden, by the water that was scattered in every direction as they fell into it one by one. Less fortunate, however, and less vigorous than he was, they were unable to fight against the current, and after vainly battling with it, they were borne along out of sight before they had even got scent of the were-wolf's retreat. Over head he could hear the tramping of the horses' feet, the baying of the dogs that were still left, the cries of men, and above all these sounds, dominating the other voices, that of the Baron as he cursed and swore. When the last dog had fallen into the water, and been carried away like the others, he saw, thanks to a bend in the river, that the huntsmen were going down it, and persuaded that the Baron, whom he recognised at the head of his hunting-train, would only do this with the intention of coming up it again, he determined not to wait for this, and left his hiding-place. Now swimming, now leaping with agility from one rock to the other, at times wading through the water, he went up the river to the end of the Crene coppice. Certain that he had now made a considerable advance on his enemies, he resolved to get to one of the villages near and run in and out among the houses, feeling sure that they would not think of coming after him there. He thought of Preciamont; if any village was well known to him, it was that; and then, at Preciamont, he would be near Agnelette. He felt that this neighbourhood would put fresh vigour into him, and would bring him good fortune, and that the gentle image of the innocent girl would have some influence on his fate. So he started off in that direction. It was now six o’clock in the evening; the hunt had lasted nearly fifteen hours, and wolf, dogs and huntsmen had covered fifty leagues at least. When, at last, after circling round by Manereux and Oigny, the black wolf reached the borders of the heath by the lane of Ham, the sun was already begining to sink, and shedding a dazzling light over the flowery plain; the little white and pink flowers scented the breeze that played caressingly around them; the grasshopper was singing in its little house of moss, and the lark was soaring up towards heaven, saluting the eve with its song, as twelve hours before it had saluted the morn. The peaceful beauty of nature had a strange effect on Thibault. It seemed enigmatical to him that nature could be so smiling and beautiful, while anguish such as his was devouring his soul. He saw the flowers, and heard the insects and the birds, and he compared the quiet joy of this innocent world with the horrible pangs he was enduring, and asked himself, whether after all, notwithstanding all the new promises that had been made him by the devil’s envoy, he had acted any more wisely in making this second compact than he had in making the first. He began to doubt whether he might not find himself deceived in the one as he had been in the other.

As he went along a little footpath nearly hidden under the golden broom, he suddenly remembered that it was by this very path that he had taken Agnelette home on the first day of their acquaintance; the day, when inspired by his good angel, he had asked her to be his wife. The thought that, thanks to this new compact, he might be able to recover Agnelette’s love, revived his spirits, which had been saddened and depressed by the sight of the universal happiness around him. He heard the church bells at Preciamont ringing in the valley below; its solemn, monotonous tones recalled the thought of his fellow men to the black wolf, and of all he had to fear from them. So he ran boldly on, across the fields, to the village, where he hoped to find a refuge in some empty building. As he was skirting the little stone wall of the village cemetery, he heard a sound of voices, approaching along the road he was in. He could not fail to meet whoever they might be who were coming towards him, if he himself went on; it was not safe to turn back, as he would have to cross some rising ground whence he might easily be seen; so there was nothing left for it but to jump over the wall of the cemetery, and with a bound he was on the other side. This graveyard as usual adjoined the church; it was uncared for, and overgrown with tall grass, while brambles and thorns grew rankly in places. The wolf made for the thickest of these bramble bushes; he found a sort of ruined vault, whence he could look out without being seen, and he crept under the branches and hid himself inside. A few yards away from him was a newly-dug grave; within the church could be heard the chanting of the priests, the more distinctly that the vault must at one time have communicated by a passage with the crypt. Presently the chanting ceased, and the black wolf, who did not feel quite at ease in the neighbourhood of a church, and thought that the road must now be clear, decided that it was time to start off again and to find a safer retreat than the one he had fled to in his haste.

But he had scarcely got his nose outside the bramble bush when the gate of the cemetery opened, and he quickly retreated again to his hole, in great trepidation as to who might now be approaching. The first person he saw was a child dressed in a white alb and carrying a vessel of holy water; he was followed by a man in a surplice, bearing a silver cross, and after the latter came a priest, chanting the psalms for the dead.

Behind these were four peasants carrying a bier covered with a white pall over which were scattered green branches and flowers, and beneath the sheet could be seen the outline of a coffin; a few villagers from Preciamont wound up this little procession. Although there was nothing unusual in such a sight as this, seeing that he was in a cemetery, and that the newly-dug grave must have prepared him for it, Thibault, nevertheless, felt strangely moved as he looked on. Although the slightest movement might betray his presence and bring destruction upon him, he anxiously watched every detail of the ceremony.

The priest having blessed the newly-made grave, the peasants laid down their burden on an adjoining hillock. It is the custom in our country when a young girl, or young married woman, dies in the fullness of her youth and beauty, to carry her to the grave-yard in an open coffin, with only a pall over her, so that her friends may bid her a last farewell, her relations give her a last kiss. Then the coffin is nailed down, and all is over. An old woman, led by some kind hand, for she was apparently blind, went up to the coffin to give the dead one a last kiss; the peasants lifted the pall from the still face, and there lay Agnelette. A low groan escaped from Thibault's agonised breast, and mingled with the tears and sobs of those present. Agnelette, as she lay there so pale in death, wrapped in an ineffable calm, appeared more beautiful than when in life, beneath her wreath of forget-me-nots and daisies. As Thibault looked upon the poor dead girl, his heart seemed suddenly to melt within him. It was he, as he had truly realised, who had really killed her, and he experienced a genuine and overpowering sorrow, the more poignant since for the first time for many long months he forgot to think of himself, and thought only of the dead woman, now lost to him forever.

As he heard the blows of the hammer knocking the nails into the coffin, as he heard the earth and stones being shovelled into the grave and falling with a dull thud on to the body of the only woman he had ever loved, a feeling of giddiness came over him. The hard stones he thought must be bruising Angelette's tender flesh, so fresh and sweet but a few days ago, and only yesterday still throbbing with life, and he made a movement as if to rush out on the assailants and snatch away the body, which dead, must surely belong to him, since, living, it had be longed to another.

But the grief of the man overcame this instinct of the wild beast at bay; a shudder passed through the body hidden beneath its wolf skin; tears fell from the fierce blood-red eyes, and the unhappy man cried out: "O God! take my life, I give it gladly, if only by my death I may give back life to her whom I have killed!"

The words were followed by such an appalling howl, that all who were in the cemetery fled, and the place was left utterly deserted. Almost at the same moment, the hounds, having recovered the scent, came leaping in over the wall, followed by the Baron, streaming with sweat as he rode his horse, which was covered with foam and blood.

The dogs made straight for the bramble bush, and began worrying something hidden there.

"Halloo! halloo!! halloo!!!" cried the Lord of Vez, in a voice of thunder, as he leapt from his horse, not caring if there was anyone or not to look after it, and drawing out his hunting-knife, he dashed towards the vault, forcing his way through the hounds. He found them fighting over a fresh and bleeding wolf-skin, but the body had disappeared.

There was no mistake as to its being the skin of the were-wolf that they had been hunting, for with the exception of one white hair, it was entirely black.

What had become of the body? No one ever knew. Only as from this time forth Thibault was never seen again, it was generally believed that the former sabot-maker and no other was the were wolf.

Furthermore, as the skin had been found without the body, and, as, from the spot where it was found a peasant reported to have heard someone speak the words: "O God! take my life! I give it gladly, if only by my death I may give back life to her whom I have killed," the priest declared openly that Thibault, by reason of his sacrifice and repentance, had been saved!

And what added to the consistency of belief in this tradition was, that every year on the anniversary of Agnelette's death, up to the time when the Monasteries were all abolished at the Revolution, a monk from the Abbey of the Premonstratensians at Bourg-Fontaine, which stands half a league from Preciamont, was seen to come and pray beside her grave.

Such is the history of the black wolf, as it was told me by old Mocquet, my father's keeper.

THE END

JANE

Translated by Alfred Allinson

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PREFACE

WHEN you travel in any country, and wish to impart information concerning that country to others, whatever you write about should be written from the national point of view.

Therefore, during my stay in Russia, I made it my business to collect stories contemporaneous, as far as was possible, with our own days, since it was my intention to describe the Russia of the nineteenth century.

Here is a tale borrowed from the year 1812. It is taken from the reminiscences of Bestuchef-Marlinski, a man of considerable talent, who was condemned to death in 1826, but whose sentence was commuted, by special grace of the Emperor Nicholas, to one of banishment to the mines.

Those who have read my *Travels in the Caucasus* will there find some curious and graphic details connected with that eminent author.

CHAPTER I

THE STORM

AT the moment when the army of Napoleon was approaching Moscow, the Russian Fleet, in conjunction with that of Great Britain, was blockading, under command of the English admiral, the French fleet shut up in the harbour of Flushing.

During the worst season of the year, upon a sea exposed to all winds, and casting their anchors in widely varying depths, the combined fleets had to sustain a double combat, against foe and weather. Behind them lay the ocean with its roaring waves, before them were the batteries belching forth lead and flame.

In the month of October the storms are terrible and continuous. No one who has not experienced their fury can picture what such weather means to a fleet compelled to ride at anchor. Under such circumstances the ship remains stationary, but quivering in every limb like a giant enchained, and, no matter what the fury of the waves, is unable to fly before them.

The gale which sprang up during the night of October 16th, 1812, destroyed several vessels both on the Dutch and English coasts. All that night, amid darkness and storm, was heard from time to time that terrible boom of cannon proclaiming “We are lost!” — that last death-rattle of life which finds its echo in the grave.

As the day dawned — a day almost as dark and threatening as the night which had just passed away so slowly — the terrible situation of the fleet could be discerned. The vessels had fallen out of line; masts were gone by the board and cables parted; some of the ships, torn from their moorings, were drifting to leeward. The waves ran mountains high, and seemed ready to swallow them up at any moment. The situation was appalling, even to the eyes of sailors.

The Russian vessel, the *Vladimir,* had sprung a leak in several places. She occupied the extreme left of the line, and was almost touching the rocks which extend for more than a mile into the sea in a direction parallel with the coast. The sailors, working with the energy of men who feel that their lives depend on the vigour of their arms, some at the pumps, the rest at the rigging, only gave proof to experienced eyes that all their labour would be ineffectual; the destruction of the crew appeared inevitable, when, by an unhoped-for chance, with the advent of day the wind dropped and the sea moderated. A gleam of hope pervaded the sailors' breasts, a hope which in a short time was exchanged for a certainty of escape. A lot of liquor was served out to the men, and order once more began to reign on board. Half of the crew were allowed to turn in; it was four o'clock in the afternoon.

The lieutenant, whose duty it was to arrange the watches, then came on deck, and, addressing the captain, who was pacing up and down, saluted, and said, —

"I have got everything in trim again, sir; the wind is nor'-nor'-west; we are anchored at sixty-eight fathoms with seventy-one fathoms of cable running."

"And how do the anchors hold, Nicolas Alexiovitch?' asked the captain.

"We are all right as far as that is concerned, and can ride secure; have you any orders to give me?"

"None, since you have seen to everything, Nicolas; accept my thanks, and congratulate the crew from me on their work of last night: had it not been for their superhuman exertions, we should be at this moment clinging, like a piece of rag, to some rock, angling for star-fish."

The lieutenant was an old salt tanned by the suns of every climate, who wore his cap tilted sideways, and had allowed his right shoulder, through absent-mindedness no doubt, to assume a marked pre-eminence over the left. A cloak still soaked with rain hung from his shoulders without his having once thought of removing it; he held his speaking-trumpet in his hand.

He smiled on hearing the captain's words.

"Oh I" said he, "we have done nothing worth mentioning: when we were serving in the *Vladimir* in the Adriatic, we saw far worse weather than this. Luckily," Alexiovitch went on, "there are no typhoons in the Channel, though it would be an interesting sight to see them form and then disappear."

"Yes, my word, that must indeed be interesting, Nicolas Alexiovitch," answered Elim Melosor, a handsome young fellow of four or fivç and twenty, who wore gold epaulettes. In point of fact, he was aide-de-camp to the Russian admiral, but was serving, during the war, on board ship. “I imagine our Baltic typhoons are more dangerous to the grog glasses than to the ships.”

“Quite true, my lad,” said the old salt: “water was made for fishes and crabs; milk for children and consumptives; wine for young people and pretty women; Madeira for men and soldiers; but rum and brandy are the natural beverage of heroes.”

“In that case,” answered the young aide-de-camp with a smile, “I am not destined to immortality. I cannot look a bottle of rum in the face; I detest the abominable stuff.”

“Ah, my dear Elim, with me it is just the contrary; my spirit is roused to action at the very sight of it. When you have trod the boards of old Neptune for thirty years, and have weathered as many squalls as I have seen hundreds of tempests, you will allow that a good glass of grog is better than all the cloaks in the world, blue-fox or sable, or what you please; at the second glass, you will feel yourself becoming inspirited; at the third, a bird will sing in your breast, and then you will lean over the side and see the waves pass by as quietly as if they were flocks of sheep. The masts will shout and creak overhead, and you will take as much heed of their cries as *that.”*

And the old tar snapped his fingers.

For all that, Nicolas Alexiovitch, had it not been so dark last night, maybe we should have seen your cheeks turn pale at one or two critical moments.”

“Hang me if there is a word of truth in what you say, Elim Melosor! Storms are life and breath to me. Would that Heaven would send us many such nights, for then the service would not be so neglected as it is in fine weather. When the wind blows, then feet and hands are busy, and I feel proud, for I seem to assume the command of all nature.”

“Many thanks, Lieutenant, for your storm,” said the young officer. “I was soaked to the skin and turned in supperless, as hungry as a dog, while, to complete my good fortune, I was rolled twice out of my bunk on to the floor.”

“Come, come, you are a positive baby, my dear Elim,” said the old sailor. “You would like your ship to sail in rose-water, you would wish that the wind had been created only to tickle your sails, and that lieutenants should serve as partners for fair ladies at a dance.”

“Joke as much as you like, Alexiovitch, I declare that I should not refuse, at this moment especially, to warm myself up in the company of some pretty girl at Plymouth, or to have a pleasant nap, after a good dinner, at the Opera in Paris. I should think that a deal pleasanter than hearing the wind whistle, and being every moment on the point of taking my last drink from the same cup as the sharks and whales.”

“For my part, I think there is always more danger on land than on sea. On land you are always running the risk of losing your purse or your heart. For instance, don’t you remember when you took me to Stephen’s house? I did not know how to pilot myself between the sofas and armchairs which blocked up the drawing-room; I would rather have steered on a starless night through the channel of the *Devil’s Grip.* Ah! that confounded Miss Fanny; she looked at me so haughtily that I was ready to weigh anchor and sheer oft at ten knots an hour to escape from her. But you are not listening to me, sir.”

In point of fact, since the time that his old comrade had touched on the subject of women, Elim, half leaning on a gun, had turned away and fixed his eyes on the coast of Holland. That distant shore seemed to him a paradise — there you could And nice people, witty men, and pretty girls; there you could find hearts ready to love and worthy of being loved.

A perilous reflection this for a man of five and twenty, especially when he is confined within that floating monastery termed a ship. Accordingly, Elim, who was suffering from that sublime malady called youth, had become doubly pensive at the sight of the land and at the words of his companion. He gazed at Holland with such affection you would have said that he had some treasure hidden there. The impossibility of leaving the ship gave him, besides, a more eager desire to go on shore, and he sighed so profoundly that, as truthful narrators, we feel ourselves bound to record that sigh’ here and direct the reader’s attention to it.

The day began to decline, and as it declined the force of the wind increased and gradually changed into a storm; but, as all precautions had been taken beforehand, the advent of night was awaited with some degree of calmness.

At this moment a ship appeared on the horizon making for the fleet with all sails set. Impelled by the rising gale, she seemed to be endeavouring to outstrip it; presently she could be recognized as an English man-o’-war: her red standard gleamed amid the clouds. All eyes were turned in her direction.

"Ah, ha! let us watch how our friend will come to anchor in this wind," said Elim.

"Why, she must be mad," said a young lieutenant; "she is crowding sail as she enters the line! Just look, her masts are bending like reeds; you can almost hear them creaking from here. Either her captain must have got an extra set of masts up his sleeve, or else his crew are devils incarnate and not sailors."

A signal now appeared from the flag-ship, but the vessel, as though urged forward by some irresistible force, seemed not to pay the slightest attention to it.

"Why, she doesn't answer," cried several voices in astonishment.

"She is making straight for the rocks," said Elim.

Three flags were displayed together from the admiral's ship.

"Number one hundred and forty-three!" cried a sailor.

The lieutenant opened the code-book.

"The vessel coming from the open sea," said he, "is to form in line and cast anchor to port."

Has she replied?" asked the lieutenant.

She seems not even to have any idea that she is being spoken to," said the sailor.

Uncertainty, fear and astonishment were depicted on the countenances of all. The same signal was repeated, accompanied by a blank shot by way of reprimand.

The vessel still took no notice, and continued to make straight for the reefs.

In vain did the admiral redouble his signals; the ship seemed not to see them, and neither stopped nor even slackened speed.

All gazed in terror at the infatuated vessel. It was clear that she was going headlong to destruction.

"She does not understand our signals!" cried the lieutenant. "She does not hail from England, but from the ocean; at any rate, she ought to know the rocks, which are marked on all the charts."

"If she does not go about in one minute from now," said Elim, "she is lost."

The crisis was imminent.

The young man sprang into the nettings, holding on with one hand only, while with the other he waved his cap and shouted, —

“Port your helm! port your helm!” just as though, in spite of the distance, the vessel could hear him.

The ship was now close enough for them to see her crew, who were rushing about on deck, endeavouring to strike the fore-sail; but, just as they were engaged in this manœuvre, a terrible crash was heard. The mast had snapped in two.

“His rudder is gone,” cried the lieutenant; “he is lost!”

And, old salt as he was, he turned his eyes from the sight.

He was right; the doomed ship seemed lo hurry to her destruction. Carried along by wind and current, although she had furled all her sails one after the other, she still flew towards her doom with headlong rapidity.

The crew were evidently in despair; no orders were given, no discipline observed. The sailors ran up and down, extending their hands towards the other vessels, instinctively imploring the aid which it was impossible to convey to them.

Their last hour struck.

With the rapidity of lightning, with the force and noise of a thunderbolt, the vessel dashed on the rocks.

Instantly she was seen to go to pieces amid the foam. The sails were carried away in all directions; one of them flew like an eagle up into the clouds. An enormous wave once more lifted the floating wreckage and dashed it against the rock.

“All is over!” cried Elim, swinging himself back upon deck.

And indeed, at the spot where the ship had loomed aloft but a moment previously, nothing was now to be seen but the leaping waves, dashing against each other and breaking into foam.

“A signal, number one hundred and seven,” cried the sailor.

“Help for the shipwrecked crew!”

“A noble order!” said Lieutenant Nicolas Alexiovitch, “but, unhappily, more easy to give than to execute.”

At this moment three men — all that remained of the crew — appeared amid the foaming waves.

All three were clinging to the same plank.

Elim seized the old tar by the arm.

“Do you see them? do you see them?” he shouted.

“Great God! of course I see them; but what do you want me to do?”

“Then you think it is impossible to rescue them?” asked Elim.

“I do,” answered Nicolas Alexiovitch.

“And *I* think it would be a disgrace for a Russian to regard as impossible an order given by an Englishman. Captain,” he continued, stepping towards the officer commanding the *Vladimir,* “give me leave to lower a boat.”

“I cannot prevent you from fulfilling a duty, Elim,” answered the captain sadly, “but you will only lose your own life, and you will not save those unfortunate men.”

“Captain, I have neither mother nor wife to grieve for my loss, and my father is a soldier, who will rejoice to hear that his son has died doing his duty.”

“You will have no time to lower the cutter, and the small boats cannot live in this sea.”

“I *will* go, were it in a basin; I think it is easier to die oneself than to see others die.”

“Ho there!” he shouted; “lower the *Gull;* five volunteers to the front!”

Thirty stepped forward. Elim selected five and sprang into the long boat, whose speed and smartness had earned her a bird’s name. One of the five sailors stationed himself at the helm, the others seized the oars, while Elim stood in the bows.

“Good luck!” shouted his comrades.

The ropes which held the boat were cast off, and the frail craft, disappearing amid the foam, seemed to be instantly swallowed up by the waves.

CHAPTER II

THE WRECK

THE boat reappeared at twenty yards from the ship from which it had been launched, just as a leaf blown by the wind is carried from a tree.

There were three inches of water in the boat; two of the men continued to row, while Elim and the two others baled out the water with their caps.

Then the four rowers eagerly resumed work.

Meanwhile, Elim was fixing the mast and hoisting the little sail.

When this was accomplished he looked round him and found that the fleet was already a long way off.

He turned round again in the direction of the shipwrecked men.

The plank to which the three unhappy wretches were clinging sank beneath the water every moment. They had scarcely time to take breath as they came up to the surface; then they disappeared again almost immediately.

"Lieutenant," said the sailor who was steering, "I think there are but two of them now."

Elim crossed himself, according to the custom of the Russians when they witness the departure of a soul from life.

"Never mind," said he; "all the more reason for pushing on. Courage, my friends, courage!"

The boat pitched wildly, and heeled over to such an extent that the edge of the sail dipped in the water again and again.

The men continued to row, but, more often than not, the oars only struck the air.

"Lieutenant," said the man at the stern in a hollow voice and wiping his forehead with his sleeve, "there is only one left now."

"Let us try to save him at any rate," said the lieutenant, crossing himself a second time.

Then, standing up in the bows and waving his handkerchief, he shouted in English to the one remaining sailor, —

“Courage, courage! hold on! we are coming.” But he had not uttered this last word when the plank, which had again plunged downwards as he was shouting this message of encouragement, reappeared bare and deserted.

“Ah!” cried the lieutenant in despair, as he buried his hands in his hair, “the unhappy man had not strength enough to wait for us! Two strokes more, and we should have been there.”

At the same moment the body appeared on the crest of a wave and seemed to stand half up out of the water. The lieutenant stretched out his hand to grasp him, but he was out of reach; he went down with the wave and disappeared for ever.

“Yorsko, did you see how his eyes were staring?” said one of the rowers in a low tone to his mate.

“Yes,” answered the other, and his fists clenched.

“The lieutenant has forgotten to make the sign of the cross for this one,” said a third.

“And he is quite capable of coming and laying hold of the lieutenant by the feet to remind him of his forgetfulness,” said Yorsko laughing.

“Jest with the living as much as you please, Yorsko,” sternly observed the sailor who was at the helm, and who, being older than the others, exercised a certain authority over them, “but not with the dead, for it brings bad luck.”

“Gome, lads!” said the lieutenant, in a voice which not only drowned the whispers of the sailors, but was plainly heard even in spite of the whistling of the wind and the roar of the waves; “we have been unable to save the lives of the others, let us now think of our own.”

A glance was sufficient to make the young lieutenant understand that with the wind against him and the sea running mountains high it was impossible for him to regain the fleet. His only chance was to run before the wind and gain the shore, to pass the night there, and, should the wind change next morning, to make for the *Vladimir.*

In attempting to land to the left of the town, he had the wind full on his quarter, which gave to the little craft the speed of an arrow; the only drawback was that the land towards which the gale was urging him was a hostile shore, where, should he be recognized, death, or at least imprisonment, awaited him.

Elim had taken the place of the old sailor at the helm; three of the men baled out the water which they continued to ship; the two others held themselves ready in case of emergency. The boat heeled over to such an extent that two of the men, with knives in their hands, waited but the lieutenant’s order to cut the sheets.

However, seeing the calmness displayed by Elim, the sailors, if they had not been sufficiently experienced to gauge the situation for themselves, might have believed themselves out of all danger.

Night came on suddenly; but by the last rays of daylight they had been able to perceive, from a broad stretch of surf that extended along the beach, that the coast was guarded by a line of reefs.

The wind drove the little craft straight for this white line, which could still be seen through the darkness, and the boat must have possessed the wings of the bird whose name she bore if she was to clear the terrible barrier against which they could now hear the roaring waves breaking.

“Strike sail!” shouted Elim to the two men who held themselves in readiness.

One of the sailors loosened the sheet and let the rope run, but the wind was so violent that it tore it from his hands, and the sail, set at liberty, began to beat the air so violently that the *Gull* shivered through all her timbers, and her bows, dragged down by the weight of the sail, plunged under the sea.

But, like a spirited steed that has stumbled into too deep a ford, she righted herself and rose again above the water.

Another similar movement, however, and the boat would be submerged.

Elim lost no time in giving orders; he plunged his hand to the bottom of the craft, seized an axe, and, at the moment when the little mast was bending like a reed, struck it with all the strength of his arm.

A prolonged creaking was heard, and the mast crashed down upon the prow.

“Overboard!” cried Elim, resuming his place in the stern.

The sailors, realizing the necessity of ridding the boat of this useless encumbrance, threw themselves upon the three-parts-broken mast, and, at the end of five minutes, both mast and sail were in the sea.

During these five minutes they had approached the reefs in such a manner that there was no possibility of working the boat either to right or left; luckily, the beach on which the waves drove our adventurous sailors was level with the water.

Elim entertained the hope of clearing it.

“All hands astern!” he cried, when he saw that the boat was about to strike the rock.

The sailors obeyed the order; the half of the boat rose out of the water, as a whale that comes up to breathe, and, instead of the bows, it was now the stern that bore down.

The boat was crushed to pieces; but the sailors and their young officer, springing forward, found themselves in comparatively smooth water, while the fury of the sea spent itself against the reefs.

“Courage, lads, and make for the shore!” cried the young lieutenant. “If there is one of you who cannot swim, or who feels himself exhausted, let him lean on my shoulder.”

The noise of the storm, however, drowned his voice. The waves, as though furious at seeing their prey escape them, leapt the reefs and pursued the swimmers.

But the latter were already beyond their reach, and now felt the bottom beneath their feet.

Elim stopped to make sure that none of his men had been left behind, and found that all five were with him.

“My word,” said the old tar; “I quite thought for a minute that the forgetting of the sign of the cross would bring us disaster; so, Lieutenant, if I may give you a bit of advice, it would be to make two signs instead of one.”

“There was a moment,” said Yorsko, “when it seemed as if that confounded drowned man was dragging me by the legs, so I gave him a good kick.”

“Would you like to know where your kick went to?” replied one of the sailors to Yorsko, pointing to his eye, which was black and blue; “there it is!

“It was you, then, who so imprudently seized me by the leg?” asked Yorsko.

“Look here, when a fellow is at the bottom of the sea, and has cut such a caper as we have just done, he lays hold of whatever comes to hand.”

While joking over the peril which they had just encountered, with that nonchalant disregard of danger which is one of the virtues of sailors of every nationality, our six wrecked mariners, still led by the lieutenant, had gained the shore.

The sea roared below, but only the spray could now reach them.

“We have got out of the water, and a good job too,” said one of the sailors; “but we shall be frozen here.”

“Wait until the Cossack’s sun appears,” said Yorsko; “and you can dry yourself by its rays.”

Go on!” said another, “I should smoke a pipe.”

“What a pity you didn’t think of that sooner,” said the sailor with the black eye; “you might have lighted it at the three dozen candles which I saw when Yorsko presented me with that kick on my nob.”

But for all their jokes, the poor wretches were shivering. Elim himself, spite of his courage and lusty youthfulness, felt himself gradually overpowered by the cold.

“Come, come, my lads,” said he to two sailors who had lain down in the mud and seemed disposed to give way to torpor, “get up, and look sharp about it! Remember, those who sleep here to-night will wake tomorrow in another world.”

“All right, Lieutenant, what next?” said the sailors, getting up and shaking themselves.

“Well, my lads, now we will try and find a lodging where we can pass the night. Perhaps we may fall in with some worthy people who will not betray us, and to-morrow morning we will seize a fishing-boat and get out to sea.”

The plucky young fellow tried to inspire his sailors with a hope which he did not entertain himself.

“Only,” he added, “we must not separate; follow me, and speak softly; remember that you talk Russian, and that we are in Holland.”

“Oh! I may talk,” said Yorsko; “I know the language of the country.”

You know Dutch?” said Elim; “where the deuce did you pick it up?”

“Was I not a freshwater sailor before I took to the sea?”

“Well, what of it?”

“Well, I learned Tartar at Kasan.”

“And you are going to speak Tartar to these Dutchmen?”

Of course. Don’t all heathens speak the same lingo, Lieutenant?”

Although the situation was not cheerful, the young lieutenant of the *Vladimir* could not help laughing at the tone of conviction in which Yorsko enunciated this somewhat erroneous opinion concerning the universal language spoken by all those not professing the religion of the Greek

Church, in the bosom of which Yorsko had had the good fortune to be reared.

For about ten minutes, the sailors, guided by Elim, walked along a narrow path at ten paces from which it was impossible to see anything, so great was the darkness. The young man stopped occasionally; but he could hear nothing except the noise of the wind and the roar of the waves.

At last, having gone little more than a mile, our travellers began to hear a sound which, in proportion as they advanced, drowned even the roaring of the sea. They realized that the sound proceeded from a torrent, and, dark as was the night, they presently distinguished something darker still, namely the walls of a mill.

“Halt!” said Elim.

“Whai for, Lieutenant?”

“Because the French may be there.”

“But, with all respect to your superior judgment, even if the devil were there, I think we should go in all the same.”

“They will make it pretty warm for us if the French are inside,” said the sailor with the black eye.

“Warm?” said Yorsko. “That’s the very thing I want: I declare I am dying of cold.”

“And I am mad with hunger,” said another; “I believe I could eat the millwheel.”

“What do you advise, my lads?” said Elim; “for you understand that, situated as we are, there is no question of superior or inferior; we are all brothers.” The sailors held a consultation.

“Well, Lieutenant,” said Yorsko, “the general opinion is that anything is better than to die of hunger or cold.”

And if the French are there? “ — objected the young officer.

What of it, Lieutenant? Well, look, I will explain. In any case, they will not begin by eating us; deuce take it, we should be too big a mouthful. The worst that can happen to us is to be taken prisoners.”

“No doubt; but you will allow that it would be still better to have a good supper and comfortable bed and go back to-morrow to the ship.”

Yorsko shook his head.

“It would certainly be much better,” said he; “but I think you are asking for too much at once, Lieutenant.”

“Who knows?” said the young man: “this mill must be some distance from the town; well, the miller must conceal us voluntarily or by compulsion; and, when day comes, we shall see how to act. Arm yourselves with anything that comes to hand — I have my dagger — and let us enter quietly.”

The gale was fastened on the inside merely by a wooden bolt loosely fastened, which gave way as soon as the gate was shaken. They were in the courtyard; that was something gained. Elim searched for the door of the dwelling-house and soon discovered it.

The door yielded, as that of the courtyard had done: it opened upon a dark passage, but a light shining beneath another door indicated a lighted chamber.

The young lieutenant went straight up to this door and opened it boldly.

He stood at the entrance to a kitchen brightly lighted up.

The fire blazed merrily in a large fireplace, and in front of this fire a goose was slowly turning on a spit.

This kitchen was spruce as only Dutch kitchens can be. The saucepans gleamed like so many suns on the walls, which were garnished with crockery, while in the centre of this luminous system a table, round like the earth, was set with dishes, plates and glasses.

Two enormous beakers crowned the table, at the mouths of which was seen, like a fringe of silver, a fresh froth which denoted that the beer which filled them had been poured out the moment before.

There was wherewithal both to warm and fill the six shipwrecked mariners.

But, to their great astonishment, there was absolutely no one in the kitchen, although near the table lay a dog.

The dog neither barked nor stirred.

Hallo I this is the Promised Land which God has allowed us to enter,” said Yorsko. “The dogs apparently are not on duty, even at night.”

A door led from the kitchen.

Elim opened this door and stood speechless with astonishment. He found himself on the threshold of a room where a woman, gagged and with her hands tied, was lying on the bed.

He turned towards the sailors, who had followed him on tiptoe.

“What does this mean?” he asked.

“Probably she chattcred too much,” answered Yorsko.

“Good! and here is a man,” said the sailor with the black eye, stumbling over a body.

“By Jove, it is the miller,” said Yorsko, stooping to have a look at him; “and a fine healthy man too.”

The miller, unable to speak, uttered a groan; he too was gagged like his wife.

Meanwhile Elim was listening at a door which led to another room.

“Silence!” said he, motioning with his hand to his companions.

A sound was heard of confused voices, tears, threats and curses.

Elim grasped the meaning of some words, half French, half German.

The words doubtless appeared to him to require his presence, for he tried to open the door; but finding it fastened, he shook it roughly.

The door held fast.

“Open!” he cried in French.

Then he repeated in German: — ” *Machen sie auf!*”

“What for?” answered a voice in French.

“Open and you will find out!” cried Elim.

“Go and be hanged!” replied a voice, “and leave us to do our own business.”

And the cries were redoubled.

“Will you allow us, Lieutenant?” said Yorsko, who had not yet dropped the two stones with which he had armed himself.

Elim stood back from the door. Yorsko placed one of his two stones on the ground, raised the other with both hands above his head, and hurled it with the force of a catapult at the door, which broke into splinters.

An unlooked-for sight was presented to the eyes of the lieutenant and his men.

Four of those marauders belonging to no country in particular, but who follow in the train of armies like wolves and ravens, ragged, half-drunk, their uniforms in tatters, were busily plundering the room.

One of them held his sword uplifted over the head of an old man seated in an armchair, while another rifled his pockets; a third held his pistol at the head of a girl who was on her knees and calling for her father; a fourth was emptying a bottle of wine prepared for supper while he stuffed into his pockets the silver which he had taken from the table; a fifth, in one corner of the room, was forcing the locks of a chest.

“Help, my friends!” cried Elim, hurling himself upon the ruffian who was threatening the girl.

“Ah! you thief!” shouted Yorsko sending his second stone into the ribs of the man who held his sword over the old man.

“Scoundrels I” shouted the others, dashing with uplifted sticks upon each of the remaining actors in this scene.

“We are surrounded!” cried the marauders, without even attempting to resist; “let us fly!”

And, breaking a window, without knowing what was below it, they sprang out of the room.

The window overlooked the torrent.

The cries of the first two or three made the others hesitate; but, urged by the lieutenant’s dagger and the bayonet belonging to the man who was trying to burst open the chest, and which Yorsko had picked up, they were compelled to follow the road taken by their companions.

All this had been the work of a moment. The old Dutchman, clad in a dressing-gown and still buried in his armchair, had witnessed with profound astonishment all that had occurred.

The sight of half a dozen men scantily clothed, with long beards, belonging to God only knows what race, caused him to think, with some degree of probability, that he had only made an exchange of robbers. The exclamation: “Great heavens!” then an “Ah! ah!” which changed into an “Oh! oh!” and ended with an “Eh! eh!” proved that his brain was momentarily confused.

His daughter, however, was more grateful than he was, or, at any rate, demonstrated her gratitude in a clearer manner. She had had no difficulty in recognizing in the six men who had just entered a leader and five subordinates. The unexpected transition from fear to joy had so surprised her, the delight was so great, that she had almost thrown herself upon the young officer’s neck; but she had contented herself with grasping him by the hand and thanking him with tears in her eyes for the assistance which he had just rendered them. Elim bowed to the girl, and the girl curtseyed to Elim, laughing and crying both at once. The old man, still buried up to his neck in his arm-chair, gazed at them in astonishment, while Yorsko and his comrades, drawn up in line as if awaiting inspection, looked on with the silent smile which subordinates of all countries maintain in the presence of their superior officers.

At last, observing the young lieutenant’s frank and noble countenance, the old man breathed more freely. He rose, leaning with one hand on the arm of his chair, and raising his nightcap with the other, —

“To whom am I to express my gratitude?” he inquired in French, having heard the young Russian officer employ that language more especially.

“To a man cast by the storm upon your coast,” replied Elim, “and who asks of you, not hospitality, but a place of refuge; I am a Russian officer.”

And at the words he threw off his cloak and displayed his uniform.

“A Russian officer!” exclaimed the Dutchman, falling back in his chair as though the news had paralysed him, “great heavens!”

Such a beginning augured ill for Elim; he knew that there were in Holland a great number of people favourable to King Louis, and the owner of the house might very well be one of his partisans.

He accordingly went on, —

“May I hope, sir, to find in you a friend, or, at least, a friendly enemy? If you refuse to shelter us for a time, at least do not hand us over to the French.”

“Allow me, allow me, young man,” replied the Dutchman eagerly — ” August van Naarvaersen was never a traitor, and all the Dutch from first to last have been friends of the Russians since the time of your Peter the Great, myself especially, inasmuch as my wife’s grandfather was master-carpenter to your Emperor at Saardam. With me you and your companions are therefore safe from danger, for a few days at least. Here is my hand, the matter is arranged. And now, my friend, what is your name, *saperloot?”*

“Elim Melosor,” replied the young man, delighted at the turn affairs had taken.

“Well, my friend Elim Melosor,” continued the old man, “take off your wet uniform; after which, with glasses in our hand, we will make all our arrangements.”

Then at last the old man made up his mind definitely to rise from his arm-chair. Yorsko had already unbound the man and woman whom they had found in the first room, and, at the orders of the master, the grateful cook — whom Yorsko had had the good fortune to rescue — had carried off the five sailors to supper.

As for Elim, the old man had taken him under his charge; he had taken him to a large closet and provided him with a dressing-gown and a change of linen; in a word, had looked after him as if he were his own son.

After ten minutes employed in making a change of toilet, the young officer entered the dining-room in some confusion at presenting himself before the daughter of his host in flowered dressing-gown and slippers. Luckily the situation excused him.

Supper was now served.

Elim began to feel quite a different man from what he had been an hour before. His twenty-five years, which had not gone to the bottom of the sea with his cap, a warm room, a good supper, mellow wine, a pretty girl, a smiling host — all these things not only restored to him his accustomed gaiety but made him merrier than he had ever been before. He drank with his host, laughed with the daughter, and ate enough for that day and the next, like a man uncertain of the future. I am well aware that what I have just related is contrary to the custom of all heroes of romance, who neither eat nor drink.

Doubtless all authors at the beginning of this century suffered from gastritis; but we are in the middle of the century, and everything has followed the law of progress. Literature to-day is as realistic as Nature herself. It is only humming-birds that exist nowadays on essence of roses and drops of dew: the nightingale breaks off her song and descends from heaven to pick up a worm from the ground.

Elim, like all Russians of distinction, spoke French perfectly. German, too, was almost his mother tongue, for he had been brought up by his mother, who was a German. There was no difficulty therefore in carrying on the conversation, for these were just the languages spoken by August van Naarvaersen and his daughter.

At dessert, the young lieutenant, who had never felt in such a happy mood, became uproarious with merriment, and told stories which delighted his host beyond expression; the worthy Dutchman had never laughed so much in his life.

“Ah I my dear Elim!” he cried, falling back in his chair and holding his stomach with both hands, “you are certainly a funny fellow: you may make your mind easy, we shall not let you leave us in a hurry, shall we, Jane?”

The girl blushed. It was easy to see that, if she had been told to hold back the young officer by the flap of his coat, she would not soon open her hand.

“Really,” said Elim, “I hardly know how to express my gratitude to you.”

“That’s all right; you have paid for your entertainment in advance,” said the old man. “Do you know the loss you have saved me from, *saperloot?* It is no trifle. I received twenty thousand pieces of gold to-day from the French for a consignment of cloth. These confounded marauders were going to rob me of them when you arrived. You tumbled from the sky, my dear Elim, and never will you arrive anywhere more opportunely or deserve a better welcome.”

“Tumbled from the sky!” repeated Elim, “came up from the sea, you ought to say, my dear host; but, if I have had the good luck to scare away these rogues, I have the bad luck to be obliged to fly in my turn; we shall have to disguise ourselves in sacks of flour tomorrow, Mynheer August van Naarvaersen.”

“Oh! perhaps you imagine that August van Naarvaersen, whose name you have got so pat, the chief manufacturer of cloth in all Holland, lives in a mill? *Saperloot!* No, my dear fellow. Let me tell you. I was delayed, and stopped here to spend the night, after sending my carriage to the town to make some purchases. To-morrow morning we shall start for the factory; we shall shut the sailors up in a room apart where they must not jabber too loud nor show their faces at the window, but where they will have plenty to eat and drink. As for you, you shall be a relation of ours arrived from Frankfort-on-Main; then, at the first opportunity, we will find some trusty fellows to take you back.”

Elim was delighted; the thought of spending several days with the charming Jane made him, he hardly knew why, the happiest man in the world. Several days! at the age of twenty-five, that is a century, just as a piece of gold is riches to a child.

He got up then from his seat, full of unknown hopes, bade good-night to the worthy Dutchman and his daughter, went to bed and slept soundly.

And all through the night the golden bird of dreams sang to his heart its sweetest strains.

CHAPTER III

THE JOURNEY

ELIM woke late and sprang out of bed. Warm water and scented soap removed the last traces of the night's storm. His toilet was a short one; Nature had endowed him with the qualities which she bestows upon her favoured ones, and which simplify all toilets — youth and beauty.

To his great delight, instead of his flowered dressing-gown, he found a complete suit of well-fitting clothes which had been brought that morning from the town. He dressed therefore as an ordinary citizen, which was a safer costume for the moment than a Russian uniform, however elegant, and went into the dining-room, where the *samovar* was already boiling.

"Late bird! *saperloot!* late bird!" said the old Dutchman, holding out his hand: "long slumber, pleasant dreams, eh?"

Elim smiled.

At this moment Jane entered, and, raising her beautiful blue eyes shyly, said, —

"Good morning, Monsieur Elim."

Elim wished to reply to this simple greeting, but blushed like the morning sky. His tongue got in his way, and Jane seemed to him so beautiful that he could only gaze at her with an expression far more eloquent than words. And, in truth, she was charming in her morning costume.

A little cap, or rather, a simple square of lace placed on her head and fastened under the chin by a pink riband, allowed a mass of fair hair to fall in every direction, encircling a face so fresh and velvety that the riband paled by contrast with it. In each of her cheçks lurked one of those dimples styled by the poets of the eighteenth century "nests of love." On her breast, heaving with emotion, Elim, in his capacity of sailor, thought he perceived two undulating waves which, impatient of their muslin barrier, were ever trying to burst it. Below was a round waist so flexible, that it seemed to court the aid of a protecting hand to prevent its breaking. Lastly, to complete the charms of this sweet flower of sixteen, came two feet which seemed to have been modelled to the size of Cinderella's slipper.

Elim was still at that age when men do not seek for an intimate friendship, but are greedy for love, and, obedient to the promptings of their heart, feel but one want, namely, that of not loving fruitlessly. Later on, when weary of the caprices of love, they look rather for intelligence than for sentimental affection, and a witty mind attracts them more than a timid heart does.

Elim had not yet attained this exalted wisdom. If he gave his heart, he demanded another heart in return. He loved in order to love, and not to argue about his love. His heart flew to meet that of the girl who, but the evening before, was a child playing with her doll, who had as yet taken no notice of those mechanical automata called Dutchmen. Sixteen is a critical age for a girl. A charming face, a frank and lively disposition, and, above all, the determination with which she resolved to protect the unfortunate men who had come to the mill to ask for shelter — all this formed one of those situations in which the feelings, conflicting together, strike out burning sparks by which the heart is inflamed. Seeing Jane did not conceal her sympathy for Elim, however inexperienced in love our young lieutenant may have been, he could not fail to perceive that Jane was far from entertaining any aversion for him. From the morrow of the day on which they had become acquainted, they began to converse fluently, if not with the mouth, at any rate with the eyes, which is often even more dangerous.

Occupied in contemplation of the girl, or rather, quite absorbed in this contemplation, the young sailor gave but inattentive answers to the questions and witticisms of August van Naarvaersen, who, moreover, when he took his coffee, smoked his pipe or read the *Commercial Gazette*, was so taken up with these serious occupations, that he neither saw nor heard anything of what was going on round him.

However, at one of such moments, the noise of a door creaking on its hinges as it opened attracted everybody’s attention.

The person, still unknown to our readers, who came thus unexpectedly to mingle in the life of our hero and heroine, was tall and thin and wore a tight-fitting black coat. His nose protruded at such a sharp and prolonged angle that his face resembled a sun-dial. He had a habit, peculiar to himself, of raising his eyebrows and eyelids by a slight contraction of his forehead, in such a fashion that you might have thought that his eyebrows wanted to fly away and his eyelids to take their place. Occasionally you would see him make an effort to smile, but the effort proved abortive.

This man was Van Naarvaersen’s cashier. You might have guessed his occupation by the big book which he carried under his arm. Upon a heart of red morocco in the centre of this book was written: —

“*Groot boek”* (great book).

“Ah I good-day to you!” cried Mynheer August upon seeing him; “we were expecting you; give me a pinch of snuff, Quenzius.”

Quenzius, in addition to being cashier, acted also as snuff-box to his employer.

He accordingly opened an enormous snuff-box, harmoniously adapted to the nose which it had the honourable office of supplying, and presented it respectfully to the master of the house.

“Well, what news in the town?” asked Jane’s father as he took the pinch of snuff with a slow and noisy inhalation.

Quenzius’ mouth, which, in repose, took the form of a blue line which was lost in the red of his cheeks, opened like a window. “There is no news,” he answered.

“What do the Orange faction say? What are the Napoleonists doing?”

“Things are to-day just the same as yesterday,’’ replied the man with the big book.

“That is just like you, brother Quenzius! close as a Trappist monk. If I were a king, I would make you my secretary. Did you get a receipt from Van Seinten for the cloth you delivered to him?”

This question appeared very agreeable to the cashier. He opened his book with pride and showed his employer a page covered with figures. The latter’s countenance beamed.

“Good business! a nice profit!” he murmured; “clearly my factory does not resemble the hanging gardens of Babylon, and my credit is more stable than the pyramids of Egypt. Well, sir, now, in God’s name, we can set out.”

All was in readiness for the departure; in an instant a carriage, to which four big horses were attached, made the pavement tremble, and our travellers started for the chief factory of Mynheer August.

The father and daughter seated themselves facing the horses; Quenzius and Elim took the opposite seat.

The young officer was so delighted at finding himself opposite the fair Dutch maiden, that all the sights they passed on the road, however interesting, could not divert his eyes from the object of their contemplation. Our young man was so happy to travel in this way, that he would fain have gone on for ever. His whole universe was with him. You would have said that he had dropped the past together with his cap at the bottom of the sea, and was entering another world and a new future. He only asked of fate one thing, namely, to make as many hollows and ruts in the road as possible, and you will guess why, dear readers, if you have ever been in a carriage with a woman whom you loved. It was in order that his knee might touch Jane's.

It would be interesting to make the experiment of how great a charge of electricity a girl's knee can contain.

It would be useless, then, for the reader to expect from Elim a narrative of his journey or a sketch, however slight, of the cities, towns and scenery through which he passed. But, by way of compensation, he knew the girl's topography by heart, and could have talked learnedly to us of the smallest grain of beauty scattered by Nature over her face and shoulders.

Meanwhile, the carriage rolled on swiftly, drawing nearer to the factory. Elim had forgotten the whole

world. The old man's scientific disquisitions on the subject of the dykes beat at the door of his ear, but did not effect an entrance. Such hours are sweet and seldom return!

At last they arrived at their destination; the doors of the carriage were opened, and Elim roused himself; but when on getting out of the carriage, Jane's little hand grasped his own, when a soft voice murmured the words, "Here is your prison, Elim!" he would have sworn that Van Naarvaersen's house, built as it was in the clumsy Flemish style, was the eighth wonder of the world.

To say truth, this house, which was built on the great square, very much resembled a house of cards.

An elevation, occupying the place of the usual flight of steps, extended the whole length of the building and supported a balcony which overshadowed the ground-floor. Although autumn was far advanced, the courtyard was clean and tidy; the walls, scrubbed with soap, shone like glass; the doors and windows were adorned with silver and bronze fastenings, and a wonderful neatness prevailed throughout.

Jane, running as lightly as a feather floating on the breeze, threw herself on the neck of her mother, a worthy and open-hearted Dutchwoman in the fullest sense of the word.

If ever you have seen, at the Hermitage Palace in St. Petersburg, the Amsterdam doll with which Peter the Great played in his childhood, you have seen Jane’s mother; and yet this stout, homely little woman was the most caressing creature in the world.

She took Elim by the hand and carried him off to inspect the apartments. The description of each rare article of furniture was a torture to him. The young man listened without hearing, and stared without seeing. After going through all the rooms, in which a mass of valuable things was heaped up, they came to the chamber containing the bed of state. The sight of this came as a magnificent dessert after a splendid dinner. Madame van Naarvaersen showed him with pride the coverlets embroidered by herself, the ancient lace, and the brocaded quilts, and immensely enjoyed his astonishment at the sight of the bridal bed, an enormous erection which seemed to have been made to be occupied not only by husband and wife, but by all their posterity as well. Piles of pillows, continually diminishing in size, seemed to ascend to the sky in a double pyramid; a canopy, adorned with lace like the clouds which accompany the transformation scenes in the theatre, reached from the top of the bed to the ground, and a counterpane of white satin extended over the immense area of the bed, resembling, except in colour, the surface of an azure sea on a fine summer’s day. The mortal who should venture to lie down in this bed suited to the gods would certainly incur the risk of being drowned in its feathery waves and billows of down. Doubtless this was the reason why Elim contented himself with merely looking at it.

After being initiated into all the mysteries of Van Naarvaersen’s house, Elim found rest at the dinner table from all his fatigues, and, after finishing the evening in merry fashion, fell asleep, perfectly contented with his lot.

CHAPTER IV

THE STAY

THE life of the inhabitants of Vlamhuis was exceedingly quiet and, we will even venture to say, exceedingly monotonous.

The master of the house was almost always busy in his factory, while the mistress, though she pretended to have relinquished all the petty details of housekeeping, was, on the contrary, entirely given up to them.

Housekeeping was the sole passion the worthy woman had ever entertained.

Men, if one may judge by appearances, are created for a roving life; women, on the contrary, for a sedentary existence. They are called by nature to adorn household life.

The kitchen fire is the sun of the good housewife. You would not have doubted this truth for a moment had you seen Madame van Naarvaersen revolving round her fire like a planet and borrowing from it her light and brilliancy. You would have said that she understood the mute language of the broken vessel on which appeared the marks of long service. You might see there, as in another *Hôtel des Invalides,* a noseless teapot, a cup without arms, a coffee-pot without legs; but from all her cripples the intelligent mistress of the house continued to extract important services. As for condiments and the invention of new dishes, she was in no way inferior to the famous Vatel, though I doubt if she could have carried to such lengths as he did his despair at the delay in the arrival of the fish. Her gherkins, for example, celebrated for forty leagues round, were something wonderful. She had, besides, discovered, or rather invented, a preparation of fish which was not to be found in any cookery book hitherto published, and the secret of which would only be confided to her daughter on her wedding-day.

The consequence was that, as Jane's mother spent all her time in the kitchen, while her father only came back to the house at dinner-time, Elim, seated close to Jane's embroidery frame, had abundant time for looking at and talking to her. This contemplation and conversation were uninterrupted except by some occasional reading of poetry, or when Elim amused himself during the girl’s absence by drawing. In these intervals, which might very justly be called the unfolding of the play, Elim talked to her, with a warmth that was ardent enough to melt their snows, of the Russian winters, of the delights of sleighing, and of the lovely summer nights so well sung by Poushkin, during which the sun appears never to leave the horizon.

And Jane would exclaim, —

“Oh, how I should love to see it all!

“Why shouldn’t you?” Elim would answer with a smile.

And he would look at her with an expression which completed the thought that was in her mind.

Jane would then lower her eyes with a deep sigh and resume her work.

Of what was she thinking at such times?

There was a time when I could have told you; but now I have quite forgotten what girls think about.

Elim, who was naturally amusing, and was now stimulated by the pleasure of giving pleasure, grew charming; but he had by his side a disposition even more gay and smiling than his own, and that was Jane’s.

Educated at a French boarding-school, she possessed all the good qualities of a Frenchwoman coupled with the frankness of her own country; add to that a real beauty which expanded day by day, enhanced by all the charms of youthfulness.

This combination of attractions made Elim very thoughtful at times: it is true that the thoughtful mood was often sweeter than the merriment itself; but, as regards Jane, she was always merry. Love was to her as yet only a plaything; she knew neither its happiness nor its torture. Often her evenness of temper made Elim angry; but his anger succumbed quickly to Jane’s bantering, and the two young people would begin to laugh again like two children.

A week of rainy weather passed in this way.

At last the sky cleared, and Jane proposed a walk in the garden, which was of the true Dutch type. The paths were strewn with fine bright sand; all the little mounds were tended like almond cakes; the trees were clipped hedge-wise, the bushes trimmed to resemble vases of flowers, columns, or fans. All the vegetable creation seemed to have passed beneath the joiner’s plane.

Nothing had preserved its natural shape. There was a bridge on which two fowls could not have passed each other; there were flowers in steel, Chinamen in wood, sheltering themselves with parasols from the summer sun in the month of October; a sportsman aiming at a duck which, for twenty years, had had no thought of flying from the lake.

Observing a stork on a tower, Elim asked if it was not made of marble.

Ah! Monsieur Elim,” said Jane, laughing, “we are not quite heathens, and although this bird is the object of a kind of cult with us, as it was with the Egyptians, we do not yet build temples to it nor worship it as an idol.”

“That is a pity; for Master Quenzius seems to me to have been created and sent into the world to be the priest of this household god, of whom he has both the nose and mouth.”

“And what do you think of our garden?”

“It is very interesting; quite a museum of quaint things. What a misfortune that I cannot see it when it is green and filled with flowers!”

“You may console yourself for your loss: under the gardener’s shears it is exactly the same, summer and winter; only perhaps it is even more doleful in summer. As to flowers, I will show you their domain, where they bl’oom like your northern beauties.”

Jane opened the door of the greenhouse. A little turret through which they passed was filled with birds; behind a wire curtain hopped and flew a large number of rare birds. Some of them came and settled on Jane’s fingers and ate sugar from her mouth.

Elim smiled at this idyllic picture.

“It is charming,” said he; “but, after all, your guests are prisoners.”

“What does it matter, if I make my guests blithe and happy? The poor creatures nearly all come from hot climates, and if I gave them their freedom they would inevitably perish.”

“You are so kind, dear Jane, that you would make even a falcon forget his freedom.”

“A falcon! thank you; it is not the custom nowadays for ladies to carry birds of prey at their wrists. No; I am afraid of falcons, both for myself and for my birds.”

“You are wrong, Jane; a falcon when tamed is a delightful bird: with you, it would live on bonbons and caresses.”

“Yes, only to fly away some fine day.”

“No, to remain under your roof like a pigeon.”

“That’s a nice tale you are telling me, Elim. Do you think I believe that a falcon wears talons as a mere ornament? But let us leave the birds and go to the flowers — flowers are my father’s favourite companions.”

“The cultivation of flowers is an amusing occupation for old men, as a recollection of pleasures that are past; it is a useful lesson for young people.”

“Yes, Mr. Philosopher; and I, too, wish that they would last longer. You want either to have a thousand hearts, or only one very cold one, to see flowers die.”

“The flowers are happier than we, Jane; we die as they do, and they do not suffer like us.”

“Yes, but to make up for it, they have not our pleasures, and I confess that I do not envy flowers their fate. You are a botanist, Elim?”

“Oh, I am merely an amateur, Jane. The names *bulbata, barbata, grandifolia, grandiflora,* are like the Arabic alphabet to me.”

“And you do not blush to confess your ignorance when you are in the flower-temple of the most celebrated botanist in Holland?”

“Not only do I confess my ignorance, but I am not ashamed of it. I am like the nightingale of the Persian poets — I adore the rose, the white rose alone.”

“That is not enough, Elim, and if you wish to win a lasting place in my father’s estimation, you must be able to talk to him about the stems and leaves, the petals and the pistils of all the rare flowers.”

“Your advice is law, Jane; I am prepared not only to hang on to the flowers like a bee, but to grow out of the ground myself like a flower, if you will water me with the scented water of your knowledge. It is only from Flora herself that I can learn the paths of her kingdom and the names of her subjects, male and female. Let us begin our lessons from to-day.”

“Willingly. Look at this flower, for example; its name is *aster.*”

“That means *star,*” said Elim. “I, too, know two stars. The sky has none more clear or brilliant, and it is by their rays alone that I would guide my bark across the ocean.”

“Ah! please don’t talk about your ocean, which frightens me so, since you were nearly drowned, and let us come down from the sky, where we are not worthy to have our dwelling.”

“Nothing easier, when the sky comes down to the earth.”

“Oh! how confused your poetical similes are growing, Elim. Isn’t that what is called *fustian* in plain English? Look, here is a relation of your much-loved rose — it is the moss-rose.”

“Don’t you think it looks rather chilly in its pelisse?”

“This is *Chinese fire.”*

“Which burns only when in your hands.”

“Here is a flower which, as the Indians assert, gives a cry when you pluck it from its stem.”

“Probably it cries, ‘Don’t touch me.’”

“None of them can ever say that to me, for I have never done them any harm. Now, mind you don’t fall asleep, for here is the whole poppy tribe.”

“I’m not afraid of their putting me to sleep; I am too close to the antidote; and I say this from experience, for, when you say to me, ‘Good night, Elim,’ I have noticed that I have not slept the whole night.”

“Poor Elim! now I understand why you dream so much during the day. But where did we leave off; was it at this tulip? Oh, no; you see your absent-mindedness is becoming infectious, my pupil. Let us pass on to this cactus, which flowers once a year, and that at night. Poor ephemeral creature, it lives for two hours, and then its leaves fall.”

“Only two hours! but still, it *does* bloom; for two hours it delights the fair eyes which gaze at it. I would give years of my life in order to bloom and be loved for two hours.”

And Elim looked passionately at Jane. Jane saw the look and lowered her eyes.

“It is dreadfully hot in here,” she said, letting the wrap which surrounded her neck drop upon her shoulders, and opening the door of the greenhouse.

“Come,” she went on, “let us repeat this first lesson and see what progress my pupil has made, and whether he is to be sent into the corner or allowed to play in the yard. So, to begin with, Monsieur Elim, be good enough to tell me the name of this flower,” she asked, as she plucked a tuberose.

I don’t know,” answered Elim, still gazing at her. “But, good gracious! what *do* you know, then?” she cried.

“I know how to love, and lore passionately!” said the young man, seizing her two hands.

And what does ‘love’ mean?” asked Jane, with a simplicity which had no trace of affectation in it.

Suppose this question put by a woman of thirty, dear reader; it would be artifice rather than simplicity.

I have read in books and heard so many dissertations on the subject of love, that I am ready to say with Jane, “What does ‘love’ mean?”

Some say that lore is synonymous with desire; others, that to lore is to forget completely the material side of lore. Some say there is no lore without money; others, that the rich do not know the meaning of love. And it is all in rain for you, realistic philosophers, spiritualists, Epicureans, Platonists, and even lovers, to argue about lore; the more you pile argument upon argument, the more perplexed will the question become.

Do not, then, be surprised, dear reader, at the perplexity into which this simple question threw our hero. He did not find a word to reply, but dropped his eyes to the flower which Jane held in her hand, and, without thinking what he was saying, replied, —

“It is a campanula.”

Jane burst out laughing.

“Ah!” she said, “you are a terrible pupil, and I do not believe I can sow flowers in your memory any more than in the snow of St. Petersburg, of which you were telling me the other day.”

“I confess, Jane, that I do not understand flowers except in a garland. A bird of paradise appears beautiful, but we do not need on that account to know its real name; we know that it comes from the sky, and that is all. Suppose, Jane, that neither of us knew the name of the rose, should we smell its scent any the less on that account?”

“True; but I think it would be better to smell the scent and at the same time to know the name of the flower. Campanulas have not leaves as large as this — look!”

Elim looked, and in order to see better, raised Jane’s hand towards his eyes, lowering his eyes at the same time to her hand.

The result was that his face was about on the same level as the girl’s, and, the half-open door of the greenhouse setting up a current of air, her hair, wafted by the breeze, brushed his face.

The young man raised his eyes and saw close before them Jane’s blue eyes, pink cheeks and fresh mouth, and felt her scented breath.

You know the electricity contained in a woman’s hair. Elim had no strength to resist; he clasped her waist with his arm, and in a transport of passion and with a cry of love pressed his lips to Jane’s, smothering her astonishment in a kiss.

Jane tore herself from his arms.

“Oh!” she cried, “I would not have believed you could behave so.”

And bursting into tears she escaped from the greenhouse.

The young man remained where he was, motionless and confused, with arms outstretched.

A bomb exploding in his pocket would have alarmed him less than this unexpected severity, which really seemed somewhat incomprehensible.

CHAPTER V

THE MEANING OF LOVE

“ELIM rubbed his eyes, thinking he must be under the influence of a dream. Why was Jane annoyed? what made her so angry?

“She did not appear so indifferent to me, all the same,” he said to himself; “I thought she listened readily enough and answered to the language which my eyes spoke to her. True, the kiss which I gave her was unexpected, but her lips did not avoid mine. I could not possibly have been mistaken on that point.”

Quite perturbed by anxiety, Elim entered the diningroom; but he sought in vain to meet Jane’s glance.

Jane was in a sulk, and, when the culprit addressed her, contented herself with answering “yes” and “no.”

Elim, however, persevered. The more Jane treated him with coolness, the more anxious was the young man to gain her forgiveness.

At last he resolved to follow her example, and withdraw to his own chamber, quite determined not to appear either for tea or for supper.

“I really never saw anything like it,” he said to himself as he strode backwards and forwards. “So young and at the same lime so changeable! Changeable, do I say? worse than that, unkind! What a blessing that I am not in love with her.”

At these words he sighed.

“It is true she is beautiful; as far as that goes, there is nothing to be said: she is made like a Venus and is pure as the day; but what a disposition! a regular serpent — Yes, yes, Miss Jane, all is over between us, I warrant you, and now you may flirt with Quenzius, if it amuses you to do so.”

The door of Elim’s room opened, and the servant appeared.

“Will you have tea, sir?” he asked.

“Eh! what?” said Elim, who had neither heard nor understood.

“I asked if you would come and take tea, sir,” repeated the servant.

“I am coming this very moment,” answered the young man — “Well, yes,” said he when the servant had gone out, “I am coming, but I will take no more notice of her than if she were not present.”

And carrying his intention into effect, Elim entered the drawing-room with a cheerful air, and, instead of going to sit by Jane as usual, seated himself near Mynheer August and began to laugh and chat with him.

But Jane, who formerly interested herself in all that Elim said or did, did not even appear to notice his presence.

More than this; she seemed to have forgotten all Elim’s likes and dislikes. He detested tea with sugar, and she put three lumps in his cup: she offered him cream, though it was a matter of public notoriety that he took his tea with a slice of lemon.

The young man was furious. Jane seemed to him a little monster; it is true that she was the prettiest little monster in the world. Elim’s exasperation was so great that he was capable of two alternatives — either of falling out with her for the rest of his life, or of taking her in his arms before her father and mother and pressing her to his heart.

I have often asked myself which is the sweeter to two lovers, their first kiss, or their first quarrel; but when the two things come together, it is enough to drive you mad.

Elim went back to his room choking with rage. Had he known by heart the soliloquy of Figaro, he would have recited it from beginning to end; but as he did not know it, he contented himself with exclaiming, —

“Oh! women, women!”

For fear lest he should be induced to go back to the drawing-room, Elim undressed and went to bed, biting his nails.

At midnight he was still tossing from side to side on his bed, without having discovered anything else to say but the eternal exclamation, —

“Oh! women, women!”

At last, at about two in the morning, he fell asleep.

What happened to him during his sleep? By what dreadful nightmare was he beset? I know not; but, as a matter of fact, he awoke to find himself on the floor.

He plunged into his bath and dressed; then, not feeling sufficiently refreshed, he went down to the garden in order to collect his wits for another interview.

Without knowing why, he went up to the doors of the greenhouse: there he met the gardener, who had a watering-pot in his hand and a pipe in his mouth.

"There is nobody in there?" asked Elim, wishing to make some remark to the man.

"What! nobody, sir?" said he. "Why, there are more than a thousand flowers and a hundred birds." Old joker!" said Elim, entering the greenhouse and closing the door behind him.

"*Zoo! zoo!*" murmured the Dutchman with a shake of his head; and he went off smiling to himself.

Elim, on entering the greenhouse, went involuntarily up to the group of tuberoses near which he had been so happy and then so miserable the day before. His soul floated in the perfume of the flowers like the Indian peri. The scented atmosphere seemed to take possession of him; it penetrated every pore, and filled him with an irresistible sadness.

"How strange it is!" he murmured: "I have never before been at once so happy and so miserable."

He sat down on a bench surrounded by roses, and feeling the sweet sadness intoxicate him more and more, he did not try to combat it, but let his head fall between his hands.

Then his heart, big with sighs, unburdened itself; those tears so sweet that you retain them in your breast as long as possible rose to his eyes. He felt them trickle between his fingers, and, having no longer strength or will to hold them in, he murmured in his softest tones, as though speaking to himself, —

"Jane, my beloved Jane!"

At this moment he seemed to hear a gentle noise at his side, like the flutter of a bird.

He raised his face, all bathed in tears, and uttered a cry.

Jane was standing before him.

He opened his arms and repeated, —

"Jane! my beloved Jane!"

The girl fell upon his breast.

"Oh!" said he after an interval — so powerless is man in the presence of happiness — " Jane, Jane, how you have hurt me!"

This time it was Jane who smilingly offered him her rosy and innocent lips. Elim, as though he dreaded lest she should escape from him again, clasped her with both hands round the head, and once again the lips of the two lovers met.

Jane pushed Elim gently from her.

“Why do you push me away, Jane?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” answered the girl; “it is not I who push you away, Elim; it is not my heart, it is my hands. Naughty hands! take hold of them, they will not push you away any more.”

Elim seized them and covered them with kisses.

Both spoke at once, each looked at the other; they laughed, without knowing what made them laugh. They “thee’d” and “thou’d” each other, though which of them began it they would have been puzzled to say.

“What was the matter with you yesterday, naughty girl?” asked Elim.

“I don’t know: I ran away without knowing why. It seemed as though you had scorched my lips with a hot iron.”

“But afterwards? in the evening?” asked the young man.

“I wanted to tease you,” said Jane, playing with his hair; “but, to tell the truth, it was myself whom I teased; I could not sleep, and was calling to you the whole night.”

“Yesterday you asked me what love was, Jane.”

Is this love? In that case, it hurts a good deal — but yet it is very sweet.”

“You capricious child!” cried Elim.

“Oh! don’t be angry, Elim. You frighten me when you are angry; you frighten me so much that, when I saw you coming, I hid behind this seat, and that is exactly where you came and sat down. Then I looked through the branches and saw you holding your head in your hands; I wanted to seize the opportunity’ to escape on tiptoe; but, all of a sudden, I thought you were crying, and then I couldn’t take another step. You know the fable of Daphné turned into a laurel; I looked hurriedly to see if I were not growing into branches. And at that moment you said, ‘Jane, my beloved Jane!’ I felt my heart melt. You raised your head and your face was wet with tears. I thought I was going to choke, and, if you had not opened your arms to receive me, I should have fallen fainting to the ground. Ah! why do I love you so?”

“Is it the first time you have loved?’

The girl laid her hand upon her heart.

“Yes, and it will be the last,” she said; “and you?”

“Oh! for me,” cried Elim, “it is not enough for me to love you in this world, I want to love you in the next world also.”

Jane did not ask again the meaning of the word “love.”

The gardener’ entered; he had come to water the flowers.

Our young lovers separated, each saying to the other, —

“For ever! for ever!”

Then they went out, Elim by one door, Jane by the other, and so back to their own rooms to enjoy their happiness in peace.

CHAPTER VI

THE BRINGER OF NEWS

EVERY day, in the morning, Elim left his room and ‘paid a visit to the greenhouse.

Jane, on her part, did not fail to go there; had she needed an excuse, she could have given two: —

The watering of the flowers, and the feeding of her birds.

But there was some one who had become far dearer to her than all the flowers in the world and all the birds of the air.

The lovers would run to meet each other and embrace; then they talked and embraced again.

Which should give the other the most kisses was the arithmetical problem which they had set themselves to solve, and for the first lime an arithmetical problem became amusing.

Lost in Jane’s greenhouse as in a second garden of Armida, our lieutenant forgot the sea, forgot the fleet, forgot his friends, forgot his foes. Keen patriot though he was, he lost sight of the fact that the French had reached the heart of his own country, or, if it occurred to him, he said to himself, —

“No, Russia will not fall, Napoleon will slip on the blood of our countrymen; at any rate, such a war cannot last long.”

Then he put to himself this question, which brought its own answer, —

“Besides, what can I do?”

Love also is a despot and winner of victories; it suppresses and enchains all other sentiments. The morrow had ceased to have any existence for Elim; he lived for the present day, and felt so happy in living thus that he had only one fear, namely, that some change should happen to his present mode of existence.

He could no longer call his soul his own; he had given it away.

As for Jane, she also experienced the bitter sweet of love. She felt oppressed, she remained with eyes closed; her half-opened mouth murmured low, —

“Elim! Elim! Elim!”

One day she found herself, amid her flowers, embroidering a whole piece of material with E’s; in her drawing-book she outlined a young man’s head.

“What is that head you are drawing?” asked her mother, who was looking over her shoulder.

Jane started; she did not know her mother was so near.

“The head of Julius Caesar,” she said.

The worthy Dutchwoman did not know who Julius Caesar was, but she asked no further question.

At the time when Jane was accustomed to help her mother with the household work she was suddenly seized with a desire to dance; at the times when she ought to have been practising on the piano she wanted to pray. Sometimes she forgot her keys on a seat in the garden and had to hunt for an hour or two before finding them; sometimes she put salt instead of sugar in the pastry, and, as it was Jane who had made this pastry, Elim maintained that it was excellent. One day — an accident more terrible than if some planet had threatened the earth with destruction — she left a chair in the middle of the floor, thereby disturbing all the harmony of the drawing-room. Finally, when she gave him his coffee without any sugar, Mynheer August perceived that his daughter was losing her head, and one day when she plucked a tulip, a specimen of its kind unique in the whole of Holland, he thought seriously of taking her to task for her folly.

“*Saperloot!*” he cried, opening his eyes as wide as folding doors, “this certainly means something.’”

But he remained with his eyes wide open, and those eyes saw absolutely nothing.

Elim had already been at the factory for three weeks without the least thought of going away. The old man, on his part, was delighted with his company and had forgotten that he was not a member of the family. As for the excellent mistress of the house, she had grown as accustomed to Elim as to some old piece of furniture given her at her marriage, and, provided he was found in his usual place, that is to say, by Jane’s side, she took no more notice of him than of a cupboard or sideboard.

Added to all this, the winter rendered the navigation of the Zuyder-Zee impossible; so that everything seemed to accord with the wishes of our hero.

On the morning of November 1st, Elim repaired to the greenhouse as usual.

There he found Jane in tears.

He questioned her; but, without answering his questions, she went on crying.

“Ah I” she said at last, “my happiness is over, Elim; you are going to leave me.”

“What a foolish idea, dear Jane! Leave you, when I love you more than ever!”

“Ah! if you loved me less, I should find some consolation in being angry: I should call you traitor and ungrateful, and that would console me. Oh! I am much more unhappy at losing you when you are not to blame than I should be if you were.”

“Don’t worry yourself about troubles to come; of course we must separate some day; but when?”

“Why did I love you, Elim?” cried the girl, throwing herself into his arms and overcome with tears.

But I don’t understand, Jane dear; in heaven’s name explain yourself.”

“Listen, this is what has happened; my father has engaged some fishermen to take you back to your ship, and you are going away to-morrow night.”

Elim, as though thunderstruck by the dreadful news, remained in front of the girl pale and motionless. At last he remembered that he was a man, and that consequently the part of comforter belonged to him.

“Hush, hush, Elim! I do not want to be comforted. I feel that, if I were with you, even in the tiniest boat, I should not be afraid of the most angry sea; but when I think of you alone amidst strangers in the tempest, the mere thought of it kills me. Not to mention that you are going to England and from there to Russia, and, once in Russia, you will think no more of your poor Jane. What am I saying — you will think of her no more? Yes, you *will* think of her, but only to laugh at her folly and her love.”

Her voice was drowned in sobs.

Elim, on his part, could not restrain his tears; but at last, though still weeping himself, he succeeded in calming her a little.

“Listen,” he said, “I will ask for an interview with your father; I will tell him that I love you, and that you love me, that we cannot live if parted. When he is quite convinced that we are telling him the truth, he will give his consent. And then the war will not last for ever, as our love will: one day things will change. Come, look; just now the sky was so dark that it seemed to herald the day of doom, and now the sun is shining brightly. His rays are sent by God as an omen of comfort to us.”

Jane smiled sadly. The sun’s rays made two tears gleam in her eyes like liquid diamonds; Elim reverently kissed them away, and then both of them, raising their eyes to heaven, exclaimed together, “God is good!” At this moment the bell rang for breakfast.

The young people came in, as usual by different doors. Mynheer van Naarvaersen, thrusting his hands into his pockets, told Elim all about his business, what he had bought and sold, and what his profits had been for the month of October. Quenzius, contemplating a picture on the wall which represented a meal, sounded a flourish on his nose, like that of a trumpet, which might be termed the bugle-call for breakfast. Jane looked sadly at the lieutenant. Madame van Naarvaersen had just entered the dining-room, her cheeks still red from cooking, when Quenzius, who was looking out of the window, exclaimed, —

“Hallo I there is that chatterbox Montane coming to pay us a visit.”

“Good gracious! Captain Montane!” cried the mistress of the house in alarm; “what are you talking about, Quenzius?”

“It is a judgment from Heaven!” cried Mynheer August in despair.

“It is disaster!” repeated Madame van Naarvaersen. “He is more dreadful to me than the drum, and Heaven knows there is nothing I hate so much as the noise of a drum,” said Mynheer August.

“I hate him worse than flies,” said his wife.

“He will break down all my tulips with his boots.”

“And tear all my carpets with his spurs.”

But what was to be done? Living, as they did, in the country, there was no means of declining to receive visitors.

The enemy was already on the steps.

In short, the visitor who had been preceded by this chorus of imprecations came in with a waddling gait and singing, —

“*The French they love the dance In a way I can’t express; And the secret they possess Of setting things to dancing measure I well believe, When I perceive These doughty conquerors of Nations Making Kings and populations Dance and caper at their pleasure.”*

The doors opened and Captain Custom-house-officer Coast-guard Montane Lassade, native of the neighbourhood of Bordeaux and transplanted from the moors of Mont-de-Marsan to the swamps of Holland, entered.

He was a man of five or six-and-thirty, with the eyes of a rabbit, the beak of a cuckoo, and an assurance which smacked of the Gulf of Gascony a mile off.

He wore a blue uniform with plain epaulettes, and carried a slender sword that resembled a probe.

“Upon my word,” said he, bowing to the company, “there are good reasons for saying, Monsieur *Narvarsan*” — the captain had turned the name of the worthy Dutchman into French — ” there are good reasons for saying that the road to Paradise is difficult. Your Vlamis “ — he had Frenchified the name of the estate as well as that of the owner — ” your Vlamis is a regular Paradise; a Mahomet’s paradise, I mean,” he added, looking at the girl, “inasmuch as Miss Jane herself is worth all the houris put together.”

Delighted with the compliment he had paid, he shook his hat, which was wet with rain, and sprinkled everybody.

“You are so polite,” said Jane, wiping off with her handkerchief the water with which she was covered, “that it is not possible to receive you and your compliments drily.”

“You are divine, Miss Jane!” replied the Gascon; “but guess, if you can, what I have brought you; a pretty pattern for a scalloped collar, with doves perching upon hearts: it is charming. And for you, Madame Narvarsan, a receipt for keeping the colour of preserved rose-leaves.”

“It would have been much better if you had brought a receipt for preserving carpels from damp,” said Madame de Naarvaersen, as she saw with alarm the water continuing to drip from the custom-house officer’s hat like a fountain.

“The captain is the friend of the ladies, or else the ladies are very ungrateful,” said Mynheer August, laying his hand on the shoulder of the new arrival; “he has always a present for them in his pocket and a compliment in his head.”

“By St. Barbe!” said the captain, with a movement of his neck in his cravat and a twitch of the mouth which was habitual to him, “my heart is always as ready to fall at the feet of the fair as my sword to encounter the steel of the enemy.”

“Which will have the most work, Captain, your heart or your sword?” said Mynheer August, laughing: “we have plenty of beauties in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, but also plenty of barrels to probe at the frontier.”

“I am overwhelmed with business,” replied the custom-house officer, appearing not to understand Mynheer August’s joke, and accompanying his answer with his customary twitch; “your compatriots, instead of being grateful to our Emperor, who has refrained from pushing Holland into the sea when he could do it so easily, are holding conventicles in all the inns in order to carry on a correspondence with those damned Russians and confounded English, who are planning a descent upon the coast. A plot has just been discovered, having for its object no less than the handing over to them of the fortress and harbour. Quite a trifle! Luckily, dear Mynheer August, with my customary keenness of scent, I found out the secret quite simply and saved the town. You see before you, Mynheer August, a man who ought to have triumphal arches erected in his honour. The traitors have been seized, and where? Just guess. Like Ali Baba’s forty thieves, in casks of wine.”

“Well, I vote that they erect for you, in front of the principal gate of the town, a statue whose pedestal shall be an enormous barrel. But won’t you breakfast with us, Captain Montane? Coffee should be drunk, as iron is struck, as hot as possible.”

“Willingly, willingly, Mynheer *Narvarsan,”* said the captain with his habitual movement of the neck.

And he offered his arm gallantly to the mistress of the house, while Elim, according to custom, gave his to Jane. Mynheer August and Quenzius brought up the rear.

The captain seated himself at the table.

“And what news is there,” asked Mynheer August, “besides that of the plot which you have just told us?”

“The news is, that our little Corporal — if I may say it without offence — sends us every week the keys of some capital. We have received the keys of Moscow, and we are at this moment expecting those of St. Petersburg. The ladies of Russia have already ordered thirty thousand pairs of shoes for the ball that will be given at the Palace of the Hermitage. What a wonderful country Russia is! if you only knew it!”

“Were you ever in it, sir?” asked Elim.

“No; but I have a brother who wanted to go there. Just fancy; the ordinary hail, which we call sleet, falls from the sky there as large as hens’ eggs; which is a dispensation of Providence, since these hail-stones are kept and serve to cool the wine in summer. What is more curious still, is that they use for climbing the mountains — you know that Russia is a land of mountains?”

“No,” said Elim, “I did not know it.”

“Well, sir, then I tell you of the fact. I was saying that for climbing the mountains they employ small horses called *lochaks,* which probably means *cats,* since they are no larger than dogs.”

“I am only afraid of one thing,” said Elim, “and that is that your countrymen will find nothing to eat in a country already poor, and which, according to report at least, had been ravaged beforehand.”

“A mere trifle!” replied the captain. “What are the frosts of Russia to our grenadiers, who, when crossing the St. Bernard, devoured ice? It is true that they did this in order to descend into Italy, that beautiful Italy which has no rival but Spain, with her orange-groves, her forests of oleander and her bowers of China roses. Ah! Mynheer *Narvarsan,* that is where you ought to have a country-house, between Grenada and Seville, on the banks of the Guadalquivir, beneath the shadow of the Sierra Morena!”

“Judging from the way in which you speak of the woods and forests of Spain,” said Elim, laughing, “it is easy to see that you have been in that country.”

“No, sir, but I had an uncle who used to get his tobacco from there.”

Elim shook his head.

“The difficulty is not to get into Russia,” said he, “but to get out of it again.”

“How is that?”

“Because there are two dread sentinels that guard the gates of Russia — hunger and cold.”

The custom-house officer burst out laughing.

“Oh! as to that,” said he, “you are very kind, but you need not be uneasy: our troops are followed by immense flocks of merino sheep.”

“Would the Emperor wish to establish cloth factories in Russia?” asked Mynheer August.

“No,” answered the captain, “and we have enough of those, thank God, in Holland. No; our soldiers eat the sheep, and as soon as a sheep is eaten, a pelisse is made of its skin; and besides, now that we are at Moscow — ”

“At Moscow!” cried Elim, springing from his chair.

“Yes, certainly, at Moscow. Didn’t you hear me announce just now that we had received the keys of the city?”

“I thought you were joking, sir; but to some jokes there is a limit.”

“A mere trifle!” — it was the captain’s favourite expression — ” But you must have come from under ground, sir, if you have yet to be told this news when all the mutes of Pekin are already talking of it.”

Van Naarvaersen had not wished to distress Elim by the news of the capture of Moscow; but when the young man fastened on him a look of inquiry, he was compelled to admit the truth.

“Yes,” he said in German, “Moscow is taken, it is true; but the Russians are brave, and winter is coming on. Keep cool, Elim, keep cool!”

To ask Elim to be cool on hearing such news was to ask what was impossible.

Montane continued, —

“Yes, sir; and before arriving at Moscow, we defeated a little army of some five hundred thousand men commanded by Souvarof, Korsakof, and Koutosof — perhaps I have not got these crack-jaw names quite right. Russia had mustered all the men she could scrape together; she had formed a regiment of sappers, the youngest of whom was ninety, and whose beards came down to their knees. These beards rendered cuirasses quite unnecessary, for the bullets were flattened against them as though they were targets. By noon all was over, and at two o’clock Napoleon entered Moscow, borne aloft on the arms of noblemen, according to the Russian custom. At the gate of Kalouga, a loaf was presented to him as high as the Canigou, and, on a silver dish, a small whale about five and twenty feet long, which had been caught in the White Sea.”

“Do you know where the White Sea is, sir?”

“Between the Black and Red Seas, sir.”

“It is nearly a thousand miles from Moscow.”

“You mean that it was at that distance in the time of Peter the Great, perhaps. Possibly it was. But, for the benefit of Moscow, the Emperor, who intends to spend the winter there and give some grand fêtes, has blown it nearer with his cannon. In the evening he gave a ball, and all the bells in Moscow were set ringing; there are twelve thousand of them, so this music produced a fine effect. Two squadrons of Cossacks that had been captured the day before danced the galop with great success; all the windows in the city were illuminated at night, and the inhabitants were so delighted that, in their enthusiasm, they set fire to five hundred houses, and three-fourths of the town was burned to the ground.”

“If they did that,” said Elim, “it was in order that all the French might perish in the conflagration.”

As he finished speaking, the servant entered with the English newspapers.

They announced the retreat of the French.

Van Naarvaersen read the news first, then, handing the paper to Elim, said in German, —

“Moscow is in ruins, but Russia is saved; the French have retreated from the town.”

Elim read the paper and passed it to the customhouse officer.

“I do not know English,” said the latter.

“Well, sir,” said Elim, “I do not wish to tell you bad news; ask some one who knows English to translate those ten lines for you.”

And rising from the table, lest any fresh bragging on the part of the Gascon should make him break through the restraint which he had placed upon himself, he withdrew to his own room.

Hardly had Elim gone out when Captain Montane, with an air of mystery, requested Mynheer August to give him a private interview on a matter of the greatest importance.

Mynheer August motioned to his wife and daughter, who left the room together with Quenzius, leaving August alone with the captain.

CHAPTER VII

AN OFFER OF MARRIAGE

WHAT was the affair of such great importance which Captain Montane had to communicate in private to Mynheer August?

History remains silent on this point, and, until further orders, we are compelled to restrict ourselves to conjectures.

All we can say is, that after a quarter of an hour, the door of the dining-room, which had been hermetically sealed in the interval, was flung open violently, and the captain came out purple with rage and tugging at his moustaches, while Mynheer August van Naarvaersen said to him in his gentlest tones and acompanying the words with several bows, —

“The nose, my dear Monsieur Montane, is a great encumbrance. *Saperloot!* an ell is all right, or even two ells; but two and a half ells, that is too much of a good thing!”

The captain crossed the drawing-room without looking at or saying a word to Madame August, who was playing piquet with Quenzius, or to Jane, who was talking to Elim.

When he reached the steps, however, he was heard to mutter, — “Ah! Monsieur *Narvarsan*, I will pay you out for this!”

A moment later the sound of two horses’ feet was heard, and the custom-house officer was seen galloping away.

Not understanding the reason for this abrupt departure, Jane and Elim rose and went to find Mynheer August in his study.

Contrary to his custom, Mynheer August appeared greatly disturbed; he was walking rapidly up and down the room. It was easy to see that he was under the influence of some unusual emotion.

But, on seeing his pretty Jane, his face brightened.

He took her by the hand and kissed her.

“You don’t want to leave your father, my child, do you?”

“Why do you ask me that?” said Jane timidly.

“Because, my dear, a sad thought has crossed my mind. I remember that I have seen in the spring the young swallows, scarcely fledged, that had left their nest. They were caught by schoolboys. Daughters, my poor Jane, are like swallows.”

“I don’t know what you mean, father; but I have never wanted to leave you. I don’t want to leave you now — ”

Jane hesitated; then, recovering her courage, she added, —

“Promise to grant me what I am going to ask you.”

“All right, dear, I understand; you want some jewellery, a ring, a necklace. Tell me what it is, you know I refuse you nothing.”

“Oh! father, I have so much jewellery already that I want nothing of that sort. But you won’t be angry, father, will you?”

“I shall be angry if you don’t tell me at once what you want. Is it a dancing-master? You shall have M. Saint-Leger, a pupil of Vestris, who can dance a gavotte on the neck of a bottle.”

“You will keep on joking, father, but I want to talk to you seriously.”

“Seriously! You? Bless me! I am curious to know what serious matter you can have got in your head.”

“But in my heart, father — ”

Mynheer August looked at Jane.

“Yes, we — I — Elim — ” she stammered.

“Ah I yes, the dear Elim, my poor friend! Do you know,” he continued, addressing the young man, “that we must soon part from you?”

“That is just why I have come to rout you out in your study, my worthy sir. Yes, we must either part for ever, or else for a very short time. I won’t make you a long speech; neither you nor I like roundabout methods. I love your daughter, and Jane loves me: your consent will make us happy. Say ‘Yes,’ and I will leave you; and when the war is over I will come back and say to you, ‘Dear father, give me Jane.’”

“Jane! give you Jane! Jane get married!” cried Mynheer August, taking three steps backward. “*Saperloot!* that is short and to the point, Elim. Why! there is a regular rage, a sort of epidemic, to-day; everybody wants to marry Jane. I have only just sent Montane away, and now another suitor presents himself with the same story.”

“I hope, my dear Mynheer van Naarvaersen,” said Elim, laughing, “that you don’t class me in quite the same category as Captain Montane.”

“*Saperloot!* God forbid, my dear fellow!”

“My worthy friend, I should never have ventured to ask you for Jane’s hand if I had not a certain claim to her — first of all, her love for me, and next my desire to make her happy.”

“Father, dear,” said Jane in her turn, throwing herself on the old man’s neck, “I love Elim with all my heart.”

“Come, my little girl, no folly,” interrupted Mynheer August, “what do you know about your heart, I wonder? Children, when they play with their dolls, often say ‘I love,’ without knowing what they mean. I am surprised, however, that you should have given your love to a stranger without saying a word about it to your father or your mother. Just think, you are not sixteen yet! As for you, Elim, I do not blame you, and you have a two-fold motive for falling in love with a pretty girl and a rich heiress.”

Elim gave a start which indicated that August’s words had slung him as deeply as if he had received a wound.

“Van Naarvaersen,” said he, “you can refuse to show me kindness, but you have no right to withhold your respect from me. I have, in Russia, a competent estate and an unblemished reputation, nor have I ever said or done anything which could lead you to think that I am a mere adventurer. I have no need of your wealth, and have enough for both of us. Give me Jane, just as she is. I ask for nothing with her, except her love and your approval.”

“Your thoughts and your words are honourable, young man: I have only known you for three weeks; I will not insult you by any suspicion. I believe your word; but remember that it is very risky to offer your hand when your very life is in such peril. Montane suspects something. It is your own fault, for you were not able to restrain yourself. He will lose no time in denouncing me to his government, who detest me. For my own part, I am thinking of leaving Holland. In whichever direction our sympathies may lie, the fact remains that we are at war with Russia, and God alone knows when this war will end, and even if it should end soon, again God alone knows when you will be able to return. Moreover, consider how dearly it costs a father and mother to part with their child.”

“I will pay you a visit every year, I give you my word. More than that; I am alone in the world, and my own master; I will live with you if you desire it.”

“No, my dear Elim, no,” said the old man, shaking his head. “The Bible says that the wife must forsake all and follow her husband; but it does not say that a husband should forsake his country for his wife. I must admit that I like you very much, Elim, and were you a Dutchman, I would take you as my son-in-law at once, even if you had not a ducat in your purse. But to let my daughter go so far away from me, she so young and you so fickle! — Who knows! perhaps before six months were over, you might be tired of each other.”

“Had we never met in this world, Mynheer August, I should have said, if I had met Jane in the next, ‘That is the woman of my heart — ’”

“Anyhow, father, I will say one thing,” added Jane; “and that is, that I will never marry any one but Elim.” All this is very serious, my dear child; you speak from excitement, and excitement is a malady which soon passes off. I am quite ready to believe that your love is enduring, and that neither time nor dangers will get the better of it. We are now about to part. Listen to me, Elim: if you come back in the same frame of mind, and if you find Jane’s feelings unchanged, why then God bless you both! I will never stand in the way of my child’s happiness. During the interval, our knowledge of one another will grow deeper; Jane will grow older, and in so doing, she will become more serious-minded.”

“May we depend on your word, father, and exchange rings?”

“As far as my word goes, you may build a castle upon it; but, as regards exchanging rings, I think nothing can be more unnecessary. You are a sailor and engaged in war, you may be killed or perish in a storm, and then Jane would be a widow without having been a wife.”

“My worthy friend,” said Elim, “I am neither appealing to custom nor asking for an engagement; it is only for a consolation to our hearts. Give me the right to count myself as belonging to your family, give me the right to call Jane my fiancée, to call you my father.”

Elim knelt down before the old man.

“Father,” said Jane, “have pity on us; make your children happy.”

“There!” cried the old man brushing away the tears from his eyes, “haven’t you finished, *saperlootl* Get up, and be comforted and embrace each other; but don’t insist on more, if you don’t want me to refuse you everything. I must show common-sense for you, since you do not show it for yourselves. To-morrow you part; but you can part saying that the future depends upon yourselves. Now, leave me in peace, and give me time to collect my thoughts.”

To Elim it seemed as though this consent almost amounted to a refusal, but what could he do? He kissed the old man’s hand, while Jane embraced him, half caressingly, half sulkily, and both left the room slowly and sadly.

Meanwhile, our custom-house captain was on his way back to the town, anathematizing everything that he came across. Being but a poor rider, he bumped terribly in the saddle, which movement added no little lo his bad temper. His companion, a soldier of the marines, and a native of Bordeaux like himself, followed him on a lean horse, smoking a short pipe, and remarking, “Confound the brutes!” every lime the captain gave a jolt, with regularity, never varying.

“Both men and horses, Cabaret” — this was the man’s name, a name evidently bestowed on him on account of the frequency with which he visited the establishments consecrated to the god of wine — ” both men and horses, water and land, air and sky, everything is disgusting in this land of fogs. Twelve hundred bombs! If it only wanted a sign from me to burst in their dykes, they would precious soon be submerged.”

“I quite agree with you, Captain,” replied Cabaret. And, the captain being once more jolted about a foot from his saddle, —

“Confound the brutes!” said Cabaret, who was scarcely a better horseman than his companion.

“I will tell you my opinion, and a candid opinion too. What are the men here? Clumsy tradesmen. The women? Nothing but cooks. And the girls? Milk-jugs. No education, no manners. A piece of Limburg cheese is more acceptable to them than the love of a gentleman.”

“Ecod! I quite agree with you, Captain — Confound the brutes!”

“So I would rather marry the widow of the devil himself than wed that girl. The fool of a Dutchman was quite taken in; he thought I was asking for his daughter seriously! he did not see that I was laughing at him when I made my proposal.”

“The fact is, Captain, that while I was waiting at the door I was cudgelling my brains to discover what on earth you could be about, to marry such a tulip as that!

“And how do you think the old wretch received my proposal?” said the captain.

“I trust he threw himself on your neck, Captain, with open arms and open purse.”

“Ha I ha I said the captain with a very forced laugh,” just think of it; he refused me!”

“Refused you I you are joking, Captain.”

“No, Cabaret, what I am telling you is gospel truth. He considers himself a great nobleman, because he walks on velvet carpets and has bronze candelabra on his table. A fine ideal Why, if he could cover all Europe with his cloth, and pave the whole Zuyder-Zee with his gold, I wouldn’t take his minx of a daughter. What is more,” he added with a frown as he bit his moustache, “in spite of all his wealth, I can ruin him.”

“I quite agree with you, Captain. If you can do so, you must; but it is not easy to get your teeth into these damned Dutchmen.”

“In the first place, Cabaret, he reads the English newspapers: in the second, he is a Jew: in the third, he is — he is — ”

The captain searched vainly to discover what Mynheer August was in the third place: this, however, did not deter Cabaret from replying, —

“I quite agree with you,”

Or from adding, —

“Not lo mention that he has got some men with him — ahem!”

“Some men?” repeated Montane.

“Yes, of whom I am suspicious,” said Cabaret.

“What men?” asked Montane, whose eyes lighted up at the expectation of hearing something which might compromise the cloth manufacturer. “Come, of whom are you speaking?”

“Well, Captain, about three weeks ago I was on patrol with some of my comrades — Confound the brutes!”

“I know what you call going on patrol; the Emperor does not like marauders.”

“That’s good! Each man takes what he can; one man takes a city, another rifles a strong-box.”

“And you’re the man who rifles strong-boxes, are you, booby? Be careful! The man who takes cities gains a crown, whereas he who plunders coffers sometimes meets with nothing but a halter. But this is your business and not mine. What men are you talking about, Cabaret?”

“Well, while I was on patrol, I saw half a dozen men who had gone into this manufacturer’s mill, and such men I regular ruffians: I should not like to have met them on my road — Confound the brutes!’

“And how did you manage to see them?”

“By looking through the window; you see, Captain, I am naturally inquisitive; that is one of my defects.”

“Did you fancy this, or did you really see them?”

“I really saw them; armed to the teeth, Captain, and with beards! — beards to which those of the sappers of the Old Guard are a mere trifle — and the lingo they jabbered! it is ringing in my ears even now.”

“They were probably English runners.”

“The English do not wear beards, Captain.”

“True.”

“Suddenly their leader discovered me and fired at me with a pistol as long as a duck-gun and as big as a blunderbuss.”

“And what did you do, Cabaret?”

“Ecod! I ran away, Captain.”

“And what happened next?”

“Next? Look here; listen carefully to the rest of my story, for it is the most interesting part of it.”

“I am listening.”

“To-day, while you were having your breakfast in the dining-room, I had mine in the kitchen, close to the fire, since in this confounded climate you may roast yourself without getting warm. Presently Mynheer August’s nephew came in to light his cigar. I raised my head and recognized — guess whom I recognized, Captain.”

“Mynheer August’s nephew, I suppose.”

“Yes, indeed, and the leader of my bandits!”

“Cabaret!”

“Devil take me if it is not true, Captain.”

“Ah! my dear Cabaret, if only you were sure of what you were saying!”

“But it is as true as truth itself. As for the other five. I am told that — ”

Cabaret lowered his voice.

“They are shut up in the factory. The old man declares they are mechanics — mechanics who coin false money, I should say! No wonder the old scoundrel is so rich.”

“Unquestionably, I am a man of genius, Cabaret!” I quite agree, Captain, but in what respect?”

For having seen at once that this young man was an enemy of France. You are certain of what you say, Cabaret?”

“Morally certain, Captain.”

“Morally or immorally, it’s all one to me, so long as you are certain.”

“I am certain.”

"Very well, then, to-morrow I will denounce the old rascal to the police. Aha! the crime of high treason, August *Narvarsan*, is no trifle."

As they were now entering the town, Captain Montane motioned to Cabaret to be silent, an invitation which the son of the Garonne obeyed, contenting himself with occasionally breaking the silence by saying, "Confound the brutes!"

CHAPTER VIII

AN ACT OF TREACHERY

THE very next day Colonel van Waan, the commandant of Flushing, gave orders for the arrest of Mynheer August van Naarvaersen, and appointed an officer and twelve men to carry out his decree.

Chance — the author of all the good and likewise of all the mischief that occurs in the world — miraculously threw Captain Montane across the path of the tall and lean Quenzius, who was walking by the side of the canal.

A man in sailor’s dress was following him with a line under his arm.

Montane stopped.

The nose of a custom-house officer, especially when it has attained the size which Montane’s nose had reached, is the keenest and most sensitive instrument in the world.

At the time when civilization was in its infancy, men employed the hazel-wand for the discovery of treasure; in our own days this mysterious rod has been superseded by the custom-house officer’s nose. These officers scent their prey with more keenness than the crow scents corpses, and contraband goods cannot escape them even though hidden in the stomach of a Pantagruel or a Gargantua.

“There is something at the bottom of this,” said the captain. “Humph! Humph! Quenzius out of doors and away from his ledgers! — ”

And he sniffed the air more emphatically than before. “The fisherman accompanying him is a very clever dog; I have seen him two or three times catch fish as big as my arm. That is not natural for a fisherman to do. He has a parcel in his handkerchief; what the deuce can there be in that parcel?’

And Captain Montane, quickening his pace, pulled Quenzius by his cloak.

Quenzius had pretended all along not to have seen Montane; he now pretended not to feel him. But Montane pulled so violently that Quenzius was obliged to turn round.

“Ah! it is you, monsieur Montane?” said he, smiling. “Delighted to see you!”

“The same to you, monsieur Quenzius.’’

Quenzius was continuing his journey, but that was not Montane’s intention.

“Where are you off to?” he asked.

“Straight in front of us, as you see,” replied Quenzius. “Then you are in no great hurry.”

“On the contrary, I am in a very great hurry.”

“Oh! but you won’t refuse to have a bit with me all the same.”

“I have already breakfasted, monsieur Montane.”

“Well, then, a glass of porter; there is an inn, about twenty yards from here, where they sell excellent stuff.” Every one has his own failing. That of Quenzius was a love of porter.

“Excellent porter, did you say?”

“I said ‘excellent,’ and I won’t unsay it; customhouse officials examine carefully all that passes between their lips.”

Quenzius had already lost a little time in this conversation, when he recollected the errand on which Mynheer August had sent him.

“No thank you, Captain, I am in such a hurry that I must not waste a moment, even in your agreeable company.”

“Oh! come, Mr Secretary, a dry pen will not write: you say you are in a hurry; well, to give quickness to your feet, you must give support to your stomach.”

“I admit the truth of both your proverbs, Captain; but it is no less true that I cannot accompany you.”

“That’s a great pity, my dear Quenzius; I wanted to talk a little business with you. I am going to Vlamhuis presently.”

“Your journey will be useless, Captain; my employer will be at the mill the whole day, as it is the beginning of the month.”

“At the mill? Oho!” thought Montane, “the barrel of gold is rolling into our cellar of its own accord, it seems to me. Now, Mr Cashier, you may go where you please; I have got all I wanted out of you without even going to the expense of a bottle of beer.”

And loosing his hold of Quenzius’ cloak, he left him fiee to continue his road.

Then, summoning his worthy follower, —

“Cabaret,” said he, “follow that rogue,” pointing to Quenzius. “And at the same time give the signal to four or five soldiers to follow you in their turn. Should either he or his companion attempt to launch a boat from the beach, arrest them and bring them to me. If you meet any other soldiers, despatch them to the mill to reinforce their comrades in case of need.”

It shall be done, Captain,” answered Cabaret; “only, the job smacks of profit, you know.”

“Who told you there wouldn’t be any profit?

“Oh! of course, the leaders always make a good thing of it; it is not that which disturbs me.”

Make your mind easy. There will be plenty for everybody,” said the captain, rubbing his hands togsther.

The same evening, Van Naarvaersen arrived at the mill with his daughter and Elim; the sailors had already been there for two days waiting for them, and all was in readiness to start as soon as it was dark.

Van Naarvaersen drew out his watch; it was five o’clock.

Elim rose from his seat with a deep sigh; Jane threw herself in tears upon her father’s neck.

“Farewell, Elim,” said she, “farewell for ever; for I have a presentiment that we shall never meet again.”

Elim kissed the girl’s hand.

“Dearest Jane,” said he, wetting her loved hand with his tears, “may God crush me with His wrath if I don’t soon come back to you somehow or other.”

“*Saperloot!*” said Mynheer August, “where do you get such words from? Console yourself, my girl, with the thought that the next spring will bring new flowers. It is a curious thing!” he continued as he mounted his horse, “only yesterday I could have sworn that Jane didn’t know the difference between a cock and a hen, and now — *Saperloot!*”

As Mynheer August was speaking only to himself, it was sufficient that he knew his own meaning.

There were two roads leading to the sea: the one short and direct, which our shipwrecked mariners had taken; the other making a bend and going round by Helmond.

It was this last road which our travellers took.

Elim rode along buried in thought: Mynheer August, seeing that he was not inclined for conversation, chatted with the guide who was carrying a lantern.

The five sailors brought up the rear, talking to one another in low tones.

“What the deuce shall we say to our mates when we get aboard again?” observed one of them.

“That we have come from the kingdom of frogs, inasmuch as men live here much as frogs do with us.”

“Go on,” said a third, “it is bad to break the glass out of which you have drunk. What have we come short of here? Ham or brandy? No, thank God! you could eat as fast as you liked, there was plenty more put before you, and before you had finished your first glass, another was already poured out.”

“True,” said the first, “and it would be a sin to be ungrateful: we were helped to our heart’s content; the bread was as white as sugar, the cheeses as big as blocks of stone, and we had coffee every morning I”

“For my part,” replied the second, “I shan’t go out of my way to thank them; in vain did I ask them for black bread; they always answered, *‘Mix goed.’* As for the coffee, they strained it through a cloth, giving us the thin and keeping the thick for themselves, the greedy pigs! while as for the cheese, it was all in holes!”

“Each to his taste,” said Yorsko, sententiously, “and you can’t take your own rules into other people’s establishments. For my own part, if ever I am hungry some fine day, I shall think of the splendid dinners that I got with the worthy man who is walking in front of you, and I warrant you I shall be filled by the mere recollection of them.”

“No doubt; lazy folk are always thinking about stuffing themselves,” replied the second. “It is all very well to go visiting, but, after all said and done, one is always best off at home.”

“Never mind! Heaven send we see our mates again,” said the sailors, quickening their pace.

It seemed at first as though Heaven were sending a favourable answer to this prayer. They arrived at the spot fixed for embarkation without misadventure; the sea, though black-looking, was calm; the shore appeared deserted.

“*God* zÿ *met ons!*” said the guide, clapping his hands, “he ought to be waiting for us there.”

“*Saperloot!*” said Mynheer August.

“Are you certain this is the place?” asked Elim.

“As sure as I am of my *Pater noster,”* said the guide. They walked some way along the beach, but neither boat nor fisherman was to be seen.

Mynheer August lost all patience: a man who failed to keep his word he regarded as worse than a thief.

“*Saperlootl”* he cried, “I’ll give them all a good dressing down! To take my money and then not be in time! I’ll make it so hot for them that my ducats will melt in their pockets. Drunken scoundrels! I wager they are at the inn.”

But all this outburst did not advance matters in the slightest degree, and the position of Elim and his men became more and more critical.

Mynheer August sent the guide on Elim’s horse to examine the shore to the left, while he went himself to the fisherman’s hut.

Meanwhile Elim, left alone with his men, proposed that they should make a search on their own account. Accordingly he set off, following the beach in the opposite direction to that taken by the guide, hoping to fall in with the boat which was to take them, or find another which might be hired.

As he approached the spot where he had been cast ashore by the tempest, he noticed something white.

Laying a hand on the shoulder of Yorsko, who was following him, he pointed with the other to the object which had attracted his attention.

“Look,” said he.

“If I wasn’t sure that our boat was broken to bits, Lieutenant, I should say she had come out of the water like a sea-calf and was asleep on the beach; but, anyhow, if it is not our boat, it is some other boat.”

“Go softly and silently, my lads,” said Elim; “I fancy I see some men lying down there.”

“Not only lying down, but asleep,” said one of the sailors, “I can hear them snoring.”

“And there is no sentry,” said Elim joyfully.

“No, none,” answered the sailors.

“In that case,” said Elim, still lowering his voice, “let us surround them and take them prisoners; we won’t kill them if we can possibly avoid it.”

The sailors dispersed, surrounded the little boat, and threw themselves upon the sleeping men, who found themselves pinioned and gagged almost before they awoke.

The man who appeared to be their leader was then ungagged.

“Who are you?” asked Elim in German.

“Dutch custom-house officers,” replied the prisoner. “Who is your captain?”

“Monsieur Montane.”

“Hal an old acquaintance; and what are you doing there?” —

I don’t know; four of us have gone off somewhere into the country by the captain’s order, and we have been left to take care of the boat.”

“Many thanks for taking care of it for us,” said Elim.

Lieutenant,” said Yorsko, “the boat is quite ready and is waiting for you.”

“Put this man and the weapons in the locker of the boat,” said Elim. “The rest of them can remain where they are; we shall probably be a long way from here by the time Captain Montane returns. All is ready, you say, Yorsko?”

“Everything, Lieutenant.”

“Then first our prayer, and then to your oars.”

The prayer being finished, the oars were in the act of being raised, when it seemed to Elim that a feeble cry for help reached his ears.

“Stop!” said he to Yorsko, laying his hand on his shoulder.

CHAPTER IX

FLIGHT

WHILE the guide was wandering up and down the” beach, and while Mynheer August was searching for the fisherman’s hut, and Elim obtaining possession of the boat in such a lucky fashion, let us say a word about what was happening at the mill where we saw our shipwrecked friends arrive at the beginning of this story.

Jane had remained at the mill overcome with grief.

The poor child was in love as only a woman loves for the first time. Her pure young heart had received its first impress from the powerful hand of love, and to destroy that impress, you would have to break her heart as you break a glass.

On going into the inner room, the same in which her father had been almost murdered by the bandits, she had sunk into a chair and remained there motionless and silent, like a statue of Dejection, showing no sign of life save the tears that trickled from her eyes.

Suddenly Quenzius entered, breathless and scared, his face as pale as death.

“Where is your father, Mademoiselle?” he cried, “where is your father?”

“He is where I should like to be,” answered Jane, without noticing the emotion in Quenzius’ voice or the alarm depicted on his countenance.

“In the name of the big book,” cried the latter, “tell me which way your father has gone.”

“I don’t know.”

“But I must know! He is in danger.”

“In danger! my father?” cried Jane, alarmed at last by the words of Quenzius. “What are you saying, Quenzius? My father! Why?”

“Ah! Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle I think of the burgomaster Van Kempenaar van Driel.”

“Why! what have I to do with your burgomaster? Don’t you hear me asking you in what way my father is in danger?”

“Montane has denounced us all to the burgomaster, Mademoiselle.”

“All! whom do you mean by all?”

“Well, you, your father, the Russians, and monsieur Elim. He said your father was a traitor who had relations with the enemy, and had promised to hand over the fortress to the English and the Russians.”

“Well, what then?”

“Why, the burgomaster gave orders that your father should be arrested and sent to prison for trial.”

“My father in prison I to be tried I perhaps shot! Oh! our cup of misfortune is indeed full!”

“Alas!” said Quenzius, raising his hands and his nose to heaven.

“What are you doing here then, sir?” cried Jane. “Why don’t you run, fly, to find my father? Warn him, so that he may get away and seek shelter among strangers. Tell him to go — Has he any money? Take these pearls and diamonds.”

“I have taken from the bank all that he requires, only I have not had time to debit Mynheer August’s account in the big book; but, should any misfortune occur, you must enter it yourself, Mademoiselle — Ten thousand new ducats.”

“Will you go, wretched man!” cried Jane, pushing Quenzius out. “Tell my father to go away, do you understand? to go away, and not to be anxious about my mother or me. They will not harm two women.”

“God grant it, Mademoiselle!” said Quenzius, climbing on to the back of the big carriage-horse and disappearing in the gloom like the phantom of a giant.

Jane remained stunned. Her love for her father had made her forget for the time her love for Elim.

She remained alone with the miller and his wife, or rather, alone with her grief.

An hour later a knock was heard at the door.

“Open!” cried a peremptory voice, “open, in the Emperor’s name.”

No answer was given.

“Look sharp!” said the same voice, “we know you are there. Open the door, or we shall treat you as rebels and set fire to the house.”

“My God!” cried the miller’s wife, “it is the voice of the same ruffian who tried to murder us, Peter.”

“I hear you, you old hag!” cried Cabaret: “if you don’t open the door, we will break it in.”

“Ah! Mademoiselle, what are we to do?” said the miller’s wife to Jane, who, hearing the noise, now appeared at the entrance to the kitchen. “We are lost and all we have.”

“All we have!” said the miller, “what does that signify? The master will restore it to us a hundred times over; but our lives, the young lady — ”

“I would rather die than fall into that ruffian’s hands!” cried Jane. “Peter, guard the door as long as you can; I shall escape and try and join the others.”

“Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle, beware of the canals!”

“Wasn’t I brought up here? don’t I know the smallest stream?”

And seizing her jewel-box, Jane jumped out of a low window into the garden, from which a path led down to the sea.

She had already reached the beach when the doors yielded to the blows of the bandits.

Without stopping or considering where she was, Jane ran along the shore. Fear gave her strength, the hope of rejoining Elim lent wings to her feet.

As she ran, she kept crying, —

“Father! Elim!”

And at last she thought she perceived close down by the sea some object resembling a boat and men moving about near it. But she was so breathless and exhausted with her efforts that she could scarcely articulate. It seemed to her as though she were being pursued; she was only a few yards from the water’s edge, but unhappily the boat was disappearing.

She felt it impossible to take another step; her breath had failed her. She summoned all her strength to cry for the last time, —

“Father! Elim!”

Then she fell fainting on the beach.

Her pursuers were not more than a hundred yards from her.

CHAPTER X

THE FINGER OF GOD

IT was her last cry that Elim had heard.

“Back water, my lads, back water!” said he.

The sailors obeyed his directions, and the boat was pushed ashore again.

“Stop!” cried a voice, drawing gradually nearer, “stop, or we fire!’

“Help, my lads,” said Elim. “One of you stay to mind the boat, the rest follow me.”

And he sprang ashore with a pistol in each hand.

At twenty yards from the boat he found Jane motionless and lying like a corpse.

He seized her in his arms and carried her towards the boat.

But her pursuers were close upon her. Elim faced round. At two paces from him was Cabaret, some distance in advance of his men.

“Stop, yourself! or you are a dead man!” cried Elim.

The bandit stopped, but only for the purpose of raising his carbine to his shoulder.

But before he had rested his cheek against the stock, Elim fired, a flash gleamed in the darkness, and Cabaret, pierced to the heart by the lieutenant’s bullet, rolled over on the sand.

Elim jumped into the boat.

“Now, my lads, pull! pull for all you’re worth; not only are our own lives at stake, but hers too.”

“The young mistress!” cried Yorsko. “Bravo, Lieutenant, well done!”

“Firel” shouted a man from the shore, pointing at the boat, which was rapidly making off like a belated sea-bird.

The bullets spent themselves in the darkness; one only of them, striking the sea, drenched Jane’s face with water.

“Thank you for the honour you do us, gentlemen! cried Yorsko.

The water splashing into Jane’s face made the girl open her eyes.

She was in her lover’s arms.

“Elim! dear Elim!’ she cried.

And their lips met in a long and tender embrace; the poor children had thought themselves separated for ever, and lo! the finger of God was reuniting them.

Suddenly Elim felt himself touched on the shoulder by Yorsko.

“Well?’ ‘he asked.

“Whyl don’t you see? — ”

“What?”

“That we can see nothing, Lieutenant.’’ And, in point of fact, a dense fog had just spread over the surface of the sea.

“Don’t row another stroke! I hear the breakers.”

The sailors stopped rowing. Elim laid Jane on the thwart and stood up in order to listen.

“The reefs are to starboard,” he said.

“And to port as well, Lieutenant,” said Yorsko, “do you hear?”

It was but too true; on both sides could be heard the sound of the waves as they dashed against the reefs.

Elim looked in alarm at Jane.

“Have we lost our bearings, Lieutenant?” asked one of the sailors.

“No,” said Elim; “on the contrary, I know only too well where we are.”

“There is a passage, no doubt,” said Yorsko.

“Possibly,” said Elim; “but who will show us it?”

“The custom-house man who is lying in the bottom of the boat,” said Yorsko. “I fancy that he ought to know it, as it is his business to patrol the coast.”

“By God, Yorsko, you are right. Ungag him, but without untying his feet or hands.”

Then, turning to the girl, —

“Don’t be afraid, Jane dear,” said he.

“Why should I be afraid, Elim? Shall I not die with you, if I must die?”

The custom-house man was ungagged.

“The reefs I the reefs!” he cried as soon as he had recovered speech.

“Good! he is afraid!” said Elim. “Well, yes, we are on the reefs.”

“But there is a passage,” replied the man, whose terror increased in proportion as the sound became more audible.

“Can you find the passage?” said Elim. “I promise you not only your life and your liberty, but a hundred ducats into the bargain if you find it.”

“I could find it blindfolded, Lieutenant.”

"Untie his hands and give him the rudder."

His hands were promptly untied, and he took his place at the helm.

Elim sat beside him and cocked his second pistol.

"All right, all right," said the custom-house man, visibly terrified by the noise of the waves against the rocks, and putting the helm to starboard, "give way, give way hard!"

Elim repeated the order in Russian.

The sailors bent to the oars, and the little boat flew over the surface of the sea.

"Not too near the coast!" said Elim.

"But look on the port side," said the man.

And, truly enough, a long line of foam gleamed through the darkness; and, as the fog was dense, it was clear that the boat must be skirting the reefs at hardly twenty yards' distance.

"It will be impossible with this wind to make the open sea in a small boat, Lieutenant Elim," said one of the sailors.

"Would you rather go back ashore and fall into the hands of the French?" replied Elim.

Then turning to the pilot, —

"Courage!" he cried.

"I am risking my own life at the same time as yours," answered the custom-house man; "you can make your mind easy, I will do my best."

It was the best answer he could have made.

Elim took Jane in his arms again, and wrapped her in his cloak under the pretext of protecting her from the cold, but in reality to shut out the danger from her eyes.

Less resigned than she, he said to himself that it would be indeed a cruel fate if they should be brought together for a brief moment, only to be parted again for ever.

He had, however, retained the use of his eyes, and did not take them off the line of foam whose incessant roar filled his ears with terror.

At last he seemed to see a break in that line at a place where, for three or four cables' length, the sea appeared to be calm.

"The passage!" he said to the custom-house man.

"I see it all right," said the latter, porting the helm.

The little boat answered to the rudder like a horse obedient to the rein, and in an instant had left the line of reefs behind and found herself in the open sea.

They were now, however, in greater danger, perhaps, than before, and, as Yorsko had said, it was impossible to keep the sea in such a tiny craft.

The fog at the same time was growing more and more dense.

"I have done all that I undertook to do," said the custom-house officer in a tone of discouragement; "put me to death now, if you will, but I can do no more."

"True," said Elim, almost as much discouraged as the other.

And pressing Jane to his heart, he let his head fall with a sigh on the child's head.

He saw clearly that in this frail boat they could not proceed half a mile without being capsized.

Suddenly Elim raised his head; he had just heard the sound of a distant bell.

Nowhere does the sound of a bell travel so far as at sea and during the night; you might imagine that some bird with wings of bronze was skimming the wares.

"One, two, three," counted Elim.

And the last stroke died away with a long vibration. "That sound doesn't come from shore, Lieutenant," said Yorsko, "the distance is too great."

An idea flashed across Elim's mind; he turned towards their Dutch pilot, and observed that he was gazing with an expression of delight in the direction from which the sound of the bell had come.

"I understand," said Elim to him, "we are close to your sloop, and they have just struck the hour aboard of her."

"Very likely," said the Dutchman.

"How many men on board?" asked Elim.

"Enough to string the lot of you up to the yards like lanterns."

"*You* won't enjoy that sight, my friend, whatever happens, for you will be a dead man long before."

Then, with a frown, and placing his pistol to the man's head, he repeated, —

"How many men are there?"

"Twelve," replied the pilot laconically, seeing that the young lieutenant was in no humour for joking. Then turning to the sailors, —

"My lads," said he, "the good God has sent us a vessel which can keep the sea; it only remains for us to take her."

"In that case, Lieutenant, the thing is already done," answered Yorsko.

"There are a dozen men in the crew."

"They are not on the look out, we are; the proverb says, 'One man forearmed is worth two who are not,' so we are twelve to twelve — "

"But there is the young mistress," added Yorsko, nodding his head in the direction of Jane.

"One of you will look after her."

"Ah! then we shall be only five, that is to say, only ten against twelve — but bah! custom-house men, and Dutchmen into the bargain!" said Yorsko.

All this was said in Russian, so that Jane understood nothing of it.

"My lads," continued Elim, addressing the sailors, "you understand the situation, don't you? We are playing a difficult game; but, in face of the words — ' It must be done ' — none of you, I hope, will recoil. Besides, I will show you the way, and you will follow me."

"Through water as through fire, to paradise or lo hell!" answered the sailors with one voice.

"Thanks, my lads; with you I could reach the moon: examine your guns, and the moment we come alongside the sloop, jump aboard and kill all who resist."

Then turning to the custom-house pilot, —

"As for you," he said, "you know our agreement."

"Pull away," said the pilot, turning the rudder in the required direction.

At the end of five minutes they perceived the vessel, which was rocking quietly on the waves.

A single sentry was pacing the deck.

By the movement which the sentry made Elim saw that they were discovered.

"Look out!" said he, again placing his pistol to the pilot's head.

"Who goes there?" cried the sentry.

The pilot gave the password.

"All right!" muttered the sentinel.

And turning away quite unsuspectingly, he summoned the chief officer.

"Am I going to leave you, Elim?" cried Jane in terror. "Oh! I can't leave you, even for a moment."

"Cling round my neck, then; we have reached our destination."

The boat had, in point of fact, now come alongside the sloop. Elim supported Jane with one arm, while with the other he caught hold of a rope, and was the first to spring on board the sloop.

The five Russians followed their lieutenant.

The sentry tried to give the alarm, but before he could utter a word he was hurled overboard.

The Bussians were masters of the deck.

Elim took out his purse and threw it to the pilot, who had remained in the boat.

“Here,” said he, “a Russian always keeps his word.

There is your money, to begin with; as for your liberty, you have got it; while as for your life, it depends on yourself, my friend; you found your way here, and you can find it back again.”

Then, addressing his men, without paying any further attention to the pilot, who, with an oar in each hand, had already begun to draw away from the vessel, — Clap down the sailors’ hatchways, my lads,” said he; “I will take charge of that of the officers.”

“Where are you going?” asked Jane.

“To pay a visit to Captain Montane, most probably,” said Elim; “but, as he is a bachelor, it wouldn’t be proper for a young lady to go and see him; so sit down and wait for me.”

Reassured by the humorous tone adopted by her lover, Jane did as she was ordered.

Elim wrapped her in his cloak: selfish lover that he was, he would not have the girl’s cheeks lose any of their roses.

Then he went softly down the officers’ gangway, and, guided by the sound of voices, made for the door of the cabin. Ascertaining that the key was on the outside, he bent his head down and looked through the keyhole.

He was not mistaken: the captain, seated at table with two of his lieutenants, was drinking bumpers of champagne.

“Ah! Captain,” one of the lieutenants was saying, “you have done it neatly, upon my word.”

“To Mademoiselle Jane’s health!” said the other.

“To Jane’s health!” repeated the captain, emphasizing the baptismal name, without its accompanying title of respect. “Thank you, gentlemen.”

And the three officers emptied their glasses.

“Go and fetch your mates,” said Elim to Yorsko.

“I understand,” said the latter, going off on tiptoe.

Elim continued to look and to listen.

The captain uncorked a third bottle.

“And the dear lover,” asked one of the lieutenants, “what are you going to do with him?”

“Ah! her lover, that’s quite another matter,” said Montane with an evil smile; “he is to be brought here to me tied and bound; after which we shall ship him off to France, so as not to be annoyed by his lover’s complainings.”

“Here we are, Lieutenant,” said Yorsko.

“All right,” answered Elim; “be silent, and do as you see me do.”

“Well, Captain,” said one of the lieutenants, “let us be generous.”

“With all my heart,” said the captain, throwing himself into a chair with a self-conceited air, —

“Out with it, Lieutenant, what is it?”

“To the health of the poor lover! It is the least you can do for him, Captain.”

“Ha! a good idea!” cried Montane. “To the health of the poor lover, as you say; and I only regret that he is not here to give point to the toast.”

“Your wish is answered, Captain,” said Elim, opening the door: “here he is.”

The three officers gazed in stupefaction at the newcomer, who had sprung from nobody knew where. Elim stepped forward to the table, filled a glass, and, raising it above his head, repeated, —

“To the health of the poor lover!”

Then, turning to his sailors, —

“Shout hurrah! all of you,” he said in Russian.

The sailors shouted hurrah! in chorus.

Elim emptied his glass.

“Well, gentlemen, don’t you drink?”

Captain Montane, who had recognized Elim, trembled so violently that his glass emptied itself.

The other two officers, not understanding what was happening, set their glasses down on the table and put their hands to their swords.

“No resistance, gentlemen,” said Elim; “we are masters of your ship, and should you doubt the fact, here is the proof: come in, my lads!”

The five sailors entered with their guns in their hands. “Captain,” said Elim, addressing Montane, “this is one of those tricks which Fate sometimes plays us. Instead of my being in your power, it is you who are in mine; instead of my being shipped off to France, it is you who will go and travel in Russia; but you won’t be badly off, as you will get there in time for the sleighing. Your weapons, gentlemen.”

There was no possibility of resistance; accordingly the three officers gave up their swords.

“Yorsko,” continued Elim, “take these gentlemen to the lieutenant’s cabin; we want this one for a lady.”

CHAPTER XI

A HURRIED MARRIAGE

WE know for what lady the cabin was destined.

The moment Jane was settled in it, Elim, taking command of the sloop, gave orders to weigh anchor.

“Suppose we were merely to cut the cable?” said Yorsko.

“Quite right; that is much the quickest way.”

Yorsko seized a hatchet and severed the cable, and the ship began to drift.

But almost immediately Elim gave orders for the sails to be unfurled, the wind which was blowing off shore filled them, and the little sloop, though somewhat clumsy in build, ploughed the waves merrily enough.

At dawn Elim perceived the line of warships forming the blockade.

A small cutter, which acted each night as scout to the fleet, was making for them.

The young officer in command of the cutter perceived, from her build and the cut of her rigging, that the sloop was Dutch. He fired upon her with his one gun.

And, having given the alarm, he hastened to rejoin the fleet.

In an instant all the batteries of the fleet were lighted up with lanterns.

Elim seized a speaking-trumpet and shouted, —

“Do not fire; I am a Russian, bringing in a Dutch vessel.”

His voice, however, died away in space.

A flame shot from the port-hole of the nearest vessel, and a ball, ricochetting on their port side, sent the water flying over the deck.

“What the deuce are they up to, Yorsko?” asked Elim.

“Can’t you see, Lieutenant; they are firing at us.”

“But they will sink us!”

“In about ten minutes, unless — ”

A second ball cut short Yorsko’s words and severed the main-yard at the same moment.

“Unless what?” asked Elim.

“Unless we alter our flag, Lieutenant.”

Elim raised his head; the Dutch flag was floating proudly at the peak of the sloop.

"You can see for yourself, Lieutenant," said Yorsko, "that they think we are coming to board them."

"What a fool I am!" said Elim.

Then, turning to his men, —

"Down with the Dutch flag," said he, "and hoist this handkerchief."

The Dutch flag was lowered, and Elim's handkerchief took its place.

Before the exchange had time to take effect, a third ball buried itself in the fore part of the sloop.

But the firing ceased when the white handkerchief, which indicates a vessel bearing a flag of truce, was observed.

Elim cast his eyes over the fleet and recognized his own ship.

"Steer for the *Vladimir,* Yorsko," said he; "you must be in a hurry, like myself, to get home again."

Yorsko steered towards the *Vladimir.*

It now began to be light enough to distinguish what was going on in the fleet.

The crews of all the vessels, aroused by the shots which had just been fired, were on the decks and shrouds.

No less curiosity was evinced on board the *Vladimir,* towards which, in preference to the other vessels, the sloop appeared to be steering.

"Good!" said Elim, "there is Nicolas Alexiovitch looking at us through his spy-glass."

Then, taking up the speaking-trumpet, he shouted, — "Halloa! Nicolas Alexiovitch, good morning."

"Deuce take it if it isn't that madman Elim!" said the lieutenant.

Elim, Elim, Elim!" shouted twenty officers at least.

Lieutenant Melosor!" shouted the crew with one voice. "Hurrah for Lieutenant Melosor!"

"Run alongside!" cried Elim to the sailors.

The latter, armed with boat-hooks, by means of which they broke the shock, grappled the sloop to the frigate.

"Really, my dear Elim," said Nicolas Alexiovitch, holding out his hand to the young lieutenant, "you must be a magician: you fall into the water and don't get drowned; you go through fire and don't get burnt. We thought you had been strung up, and here you are safe and sound; welcome to you."

“And I haven’t come alone,” said Elim, holding out his hand to Jane, whom Yorsko was supporting in his arms.

“Ah!” said Nicolas, looking at the girl: “I am not surprised that we mistook you for an incendiary; those two eyes are enough to set fire to a whole fleet.”

“My dear Nicolas,” said Elim, “be good enough to give the lady your arm until I have explained matters to the captain.”

Nicolas Alexiovitch bowed to Jane and offered her his arm.

Elim found the captain in the act of ascending the companion-ladder from the cabin to the deck.

The captain uttered an exclamation of joy as he recognized Elim, for he loved the young man as though he were his own son.

“Good! very good!” said he when Elim had finished his story: “I will see that you get a good reward for the sloop which you have brought in. But tell me, sir,” added the captain in a stern tone, “who is the lady who accompanies you?”

The captain, looking through his port hole, had seen Jane being transferred to the frigate.

Elim thereupon related the story with which we are already acquainted. The captain listened coldly to the young man’s narrative.

“All that you have told me, Elim Paulovitch, is true, I have no doubt,” answered the captain; “but your heroic conduct in the case of the drowning sailors, and your return with one of the enemy’s ships, have attracted the eyes of the whole fleet to you. You must preserve your name pure from all suspicion, Elim; as matters stand, any one will have it in his power to say that you have invented this whole tale in order to contract an intimacy with a person who is unworthy of you.”

“Captain! — ” exclaimed the young man, an angry blush mounting to his cheeks.

“Do not let us get angry, Elim; on the contrary, listen to me calmly. The more angry you grow, and especially with me, the more you will be to blame. You know, do you not, that our maritime regulations forbid our having women on board in time of war. What story would you have me tell the admiral? His first question will be, ‘Is she his wife or his sister?’ “

Elim hung his head and remained silent. The captain continued in a milder tone, —

“Let us even suppose, my dear Elim, that this affair should do you no harm in the estimation of the service; ought you not to consider the reputation of this poor child, who will have all the more to lose in respect to the affair in proportion as she is innocent? You are now her sole protector, Elim, and a girl’s honour is a sacred thing.”

“What must I do, Captain?” said Elim sadly. “Guide me, counsel me.”

“You wish me to advise you, Elim?”

“Oh! yes, Captain, I entreat you to do so.”

“You want me to speak to you as if you were my son?”

“I ask you as a favour to do so.”

“Do you love this girl, Elim?”

“I am ready to give my life for her.”

“Does she love you?”

“With all her heart.”

“Can you make her happy?”

“I am sure of it, Captain.”

“Have you the consent of her parents?”

“She is engaged to me.”

“Well, then, my dear fellow, marry her!”

So quickly, Captain?” asked the young man, almost choking with joy.

“At this very instant; I will give you my cabin and will be your best man.”

“Oh! my good, kind friend I” cried Elim, throwing himself into the worthy officer’s arms.

Come,” said the captain, “now it is all arranged: go and warn the bride; it is only fair that she should have five minutes’ notice.”

Elim went on deck, and, half laughing, half crying, snatched the girl from the arm of Nicolas Alexiovitch and pressed her to his heart.

“But what has happened, Elim, what has happened?” asked Jane.

“My dear Jane — ” answered Elim, “Good heavens! I can’t believe my happiness.”

“Tell me; speak.”

“The captain insists on our being married immediately.”

“Immediately?” repeated the girl, quite bewildered. “You can’t refuse to obey him, Jane, it is the law.”

“I don’t want to refuse,” said the girl, blushing and lowering her eyes.

“Jane, you are an angel!”

“The priest is waiting for the bride and bridegroom in the captain’s cabin,” said Yorsko, “and I warn you, Lieutenant, he is in a hurry.”

“Come,” answered the girl in a scarcely articulate voice, while her arm, trembling on that of Elim, spoke more intelligibly than her words.

Nicolas Alexiovitch acted as father to the bride, and the captain performed the office of best man for the bridegroom.

The whole crew had the privilege of going down between decks and being spectators of a ceremony which, taking place but seldom on board ship, aroused general curiosity. As soon as the nuptial benediction was given, the corks of the champagne bottles were heard popping noisily.

They were the guns that celebrated the wedding.

Jane, covered with blushes, thanked the spectators and offered her rosy cheeks to the officers of the *Vladimir* to be kissed.

“And now,” said the captain, “you must be tired out. Good night, my children, they will awake you in time for dinner.”

He shut the door and went out.

Elim and Jane remained alone.

Three days after the wedding, the fleet went into winter quarters at Tchata.

The first person whom the newly married couple encountered on the quay was Mynheer August van Naarvaersen.

Elim and Jane threw themselves into his arms, both addressing him as “father.”

The old man nearly died of joy; he wept, he laughed, he caressed, he scolded.

But there was no good in going back over the past; all was settled, and settled for the best.

A letter was written to Jane’s mother, who had remained at home.

A week later Jane received an answer from her mother.

The worthy woman sent her blessing; but she could not forbear expressing to Jane her regret that she had been unable to make, for her wedding breakfast, the famous preparation of apples, the secret of which she alone possessed. And what was also, according to her, an irreparable misfortune, was the absence of the celebrated bed which had been in the family for five generations.

It was Jane’s turn to laugh and cry.

“Father dear,” said she, “will you tell my mother — ”

“That you got on very well without it, my child,” answered the old man.

Jane looked at her husband and threw herself, covered with blushes, into his arms, while Elim. over his shoulder, squeezed the hand of Mynheer August van Naarvaersen.

“*Saperloot!*” said the old fellow, “it is a fool’s trick to check one’s tears; they only choke a man.”

And he burst into tears, without an attempt at concealing his emotion.

Happily, they were tears of joy.

THE END

CROP-EARED JACQUOT

Translated by Alfred Allinson

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INTRODUCTORY

THE tale I am going to tell you is the life history of the Chief Huntsman of a Boyar, or great Russian Feudatory, the very last representative perhaps of the old Muscovite manners and customs of the days of Peter the Great and Riren.

True, my story will have more to say about the master and the mistress than about the man, and might be entitled *The Princess Varvara* or *The Prince Groubenski* equally as well as *Crop-eared Jacquot.* But what would you have? In an age when an author's first preoccupation is to discover a name for his novel or play, even before he has found a subject, and when more than half his chance of success depends upon the title, *Crop-eared Jacquot* really seems to me to be startling and original enough duly to arouse my readers' curiosity. So *Crop-eared Jacquot* it shall be!

I had often heard talk both at St. Petersburg and Moscow, and still more at Nijni-Novgorod, of the Prince Alexis Ivanovitch Groubenski. The most incredible eccentricities were related of him; but these eccentricities, pronounced enough to shock the maddest of Englishmen, were, even as pieces of rough humour, over-shadowed by a sinister cloud of gloom and horror, that seemed to brood over all this nobleman's strange life. You felt that, albeit half effaced by time and by the efforts of interested persons whose wish it was to remove the stain altogether, the life of the *Last of the Boyars,* as he was generally called in the Government of Nijni-Novgorod, was disfigured by one of those grim blotches of dark red,

such as they show dyeing the floor of the Galérie aux Cerfs at Fontainebleau and the Royal Closet at Blois — the signs-manual of ancient bloodshed.

Everywhere I had been advised, "If ever you happen to stop at Makarieff, remember to pay a visit to the ruins facing the Monastery, on the opposite bank of the Volga — the ruins of the Castle of Groubenski. Above all," people invariably added, "do not forget to ask to see the Portrait Gallery."

None but such as have been my travelling companions can properly appreciate the degree of obstinacy I am capable of under circumstances of this sort. Once I nose a legend, a tradition, a bit of history, no objection or opposition whatsoever will turn me from the scent, once the hunt is up.

Accordingly, I had not failed to exact a promise from the skipper of the steamer I had boarded to convey me from Nijni to Kasan, to stop under any circumstances at Makarieff, whether the boat passed that place by day or by night. And, as a matter of fact, the instant we hove in sight — I will not say of Makarieff, for Makarieff is not actually visible from the surface of the Volga — but of the battlemented walls of the old Monastery, which oomes down to the banks of the stream there, the Captain was as good as his word, and sought me out to tell me — “You must be getting ready, sir, if you still mean to get off at Makarieff; we shall be there in ten minutes.” Ten minutes more and we *were* there; and in obedience to my beckoning, a boatman put off from the left bank of the Volga and struck out for the steamer, to put me ashore.

Then, and not till then, I noticed a young Russian officer, with whom I had exchanged a few words of casual talk during my passage down the river, to be engaged in the same preparations as myself.

“Are you by any chance getting off at Makarieff, sir?” I asked him.

“Alas I yes, sir; I am on garrison duty there.”

“Your ‘alas!’ is not over and above flattering to Makarielï.”

“‘Tis an abominable hole, and I cannot help asking you however you come, without exterior compulsion, to be stopping there. What in Heaven’s name have you to do at Makarieff?”

“Two most important things. I am going to buy a carved chest, and I am going to pay a visit to the Castle of Groubenski. Indeed, I am bound to confess that, when I saw you were getting your baggage together, I congratulated myself on the very thing that occasions your despair. Knowing your kindness and courtesy, I said to myself, ‘Ha, ha I here’s a cicerone ready found to help me make my bargain and make my visit. ‘“

“As far as that goes,” the young officer assured me, “you are not mistaken, and it is I shall be obliged to you for filling up my time. Distractions are few and far between at Makarieff; you offer me that of your society, and I accept it gratefully. It is the honey nurses put on the rim of the cup, when they want to get children to lake medicine. Now, you must permit me to lay down some conditions to our bargain.”

“Out with them; I agree to them beforehand.”

“You understand this, that since the removal of the great fair to Nijni-Novgorod, nobody ever stops at Makarieff nowadays.”

“Except people coming to buy a chest and visit the Castle of Groubenski!”

“True; but such people are extremely rare. Anyhow, the fact remains, there is no inn at Makarieff, or if there is, it is of such a sort as to make it worse than there being none.”

“Ah, I see what you are driving at. You are going to offer me board and lodging. I am used to these little Russian peculiarities.”

“Yes, that is precisely what I am going to do.”

“Another man might hesitate about accepting your kindness, but I say’ Yes ‘right out;” and, so saying, I gave him my hand.

“‘Faith,” said he, “I was far from expecting such luck. Let’s get into our boat at once;” for the shore-boat that was to convey us to land had just ranged alongside the steamer.

I said good-bye to the skipper and sundry persons with whom I had scraped acquaintance during my three days’ sail on the Volga, and proceeded to take my seat in the skiff, whither my young companion followed me.

“Ah! so here you are, Count?” the boatman exclaimed on recognising him. “Why, the carriage has been wailing for you ever since yesterday evening.”

“Yes,” replied the young man, “I fully expected to have arrived yesterday; but these wretched boats are as slow as tortoises.... And is all well at Makarieff?”

“Yes, Count, praise God, all is well.”

“Now, I hoped he was going to inform me that the town had been burnt down, that not a house was left standing and that the garrison had been recalled to St. Petersburg, or, at any rate, moved on to Kasan. But nothing, nothing whatever, has happened. Well, God’s will be done;” and the Count heaved a sigh as heartfelt as if he had veritably wished to find the town burnt to the ground.

A carriage and a man-servant in French livery awaited us on the quay — the carriage not a droshky at all, but a well-appointed American buggy.

The sight raised my highest hopes — to wit, that in the room my host was going to give me I should find a bed and washhand-stand, two articles I had not met with in one and the same apartment since leaving Moscow.

I was not disappointed. Count Vaninkof’s house — Vaninkof was my young officer’s name — was furnished in French fashion, and I found within a verst of the Volga a replica, more or less exact, of my Paris bedroom.

Tea was awaiting us — real Russian tea, I was thankful to see, full-flavoured and fragrant, and brewed, moreover, with all the exquisite art a Muscovite servant is master of in the matter of tea-making.

As we emptied our glasses — in Russia tea is drunk from glasses, ladies only being allowed cups — we arranged that next day after breakfast would be the time for our excursion to the Castle of Groubenski; and the same evening orders were given for a boat to be at our disposal between ten and eleven the following morning.

Also before breakfast we were to inspect — Count Vaninkof and myself — two or three shops containing the best assortment of carved chests in the town.

At nine o'clock the Count was up and about, and we started to roam the town through — driving, of course, for like the complete Russian gentleman he was, our young Gaptain was incapable, unless absolutely obliged, of walking a hundred yards anywhere.

I bought two chests, which, needless to remark, my host insisted on paying for. No help for it, it is the custom of the country — and a very agreeable custom too — and you are bound to submit.

After an excellent breakfast — my host boasted a French cook — we had the carriage out again, then took boat, and crossed to the other side of the Volga. There a couple of saddle-horses were in readiness, their bridles held by two grooms. There was a hill about as high as Montmartre to climb; but this was far too heavy an undertaking for a Russian officer to attempt on foot — one of the men who scale the peaks of the Caucasus by mountain-tracks known only to the chamois and the bouquetins, when it becomes a question of bringing Schamyl to bay among the clouds or in the precipitous gorges of his native mountains.

We mounted, and in ten minutes more found ourselves face to face with the ruins of the Castle of Groubenski. It was a magnificent edifice built towards the latter end of the eighteenth century from the plans of the celebrated architcct Rastrelli, the same who designed the Winter Palace at St. Petersburg and the Czarina's Palace near Moscow. Abandoned for perhaps thirty or forty years past, it has suffered the fate of every neglected building — that is to say, with the exception of a few of the offices, a single gallery, and a single pavilion, it lies in ruins.

At its feet, at the very moment when its life expired, a nondescript fishing village, Niskevo by name, had sprung into existence; and from the summit of its hill -the old-time Residency stood scornfully looking down upon the youthful activity of this child of yesterday.

True, by carrying its gaze further afield and looking towards the Volga, the granite spectre of the old Castle might behold the Monastery of Makarieff; and perhaps the two ancients, of nights, when all is asleep around, may by help of the wind hold mysterious discourse with one another touching the mutability of human creations — the Castle deploring the days when its saloons and pavilions and galleries sparkled with lights and re-echoed to the tread of crowds of guests and merry-makers, the sound of music and the shock of glasses; the Monastery bewailing the seasons of sacred solemnity, when it spoke aloud to sixty vassal villages by the voice of its twelve bells and the chants of its two hundred monks.

Nowadays a poor dozen monks only inhabit the Monastery. As for the Castle, the illustrious race of its masters is extinct, and it belongs to the Farmer of the local taxes, a certain Master Kirdiapine, whose father was third waiter once upon a time at Razgoulai’s Hotel, the best inn in Makarieff in the days when Makarieff still possessed inns — in other words, when Makarieff still had a faiT.

Wo had driven from Makarieff to the Volga, w’e had ferried over from the right to the left bank of that river, we had climbed the hill leading to the ruins; but so far we had accomplished only the easier half of our pilgrimage. We had still to get hold of the keys of the Castle.

The fact is, the two or three servants to whom had been intrusted the care of these venerable ruins, never dreaming anybody would take it into his head to visit them, and never fearing any wreckers would think it worth their while to knock them about, had very reasonably concluded they might just as well absent themselves a while, in order to offer their services to shipowners as stevedores and porters. By this means they were enabled every day to enjoy the luxury of drinking a glass or two of tea, with sugar to match, seated comfortably together round the same table, which is the greatest treat imaginable among men of the labouring class in Russia.

On this particular occasion they had begun the day as they intended to finish it, and though it was barely midday, my three fine fellows were already installed at the tavern.

However, one of the party agreed to move on receiving a promise of twenty copeks, which the Count's man took it upon himself to make, and he started up the hill keys in hand.

To find the fellow and strike the bargain had taken pretty near an hour; but meantime we had employed our time to good advantage. Slipping through a breach in the wall, we had made our way into the gardens, which formerly belonged, and presumably belong still, to the Castle. They formed a vast enclosure, quite a couple of versts in length, and after stretching along the level summit of the hill, finally sloped down to the banks of the Volga. But here time had produced an effect exactly the opposite to its destructive power on the buildings, and the result was beneficent and picturesque. Left to themselves, the trees had attained a gigantic size when standing isolated, while those united in groups had interlaced their boughs in the most wonderful profusion of greenery. Certain lime avenues were especially magnificent; the trees must have been planted many years ago, under the Queen Elizabeth, and were grown so thick and impenetrable to the sun's rays that the moment you entered their shade you seemed to have descended into a mine, and to be threading one of those subterranean corridors that pierce the bowels of the Ural Mountains.

In some places, closing the vista of one of these avenues or marking the centre of lawns now all overgrown with weeds and brambles, stone pedestals were still to be seen, on which statues had once stood — masterpieces, or at any rate copies of the masterpieces, of antiquity. On one of them you could still make out the letters JOV... OMNIPOT.. and on another the dedication, *To Venus and Adonis.*

On quitting the main avenue and turning off to the left we came across the deep bed of an artificial stream, now all but dried up; though far down in the depths there still ran a tiny thread of limpidly clear water, flowing from a neighbouring spring, which we had all the difficulty in the world to discover, hidden as it was in the tall grass. No doubt this watercourse had once been the fairest ornament of the garden, which it traversed from end to end, winding in graceful curves, while several arches, thrown boldly and picturesquely across the ravine, formed bridges, still in substantial repair, though their utility was altogether a thing of the past.

In the most retired corner of the park we lighted on the remains of a detached Pavilion. It had once been the rendezvous of Prince Alexis and his courtiers; but alas! years ago the winter storms, its only visitors now, had torn away doors and windows, and scattered them far and wide. If only these walls, which in their prime possessed both eyes and ears, had had a tongue, no doubt they could have told tales to-day to make the stones of Monceaux and the Grand Trianon blush with shame. But they are dumb and silent, save when the hurricane lends them a voice — a voice that in sad and sombre tones ever proclaims to the monuments of men's hands what experience ever teaches men themselves: "There is naught sure and naught eternal save only Death!"

In the interior were still discernible a series of mythological frescoes in very fair preservation. They were undoubtedly the work of a French artist of the school of Boucher, and represented Venus and Mars captured in the nets of Vulcan, the Rape of Europa by the White Bull, whose shape Jupiter had borrowed, Leda amorously pressing to her bosom the Divine Swan, concluding with a picture of Diana bathing and surprised by Actæon. The ceiling had fallen in.

Facing this Pavilion was a heap of stones and bricks almost completely over-grown with brambles and ivy. I asked my young friend if he knew what was the origin of this accumulation of *débris*.

"I think I remember their saying," he told me, "on the first occasion of my visiting the ruins, that this was the remains of another Pavilion, the fellow to the first."

"Did it fall in from decay?" was my next question.

"No; it was destroyed intentionally, by what I was told."

"And for what reason, do you happen to know?"

"I know the story commonly told to account for it."

"And what is the story? I give you fair warning, I am the most persistent asker of questions ever was in this world."

"The story goes that the last Prince Danilo Alexiovitch, on a visit here twenty-five or thirty years ago, made so strange a discovery in this Pavilion, that not only did he resolve to demolish it, but actually drove in the first pickaxe with his own hand."

"And what did he find in the said Pavilion, eh?"

"Ah, that is just where the mystery comes in! They speak of a walled-up, barricaded, condemned cell, into which nobody had ever thought, or rather dared, to penetrate. Prince Danilo did so, the tale continues, without saving a word to anyone, and by the living Lord I saw something so appalling, he came out again looking as pale as a dead man, and promptly ordered the whole building to be razed to the ground, as I mentioned before.”

At this moment we saw approaching the servant of Master Kirdiapine, the new owner of the Castle, the individual who had been unearthed from the tavern by the promise of twenty copeks. I questioned him about the demolished Pavilion; but he knew even less of the matter than Captain Vaninkof, who, as we have already seen, did not know very much.

However, the fellow had the keys of the Castle, and volunteered to show us the interior. I readily accepted his offer, hoping to light on something that might establish a connection between the Castle and the mysterious Pavilion.

The man led the way, taking us in by a side door opening into the vestibule. No sooner was this door thrown back than a damp air, saturated, as it were, with antiquity and smelling of decay, set us coughing. Every step we took on the flags raised a heavy cloud of dust, while the wind, which had followed us through the open door, tossed the tom and tattered remnants, still hanging on the walls, of superb tapestry, which must originally have come straight from the Gobelins as the gift of some reigning prince or king.

“The best-preserved part of the building,” our guide informed us, “is the Portrait Gallery.”

Seeing it was in all likelihood the most interesting too, we told him to take us there, sacrificing the rest of the ruins to its claims.

I cannot tell whether it was fancy or reality, whether it was a result of the original brush-work or of the way the pictures were lighted, but it struck me that these portraits, with their darkened tints, one and all cast upon us, who came disturbing them in their age-long silence and solitude, looks of hatred and displeasure. From their richly carved frames, twisted and warped, however, by age, they seemed ready to cry out, “Who are you, rash visitors, indiscreet troublers of the dead? Who has given you any right to disturb the silence of the past? Regone; we know you not, and we are equally unknown to you. Yes, you may look at us, and question us, you will learn nothing of our wild lives and tumultuous pleasures, our Homeric banquets and our unbridled passions.”

“This is the Prince Alexis Andreovitch Groubenski,” our guide said, as if in answer to the unspoken question I was addressing to the most modern of the series.

My eyes were fixed on the portrait of a man of tall stature. His high forehead, heavy eyesbrows, Roman nose, and strongly projecting lower lip proclaimed a vigorous and energetic will equally implacable and irresistible. The mouth wore a smile, but the smile had something wild-beastish and menacing in it. I felt sure that at the smallest hint of opposition the brow must have puckered with savage hate, the dark, crafty eyes, caught in a moment of comparative softness by the painter, must have flashed with the lurid glare of overmastering anger.

Next to the Prince, wearing a costume of the time of Louis XVI. — as is generally known, Russia was, in matters of dress, always some year behind her model France — hung a portrait of a tall, handsome woman. She was dressed in a robe of yellow satin, trimmed with lace such as was worn towards the end of Louis XVI.'s reign, which would make her contemporary, taking her country-women's old-fashioned ways into account, with the early years of the First Empire. The face was charming, the eyes expressing a bright, keen intelligence united with an inexplicable tinge of sadness. Without a shadow of doubt the woman had been unhappy in her life, and if she had enjoyed some brief moments of joy, they had been but lightning flashes, come and gone in an instant.

"That is the Princess Marfa Petrovna," the servant informed me, noticing the attention I was bestowing on this portrait, which represented the wife of the Prince Alexis. But my eyes had already left her figure, interesting as it was, to travel to another female portrait.

This last wore a blue dress, with a long waist, stiffened with whalebones, such as were still fashionable at the Russian Court as late as 1806 or 1807. Her figure was slim, and held coquettishly; her hand, charmingly shaped, and full of aristocratic elegance, held a spray of verbena. Rut, strange to say, the face of this alluring being was entirely obliterated by means of a huge smear of black paint I "Whose portrait is this?" I asked eagerly of the man who had named the others for me.

"Ah," he answered, "that portrait! As to that one, we have only guess-work to go upon; nobody knows for certain. But the most generally received version would seem to be that it represents the Prince Alexis' daughter-in-law, wife of the Prince Boris Alexiovitch, and mother of the last Prince — Prince Danilo."

"But why the blotch of black paint across the face?"

"God only knows; likely the lady was plain."

"Is there no tradition on the subject?"

The man hesitated.

"It does not do to believe everything we are told," he said at length.

"Well, but come, what *are* we told?" I asked.

But he only shook his head.

"There is only one man alive who knows the real truth of the matter," he declared, "and he has always refused to speak."

"And who is this man?"

"Yoü know him, my Lord," the fellow answered, turning to the Count.

"I do?" exclaimed the young Captain, in some surprise.

"Yes! I mean Crop-eared Jaquot."

"Whose grandson is in my father's service?

"Precisely."

"What! is he alive still?"

"He has just attained his hundredth year."

"And where does he live?" I asked.

"At Makarieff."

"Do you hear that, Captain?"

"Yes. But, it seems, he had made a vow, if he lived to be a hundred, that he would perform a pilgrimage to the Cloister of Troitza. He reached his hundred the day before yesterday, and yesterday he started for the Monastery."

"Ry the Lord, I have no sort of luck!" I cried, greatly disappointed.

"Well, now, look here," said the Captain, addressing me, "If you will stay another day at Makarieff with me, I will promise you something."

"What will you promise me?"

"To watch for Jacquot's return, to make him tell me the whole history of Prince Alexis Groubenski from one end to the other, and to send it to you."

"Will you really do that, Count?"

"I will, upon my word of honour."

"Then I will stay with you, not only one day, but two." And, truly, I would have stayed not two days only, but a week, a fortnight, a month, if I had not had my two (ravelling companions waiting for me at Kasan.

He was a most charming fellow, was this Count Vaninkof, and, what is more important, a man of his word. The proof of which is, that I duly received, two months after my return to France, the manuscript I print below. The reader will find it absolutely unaltered, for, fearing to diminish its authenticity, I have changed nothing whatsoever except the title.

It was originally headed “Days of Yore,” and appeared to be written by a former Intendant of the Prince Danilo, son of Prince Boris and grandson of Prince Alexis. Where and how Count Vaninkof unearthed the manuscript, I have not an idea, nor do I suppose it is of much concern to my readers to know these facts.

If it amuses them, — that is the one thing needful.

CHAPTER I

THE PINK PAVILION

It was on June 17, 1828, that we arrived at the Castle of Groubenski — Prince Danilo and myself.

Prince Danilo did not know the Castle, having been brought up at St. Petersburg, and never having visited it during the lifetime of his grandfather, the Prince Alexis, who had died some two years before.

Prince Danilo had just lost his father, the Prince Boris, and had wished to judge for himself what this same Castle of Groubenski was like, of which he had heard so much talk.

We arrived about ten o’clock at night, and the Prince retired immediately, being very much fatigued. Next morning, about eight o’clock, I was summoned to his room, where I found him still in bed.

“Ivan,” he said to me, directly he saw me, “what is the howling I have heard all night long, and which has prevented me closing my eyes for one single minute?”

“Doubtless, my Lord,” I replied, “it is the dogs in the kennels, which have scented the approach of game during the night.”

“Oh ho I” cried Prince Danilo Borisovilch, frowning; “so there are kennels, are there, at the Castle?”

“Why, certainly I” I hastened to answer, thinking to give him an agreeable piece of news. “Your Highness possesses a magnificent pack — five hundred hounds, a hundred and twenty setters, and sixty greyhounds. As for kennelmen, I suppose you have a good forty of them.”

“So my establishment,” exclaimed the Prince, “embraces between six and seven hundred dogs, and forty men to look after them?”

“There or thereabouts, my Lord,” was my answer.

“But these confounded animals,” resumed the Prince, “must eat as much bread in a day as would suffice to feed a hundred and fifty poor people for a whole month.”

“Oh, never mind that, my Lord!”

"Well, I must beg you, Ivan, to make arrangements that all these dogs are hanged or drowned this very evening. As for the kennelmen, you will put them on work of some sort or another, while such as can make a living elsewhere, you will discharge. The money that was spent in keeping up the pack we will devote to the foundation of a primary school at Makarieff or Niskevo."

"Your Excellency shall be obeyed," I answered; and I made my bow and went out to give orders that the six hundred and eighty dogs, hounds and greyhounds and all, should be drowned or hanged that evening, as his Highness thought good to command.

But half an hour later, just as preparations were beginning for carrying out this wholesale execution, the Prince was confronted by an old man of sixty or thereabouts. His face was wrinkled, and his long white hair fell about his shoulders. He had not a tooth left in his head, but his eyes shone with a fire that proved he was still far from having reached the last days of his life.

His dress consisted of a coat of raspberry-coloured velvet with gold embroidery, leather breeches, and great French knee-boots, as they are called. A Circassian girdle confined his waist, and a hunting-knife hung at his side, while he held an old-fashioned three-cornered hat in his hand.

Though somewhat uncompromising, as we have seen, towards dogs, Prince Danilo, who was a philanthropist, Was first-rate with men. Accordingly, he received the old fellow with great affability, and asked him who he was.

"Saving your respect, Excellency," the man answered, in a firm voice, "I am an old serf of your Highness. I am called Crop-eared Jacquot, and I was at the time of his death first Squire to the Prince Alexis, your grandfather."

Doubtless this name of Crop-eared Jacquot was not unknown to Prince Danilo, for he cast a rapid glance at the place where the ears should have been, whose absence had earned for poor Jacquot the nickname by which he was universally known.

"Welcome, friend," said Prince Danilo, "and sit ye down; you are tired, perhaps?"

"I thank your Highness; but it would not be becoming for me to sit in your Excellency's presence. I am come merely to prostrate myself at your feet, and beseech you to grant my prayer."

"What prayer, my good fellow?" asked Danilo Borisovitch.

“They tell me, your Highness has thought good to visit your princely displeasure upon us.”

“What is wrong with you, my poor Jacquot? You are not going crazy by any chance, eh?”

“Ah I your Highness, and there would be nothing wonderful if we did go crazy to see such cruelty — the massacre in cold blood of six hundred and eighty poor beasts that have hurt nobody! Why, indeed, your Excellency, ‘tis nothing more nor less than the slaughter of the Holy Innocents by King Herod! What harm have the poor dogs done your Highness? Believe me,’ tis no laughing matter to shed so much blood, and though it is only the blood of brute beasts, I say you shall answer for it all the same before God.”

“Enough, I say — enough! I have made up my mind; so stop...”

But the old man fearlessly interrupted his lord and master.

“And why should I stop? Am I not the only defender God has given these poor beasts? If I hold my tongue, who will speak up for them? I will not stop. How can you be so inhuman, Excellency, as to massacre these poor, poor dogs? For, after all, the pack, established by your ancestors long ago, is part of the family, and has existed, always renewed, yet always the same, for more than a hundred years. Its fame, after spreading through all the Russias, has penetrated even to France. It has been talked of at foreign Courts, and Sovereigns have written by their own or other’s hands to your ancestors to beg. a specimen of the breed; and lo! in a moment, for no reason whatever, you would destroy this world-renowned pack! What can you be thinking of, my little father?’ cried the old man, warming to his work.” I tell you, if you did such a deed, your fathers’ bones would turn in their graves, and the spectre of poor Prince Alexis would start from his coffin to point its fleshless finger at you and curse you.... Remember, my dear and honoured master — remember the kennels of the Groubenskis have existed and have been ever growing since the reign of Peter the Great of glorious memory! What, what can induce you to attack them so savagely to-day? Think how the massacre of the Strelitz was a blot the Great Emperor found it hard to rid himself of, and yet the Strelitz were guilty, which the poor dogs are not. It would indeed be, for you and your princely descendants, an eternal disgrace, an everlasting humiliation, to have no pack of hounds, to say nothing of the remorse of conscience you must ever feel within yourself at the thought of such a foul murder. The dog, your Highness, is one of God’s creatures like the rest, and it is written in the

Scriptures, ‘Rlessed the man which shall love animals!’ Then how can you, little father, whose face is kind — how can you act so against God’s will and pleasure?... You see, Excellency, I have put on, to present myself before you, the same costume I used to wear when I had the honour to be confidential groom — Squire, in other words — to your grandfather of gorgeous memory, the good Count Alexis. The costume has not left the wardrobe for the last six years, and I never thought to put it on again, except to be buried in it. See, too, Highness, I have donned the Circassian girdle that he gave me three days after the thrice-happy arrival of your mother at the Castle, when you were still a babe in the cradle, little father. Three days after her coming, which gave cause for much apprehension to all us retainers, but which his Highness made a blessing to everybody, a great hunting-party was held. Not one of us could run the fox to earth, unless it were our neighbour, Ivan Ramiroff, who all but got him; seeing this, I dashed off after the cunning brute, and caught him. Yes, I caught him, I did, and saved the honour of the house. Well! I have said my say; you must act as you hold good, my dear and honoured master. Only I will not leave this room till I have got mercy for my poor dogs.”

“Well, what would you have, then?” asked the Prince, who began to be melted by this long and fervent appeal.

“I would have your promise, if it is still your Excellency’s gracious pleasure to have the dogs hanged or drowned, first to cut off my head. Then you can massacre the poor innocent beasts at your leisure, and never a voice will be raised in their defence. But, dressed as I am and wearing this girdle you see, I will present myself before your father, your grandfather, your forebears and ancestors; I will show them my poor dogs slaughtered, and the men who guarded them as lovingly and carefully as the apple of their eye, left to starve. What will they say at such a sight? — I ask you that. I am a man of other days,” the old man went on, shaking his head, “and your modern ways are strange to me; so send me as soon as may be to join my masters, whose habits I respected, and who loved me because I loved my poor dogs.”

The old man had come to the end of his strength. The violent excitement he had undergone was succeeded by a state of complete collapse. His voice failed him, his breathing grew spasmodic, his legs trembled beneath him, and he would have fallen backwards, had not the Prince thrown his arm about him.

He was carried out unconscious; but the vigorous intervention of old Crop-eared Jacquot saved the pack, and the kennels, though destined to be abolished later on, were preserved for the time being.

And not only were the kennels saved, but the Prince Danilo Borisovitch went further, and conceived a warm affection for old Jacquot. He would often have him to the great house to question him about years gone by, and it thus came about that the pair would often spend whole hours in each other’s society.

One evening, after one of these long talks with the old man, the Prince sent for me, and on obeying his order, which I did instantly, I found his Highness suffering under strong excitement.

“Ivan Andreovitch,” he asked me, “are you ready to spend some hours with me?”

“I hope to spend all my life with you, my Prince,” was my answer.

“Yes, yes, of course; but I am thinking of something else just now. Are you ready to help me demolish...?” But here the Prince stopped dead.

“To demolish what?’ I asked him.

“To demolish, or, at any rate, break through a stone wall. Jacquot has just told me a very extraordinary story, which highly concerns our family in general and myself in particular. Look you, Ivan Andreovitch, I would know for certain whether he is telling me old wives’ tales or whether he is speaking the truth. I cannot have a stranger mixed up in the affair, and still less any of my serfs, so I beg you not to refuse to do what I ask, Ivan.”

I agreed on the spot, as may be supposed, and asked the Prince what the story was Jacquot had told him.

“To-morrow — you shall know to-morrow,” the Prince assured me. “After all, the whole thing may only be a silly fable. I am inclined to think poor old Jacquot’s dotage is beginning he told me some things that seem altogether impossible. However, I am determined to make sure with my own eyes; so to-morrow we will find out what to think of this most strange story. I count on your help and your discretion, Ivan.”

I once more repeated my promise to the Prince to help him on the morrow in whatever way he required. This done, he proceeded to discuss with me various questions of land cultivation and tillage, the felling of timber, etc., but all the while his mind was obviously taken up with quite other matters. He did not hear a word I said to him, and his own remarks were so inconsequent I had the greatest difficulty in following his meaning.

“Well, to-morrow, then,” he finally concluded, getting up and offering me his hand.

“To-morrow, no less than to-day, I shall hold myself always at your Excellency’s orders.”

I am ready to confess the mysterious nature of the adventure had so captivated my mind and set my imagination agog, that I did not sleep a wink all night. It was just as well, for barely had the first rays of dawn appeared when the Prince sent a messenger to rouse me.

“Are you all ready?” were his first words on seeing me enter his study. “Well, I am ready too; so we will be moving.” And giving me the example, he descended the steps before the great door, after giving orders that no one, not even Crop-eared Jacquot, was to enter the gardens during his absence.

We traversed a great part of the park, crossed the two little bridges thrown over the artificial river, and made straight for the Pink Pavilion. Arrived there, we found in the vestibule a couple of pickaxes, a supply of wax candles, and a black wooden box of moderate dimensions — all of which articles had been brought there by the Prince himself prior to our arrival.

The Pavilion contained five or six rooms. After passing through the first three of these the Prince stopped, and, striking with the crowbar he was carrying against a solid-looking wall, said —

“This is the place.”

We immediately set to work, and after an hour and a half’s labour the wall offered an opening large enough to allow a man to creep through. The Prince lit two candles, and gave me one, after which we pushed our way into the room beyond, which was quite dark, and hermetically closed on every side.

The strong smell issuing from this vault-like chamber very nearly stopped me from passing the opening; but seeing his Highness go through, I felt bound to follow.

But no sooner was I inside than I felt my hair stand up on my head. It was not merely that a hideous odour of the tomb caught my breath; more than that, for there, amid the remains of some pieces of furniture, half rotted away, I beheld a human skeleton lying on the floor.

At the sight the Prince crossed himself and said — “Lord, have pity on this Thy servant’s soul, for it may well be she died in despair.”

Then, turning to me after a few moments’ silence, he added —

“So the old man spoke truth after all.”

“What does it mean?” I asked wildly, scarcely recovered from the violent emotion I had just experienced.

“It means the *dead sins of bygone years*, my dear Ivan Andreovitch, that’s what it means. I will tell you the whole story one day; for the moment it is beyond me. Only help me to gather all this together.”

And, suiting the action to the word, he began reverently to collect the bones lying scattered at his feet, in which task I forced myself by a supreme effort of will to assist him.

We laid all that was left in the box prepared beforehand for the purpose, which the Prince carefully locked, and put the key in his pocket.

In collecting together these relics of mortality, we had found lying amongst them a pair of diamond earrings, the remains of a pearl necklace, a gold wedding-ring, some wire and vestiges of whalebone, to which still clung the half-rotten fragments of some silken material, the colour faded beyond the possibility of identification.

The Prince carefully locked up the earrings, the remains of the necklace, and the wedding-ring. Then we shouldered the box, and, utterly exhausted with our labours and the emotions we had gone through, we returned to the Castle.

“Get me fifty workmen at once,” he said to the Factor of the Estate, whom we met as we crossed the Courtyard, “and let them bring their crowbars and pickaxes with them.”

For my own part, I went straight to my rooms, to wash and change my clothes. When I returned to the Prince’s apartments, I failed to find him in his study, the room where he usually sat.

“Where is the Prince?” I asked his valet.

“In the Portrait Gallery,” the man told me.

I followed him there, and found him standing in the middle of the vast apartment, still all covered with dust and plaster — in fact, in precisely the same state as on leaving the Pink Pavilion. He was gazing, perfectly still and silent, at a woman’s portrait, the face of which, by some strange caprice of the former masters of the Castle, was completely hidden under a huge blotch of black paint.

The box containing the bones rested on the floor directly underneath this sinister-looking picture. Turning to the Prince, I saw that he was weeping silently.

Presently a messenger arrived to tell him the workmen were assembled; on which he wiped his face, which was streaming with tears, and left the Gallery, signing to me to follow him.

The Prince led the workmen to the Pink Pavilion, and pointing to the building, ordered them to destroy it to the very foundations, and convey the materials to the Church of Niskevo, which he was building at the time.

But before starting the men on their task, he resolved to enter the sepulchral chamber once more in person, to make a last inspection of anything that might still be there. It was well he did; for on one of the walls of the room, engraven on the stone with some sharp-pointed instrument, was an inscription, of which I could only make out what I copy here —

“Year 1807 — the 14 October.

“Farewell, my best beloved Boris! Your own dear Varvara... here, by the cruelty of your...”

“An axe!” cried the Prince, excitedly. “Give me an axe!”

I gave him one with a trembling hand, for this name of Boris was his father’s, and Varvara was his mother’s.

His Highness seized the hatchet, and shivered into splinters the stone that bore the inscription, shouting at the same time to the workmen —

“Down with it! Raze it to the ground! Before today’s sun set let there not be one stone left upon another!” And by the same evening the Pavilion was literally demolished to its very foundations.

Next morning at daybreak one of the Prince’s carriages stood waiting for us at the door of the Castle, into which we climbed, carrying with us the box of bones covered like a coffin with a black cerecloth embroidered with a silver cross.

“To the Monastery of Makarieff,” were the Prince’s orders to the coachman.

Arrived there, we found the monks assembled in the great Courtyard. The box was deposited in the vault of the Groubenski Princes; after which we attended a solemn service for the repose of the soul of the Princess Varvara.

The same night Prince Danilo Borisovitch, the last of the race of the Groubenski, started for St. Petersburg, taking no one with him but myself, and giving holiday and freedom to all his serfs and retainers. Three years later he died, not forgetting in his will either myself or Crop-eared Jacquot.

Our mysterious labours and the demolition of the Pink Pavilion soon got noised abroad among the populace. As we had been seen carrying the black box out of the Pavilion, it was reported that the Prince had there discovered a chest full of gold and precious stones; and with a view to confirm this account of the matter, his Highness himself declared how Crop-eared Jacquot had informed him of a secret hiding-place, in which the old Frince Alexis had deposited sundry family jewels. Everybody congratulated the Prince in this lucky find, and as we had received orders, Jacquot and myself, to tell the same tale, everybody was firmly convinced of its authenticity.

CHAPTER II

THE PRINCE ALEXIS

Oh, no! little father (Crop-eared Jacquot confided to me one day, in the course of one of the many conversations that followed his ever-memorable intercession on behalf of the hounds), no! in old day life was by no manner of means conducted on the same lines as nowadays. In those times a great Lord lived like a great Lord; but to-day, under the reign of our good Emperor Nicholas, — whom God preserve! — everything is grown mean and petty, and the glories of yore fall and fade away more and more every day. It is very like, the world is come to its last years, and. is verging fast to its extinction.... Ah, I can only repeat, little father, Ivan Andreovitch, (Jacquot resumed with a deep sigh), that when I see what goes on about me now, I am sometimes tempted to sinful murmuring and the use of wicked and impious words like these: “Why, Lord, in your anger have you deemed good to leave me yet alive among the living? It were surely time my old bones were sleeping the eternal sleep, and my eyes closed for ever, instead of shedding the bitter tears they must needs shed at sight of the things of to-day!”

All is now brought down to so mean and low a level it shames me, who have seen the great days of old. Look at my master, the Prince Danilo, for example; he owns scarce a poor thousand souls all told, and if there are left in all the Castle thirty or forty servants at his orders, it is the most there are! Can that be counted a proper supply for a great house like ours? Yes, I know the pack is well kept up; but you know very well that but for me the poor dogs would have disappeared long ago.

Yes, the pack is left. But the musicians, and the huntsmen, and the dwarfs, and the fools, and the negroes, and the running footmen, and the mutes, where are they gone? Yet they were once upon a time adjuncts — the indispensable adjuncts, I tell you — of every house of any degree of self-respect. Well, Ivan Andreovitch, search and see, and you will not find a vestige of them whether in my master’s house or, I may safely say, in that of any Russian nobleman in the land; one and all, they live with a niggardliness that is altogether deplorable! I am ready to wager you will not find one, of the present generation, that knows how to drive a six-in-hand; they drive shabbily, the best of them, with a beggarly pair of horses, never caring if folk take them for nobodies or dirty traders!

But, after all, what is the good of horses to such-like folks? We have reached such a pitch of abomination that we harness a single horse to a carriage so small as to be next door to invisible; the lackey takes his seat side by side with his master, and calmly folding his arms, is driven by his master, who makes himself coachman to his own servant.... Ah, dear Ivan Andreovitch, I tell you this, and you may take my word for it, I cannot witness without feeling sick the depths of degradation into which we are fallen. We may say without fear of contradiction, there is no proper sense of dignity left now in the world, and God only knows what will be the end of it all!

Consider the state our nobles are come toi There are some positively not ashamed to engage in trade, while others have married merchants’ daughters, and keep their ledgers posted with their own hands. They might just as well let their beards grow at once, and wear their trousers tucked into their boots, and the kumatch shirt over their trousers. If only they got any richer by it all, but, upon my word, they only sink deeper and deeper into debt. Every one of them owes more than he can ever save all his life long; and as for money coming in, you may hear them grumbling every day and saying how long it takes to arrive.

Ah, but if their fathers and grandfathers and forefathers — whom God keep in His everlasting kingdom! — if only they could leave their graves, they would soon send their dear descendants to the stables, and there, according to the fine old customs of our ancestors, give them such a sound taste of the knout and the rods they would deem it the wiser course to change their fashion of life back again.

Well, now, think of it, little father, here is our master, Danilo Borisovitch; well, he has still a thousand souls left, or thereabouts, so he could be a great lord, if he would. Well, I ask you, does he look like a great nobleman? does he act like one? He has studied at Moscow, at a University — how do they call the thing? it passes my understanding — for all the world like a shopkeeper’s son, and sat there on the same benches — so they tell me, though I am bound to say I can scarce credit it — on the same benches with the shoemakers’ and the tailors’lads!... Now, I ask you, Ivan Andreovitch, as a reasonable and sensible man, tell me in God's name, is it possible shoemakers and tailors can be fit comrades for a Prince? What has come of it? Why, he has ennobled the shoemakers and the tailors, and has learnt himself in their company the mean habits you see him practise.

When he came here first, instead of ordering a great hunt, instead of offering the nobility of the neighbour hood a magnificent banquet such as his ancestors used to give, what was the first thing he did? Why, order the hounds to be hanged or drowned!

I forgive him, for the order was never carried out... But there! his favourite amusement is to attend the Moujiks' merrymakings, dance with the peasant girls, get the old grandads to tell him some tale of Czar Ivan the Terrible, or hum over some ancient ballad of the Cossacks or Strelitz! Is that a pastime becoming a Prince's dignity? — to say nothing of his buying up old books and old pictures at fabulous prices!

One day he set eyes on an old blind beggar propped up against the wall of a bazaar, and singing through his nose some silly old song in honour of St. Vladimir. Ah, Holy Apostles! the Prince, when he heard the song, just trembled with delight. He grasped the old fellow by the hand, had him up into his coach, and brought him back in state to the Castle. Arrived there, he led him straight to his own private room, seated the old scamp in a fine velvet armchair, and when he had installed him quite comfortably, gorged him with wine and brandy, made them bring him all that was best from his own table, and finally begged him — begged him! when he could have ordered him, and sent him packing to the stables if he refused — begged him to sing his old song of St. Vladimir over again. Then, convinced at last the Prince was not making game of him, the old rascal struck up his canticle with all the power of his lungs, and bellowed it out from start to finish, while the Prince took all the pains in the world to listen with his own two ears, as if it had been something downright precious! For three days — you saw it yourself, little father, for you were here at the time — for three days he lodged this dirty old beggar in the Castle; for three nights, this old mangy dog lay in a feather bed; and when he had sung all his songs, the Prince gave him twenty roubles, a complete suit of clothes, and sent him back safe to the place where he had first found him, saying joyfully and triumphantly —

"Ah! these old folk-songs; they are gold indeed, pure gold! For such treasures I would gladly give my last acre of land!"

Now tell me true, Ivan Andreovitch; is this stark madness, or is it not?

And then, when he takes it into his head to have an *antiquity hunt,* as he calls it, what a to-do that is! He has all the old graves dug up for miles around. God forgive him for disturbing the dead in their last resting-place! You have seen him yourself take pickaxe in hand and set to, excavating, with a moujik working away either side of him. Then, if he comes across some old copper gewgaw or cracked earthenware pot, not fit to hold dog’s meat, he jumps with joy and wraps it all up in paper, as if he had recovered the necklace or bracelet of Queen Soubika!

Nay, nay! by St. Sergius, we lived in another fashion in the good old times, little father. Then great noblemen only associated with great noblemen, and so far from filth like that blind beggar being allowed inside their palaces to loll in armchairs, they would never have dreamed of admitting to familiarity any one not of their own rank and fortune. Suchlike were only seen on rare occasions, and then as mere acquaintances, admitted chiefly that their host might count at his table more guests than his neighbours could ever get together. On their side, it behoved them, as the phrase went then, to tread the tight rope warily, for let them make a slip, and they were sent packing with the whip pretty smartly! That’s the way to treat such gentry. If the frost never nipped the peas, they’d grow as tall as poplars!

Hurrah! say I, for the good old times. Now take the case of the Prince Alexis. God in Heaven! what a life it was! The Castle was a perfect paradise; what wealth! what abundance! The table silver alone weighed a hundred and forty *pouds;* and the cellars were crammed with casks full of roubles. As for copper money, it was stored in the granary like wheat, in great boxes.

There were two several bands of musicians, each sixty performers strong; there were five hundred saddle and two hundred carriage horses; there were a thousand dogs, eighteen professional fools, a dozen negroes and as many mutes. The minimum total of guests was forty at the high table, without counting in the others. Our house may indeed be said to have been like a cup brim full to overflowing in those days. And the master of all this magnificence, what a great lord he was, to be sure! You might go through all the whole world nowadays with torches alight at high noon, and not come across his like.... Alas! alas! it is all gone, all vanished away, never to return. No, no! there are never two summers in the same year.

I should be believed when I praise the Prince Alexis, for I did not always enjoy the happiness of being in his good graces.

First of all I was kennelman in his service, and afterwards groom. I held the latter post when one day the fancy took him, after a dinner with some boon companions of his, to call me in at dessert to wrestle with his bear. Now, when Prince Alexis thought good to order you to do a thing, there was nothing else for it but to obey.

The bear stood up on his hind legs, and we took grips of one another. I was getting on very well, and I am pretty sure, with the help of a final and decisive trip, I was going to throw the beast, when the accursed quadruped, feeling he was going to be beaten, caught my ear between his teeth and began deliberately eating it off.

“Saukinsin,” said I, “will you let go? No?... One — will you let go? Two — will you let go? Three — will you let go? You won’t?... Then look out!

So saying, I took my hunting-knife from my pocket, and drove it in under the animal’s arm-pit up to the handle. The bear fell stark dead, but he had my right ear well between his teeth. Seeing what had happened, the Prince Alexis, he cut off my left ear, to teach me not to kill bear again without his leave.

Since that day I have always been known as *Crop-eared Jacquot.* However, as the Prince had satisfied his momentary anger, he bore me no grudge. The bear was stuffed and set up in the antechamber, facing the trunk of a tree which he seemed to be climbing. As for me, I was some while afterwards promoted to the dignity of huntsman.

Unluckily, the first day I was in charge of the pack, I let the fox get away, and never managed to put the dogs on his scent again. The Prince was furious, and thought fit (hen to give me a fatherly correction of fifty lashes of the knout; then, on returning to the Castle, he packed me off to the stables, where another hundred was counted out to me, with the rods this time. Eventually he decided I was good for nothing better than keeping the pigs, and sent me away for this purpose to a distant estate, banishing me altogether from the Castle and its delights and privileges.

Five years later the Prince deigned to restore his goodwill to me. I will tell you how this happened.

One morning his Highness started for the chase at break of day. It was freezing, and the Volga was already skimmed over with a slight coaling of ice, but so thin it could easily be broken with a kick of the heel. It was a hunt with nets, and they killed more than five hundred head, foxes and hares together. Then a halt was called on the plateau of Niskevo, which, from a height of some twenty feet, drops almost sheer to the level of the stream. The Prince Alexis, already well pleased with the result of his day’s sport, resolved lo indulge in a yet more exciting diversion. To begin with, he took his seat on a cask of vodka, and first draining a great glass of the liquor himself, he graciously condescended to offer the same refreshment to all present with his own hand. After which, desiring to afford his guests a token of his good humour, he ordered his huntsmen to give an exhibition of the *rejak*, a sport little practised in these degenerate days....

(So much so that I did not myself know what this *rejak* was, and asked Jacquot to enlighten me.)

Oh, it was a most entertaining amusement, (Jacquot informed me). From the lop of the cliff overhanging the Volga you had to lake a header into the river, break through the crust of ice forming on the surface, dive under water, and come up again at a point more or less distant.

It was the favourite diversion of the late Prince Alexis — whom God keep in His kingdom! But on this occasion it so happened there was nobody skilful enough to perform the *rejak* to his satisfaction. One man fell flat, full length to the water, and offering too large a surface, failed to pierce the ice. This performer received there and then fifteen lashes of the knout on his bare back, to teach him not to dive belly first again, when it should be head first.

Another, before ever reaching the water, broke his neck on a projecting rock; while three other imbeciles, after taking an excellent header, and smashing the ice all right from above downwards, could not succeed in breaking it from underneath upwards, and stayed below to mount guard among the fishes.

Thereupon the Prince flew into a violent passion, and seized his whip, shouting —

“Scoundrels! is that the way you make sport for me? Well, I’m going to beat you, one and all, till death puts an end to your sufferings.”

But he thought better of this; and seeing he could not get his grooms and squires to do the feat properly, he turned to the petty nobles who were his henchmen and boon companions.’

“Come,” he cried, “have a try, you there, and show these fellows that gentlemen are better divers than any moujiks.”

But they did worse still. Only one succeeded in breaking the ice properly, and dived in head first; but once under the ice, fearing, no doubt, he would be made to repeat the performance, he played the Prince the mean trick of staying there for good and all.

At this, the good Prince Alexis felt all his anger turned to shame, and bursting into tears like a child, he cried —

“Truly, I think my last days are approaching, seeing I have not a single man left with me brave enough and skilful enough to execute the *rejak* as it should be done. You are a parcel of old women, every one of you!...

Ah I” he added, “Crop-eared Jacquot, my poor lad, where are you — where are you this day?”

Then, turning towards those about him —

“Yes, there was a brave lad,” he said, “who could do the *rejak* as often as three times running. Where is he? Where is he, I say? Bring him here!”

Then they timidly approached the Prince and told him —

“But, little father Alexis, do you not remember you thought good to banish him, because he had displeased your Highness?”

“If he had spat upon my mother’s grave I would have him back,” cried the Prince, “and forgive him freely.” At this, two or three men jumped on horseback and dashed off at a hand gallop to fetch me. I mounted one of their horses, and a quarter of an hour after was by the Prince’s side.

If I had suffered it, I verily believe my good, noble master would have kissed my cheek. He was for explaining the matter to me; but as there was no time to lose, seeing how the frost was increasing, and the ice thickening at the rate of a line a minute, I cried, “I understand, my Prince, I understand!” and throwing myself from the top of the cliff, broke the ice with my head, and rose to the surface again twenty paces further on.

In less than a quarter of an hour I had repeated the same feat three times over, to the vast satisfaction of the Prince and the vast astonishment of the spectators.

I wanted to do it a fourth time, though my head was already streaming with blood; but the Prince shouted to me —

“Well done! well done! Enough for to-day. I restore you to my favour, and hereby appoint you Head Kennelman of the Hounds.”

More than that, he graciously presented me with five and twenty roubles on the spot, and bade me accompany him whenever he went a-hunting, and gave me a suit of his livery. Some while after he named me Head Pricker of all his dogs, and married me to a lady's-maid whom, in a moment of lightheartedness, he had honoured with his favours.

From that lime I was always in his good graces, and may boast to have been his favourite and most confidential servant.

Next year, the grace of God suffered me to do our late Prince a great service, which completed the excellent footing on which I stood.

Twenty versts from Niskevo, on the farther side of the forest of Undol, lies the village of Zabor, in which village there resided at that date a man called Solmime, a Corporal on half-pay. He had been honourably discharged from service on account of increasing age and sundry wounds he had received in the year 1799 when serving under Suvarof.

So he lived in the village of Zabor along with his young wife, whom he had brought from Lithuania, and who was so beautiful a woman it was said that in all Russia, great or little, her match was not to be found.

Well, seeing the good Prince Alexis was as keen a connoisseur of women as he was of dogs and horses, it was but natural that Corporal Solmime's wife should have attracted his august attention.

First of all he wanted — for he was a nobleman of much gentleness and courtesy, was the late Prince — he wanted in the first instance to get her to the Castle of Groubenski on some open and honourable pretext. But the woman refused point blank, and as for the man, Why, he lost his temper, and swore, either he would go and complain to our little father the Emperor of the insult intended him, or take the still shorter course of killing the Prince with his own hands.

One day — it was in summer-time, I remember — we went hunting in the forest of Undol, and after killing a dozen foxes we called a halt not far from Zabor.

The Prince was sad, and sat apart by himself. Neither the sight of our spoil lying on the turf, nor the five or six glasses of vodka his Highness condescended to drink, availed to distract him from the melancholy thoughts that possessed him. He fixed such burning eyes on the village of Zabor, you might have supposed he wanted to set it afire.

"What care I for your game?" he exclaimed at last, turning towards the rest of us. "'Tis another sort of game I would fain hunt down....Ah! what would I not give the man who should bring me the pretty fawn that lurks in the village yonder!" And with a despairing gesture the poor Prince pointed towards Zabor.

No sooner did I hear him express this desire than I sprang to horse and drove my spurs in with a will. Arrived at Solmime's, I caught sight over a hedge of his wife, who was in her garden plucking raspberries. To clear the hedge at a bound, seize the fair lady round the body and swing her in front of me on the saddle, was the work of an instant. I galloped as hard as I could go to where I had left the Prince, and deposited at his feet the woman he thought fit to sigh for.

"And now," I cried, "may your Highness have a merry heart," for I was most anxious to show him I was a truly devoted servant.

Suddenly we see the husband tearing up, so furious and so blinded with rage he came near trampling the Prince under his horse's hoofs. I cannot tell you exactly how things happened then; I only remember it was a hot few minutes, and that at the end of it the Corporal was a dead man. As for the fair Lithuanian, she lived thenceforth at Groubenski, in a retired pavilion, which she only quitted, three years later, to be shorn of her pretty hair, and enter the Convent of Zimorag as a nun. The Prince Alexis, who was always open-handed, endowed the House magnificently, had a new Church built, and gave the foundation a hundred acres of land as a free-will offering.

She was a real good woman, the little Lithuanian. The Lord give her her part in the kingdom of heaven! As long as she lived at the Castle, she could always soothe the Prince's savage humours. Whenever she saw him getting enraged with one of his moujiks, she had the trick of interposing in the nick of time, and so effectually that she saved more than one poor wretch from the bastinado he had earned. So, when she came to die, there were many folks prayed for the welfare of her soul.

It was I who brought the news of her end to the Prince; and he would most certainly have been deeply touched, if I had not had to tell him at the same time of the death of Arabka, his favourite bitch.

It was the second time I had seen his Highness the Prince in tears.

"Ah, my poor Arabka I" he said. "I could tell her voice among the baying of a thousand dogs; and if she howled in the night, you remember how I used to wake you up, my poor Jacquot, and tell you — 'Jacquot, Arabka is crying; go see if she wants anything, the poor dear little beast.'" And it was quite true; such was his kindly custom.

Well, the Prince buried Arabka like a Christian; compelled the parish priest, willy-nilly, to say the prayers for the dead over her, and built her a fine monument, the ruins of which you may see to this day in the park.

CHAPTER III

TnE FAIR OF MAKARIEFF

You must know, my dear Ivan Andreovitch (resumed Crop-eared Jacquot), that there used formerly to be held at Makarieff a magnificent Fair, which subsequently, by the good pleasure of our father the Czar, was transferred to Nijni-Novgorod. To this Fair resorted not only the folk of the neighbouring districts, but likewise merchants from other lands, and even from the most remote quarters of the world. The Chinese came with their teas; the Calmucks and Tartars with their cattle; the Persians with their carpets and turquoises. Thus at the height of the Fair as many as three or four hundred thousand men would be assembled at Makarieff.

To keep order, there came from Nijni, and Kasan, and even Saratoff, commissaries of police, with regiments of dragoons; but the chief authority and the disposal of all these forces rested in the hands of Prince Alexis.

The Fair always opened on the ninth Friday after Pentecost. From early morning all was as busy as an anthill, and everybody appeared dressed in holiday attire, powdered, and either on horseback or driving. When all was ready, a Deputy Intendant would appear — the office was generally entrusted to some petty noble who had lost his fortune — and immediately betake himself to the Prince’s quarters to advise him the time was come to open the Fair. Then the Prince would order us to take our places in line, and, on being informed we were all awaiting his orders, he would come forward to the head of the main steps in gala dress — scarlet coat with gold embroideries, waistcoat of frosted brocade with silver buttons, powdered wig, three-cornered hat, knee-breeches, and sword. He was accompanied, besides us retainers, by a hundred or more petty nobles, his acquaintance, and pages, all wearing silk coats and wigs. The Princess Marfa Petrovna in a gown *à la Pompadour,* richly embroidered in silver and trimmed with crimson, her neck and shoulders literally covered with jewels, also showed herself in the same place, attended by her women, all in silk, and wearing powder, together with her “Dames in Residence,” dressed out like princesses.

And here I should tell you what these Dames in Residence were, viz. a selection of the handsomest girls among the Prince's serfs, forming just as truly a harem for his enjoyment as ever the Grand Turk had. From the moment a peasant's daughter had been the Prince's mistress, her future was secure. She received a dowry of a thousand roubles, to enable her either to marry one of us or to enter a Nunnery, whichever she pleased. If she preferred to stay on at the Castle with her companions she might do so; only in that case she was liable to the surveillance of two old harridans, named respectively Vasilika and Ouliachka. For looks, they were two as ugly old women as you would wish to see; but for bodily strength, sturdy wenches, fit to fight the most stalwart of us all. Whenever it was a question of administering corrections in the harem, they could be trusted to strike hard, laying on the lash with all the spite the old and ugly invariably feel for the young and beautiful.

Behind the "Dames in Residence" stood the maidservants, dressed in jackets embroidered in gold, and wearing little round caps of sable.

March!" the Prince would cry, and the procession would move off.

Fifty horsemen headed the line; their costume consisted of a tunic of red cloth, sky-blue riding-breeches with silver stripe and silver girdle, yellow boots, powdered wig, and yellow cap with a red feather to match the red of the tunics.

Behind the horsemen came the several companies of huntsmen, prickers, outriders and kennelmen. Each company was subdivided into three squadrons — the first dressed in red coats and mounted on brown horses, the second in green coats and riding bays, the third in blue coats on greys.

Next came the grooms in raspberry-coloured coats, with yellow jockey-caps and feathers of the same shade as the coats, wearing gold scarves with a silver horn embroidered on them.

Lastly, after the grooms, marched the neighbouring gentry and petty nobles of the Prince's acquaintance, mounted on the Prince's horses, each dressed according to his own means and taste, but always as richly as possible.

Then, after an interval, came the Prince Alexis himself, riding in a gilt coach drawn by six white horses with tails and manes dyed black. Behind the coach were six *heyducs*, while six running footmen followed on foot, wearing plumed hats, white breeches, and satin shoes, and carrying silver wands.

Then came the negroes in long coats of dark red satin and gold belts, with a silver chain round their necks and red caps on their heads.

After these, the Princess Marfa rode in another coach, every bit as rich as the first, and drawn by as fine horses as the Prince’s own. All about her carriage ran a dozen foot-pages, in red and gold tunics, all the rest of their dress being white and silver; they wore huge powdered wigs, and held their hats in their hands, as they would not go on their heads.

The Princess was followed by forty coaches, each with four horses, and containing the Princess’s attendant women; and behind each carriage were two footmen in yellow liveries.

Arrived at the river-bank, the whole cavalcade embarked on ferry-barges specially provided beforehand, and lined with red velvet, on which the horses pranced as if they were treading turf, and the carriages rolled as smoothly as on a paved highway. Presently the further bank was reached, and all made for the Monastery, where Mass was sung, a procession marched round the Church, and the Priest then sought the scene of the Fair, to bless the banners of the different Guilds. With his own hands the Prince used to present the Town banner to the Archimandrite; the music played “The Glory of the Lord of Sion;” the musketry rattled, and the big guns thundered. The Archimandrite sprinkled a few drops of holy water over the banner, the Prince hauled it up to the top of the pole; and then, amid salvos of artillery and volleys of musketry, rose a mighty hurrah from three hundred thousand voices.

The meaning of all this noise was to announce that the Fair was now open, and any one might henceforth freely buy and sell. If any merchant had been so ill-advised as to open his stall before this recognised and solemn signal, the Prince Alexis would have soon seen to it he had a sound thrashing, and all his goods thrown into the river or burnt.

The Prince then betook himself with his followers to the Archimandrite’s residence, where he was always invited to dine. Meantime the populace of Makarieff and the surrounding villages crowded to a vast raised space bordering on the Fair-ground, on which tables were set out for a feast.

In fact, the Prince signalized the day by a free banquet to five or six thousand guests. Three hundred casks of wine and a hundred breakers of brandy were put at the people’s disposition, and the only orders given them were to eat and drink their fill. Indeed, so well were these directions carried out, that it was counted a poor year when less than fifty drunkards were left dead on the ground. That day no man had any right to disturb a drunken man, no matter what spot he might have chosen to sleep off his potations in. If he lay right across the road, blocking the carriage-way, you were bound to drive round him. at the risk of upsetting in the ditch, while foot passengers merely stepped over the prostrate form of this good son of Noah. But no man must touch him so much as with the tip of his little finger; the prohibition applied to each and all, be his rank what it might, and the Prince gave the good example of being the first and foremost to respect it.

The next day the Prince gave a fine entertainment at the Castle of Groubenski, to which he invited all the great nobles of the vicinity, who each came attended by a numerous following — as well as the chief merchants and notables of Makarieff.

In bad years the number of persons invited to this *fête* would be between a thousand and fifteen hundred; in good years I have known it rise to three thousand.

It was on the lawn behind the Castle that the tables were spread for the smaller fry, much after the model of the people’s banquet of the day before. There was the same lavish provision of meat and drink, and you could scarce hear yourself speak for the music and singing and banging of guns. After nightfall there was dancing everywhere by torchlight; all the women and girls that could be found in the Fair and its purlieus were brought to the ball, and you may well suppose, poor human flesh being what it was, it was a hard matter to come out of such a merry-making without having been guilty of some wickedness, greater or less. When the fireworks were over, the Prince retired with some of his special cronies to the garden pavilions, while the rest of us kept it up outside till daybreak.

As long as the Fair lasted — for six weeks, that is to say — there was an unbroken series of *fêtes* and merrymakings.

To assure himself with his own eyes that all was going well and orderly, the Prince Alexis condescended to visit the Fair-ground in person every day; and woe to such as were found in fault — punishment was not long in overtaking them. The Prince was a man who hated all protracted proceedings: no sooner was complaint laid than an inquiry was held; no sooner was the inquiry completed than judgment was delivered. No need of tedious pleadings and a lot of papers with him, and for this reason the merchants one and all professed the greatest admiration for him, calling him their *little father* and their *benefactor.* They entertained as little love as he did for papers and legal documents, and the Prince’s vigorous and summary justice pleased them well, both because it saved precious time — particularly precious in Fair-time — and because it rescued them from the clutches of the Commissaries, Attorneys, and suchlike limbs of the law. They were well convinced of one thing, these worthy traders, and that was, that if they once got mixed up with the lawyers, not only their profits realised at the Fair would change hands, but that even their previous savings would soon vanish from the leathern bag where they were ensconced.

The fashion in which the Prince administered justice was extremely simple. He had the delinquent brought before him, and the delinquency once proved, the offender, whether nobleman, merchant, or moujik, was treated with the same impartiality. The Prince began by admonishing him, and in doing so spared neither oaths nor insults; he even condescended on occasion to second the admonition with a good cuff on either ear or a sufficient number of lashes of his whip laid on with his own hand. After that, he sent the culprit off to the stables, where he had a more or less considerable tale of blows of horsewhip or scourge duly counted out to him, the severity of the punishment being in no wise modified by rank or quality, but depending solely on the nature of the offence. When all was over, the man had lo present himself once more before the Prince, to thank him for his goodness, the trouble he had taken, and the paternal solicitude he had shown. Then the Prince would make him a little speech appropriate to the circumstances, give him his hand to kiss, and order meat and drink to be set before him; and so the matter would end.

The merchants admitted to the Fair were expressly charged to sell as dear as ever they could to the rich, and cajole them in every way, both in quality, weight and measure of the commodities they purchased; but, on the other hand, to do no sort of wrong or injury to the poor.

On one occasion the Prince invited to the Castle to dinner a merchant from Moscow who was in the habit of making a profit of five or six thousand roubles at every Fair, his dealings being chiefly in silk goods and mercery of all sorts.

Dinner ended, and Prince and merchant sitting at the board, coffee-cup in hand, the following dialogue took place: —

“What price do you sell your scarlet Levant silk at, Trifon Egoritch, eh?”

“At one *grivne* four *allines*, your Excellency,” replied the trader; “it is the best quality in the market.”

It was at your stall the wife of the Pope Athanasius bought some yesterday?"

"Very likely, your Lordship; but I really cannot. remember for certain. I have so many customers in a day, it is impossible to remember them all."

"I tell you the Pope's wife bought an *archine* of Levant silk yesterday. What price did she have it at?"

"I don't remember now, Excellency. Besides, very possibly she bought the silk at my shop without its having been I who served her. It may have been one of my salesmen."

"Call me a messenger," was the Prince's only answer. I should have told you, my dear Ivan Andreovitch, that there were always stationed at the Great Steps a dozen mounted messengers, standing by their horses, which were saddled and bridled, so as to be ready to start anywhere the instant they received the Prince's orders.

One of these entered the dining-hall. The merchant was terrified, thinking he was to be led off to the stables; but he was mistaken. Prince Alexis thus instructed the messenger —

"You will accompany this merchant to his stall at the Fair, where he will hand you a remnant of his best levantine. Then you will go straight to Pope Athanasius' house, ask to see his wife Visigha, and say, 'Little mother, here is a nice remnant of levantine which the merchant Trifon Egoritch Tchourine, of Moscow, sends you. He sold you some over dear yesterday, and begs you, of his own motion, to accept this as a compensation.' For you, Trifon Egoritch Tchourine, you will do well, sirrah, to look better after your clerks for the future, and see they don't harry poor folks again; otherwise, I shall have to take you in hand. Enough said for this time, but be careful, be very careful! I shall keep my eye on you, and if it happen again, *I* will be your clerk, and attend to the sale of your goods myself."

A week had barely passed ere the Prince was informed that Tchourine had given a poor peasant short measure in a piece of dimity.

He had a horse brought round, and started for the Fair without a moment's delay.

"So, Trifon Egoritch," he said to the merchant, "you have forgotten my advice to you, it would seem. You have a bad memory, my man; luckily *I* have a good one. You know what was agreed upon? I have come to take my place as your salesman.... You others, there, who are so knowing in *archines*, begone, and be quick about it! From this moment I am merchant and clerk in one."

Tchourine knew the Prince was not a man to play with, and left his shop instanter, followed by all his assistants in a body.

The Prince Alexis then proceeded to take his stand behind the counter, crying out in his loudest tones —

"Ho! all honest folk and good buyers, we pray and beseech you to honour our shop with your custom. We have articles to suit all tastes — magnificent satins, English dimities, China nankeens; we have every kind of ladies' goods — stockings, shawls, French muslins. Only say what you want, and we will sell it you at a fair price and good measure. We sell our merchandise for cash; but if so be anybody has no money, we will give credit. If he pay us later on, so much the better; but if he should forget to pay, we will never trouble him."

You will readily understand, little father, that on hearing such an announcement, everybody hurried to the Prince's stall. The latter, standing behind his counter, was ready to face all and sundry, and though he never gave four *archines* instead of five, he not unfrequently gave five instead of four. At this rate, in three hours' time he had sold every single thing Tchourine's establishment contained. The only objection was that ready money was very far from plentiful, for the cash customers were in a small minority compared with those who bought on credit.

When all was finished the Prince sent for Tchourine.

"Well, here is your shop for you," said he. "I return it to you clean and nicely swept out. In this drawer here is the cash, and this ledger contains the names and addresses of customers who have bought on credit. It is your business to get in the money as quick as you can. I only hope you will always remember the Priest's wife and the peasant and his dimity. Now come and dine with me at the Castle, though, properly speaking, it is you should have invited me; you owe me a good treat for managing your business so well, and selling off your goods for you quicker than any other man in the Fair. But I won't be exacting, and *I'm* going to regale *you* this time. So come along with me."

Tchourine was in no pressing hurry to obey, and showed evident signs of perturbation.

"Oh, never be afraid, Master," said the Prince Alexis. "You may come in perfect security. You must see that, if I did want to give you a taste of the knout, I could do it here just as easily as at Niskevo. You can come without the least apprehension.”

There was no resisting such plain orders. So, reassured by the Prince’s words, Tchourine took his seat by the great man’s side in the coach.

At dinner Tchourine was given the place of honour, and throughout the meal the Prince stood behind the merchant’s chair, handing him the best tit-bits, filling his glass with the best wines, and addressing him as *Master* without more ado. Nor was this all; for on taking leave of his host, the merchant received a present that testified his highest goodwill — nothing less than a pair of pups, a dog and a bitch, of the stock of the much lamented Arabka.

But from that day forth Tchourine was never seen again, either at the Castle or at Makarieff, and next year it was reported in explanation of his absence that the ruinous sale he had made of his merchandise at the last Fair had so embarrassed his finances, that he was never like to recover himself again.

The Prince Alexis was always well disposed to men who dealt boldly and frankly with him. Once he was walking through the Fair, unattended and unobtrusively attired, when he encountered a merchant who had disobeyed his orders by opening his shop on a different site from the one assigned him. The meeting took place in a retired spot, behind the line of stalls, on a wide sandy plain, beyond which lay a small lake, the bottom of which was very level and the shores sloping and gradual.

The Prince saw, and instantly recognized the delinquent, a great strapping fellow of twenty-five to thirty and a head taller than his adversary.

“Come here, my fine fellow,” the Prince called out to him.

But the trader, knowing his precious skin was in peril, never budged, but stopping where he was, forty paces or so from the other, shouted back —

“D’ye take me for a fool, little father? I know what you want with me, and I assure you I haven’t the smallest wish in the world to make the acquaintance of your stick.”

“You shopkeeping varlet,” cried the Prince, “is that the way you obey my orders?” and he dashed for the merchant, brandishing his stick in the air.

The fellow saw very plainly his back was in imminent peril — the more so as the Prince was by this time boiling with rage. So he wasted no time waiting for his assailant, but bolted as hard as his legs would carry him for the lake. The loose sand hindered him sadly in his flight; but then it hindered his pursuer just as much. Both sank up to their ankles in it. Presently the merchant, guessing the Prince, who was older and less active than himself, must be some way behind by this time, looks round, and finds, as he expectcd, that he has gained considerably. “Good!” he says to himself, “I have just lime and so saying, sits down and rapidly takes off his boots, so as to be less hampered in running. Then, bootless and unembarrassed, he darts away towards the lake, going faster than ever. The Prince Alexis takes it all in, and considers the little shopkeeper has acted very wisely. Accordingly *he* squats himself down too, and kicks off *his* boots before continuing the race. The merchant is still heading for the lake, the Prince in close pursuit. The first dashes into the water, the other unhesitatingly follows his example. The merchant halts presently, with the water up to his neck; but inasmuch as the Prince is a head shorter than the trader, when the latter is only in up to the armpits, the former has his mouth only just above the water. Both are forced to stop, but there is still a good twenty feet between them.

Thus, unable to advance a step further, the Prince begins shouting at the merchant once more.

“Come here, you rascal,” he cries; “I have a score to settle with you.”

“No, no, little father, I’m not such a fool,” is the trader’s only reply. “I’m no ways very anxious to settle my score with you; it’s you that want to arrange matters with me. You come here to me; for I tell you I’m not going to budge.”

“So, then, you want to drown me, do you, you coward?” cried the exasperated nobleman.

“I have no lights as lo what the good God has resolved on that point; but this I do know, I shall not come lo you.”

And so they went on wrangling for a good half-hour, without either one or the other budging an inch. And as the water was pretty cold, for all the summer weather, both soon started shivering from head to foot.

“Come, now; you are a brave lad,” said the Prince at last, “and I like brave fellows like you, particularly as I don’t often come across them. I will forgive your little peccadillos; come along to the Castle. I ask you to dinner.”

“Now you’re lying, little father; it’s not a dinner I’m to get up there, but a thrashing.”

“I will not lay a finger on you, I give you my word of honour.”

“No, but you’ll get other people to; we all know that.”

“No, I won’t, upon my word as a man of honour!”

“Well, then, make the sign of the cross.”

So the Prince up to his armpits in the water as he was, signed himself several times over, swearing each time he did so by his Patron Saint he would play no trick whatever on the wily trader.

Entirely reassured by these oaths and gestures, the shopkeeper at last consented to come out. The Prince promptly followed suit; and the pair betook themselves to the Castle on the best of terms with one another. There the Prince changed his clothes and made his guest do likewise, giving him the necessary garments from his own wardrobe.

“I am positive you would have drowned me, if I had been fool enough to go after you any further,” the Prince used invariably to observe to Konone Fadeïtch, — such was the merchant’s name — whenever he encountered him in after days.

“I really don’t know, your Highness,” the latter would as invariably answer; “I should have done whatever God told me to do.”

He was a cunning, very cunning rascal, was Konone Fadeïtch.

The Prince was in the habit of going to sleep, in summer time, in an armchair after his dessert. To this end he used to have his seat moved to the doorway opening upon the balcony. All the while the Prince’s siesta lasted, every one was bound to observe the strictest silence — an obligation extending not only to the inhabitants of the Castle itself, but also to all persons going up or down the Volga in their boats. Or — a visit to the stables!

Moreover, that all might be warned the Prince was condescending to enjoy the sweets of repose, a sky-blue flag, specially provided for the purpose, was hoisted on the Castle tower.

One day when he was sleeping thus, he was suddenly awakened by a voice singing right under his very balcony — the voice, in fact, of a certain petty noble, who had actually so far forgotten himself as to transgress the orders given.

He had some excuse, indeed, for while passing the lodgings of the Dames in Residence, he had been so excited by the oglings and enticing gestures of these young women, who knew from the blue flag that the Prince was fast asleep, that he had completely lost his head, and started singing at the top of his voice —

“A little footpath across the fields...”

But this was an excuse, as you will readily allow, he could not very well plead in mitigation of the Prince’s resentment.

Directly he realized the delinquency he had been guilty of, the culprit accordingly took his heels.

“Who was that singing ‘The Little Footpath’?” asked the Prince, starting up.

The domestics to whom the question was addressed instantly dispersed in all directions in pursuit of the delinquent, trying their best to find and seize him.

Luckily this latter in his flight had stumbled upon a haystack, had hastily dug out a hole and crept in, like a rabbit into its burrow, and this without anybody seeing him save and except the young ladies aforesaid; and there was no danger of their betraying the secret of a poor fellow who had got into trouble all on their account.

“Who was it singing ‘The Little Footpath,’ eh?” cried the Prince, for the second time in a peremptory tone; and you could hear the smashing of furniture and breaking of glass accompanying the words.

The men-servants were running all the while this way and that, as if the devil had been at their heels, but without finding a trace of the delinquent.

“Who was it singing that song?” bawled the Prince a third time in a voice of thunder, appearing at the head of the Great Steps whip in hand.

No one could tell him. The whole household was hunting and searching, questioning each other, and asking again and again in every tone of menace and consternation, “Who was it? Who was it singing ‘The Little Footpath’?”

“I must have the scoundrel now, this instant,” thundered the Prince, “or your backs, every one of you, shall answer for his noisy tongue!”

More hunting, more searching, without the very smallest result, the Prince all the time roaring and growling like a bear at bay, and swearing fit to split the rocks of the grotto and the cascade in the gardens.

Then the Chief Heyduc, knowing his own back was in more especial danger than anybody else’s — for whenever suchlike summary executions took place, having as their object the discovery of an unknown delinquent, the Prince always corrected the head men with his own hands, and never failed to put in his thirty lashes — the Chief Heyduc, I say, appealed to Vasko, the singer, and besought him to take the blame on himself.

But Vasko, perfectly well aware what his fate would be, refused point-blank.

Then they all begged and prayed him, with tears in their eyes, and the Intendant promised him all sorts of presents, to say nothing of a douceur of ten silver roubles.

Vasco grew pensive, winked his eye and scratched his ear; ten silver roubles was a good round sum in those days. On the other hand, his poor back ran terrible risks, for the Prince was desperately angry — there was no doubt about that.

“Well, well,” he cried at last, tempted by the sight of the ten silver roubles, “I agree. Only, look here, all of you; supposing the Prince does not chastise me with his own hand, you won’t hit over and above hard now, will you?” And this they promised unanimously.

Meantime the Prince had worked himself up into a very paroxysm of rage.

“All these beggarly moujiks,” he bellowed, “are to get a thousand lashes; friends of the house five hundred; and for the Dames in Residence — just send Ouliachka and Vasilika to me...”

At this the consternation was universal; not a soul dared utter one single word, or hardly so much as breathe, indeed.

“Go bring me every whip there is in the Castle I” roared the Prince.

“Here comes the culprit; they’ve got him now. Hurrah! hurrah!” cried the rabble of servants, catching sight of the Intendant and a number of heyducs bringing in Vasko, bound hand and foot.

The Prince took his seat on a divan to deliver judgment. Vasko was led before him, and all awaited anxiously the result of this terrible scene.

“So it was you singing?’ asked the Prince.

“Yes, your Highness!” stammered Vasko.

The Prince sat silent some moments, frowning fiercely.

“You have a fine voice of your own!” he said at last. “Count the fellow out ten roubles, and give him a new coat.”

Yes; that is what the Prince Alexis was like — as good and sweet as good white bread. Only, he loved discipline, and would have his regulations properly observed.

CHAPTER IV

PRINCE ALEXIS’ BIRTHDAY

THE birthday of our dear little father, the Prince Alexis, fell five days after the Festival of the Intercession of the Holy Mother of God, and the good Prince was fain the day should be celebrated with the utmost pomp and magnificence, and it was invariably the occasion of a superb series of balls and entertainments. The guests always began lo arrive at the Castle a fortnight or three weeks before the day. Among the chief of these were to be found first the great nobles of the neighbourhood, then the Imperial Governor of Kasan, the governors of contiguous provinces, the General of Dragoons in garrison at Nijni. There were some who came from as far off as Moscow, or even St. Petersburg itself, for Prince Alexis’ friends, one and all, were delighted to compliment him with their presence on his *fête* day.

Each guest of importance had a room to himself in the Castle, the particular room assigned depending on the rank and circumstances of its intended occupier. The Governor was given a pavilion to himself, the General another.

For the petty nobles, who always attended the festival twelve or fifteen hundred strong, these were accommodated some in outbuildings, some in the moujiks’ quarters, where they slept on the floor or atop of the stoves.

On the eve of the great day there was a religious service in the evening, and after that a dinner, but it was a very Lenten affair. The Prince wished to avoid, both for himself and his guests, all temptation to commit during the night any sin that could tarnish the solemnity of the next day, and prevent everybody’s being up and about at an early hour.

Next morning all paid their respects to the Prince, and congratulated him, as he sat in gala costume in the great Hall of Honour, with the Governor on his right and the Princess Marfa Petrovna on his left.

The rest of the company were accommodated with seats according to their respective rank, while the petty nobles stood in the background, and the servants to a man crowded about the doors.

Then appeared upon the scene the poet the Prince kept solely and specially for ceremonials of the kind being celebrated that day. His name was Semione Tetich, the son of a Parish Pope, who had been sent to Moscow on purpose to learn the trade of verse-making.

The poet was lodged and fed in a separate dwelling, where he spent an easy and a quiet life; his only occupation was to write a copy of verses or a pastoral whenever any special solemnity was toward at the Castle. On the present occasion he used to be shut up for three weeks beforehand in the pigeon-house, to prevent his labours being interrupted, and above all to keep him from getting drunk.

Tetich, then, wearing a brand new silk coat and a powdered wig, would halt in the middle of the assembled company, and after a deep bow would solemnly uphold his manuscript and read out the verses he had composed, which everybody listened to in awestruck silence. This done, he would step up to the Prince, drop on one knee before him, and present him with the precious paper. Then the Prince, in token of his satisfaction, used lo give him his hand to kiss, make him a present of money, and then order him to be provided with meat and drink at discretion, never omitting to charge the attendants to keep a sharp eye on him, to see he did not die under the effects of his own intemperance. For this would have been a sad loss indeed, seeing it would have taken as much as six or eight years very likely to educate another poet laureate of the same calibre.

Moreover, general orders had been given that no one was to hurt the court poet under any circumstances. Yet in spite of this injunction, one day a certain petty noble, a hanger-on of the Prince Alexis, was tempted to play a practical joke on poor Tetich. Coming upon the poet lying fast asleep after a drinking bout, at the very moment he had just caught a hedgehog, he popped the creature between the poet’s shirt and his bare skin. The latter, suddenly awakened by a violent pain, and utterly unable in his fuddled condition to guess the reason, started running like a madman straight up to the Castle, bellowing out with all the power of his lungs —

“Police! thieves! murder!”

As ill-luck would have it, he ran right into the Prince’s arms, and his Highness, on learning why the unfortunate poet was kicking up such a disturbance, condescended to laugh heartily at the trick they had played him. But all the same, after having a sound whipping administered to the delinquent nobleman, he gave orders that this latter should carry for a whole day the self-same hedgehog in the same place, to wit, between shirt and skin.

But to return to the birthday festivities. After Tetich had taken his departure, tea was served, but only to the grand people, for in old days tea was still a very rare treat, to which the rich and great alone were accustomed. The petty nobles would not so much as have known how to set about preparing the beverage and drinking it.

Then, after the tea was drunk, the fools were introduced, who hastened to show a thousand antics and tricks of their trade. Only when everybody had laughed his fill, and the company was tired of their buffooneries, they would kick them out without further ceremony — which showed the different footing they were on from that of the poet.

When dinner was announced, all made their way to the great dining-hall, each taking proper precedence according to his rank. One end of the table was occupied by our little mother Marfa Petrovna and the ladies, the other by our little father Alexis and the lords. Three several times in the course of the meal they drank the Prince’s health, and each time all present uttered deafening hurrahs, cannon thundered, a choir of singers raised a hymn of felicitation, dwarfs grimaced, negroes danced, and guests broke with a crash whatever china-ware or glass they could lay hands on — all by way of wishing the amphitryon of the feast a long and happy life. This, too, was the moment when the Prince’s favourite bear, the successor of the one that had eaten up my ear for me, would spring up, excited by the din, get on his hind legs, and start a dance, in which he very certainly displayed more grace, skill, and agility than three-quarters of the company could have done, half stupid as these were with the heavy potations they had indulged in.

At seven o’clock began the ball, opened with a polonaise which the Princess Marfa danced with the Governor of Kasan.

At ten o’clock the ball was interrupted to make way for the Pastoral. Everybody proceeded to the Great Gallery, while to drown more or less the noise made by so many people hurrying from one apartment to the other, the musicians struck up a series of Italian morceaux.

When the spectators were all seated, the curtain rose, and the heroine made her appearance, entering from behind a tree. More often than not, whilst she was still young that is to say, this was Douniaka, daughter of Egor the weaver, the best-reputed beauty not at Makarieff only, but for twenty leagues around. Her hair, raised high behind, was powdered and bedecked with flowers, whilst her charming face was rendered more seductive still by two or three patches artistically disposed. She wore a magnificent gown of blue satin, and held in one hand a shepherd’s crook tied with pink ribbons.

After bowing to the audience collectively, she would advance towards the Prince and recite him a second poem of compliment and congratulation, also the composition of Semionc Tetich.

When Douniaka had finished her recitation, her comrade Paraka would come on, dressed as a shepherd lad in jacket, waistcoat, and breeches of satin, and with powdered hair. Then followed a metrical dialogue, treating at length of love and sheep, after which shepherd and shepherdess sat down side by side and fondled one another in so tender and amorous a fashion that the old men even trembled with delight, while younger people were like to faint with pleasure.

Tetich had experienced the utmost difficulty at first in teaching the two young women to say their verses properly. As neither could read, and both were extremely lazy girls, they declared they could not understand a word of the poetry they had to learn, and could not therefore be expected to remember it. But at this the Prince Alexis had sent for Vasilika and Ouliachka. The two Furies had promptly appeared on the scene, each armed with a good birch rod, promptly tucked up the skirts of the two rebels, who next morning, as if a miracle had been performed, knew their parts so pat as never once to want the prompter’s help.

Everybody was always highly delighted with the Pastoral, and Prince Alexis would seize the opportunity to call in Tetich to be complimented as he deserved. But unfortunately, as a rule, Tetich was by that time in no state to appear before the Prince, being engaged in sleeping off the effects of his self-indulgence. However, this in no wise prevented him from supplying every year a first-rate Pastoral. God give him a place in His kingdom!

At one o’clock supper was served, at which meal the number of dishes barely exceeded sixty, because, as the Prince said very truly, it is not wholesome to eat at night. But to put the balance square, wines and cordials were provided in the utmost profusion. Every one was bound to empty his glass the instant it was filled, or else his Highness had the liquor, whatever it was, poured over the head and over the clothes of all who did not drink in a becoming manner.

After supper was over, all were at liberty to go where they pleased. The Prince Alexis himself, accompanied by fifteen or twenty of his bosom friends, would retire to one of the garden pavilions. Arrived there, the first thing done was to get rid of all superfluous clothing; then the Prince had a great gold goblet of Cyprus wine filled to the brim, which he first drained himself and afterward passed round to each of his bosom companions.

Finally, when the last of the Prince's friends had emptied the goblet, his Highness would cry —

"Now open the doors, and let the denizens of Olympus come down to us mortals."

At the word a score of the Dames in Besidence would flock in, all dressed in costumes of the Heathen Goddesses, from the Nine Muses to the Three Graces, and all resplendent in their youth and beauty.

Then followed dances and songs to ravish the very soul, and a scene of indescribable brilliancy and delight, forming the grand finale — and a grand finale it was indeed, dear Ivan Andreovitch — of the festivities of Prince Alexis' birthday.

CHAPTER V

ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOURTEENTH OF OCTOBER

“‘Yes; but the Princess Varvara, the Pink Pavilion, the black box, and the writing on the wall?” I put in, interrupting my friend Crop-eared Jacquot. “It seems to me we are rather forgetting all that part of the story.”

Not at all! (was his reply); we are coming to it directly, Ivan Andreovitch. I am telling you the history not in the order of the events, but in the order in which I became acquainted with them.

Well, the Prince Alexis, as you may have gathered, was wild after sport of all sorts; but what he loved above everything else was bear-hunting. In those days the forests were not so over-hunted and poached as they are nowadays, and game of every kind was plentiful. We regularly put up every winter thirty bears or so, at the fewest.

I will tell you how things were managed. Directly winter began to make itself felt, the Prince used to send out forty men into the neighbouring forests to discover where the bears were lying. All the peasants of the estate, and even those of neighbouring properties, were likewise warned, and they never failed to come up to the Castle to announce any discoveries they made; for they well knew the Prince paid liberally anybody who brought in information that enabled him to enjoy his favourite sport.

He always tackled his bear hand-to-hand, and suffered no one else to bring the animal down. One and all had received peremptory orders. “Don’t touch the bear, unless he has me down and is starting to mangle me; otherwise, as you value your life, hold off, and don’t interfere.”

He used neither gun nor pike, nothing but hunting-knife and boar-spear; and I assure you on my word, little father, he settled more than a hundred and fifty in his day. Again and again he found himself in very critical positions; and twice over he thought it was all over with him. The first time he had one thigh half eaten; the second the bear took him round the body, and hugged till the bones cracked. That once he called for help, but it was the one and only occasion. He was carried home in a dead faint on a sledge, and came very near dying of the effects. But God had pity on him, and he got well.

When we set out to hunt the more distant forests, as was done in autumn, we often remained for six weeks away from the Castle. On these occasions the Prince would take along with him the whole pack of dogs and the whole posse of huntsmen, four hundred prickers with a thousand hounds, a hundred and fifty kennel-men, and from two to three hundred petty nobles. Sometimes we would encounter on the way two or three great lords as wealthy as the Prince himself, so that we seemed more like an army marching out to war than a company of noblemen going a-hunting.

Occasionally we would call a halt at the house of Peter Alexiovitch Mouranski, a neighbouring landowner, a nobleman, and extremely wealthy, but a poor pitiable creature. He was of feeble constitution, and so racked with rheumatic pains he could only walk with the help of a pair of crutches; yet this in no wise hindered him, directly he heard the hunting-horns and the shouts and uproar we kicked up, from coming out to meet and greet us, crutches and all, at the top of the Great Steps.

Once — listen, little father, listen, for we are coming to a terrible episode — once we arrived at this nobleman’s door in the middle of a fearful storm. It was raining in torrents, and blowing fit to knock a Cossack off his horse. Out of the question to think of leaving in such weather; so, instead of making a passing stop, we were bound to spend the night under Mouranski’s roof. Every man slept as he could. Mouranski was for giving up his own room to his friend the Prince Alexis, but the latter would not hear of such a thing; so that eventually he was given a pavilion detached from the main building, which had not been occupied for years, and which consisted of two rooms only. Naturally, the Prince had the one containing a bed, while I slept in the other, on a rug they spread for me on the floor.

The Prince had been strangely melancholy, I had noticed, all day, as was always the case with him, indeed, on every anniversary of the fourteenth of October for several years past.

That morning he had actually dismounted at a little church by the wayside, had gone inside and said his prayers with the accompaniment of plentiful crossings and many deep sighs.

The Prince went to bed as usual, but without any talk with me. He merely asked me two or three times over —

"You are sleeping in the next room, are you not, friend Jacquot?" — to which I had answered, "Yes! your Highness," each time he put the question.

The nearer we drew to midnight, the fiercer grew the hurricane, while the wind roared in the chimneys and whistled down the passages in the most dismal fashion, sounding for all the world like the sobs and groans of some one in mortal pain. The shutters banged against the walls and the trees cracked every now and then in a way to make the boldest heart tremble.

At last midnight struck — just where, I cannot say, but it sounded as if the clock were in the room itself.

Of a sudden I heard the Prince calling, his voice not as usual, haughty and contemptuous in tone, but subdued and almost humble.

"Are you asleep, Jacquot, old fellow?" he asked.

"Not I, little father. Is there anything you want?" I asked in my turn.

"I don't know what has come over me," the Prince said next, "but I am afraid."

I thought I had misheard him. The Prince afraid? — the thing was impossible; he was one who feared, as they say, neither God nor Devil.

"Do you say you are afraid?" I asked him.

"Yes, I am indeed," answered the Prince, in a scarcely audible voice.

"And what of?"

"Do you hear that howling?"

"That whistling you mean, little father, don't you? It is only the wind."

"No, no, Jacquot," declared the Prince; "it is not the wind, it is something else."

"What is it, then?"

"Listen, I tell you, listen!"

"Why, yes," I said, after listening a while, "your dogs are howling too."

‘‘But amid their howls do you hear one voice we have no business to hear?"

"One voice we have no business to hear! Why, what do you mean?"

"I mean the voice of my poor Arabka."

"You are losing your wits, little father!" I cried, beginning to shudder myself. "How can you say it is Arabka howling, when she has been dead this ten years?"

"It is Arabka, it is!" insisted the poor Prince. "When she was alive, I knew her voice among a thousand; am I likely to mistake it, now she is dead? There, can't you hear?" went on the Prince. "She's leaving the kennels and coming here. Listen, man; she’s only five hundred paces away now; now she’s only two hundred; now she’s coming up to the door.”

And in very truth the sound of a single dog howling in the dark was coming closer and closer every moment.

“Like enough, dear little father, one of your hounds has escaped from the kennels, and is nosing you down. Don’t you often feed the dogs with your own gracious hands?”

“It is Arabka, I tell you! Ah, you don’t understand, you don’t, how much that’s supernatural there is in this world.”

“But what should Arabka want with you, your Highness? You built her a sweet little tomb, and had the best prayers of the Church said over her.”

“There, didn’t I tell you she would come to the door. Listen, listen there!”

And with my own ears I heard a long, dismal, melancholy howl that rose from the very doorstep of the Pavilion.

“Yes, yes, you are come to announce my approaching end to me, poor old Arabka.... Oh, it is horrible, horrible! O God, O God, have pity on Thy sinful servant’s soul!”

Albeit sorely moved myself, I wanted to prove to the Prince it was not Arabka at all, but some dog from the pack that had got out of the kennels. So I got up in the darkness, and made for the door.

The Prince heard me, and called out.

“What are you at, Jacquot? what are you at? Don’t open the door, don’t, don’t! Once you open the door she’ll come in, I tell you!”

But he was too late; the door was already open. To my utter amazement, I could see no dog whatever, either on the doorstep or anywhere near the Pavilion.

I could hear, however, the Prince’s voice saying in anguished accents —

“You would not listen to me, Jacquot; you opened the door, and here’s Arabka coming right into my room.... Get away, foul beast, get away! don’t come near my bed! Ah, she’s licking my hands now with her icy cold tongue, and my face.... Help! help! save me! I’m dying!” and the Prince’s voice sank away in a sort of rattling sob.

I — was perfectly certain I had not let any dog pass; but I shut the door to with a bang, and ran to the Prince’s side, lighting a candle with all possible speed.

He lay in a dead faint on the bed. I looked everywhere about the room; there was no dog there, neither Arabka nor any other.

The sweat was pouring down the Frince’s face, and his hands were clenched in dire terror. I threw water in his face, and he opened his eyes, shuddering.

“Is she gone?” he asked.

“But I tell you, little father, she never came in.”

“I swear I saw her with my own eyes; I saw her come in through the door and right up to my bed.”

“How could you see her at night time? She was as black as the Devil’s oven — and that’s why we called her Arabka.”

“True; but then her eyes glittered like two live coals, and lighted up the room all about her. She came to tell me, faithful beast, it was time to begin thinking of my sinful soul.”

“Come, come, little father, why return again to these silly notions?”

“Not at all. I am seventy years old, and yesterday I dreamt I was marrying Macka, the cow-girl. To dream of a wedding is a sign of death. The day we left the Castle a sow had a litter of thirteen, a sign of death. Worst of all, on my last birthday a pane of glass broke all of its own accord — a sign of death, Jacquot, a sure sign of death!”

“Well, then,” I told him — ” well, then, my dear Prince, as you are so firmly convinced your hour is at hand, you should attend forthwith to your spiritual welfare.”

“It’s easy for you to talk like that, Jacquot,” protested the Prince, in a dull, despairing voice. “My spiritual welfare you say. Yes, truly, that is just what is troubling me.”

“Just what is troubling you! Why, your Highness knows the first Pope you come across, for a hundred roubles or so, will make your conscience as clean and bright as a mirror! You have lived a good, easy, pleasant life of it; but you have never killed anybody or committed murder.”

The Prince fell a-coughing, as if he would choke right away.

“But who told you that, Jacquot Petrovitch — that I have never killed or done murder, eh?”

I stared at him with startled eyes that seemed to frighten him.

“Jacquot,” he ordered me, “leave me the light, get to your prayers in the next room, and when dawn breaks, go for a Priest.”

I did as I was told, and withdrawing to my own room, fell on my knees. All night long I could hear the Prince sighing, sobbing, and beating his breast.

At daybreak I got up and put my head in at the Prince’s door. “Do you still want the Pope fetched, little father?” I asked.

“Yes. worse than ever.” was the answer.

So I started to find the Priest, and brought him back with me.

“Here’s your Pope,” I announced to the Prince. “Make your mind easy, ‘tis a poor devil you can make what you will of for ten copeks.”

Then the Priest came in — a young man of between twenty-eight and thirty, with a pale face and stern eye. He had only been Parish Priest a year, in a small village in the neighbourhood.

I left the two men together. For the first ten minutes all went well; but at the end of that time I heard the Prince’s voice raised in a tone of angry menace.

“What I you refuse to give me absolution, Sir Priest, and all for a miserable job like that?” he was shouting — ” not when I offer you a hundred roubles — five hundred roubles — a thousand roubles?”

“Your Highness,” the Priest made answer in a calm, grave voice, “though you were to offer me all the riches of our father the Czar Nicholas himself, I could not give you absolution. It is murder, premeditated murder planned long beforehand, and executed in cold blood. See the Archimandrite or the Metropolitan; they have wider powers than a poor village Pope. But for me, I cannot do it, I cannot.”

“I will have you scourged, miserable hypocrite, till there is not one strip of your skin holding to another!” roared the Prince.

“My life is in your hands, your Highness, but my soul is in God’s. If it is His will I die a martyr, my soul will the sooner rise to His heaven above.”

Then I heard the Prince’s voice soften and assume the accents of supplication; but, without either softening or hardening, the other’s retained the same firm, inexorable tone.

“Get you gone, vile wretch,” cried the Prince at last, “and never let me set eyes on you again!”

The Priest made his exit with the same quiet, stately step with which he had entered, without the smallest appearance of being disturbed by the Prince’s threats. He gave me his blessing as he passed through the outer room, and made straight for the door.

Pale as death and with bristling hair, the Prince followed him, holding a whip in his hand. He opened the door of the Pavilion, as if he was for pursuing the Pope; but when he saw him walking away so calm and dignified, the whip dropped from his hands, and he called after him.

“In the Lord’s name, pray for me, pray for me, my Father.”

Then seeing his strength failed him, I ran to my poor master’s help, caught him in my arms, and seated him in an armchair. He had fallen as weak as a child, and cried pitifully.

“And you, you will pray for me, Jacquot Petrovitch, won’t you? We will go back to the Castle this very day, and the instant we get there, you will go to the Archimandrite of Kasan, and order him to make many prayers for my soul’s salvation. He is bound to pray. Is it not his business to pray? Do I not give him above a thousand roubles one year with another? Tell him if he prays well, he shall have a bell for his church that shall be heard from Saratoff the one way to Nijni the other. I have made my will, and I tell you I have appointed Mouranski, our host at this moment, my sole executor; he is the only man I can trust with so grave a duty. My son Boris is dead, and I have never seen my grandson Danilo, who has always lived at St. Petersburg. My neighbours are drunkards, every one of them, — neither to hold nor to bind. So to Mouranski, I entrust my earthly concerns; but it is to you, Jacquot, to you and the Archimandrite of Kasan, I entrust my soul. You and Father Trifon, take heed of my bequest; you will have to answer for it in God’s sight.

“When I am dead, Jacquot, they must lay me in our ancestral vault, at my father’s feet, and you will have forty masses said for my soul in the church. Moreover, you will see my name is entered in the registers of the synod, that prayers may be said in perpetuity for me. And be there yourself, Jacquot, when the entry is made, for the rascally Priests are very keen practitioners, very keen indeed!

“And, by-the-by, the Blessed Virgin in our own Church here is badly in want of a necklace of pearls and a silver altar-cloth; I blame myself for having shut my eyes and pretended not to see she lacked these two articles. The Intendant, on whom I will write you an order, will give you the pearls and the ingot of silver you will require to carry out my wishes. You will order the things to be made at Moscow — but not by that thief Zoubrillof; he will have it I owe him two thousand roubles, and as he knows very well I shall never pay him, he would make them good out of the Holy Virgin’s pearl necklace and silver altar-cloth. Ah I the abominable son of a dog,” cried the Prince, clenching his fists as he got up, seized his whip again, and began striding up and down the room, “if ever I can lay hands upon him, the villain, my knout shall be the death of him!” But at this moment a badly fastened shutter swung in the wind and knocked against the wall, and the Prince turned all pale and trembling again, crying —

“God have pity on my poor soul!”

“But can’t you see for yourself, your Highness, ‘tis nothing? A banging shutter, nothing worse.”

“But it’s always nothing according to you.... Now, where were we? Ah, I remember. You need not buy any silk for a pall, for last year when my cousin german, the Prince Vladimir, went to Paris, I gave him the money to purchase a piece of the best Lyons silk. So you can use this to throw over my coffin. Still, even now I am not quite easy on this head.”

“Why not, little father?” I asked him.

“Well it appears my cousin Vladimir lives a very loose life at Paris, and drops enormous sums at play. Now, I know what gamblers arc. He may very likely lose, when his own money is gone, what I have given him, without ever thinking how, by his fault, I am running the risk of setting forth for the other world shabbily provided, and presenting myself before God the Father like any beggarman.

“You will invite to my funeral all the aristocracy of the neighbourhood, as well as all the petty nobles; for I particularly wish the ceremony to be imposing and well attended. Only don’t ask Kartchaguine; I detest the man with all my heart. He always adopts towards me, under pretence of being descended from Rurik, silly airs of importance and superiority that annoy me more than I can tell you; for truly I consider myself far above him in every respect. And above all, don’t forget to set on my head a fine cap of gold brocade embroidered with pearls. You will see to it yourself to have it well made; nowadays they put them together in the most rubbishly fashion, so that they have no shape or form whatever.”

“I will do all you wish, your Highness, never fear; but now the storm is passed and day come at last, will it not be best to sleep a while?”

The Prince Alexis followed my advice, and lay down again, while I took a seat in the next room, ready to come to him at the first call. Then I heard him turning and tossing in his bed like a man who cannot get to sleep. At last he uttered my name in a lamentable voice, and I returned to his room again.

“Sit you down there,” he said, pointing to a chair by the bed’s head. —

When I had done so he went on —

“Listen now. There is never a man I have entire confidence in except you, my poor Crop-eared Jacquot, and I am going to make a clean breast of it. I am horribly afraid, after all the warnings I have had, of dying by one of those accidents a man meets with by the roadside when he least thinks of danger. In that case I should perish without confession or absolution. So this is what I want you to do. If I should die suddenly, and without time to get assoiled, you must set out a-foot — you understand — pilgrim’s bell in hand, for Moscow; you must see the Metropolitan, make confession in my stead, and perform the penance he assigns you. In this fashion I hope my poor sinful soul may win some mercy. Will you do this for me, Jacquot?”

“Yea, as truly as I would lay down my life for you, little father,” I assured him, “I will do as you wish.”

“Good! Then hear my confession,” the Prince went on; and therewith he proceeded to tell me a dreadful, dreadful story.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRINCESS MARFA PETROVNA ‘At last, at last I am going actually to hear the story of the Princess Varvara.”

Not yet, Ivan Andreovitch, not quite yet (was Jacquot’s disappointing answer). Everything must come in its proper turn; so we must begin with the history of the Princess Marfa Petrovna.

The said Princess Marfa Petrovna had many griefs to bear in her lifetime, which was a veritable martyrdom. Her happy days were few, very few, in this world; may God give her His kingdom in the next!

Her father, the Prince Peter Ivanovitch, had originally refused her to the Prince Alexis, whose antecedents did not inspire him with much confidence in his future good behaviour. However, Prince Alexis, who had accompanied Count Orlof in his expedition against the Turks, having been sent home by the latter to carry the news to the Empress Catherine of the victory of Tchesmé which he had just won — Prince Alexis, deep in love with the beautiful Marfa Petrovna as he was, answered the Empress, when she asked him what boon she could grant him, that he desired nothing whatever but to wed the daughter of her Majesty’s favourite, Peter Ivanovitch.

Instantly, and without saying one word, the Czarina sat down at her desk and wrote the following letter: —

“Taking into consideration the services rendered us by the Prince Alexis Groubenski, and desiring to reward him for the good news of which he has just been the bearer, we would have it please you to give him in marriage your daughter Marfa Petrovna, and we pray you to arrange this matter without the smallest delay.

“May the Most High have you in His holy keeping.

“Your loving mistress,” CATHERINE.”

On receiving this letter, or rather on reading it, the Prince Trotinski first trembled violently; then, after bowing the knee thrice before the image of Christ, he said —

“The Czarina’s will be done; we belong all of us to God and to her.” And a fortnight later the marriage took place.

The ceremony was far from gay. The bride looked more as if she were going to her death than to her wedding; and for fear her melancholy should set ill-natured tongues wagging, scarce any marriage festivities were held, and at the ball held the same evening, no sooner was the polonaise danced than all the guests took their leave.

They were married at St. Petersburg; but directly the rite was done, the Prince quitted the capital for his estates, taking his wife away with him to the Castle of Groubenski.

Six months passed without much possibility of knowing how the newly wedded pair suited each other. Not a soul was admitted to the Castle, and it was only when the Princess Marfa was seen abroad by some chance that the marks of an ineffaceable melancholy could be observed on her features.

Little by little the Prince Alexis returned to his old ways, leaving the Princess Marfa entirely to herself, and consoling himself for the fact that he never now received company at home by taking full advantage of the merrymakings, hunting-parties, and entertainments of all sorts to which the great lords, his neighbours, invited him.

The result of all this was that the Princess found little pleasure in her home life, and it was not long ere her marriage began to seem an insupportable burden. The Prince, on his side, weary no doubt of all this repining, which was anything but complimentary to him as a husband, began to treat his wife in the harshest fashion, and would often kick up — in the Princess’s bedchamber for choice — such a disturbance, it was fit to drive the holy images out of the house, as the saying goes. It was even alleged that at times, when the Prince came home drunk, or got drunk within doors, he did not always stop short at verbal reproaches, but adopted methods with the Princess which left next morning, and for days afterwards, manifest traces on the face and hands of the poor lady.

The Princess was of a gentle and patient character, and tears were the only answer to her husband’s brutalities. But this very gentleness and long-suffering, instead of appeasing the Prince’s anger, only roused him to greater exasperation.

He proved unfaithful to his marriage vows — first during his absences at Moscow and St. Petersburg. Later on, he kept sundry Livonian girls as his mistresses, but still outside the Castle precincts. Eventually he maintained in his own house a number of Dames in Residence, as we have explained elsewhere. All this went on without the Princess ever uttering one word of complaint to any living soul, so used was she grown to bury her grief in her own bosom. Gradually the passive indifference of the Prince Alexis towards his wife turned to active hatred. He ceased from all relations with her, and most likely his race would have ended with him, had not the Princess, during the first year of their married life, borne him a son, the Prince Boris Alexiovitch.

So long as the young Prince remained at the Castle, his presence was a great consolation to the poor mother. She gave the greatest attention and care to his education, providing him with German and French masters, and personally superintending his progress in these two languages, which she spoke as fluently as her mother-tongue. The result was that Prince Boris at twelve knew them as well as most young Russian nobles do at twenty.

But no sooner had young Prince Boris attained the age of fifteen than Prince Alexis, fearing his education under the superintendence of a woman should prove too feminine in character, took his son personally to see the Czar Paul I., who had just ascended the throne; and as chance so ordained that the Prince had a turn-up nose — which was an indispensable condition to the favour of the Emperor in question — the latter appointed him on the spot to an Ensigncy in the Paulovski Regiment, which he had just enrolled.

From the instant her son left her, the unhappy Princess, whose only remaining joy he was, lived the life of a recluse, and began to waste and melt away for all the world like a wax taper. She never appeared now except on great occasions, such as the opening day of the Fair or on her husband’s birthday. Then, by express order of the Prince, she would dress herself in her finest array and attend all the grand ceremonies, but always dumb and silent, never answering but by signs and motions of head or hands. All the rest of the year round she remained shut up in her chamber, finding her sole and only distraction in prayer and in making ornaments for different churches.

The Prince received his guests in his own apartments, without troubling himself in the least about the Princess and her doings. The latter, as we have said, lived a uniformly solitary life; so that, while on the one side dissipation and debauchery, noise and merry-making, were the order of the day, on the other all was prayer and pious meditation. Often the Princess’s loneliness was such that she would retire to bed without supping, not having a single servant available to give an order to, as the whole household was occupied in attending on the Prince and his boon companions.

Worst of all, a time came when the Princess Marfa Petrovna found herself deprived of her chief source of distraction — books. She had shed so many tears that her sight became affected, and she grew almost blind.

Fortunately, among the Prince's *protégés* living at the Castle was a petty noble by name Bieloussof. The man had lost his modest patrimony through a vexatious lawsuit in which one of his more powerful neighbours had involved him; so, finding himself with no visible means of subsistence, he had quartered himself on Prince Alexis, at whose expense and in whose house he lived in comfort, like many another.

He was past middle age now, full of excellent qualities of mind and heart, quiet, gentle, and affable to all around him. He had only one defect to distinguish him from his fellows; he could never be induced to touch either wine or brandy. To make up for this, he was extremely well read in the Scriptures and matters of religion, spending most of his time, indeed, bent double over great old tomes treating of every description of things sacred and profane. With this, he was scrupulously exact in the performance of all duties imposed by religion, always getting to Church before the Priest, and being the last to leave it.

The Princess, unable any longer to devote herself to reading because of her weak sight, sent for Bieloussof and begged him to act as her reader.

Well, five or six more years slipped by in much the same way, the Princess fading away slowly all the while.

One day the Prince Alexis started for the chase; but at the very moment of his departure he met with a most annoying check. Scarcely had he got clear of the outermost fences of the demesne when he met a Pope in his track. Now, you know, dear little father, that as sure as a man meets a Pope at starting for the chase, he may give up all hope of sport for the rest of the day. You may be certain the Prince Alexis was not the man to let off the plaguey Priest who had spoilt his day's amusement without giving him something to remember; but he had only just settled accounts with him at the price of a score of lashes when his horse took fright and almost killed him, falling and throwing its rider over its head into the middle of a great dunghill. The Prince scrambled out safe and sound; but he was obliged to change every single thing he had on, being mired from head to foot.

That day they put up eleven foxes and three wild boars. But the foxes ran so cunning, there was not a single kill; while the wild boars turned on the dogs, ripped up a score of the best, and got clean away. You may be sure the Prince distributed a goodish few thrashings amongst the company, but without satisfying his vexation; and that evening he came home as gloomy and lowering as a thunderstorm.

Just as he reached the Castle, a letter from Prince Boris was handed him. The moment he had glanced it through, he began to roar like an angry lion, after which we could hear a mighty crashing of broken glass and furniture and the smashing of windows. None of us could guess the origin of such an exhibition of rage, nor on whom it would spend its fury. One and all, we cowered in corners, each addressing to Heaven the mental prayer —

"Lord, Lord, save us from the dangers that threaten us this day!"

Presently we heard the Prince shouting —

"Send the Princess Marfa Petrovna here, some one, this very instant!"

A heyduc sprang forward to obey the order; but in a few minutes he returned to tell the Prince that the Princess's state of health was such she could not possibly leave her apartments.

The man had not finished speaking before he was rolling on the floor, felled by the Prince's fist; and from that day to this he has never been able to tell the full tale of his teeth, five or six of which have missed the roll-call ever since.

The Prince sprang over the poor footman's body, and swept upstairs like a hurricane to the Princess's chamber. She was stretched on a couch, very sad, and very ill indeed; beside her was Bieloussof, seated at a table reading aloud the "Martyrology of St. Varvara."

"So, Madam," shouted the Prince, "it seems you have brought up your son so well that he has ended by marrying a common baggage. Well, well, it was only what was to be expected of a son reared by a mother who spends her nights, and even her days, like you, with her lovers."

The Princess broke into a cry, and it was her last. She tried to rise, but her strength failed her, and she fell back swooning on her sofa.

The same evening the intelligence went abroad that the Princess was dead, and next day Bieloussof disappeared, and it was never known what became of him.

Later in the same day the Princess Marfa Petrovna lay in state. May God grant her soul His peace! The funeral was a magnificent function, at which no less than three Archimandrites and a hundred Popes assisted. Betired and solitary as her life had been, the Princess had given away so much in charity that many bewailed her death, the poor in particular. As for Prince Alexis, he never shed a tear; all the same he looked terribly downcast, and every now and again was shaken by a convulsive spasm.

For six weeks following the sad event a whole host of beggars were fed at the Castle kitchens, while each was presented with a piece of money every Saturday. The burial alone cost five thousand roubles.

Throughout the dinner that followed the funeral the Prince Alexis gave himself up entirely to pious discourse with the Archimandrites concerning the best way of living a Christian life and the surest means of saving one's soul. He pronounced touching elegies on the angelic virtues of his dead wife, and expressed in lively terms the deep and exceeding sorrow and despair her loss occasioned him.

The Archimandrites said what they could to soothe the poor man's grief; but the Prince only said, addressing the one who had displayed most eloquence in the course of his consolatory remarks —

"No, 'tis very certain I cannot remain without her in this world below, and I beseech you, reverend Father, to receive me in the ranks of your brethren."

"Truly a most commendable purpose, dear Prince," was the Archimandrite's answer; "but to be really sound and good, every purpose should be fulfilled only after ripe reflection."

"Reflection! What is the use of reflection?" cried the Prince wildly. "Think you I shall not pay my footing handsomely enough, Father? Nay, never fear. I will bring your House forty thousand roubles; why should I save and scrape any more?"

"But," objected the Archimandrite, "you have a son.

"A son indeed!" ejaculated the Prince. "You mean Boris? The good-for-nothing scamp! If he has any regard for his skin, I warn him not to let me see him. He is the real reason of all my grief, the scoundrel, and his poor mother's actual murderer! He has gone and married a slut without even waiting for our blessing or giving us a word of warning about this fine project of his. He killed his mother; I tell you he killed her. Father. The moment Princess Marfa heard of the disgrace he had brought on our house, she fell back swooning; then came an attack of apoplexy, and all was over with my poor dear wife! But he shall pay for it, the villain! I'll leave him to rot on the straw, he and his fine madam; and if you won’t have me in your Cloister, I shall marry and soon have another lot of children.”

Next day, to show his grief, the Prince condescended to punish a number of offenders with his own hand. Every soul he met in his perambulations was more or less to blame for some fault or other. Petty nobles and household friends were spared as little as the moujiks themselves, and soon began to find their position at the Castle so untenable that they one by one disappeared, and their places knew them no more.

However, God be thanked, the Prince Alexis rid himself of these evil notions after a fortnight’s time, and one fine morning started out to hunt the bear. The sport was first-rale, and his sorrow vanished as if by enchantment. From that day forth his life resumed its regular course, only in the midst of all the dances and banquets and entertainments the Prince was visibly ageing; and it would often happen that when he was out a-hunting, and would seat himself as of old astride a barrel of vodka, the glass would tumble out of his hand, and he would suddenly fall all gloomy and pensive. Then the laughter and shouting of his gay companions would drop into silence; but after a few moments of melancholy he was always first to raise his head again and strike up an old-fashioned drinking-song, of which everybody present took up the refrain in chorus.

CHAPTER VII

THE PRINCESS VARVARA

PRECISELY a year after the death of the Princess Marfa Petrovna, Prince Alexis received yet another letter from Prince Boris, his son. After reading it, he broke out into horrible oaths, and summoning his Intendant and Chief Butler, he gave them these orders —

“Now, listen, both of you, and take care you don’t forget a word of what I am going to say. Prince Boris will be here to-morrow with his slut of a wife; mind you, I expressly forbid any one to greet them except with insults. You will admit them to see me; but their horses are not to be taken out, for I have simply and solely to teach them a little lesson, after which I mean to turn them out of the Castle. You understand your orders?’

“Yes, Prince,” answered the two men. “You may rest assured it shall be done as you wish.” And, indeed, so it was.

Next day, about eleven in the forenoon, the carriage conveying the Prince and his wife was announced as being within sight of the Castle.

I cannot tell you, dear Ivan Andreovitch, all the abominations the young couple had to put up with on their arrival at Niskevo.

The Prince sat gloomy and silent in his coach, while the Princess replied with smiles, though she was crying bitterly all the time, to the insults and ribald jests levelled at them from all sides. A hundred of the lowest ruffians had been collected expressly for the purpose of hooting them, which they did from the moment the carriage entered the village till it drew up at the Castle.

The Prince Alexis, with a great whip of plaited leather thongs in his hand, stood in the great drawing-room awaiting the arrival of his son and his son’s wife. His eyes flashed fire like a wolf’s prowling at night round a sheepfold. We of the household hid ourselves as best we might in corners, for we saw plainly an appalling storm was brewing. I had called in a Pope surreptitiously and concealed him in an out-of-the-way room, in case the Prince should proceed to such extremities that the intervention of a Priest would be absolutely necessary.

Over all the Castle brooded a silence like the awful stillness that precedes a hurricane.

At last the Prince and Princess appeared on the threshold of the great room. On their first entrance Prince Alexis made a sudden movement full of anger and menace, and raised his whip. But when he saw his son's young wife, so fair and sweet and good she seemed, a very angel come down from heaven, the whip dropped from his hands, his face changed completely, and losing all its threatening aspect, became in an instant affable and smiling.

The young people threw themselves at their father's feet; but Prince Boris was the only one to put knee to ground, for Prince Alexis prevented the Princess from carrying out the movement. Throwing an arm round her waist, and fondling her dimpled chin with the other hand, he cried in his gentlest voice —

"So this is the naughty child, is it? Well, well, I can understand my son's infatuation now, when I see what a pretty girl it is. Kiss me, *Douchinka;* we'll get on very well together, never you fear."

Then, turning to his son —

"Welcome, Boris," he said. "I had meant to give you a sharp lesson, but when I look at your wife here, I have not the heart. God bless you!

The turn things had thus taken astonished us prodigiously; but it must be admitted that the Princess was of such dazzling beauty and such angelic sweetness she would really have disarmed the rage of a tiger by a single glance of her lovely eyes. I ran to the room where the Pope was shut in, and got him away off the premises without a soul setting eyes on him.

That day, and for many days following, there were high times at the Castle; banquets and balls succeeded each other, as splendid and brilliant as in the best of former days. Only at table neither bear nor Dames in Residence put in an appearance, and no drunkards were to be seen littering the corridors. Everything was done with the utmost propriety, and when one of the Prince's friends ventured to whisper in his ear," Are we not to visit the garden pavilions, then, and hold some converse with Olympus, eh? "Prince Alexis looked at him so sternly he felt his foolish tongue freeze instantly in his mouth.

All these changes were made under the influence and by the advice of the Princess Varvara. She had only to say," Enough, dear little father.... No, it's not nice, what you're after there I "and Prince Alexis immediately yielded to her wishes.

Not only did he give up sending folks to the stables, but, more than that, all the whips and knouts and rods were burned, to everybody's huge satisfaction.

Nor was this all; for the Prince Alexis married off every one of his Dames in Residence, from the first to the last; and of the petty nobles and friends of the house, all who were reported turbulent and over fond of the bottle were packed off to estates at a distance from the Castle.

The result of it all was that a strictness of conduct and a degree of orderliness were established in the household such as had never been known before.

Even the hunting-parties were conducted less riotously than of old, and the Prince entirely left off sitting on barrels of brandy and drinking to excess. He would still toss off two or three small glasses of vodka and treat his companions to the like, but compared with olden days, he kept both himself and them within the bounds of the strictest sobriety.

"Mustn't drink too much," he would say to his fellow-sportsmen. "If *Douchinka* got to hear of it, she would scold me, you know."

This excellent state of things continued a whole year, and the question of having little Prince Danilo to the Castle was much debated. He had been left all this while with his nurse, his parents not having dared bring him with them, as they could not tell how things might turn out. But he was thirteen months old now, his nurse wrote to say he was beginning to walk by himself, and Prince Alexis was dying, he said, to see his little grandson.

Unfortunately, at this point the peace which had followed the Battle of Austerlitz was broken, and the campaign of 1806 began.

Prince Boris was still in the army, and on receiving the news that his country was to take up arms once more against France, he felt bound to start for the scene of action.

The Princess Varvara was eager, come what might, to go with her husband. But Prince Alexis besought her, with tears in his eyes, not to abandon him in his old age; while, on the other side, Prince Boris held it was neither wise nor seemly for his wife to accompany him to the wars. Accordingly the Princess, yielding to the prayers of her father-in-law and the advice of her husband, made up her mind to remain at the Castle.

I can quite well recollect the sad, heart-rending farewells that husband and wife interchanged; you would have thought they foresaw the truth — that they were never to see each other again.

The Prince Alexis gave his son his blessing, touching him with a holy icon, kissed him fondly, and bade him fight bravely and be a good soldier to the Emperor Alexander.

"For your wife," he told him expressly, "be under no apprehension; her life here shall be as pleasant and peaceful as a queen's."

After Prince Boris's departure, existence went on at the Castle much as before, indeed if anything, with even greater tranquillity, for the Princess felt her husband's absence deeply. Visits became less and less frequent, while balls and dinners were never so much as dreamt of.

The Prince Alexis scarcely ever quitted his daughter-in-law's side, and strove by every means in his power to reassure her as to her husband's well-being.

Alas! the Enemy of Mankind was sorely vexed, doubtless, to contemplate this resigned melancholy, so gentle and peaceful as to be almost happiness. Accordingly he breathed vile thoughts into the Prince's heart, inspiring him with an odious and guilty love for his son's wife, so that he set all the resources of his wits to work to rouse the like feeling in her breast.

As you may readily suppose, the young Princess was terrified, when she heard the man who had promised her husband to see her safe, talking to her in this dreadful strain. With all the gentle tact she was mistress of, she tried to make him realize all the horror of the sin he contemplated. But Satan had won too firm a hold on the old Prince's heart for him to be capable of listening to reason.

There was a sore struggle of wills, which lasted several months. At last, one day he was going hunting, the prickers waiting ready to start at the foot of the Great Steps, the Prince entered his daughter's chamber at six o'clock in the morning, under pretext of bidding her farewell, and did not leave it till seven o'clock.

Then suddenly he was heard shouting —

"Send me Ouliachka and Vasilika here, some one!"

The two women were quickly on the spot, prompt as always to obey the Prince's orders, and found the latter struggling with his daughter-in-law, who could not scream, as she had a handkerchief forced between her teeth.

"Now, you two," ordered the Prince, "fix me up this pretty bird; you know how."

Then the two harridans tied the Princess's arms firmly behind her back, and discreetly left the room.

“Ho, trumpets, a fanfare!” shouted the Prince, throwing open the window and immediately closing it again.

Then two hundred hunting-horns blew a deafening blast, while the howling of the dogs, excited by the sudden fanfare, added to the din — which effectually drowned the cries of poor Princess Varvara....

Once more riot and disorder reigned at the Castle of Groubenski. The Dames in Residence returned to their old quarters, which had been unoccupied for eighteen months; the garden pavilions were lit up to receive fresh bands of Olympian goddesses; while above the sounds of dance and song were heard, as of old, the yells of unhappy culprits who had been sent to the stables to be knouted.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SUBSTITUTE

The Princess Varvara was sick — so sick that not a soul went near her chamber, no one either saw her or spoke to her any more. Had she fallen into the lake and been drowned she could not have been more absent from the Castle than she appeared to be. It was whispered, however, that she was firmly determined to set out for Memel, where her husband was quartered, but that the Prince Alexis positively forbade any such expedition.

Among the Prince's servants was a certain Grinshka Chatoune, who, to escape the obligation of military service, had passed ten years of his early manhood with the horde of freshwater pirates who, towards the latter part of the eighteenth century, used to cruise up and down the Volga, seizing vessels, robbing merchandise, and holding travellers to ransom.

One fine day, growing weary of the life, the fellow had come to the Prince, made a clean breast of it, and besought his protection, or, in other words, impunity for past misdoings. The Prince was very fond indeed of thwarting the justice of the Provincial Governors — a thing which gave him a high idea of his own power, and afforded satisfaction to his self-importance.

Accordingly, he took Grinshka into his service, gradually gave him more and more of his confidence, and ended by according him entire liberty of access to his person. In gratitude for these favours Grinshka had made himself spy-in-chief to the Prince, and by his means the latter found out whatever was afoot on his estates. The natural result was that everybody feared and detested Grinshka, and it was currently reported that when he was living with the pirates of the Volga he had sold his soul to the devil one night in the Forest of Saratoff, since which time he was given up to wizardry and every kind of abominable practices.

Now, this same Grinshka happened one day to lay hands on a letter which the Princess Varvara was writing to her husband to complain of her father-in-law's behaviour. What charge she preferred against the Prince Alexis nobody ever knew; but, as everybody could see plainly enough, after reading the letter the Prince fell into a train of gloomy reflections, and roamed all day long through the vast apartments of the Castle, holding his hands behind his back and whistling the *March of the Strelitz* between his teeth, which was always a sign with him of the deepest preoccupation of mind.

Next day the same symptoms were redoubled after his receipt of a letter from the Secretary of the Governor of Kasan. This official, who was devoted heart and soul to the Prince, warned him to be on his guard, inasmuch as the Governor, albeit one of his friends, could not avoid the obligation to make a descent upon his residence for the purpose of holding an inquiry — and this in consequence of a letter he had had from the Princess Varvara. At the same time the Secretary added that he would so arrange matters on his part that the visit in question should not take place till four or five days hence, so that, should any incriminating proof be in existence, it might be destroyed before the critical day.

After mastering the contents of this letter, the Prince went stalking up and down the Castle in a mood far more gloomy and thoughtful even than the day before.

All day long he took neither bite nor sup, but lowered like a thundercloud ready at a moment’s warning to flash out flame and fire, so that never a man of us dare face him.

That evening he sent for his familiar demon, Grinshka Chatoune, and remained closeted with him till daybreak.

What devilish art they employed the time upon no man can tell, the Lord God alone knowing what passed betwixt the pair.

When morning broke, the Prince Alexis issued orders to make whatever preparations were necessary for the journey of the Princess Varvara, who was to go to join her husband at Memel. The day was occupied in various arrangements, and the same evening a carriage drove up and slopped at the Great Steps.

Then the Princess Varvara, her face pale with sickness and the effects of moral suffering, came down the main staircase of the Castle and advanced to the outside balustrade at the foot of the Great Steps. There she halted and bade farewell to all. Respectfully approaching the Prince Alexis, she simply kissed his hand, without uttering a single word; but everybody could observe that as she touched the Prince’s hand, she shuddered convulsively from head to foot, and all but fell over backwards on the flags.

“Well, well, God keep you, daughter!” said the Prince. Then, turning towards the women, “Put her in the coach,” he ordered.

The Princess Varvara was helped into the coach, on the box of which, beside the coachman, sat Chatoune, while after the Princess there climbed into the carriage with her Ouliachka and Vasilika, the same two women who a month before had tied her hands together at the Prince’s order.

The servants, when they saw this, exchanged glances full of foreboding, each thinking in his heart that their presence could only mean mischief, and that some great calamity was brewing.

At eleven the same night Prince Alexis left the Castle all alone, went down into the garden, and made his way to the Pink Pavilion, where he spent part of the night. At five in the morning he came out of the building, locked the door behind him with the utmost care, and threw the key into the lake.

From that morning on, every door that gave access to the garden was barred and forbidden, and not a soul was suffered to enter or so much as go near it.

Moreover, the same night on which the Prince left the Castle and went and shut himself up in the Pink Pavilion, another very extraordinary event occurred.

Aringa, daughter of the groom Nikisof, disappeared, without leaving word or trace behind her. She had been sick for a month past of a severe intermittent fever, and it was hard to believe she had been carried off by a lover attracted by her charms, seeing she was anything but comely, even when in full possession of her health. Her strange disappearance exercised all men’s minds, though no one dared say what he could not help thinking of the matter.

A fortnight more, and Chatoune came back to the Castle, together with the two women who had accompanied the Princess Varvara on her journey. Their story was that the Princess, getting worse and worse the farther they left the Castle behind, had eventually become so very ill that she was forced to stop at a small village on the road. She had had a doctor called in to prescribe for her; but his efforts had evidently proved fruitless, for the poor Princess had died on the evening of the third day after they had broken their journey at the village.

Chatoune delivered to the Prince Alexis the papers verifying this unhappy event, consisting of certificates given by the governor of the nearest town to the place where the Princess died, by the doctor who had attended her previously to her decease, and by the Pope who had officiated at her burial. These papers Princc Alexis took, and after reading them, locked them up carefully in his secretaire.

Now, need I tell you, my little father Ivan Andreovitch, that the Princess Varvara had, after being driven round the country, been brought back to the Pink Pavilion; that the Prince Alexis, with the assistance of that devil Chatoune and his two worthy acolytes, Vasilika and Ouliachka, had walled up the Princess Varvara in the room where her body was found years afterwards, while they had put in her stead in the carriage that was supposed to be conveying the Princess to her husband, the groom Nikisof’s fever-stricken daughter, who died on the road, and was buried under the name and in the place of the Princess Varvara?

To complete the plot, all traces of the terrible affair were soon afterwards utterly effaced; for Chatoune and his two companions in guilt did not long survive. The very next day after their return to Groubenski, Prince Alexis ordered them to quit the Castle immediately, and go and live on one of his farms on the other bank of the Volga. It was autumn, and the river was sweeping down great floes of ice, which made the crossing extremely perilous. In spite of this, Chatoune and the two women obeyed the order, for no one would have ventured to disregard the commands of Prince Alexis; but they had not reached the middle of the stream before the frail boat that carried them was swamped by the ice, and all on board disappeared in the waves and were drowned without a chance of rescue.

On hearing the rumour that some of our folks were drowning in the Volga, we ran rapidly to the river, and there we saw the Prince Alexis standing on the top of a steep rock, his hands clasped behind his back. The wind had blown off his cap, which lay on the ground a dozen paces from him, and with his grey hair tossing in the wind he gazed calmly and fixedly at the three bodies the stream was carrying away in its rapid course, and which every now and again kept rising to the surface.

When every trace had disappeared — the three human bodies and the frail boat that had borne them to their death — the Prince Alexis crossed himself devoutly; no doubt he was repeating a prayer for the repose of the souls of his servants, who had just perished under his eyes. This done, he picked up his cap and set off homewards.

Thus it was that all traces of the tragedy were obliterated for ever, till the day came when the corpse, or rather the skeleton, of the Princess Varvara was discovered in the Pink Pavilion; and not only the Governors of Kasan, but all the Governors in Russia might have held twenty perquisitions and twenty courts of inquiry without unearthing a single fact.

But even as in the depths of the Volga stream lie the bodies the current engulfed, so in the depths of the Prince's heart lay remorse. So when he thought the hour of his death was announced by Arabka's howls, the dread secret came to light and he knew no rest till he had told me all.

It is true that, two hours later, when the storm was blown over and the sun was shining again, when they came to inform the Prince there were five or six boars marked down, the whole man was instantly transformed, and, forgetting or making pretence to forget the past, he sprang forward like a war-horse at sound of the trumpet. Dashing out of the Pavilion with all the eagerness of a young man of twenty-five, he cried, "To horse, to horse!" in his loudest and most ringing voice.

Then, leaping into the saddle, he started off at a tearing gallop, scarcely half dressed, and without a word of farewell to his testamentary executor, Mouranski.

As for us, we hurried after him, riding off as hard as our horses could go in the direction of the Forest of Uraginski.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

A WEEK more, and we were all back again at the Castle. There, in the great *salon,* a hundred bottles of wine — most of them empty, some half empty, twelve or fifteen still unopened — together with five or six casks of brandy on tap bore witness, if not to the good taste of the guests there assembled, at any rate to the merry life led by them, and amply justified the loud bursts of merriment which could be heard floating out in great waves of sound from doors and windows.

Thirty or so boon companions were gathered together in the vast room. Each man drank as much as he pleased, and when fatigue and intoxication at length compelled one of them to snatch some moments of repose, he would drop asleep wherever he was — on the floor or on some rich sofa, in the midst of other recumbent forms and arms and legs thrown about pellmell and hands clasping the necks of bottles. Meantime, the Dames in Residence, dressed in mythological costumes, sang obscene songs and danced lascivious dances.

The Prince, uncombed, unshaven, and unpowdered for days, coatless, and wearing only his breeches and jacket, sat in a great armchair as president of the general orgy.

“Come, come,” he would cry, “come, you devils, male and female, please try and be a trifle less depressing. You do really bore me to extinction, upon my word!”

I cannot tell you, Ivan Andreovitch, all the money the Prince spent at this time; he used to distribute handfuls of pearls and precious stones among the Dames in Residence, to say nothing of earrings and pins and brooches and rings, clasps and ornaments of gold set with diamonds, to say nothing either of costly stuffs of satin, silk, and velvet. It was a veritable golden age for all the Prince’s satellites, and there is more than one moujik who has cut his beard and who now wears his shirt inside his trousers, whose wealth dates from those days.

The fact is, I firmly believe, that the Prince was not in full possession of his senses all this time.

One morning he was informed that the Magistrates were come, their business being nothing more nor less than to hold an official inquiry on the spot, in the Castle of Groubenski. At the news everybody struck his colours, and the revel fell silent as if it had been broken up by a thunderbolt; the Prince alone burst into a great fit of laughter.

“Every one go instantly to his post,” he cried, “and have the knouts ready! I’ll show the Magistrates a queer sort of inquiry, I will!”

The guests all vanished instantly, and the house was hurriedly put in order from top to bottom. A quarter of an hour later there arrived at the Castle a Major of Dragoons, accompanied by two Magistrates, having instructions to hold an official perquisition and inquiry.

The Prince Alexis, in full gala dress and with hair duly powdered sat to receive them in the state saloon. When the Magistrates and the military officer entered, Prince Alexis barely rose from his chair, and, without offering them seats, asked them in a curt, cold voice what he could do for them.

“We have received orders, Prince,” one of the Magistrates replied, “to carry out the most rigorous investigations as to certain acts of criminality imputed to you, of which to all appearance you have been guilty, against the Princess Varvara.”

“Ah, ha, ha! So you have received orders like that, have you?” shouted the Prince, “and you come here to carry them out? How dare you show your nose, you miserable moujik, inside the Castle of Groubenski? Do you know who I am?... Who sent you, eh? Was it that cur of a Vaivode, or that rascal of a Governor? If you come from them, they had better look out. I shall know how to deal with them, and they may very likely find themselves paying a visit to my stables; as for you, I promise you...”

“Calm yourself, Prince,” interrupted the Major. “I have fifty dragoons with me, and I am not sent either by the Vaivode or the Governor.”

“Who are you sent by, then, eh?”

“By our Father and our Czar, the Emperor Nicholas, who has just mounted the throne of his glorious ancestors.”

No sooner had the Prince Alexis heard the words than he shuddered from head to foot, and, dropping his head between his two hands, muttered in a voice of despair —

“I am lost — lost and undone!”

The fact is, he had never for an instant expected the matter would have reached the Czar’s ears.

Next he went up to the Major calmly and humbly, and swore by all the Saints he was utterly ignorant of what crime he could be accused, and that, were the Princess Varvara still alive, she would be the first to proclaim his innocence.

“It is the Princess Varvara herself that is your accuser,” said the Major, “and here is her accusation.”

The Prince started back panic-stricken. Had Chatoune betrayed him? Had the Princess been insecurely walled up in her sepulchre?

He took the paper of accusation in his trembling hands, and saw that it bore the date 1807 — nineteen years back, that is to say. But the Emperor Nicholas, on ascending the throne, had announced his wish to have all the complaints brought against the great nobles of the Empire during the last twenty years submitted to him, that he might adjudicate upon them.

The Prince, when he noted that the complaint was in the handwriting of his daughter-in-law, dropped his arms by his side with an air of the deepest discouragement.

Presently the Major and the two Judges took their seats at a table, on which they laid their papers.

Prince Alexis saw it all, but with such a broken look he scarcely seemed to notice what he saw. He remained standing, staring wildly and distractedly about him, and repeating over and over again —

“I am lost — lost and undone!”

The Major, who presided over the inquiry, addressed the Prince —

“Prince Alexis, in conformity with a formal order of His Imperial Majesty, given in his Chamber of Secret Service, you will be pleased to reply with the most scrupulous accuracy to all such questions as may be asked you relative to the abominable crime you..

“Oh, have pity on me, and save me from ruin!” broke in the Prince. “Be my father and my benefactor! It may be I committed crimes in my youth, and even in my maturity; but now I am a poor old man with grey hair, more than seventy years of age...” and the Prince Alexis threw himself at the Major’s feet.

Now, just think, my dear Ivan Andreovitch, what a thing the fear of the Czar is! Prince Alexis was a great lord, so great and powerful he would not have hesitated to take his whip to the Governor of a town or even a Minister of State, if either of them had incurrred his displeasure. Yet, on finding himself confronted with the majestic and terrible anger of the Czar, he felt himself so small and insignificant he fell at the feet of a Major of Dragoons.

“Do not ruin a poor old man!” he went on again, in a lamentable voice. “I have not much longer to live, that is certain, for they who have gone before me to the other world have warned me I am expected there.... Only spare me, and I will enter a Monastery and put on a monk’s habit. Be merciful, and I will load you with gold; everything here shall be yours, if only you will spare me.”

“Enough,” said the Major, shortly. “Come, get up. Are you not ashamed to grovel at my feet like this? Remember you are a noble, a Prince. So get up, and answer the questions I am going to ask you in obedience to the order of his Majesty.”

The Prince rose from his knees, and, endeavouring to assume a confident bearing, said —

“As you wish me to answer, I will do so; but I do not know what you would be at.”

“Be careful what you say, Prince, lest this hall become a torture-chamber for you. If you refuse to tell the truth of your own free will, we have efficacious means of forcing you to speak.”

At this threat the Prince Alexis fell back into an armchair, and turned lividly pale; his eyes grew haggard, and his breathing became difficult and painful.

The Major looked at his face, and saw that he was really not completely master of his reason. Accordingly, he put off the inquiry till the morrow, after taking precautions to prevent any one holding communication with the Prince.

A prey to the deepest despair, the latter roams like a lost soul through the vast and numerous apartments of his Castle — now suddenly fallen lonely and silent, — tearing out his white hair as he goes, and uttering dismal groans.

Wandering thus at random, he enters the Portrait Gallery, and in spite of himself casts a glance at the picture of the Princess Varvara.

Suddenly he stops and stands motionless, his hair rising on his head and his eyes fixed in a glassy stare.

He seems to see the Princess's face come to life on the canvas, and the head, but now so still and motionless, make signs lo him, nodding slightly up and down. Then he thinks he hears the gentle angel voice of the dead Princess murmuring three times over —

"Murderer! murderer! murderer!"

The Prince Alexis fell on the floor a lifeless mass; his paralysed tongue could not articulate a word; his limbs refused their office, and were incapable of the smallest movement.

He was found stretched on the ground, from which he was picked up and carried to his bed. There he was seized with terrible delirium, breaking out into a string of words without sense or sequence, while his eyes blazed with a fearful light.

The Major took compassion on his state, and sent for a physician, besides giving permission for the Prince to be nursed by his own attendants. The physician bled his patient, an operation which was followed by a great improvement. From that time the Prince began to talk connectedly, though he still found considerable difficulty in making his tongue obey him.

Presently he summoned his Intendant, and beckoning him to come close to him, gave him an order in a low voice —

"You will have a smear of black paint laid across the face of the Princess Varvara."

The Intendant had the command executed, and returned to tell him his directions had been obeyed.

"That is right," the Prince said. "She will not be able to speak to the Major now, as she did to me."

Those present thought he was relapsing into a state of delirium, but they were mistaken; he was dead.

The Prince being dead, the inquiry could lead to nothing, and was abandoned; and this was the reason why, instead of their being unearthed by the Major and the two Judges, the remains of the Princess Varvara — in consequence of the information I gave him — were discovered by Prince Danilo.

THE BALL OF SNOW

Anonymous translation

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LIST OF CHARACTERS.

THE BALL OF SNOW.
Period, 1830.
HADJI FESTAHLI, a holy Mussulman.
KASSIME, his niece.
KITCHINA, friend to Kassime.
ISKANDER BEG, a young Tartar in love with Kassime. YUSSEF, his friend.
HUSSEIN INHABITANT Of Derbend.
FERZALI INHABITANT Of Derbend.
DJAFFAR, a goldsmith.
MULLAH SEDEK, friend of Hadji Festahli.
MONZARAM BEG, chief of police at Derbend.
MULLAH NOUR, a brigand.
GOULCUADE, his wife.

CHAPTER I.

FORTY DEGREES IN THE SHADE.

THE sad, sonorous voice of the muezzin was heard as a dirge for the brilliant May day that was just sweeping into eternity.

"Allah! it is hot weather for Derbend! Go upon the roof, Kassime, and see how the sun is setting behind the mountain. Is the west red? Are there clouds in the sky?"

"No, uncle; the west is as blue as the eyes of Kitchina; the sun is setting in all its glory; it looks like a flaming rose upon the breast of evening, and the last ray that falls upon the earth has not to pierce the slightest fog."

Night has unfurled her starry fan; the shadows have fallen.

"Go up on the roof, Kassime," bade the same voice, "and see if the dew is not dripping from the rim of the moon. Is she not lurking in a misty halo, like a pearl in its brilliant shell?"

"No, uncle; the moon is floating in an azure ocean; she is pouring her burning beams into the sea. The roofs are as dry as the steppes of the Mogan, and the scorpions are playing about gayly."

"Ah," said the old man, with a sigh, "it means that to-morrow will be as warm as to-day. The best thing to do, Kassime, is to go to bed."

And the old man falls asleep, dreaming of his silver; and his niece falls asleep dreaming of what a young girl of sixteen always dreams, whatever her nationality may be, — of love; and the town falls asleep dreaming that it was Alexander the Great who had built the Caucasian Wall and forged the iron gates of Derbend.

And so, toward midnight, everything slept.

The only sounds to be heard, in the general stillness, were the warnings of the sentinels to each other, "*Slouchay!*" (watch!) and the moaning of the Caspian sea, as it advanced to press its humid lips upon the burning sands of the shore.

One could have fancied the souls of the dead to be communing with eternity, and this conception would have been the more striking, since nothing so resembles a vast cemetery as the city of Derbend.

Long before day the surface of the sea seemed ablaze. The swallows, awake before the muezzin, were singing upon the mosque.

True, they did not much precede him. The sounds of his footsteps put them to flight. He advanced upon the minaret, bowing his head upon his hand, and crying out in measured tones that lent his words the effect, if not the form, of a chant, —

“Awake ye, arise, Mussulmans; prayer is better than sleep!”

One voice answered his; it said, —

“Go up on the roof, Kassime, and see if a mist is not descending from the mountains of Lesghistan. Tell me, is not the sea obscured?”

“No, uncle; the mountains seem covered with pure gold; the sea shines like a mirror; the flag above the fortress of Nazinkale hangs in folds along its staff like a veil about a young girl’s form. The sea is still; not the slightest puff of wind lifts an atom of dust from the highway; all is calm on the earth, all serene in the sky.” The face of the old man became gloomy, and, after performing his ablutions, he went up on the roof to pray.

He unfolded the prayer-rug that he carried under his arm and knelt upon it, and, when he had finished his prayer by rote, he began to pray from the heart.

“*Bismillahir rahmanir rahim!*” he cried, looking sadly about him.

Which means, —

“May my voice resound to the glory of the holy and merciful God!”

Then he proceeded to say in Tartar what we shall say in French, at the risk of divesting the prayer of Kassime’s uncle of the picturesque character imparted to it by the language of Turkestan.

“O clouds of spring-time, children of our world, why do ye linger on the rocky heights? why hide ye in caves, like Lesghian brigands. Ye like to rove about the mountains, and sleep upon the snowy peaks of granite. Be it so; but could ye not find yourselves better amusement than pumping all the humidity from our plains, only to turn it upon forests that are impenetrable to man and permit to descend into our valleys naught but cataracts of flint that look like the dried bones of your victims, ye capricious children of the air?

See how our unhappy earth opens a thousand mouths! She is parched with thirst; she implores a little rain. See how the wheat-blades shrink; how they break when a butterfly imprudently lights upon them; how they lift their heads, hoping to inhale a little freshness, and are met by the sun’s rays, which lap them like flame. The wells are dry; the flowers hold no perfume; the leaves on the trees shrivel and fall; the grass dries up; the madder is lost, the crickets grow hoarse, the death-rattle of the cicada is heard, the buffaloes fight for a streamlet of mud; the children dispute over a few drops of water. O God! O God! what is to become of us? Drouth is the mother of famine; famine is the mother of pestilence; pestilence is the twin of robbery! O cool wind of the mountains, waft hither on your wings the blessing of Allah! Ye clouds, life-giving bosoms, pour the milk of heaven down upon the land! Whirl into storms, if ye will, but refresh the earth! Strike down the wicked with your thunderbolts, if ye deem it best, but spare the innocent! Gray clouds, wings of the angels, bring us moisture; come, hasten, fly! Speed ye, and ye shall have welcome."

But the old Tartar prays in vain, the clouds are invisible. It is sultry, it is stifling, and the inhabitants of Derbend are quite prepared to seek for coolness in their ovens.

And note well that this was the month of May, just when St. Petersburg hears a loud crashing at the northeast as the ice of the Ladoga breaks up and threatens to sweep away the bridges of the Neva; when a man catches cold while crossing the Place d'Isaac; when he gets inflammation of the chest by turning the corner of the Winter Palace; when people shout at each other, from Smolnyi to the English embankment, —

"You are going out? Don't forget your cloaks!"

At St. Petersburg they were thinking of the spring, which was, perhaps, approaching; at Derbend they took thought of the harvesting, which was almost at hand.

For five weeks, not a drop of rain had fallen in South Daghestan, and it would have been forty degrees in the shade if there had been any shade in Derbend. As a fact, it was fifty-two degrees in the sun.

A drouth in the Orient is a terrible thing. It scorches the fields and deprives every living creature of nourishment, — the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, the dwellers in cities. In a country where the transportation of grain is always difficult, often impossible, drouth is invariably the forerunner of famine. An Asiatic lives from day to day, forgetful of yesterday, unmindful of to-morrow. He lives thus because ease and *far niente* are his dearest enjoyments; but when there is no Joseph to interpret the parable of the seven lean kine, when misfortune falls suddenly upon his shoulders in the hideous guise of famine, when to-morrow becomes to-day, he begins to complain that he is not granted the means of living. Instead of seeking them, he waxes wroth, and, when he should act, his cowardice augments the evil, as his incredulity has abridged it.

You can now judge of the trouble they were in at Derbend, a city wholly Tartar, and, consequently, wholly Asiatic, when this desert heat began to destroy the prospects of both merchants and husbandmen.

To tell the truth, at that time Daghestan had many reasons for anxiety; the fanatical Kasi Mullah, the adoptive father of Schamyl, was at the height of his fame; the inhabitants of Daghestan had revolted, and more bullets had been sown in their fields than wheat; fire had destroyed the houses, whose ashes the sun kept hot; and the mountaineers, instead of harvesting, rode under the standard of Kasi Mullah or hid themselves in caves and forests to escape the Russians, or, rather, to fall upon their backs when they were least on guard.

The result was not difficult to foretell, — it was famine. The sowing not having been done, the harvest was wanting. Anything that the war had spared — silver plate, rich arms, beautiful carpets — was sold for a mere trifle at the bazaar. The most beautiful necklace of pearls in Derbend could have been bought with a sack of flour.

The man possessed of neither plate, nor arms, nor tapestries, nor pearls, began upon his flocks, eating such as had been left him by friend and foe, or Russian and mountaineer. The poor began to come down from the mountains and beg for alms in the city, while waiting until they could take without asking.

At last, vessels loaded with flour arrived from Astrakhan. Through pity or fear, the rich helped the poor; the people were quieted for a time.

The new harvest could yet right matters.

The fête of the Khatil had come, and it had been celebrated by the inhabitants of Derbend.

The Khatil is a religious festival in memory of the fate of Shah Hussein, the first caliph, a martyr of the sect of Ali. They made merry while it lasted, with the childish gayety of the Orientals.

Thanks to this fête, the only diversion of the people during the entire year, they had gradually forgotten the crops and the heat, or, rather, they had forgotten nothing; no, they had in all simplicity thanked Heaven that the rain had not interfered with their pleasures. But, when the fête was over, when they found themselves face to face with the reality, when they awoke with parched mouths, when they saw their fields baked by the sun, they lost their heads.

It was interesting then to note the wagging of red beards and black, to mark the rattling of beads as they slipped through the fingers.

Every face was long, and only repinings were heard.

It was really no laughing matter to lose a crop, and have to pay two roubles a measure for flour without knowing what must be paid for it later.

The poor trembled for their lives, the rich for their purses. Stomachs and pockets crept close together at the mere thought of it.

Then it was that the Mussulmans began to pray in the mosque.

The rain came not.

They prayed in the fields, thinking that in the open air they stood two chances to one, — the one of being seen, the other of being heard.

Not a drop of water fell.

What was to be done?

They fell back on their magi.

First, the boys spread their handkerchiefs in the middle of the streets and collected the coins that were thrown into them. Purchasing wax tapers and rose-water, and fastening tree branches to the body of the most beautiful boy, they decked him with flowers and covered him with ribbons, and then followed him in a procession through the streets, chanting verses to Goudoul, the god of rain.

The hymn ended with a strophe of thanksgiving. They did not doubt that Goudoul would answer the prayers of his worshippers.

Thus, for three days, the young boys shouted at the tops of their voices this thanksgiving, which we translate, without any pretension of rendering otherwise than very feebly the Arabic poem: —

“Goudoul, Goudoul, O god of rain,
The drouth has fled from mount and plain;
Thy voice from heaven the rain doth send.
Then go, fair maid, unto the rill!
And high thy jar with water fill,
Till thou beneath its weight doth bend.”

And all the youths of Derbend danced around the beribboned and garlanded Tartar, so sure of rain that, as we see, they were sending the young girls in advance to the fountain.

And, in truth, clouds gathered in the sky; the sun sulked like a miser obliged to surrender the treasure that had been intrusted to him. The city took on the dreary look that dull weather imparts.

But the darker the sky became, the greater was the people's joy.

A few drops of rain fell.

They cried out with fervor, —

"Sekour Allah!"

But their joy was short-lived; the wind blew up from Persia as hot as if it had come from a furnace, and drove away the very last remnant of a cloud, which betook itself to St. Petersburg to fall as snow. The sun glared worse than ever; the grass crumbled under the heat; the flowers bent their heads, and the faithful began to doubt, not Mahomet's might, but Goudoul's.

Another day dawned; the sun pursued his blazing path, then he sank behind the mountain, like a weary traveller in the burning sands of the desert.

On that night and the next morning the two conversations which opened this chapter took place between Kassime and her uncle.

The old Tartar had then addressed to the clouds the prayer that we have attempted to translate. But, in spite of his fervent prayer, that day, like the preceding one, passed without a drop of rain.

And on that day the commander of Derbend announced that the thermometer had registered forty-two degrees in the shade and fifty-two degrees in the sun.

CHAPTER II.

A HOLY MUSSULMAN.

AH! when you go to Derbend, traveller, from whatever country you hail, — whether you come from the south, the north, the east or the west, — go, I entreat you, to see the principal mosque.

Otherwise, as the Catholics say, you will have been to Rome without seeing the pope.

What would you have to relate about Derbend, I ask, if you had not seen the great mosque?

While, if you have seen it, it is a very different matter.

"The great mosque," you say, snapping your snuffbox, or flicking the ashes from your cigar, if you are only a smoker, "the mosque," you say, "was formerly a Christian church — "

Proceed boldly, I assume all responsibility.

"It was a church, a Christian church, rather, because its face is turned to the east, while the Mussulman mosques of the northern Orient should veer southerly, in nautical phrase, in order to look toward the two holy cities, — Mecca, where the prophet was born; Medina, where he was buried."

This gives you at the outset a somewhat learned air which sits well. Proceed.

"Upon entering, you discover a great court shaded by magnificent plane-trees, with a well in the centre.

Three doors, always open, symbolically and practically summon the Mussulmans to prayer.

"A verse from the Koran inscribed over the principal door attracts the attention. Enter: but first put off the shoes from your feet; put away earthly thoughts from your mind. Into the house of Allah bring not the clay of the street, nor of the mind. Fall upon your knees and lift up your prayer. Reckon not your rents, but your sins. *La illah il Allah! Mohammed rassoul Allah!* — that is to say: There is no God but God, and Mahomet is his prophet."

Here you cough and make a pause; that was quite worth the trouble. You have an air of knowing Turk. You resume: —

“Mussulmans are long at their prayers, remaining on their knees or prostrate on the prayer-rug, as they pass from adoration to ecstasy, and nothing, especially in this last state, can then distract their attention.”

Memory then reverts to the past, and you exclaim, — “Where are you, Christian builders of this temple? are you now remembered anywhere but in heaven? You are forgotten, even in the history of Derbend, and the words of the Koran echo to-day where formerly sounded the hymns of the prophet king.”

And now that you have given your account, now that you have acquired the right to be a corresponding member of the section of inscriptions and *belles-lettres* of the French Academy, the most learned, as you know, of all academies, I again take up the thread of my history; for this, pray take note, is history.

I resume then, the thread of my history.

Among Mussulmans of all countries, and particularly among the Mussulmans of Daghestan, the court of the mosque is the usual place of meeting. There the merchants gather to talk over their commercial interests, and the Tartar chiefs, their political issues. The first have but one aim, — to get the better of their customers; the second, but one hope, — to throw off the yoke of their master. The former have vowed to Allah to be honest; the latter have sworn to the emperor to be faithful. But, in Asia, oddly enough, — and this will astonish our public officers, our judges and senators, — the oath is regarded as a simple formality, of no consequence and not binding.

Does this, perchance, mean that the Asiatics, whom we believe to be behind us in the matter of civilization, are, on the contrary, in advance?

This would be very humiliating, and, in such case, we must hasten to overtake them.

You must know that at this period of frightful heat, which we have tried to depict, the court of the mosque — — the only place where there were any trees, consequently any shade, consequently only forty degrees of heat — was full of people. Effendis with white beards, muftis with red, were talking in the centre of circles more or less wide, according as they were more or less eloquent; but the learning of these and the dignity of those did not cause the sky to sweat the least drop of moisture, and the beards of all lengths and of all colors were powerless even to invent an equivalent. They talked much, they argued still more; but at last discourse and discussion ended this way: —

“*Nedgeleikh?* (What shall we do now?)”

Shoulders went up to the ears, eyebrows to the papaks; many voices in many keys united in one cry,- —

“*Amani! amani!* (Spare us! spare us!)”

“Finally, a prince began to speak.

He was not only a prince, but a saint, — a combination which was formerly seen in Russia and France, but which is to be met with to-day only in the Orient.

It is true that his saintship, like his principality, came to him by inheritance; he was related in the sixty-second degree to Mahomet, and, as we know, all relatives of Mahomet, of whatsoever degree, are saints.

His eloquence grew heated in the smoke of his kabam, and golden speech emanated from the fumes of the Turkish tobacco.

“‘Amatii! amani!’ you cry to Allah; and think you that, for this one word, Allah will be so simple as to pardon you and put faith in your repentance without other proof? No! kiss not the Koran with lips still smeared with the fat of pork; no, you do not deceive God with your flatteries and plaintive tones. He is not a Russian governor; ho has known you this long while. Your hearts are covered with more stains than there are sins in the book in which the angel Djebrael records the faults of men! Do not think to cleanse your hearts from one day to the next by prayer and fasting. God beholds your image in the sunlight of day and the starlight of night; ho knows every thought of your mind, every impulse of your heart; he knows how you go to the pharmacies, and, on a pretext of buying balsam, manage to get brandy under a false label. But God is not to be deceived by such means. The word of Mahomet is decisive: ‘He who in this world has drunk the juice of the vine, in the other shall not drink the wine of gladness.’ No! you will have no rain for your crops, because you have drained the source of the rains of heaven by exhausting the patience of the Lord! Allah is great, and you are yourselves the cause of your misery.”

The orator ceased speaking, raised his eyes toward the heavens, grasped his beard with his hand; and, in this attitude, he was not unlike Jupiter about to hurl from his mighty hand a sheaf of thunderbolts.

And, sooth to say, a very eminent scholar was Mir Hadji Festahli Ismaël Ogli. From the beginning of his speech it was as if one were listening to a brooklet’s murmuring or a nightingale’s singing. Every word produced upon the by-standers the effect of a melting pastel, and there was not, in all

Daghestan, a single effendi who understood the half of what he was saying. The interpreter of the commander of Derbend himself, Mirza Aly, who had swallowed, digested, and thrown up criticisms upon all the poets of Farzistan, after having talked with him for more than two hours, ended by saying, —

"I can make nothing of it."

This, in Tartar, corresponds to the Russian saying, which, I think, is also a little French: "I throw my tongue to the dogs."

This time our orator had taken the trouble to make himself clear, so that he had been understood by everybody, as was expedient in a conjuncture of such importance; hence his discourse had produced the greatest effect. They gathered around him with mingled respect and awe, and these words were heard murmured on all sides: "He is right, he speaks the truth;" and each man, like a bee, regaled him with the honey of praise.

Thereupon, addressing himself anew to his auditors, with the confidence gained from his first success, he said, —

"Listen, brethren; we are all guilty in the eyes of Allah, and I stand quite the first; our faults have mounted to the third heaven, but, happily, there are seven of them, and four remain to us in which to seek for God's mercy. He punishes the innocent with the guilty; yet, sometimes, for a single good man, he saves a whole people. Well, I am going to make you a proposition. Whether you will accept it or not, I do not know, but here it is: This is not the first time that Daghestan has prayed for water; well, our fathers and grandfathers, who were wiser than we, were accustomed, under such circumstances, to chose from among the young Mussulmans a youth pure in mind and body, and send him, with the prayers and blessings of all, up to the summit of the mountain nearest to Allah, — that is, to the top of Schach Dagh. There he must pray fervently, as one who prays for a whole people; he must take some unsullied snow from the mountain, make a ball of the size of his head, enclose it in a vase, and then, without permitting it to touch the earth, he must bring it to Derbend. Finally, at Derbend he must turn the melted snow into the sea. God is great. The snow-water from Schach Dagh will scarcely have mingled with the waters of the Caspian sea before the clouds are heaped above the mingled waters, and the down-pouring rain refreshes the parched earth."

"It is true! it is true!" cried every voice.

"I have heard my father tell about it," said one.

“And I my grandfather,” said another.

“And I have seen it,” said, as ho advanced, an old man with a white beard whose extremity alone was tinged with red.

They turned and listened to him.

“It was my brother,” continued the old man, “that went to get the ball of snow; the miracle was performed; the waters of the Caspian sea became as fresh as milk; the raindrops were as large as silver roubles; never, in the memory of man, had there been so fine a harvest as that year’s.” — .

The old man was silent.

Then there was but one cry.

They must choose a messenger, must pick him out that very instant, must send him to Schach Dagh without losing a moment.

“To Schach Dagh! to Schach Dagh!” they shouted. As by a train of gunpowder, the words reached the town, and all Derbend cried with one voice, like an echo of the mosque, —

“To Schach Dagh! to Schach Dagh!”

The solution of the great puzzle was therefore discovered; they knew then at last a sure way to bring rain. Everybody danced with delight and screamed for joy.

The rich especially appeared enchanted that a means had been found that would not cost a kopeck.

There is no one like a rich man for appreciating economical measures.

The young men said proudly, —

“They will choose from among us; upon one of us depends the fate of Daghestan.”

But where was this young man to be found, pure of body and mind? In any nation it would be difficult; but among the Asiatics! —

While reflecting upon this question, the inhabitants of Derbend were much embarrassed, and the effervescence of their first exultation subsided.

Where, indeed, was this innocent young man to be found who knew as yet neither the savor of wine nor the sweetness of a kiss?

They began to consider the matter seriously, to point out this one, then that one; but the one was too young, the other too experienced. The first had as yet no moustache; that of the second was too long. It was a dreadful affair to manage successfully.

What we have just said is not entirely to the credit of the inhabitants of Derbend; but, I repeat, this is history that I am writing: truth, then, before everything.

If this were a romance! Ah! *pardieu!* my hero would already be found.

“We must take Sopharkouli,” said some; “he is as shy as a young girl.”

So shy that, afraid of no one knows what, he had been seen, three days before, to leap, at peep o’ day, from his fair neighbor’s terrace into the street, enter hastily his own house, and lock his door with a double turn.

“Or Mourad Annet; he leads a life as quiet and solitary as a lily.”

But it was affirmed that a month before, upon returning home with a bottle of balsam in each hand, after a visit to the pharmacy, the immaculate lily had sung songs that would have made the devils themselves clap their hands to their ears.

There still remained Mohammed Rassoul; surely no one could speak evil of him. However, they might think it. He had in his house a charming Lesghienne whom ho had bought from her father; he had paid only twenty-nine roubles, and had since refused a hundred for her. He was a man after all; a sword of steel sometimes rusts.

They sought in vain; too much was said of this one; that one said too much of himself.

Melancholy began to possess the inhabitants of Derbend, and under such circumstances there is but a step from melancholy to despair.

“And Iskander Beg?” said a voice in the crowd. “Iskander Beg, surely! Excellent! Iskander Beg! Perfect! How did we forget Iskander Beg? It is incredible! incomprehensible! As well overlook a rose in a bouquet, a pomegranate in a dish of fruit! Allah! Allah! The heat has shrivelled up our wits.”

“Well,” said a voice, “Allah be praised! we have found our man! Call Iskander Beg!”

“Iskander Beg! Iskander Beg, hallo! Iskander Beg, hallo!”

“Now indeed are we saved,” was declared on all sides. “This dear Iskander Beg! this excellent Iskander Beg! this noble Iskander Beg! Why, he scarcely eats! he never drinks! *He* is not hand-in-glove with unbelievers. No one remembers having ever met him in a garden. Who has ever seen him look at a woman? Have you?”

“No.”

“Or you?”

“Nor I, either. He lives apart like the moon.”

“Well, then, let us run to Iskander Beg’s house!” cried several voices.

“But people don’t go to Iskander Beg’s like that.”

“Why?”

“Because he is so dignified that a man does not know how to approach him; so haughty that one speaks only when spoken to; so sparing of speech that one would say every word cost him a rouble. Who ever saw him laugh, hey?”

“Not I.”

“Nor I.”

“Nor I. We must think twice about it before going to his house.”

“There is but one man that might venture to run the risk,” said a voice.

And every one answered, —

“That man is Mir Hadji Festahli Ismaël Ogli.”

It was indeed very proper that the one who had given the advice should finish what he had begun.

“Go, Hadji Festahli, go,” cried the by-standers, “and entreat Iskander in the name of us all! Get his consent; you will have no difficulty, you are so eloquent!”

Hadji Festahli was not eager for the honor; but, in the end, he agreed to undertake the commission. They gave him two begs as escort, — the fat Hussein and the lean Ferzali.

The deputation set out. “Ah!” said the crowd, “that is well.”

“I am as tranquil now,” said one, “as if Iskander had accepted.”

“If Festahli has a mind, he is sure to succeed,” said another.

“He could coax half a beard away from a poor man.”

“He is cleverer than the devil.”

“A very respectable man!”

“He is a genius!”

“He could make a serpent dance on its tail.”

“And what eloquence! when he speaks, they are not mere words that fall from his mouth — ”

“They are flowers!”

“The ears have not even time to gather them in.”

“He could so cheat you that he could get judgment against you for having been taken in by him.”

“But we could not have sent him for the ball of snow.”

“He is not chaste enough for that.”

“Nor sober enough.”

“Nor brave enough.”

“Nor quite — ”

Permit us to break off from the eulogies of Mir Hadji Festahli. We are not of those who, after bathing a man’s eyes with rose-water, — as the Tartars say, — give him, while he is drying them, a scorpion instead of a cherry to eat, or an aconite blossom in place of a jasmine to smell.

CHAPTER III.

ISKANDER BEG.

THE respectable Hadji Festahli proceeded slowly as he climbed the ladder of streets that leads to the higher part of the city, in which stood the house of Iskander Beg. From time to time he had to pass through streets so narrow that his two honorable companions, Hussein and Ferzali, who walked beside him along the streets where they could go three abreast, were then obliged to fall back and walk behind him in single file, — a humiliation from which they made haste to escape as soon as the street became wide enough for three abreast. Occasionally one or the other would attempt to engage the hadji in conversation; but so great was his preoccupation, he did not hear them, did not answer; and he was even so absent-minded that he failed to observe that in spitting to right and left, he sometimes spat upon the black beard of Hussein, sometimes upon the red beard of Ferzali.

His inattention continued so long that his two companions began to be angry.

“This is a singular man!” said Hussein; “he is spoken to, and, instead of replying, he spits.”

“May it fall into his throat!” cried Ferzali, wiping his beard. “The proverb says truly, Hussein: ‘If the master is at home, it is sufficient to speak his name, and the door will be opened to you; but if he is not there, you will get nothing, even by breaking in.’

Useless to speak any more to Mir Hadji Festahli; his mind is elsewhere, the house is empty.”

Ferzali *à la barbe rose*, as they called him in Derbend, because, instead of employing the two substances in use among the Tartars for coloring the beard, — substances, the first of which begins by tinting the beard red, and the second finishes by dyeing it black, —

Ferzali, who used only the first, and who, consequently, kept his beard the color of the first streak of dawn as it appears on the verge of the horizon — Ferzali was deceived. The house was not empty; it was, on the contrary, so full of its own occupants, and their strife was creating such an uproar, that, not being able to understand even the voice of his own mind, Hadji Festahli could not understand other people's voices.

This was what his thoughts were urging: "Have a care, Festahli! every step that you take toward the dwelling of Iskander Beg brings you nearer to danger. Remember how seriously you have offended him. Beware, Hadji Festahli, beware!"

What, then, had passed between Hadji Festahli and Iskander Beg?

We are about to relate it.

Iskander was born at Derbend, when the city was already occupied by the Russians, — this occupation dates from 1795; but his father had been the intimate friend of the last khan, who had been driven from his provinces by Catherine's army. In 1826, he died of chagrin because the Persians, whom he was expecting at Derbend, had been routed at Kouba, to which point they had advanced; but, when dying, he had charged his son, then fifteen years of age, never to serve the Russians, and never to make friends with the inhabitants of Derbend, who had repelled the Persians.

He was dead; but his convictions, his habits, his opinions, all survived in his son, whose ideas, thoughts, and desires were all opposed to the desires, thoughts, and ideas of the inhabitants of Derbend. A handful of rice, a glass of water, a little light, much air, were all of which the young Iskander Beg had need.

In the spring, when the entire world was awakening to the breath of love and poetry, he would saddle his good Karabach horse, swing from his shoulder the fine gun from Hadji Moustaff, the most celebrated gunsmith in Daghestan, and, with his bold yellow falcon perched upon his thumb, he would hunt the pheasant over mountain and valley until he was ready to drop with fatigue, if you grant there can be fatigue in the pursuit of a passion. Then he would dismount from his horse, which he allowed to wander at will, lie down in the shade of some great tree beside a stream, and sleep tranquilly to its gentle sound. Whether its sweet harmony caused him to dream, whether his dreams were prosaic, whether he was poet or philosopher, rhymer or reasoner, I know not. This I do know, — he lived tingling with the thrill of life. What more would you have?

In winter, when the snow, driven by the wind, beat against his windows, he loved to listen to the howling of the storm whirling over his chimney; stretched upon his rug, his eyes would follow the play of the embers upon his hearth, or the curling smoke from his pipe.

Did he see the figure of the devil in the embers? Did he see angels’ wings in the smoke from his pipe? He said so, himself. The fact is, he dwelt in a nameless realm, and in this realm, of which he was king, he rummaged boxes of emeralds, pearls, and diamonds; he carried off women beside whom the houris, green, yellow, and blue, promised by Mahomet to the faithful, were but Kalmucks or Samoyedes; he cast himself into unheard of perils; he fought gnomes, giants, enchanters, and fell asleep amidst the creatures of his fancy, and awoke in the morning, the ideal so confused with the real that he did not know whether he had been awake or dreaming.

And sometimes he would summon his Lesghian noukar and have him sing. The Lesghian sang of the freedom of his brothers upon their mountains, their courage in combat and the chase; and then the Asiatic heart of Iskander would begin to swell. He would take his dagger and feel its point; he would sharpen the blade of his shaska, and mutter, —

“Shall I, then, never fight?”

His wish was not long in being realized; Kasi Mullah attacked Derbend. It was a fine opportunity for brave men to test their mettle.

Iskander Beg did not overlook it.

He sallied forth with the Tartars, mounted on his fine Karabach charger, which knew neither rocks nor abysses; and he was always at the front. To join him, yes, that might be possible; but to pass him, never. He did not run, he flew like the eagle, despatching death far and near, first with his gun, then, the discharged gun swung from his shoulder, with kandjiar on high, hurling himself with savage shouts upon the enemy.

One day there had been an engagement near Kouba, and having dislodged the Russians from a vineyard, the Tartars began, notwithstanding their success, to riot, according to the Asiatic custom, with two heads lopped off and fastened to a standard taken from the enemy. The Russian troops had already re-entered the town, but a young Russian officer and a few Tartars, among whom we find Iskander Beg, had halted near the fountain. Bullets and balls were whistling around them; the Russian officer was at the time drinking of the pure, limpid water. Lifting his head, he saw before him Iskander Beg in simple close tunic of white satin; his rolled-up sleeves revealed hands and arms reddened with blood to the elbow.

He was leaning upon his gun, his lips curled in scorn, his eyes flashing through tears, blazing with wrath.

“What is the matter, Iskander?” demanded the Russian. “It strikes me that you have acquitted yourself well of your share of the work, and have nothing to regret.”

“Hearts of hares!” he muttered. “They march regularly enough when advancing, but in retreat, they are wild goats.”

“Well, after all,” said the young Russian, “the day seems to be ours.”

“Of course it is ours; but we have left poor Ishmael over there.”

“Ishmael?” demanded the officer. “Isn’t that the handsome lad that came to me at the beginning of the fight and begged me to give him some cartridges?”

“Yes; he was the only one I loved in all Derbend; an angelic soul. He is lost!”

And lie wiped away a single tear that trembled upon his eyelid and could not decide to fall.

“Is he captured?” inquired the Russian.

“He is dead!” answered Iskander. “Braver than a man, he had all the imprudence of a child. He wanted to pick a bunch of grapes, and he cleared the space separating him from the vines. He lost his head by it. Before my eyes, the Lesghians cut his throat. I could not help him; there were ten men to deal with. I killed three of them, that was all I could do. Just now they are retreating; they are insulting his body, the wretches! Come,” cried he, turning to three or four Tartars who stood listening, “who of you still has some love, fidelity, and courage in his soul? Let him return with me to rescue the body of a comrade.”

“I will go with you myself,” announced the Russian officer.

“Let us go,” said two of the Tartars also.

And they four rushed upon the band of Lesghians, who, not expecting this sudden attack, and believing that these four men were followed by a much greater number, retreated before them; and they advanced to the boy’s body, took it up, and bore it back to the town.

At her gate, the mother was waiting. She threw herself upon the decapitated body with heart-rending shrieks and tears.

Iskander gazed at her, his eyebrows drawn together; and now it was not a single tear that trembled alone upon his eyelid, — there were streams of them coursing down his cheeks like waters from a fountain.

A mother’s despair melted this lion’s heart.

"How unfortunate that you are not a Russian!" said the officer, extending his hand.

"How fortunate that you are not a Tartar!" replied Iskander, grasping the hand.

One thing is well known: the moustache, which is an indication of approaching maturity, is likewise the herald of love.

Iskander had not escaped the universal law. Every hair of his moustache had sprouted upon his lip at the very instant that a desire had sprung up in his heart, — — desires vague as yet, inexplicable to himself, but, like orange boughs, bearing on the same branch both fruit and flowers. Why do women like the moustache so much? Because, the symbol of love, it springs from the same source, and crisps in the warmth of desire. What seeks the youth with head erect, humid eye, smiling face, and ruby lip under the budding moustache?

Neither honors nor fortune, — only a kiss.

A virgin moustache is a bridge thrown across two loving mouths; a moustache —

Let us leave the moustaches here, they are carrying us too far; then, too, why, with gray moustache, talk ot black or blonde?

Besides, moustaches, of whatever color, lead me from my subject.

I return, then.

In the month of the preceding April, Iskander had, according to his custom, set out for the chase. The day was beautiful; it was a true spring holiday; it was warm without heat, fresh without humidity. Iskander plunged into the midst of an ocean of verdure and flowers. He had now, for several hours, been going from gorge to gorge, from mountain to mountain; he wanted something, he knew not what. For the first time the air seemed difficult to breathe, for the first time, his heart beat without cause; his unquiet breast fluttered like a woman's veil.

And, speaking of veils, let us note a fact.

When Iskander formerly passed through the streets of Derbend, he would never have cast a look toward a woman, had she been unveiled to her girdle; while, on the contrary, from the very day on which he was able to twist the ends of his little black moustache between his fingers, every nose-tip, every lip, every brown eye or blue that he could catch a glimpse of through a peephole in a veil, turned him hot and cold at once. It is a positive fact that he had never studied anatomy; well, in spite of his ignorance, he could picture to himself a woman from the toe of her slipper to the top of her veil, not only without error but even without oversight, merely from catching sight of a little silk-stockinged foot in a velvet slipper under a kanaos trouser embroidered with gold or silver.

I will not tell you whether, on this occasion, his hunt was successful; I will say only that the hunter was very distrait, — so distrait that, instead of seeking the lonely haunts where pheasant and partridge are wont to hide, he turned his horse toward two or three hamlets where he had absolutely no business.

But the day was fine, and, whether standing at their gates, or sitting on the house-tops, he hoped to see one of those pretty little contemporaneous animals that he had reconstructed with as much precision as the learned Cuvier had reconstructed a mastodon, an ichthyosaurus, a pterodactyl, or any other antediluvian monster.

Unfortunately, he had to be content with the specimens already known. Women were at their gates, women were on the terraces; but the Mohammedan women, who sometimes put aside their veils for unbelievers, never lift them for their compatriots. The result was that the desires of Iskander Beg, not finding a face upon which to fix themselves, were scattered to the winds.

The young man became sad, drew a profound sigh, threw the bridle on his horse’s neck, and left him master to go what way he would.

This is what travellers and lovers ought always to do when they have an intelligent horse.

The horse knew a delightful road leading home; on this road, under some tall plane-trees, was a spring forming a pool, at which he was in the habit of slaking his thirst: he took this route.

Iskander Beg paid no attention as to what path his horse was taking.

Little it mattered to him; he was riding in a dream.

And along with him, on both sides of the road, stalked all sorts of phantoms; these were women, all veiled it is true, but their veils were so carelessly worn that not one of them prevented his seeing what should have been unseen.

Suddenly Iskander reined in his horse; his vision seemed turned into reality.

At the edge of the spring was hidden a girl of fifteen or sixteen years, more beautiful than he had ever dreamed a woman could be. With the pure water she was cooling her beautiful face, which the April sun had tinted like a rose; then she gazed at herself in the shimmering mirror, smiled, and took so much pleasure in seeing herself smile, that she saw nothing else, listening the while to the birds that sang above her head, and hearing only their songs, which seemed to say: "Gaze into the fountain, beautiful child! Never was flower so fresh as thou mirrored there before; never will flower so fresh as thou be mirrored after thee!"

They doubtless said it to her in verse; but I am obliged to tell it in prose, not knowing the rules of poetry in bird language.

And they were right, the feathered flatterers; it was hard to imagine flower fresher, purer, more beautiful than this one which appeared to have sprung up from the edge of the pool in which it was reflected.

But it was one of those human blossoms that Granville knows so well how to paint, — with black locks, eyes like stars, teeth like pearls, cheeks like peaches; the whole enveloped, not by one of those thick, ill-advised veils that conceal what they cover, but by a gauze so fine, so silky, so transparent, that it seemed woven from the filmy beams which Summer shakes from her distaff when Autumn comes.

Then if the imprudent eye descended in a straight line from her face, that was indeed another matter. After a neck, which might have served as a model for the Tower of Ivory of Scripture, came —

Undoubtedly what came after and was half hidden by a chemise of white *maufe*, embroidered with blue, and. an *arkabouke* of cherry satin, was very beautiful, since poor Iskander could not repress an exclamation of delight.

The cry had no sooner escaped him than Iskander wished that he had been born dumb; he had driven himself out of Paradise.

The girl had heard the exclamation; she turned around and uttered a cry on her part; over her transparent veil she threw a thick one, and ran, or, rather, flew away, twice gasping the name of Iskander Beg.

He, stricken dumb when it was too late, motionless when perhaps he would have run, his arms extended, as if to stay the reality which, in fleeing, again melted into a vision, stood breathless with staring eyes, like Apollo watching the flight of Daphne.

But Apollo very quickly darted forth upon the track of the beautiful nymph, while Iskander Beg did not budge so long as he was able to catch a glimpse through the thicket of a hand's breadth of that white veil.

And when it was lost to view he became much agitated, for he felt then as if life, a moment suspended, was returning in waves upon him, rudely and noisily invading his heart.

“Allah!” murmured he, “what will they say of her and of me if any one has seen us? — How beautiful she is! — She will be scolded by her parents. — What lovely black eyes! — They will think that we had planned a rendezvous! — What lips! — She knows my name; twice as she ran she cried: ‘Iskander! Iskander*!’*”

And he again sank into his revery, if a state can be called a revery in which the blood is boiling, while harps are ringing in one’s ears, and when all the stars of heaven are seen in broad daylight.

Most certainly would night have surprised Iskander on the borders of the pool, into whose waters his heart seemed to have fallen, had not the horse, feeling his bridle, tightened for an instant, gently relax, continued on his way without consulting his rider.

Iskander reached home madly in love.

We are sorry indeed not to have found either time or space in this chapter to tell why Iskander bore malice to Mir Hadji Festahli; but we promise our readers, positively, to tell them in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH ISKANDER LEARNS THE NAME OF HER WHO KNOWS HIS.

AND yet Iskander recalled his father’s words..His father had been wont to say: “The loveliest rose lasts but a day, the smallest thorn endures a lifetime. Caress women, but do not love them if you would not become their slave. Love is sweet only in song; but in reality its beginning is fear; its middle, sin; and its end, repentance.”

And to these three sentiments he added a fourth, their fitting complement: “Look not upon the wives of other men, and listen not to your own.”

Let us hasten to add, to Iskander’s credit, that he forgot all these precepts in less than five minutes.

The young Tartar loved and was afraid. The first part of his father’s premonition, “The beginning of love is fear,” was then fulfilled in him.

Eight days before, poor Iskander had slept so tranquilly, the night had seemed so short and refreshing.

Now he tossed about upon his mattress; he bit his pillow; his silk coverlet stifled him.

But who was *she?*

At this question, which he had put to himself for the tenth time, Iskander leaped from his bed to his feet.

She! what a villanous word!

Love tolerates no pronouns, and especially love in Daghestan.

Until he knew her true name, Iskander would give her a fictitious one.

“I must know the name of my — Leila,” said he, thrusting his kandjiar into his girdle; “I shall die, perhaps, but I will know her name.”

A moment later he was in the street.

Probably the devil left one of his serpents at Derbend’: to some he takes the form of ambition, — how many celebrated men have disputed the possession of Derbend! to others he goes in the guise of love, — how many young people have lost their wits at Derbend!

The latter serpent, decidedly, had bitten Iskander Beg.

He wandered up and down the streets, looked through every gate, scanned every wall and every veil.

It was all in vain.

Whom could he ask for her name? Who would point out her house?

His heart’s eagerness urged him forward.

“Go!” it bade him.

Where? He did not know.

He joined the crowd; the crowd conducted him to the market-place.

If he had wished to learn the price of meat, he was in a fair way; but the name of his beloved? No!

He approached an Armenian. The Armenians know everybody, dealing in everything.

This one was selling fish.

“Buy a fine *chamaia*, Iskander Beg,” said the Armenian.

The young man turned away in disgust.

At last he approached the shop of a goldsmith, a skilful enameller.

“God save you!” said he to the Tartar.

“May Allah grant yon happiness!” responded the goldsmith, without raising his eyes from a turquoise that he was mounting in a ring.

On the counter behind which the goldsmith was working stood a copper sebilla, filled with different objects more or less precious.

Iskander Beg uttered a cry.

He had just recognized an earring which he was certain of having seen, the day before, swinging in the ear of his unknown.

His heart gave a leap; it seemed to him that he had just learned the first letter of her name.

It was as if he saw her pretty little hand with the pink nails beckoning to him.

He dared not speak a word. He hesitated to put a question; he did not know what to say; his voice trembled, his thoughts were in a tumult.

Suddenly a light flashed across his brain.

He had hit upon a truly military ruse, — one of those that capture cities.

He emptied the cup into his hand, as if to look at the jewels. The goldsmith, who had recognized him, allowed him to do so.

He adroitly withdrew the earring from the heap of jewels, slipped it into his pocket, and suddenly ejaculated, —

“There! I have dropped an earring!”

And he replaced the other jewels in the cup.

"What earring!" demanded the merchant.

"The one with little bells on it."

"Par Allah! pick it up quickly, Iskander; I would not have that lost for five hundred roubles."

"Oh! it is not lost," said Iskander.

Then, after a pause, he said, —

"It is very strange, though, that I do not see it anywhere."

"One loses sight of a thing as it falls," said the merchant, laying down the ring upon which he was working; and rising, he looked under his bench as he raised his spectacles.

Iskander stepped about feigning to search.

"I do not find it," said he.

Then, a moment later, lie added, —

"It is certainly lost."

This time the goldsmith took his spectacles from his forehead and laid them on his table.

"Allah!" he exclaimed, "what have you done, Iskander Beg?"

"I have lost an earring, that is all."

"But you don't know what will happen to me. That old rascal of a Hadji Festahli is capable of bringing suit against me. An earring of Baku enamel!"

"On my soul, you are laughing at me, Djaffar. Do you expect me to believe that a man as serious as Hadji Festahli, a descendant of Mahomet, a saint, wears earrings?"

"And who says that he wears earrings?"

"He has neither wife nor daughter, that I know of at least."

"He is too stingy for that, the old miser! But it is as much as ten years now since his brother Shafy fled into Persia, leaving him his wife and daughter. The little girl was only six years old then, she is sixteen now."

"It must be she! it must be she!" murmured Iskander under his breath.

Then he asked aloud, — — "What is she called — this niece?"

"Kassime," replied the goldsmith.

"Kassime, Kassime," repeated Iskander to himself.

And the name seemed to him far prettier than Leila, which he discarded as one throws away a lemon from which he has squeezed all the juice.

"And since her father's departure," he added aloud, "I presume that the little one has grown."

“You know our country, Iskander: the child of one year looks as though it were two; a girl of five appears to be ten. Our young girls are like the grape-cuttings which are scarcely planted before the grapes are ripe; I have never seen her, but her uncle says that she is the prettiest girl in Derbend.”

Iskander Beg tossed the earring into the goldsmith’s hand and darted off like an arrow. He knew all that he wished to know, — the name and dwelling of his lady fair.

He ran straight to the house of Hadji Festahli. He did not hope to see Kassime, but perhaps he should hear her voice; then, who knows? she might be going out with her mother, perhaps, and, whether he saw her or not, she would see him. She would certainly suspect that he was not there to get a glimpse of her uncle.

But, as usual, old Hadji Festahli’s house was shut up; Iskander foresaw one drawback, — it was, in all Derbend, the most difficult house to enter.

He heard, not Kassime’s voice, but a dog’s bark, and it was redoubled every time that he drew near the gate. Finally, the gate opened.

But an abominable old hag emerged, broom in hand.

She was some old witch, doubtless, going to her vigil.

She did not even have the trouble of shutting the gate behind her; it closed quite of itself, one would have thought had he not heard a hand push the bolts.

Iskander had resolved to remain there until evening, until the next morning, until Kassime came out. But his presence could not fail to be remarked, and his presence would announce openly to Hadji Festahli: “I love your niece; hide her more carefully than ever.”

He returned home, and threw himself down upon a rug.

There, as he was no longer afraid of being seen or even heard, he threshed about, lie roared, he bellowed.

Iskander loved after the manner of lions.

A good Mussulman, a true believer, has no conception of what we call perfect love; Iskander was purely enraged, he wanted Kassime that very moment, without delay, instantly.

He was one of the readers that skip the preface of a book and proceed immediately to the first chapter.

Terrible people for authors and uncles!

But Iskander very soon reached the conclusion that he might vainly roll on his rug all day long, roar a whole week, howl for a month, and it would not bring him a hair’s breadth nearer to Kassime.

He must bestir himself, then.

Finally, by dint of saying over to himself: “Kassime’s uncle,” he was reminded that, if he himself had no uncle, he had an aunt.

An aunt! Why were aunts made, if it were not to take charge of their nephew’s love affairs?”

That is all aunts are good for.

You do not know of an aunt who ever served any other purpose; neither do I.

He went out and purchased some silk stuff for a dress; then he ran to his aunt’s house.

The aunt took the dress, listened to the whole story of her nephew’s love affair, and as an aunt, however old she may be, remembers the days when she was young, Iskander’s aunt, sending a sigh after hef own lost youth, promised him to do all in her power to bring about an interview.

“Come to my house to-morrow, at noon, my child,” she said; “I will send for Kassime, under pretext of darkening her eyes with kohl. I will hide you behind this curtain, you rascal! But be discreet. Do not move, do not breathe, and, above all, beware of whispering a word to any one of what I am doing for you.” As one can well understand, Iskander returned home in high spirits.

He went to bed at sunset, hoping to sleep, and that the time would pass swiftly while he slept.

Sleep had been good once upon a time.

He fell asleep at one o’clock, and awoke at two.

By seven in the morning he was at his aunt’s house, insisting that it was almost noon.

At every sound made at the gate he ran and hid behind the curtain.

Then he would resume his position beside his aunt, shaking his head and saying, —

“She will not come.”

Whereupon, falling into a rage, and stamping his foot, he would exclaim, —

“Ah! if she does not come I will set fire to her uncle’s house; she will have to come out so as not to be burned; then I will seize her, I will put her on my Karabach and run away with her.”

And each time his aunt would soothe him, saying, — “That could not have been she: it is only nine o’clock — — it is only ten — it is only eleven.”

But at noon the aunt exclaimed, —

“Ah! there she comes this time.”

Iskander, like his aunt, had heard the heels of little Turkish slippers pattering on the paved court, and he had sprung behind his curtain.

It was indeed she, with her friend Kitchina, — blueeyed Kitchina, as they called her.

The maidens took off their slippers at the threshold of the door and came in, seating themselves beside the old aunt.

The two veils fell to the floor. The curtain was agitated; happily, neither of the girls looked that way.

No; they were watching the old aunt, who was stirring with a small ivory stick the kohl at the bottom of a little silver jar.

Kassime knelt before the good woman, who first pencilled her eyebrows, then the under-lids; but when Kassime, for the latter operation, raised her beautiful eyes, Iskander felt as if his heart were pierced by a bullet.

The old woman herself was struck with their wonderful beauty, and in her admiration for the girl, she said, embracing her, —

“How soon, my pretty Kassime, shall I be painting you in the bath amid the songs of your friends? You have such beautiful eyes that I could wish them each morning to awake tearless and to be sealed every night by a kiss.”

Kassime sighed, and affectionately kissed the old woman.

Iskander heard the sigh and felt the warmth of the kiss.

“My uncle Festahli says that I am too young,” answered Kassime, sadly.

“And what says your heart?” demanded the old lady.

Instead of replying, Kassime took down the tambourine hanging on the wall, and sang: —

“Fair dawn, oh, why did I so early feel
The dewy coolness of thy wings?
Fair youth, oh, why this eve did thine eyes steal
Into my heart their fiery stings?

“Oh, why, though I have seen in cloudless sky

Enthroned the god-like shining star, —
Oh, why, though I have seen from storm-cloud high
A serpent fire o'erleap heaven's bar, —

"Oh, why, since I've forgotten dreaded woes
And longed-for weal, sad earth, gay skies —
So much forgotten, sun and fire, dawn's rose —
Oh, why forget I not thine eyes?"

While singing the last verse of the song which she was improvising, Kassime blushed to her shoulders; then, laughing like a child, she dropped her tambourine and threw herself into her friend's arms; and then the two silly young things both began to laugh.

Why were they laughing, and what was there so laughable in all that?

But Iskander's aunt understood very well, and, for the sake of her nephew's happiness, she determined to bring out the secret of the enigma immediately.

"O my sweet rose," she said, playing with Kassime's rings, "if my nephew could have heard the song you have just sung, he would have staved in the wall to see the singer, and after seeing her, he would have carried her off as a lion does a kid."

And just then a jar filled with jasmin water fell from the chest that stood near the curtain and broke into a thousand pieces.

The old woman faced about; the two young people turned pale.

"Why did it fall?" asked Kassime in trembling tones. "That devil of a black cat!" exclaimed the old lady; "there was never another like it!"

Kassime was reassured.

"Oh, I detest black cats!" said she. "It is said that they sometimes lend their skin to the devil, and that is why we can see their eyes glare in the dark."

Then turning to her friend, she said, —

"Come, Kitchina, mamma allowed me but an hour, and there is the mullah's call."

Kassime rather coldly embraced the old woman, who saw that the reserve was assumed.

"Nonsense!" said the aunt, accompanying her to the door, "it is useless for you to be angry, Kassime. I should like to see you with flowers upon your head; your happiness is as dear to me as a link of gold, and with a link of gold, I know a young man who would like to bind his soul to yours. But be at ease, my dear child, only Allah, he, and I know the secret."

Kassime opened her great eyes, whose size was doubled with amazement, but she was just then at the threshold of the street-door; her friend, who was behind, pushed her gently, the door was shut, and, for all explanation, she heard the key creaking in the lock.

Iskander Beg fairly stifled his aunt in his arms when she returned from Kassime. The good woman scolded him well because he had not been able to keep still at his post of observation.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "when that dreadful jar fell I nearly died from fright! Wicked child! it would have been the death of me if Kassime had guessed who made it fall."

"Is it my fault, aunt?" cried Iskander; "and could I keep quiet when my heart threatened to burst at sight of the roses that overspread Kassime's cheeks after you had spoken of me? I longed to gather them with my lips. What could you expect? Who sows must reap!"

"Not when he sows in another's garden."

"Then buy me this garden, aunt; do not let me expire like a nightingale on the thorns of a rose-bush. Kassime must be my wife; ask her uncle for her, then, without delay, and rest assured that I shall be as grateful as I am loving. Succeed in your embassy, dear aunt, and I promise you the most beautiful pair of buffaloes in Daghestan."

On the morrow Iskander Beg received the answer of Mir Hadji Festahli.

Alas! it was very far from being what he had hoped. Here it is, for that matter; the reader can judge how much of hope it left to poor Iskander.

"Tell your Iskander, for me," Festahli had replied to the aunt, "that I have not forgotten his father. His father was a brute. One day, before everybody, he called me, — I will not repeat what he called me; I could take no revenge, because it was just at the time when the Russians were interfering with our customs; but I have not forgotten the offence. I have not burned his coffin. It is proper for the son to pay his father's debt, and I am no dog to fawn on the hand that has beaten me. But, to tell the truth, had there been no feud between us, Iskander should not have had my niece in any case. A great honor to be the uncle of this beg! There are seventy begs in Derbend just like him; I will give him their names whenever he likes. Why talk to me of a dowry? Yes, faith, by ruining himself, he could pay for my niece; but after that how would he provide for her? Has he any relatives to help him in case of need? How many raven’s-eggs does he get from the rent of his huts? How many bundles of nettles has he reaped in his fields? He is destitute, utterly destitute, your beggar of a nephew. Tell him no, — a hundred times no. I will not have such a good-for-nothing as he is in my family. A head and a purse so empty that with only a breath both head and purse would fly away. Good-evening, old woman!”

With the knowledge that you already possess of Iskander Beg’s disposition, you can imagine his rage when his aunt brought him this answer, word for word.

At last, his wrath cooled; and he had sworn to be terribly revenged upon Mir Hadji Festahli.

Ho was a Tartar.

This explains why Hadji Festahli was so preoccupied while climbing the streets which led to the dwelling of Iskander Beg; why, in his preoccupation, he spat upon the black beard of Hussein and the red beard of Ferzali, and why, at last, arrived at Iskander Beg’s door, instead of knocking impatiently, he knocked very gently.

CHAPTER V.

A BARGAIN.

Iskander was neither rich nor married: his door, therefore, was quickly opened, not half way, but wide open; for he had no fear that in coming to see him people would see either his wife or his strong-box.

Hence Iskander received his visitors, not on the threshold, as do Mussulmans who are fathers of a family, but in his innermost room. There was nothing in his house to tempt the pilferer of either hearts or money.

“Welcome!” he cried from the other side of the door to the arrivals, even before knowing who they were..

And the door was opened.

Iskander Beg himself had come to let them in, as his noukar was grooming his horse. He stood amazed at beholding Mir Hadji Festahli and his associates in the street.

The blood rushed to his head, and his first impulse was to feel for his dagger.

But, thanks to a violent effort, curiosity overcame the anger within him.

He respectfully placed his hand upon his heart, bowed to his visitors, and invited them to enter.

They seated themselves upon the rugs, stroked their beards with oriental gravity, regulated the folds of their garments, and the conversation opened with commonplaces.

Finally, after five minutes lost in trivialities, Mir Hadji Festahli broached the question.

He spoke of the misfortunes which threatened Daghestan in general and the town of Derbend in particular, if such a drouth should continue eight days longer.

At every pause he turned to his companions, as if to ask their support; but it was now their turn to be silent, and if they spat not upon his beard, it was certainly not the desire that was lacking.

Iskander, on his part, appeared very little moved at the pathetic picture that Mir Iladji Festahli drew of the hardships of the city and province; but from the flush on his face it could be seen that a fire was smouldering in his bosom.

Finally, Hadji Festahli rounded up his discourse with this threefold lamentation: —

“Woe! woe! woe to Derbend!”

“Probably!” answered Iskander.

“Certainly!” added Hussein.

“Absolutely!” whimpered Ferzali.

After which ensued a moment of silence.

During this pause Iskander looked from one to another of his visitors with questioning glance; but they were dumb.

Iskander began to be impatient.

“You have not come, brethren,” said he, “that we might wipe away our perspiration and shed our tears together, and I presume that, on your part, or on the part of those that sent you, — for you impress me as being ambassadors to my august presence, — you have something to say to me of more importance than what you have communicated.”

“Our brother is possessed of great penetration,” returned Hadji Festahli, inclining his head.

And then, with an abundance of oriental circumlocution on the honor to Iskander of being the object of such a choice, he recounted what the inhabitants of Derbend were expecting from his devotedness.

But at that, Iskander’s brow began to cloud threateningly.

“Strange choice!” he cried with emphasis. “Until now the inhabitants of Derbend, for whom, however, I have fought tolerably well, — though it is true that I fought on my own behalf rather than theirs, — not only have not spoken to me, but they have hardly saluted me. And here they offer me a commission which I was not soliciting and of which I am unworthy. It is true that there are many precipices on the heights of Schach Dagh; true, too, that in the gorges of Schach Dagh are the haunts of the brigand Mullah Nour, that there are ten chances to one of my rolling over a precipice, and twenty to one of my being killed by Mullah Nour; but little it matters to them, — I can be of use to them in this, and they have turned to me. And why, pray, should I, who love warmth and sunshine, ask Allah for clouds and rain? On the contrary, I am delighted that my house is dry, my stable wholesome, and that there is neither fog in the air nor mud in the street. Besides, the sun hatches my raven’s-eggs, and my nettles grow well without rain. You scoffed because I have no grain to reap! Why, having no grain, should I disturb myself about yours? You have maligned my father, you have robbed him, you have persecuted him, you have scorned me, and now, you wish me to risk my life for your sake, and to pray God to have mercy upon you! But I mistake, — doubtless it is for some new affront that you come to me, and, that nothing may be wanting to the insult, the task of making me such a proposition has been confided to this holy man, the respectable Hadji Festahli. They do not load the camel when he is on his feet, but when he kneels; and I, pray observe, am on my feet."

And Iskander stood as haughty as a king, as terrible as a god.

"Now," said he, "we have a little matter to settle, Hadji Festahli and I will absent ourselves a few moments; excuse us, worthy lords!"

And he beckoned Hadji Festahli to follow him into an adjoining room.

Thereupon the face of the holy Mussulman became as long and sombre as a night in autumn. He arose smiling; but, as every one knows, there are two kinds of smiles; one puts out the lips as if to kiss, the other shows the teeth as if to bite.

They passed together into the next room.

What black-bearded Hussein and red-bearded Ferzali were talking about meanwhile, we are unable to tell our readers, because we were listening at the keyhole of the room to which Hadji Festahli and Iskander had retired.

The two enemies returned in a short time with radiant faces; they looked like the two diamond-set medals of the Lion and the Sun, hung side by side on the breast of a Persian Minister.

Iskander then turned to his other guests and said: — "At first I had certain motives, best known to myself, for not conforming to the desires of the people of Derbend; but the honorable Hadji Festahli, whom God preserve, has given me such excellent reasons for complying that I am now ready to go and bring the snow from the summit of Schach Dagh, at the risk of plunging over precipices and getting my moustache singed by Mullah Nour. Allah is all-powerful, and if an earnest, fervent prayer can touch his heart, I venture to prophesy that it will soften, and that the very clouds will weep so many tears that the earth's thirst will be quenched not only for this year, but for a year to come. I set out this evening. Pray, — I will act."

Then he added: —

"Time is precious, I will not detain you."

The ambassadors thanked Iskander; their feet glided into their slippers and the visitors were gone.

Iskander was left alone; it was what he wanted. “Well,” cried he, joyfully, when he was sure that no one could hear him, “he is a little better than I took him to be, that old knave of a Hadji Festahli. He could have killed me because my father, one day, before everybody, had called him a son of — no matter what! and now, like a true patriarch, he sacrifices his resentment for the public good, and gives me his niece in exchange for a little snow. Excellent man, that!”

Hussein and Ferzali, as they went away, were saying: —

“That Iskander is not a man, but an angel. He was furious against Derbend, enraged against Festahli; but when we had spoken of the wailing and suffering of the poor, he could refuse us no longer.”

And as for the people, overjoyed that Iskander had given his consent, they began to dance and sing.

Festahli — laughed in his sleeve.

“A promise, a promise!” murmured he. “What is a promise, especially when no witnesses are by? He cannot hold me to it; I should have died of shame if I had gone before the people with Iskander’s refusal. And besides, I added, ‘If your journey ends happily/ Now, Iskander has not returned, the paths of Schach Dagh are very steep, and Mullah Nour is very brave. We shall see! We shall see!”

A very holy man was Mir Hadji Festahli Ismael Ogli! he was a direct descendant of the prophet.

Iskander kissed his good Karabach from very joy, saying: —

“They are fools, on my word of honor, to suppose that I am doing all this for the sake of their wheat. Ah! for Kassime, for my beloved, for my adored Kassime, I would climb not only Schach Dagh, but the moon besides! Ibrahim! Give my horse some oats. Oats!”

CHAPTER VI.

A DISSERTATION ON THE NOSE.

HAVE you ever considered, dear reader, what an admirable organ is the nose?

The nose, yes, the nose!

And how useful is the nose to every creature that lifts, as Ovid says, his face to heaven?

Ah, well, strange to say, — ingratitude unparalleled! — not a poet has yet thought of addressing an ode to the nose!

It has remained for me, who am not a poet, or who, at least, claim only to rank after our great poets, to conceive such an idea.

Truly, the nose is unfortunate.

Men have invented so many things for the eyes!

They have made them songs, compliments, kaleidoscopes, pictures, scenery, spectacles.

And for the ears:

Earrings, first of all, *Robert the Devil*, *William Tell*, *Fra Diavolo*, Stradivarius violins, Erard pianos, Sax trumpets.

And for the mouth:

Carême, *The Plain Cook*, *The Gastronomist's Calendar*, *The Gourmand's Dictionary.* They have made it soups of every kind, from the Russian *batwigne f* to the French cabbage-soup; they have garnished its dishes with the reputations of the greatest men, from cutlets *à la Souhise* to puddings *à la Richelieu;* they have compared its lips to coral, its teeth to pearls, its breath to benzoin; they have set before it peacocks in their plumes, snipes undrawn; finally, for the future they promise it larks roasted whole.

What has been invented for the nose?

Attar of roses, and snuff.

Ah! that is not well, O philanthropists, my masters! O — poets, my confrères!

And yet with what fidelity this member —

"It is not a member!" cry the savants.

Pardon, messieurs, I take it back: this appendage — Ah! And yet, as I was saying, with what fidelity has this appendage served you!

The eyes go to sleep, the mouth closes, the ears are deaf.

The nose, alone, is always on duty.

It guards your repose, contributes to your health. All other parts of your body, the feet, the hands, are stupid. The hands let themselves be caught in the act, like the fools they are; the feet stumble and let the body fall, like the clumsy creatures that they are.

And, in the latter case, who suffers for it, generally. The feet commit the fault, and the nose takes the punishment.

How often do you hear it said, —

Monsieur So-and-so has broken his nose!

There have been a great many broken noses since the creation of the world.

Can any one cite a single nose whose fault it was?

No. Everything assaults the poor nose.

Well, it endures all with angelic patience. True, it sometimes has the hardihood to snore. But where and when did you ever hear it complain?

We forget that nature created it an admirable instrument for increasing or decreasing the volume of the voice. We say nothing of the service it renders us in acting as a medium between our souls and the souls of flowers. Let us repress its utility and regard it only from its aesthetic side, that of beauty.

A cedar of Lebanon, it tramples underfoot the hyssop of the moustache; a central column, it provides a support for the double arch of the eyebrows. On its capital perches the eagle of thought. It is enwreathed with smiles. With what intrepidity did the nose of Ajax confront the storm when he said, “I will escape in spite of the gods!” With what courage did the nose of the great Condé — who would never have been great except for his nose — with what courage did the nose of the great Condé enter before all others, before the great Condé himself, the entrenchments of the Spaniards at Lens and Rocroy, where their conqueror had been so bold, or, rather, so rash as to flourish his bâton of command? With what assurance was thrust before the public Dugazon’s nose, which knew forty-two ways of wriggling, and each funnier than the last!

No, I do not believe that the nose should be condemned to the obscurity into which man’s ingratitude has hitherto forced it.

Perhaps, also, it is because the noses of the Occident are so small, that they have submitted to this injustice.

But the deuce is to pay if there are none but Occidental noses!

There are the Oriental noses, which are very handsome noses.

Do you question the superiority of these noses over your own, gentlemen of Paris, of Vienna, of Saint Petersburg?

In that case, Viennese, take the Danube; Parisians, the steamer; Peterbourgeois, the *perecladdoi*, and say these simple words: —

“To Georgia!”

Ah! but I forewarn you of a deep humiliation; should you bring to Georgia one of the largest noses in Europe, — — Hyacinthe’s nose or Schiller’s, — at the gate of Tiflis they would gaze at you with astonishment and exclaim:

“This gentleman has lost his nose on the way, — what a pity!”

At the first street in the town, — what am I saying! at the first house in the faubourg, you would be convinced that all other noses, Greek, Roman, German, French, Spanish, Xeopolitan even, should bury themselves in the bowels of the earth with chagrin at sight of the Georgian noses.

Ah! blessed God! Those beautiful Georgian noses! robust noses! magnificent noses!

To begin with, there are all shapes.

Round, fat, long, large.

There is every kind.

White, pink, red, violet.

Some are set with rubies, others with pearls; I saw one that was set with turquoises.

You have only to squeeze them between two fingers, and a pint, at the very least, of Kakhetia wine will flow.

In Georgia, Vakhtang IV. abolished the fathom, the metre, the archine; he retained but the nose.

Goods are measured off by the nose.

They say: “I bought seventeen noses of termalama for a dressing-gown, seven noses of kanaos for a pair of trousers, a nose and a half of satin for a cravat.”

And, let us add, the Georgian dames find this measure more convenient than the European measures.

But, in the matter of noses, Daghestan is not to be sneezed at.

Thus, for instance, in the centre of the face of a Derbend beg, Hadji Yussef, — God give strength to his shoulders! arose a certain protuberance for which his compatriots are still hunting a suitable name, although some call it a trumpet, some a rudder, others a handle!

In its shade three men could sleep.

One can understand how such a nose would be greatly respected at Derbend during a hot spell of fifty-two degrees in the sun, since on the other side of this nose, that is to say in the shade, it was but forty degrees.

We need not be greatly surprised, then, that Yussef had been assigned to Iskander as a guide.

But let us confess the whole truth: it was not entirely on account of his nose that he had been appointed.

As indicated by the title Hadji, prefixed to Yussefs name, Yussef had made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

In order to get there, he had traversed Persia, Asia Minor, Palestine, the Desert, a part of Arabia Petræa, and a portion of the Red Sea.

And, on his return, wonderful tales did Yussef tell of his travels, of dangers encountered, of bandits slain, of wild beasts whose jaws he had broken like a Samson!

Whenever he appeared at the bazaar of Derbend, people stepped aside, saying, —

“Make way for the lion of the steppe!”

“He is a remarkable man!” assented the most pointed moustaches and the longest beards, as Yussef Beg turned their heads with the current of his plausible speech. It was said that in going over the summit of a mountain in Persia, his papak had caught on the horn of the moon, the mountain was so high; that for a long time, his sole nourishment had been derived from omelettes of eagles’ eggs; and that he had passed nights in caverns where, when he sneezed, the eclio itself had responded, “God bless you!”

It is true that he spoke without reflection for the greater part of the time; but when he did speak, his words supplied food for reflection to others. What beasts had he not seen! What men had he not met! He had seen animals having two heads and a single foot, he had met men who had no heads and who thought with their stomachs.

All these tales were really a little old; doubtless that was why no one had thought of sending him for the ball of snow; but when by common consent this commission had fallen to Iskander, Yussef mounted his Persian steed, put his Andrev poniard, his Kouba pistol and Vladikafkaz schaska in his girdle, and rode proudly through the streets of Derbend, proclaiming, —

“If you like, I will accompany poor Iskander; for how do you imagine poor Iskander can get along without me?” The people answered, —

“Ah, very well; accompany Iskander.”

Then he went home to reinforce his defensive armor with a breastplate of copper links, his offensive armor with a Nouka gun. Yellow boots with high heels completed his costume; last of all, he suspended whip and sabre from his saddle.

He could hardly stir in the midst of his arsenal.

He was ready long before Iskander, and awaited him at the city gates, declaiming: —

“Well! will he never come? If they had selected me I should have been off two hours ago.”

About six o’clock in the afternoon, Iskander issued from his court on his Karabach horse, wearing the cos tume and arms with which all were familiar.

Iskander traversed the city slowly, — not that he had the least intention in the world of exhibiting himself, but because the streets leading from his house to the gates of Derbend were thronged with people.

At last, he succeeded in joining Yussef Beg, gave him his hand, saluted for a last time the inhabitants of Derbend and set off at a gallop.

Yussef followed on a Khorassan charger. For some time horses and riders could be distinguished, then only the dust, then nothing at all.

Horses and riders had disappeared.

Arrived at a vast cemetery, Iskander Beg slackened his Karabach’s pace.

Night began to fall.

But Iskander heeded neither night nor cemetery; he was dreaming of his darling Kassime.

Yussef kept glancing to right and left with a certain degree of uneasiness, and he profited by Iskander’s slackening speed to approach him.

Iskander was plunged in thought.

Ah! if you have ever been youthful in soul, if you have ever loved with all your heart, and if, youthful and loving, you have been going far away from the place where lives your dear one, you will then understand what feelings were uppermost in the breast of Iskander Beg. It is folly, doubtless, to imagine that in breathing the same atmosphere we have the same dreams;

that in gazing ten times at a window, although it be shut, we bring away ten memories; but this folly is solacing. Fancy is always more picturesque than fact: fancy is poetry; it flies, light as bird or angel, and never are its white wings sullied with either mud or dust from the highway.

Fact, on the contrary, is prose: it plunges into details; while clinging round the bride's fair neck it fails to note the delicacy of her skin, but asks itself if the pearls of her necklace are real or false, if she makes love to her husband, pets her dog, or gives money to the servants.

Ma foi! long live poetry!

Iskander was making very nearly the same reflections as ourselves, — but he at least was making them at twenty-live, which necessarily imparted to them both the colors of the rose and the perfume of May-bloom, — when he felt himself touched on the elbow by Yussef Beg.

"Well," he asked, emerging from his revery, "what is it, Yussef?"

"Merely that, as we have not seen fit to stay in the city with the living, I see no reason why we should remain in a cemetery with the dead. How I would bum their graves, did not every stone appear to be rising, and were not that she-devil of a gallows stretching out her lean black hand toward us!"

"She is longing for you, Hadji Yussef; she fears that you may escape her," laughed Iskander.

"I spit on the beard of him that put her there," said Hadji Yussef. "Allah protect me! but whenever I pass this place, good Mussulman as I believe myself to be, pure of heart as I think I am, it always seems to me as if she were about to clutch me by the throat; and avow the truth, Iskander, confess that if we were not under Russian rule we should not remain very long in the city, foot in the stirrup and gun on the shoulder. Down with the troops! Ah! but I should like to settle those troops, — I would hack them into bits no larger than millet-seed!"

"Really, my dear Yussef, I did not know you were so brave at night. At the time of Kasi Mullah's attack, I saw how you fought in the day-time, or rather I did not see you; were you not in Derbend?"

"Ah, now! my dear Iskander, you are always making fun of me! Did I not indeed in your own presence cut off the head of that Lesghian, who was so enraged against me that his head, after it had fallen to the earth, bit my foot so cruelly that I suffer from it to this very day every time the weather changes? What! seriously, did you not see that?"

“Allah denied me that pleasure.”

“Besides, are those Lesghians men? Is it worth while to pit one’s head against their balls? If I kill a Lesghian, it matters little; but, if a Lesghian kills me, Allah will find it difficult to fill my place. So, after I had killed that one, I thought it quite enough of hand-to-hand combat. I went into the citadel every day: I appropriated a cannon; yes, I constituted myself its artillery-man, I aimed it and I gave the gunner the order, ‘Fire!’ and then I saw some dancing in the group at which I had pointed my gun. Ah! Allah! I had great sport. I have never boasted of it, but I can say this to you as a friend; I am sure that I was the principal cause, in view of the damage that I did, of Kasi Mullah’s raising the siege; and when you reflect that I have never received a single cross, not even that of Saint George — Eh! do you not hear something?” added the valiant Beg, shrinking against Iskander.

“What the devil could you hear in this place, except the whistling wind and howling jackals?”

“Cursed brutes! I could kill their fathers, mothers, and grandparents. What wake are they keeping now, I want to know.”

“Perhaps they expect to feast to-morrow night on our carcasses. You know, really, Yussef, that the one that captures your nose will be in luck.”

“Come, come, no sinful jesting, Iskander! Ill word brings ill work. This is the very hour for brigands. When night comes, the devils walk the highways. Iskander, what if we should meet Mullah Nour?”

“Who is Mullah Nour?” said Iskander, as if he had never heard the name that his fellow-traveller had just pronounced.

“Not so loud, Iskander! not so loud, I beg of you in the names of Hussein and Ali, or I swear I will not stay with you. This cursed Mullah Nour has ears in every tree; just when you are not thinking of him — crash! befalls on your head like a thunderbolt.”

“And then?”

“How ‘and then’?”

“I ask, what happens afterwards?”

“Afterwards you are caught. He likes to laugh and joke, but, you understand, with a brigand’s pleasantry. If he knows you to be miserly ho will first take all that you have in your pockets, without counting the ransom that he will put on your head. From another, if he is poor, he will take nothing; he will even give.”

“What! he will give?”

"Yes, there have been such instances. Fine fellows who are in love and who have not twenty-five roubles to buy them a wife, — well, he gives them the money. From some he will take in gold the weight of the shot in his cartridges; of others still, he will demand as many roubles as he can hold on the blade of his sword. 'What would you have?' says he; 'I am myself a poor merchant, and every trade has its risks, especially mine.'"

"But," laughed Iskander, "those whom he stops must carry pipes instead of guns. Or is Mullah Nour made of iron?"

"Of iron? Say rather of steel, my friend. Balls flatten against him as against granite. Allah is great!"

"After what you tell me, Yussef, I am inclined to think that Mullah Nour is the devil in person. He must be the devil instead of a man, to be able to stop whole caravans."

"Ah! one can see, poor boy, that you have never heard anything but the crowing of your own cock! And who, pray, says that Mullah Nour has no comrades? Why, on the contrary, he is surrounded by a parcel of knaves who think it better to eat bread raised by others than to be at the pains of raising their own. Comrades! By Allah! he is not wanting for comrades. Why, I myself, for instance, have often thought of it. If I had no relatives, no inheritance to expect, brave and adventurous — But what is the matter now, Iskander] Where are you going at that gait? They say that night is the devil's day, and I am beginning to believe it, for this night is as black as hell. But answer me, Iskander; what are you thinking about?"

"I am thinking that you are a bad soldier, Hadji Yussef."

"I, a bad soldier? Aren't you ashamed to say such a thing to me? It is to be regretted that you were not present when I settled a band of brigands near Damascus. I can say without boasting that after I had saved them the whole caravan of pilgrims was at my feet, and with good reason, too. I killed so many that my gun waxed red-hot and went off of itself. As for my sword, it was in pretty shape'; it had teeth like a comb. I left seven dead on the field of battle and took two alive."

"What did you do with them?"

"I burned them the next morning; they were in the way."

"That was savage, Yussef."

"What can you expect? I am as I am."

"And you can tell me such tales without blushing? Your musket had more conscience than you; it turned red, at any rate."

“You do not believe me? Ask Sapharkouli; he was there.”

“How unfortunate that Sapharkouli died eight days ago!”

“True. As if ho could not have waited, the fool! Well, well! but, according to you, I must be a poltroon. *By Allah!*. Set me face to face with a dozen brigands, and you shall see how I will settle them. Come, where are they? Point your finger at them, — but not at night. Oh! I don’t like to fight at night. I want the sun to shine on my valor; and then, I have a habit of taking aim with my right eye.”

“I cannot recover from my surprise, Yussef. A dozen brigands, and you will consider them your affair?”

“I will make a breakfast of them.”

“Let day come, then, and may we meet a dozen brigands, — a round dozen. I promise to leave them to you, Yussef. I will not touch one, not even with the liilt of my dagger.”

“My dear, never wish to see the devil, lest he immediately appear. Now, as brigands are devils, and as we are here on their ground, it is best not to invoke them. For that matter, it gets darker and darker. Satan must have made off with the moon. Cursed night! how it drags! Ah! help! help!”

“What ails you?”

“A brigand has caught me, Iskander! Let me go, demon!”

“Stand aside, and I will fire.”

“Stand aside, stand aside! that is very easily said. I believe he has daws. He has got me as a hawk holds its prey. Who are you? What do you want? Come, friend, let us make terms.”

Iskander approached Yussef.

“I suspected as much,” said he. “Fear has big eyes; your brigand is a thorn bush. Oh, my dear Yussef, you ought to have ridden an ass to the fountain for water, instead of coming with me to get snow on the top of Schach Dagh.”

“A bush? I swear that it was certainly a Lesghian or Tchetchen; but he saw me put my hand on my poniard, and he loosed his grip.”

“He saw you put your hand on your poniard in such darkness as this, when you yourself say the devil has run away with the moon?”

“Those knaves are like cats; it is well known that they can see in the dark. Oh! my dear Iskander, what is that in front of us?”

“It is the river. What! with a nose like yours, can you not scent water? See, my horse knows more than you.”

“Do you mean to cross the river to-night!”

“Certainly.”

“Iskander, you are undertaking a very imprudent thing. Better wait till to-morrow, Iskander. It is no trifling matter to cross the river at this hour, and the Karatcha too!”

Iskander was already in the middle of the stream.

Yet Yussef preferred to follow his companion rather than to stay behind; he plunged into the black river, and, after exclaiming at the coldness of the water, after shrieking that he was being dragged down by the feet, after calling Allah to witness that he was a lost man, Yussef finally reached the opposite bank.

The comrades resumed their journey and crossed successively the Alcha and the Velvet.

At daybreak they had reached the banks of the Samour.

The Samour flowed swiftly; they saw enormous boulders roll with the waves, and uprooted trees were following its current, floating on the surface like so many wisps of straw on a brooklet.

This time Iskander yielded to Yussef’s advice, and halted.

The riders dismounted to give their horses time to rest, they themselves lying down upon their bourkas.

But Yussef was not the man to go to sleep without relating some of his daring deeds.

Iskander listened this time, neither interrupting him nor laughing at him. He was falling asleep.

The one told of what had never taken place.

The other dreamed of what was to come.

At last, finding himself without support in the conversation, Yussef decided to go to sleep.

Iskander had been asleep a long time.

CHAPTER VII.

MULLAH NOUR.

It îs delightful to be awakened by the sun's first ray, as it peeps through a silk curtain, and lifts the black covering of night from the face of the wife sleeping near you, as fresh as the dewdrop on the leaf. But it is more delightful still, after a short sleep, to open the eyes under a cloudless sky and find yourself face to face with the smiling countenance of Nature. The *fiancée* is always more beautiful than the wife; and what is Nature, if not the eternal *fiancée* of man?

Iskander slowly raised his eyelids, still weighted with dreams, and admired the splendid picture of the morning. All around him undulated the forest, rich with its Southern verdure; above his head glittered and smoked the snowy peak of Schach Dagh. At his feet rolled the noisy Samour, sometimes leaping in cascades, sometimes winding its waves into great coils, like a serpent writhing amidst the rocks.

On the banks of the channel where the river roared, the nightingale sang.

Iskander enjoyed a brief moment of enchantment; but just as the bird was renewing an interrupted song, a terrible snore from Yussef roused him to reality.

The sleeper's nose projected from his bourka, whose surface it overshot by two or three inches.

Iskander shook Yussef by the nose and awoke him.

"Hallo! Who goes there?" demanded Yussef, speedily opening his eyes. "Ah! it is you. May the devil fly away with you!" was his greeting to Iskander on recognizing him. "Is a man to be rung by the nose as a Russian official rings a bell to summon his aids? Know, Iskander, that when Allah favors a man by giving him such a nose, it is that he may command respect and admiration from others. I admire and respect my nose; share my sentiments in this regard, or we shall have a falling out."

"My dear Yussef, excuse me; but when I am in haste I seize a man by the first part of him that comes to hand. The first — I will even say the only part of you that I saw, the rest being hidden under your bourka — — happened to be your nose, and I took hold of it.”/

“Iskander, my friend, some day we shall quarrel, and that day, I foresee, will be a sorry one for you. What the deuce was the matter? Out with it!”

“I was vexed at that confounded nightingale, whose singing interfered with my listening to your snore. Why, my dear Yussef, you snore so musically that, compared with the melodies that you play naturally in your sleep, the Georgian djourna’s performance is like a penny trumpet’s.”

“Ah, yes, appease me now. But may you all your life feed only on the odor of roses, and have all their thorns in the soles of your boots, if ever — ”

Iskander interrupted him.

“Do you not hear something, Yussef?” he asked. Yussef listened uneasily.

“No, nothing,” said he, after a pause; “nothing but the voice of the mullah at Seyfouri.”

“Well, what says the voice, Yussef? ‘Wake ye, faithful Mussulmans; prayer is better than sleep.’ We have a journey to make, Yussef; let us pray and be setting forth n Yussef yielded to the invitation, although with grumbling. It seemed to him that Iskander had yielded ground in the discussion, — an event happening with them so rarely that he would gladly have profited by his comrade’s frame of mind.

Having performed their ablutions and their prayers, our travellers made ready to ford the river.

The water was not unusually high; yet it is admitted by those who are acquainted with mountain torrents, and especially with the Samour, that the fording of a river is always more perilous than a battle.

Everything depends, in such a case, upon your horse; if he makes a misstep, you are lost. But habit renders travellers indifferent to these dangers, although, every year, more than one is left at the ford forever.

Our two begs, thanks to their skill, to their acquaintance with this sort of exercise, and especially to the excellence of their horses, reached the opposite bank of the Samour safe and sound.

Yussef, who had been as mute as a tench during the whole time of their crossing, began to scold again the very instant that he touched the farther bank.

“May the devil take this river!” said he; “I will heave a pig at it! And to think that it is so dry during the autumn and winter that a frog crossing it could not manage to wash his feet!”

“Where shall we stop in Seyfouri?” inquired Iskander, without heeding the tirades of his comrade, who, the danger past, had already forgotten it. “I do not know a living soul there; yet there our horses must breakfast, and so must we.”

“I will burn their beards with a wisp of straw, — the blackguards!” responded Yussef. “It is very clear that, without an order from the governor, not one of them will offer us a drop of water, or even a radish, if they see us drop down with hunger and thirst.”

“The people of Seyfouri are neither better nor worse than those of Derbend; but when it comes to that, we are all Tartars.”

“Hero we are! we shall see. Perhaps with a little money we can get something from them. As we ride along, look well on your side into the courts; I will keep watch on mine. Perhaps we shall come across a grey-beard; the grey-beards are better than the red ones. The grey-beard is a starost, while the red-beard is a rich man. The red-beard almost always has money and a pretty wife, — two reasons for shutting his doors in the faces of two handsome fellows like us. And here is just the man I was looking for. Hey! friend,” continued Yussef, addressing a grey-beard, “can we rest an hour at your house, and have a bite to eat?”

“Are you on government service?” demanded the man, a tall, dark-hued Tartar.

“No, my friend, no.”

“Have you an order from the governor?”

“We have money, nothing more.”

“That is sufficient to obtain a welcome in my house; I receive many lords from Khorassan, and, thanks be to Allah, never have horse or horseman had reason to complain of Agraïne.”

The gates were thrown open; the travellers entered the court, dismounted, unsaddled their horses, and gave them oats.

Let us say, in passing, that the people of Daghestan are remarkably neat, and usually have two-story houses of brick white-washed with lime.

Agraïne’s house was one of these. He invited his guests to ascend to the first floor.

Yussef required no urging, and led the way for Iskander.

At the door of the first room, Agraïne took their arms and set them against the wall, as a sign that, being in his house it was now his duty to provide for their safety.

This custom is so widespread that our two travellers opposed no resistance.

Within this room they saw nothing but a pair of woman’s trousers.

Nothing so irritates an Asiatic, and, in general, a Mussulman, whoever he may be, as a question about his wife.

Hadji Yussef was dying to question his host about those trousers; but Agraïne was the owner of one of those faces that check raillery on the lips of the jester.

“Have you not a pinch of pilaff to offer us, my friend?” he asked the Tartar.

“The prophet himself never ate the like of that my wife used to prepare,” answered Agraïne. “Allah! my guests wore out their fingers with licking them, it was so rich.”

“What the deuce is he talking about!” demanded Iskander Beg of his companion.

“I don’t know, but it seems to me that, speaking as he does of the past, the idiot thinks to regale us only with his wife’s trousers.”

“Why not!” said Iskander; “they are greasy enough for that!”

Then, to the Tartar, —

“Tell us, now, friend, is there any chance of our having a dish of soup and a bit of chislik? Here is bread and cheese, it is true; but the bread is very moist and the cheese very dry.”

“Soup? And where should I get soup?” answered Agraïne. “Chislik? And where should I get eliislik? Khan Muel has eaten my sheep to the very last. Ah! my wife, my beautiful young Oumi, used to prepare such delicious chislik!”

And the Tartar smacked his lips.

“And where is she, your young and beautiful Oumi?” asked Yussef.

“She is dead and buried/’ replied the Tartar,” and I buried my last fifty roubles with her; I have nothing left of her but her trousers, over which I weep.”

And, in fact, the Tartar took up the trousers, which he pressed to his lips, and fell to weeping.

“A precious souvenir,” remarked Yussef. “She must have been a charming woman, your lovely young Oumi. Give us each a glass of milk and we will weep with you.”

"Milk? Oh! you should have seen my dear Oumi milking the cows with fingers whiter than the milk itself. But no more Oumi, no more cows; and no more cows, no more milk! and now — "

"Now you are beginning to weary us, my dear fellow, with your young and lovely Oumi. Fifty kopecks if you bring us each a glass of milk; if not, take yourself off."

And he thrust him out of the room.

"I will sell your mother for two onions, you villanous beast!" continued Yussef, returning to his seat near Iskander, and trying his teeth on the cheese. "All the cocks of the village are crowing in my stomach, and this scoundrel tries to entertain us with the trousers of his beautiful young Oumi. — Good! there he is now meddling with our guns and gossiping with the passers-by. — What do you mean by whispering to that vicious Lesghian, like a Schummak Bayadere, you wretched knave, instead of bringing us something to eat? So help me, Allah! but I am hungry enough to devour the fish that caused the universal flood by flopping from the Ganges into the sea. Come, bring us something, quickly!"

"Immediately," replied the Tartar.

And, indeed, he returned a few minutes later holding in each hand a bowl of milk.

Our travellers dipped their bread into the milk, while their host resumed his weeping where he had left off, again contemplating his wife's trousers.

Having ended their frugal repast, Yussef threw down sixty kopecks on the trousers of the beautiful young Oumi, and, leaping to their saddles and taking the mountain road, they had very soon left the village of Seyfouri behind.

"Look back now," bade Yussef, always on the alert, to Iskander. "The very Lesghian that the soft-hearted Agraïne was talking to is keeping us in sight and watching where we go."

In fact, behind the two travellers, on a slight rise of ground, they could descry the interlocutor of the Tartar landlord.

But when the Lesghian discovered that he was himself an object of interest to the travellers, he disappeared.

"Well, what of it?" demanded Iskander.

"I distrust these beggarly Lesghians, — that is what!"

"According to you, every shepherd is a robber."‘

“As if shepherds were honest men in this country! The mountaineers murder travellers and pillage caravans, and the shepherds feed the mountaineers and receive their booty. Mullah Nour’s entire troop, entire gang, rather, what is it? Made up of mountaineers. And who feeds Mullah Nour and his gang? The shepherds.”

“Well, what then? Are not Mullah Nour and his mountaineers made of flesh and blood as we are? The devil take me if you do not make me wish to meet this bandit of yours, were it only out of curiosity, and to see whether, as you have said, his skin is proof against a ball.”

“Well, well, here we are back on the old subject. You are either a dog or a pagan, however, to express such a wish. Does it seem, then, such a burden to carry your soul around in your body and a head on your shoulders? May the devil seize my nose if I would not rather meet a lion than this Mullah Nour. Why — — why do you halt?”

“If you had not been in such a panic, you would not have lost your way. Look, pray, where you have brought us. The devil could not pass here without a lantern!”

And, indeed, the two found themselves upon a steep mountain, forming, so to speak, the first round of the ladder up Schach Dagh. Their way was becoming so perilous, that our travellers were obliged to dismount and lay hold of their horses’ tails.

At length they reached a plateau, and, as usual, Yussef, who had maintained silence in the presence of danger, began as soon as the danger was over to curse and swear.

“May the devil’s tail hack this mountain into mincemeat!” said he; “may all the wild boars of Daghestan root holes into it! may an earthquake upset it, and may thunderbolts grind it to powder, — curse it!”

“The fault is yours, and you lay the blame on the mountain, “said Iskander, shrugging his shoulders.” What was it that you told me? ‘I know the way as well as I know my mother’s pockets; I will conduct you through the defiles of Schach Dagh as easily as I could make the rounds of the bazaar. I have played at hucklebones on every rock, and at pitch-penny in every cranny. Did you or did you not say all that! ”

“Certainly I said it. Did I not, three years ago, make the ascent of Schach Dagh’s topmost peak? However, three years ago it was not so steep as now.”

And, indeed, at the point where our travellers had now arrived, Schach Dagh rose before them, a sheer wall surmounted by white battlements; and the white battlements were snow.

The two men comprehended the impossibility of scaling the peak from that side.

They resolved to attempt the task from the east side. Yet it was easier to resolve than to execute. All was wild and lonely on those steep and rocky declivities; the eagles’ cries alone broke the solemn stillness which seemed like that of the dead.

Iskander Beg turned toward Yussef and looked at him as if to say: “Well!”

“May a thousand million curses fall on the head of this miserable Schach Dagh! Ah! this is the way he receives his visitors, the ill-mannered pig! He pulls his bashlik over his ears, shuts himself within his walls, and hauls up his ladder after him. Where shall we go now. Over the mountain or under the mountain? In faith, ask advice of whom you will, Iskander; as for me, I shall take counsel of my bottle.”

And Yussef drew from his pocket a full flask of brandy.

“What a hardened sinner you are, you wretch!” exclaimed Iskander to his comrade. “Have you not enough folly of your own without adding that of wine?”

“This is not wine, it is brandy.”

“Wine or brandy, it is all one.”

“Not at all; observe the distinction: Mahomet has forbidden wine, but not brandy.”

“I am aware of that; it was not invented in Mahomet’s time: he could not forbid what did not exist.”

“That is where you are wrong, Iskander. As a prophet, Mahomet knew very well that brandy would be invented later, or, if he did not know it, — why, he was a false prophet.”

“No blasphemy, Yussef!” remonstrated Iskander, frowning; “let us seek, rather, our way.”

“Our way? It is here,” said Yussef, slapping his flask. Ho approached the bottle to his lips, blissfully closed his eyes, and tossed otf five or six swallows of the liquor whose orthodoxy was contested.

“Yussef, Yussef,” said Iskander, “I can myself foretell one thing: with such a guide, you will more speedily attain hell than heaven.”

“Well, what did I tell you, Iskander?” returned Yussef. “Before I had given that fraternal kiss to my flask, I could not see a single path; now, *brrruhf* I see a dozen of them.”

“That may be, Hadji Yussef; I shall not follow your paths, however,” said Iskander. “Take the right, take the left, take whichever you will; I shall attempt to climb straight ahead. If either of us finds a good way, he can return here and call the other, or wait for him. I shall take half an hour and give you as long for the quest. *Au revoir I”*

Hadji Yussef, animated by the five or six swallows of brandy that he had taken, deigned no reply to Iskander. He set out bravely to seek a path.

Iskander, therefore, leading his horse by the bridle, began to ascend straight ahead, as he had said.

The day was drawing near its close.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW YUSSEF REACHED THE SUMMIT OF THE MOUNTAIN SOONER THAN HE WISHED.

DIRECTLY above the spot where the two travellers separated, near the border-line of clouds and snow, arose an enormous rock. On its flattened top men and horses found refuge.

Sixteen Tartars and one Lesghian were lying around a fire; as many horses as there were men were eating grass that had been mowed with poniards.

A few steps away, lying on a rug, was a man of about forty years, distinguished by the beauty of his countenance and its serenity of expression.

He was dressed very simply; yet — and this was indicative, not of wealth, but of the customs of a warlike life — gold and silver gleamed from his gunstock and from the sheath and blade of his kandjiar.

He was smoking a chibouk, and fondly regarding a sleeping youth, whose head was resting on his knees. At times he sighed, shaking his head, and again he would sigh heavily, casting an anxious glance around.

It was Mullah Nour, the scourge of Daghestan; the brigand, Mullah Nour, and his band.

Suddenly, a thousand feet below, he caught sight of Yussef, who, still seeking a path by which to scale the heights of Schach Dagh, was cautiously advancing amid the rocks.

Mullah Nour, resting on his elbow, watched the traveller’s movements a little while; then he smiled, and bending down to the youth’s ear, he said, —

“Awake, Goulchade.”

Goulchade, in Tartar speech, means *the rose.*

The youth opened his eyes, smiling also.

“Goulchade,” said Mullah Nour, “would you like me to bow down to the earth before you?”

“I should like it very well,” said the young man, “and it would be a strange sight to see you at my feet.”

“Softly, softly, Goulchade! Before the bee’s honey is the sting. Look down there.”

The young man lowered his gaze in the direction indicated by Mullah Nour.

“Do you see that traveller riding along!”

“Of course I see him.”

“I know his name and his courage. He is as fearless as a leopard; he is the best shot in Derbend. Go down, disarm him, and bring him to me. If you do that, I will be your slave the whole evening, and before all your comrades will I do you homage. Come, do you consent!”

“Gladly,” returned Goulchade.

And the young man leaped upon a wiry little mountain horse and set off by a narrow trail, which seemed rather a line traced with a crayon than a road channelled in the rock.

The stones could still be heard rolling from under his horse’s hoofs, when the rider himself was no longer visible.

Mullah Nour’s entire band peered over the rock, curious to see what would happen.

The chief was more intent than all the rest.

Perhaps he regretted that he had exposed the youth to this danger; for, when Goulchade was but a few paces from Yussef, his chibouk fell from his hands, and anxiety was portrayed on his countenance.

Hadji Yussef had no idea of what was happening, or rather, of what was about to happen. Stimulated by the few swallows of brandy that he had taken, he was endeavoring to keep his courage up by talking aloud, and was putting on as bold a front as Shinderhannes or Jean Shogar.

“Oh! ho!” he was saying. “No, it is not for nothing that my gun bears the inscription: ‘*Beware! I breathe flame.*’ I will burn the beard of the first bandit that dares to cross my path. Besides, I have nothing to fear; my breastplate is proof against bullets. But where are these brigands now? They are hiding, the cowards! Doubtless they can see me. Allah! for my part, I detest cowards!”

And suddenly, having reached a turn in the path, as the last syllable came thundering from his mouth, he heard a gruff voice cry out, —

“Halt! and dismount!”

And as he lifted his head in great dismay, he perceived, ten feet distant, the muzzle of a gun pointed at his breast.

“Come, come, down from your horse, and speedily!” was ordered a second time, in a tone that seemed gruffer than the first. “Make no attempt to put your hand to your gun or schaska! If you try to fly, I shall fire. The gun first!”

“Not only my gun, but my soul, master bandit,” replied Yussef, quaking. “I am a good fellow, incapable of harming any one whatever. Don’t kill me, and I will be your slave. I will take care of your horse and brush your clothes.”

“Your gun! your gun!” repeated the voice.

“There it is,” said Yussef, laying it down upon a rock with trembling hand.

“Your other arms, now, — schaska! kandjiar! pistol!”

“Here it is,” faltered the unhappy Yussef at each item of the command, simultaneously casting on the ground the weapon designated by the bandit.

“Now turn your pockets.”

Yussef flung all his money down beside the arms, imploring the bandit’s mercy while executing his orders.

“I will cut off your tongue and throw it to the dogs if you do not hold your peace,” said Goulchade. “Be silent, or I will silence you forever!”

“Excuse me, master bandit; I will not speak another word, if that is your desire.”

“Silence, I tell you!”

“I hear and obey.”

But not until Goulchade had pointed a pistol at Yussef did he cease to talk.

Goulchade bound his hands, took up his arms, and made him walk in the direction of the plateau where Mullah Nour and his comrades were awaiting the end of the comedy.

After a quarter of an hour’s climbing, Yussef stood before the chief of the brigands.

His comrades formed a circle round him; all maintained an ominous silence.

Goulchade laid Yussef’s weapons at the feet of Mullah Nour.

Then Mullah Nour saluted Goulchade three times, bowing down to the ground, and the third time, he kissed the youth’s forehead.

Then turning to Yussef, he demanded, —

“Do you know who disarmed you, Yussef?”

Yussef's whole frame shook at the sound of that voice.

"The bravest of the brave, the mightiest of the mighty! How could I prevail against him, before whom a lion would become a hare, and Goliath be as a child but eight days old?"

The bandits burst into laughter.

"Behold, then, the bravest of the brave, the mightiest of the mighty," said Mullah Nour, as he lifted the white papak from Goulchade's head.

And the long black locks fell down upon the shoulders of a girl, who became as pink as the flower whose name she bore.

Mullah Nour held open his arms to her, and she threw herself on the brigand's breast.

"Yussef," said Mullah Nour, "I have the honor to present my wife."

A wild burst of laughter greeted the ears of the unhappy prisoner.

He turned purple with shame, and yet, recovering himself, he said, —

"Do me a favor, master; do not sell me in the mountains. I can pay you a noble ransom."

Mullah Nour's eyebrows drew together as black as two thunder-clouds.

"Do you know to whom you are offering a ransom, skin of a hare?" he cried to Yussef. "Think you, wretch, that I am a Derbend butcher that I should sell spoiled meat for fresh? Do you suppose that I would demand gold for you when you are not worth an ounco of lead? Why should I sell you in the mountains? Tailless dog that you are, what are you good for? Not even to root the earth with your nose. You will tell me that yon can, as well as any nurse or old governess, tell tales of ogres and giants to the little ones; but, for that, you must dress like a woman, and, instead of amusing the poor innocents, you would frighten them. Well, Yussef, you see that I know you; you see that I am not a flatterer. Now, do you in turn tell me what you think of me. I am Mullah Nour."

Upon hearing that terrible name, Hadji Yussef fell on his face to the earth, as if he had been struck by a thunderbolt.

"Allah!" said he, "you wish me to say what I think of you, how I regard you, — I who would be proud to perform my ablutions with the dust of your feet? May Hussein and Ali preserve me!"

"Listen, Yussef," said Mullah Nour, "and bear this in mind: I have an abhorrence of giving the same command twice. I have asked you once what you think of me; I ask you a second time, but know that it is the last. I am listening."

"What do I think of you? May the devil crack my head like a nut, if I think anything of which you could complain. I, think ill of you? I, a cipher! I, a mere atom of dust!"

"Yussef," said Mullah Nour, stamping his foot, "I tell you that I have never repeated the same order thrice."

"Be not angry! be not angry, mighty Mullah Nour! Consume me not with the fire of your wrath. Your wish has transformed the ideas of my brain into pearls, but these pearls are mere glass in comparison with your endowments. What do I think of you, illustrious Mullah Nour? Well, since you insist, I will tell you.

I think that your mind is a gun adorned with silver and gold; its charge is wisdom; it never misses fire and always hits the mark; I think that your heart is a flask of attar of roses, diffusing the perfume of your virtues on all around you; I think that your hand dispenses good broadcast, as the husbandman scatters grain; I deem your tongue a branch bearing flowers of justice and fruits of mercy. Even now I hear you say: 'Go home, my good Yussef, and remember Mullah Nour as long as you live.' Well, am I right, mighty man?"

"It were nothing to say that you are a great orator. But you are a false seer, and, to prove that you have lied, hero is my decision: Because you, a beg, allowed yourself to be disarmed, bound, and taken prisoner by a woman — "

"Is not Death herself a woman also," interrupted Yussef, "and more terrible than the most terrible of men?"

"Let me finish, Yussef; I shall not be long. Since whoever is afraid of death is unworthy of life, you shall die."

Yussef gave a groan.

"To-morrow will be the last morning of your life, and if you say a single word, if you put forth a single plea, if you utter one complaint," added Mullah Nour, putting his hand to his poniard, "you will not even see to-morrow. Come, let him be more securely bound, let him be taken to the cave, and leave him there alone. There he can talk at will and as much as he pleases."

Mullah Nour gave the signal, and poor Yussef was picked up and carried off like a sack of meal.

"He will die of terror before to-morrow," said Goulchade to her lover. "Do not frighten him so, my beloved."

“Nonsense!” laughed Mullah Nour, “this will be a lesson for him; he will learn, the craven, that fear saves no one. The coward dies a hundred deaths; the brave man only one, and even then he goes to meet it.”

Then, turning again to the bandits, he said, —

“My children, I am leaving you for an hour; if anything should happen to me, — if, by chance, I do not return, — well, Goulchade could lead you. She has proved to-day that she is worthy to command men. Ill betide him who does not obey her! Adieu, Goulchade,” he added, straining the young woman to his heart and kissing her brow; “and I bid you adieu and embrace you because I anticipate an encounter somewhat more serious than yours. For a long time I have wished to measure my skill with Iskander Beg’s, and, thanks to my noukar, I know where to find him. If I do not return before night, follow my trail in the mountains and endeavor to recover my body, that I may not be eaten by jackals, like a dead horse. If you hear shots and voices, let no one stir. If Iskander kills me, let no one avenge my death. Let the man that kills Mullah Nour be sacred to you, for he will be a brave man. I go in pursuit; adieu.”

He slung his gun across his back and departed.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PRECIPICE.

MEANWHILE Iskander Beg had found a path that wound around the mountain.

On his right dropped a precipice; on his left arose walls furrowed at intervals as by thunderbolts.

But there was no return for the dauntless traveller; he needs must always advance. The way was too narrow for a horse to turn, and he went forward.

At last lie came to an overhanging rock, under whose arch ho must pass.

Beneath its vault the road was missing, but a block of ice, dislodged from the mountain, constituted a frail, transparent bridge.

Below this bridge, at the bottom of the abyss, thundered a torrent.

The young man halted; for an instant lie paled, and the perspiration dampened his brow; but a thought of Kassime restored his self-possession.

Then his practised eye observed a horse’s tracks on the ice; he pressed his own forward, urging him on with knees and voice. By crossing swiftly, the strain would be less.

Behind, he could hear the broken ice crashing into the gorge.

At last he began to breathe more freely, perceiving at the farther end of the tunnel the light’s increasing brightness from the reflection of the snow.

But suddenly, enframed in the opening, appeared a horseman whom the optical effect rendered of gigantic proportions.

“Halt, and throw down your arms, or you ‘re a dead man!” cried the horseman to Iskander; “I am Mullah Nour.”

In his first surprise at the unlooked for apparition, Iskander had reined in his horse; but, upon hearing the name of Mullah Nour, one danger made him forget the other.

He spurred on his horse, and, detaching the gun from his shoulder, he said, —

“You are Mullah Nour? Well, out of my way, Mullah Nour! You see very well that there is not room here for two.”

“Let God decide, then, who shall pass,” said the brigand, aiming his pistol at the breast of Iskander, who was not more than ten paces distant. “Shoot first.”

“Shoot yourself. I am not hiding behind my horse, ami?”

They stood thus for some seconds face to face, each with his weapon raised, and waiting for the other to fire.

Then the one lowered his pistol, the other his gun.

“Well, you are brave, Iskander,” said Mullah Nour, “and no one deprives a brave man of his arms. Give me your horse, and go where you will.”

“Take my arms first, and then you shall take my horse; but as long as I have a load for my gun, as long as the soul remains in my body, the hand of dishonor shall not touch my horse’s bridle.”

Mullah Nour smiled.

“I do not need your gun, nor your horse,” said he; “I merely wish you to do my will. Not for the sake of miserable plunder has Mullah Nour made himself a chief of brigands, but because he is accustomed to command. Then ill befall him that obeys not his command. I have many times heard you spoken of; often has your courage been extolled to me, and now I see for myself that you are brave, Iskander. But I did not cross your path for nothing. We do not part until our swords have crossed. That is my last word. Salute me; say, offering your hand, ‘Let us be friends,’ and the way is yours.”

“Stay, this is my answer,” said Iskander, carrying his gun to his shoulder and pulling the trigger.

But no discharge followed; doubtless a drop of water fallen from the arch had dampened the priming.

Enraged, Iskander swung back the gun, drew the pistol from his belt, and fired.

The ball flattened against the silver cartridge-boxes that ornamented Mullah Nour’s tcherkesse.

The latter did not move; he folded his arms and replied by a mocking laugh to Iskander’s rage.

“Oh, that shall not save you, brigand!” cried Iskander.

And, with schaska uplifted, he boro down upon Mullah Nour.

Mullah Nour’s sword flashed from its sheath with the swiftness of lightning.

Iskander’s blade whistled above the brigand’s head, and the stroke descended like the wrath of God.

Then, with a rending crash, the icy bridge broke beneath the feet of the two combatants. Iskander’s horse had upreared just as his master’s sword was descending upon the head of Mullah Nour; but the brigand was not touched.

He had fallen into the chasm.

Iskander Beg, thrown over backward, had seized hold of a projecting rock; he clung to it with double tenacity upon feeling that his horse was for some cause sinking from under him. The ice-bridge had become an inclined plane, and the horse was slipping down its steep descent.

The animal made a supreme effort, gathered his whole strength into his hams, and, impelled by their steely springs, he cleared the yawning space and landed on the other side of the gulf, streaming with sweat, and quivering with terror.

Fortunately, Iskander had disengaged his feet from the stirrups. Encumbered by the rider’s weight, the horse could not have cleared the abyss. Behind him, under him, the ice-bridge was crashing with a frightful sound. The gulf roared, as with the greed of a tiger devouring its prey; then a deathlike silence succeeded.

Iskander hung from the arch.

Below him, uncovered by the rupture of the bed of ice, a rock jutted upward, presenting a surface of two or three feet. All around it floated space.

Iskander felt his arms grow numb, his sinews snap.

He knew that he could not long sustain himself in that position; if his hold loosened, he was lost in spite of himself.

He calculated the distance with the cool eye of a mountaineer, straightened his arms to diminish this distance by their entire length, and let himself drop vertically upon the rock.

He stood on this granite pedestal like a bronze statue of Volition.

He was saved, at least for the time being; but to avoid dizziness, he was obliged to close his eyes for an instant.

He was not long in opening them again to note his surroundings and seek an issue.

This rocky excrescence, if it may be so called, was sloping on the outer side, slippery, crumbling in places, and yet practicable to the foot of a mountaineer.

Clinging with hands and feet, Iskander succeeded in achieving a semicircle around the immense column.

He then found that he was on the farther side of the ravine.

To go back by the way that he had just come was impossible. It would have been like climbing a wall.

There remained, then, but the one recourse of descending to the foot of the precipice and then following the torrent until he should find a practicable path.

But Iskander Beg was tormented by one idea, — to learn what had become of Mullah Nour.

A brave man, after all, was Mullah Nour, out-and-out brigand that he was. If lie were merely hurt, he must receive assistance; if dead, his body must be saved from the teeth of wild beasts.

For any one other than Iskander or a mountaineer born on the side of a precipice, such a descent would have been impossible.

Iskander undertook it.

The road, or rather the path, by which he had come with his horse, was cut off, as we have said, by a deep gorge spanned by the ice-bridge, which had broken from under the horses’ feet. He gained the steep side of the gash-like cleft and made its descent, aided by the projections of its rugged surface.

It took more than an hour to advance a quarter of a verst.

At last he reached the bottom; then only did he dare to look above his head.

Mullah Nour, falling from a height of five hundred feet perhaps, had crashed through several bridges of ice, superposed one above another, and had ended by plunging into a vast bed of snow, from which the torrent gushed as from a glacier.

This snow, without possessing the firmness of rock or ice, could yet sustain a man’s weight.

Iskander ventured upon it, at the risk of being engulfed. Only a pale, wan light penetrated the cleft. It was gloomy and cold.

He soon saw, by the line through the broken bridges above his head, that he must be nearing the spot where Mullah Nour had fallen.

The fall of horse and rider had indented an immense funnel in the snow.

Iskander carefully lowered himself into it and found resistance under his feet.

He had come upon the horse, whose neck was broken.

He searched for the man and found an arm. He drew the arm toward him, making the horse his vantage ground, and succeeded in drawing the body out of the snow in which it was buried.

Mullah Nour was like one dead, — his eyes were closed, he did not breathe.

However, no limb was broken; no serious wound was apparent. In accordance with the laws of gravity, the animal's fall had preceded the man's, clearing a path for him. The horse had saved the rider.

Iskander succeeded in loading the body upon his shoulders, in getting out of the snow-funnel, and gaining the bottom of the valley.

He rubbed Mullah Nour's face with his rough cloak; he slapped the palms of his hands and threw ice-cold water into his face.

Mullah Nour remained unconscious.

"Just wait," muttered Iskander; "if you are not dead, I know how to waken you."

He sat down, placed Mullah Nour's head upon one of his knees, loaded his pistol and fired beside his ear.

The report echoed like a clap of thunder.

Mullah Nour opened his eyes and moved a hand toward his kandjiar.

"Ah! I was sure of it!" murmured Iskander.

Mullah Nour's hand was unable to execute its design, and fell back at his side.

His eyes stared vacantly; his mouth essayed to articulate some sound, but his tongue would not obey.

At last he breathed a sigh; thought, returning to his brain, lighted up his eyes with the fire of intelligence. His gaze fixed itself upon Iskander; he recognized him, understood that to him he owed his life. With an effort he whispered, —

"Iskander Beg!"

"Ah!" said the latter, "this is very lucky. Yes, Iskander Beg, who is not willing that you shall die — do you understand? — because you are a brave man; because jackals and foxes are common, but lions are rare."

A tear sprang to the brigand's stern eye; he pressed Iskander's hand.

"After God," said he, "I owe you my life; to you, then, as to God, is due my eternal gratitude. It is not for my life that I thank you, but for your having endangered yours to save mine. Men have insulted, scorned, betrayed me; I owe them ill-will; I have paid them in hatred. Nature has endowed me with many wicked instincts; men have attributed to me more than nature gave; but neither my friends nor my enemies can accuse Mullah Nour of being an ingrate. Listen, Iskander," added the bandit, raising himself a little, "misfortune follows every one; possibly it may some day overtake you. My heart and hand are at your service, Iskander, — a heart and hand that fear nothing in the world. I would sell and cut off my head to save you. For the rest, you shall judge me by my deeds. Let us see now how much I am hurt."

The bandit tried to rise, and after a few attempts, he found himself upon his feet. He felt of his arms, first one and then the other; then his thighs, then his legs; took a few steps, unsteadily, it is true, but still a few steps.

"My head," said he, "is still a little light, but nothing is the matter with the rest of me, by my faith! Come, let us go! Allah has preserved me! it would seem that I am still necessary to his designs on earth."

"And now," asked Iskander, "how do we get out of here!"

"You are putting me to it," said Mullah Nour; "but I am forced to say what is so hard for men to admit, — I do not know."

"Yet we cannot die of hunger here," said Iskander.

"Before dying of hunger, we would first eat my horse, then yours; for, as I was falling, although I could not see much, I saw him ready to follow me."

"No, fortunately," said Iskander, with a feeling of real joy, "my poor Karaback was saved. And hark! by Allah! he is neighing!"

Both turned in the direction of the neighing, and they saw the horse coming toward them, following the bed of the stream.

"On my faith," said Mullah Nour, "you were asking how we should get out of here; your horse is answering us. He must be the devil if we cannot go up the way he came down."

Overjoyed, Iskander went to meet his horse. The latter, in turn, ran to his master as rapidly as the difficult road permitted.

When horse and master were side by side, the man put his arms around the animal's neck and kissed him as he would have kissed a friend. The horse whinnied with delight; the man wept for joy.

“There,” said Mullah Nour, who had looked on with a smile, “now that the meeting is over, if you will ask your horse the way, nothing need detain us here any longer, it seems to me.”

Iskander sent his horse ahead of them, as if he had been a dog, and doubtless the animal understood the service that was demanded of his intelligence, for he took the very route by which he had come.

After nearly a demi-verst, he stopped, scented the ground, cast a glance overhead, and, without hesitation, began to ascend the mountain.

On looking carefully, they discerned a narrow path, scarcely perceptible, worn by the wild goats when descending to drink at the torrent.

The horse went first.

“Follow my horse and lay hold of his tail, — I will not say in case your head grows giddy, but in case your legs fail.”

But Mullah Nour shook his head.

“I am at home,” he said; “the mountain is my domain. It is for me to do the honors of my house; go first.”

Iskander followed his horse. At the end of half an hour’s almost impossible climbing, they found themselves upon the path which the bandit had taken in order to intercept Iskander.

Of course this path led to the platform where Mullah Nour had left Goulchade and her companions.

The sun was just setting. Goulchade and the brigand’s comrades, not seeing him return within the time that he had fixed, were on the point of starting out to search for him.

Goulchade threw her arms about her lover’s neck; his comrades gathered round.

But Mullah Nour put Goulchade aside, waved back his comrades, and made way for Iskander to enter within’ the circle of joyous faces, which overclouded at sight of him.

“This is my elder brother,” said he to his fellows. “From this time forth you owe him three things which you have sworn to me, — love, respect, and obedience. Wherever he shall meet one of you, he may command you as I myself. Whoever shall render him a service, however small, becomes my creditor, and shall have the right to exact his price with usury. To the one who does him a great service, I shall be beholden forever; but if one of you shall harm a hair of his head, that one shall never be safe from my vengeance, even at the bottom of the sea, or within the tomb; I swear it, —

and may the devil claw out my tongue with his nails if I do not keep my oath! Now let us sup."

A rug was spread and a scanty meal was served. The anxiety felt by the bandits concerning the absence of their chief had caused them to think little about supper.

Goulchade, according to the custom of the Tartar women, did not eat with her lover. She stood shyly back, leaning against a rock.

Iskander noted her tearful sadness; he asked that she should have a place on the rug.

"It is just," said Mullah Nour; "this day Goulchade has been a man, and not a woman."

The supper ended, Iskander, moved by the beauty of the summer night, touched by the brotherly attentions lavished on him by Mullah Nour, could not retain the secret that filled his heart. He told his love for Kassime.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "if some time I could take wings like a bird, I would bring Kassime up to this height! I would show her all that makes me sad and ashamed to gaze upon alone, so beautiful it is! I should rejoice in her admiration, and when she would say, 'It is magnificent!' I should press her to my heart, answering, 'It is beautiful, but you are more beautiful; you are better than anything in the world! I love you more than the mountain, more than the valley, more than the streams, more than the whole of Nature!' See, Mullah Nour, how the earth, softly lighted by the moon, sleeps in the midst of Nature's myriad smiles. Well, I believe it to be sweeter still for man to fall asleep under the kisses of the woman he loves. You are very fortunate, Mullah Nour; you are as free as the wind. The eagle lends you his wings to fly among the highest peaks. You have a fearless consort; that does not surprise me, but I envy you."

Mullah Nour sadly shook his head as he listened to the young man speaking thus upon life's threshold.

"To every man his fate," he replied; "but mark me, Iskander, envy not mine, and especially follow not my example. It is dangerous to live among men, but it is sad to live without them. Their friendship is like the opium that intoxicates and puts to sleep; but, believe me, it is bitter to live with their hatred. It is not my own will, it is fate that has thrust me outside of their circle, Iskander. A stream of blood separates us, and it is no longer in my power to overleap it. That liberty is a gift from heaven, the most precious of all, I know well; but the outlaw has no liberty, — he has but independence. True, I am lord of the mountain; true, I am king of the plain; but my empire is peopled only with wild beasts. There was a time when I hated men, when I scorned them; to-day, my soul is sick of scorning and hating. I am feared, men tremble at my name; the mother uses it to still her crying babe; but the terror one inspires is but a plaything, of which, like all others, he quickly tires. Undoubtedly, there is a joy in humiliating men, in mocking at all they boast, in exposing their baseness by opening their whited sepulchres. It yields one a moment's pride; he feels himself more criminal, yet less contemptible than others. That feeling gladdens for an hour and saddens for a month. Man is wicked; but, after all, man is man's brother. Look about us, Iskander. How vast are the mountains! how green the forests! how rich the lands of Daghestan! yet there is not a cave in the mountain, not a tree in the forest, not a house in the plain where I — can rest my head and tell myself, 'Here you can sleep tranquilly, Mullah Nour; here an enemy's ball will not find you in your sleep; here you will not be bound like a wild beast. Your cities are peopled and often gorged with inhabitants; yet, rich or poor, every man has his place, his own roof to shield him from the rain, to shelter him from the cold. As for me, my bourka alone is my roof, my shelter, my cover. The town will not grant me even a bit of earth in which to lay my bones. Sorrow is like the wife of the kahn; she knows how to tread on velvet carpets, but she must also know, like the goat, how to leap from rock to rock. Sorrow is my shadow, and, as you see, my shadow follows me even here."

"You have suffered much, Mullah Nour?" Iskander asked, deeply interested.

"Do not remind me of it, friend. When you pass the gorge into whose depths I fell, and from which you rescued me, do not ask whether it was lightning or frost that ploughed the chasm in the granite, but pass over quickly; the bridge is frail and may give way beneath you. Flowers are planted in gardens, but the dead are not buried there. No, I will not cast a gloom over the morning with the storms of noon-tide. The past is past; it cannot be changed, even by the will of Allah. Good-night, Iskander. And God grant that no one may dream what I have suffered in reality. I will show you to-morrow the shortest way to reach Schach Dagh. Good-night!"

And he lay down, wrapped in his bourka; the others had been asleep for an hour.

Iskander waited long for sleep to come; he thought much of the day’s events and Mullah Nour’s solemn words.

Then, once asleep, he was troubled with the most fearful dreams. Sometimes it seemed as if a ball wore piercing his heart, sometimes as if he were falling into a bottomless abyss.

Our dreams are but memories of the way we have come, — the confusion and excitement of past events.

There is but one dreamless sleep, — the deep sleep, death.

CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH YUSSEF RELATES WHAT DID NOT HAPPEN, BUT TAKES GOOD CARE NOT TO RELATE WHAT DID HAPPEN.

THE sun, tinting the mountain-tops, awoke Mullah Nour and his men. All first prostrated themselves in prayer, then they set about polishing their arms, currying their horses, and preparing breakfast.

“Your travelling companion spent a bad night,” announced Mullah Nour to his guest, with a laugh.

“What! Yussef?” inquired the latter.

“Yussef in person.”

“You know where he is, then?”

“I have an idea.”

“I begged you twice yesterday to have him searched for, but you gave me no answer.”

“Because I knew where to find him.”

“And where is he?”

“Fifty paces from here.”

“What do you intend to do with him?”

“Nothing at all. I give him to you; you may do what you like with him. Eh! my lads,” continued Mullah Nour, addressing his men, “carry our prisoner something to eat, and say that Mullah Nour does not wish to starve him to death.”

Then he told Iskander how Goulchade had stopped Yussef, forced him to surrender his arms, and brought him back with her as a prisoner.

When breakfast was over, Mullah Nour took Iskander by the hand and held him to his heart, and cheek to cheek.

“You are at home here,” said he; “I shall always greet you with joy, I shall always love you with gratitude. Now I have pointed out a route by which you can ascend Schach Dagh, and the one by which you are to descend; make haste to serve your fellow countrymen. I myself am going in the opposite direction and for another purpose. Adieu! remember Mullah

Nour; if you are in need of a friend, summon him, and the avalanche will not more swiftly reach the mountain's foot than he will reach you."

And, like a flight of wild pigeons, the chief and all his band whirled out of sight.

Iskander then went to the cave.

Yussef was lying down with his hands tied, his eyes bandaged.

The young beg could not resist the desire to experiment on the courage of his companion.

"Get up, and prepare to die!" said he, roughly, disguising his voice.

Yussef trembled in every limb; but, thanks to a strenuous effort, he managed to get upon his knees.

He was deathly pale; his nose seemed to have lost that firm base by whose help it ordinarily formed an acute angle with his mouth, an obtuse angle with his chin, and drooped inert over his lips. He raised his hands to heaven and implored pardon between his groans.

"O Angel Azraël," he cried, "spare my head, it is not ripe for death! Where and how have I offended you?"

"It is not my will, it is Mullah Nour's. He said: 'Yussef fought-like a tiger; now that Yussef knows my retreat, there is no more safety for me in the mountain. Besides, the blood of my comrades spilled by him at the siege of Derbend cries aloud for vengeance, and it must be taken.'"

"I!" cried Yussef, "I! I fought in the siege of Derbend? What abominable calumniator says that! Shame befall the tomb of his fathers and of his grandfathers, even to the tenth generation! No, no! I am not the man to fight against my compatriots, not I. When trumpet or drum called to the rampart, for my part I descended at once to the bazaar; and when it was my turn to march, I took refuge in the mosque and slept there honestly and conscientiously, to the glory of the prophet. True, one day I fired three shots; but it is an established fact that the enemy was five versts away. As for my sabre, try yourself to draw it, and if you can get the blade out of its sheath, you may strike off my head with it. Not once, since the days of my father, has it ever been out. And why should I have fought against Kasi Mullah, against a brave, a holy man, a prophet? Had he not cut off the heads of all who drank and smoked, I should be to-day one of his most ardent fanatics."

"That may be; but there is a religious side to Mullah Nour's wrath against you; he knows that you are a partisan of Ali, and he has sworn to slay all who believe in Ali."

"A partisan of Ali, I? Why, I would pluck him by the beard, this Ali and his twelve caliphs! What is more, if I had lived in Egypt in the time of the Fatimites, I should not have rested until I had dragged them from the throne. I am a Sunnite, pray understand, a Sunnite, heart and soul! Who is he, this Ali?

An atom of dust, — I give a puff and it flies away; a grain of sand, — I crush it under foot as I walk."

"But, above all, look you, the thing Mullah Nour will never forgive you is your friendship for Iskander, his mortal enemy."

"My friendship!" cried Yussef.

"Was it not a proof of friendliness, then, your accompanying him to Schach Dagh?"

"Of friendliness, no doubt, directed especially toward my own pleasure."

"Well, the affair has ended rather worse for him than for you, and his head has fallen before yours."

"His head has fallen?" echoed Yussef. "Ah, well, it was no great loss, that. His head was not of much account. But instead of bearing me ill-will, Mullah Nour ought to thank me, since it was I who brought him Iskander, who delivered him up, bound hand and foot. Iskander my friend? A precious friend he is now! but when he was alive, I would have exchanged him for a piece of gingerbread. Iskander my friend! one of the greatest rakes in Derbend, who ate ham with the Russian officers? He my friend? I would burn his mother's beard."

"Wretch that you are! Leave the dead in peace. If fear had not turned your head, you would reflect that his mother could n't have a beard."

"No beard? Why, I tell you, myself, that she used to shave. Allah! the number of razors that she broke! Iskander's friend? I? — why, would I have been such a fool as to make a friend of a man whose father was a brigand, whose mother was a lunatic, and whose uncle made boots?"

"I am tired of hearing you perjure yourself, renegade! liar! tongue of a dog! Bend your neck, the sword is raised!"

Iskander made his schaska whistle around Yussef's head; but instead of touching him with its blade, with his usual skill he lifted on its point the handkerchief that bandaged his eyes.

Yussef, terror-stricken, looked at his pretended executioner and recognized. skander.

He uttered a cry and sat stupefied.

“Well, and what do you see, you wild boar stuffed with folly? Come, tell me again that my father was a brigand, my mother was a lunatic, and my uncle made boots!”

Yussef, instead of seeking pardon and looking confused, burst out laughing, and threw himself upon Iskander’s neck.

“Ah! then I have managed to put you in a rage. There was no lack of skill on my part. It took a long time, but I succeeded at last. Ha! ha! snare a nightingale, and catch a crow! Why, do you think that, with the very first word, I did not recognize your voice, — — your voice, the voice of my best friend? Why, I should know it amidst the crying of jackals, the mauling of cats, and the barking of dogs!”

“Very well; you knew me?”

“Do you doubt it?”

“No; you scoffed at me.”

“Just for a laugh, a joke, — for nothing else; you understand, surely?”

“But how about your surrendering to Mullah Nour’s wife? How about your letting her disarm you?”

“Do you not recall having seen at the house of the commandant of Derbend an engraving which represents a very beautiful woman indeed, unlacing the breastplate of a beg called Mars? Underneath, it says in Russian: *Mars disarmed by Venus.* That is the reason why I allowed myself to be disarmed, my dear friend. Why, to such a beautiful creature I would have given up everything, Iskander, from my bourka to my heart. I would like to know what you would have done, you rogue, on meeting her face to face. Such a nose! such eyes! and a mouth no bigger than the hole in a pearl bead! And her figure, too! A connoisseur like you would have noticed her figure. I longed to rob her of her belt to make me a ring.”

“And so it was for love that you let yourself be bound, and that is why you followed her at the end of a rope?”

“I would have followed her at the end of a hair.”

“Perhaps; yet one thing is very certain, — you will not talk in Derbend, and especially in my presence, of your devotion to Goulchade.”

“Goulchade? Her name is Goulchade? What a charming name! But you are the one that is making me prate; that is the reason why I have not asked how you chance to be here.”

Iskander briefly related what had passed between him and Mullah Nour. When he reached the point of the brigand’s fall over the precipice, Yussef interrupted him.

“Then he must be dead!” said he.

“No.”

“What! not dead?”

Iskander told how he had saved Mullah Nour and returned him to his men.

“Then he is there, this dear Mullah Nour?” demanded Yussef.

“No, he has gone away.”

“Where?”

“On an expedition.”

“You are very sure of it?”

“I have seen the dust flying after his last horseman.”

“And he fell from a height of five hundred feet, say you, and the devil did not break his neck? and he did not shatter his arms and legs into a thousand pieces? I shall spit on the gun of that brigand yet. Ah! if he had come to bar my way himself, instead of sending his wife, I should have taught him how to write the word *brave*. But he did not dare, the coward!”

“Come, come, be silent, you braggart! Why, if you had met Mullah Nour in person, you would have left off lying and boasting, for you would have been frightened to death.”

“Frightened! I? Learn, my dear Iskander, that there is but one man in the whole world that can make me afraid, and he is the man I see in the mirror when I look at myself.”

This time Iskander could not contain himself. The gasconade was so strong, even for a Tartar, that he burst out laughing.

“Come,” said he, “enough of this. You have just taught me something new about yourself, and yet I thought I knew you very well. To horse! and away, brave Yussef!”

“You know the road?”

“Yes; Mullah Nour pointed it out to me.”

“Well, go ahead and I will follow you, and he shall fare ill that attacks us in the rear.”

Iskander took the path which the bandit had shown him.

Watching them from below, one would certainly not have thought that human beings would venture on such a road.

When they had reached the snow line. Iskander gave his horse to Yussef to hold, and he alone, jar in hand, began to scale the highest peak.

For the first time, this virginal snow was receiving the imprint of a human foot.

Iskander prostrated himself upon the peak where, hitherto, only the angels had prayed.

When he lifted his head and gazed about, he looked upon a land of marvellous beauty.

Before him ran down the whole chain of mountains which extend from the Caspian Sea to the Avari; his sight penetrated the depth of the valleys, where he saw rivers as shining and slender as silken threads.

All was calm and silent. Iskander was too far distant to be able to distinguish either men or animals; too high up to hear a sound.

He might have remained a long time admiring the splendid spectacle, had not the atmosphere, totally free at this height from all terrestrial vapors, been too rare for human lungs.

The young beg’s every artery began to throb, as if the blood, not being sufficiently compressed by the air, were ready to issue from the pores.

He then bethought him to acquit himself of his mission, and in his profound faith that everything was possible to the God between whom and himself nothing seemed to intervene, he formed a ball of snow, placed it in his vase, and began to descend, holding the vessel high above his head, in order that, in accordance with the decree, it should not be sullied by contact with the earth.

The descent was as difficult as the ascent, in a very different way; but throughout the entire expedition, a higher power had seemed to watch over Iskander.

At the end of almost an hour he found himself beside Yussef.

Yussef questioned him, hut Iskander shook his head. Yussef tried to engage him in jest, but Iskander gravely pointed to the sky.

He was descending to the plain, full of the sublimity of those tall summits.

“Umph!” said Yussef, “you must have taken a bite of the sun up there; you seem afraid of dropping a morsel if you open your mouth.”

But Yussef spoke in vain; he did not succeed in extracting a single word from Iskander.

He finally became silent in turn.

In spite of all their haste, our travellers did not arrive at Derbend until far into the night, and long after the gates had been shut.

Iskander's heart beat as if it would rend his breast; fear, doubt, hope, challenged each other with every throb. He hung the jar on a branch of a tree, and moodily regarded, sometimes the black wall, which separated him from what he held dearest on earth, sometimes the heavens, which seemed to be frowning at him. He appeared to be asking all Nature: "Must I fear! May I hope!"

Ere long he saw with joy that clouds were gathering in the sky and stealing over the brilliant face of the moon.

Overjoyed, he plucked the sleeping Yussef by the arm and exclaimed, —

"Look, Yussef! look at these clouds scudding across the heavens, hurrying like a flock of sheep!"

"A flock of sheep!" muttered Yussef. "Pick out the tenderest, and take the ramrod from my gun to make chislik out of him. I am literally dying of hunger."

"Listen to the animal," said Iskander; "he never thinks of anything but his stomach. The sheep that I am talking about are in the clouds, Yussef; it is going to rain, my friend."

"Ah!" murmured Yussef, "if that meant larks, I would get under the spout, with my mouth wide open, too!"

"Well, sleep then, brute, for there is a proverb that says: 'Who sleeps, dines.'"

"Good-night, Iskander!" said Yussef, yawning.

And lie went to sleep on his bourka. As for Iskander, he did not close his eyes during the night, nor did he cease scanning the heavens, which became more and more overcast.

At daybreak the gates of Derbend were opened, and in a brief space of time it was known throughout the town that Iskander had arrived with the snow from Schach Dagh.

After a short prayer, the mullahs, accompanied by the people, led the way to the sea.

Iskander modestly bore the vessel containing the melted snow; but Yussef, the centre of an immense crowd, narrated with great gusto the events of their journey. Only, in Yussef's story, Iskander wholly disappeared. As for himself, Yussef, he had gone so near to heaven as to hear the snoring of the seven sleepers and the voices of the houris. He had suffered horribly from the cold; but, fortunately”, he had got warmed up in a fight with two bears and a serpent of frightful dimensions. He had wished to bring home the serpent’s skin, and had flayed it for that purpose; but his horse was so terribly afraid of it that he was obliged to abandon it on the way. However, he knew exactly where it lay, and, on the morrow, he would send the muezzin to fetch it.

But, however interesting Yussef’s tales might be, he had not a single auditor when the time came for Iskander to turn the water from his jar into the sea.

Since early morning a high wind had been blowing; but the wind brought no rain, — not one drop of water fell.

When, after a long prayer by the mullah, Iskander was ready to empty his jar into the Caspian, he turned to Festahli, who was walking in the front rank, and said, —

“Remember your promise.”

“Remember the conditions,” Festahli in turn replied. “Your fate lies not with those now, but with the rain. If you are dear to Allah, you are very dear to me.”

Iskander elevated the jar above his head, and in the sight of all he poured the snow-water from Schach Dagh into the sea.

Immediately, as if by magic, a great tempest arose; clouds, which seemed charged with rain, blackened the sky; thunder was heard rumbling in the distance; the leaves, violently agitated by the wind, shook off the dust which covered them. Young Tartar girls peeped brightly from the veils which the wind tried to snatch from their heads. The hands of all were outstretched to feel the first drops of the rain so impatiently awaited. At last a flash rent the dome of clouds amassed above Derbend, and it seemed as if all the windows of heaven had opened at once in another deluge.

A torrent of rain poured from the clouds and flooded the land of Daghestan.

This time no one dreamed of fleeing, no one thought even of opening his umbrella.

Not joy, but delirium, possessed the people.

Papaks flew up into the air and fell back into the water; prayers and shrieks of delight joined in flight to heaven. They hugged each other, they congratulated each other, they gazed at the water which was descending like a giant waterfall, or rather, like a hundred waterfalls, from Tartar city to Russian city, and leaping from the citadel into the sea.

Iskander alone felt more joy within himself than all the other inhabitants of Derbend put together.

For him, a wife was coming down from heaven with the rain.

CHAPTER XI.

TWO HOLY MEN.

YOUTH — what is it without love? Love — what is it without youth?

The fire burns readily in pure air, and what air is purer than the breath of spring?

True, the walls of Mussulmans’ courts are high, and the locks of their gates are strong; but the wind blows over the walls and through the keyholes.

The hearts of beautiful women are well protected, — they are kept behind the padlocks of a thousand prejudices; but love is like the wind, — it easily finds a passage.

Kassime was already in love without the courage to confess it. Iskander Beg had the most of her thoughts by day and the most of her dreams by night; while embroidering in advance with gold, as every young Tartar girl does, the pistol-case for the *fiancé* whom she did not know, Kassime kept saying to herself, —

“Oh! if this might be Iskander’s!”

Judge, then, of her joy when her uncle came officially to announce that she was the promised bride of this handsome young man!

She became redder than a cherry, and her heart began to beat like a wild dove’s.

And so her dearest and most secret wishes were to be realized.

From that moment, her nameless hopes were called Iskander; from that moment she could receive with pride the congratulations of her companions, and, in her conversations with them, she, too, could speak of her future husband.

As for Iskander, he did not feel the earth under his feet, and to console himself for not being allowed to see his promised bride, he thought of her incessantly.

“She will work here on this rug; she will drink out of this cup; she will refresh her rosy cheeks with the water from this silver ewer; she will sleep under this satin coverlet.”

Into those countries of the Caucasus that follow the religion of Ali, there frequently come priests and mullahs from Persia to expound the Koran and recount the miracles of their imdms.

This, as a rule, takes place in the month of May.

Beginning with the first day of this month, the Shiites celebrate the death of Hussein, Ali's son, who, after the death of his father, rebelled against Yazid, son of Moawyah, with the intention of seizing the caliphate; but engaging in battle with Obaid Allah, Yazid's general, ho was killed in the combat. The Shiites celebrate the anniversary of this event with great splendor. The fete takes place at night, by the light of numberless torches; and this time, coming from Tabbas to direct the fête, Mullah Sédek had remained in Derbend throughout the entire month of May.

Mullah Sédek was a man of forty years, affecting extreme dignity, for which reason he walked as slowly as a man of seventy, — in a word, for twenty paces round him he exhaled the odor of sanctity and attar of rose.

And yet, while Sédek's eyes were raised to heaven, he never quite lost sight of earth. He had few friends; but as soon as a man came to him with money in his hand, that man found a welcome. He had reaped a rich harvest of presents at Derbend, but it was his desire to carry away something else besides money and jewels. He thought of marrying, and after having secured information as to the best matches in the city, he made overtures to Hadji Festahli, with respect to his niece, whom he knew to be richly endowed.

He began his overtures by flattering Hadji Festahli, and as vanity was the weakness of Kassime's uncle, Sédek had, in a short time, come to be his most intimate friend.

"Ahsaid Sédek," the end of the world is not far distant now. Houtte, the fish on whose back the universe rests, is weary of bearing, along with the weight of men, the otherwise heavy burden of their sins. The Mussulmans are corrupt: they worship money; they wear decorations in their button-holes and ribbons of many colors on their swords. Truly, I know not what would have become of Derbend when she was threatened by the Lord, if you had not been there to act with your virtues as a counterpoise to the crimes of the people. You are a pure man, a respectable man, a holy man, a true Shiite; you are in league with neither the Armenians nor the Russians. The only thing I will not and cannot believe is that you are marrying your niece to this wretched Iskander, who i3 as poor as a dervish's dog. When I heard that report I said to myself: ‘It is not possible! A man like Hadji Festahli would not cast the pearl of the prophet into the mud; he will not give his brother’s daughter to the first-comer.’ No, I am sure it is either a lie or a jest.”

“And yet, it is the truth,” admitted Festahli, quite embarrassed.

And he told Sédek the whole story; how Iskander had made his conditions, and how he himself had been obliged to consent to this marriage.

“I can say with truth,” he added, “that there are in Derbend no eligible young men with fortunes; the rich men, as if by a curse, are all old.”

Mullah Sédek stroked his beard and said: “All is from Allah! all shall return to Allah! Are there no true worshippers of Hussein in the land of Iran? The sun rises and sets twice each day in the great king’s empire, and there is where you should choose a husband for your niece. O holy prophet, if you would mate the moon with one of the most glorious stars of heaven, I will send you my nephew, Mir Heroulali Tebris. He is intelligent and handsome; he is so rich that he does not know the number of his pearls and diamonds, and yet he is as shy and modest as a girl. AY lien he passes through the bazaar, every one bows, and it is who shall provide him with fruits, with cakes, with raisins. There is no danger of a single visitor’s presenting himself at his house without a present. If ever your niece becomes his wife, you can rest assured that she will have the first place in the baths of Tabbas.”

This proposition was all the more pleasing to Festahli as it must destroy the hopes of Iskander, whom he could not endure.

However, he had scruples against thus breaking a sacred promise.

He therefore told Sédek that if such a transaction could be brought about, he would be rendered the proudest and happiest man in the world; but it was to be feared that Kassime’s mother might not approve. Then, too, the commandant of Derbend would certainly not permit a native of his own town, and consequently a Russian, to wed a Persian. And, besides, what would the people of Derbend say?

“*What will people say?”* has some weight in Paris or at Saint Petersburg; but on the shores of the Caspian Sea, in the Orient, it is an afterthought of one who has forgotten his first.

“‘What will they say?*9*” replied Sédek, banteringly. “Why, they will say that you are a man of judgment! To commit faults is pardonable, — to repair them praiseworthy; and, to be frank, what has this Iskander done that is so wonderful? Do you really believe that his snow brought the rain? Let me manage the thing, and I will show you how this affair can be arranged. In the meantime, give out that your sister is dangerously ill, and that, in fear of death, she has sworn to marry her daughter to none but a descendant of the prophet, to an imam. Your sister never leaves her room; in her room, even, she is as dumb as a fish: do not consult her. Have you not read in the sacred books how Job beat his wife when she counselled him to make friends with the devil? Besides, is Kassime's mother your wife? What is she to you? A sister; that is all. Then spit upon her caprices."

"And the commandant?" said Festahli, smiling.

"What can the commandant do? And then, cannot the commandant be tricked? What hinders your getting a passport to go to see your relatives in Persia?"

Festahli consented, or rather, he had already consented long before.

The next day they sent back to Iskander the *halmi*, or wedding-present, which he had already given to his betrothed.

The young man, not being able to tear his hair, very nearly tore off his ears. For a long time he could not believe in this insult. But the bag, with the money it contained, was certainly there, under his very eyes. The old aunt could make nothing of it, and she pitied him with all her soul.

Iskander was overwhelmed.

He reviewed in his mind every means of avenging himself on Festahli without breaking the Russian laws. Ah! if there had been a khan at Derbend instead of a colonel! One thrust of a dagger, all would have been said, and Kassime would be his own.

But he must not think of such a measure, expeditious though it was.

Iskander became moody, and spoke no more than a dead man. He did not see Hadji Yussef, who had been standing in front of him a long time.

Apart from his cowardice and lying, Hadji Yussef was truly an excellent man. He was really moved by his friend's grief; he would have wept, had he known how.

"Why, what is the matter, my dear Iskander?" he asked.

"What is the matter yourself? what do you want of me?" demanded Iskander, frowning.

"I came to tell you that three vessels loaded with grain have arrived, and the people are well pleased. It is good news, Iskander."

"If you had come to tell me that three vessels loaded with poison had arrived, the news would be better still."

"Oh! oh! it is cloudy weather, is it? Come, tell me what vexes you."

"Why should I tell you? As if you did not know already. As if all Derbend did not know, for that matter."

"Is it true that Kassime's mother refuses you for a son-in-law?"

"Her mother?"

Iskander burst into a laugh that made Yussef shiver. "Hermother? No; it is that wretch, Festahli," said he; "but I will kill him!"

"It is easily seen that you have eaten bread on the mountains, my poor Iskander. It is not difficult to kill a man and run away; but, to the end of life, all thought of returning to one's native town must be given up. For my part, I advise you to content yourself with a good drubbing; afterwards, you can tranquilly retire to Baku. If you absolutely wish to take a wife, well, you can get married there for three months; it will cost you twenty-five roubles. It is a magnificent invention, especially for travellers, that sort of marriage. I have tried it. I was married one day, just as I am, for six weeks only. I lacked the patience to serve out my time; I ran away at the end of a month. When asleep, I was in constant fear lest my wife should bite off my nose, she was so crabbed and spiteful. Try it, and I will wager that on your return you will bring me a present by way of thanks."

Iskander continued pensive and silent.

"My dear heart, my handsome lily, my proud palm, Iskander," resumed Hadji Yussef, "do you not hear me? are your ears full of water? A bride! i' faith, a little matter that, a bride! Take a handful of roubles, go and show them in the Derbend market, crying, 'A bride! a bride!' and brides will flock around you like chickens."

Iskander still maintained silence.

"But what is there about it, then, to grieve you so, Iskander. The devil! that Kassime of yours is no star.

In the first place, one of her eyes is larger than the other, and then she is so black that she will ruin you in the one item of Spanish white. I can even add that she is slightly hump-backed. Don't contradict me, I know her, I have seen her."

Iskander heard this time; he seized Yussef by the throat.

"You have seen her! Where have you seen her? how did you see her? when? in what place did you dare raise your basilisk eyes to her? Why don't you answer me, wretch?”

“How can I answer you? you are choking me! Oh! in Allah’s name, let me go! Can’t you see that I am joking? You know very well that I keep my eyes in my pockets, and my pockets have no holes, thank God! And when could I have seen her, why should I have looked at her? Do I not know that she is the promised bride of my best friend? Never marry, Iskander; you are really too jealous for a man that is on good terms with the Russians. You would be obliged to stand guard all night, and to spy all day upon those who came to visit you. For that matter, I cannot see how they manage, these devils of Russians; they are not in the city ten days before they have already made friends with every one of our beauties. You know Mullah Kasim? — — bless God; but he is jealous, that fellow; well, he bought himself a charming wife. As he had paid dearly enough for her, he determined to keep her to himself. His wife had but one friend in the world, — a woman could not have less. Three times a week the friend came to Mullah Kasim’s house; he himself conducted her to his wife and stood guard at the gate, lest the two women should come upon the balcony and look down into the street. Do you know who that friend was? It was a young Eussian ensign who had as yet no beard.”

Iskander clutched Yussef’s arm, but not in anger this time.

“A man dressed as a woman?” said he. “Yes, that might really be possible indeed. Thanks for your story, Yussef; it is very amusing.”

“That is right. Well, now that you are in a better humor, I will leave you. I have a heap of business. This evening I represent the French ambassador at Yazid’s court. I must try on my tight trousers; I am afraid I shall not be able to get into them. May the devil make himself a jacket of a Russian’s skin for having thought of inventing these damned pantaloons! Now, if I meet a cock, he may as well stand still, — I shall get his tail for a plume. You will see, Iskander, how haughty I shall be when I appear on the scene. Every soldier greets me with: ‘We hope you are in good health, your Highness.9 Adieu! I have no time to lose if I wish to be admitted.”

And Yussef departed, throwing the sleeves of his tchouka back over his shoulders, that he might walk the faster.

Iskander sat alone, pensive, but smiling in his revery. The anecdote related by Yussef had given rise, in the midst of his garrulity, to an idea which was nothing less than to take advantage of the fête which they were then celebrating, — a kind of Mussulman carnival, — to disguise himself as a woman and approach Kassime.

Let us say forthwith that nothing adapts itself to such a disguise more readily than the Tartar costume, with its wide trousers, arkalouke, and immense veil.’

After he had decided upon this step, Iskander ceased to despair.

“Ah, I shall see her,” said he, “and she shall be mine! Then, Festahli, you shall know what it means to awaken a tiger. Kassime, Kassime, expect Iskander, even if the road between us were paved with daggers!”

And, on the instant, Iskander set off for the bazaar, and purchased a woman’s complete costume, pretending that it was a present for his *fiancée.*

Returning home, he despatched his noukar, whose indiscretion he feared, to the meadow with the horses; then, as soon as the noukar was gone, he shaved off all his beard, which, for the matter of that was barely beginning to grow; he stained his eyelids, painted his brows, put on some rouge and donned the trousers, arkalouke and veil; he practised the gait of the Tartar women in his new costume, retaining his bechemette so that he might be in masculine attire in case of necessity for attack or defence.

He awaited the evening impatiently; but the day, like a rich uncle, could not make up its mind to die.

At last, the gong beat for prayer, and the theatre was lighted.

Then Iskander placed on his cheeks two indispensable little spangles of gold, slipped his kandjiar into his girdle on one side and his pistol on the other, enveloped himself from head to foot in an immense white veil, and set out, carrying a little lantern in his hand.

At the end of a quarter of an hour, Kassime issued forth with two friends; all three were on their way to see the religious drama which was being enacted at Derbend in honor of the death of Hussein, and which very much resembles the Mysteries which the Brothers of the Passion used to perform in France during the Middle Ages.

Both streets and public squares were full of people afoot and on horses; for it is remarkable that at out-of-door performances in the Orient, no matter how crowded the spectators may be, at least a third of them is on horseback. This third circulates about, goes and comes without concerning itself as to the feet it crushes or the shoulders it injures. It is the pedestrian’s business to get out of the way and take care of himself. His only due is the Circassian warning, “*Kabarda*! *Karbarda*!” uttered from time to time, and equivalent to our own “look out, there!”

The house-tops, the only points inaccessible to the horsemen, were covered with women enveloped in long veils of every color.

The play had not yet begun. Upon the stage fitted up for the presentation of “Yazid,” the name of the tragedy, Mullah Sédek, between two other Mussulmans, was reading the prologue, and, at the pathetic places, he interrupted himself to cry to the spectators, “Weep and wail, O ye people!” The people responded to the apostrophe with groans and lamentations.

Utterly reckless, Iskander, who had followed Kassime, climbed after her up the small staircase which led them to the roof of a house which was already covered by a throng of Moslem women irradiated by numerous torches.

The women embraced as they met and recognized each other, laughing and talking with ceaseless babble.

All were richly dressed, and adorned with gold and silver necklaces, and each exhibited to the others, as rival to rival rather than as friend to friend, the finery which she was wearing for the first time.

One who has had no experience of the Asiatic woman does not know, and never will know, the half of an Asiatic man, should he live with him many years. In the presence of unbelievers, the followers of the prophet eternally wear a mask, and, outside of the harem, the Oriental man never shows to his own brother either the bottom of his heart or the depths of his purse. All nations have the same ruling passion, — that of vaunting their own customs. The Mussulmans are addicted to this more than any other people. If their word is to be accepted, you can regard them every one as saints. According to them, husbands and wives in the performance of their duties walk between the lines of the Koran and never step aside either to right or left. Only within his home does the Mussulman show himself as he is; it is because he has to render no account of his conduct to either wife or children. The wife, contrariwise, is quite free in her husband’s absence. No sooner has she seen the heels of his slippers, than she becomes unrecognizable. Speechless and humble before him, she becomes garrulous, boastful, shameless even before her female companions, with whom she is always sincere, as jealousy exists among the women of the Orient only in matters of costliness of apparel and value of gems.

Hence arises a double life entirely foreign to that of Europe, whose nature this book will be at least one of the first to signalize and impress, — a life less accessible even to men than to women, because man constantly reveals himself to woman, woman to man, never.

Now, suppose that in some way, — what way that is not my affair, — suppose that in some way you are in the company of a Moslem woman; suppose that you have penetrated to the bath and listened to her prattle with a friend; that you have entered the harem and seen her romp — it is the only word that presents itself to my pen — romp, I say, with her companions; clearly, you will learn more yourself than a Mussulman would ever tell you, more than he himself will know.

Judge, then, of Iskander's astonishment when he found himself surrounded by feminine indiscretions. Lost in a flock of young women, pretty and talkative, — — he who had never spoken to a woman who had not passed her sixtieth year, — his eyes devoured them; he was eager to hear every word that they were saying.

"Ah, my dear, what a pretty coiffure you have! My stingy old husband has been to Snizily, and he brought me back some embroidered trousers. I am wrong to call him stingy, for he is not so with me; he refuses me nothing that I ask of him. It is true that he is very exacting, and that, for my part, I do just as he wishes."

"Do you know, Fatima," said another, "that my old ape of a husband has taken a second wife at Baku? I began to weep and reproach him. Guess what he answered me? 'Can I go without rice?9 Oh! I shall have my revenge. He takes a second wife, the old rascal, and is in no condition to observe Saturday with me. Not he, my dear, no. It is incredible, is it not? But that is the way. By the by, do you know that a ukase has been issued in Russia ordering the women to wear trousers? I have myself seen ladies in Derbend with white trousers all embroidered and open-worked.

— — It was high time! They were scandalous to behold when the wind blew."

"Oh! how good that soap is you gave me, my dear Sheker!" said a third; "and how grateful I am to you for it! Fancy, since using that, my skin has become like satin."

"Ah, well, yes, she is dead," a fourth was saying; "he killed her, so much the worse for her. When she fell in love with some one else, she ought to have known how to keep it to herself. As soon as her husband left the house, she went visiting, with a lantern, too. Faith! he killed her in short order.”

“Ah, my dear,” said a fifth, “how my children worry me! I never saw children grow so fast! To look at them, one would think I was an old woman; and they have sore heads, besides. You understand; I have never had a pimple myself; it comes from their father.”

“Ah! your little children may trouble you with their heads, but mine trouble me with their hearts. Mégely torments me beyond measure; he will give me no peace until I buy him a wife.”

“Ah well, buy one for the boy; he is tall and old enough to have a wife. I saw him pass just yesterday.”

“You are a silly one, you are! You talk as if a wife called for two kopecks. A wife costs something. Where shall I get the money, pray?”

“Ah!” cried a sixth, “what a shame! and you say, my dear, that she is with an Armenian? Are there no more Mussulmans or Russians, then?”

“How kind my husband is! if you but knew,” said a seventh; “and he is so handsome! he might be taken for the prophet himself, and although large —”

Iskander listened so intently that he almost forgot why he was there. Rut the cries, “They are beginning! they are beginning!” put an end to all chattering.

Each turned to the stage and gave her attention to the play. Yazid, in red caftan and green turban, was seated on his throne. Below him, at his left, standing on the fourth step of his throne, was the European ambassador, represented by Yussef in a fantastic costume, whose conspicuous features consisted of a three-cornered hat surmounted by an immense plume, an enormous sword, and spurs six inches long.

Yazid’s suite, composed of white-turbaned supernumeraries, formed a semi-circle about his throne.

But not Yazid’s self upon his throne, not the magnificent white-turbaned suite, produced an effect to be compared with that of Yussef, with a hat that would not keep its balance on his shaven pate, a sword he knew not where to put, and spurs that tore the trousers of the noblest and gravest lords of Yazid’s court.

But what especially excited great hilarity among the men, and the liveliest discussion among the women, was that gigantic nose and that colossal plume.

“Oh, look, sister,” said a little girl of rank, “look at that creature beside Yazid! What kind of beast does he represent?”

“That is a lion, you silly child,” responded the sister. “Did you not know that the abominable tyrant, Yazid, that brute among caliphs, always had a lion near him? If any one incurred his displeasure, he was thrown to the lion, who ate him up. Come, listen, there is Yazid saying to Hussein, ‘Adopt my religion or you shall die!’

Hussein sneezes, which signifies, — I will not.!

“That’s not a lion,” pursued the insistent little one; “lions have n’t beaks; it’s a bird.”

“A bird with a tail on his head! Have you ever seen birds with tails on their heads?”

“Yes; it’s a top-knot.”

“It’s a mane.”

“The child is right,” said a third, entering upon the discussion. “Can you not see that it is a parrot? This parrot was interpreting secretary at Yazid’s court. Do you not see how the caliph caresses him?”

“Then why does he shout like the devil?”

“Oh, do keep still, now, parrots of nieces that you are!” said a good Tartar dame weighing one hundred and fifty kilogrammes, and occupying the space of four ordinary people, with whom listening for herself was like listening for a whole society.

The dispute became general at this juncture. Some continued to maintain that it was a lion, others contended that it was a bird; but Yussef ought to have felt highly flattered that the general opinion held him to be some sort of an animal.

He, little suspecting the flutter which he heard to be occasioned by his own nose and feathers, was discoursing meanwhile with the tyrant.

“My king,” he was saying, “the ruler of France, having heard of your conquests, sends me to offer you his friendship.”

Yazid answered: “Let your king cease to eat pork, let him forbid his allies to eat it, and let him order them to become Mussulmans.”

“But if his friends refuse?” replied the ambassador.

“Then let him introduce my system.”

“Let us see your system,” demanded the ambassador. “Bring me my system,” said Yazid.

An executioner entered, naked sword in hand.

Yussef shook his head.

“What do you mean by that?” demanded Yazid.

“I mean, great prince, that your system would not succeed in Europe.”

“Why not?”

“Because it would be impossible to cut off a European’s head as you would an Arab’s.”

“Impossible?” said Yazid. “You shall see whether it is impossible.”

And, turning to his guards and the executioner, he commanded, —

“Take the European ambassador and cut off his head, that he may see that my system is adapted to every country.” — .

Guards and executioner advanced towards Yussef; but he had so recently taken part in a similar drama with Mullah Nour, that fact and fancy became confused in mind and sight; when he saw the guards about to lay hands on him, he wanted to run away; when he saw the executioner raise his sword, he emitted piercing shrieks. He was arrested when about to leap from the stage into the street, and brought back amid the frantic applause of the multitude, who had never seen terror simulated with such fidelity.

He was still heard calling Iskander to his rescue long after he had gone behind the scenes.

But Iskander had quite another affair on hand.

Iskander had at last got next to Kassime. He could scarcely breathe for joy; his heart was burning; he felt the warmth of Kassime’s cheeks; he inhaled the perfume of her breath.

What could you expect? He was in love; he was twenty years old; he loved for the first time.

But he could contain himself no longer when, in shifting her position to be more at her ease, Kassime leaned her hand on his knee.

“Kassime,” he whispered in her ear, “I must speak with you.”

And he gently pressed her hand.

The young girl’s heart and head were full of Iskander; she was hoping to see him at this fête, at which all Derbend was present. She had not come for Yazid’s sake; no caliph’s executioner was occupying her mind.

Her eyes had searched for Iskander on all sides, but he was nowhere to be seen.

Imagine, then, her amazement, fancy her joy when she heard in her ear that well-known, that beloved voice!

She had not the strength to resist.

Iskander rose; she followed him. He led her to the darkest corner of the roof.

Those around were so occupied with Yazid that there was nothing to fear.

Yet Iskander understood that he had no time to lose.

“Kassime,” said he, “do you know how I love you? do you know how I worship you? You see what I have risked for the sake of seeing you for one moment, for the sake of saying a few words to you. Then consider what I am capable of doing if you say, ‘Iskander, I love you not.’ Yes, or no, Kassime? yes, or no?”

Iskander’s eyes flashed lightnings through his veil; his left hand pressed Kassime’s waist, his right rested on his pistol. The poor child trembled as she looked about her.

“Iskander,” said she, “I ask of you but two things, — — do not kill me, do not disgrace me! I would gladly clasp you in my arms as closely as your sword belt; but you know my uncle.”

Then, urged on in spite of herself, after a moment’s hesitation, she added, —

“Iskander, I love you!”

And, like steel to the magnet, her lips were drawn to those of the young man.

“And now,” said she, “let me go.”

“So be it; but on one condition, my darling, — that we meet here to-morrow night.”

Kassime answered nothing; but the word *to-morrow* was so clearly revealed in the look which she gave her friend at parting, that Iskander took the rendezvous for granted.

I cannot tell you how Kassime passed the night; but Iskander’s sleep was very sweet.

There are some sins after which we sleep better than after the best of good works.

CHAPTER XII.

ACCUSED AND ACQUITTED.

Two days after the fête, there was a large meeting in the fortress of Narin Kale, near the commandant's house.

Armed noukars held their masters' horses by the bridle; there were people in the courts, about the fountain, on the stairs; the salon was full of visitors, and these visitors were the leading people of the town. At the entrance door the commandant's interpreter was eagerly rehearsing something extraordinary, no doubt, for he was listened to and questioned. Elsewhere, they spoke in low tones. The old men shrugged their shoulders; in short, it was easy to see that something strange and out of the common was taking place, or had already taken place.

"Yes," said the interpreter, "this is exactly how the thing was done. The brigands made a hole in the wall and entered the room of Soliman Beg. He awoke, but only when one of the robbers was in the act of taking down the arms that hung above his head. Soliman then drew a pistol from under his pillow and fired, but the ball hit no one. Meanwhile, two or three other bandits were binding his wife in a neighboring room. Hearing the shot, they rushed out and came to the aid of the two who were in Soliman's room. The darkness interfered with the effectiveness of his shots, yet Soliman wounded two or three of the bandits; however, he himself fell dead under four or five dagger-thrusts. The shooting, and the cries of Soliman and his wife, awoke the neighbors; but while they were dressing, lighting their lanterns, and rushing to Soliman's house, the robbers had broken into his coffers and emptied them, and they were gone without having been seen, and, consequently, without a single one's having been identified."

"So not one of the knaves has been arrested?" demanded a new-comer.

"No; and yet it is believed that an accomplice is caught."

"An accomplice?"

"Yes; he had been stationed as a watch; he had a rope around him, for the purpose no doubt of aiding his comrades in scaling the wall. He carried a pistol and a dagger in his belt; but it must be admitted that, as a beg, he had a right to carry arms.”

“What! a beg? But it is impossible that a beg should be an accomplice of thieves!” cried several voices at once.

“And why is it impossible?” replied a mirza, casting around him the scoffing glance so much affected by Tartar youths.

“Yes; but this one is really a beg belonging to one of the best families in Derbend, and you will indeed be astonished when I tell you his name. It is Iskander Ben Kalfasi Ogli. Wait, at this very moment the commandant is reading the report of the chief of police, and you will presently see Iskander; an order has been given to bring him here.”

In fact, the news astonished everybody. Iskander was greatly pitied. How could a young man whose conduct was so irreproachable, who had been chosen to bring the snow from Schach Dagh, be the accomplice of such bandits?

The commandant’s entrance put a stop to all discussion, and a profound silence was established. He was one of those men who thoroughly understand the Asiatic character. lie was discriminately affable, the better to make his affability appreciated, severe without the rudeness that envenoms justice, even when she is just, lie entered the salon in full uniform.

All the by-standers saluted him, placing their hands over their hearts and letting them fall to the knee.

The commandant bowed to all, and spoke briefly on current matters. Some he gently eluded for inefficient service; others he thanked for having performed their duties conscientiously; he pressed the hands of some of the Derbend freeholders, — there are freeholders everywhere, — and invited two of them to dine with him the next day.

Then, addressing himself to all, he said, — “Gentlemen begs, I suppose you all know what took place last night. I have every reason to think it an enterprise of our friends the mountaineers, and not the deed of residents of Derbend. I entreat you all to do your utmost to capture the thieves and bring them before me. Well,” he added, turning to the mirza, “has the mullah questioned Iskander? In that case, what has the beg to say?”

“Iskander naturally replies that he is as innocent as a new-born babe of this whole affair. lie says that lie carried the rope to get outside of the city for a walk, and climb back again whenever he pleased, because, he asserts, the air of the city is stifling. As to his arms, he gave no other explanation than this: ‘As a beg, I have a right to carry them.’ “

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“A singular walk, that,” said the commandant, “with a rope around the loins! and yet I must say the whole of Iskander’s past conduct is a protest against the crime of which he is accused. I wish to see and question him myself; bring him in.”

Iskander Beg entered, his papak on his head, according to the Asiatic custom; he bowed respectfully to the commandant, haughtily to the people, and waited in the place assigned to him.

The commandant regarded him coldly. At the thought of being an object of suspicion, the young beg could not help blushing; but his eye was steady and clear.

“I little suspected, Iskander,” said the commandant, “that I should ever see you brought before me as a criminal.”

“It is not crime, but fate, that brings me here,” replied Iskander.

“Do you know the consequences of the crime of which you are accused?”

“Only here have I learned of my supposed crime. I acknowledge my imprudence; appearances are against me, I am aware; but guilty? God knows I am not!”

“Unfortunately, Iskander,” returned the commandant, “men must be governed by appearances, and until your innocence is proved, you are in the hands of justice. However, if there is any one here who will answer for you, I will consent to your going at liberty.”

Iskander cast a questioning glance around; but no one offered to become his surety.

“What!” said the commandant, “not one?”

“At your pleasure, commandant,” replied the bystanders, bowing.

“Well, I will answer for him myself, and be his w bondsman,” said Hadji Yussef, coming forward.

The commandant smiled; the lookers-on laughed aloud; but the commandant frowned, and the faces grew long.

“Truly, I am astonished, gentlemen,” said the commandant, “that you, who so readily give bail for the greatest rascals to be found in our city, for wretches who have twenty times fled to the mountains after you have gone on their bonds, should hesitate to do as much for a young man whom, eight days ago, you recognized as the purest and most upright among you. His good reputation will not save him from chastisement; on the contrary, if he is guilty, he shall be severely punished. But until he is convicted, he is your compeer, and his exemplary life should be respected. Go home, Iskander; if you had not found security, I should have served you myself."

The commandant saluted the assembly and set off for the mosque.

The young beg went home, his eyes dimmed with tears of gratitude.

The morning sun gilded the porch of the mosque of Derbend. The old men were warming themselves in its vivifying rays as they talked of bygone days; two or three beggars had halted at the entrance of the court.

A few steps farther on, a wayfarer was sleeping under his bourka; not far from the traveller sat Mullah Sédek on his rug.

The holy man was ready to leave Derbend the next morning, and was reckoning up from memory all the small profits by which his journey had enriched him. While mentally recalling the trifling items, he was eating a sort of pastry which he dipped into a dish of garlic and milk. From time to time he plunged his reed pen into a wooden ink-bottle, and wrote a few words on a little scrap of paper that he had beside him. It was curious to note with What appetite the holy man ate his breakfast, and with what pleasure he footed up his accounts.

He was so deeply engrossed in this twofold enjoyment that he did not see a poor Lesghian before him begging for alms. The wretch was asking for a kopeck in such pitiful accents that it was truly a crime to deny him.

Mullah Sédek finally heard the sort of litany that the poor devil was chanting; he raised his eyes, but almost as quickly lowered them again to his accounts.

"For three days I have had nothing to eat, master," the Lesghian was saying, as he held out his hand.

"Ten, twenty-five, fifty, one hundred," counted Mullah Sédek.

"A kopeck will save my life and open the gates of Paradise to you."

"One hundred, five hundred, one thousand," continued Mullah Sédek.

"You are a mullah," persisted the Lesghian; "recall what the Koran says: 'The first duty of a Mussulman is charity.'"

Mullah Sédek lost his patience.

"Go to the devil!" he angrily exclaimed. "Was it for wretches like you that Allah invented charity? You have sticks in the town and herbs in the fields. When you are strong enough, you rob; otherwise, you ask alms, and they are no sooner given than you laugh at the fool that gave. You will get nothing from me; I am a poor traveller, too, and all that I had has been taken away by your brigand of a Mullah Nour.”

The wayfarer lying under his bourka, who had not said a word until then, quietly raised himself, and stroking his beard with his hand, he politely demanded of Mullah Sédek, —

“Has Mullah Nour been so cruel as to leave you absolutely without money, — a holy man like you? Yet I have heard it said that Mullah Nour is a conscientious man, and that he rarely takes more than two roubles from one traveller.”

“Two roubles! that rapacious Mullah Nour! Trust yourself in his hands and you will be very lucky if he does not pick out your two eyes. Would that he might be struck down by the destroying angel, and boil throughout all eternity in the gold that he took from me, even if I had to melt the gold myself. Did he not take even my aba of camel’s-hair?”

“That is true,” said the old men. “Mullah Sédek came to us without an aba and with only his mantle; we have done our best to reclothe him. Curses on this Mullah Nour!”

The wayfarer with the bourka arose smiling, and drawing a piece of gold from his pocket he held it out to the Lesghian, saying, —

“Curse Mullah Nour as these honest men have just done, and this *tchervonies* is yours.”

The Lesghian at first extended his hand; but almost instantly withdrew it, shaking his head, and replied, —

“Xo, Mullah Nour has helped my brother in misfortune, — he gave him a hundred roubles; on ten occasions he has aided my compatriots. I do not know his face, but I know his heart. Keep your gold, I will not curse Mullah Nour. I sell neither my benedictions nor my maledictions.”

The wayfarer regarded the beggar with astonishment, and Mullah Sédek with scorn.

Then, drawing out four other gold pieces, which he added to the first, he gave them all five to the poor Lesghian.

Thereupon, resting one hand on Mullah Sédek’s shoulder, and pointing with the other above his head, he said, —

“In heaven there is a God of truth, and on earth are some good men.”

After which, picking up his bourka, he threw it over his shoulder, mounted his horse, which had been tied to the mosque wall, and slowly descended to the bazaar.

Then, having crossed the bazaar, always at a walk, he entered the street in which was to be found the house of the chief of police.

This official was at his door, surrounded by several persons to whom he was doling out justice; he was already old, but so black did he keep his beard that he was himself deluded as to his age, and fancied that he was at least ten years younger than he was. His tchourka was trimmed with lace, no more nor less than that of a man of fashion, and, as a much livelier reminder of his youth, he still had four wives and three mistresses, and drank several bottles of wine every evening. In short, had he not worn spectacles, had he not been as wrinkled as an old apple, had he not had a paunch like a pumpkin, one might have believed, after what he himself had said, in the youth of this most worthy man.

That day his Excellency was in a bad humor; he was in a rage with everybody, and quarrelled even with the passers-by. — .

It was in this state of mind that he saw a traveller dismount from his horse and approach him.

"*Salaam Aleikoum*, Mouzaram Beg!" was the wayfarer's greeting.

The chief of police shook as if he had been stung by a scorpion, and laid his hand on his pistol.

But the traveller bent down to his ear and said, —

"Mouzaram Beg, if I were to give you a bit of advice, it would be that you do not meddle with old friends. I have come, too, for your own good; I can do you a service, only, let us go within. I can tell you something for which all Derbend will thank me. But if you make a doubtful sign, you know my pistol carries a ball, and that that ball goes, too, just where I wish it to go, as surely as if, instead of placing it with the eye, I were to place it with my finger. At the first move, then, I fire. I appear to be alone, but do not trust to that. A dozen of my brave men keep me in sight, and at my first summons they will be here. Come, lead the way, Mouzaram Beg."

The chief of police made no protest and went in first.

What took place then? The interview was without witnesses; no one can tell.

We know only that a quarter of an hour after entering, the unknown came out, calmly mounted his horse, threw a silver rouble to the noukar who had held the bridle, and left the city.

But two days later it was told how the celebrated brigand Mullah Nour had had the audacity to enter the city; how, thanks to his active surveillance, the chief of police had been warned of his presence, and had sent after him a dozen noukars, to whom Mullah Nour was glad to show his horse's heels.

Ill-bred people said much worse; but one never has to believe what ill-bred people say.

During this time poor Iskander was moping within the four walls of his house. He had but to say one word to establish his innocence; but he would a hundred times have preferred to die rather than dishonor Kassime.

To await trial is purgatory for every native of Asia. An Asiatic can better sustain an undeserved punishment than a merited trial if the latter is delayed.

"Ah!" he cried in his impatience, "eternal chains, the snows of Siberia, everything rather than the suspicion of the Russians, who force me to love them, and the mockery of my compatriots, whom I detest. I am ready to die by the sword, but to die by the rope is to die twice."

And, bound by his parole, he began to roar and rage like a caged tiger, to rend the sleeves of his tchourka and weep like a child.

In the evening, at an hour when all the streets in the city were empty, when the houses were enlivened by the sound of voices and the flashing of lights, when the married Mussulman was enjoying repose of soul beside his wife, — even beside the four wives allotted him by the prophet, — and when, on the other hand, the celibate was moping at his hearth, Iskander, sitting by his own with his head thrust between his two hands, heard one of his window-panes crash under a blow from some object, and that object fell into his room.

It was a pebble, to which was attached a small note.

He unfolded it, and read, —

"Mullah Nour to Iskander, greeting! Better to be a captive and innocent, than a free man and guilty, believe me.

"I know all; I will declare everything in order to prove your innocence.

"The rest lies with Allah."

"Patience and hope; your deliverance shall not be long in coming."

The next morning, Iskander was summoned before the commandant; but he had not had time to arrive before every one was already congratulating him upon the happy turn in his affairs.

The robbers were captured; they had got together to divide the booty at Baktiara, where they had been surrounded and made prisoners.

Two were Lesghians, two were men of that city.

In the house of one of the latter was a double wall in which the plunder had been secreted.

Iskander Beg was quite innocent.

Then Iskander, deeply touched by the kindly regard bestowed on him by the commandant, in turn sought a private interview. He confessed all, — his love for Kassime, Festahli’s broken promise.

The commandant listened, half smiling, half sad.

“Iskander,” said he, “you see yourself into what your imprudence has led you. Festahli did wrong, doubtless; but one is not avenged of a wrong by doing wrong. Thieves of gold are not the only thieves; an upright man does nothing underhandedly. Secrecy and night are the cloaks of ravishers and brigands. Your future happiness occupies your heart; I shall do what I can to make it expand from your heart into your life. Adieu, Iskander. In the name of those who love you, remain what you are, and what you nearly ceased to be, — — an honest man!”

And he pressed his hand affectionately, again wishing him happiness.

Iskander was proclaimed innocent, Iskander was free; his enjoyment of the twofold happiness lasted but a moment. It was such grief for the young man to believe that he must renounce his Kassime.

The kiss that he had snatched from her lips thrilled him yet to the depths of his heart. He recalled minutely every detail of his last meeting with his beloved; his soul seemed ready to fly at the thought of that sweet voice whose echo it had become.

“No,” said he, “Mullah Nour has written nonsense, and as for what the commandant told me, it is easily seen that he is not in love. I am ready to purchase Kassime even with a crime, and I am sure that in spite of the crime I should be happy with her, — happy, even if I should be forced to carry her to the mountain, with her consent or without it. I will take her away, if only for an hour; I will steep my heart in heavenly delights.”

Poor Kassime was sorrowful also. In her solitude she was learning with tears to count the hours of separation.

“I fastened a rose on my breast,” sighed she, “and it whispered, ‘I am the Spring;’ a nightingale sang me his song of love, and I called it joy; Iskander looked into my eyes and gave me a kiss, and with that kiss I knew love. But where art thou, lovely rose? where art thou, sweet nightingale? where art thou, Iskander? They are gone where my happiness has flown.”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MILLER.

KNOW you the Tengua?

It is sometimes a brooklet, sometimes a torrent, sometimes a stream, and at times a river.

For a quarter of a verst it runs cramped within a narrow gorge, into which it plunges with abhorrence, and through which it madly courses.

The storms of many centuries have not washed the blackened traces of lightning from the walls of the gorge where the Tengua thunders.

Entire masses of rock, precipitated from the mountain's height to the bottom of the gorge, form the bed over which it leaps and foams with maddening uproar.

The neighborhood of this chasm is wild and gloomy; its entrance is formidable.

The right bank of the torrent casts the shadow of its rocks far over the valley.

The left bank lowers into the water a narrow path which first traverses a little wood.

Ill luck to the horseman who, without guide, engages in a struggle with this liquid hell, especially at seasons of thaw or melting snow.

Ill luck to him if he encounter brigands in this pass, which seems expressly planned for an ambuscade. Defence and flight are impossible here.

At this spot Mullah Nour, the bandit from the book of whose life we are taking a page, — this very Mullah Nour with a dozen of his fellows stopped three regiments which were returning with the enormous spoils of General Pankratief's expedition.

When they were just on the point of descending into the river, he appeared before them mounted and completely armed, threw his bourka on the ground and said, —

"I salute you, comrades! Allah has granted you victory and spoils. Honor be to you! but it would only be like the good Christians you are to let me share your happiness. I exact nothing, — I entreat; be generous, and let each give me what he will. Think now, brothers, you are returning rich, carrying presents to your relatives. As for me, I am poor, I have no home; and for an hour's repose under others' roofs, I pay a handful of gold. Yet, know you, brothers, men have, like cowards, stripped me of everything. Happily, Allah has preserved my courage; more than that, he has given me these gloomy ravines and these naked rocks which you yourselves scorn. Of these rocks and ravines I am king, and no one shall pass through my territories without my permission. You are in great numbers, you are brave; but if you mean to pass by force, it will cost you much blood, and of time much more, for you will cross only when I and my brave men have fallen. Every stone will fight for me, and as for myself, I will shed here the last drop of my blood; I will burn here my last grain of powder. Choose; you have much to lose, and I nothing. Men call me Nour, *The Light*, but my life, I swear, is gloomier than the darkness."

A murmur rose from the ranks of the troopers; some frowned, others were wrathful.

"Let us trample Mullah Nour under our horses'

feet," said they, "and go on. You see how many we are, how many you are. On! let us charge the bandits!"

But no one ventured first into the roaring stream, whose ford was covered by the guns of a dozen brigands.

Rashness made way for reflection, and the three regiments yielded to Mullah Nour's demands.

"We shall give you what we like, and nothing more."

And so saying, each cavalier threw a little money down on the bandit's bourka.

"But understand that, by force, you could not have taken a nail from our horses' shoes."

And they passed one by one in single file before Mullah Nour.

Mullah Nour smilingly bowed to them.

"Allah!" said he, after this adventure which had brought him three or four thousand roubles, "it is no feat to shear the wool from the sheep of Daghestan, when I have shaved the hair from the wolves of the Karabaeh. I do not know why these people of Daghestan should complain about their crops; I take no pains to sow, plough, or cultivate; I stand on the highway and pray, and my prayer brings me an ample harvest. Only know how to set about it, and you can extract an abassi, not from every carriage, but from every gun-barrel.”

But early in the summer of the year in which the events that we are relating took place, no one had seen Mullah Nour, no one had heard Mullah Nour spoken of as on the banks of the Tengua. Where was he, then?

In the government of Shekin perhaps; perhaps in Persia, where he might indeed have been forced to take refuge; and perhaps he was dead.

Nobody knew anything about him, — not even Mullah Sédek, who pretended to have been robbed by him on his way from Persia to Derbend.

He had left Kouban early in the morning, this worthy, this respectable Mullah Sédek, and, toward noon, he had reached the spot where the Tengua, freed from the confines of the gorge, goes on its way. Insatiate as the desert sand, he was unwilling to take a guide, whose trouble he must have paid for by a few paltry pieces of the coin that he had gathered by the bushel at Derbend.

The June sun was terribly warm, and our wayfaring mullah was in the act of transferring his gun from the right shoulder to the left.

When he caught sight of a little wood in the distance, he was delighted; but when he saw the river close at hand, he was in despair.

“May the devil take me!” murmured he; “had I known what this river was like, I would not have attempted to cross it without a guide, although its bed were silver and gold instead of rocks. In fact, I was crazy not to have hired one.”

And he gazed about him in terror; the spot was deserted and solitary.

However, after careful search, he discovered, tied to a tree in the wood, a horse all saddled and bridled; and under this same tree was a simple Tartar, armed only with his kandjiar, a weapon that no Tartar ever goes without.

Mullah Sédek approached step by step and looked attentively.

The flour whitening the Tartar’s coat and beard indicated that he was a miller. The miller was eating his breakfast.

Our holy man, who had felt his heart beat for an instant, became reassured.

“Hi! friend!” cried he to the unknown, “it seems to me that you belong hereabouts, do you not?”

“To be sure I belong here,” replied the miller with his mouth full.

“In that case, you ought to know all the fords of this river?”

“Oh! I certainly think I ought to know the fords of the Tengua; she runs only with my permission. Such as you see her, this river is my servant.”

“You will do me a great service, my good man, and Allah will bless you, if you will conduct me to the other side of the gorge.”

“Wait until night,” tranquilly returned the miller. “Between now and night the river will fall, my horse will be rested, and I, too, shall be refreshed. It will not take us more than a quarter of an hour then to ford the torrent; but just now it is dangerous.”

“In the name of Allah! In the names of Ali and Hussein! In the name of my prayers! I am a mullah; lead me across without delay, now, instantly!”

“Oh!” said the miller, “neither prayers nor blessings will bring that to pass. Never, at such high water, will I try to ford the Tengua!”

“Have some feeling, my friend; Allah will reward you, you may be sure, if you do anything for a mullah.”

“Mullah as much as you like, but I would not risk getting drowned to guide the prophet himself.”

“Do not despise me; I am not so poor as you think, perhaps, and if you render me this service, it shall not be for nothing.”

The miller smiled.

“Well, let us see, what would you give me?” he said, scratching his beard.

“I will give you two abassis; I hope that is reasonable.”

“Good! two abassis? With two abassis I should not even have the means of getting my horse shod. No, I will not take you across for two roubles even; because a new head is not to be bought with two roubles, and a man would plainly be risking his head in that frightful ford.”

They bargained a long time; at last Mullah Sédek ended by promising the sum exacted by the miller.

On giving up his horse’s bridle to the guide, Mullah Sédek surrendered at discretion and trusted himself entirely to the other’s experience. The holy man nearly died of fright when he began to ford the river and penetrated the entrance of the gorge. But when, through the opposite gap, he again caught sight of the valley covered with grass, with sunlight and flowers, his courage revived, and supposing there was nothing more to fear, he addressed his guide, —

“Come, will you get on a little faster, you rascal?”

But our brave mullah had found his courage a little too soon. The last part of the ford was the deepest and most dangerous.

The guide halted just at that part, and turning his horse, he said, —

"Well, Sédek, ten steps more and you are on the bank. Now let us settle our accounts. You know that I have well earned your gold-piece, eh?"

"A gold-piece! Have you no conscience, friend? No, you are joking, surely. I might as well have built me a silver bridge to cross on. Go on, now, good fellow, and on the other side I will give you two abassis and you can be off."

"Good! we shall come to better terms, I fancy."

"Undoubtedly, undoubtedly. Necessity — you hold a knife to my throat, and I must certainly cross over. Where do you expect a poor traveller to get so much money? Alas! I have already been robbed. Come, come, take me to the other side, brother; and once there, you can go about your business, and I will go about mine."

"Not so," said the miller, shaking his head; "I told you, and I repeat that I will not leave this spot without having settled my account with you, and our account docs not date from to-day. You have no conscience, Mullah Sédek, but you doubtless have a memory. To excite sympathy and obtain money at Derbend, you invented the story that Mullah Nour had stopped you, stripped you, and taken everything. Tell me, where did that happen?"

"I have never said such a thing!" cried Mullah Sédek; "may Allah condemn me if I said that!"

"Recall the court of the mosque, Sédek; remember what you said to the Lesghian, what you told the wayfarer who slept on his bourka. And now look me in the face, as I am looking at you, and perhaps we shall recognize each other."

Mullah Sédek scanned the face of his guide; under the flour which covered it he was at first unrecognizable, but the flour had disappeared; gradually the whitened beard had become black; under the frowning brows glittered two black eyes. However, seeing that he had no weapon but his kandjiar, Mullah Sédek seized his gun; but before he could cock it, the kandjiar's point was at his breast.

"If you twitch so much as a hair of your moustache," said the counterfeit miller, "I warn you that, like Jonah, you shall go to preach to the fishes against drinking either wine or brandy. Come, now, away with your gun, away with your sword! Your business is to cheat people in the shops and in the pulpit; to lie in the morning, to lie in the evening, to lie at all times; but fighting is the business of brave men, — not yours, therefore. Do not move, I say, you son of a dog! In this place, there is no need for me to waste even one charge of powder on you, and that is why I carry no fire-arms; I have only to drop your horse’s bridle, and in five minutes you are a corpse.”

At these words Mullah Sédek turned as white as wax. He clutched his horse’s mane, conscious that he was growing dizzy, and about to slip from his saddle. But, without for an instant losing sight of the wicked kandjiar that glittered against his breast like a flashing light, he cried, —

“Mercy! I am a mullah!”

“I am myself a mullah,” responded the guide, “and even more than a mullah, — I am Mullah Nour.” Mullah Sédek gave a shriek and cowered to his horse’s mane, clasping both hands about his own neck, as if he already felt the steel’s sharp edge upon its nape.

Mullah Nour began to laugh at Sédek’s terror; then raising him up at last, he said, —

“Your story to the people of Derbend maligned me; you made everybody believe that I had robbed you of your last kopeck, of your last shirt even, — I, who give the poor man the bit of bread that he begs in vain at the rich man’s door, — I who never take more than one piece of gold from the merchants themselves, and that not for myself, but for my comrades, — comrades who would kill and plunder without shame and without remorse, did I not restrain them. And more than that, — you are the robber, for you meant to rob your guide by refusing him what you had promised; lastly, you are an assassin, for when I demanded what was legitimately my due you would have assassinated me.”

“Have pity on me, pardon mo, good Mullah Nour!” said Sédek.

“Have you ever pitied the lot of the poor man whom you saw dying of hunger? Would you have felt any remorse if you had killed me? No; for you are a miserable wretch. You coin every letter of the Koran into money, and in your own interests and for your own profit you sow dissension in families. I recognized you; I knew what sort of a man you were, and I did not touch you when you passed along here on your way to Derbend. You did not see me; you did not meet me; you did not know me; yet you insulted me. Well, now you will not be lying when you say that I have robbed you. Mullah Sédek, give me your money!”

Mullah Sédek sent up shriek after shriek, he shed great tears; but he was entrapped, he had to submit. One after another, he cast his poor roubles into the sack held out to him by Mullah Nour, squeezing each coin before letting it go, as if a coating of silver might cling to his hands.

Finally, he reached the last piece.

“That is all,” said he.

“You would swear to a lie on the edge of the grave!” cried Mullah Nour. “Look here, Sédek, unless you wish to become more intimately acquainted with my poniard, count better. You still have money; you have gold in the inside pocket of your tchouska. I know how much, and I can tell you, — fifteen hundred roubles. Is n’t that it?”

Great was the lamentation of Sédek, but he was forced to yield up his very last piece of gold.

Mullah Nour had spoken the truth, he knew the amount.

Mullah Nour then conducted Sédek to the much desired bank, and made him there dismount from his horse.

Mullah Sédek believed himself at quits with the bandit, but he was deceived.

“Now, that is not all,” said the latter; “you have hindered the marriage of Iskander Beg, and you must mend what you have marred. You have a bottle of ink in your girdle; write to Hadji Festahli that you have received on the way a letter from your brother, in which he tells you that his son does not wish to marry, and has gone on a pilgrimage to Mecca; or say that he is dead, if you like. The deuce! you ought not to be put to it for a lie! Only, arrange it so that Iskander can wed his promised bride. Otherwise, I shall see to marrying you to the houris, Mullah Sédek!”

“Never!” cried Mullah Sédek, “never! No, no, no, I will not do it! You have taken all I had; be content with what you have robbed me of.”

“Ah! is it so?” said Mullah Nour.

He clapped his hands three times, and, at the third, a dozen bandits appeared, as if they had issued from the rocks.

“The worthy Mullah Sédek wishes to write,” said Mullah Nour; “second him, my friends, in the laudable intention.”

In a twinkling, Mullah Sédek, if such was indeed his desire, had nothing left to wish for. One bandit detached his ink-bottle, another dipped his pen in the ink, a third handed him paper, and last of all, a fourth, bracing his hands against his knees, and lowering his shoulders, offered his back for a desk.

Three times Mullah Sédek began to write, but, whether from errors or unwillingness, three times he broke off., “Well?” demanded Mullah Nour, his voice but the more threatening for appearing to be perfectly calm.

“The ink is bad, and my head is so bothered that I can think of no words.”

“Then write with your blood and think with your papak,” said Mullah Nour, with an emphasizing flash of the terrible kandjiar; “but write very quickly! If not, I will put such a point between your two eyebrows that the devil alone can tell which letter of the alphabet you resemble.”

Mullah Sédek saw that his hesitation had gone its length, and he finally made up his mind to write.

“Set your seal now,” said Mullah Nour, when the letter was finished.

Mullah Sédek obeyed.

“There! now give it to me,” demanded Mullah Nour; “I will see to posting it.”

He took the letter, read it, assured himself that it was what he desired, thrust it into his pocket, and then, tossing to Mullah Sédek all that had been taken from him, he said, —

“There is your gold and silver, Sédek; take it back, not a kopeck is missing. And now which of us two is miser or thief? Answer. However, it is not a gift, but a payment. You have blackened my name at Derbend, you must regild it at Schumaka, and that in open mosque. Go, then, and know that if you do not carry out my orders, my ball will find you, however well hidden you may be. I have convinced you that I know everything; I will prove to you that I can do everything.”

Mullah Sédek pledged himself to all that the bandit exacted, took possession of his money very joyfully, restored it to his pockets, after first assuring himself that his pockets contained no holes, and, remounting his horse, he set off at full gallop.

Two days later, Mullah Sédek scandalized the people of Schumaka by a discourse in which he eulogized Mullah Nour, comparing him to a lion that bore the heart of a dove in his breast.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCLUSION.

PROBABLY the letter written to Festahli by his friend, Mullah Sédek, left the former not a ray of hope for the union on which he had counted; for, one evening after the letter had reached his address, music and songs were heard in the streets of Derbend.

Kassime was being escorted to the home of her betrothed husband, Iskander.

All Derbend followed her; shouts and acclamations rent the air on every side, and from every house-top innumerable guns discharged their fires, like brilliant rockets.

The whole town seemed ablaze, rejoicing in Iskander's happiness.

Iskander Beg, on hearing the noise and music, had twenty times drawn near to his door, and every time custom forbade his opening it.

Finally, at the twenty-first time, when the procession was almost at his threshold, as he half-opened his door and shyly put out his head, a horseman extended his hand, saying, —

"Iskander, may Allah grant you all the happiness that I wish you!"

And the same instant he wheeled his horse away, that he might not be caught in the midst of the crowd.

But, just as the horse turned, he found himself face to face with Yussef, who, naturally, was the best man at Iskander's wedding.

Yussef Beg recognized the horseman, and could not restrain an exclamation of terror.

"Mullah Nour!" he cried.

That name, as one can well understand, threw the fête into great confusion.

The cry "Mullah Nour! Mullah Nour!" re-echoed on all sides.

"This way! that way! catch him! hold him fast!" howled the ten thousand voices together.

But Mullah Nour shot away like a flash of lightning.

All the young men who were on horseback in the bride’s train dashed off in pursuit of the bandit.

Mullah Nour flew through the streets of Derbend, and all they saw of him in the dark was the shower of sparks from his horse’s hoofs.

But as the city gates were closed Mullah Nour could not get out.

By the glare of shots fired at him along his course, they saw that he was headed toward the sea.

He would there find himself caught between the ramparts and the water.

One instant the bandit paused; the sea was high. They saw the leaping waves and tossing foam; they heard their roar.

“He is caught! he is ours! Death to Mullah Nour!” shouted his pursuers.

But Mullah four’s whip whistled like the wind, flashed like the lightning, and from the rock where he had an instant paused, at one leap his horse plunged into the sea.

His pursuers drew rein as the waters of the Caspian Sea washed their horses’ flanks.

They strained their eyes, screening them with their hands, in an effort to pierce the gloom.

“He is lost! drowned! dead!” they shouted at last.

A formidable peal of laughter answered their shouts, and a hurrah sent up from a dozen throats was heard in the direction of a little island uprising about a quarter of a verst from Derbend, which announced to the disappointed pursuers that not only had Mullah Nour escaped, but that he was even surrounded by his comrades.

In Iskander’s house the doors are closely shut. All is very quiet within; a faint whispering can scarcely be heard.

Gayety seeks the crowd; happiness loves silence and solitude.

THE NEAPOLITAN LOVERS

THE FIRST PART OF *La San-Felice*

Translated by R. S. Garnett

In 1861, Dumas, having helped Giuseppe Garibaldi conquer the Kingdom of Naples, resided in a comfortable Neapolitan villa, where he had access to the secret archives of the late Bourbon regime. From his historical research came a work of history, *Les Bourbons des Naples*, and a work of historical fiction titled *La San Felice*.

First published in *La Presse* from 1863 to 1865, this novel was one of Dumas' last successes. It concerns the establishment of the Republic in Naples in 1799 by General Championnet and the re-establishment of the Bourbons three months later. Interestingly, the novel features the Admiral Horatio Nelson, Sir William and Lady Emma Hamilton, among the various other characters.

The Neapolitan Lovers is more history than fiction and was Dumas' personal favorite among his many works. The novel opens with the arrival of the British commander of the Mediterranean fleet, Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson (1758-1805), in Naples. Nelson has just crushed the French fleet in the Battle of the Nile, stranding Napoleon and his army in Egypt. Nelson is met by the Bourbon King and Queen of Naples, Ferdinand (1759-1825) and Maria Carolina (1752-1814).

CHEZ LES MÊMES ÉDITEURS

OUVRAGES

D'ALEXANDRE DUMAS

LA

SAN-FELICE

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

PARIS

The titlepage of the first edition

Dumas, close to the time of publication

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THE NEAPOLITAN LOVERS
THE ONLY EDITION IN ENGLISH
ALEXANDRE DUMAS

A later English edition

TRANSLATOR’S INTRODUCTION.

BRITISH subjects all the world over, being familiar with the life of Nelson, will remember that having won the battle of the Nile and so blocked up Bonaparte and his army in Egypt, he returned to Naples in the poor wretched *Vanguard*, as he described his vessel, sighting the city on 22nd September, 1798.

Dumas opens the present romance on the following day when Ferdinand IV., King of the Two Sicilies, and his Queen Maria Carolina, sister of Marie Antoinette; Caracciolo, accompanied by the British Minister, Sir William Hamilton with his celebrated wife who were also in the royal galley, came out into the bay of Naples to meet the saviour of Italy, as the Queen called our greatest Admiral.

Three months later, almost day for day, after that brilliant and joyous reception on the water, Nelson, on a wild, stormy night, secretly and stealthily embarked King Ferdinand, his family and courtiers in three barges, and having thus transported them on board the *Vanguard*, conveyed them from Naples to Palermo.

What had occurred during these three months? Why this royal flight in the dead of night under the protection of Nelson? Dumas is going to explain it all down to the most minute detail in his inimitable manner, and we need only mention that King Ferdinand was so anxious to obliterate every record of that epoch that he issued a decree ordering every proclamation, every edict, manifesto, deed and writing to be given up by his Neapolitan subjects to his police within eight days. For what purpose? Simply for burning by the public hangman. The hangman was, however, to preserve one complete set for the use and as the property of His Majesty. This decree was dated 18th January, 1800.

Dumas had long awaited an opportunity of dealing with the Neapolitan Claudius and the Venetian Messalina (King Ferdinand and Queen Maria Carolina). He might have said in the words of Hernani when he was at war with Charles V.:

La meurtre est entre nous affaire de famille.

In 1851 Dumas wrote: —

“Perhaps some day my filial vengeance will evoke these two blood-stained spectres and force them to pose in naked hideousness before posterity; perhaps some day the assassins of Caracciolo and the mistress of Acton will account to me for the father’s love that they snatched from me when I was scarcely old enough to know what it was to have a father.’’

The opportunity, then, was long in coming, but when it arrived it did so in the most dramatic manner possible.

In May, 1860, Dumas had hardly finished writing his “Memoirs of Garibaldi “from material handed him by his friend, when, bound for a tour in the East, he learnt on arriving at Genoa that Garibaldi had just left that port for Sicily. Dumas read some letters left for him by Garibaldi with Vecchi, the historian, and realising the vast results which would follow the success of such an enterprise as the conquest of Sicily, set sail again on his yacht the *Emma* for Palermo, which he reached just as the Dictator had taken it after a three days’ siege. The remainder of the campaign was witnessed by Dumas who accompanied Garibaldi, and has recorded those marvellous days in his “Garibaldians in Sicily,” being the letters which, as a Special Correspondent, he tore from his note book and despatched to Paris.

The conquest of Sicily accomplished, Dumas, with the hearty assent of Garibaldi went to Marseilles to buy arms and ammunition for the “Thousand Heroes,” and having seen them despatched, sailed for Naples, where, much to the annoyance of the authorities, he anchored the *Emma* in the bay.

The joy of our author may be imagined when Garibaldi, having crossed the strait and entered Naples, the while King Francis fled, installed him, the poet and romancer, in the Chiatamone Palace, giving him permission to examine the secret Archives of the City. There he found the unique set of the public documents, manuscripts and letters which the public hangman had reserved for the delectation of King Ferdinand, his father’s murderer.

Had Garibaldi’s entry into Naples achieved no other result than making Dumas happy, his many admirers would, doubtless, have deemed it worth accomplishing, but it did more than that, for it enabled our author to write the present story. With what delight must he, have examined that royal set of papers, filled as they were with proofs of the baseness, cruelty and folly of the King and Queen. As he read, he saw them with Nelson, Sir William and Lady Hamilton, Caracciolo,. Cardinal Ruffo, the unspeakable General Mack, the French Republican General Championnet, the Conspirators Hector Caraffa, Cirillo, Palmieri, Manthonnet, the monk Fra Pacifico, the bandit Fra Diavolo, and a host besides. Then his imagination taking fire, he seized a pen and sketched out his plan, including many characters which his long acquaintance with Italy and the Italians enabled him to invent at will. Soon his Neapolitan newspaper "The Independent," which Garibaldi suggested he should establish and edit, heralded the publication in its columns of the new romance in the Italian language, while the Parisian journal "*La Presse,*" to which a copy of the original manuscript was to be despatched, informed its readers of the good fortune in store for them. In due course, the story took its place in the "Oeuvres Complètes," where it fills four volumes.

Such is the history of the present book, which, although much read on the continent, appears to be almost unknown in this country.

It may be admitted that the best way to write a romance, a historical romance especially, is not to select the murderers of one's own father as principal characters — and indeed but few of us could do so — and did not history, as it undoubtedly does, support Dumas in his main facts and conclusions respecting King Ferdinand and his Queen, the reader might be excused for supposing that the author's ardent imagination had misled him. A book which nearly every one possesses, Southey's "Life of Nelson," will convince any one who refers to it in the matter. Those who have time and opportunity may profitably read a more detailed study made with documents at the author's hand which were unknown to Southey — " La Reine Marie — Caroline de Naples," — by A. Gagnière. They will then, we consider, be able to say that Dumas, although writing from the standpoint and with the predispositions of a Frenchman, took his vengeance in a legitimate and creditable manner, when he composed this historical romance.

R. S. GARNETT.

CHAPTER I.

THE HERO OF THE NILE.

ON September 22nd, 1798, the magnificent Bay of Naples, always smiling, incessantly furrowed by thousands of boats, always echoing the sound of music and the songs of mariners, was even more joyous, more noisy, and more animated than ever.

September at Naples is glorious, for neither the excessive heat of summer nor the capricious rains of autumn are then known, and this day on which our story opens was one of the most splendid of the month. A flood of golden sunlight bathed the vast amphitheatre of heights which extends one arm to Nisida and the other to Portici, enclosing the favoured town on the slopes of Mount St. Elmo, above which stands the ancient Angevin citadel — a mural crown adorning the brow of the modern Parthenope. The vast expanse of the Bay, resembling an azure carpet strewn with golden spangles, was slightly stirred by the morning breeze, perfumed and balmy, so gentle as to bring a smile to every face it touched and yet keen enough to rouse in the breasts it stirred that yearning towards the Infinite which inspires Man with the proud thought that he also is,

or may become, Divine, and that this world is merely the shelter of a day, a brief resting-place in the life eternal.

Eight o’clock resounded from the church of San Ferdinando and the last vibration had hardly died away when all the thousand bells of the three hundred churches of Naples clanged a joyous peal from their various belfries, while the guns of the forts Del Ovo, Castel Nuovo and Del Carmine thundered forth as if attempting to out-do them and surrounded the town with a girdle of smoke. Above this, St. Elmo, flaming amidst clouds like a volcano in eruption, seemed a new Vesuvius confronting the old.

Both guns and bells were saluting a magnificent galley which at this moment left the quay, crossed the military harbour and, propelled by both sails and oars, glided majestically towards the open sea. She was followed by ten or twelve smaller but scarcely less magnificent craft and might well claim to rival the Bucentaur bearing the Doge to his nuptials with the Adriatic.

On her quarter-deck stood an officer wearing the rich uniform of a Neapolitan Admiral and apparently about forty-six years of age. He was Francis Caracciolo, a scion of an ancient family accustomed to provide ambassadors for kings and lovers for queens, and he stood on his quarter-deck precisely as if he were taking his ship into action.

The whole of the deck was covered with a purple awning, emblazoned with the royal arms, intended to shelter the august passengers from the rays of the sun. They were disposed in groups differing widely in appearance and attitude.

The most considerable of these groups consisted of five men occupying the centre of the ship. Three stood outside the awning on the deck and two carried a golden key suspended from a coat button, indicative of the wearer's rank as chamberlain. All wore ribbons of various colours sustaining orders of every country, and their breasts were bedizened with stars and crossed with ribbons. The central figure was a man of about forty-seven, tall and slight, but well built. He stooped slightly in consequence of a habit of leaning forward to listen to those who conversed with him. But not the splendid coat richly embroidered with gold, nor the diamond stars of different orders which he wore, nor even the "Majesty," incessantly on the lips of his attendants, could obviate the vulgarity of his appearance. He had clumsy, large hands, thick ankles and wrists, a low forehead and a retreating chin which accentuated an enormously thick and long nose. The eyes alone were lively and mischievous, but nearly always furtive, and sometimes cruel. This was Ferdinand IV., King by the Grace of God of the Two Sicilies and Jerusalem, an Infante of Spain, Duke of Parma, of Piacenza, of Castro and hereditary Grand Prince of Tuscany, but whom the lazzaroni of Naples qualified quite simply as "II Re Nasone "("King of the big nose ").

The person most frequently addressed by the monarch and who, though wearing the embroidered coat of diplomacy, wore the most simple dress of the party, was Sir William Hamilton, foster-brother of George III., who for five-and-thirty years had represented Great Britain at the Sicilian Court. The remaining three were the Marquis Malespina, aide-de-camp to the King, John Acton, Irish by birth and Prime Minister, and the Duke d'Ascoli, Ferdinand's friend and chamberlain.

Another group consisted of two women only, who might have formed a fitting subject for the brush of Angelica Kauffman, and whose appearance could not have failed to arouse interest and attention in even the most indifferent observer, however ignorant of their names and rank. The elder of the two ladies, although past her brilliant youth, still shewed traces of remarkable beauty. Daughter of Maria-Theresa, sister to x Marie-Antoinette, as could be guessed from her features, she was Maria-Carolina, Queen of the Two Sicilies, and wife of Ferdinand IV., whom for various reasons, she had first treated with indifference, which later became dislike and had now developed into contempt. Only political considerations brought the two together, otherwise they lived entirely apart, the King hunting in the royal forests or reposing in his harem at St. Leucio, while the Queen transacted business of state at Naples, Caserta or Portici, with her minister Acton, or rested in orange groves with her favourite Lady Hamilton, who at this moment was sitting at her feet in the attitude of a captive queen.

A single glance bestowed on the latter sufficed to explain not merely the favour with which the Queen regarded her, but also the frenzy of enthusiasm which she excited among the English artists, who depicted her in every possible attitude, and the Neapolitan poets, who sang of her in every metre. If human nature can arrive at the perfection of beauty, then certainly Emma Hamilton had attained this goal, and must have inherited some of that wonderful potion given by Venus to Phaon which endowed its possessor with an irresistible power of attraction.

This assembly of kings, princes and courtiers, sheltered by their purple awning, glided over an azure sea to the-melodious sound of music presided over by Domenico Cimarosa, the royal choir master and composer. The magnificent ship passed successively Résina, Portici and Torre-del-Greco, driven by that soft wind of Baïa which causes the roses of Paestum to bloom twice in a year.

Far beyond Capri and Cape Campanella a man-of-war became visible on the horizon. Observing the royal fleet, she immediately altered her course and headed towards it. A slight puff of smoke appeared from a port-hole and the crimson flag of England unfurled gracefully from the mast, while a prolonged detonation like the roll of distant thunder resounded over the tranquil sea.

When the two ships were within a cable’s length of each other, the royal musicians struck up “God save the King,” to which the sailors of the other ship, the famous *Vanguard,* who were manning the yards, replied with the three traditional English cheers, due to each official compliment.

The officer in command of the *Vanguard* was Horatio Nelson. He had just destroyed the French fleet at Aboiikir; by so doing depriving Bonaparte and the republican army of all hope of returning to France. He ordered his ship to lay to so as to allow the royal galley to come alongside, and the accommodation ladder, reserved for guests and officers, to be lowered. Standing hat in hand at the top he awaited his visitors, while all the crew, even those still suffering from wounds, were drawn up three deep on deck ready to present arms. He expected, according to all etiquette, to see first the King, then the Queen, then the Prince Royal and others according to rank; but by a clever feminine piece of strategy, the Queen (Nelson himself mentions this in a letter to his wife) pushed Lady Hamilton to the front. Blushing at being thus forced to take precedence, Emma mounted the steps, and, was it real emotion, or only skilful acting? on seeing Nelson with bandaged head, pale with loss of blood, she turned pale herself, and exclaiming “O dear, dear Nelson!” sank fainting on his breast. Nelson dropped his hat with a cry of joy, and supporting her with his one arm, pressed her to his heart, for one instant forgetting the whole world in a momentary trance of ineffable delight. When he recovered his senses, the King, Queen, and all the Court were already on deck, and all emotion must be suppressed.

The King took Nelson’s hand, and addressing him as the “Liberator of Europe “offered him the magnificent sword of Louis XIV., on the pommel of which were hung the letters patent of the Dukedom of Brontë, and the Grand Cross of the Order of Merit of St. Ferdinand. To this succeeded the Queen, who called him her friend, the “Protector of Thrones,” the “Avenger of Kings,” and taking his hand and that of Emma Hamilton in both her own, pressed them together.

The King himself girded on the historic sword, the Queen presented the title of Duke of Brontë, and Lady Hamilton hung the ribbon sustaining the Cross of St. Ferdinand round the hero’s neck.

Then came all the rest, Prince and Princess Royal, Ministers, Courtiers, but what were their praises compared to those of the King and Queen, or to one touch of the hand of Emma Hamilton?

It was agreed that Nelson should go on board the royal galley, but first of all, Emma, by desire of the Queen, requested to be shewn all the details of the *Vanguard,* which, like her commander, still shewed glorious and unhealed wounds. Nelson, with Lady Hamilton leaning on his arm, did the honours of his ship with all the pride of a sailor.

It was now two o'clock and the return to Naples would take three hours. Nelson desired his flag-captain to take command, and to the sound of music and of ordnance, descended into the royal galley, which, light as a sea-gull, shook herself free of the man-of-war, and glided gracefully over the waves on her return voyage.

It was now the turn of the Italian Admiral to do the honours of his ship. Nelson and Caracciolo had both fought at the siege of Toulon, where the courage and skill of the latter had been rewarded by the rank of Admiral, thus making him equal to Nelson over whom he had already the advantage of being heir to a name illustrious during three centuries. Possibly this last detail explains the cold greeting exchanged between the Admirals and the evident haste with which Caracciolo returned to his post on the quarter-deck.

Meanwhile Sir William Hamilton had been explaining to the King how the island of Capri had been bought from the Neapolitans by Augustus, who had observed that the branches of a decayed old oak, at the moment of his landing in the island had recovered themselves and put forth fresh leaves. The King listened attentively, and then remarked:

"My dear Ambassador, the quails began their migration three days ago. In a week's time we will have a grand shoot at Capri; there will be thousands of them."

The Ambassador, who owed his favour with the King to the fact that he was himself an excellent shot, bowed his acknowledgment.

The Commandants at Naples had kept their glasses fixed on the royal galley and when she was seen to tack and make for Naples, judging that Nelson must be on board, they ordered a salute of a hundred and one guns, such as announces the birth of an heir to the crown. The royal carriages and those belonging to the Embassy were in waiting, it having been agreed that for this day the Palace would cede its rights to the Embassy, that Nelson should be the guest of the Hamiltons, who would give the dinner and the fête which was to follow it, in which the town of Naples would join with illuminations and fireworks.

When close upon the harbour, Lady Hamilton approached Caracciolo and, addressing him with her gentlest voice and most seductive manner:

“The entertainment we are giving to our illustrious countryman will be incomplete,” she said, “if the only sailor who can compare with him does not help us in doing honour to his victory by proposing a toast to the greatness of England, the happiness of the Two Sicilies and the humiliation of the proud French Republic which dares to make war upon kings. We hope that Admiral Caracciolo, the hero of Toulon, will undertake this.”

Caracciolo, one of the handsomest and most dignified men of his time, bowed courteously.

“Milady,” he replied with gravity, “I deeply regret my inability to perform the glorious task you would entrust to me, but the night threatens to be as stormy as the day has been beautiful.”

Lady Hamilton smiled and glanced at the horizon. Except for a few light clouds rising near Procida the blue of the sky was as clear as that of her eyes.

“You do not believe me, Milady,” said Caracciolo, “but a man who has spent two-thirds of his life on this capricious Mediterranean can read the message of the atmosphere. Those light clouds which you see rising over there and approaching us show that the wind is veering from N.W. to West. By ten o’clock this evening it will be blowing from the South which means a “scirocco,” and the port of Naples being open to every wind that blows, and this one in particular, it becomes my duty to see that the ships of His Britannic Majesty, already damaged in battle, at least get a safe anchorage. What we have done to-day, Milady, is simply a perfectly plain declaration of war with France. Now the French are at Rome, five days’ march from here. Believe me, in a very few days it will be well to have both fleets in fighting condition.”

Lady Hamilton frowned.

“Prince,” she said, “I accept your excuse, which shews so much anxiety for the joint interests of their Majesties of England and Naples. But we hope at least to see your charming niece Cecilia, who cannot plead ignorance, having received her invitation the very day on which we heard from Lord Nelson.”

“Alas! Milady, but there is another unhappy circumstance which I have to tell you. My sister-in-law, Cecilia’s mother, has been so ill the last few days that it is impossible for her daughter to leave her, and I received a letter from the poor girl this morning expressing her deep regret at being unable to attend your fête and begging me to present her excuses to your ladyship, which I have the honour to do at this moment.”

During this short conversation the Queen had approached, listened, heard, and understood. She frowned, her lower lip lengthened, and her cheek lost its colour.

“Beware, Prince!” she said in angry tones, and with a smile as threatening as the, light clouds which announced the coming tempest, “no one except those present at Lady Hamilton’s entertainment will be invited to the Court festivals.”

“Alas! Madame,” replied Caracciolo with perfect serenity, “but my poor sister-in-law is so seriously ill that she could not be present at these fêtes if they lasted a whole month, nor consequently can her daughter attend them, since a young girl of her age and position cannot, even at the Palace, appear in society without her mother.”

“Very well, sir,” replied the Queen, unable to control her anger, believe me, this refusal will not be forgotten.”

Taking Lady Hamilton’s arm, “Come, dear Emma,” she said; adding in a lower voice:

“Oh! these Neapolitans! How they hate me! I know it well. But I am not behindhand, I execrate them!”

And she hastened towards the staircase, but Caracciolo preceded her, giving a sign at which the music again burst joyously forth, the cannon thundered, and all the bells pealed together. The Queen with rage in her heart, and Emma with the blush of shame on her brow, descended the steps amidst all outward signs of triumphant joy.

The King, Queen, Lady Hamilton and Nelson entered the first carriage, the Prince and Princess Royal, Sir William and Acton took their places in the second, the rest followed.

They drove straight to the church of Santa Chiara, where a solemn Te Deum was performed.

Then the assembly returned to their carriages and proceeded to the English Embassy, which occupied one of the largest and most beautiful palaces in Naples. The streets were so crowded that the progress was slow, and Nelson, unaccustomed to the noisy demonstrations of a southern race, was intoxicated by the cries of “Long live Nelson,” shouted by thousands of voices, and dazzled by the multitudes of coloured handkerchiefs waved by as many arms.

But what more astonished him was the audacity of the lazzaroni, who climbed on the steps and on the box and back of the Royal carriage without the coachman, footman, or runners taking the smallest notice of them. They pulled the Royal queue and even tweaked the Royal nose, addressing the king as “Gossip Nasone!” asking when he would sell his fish at Mergellina, or eat maccaroni at St. Charles. It was something widely different from the respectful homage shewn to the English kings, but Ferdinand seemed so happy, and replied so gaily to the jokes and rough speeches with which he was favoured, and bestowed such vigorous thumps on those who pulled his queue too rudely, that Nelson concluded it signified the excesses of spoilt children with a too indulgent father rather than any intentional rudeness or impertinence.

The entrance to the Embassy had been transformed into an immense triumphal arch crowned by the new Coat of Arms which the King of England had just conferred on Nelson along with the title of Baron Nelson of the Nile. At each side stood a gilt Venetian mast with a long, crimson pennon floating from the top bearing the legend, “Horatio Nelson,” in letters of gold. And the staircase was an archway of laurels starred with bouquets of the costliest flowers forming the monogram H. N. These initials were seen everywhere, they adorned the livery buttons of the servants, the china dinner service, even the table napkins, and the immense palace appeared full of floating perfumes and invisible melody like the enchanted garden of Armida.

On the announcement, “Their Majesties are served,” the dinner began, Nelson being placed facing the King between the Queen and Lady Hamilton.

The light of thousands of tapers was reflected in the mirrors, and shone from the candelabra upon gold and silver embroideries, bringing sparks of many colours from jewels, diamond crosses and stars, and seeming to invest the illustrious guests with the sort of aureole which, in the eyes of an enslaved nation, sets apart kings, queens and princes as a race of demi-gods, or at least of superior and privileged beings.

A toast was given at each course, the King setting the example by proposing the “Glorious Reign, the cloudless prosperity, and the long life of his beloved cousin and august ally, George III., King of England.” In defiance of etiquette, the Queen herself proposed the health of Lord Nelson, the “Liberator of Italy,” to whom Emma Hamilton passed the glass which she had touched with her lips; and each toast was received with cheers and applause which seemed to rend the roof. The enthusiasm increased until the dessert was arrived at, when an unexpected circumstance heightened it into delirium.

The guests were only awaiting the King’s signal for rising. He rose and all followed his example, but he remained standing in his place, while the most splendid voices of the St. Charles’ theatre, accompanied by the whole orchestra, sang the solemn anthem of “God Save the King.” Each verse was furiously applauded, especially the last, when unexpectedly a voice, clear, pure and sonorous rose above the din and sang solo another verse, added expressly for the occasion:

“Joignous-nous, pour fêter la gloire
Du favori de la Victoire
Du Français l’effroi!

Des Pharaons l’antique terre
Chante avec la noble Angleterre,
De Nelson orgueilleuse mère:

‘Dieu Sauve la Roi!’”

These lines were received with thunders of applause, until suddenly the words died on the lips of the guests who turned terrified eyes towards the door as if the spectre of Banquo or the statue of the Commander had suddenly appeared on the threshold.

A man of great height and threatening aspect, stood framed in the doorway, in the centre of a blaze of light which shewed every detail of that severe and magnificent costume worn in the early days of the French Republic, the blue coat, red waistcoat embroidered with gold, the tight white pantaloons and highboots. His left hand rested on the hilt of his sword, his right was held inside his coat, and, unpardonable insolence! his head was covered with the three-cornered hat, on which rested the tricolour plume, the emblem of a Revolution which raised the nation to the height of a throne and brought kings to the scaffold. He was Garat, the Ambassador of France, the man who had read the sentence of death to Louis XVI. in the Temple. The effect produced by-such an apparition at such a moment may be imagined.

A death-like silence, which no one dared to break, prevailed in the hall, until with a firm and clear voice the Ambassador spoke:

“Notwithstanding my experience of the ceaseless treachery of this lying Court of the Two Sicilies, I still doubted; I wished to see with my own eyes, to hear with my own ears. I have seen and I have heard. More plain-speaking than that Roman, who, in a fold of his toga offered Peace or War to the Senate of Carthage, I bring you only War, for you have to-day denied and rejected Peace. Therefore, King Ferdinand, Queen Caroline have the war you desire, but I warn you that it will be a war of extermination in which, in spite of the hero of this feast, in spite of the impious Power which he represents, you will lose both throne and life. I leave this perjured town; close your gates behind me; let your forts bristle with cannon and assemble your fleets in your ports. The vengeance of France may be slow but you will not make it less inevitable or less terrible, for everything will fall before this-war-cry of the Great Nation, ‘Long live the Republic! ‘“

Leaving the modern Belshazzar and his terrified guests shrinking from the three words which echoed through the hall, and which each thought must be traced in flame on the walls, the herald, who, like him of old, had thrown the flaming and bloody javelin, symbol of War, on the hostile soil, slowly withdrew, the scabbard of his sword resounding on the steps of the marble staircase.

Hardly had these sounds died away, when they were succeeded by those caused by the wheels of a post-chaise departing as fast as four vigorous horses could take it.

CHAPTER II.

THE ENVOY FROM ROME.

A SMALL door in a dwelling situate in the most lonely part of the ascent to Pausilippo, was opened from the inside, and a man emerged. He followed a narrow path which turned downwards, descending rapidly towards the sea, and leading straight to the “Palace of Queen Joanna,” a curious ruin which covered the top of a rock incessantly washed by the waves, which at high-tide penetrated the lower rooms of an unfinished building which had arrived at decrepitude without having ever enjoyed life. The Neapolitans, wholly regardless of the fact that its architecture plainly proved that it dated only from the seventeenth century, persisted in attributing it to Queen Joanna of evil memory, but it had, in fact, been built by the Duke of Medina, a favourite of Olivarez, who on his master’s downfall had been obliged to return to Spain, leaving this unfinished palace to become, so it was said, the hiding-place of evil-doers, and the haunt of evil spirits.

The pathway ended abruptly on the edge of a rock overhanging an abyss some twelve feet in depth. At present, however, the path was continued by a narrow plank, the other end of which rested on a window sill on the first floor of the palace, forming a bridge something like the one to be crossed in order to arrive at the Mohammedan Paradise.

The man in the mantle nevertheless walked straight over it with a carelessness which indicated full acquaintance with his road, but the instant he arrived at the window another man appeared inside presenting a pistol at his breast. This was evidently the usual precaution, for the newcomer did not trouble himself in the least, but made a slight masonic sign and murmured the half of a word which the other finished, standing aside as he did so, in order to allow his visitor to descend into the room. Arrived there, the latter wished to relieve the sentry in his post, in order to await the next arrival as was apparently the custom, just as in the Royal mausoleum at St. Denis, the late King of France awaits the coming of his successor at the top of the staircase.

“No need,” replied the other, “we are all here except Velasco, who cannot come before midnight.” Thereupon both applied themselves to pulling over the plank which had served as a drawbridge, and placing it against the wall. Having thus guarded against intruders they disappeared in the darkness, more dense within the ruins than without.

But, however great the gloom, it presented no difficulty to the two friends, who plunged without hesitation into a sort of corridor which here and there admitted a little light through the cracks in the ceiling. It led them to a staircase, deprived of all handrail, but sufficiently wide to be used without danger, and which ended in a hall overlooking the sea in one of the empty window spaces of which a human form could be discerned from within, though invisible from without. It turned round at the sound of their footsteps.

“Are we all here?” enquired the shadowy form.

“Yes, all,” replied two voices at once.

“Then,” said the shadow, “there only remains the envoy from Rome to wait for.”

“And,” replied the man with the mantle, “if he is much later I doubt whether he can come at all — to-night at any rate.” And he glanced out at the waves, already white with foam under the first breath of the coming scirocco.

“True, the sea is angry,” replied the shadow, “but, if he be indeed the sort of man promised us by Hector, he will not be stopped by a small thing like that.”

“A small thing, Gabriel! Do you know of what you are talking? The South wind is rising, in another hour the sea will be impassable. I am not the nephew of Admiral Caracciolo for nothing.”

“If he cannot come by sea he will come by land, if he cannot come in a boat he will swim, if he cannot swim he will take a balloon,” said a youthful and fresh voice. “I know my man; I have seen him at work. If he has said to General Championnet, ‘I will go,’ go he will, if it has to be through all hell fire.”

“Any how, we are not losing time,” said he of the mantle, striking his repeater, “the rendezvous is between eleven and midnight, and as you hear, it is not yet eleven.”

“Very well,” said the admiral’s nephew, “as I am the youngest, it is my business to keep guard here and yours, being older and wiser, to go and deliberate. Go down then to the council chamber, I will remain here, and when I see a boat with a light at its prow I will let you know.”

“There is nothing to deliberate upon, only a certain number of facts to exchange. Don Nicolino may be a fool but his advice is good.”

“If you really think me a fool,” said Nicolino, “then there are four men here who are still greater fools than I am, because, knowing me to be a fool, they yet admit me to a share in their councils. For, my friends, call yourselves what you will, you are simply Free Masons, members of a prescribed sect, and you are plotting the downfall of King Ferdinand and the establishment of a Republic, which means high treason, which means death. As to that, Hector Caraffa — who is an aristocratic Danton — and I despise it, because, being nobles, we should only be beheaded, an accident which is no slur on our coat of arms; but as for you, Manthonnet — born leader of men — and you, Schipani — instrument of fate — and Cirillo — man of science — who is below, as you are only courageous, meritorious and of distinguished talent, being worth some hundreds of us, but having the misfortune to be plebeians, you will just simply be hanged. Ah, my friends! I shall laugh when from the guillotine I see you dangling at the end of your halters, always supposing that the illustrious Don Pasquale di Simone has not, by the Queen’s orders, already disposed of me otherwise. Go then, deliberate, and when there is something impossible to be done, which only a fool would undertake, then you can think of me.”

The others probably agreed, for, half laughing, half shrugging their shoulders they left Nicolino at his window and descended a winding staircase on the steps of which fell the light of a lamp in a room below. It was beneath the level of the sea, and had probably been intended for the wine cellar of the palace. It was now occupied by a man who sat absorbed in melancholy thought at a stone table. His open mantle revealed a face pale and worn with watching, before him were papers, pens and ink, and a pair of pistols and a dagger lay within reach. He was the famous doctor, Domenico Cirillo.

The three conspirators whom Nicolino had addressed as Schipani, Manthonnet and Hector Caraffa successively entered the pale circle of light cast by the lamp. Each took off hat and mantle, placed pistols and dagger before him, and then began, not to deliberate, but to recount the various bits of news which each had been able to collect.

From time to time the roll of distant thunder was heard, preceded by broad flashes of lightning. They split the dark mass of cloud from end to end and shed a fantastic momentary light on the black rocks of Capri, otherwise indistinguishable from the opaque clouds which rested on them. Frequent gusts of the dry, suffocating wind which brings the sand of the Libyan deserts even to Naples, came in squalls, causing a phosphorescent agitation on the sea, which became for an instant a lake of flame and then returned to its previous darkness, \

Suddenly at the point of Pausilippo appeared a reddish flame, quite different from the phosphorescence of the sea and the sulphurous flashes of the tempest. It seemed to be making straight for the palace of Queen Joanna. As if it had been a signal, a tremendous burst of thunder rolled across the Bay, the clouds above parted, shewing terrible abysses of gloom behind. Loud squalls of wind came rapidly from opposite points of the compass with a sound like a mighty trombone, the waves rose as if heaved up by a submarine eruption. The tempest was let loose and raged like a furious lion over the field of battle.

Nicolino uttered a cry which roused the conspirators below. They rushed up the stairway, and arriving at the window, gazed out at the tempest. They saw that the little boat which was no doubt bringing the expected messenger had been caught by the tempest when halfway across. The little square sail she carried had been instantly taken in, and the boat was now endeavouring to make way by means of two vigorous rowers.

As Hector Caraffa had said, nothing had hindered the young man with the iron heart whom they expected. As had been arranged, more for the safety of the conspirators than of the envoy, sufficiently protected by his French uniform, he had quitted the direct route at Santa Maria, had gone to the shore left his horse at Pozzuoli, averring that it was too tired to go further, and, partly by threats, partly by the offer of a large reward, had induced two fishermen to take him over notwithstanding the weather. They objected, but finally started in the midst of the tears and lamentations of their wives and children. Arrived at Nisida they wished to land their passenger and shelter behind the jetty, but the young man calmly presented his pistols at their heads and after one glance at his composed and resolute countenance they bent to their oars with renewed energy. Emerging from the little gulf of Pozzuoli into the wide Bay of Naples they were exposed to the full force of the tempest which seemed to concentrate its fury on the solitary bark which dared to oppose it.

Hector Caraffa broke the anxious silence which prevailed. “Ropes, ropes, we must find a rope,” he cried, wiping the sweat-which covered his forehead.

Nicolino sprang up, hastily replaced the plank, rushed over it, and ten minutes later reappeared with a rope taken from a public well. The tempest, meanwhile, seemed to have redoubled its fury, but it had driven on the boat to within a few cable lengths of the palace, and there appeared every chance of her going to pieces on the rock.

By the light burning on the prow which every wave threatened to extinguish, the two mariners could be seen bending to their oars with anxious and terrified faces, while erect, firmly planted in the boat, stood a young man, his hair tossed by the wind, but with a scornful smile on his lips, and apparently inaccessible to fear. He shaded his eyes with his hand as if attempting to discern the outline of the ruin; a flash of lightning shewed him the old building and a group of five anxious men who cried, “Courage,” with one voice.

At that instant a huge wave, recoiling from the rock, fell back upon the boat, and, extinguishing the light, seemed to have swallowed it up.

The spectators held their breath, Hector grasped his hair with both hands, but a calm and powerful voice was heard above all the roar of the tempest crying, “A torch!”

This time it was Hector’s turn to rush. There were torches stored in a hole in the wall for use on dark nights. Seizing one, he lit it at the lamp below, and appeared on the outer platform of rock holding out his resinous torch towards the boat, which now re-appeared as if from the depths of the sea only a few feet from the rock. The rowers had abandoned their oars, and holding up their arms to Heaven cried aloud to the Madonna and Saint Januarius.

“A rope!” cried the young man.

Nicolino climbed on to the window-sill, Manthonnet held him firmly round the waist, while, carefully measuring the distance he flung one end of the rope into the boat; Schipani and Cirillo holding tight on to the other end.

Scarcely had they heard the sound of the rope striking the wood than another enormous wave dashed the boat with irresistible force upon the rock. A great crash was heard, followed by a cry of anguish, and boat, mariners and passenger had all disappeared.

But Schipani and Cirillo both exclaimed: “He holds it! he has got it!” and they pulled hard at the rope.

In another moment the sea at the foot of the rock parted, and by the light of Hector’s torch they saw the young officer appear. Aided by the rope he climbed the rock, seized the hand held out to him, mounted the platform, and while Hector clasped him in his arms, looked up at his deliverers, and calm and serene as ever, uttered the one phrase:

“I thank you!”

As he said it a flash of lightning appeared to illuminate the whole building, while a terrific peal of thunder shook it to its base, and the sea with a tremendous roar dashed round the two young men’s knees.

Hector Caraffa, with all the enthusiasm of the South, lifted his torch in defiance. “Howl, O thunder!” he cried, “blaze, ye lightnings! let the tempest do its worst! We are of the race of the Greeks who burnt Troy and he,” — placing his hand on his friend’s shoulder — ” he is the descendant of Ajax son of Oïleus, he will escape in spite of the Gods!”

Of the two poor fishermen, whom the shattering of their boat had plunged into the abyss, our five conspirators, superior men though they were, thought not at all as they sprang forward to greet the rescued man now advancing on the arm of his friend the Count di Ruvo. It is always so — though little indeed to the honour of humanity — those who play the chief roles, those from whom great things are expected, hold all our interest and attention while the inferior beings, useful though they may have been, are swallowed up in the gulf. But for the fishermen the envoy could never have reached the castle of Queen Joanna, yet they perished in the waves unheeded, even while the first greetings were being exchanged between the six men.

Though his curly black hair and his republican uniform (Hoche, Marceau and Klèber have familiarised us with its heroic and elegant appearance) were saturated and dripping, the envoy, as he stood in the centre of the group, looked a very hero. Why? Perhaps because his eyes, which were set in a pale handsome face beneath arched dark brows, flashed so finely. Certainly they were remarkable. Then one noticed that his face was strangely calm for that of a man who had just escaped death, and that his head and form were of classic mould. He scarcely looked his age — five-

and-twenty — but no one who saw him would have doubted his ability to hold any position however responsible and dangerous. That he wore a republican uniform was, of course, an act of imprudence. The conspirators knew, however, that when he had left Rome forty-eight hours ago, neither General Championnet nor he had the least idea of the events which had caused Garat to quit Naples. When the envoy donned his uniform it was for the purpose of presenting himself before the French Ambassador and the Neapolitans would have been obliged to treat it with respect. Now the wearing of it might be construed as an act of defiance; moreover, it would undoubtedly compromise the patriots to whom the first visits were to be paid. Emmanuel di Deo, Galiani and Vitalino had been hung on the mere suspicion of connivance with the French — a warning not to take risks with a Government whose bad faith in modern days recalled that of Carthage in those of antiquity.

The conspirators pressed round Salvato Palmieri — their southern excited gestures and voices contrasting strangely with the calmness of the young man. One would have thought it was they who had just escaped death; he seemed already to have forgotten the waves which thundered a few steps away and scattered their foam and spray over the group. Anxious as the five men were to hear the envoy’s news, they insisted on his accepting from Nicolino Caracciolo (he had a house close to the castle of Queen Joanna) a complete change of costume. When the young man stood before them again his appearance was transformed, for Caracciolo was a leader of fashion in Naples, and the envoy in Nicolino’s clothes might himself have passed as such.

Salvato Palmieri had now for some time been aide-decamp to General Championnet, then commanding at Rome, to whom Hector Caraffa had written, enquiring whether a revolution in Naples, if it took place, could count on the support of both the French troops and the French Government. Championnet was then about thirty-six, possessing boundless energy and courage combined with the courteous and attractive manners of a man of the world. He was the natural son of a high official who had settled a small estate upon him of which he took the name, and in early youth had shewn his courage by breaking in all the most restive horses he could find.

At eighteen he began the pursuit of the two phantoms known as “Glory” and “Fortune,” and joined the Italian troops in Spain. Encountering a Breton regiment in which he found some of his early friends, he obtained leave from his Colonel to join it as a volunteer. Peace brought him back to France, but, in 1789, the cannon of August 10th roused France, and each Department furnished its Volunteer Brigade. Championnet was named chief of that raised by the Drome and stationed at Besançon. Here he was found by Pichegru, who had known him when both were -Volunteers, and who granted his request to be placed on active service.

After this his name deserves to be quoted along with those of Joubert, Hoche, Klèber, Bernadotte and others whose friend he was and under whom he served. They knew him so well, that whenever anything extra difficult, or apparently impossible had to be done, they said with one accord: “Oh, send Champiorinet!”

His constant success was rewarded by his becoming first a general of brigade, then of a division guarding the sea coast from Dunkirk to Flushing, until the Peace of Campo Formio sent him back to Paris, where of all his military household he retained only one young aide-de-camp.

Championnet had noticed particularly a young officer as excelling in valour, and as having performed some brilliant action in every engagement which took place. If a town were taken he was first on the rampart. Had a river to be crossed, he found a ford while under fire. At Laubach he had taken a standard. At the head of three hundred men he attacked fifteen hundred English, but when a desperate charge made by the Prince of Wales’s regiment forced his men back he disdained to retire along with them.

Championnet, who was watching, saw him disappear in a crowd of enemies. He rallied a hundred men and charged to support him. He found the young officer still erect, his foot on the breast of the English general, whose thigh he had broken with a pistol shot, and surrounded by the dead, but with three bayonet wounds. Championnet got him off the field and sent his own surgeon to him, and when he recovered made him his aide-de-camp.

When he gave his name as Salvato Palmieri, Championnet was considerably astonished, for besides speaking French like a native, he had heard him interrogating both English and German prisoners with equal facility. Salvato explained that having been taken to France as an infant and having finished his education in England and Germany, it was not wonderful that he should speak all three languages as well as his own.

Championnet, realizing how extremely useful such a young man might be, retained him when he dismissed the rest and brought him to Paris.

When Bonaparte went to Egypt, Championnet was anxious to follow him, but Barras, to whom he had applied, answered:

“Stay with us, citizen general, we shall need you on this continent.”

And, Joubert succeeding Bonaparte as commander in Italy, desired to have Championnet as general of the army in Rome, which was intended to watch, and if necessary, to threaten Naples.

And this time Barras, who took a special interest in Championnet, remarked, when giving him his instructions:

“Should war break out again you will be the first Republican general commissioned to dethrone a king.”

“The orders of the Directory will be carried out,” replied Championnet with true Spartan simplicity.

And, strangely enough, the promise was to be realized.

The general departed for Italy with Salvato, and being already able to speak Italian, but wanting practice, from that time he spoke nothing else with his aide-decamp, and even with great foresight applied himself to acquire the Neapolitan patois which Salvato had picked up from his father.

At Milan, Salvato became acquainted with Hector Caraffa, the Comte de Ruvo, whom he introduced to his general as one of the great nobles and most ardent patriots of Naples. The story of Hector’s life, which is widely known, sufficed to obtain permission for him to join the staff without any official duty. Both accompanied Championnet to Rome, where the course prescribed by the Directory was as follows. He was to “Repulse any hostile attack aimed against the independence of the Roman Republic, and to make war upon Naples, should the King attempt to carry out the invasion he had so often threatened.”

Salvato was charged to explain the present miserable condition of the Roman Republic to the Neapolitan patriots. Championnet had begun by turning out all the fiscal officers and was applying any money he could get which was due to the Directory to the immediate needs of the town and the army. The condition of the latter was no better than that of the Republic. Upon paper it amounted to thirty-two thousand men, in reality to eight thousand, who for three months had not received a farthing of pay, who were destitute of shoes, clothes, and bread, and were practically surrounded by the Neapolitan army, which consisted of sixty thousand men, well clothed, well shod, and regularly paid. By way of munitions, the French army possessed 180,000 cartridges — fifteen shots for each man, and the scarcity of powder was such that at Civita-Vecchia they had actually been unable to fire at a Barbary pirate, which carried off a fishing smack within half-range of the guns of the fort. In all, they had only nine pieces of ordnance, all the artillery had been melted for copper coinage. Some fortresses, indeed, had cannons, but whether by treachery or negligence, no cannon-balls fitted them, and some had no balls at all. The arsenals were as destitute as the forts; they had vainly tried to find guns for two battalions of National Guards, and that in a country in which every man carried a gun on his shoulder if on foot, or slung on his saddle if on horseback.

But Championnet wrote to Joubert, who promised to send him a million cartridges, and a train of ten pieces of artillery. As to cannon balls he had established a foundry which turned out four or five thousand per day. So Salvato, as Championnet's aide-de-camp, was" to beg the patriots not to hurry things as the General wanted a month in which to become fit, — not to invade Naples, but to defend himself.

Salvato had also a letter for the French Ambassador explaining the position, and begging him at all hazards to avoid a rupture between the two Courts. This letter, fortunately enclosed in a waterproofed portfolio, had escaped damage from the water. Salvato knew the contents, and could have repeated them word for word, but he required the letter as a guarantee of his good faith.

"What are we to do?" demanded Hector, when the facts had been sufficiently explained.

"We must follow the General's instructions," replied Cirillo.

"And, in order to do so," said Salvato, "I will go to the Ambassador this very moment."

"You will have to make haste then," said a voice from the head of the stairs, which made everyone start, even Salvato himself. "From what I hear the Ambassador leaves for Paris this very night, or to-morrow morning."

"Velasco!" exclaimed Nicolino and Manthonnet together.

Then Nicolino continued:

"It is our sixth friend, Signor Palmieri, whom we were expecting, and who, by my unpardonable carelessness, has been able to cross the plank which I forgot to remove, both when I brought the rope and the clothes."

“Nicolino! Nicolino!” said Manthonnet, “you will bring us all to the scaffold.”

“I have already said so,” answered Nicolino indifferently. “But there, why do you join in conspiracy with a fool?”

If Velasco’s news was correct, there was not a moment to lose, for the Ambassador’s departure, tantamount to a declaration of war, might be disastrous to Championnet, and was exactly what Salvato was bound to prevent. Everyone wished to accompany him to the Embassy, but he refused absolutely. Once his mission were known, anyone seen with him would be lost, either seized by the police, or a mark for the daggers of the Government emissaries.

There was no risk of his losing his way, he had only to follow the coast, keeping the sea on his right hand, and he could not fail to arrive at the Embassy, easily recognised by the tricolour flag, and the fasces sustaining the cap of Liberty.

However, as much for the sake of friendship as of safety, he exchanged his own wet pistols for Nicolino’s, and then buckled on his sword under his cloak, hanging it from his carbine holder so that it might not attract notice by striking the ground. It was agreed that he should start first, the others following one by one ten minutes later; each going home separately by detours among the labyrinth of streets and lanes more puzzling than that of Crete.

Nicolino conducted the newcomer as far as the road, and shewing him the slope of Pausilippo and the few lights yet unextinguished in Mergellina.

“There lies your road,” he said, “do not let anyone either follow or converse with you.” And with a warm hand-clasp the two young men parted.

Salvato glanced around, the road seemed deserted, the tempest was not quite over, for, though the rain had ceased, there were constant flashes of lightning and mutterings of thunder from all parts of the heavens. As he passed the darkest corner of the palace of Queen Joanna he thought he saw the outline of a man against the wall, but, deciding to take no notice, he walked steadily on.

Twenty paces further he stopped and looked round, he had not been mistaken, a man was crossing the road, seemingly wishing to keep on his left. Ten paces further he thought he distinguished the head of a man above the wall, which here served as a sort of parapet, it promptly disappeared;

Hector leant over the wall, but could see no one, only a garden, the trees in which rose to the height of the wall.

Meanwhile, the other man had come up, and was now walking even with him. Salvato pretended to approach him, carefully watching the place where he had seen the head. A flash of lightning shewed a man stepping over the wall and turning, like himself, towards Mergellina.

Salvato put his hand to his belt, assured himself that his pistols were safe, and continued on his way, the two men keeping near him, one a little in advance on his left, the other a little behind on his right. At a short distance they found two fellows occupying the middle of the road, apparently quarrelling, with the discordant cries and gestures peculiar to the lowest classes of Naples.

On the right was the lonely sea, on the left a long garden wall with a shuttered house behind it. Orange trees and a splendid palm waved above.

Salvato cocked his pistols under his cloak, and, divining a plot when he saw the men did not move, walked straight up to them.

Suddenly two confederates sprang from the shelter of a dark door in the garden wall, and rushed at Salvato from behind. As they did so he shot down the first two men, and having killed one and wounded the other, he unfastened his cloak and flung it away. Turning upon the new assailants, he laid open the face of one with a blow of his sword, and with a sharp thrust severely wounded the other. Then something came hissing toward him, and he felt a sharp pain in the right side of his chest. He seized the knife with his left hand, drew it out, staggered a few feet back, feeling as if the earth were giving way under him. He found himself up against the wall, which seemed to be receding like the ground. A flash of lightning which lit up the sky appeared the colour of blood, he stretched out his arms, let go his sword, and sank down insensible. In his last conscious moment he seemed to see a man advancing upon him and endeavoured to repulse him; then everything vanished, and he uttered a sigh which seemed to be his last.

CHAPTER III.

THE HOUSE OF THE PALM TREE.

ON the descent from Pausilippo between the Royal Casino and the Lion’s Fountain, stands the house known as The House of the Palm Tree, from an unusually fine specimen of these graceful and feathery trees, so tall as to overtop a galaxy of golden oranges by at least two-thirds of its height. It was the ancestral home of the Chevalier di San Felice.

The Chevalier, no longer young, was a man of charming manners, combined with the gentleness and simplicity which often accompanies deep learning. His tastes were many and varied, but were chiefly those of a naturalist and philosopher, a dreamer, who in the study of Nature passed from the visible and material world to the invisible and spiritual one, beholding the Eternal, not in the tempest of Elijah, nor in the burning bush of Moses, but in the Majestic Serenity of the Eternal Love, which embraces the whole universe.

Educated at the college dei Nobili, founded by Charles III., San Felice’s chief friend and fellow-pupil was the Prince Joseph Caramanico — whose adventures and distinguished career towards the end of the eighteenth century are not yet forgotten. He was then not only a prince, but a charming and affectionate boy, and, later, a charming man full of honour and loyalty.

In this friendship the part played by the Chevalier was that of Pylades. His Orestes, it must be confessed, was but an idle scholar, who nevertheless obtained quite as many prizes as his industrious friend, and although his tutors either did not know or did not choose to know the secret of his success, Caramanico was very well aware of it himself, and not ungrateful. When they left college he entered the army while San Felice devoted himself to science. Caramanico procured him an admission to the Order of Knights of Malta, dispensing with the vows, and further secured him an abbey with an income of 2,000 ducats, which, in addition to his own small private fortune, was wealth for a man of San Felice’s simple tastes.

About 1783, Caramanico, who had long been Prime Minister of Naples and prime favourite of the Queen, but who, it was whispered, had been undermined by the intrigues of Acton, appeared one evening unannounced at the House of the Palm Tree. He found San Felice in the garden engaged in catching fireflies, being anxious to study the light they gave. He received the Prince with delight, but the latter appeared sad and pre-occupied. They sat down under the palm, and, after a short silence:

“My friend,” said the Prince, “I come to say farewell, perhaps for ever. I can fight no longer. I should probably lose my honour in the conflict and certainly my life. To-day the Queen is entirely governed by this intriguing Irishman, who, I believe, will ruin Naples. Well, if the throne is to fall, I, at least, will have no hand in it. I go.”

“And whither?” enquired San Felice. “I have accepted the Embassy at London, it is at least an honourable exile. I take my wife and family, but there is one whom I cannot take and I hope to leave her in your care.”

“Her!” said the philosopher in evident dismay. Caramanico smiled. “Be not anxious,” he said, “she is not a woman, only a little child.” San Felice breathed again; the Prince continued: “In the midst of my troubles I found consolation in the love of a woman. An angel from Heaven, she has returned whence she came, but she has left me a little daughter now five years old. I cannot openly acknowledge her, and the Queen must not know of her existence. I love her dearly, but I fear she has been born under an unlucky star, and I trust to you to care for her. I want to provide for her. Here is a bond for 50,000 ducats which you will invest for her, and which, left to accumulate, will in fourteen or fifteen years have doubled itself; I ask you, meanwhile, to provide for Her board and suitable education, and when she comes of age or marries you are to repay yourself.’’

“You do not love me as I thought,” said San Felice, somewhat hurt by this latter stipulation.

“I love you more than any other man in the world, and I am leaving you the only piece of myself which has remained pure and unbroken.”

“Listen to me,” said San Felice, “I am a lonely man, almost without friends. I am not unhappy with this great book of Nature spread before me, but I do not care for one thing more than another, and I have no one to love me. Let me have your child here, I will love her and care for her, and perhaps she will understand and love me a little in return. The air here is splendid, there is a garden with oranges and butterflies, she will grow tall and graceful like this palm tree. Say, will you let your child come to me?”

Caramanico looked at him with tears in his eyes.

"Yes," he said, "take my child; yes, she will love you. But promise that you will speak of me every day, and try that next to yourself she shall love me better than all else. Adieu, best of friends," said the Prince rising, "you have given me the only happiness, the one consolation possible in this world."

The next day the Prince left for London, and the little Luisa and her attendants were duly installed in the House of the Palm Tree where she led a tranquil and happy life. San Felice found a new and delightful pleasure in superintending her education and watching the development of both body and mind. Caramanico, in 1790, exchanged the Embassy of London for that of Paris, but when the Two Sicilies sent troops against France, he desired to be recalled. Acton, not wishing for his presence at Naples, sent him as Viceroy to Sicily, where his excellent government formed a great contrast to the reign of terror under Acton at Naples. The Neapolitans murmured loudly, and whispered that the Queen herself, were it not for her false pride, would gladly replace Acton by Caramanico. One day the Chevalier received the following letter:

"My friend,

"I know not the cause, unless it be poison, but in the last ten days my hair has become grey, my teeth are loose, I am hopelessly languid and depressed. Bring Luisa here, start at once, and may you arrive in time to see me again!"

Luisa was now a beautiful girl of nineteen, and had never seen her father since he entrusted her to San Felice, who had religiously carried out his promise, and taken care that joint letters were written to the Prince every fortnight. He hastened at once to the harbour and finding a small passenger boat on the point of returning empty to Sicily, immediately engaged it for a whole month. On the third day they landed at Palermo.

The whole town appeared to be in mourning, they passed a church which was hung with black and where the priests recited the prayers for the dying.

"What is happening?" said San Felice to a poor fisherman at the door, "we have just come from Naples."

"Our father is dying," said the man, and kneeling on the steps he prayed aloud that his own life might be taken and the beloved viceroy spared.

At first they were refused admission to the palace, but on San Felice naming himself, the Prince's valet rushed forward and at once took them to his master, whose eyes lit up with delight at seeing them, but who was clearly in the last stage of exhaustion. San Felice left Luisa alone with her father, who questioned her closely, and finding that she had as yet seen no one who had made any impression on her heart, asked if she would marry San Felice. She replied in the affirmative, and when San Felice returned, the Prince exclaimed joyfully: "She consents, my friend! all is well, she consents!" Luisa extended her hand towards the Chevalier.

"But to what is she consenting?" asked the latter gently.

"My father says he can die in peace if you will marry me. I have answered for myself."

If Luisa had been startled by the sudden proposal, the Chevalier was even more so. He looked at them both in astonishment.

"But it is impossible," he said, though the look which he cast on Luisa contradicted his words.

"Why impossible?" asked the Prince.

"Only look at us both. She stands on the threshold of life, radiant in youth and beauty, ignorant of love — yes, but will she remain ignorant? I am forty-eight, my hair is turning grey, my frame bowed with study. You must see the thing is impossible. Think no more of it, Caramanico, in arranging for our happiness you will only bring misery to us both. One day she will really love — but it will not be me."

"Then," said Luisa, "as I wish to obey you, my father, I will never marry."

The Prince's head sunk on his breast and a tear fell on Luisa's hand. She silently pointed it out to the Chevalier.

"Since, then, you both desire this," said San Felice, "which I also both desire and dread more than anything in the world, I also consent — on one condition."

"What is that?" asked the Prince.

"The marriage is not to take place for a year during which Luisa must see the world she has not seen and learn to know the young people she has not known. If at the end of the year she still cares for no one and says: 'In my father's name, my friend, fulfil your promise,' I shall then have no further objection to make. But I have yet something to say, Giuseppe, listen. I believe in the purity and the chastity of this child as I should believe in an angel, — but — she is a woman, she may fail. — In such a case, I swear on this crucifix that I will have no words for the sin but those of mercy and pardon, and may everlasting punishment overtake me if I act otherwise. Give me your hand, Luisa.”

Caramanico took the crucifix and held it out to them. They held it in a joint clasp. “Caramanico,” said San Felice, “I swear to you on this crucifix that this day year, if Luisa still thinks as she does now, she shall be my wife. And now, my friend, die in peace! I keep my oaths.”

Caramanico died the following night.

Palermo was sunk in the deepest mourning; the funeral which took place at night was magnificent. The cathedral blazed with torches and tapers, and — strange relic of the Dark Ages — the Prince’s horses were not allowed to survive their master. The ceremony over, the last torch was extinguished, and, silent as a procession of phantoms, the vast crowd dispersed in the dark and silent streets, where not a glimmer of light could be seen, a whole city plunged into darkness under the wings of Death. On the following day San Felice and Luisa re-embarked for Naples.

The first three months passed in the usual quietude, then San Felice bought the most elegant carriage and finest horses he could procure, engaged more servants, and shewed himself with Luisa every day on the fashionable promenades of Naples. The nearest house to his own, only separated by a slight garden barrier, belonged to the Duchess Fusco, whose family had always been intimate with his own. She was a widow and very wealthy, some ten years older than Luisa, and she had hitherto declined all invitations on the plea of preferring a retired life. She now, however, accepted them, and the two soon became intimate friends. But to all admirers of the other sex Luisa remained as adamant; rejecting the distinction offered by the Prince Moliterno, the elegance and wit of Rocca-Romana, and the wealth of Andrew Baker. The year of probation ended, she and San Felice were married very quietly, in the presence of the Prince Francis, who had with difficulty induced San Felice to become his librarian, and who wished therefore, to shew his appreciation of the fact.

The marriage concluded, Luisa only asked to reduce the household to its former footing. The extra servants with the one exception of her own maid, Nina, were dismissed, the carriage and horses sold, and the old governess retired with a pension to her beloved Portici. Of all the worldly brilliance which had surrounded Luisa during the last nine months, the only remaining trace was her intimacy with the Duchess Fusco. This, San Felice highly approved, and the old door communicating between the two mansions was re-opened so that their intercourse was perfectly unrestrained. A year passed in perfect happiness, then some imprudent remarks of the Duchess concerning Lady Hamilton were reported to the Queen, and the Duchess received an intimation from the police that her health would benefit by a residence on her country estates. One of her friends, who had not only spoken, but, what was worse, had written inadvisably, shared her exile. They departed for the Basilicata, leaving the keys of the house with Luisa.

Luisa's solitude now became extreme, for the Prince Royal, interested by his librarian's knowledge and conversation, made more and more demands upon San Felice's time. She became, not unhappy, she wanted nothing that she had not got, but languid, and absorbed in aimless dreams of the unknown. One day, when more than ever lost in reverie, her foster-brother, known as "Michael the Fool," not on account of lack of wit, but because of his numerous escapades, came to see her. Though he wore the white drawers and the red cap of the ordinary Neapolitan fisherman, yet the tie between them was a very real one, as is the case with most primitive peoples, and permitted him, unrebuked, to address her as if she had been his actual sister in his own rank of life. He had told her of the wonderful predictions of an old Albanian gipsy, and with a sort of vague desire to hear something of the future even if she did not believe it, Luisa, knowing that her husband would be detained that evening by the Nelson festivities, asked him to bring old Nanno to see her that very night. Michael brought her accordingly, but the old woman had only time to inform Luisa that her fate was linked with that of a man over whom at that moment some great danger was impending, when in the street, immediately outside, they heard two pistol shots, succeeded by cries, oaths, then the clashing of swords.

"Madame," cried the maid, rushing into the room, "they are murdering a man under the garden wall."

"Michael, Michael," cried Luisa, stretching her arms towards him, "you are a man, you have a knife, will you not try to help?"

"By the Madonna, I will!" exclaimed Michael. And he opened the window, and was just going to leap down into the road, when he uttered a cry of terror, and murmuring: "It is Pasquale di Simone, the Queen's own assassin!" crouched down below the window.

“Then,” cried Luisa, rushing towards the entrance, “I will go myself.”

Nanno moved as if to hold her back, then, shaking her head:

“Go, ill-fated one!” she said, “go to meet they fate!”

Short as the distance was to the garden entrance, the assassins had already vanished when Luisa opened it. The body of a young man sank back into the garden. With a strength hitherto unsuspected by her she dragged the motionless weight inside, closed the door, bolted it, and called on the others to help. Michael raised the young officer in his arms, Nina took his feet, Luisa supported the head, and together they bore him into the house. Nanno remained behind seeking for various medicinal herbs in the garden, and muttering magic spells while she sought.

Michael looked at the young man and shook his head.

“Little sister,” he said, “what will the Chevalier say when he sees this handsome young man brought in here by you in his absence?”

“He will pity him, Michael, and say that I did well,” answered Luisa with confidence.

“Very likely, if it were an ordinary assassination, but when the assassin happens to be Pasquale di Simone, do you think an officer of the Prince’s household can shelter a man hunted down by the Queen’s assassin?”

“You are right,” said Luisa after a moment’s thought. “But what are we to do, I cannot abandon a man in this condition?”

“Little sister,” said Michael, “have you not the keys of the Duchess’s house which is now empty?”

“Oh, yes, you are right, Michael, you are right!” cried Luisa. “Yes, we will take him there, into a room looking on the garden. Oh! thank you. If only he lives, poor young man, we can care for him there.”

“And,” continued Michael, “as long as your husband does not know, he can always plead ignorance. He could not if we told him.”

“No, you are right again, he would never save himself by a lie, and he must not have to choose between his duty as the Prince’s friend and his conscience as a Christian. There must be no trace left in the house.”

They conveyed the wounded man along a passage which led to the Duchess’s house, where he was placed, still quite insensible, on a bed in one of the rooms. Luisa and Nina then hastily returned to their own house where the Chevalier was already knocking at the bolted door. Michael, under Nanno’s directions, pounded herbs in a mortar, and Nanno herself carefully applied the juice thus extracted to the gaping wound made by Pasquale’s knife.

CHAPTER IV.

THE KING AND QUEEN.

IT was about two in the morning when the King and Queen left the English Embassy. The King, much affected by the scene which had taken place, went straight to his own apartments. He considered the situation serious, and in such circumstances there was one man whom he liked to consult, and whose advice he had generally found to be good. As he left the banqueting-room he whispered to Cardinal Ruffo: “I shall expect you at the Palace to-night.”

Cardinal Fabrizio Ruffo, a Calabrian, the hero of many scandalous adventures, had military tastes; he had fortified Ancona and was ambitious of military or naval employment. He was still young, was brave and bold and better at putting an edge on a sword than at saying Mass. As the Queen disliked him he had obtained no preferment.

Within ten minutes of his arrival in his own rooms, the usher-in-waiting informed the King that Cardinal Ruffo enquired if it were His Majesty’s pleasure to receive him.

“It certainly is,” cried the King, so that the Cardinal could hear him. “Bring him in at once!”

The Cardinal, hearing this did not wait to be announced, but entered. The King flung himself into an armchair and signed to Ruffo to be seated, an intimation which was promptly obeyed.

“Well, Eminence, what do you think of all this?” demanded the King.

“I think it is a very serious matter,” replied Ruffo, “and that it is fortunate Your Majesty incurred it in doing honour to England, as England will be bound in honour to support you.”

“What do you think of this bulldog of a Nelson? Speak freely, Cardinal.”

“I think he is a lion in courage, and a genius in military matters, otherwise, fortunately, only mediocre.”

“And why ‘fortunately?’”

“Because with two decoys you can lead him as you will.”

“What are they?”

"Love and ambition. The love is Lady Hamilton's business, the ambition is yours. He is not well-born, and has no education. He has attained his rank solely by merit, by losing an eye at Calvi, an arm at Teneriffe, and getting scalped at Aboukir. If you will treat him as a great noble he will be intoxicated, and then you can do what you will with him. But are you sure of Lady Hamilton?"

"The Queen says so, I understand."

"Then that is all you want, if you have that woman she will give you both the husband and the lover. Both are mad about her."

"I am afraid she may play the prude."

"Emma Hamilton a prude!" said Ruffo with the most profound contempt. "Your Majesty need not imagine it for one moment."

"I did not suppose she would act the prude for prudery's sake," said the King. "Good Heavens, no!"

"For what, then?"

"Well, your Nelson is no beauty, with one arm and one eye and a broken head. If it takes all that to make a hero I prefer to remain as I am."

"As to that, women have odd ideas, besides, Lady Hamilton is devoted to the Queen. What she does not do for love she will do for friendship."

"Then that is settled," said the King, with the air of one committing to Providence something too troublesome for himself. "Now," he continued, "I am sure you have an opinion to give on this other matter?"

"Certainly, there is only one thing to be done, Your Majesty has a treaty of alliance with your nephew, the Emperor of Austria."

"I have treaties of alliance with every state in Europe, so much the worse for me!"

"Well, but, Sire, are you not bound to act with Austria and Russia and to furnish thirty thousand men to the next coalition?"

"Quite so. Well?"

"Whatever pressure may be put on you, Sire, on no account let your troops begin hostilities before Austria and Russia have begun themselves."

"Certainly not. I have not the remotest idea of fighting France all by myself. But, Eminence, suppose France does not wait for the Coalition? She has actually declared war, suppose she really makes it?"

"Judging by what I hear from Rome, Sire, I think I may assert that the French are not in a position to make war upon you at present."

"That is some comfort, anyhow."

“Your Majesty asked only for one piece of advice, but the first entails a second. Am I permitted to offer it?”

“Good gracious, yes. Out with it!”

“If I were Your Majesty I would write myself to my Imperial nephew, and ask him, confidentially, not diplomatically,-when he expected to take the field, and I should regulate my movements by his.”

“Most Eminent, you are quite right. I will write at once.”

“Have you a trustworthy messenger, Sire?”

“There’s my courier, Ferrari.”

“But is he one you can trust, trust, trust?”

“Good gracious, Cardinal, do you expect me to produce a man who can be trusted three times over! Think how difficult it is to find one I can trust once.”

“How often can you trust Ferrari?”

“He is a long way better than the rest, I have had proofs of his fidelity.’’

“Where is he?”

“How should I know! Somewhere about, all booted and spurred ready to start any hour of the day or night.”

“Well, better write first, we will find him afterwards.”

“Easier said than done, your Eminence. Where the devil, at this time of night, am I to find paper, pens, and ink?”

“The Bible says: ‘Quaere et invenies.’”

“What is that? I don’t understand Latin.”

“‘Seek, and thou shalt find.’”

The King went to his writing-table, pulled the drawers out one after another and not finding any writing materials. “The Bible is a liar,” he observed.

Then falling back in his armchair, “I ask your pardon, Cardinal,” he said penitently, and, with a deep sigh, “Oh! how I loathe writing!”

“But Your Majesty has decided to write, this very night?”

“Certainly, only as you see, there is nothing here. I shall have to wake everybody up, and you understand if the King wants to write neither paper, pens, nor ink can be found. I should have to ask the Queen for all that, she has plenty, she is always writing. But as for me, if they knew I had written a letter they would think the whole State must be in danger, which perhaps it is. ‘The King wrote a letter!! “But to whom did he write?” Why did he write?’ It would upset the whole palace.”

“Sire, allow me to find what you have sought in vain.” And the Cardinal disappeared with a bow and returned presently bearing paper, pens, and ink. The King regarded him with admiration. “Now, where the deuce did Your Eminence find all that?” he demanded.

“Quite naturally, among the ushers’ belongings.”

“But I had strictly forbidden the fellows to have any.”

“But, Your Majesty, they must have them in order to write down the names of persons begging for an audience.”

“I have never seen any.”

“Because they are hidden away in a cupboard. I have found the cupboard and here we are.”

“Most Eminent, you are clearly a man of resource! And now,” continued the King in a melancholy tone, “is it really necessary that this letter should be in my handwriting?”

“It would be much better so, it will seem more confidential.”

“Then you must dictate it, or I shall be two hours in writing half a page. Ah! I do trust San Nicandro may be damned for Time and all Eternity, for having made me the donkey I am.”

The Cardinal dipped a new pen in the ink and handed it to the King. “Since Your Majesty commands,” he said with a low bow, and he dictated:

“Most Excellent Brother, Cousin and Nephew, Our Ally and Confederate.

“I must inform you without delay of what occurred last evening at the English Embassy. Lord Nelson has landed at Naples on his return from Aboukir; and on Sir William Hamilton giving an entertainment in his honour, the Citizen Garat, Minister of the Republic, took the opportunity of declaring war against me on behalf of his government.

“Most Excellent Brother, Cousin and Nephew, Our Ally and Confederate, I desire to know what arrangements you have made for the conduct of the approaching war, and especially at what date you expect to take the field, as I wish to act at the same time and in concert with you. The courier who takes this letter may be trusted to bring me your reply. I await Your Majesty’s instructions and will regulate my own course in every point by what I hear.

“I conclude by wishing Your Majesty all possible prosperity, and am, Your Brother, Cousin, and Uncle, Ally and Confederate.

“FERDINAND B.”

“When I think,” said the King, “that it would have taken me the whole blessed night to write that letter! Thanks, my dear Cardinal, thanks. But,” he added uneasily, “what are we to do for an envelope?”

“We must make one,” said Ruffo.

There’s another thing San Nicandro never taught me. It is true that as he forgot to teach me to write he might not think it necessary.”

“Does Your Majesty permit?” asked Ruffo.

“I should think I did,” said the King, rising. “Take my chair, Cardinal.”

The Cardinal took the King’s seat, and with great dexterity proceeded to cut and fold the sheet of paper intended to cover the Royal missive. The King looked on admiringly. “Now,” said Ruffo, “will Your Majesty kindly tell me where to find your seal?”

“I will give it you,” said the King. “Do not disturb yourself, it is here.” The letter was sealed and the King addressed it. Then, resting his head on his hand, he became extremely thoughtful.

“Is it permitted to enquire Your Majesty’s thoughts?” asked the Cardinal.

“I am anxious,” said the King. “I should prefer no one to know either that I have written this letter, nor by whom it is sent.”

“In that case,” said Ruffo, laughing,” Your Majesty had better have me assassinated when I leave the palace.”

“You, my dear Cardinal, you are another myself. Oh!” as Ruffo bowed low, “it is no great compliment.”

“But what are we to do, sire? We must get at Ferrari somehow. If I only knew where he was I could go and find him.”

“So could I,” said the King.

“But you said he was in the palace.”

“And so he is, only the palace is a large place. But wait a moment. I am a greater idiot even than I thought.”

The King opened his bedroom door and whistled, a beautiful spaniel sprang from his mat, put his paws on the King’s breast, and licked his face, which the King seemed to enjoy as much as the dog.

“Ferrari brought him up,” said the King, “he will find him for us.” And speaking as he might have done to a child: “Where is that poor Ferrari, Jupiter? We want Ferrari. Find Ferrari, Jupiter!”

Jupiter understood perfectly, he jumped up and down the room, uttering sounds of pleasure and then scratched at a door opening on a secret passage. “Good dog!” said the King.

And he lit a taper, and opening the door, “Seek, Jupiter, seek,” he said. The Cardinal, both interested, and not wishing to leave the King alone, followed.

Jupiter ran down the passage and scratched at the door at the end. Ferdinand unlocked the door which led into a deserted anti-chamber. Jupiter went straight to a door on the opposite side and put his paws on it.

“Come, Cardinal, we are burning now,” said the King.

The door, when opened, revealed a narrow staircase; Jupiter rushed up it, and began scratching at a fourth door, uttering little excited cries. “Hush, hush!” said Ferdinand, opening it. Sure enough, there lay the courier fully dressed, asleep, on a camp-bed. Jupiter, notwithstanding his excitement, at a sign from the King retired quietly behind him. Ferdinand went up to the bed, and touched the sleeper lightly on the shoulder. The man sprang up in a second, with the bewildered look of one startled in his first sleep, but, instantly recognizing the King, he hastily put his feet to the ground and stood at attention, awaiting the Royal orders.

“Can you start at once?” enquired the King.

“Certainly, sire.”

“Can you go to Vienna without stopping?”

“Yes, sire.”

“And how many days will you take to get there?”

“Last time, sire, I took five days and six nights; but I believe now it can be done in twelve hours less.”

“When you arrive at Vienna how long will you require to rest?”

“Just as long as it will take Your Majesty’s correspondent to write his answer.”

“Then you might be back in twelve days?”

“In less if there is no accident and they do not keep me waiting.”

“Go down to the stables, saddle a horse yourself. Go as far as possible with the same horse, you must risk injuring it. Leave it at some post house, and pick it up on your return. You are to tell no one where you are going.”

“Certainly not, sire.”

“You are to deliver this letter into the Emperor’s own hands, and to no one else. You will bring the reply to me, and not allow any one, not even the Queen, to see it.”

“I quite understand, sire.”

“Have you plenty of money?”

Yes, sire.”

“Then get off at once.”

“I go, sire.”

Ferrari slipped the King’s letter into a pocket made in the lining of his waistcoat, tucked a small packet of linen under his arm, took his courier’s cap and prepared to descend the stairs.

“But are you not going to say good-bye to Jupiter?” asked the King.

“I did not presume, sire.”

“Oh, embrace each other, you are old friends, and fellow servants.”

“I thank Your Majesty,” said the courier, and flung his arms round the dog who returned the caress in his own fashion. The courier dashed a tear from his eye and fled down the staircase. Said the Cardinal:

“Unless I am much mistaken, sire, that man would gladly die for Your Majesty.”

“I believe you,” said Ferdinand. “I hope to reward him some day.” They now returned to the King’s room by the way they had left it, carefully closing the doors behind them. They found the Queen’s usher awaiting them in the anti-chamber with a letter from Her Majesty.

“What!” said the King, glancing at the clock, “at three in the morning! It must be something very important.”

“Sire, the Queen saw your room was still lighted, and concluded Your Majesty had not yet gone to bed.”

The King opened the letter with the repugnance he always shewed on receiving letters from his wife. “Confound them!” said he, as he saw the first lines, “it is all up with my hunt to-morrow.”

“Dare I ask Your Majesty what news the letter brings?”

“Oh! yes, Cardinal, you may ask. The letter says that on account of important tidings received, the Queen and General Acton have decided to hold an Extraordinary Council of State this very morning. Confound them both! I do not interfere with them, why “cannot they do as I do, and leave me in peace!”

“Sire,” said Ruffo, “for once I am afraid Her Majesty and the General are right. A Council of State appears to me absolutely necessary, and the sooner it takes place, the better.”

“In that case you must be there, Cardinal.”

“I, sire? I have no right to be present at a Council.”

“I have the right to require your presence.”

“I accept, sire,” said Ruffo with an obeisance. “The others will bring their brilliant abilities, I can only offer you my devotion.”

“That is well,” and addressing the usher: “Tell the Queen that I will come to the Council at the time appointed which is nine o’clock.”

The usher bowed and retired. Ruffo was also retiring when they heard the sound of a horse passing under the palace archway. The King seized Ruffo’s hand.

“That is Ferrari starting,” he said, “Eminence, you shall be one of the first to hear what my dear nephew has to say in the matter. And now, good-night! Ah, they had better mind what they are about at the Council, I can promise the Queen and General Acton that they will not find me in the best of tempers.”

“Bah! sire,” said the Cardinal, laughing. “La nuit portera conseil.”

The King went into his bed-room and rang furiously. His valet, terrified, rushed in, thinking he must be ill.

“Undress me at once, and let me get to bed,” he cried in a voice of thunder. “And another time see that the shutters are properly closed so that all the world does not see my room is still lighted at three o’clock in the morning.”

Scarcely had the Queen reached her private apartments when she was informed that General Acton enquired if Her Majesty would receive him as he had two important facts to communicate. Apparently, however, Her Majesty was expecting someone else for she answered impatiently:

“Let him wait in the saloon; I will come as soon as I am at liberty.”

All pretence at love-making between Queen Caroline and Acton had ceased long ago. He remained the “Queen’s favourite “in name, just as he was Prime Minister, which did not prevent there being other ministers as well. Only a political tie united them, each profited by the influence the other could exert.

The Queen hastily discarded all her festal attire, robe, flowers, diamonds and rouge. She slipped on a white dressing-gown, then took a taper, went down a long passage, and having crossed a whole suite of rooms, arrived at last at a solitary room very simply furnished, and communicating with the outer world by means of a secret staircase of which the Queen had one key, and her chief of secret police,- Pasquale di Simone, had another. The windows of this room remained constantly closed and not a ray of light entered. A bronze lamp was securely fixed in the middle of the table, and was provided with a shade which cast the light of the lamp down on the table, leaving the rest of the room in shadow.

Here informers brought their denunciations. If they feared recognition they might wear a mask, or might in the anti-chamber put on one of those terrible penitential robes in which the wearer might be taken for a spectre; the holes left for the eyes resembling those in a Death's head. Three inquisitors generally presided, whose names have acquired a dismal celebrity. Castel-Cicala, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Guidobaldi, vice-president of the Junta, and Vanni, procurator fiscal. The populace, observing that the shutters of this room remained always closed, called it the "Dark Chamber," and had formed a tolerably correct idea as to the use made of it. To-night, however, the chamber was empty, the lamp extinguished, and only the monotonous tic-tac of a large clock broke the funereal silence which prevailed in the room.

Just as the Queen entered, taper in hand, pale as Lady Macbeth, a whirring sound was heard and the clock struck half-past two. The Queen, startled, hesitated for a moment, then assuring herself that the room was indeed empty, she slowly and thoughtfully seated herself at the table, which, unlike that in the King's room, had an ample provision of writing materials, and was heaped up with official-looking documents.

The Queen turned the papers absently over, without attempting to read them. Her mind was evidently elsewhere, and her power of hearing at the utmost tension. Unable to sit still any longer, she went to the door leading to the secret staircase, put her ear to it, and listened intently.

After a few moments she heard the sound of a key turning in the door below. "At last!" she murmured. Then opening the door against which she stood, "Is that you, Pasquale?" she asked.

"Yes, Your Majesty," said a man's voice at the foot of the staircase.

"You are exceedingly late," said the Queen angrily.

"It is only by good luck that I come at all," replied the voice drawing nearer and nearer.

"How is that? What do you mean?"

"Because we had a rough customer," said the man, appearing at length at the door. "Thanks to God and Saint Pasquale we have done our work and done it well; but it cost us dear."

So saying he deposited on a chair something wrapped up in a mantle which gave forth a metallic clink as he put it down. The Queen looked on with a mixed expression of curiosity and disgust. “What has it cost us?” she asked.

“Only one man killed and three wounded!”

“Well! The widow shall have a pension and the wounded men some compensation. There were many then?”

The officer bowed his thanks. “No, madame,” he said, “the man was alone but he fought like a lion. I threw my knife at him at a distance of ten paces or I should have fared like the rest.”

“Then you took the papers by force?”

“Oh! no, madame, not at all. He was quite dead.”

“Ah!” said the Queen shuddering, “then you were obliged to kill him?”

“Obliged, indeed! And yet I confess I am sorry. If it had not been for Your Majesty’s service.”

“What! you regret having killed a Frenchman? I did not suppose you had such tender regard for the soldiers of the Republic.”

“This was no Frenchman,” said Pasquale, shaking his head.

“What!” said the Queen, “surely you have not made some terrible blunder. I carefully described a Frenchman coming on horseback from Capua to Pozzuoli.”

“Exactly, madame, and thence by boat to the palace of Queen Joanna.”

“An aide-de-camp of General Championnet.”

“Oh, yes, it is the right man.”

“We shall see. What have you done with the body?”

“Ah, madame, I heard a patrol coming at that moment, and fearing to compromise Your Majesty, I left it to them to pick up the dead and care for the wounded.”

“Then they will see he was a French officer.”

“How, madame? Here is his mantle, here are his pistols and his sword which I picked up on the field of battle. Ah, he could use his weapons, I assure you. As to papers, there was nothing on him but this case, and a rag of paper which has stuck to it.”

And Pasquale threw on the table a leather case stained with blood, to which was adhering a piece of paper which might have been a letter. The Queen put out her hand, but, as if disliking to touch these ensanguined relics, stopped half-way.

“What have you done with the uniform?” she asked.

“That’s another thing which nearly put me on the wrong track! He had no uniform, none at all! Under his cloak he had a great-coat of green velvet with black fastenings. As there was a tremendous storm, he must have borrowed it from some friend and left his uniform in exchange.”

“It is very strange,” said the Queen, “the description given to me was very precise. However, the papers will show whether it was the right man or not.”

And she opened the case, staining her gloves with red as she did so, and drew out a letter addressed:

“To the Citizen Garat, Ambassador of the French Republic, at Naples.”

The Queen broke the seals without ceremony, and uttered an exclamation of joy as she saw the first lines. Her pleasure evidently increased as she proceeded, and having come to the end:

“You are a very valuable servant, Pasquale,” she said. “I will take care that your fortune is made.”

“Your Majesty promised me that a long time ago, “replied the sbirro.

“You can depend on me, I shall keep my word. Meanwhile, here is something on account.”

She took a piece of paper and wrote a few lines. “Here is an order for a thousand ducats, five hundred for you, the rest for your men.”

“Thank you, madame,” said Pasquale, blowing on the paper in order to dry the ink before pocketing it. “But I have not yet told Your Majesty all there is to tell.”

“Neither have I asked all I have to ask, but, first, I must read this letter again.” The second reading appeared quite as satisfactory as the first had been. Having finished, “Well, my good Pasquale,” she said, “what more have you to relate?”

“Only this, madame. This young man was in the palace of Queen Joanna from half-past eleven until one in the morning, and, as he changed his uniform for a civilian costume during that time, he cannot have been alone, and probably had letters from his General for others as well as for the French Ambassador.”

“That is precisely what I was thinking,” replied the Queen. “Have you no idea who these other persons may be?”

“Not yet, but I hope soon to have some information. I had ordered eight men for this night’s work and, supposing that six would be enough to dispose of our aide-de-camp — a miscalculation which nearly cost me dear

— I detailed two of them to watch the road above Queen Joanna’s palace with orders to follow anyone who came out either before or after my man did, and try to ascertain who they were, or at least where they lived. They have orders to meet me at the Giant’s Statue, and with Your Majesty’s permission I will go and see if they are there now.”

“Go, and if they are there bring them here, I will question them myself.”

Left alone, the Queen glanced carelessly at the table and noticed the second paper which Pasquale had detached from the leather case, and thrown upon the table, where it had remained unobserved. It was a letter written on excellent paper and the fine, aristocratic handwriting was evidently that of a woman.

It began, “Dear Nicolino,” and one glance sufficed to. tell the Queen that it was a love letter.

Unfortunately for the gratification of her curiosity the whole page was soaked in blood. The date, Sept. 20th, was legible and a few words at the end, wherein the writer expressed her regret at being unable to come to the usual trysting-place because she would be in attendance on the Queen who was going to meet Admiral Nelson. The only signature was “E.”

For some moments the Queen was hopelessly puzzled. A letter of this sort, dated Sept. 20th, written by a lady who excused her absence because she was in attendance on the Queen, could not possibly be meant for the French aide-de-camp, who at that date, moreover, would have been fifty leagues from Naples. The only explanation, which the Queen soon arrived at, was that the letter must have been already in the coat pocket when lent to the officer, who had put his case in the same pocket without noticing it, and the blood from his wound had fastened the two together. She rose from her seat, went to the chair on which Pasquale had thrown his bundle, and unfolding it, found the sabre and pistols. Both mantle and sabre were evidently part of a cavalry officer’s regulation equipment. But the pistols were quite different. They were mounted in silver and bore the stamp of the Royal Neapolitan manufactory, and had the letter “N,” engraved on a small silver plate, no doubt standing for the “Nicolino “to whom the letter had been written. The Queen put them aside with the letter, just as di Simone returned with his two satellites.

They brought no news of importance. Five or six minutes after the officer had come out they thought they saw a boat with three persons in it seemingly rowing towards the town. As they could not follow it they paid no further attention to it. Presently three persons appeared at the gate opening on the road from Pausilippo, who looked cautiously to see that the road was clear and then proceeded upwards in the opposite direction to that taken by the aide-de-camp. The two spies followed. Presently one of the three turned to the right and calling out "Au devoir" to his friends, disappeared among the aloes and cactus. By his voice and activity he must have been quite young. The other two, soon perceiving that they were followed, turned sharply round and presenting their pistols at the two men, said sternly, "A step further and you are dead men!" The two spies, who had no orders to fight, and were only armed with knives, stood still, and watched until the others disappeared from sight.

The Queen intimated that Pasquale and his subordinates might now go. She then threw the cloak and sabre into a cupboard and took with her the letter case, pistols and letter. She carefully locked up the two first, retaining the blood-stained note, with which she entered the saloon where Acton was still awaiting her.

He arose and bowed, showing no signs of impatience at her long delay. The Queen went straight towards him.

"You are a chemist, are you not?" she asked.

"Not in the usual acceptation of the word, madame," replied Acton, "but I have some knowledge of chemistry."

"Would it be possible to efface the blood stains from this letter without also obliterating the writing?"

Acton surveyed the letter doubtfully.

"Madame," he said, "providence has ordained, that for the just punishment of those who shed blood, it should be extremely difficult to efface the traces left by it. In this case it is entirely a question of the composition of the ink; if it be only ordinary writing-ink the words will disappear, but if, which is unlikely, it should contain nitrate of silver or animal charcoal they will probably remain."

"Well, do your best, it is important that I should know the contents of that letter."

Acton bowed. The Queen continued:

"You said you had two facts of importance to communicate. I await them."

"General Mack arrived this evening during the entertainment. As I had invited him, he came to my house, where I found him on my return."

“He is welcome. I think Providence must be on our side. And your second piece of news, sir?”

“Is no less important than the first. I have had a few words with Admiral Nelson, and, in the matter of money, he is disposed to do all Your Majesty wishes.”

“Thank you, that completes a satisfactory chain of events.” Caroline then went to the window, put the curtains aside and looked across at the King’s apartments. They were still lighted.

“Fortunately the King is still up,” she remarked. “I will send him word that we have an Extraordinary Council this morning, at which his presence will be necessary.”

“I believe he has planned a hunt for this morning,” said the Minister.

“Indeed,” said the Queen contemptuously, “then he must put it off.” And taking a pen she wrote her note and desired the usher to take it to the King* And seeing Acton still standing as if waiting for final instructions:

“Good-night, my dear General,” she said, with a gracious smile, “I am sorry to have kept you so late, but when you know all that has happened you will acknowledge that my time has not been wasted.”

She held out her hand to Acton, who kissed it respectfully, then bowed, and was retiring.

“By-the-way,” said the Queen, “the King will be in a very bad temper at the Council.”

“I imagine so,” said Acton, smiling.

“Warn your colleagues to give no information and merely to answer direct questions. The King and myself must be the only actors in this performance.”

“I am sure Your Majesty will have the better part,” said the Minister.

“I think so,” said the Queen. “We shall see.”

Acton bowed again, and finally took his leave.

“Ah!” said the Queen as she rang for her maids, “if Emma only keeps her word all will be well.”

CHAPTER V.

THE COUNCIL OF STATE.

AT a quarter-past nine everyone had assembled except the King. Then the folding-doors in the Council room were flung open, and the ushers announced:

“His Majesty the King.”

Ferdinand’s air of sulky annoyance was a great contrast to the self-satisfied and cheerful countenance of the Queen. And Jupiter followed suit with hanging head and tail between his legs. By way of protest the King was in hunting attire, although the hunt had been postponed to another day. At his entrance every one rose, including the Queen. Ferdinand looked at her sideways, shook his head and sighed, as if recognizing in her an obstacle which continually interfered with his pleasures. He bowed right and left, giving a special recognition to the Cardinal, and then said in melancholy tones:

“Gentlemen, I am indeed grieved at having had to disturb you on a day when, like myself, you probably hoped to be at liberty to attend to your own affairs. I assure you it is not my fault, but I am informed there are pressing matters of great importance to consider, which the Queen thinks can only be dealt with in my presence. Her Majesty will explain these matters; you must consider them and give me your advice. Be seated, gentlemen.”

Then seating himself a little behind the rest and opposite the Queen, “Come here, my poor Jupiter!” he said. “It will be pleasant for you and me, will it not?”

“Oh! gentlemen,” said the Queen, annoyed as usual by her husband’s mode of speaking, “the matter is quite simple, and if the King chose he could explain it in very few words.”

And, as everybody listened with the utmost attention, she continued:

“The French Ambassador, Citizen Garat, left Naples last night after having declared war upon us.”

“And,” said the King, “let us add that we did not invite this declaration of war, and that it remains to be seen whether England will help us. But that is

General Acton’s business.”

“And Admiral Nelson’s,” said the Queen. “He has just shewn at Aboukir what can be done by genius and courage combined.”

“None the less, madame,” replied the King, “I do not hesitate to tell you that war with France is a serious matter.”

“But less serious,” said the Queen sharply, “since Bonaparte, conqueror, as he calls himself, of Dego, Montenotte, Areola, and Mantua, is now shut up in Egypt, where he will have to stay until France can build a new fleet to fetch him back, which I hope will give him time to see the radishes grow, which the Directory instructed him to sow on the banks of the Nile.”

“Quite so,” replied the King with equal acidity, “but if Bonaparte is out of the way, who, indeed, is truly modest if he only calls himself the victor of Areola, etc., when he might very well add half-a-dozen more names to those you have cited, France still has Massena, Bernadotte, Moreau and a few other conquerors, quite enough for us here who have never conquered anything at all.

I am forgetting Championnet, the victor of the Dunes, who, you may remember, is only thirty leagues distant — three days’ march.”

The Queen shrugged her shoulders with a contemptuous smile intended for Championnet, whose unpleasant position she knew. The King thought it aimed at him. “If I am wrong by two or three leagues,” he said, “it is no more. Since the French have occupied Rome I have enquired the distance often enough.”

“Oh! I do not question your geographical knowledge, sire,” replied the Queen, pouting her Austrian lip.

“No, I am aware, you only doubt my political wisdom. Of one thing I am sure. If I were one of my own soldiers I should have deserted and turned brigand long ago. The brigands, at least, fight and get killed for themselves. My soldiers, who have not a cent’s worth of property, and are compelled to fight, have nothing to fight for, and they will run away at the first shot.”

“Sire,” said Ariola, “I am compelled to own there is a good deal of truth in what you say.”

“As to that,” replied the King, “I always do speak the truth — when I am not obliged to lie, that is! Now, let us see — I understand I have 65,000 men — there they are in battle array, in their new Austrian uniforms, musket on shoulder, sword at side, haversack on back. Who is going to lead them? Is it you, Ariola?”

“Sire,” answered Ariola, “I cannot be both Minister of War and Commander-in-Chief.”

“And you prefer being Minister of War. I quite understand! That’s one disposed of. Now, Pignatelli, would it suit you to command Ariola’s 65,000 men?”

“Sire,” replied the General addressed, “I should not like to undertake so great a responsibility.”

“That’s two then. And you, Colli?” continued the King.

“Nor I, either, sire.”

“You, Parisi?”

“Sire, I am only a brigadier.”

“Yes, you would all like to command a brigade, perhaps even a division. But if there is a plan of campaign to draw up, strategy to consider, and a formidable enemy to encounter, not one of you can do it!”

“Your Majesty need not trouble about a General-in-Chief,” said the Queen, “he is already found.”

“Indeed!” said Ferdinand. “Not one of my people, I trust?”

“No, do not alarm yourself’ replied the Queen. “I asked my nephew to recommend a man whose military reputation might both impress the enemy and satisfy our friends.”

“And he?” enquired the King.

“Is Baron Charles Mack. Have you anything against him?”

“Only this,” answered Ferdinand, “that he let himself be beaten by the French; but as the Imperial Generals, including your brother Prince Charles, are all in the same boat, we may as well have Mack as another.”

The Queen bit her lips, and rising, said:

“Then, you will accept Baron Mack as Commander-in-Chief?”

“Certainly,” said the King.

“Then, with your permission “ — And she went to the door while the King looked on — mystified. Suddenly, from the Court below rose the sound of a hunting horn vigorously blown, and giving the first notes of the “lancer” or starting blast. The very windows shook with the noise; and King, Ministers and Councillors stared at each other in astonishment. “What is the fool about?” exclaimed the King. “He must know the hunt was postponed.” Then, as the huntsman continued to blow furiously, Ferdinand flung the window open, and exclaimed, “Stop that, you idiot!” After which he returned to his seat more sullen than ever. But while his back was turned, a new individual had, on the Queen’s invitation, entered the Council Chamber and become a fresh source of surprise to the assembly. This newcomer was a man of about forty-five, tall, fair, and pale, wearing the uniform of an Austrian General and the Orders of Maria Theresa and Saint Januarius.

“Sire,” said the Queen, “I have the honour to present the Baron Charles Mack, whom you have just named Commander-in-Chief of your armies.”

“Ah! General,” said the King, gazing with some surprise at the Order of St. Januarius, which he had no recollection of having bestowed on Mack. “I am charmed to make your acquaintance.”

And he exchanged a meaning glance with Ruffo. The Queen intervened:

“Sire,” she said, “I thought we ought not to await the Baron’s arrival here before giving him some sign of your consideration, and before he left Vienna, I desired your Ambassador to transmit to him the insignia of your Order of St. Januarius.”

“And, sire,” said the Baron with an outburst of theatrical enthusiasm, “overflowing with gratitude, I have hastened hither with the speed of lightning in order to say, ‘Sire, my sword is yours.’ “And he drew the weapon with a formidable flourish, whereat Ferdinand, who, like James I., was not fond of cold steel, pushed his chair some paces back. Mack continued:

“I draw this sword for you and Her Majesty the Queen, nor shall it be sheathed until it has overthrown this infamous French Republic, which is the negation of Humanity and a disgrace to Europe. Will you accept my oath, sire?”

Ferdinand’s sound sense estimated Mack’s boasting at its proper value. With a mocking smile he murmured in Neapolitan patois, “Ceuza,” a word unintelligible to anyone not born at the foot of Vesuvius. It is quite untranslatable but may be said to mean something between “coxcomb “and “idiot.” Mack, naturally, did not understand, and not knowing whether the King accepted his oath or not, turned in embarrassment towards the Queen.

“His Majesty,” said the Queen with perfect gravity, “has expressed his gratitude to you, General, by a single and most expressive word.”

Mack bowed, and put up his sword with much solemnity.

“Now,” said the King, with the quiet mockery which delighted him so much, “I hope my dear nephew, besides sending me one of his best

Generals to overthrow the infamous French Republic, has also sent me a plan of campaign revised by the Aulic Council."

The Aulic Council, be it remembered, had drawn up the plans of campaign for '96 and '97, which had resulted in the Austrian Generals and the Archduke Charles being gloriously beaten. Ferdinand's question was put with an engaging simplicity.

"No, sire," said Mack. "My august master has graciously given me carte blanche on this subject."

"Then you will consider it at once, will you not, General? I own I am quite impatient to hear your plan explained."

"It is already decided on," said Mack, with an air of absolute self-satisfaction.

"Ah!" said Ferdinand, recovering his good temper as soon as he found someone to deride, "you hear, gentlemen. Actually before Citizen Garat declared war on us in the name of the infamous French Republic, the infamous French Republic, thanks to the genius of our Commander-in-Chief, was already beaten! Most certainly we are under the protection of God and Saint Januarius. Thanks, my dear General, thanks!"

Mack, swelling with pride at what he took for a genuine compliment, made a deep obeisance.

"It's a pity," continued Ferdinand, "that we have not here a map of our kingdom and the States of the Church, so that we could follow the General's movements. Citizen Bonaparte, we are told, has a large map in his study on which he points out beforehand the exact places where he will beat the Austrian Generals; the Baron could have shewn us those where he will beat the French Generals. We must have a similar map made for the use of Baron Mack. Do you hear, Ariola?"

"Unnecessary, sire," said Mack. "I have an excellent one,"

"Is it as good as the Citizen Bonaparte's?" demanded the King.

"I think so," said Mack with perfect satisfaction.

"Then let us have it at once, General," cried the King. "I am dying to see a map on which one beats one's enemy beforehand."

Mack requested that his portfolio might be brought from an adjoining room. The Queen, who perfectly understood her husband's veiled mockery, and was afraid lest Mack might discover that he was merely serving as a butt for the King's caustic humour, suggested that this was hardly the time for details; but Mack, unwilling to lose the chance of displaying his military science before the various Generals present, respectfully persisted, and a large portfolio was brought, bearing the Austrian arms on one side, and its owner's name and titles on the other. Mack drew out a large map of the States of the Church, and spread it on the table.

"Now, my Minister of War! Now Generals!" said the King, "your best attention, please! Do not lose a word of what the Baron has to tell you. Now, Baron, we are listening."

The officers approached the table with much curiosity, for, at that time, Mack enjoyed the reputation — why, no one knew, either then or now — of being one of the first strategists in Europe. The Queen, however, thinking more raillery was intended, drew back a little.

"What! madame," said the King, "do you withdraw just when the Baron is going to shew us where he will beat those Republicans you detest so much."

"I do not understand strategy, sire," replied the Queen sharply, "and," indicating Ruffo, "perhaps I had better make room for someone who does." And she went to a window and idly tapped the glass with her fingers. At that moment, as if in answer to a signal, a second hunting blast was heard from below, only this time, instead of the "lancer," it sounded the "view."

The King stopped short as if rooted to the ground, his expression changed from good-humour to one of anger. "Really!" he exclaimed, "either they are mad themselves or they want to make me so. How can we hunt either stag or wild boar, when we are hunting Republicans!"

He rushed to the window and flung it violently open.

"Will you be silent, you double-dyed idiot!" he cried, "do you want me to come down and kill you with my own hands?"

"Oh! sire," said Mack, "it would really be doing the rascal too much honour!"

"Do you think so, Baron?" said Ferdinand, recovering his temper. "Well, then, we will let him live, and kill the French instead. Let us have your plan, General."

And he shut the window more quietly than might have been expected from the exasperation caused by the sound of the horn. Mack's little bit of commonplace flattery happily saved the situation.

"You see, gentleman," said Mack in the manner of à professor lecturing his class, "our 60,000 men are divided into four or five points on this line between Gaeta and Aquila."

"There are 65,000," said the King, "no need to stint yourself."

"I only want the 60,000," said Mack, "my calculations are based on that number. If you had 100,000 I should not want one more. Besides, I have exact information as to the French, they have barely 10,000 men."

"Then," said the King, "we are six to one, which is comforting. We were only two to one in the campaign of '96 and '97 when Bonaparte beat my nephew's forces so completely."

"But I was not there, sire," remarked Mack with a self-satisfied smile.

"True," replied the King with the utmost innocence, "there were only Beaulieu, Wurmser, Alvinzi and the Archduke Charles."

"Sire, sire!" murmured the Queen, pulling Ferdinand's hunting-coat as she spoke.

"Don't alarm yourself," answered the King aside. "I understand the man, and will only scratch when he invites it."

"I was saying," resumed Mack, "that our largest body of troops, about 20,000 is at San Germano, and the 40,000 others are encamped on the Tronto, at Sessa, at Tagliacozzo and at Aquila. Ten thousand men will cross the Tronto and turn the French garrison out of Ascoli, then advance upon Fermo by the Emilian' Way. Four thousand others leave Aquila, occupy Rieti, and march towards Terni. Five or six thousand proceed from Tagliacozzo to Tivoli and over-run the Sabini district. Eight thousand more leave the camp at Sessa and enter the Roman territory by the Appian Way. Six thousand go by sea to Leghorn and cut off the French who are retreating by way of Perugia."

"Who retreat by Perugia! Our General, unlike Citizen Bonaparte, does not say precisely where he will beat the enemy, but he tells us by which way they will retreat."

"Oh! yes!" said Mack triumphantly, "I do tell you where I shall beat the enemy."

"Come, now, let us see that," said the King, seemingly as much interested in the war as if it had been a hunt.

"I leave San Germano with Your Majesty and twenty or twenty-five thousand men."

"What? You leave San Germano with me!"

"I, march upon Rome — — "

"Still with me!"

"I reach it by way of Ceperano and Frosinone."

"Very bad roads, General! I know them, I have been upset there!"

"The enemy abandons Rome."

"Does he?"

"Rome is a place which cannot be defended."

"Well, when the enemy abandons Rome, what does he do next?"

"He will retire upon Civita-Castellana, a formidable position."

"Ah! And you naturally leave him there?"

"Oh! no! I attack him and beat him."

"Excellent! But if you do not beat him — by accident?"

"Sire," said Mack, putting his hand on his breast and bowing low, "when I have the honour to tell Your Majesty I shall beat the enemy, Your Majesty may consider that he is beaten."

"Then that is settled," said the King.

"Has Your Majesty any objections to make to my arrangements?"

"No, there is only one point about which we must agree. You said you would leave San Germano along with me?"

"Yes, sire."

"Well, this is the very first I have heard about it. What rank do you offer me in my own army? I hope the question is not indiscreet?"

"Naturally the supreme command, sire. I shall be proud and happy to obey Your Majesty's orders."

"The supreme command! Hum."

"Your Majesty will not refuse?.... Her Majesty the Queen gave me hopes."

"Her Majesty the Queen is extremely kind. She has always cherished too good an opinion of me and shews it now, but she unfortunately forgets that I am no soldier. In Supreme Command!! Did San Nicandro bring me up to be an Alexander or a Hannibal? Have I studied at the School of Brienne like the Citizen Bonaparte? Have I read Polybius, or Caesar, or Marshal Saxe like the Archduke Charles? or indeed anything else one ought to read in order to get beaten according to rule? And have I ever commanded anything except my Lipariotes?"

"Sire," replied Mack, "a descendant of Henri IV., and a grandson of Louis XIV. knows all that without having learnt it."

"My good General," said the King, "you can tell those whoppers to fools if you like, but not to mere asses like myself."

“Sire!” exclaimed Mack, much astonished at the King’s frank pronouncement on himself.

Ferdinand continued:

“One of the first qualities of a General is to be brave, is it not?”

“Most indisputably, sire.”

“Well, then, you are brave, I suppose.”

“Sire!”

“You are quite sure you are brave, are you not?”

“Oh! sire!!”

“I am not at all sure that I am brave, however.”

The Queen blushed up to her ears, Mack stared, and the Ministers and Councillors smiled. Well acquainted with the King’s cynicism, nothing that he said could astonish them.

“After all,” resumed the King, “perhaps I am mistaken. I may be brave without knowing it. We shall see.”

Turning towards his Councillors, “Gentlemen,” said Ferdinand, “you have heard the General’s plan of campaign. Do you all, without exception, fully approve?”

All signified that they did.

“And you, Ruffo?” asked the King turning towards the Cardinal, who had remained a little apart from the rest.

But Ruffo remained silent.

Mack had acknowledged the general approval with a smile, he now looked with wonder at this ecclesiastic who presumed to differ from the rest.

“Perhaps the Cardinal is prepared with a better plan,” said the Queen.

“No, Your Majesty,” answered Ruffo quietly, “I did not know war was so imminent, and no one honoured me by asking my opinion.”

“If Your Eminence has any observations to make,” said Mack jeeringly, “I am ready to listen.”

“I should not have presumed to offer my opinion without Your Excellency’s permission,” said the Cardinal with extreme courtesy. “But since Your Excellency allows me.”

“Oh! yes, yes, Eminence,” said Mack, laughing.

“If I rightly understand Your Excellency’s combinations, the object proposed in the plan you have done us the honour to lay before us.”

“Yes, what is my object?” said Mack, thinking he had got someone to ridicule in his turn.

“Let us see,” said Ferdinand, who upheld the Cardinal for the simple reason that the Queen detested him.

“Your Excellency is extending your line in the hope that, ‘owing to your great numerical superiority, you will be able to turn the ends of the French line, surround their troops, drive the different masses one upon another, throw them into confusion, and as they cannot retreat through Tuscany, either destroy, or force them to surrender.”

“Your Eminence could not have put it more clearly if I had explained it all beforehand,” said Mack, delighted. “As sure as I am Baron Charles Mack, they will be taken prisoner to the very last man, and not one will return to France to tell the tale. Have you anything better to propose?”

“If I had been asked,” said the Cardinal, “I should have proposed another arrangement.”

“And it would have been -?”

“To divide the army into three parts only. I would concentrate 25,000 or 30,000 men between Cieti and Terni. I would send 12,000 on the Emilian Way to meet the French left wing, and 10,000 into the Pontine Marshes to crush their right wing. I would also send 8,000 into Tuscany. I would use my utmost efforts to break down the enemy’s centre, and to turn” the flank of his two wings, and to prevent their giving help to one another. Meanwhile, the Tuscan legion, having collected all the country could provide, should be on the watch to join hands with us and help us according to circumstances. This would allow our troops, which are young and inexperienced, to act in masses, and would have given them self-confidence. But I am only a poor Churchman, and I bow before General Mack’s genius and experience.”

And the Cardinal, who had approached the table in order to demonstrate his ideas upon the map, stepped backward, as if abandoning the discussion. The Generals looked at each other in surprise for it was evident that Ruffo’s advice was good. Mack, by scattering the Neapolitan army and dividing it into small bodies, ran the risk of these being beaten separately even by a much inferior force, a danger which Ruffo’s plan would have averted. Mack bit his lips, for he felt that the Cardinal’s strategy was better than his own.

“Eminence,” said Mack, “the King must choose between you and me. Possibly,” he added with a forced smile, “Peter the Hermit is more suitable than Godfrey de Bouillon for what may be called a Holy War."

The King had only vague ideas as to the identity of the persons mentioned, but although he ridiculed Mack he did not wish to quarrel with him.

"What are you talking about, General?" he exclaimed. "I am sure your plan is excellent, and as you see, these gentlemen all approve of it. So do I, and we will not change a single movement. There is the army — good! There is the Commander-in-Chief — good, very good! Now we only want money. Come, Corradino, Ariola has shewn us his men, you must produce the money."

"Eh! sire," answered the unlucky Minister thus suddenly attacked. "Your Majesty knows that the expense of fitting out the army and clothing it has completely emptied your Exchequer."

"Bad news, Corradino, very bad! I have always heard that money is the sinews of war. Do you hear, madame? We have no money!"

"Sire," replied the Queen, "the money is forthcoming as well as the army and the General. For the moment there is a million pounds sterling at your disposal."

"Good again!" said the King, "and pray who is the alchemist who has the inestimable power of producing gold?"

"I shall have the honour of presenting him to you, sire," said the Queen, going to the door by which Mack had entered. "Will Your Grace," she said to someone as yet invisible, "have the kindness to confirm what I have just told the King, namely, that money to enable us to make war on the Jacobins will not be wanting."

All eyes turned towards the door, on the threshold of which appeared Nelson, radiantly happy from the first kiss, with which his devotion and the subsidies of England had just been purchased by Emma Hamilton. The evil genius of France came in person to sit at the Council Board and support Caroline's lying treason with the full weight of English gold.

Nelson's appearance was familiar to all except Mack. The Queen took the latter's hand and leading the future victor of Civita Castellana to the victor of Aboukir.

"Let me present," said she, "the Hero of the Land to the Hero of the Sea."

Nelson did not seem exactly flattered by the compliment, but being in a happy frame of mind, he bowed courteously to Mack, and turning to the King, said:

“Sire, I am fortunate in being able to announce to Your Majesty and your Ministers that my Government has invested me with full powers to treat with you on any questions relative to war with France.”

The King felt that he was caught, and as completely tied hand and foot as was Gulliver at Lilliput. However, he made the only objection which remained to him:

“Your Grace has heard,” he said, “the subject under discussion. Our Minister of Finance has just frankly informed us that our Exchequer is, unfortunately, empty, and I observed that, being destitute of money, war is quite impossible.”

“And, as usual, Your Majesty displayed an excellent wisdom,” replied Nelson, “but Mr. Pitt has fortunately invested me with powers to remedy this difficulty.”

And he laid on the table a warrant drawn up as follows:

“On arriving at Naples, Admiral Nelson, Baron, Nelson of the Nile, is authorized to make arrangements with Sir William Hamilton, our Ambassador at the Court of the Two Sicilies, for the support of our august ally, the King of Naples, in any expenses incurred in sustaining a war against the French Republic.

“W. PITT, “London, September 7, 1798.”

“Your Majesty should also be informed,” said the Queen, “that the French are in no position to make war at present.”

“They have declared it, notwithstanding,” replied Ferdinand. The Queen smiled scornfully.

“The Citizen Garat was in too great a hurry,” she said. “He would have waited a little had he known the position of General Championnet at Rome.”

“And you know this situation better than did the Citizen Garat, madame. Are you in correspondence with the General’s staff?”

“I do not trust to correspondence with foreigners, sire.”

“Then did you get your information from Championnet himself?”

“Precisely. The French Ambassador should have received this letter this morning had he not been in such a desperate hurry to leave yesterday evening.”

And the Queen took out of its envelope the letter which Pasquale di Simone had brought to her in the Dark Chamber, and handed it to the King.

“It is written in French!” said Ferdinand, much as he might have said, “It is written in Hebrew!” and, handing it to Ruffo, “Eminence,” he said, “be good enough to read this letter in Italian.”

Ruffo took the letter and, in the midst of a profound silence, read as follows: “Citizen Ambassador.

“I have now been at Rome a short time only and I think it my duty to inform you of the state in which I find the army I am called on to command in order that you may decide on your course of conduct towards a treacherous Court, which, egged on by our eternal enemy, England, only awaits a favourable moment for declaring war upon us.”

The Queen looked at Nelson, and both smiled. Nelson understood neither French nor Italian, but the letter had probably been translated to him beforehand. The Cardinal continued:

“To begin with, this army, which on paper consists of 35,000 men, is really composed of 8,000 only. The men are in want of clothes, boots and provisions, and have not received a farthing of pay for the last three months. Of cartridges we have only 180,000, everywhere we are short of powder, and at Civita Vecchia the other day we could not even fire on a Barbary Corsair which came to reconnoitre the coast.”

“You hear that, sire?” said the Queen.

hear,” said the King. “Continue, Eminence.”

“Our fortresses are no better than the arsenals. The cannon balls do not fit the cannon in any one of them. In some there are balls and no cannon, in others cannon and no balls. And as to artillery we have only 5 cannon and a park of four pieces. This disastrous condition of affairs explains the instructions I received from the Directory which I now hand on for your guidance.”

“I am to repel by force of arms any hostile attack on the Roman Republic, and carry the war into the Neapolitan territory, but only if the King of Naples carries out his long threatened projects of invasion.”

“You hear that, sire?” said the Queen, “I think we have not much to fear from an army of 8,000 men, provided with five pieces of cannon and 180,000 cartridges.”

“Will you continue, Cardinal,” said the King, rubbing his hands.

“Yes, continue,” said the Queen, “let us hear what the General himself thinks of his position.”

“Now,”

continued the Cardinal, “you will easily understand, Citizen Ambassador, that with the means at my command I can hardly repel a hostile attack, much less carry the war into the enemy’s country.”

“Does that re-assure you, sire?” enquired the Queen. “Hum!” said Ferdinand, “let us hear the rest.”

“I cannot insist too strongly, Citizen Ambassador, on the necessity, as far as the dignity of France will permit, of maintaining harmonious relations between the Republic and the Court of the Two Sicilies, and of restraining the impatience of the Neapolitan patriots as much as possible. Any movement undertaken within the next three months, that is to say, before I have had time to re-organize my troops, would be premature and doomed to failure.

“My aide-de-camp is charged to bring you this letter and to interview the Chiefs of the Republican party at Naples. He is most reliable and of distinguished courage, and having been born in Neapolitan territory, speaks not only Italian but also the dialect of Naples. Kindly send him back as quickly as possible with a full explanation of your position with regard to the Court of the Two Sicilies.

“Fraternity, “CHAMPIONNET.

“September 18, 1798.”

“Well, sire,” said the Queen, “are you not now completely reassured?”

“On one point, yes, madame; on another, no.”

“Oh! I understand, you are thinking of the Republican party in whose existence you refused to believe. Well, it is no phantom, but really exists, since it has to be restrained on the advice of the Jacobins themselves.”

“How the devil did you obtain this letter?” asked the King, taking it from the Cardinal and turning it over curiously.

“That is my secret,” answered the Queen, “and I must ask to be allowed to keep it. But Your Majesty is looking at Lord Nelson.”

“I was going to say that September and October are stormy months and that it might well be a month or six weeks before this money we need so much could arrive from England.”

Nelson replied:

“The case, sire, has been foreseen and provided for. Messrs. Baker and Son, with the help of their various correspondents, will cash a cheque for one million stirling, which Sir William Hamilton will draw upon them and which I will endorse. It is only necessary, as the sum is a large one, for Your Majesty to give them sufficient notice."

"Good, very good!" said the King, "Sir William writes the cheque, you endorse it, then it is given to me, and I settle with the Bakers."

Ruffo whispered something to the King. Ferdinand continued, "But I am well aware that our kind ally, however friendly she may be, is not going to give us all that for nothing. What does England want in return for her £1,000,000 sterling?"

"Only a small concession which will not affect Your Majesty in the least."

"And what may that be?"

"England desires that when Malta, now blockaded by the fleet of His Britannic Majesty, shall have been retaken from the French, Your Majesty shall consent to renounce your rights to this island, in order that England, which has no Mediterranean possession except Gibraltar, may make Malta a station of call and supply for the English fleet."

"Good. It would be an easy cession on my side. Malta belongs to the knights and not to me."

"True, sire, but when Malta is retaken the Order will be dissolved," said Nelson.

"And, if the Order is dissolved," said Ruffo, "Malta returns to the Two Sicilies. It was given to the knights of Rhodes in 1535 by Charles V. as heir to the crown of Aragon. If England has so much need of a Mediterranean station Malta is cheap at £1,000,000 sterling."

Possibly there would have been a further discussion on this point had not a third hunting-blast been heard in the Court below, which produced as great an effect as the two previous ones had done.

The Queen glanced knowingly at Mack and Nelson. The King rushed to the window and flung it open again. The horn this time was sounding the "hallali."

"Will anyone tell me," he cried furiously, "what is meant by sounding these abominable hunting-calls?"

"They mean that Your Majesty can start when you like," answered the huntsman. "You will not be disappointed, the boars have been turned."

"Turned," repeated the King, "the boars have been turned!"

"Yes, sire, there are fifteen of them!"

“Fifteen boars! Do you hear, madame?” cried the King. “Do you hear gentlemen? Fifteen boars! Dost hear, Jupiter? Fifteen! Fifteen! Fifteen!”

Then returning to the huntsman, “Wretched man!” he cried in an agonized voice, “do you not know there can be no hunt to-day!”

On this the Queen came forward. “Why can there be no hunt to-day, sire?” she enquired with her most bewitching smile.

“Because, madame, when I received your note last night I put it off,” said the King, turning to Ruffo as if asking his testimony.

“I do not doubt it, sire,” replied the Queen, “but I knew it would disappoint you to do so, and as I thought the Council would finish early and there might still berime for your hunt, I intercepted your messenger and let the first order stand; only saying you would start at eleven instead of nine. It is striking eleven now, the Council is over, the boars are there, there is nothing to interfere with Your Majesty’s pleasure!”

Ferdinand’s countenance cleared as the Queen spoke, and ended by becoming radiant.

“Ah! chère mâitresse!” he cried, “you are fit not only to take Acton’s place as Prime Minister, you might take the Duke de Salandra’s as well and be Grand Huntsman. You are right, the Council is over, you have your General on land and your Admiral on sea, we have got five or six million ducats we did not expect to get, and all you do is well done. I only ask you not to begin your campaign before the Emperor begins also. Upon my word, I feel quite ready for war, perhaps I am really brave, after all. Au revoir, chère mâitresse! Au revoir, gentlemen! Au revoir, Ruffo!”

“What about Malta, sire?” asked the Cardinal.

“Oh! let them do what they like about Malta; I have done extremely well without Malta for two hundred and sixty-three years. I can continue to do without a good-for-nothing rock where one can only shoot twice a year when the quails fly over it. Where one cannot have pheasants because there is no water, where you cannot even grow a radish, but must fetch everything from Sicily! Let them take Malta and take the Jacobins as well. I ask no more. Fifteen boars! Jupiter, tally ho! tally ho, Jupiter!”

And the King departed, whistling a fourth hunting call.

“My lord,” said the Queen, addressing Nelson, “you can inform your Government that the King of the Two Sicilies has no objection to the cession of Malta.”

Turning to the assembled Councillors:

“Gentlemen,” said she, “the King thanks you for the good advice you have given. The sitting is ended.”

And, including everyone in a sweeping bow, accompanied by an ironical glance at Ruffo, the Queen retired to her apartments followed by Mack and Nelson.

CHAPTER VI

LUISA AND SALVATO

AFTER Salvato had left the Palace of Queen Joanna, the remaining conspirators divided themselves into parties of three each — Nicolino, Velasco and Schipani climbing the hill towards Pausilippo, while Cirillo, Hector and Manthonnet availed themselves of the latter's boat, which had remained safely moored under shelter of the palace, to cross the bay towards Portici. On the way they landed Cirillo at Mergellina, the nearest point to his home. He proceeded upward and reached the road near the Palm Tree without encountering any obstacle. But once in the road he observed a group of men in front of him apparently examining two others lying prostrate on the ground. By the light of the torches they carried Cirillo quickly recognized them as a night patrol in the exercise of their duties. They were, in fact, the same patrol whose coming had alarmed Pasquale and had caused him to decamp, leaving killed and wounded on the ground. Two of the latter had contrived to drag themselves away, and of the two remaining one was quite dead, the other still breathing, and the officer ordered him to be carried to the nearest house. Cirillo, remembering that Salvato would have had to pass this way, began to fear that something untoward might have happened and followed the patrol. Arrived at a small house they demanded admittance which was refused until the officer threatened to break the door down unless it were at once opened. Hearing the soldiers enquiring for a surgeon, Cirillo came forward.

"I am not a surgeon," said he, "but a physician. Probably I can do all that is necessary here." And he ordered the man to be carried in and laid carefully on the table on a mattress.

"Ah! doctor," said the wounded man, "I am not a patient that will do you credit. I have experience in wounds."

Signing to Cirillo to bend over him, he whispered:

"You would do well to send for a priest."

Seeing two children in the room, Cirillo desired the eldest to let the priest know he was required, and also to wake the chemist and get a prescription made up. Very little examination told him that the wound was mortal, and the sufferer completely paralysed. He cleansed and bound up the wound and administered a cordial. The officer then came forward. “Are you able to answer my questions?” he enquired.

“Your questions? What for?”

“I must draw up my report,” said the officer.

“Ah! your report. I can give it you in four words. Another spoonful of your cordial, doctor.”

It was administered, and the patient continued:

“There were six of us. We lay in wait to assassinate a young man. He killed one of us and wounded three. I am one of the three. That is all.”

Cirillo’s doubts as to Salvato’s concern in the affair were solved. Who else was likely to have accounted for four men out of six?”

“The names of your companions?” demanded the officer.

The wounded man grinned.

“Ah!” he said, “you would like to know them, would you not? I can tell you someone who knows them if you like to ask him.”

“Who is that?”

“Pasquale di Simone. Would you like his address?”

“The Queen’s cut-throat!” murmured the listeners under their breath.

“Thanks, my friend,” replied the officer, “I think that is all I want. Come, men,” he said, “let us get on. We are only wasting time here.”

As the sound of their footsteps died away Cirillo approached the sufferer. “My friend,” he said, “I think you will not refuse to give me some information which will harm no one and is of great consequence to me. This young man you speak of was a French officer?”

“It seems so.”

“Was he killed?”

“I cannot say; but I am quite sure that if not dead he must be very near it.”

“Did you see him fall?”

“Yes, but not clearly. I was on the ground and thinking most about myself.”

“Try and tell me what you did see. I am most anxious to know what happened to this young man.”

“I saw that he fell against the garden door of the House of the Palm Tree, and then, as in a mist, I thought the door opened and someone dressed in white drew him inside. But it might be only a vision, and the figure in white was perhaps the Angel of Death come for his soul."

"Thank you, friend, I now know all I want to know, and I hear."

"Yes, the priest and his bell. One hears it a long way off when he comes for oneself. It is all over with me, is it not?"

"You have borne pain as a brave man should, and I answer accordingly. You have time to make your peace with God and that is all."

The priest, bearing the Viaticum, entered with his acolytes. All present fell on their knees. Cirillo's work was done and he quietly left the house and retraced his steps as far as the garden door of San Felice's house. He examined the door carefully and satisfied himself that there were traces of blood on it.

"Salvato is here without doubt," he murmured to himself. "Is he dead or alive? I must find out as quickly as possible."

At nine o'clock the next morning San Felice as usual entered his dining-room expecting to find Luisa occupied with the breakfast arrangements. To his astonishment she did not appear and the only information he could extract from Nina was: "Madame is still asleep and did not wish to be disturbed."

Luisa invariably rose at seven. And the Chevalier, much disturbed at her non-appearance, walked anxiously up and down for some time. He was on the point of going to her door himself when she entered the room looking tired and pale, but more lovely than ever. Luisa was exquisitely fair, but with large dark eyes and long dark lashes. Her features and form were beautifully modelled and there was something almost angelic in her smile, mien and beauty. The Chevalier kissed her white forehead, remarking in the mythological language then fashionable:

"If Aurora has kept her old Tithonus waiting, it must have been because she wanted time to disguise herself as Venus."

"I had terrible dreams last night," said Luisa, blushing, "and I do not feel well in consequence."

"And have these terrible dreams spoiled your appetite as well as your sleep?"

"I am afraid so," said Luisa, seating herself and trying to eat. But she found it impossible, and felt herself getting alternately red and white under San Felice's anxious and enquiring looks. To her great relief someone knocked at the garden door and she rose hastily to go and open it.

“Where is Nina?” asked the Chevalier.

“I do not know, she has gone out perhaps. I had better answer the door.”

“Nina out at this time, and when you are not well. Impossible! But stay where you are, I will go.”

Presently San Felice returned, bringing Cirillo with him. Luisa breathed again; Cirillo and she were great friends, partly because the doctor had attended Prince Caramanico and often, spoke of him, although entirely ignorant of his relationship to Luisa. During the last night she had been continually on the point of sending for him but did not dare to do so. She wondered now what he would think of the whole affair, and still more what curious chance had brought him on this particular morning at so unusual an hour.

“Well,” said San Felice, putting his hand on the doctor’s knee, “is this early visit by way of excuse for your previous neglect? We might die twenty times over without knowing whether you yourself were dead or alive.”

Cirillo studied the looks of his friends carefully. One shewed evident signs of an anxious and disturbed night, the other appeared full of serene happiness. “Then,” he said with emphasis, “you are glad to see me *this* morning, dear sir?”

“I am always glad to see you, dear doctor, morning, noon or night; but certainly I am particularly glad to see you to-day.”

“And why? Tell me.”

“For two reasons — but drink your coffee — Ah, yes, you are unlucky, Luisa did not make it this morning. Imagine what time she appeared. No wonder she blushes! Not till after nine o’clock!”

Cirillo noted Luisa’s changing colour, and had compassion. “But what is your other reason?” he enquired.

“Only think, I brought from the palace yesterday Buffon’s * Epochs of Nature.’ The Prince has got it secretly, because it is on the censor’s list — I don’t know why, perhaps because it does not entirely agree with the Bible.”

“I should not mind that,” said Cirillo smiling, “provided only that it agrees with common sense.”

“Well, that was the least important of my reasons, so I have said most about it. The other is before your eyes. What think you of the countenance opposite?”

“Why, that it is always a charming countenance, but to-day seems a little tired. Perhaps madame was frightened last night?”

Frightened? Why?” enquired San Felice.

“Did nothing happen to alarm you last night, madame?” asked Cirillo.

“No, nothing at all,” said Luisa, with an imploring glance.

“Then,” said Cirillo, carelessly, “I conclude you had only a bad night.”

“Yes!” said her husband laughing; “she had terrible dreams, and yet when I came home from the Embassy she was sound asleep. I went into her room and kissed her, and she never awoke!”

“At what time was that?”

“About half-past two.”

“That explains it,” said Cirillo: “it was all over by then.”

“But what was all over?”

“Only this,” said Cirillo. “A man was assassinated at your gate last night, but as you did not come home till late, and madame was asleep, I conclude you have heard nothing.”

“No. This is the first I hear of it. Unfortunately, assassinations are not uncommon in Naples, particularly here. Mergellina is badly lighted, and the people go to bed at nine. Ah! so that is why you pay us an early visit.”

“Just so. This was not quite a common-place murder, and as it happened under your windows, I thought I should like to know if it had caused any trouble here.”

“No — as you see. But how do you know about it?”

“I must have passed your door just after it happened. The man — he must have been both brave and strong — had killed two of the police and wounded two others.”

“What!” said San Felice, lowering his voice, “did the assassins belong to the police?”

“They were led by Pasquale di Simone,” answered Cirillo, also in a whisper.

“Do you believe all these scandals?” asked San Felice.

“Unfortunately, I am compelled to believe them. Look, do you see that bier at the door of a house beyond the fountain? It is for the wounded man who died there. I did what I could for him, and he told me all.”

Luisa understood - that Cirillo’s words were intended for her. She clasped her hands in great agitation. Cirillo gave her a reassuring glance, and continued:

“I am only too thankful that neither you nor Madame heard anything of this. But as I see madame does not look well, I should like to ask her a few questions, and as sometimes we are obliged to touch on delicate subjects, perhaps you will allow us to go into another room.”

“Oh! quite unnecessary, doctor. I am twenty minutes late as it is. I must be off to my library. You can talk to Luisa as much as you will. Adieu, my dear child; tell the doctor anything he wants to know, and remember you are the joy of my life. Good heavens! it is a quarter past ten already! “And he bestowed a hasty kiss on Luisa, caught up his hat and umbrella and hastened away. Cirillo did not wait to see him leave the garden. Turning to Luisa:

“He is here, is he not?” he asked in a tone of great anxiety.

“Yes, yes,” she answered, sinking on her knees before him.

“Dead or alive?”

“He is alive.”

“Heaven be praised,” cried Cirillo. “But you, Luisa.”

“But what of me?” she asked, trembling. “May you be for ever blessed!” exclaimed Cirillo, raising and embracing her. And he threw himself into a chair, in his turn overcome by emotion. Luisa only understood that she had saved the life of someone dear to her friend, but she poured out a glass of water and brought it him. Cirillo drank and recovered himself. “Now,” he said, springing up, “let us lose no time. Where is he?”

“There,” said Luisa, pointing down the corridor, and as Cirillo moved towards it, “Wait,” she said, “and listen to me; there is something you must hear first.”

t “I am listening,” said Cirillo, smiling; “he is not at the last gasp, is he?”

“No, thank heaven! I even believe he is as well as he can be. But hear me,” she said in her sweet voice, placing her hands on his shoulders, “I did not dare to send for you because you are my husband’s friend, and I felt sure that he ought not to know this. Neither did I dare to trust an important secret to a doctor I did not know, for there is a secret behind all this, is there not?”

“You are right; there is a terrible secret.”

“And a royal one too, is it not?”

“Hush! Who told you that?”

“Michael, my foster-brother, was here, and recognised Pasquale di Simone. But what I also wanted to say was that, not daring to send for a doctor, I allowed an old woman who chanced to be here to do what she could. “Has she any medical knowledge?” asked Cirillo. “She professes to be able to treat wounds. My foster-brother — ’ Mad Michael ‘the people call him.”

“You must be careful,” interrupted Cirillo; “he is a furious Royalist, whose only idea is to slaughter Jacobins.”

“Yes, but he would never betray a secret in which I was concerned.”

“That is possible. Our lazzaroni are a strange mixture of good and evil, only the evil comes uppermost in most of them. But you were saying.”

“Michael had brought an Albanian gipsy here, to tell my fortune. I assure you it was his idea, not mine. She told me all sorts of foolish things, and as she was here when this trouble occurred, she used herbs to stop the bleeding and put on a dressing.”

“You are sure she bore no ill-will to the young man?” asked Cirillo anxiously. “She might have used something poisonous.”

“Oh no! She did not know him, and seemed much interested in the case. He is terribly weak, but seemed relieved when the dressing was put on.”

“These women,” said Cirillo as if speaking to himself, “sometimes have wonderful knowledge, and medical science owes a good deal to them. Only, Luisa,” he added, “they are often dangerously jealous, and she might do harm if she thought another doctor interfered. Try to get her out of the way while I see the wounded man.”

“That is just what I feared,” said Lusia, “but now you know, I will leave you in another room and find some excuse for sending Nanno away. Come then.”

She led the way through a long suite of apartments, and came to the door leading into the adjoining house.

“Ah!” exclaimed Cirillo, “this is excellent. I understand now. He is not in your house at all, but in the Duchess Fusco’s. It is most providential.”

“And,” said Luisa, “he must be hidden?-”

“From everybody without exception. His presence in this house, even though it is not yours, would, if known, compromise your husband most fatally.”

“Ah!” cried Luisa joyfully; “then I was right in keeping all this a complete secret?”

“Quite right, and I will only add to reassure you that if this young man were discovered and arrested it would be a question, not only of his life, but of yours, your husband’s, mine, and of many other lives much more valuable than mine.”

“No one’s life could be more valuable than yours, doctor. Here we are at the door. Will you remain here and I will go in?”

Cirillo stood aside, and Luisa entered noiselessly. To her surprise only Nina was there, who was applying the juice of Nanno’s herbs to the wound by means of a small sponge. She explained that Nanno had said all was going well, and that she could do no more and had business elsewhere, and that Michael, anticipating disturbances in the Old Market, where he was a person of consequence, had likewise departed.

“Come in, doctor,” said Luisa, “the field is quite clear.”

Cirillo entered. The wounded man was lying on a bed with his chest uncovered except for the dressing which was kept in its place over the wound by a linen bandage taken crosswise over the shoulders, and was continually moistened by the sponge which Nina held. Salvato, hearing Luisa, opened his eyes, and his countenance assumed an expression of happiness which almost effaced that of suffering. He looked doubtfully at Cirillo, then recognising him, murmured his name and held out his hand, then sank back exhausted.

Cirillo signed to him to keep quite still, and carefully examined the dressing and the remains of the pounded herbs, recognising an astringent compound of fumitory, plantain and southernwood.

“This is well,” he said to Luisa, “you can continue your old gipsy’s preparation. I might not have ordered it myself, but I could have done nothing better.” In fact, the wound appeared perfectly healthy and on the way to healing; the pulse, though very weak, was regular. Cirillo listened to the respiration, and seemed to find it satisfactory. “How do you feel, Salvato?” he enquired.

“Very weak, but very comfortable,” was the answer. “I think I could remain like this for ever.”

“Bravo!” said Cirillo; “the voice is better than I could have hoped. The old woman has done splendidly. I think you can perhaps answer a few questions; they are important. At any other time I would have spared you the exertion, and if Luisa can answer them, you must let her do so.”

“Is your name Luisa?” said Salvato. “It was one of my mother’s names also. God has granted that she who gave me life and she who has saved it should bear the same name, and I thank Him for it.”

“My friend,” said Cirillo, “you must be more sparing of your words. I blame myself, as it is, for each word I let you utter. Do not speak at all unless you are obliged. At what time did he recover consciousness?” he continued, addressing Luisa.

“At five o’clock,” she answered quickly; “the sun was just rising.”

Salvato smiled, the first rays of daylight had shown him Luisa.

“What did you think on finding yourself here in a strange place with unknown persons.”

“I thought I was dead, and that one of God’s angels had come to take me to Heaven.”

Luisa endeavoured to hide behind Cirillo, but Salvato put out his hand so quickly that Cirillo stopped her and made her remain in sight. “He took you for the Angel of Death,” he said; “you must prove, on the contrary, that you are the Angel of Life.” Luisa sighed and came nearer the bed. Her glance met Salvato’s, and henceforward the two pairs of eyes saw only one another.

“Have you any idea as to who your assassins might be?” asked Cirillo.

“I know,” said Luisa promptly. “I told you, they were the queen’s men.”

Salvato assented with a nod.

“And can you guess their motive?”

“They told me themselves,” said Salvato, “they wanted the papers I was carrying, which were in the pocket of the coat Nicolino lent me.”

“Did they get them?”

“I believe they were taking them when I fainted away.”

“May I examine your coat?”

Salvato nodded, but Luisa interposed:

“I will get it if you like,” she said, “but I know the pockets are all empty.” And answering Cirillo’s silent look of surprise, she continued: “The first thing we did was to try to ascertain who our guest was. If he had a mother or sister in Naples, it would have been my duty to let them know at any risk. We found nothing, Nina, did we?”

“There was absolutely nothing, madame.”

“What were these papers which are now in your enemy’s hands? Do you know the contents, Salvato?”

“There was only one — the letter from General Championnet enjoining the French Ambassador to maintain as friendly relations between the two

States as possible for the reason that he himself was not in a position to make war.”

“Did he mention the patriots who were in communication with him?”

“Yes, the Ambassador was asked to calm them down as much as possible.”

“Were any names mentioned?”

“No.”

“You are quite certain?”

“I am perfectly certain.”

Exhausted by the effort of speaking, Salvato turned very pale and closed his eyes. Luisa uttered a cry, thinking he had fainted. Salvato opened his eyes again, and a smile — was it gratitude or love? — lit up his countenance.

“It is nothing, madame,” he said; “nothing at all.”

“Not another word,” said Cirillo, “I know now all I want to know. If it concerned my life only, I would not have let you speak at all, but you know there are others as well, and you will forgive me.”

Salvato took the doctor’s hand and pressed it so as to prove that his energy had not forsaken him. “Now,” said Cirillo, “keep silence and calm yourself; the danger is not as great as I feared it might have been.”

“But the General,” said the patient, ignoring the orders just given, “the General. He must know what he will have to do.”

“The General,” said Cirillo, “will receive either a messenger or a message within three days. He will know that you are wounded dangerously though not mortally, that you are safe from the Neapolitan police, that you have a nurse whom you at first took for an angel, and, finally, that every wounded man would like to be in your place, and would only beg his doctor not to get him well too quickly.”

Cirillo went to a writing-table and proceeded to write a prescription, which he gave to Nina, telling her to take it at once.

Meanwhile, Salvato felt for Luisa’s hand, and clasped it in his own. She, blushing, allowed it to remain until Cirillo called her to him. In a low voice he said: Care for this young man as a sister cares for her brother, nay, more, care as a mother cares for her child. No one, not even San Felice, must know of his presence here. Providence has confided a precious life to your hands, and you will have to account to Providence.”

Luisa hung her head and sighed. Her own heart pleaded for the sufferer quite as tenderly as any words of Cirillo's. "I will come again the day after tomorrow," continued the doctor. "Do not send for me unless there is something serious; the police are sure to keep an eye on my movements. There is nothing to do but to continue the treatment and avoid all agitation. Remember it is you who are unwell, and you that I come to see."

"But," murmured Luisa, "if my husband knew."

"In that case I will take all the blame," answered Cirillo.

Luisa breathed more freely. Nina returned with the prescription, and aided Cirillo in placing freshly-bruised herbs on the wound. He replaced the bandage, again advised perfect quiet, and feeling much re-assured, took leave.

That evening Hector Caraffa left Naples in disguise, taking the same mountain paths as before. He reached the frontier in safety, and hastened to Rome in order to inform Championnet of the misfortunes of his aide-decamp, and to consult as to what measures should be taken.

CHAPTER VII.

FRA PACIFICO.

MICHAEL'S anticipations were not disappointed; there was indeed a great tumult in the Old Market, that uproarious quarter where Masaniello began his revolution, and where all the commotions which have agitated Naples during the last five hundred years have had their origin, just as all the earthquakes which have shaken Résina, Portici and Torre del Greco have proceeded from Vesuvius.

About six o'clock in the morning of that day the "questing "or collecting brother of the Convent of St. Éphrem was as usual driving his ass before him and descending the long street leading from the convent gate. Both the monk and the ass were in their way remarkable, particularly the monk, who was known to the world as Fra Pacifico. He was a man of about forty years, and six feet in height, muscular and powerful. He wore the brown capuchin robe and hood, and the regulation sandals with wooden soles, which clattered between his feet and the pavement. His head was strictly tonsured, and his waist encircled by the miraculous cord of St. Francis with its three knots, betokening the threefold vow of poverty, chastity and obedience. His beard was black and thick, and his eyes had that terrible expression found in France only in the natives of Nimes and Avignon, and in Italy among the mountaineers of the Abruzzi, descendants of those fierce Samnites whom the Romans conquered with the utmost difficulty, or of the Marsii whom they never conquered at all.

Fra Pacifico had begun life as a sailor, and was then known as Francis Esposito (the Foundling). He was on board the Minerva, commanded by Caracciolo, when the expedition to Toulon in aid of the French Royalists took place. When the tables were unexpectedly turned by Bonaparte's capture of the forts and turning their guns on the allied fleets, Caracciolo ordered every stitch of canvas to be set, and Esposito, one of the most active sailors, was sent aloft to get the top-gallant sail spread. He was accomplishing his task satisfactorily when a cannon ball cut away the yard on which he was standing and left him hanging by his hands to the loose sail above him. He could feel the sail giving way, and had to choose between attempting to swing himself clear of the ship into the sea, or falling on the deck and being killed. He chose the former, first making a vow to his patron saint, St. Francis, that should he escape he would forsake the sea and become a monk. Profiting by the rolling of the vessel, he chose a favourable moment and dropped some sixty feet into the sea, and, as luck would have it, within three yards of a boat which Caracciolo had ordered to be on the look out, and rose to find willing hands and oars extended to help him. He was promptly dragged into the boat and put on board again, but when Caracciolo congratulated him on his escape, he appeared so absent-minded that the admiral enquired what was the matter. Esposito told him of his vow, adding that some great evil would befall him in either this world or the next were he prevented from accomplishing it. Caracciolo promised that on their return to Naples he should be set free to fulfil his vow, but on one condition. The day after he had taken the final vows and become a full-fledged monk, he was to return to the ship, wearing the habit of his order, and again perform the wonderful leap which had saved his life, having a boat and crew again in attendance to pick him up as before. Esposito accepted willingly, declaring himself certain that St, Francis would not hesitate to come to his aid a second time, whereupon the admiral ordered him a double ration of grog, and gave him leave to remain in his hammock for the next twenty-four hours. Esposito thanked him, swallowed the grog, and went to sleep in the midst of the infernal uproar made by the furious cannonade from the three forts, in consequence of which the allied ships were making for the open sea as fast as they could, aided by the light of the burning arsenal. In spite of the hostile guns and the terrible storm which overtook the fleet as soon as it was clear of the harbour, Caracciolo brought the Minerva back to Naples with comparatively small damage, and once there, duly signed the dismissal of Francis Esposito, reminding him again of the condition attached, which the sailor again promised to observe.

On the Feast of St. Francis, October 4th, 1794, Caracciolo, who by that time had completely forgotten Esposito and all about him, was on board his ship, which, fully dressed, was firing salutes in honour of the Prince Royal, whose name-day it was, when the new monk saluted the admiral and reported himself thus: “I am here, my admiral. I come to keep my word.”

“It is the word of a good sailor,” replied Caracciolo. “On which side do you mean to leap?”

“To larboard, as before. Besides, it is the side to the quay, and one must not disappoint these good people.”

“Lower a boat there,” cried the admiral, “to larboard.” And willing to make the scene as imposing as possible, he took his trumpet and ordered: “Man the yards.”

In an instant two hundred sailors were seen climbing upward like so many monkeys, while the marines quickly fell into battle array on the deck facing the harbour. The spectators on shore clapped their hands, waved their handkerchiefs, and shouted: “Long live St. Francis; long live Caracciolo,” while twelve boats manned by the monks drew up in a long semi-circle beyond the Minerva.

Caracciolo glanced at his former sailor, and said: “Have you anything to ask in case things go badly?”

“I would ask your excellency to have a mass said for the repose of my soul. The monks have promised me hundreds, but I know them! Once dead, not one would hold out a finger to help me out of Purgatory.”

“I will have not one, but ten, said for you.”

“Thanks, my admiral. I am ready.”

“Attention!” cried Caracciolo in a voice which reechoed even from the shore itself. This was followed by the shrill sounds of the boatswain’s whistle, which had hardly died away when Fra Pacifico sprang into the rigging, and, notwithstanding his robe, climbed upward with an agility which proved that the sailor was by no means lost in the monk. Mounting rapidly from yard to yard, he ascended even higher than he had promised, and crying “May St. Francis grant me his help,” sprang forthwith into the sea.

A cry of mingled terror, wonder and admiration came from the gazing crowd, excited by the emotion always caused by the brave performance of a deed in which a man’s life is at stake.

It was followed by a dead silence, all waiting anxiously to see if the diver would re-appear. Three seconds, which to the expectant crowd seemed three ages, passed without a sound; then the tonsured head appeared and a formidable voice cried, “Long live St. Francis!”

In another minute the attendant boat reached the monk and hauled him triumphantly on board. The twelve boat-loads of capuchins with one voice thundered out a Te Deum, the crew of the Minerva gave three vigorous cheers, and the spectators on shore applauded with the true Neapolitan frenzy which hails any success whatever, but most particularly the triumph of some favourite saint or madonna.- Needless to say that the capuchins of St. Éphrem immediately became the popular favourites, and Fra Pacifico the popular hero of Naples.

Naturally, the quest promptly improved under the new "questor." At first the brother started, as did all the other questing monks, with a simple wallet on his back. But at the end of an hour the wallet overflowed. The next day he took two, and the second was filled in the second hour. Thereupon, Fra Pacifico informed his superiors that if he had an ass he would be able to go much further and bring back food of every kind and of the first quality.

The heads of the convent assembled and solemnly deliberated on the suggestion, which was unanimously approved, and the ass was voted by common consent. Fifty francs were handed over to Fra Pacifico with the permission to choose and buy the animal himself.

This resolution was passed on Sunday, and on Monday Fra Pacifico betook himself to the animal market, and soon decided on a sturdy "Neddy "from the Abruzzi. The owner, however, demanded a hundred francs, which the animal, in fact, was worth. Fra Pacifico reminded him that he had only to lay his cord on its back saying "St. Francis," and the ass would become the saint's property without more ado, in which case there would be no occasion to pay even the fifty francs so benevolently offered. The unfortunate dealer recognized the claims of St. Francis, but assured the monk that his choice was a most unlucky one, that this ass in particular combined all the faults of the whole family of asses in general, being greedy, obstinate, idle, given to kicking and rolling, objecting to carry anything on his back, and in short so evilly disposed that the only name found suitable to him had been "Jacobino."

Fra Pacifico uttered an exclamation of joy. All Naples was aware of the hatred which he bore to the very name of "Jacobino." From time to time the old Adam re-appeared in him, and he felt an intense longing to quarrel, curse and fight as in his unregenerate days. A vicious donkey called "Jacobino "would be the saving of him; he would at least have something to beat! In attacking, insulting, cursing an animal with such a name he would insult and curse the whole Jacobin party, which, judging by cropped heads and variegated pantaloons, seemed to be gaining ground in Naples. The name settled the matter, and the more the dealer tried to put him off, the more determined he became, until at length, fearing to lose even the fifty francs offered, the dealer gave way, and the ass became the property of St. Francis.

Whether out of sympathy for the old master or dislike to the new, Jacobino appeared resolved to justify his name. Fra Pacifico took the halter in order to lead him away, but the ass planted his feet firmly in the ground and absolutely refused to move. All the monk's efforts were in vain until he suddenly remembered that when cruising on the African coast he had seen camels led by a cord passed through the nostril. He promptly acted on his idea, and when the cord was next pulled Jacobino uttered a snort of pain and unwillingly followed where he was led. Arrived at home, Fra Pacifico's first care was to provide himself with a stout stick, and what afterwards occurred remained unknown. But the next day the brother with his staff, and the donkey duly bearing his partniers, sallied forth side by side, apparently on friendly terms with each other, except that Jacobino's hide bore marks which showed that the good understanding had not been attained without considerable protest on his part.

Fra Pacifico kept his word, and brought back such a profusion of meat, fish, vegetables, and provisions generally that the brothers were able not merely to feed themselves, but to keep a miniature market at their gates of the food they were unable to consume. Nearly four years had passed thus, and the monk and his ass still enjoyed undiminished popularity. In fact, Fra Pacifico had arrived at the point of no longer begging for what he wanted, he simply touched the article with his cord and there the matter ended. If the dealer appeared discontented, the friar produced a horn snuff-box, offered him a pinch of snuff, and generally succeeded in soothing him. But if this were insufficient, then Fra Pacifico's bronze cheeks became pale, his terrible eyes flashed lightning, and he handled his staff in a manner which promptly appeased even the most obstinate person who failed in giving willing honours to Saint Francis and his messenger.

On this particular day Fra Pacifico arrived at the Old Market and made his usual collection. As he proceeded he became aware that something unusual must have occurred. Men stood in groups talking, women whispered together, children played unheeded, and more remarkable still, no one paid much attention to himself. Being still in want of meat, he made his way to the butchers' quarter, where the crowd seemed yet more dense and more excited, and he heard the words "French" and "Jacobins" muttered in angry tones. The particular shop which he intended to tax that morning was crowded with men and women talking and gesticulating violently. They made way for him, however, and the mistress of the shop, exclaiming that God must have sent him, rushed out and led him into the back room, where her husband, the “beccaio,” was lying on his bed with one cheek laid entirely open by a sabre cut.

The unfortunate man either could not, or would not, give much information. But he had murmured “Jacobins “and “French,” which were enough to cause the wildest conjectures, especially when it became known that another man had been killed, and that two others were wounded, one of whom had died in the night. Everyone had something to say on the subject, but when it was declared that the butcher and his three friends had been peaceably going home after a supper at a tavern, and had been attacked by a gang of fifteen Jacobins near the Lion’s Fountain, our friend Mad Michael, who had been quietly listening and leaning against the door-post, smiled and shrugged his shoulders, as if to say that he knew better, and could tell a good deal if he chose.

“Why do you laugh at us?” asked a friend of his, generally known as the “Popinjay,”

“do you know so much more than we do?”

“It is not difficult to know more than you, Popinjay, who cannot even read.”

“If I cannot read,” replied the other, “it is because I have not had the chance. You have a foster sister who is rich and is the wife of a learned man, but you need not despise your friends on that account.”

“I do not despise you at all. You are a good and brave fellow, and if I had anything to tell I would tell it to you.”

And very likely Michael might have been as good as his word, had not a heavy hand been laid on his shoulder. Michael turned round and started in terror. Behind him stood the dreaded Pasquale di Simone.

“If indeed you know something about this affair, which I doubt,” Pasquale muttered in his ear, “and if you mention this something to any living soul whatever, you will certainly deserve your nickname of ‘Mad Michael.’ It would be wiser to go and look after your Assunta — she is in the church of the Madonna del Carmine — than to stop here and talk about things you have not seen, and which would only bring you ill-luck if you had.”

"You are right, signor," answered Michael, trembling all over. "I will go at once." And he retired hastily in the direction indicated, saying to himself, "No, indeed, I will not say a word. Master Cutthroat may be sure of that. Still, it is enough to make the dumb talk to hear about fifteen men attacking these assassins, when they were six to one themselves. I don't love Jacobins, but I love the secret police even less."

Arrived at the church, Michael had some difficulty in discovering his beloved among the crowd of worshippers, but at last found her kneeling before the altar of St. Francis. Assunta was the daughter of an old fisherman called Basso-Tomeo, who did not regard Michael's suit with any favour, and had told him he would never give him his daughter until he had some honest and lucrative calling, or had inherited a fortune. Michael replied that in Naples no calling could be at once honest and lucrative, and pointed out that Basso-Tomeo and his three sons spent eighteen hours a day in the exercise of their own perfectly honest trade, and in the fifty years that the father had been at it had never succeeded in saving as much as fifty ducats. He therefore waited in hopes of the heritage, and meanwhile, as Basso-Tomeo and his sons perforce spent the six hours which remained to them in sleep, there was no great difficulty in his seeing Assunta.

The fishing during the last three days had been so desperately bad that old Tomeo had made a vow to burn twelve tapers at the altar of St. Francis, and had ordered his daughter to spend the whole morning in prayer before the altar, where Michael at length found her. She beckoned to him to come and kneel beside her, and, as the nets would have been drawn by that time, they ventured to intersperse the prayers with a little loverlike conversation. Assunta explained her presence in the church, and Michael in return told her of the affray at the Lion's Fountain and the general commotion in the Old Market, whereupon Assunta, true daughter of Eve, quickly finished her prayers, made her reverence to the altar, dipped her finger in the holy water and offered the same to Michael, then took his arm and hurried away to see for herself what might be happening.

The old fisherman's trust in St. Francis had not been misplaced; the catch had indeed been a marvellous one. The nets were so heavy that at first the fishers greatly feared lest they might be bringing a dead body to the surface — a terrible omen; but as the nets rose more and more it became evident that they contained large fish which were making desperate efforts to escape. Two of the sons leaped into the water, which was up to their necks, and succeeded in getting behind the net and holding it up while Tomeo and the other brother exerted themselves to drag the net on to the shore, where a large crowd quickly assembled to see the result of the night’s work. It really seemed as if the saint had, in acknowledgment of the twelve tapers, bestowed on his votaries specimens of every sort of fish found in the Bay. Chief among them was a magnificent tunny, so large and heavy that it seemed as if only a miracle could have prevented his breaking through the net, and thereby opening a way of escape for the rest. The old man was overwhelmed with joy, and recounted to the lookers on how the catch was entirely due to the favour of St. Francis. The hearers crossed themselves, and cries of “All hail to St. Francis “echoed along the shore.

All this took place in front of a fine house overlooking the quay, which was known as the Palazzo della Torre, and which belonged to the duke of that name. A young man elegantly dressed, with hair unpowdered and cut short in the Parisian style, stood at one of the first-floor windows and idly surveyed the crowd beneath him. He was Don Clemente Filomarino, the duke’s younger brother, in disfavour with the Court on account of his liberal opinions. He had, in fact, been recently imprisoned during eighteen months, which, far from causing him to alter his views, had only strengthened them. Having been declared innocent, he rashly concluded he had nothing to fear, and had become one of the habitués of the French Embassy.

His imprisonment had nearly driven his elder brother frantic. The duke, fully twenty-five years older than Don Clemente, had two objects in life. He loved his brother, who had been left an orphan at five years old, with an overpowering devotion, and he was a most enthusiastic collector. The Royal Library itself contained nothing that could compete with the duke’s nearly perfect set of Elzevirs, and his collection of autographs was the finest in the world. That very morning he had received information that one of the Elzevirs, hitherto wanting on his shelves, had been found, and he hastened off to the bookseller who announced the fact in order to secure the precious volume. On his way downstairs he entered his brother’s room in order to impart this excellent piece of news, and bade him an affectionate farewell. Don Clemente returned to his window, from whence he could observe the excitement caused by Tomeo’s wonderful catch, and could also see something which the fisherman, surrounded by an admiring crowd, could not see.

Down the quay came Fra Pacifico driving his ass, marching proudly in the middle of the pavement, and taking a line which must infallibly bring him into collision with the freshly-caught heap of fish. Finding the crowd in his way, he cried, “Room for St. Francis. Room!”

The crowd divided. Basso-Tomeo grew pale, knowing what would happen. Fra Pacifico, who had hitherto found no fish worth taking, smiled with delight. He laid his cord on the splendid tunny, and pronounced the dreaded words:

“In the name of St. Francis.”

The old fisherman at first seemed inclined to dispute the matter, but on second thoughts stepped back, and said meekly, “St. Francis gave it. St. Francis takes it. Hail to St. Francis. The fish is yours, Father I”

“Oh fool!” exclaimed Don Clemente from above. And as the crowd looked up, not knowing whom he addressed, he continued; “Yes, I mean you, Basso-Tomeo. You and your sons are honest hard working-men, and you allow the fruits of your labour to be extorted from you by an idle, impudent knave of a monk.”

Fra Pacifico, finding himself thus suddenly attacked, uttered a howl of rage and shook his staff at Don Clemente.

“Keep your stick for your ass, monk; it will not frighten anyone else.”

“I warn you, signor dandy, that my ass is called ‘Jacobino. ‘“

“Then the donkey has got the name of a man, and his driver the name of the ass!”

The crowd laughed. Fra Pacifico, more furious than ever, assailed Don Clemente with the worst names he could think of.

“He is a Jacobin! My brothers, do you not see he is a Jacobin with his short hair and trousers. Jacobin! Jacobin!”

“As much as you like, I am proud of being one. Do you know what a Jacobin is?”

“He is a demagogue, a republican, a regicide.”

“In Italy he is an honest man who loves his country, and who thinks it unfair that when a poor fisherman, who has worked hard all night, has for once in his life taken a valuable fish, it should be taken from him by a man — no, a monk — a man is one who helps his neigh-hours and not one who steals from them, one who works for his wife and children, and not one who lives in idleness at the expense of others. A Jacobin desires equality, that is to say, the same laws for both poor and rich, liberty for all alike, and who considers other men as his brothers. Yes, that is what Jacobin means, and I am proud to be one.”

“You hear,” cried the furious monk; “he insults the Church, and he insults St. Francis! He is an Atheist!”

“What is that?” enquired various voices. “A man who does not believe in God, nor in the Madonna, nor in Jesus Christ, nor in the miracle of Saint Januarius!”

A cry of anger rose from the crowd, and clenched fists were shaken in Don Clemente’s direction. The monk produced his last and most telling invective

“And who is also a friend of the French!”

“And you,” cried Don Clemente, “are asses for whom panniers can never be made too large, nor burdens too heavy.”

He closed the window. But a shower of stones came hurtling through the air, and the glass fell in fragments. One piece caught Don Clemente on the cheek and cut it. Furiously angry, he caught up his loaded gun and shouted, “Who threw that stone?”

“I,” answered a short thick-set man, crossing his arms on his breast, “I, Gaetano Mammone.” It was a name which later acquired a terrible celebrity as belonging to a brutal savage who boasted that he drank the blood of his victims.

Don Clemente took aim and fired; the gun only flashed in the pan.

“A miracle!” cried the monk, taking away the fish on his ass. Two hundred voices re-echoed the cry, but above them all rose Mammone’s:

“Kill the Jacobin! Kill the Atheist! Kill the Frenchman!”

Don Clemente fired again into the crowd. This time a man fell. The imprudent young man’s fate was now sealed, and he saw that nothing remained but to sell his life as dearly as possible. The mob rushed in at the great gates of the palace, others brought a ladder and attacked Don Clemente’s window. He knocked down the first who mounted with the butt end of his gun, and shot the two next; but what could one man do against an infuriated crowd. The door behind him was soon broken down, and he was overwhelmed and surrounded by a crowd of savages, all armed with knives and daggers. Others had mounted to the floor above, and were carrying out their work of destruction on inanimate objects. The duke’s library was sacked, and precious volumes, manuscripts, autographs were flung into the street, where, mixed up with broken furniture and wood brought from the quays, they were formed into a funeral pile, on the top of which they flung Don Clemente's inanimate body and prepared to consume it.

The duke, returning triumphant with his precious volume, saw from a distance a large crowd in front of his palace, and as he drew nearer, discovered that a cascade of books and papers was descending from the upper windows like a flight of birds. He sprang out of his carriage, and uttering inarticulate cries, forced his way through the crowd with a strength hitherto unknown. At length he reached the centre, and saw the mangled body of his beloved brother lying on a pile composed of every sort of débris.

"Ah! Wretched traitors and cowardly murderers!" he cried to the throng, "at least we can die together," and he threw himself on his brother's body and clasped it in his arms.

The crowd shouted for joy. Instead of one insensible victim they had now two. The pyre burnt slowly, and i only at the end of three hours did the crowd begin to disperse.

Thus perished the Duke della Torre and his brother, the first victims of the outbreaks of popular fury at Naples. —

The arms of the city of azure sky and sea are a mare "passant." True daughter of the savage horses of Diomed, -she has often demanded and been regaled on human flesh.

CHAPTER VIII.

GENERAL CHAMPIONNET.

WHILE Hector Caraffa was making his way along little-used mountain paths, Garat, the French ambassador, was travelling as fast as four horses could take him on the high road between Naples and Rome. The high road, unfortunately, was a very bad one, but as it must be a very ill wind which suits no one, this circumstance brought much profit to Don Antonio della Rota, so called on account of the nobility of Spanish descent which he claimed, and also on account of his profession — (“Rota “meaning a wheel) — which was that of chief wheelwright in the little post town of Itri, where, once upon a time, Horace supped with Capiton and slept at Murena’s. Don Antonio had very wisely established himself close to the posting-house, and opposite the little hotel, which, by calling itself “The Rest of Horace,” claimed to occupy the site where Murena’s house had stood. At this particular date a marriage festival was in progress, Antonio’s daughter Francesca being about to espouse her father’s foreman, Peppino, and the young people of the village were dancing to the sound of a guitar and two tambourines, while their elders talked and drank and looked on.

Leaning against a wall which divided the wheelwright’s premises from those of his neighbour, the harness-maker, was a young man of about two and twenty, who also looked on, and whose presence, judging by the glances cast in his direction, was regarded with

extreme disfavour both by Antonio and bride and bridegroom. He was tall and fair, apparently half peasant, half townsman, while the soft wide-brimmed hat lying on the wall beside him seemed to imply a clerical education. He was the youngest son of a family named Pezza, whose parents had always intended him for the Church, and who, when he had acquired the arts of reading and writing, had obtained for him a place as server in the church at Itri, an employment which caused him to be known as Fra Michael.

For some years the boy acolyte was a model of devotion, but, as he grew older, worldly desires awoke in him, and when he became eighteen he announced, to the great grief of his parents, that he would serve the Church no longer, and entered the service of Giansimone, the harness-maker, as apprentice. Here he applied himself, not only to his trade, but to quietly acquiring the various accomplishments from which his education had debarred him. It was said that he had become the best shot in the village, and could make formidable play with his knife, while the village maidens would stop under his window to listen while he played the guitar. But the one and only girl whom he wished to attract remained wholly insensible, and she was Francesca, Antonio's daughter.

The wheelwright was not long in noticing young Pezza's devotion to his daughter. Francesca, interrogated on the subject, said she had nothing against Michael, but she wished to marry Peppino, which suited her father's views also, and the pair were betrothed. Antonio then betook himself to his neighbour, and asked him to dismiss Michael. Giansimone promised to do so, but the task was not an easy one. Michael worked well, and there was absolutely no cause of complaint against him. Week after week passed, and at length Giansimone, urged by Antonio, summoned up his courage and gave Michael notice to leave without delay. Michael simply refused to go, saying that although there was no formal contract between them, there was a verbal agreement, which would be binding to honourable men, and as long as there was no fault proved against him, he had a perfect right to remain.

"But if I order you to go," said Giansimone.

"If you turn me out that would be another matter."

"Then you would go?"

"I would go, yes; but you would have treated me with unmerited injustice. It would be an unpardonable insult, and — as sure as my name is Michael Pezza — I should kill you for it."

"I believe you would," cried the harness-maker, drawing back.

"Well, my dear master," said the young man, having had the luck to get an apprentice who is neither idle, nor dishonest, nor a drunkard, would it not be better to tell Don Antonio that you are too honourable to drive away a poor lad who deserves nothing but praise?"

"I think it would be better," said Giansimone.

"And also more prudent. Let us shake hands upon it."

The two clasped hands, and Michael resumed his work as quietly as if nothing had happened. But the next day, which was Sunday, he dressed carefully and went as usual to mass, where he met his father and mother. Having escorted them home, Michael asked and obtained their consent to his marriage with Francesca should her father and she be willing to accept him; and then betook himself to Don Antonio’s house in order to make his proposal in due form.

He found Antonio in company with Francesca and Peppino, and their astonishment at his appearance was so evident, and their conversation came to such an abrupt termination, that it was clear his visit was as unwelcome as it was unexpected. Giansimone had never dared to tell Antonio of his failure in dismissing his apprentice, and had merely begged him to have patience and wait another week. Michael saluted all three courteously, and asked permission to speak to Antonio in private.

Antonio agreed with some hesitation, and signed to the others to leave the room. They went out arm-in-arm, laughing in Michael’s face as they went. But whatever torture the latter felt he made no sign.

“Sir,” said Michael when the door had closed behind them, “it is perhaps unnecessary to tell you that I love your daughter.”

“Why tell me this?” replied Antonio scornfully.

“Because I come to ask her hand in marriage.”

The wheelwright burst into a roar of laughter. “What,” he said, “does Signor Michael Pezza honour Don Antonio by asking his daughter in marriage?”

“I do not think I am doing Don Antonio any particular honour,” replied Michael calmly. “I think the honour is reciprocal, and I know well you will refuse me.”

“Why expose yourself to a refusal then?”

“Simply to satisfy my conscience.”

Don Antonio laughed again, then catching a glimpse of Michael’s meaning. “To satisfy your conscience,” he repeated, “does that mean that if I do not consents some misfortune will happen?”

“Precisely,” replied Michael with Spartan brevity.

“And what is likely to happen?”

“God knows,” said the young man. “I can tell you only this. As long as I live, Francesca shall never be the wife of another.”

“Go to, you are mad!” exclaimed Antonio.

“I am not mad, but I am going,” said Michael. Half way to the door he stopped. “Remember,” he said, “that God punishes not the mad, but those who drove them to madness.” He then returned to Giansimone’s house, shut himself up in his room, and gave way to blank despair. Two hours later someone knocked at his door. He opened it and found one of his comrades, who kindly invited him to come and play at bowls, giving as a reason that a person who was unhappy needed amusement.

“Am I unhappy to-day then?” asked Michael.

“I should suppose so. People are generally unhappy when they are in love and are refused the girl they want.”

“You know that then?”

“All the town know it, and on good authority. Peppino told us himself.’’

“Ah! What did Peppino say?”

“He said: ‘Fra Michael came to Don Antonio to ask Francesca in marriage, and was sent away with a flea in his ear.’”

“Indeed! Did he say anything else? ‘“Yes. He said:’ If that is not enough, I can give him one in the other ear.’”

“You are right,” said Michael, assuring himself that his knife was safe in his pocket; “I want some amusement; let us go and have a game.”

The two went quietly out together, and soon reached a wide avenue of plane trees, used as a promenade by the elders of Itri, and as a playground by the younger people. At least twenty different groups were playing various games, amongst which bowls appeared to be the favourite. Michael looked for Peppino, and at last found him in the set furthest from the promenade. He walked straight up to him. Peppino, who was discussing a throw, saw him, and in spite of himself, shrank before the blue lightning of his rival’s eyes.

“That you, Michael?” he said. “I thought you never played at bowls.”

“No more I do. I come for that other flea you promised me.”

Peppino was holding the small bowl in his hand which is used as a mark for the others. Hearing this, he assumed the offensive, and flung the ball at Michael with all his strength. Michael, who had kept a careful watch on his movements, simply ducked his head. The ball passed within two inches of his temple and broke into fragments against the wall. Michael picked up a stone.

“If I broke your head with this,” he said, “it would only be what you tried to do for me. Instead of putting it in the middle of your forehead, as David did to Goliath, I shall put it in the middle of your hat.” And he threw the stone with so true an aim that it struck Peppino’s hat right in the centre and carried it away. “Now,” he continued, “men do not fight with balls and stones, but with steel.” And he drew his knife as he spoke. Turning to the young men who were interested spectators: “You can bear witness,” he said, “that Peppino is the aggressor. Watch and see what happens.”

“With how many inches of steel do we fight?” asked Peppino, who stood ready knife in hand.

“With the whole blade,” answered Pezza; “there is then no chance of treachery.”

“To the first or second blood-letting?” demanded Peppino.

“To the death,” replied his adversary. The words fell in the midst of a sepulchral silence, for the spectators understood that something terrible was about to happen.

Each combatant took off his coat and wrapped it round his left arm to serve as a shield. They were a great contrast, the one sturdy and muscular, the other lithe and active. Michael was clearly the weaker, and probably the less skilled of the two; nevertheless, three-fourths of the spectators would have voted for him had their opinion been asked.

The first few blows were either lost in the air or warded off by the left arm. Suddenly Peppino’s right hand became covered with blood; Michael’s knife had cut across all four fingers.

Michael bounded back so as to allow Peppino to change hands if necessary. The latter held his knife in his teeth, bound up his hand with his handkerchief, changed his coat to the right arm, and took his knife in the left hand. Michael did the same. Half a minute more, and Peppino was wounded a second time, in the left arm. He uttered a cry of rage, understanding that Pezza meant, not to kill, but to disarm him.

Michael caught his adversary’s left wrist in his right hand and held it in an iron grasp. Peppino made desperate efforts to free himself, but in vain. His knife was now useless, and Michael, had he chosen, could have stabbed him any moment. The arm, weakened by loss of blood, became more and more numb, his fingers relaxed their hold, and the knife fell to the ground. Michael put his foot on it.

One only chance remained to Peppino. He sprang on his enemy and seized him in his powerful arms, which were, however, weakened by wounds. Michael returned the pressure, and the two wrestled furiously. To the onlookers’ surprise, Peppino, who was counted the best wrestler in the place, but who had never encountered Michael before, did not seem any better than his opponent. Suddenly the two rolled together on the ground. Michael, by a sudden desperate effort, had lifted Peppino and thrown him, and had fallen upon him. Peppino lay on his back. Michael knelt upon him and held his knife at his throat.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “has this duel been fought honourably and according to rule?”

“Honourably and according to rule,” said the spectators with one voice.

“Is Peppino’s life in my power?”

“It is,” came the unanimous answer. “Do you agree, Peppino?” asked Michael, pricking the fallen man with the point of his knife.

“Yes. Kill me; it is your right,” gasped Peppino. “Would you have killed me if you had won instead of me?”

“Yes; but I shouldn’t have been so long about it.” Michael bent over him, and whispered: “You agree that your life is in my power. Well, I give it you, or rather, I lend it you. The day on which you marry Francesca I shall take it again. Do you understand?”

“Ah, wretch!” cried Peppino; “you are the devil himself. You are nor Fra Michele, but Fra Diavolo!”

“You can call me what you please,” said Michael, “but remember that your life belongs to me, and if the event I speak of comes to pass I shall take it without asking your permission.”

Therewith he rose, wiped his knife on his shirt sleeve, and put it quietly in his pocket. “That is all,” he said; “there is nothing to prevent your finishing your game. Adieu.” And he walked slowly away, leaving the spectators wondering what he could have said to Peppino, who remained motionless half risen from the ground in the attitude of the Dying Gladiator. They would have guessed easily enough had the latter renounced Francesca. But he did not do so, and the marriage was fixed for the end of September, before the vintage should begin. The duel took place at the end of May, and the succeeding months passed quietly until September 7th, when the priest announced in the church that the wedding would take place on the 23rd.

The betrothed pair were in church, and Michael at no great distance from them. Peppino glanced at him, but he appeared quite unmoved. Only as they left the church Michael came close to Peppino and whispered in his ear:

“It is well! You have still eighteen days to live.”

The next Sunday the banns were read a second time. Michael repeated his warning, but the days had dwindled to ten. The third Sunday the same thing happened. Peppino’s lease of life was reduced to two days only.

After-a wild and stormy night the morning of September 23rd was a magnificent one. The wedding was to take place at eleven in the morning. The guests were assembled at Antonio’s house, and the terrace and garden re-echoed with joyful sounds. But from time to time the three persons most concerned looked anxiously at the sombre young man who surveyed the proceedings from the other side of the boundary wall, and whom they had no right to drive away however ominous his presence might seem.

Just as one of the most lively Tarantellas was finished, a very familiar sound struck Don Antonio’s ear. It was the shrill tinkle of the bells of post-horses, accompanied by the bass rumble of a heavy carriage, and the hoarse cries of two postboys summoning Don Antonio himself. Frequently Don Antonio’s aid was required for a damaged vehicle, and not infrequently that of the village doctor for a damaged occupant. In this case, however, the occupant had escaped unscathed, and when to the postboys’ invitation to “Make haste, Don Antonio, the gentleman is in a great hurry,” Antonio answered “So much the worse for him; we are not working to-day,” the traveller himself entered the court and enquired:

“And why are you not working to-day, Citizen Antonio, may I ask?”

Antonio, vexed at the unfortunate moment of the occurrence, and further annoyed by being addressed as “Citizen,” a style which he considered quite beneath his dignity, would have given a rude answer, but glancing at the traveller, concluded he was too great a person to be insulted. He was, in fact, the French ambassador, whose carriage had broken a wheel shortly before, and who, consequently, had been obliged to traverse the last mile on foot. From his costume, Antonio took him for a soldier, and a general at least, and answered civilly, “Excuse me, General; had I had the honour to know to whom I was speaking I should have said, ‘We can do no work for another hour.’”

“And why cannot you work at once,” asked Garat in a tone which implied that if the delay were a mere question of money he was willing to produce it.

“Because the church bell is ringing. Excellency, I could not keep the priest waiting were it for the king himself.”

“I seem to have fallen into the middle of a wedding. Is that handsome girl the bride?”

“Yes; she is my daughter.”

“I congratulate you, and will wait for her sake. How long will the ceremony last?”

“About three-quarters of an hour. If you will accompany us it will not seem so long. Or will you remain here and drink a glass with us on our return in honour of the bride? We shall work all the better afterwards.”

“Thank you, my friend, I accept, and will remain here.” Everybody hastened towards the church except Peppino, who hung back. He went up to Michael, offering his hand, and said with a forced smile: “Cannot we let bygones be bygones, and make an honest peace?”

“Not so,” answered Michael solemnly. “You can \

make your peace with God, and with Him only. Lover of Francesca, you have yet one hour to live.” He turned round and disappeared.

Peppino made the sign of the cross, murmuring: “My God! My God! I commend my soul to Thee.” He then hastened after the others and took his place in the procession.

The Ambassador, left alone, with nothing to do but to look out upon the road, was greatly surprised at seeing French uniforms appearing in the distance, coming apparently from Rome towards Naples. As the uniforms drew nearer Garat discerned that they were worn by a corporal and four dragoons, who were escorting a travelling carriage which seemed to regulate its pace by theirs. The corporal, seeing Garat, and knowing by his uniform that he must be a Republican of high rank, galloped up to him and saluted respectfully.

“My friend,” said Garat; “I am the Ambassador of the Republic at Naples, which authorizes me to enquire whom you are escorting.”

“Two old aristocrat women,” replied the officer, “and a man who says ‘Princess!’ when he speaks to them.”

“Do you know their names?”

“One is called Madame Victoire and the other Madame Adelaide. It seems they are aunts of the late tyrant who was guillotined. They fled to Austria, and then they came to Rome. Then, when the Republic was declared, they wanted to run further, but it seems there was an older sister, who was called Madame Sophie, and she became ill. They would not leave her, which was good of them, and she died and was buried. Then they asked leave of General Championnet to go to Naples, and the General sent for me and said, ‘Corporal Martin, you are an educated man, and know how to speak to ladies. Take four men and escort these old ladies till they are over the frontier; they are daughters of France after all. And so treat them with respect, and speak with your hand at the salute, as if they were superiors. There is a man with them, their equerry, who is called the Count de Chatillon., 'But, General,'

I said, 'I thought there were no more Counts? 'Not in France,' he told me, 'but there are a few up and down in Italy, and they will all like it better if you say "Monsieur le Comte "than if you say "Citizen." 'So I have done so all the way, and it really seemed to please the poor old ladies, and it has been 'Martin 'here and 'Martin 'there whenever they wanted anything. But I must have bored you with all this talk."

"Not at all," said Garat. "I am much interested. How far were you to escort them?"

"Over the frontier, and further if they wished."

"Well, then you have fulfilled your orders. You are now two stages beyond the frontier, and it is dangerous to go further. You must tell the princesses that your service is over, and you must return."

"The poor things will be greatly distressed. What is to become of them without their Martin? See, they are frightened, and calling for me already."

In fact, while Martin had been telling his long story the carriage had stopped at the little inn, and the old ladies, seeing their protector in earnest conversation with a Republican official, evidently of high rank, became alarmed lest their progress should be interfered with, and were calling for Martin in their most dulcet tones. Garat, not wishing for an awkward interview, retired into the wheelwright's garden. Martin, with his hand at the salute, appeared at the carriage door and respectfully informed the royal ladies that he had received orders to at once return to Rome. The princesses were much -disturbed, and finally requested their equerry to interview the interfering Republican on the subject.

Garat had received a first-rate education, and was a man of distinction and of elegant manners, who only used the Republican code of speech when obliged to do so. Seeing Chatillon approaching him, he rose and went to meet him. The two exchanged courteous salutations, much more in the style of Versailles than that of the Directory.

"Am I to address you as 'Monsieur 'or 'Citizen? '"asked Chatillon with a smile.

"Whichever you please, Monsieur le Comte," answered Garat. "I shall be honoured in replying to any questions on the part of their Royal

Highnesses.”

“Really,” said the Count, “it is indeed a pleasure to find a civilized man in this howling wilderness. Their Royal Highnesses — since you permit the use of this title to the daughters of Louis XV. — wish to know what prevents their retaining the escort which General Championnet was kind enough to give them.”

“The difficulty, sir, is caused by the fact that since midnight yesterday the Two Sicilies and the Republic are at war. Consequently, an escort of five hostile soldiers would be for the princesses a danger instead of a protection. For the rest, I should be sorry to expose these royal ladies to the certainty of insult and their escort to assassination. I hope, sir, the explanation is satisfactory.”

“So satisfactory, sir, that I should be grateful if you would repeat it yourself to their Royal Highnesses.”

“I would do so with pleasure but for the melancholy fact that I am aware my presence would be extremely disagreeable to these distinguished ladies.”

“May I ask why, sir? It is evident that you are a man of the world, and exceedingly courteous.”

“Because, for that very reason, the Convention selected me for the fatal honour of reading his death sentence to King Louis XVI.”

The Comte de Chatillon sprang back as if he had suddenly seen a serpent in his path. “Then; then,” he cried, “you must be Garat of the Convention.”

“Even so, Count. If my name produces such an effect on you, you can easily guess what it would mean to these poor princesses who were the King’s aunts. It is true they did not greatly love their nephew when he was alive, but now that he is dead they adore his memory. Death is like night; it changes the look of things.”

Chatillon bowed and went to report the result of his interview to the princesses, who were greatly troubled at the idea of continuing their journey unprotected. He wisely remained silent on the subject of Carat’s identity, which would have disturbed them still more. While they were still discussing the subject, a servant came to the door and announced that a young man wished to speak to the Count de Chatillon.

The Count went out, and soon returned and reported that the young man was a soldier of Condé’s army, and was bearer of a letter from the Count de Narbonne addressed to their Royal Highnesses.

The messenger was desired to enter, and proved to be a young man of about twenty-four, whose appearance and manner indicated good birth and breeding. He bowed respectfully at the door, then advanced into the room, and kneeling on one knee presented his letter to Madame Adelaide. She signed to the young man to rise, and requested Chatillon to read the letter to her. It was short, and merely recommended Giovan Battesta di Cesare of Corsica to the kind notice of their Royal Highnesses, adding that he and his friends had fought in Condé’s army, and that the princesses would have no cause to regret any kindness shewn to this bearer. In answer to Madame Adelaide’s questions, di Cesare explained that Condé having disbanded his army, he and his friends found themselves stranded, and had been advised to go to Naples, where there was every prospect of war breaking out, and M. de Narbonne had given him this letter in hopes that the princesses might recommend him and his friends to the King. They had followed in the ladies’ track, and now, hearing that the French escort was to return, they begged to have the honour of replacing it. They were six in number, besides di Cesare, and they would gladly die, if need be, in the ladies’ service.

“Well,” said Madame Adelaide, “this is truly fortunate! At the moment when our escort fails us Providence supplies another. I thank Heaven for delivering us from those Jacobin soldiers and their corporal. Take ten louis, Chatillon, and give them to Martin for himself and his men. It must not be said they have served us for nothing.”

“I will do so, madame,” replied Chatillon, “but I do not think he will accept.”

“He would rather take them by force, no doubt, but this time he must accept. But what is that music. Is the village serenading us?”

“It is a wedding party returning from church,” said the young Corsican, smiling. “The daughter of the wheelwright opposite is married to-day. As there is a rival in the field it is thought there may be a tragedy before the day is over.”

“That is no concern of ours,” said Madame Adelaide. “Will you present your companions to us? We shall start at four o’clock. With an escort such as yours we need not fear to travel at night.”

Di Cesare brought in his companions and presented them one by one. They were graciously received, especially M. de Bocche-chiampe, who alone could claim nobility of descent, and to whom the princesses accorded the privilege of dining with them, an invidious distinction which the young man would gladly have been spared. Just then Chatillon returned.

"What did Corporal Martin say?" asked Madame Adelaide.

"He said that if anyone but myself had made him such an offer he would have had his ears cut off for his pains. As for me, he forgave me, and even accepted what I offered on my own account."

"And what might that be?"

"Simply to shake hands."

"To shake hands!! Chatillon! You offered to shake hands with a Jacobin! It is incredible. A corporal who refuses ten louis and a Chatillon who shakes hands with him! What can the world be coming to! Of what is society composed in these days?"

"Or rather," said Madame Victoire, looking up from her book of devotions, "from what is it decomposed!"

"You are right, sister, it is decomposed. Shall we live to see it recomposed? I doubt it. Meanwhile, Chatillon, give the necessary orders. We start at four."

The music which had surprised the ladies was that which preceded the returning wedding-party. Both Peppino and Francesca cast anxious glances at the crumbling boundary wall, and felt relieved when they saw it deserted. It was mid-day, the magnificent sunlight came tempered through the vine-leaf trellis which sheltered the guests, the birds sang and fluttered, and the wine, red and gold, sparkled in the light. Peppino saw life surrounding him instead of death, and breathed more freely. For a moment he forgot Michael Pezza and his terrible threat.

Antonio looked at the damaged carriage, and went up to Garat. "Is it really necessary that your Excellency should continue your journey to-day?" he enquired.

"It is absolutely necessary," said Garat. "I have already lost three or four hours, and I am expected in Rome on business of the utmost importance."

"Well then, an honest man keeps his word. When you have done us the honour to drink a glass of wine to the health of these young people, we will at once set to work."

The glasses were filled, the finest, distinguished by a gold rim, was presented to the stranger, who drank its contents to the health of the young couple, there was a general cry of "Hurrah!" and the music struck up anew.

“Now, Peppino,” said Antonio, “there is a time for all things. Kiss your wife, my boy, and let us set to work.”

Peppino did not wait to be told twice. He took Francesca in his arms and bent over her. But, before his lips had touched hers, the report of a gun and the whistle of a ball were heard. “Oh! oh!” said Garat, “that must have been meant for me!”

“No,” said Peppino, sinking to the ground, “it is for me.” Francesca fell on her knees beside him, and in a few moments he breathed his last.

A light bluish smoke was visible among the poplars, and further off a young man, gun in hand, was seen climbing the hill with rapid bounds. “Fra Michele,” cried the guests, “it is Fra Michele.”

The fugitive stopped on a ledge of rock, and cried with a threatening gesture, “I am no longer Fra Michele; henceforth I am Fra Diavolo! “And it is by this second name of sinister import that he has become known to posterity.

On the following morning, while Garat was still continuing his much-interrupted journey to Rome, two French officers were walking up and down one of the large halls in the Palazzo Corsini, stopping every now and then to consult the maps with which some of the tables were littered. Other tables bore witness to the varied tastes of the present tenant, one supporting an entire collection of Piranesi’s engravings, while others were heaped with books, classic and modern, chiefly relating to Roman history or Roman war, and an ample provision of writing materials adorned each table. The two officers seemed about the same age; one was General Championnet; the other, a trifle younger, bore tokens of a northern origin. Irish by descent, but born in France, he was tall and fair, blue-eyed and with decided features. He was Joseph Alexander Macdonald, later a Marshal of France and Duke of Tarento. They were deep in conversation when Macdonald suddenly exclaimed, “Surely that is a travelling carriage at the entrance. Good Heavens! it is Garat himself!”

“Not the Ambassador surely. Impossible!” said Championnet.

“It is indeed. Look, General.” Championnet hastened to the door. Garat had already reached the landing. The two shook hands, but wasted no time in compliments. Macdonald would have left them, but —

“You are my left arm,” said Championnet, “and sometimes my right as well. Better hear what there is to hear.”

Garat hastily told them of the events at Naples, of Nelson’s arrival and his own midnight departure; then of his detention at Itri, where he had stopped the princesses’ escort. He had ordered the corporal to bring on his carriage as soon as it could be mended, had hired another at Fondi, and come on himself after a delay of six hours. He also mentioned the tragic occurrence at the wedding and the escape of Fra Diavolo to the mountains, where he would probably make a livelihood by brigandage. The corporal and escort would, he hoped, arrive in the course of another day.

Championnet let him finish his story without interruption, but when it came to an end without Salvato’s name being once mentioned, he began to be seriously anxious as to the fate of his envoy, and was going to question Garat on the subject when the door opened and an orderly announced that a man in peasant’s attire insisted on seeing the General. Behind him a louder voice exclaimed:

“It is I, General. Hector Caraffa. I bring news of Salvato.”

“Come in. Come in, Hector!” cried Championnet. “You are most welcome. I was just going to question the Ambassador.”

Hector rushed in and embraced Championnet. “Ah!” he exclaimed, “how good it is to see you again!”

“But what of Salvato? Hector, what news have you?”

“Both bad and good. Good, because he ought to be dead and is still alive. Bad, because they got the letter he was taking to the Ambassador.”

“Had he then a letter for me?” asked Garat. “And what was in it?”

“This is most unfortunate,” said Championnet. “My letter was to tell you that we are utterly unfit to fight. We want men, money, food, munitions, every single thing we ought to have. I begged you to maintain peaceable relations as long as you possibly could. If my letter has fallen into the enemy’s hands it is a great misfortune, but it would be worse still if they killed Salvato. What really happened, Hector?”

“They only missed killing him by a miracle. It seems he was waylaid, and six men set upon him. Well, you know Salvato! He killed two of them and wounded two more, and then the Queen’s cutthroat, Pasquale, the leader, flung his knife and planted it in Salvato’s chest up to the handle. Well, some people have luck! He fell into the arms of the most beautiful woman in Naples, who has hidden him from all eyes, even her husband’s.”

“But the wound,” cried the General. “Is it mortal? Salvato is as a son to me.”

“The wound is certainly serious, very serious, but-the best doctor in Naples, one of ourselves, is looking after him. But there are other things. The people are rising against our party. Cirillo was delayed two hours on his way to me by a crowd of lazzaroni, who burnt alive the two brothers della Torre in front of their house.”

“The wretches!” exclaimed Championnet.

“Then I hear there was a great council at the palace, and war against the Republic was decided on. I know that by Nicolino Caracciolo, who has a friend among the ladies-in-waiting. Austria supplies the general, who is Baron Charles Mack.”

“That is not particularly alarming.”

“No, but what is alarming is that England has put a finger in the pie, and provided money. There are 60,000 men ready to march on Rome in eight days if necessary. Well, I think that is all.”

“It is enough, in all conscience!” remarked Championnet.

“You see,” he continued, turning to Garat, “there is not a moment to lose. Luckily, two million cartridges arrived yesterday. Cannon there are none to speak of, but with two million cartridges and ten or twelve thousand bayonets behind them we can take the Neapolitan cannon and use them.”

“I thought you had only nine thousand men?”

“No more I have, but I hope for a reinforcement of three thousand. Can you get on to Milan, Hector?”

“As soon as I have had some food and a change of clothes. I am dying of hunger, and, as you see, plastered with mud from head to foot. The roads are awful. I do not wonder that your orderlies objected to let me in.”

Championnet rang, and his valet appeared.

“Breakfast, a bath, and clothes for Citizen Caraffa.

The bath in ten minutes, the clothes in twenty, breakfast in half-an-hour.”

“But, General,” said the servant, “your clothes will not fit Citizen Caraffa; he is a head taller than you.”

“Here,” said Garat, “take this key and open my portmanteau. The Count de Ruvo is about my size; you will find linen and a suit of clothes. As for the fit, well, it is war time!”

“At Milan you will find Joubert. Are you listening, Hector? I am speaking to you. At Milan you will find Joubert. Tell him he must manage as he best can, but unless he sends me three thousand men Rome will be lost. He had better send Kellermann if he can; he is a first-rate cavalry man, and it is cavalry we want. You must guide them, Hector, and make for Civita Castellana; we shall probably meet there. I need hardly tell you to be quick about it.”

“As I have just done seventy-two leagues of mountain road in forty-eight hours, it seems superfluous.”

“Besides,” said Garat, “I can take Citizen Caraffa on to Milan. My carriage must arrive to-morrow.”

“You will not wait for your travelling carriage, Ambassador; you will take mine. There is not a moment to lose. Macdonald, will you write in my name to all the outposts. They are on no account to resist, but once they know that the enemy has crossed the frontier, to fall back upon Civita Castellana.”

“What!” cried Garat, “will you not even attempt to defend Rome?”

“I shall abandon it, if I can, without firing a shot, but not for very long.”

“Well, General, you know more of these things than I do.”

“I? I know no more of war than you can learn from Macchiavelli.”

“And what says Macchiavelli?”

“Must I quote Macchiavelli to a diplomatist who ought to know him by heart? Well, he says

Listen, Hector; and you, Macdonald. Macchiavelli says: ‘The whole secret of war lies in two things, in doing whatever the enemy did not expect you to do, and in allowing him to do whatever you expected him to do. By observing the first precept you ruin his calculations for defence, and by observing the second you upset his plans of attack.’ Read Macchiavelli, Garat, he was a really great man, and when you have read him.”

“Well, what then?”

“Read him all over again.” The door opened, and the valet re-appeared. “Here comes Scipio to say the bath is ready. While Macdonald writes his letters I will give Garat an account of all the plundering done here by the Directory’s agents, which he can repeat to the Directory in Paris. Then we will breakfast, and drink to our speedy entrance into Naples in the best wine in the Papal cellars.”

CHAPTER IX.

ANDREW BAKER.

IT is ten o’clock in the morning, on the Quay of Mergellina, much crowded with fishermen, lazzaroni and humble folk of every kind who hasten, mingled with cooks from the great houses, towards the market. There, King Ferdinand, dressed as a fisherman, stands behind a table covered with fish, selling his catch himself; but we are more interested for the moment in old friend Michael the Fool, who, instead of keeping pace with the rest, stops at the little door into the garden already well-known to our readers. For at the garden door, leaning against the wall, gazing into the blue sky, or rather into her wandering thought, stands a young girl to whom her secondary position has not allowed us until this moment to give more than slight attention.

It is Giovannina, generally shortened to Nina, Luisa San Felice’s own maid. Of a peasant type quite special to the neighbourhood of Naples; she is a girl aged between nineteen and twenty, of medium height, with a perfect figure, and to whom association with a lady has given refined tastes rare in her class. Her abundant, carefully-dressed hair is flame-like in its fiery fairness; her complexion a milky white studded with freckles; her eyes greenish, with golden irises and contracting pupils, as in cats; her thin, pale lips, becoming blood red at the slightest emotion, cover irreproachable teeth; and her veinless hands are white and cold as marble. Up to the present she has seemed much attached to her mistress, and beyond a slight frivolity has given her little cause for complaint.

To Giovannina her inferiors and her equals have paid their court, but she has never responded to any of them; her ambition is to rise, and she has declared twenty times that she would prefer to remain single all her life than marry a man beneath her, or even in her own rank. Michael and Giovannina are old acquaintances; during the six years Giovannina has spent at Luisa’s they have had many opportunities of meeting, and Michael also, like other young men fascinated by the girl’s physical and moral oddity, has tried to make love to her; but she has explained to him without any circumlocution that she will never love anyone but a *signor*, even at the risk that the *signor* of her choice will not respond. Upon that, Michael, no platonist, has wished her every prosperity, and has turned to Assunta, who, having no aristocratic pretentions, is perfectly contented with him, and he, excellent young man, bearing no ill will to Giovannina, has asked and obtained the promise of her friendship.

Thus, instead of going on his way to the royal market, Michael, seeing Giovannina so pensive at the garden door, stopped.

"What are you gazing up into the sky for?" he asked.

The young girl shrugged her shoulders: "I dream, as you see."

"Ah, like the great lady you hope to be."

Giovannina looked about her, and then said:

"There is a good deal to be dreaming about. Are you as devoted to your foster-sister as I am to my mistress?"

"Yes, indeed! For life and death! She can be sure of that."

"Well then, she will probably need you some day as she needs me already. What do you suppose I am doing at this door?"

"Day-dreaming as you told me."

"Well, have you seen the Chevalier San Felice anywhere on the road?"

"Yes, at the top of the Pie-di-Grotta."

"And I am here to see if he turns back as he did yesterday."

"What! He turned back? Does he suspect anything, then?"

"He? Poor dear sir! He would likelier believe what he refused to the other day, that the earth is a piece of the sun knocked off by a comet, than to believe that his wife deceives him; besides, she doesn't!.... or at least not yet: she is in love with Signor Salvato, that's all; but all the same, if the chevalier were to ask for her I should be in a fix, for she is already with her invalid, whom she leaves neither night nor day."

"Ah, then she told you to come and make sure that the chevalier kept on his way to-day to the palace?"

"Oh! no; thank God! Madame is not quite so far gone; but it will come to that, you'll see. No, I saw her uneasy, coming and going, looking towards the corridor and towards the garden, dying to post herself at the window and not daring to. So I said: 'Will not madame go and see if M. Salvato needs her, since she left him at two o'clock this morning?'

"'I dare not, my dear Nina,' she replied. 'I am afraid that my husband may forget something, as he did yesterday, and you know that Dr. Cirillo said it was of the utmost importance that my husband should not know of the young man's being at Princess Fusco's house." Oh, don't let that disturb you,' I answered; 'I can keep an eye on the street, and if by chance the chevalier comes back, as soon as I see him coming I will run and tell madame; it will be good for me — I want some air.' And here I am doing sentinel at this door, where I have the pleasure of a talk with you while madame enjoys talking with her invalid."

Michael was surprised at something bitter in the words and harsh in the voice of the young girl.

"And what of the young man?" he asked. "Is he in love with her?"

"He; I should think so! He devours her with his eyes. Directly she leaves the room they close as if he need see nothing more, not even the daylight. It was no use Dr. Cirillo — who is against husbands knowing that their wives are nursing handsome wounded young men — to forbid him to speak, saying: that if he does he risks rupturing something in his lungs — he is not obeyed on *that* head. Hardly are they alone than they begin talking without a moment's pause, and in English or French. The chevalier is a prudent man," added Nina with a little jerky laugh: "He has taught his wife two foreign languages so that she can freely discuss her affairs with strangers, and so that the household shouldn't understand."

"I had come to see Luisa," said Michael, "but after what you tell me, I should probably be in her way." And he made as if to go.

"No, no, stay, Michael; last time you came she scolded me for letting you go away without seeing her: it seems that the wounded man also desires to thank you."

"Well, upon my word, I shan't be sorry to give him *my* compliments: he is a fine fellow, and the butcher has learned the weight of his arm."

"Come in then, and as there is no danger now of the chevalier's return, I am going to tell madame you are here." And the two young people disappeared into the garden to re-appear presently at the top of the steps, and vanish once more into the house.

As Nina had stated, her mistress had gone into the wounded man's room nearly half-an-hour previously. From seven in the morning, when she arose, to ten o'clock, when her husband left the house, although Luisa never ceased thinking of the invalid for a moment she did not dare go near him, this interval being entirely devoted to those household cares which we have seen her neglecting the day of Cirillo's visit and which she thought it imprudent not to resume since. To make up for that, she did not leave

Salvato for a minute from ten in the morning till two in the afternoon, the time at which her husband was accustomed to return. After dinner, towards four o’clock, the Chevalier passed into his study and remained there an hour or two.

For at least an hour, Luisa at peace, and on the pretext of making some change in her dress was supposed to be also in her room, but, light as a bird, she was always in the corridor, and managed to pay two or three visits to the wounded man, at each visit exhorting him to rest and quietness. Then from seven o’clock till ten, the time for visits or a promenade, she again left Salvato who remained in Nina’s care, but whom she used to visit again about eleven, that is directly her husband went to his room. She stayed at Salvato’s bedside till two in the morning, at two she went to her own apartment, whence she did not emerge again till seven as we have said.

Everything had gone on like this without the least variation since Dr. Cirillo’s first visit, that is for nine days.

Although Salvato awaited with ever fresh impatience the moment when Luisa would re-appear, to-day, with his eyes on the clock, he seemed to be watching for her return more impatiently than ever. Light as was his fair visitor’s footfall, his eye was so attuned to it, and especially to the way in which Luisa opened the door of communication, that at the first creak and the first sound of a certain satin slipper, a smile, fled since her departure, returned to his lips, and his eyes turned towards that door and remained fixed, as the needle of a compass points to the North star.

At last Luisa appeared.

“Oh, you are here,” he said, “thank God, to-day as usual, and at the usual hour!”

“Yes, thanks to our good Nina, who, of her own accord, offered to go down and watch at the door. How have you passed the night?”

“Very well! Only, tell me....”

Salvato took both her hands as she stood by his bedside, and, raising himself to be nearer her, looked at her earnestly.

Luisa, surprised and ignorant of what he was going to ask, returned his look. There was nothing in it to make her lower her own; his gaze was tender but more questioning than passionate.

“What do you want me to tell you?” she asked.

“You left my room yesterday at two o’clock in the morning, didn’t you?”

“Yes.”

"Did you come back into it?"

"No."

"You are certain?"

"Sure."

"Then," said the young man, speaking to himself, "it is she."

"Who? She?" enquired Luisa, more astonished than ever.

"My mother," replied Salvato, into whose eyes came a dreamy expression, and whose head fell on his chest with a sigh neither painful nor over-sad.

At these words: "My mother," Luisa shuddered.

"But," she queried, "your mother is dead?"

"Have you not heard, dear Luisa," returned Salvato, with the same dreamy expression, "that there are certain privileged people without any exterior signs of it, and who cannot themselves account for it, who possess the faculty of communicating with the spirits of the dead?"

"I have sometimes heard the. Chevalier San Felice argue the point with German savants who advanced these communications between earthly beings and those of a higher order as proofs of the immortality of the soul. They called these people seers, these intermediaries, mediums."

"Without your being aware of it, to a woman's grace you unite the education of a learned man and the knowledge of a philosopher," said Salvato. "So one can discuss everything with you, even the supernatural."

"Then," said she, "you believe that last night."

"I believe that last night my mother came into my room and leaned over my bed."

"But, dear friend," asked Luisa, shivering, "how do you explain the apparition of a soul parted from its body?"

"Some things cannot be explained, you well know. I am relating one of those mysteries."

"Friend," said she, "sometimes you terrify me."

The young man, pressing her hand, cast on her his most gentle look. "How can I terrify you. I who would give you the life you have preserved to me?"

"It is because," she answered, "you sometimes seem to be not quite of this world."

But at this moment there was a tap at the half-open door.

"Do you want to see me, little sister," said Michael, putting his head in.

She slowly withdrew her gaze from Salvato.

"Yes, come in," she said, "and see how well our patient is getting on."

Michael approached the bed on tip-toe, and Salvato immediately recognizing him held out his hand, which Michael turned over and examined.

"See, little sister," said he, "it looks like a woman's, and to think that with it he gave the butcher that famous sword-stroke! And you should have seen Luisa," he went on to Salvato, "when she heard the pistol shots, and the swords clashing, when she saw that I, a man, and a fearless one, dared not go to your aid because you had to do with the Queen's assassins. 'Then *I* must save him,' she cried, and darted into the garden. Oh, if you had only seen her, Your Excellency, she did not run, she flew."

"What is the good of telling him this?" cried Luisa, and shuddering at the recollection of that night, she hid her crimson face and her eyes brimming with tears in her hands. "You are well named 'Michael the Fool.' "she murmured, "I was wrong to scold Nina for sending you away."

"Your hand, Luisa, your hand," begged the wounded man, "I did not know that you, a stranger to me, saved me from royal assassins. You weep, do you then regret having saved my life?"

Madame San Felice, exhausted by conflicting sensations, leaned her head on the back of the chair, closed her eyes and let fall her quivering hand into the young man's.

Salvato eagerly seized it; Luisa sighed, this sigh was a confession.

Giovannina, half concealed by the window curtains, understood what was passing in her mistress's heart; and so rooted to the spot she stood, with clenched hands, and stony gaze, like a statue of jealousy, that she did not hear a loud ringing till Michael said:

'"Are you asleep, Nina, they will pull the bell down."

"Yes, go, to the house door," said Luisa, and in a rapid low tone to Salvato: "It is not my husband, he always comes in by the garden. Go quick, Nina; you understand, I am not at home."

"Quick, not at home, do you hear, Nina?" called Michael after her.

She went out without replying, and returning in a few minutes, and approaching her mistress mysteriously said, in a low tone of voice, that M. Andrew Baker asked to speak with her, "and I hesitated to say you were not at home," she added, "because I know he is your banker, and because he said he came on important business."

“Important business concerns my husband, not me.”

“Precisely madame, but he might tell the Chevalier that he had called and had not found you in.”

Luisa reflected for a moment, and turning to Salvato, “Be easy, I shall soon return,” said she. The two exchanged a handshake, smiling, Luisa rose and went out. Hardly had the door shut behind her than Salvato closed his eyes, as he always did when she was no longer there.

Michael, thinking he wished to sleep, approached Nina. “What was it?” he whispered with that unrestrained naïf curiosity of the primitive.

Nina, raising her voice so that Salvato could hear, answered: “It’s that rich, elegant young banker; you know him, M. Andrew Baker, that good-looking, fair boy, an Englishman who paid court to madame before her marriage.”

“Ah, yes; Luisa’s whole fortune is in his bank, is it not?”

“Exactly,” said Nina; and by the almost imperceptible quivering in the wounded man’s face, she knew that he had not lost a word of what she had said.

Meanwhile, Luisa had gone into the reception room where Andrew Baker was awaiting her, and for a moment she had difficulty in recognizing him; he was in Court dress, had shaved off his long, fair English whiskers, an adornment detested by King Ferdinand, he wore the Cross of a Commander of Saint Georges-Constantinien, and the badge on his coat; he had knee breeches and he carried a sword. Luisa smiled slightly at such a costume at half-past eleven in the morning.

“Oh, my dear M. Andrew,” said Luisa, having glanced at him, and having received a respectful bow, “how splendid you are! I don’t wonder you wanted me to have the pleasure of seeing you in all your glory, for I presume that it is not for a matter of business you have put on Court dress!”

“Had I thought, madame, that it would give you more pleasure to see me thus than in my ordinary attire, I should not have waited till to-day to assume it; but I know that on the contrary you are one of those intelligent women who, while always choosing the most becoming dress themselves, pay little attention to what others are wearing. My visit is the result of my wishes, but my costume the result of circumstances. Three days ago the King deigned to make me a Commander of the Order of Saint Georges-Constantinien, and to invite me to dine at Caserta to-day.”

Luisa’s expression of surprise was not very flattering.

“You are rightly astonished, madame,” replied the young man, a little piqued, “but have you not heard how one day Louis XIV., aristocrat as he was, invited the banker, Samuel Bernard, from whom he wanted to borrow twenty-five millions, to dine with him at Versailles? Well, it seems that King Ferdinand has as great a need as that ancestor of his, and as my father is the Samuel Bernard of Naples the King invites his son, Andrew Baker, to dine with him at Caserta, his Versailles, and, as he wishes to be sure that the twenty-five millions will not escape him, he has put round the neck of the poor wretch he admits to his table, this halter by which he hopes to lead him to his treasury.”

“You are a sensible man, M. Andrew. I observed it not for the first time to-day, if good sense sufficed to open the doors of Royal Palaces, you might be invited to table with all the kings on earth. You have compared your father to Samuel Bernard, I, who am acquainted with his unassailable probity and his liberality in business, accept the comparison. Samuel Bernard was a noble-hearted man, who rendered great service to France, not only under Louis XIV., but under Louis XV. But why do you gaze at me thus?”

“I admire you, madame.”

“Why?”

“Because I think you are probably the only woman in Naples who knows who Samuel Bernard was, and who has the gift of complimenting one who is the first to recognize that, for a simple visit, he is presenting himself to you in a ridiculous get up.”

“You embarrass me, but may I ask if there is a new road then, through Mergellina to Caserta?”

“No, but not being due at Caserta till two o’clock, I believed I should have time to speak to you about a matter precisely in connection with the expedition.”

“You would not, I trust, dear M. Andrew, exert your influence to have me made a Lady-in waiting to the Queen? That, I warn you, I should decline in advance.”

“Ah, madame, devoted to the Royal Family as I am, there are certain pure souls who must remain aloof from a certain atmosphere.... as the healthy should avoid the miasmas of the Pontine Marshes. No, but our house is negotiating great affairs with the King, does us the honour of borrowing twenty-five millions guaranteed by England; it is a safe undertaking in which the money invested can bring in seven or eight instead of four or five per cent.; you have a half-million to your credit with us; we are going to be asked immediately for coupons for this loan of which our house personally takes up eight millions. I have come to enquire, before we make the matter public, if you would like us to include you."

"Dear M. Baker," I am extremely obliged to you," replied Luisa, "but you know that money matters are the Chevalier's business only; and that (you know his habits) the Chevalier is probably talking from the top of his ladder to His Royal Highness the Prince of Calabria, so that you should have gone to the palace library if you wanted to meet him, besides, there, in the presence of the heir-apparent, your costume would have been infinitely more in place."

"You are cruel, madame."

"I believe," went on Luisa in a naïve tone, "that the Chevalier has invited you to our Thursday evenings from six to ten. If he forgot, I hasten to supply the omission; if you forgot, I remind you."

"Madame," stammered Andrew, "had you wished it you could have made very happy one who loved you, and who is obliged merely to adore you."

Luisa, with her calm and limpid eyes upon him, advanced, holding out her hand, said:

"Sir, you did me the honour to ask from Luisa Molina the hand that Madame San Felice offers you. If I were to allow you a title other than that of friend you would be deceived in me, and applying to a woman who would have been unworthy of you. It is not a moment's caprice which makes me prefer to you the Chevalier who is nearly thrice my age, and twice yours; it is the deep feeling of filial gratitude which I vowed to him; he is still for me to-day what he was two years ago; remain for your part what the Chevalier, who esteems you, offered, that is, my friend; and prove to me that you are worthy of this friendship in never reminding me of an occasion on which, by a refusal which, however, had nothing offensive in it, I was obliged to wound a noble heart which should cherish neither rancour nor hope." Then, bowing with great dignity, "The Chevalier will have the honour of calling upon your father to give him his reply."

"If you will neither permit one to love or to adore you," replied the young man, "at least you cannot prevent one's admiration." And, bowing in his turn with the most profound respect, he withdrew, stifling a sigh.

As for Luisa, without a thought of her inconsistency, hardly had she heard the street door shut on Andrew Baker than she flew, like a bird returning to its nest, to the bedside of the wounded man.

Salvato was very pale, his eyes were closed and his marble-like countenance wore an expression of suffering.

“Are you asleep, my friend,” she asked in French, in a voice whose anxiety there was no mistaking, “or have you fainted?”

“Neither, calm yourself, madame,” said Salvato, half opening his eyes but not looking at her.

“Madame!” repeated Luisa, astonished. “Madame!”

“But I suffer,” the young man went on.

“From what?”

“From my wound.”

“No,” said Luisa, “I have studied your countenance more carefully. You are suffering from a moral pain, and you must tell me the cause immediately, I insist. I have a right to know. Hasn’t the doctor told me to spare you every emotion?”

“Well, then, since you insist,” replied Salvato, gazing at her fixedly, “I am jealous.”

“Jealous! Of whom, in Heaven’s name?”

“Of you. Yes. How is it that you remained away half-an-hour when you were to stay only a few minutes? And what is this M. Baker to you that he is privileged to rob me of half-an-hour of your presence?”

An expression of heavenly happiness came into the young woman’s face. Salvato also, without uttering the word love had just told her that he loved her. She lowered her head towards his so that her hair almost touched his face, fanned with her breath, and beneath her gaze.

“Child!” said she with that melody in the voice which arises from the deepest fibres of the heart. “What is he? What did he come for? Why did he stay so long? I am going to tell you.”

“No, no, no,” murmured the wounded man, “no, I do not need to know; thanks, thanks.”

“For what? Why thanks?”

“Because your eyes have told me all, my beloved. Your hand! Your hand!”

Luisa gave her hand to Salvato, who set his lips convulsively to it, whilst on it he let fall a tear.

Without considering what she was doing, Luisa carried her hand to her lips and drank this tear.

King Ferdinand had invited Andrew Baker to dine at Caserta, first because he found, doubtless, that receiving a banker at his table was of less importance in the country than in town, and further because he had received from England and Rome some precious consignments of which we shall speak later. He had therefore hastened over the sale of his fish at Mergellina, a sale which in spite of this haste was accomplished, let us add, to the greatest satisfaction of his pride and purse.

Caserta, the Neapolitan Versailles as we have called it, is, indeed, a building in the frigid and heavy taste of the middle of the XVIIIth century. Neapolitans who have not travelled in France contend that Caserta is finer than Versailles; those who have, content themselves with saying that Caserta is as fine; finally, uninfatuated travellers, without putting Versailles very high, put Caserta much below Versailles; which is also our own opinion, and we are not afraid of being contradicted by people of taste.

But for a week Caserta had contained treasures worthy of bringing from the four quarters of the globe amateurs of statuary, painting, and even of natural history.

Ferdinand had just had brought from Rome and installed there, the artistic inheritance of his ancestor Pope Paul III., he who excommunicated Henry VIII., who signed a league against the Turks with Charles V. and Venice, and who took up again the building of St. Peter’s, confiding it to Michael Angelo.

But while the masterpieces of the Greek chisel and the brush of the Middle Ages were arriving from Rome, another consignment was coming from England which was engaging the curiosity of His Majesty the King of the Two Sicilies far otherwise.

It was primarily an ethnological museum gathered together in the Sandwich Isles by the expedition which succeeded that in which Captain Cook had perished, and eighteen live kangaroos, male and female, brought from New Zealand, in expectation of which Ferdinand had had prepared, in the middle of the park of Caserta, a magnificent enclosure with sheds. These interesting marsupials had just come out of their cages and King Ferdinand was in astonishment at the immense leaps they were making, frightened as they were at Jupiter’s barking, when the arrival of M. Andrew Baker was announced.

“Good,” said the King, “bring him here, I am going to show him something he has never seen, and that, with all his millions, he won’t be able to buy.” And the King, perceiving the young man in the distance, took some steps in his direction. He knew the fattier and son only as the leading bankers of Naples. It was Corradino who was transacting the loan with them and who had suggested flattering their pride with the Cross of St. Georges Constantinien. This had, naturally, been offered first to the head of the firm, Simon Baker, but he, worthy man, had put forward his son who had been named a Commander of the Order in his stead.

We have seen that Andrew Baker had a good appearance,- good sense and was a man of education. He

approached the King, then, with much circumspection and deference, but with far less embarrassment than an hour previously he had accosted Madame San Felice; and the salutations made, he waited for Ferdinand to address him.

The King examined him from head to foot and made a slight grimace. Though Andrew Baker had no whiskers or moustache, neither had he powder or queue, signs of soundness in the King’s estimation. But as he greatly held to getting his twenty-five millions he said graciously to the young man: “Well, M. Baker, how goes our negotiation?”

“I believe, sire, that the matter is arranged. The King’s wishes are orders. To-morrow the payment to our firm of the various houses taking shares in the loan will commence.”

“And how much does your firm personally lend?”

“Eight millions, sire, which are from this moment at your Majesty’s disposal.”

“At my disposal, when?”

“To-morrow, or this evening on a simple receipt from your Minister of Finance.”

“Would not mine do as well?”

“Better, sire, but I did not hope that the King would do our firm the honour of giving a receipt in his own hand.”

“Yes, indeed, yes, and with great pleasure....! So you say that this evening....? As I should be sorry, my dear M. Baker, that it should be known that I have had this money,” said the King, scratching his ear, “seeing that it is destined to surprise people, I should like it to be conveyed to the palace to-night.”

"It shall be done, sire, only, as the bank closes at six, in that case I ought, if Your Majesty permits, to send an express to my father. Two pencilled words to my footman will suffice."

"It will be simpler to send your carriage back, I shall return to Naples at about seven o'clock, and will take you with me."

"Sire, this will be an honour indeed for a poor banker," said the young man, bowing, and, tearing a leaf from his note-book, he wrote several pencilled lines, and turning to the King, "Does Your Majesty permit me to give an order to this man?" said he, indicating the footman who had brought him to the King.

"Certainly, certainly."

"My friend," said Andrew Baker, "you are to give the paper to my coachman, who is to set off immediately to Naples, and to give it to my father. The carriage need not return. His Majesty is doing me the honour of bringing me," and at these words he bowed respectfully to the King.

"If this youth wore powder and a queue," mused Ferdinand, "well, one can't have everything," and aloud:

"Come, M. Baker, and I will show you some animals you don't know, to a certainty;" and he led him straight to the enclosure.

"Ah!" said Andrew, "kangaroos."

"You recognise them?" cried the King.

"Sire, I have shot hundreds."

"Where "In Australia."

"And what the devil were you doing there?"

"When I left the University of Jena, my good father sent me to England to finish my education, and afterwards consented to my going round the world with Captain Flinders. The voyage lasted three years, and he having discovered some islands off the southern coast of New Holland named them Kangaroo Isles, on account of the enormous number of those animals there. I shot some each day and kept every man aboard supplied with fresh meat."

"Ah, ah," said the King, who knew nothing of geography, "but Hamilton has not deceived me in saying that the kangaroo is a rare animal, I hope, or I shall regret my papyri. They were found at Herculaneum. Hamilton, an amateur of that sort of old rubbish, saw them; he spoke of the kangaroos, and I told him I wanted to try and acclimatise some. So he asked me if I would give the London Museum as many rolls of papyrus as the Zoological Gardens there would give me kangaroos. I said, 'Bring over the kangaroos as quick as you can! ‘Yesterday eighteen arrived, and I have given him eighteen papyri.”

“Sir William has not made a bad bargain,” said Baker, smiling, “perhaps he has got Tacitus’s panegyric on Virginius, his speech against the proconsul Marcus-Priscus, or his last poems, an irreparable loss.”

r Irreparable! It is to hoped that now I have made such a sacrifice for them my kangaroos will breed! What do you think, M. Baker?”

“I greatly doubt it, sire.”

“The devil! But come and see Sir William Hamilton’s Polynesian Museum; come, it is very curious, and I have only given for it some old urns of broken earthenware.” The King moved on towards the palace. Baker followed him. Sir William Hamilton’s Museum surprised him no more than the kangaroos had done; for in his voyage with Flinders he had put into the Sandwich Isles and he could show the King the use of each weapon and the object of each instrument.

He enquired which were the old pots given in exchange for these curiosities of a dealer in bric-a-brac, and was shown five or six magnificent Greek urns, found in the excavations of Sant’ Agata-dei-Goti. He uttered an artist’s sigh, he would have given 100,000 francs for those old broken pots as Ferdinand called them, and would not have given ten ducats for the tomahawks, and bows and arrows collected in the kingdom of His Majesty Kamehameha I.

The King, tolerably disappointed at his guest’s small admiration for the kangaroos and the Sandwich Islands Museum, expected to make up for it over his statues and pictures, and indeed, the young banker here displayed much admiration. During his frequent journeys to Rome, great amateur of the fine arts as he was, he had visited the Farnese Museum, so that it was he who did the honours of the King’s splendid inheritance, citing the probable artists and schools, relating the story of Dircé, quite unknown to the King; and helping him to decipher inscriptions.

Among the pictures, he pointed out the masterpieces of Titian, he turned over the leaves with him of a manuscript masterpiece of the XVI. century, and, in short, he astonished Ferdinand, who, thinking to find in him a kind of ignorant and vain Turcaret, was discovering, on the contrary, a learned and courteous amateur of art.

The result of this was that, as at bottom Ferdinand was a prince of great good sense, instead of disliking the young banker for being a learned man, when he, the King, as he himself said, was but an ass, he presented him to the Queen, to Acton, to Sir William, to Emma Hamilton, no longer with the questionable consideration given to the moneyed man, but with that courteous protection always accorded by intelligent princes to men of mind and education.

This presentation gave Andrew Baker occasion to turn to account new studies. He spoke German with the Queen, English with Sir William and Lady Hamilton, French with Acton, and in the midst of it all behaved so modestly and becomingly, that, when entering his carriage to take him back to Naples, the King said to him:

“M. Baker, had you retained your carriage, I should, none the less, have brought you back in mine, were it only to procure longer for myself the pleasure of your conversation.”

CHAPTER X.

THE ACROSTIC.

SCARCELY had the King left, taking with him Andrew Baker, than Queen Caroline, who, till then, had been unable to speak to Acton, rose, made him a sign to follow her, and charging Emma and Sir William to do the honours should any of the guests arrive before her return, went into her cabinet. Acton entered behind her.

She sat down and motioned him to do so.

“Well?” she asked.

“Your Majesty is probably questioning me about the letter?”

“I am. Did you not receive two notes from me asking you to experiment? I feel as if surrounded with daggers and plots, and I am in a hurry to get to the bottom of this affair.”

“As I promised Your Majesty, I succeeded in removing the blood, and the writing has become clear enough for me to read it with a magnifying glass.”

“And you have read it?”

“Yes, madame.”

“Let us see the result,” said she.

Acton handed to Caroline the letter he had received from her on the night of the 22nd September. The blood had, in fact, disappeared, but wherever it had been, the ink left such faint traces, that, at first sight, the Queen cried:

“It is impossible to read it, sir.”

“Yes, indeed, madame,” replied he, “but with a

magnifying glass and a little imagination Your Majesty will find that we shall reconstruct the entire letter,” and he handed her a glass.

The Queen had been right; for with the naked eye, by the light of two wax candles, this was all one could read of the letter:

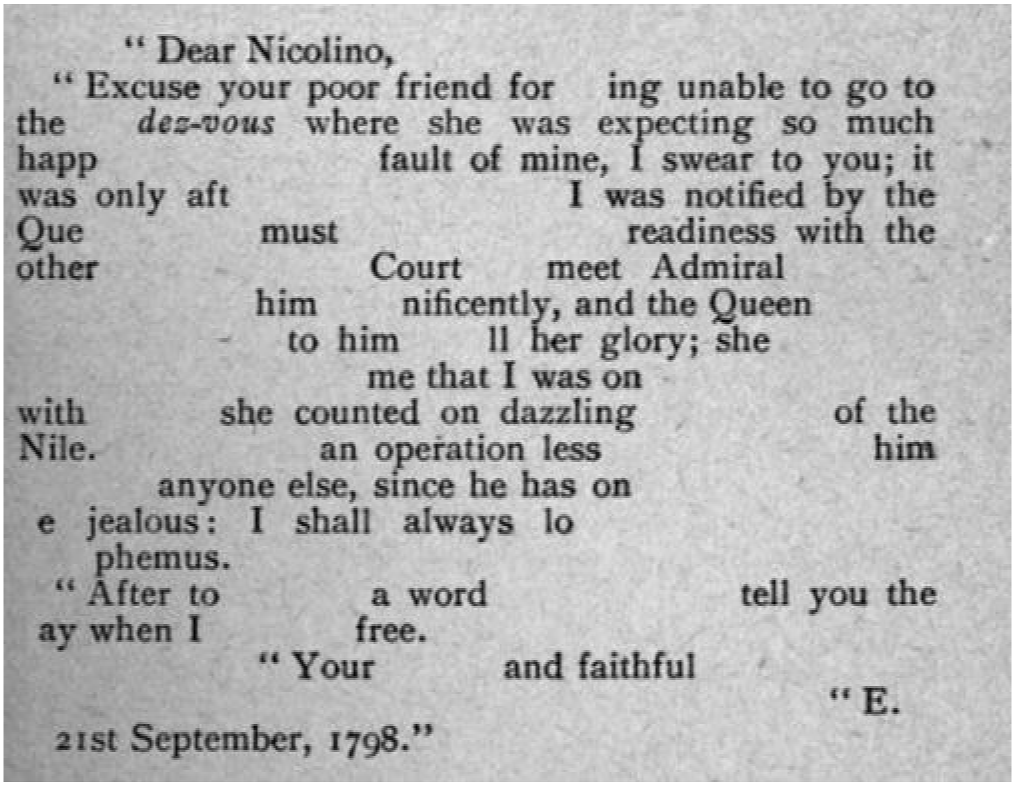

“Dear Nicolino,
“Excuse your poor friend for ing unable to go to
the *dez-vous* where she was expecting so much
happ fault of mine, I swear to you; it
was only aft I was notified by the
Que must readiness with the
other Court meet Admiral
him nificently, and the Queen
to him ll her glory; she
me that I was on
with she counted on dazzling of the
Nile. an operation less him
anyone else, since he has on
e jealous: I shall always lo
phemus.
“After to a word tell you the
ay when I free.
“Your and faithful
“E.
21st September, 1798.”

Although the Queen held the glass in her hand she tried at first to do without it; but, impatient as she was, she quickly tired; and, putting her eye to the glass, she soon succeeded in reading with some difficulty, and finally made out the following lines, giving the letter in entirety:

“Dear Nicolino,

“Excuse your poor friend for being unable to go to the *rendez-vous* where she was expecting so much happiness; it was no fault of mine, I swear to you; it was only after seeing you that I was notified by the Queen that I must hold myself in readiness with the other ladies of the Court to meet Admiral Nelson. They will fête him magnificently, and the Queen desires to show herself to him in all her glory; she has done me the honour to tell me that I was one of the sunbeams with which she counted on dazzling the victor of the Nile. It will be an operation less meritorious on him than on anyone else, since he has only one eye; do not be jealous: I shall always love Acis better than Polyphemus.

“After to-morrow a word from me will tell you the day when I shall be free.

“Your tender and faithful “E.

"21st September, 1798."

"Hum," said the Queen when she had read it, "all that doesn't tell us much, General. The lady has taken her precautions."

"But not enough," returned Acton, "for this very evening we shall know what to think of her."

"How so?"

"Has Your Majesty been good enough to invite this evening to Caserta, all the ladies of the Court whose baptismal names begin with an 'E,' and who had the honour of composing your train at the meeting with Lord Nelson?"

"Yes, there are seven."

"Which, please madame?"

"Princess Cariati, who is called *Emilie*; Countess San Marco, who is called *Eleonora*; the Marchioness San-Clemente, who is called *Elena;* the Duchess of Termoli, who is called *Elizabetta;* the Duchess of Tursi, who is called *Elisa;* the Marchioness of Altavilla, who is called *Eufrasia*, and the Countess Policastro, who is called *Eugenia.* I do not include Lady Hamilton, who is called Emma; she would have nothing to do with such an affair. So you see we have seven people compromised."

"Yes, but of these seven," replied Acton, smiling, "there are two no longer of an age to sign with initials only."

"True! That leaves five. And then?"

"Then, it is quite simple, madame, and I do not understand why Your Majesty troubles to listen to the remainder of my scheme."

"Oh, my dear Acton! On some days I am really stupid, and this must be one of them. But go on, you make me impatient with all your circumlocutions."

"Alas, madame, one is not a diplomatist for nothing."

"Well, let's get on."

"I can say it in two words."

"Say them, then," cried the impatient Queen.

"Let Your Majesty find a means for putting a pen in the hand of each of these ladies, and, in comparing the handwritings...."

"You are right," the Queen said, laying her hand on his; "we shall soon discover the lover when we have found the mistress. Let us return." And she rose.

“With Your Majesty’s permission, I will ask ten minutes further audience.”

“For matters of importance?”

“For matters of the greatest gravity.”

“Speak,” said the Queen, sitting down again.

“On the night on which Your Majesty gave me this” letter, you will recall seeing the King’s room lit up at three in the morning? Is Your Majesty aware with whom the King was conversing so late?”

“My usher told me it was with Cardinal Ruffo.”

“Very well, at the end of that conversation, the King dispatched a courier.”

“I did hear, certainly, a horse galloping under the archway. Who was the courier?”

“His confidential man, Ferrari.”

“How do you know that?”

“My English groom, Tom, sleeps in the stables; at three o’clock in the morning he saw Ferrari, in travelling dress, come into the stable, saddle a horse himself and set out. He told me next day when holding my stirrup.”

“Well?”

“Well, madame, I asked myself to whom His Majesty would be likely to send a courier after conversing with the Cardinal, and thought it would be to his nephew the Emperor of Austria.”

“The King would do that without telling me?”

“Not the King,” replied Acton.

“Oh! Oh!” said Queen Caroline, frowning, “I am not Anne of Austria and M. Ruffo is not Richelieu. Let him take care!”

“I considered the matter serious.”

“Are you sure Ferrari went to Vienna?”

“My doubts were soon at an end. I sent Tom along the road to learn if Ferrari had taken post horses. He left his own at Capua, telling the postmaster to take care of it, that it was from the Royal stables, and that he would take it again on his return, the night of the 3rd October, or the morning of the 4th.”

“Eleven or twelve days.”

“Exactly the time it takes him to go to and from Vienna.”

“And after these discoveries what did you decide to do?”

“First, to inform Your Majesty; secondly, it seems to me for our war plans, for Your Majesty is still decided on war ?”

“Still. A coalition is in preparation which will drive the French out of Italy; the French driven out, my nephew, the Emperor of Austria, will get not only the provinces he held before the Treaty of Campo-Formico, but even the Roman ones. In these sorts of wars, each keeps what he has taken, one gives back only slices; let us seize then, alone, and before anyone else, the Roman states, and, in restoring Rome, which we cannot keep, to the Pope, well, we shall lay down our conditions for the remainder.”

“Therefore the Queen being still decided upon war, it is important for her to know what the King, less resolved upon it than Your Majesty, has, on the advice of Cardinal Ruffo, been able to write to the Emperor of Austria, and what the Emperor has replied.”

“One thing you are aware of, General?”

“What?”

“That one can expect no favour from Ferrari. He is entirely devoted to the King, and as one is assured, incorruptible.”

“Good! Philip, the father of Alexander, said there was no fortress impregnable as long as a mule laden with gold could be introduced. We shall see at how much the courier, Ferrari, will estimate his incorruptibility.”

“And suppose Ferrari refuses, however much the offered sum; suppose he tells the King that the Queen and her Minister tried to seduce him; what will the King, who is becoming more and more suspicious, think?”

“Your Majesty knows that in my opinion the King has always been suspicious; but I believe there is a means to put Your Majesty and myself out of the question, namely, for Sir William to approach Ferrari. If Ferrari is purchasable, he will take Sir William’s money as easily as ours, and the more that, as the English Ambassador, he has the pretext to advance of desiring to instruct his Court on the real intentions of the Emperor of Austria. If Ferrari accepts, — and he runs no risk in doing so, for one merely asks to read the letter, return it to its envelope and seal it up again — if he accepts, all goes well; if, on the contrary, he is sufficiently his own enemy to refuse, Sir William will give him a hundred louis to keep secret the offer made; finally, at the worst, if he refuses the hundred louis and does not keep the secret, Sir William puts off all that the attempt has of — shall I say — of hazard, on the great friendship he bears his foster brother, King

George; if this doesn’t suffice, he will ask the King, on his honour, if, in a like case, he would not do as much as he, Sir William. The King will begin to laugh and there the matter will end. To sum up, the King needs Sir William Hamilton too much in the position he is in, to be angry with him for long.”

“You believe that Sir William will consent...?”

“I will speak to him about it, and if that isn’t enough Your Majesty will make his wife speak to him.”

“And now are you not afraid that Ferrari will pass by without our knowing it?”

“Nothing is simpler than to provide for this fear, and I merely await Your Majesty’s consent, not desiring to do anything without your order.”

“Go on.”

“Ferrari will again pass this night or to-morrow morning at the posting station at Capua where he left his horse; I send my secretary there that Ferrari may be informed that the King is at Caserta and awaits his dispatches there; we stay here to-night and all day tomorrow; instead of passing by the castle, Ferrari enters, asks for His Majesty and finds Sir William.”

“All that may succeed, indeed,” replied the Queen, anxiously, “as it may all fall through.”

“But it is much, madame, when one fights with equal chances, and being woman and Queen has fortune on one’s side.”

“You are right, Acton. Besides, in any case, one must allow for a fire; if the fire doesn’t seize everything, so much the better; if it does, well, one must try to put it out. Send your secretary to Capua, and inform Sir William Hamilton.”

And the Queen, shaking her still lovely head, laden with care, as if to shake off the thousand pre-occupations weighing upon her, returned to the reception room with a light step, and a smile upon her lips.

Some of the guests had already arrived, and among them the seven ladies whose baptismal names began with an “E.” Among the men were Admiral Nelson with two of his officers, or rather two of his friends, Captain Troubridge and Captain Ball, and others were the elegant Duke of Rocca-Romana, brother of Nicolino Caracciolo, who was far from suspecting — we speak of Nicolino — that a Minister and a Queen would be taking such trouble to discover his joyous and careless personality; the Duke of Avalos, more usually called the Marquis of Vasto, whose ancient family divided in two branches, and of whom an ancestor, one of Charles V.'s captains, who had been taken prisoner at Ravenna, who had married the famous Vittoria Colonna, and composed for her in prison his *Dialogue de l'amour,* received at Pavia, from the hands of the vanquished Francis I., his sword, of which only the hilt remained; whilst the other, under the name of the Marquis del Guasto, became the lover of Margaret of France and fell assassinated; the Duke of Salandra, the King's Master of the Hounds, Prince Pignatelli, and several more besides descended from the noblest Neapolitan and Spanish families. All were awaiting the arrival of the Queen, and bowed respectfully as she came in. Two things were pre-occupying Caroline: She had to use Emma Hamilton to make Nelson more infatuated than ever, and to recognise by her handwriting the lady who had penned the note, in the hope that once that lady was known it would not be difficult to discover the man to whom it was addressed.

Only those who were present at these intimate and intoxicating evenings of the Queen of Naples, evenings of which Emma Hamilton was both the great charm and principal ornament, have been able to relate to their contemporaries to what a point of enthusiasm and delirium the modern Armida brought her hearers and spectators. If her magical poses, if her voluptuous pantomime had had the influence we have mentioned on cold Northern temperaments, how far more they were likely to electrify those violent Southern imaginations passionately fond of singing, music and poetry, and knowing by heart Cimarosa and Metastasio!

We ourselves have known and questioned old men who were present at these magnetic evenings, and we have marked their expressions as, after the flight of fifty years, they spoke of their ardent remembrances.

Emma Hamilton was lovely, involuntarily. Let us try to grasp what she was upon this evening when she desired to be beautiful, both for the Queen and for Nelson, in the midst of all these elegant costumes of the end of the XVIIIth century which the Courts of Austria and of the Two Sicilies persisted in wearing as a protest against the French revolution. Instead of the powder still covering those ridiculously high coiffures erected on the top of the head, instead of those scanty dresses which would have stifled the grace of Terpsichore herself, instead of that violent rouge which turned women into bacchantes; Emma Hamilton, faithful to her traditions of liberty and art, was wearing a long tunic of pale blue cashmere, falling round her in folds to make an antique statue envious; her hair, waving in long curls on to her shoulders, displayed two rubies which shone like the fabulous carbuncles of the ancients; her girdle, a gift from the Queen, was a chain of valuable diamonds, which, knotted like a Franciscan Nun's, fell to her knees; her arms were bare from the rise of the shoulder to her finger tips, and one of her arms was clasped at shoulder and wrist by two diamond serpents with ruby eyes. The hand of the arm without ornament was laden with rings, while the other, on the contrary, shone only by the brilliant fineness of the skin and tapering nails, transparently pink like rose leaves, while her feet, in flesh-coloured stockings, seemed bare as her hands in their blue sandals laced with gold.

This dazzling beauty, further increased by this strange costume had something almost supernatural, and therefore terrible and dreadful in it; women turned aside from this resurrection of Greek paganism, from jealousy, men with fear. Possession or suicide were the only alternatives for whomsoever should have the misfortune to become enamoured of that Venus Astarté. It resulted from this that Emma, lovely as she was and precisely on account of her fascinating beauty, remained isolated in the corner of a sofa, in the middle of a circle formed round her. Nelson, who alone would have had the right of seating himself at her side, devoured her with his eyes, and reeled, dazzled, on the arm of Troubridge, asking himself by what mystery of love or political calculation, this privileged creature who united in herself every perfection, was given to him, the rough seaman, mutilated veteran of twenty battles.

"Oh, Your Majesty," cried she, when she saw the Queen appear, springing towards her as if to implore her help, "come quickly and hide me in your shadow and tell these ladies and gentlemen that, in approaching me, one does not run the same risk as in sitting beneath the upas tree."

"Do you complain of that, ungrateful being that you are!" laughed the Queen. "Why are you so lovely as to make all hearts burst with love and jealousy, insomuch that only I here am sufficiently humble, and so little the coquette as to dare approach my face to yours in kissing you on both cheeks?" And the Queen embraced her, saying in a low tone as she did so:

"Be charming this evening, it is necessary." And throwing her arm round her favourite's neck she drew her on to the sofa, around which each then pressed, the men to pay court to Emma in making court to the Queen, and the women to make court to the Queen in making court to Emma. At this moment Acton entered; the Queen exchanged a look with him intimating that everything was going as she wished.

She drew Emma into a corner, and, after having spoken to her awhile, in a low voice:

“Ladies,” said she, “I have just been promised by my good Lady Hamilton that she will give us this evening a sample of all her talents, namely, that she will sing us some ballad of her country or some song of ‘antiquity; that she will play a scene from Shakespeare for us, and that she will dance her shawl dance, which she has as yet danced for and before me only.”

There was but one cry of curiosity and delight in the room.

“But,” said Emma, “Your Majesty knows that it is on one condition....”

“What?” enquired the ladies, still more eager in their desires than the men.

“What?” repeated the men after them.

“The Queen,” said Emma, “has just remarked to me that by a singular chance, except for her own, the baptismal name of the eight ladies who are assembled in this room begin with an E.”

“True!” said the ladies, looking at one another.

“Well, if I do what I am asked, I desire that what J ask should be done.”

“You will agree that that is right, ladies,” said the Queen.

“Well, what do you want? Let us see, tell us, milady!” cried several voices.

“I want to preserve a precious remembrance of this evening,” said Emma. “Her Majesty is going to write her name, CAROLINA, on a scrap of paper, and each letter of this august and cherished name will be the initial of a line of verse written by each of us, I the first, to the greatest glory of her Majesty; each of us will sign her line, good or bad, and I expect that, mine assisting, there will be more bad than good ones; then, as a remembrance of this evening, on which I shall have had the honour of being in the company of the handsomest Queen in the world, and the most noble ladies of Naples and Sicily, I shall take this precious and poetic autograph for my album.”

“Granted,” said the Queen, “and heartily.”

And the Queen, going to a table, wrote across a scrap of paper the name CAROLINA.

“But your Majesty,” cried the ladies summoned to make verse instantly, “but we are not poets.”

“You will invoke Apollo,” said the Queen, “and you will become poets.”

There was no possibility of withdrawing; besides, Emma, going to the table as she had said she would, wrote opposite the letter C the first line of the acrostic, and signed “Emma Hamilton.” The other ladies resigned themselves, and one after the other approached the table, took the pen, wrote a line and signed their name.

When the last, the Marchioness of San Clemente, had signed hers, the Queen eagerly took the paper. The joint action of the eight muses had given the following result.

The Queen read aloud:

C’est par trop abuser de la grandeur suprême, *Emma Hamilton.*

> Ayant le sceptre en main, au front le diadème, *Emilia Cariati.*

Réunissant déjà de si riches tributs, *Eleanora san Marco.*

O Reine! de vouloir qu’en un instant Phébus, *Elizabetta Termoli.*

Lorsque le mont Vésuve est si loin du Parnasse, *Elisa Tursi.*

Initie au bel art de Pétrarque et du Tasse, *Eufrasia d’Altavilla.*

Nos cœurs, qui n’ont jamais pour vous jusqu’ à ce jour, *Eugenia de Policastro.*

> Aspiré qu ‘a lutter de respect et d’amour, *Elena San Clemente.*

“See then,” said the Queen, whilst the men were all amazement at the merits of the acrostic, and the ladies were surprised themselves at having done so well, “see then, General Acton, what a charming handwriting the Marchioness of San Clemente has.”

General Acton took it, and withdrawing from the group to a candle as if he wished to re-read the acrostic, compared the writing in the letter with that of the eighth line. Then smilingly handing back the precious and terrible autograph to Caroline:

“Charming indeed,” said he, The double praise of the Queen and Captain General Acton with regard to the Handwriting of the Marchioness San Clemente passed without anyone, even the object, attaching to it its real importance.

The Queen took possession of the acrostic, promising to return it to Emma next day, and, as the first ice was broken, everyone mingled in that charming confusion which the Queen was an adept at creating in the circle of her intimates by the art she possessed of making every embarrassment forgotten while banishing all etiquette.

Conversation became general; lips no longer let fall but let fly words; laughter displayed white teeth; men and women mingled; each to his taste sought wit or beauty; and in the midst of this gentle murmur, which seemed like the warbling of birds, one felt the atmosphere become warm and impregnated with youth, of which the breath and perfume made a kind of philtre, invisible, unseizable, intoxicating, composed of love, desires and voluptuousness.

In this kind of gathering Caroline used to forget that she was Queen; her eyes glowed, her nostrils dilated, her bosom swelled. She came to Emma, and placing her hand on her shoulder said: “Well, fair lady, have you forgotten that you do not belong to yourself this evening? You have promised us miracles, and we are in a hurry to applaud you.”

Emma seemed as if in a languorous swoon; her head drooped now on this shoulder now on that, her half-closed eyes were hidden beneath her long eyelashes; her dazzling teeth visible through opened crimson lips; her black curls strikingly contrasted with the dead white of her bosom.

She felt rather than saw the Queen’s hand on her shoulder; and quivered from head to foot.

“What do you wish of me, dear Queen?” said she, with a supremely graceful motion of the head. “I am ready to obey you. Would you like the balcony scene? But there should be two for that, and I have no Romeo.”

“No, no,” said the Queen laughing, “no love scene; you would make them all mad. No, something to terrify them. Juliet’s monologue, that is all I permit you this evening.”

“So be it; give me a large white shawl, my Queen, and clear a space for me.”

The Queen took from a sofa a large shawl of white China crape, which no doubt she had thrown down there purposely, gave it to Emma, and with a gesture in which she became Queen again, ordered everyone to stand aside.

In a moment Emma found herself alone in the midst of the room.

“Madame, I must ask you to be so kind as to explain the circumstances. That will distract attention from me for a moment, besides, and I need this little trick to produce my effect.”

“You are all familiar with the play of Romeo and Juliet, are you not?” said the Queen. “It is desired to marry Juliet to Count Paris, whom she does not love, loving as she does poor banished Romeo. Friar Laurence, who has wedded her to her lover, has given her a sleeping draught to make her appear as if dead; she is to be laid in the tomb of the Capulets, and there Laurence will come to find her and to take her to Mantuap-where Romeo is awaiting her. Her mother and her nurse have just left her room, leaving her alone, after having announced that at daybreak next day she will marry Count Paris.”

Scarcely had the Queen finished this narrative, which had drawn all eyes to her, than a cry of pain made them turn again to Emma Hamilton. She had needed but a moment or two so to drape herself in the immense shawl as to leave nothing showing of her own dress; her head was hidden in her hands, which she let glide slowly down, gradually disclosing her pale face stamped with profound grief, and in which it was impossible to discover a trace of that sweet languor we have tried to depict; it displayed, on the contrary, a paroxysm of anguish; terror reaching its zenith.

She turned slowly about her as if to follow with her gaze her mother and her nurse, even out of sight, and in a voice whose every vibration pierced hearts of the hearers, her arm extended as if to bid the world an eternal adieu:

“Farewell!” said she.

“God knows when we shall meet again.

“I have a faint cold fear thrills through my veins, “That almost freezes up the heat of life:

“I’ll call them back again to comfort me —

“Nurse! — What should she do here?

“My dismal scene I needs must act alone.”

And so continued to the end of the scene, when, carrying the phial containing the drug to her lips, she cried: “Romeo, I come! this do I drink to thee.” And, making a gesture of swallowing it, she sank down and fell stretched on the carpet, where she remained lifeless and motionless.

So great was the illusion that, forgetting it was merely dramatic representation, Nelson, the rough sailor, more acquainted with ocean storms than with the deceits of art, uttered a cry, sprang towards Emma, and with his only arm raised her from the ground as if she had been a child.

He had his reward: on opening her eyes, Emma’s first smile was for him. Only then did he comprehend his mistake and withdraw in confusion to a corner of the room.

To him succeeded the Queen, and everyone flocked round the sham Juliet.

Never did the magic of art, even if urged to this point, go beyond it. Although expressed in a foreign tongue, not a feeling agitating the heart of Juliet had escaped the spectators; she had rendered each with such magic and such truth that she had made them pass into the souls of the listeners for whom, thanks to her, fiction had become reality.

The emotions raised by this scene of which the noble company, completely a stranger to the mysteries of the poetry of the North, had not even any idea, were some time in calming down. To the silence of stupefaction succeeded enthusiastic applause; then the praise and charming flatteries so gently caressing to the artist’s self-love.

Emma, born to shine on the scene of letters, but urged by her irresistible fortune into the scene of politics, on each occasion became once again the ardent and passionate actress.

But at this moment, when all eyes were on Emma, the Queen felt a hand grasp her wrist; she turned; it was Acton.

“Come,” said he, “without a moment’s delay; God is doing for us more than we could have hoped.”

“Ladies,” said she, “in my absence, for I am obliged to absent myself for some minutes; in my absence, Emma is Queen; I leave you, in place of power, genius and beauty.”

Then, in Nelson’s ear:

“Tell her to dance for you the shawl dance that she dances for me. She will do it.” And she followed Acton, leaving Emma intoxicated with pride, and Nelson madly in love.

CHAPTER XI.

FERRARI, THE KING’S COURIER.

THE Queen followed Acton; she understood that something serious indeed must have occurred if he permitted himself to call her so imperatively from the room. She was about to question him in the corridor, but he merely answered:

“Do me the favour to come quickly, madame! We have not a moment to lose; you will know all in a few minutes.”

Acton took a little back staircase leading to the castle dispensary. It was here that the King’s doctors and surgeons, Vairo, Troja, Cottugno had a fairly complete assortment of remedies for giving first aid to the sick or wounded in the illnesses or accidents whatever they might be for which they were summoned.

The Queen guessed whither Acton was leading her.

“Has anything happened to one of my children?” she asked.

“No, madame, re-assure yourself,” said Acton; “and if we have any experiment to make, we shall be able to perform it at least *in anima vili*.” He opened the door; the Queen entered and cast a rapid glance round the room.

A man in a swoon was lying upon a bed.

She drew near with more curiosity than fear.

“Ferrari!” said she. Then, turning towards Acton, with dilated eye. “Is he dead?” she asked, in a tone as much as to say: “Have you killed him?”

“No, madame,” replied Acton; “he is only in a faint.”

The Queen looked at him, and her look demanded an explanation.

“It is the simplest thing in the world,” said he. “As we agreed, I sent my secretary to tell the master of the post at Capua that he must inform the courier Ferrari, as he passed, that the King was awaiting him at Caserta; he did so; Ferrari took only the time to change horses; but, in coming in under the great gate of the castle he turned too short, embarrassed by our guests’ carriages; his horse fell, the rider’s head hit against a stone, he was picked up unconscious, and I have had him brought here, saying it was useless to go in search of a doctor, and that I would attend to him myself.”

“Well, then,” said the Queen, grasping Acton’s idea, “there is no longer need to buy his silence; we need not fear his speaking, and provided that he remains unconscious long enough for us to open the letter, read it and seal it up again, that is all we require; only, you understand, Acton, he must not wake up while we are doing it.”

“I have taken my precautions. I have given this unfortunate twenty drops of laudanum, and to make sure I will give him ten more.” And pouring ten drops of a yellowish liquid into a little spoon, he inserted it into the throat of the unconscious man.

“I don’t see any courier’s bag,” said the Queen.

“Ah, the King doesn’t take ordinary precautions with his confidential man; and he carries simple despatches in a leather pocket made inside his jacket.”

“Let us see,” said the Queen without the slightest hesitation.

Acton undid the jacket, ransacked the leather pocket and drew out a letter sealed with the private seal of the Emperor of Austria, namely, as Acton had forseen, with a head of Marcus-Aurelius.

The Queen wished to take the letter from him to unseal it.

“Oh! no, no, not thus,” said he, and he held it at a certain height above a taper, the seal gradually melted, one of the four corners of the envelope rose. The Queen passed a hand over her brow. “What are we about to read?” she said. Acton drew the letter from its envelope, and bowing presented it to her. The Queen opened it and read aloud: —

“Castle of Schœnbrûnn, 14 28th September, 1798. “Most excellent brother, cousin and uncle, ally and confederate, “I reply to Your Majesty in my own hand, as you have written to me in yours.

“My advice, in agreement with that of the Aulic council, is that we should begin a campaign against France only when we have collected all our chances of success, and one of the chances on which I am permitted to rely is the co-operation of 40,000 Russians led by Field-Marshal Souvarov, to whom I intend giving the chief command of our armies; but these 40,000 men will not be here till the end of March. Temporise then, my most excellent brother, cousin and uncle, retard by every possible means the opening of hostilities; I do not think France is any more desirous of going to war than we are; profit by her peaceful intentions; give some good or bad reason for what has passed, and, in April, we will open a campaign with all our forces.

“With this, and this letter having no other aim, I beg, my very dear brother, cousin and uncle, ally and confederate, that God may have you in his holy and worthy keeping.

“FRANCOIS.’’

“This is something quite unexpected,” said the Queen.

“Not to me, madame,” replied Acton. “I never believed that his Majesty the Emperor would begin a campaign before next spring.”

“What are we to do?”

“I await your Majesty’s orders.”

“You are aware of my reasons for wanting an immediate war, General?”

“Does your Majesty take the responsibility?”

“What responsibility do you want me to take with such a letter?”

“The Emperor’s letter will be whatever we desire.”

“What are you saying?”

“Paper is a passive agent, and one makes it say what one likes. The whole question lies in the calculation: Is it better to make war immediately or later, to attack or to wait to be attacked.”

“There’s no need to discuss that, it seems to me; we know the state in which the French army is, it cannot resist us to-day; if we give it time to organise, it is we who will be unable to resist.”

“And, with that letter, you think it impossible for the King to open a campaign?”

“He! He will be only too pleased to find a pretext for not budging from Naples.”

“Then, madame, I know only one course,” said Acton in resolute tones.

“What?”

“To make the letter say the contrary of what it does say.”

The Queen grasped Acton’s arm.

“Is it possible?” asked she, fixedly regarding him.

“Nothing is easier.”

“Explain to me.... Wait a moment!”

“What?”

“Didn’t you hear that man sigh?”

“What does it matter?”

“He raises himself.”

"To fall back again; look."

And, in truth, the unfortunate Ferrari fell back on his bed moaning.

"You were saying?" continued the Queen.

"That the paper is thick, colourless, written on a single page."

"Well?"

"So one can, by using an acid, remove the writing, leaving only the three last lines and his signature in the Emperor's hand, and substitute the advice to open hostilities without delay for that of waiting till April."

"What you are proposing is a serious matter, General."

"Therefore I said it is for the Queen alone to take such a responsibility."

The Queen reflected for a moment, with wrinkled forehead, with frowning eyebrows, a hardened look and a clenched hand.

"Good," said she. "I take it."

Acton gazed at her.

"I have told you that I take it. To work!"

Acton approached the wounded man's bed, felt his pulse, and returning to the Queen said, "He will not regain consciousness for a couple of hours, and now I should like a chafing-dish, fire and a flat-iron."

"Ring then, and ask for what you require, as you are known to be here."

"But your Majesty is not known to be."

"True," said the Queen, and she concealed herself behind the window curtain.

Acton's secretary came in answer to the ring.

"Ah! it is you, Dick?" said Acton.

"Yes, milord; I thought that possibly your Excellency might require things in which a servant would be of no use."

"You are right. First get me and as soon as possible a stove, lighted charcoal and a flat-iron; and do not go out of call; I shall probably need you later."

When the young man had left the room, and Acton had closed the door after him, "Are you sure of this young man?" asked the Queen.

"As of myself, madame."

"What do you call him?"

"Richard Menden; Dick for short."

Five minutes afterwards steps were heard.

"Since it is Richard," said Acton, "your Majesty need not hide; besides, we shall need him immediately to re-write the letter; for the King would recognise our hands at once."

"True," and the Queen seated herself with her back to the door. The young man came in with the objects asked for, and put them down near the fireplace; then he went out without seeming to have noticed that someone was in the room whom he had not previously seen.

Acton lit a fire in the little stove; and opening the medicine cupboard, brought out a little bottle of oxalic acid, cut the feather of a pen to serve as a brush for the liquid, folded the letter in such a way as to safeguard the three last lines and the imperial signature from all contact with the letter, poured the acid upon the paper and spread it with the feather of the pen.

The Queen followed these proceedings with curiosity mingled with uneasiness, afraid that it would ill-succeed or not succeed at all; but to her great satisfaction, she saw the ink first turn yellow, then white, then disappear under the biting acid.

Acton took out his handkerchief, and using it as a pad, sponged the letter. That done, the paper became perfectly blank; he took the iron, spread the letter on some sheets of paper, and ironed it as one irons linen.

"There now," said he, "while the paper dries let us compose his Majesty the Emperor of Austria's reply."

The Queen dictated it. Here is the text word for word: —

"Schœnbrunn, 28 September, 1798. "My most excellent brother, cousin, uncle, ally and confederate, "Nothing could please me better than your letter in which you promise me to submit yourself on every point to my advice. News which reaches me from Rome informs me that the French army is in the most complete prostration; quite as much as the army of Upper Italy.

"Undertake the one, my most excellent brother, cousin and uncle, ally and confederate; I will undertake the other. The moment I learn that you are at Rome, I, for my part, open a campaign with 140,000 men; you have 60,000, I am expecting 40,000 Russians; these are more than required, in order that the coming treaty of peace, instead of being called the treaty of Campo-Formico, may be called the treaty of Paris."

"Will that do?" asked the Queen.

"Excellent!" said Acton.

"Then it only remains to copy."

Acton made sure that the paper was perfectly dry, ironed out the protecting fold in it, went to the door and called Dick.

The young man came at once.

"Place yourself at this table," said Acton, "and copy this rough draft on to this letter in a slightly disguised hand."

The secretary sat down without remark, and, apparently without surprise, took up the pen as if the matter were perfectly simple, did as bidden, and rose, awaiting further orders.

Acton examined the letter by the light of the candles: there was nothing to indicate the treason which had just been committed; he re-inserted the letter in its cover, held the wax over the flame again, let fall on this first stratum another in order to efface all trace of the opening of the letter, and impressed upon it the seal which he had had made in facsimile of the Emperor's.

After which he returned the despatch to the leather pocket, buttoned up again the courier's jacket, and, taking a taper, examined the wound for the first time.

There was a bad contusion on the head, the skin was cut for about two inches, but there was no injury to the skull.

"Dick," said he; "you are to send for a doctor at Santa-Maria; while he is being found, which will take about an hour, you are to administer to this man, spoonful by spoonful, about a glassful of boiling green coffee. The doctor will think that he has been inhaling salts, or that his temples were rubbed with ether to make him come to; let him think so; he will bandage the wounded man, who will continue his way on foot or in a carriage, as he is able. The wounded man," continued Acton, laying stress on each word, "was picked up after his fall by the house servants, carried by them at. your bidding into the dispensary, tended by you and the doctor; he has seen neither me nor the Queen, neither have the Queen or I seen him. You hear?"

"Yes, Your Excellency."

"And now," said Acton, returning to the Queen, "you can let things go of themselves, and go back to the drawing-room without anxiety. All will happen as ordered."

The Queen looked once more at the secretary; then when the door had shut: "You have a valuable man in him, General," she said.

"He is not mine; he is yours, madame, as is everything I possess," and he bowed as he made way for her to pass.

When the Queen returned to the drawing-room, Emma Hamilton, wrapped in purple cashmere with gold fringes, amid the frenzied applause of the spectators, was falling back on a sofa with all the abandon of a professional dancer who has just obtained her greatest success; and truly, never did a ballet dancer of San Carlo throw her public into such intoxication, so that the moment had come when, by an imperceptible attraction, the circle round her had contracted till she had scarcely room to breathe; but at sight of the Queen the crowd opened out to let her reach Emma; and the applause redoubled. It was well known that to praise her favourite's grace, talent and magic was the surest way to pay court to Caroline.

"From what I see and hear," said the latter, "it appears to me that Emma has kept her word to you. She must now rest; besides it is one o'clock in the morning, and Caserta from Naples — my thanks that you have forgotten it — is distant several miles."

All understood this as a dismissal in due form; the Queen gave her hand to kiss to three or four of the more favoured, detained Nelson and his two friends, and calling to her the Marchioness of San Clemente: "My dear Elena; you will be on duty with me the day after to-morrow."

"Your Majesty would say to-morrow; for, as you have observed, it is one o'clock in the morning; I prize this honour too much to allow it to be postponed for a single day."

"I am going to vex you a good deal then, my dear Elena," said the Queen with a smiling expression difficult to define; "but Countess San Marco asks my permission — with yours granted naturally — to take your place, and begs you to take hers; she has something of importance doing next week. You don't see anything inconvenient in this exchange?"

"Nothing, madame, but the postponement for a day of the happiness of paying my court."

"Well, then, it is settled; you are entirely free tomorrow, my dear Marchioness."

"I shall probably take advantage of it by going into the country with the Marquis San Clemente."

"That's right," said the Queen; "here is an example." And she saluted the Marchioness, who, detained by her, was the last to make her curtsey and leave.

The Queen was then alone with Acton, Emma, the two officers and Nelson.

“My dear lord,” said she to the latter, “I have reason to think that to-morrow or the following day the King will receive from Vienna news relative to the war confirming your opinion; for you continue to hold, do you not, that the sooner one begins a campaign the better it will be.”

“Not only do I think so, madame, but if this advice is taken, I am ready to lend you the support of the English fleet.”

“We shall profit by it, milord; but it is not that which I have to ask of you for the instant.”

“Whatever the Queen commands, I am ready to obey.”

“I know, milord, how greatly the King confides in you; to-morrow, even though the reply from Vienna be favourable to war, he will still hesitate; a letter from your lordship, in the same sense as that of the Emperor’s, would remove all his irresolution.”

“Should it be addressed to the King, madame?”

“No. My august consort has an invincible repugnance to follow advice given directly; I should therefore prefer it to come in a confidential letter written to Lady Hamilton. Write collectively to her and Sir William; to her as my best friend, to Sir William as the King’s; coming by double rebound, the advice will influence him more.”

“As Your Majesty is aware,” said Nelson, “I am neither diplomat nor politician; my letter will be that of a sailor who says frankly, roughly even, what he thinks, and not anything else.”

“It is all I ask of you, milord. Besides, you are going away with the Captain-General, you will talk on the way; as no doubt something important will be decided in the morning, come and dine at the palace; Baron Mack dines there, you will combine your movements.”

Nelson bowed.

“We shall be by ourselves,” continued the Queen. “Emma and Sir William will be with us. We must urge and press the King; I should return to Naples myself this evening if my poor Emma were not so fatigued. You know, however,” added the Queen, lowering her voice, “that it is for you and for you only, my dear admiral, that she has said and done all the exquisite things you have seen and heard.” Then still lower: “She obstinately declined, but I told her I was sure she would enrapture you; all her obstinacy gave way in that hope.”

“Oh, madame, I entreat you!” said Emma.

“There, don’t blush, and give your beautiful hand to our hero; I would give him mine willingly, but I am sure he will prefer yours; mine will be therefore for these gentlemen.” And, in fact, she held out her hands to the officers, who each kissed one, while Nelson, grasping Emma’s with more passion perhaps than royal etiquette permitted, carried it to his lips.

“Is it true,” he asked in a low voice, “that it was for me you consented to recite, sing and go through that dance which has made me madly jealous?”

Emma gazed at him as she was accustomed when she wished to deprive her admirers of the little reason left to them; then with a tone still more intoxicating than her look: “Ungrateful being,” said she; “he asks!”

“His Excellency the Captain-General’s carriage,” announced a footman.

“Gentlemen,” said Acton, “when you are ready.”

Nelson and the two officers made their bows.

“Has Your Majesty any private commands for me?” said Acton to the Queen just as they were going.

“Yes,” said she; “at nine this evening the three State inquisitors in the dark room.”

Acton bowed and went out; the two officers were already in the anti-chamber.

“At last!” said the Queen, throwing an arm round Emma’s neck, and embracing her with the warmth which she put into all her actions; “I thought that we should never be alone!....”

CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH THE KING WASHES HIS HANDS, AND THE QUEEN INSTRUCTS HER INQUISITORS.

ONE of the great diversions at Naples, on the approach of Christmas, used to be and still is the making of crèches. In 1798 there were few of the great houses without one of some kind, and King Ferdinand was specially renowned for his, for which he had had constructed a theatre on the ground-floor of the palace. Private cribs, according to the wealth of their owners, cost from about five to fifteen thousand francs; and the objects of which they were composed served the same purpose year after year. Ferdinand, however, used to spend on his about two or three hundred thousand francs, and after it had been on view for a couple of months it was dismantled and the precious objects bestowed upon his favourites as special marks of approbation.

The crèche for 1798 was to be more splendid than ever; it was not yet complete, and already very large sums had been spent, which, as money was needed for the war, was the reason why he had pressed for payment of the house of Baker’s share in the twenty-five million loan the previous evening.

The eight millions, weighed and counted, had been, according to Andrew Baker’s promise, transported during the night from the bank cellars to those of the palace. And, Ferdinand, radiant, no longer afraid of a lack of money, had sent for Cardinal Ruffo, firstly to show him the crib and ask his opinion on it, and secondly to await with him the return of Ferrari, who should have reached
Naples during the night, or at the very latest, in the morning.

Meanwhile, he was discussing the merits of Saint Éphrem with Fra Pacifico, who was to have the honour of a place in the crib, in consequence of which he and his ass Jacobino were being posed by a sculptor, who was modelling them in clay preparatory to carving them in wood. As it was impossible for Fra Pacifico to pursue his usual avocations during the sittings, the King’s head cook had been charged with filling his baskets, to the great satisfaction of man and beast, who never in their wildest and most ambitious dreams had hoped for the honour of being face to face with the King.

Ferdinand was in the midst of making Fra Pacifio relate the legend — swollen to formidable proportions — of how the butcher had been attacked by a whole army of Jacobins, when the arrival of Cardinal Ruffo interrupted the recital, for the Cardinal recognised the monk and knew the abominable crime of which he had been the cause, and turned aside to examine the crib. The King did not send Fra Pacifico away empty-handed however; besides the loads of fish, vegetables, wine and meat from the royal kitchens, Ferdinand made an order to pay him a hundred ducats for each sitting, as alms, and demanded his blessing in dismissing him, and whilst the monk, a blesser worthy of the blest, with a heart bounding with pride was going away on his ass, he went to rejoin Ruffo.

“Well, Eminence,” he was saying, “there is no news of Ferrari, generally so punctual, and so I have sent for you to help me pass the time while waiting for him.”

“And you have done well, sire,” replied Ruffo, “for on crossing the courtyard I saw a horse covered with sweat taken to the stable, and in the distance a man being supported under the armpits. This man was going up to your apartment with difficulty; I thought I recognised the poor devil you expect by his jack boots, leather breeches, and laced jacket; perhaps he has had an accident.”

At this moment a footman appeared. “Sire,” said he, “the courier, Antonio Ferrari, has arrived, and is waiting in your study that your Majesty may be pleased to receive the despatches he brings.”

“Here is our reply, Eminence,” said the King, and without even asking if Ferrari were hurt, Ferdinand went quickly to his room by a secret staircase, and was there with Ruffo before the courier, who delayed by his wound, could go but slowly, and was obliged to pause at each ten steps. Some moments later, the door opened and Ferrari, still supported by the two men, appeared on the threshold, pale, with his head wrapped in a bloodstained bandage.

On seeing the King, Ferrari, as if his master’s presence gave him strength, took three steps forward, and whilst the men who held him up withdrew, shutting the door behind them, he pulled the despatch from his pocket and presented it to the King.

“Good,” said Ferdinand for all thanks; “there’s my imbecile who let himself fall; and where did it happen?”

“In the castle courtyard; the master of the post at Capua told me the King was at Caserta.”

“You hear, Cardinal?” said the King. “And how did it happen?” he asked Ferrari; and when he had been informed, “Hum!” he responded, and turning over the letter as if he hesitated to open it, “Let us see what my nephew writes, Cardinal.”

“If your Majesty permits,” replied Ruffo, pushing forward an armchair, “the messenger had best be seated, and I will give him a glass of water, and some salts,” and indeed Ferrari fell into the chair almost fainting. “Perhaps his friend Jupiter may help to revive him,” added Ruffo, as whining and scratching were heard at the door, and he went to open it. The King frowned and became absorbed in the letter, while Jupiter, keeping as far from him as possible, edged towards the courier.

“Did the Emperor write this letter himself?” asked Ferdinand of Ferrari, handing it to the Cardinal.

“I do not know, sire; but it was he who gave it to me.”

“And since then no one has seen it? It has not left you?”

“It was in my pocket when I fainted; and when I recovered consciousness.”

“And what was done with you in the interval?”

“M. Acton’s secretary carried me into the dispensary.”

“Who bandaged you?”

“The doctor from Santa-Maria. I saw only him and the secretary.”

“What do you think of the letter, Cardinal?” asked Ferdinand.

“It is in precise terms. The news originates from Rome the same as ours.”

“The body of the letter is not in his own hand, though,” returned Ferdinand suspiciously.

“No, but the concluding lines, the signature and the address are autograph, and the seal is his. One can hardly ask more. Has your Majesty any further questions for your courier?”

“No; let him get his wound attended to;” and he turned his back.

“And these are the men one dies for!” murmured Ruffo, and he rang for help for Ferrari, but the latter rose unaided, saluted, and made his way to the door alone, passing as he went out a footman come to ask for an audience for Sir William Hamilton. The King signed to the Cardinal to remain. “This visit sounds as if it were official. I shall need your help probably,” he told him, and as the door re-opened to admit the English Ambassador, added: “*Zitto!*” displaying the Emperor’s letter ere pocketing it. The Cardinal had barely time to make a corresponding gesture when Sir William Hamilton entered.

“Welcome, Sir William,” said the King, “and all the more that I believed you at Caserta.”

“The Queen has honoured Lady Hamilton and myself in bringing us back in her carriage, and. having a communication to make to your Majesty.”

“Relative to the war, I presume,” said the King with a glance at Ruffo.

“Exactly, sire.”

“Then you may speak before his Eminence, for it was the subject we were discussing at the moment you were announced.”

The two men bowed to one another, which they never did if they could avoid it.

“Well,” continued Sir William, “I have here a letter addressed by Lord Nelson to Lady Hamilton and myself which I think it my duty to communicate.”

“Read it; we are listening,” said the King. Here is the very text of the letter which the English Ambassador translated from English into Italian for the King: —

“To Lady Hamilton.

“Naples, 3rd October, 1798.

“My Dear Madam, “The interest that you and Sir William Hamilton have always taken in their Sicilian Majesties, is, for the last six years, graven in my heart, and I can truly say, that on all the occasions offered, and they have been numerous, I have never ceased to show my sincere sympathy for the prosperity of this kingdom.

“In virtue of this attachment, dear Madam, I cannot remain indifferent to what has passed and is passing at this moment in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, nor to the misfortunes which, from what I see clearly without being a diplomat, are about to fall on all this loyal country, and that, through the worst of all policies, temporizing.

“Since my arrival in these waters, namely since May last, I have seen in the Sicilian people one devoted to its Sovereign, and terribly detesting the French and their principles. It has been the same during my stay at Naples; and I have found the Neapolitans there, from first to last, ready to make war on the French, who, as one knows, are organising an army of thieves to pillage this kingdom and pull down the monarchy.

"And, indeed, has not the policy of France always been to rock governments in a false security in order to destroy them afterwards? and, as I have already stated, is not one aware that Naples is the country they wish above all to deliver over to pillage? Knowing that, but knowing that his Sicilian Majesty has a powerful army, ready, I am assured, to march on a country which invites it, with the advantage of making war besides, instead of awaiting it resolutely, I wonder that this army has not been set marching this month past.

"I have full confidence that the so fortunate arrival of General Mack will urge the government to profit by the most favourable moment that Providence has granted; for if it attacks or waits to be attacked at home, instead of carrying the war outside, it needs no prophet to predict that the kingdoms will be lost and the monarchy destroyed! But, should, unfortunately, the Neapolitan Government persist in this wretched and ruinous system of temporizing, I recommend you, my dear friends, to hold your most precious possessions and yourselves ready to be embarked at the slightest news of invasion. It is my duty to think of and to provide for your safety. I regret to think that this might also be necessary for that of the amiable Queen of Naples and her family; but it would be best that the words of the great William Pitt, Earl of Chatham, should come to the minds of the ministers of this country.

"'The boldest course is the safest.'

"This is the sincere desire of him who calls himself, "Dear Madam, "Your very humble and very devoted "Admirer and friend, "HORATIO NELSON."

"Is this all?" asked the King. "Sire," replied Sir William, "there is a postscript."

"Let us see it.... Unless...." His hesitation visibly indicated "unless the postscript is for Lady Hamilton only." So Sir William hastened to continue:

"I beg your ladyship to receive this letter as a proof, for Sir William Hamilton, to whom I write with all due respect, of the firm and unalterable opinion of an English Admiral desirous of proving his fidelity towards his sovereign in doing all in his power for the happiness of their Sicilian Majesties and of their kingdom."

“This letter deserves to be considered,” said the King. “It is the advice of a sincere friend,” returned Sir William.

And promised ally?” continued the King.

“He will fulfil his promise. Your Majesty need fear no French ship while his fleet is here, but in six weeks’ time he may receive sailing orders; that is why no time should be lost.”

The King and Cardinal exchanged looks, as much as to say, “They have taken their decision.”

“What is your sincere advice as to war, Cardinal?” asked Ferdinand.

“I think that if both the Emperor of Austria and Nelson keep their promises, under all the circumstances it would be best to attack.”

“Nelson and you urge war, do you not, Sir William?” interrogated the King.

“Nelson counsels it out of his devotion; I, as English Ambassador, seconding what I know to be my gracious sovereign’s wishes.”

“Cardinal,” said the King; “do me the pleasure to pour some water into that basin for me.”

The Cardinal obeyed without making any remark, and presented the basin to the King.

The King turned up his cuffs and washed his hands with a kind of fury.

“You see what I am doing, Sir William?” said he.

“I see, sire,” replied the English Ambassador, “but I cannot quite say why.”

“Well, I will explain it to you,” said Ferdinand. “I am doing what Pilate did, washing my hands.”

ACTON had not forgotten the Queen’s command of the morning, and had summoned the State inquisitors to the dark room for nine o’clock; but to prove their zeal, and from personal uneasiness, each had come half-an-hour before the time. These three men, whose names remain in merited execration in Naples, were the Prince of Castelcicala, Guidobaldi, Vanni. The Prince, first in rank as in shame, was ambassador in London when the Queen, needing a great Neapolitan name to shield her vengeance, recalled him. From ambition and greed he had consented to lower himself from Prince to policeman, and from ambassador to spy.

Guidobaldi, an iniquitous judge and a shuffling magistrate, without conscience, was pleased to operate on a larger scale under royal favour; but both were less feared and detested than the fiscal procurator Vanni, for a comparison for whom one must seek in the animal species among beasts of prey. There was in him something both of wolf and hyena, morally and physically. He was rather tall than short; had a sombre and concentrated expression; an ashen face; never laughed and slept little.

It was thanks to Vanni's zeal that the prisons were full of suspects, crowded into infected dungeons, deprived of air, light and bread; and there left to languish at his pleasure ignorant even of what they were accused, while he was busy in causing yet further arrests. Unlike Guidobaldi, he was reputed upright and inflexible; to limitless ambition he united limitless cruelty and enthusiasm.

He was dangerous and fatal, because he possessed an imagination which magnified the smallest actions of his own and of others. He had made his reputation over the case of the Prince of Tarsia, director of the King's silk factories, an honest man with no business ability, who became involved in his accounts. The Prince would have paid off the deficit from his private purse, and have ended the business in a couple of hours; but Vanni, having got it into his clutches, let it drag on ten years, at the end of which time the Prince was ruined both in pocket and reputation.

The Queen, who always fancied herself surrounded with plots and conspiracies, allowed Vanni to work upon her feelings and increase her fears. This white terror lasted three years. The prisons were full of persons against whom nothing had been proved, and the tide of public indignation rose high. In these circumstances, Vanni wished to resort to the tortures of the middle ages; but all the judges except Guidobaldi and Castelcicala revolted, with the result that the prisoners were released, the tribunal dissolved in public disgust, and Vanni lost his position as fiscal attorney. It was then that the Queen came forward, made Vanni a marquis, and of these three men, who had incurred public execration, formed her private tribunal; which sat alone, and struck in the dark no longer with the axe of the executioner, but with the dagger of the secret police.

We have seen Pasquale di Simone at work; let us observe Guidobaldi, Castelcicala and Vanni.

The three iniquisitors, uneasy at their summons, were assembled round the green table lighted by the bronze lamp, whose shade left their faces in shadow. As they waited for the Queen, from time to time each cast an uneasy glance into the darkest corner of the room, where, almost invisible stood the police agent Pasquale. They knew that he was even more in the

Queen’s secrets than they were, and they feared him more than the public executioner, Master Donato; for he was the private executioner — not of the law but of the royal pleasure — and they were aware that their very knowledge of the royal secrets might become a terrible danger to them.

As the last stroke of nine sounded, the door opened and Caroline appeared; the three inquisitors rose simultaneously, but she did not leave them time to speak.

“This time, Monsieur Vanni,” said she, it is I who hold the threads of a plot; and more fortunate than you who find the guilty without the proofs, I have found the proofs first; and through them I bring you the means of finding the guilty,” and she came to the table, opened her purple cashmere shawl worn like a cloak on one shoulder, parted it, and set out on the table a pair of pistols, and a letter still slightly stained with blood.

“Sit down, sirs,” said she to the astonished inquisitors.

“Marquis Vanni, write to my dictation,” and she remained standing, her closed fist resting on the table, and wrapped in her purple shawl like a Roman Empress, dictating as follows: —

“On the night of 22nd-23rd December last, six men were assembled in the ruins of the Castle of Queen Joanna; they were awaiting a seventh, sent from Rome by General Championnet. This man had left his horse at Pozzuoli, had taken a boat there, and in spite of the storm which was threatening, and which later burst, he proceeded by sea to the ruins. As the boat reached the shore it foundered; the two fishermen who were rowing perished; Championnet’s messenger also fell into the water, but saved himself. He and the six conspirators conferred together till about half an hour after midnight. He left first and went towards the river Chiaïa; of the other six, three went up Pausilippo, and three took a boat along the coast towards the Chateau de L’Ovo. Shortly before reaching the Lion fountain, the messenger was assassinated. Before falling he killed two men with these pistols, and wounded two with the sword which you will find in that cupboard. The sword is of French make; but the pistols are from the royal factory at Naples; they are engraved with an N., the first letter of their owner’s Christian name.”

Not a breath interrupted the Queen.

“The messenger,” she continued, “had changed his uniform, wet from his immersion, for a coat of laced green velvet, which had been lent him by one of the six conspirators, who had left in the pocket a letter, a love letter from a woman addressed to a young man named Nicolino; the same-probably who had also lent his pistols engraved with an N."

"The letter," said the Queen with a singular smile, "is from the Marchioness Elena di San Clemente, one of my ladies of honour. But, as the lovers, it would appear, are still in their honeymoon, I have this morning granted leave of absence to the Marchioness. Now, listen attentively," went on the Queen. The three inquisitors drew nearer, and into the circle of lamplight, so that their three heads were suddenly illuminated; and the Queen continued: "Most likely my *lady of honour* will not tell her husband of the leave I give her, and will devote the whole of to-morrow to her dear Nicolino; you understand now, do you not?"

The three men looked questioningly at the Queen; they had not understood. Caroline continued:

"It is, however, very simple. Pasquale di Simone surrounds the Marchioness's palace with his men; they see her come out, and follow her; the rendez-vous is in a third house; they recognise this Nicolino; and leave the lovers their leisure. Probably the Marchioness will go away first; and when Nicolino emerges in his turn, he is arrested, without injury," said the Queen, raising her voice and frowning. "Pasquale's men take him alive to the Governor of the Castle of St. Elmo, who chooses for him one of his safest cells. If he names his accomplices, well and good; if he refuses, then Vanni, it is your affair: there is no longer a stupid tribunal to prevent your administering torture, and *as upon a corpse*. Is that clear, gentlemen? And when *I* set out to discover conspiracies, am I a good bloodhound?"

"All that the Queen does is stamped with genius," said Vanni, bowing. "Has your Majesty any other commands?"

"No," replied the Queen. "You have your written instructions; I require a report of the first interrogatory. Take the cloak and sword in the cupboard, the pistols and this letter, and God guard you." She acknowledged their profound bows with her hand; they withdrew backwards.

When the door had shut behind them, Caroline signed to Pasquale di Simone, and as he approached the table threw upon it a purse full of gold.

"You heard?" she said; "to-morrow, come here at the same hour to report to me."

The next day Pasquale punctually informed her that the Marchioness's lover, surprised unawares, had been arrested at three o'clock in the afternoon without having been able to offer any resistance, taken to the

Castle St. Elmo and incarcerated. She learned besides that this lover was Nicolino Caracciolo, brother of the Duke of Rocca Romana, and nephew of the admiral.

“Ah!” murmured she; “if we had the good fortune to find the admiral compromised!”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE OPPOSING GENERALS.

ON a fine autumn day a fortnight after the arrest of Nicolino Caracciolo, the population of Naples and its environs were hurrying to the approaches to the Royal Palace, all of which were guarded by troops. In the centre of the People's Square, in front of the Palace, General Mack was parading, surrounded by a most brilliant staff composed of officers of the highest rank, covered with decorations from all countries and wearing uniforms glittering with gold lace. At all the windows from which a view of the square could be obtained, women, in gala dress, beneath the white flags of the Bourbons and the red flags of England, were waving their handkerchiefs to cries of "Long live the King! Long live England! Long live Nelson! Death to the French!" which rose like the menace of a tempest from the midst of that human swell whose waves were beating against the dykes which they threatened every moment to overturn. The galloping staff in the square, the people blocking the streets, the ladies waving their handkerchiefs, the whole mass of spectators was waiting for the King who was coming to put himself at the head of his army, to take the field in person against the French.

For a week past war had been decided on; it was preached in the churches and out of doors; and Ferdinand's proclamations covered the walls. They declared that the King had done all he could to preserve friendly relations with the French, but that the honour

of Naples was outraged by the occupation of Malta, a fief of the kingdom of Sicily, that he could not tolerate the invasion of the states of the Pope, whom he loved as his ancient ally and respected as Head of the Church, and that consequently he was marching his army to restore Rome to its rightful sovereign. Then, addressing himself directly to the people, he said:

Had I been able to gain this advantage by any other sacrifice, I should not have hesitated to make it; but what hope of success was there after the many melancholy examples well known to you all? Full of confidence in the goodness of the God of armies, who will guide my steps and direct my operations, I set out at the head of the courageous defenders of the country. I go with the greatest joy to brave all dangers for love of my fellow-countrymen, my brothers and my children; for such I have always considered you. Be faithful to God, obey the commands of my well-beloved companion whom I charge with the cares of government in my absence. I enjoin you to respect and cherish her as a mother. I also leave you my children, who should be no less dear to you than to myself. Whatever may betide, remember that you are Neapolitans, that to be brave, it suffices to will it, and that it is better to die gloriously for God and one's country than to live in a fatal oppression. May Heaven shed her blessings upon you! Such is the prayer of him, who, while life lasts, will preserve for you the tenderest feelings of a sovereign and father."

This was the first time that the King of Naples had spoken directly to his people; and since the victory of the Spaniards at Villetri in 1744 the Neapolitans had heard no cannon except on fête days. As to Ferdinand he had had no occasion for proving his courage or military talent; and his capacities were unknown, unless to himself. But he had taken a grave step in declaring war; even though after the letter he had received he made no doubt of the help of Austria, and also counted on a division from Piedmont.

The Neapolitans, always ready to rush to extremes, were by this time in a state of enthusiasm bordering on delirium. They looked upon the King as a second Godëfroy de Bouillon, a champion of the Church flying to the aid of demolished altars and religion profaned, an example of Christianity, the idol of Naples. Thus all who could be suspected of Jacobinism, namely, of desiring progress and instruction and of looking upon France as a civilising influence, were prudently within doors, and careful not to mingle in the crowd.

But the King, who was always so punctual at the hunt, at the theatre and at the entertainment of publicly eating his macaroni, was an hour and an half behind time and the crowd was growing impatient. This time he was engaged to play a far different game; one to which he was unused, and for which he may have doubted his skill.

At last, however, there was a greater stir, drums beat, bands played, and the palace balconies filled, in the middle one appeared the Queen, the Prince Royal, the Princess of Calabria, the Princes and Princesses of the Royal Family, Sir William and Lady Hamilton, Nelson and his officers Troubridge and Ball; and in the others all the ladies and gentlemen attached to the Court. And at the same moment, in the midst of frenzied and deafening cries, Ferdinand himself appeared on horseback with his escort, framed in the great gateway of the palace. On horseback he showed to great advantage, being one of the finest horsemen in the kingdom. As fate would have it, however, even before he had emerged from the gateway, his horse started violently, refusing to advance into the square, and reared so as to have thrown any less accomplished rider than Ferdinand. Making free use of his spurs he urged him forward with a single bound as if he had crossed some invisible obstacle, and proud of displaying his horsemanship to such an assembly, sprang into the middle of the circle of generals awaiting him; then making his horse pivot till he faced the Queen, raised his hat and saluted her. At this the thunderous acclamations on his appearance redoubled on all sides; the vessels in the harbour dressed their flags and the cannon from the forts rent the air with salvoes of artillery.

Eleven o’clock struck. Ten o’clock should have been the hour of departure. But Ferdinand could not make an end without theatrical display.

“My children!” he cried, extending his arms towards the balcony, where were, with the young princesses, the young princes Leopold and Albert, who, hearing themselves called, left the balcony, and, escaping from their professors, sped out by the great gate, adventuring with the careless courage of youth among all the horses crowding the square, and rushed to the King.

Ferdinand lifted them, turn by turn, from the ground and embraced them. Then he showed them to the people, crying in a powerful voice, which carried far into the crowd: “My friends, I entrust them to you; they are, after the Queen, my most precious possessions,” and, restoring them to their tutors, he added, drawing his sword:

“And I, I go to conquer or to die for you!”

At these words the general emotion reached its height. Tears flowed, blessings were called down from Heaven; the desired effect was produced; to remain longer would have spoiled it. The trumpets sounded the signal for departure. A small body of cavalry formed the head of the column; then came the King at a distance, alone, bowing to the people; after him, Mack and the Staff; then the main body of troops; and another small detachment of cavalry brought up the rear.

Before finally leaving the Castle square, the King turned for the last time to salute the Queen and his children. Then he was swallowed up in Toledo Street on the road to Capua, where his suite was to make its first halt, while he, at Caserta, would take his real farewells of his wife and children and pay a last visit to his kangaroos. What he regretted most was his crib, which he was leaving unfinished.

For more than a month the King of Sicily's army had taken up its positions; it was divided into three bodies, 22,000 men under the King at San Germano; 16,000 under General Micheroux in the Abruzzi; and the third of 8,000 in the plain of Sessa; also 6,000 at Gueta, Under General de Damas; while yet another 8,000 were ready to set sail for Leghorn under General Naselli. Thus, without counting these latter there were 52,000 men marching against Championnet and his 9-10,000.

After three or four days in camp at San Germano, where the Queen and Lady Hamilton reviewed the first division on horseback, and by gracious words and smiles to the officers, double pay and distribution of wine to the men, did their utmost to raise the enthusiasm of the army, the Court and the guests invited to these warlike festivities, including the Ambassadors and Nelson, returned to Caserta, while, on a concerted signal, at the same hour, the army began its march on three different objectives.

According to the orders we have seen given by General Macdonald in the name of Championnet, in the Corsini Palace, orders to abandon every position at the approach of the Neapolitans, we shall not be surprised to see the whole French army in retreat before the aggression of King Ferdinand.

General Micheroux, with a right wing of 10,000 going by the Emilian Way took the direction of Porto-de-Fermo; General de Damas's left wing took the Appian Way, and the King, leading the centre, marched on Rome by Ceperano and Frosinone.

At Ceperano the King halted for breakfast at about nine in the morning, after which General Mack, who was now honoured with a seat at the Royal table, asked permission to summon his aide-de-camp, Major Riescach, a young Austrian of good education and distinguished appearance, speaking French as his mother tongue.

"Sire," said Mack, "it is customary in war to announce one's attack to the enemy; I think it my duty to inform the Republican General that we have crossed the frontier; besides, when he learns in what strength we are, he may yield. Does Your Majesty permit it?"

"By all means," said the King.

"Major Ulrich," said Mack, pivoting his chair on one leg, and leaning his elbow on the table, "sit down at that bureau and write in your best hand, for it is possible that the Republican General reads with difficulty, and I don't want him to say afterwards that he didn't understand."

"If it is to General Championnet, Baron," replied the young man, "you need have no fear, I believe he is one of the most literary men in the French army."

"Well, do as I tell you," replied Mack, piqued at this observation. "Does Your Majesty allow me a free hand?"

"Certainly, assuredly," replied the King, "however literary your Citizen-General, he would be puzzled to make out what I should write, I think."

"Write, sir," then said Mack, and he dictated the following ultimatum, unreported in any history, copied by us from the official duplicate sent to the Queen, and a model of impertinence and pride.

"General.

"I announce to you that the Sicilian army which I have the honour of commanding under the orders of the King in person, has just crossed the frontier to take possession of the Roman states, revolted and usurped since the peace of Campo-Formico, a revolution and usurpation which have not been recognised by His Sicilian Majesty, nor by his august ally the Emperor and King; I require therefore that without the least delay that in the cisalpine republic you order the French troops to evacuate the Roman states and all the places where they are in occupation. The Generals commanding His Sicilian Majesty's divisions have the most positive orders not to begin hostilities where the French troops retire on my notice, but to use force where they resist.

"I announce to you, moreover, citizen-general, that if the French troops set foot on the territory of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, I shall consider it a hostile act. I await your reply without any delay and beg you to send back to me Major Riescach, whom I am despatching to you, four hours after having received my letter. The reply should be positive and categoric. As to the demand to evacuate the Roman states and not to set foot in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, a negative" answer will be considered as a declaration of war on your part, and His Sicilian Majesty will know how to sustain, sword in hand, the just demands I address to you in his name.

"I have the honour, etc."

"Has the King any observations to make?" asked Mack.

"You sign it, do you not?" returned Ferdinand, and he shrugged his shoulders as much as to say: "Do as you please."

Mack signed, and dictated as address: “Citizen-General. The title these *sansculottes* of republicans give to themselves,” he remarked; and to the young man he added: “Carry this letter as fast as possible to the French general. Wait for his decision four hours and not a minute more. We shall continue to march.”

At half-past nine next morning the Major reached Rome by the Gate of San-Giovanni, and was given a soldier to take him to Championnet. The General had just returned from a walk round the walls, and had received at the door of the Corsini palace a letter brought by a peasant, who gave as a countersign the words Naples and Rome. This letter informed him of the convalescence of Salvato, the arrest and imprisonment of Nicolino Caraccioli and the marching orders and equipment of the Neapolitan army. Championnet was accompanied by his aide-de-camp, Thiébaut, and Éblé, a general of genius, just arrived. All three entered the palace; and Championnet gave the others the letter to read.

“Here is food for thought,” said he. “What do you say, Éblé?”

“I say,” returned he, as they came into the great gallery, “that 52,000 men and 100 cannon are a pretty figure. How many have you?”

“Nine cannon, and eleven or twelve thousand men. But we are French, and they are Neapolitans, commanded, moreover, by General Baron Mack. I think you were organising Neapolitans once, Éblé, and know something of them;” and turning to Thiébaut he continued:

“As the enemy may be here in three or four days, order the port Saint Angelo to fire the cannon; beat an alarm throughout the city, and let the garrison, under General Mathieu Maurice, assemble in the People’s Square.”

The aide-de-camp went to obey the order, but returned almost immediately. “General,” said he, “a messenger from San-Germano with an important despatch from General Mack.”

“Bring him in,” replied Championnet; “we should never make our friends wait, and still less our enemies.”

Major Riescach entered smiling, gracefully saluted, and presented General Mack’s letter; and since he had indited the contents, followed with some anxiety the Commander-in-Chief’s eyes as they passed from line to line. But at the last word Championnet smiled, and put the despatch in his pocket.

“Sir,” said he, “the honourable General Mack informs me that you have four hours to spend here; I thank him for it; and shall not let you off a minute. At a quarter-past two o’clock you will be free. Thiébaut, order an extra plate; this gentleman gives us the honour of his company to luncheon, that is if he will accept luncheon from poor devils in want of everything, when he has quitted a Royal table sumptuously served?” he added, laughing.

“General,” stammered the young officer, embarrassed at such politeness from the chief to one who brought him such a discourteous letter, “perhaps I am bidden to a Spartan repast, but only a Frenchman could have the courtesy to invite me to it.”

The meal, though not that of a Sybarite, was not quite that of a Spartan; it held the golden mean, thanks to the cellar of His Holiness Pius VI., the wines were of the best. As they sat down to table, three cannon shots were heard; almost at the same time the general alarm was being beaten.

“You hear, Major,” said Championnet, seeing that his guest was silent. “You understand that after a letter such as General Mack has honoured me by writing... I presume that you are aware of the contents?”

“I wrote it.”

“You write a very good hand, Major.”

“But General Mack dictated it.”

“General Mack has a very fine style.”

“But I have not heard you give any orders,” said the young man, “did your drums and cannon recognise me? Are they sorcerers?”

“They need to be, we have only nine, not too many to reply to a hundred. Another cutlet, Major?”

“With pleasure.”

“No. I gave the order before I saw you; I have a familiar spirit, like Socrates, I know your numbers and dispositions. Ah, General Mack is a great strategist, all Europe knows it; but you understand that I have only 12,000 men; of whom the Directory is taking 3,000 to reinforce the garrison at Corfu... and àpropos Thiébaut, give the order for them to embark. The Spartans were only 300, one has always sufficient to die.” Thiébaut went out. “Let me give you this wing, Major, you are not eating,” said Championnet; and, indeed the young man, uneasy at the General’s calmness, which he began to take for a trap, was forgetting his hunger.

"Éblé," continued Championnet, "as soon as we have finished, and while with Major Riescach I review the garrison, you will go on ahead and be in readiness to blow up the bridges of Tivoli and Borghetto as soon as the French troops shall have crossed."

"Yes, General," replied Éblé simply.

The young major gazed at Championnet who passed him the wine.

"Then you abandon Rome to us?" said he.

"You are too experienced a soldier, my dear Major," answered Championnet, "not to be aware that in 1799, under citizen Barras, one does not defend a town fortified in 274 by the Emperor Aurelian. I would risk it if General Mack were coming with Parthian arrows, Balearic slings, or even with those famous rams of Antony seventy-five feet long; but against a hundred cannon it would be madness."

Thiébaut returned. "Your orders are carried out, General," said he. Championnet nodded, and continued, "However, I shall not entirely abandon Rome; no, Thiébaut will shut himself up in the Castle of St. Angelo with five hundred men — won't you, Thiébaut?"

"If you order me, General, certainly."

"And you will give it up under no pretext."

"Under no pretext, you can be easy."

"You will choose your men yourself; you will easily find five hundred to die for the honour of France. Besides, we set out to-day. I beg pardon, Major, for thus speaking of all our little affairs before you: but you are of the-profession. To-day we depart. I ask you, Thiébaut, to hold out only twenty days; at the end of that time I shall be in Rome again, and even before.- Éblé, you will rejoin me at Civita-Castellana. I shall concentrate there, it is a fine position. You excuse me, my dear Major, I am one of those players who put their cards on the table; with an inferiority in men and munitions such as mine, one must take one's precautions, and," as while listening, the young man was letting his coffee get cold:

"Drink your coffee hot, Major; Scipio, my general factotum, prides himself on his coffee."

"It is indeed excellent," said the Major.

"Then empty your cup, my young friend, for if you are agreeable, we are going on horseback to review the garrison from which Thiébaut will pick out his five hundred men."

As all rose, Scipio appeared, enquiring what books, maps and plans were to be taken, what trunks to be packed.

"No, no, Scipio, leave everything as it is; we shall find it all on our return. My dear Major" continued Championnet, buckling on his sword, "General Mack will do well to lodge here, I think; he will find a library and excellent maps; commend them to him, I beg, I think a good deal of them; they are, like my palace a loan to him, and I place them in your safe keeping. If, as is probable, the King lodges opposite in the Farnese palace, it will be very convenient; His Majesty and his Commander-in-Chief can signal to one another from the windows."

"If the General inhabits this palace," answered the Major, "I can answer for it that anything that may have belonged to you will be sacred."

"Scipio," said Championnet, "a change of uniform and six shirts in a portmanteau; you can strap it on behind my saddle now; the review over, we shall march immediately."

Five minutes afterwards his orders were executed; and four or five horses were awaiting their riders at the door of the Corsini palace; among them a fresh one for the Major, presented by Championnet in place of his own, so fatigued. The little cortège then set out taking the right bank of the Tiber by the Lungara to the bridge of St. Angelo, which it crossed to the left bank, proceeding by the Ripetta into the Square of the People, where was drawn up in battle array the garrison of Rome.

This garrison numbered nearly three thousand; two-thirds French, a third Polish. On seeing the General, a spontaneous cry arose "Long live the Republic!"

Championnet advanced to the centre of the first line, and signed that he wished to speak. The cries ceased.

"Friends," said he, "I am obliged to leave Rome, but I do not abandon it. I leave Colonel Thiébaut who will occupy Fort St.. Angelo with five hundred men; I have given my word of honour to come and deliver it in twenty days; do you engage with me?"

"Yes, yes, yes," cried three thousand voices.

"On your honour?" said Championnet.

"On our honour," repeated the three thousand.

"Now," continued Championnet, "choose from among you five hundred men ready to be entombed in the ruins of the fort rather than surrender it."

"All, all! We are all ready," was the cry.

“Sergeants,” said the General, “come out from the ranks and choose fifteen men from each company.”

“Friends,” said Championnet to them when this had been done and they were drawn up apart, “you will guard the flags of the two regiments and we will come to take them back. Let the standard bearers pass into your ranks.” Then arose frenzied cries of “Long live Championnet! Long live the Republic!”

“Colonel Thiébaut,” continued Championnet, “swear and make your men swear that you will let yourselves be killed to the last man rather than surrender.”

Every arm was stretched out, every voice cried:

“We swear it.”

Championnet approached his aide-de-camp.

“Embrace me, Thiébaut,” said he, “if I had a son, I should give to him the glorious mission I confide to you,” and they embraced in the midst of general hurrahs. Two o’clock was striking.

“Major Riescach,” said Championnet to the young messenger, “the four hours have elapsed, and to my great regret, I have no longer the right to detain you. I hope that you will honour me by accepting your mount as a souvenir of the too short moments we have just passed together.”

“Thanks from the bottom of my heart,” returned the young man bowing, and he laid his hand upon it. “And now, what am I to report to General Mack?”

“All that you have seen and heard, sir. Brigadier Martin, take four men and escort Major Ulrich de Riescach to the gate of San-Giovanni, and rejoin us on the road of La Storta.”

Championnet and the Major saluted for the last time; the latter and his escort plunging at a sharp trot into the Via Babuino. Colonel Thiébaut and his five hundred returned by Ripetta to the Castle of St. Angelo where they shut themselves up; and the remainder of the garrison, with Championnet and his staff at its head, went out of Rome, with drums beating, by the People’s Gate.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE KING AT ROME.

As General Mack had foreseen, his envoy re-joined him a little above Valmontone; but he did not listen to anything the Major told him except that the French had evacuated Rome; with which news he hastened to the King. They slept at Valmontone the same evening and by midday following reached Albano from whose heights the view extended beyond Rome to Ostia. As it was impossible to enter Rome the same day it was agreed that next morning at nine o’clock King Ferdinand should make his solemn entry, and proceed immediately to San Carlo to hear Mass.

A halt was called at seven in the evening, and the King was supping in a magnificent tent with General Mack, the Duke of Ascoli and the courtiers most favoured, when the arrival of a deputation from Rome was announced. They came to receive the King’s orders for the next day’s ceremony.

The King was radiant, he too, like Pompey and like Caesar was to have his triumph. What a splendid effect it would produce at Caserta and among his good lazzaroni. He had then vanquished without a single shot, this terrible French republic! Decidedly General Mack was a great man!

The deputies dismissed, and everything arranged for the morrow, he resolved to announce the good news to the Queen by express courier; and did so as follows:

“My Dear Mistress, “Everything is succeeding as we desire; in less than live days I have reached the gates of Rome, where tomorrow I make my solemn entry. All have fled before our victorious arms, and to-morrow evening, from the Farnese palace, I shall write to the Sovereign Pontiff that he may, if such is his good pleasure, come and celebrate the feast of the Nativity with us at Rome.

“Ah! if I could transport my crib here for him to see!

“The messenger I send to take you these good tidings is my usual courier Ferrari. Allow him, as a reward, to dine with my poor Jupiter who must be wearying for me. Reply to me in the same way; reassure me as to your dear health and that of my beloved children, to whom, thanks to you and to our illustrious General Mack, I hope to bequeath a throne not only prosperous, but glorious.

"The fatigues of the campaign have not been so great as I feared. It is true that, up to the present, I have been able to drive nearly all the time.

"There is but one black spot on the horizon: in leaving Rome the republican general has left five hundred men and a colonel in the Castle of St. Angelo; with what object? I don't quite understand, but am not uneasy otherwise: as our illustrious friend General Mack assures me that they will surrender at the first summons.

"To our speedy meeting, my dear mistress, whether you come, that the festival may be complete, to celebrate the Nativity with us at Rome, or whether, all being quieted down, and His Holiness re-established on his throne, I gloriously re-enter my dominions.

"Receive, dear mistress and spouse, to share with my beloved children, the embraces of your tender husband and father.

"FERDINAND."

P.S. — " I hope that nothing tiresome has happened to my kangaroos, and that I shall find them quite as well as when I left them. *A propos,* transmit my most affectionate remembrances to Sir William and Lady Hamilton; as to the Hero of the Nile, he must still be at Leghorn; wherever he is, inform him of our triumphs."

It was a good while since Ferdinand had penned such a long letter; but his enthusiasm explains his prolixity. On re-reading it he regretted not having thought of Sir William and Lady Hamilton before his kangaroos, but he did not think an alteration necessary; and he sealed and despatched the letter by Ferrari. After which he won a thousand ducats at whist, went radiant to bed and dreamed that he was going to make his entry, not at Rome, but at Paris!

Day dispelled this illusion, but his entry into Rome was indeed splendid. The municipality, on its knees, presented him with the keys of the city on a silver salver at the Gate of San Giovanni, to the accompaniment of a burst of song; and amid splendid military music he was followed by an imposing procession of his troops and artillery, in a rain of rose leaves thrown up into the air by a hundred young girls in white and choirs of children swinging censers who walked on ahead. It was a magnificent autumn day and the population lined the streets in its best clothes in this air sweet with the scent of flowers and incense.

Halts were made for the King to kiss the sacred stairs which Jesus Christ had trod, brought from Pilate's house at Jerusalem; and at San-Carlo to hear a Te Deum, then continuing along the Corso, and reversing the route from the Square of the People which Championnet had taken in leaving Rome, he reached the Farnese palace, the end of his long ride and of his triumph.

Covers for two hundred people were laid there in the long gallery; but the whole of Rome seemed to have gathered in the square outside, even overflowing into the palace itself with cries of "Long live the King," so that Ferdinand had to leave the table three times to show himself at the windows.

So, drunk with joy and wine, his heart bounding with pride and unwilling to wait the morrow to announce his entry into Rome to Pope Pius VI., and forgetting that, as prisoner of the French, His Holiness was not free to act, as soon as he had taken coffee, Ferdinand passed into a study and indited the following letter; "*To His Holiness Pope Pius VI., First Vicar of Our Lord Jesus Christ.*

"Prince of Apostles, King of Kings, "Your Holiness will no doubt learn with the greatest satisfaction, that by the help of Our Lord Jesus Christ and under the august protection of the blessed Saint Januario, this very day, with my army, I entered, without resistance, triumphantly into the capital of the Christian world. The French have fled, terrified at the sight of the cross and at the simple lustre of my arms. Your Holiness can therefore resume your supreme and paternal power which I shall shelter with my army. May you then quit your too modest dwelling in the Chartreuse, and on the wings of cherubims, like our holy maid of Loretto, come and alight at the Vatican to purify it with your sacred presence. Your Holiness will be able to celebrate divine service at St. Peter's on the birthday of Our Saviour."

That evening, the King drove along the principal streets of Rome to cries of "Long live King Ferdinand! Long live His Holiness Pius VI!" He stopped to hear a cantata in his honour at the Argentina Theatre; then to see Rome illuminated he mounted to the topmost rampart of the Pincian hill.

The whole of the city was light as day. One monument only, surmounted by a tricolour flag, like a solemn and menacing protest of France against the occupation of Rome, remained dark in the midst of all this brilliance, mute in the midst of all this noise. It was the Castle of St. Angelo. When going up the Pincio from the People's Square, the King had seen a crowd of women and children dancing round a bonfire in the Square. He had stopped and had asked what they were all doing, and had learned that the fire was made of a tree of Liberty planted eighteen months previously by the consuls of the Roman Republic. Touched by this devotion to good principle, Ferdinand had thrown a handful of money to the crowd crying: "Bravo, friends, amuse yourselves."

In the Navone Square he saw a second bonfire, and received a similar reply; and taking another handful of money, this time from the Duke of Ascoli, he threw that also to the people. The same thing happened in Colonna Square, where there were many men, and where fighting for the money became serious, and where an unfortunate passer-by in a large cloak with a hat drawn down over his eyes was assumed to be a Jacobin and thrown by the combatants into the fire where he perished miserably, to the cries of joy of the populace; who, all at once, conceived the brilliant idea that well as it was to burn the trees, it would be better still to burn the people who had planted them. These were the two consuls of the Roman Republic, Mattei and Zaccalone; and these names, for a year past, had been blessed and revered by the people to which these two truly liberal-minded men had devoted their time, their intelligence and their fortunes. But it was a day of re-action. A man whom Zaccalone had obliged to send his son to school, a young Roman, jealous of individual liberty, suggested that one of the trees of Liberty should be kept to hang the consuls on. This suggestion was adopted unanimously; and the crowd straightway made for the houses of the consuls. Happily both had quitted Rome. But two of their dependents declared that they knew where to find them, and would give them up. The offer was greeted with enthusiasm, and in the meantime the crowd began to pillage the houses of the absentees and to throw their furniture out of the windows.

Among the furniture, in each house, was a splendid bronze clock with this inscription:

To the Consuls of the Roman Republic, from grateful Israelites!

For the consuls had issued a decree bestowing the rights of citizens upon the Jews. But gratitude here proved a misfortune; the people were reminded of their existence; and with cries of "To the Ghetto!" rushed to find them.

Now the Jews on the departure of Championnet had hastened to set up again the Ghetto barriers which they had taken down when the decree of their emancipation was published; they had withdrawn again within them and the crowd found material obstacles opposed to its progress. Nothing daunted it conceived the idea of throwing over the barricades lighted brands from the neighbouring bonfire. No sooner said than done; pitch and tar were added, and soon the Ghetto looked like a bombarded town; and flames began to announce that fires had broken out in five or six places. In an hour's time, the doors and barriers gave way of themselves, and with cries of terror, the whole of the wretched population, men, women, and half-naked children, surprised in sleep, precipitated itself out into the city like a torrent. This was what the Romans were hoping for; each seized his Jew and a whole repertory of atrocious tortures was carried out upon the unfortunate people; those were fortunate who were thrown into the Tiber and purely and simply drowned.

These amusements lasted all night and the following days and could not but attract the King's attention. In answer to his enquiries he was shown the decree of the Republic bestowing the rights of citizens upon the Jews; he asked who were the people responsible for such an abhorrent act; and was told the consuls, Mattei and Zaccalone.

"Then these are the men to punish; not the people they emancipated," replied Ferdinand, preserving his natural common-sense even amid his prejudices; and he added that if the two men who had gone to find them gave them up, there would be five hundred ducats each for them, and the two consuls would be hanged.

The Roman crowd delighted with this liberality, decided that if the King was to provide a real gallows for the event they could afford to cut down the remaining tree of Liberty, and present him with the logs from it so that he might have a fire of good revolutionary wood. And this idea charmed the King so much that he set aside two of the largest logs and sent them to the Queen with this letter:

"My Dear Spouse, "You are aware of my fortunate entry into Rome without encountering the least obstacle on my way; the French have vanished like smoke. There remain the five hundred Jacobins in the Castle of St. Angelo; but these keep so quiet that I believe they only ask to be forgotten.

“Mack sets out to-morrow with 25,000 men to fight the French; he will rally Micheroux’s division on the way, which will give him 38,000 or 40,000 men, and he will only give fight to the French with the certainty of crushing them.

“Here we are in continual fêtes. Would you believe that those miserable Jacobins had emancipated the Jews! For three days past the Roman people has been hunting them through the streets just as I hunt my deer in the forest of Persano, and my boars in the woods of Asproni; but I am promised better than that: it seems that they are on the track of the two consuls of the so-called Roman republic. I have put a price of five hundred ducats on the head of each of them. I think that hanging them will make a good example, and, if they are hanged I keep for the garrison in the Castle of St. Angelo the surprise of assisting at their execution.

“I am sending you to burn on Christmas night two big logs cut from the tree of Liberty in the Rotunda Square; warm yourselves well, you and the children, and in doing so think of your spouse and father who loves you.

“To-morrow I issue an edict to instil a little good order among all these Jews, to make them return to their Ghetto and to submit them to a wise discipline. I will send you a copy of this edict directly it is issued.

“Announce at Naples the favour heaped upon me by the divine goodness; have a Te Deum sung by our Archbishop Capece Zurlo, whom I suppose is a good deal tainted with jacobinism; this will be his punishment; command public rejoicings and urge Vanni to hasten on the affair of that damned Nicolino Caracciolo.

“I shall keep you informed of the success of our illustrious General Mack in proportion as I learn it myself.

“Take every care of your precious health and believe in the sincere and eternal affection of your pupil and spouse.

“Ferdinand.”

P. S. — -” Present my respects to the Ladies. Although a little ridiculous these good princesses are none the less the august daughters of King Louis XV. You may authorize Ariola to make a small payment to those seven Corsicans who have served them as a bodyguard and who were recommended to them by the Count de Narbonne, one of the last ministers of your dear sister Marie Antoinette, I believe; that will please them and commits us to nothing.”

The next day Ferdinand issued his decree against the Jews, which was in fact a vigourous re-instatement of the one abolished by the so-called Roman Republic. And the day following, General Mack took leave of the King, leaving five thousand men to guard Rome, and set off to pursue Championnet and give him battle-wherever he should encounter him.

At the very moment his rearguard began its march, a procession, not wanting for character, entered Rome by the opposite gate.

Four mounted Neapolitan gendarmes were preceding two men bound together by the arms. These two men were wearing white cotton caps and coats of indecisive colour such as are worn by the sick in hospitals; they were mounted, saddle-less, on two asses, and each ass was led by a peasant, who, armed with a thick stick, threatened and insulted the prisoners. The prisoners were the two ex-consuls, and the peasants were the two men who had promised to give them up. The two unhappy fugitives had sought refuge in a hospital founded by Mattei in his native town of Valmontone, and had been denounced there by an attendant who owed his place to him.

Scarcely had they entered Rome and had been recognised, than the crowd began to insult them, throwing mud and stones; then with cries of “Death to them!” tried to carry out its threats. The gendarmes, however, explained that they were being brought back to be hanged next day, before King Ferdinand, by the public executioner, in the Square of St. Angelo; and this promise calmed the crowd which, however, indemnified itself for the delay by continuing to howl at the ex-consuls and to throw mud and stones.

They, resigned, awaited events, mute, sad, but calm. Thus was traversed three parts of Rome till their prison was reached. Two hours later placards affixed throughout the city announced the execution for the morrow at mid-day.

The Square of St. Angelo was the usual place for executions; and at seven the next morning the scaffold was set up, the gallows raised, and a balcony adorned with rich draperies to serve as a Royal box from which to witness the execution. These preparations drew such an immense crowd from all parts of Rome, that the carpenters at work on the scaffold had to be protected by a guard. The right bank of the Tiber where rises the great gate of the Castle of St. Angelo alone was deserted. The terrible fortress which is for Rome what the Bastille was at Paris, and Fort St. Elmo at Naples, although dumb and seemingly uninhabited, inspired sufficient dread to keep everyone off the bridge leading to it. And truly the tricolour flag hoisted above it, seemed to say to all the people, drunk with bloody orgies: “Take care what you do, France is still here.”

At eleven o’clock the condemned men, still clothed in hospital garb, were brought out of prison, set again upon the asses, and accompanied by that brotherhood of penitents which assists sufferers on the scaffold, and followed by an immense concourse of people, taken to the church of San Giovanni to make a public apology. The King, proceeding from the Farnese palace to the place of execution, passed by just as the executioner’s assistants were forcing the prisoners to their knees. Formerly in such a case the Royal presence would have been the salvation of the prisoners; this time it assured their execution.

The crowd opened to let the King pass; he cast an uneasy glance at the Castle of St. Angelo and its flag, alighted from his carriage amid acclamations, and appeared on the balcony bowing to the people. A moment later loud cries announced the approach of the condemned; who were preceded and followed by a detachment of Neapolitan mounted police who drove back the crowd and kept clear a space for the execution.

The silence and solitude of the Castle of St. Angelo re-assured everyone, and it was thought no more of. At five minutes to twelve, the condemned, who seemed broken with fatigue, but calm and resigned, got down from their asses at the foot of the scaffold. The penitents pressing them more closely, exhorted them to death, offering them the crucifix to kiss.

Mattei, on kissing it, said:

“O Christ! thou knowest that I die innocent, and, like thee, for the salvation and liberty of men.”

Zaccalone said:

“O Christ! thou are my witness that I forgive this people as thou hast forgiven thy executioners.”

The spectators nearest to the sufferers heard these words; they were greeted with some hooting.

Then a powerful voice cried: “Pray for the souls of those about to die.” It was the voice of the leader of the penitents.

Everyone fell on his knees to say an *Ave Maria,* even the King on the balcony, even the executioner and his assistants on the scaffold.

At that moment a cannon shot awoke the echoes, the scaffold broken up, gave way beneath the executioner and his assistants; the castle gate of St. Angelo opened, and a hundred grenadiers, preceded by a drum beating the charge, crossed the bridge at a gallop, and amid cries of terror from the crowd, of “everyone look out for himself “of the police, of astonishment and fear from all, laid hold on the two condemned and carried them off to the Castle of St. Angelo, whose gate shut on them before the people, executioners, penitents, police and the King himself, awoke from their stupefaction.

The Castle of St. Angelo had spoken but one word, but, as one sees, it had been well said and had produced its effect.

The Romans were obliged to do without a hanging that day and to vent their rage on the Jews.

King Ferdinand returned to the Farnese palace in a very bad humour; this was the first check be had experienced since his commencement of the campaign, and, unluckily for him, it was not going to be the last.

The letter addressed by Ferdinand to the Queen had produced the effect he expected. The news of the triumph of the Royal arms spread like lightning throughout the kingdom; the bells of the three hundred churches in Naples pealed out announcing *Te Deums;* and salvoes of cannon from all the forts yelled with their brazen voices praises of the God of armies.

The noise resounded in every house in Naples, and, according to the opinion of the inhabitants, awakened joy or vexation. Liberals viewed with pain Ferdinand’s triumph over the French, for to them the French idea represented humanity, love of public welfare, progress, light, liberty; whilst the Neapolitan idea meant barbarism, egoism, stagnation, obscurantism and tyranny. They therefore kept within doors, remembering the terrible deaths of the Duke of Torre and his brother. As to the absolutists, a great number, for they were composed of all belonging to or depending on the Court, and the whole of the common people, fishermen, porters, lazzaroni; these were in a state of the highest jubilation, rushing through the streets crying, “Long live Ferdinand IV! Long live Pius VII Death to the French I Death to the Jacobins!” And in their midst, crying louder than the rest, was Fra Pacifico, returning to the monastery with his ass Jacobino, laden with provisions and braying with all his might.

Though the House of the Palm Tree was far from the centre of the city, the noise had penetrated even there, and had made Salvato start as a battle horse at the sound of a trumpet! The wounded man, though not quite cured, was going on well; from his bed he had moved to an armchair; from his armchair he walked about the room several times on the arm of Luisa; and she being absent one day, rejecting Giovannina’s proffered aid, he had taken a little promenade alone; whereupon the maid, understanding that she could not be to him what her mistress was, had retired into her room and had wept long and bitterly. And when she saw Luisa, light as a bird, return to the sick man’s room after the chevalier’s departure, she had uttered a groan sounding like a threat, hating her mistress as instinctively and even involuntarily as she had loved the young man.

“Oh!” she murmured, “he will be cured some day or other, and then he will go away; and she in her turn will suffer.” And at this bad thought the tears dried in her eyes.

At every visit Dr. Cirillo was better pleased at his patient’s progress; and the night before the celebration of the victory, after a careful examination, he had said: “Come, come, in ten or twelve days our invalid will be able to mount a horse and carry his own news to General Championnet.” At these words Giovannina noticed the tears rise in Luisa’s eyes, and the pallor of Salvato; and” when, after going with Dr. Cirillo to the garden, her mistress did not soon return, “Ah,” said she, “she weeps!” As for Salvato, his head had fallen on his hands, and he had become motionless, and indifferent to all around him, as a statue.

Luisa’s return, as always, brought a smile to his face; the first thing she was accustomed to see on entering the room. A smile is the soul’s sun, and its least ray suffices to dry up that heart’s dew called tears. Luisa, in her turn, responded with a smile, and holding out both hands to the young man: “Oh, how happy I am,” said she, “that you are quite out of danger!”

But the next day when the noise of cannon and the pealing of bells reached the sick chamber, Salvato started as we have said, rose to his feet, and, looking in turns at each of his nurses, demanded: “What is that?”

“Go and ask, Giovannina,” said Madame San Felice, “it is probably for some fête that we have forgotten,” and she stretched out her hand towards a calendar. “Yes, indeed,” said she joyously, “it is Advent Sunday.”

“Is it a custom at Naples to celebrate Advent with salvoes of cannon?” asked Salvato, and as he spoke Giovannina returned.

“Well?” said her mistress.

“Michael is there, madame, he has some news; perhaps madame had best question him herself.”

“I will come back, friend,” said Luisa to Salvato, and she went out in her turn, while Salvato, without a question to the maid, closed his eyes and became once more mute.

Luisa found her foster-brother in the dining-room; his expression was triumphant, he was clad in his best, and ribbons streamed from his hat.

“Victory!” cried he, “victory, little sister! Our great King Ferdinand has entered Rome, General Mack is victorious at all points, the French are exterminated; the Jews are being burned and the Jacobins hanged. Long live the Madonna....! Well, what’s the matter?” For Luisa had turned pale and her strength failing her, had sunk upon a chair. She well understood that if the French were victorious, Salvato could stay with her and wait for them at Naples; but if defeated, that he ought to leave even her, to go and share the reverses of his brothers in arms. “It is nothing,” she murmured, “but the news is so astonishing and unexpected.... Are you sure about it, Michael?”

“But you don’t hear the cannon, then, or the bells? But see, if you doubt me, here is the Chevalier who will confirm it; he must know the news as he is at the Court.”

“My husband!” cried Luisa, “but it is not his usual time!” and she turned quickly to look into the garden, adding, “Make haste, Michael, into the sick room; and tell our friend that the noises are to celebrate Advent.” And as she shut the door into the corridor behind him, the Chevalier appeared at the top of the steps.

“Ah,” cried he, coming in, “here is news I hardly expected: King Ferdinand is a hero! The French in retreat! Rome abandoned by Championnet! And unhappily murders and executions as if Victory knew not how to remain pure. Not thus did the Greeks understand their Niké, daughter of Force and Valour. The Romans said: ‘*Woe to the vanquished!’* And I say: ‘*Woe to the victors* whenever scaffolds and gallows are added to the spoils of war. I should have made a bad conqueror, Luisa.”

“But is it all true?” then said she.

“Official, my dear. I have it from the lips of His Highness the Duke of Calabria, who has sent me home to dress as quickly as possible for a dinner he is giving, which I am obliged to attend. It is a dinner of savants; Latin inscriptions and allegories are required for the King’s return. He is to have magnificent fêtes from which it will be difficult to excuse your attendance, my dear child. When the Prince came to tell me the news at the library, I was so surprised that I nearly fell off my ladder; a proof that I furiously doubted his father’s military genius. But you will help me dress, will you not? It will be an academic dinner, and I shall be so bored that I shall return as soon as I can from all those pedants; but that, I fear, can’t be before ten or eleven to-night. And now, we must make haste, there is no time to lose.”

In the meantime, as Salvato had merely acknowledged Michael’s entrance by a friendly sign, and had thereupon sunk back again in his chair with closed eyes as though to sleep, Michael and Giovannina had withdrawn to the embrasure of a window and had commenced an animated conversation in low tones on the great news. Giovannina had quickly realised that it could not fail to affect profoundly the destinies of Luisa and Salvato, and in consequence, her own. Michael, too, was overflowing with the excitement which had infected the whole of the city, and little by little, forgetting Salvato and Luisa’s injunctions, they raised their voices so that, not being in reality asleep, he could not but hear and comprehend something of what had taken place and the actual significance of the rejoicing sounds of the bells and the cannon. Thus it was, that when, at length, Luisa, having seen her husband depart, dressed for the dinner, returned to the sick room, he had not only learned all that Michael could tell him, but his preparations for his own departure were already made. He had given Michael a hundred louis to procure for him a strong horse of local breed, inured to fatigue; the complete dress of a peasant, and for himself the finest sword he could buy as a parting gift. The horse was to be ready saddled in the lane at the back of the House of the Palm Tree at nine o’clock that night.

The unsuspecting Luisa, then, returned to find a new light in his eyes, neither that of fever nor of love, but of enthusiasm.

“Luisa!” he murmured in his gentlest voice.

“Oh!” cried she. “Unhappy am I, I see you know all.”

Salvato bowed his head.

“And.... (she made an effort), and when do you leave?”

“I had decided for nine to-night, Luisa, but I had not seen you again then....!”

“And now....?”

“I shall go when you wish.”

“Ah, Salvato, then you will go at nine, as you had settled. Could you think that I should love you so ill as ever advise you contrary to your honour? Your going will cost me many tears, for you will take away with you the unknown soul you brought and gave to me, and only God could divine the sadness and solitude of the Void.... Ah, poor deserted room,” continued she, while her tears flowed, “how often shall I come in the night, seeking the dream instead of the reality! How dear, how poetic in your absence will all these common objects become! This bed where you have lain suffering, this armchair in which I have watched over you, this glass from which you have drunk, this table on which you leaned, all will speak to me of you, friend, whereas to you nothing will speak of me...

“Except my heart, Luisa, which is filled with you!”

“Then, Salvato, you are less unhappy than I; for you will go on seeing me; your absence will change nothing of my habits; you will see me come in and out of this room at the same hours as when you were here: not a day, not an instant that passed here will be forgotten; but I — where shall I seek you? On battle fields, amid fire and smoke, amid the wounded and the dead!.... Oh! write to me, write to me, Salvato!” she added with a moaning cry.

“But can I?” asked he. “Suppose a letter came into your husband’s hands?”

“Sealed or unsealed he would never read it; you do not understand what an angel of goodness he is. And even if he did read it, would you say anything else than a tender brother might say to a beloved sister?”

“I shall say that I love you.”

“If you say only that, Salvato, he will pity us. Reflect, my friend, he is more a father than a spouse to me. Since the age of five I have been with him, and to him I owe everything — all my best qualities; for he has taught them to me”. You are good, great and generous, I see it and judge you with the eyes of a woman who loves. Well, he is better, greater, more generous, and God grant that he may not have occasion to prove it to you one of these days.”

“But, Luisa, you will make me jealous of him.”

“Oh, be jealous then, if a lover can be jealous of a father. I love you profoundly, Salvato, since I tell you so, now, without being asked, but if I had to save one only of you two from supreme danger, I should save him, Salvato, free to return to die with you.”

“Ah, Luisa, how blessed is the Chevalier to be thus loved!”

“And yet, you would not desire this love which one has for spiritual and superior beings; for this love has not prevented mine for you: I love him better than you, and I love you more than him; that’s it.”

And, saying this, as if Luisa had spent all her strength in the struggle of the two affections which held, one her soul, and the other her heart, she subsided into a chair, joined her hands, gazed upwards, and, with a smile on her lips, murmured unintelligibly.

"What are you doing?" asked Salvato.

"I am praying," she answered.

"To whom?"

"To my guardian angel.... Kneel, Salvato, and pray with me," and he knelt down as if overcome by a higher power.

After some minutes the lovers gazed at one another with deep sadness, but with "supreme serenity in-their hearts.

Sad hours pass as rapidly, sometimes more rapidly, than happy ones. Nina came in and out without their noticing it; they were living in a world apart, neither of heaven nor of earth; but as the clock sounded each hour they sighed.

At eight o'clock Nina brought in a bundle tied up in a napkin, it contained the peasant's costume bought by Michael. The two women left Salvato to effect his change of dress; and when he opened the door to them again, Luisa could not forbear a cry of astonishment. As a mountaineer, Salvato was handsomer and more elegant, if possible, than as a townsman. The last hour fled as if the minutes were seconds, and as nine o'clock struck, Nina entered, pale and agitated, to say that Michael was waiting.

"Let us go," said Luisa, and she held out her hand.

"You are noble and great, Luisa," said Salvato, and he rose; but he tottered, man though he was.

"Lean on me yet again, my friend," said she, "alas, it will be for the last time."

On going into the room which looked into the lane they heard a horse neigh.

"Open the window, Giovannina," said Madame San Felice. Giovannina obeyed. A little below the window-sill they made out in the darkness a man and a horse; the window opened on a level with the floor of the little balcony. They went on to this, and Nina kept behind them like a shadow. Both the lovers were weeping, but silently, not to enfeeble one another. Nina was dry-eyed, her eyelids burned; she breathed hard.

"Luisa," said Salvato in a halting voice, "I have wrapped in paper a gold chain for Nina, give it to her from me." Luisa nodded and pressed his hand, in silence. Then to the young lazzaroni: “Thanks, Michael. So long as the remembrance of this angel lives in my heart (and he threw his arm round her neck), so long, that is, as my heart beats, each beat will remind me of the good friends in whose hands I leave her and to whom I confide her.”

With a convulsive, perhaps an involuntary movement, Giovannina seized the young man’s hand, kissed it, almost bit it; and then, as the surprised Salvato turned, darted back.

“I have change to give you, sir,” said Michael.

“Give it to your old mother, and tell her to pray to God and the Madonna for Luisa and me.”

“Good!” said Michael. “What, am I weeping now....?”

“Au revoir, my friend!” said Luisa. “May the Lord and all the angels of Heaven guard you!”

“Au revoir?” murmured Salvato.

“Yes,” she answered. “Leave to God the unknown future. But whatever may betide, I will never leave you with the word good-bye.”

“Well, so be it!” said Salvato, bestriding the balcony and getting into the saddle without removing his arms, linked round the neck of Luisa who bent down towards him with the suppleness of a reed, “so be it, adored of my heart.. Au revoir!” And the last syllable of that word of hope was lost on their lips in a first kiss.

Salvato uttered a cry both of joy and pain, and, spurring his horse into a gallop, was so snatched from Luisa’s arms and disappeared in the night.

CHAPTER XV.

BATTLE AND VICTORY.

CHAMPIONNET had reached Civita Castellana forty-eight hours after leaving Rome. His first care was to put the citadel, used only as a prison, in a state of defence; his next to assign positions to the different corps of his little army.

He placed Macdonald, who was to bear the brunt of the morrow's engagement, at Borghetto with seven thousand men, ordering them to lean on the extreme right of the French army at the foot of Civita Castellana. He sent General Lemoine with five hundred men into the defiles of Terni, and Casablanca and Rusca into those of Ascoli on the extreme left to guard his flank. He sent couriers to General Pignatelli to join up with the Polish General Kniasewitch, and to march forward in whatever direction he heard the sound of firing. Lahure was ordered to take up a position at Regnano, in advance of Civita Castellana, and General Maurice Mathieu to go forward to Vignanello. He also sent couriers along the Spoleto road to hasten the arrival of Joubert with his promised reinforcement of three thousand men. These arrangements made, he resolutely awaited the enemy, all of whose movements he could follow from his high position at Civita Castellana, where he held in reserve a thousand men for eventualities.

At last General Mack began his march, having split up his army into five columns. He took no special precautions, relying, one supposes, on the friendliness of the neighbouring populations, all more or less in

revolt, and preceded by a proclamation ridiculous in its barbarity.

Championnet had left three hundred sick in hospital in Rome, relying on the honour and humanity of the enemy, but Mack drew up a manifesto declaring that if the French general dared to defend his position at Civita Castellana, the three hundred would respond with their heads for the Neapolitan slain, and he delivered up head for head, to the just *indignation* of the Roman people.

Macdonald's loyal nature was exasperated by such a proclamation, and he immediately galloped off to Civita Castellana to show it to Championnet and demand his orders. Championnet merely shrugged his shoulders; as Macdonald stood by pale and agitated.

"Don't you know the man we are dealing with?" said he. "But what have you replied to it?"

"I have ordered it to be read throughout the army."

"That is well done; a soldier should know his enemy; and better still, despise him. And what more?"

"I think that each Neapolitan prisoner should answer with *his* head for each sick Frenchman killed in Rome."

Championnet looked at Macdonald with infinite gentleness, and laying a hand on his shoulder, answered: "My friend, you are wrong; not with bloody reprisals should Republicans reply to their enemies; return to your men and read to them this 'Order of the day of General Championnet before the Battle of Civita Castellana '; for thus the battle you will gain to-morrow will be called, Macdonald," and he went on dictating to his secretary as follows: —

"Every Neapolitan soldier taken prisoner will be treated with the usual humanity and kindness of Republicans to their enemies.

"Every soldier who permits himself ill-treatment of any kind of a disarmed prisoner will be severely punished.

"Generals will be responsible for the carrying out of these two orders...."

Championnet had just taken his pen to sign when a horseman, wounded and covered with blood, dashed up.

"General," said he, "the Neapolitans have surprised an advance guard of fifty at Baccano; have cut all their throats in the guard-house; and have set fire to it amid cries of joy from the people."

Championnet affixed his signature. "It is thus," said he, "that civilisation should reply to barbarism. Go, Macdonald, and publish this order of the day immediately."

These were the last great days of the Republic.

At three o'clock in the afternoon, Championnet visited Lahure's advance posts and Macdonald's division, and mingled with the men, talking to them paternally and hopefully of the morrow. In the evening he had wine, bread and meat distributed to all; great fires were lit, and regimental bands played the "Marseillaise" and "Song of Departure," a celebration before battle astonishing to the peasants looking down on the scene from their mountain villages.

The night passed peacefully; but the rising sun shone on the whole army of Mack, advancing in three visible and two concealed columns. The central division, numbering twenty thousand, under Mack himself, was to attack Macdonald and his seven thousand.

Lahure drew the first fire, and twice repulsed the enemy, who came on very vigorously. They were the same men who had massacred the advanced post at Baccano the evening before. Micheroux, supporting them with artillery, brought them again to the charge, and they carried the village with a heavy fire. Upon this, Lahure, forming his men in square, withdrew them in excellent order on Civita Castellana, and reached the bridge with his forces intact, fighting all the way. The hot pursuit had put some disorder into the Neapolitan ranks; and seeing this, Championnet, from the top of his rock, ordered Lahure to retake the offensive, sending him a reinforcement, which arrived at a run with fixed bayonets and drums beating. The Neapolitans, at this unlooked-for fresh attack, hesitated, broke ranks and fled.

Lahure pursued, made five hundred prisoners, killed seven or eight hundred, took two flags, four guns, and returned to his original position at Regnano.

In the meantime, the enemy's right fared no better at the hands of General Maurice Mathieu at Vignanello, which they evacuated, fleeing till they reached Borghetto, and leaving to the French five hundred killed, five hundred prisoners, a flag and four guns.

The attack of the centre, led by Mack with thirty thousand men, was more serious.

Macdonald's advance guard was commanded by General Duhesme, from the army of the Rhine, eager to distinguish himself, who, instead of awaiting an attack, ordered a charge, at the same time manoeuvring some light guns on the enemy's flank. Taken thus unawares, Mack's advance column was thrown into confusion, and fell back on the second, abandoning guns, munitions, flags and six hundred prisoners. But even so, Duhesme's position was not a happy one, and he was forced to retreat step by step before the second column, the rally of the first and a swarm of peasants with rifles. Macdonald, seeing this, sent to tell him to return to his former position, halt, and form battalions in square to receive the enemy on the bayonet; placed some artillery on a slight rise to take the Neapolitans crossways, and dividing his own men, passèd to right and left of Duhesme's square and charged.

Championnet, dominating the immense chessboard, could not but admire the intrepidity of Macdonald, whom he loved as a brother, but he was considering that he should perhaps send a message ordering him to retreat and bring on to the Neapolitan flank Lahure and Maurice Mathieu, when he saw Macdonald begin to do so; and Duhesme, reforming, dash against the enemy's centre, forcing him to loosen his pressure on Macdonald. Then both Macdonald and Duhesme formed into square battalions, and the battlefield had the appearance of thirty thousand men besieging six redoubts, each composed of twelve hundred men, and vomiting torrents of fire.

Mack, finding it impossible to prevail thus, placed his numerous guns in such a position as to rake the French squares, and at the same time to protect a formidable column which he held in readiness to cut the Republican army in two. Against such a disposition of forces Championnet was uneasily aware neither courage nor genius could prevail. His eye was piercing Mack's wave-like masses on the horizon, when suddenly towards the left he saw, towards Rieti, a glitter of arms in a rapidly advancing whirlwind of dust. He thought it must be a reinforcement sent for by Mack, when turning to take counsel with his officers, he saw on the side diametrically opposite a second corps, even larger than the first, making towards the battlefield with equal speed. One would have thought it a pre-arranged race between the two bodies of men. Could it be General Naselli from Florence, and Mack a cleverer organiser than one had supposed?

But all at once Championnet's aide-de-camp, Villeneuve, uttered a cry of joy, and pointing to the clouds of dust on the Viterbo road:

"General," said he, "the tricolor flag!"

"Ah!" cried Championnet; "ours; Joubert has kept his word." Then, gazing at the other body from Rieti: "Oh!" he exclaimed, "but this would be too much luck!" while all around him shouted with one voice: "The tricolor flag! Pignatelli and the Roman Legion, Kniasewitch and his Poles! in short, Victory!"

Then, with a gesture of marvellous greatness, stretching out his hand towards Rome:

"King Ferdinand," cried the Republican general, "you can now, like Richard III., offer your crown for a horse."

But the day was yet to be won, and Championnet despatched Villeneuve to tell Macdonald to hold firm for another half-hour, sending with him two young officers with similar orders to Duhesme and the squares on the left. “Add,” said he, “the General answers for everything.” He watched them disappear, galloping into the fiery furnace; seeing, at the same time, the two Republican forces rapidly advancing quite unseen by the enemy, upon whose flanks their cavalry suddenly fell like avalanches, hewing a passage for their infantry protected by three pieces of light artillery.

Then happened what Championnet had foreseen. The Neapolitans, taken completely by surprise, began to leave their ranks; Macdonald and Duhesme saw that something extraordinary and unforeseen had occurred by the confusion into which they were thrown, and seized the opportunity to break squares and unite like pieces of three immense serpents, and during a charge with fixed bayonets and cries of “Long live the Republic!” with irresistible impetus they drove the enemy before them.

“Come, friends,” cried Championnet to the five or six hundred men he had kept as a reserve, “let it not be said that our brothers were conquering before our eyes and that we had no part in the victory. Forward!” And hurrying his men into the horrible struggle, he also made his breach in the living wall.

But in the midst of this immense disorder a great misfortune nearly happened. Kellerman’s dragoons and Kniasewitch’s Poles, having fallen on the enemy masses from opposite sides, and pierced them like wedges driven into an oak, met each other in the middle, and but for two young men from their separate ranks embracing with cries of “Long live the Republic,” would have proceeded to exterminate one another by mistake. These young men were Hector Caraffa with Kellerman’s force, who had been sent to demand help from Joubert; and Salvato Palmieri with Kniasewitch and Pignatelli, who had fallen in with them on his way to rejoin his regiment. This joyful embrace at the head of their respective columns, amid cries of “Victory! Victory “from ten thousand voices, was thus happily in time to prevent French and Poles from firing on one another.

Indeed, the victory was complete; and Championnet came up to finish the rout; it was terrible, mad, unheard of. Thirty thousand Neapolitans defeated, dispersed, fleeing in all directions, were struggling amid twelve thousand French victors, combining their movements with implacable coolness to annihilate at one blow an enemy three times more numerous.

In the midst of this frightful *debacle* the French chiefs met; Championnet made Salvato Palmieri and Hector Caraffa chiefs of brigade on the spot; leaving to them, Macdonald and Duhesme, all the honours of the victory he had planned; and pressing the hands of Kellerman, Kniasewitch and Pignatelli, told them that they had saved Rome, must conquer Naples, and consequently continue the pursuit, and if possible cut off the enemy's retreat. Rome was to be re-occupied, the Republic set up again, and the French army was to march on Naples.

After this council on horseback, the trophies of victory were gathered up.

There were three thousand dead, as many wounded, and five thousand prisoners, who were disarmed and taken to Civita Castellana; eight thousand rifles were picked up; thirty guns and sixty abandoned artillery waggons were found, and finally amid all the baggage two vans full of gold.

This was the treasure of the royal army, totalling seven million francs.

With this portion of cash from the bill drawn by Sir William Hamilton on the Bank of England, and endorsed by Nelson, a distribution of pay was made that same evening to the French Army; a sum was set aside to purchase clothes and shoes for the men, and the remainder of nearly four millions was sent to France.

It was a night of general rejoicing; the wounded stifled their groans; the dead were forgotten.

Meanwhile, at Rome on the day of the battle, the King was engaged in hunting, as at Naples, to which he had sent for his pack of hounds. The previous evening he had received from Mack a despatch from Baccano promising victory, and concluding in these terms: —

"To-morrow, if God wills, your Majesty will have good news from Civita Castellana; and if your Majesty goes to the play, you will be able, between the acts, to learn that the French have evacuated the Roman states."

The King had, therefore, slept well, and had set off to hunt at half-past six next morning; had had a successful day; and at the sound of distant firing had remarked, "It is Mack crushing Championnet! "He dined comfortably with his intimates, and at eight o'clock drove to the Argentina theatre. There a magnificent box had been got ready, with a table arranged in the drawing-room attached, so that between the opera and the ballet he could eat his macaroni as he did at Naples: it was rumoured that this spectacle was added to the entertainment billed, and the theatre was crammed.

His Majesty’s entrance was loudly applauded. The order had been given to send on General Mack’s couriers to the theatre, and the manager had been notified and was in attendance to raise the curtain and announce that the French had evacuated the Roman states. The dénouement of *Il Matrimonio Segreto* was, however, reached without interruption, and then two footmen carried into the royal box a supper table upon which, between candelabra laden with waxlights, appeared a dish of gigantic macaroni reposing on an appetising layer of tomatoes.

It was the King’s turn to give his representation, - which he preceded with his usual pantomimic announcement. Advancing to the front of the box dish in hand, Ferdinand, manœuvring the contents with his other hand, opened a mouth of immoderate size, and into it with that same “hand let fall a veritable cascade of macaroni.

At this spectacle, the Romans, serious, and with their own lofty ideas of supreme dignity, burst out laughing. It was no longer a King they saw; it was Pasquin, Marfosio, or even Pulcinella.

Ferdinand, taking these cries for applause, was already half through his dish, and at the third cascade, when suddenly the door of his box opened so violently that he swung round, the macaroni half-way to his mouth, to see what low fellow dared thus to burst in on his important occupation.

This low intruder was Mack himself, but so pale, so scared, so covered with dust that at his appearance alone, the King let go his dish, and wiped his fingers on his batiste handkerchief.

“What is it?” asked he. “Alas, sire!” replied Mack.

They understood one another. The King left the box, shutting the door behind him.

“Sire,” said the General, “I have abandoned the field of battle; I have quitted the army to come and tell you myself that there is not an instant to lose.”N “To do what?” demanded the King. “To leave Rome, or we shall risk the French reaching before us the passes of the Abruzzi.”

“The French there before me,” cried the King. “Ascoli! Ascoli! “The Duke came into the room.

“Tell the others to stay till the end of the performance, you understand? It is important that they should be seen in the box, that nothing may be suspected, and come with me.”

The Duke of Ascoli transmitted the royal order to the courtiers, who were far from guessing the whole truth, and rejoined the King, who had already reached the corridor crying:

“Ascoli! Ascoli! Come, stupid. Haven’t you heard that the illustrious General Mack has said there isn’t a moment to lose, or these French sons of

will be before us at Sora?”

At the door of the theatre Ferdinand found his carriage, and sprung into it with Mack, calling to Ascoli to get in with them. They stopped at the Farnese palace; a courier had arrived from Vienna bringing a despatch from the Emperor of Austria; the King opened it with precipitation and read:

“My very dear brother, cousin, uncle, father-in-law, ally and confederate, “Permit me to felicitate you very sincerely on the success of your arms and on your triumphal entry into Rome.”

The King proceeded no further. “Ah, good!” said he, “this is indeed an arrival àpropos,” and he pocketed the despatch. Then, looking about for the courier, “Take this for your pains,” said he, giving him his purse.

““Will your Majesty do me the honour to give me a reply for my august sovereign?” enquired the man.

“Certainly; but I shall give you a verbal one, as I have no time to write. That is so, is it not, Mack?”

“No matter,” said the courier, “I can assure your Majesty that I have a good memory.”

“Well, then; tell your august Sovereign from me; you understand, from me.”

“I understand, sire.”

“Tell him that his brother and cousin, uncle and father-in-law, ally and confederate, King Ferdinand, is an ass.”

The courier stepped back, in alarm.

“Do not change a single syllable,” went on the King, “and you will have uttered the greatest truth that can ever come from your lips.”

The courier withdrew in stupefaction.

“And now,” said the King, “let us set out.”

“I venture to observe to your Majesty,” said Mack, “that it will be prudent to cross the plain of Rome on horseback.”

“On horseback? Why?”

“Because such an excellent horseman as your Majesty on a good mount could cut across country and escape any awkward encounters as you could not in a carriage. I ought to warn your Majesty that these infamous Jacobins have dared to say that if the King falls into their hands.”

“Well?”.

“That they will hang him to the first street lamp, if in town; to the first tree, if beyond it.”

“*Finnimo,* d’Ascoli! let us...! What are you doing there, you other do-nothings? Two horses! Two horses! the best! They would do as they say, the brigands! But we can’t get to Naples on horseback?”

“No, sire,” replied Mack, “but at Albano you can take the first postchaise.”

“You are right. A pair of boots! I can’t travel post in silk stockings. Boots, do you hear, rogue?” A footman ran to get them, and the King put them on in the carriage without troubling about his friend d’Ascoli. The two horses were brought round.

“And now, ten men for an escort, and a cloak for his Majesty,” cried Mack. The King mounted; and a dark-hued cloak was brought him, in which he enveloped himself.

Mack then mounted. “As I shall not be easy till I see your Majesty beyond the walls, I ask your Majesty’s leave to accompany you to the Gate of St. John,” said he. “The gates may be guarded by Jacobins.”

“It is possible. Let us start,” said the King, “but which way are you going?”

“To the Gate of the People; the nearest, and the one least likely for you to leave by, as it is in the opposite direction to the way you want to go. But once out of Rome, we shall skirt round the walls, and in a quarter of an hour reach the Gate of St. John.”

On reaching the end of the Ripetta, the King seized the bridle of Mack’s horse.

“Hulloa! General,” said he, “who are all these folk coming in by the People’s Gate?”

“Your Majesty’s soldiers, I should say, if they had had time to flee so far.”

“So they are, General, so they are; you don’t know these fellows. When it comes to fleeing, they have wings on their heels,” and the King held his cloak before his eyes, and passed through their midst without being recognised.

Once out of the town the little troop turned to the right, and following the Aurelian wall, finally reached the Gate of St. John, where sixteen days previously the King, with such great pomp, had received the keys of the city.

"And now," said Mack, "here is your road, sire; you will reach Albano in an hour; at Albano you are safe."

"You are leaving me, General?"

"Sire, it was my duty to think of the King before everything; it is now my duty to think of the army. And now, may God guard Your Majesty!"

Mack bowed to the King, and putting his horse to the gallop, retook the road by which he had come.

"And may the Devil take you, imbecile,'' the King murmured, burying his spurs in his horse, and urging him at full speed on the road to Albano. As it would appear, he had not changed his mind in regard to his general-in-chief.

Such was the panic-inspired pace set by Ferdinand that he and the Duke of Ascoli, on their splendid mounts, soon left the escort behind. If there is a spot in the world which, at night above all, is fantastic in aspect, it is the Roman Campagna, with its broken aqueducts like rows of gigantic figures marching in the darkness, its tombs suddenly rising up, sometimes to right of one, sometimes to left, and those mysterious sounds which seem like the lamentations of their inhabiting shades. Continually the King would bring his horse alongside his companion's, and gathering up the reins in readiness to leap the ditch, ask: "Do you see, d'Ascoli?...."

"Do you hear, d'Ascoli? "And d'Ascoli, calmer because he was braver, would look and answer, "I see nothing, sire"; would listen and reply, "Sire, I hear nothing." And Ferdinand, with his usual cynicism, would add:

"I told Mack I wasn't sure I was brave; well now, I have made up my mind about it: decidedly, I am not."

Thus they reached Albano. It was close on midnight. Every door was shut, including that of the posting station. The Duke of Ascoli, recognising it from the inscription over the door, dismounted and knocked loudly.

The postmaster came grumbling to the door in a very bad humour, but d'Ascoli pronounced that magic word at which all doors open: "Be easy, you will be well paid; we require a carriage, three post horses and a smart postillion "; and his face calmed.

"Their Excellencies shall have them in a quarter of an hour," said he, and, as a fine rain began to fall, he added: "Will the gentlemen come into my room, in the meantime?"

"Yes, yes," said the King, who had his own idea; "you are right, a room, a room immediately."

“And what am I to do with their Excellencies’ horses?”

“Stable them; they will be fetched for me, for the Duke of Ascoli, do you understand?”

“Yes, Your Excellency.”

The Duke of Ascoli stared at the King.

“I know what I am doing,” said Ferdinand; “let us get on and lose no time.”

The innkeeper took them to a room and lighted two candles, and then seeing the King uncloaked and quite plastered with orders, retired backwards bowing to the ground.

“Ah, my dear d’Ascoli,” said the King in his most caressing voice, as soon as they were alone, “you don’t know what you are about to do.”

“I, sire?”

“But no,” said the King, “it may be you will not....”

“Sire!” said d’Ascoli, gravely; “I will do all Your Majesty desires.”

“Oh! I know well you are devoted to me; I know well you are my only friend, I know well you are the only man of whom I could ask such a thing.”

“It is difficult?”

“So difficult, that if you were in my place, and I in yours, I do not know that I should do for you what I am going to ask you to do for me.”

“Oh! sire, that is not a reason,” replied d’Ascoli with a faint smile.

“I believe you doubt my friendship, that’s bad,” said the King.

“What matters at the moment, sire, is that Your Majesty should not doubt mine,” responded the Duke with supreme dignity.

“Oh! when you have given me this proof, I shall be in no further doubt, I answer for it.”

“What is this proof, sire? Probably something quite simple.”

“Very simple, very simple,” murmured the King; “you know that those brigands of Jacobins have threatened to hang me if I fall into their hands. Well, my dear friend, well, my dear d’Ascoli, it is simply to change clothes with me. You understand: if they take us, believing you to be the King, they will concern themselves with you only; meanwhile, I shall slip away, and then you will disclose your identity, and without having run much risk you will have the glory of saving your sovereign. You understand?”

“It is not a matter of the greater or less risk I shall run, sire; it’s a matter of being of service to Your Majesty.” And the Duke of Ascoli, taking off his coat and presenting it to the King, merely said, “Yours, sire!”

Profoundly egotistic though the King was, he yet felt touched with this devotion; he took the Duke in his arms and pressed him to his heart; then taking off his own coat he helped him into it and buttoned it on him with the dexterity of a practised valet. “There,” said he, “now the ribbons; are you not a commander of Saint George? Have you not the ribbon of Marie Thérèse? Nor of St. Januario? You shall have them all, my poor d’Ascoli; you have earned them, but don’t forget to remind me,” said the King, passing the ribbons over his neck; “I should be quite capable of forgetting.”

“Yes,” said the Duke; “Your Majesty is certainly very absent-minded, I know that.”

“Chut! it is not generous to mention my faults at such a moment. How well you look in the coat! One would say it had been made for you. You may have the badge of St. Januario which is attached; it is in diamonds, but I wish it were worth twice as much. It is singular how at ease I feel in your coat, d’Ascoli; I don’t know why, but the other was stifling me. Ah!....” And the King drew a deep breath.

At that moment they heard the master of the post coming. The King seized the cloak, and prepared to put it round the Duke’s shoulders.

“But, sire. I cannot permit....”

“Silence.”

The master of the post entered. “The horses are in your Excellencies’ carriage,” said he, and stopped in astonishment, for some change for which he could not exactly account seemed to have taken place between the travellers.

Meanwhile, the King arranged the cloak on d’Ascoli’s shoulders. “His Excellency, in order not to be disturbed on the journey, desires to pay up to Terracina,” said he; “and will give a ducat to the postillions if they make good progress.”

“In that case,” said the man, bowing down before d’Ascoli, “His Excellency should progress like the King.”

“Exactly,” cried Ferdinand, “that is how His Excellency does wish to progress “; and he plunged his hand into the Duke’s pocket and paid with his money, laughing at the good turn he was doing him.

The innkeeper took a candle and lighted d’Ascoli down the stairs with every mark of attention; but on reaching the carriage the Duke, doubtless from habit, gave place to the King.

“Never, never,” cried Ferdinand, bowing hat in hand; “after Your Excellency. It is already too much honour for me to ride in the same carriage.” And taking his seat after him, he placed himself on his left, crying: “His Excellency pays the post boys double I”

In an instant a postillion had leapt on horseback, and the carriage set off at a gallop on the road to Velletri, passing shadows in motion on both sides of the way with extraordinary velocity. These shadows caused the King uneasiness.

“My friend,” said he to the postillion, “who are these people going our road, and at such a pace?”

“Excellency,” replied the postillion, “it seems that there was a battle to-day between the French and the Neapolitans, and that the Neapolitans were defeated; those people are the ones who are running away.”

“‘Pon my word,” said the King to d’Ascoli, “I thought that we were the first; we are distanced. It is humiliating. What shanks those fellows have! Two ducats, postillion, if you pass them.”

Mack had been right in fearing the rapidity of movement of the French army: already, during the night after the battle, the two vanguards, one led by Salvato Palmieri, the other by Hector Caraffa, had taken the road, one hoping to reach Sora, the other to reach Ceprano, and thus to close the pass of the Abruzzi to the Neapolitans.

As to Championnet, as soon as he had finished his business at Rome, he was to take the Velletri and Terracina road through the Pontine marshes.

At daybreak, after having despatched to Lemoine and Casabianca news of the victory, with the order to march on Civita Ducale, to join forces with the army corps of Macdonald and Duhesme, and with them to take the road to Naples, he set out with six thousand men to return to Rome, and next day at eight in the morning appeared at the People’s Gate, re-entered the city amid joyful salvoes from the Castle of St. Angelo, took the left bank of the Tiber, and regained the Corsini palace, where, as Baron Riescach had promised, he found everything just where he had left it.

The same day the Republican government was set up again at Rome.

CHAPTER XVI.

“ALL IS LOST SAVE HONOUR “.

No capital in the world contains so many poets as Naples, and since the King’s departure, and especially since his success, there had been a perfect deluge of sonnets, acrostics, quatrains, and distiches, insomuch that the Queen, judging it useless for the court poet to compose any, was employing him at a double salary to select the best among the three or four hundred pieces pouring in every day.

The evening of the ninth of December, 1789, had been fixed for the reading of those selected in the theatre of the Castle of Caserta; and in the presence of the six hundred spectators filling the auditorium this reading had been followed by the communication of a letter from the King to the Queen, which had just arrived by Courier from the theatre of war, mainly, to be sure, about the pleasures of the chase, but terminating with the optimistic words, “I expect news of a great victory in the evening?”

When the ballet was ended, the theatre emptied, the lights extinguished, and the guests dispersed, the Queen returned to her apartments with those intimate friends who were to remain and sup at the Castle with her, among whom were of course included Emma, her ladies-in-waiting, Sir William, Lord Nelson, the Prince of Castelcicala, Acton; and finally, and this was naturally most unusual, the aged Princesses Victoire and Adelaide, daughters of Louis XV., whom Caroline, on her husband’s injunction, had invited to Court for

a fortnight with their bodyguard of seven. One of this bodyguard was invited to accompany them to the royal supper each evening, and on this occasion it had been the turn of Jean Baptiste de Cesare, of an old Corsican family, whose entry in a lieutenant’s uniform had made some sensation, such was his remarkable resemblance to Prince Francis, the heir-apparent, a situation in which he acquitted himself, however, with much presence of mind.

The supper was very gay, everyone being persuaded, or having the appearance of it, that the French were actually defeated at that moment.

Nelson only, in spite of Emma's magnetic looks, seemed so preoccupied that at last the Queen asked him what was on his mind. Nelson replied that he was uneasy because there was no indication that the Emperor of Austria had commenced operations, which looked as if he would postpone doing so till April.

"But," asked Emma, "did he not write to the King to begin his campaign, assuring him of his assistance when the King entered Rome?"

"Yes, I believe so," stammered the Queen.

"Did you see the letter yourself, madame?" demanded Nelson, fixing her with his grey eye as if she were an ordinary woman.

"No; but the King told M. Acton, and even supposing that we were deceived, is that a cause for despair?"

"Not necessarily," returned Nelson, "but, if by mischance, Mack has been defeated yesterday, in a fortnight the French would be in Naples."

The aged Princesses paled perceptibly; and the Queen, who attached more importance to Nelson's remarks than she chose to let appear, enquired if he really believed the Neapolitans, who were six to one of the French, unable to win when the English often attacked with equal or inferior forces.

"At sea, madame, yes, because the sea is our element," responded Nelson, "but on land it is another matter; on land the French are what the English are at sea. God knows I hate the French, and have vowed to exterminate that impious nation which denies its God and cuts off the heads of its rulers. But to hate them is not to despise them; I do them justice."

"Oh, come, dear lord," said Emma, with inimitable grace and charm, "do not be a bird of ill-omen here. The French will be beaten on land by General Mack as they have been beaten at sea by Admiral Nelson..... And hark, I hear a whip crack; is it the arrival of the courier the King promised us?" and as she spoke the noise repeated, coming nearer and nearer, was distinctly heard, and with it the roll of carriage wheels.

Everyone rose spontaneously to listen; and Acton, visibly excited, at a sign from the Queen sprang to the door just as the carriage was heard to stop at the bottom of the grand staircase. But he quickly returned, and backwards, like a man faced with some impossible apparition.

"The King!" cried he; "the King! What does it mean?" and almost directly the King entered, in fact, followed by the Duke of Ascoli.

King Ferdinand was in a curious state of mind: his vexation at his defeat was struggling within him against satisfaction at his escape, and he was feeling his natural need of mockery, and mockery embittered in the circumstances he was in. Add to that the physical discomfort of a man, more, of a King, who has just accomplished sixty leagues in a wretched chaise, without food. It was December, moreover.

"Brrrou!" cried he on entering, while rubbing his hands without seeming to notice the persons present. "It is better here than on the road from Albano; what do you say, d'Ascoli?"

Then, as the Queen's guests confusedly made their bows: "Good evening, good evening," he went on, "I am very glad to find the table laid. Since we left Rome we haven't had a taste of meat. Some bread and cheese in one's fingers, how refreshing that is! Pouah! What miserable inns there are in my kingdom, and how I pity the poor devils relying on them! To table, d'Ascoli, to table! I am outrageously hungry." And the King seated himself without more ado, and made d'Ascoli sit by him.

"Sire, would you be good enough to calm my uneasiness," said the Queen, approaching her august spouse, for whom respect kept all at a distance, "by informing me to what circumstance I owe the happiness of this unexpected return?"

"Madame, you have related to me, I think — to a certainty it is not San Nicandro — the story of Francis I., who, after I don't know what battle, prisoner of I don't know what Emperor, wrote a long letter to his mother, ending with this fine phrase: 'All is lost but honour.' Well, suppose I am arriving from Pavia — I remember now that's the name of the battle — suppose I am arriving from Pavia then, not having been so stupid as to let myself be taken like Francis I., instead of writing to you, I come to tell you myself...."

"All is lost, except honour!" cried the Queen in alarm.

"Oh! no, madame," said the King with a harsh laugh, "there is a little variation: all is lost, and even honour!"

"Oh! sire," murmured d'Ascoli, ashamed as a Neapolitan of this cynicism of the King.

"If honour is not lost, d'Ascoli," said Ferdinand, frowning and grinding his teeth, a proof that he was not as insensible to the position as he feigned, "after what were those people running who ran so fast that even paying a ducat and a half to the postboys, I had the greatest trouble to pass them? After disgrace!"

Everyone kept silence; an icy silence; for without as yet knowing anything, everything was already suspected. The King, reaching out his fork, had taken a roasted pheasant from the dish in front of him, had divided it, and had put one half on his plate, and had passed the other to d'Ascoli. Looking round, he saw that everyone was standing, even the Queen.

"Sit down then, sit down then," said he; "things won't go any better for having supped badly." Then, pouring out a glass of Bordeaux and passing the bottle to d'Ascoli: "To Championnet's health!" said the King. "That's right! There is a man of his word: he promised the Republicans to be in Rome before the twentieth day, and he will be there on the seventeenth. It is he who deserves this excellent Bordeaux, and I who ought to drink asprino."

"What, sir! What do you say?" cried the Queen. "Championnet is in Rome?"

"As true as that I am at Caserta."

"Where we were little expecting the happiness of seeing you so soon again," said the Queen. "Scarcely three hours ago I received a letter from you announcing a courier who would bring the news of the battle."

"Well, madame," returned the King: "here is the courier, and here the news: we have been beaten hollow. What do you say to that, milord Nelson, you, the conqueror of conquerors?"

"I was expressing my fears about half-an-hour before Your Majesty arrived."

"But what of Mack's forty thousand men, then, sire....?" said the Queen.

"Crushed by Championnet's ten thousand Republicans," said he. "I say, d'Ascoli, when I think that I wrote to the sovereign pontiff to come on the wings of cherubims to keep Christmas with me at Rome, I hope he won't be too much in a hurry to accept the invitation. Pass me that boar's haunch, Castelcicala; one doesn't dine on half a pheasant when one has eaten nothing for twenty-four hours." Then, turning to the Queen: "Have you any further questions to put me, madame?" he enquired.

"A last one, sire. I should like to ask Your Majesty the reason of this masquerade?" and Caroline pointed to d'Ascoli, his cross, his ribbons and his stars.

"Ah, to be sure! But first of all, sit down; it annoys; me to be seated and eating, while you are all standing round me, and especially their Royal Highnesses," said the King rising and bowing to the ladies.

“Sire,” said Madame Victoire, “whatever may be the circumstances in which we see Your Majesty again, be assured that we are happy to do so.”

“Thanks, thanks. And what is this handsome young lieutenant who allows himself to resemble my son?”

“One of the seven guards you have given to their Royal Highnesses,” said the Queen; “M. di Cesare is of good Corsican family, sire, and, besides, the epaulette ennobles.”

“When he who wears it does not disgrace it

Serve my cousins well, M. di Cesare.” The King made a sign, and everyone sat down, although no one ate anything.”

“And now,” said Ferdinand to the Queen, “d’Ascoli will relate how it is he come to have changed clothes.”

“It is not for me, sire, to boast of the honour Your Majesty has done me.”

“He calls that an honour! Poor d’Ascoli!

Well, I will tell you about it myself. Imagine that it came to my ears that those wretched Jacobins had vowed to hang me if I fell into their hands.”

“They would have been quite capable of it.”

“Ah! Well, as we left just as we were, without time to disguise ourselves, at Albano I said to d’Ascoli: ‘Give me your coat and take mine, then if these wolves of Jacobins catch us they will think you are the King and will let me escape; and when I am safe, you can explain.’ But poor d’Ascoli didn’t reflect on one thing,” added the King, bursting out laughing, “and that is that they wouldn’t have given him time to explain, but would have hanged him first and have left the explanation till afterwards.”

“Sire, I did think of it,” replied the Duke, “and that is why I did it.”

Again the King felt touched by devotion so noble and so simple. “D’Ascoli,” said he, “keep this coat, those ribbons and orders in remembrance of the day when you offered to save your King’s life, and I will keep yours as a remembrance also. If you ever have a favour to ask or a reproach to make, put on that coat and come to me.”

“Bravo, sire,” cried di Cesare, “that is something like a reward!”

“Young man,” said Madame Adelaide, “do you forget that you have the honour to speak to a King?”

“Pardon, Your Highness, it was never more present to my mind, for I have never seen a King greater.”

“Ah! Ah!” said Ferdinand. - “There’s some good in that young man. Come here! What is your name?”

"Di Cesare, sire."

- "Di Cesare, I make you a captain. Monsieur Acton, see he gets his brevet to-morrow; and add a present of a thousand ducats."

"Sire," said Nelson, "permit me to felicitate you; you have been twice a king this evening."

"For the days when I forget to be one, milord," replied Ferdinand; then, turning to the Duke, "Well, d'Ascoli, is it a bargain?"

"Yes, sire, and the gratitude is all on my side. But might I ask Your Majesty to return me a little snuff box from my pocket in exchange for this letter from His Majesty the Emperor of Austria, of which Your Majesty has read only the first line?"

The King took the letter, and opening it mechanically, began to read, but at the second or third line his expression suddenly changed, and visibly darkened.

The Queen and Acton exchanged a look, and eyed the letter with avidity, the King continuing to read with increasing agitation.

"I hope there is no bad news," said the Queen.

"Oh, no; something I was not expecting, that's all."

At that moment a footman approached the King and said something in a low tone, to which the King replied: "Good, and tell Ferrari not to budge. I shall want him in a quarter of an hour." Then, turning to the Queen," Madame," said he, "you will excuse my leaving you, but, as you may imagine, I need repose," and addressing the aged Princesses, "Ladies, I had hoped to offer you a safer and more durable hospitality, but I shall have

no uneasiness on your Royal Highnesses' account so long as you have for bodyguard Captain di Cesare and his companions." He then took leave of Nelson, saying that he counted on him, and on d'Ascoli, and finally turning to the English ambassador: "Sir William Hamilton," he went on, "you will remember that, like Pilate, I washed my hands of anything that might happen?"

"Perfectly, sire."

"Well, it concerns me no longer; it concerns those who have acted without consulting me, and who, when they did consult me, did not desire to listen to my advice." And having enveloped with the same reproachful look the Queen and Acton, he went out.

The Queen approached Acton quickly. "Did you hear?" said she. "He spoke Ferrari's name after having read the Emperor's letter."

"I heard, madame; but Ferrari knows nothing; he was in a swoon the whole time."

"No matter! it will be prudent to rid ourselves of that man."

"Well," said Acton; "he will be got rid of."

The King had sent for Cardinal Ruffo, who was awaiting him in his apartment, as Ferdinand hurriedly entered crying, "First of all, pardon, my dear Cardinal, for having waked you up at two in the morning, but never have I had more need of my friend's devotion."

"Your Majesty honours me. I presume that General Mack is defeated, and I am not surprised."

"But why did you advise war then?"

"Your Majesty will recall that it was on the one condition that the Emperor of Austria would march on the Mincio at the same time that Your Majesty marched on Rome; but it seems that he did not do so."

"No, and thereby hangs a mystery. You perfectly remember the Emperor's letter I showed you, saying that he would take the field as soon as I was in Rome; well, now study this other letter that I received there just as I was putting my foot in the stirrup, and which I have only just read through, and see if you can make anything of it, sorcerer that you are," and he handed the letter to the Cardinal, who began, "My dear brother and cousin, uncle and father-in-law, ally and confederate...

"Go on," interrupted the King, as he stopped.

The Cardinal continued: "In the first place, permit me to felicitate you on your triumphant entry into Rome. The God of battles has protected you, and I return him thanks for the protection he has accorded you; that is all the more fortunate as there seems to be a great misunderstanding between us."

The Cardinal looked at the King and continued: "You tell me in the letter that you do me the honour to write me to announce your victories that I have only on my part to keep my promise as you have kept yours; and you tell me clearly that this promise I made you was to begin a campaign directly you should be in Rome..."

"You remember perfectly, don't you, Your Eminence, that my nephew, the Emperor, made that engagement? besides," continued the King, who while the Cardinal was reading had opened his portfolio and had taken out the first missive, "we are about to judge of that: here is my dear nephew's letter; we will compare the two. Go on, go on."

The Cardinal continued: “Not only I did not promise that, but, on the contrary, I wrote to you positively that I should not begin a campaign till the arrival of General Souvorov and his forty thousand Russians, that is to say towards the approaching month of April. I am the more sure of what I say, my dear uncle and father-in-law, that, in accordance with the advice given me by Your Majesty, I wrote the letter that I had the honour to address to you entirely in my own hand, and that I might depart in nothing from what I had the honour to say to Your Majesty, I had a copy made by my secretary. I send you this copy so that you can compare it with the original and assure yourself with your own eyes that there could not have been in my phrases, any ambiguity to lead you into such an error. And as I had the honour to tell Your Majesty,I am doubly happy that Providence has blessed your arms; for if, instead of being victorious, you had been defeated, it would have been impossible for me, without failing in my engagements with my Prussian confederates, to go to your help, and I should have been obliged, to my great regret, to abandon you to your bad fortune; this would have been a great disappointment, which, happily, Providence has spared me in granting victory. And now receive, my dear brother and cousin.”

“Et cetera, et cetera! “. interrupted the King. “Ah!... And now, my dear Cardinal, let us look at the copy of the pretended letter, of which, luckily, I have preserved the original.”

The copy was, in fact, enclosed in the letter. Ruffo had it in his hand, and he read it. It was in truth a copy of the despatch which had been unsealed by the Queen and Acton, and which, as it did not appear to second their desire, had been replaced by the forged letter which the King had in his hand ready to compare with the copy sent him by Francis II. Our readers will remember the contents of the original despatch, and can therefore judge of the King’s amazement as the Cardinal read aloud to him first the copy of the original despatch and then the forged letter which he had taken from his portfolio, and the contents of which were so diametrically different. The reading finished, the Cardinal became pensive.

“Well, Your Eminence; what do you think of it?” said the King.

“That the Emperor is right, but that Your Majesty is not wrong.”

“Which means?”

“That beneath it all there is, as Your Majesty has said, some terrible mystery perhaps; more than a mystery, some treason.”

“Treason; and in whose interest was it to betray me?”

"Let us try to discover. I ask no better than to be Your Majesty's sleuthhound. Jupiter found Ferrari.... and, by-the-bye, it would not be a bad thing to question Ferrari a little."

"It was my first idea; I have had him sent for," and the King rang, and told his footman to fetch the courier.

"Your Majesty told me you were sure of this man?" said the Cardinal.

"I said I thought I was sure."

"Well, I will go further," returned Ruffo. "I am quite sure."

Ferrari appeared on the threshold, booted, spurred and ready to set out.

"Come here, my good man," said the King. "At Your Majesty's orders. Despatches, sire?"

"It is not a question of despatches this evening, my friend, but merely of answering our questions."

"Question him, Cardinal."

"My friend," said Ruffo to the courier, "the King has the greatest confidence in you."

"I believe I have merited it by fifteen years of good and loyal service."

"That is why the King begs you to exert your memory, and desires through me to warn you that it concerns a very important matter. No doubt you recollect the smallest details of your journey to Vienna? Was it indeed the Emperor who himself gave you the letter you brought to the King?"

"It was the Emperor himself, as I have already had the honour of telling His Majesty."

"Where did you put the Emperor's letter?"

"In this pocket," said Ferrari, opening his jacket.

"Where did you stop?"

"Nowhere, except to change horses."

"Where did you sleep?"

"I did not sleep?"

"Hum!" said the Cardinal; "but you told us of an accident."

"In the courtyard of the castle, monseigneur, where I fainted."

"Where did you come to yourself?"

"In the dispensary."

"How long were you unconscious?"

"My horse fell under me at about one o'clock in the morning. When I came to it was daybreak, about half-past five."

"Who was with you then?"

"M. Richard, the Captain-General's secretary, and the surgeon from Santa Maria."

"You did not suspect anyone of having touched your letter?"

"The first thing I did was to feel for it. I examined the seal and envelope; they seemed to me to be intact."

"Then you had some suspicion?"

"No, monseigneur, I acted instinctively."

"And then?"

"Then, as the surgeon had dressed my wound while I was unconscious, I was given some broth; I came away, and I handed my letter to His Majesty, as you know."

"Yes, my dear Ferrari, and I believe I may assure the King that you acted as a good and loyal servant throughout. This is all we had to ask of you, is it not, sire?"

"Yes," replied Ferdinand.

"His Majesty permits you to withdraw then, and to take the rest of which you must be in need."

"Dare I ask His Majesty if I have abused his kindness in any way?"

"On the contrary, my dear Ferrari," said the King, "you are more than ever the man I trust."

Ferrari withdrew happy.

"Well," asked Ferdinand, "as he told you, Your Eminence, the seal and the envelope were intact."

"It is easy to take the imprint of a seal."

"But then one would have had to forge the Emperor's signature?"

"Not necessarily, sir. Suppose one had had a seal with the head of Marcus Aurelius; one could have melted the wax of the seal by holding it above a taper, have opened the letter, have folded it thus...." And Ruffo folded it, actually, as Acton had done.

"Why fold it like that?" enquired the King.

"To preserve the heading and the signature; then, with some acid, to remove the writing, and instead of what was there, put what there is at present."

"Do you think that possible, Your Eminence?"

"Nothing easier; and I would even say that it is a perfect explanation."

"Cardinal! Cardinal!" said the King, after having attentively examined the letter, "you are a very clever man. And now, what is to be done, in your opinion?”

“Allow me the remainder of the night for reflection,” replied Ruffo, “and to-morrow we will speak of this again.”

“My dear Ruffo,” said the King, “do not forget that if I do not make you Prime Minister it is because I am not the master.”

“I am so convinced of it, sire, that I am just as grateful to you as if you had.” And, bowing to the King with his customary respect, the Cardinal went out, leaving His Majesty lost in admiration of him.

Scarcely had the King left the dining-hall to confer with Cardinal Ruffo, as just related, than as if he had been the sole link uniting the guests agitated with their various emotions, each hastened to seek his own chamber.

The Queen informed Sir William that after the news now brought by her husband, she had too much need of a friend to let her dear Emma go. Sir William sought his apartment to draw up a report for his Government, and Nelson, with head bent and heart pre-occupied with gloomy forebodings, returned to his room. He, also, like Sir William, had a letter to write, but it was a private one. He was not commander-in-chief in the Mediterranean, but under the orders of Admiral Lord St. Vincent; not a galling inferiority; the admiral treating him rather as a friend than an inferior.

This intimacy between Nelson and his commander-in-chief comes out clearly in their correspondence which is preserved, which reveals in all its details the irresistible progress of Nelson’s mad passion for Lady Hamilton, and which would be Nelson’s excuse in the eyes of posterity, if posterity, which for two thousand years has condemned the lover of Cleopatra, could reverse its judgment.

Fresh from the impression made by the King’s news, no sooner did Nelson enter his apartment than he went straight to his desk, and troubled at thought of the changes, public and private, foreshadowed, began the following letter: —

“To Admiral Lord St. Vincent. “My Dear Lord, “The face of events has greatly changed since my last letter dated from Leghorn, and I much fear that His Majesty the King of the Two Sicilies may be on the point of losing one of his kingdoms, and perhaps both.

“General Mack, as I suspected, and as I think I even told you, was only a braggart who had gained his reputation as a great general, I don’t know where, but certainly not on battlefields; to be sure he had under his command a sad army; but who would suppose that sixty thousand men would let themselves be beaten by ten thousand!

“The Neapolitan officers had not much honour to lose, but they lost all they had.”

Nelson had got thus far with his letter when he heard behind him a noise as of butterfly’s wings. He turned and beheld Lady Hamilton. He turned with a joyful exclamation, but Emma, with a charming smile, put a finger to her lips, and, laughing and gracious as a figure of happy silence, signed to him to be quiet. Then, coming to his armchair, she leaned over the back and said in a low voice: “Follow me, Horatio; our dear Queen is waiting for you and wishes to speak to you before seeing her husband again.”

Nelson sighed, thinking that a few words from London, by changing his destination, might part him from this sorceress, whose every gesture, word and caress was a fresh link in the chain by which he was already bound; he rose unsteadily from his seat, attacked by that dizziness he always had, when, after a short absence he saw once more that dazzling beauty.

“Lead me,” said he; “you know that I am blind to everything as soon as I see you.”

Emma detached the gauze scarf wound round her head which she used both as hood and veil, as one may see in Isabey’s miniatures, and throwing him an end which he seized and carried feverishly to his lips:

“Come, my dear Theseus,” said she,’ “here is the thread of the labyrinth if you must abandon me like another Ariadne. Only, I warn you that should such a misfortune happen, I should not let myself be consoled by anyone, even by a god!”

Nelson followed her; had she led him to hell he would have gone down into it with her.

The Queen was sitting on a sofa in the boudoir which separated Emma’s room from hers. There was an angry light in her eyes.

“Come, Nelson, my defender,” said she, indicating a place at her side, “I have need indeed that the sight of and contact with a hero may console me for our disgrace Did you see that crowned buffoon, the messenger of his own shame? Did you hear him mocking at his own cowardice? Ah! Nelson, Nelson, it is mournful when one is a proud and courageous woman to have for a spouse a King who knows how to wield neither sceptre nor sword.”

Emma, seated on cushions at the Queen’s feet, bent upon him whom it was her mission to fascinate her most magnetic looks, and fingered his cross and ribbons; while Nelson responded, “The fact is, madame, that the King is a great philosopher.”

“What?” cried the Queen, “a man without dignity or heart who would have let d’Ascoli be hanged in mistake for himself without saying a word? And that I, daughter of Marie Thérèse, should be his wife! It is enough to make one doubt of Providence. Oh, if I were a man, if I wore a sword!”

“It could not be better than this,” said Emma, playing with Nelson’s, “and, from the moment that this protects you, you have no need of another, thank God.”

Nelson laid his hand on Emma’s head and gazed at her with an expression of infinite love.

“Alas! dear Emma,” said he; “I also have my fears.”

“You?” demanded Emma.

“Oh, I guess what he desires to say,” cried the Queen, carrying her handkerchief to her eyes; “Oh, I weep, but with tears of rage....”

“Yes, but I do not guess,” cried Emma. “Nelson, what do you mean by your fears; you must explain!” And, throwing an arm round his neck, and raising herself gracefully by it, she kissed his scarred forehead.

“I only think of one fear,” she added; “that of being parted from you.”

“You see then that you have guessed, Emma.”

“To part!” cried she, with an admirably assumed expression of terror; “and who could part us now?”

“Oh, Admiralty orders; a caprice of Mr. Pitt; could they not send me to capture Martinique, as they sent me to Calvi, Teneriffe, Aboukir?”

“But you would not obey such an order, I hope? An order to leave me?”

“Emma! Emma! do you not see that you are placing me between my duty and my love.... That is to make of me a traitor or to drive me to despair.”

“Well,” replied Emma, “I admit that you cannot urge our mutual passion to His Majesty George III., but you could say: ‘My King, I do not wish to leave a Queen of whom I am the sole support, the sole defender;’ and if you, a subject, cannot speak thus, his foster-brother, Sir William, can.”

“Nelson,” said the Queen; “perhaps I am very egotistical, but, if you do not protect us, we are lost; and when it is a question of saving a kingdom, do you not think a man of heart like you may risk something?”

“You are right, madame,” replied Nelson; “I was thinking only of my love, my heart’s polar star. Your Majesty makes me very happy in showing me devotion where I saw but a passion. This very night I will finish a letter to Lord St. Vincent begging and praying him to attach me to your service; he will understand, he will write to the Admiralty."

"Do you realise, Nelson," the queen went on, "how much we need you, and what immense services you can render us! In all probability we shall be obliged to leave Naples and go into exile."

"But if the King wished...."

The Queen shook her head, and smiled sadly.

"No, Nelson," she said. "The Neapolitans hate me; they are a race jealous of all talent, beauty and courage; they hate Acton because he was born in France; Emma because she was born in England; me because I was born in Austria. Suppose that if by a courageous effort of which he is incapable the King rallies-the débris of the army and checks the Jacobins in the Abruzzi, the Jacobins here will profit by the absence of the troops and rise, and then the horrors of France in 1792 and 1793 will be repeated. The King is shielded by his nationality, his lazzaroni adore him, but we others are lost. Would it not be a great role reserved for you by Providence, dear Nelson, should you be able to do for me what none of her protectors were able to do for my sister the Queen of France."

"It would be glory too great, an eternal glory to which I do not aspire, madame," replied Nelson.

"Then should you not give due weight to this," the Queen went on, "that it is through our devotion to England that, we are compromised? If, faithful to its treaties with the Republic, the Government of the Two Sicilies had refused you permission to take in water, stores and to repair your damage at Syracuse, you would have been obliged to revictual at Gibraltar, and would not have found the French fleet at Aboukir."

"True, madame, and in that case I should have been lost myself."

"Finally," continued the Queen, "was it not àpropos of the fêtes we gave in our enthusiasm for you that this war burst out? Ah, Nelson, the fate of the kingdom and sovereigns of the Two Sicilies is bound up with you. It will be said in the future: 'They were abandoned by all, by their allies, by their friends, by their relations; they had the world against them; but Nelson was for them, Nelson saved them.' "And, on pronouncing these words, the Queen held out her hand, which Nelson took, and kneeling, kissed.

"Madame," said he, becoming enthusiastic at the Queen's flattery, "will Your Majesty grant me one thing?"

"You have the right to ask everything from those who will owe all to you."

"Then, I ask your royal word that on the day you leave Naples, Nelson's ship and no other shall guide to Sicily your sacred person."

"Oh, that, I swear it, Nelson; and I add that, wherever I shall be, my sole, my only, my eternal friend, my dear Emma will be with me." And the Queen took Emma's head in her two hands and kissed her upon the eyes.

"My word is pledged to you, madame," said Nelson. "From this moment your friends are my friends, and your enemies my enemies; and even had I to lose myself in saving you, I will save you."

"Oh!" cried Emma; "you are truly the knight, of kings and the champion of thrones! You are truly such as I have dreamed, the man to whom I should give all my love and all my heart! "And this time it was to her lover's lips that the modern Circe set her own.

At this moment there was a gentle tap at the door.

"Go in there, dear friends of my heart," said the Queen, pointing to Emma's room; "Acton is coming to give me an answer."

Nelson, intoxicated with praise, love, and pride, drew Emma into that room with its perfumed atmosphere, the door seeming to shut upon them of itself.

In a moment the Queen's expression changed, as if she had dropped a mask. "Come in," she said in a short voice, and as Acton entered, "Well, who was waiting for His Majesty?"

"Cardinal Ruffo, and they sent for Ferrari."

"I suspected as much. All the more reason, Acton, for doing what you know of."

"It shall be done on the first opportunity. Has Your Majesty any other commands?"

"No," replied the Queen. Acton bowed and went out.

CHAPTER XVII.

A SERVANT OF THE QUEEN AND A SERVANT OF THE KING.

IT will be remembered that the King in one of his letters to the Queen had urged that the trial of Nicolino Caracciolo should be hastened on. This was from no philanthropic motive. The King had his own reasons for hating him, one of them his relationship to the handsome Duke of Rocca-Romana, whom scandal connected with the Queen, another that Nicolino, half French by birth and wholly French in his ideas, had been one of the first to offend the King’s eyes by leaving off powder, sacrificing his queue, and letting his whiskers grow; and had actually exchanged knee breeches for trousers.

But the King’s suspicions, vague and instinctive as they were, were well founded, since Nicolino was involved in that great conspiracy extending to Rome, the object of which was, by inviting the French to Naples, to bring in with them light, progress and liberty. Nor was the Marquis Vanni, who had charge of Nicolino’s case, to be blamed for neglect of the royal wishes. He had the man safe, he had proofs of his guilt, he was sure he could not escape him; but he had feline instincts, he was merely amusing himself a little with his victim before cutting off his head. And even so, with all his advantages, armed with the law, torture and the scaffold, the game did not always go as he wished. Nicolino Caracciolo held firmly to a policy of non-avowal, and to all the questions put to him by Vanni as regards all those matters not of general knowledge, replied in every

interrogatory by putting questions himself. These questions were of such a personal kind that Vanni did not even dare to let the clerk record them, and finally, having threatened the prisoner to put him to the torture if he continued to make game of justice in this matter, he arrived at St. Elmo on the morning of the ninth of December, quite decided, if Nicolino persisted in his impertinences, to put his threat into execution. He was, of course, ignorant of the secret return of the King from Rome, which was only known so far to the intimate circle at Caserta.

Vanni was escorted by Master Donato, the Naples executioner, with two of his assistants, as well as by his clerk, a man so silent in his devotion to his master that he appeared to be his very shadow. For this solemn occasion of the revival of torture in Naples, fallen into disuse for sixty-five years for the benefit of a member of one of the first families of the kingdom, orders had been given to the Governor of the Castle of St. Elmo to get ready the old torture chamber, in which process seven hundred ducats had actually been expended.

At the news of Vanni's arrival the Governor accordingly came to meet him and conduct him into this ancient museum of pain, where he was able to study a fine collection of instruments, drawn for the most part from the arsenals of ecclesiastical inquisition. By the care of the Governor, each instrument was ready for use.

Leaving Master Donato and his assistants in this funereal apartment, lighted only by torches clamped to the walls, the Governor and Vanni passed into an adjoining room, railed off by an iron grille, before which hung a heavy curtain of black serge. This room had been that of the secret tribunal, abandoned at the same time as the torture chamber; no daylight reached it, and it was furnished only by a table covered with a green cloth, lighted by two candelabra, and supplied with paper, pens and ink; an armchair for the judge, a stool for the prisoner, and a little table for the clerk; a most forbidding-looking crucifix carved out of the trunk of an oak; and a lamp hanging from the ceiling, which lit up this terrible agony on the cross.

Vanni, after inspecting everything in silence, complimented the Governor on his zeal, of which he promised the Queen should hear, and requested him to send the prisoner with an escort; and if it so pleased him, to accompany him himself, that is if he cared to witness the manner in which he, Vanni, would conduct the necessary operations. The Governor thanked him warmly for this permission, and bowing to the ground, withdrew to fetch Nicolino Caracciolo. The short interval which elapsed was employed by the fiscal attorney in putting a judge's robe over his town suit, in covering his long horny head with an enormous wig, which added, he thought, to the majesty of his countenance, and in placing on this wig a lawyer's cap. The clerk began by laying on the table as evidence the two pistols engraved with an N and the Marchioness of San Clemente's letter; and then made the same toilette as his superior, that is, he put on a narrower robe, a smaller wig, a lower cap. After which he sat down at the little table.

The Marquis Vanni took his place at the large one, and prepared himself as effectively as possible to impress Nicolino.

Unfortunately, Nicolino was not easily impressed. He came in smiling and humming a tune, accompanied by four soldiers, and followed by the Governor, and took his seat on the stool with these words:

“Marquis, have you by any chance read ‘*The Mysteries of Udolpho?’*”

“Sir, we are here to concern ourselves with other matters than novels,” replied Vanni.

“Well, I merely wished to observe that in ‘*The Mysteries of Udolpho* ‘there is a description of a room exactly like this; it is in that apartment that the chief brigand held his sittings.”

Vanni summoned his dignity to his aid.

“Prisoner, you are accused of a plot against the State.”

“Oh come! You have relapsed into your mania again.”

Vanni stamped impatiently.

“Have you at last made up your mind to answer the questions I am going to put to you?”

“That depends on the questions.”

Vanni thereupon, as he had already often done, demanded the accused’s age, name, domicile, and finally, “Did you form one of the assembly of conspirators in the ruins of the palace of Queen Joanna on the 22nd-23rd September?”

“I do not know of such a place.”

“You do not know the ruins of the palace of Queen Joanna at Pausilippo, almost in front of your house?”

“Pardon, Marquis, I am surprised that an archaeologist like you should fall into such an error. You mean to say the palace of Anna Caraffa, wife of the Duke of Medina.... if this gets rumoured you will be taken for a real Marquis.”

“Very well, were you in the ruins of the palace of Anna Caraffa during the night of 22nd-23rd September? Answer yes or no!” insisted the furious Vanni.

“And what the devil should I have gone looking about there for? Don’t you remember the awful weather that night? I don’t go conspiring when it rains; it is tiresome enough in fine weather.”

“Did you that evening lend your great coat to someone?”

“Not so stupid on such a night if I had had two I should have put one on top of the other.”

“Do you recognise these pistols?”

“No,” said Nicolino.

“They are marked with an N however.”

“Am I the only person in Naples whose name begins with an N?”

“Do you recognise this letter? “And Vanni showed the Marchioness San Clemente’s letter to the prisoner.

“Pardon, Marquis, I should like to have a nearer view of it,” and he looked at the two soldiers, one on either side of him, saying: “Is it permitted?”

The soldiers drew back; Nicolino approached the table, took the letter and examined it.

“Oh fie! to ask a gallant man if he recognises a woman’s’ letter! Oh, Marquis! “And calmly holding the letter to one of the candelabra, he set fire to it.

Vanni got up, furious: “What are you doing?” cried he.

“I am burning it, as you see; one should always burn women’s letters, or the poor creatures will be compromised,” and he blew the ashes into Vanni’s face and quietly went back to his seat.

“Good,” roared Vanni, “he may laugh who laughs last,” then, though shaking his snuff-box furiously, he appeared to calm down, and went on: “You are the nephew of Francesco-Caracciolo?”

“I have that honour.”

“Do you see him often?”

“As often as I can.”

“You are aware that he is infected with bad principles?”

“I am aware that he is the most honest man in Naples, and His Majesty’s most faithful subject, without excepting you, Marquis.”

“Have you heard it said that he had to do with Republicans?

“Yes, at Toulon, where he fought against them so gloriously that to his various combats with them he owes his rank of admiral.”

“Come,” said Vanni, as if he were taking a sudden resolution, “I see that you will not speak, and that we shall draw no avowal from you by mildness.”

“Nor by force, I warn you.”

“Nicolino Caracciolo, my powers as judge are extensive. I warn you that I shall be forced to put you to the torture.”

“Do so, Marquis, do so; that will help pass the time,” Nicolino yawned.

“Master Donato!” cried the fiscal attorney, “show the torture chamber to the accused.”

Master Donato pulled a cord, the curtains parted; Nicolino could then see the executioner, his two assistants, and the formidable instruments of torture surrounding them.

“Hum,” said Nicolino, “this appears to be a very curious collection; can one see it a little nearer?”

“You will see it too nearly, immediately, miserable hardened sinner. Donato, seize the accused.”

The grille turned on its hinges, and Donato stepped towards the prisoner.

“The guide?” asked the young man.

“I am the executioner,” replied Master Donato.

“To the torture; to the torture!” yelled Vanni.

“Marquis,” said Nicolino, “I believe that by being in a hurry you are depriving yourself of the great pleasure of explaining to me the uses of these curious machines; but do you prefer to begin immediately? It is all the same to me.”

Vanni lowered his eyes and considered for a moment.

“It shall not be said that I refused delay to an accused, however guilty,” he replied, and he forthwith commenced to point out the workings of the estrapade, the *cuffia del silenzio*, the red-hot chair, the boot, and the torture by water. Nicolino continued to jest at each explanation.

“Then you refuse to confess,” finally demanded Vanni.

“More than ever.”

“Reflect that it is no longer a joking matter; I shall begin by the estrapade. Executioner, remove the prisoner’s coat.”

But Nicolino, with the greatest calmness, saved him the trouble, and also took off his waistcoat and shirt.

“Once more, will you confess?” cried Vanni, desperately shaking his snuff-box.

“Has a gentleman two ways of speaking?” returned Nicolino.

“Bind his hands behind his back, attach a weight of a hundred pounds to each foot, and raise him to the ceiling,” Vanni directed.

The executioner's assistants threw themselves on Nicolino, bound him and fixed the weights to his feet.

"You won't confess? You won't confess?" cried Vanni approaching the prisoner.

"Yes; come nearer," said Nicolino.

Vanni approached; Nicolino spit in his face.

"Christ!" cried Vanni; "raise him, raise him."

But at that moment the Governor, hurriedly going up to him, said, "A note by express from the Prince of Castelcicala."

Scarcely had Vanni taken the note and cast an eye over it than he turned livid; read it again and became paler still. Then, after a moment's silence, passing his handkerchief over his damp forehead, "Loose the prisoner and take him back to prison," he ordered; "the torture will be another day," and he instantly rushed out of the room, without even speaking to his clerk.

"You are forgetting your shadow," Nicolino called after him.

"A devil's trade!" cried Master Donato. "One is never sure of anything."

Nicolino seemed moved by the executioner's disappointment, and taking three pieces of gold from his pocket, gave them to him, and turning to the Governor, requested to be taken back to prison.

The note received by Vanni had been thus expressed:

"The King arrived to-night. The Neapolitan army is defeated; the French will be here in a fortnight.

"C."

Now the Marquis Vanni had reflected that it was inopportune, just as the French were to enter Naples, to torture a prisoner accused solely of being a partisan of the French. As to Nicolino, who had been threatened with such a severe trial, he returned to dungeon No. 3, without knowing to what fortunate chance he was indebted for getting off so cheaply.

The same hour that saw Nicolino taken back to his cell saw Cardinal Ruffo, faithful to his promise of the night before, entering the King's apartments.

The King was alone with a man of about forty years of age. By an almost imperceptible tonsure lost in a forest of black hair one recognised him for an abbé. For the rest he was a strapping fellow, made one would have thought rather for a carabineer’s uniform than for the robe of an ecclesiastic.

Ruffo drew back a step.

“Come in, come in, my dear Cardinal,” said the King; “you are not in the way; I present to you the Abbé Pronio. He came but a minute ago from my director, Monseigneur Rossi, Bishop of Nicosia. He can now speak before us both. Relate what has brought you; Cardinal Ruffo is one of my friends.”

“One of the best, sire,” said the abbé, bowing to the Cardinal. “Who does not know him, the fortifier of Ancona, the inventor of a new furnace to mould bullets!”

“Ah, Cardinal, you were not expecting a compliment on your military exploits.”

“No, but I presume,” said Ruffo, “that the abbé has not come only for that.”

“True, abbé, the Cardinal reminds me that I have business on hand; proceed, we are listening.”

“I will be brief, sire. Yesterday, at nine in the evening, I was at my nephew’s, a master of the post. Ten minutes previously a courier had passed, had ordered horses urgently for a very great nobleman, and had gone on laughing. I was seized with curiosity; and when the carriage stopped, I approached it, and to my great amazement recognised the King. The King, whom one supposed to be in Rome, was returning alone in a post-chaise, accompanied by a single nobleman who was wearing the King’s clothes, while the King was wearing the clothes of that nobleman; it was an event. I questioned the postillions and heard that there had been a great battle, that the Neapolitans had been defeated, and that the King — how shall I say it, sire?” the abbé asked, bowing respectfully — ” and that the King.”

“Cut away.”

“Then the idea occurred to me that if the Neapolitans were really in flight they were running with one accord to Naples, and that therefore there was but one way of stopping the French, who would be, if not stopped, on their heels.”

“Let us hear it,” said Ruffo.

“It was to raise the Abruzzi and the labourers in insurrection, and since there was no longer an army to oppose them with, to oppose to them a people.”

Ruffo looked at Pronio. “Are you by chance a man of genius, abbé?” he asked.

“Who knows?” replied the abbé.

“Let him go on; let him go on,” cried the King.

“So this morning I have come straight to the King as from His Majesty’s confessor.”

“Are you acquainted with him?” asked Ruffo.

“I have never seen him, but I hoped that the King would pardon my lie for my good intentions; if the King adopts my plan of an insurrection, no train of powder would ignite more quickly; I proclaim a holy war, and before a week is out I raise the whole country from Aquila to Teano.”

“And you will do that singly?” demanded Ruffo.

“No, monseigneur; I should have two assistants — one is Gaetano Mammone, better known as the miller of Sora.”

“Haven’t I heard that name in connection with the murder of those two Jacobins della Torre?” enquired the King.

“It is possible, sire,” replied the Abbé Pronio. “Gaetano Mammone is rarely absent when anyone is killed within ten leagues of him; he scents blood.”

“You know him?” asked Ruffo.

“He is my friend, Eminence.”

“And who is the other?”

“A young brigand of the greatest promise, sire, called Michael Pezza; but he has taken the name of Fra Diavolo. Though scarcely one and twenty years of age, he is already leader of a band of thirty men in the mountains of Mignano. He was in love with a young girl whose father gave her to another; he killed his rival, and * \

afterwards carried off the girl, who now adores him and is as great a brigand as he.”

“And these are the men you think of employing?” asked the King.

“Sire, one does not raise an insurrection with seminarists.”

“The abbé is right, sire,” said Ruffo.

“So be it, and with these means you promise to succeed, and will raise the Abruzzi and the field labourers.”

“I answer for it; I know everyone, and everyone knows me; but I am counting on my two friends, captains as I am; they are as valuable as I, and I no less than they. Only let the King deign to sign commissions for us to prove to the peasants that we are acting in his name, and I will answer for everything.”

“Oh, oh,” said the King; “I am not scrupulous, but to choose as my captains two such fellows! You must give me ten minutes for reflection, abbé.”

“Ten, twenty, thirty, sire. The matter is too advantageous for Your Majesty to refuse, and His Eminence is too devoted to the interests of the crown not to advise it.”

“Well, abbé,” said the King, “leave us alone for a moment; we will discuss your plan.”

“I will read my breviary in the ante-chamber,” said Pronio, and he bowed and went out.

The King and the Cardinal looked at one another.

“An odd sort of St. Bernard to preach a crusade, eh, Cardinal,” said the King.

“Men are scarce. Perhaps he will succeed all the better.”

“Yes, but when one is called Ferdinand of Bourbon, how can one sign commissions for a brigand chief and a man who drinks blood as another drinks water?”

“I understand Your Majesty’s repugnance

still, in the position in which we are but only sign the abbé’s, and authorize him to sign the others.”

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“Ah, with you one is never in a difficulty. Let us recall the abbé,”

“No, sire; leave him time to read his breviary; we have other matters on hand at least as pressing. Your Majesty did me the honour to ask my opinion as to the forgery of a certain letter.”

“Well?”

“Your Majesty will not dispute the fact that I am detested by the Queen; now I have no wish to make her detest me still more.”

“Why do you say this?”

“Apropos of the letter from His Majesty the Emperor of Austria. At what o’clock did you return to Naples with M. Andrew Baker the day he had the honour of dining with you?”

“Between five and six o’clock.”

“Well, an hour afterwards the master of the post at Capua was instructed to tell Ferrari when he should come through that he would find Your

Majesty at Caserta. Why was Ferrari wanted at Caserta? I do not know. Probably to try to seduce him. We have heard and believe his story that his horse fell, and that he was carried into the dispensary by Acton's secretary, and there it was found convenient to prolong his swoon with the aid of some drops of laudanum. I had no need to ask questions," said the Cardinal, and he drew from his pocket a coffee spoon. "Here," said he, "is the spoon with which it was introduced into his mouth, with a deposit remaining, which proves that he did not lick it, and the sharp and persistent smell of opium indicates the nature of the deposit even after the lapse of a month."

The King gazed at the Cardinal with his usual naive astonishment when anything was beyond him.

"And then?"

"And then, sire, when Ferrari in his swoon was still further lulled by these extra precautions, *someone* took the letter from his pocket, unsealed it by holding the wax above a taper, read the letter, and as it contained the opposite of what was hoped, *someone* removed the writing with oxalic acid. Here is the little bottle still more than half full," and the Cardinal drew from his pocket a little flask containing a liquid clear as spring water, and evidently distilled, and asking the King for some unimportant letter, he demonstrated with ease the removal of some lines of handwriting, and inserted some others in their place.

"Well, what happened after that?" said the King, sighing when he had inspected the paper.

"Then, sire, after the substitution of the Emperor's approval for his refusal, the letter was resealed with a seal like the Emperor's; only, as this was done by candlelight, it was done with a wax a little paler in colour than the original;" and taking the letter, he pointed out to the King the difference between the two layers of wax on the seal.

"True," cried the King, "quite true."

"Besides," added the Cardinal, "here is the stick of sealing-wax," and he laid it beside the spoon and the phial on the table.

"And how did you get all this evidence," asked the King, so interested and astonished that he was unwilling to lose a detail.

"Oh, in the simplest way, sire. I came this morning to the dispensary in search of some medicine, as I often do, but with a certain fixed idea; I found this spoon on the night table, this phial in the glass cupboard, and the sealing wax on the table. Cardinal Richelieu required but three lines of a man's handwriting to get him hanged."

"Yes," said the King. "Unfortunately, there are some people one does not hang, whatever they may have done."

"And now," said the Cardinal, looking fixedly at the King, "if you have any regard for Ferrari, I believe that the air of Naples is very unhealthy for him just now. I am sure of it."

"Then it is very simple. I will send him to Vienna. Besides, as you will understand, I want this matter cleared up; so I will return to the Emperor the despatch in which he tells me that he will begin a campaign as soon as I am in Rome; and I will ask him what he has to say to that."

"And, that no one may suspect anything, Your Majesty sets out for Naples to-day, telling Ferrari to come to me to-night at St. Lencio, and to take my orders as if they were Your Majesty's. I will write to the Emperor in Your Majesty's name, telling him of your doubts, and begging him to send the reply to me. I will map out Ferrari's route that he may avoid the French."

"You are prodigious, my dear Cardinal! Nothing is impossible to you."

"Then, sire, as time presses, let us return to the Abbé Pronio."

The King summoned a footman to fetch Pronio.

The abbé did not keep him waiting, and whether he had been reading his breviary or no, entered with the same easy bearing as before, and saluting the King and Cardinal said: "I await His Majesty's commands."

"My commands will be easy to follow, my dear abbé. I order you to do all you have promised."

"I am ready, sire."

"Now, let us understand one another."

The meaning of these words was evidently not clear to Pronio, who looked questioningly at the King.

"I am asking you," said Ferdinand, "what favours you are expecting from me."

"To serve Your Majesty, and, if need be, to die for you."

"You do not ask for an archbishopric, a bishopric, not the least little abbey?"

"If when the French are driven out and all is over, I have served Your Majesty well, you will reward me; if ill, you will have me shot."

“Then,” said the King, “it is simply a matter of giving you a commission?”

“One to me, sire, one to Fra Diavolo, one to Mammone. I answer for them as for myself.”

“Draw up the abbé’s commission, Eminence.”

Ruffo seated himself at a table, wrote a few lines and read as follows: —

“I, Ferdinand of Bourbon, King of the Two Sicilies and Jerusalem, “Declare “Having entire confidence in the eloquence, patriotism and military talents of the Abbé Pronio, “that I name him “*my Captain* in the Abruzzi and “if necessary in all other parts of my kingdom; “approving “All he will do for the defence of the territory of this kingdom and to prevent the French from penetrating it, authorize him to sign commissions like this in favour of two persons whom he will judge worthy of seconding him in this noble task promising to recognize for leaders of the people the two persons whom he will have chosen.

“In witness of which we have given to him the present commission, “In our Castle of Caserta, this 10th December, 1798.”

“Is that it, sir?” enquired the King of Pronio, after having heard the Cardinal read the above.

“Yes, sire, except that Your Majesty has not desired to assume responsibility in signing commissions for the two captains I had the honour to recommend.’’ “No, I have given you the right to sign them.”

“I thank Your Majesty; and if you will sign and seal at the foot of this, I shall have but to present my most humble acknowledgements and to set out to execute your orders.”

As the King was signing, the Cardinal approached him and said a few words in a low voice.

The King turned to Pronio. “The Cardinal believes,” said he, “that better than anyone you would be able to draw up a proclamation addressed to the people of the two provinces in which you are to command.”

“His Eminence gives good advice, sire; am I to speak in the King’s name or in my own?”

“In the King’s name, sir, in the King’s name,” Ruffo hastened to answer.

Pronio acknowledged this permission, not only to write in his sovereign’s name, but also to seat himself in his presence, with a bow; and without hesitation, without erasure, from a flowing source he wrote:

"While in the Christian capital of the world, employed in re-establishing the Holy Church, the French, with whom I have done everything to remain at peace, threaten to penetrate into the Abruzzi. I risk my person therefore, in spite of the danger I run crossing their lines to regain my endangered capital; but, once at Naples, I shall march against them with a numerous army to exterminate them. Meanwhile, let the people rush to their arms, let them fly to the aid of religion, let them defend their king, or rather their father, who is ready to sacrifice his life to preserve to his subjects their altars and their goods, the honour of their women and their liberty! Whoever will not repair to the standards of the holy war will be considered a traitor to his country, whoever shall abandon them after having enrolled himself will be punished as a rebel and as an enemy of the Church and State.

"Rome, 7 December, 1798."

Pronio handed his proclamation to the King to read. But he, passing it to the Cardinal, said: "I do not understand very well, my Eminence."

Pronio, who had not paid much attention to the expression in the King's face, as he read, followed with the greatest attention the effect his effort was producing in the Cardinal's, who, as he read, raised his eyes to Pronio two or three times, and each time saw the new captain's gaze riveted on him.

"I was not deceived in you, sir," said he to Pronio when he had finished; "you are an able man! "Then, addressing the King, "Sire," continued he, "no one in your kingdom, I venture to say, could have composed such an adroit proclamation, and Your Majesty can sign it boldly, without changing a syllable." The King signed.

"And now, sire," said Ruffo, "while you have the pen in your hand, you can add beneath your signature:

"Captain Joseph Pronio is authorised, for me and in my name, to distribute this proclamation, and to see that the intentions therein expressed by me be faithfully carried out."

The King, without making any objection, wrote the words dictated by Ruffo. "It is done," he said.

"Now, sire," said the Cardinal, "while M. Pronio makes us a copy of this proclamation, Your Majesty will sign a cheque to his order for ten thousand ducats."

"Monseigneur!" said Pronio.

"Ten thousand ducats!... Eh! Eh!" said the King.

“Sire, I beg Your Majesty.”

“Very well,” said the King. “On Corradino? “No, on Baker and Co.; it is safer and especially quicker.” The King drew the cheque and signed it.

“Here is the duplicate of His Majesty’s proclamation,” said Pronio, handing the Cardinal his copy.

“Now,” said Ruffo to him; “you see the confidence the King puts in you. Here is a cheque for ten thousand ducats; go to a printing office and order as many copies of this proclamation as can be made in twenty-four hours; the first ten thousand will be posted to-day in Naples, if it is-possible before the King arrives. It is mid-day: they can be ready at four o’clock. Take away ten, twenty, thirty thousand; distribute them in abundance, and before to-morrow evening ten thousand will have been spread about!”

“And what shall I do with the remainder of the money, Monseigneur?”

“You will buy rifles, powder and shot.” Pronio, at the height of joy, was about to rush from the room.”

“What!” said Ruffo, “do you not see, captain, that the King gives you his hand to kiss?”

“Oh! sire!” cried Pronio, kissing it, “the day I die for Your Majesty I shall not be out of your debt.”

And he went out, ready indeed to die for the King.

The King evidently wanted him to be gone; he scarcely understood the part he had played throughout this scene. “Well,” said he, when the door shut, “it is still probably San Nicandro’s fault, but devil take me if I understand your enthusiasm for that proclamation, in which there is not a word of truth.”

“Ah! sire, it is just because of that and because neither Your Majesty nor I would have ventured to do it, that I admire it.”

“Then,” said Ferdinand, “explain it to me that I may see if it is worth my ten thousand ducats.”

“Your Majesty would not be rich enough to pay for it, if its full value were paid.”

“Ass’s head!” said Ferdinand, striking his forehead.

“If your Majesty will deign to follow me on this copy,” said Ruffo, “I think I can make the matter clear. While Your Majesty was *peacefully* at Rome employed in *re-establishing the Holy Church,* in the sole interests of the Holy Father, the French with whom you had done everything to remain at peace, *threatened to penetrate the Abruzzi.”*

“Ah!” said the King.

“Thus the bad faith and the treason is their’s,” went on the Cardinal. “In spite of their ambassador’s threats, you go to Rome full of confidence in their, loyalty, and while quietly there, the French attack you unawares, and defeat Mack. Nothing extraordinary, you will agree, sire, if taken unawares. Your Majesty adds: f *I risk my person, therefore, in spite of the danger I run, crossing their lines, to regain my endangered capital.’* You understand, sire? You do not flee before the French; on the contrary, you cross their lines; you do not fear the danger — you confront it. And why do you so temerariously expose your sacred person? To protect your capital; in short, to march against the enemy with a numerous army, to exterminate the French “.

“Enough,” cried the King, bursting out laughing; “enough, my dear Cardinal! I quite understand. You are right, my Eminence, thanks to this proclamation, I shall pass for a hero. Who the devil would have thought it when I changed clothes with Ascoli in an inn in Albano? Decidedly, you are right, and your Pronio is a man of genius. Look, he has forgotten his book; and it is not a breviary either,” said the King, reading the title, “it is *The Prince*, by Machiavelli.”

“Oh!” said Ruffo; “you can keep it, sire, to study in your turn; he has nothing further to learn from it.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

FIRST FRUITS OF THE KING’S DUCATS.

ON the same day, towards four or five o’clock in the afternoon, one of those dull and threatening noises, like those which precede storms and earthquakes, rising from the old quarters of Naples, gradually began spreading to the whole town.

Men issuing in groups from the printing office of Florio Giordani, in the Largo Mercatello, their left shoulders laden with large printed sheets, their right arms furnished with a brush and a pailful of paste, were pervading the various parts of the city, each leaving behind him a series of posters about which gathered the curious, and by help of which one could follow its track throughout Naples. This series of posters was the proclamation of King Ferdinand, or rather of Captain Pronio, of which we have just had the history; and this continually increasing noise, rising from every part of the city, was the effect of reading it upon the inhabitants. By the same stroke the Neapolitans were learning of the return of the King, whom they believed to be at Rome, and of the invasion of the French, whom they believed to be in retreat.

In the midst of this slightly confused account of events, and the confusion was a stroke of genius, the King appeared as the sole hope of the country as the guardian angel of the kingdom. Had he not risked life and liberty to come and die with his faithful Neapolitans?

Thus, in front of each poster, one saw a crowd discussing it, the small number of those able to read holding forth to the others, who listened with steadfast look, strained ears, and open-mouthed.

At the Old Market, where there was less education than anywhere else, a large group had formed at the butcher’s door, and in the midst of it might be noticed our friend, Michael the Fool, who was reading out the proclamation to the astonished crowd.

“What I see most clearly in all this,” the butcher was saying, with his rough good sense, fixing on Michael his burning eye, the only one left him by the terrible gash he had got from Salvato at Mergellina. “What I see most clearly is that these wolves of republicans, may hell confound them! have given the bastinado to General Mack, and, if so, the French — may the last die of the plague! — are marching on Naples and will perhaps be here in less than a fortnight."

"Yes," said Michael, "for I see in the proclamation that they are invading the Abruzzi, evidently the road to Naples; but it depends on us not to let them do it.".

"But how to prevent them?" enquired the butcher.

"Nothing easier," said Michael. "You, for example, by taking your large knife, Pagliuccella his big gun, and I my great sword, each of us in short by taking something and marching against them."

"That is very easy to say," grumbled the butcher.

"And still easier to do, my butcher friend. It only needs one thing — courage. I know for certain that there are only ten thousand of the French; now at Naples there are sixty thousand lazzaroni, sound, strong, with good arms, good legs and good eyes."

"With good eyes," said the butcher, seeing in Michael's words a personal allusion.

"Very well," Michael went on, "let us each arm ourselves with something, if only a stone and a sling, and let us each kill the sixth part of a Frenchman, and then there will be no more of them; and it will be especially easy for you, butcher; who, as you tell us, fought one against six."

"It is true," said the butcher, "that everyone who falls into my hands...."

"Yes," replied Michael; "but it won't do to wait for that, because then we shall be in theirs; we must go to meet them. Well now, one man is as good as another. Six men who are afraid of one man are cowards."

"He is right! Michael is right!" cried several voices.

"Well then," said Michael, "if I am right, prove it to me. I ask no better than to die; let those who wish to die with me, say so."

"I! I! I! We! We!" cried fifty voices. "Will you be our chief, Michael?"

"Faith, I ask no better."

"Long live Michael! Michael for ever! Long live our Captain!" cried a great number of voices.

"Good! Here I am a captain already," said Michael. "Will you be my lieutenant, Pagliuccella? And let those who want me to be their leader go and wait for me in Carbonara Street with what arms they can get; as for me, I am off to fetch my sword.”

At this there was a movement in the crowd, and about a hundred men set off to find a weapon, without which one could not enter Captain Michael’s ranks.

Meanwhile, at the other end of the town, at the foot of the Mount of the Capucini, Fra Pacifico, returning from his collecting with his friend Jacobino, had also observed the proclamations being pasted up; had approached one, spelled it out with difficulty, and at its unexpected contents, his warlike ardour had sprung up fiercer than ever at seeing-these Jacobins, whom he execrated, ready to cross the frontiers of the kingdom. So, he had struck the ground furiously with his laurel stick, had got up on a milestone to speak, and, holding Jacobino by his bridle, in the midst of a religious silence, he had explained to the huge circle his popularity gathered round him, what the French were; that is, according to him, that they were all infidels, sacrilegious, pillagers, despoilers of women, cut-throats of children, who did not believe that the Madonna of Pie-di-Grotta moved her eyes, and that the hair of the Christ of the Carmine grew so fast that it had to be cut every year; Fra Pacifico affirmed that the French were all the devil’s bastards, and, as a proof of it, that all those he had seen, had, on some part of the body, the imprint of a claw; a sure sign that they were all destined to fall into those of Satan. It was therefore urgent, by every possible means, to prevent their entering Naples, or Naples, turned from top to bottom, would vanish from the earth’s surface, as if buried under the ashes of Pompeii, or the lava of Herculaneum.

Fra Pacifico’s discourse, and especially the peroration had had the greatest effect on his hearers. Enthusiastic cries arose in the crowd; two or three voices had asked, if, in the event of the Neapolitans rising against the French, Fra Pacifico would march in person against the enemy. Fra Pacifico had then replied that not only he, but his ass Jacobino were at the service of King and altar, and that, on this humble mount, chosen by Christ to make his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, he would undertake to guide to victory those who desired to fight with him.

Then cries, “We are ready! We are ready!” had resounded. Fra Pacifico asked but five minutes, had rapidly ascended to the Capucin Monastery to deposit Jacobino’s load in the kitchen, and had actually reappeared to the second, mounted on his ass, and at a gallop, had returned to take his place in the circle which had chosen him.

It was nearly six o’clock in the evening, and without Ferdinand having the least idea of it, Naples was in the state of exasperation we have described. When he, with lowered head, and asking himself what reception was awaiting him in his capital, entered by the Capuan gate, taking care not to add to his disgrace the share of unpopularity borne by the Queen and her favourite, to separate from them at the entrance to the city.

Now it was just in front of the Capuan gate that Michael, because this is a popular centre, had told his troop to meet him! But his troop had more than doubled on its way, so that more than two hundred and fifty men were obstructing the space before the gate just as the King arrived to cross it.

The King knew very well that he would never have anything to fear among his dear lazzaroni. He was therefore surprised, but no more than that, when, amid such a crowd, by the light of the sparse street lamps, lit at each hundred paces, and the more numerous tapers burning before the madonnas, he saw the glint of swords and rifle barrels; he accordingly leaned out, and touching on the shoulder him who seemed to be the leader:

“Friend,” asked he in Neapolitan patois, “could you tell me what is going on here?”

The man turned round and found himself confronting the King. This man was Michael.

“Oh!” cried he, suffocated with joy, amazement, and pride at being touched by him. “Oh! His Majesty! His Majesty King Ferdinand! Long live the King! Long live our Father! Long live the Preserver of Naples!” And the whole troop repeated these cries with one voice.

Whatever cry King Ferdinand had expected to be greeted by on his return to his capital, it certainly was not by this.

“Do you hear them?” he asked the Duke of Ascoli. “What in the world are they singing then?”

“They cry ‘Long live the King!’ sire,” replied the Duke with his customary gravity; “they call you their father and the saviour of Naples.”

The cries redoubled.

“Then,” said Ferdinand, “since they insist upon it....” and half issuing from the door, “Yes, my children,” said he, “yes, it is I; yes, it is your King, your father, and, as you justly say, I am coming back to save Naples or to die with you.” This promise increased the enthusiasm to a pitch of frenzy.

“Pagliuccella,” cried Michael, “run on ahead with a dozen men; some torches, some flambeaux! illuminations!”

“There is no need, my children!” cried the King, who could not endure a very strong light; “there is no need, why make illuminations?” But no one paid any attention to him; Pagliuccella and his men ran on ahead like madmen; and the cries continued.

“Well, well,” said the King to d’Ascoli, “I think we had better not thwart them. Let them do it; most assuredly the Abbé Pronio is a clever man.” And in fact the cries of Pagliuccella and his lazzaroni had a magical effect; people swarmed out of their houses with torches or tapers; all the windows were illuminated; when the Rue Fona was reached, it was seen to be lit up from end to end. The result was that the King’s entry, which had seemed as if about to be made under the silence and shame of a defeat, had, on the contrary, all the brilliance of a victory, all the noisy din of a triumph. At the steps of the Bourbon Museum, the people could not permit their King to be drawn by horses any further; they took out the horses from the carriage and harnessed themselves to it. At Toledo Street a second crowd of at least two or three hundred persons, no less enthusiastic and no less noisy, joined Michael’s. It was led by Fra Pacifico, riding his ass; his laurel stick on his shoulder like another Hercules with his club; Toledo Street literally streamed with illuminations; and the carriage could hardly get along so great was the crowd bringing the runaway King to his palace.

Meanwhile the Queen had reached the palace by deserted streets, and had found it dumb and almost solitary; then she had heard a distant tumult, something like the threatenings of a storm; had gone on to the balcony; had heard it swelling louder and louder as it drew near; had seen the torrents of light pouring down Toledo Street, and, always fearful as she was in remembering the fate of her sister Antoinette, had taken it for the oncoming wave of a revolution. She was already talking of flight; Nelson was even offering her a refuge on board his vessel, when she was informed that the King was being brought home in triumph by the people. As she knew nothing of Pronio’s proclamation, this seemed quite impossible; but neither Emma, Nelson, Sir William, or Acton could explain this absence of moral sense in a whole people, and the absence of the philosophic sense in themselves prevented these illustrious persons from realizing what wretched little accidents, when a throne is shaken, sway its establishment or its fall. The Queen, finally reassured, hastened on to the balcony followed by all her friends except Acton, who, disdainful of popularity and detested as a foreigner, and no longer loved by the Queen, had ceased to court it. But though the Castle Square was full of people, no one seemed to notice the Queen; every look, every cry, every heart beat was for the King *who had passed through the French lines to come and die with his people*. Then the Queen ordered the Duke of Calabria to be told of his father's approach, and she had all the Royal children brought, and took up a position behind them on the balcony. Even then the attention of the crowd was all for the Royal procession just then beginning to pass Santa Brigitta.

As to Ferdinand he was beginning to think with Cardinal Ruffo that ten thousand ducats was not a high price for such an entry, especially in comparison with the one his, by no means severe, Royal conscience had led him to anticipate.

The King alighted from his carriage; the people actually carrying him up the great staircase to his apartments.

The crowd was so great that he was parted from the Duke of Ascoli, of whom no one took any notice and who disappeared in this human wave. The King showed himself on the balcony, took the hand of Prince Francis, embraced his children amid the frenzied cries of a hundred thousand persons, and gathering into one group all the young princes and princesses, whom he encircled in his arms: "They also," cried he, "will die with you."

And all the people cried with one voice: "For you and for them, sire, we will perish to the last man."

The King took out his handkerchief and made as if to wipe away a tear.

The Queen, pale and shuddering, stepped back from the balcony, and sought Acton, within the room, standing, resting one hand on a table, looking on at this strange sight.

"We are lost," said she, "the King will stay."

"Be easy, madame," said Acton with a bow, "I will undertake, myself, to make him go."

The people stood about in the streets long after the King had disappeared, long after the windows were shut!

The King went to his apartments without even enquiring what had become of d'Ascoli, who had been carried home in a faint, bruised, trampled under foot, half dead. It is true that Ferdinand was in a hurry to see Jupiter again, whom he had not seen for more than six weeks.

Intelligent people, undeceived by the popular manifestations, saw behind that spontaneous enthusiasm the real bearing, of events; the King in flight, his army defeated, and the French marching on Naples, and foresaw the inevitable consequences. One of the houses where the news produced the liveliest sensation on account of the different personal interests of the inhabitants was the House of the Palm Tree.

Luisa had kept her word to Salvato; since he had left that room into which he had been carried a dying man, to revive under her tender care, her every free moment had been passed in it. She neither wept nor lamented; she did not even need to speak of him. Once gone it seemed to her that she should no longer mention him but to God. No, the purity of her strong and controlled love left her melancholy and serene; she entered the room, tenderly surveyed everything there, sat down in her usual place at the head of the bed, and fell to dreaming.

These reveries in which she saw pass again, day by day, hour by hour and minute by minute, the two months which had just fled; these reveries were infinitely sweet. Formerly she had occupied her solitude with work or reading; now needle, pencil, music, were all neglected. In the presence of her friends, or of her husband, she lived with one foot in the past, one in the present. But when alone she lived in the past only.

The four days that had elapsed since Salvato’s departure had assumed an immense place in her life; and in this life everything passed as in a dream. This melancholy, tempered by the hope of Salvato’s return, was so gentle that her husband had not even remarked it. Her tender and deep affection for him in no way suffered for the love she bore to another; and the Chevalier San Felice remained as unconscious of it, as calm and happy as he had always been.

But each of them felt a separate uneasiness on learning of the King’s return to Caserta.

San Felice had heard the news at the Royal palace; but being unaware that it would have an especial interest for Luisa, he had returned home at his usual time and had told her of it without special disquiet. But Luisa, who knew through Salvato that a battle was imminent, had astonished the Chevalier by pointing out the Neapolitans had probably encountered the French and had been beaten. This she did with great self-control, for, even supposing the French victorious, they must have had losses, and who could assure her that Salvato was neither wounded nor dead? At the first pretext that occurred to her she withdrew to her room and knelt in prayer long and piously before the crucifix on which San Felice had sworn to make her happy to the dying prince her father.

At five o’clock, the Chevalier roused by a great noise in the street, had gone out, had seen the proclamation being posted up, had read it, and had gone into the town to obtain further news. While he was absent, Cirillo had come, unaware of Salvato’s departure, or of the King’s return. On hearing of this from Luisa he was very uneasy, “but he went away promising to send her any news he received of Salvato at once. He had been gone a long time when San Felice brought back word of the King’s triumph which he had witnessed. He shrugged his shoulders at the Neapolitan’s enthusiasm; he was too sagacious not to have observed the obscure side of the proclamation, and he suspected some deception. At eleven o’clock he retired to rest; and Luisa went as usual to Salvato’s room. But this fear was stirring her love to passion; she knelt down at the bedside, wept much, and several times set her lips to the pillow where the wounded man’s head had rested. Next day she was pale and discomposed. Directly after breakfast San Felice was summoned to attend the Prince, and, as he was going out a letter was brought for Luisa, from Portici. It was in an unknown hand. She opened it mechanically, but on seeing the signature uttered a cry: the letter was from Salvato. She laid it to her heart, and ran to shut herself up in the sacred room.

“It is from him,” she murmured; falling into the armchair at the head of the bed, “it is from him!” For a moment she was powerless to read; the blood which flew from her heart to her brain made her temples throb and dimmed her eyes. Salvato wrote from the battlefield:

“Thank God, my beloved! I arrived in time for the struggle, and have known victory; your prayers have been heard; God has watched over me and my honour.”

“Never has a victory been more complete, my beloved Luisa; on the field of battle itself my dear General pressed me to his heart, and made me chief of brigade. Mack’s army has vanished like smoke! I am setting out immediately for Civita-Ducale, whence I shall find means to send you this letter. In the disorder which will result on our victory and the defeat of the Neapolitans, it is impossible to rely on the post. I love you, I love you!”

“Civita Ducale, two o’clock “in the morning.

“Here I am ten leagues nearer to you. Hector Caraffa and I have found a peasant who, thanks to my horse which I had left here, and for which please give all my compliments to Michael, consents to set out this very instant; he will stop only when the horse falls under him, and he will immediately take another; he undertakes to carry a letter to the friend of ours with whom Hector was hiding at Portici. Your letter will be enclosed in his; he will send it on to you.

‘I tell you this that you may not wonder how it comes; that preoccupation would separate you a moment from me. No, I want you to be all joy in reading me, as I am all happiness in writing to you.

“Our victory is so complete that I don’t think we have another battle to fight. We shall march straight upon Naples, and if nothing stops us, as is likely, I shall see you in eight or at most ten days.

“Leave open the window by which I came away, I shall re-enter by that same window. I shall see you again in that same room where I was so happy, I shall bring you back there the life you there gave me.

“I shall not miss any opportunity of writing to you; if however you do not get a letter from me do not be uneasy, the messengers will have been unfaithful, stopped or killed.

“Oh Naples! my dear country! my second love after you! Naples, you are then about to be free!

“I don’t want to delay my courier, I don’t want to delay your joy; I am twice happy in my love and in yours. Au revoir, my much adored Luisa! I love you! I love you!....

“SALVATO.”

Luisa had read the young man’s letter ten times, perhaps, when, suddenly, Giovannina knocked at the door.

“The Chevalier is returning,” said she. Luisa uttered a cry, kissed the letter, placed it on her heart, and, on leaving the room, smiled at the window in the other room by which Salvato had left and was to return. This love invested with life every inanimate object around her which had been near Salvato.

As she entered the drawing-room by one door, her husband-came in by the other, visibly pre-occupied.

“What ails you, my friend?” asked Luisa, “you are sad and disturbed.”

The Chevalier sat down, took both hands of Luisa, who remained standing, and looked earnestly at her. “I have seen the prince,” said he, “the position of the royal family is quite as serious as we had forecast last evening; there is no hope of “defending Naples against the French; and it is decided to withdraw to Sicily.”

Without knowing why, Luisa felt her heart contract. The Chevalier saw in her face a reflection of what was passing within his breast. His lips trembled, his eyes half closed.

“So.... listen attentively, my child,” said he, with that gently paternal tone he sometimes used to Luisa. “So, the Prince said to me: ‘Chevalier, you are my only friend, you are the only man with whom I have real pleasure in conversing; the little solid education I have I owe to you; the little I am worth I have from you; one man only can help me to support exile, and it is you, Chevalier. I ask you, I beg you, if I am obliged to go, go with me.’”

Luisa felt a shudder run through her.

“And what did you answer, my friend?” she asked in a trembling voice.

“I pitied this royal misfortune, this weakness in greatness, this prince without a friend in exile, this heir to the crown without a servant, because, perhaps, he was going to lose the crown: I promised.” Luisa started; the Chevalier was aware of it for he held her hands.

“But,” he went on quickly, “understand this, Luisa. My promise is quite a personal one, binding on me alone; away from the court, where you have disclaimed your place, you have no obligation towards anyone. You are free, dear child of my heart, to stay in Naples, not to leave this house that you love, this garden where you have run about and played as a child; this little nook, in short, where you have gathered up seventeen years of memories; where for seventeen years you have been the joy of my hearth! It seems as if you came yesterday.”

The Chevalier sighed. Luisa said nothing; he went on:

“As soon as the Queen has gone, the Duchess Fusco, exiled by her, will return; with such a friend to watch over you I shall fear for you no more than if you were with a mother. In a fortnight the French will be in Naples; but you need not dread the French. I know them, having long dwelt among them. They bring to my country benefits I could have wished bestowed by its rulers: liberty, intelligence. All my friends, and consequently all yours are patriots; no revolution can disquiet them, no persecution can reach them.

“So, my friend,” demanded Luisa, “you believe that I can live in happiness without you?”

“A husband such as I, dear child,” said San Felice with a sigh, “is not a husband for a woman of your age to regret.”

“But admit that I can live without you, can you, my friend, live without me?”

San Felice looked down.

“You fear I shall miss my little nook,” continued Luisa, “but will not you miss my presence? Will not our common life for seventeen years as it sunders tear something from you, not only customary, but indispensable?”

San Felice remained mute.

“When you do not wish to abandon the prince who is only your friend,” added Luisa in a stifled voice, “are you giving me a proof of regard in proposing to abandon me, you, my father and my friend, who have put intelligence into my mind, goodness in my heart, God in my soul?”

San Felice sighed.

“When you promised the Prince to follow him, in short, did you think that I should not follow you?”

A tear fell from the Chevalier’s eyes on to Luisa’s hand.

“If you thought that, my friend,” she went on with a gentle, sad head shake, “you were wrong; my dying father united us, God has blessed our union, death only will disunite us. I will follow you, my friend.”

San Felice quickly raised his face, beaming with happiness, and in its turn a tear of Luisa’s fell on her husband’s hand.

“But you love me, then? Blessing of the good God! You love me, then?” cried the Chevalier.

“My father,” said Luisa, “you have been ungrateful, beg your daughter’s pardon.”

San Felice knelt down, kissing his daughter’s hands; while she murmured:

“If I did not do what I am doing, should I not be unworthy of both?”

CHAPTER XIX.

FURTHER FRUITS OF THE KING’S DUCATS.

PRINCE FRANCIS in speaking to San Felice of the flight of the royal family into Sicily as decided upon, was correct as regards the Queen, who desired flight at any price; but on witnessing the devotion of his people the King had again the idea of defending his capital and of appealing from the cowardice of the army to the energy of this people which was offering itself so spontaneously to him.

He was rising, then, on the morning of the nth December, the day following that incredible triumph in which we have tried to make our readers participate, without a fixed plan as yet, but leaning rather towards resistance than flight, when he was informed that Admiral Francis Caracciolo had been in the ante-chamber for half-an-hour waiting till His Majesty rose.

Influenced by the Queen’s prejudices, Ferdinand did not like the admiral, but could not help esteeming him: his splendid courage in the different encounters he had had with Barbary pirates, the skill with which he had drawn his frigate, the Minerva, from the roads of Toulon, when Toulon had been retaken from the English by Bonaparte, the coolness he had displayed in the protection he gave to the other vessels which he had brought back damaged by shot and tempest, without losing one — all this had secured for him the rank of admiral.

Ferdinand thought that Caracciolo had come to beg

for his nephew Nicolino’s pardon, and delighted to have a hold on the admiral through the false position in which a member of his family was placed, and feeling a malevolent disposition to be disagreeable to him, he gave orders for his immediate admittance.

The Admiral, in full dress, came in calm and dignified as usual, their high social position for four hundred years had put the heads of his family in contact with the sovereigns of all the races, Angevin, Aragon, Spanish, which had succeeded to the throne of Naples; he joined, therefore, to a supreme dignity, a perfect courtesy, always slightly embarrassing to

Ferdinand, in whom courtesy was not a strong point. So, when he saw the Admiral stop respectfully at a little distance, and, according to Court etiquette, wait for the King to address him first, he hastened to begin the conversation with the reproach on his lips.

“Ah, there you are, Admiral,” said he, “it seems that you have made a great point of seeing me?”

“True, sire,” replied Caracciolo, bowing; “I thought it of the first importance to have the honour of seeing Your Majesty personally.”

“Oh, I know what brings you,” said the King. “You come to speak for that bad lot, your nephew Nicolino, don’t you? It appears he is mixed up in a bad business, nothing less than the crime of high treason; but I warn you that all prayers, even yours, will be useless, and that justice will take its course.”

A smile flitted across the Admiral’s austere countenance.

“Your Majesty errs,” said he; “amid great political catastrophes, little family happenings are lost sight of. I do not know, and do not desire to know, what my nephew has done; if he is innocent, his innocence will appear in his trial; if guilty, justice will be done. Nicolino is of high birth; he will have the right of being beheaded, and, Your Majesty knows, the sword is such a noble weapon that, even in the hands of the executioner, it does not dishonour those who are struck by it.”

But then,” said the King, a little surprised at such calm and simple dignity, of which his nature, temperament and character, gave him no instinctive notion, “but then what have you come to speak to me about?”

“Of you, sire, and of the kingdom.”

“Ah, ah,” said the King, “you come to give me some advice.”

“If Your Majesty deigns to consult me,” replied Caracciolo, “I shall be happy and proud to place my humble experience at your disposal. In the contrary case I shall content myself with offering my life and those of my brave sailors.”

The King would have liked a pretext to take umbrage, but could find nothing. “Hum!” said he, “hum!” and after two or three seconds silence:

“Very well, Admiral,” he said, “I will consult you.”

And, in fact, he was already turning to Caracciolo, when a footman approached him and said a few words in a low tone.

The King turned again to Caracciolo, “Can what you have to say to me be said before a witness, sir?” he enquired.

"Before the whole world, sire."

"Then, introduce him," said Ferdinand to the footman, and to Caracciolo, "It is a friend, more than a friend, an ally; it is the illustrious Admiral Nelson." And at that moment the footman announced:

"Lord Nelson of the Nile, Baron of Burnham-Thorpe, Duke of Brontë!"

A slight smile, not untinged with bitterness, just showed itself on Caracciolo's lips at the enumeration of all these titles.

Nelson entered and fixing his grey eye on the man who had preceded him, recognised Admiral Caracciolo.

"You are acquainted with one another, gentlemen, I believe," said the King.

"Since Toulon, yes, sire," said Nelson.

"And I since 1786, for twelve illustrious years," said Caracciolo, courteously referring to an exploit of Nelson's off Canada.

"Milord," said the King, "here is Admiral Caracciolo come to offer his advice on the situation. Sit down and hear what he has to say, when he has finished you can reply if you desire; only, I tell you beforehand, I should be happy if two such eminent men, so well acquainted with the art of war, were of the same opinion. Now, Caracciolo."

"It was rumoured in the town yesterday, wrongly, I hope," began the Admiral, "that Your Majesty, despairing of defending your kingdom on land, had decided to withdraw to Sicily."

"And you would be of a contrary opinion, it seems?"

"Sire," replied Caracciolo, "I am and always shall be for a counsel of honour against a counsel of shame. It is for the honour of the kingdom, sire, and consequently for the honour of your name that your capital be defended to the last extremity."

"Do you know in what state our affairs are?" said the King.

"Yes, sire; bad, but not lost. The army is scattered, but not destroyed. You still have about forty thousand men, an army four times larger than that of the French, and fighting on its own soil, with the support of the population."

"And you would undertake to rally the army?"

"Yes, sire."

"Do me the pleasure of explaining in what way."

"I have four thousand sailors under my command, tried men; give me the order, sire, and I put myself instantly at their head; a thousand will defend the road from ltri to Sessa, a thousand that from Lora to San Germano, a thousand that from Castel-di-Sangro to Isernia; the remaining thousand will fortify these three passages and serve the artillery; with these, were it only with their boarding pikes, I bear the shock of the French, however terrible, and when your soldiers see how sailors die, sire, they will rally behind them; above all if Your Majesty is there as their standard."

"And who will guard Naples, meanwhile?"

"The Prince Royal sire, and the eight thousand men under General Naselli, whom Milord Nelson convoyed to Tuscany, where they have nothing further to do. Milord Nelson left a part of his fleet at Leghorn, I believe; let him send a small vessel with Your Majesty's command to bring back these eight thousand fresh troops to Naples, and, with God's help, they will be here in a week. Thus, you see, sire, what a force remains to you; forty-five to fifty thousand troops, the population of thirty towns and fifty villages which will rise, and behind them Naples with its five hundred thousand souls. What will become of ten thousand French in that ocean?"

"Hum!" said the King looking at Nelson, who remained silent.

"There will be always time, sire, for you to embark," continued Caracciolo. "Be convinced of that: the French have no armed vessel, and you have three fleets in port: your own, the Portuguese and His Britannic Majesty's."

"What do you say to the Admiral's plan, milord?" said the King, this time putting Nelson under the necessity of answering.

"I say, sire," replied Nelson, remaining seated and continuing to trace hieroglyphics with the pen in his left hand on a piece of paper, "I say that there is nothing worse in the world than to change a decision once it is taken."

"Has the King already decided?" asked Caracciolo.

"No, you see, not yet; I am hesitating, I waver..."

"The Queen," said Nelson, "is resolved on departure."

"The Queen?" said Caracciolo, not leaving the King time to reply. "Very well, let her go. Women, in these circumstances, may leave danger behind; but men should face it."

"You see, Caracciolo, Milord Nelson is for departure."

"Pardon, sire," said Caracciolo, "but as yet Milord Nelson has given no opinion."

"Give it, milord," said the King, "I ask for it."

“My opinion, sire, is the same as the Queen’s, namely, that I shall rejoice to see Your Majesty seek in Sicily a safe refuge that Naples no longer offers you.”

“I entreat Milord Nelson not to give his advice lightly,” said Caracciolo, addressing himself to his colleague; for he knew the weight of the opinion of such a man.

“I have given it and I do not retract it,” Nelson harshly replied.

“Sire,” returned Caracciolo, “remember that Milord Nelson is English.”

“What does that mean, sir?” proudly demanded Nelson.

“That if you were a Neapolitan you would say otherwise.”

“And why, pray?”

“Because you would consult your country’s honour in place of Great Britain’s interest.”

“And what interest has Great Britain in my advice to the King, sir?”

“By enhancing the danger, to demand a greater recompense. It is known that England desires Malta, milord.”

“England has Malta, sir; the King has given it to her.”

“Oh, sire,” said Caracciolo in a reproachful tone, “I was told so but did not wish to credit it.”

“And what the devil do you want me to do with Malta?” said the King. “A rock good for cooking eggs in the sun!”

“Sire,” said Caracciolo, without further addressing Nelson, “I entreat you in the name of all the hearts truly Neapolitan in the kingdom, to listen no longer to foreign advice which puts your throne within an inch of the abyss. M. Acton is a foreigner, Sir William Hamilton is a foreigner, Milord Nelson himself is a foreigner; how do you suppose that they can rightly appreciate Neapolitan honour?”

“True, sir; but they rightly appreciate Neapolitan cowardice,” returned Nelson, “and that’s why I said to the King after what happened at Civita Castellana: ‘Sire, you can no longer confide yourself to men who have deserted you, either from fear, or from treason.’”

Caracciolo grew terribly pale and, in spite of himself, put his hand to his sword hilt; but, controlling himself, he said: “Every nation has its hour of weakness,” and turning to the King: “Sire, it is the duty of a King who loves his people to give them the chance of repairing its failure; let. the King say but one word and not a Frenchman will emerge from the Abruzzi, if they are imprudent enough to venture therein.”

“My dear Caracciolo,” the King said, turning to the Admiral whose advice flattered his secret desire; “your opinion is that of a man whose counsel I greatly appreciate — Cardinal Ruffo.”

“Well, sire,” cried Caracciolo quickly, clinging to the hope thus given, “it is the good genius of Naples inspiring you; follow the Cardinal’s advice, and I, can I say more? will be at his command.”

“Sire,” said Nelson, rising and bowing to the King, “I hope that Your Majesty will not forget that if Italian admirals obey the orders of a priest, an English admiral obeys only the orders of his government.” And casting on Caracciolo a look, in which could be read the threat of an eternal hatred, Nelson went out by the same door by which he had entered and which communicated with the Queen’s apartments. The King followed Nelson with his eyes and when the door had closed behind him: “Oh well,” said he, “there is gratitude for my twenty thousand ducats annuity, my duchy of Brontë, my sword of Philip V. and my ribbon of St. Ferdinand.” Then, turning to Caracciolo: “You are right, my poor Francis,” said he, “the foreigners are the evil! M. Acton, Sir William M. Mack, Lord Nelson, the Queen herself, Irish, Germans, English, Austrian dogs everywhere; Neapolitans-nowhere. What a bulldog this Nelson is! It doesn’t matter, you set him down very well! If ever we go to war with England and he gets you into his hands, your account is....”

“Sire,” said Caracciolo laughing, “I am happy at any such risk to have deserved your approval. Will you permit me to insist further?”

“You have no need, since I agree with you. I shall see Ruffo to-day, and we shall speak again of all this; but, since we are alone together, why on earth did you make an enemy of the Queen? You know that when she hates, she does not do it by halves!”

Caracciolo looked away, then returning to his incessant pre-occupation, “So I may take with me the hope that Your Majesty has given up this shameful flight and that Naples will be defended to the last?”

“Take more than a hope; a certainty. There is a council to-day, I am going to signify that I have resolved to stay in Naples. I have well in mind what you have said as to our means of defence; be easy.”

“Sire; one last favour? If against all expectation Your Majesty does go....”

“But I tell you that I shall not.”

“Sire, if by any hap whatever, if by an unexpected reaction, Your Majesty went, I hope you would not cast the disgrace on the Neapolitan Navy of going on an English vessel.”

“Oh, as to that, you may be easy. I don’t speak for the Queen, the Queen will do as she likes, but if reduced to such an extremity I give you my word of honour to go on your vessel, the Minerva. So, you are warned, change your cook if he is no good, and lay in some macaroni and parmesan if you have not enough on board. Au revoir....”

Caracciolo, enraptured with the result of his interview, withdrew, relying on the King’s double promise.

The King looked after him with marked good will. “And to think,” said he, “that one is stupid enough to embroil one’s self with such men for a regular Tartar like the Queen, and for a bad lot like Lady Hamilton!”

The King kept the promise he had made to Caracciolo; he declared loudly and resolutely to the Council that, after the popular manifestation he had witnessed the preceding evening, he had decided to remain in Naples and to defend to the last extremity the entry of the kingdom from the French. In face of such a plainly formulated announcement, no opposition was possible; it could only have proceeded from the Queen, and, reassured by Acton’s positive promise that he would find a way to make the King set out for Sicily, she had given up the idea of an open struggle which would have increased his obstinacy as usual.

On leaving the Council the King found Cardinal Ruffo waiting for him; he had done as agreed with the King with his usual exactitude. Ferrari had come to him during the night, and half-an-hour later had set out for Vienna through Manfredonia, taking the forged letter which was to be shown to the Emperor, with whom Ferdinand was most anxious not to quarrel, he being his sole support against France through the influence he had in Italy, just as in the contrary case, France alone could support him against Austria. An explanatory note signed by Ruffo in the King’s name accompanied the forgery.

The King having related what passed between himself, Caracciolo and Nelson; Ruffo had strongly approved the King’s action, and had insisted on a conference between him and Caracciolo in the King’s presence. It was agreed to wait for news of the effect produced by Pronio’s manifesto in the Abruzzi, and on the result, to decide upon the course to follow.

On the same day, the King received the young Corsican, di Cesare, whom the ushers mistook for the Prince Royal on account of his striking resemblance to him. The young captain in his new uniform, and bringing the commission made out by Acton, was proud and joyful; he came to place his own and his comrades’ devotion at the King’s feet; proof of which was only delayed by their engagement to escort the aged princesses to Manfredonia, whence they were to take ship for Trieste.

The news expected from Pronio was not long in coming, and surpassed every expectation. Priests, nobles and magistrates were echoing the King’s words; the cry, “To Arms,” was resounding everywhere. Fra Diavolo and Mammone had accepted their mission with enthusiasm; armed with their commissions and with the King’s name on their lips, their power was limitless, since the law protected instead of suppressing them. From the moment that they could give their brigandage a political colour they promised to raise the whole countryside. Brigandage, in fact, in the mountains of southern Italy is an indigenous product; like figs in the valleys or grapes on the hills. It is a profession like any other, and no disgrace attaches to it. It is followed during nine months of the year, and in the winter the brigand returns to his village and dwells there amicably with his kind. The laws against him do not vary, nor do his misdemeanours, and he is always a reactionist, and for the throne and altar if they will accept his services in times of revolution; whilst he is disowned by liberals and progressists. It is, therefore, most difficult to extirpate brigandage, supported as it often is by the authorities; who are actually often themselves involved in it. As for priests and monks they are the very soul of it; they distribute medals which have been blessed to the insurgents, who, if they are killed in spite of them, die heroically, looking upon them as passports to heaven.

There is an enormous difference between INDEPENDENCE AND LIBERTY. The brigand is independent and individually courageous. The soldier is free and collectively courageous. In 1798, the Neapolitans had not progressed further than their independent state; they had acquired neither liberty nor fraternity; that is why they were defeated in battle by an army five times less numerous.

But the peasants in the Neapolitan provinces had always been independent. So when the monks spoke in the name of God, the King in the name of the family, and hatred in the name of covetousness, robbery and murder, the whole people rose. Each man took his rifle, axe or knife and set out to destroy and plunder. Masses of troops had fled before the French;

single men marched against them; an army had dissolved away, a people sprang from the earth.

It was time. The news of the army continued to be disastrous. One part of it, under Moesk, had taken up a fortified position at Calvi, and surrendered at discretion to General Maurice Mathieu. Macdonald’s rapid blows had saved some but not all of Mack’s prisoners. At Ascoli, three hundred republicans had been tied to trees and shot. At Abricalli, thirty sick or wounded, some of whom had suffered amputation, had had their throats cut in the ambulance. The others, lying on straw, had been pitilessly burnt. But loyal to his proclamation, Championnet had responded to all these barbarities with humane actions.

General de Damas, who, as an emigrant Frenchman, had offered his sword to Ferdinand, alone sustained the honour of the Neapolitan flag after the defeat of Civita Castellana. He and his column of seven thousand, forgotten by Mack, asked permission of Championnet to cross Rome and join the débris of the Royalist army on the Teverone. Championnet instructed one of his promising young officers, Bonami, to investigate and report. At the Salarian gate, Bonami met General Rey and his cavalry entering Rome, and suggested to him to make a reconnaissance on the road to Albano and Frascati; while he himself hastened as fast as he could across the Ponte Molle in search of General de Damas, followed at a distance by Rey’s detachment and Macdonald’s light cavalry. He made such haste that he left them far behind, and to give them time to come up, presented himself with a flag of truce.

He was brought before General de Damas.

“You wrote to the Commander-in-Chief of the French army, General,” said he; “he sends me to ask you to explain what you require.”

“I want a passage for my division.”

“And if he refuses it?”

“I have but one resource: to carve it, sword in hand.”

Bonami smiled.

“You must understand, General, that such benevolence is impossible to you and your seven thousand men. If you try to force a passage you will have your work cut out. I therefore suggest to you to lay down your arms.”

It was General de Damas’s turn to smile.

“Chief of the Staff,” replied he, “when each of one’s seven thousand has eighty cartridges, one does not surrender; one passes or dies.”

“Well, so be it! Let us fight, General,” said Bonami.

The emigrant general appeared to consider.

“Give me six hours,” said he, “to assemble a council of war and decide.”

This did not suit Bonami. “You don’t need six hours,” he answered, “I will give you one. It was just the time he needed for his infantry to come up. So it was agreed. Bonami galloped off and rejoined Rey to hasten him on. But General de Damas had profited by the hour; and when Bonami returned with his troop, he discovered him retreating in good order towards Orbitello.

Rey and Bonami immediately started in pursuit; came up with them at Storta and charged energetically. The rearguard turned and faced them. For the first time Rey and Bonami met serious resistance, but they wore it down with repeated charges. Night fell. The devotion and courage of the rearguard had saved the army. General de Damas took advantage of the darkness and his knowledge of the locality to continue his retreat. The French were too tired to follow him.

But General de Damas had not done with the Republicans. Macdonald sent word to Kellerman at Borghetta; who, assembling his troops, came across de Damas’s column at Toscanelli, which, holding firm under French generalship, vigorously resisted; de Damas himself fighting with splendid courage in the rearguard.

However, one of Kellerman’s well-known charges, and an injury to the emigrant general, decided the day in favour of the French. The largest part of the Neapolitan column had already reached Orbitello and had had time to embark. Pushed speedily into the town, Damas had time to shut the gates behind him, and whether out of consideration for his courage, or because the French general did not want to waste time in an assault on such a wretched little hole, Kellerman allowed Damas, provided he abandoned his artillery, to embark with his vanguard without interference.

The result was that the only general of the Neapolitan army, who had done his duty in this short and shameful campaign, was a French general.

Conqueror at all points, and thinking that nothing could hinder his march upon Naples, Championnet gave the order to cross the Neapolitan frontier in three columns.

The left wing, under Macdonald, invaded the Abruzzi by Aquila. The right wing, under General Rey invaded the Campagna by the Pontine

Marshes, Terracina and Fondi. The centre, under Championnet himself, invaded the Terra di Lavoro by Valmontone, Ferentina, Ceperano.

Three fortresses, all almost impregnable, defended the marches of the kingdom: Gaeta, Civita-del-Tronto, Pescara.

Gaeta, commanding the route by the Tyrrhenian Sea, was defended by an old Swiss general named Tchudy; he had at his command four thousand men, seventy guns, twelve mortars, twenty thousand rifles, provisions for a year and vessels in the port. General Rey summoned him to surrender.

Tchudy had just married a young wife. He was afraid for her, perhaps, who knows? As for himself, instead of holding out, he called a council, consulted the bishop, and assembled the magistrates, who seized upon the pretext to spare Gaeta the miseries of a seige. However, they were still hesitating when the French general threw a shell into the town; and this hostile demonstration was sufficient to cause Tchudy to send a deputation to the beseigers to ask their terms. “A surrender at discretion or all the rigours of war,” General Rey replied.

The place surrendered two hours afterwards.

Duhesme, who, with fifteen hundred men, was marching along the Adriatic coast, sent an envoy to Pricard, commanding Pescara, to summon him to surrender. Pricard, as if he intended burying himself in the ruins of the town, made the French officer inspect the defences in every detail, showing him fortifications, arms, munitions and provisions, and finally sent him back with these lofty words:

“. A fortress thus supplied does not surrender.”

Which did not prevent him, at the first gunshot, from opening his gates and giving up this town, so well fortified, to General Duhesme. It contained sixty guns, four mortars and nineteen hundred soldiers.

As to Civitella-del-Tronto, a place already strong in its position, and stronger still artificially, it was defended by a Spaniard named Jean Lacombe, and had ten heavy guns, and plenty of munitions and supplies. It could have held out for a year; it did so for a day and surrendered after two hours’ siege.

Thus it was time that leaders of bands should replace generals, and brigands take the place of soldiers.

Three bands under Pronio’s direction were organised with lightning rapidity; one which he commanded himself, Gaetano Mammone’s and Fra Diavolo’s.

It was Pronio who first encountered the French columns.

After having taken Pescara, leaving there a garrison of four hundred men, Duhesme took the road to Chieti to effect a junction with Championnet before Capua as he had been ordered. On reaching Tocco he heard brisk firing from near Sulmona and hastened on his men.

The fact was that a French column, under General Rusca, after having entered the town of Sulmona unresisted, with drums beating, had suddenly met with a hail of shot raining upon it from every window. Surprised at this unexpected attack it had hesitated.

Pronio, profiting by being ambushed in the church of San Panfilo, had emerged with a hundred men, and had charged the French, while the firing from the windows redoubled. In spite of Rusca’s efforts, his men broke ranks, and he had retired precipitately from Sulmona, leaving about a dozen dead and wounded in the streets. But when they saw Pronio’s soldiers mutilating the corpses, and the inhabitants despatching the wounded, crimson with shame the Republicans formed up again of their own accord, and with cries of vengeance again entered Sulmona, returning both the fire from the windows and the street. However, hidden in doorways, ambushed in bye-lanes, Pronio and his men kept up a terrible fire, and it is possible that the French might have had to retreat for the second time when a sharp fusillade was heard at the other end of the town. Duhesme and his men, hastening to the scene of action, had made a circling movement and were falling on Pronio from behind. Pronio, a pistol in each hand, ran to his rearguard, rallied it, found himself confronting Duhesme, fired at him and hit him in the arm. A republican sprang forward at Pronio with lifted sword; but with a second shot Pronio killed him, picked up a rifle, and, heading his men, sounded a retreat, meanwhile giving an order in patois that the French could not understand. The order was to retreat fighting, and escape by all the little lanes and regain the mountains. In a moment the town was evacuated. Those who were indoors fled through the gardens. The French were masters of Sulmona; but this time the brigands had fought one against ten. They had been beaten; but they had caused cruel losses to the republicans. This encounter was, therefore, looked upon in Naples as a triumph.

For his part, Fra Diavolo with about a hundred men, after the capture of Gaeta, so shamefully surrendered, had valiantly defended the bridge of Garigliana, attacked by the aide-de-camp, Gourdel, and fifty republicans whom General Rey, not suspecting the organisation of the bands, had sent to seize it. The French had been repulsed, and Gourdel, several officers and men lying wounded on the field had been picked up half dead, tied to trees and burned over a slow fire, amidst the hooting of the people of Mignano, Sessa, and Traetta, and the furious dances of the women, always more ferocious than the men at these kinds of festivals.

At first Fra Diavolo had wanted to oppose these murders and prolonged agonies. From a feeling of pity he had discharged his pistols and carbine at the wounded. But, from the frowns of the men and the insults of the women, he had seen that he was risking his popularity by such acts of pity. He withdrew from the stakes where the republicans were undergoing their martyrdom, and wished to send Francesca away; but Francesca did not want to lose any part of the sight. She escaped from his hands and danced and shouted with more frenzy than the other women.

As to Mammone, he stayed at Capistrella, before Sora, between Lake Fucina and the Liri. He was told that an officer in French uniform, escorted by a guide, could be seen in the distance descending the source of the Liri.

“Bring them both to me,” said Mammone.

Five minutes later they were before him. Instead of leading the officer to General Lemoine to whom he was charged to transmit an order from General Championnet, the guide had treacherously brought him to Gaetano Mammone. He was an aide-de-camp of the Commander-in-Chief, named Claie.

“You arrive opportunely,” said Mammone to him. “I am thirsty.” One knows with what kind of liquid Mammone used to quench his thirst.

He had the aide-de-camp stripped of his coat, waistcoat, cravat and shirt, and ordered that his hands should be bound and that he should be tied to a tree. Then he put his finger on the carotid artery to make sure of its position, and feeling it throb, plunged in his dagger. The aide-de-camp had neither spoken, pleaded nor uttered a groan; he knew into the hands of what cannibal he had fallen, and, like the gladiator of old, had thought of one thing only, to die well. Mortally wounded, he uttered no cry, and let no sigh escape. The blood spurted from the wound in jets, as it bursts from an artery.

Mammone set his lips to the aide-de-camp’s neck, and gorged himself voluptuously.

After this, as his spies informed him that a small party of republicans, numbering twenty or thirty, was advancing by the Tagliacozza road, he ordered that arms should be concealed, flowers and olive branches plucked; that women should take the former, boys and men the latter, and that they should go to meet the detachment, and invite the officer in command to come with his men and take part in a feast that the village of Capistrello, composed of patriots, was giving as a sign of rejoicing at their happy advent.

The messengers set out singing. Every house in the village opened its doors; a large table was set up on the square in front of the mayor’s office; and wine, bread, meat, hams and cheese were brought out. Another table was arranged for the officers in the mayor’s parlour, the windows of which looked out on the square.

At a league’s distance from the town, the messengers met the little detachment commanded by Captain Tremeau. A guide, interpreter, and a traitor as usual, who was leading the detachment, explained to the republican captain what these men, children and women, coming with flowers and olive branches to meet him, wanted. Full of courage and loyalty, the captain had not even an idea of treason. He kissed the pretty girls who were offering their flowers, he ordered the sutler to empty her barrel of brandy; all drank to the health of General Championnet, to the spread of the French republic, and made their way arm in arm towards the village singing the *Marseillaise.*

Gaetano Mammone, with all the rest of the inhabitants, was awaiting the French detachment at the gate into the village; it was welcomed by an immense ovation. Everyone fraternised once more, and amid cries of joy, proceeded to the mayor’s.

There, as we have said, a table was set up; a plate was put for each soldier. The few officers dined, or rather were to have dined, with the magistrate, deputies and municipal body represented by Gaetano Mammone and the chief brigands enrolled under his orders. The soldiers, delighted with their reception, stacked their rifles at ten paces from the table prepared for them; the women took away their swords with which the children amused themselves playing at soldiers; then they sat down, bottles were uncorked and glasses filled.

Captain Tremeau, a lieutenant and two sergeants, at the same time sat down in the lower hall.

Mammone's men glided between the table and the rifles that the captain had had loaded for greater precaution, on setting out; the officers were separated at the table within in such a way as to have three or four brigands between each of them.

The signal for the massacre was to be given by Mammone; he would raise Claie's skull full of wine at one of the windows and drink to the health of King Ferdinand. Everything happened as arranged. Mammone went to the window unobserved, filled with wine the still bleeding skull of the unhappy officer, took it by the hair as one lifts a goblet by its stem, and, appearing at the middle window, raised it to the toast agreed upon.

The whole population immediately responded with the cry: "Death to the French!"

The brigands threw themselves upon the stacked rifles; those who, pretending to serve them had surrounded the French, stepped back; firing burst out point blank, and the republicans fell under shots from their own weapons. Those who had escaped or who were only wounded had their throats cut by the women and children who had seized their swords.

As to the officers inside the hall, wishing to rush to the aid of their men, they were each held in their places by five or six men.

Mammone, triumphant, approached them, his bleeding cup in his hand, and offered them their lives if they would drink to the health of King Ferdinand in their compatriot's skull.

All four refused in horror.

Then he had a hammer and nails brought, made the officers spread their hands on the table and nailed them to it. Then fagots and bundles of straw were thrown into the room, and, when they had been set alight, the doors and windows were shut.

However, the torture of the republicans was shorter and less cruel than their tormentor had hoped. One of the sergeants was courageous enough to tear his hands free of the nails, and with Captain Tremeau's sword he performed for his companions the terrible service of stabbing them, and he stabbed himself afterwards.

The four heroes died crying: "Long live the Republic!"

The news reached Naples where it rejoiced King Ferdinand, who, seeing himself so well seconded by his faithful subjects, resolved more firmly than ever not to leave Naples.

Let us leave Mammone, Fra Diavolo and the Abbé Pronio to pursue their exploits, and let us see what was happening to the Queen, who, more firmly than ever, on the contrary, had resolved to quit the capital.

CHAPTER XX.

THE UNDERGROUND PASSAGE.

CARACCIOLO had spoken truly. It suited the English policy that, driven from their capital on *terra -firma*, Ferdinand and Caroline should take refuge in Sicily, where they had nothing further to expect from their troops or their subjects, but only from English ships and sailors.

That is why Nelson, Sir William and Lady Hamilton urged the Queen to flight, which, besides, her personal fears energetically counselled. The Queen knew herself to be indeed so hated that in the event of a republican outburst she was certain, that just as her husband would be defended by the people, so on the contrary the people would abandon her to a prison or even to death!

The spectre of her sister Antoinette, her head, with hair turned white in one night, bowed in her hands, was day and night before her.

Now, ten days after the King’s return, that is, on the 18th December, the Queen, Acton and Emma Hamilton were snugly together in the Queen’s bedchamber.

It was eight o’clock in the evening. A terrible wind was beating with its wild wing against the windows of the royal palace, and the roar of the sea was heard breaking against the Spanish towers of the Castello Novo. A single lamp lit the room, and shed its light on a plan of the palace upon which the Queen and Acton appeared to be eagerly seeking some detail which escaped them.

In a corner of the room one could make out, in the shadows, a motionless and dumb silhouette, which, with the impassiveness of a statue, seemed to be awaiting an order in readiness to carry it out.

The Queen made an impatient movement.

“Yet this secret passage exists,” said she. “I am sure of it, although for a long time it has been out of use.”

“And Your Majesty thinks this secret passage necessary to you?”

“Indispensable!” said the Queen. “Tradition assures one that it opens on to the military port, and by this passage only, without being seen, we can transport on board the English vessels our jewels, our gold, and the precious objects of art we wish to take away with us. If the people suspect our departure, and if they see us remove a single trunk on board the Vanguard, they will be suspicious; that will cause a disturbance, and there will be no further chance of going. It is absolutely necessary therefore for us to find this passage.”

And the Queen, with the help of a magnifying glass, again began to look for the pencil marks which would indicate the underground passage in which she put all her hope.

Acton, seeing the Queen’s pre-occupation, looked up, sought for the shade in the room which we have indicated, and having found it: “Dick!” said he. The young man started, as if he had not expected to be called, and especially as if his thought, sovereign mistress of his body, had transported him a thousand leagues from the spot where he stood. “Come here, Dick,” said Acton. “You are something of an architect, I believe?”

“I studied architecture for two years,” said this intelligent and passive servant, approaching.

“Well then, look, seek; perhaps you will discover what we cannot find. There should be in the cellars an underground passage, a secret tunnel leading from the palace interior to the military port.”

Acton left the table and gave up his place to his secretary, who leaned over the plan; then, rising immediately:

“I think it’s no good looking for it,” he said.

“Why?”

“If the architect of the palace has made a secret passage in the foundations, he will have taken care not to show it on the plan.”

“Why so?” asked the Queen with her usual impatience.

“Because, madame, from the moment the passage is shown on the plan it is no longer a secret passage, since it will be known to everyone who looks at it.”

The Queen laughed. “What your secretary says is logical enough, you know, General?”

“So logical that I am ashamed not to have thought of it,” answered Acton.

“Well, now, Mr. Dick,” said Emma Hamilton, “help us to find this underground way. Once found, I feel quite disposed to explore it like a heroine of Anne Radcliffe’s, and to come and give the Queen an account of my exploration.”

Before replying, Richard looked at General Acton as if to ask permission. “I believe,” said he, “that the first thing to do is to explore all that part of the palace foundations that looks on to the wet dock. However well concealed the door may be, it is impossible that no trace should be found.”

“Then we must wait till tomorrow,” said the Queen, “and that is a night lost.”

Dick went to the window. “But why, madame?” said he. “The sky is cloudy, but there is a full moon. Each time it comes from behind a cloud it will give me sufficient light for my search. I should only need the watchword so that I could move freely about within the port.”

“Nothing simpler,” said Acton. “We will go together to the governor of the castle; not only will he give you the watchword, but he will tell the sentries not to bother about you, but to let you do in peace all you require.”

“Then, General, as Her Majesty said, let us lose no time.”

“Go, General, go,” said the Queen. “And you, sir, try to do honour to our good opinion of you.”

“I shall do my best, madame,” said the young man, and having bowed respectfully, he went out behind the Captain-General.

At the end of ten minutes Acton returned alone.

“Well?” asked the Queen.

“Well,” returned he, “our hound is on the track, and I shall be much surprised if he comes back, as His Majesty says, after having made a hollow draw.”

Indeed, furnished with the watchword, Dick had begun his search, and in an angle of the wall had discovered a grille with crossbars, covered with rust and spiders’ webs, before which, without taking any notice of it, everyone passed with the carelessness of habit. Convinced that he had found one of the ends of the secret passage, Dick now occupied himself only with finding the other.

He re-entered the castle, enquired who was the oldest servant among all the domestics swarming in the lower floors, and heard that it was the father of the butler, who, after having had that office for forty years, had relinquished it to his son for twenty years past.

Dick had himself taken to the butler. He found the whole family of twelve persons at table. The grandfather, who had come with Charles III. as butler from Spain, was a handsome old man, upright, still vigorous, and seeming to have lost none of his intelligence.

Dick addressed him in Spanish. “The Queen asks for you,” said he.

The old man started; no one had spoken to him in his own tongue for forty years. All the guests rose from their seats as if moved by a spring.

“The Queen asks for you,” Dick repeated.

“Is Your Excellency quite sure?”

“Sure.”

“And when?”

“Immediately.”

“But I cannot appear like this before Her Majesty.’’

“She asks for you just as you are; she is waiting.”

The old man got up, more perturbed than flattered by the invitation, and looked at his son with some uneasiness.

“Tell your son the locksmith not to go to bed,” continued Dick in Spanish, “the Queen will probably need him tonight.”

The old man transmitted the order to his son in Neapolitan. “I am at Your Excellency’s service,” said he, and with a step almost as firm, though weightier than that of his guide, he went up the servants’ staircase with Dick and through the corridors. Dick signed to the ushers not to rise, and knocked gently at the Queen’s door.

“Come in,” said Caroline’s imperious voice. “Well?” she continued, as he entered, leaving the old man in the ante-room, “what have you discovered?”

“What Your Majesty seeks — at least, I hope so. One of the doors of the secret passage, and I hope to bring to Your Majesty the man who will find the other.”

“The man who will find the other?”

“The former butler of King Charles III., an old man of eighty-two.”

“Have you questioned him?”

“I did not think myself authorised, madame, and I have left this task for you.”

The old man was then called in.

“Ah! Ah! It is you, Pachecho,” said the Queen, who recognised him as having waited upon her for fifteen or twenty years. “I was not aware that you were still among us. I am glad to see you alive and well. You can, precisely, because of your great age, do me a service.”

“I am at Your Majesty’s disposal.”

“You ought, in the time of the late King Charles III. — God keep his soul! — you ought to have known or to have heard of a secret passage leading from the castle cellars on to the wet dock or the military port?”

The old man put his hand to his forehead.

“Yes,” said he; “I do remember something of the kind, but,” he shook his head, “I am old; at eighty-two memory fails. Am I allowed to consult my sons?”

“What are your sons?” enquired the Queen.

“The eldest, aged fifty, has succeeded me as butler, Your Majesty, the other, aged forty-eight, is locksmith.”

“Locksmith! Your Majesty hears that,” said Richard. “To open the door one will be needed.”

“Very good,” the Queen said; “go and consult your sons, but them only, not the women.”

“May God be always with Your Majesty,” the old man said, bowing as he withdrew.

“Follow that man, Mr. Dick,” said the Queen, “and come back as soon as possible to give me the result of the conference.”

Dick saluted and followed Pachecho. After a quarter of an hour he returned.

“The passage is found,” said he, “and the locksmith is ready to open the door on Your Majesty’s order.”

“General,” the Queen remarked, “in Mr. Richard you have a valuable man, and some day or other I shall probably ask you for him.”

“On that day, madame,” replied Acton, “his dearest wishes and mine will be fulfilled. What are Your Majesty’s commands meanwhile?”

“Come,” said the Queen to Emma Hamilton, “there are certain things one must see with one’s own eyes.”

Time, however, was running on in its remorseless way, and, although harassed on all sides by the bands of Pronio, Gaetano Mammone and Fra Diavolo, the French army, unmoved as time, followed its triple road through the Abruzzi, the Terra di Lavoro, and that part of the Campagna of which the Tyrhennian sea washes the shore.

All the movements of the Republicans being-known at Naples, it had not escaped attention that from the 20th the chief body, that commanded by Championnet in person, had encamped on the evening of the 18th at San Germano, and was advancing upon Capua by Nignano and Calvi.

On the 20th, at eight o’clock in the morning, the Prince of Maliterno and the Duke of Rocca Romana, each at the head of a regiment of volunteers recruited among the noble or wealthy youth of Naples and its neighbourhood, had come to take leave of the Queen, and had set out on their march to meet the Republicans. The nearer the danger approached, the more the King’s party and the Queen’s party separated into two camps.

The King’s party was composed of Cardinal Ruffo, Admiral Caracciolo, the Minister of War, Ariola, and of all those who, clinging to the honour of the Neapolitan name, desired resistance at all price and the defence of Naples pushed to the last extremity.

The Queen’s party, composed of Sir William and Lady Hamilton, Nelson, Acton, Castelcicala, Vanni and Guidobaldi, desired the abandonment of Naples, and a prompt flight.

Then, amid all this, the Queen was extremely agitated with the fear of Ferrari’s return at any moment. The King, seeing himself insolently deceived, knowing in short whom to blame for all the disasters overwhelming the kingdom, might, as weak natures do, have a moment’s energy and escape for ever from the pressure put upon him for twenty years by a minister he had never liked and a spouse he no longer loved.

On the evening of the 20th there was a Council of State: the King announced himself openly and firmly for defence. The Council broke up at midnight. From midnight to one o’clock the Queen stayed in the dark room, and sent for Pasquale di Simone, who received secret instructions from Acton, who was waiting for him there. At half-past one Dick set out for Bénévento, where, two days previously one of the fastest horses in Acton’s stables had been sent by a confidential groom. The 2 ist commenced with one of those tempests which always last for three days at Naples, and which have given rise to this proverb: “*Nasce, fasce, mori* “ — it is born, has its will, and dies.

In spite of the alternatives of rain falling in sheets, and of wind blowing in squalls, the people, who, full of emotion, had a vague feeling of a great catastrophe, were blocking up the streets, squares and cross-roads.

But what pointed to some extraordinary circumstance was that the people were not crowding the old parts of the town; and by the people we mean that multitude of sailors, fishers and lazzaroni who form the population at Naples. On the contrary, one noticed that the most animated groups, while surrounding the royal palace, seemed to be watching Toledo Street and the

Strada del Piliero. Finally, three men, already conspicuous in the previous riots, were speaking loudly and agitating heatedly amid these groups. These three men were Pasquale di Simone, the butcher, hideous from his disfigurement, and Fra Pacifico, who, without being in the secret, without knowing what was afoot, giving rein to his violent character, was striking with his laurel stick, now the pavement, now the wall, now poor Jacobino, the scapegoat of the terrible Franciscan's passions.

The whole crowd, without knowing what it was waiting for, seemed to expect something or someone; and the King, who knew no more, but whom the concourse made uneasy, hidden behind the Venetian blind of a window on the ground floor, while mechanically petting Jupiter, was watching it as from time to time, like the rumbling of thunder or the roar of a waterfall, it emitted the double cry of "Long live the King!" and "Death to the Jacobins!"

The Queen, who had ascertained where the King was, kept within the room with Acton, ready to act according to circumstances, whilst Emma in the Queen's apartment with the Countess San Marco was packing up her royal friend's most secret papers and most precious jewels.

Towards eleven o'clock, a young man, exchanging signs with Pasquale - di Simone and the butcher, galloped up on an English horse to the great gate in the palace courtyard, leaped down, threw the bridle to a groom, and as if he had known beforehand where to find the Queen; entered the room where she was waiting with Acton.

"Well?" they asked together.

"He is following me," said he.

"How soon will he be here?"

"In half-an-hour."

"Are those expecting him warned?"

"Yes."

"Well, go to my room and tell Lady Hamliton to inform Nelson."

The young man went up the servants' staircase with a rapidity showing how well-known to him were all the ins and outs of the palace, and transmitted the Queen's wishes to Emma.

"Have you a safe man to take a note to milord Nelson?"

"Myself," replied the young man.

"Then "She wrote at the Queen's desk this single line:

"It will probably be for this evening: hold yourself in readiness.

“EMMA.”

The young man went downstairs as promptly as he had come up, crossed the courtyard, took the slope leading to the military port, jumped into a boat, and in spite of wind and rain, had himself taken to the Vanguard, which, with top-gallant masts down, lay at five or six cable’s lengths distant, at anchor, surrounded by other English and Portuguese vessels placed under the command of Admiral Nelson. The young man, no other than Richard, was soon with Nelson in his cabin, and gave him the note.

“Her Majesty’s orders are about to be carried out,” said Nelson, “and that you may give satisfactory news, you shall be the bearer yourself. Henry,” said he to his flag captain, “have the boat manned ready to take monsieur on board the Alcmène.” Then, putting Emma’s note in his breast, he wrote in his turn:

“Strictly Private.

“Three boats and the little cutter from the Alcmène, armed with blank weapons only, to be at the Vittoria at half-past seven precisely.

“A single boat will signal; the others will remain at a distance with raised oars. The boat to accost will be the Vanguard’s.

“All the boats will be collected alongside the Alcmène before seven o’clock, under command of Commander Hope.

“*Grappling irons in the boats.*

“All the other boats of the Vanguard and of the Alcmène, armed with knives, and the pinnaces with their grappling irons, will be assembled alongside of the Vanguard, under the command of Captain Hardy, who will depart at eight o’clock precisely to take to the sea half-way from Molosiglio.

“Each boat should carry from four to six soldiers.

“In case assistance should be necessary, signals to be made with lights.

“HORATIO NELSON.”

“The Alcmène to be ready to pay out in the night, if necessary.”

While these orders were being received with respect equalling the punctuality with which they were to be executed, a second courier arrived in his turn at the bridge of the Madeleine, and taking the route of the first, reached the Strada del Piliero.

There! he began to find the crowd denser, and in spite of his dress, in which it was easy to recognise a special courier of the King's, he found a difficulty in continuing his way at the same pace. Besides, as if they had done it purposely, people got in the way of his horse, and, displeased at their hurts, began to abuse him. Ferrari, for he it was, accustomed to see his livery respected, at first responded with some strokes of his whip sturdily dealt to left and right. The lazzàroni scattered and kept quiet from habit. But, as he reached the corner of the Saint Charles theatre, a man wanted to get in front of the horse, and passed so clumsily that he was knocked down.

"Friends," cried he as he fell, "this is not a King's courier as you might think from his dress. This is a Jacobin in disguise who is escaping! Death to the Jacobin! Death!"

Cries of "The Jacobin! The Jacobin! Death to the Jacobin!" were then heard in the crowd.

Pasquale di Simone flung his knife at the horse; it entered to the hilt. The butcher rushed to the beast's head, and, accustomed to bleed lambs and sheep, opened the artery in the neck. The horse reared, neighed with pain, beat the air with its fore feet, whilst a jet of blood spurted on the bystanders.

The sight of blood has a magical effect on southern peoples. No sooner did the lazzaroni feel themselves watered by the red and warm fluid, no sooner did they scent its acrid odour, than they rushed upon the man and the horse with ferocious cries.

Ferrari felt that if his horse fell he was lost. He kept him up as well as he could with the bridle and with his legs, but the unfortunate animal was mortally wounded. He stumbled to left and right, then crossed his fore legs, rose through a desperate effort on his master's part, and made a bound forward. Ferrari felt the beast giving under him. He was at fifty paces only from the palace guard; he called for help; but the sound of his voice was lost in cries repeated a hundred-fold, "Death to the Jacobin!" He seized a pistol from his holsters, hoping that the report would be better heard than his cries. At that moment his horse fell. The shock made the pistol go off at random, and the bullet hit a boy of from eight to ten years old.

"He assassinates children!" a voice cried.

At that cry, Fra Pacifico, who up till then had been fairly quiet, rushed among the crowd, which he drove apart with elbows pointed and hard as oaken wedges. He reached the centre of the disturbance just as, fallen with his horse, the unhappy Ferrari was trying to get on his feet. Before he could succeed, the monk’s club came down on his head; he fell like an ox struck with a mallet!

But this was not what was wanted; it was under the King’s own eyes that Ferrari had to die. The five or six police in the secret of the drama surrounded the body and defended it, whilst the butcher, dragging it by the feet, cried: “Room for the Jacobin! “They left the horse’s corpse where it was, after having stripped it, and followed the butcher. Twenty steps further on they were in front of the King’s window. Anxious to know the cause of this frightful uproar, the King opened the blind. At the sight of him the cries changed. Hearing these yells, the King really thought that justice was being meted out to some Jacobin. He did not dislike this method of ridding him of his enemies. He saluted the people, a smile on his lips; the people, feeling encouraged, desired to show their King that they were worthy of him. They raised the unhappy Ferrari, bleeding, torn, mutilated, but still alive, in their arms; the corpse had just recovered consciousness: he opened his eyes, recognised the King, and stretched out his arms towards him.

“Rescue! help! Sire, it is I! I, your Ferrari!”

At this unexpected, terrible, inexplicable sight the King sprang backwards, and going to the back of the room, fell half fainting into a chair — whilst, on the contrary, Jupiter, who, being neither man nor King, had no reason for ingratitude, uttered a howl of distress, and, with bloodshot eyes and foam at the mouth, leaping from the window, sprang to his friend’s help.

At that moment the door opened: the Queen came in, seized the King’s hand, forced him to rise, dragged him to the window, and showing him this cannibal people dividing up the remains of Ferrari:

“Sire,” said she, “you see the men on whom you are relying for the defence of Naples and for ours; today they cut your servants’ throats; to-morrow they will cut the throats of your children; the day after to-morrow they will cut our throats. Do you still persist in your wish to remain?”

“Have everything got ready!” cried the King; “this evening I set out....”

And, thinking he still saw the slaughter of the unhappy Ferrari, still heard his dying voice appealing for help, he buried his head in his hands, closing his eyes, shutting his ears, and took refuge in the room in his apartments furthest from the street.

When he emerged, two hours later, the first sight he saw was Jupiter lying down all bleeding on a scrap of cloth, which seemed from the remains of fur and bits of braid to have belonged to the unfortunate courier.

The King knelt down by Jupiter, made sure that his favourite had no serious wound, and, wanting to ascertain on what the faithful and courageous animal was lying, he drew from under him, in spite of his howls, a part of Ferrari's jacket which the dog had wrested from his murderers.

By a providential chance, this piece was that in which was the leather pocket made for the despatches; the King unbuttoned it and found intact the imperial contents which the courier was bringing in answer to his letter.

The King restored to Jupiter the scrap of clothing, on which he lay down again, uttering a lugubrious howl; then he went back to his room, shut himself in, unsealed the imperial letter, and read: —

"To my dear brother and beloved cousin, uncle, father-in-law, ally and confederate.

"I never wrote the letter you send me by your courier Ferrari, it is forged from one end to the other.

"The letter' which I had the honour of writing was entirely in my own hand, and, instead of urging you to open a campaign, invited you to attempt nothing before the month of April next, the time when I myself count on the arrival of our good and faithful allies the Russians.

"If the guilty are those whom Your Majesty's justice can reach, I do not conceal that I should like to see them punished as they deserve.

"I have the honour to be, with respect, Your Majesty's very dear brother, beloved cousin, nephew, son-in-law, ally and confederate.

"FRANCOIS."

The Queen and Acton had just committed a useless crime. We are mistaken: this crime had its use, since it determined Ferdinand to leave Naples and take refuge in Sicily!

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FLIGHT.

AT half-past two the Chevalier had returned home as usual, but with agitation foreign to all his habits had twice called: “Luisa! Luisa!”

Luisa darted into the corridor, for, by her husband’s voice, she understood that something extraordinary had occurred.

From the library windows, indeed, he had seen what had passed in San Carlo Street, namely, the mutilation of the unhappy Ferrari. As, beneath his gentle exterior, the Chevalier was extremely courageous, with that special courage which endows great hearts with a profound feeling of humanity, his first movement had been to descend and run to the aid of the courier, whom he had recognised as the King’s; but, at the library door, he had been stopped by the Prince Royal, who with his coaxing and cold voice had asked: “Where are you going, San Felice?”

“Where am I going?.... Where am I going? “San Felice had replied. “Your Highness is ignorant of what is happening then?”

“Yes; a man is being killed But is it such a rare thing for a man to have his throat cut in Naples that you should concern yourself with such a matter?”

“But this man is one of the King’s servants.”

“I know.”

“The Courier Ferrari.”

“I recognised him.”

“But how is it, why do they kill a poor fellow with

cries of ‘Death to the Jacobins!’ when, on the contrary, the unfortunate man is one of the King’s most devoted servants?”

“How? Why? Have you read Machiavelli’s correspondence? Return to your ladder, my dear Chevalier and reflect upon it,” said the Duke of Calabria with a wan smile.

The Chevalier did so, and at the third step comprehended that the hand of someone interested in Ferrari’s death had directed the blows which had just struck him down.

A quarter of an hour afterwards, the Prince received a summons from his father, and returning in less than an hour said: “San Felice, you remember your promise to accompany me to Sicily? Are you still ready to fulfil it?”

“Certainly, only.”

“What?”

“When I informed Madame San Felice of the honour done me by Your Highness, she asked to go with me.”

“Thank you for this good news,” said the Prince, joyously; “the Princess will be rejoiced to have such a lady of honour. Tell her, my dear Chevalier, how welcome she will be. But I have not told you all. We go to-night.”

The Chevalier opened his eyes very wide. “I thought,” said he, “that the King had decided not to go till the last extremity.”

“Yes; but Ferrari’s murder has upset everything. At half-past ten His Majesty embarks with the Queen, the Princesses, my two brothers, the ambassadors and ministers on board Lord Nelson’s ship. The Queen has thus decided, and no doubt as compensation to Caracciolo, it is I who embark on his vessel, and consequently you also. I will tell you the time when I know it. Hold yourself in readiness: it will probably be between ten o’clock and midnight.”

The Prince then took San Felice’s hand. “You know,” said he, earnestly, “lam counting on you.”

“Your Highness has my word,” replied the Chevalier, bowing; “it is too great an honour for me to have a moment’s hesitation.” Then, taking his hat, he went out.

No sooner had he told Luisa the reason of his return than she became pale, but all she said was: “At what o’clock do we go?”

“Between ten o’clock and midnight,” replied San Felice.

“I shall be ready,” said she; “do not be uneasy on my account, my friend.” And she withdrew on the pretext of making preparations for the departure, ordering dinner for three o’clock as usual.

But it was to Salvato’s room that Luisa went.

Duty had conquered love; but having sacrificed her love, she owed it her tears. So, since the day when she told her husband, “I shall go with you,” she had wept much.

She called Giovannina, told her of the projected departure, and instructed her as to the packing, offering to take her with her, or to leave her in charge of the house as she preferred. The girl’s extreme joy in declaring for the latter might have opened her eyes if she had any suspicions, but, on the contrary, thinking that it would be less cruel if Salvato were to find someone to talk to of herself than to discover an empty house, she said to the maid: “Perhaps our absence will not last long, but while we are away, say to those who come to see me — remember my words, Nina — say that it was my husband’s duty to follow the Prince, and mine to follow my husband; say (for better than anyone you, who do not want to leave Naples, will appreciate what I suffer in leaving it), say that it is bathed in tears that I make my first farewells, and at the hour of departure my last farewells, to each room in this house and to each object in these rooms. And, when you mention tears, you know that these are not empty words, for you have seen them flow.” Luisa finished speaking with sobs.

“And....” Giovannina hesitated a moment, while a fleeting expression of joy lit up her face. “And if M. Salvato should come, what shall I tell him?”

“That I love him always,” replied Luisa, with supreme calm, uncovering her face, “and that this love will last my life long. Go and tell Michael not to go away. I must speak to him before I go, and I am relying on him to take me to the boat.”

Nina went out. Left to herself, Luisa sank her face in the pillow on the bed, left a kiss in the print she had made there, and went away in her turn.

Three o’clock had just struck, and with his habitual punctuality that nothing could disturb, the Chevalier entered the dining-room by one door as Luisa came in by another. Michael was on the steps outside.

“Where is Michael?” enquired San Felice. “I hope he has not gone.”

“No,” said Luisa, and she called him in.

The Chevalier enjoined upon him the strictest secrecy. Michael made the sign of the cross on his mouth. “Speak,” said he, “it is as if the butcher had cut out my tongue.”

“Well, Michael, everyone is leaving this evening. The King, the Queen, the Royal Family and ourselves.”

Tears filled Luisa’s eyes not unobserved by Michael.

“And to what land are you going?”

“Sicily.”

The lazzaroni shook his head. “I have - not the honour of being in His Majesty’s counsels,” said Michael, “but if I were I should say, ‘Sire, you are wrong.’”

“So Admiral Caracciolo and Cardinal Ruffo have advised him,” continued the Chevalier; “but the Queen and Acton are afraid, and since to-day’s murder the King has decided to leave.”

“Ah, ah,” said Michael; “I begin to understand why I saw Pasquale di Simone and the butcher among the assassins; but one must not speak of such things at Naples. No matter! The King is wrong. If he remained, the French would never come: we would rather all perish! Ah! if the people knew the King wanted to go!”

“Yes; but the people must not know, Michael. In short, we set out this evening.’’

“And my little sister also?” asked Michael, in a tone from which he could not banish his surprise.

“Yes; this beloved child wishes to follow me,” said the Chevalier, stretching out his hand to grasp Luisa’s.

“Well,” said Michael, “you may boast of having wedded a saint; I wish I could go with you.”

“Come, Michael, come,” cried Luisa, who saw in him a friend to whom she could speak of Salvato.

“Alas, it is impossible, little sister: each to his duty. I am a captain of the people; I have to fight, to defend Naples; to kill as many French as I can, but be easy, little sister,” he went on laughing, “I shall not kill them all.”

“Well, to conclude,” went on the Chevalier, “we embark this evening at the Vittoria, to join Admiral Caracciolo’s frigate, behind the Castle de l’Ovo. I wanted to beg you not to leave your sister, and, if need be, to do for her, at the moment of embarkation, what you did two hours ago for me, that is, to protect her.”

“Oh, as to that, you can be easy, Chevalier. I would die for you, but for her I would let myself be chopped in pieces. All the same, if the people knew this there would be a rare riot.”

“So,” said the Chevalier, getting up from the table, “I have your promise, Michael: you will not leave Luisa till she is in the boat.”

“No more than her shadow,” replied the young man.

The Chevalier, who had his papers to arrange, his books to pack, his manuscripts to remove, withdrew to his study.

Michael, studying Luisa, saw two large tears silently welling from her beautiful eyes. “Some men have luck,” said he; “the Chevalier is one of them.”

Luisa rose, but quickly as she went out and shut the door behind her, Michael could hear her bursting sobs. She went on tiptoe, as usual to Salvato’s room; and sighed as she heard Giovannina singing a gay Neapolitan air.

“How glad the poor girl is to stay in Naples!” she thought; “if I were free to do so, perhaps I should sing also,” and she went into the room with a heart further oppressed by the contrast. Alone there she fell once more into one of those long reveries filled with the image of Salvato and the hours they had passed together, and remained thus with closed eyes till Michael gently knocked at the door. He brought a letter. Was it possible that she was to have the supreme consolation at such a moment of a last letter from Salvato?

“From Portici; I took it from the postman,” said Michael. “Shall I stay or go?”

“Stay,” cried Luisa. “I have no secrets from you.” But for some moments her eyes swam in a mist of tears, and she could read nothing. At last she was able to make out:

“San-Germano, 19th December, in the morning. “Dear Luisa, “Here I am, then, twenty leagues from you, my lovely fairy of the palm-tree, and when you get this letter, I shall be still nearer. The brigands harass us, assassinate us, mutilate us, but do not stop us. This is because we are not an army, not men marching to invade a kingdom and conquer a capital: we are an idea travelling round the world.

There I am, talking politics!

“I wager that I guess where you are reading my letter. You are reading it in our room, sitting at the head of my bed, in that room where we shall see one another again, and where I shall forget, in doing so, the long days passed far from you.....”

Luisa broke off; tears blinded her eyes, sobs choked her voice.

Michael ran to her and knelt down. “Come, little sister,” said he. “Courage! What you are doing is splendid, and God will reward you. And who knows! You are both young; perhaps, one day you will see one another again.”

Luisa shook her head.

“No, no,” said she, “we shall never meet again. And it will be best; I love him too much, Michael; and it is only since I resolved to see him no more that I know how much I love him.”

Just then San Felice’s voice was heard calling her. She went to him, and in the drawing-room found Dr. Cirillo.

Luisa flushed. Dr. Cirillo was also in her secret. Besides, she did not forget that it was from the liberal committee, of which he was one, that the letters of Salvato reached her.

The doctor greeted the young woman, and at the first glance perceived the agitation of her moral disturbance.

“She is better, but not cured,” said he. “I am very glad I came to-day,” and he laid stress on *to-day*. Luisa looked down.

“Well, I must leave her alone with you,” said San Felice; “fortunately, I am very busy, or I should be listening at the door.”

“Then pray go, Chevalier,” said Cirillo, laughing, and he pushed San Felice towards the door, and shut it after him.

Then, coming back to Luisa, and taking her hands, “You have been weeping, my dear child,” said he. “Since you had a letter from him, or before?”

“Both.”

“Any accident to him?”

“No, thank God.”

“Then what is it?”

Luisa’s eyes filled with tears.

“You have nothing to say in complaint of San Felice, I presume?”

“Oh!” cried Luisa, clasping her hands, “he is an angel of fatherly goodness.”

“I understand — he goes and you stay.”

“He goes, and I follow him.”

Cirillo’s eyes grew moist. “*You* are an angel, I think.”

“No; angels do not weep at doing their duty.”

“And I will perform mine in telling him how much you love him, how much you have suffered.”

Cirillo wanted to kiss her hands; but Luisa threw her arms round his neck.

“Oh! you will tell him! You will tell him! won’t you,” murmured she low in his ear.

Cirillo pressed her hand in promise.

San Felice, entering, found Luisa in his friend’s arms.

“Well,” said he laughing, “you give your patients consultations by embracing them, doctor?”

“No; but in embracing them I take leave of those I love, of those I esteem, of those I revere. Ah, Chevalier, you are a happy man!”

“He deserves to be,” said Luisa, holding out her hand to her husband.

“That is not always a reason,” said Cirillo. “And now, au revoir, Chevalier! Go! and serve your Prince. I stay and am going to try to serve my country.”

Then, joining the husband’s and wife’s hands in his: “I should like to be Saint Januario, not to perform a miracle twice yearly, but to bless you as you deserve. Adieu! “And he bounded out of the house.

San Felice followed him on to the steps to wave adieu; then coming back to his wife: “At ten o’clock the Prince’s carriage is coming to fetch us,” said he.

“I shall be ready,” said Luisa, and she kept her word.

She took her husband’s arm, and entered the Prince’s carriage with him. Michael got up on the box. Nina, her lips trembling with joy, kissed her mistress’s hands. Then the door shut and the carriage set off.

The weather was frightful. Wind, hail and rain were beating against the carriage windows, and the bay, which, in spite of the darkness, was seen in all its extent, was but a mass of foam, tumultuous with waves. San Felice threw an alarmed glance on this furious sea, which Luisa, buffeted by a storm of a different kind of violence, scarcely noticed. The idea of the danger to which he was about to expose the only being he loved in the world, terrified him. He turned to look at her. She was pale and motionless in her corner. Her eyes were closed, and thinking she was unobserved in the darkness, she let her tears flow. Then, for the first time, it occurred to the Chevalier that his wife was making some great sacrifice of which he was in ignorance. He took her hand and put it to his lips. Luisa opened her eyes, and, smiling at her husband through her tears:

“How good you are, my friend,” said she.

The Chevalier put his arm round her neck. Luisa could not restrain a groan. The Chevalier seemed as if he did not hear.

They reached the landing-place. A boat, manned with six rowers, was waiting, keeping its place with great difficulty against the waves which were driving it on to the shore.

Scarcely did the men see the carriage stop than they cried: “Make haste! there is a heavy sea; we can scarcely manage the boat.”

And, indeed, San Felice had only to look at it to see the jeopardy of those in it.

The Chevalier said something in a low tone to the coachman, and something else to Michael as low, took Luisa by the arm and went down with her on to the shore. Before they reached the sea line, a wave, breaking on the sand, covered them with foam.

Luisa uttered a cry.

The Chevalier took her in his arms, and pressed her to his heart. Then, making a sign to Michael: “Wait,” said he to Luisa; “I am going to get into the boat, and when I am in it, Michael and I will help you in too.”

Luisa was in that state of mind which precedes utter exhaustion, and which hardly leaves power of expression to the will. She passed then, almost without remarking it, from the Chevalier’s arms to her brother’s.

The Chevalier resolutely approached the boat, and just as, with the help of a boat-hook, two men kept it close up to the shore, he sprang in crying:

“Shove off!”

“And the little lady?” enquired the coxswain.

“She remains,” said San Felice.

“Indeed, it is no weather to take women on board in,” replied the coxswain. “Row, boys! Row together, and smartly!”

In a moment the boat was ten fathoms from the shore. All this had happened so quickly that Luisa had not had time to guess her husband’s intention, or consequently to dispute it.

On seeing the boat put off, she cried out: “And I! And I!” said she, trying to escape from Michael’s arms to follow her husband, “And I; are you leaving me behind then?”

“What would your father, to whom I promised to watch over you, say if he saw me expose you to such danger?” replied San Felice, raising his voice.

“But I cannot stay in Naples!” cried Luisa, trying to free her arms. “I want to go, I want to follow you, to be with you always! Help, Luciano! If I stay I am lost.”

The Chevalier was already distant; a gust of wind brought these words:

“Michael, I trust her to you!”

“No, no,” cried Luisa, despairingly. “Come back, Luciano! You do not know. I love Salvato!”

At the same moment, the boat which was bearing away the Chevalier on the first part of his voyage to Sicily disappeared behind the gloomy and massive structure of the Castle de l’Ovo. It was Destiny.

We must return to the King and the Queen, whose flight, as we know, was resolved and fixed for the same evening. The heir apparent, his wife and daughter, Sir William and Lady Hamilton, Acton, and the most intimate of the palace circle, it was arranged should accompany them to Sicily on the Vanguard.

The King, as we have seen, had promised Caracciolo that if he left Naples it would only be upon his ship; but having fallen again under the Queen’s yoke in his terror, his Majesty forgot his promise for two reasons. The first, his own, was on account of the shame he would feel when with the admiral for leaving Naples after having promised to remain. The second, the Queen’s, was that Caracciolo, sharing the patriotic principles of all the Neapolitan nobility, might, instead of taking the King to Sicily, give him up to the Jacobins, who, masters of such a hostage, would then force him to set up the government of their choice, or worse still, would bring him to trial as the English had brought Charles I., and the French Louis XVI.

As a consolation and compensation for the honour of which he was deprived, it was decided that the admiral should have that of convoying the Duke of Calabria, his family and household.

The aged Princesses of France were informed of the decision taken, and invited with the help of their bodyguard of seven to provide for their safety as they deemed best, and fifteen thousand ducats were sent to assist them in their flight. This duty performed, no further thought was spent on them.

All day long jewels, money, precious furniture, works of art, and the statues that they wished to remove to Sicily were brought down and piled up in the secret passage. The King would have liked to take his kangaroos, but it was impossible. He remained shut up in his apartments, brooding over the treason of Acton, of which the Emperor’s letter gave proof, and refused to receive anyone whatever. The order was strictly enforced as well with regard to Francis Caracciolo, who, having seen from his ship the comings and goings and signals on board the English warships, had his suspicions; as to the Marquis Vanni, who, having found the Queen’s door closed, and knowing from the Prince of Castelcicala that there was a question of departure, came despairingly to knock at that of the King.

Ferdinand for a moment thought of sending for Cardinal Ruffo, and of taking him for his companion and counsellor during the voyage, but he and Nelson were not on terms. Besides, the Cardinal was hated by the Queen, and, as usual, Ferdinand preferred his ease to the niceties of friendship and gratitude. And he told himself that, being so clever, the Cardinal would manage perfectly alone.

The embarkation was fixed for ten in the evening. So it was agreed that at ten all those who with their Majesties were to be embarked on the Vanguard, should assemble in the Queen's apartment.

As ten o'clock struck, the King entered holding his dog in leash; this was the sole friend on whose fidelity he relied, and consequently the only one he took with him. He had thought of Ascoli and Malaspina, but he had thought also that, like the Cardinal, they would manage for themselves. He looked round the immense dimly-lighted drawing-room — it was feared that too much light might lead to suspicions of departure — and he saw all the fugitives assembled or rather dispersed in different groups. The principal one was composed of the Queen, her much-loved son Prince Leopold, the young Prince Albert, the four Princesses and Emma Hamilton. Acton, Sir William and Castelcicala were standing talking at a window, listening to the wind whistling and the rain beating against the glass. A group of ladies-in-waiting was gathered at a table. Apart from all, scarce visible in the shadow, was the outline of Dick.

As the King entered all rose, but at a sign from him kept their places.

"Do not disturb yourselves," said he, "do not disturb yourselves, that is no longer worth the trouble." And he sat down in an easy chair near the door, taking Jupiter's head between his knees.

At his father's voice the young Prince Albert ran to the King, who, parting his fair hair, kissed him on the forehead, and having held him to his breast for a moment, sent him back to Emma, whom the child called his *little mother.*

There followed a mournful silence in this shadowy apartment; those who were talking spoke low.

At half-past ten the Count of Thurn, a German in the Neapolitan service, should have entered the palace by the postern. He had been given a key to the Queen’s apartments, which by a single, almost massive, door communicated with that exit leading to the military port.

The clock, amid silence, struck the half-hour. Almost directly a knock was heard at the door of communication. Why did the Count knock instead of opening the door with his key?

In supremely important moments like this, everything that in other circumstances would merely cause uneasiness, causes terror.

The Queen started and rose. The King merely gazed; he knew nothing of the arrangements made.

“It can only be the Count,” said Acton, ever calm and logical. “If Your Majesty permits I will go and see.”

“Go,” said the Queen.

Acton lit a taper and entered the corridor. The Queen anxiously looked after him. The silence, already lugubrious, became deadly. At the end of a few minutes Acton re-appeared.

“Well?” asked the Queen.

“The door has probably not been opened for a long time; the key has broken in the lock. The Count knocked to ascertain if there is any way of opening the door on the inside. I tried, but there is none.”

“What is to be done then?”

“Break it open.”

“Did you give the order?”

“Yes, madame, and it is being done.”

One heard, in fact, violent blows being struck on the door, then cracking, as it broke down. There was something ominous in all these sounds.

Steps approached, the drawing-room door opened, and the Count of Thurn appeared, apologising for the accident and delay.

“It is an omen,” said the Queen.

“In any case, if it is an omen,” said the King with his natural good sense, “it is one signifying that we should do better to stay than to go.”

The Queen was afraid of a return of determination in her august spouse. “Let us start,” said she.

“Everything is ready, madame,” said the Count of Thurn, “but I ask permission to communicate to the King an order I received this evening from Admiral Nelson.”

The King rose and approached the candelabra, near which the Count was waiting with a paper in his hand.

"Read, sire," said he."

"The order is in English; and I do not know English," said the King.

"I will translate it to Your Majesty."

"To Admiral Count of Thurn.

"Gulf of Naples, 21st December.

"Get the Neapolitan frigates and sloops ready to be burned."

"What do you say?" said the King.

The Count repeated the order.

"And why burn frigates and sloops which have cost so dear and which have taken ten years to build?"

"To prevent their falling into the hands of the French, sire."

"But why not take them to Sicily?"

"Such is Milord Nelson's order, sire, and the reason why before transmitting it to the Marquis of Nizza, who is to carry it out, I wished to submit it to Your Majesty."

"Sire, sire," said the Queen, approaching the King, "we are losing precious time, and for a mere nothing."

"*Peste,* madame!" cried the King, "you call that nothing. Consult the naval budget for the last ten years, and you will see it amounts to more than a hundred and sixty millions."

"Sire, eleven o'clock is striking," said the Queen, "and Milord Nelson is expecting us."

"You are right," the King said, "and Milord Nelson is not made to wait even for a King, even for a Queen. You will follow Milord Nelson's orders, Count; you will burn my fleet. What England dares not seize, she burns. Ah I my poor Caracciolo, how right you were, and how wrong I was not to take your advice! Come gentlemen, come ladies, let us not keep Milord Nelson waiting." And the King, taking the taper from Acton's hands, went first; everyone followed him, as he stepped in silence, with straining ear, with palpitating heart! Having reached the middle of the staircase before a window, he thought he heard a noise without. He stopped, and hearing it once more, he blew out his candle, and everyone was in the dark. Then one had to descend groping and step by step the narrow, difficult stairs, which, without a balustrade, were steep and dangerous. However, the last step was reached without accident, and there came a puff of fresh, damp open air. The landing stage was only a few steps off.

In the military port the imprisoned sea was fairly calm; but the violence of the wind made itself felt, and the sound of the waves furiously breaking on the shore was heard.

On reaching the sort of quay which runs along the castle walls, the Count of Thurn threw a rapid and questioning glance at the sky. It was full of heavy, low, hurrying clouds; and in the short space between them and the water came and went gusts of that terrible south-west wind which causes those wrecks and disasters of which the Gulf of Naples so often sees on its bad days.

The King noticed the Count's uneasy glance. "If the weather is too bad you could not take us on board to-night," he said.

"It is milord's order," replied the Count; "however, if Your Majesty absolutely declines...."

"The order! the order!" the King repeated, impatiently, "but it is risking our lives! Come, do you answer for us, Count?"

"I shall do all in a man's power, struggling against wind and sea, to conduct you on board the Vanguard."

"Faith! that is not an answer. Would you embark yourself on such a night — if you were in my place?"

"In Your Majesty's place, commanded only by circumstances and by God, I should think twice about it."

"Well," asked the impatient Queen, not daring, however, so mighty is the law of etiquette, to get into the boat before her husband, "well, what are we waiting for?"

"What are we waiting for?" cried the King. "Don't you hear what the Count says? It is bad weather; he does not answer for us, and there is no one, not excepting Jupiter straining at his leash, but would advise me to return to the palace."

"Return then, sir, and allow us all to be torn in pieces as you have seen one of your most faithful servants to-day. As for me, I prefer the sea and storms to-Naples and its population."

"I beg you to believe that I regret my faithful servant more than anyone, especially now that I know what to think of his death. But, as to Naples and its population, it is not I who would have anything to fear."

"Yes, I am aware of that. As it sees in you its representative, it adores you. But I, who have not the honour of enjoying its sympathies, I am going."

And despite the respect for etiquette, the Queen entered the boat first. The young Princesses and Prince Leopold, accustomed to obey the Queen rather than the King, followed her, as cygnets follow their mother. Little Prince Albert, only, let go the hand of Emma, ran to the King, and seizing his arm and pulling him towards the boat, said, “Come with us, papa.”

The King had no power of resistance, unless supported. He glanced round to see if he could find support from anyone; but at his look, which, however, had more of entreaty than of command in it, every eye was lowered. The Queen had allies — some of whom fear dominated, while others were wrapped in selfish considerations; the King had none at all. He felt completely alone, deserted; he bent his head, and letting the little Prince lead him, pulling his dog along the while, the only living thing which shared his reluctance to quit the shore of Naples, he stepped into the boat in his turn. Then, taking his seat, he said: “I am here, since you all wish it.”

The lieutenant without losing a moment cried “Cast off.” Two sailors on the quay pushed the boat off; the oars dipped and the illustrious fugitives headed towards the open, roaring sea. A few moments, and they were lost in the immensity of the night.

THE END

ROBIN HOOD THE OUTLAW

Translated by Alfred Allinson

First published in 1872, Dumas' account of the life and adventures of the English outlaw was split into two volumes, due to its large size. They are somewhat adapted and slightly compressed versions of Pierce Egan the Younger's *Robin Hood and Little John. Robin the Outlaw* is the second volume and concerns the later adventures of Robin Hood and his Merry Men, following his initial outlawing by the Baron of Nottingham.

Dumas, close to the time of publication

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CHAPTER I

In the early hours of a beautiful day in the month of August, Robin Hood, with a light heart and a song on his lips, was strolling down a narrow glade in Sherwood Forest. Suddenly a strong voice, whose capricious tones evidenced a profound ignorance of the rules of music, took up the amorous ballad Robin Hood was singing.

"By'r Lady!" muttered the young man, listening attentively to the stranger's song, "what an extraordinary thing. Those words are mine own composition, dating from my childhood, and I have never taught them to a soul."

Reflecting thus, Robin glided behind the trunk of a tree, to wait until the traveller had passed. The latter soon appeared. As he came opposite the oak tree at the foot of which Robin was sitting, he stopped and gazed into the depths of the wood.

"Ha! ha!" he said, perceiving through the thicket a magnificent herd of deer, "there are some old acquaintances; let us see whether mine eye is still true and my hand sure. By St. Paul! I shall give myself the pleasure of sending an arrow into yonder lusty fellow pacing along so stately."

Saying which, the stranger took an arrow from his quiver, and, adjusting it to his bow, aimed at the deer, wounding him mortally.

"Well done!" cried a laughing voice; "that was a right clever shot."

The stranger, taken by surprise, turned abruptly.

"Think you so, master?" said he, looking Robin up and down.

"Yea, you are most dexterous."

"Indeed!" added the other in a scornful tone.

"Never a doubt of it, and especially so for one little used to shoot at deer."

"How know you that I am not practised in this exercise?"

"By your fashion of holding the bow. I would wager what you will, Sir Stranger, that you are better versed in overthrowing a man on the field of battle than in stretching out the deer in the green wood."

"Excellently answered," laughed the stranger. "Is it permissible to ask the name of one whose eye is so penetrating as to judge by a single shot the difference betwixt the action of a soldier and that of a forester?"

"My name boots little in the question before us, Sir Stranger, but I can tell you my qualifications. I am one of the chief keepers of this Forest, and I do not intend to allow my helpless deer to be exposed to the attacks of any who take it into their heads to kill them, merely to try their skill."

"I care not much for your intentions, fair keeper," rejoined the stranger in a deliberate tone, "and I defy you to prevent me from shooting mine arrows as best me seemeth. I will kill the deer, I will kill the fawns, I will kill what I please."

"That will be easy, an if I do not oppose you, because you are a right good bowman," Robin replied. "And now I will make you a proposition. Hear me! I am chief of a band of men, stout-hearted, clear-witted, and well skilled in all the exercises of their trade. You seem to me a good fellow: if your heart be honest, if you be of a calm and conciliatory spirit, I shall be happy to enroll you in my company. Once you are one of us, you may hunt the deer; but if you refuse to join our brotherhood, I must ask you to quit the Forest."

"Truly, master keeper, you speak in a mighty overbearing tone. Come now, hear me in your turn. If you do not speedily show me your heels, I will give you such counsel as with no grand phrases will teach you to weigh your words; which counsel, pretty bird, will be a volley of blows from a cudgel plied pretty briskly."

"You beat me!" cried Robin, scornfully.

"Yea, I!"

"My lad," replied Robin, "I would fain not lose my temper, for thou wouldst, find it would go ill with thee then; but if thou dost not at once obey my order to quit the Forest, thou wilt be first vigorously chastised; thereafter we will e'en try the compass of thy neck and the strength of thy body on the highest branch of a tree in this Forest."

The stranger began to laugh.

"Beat me and hang me," said he, "that would be curious, if it were not impossible. Let us see, then. Get to work; I am waiting."

"I do not trouble myself to cudgel with mine own hands all the rogues I encounter, my friend," returned Robin. "I have those who fill that useful office in my name. I will summon them, and thou canst explain thyself to them."

Robin raised a horn to his lips, and was about to sound a vigorous call, when the stranger, who had quickly fitted an arrow to his bow, shouted

"Hold, or I kill you!"

Robin dropped his horn, seized his bow, and leaping towards the stranger with incredible nimbleness, cried "Madman! Dost not see with what a power thou wouldst strive? Before thou couldst strike me, I should have already smitten thee, and the death thou wouldst aim at me would have recoiled upon thyself. Be reasonable; we are strangers to each other, and for no good cause we treat each other as enemies. The bow is a murderous weapon: replace the arrow in thy quiver, and, since thou wilt play with the quarter-staff, so be it. I accept thy challenge."

"The quarter-staff then!" repeated the stranger; "and let him who is able to knock the other on the head, be not only the victor, but also free to rule the fate of his adversary."

"So be it," Robin returned. "Take heed of the consequences of the compact thou proposest; if I make thee cry for mercy, I shall have the right of enrolling thee in my band."

"Agreed!"

"Very well; and may the best man win the day."

"Amen!" said the stranger.

The trial of strength commenced. The blows, liberally administered on both sides, soon overwhelmed the stranger, who did not succeed in hitting Robin once. Indignant and breathless, the poor youth flung down his weapon.

"Cease!" he cried. "I have had enough of this."

"You own yourself beaten?" asked Robin.

"No; but I see you are much stronger than I am. You are accustomed to wield a cudgel, which gives you too great an advantage; the match should be as equal as possible. Can you use a sword?"

"Yea," replied Robin.

"Will you continue the struggle with that weapon?"

"Certainly."

They drew their swords. Each was an expert swordsman, and when they had fought for a quarter of an hour, neither had succeeded in wounding the other.

"Stop!" cried Robin, suddenly.

"You are tired?" asked the stranger, with a smile of triumph.

"Yea," Robin replied frankly; "since to me the sword is not a pleasant weapon. The quarter-staff is the thing; its blows are less dangerous and offer some sport; the sword hath something savage and cruel about it. My fatigue, though real," Robin went on, scrutinising the face of the stranger, whose head was covered by a cap which partly concealed his forehead, "is not my sole reason for seeking a truce. Since I have stood facing thee, memories of my childhood have surged up within me; the look of thy large blue eyes is not unfamiliar to me. Thy voice recalls that of a friend, my heart is irresistibly attracted towards thee. Tell me thy name; if thou art he whom I love and long for with all the yearning of a tender friendship, thou art welcome a thousand times. I will love thee for thyself and for the dear memories thou dost recall."

"You speak with a good nature which attracts me, Sir Forester," replied the stranger, "but, to my great sorrow, I cannot grant your reasonable request. I am not at liberty to do so; my name is a secret which prudence counsels me to guard with care."

"You have nothing to fear from me," replied Robin; "I am one of those whom men call outlaws. Moreover, I am incapable of betraying the confidence of one who trusts me, and I despise the baseness of him who would reveal even a secret involuntarily surprised. Tell me your name?"

The stranger still hesitated.

"I will be your friend," added Robin, with an air of frankness.

"Agreed," replied the stranger. "I am called William Gamwell."

Robin uttered a cry.

"Will, Will merry Will Scarlett?"

"Yea."

"And I am Robin Hood!"

"Robin!" cried the young man, as he fell into the arms of his friend; "what joy!"

The two young men embraced each other heartily; then, with looks of unspeakable delight, they gazed at each other with an affecting wonder.

"And I threatened thee!" said Will.

"And I did not recognise thee!" added Robin.

"I wished to kill thee!" cried Will.

"And I cudgelled thee!" continued Robin, breaking into a laugh.

"Bah I think no more of that. Give me news quick of... Maude."

"Maude is well, very well."

"Is she...?"

"Always a charming girl, who loves thee, Will, and only thee in all the world. She hath kept her heart for thee; she will give thee her hand. She hath mourned thy absence, the dear creature; thou hast suffered much, my poor Will, but thou wilt be happy, if thou dost still love the good and beautiful Maude."

"I love her! How can you question it, Robin? Ah! yes, I love her, and God bless her for not having forgotten me! I have never ceased thinking of her for a single moment; her dear image was ever in my heart, and gave it strength. It was the courage of the soldier on the field of battle, and the consolation of the prisoner in the dark dungeon of the State prison. Maude, dear Robin, hath been my thought, my dream, my hope, my future. Through her I have been able to bear the most cruel privations, the most grievous hardships. God implanted in my heart an unshakeable confidence in the future. I felt sure of seeing Maude again, of becoming her husband, and of spending the last years of my life with her."

"That patient hope is on the point of being fulfilled, dear Will," said Robin.

"Yea, I trust so, or rather, I am certain of it. To prove to thee, friend Robin, how much I thought of the dear child, I will tell thee a dream I had in Normandy, a dream which lingers still in my thoughts, though it dates back nearly a month. I was in the depths of a prison, my arms bound, my body loaded with chains, and I saw Maude a few paces from me, pale as death and covered with blood. The poor girl held out supplicating hands toward me, and her mouth, with its blood-stained lips, murmured plaintive words, the sense of which I could not comprehend, but I saw that she suffered cruelly and was calling me to her aid. As I have just said, I was bound with chains. I rolled upon the ground, and in my helplessness I bit the iron bands which gripped my arms; in a word, I made superhuman efforts to drag myself to Maude. Suddenly the chains which entwined me slackened gently, then fell off. I leapt to my feet and ran to Maude. I took the poor bleeding girl to my heart; I covered with burning kisses her wan, white cheeks, and little by little the blood, arrested in its course, began to circulate, slowly at first, then regularly and naturally. Maude's lips gained colour, she opened her great black eyes, and cast upon my face a look, at once so grateful and so tender that I was touched to the quick; my heart leapt within me, and a deep groan escaped my burning bosom. I suffered, but at the same time I was very happy. Awakening soon followed this deep emotion, and I leapt from my bed with the firm resolution of returning to England. I longed to see Maude again. Maude who must be unhappy. Maude who must be in need of me. I went at once to my Captain; he had been my father's steward, and I thought I had some interest with him. To him I disclosed, not the reason of my desire to return to England, for he would have laughed at my fears, but the desire alone. He refused harshly to give me leave. This first rebuff did not deter me. I was like a man possessed, mad to see Maude once more. I besought this man to whom I had once given orders; I entreated him to grant my wish. You will pity me, Robin," added Will, blushing; "no matter, I will tell you all. I threw myself on my knees before him; my weakness made him smile, and, with a brutal kick, he threw me on my back. Then, Robin, I rose. I was wearing my sword; I drew it from its scabbard, and, without hesitation or reflection, I slew the wretch. Ever since I have been pursued, but I hope my trail is lost. That is why, dear Robin, taking you for a stranger, I would not give you my name; but thank Heaven for leading me to you! Now tell me about Maude; does she still live at Gamwell Hall?"

"At Gamwell Hall, my dear Will?" repeated Robin. "Then thou dost not know what hath happened?"

"I know nothing. But what hath happened? Thou dost frighten me!"

"Nay! never be uneasy; the trouble which befell thy family hath been partly repaired. Time and resignation have effaced all traces of a painful deed; Gamwell village and Hall have both been destroyed."

"Destroyed!" cried Will. "Holy Virgin! And my mother, Robin; my father and my poor sisters?"

"Are all safe and sound; do not be alarmed! Thy family are now living at Barnsdale. Later on I will tell thee the fatal story in detail; for the present let it suffice that this cruel destruction, which was the work of the Normans, hath cost them dear. We killed two-thirds of the troops sent by King Henry."

"By King Henry!" exclaimed William. Then he added hesitatingly, "Thou art, thou sayest, Robin, chief keeper of the Forest, and naturally in the service of the King."

"Not quite, fair cousin," returned the young man, with a smile. "It is the Normans who pay me for my supervision at least, those who are rich, for I take naught from the poor. I am indeed keeper of the Forest, but on my own account and that of my jolly companions. In a word, William, I am lord of Sherwood Forest, and I will maintain my rights and privileges against all pretenders.”

“I do not understand thee, Robin,” said Will, in utter amazement.

“I will explain myself more clearly.” Saying which, Robin lifted his horn to his lips and blew three piercing blasts.

Scarce had the depths of the wood been stirred by the strident notes, ere William saw issue from brake and glade, to right and left, a hundred men all clad alike in a neat garb, whose green colour well became their martial forms.

These men, armed with bows and arrows, shields and short swords, ranged themselves silently around their leader. William stared in amaze, and looked at Robin with an air of stupefaction. The young man amused himself for a moment in watching the astonishment and surprise his cousin displayed at the respectful attitude of the men summoned by the blast of his horn, then, laying a muscular hand on Will’s shoulder, he said laughingly

“My lads, here is a man who made me cry mercy in an encounter with swords.”

“He!” cried the men, examining Will with marked curiosity.

“Yea, he beat me; and I am proud of his victory, for he hath a sure hand and a brave heart.”

Little John, who seemed less delighted by William’s prowess than Robin had been, advanced to the middle of the circle, and said to the young man

“Stranger, if thou hast made the valiant Robin Hood ask for quarter, thou must be of superlative strength; natheless, it shall not be said that thou hast had the glory of beating the chief of the merry foresters without having been thrashed by his lieutenant. I am a good hand with the quarter-staff wilt play me? If thou canst make me cry, ‘Hold, enough!’ I will proclaim thee the best blade in all the country side.”

“My good Little John,” said Robin, “I wager a quiver of arrows against a bow of yew that this brave lad will be victor once again.”

“I take the double stake, master,” replied John, “and if the stranger bears off the prize, he shall be known not only as the best blade, but as the most skilful cudgel-player in all merry England beside.”

On hearing Robin Hood address the tall swarthy young man before him as “Little John,” Will felt his heart beat quickly, though he showed no emotion. He composed his face, pulled down the cap which covered his head on to his brows, and, answering with a smile the signals Robin was making him, he saluted his adversary gravely, and, armed with his quarter-staff, awaited the first onslaught.

"What! Little John," cried Will, as the young man was about to begin the contest, "wouldst fight with Will Scarlett with 'merry William,' as thou wast wont to call him?"

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Little John, as he let fall his quarter-staff. "That voice! That look!"

He took a few steps forward, and, staggering, leant on Robin's shoulder for support.

"Well! that voice is mine, Cousin John," cried Will, throwing his cap on the grass; "look at me!"

The long red locks of the young man clustered in silky curls around his cheeks, and Little John, after gazing in silent joy at the laughing face of his cousin, threw himself upon him, clipping him fairly in his arms, as he said, with an expression of unutterable tenderness "Welcome to merry England, Will, dear Will; welcome to the land of thy fathers, thou who, by thy return, bringest it happiness and content. To-morrow the inhabitants of Barnsdale will make merry; to-morrow their arms will be around him they believed lost for ever. The hour which brings thee back to us is an hour blessed of Heaven, beloved Will; and I am glad to... to... see thee again. Thou must not think that because thou seest tears on my face, that I am chicken-hearted, Will. No, no; I am not weeping. I am happy, very happy."

Poor John could say no more; he clasped Will convulsively in his arms and continued to weep silently.

William shared in the affecting delight of his cousin, and Robin Hood left them for a moment in each other's arms.

Their first emotion calmed, Little John gave Will, as briefly as possible, the details of the frightful catastrophe which had driven his family from Gamwell Hall. The tale finished, Robin and John conducted Will to the different hiding-places which the band had made for themselves in the Forest, and, at the young man's request, he was enrolled in the troop with the title of lieutenant, which placed him in the same rank as Little John.

Next morning, Will expressed a wish to go to Barnsdale. Robin perfectly understood this very natural desire, and he at once prepared to accompany the young man, as did Little John also. For two days previously Will's brothers had been at Barnsdale, preparing a feast to celebrate Sir Guy's birthday, and by William's return this would be made a scene of great rejoicings.

After giving some orders to his men, Robin Hood and his two friends took the road to Mansfield, where they would find horses. They started blithely on their way, Robin singing pretty ballads in his true and tuneful voice, while Will, intoxicated with joy, danced along beside him, taking up at random the refrain of his songs. Little John even ventured on a wrong note sometimes, whereat Will shouted with laughter, and Robin joined in his mirth. If a stranger had seen our friends, he would certainly have taken them for the guests of a too-generous host, so true is it that intoxication of the heart can resemble closely the intoxication of wine.

At a short distance from Mansfield their high spirits received a sudden check. Three men in the garb of foresters emerged from behind a group of trees and placed themselves across the road, as if determined to bar their way.

Robin Hood and his companions stopped for an instant. Then the young man scrutinised the strangers, and asked imperiously "Who are ye, and what do ye here?"

"I was just about to put the same questions," replied one of the three men, a sturdy, square-shouldered fellow, who, armed with quarter-staff and dagger, seemed quite prepared to stand any attack.

"Verily?" replied Robin. "Ah, well! I am very glad to have spared you the trouble; for had you permitted yourself to ask me anything so impertinent, it is probable that I might have responded in such fashion as to make you regret your audacity for ever and a day."

"Thou speakest proudly, my lad," replied the Forester, in a mocking tone.

"Less proudly than I should have acted, had you been so impertinent as to question me; I do not reply, I question. Therefore I ask, for the last time, who are ye, and what are ye doing here? One would think, by your haughty mien, that Sherwood Forest belonged to you."

"God be praised, my lad, but thou hast a good tongue. Ah! thou dost me the favour of promising me a thrashing, if I question thee in turn? 'Tis bravely boasted! Now, jovial stranger, I am about to give thee a lesson in courtesy and to reply to thy request. That done, I will make known to thee how I chastise fools and impudent rascals."

"Done!" returned Robin, gaily. "Tell me thy name and title; then beat me, an thou canst; I should like it."

“I am the keeper of this part of the Forest; my rights of supervision extend from Mansfield as far as a wide crossroad about seven miles from hence. These two men are my assistants. I hold my commission from King Henry, and by his orders I protect the deer against ruffians like you. Dost take me, sirrah?”

“Perfectly; but if you are keeper of the Forest, what am I and my companions? Up to this present I was thought to be the only man possessing the rights of that title. True it is, I do not hold them by the kindness of King Henry, but entirely of my own will, which is all-powerful here, because it is called the right of the strongest.”

“Thou the chief keeper of Sherwood Forest!” replied the Forester, scornfully. “Thou art joking; art a common rogue and vagabond no less.”

“My good friend,” Robin returned quickly, “you seek to overawe me with your own importance; but you are not the keeper whose name you are attempting to assume. I know the man it belongeth to of rights.”

“Ho! ho!” laughed the keeper; “canst tell me his name?”

“Certainly. He is called John Cockle, the fat miller of Mansfield.”

“I am his son, and bear the name of Much.”

“You are Much? I do not believe it.”

“He speaks truly,” put in Little John. “I know him by sight. He hath been pointed out to me as one well skilled in handling a cudgel.”

“Thou hast not been misinformed, forester, and, if thou knowest me, I can say the same of thee. Hast a face and figure ‘tis impossible to forget.”

“You know my name?” queried the young man.

“Yea, master John.”

“As for me, I am Robin Hood, Keeper Much.”

“I suspected as much, my good fellow, and I am delighted to meet thee. A handsome reward is offered to him who can lay hands on thy person. I am naturally ambitious, and the reward, which is for a large amount, would be quite to my taste. To-day I have the opportunity of catching thee, and I do not mean to let it escape me.”

“You are quite right, gallows purveyor,” replied Robin, in a tone of contempt. “Come, off with your jacket, draw your sword. I am your man.”

“Stop!” cried Little John. “Much is more expert in handling a cudgel than in drawing a sword; let us fight all against all. I will take Much; Robin and you, William, take the others, and ‘twill be an equal match.”

“Done,” replied the keeper, “for it shall never be said that Much, the miller of Mansfield’s son, ran away from Robin Hood and his merry men.”

“Well answered,” cried Robin. “Come, Little John, take Much, as you wish to have him for your foe; and I will take this lusty rascal. Art willing to fight me?” Robin asked the man whom chance had given him as opponent.

“Right willing, brave outlaw.”

“To work, then, and may the Holy Mother of God give the victory to them that deserve her aid.”

“Amen,” said Little John. “The Holy Virgin doth never desert the helpless in the hour of need.”

“She doth forsake no one,” said Much.

“No one,” said Robin, making the sign of the cross.

Preparations for the contest being cheerfully completed, Little John cried aloud:

“Begin!”

“Begin!” repeated Will and Robin.

An old ballad, which has preserved the memory of this combat, describes it thus:

“Robin and Will and Little John
Had fought from eight till noon,
All on a lovely summer day
In the leafy month of June,
And never gave the foemen chance
To injure them with sword or lance.”

“Little John,” panted Much, after asking for quarter, “I had long heard tell of thy skill and gallantry, and I desired to match myself against thee. I have had my wish; thou hast beaten me, and thy victory will teach me a salutary lesson in modesty. I considered myself a worthy adversary, and thou hast e’en taught me I am but a blundering fool.”

“Thou art an excellent jouster, friend Much,” replied Little John, shaking the hand held out to him by the keeper, “and well deservest thy reputation for valour.”

“I thank thee for thy compliment, forester,” returned Much, “but I consider it more polite than sincere. Thou supposest, perhaps, that my vanity would suffer under an unexpected defeat, but thou mayest undeceive thyself; I am not mortified at having been beaten by a man of thy worth.”

“Bravely spoken, valiant miller’s son!” cried Robin, cheerily. “Thou givest proof that thou dost possess the most enviable of all riches a good heart and a Saxon soul. Only an honest man would accept cheerfully and without the least bitterness a wound to his self-esteem. Give me thy hand, Much, and forgive the name that I called thee when thou madest me the confidant of thy covetous ambition. I did not recognise thee, and my slight was directed not at thy person but at thy words. Wilt take a glass of Rhine wine? We will drink to our lucky meeting and future friendship.”

“Here is my hand, Robin Hood; I offer it with all my heart. I have often heard thy praises sung; I know that thou art a noble outlaw, and that thou dost extend a generous protection to the poor. Thou art even the friend of those that should hate thee worst, thine enemies the Normans. They speak of thee with esteem, and I have never heard any one seriously blame thine actions. Thou hast been stripped of thy possessions; thou hast been banished; honest men should hold thee dear, because misfortune hath been a guest in thy home.”

“I thank thee for those words, friend Much; I will not forget them, and I hope that thou wilt give me the pleasure of thy company as far as Mansfield.”

“I am with thee, Robin,” replied Much.

“And I too,” said the man who had fought with Robin.

“I say the same,” added Will’s adversary.

Arm in arm they took their way together toward the town, laughing and conversing as they went.

“My dear Much,” asked Robin, as they entered Mansfield, “are thy friends discreet?”

“Why do you ask?”

“Because their silence is necessary for my security. As thou mayst well believe, I am here disguised; and if my presence at a Mansfield inn were to be made known by an indiscreet word, the dwelling of mine host would promptly be surrounded by soldiers, and I should be obliged to fight or fly, neither of which would suit me to-day. I am expected in Yorkshire, and I want not to delay my departure.”

“I can answer for the discretion of my comrades. As to mine own, how canst doubt it? but I think, good Robin, thou dost exaggerate the danger; the curiosity of the citizens of Mansfield is the only thing to fear. They will dog thy steps, so anxious are they to see with their own eyes the celebrated Robin Hood, the hero of all the ballads the maidens sing."

"The poor outlaw, you mean to say, Master Much," replied the young man, bitterly. "Fear not to call me so; the shame of that name falls not on me, but rather on the head of him who pronounced a sentence as cruel as it was unjust."

"Very good, my friend; but whatever the name added to thine own, they love and respect it."

Robin wrung the honest fellow's hand.

Without attracting any attention, they reached an inn a little way out of the town, and installed themselves at a table, which the host quickly covered with half a dozen long-necked bottles full of that good Rhine wine which loosens the tongue and opens the heart.

The bottles succeeded each other rapidly, and the conversation became so unreserved and confidential that Much experienced a wish to prolong it indefinitely. Consequently he proposed to join Robin Hood's band; and his companions, enchanted by the delightful descriptions of a life of freedom under the great trees of Sherwood Forest, followed the example of their leader, and engaged themselves with heart and lip to follow Robin Hood. He accepted the flattering offer made to him, and Much, who wished to start at once, asked his new chief for permission to bid his family good-bye. Little John was to await his return, conduct the three men to the hiding-place in the Forest, instal them there, and once more take the road to Barnsdale, where he would find William and Robin. These several arrangements concluded, the conversation took another turn.

Some minutes before the hour of their departure from the inn, two men entered the room in which they sat. The first of the men glanced rapidly at Robin Hood, looked at little John, then fixed his attention on Will Scarlett. This attention was so intense and so tenacious that the young man noticed it himself, and he was about to question the new-comer, when the latter, perceiving that he had roused a feeling of uneasiness in the young man's mind, turned away his eyes, swallowed a glass of wine at a gulp, and left the room with his companion.

Entirely absorbed in the delight caused by the hope of seeing Maude before nightfall, Will neglected to inform his companions of what had occurred, and mounted horse and rode away with Robin Hood without giving it another thought. As they went on their way, the two friends concocted a plan for Will's entry into the castle.

Robin wished to appear there alone, and prepare the family for Will's return; but the impatient youth would not allow this.

"My dear Robin," said he, "do not leave me alone; my emotion is such that it would be impossible for me to remain silent and tranquil a few steps from my father's house. I am so much altered, and my face bears such visible traces of a hard life, that it is not to be feared my mother will recognise me at a first glance. Present me as a stranger, as a friend of Will's; I shall thus have the happiness of seeing my dear parents the sooner, and of making myself known when they have been prepared for my arrival."

Robin acceded to Will's wishes, and the two young men presented themselves at Barnsdale Castle together.

The whole family was assembled in the hall. Robin was received with open arms, and the Knight extended to the stranger as he took him to be a cordial and affectionate hospitality.

Winifred and Barbara seated themselves near Robin, and overwhelmed him with questions, for he was usually an echo of the news of the outer world to the young girls.

The absence of Maude and Marian put Robin at his ease, and after answering his cousins' questions, he rose and said, turning to Sir Guy

"Uncle, I have good news for you, news which will make you very happy."

"Your visit alone is a great joy to my old heart, Robin Hood," replied the old man.

"Robin Hood is a messenger from heaven," cried pretty Barbara, shaking her clustering blonde tresses coquettishly.

"At my next visit, fair Barbara," Robin returned gaily, "I will be a messenger of love, for I will e'en bring you a husband."

"And I will welcome him right gladly, Robin," replied the girl, laughing merrily.

"You will do well, cousin, for he will be worthy of your kindest welcome. I will not draw his portrait, but will content myself with saying that, so soon as ever your pretty eyes light upon him, you will say to Winifred, 'There, sister, there is the right man for Barbara Gamwell.'"

"Are you quite sure of that, Robin?"

“Perfectly sure, little witch.”

“Well, to decide that, we must know all about the matter, Robin. Though you might not think it, I am very particular, and the young man will have to be very nice to please me.”

“What do you mean by ‘very nice’?”

“Like you, cousin.”

“Little flatterer!”

“I say what I think, and I cannot help it, if you call it flattery. And I do not only require my husband to be as handsome as you are, but he must have your good heart too and kindly ways.”

“You approve of me, then, Barbara?”

“Certainly; you suit me exactly.”

“I am both pained and pleased to have such luck, cousin mine; but, alas! if you are nourishing the secret hope of winning me, allow me to lament your folly. I am already pledged, Barbara pledged to two people.”

“I know those two people, Robin.”

“Really, cousin?”

“Yea, an if I liked to name them.”

“Ah! I beseech you not to betray my secret, Mistress Barbara.”

“Never fear, I will spare your blushes. But to return to me, dear Robin; I consent, if you will graciously grant me this favour, to be the third of your lady-loves, or even the fourth, for I presume that there are at least three other damosels awaiting the felicity of bearing your illustrious name.”

“You little scoffer,” said the young man, laughing, “you do not deserve the affection I feel for you. Nevertheless, I will keep my promise, and within a few days I will bring you a charming young man.”

“If your friend be not young, lively, and handsome, I will have never a word to say to him, Robin; remember that.”

“He is all that you could wish for.”

“Very well; now let us hear the news that you were on the point of telling my father, ere you bethought you to offer me a husband.”

“Mistress Barbara, I was about to tell my uncle, my aunt, and you too, dear Winifred, that I had news of some one very dear to your hearts.”

“Of my brother Will?” said Barbara.

“Yea, cousin.”

“Ah, what joy! Well?”

"Well, that young man who is looking at you so shyly, delighted as he is to be in the presence of so charming a girl, saw William only a few days agone."

"Is my boy well?" asked Sir Guy, in trembling tones.

"Is he happy?" questioned Lady Gamwell, clasping her hands.

"Where is he?" added Winifred.

"Why does he stay away from us?" said Barbara, fixing her eyes, which were full of tears, upon the face of Robin's companion.

Poor William was unable to speak a word for the lump in his throat and the beating of his heart. A minute's silence followed these searching questions. Barbara continued to gaze pensively at the young man, then suddenly she uttered a cry, threw herself upon the stranger, putting her arms around him, as she sobbed out

"It is Will, it is Will! I know him! Dear Will, how glad I am to see you!"

And dropping her head upon her brother's shoulder, she began to weep convulsively.

Lady Gamwell, her sons, and Winifred and Barbara, pressed round the young man, while Sir Guy, though he tried to appear calm, sank into an armchair and wept like a child.

Will's young brothers seemed intoxicated with joy. After giving vent to a terrific hurrah! they picked William up in their strong arms and hugged him until he was nearly stifled.

Robin took advantage of the general attention being taken off himself to leave the room, and went to look for Maude. Mistress Lindsay was in very delicate health, requiring the greatest care, so that it might have been dangerous to announce William's return too suddenly to her.

As he crossed the apartment adjoining Maude's, Robin met Marian.

"What is a-foot in the Castle, Robin dear?" asked the girl, when her lover's tender greeting was over. "Just now I heard what methought were shouts of joy."

"And so they were, dear Marian, to celebrate the return of one ardently longed for."

"Whose return?" asked the girl, tremulously "not my brother's?"

"Alas! no, dear Marian," returned Robin, taking the girl's hand; "as yet God hath not sent Allan back to us; but Will you remember Will Scarlett, merry William?"

"Of course I do, and I am right glad to hear that he is back again safe and sound. Where is he?"

"With his mother; when I left the hall his brothers were fighting to embrace him. I am looking for Maude."

"She is in her room. Shall I tell her to come down?"

"No, I must go to her, for the poor child must be prepared for William's visit. My mission is not easy to fulfil," Robin went on with a laugh, "for the labyrinths of Sherwood Forest are much better known to me than the mysterious recesses of a woman's heart."

"Why so modest, Master Robin?" replied Marian, gaily. "You know better than any one how to set about fathoming a woman's heart."

"Really, Marian, I do believe that my cousins, you and Maude, are all in league to try and make me vain; you vie with one another in showering compliments upon me."

"There is no doubt about it, Master Robin," said Marian, shaking her finger at the young man. "You lay yourself out to make Winifred and Barbara fond of you. What? you are trying to break your little cousins' hearts? Very well, then, I am delighted to hear it, and I will in my turn try the effect of my eyes on handsome Will Scarlett."

"I give my consent, dear Marian, but I warn you that you will have a dangerous rival. Maude is devotedly loved, she will defend her own honour; and poor Will will blush sorely when he finds himself betwixt two such charming women."

"If William cannot blush better than you do, Robin, I need not be afraid of causing him that embarrassing emotion."

"Hah! hah!" laughed Robin, "you mean, Mistress Marian, that I know not how to blush?"

"Nay! I mean that you have forgotten how, which is quite a different matter. Once upon a time, I remember, a brilliant scarlet tinted your cheeks."

"When did that memorable event take place?"

"The day when first we met in Sherwood Forest."

"May I tell you why I blushed, Marian?"

"I am afraid to say yea, Robin, for I see a twinkle in your eye and the outline of a wicked smile on your lips."

"You dread my reply, but at the same time you await it impatiently, Marian."

“Not at all.”

“That’s a pity, for I thought I should please you by divulging the secret of my first and last blush.”

“You always please me when you talk about yourself, Robin,” said Marian, with a smile.

“That day when I had the happiness of taking you to my father’s house, I had the greatest desire to behold your face, which was hidden within the folds of a great hood, leaving visible only the limpid brightness of your eyes. Walking shyly beside you, I said to myself, ‘If yonder wench’s face be as sweet as her eyes, I will e’en be her lover.’”

“What, Robin, at sixteen you dreamt of making a woman love you?”

“I did i’faith; and just as I was contemplating devoting my whole life to you, your adorable face, shaking off the sombre veil which had hidden it from mine eyes, appeared in all its radiant splendour. So ardently did I gaze upon you that your cheeks became suffused with blushes. Something within me cried, ‘This maid shall be thy wife.’ The blood which had rushed to my heart mounted to my face, and I felt that I must love you. There, dear Marian, that is the story of my first and last blush. Since that day,” Robin went on after a moment of affecting silence, “this hope, heaven-born promise of a happy future, hath been the consolation and support of mine existence, I hope and I believe.”

Sounds of merriment from the Great Hall below reached the room above, where hand-in-hand the two young people continued to exchange tender whispered confidences.

“Quick, dear Robin,” said Marian, pressing her lovely forehead to the young man’s lips, “go to Maude; I must go to welcome Will, and tell him that you are with his betrothed.”

Robin soon reached Maude’s room, and found the girl within.

“I felt almost sure I heard the shouts of joy which announced your arrival, dear Robin,” she said, as she offered him a seat. “Excuse me for not having come down to the withdrawing room, but I feel ill at ease and almost an intruder amongst the general rejoicings.”

“How is that, Maude?”

“Because I am the only one for whom you never have any good news.”

“Your turn will come, dear Maude.”

“I have lost courage, Robin, and I am filled with a feeling of deadly sadness. I like you with all my heart, I am very glad to see you, and yet I give you no proof of my affection, nor do I convey to you how agreeable your presence is; sometimes, dear Robin, I even try to avoid you."

"To avoid me?" cried the young man, in a tone of surprise.

"Yea, Robin, for when I hear you giving Sir Guy news of his sons, or giving a message from Little John to Winifred, or one from her brothers to Barbara, I say to myself, 'I am always forgotten; I am the only one to whom Robin never brings anything.'"

"Never anything, Maude?"

"Oh, I am not speaking of the charming presents which you bring, and a very large proportion of which you always give to your sister Maude, thinking thus to compensate her for the lack of news. Your kind heart wishes to console me, dear Robin, but alas! I cannot be comforted."

"You are a naughty little girl," said Robin, in a bantering tone. "What, do you complain that you never receive from any one tokens of friendship or remembrance? Ungrateful girl, do I not bring you news from Nottingham at each of my visits? Who was it, who, at the risk of losing his head, paid frequent visits to your brother Hal? Who, at the still greater risk of losing his heart, exposed himself bravely to the murderous fire of two beautiful eyes? In order to please you, Maude, I brave the danger of a tete-a-tete with the lovely Grace, I submit to the charms of her gracious smile, I suffer the touch of her pretty hand, I even kiss her beautiful brow; and for whom, I ask you, do I thus endanger my peace of mind? For you, Maude, and for you alone."

Maude began to laugh.

"I must indeed be of an ungrateful nature," said she, "for the pleasure I feel in hearing you speak of Halbert and his wife doth not satisfy the desire of my heart."

"Very well, then, Madam, I will not tell you that I saw Hal last week, that he charged me to kiss you on both cheeks; nor will I tell you that Grace loves you with all her heart, and that her little daughter Maude an angel of goodness wishes her pretty godmother a very good day."

"Thank you a thousand times, dear Robin, for your charming manner of telling me nothing. I am quite content to remain thus in ignorance of what is happening at Nottingham; but, by the way, have you told Marian of the attention you paid to Halbert's charming wife?"

"What a spiteful question, Maude! Well, to give you a proof my conscience hath naught to reproach itself withal, I will tell you that I have confided to Marian but a small part of my appreciation of the charms of the beautiful Grace. However, as I have a great admiration for her eyes, I was very careful not to be too expansive upon the subject."

"What! you deceived Marian? It would serve you right were I to go at once and reveal to her the full extent of your wickedness."

"We will go together presently, and I will offer you my arm; but before we go to Marian, I wish to talk to you."

"What have you to tell me, Robin?"

"Something very nice, and which, I am sure, will give you great pleasure."

"Then you have news of... of..." And the young girl looked at Robin with questioning eyes and an expression of mingled doubt, hope, and joy, while the blood rushed into her face.

"Of whom, Maude?"

"Ah! you are teasing me," said the poor girl, sadly.

"No, dear little friend, I really have something very good to tell you."

"Tell me quick, then."

"What do you think of a husband?" asked Robin.

"A husband? What a strange question!"

"Not at all, if that husband were..."

"Will! Will! You have heard news of Will! For mercy's sake, Robin, never play with my heart; it beats with such violence as to pain me. I am listening. Speak, Robin; is dear William sound and well?"

"Without a doubt, since he wishes to call you his dear little wife at the earliest possible moment."

"You have seen him? Where is he? When will he be here?"

"I have seen him; he will soon come."

"Holy Mother of God, I thank thee!" cried Maude, clasping her hands and raising her tearful eyes to heaven. "How glad I shall be to see him!" added the girl. "But..." continued Maude, as her eyes turned irresistibly towards the door, on the threshold of which stood a young man, "it is he! it is he!"

Maude, with a cry of intense delight, threw herself into William's arms and swooned away.

"Poor dear girl!" murmured the young man, in a trembling voice, "the emotion hath been too much for her, too sudden; she hath fainted. Robin, hold her up a little; I am weak as a child, I can hardly stand."

Robin took Maude gently from William’s arms and carried her to a couch. As for poor William, with his head hidden in his hands, he wept bitterly. Maude soon came to herself, and her first thought was for Will, her first look for him. He knelt at her feet, and, putting his arms round her waist, murmured tenderly the name of his beloved

“Maude! Maude!”

“William! dear William!”

“I want to speak to Marian,” said Robin, smiling. “Good-bye; I will leave you together. Do not quite forget others who love you.”

Maude held out her hand to the young man, and William looked gratefully at him.

“Here I am, back at last, dear Maude,” said Will. “Are you glad to see me?”

“How can you ask, William? Oh yes, I am glad, and, more than that, I am happy, very happy.”

“You don’t want me to go away again?”

“Did I ever want you to?”

“No; but it depends on you alone whether I stay here for good or only as a visitor.”

“What do you mean?”

“Do you remember the last conversation we had together?”

“Yea, William dear.”

“I left you with a heavy heart that day, dear Maude; I was in despair. Robin noticed my distress, and, urged by his inquiries, I told him everything. I thus learned the name of him you once loved...”

“Do not let us speak of my girlish follies,” interrupted Maude, twining her arms round William’s neck; “the past belongs to God.”

“Yea, dear Maude, to God alone, and the present to us, is it not so?”

“Yea, to us and to God. Perhaps it might be as well for your peace of mind, dear William,” added the young girl, “to have a clear, frank, and decided idea of my relations with Robin Hood.”

“I know as much as I desire to know, dear Maude; Robin told me all that had passed betwixt you.”

A delicate pink flooded the girl’s face.

“If your departure had been less hurried,” she replied, hiding her blushing face on the young man’s shoulder, “you would have learnt that, deeply touched by the patient tenderness of your love, I longed to return it. During your absence I got into the habit of regarding Robin as a brother, and to-day I ask myself, Will, if my heart ever beat for any one but you."

"Then it is quite true that you love me a little, Maude?" said William, clasping his hands, and with tears in his eyes.

"A little! No; but very much."

"Oh, Maude, how happy you make me! You see, I was right to hope, to wait, to be patient, to say to myself, 'The day will come when I shall be loved.' We are going to be married, are we not?"

"Dear Will!"

"Say yea, or say, rather, 'I want to marry my good William.'"

"'I want to marry my good William,'" repeated the girl, obediently.

"Give me your hand, dear Maude."

"Here it is."

William kissed the little hand of his betrothed passionately.

"When shall our wedding be, Maude? he asked.

"I do not know, my dear, some day."

"Of course, but it must be settled; suppose we say to-morrow?"

"To-morrow, Will! You don't mean it; 'tis impossible."

"Impossible! Why impossible?"

"Because it is too unexpected, too soon."

"Happiness never comes too soon, dear Maude; and could we be married at this very moment, I should be the happiest of men. As we must wait until tomorrow, why, I resign myself to it. But it is settled, is it not, that to-morrow you will be my wife?"

"To-morrow!" cried the girl.

"Yea; and for two reasons, the first being that we shall keep my father's seventy-sixth birthday, the second that my mother wishes to celebrate my return with great rejoicings. The merrymaking would be quite complete, if still further brightened by the accomplishment of our mutual desires."

"Your family, dear William, are not prepared to receive me as one of their number, and your father would perhaps say..."

"My father," interrupted Will "my father will say that you are an angel, that he loves you, and that you have long been his daughter. Ah, Maude! you do not know the good and kind old man, if you doubt his joy at the happiness of his son."

"You have such a gift of persuasion, my dear Will, that I agree with you entirely."

“Then you consent, Maude?”

“I suppose I must, dear Will.”

“You are not forced to do so, Madam.”

“Really, William, you are very difficult to please; probably you would prefer to hear me reply, ‘I consent with all my heart.’”

“To marry you to-morrow,” added Will.

“‘To marry you to-morrow,’” repeated Maude, laughing.

“Very well; I am content. Come, dear little woman, let us go and announce our approaching marriage to our friends.”

William took Maude’s arm, drew it through his own, and, kissing the girl, he led her towards the Great Hall, where the whole family was still assembled.

Lady Gamwell and her husband gave Maude their blessing, Winifred and Barbara greeted her by the sweet name of sister, and Will’s brothers embraced her enthusiastically.

The preparations for the wedding now occupied the ladies, who, all animated by the same desire of ministering to the happiness of Will and to the beauty of Maude, set themselves at once to make a charming dress for the young girl.

The morrow came slowly, as do all impatiently expected to-morrows. From early morning the courtyard of the Castle had been furnished with innumerable casks of ale, which, festooned with garlands of leaves, were to wait patiently until their presence was discovered. A splendid banquet was in preparation, armfuls of flowers strewed the halls, the musicians tuned their instruments, and the expected guests came thronging in.

The hour fixed for the celebration of the wedding of Mistress Lindsay and William Gamwell was about to strike; Maude, dressed with exquisite taste, awaited William’s arrival in the Great Hall, but William did not come.

Sir Guy sent a servant to look for his son.

The servant looked all over the pleasaunce, searched the Castle, called the young man, and got no reply, save the echo of his own voice.

Robin Hood and Sir Guy’s sons mounted their horses and searched the neighbourhood; they could find no trace of the bridegroom, nor hear any tidings of him.

The guests divided into parties, and explored the country in other directions, but their search was equally futile.

At midnight, the whole family gathered round Maude, who had been unconscious for the last hour.

William had disappeared.

CHAPTER II

As we have already mentioned, Baron Fitz-Alwine had brought his beautiful and charming daughter, the Lady Christabel, back with him to Nottingham Castle.

Some days before the disappearance of poor Will, the Baron was sitting in one of his apartments opposite to a little man, splendidly dressed in a robe laden with golden embroidery.

If it were possible to be rich in ugliness, one would have said that Lord Fitz-Alwine's guest was immensely rich.

Judging by his face, this old beau should have been much older than the Baron, but he did not seem to recall the antiquity of his birth himself.

With wrinkled and grimacing faces, like two old monkeys, the men talked together in low voices, and it was evident that they were trying to obtain from one another, by dint of cunning and flattery, a definite conclusion to some important business.

"You are too hard on me, Baron," said the hideous old man, wagging his head.

"Faith, no," replied Lord Fitz-Alwine, briskly. "I wish to secure my daughter's happiness, that is all, and I challenge you to discover any ulterior motive in me, my dear Sir Tristan."

"I know that you are a good father, Fitz-Alwine, and that the happiness of the Lady Christabel is your only thought... And what dowry intend you to give this dear child?"

"I have told you already, five thousand pieces of gold on her wedding day, and the same amount later."

"The date must be stated precisely, Baron; the date must be precisely stated," grumbled the old man.

"Let us say in five years, then."

"The delay is long, and the dowry you give your daughter is very small."

"Sir Tristan," said the Baron, dryly, "you put my patience to too great a trial. I pray you to remember that my daughter is young and beautiful, and that you yourself no longer possess the physical advantages you may have had fifty years ago."

"There, there, don't get angry, Fitz-Alwine; my intentions are good. I can place a million beside your ten thousand pieces of gold. What am I saying? One million, probably two."

"I know you are rich," interrupted the Baron. "Unhappily, I am not on a level with you there, and yet I would fain place my daughter in the rank of the greatest ladies in Europe. I want the Lady Christabel's position to be equal to that of a queen. You are aware of this paternal desire, and yet you refuse to entrust me with the money necessary to realise it."

"I cannot understand, my dear Fitz-Alwine, what difference it can make to the happiness of your daughter, an I keep the half of my fortune in mine own hands. I will settle the income of a million, of two millions even, on the Lady Christabel, but I must retain the control of the capital. Do not distress yourself, my wife shall lead the life of a queen."

"That is all very well, in words, my dear Sir Tristan; but permit me to remind you that when there is a great disparity in the ages of husband and wife, misunderstanding is apt to be their guest. It might happen that the caprices of a young woman would become unbearable to you, and you would take back what you had given. If I kept half your fortune in mine own hands, I should be satisfied as to the future happiness of my daughter; she would have nothing to fear, and you might e'en quarrel with her to your heart's content."

"Quarrel? You are joking, my dear Baron; never could such a misfortune occur. I am too fond of the pretty little dove to wish to annoy her. For twelve years I have aspired to the honour of her hand, and yet you think me capable of reproving her caprices; she may have as many as e'er she please, for she will be rich and able to satisfy them."

"Permit me to remark that, if you still refuse to accede to my demands, I shall distinctly retract the promise I have given you."

"You are too hasty, Baron, much too hasty," grumbled the old man. "Let us discuss the matter a little longer."

"I have already said all there is to say; I have come to a decision."

"Do not be obstinate, Fitz-Alwine. What if I were to place fifty thousand pieces of gold in your hands?"

"I should ask whether you intended to insult me."

"To insult you, Fitz-Alwine? What a poor opinion you must have of me! If I said two hundred thousand pieces of gold?"

“Sir Tristan, this must end. I know your immense fortune, and the offer you make me is a mere mockery. What am I to do with your two hundred thousand pieces of gold?”

“Did I say two hundred thousand, Baron? I meant to say five hundred thousand five hundred, do you understand? Now, isn’t that a noble sum, a very noble sum?”

“True,” replied the Baron, “but you have just told me that you could lay two million beside my daughter’s ten thousand pieces of gold. Give me one million, and my Christabel shall be your wife to-morrow if you wish it, my dear Sir Tristan.”

“A million! You want me to give you a million, Fitz-Alwine! Truly your demand is absurd. I cannot in conscience place half my fortune in your hands.”

“Do you doubt my honour and good faith?” cried the Baron, irritably.

“Not in the least, my good friend.”

“Do you imagine that I have any motive other than my daughter’s happiness?”

“I know that you love the Lady Christabel, but...”

“But what?” thundered the Baron. “Decide quickly, or I annul for ever the promises I have made.”

“You do not give me time for reflection.”

At this moment a serving-man knocked softly at the door.

“Come in,” said the Baron.

“My Lord,” said the man, “a messenger from the King hath brought urgent news, and awaits your Lordship’s good pleasure to announce them.”

“Bring him hither,” replied the Baron. “Now, Sir Tristan, one last word. If you do not accede to my wishes before the entry of the messenger, who will be here in two minutes, you shall not have the Lady Christabel.”

“Hear me, Fitz-Alwine, pray hear me.”

“I will hear nothing. My daughter is worth a million; besides, you told me that you loved her.”

“Tenderly, very tenderly,” mumbled the hideous old man.

“Well, then, Sir Tristan, you will be very unhappy, for you are about to be separated from her for ever. I know a young lord, as noble as a king, rich, very rich, and good-looking, who only awaits my permission to lay his name and fortune at my daughter’s feet. If you hesitate a second longer, to-morrow note well, to-morrow the maiden you love, my daughter, the beautiful and charming Christabel, will be the wife of your more fortunate rival."

"You are pitiless, Fitz-Alwine!"

"I hear the messenger. Answer yes or no."

"But, Fitz-Alwine..."

"Yea or nay?"

"Yea, yea," stammered the old man.

"Sir Tristan, my good friend, only think of your happiness; my daughter is a treasure of grace and beauty."

"It is true she is very beautiful," said the amorous old man.

"And that she is worth a million pieces of gold," added the Baron, with a sneer "Sir Tristan, she is yours."

Thus did Baron Fitz-Alwine sell his daughter, the beautiful Lady Christabel, to Sir Tristan Goldsborough for a million pieces of gold.

As soon as he was announced, the messenger informed the Baron that a soldier who had killed the captain of his regiment had been pursued as far as Nottinghamshire. The King's orders to Baron Fitz-Alwine were to have this soldier seized and hanged without mercy.

The messenger dismissed, Lord Fitz-Alwine wrung the trembling hands of his daughter's future husband, excusing himself for leaving him at this happy moment, but the King's commands were peremptory, and must be obeyed without the least delay.

Three days after this most honourable bargain had been struck between the Baron and Sir Tristan, the fugitive soldier was taken prisoner and thrown into a dungeon of Nottingham Castle.

Robin Hood still continued an active search for William, who was, alas!, the poor soldier seized by the Baron's men.

In despair at the ill success of his investigations throughout the county of Yorkshire, Robin Hood sought the Forest once more, hoping to hear something from his followers, who, posted on the roads leading from Mansfield to Nottingham, might perchance have discovered some traces of the young man.

About a mile from Mansfield, Robin Hood met Much, the miller's son, who, mounted like himself on a spirited horse, was galloping at full speed in the direction from which Robin had just come.

On seeing his young leader, Much uttered a cry of joy, and drew rein.

"How glad I am to meet you, friend!" said he. "I was going to Barnsdale. I have news of the lad who was with you the first time we met."

"Have you, indeed? We have been seeking him these three days past."

"I have seen him."

"When?"

"Last evening."

"Where?"

"At Mansfield, whither I returned, after spending eight and forty hours with my new companions. As I drew near my father's house, I perceived at the door a troop of horse, on one of which sat a young man with his arms tightly bound. In him I recognised your friend. The soldiers, who were refreshing themselves, had left their prisoner guarded by the cords which bound him to the horse. Without attracting their attention, I was able to convey to the poor lad that I would at once hasten to Barnsdale and inform you of the misfortune which had overtaken him. This promise revived the courage of your friend, and he thanked me with an expressive look. Without losing a moment I called for a horse, and as I mounted asked a soldier some questions as to the fate in store for their prisoner; he replied that by order of Baron Fitz-Alwine they were taking the young man to Nottingham Castle."

"I thank you for the trouble you have taken to help me, my good Much," replied Robin. "You have just told me everything I wanted to know, and we shall be unlucky indeed an we do not succeed in preventing the cruel intentions of his Norman Lordship. To horse, good Much. Let us hasten to the heart of the Forest; there I will take measures for a successful expedition."

"Where is Little John?" asked Much.

"He is making his way to our retreat by another road; by separating, we each hoped to obtain news. Fortune hath favoured me, since I had the luck to meet you, brave Much."

"The luck is on my side," replied Much, cheerily; "my actions are governed by your will alone."

Robin smilingly acknowledged the compliment, then set off at a gallop, followed closely by his companion.

On arriving at the general rendezvous, Robin and Much found Little John already there. After giving the latter the news Much had brought, Robin ordered him to assemble the men scattered through the Forest, form them into one troop, and take them to the verge of the wood near Nottingham Castle. There, concealed in the covert of the trees, they were to await a summons from Robin, and hold themselves ready to fight. These arrangements concluded, Robin and Much mounted again, and set off at full gallop on the way to Nottingham.

"Friend," said Robin, when they had reached the edge of the Forest, "here we are at the end of our journey. I must not enter Nottingham; my presence in the town would be known at once, and its motive (which I wish to conceal) discovered. You understand, don't you? If William's enemies became aware of my sudden appearance, they would be on their guard, and, in consequence, it would be more difficult for us to set our friend at liberty. You must go alone into the town, and then make your way to a cottage lying on the outskirts of the place. There you will find a good friend of mine, by name Halbert Lindsay; in the event of his absence, his comely wife, who well deserves her pretty name of Grace, will tell you where to find him. You will seek him out and bring him to me. Is that quite clear?"

"Perfectly."

"Very well, then go! I will stay here to keep a look-out."

Left alone, Robin hid his horse in the thicket, stretched himself beneath the shade of an oak, and set to work to devise a plan of campaign for poor Will's successful deliverance. While bringing all his inventive faculties to bear upon this subject, the young man kept a careful watch on the road.

Presently he saw in the distance a richly dressed young knight approaching the Forest from the direction of Nottingham.

"By my faith!" said Robin to himself, "if this gay traveller is of Norman blood, he does well to choose this direction for his country walk. Dame Fortune appears to have treated him so kindly, that it will be a pleasure to relieve his pockets of the price of the bows and arrows which will be broken to-morrow in William's honour. His habit is sumptuous, his gait haughty; of a truth, this gallant is well met. Come along, my fine gentleman, you will be all the lighter when we have become acquainted."

Rising quickly from his recumbent position, Robin placed himself in the traveller's way. The latter, expecting, doubtless, some token of politeness, stopped courteously.

"Welcome, Sir Knight," said Robin, putting his hand to his cap. "The sky is so dark that I took your glorious appearance for a messenger from the sun. Your smiling countenance brightens the landscape, and if you would remain a few minutes longer on the verge of the old Forest, the very flowers hidden beneath its shade would take you for a ray of light."

The stranger laughed gaily.

"Do you belong to Robin Hood's band?" he asked.

"You judge by appearances, Sir," plied the young man, "and because you see me clothed in the garb of the foresters, you presume that I must belong to Robin Hood's band. You are wrong. All the inhabitants of the Forest do not follow the fortunes of the Outlaw Chief."

"That's like enow," returned the stranger, in a tone of manifest impatience. "I thought I had met a member of the company of Merrie Men. I was wrong, that is all."

The traveller's reply excited Robin's curiosity.

"Master," said he, "your countenance betokens a hearty frankness, which, despite the profound hatred I have borne against the Normans these many years past..."

"I am no Norman, Sir Forester," interrupted the traveller, "and I might imitate you in saying that you, too, judge by appearances. My dress and the accent of my speech lead you into error. I am Saxon, though there are a few drops of Norman blood in my veins."

"A Saxon is a brother to me, Master, and I am happy to be able to give you a proof of my confidence, I do belong to Robin Hood's band. As you are doubtless aware, we use a less disinterested fashion of making ourselves known to Norman travellers."

"I know that fashion, at once courteous and productive," replied the stranger, laughingly. "I have often heard of it, and I am on my way to Sherwood solely that I may have the pleasure of meeting your leader."

"And what if I were to tell you that you were now in the presence of Robin Hood?"

"I would offer him my hand," replied the stranger, quickly, accompanying the words with a friendly gesture. "And I would say to him, 'Friend Robin, have you forgotten Marian's brother?'"

"Allan Clare! You are Allan Clare!" exclaimed Robin, gleefully.

"Yea, I am Allan Clare. And the recollection of your expressive countenance, my dear Robin, was so deep graven on my heart that I recognised you at the first glance."

"How glad I am to see you, Allan!" replied Robin Hood, shaking the young man by both hands. "Marian doth not expect the happiness which your return to England will give her."

"My poor dear sister!" said Allan, with an expression of deep tenderness. "Is she well? Is she happy?"

"Her health is perfect, Allan, and she hath no other sorrow than that of being separated from you."

"I have returned, never to quit my native land again. My good sister will then be quite happy. Did you hear, Robin, that I was in the service of the King of France?"

"Yea. One of the Baron's men, and the Baron himself in a burst of confidence produced by fear, made known to us your position about the King's person."

"A lucky chance enabled me to render the King of France a great service," continued the Knight, "and in his gratitude he deigned to acquaint himself with my desires, and took a great and friendly interest in me. His Majesty's kindness emboldened me, and I made known my troubles to him. I told him how my goods had been confiscated, and I besought him to allow me to return to England. The King was so gracious as to grant my prayer; he gave me a letter to King Henry on the spot, and, without losing a moment, I started for this country. At the request of the King of France, Henry II. restored to me my father's property; and the King's Treasury will have to give me back in good golden crowns the revenue produced by mine estates since their confiscation. Beside which, I have realised a large sum, which, once placed in the hands of Baron Fitz-Alwine, is to win me the hand of my dear Christabel."

"I have heard of the bargain," said Robin. "The seven years given you by the Baron are on the point of expiring, are they not?"

"Yea. To-morrow is my last day of grace."

"Well, then, you had best hasten to see the Baron, for the delay of an hour would be your loss."

"How did you learn of the existence of this contract and its conditions?"

"From my cousin, Little John."

"Sir Guy of Gamwell's gigantic nephew?" asked Allan.

"The very same; then you remember the worthy fellow?"

"Of course I do."

"Well, he is now bigger than ever, and stronger even than he is tall. It was from him that I learnt of your arrangement with the Baron."

“Lord Fitz-Alwine took him into his confidence, then?” said Allan, with a smile.

“Yea, Little John threatened his Lordship, and interrogated him at the point of the dagger.”

“Then I can quite comprehend the Baron’s expansiveness.”

“My good friend,” replied Robin, gravely, “beware of Lord Fitz-Alwine. He bears you no love, and if he can find a means of breaking his oath, he will not hesitate to do so.”

“Should he attempt to dispute with me over Lady Christabel’s hand, I swear to you, Robin, I will make him repent it bitterly.”

“Have you any especial means of making the Baron fear your threats?”

“Yea; and beside, were I unable to obtain the fulfilment of his promise, I would lay siege to the Castle sooner than give up my Christabel.”

“An you want help, I am entirely at your service, good Allan; I can immediately place at your disposal two hundred men, fleet of foot and strong of arm. They are equally well skilled in the use of bow, sword, lance and buckler; say but one word, and at my command they will be with us.”

“A thousand thanks, dear Robin. I expected no less from your good friendship.”

“And you were right; but tell me how learned you that I dwelt in Sherwood Forest?”

“Having concluded my business in London,” replied the Knight, “I came to Nottingham. There I heard of the Baron’s return, and of Christabel’s presence at the Castle. Being assured of the existence of my beloved, I repaired to Gamwell. Imagine my astonishment on entering the village and finding only the ruins of the good Knight’s noble dwelling. I returned to Mansfield with all haste, and an inhabitant of that town told me what had occurred. He sang your praises to me, and informed me that the Gamwell family had retired secretly to their Yorkshire lands. Tell me of my sister Marian, Robin Hood; is she much changed?”

“Yes, Allan, she is indeed changed.”

“My poor sister!”

“She is of a perfect beauty now,” continued Robin, laughing, “for each spring hath added to her graces.”

“Is she married?” asked Allan.

“Nay, not yet.”

"So much the better. Do you know if she hath given her heart to any one, or if her hand is promised?"

"Marian shall answer that question," said Robin, blushing slightly. "How hot it is to-day!" he added, passing his hand over his flushed brow. "Do let us go into the shade of the trees; I am expecting one of my men, and meseemeth his absence is unduly prolonged. By the way, Allan, do you recall one of the sons of Sir Guy William, surnamed Scarlett, by reason of the something vivid hue of his locks?"

"A well-favoured lad with large blue eyes?"

"The same. The poor fellow, sent to London by Baron Fitz-Alwine, had been enrolled in a regiment that formed part of the army which still occupies Normandy. One fine day William was taken with an unconquerable desire to see his family again; he asked for leave, which he could not obtain, and, beside himself at the persistent refusal of his Captain, he killed him. Will succeeded in reaching England, a lucky chance brought us together, and I took the lad to Barnsdale, where his family live. The day after his return all the household were rejoicing, for they were not only celebrating the return of the wanderer, but also his marriage and Sir Guy's birthday."

"Will going to be married? To whom?"

"To a charming damosel whom you know Mistress Lindsay."

"I do not recollect the lady you name."

"What, you have forgotten the existence of the companion, friend, and devoted follower of the Lady Christabel?"

"I know, I know," returned Allan Clare. "You are speaking of the merry daughter of the Keeper of Nottingham, of the sprightly Maude?"

"That's it; Maude and William have loved each other for a long time."

"Maude loved Will Scarlett! What are you saying, Robin? It was you, my friend, who had won the girl's heart."

"Nay, nay, you are mistaken."

"Not at all, not at all; I remember now that, if she did not love you, which I doubt, at least she took a deep and tender interest in you."

"I had then, and have still, a brotherly affection for her.

"Really?" questioned the Knight, slyly.

"On my honour, yea!" replied Robin. "But to finish William's story. This is what happened to him. An hour before the celebration of his marriage, he disappeared, and I have just learnt that he hath been carried off by the Baron's soldiers. I have collected my men in a few minutes they will be within call and I am relying on my skill, supported by their aid, to deliver William."

"Where is he?"

"Without the least doubt he is in Nottingham Castle. I shall soon be certain of it."

"Do not be too rash, my good Robin; wait till to-morrow. I shall see the Baron, and I will bring to bear all the influence which entreaties or threats can have on him to obtain the release of your cousin."

"But if the old miscreant acts summarily, should I not all my life regret having lost several hours?"

"Have you reason to fear it?"

"How can you ask me such a question, Allan, when you know the cruel answer to it better than I do myself? You know well, do you not, that Lord Fitz-Alwine is without pity and without feeling? If he dared to hang Will with his own hands, be assured he would do it. I must hasten to drag William from the lion's jaws, an I would not lose him for ever."

"Belike you are right, dear Robin, and my prudent counsel would be dangerous to follow in that case. I shall present myself at the Castle this very day, and, once inside, I may possibly be able to help you. I will question the Baron; an he will not answer, I shall address myself to the soldiers, who will, I hope, be open to the temptation of a heavy bribe. Rely on me; but an if my efforts be fruitless, I will let you know, and you must act with the greatest promptitude."

"That is understood. Here is my man coming back; he is accompanied by Halbert, Maude's foster brother. We shall now learn something of poor Will's fate."

"Well?" asked Robin, after having greeted his friend.

"I have very little to tell you," replied Halbert; "I only know that a prisoner hath been carried to Nottingham Castle, and Much tells me that the unfortunate wretch is our poor friend Will Scarlett. If you wish to try and save him, Robin, you must lose no time; a monk, a pilgrim on his way through Nottingham, hath been sent for to the Castle to shrive the prisoner."

"Holy Mother of God, have pity on us!" cried Robin, in a trembling voice. "Will, my poor Will, is in danger of his life; we must rescue him; it must be done at any cost. You know naught else, Halbert?" he added.

"Naught relating to Will; but I have learnt that the Lady Christabel is going to be married at the end of the week."

"Lady Christabel to be married?" repeated Allan.

"Yea, master," replied Halbert, looking at the Knight with an air of surprise. "She is to marry the richest Norman in all England."

"Impossible! Quite impossible!" exclaimed Allan Clare.

"It is perfectly true," returned Halbert, "and great preparations are on foot at the Castle to celebrate the happy event."

"The happy event!" repeated the Knight, bitterly. "What is the name of the scoundrel who thinks to marry the Lady Christabel?"

"Are you a stranger to these parts, Master?" continued Halbert, "since you are unaware of the immense delight of the Baron Fitz-Alwine? His Lordship hath manoeuvred so well that he hath succeeded in securing a colossal fortune in the person of Sir Tristan Goldsborough."

"Lady Christabel to be the wife of that hideous old man?" cried the Knight, completely taken aback. "Why, the creature is half dead! He is a monster of ugliness and sordid avarice. The daughter of Baron Fitz-Alwine is my betrothed, and so long as there is breath in my body, none other save I shall have a right to her."

"Your betrothed, master! Who, then, are you?"

"Sir Allan Clare," said Robin.

"The brother of the Lady Marian! The Lady Christabel's dearest friend?"

"Yea, Halbert," said Allan.

"Hurrah!" cried Halbert, throwing up his cap. "Here's a piece of good luck! Welcome to England! Your presence will change the tears of your beautiful betrothed into smiles. This odious marriage is to be solemnised at the end of this week, and i' faith you have no time to lose, an you wish to prevent it."

"I will go and see the Baron this instant," said Allan. "An he thinks he can still play with me, he is wrong."

"You may count on my help, Sir Knight," said Robin; "and I will engage to put an all-powerful obstacle in the way of the accomplishment of this misfortune, to wit force allied with cunning. We shall carry off the Lady Christabel. My idea is that we should all four go to the Castle together; you will enter alone, while I await your return with Much and Halbert."

The young men soon reached the approach to the Castle. As the Knight went towards the drawbridge, a noise of chains was heard, the bridge was lowered, and an old man in the garb of a pilgrim emerged from the postern.

"Yonder comes the Confessor summoned by the Baron for poor William," said Halbert. "Question him, Robin; perhaps he can tell you what fate is destined for our friend."

"I had the same idea, good Halbert, and I feel that our meeting with this holy man is an omen of Divine favour. May the Holy Virgin protect you, good Father!" said Robin, respectfully saluting the old man.

"Amen to thy kind prayer, my son," replied the pilgrim.

"Have you come far, Father?"

"From the Holy Land, where I have made a long and wearisome pilgrimage to expiate the sins of my youth. Now, worn out with fatigue, I have returned to die beneath the sky of my native land."

"God hath vouchsafed you a long life, Father."

"Yea, my son, I shall soon be ninety years old, and my life seems but a dream."

"I pray the Virgin may give you calm repose in your last hours."

"So be it, my child. I, in my turn, pray Heaven to shower blessing's on thy young head. Thou art good and a believer, be thou also charitable, and give a thought to those who suffer, to those about to die."

"Explain yourself, Father; I do not understand," said Robin, in a broken voice.

"Alas! alas!" returned the old man, "a soul is about to ascend to heaven, its last home. The body which it animates can scarce count thirty years. A man of your age is about to die a terrible death. Pray for him, my son."

"Hath this man made his last confession to you, Father?"

"Yea. In a few hours more he will be violently removed from this world."

"Where is the unfortunate man?"

"In one of the dark dungeons of this stately pile."

"Is he alone?"

"Yea, my son, alone."

"And this unhappy creature is to die?" questioned the young man.

"To-morrow morning at sunrise."

"You are quite sure, Father, that the execution will not take place before daybreak?"

"I am quite certain. Alas! is it not soon enough? Thy words grieve me, my son; dost desire a brother's death?"

"No, holy man, no; a thousand times no! I would give my life to save him. I know the poor lad, Father; I know and love him. Know you to what death he is condemned? Have you heard whether he is to die within the Castle?"

"I learnt from the gaoler of the prison that the unhappy youth is to be put to death by the hangman of Nottingham. Orders have been given for a public execution in the market-place of that town."

"God keep us!" murmured Robin. "Kind, good Father," he went on, taking the old man's hand, "will you render me a service?"

"What wouldst thou, my son?"

"I desire, I pray, Father, that you will of your kindness return to the Castle and beg the Baron to grant you the favour of accompanying the prisoner to the foot ot the gallows."

"I have already obtained that permission, my son; I shall be near thy friend to-morrow morning."

"Bless you, holy Father, bless you! I have one last word to say to the condemned man, and I would charge you to give it him. To-morrow morning I will be here, near this clump of trees; will you be so good as to confess me before entering the Castle?"

"I will meet thee punctually, my son."

"Thank you, holy Father; until tomorrow, then."

"To-morrow. And may the peace of our Lord go with thee."

Robin bowed reverently, and the Palmer, with his hands crossed on his breast, went on his way praying.

"Yea, to-morrow," repeated the young man. "We shall see to-morrow an if Will is to be hanged."

"It will be needful," said Halbert, who had listened to Robin's conversation with the prisoner's Confessor, "to place your men within a short distance from the place of execution."

"They will be within sound of call," said Robin.

"How will you screen them from view of the soldiers?"

"Do not be uneasy, my good Halbert," replied Robin. "My merry men have long possessed the art of making themselves invisible, even on the high-road; and, believe me, their doublets will not graze the Baron's soldiers, nor will they make their appearance, save at a prearranged signal from me."

"You seem so certain of success, my dear Robin," said Allan, "that I begin to wish I could be as hopeful about mine own affairs."

"Sir Knight," returned the young man, "first let me set William free, and put him safe in the hands of his dear little wife at Barnsdale, then we will think about the Lady Christabel. The projected marriage will not take place for several days; we have time to prepare for a serious struggle with Lord Fitz-Alwine."

"I will go into the Castle," said Allan, "and by hook or by crook I will get to the bottom of this business. If the Baron hath thought fit to break an engagement which he should, in honour, have held sacred, I shall consider myself justified in waiving all respect, and, willy-nilly, Lady Christabel shall be my wife."

"You are right, my friend. Present yourself at once to the Baron; he doth not expect you, and very like in his surprise he will deliver himself into your hands bound hand and foot. Speak him boldly, and make him understand you intend to use force, if need be, to win the Lady Christabel. Whilst you are taking these important measures with Lord Fitz-Alwine, I will go and seek out my men and prepare for the successful accomplishment of the expedition I have planned. If you should need me, send without delay to the place where we met a few minutes since; there you are sure of finding one of my brave companions at any hour of the day or night. If it is necessary for you to have a talk with your faithful ally, you will be conducted to my retreat. But are you not afraid lest, once inside the Castle, it may be impossible for you to leave it again?"

"Lord Fitz-Alwine would not dare to treat a man like me with violence," replied Allan; "he would be exposing himself to too great a risk. Beside, an if he really intend to give Christabel to this hateful Tristan, he will be so eager to get rid of me that I fear he may refuse to receive me at all, rather than that he will wish to keep me near him. Farewell, then, for the present, my good Robin; I shall surely see you again before the end of the day."

"I shall expect you."

Whilst Allan Clare made his way towards the postern of the Castle, Robin, Halbert, and Much hastened to the town.

Introduced without the least difficulty into the apartment of Lord Fitz-Alwine, the Knight soon found himself in the presence of the terrible Castellan.

If a spirit had risen from the tomb, it could scarce have caused the Baron more dismay and terror than he experienced at sight of the handsome young man who stood before him with proud and dignified mien.

The Baron threw at his serving-man so withering a glance that the latter escaped from the room with the utmost speed his limbs were capable of.

“I did not expect to see you,” said his Lordship, bringing back his wrathful eyes to the Knight.

“That may well be, my Lord; but here I am.”

“So I see. Happily for me, you have broken your word the term which I had allotted you expired yesterday.”

“Your Lordship is in error; I am punctual to the rendezvous you gave me.”

“I can hardly take your word for it.”

“I am sorry, because you will oblige me to force you to do so. We undertook a formal engagement, and I am in the right in exacting its fulfilment.”

“Have you fulfilled all the conditions of the agreement?”

“Of a truth have I. They were three: I was to obtain re-possession of my estates; I must possess one hundred thousand pieces of gold; and I must return in seven years to claim the hand of the Lady Christabel.”

“Do you really possess one hundred thousand pieces of gold?” asked the Baron, enviously.

“Yea, my Lord. King Henry hath restored me mine estates, and I have received the revenue arising from my patrimony since the day of its confiscation. I am rich, and I insist on your giving me the Lady Christabel tomorrow.”

“To-morrow!” cried the Baron, “to-morrow! and if you were not here to-morrow,” he added, sombrely, “the contract would be annulled?”

“Yea; but hearken to me, Lord Fitz-Alwine. I advise you to renounce all thoughts of consummating the diabolical schemes you are meditating at this moment. I am within my rights; I am here at the hour appointed me, and naught in all the world (it is useless to dream of resorting to force) naught in all the world will constrain me to renounce her I love. If in desperation you resort to fraud and cunning, I will take of that you may sure a terrible revenge. I know of a dark secret in your life, which I will reveal. I have sojourned at the court of the King of France; I have been initiated into the secret of an affair which doth very narrowly concern you.”

"What affair?" questioned the Baron, uneasily.

"It is useless for me to enter into long explanations with you just now; let it suffice that I have learnt and keep a note of the names of the miserable Englishmen who have offered to place their country under the yoke of the stranger."

Lord Fitz-Alwine became livid.

"Keep the promise you have made me, my Lord, and I will forget you have been a coward and a traitor to your King."

"Sir Knight, you insult an old man," said the Baron, assuming an indignant air.

"I speak truth, and no more. One more refusal, my Lord, one more lie, one more subterfuge, and the proofs of your patriotism will be sent to the King of England."

"It is lucky for you, Allan Clare," said the Baron, blandly, "that Heaven hath bestowed upon me a calm and equable temper; if I were of an irritable and hasty nature, you would pay dearly for your audacity, for I would have you thrown into one of the Castle moats."

"That would be a great mistake, my Lord, for it would in no wise save you from the Royal vengeance."

"Your youth excuses the impetuosity of your words, Sir Knight; I would rather show indulgence where it would be easy for me to punish. Why speak threateningly, ere you know whether I really intend to refuse you the hand of my daughter?"

"Because I have learnt for certain that you have promised the Lady Christabel to a miserable and sordid old man to Sir Tristan Goldsborough."

"Indeed, indeed! And from what silly gossip learnt you this foolish story?"

"That matters not; the whole town of Nottingham hath heard rumours of the preparations for this rich and ridiculous marriage."

"I cannot be responsible, Sir Knight, for the stupid lies which circulate around me."

"Then you have not promised the hand of your daughter to Sir Tristan?"

"I must beg to decline to answer such a question. Until to-morrow I am at liberty to think and wish what I please; to-morrow is yours. Come then, and I will give you a full satisfaction of your desires. Farewell, Sir Allan Clare," added the old man, rising; "I wish you a very good day, and pray you to leave me."

“I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again, Baron Fitz-Alwine. Remember that a gentleman hath only one promise.”

“Very well, very well,” grumbled the old man, turning his back on his visitor.

Allan left the Baron’s apartment with a heavy heart. He could not hide from himself that the old Lord meditated some perfidy. His menacing looks had accompanied the young man to the threshold of the room; then he had retired to the embrasure of the window, disdaining to respond to the Knight’s parting salute.

As soon as Allan had disappeared (the young man went to seek Robin Hood) the Baron rang a small handbell on the table violently.

“Send Black Peter to me,” said the Baron, gruffly.

“Anon! my Lord.”

Some minutes later the soldier in question appeared before Lord Fitz-Alwine.

“Peter,” said the Baron, “thou hast under thee brave and trustworthy fellows that will execute, without comment, any orders given them?”

“Yea, my Lord.”

“They are courageous, and know how to forget the services they are able to render?”

“Yea, my Lord.”

“That is well. A knight, elegantly clad in a red tunic, hath just left here; follow him with two good men, and see that he is no longer able to trouble any one. Dost understand?”

“Perfectly, my Lord,” replied Black Peter, with a frightful leer, and half drawing a huge dagger from its sheath.

“Thou shalt be well rewarded, brave Peter. Go without fear, but act secretly and with prudence. An if this butterfly take the road through the wood, let him get well under the trees, and there you will have it all your own way. After he hath been despatched to another world, bury him at the foot of some old oak, and cover the spot with leaves and brushwood, so that his body is not likely to be discovered.”

“Your orders shall be faithfully executed, my Lord; and when you see me again, the Knight will sleep beneath a carpet of green grass.”

“I shall look out for thee. Now up and follow yonder impertinent fop without delay.”

Accompanied by two men, Black Peter left the Castle, and soon found himself on the track of the young Knight.

The latter, with pensive brow, his mind absorbed and his heart heavy with sorrow, paced slowly along the borders of Sherwood Forest. On seeing the young man enter under the covert of the trees, the assassins following him trembled with sinister joy. They hastened their steps, and took hiding behind a bush, ready to throw themselves upon the young man at an opportune moment.

Allan Clare looked about for the guide promised by Robin Hood, and whilst he searched he reflected on the means necessary for tearing Christabel from the hands of her unworthy father.

A sound of hurried footsteps roused the Knight from his sad reverie. Turning his head, he beheld three men with evil faces advancing towards him, sword in hand.

Allan set his back against a tree, drew his sword from the scabbard, and said in a firm voice

"Ho, caitiffs! what would you have?"

"We would have thy life, thou gaudy butterfly!" cried Black Peter, throwing himself upon the young man.

"Back, rogue!" said Allan, striking his aggressor in the face. "Back all!" he continued, disarming with incomparable skill the second of his adversaries.

Black Peter redoubled his efforts, but he could not succeed in touching his adversary, who had not only rendered one of the assassins powerless by sending his sword up into the branches of a tree, but had likewise broken the skull of the third.

Disarmed and mad with rage, Black Peter uprooted a young tree and again rushed upon Allan. He hit the Knight on the head with such violence that the latter let fall his weapon and fell senseless to the ground.

"The quarry is pulled down!" Peter cried exultingly, as he assisted his wounded companions to their feet. "Get ye along to the Castle, and leave me alone; I will finish this fellow. Your presence here is a danger, and your groanings weary me. Begone; I will myself dig the hole in which to bury the young Lord. Give me the spade you brought."

"'Tis here," said one of the men. "Peter," added the wretched varlet, "I am half dead, I cannot walk."

"Begone, or I will finish thee," replied Peter, brutally.

The two men, overcome with pain and fright, dragged themselves painfully out of the Forest.

Left alone, Peter set to work; he had half finished his dreadful task when he received upon the shoulder a blow from a stick, so vigorously delivered that he fell full length at the edge of the hole.

When the violence of the pain was a little spent, the wretch turned his eyes Jtowards the dealer of this very just retribution. He then perceived the rubicund visage of a robust fellow arrayed in the garb of a Dominican Friar.

“How now, profane rascal with the black muzzle!” cried the Friar, in stentorian tones, “dost knock a gentleman on the head, and then, to hide thine infamy, bury thy victim? Answer me, robber, who art thou?”

“My sword shall speak for me,” said Peter, leaping to his feet. “It shall send thee to another world, where thou mayest have leisure to ask Satan the name thou dost desire to know.”

“I shall not need to give myself that trouble; an I have the bad luck to die before thee, insolent rogue, I can read on thy face thine infernal parentage. Now let me counsel thy sword to keep quiet, for an it attempt to wag its tongue, my cudgel will impose an eternal silence on it. Get thee hence, that is the best thing thou canst do.”

“Not until I have shown thee that I know how to use a sword,” said Peter, striking at the Monk.

The blow was so rapid, so violent, and so adroitly aimed that it struck the Brother on the left hand, cutting three fingers almost to the bone. The monk uttered a cry, fell upon Peter on the instant, and crushing him in his powerful embrace, applied a volley of blows from his cudgel.

Then a strange sensation overcame the miserable assassin; he lost his sword, his eyes grew dim, his senses failed him, and he lost all power of defending himself. When the Brother ceased beating him, Peter fell dead.

“The knave!” muttered the Monk, spent with pain and weariness, “the damned knave! Did he imagine that the fingers of poor Tuck were made to be cut about by a Norman dog? I think I have given him a good lesson; unfortunately, he will not derive much benefit from it, since he hath breathed his last breath. So much the worse; ‘twas all his fault, not mine. Why did he kill this poor boy? Ah!” cried the good Brother, placing his sound hand on the Knight’s breast, “he still breathes, his body is warm and his heart beats, feebly ‘tis true, but enow to show that there is still life in him. I will bear him on my shoulders to the retreat. Poor lad, ho is no great weight! As for thee, vile assassin," added Tuck, pushing away Peter's body with his foot, "lie there, and if the wolves have not yet dined, thou wilt serve them for a meal."

Saying which, the Monk took his way with a firm and rapid step in the direction of the retreat of the merry men.

* * * * *

A few words will suffice to explain Will Scarlett's capture.

The man who had seen him in company with Robin Hood and Little John in the Inn at Mansfield was under orders seeking the fugitive. Perceiving the young man accompanied by five strong fellows who might lend him a helping hand, the wary scout determined to await a more favourable moment to effect the capture. Quitting the Inn, he sent to Nottingham to ask for a company of soldiers, and these, guided by the spy, repaired to Barnsdale at midnight.

Next morning a strange fatality led Will outside the Castle; the poor youth fell into the hands of the soldiers, and was carried off without being able to offer the smallest resistance.

At first he was seized with utter despair; but the meeting with Much gave him some hope. He understood instantly that, once made aware of his unhappy plight, Robin Hood would do everything in the world to come to his aid, and if he could not succeed in saving him, at least he would allow no obstacle to deter him from avenging his death. He knew, moreover and this afforded some relief to his heavy heart that many tears would be shed over his cruel fate; he knew, too, that Maude, so happy in his return, would weep bitterly at the destruction of their mutual happiness.

Imprisoned in his dark dungeon, Will awaited in agonies of fear the time fixed for his execution, and every hour brought him both hope and anguish. The poor prisoner listened with straining ears for every sound from without, hoping always to hear the echo of Robin Hood's horn.

The first streak of dawn found Will at his prayers; he had confessed piously to the good pilgrim, and with strengthened spirit, and confident in him whose succour he still expected, he made ready to follow the guards who came to seek him at sunrise.

The soldiers set Will in their midst, and took the road to Nottingham.

On entering the town, the escort was soon surrounded by a large concourse of the inhabitants, who, since dawn, had been on the look-out for the melancholy procession.

However great the young man’s hopes might be, he felt his spirits fail at seeing around him not one single face he knew. His heart sank, and the tears, though manfully repressed, wetted his eyelashes; nevertheless, he still hoped, for a voice within him seemed to say, “Robin Hood is not far away, Robin Hood will come.”

When they reached the hideous gallows erected by the Baron’s orders, William became livid; he had not expected to die so infamous a death.

“I wish to speak to Lord Fitz-Alwine,” said he.

In his capacity of Sheriff the latter was obliged to assist at the execution.

“What dost want of me, wretch?” asked the Baron.

“My Lord, may I not hope for pardon?”

“No,” replied the old man, coldly.

“Then,” said William, in a firm voice, “I implore a favour which it is impossible for a generous soul to refuse me.”

“What favour?”

“My Lord, I belong to a noble Saxon family, whose name is the synonym of honour, and never yet hath one of its members merited the scorn of his fellow-citizens. I am a soldier and a gentleman; I deserve the death of a soldier.”

“Thou wilt be hanged,” said the Baron, brutally.

“My Lord, I have risked my life on the field of battle, I do not deserve to be hanged like a thief.”

“Ah, indeed!” sneered the old man. “And in what fashion, then, dost wish to expiate your crime?”

“Give me but a sword, and command your soldiers to pierce me with their spears or pikes; I would die as dies an honest man, with free arms and face upturned to Heaven.”

“Dost think I am fool enough to risk the life of one of my men to satisfy thy fancy? Not at all, not at all! Thou wilt be hanged.”

“My Lord, I conjure you, I beseech you to have pity on me. I will not even ask for a sword, I will not defend myself, I will let your men hack me in pieces.”

“Vile wretch!” said the Baron; “thou hast killed a Norman, and thou dost ask pity from a Norman. Art mad? Back, I say! Thou shalt die upon the gallows; and shalt soon have company, too, I trust the robber who with his band of rascals doth infest Sherwood Forest.”

"An if he you speak of with such scorn were within earshot, I would laugh at your boasts, cowardly poltroon that you are. Remember this, Baron Fitz-Alwine, if I die, Robin Hood will avenge me! Beware of Robin Hood! Ere this week be gone, he will be at the Castle of Nottingham."

"Let him come, and eke his whole band with him! I will have two hundred gallows erected. Hangman, do your duty," added the Baron.

The hangman put his hand on William's shoulder. The poor youth threw a glance of despair around him, and seeing only a silent and pitying crowd, commended his soul to God.

"Stay," said the trembling voice of the pilgrim "stay; I have one last benediction to give to my unhappy penitent."

"Your duties toward the wretched creature are ended," cried the Baron, in a furious tone. "It is useless to retard his execution longer."

"Ungodly man," cried the pilgrim, "would you deprive this young man of the succour of religion?"

"Hurry, then," said Lord Fitz-Alwine, impatiently; "I am aweary of all these delays."

"Soldiers, stand back a little," said the old pilgrim; "the prayers of a dying man must not fall upon profane ears."

At a sign from the Baron the soldiers fell back a little way from the prisoner, and William was left alone with the pilgrim at the foot of the gallows.

The hangman was listening respectfully to some orders from the Baron.

"Do not move, Will," said the pilgrim, leaning towards the young man; "I am Robin Hood, and I am going to cut the cords which fetter your movements. Then we will dash into the midst of the soldiers, and sheer surprise will rob them of their wits."

"Bless you, dear Robin, bless you!" murmured poor William, choking with joy.

"Stoop down, William, and pretend to talk to me. Good! the cords are cut. Now take the sword which hangs beneath my gown. Can you feel it?"

"Yea! here it is," murmured Will.

"Very well; now, put your back against mine, and we will show Lord Fitz-Alwine that you did not come into this world to be hanged."

With a movement quicker than thought, Robin Hood dropped his pilgrim's gown, and revealed to the amazed gaze of the assembled crowd the well-known costume of the renowned outlaw.

“My Lord,” cried Robin, in a firm and thrilling voice, “William Gamwell is one of our band of merry men. You took him from me. I am come to reclaim him, and in exchange I will send you the corpse of the rogue who had your orders foully to destroy the good Knight Allan Clare.”

“Five hundred pieces of gold to the man who arrests this robber,” bellowed the Baron; “five hundred pieces of gold to the valiant soldier who will secure him.”

Robin Hood flashed a glance at the crowd, who stood stupefied with fear.

“I do not advise any one to risk his life,” said he; “my comrades will rally round me.”

As he finished speaking, Robin blew his horn, and instantly a large body of foresters issued from the Forest, their bows ready strung in their hands.

“To arms!” cried the Baron, “to arms, faithful Normans; exterminate these bandits!”

A volley of arrows poured upon the Baron’s company. The latter, seized with terror, threw himself on his horse, and urged it with loud cries in the direction of the Castle. The citizens of Nottingham, distracted with fright, followed in the steps of their lord; and the soldiers, carried away by the terror of the general panic, took to their heels in headlong flight.

“Ho for the good green wood! Ho for brave Robin Hood!” shouted the merry men, as they chased their foes before them with great shouts of laughter.

Citizens, foresters, and soldiers dashed through the town, helter-skelter, the first dumb with fright, the second laughing, the last with rage in their hearts. The Baron was the first to gain the interior of the Castle, whither the others followed him, all except the merry men, who on arriving there took leave of their fainthearted adversaries with shouts of derision.

When Robin Hood, accompanied by his band, had again taken the Forest road, the citizens who had suffered no hurt or loss through this strange encounter, sang the praises of the young Chief and his readiness to succour any in distress.

The maidens blended their sweet voices in this chorus of eulogy, one of them even declaring she thought the Foresters appeared such kind and merry gentlemen, she would never more fear to cross the Forest alone.

CHAPTER III

Having assured himself that Robin Hood had no intention of besieging the Castle, Lord Fitz-Alwine, with aching body and mind torn by a thousand projects, each more impossible than the other, retired to his own apartments in the Castle.

There the Baron reflected on the strange audacity of Robin Hood, who in broad daylight, with no other weapon save an inoffensive sword (for he had only drawn it from the scabbard to cut the prisoner's bonds) had enough strength of mind to hold a large body of men in check. Remembering the shameful flight of his soldiers, and forgetting that he had been the first to set them the example, the Baron cursed their cowardice.

"What craven terror!" he cried; "what silly panic! What will the citizens of Nottingham think of us? Their flight was permissible, for they had no means of defence, but well-disciplined soldiers, armed to the teeth! My reputation for valour and courage will be gone for ever by this unheard-of behaviour!"

From this reflection, so humiliating to his self-esteem, the Baron passed to another train of thought. So greatly did he exaggerate the shame of his defeat, that he ended by making his soldiers entirely responsible for it; he imagined that instead of having shown the way for their stampede, he had covered their mad flight, and that with no protection save his own courage, he had cut a way through the ranks of the outlaws. Utterly confounding fact and fancy, this last thought brought the Baron's indignation to a head; he dashed from his room and burst headlong into the Courtyard, where his men, gathered in little groups, were talking over their pitiful defeat, for which they blamed their noble lord. The Baron fell like a thunderbolt into the midst of the troop, and ordered them to form up around him, whilst he read them a lecture on their infamous cowardice. After this, he cited imaginary examples of senseless panics, adding that never in the memory of man had such cowardice been known as that which they had just exhibited. The Baron spoke with such vehemence and indignation, and adopted such an air of invincible and unappreciated courage, that the soldiers, influenced by the feeling of respect in which they held their Chief, at last came actually to believe that they alone were really guilty. The Baron's rage appeared to them a righteous indignation; they bowed their heads, and fully believed that they were no better than poltroons frightened by their own shadows. When the Baron had terminated his pompous discourse, one of the men proposed to pursue the outlaws to their Forest retreat. This proposition was hailed with acclamation by the entire troop, and the soldier with whom had originated this bellicose notion, begged the valiant orator to put himself at their head. But the latter, little disposed to accede to this ill-timed demand, replied that though he was gratified at such a token of high esteem, it seemed to him for the moment far wiser to remain at home.

"My brave fellows," added the Baron, "prudence counsels us to await a more favourable opportunity of seizing Robin Hood; it will be wiser, I think, to abstain from any precipitate measures, at any rate, for the present. Patience now, and courage in the hour of battle, is all I ask of you."

Having thus said, the Baron, who feared that his men might insist more strongly, hastily left them to their dreams of victory. His mind at ease concerning his military reputation, the Baron forgot Robin Hood and turned his attention to his personal affairs, and the aspirants to his daughter's hand. It is unnecessary to add that Lord Fitz-Alwine relied entirely on the proved skill of Black Peter for the realisation of his dearest hopes, and imagined that Allan Clare no longer existed. It is true that Robin Hood had informed him of the death of his blood-thirsty emissary, but it was of little consequence to the Baron that Peter had paid with his life the services rendered to his lord and master. Allan Clare disposed of, no obstacle could come between Christabel and Sir Tristan, and the latter was so near his grave that the young wife might exchange in a day her bridal veil for a widow's weeds. Young and passing fair, free of all bonds, enormously rich, Lady Christabel might then make a marriage worthy of her beauty and her immense fortune. "But what marriage?" asked the Baron of himself; and, fired by an overpowering ambition, he sought for a husband who should fulfil his highest hopes. The elated old man had glimpses of the splendour of the Court, and he dreamt of the son of Henry II. At that moment of incessant strife between the two parties which divided the kingdom of England, necessity had made a great power of wealth, and the elevation of the Lady Christabel to the rank of Princess Royal was not quite impossible of realisation. The exciting hope which Lord Fitz-Alwine had conceived began to take the shape of a project on the eve of execution; already he looked upon himself as the father-in-law of the King of England, and he wondered to what nation it would be most advantageous to unite his grandsons and great-grandsons, when Robin's words recurred to his mind, and shattered this castle in the air. Perhaps Allan Clare was still alive! "I must make certain of it at once," cried the Baron, almost beside himself at the mere supposition. He rang the hand-bell, placed within his reach night and day, violently, and a servant appeared.

"Is Black Peter in the Castle?"

"No, my Lord, he went out yesterday with two men, who returned alone, one grievously wounded, the other half-dead."

"Send the one who is able to get about to me."

"Yea, my Lord."

The man required soon made his appearance, his head enveloped in bandages and his left arm in a sling.

"Where is Black Peter?" inquired the Baron, without even bestowing a look of pity on the poor creature.

"I know not, my Lord; I left Peter in the Forest digging a hole in which to hide the body of the young Lord whom we had killed."

The Baron's face became purple; he tried to speak, confused words rushed to his lips; he turned his head away, and signed to the assassin to leave the room. The latter, who wished for nothing better, went out, supporting himself by the wall.

"Dead!" murmured the Baron, with an indefinable feeling. "Dead!" he repeated; and, pale as death, he continued to stammer in a feeble voice, "Dead! dead!"

Let us leave Lord Fitz-Alwine a prey to evil conscience, and seek his daughter's destined husband.

Sir Tristan had not left the Castle; and indeed his sojourn there was to be prolonged until the end of the week.

The Baron wished his daughter's marriage to be celebrated in the Castle Chapel; but Sir Tristan, who feared some sinister attack on his person, preferred to be married openly at Linton Abbey, about a mile from the town of Nottingham.

"My good friend," said Lord Fitz-Alwine, in a peremptory tone, when this question was broached, "you are a stubborn fool, for you do not understand either my good faith or your own interests. You must not imagine that my daughter will be overjoyed to be yours, nor that she will walk gladly to the altar. I cannot tell you the reason, but I have a presentiment that at Linton Abbey some great disaster may occur. We are in the neighbourhood of a troop of bandits who, led by an audacious chief, are quite capable of surrounding and plundering us."

"I should be escorted by my servants," replied Sir Tristan; "they are numerous and of tried courage."

"As you please," said the Baron. "If any accident occur, you will only have yourself to blame."

"Never be uneasy; I will take the responsibility of the fault upon myself, if it be a fault, my choice of the place for celebrating the wedding."

"By the way," said the Baron, "do not forget, I beg, that on the eve of the happy day you are to give me a million pieces of gold."

"The chest containing that amount is in my room, Fitz-Alwine," said Sir Tristan, fetching a deep sigh, "and it will be carried into your apartment on the day of the wedding."

"On the eve," said the Baron "the eve, so it was agreed."

"On the eve, then."

With this the old men parted, the one going to pay his court to the Lady Christabel, the other returning to his dreams of greatness.

At Barnsdale Hall the gloom was profound. Old Sir Guy, his wife and their daughters, passed the hours of the day in mutual consolation and the nights in weeping over the death of poor Will.

The day after the lad's miraculous deliverance, the Gamwell family was assembled in the great hall, talking sadly over Will's strange disappearance, when the joyous sound of a hunting-horn was heard at the gate of the Hall.

"It is Robin!" cried Marian, rushing to the window.

"He must be bringing good news," said Barbara. "Come, dear Maude, hope and courage, William is coming back."

"Alas, my sister! may you prove right," said Maude, weeping.

"I am right! I am right!" cried Barbara. "Here are Will and Robin with a young man, doubtless a friend of theirs."

Maude flew to the door, and Marian, who had recognised her brother (for Allan Clare had only been stunned, and, after lying unconscious for a few hours, was now quite recovered), threw herself, like Maude, into the young men's outstretched arms. Maude, nearly delirious with joy, would only murmur fondly, "Will! Will! dear Will!" whilst Marian, with her arms around her brother's neck, was unable to utter a word. We will not attempt to depict the joy of this now happy family, to whom God had sent back safe and sound him they had mourned as lost for ever.

Laughter soon drove away their tears, and both beloved children were strained to the maternal bosom with the same fond kisses and caresses. Sir Guy gave his blessing to Will and to his son's deliverer, while Lady Gamwell, radiant with joy, pressed the charming Maude to her heart.

"Was I not right in maintaining that Robin was bringing good tidings?" said Barbara, kissing Will as she spoke.

"Of a truth, you were right, dear Barbara," replied Marian, pressing her brother's hand.

"I should like," said saucy Barbara, "to pretend that Robin was Will, and hug him with all my might."

"Such a mode of expressing your gratitude would set us a very bad example, Barbara dear," laughed Marian; "for we should all feel constrained to imitate you, and poor Robin would succumb beneath the weight of so much happiness."

"My death would be an easy one, at any rate. Think you not so, Lady Marian?"

Marian blushed, and an almost imperceptible smile hovered on Allan Clare's lips.

"Sir Knight," said Will, approaching the young man, "you see what an affection Robin hath inspired in my sisters' hearts; but he well deserves it. In recounting our troubles to you, Robin never told how he had rescued my father from death; he said nothing of his devotion to Winifred and Barbara; he spoke not of his affectionate care that of the best of friends for Maude, my affianced bride. When giving you tidings of Lady Marian, Robin added not, 'I have watched over her happiness when you were far away; in me she had a faithful friend, a devoted brother.' He did not..."

"William, I beseech you," interrupted Robin, "spare my blushes; for though Lady Marian avers that I cannot blush, my face doth verily feel afire."

"My dear Robin," said Allan, visibly affected, as he wrung the young man by the hand, "I have long been greatly in your debt, and at length I am happy in being able to repay you. It did not need Will's words to assure me that you had nobly fulfilled the delicate mission confided to you; the loyalty of all your deeds was a sure guarantee of that."

“Oh, brother,” said Marian, “if you only knew how good and generous he hath been to us all! If you only knew how praiseworthy his conduct toward me hath been, you would honour him and you would love him as... as...”

“As thou dost thyself is it not so?” said Allan, with a tender smile.

“Yea, as I do myself,” replied Marian, her face radiant with a smile of unutterable pride, and her sweet voice tremulous with emotion. “I fear not to openly avow my love for the generous man who hath shared the sorrows of my heart. Robin loves me, dear Allan; his love for me is as deep and hath endured as long as mine for him. My hand is promised to Robin Hood, and we only awaited thy presence to ask of God His holy benediction.”

“I am ashamed of my selfishness, Marian,” said Allan; “and my shame forces me to admire the more Robin’s gallant behaviour. Thy natural protector was far from thee, and thou didst not deem it fitting to be happy until he returned. Forgive me both for abandoning you so cruelly; Christabel will plead my cause to your tender hearts. Thank you, dear Robin,” added the Knight, “thank you; no words can express to you my sincere gratitude. You love Marian and Marian loves you; I am proud and happy to give you her hand.”

As he finished speaking, the Knight took his sister’s hand, and with a smile placed it in that of the young man, who, straining Marian to his bursting heart, kissed her passionately. William seemed quite intoxicated with the joy he saw around him, and with the object of suppressing the violence of his emotion, he took Maude round the waist and kissed her neck again and again, uttering some incoherent words and finishing with a triumphant “Hurrah!”

“We will be married on the same day, won’t we, Robin?” cried Will, joyously, “or rather we will be married to-morrow. Oh no! not to-morrow; it is unlucky to put off till to-morrow what can be done to-day — we will be married to-day. What say you, Maude?”

The girl laughed.

“You are in a tremendous hurry,” cried the Knight.

“A hurry! It is easy for you, Allan, to criticise; but an if, like me, you had been torn from the arms of your beloved when you were on the point of giving her your name, you would not say I was in too great a hurry. Am I not right, Maude?”

“Yea, William, you are right; but our marriage cannot take place to-day.”

“Why not? I should like to know, why not?” repeated the lad, impatiently.

“Because it is necessary for me to leave Barnsdale in a few hours, friend Will,” replied the Knight, “and I must certainly be present at your wedding and at my sister’s. I for my part hope to have the happiness of marrying the Lady Christabel, and our three weddings could then be celebrated on the same day. Wait a little longer, William; in one week from to-day all will be settled to our mutual satisfaction.”

“Wait another week?” cried Will. “It is impossible!”

“But, William,” said Robin, “a week is soon gone, and you have a thousand reasons for patience.”

“Well, I resign myself,” said the young man, dismally. “You are all against me, and I have never a soul to speak up for me. Maude, who of rights should add the eloquence of her sweet voice to mine, remains silent, so I will hold my tongue too. I suppose, Maude, we ought to talk of our future home. Come, let us go round the garden; that ought to take a good two hours at least, and it will be so much subtracted from the eternity of a week.”

Without awaiting the girl’s consent, Will took her hand, and laughingly led her out under the shady trees of the park.

A week after the interview between Allan Clare and Lord Fitz-Alwine, the Lady Christabel was alone in her room, seated, or rather crouching, in an armchair. The silken folds of a beautiful white satin dress draped the girl’s cowering form, and a veil of English point covered her blonde tresses. A deathly pallor overspread her delicate and perfect features, her colourless lips were closed, and her large eyes, with their listless look, were fixed in a terrified stare on a door opposite.

From time to time a large tear rolled down her cheeks, and this tear, a pearl of sorrow, was the only sign of life her enfeebled body gave. Two hours passed in dreadful waiting. Christabel was hardly conscious; her mind, steeped in happy memories of a past beyond recall, regarded with unspeakable horror the approaching sacrifice.

“He hath forgot me,” wailed the poor girl, suddenly, wringing her hands, whiter than the satin of her dress; “he hath forgot her whom he said he loved, whom alone he loved; he hath forgot his vows he is married to another. Oh, God! have pity on me; my strength fails me, for my heart is broken. I have suffered so much already! For him have I borne bitter words, the loveless looks of the father I should love and respect! For him I bore ill-treatment without complaint, even the sombre solitude of the cloister! I believed in him and he hath deceived me!"

A convulsive sob escaped her, and the tears gushed from her eyes. A light tap at the door aroused her from her painful thoughts.

"Come in," she said in a stifled voice.

The door opened, and the wrinkled face of Sir Tristan appeared before the eyes of the unhappy girl.

"Sweet lady of our Prithee," said the old man, with a leer, which he fondly imagined was an enchanting smile, "the hour departure is about to strike. Allow me to offer you my arm; the escort awaits us, and we shall soon be the happiest couple in England."

"My Lord," stammered Christabel, "I cannot go downstairs."

"How say you, dear love you cannot go downstairs? I do not well understand; you are quite ready, and they wait for us. Come, give me your dear, dainty hand."

"Sir Tristan," replied Christabel, as she rose with burning eyes and trembling lips, "hear me, I beseech you, and if there be a spark of pity in you, you will save the poor girl, who thus implores you, from this terrible ceremony."

"Terrible ceremony!" repeated Sir Tristan, in astonishment. "What means this, my Lady? I do not comprehend you."

"Spare me the pain of an explanation," Christabel answered, with a sob, "and I will bless you, Sir, and ever remember you in my prayers."

"You appear agitated, my pretty dove," said the old man in honeyed accents. "Calm yourself, my love, and this evening, or to-morrow, if you prefer it, you shall make your little confidences to me. At present we have no time to lose, but when we are married it will be different; we shall have plenty of leisure, and I will listen to you from morn till eve."

"In the name of pity, Sir, hear me now. If my father hath deceived you, I will not buoy you up with false hopes. My Lord, I do not love you; my heart is given to a young Lord who was my childhood's earliest friend. At the very moment when I am about to bestow my hand upon you, I am thinking of him. I love him, my Lord, I love him, and my whole soul is his, and his alone."

"You will soon forget this young man, fair lady. Once my wife, believe me, you will think of him no more."

"Never shall I forget him; his image is indelibly graven on my heart."

"At your age we think we shall love for ever, my dear love; then time creeps on and effaces in his march the tenderly cherished image. But come, we will speak of all this another time, and I will help you to set the hope of the future betwixt the past and the present."

"You have no pity, Sir?"

"I love you, Christabel."

"God have pity on me!" sighed the poor girl.

"God will certainly have pity," said the old man, taking Christabel's hand. "He will send you resignation and oblivion."

Sir Tristan kissed the cold hand in his with a respect mingled with tenderness and sympathy.

"You will be happy, fair lady," he said.

Christabel smiled sadly.

"I shall die," she thought to herself.

At Linton Abbey great preparations were being made for the wedding of the Lady Christabel and old Sir Tristan.

Ever since daybreak the Chapel had been hung with magnificent hangings, and sweet-smelling flowers diffused the most fragrant perfumes throughout the sanctuary. The Bishop of Hereford, who was to perform the marriage ceremony, stood at the Church door, with Monks in white vestments around him, awaiting the nuptial procession. Shortly before the arrival of Sir Tristan and the Lady Christabel, a man bearing in his hand a small harp presented himself before the Bishop.

"My Lord," said the new-comer, making respectful genuflexion, "are you not about to celebrate a High Mass in honour of the bride and bridegroom?"

"Yea, friend, I am," returned the Bishop. "But why dost thou ask?"

"My Lord," answered the stranger, "I am the best harpist in France or England, and usually in much request at all feasts. Having heard of the intended marriage betwixt the rich Sir Tristan and Baron Fitz-Alwine's only daughter, I am come to offer his Lordship my services."

"An thy talent match thy vanity and assurance, thou art welcome."

"I thank you, my Lord."

"The sound of the harp pleaseth me much," the Bishop continued, "and I should love to hear thee play before the wedding party arriveth."

"My Lord," replied the stranger, haughtily, drawing the folds of his long cloak around him with a majestic air, "an I were a wandering minstrel, like those you are wont to hear, I would fall in with your wishes; but I play only at stated seasons and in suitable places. By-and-by I hope to give you complete satisfaction.”

“Insolent varlet,” replied the Bishop, in an angry voice, “I command thee to play to me this very instant.”

“I will not touch a string until the escort arrive,” said the stranger, imperturbably; “but when it doth come, you will hear sounds which will astonish you. Of that rest assured.”

“We shall be able to judge of thy merits,” replied the Bishop, “for here they come.”

The stranger stepped back a few paces, while the Bishop advanced to meet the procession.

As she was about to enter the Church, Christabel turned half fainting to Baron Fitz-Alwine.

“Father,” she said in a faltering voice, “have pity on me; this marriage will be my death.”

A severe look from the Baron silenced the poor girl.

“Sir Knight,” added Christabel, laying her trembling hand on Sir Tristan’s arm, “be not merciless; you can still restore me to life. Have pity on me!”

“We will speak of that later,” said Sir Tristan; and he signed to the Bishop to enter the Church.

The Baron took his daughter’s hand, and was about to conduct her to the altar, when a loud voice cried “Stay!”

Lord Fitz-Alwine uttered a cry; Sir Tristan tottered, and had to lean for support against the great doorway of the Church. The stranger took the Lady Christabel’s hand in his.

“Presumptuous caitiff!” said the Bishop, recognising the minstrel, “who gave thee permission to lay thy mercenary hands on this noble lady?”

“‘Tis Providence sends me to succour her in her helplessness,” replied the stranger, haughtily.

The Baron threw himself upon the minstrel.

“Who are you?” he asked; “and why come you here to disturb a holy ceremony?”

“Villain!” cried the stranger, “call you this shameful union of a young maiden with an old man a holy ceremony? My Lady,” he added, bowing respectfully to the Lady Christabel, who was half dead with anguish, “you are come into the House of the Lord to receive the name of an honest man, and that name you shall receive. Take courage! Divine Providence yet watcheth over your innocence.”

The minstrel loosed with one hand the girdle which confined his robe, while with the other he raised to his lips a hunting-horn.

“Robin Hood!” cried the Baron.

“Robin Hood! the friend of Allan Clare!” murmured the Lady Christabel.

“Yea, Robin Hood and his Merrie Men,” replied our hero, indicating by a glance a number of foresters, who had stolen up silently and surrounded the escort.

At the same moment an elegantly clad young knight threw himself at the feet of Lady Christabel.

“My Lord,” said Robin Hood, respectfully approaching the Bishop with bared head, “you were about to unite, contrary to all human and social laws, two beings never destined by Heaven to dwell beneath one roof. Behold this young maiden; look at the husband whom the insatiable avarice of her father would have given her. Since earliest childhood the Lady Christabel hath been betrothed to the Knight Allan Clare. Like herself he is young, rich, and noble; he loves her, and we are come to humbly beg you to bless their union.”

“I formally oppose the marriage!” cried the Baron, striving to break from the grasp of Little John, to whom had fallen the lot of guarding him.

“Peace, inhuman man!” cried Robin Hood. “Dost dare to raise thy voice on the threshold of this holy place, and give the lie to the promises thou hast made?”

“I have made no promises,” roared Lord Fitz-Alwine.

“My Lord,” continued Robin Hood, addressing the Bishop, “will you unite these young people?”

“I cannot do it without the consent of Lord Fitz-Alwine.”

“Which consent I will never give.”

“My Lord,” continued Robin, taking no notice of the vociferations of the old man, “I await your final decision.”

“I cannot take it upon me to do as you wish,” replied the Bishop; “the banns have not been published, and the law doth require...”

“We will obey the law,” said Robin. “Friend Little John, confide his Lordship to the care of one of our men, and do you publish the banns.”

Little John obeyed. Three times he announced the marriage of Allan Clare and the Lady Christabel Fitz-Alwinev but the Bishop again refused to give the young people his blessing.

“Your decision is final, my Lord?” asked Robin.

“It is,” replied the Bishop.

“So be it. I had foreseen such an event, and am accompanied by a holy man, who hath the right to officiate. My father,” continued Robin, addressing an old man, who had remained unnoticed, “I pray you enter the Chapel; the young couple will follow you.”

The pilgrim, the same who had connived at Will’s escape, advanced slowly.

“I am here, my son,” he said; “I go to pray for the unfortunate and to beseech God to pardon the wicked.”

Guarded by the merrie men, the party entered the Chapel quietly, and the ceremony began at once. The Bishop disappeared, Sir Tristan groaned dismally, and Lord Fitz-Alwine muttered deep oaths of vengeance.

“Who giveth this woman?” asked the old palmer, laying his palsied hands on Christabel’s head, as she knelt before him.

“Will you be so good as to answer, my Lord?” said Robin Hood.

“Father, I pray you!” besought the girl.

“No, no! a thousand times, no!” cried the Baron, beside himself with rage.

“Since her father hath refused to keep the solemn promise he gave,” said Robin, “I will take his place. I, Robin Hood, do give the Lady Christabel as wife to the good Knight Sir Allan Clare.”

The ceremony proceeded without further obstacle. Hardly were Allan Clare and Christabel wedded ere the Gamwell family appeared on the threshold. Robin Hood advanced to meet Marian, and led her to the altar, William and Maude following them. As he passed close to Robin, who knelt at Marian’s side, Will whispered “At length, Rob, the happy day hath arrived. Look at Maude; how beautiful she is, and her dear little heart is beating fast, I warrant you.”

“Silence, Will; God is listening to us at this moment.”

“Yea, I know, and I am going to pray with my whole soul,” replied the happy youth.

The palmer blessed the new couples, and, raising his hands to Heaven, implored the divine mercy upon them.

“Maude, dear Maude,” said William, as soon as he was able to lead the girl from the Church, “at last you are my wife my dear wife! Fate hath set so many obstacles in the way of our happiness, ‘tis difficult for me now to realise its full extent. I am mad with joy; thou art mine, and mine alone. Hast prayed, Maude, my darling? Hast asked the Holy Virgin to grant us for ever same radiant joy she doth bestow on this day?”

Maude smiled and wept together, so full was her heart of love and gratitude to William.

Robin’s marriage threw the band of merrie men into transports of delight, and on issuing from the Church they uttered deafening cheers.

“The brawling ruffians,” growled Lord Fitz-Alwine, reluctantly following the form of Little John, who had politely requested him to leave the Chapel.

A few minutes after the Chapel was deserted. Lord Fitz-Alwine and Sir Tristan, deprived of their horses, dolefully supporting each other, and in a state of mind which baffles description, set out for the Castle with halting steps.

“Fitz-Alwine,” said the old man, stumbling as he spoke, “you will give me back the million pieces of gold which I confided to your care?”

“Nay, faith! Sir Tristan, for it was not my fault that misfortune befell you. Had you followed my counsels, this disaster would never have occurred. By holding the wedding in the Castle Chapel, our mutual desires would have been assured; but you preferred broad daylight to obscurity, and behold the result! This rascal hath carried off my daughter; I must have compensation, therefore I keep the gold.”

Returning to Nottingham in as sorry a plight as their masters, the servants of the two noblemen followed them at a distance, laughing behind their backs at the strange events of the day.

The wedding party, escorted by the merrie men, soon gained the depths of the wood. The old Forest had decked itself out to receive the happy couples, and the trees, refreshed by the morning dew, bowed their green branches over the visitors. Long garlands of flowers and foliage were wreathed from tree to tree, and bound together secular oaks and sturdy elms and slender poplars. Here and there appeared in the distance a stag crowned with flowers like a classic god. A fawn, bedecked with ribbons, bounded across the path, or a deer, wearing its festive collar too, darted like an arrow along the greensward. In the midst of a wide clearing in the woods a table was spread, a dancing-green levelled, and sports prepared in short, all the pleasures that could add to the satisfaction of the guests were disposed around them. Most of the fair maids of Nottingham had come to grace with their presence the feast of Robin Hood, and the most frolic gaiety prevailed in the happy gathering.

Maude and William, arm in arm, with smiling lips and joyous hearts, were wandering apart down a green avenue near the dancing-green, when Friar Tuck appeared before them.

"Halloo, good Tuck, merry Giles, my fat brother," cried Will, laughing, "art come to share our stroll? Welcome! Giles, my very good friend, and do me the honour to look at the treasure of my soul, my cherished wife, my most precious possession; look at this angel, Giles, and tell me if there doth exist beneath the skies a more charming being than my beautiful Maude. But methinks, friend Tuck," added the young man, looking more closely at the Monk's anxious face "methinks thou art ill at ease; what is it? Come, confide thy troubles to us; I will endeavour to cheer thee. Maude, my darling, let us be kind to him. Come, what is it, Giles? First, I will hear thy confidences, then I will speak to thee of my wife, and thine old heart will be young again in sympathy with mine."

"I have no confidences to make thee, Will," replied the Monk, in a somewhat broken voice, "but I rejoice to know that all thy desires are fulfilled."

"That doth not prevent me, friend Tuck, from remarking with real sorrow the sad expression of thy countenance. Come, what is it?"

"Naught," replied the Monk, "naught, unless it were an idea which crossed my mind, a will o' the wisp which burns into my brain, an elf which plagues my heart. Well, Will, I know not whether I should tell thee, but for many years I had hoped that the little witch whom thou dost hold so tenderly to thee would be my sunbeam, the joy of my existence, my dearest and most precious jewel."

"What, poor Tuck, until now thou hast loved my pretty Maude?"

"Yea, William."

"If I am not wrong, thou hast known her longer than Robin?"

"Than Robin? Yea, indeed."

"And hast loved her?"

"Alas, yea!" sighed the Monk.

"Could it be otherwise?" said Will, in a tender voice, kissing his wife's hand "Robin loved her at first sight, I adored her from the first, and now, Maude, thou art mine."

Silence followed Will’s passionate exclamation. The Monk bowed his head and Maude blushed and smiled at her husband.

“I do hope, friend Tuck,” continued William, in a tone of affection, “that my happiness is not thy pain; if I am happy to-day, it is by great tribulation that I have succeeded in making Maude my well-beloved wife. Thou hast not known the despair of rejected love; thou hast not known exile; thou hast not languished far from thy beloved; thou hast not lost thy strength, thy health, thy peace of mind.”

As he enumerated the last of his sorrows, Will cast his eyes upon the rubicund countenance of the Monk, and a loud laugh burst from him. Friar Tuck weighed at least fifteen stone, and his expansive figure resembled a full moon. Maude, who had understood the cause of Will’s sudden laughter, shared in his mirth, and Tuck joined in unaffectedly.

“I am quite well,” he said, with a charming good nature; “but that makes no odds... Well, no matter, I quite understand; and by’r lady, good friends,” he added, taking the clasped hands of the young people in his own large ones, “I wish you both perfect happiness. ‘Tis true, sweet Maude, your fawn-like eyes turned my head long ago; but there, I will not bear much thought. I have found a good moral to that chapter; I sought for a consolation in my cruel sorrow, and I found it.”

“Found it!” cried William and Maude together.

“Yea,” replied Tuck, with a smile.

“A black-eyed maid?” asked the coquettish Maude; “a young girl who can appreciate your good sterling qualities, Master Giles?”

The Monk began to laugh.

“Yea, truly,” he said, “my consolation is a lady with brilliant eyes and ruby lips. You ask me, sweet Maude, if she appreciates my merits? That is a question difficult to resolve, for my consoler is truly a thoughtless creature, and I am not the only one to whom she renders kiss for kiss.”

“And yet thou lovest her?” said Will, in a tone full at once of pity and reproach.

“Yea, I love her,” replied the Monk; “albeit, as I have just told you, she is very free with her favours.”

“But she must be a horrid woman,” cried Maude, flushing.

“What, Tuck,” added Will, “as brave a heart and as honest a soul as thine to be caught in the toils of such an infatuation! As for me, sooner than bestow my love on such a creature, I...”

"Tut! tut!" interrupted the Monk, mildly; "be careful, Will."

"Careful why?"

"Because it ill becomes thee to speak evil of one whom thou hast oft embraced."

"You have embraced this woman!" cried Maude, in a reproachful voice.

"Maude, Maude, it is a lie!" said Will.

"It is not a lie," replied the Monk, tranquilly; "thou hast embraced her not once, but ten times, twenty times."

"Will, Will!"

"Never listen to him, Maude, he is deceiving you. Now, look here, Tuck, tell the truth. I have embraced the maid of thy love?"

"Yea, and I can prove it."

"You hear him, Will," said Maude, ready to weep.

"I hear him, but I do not understand him," replied the young man. "Giles, in the name of our good friendship, I adjure you to confront me with this maid, and we will see whether she hath the effrontery to sustain your imposture."

"I ask naught better, Will, and I wager that not only wilt thou be constrained to confess the affection thou dost bear her, but thou wilt eke give her fresh proofs of it, and thou wilt even embrace her."

"I do not wish him to do so," said Maude, twining her arms round Will; "I do not wish him to speak to this woman."

"He will speak to her and he will embrace her," replied the Monk, with strange persistency.

"'Tis impossible," said Will.

"Quite impossible," added Maude.

"Show me thy beloved, Master Giles. Where is she?"

"What mean you, Will?" said Maude. "You cannot desire her presence, and beside... and beside, Will, methinks the person of whom you speak would not be a proper acquaintance for your wife."

"Thou art right, dear little wife," said Will, kissing Maude's brow; "she is not worthy to look at thee for a moment. My dear Tuck," he continued, "thou wilt oblige me by ceasing a pleasantry which is so disagreeable to Maude. I have neither desire nor curiosity to see thy beloved, wherefore let us speak of her no more."

"But 'tis necessary for the honour of my word, Will, that thou shouldest be confronted with her."

“Not at all, not at all!” said Maude. “William doth not desire this meeting, and it would be too painful for me.”

“I wish thee to see her,” replied the obstinate Giles; “and here she is!” Saying which, Tuck drew from his robe a silver flask, and raising it to William’s eyes, he said, “Look at my pretty bottle, my sweet consolation, and dare to say again that thou hast ne’er embraced her.”

The two young people laughed merrily.

“I do confess my sin, good Tuck,” cried Will, taking the bottle, “and I ask my dear little wife’s permission to implant a kiss of friendship on the ruby lips of this old friend.”

“Thou hast my consent, Will; drink to our happiness and the merry Monk’s prosperity.”

Will sipped the rosy fluid and returned the flask to Tuck, who in his enthusiasm drained it completely. The three friends then strolled about with linked arms until at a call from Robin they rejoined the assembly.

Robin had presented Much to Barbara, saying, that this handsome young man was the long-promised husband. But Barbara had shaken her fair curls, saying that she did not want to marry yet.

Little John, who was not of a very expansive nature, was quite amiable that day. He showered attentions on his cousin Winifred, and it was easy to see that the two young people had many secrets to confide to each other, for they conversed in whispers, danced together all the time, and seemed unconscious of everything going on around them.

As for Christabel, her sweet face was radiant with happiness, but she was still so much affected by her abrupt separation from her father, so much enfeebled by her recent sufferings, that it was impossible for her to mix in the games. Seated near Allan Clare beneath a canopy, upon a little hillock strewn with flowers, she looked like a young Queen presiding over a Royal feast given to her subjects.

Marian, tenderly supported by the arm of her husband, was walking on the dancing-green with him.

“I am coming to live near you, Robin,” said the young wife, “and until the happy moment when you are restored to favour, I shall share the vicissitudes and loneliness of your existence.”

“It were wiser, my dearest, to live at Barnsdale.”

“No, Robin, my heart is with you, and I cannot leave my heart.”

“I am proud to accept thy courageous devotion, dear wife, my sweet love,” replied the young man with emotion, “and I will do all ever I can for thy satisfaction and happiness in thy new life.”

In truth Robin Hood’s wedding day was one of happiness and joy.

CHAPTER IV

Marian kept her word, and, despite Robin's mild objections, took up her abode under the great trees of Sherwood Forest. Allan Clare, who owned, as we have already said, a large house in the valley of Mansfield, could not prevail upon his sister to come and live in it with Christabel; for Marian was firmly resolved not to leave her husband.

Immediately after his wedding, the Knight had offered to sell his Huntingdonshire estates to King Henry II. at two-thirds of their value, on condition of his marriage with Lady Christabel Fitz-Alwine being confirmed by letters patent. The King, who always seized with avidity any opportunity of acquiring the richest domains in England for the Crown, accepted the offer, and, by a special act, confirmed the marriage of the two young people. Allan Clare had made his application with such adroitness and promptitude, and the King was so eager to close the bargain, that all was completed by the time the Bishop of Hereford and Baron Fitz-Alwine arrived at Court.

It is hardly necessary to remark that the Bishop and the Norman Baron stirred up the Royal anger against Robin Hood to the utmost. At their urgent request, Henry gave the Bishop leave to seize the person of the hardy outlaw, and to put him to death without delay or mercy.

Whilst the two Normans were conspiring thus against Robin Hood, the latter, at the height of his bliss, was living quietly and without a care beneath the good green trees of Sherwood Forest.

Will Scarlett was the happiest man in all the world, in the possession of his well-beloved Maude. Gifted with a vivid imagination, Will had imagined eternal bliss as consisting in a wife like Maude, and in his eyes she was endowed with all the charms of an angel. Maude was aware of this flattering affection, and she strove to remain upon the pedestal to which her husband's love had elevated her. Following the example set by Robin Hood and Marian, Will and his wife had made their home in the Forest, and they all lived there together in the greatest harmony.

Robin Hood loved the fair sex, firstly from natural inclination, and secondly out of regard for the charming creature who bore his name. Robin Hood's companions shared his feelings of respect and veneration towards women; and thus the maidens of the neighbourhood were able to traverse the Forest paths without fear of molestation. If by chance they encountered any of the band, they were asked to partake of refreshment, and afterwards they were given an escort through the wood, and no cause for complaint had ever arisen. When the kindly courtesy of the Foresters became known, its renown travelled afar, and many a bright-eyed maiden with light heart and tripping feet had ventured among the dells and glades of Sherwood.

On Robin's wedding day, a number of these young maidens joined in the festivities, and gazed admiringly at the handsome couple. As they danced, these fair daughters of Eve cast furtive glances at their gallant swains, and were only surprised to think that they had ever feared them for a single moment, whispering to each other that it must be very delightful to share the adventurous loves of the hardy outlaws. In the innocence of their young hearts they allowed these secret wishes to appear, and the enraptured Foresters, making the best use of their time, the beautiful maidens of Nottingham found that the language of Robin Hood's Merrie Men was no less irresistibly eloquent than their eyes.

The result of all this was that Friar Tuck became overwhelmed with work, being occupied from morning to night in solemnising marriages. Very naturally the good Monk was anxious to discover whether these multiple unions were not an epidemic of a peculiar character, and how many people would still succumb to it. But his question remained unanswered. Having attained its zenith, the rage for marriages abated, and the cases became fewer. Nevertheless, it is curious to observe that the symptoms are still as violent, and that they continue even to our own day.

The little colony in the Forest lived very merrily. The cave of which we have spoken had been divided into cells and rooms which served only for bedchambers, the vast glades serving as drawing and dining-rooms, and it was only in winter that they had recourse to their subterranean retreat. It is difficult to imagine how quiet and peaceful was the life these men led. Nearly all were of Saxon origin and attached to one another like members of one family; most of them had suffered cruel oppression at the hands of the Norman invaders.

Robin Hood's band levied tribute most particularly upon two classes of society: the rich Norman nobles and the clergy. On the first because they had robbed the Saxons of their titles and patrimony, and on the second because they were continually augmenting their already considerable riches at the expense of the people. Robin Hood levied imposts on the Normans, and though such contributions were heavy, they were exacted without combat or bloodshed. The orders of the young Chief were strictly carried out, for disobedience meant death. The severity of this discipline had earned an excellent reputation for Robin Hood's band, whose loyal and chivalrous character was well known. Many expeditions were undertaken vainly to try and oust the Merrie men from their retreat; but the authorities, wearied at last by their fruitless endeavours, ceased to harass them, and Henry II's indifference finally compelled the Normans to submit to the dangerous vicinity of their enemies.

Marian found her forest life even more agreeable than she had dared to hope; she was born (as she laughingly said) to be Queen of this merry tribe. The respectful homage, affection, and devotion lavished on Robin were extremely flattering to Marian, and she was proud to depend on the valiant young man's protecting arm. If Robin Hood knew how to gain and keep the affection of his followers by showing towards every man a consistent kindness and sincere friendship, he could also exert absolute authority over them.

The beautiful Forest held a thousand pleasures for Marian. Now she wandered with her husband through the picturesque windings of the wood, anon she found amusement in the sports and games then in vogue. Thanks to Robin's care, she possessed a rare and valuable flock of falcons, and she learnt to fly them with a tried and skilful hand. But the sport which Marian loved best was archery; with indefatigable patience Robin initiated his young wife into all the mysteries of the art. Marian attended carefully to the lessons given her, and never was pupil more apt. She thus became in a short time an archer of the first rank. It was a pleasing sight to Robin and his Merrie Men to watch Marian, bow in hand, clad in a tunic of Lincoln green, her majestic and supple figure slightly bent, her left hand holding the bow, while her right, curving gracefully, drew the arrow to her ear. When Marian had mastered all the secrets of the art which had made Robin so famous, she acquired a like renown. The young woman's inimitable skill roused the admiration and respect of the inhabitants of the Forest to the utmost, and the allies of the band and the citizens of the towns of Mansfield and Nottingham came in crowds to witness her prowess.

A year slipped by a year of joy, happiness, bliss. Allan-a-Dale (we will now speak of the Knight by the name of his property) had become a father;

Heaven had blessed him with a daughter. Robin and William each rejoiced in a handsome son, and a round of dances and general rejoicings celebrated these happy events.

One morning Robin Hood with Will Scarlett and Little John met beneath a tree called the "trysting-tree," because it served as the rallying-point of the band, when they heard a faint sound in the distance.

"Hark!" said Robin, quickly. "'Tis a horse I hear in the clearing; go see whether we may expect a guest. You take me, Little John?"

"Perfectly. And I will bring back the rider, an he prove worthy to share your repast."

"He will be twice welcome," laughed Robin, "for I begin to feel the pangs of hunger."

Little John and Will glided through the thicket toward the road taken by the traveller, and soon came near enough to distinguish him.

"By the holy Mass, the poor devil hath a sorry look, and I dare swear his fortune causeth him but little embarrassment."

"I must e'en avow the Knight doth wear a grievous air," replied Little John; "but perchance the poverty of his outer man is but a clever artifice. The traveller trusteth to his seeming misery to traverse the Forest with impunity. We will teach him that, an he incline to trickery, we are his match in cunning."

Though habited in the garb of a Knight, the traveller at a first glance inspired a feeling of pity. His clothes hung on him anyhow, as though adversity had made him careless of appearances; the hood of his cloak hung round his neck; and his head, bowed in thought, bore evidence of extreme wretchedness. The deep bass voice of Little John roused the stranger suddenly from his reverie.

"Good day, Sir Stranger!" cried our friend, advancing to meet the traveller; "art welcome to the green wood. Thou hast been anxiously awaited."

"Awaited?" asked the stranger, fixing his sad gaze upon John's broad countenance.

"Yea, Sir Knight," replied Will Scarlett; "our master bade us seek thee, and for three hours he hath awaited thine arrival, ere commencing his meal."

"No one doth expect me," replied the stranger, with a troubled air, "You are mistaken; I am not the guest whom your master expects."

“I ask pardon, Master, but ‘tis indeed thou. He had learnt thou wouldst be coming through the Forest to-day.”

“Impossible, impossible,” repeated the stranger.

“We speak the truth,” returned Will.

“May I ask the name of one who shows such courtesy toward a poor traveller?”

“It is Robin Hood,” replied Little John, hiding a smile.

“Robin Hood, the famous outlaw?” questioned the stranger, in evident surprise.

“Himself, Master.”

“I have long heard tell of him,” added the stranger, “and his noble conduct hath inspired in me a true regard for him. I am much pleased to have a chance of meeting Robin Hood; he hath a loyal and faithful heart. I will accept his kind invitation with pleasure, though I am at a loss to understand how he was aware of my journey through his domains.”

“He will be glad to inform thee of that himself,” replied Little John.

“As you will, brave Forester. Lead the way; I will follow in your steps.”

Little John took the traveller’s horse by the bridle, and conducted him into the path leading to the cross-road where Robin still remained. Will followed as rear-guard.

Little John did not doubt for a single moment but that this semblance of grief and poverty was a mask to serve as passport in case of an unwelcome encounter, whilst Will divined, more correctly perhaps, that the traveller was really and truly a poor man from whom they would obtain no other satisfaction than that of seeing him eat a right good dinner.

The stranger and his guides soon found Robin Hood. The latter saluted the new-comer, and, struck by his dejected appearance, watched him narrowly, whilst the other strove to readjust in some measure his poor clothing. An air of the greatest distinction accompanied all his movements, and Robin soon arrived at the same conclusion as Little John, that the stranger affected this careworn melancholy and these tattered garments as a safeguard to his purse.

Nevertheless, the young Chief received the dejected stranger with great kindness, offering him a seat, while he ordered one of his men to look after his guest’s horse.

A delicious repast was spread upon the green turf, which is thus described in the words of an old ballad:

“And then with wine and manchet bread
And mumbrils of the roe,
They feasted, while the Malmsey wine
Around the board did flow.
And many a sylvan guest was there,
With feathered minstrels of the air.”

As we have remarked, despite the miserable appearance of his guest, Robin did not fail in hospitality toward him. If sorrow sharpens the appetite, we must say that the stranger was full of woe. He attacked the dishes with all the ardour of a stomach that has been empty for twenty-four hours, and the meats disappeared with great draughts of wine which bore witness to the excellence of the liquid, or to the weakening effect of sorrow.

After the repast Robin and his guest stretched themselves beneath the majestic shade of the great trees, and conversed without reserve. The Knight’s opinions of men and matters raised him high in Robin’s estimation, and, notwithstanding his miserable bearing, the young Chief could not believe in the sincerity of his apparent misery. Of all vices Robin most disliked dissimulation; his frank and open nature hated cunning. Therefore, in spite of the real esteem with which the Knight inspired him, he resolved to make him pay heavily for his repast. An opportunity for putting this determination into effect soon presented itself, for, after having railed against human ingratitude, the stranger added “I have so great a scorn for this vice that it doth no longer astonish me; but I can affirm that never in all my life have I been guilty of it myself. Allow me, Robin Hood, to thank you with all my heart for your friendly reception of me, and if ever a lucky chance should lead you into the neighbourhood of St. Mary’s Abbey, forget not that at the Castle of the Plain you will ever find a loving and cordial hospitality.”

“Sir Knight,” replied the young man, “those whom I receive in the Forest never undergo the danger of a visit from me. To those who are really in need of a good meal I willingly give a place at my table; but I am less generous toward travellers who have the wherewithal to pay for my hospitality. I fear to wound the pride of a man favoured by fortune, an if I give him of my venison and wine for naught. I find it more pleasant both for him and myself to say, ‘This Forest is an inn, I am the host, my Merrie Men the servants. As noble guests, pay liberally for your refreshment.’”

The Knight began to laugh.

“That is,” said he, “a mighty pleasant way of looking at things, and an ingenious fashion of levying tribute. I heard tell, not many days agone, of the courteous way in which you eased travellers of their superfluous wealth, but I have never had so clear an explanation as this.”

“Well, Sir Knight, I am about to complete the explanation,” saying which Robin took up a hunting horn and raised it to his lips. Little John and Will Scarlett appeared in answer to his summons. “Sir Knight,” Robin Hood went on, “the hospitality comes to an end; be so good as to pay the shot, my manciples stand ready to receive it.”

“Since you consider the Forest as an inn, the charges are no doubt in proportion to its extent?” said the Knight, in a calm voice.

“Just so, Master.”

“You receive knights, barons, dukes, and peers of the realm at the same price?”

“Yea, at the same price,” replied Robin Hood, “and it is but just. You would not wish, I imagine, that a poor peasant like myself should entertain gratuitously an emblazoned knight, an earl, a duke, or a prince; it would be contrary to all rules of breeding.”

“You are perfectly right, good host, but you will have but a sad opinion of your guest, when he tells you that his entire fortune consists in ten pistoles.”

“Permit me to doubt that assertion, Sir Knight,” replied Robin.

“My dear host, I invite your companions to prove the truth of my statement by searching me.”

Little John, who rarely allowed an opportunity of demonstrating his social position to escape him, hastened to obey.

“The Knight speaks truth,” he cried, with a disappointed air; “he hath but ten pistoles.”

“And that small sum doth represent all my fortune at present,” added the stranger.

“Have you, then, consumed your inheritance?” asked Robin, with a laugh, “or was that inheritance of so little value?”

“My patrimony was considerable,” replied the Knight, “and I have not squandered it.”

“How, then, are you so poor? for you will own that your present situation looks hopeless enow.”

“Appearances sometimes err, and to make you understand my misfortunes it would be necessary to recount to you a very sad story.”

“Sir Knight, I will give you my best attention, and should it be in my power to help you, make use of me.”

“I am aware, noble Robin Hood, that you generously extend your protection to the oppressed, and that they have claims on your warm sympathy.”

“Spare me, Master, I pray you,” interrupted Robin, “and let us concern ourselves with your affairs.”

“My name is Richard,” continued the stranger, “and my family is descended from King Ethelred.”

“You are a Saxon, then?” said the young man.

“Yea, and the nobility of my birth hath been the cause of much misfortune.”

“Suffer me to shake a brother’s hand,” replied Robin, with a merry smile on his lips. “Saxons, rich or poor, are freely welcome to the Forest of Sherwood.”

The Knight responded cordially to his host’s hand-clasp, and continued thus:

“I was given the surname of Sir Richard of the Plain from the situation of my Castle in the centre of a vast moorland about two miles from St. Mary’s Abbey. While still quite young I was married to a maid whom I had loved from my earliest childhood. Heaven blessed our union and sent us a son. Never did parents love their child as we loved our little Herbert, and never was child more love-worthy. Our proximity to the Abbey had led to frequent intercourse, and a great intimacy had sprung up betwixt the Brothers and myself. One day a Brother toward whom I had shown much sympathy asked me for a few minutes’ conversation, and taking me aside spoke thus:

“Sir Richard, I am about to take irrevocable vows. I am about to quit the world for ever. Beside her mother’s tomb I leave a poor orphan, defenceless and penniless. I am for ever dedicated to God, and I trust that the austerity of the Cloister will give me the courage to support the burden of life a few years longer. I come to ask you in the name of Divine Providence to have pity on my poor little daughter.”

“My dear brother,” said I to the unhappy man, “I thank you for your confidence, and since you have placed your trust in me, that trust shall not be betrayed; your daughter shall become mine.”

The Brother, moved to tears by what he called my generosity, thanked me warmly and, at my request, sent for his little daughter.

I have never experienced any emotion like that produced by the sight of this child.

She was twelve years old, with a willowy, graceful figure, and long blonde tresses covered her pretty shoulders with their silken curls. On entering the room where I was waiting, she greeted me prettily, fixing upon me two large blue eyes full of sadness. As you may imagine, good host, this charming little maid quite won my heart; I took her hands in mine, and implanted on her brow a fatherly kiss.

“You see, Sir Richard,” said the Monk, “this sweet child is worthy of affection.”

“Yea, truly, Brother, and I avow that never in my life have mine eyes rested upon so charming a being.”

“Lilias is very like her mother,” replied the Monk, “and the sight of her adds to my sorrow; she takes my mind from heavenly things and carries back my thoughts to the sweet creature sleeping yonder within the cold tomb. Adopt my sweet child, Sir Richard; you will never regret your charitable action. Lilias doth possess excellent qualities and a good temper; she is pious, sweet, and good.”

“I will be a father to her, a tender father,” I replied with emotion.

The poor little girl heard us with an air of surprise, and looking anxiously from her father to me with her large blue eyes, she said “Father, you wish...”

“I only wish your happiness, my darling child,” replied the Monk. “Our separation hath become imperative.”

“I will not attempt to depict the painful scene which followed or the long explanations given by the Monk to his heart-broken child. He wept with her, until, at a sign from the unhappy man, I took Lilias in my arms and bore her from the Monastery.

During the first days after her arrival, at the Castle, Lilias was sad and troubled, then time and the companionship of my son Herbert appeared to calm her sorrow. The two children grew up together, and when Lilias had attained her sixteenth, and Herbert his twentieth year, I could plainly see that they loved each other with a more tender love.

“These young hearts,” I said to my wife, after having made this discovery, “have never known sorrow; let us protect them against its attacks. Herbert adores Lilias, and on her part Lilias loves our dear son passionately. What matters it to us thai Lilias is of lowly birth? Though her father was once only a poor Saxon peasant, he is now a holy man. Thanks to our care, Lilias possesses all the qualities which are an appanage of her sex; she loves Herbert, and will make him a good wife.”

My wife consented with all her heart to the marriage of her two children, and we betrothed them that same day.

The day fixed for the happy union was approaching, when a Norman Knight, owner of a small fief in Lancashire, came to pay a visit to the Abbey of St. Mary. This Norman had seen and admired my house, and was seized with a desire to possess it himself. Without disclosing this covetousness, he learned that I had under my paternal care a pretty girl of marriageable age; and rightly supposing that a portion of my wealth would be given to Lilias as her dowry, the Norman appeared at my gate, and under pretext of visiting the Castle, he managed to gain an entrance into our family circle. As I told you, Robin, Lilias was very beautiful, and the sight of her fired my guest’s imagination; he repeated his visit, and confided to me his love for my son’s betrothed. Without rejecting the Norman’s honourable proposal, I told him of the engagement already made by the maiden, adding at the same time that Lilias was free to bestow her hand where she would.

He then spoke to the girl herself. Lilias’ refusal was kind but firm; she loved Herbert.

The Norman left the Castle in a rage, swearing to have his revenge for what he called our insolence.

At first we only laughed at his threats, but we learnt by experience how serious they were. Two days after the departure of the Norman, the eldest son of one of my vassals came to tell me that he had met, some four miles from the Castle, the stranger who had lately been my guest, carrying in his arms my poor unhappy child. This news caused us terrible distress. I could hardly believe it, but the young man gave me irrefutable proofs of the calamity.

“‘Sir Richard,’ he said to me, ‘my words are only too true, and it was thus that I became assured that Mistress Lilias had been abducted. I was seated at the side of the road when a horseman, bearing before him a weeping woman and followed by his squire, stopped a few paces from me. The harness of his horse was broken, and with angry threats he called me to his assistance. I approached; Mistress Lilias wrung her hands. 'Arrange this bridle,' said the Knight, gruffly to me. I obeyed, and without being perceived, I cut the girths of the saddle; then, whilst pretending to examine the horse's shoes, I managed to slip a pebble into his hoof. Having done which, I fled to warn you.'"

My son Herbert could tarry to listen to no more, but away to the stables, saddled a horse, and set off at topmost speed.

The young peasant's trick had been successful. When Herbert overtook the Norman, he had dismounted. Then there was a terrible fight between the villain and my son, in which right conquered, and my son killed the ravisher.

Soon as ever the Norman's death became known, a troop of soldiers was sent to arrest Herbert. I hid him and sent a humble petition to the King. I made known to His Majesty the Norman's infamous conduct; I pointed out to him that my son had fought with his enemy, and had killed him while exposing himself to a like fate. The King made me buy my son's pardon at the price of a considerable ransom. Only too happy to obtain mercy, I hastened to satisfy the King's demands. My coffers emptied, I appealed to my vassals, and sold my plate and furniture. My last resources exhausted, I still required four hundred gold crowns. The Abbot of Saint Mary's then offered to lend the required sum on mortgage, and it is hardly necessary to add that I gladly accepted his kind offer. The conditions of the loan were as follows: A pretended sale of my estates would give him the rents for one year. If on the last day of the twelfth month of this year I do not repay him the four hundred gold crowns, all my goods will remain his. That is my position, good host," added the Knight "the day of reckoning approaches, and my whole fortune consists of ten pistoles."

"Do you think that the Abbot of Saint Mary's will not give you time to free yourself?" asked Robin Hood.

"I am unfortunately but too sure that he will not give me an hour, a minute. If he be not reimbursed to the last crown, my estates will remain in his hands. Alas! I am indeed in a sorry plight; my beloved wife will have no home, my children no food. Could I suffer alone, I should take courage; but to watch the sufferings of those I love is too great a trial of my strength. I have asked help from those who called themselves my friends in the day of prosperity, and have received an icy refusal from some, indifference from others. I have no friends, Robin Hood; I am alone."

As he finished speaking, the Knight hid his face in his trembling hands, and a convulsive sob escaped him.

"Sir Richard," said Robin Hood, "your story is a sad one; but you must not despair of God's goodness; He watcheth over you, and I believe you are on the point of obtaining heavenly succour."

"Alas!" sighed the Knight, "could I but obtain a delay, I might be able to pay off the debt. Unfortunately the only security I can offer is a vow to the Virgin."

"I will take that security," replied Robin Hood; "and, in the revered name of the Mother of God, our holy patroness,

I will lend you the four hundred golden crowns you lack."

The Knight uttered a cry.

You, Robin Hood! Ah! bless you a thousand times. I swear with all the sincerity of a grateful heart loyally to repay the money."

"I will count on it, Sir Knight. Little John," Robin added, "you know where to find our horde, since you are treasurer of the Forest; go seek me four hundred crowns. As for you, Will, go look in my wardrobe and see whether there be not a garment worthy of our guest there."

"In truth, Robin Hood, your goodness is so great..." cried the Knight.

"Peace, peace," interrupted Robin, laughingly. "We have just entered upon an agreement, and I must honour you as the envoy of the Holy Virgin. Will, add to the clothes some ells of fine cloth; put new harness on the grey horse which the Bishop of Hereford committed to our care; and, Will, my friend, add to these modest gifts all that your inventive mind can think of as necessary to a Knight."

Little John and Will hastened to accomplish their mission.

"Cousin," said John, "thy hands be nimbler than mine, count the money whilst I measure the cloth; my bow will serve for yard measure."

"Certes," replied Will, with a laugh,

"the measure will be good."

"It will, as thou shalt see."

Little John took his bow in one hand, unrolled the piece of cloth with the other and set himself to measure, not by ells' but exactly by bow lengths.

Will burst out laughing.

"Go on, friend John, go on; wilt soon come to an end of the whole piece, an thou go on giving three yards for one. Well done!"

"Hold thy tongue, thou prating fool. Dost not know that Robin would give even more, an he were in our place?"

"Then will I add a few crowns," said William.

"A few handfuls, cousin; we will recover it from the Normans."

"Well, I have finished."

When Robin saw the generosity of John and Will, he smiled, and thanked them by a look.

"Sir Knight," said Will, putting the gold into the Knight's hand, "each roll contains one hundred crowns."

"But there are six rolls, my young friend."

"You are mistaken, Sir Guest; there are but four. And, after all, what matter? Put the money in your purse, and say no more on't."

"When shall I repay it?" asked the Knight.

"One year from this, day for day, an that will suit you, and I am still of this world," said Robin.

"Agreed."

"Beneath this tree."

"I will attend punctually, Robin Hood," replied the Knight, as he wrung the young Chief's hand with effusive gratitude. "But ere we part, let me tell you that all the praises lavished on you cannot equal those which fill my heart; you have saved more than my life; you have saved my wife and children."

"Master," replied Robin Hood, "you are a Saxon, and that name alone doth give you a claim upon my friendship; beside which, you have another interest for me that of distress. I am what men call a robber, a thief so be it! But an I extort money from the rich, I take naught from the poor. I detest violence, and I shed no blood; I love my country, and the Norman race is odious to me because to usurpation they have added tyranny. Nay, never thank me; I have done but my duty; you had naught, and I gave to you, 'tis only just."

"Say what you will, your conduct toward me is noble and generous; you, a stranger, have done more for me than all they which call themselves my friends. May God bless you, Robin, for you have brought joy to my heart. At all times and in every place I shall be your debtor, and I pray Heaven to enable me to prove my gratitude some day. Farewell, Robin Hood! farewell, true friend! In one year I will return to pay my debt."

“Farewell, Sir Knight,” replied Robin, shaking his guest warmly by the hand; “and should fate bring me to a pass where I need your help, believe me, I shall not fail to ask it without compunction or reserve.”

“May God hear you! My greatest hope is that I may be able to assist you.”

Sir Richard wrung the hands of Will and Little John, and bestrode the Bishop of Hereford’s dapple grey. The Knight’s own mount, laden with Robin Hood’s presents, was to follow its master.

As Robin Hood watched his temporary guest disappear at a bend of the road, he said to his companions, “We have made a man happy; the day hath been well spent.”

CHAPTER V

Marian and Maude had been living at Barnsdale Hall for a month past, and they could not return to their old mode of life until their health was quite re-established, for it must not be forgotten that the young women had become mothers.

But Robin Hood could not endure the prolonged absence of his beloved companion, and one day, carrying with him part of his band, he took up his abode in Barnsdale Forest. William, who had naturally followed his young chief, soon declared that the subterranean dwelling, constructed hastily in the neighbourhood of the Hall, was infinitely preferable to that in the great Forest of Sherwood; or, at least, if it wanted certain things to complete the well-being of the troop, the proximity of Barnsdale Hall was a very agreeable compensation.

Robin and William were enchanted at their change of abode, and two young people of our acquaintance shared in their unreserved satisfaction for the same reason; these two young men were Little John and Much Cockle, the miller’s son. Kobin soon perceived that Little John and Much were absent at all hours of the day without apparent motive. These absences became so frequent that Robin wished to know the cause of them. He made inquiries, and learnt that his cousin Winifred, being very fond of walking, had asked Little John to show her the most noteworthy parts of the Forest. “Good!” said Robin. “So much for Little John; now for Much.” He was told that Barbara, sharing her sister’s curiosity as to the beauties of the country, had wished to accompany her in these woodland rambles; but that Little John, with praiseworthy prudence, had told the young girl that the responsibility of looking after the one lady was already very great, and that it was impossible for him to accept her company and the extra responsibility involved thereby. Consequently, Much offered his protection to Mistress Barbara, and she accepted it. So the two couples wandered among the trees and into the most mysterious and gloomy recesses of the woods, talking the while of no one knows what. They forgot to look at the objects they had come to see; and the old gnarled oaks, the beeches with their graceful boughs, the secular elms, passed before their eyes without attracting the least attention. Then a coincidence, stranger even than this indifference to the beauties of nature, always led them to remote paths, and they never met till they came to the gate of the Hall as the stars began to peep out.

These walks, repeated daily, sufficiently explained to Robin the absence of his two companions.

It was the evening of a scorching day, and a warm zephyr fanned the air, when Marian and Maude, leaning on the arms of Robin and William, set out from the Hall to take a long walk in the fragrant glades of the Forest. Winifred and Barbara followed the two young couples, while Little John and his inseparable friend Much shadowed the two sisters.

"Here I can breathe," said Marian, holding up her pale face to the breeze. "There seems no air in a room, and I long to return to the Forest once again."

"Then life in the woods is very pleasant?" questioned Mistress Barbara.

"Yea," replied Marian; "there is so much sunshine, light, shade, flowers, and foliage."

"Much told me yesterday," continued Barbara, "that Sherwood Forest doth surpass Barnsdale in beauty; but if that is so, it must contain all the marvels of creation, for here we have the most bewitching spots."

"You think Barnsdale Wood very pretty, then, Barbara?" said Robin, concealing a smile.

"It is charming," replied the girl, vivaciously; "there are such beautiful views in it."

"Which part of the wood particularly attracts your attention, cousin?"

"I cannot well reply to your question, Robin; but I think I prefer a valley, which I am certain hath not its equal in old Sherwood Forest."

"And where is this valley?"

"Some distance from here. But you can imagine nothing fresher, more still, or more fragrant than that little spot. Picture to yourself, cousin, a large lawn with sloping sides, on the summit of which all kinds of trees grow in profusion. The different varieties of leaves lit up by the sunshine take on marvellous aspects; now you see before you a curtain of emeralds, anon a veil of multitudinous colours unrolls itself beneath your gaze. The turf which covers this dell is like a large green carpet without a wrinkle to break its smooth surface. Scatter flowers of purple and gold and all the colours of the rainbow over the declivities beneath the trees, imagine a slender thread of water rippling through the shady ravine, and you will have before you the oasis of Barnsdale Forest. And then," continued the girl, "the stillness is so great in this delicious spot, the air one breathes so pure, that the heart swells with joy in very truth I have never in all my life seen so ravishing a place."

"And where is this enchanted valley, Barbara?" asked Winifred, innocently.

"Oh! then you do not always, walk about together?" interrupted Robin, with a smile.

"Yea," added Winifred; "only we always lose each other no, I mean to say very often at least sometimes. I mean to say that Little John loses the way, and then we get separated; we seek for each other, but I do not know how it happens that we never meet until we arrive at the Hall. This continual separation is quite accidental, I assure you."

"Yea, truly; quite accidental," Robin returned mockingly; "and no one supposes the contrary. Then why blush, Barbara? Why look down, Winifred? Look at John and Much, neither of them is embarrassed; they know so well that you get lost in the wood without meaning it."

"Yea, i'faith!" answered Much; "and knowing Mistress Barbara's fancy for quiet and retired spots, I took her to the little valley which she hath just described."

"I am forced to believe," said Robin, "that Barbara doth possess a great talent for observation to have been able to take in at one glance all the charming details which she hath just depicted. But tell me, Barbara, did you not find in this oasis of Barnsdale, as you call the vale discovered by Much, something still more charming yet than the trees with varied green, the verdant sward, the murmuring stream and the many-hued flowers?"

Barbara blushed.

"I do not know what you mean, cousin."

"Oh, indeed! Much will understand better than you, I hope. Come now, Much, answer frankly: Hath not Barbara forgotten to tell us of some charming episode connected with your visit to this terrestrial paradise?"

"What episode, Robin?" asked the young man, with the shadow of a smile.

"My discreet friend," replied Robin, "have you never known two young people, attracted by one another, go alone to this delicious retreat, the memory of which is engraved on Barbara's heart?"

Much blushed painfully.

“Well,” continued Robin, “two young people, intimate acquaintances of mine, visited your terrestrial paradise a few days ago. Arrived on the flowering banks of the little stream, they seated themselves side by side. At first they admired the landscape, listened to the song of the birds; then for some minutes they remained blind and dumb; then the youth, emboldened by the solitude, the stirring silence of his trembling companion, took her two little hands in his. The maiden did not raise her eyes, but she blushed, and this blush spoke for her. Then, in a voice which to the girl sounded sweeter than the song of birds, more melodious than the murmur of the breeze, the young man said to her, ‘There is no one in all the world I love so much as you; I would rather die than lose your love; and if you will be my wife, you will make me the happiest of men.’ Tell me, Barbara,” added Robin, with a smile, “do you know whether the maiden granted her lover’s fervent prayer?”

“Make no reply to such a very indiscreet question, Barbara!” cried Marian.

“Speak for Barbara, Much,” said Robin.

“You ask us such strange questions,” replied the young man, strongly inclined to believe that Robin had overheard his tete-a-tete with Barbara, “that it is impossible to gather what they mean.”

“In faith, Much,” said William, “meseemeth Robin speaks truth, and, judging by your abashed looks and the brilliant colour which o’erspreads my sister’s face, you are the lovers of the vale. Upon my word, Barbara, if they call me Will Scarlett because of my ruddy locks, they might e’en call thee Barbara Scarlett, for thy face is well-nigh purple. Is’t not so, Maude?”

“Master William,” said Barbara, with an air of displeasure, “if thou wert within reach of mine hand, I would have much pleasure in pulling out a handful of thine ugly locks.”

“Thou mightest well behave so, an those same locks grew on any head save mine,” said William, throwing a look at Much; “but thy brother’s head is unassailable. It hath its own particular tyrant eh, Maude?”

“Yea, Will; but I never pull your hair out.”

“That will come, little wife.”

“Never,” said Maude, with a laugh.

“Then, Much, thou wilt not tell me what answer the maiden gave thee?”

“If you should e’er meet that maiden, you can ask her yourself, Robin.”

“I will not fail. And you, Little John, do you know any youth who loves a tete-a-tete with a charming lady?”

“Nay, Robin, but if you wish to know these lovers, I will strive to discover them for you,” replied Little John, naively.

“I have just thought of something, John,” cried Will, bursting out a-laughing. “These lovers of whom Robin speaks are not unknown to thee, and I dare wager what thou wilt that the young man in question might be called my cousin, while the maiden is a sweet lady of this neighbourhood.”

“Art wrong, Will,” answered John; “it is naught to do with me.”

“Certes, I am on the wrong track,” returned Will, with a smile; “it could not have been thou, for thou hast never been in love.”

“I beg thy pardon, Will,” replied the giant, tranquilly. “I love with all my heart, and have long done so, a beautiful and charming maid.”

“Ha! ha!” cried Will. “Little John in love; here’s something new!”

“And why should not Little John be in love?” asked the youth, goodhumouredly. “I ween there is naught extraordinary in that.”

“Naught at all, my good friend. I like to see all the world happy, and love is happiness; but, by St. Paul! I should very much like to see thy lady love.”

“My lady love!” exclaimed the other. “But who could that be save thine own sister Winifred, Cousin Will? Thy sister, whom I have loved from childhood as you love Maude, or Much loves Barbara.”

A general shout of laughter greeted John’s frankness, and Winifred, overwhelmed with congratulations, threw a look of tender reproach at the young giant.

“Ah, ha! Much,” Robin resumed, “sooner or later truth will out. I hit the mark in fixing upon thee as the hero of the little scene enacted in Barnsdale Wood.”

“You witnessed it, then?” asked Much.

“Nay; but I guessed it, or, rather, I recalled mine own impressions. The same thing happened to me a year agone; Marian had enticed me...”

“What, enticed you?” cried the young wife. “I would have you remember that it was you, Robin, and had I foreseen then how you would treat me after our marriage...”

“What would you have done in that case?” interrupted Barbara.

“I should have married all the sooner, dear Barbara,” replied the young wife, smiling at her husband.

“There, I hope that is an answer which will encourage the confidence of which you have already given secret proof, saucy Barbara. Come, make a clean breast of it; we are all one family. Tell us that you love Much, and Much on his part will avow the same.”

“Yea, I will avow it,” cried Much, with deep emotion. “I will cry aloud, ‘I love Barbara Gamwell with all my strength.’ I will say to all who will listen, ‘Barbara’s eyes are the light of my day, her sweet thrilling voice echoes in mine ears like the harmonious notes of singing birds; I prefer the company of my dear Barbara to the pleasures of the feast and the elation of the dance beneath the green leaves of spring; I would rather a tender look from her eyes, a smile from her lips or the pressure of her little hand, than all the riches of the world. I am entirely devoted to Barbara, and sooner than do anything to annoy her, I would e’en ask the Sheriff of Nottingham to send me to the gallows.’ Yea, good friends, I love the dear maid, and I call down all the holy blessings of Heaven upon her fair head. If she will give me the happiness of protecting her with my name and life, she shall be happy and very, very tenderly beloved.”

“Hurrah!” cried Will, throwing his cap into the air, “‘tis right well spoken. Dry your eyes, little sister, and I give you permission to present your pink nay, scarlet cheeks to this brave wooer. If, instead of being a lusty lad, I were but a feeble maiden, and I had heard such sweet things said, I should have already given my hand and heart to my lover. Would you not have done the same, Maude? You know you would.”

“Nay, Will, modesty...”

“We are a family party, there is no need to blush at so natural an action. I am assured, Maude, that you are of mine own opinion. If I were Much and you were Barbara, you would be already in mine arms, and I should embrace you with all my heart.”

“I am on William’s side,” said Robin, smiling a little maliciously. “Barbara must give us a proof of her affection for Much.”

Thus called on, the maiden advanced to the centre of the merry group, and said timidly “I sincerely believe in the love which Much doth bear me, and I am very grateful to him for it. In return I must avow that... that...”

“That you love him as much as he loves thee,” added Will, quickly. “Your speech is slow to-day, little sister. I assure you it took me much less time to make Maude understand that I loved her with my whole heart, did it not, Maude?”

"That is true, Will," replied the young wife.

"Much," continued William, more seriously, "I give thee sweet Barbara to wife; she doth possess all the qualities of a true heart, and thou wilt be a happy husband. Barbara, my love, Much is a good man, a brave Saxon, true as steel. He will never disappoint thy tender hopes; he will love thee for ever."

"For ever and ever," cried Much, taking the hands of his betrothed in his.

"Embrace thy future wife, friend Much," said Will.

The young man obeyed, and, despite Mistress Gamwells pretended resistance, he touched her crimson cheeks with his lips.

The Knight gave his consent to the marriage of his daughters, and the date of the double wedding was fixed forthwith.

Next morning Robin Hood, Little John, and Will Scarlett were gathered, with about a hundred of their Merrie Men, beneath the old trees of Barnsdale Forest, when a young man, who appeared to have come from a distance, presented himself before Robin.

"Noble master," said he, "I bring you good tidings."

"Very good, George," replied the young man. "Let us hear them quickly. What is it all about?"

"It is about a visit of the Bishop of Hereford. His Lordship, accompanied by a score of his servants, will traverse Barnsdale Wood this very day."

"Bravo! This is indeed good tidings. Dost know at what hour my Lord Bishop will give us the honour of his company?"

"About two o'clock, Captain."

"Good. How didst learn of his Lordship's journey?"

"From one of our men, who, in passing through Sheffield, learnt that the Bishop of Hereford proposed paying a visit to St. Mary's Abbey."

"Art a good lad, George, and I thank thee for thy kind thought in putting me on my guard. My sons," added Robin, "pay heed to my words, and we will have a merry jest. Will Scarlett, take with thee a score of men, and go guard the road near thy father's house. Thou, Little John, go with a like number of companions to the path leading to the north of the Forest. Much, thou wilt post thyself at the eastern side of the wood with the rest of the band. I will take up my position on the high-road. We must not give his Lordship an opportunity of escaping, for I am fain to invite him to take part in a right royal feast; he will be treated nobly, but he must pay for it. As for thee, George, thou wilt choose a deer of good growth and a fine fat roe, and thou wilt prepare two joints to receive the honours of my table."

When his three lieutenants had set out with their little band of men, Robin ordered those who were left to dress themselves as shepherds (the outlaws kept every kind of disguise in their stores), and himself donned a modest smock-frock. This transformation complete, they planted sticks in the ground, to which they suspended the deer, and the flames of a goodly fire, fed with dry branches, soon began to lick the savoury venison.

Towards two o'clock, as George had announced, the Bishop of Hereford and his suite appeared at the end of the road, in the middle of which sat Robin and his men disguised as shepherds.

"The prey approaches," said Robin, with a laugh. "Come, merry friends, baste the meat; here is our guest."

The Bishop, accompanied by his suite, moved quickly, and the noble company soon came up with the shepherds.

At sight of the gigantic spit turning slowly above the fire, the Prelate gave vent to an outburst of violent anger.

"How is this, rogues? what means...?"

Robin Hood raised his eyes to the Bishop, and looked at him stolidly, but made no reply.

"Do ye not hear me, villains?" repeated the Bishop. "I ask for whom do ye prepare this noble feast?"

"For whom?" repeated Robin, with an admirably affected expression of simplicity.

"Yea, for whom? The deer of this Forest belong to the King, and I deem you mighty insolent varlets in daring to lay hands upon it. Answer my question. For whom is this repast prepared?"

"For ourselves, my Lord," replied Robin.

"For you, fool? for you? What a jest! Never think to make me believe that this profusion of food is for your repast."

"My Lord, I speak truth; we be hungry men, and since the roast is cooked to a turn, we will e'en sit down to it."

"To what estate do ye belong? Who are ye?"

"Simple shepherds who guard our flocks. To-day we wished to seek repose from our labours and to amuse ourselves a little, with which idea we killed the two fine roes you see before you."

"Of a truth, ye wished to amuse yourselves! This is but an artless answer. Come, say, who gave you permission to hunt the King's game?"

"No one."

"No one, varlet! and think ye to calmly enjoy the product of so shameless a theft?"

"Of a surety, my Lord; but an if your Lordship would take your share, we should hold ourselves highly honoured."

"Thine offer is an insult, insolent shepherd; I decline it with scorn. A not aware that poaching is punishable death? Peace; enough of these useless words. Prepare to follow me to prison, from whence ye will all be conducted to the gallows."

"The gallows!" cried Robin, with an air of despair.

"Yea, my lad, to the gallows."

"I have no wish to be hanged," groan Robin Hood, in doleful accents.

"Of that I am very sure, but it matters little; thou and thy companions deserve the noose. Come, fools, prepare to follow me; I have no time to waste."

"Pardon, my Lord, a thousand pardons, if we have sinned in ignorance; be merciful to poor wretches who are more deserving of pity than of blame."

"Poor wretches who eat such good roast meat are not to be pitied. Ah, my fine fellows, you feed yourselves on the King's venison; it is well very well! Together will we go into the presence of His Majesty, and we shall see if he will grant you the pardon which I refuse."

"My Lord," continued Robin, in a supplicating voice, "we have wives and children; be merciful, I implore you, in the name of their weakness and their innocence. What would happen to the poor creatures without our support?"

"What care I for your wives and children?" returned the Bishop, harshly. "Seize the varlets," he added, turning to his followers, "and if they attempt to escape, slay them without pity."

"My Lord," said Robin Hood, "allow me to give you some good advice. Take back your unjust words; they breathe of violence, and are lacking in Christian charity. Believe me, it were wiser for you to accept the offer I have just made you, to partake of our dinner."

"I forbid you to address another word to me," cried the Bishop, furiously. "Soldiers, seize the robbers!"

“Stand back!” cried Robin, in a voice of thunder, “or, by Our Lady, you will repent it!”

“Have at the vile serfs roundly,” repeated the Bishop, “and spare them not.”

The Bishop’s servants hurled themselves upon the group of Merrie Men, and the melee threatened to become a bloody one, when Robin wound his horn, and instantly the rest of the band, who, warned of the Bishop’s presence, had stolen up quietly, made their appearance.

The first task of the new-comers was to disarm the Bishop’s escort.

“My Lord,” said Robin to the Prelate, who had fallen dumb with terror on finding into whose hands he had fallen, “you have shown yourself pitiless; we will show no pity neither. What is to be done to the man who would have sent us to the gallows?” asked Robin of his companions.

“His dress must mitigate the severity of his sentence,” replied John, quietly; “he must not be made to suffer.”

“Your speech is that of an honest man, good Forester.”

“Think you so, my Lord?” replied John, quite unconcerned. “Well, I will further disclose to you my peaceful intentions. Instead of torturing you, both body and soul, and killing you by slow degrees, we will simply cut off your head.”

“Simply cut off my head!” groaned the Bishop, in a voice of despair.

“Yea,” replied Robin; “you must prepare for death, my Lord.”

“Robin Hood, have pity on me, I do beseech you!” besought the Bishop, clasping his hands. “Grant me a few hours; I would fain not die without confession.”

“Verily, your erstwhile haughtiness hath given place to very great humility, my Lord,” responded Robin, coldly; “but this humility doth naught affect me. You are condemned out of your own mouth, therefore prepare your soul to appear before God. Little John,” he added, making a sign to his friend, “see to it that the ceremony lacketh naught of due solemnity. Will you follow me, my Lord? I will lead you to the Court of Justice.”

Half paralysed with fear, the Bishop dragged himself along, tottering, in the wake of Robin Hood.

When they were arrived at the trysting-tree, Robin made his prisoner sit down on a grassy hillock, and bade one of his men bring some water.

“Will you be pleased, my Lord, to lave your hands and face,” asked the young Chief, politely.

Although very much surprised at receiving such a suggestion, the Bishop condescendingly acquiesced. This done, Robin added “Will you do me the honour of sharing my repast? I am about to dine, for I cannot administer justice fasting.”

“I will dine, if you insist upon it,” replied the Bishop, in a tone of resignation.

“I do not insist, my Lord; I pray you.”

“Then I yield me to your prayer, Sir Robin.”

“Good, my Lord; to dinner, then.”

With these words, Robin led his guest to the banqueting hall that is to say, towards a green sward spangled with flowers, where the meal was already set out.

The festive board, laden with dishes, presented a pleasing spectacle, and its appearance seemed to lighten the Prelate’s dismal forebodings. Having fasted since the night before, the Bishop was hungry, and the stimulating odour of the venison mounted to his head.

“These,” he said, sitting down, “are admirably cooked viands.”

“And of a delicious flavour,” added Robin, helping his guest to a choice morsel.

By the middle of the feast the Bishop had forgotten his fears; by the time dessert came, he looked upon Robin only as an amiable companion.

“My excellent friend, he said, “your wine is delicious, it warms my heart. A while agone I was cold, I was ill, sorrowful, anxious; now I feel quite lighthearted.”

“I am very happy to hear you say so, my Lord, for you praise my hospitality. My guests are generally enchanted at the good cheer they are welcomed here withal. However, there comes a bad quarter of an hour with them when it; comes to the settlement of the account. They are very happy to receive, but they are very loth to give; it really seems quite disagreeable to them.”

“True, very true,” replied the Prelate, not knowing in the least what he meant by this approval. “Yea, truly, such is the case. Give me another bumper, an it please you; meseemeth there is a fire in my veins. Ah! mine host, do you know you lead a very happy life here?”

“That is why we are called the Merrie Men of the Forest.”

“That is right, that is right. Now, Sir I do not rightly know your name allow me to bid you farewell; I must continue my journey.”

“Naught could be more reasonable, my Lord. I pray you, pay your reckoning, and prepare to drink the stirrup-cup.”

“Pay my reckoning!” grumbled the Bishop. “Am I, then, in an inn? I believed myself to be in Sherwood Forest.”

“My Lord, you are in an inn; I am master of the house, and these men around us are my drawers.”

“How say you, all these men are your drawers? But there are at least one hundred and fifty or two hundred.”

“Yea, my Lord, not counting the absentees. You must see, then, that with such a following I am bound to make my guests pay as heavily as may be.”

“Give me my account,” said he, “but treat me in a friendly spirit.”

“As a great Lord, Sir Guest, as a great Lord,” replied Robin, gaily. “Little John!” he called. The latter ran up. “Make out the charges for my Lord the Bishop of Hereford.”

The Prelate looked at John, and began to laugh.

“Well indeed, little, little! they call you little, and you might be a young tree! Come, gentle treasurer, give me my score.”

“That is scarce needful, my Lord; only tell me where you keep your money, and I will pay myself.”

“Insolent varlet!” said the Bishop, “I forbid you to poke your long fingers into my purse.”

“I would spare you the trouble of counting, my Lord.”

“The trouble of counting! Think you I am drunk? Go seek my valise and bring it me; I will give you a piece of gold.”

Little John hastened to obey the Prelate’s command; he opened the valise and found a leathern bag. John emptied it; it contained three hundred pieces of gold.”

The Bishop of Hereford, with half-closed eyes, heard John’s triumphant exclamations without comprehending them and when Robin said to him “My Lord, we thank you for generosity,” he only closed his eyes completely and muttered some confused words, of which Robin caught the following only “Saint Mary’s Abbey at once...”

“He is fain to set forth,” said John.

“Order his horse to be brought up,” added Robin.

At a sign from John one of the Merrie Men brought up the horse ready saddled and with its head garlanded with flowers.

The Bishop was hoisted half asleep into his saddle, and tied on to prevent a fall, which might prove serious; then, followed by his little company, enlivened by the wine and good cheer, he took the road to St. Mary's.

A band of the Merrie Men, mingling in a friendly way with the Prelate's escort, accompanied the cavalcade to the gates of the Abbey.

It need scarce be added that after ringing the porter's bell the Foresters hasted away as fast as their horses could carry them.

We will not attempt to depict the surprise and horror of the reverend brothers when the Bishop of Hereford appeared before them with a red face, staggering gait, and disordered garments.

On the morrow of this fatal day the Bishop was mad with shame, rage, and humiliation. He passed long hours in prayer, asking God to pardon his faults, and imploring the Divine protection against that rogue and villain Robin Hood.

At the request of the outraged Prelate the Prior of St. Mary's armed fifty men and placed them at the disposal of his guest. Then, his blood boiling with rage, the Bishop led his little army in pursuit of the famous outlaw.

That very day Robin, desiring to see for himself how Sir Richard of the Plain was faring, went alone along a forest path leading to the main road. The sound of an approaching cavalcade attracted his attention; he hastened his steps in the direction of the sound, and found himself face to face with the Bishop of Hereford.

"Robin Hood!" cried the Bishop, recognising our hero. "It is Robin Hood! Traitor, surrender yourself!"

As may be well imagined, Robin Hood had no desire to comply with this request. Surrounded on all sides, unable to defend himself or even to call his Merrie Men to his aid, he slipped daringly between two horsemen, who made as if to block his passage, and darted with the swiftness of a deer towards a little house standing about a quarter of a mile away.

The Bishop's men started in pursuit of the young man, but, being forced to make a detour, they could not reach as soon as he did the house in which he sought shelter.

Robin Hood found the door of the house open, and entering, he barricaded the windows, without paying any heed to the cries of the old woman within seated at her spinning-wheel.

“Have no fear, good mother,” said Robin, when he had finished closing the doors and windows; “I am no thief, but a poor unfortunate man, to whom you can render a service.”

“What service? What is your name?” demanded the old dame, in very uneasy tones.

“I am an outlaw, good mother; I am Robin Hood. The Bishop of Hereford pursues me to take my life.”

“Eh, what? You are Robin Hood?” said the peasant dame, clasping her hands, “the noble and generous Robin Hood! God be praised for enabling a poor creature like myself to pay her debt of gratitude to the charitable outlaw! Look at me, my son, and search the memory of your good deeds for the features of her who speaks with you now. It is two years agone. An ungrateful woman would say you came in here by chance; I say you were sent by Divine Providence. You found me quite alone. I had just lost my husband; there was naught left for me but death. Your sweet and consoling words gave me back courage, strength, and health. The next day a man, sent by your orders, brought me food, clothing, and money. I asked him the name of my generous benefactor, and he answered me, “He is called Robin Hood.” Since that day, my son, I have alway remembered you in my prayers. My house and my life are yours; do as you will with your servant.”

“I thank you, good mother,” replied Robin Hood, cordially pressing the woman’s trembling hands. “I crave your help, not through fear of danger, out to avoid useless shedding of blood. The Bishop is accompanied by fifty men, and, as you see, a struggle between us is impossible I am but one.”

“If your enemies discover your retreat they will kill you,” said the old woman.

“Be not uneasy, good mother. They shall not accomplish their end. We will invent a plan for saving ourselves from their violence.”

“What plan, my son? Speak; I am ready to obey you.”

“Will you exchange your garments for mine?”

“Exchange our garments!” cried the old dame. “I fear, my son, that would be but a useless trick. How could you transform a woman of my age into a gay young gentleman?”

“I will disguise you so well, good mother,” replied Robin, “that it will be quite possible to deceive the soldiers, to whom my face is probably unknown. You must feign to be drunk, and my Lord of Hereford will be so anxious to seize my person that he will look only at your dress.”

The transformation was quickly effected. Robin put on the old woman’s grey gown; then he helped her to dress herself in his hose, tunic, and buskins.

This done, Robin hid the peasant’s grey hair under his elegant cap, and attached his weapons to her belt.

The double disguise was just completed when the soldiers arrived at the door of the cottage.

First they knocked repeatedly; then a soldier proposed that he should make his horse kick in the door.

The Prelate received the proposition favourably, whereupon the horseman, turning his horse round, backed it against the door, at the same time pricking it up with his lance. This produced an effect contrary to that expected by the soldier, for the animal reared and threw his rider to the ground.

This accident to the poor soldier, who shot through the air with the rapidity of an arrow, had a disastrous effect. The Bishop, who had come up to see the door fall in and to prevent Robin Hood from escaping, was struck violently in the face by the soldier’s spurs.

The pain caused by this blow so exasperated the old man that, without thinking of the unjust cruelty of his rage, he raised the mace which he carried in his hand as a token of his rank, and unmercifully beat the unlucky wretch, who lay half dead under the hoofs of the plunging horse.

In the midst of this valiant proceeding the cottage door opened.

“Close your ranks!” cried the Bishop, in a tone of command; “close your ranks!”

The soldiers pressed in confusion around the cottage.

The Bishop dismounted, but as he touched the ground, he stumbled over the body of the soldier, where it lay weltering in blood, and fell head foremost through the open doorway.

The confusion caused by this ludicrous accident served Robin Hood’s turn admirably. Stunned and breathless, the Bishop saw, without examining closely, a figure standing motionless in the darkest corner of the room.

“Seize the rogue!” cried his Lordship, pointing out the old woman to his soldiers. “Gag him, bind him to a horse. You are answerable for his safe keeping with your lives, for if ye let him escape, ye shall all hang without mercy.”

The soldiers rushed upon the person indicated by their leader’s furious outcry, and in default of a gag they muffled up the old woman’s face in a large handkerchief which happened to be handy.

Bold to rashness, Robin Hood in a trembling voice implored mercy for the prisoner; but the Bishop thrust him aside and left the cottage, after enjoying the intense satisfaction of seeing his enemy bound hand and foot on the back of a horse.

Sick and half blinded by the wound which had gashed his face, his Lordship remounted and ordered his men to follow him to the Trysting Tree of the outlaws. It was upon the highest branch of this that the Bishop proposed to hang Robin. The worthy man was determined to give the outlaws a terrible warning of the fate in store for them, if they continued to follow their worthless leader’s mode of life.

No sooner had the cavalcade disappeared into the depths of the wood, than Robin Hood left the cottage and ran towards the Trysting Tree.

He had just entered a glade when he perceived Little John, Will Scarlett, and Much at some little distance.

“See there in the centre of the clearing,” said Little John to his two friends, “what a strange creature approaches; it looks like an old witch. By’r Lady, if I thought the vixen had evil intentions, I would let fly an arrow at her.”

“Thine arrow could not touch” replied Will, laughing.

“And wherefore, I pray thee? Dost doubt my skill?”

“Not the least in the world; but an if, as thou dost suppose, this woman is a witch, she could arrest the flight of thine arrow.”

“By my faith I” quoth Much, who had kept his attention fixed on the strange figure, “I share Little John’s opinion. This doth seem a very extraordinary old dame; her figure is gigantic, and, moreover, she doth not walk like a woman, she covers the ground with prodigious strides. Verily she affrighteth me; and if you will suffer it, Will, we will e’en prove the power of the sorcery she seems richly endowed withal.”

“Act not so rashly, Much,” replied Will. “The garments this poor creature wears claim our respect; and for me, you know I could not hurt a woman. Beside, who knows whether this strange creature be verily a witch? One must not judge by appearances, for ofttimes it happens that an ugly rind doth enclose an excellent fruit. In spite of her ridiculous looks, the poor old dame is, mayhap, a good wench and an honest Christian. Be kind to her, and, to make the indulgence easier, call to mind Robin’s orders, which do straitly forbid any hostile or even disrespectful doings toward women.”

Little John made as if to bend his bow and take aim at the supposed witch.

“Hold!” cried a deep and sonorous voice.

The three men uttered a cry of surprise.

“I am Robin Hood,” added the person who had puzzled the Foresters so sorely, and while declaring his name, Robin tore off the head-dress which covered his head and part of his face. “I was quite unrecognisable, then?” asked our hero, as he joined his comrades.

“You are very ugly, my good friend,” replied Will.

“Why did you assume such an unbecoming disguise?” asked Much.

Robin related to his friends as briefly as possible the mishap which had befallen him.

“Now,” he continued, having ended his tale, “we must think about defending ourselves. First of all, I must have clothes. You, good Much, will do me the service of hastening to the store-house, and bringing me thence some suitable garments. Meanwhile, Will and Little John will assemble all the men who are in the Forest round about the Trysting Tree. Hasten, my lads; I promise you compensation for all the trouble caused us by my Lord Bishop of Hereford.”

Little John and Will dashed off into the Forest in different directions, while Much went in search of the garments required by Robin.

An hour later Robin, arrayed an elegant hunting-suit, arrived at the Trysting Tree.

John brought sixty men, and Will had collected forty.

Robin dispersed his men among the thickets which formed an impenetrable background to the clearing, and seated himself at the foot of the great tree designed by his Lordship to serve as a gallows.

Scarce were these arrangements completed, ere the ground echoed with the sound of the approaching cavalcade, and the Bishop arrived, followed by his escort.

When the soldiers had made their way to the middle of the clearing, the blast of a horn rang through the air, the foliage of the young trees stirred, and from every side emerged men armed to the teeth.

A cold shudder ran through the Bishop at sight of the Foresters' formidable appearance. The latter ranged themselves in battle array at a sign from their Chief, who had not yet been perceived by the Prelate; he threw a glance of dismay around him, and discovered a young man clad in a scarlet tunic, with words of command on his lips, directing the band of outlaws.

"Who is this man?" demanded the Bishop of a soldier standing beside the prisoner, who was bound to a horse.

"That man is Robin Hood," replied the prisoner, in trembling tones.

"Robin Hood!" quoth the Bishop. "And who, then, art thou, wretch?"

"I am but a woman, my Lord, a poor old woman."

"Woe be to thee, malignant hag!" cried the infuriated Bishop, "woe be to thee! Come, my men," continued his Lordship, beckoning to his men, "charge down the glade. Fear nothing; force a road with your swords through the ranks of these rogues. Forward, my brave lads, forward!"

Doubtless the brave lads thought that if the order to attack the bandits was easy enough to give, it was more difficult to carry out, for they did not stir.

At a signal from Robin, the Foresters adjusted their arrows, lifting their bows with admirable uniformity; and their reputation for skill was so widely known and so renowned that the Bishop's soldiers, unable to remain inactive, stooped in their saddles as one man.

"Down with your arms!" cried Robin Hood. "Unbind the prisoner."

The soldiers obeyed the young man's orders.

"My good mother," said Robin, leading the old woman beyond the glade, "go home now, and to-morrow I will send you a reward for your kind action. Go quick. I have no time to thank you now, but forget not that my gratitude is great."

The old dame kissed Robin Hood's hands, and went her way, accompanied by a guide.

"O Lord, have pity on me!" cried the Bishop, wringing his hands.

Robin Hood drew nearer to his enemy.

"Welcome, my Lord," said he, in a wheedling tone, "and permit me to thank you for your visit. My hospitality, I see, proved so attractive that you could not resist the desire of once more partaking its delights."

The Bishop gazed despairingly at Robin, and a deep sigh escaped him.

"You appear downcast, my Lord," Robin continued. "What troubles you? Are not you pleased to meet with me again?"

"I cannot well say that I am pleased," replied the Bishop, "for, indeed, the plight in which I find myself renders that impossible. You can readily guess my intention in coming here, and your conscience will acquit you if you avenge yourself on me, for you will be striking an enemy — However, let me say this much. Let me go free, and never, under any circumstances whatever, will I seek to harm you. Let me go with my men, and your soul will not have to answer to God for a mortal sin, for such it would surely be, were you to attempt the life of a high priest of the Holy Church."

"I detest murder and violence, my Lord," replied Robin Hood, "as mine actions do daily prove. I never attack; I am content to defend my life and the lives of my brave followers, who trust in me. Did I cherish in my heart the least sentiment of hate or rancour toward you, my Lord, I would inflict on you the same death which you had intended for me. But it is not so. I bear you no ill will, and I take no vengeance on those who have not succeeded in harming me. Therefore I will set you free, but on one condition only."

"Speak, Sir," said the Bishop, graciously.

"You must promise to respect my independence and the liberty of my men; you must swear that at no future period and under no circumstances whatever will you lend a hand to any attempt upon my life."

"I have willingly promised to do you no harm," replied the Bishop, suavely.

"A promise is not binding on an unscrupulous conscience, my Lord. I must have an oath."

"I swear by St. Paul to let you live as you please."

"Very good, my Lord; you are free."

"I thank you a thousand times, Robin Hood. Will you be so good as to give an order to my men to assemble; they have dispersed, and are fraternising with your companions."

"I will do as you wish, my Lord; in a few minutes the men will be in the saddle. In the mean time will you accept some slight refreshment?"

"Nay, nay! I wish for naught," the Bishop answered hastily, terrified at the mere mention of the word.

"You have been long fasting, my Lord, and a slice of pasty..."

"Not a morsel, good host not a mouthful even."

"A cup of good wine, then?"

"Nay, nay, a hundred times nay!"

"You will neither eat nor drink with me, my Lord?"

"I am neither hungry nor thirsty. I wish to depart, that is all. Do not seek to detain me longer, I pray you."

"As you please, my Lord. Little John," added Robin, "his Reverence wishes to leave us."

"His Reverence is at perfect liberty," growled John. "I will give him his bill."

"My bill!" repeated the Bishop, in surprise. "What do you mean? I have neither eaten nor drunken."

"Oh! that boots not," replied Little John, calmly; "from the moment you enter the hostelry, you must share its expenses. Your men are hungry; they ask for food. Your horses are satisfied already; nor must we be the sufferers by your abstemiousness, and receive naught, because it doth not please you to accept of anything. We demand largess for the servants who have had the trouble of entertaining man and beast."

"Take what you will," answered the Bishop, impatiently, "and let me go."

"Is the money still in the same place?" asked Little John.

"It is here," replied the Bishop, showing a little leathern bag attached to his saddle-bow.

"It feels heavier than at your last visit, my Lord."

"I should well think so," responded the Bishop, making a desperate effort to appear cool and calm; "it contains a much larger sum."

"You shall watch me take it away, my Lord; and may I ask how much there is in this elegant saddle-bag?"

"Five hundred pieces of gold..."

"Admirable! What generosity to come here with such a treasure!" said the young man, ironically.

"This treasure," stammered the Bishop "shall we not divide it? You dare not utterly despoil me rob me of so large a sum?"

"Rob you!" repeated Little John, disdainfully. "What do you mean by such a word? Do you not comprehend the difference between robbing and taking from a man what is not his? You have obtained this money on false pretences; you took it from those who needed it, and I shall return it to them. Thus you see, my Lord, I do not rob you."

"We call our way the woodland philosophy," said Robin, with a laugh.

"The legality of such philosophy is doubtful," returned the Bishop; "but having no means of defence, I must submit to anything you may exact. Therefore, take my purse."

"I have another request to make, my Lord," Little John continued.

"What is it?" questioned the Bishop, anxiously.

"Our spiritual adviser," replied Little John, "is not at Barnsdale just now, and as it is long since we have profited by his pious instructions, we would beg of you, my Lord, to say a Mass for us."

"What profane request is this you dare make to me?" cried the Bishop. "I would liever die than do aught so impious."

"Nevertheless, it is your duty, my Lord," replied Robin, "to help us at all times to adore the Lord. Little John is right; for long weeks we have not been able to take part in the Holy Office of the Mass, and we would not lose this fortunate opportunity; I pray you, therefore, be so kind as to prepare yourself to satisfy our very proper demands."

"It would be a mortal sin, a crime, and I should expect to be struck by the hand of God, did I commit this unworthy sacrilege!" replied the Bishop, purple with rage.

"My Lord," continued Robin, gravely, "we reverence with the most Christian humility the divine symbols of the Catholic faith, and, believe me, you will never find, even within the walls of your vast Cathedral, a more attentive or more select congregation than the Outlaws of Sherwood Forest."

"Can I put any faith in your words?" asked the Bishop, doubtfully.

"Yea, my Lord, and you will soon recognise the truth of them."

"Then I will believe you. Conduct me to the Chapel."

"This way, my Lord."

Robin, followed by the Bishop, made for an enclosure at a short distance from the Trysting Tree. There, in the centre of a declivity appeared an altar of earth embellished with a thick layer of moss sprinkled with flowers. All the vessels necessary for the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice were disposed on the high altar with exquisite taste, and His Reverence marvelled at the beauty of this natural shrine.

It was a touching spectacle to see the band of 150 or 200 men kneeling in prayer with bared heads.

After Mass the Merrie Men testified their gratitude to the Bishop, and he had been so astonished at their respectful attitude during the celebration of the Holy Office that he could not resist putting a host of questions to Robin as to his manner of life beneath the trees of the old Forest.

Whilst Robin responded with a charming courtesy to the Bishop's questions, the foresters placed before the soldiers a substantial repast, and Much looked after the preparation of the most delicate feast that had ever been served in the greenwood.

Led insensibly toward the merry revellers by Robin, the Bishop watched them with an envious eye, and the sight of their gaiety dissipated the last vestiges of his bad temper.

"Your men employ their time well," said Robin, pointing out the most voracious group amongst them.

"They certainly eat with a good appetite."

"They must be hungry, my Lord; it is two o'clock, and I myself feel the need of something. Will you play your part in a little unceremonious dinner?"

"Thank you, my dear host," replied the Bishop, trying to remain deaf to the repeated appeals of his stomach; "I wish for nothing, absolutely nothing, although I am a little hungry."

"You should never disregard the calls of nature, my Lord," replied Robin, gravely. "Mind and body alike suffer thereby, and the health is injured. Come, let us take our places on this green turf; they will bring us something, and you need only eat a little bread, an if you be afraid of retarding your departure."

"Am I obliged to obey you?" said the Bishop, with a vainly dissimulated expression of joy.

"You are not constrained, my Lord," said Robin, maliciously, "and if you are not pleased to taste of this delicious venison pasty or the exquisite wine contained in this bottle, abstain, I pray you; for it is even more dangerous to force the stomach to receive food than to deprive it of all nourishment for several hours."

"Oh, I do not force my stomach," replied the Bishop, laughing. "I am endowed with an excellent appetite, and as I have been long fasting, why, I think I will e'en accept your kind invitation."

"To table, then, my Lord, and a good appetite!"

The Bishop of Hereford dined well. He was fond of the bottle, and the wine Robin Hood poured out for him was so heady that at the end of the repast the Bishop was quite drunk, and towards evening he returned to St.

Mary’s Abbey in a condition of mind and body which drew forth fresh cries of horror and indignation from the pious Monks of that Monastery.

CHAPTER VI

“I should much like to know how the Bishop of Hereford finds himself to-day,” said Will Scarlett to his cousin Little John, who, followed by Much, was accompanying Will to Barnsdale.

“The poor Prelate’s head must be a little heavy,” replied Much, “though one would think that his Lordship was accustomed to the abuse of wine.”

“Your observation is very just, my friend,” replied John; “my Lord of Hereford doth possess the faculty of drinking heavily without losing his senses.”

“Robin treated him right pleasantly,” said Much. “Does he act thus toward every Ecclesiastic he encounters?”

“Yea, when these same Ecclesiastics, like the Bishop of Hereford, do abuse their spiritual and temporal power to rob the Saxon people; it hath even happened to Robin not only to await the arrival of these pious travellers, but eke to go out of his own way to put himself in theirs.”

“What do you mean by ‘go out of his way’?” said Much.

“I will tell you a story as we go along which will explain my words. One morning Robin Hood learned that two Black Friars, carrying a large sum of money to their Abbey, would traverse a part of Sherwood Forest. This was good news for Robin, as our funds were on the decline, and the arrival of the money would be most opportune. Without a word to any one (the waylaying of two Monks was but a small affair), Robin, dressed in a long pilgrim’s robe, posted himself in the road the two Friars must take. He had not long to wait, for the Monks soon appeared, two large men sitting squarely in their saddles.

“Robin advanced to meet them, bowed to the ground, and, seizing as he rose the bridles of the two horses, which were pacing side by side, said in pitiable accents, Bless you, holy brethren, and let me tell you how glad I am to have met you; ‘tis a great happiness for me, and one for which I humbly give thanks to Heaven!

“What means this deluge of words?” asked one of the Monks.

“It expresseth my joy, Father. You are the representatives of the God of goodness, you are the reflection of Divine mercy. I need help, I am unhappy, I am hungry; brothers, I die of hunger, give me the charity of some food."

"We have no provisions with us" replied the Monk who had first spoken, "therefore cease your useless demands, and let us pursue our way in peace."

Robin Hood, who still held the bridles of the horses in his hands, prevented the Monks from escaping him.

"Brothers," he went on in a still sadder and weaker voice, "have pity on my misery, and as you have no bread to give me, give me instead a small piece of money. I have wandered in this wood since yesterday morning, and have neither eaten nor drunk. Good brothers, in the name of the Holy Mother of Christ, grant me, I conjure you, this small charity."

"See here, foolish babbler, let go our bridles; leave us in peace; we do not wish to waste our time with a witless loon like you."

"Yea," added the second Monk, repeating word for word the speech of his companion, "we do not wish to waste our time with a witless loon like you."

"For mercy's sake, good Monks, a few pence to keep me from dying of hunger."

"Even supposing that I were fain to give you an alms, thick-headed mendicant, 'twould be impossible, for we do not possess a farthing."

"All the same, brothers, you have not the appearance of men deprived of all resources; you are well mounted, well equipped, and your jovial faces shine with good cheer."

"We had some money a few hours agone, but we have been despoiled by robbers."

"They have not left us a penny piece," added the Monk, whose mission seemed to be to repeat the words of his superior like an echo.

"I verily believe," said Robin, "that ye both lie with a rare impudence."

"Thou dost dare to accuse us of falsehood, thou miserable rogue?" cried the fat Monk.

"Yea, first because ye have not been robbed, for there are no robbers in the old Forest of Sherwood; and then ye tried to deceive me in saying that ye had no money. I hate falsehood, and I love to know the truth. So you will see it is but natural I should assure myself by mine own investigations of the falseness of your words."

As he finished speaking, Robin let fall the bridles of the horses and put his hand on a bag which hung from the firsl Monk's saddle-bow, who, startled, put spurs to his horse and made off at a gallop, closely followed by his companion Robin, who, as you know, is fleet as a deer, overtook the travellers, and at a stroke unhorsed them both.

"Spare us, worthy mendicant," murmured the fat Monk; "have pity on your brethren. I assure you we have neither money nor food to offer you, wherefore it is a sheer impossibility to exact immediate help from us."

"We have naught, worthy mendicant," added the Father Superior's echo a poor lean devil, now livid with fear. "We cannot give you what we have not ourselves!"

"Well, Fathers," Robin continued, "I would fain put faith in the sincerity of your words. Therefore will I point out to you both a means of obtaining a little money. We will all three kneel down and ask the Holy Virgin to help us. Our Lady hath never abandoned me in the time of my need, and I am sure she will hearken favourably to my supplications. I was engaged in prayer when ye appeared at the end of the road, and, thinking that Heaven had sent you to my assistance, I put my modest request to you. Your refusal hath not discouraged me. Ye are not the emissaries of Providence, that is all; but ye are or should be holy men: we will pray, and our united voices will the better carry our invocations to the feet of the Lord."

"The two Monks refused to kneel, and Robin Hood could only constrain them to do so by threatening to search their pockets."

"What," interrupted Will Scarlett, "they all three fell on their knees to ask Heaven to send them money?"

"Yea," replied the story-teller, "and they prayed, by Robin's orders, aloud and in an audible voice."

"It must have made a funny picture," said Will.

"Very funny indeed. Robin had enough self-control to remain serious, and listened gravely to the Monks' prayers. 'Holy Virgin,' said they, 'send us some money to save us from harm.' It is unnecessary to tell you that the money came not. The Monk's voices took every minute sadder and more lamentable accents, so that at length Robin could control himself no longer, but broke into a hearty peal of laughter.

"The Monks, reassured by this transport of mirth, attempted to rise, but Robin raised his staff and asked, 'Have ye received any money?'"

"No," they replied, "none."

"Then pray once more."

“The Monks bore this wearisome torture for an hour; then they began to wring their hands in despair, to tear their hair and weep with rage. They were spent with fatigue and humiliation, but they still protested that they possessed nothing.

“The Holy Virgin hath never abandoned me,” quoth Robin, to console them. “I have not the proofs of her goodness as yet, but I shall not have much longer to await them. Therefore, my friends, be not disheartened, but, on the contrary, pray the more fervently.”

“The two Monks groaned so dismally that at length Robin got tired of listening to them.

“Now, my dear brothers,” he said to them, “let us see how much money Heaven hath sent us.”

“Not a farthing,” cried the fat Friar.

“Not a farthing?” repeated Robin. “How is that? My good brothers, tell me, could ye be quite sure I had no money, even though I did affirm the emptiness of my pockets?”

“No, certainly we could not be quite sure,” said one of the Monks.

“There is always a means of ascertaining.”

“What is that?” asked the fat Monk.

“It is quite simple,” replied Robin; you would have to search me. But it doth not concern you greatly whether I have money or no, that question interesting myself alone. Now I am e’en going to take the liberty of searching your pockets.’

“We cannot submit to such an outrage,” cried both Monks with one voice.

“It is not an outrage, my brothers; I only wish to prove to you that if Heaven hath heard my prayers, it hath sent me succour through your holy hands.”

“We have nothing, nothing!”

“It is of that I wish to assure myself. Whatever sum of money hath fallen to you jointly, we will divide, one part for you and the other for myself. Search yourselves, I pray you, and tell me what you possess.”

“The Monks obeyed mechanically; each put a hand into his pocket, but brought nothing whatever out.

“I see,” said Robin Hood, “that you would fain give me the pleasure of searching you myself; so be it, then.”

The Monks objected strenuously, but Robin Hood, armed with his terrible staff, threatened so seriously to beat them unmercifully that they resigned themselves to a close search. After seeking for some minutes, Robin got together 500 golden crowns. In despair at the loss of all this pelf, the fat Monk asked Robin, anxiously, “Will you not share the money with us?”

“Do you really think it was sent you by Heaven since we have been together?” replied Robin, looking at the Monk sternly. The Monks were silent, “You have lied; you protested that you had no money when you carried in your pockets the ransom of a good man; you refused an alms to one who said that he was famished and dying. Do you think, either of you, this was the conduct of a Christian? However, I pardon you. I will keep the promise I made you; here are fifty gold crowns for each of you. Go, and if upon your way ye should meet with a poor beggar, remember that Robin Hood hath left you the means of helping him.”

At the name of Robin Hood the Monks trembled, and gazed stupidly at our friend. Without taking any notice of their affrighted looks, Robin saluted them and disappeared into the glade. Hardly had the sound of his footsteps died away, ere the Monks threw themselves upon their horses without a glance and fled behind.

“Robin must have been very skilfully disguised not to have been recognised by the Monks,” said Much.

“Robin Hood is wonderfully clever at that, as you have seen for yourself in the way he counterfeited the old woman. I could cite hundreds of examples in which he was disguised and not recognised, and I assure you it was a merry jest he played upon the Town-Reeve of Nottingham.”

“Yea,” said Much, “it was a pretty jest, and it made a noise; every one laughed at the Reeve and applauded Robin’s audacity.”

“What was that?” asked William. “I have never heard of it.”

“What, know you not of Robin’s adventure as a butcher?”

“Nay; but tell me the tale, Little John.”

“Willingly.”

About four years agon a great dearth of meat was felt in Nottinghamshire. The butchers kept the price of meat so high that only the rich could furnish their tables withal. Robin Hood, who is alway on the look-out for news, learned of this state of things, and resolved to find a remedy for the sufferings of the poor. One market day he lay in wait upon the road through the Forest to be taken by a cattle-dealer, who was the chief purveyor to the town of Nottingham. Robin met his man mounted upon a thoroughbred and driving before him an immense herd of cattle, and he at once bought the herd, the mare, the butcher’s consent and his secrecy, and as a guarantee of the last purchase, he confided the man to our care until his own return to the Forest.

Robin, who intended to sell his meat at a very low price, thought that if he neglected to procure protection for instance, that of the Reeve the butchers might combine against him, and defeat his good intentions toward the poor. The Reeve kept a large Inn, where the dealers of the neighbourhood and the other dealers met together when they came to Nottingham to prevent any strife. Robin knew this, and betwixt himself he took his beasts to the Market Place, picked out the fattest animal, and led it to the Town Reeve’s Inn.

The latter was standing at his door, and was much struck by the appearance of the young bullock Robin was leading. Our friend, delighted at the great man’s welcome, which was, perhaps, somewhat interested, told him he possessed the finest drove in the Market, and that he would be well pleased an if the Reeve would accept a bullock as a present.

The Reeve protested modestly against so rich a gift.

“Sir Reeve,” continued Robin, “I am ignorant of the customs of this country. I do not know my fellow dealers, and I greatly fear me they may seek to fasten a quarrel upon me. I should therefore be obliged if you would extend your protection to one who is only too anxious to please you.”

“The Reeve swore (for the moment his gratitude equalled the bullock in size) that he would hang any man who should dare to molest our friend; and he declared further that Robin was a good fellow, and the best butcher who had ever sold him meat.

With mind at rest on this important point, Robin returned to the Market Place, and when the sales began, a crowd of poor people came to ask the price of the meat; but, unhappily for their small purses, the price was still very high. When he saw the prices fixed, Robin offered as much meat for a penny as his neighbours were selling for three.

The news of this extraordinary cheapness spread rapidly through the town, and the poor flocked in from all sides. Robin then gave them for a penny about as much as his neighbours could give for five. Soon it was known in every corner of the Market that Robin sold only to the poor. Thus they formed an excellent opinion of him, while his fellow-dealers, who were not disposed to follow his example, looked upon him as a prodigal who, in an access of generosity, was squandering the best part of his wealth; so acting on this supposition, they sent to Robin all those to whom they could sell nothing.

Towards mid-day the cattle-dealers consulted together, and with one accord decided that they must make the acquaintance of the new-comer. One of them, detaching himself from the rest, approached Robin, and said

“Good friend and brother, your conduct seems passing strange; for, by your leave, it quite ruins the trade. But, on the other hand, as your intentions are excellent, we can only congratulate you heartily, and give warm praise to so admirable a sentiment of generosity. My companions, enraptured with your goodness of heart, charge me to present their compliments and to invite you to dinner in their names.”

“I accept their invitation with the greatest pleasure,” replied Robin, gaily, “and I am ready to follow wherever you are pleased to lead me.”

“We usually meet at the Town Reeve’s Inn,” answered the butcher, “and if that house is not out of your way...”

“Why, certainly not,” interrupted Robin. “On the contrary, I shall be most happy to be in the company of a man whom you honour with your confidence.”

“In that case, Master, we will end the day right merrily.”

“Were you with Robin then?” asked Much, surprised to hear the narrator enter into so much detail.

“Of course. Do you think I could have allowed Robin to expose himself alone to the danger of being recognised? He had ordered me to keep aloof; but I did not consider myself bound to obey his order, and I was almost at his side. All at once he became aware of my presence, and, seizing my hand, he angrily reproached me for my disobedience. In a low voice I explained my motive for disregarding his orders. He calmed down at once, and regarding me with that sweet smile you know so well, he said “Mingle with the crowd, John, and while keeping an eye on me, look to thine own safety also.” I obeyed him, and disappeared in the crowd. When Robin and the gay band of butchers set out for the Reeve’s Inn, I followed in their wake, and entered the dining-hall along with him. Ordering a good meal, I took my place in the embrasure of a window.”

Robin was very merry that day, and toward the end of dinner he invited them to drink of the best wine in the cellar, adding that he would bear this last expense. As you may imagine, Robin’s generous offer was received with acclamation; the wine went round the room, and I had my share with the rest.

When the merriment was at its height, the Reeve appeared in the doorway.

Robin invited him to take a seat. He accepted, and as Robin seemed to be the guest of honour, he asked him for news of Robin Hood.

“Tis a cunning rascal!” cried one of the butchers; “a fine blade, a rare wit, and a good lad.”

Then the Reeve perceived me. I was not drunk, and my sober face inspired him with a desire to question me.

“That young man,” said he, indicating Robin by a glance, “is doubtless a prodigal who, having sold lands, house, or castle, intends to squander his money foolishly.”

“It may well be so,” I replied with indifference.

“Maybe he doth still possess some wealth,” continued the Reeve.

“That is very likely, Master.”

“Do you think he would be disposed to sell his remaining cattle cheap?”

“I do not know; but there is one very simple way of finding out.”

“What is that?” asked the Reeve, innocently.

“Why, to ask him thyself.”

“You are right, Sir Stranger.” Saying which the Reeve approached Robin, and, after paying him some pompous compliments on his generosity, he congratulated him on the noble use to which he was putting his fortune. “My young friend,” added the Reeve, “have you not some cattle to sell? I will find you a purchaser, and, while rendering you this service, permit me to remark that a man of your rank and appearance cannot well become a cattle-dealer without compromising his dignity.”

Robin perfectly understood the true motive of this crafty speech; he began to laugh, and answered the obliging Reeve that he possessed a thousand head of cattle, and that he would dispose of them willingly for five hundred golden crowns.

“I will offer you three hundred,” said the Reeve.

“At present prices,” Robin continued, “my beasts are worth, taking one with another, two crowns a head.”

“If you will consent to sell the whole herd, I will give you three hundred crowns; and I might remark, my gallant gentleman, that three hundred gold crowns in your purse would be worth more than one thousand beasts in your pastures. Come, decide; the bargain will be for three hundred gold crowns."

"Tis too little," replied Robin, throwing a furtive look at me.

"A liberal heart like yours, my Lord," replied the Reeve, trying to flatter, "should not haggle over a few crowns. Come, let us strike a bargain. Where are your cattle? I should like to see them all together."

"All together!" repeated Robin, laughing at an idea which struck him.

"Certainly, my young friend; and if the pasture of this magnificent herd is not very far from here, we could ride over and conclude the bargain there. I will take the money, and if you are reasonable, the matter can be settled before we return to Nottingham."

"I possess a few acres about a mile from the town," replied Robin; "my beasts are penned there, and there you may see them at your ease."

"A mile from Nottingham!" replied the Reeve "some acres... I know the neighbourhood, and I cannot quite make out the situation of your property."

"Silence!" whispered Robin, leaning toward the Reeve. "I desire for private reasons to conceal my name and quality. A word of explanation as to the whereabouts of my cattle would betray a secret required in mine own interest. You take me, do you not?"

"Perfectly, my young friend," replied the Reeve, winking slyly; "friends are to be feared, the family dreaded. I understand, I understand."

"You possess an admirable penetration of mind," said Robin, mysteriously, "and I am tempted to believe that we understand each other wonderfully. Well, an if you like, we will profit by the inattention of the butchers, and make off secretly. Are you ready to follow me?"

"How now! 'tis I who wait for you. I will have our horses saddled with all haste."

"Go, then; I will rejoin you immediately."

The Reeve left the room, and at Robin's orders I went to seek our companions, whom I had posted, in case of misadventure, within sound of his horn, and announced the Town Reeve's visit to them.

A few minutes after my departure the latter took Robin up to his private lodging, presented him to his wife, a pretty woman of some twenty years, and begging him to take a seat, said he would go and count his money.

When the Reeve returned to the room in which he had left Robin alone with his wife, he found the young man at the feet of the lady.

This sight greatly irritated the touchy husband, but his hope of gulling Robin enabled him to control his anger. He only bit his lips, and said, “I am ready to follow you, fair Sir.”

Robin threw a kiss to the pretty lady, and, to the great indignation of the scandalised husband, announced to her his speedy return.

Soon after, the Reeve and Robin set out on horseback from Nottingham.

Robin led his companion by the most deserted woodland paths to the cross-road where we were to meet him.

“This,” said Robin, pointing to a delightful valley, “is part of my land.”

“You speak absurdly and falsely,” replied the Reeve, who thought it was all a hoax. “This Forest, with all it contains, is the property of the King.”

“Possibly,” returned Robin; “but as I have taken possession of it, it belongs to me.”

“To you?”

“Certainly, and you shall soon learn in what manner.”

“We are in a lonely and dangerous part,” said the Reeve. “The wood is infested by robbers. God keep us from falling into the hands of that wretch, Robin Hood! Should such a misfortune befall us, we should very soon be stripped of all we possess.”

“We shall see what he will do,” replied Robin, with a laugh, “for I could wager a thousand to one that we shall be face to face with him immediately.”

The Reeve turned pale, and cast affrighted glances into the underwood.

“I wish,” said he, “that your estates were less evilly situated; and had you warned me of the dangers surrounding them, I would certainly never have come.”

“I assure you, my dear sir,” replied Robin, “that we are on my land.”

“What mean you? Of what land do you speak?” asked the other, anxiously.

“My words seem plain enow to me,” replied Robin. “I show you these glades, valleys, cross-roads, and I say, ‘Behold my estates.’ When you speak of your wife, do you not say ‘my wife’?”

“Yea, yea, without doubt,” stammered the Reeve. “And I pray you, what is your name? I am anxious to know the name of so rich a landlord.”

“Your very proper curiosity shall soon be gratified,” laughed Robin Hood.

At that moment a large herd of deer crossed the road.

"Look, look, Master, to your right; there are an hundred beasts. How say you, are they not fat and well to look upon?"

The poor Reeve trembled in all his limbs.

"I would I had never come here," said he, gazing into the depths of the wood with terror.

"Why?" asked Robin. "I assure you old Sherwood is a charming dwelling-place; besides, what have you to fear? Am I not with you?"

"That is just what doth alarm me, Sir Stranger. For some moments past I own that your companionship hath ceased to be agreeable to me."

"Happily for me, there are very few people of that opinion, Sir Reeve," replied Robin, laughing; "but since, to my distress, you are of that number, it is useless to prolong our interview."

As he said this, Robin bowed ironically to his companion, and raised his hunting-horn to his lips.

(I forgot to tell you, my friends, that we had followed the travellers step by step.) At his first call we ran forward. The terrified Reeve very near fell flat upon the neck of his horse.

"What do you desire, noble Master?" said I to Robin. "Give me your orders, I beg, that I may execute them instantly."

"Do you always speak thus to Robin, Little John?" asked Will Scarlett.

"Yea, Will, for it is a duty and a pleasure," replied the young giant, good-humouredly.

"I have brought hither the puissant Town Reeve of Nottingham," replied Robin. "His Lordship wishes to see my cattle and share my supper. See to it, my good lieutenant, that our guest is treated with the style and splendour due to his position."

"He shall be served with the choicest viands," I replied, "for I know he will pay very generously for his dinner."

"Pay!" cried the Reeve. "What mean you by that?"

"Explanations will follow in their turn, Master," replied Robin. "And now permit me to answer the question you did me the honour to put as we entered the Forest."

"What question?" muttered the Reeve.

"You asked my name."

"Alack!" groaned the Innkeeper.

"They call me Robin Hood, Master."

"So I see," said the Reeve, looking round at the Merrie Men.

“As to what we mean by paying, it is this. We keep open house for the poor, but we re-imburse ourselves largely by the guests who are fortunate enow to possess well-furnished purses.”

“What are your conditions?” asked the Reeve, in a doleful voice.

“We have none, nor any fixed price; we take the whole of our guests’ money without counting it. For example, you have three hundred gold crowns in your pocket.”

“Lord, Lord!” muttered the Reeve.

“Your expenses will be three hundred gold crowns.”

“Three hundred crowns!”

“Yea, and I advise you to eat as much as possible and drink as much as you can, so as not to have to pay for what you have not consumed.”

An excellent repast was served upon the green turf. The Reeve was not hungry, and ate but little, though, to make up for it, he drank heartily. This boundless thirst we supposed to be a result of his despair.

He gave us three hundred golden crowns, and no sooner was the last crown in my purse than he manifested an ardent desire to quit our company. Robin ordered his horse to be brought, helped him into the saddle, wished him good luck, and begged earnestly to be remembered to his charming wife.

The Reeve made no reply to our farewells; he was in such haste to leave the Forest that he put his horse to a gallop, and set off without saying one word. Thus ended Robin’s adventure with the Town Reeve of Nottingham.

“I should much like,” said Will Scarlett, “to prove my cleverness in disguising myself one day. Have you ever tried it, Little John?”

“Yea, once, in obedience to Robin’s orders.”

“And how did you fare?” asked Will.

“Well enough for the occasion,” replied John.

“And what was the occasion?” asked Much.

“‘Twas thus. One morning Robin Hood wished to pay a visit to Halbert Lindsay and his pretty little wife; but I pointed out to him the danger of going openly into the town after what had happened with the Reeve about the sale of the cattle, for we feared serious reprisals. Robin Hood laughed at my fears, and replied that, in order to deceive everybody, he would go disguised as a Norman. To that intent he assumed a magnificent knight’s dress, paid a visit to Halbert, and from his abode made his way to the Town Reeve’s Inn. There he spent much money, complimented the host’s pretty wife upon her good looks, and chatted with the Reeve, who overwhelmed him with attentions. Then, a few minutes before quitting the house, he took the man aside, and said to him with a laugh, ‘A thousand thanks, good host, for your courteous entertainment of Robin Hood.’”

Before the Reeve could recover from the astonishment caused by Robin’s words, the latter had vanished.

“Good,” said William; “but this fresh proof of Robin’s ability doth not tell us in what manner you were disguised Little John.”

“I dressed myself as a beggar.”

“But wherefore?”

“To carry out, as I told you, an order from Robin. Robin wished to put my ability to the test, and desired to know whether I was capable of seconding his wonderful adroitness. The choice of disguise was left to me, and having learnt of the death of a rich Norman whose estates lay in the neighbourhood of Nottingham, I resolved to mingle with the beggars who usually accompany the funeral procession. On my head was an old hat adorned with cockle-shells; I wore a pilgrim’s dress, and carried a mighty staff, a sack of provisions, and a purse destined for gifts of money. My garments were so wretched, and I so much resembled a real beggar that even our merry companions were tempted to offer me an alms. About a mile from our retreat I fell in with several beggars who, like myself, were on their way to the Castle of the deceased noble. One of these rogues was apparently blind, another limped painfully, the others bore no distinctive signs beyond miserable rags and tatters.

“Here,” I said to myself, regarding them out of the corner of mine eye “here are fellows who will serve me for models. I will accost them, so as to be able to take a leaf out of their book.”

“Good day, brothers,” I cried heartily. “I am right glad to meet you. Which way are you going?”

“We are going along the road,” dryly replied the man whom I had more particularly addressed.

The jester’s companions eyed me with suspicion from head to foot.

“Might not this fellow be taken for the Tower of Linton Abbey?” quoth one of the beggars, stepping back a step or two.

“I might be taken for a man who fears no one,” I replied in a menacing tone.

“Come, come, peace!” growled another of the beggars.

“So be it,” I replied. “But what is there to devour at the end of this road, that I see surging from all directions our holy fraternity of rags? Why do the bells of Linton Abbey toll so mournfully?”

“Because a Norman hath just died.”

“Are ye, then, going to his burial?”

“We are going to take our share of the largess which they distribute among poor devils like us on the occasion of a funeral; you are at liberty to accompany us.”

“I trow I am, and I owe you no thanks for the permission,” I replied scornfully.

“Long handle of a dirty broom,” cried the lustiest of the beggars, “if that be so, we are not disposed to bear with thy foolish company any longer. Thou dost appear a very sorry rogue, and thy presence is distasteful to us. Go, and take as a parting gift this blow on thy pate.”

As he said these words, the tall ragamuffin dealt me a blow on the head.

“This unexpected onslaught made me furious,” continued Little John. “I fell on the rascal, and rained a volley of blows upon him.”

He was soon incapable of defending himself, and cried for mercy.

“Here’s at you, lying dogs!” I cried, menacing the other miscreants with my staff.

You would have laughed, I am sure, good friends, to have seen the blind man open his eyes and fearfully watch my movements, and the lame man run at the top of his speed toward the woods.

I silenced the brawlers, who were shouting fit to deafen a man, and laid my staff soundly and well across their broad shoulders. A wallet, broken open by my blows, let fall some pieces of gold, and the rogue to whom they belonged fell on his knees upon his treasure, hoping, doubtless, to conceal it from me.

“Oho!” I cried, “this puts another appearance on the matter, miserable ragamuffins, or rather thieves, that ye are. Give me instantly, to the last groat, all the money you possess, or I will beat you all into a pulp.”

The cowards again sued for mercy, and as my arm was beginning to get tired of beating, beating, beating, I was merciful.

When I left the beggars with my pockets full of their spoils, they could scarce stand up. I quickly took my way to the Forest, delighted with my prowess, for there is a certain justice in plundering thieves.

Robin Hood, surrounded by his Merrie Men, was practising at archery.

“Well, Little John,” he cried as I appeared, “are you back already? Had you not the courage to carry out your beggar’s part to a finish?”

“Pardon me, dear Robin, I have done my duty, and my quest hath been productive. I bring back six hundred gold crowns.”

“Six hundred golden crowns!” he cried. “Then you have plundered a Prince of the Church.”

“Nay, Captain, I gleaned that sum from members of the beggar tribe.”

Robin looked grave.

“Explain yourself, John,” he said to me. “I cannot believe that you have robbed the poor.”

I recounted the adventure to Robin, observing that beggars with pockets full of gold could only be professional thieves.

Robin was of my opinion, and smiled again.

“That was a good day’s work,” laughed Much “six hundred golden crowns at one haul.”

“That very evening,” continued John, “I distributed the half of my booty among the poor in the neighbourhood of Sherwood.”

“Good John!” cried Will, wringing the young man’s hand.

“Generous Robin! you should say, William, for in acting thus I only obeyed the orders of my Chief.”

“Here we are at Barnsdale,” said Much; “but the way hath not seemed long to me.”

“I shall tell that to my sister,” cried Will, laughing.

“And I will add,” replied Much, that I never ceased to think of her for a single instant.”

CHAPTER VII

William, Much, and Little John had been staying at Barnsdale for a week, and the happy household was preparing to celebrate the wedding of Winifred and Barbara. By Will Scarlett's orders the park and gardens of the Hall had been transformed into dancing-greens; for the good-natured young man was constantly watching over the well-being of the world in general and the happiness of each in particular. Indefatigable in his efforts, he turned his hand to anything, busied himself over everything, and rilled the house with his light-hearted mirth.

While working hard he talked and laughed, poking fun at Robin, tormenting Much. Suddenly a wild idea struck him, and he began to roar with laughter.

"What ails you, William?" asked Robin.

"My dear friend, I will leave you to guess the reason of my mirth," replied Will, "and I wager you will not succeed."

"It must be something very entertaining, seeing it doth amuse you so much that you laugh all by yourself."

"In sooth, 'tis highly entertaining. You know my six brothers? They are all built much on the same model fair as corn, gentle, placid, brave, and honest."

"What is all this leading up to, Will?"

"To this: these good lads are unacquainted with love."

"Well?" asked Robin, smiling.

"Well," replied Will Scarlett, "an idea hath just struck me which might give us a good deal of amusement."

"What is it?"

"As you are aware, I have a great influence over my brothers, and this very day I will persuade them they ought all to marry."

Robin began to laugh.

"I will assemble them in a corner of the court-yard," Will went on, "and I will put into their heads the idea of taking each of them a wife on the same day as Much and Little John."

"It is impossible to do such a thing, my dear Will," responded Robin. "Your brothers are of too placid and phlegmatic a nature to be influenced by your words; besides, I know well they are not in love.”

“So much the better; they will be obliged to pay their court to my sisters’ young friends, and that will be a most pleasing sight. Picture to yourself for one moment the appearance of Gregory, the steady, awkward, simple fellow of Gregory striving to make himself agreeable to a young woman. Come with me, Robin, for there is no time to lose; we can only give them three days in which to make their choice. I will call my brothers together, and in a grave voice deliver a fatherly oration to them.”

“Marriage is a serious thing, Will, and ought not to be lightly treated. If your brothers, persuaded by your eloquence, consent to marry, and then later on are rendered unhappy through a thoughtless choice, will you not keenly regret having helped to make their whole life miserable?”

“Have no fears on that score, Robin; I mean to find my brothers young maidens worthy of the most tender love both now and in the future. I know, for one, a charming little creature who loves my brother Herbert passionately.”

“That is not enough, Will. Is this maiden worthy to call Winifred and Barbara her sisters?”

“Without a doubt; and, what is more, I am certain that she will make an excellent wife.”

“And hath Herbert already seen this young damsel?”

“Certainly he hath; but the poor artless fellow little imagines that he could be the object of such a preference. Several times I tried to make him perceive that he was always welcome at Mistress Anna Meadows’ house. ‘Twas but wasted labour, for Herbert did not understand me; he is so young, in spite of his twenty-nine years. I have a great friendship for a charming damsel who would suit Egbert perfectly in every respect; then Maude was speaking to me to-day of a maiden in this neighbourhood who thinketh Harold a mighty fine fellow. Thus, as you see, Robin, we have already a part of what is needful to carry out my project.”

“Unfortunately, Will, ‘tis not sufficient, seeing you have six brothers to marry off.”

“Never distress yourself; I will go seek, and I shall find three more maidens.”

“Very good. But when you have found the damsels, do you think that your brothers will please them?”

"I am sure of it. My brothers are young and strong, fair to look upon, they resemble me in appearance," added Will, with a touch of self-conceit in his tone; "and if they be not so attractive as you are, Robin, if they are not exactly sweet-tempered or lively, at any rate there is naught in their looks to offend the eye of a wise and sensible girl, a girl who seeks a good husband. There is Herbert," he went on, turning towards a young man crossing a garden path; "I will call him. Herbert, come here, my lad."

"What dost want, Will?" replied the young man, as he came near them.

"I wish to speak with thee."

"I am listening, Will."

"That which I have to say doth concern thy brothers also; go seek them."

"I will do so at once."

Will remained thoughtful during the few moments which elapsed before Herbert's return.

The young men came running up, their faces wreathed in smiles.

"Here we are, William," said eldest, joyfully. "To what must we set down thy wish to assemble us all around thee?"

"To a grave cause, my dear brothers. Will you allow me first to ask you all a question?"

The young men gave signs of assent.

"You love our father dearly, do you not?"

"Who dare doubt our love for him?" demanded Gregory.

"No one; that question is merely a preliminary. So, you love our father dearly. You have never seen him behave otherwise than as a man of honour, a true Saxon?"

"Certainly not," cried Egbert; "but, in the name of Heaven, Will, what do thy words signify? Hath some one slandered our father's name? Point out the wretch to me, and I undertake to avenge the honour of the Gamwells."

"The honour of the Gamwells is unsullied, dear brothers; and if it has been soiled by a lie, the stain would have been already washed out in the slanderer's blood. I wish to speak to you of something less grave, but still very serious; only you must not interrupt me, an if you wish to hear the last words of my harangue before nightfall. Show your approbation or disapprobation of my words by nodding or shaking your heads. Attend; I am about to begin again. The conduct of our father is that of an honourable man, and ought to serve as our guide and model."

"Yea," nodded the six fair heads with one accord.

"Our mother hath followed the same path," continued Will. "Her existence hath been the accomplishment of every duty, the example of every virtue?"

"Yea, yea!"

"How, then, have you been able to remain blind, with this picture of bliss before you? How can you be so ungrateful to Providence? How is it you refuse to accord to our parents a token of respect, tenderness, and gratitude?"

Will's brothers stared in astonishment, for they could make naught of his words.

"What mean you, William?" asked Gregory.

"I would say, Sirs, that, following the example of our father, you should marry, and by so doing prove your admiration of our father's conduct, who himself married."

"Oh, good Lord!" cried the youths, but little pleased.

"Marriage is happiness," Will continued. "Think how happy you will be when you have a dear little creature hanging on your arm like the flower on a vigorous plant, a dear little creature who will love you, think of you, and whose happiness you will be. Look around you, rogues, and you will see the sweet fruits of marriage. First of all, there are Maude and me, whom I am sure you must envy when we are playing with our dear little child. Then Robin and Marian. Think of Little John, and imitate that worthy lad's example. Do you want further proof of the happiness shed by heaven on young husbands and wives? Go and visit Halbert Lindsay and his pretty wife Grace; go down into the valley of Mansfield, and there you will find Allan Clare and the Lady Christabel. You are shockingly selfish to have never thought it was your duty to make a woman happy. Nay, do not shake your heads; you will never persuade any one that you are good and generous lads. I blush for the hardness of your hearts, and I am hurt by hearing everywhere: 'The sons of the old Knight have bad hearts.' I am resolved to put an end to such a state of things, and I warn you that I intend you to marry."

"Really!" said Rupert, defiantly. "Well, I want no wife. Marriage may be a very fine thing, but at present it doth in no wise concern me."

"Thou dost not want a wife?" replied Will. "Very possibly; but thou shalt take one, for I know a maiden who will make thee take back that opinion."

Rupert shook his head.

“Come now, speak freely; dost love any one woman more than another?”

“Yea,” replied the young man, gravely.

“Bravo!” cried Will, quite taken aback at this unexpected confidence, for Rupert shunned the society of girls. “Who is she? Tell us her name.”

“It is my mother,” said the simple lad.

“Thy mother!” repeated Will, a little scornfully. “Thou dost teach us nothing new. I have long been aware that thou dost love, venerate, and respect our mother. I am not speaking of the filial affection which we have for our parents; I speak of another thing of love, true love. Love is a sentiment which... a tender feeling that... well, a sensation which makes the heart leap toward a young woman. One can adore one’s mother and cherish a charming maiden at the same time.”

“I do not wish to marry, either,” said Gregory.

“Dost think thou hast a will of thine own, my boy?” replied Will. “Wilt soon be shown thine error. Canst tell me thy reason for refusing to marry?”

“No,” murmured Gregory, fearfully.

“Wilt live for thyself alone?”

Gregory remained silent.

“Hast thou the audacity to answer me,” cried Will, with an affectation of indignation, “that thou dost share the opinion of the rascals who despise the society of women?”

“I did not say that, and still less do I think it; but...”

“There is no but which can hold good in the face of reasons so conclusive as those which I do give you all. Therefore, prepare to set up house, my lads; for you will be married at the same time as Winifred and Barbara.”

“What,” cried Egbert, “in three days? Thou art mad, Will; we have not time to find wives.”

“Leave that to me; I will undertake to satisfy you better even than your natural modesty could dare to hope.”

“As for me, I positively refuse to relinquish my liberty,” said Gregory.

“I did not think to find such selfishness in a son of my mother’s,” said William, in a wounded tone.

Poor Gregory blushed.

“See here, Gregory,” said Rupert. “Let Will do as he doth purpose; he only wishes our happiness, after all, and if he will have the kindness to seek me a wife, why, I will take her. Thou knowest well, brother, that resistance is useless; William hath always done what he would with us.”

“Since William doth insist upon marrying us off,” added Stephen, “I would as lieve wed in three days as in six months.”

“I am of Stephen’s opinion,” said the timid Harold.

“I give way to force,” added Gregory, “for Will is a very devil; he would surely end sooner or later in dragging me into his nets.”

“Thou wilt soon thank me for having overthrown thy false allegations, and thy joy shalt be my reward.”

“I will marry to oblige thee, Will,” said Gregory, again; “but I hope that in return thou wilt give me a pretty little bride.”

“I will introduce you one and all to young and charming maidens, and, if ye do not find them adorable, ye may spread it abroad that Will Scarlett doth not know a pretty face.”

“I can spare thee the trouble of hunting about for me,” said Herbert, “my wife is already found.”

“Ha, ha!” laughed Will, “you will see, Robin, that my fine fellows are provided for, and their apparent distaste for marriage is but a merry jest. Who is thy beloved, Herbert?”

“Anna Meadows. We had arranged that our marriage should take place at the same time as my sisters’.”

“Sly dog!” said Will, giving his brother a dig in the ribs. “I spoke to thee yesterday of the maiden, and thou hadst never a word to say.”

“‘Twas only this morning my dear Anna gave me a satisfactory reply.”

“Very good; but when I alluded to her love for thee, thou didst make no response.”

“I had none to make. Thou saidst to me, ‘Mistress Anna is very pretty, she hath a good temper, she will make an excellent wife.’ As I have long known all that, thy reflections were but an echo of mine own. Thou didst add further, ‘Mistress Anna loveth thee well.’ I believed it, thou didst think it; we were each as wise as the other, and consequently I had nothing to tell thee.”

“Well answered, discreet Herbert; and I see, from my brothers’ silence, that thou alone art worthy of mine esteem.”

“I had already made up my mind to marry,” said Harold; “Maude inspired me with the wish.”

“Hath Maude chosen thy wife?” asked Will, with a laugh.

“Yea, brother; Maude said it was very agreeable to live with a charming little wife, and I agree with her.”

“Hurrah!” cried Will, in delight. “My good brothers, will you consent willingly, with hand on heart, to be married on the same day as Winifred and Barbara?”

“We consent,” answered the young men, who had no prospective wives.

“Hurrah for marriage!” cried Will, again, throwing his bonnet in the air.

“Hurrah!” repeated the six voices, with one accord.

“Will,” said Egbert, “think of our brides; thou must haste to present us to them, for sure they would wish to converse a little with us before wedding us.”

“That is very like. Come with me, all. I have a pretty maiden for Egbert, and I think I know three girls who would suit Gregory, Rupert, and Stephen admirably.”

“My dear Will,” said Rupert, “I wish for a fair, slim maiden; I would not care to marry too stout a wife.”

“I know thy romantic taste, and I will deal with thee accordingly; thy betrothed is frail as a reed and pretty as an angel. Come, my lads, I will present you one after another; ye shall pay your court, and if ye do not know how to please a woman, I will advise you, or, better still, I will take your places beside your lady-loves.”

“What a pity ‘tis that thou canst not marry our future wives, brother Will; things would go so much more smoothly then.”

William shook his fist at his brother, took Gregory by the arm, and set out from Barnsdale, accompanied by the procession of lovers.

The seven brothers soon reached the village, where Herbert separated himself from his companions to pay a visit to his beloved; Harold disappeared some moments later; and Will, accompanied by the rest of his brothers, made his way to the home of the maiden destined for Egbert.

Mistress Lucy opened the house-door herself. She was a charming girl with a rosy face and archly sparkling eyes. Her smile expressed goodness, and she was always smiling.

William presented his brother to Mistress Lucy, and told her of Egbert’s good qualities. He was so eloquent and persuasive that the maiden, with her mother’s consent, allowed Will to hope that his wishes would be accomplished.

Delighted at Mistress Lucy’s complaisance, William left Egbert to continue his wooing alone, and went off with his brothers.

Hardly were they out of the house ere Stephen remarked to Will, “I wish I could speak with as much wit, animation, and grace as thou dost use in conversation.”

“Nothing is easier than to speak gracefully to a woman, my dear lad. The words themselves are of little importance; it is quite enow to tell the truth, and that right heartily, without embellishing it with fine speeches.”

“Is she whom thou hast chosen for me comely?”

“Let me know thy taste; tell me of the kind of beauty thou dost admire.”

“Oh,” replied Stephen, “I am not very hard to please; a wife like Maude would suit me well enow!”

“A wife like Maude would suit thee well enow!” repeated Will, overcome with astonishment. “That I can readily believe, and I would have thee know that thou art not at all moderate in thy desires. By St. Paul! Stephen, a wife like Maude is a rare thing to find if not quite undiscoverable. Know well, poor ambitious lad, that there doth not exist on earth any one to be compared with my dear little wife!”

“Dost think so, Will?”

“I am certain of it,” replied Maude’s husband, in a peremptory tone.

“Indeed, I did not know it. You must excuse my ignorance, Will; I have not travelled yet,” replied the young man, innocently. “But if thou couldst give me a wife whose beauty was of Maude’s kind...”

“No one in the world doth possess one of Maude’s perfections,” replied Will, half irritated by his brother’s desire.

“Very well, then, Will, choose a wife for me after thine own taste,” replied Stephen, in a disconsolate tone.

“Then thou wilt be happy with her. First of all, I will tell thee her name; it is Minnie Meadows.”

“I know her,” said Stephen, smiling. “She is a young girl with black eyes and curly hair. Minnie was in the habit of making fun of me; she said that I was foolish and sleepy. However, I like her, in spite of her teasing. One day, when we were by ourselves, she laughingly asked me if I had ever kissed a maid in my life.”

“What reply didst make to Minnie’s question?”

“I answered that certainly I had kissed my sisters. Minnie went off into fits of laughter, and asked me again, ‘Have you never kissed any other woman but your sisters?’ ‘By your leave, mistress,’ I replied, ‘I have kissed my mother.’”

“Thy mother, thou silly fool! Well, what did she say to thee after thy fine answer?”

“She laughed louder than ever. Then she asked me if I did not wish to kiss any other women besides my mother and sisters. I made answer, ‘Nay, mistress.’”

“Thou great ninny! thou shouldest have kissed Minnie; that was the reply due to her questions.”

“I never thought of it,” answered Stephen, quietly.

“How did ye part after this pleasant conversation?”

“Minnie called me a gaby; then she ran away, laughing still.”

“I thoroughly approve of the epithet applied to thee by thy future wife. Doth she really suit thee?”

“Yea, but what shall I say to her when we are alone?”

“Thou must say all sorts of pretty things to her.”

“I understand. But tell me, Will, how must I begin a pretty sentence? It is alway difficult to think of the first word.”

“When thou art alone with Minnie, thou wilt tell her thou dost wish to receive lessons in the art of kissing young maidens, and as thou art speaking, thou wilt kiss her. The first obstacle surmounted, thou wilt not find it difficult to continue the progress.”

“I should never dare to be so bold,” said Stephen, timidly.

“‘I should never dare!’” repeated Will, in a mocking tone. “Upon my word, Stephen, if I were not sure that thou wert a brave and valiant forester, I should take thee for a girl dressed in man’s clothes.”

Stephen blushed.

“But,” he said hesitatingly, “if the maiden should be distressed at my behaviour?”

“Well, thou wilt kiss her again, and say to her, ‘Sweet mistress, adorable Minnie, I shall not cease from kissing you until you do forgive me.’ Beside which, bear this in mind, and remember it on occasion, a girl never seriously objects to a kiss from the man she loves. But if her lover displeases her, the case is altered; then she defends herself, and she defends herself so well that you cannot begin again. Thou needst not fear a real refusal from Minnie. I have learnt from a good source that the little maid is friendly disposed toward thee.”

Stephen plucked up courage, and promised William to get over his shyness.

Minnie was alone in the house.

“Good day, sweet Minnie,” said Will, taking the extended hand of the maiden, who blushed prettily as she greeted him. “I have brought my brother Stephen, who hath something of importance to tell you.”

“He!” cried the girl. “And what very important thing can he have to say to me?”

“I must tell you,” responded Stephen, quickly, becoming pale with fright, “that I wish to take some lessons...”

“Hush! hush!” interrupted Will. “Not so fast, my boy. Dear Minnie, Stephen will explain to you presently what he wishes you to grant him of your kindness. Meanwhile, allow me to announce my sisters’ marriages.”

“I have heard of the festivities which are on foot at the Hall.”

“I hope, dear Minnie, that you will take part in our merrymakings.”

“With pleasure, Will; the maidens of the village are all busied with their dresses, and I myself shall be overjoyed to dance at a wedding ball.”

“You will bring your lover, will you not, Minnie?”

“Nay, nay,” interrupted Stephen. “Thou dost forget, Will...”

“I forget naught,” said Will. “Be so good as to hold thy tongue for a few minutes. You will bring your lover, eh, Minnie?” continued the young man, repeating his question.

“I have no lover,” replied the maiden.

“Is that true, Minnie?” asked Will.

“It is quite true; I know not of any whom I could call lover.”

“If you wish it, Minnie, I will be your lover,” cried Stephen, taking the girl’s hand in one of his own trembling ones.

“Bravo, Stephen!” said Will.

“Yea,” continued the young man, encouraged by his brother’s approbation, “yea, Minnie, I will be your lover; on the wedding day I will seek you, and we will be married at the same time as my sisters.”

Astonished at this abrupt declaration, the maiden did not know how to answer.

“Listen to me, dear Minnie,” said Will. “My brother hath long loved you, and his silence cometh not from his heart but from the extreme timidity of his nature. I assure you upon mine honour that Stephen speaks with the sincerity of love. You are not betrothed; Stephen is a fine lad, better still, he is a good and excellent lad, and will be a husband worthy of you. If we have your consent and that of your family, your marriage could be celebrated at the same time as my sisters'."

"Really, Will," replied the girl, looking down in confusion, "I was so little prepared for your proposal; 'tis so hasty and unexpected, I do not know how to reply."

"Reply thus: 'I take Stephen for my husband,'" said that youth, put quite at his ease by the pretty girl's sweet looks. "I have a very great affection for you, Minnie," continued he, "and I should be the happiest of men an if you would give me your hand."

"'Tis impossible for me to reply to your honourable proposal to-day," said the maiden, bowing gracefully and playfully to her timid lover.

"I will leave you alone, good friends," William continued. "My presence embarrasses you, and I am certain that if Minnie loves Winifred and Barbara, she will be glad to call them sisters."

"I love Winifred and Barbara with all my heart," replied the girl, softly.

"Then," said Stephen, "I may hope, mistress, that in consideration of your love for my sisters, you will treat me kindly?"

"We shall see," said the girl, coquettishly.

"Good-bye, charming Minnie," said William, with a smile. "I pray you be good and kind to the fine fellow who loves you so well, even though he doth not testify very eloquently to his love."

"You are too severe, Will," replied the maiden, gravely. "I do not think Stephen could possibly have expressed himself better."

"Well, I see that you are really a most excellent young woman, sweet Minnie," said Will. "Permit me to kiss your hand and to say once more, 'Good-bye, sister mine.'"

"Should I reply to William, 'Good-bye, brother mine?'" asked Minnie, turning to Stephen.

"Yea, dear lady, yea," cried Stephen, joyfully. "Say to him, 'Good-bye, brother' so that he may go quickly."

"Thou dost make progress, my lad," laughed Will. "My lessons are evidently bearing fruit."

With which William kissed Minnie, and went on his way with Gregory and Rupert.

"Now 'tis our turn, is't not, Will?" said Gregory. "I am impatient to see my future wife."

"And so am I," added Rupert.

“Where doth she live?” asked Gregory.

“Shall I see my future bride to-day?” continued Rupert.

“Your very natural curiosity shall be satisfied,” replied Will. “Your future wives are cousins, and are called Mabel and Editha Harrowfield.”

“I know them both,” said Gregory.

“I know them too,” added Rupert.

“They are pretty girls,” Will continued, “and I am not surprised that their charming faces have attracted your attention. I have hardly been eighteen months at Barnsdale, but there is not a maiden in the county, blonde or brunette, that I do not know. Like yourselves, mine attention hath already been attracted by Mabel and Editha.”

“I never saw a fellow to equal thee, Will,” said Gregory; “thou dost know all the women, and art always roving. Of a truth we resemble thee but little.”

“Unhappily for yourselves, my lads; for did you resemble me the least bit in the world, I should not be obliged to seek wives for you, or have to teach you how to make love to them.”

“Oh,” replied Gregory, firmly, “it will not be difficult for us to make love to Mabel and Editha. Rupert thinks Mabel charming, and I am persuaded Editha is a good creature, so I shall just ask her an if she will be the wife of Gregory Gamwell.”

“Such a question must not be put abruptly, my good lad, or thou wilt run the risk of a refusal.”

“Tell me, then, how I should explain mine intentions to Editha. I do not know the tricks of cunning. I wish to have her for wife, and I should think it but natural to say, ‘Editha, I am ready to marry you.’”

“Thou wilt embarrass the maiden overmuch, an thou dost shoot such a declaration at her point blank.”

“What must I do, then?” asked Gregory, in despair.

“Thou must gently lead the conversation in the way thou wouldst follow; speak first of the ball to be given at the Hall in three days’ time, of the happiness of Little John and Much; make a skilful allusion to thine approaching marriage, and, in this connection, ask Editha, as I have asked Minnie, if she thinks of being married, and if she will come to the feast at Barnsdale with a lover.”

“What if Editha reply, ‘Yea, Gregory, yea, I will go to the ball with a lover’?”

“Well, then thou wilt say, ‘Mistress, that lover is myself.’”

“But,” Gregory ventured once again, “what if Editha doth refuse my hand?”

“Then you will offer it to Mabel.”

“And what of me?” said Rupert.

“Editha will not refuse,” answered Will; “therefore never be uneasy: each of you shall have the girl of his heart to wife.”

The young men crossed the village green, and stopped before a pretty house, upon the doorstep of which stood two girls.

“Good morrow, fair Editha and Mabel,” said Will, greeting the cousins. “My brothers and I are come to ask you to a wedding dance.”

“Welcome, fair Sirs,” said Mabel, in a voice as sweet as the song of a bird. “Do us the honour to enter and partake of some refreshment.”

“A thousand thanks, charming Mabel,” replied Will. “So kind and gracious an offer should not meet with a refusal. We will drink your health and happiness in a flagon of ale.”

Editha and Mabel, who were kind-hearted and sprightly maidens, received the brothers’ compliments with much laughter; then, after an hour’s merry conversation, Gregory summoned up his courage to ask Editha timidly whether she intended going to the Hall in the company of her lover.

“I shall not be accompanied by one lover alone, but by half a dozen merry lads,” replied Editha, gaily.

This most unexpected answer threw poor Gregory into great confusion. He sighed, and turning to his brother, whispered him aside

“‘Tis all over with me; dost not think so? I cannot compete with half a dozen aspirants. Really, I have no luck, and must e’en remain a bachelor all my days.”

“Since thou dost not wish to marry, that will suit thee,” said Will, teasingly.

“I had not thought of it, that was all; but since the idea entered my mind, I have been tormented with the fear of not being able to find a wife.”

“Thou shalt have Editha; let me manage it. Mistress Editha,” said William, “our visit had a double object. First we wished to invite you to our family festivities, then I would present to you, not a gallant for the dance, an adorer for four and twenty hours you have six of those, and the seventh would cut a sorry figure but an honest lad, steady, good, rich, and one who will be proud and happy to offer you his heart, his hand, and his name."

Mistress Editha looked pensive.

"Are you speaking seriously, Will?" she asked.

"Quite seriously. Gregory loves you; however, he is here himself, and if you close your eyes to the eloquence of his looks, pray be so kind as to give heed to the sincerity of his words. I will leave to him the pleasure of pleading a cause which is, I believe, half won already," added the young man, interpreting in his brother's favour the joyous smile which hovered on Editha's lips. William allowed Gregory to approach the maiden, and looked at Rupert to see whether he required any help, intending to go to his assistance, if it were necessary. But Rupert did not require his aid; he was talkng to Mabel in a low voice and holding her hands as he knelt on one knee before her, apparently thanking her for some favour.

"Good," quoth Will to himself, "he can look after himself; I can leave him to his own resources."

He watched the lovers for a few minutes, and then, without attracting their attention, he left the room and ran back to the Hall.

There he met Robin, Marian, and Maude, to whom he related what had happened, depicting to them the timorous embarrassment of the prospective bridegrooms, but he ended in recognising that the young men had brought themselves out of their difficult positions very well.

Towards evening the brothers returned to the Hall radiant with joy. Their victory was complete, and they had one and all obtained the consent of their lady loves.

The parents of the maidens thought it a piece of folly to marry with such precipitation, but the honour of entering the noble family of Gamwell removed all their scruples.

Sir Guy, cleverly prepared by Robin to approve of his sons' choice, welcomed the six pretty girls with great kindness. The eight marriages were celebrated on one day with much pomp, and each was delighted at the happiness which had fallen to his share.

CHAPTER VIII

A month after the events just related, Robin Hood, his wife, and the whole of his band of Merrie Men were installed once again beneath the trees of Sherwood Forest.

About this time, a number of Normans, liberally paid for their military services by Henry II., came to take possession of the domains given them by the King's generosity. Some of these Normans, who were obliged to cross Sherwood Forest to reach their new estates, were constrained to pay their way liberally by the merry band of outlaws. The newcomers protested loudly, and carried their complaints to the authorities in the town of Nottingham. But these complaints were taxed with exaggeration, and received no reply, and the reason of this apathy on the part of the Reeve and other important personages was as follows.

Many of Robin Hood's men were related to the inhabitants of Nottingham, and quite naturally these latter used their influence with the civil and military authorities to prevent any rigorous measures being taken against the Foresters. These worthy men were terribly afraid that if, in consequence of a successful attack, the Merrie Men were driven from their green dwelling-place, they might some morning have the melancholy satisfaction of seeing one of their own kinsmen hanging by the neck from the town gallows.

However, as it was necessary to make a pretence of righteous indignation and justice, they doubled the reward promised to any one who should succeed in capturing Robin Hood. Whoever applied for it could at once obtain a warrant for arresting the famous Outlaw. Many men of great physical strength or of a determined spirit had made the attempt, but an unexpected thing happened they had all become, by their own wish, members of the band of merry Foresters.

One morning Robin and Will Scarlett were strolling through the Forest when Much suddenly appeared before them streaming with perspiration and panting for breath.

"What hath happened, Much?" asked Robin, anxiously. "Are you pursued? You are soaking with perspiration."

“Never fear, Robin,” replied the young man, wiping his crimson face. Thanks be to Heaven, I have had no dangerous encounter. I have only come from a bout with quarter-staves with Peaceful Arthur. Good Lord! the lad hath the strength of a giant in his arm.”

“You speak truly, my dear Much, and ‘tis indeed a rough job to fight with Arthur when he is in earnest...”

“Arthur always keeps cool,” replied Much; “but as he is ignorant of the real rules of the game, he owes his success only to his tremendous muscle.”

“Did he make you cry for quarter?”

“I should think so. But for that, he would have knocked all the breath out of me. At this moment he is trying a bout with Little John, but with such an adversary Arthur’s defeat cannot be doubted, for when he begins to strike hard, Little John doth e’en lift his staff and give him some shrewd blows on the shoulders, to teach him to moderate the transports of his strength.”

“For what reason did you engage with the indomitable Arthur?” asked Robin.

“Without rhyme or reason, simply to pass an hour agreeably and to give our limbs healthy exercise.”

“Arthur is a terrible fighter,” said Robin, “and one day he overcame me in a bout with quarter-staves.”

“You!” cried Will.

“Yea, cousin, he treated me somewhat after the fashion in which he hath handled Much; the rascal used his oaken staff like a bar of iron.”

“How was it that he beat you? Where did the bout take place?” asked Will, curiously.

“The match took place in the Forest, and this is how I made Arthur’s acquaintance. I was walking by myself down a lonely path in the wood, when I saw the gigantic Arthur leaning upon an iron ferruled staff, with eyes and mouth wide open watching a herd of deer within a few feet of him. His gigantic appearance, the air of candid innocence which overspread his large face, made me wish to amuse myself at his expense. I glided dexterously behind him, and accosted him by a vigorous blow with the fist between his shoulders. Arthur started, turned his head, and glared at me wrathfully.

“Who art thou?” said I to him, “and what dost thou mean by wandering in the wood? Thou hast all the appearance of a robber going to steal the deer.

Be so good as to clear off at once. I am the Keeper of this part of the Forest, and I will not suffer the presence of rascals of thy kind."

"Well," he replied carelessly, "try and remove me if thou dost wish it, but I do not intend to go. Call for help, if it be thy good pleasure; I will not oppose thee."

"I need call for no one to enforce the law or my wishes, my fine fellow. I am accustomed to trust to mine own resources, which, as thou mayst see, are worthy of respect. I have two good arms, a sword, and a bow and arrows."

"My little forester," said Arthur, looking me up and down from head to foot disdainfully, "if I gave thee a single blow on the fingers with my staff, thou wouldst not be able to use either sword or bow."

"Speak civilly, my lad," I replied, "an thou wish not to get a sound thrashing."

"How now, little friend, whip an oak with a reed! Whom dost take thyself for, then, young prodigy of valour? Learn that I care not for thee the least bit in the world. However, an if thou wish to fight, I am thy man."

"Thou hast no sword," I observed.

"I need none when I have my staff."

"Then I must take a staff of the same length as thine."

"So be it," said he, putting himself on his guard.

I immediately dealt him the first blow, and I saw the blood gush from his forehead and stream down his cheeks. Staggering under the blow, he made a step backward. I lowered my weapon, but seeing the movement, which no doubt appeared to him an expression of triumph, he set himself again to wield his staff with an extraordinary strength and cleverness. With such violence did he strike out that I had hardly strength to ward off his blows and keep my staff in my clenched hands. In leaping back to avoid a terrible attack, I neglected to keep up my guard, and he took advantage of it to deal me the most terrific crack on the skull I have ever received. I fell back as though pierced by an arrow, but I did not lose consciousness, and again sprang to my feet. The combat, suspended for an instant, began again; Arthur rained his blows upon me with such tremendous force, he scarce gave me time to defend myself. Thus we fought for nearly four hours. We made the echoes of the old wood ring with our blows, revolving round one another like two wild boars when they fight. At length, thinking there was not much use in continuing a struggle in which there was little to gain, not even the satisfaction of thrashing my adversary, I threw down my staff.

"Enow," I said to him; "let us finish the quarrel. We might knock each other about until to-morrow and both be ground to powder without winning aught thereby. I give thee the free run of the Forest, for thou art a brave lad."

"Gramercy for that great favour," he replied disdainfully. "I have purchased the right to go my own way by the aid of my staff; therefore it is to that rather than to thee my thanks are due."

"That is true, my brave lad, but thou wouldst have found it difficult to defend thy right with thy staff alone to enforce it. Thou wouldst find some doughty opponent in the green wood, and thou couldst only preserve thy liberty at the cost of broken crowns and aching limbs. Believe me, life in the town even would be preferable to that which thou wouldst lead here."

"However," replied Arthur, "I am fain to dwell in the old Forest."

"My valiant adversary's answer made me consider," continued Robin. I looked at his tall figure, the amiable frankness of his face, and I told myself that the attachment of such a young blade as this might be to the advantage of our community.

"Then thou dost not like living in the town?" I asked him.

"Nay," he replied, "I am aweary of being the slave of these cursed Normans. I am tired of hearing myself called "dog, knave, serf." My master hath applied to me this morning some of the worst epithets in his vocabulary, and, not content with baiting me with his viperish tongue, wished to strike me. I did not wait for the blow. 'found a stick within reach of my hand, and used it, giving him a blow over the shoulders that knocked him senseless. That done, I fled."

"What is thy trade?" I asked him.

"I am a tanner," he answered, "and I have lived for several years in the county of Nottingham."

"Well, my fine friend," I said to him, "if thou have not too great a liking for your trade, canst say good-bye to it, and come and live here. I am Robin Hood. Is the name known to thee?"

"For sure it is; but are you Robin Hood? You told me just now that you were one of the Keepers of the Forest."

"I am Robin Hood, I give thee my word of honour," I replied, holding out my hand to the poor lad, who was overcome by surprise. "Upon my soul and conscience!”

“Then I am very glad to have met you,” added Arthur, joyfully, “for I came to seek you, generous Robin Hood. When you told me that you were one of the Keepers of the Forest I believed you, and should not have dared to tell you my reason for coming to Sherwood. I wish to join your band, and if you will accept me as a companion you will have no more devoted or more faithful follower than Peaceful Arthur, the tanner of Nottingham town.”

“Thy frankness pleaseth me, Arthur,” I answered him, “and I consent gladly to admit thee as one of the Merrie Men who form my band. Our laws are few and simple, but they must be observed. On every other point thou shalt have complete liberty, and in addition to that thou wilt be well clothed, well nourished, and well treated.”

“My heart swells as I listen to you, Robin Hood, and the thought of being one of your band makes me very happy. I am not quite the stranger you might imagine, for Little John is a kinsman of mine. My maternal uncle married John’s mother, who was a sister of Sir Guy Gamwell. Shall I see Little John soon? I am all impatience to do so.”

“I will bring him hither,” I said, and wound my horn.

Some minutes later Little John appeared.

At sight of our blood-bespattered faces and frightful bruises, Little John stopped short.

“What is it, Robin?” he cried, startled. “Your face is in a frightful state.”

“I have been thrashed,” I replied calmly, “and the culprit stands before thee.”

“If that rascal hath beaten you, he must wield his staff very prettily,” cried Little John. “Well, I will repay with interest the blows he hath given thee. Step forward, my fine lad.”

“Stay thy hand, friend John, and give it to a faithful ally, to a cousin; this young man is called Arthur.”

“Arthur of Nottingham, known as Peaceful Arthur?” questioned John.

“The same,” replied Arthur. “We have not met since our childhood, but all the same I recognised thee, Cousin John.”

“I cannot say as much,” said John, with his simple frankness. “I do not recall thy features, but that matters little; thou art welcome, Cousin, and thou wilt find good and merry hearts in the green wood.”

Arthur and John embraced each other, and the remainder of the day passed merrily.

"Have you ever striven against Arthur since that day?" Will asked Robin.

"I have had no opportunity of doing so as yet; but it is probable that I should be vanquished again, and that would be for the third time."

"What, for the third time?" cried Will.

"Yea, Jasper the Tinker gave me a sound drubbing."

"Really? When was that? Doubtless before he was enrolled in the band?"

"Yea," replied Robin. "I am in the habit of proving the courage and strength of a man for myself before putting my confidence in him. I do not wish for companions with weak heads and hearts. One morning I met Jasper the Tinker on the road to Nottingham. You know his vigorous broad-shouldered person, and I need give you no description of the jolly rascal; his looks pleased me, as he walked with a firm step, whistling a gay air. I advanced to meet him."

"Good day, my friend," said I to him. "I see thou art a traveller. 'Tis said there is bad news abroad; is that true?"

"What news dost speak of?" he asked. "I know of none worth naming. I come from Bamborough, and am a tinsmith by trade, and I think only of my work."

"The news in question ought to interest thee all the same, my fine fellow. I have heard that ten of you Tinkers have just been put in the stocks for being drunk."

"Thy news is not worth a groat," he replied; "but if all who drank were put in the stocks, thou wouldst certainly take the first place there, for thou hast not the air of a man who despiseth good wine."

"In truth, I am no enemy to the bottle, and I do not think there is a jovial heart in all the world that despiseth wine. But what brings thee hither from Bamborough? For assuredly it was not the interests of thy trade."

"It was not my trade, in sooth," responded Jasper. "I am seeking a robber called Robin Hood. A reward of one hundred golden crowns is promised to anyone who can capture him, and I much desire to gain that reward."

"How thinkest to capture Robin Hood?" I asked the Tinker, for I was greatly surprised at the calm and serious way in which he made this strange confidence.

"I have an order for his arrest, signed by the King," Jasper made answer.

"Is the order strictly in rule?"

"Perfectly; it empowereth me to arrest Robin, and proposeth me the reward."

"Thou speakest of this arrest, already so often vainly attempted, as if it were the easiest thing in the world to accomplish."

"It will not be very difficult for me," replied the Tinker. "I am of solid build, I have muscles of iron, a tried courage, and much patience. Thus can I well hope to catch my man."

"Wert thou to meet accidentally, shouldst recognise him?"

"I have never seen him; an if I knew his face, my task would be half accomplished. Art any wiser than I am in this respect?"

"Yea, I have met Robin Hood twice, and perchance it would be possible for me to help thee in thine enterprise."

"My fine lad, an thou canst do that," said he, "I will e'en give thee a large share of the reward I shall gain."

"I will point out a place where thou couldst meet him," I replied; "but before going any further in our undertaking, I should like to see the order for his arrest; to be valid it must be drawn up according to rule."

"I am greatly obliged for thy precaution," answered the Tinker, defiantly, "but I shall confide the paper to no one. I know it is valid and in order; that satisfies me, and so much the worse for thee if thou dost not believe it. Robin Hood shall see the King's order when I have him in my power, bound hand and foot."

"Perchance thou art right, my good man," I replied indifferently. "I am not so anxious to assure myself of the value of thy permit as thou seemest to think. I am going to Nottingham as much from curiosity as from idleness, for I heard this morning that Robin Hood was going into the town, and if thou wilt come with me I will show thee the famous Outlaw."

"I will take thee at thy word, my lad," said the Tinker, quickly, "but an if, when we arrive at our destination, I see any sign of deceit on thy part, thou shalt make acquaintance with my staff."

I shrugged my shoulders in disdain. He saw the action, and began to laugh.

"Thou wilt not regret having helped me," said he, "for I am not an ungrateful man."

When we arrived at Nottingham we stopped at Pat's Inn, and I asked the master of the house for a bottle of a special kind of beer. The Tinker, who had been on his feet since early morning, was literally dying of thirst, and the beer soon disappeared. After the beer I called for wine, and after the wine again for beer, and so on for an hour. Without perceiving it, the Tinker had emptied every bottle set before him, for I, being by nature averse to the immoderate use of wine, contented myself with a few glasses. I need hardly tell you that the worthy fellow became completely intoxicated. Then he began to regale me with a boastful account of all he would do to capture Robin Hood, and how, after taking the Chief of the Merrie Men prisoner, he would arrest the whole band, and take them all to London. The King would reward his bravery by giving him a fortune and the privileges of a grand dignitary of the State; but at the very moment when the illustrious conqueror was on the point of marrying an English Princess, he fell from his chair, and rolled, fast asleep, beneath the table.

I took the Tinker's purse; it contained, besides money, the order for my arrest. I paid our expenses, and told the Innkeeper

"When this fellow awakes, you will ask him to pay for our refreshment; then, if he asks you who I am and where I am to be found, you will answer that I live in the Forest, and that my name is Robin Hood."

The Innkeeper, a worthy man, in whom I have every confidence, began to laugh gaily.

"Be easy, Master Robin," said he, "I will faithfully carry out your orders; and should the Tinker wish to see you again, he will only have to seek you."

"You understand me, my good fellow," I replied, picking up the Tinsmith's bag. "And there is every reason to believe the good man will not let me wait his visit for long."

Saying which, I bade the Innkeeper farewell, and left the house.

After sleeping for some hours, Jasper awoke. He soon became aware of my absence and of the loss of his purse.

"Landlord," he shouted, in a voice of thunder, "I am robbed, I am ruined! Where is the thief?"

"Of what thief do you speak?" asked the host, with the greatest coolness.

"Of my companion. He hath plundered me."

"Well, that doth not suit me at all," said the Innkeeper, with an appearance of anger, "for you have here a long shot to settle."

"A shot to settle!" groaned Jasper. "I have naught left, naught whatever; the wretch hath utterly despoiled me. I had in my purse a warrant of arrest under the King's hand; and by the help of that warrant I might have made my fortune, I might have captured Robin Hood. This thief of a stranger promised to help me, and was going to conduct me into the presence of the outlaw chief. Oh, the rogue! He hath abused my confidence and carried off my precious paper!"

"How?" returned the Innkeeper. "You confided to that young man the evil intentions that have brought you to Nottingham?"

The Tinker threw a sidelong glance at his host.

"It appears," said he, "that you would not lend a helping hand to the brave fellow who would wish to arrest Robin Hood?"

"By my faith," replied the Innkeeper, "Robin Hood hath never done me harm, and his quarrels with the rulers of the land do not concern me. But how the devil," continued the man, "did you come to be drinking joyously with him, and showing him your little paper, instead of seizing his person?"

The Tinker stared wildly at him.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean that you have lost an opportunity of capturing Robin Hood."

"How so?"

"Oh, what a dolt you be! Robin Hood was here just now. You entered together, you drank together, and I thought you were one of his band."

"I drank with Robin Hood! I clinked glasses with Robin Hood!" cried the astounded Tinker.

"Yea, a thousand times yea!"

"This is too much!" exclaimed the poor man, seating himself heavily in a chair. "But he shall never say that he tricked Jasper the Tinker with impunity. Oh, villain! Oh, thief!" bellowed the Tinker, "wait, wait, wait while I seek thee out."

"I would fain see the colour of my money before you go," said the Innkeeper

"What is the amount of your bill?" asked Jasper, wrathfully.

"Ten shillings," replied the host, overjoyed at the unhappy Tinker's furious countenance,

"I have not a penny to give you," returned Jasper, turning out his pockets; "but as guarantee for the payment of this unlucky debt, I will leave my tools with you. They are worth three or four times what you claim. Can you tell me where to find Robin Hood?"

"Not this evening, but to-morrow you will find your man hunting the King's deer."

“Well, then, to-morrow the robber shall be captured,” rejoined the Tinker, with an assurance which gave the Innkeeper food for thought; “for,” added Robin, “when recounting this to me, the host avowed that he greatly feared Jasper’s rage against me.”

The next morning I started in quest, not of the deer, but of the Tinsmith, and I had not long to seek. As soon as he perceived me, he uttered a cry, and threw himself upon me, brandishing an enormous cudgel.

“What clown is this,” I cried, “who dares to present himself before me in so unseemly a manner?”

“It is no clown,” replied the Tinker, “but an ill-used man, resolved to take his revenge.”

Saying this, he attacked me with his cudgel; but I placed myself beyond his reach and drew my sword.

“Stop,” I said to him. “We will fight with equal weapons; I must have a cudgel.”

Jasper suffered me quietly to trim the branch of an oak tree, and then recommenced his attack.

He held his staff in both hands, and hacked at me like a woodcutter at a tree. My arms and wrists were beginning to fail me, when I called for a truce; for there was no honour to be gained from such a contest.

“I would fain hang thee on the nearest tree,” he said furiously, throwing down his staff.

I leapt back and blew my horn; the fellow was strong enough to send me into another world.

Little John and the Merrie Men ran up at my call.

I was seated beneath a tree, spent with fatigue, and, without saying a word, I pointed out the reinforcement which had come to my assistance.

“What is it?” asked John.

“My lad,” I replied, “here is a Tinker wight who hath given me a sound drubbing, and I recommend him to you, for he is worthy of your consideration. My good man,” I added, “an if you will join our band, you will be very welcome.”

The Tinker accepted forthwith, and from that time, as you are aware, he hath been one of us.

“I prefer a bow and arrows to all the cudgels in the world,” said William, “whether as a game or taken as weapons of offence and defence. It is better, in my opinion, at least to be sent out of the world by one single blow than to go piecemeal; and the wound of an arrow is a thousand times preferable to the pain caused by a blow from a cudgel."

"My good friend," returned Robin, "the cudgel renders very good service where the bow hath no power. The effect doth not depend on whether your quiver is empty or full, and when you do not desire the death of an enemy, a good beating will leave him a sharper remembrance than the wound of an arrow."

The three friends were making their way to Nottingham as they conversed, and all at once they met a little girl dissolved in tears.

Robin hastened toward the weeping beauty.

"Why dost weep, my child?" he asked in a kindly tone.

The little girl broke into sobs.

"I want to see Robin Hood," she answered, "and if you have any pity in your heart, Master, take me to him."

"I am Robin Hood, my pretty child," replied the young man, gently. "Have my men been wanting in respect to thy youth and innocence? Is thy mother ill? Dost come to ask my help? Speak, I am entirely at thy disposal."

"Master, a great misfortune hath befallen us; three of my brothers, who belong to thy band, have been taken prisoners by the Sheriff of Nottingham."

"Tell me the name of thy brothers, my child."

"Adalbert, Edelbert, and Edwin the Merry-hearted," sobbed the little girl.

An exclamation of dismay escaped Robin.

"Good companions," said he, "these are the bravest and hardiest of all my troop. How did they fall into the Sheriffs hands, my little friend?"

"In rescuing a young man who was being taken to prison for having defended his mother against the insults of some soldiers. At this very moment, Sir, they are getting ready the gallows at the gate of the town, doubtless to hang my brothers thereon."

"Dry thy tears, pretty child," answered Robin kindly. "Thy brothers have naught to fear; there is not a man in all Sherwood Forest but would not be ready to give his life for these three good fellows. We will go into Nottingham; return to thy home, console thy father's afflicted heart by thy sweet voice, and tell thy mother that Robin Hood will give her back her children."

"I will pray Heaven to bless thee, Master," murmured the little girl, smiling amid her tears. "I had heard that thou wert alway ready to help the unfortunate and protect the poor. But, I beseech thee, Master Robin, haste thee, for my dear brothers are in sore danger of their lives."

"Trust me, dear child; I will arrive at the most propitious time. Hurry back to Nottingham, and tell no one of what thou hast done."

The child took Robin Hood's hands and kissed them warmly.

"I shall pray for thy happiness all my life, Master," said she, in a voice full of emotion.

"God bless thee, my child! Good-bye."

The little maid ran off down the road to the town, and soon disappeared beneath the shade of the trees.

"Hurrah!" said Will. "We shall have something to do now. I shall be amused. What are your orders, Robin?"

"Go to Little John, tell him to assemble as many of the men as he can find, and lead them of course without being seen to the outskirts of the wood nearest to Nottingham. Then at sound of my horn you will cut your way through to me, sword in hand and with bows bent."

"What do you purpose, then, to do?" asked Will.

"I shall go into the town and see whether there be any means whatever of delaying the execution. Forget not, friends, that you must act with extreme caution, for should the Reeve come to learn that I have been warned of the critical condition of my men, he would take care to prevent any attempt at deliverance on my part, and would hang our comrades within the Castle. So much for the prisoners. As for you, you are well aware that his Lordship hath loudly boasted that if ever we fell into his hands, he would hang us upon the town gallows. The Sheriff hath conducted the affair of the Merry Hearts so swiftly that he cannot fear that I have been warned of the fate in store for them; consequently, in order to instil a wholesome lesson into the citizens of Nottingham, he will hang our companions publicly. I will make all speed to the town; do you rejoin your men, and follow my instructions to the letter."

As he said this, Robin hurried off. Hardly had he left his companions ere he met a pilgrim of the Mendicant Order.

"What news from the town, good Father?" asked Robin.

"The news from the town, young man," replied the pilgrim, "is full of woe and lamentation. Three of Robin Hood's companions are to be hanged by order of the Lord Fitz-Alwine."

A sudden idea crossed Robin's mind.

"Father," said he, "I should like to be present at the execution of these poachers, without being known for one of the Keepers of the Forest. Wilt exchange thy clothes for mine?"

"Art joking, young man?"

"Nay, father, I simply desire to give thee my costume and to put on thy robe. If thou dost accept my proposition, I will give thee forty shillings, to use according to thy fancy."

The old man looked curiously at the author of this strange request

"Thy clothes are handsome," said he, "and my robe is ragged. It is not possible to believe thou shouldst wish to change thy brilliant garb for these wretched rags. He who makes fun of an old man commits a great sin; he mocks both God and misfortune."

"Father," replied Robin, "I respect thy white hairs, and I pray the Virgin to take thee under her Divine protection. I put my request with no ill intent in mine heart; 'tis necessary for the accomplishment of a good work. Hold," added he, offering the old man twenty pieces of money, "here is an earnest of our bargain."

The pilgrim looked covetously at the coins.

"Youth hath many foolish ideas," said he, "and if thou art in a paroxysm of fantastic mirth, I see not why I should refuse to let thee have thy way."

"Now, that is well said," returned Robin, "and if thou wilt disrobe ... Thy hose are fashioned by events," continued Robin, gaily, "for, to judge by the innumerable pieces of which they are composed, they have gathered to them the materials of the four seasons."

The pilgrim began to laugh.

"My robe is like a Norman's conscience," he said, "'tis made up of odds and ends, while thy doublet is the image of a Saxon heart, strong and without blemish."

"Thy speech is golden, Father," said Robin, donning the old man's rags as fast as he was able, "and if I must do homage to thy wit, 'tis likewise my duty to accord praise to the manifest scorn I inspire in thee, for thy robe is of quite a Christian simplicity."

"Am I to keep thy arms?" asked the pilgrim.

"Nay, Father, for I shall want them. Now that our mutual transformation is complete, allow me to give thee some advice. Get thee hence from this part of the Forest, and above all, in the interests of thine own safety, beware of attempting to follow me. Thou hast my clothes upon thy back, my money in thy pocket, thou art rich and well clothed, go seek thy fortune some leagues away from Nottingham."

"I thank thee for thy advice, good lad; it doth accord well with mine own wishes. Take the benediction of an old man, and if thine enterprise be honest, I wish it immediate success."

Robin saluted the pilgrim gracefully and made off with all haste in the direction of the town.

At the moment when Robin, thus disguised, and bearing no weapon save an oaken cudgel, arrived at Nottingham, a procession of mercenaries left the Castle, and took the road toward the end of the town, where three gallows had been set up.

Suddenly an unexpected piece of news went round the crowd; the hangman was ill, and, being on the point of death himself, was quite unable to launch another into eternity. By order of the Sheriff, a proclamation was made; and a man was called for who would consent to fulfil the office of hangman.

Robin, who had placed himself at the head of the procession, advanced towards Baron Fitz-Alwine.

"My Noble Lord," said he, in a snuffling voice, "what will you give me, an I consent to take the hangman's place?"

The Baron stepped back, as one who fears a dangerous contact.

"Methinketh," replied the noble Baron, looking Robin up and down, "that if I should offer thee a new assortment of clothing, thou shouldst be glad to accept such reward. Therefore, beggar, if thou wilt get us out of this difficulty, I will e'en give thee six new suits, and beside that the hangman's perquisite of thirteen pence."

"And what will you give'me, my Lord, if I hang you into the bargain?" asked Robin, approaching the Baron.

"Keep thy distance, beggar, and repeat what thou hast just said; I did not understand it."

"You offered me six new suits and thirteen pence," returned Robin, "for hanging these poor lads. I ask what you would add to my reward an if I engage to hang you and a dozen of your Norman dogs."

"Shameless ragamuffin! What is the meaning of thine insolence?" cried the Baron, astounded at the pilgrim's audacity. "Dost know whom thou art addressing? Impertinent knave, one word more and thou wilt make the fourth bird hanging on the gallows-tree."

"Have you remarked," quoth Robin, "that I am a poor man, very miserably clad?"

"Yea, in truth, very miserably clad," replied the Baron, making a face of disgust.

"Well," continued our hero, "that outer misery hides within a large heart and a right sensitive nature. I am very sensible to an insult, and resent disdain and injury at least as much as you do, noble Baron. You do not scruple to insult my misery."

"Hold thy tongue, thou beggarly chatterbox. Dost dare compare thyself with me, the Lord Fitz-Alwine? Go to, thou art mad."

"I am a poor man," said Robin, "a very poor, miserable man." "I did not come here to listen to the prating of one of thy sort," returned the Baron, impatiently. "If thou dost refuse my offer, get you gone; if thou dost accept it, prepare to fill thine office."

"I do not rightly know in what mine office consists," returned Robin, who was seeking to gain time for his men to reach the outskirts of the wood. "I have never acted as hangman, and I thank the Holy Virgin for it. Cursed be the infamous trade and the miserable wretch who doth practise it."

"How now? dost mock me?" roared the Baron, beside himself at Robin's insolence. "Hark thee, if thou dost not set about thy work at once, I will have thee soundly beaten."

"And would that help you on at all, my Lord?" returned Robin. "Would you the more readily find a man disposed to carry out your orders? No, you have just made a proclamation which all have heard, and yet I am the only man who hath offered to do your wishes."

"I know well enow what art driving at, base wretch," cried the Baron, overwhelmed with rage. "Thou wouldst have the sum promised thee for despatching these clowns into another world increased."

Robin shrugged his shoulders.

"Let them be hanged by whom you please," replied he, affecting complete indifference.

"Not at all, not at all," returned the Baron, in a milder voice; "thou shalt do the work. I will double the reward, and if thou dost not fill thine office exactly, I shall have the right to call thee the least conscientious hangman in the world."

"If I wished to put the unhappy creatures to death," replied Robin, "I should content myself with the reward you have already offered me, but I refuse point blank to soil my hands by contact with the gallows."

"What dost mean, wretch?" bellowed the Baron.

"Wait, my Lord; I will call for men who, at my command, will deliver you for ever from the sight of these terrible culprits."

As he finished speaking Robin blew a joyous flourish upon his hunting-horn, and laid his hands upon the terrified Baron.

"My Lord," said he, "your life hangs by a thread; if you make a movement, I plunge this knife into your heart. Forbid your servants to come to your assistance," Robin added, brandishing an immense hunting-knife over the old man's head.

"Soldiers, remain in your ranks!" cried the Baron, in a stentorian voice.

The sun glanced off the sparkling blade of the knife, and the shining reflection dazzled the old lord, and made him appreciate his adversary's power; so, instead of attempting an impossible resistance, he submitted with groans.

"What dost desire of me?" he said, trying to put a conciliatory softness into his voice.

"The life of the three men whom you would hang, my Lord," replied Robin Hood.

"I cannot grant thee that boon, my good man," returned the old man; "the unhappy creatures have killed the King's deer, which misdemeanor is punishable by death. The whole town of Nottingham knows of their crime and their sentence, and if, from a culpable weakness I grant thy prayer, the King would be informed of a compliance so entirely inexcusable."

At that moment a great tumult was observed among the crowd, and the whistling of arrows was heard.

Robin, who knew his men were come, gave a shout.

"Ah, you are Robin Hood," groaned the Baron.

"Yea, my Lord," replied our hero, "I am Robin Hood."

Protected in a friendly manner by the inhabitants of the town, the Merrie Men now appeared from all directions, and Will Scarlett with his brave fellows soon joined their companions.

The prisoners once free, Baron Fitz-Alwine saw plainly that the only means of getting himself safe and sound out of such a critical situation was to conciliate Robin Hood.

“Take the prisoners away quickly,” said he. “My soldiers, exasperated by the remembrance of a recent defeat, might put obstacles in the way of the success of your project.”

“This act of courtesy was dictated to you by fear,” retorted Robin Hood, laughingly. “I do not dread any violence from your soldiers; the number and valour of my men render them invulnerable.”

Saying which, Robin Hood saluted the old man ironically, turned his back on him, and ordered his men to hie them back to the Forest.

The Baron’s livid features expressed rage and fear. He called his men together, remounted his horse, and rode off in all haste.

The citizens of Nottingham, who regarded poaching as hardly a blameworthy action, surrounded the Merrie Men, uttering shouts of joy. Then the chief men of the town, put at ease by the Baron’s flight, testified their sympathy to Robin Hood, while the parents of the young prisoners embraced the knees of their sons’ deliverer.

The humble and sincere thanks of these poor people appealed more to Robin Hood’s heart than any lofty sentiments expressed in flowery rhetoric could have done.

CHAPTER IX

A whole year had slipped away since the day when Robin had so generously succoured Sir Richard of the Plain, and for some weeks past the Merrie Men had again taken up their abode in Barnsdale Forest. From the early morning of the day fixed for the Knight's visit Robin had been prepared to receive him, but the appointed hour did not bring the expected visitor.

"He will not come," said Will Scarlett, who, with Little John and Robin, was seated beneath a tree watching with some impatience the road which stretched before them.

"Sir Richard's ingratitude will give us a lesson," replied Robin. "It will teach us to put no trust in the promises of men; but for the sake of the human race I should not like to be deceived by Sir Richard, for I have never seen a man who bore in his countenance more visible imprints of loyalty and frankness; and I declare that if my debtor doth not keep his word, I shall no longer know by what external sign to know an honest man."

"I await the good Knight's coming with certainty," said Little John. "The sun is not yet hidden beyond the trees and Sir Richard will be here before another hour hath passed."

"May God grant it, my dear John," replied Robin Hood, "for, like you, I would fain hope that the word of a Saxon is a pledge of honour. I will stay here until the first stars begin to peep out, and if the Knight come not, I shall mourn for him as for a friend. Take your arms my lads, call Much, and patrol the road leading to St. Mary's Abbey. You may meet with Sir Richard, or, in default of that ungrateful man, some rich Norman, or even some half-famished devil. I wish to see some unknown face; go, seek some adventure, and bring me any guest whatsoever."

"That indeed is a strange way of consoling yourself, my dear Robin," laughed Will, "but it shall be as you wish. We will go in search of some passing distraction."

The two young men called Much, and on his appearance they all set off together in the direction indicated by Robin.

"Robin is very gloomy to-day," said Will, thoughtfully.

"Why?" asked Much, in a tone of surprise.

“Because he fears he hath been deceived in trusting Sir Richard of the Plain,” replied Little John.

“I do not see why it should cause Robin such sorrow; we do not need money, and four hundred crowns more or less in our treasure-chest...”

“Robin doth not think of the money,” interrupted John, almost irritably. “You are talking very foolishly, cousin. Robin is wounded at having helped an ungrateful soul, that is all.”

“Stop,” said Will. “I hear horses approaching.”

“I will go and meet the travellers,” cried Much, running off.

“If it is the Knight, call us,” said John.

William and his cousin waited, and soon Much re-appeared at the end of the path.

“It is not Sir Richard,” said he, as he came up to his friends, “but two Dominican friars accompanied by a dozen men.” “If these Dominicans have a cavalcade at their heels,” said John, “you may be sure they are richly provided with gold, consequently they must be invited to partake of Robin’s repast.”

“Shall we call some of the Merrie Men?” asked Will.

“‘Tis not needful; the cravens’ hearts are in their legs and are so much the slaves of the latter that in the presence of danger their one thought is flight. But hold! here comes the monks. Remember, we absolutely must take them to Robin; he is dull, and ‘twill be a pleasant distraction for him. Get ready your bows, and be prepared to bar the way of this fine cavalcade.”

William and Much hastened to carry out his orders.

On turning a corner of the road, which wound at will among the trees, the travellers perceived the Foresters and the hostile position they had taken up.

The servants, terrified at the dangerous encounter, reined in their steeds, and the Monks, who occupied the front rank of the little column, tried to hide themselves behind their men.

“Do not attempt to move,” cried John, commandingly, “or I will surely kill you.”

The Monks grew pale, but, finding themselves at the mercy of the Foresters, they obeyed the order so roughly given.

“Fair stranger,” said one of the Monks, grinning most amiably, “what do you desire from a poor servant of Holy Church?”

“I desire that ye bestir yourselves. My master hath awaited you this three hours, and the dinner groweth cold.”

The Dominicans exchanged uneasy looks.

"Your words are a riddle to us, my friend. Be so good as to explain yourself," replied one of them in honeyed tones.

"I will say it once again, and it needs no explanation, my master awaits you."

"Who is your master, my friend?"

"Robin Hood," replied Little John, shortly.

A shudder of fear passed like an icy blast over the men who accompanied the Monks. They glanced fearfully around them, expecting, no doubt, to see more outlaws burst from the thicket.

"Robin Hood," repeated the Monk, in a voice more harsh than musical. "I know of Robin Hood; he is a robber by profession, on whose head a price is set."

"Robin Hood is no robber," replied Little John, furiously, "and I do not counsel any one to echo the insolent accusation you bring against my noble master. But I have no time to discuss so delicate a point with you. Robin Hood invites you to dinner; follow me without demur! As for your servants, I warn them to show me their heels, an if they wish to save their lives. Will and Much, bring down the first man who attempts to remain here against my wishes."

The Foresters, who had lowered their bows during the conversation between the Monk and Little John, raised them once more, and stood ready to discharge their arrows. Seeing the bows raised and turned against them, the Dominicans' men set spur to their steeds and saved themselves with a precipitation which spoke volumes for their prudence. The Monks were preparing to follow the example of their men when they were arrested by John, who constrained them to stop by seizing the bridles of their horses. Behind the Monks, John perceived a young groom who appeared to be in charge of a sumpter horse, and near the groom stood a boy, dressed as a page and dumb with fear.

More courageous than the men of the escort, the two youths had not deserted their posts.

"Keep an eye on those young rogues. I give them permission to follow their masters."

Robin had remained seated beneath the Trysting Tree, but when he saw John and his companions, he rose quickly, and, advancing to meet them, greeted the Monks with effusion.

“Never heed the insolent fellows, Robin,” said John, irritated by the Monks’ want of respect. “They are but ignorant fellows; they have never a kind word for the poor nor courtesy toward any one at all.”

“No matter,” replied Robin. “I know the Monks, and I expect from them neither good words nor gracious smiles; but I am a slave to politeness. Whom have you there, Will?” added Robin, looking at the two pages and the sumpter horse.

“The remainder of a troop consisting of a dozen men,” replied the young man, with a laugh.

“What have you done with the main body of this valiant army?”

“Naught at all; the sight of our bent bows threw its ranks into confusion, and they fled without even turning their heads.”

Robin began to laugh.

“But, worthy brothers,” he continued, addressing the Monks, “you must be very hungry after so long a journey; will ye share my meal?”

The Dominicans regarded the Merrie Men, who had run up at the sound of the horn, with so terrified an expression that Robin said kindly to them, in order to calm their fears

“Fear naught, good Monks; no harm shall befall you. Seat yourselves at the table, and eat your fill.”

The Monks obeyed, but it was easy to see that they were but little reassured by the young Chief’s kind words.

“Where is your Abbey?” asked Robin; “and what name doth it bear?”

“I belong to the Abbey of St. Mary,” said the elder of the Monks, “and I am the Grand Cellarer of the Monastery.”

“Welcome, Brother Cellarer,” said Robin. “I am happy to receive a man of your worth. You shall give me your opinion on my wine, for you must be an excellent judge in such matters; though I dare hope you will find it to your taste, for, being myself difficult to please, I always drink wine of the best quality.”

The Monks took heart; they ate with a good appetite, and the Cellarer acknowledged the excellence of the dishes and the full body of the wine, adding that it was a real pleasure to dine upon the turf in such joyous company.

“My good brothers,” said Robin Hood, toward the end of the meal, “ye appeared surprised at being asked to dinner by a man whom ye did not know. I will explain the mystery of the invitation in a few words. A year ago I lent a sum of money to a friend of your Prior, and accepted as a guarantee the Holy Mother of Jesus, our sainted patroness. My unshakeable confidence in the Holy Virgin led me to believe firmly that at the expiration of the appointed term I should receive in some manner the money I had lent. Whereupon I sent three of my men to seek for travellers; they saw you, and brought you hither. You belong to a Monastery, and I can guess the delicate mission confided to you by the provident and generous benevolence of our Holy Patroness; you are come to repay me in Her name the money lent to the poor man. Be ye welcome!"

"The debt of which you speak is quite unknown to me, Master," returned the Monk, "and I do not bring you any money."

"You are mistaken, Father; I feel certain that the chests carried by that horse led by your page contain the amount due to me. How many pieces of gold have you in that pretty little leathern trunk attached so securely to the poor beast?"

The Monk, thunderstruck by Robin Hood's question, grew pale, and stammered out in an almost unintelligible voice "I have scarce anything, Master; most but a score of gold pieces."

"Only twenty pieces of gold?" turned Robin, fixing a stern look upon the Monk.

"Yea, Master," replied the Monk, whose livid face became suddenly suffused with colour.

"If you are speaking the truth," said Robin, in a friendly tone, "I will not take one groat of your small fortune from you. Better still, I will give you as much money as you may need. But, on the other hand, if you have had the bad taste to lie to me, I will not leave you even a penny piece. Little John," continued Robin, "open the little trunk; if you find there but twenty pieces of gold, you may respect our guests' property, but if the sum is double or treble that amount, take it all."

Little John hastened to obey Robin's order. The colour faded from the Monk's cheeks; tears of rage coursed down his cheeks; he clasped his hands convulsively together, and a deep groan burst from him.

"Ho, ho!" said Robin, watching the Brother, "it appears that the twenty pieces of gold are in numerous company. Well, John," he asked, "is our guest as poor as he would fain make out?"

"I know not if he be poor," answered John; "but of one thing am I well assured, and that is that I have just found eight hundred gold pieces in the little trunk."

"Leave me the money, Master," said the Monk; "it is not mine, and I am responsible for it to my Father Superior."

"To whom bear you these eight hundred pieces of gold?" questioned Robin.

"To the Inspectors of St. Mary's Abbey, from our Abbot."

"The Inspectors abuse the generosity of your Prior, Brother, and it ill becomes them to repay themselves so heavily for a few words of indulgence. This time they shall have nothing, and you will tell them that Robin Hood, having need of money, hath carried off the sum they expected."

"There is yet another chest," said John; "shall I open it?"

"Nay," replied Robin; "I will content myself with eight hundred pieces of gold. Sir Monk, you are free to continue your journey. You have been treated with courtesy, and I hope I see you depart satisfied on all points."

"I do not consider a forcible invitation and an open theft very courteous," said the Monk, superciliously. "Here am I obliged to return to the Monastery, and what can I say to the Prior?"

"You will greet him from me," laughed Robin Hood. "He knows me, the worthy Father, and he will be very sensible of this token of good friendship."

The Monks mounted their horses, and, with hearts bursting with rage, galloped off along the road leading to the Abbey.

"The Holy Virgin be praised!" cried Little John; "she hath returned to us the money you lent Sir Richard, and if the latter have broken his word, we can still console ourselves in that we have lost nothing."

"I cannot so easily console myself in having lost confidence in the word of a Saxon," replied Robin, "and I should have preferred a visit from Sir Richard, poor and despoiled of everything, rather than be convinced that he is ungrateful and without honour."

"Noble Master," suddenly called a voice from the glade, "a Knight appeareth on the high-road, accompanied by an hundred men, all armed to the teeth. Shall we prepare to bar their way?"

"Are they Normans?" asked Robin, quickly.

"One seldom sees Saxons so richly clothed as these travellers," answered the lad who had announced the approach of the troop.

“Look alive, then, my Merrie Men,” cried Robin. “To your bows and lurking-places. Get ready your arrows, but draw not ere you receive my order to attack.”

The men disappeared, and the crossroad where Robin remained soon appeared completely deserted.

“You come not with us?” John asked Robin, who sat motionless at the foot of a tree.

“Nay,” rejoined the young man; “I will await the strangers, and find out with whom we have to deal.”

“Then I remain with you,” said Little John; “to be alone might prove dangerous for you, an arrow is so quickly sped. If they strike you, I am at least here to defend you.”

“I, too, will remain as body-guard,” said Will, seating himself beside Robin, who had stretched himself carelessly on the grass.

The unexpected arrival of a body of men so formidable in proportion to the number of the Foresters, who were mostly scattered all about the wood, disquieted Robin slightly, and he did not wish to commence hostilities before being assured of victory.

The horsemen advanced rapidly along the glade. When they were an arrow’s flight from where Robin lay, the man who seemed to be their chief cantered up to encounter Robin.

“It is Sir Richard,” cried John gaily, as he looked at the approaching horseman.

“Holy Mother, I praise thee!” said Robin, springing to his feet. “A Saxon hath not broken his word.”

Sir Richard leapt from his horse, ran toward Robin, and threw himself into his arms.

“God keep thee, Robin Hood,” said he, giving the young man a fatherly embrace. “God keep thee in health and happiness to thy last day!”

“Be welcome to the green wood, gentle Knight,” replied Robin, with emotion. “I am happy to see thee true to thy promise, and with a heart full of kindness to thy devoted servant.”

“I should have come empty-handed even, Robin Hood, to have the honour of wringing thy hand; but, luckily for mine own satisfaction, I can return the money thou didst lend me with so much grace, kindness, and courtesy.”

"Hast, then, recovered entirely the possession of thy property?" asked Robin Hood.

"Yea, and may God prosper thee in proportion to the happiness which I owe to thee."

Robin's attention was next attracted by the men, magnificently clad in the fashion of the day, who formed a glittering line behind Sir Richard.

"Doth this fine troop belong to thee?" asked the young man.

"It doth at present," answered the Knight, with a smile.

"I admire the bearing of the men and their martial figures," continued Robin, in a tone of some surprise; "they seem to be perfectly disciplined."

"Yea, they are brave and faithful, and all of Saxon origin, and their temper loyal for I have proved all the qualities which I have described to thee. Thou wouldst do me a good service, dear Robin, if thou wouldst instruct thy men to entertain my companions; they have made a long journey, and will require some hours of repose."

"They shall learn the meaning of forest hospitality," replied Robin, heartily. "My Merrie Men," continued he to his band, who began to appear on all sides, "these strangers are brother Saxons, they are hungry and thirsty; I pray you show them how we treat the friends who visit us in the green wood."

The Foresters obeyed Robin's orders with a promptitude which should have satisfied Sir Richard, for before retiring with his host he beheld the turf covered with viands, pots of ale and bottles of good wine.

Robin Hood, Sir Richard, Little John, and Will sat down to a succulent repast, and when dessert was brought, the Knight began the following account of the events which had befallen him since his first encounter with our hero.

"I cannot depict to you, my good friends, with what sentiments of gratitude and infinite joy I quitted the Forest a year agone to-day. My heart leapt within me, and I was in so great a haste to see my wife and children once more, that I regained the Castle in less time than it would take to tell you all my story.

"We are saved," I cried, straining my beloved ones to my heart. My wife dissolved in tears, and almost fainted.

"Who is the generous friend who hath come to our aid?" asked Herbert.

"My children," I replied, "I knocked in vain at every door; in vain I implored the succour of those who called themselves my friends; and I received no pity save from one man to whom I was unknown. This benevolent man is a noble Outlaw, the protector of the poor, the support of the wretched, the avenger of the oppressed, and his name is Robin Hood."

"My children knelt around their mother, and piously rendered to God the sincere thanks of a profound gratitude. This duty accomplished, Herbert entreated me to allow him to pay thee a visit, but I pointed out to him that such a step would give thee more pain than pleasure, since thou dost not love to hear thy good deeds spoken of."

"My dear Knight," interrupted Robin "let us put aside this part of thy story, and tell us how thou didst arrange thy business with the Abbot of St. Mary's."

"Patience, good host, patience," said Sir Richard, with a smile. "I do not wish to praise thee. Be not afraid; I know thy admirable modesty on that point. Nevertheless, I must tell thee that sweet Lilas joined her prayers to Herbert's, and I was obliged to exert all my paternal authority to calm the impatience of their young hearts. I promised my children in your name, however, that they should have the happiness of seeing you at the Castle."

"Thou didst well, Sir Richard, and I promise thee that some day I will seek thy hospitality," said Robin, with emotion.

"Thank thee, good host; I will inform Herbert and Lilas of the engagement thou hast just made, and the hope of thanking thee in person will give them great satisfaction."

"On the morrow of my return," continued Sir Richard, "I presented myself at St. Mary's Abbey. I learnt later that at the very moment that I was making my way towards the Abbey, the Abbot and the Prior were together in the refectory and speaking of me in these terms

"It is a year to-day," said the Abbot to the Prior, "since a Knight whose domains adjoin the Monastery, borrowed from me four hundred pieces of gold; he was to repay me the money with interest, or leave me the free disposal of all his property. According to me, the time is up at mid-day, therefore I consider the moment for payment hath arrived, and I consider myself absolute master of all his hereditaments."

"Brother," returned the Prior, indignantly, "you are cruel; a poor man with a debt to discharge should in all justice have a final delay of four and twenty hours. It would be shameful of you to lay claim to property on which you had no rights. In acting thus you would ruin an unfortunate creature and reduce him to great misery, while as a member of Holy Church it is your duty to relieve as much as possible the burden which doth weigh upon our unfortunate fellow-creatures."

"Keep your counsels for those who need them," replied the Abbot, angrily. "I will do what meseemeth good without heeding your hypocritical reflections."

At this moment the Chief Cellarer entered the refectory.

"Have you any news of Sir Richard of the Plain?" the Abbot asked of him.

"Nay. But that matters not. All I know is that his property is now yours, Sir Abbot."

"The Chief Judge is here," continued the Abbot; "I will ask him whether I may now claim Sir Richard's Castle.'

The Abbot went to find the Judge, and the latter, for due consideration received, replied to the Monk

"Sir Richard will not come to-day, therefore you may consider yourself entitled to all his estates."

"This iniquitous judgment had just been given when I presented myself at the gate of the Monastery.

In order to prove the generosity of my creditor, I had arrayed myself in mean garments, while the men who accompanied me were also very poorly accoutred.

The porter of the Abbey came to meet me. I had been kind to him in the time of my prosperity, and the poor man had not forgotten it. He told me of the conversation which had taken place between the Abbot and the Prior. I was not surprised; I knew well that I had no reason to expect any grace from the holy man.

"Be welcome," continued the Monk; "your arrival well be a very agreeable surprise to the Prior. My Lord Abbot will doubtless be less satisfied, for already he looketh upon himself as owner of your estates. You will find a large company in the Great Hall, several lords and gentlemen. I hope, Sir Richard, that you will put no confidence in the honeyed words of our Father Superior, and that you have brought the money," added the porter, in tones of affectionate solicitude.

I reassured the good Monk, and proceeded alone to the Great Hall, where the whole of the Community was assembled in solemn conclave, to make arrangements for informing me of the sequestration of my property.

The exalted assembly was so disagreeably surprised at my appearance that I might well have been some phantom come from another world on purpose to snatch from their grasp some ardently coveted prey.

I humbly saluted the honourable company and, with an air of false humility, I said to the Abbot “You see, Sir Abbot, I have kept my promise and have come back.”

“Have you brought the money?” demanded the holy man, sharply.

“Alas! not one penny...”

A pleased smile hovered on the lips of my generous creditor.

“Then what doest thou here, an thou art not prepared to discharge thy debt?”

“I am come to entreat you to give me yet a few days longer.”

“It is impossible; according to our agreement, thou must pay this very day. If thou canst not do it, thine estates belong to me; besides which, the Judge hath so decided. Is that not true, my Lord?”

“It is,” replied the Judge. “Sir Richard,” he continued, throwing a contemptuous look at me, “the lands of your ancestors are the property of our worthy Abbot.”

I feigned a great despair and entreated the Abbot to have compassion upon me, to grant me three days longer. I depicted to him the miserable fate in store for my wife and children, an they were turned out of their home. The Abbot was deaf to my entreaties, he wearied of my presence, and imperiously commanded me to quit the Hall.

Exasperated by this unmerited treatment, I held up my head proudly, and advancing to the middle of the great room, I laid upon the table a bag full of money. “Here are the four hundred pieces of gold you lent me. The dial doth not as yet show the hour of noon; I have therefore fulfilled all the conditions of our agreement, and, despite your subterfuges, my estates will not change owners.”

“You cannot conceive, Robin,” added the Knight, laughing, “the Abbot’s stupefaction, rage, and fury. He rolled his head from side to side and glared around him, muttering incoherently, and looking like a madman.

After enjoying the spectacle of his dumb fury for a few seconds, I left the Hall and regained the Porter’s lodge. There I arrayed myself in more suitable garments; my men also changed their clothes, and, accompanied by an escort worthy of my rank, I re-entered the Hall.

The change in my outer appearance seemed to strike the company with astonishment; deliberately I advanced to the Judge's chair.

"I address myself to you, my Lord," I said, in a loud firm voice, "to ask in the presence of this honourable company whether, having fulfilled all the conditions of my bond, the lands and Castle of the Plain are not mine?"

"They are yours," replied the Judge, reluctantly.

I acknowledged the justice of this decision and left the Monastery with a light heart.

On the way home, I met my wife and children.

"Rejoice, my dear ones," I said, as I embraced them, "and pray for Robin Hood; for without him we should be beggars. And now let us try to show generous Robin Hood that we are not insensible of the service he hath rendered us."

We set to work the very next day, and my estates, with proper cultivation, soon realised the value of thy loan. I bring thee five hundred pieces of gold, my good Robin, one hundred bows of the finest yew, with quivers and arrows, and besides that, I make thee a present of the troop of men whose fine appearance thou didst but now admire. The men are well armed and each one hath a good horse to ride. Accept them as followers, they will serve thee with gratitude and fidelity.

"I should hurt mine own self-esteem an I were to accept so rich a gift, my dear Knight," replied Robin with emotion. "Nor can I take the money which thou dost bring. The Chief Cellarer of St. Mary's Abbey broke his fast with me this morning and his expenses here have put eight hundred pieces of gold into our coffers. I do not take money twice in one day; I have taken the Monk's gold in place of thine, and thou art out of my debt. I know, my dear Knight, that the revenues of thy property have been impoverished by the King's exactions, and they must be carefully managed. Think of thy children. I am rich; the Normans crowd into these parts with their pockets full of money. Never speak of service or gratitude betwixt us, unless I can be useful in furthering the fortunes or the happiness of those whom thou dost love."

"Thou dost treat me in so noble and generous a manner," replied Sir Richard, greatly moved, "that I feel I should be indiscreet to force upon thee a gift which thou dost refuse."

"Yea, Sir Knight, let us speak no more of it," said Robin gaily. "But tell me how it is thou didst come so late to keep thine assignation."

“On my way hither,” replied Sir Richard, “I passed through a village where all the best yeomen of the West Country were gathered together, occupied in trying feats of strength against one another. The prizes destined for the victor were a white bull, a horse, a saddle and bridle studded with gold nails, a pair of gauntlets, a silver ring, and a cask of old wine. I stopped awhile to watch the sport. A yeoman of ordinary size gave such proofs of strength that it was evident the prizes would be his, and, indeed, having felled all his adversaries, he remained master of the field. They were about to give him the objects he had earned so well, when he was recognised as one of thy band.”

“Was he in truth one of my men?” asked Robin, quickly.

“Yea, they called him Jasper the Tinker.”

“Then he gained the prizes, brave Jasper?”

He gained them all; but under pretext of his being one of the band of Merrie Men; they disputed his right to them. Jasper defended his cause valiantly. And then two or three of the other combatants set to calling thee evil names. Thou shouldst have seen the vigour of lungs and muscles with which Jasper defended thee; he spake so loud and gesticulated so wildly that knives were drawn, and thy poor Jasper would have been vanquished by the number or treachery of his enemies, when, aided by my men, I put them all to flight. This small service rendered to the brave lad, I gave him five pieces of gold to drink with, and I invited the fugitives to make acquaintance with the cask of wine. As you may imagine, they did not refuse; and I brought Jasper away in order to save him from their future vengeance.

“I thank thee for having saved one of my brave fellows, my dear Knight,” said Robin. “He who lends his support to my companions hath an endless claim upon my friendship. An ever thou have need of me, ask me what thou wilt; my arm and purse are ever at thy disposal.”

“I shall always look upon thee as a true friend, Robin,” answered the Knight; “and I hope that thou wilt treat me in the same spirit.”

The remaining hours of the afternoon wore merrily away, and toward evening Sir Richard accompanied Robin, Will, and Little John to Barnsdale Hall, where all the members of the Gamwell family were again assembled.

Sir Richard could hardly refrain from smiling as he admired the ten charming women who were presented to him. After having directed the

Knight’s attention to his beloved Maude, Will took his guest aside and asked him in a whisper if he had ever seen so ravishing a face as Maude’s.

The Knight smiled, and whispered to Will that he would be lacking in gallantry toward the other ladies, if he permitted himself to say aloud what he thought of the adorable Maude.

William, enchanted by this gracious reply, went over to his wife and kissed her with the firm conviction that he was the most favoured of husbands and the happiest of men.

When night fell, Sir Richard left Barnsdale, and, escorted by some of Robin’s men, who were to guide him through the Forest, he soon regained the Castle of the Plain with his numerous following.

CHAPTER X

Sheriff of Nottingham (we are now speaking of Lord Fitz-Alwine of happy memory) having learnt that Robin Hood and a portion of his band were in Yorkshire, thought it would be possible, with a strong troop of his own brave men-at-arms, to clear Sherwood Forest of these outlaws, who, separated from their chief, would find it impossible to defend themselves. In planning this clever expedition, Lord Fitz-Alwine resolved to watch the approaches to the Forest in order to catch Robin as he returned. We know that the Baron's mercenaries were not very courageous, but he likewise sent to London for a troop of ruffians and trained them himself for the pursuit of the Outlaws.

The Merrie Men had so many friends in Nottingham that they were warned of the fate in store for them and the Baron's kind intentions, even before he himself had fixed the day on which the bloody battle was to take place.

This gave the Foresters time to put themselves on the defensive, and to prepare to receive the Sheriff's troops.

Attracted by the hope of a rich reward, the Baron's men marched to the attack with every appearance of indomitable courage. But no sooner had they entered the wood, than they were met by such a terrible volley of arrows that the ground was strewn with the corpses of half their number.

A second volley, more vigorous and more murderous still, followed the first; each arrow found its mark while the bowmen remained invisible.

Having thus filled the ranks of the enemy with fear and confusion, the Foresters broke from their hiding-places, shouting loudly and overthrowing all who tried to resist them. A terrible panic spread among the Baron's troop, and in indescribable confusion they regained Nottingham Castle.

Not one of the Merrie Men was wounded in this strange encounter, and in the evening, recovered from their fatigue, as fresh and vigorous as they had been before the combat, they collected upon litters the bodies of the soldiers who had been killed, and deposited them at the Outer Gate of Lord Fitz-Alwine's Castle.

Desperate and furious, the Baron passed the night in cursing his luck. He accused his men; he said that his patron saint had deserted him; he laid the blame of the non-success of his arms on everybody, and proclaimed himself a valiant leader, but the victim of the faintheartedness of his subordinates.

On the evening of the following day, one of Lord Fitz-Alwine's Norman friends came to visit him, accompanied by fifty men-at-arms. The Baron told him of his misadventure, adding, doubtless to excuse his perpetual defeats, that Robin Hood's band was ever and always invisible.

"My dear Baron," quietly replied Sir Guy Gisborne (such was the visitor's name), "if Robin Hood were the devil in person and I took it into my head to tear out his horns, I should tear them out."

"Words are not deeds, my friend," answered the old man sharply; "and it is very easy to say, 'I could do that, an I would,' but I defy you to catch Robin Hood."

"An it pleased me to take him," said the Norman, carelessly, "there would be no need to excite myself. I feel strong enough to tame a lion, and, after all, Robin Hood is only a man; a clever man, I admit, but not a diabolical or unassailable being."

"You may say what you please, Sir Guy," declared the Baron, evidently bent on persuading the Norman to make an attempt against Robin Hood, "but there is not a man in England, be he peasant, soldier, or great Lord, could make this heroic Outlaw bow down before him. He believes in naught, he fears naught, and a whole army would not intimidate him."

Sir Guy smiled disdainfully.

"I do not doubt the bravery of your fine Outlaw in the very least," said he; "but you must own, Baron, that up to the present Robin Hood hath fought only phantoms."

"What!" cried the Baron, cruelly wounded in his self-esteem as commander-in-chief.

"Yea, phantoms; I repeat it, my friend. Your soldiers are made, not of flesh and bones, but of mud and milk. Who ever saw such fools? They fly before the Outlaws' arrows, and the name alone of Robin Hood sets them a-shuddering. Oh! if I were but in your place!"

"What would you do?" asked the Baron, eagerly.

"I would hang Robin Hood."

"My good intentions in that respect are not lacking," replied the Baron, sombrely.

"So I perceive, Baron. It is the power that is lacking. Well, it is lucky for your enemy that he hath never found himself face to face with me."

“Ha, ha!” laughed the Baron, “you would put your spear through his body, would you not? You amuse me very much, my friend, with all your bragging. Let be, you would tremble from head to foot, if I were only to say, ‘There is Robin Hood.’”

The Norman bounded up.

“Know well,” said he, furiously, “that I have no fear of either man or devil or of anything in the world, and I challenge you to test my courage. Since the name of Robin Hood was the starting-point of our conversation, I ask you, as a favour, to put me on the track of this man whom you are pleased to consider invincible, only because you are unable to vanquish him. I undertake to seize him, crop his ears, and hang him up by the feet, with no more compunction than if he were a hog. Where is this mighty man to be with?”

“In Barnsdale Forest.”

“How far is the Forest from Nottingham?”

“Two days’ journey would take us there by unfrequented ways; and as I should be grieved, my dear Sir Guy, if you were to come to any harm through me, if you will permit it, I will join my men to yours, and together we will go seek the rascal. I have learnt from a trustworthy source, that, at this moment, he is separated from the greater part of his men; it would therefore be easy, if we act with prudence, to surround the robbers’ den, carry off their Chief, and deliver his band over to the vengeance of our soldiers. Mine have suffered greatly in Sherwood Forest, and they would be overjoyed to take a fierce and savage revenge.”

“I am right glad to accept your offer, my good friend,” replied the Norman; “for it will give me the satisfaction of proving to you that Robin Hood is neither a devil nor invincible. And, not only to equalise the struggle between the Outlaw and myself, but likewise to show you that I do not intend to act in any underhand manner, I will don a yeoman’s costume and fight hand to hand with Robin Hood.”

The Baron concealed the pleasure which his guest’s vainglorious reply gave him, and in a fearful and solicitous tone, hazarded some timid remarks on the danger his excellent friend would run, and on the imprudence of a disguise which would put him in direct contact with a man renowned for his strength and skill.

The Norman, bursting with vanity and self-confidence, cut short the Baron’s false-hearted objections; and the latter hastened with a briskness quite remarkable in one of his age to make ready his men-at-arms.

An hour later, Sir Guy Gisborne and Lord Fitz-Alwine, accompanied by a hundred men, and with the air of conquerors, took the cross-road that would lead them to Barnsdale Forest.

It had been arranged between the Baron and his new ally that he should direct his troop toward that part of the wood agreed upon beforehand, while, guarding against any appearance of sinister motive by his yeoman's garb, Sir Guy would take another direction, seek out Robin Hood, and fight him whether or no, and would, of course, slay him. The success of the Norman (we might add that he did not in the least doubt his own success) would be announced to the Baron by a peculiar blast upon a hunting-horn. At this triumphant call, the Baron would proclaim the Norman's victory, and gallop up to the field of battle. The victory verified by the sight of Robin's corpse, the soldiers would search the thickets and copses and underground retreats, to kill or take prisoner (the choice was graciously left to them) any Outlaws unlucky enough to fall into their hands.

Whilst the troop were making their way secretly to Barnsdale Forest, Robin Hood was stretched carelessly beneath the thick foliage of the Trysting Tree, fast asleep.

Little John was seated at his leader's feet, thinking the while of his charming wife and his sweet Winifred's many good qualities of heart and mind, when his tender dream was disturbed by the shrill cry of a thrush, which, perched on one of the lower branches of the Trysting Tree, sang out loud and shrill.

This strident warbling woke Robin abruptly, and he leapt up with a gesture of fear.

"Why, Robin," said Little John, "what is it?"

"Naught," replied the young man, composing himself again. "I had a dream, and I know not whether I should say it, but I was frightened. Methought I was attacked by two yeoman; they beat me unmercifully, and I returned their blows with an equal generosity. However, I was almost vanquished, death stood beside me, when a bird which came I know not whence, sang to me, 'Take courage, I will send thee help.' I am awake, and I see neither the bird nor the danger. But then dreams do not come true," added Robin, smiling.

"I am not of your opinion, Captain," said John, seriously, "for part of your dream was true. A moment agone, upon the branch which you are touching, a thrush was singing with all its might. Your awakening put it to flight. Perhaps it came to warn you."

"Are you getting superstitious, friend John?" asked Robin, pleasantly. "Come, come, at your age 'twould be ridiculous; such childishness is for young girls and boys, not for us. However," he continued, "perchance 'tis wise, in an existence so adventurous as ours, to pay attention to every occurrence. Who knows? Perhaps the thrush said, 'Sentinels, beware!' and we are the sentinels of a troop of brave men. Forward, then; forewarned is forearmed."

Robin wound his horn, and the Merrie Men, dispersed through the wood, ran up in answer to his call.

Robin sent them down the road to York, for on that side alone was an attack to be feared, and, accompanied by John, he went to search the opposite side of the wood, William and two stout Foresters taking the road to Mansfield.

After searching the paths and roads toward which they had bent their steps, Robin and John made their way down the road followed by Will Scarlett. There, in a vale, they met a yeoman with his body wrapped in the skin of a horse, which served him for cloak. At that epoch, this strange garment was in great favour among the Yorkshire yeomen, the greater number of whom were engaged in horse breeding.

The newcomer wore at his side a sword and dirk, and his face, with its cruel expression, told plainly enough of the murderous uses to which his weapons were wont to be put.

"Ha, ha!" cried Robin, as he perceived him, "upon my soul, here comes a very ruffian. Crime oozes from him. I will question him; but an if he do not answer like an honest man, I will see the colour of his blood."

"He hath the appearance of a mastiff with good teeth, Robin. Beware; do you remain beneath this tree, while I ask his name, surname, and qualities."

"My dear John," replied Robin, quickly, "I have taken a fancy to that rascal. Let me tan his hide in mine own way. It is a long time since I was beaten, and, by the Holy Mother, my good protectress, I should never exchange a blow with any one if I listened to your prudent advice. Take care, friend John," added Robin, in an affectionate tone, "there will come a time when in default of an adversary, I shall be obliged to beat thee unmercifully; oh! only to keep my hand in, but thou wilt be none the less the victim of thy benevolent generosity. Go and rejoin Will, and do not return to me until thou hearest the sound of a triumphant blast."

"Your will is my law, Robin Hood," answered John, in an offended voice, "and it is my duty to obey, however unwillingly."

We will leave Robin on his way to meet the stranger, and we will follow Little John, who, faithful slave to his Chief's commands, hastened after William, who had started with two men on the high-road to Mansfield.

About three hundred yards from the spot where Little John left Robin alone with the yeoman, he found Will Scarlett with his two companions, occupied in exercising all their strength against a dozen soldiers. John gave a shout, and with a bound placed himself beside his friends. But the danger, already so great, became even more so as the clash of arms and the sound of horses' hoofs attracted the young man's attention to the extremity of the road.

At the end of the road, and in the half-shadow cast by the trees, appeared a company of soldiers, and at their head trotted a richly caparisoned horse.

John sprang forward to meet the newcomers, bent his bow, and took aim at the Baron. The movements of the young man followed each other with such rapidity and violence that his too tightly stretched bow broke like a thread of glass.

John uttered a curse upon his inoffensive arrow, seized a new bow handed to him by an outlaw, who had been mortally wounded by the soldiers fighting with William.

The Baron understood the archer's actions and intentions; he bent down low upon his horse until he appeared to be one with the animal, and the arrow destined for him sent a man behind him rolling in the dust.

His fall maddened the whole troop, who, determined to carry off the victory, and finding themselves in the majority, spurred their horses and advanced rapidly.

One of William's comrades was dead, the other was still fighting, but it was easy to perceive that he could not last long. John saw the danger to which his cousin was exposed, and falling upon the group of combatants, he snatched Will from their grasp, urging him to fly.

"Never," cried Will, firmly.

"For pity's sake, Will," said John, continuing to hit out at his aggressors, "go seek Robin and call the Merrie Men. Alas, rivers of blood will flow this day; the song of the thrush was a heaven-sent warning."

William went at his cousin’s request; it was easy to understand its import considering the number of soldiers who now appeared in the glade. He dealt a terrific blow at a man who attempted to bar his way, and disappeared in the thicket.

Little John fought like a lion, but it was madness to try and fight so many enemies single handed; he was vanquished and fell, and the soldiers, after binding him hand and foot, tied him to a tree. The Baron’s arrival was to decide the fate of our poor friend.

Lord Fitz-Alwine hastened up, attracted by the shouts of the soldiers. At sight of the prisoner, a smile of gratified hate lent a ferocious expression to the Baron’s features.

“Ha! ha!” said he, relishing with unspeakable joy the triumph of his victory, “I have you in my hands then, great maypole of the Forest. You shall pay dearly for your insolence, ere I despatch you into another world.”

“By my faith,” said John, in a flippant tone, biting his lip furiously the while, “whatever tortures it may please you to inflict upon me, they could not make you forget that I have held your life in my hands, and that if you still have the power to martyrize the Saxons, it is to my goodness that you owe it. But beware! Robin Hood is coming, and you will not have the easy victory over him that you have had over me.”

“Robin Hood,” sneered the Baron. “Robin Hood’s last hour will soon arrive. I have ordered his head to be cut off and his body to be left here as food for maneating wolves. Soldiers,” he added, turning to two men, the vile slaves of his wishes, “place this villain upon a horse and let us remain on this spot to await the return of Sir Guy, who will, I presume, bring us Robin Hood’s head.”

The men who had dismounted stood ready to leap into the saddle, and the Baron, seated comfortably upon a grassy hillock, waited patiently for Sir Guy Gisborne’s bugle call.

Let us leave his lordship to recover from his fatigue, and see what has been passing between Robin Hood and the man in the horse-skin cloak.

“Good morrow, fair Sir,” said Robin, approaching the stranger. “One might think, judging by the excellent bow you carry, that you were a brave and honest archer.”

“I have lost my way,” replied the traveller, disdaining to reply to the interrogatory supposition addressed to him “and I fear much to stray in this labyrinth of cross-roads, glades, and paths.”

“To me all the forest paths are well known, Master,” replied Robin, politely “and if you will tell me to what part of the wood you wish to make your way, I will be your guide.”

“I am not making my way to any particular spot,” answered the stranger, examining his interlocutor attentively, “I wish to get near the middle of the wood, for I hope to meet there a man with whom I would fain converse.”

“This man is doubtless some friend of yours?” asked Robin, amiably.

“Nay,” returned the stranger, quickly; “he is a villain of the deepest dye, an Outlaw who doth well deserve the noose.

“Oh! indeed,” said Robin, still smiling. “And may one inquire without indiscretion, the name of this scapegrace?”

“Certainly; he is called Robin Hood. And hark ye, young man, I would gladly give ten peces of gold to have the pleasure of meeting him.”

“My good Sir,” said Robin, “congratulate yourself upon the luck which hath placed you in my way, for I can conduct you into the presence of Robin Hood without putting your generosity to the proof. Only suffer me to ask your name.”

“I am called Sir Guy Gisborne. I am rich and own many vassals. My costume, as you may well imagine, is but a clever disguise. Robin Hood, not being on his guard against a poor devil so wretchedly attired, will let me come right up to him. So the question is simply how to find him. Once within reach of my hand he will die, I swear it, without having either the time or chance to defend himself; I will slay him without ruth or pity.”

“Robin Hood hath done you much evil then?”

“For no reason at all, simply because it is my pleasure.”

“A singular pleasure, if you will pardon me for saying so; and moreover, I pity you greatly for having such bloodthirsty ideas.”

“Well, you are wrong. I am not really ill-natured, and had it not been for that fool Fitz-Alwine, I should be at this moment wending my way quietly homeward. It was he who induced me to make the attempt, by defying me to vanquish Robin Hood. My self-esteem is involved, therefore I must bear off the victory at any price. But, by the way,” added Sir Guy, “now that I have told you my name, estate, and projects, you must answer me in your turn. Who are you?”

“Who am I?” repeated Robin, with loud voice and serious look. “I am the Earl of Huntingdon, the King of the Forest; I am the man you seek, I am Robin Hood!”

The Norman leapt back.

"Then prepare to die," he cried, drawing his sword. "Sir Guy Gisborne hath but one word; he hath sworn to kill thee, thou shalt die! To thy prayers, Robin Hood, for in a few minutes the call of my hunting-horn will announce to my companions, who are near at hand, that the Outlaw Chief is only a headless, shapeless corpse."

"To the vanquisher shall be reserved the right of disposing of the body of his adversary," replied Robin Hood, coldly. "Look to thyself! Thou hast sworn to spare me not; I swear on my side that if the Holy Virgin grant me the victory, I will treat thee as thou dost deserve, ome then, no quarter for either; 'tis matter of life and death."

And with that, the two opponents crossed swords.

The Norman was not only a perfect Hercules, but also a past master in the art of fencing. He attacked Robin with such fury that the young man, hard pressed, was forced to step back, and caught his foot in the roots of an oak ree. Sir Guy, whose eye was as quick as his hand was strong, at once perceived his advantage; he redoubled his blows, and several times Robin felt his sword turn in the nervous grasp of his hand. His position was becoming critical; his movements fettered by the gnarled roots of the tree, which bruised his ankles, he could neither advance nor retire; he therefore determined to leap beyond the circle in which he was enclosed, and with a spring like that of a stag at bay, he leapt to the opposite side of the path, but in jumping he caught his foot in a low branch which sent him rolling in the dust. Sir Guy was not the man to miss such an opportunity for revenge; he uttered a triumphant cry, and threw himself on Robin with every intention of splitting open his head.

Robin saw his danger, and closing his eyes, he murmured fervently, "Holy Mother of God, help me! Dear Lady of Succour, wilt thou leave me to die by the hand of this miserable Norman?"

Hardly had Robin pronounced these words, which Sir Guy did not dare to interrupt (taking them no doubt for an act of contrition), than he felt a new force in all his limbs. He turned the point of his sword towards his enemy, and, as the latter sought to turn aside the menacing weapon, Robin leapt to his feet and stood up strong and free in the middle of the road. The combat, suspended for a moment, began again with renewed vigour; but the victory had changed sides and was now with Robin. Sir Guy, disarmed and struck full in the breast, fell dead without even a cry. After thanking God for the success of his arms, Robin assured himself that Sir Guy had really breathed his last; and, as he looked upon the Norman, Robin remembered that this man had not come alone to seek him, but had brought with him a troop of companions, who were now hidden somewhere in the wood, awaiting the call of his hunting-horn.

“I think it would be wise,” thought Robin, “to find out whether these brave fellows are not Baron Fitz-Alwine’s soldiers, and see for myself the pleasure which the news of my death will give him. I will dress myself in Sir Guy’s clothes, cut off his head, and call hither his waiting companions.”

Robin Hood stripped the Norman’s body of the chief parts of his costume, put them on, not without a feeling of disgust, and when he had thrown the horse’s skin over his shoulders, he resembled Sir Guy Gisborue nearly enough to be mistaken for him.

The disguise accomplished, and the Norman’s head made unrecognisable at a first glance, Robin Hood sounded the horn.

A hurrah of triumph answered the young man’s call, and he rushed toward the spot from whence he heard the joyous voices.

“Hark! hark again!” cried Fitz-Alwine, starting up. “Is not that the sound of Sir Guy’s horn?”

“Yea, my lord,” replied one of the Knight’s men; “it could not be mistaken; my master’s horn hath its own peculiar note.”

“Victory, then!” cried the old man, “the brave and worthy Sir Guy hath slain Robin Hood.”

“An hundred Sir Guys could not succeed in beating Robin Hood, if they attacked him one by one and fairly,” roared poor Little John, his heart oppressed by terrible anguish.

“Silence, thou long-legged dolt!” answered the Baron, brutally; “and if thine eyes be good, look toward the end of the glade, where thou wilt see, hurrying to us, Sir Guy Gisborne, the vanquisher of thy wretched chief.”

John raised himself, and saw, as the Baron had said, a yeoman with his body half enveloped in a horse’s hide. Robin imitated the gait of the Knight so well, that John thought he recognised the man whom he had left face to face with his friend.

“Ah, the ruffian! the miscreant!” shouted the young man in despair. “He hath killed Robin Hood! He hath killed I the most valiant Saxon in all England! Vengeance! vengeance! vengeance! Robin Hood hath friends, and in Nottinghamshire there are a thousand hands able and willing to punish his murderer!”

“To thy prayers, dog!” cried the Baron, “and leave us in peace. Thy master is dead, and thou shalt die like him. To thy prayers, and try to preserve thy soul from the tortures which await thy body. Dost think thou hast a claim upon our pity in pursuing with thy vain threats the noble Knight who hath rid the earth of an infamous Outlaw? Approach, brave Sir Guy,” continued Lord Fitz-Alwine, addressing Robin Hood, who advanced quickly. “Thou dost merit all our praise and consideration; thou hast rid thy country from this scourge of Outlaws, thou hast killed a man whom the popular terror declared invincible, thou hast slain the celebrated Robin Hood! Ask me for the reward due to thy good offices. I will place at thy disposal my favour at Court, the support of my eternal friendship. Ask what thou wilt, noble Knight, I am ready to do thy bidding.”

Robin had taken in the situation at a glance, and the fierce look which John shot at him revealed to him even more clearly than the old Baron’s protestations of gratitude, how complete was the success of his disguise.

“I merit not such thanks,” answered Robin, imitating the Knight’s voice to the echo. “I have slain mine adversary in fair combat, and since you are willing to allow me to claim the reward of my prowess, I ask, my dear Baron, in return for the service I have just rendered you, permission to array myself against yonder rascal whom you have seized. He sits glaring at me so that he doth quite anger me; I will e’en send him to bear his amiable comrade company in the next world.”

“As you will,” returned Lord Fitz-Alwine, rubbing his hands gleefully. “Kill him, an it so please you, his life is yours.”

Robin Hood’s voice had not deceived Little John, and a sigh of unspeakable satisfaction had lifted from his heart the terrible anxiety he was beginning to experience.

Robin approached John, followed by the Baron.

“My Lord,” said Robin, laughingly, “pray leave me alone with this villain. I am convinced that the fear of an ignominious death will compel him to confide in me the secret of the hiding-place of the robber band. Keep back, and draw off your men, for I will treat any inquisitive person in the manner that I used toward the man whose head you see here.”

As he spoke these words, Robin put the bloody trophy into Lord Fitz-Alwine’s arms. The old man uttered a cry of horror; Sir Guy’s disfigured head rolled upon the ground, face downwards.

The terrified soldiers decamped with all speed.

Robin Hood, left alone with Little John, hastened to cut his bonds, and put into his hands the bow and arrows which had belonged to Sir Guy; then he wound his horn.

Hardly had the sound stirred the depths of the wood ere a great clamour was heard as the branches of the trees were thrust violently aside to make way, first for Will Scarlett, whose face was of so vivid a red as to approach purple, and next for a body of the Merrie Men, sword in hand.

This terrifying apparition appeared to the Baron more like a dream than an actual fact. He saw without perceiving, heard without understanding, his mind and body were completely paralysed by an overwhelming terror. This moment of supreme agony seemed of endless duration; he made a step forward towards the supposed Norman, and found himself face to face with Robin Hood, who, having rid himself of the horse-skin and drawn his sword, commanded the respect of the soldiers as well as that of their no less dejected leader.

The Baron, with clenched teeth and unable to utter a word, turned abruptly, mounted his horse, and without any orders to his men galloped away with all haste.

The soldiers, carried away by so praiseworthy an example, imitated their Chief and followed in his steps.

“May the devil catch thee in his claws!” cried Little John, furiously; “but thy cowardice shall not save thee; my arrows carry far enow to strike thee dead.”

“Shoot not, John,” said Robin, holding his friend by the arm. “Thou canst see that by all the laws of nature this man hath not long to live; why then hasten his death by a few days? Leave him to his remorse, to his loneliness cut off from all family ties, a prey to his malevolent helplessness.”

“Hark ye, Robin, I cannot let the old thief save himself thus; let me give him a lesson, as reminder of his sojourn in the Forest. I will not kill him, I give thee my word.”

“So be it, then; draw, but swiftly, or he will be out of sight round the bend of the road.”

John let fly an arrow, and, judging by the way in which the Baron bounded in his saddle and the haste he made to draw the arrow from the wound, it was impossible to doubt that it would be long ere he would mount a horse again or be able to sit at ease in a chair.

Little John shook hands warmly with his rescuer. Will asked Robin to give them an account of his doings, and the latter hours of this memorable day slipped merrily away.

CHAPTER XI

Baron Fitz-Alwine looked upon Robin as the curse of his existence, and his insatiable desire to avenge himself liberally for all the humiliations he had suffered at the young man's hands did not lose one whit of its intensity. Beaten on every occasion by his enemy, the Baron returned to the charge, swearing, both before and after the attack, to exterminate the whole band of Outlaws.

When the Baron found himself forced to recognise that it was quite impossible to vanquish Robin by force, he resolved to have recourse to cunning. This new plan of conduct having been long meditated, he hoped that he had at last discovered a means of decoying Robin into his snares. Without losing a moment, the Baron sent for a rich merchant of Nottingham and confided to him his plans, recommending him the while to keep the most profound silence regarding them.

This man, who was of a feeble and irresolute character, was easily led to share in the Baron's hatred for one whom he described as a highway robber.

On the morrow of his interview with Lord Fitz-Alwine, the merchant, true to the promise he had given the irascible old man, gathered together in his house the principal citizens of the town, and proposed to them to go with him to ask the Sheriff to establish a public shooting match, where the men of Nottinghamshire might try their skill against those of Yorkshire.

"The two Counties are not a little jealous of each other," added the merchant, "and for the honour of the town, I should be happy to offer our neighbours an opportunity of proving their skill at archery; or, better still, an occasion to set forth the incontestable superiority of our able marksmen. And in order to equalise the match between the rival parties, we would hold the encounter on the borders of the two Counties, the victor's prize being an arrow with silver barb and feathers of gold."

The citizens, called together by the Baron's ally, received the suggestion with a generous heartiness, and, in company with the merchant, they went to ask Lord Fitz-Alwine's permission to announce an archery competition between the rival Counties.

The old man, delighted at the prompt success of the first part of his project, concealed his secret satisfaction, and, with an air of supreme indifference, gave the required consent; even adding that, if his presence would give any pleasure or be of any advantage to the success of the festivities, it would be both a pleasure and a duty to him to preside over the games.

The citizens cried unanimously that the presence of their liege Lord would be a heaven-sent blessing, and they seemed as happy at receiving the promise of the Baron’s presence as if the latter had been bound to them by the closest ties. They left the Castle with light hearts, and made the Baron’s condescension known to their follow citizens with enthusiastic gestures, and eyes and mouths agape with astonishment. Poor fellows, they were so little used to politeness from a Norman Lord.

A proclamation, learnedly worded, announced that a match would be thrown open to the inhabitants of the Counties of Nottingham and York. The day was fixed, the spot chosen between the forest of Barnsdale and the village of Mansfield. As great care had been taken to spread the news of this public joust to every corner of the two Counties concerned, it reached Robin Hood’s ears. The young man at once resolved to enter the lists and sustain the honour of Nottingham. From further information which he received, Robin learned that Baron Fitz-Alwine would preside over the games. This condescension, so little in harmony with the old man’s morose character, explained to Robin the secret end to which the noble Lord’s wishes tended. “Oh, indeed,” said our friend to himself, “we must needs attempt this venture with every necessary precaution for a valorous defence.”

The eve of the day on which the contest was to take place, Robin assembled his men, and announced to them his intention of bearing off the archery prize for the honour of the town of Nottingham.

“My lads,” he added, “hearken to me. Baron Fitz-Alwine will preside over the games, and there must certainly be some particular reason why he should be so anxious to please the yeomen. I think I know the cause it is to attempt my capture. Therefore I shall take with me to the range one hundred and forty companions. I will enter six of them as competitors for the prize; the others will be dispersed among the crowd in such manner as to re-assemble at the first call in case of treachery. Hold your arms ready, and prepare for a desperate combat.”

Robin Hood’s orders were faithfully carried out, and at the appointed hour his men, in little groups, took the road to Mansfield, and arrived without hindrance at the place, where a crowd was already assembled.

Robin Hood, Little John, Will Scarlett, Much, and five others of the Merrie Men were to take part in the contest; they were all differently dressed, and hardly spoke to one another, in order to avoid any danger of being recognised.

The place chosen for the archery was a large glade situated on the borders of Barnsdale Forest, and a short distance from the main road. An immense crowd gathered from the neighbouring country, and pressed noisily into the enclosure, in the centre of which were placed the butts. A platform had been erected opposite the shooting range; this was for the Baron, on whom devolved the honour of judging the shooting and awarding the prize.

The Baron soon arrived, accompanied by an escort of soldiers, fifty of his men having already mingled with the crowd, clad in yeomen's dress, with orders to arrest any suspicious characters, and take them before the Baron.

These precautions taken, Lord Fitz-Alwine had hopes that Robin Hood, whose adventurous nature courted danger, would come to the joust alone, and he would have the satisfaction of taking a revenge, for which he had waited beyond the term of human patience.

The match began; three men from Nottingham grazed the target, each of them touched the mark without reaching the centre. After them came three yeomen from Yorkshire, who were equally successful. Will Scarlett presented himself in his turn, and he pierced the centre of the mark with the greatest ease.

A shout of trimph greeted Will's prowess, and Little John took his place. The young man sent his arrow into the hole made by William. Then, even before the range-keeper had had time to take it out, Robin Hood's arrow broke it in pieces and took its place.

The enraptured crowd became violently excited, and the men of Nottingham laid big wagers.

The three best archers of Yorkshire came forward, and with steady hands, hit the bull's-eye.

It was now the turn of the Northerners to cry victory, and accept the wagers of the citizens of Nottingham.

All this time the Baron, but little interested in the success of either one or other of the Counties, was attentively watching the archers. Robin Hood had attracted his attention; but as his sight had for some time been getting feeble, it was impossible for him to recognise his enemy's features.

Much and the Merrie Men selected by Robin to compete touched the mark without difficulty; four yeomen followed them, and succeeded equally well.

The greater number of the archers were so well used to shooting at a target, that it appeared as though the victory would be to none in particular, and it was decided to set up wands, and choose seven men out of the victors on either side.

The citizens of Nottingham chose Robin Hood and his Merrie Men to sustain the honour of their county, while the inhabitants of Yorkshire took as their champion the yeomen who had proved the best archers.

The yeomen began. The first split the wand, the second grazed it, and the third skimmed it so closely that it appeared impossible that their adversaries would be able to surpass their skill.

Will Scarlett advanced, and taking tip his bow, he shot underhand, and broke the willow wand into two pieces.

“Hurrah! for Nottinghamshire,” cried the citizens of Nottingham, throwing their caps into the air, without in the least considering how impossible it would be to recover them.

New wands were prepared. Robin’s men, from Little John to the least of the archers, split them easily. Robin’s turn came; he shot three arrows at the wands with such rapidity that, had it not been seen that the wands were shattered, it would have been impossible to believe in such skill.

Several fresh attempts were made, but Robin triumphed over all his adversaries, although they were all tried bowmen, and it began to be said that Robin Hood himself could not compete with the yeoman in the red doublet, for it was thus the crowd had named Robin.

This supposition, so dangerous to the young man, soon became an affirmation; and the report circulated that the victor was none other than Robin Hood.

The Yorkshiremen, smarting under defeat, hastened to assert that the match was not an equal one between them and a man of Robin Hood’s strength. They complained of the slur cast upon their honour as archers, of the loss of their money (the most weighty consideration with them), and they attempted, no doubt with a hope of eluding their wagers, to turn the discussion into a quarrel.

As soon as the Merrie Men became aware of their adversaries’ ill-will, they rallied together, and formed, though without apparent intention, a group of eighty-six men.

While the seeds of strife were being sown among the wagerers, Robin Hood was borne to the Sheriff amid the joyous acclamations of the citizens of Nottingham.

"Way for the victor! Hurrah for the skilful archer!" cried two hundred voices. "He is the winner of the prize."

Robin Hood, with eyes modestly cast down, stood before Lord Fitz-Alwine in the most respectful attitude.

The Baron stared hard to try and descry the young man's features. A certain resemblance of figure, perhaps even of dress, led the Baron to believe that the invincible Outlaw stood before him; but torn between conflicting emotions of doubt and a faint certitude, he could not show too great precipitation without compromising the success of his plan. He held out the arrow to Robin, hoping to recognise the young man by the sound of his voice. But Robin cheated his hopes; he took the arrow, and bowed politely as he stuck it in his belt.

A moment passed; Robin pretended to move off. Then, as the Baron, desperate at seeing him thus escape, was about to take decisive measures; he raised his head, and looking full at the old man, said with a laugh "Words fail me to express the value which I attach to the present you have just given me, my excellent friend. I shall return with a heart full of gratitude to the green trees of my fair dwelling-place, and there I will treasure with care this precious token of friendship. I wish you a very good day, noble Lord of Nottingham."

"Stop, stop!" roared the Baron "Soldiers, do your duty! That man is Robin Hood. Seize him!"

"Miserable coward!" returned Robin. "You proclaimed that the game was public, open to all, destined for the amusements of every one without exception and without fear."

"An Outlaw hath no rights," said the Baron; "thou wast not included in the appeal to all good citizens. Now then, soldiers, seize the robber."

"I will slay the first who advanceth," cried Robin, in a stentorian voice, directing his bow toward the fellow who approached him. But at sight of his menacing attitude, the man drew back, and disappeared into the crowd.

Robin wound his horn, and his Merrie Men, prepared to sustain a bloody combat, advanced quickly to protect him. Stepping back into the midst of his men, he ordered them to bend their bows and retreat slowly, for the

Baron's soldiers were too numerous to make it possible to fight against them without risking much bloodshed.

The Baron precipitated himself before his men, and in a furious voice commanded them to arrest the Outlaws. The soldiers prepared to obey, and the Yorkshiremen, irritated by their defeat and exasperated by the loss of their money in the wagers they had just made, joined the Baron's men in pursuing the Foresters. But the citizens of Nottingham owed Robin Hood too great a debt of friendship and gratitude to leave him helpless at the mercy of the soldiers and their Lord. They opened a way for the Merrie Men, and, saluting them with friendly acclamation, reclosed it again behind them.

Unhappily, Robin Hood's adherents were neither numerous enough nor strong enough to protect his discreet flight for any length of time; they were obliged to break their ranks, and the men-at-arms gained the road along which the Foresters had fled.

Then began a desperate chase. From time to time the Foresters faced about and sent a volley of arrows at the soldiers, who retaliated as well as they were able, and in spite of the ravages made in their ranks, courageously continued the pursuit.

After this exchange of hostilities had lasted an hour, Little John, who was marching at the head of the Foresters with Robin, stopped suddenly, and said to his young Chief

"My good friend, my hour is come; I am grievously wounded, my strength faileth me, I cannot keep up the pace."

"What!" cried Robin; "thou art wounded?"

"Yea," replied John, "in the knee; and I have lost so much blood in the last half-hour that my strength faileth me. I cannot stand on my feet." And as he spoke, John sank to the ground.

"Great Heavens!" cried Robin, kneeling beside his brave comrade. "John, good John, take courage; try to rouse thyself and lean upon me. I am not tired, and will support thy steps. Only a few minutes more, and we shall be in safety. Let me bind up thy wound, it will give thee great relief."

"Nay, Robin, 'tis useless," replied John, in a weak voice; "my leg is almost paralysed; 'tis impossible for me to move. Do not stay. Abandon a useless wretch who only asks for death."

"I abandon thee!" cried Robin Hood. "Thou dost know that I am incapable of so cruel an action."

"It would not be in the least a cruel action, Robin, but a duty. Thou must answer to God for the lives of these brave men who have given themselves, body and soul, to thee. Leave me here, therefore, and if thou lovest me, if thou hast ever loved me, do not let that wicked Baron find me alive; plunge thy hunting-knife into my heart, that I may die like an honest and brave Saxon. Hearken to my prayer, Robin, and kill me; thou wilt spare me cruel sufferings and the unhappiness of again seeing our enemies; they are so cowardly, these Normans, that they would take a delight in insulting me in my last moments."

"Come, John," replied Robin, much affected, "do not ask me anything so impossible. Thou knowest well that I would not leave thee to die helpless and away from me; thou knowest that I would sacrifice mine own life and the lives of my men to preserve thine. Thou knowest, further, that far from abandoning thee, I would shed my last drop of blood to defend thee. When I fall, John, I trust that it will be at thy side, and then we shall depart for the next world with hands and hearts united as they have ever been here below."

"We will fight and die beside thee, if Heaven withholds its aid," said Will, embracing his cousin; "and thou shalt see that there are still brave men in the world. My friends," he continued, turning to the Foresters, who had come to a halt, "here is your friend, your comrade, mortally wounded; do you think that we should abandon him to the vengeance of the wretches who pursue us?"

"No! no! an hundred times no!" cried the Merrie Men, with one accord. "Let us surround him and die in his defence."

"Allow me," said the vigorous Much, advancing. "It seemeth useless to risk our lives without a cause. John is only wounded in the knee, he will therefore bear being carried without fear of losing blood. I will take him on my shoulders and carry him as long as my legs will carry me."

"When you fail, Much," said Will, "I will take your place, and another after me. Is it not so?"

"Yea! yea!" replied the gallant Foresters.

In spite of John's attempt at resistance, Much raised him with a strong hand, and with Robin's assistance took the wounded man on his back, after which the fugitives continued quickly on their way. This forced halt had enabled the soldiers to gain on the Foresters, and they now came in sight. The Merrie Men sent a flight of arrows among them, and redoubled their pace in the hope of reaching their retreat, well persuaded that the soldiers would never dare to follow them there. At the end of a branch road leading from the main road, the Foresters descried above the trees the turrets of a Castle.

"To whom doth this domain belong?" asked Robin. "Doth any one among you know the owner?"

"I do, Captain," said a man, who had been but lately enrolled in the band.

"Good. Dost know whether we should be favourably received by its Lord? For we are lost, an the gates be closed to us."

"I will answer for the benevolence of the owner, for Sir Richard of the Plain is a brave Saxon."

"Sir Richard of the Plain!" cried Robin. "Then are we saved! Forward, my lads, forward! Praised be the Holy Virgin!" he continued, crossing himself gratefully; "she never abandons the unfortunate in the hour of their need. Will Scarlett, go thou on in advance, and say to the keeper of the drawbridge, that Robin Hood and a band of his men, pursued by Normans, ask permission of Sir Richard to take refuge within his Castle walls."

With the speed of an arrow, William covered the space which separated him from Sir Richard's domain.

While the young man accomplished his errand, Robin and his companions proceeded toward the Castle.

Soon a white flag was hoisted on the outer wall, a horseman emerged from the Gate, and, followed by Will, advanced at full speed to meet Robin Hood. Arrived in the young Chief's presence, he leapt to the ground, holding out both hands.

"Sir," said the young man, grasping Robin's hand with visible emotion, "I am Herbert Gower, Sir Richard's son. My father wishes me to tell you that you are welcome to our home, and that he will feel the happiest of men, an you will give him the opportunity of discharging even a portion of the great debt we owe you. I am yours, body and soul, Sir Robin," added the young man, with an outburst of profound gratitude, "do with me what you will."

"I thank you with all my heart, my young friend," replied Robin, embracing Herbert; "your offer is tempting, for I should be proud to place so good a horseman in the ranks of my lieutenants. But for the present we must think of the danger that threatens my men. They are worn out with fatigue; my dearest comrade hath been wounded in the leg by a Norman arrow; and for near two hours we have been pursued by Baron Fitz-

Alwine's soldiers. Behold, my lad," continued Robin, pointing out to the youth a band of soldiers who began to appear on the road, "they will overtake us, an we do not hasten to seek shelter behind the Castle walls."

"The drawbridge is already lowered," said Herbert. "Let us hasten, and in ten minutes you will have nothing to fear from your enemies."

The Sheriff and his men arrived in time to witness the little troop defiling along the drawbridge of the Castle. Exasperated by this fresh defeat, the Baron immediately took the audacious resolution of commanding Sir Richard, in the King's name, to deliver up to him these men, who, doubtless abusing his credulity, had placed themselves under his protection.

Whereupon, at Lord Fitz-Alwine's request, the Knight appeared upon the ramparts.

"Sir Richard of the Plain," said the Baron, whose people had told him the name of the owner of the Castle, "do you know who the men are that entered your domain?"

"I know them, my Lord," replied the Knight, coldly.

"What! you know that the rogue who commands this troop of robbers is an Outlaw, an enemy of the King, and yet you give him shelter? Do you know that you incur the penalty of treason?"

"I know that this Castle and the grounds that surround it are my property. I know that I am master here, and do as I please, and receive whom I choose. That is my answer, Sir. Will you withdraw at once, an you would avoid a combat in which you would not gain the advantage, for I have an hundred men-at-arms with the best sharpened arrows in all the country-side at my disposal. Good day, my Lord."

And with this ironical reply the Knight left the ramparts.

The Baron, who felt that he was not well enough supported by his soldiers to attempt an attack on the Castle, decided to retreat; and, with suppressed rage in his heart, as can be well imagined, he took the road to Nottingham with his men.

"Welcome, a thousand times, to the house which I owe to thy goodness, Robin Hood," said the Knight, embracing his guest; "welcome, a thousand times!"

"I thank thee, Sir Knight," said Robin. "But, prithee, speak not of the paltry service which I had the satisfaction to render thee. Thy friendship hath already repaid it an hundred-fold, and to-day thou savest me from a real danger. Hark ye, I have brought a wounded man; I pray that thou wilt kindly entreat him."

"He shall have the same consideration as thyself, dear Robin."

"The worthy lad is not unknown to thee, Sir Knight," replied Robin. "It is Little John, my first lieutenant; the dearest and most trusty of my companions."

"My wife and Lilas will look to him," returned Sir Richard. "And he will be well cared for; be easy on that score."

"If you are speaking of Little John, or rather of the biggest John, sure, who ever wielded a cudgel," said Herbert, "he is already in the hands of a clever leech from York, who hath been here since last evening. He hath already tended the wound and promiseth a speedy cure."

"God be praised!" said Robin Hood; "my dear John is out of danger. Now, Sir Knight," added he, "I am at the disposal of thyself and of thy family."

"My wife and Lilas are impatient to greet thee," said the Knight. "They await thee in the next room."

"Father," said Herbert, with a laugh, "I have just told my friend I mean the young man, Will Scarlett that I am the husband of the most beautiful woman in the world. And do you know what he replied?"

Sir Richard and Robin Hood exchanged smiles.

"He declared that he possessed a wife whose beauty was unrivalled. But he shall see Lilas, and then..."

"Ah! had you but seen Maude, you would not speak thus, young man. Would he, Robin?"

"Certainly Herbert would think Maude very pretty," replied Robin, in a conciliatory tone.

"Doubtless, doubtless," said Herbert. "But Lilas is marvellously beautiful; and, in my opinion, there exists no woman to be compared with her."

Will Scarlett listened to Herbert with a frown. The poor young husband's self-love was wounded. But we must do him the justice to say that, when he beheld Lilas, he uttered an exclamation of surprise and admiration.

Lilas had fulfilled all the promises of her youth; the pretty child we saw at St. Mary's Abbey had become a beautiful woman. Tall, slim, and graceful as a young fawn, Lilas advanced toward the visitors with downcast eyes and a lovely smile upon her rosy lips. She raised two timid blue eyes to Robin Hood and held out her hand.

“Our deliverer is no stranger to me,” she said sweetly.

Mute with admiration, Robin Hood raised the white hand to his lips.

Herbert, who had followed Robin, said to Will, with a smile of tender pride, “Friend William, this is my wife...”

“She is very beautiful,” whispered Will; but Maude...” he added, in a still lower voice.

He said no more. Robin Hood commanded him by a glance to have no eyes save for Herbert’s charming wife.

After a mutual exchange of compliments between Sir Richard’s wife and her guests, the Knight, leaving Will and his son to talk to the ladies, took Robin Hood aside, and said “My dear Robin, I wish to prove to thee that there is no man in the world whom I love like thee, and I declare again my friendship for thee, so that thou mayest carry out thy plans according to thy will. Thou wilt be secure here so long as this house can shield thee, so long as there remains a man standing upon its ramparts, and, sword in hand, I will defy all the Sheriffs in the Kingdom. I have given orders for the Gates to be closed, and for none to be permitted to enter the Castle without my leave. My men are under arms, and ready to offer a stout resistance to any attack. Thy men are resting; let them remain one week in peace, and when that time hath elapsed, we will take counsel together as to the part thou shouldst play.”

“I willingly consent to remain here some days,” answered Robin. “But on one condition only.”

“What is that?”

“My Merrie Men will return to-morrow to Barnsdale Forest. Will Scarlett shall accompany them, and he will return hither with his dear Maude, Marian, and poor Little John’s wife.”

Sir Richard readily acquiesced in Robin’s wishes, and all was arranged to the mutual satisfaction of the two friends.

A fortnight passed happily away at the Castle on the Plain, and at the end of that time, Robin, Little John, entirely cured of his wound, Will Scarlett and the incomparable Maude, Marian and Winifred, found themselves once more beneath the green trees of Barnsdale Forest.

The day after his return to Nottingham, Baron Fitz-Alwine made his way to London, obtained an audience of the King, and recounted to him his pitiful adventure.

"Your Majesty," said the Baron, "will find it strange, no doubt, that a Knight with whom Robin had sought shelter should have refused to deliver up this great criminal to me, even though I asked in the King's name."

"What! a Knight, and failed to show respect to his Sovereign!" cried Henry, in an irritated tone.

"Yea, Sire, the Knight, Sir Richard of the Plain, refused my righteous demand. He replied that he was king of his domains, and cared but little for the power of your Majesty."

As may be perceived, the worthy Baron lied freely for the good of his cause.

"Well," replied the King, "we will judge for ourselves of the impudence of this rogue. We will be in Nottingham within fifteen days. Bring with you as many men as you think needful to give battle, and if any untoward occurrence should prevent our joining you, act as best you can. Carry off this indomitable Robin Hood and Sir Richard. Imprison them in your gloomiest dungeon; and when you have them safe under lock and key, advise our justices. We will then reflect upon our course of action."

Baron Fitz-Alwine obeyed the King's orders to the letter. He assembled a numerous troop of men and marched at their head against Sir Richard's Castle. But the poor Baron was the sport of fate, for he arrived the day after Robin's departure.

The idea of pursuing Robin to his retreat did not commend itself to the old Baron's mind. A certain remembrance, and a certain soreness, which still rendered riding painful to him, checked his ardour in that direction. He resolved, as he could do no better, to take Sir Richard, and, as an assault of the place would be a difficult thing to attempt and dangerous to put into execution, he made up his mind to attain a more certain success by means of treachery.

The Baron dispersed his men, keeping with him only a score of stout fellows, and placed himself in ambush at a short distance from the Castle. He had not long to wait. The next morning, Sir Richard, his son, and some followers fell into the trap laid for them, and in spite of the valiant resistance they offered, they were vanquished, gagged, tied to horses, and carried away to Nottingham.

One of Sir Richard's servants succeeded in making his escape, and came, all black and blue with the blows he had received, to announce the sad news to his mistress.

Lady Gower, distracted with grief, wished to join her husband; but Lilas made the unhappy woman understand that this step would be of no help to them. She advised her mother to apply to Robin Hood; he alone was capable of judging calmly of Sir Richard's position and effecting his deliverance.

Lady Gower yielded to the entreaties of the younger woman, and without losing an instant, she choose two faithful servants, mounted a horse, and set out in all haste for Barnsdale Forest.

A Forester, who had remained ill at the Castle, was now sufficiently recovered to act as guide to the Trysting Tree.

By a providential chance, Robin Hood was at his post.

"God bless you!" cried Lady Gower, throwing herself with feverish haste from her horse; "I come to you as a suppliant. I come to ask you yet another favour in the Holy Virgin's name."

"Lady, you frighten me. For mercy's sake, what ails you?" cried Robin, overcome with astonishment. "Tell me what you desire; I am ready to obey."

"Oh, Robin," sobbed the poor woman, "my husband and my son have been carried off by your enemy, the Sheriff of Nottingham. Oh, Robin, save my husband, save my child! Stop the wretches who have taken them away; they are few in number, and have only this minute left the Castle."

"Be reassured, Madam," said Robin Hood. "Your husband shall soon be given back to you. Remember that Sir Richard is a Knight, and under this title he has a right to the law of the Kingdom. Whatever the power of Baron Fitz-Alwine, it does not permit him to put to death a noble Saxon. He must bring Sir Richard to trial, if the fault of which he is accused offer occasion for trial. Take courage, dry your tears; your husband and son shall soon be in your arms."

"May Heaven bless you!" cried Lady Gower, clasping her hands.

"Now, Madam, allow me to give you some advice. Return to the Castle, keep all the gates shut, and do not allow any stranger to enter. For my part, I will assemble my men, and fly at their head in pursuit of the Baron."

Lady Gower, much reassured by the young man's consoling words, left him with a more tranquil heart. Robin Hood announced to his men the capture of Sir Richard, and his desire to capture the Sheriff. The Foresters gave a shout, half of indignation against the Baron's treachery, half of joy at having a fresh opportunity of bending their bows, and gleefully they prepared to set out.

Robin put himself at the head of his valiant troop, and accompanied by Little John, Will Scarlett, and Much, started in pursuit of the Sheriff.

After a long and fatiguing march, they reached the village of Mansfield, where Robin learnt from an Innkeeper, that, after having rested, the Baron's soldiers had continued their way to Nottingham. Robin made his men refresh themselves, left Much and Little John with them, and accompanied by Will, galloped at the best speed of a good horse to the Trysting Tree of Sherwood Forest.

Arrived at the confines of the subterranean dwelling, Robin blew a joyous flourish upon his hunting horn, and a hundred Foresters ran up at the well-known call.

Robin Hood took this fresh troop with him, and so arranged them as to get the Baron's men between the two troops; for the men left at Mansfield were to take the road to Nottingham after an hour's repose.

The Merrie Men soon arrived at a spot, a short distance from the town, where they learned to their great satisfaction that the Sheriff's troops had not yet passed. Robin chose an advantageous position, hid some of his men, and placed the remainder on the opposite side of the road.

The appearance of half a dozen soldiers soon announced the approach of the Sheriff and his cavalcade.

The Foresters prepared to give them a warm welcome. The advance guard passed beyond the limits of the ambush without hindrance, and when they were far enough for the troop that came behind to imagine there was nothing more to fear, the sound of a horn rang through the air, and a flight of arrows saluted the front rank of soldiers. The Sheriff commanded a halt, and sent some thirty men to beat the underwood; they went to their death.

Divided into two groups and attacked on both sides at once, the soldiers were soon forced to lay down their arms and cry for mercy.

This exploit terminated, the Merrie Men threw themselves upon the Baron's escort, who, being well mounted and used to arms, defended themselves with vigour.

Robin and his men fought with the hope of delivering Sir Richard and his son; the soldiers from London, on their side, sought to gain the reward promised by the King to whoever should capture Robin Hood. The struggle was desperate and furious on both sides, and the victory uncertain, when suddenly the shouts of another band of Foresters told that the situation was now to be changed. It was Little John and his band, who flung themselves into the conflict with an irresistible violence.

Some ten archers already surrounded Sir Richard and his son, cut their bonds, gave them weapons, and, undismayed by the danger to which they were exposing themselves, fought hand to hand with men clad in coats of mail. With the heedless impetuosity of youth, Herbert, with some of the Merrie Men, hurled himself into the midst of the Baron's escort. For nearly a quarter of an hour the courageous youth held his own against the horsemen; but, overcome by numbers, he was about to pay for his foolhardiness, when an archer, either to help the young man or to precipitate the issue of the battle, took aim at the Baron, and pierced his throat with an arrow, flung him from his horse, and cut off his head; then, lifting it in the air on the point of his lance, he cried in a loud voice

"Norman dogs, behold your Chief! Contemplate for the last time the ugly face of your proud Sheriff, and lay down your arms or prepare yourselves to meet a like..."

The Forester did not finish his sentence; a Norman broke open his head, and he rolled in the dust.

The death of Lord Fitz-Alwine constrained the Normans to lay down their arms and ask for quarter.

By Robin's orders some of the Merrie Men conducted the vanquished men to Nottingham, while, at the head of the rest of his band, he carried away the dead, succoured the wounded, and removed all traces of the combat.

"Farewell for ever, thou man of blood and iron," said Robin, throwing a look of disgust at the Baron's corpse. "At last thou hast met thy death, and wilt receive the reward of thine evil deeds. Thy heart hath been covetous and pitiless, thy hand hath been as a scourge to the unhappy Saxons. Thou hast oppressed thy vassals, betrayed thy King, and abandoned thy daughter. Thou dost merit all the tortures of hell. Yet do I pray the God of infinite mercy to have pity on thy soul and to pardon thy sins."

"Sir Richard," said Robin, when the old man's corpse had been raised by the soldiers, and borne away in the direction of Nottingham, "this hath been a sorry day. We have saved thee from death, but not from ruin, for thy goods will be confiscated. I could wish, Richard, that I had never known thee."

“How is that?” asked the Knight, in great surprise.

“Because without mine aid, thou wouldst assuredly have succeeded in paying thy debt to the Abbey, and thou wouldst not have been obliged to render me service out of gratitude. I am the involuntary cause of all thy trouble. Thou wilt be banished, outlawed from the Kingdom, thy house become the property of a Norman, thy family will suffer, and it will be my fault... Thou canst see for thyself, Sir Richard, how dangerous my friendship is!”

“My dear Robin,” said the Knight, with an expression of ineffable tenderness, “my wife and my children are alive, thou art my friend, what have I to regret? If the King condemn me, I will leave my Castle, deprived of all, but still happy and blessing the hour that led me to noble Robin Hood.”

The young man gently shook his head.

“Let us speak seriously of thy situation, my dear Richard,” returned he. “The news of the events which have just occurred will be sent to London, and the King will be pitiless. We have attacked his own soldiers, and he will make thee pay for their defeat, not only by banishment, but by an ignominious death. Leave thy home, come with me. I give thee the word of an honest man that while a breath of life is in my body, thou shalt be safe under the care of my Merrie Men.”

“I gladly accept thy generous offer, Robin Hood. I accept it with joy and gratitude. But before establishing myself in the Forest, which my children’s future makes my duty, I am going to try and soften the King’s anger. The offer of a considerable sum of money may induce him to spare the life of a well-born Knight.”

That very evening Sir Richard sent a message to London to ask a powerful member of his family to speak to the King for him. The messenger came back from London at full speed, and announced to his master that Henry II., deeply irritated by the death of Baron Fitz-Alwine, had sent a company of his best soldiers to the Knight’s Castle, with orders to hang him and his son to the first tree on the roadside. The Chief of this company, who was a penniless Norman, had received from the King’s hand the Castle of the Plain as a gift to himself and his descendants to the last generation.

Sir Richard’s kinsman likewise sent word to the condemned man that a proclamation was to be made in the Counties of Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, and Yorkshire, offering an immense reward to the man clever enough to capture Robin Hood and give him, alive or dead, into the hands of the Sheriff of either of these Counties.

Sir Richard at once warned Robin Hood of the danger menacing his life, and announced his own immediate arrival.

Actively assisted by his vassals, the Knight despoiled the Castle of all that it contained, and sent his furniture, arms, and plate to the trysting-place of Barnsdale.

When the last wagon had crossed the drawbridge, Sir Richard, his wife, Herbert, and Lilas rode away from their dear home, and gained the Forest without hindrance.

When the troop sent by the King reached the Castle, the doors were open and the rooms completely empty.

The new owner of Sir Richard’s domains seemed much disappointed to find the place deserted, but as he had passed the best part of his life in struggling against the freaks of fortune, he readily accommodated himself to his circumstances.

Consequently he sent away the soldiers and, to the great despair of the vassals, established himself as master of the Castle of the Plain.

CHAPTER XII

Three peaceful years followed the events we have just related. Robin Hood's band had developed in a remarkable manner, and the renown of their intrepid Chief had spread all over England.

The death of Henry II. had placed his son Richard on the throne, and the latter, after having squandered all the Crown treasure, had set out for the Holy Land, abandoning the Regency of the Kingdom to his brother, Prince John, a man of dissolute habits and extreme avarice, whose feeble spirit rendered him incapable of fulfilling the high mission entrusted to him.

The misery of the people, already very great under Henry, became complete destitution during the long period of this bloodstained regency. Robin Hood, with inexhaustible generosity, relieved the cruel sufferings of the poor in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, and he was the idol of them all. But if he gave to the poor, he took from the rich in return, and Normans, prelates, and monks contributed largely, to their great vexation, to the good works of the noble Outlaw.

Marian still lived in the Forest, and the young couple still loved each other as tenderly as in the first days of their happy union.

Time had not lessened William's passion for his charming wife, and in the eyes of the faithful Saxon, Maude, like a pure diamond, still kept her immutable beauty.

Little John and Much still congratulated themselves on their choice in taking to wife sweet Winifred and witty Barbara; and as for Will's brothers, they had no reason to repent of their hasty marriages; they were happy, and life was rose-coloured to their eyes.

Before we leave for ever two persons who have played an important part in our story, we will pay them a friendly visit at the Castle of the Dale in the valley of Mansfield.

Allan Clare and the Lady Christabel still lived happily together. Their home, built chiefly under the Knight's directions, was a marvel of comfort and good taste. A circle of old trees shut off the garden from inquisitive eyes, and seemed to place an insuperable barrier around the place.

Beautiful children with sweet faces, living flowers in this oasis of love, enlivened the calm repose of the great House with their turbulent spirits, their laughing voices awoke the echoes, and the light steps of their little feet left a fleeting imprint on the sandy paths of the park. Allan and Christabel had remained young in heart, spirits, and looks, and for them a week seemed like a day a day passed as quickly as an hour.

Christabel had not seen her father since her wedding with Allan Clare in Linton Abbey; for the irascible old man was cruelly determined to repulse all the efforts at reconciliation made by his daughter and the Knight. The Baron's death affected Christabel profoundly; but how much greater would her sorrow have been if, in losing the author of her being, she had lost a true father.

Allan had intended to maintain his rights to the Barony of Nottingham, and, by Robin's advice, who recommended him to make all haste in putting forward his very just claim, he was on the point of writing to the King, when he learned that the Castle of Nottingham, with its revenues and dependencies, had become the property of Prince John. Allan was too happy to risk his peace and well-being in a struggle which the superior rank of his adversary would render as dangerous as it was useless. He therefore took no further steps, and did not regret the loss of this magnificent heritage.

Robin's attacks upon the Normans and the clergy became so frequent and so prejudicial to the rich that they attracted the attention of the Lord Chancellor of England, Longchamp, Bishop of Ely.

The Bishop resolved to put an end to the existence of the Merrie Men, and he prepared a serious expedition. Five hundred men, with Prince John at their head, arrived at Nottingham Castle, and there, after a rest of several days, they made arrangements to seize Robin Hood. He, however, being promptly informed of the intentions of this honourable troop, only laughed, and prepared to baffle all their attempts without exposing his men to the dangers of a fight.

He made his band take shelter, arrayed a dozen foresters in different costumes, and sent them to the Castle, where they presented themselves and offered to guide the troops into the inextricable recesses of the Forest.

These offers of service were accepted with alacrity by the chiefs of the troop; and as the Forest covered very nearly thirty miles of ground, it was not easy to take account of the turns and twists through which the guides led the unhappy soldiers. Now the whole of the troop was engulfed in the declivities of a valley, now they sank knee deep in the muddy water of swamps, now they found themselves dispersed on wild and barren heights. They cursed a soldier's life, wished the Lord Chancellor of England, Robin Hood, and his invisible band at the devil; for it should be observed that not a single green doublet had ever appeared upon the horizon.

At the close of the day the soldiers found themselves seven or eight miles from Nottingham Castle, which they must regain if they did not wish to pass a night in the open. They returned therefore, exhausted with fatigue, dying of hunger, and without having seen a thing that could reveal to them the presence of the Merrie Men.

For two weeks they renewed these fatiguing marches, and the result was always the same. Prince John, recalled to London by his pleasures, abandoned the undertaking, and returned with his escort to the town.

Two years after this expedition, Richard returned to England; and Prince John, who justly dreaded to face his brother, sought refuge from the King's anger within the walls of Nottingham Castle.

Richard Coeur de Lion, having learned of the Regent's obnoxious behaviour, stayed only three days in London; and then, accompanied by a small troop, marched resolutely against the rebel.

Nottingham Castle was besieged. After three days it surrendered at discretion, but Prince John managed to escape.

While fighting like the meanest of his soldiers, Richard had noticed that a troop of lusty yeomen gave him great assistance, and that it was owing to their valuable help that he was able to win the victory.

After the combat, and once installed in the Castle, Richard asked for information concerning the brave archers who had come to his aid. But none could tell and he was obliged to seek information from the Reeve of Nottingham.

This Reeve was the same man whom Robin had played the trick of taking him into the Forest and making him pay three hundred gold crowns for his visit.

Under the influence of this poignant memory, the Reeve answered the King that the archers in question could certainly be none other than those of the terrible Robin Hood.

"This Robin Hood," added the mailicious Innkeeper, "is a downright rascal. He supports his band at the expense of travellers; he robs honest men, kills the King's deer, and daily commits every of brigandage."

Halbert Lindsay, pretty Maude foster-brother, who had had the good fortune to keep his place as Warden of the Castle, happened by chance to be near the King during this interview. Impelled by a feeling of gratitude toward Robin and by the natural impetuosity of a generous nature, he forgot his lowly condition, made a step towards the Reeve's august listener, and said in an eager tone

"Sire, Robin Hood is an honest Saxon and an unhappy Outlaw. An if he despoil the rich of their wealth, yet he doth allay the misery of the poor; and in the Counties of Nottingham and York the name of Robin Hood is aye spoken with respect and eternal gratitude."

"Do you know this brave bowman personally?" asked the King of Halbert.

The question recalled Halbert to himself. He blushed crimson, and replied confusedly "I have seen Robin Hood, but it was a long time ago; and I only repeat to your Majesty what is said of him by the poor whom he hath saved from dying of starvation."

"Come, come, my good lad," said the King, with a smile, "hold up thy head and never disown thy friend. By the Holy Trinity, if his conduct be such as thou hast described to me, he is a man whose friendship must indeed be precious. I avow I should be charmed to meet this Outlaw; and as he hath done me a service, it shall never be said that Richard of England hath shown himself ungrateful, even toward an Outlaw. To-morrow evening I will hie me to Sherwood Forest."

The King kept his word. Early next morning, escorted by Knights and soldiers, and conducted by the Reeve, who did not find this expedition very attractive, he explored the paths, roads, and glades of the old wood, but the search was in vain. Robin Hood was not to be seen.

But little pleased at his ill-success, Richard sent for a man who fulfilled the functions of Keeper in the Forest, and asked him whether he knew of any means of encountering the Outlaw Chief.

"Your Majesty might search the wood for a year," rejoined the man, "without perceiving even the shadow of an Outlaw, if you went accompanied by an escort. Robin Hood avoids strife as much as possible not from cowardice, for he knows the Forest so well that he hath naught to fear, not even the attack of five or six hundred men but from moderation and prudence. If your Majesty wishes to see Robin Hood, it were best to go disguised as a Monk, with four or five of your Knights, and I will be your

Majesty’s guide. I swear by St. Dunstan that your lives will be in no danger. Robin Hood waylays ecclesiastics, he entertains them, he despoils them, but never doth he ill-use them.”

“By the Holy Cross, Forester, thy speech is golden,” said the King, laughing, “and I will follow thy wise counsel. The garb of a Monk will become me but ill. No matter! Let them fetch me a Friar’s robe.”

The impatient monarch was soon clothed in an Abbot’s costume, and chose four Knights, who dressed themselves as Monks, to accompany him. Moreover, following another stratagem suggested by the Keeper, they harnessed their horses in such a manner as to convey the impression that they carried a load of treasure.

About a league from the Castle, the Keeper, who served as guide to the supposed Monks, approached the King and said

“My Lord, look to the end of yonder glade; there you will see Robin Hood, Little John, and Will Scarlett, the three Chiefs of the band.”

“Good,” said the King, gaily. And urging his horse forward, Richard made as though he would escape.

Robin Hood leapt on to the road, seized the animal’s bridle, and compelled it to stop.

“A thousand pardons, Sir Abbot,” said he; “pray tarry a while and receive my hearty welcome.”

“Profane sinner,” cried Richard, seeking to imitate the habitual language of the clergy. “Dost dare arrest the passage of a holy man on a sacred errand.”

“I am a yeoman of this Forest,” replied Robin Hood, “and my companions and I live upon the proceeds of the chase and the generosity of pious members of Holy Church.”

“Upon my word, thou art a daring rogue,” answered the King, concealing a smile. “To dare tell me to my face that thou eatest my... the King’s deer, and plunderest members of the Church. By St. Hubert! thou dost possess at least the merit of frankness.”

“Frankness is the only resource of those who possess naught,” returned Robin Hood. “But those who have revenues, lands, and gold and silver can pass them on, when they know not what to do with them. I believe, noble Abbot,” continued Robin, in a mocking tone, “that you are one of the happy number of whom I speak. That is why I ask you to come to the aid of our modest wants, and of the misery of our poor friends and dependants. You too often forget, my brothers, that round about your rich dwellings there are homes lacking bread, although you possess more money than wants for it to satisfy.”

“Perchance thou speakest truth, yeoman,” replied the King, partly forgetting the religious character with which he was invested. “And the expression of loyal frankness which shines from thy face pleaseth me singularly. Thou hast an appearance of being more honest than thou art in reality. Natheless, for the sake of thy good appearance, and for love of Christian charity, I make thee a gift of all the money I possess at this moment forty pieces of gold. I am sorry that it is no more, but the King, who hath been staying for several days at Nottingham Castle, as thou hast doubtless heard, hath almost entirely emptied my pockets. This money, however, is at thy service, for I like well thy fine face and the strong countenances of thy lusty comrades.”

With these words, the King handed Robin Hood a little leathern bag containing forty pieces of gold.

“You are the paragon of Churchmen, Sir Abbot,” said Robin, laughing; “and if I had not made a vow to squeeze more or less every member of Holy Church, I should refuse to accept your generous offer. However, it shall not be said that you have suffered too cruelly on your way through Sherwood Forest. Your escort and horses may pass freely, and more, you must allow me to accept only twenty oieces of gold.”

“Thou dost behave nobly, Forester,” replied Richard, who appeared sensible of Robin’s generosity; “and I shall give myself the pleasure of speaking of thee to our Sovereign. His Majesty knoweth somewhat concerning thee, for he told me to greet thee from him if I were so fortunate as to meet thee. I believe, betwixt ourselves be it said, that King Richard who doth love bravery where’er he finds it would not be sorry to give his thanks in person to the brave yeoman who helped him to open the Gates of Nottingham Castle, and to ask him why he and his valiant companions disappeared so soon after the battle.”

“If some day I were happy enough to find myself in His Majesty’s presence, I should not hesitate to reply to the latter question; but at present, Sir Abbot, let us speak of something else. I love King Richard well, for he is English in heart and soul, though he belongeth by ties of blood to a Norman family. All of us here, priests and laity, are the faithful servants of His Most Gracious Majesty, and if you will consent, Sir Abbot, we will drink in company to noble Richard’s health. Sherwood Forest knoweth how to be freely hospitable when it receiveth Saxon hearts and generous Monks beneath the shade of its old trees.”

“I accept thy kind invitation with pleasure, Robin Hood,” replied the King; “and I am ready to follow thee wherever thou dost wish to conduct me.”

“I thank you for your confidence, good Monk,” said Robin, leading Richard’s horse toward a path ending at the Trysting Tree.

Little John, Will Scarlett, and the four Knights disguised as Monks, followed the King, who was preceded by Robin Hood.

The little escort had hardly entered upon the path when a deer, startled by the noise, ran quickly across the road; but more alert than the poor animal, Robin’s arrow pierced its side with deadly effect

“Well hit!” cried the King, heartily.

“That is not a very wonderful shot, Sir Abbot,” said Robin, looking at Richard in surprise. “All my men, without exception, can kill a deer like that, and my wife herself can draw a bow and accomplish acts of skill far superior to the feeble exploit which I have achieved before your eyes.”

“Thy wife?” repeated the King, in questioning tone. “Thou hast a wife? By the Mass, I am anxious to make the acquaintance of the woman who shares the perils of thine adventurous life.”

“My wife is not the only one of her sex, Sir Abbot, who prefers a faithful heart and a home in the wilderness, to a faithless love and the luxury of a town existence.”

“I will introduce my wife to you, Sir Abbot,” cried Will Scarlett, “and if thou dost not acknowledge that her beauty is worthy of a throne, thou must permit me to declare either that thou art blind or that thy taste is execrable.”

“By St. Dunstan!” returned Richard, “the popular fancy is quite right in calling you the Merrie Men. You want for nothing here lovely women, royal game, fresh verdure, and entire liberty.”

“Yea! we be very happy folk, Sir,” replied Robin, laughing.

The escort soon reached the greensward, where a repast awaited the guests; and this repast, sumptuously furnished with fragrant venison, excited Richard Coeur-de-Lion’s appetite by its mere appearance.

“By my mother’s conscience!” he cried (let us hasten to say that the Lady Eleanor had so little conscience that it was sheer pleasantry to appeal to it), “here is a truly royal dinner!” Whereupon the King took his place at the board and ate with great enjoyment. Towards the end of the meal, Richard said to his host "Thou hast made me anxious to meet the beautiful women who people thy vast domain. Introduce them to me. I am curious to see if they are worthy, as thy red-headed companion assured me, to ornament the Court of the King of England."

Robin sent Will to find the beautiful woodland nymphs, and to tell his men to prepare the sports in which they engaged on days of rest.

"My men will endeavour to amuse you a little, Sir Abbot," said Robin, again taking his place beside the King; "and you will see that there is naught really blameworthy in our pleasures and the wild fashion of our lives. And when you find yourself in the presence of good King Richard, I ask it as a favour that you will tell him that the Merrie Men of Sherwood are neither to be feared by brave Saxons, nor unkind to any who have compassion on the inevitable hardships of the rough life they lead."

"Rest assured, brave yeoman, His Majesty shall know of all that hath happened here, as surely as though he himself had partaken of thy repast in my stead."

"You, Sir, are the most gracious Abbot that I have ever met in all my life, and I am very glad to be able to treat you as a brother. Now be pleased to direct your attention to my archers. There is nothing to equal their skill, and, in order to amuse you, I am sure they will accomplish wonders."

Robin's men then began to draw the bow with such extraordinary steadiness of hand and aim, that the King complimented them with an expression of real surprise.

The exercise lasted about half an hour, when Will Scarlett reappeared, bringing with him Marian and Maude, arrayed in Amazon costumes of Lincoln green cloth, and each carrying a bow and quiver of arrows.

The King opened his eyes in astonishment, and gazed speechless at the charming faces that blushed beneath his gaze.

"Sir Abbot," said Robin, taking Marian by the hand, "allow me to present to you the Queen of my heart, my dearly loved wife."

"Thou mightest well add the Queen of thy Merrie Men, brave Robin," cried the King; "and you have every reason to be proud of inspiring a tender passion in such a charming creature. Dear Madam," continued the King, "allow me to salute you as the Queen of Sherwood Forest, and to render you the homage of a faithful subject."

So saying, the King knelt upon the ground, and taking Marian's white hand, touched it respectfully with his lips.

"Your courtesy is great, Sir Abbot," said Marian, modestly; "but I pray you remember that it doth but ill become a man of your holy character to bow thus before a woman. You should render to God alone that token of humility and respect."

"That is a very moral rebuke for the wife of a simple forester," murmured the King, again taking up his position under the Trysting Tree.

"Sir Abbot, here is my wife," cried Will, leading Maude up to Richard.

The King looked at Maude, and said laughingly

"This lovely lady is without doubt the one who would do honour to a King's palace."

"Yea, Sire," said Will.

"Well, my friend," replied Richard, "I share your opinion, and if you will allow me, I will implant a kiss upon the beautiful cheek of her you love."

William smiled, and the King, who took this smile for a reply in the affirmative, embraced the young woman gallantly.

"A word in your ear, Sir Abbot," said Will, approaching the King, who listened with complacency to the young man. "You are a man of taste," continued Will, "and you will never have anything to fear in Sherwood Forest. From this day forth I promise you a cordial reception every time a happy chance brings you amongst us."

"I thank you for your courtesy, good yeoman," said the King, gaily. "Oh! oh! but what more do I see?" cried Richard, with his eyes upon Will's sisters, who, accompanied by Lilas, appeared before him. "Truly, my lads, your dryads are real fairies." The King took Lilas's hand. "By our Lady!" he murmured, "I did not believe that so beautiful a woman as my sweet Berengaria existed; but, upon my soul, I am forced to confess that this child equals her in purity and beauty. My pretty one," said the King, pressing the little hand he held in his own, "thou hast chosen a very hard life, deprived of all the pleasures of thine age. Dost not fear, poor child, that the stormy-winds of this Forest will destroy thy frail life, as they destroy young flowers?"

"My father," replied Lilas, gently, "the wind is tempered to the strength of the plants; it spareth the feeble ones. I am happy here; one who is dear to me lives in the old wood, and I know no sorrow by his side."

“Thou art right to acknowledge thy love if the man whom thou lovest is worthy of thee, my sweet child,” returned Richard.

“He is worthy of even greater love than I give him, my father,” replied Lilas. “Albeit, I love him as tenderly as can be.”

Saying these words the girl blushed. Richard’s big blue eyes were fixed upon her with such a burning look that, seized with an undefinable fear, she gently drew her hand away from the King’s clasp, and sat down by Marian.

“I own to you, Master Robin,” said the King, “that there is not a single Court in Europe that can boast of gathering around the throne so many young and beautiful women as we see around us. I have seen the women of many countries, and I have never met anything to compare with the sweet and tranquil beauty of Saxon women. Curse me, if any one of the fresh faces that meet my gaze be not worth an hundred women of the East or of any foreign race.”

“I am pleased to hear you speak thus, Sir Abbot,” said Robin. “You prove to me once more that pure English blood flows in your veins. I cannot presume to judge of so delicate a point, for I have never travelled, and know no lands beyond Derbyshire and Yorkshire. Natheless, I am strongly disposed to say with you that Saxon women are the most beautiful in all the world.”

“They are certainly the most beautiful,” cried Will, decidedly. “I have travelled over a great part of the Kingdom of France, and I can certify that I have not met with a single matron or maid who can compare with Maude. Maude is the pick of English beauty, that is my opinion.”

“You have served as a soldier?” asked the King, looking at the young man attentively.

“Yea, Sir,” replied Will, “I have served King Henry in Aquitaine and Poitou, at Harfleur, Evreux, Rouen, and in many other places.”

“Ah, ah!” exclaimed the King, turning his head for fear that Will would end by recognising him. “Robin Hood,” he continued, “your men are preparing to continue the games. I shall be very pleased to witness some fresh exercise of skill.”

“It shall be as you wish, Sir. I will show you how I set about forming my archers’ hands. Much,” cried Robin, “place garlands of roses upon the wands.”

Much executed the order given him, and soon the top of the wand was seen above a circle formed by the flowers.

"Now, my lads," cried Robin, "take aim at the wand; he who misses his stroke will have to give me a good arrow with which he shall receive a blow. Attend, for, by Our Lady, I shall not spare the maladroit. It is well understood that I take part with you, and, in case of unskilfulness, I submit to a like punishment."

Many Foresters missed their aim and received with good grace a sturdy blow. Robin Hood broke the wand in pieces; another was put up in its stead. Will and Little John missed their aim, and amid shouts of laughter from all the onlookers they received the reward of their awkwardness.

Robin had the last shot; but wishing to show the supposed Abbot that in such a case there was no distinction made between himself and his men, he purposely missed the wand.

"Oh, oh, Master!" cried an astonished yeoman, "you have missed the mark."

"'Tis true, i' faith, and I deserve the punishment. Little John, thou art the strongest of us all, and thou wilt know how to strike hard."

"I do not hold with it in the least," replied John; "the mission is a disagreeable one, for 'twould set me at variance with my right hand for ever."

"Very well, then, Will, I ask you."

"Thank you, Robin; I refuse entirely to do thee this kindness."

"I refuse too," said Much.

"I too," cried another man.

"And so do we all!" exclaimed the Foresters with one accord.

"All this is ridiculous childishness," said Robin, severely. "I did not hesitate to punish those who did wrong, you must do the like to me, and as severely as not one of my men will lay his hand upon me, it is for thee, Sir Abbot, to settle the dispute. Here is my best arrow, and I pray you, Sir, to serve me as I served my unskilful archers."

"Nay! I dare not take it upon me to satisfy thee, my dear Robin Hood," cried the King, laughing, "for I have a heavy hand, and I hit hard."

"I am neither tender nor delicate, Sir Abbot; so be easy."

"Thou dost really wish it?" asked the King, baring his muscular arm. "Well, thou shalt have thy wish."

The blow was so vigorously applied that Robin fell to the ground, but he soon rose again.

"I confess before Heaven," said he, with smiling lips and a red face, "that you are the most powerful monk in all merry England. You have too much strength in your arm for a man who doth exercise a holy profession, and I would wager mine head (it is valued at four hundred gold crowns) that you know more about stretching a bow and wielding a cudgel than carrying a crozier."

"It may be so," cried the King, laughing; "and let us add likewise, an thou wilt handling a sword, a spear, or a shield."

"Your conversation and manner reveal rather a man accustomed to the adventurous life of a soldier than a pious servant of Holy Church," returned Robin, examining the King attentively. "I should much like to know who you are, for strange thoughts have come into my head."

"Dismiss those thoughts, Robin Hood; and do not seek to discover whether or no I am the man I represent myself to be," replied the King, quickly.

The Knight, Sir Richard of the Plain, who had been absent since the morning, appeared at this moment in the midst of the group and approached Robin. Sir Richard trembled when he perceived the King, for Richard's face was well known to him. He looked at Robin, but the young man seemed completely ignorant of his guest's high rank.

"Do you know the name of him who wears the garb of an Abbot?" Sir Richard asked in a low voice.

"Nay," replied Robin; "but I think I discovered a few minutes agone that those russet locks and those large blue eyes could only belong to one man in England, to..."

"Richard Coeur-de-Lion, King of England," cried the Knight, involuntarily.

Robin Hood and Sir Richard fell upon their knees.

"I now recognise the noble countenance of my Sovereign," said the Outlaw Chief; "'tis our good King Richard of England. May God protect your gracious Majesty!" A benevolent smile played upon the King's lips. "Sire," continued Robin, without changing his humble attitude, "your Majesty knoweth who we be Outlaws driven from the homes of our fathers by unjust and cruel oppression. Poor and without shelter, we have found a refuge in the solitude of the woods. We have lived by the chase, on alms exacted by force, no doubt, but without violence, and with the most engaging courtesy. These alms were given with good or bad grace; but we never received them before we were quite certain that he who refused to come to the help of our distress carried a Knight's ransom at the least in his wallet. Sire, I implore your Majesty's pardon for my companions and their Chief."

"Rise, Robin Hood," replied the King, kindly, "and tell me the reason why thou didst lend me the help of thy brave archers in the assault on the Castle of Nottingham."

"Sire," returned Robin Hood, who, while obeying the King's command, still held himself respectfully inclined before him, "your Majesty is the idol of all true English hearts. Your actions, so worthy of general respect, have won for you the gracious title of 'bravest of the brave,' 'the man of the lion's heart,' who, like a loyal Knight, triumphs personally over his enemies and extends his generous protection to the unfortunate. Prince John earned your Majesty's displeasure, and when I heard of my King's appearance before the walls of Nottingham Castle, I secretly placed myself under his orders. Your Majesty took the Castle which sheltered the rebel Prince, my task was accomplished, and I retired without saying anything, because the knowledge of having loyally served my King satisfied my inmost wishes."

"I thank thee cordially for thy frankness, Robin Hood," Richard replied; "and thine affection for me is very gratifying. Thou dost act and speak like an honest man. I am pleased, and bestow full and entire pardon on the Merrie Men of Sherwood Forest. Thou hast had it in thy power to do wrong, but thou hast not taken advantage of this dangerous power. Thou hast only levied courteous contributions upon rich Normans, and then only in order to supply the needs of thy band. I excuse thy faults they were only natural in such an exceptional position; but, as the Forest laws have been broken, as Princes of the Church and noble Lords have been obliged to leave bribes out of their immense treasures in thine hands, thy pardon needs be set down in writing so that thou mayest live henceforth in safety, free from all reproach and all pursuit. To-morrow, in the presence of my Knights, I will proclaim aloud that the ban of proscription, which hath placed thee below the meanest serf of my kingdom, is entirely removed. I restore to thee and to all those who have participated in thine adventurous career the rights and privileges of free men. I have said it, and I swear to keep my word by the help of Almighty God."

"Long live Richard Coeur-de-Lion!" cried the Outlaws with one voice.

"May the Blessed Virgin protect your Majesty for ever," said Robin Hood, in a tone of emotion, and kneeling upon one knee on the ground, he respectfully kissed the generous Monarch's hand.

After this token of gratitude, Robin rose, sounded his horn, and the Merrie Men, who had all been variously occupied, some in drawing the bow, others in wielding the quarterstaff, at once abandoned their respective occupations to group themselves in a circle around their young Chief.

"Brave comrades," said Robin, "kneel, all of you, upon the ground, and bare your heads; ye are in the presence of your legitimate sovereign, of the well-beloved Monarch of Merry England, of Richard Coeur-de-Lion. Do homage to our noble Master and Lord." The Outlaws obeyed Robin's command, and while the troop remained humbly bowed before Richard, Robin made known to them their sovereign's clemency. "And now," added the young man, "make the old Forest ring with your joyous hurrahs. A great day hath dawned for us, my lads; ye are free men by the grace of God and of noble Richard."

The Merrie Men did not need fresh encouragement to express their inward joy; they gave vent to such a formidable hurrah, it were easy to believe that the echo of it was heard two miles off from the Trysting Tree.

This noisy clamour stilled, Richard of England took up the thread of the conversation, and invited Robin and all his troop to accompany him to Nottingham Castle.

"Sire," replied Robin, "the flattering notice that your Majesty deigns to show me, fills my heart with unutterable joy. I belong body and soul to my Sovereign, and if he will permit me, I will choose from among my men an hundred and forty archers who will humbly serve your most gracious Majesty with absolute devotion."

The King, as much flattered as surprised by the heroic Outlaw's humble demeanour in his presence, thanked Robin Hood cordially, and making him send his men back to their momentarily suspended games, took a cup from the table, filled it to the brim, drank it to the dregs, and said with an expression of friendly curiosity "And now, friend Robin, tell me, I prithee, who is that giant over yonder; for it is difficult otherwise to describe the huge lad whom Heaven hath likewise blessed with such an honest face. Upon my soul, I thought until to-day that I was more than ordinary tall, but I see now that if I stood beside that jolly dog, I should look but an innocent chicken. What breadth of limb, what vigour! The man is magnificently made!"

"He is likewise as good, Sire," replied Robin, "as his strength is enormous; he could stay the march of an army with his single arm, and yet he will listen to a touching story with the simple innocence of a child. The man who hath the honour to attract your Majesty's attention is my brother, my companion, my dearest friend. He hath a heart of gold, a heart as true as the steel of his invincible sword. He wieldeth the staff with such wonderful skill that he hath never once been beaten; moreover, he is the best archer in the county, and the finest lad in all the world."

"Truly, these be praises right pleasant to hear, Robin," returned the King, "for he who inspires them is worthy to be thy friend. I should like to speak with this honest yoeman. What is his name?"

"John Naylor, Sire; but we call him Little John on account of his small stature."

"By the Mass," cried the King, laughing, "a band of such Little Johns would greatly terrify those dogs of infidels. Ho there, fine tree of the forest, tower of Babylon, Little John, my lad, come to me; I would fain look at thee nearer."

John approached with bared head, and awaited with an air of quiet assurance for Richard's commands.

The King asked the young man several questions relating to the extraordinary strength of his muscles, tried to wrestle with him, and was respectfully vanquished by his gigantic adversary. After this trial, the King took part in the games and exercises of the Merrie Men as naturally as though he had been one of their companions, and finally declared that it was long since he had spent such an enjoyable day.

That night the King of England slept under the protection of the Outlaws of Sherwood Forest, and the next day, after doing justice to an excellent breakfast, he prepared to take the road once more to Nottingham.

"My brave Robin," said the Monarch, "could you place at my disposal some clothes like those worn by your men?"

"Yea, Sire."

"Well, then, give me and my Knights costumes like thine own, and we will have a diverting scene upon our entry into Nottingham. Our men of office are alway extraordinarily active, whenever the presence of a superior puts them on their good behaviour, and I feel certain the good Reeve and his valiant soldiers will give us proofs of their invincible courage."

The King and his Knights donned the costumes chosen by Robin, and after a gallant kiss bestowed upon Marian, in honour of all the ladies, Richard, accompanied by Robin, Little John, Will Scarlett, Much, and a hundred and forty archers, gaily took the road to his lordly dwelling.

At the gates of Nottingham, Richard commanded his suite to give vent to a shout of victory.

This formidable hurrah brought the citizens to the thresholds of their repective houses, and at sight of a body of Merrie Men, armed to the teeth, they imagined that the King had been killed by the Outlaws, and that the robbers, whetted by their bloody victory, were going to descend upon the town and massacre all its inhabitants. Distracted with fear, the poor creatures rushed about in disorder, some into the most obscure recesses of their dwellings, others straight before them. Others pealed the bells, besought the aid of the town guard, and went to find the Reeve, who by an extraordinary miracle had completely disappeared.

The King's troops were about to make a dangerous attack upon the supposed Outlaws, when their Chiefs, little desirous of entering upon a contest without knowing the cause of it, put a check upon their bellicose ardour.

"Behold our warriors," said Richard, with a sly look at the cowardly defenders of the town. "Meseemeth the citizens, as well as the soldiers, cling to life. The Reeve is absent, the leaders tremble; good Heavens, but these cowards deserve exemplary punishment."

The King had scarce arrived at this by no means flattering conclusion concerning the citizens of Nottingham, when his own personal body-guard, led by a Captain, left the Castle in all haste, in line of battle and with spears at rest.

"By St. Denis, my fine fellows joke not," cried the King, putting to his lips the horn that had been given him by Robin. Twice he sounded a call betokening the advance to the Captain of his Guards, and the latter, recognising the signal agreed upon by the Monarch, lowered his arms, and respectfully awaited the approach of his Sovereign.

The news of the return of Richard of England, triumphantly accompanied by the Prince of Outlaws, spread as quickly as the news of the approach of the Outlaws with murderous intent. The citizens, who had prudently retired into the recesses of their houses, sallied out again with pale faces, but with smiles upon their lips; and as soon as they learnt that Robin Hood and his band had won the King's favour, they pressed round the Merrie Men, complimenting this one, shaking the hand of that, vying with one another in proclaiming themselves the friends and protectors of them all. From the midst of the multitude cries of felicitation and joy arose, and one heard these words repeated on every side "Glory to noble Robin Hood, glory to Robin Hood, the tender and true!"

The voices growing more and more emboldened, proclaimed the presence of the Outlaw Chief so loudly and enthusiastically, that Richard, tired of the increasing clamour, cried at last "By my crown and sceptre, meseemeth that thou art King here, Robin."

"Ah, Sire," replied the young man, with a bitter smile, "do not attach any importance or value to these tokens of apparent friendship; they are but the vague result of the gracious favour with which your Majesty doth overload the Outlaw. One word from King Richard could change the admiring shouts which my presence here excites, into howls of hatred, and these very men would, pass at once from praise to blame, from admiration to scorn."

"Thou speakest true, my dear Robin," laughed the King; "rogues are the same everywhere, and I have already proved the heartlessness of the citizens of Nottingham. When I came here with the intention of punishing Prince John, they greeted my return to England with a profound reserve. For them, might is right, and they did not know that with thy help it would be easy for me to capture the Castle and expel my brother. Now they show us the fair side of their ugly faces, and plaster us with their vile flattery. Let us leave the wretches, and think only of ourselves. I have promised thee, Robin, a noble reward for the services which thou hast rendered me. Put thy request; King Richard hath but one word, to which he ever holds, and he aye fulfils the promises he doth make."

"Sire," replied Robin, "your gracious Majesty hath made me happy beyond expression in renewing your generous offer of support. I accept it for myself, for my men, and for a Knight, who, disgraced by King Henry, hath been obliged to seek a refuge in Sherwood Forest. This Knight, Sire, is a warm-hearted man, the worthy father of a family, a brave Saxon, and if your Majesty will do me the honour to hearken to the history of Sir Richard of the Plain, I am sure you will grant the request I am about to make."

“We have given our kingly word to grant any favour which it may please thee to beg of us, friend Robin,” replied Richard, affectionately. “Speak out fearlessly, and tell us by what chain of circumstances this Knight fell into disfavour with my father.”

Robin hastened to obey the King’s command, and recounted as briefly as possible the history of Sir Richard of the Plain.

“By our Lady,” cried Richard, “this good Knight hath been cruelly treated and thou hast acted nobly in coming to his aid. But it shall never be said, brave Robin Hood, that in this case again thou hast surpassed the King of England in large-heartedness and generosity. I will protect thy friend in my turn; bring him to our presence.”

Robin called the Knight, who, with a heart beating high with hope, presented himself respectfully before the Monarch.

“Sir Richard of the Plain,” said the King, graciously, “thy valiant friend, Robin Hood, hath just told me of all the misfortunes that have occurred to thy family, and the dangers to which thou hast been exposed. In doing thee justice, I am happy to testify to the sincere admiration and profound esteem which his conduct inspires in me. I restore to thee possession of thy goods, and for one year thou shalt be freed of all imposts and taxes. Besides this, I annul the decree of banishment proclaimed against thee, in order that the remembrance of this act of injustice shall be entirely effaced both from thy memory and from that of thy fellow citizens. Return to thy Castle; letters of full and entire pardon shall be delivered to thee by our command. As for thee, Robin Hood, ask something more from him who feels that he can never repay his debt of gratitude, even after having granted all thy wishes.”

“Sire,” said the Knight, kneeling upon the ground, “how can I express the gratitude which fills my heart?”

“By telling me that thou art happy,” the King replied gaily; “and by promising me never again to offend against members of Holy Church.’”

Sir Richard kissed the hand of the generous Monarch, and discreetly retired among the groups standing a short distance from the King.

“Well, brave archer,” continued the Monarch, turning toward Robin Hood, “what dost desire of me?”

“Naught at present, Sire; later on, if your Majesty will permit me, I shall ask one last favour.”

“It shall be granted thee. Now, let us return to the Castle. We have received generous hospitality in Sherwood Forest, and it is to be hoped that

Nottingham Castle can furnish resources for a right royal feast. Thy men have an excellent mode of preparing venison, and the fresh air and fatigue of the march had singularly sharpened our appetites, so that we ate greedily.”

“Your Majesty had the right to eat your fill,” Robin laughingly replied, “considering that the game was your own property.”

“Our property or that of the first hunter that comes along,” the King returned gaily; “and if all other folk make out that the deer of Sherwood Forest belong exclusively to us, there is a certain yeoman whom thou dost know very well, Robin, and three hundred of his companions forming a merry band, who reck mighty little of the prerogative of the Crown.”

Talking thus, Richard proceeded toward the Castle, and the enthusiastic acclamations of the populace followed the King of England and the famous Outlaw to the gates of the old fortress with their noisy clamour.

The generous Monarch fulfilled the promises he had made to Robin Hood the very same day; he signed an act annulling the ban of proscription, and restored to the young man possession of his rights and title to the wealth and dignities of the Huntingdon family.

The day after this happy event, Robin assembled his men in the Court-yard of the Castle, and announced to them the unhoped-for change in his fortunes. This news filled the hearts of the brave yeomen with sincere happiness; they loved their Chief devotedly, and with one accord they refused the liberty he wished to give them. It was decided forthwith that for the future the Merrie Men were to cease from levying contributions even on Normans and Churchmen, and that they should be fed and clothed afresh by their noble master Robin Hood, who had become the rich Earl of Huntingdon.

“My lads,” added Robin, “since ye wish to live near me and to accompany me to London, if I be commanded to proceed thither by our well-beloved Sovereign, ye must swear to me never to reveal the situation of our cave to any one. Let us reserve this precious refuge in case of fresh misfortune.”

The men loudly took the oath demanded by their Chief, and Robin urged them to make their preparations for departure without delay.

On March 30th, 1194, the eve of his departure for London, Richard held a council at Nottingham Castle, and amongst the many important matters that were then discussed was the establishment of Robin’s right to the Earldom of Huntingdon. The King peremptorily announced his wish to restore to Robin Hood the property held by the Abbot of Ramsey, and Richard’s councillors formally promised to carry out to his entire satisfaction the act of justice, which was to make amends to the noble Outlaw for the misfortunes he had so courageously borne.

CHAPTER XIII

Before leaving, perhaps for ever, the ancient Forest that had so long sheltered him, Robin felt such an intense regret for the past, and such apprehensions for the future, but little in keeping with the prospect which Richard's generosity had opened up for him, that he decided to await under the protecting shelter of his leafy home the definite results of the arrangements made by the King of England.

It was a lucky decision that kept him at Sherwood, for Richard's coronation, which took place at Winchester shortly after his return to London, so much absorbed his thoughts that all proceedings tending to restore the recognised but still unproclaimed rights of the young Earl of Huntingdon, were rendered inexpedient.

The coronation festivities ended, Richard departed for the Continent, to which he was summoned by a desire for vengeance upon Philip of France, and, relying on the promises of his Counsellors, he left the re-establishment of brave Robin Hood's fortunes to their care.

Baron Broughton (Abbot of Ramsey), who enjoyed the wealth of the Huntingdon family, set in motion all his influence and the resources of his immense fortune, to retard the execution of the decree made by Richard in favour of the true inheritor of the titles and domains of this rich Earldom. But all the time he was gathering to himself friends and protectors, the prudent Baron did not attempt openly to oppose the edict issued by Richard, contenting himself with asking for time, and loading the Chancellor with rich presents; and thus maintaining quiet possession of the patrimony he had usurped.

While Richard was fighting in Normandy, and the Abbot of Ramsey gradually winning over the entire Council to his cause, Robin Hood confidently awaited the message that would inform him of his having entered into possession of his father's estates.

Eleven months of fruitless waiting lessened the young man's patience. He plucked up courage, and trusting in the kindness shown him by the King during his sojourn at Nottingham, he addressed a request to Hubert Walter, Archbishop of Canterbury, Keeper of the Great Seal of England, and Lord Chief Justice of the Kingdom. Robin Hood's request reached its destination. The Archbishop was aware of it. But if this very just demand, was not openly repulsed, it remained unanswered, and was treated as though it had never been made.

The ill-will of those who had to do with restoring Robin Hood's possessions, manifested itself in this inactivity, and it was not difficult for the young man to guess that an underhand struggle was going on against him. Unluckily, the Abbot of Ramsey, who had become Baron of Broughton, was too strong an adversary to make it possible for Robin to revenge himself upon him in Richard's absence. He therefore decided to shut his eyes to the injustice of which he was a victim, and prudently to await King Richard's return.

Acting on this decision, Robin Hood sent a second message to the Lord Chief Justice. He confessed to great dissatisfaction at the evident protection accorded to the Abbot of Ramsey, and declared that, hoping for prompt justice on Richard's return to England, he would again place himself at the head of his men, and continue to live in Sherwood Forest as he had done before.

Hubert Walter apparently paid no attention to Robin's second message; but, while taking strong measures to restore peace and order throughout England, while destroying numerous bands of men who had gathered together in different parts of the kingdom, the Archbishop left Richard's friend and his Merrie Men in peace.

Four years went by in the false calm that precedes the storm of revolutionary disorders. One morning, the news of Richard's death fell upon the kingdom of England like a thunderbolt, and filled all hearts with fear.

The accession to the throne of Prince John, who seemed deliberately to have undertaken the task of making himself universally hated, was the signal for a series of crimes and acts of reckless violence.

During this disastrous period, the Abbot of Ramsey, accompanied by a numerous suite, passed through Sherwood Forest on his way to York, and was waylaid by Robin. The Abbot and his escort were taken prisoners, and could only obtain their freedom at the cost of a considerable ransom. He paid, storming and promising himself a fierce revenge the while; and this revenge was not long delayed.

The Abbot of Ramsey addressed self to the King, and John, who at that time greatly needed the support of the nobles, lent an ear to the Abbot's complaint, and forthwith sent a hundred men under Sir William de Grey, the eldest brother of John de Grey, the King's favourite, in pursuit of Robin Hood, with orders to cut the whole band to pieces.

Sir William de Grey, who was a Norman, hated the Saxons, and moved by this feeling of hatred he swore ere long to lay the head of his insolent adversary at the feet of the Abbot of Ramsey.

The unexpected arrival of a company of soldiers of warlike appearance and clad in coats of mail, caused a panic in the little town of Nottingham; but when it was understood that their destination was the Forest of Sherwood, and their purpose the extermination of Robin's band, terror gave place to discontent, and some of the Outlaws' friends hastened to warn them of the fate in store for them. Robin received the news as a man on his guard, who awaits the reprisals of a deeply injured enemy, and he did not doubt for an instant that the Abbot of Ramsey had lent his assistance to this sudden expedition. Robin assembled his men, therefore, and prepared to offer a stout resistance to the Norman attack. He at once sent out a skilful archer, disguised as a peasant, who was to meet the enemy and offer to conduct them to the tree known throughout the county as the rallying-point of the band of Merrie Men.

This simple trick, which had already rendered Robin such good service, again succeeded completely, and Sir William de Grey accepted the offices of Robin's spy without hesitation.

The genial Forester then put himself at the head of the troop and took them through bushes, thorns, and thickets for three hours, without noticing, apparently, that their coats of mail rendered the progress of the unhappy soldiers very difficult. Then, when they were overcome by the crushing weight of their armour and spent with fatigue, the guide led them, not to the Trysting Tree, but to the middle of a vast clearing surrounded by elms, beeches, and century-old oaks. On this spot, where the turf was as fresh and as green as the lawn before a country house, was gathered, some sitting, some standing, the entire band of Merrie Men.

The sight of the enemy, to all appearances disarmed, revived the soldiers' spirits. Without giving a thought to their guide, who had slipped into the ranks of the Outlaws, they uttered a shout of triumph and threw themselves upon the Foresters. To the great surprise of the Normans the Merrie Men hardly quitted the listless attitude they had taken up, and almost without a change of position, they raised their immense cudgels above their heads, whirling them round and round with shouts of laughter.

Exasperated by this derisive reception, the soldiers rushed confusedly, sword in hand, upon the Foresters, who, without manifesting the slightest emotion, knocked down the threatening weapons with lusty blows of their cudgels; then, with dazzling rapidity, they dealt a shower of deadly blows upon the heads and shoulders of the Normans. The clatter of the coats of mail and helmets mingled with the cries of the terrified soldiers and the shouts of the Foresters, who did not appear to be defending their lives, but merely exercising their skill upon inanimate bodies.

Sir William de Grey, who was in command of the soldiers, saw with rage in his heart, the best of his troop falling around him, and he cursed the folly that had made him load his men with such heavy accoutrements. In a combat with men of such superior strength, and where the victory was so uncertain, bodily skill and agility were the first elements of success, and the Normans could hardly move without an effort.

Terrified at the probable result of a total defeat, the Knight called a truce, and thanks to Robin's generosity, he was able to take back the remnants of his troop to Nottingham.

It is needless to add that the grateful Knight promised himself secretly to recommence the attack on the following day with men more lightly equipped than the Normans he had brought from London.

Robin Hood, who had guessed Sir William's hostile intentions, arranged his men in order of battle on the same spot on which the combat of the previous day had taken place, and awaited calmly the appearance of the soldiers, who had been met some two miles from the Trysting Tree by one of the Foresters sent as scouts to different parts of the Forest in the neighbourhood of Nottingham.

This time the Normans were clad in the light garb of archers, and armed with bows and arrows, small swords, and bucklers.

Robin Hood and his men had been at heir posts for about an hour, and the soldiers had not yet appeared. The young man began to think his enemies had changed their minds, when an archer, who had been posted as sentinel, ran up in all haste to announce that the Normans who had lost their way) were now marching directly upon the Trysting Tree, where, by Robin's orders, the women had assembled.

This news struck Robin with a fatal presentiment. He turned pale, and said to his men "Let us intercept the Norman dogs; they must be stopped on their way. Woe to them and to us if they get near our women!"

The Foresters rushed as one man to the road taken by the soldiers in order to bar their way or to reach the Trysting Tree before them. But the soldiers had advanced too far for the Merrie Men either to stop them or even to be in time to prevent a terrible disaster. The manners, or rather the want of manners, of this lawless period, made Robin and his companions fear cruel retaliation upon the group of completely isolated women.

The Normans soon reached the Trysting Tree. At sight of them the women rose in terror, uttering cries of anguish, and fled distractedly in every direction open to them. In the weak and forlorn position of their terrified wives, Sir William saw at a glance a means of satisfying his hatred against the Saxons; he resolved to seize them, and by their deaths to avenge the ill success of his first attack upon Robin Hood.

At their Chief's command, the soldiers halted, and for a second Sir William followed with his eyes the tumultuous movements of the poor distracted women. One of them ran forward, and her companions endeavoured to join her, and to protect her flight. This evident solicitude conveyed to the Norman the superior position of her who headed the retreat; he also considered that it would be according to the rules of war to strike her first, and seizing his bow, he fixed an arrow to it, and coolly took aim. The Knight was a good marksman; the unhappy woman, struck between the shoulders, fell bleeding in the midst of her companions, who, without a thought of their own safety, knelt around her, uttering piercing cries.

A man had seen the miserable Norman's murderous action, and hoping to arrest the fatal stroke, he took aim at the Knight. His arrow reached its mark, but too late, for Sir William had shot Marian before he met his own death at the hand of Robin Hood.

"Lady Marian is wounded mortally wounded!"

The terrible news flew from mouth to mouth; it brought tears to the eyes of all the Saxons, who dearly loved their young Queen. As for Robin, he was mad with grief; he did not speak, he did not weep, but he fought. Little John and he leapt like tigers thirsting for blood upon the Normans, and scattered death through their ranks without uttering a cry, without even opening their livid lips. Their active arms seemed endowed with superhuman strength; they avenged Marian, and they avenged her cruelly.

The bloody battle lasted for two hours; the Normans were cut to pieces, and shown no grace or mercy. One soldier alone escaped, and went to tell Sir William de Grey's brother of the fatal result of the expedition.

Marian had been removed to a clearing some distance from the scene of the combat, and Robin found Maude there, weeping as she vainly tried to staunch the blood which gushed from a frightful wound.

Robin knelt beside Marian, his heart torn with anguish; he could neither speak nor move, and felt as though he must choke. At Robin's approach Marian had opened her eyes and looked tenderly at him. "Thou art not wounded, my dear?" she asked, in a weak voice, after a moment's mute contemplation.

"Nay, nay," murmured Robin between his clenched teeth.

"The Holy Virgin be praised!" added Marian, smiling. "I have prayed to Our Dear Lady for thee, and she hath heard my prayer. Is this terrible combat over, dear Robin?"

"Yea, sweet Marian, our enemies have disappeared; they will never come back again. But let me speak of thee, think of thee; thou art... I... Holy Mother of God! This grief is more than I can bear."

"Come, come, courage, my well-beloved Robin; lift up thy head, look at me," said Marian, still trying to smile. "My wound is not deep, it will soon be cured; the arrow hath been withdrawn. Thou knowest well, my dear, that if there were anything to fear, I should be the first to perceive that mine hour was come..., Look, look at me, Robin dear."

As she spoke, Marian tried to draw Robin's head towards her; but her last strength was spent in the effort, and when the young man raised his weeping eyes to her, she had fainted.

Marian soon came to herself, and after having sweetly consoled her husband, she expressed a wish to rest a little, and soon fell into a profound slumber.

As soon as Marian was asleep upon the mossy bed in the shade of the trees, that had been prepared for her by her companions, Robin went to inquire into the condition of his band. He found John, Will Scarlett, and Much occupied in tending the wounded and burying the dead. The number of the wounded was very inconsiderable, for it resolved itself into half a score of men seriously hurt, and there was not a single death to deplore amongst the Outlaws. As for the Normans, we know that they no longer existed, and several large ditches were dug in the glade to serve as their sepulchre.

On awaking after three hours' deep sleep, Marian found her husband beside her, and the angelic creature, still wishing to give some consoling hope to him she loved so dearly, began softly to say that she felt no weakness at all, and would soon be well.

Marian was suffering, she felt a deathly depression creeping over her, and she knew there was no hope; but Robin's anguish wrung her heart, and she sought to soften, as much as lay in her power, the fatal blow which must soon be dealt him.

Next morning she was worse, inflammation had set in in the wound, and all hope of recovery faded even from Robin's heart.

"Dear Robin," said Marian, laying her burning hands in those of her husband, "my last hour approaches; the hour of our separation will be cruel, but not insupportable to such as have faith in the mercy and goodness of Almighty God."

"Oh, Marian, my beloved Marian!" cried Robin, breaking into sobs, "hath the Holy Virgin abandoned us, that she can permit this desolation of our hearts? I will die at thy death, Marian, for it will be impossible to live without thee."

"Religion and duty will be the support of thy weakness, my Robin," replied the young wife, tenderly. "Thou wilt resign thyself to bear the sorrow that overwhelms us, because it hath been imposed on thee as a Heavenly decree; and thou wilt live, if not happy, at least calm and strong, amidst the men whose happiness depends on thy life. I am going to leave thee, but, ere I close mine eyes to the light of day, let me tell thee how much I have loved thee, how much I do love thee. If the gratitude that fills all my being could be clothed in visible form, thou wouldst comprehend the strength and the extent of a feeling that hath no equal but my love. I have loved thee, Robin, with the confident surrender of a devoted heart; I have consecrated my life to thee, only asking of God the one gift of pleasing thee."

"And God hath granted thee that gift, dear Marian," said Robin, trying to moderate the violence of his grief; "for I can tell thee truly that thou alone hast filled my heart, that whether at my side or far from me, thou hast ever been my only hope and sweetest consolation."

“If Heaven had permitted us to grow old together side by side, dear Robin,” replied Marian; “if a long succession of happy days had been granted to us, the separation would have been still more cruel, for then thou wouldst have had less strength to support the crushing sorrow. But we are both young, and I leave thee alone at a time of life when solitude is crowned by remembrance, perhaps even by hope... Take me in thine arms, dear Robin, so... let me rest my head against thine. I would whisper my last words in thine ear. I would have my soul take its flight lightly and happily. I would breathe my last sigh upon thy heart.”

“Beloved Marian, speak not so,” cried Robin, in heartrending tones. “I cannot bear to hear that fatal word ‘separation’ upon thy lips. Oh, Holy Mother of God! Holy Protectress of the afflicted! Thou who hast ever granted my humble prayers! Grant me the life of her whom I love! Grant me the life of my wife, I pray thee, I beseech thee with clasped hands and on bended knees!”

And Robin, with his face bathed in tears, raised supplicating hands to Heaven.

“Thou dost address a vain prayer to the Divine Mother of the Sorrows of Mankind, sweetheart,” said Marian, laying her pale face against Robin’s shoulder. “My days, or rather mine hours, are numbered. God hath sent me a dream to warn me.”

“A dream! What dost say, dear child?”

“Yea, a dream; listen to me. I saw thee, surrounded by thy Merrie Men, in a vast clearing of Sherwood Forest. Thou wast evidently giving a feast to thy brave comrades, for the trees of the old wood were twined with garlands of roses, and purple streamers waved merrily upon the perfumed breath of the breeze. I was seated by thee; I held one of thy hands clasped in mine, and my heart was full of unutterable joy, when a stranger, with a pale face and black garments, appeared before us, and beckoned to me with his hand to follow him. I arose in spite of myself, and, still in spite of myself, I obeyed the dark stranger’s summons. Natheless, before leaving thee I questioned thee with a look, for my lips could not even give vent to a sigh from my anguished bosom. Thy calm and smiling looks met mine. I directed thine attention to the stranger; thou didst turn thy head toward him and didst smile again. I made thee understand that he was leading me far away from thee. A slight pallor spread over thy face, but the smile did not leave thy lips. I was desperate, a convulsive trembling seized my limbs, and I began to sob with my head buried in my hands.

The stranger still led me on. When we found ourselves a short distance from the clearing, a veiled woman appeared before me; the stranger stepped back, and this woman, raising the veil that hid her features from me, disclosed the sweet face of my mother. I uttered a cry, and trembling with wonder and fear, I held out my arms to her.

“Dear child,” said she, in a tender and melodious voice, “weep not, submit with the resignation of a Christian soul to the common destiny of all mortals. Die in peace, and leave without sorrow a world that hath only vain pleasures and passing joys to offer thee. There exists beyond this earth an abode of infinite bliss. Come and dwell there with me. But ere thou follow me, look!” Uttering these words my mother passed her hand, white and cold as marble, across my forehead. At this touch the veil fell from mine eyes till then obscured by tears and I saw around me a resplendent circle of maidens of supernatural beauty and with a divine smile upon their fresh and shining faces. They did not speak, but they looked at me, and seemed to convey to me how happy I should feel in coming to augment their numbers.

While I was admiring my future companions, my mother leant toward me, and said tenderly, “Dear child of my heart, look, look again.”

I obeyed my mother’s tender injunction. All around me was spread a vast garden of sweet-smelling flowers, trees laden with fruit crimson apples and golden-tinted pears bent their branches to the thick grass, which was all enamelled with the blossoms of the white Easter daisies. The air was full of a sweet perfume, and a multitude of many-coloured birds fluttered and sang in the balmy air. I was enchanted. My heart, which late was full of grief, gradually lightened, and my mother, smiling at my happiness, said to me again with an expression of caressing tenderness, “Look, dear child, look!”

I heard the sound of light footsteps behind me. The sound was scarce audible, yet it seemed like music in mine ears, and without understanding the feeling that redoubled the beating of my heart, I turned round.

Oh! then, Robin, my joy was complete, for thou wast running down the garden path; thou wast running to me with shining eyes and open arms. “Robin! Robin!” I cried, trying to run to thee. My mother held me back. “He will come,” she said. “He comes here he is.” And taking both our hands she joined them together, kissed me on the brow, and said, “My children, you are here where joy is everlasting, where love is never ending; you are in the abode of the elect; be happy!"

"The end of the dream escapes my memory, dear Robin," continued Marian, after a short silence. "I awoke, and I understood that Heaven had sent me a warning and a hope. I must leave thee, doubtless for many years, but not for ever; God will re-unite us in the blissful eternity of the next world."

"Dear, dear Marian!"

"My beloved," continued the young wife, "I feel that my strength is exhausted. Let me rest my head upon thy heart entwine thine arms around me, and like a tired child that falls asleep upon its mother's bosom, will I sleep my last sleep."

Robin embraced the dying woman feverishly, while his burning tears fell upon her brow.

"God bless thee, my beloved," repeated Marian in a more and more feeble voice. God bless thee in the present and in the future. May He extend His Divine mercy over thee and over all whom thou dost love. All grows dark about me, and yet I would fain see thee smile once more. I would fain read in thine eyes how dear I am to thee, Robin! hear my mother's voice. She calls me! she calls me! Farewell!"

"Marian! Marian!" cried Robin, falling on his knees beside his young wife's couch. "Speak to me! speak to me! I cannot let thee die! No, I cannot! Almighty God, come to my aid! Holy Virgin, take pity on us!"

"Dear Robin," murmured Marian, "I wish to be buried 'neath the Trysting Tree... I want my grave to be covered with flowers..."

"Yea, dearest Marian yea, my sweet angel, thou shalt sleep beneath a carpet of balmy verdure, and when my last hour is come, I swear it by all I hold sacred, I will demand a place beside thee from him who closes mine eyes..."

"I thank thee, my beloved. My heart's last beat is for thee, and I die happy, for I die in thine arms... Good-bye, good"

A sigh and a kiss fell from Marian's lips; her hands feebly clasped Robin's neck, around which they were entwined, then she grew quite still.

Robin remained bending over her sweet face for a long time. For long he hoped to see the closed eyes open again; for long he waited for a word from the pale lips, a tremble from that dear form; but alas! he waited in vain. Marian was dead!

“Holy Mother of God!” cried Robin, laying the motionless body of the poor girl upon the bed, “she is gone; gone for ever! my beloved, my only joy, my wife!”

And, maddened with grief, the unhappy man rushed from the spot crying wildly, “Marian is dead! Marian is dead!”

CHAPTER XIV

Robin Hood religiously performed his wife's last wishes. A grave was dug beneath the Trysting Tree, and the mortal remains of the angelic creature who had been the guide and consolation of his life, were interred beneath a bed of flowers. The maidens of the County hastened to attend the funeral ceremony, strewed Marian's tomb with roses, and mingled their tears with poor Robin's sobs.

Allan and Christabel, informed by messenger of the sad occurrence, arrived early in the day; they were both in despair, and bitterly bewailed the irreparable loss of a well-beloved sister.

When all was over, and Marian's body had disappeared from sight, Robin Hood, who had presided over the heartrending details of the burial, gave a piercing cry, trembled from head to foot like a man wounded full in the breast by a murderous arrow, and without listening to Allan, without answering Christabel, who was frightened by his fierce despair, he escaped from their hands, and disappeared into the wood. Poor Robin wished to be alone with his grief, alone with God.

Time, which calms and softens the greatest griefs, had no such effect upon the open wound in Robin's heart. He wept ceaselessly, he mourned continuously, the wife whose sweet face had brightened their woodland home, who had found happiness in his love, who had been the only joy of his life.

Life in the Forest soon became insupportable to the young man, and he retired to Barnsdale Hall. But there, the distressing memory of the past was livelier than ever, and Robin Hood fell into a gloomy apathy that numbed all his moral faculties. He seemed to be alive neither in mind, spirit, nor memory.

This splenetic sorrow, if it may be so described, threw a shadow of the deepest melancholy over the band of Merrie Men. The grief of their young leader had quenched the light of their mirth, and they wandered through the old Forest like lost spirits. No longer did Friar Tuck's loud laugh echo through the greenwood; no longer was heard the sound of the nimble quarter-staves striking against each other with vigour and skill, amidst a chorus of bravos. Arrows remained idle within their quivers, and the butts were deserted.

Want of sleep and a distaste for food wrought a visible change in Robin’s features; he grew pale, his eyes were encircled by dark rings, a dry cough shook his frame, while a slow fever finished the work commenced by sorrow. Little John, who silently watched this cruel transformation, at last succeeded in making Robin understand that he must not only leave Barnsdale, but even Yorkshire, and seek to assuage his grief in the distractions of travel. After an hour’s resistance, Robin had taken Little John’s sage advice, and before leaving his companions, he had placed them under the command of his excellent friend.

In order to run no risks of being recognised, Robin dressed himself as a peasant, and in this simple garb he arrived at Scarborough. Here he stopped to rest at the door of a small hut occupied by the widow of a fisherman, and claimed her hospitality. The good dame gave our hero a kindly welcome, and as she served him with food, she related to him all the little sorrows of her life, adding that she owned a boat manned by three men, whose support pressed heavily on her, although they were insufficient in numbers to row the boat to shore when it was fully laden with a full catch of fish.

Eager to kill time in any way whatever, Robin Hood offered, for a small wage, to complete the number of boatmen, and the peasant woman, much taken with her guest’s kindly disposition, gladly accepted the offer of his services.

“What are you called, fair lad?” asked the woman, when the arrangements for Robin’s installation in the hut were complete.

“I am called Simon of Lee, good dame,” replied Robin Hood.

“Well, then, Simon of Lee, to-morrow you will begin your work; and if the trade suits you, we shall long live together.”

Early next day, Robin Hood embarked with his new companions, but it must be owned that, despite his will, Robin, who was ignorant of the most elementary details of the work, was of no use whatever to the experienced fishermen. Luckily for our friend, he had not to deal with evil comrades, and, instead of grumbling at his stupidity, they only laughed at the idea of his bringing with him his bow and arrows.

“If I had these fellows in Sherwood Forest,” thought Robin, “they would not be so ready to laugh at my expense; but there every one to his own trade. I certainly am not their match in the one they follow.”

After loading up the boat to the gunwale with fish, the men unfurled the sails and made for the jetty. As they sped along, they saw a little French corvette making for them. The corvette did not appear to have many men on board, but none the less the fishermen seemed terrified at her approach, and cried out that they were lost. “Lost, and wherefore?” questioned Robin.

“Wherefore? Simpleton that thou art!” returned one of the fishermen. “Because the corvette is manned by the enemies of our nation; because we are at war with them; because, an they board us, they will take us prisoners.”

“I trust indeed that they will never do that,” replied Robin; “we will e’en try to defend ourselves.”

“What defence can we offer? They are fifteen, we are three.”

“Then you do not count me, my man?” asked Robin.

“Nay, my lad; thy hands have never been blistered by handling oars. Thou art no sailor, and shouldst thou chance to fall into the water, there would be one fool the less upon the earth. Nay, never take offence, thou art a pretty fellow, I bear thee no ill will; but thou art not worth thy keep.”

A half smile hovered on Robin’s lips. “I am not very sensitive,” said he; “however, I will prove to you that I am some good in the presence of danger. My bow and arrows will help us out of this difficulty. Bind me to the mast, for my hand must be sure; then let the corvette come within range.”

The fishermen obeyed; Robin was firmly lashed to the mainmast, where he waited with bended bow.

As the corvette drew nearer, Robin took aim at a man standing in the bows, and sent him rolling on the deck with an arrow through his throat. A second sailor met a like fate. The fishermen overwhelmed with wonder and delight uttered a shout of triumph, and the foremost among them pointed out to Robin the commander of the corvette. Robin killed him as quickly as he had killed the others. The two vessels placed themselves side by side. There were only ten men left upon the corvette, and soon Robin had reduced the numbers of the unhappy Frenchmen to three. As soon as the fishermen perceived that only three men were left alive on board the boat, they determined to seize her, and this was made still easier because the Frenchmen seeing that all opposition was dangerous and useless, had laid down their arms and surrendered at discretion. The sailors were given their lives, and allowed to reurn to France on board a fishing smack.

The French corvette was a fine prize, for she was carrying a large sum of money to the King of France, twelve thousand silver pieces.

Needless to add, that, in taking possesion of this unlooked-for treasure, the gallant sailors made excuses to him at whom they had been poking fun so short a time before; then, with heartfelt disinterestedness, they declared that the whole prize belonged to Robin, because he had won the victory by his skill and bravery.

“Good friends,” said Robin, “the right of settling this question is mine alone, and thus will I arrange matters half the corvette and her contents is to be the property of the poor widow to whom this boat belongs, and the rest will be divided betwixt the three of you.”

“Nay, nay,” said the men; “we will not allow thee to deprive thyself of the wealth thou hast acquired without our aid. The vessel doth belong to thee, and if thou wilt, we will be thy servants.”

“I thank you, good lads,” returned Robin; “but I cannot accept this testimony of your devotion. The division of the prize is to be according to my wishes, and I will employ the twelve thousand pieces in building for you and the poor inhabitants of the village of Scarborough healthier houses than you possess at present.”

The fishermen tried, but in vain, to change Robin’s plans. They tried to persuade him that in giving a quarter of the twelve thousand pieces to the widow, to the poor, and to themselves, he would still be acting very generously. But Robin would not listen to a word, and ended by imposing silence on his honest companions.

Robin Hood stayed for several weeks with the good people who had been made so happy by his generosity. Then one morning, tired of the sea, hungering to see the old woods and his dear companions once more, he called the fishermen together and announced his departure to them.

“My good friends,” said Robin, “I leave you with a heart full of gratitude for all the care and kindness ye have lavished upon me. Probably we shall never meet again; but I hope that ye will preserve a pleasant memory of him who hath been your guest, of your friend Robin Hood.”

Before the wonderstruck fishermen had recovered their power of speech, Robin Hood had disappeared. To this day the little bay, upon whose shores stood the hut which sheltered the noble Outlaw, bears the name of Robin Hood’s bay.

It was in the early hours of a beautiful June morning that Robin Hood reached the confines of Barnsdale Forest. With a spirit stirred by deep emotion he entered a narrow path, where often, alas! the dear creature, whose absence he must ever mourn, had awaited him with merry heart and smiling lips. After some moments' silent contemplation of the spots which bore witness to his lost happiness, Robin breathed more freely. He lived again in the past, and the memory of Marian stole lightly and sweetly like a perfumed vapour along the dim alleys, on the flowery meads, and into the glades shaded from the sun's rays by the foliage of the old oaks. Robin Hood followed the beloved shadow, with it he penetrated into the thick groves, in its steps he descended into the vales, and, still accompanied by the sweet vision, he arrived at the crossroad where the greater part of the Merrie Men were usually to be found.

To-day, however, the large open space was empty. Robin raised his hunting-horn to his lips and made the old wood resound with a vigorous call. A cry, or rather a sort of clamour, answered the notes of the horn; the branches of the surrounding trees were abruptly pushed aside, and Will Scarlett, followed by the whole band, threw himself upon Robin Hood with open arms.

"Robin, my dear, dear Robin," murmured Will in a broken voice, "so thou art returned at last, the Lord be praised! We have awaited thee with much impatience, have we not, Little John?"

"Yea, 'tis so indeed," replied John, whose eyes were sadly contemplating the traveller's pale face; "and Robin hath pitied our anguish and anxiety, since he is come back to us."

"Yea, good John, and I trust never to leave thee again."

John took Robin Hood's hand and wrung it with a violence so full of tenderness, that he had not the heart to complain of the pain which the too ardent pressure caused him.

"Be welcome among us!" cried the Foresters, joyously; "be welcome a thousand times!"

The transports of delight induced by his presence shed a refreshing balm upon our hero's incurable heart wound. He felt that he must no longer give himself up to his grief, and leave helpless the brave men who had attached themselves to his evil fortunes.

This courageous resolution caused the blood to mount to poor Robin's face. His heart, alas! revolted against his will; but the latter was the stronger, and after addressing a mental farewell to Maid Marian's memory, he held out his hand to his faithful followers, saying in a strong, calm voice, "Henceforth, dear friends, ye will have in me your friend, your guide, your chief, Robin Hood the Outlaw, your captain, Robin Hood!"

"Hurrah!" cried the Foresters, throwing their bonnets in the air; "hurrah! hurrah!"

"Be my Merrie Men once more," said Robin, "and let happiness once more reign supreme here. To-day we will rest, to-morrow the chase, and let the Normans beware!"

Robin Hood's new exploits soon became the subject of men's talk through the length and breadth of England, and the rich Lords of Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, and Yorkshire contributed to the needs of the poor and to the support of the band.

Long years slipped by without bringing any change in the condition of the Outlaws. But before closing this book, we must acquaint our readers with the fate of some of our characters.

Sir Guy Gamwell and his wife died at very advanced ages, leaving their sons at Barnsdale Hall, to which they had retired on ceasing to form part of Robin Hood's band.

Will Scarlett had followed his brothers' example; he lived in a charming house with his dear Maude, already the mother of several children, and still as tenderly loved by her husband as in the first days of their union. Much and Barbara settled down near Maude; but Little John, who had had the misfortune to lose Winifred, having no reason to desert the Forest, remained faithful to Robin's commands. Besides, let us hasten to add, John loved Robin too dearly to have ever thought for a single moment of leaving him, and the two companions lived side by side, thoroughly convinced that nothing but death would have the power to separate them.

Let us not forget to mention good Tuck, the pious chaplain who had consecrated so many marriages. Tuck remained faithful to Robin; he was still the spiritual adviser of the band, and he had lost none of his remarkable qualities; he was still the dignified drunken monk, noisy and boastful.

Halbert Lindsay, Maude's foster-brother, appointed Warden of Nottingham Castle by Richard Coeur-de-Lion, fulfilled, the duties of his post so well that he succeeded in keeping it. Hal's wife, pretty Grace May, retained her charms in spite of passing years, and her little Maude promised to be the living image of her mother later on.

Sir Richard of the Plain lived quietly and happily with his wife and two children, Herbert and Lilas. The meanest Saxon preserved an affection and gratitude for Robin Hood which would only end with life; and there was merrymaking in the Castle whenever the gallant Outlaw, drawn by the magnet of affection, came there with Little John to rest from his fatigues.

Shortly after signing Magna Carta, King John, after a series of monstrous actions, started personally in pursuit of the young King of Scotland, who fled before him, and marched towards Nottingham, scattering desolation and terror in his path. John was accompanied by several generals whose exploits had earned for them pithy surnames, such as Jaleo the Ruthless, Mauleon the Bloody-Minded, Walter Much the Murderer, Sottim the Cruel, and Godeschal of the Iron Heart. These wretches were the chiefs of a band of foreign mercenaries, and their footsteps were marked by rape, fire, and death. The news of the approach of this robber band fell like a funeral knell upon the ears of the terrified populace, who fled in dismay, leaving their homes at the mercy of the Normans.

Robin Hood heard of the odious conduct of the soldiers, and resolved thereupon to inflict upon them the same tortures to which they forced their unlucky victims to submit.

The Foresters responded to their leader’s appeal with an enthusiasm which would have made King John’s men tremble, for all the old hatred of the conquered for their conquerors, of Saxon for Norman, remained unappeased.

The band prepared for battle; Robin Hood awaited his opportunity.

In approaching Sherwood Forest, the Norman chiefs sent a small body of scouts in advance, and when the greater part of the army penetrated into the wood, they saw, hanging motionless from the branches of trees along the roadside, or expiring in the dust, the men whose return they had vainly looked for. This terrifying spectacle chilled some of their warlike ardour; but as they were in large numbers, they continued their march. Robin could not openly attack a whole army; he could only hope to succeed by stratagem; and he therefore skilfully turned to advantage the agility and inimitable dexterity of his men. He harassed the soldiers, killing them with arrows that came they knew not whence; he pursued them, slaughtering the stragglers, and pitilessly massacring all those who had the ill-luck to fall into his hands. A general terror paralysed the movements of the army; it had quite lost its bearings, and the superstitious ideas of the age led the men to believe that they were the victims of some infernal witchcraft. One of the foreign leaders, Sottim the Cruel, endeavoured to put an end to a massacre which threatened to cause terror and confusion throughout the army. He called a halt, conjured his men in the interests of their own safety to overcome their fears, and at the head of fifty determined Normans, he started to explore the underwood. But scarcely had the little band plunged into the inextricable windings of a by-path than a volley of arrows descended from the tree-tops and arose from the depths of the thickets, striking down Sottim the Cruel and his fifty companions.

The disappearance of these scouts and their intrepid leader, redoubled the terror of the Normans, and lent them wings to fly through Sherwood Forest to Nottingham. Arrived there, spent with fatigue, and furious with rage, they abandoned themselves with fresh zest to the unqualified excesses which had signalised their sojourn in the valley of Mansfield.

On the morrow of these fatal reprisals, the army, still led by King John, made its way into Yorkshire, burning and massacring at will the unoffending inhabitants of the villages through which it passed.

Whilst the Normans thus ploughed for themselves a furrow of tears and blood and fire, the Saxons, some of whom had been despoiled of their wealth, others violently torn from their wives and children, joined themselves, drunk in their turn with murder and carnage, to Robin's band, and our hero, at the head of eight hundred brave Saxons, started in pursuit of the blood-stained cohort.

A providential chance protected the peaceful dwelling of Allan Clare and the Castle of Sir Richard of the Plain. Neither of these two houses was in the way of the pillagers, for it goes without saying that John did not spare the rich Saxons. He chased them from their dwellings, and permitted his favourites to instal themselves as masters in the homes of the unhappy gentlemen. But then Robin and his formidable companions would arrive, and the new owner and the soldiers whom he had paid to help him to maintain by force the rights of this unjust usurpation, fell into the hands of the Outlaws and were mercilessly put to death.

The King learned from the public outcry, and the complaints of his men, of the Saxons' triumphal avenging progress, and sent against him a small portion of his army, hoping that it would succeed in investing Robin Hood's band, which was said to be encamped in a little wood. It is hardly necessary to say that John's soldiers had not even the satisfaction of returning to announce their defeat to the King; they were killed without having so much as reached the supposed camp in which they were to surprise Robin Hood.

Our hero's prowess made a great noise throughout England, and his name became as formidable to the Normans as had been that of Hereward the Wake to their predecessors in the reign of William I.

John reached Edinburgh, but not being able to capture the King of Scotland, he returned to Dover, leaving orders to his scattered troops to rejoin him. But the greater part of these troops were captured by Robin Hood's men, some in Derbyshire and some in Yorkshire. In the mean time King John died and his son Henry succeeded him.

In the reign of this Prince, Robin Hood's existence was not so adventurous or active as it had been during the bloodstained reign of King John, for the Earl of Pembroke, tutor to the young King, set to work seriously to improve the condition of the people, and succeeded in maintaining peace throughout the kingdom.

The sudden suspension of all physical and mental activity depressed Robin and weakened his powers. It is true our hero was no longer young; he had attained his fifty-fifth year, while Little John was gently nearing his sixty-sixth. As we have already mentioned, time had brought no solace to Robin's grief, and the memory of Marian, as lively and fresh as on the morrow of their parting, had sealed Robin's heart to any other love.

Marian's tomb, piously tended by the Merrie Men, was covered every year with fresh flowers; and many a time, after the return of peace, had the Foresters surprised their Chieftain, pale and sad, kneeling upon the greensward which extended like a green girdle around the Trysting Tree.

Day by day, Robin's sorrow grew deeper and more overpowering. Day by day, his face took a more dejected expression; the smile left his lips, and John, the patient and devoted John, could not always succeed in obtaining from his friend a reply to his anxious questions.

It came about, however, at long last, that Robin was touched by his comrade's care for him, and he consented, at his prayer, to seek the assistance of a Lady Abbess whose convent was a short distance from Sherwood Forest. The Abbess, who had already seen Robin Hood and knew all the particulars of his life, welcomed him heartily, and offered him every assistance in her power to bestow.

Robin Hood showed himself sensible of the frank welcome of the kindly Nun, and asked her if she would be good enough to bleed him immediately. The Abbess consented. She led the sick man to a cell, and with wondrous skill she performed the wished-for operation; then, as skilfully as a clever physician could have done, she bandaged up the invalid's arm and left him, nearly worn out, stretched upon a bed.

A strangely cruel smile played about the Nun's lips when, coming out from the cell, she locked the door and carried away the key. Let us say a few words about the Nun in question.

She was related to Sir Guy of Gisborne, the Norman Knight who, in an expedition, attempted with the aid of Lord Fitz-Alwine, against the Merrie Men, had had the misfortune to die the death which he had hoped to give Robin Hood. However, it would not have occurred to this woman to avenge her cousin, had not the latter's brother, too cowardly to expose himself in an honourable combat, persuaded her that she would be doing both an act of justice and a good deed in ridding the kingdom of England of the too celebrated Outlaw. The weak-minded Abbess submitted to the will of the miserable Norman. She committed the murder, and cut the radial artery of the unsuspicious Outlaw.

Having left the sick man for an hour to the overpowering sleep which was the inevitable consequence of so great a loss of blood, the Nun went silently to him again, took off the bandage which covered the vein, and when the blood had again begun to flow, she crept away on tip-toe.

Robin Hood slept till morning with no feeling of discomfort, but when he opened his eyes and tried to rise, he felt so weak that he thought his last hour was come. The blood, which had flowed ceaselessly from the wound, flooded the bed, and Robin Hood then grasped the full danger of the situation. By an almost superhuman effort of will he managed to drag himself to the door. He tried to open it, found it was locked, and, still sustained by the strength of his will a will so powerful that it succeeded in reviving his exhausted body he got to the window, opened it, and leaning out, tried to leap from the sill; then, failing in this, he made one last appeal to Heaven, and, as though inspired by his good angel, he took his hunting-horn, raised it to his lips, and with difficulty made some feeble sounds.

Little John, who could not be separated from his well-beloved comrade without sorrow, had passed the night under the walls of the Convent. He had just awakened, and was preparing to take measures to see Robin Hood, when the dying echoes of the hunting-horn sounded in his ears.

“Treachery! treachery!” cried John, running like a madman towards the little wood where a party of the Merrie Men had encamped for the night. “To the Abbey, my lads! to the Abbey! Robin Hood is calling to us! Robin Hood is in danger!”

In an instant the Foresters were on their feet and hastening in the wake of Little John, who was hammering at the gate of the Abbey. The attendant refused to open. John lost not a second in prayers, which he knew would be of no avail. He smashed in the door with a boulder of granite laying at hand, and guided by the sound of the horn, he gained the cell where, in a pool of blood, lay poor Robin Hood. At the sight of Robin dying, the strong Forester felt his strength fail him; tears of grief and indignation rolled down his bronzed cheeks. He fell on his knees, and taking his old friend in his arms, he said to him amid his sobs “Master, my well-beloved master, who hath committed the infamous crime of striking a sick man? Whose is the sacrilegious hand which hath committed this murder in a Holy House? Answer me, for pity’s sake, answer!”

Robin slowly shook his head. “What boots it,” he said, “now that all is over for me? Now that I have lost to the last drop all the blood in my veins “

“Robin,” replied John, “tell me the truth. I ought to know; I must know. Must I accuse this cowardly assassin of deliberate treachery?”

Robin nodded his head.

“Well, beloved friend,” continued John, “give me the supreme satisfaction of avenging thy death. Permit me in my turn to bring murder and sorrow where murder hath been committed, where for me hath arisen the most cruel sorrow. Say one word, make one sign, not one vestige of this hateful house shall remain. I will have it destroyed stone by stone. I still have the strength of a giant, and I have five hundred brave men to come to my assistance.”

“Nay, John, nay! I do not wish thee to lift up thy clean and honest hands against these women who are vowed to God; that would be sacrilege. She who hath slain me obeyed, doubtless, a will stronger than her religious feelings. She will suffer the tortures of remorse in this life, an she repent; and she will be punished in the next world, an she win not from Heaven the pardon which I accord her. Thou dost know, John, that I have never harmed a woman nor permitted one to be harmed, and for me a Nun is doubly sacred and to be respected. Let us speak no more of that, my friend. Give me my bow and arrow. Carry me to the window. I would breathe my last where my last arrow falleth."

Robin Hood, supported by Little John, took aim, drew the string of his bow, and the arrow, skimming the tree-tops like a bird, fell some distance away.

"Farewell, good bow; farewell, trusty arrows," murmured Robin, in a trembling voice, letting them slip from his hands. "John, my friend," he added, in a calmer tone, "bear me to the spot where I have said that I wished to die."

Little John gathered Robin in his arms, and laden with this precious burden went down to the Court of the Convent, where, by his orders, the Merrie Men had quietly assembled. But, at the sight of their Chief lying like a child against John's strong shoulder, at the sight of his white face, they uttered a cry of fury, and wanted to punish forthwith those who had struck Robin.

"Peace, my lads!" said John; "leave vengeance to God. For the moment the state of our well-beloved master should alone occupy our thoughts. All of you follow me to the place where the last arrow shot by Robin is to be found."

The troop divided in two to make a passage for the old man between them, and John walked on with a firm step, and soon gained the spot where Robin's arrow was stuck in the ground.

There John spread upon the turf some garments brought by the Merrie Men, and on them he laid, with infinite precautions, the poor sufferer.

"Now," said Robin, in a weak voice, "call all my Merrie Men. I would be surrounded once again by the brave hearts that have served me so well and so faithfully. I would breathe my last in the midst of my gallant, my life-long comrades."

John sounded the horn three several times, for this call, while warning the Outlaws of an imminent danger, hastened their progress.

Among the men who came in response to John's bugle-call was Will Scarlett; for although he had ceased to belong to the band, he paid them frequent visits, and he rarely passed a week without coming to greet his friends and bringing down a stag, which he would share with them.

We will not attempt to depict William's despair and stupefaction on learning Robin's condition, and seeing the distorted countenance of that dear friend who was so worthy of the love that he inspired.

"Holy Virgin!" said Will. "Ah! my poor friend! my poor brother! my dear Robin, what hath happened? Tell me all; art wounded? Doth he who laid his cursed hand upon thee still live? Tell me, tell me, and to-morrow he will have expiated his crime!"

Robin Hood raised his aching head from John's arm, upon which it had been resting, looked at Will with an expression of lively tenderness, saying, with a sad, wan smile "I thank thee, good Will, but I do not wish to be avenged. Put from thy heart all feeling of hatred for the murderer of one who dies, if not without regret, at least without pain. Doubtless I had reached the term of my existence, since the Divine Mother of the Saviour, my Holy Protectress, hath abandoned me at this fatal moment. I have lived long, Will, and I have been loved and honoured by all who have known me. Painful though it be to leave you, good and dear friends," continued Robin, with a tender look at Little John and Will, "that grief is sweetened by a Christian thought, by the certainty that our separation will not be for ever, and that God will unite us in a better world. Thy presence at my death-bed is a great consolation to me, dear Will, dear brother; for, indeed, we have been good and loving brothers. I thank thee for all the tokens of affection with which thou hast surrounded me. I bless thee with heart and and with lips; I pray the Holy Mother to make thee as happy as thou dost deserve to be. Thou wilt tell thy dear wife Maude from me, that I did not forget her when praying for thy happiness, and thou wilt embrace her for her brother, Robin Hood."

William sobbed convulsively.

"Weep not, Will," said Robin, after a moment's silence; "thou dost grieve me too much. Has thy heart then become as weak as a woman's that thou canst not bear sorrow more hardily?"

William did not reply; he was choked with tears.

"Old comrades, dear friends of my heart," continued Robin, addressing the Merrie Men grouped silently around him, "ye who have shared my toils and my dangers, my joy and my grief, with a devotion and fidelity beyond all praise, take my last thanks and my blessing. Farewell, my brothers; brave Saxon hearts, farewell. Ye have been the terror of the Normans; ye have gained for ever the love and gratitude of the poor. Be happy, be blessed, and pray sometimes to our dear Protectress, the Mother of the Saviour of Mankind, for your absent friend for Robin Hood."

Stifled groans were the only reply to Robin's words. Distracted with grief, the yeomen heard these farewells, but refused to realise their cruel significance.

"And thou, Little John," resumed the dying man, in a voice that grew weaker every moment, "thou of the noble heart, thou whom I love with all the strength of my soul, what will become of thee? To whom wilt thou give the affection thou didst bestow on me? With whom wilt thou dwell beneath the grand old forest trees? Oh, John! thou wilt be very lonely, very desolate, very miserable; forgive me for leaving thee thus. I had hoped for a sweeter death. I had hoped to die with thee, beside thee, bow in hand, defending my country. God hath willed it otherwise. Praised be His Name! My hour approaches, John. Mine eyes are failing. Give me thy hand; I would die holding it in mine own, John. Thou dost know my wishes; thou knowest where my mortal remains are to be interred beneath the Trysting Tree, beside her who awaits me beside Marian."

"Yea, yea!" sighed John, sadly, his eyes brimming with tears; "thou shalt be — "

"I thank thee, old friend. I die happy. I go to be with Marian for ever. Farewell, John — " The great Outlaw's dying voice became inaudible. A light breath touched Little John's face, and the soul of the friend he had so dearly loved took its flight from earth.

"To your knees, my children!" said the old man, crossing himself; "the noble and generous Robin Hood hath ceased to live!"

All heads were bowed as William uttered a short but fervent prayer over Robin; then, with the help of Little John, he carried the body to its last resting-place. Two Foresters dug the grave beside Marian, and there Robin was laid upon a bed of flowers and foliage. Little John placed Robin's bows and arrows beside him; and the dead man's favourite dog, which might never serve another master, was killed upon the grave and interred with him.

Thus ended the career of one of the most extraordinary characters in the annals of England. May he rest in peace!

The possessions of the band were loyally divided among its members by Little John, who wished to pass the remaining days of his sorrowful life in some peaceful retreat. The Outlaws separated, some going to live in

Nottingham, others settling down here and there in the neighbouring counties, but none had the heart to remain in the old green wood. Robin Hood's death had rendered that abode too painfully sad.

Little John could not decide to leave the Forest after all. He stayed there for several days, wandering about the desert paths like a soul in pain, and calling aloud to him who would never answer him again. At last he decided to go and seek shelter with Will Scarlett. Will received him with open arms, and sad as he himself, he tried to afford some consolation to this inconsolable grief; but John would not be comforted.

One morning William, seeking Little John, found him in the garden standing upright, his back against an oak, and his head turned toward the forest. John's face was very pale; fixed and staring eyes appeared to have no sight in them. William seized cousin's arm in terror, and called to in a trembling voice; but the old man made no reply — he was dead.

This unexpected blow was a great grief to William. He carried Little John the house, and the next day the Gamwell family followed this dearly-loved brother to Hathen Churchyard, situated six miles Castleton in Derbyshire.

The tomb containing the remains Little John still exists, and is remarkable for the extraordinary length of the stone that covers it. This stone presents to curious eye two initials, J.N., very artfully engraven in the heart of the granite.

A legend recounts that a certain antiquary, a great lover of the curious, had the gigantic tomb opened, removed the bones, and bore them away as worthy of a place in his cabinet of anatomical curiosities. Unhappily for the worthy man of learning, from the moment that these human remains entered his house, he knew no repose; he was visited by sickness, ruin, and death. And the gravedigger who had helped to profane the tomb was equally afflicted in his tenderer feelings. Then the two men understood that they had offended against Heaven in violating the secrets of a tomb, an they piously reinterred the old Forester's remains in holy ground.

After which the antiquary and the grave-digger lived quietly and happily. God, who grants remission to all repented sins, had pardoned their sacrilege.

THE END

THE SON OF MONTE-CRISTO by Jules Lermina

Jules Lermina (1839–1915) was a French author, who began writing as a journalist in 1859. During his career, he was arrested for his socialist political opinions and received Victor Hugo's support. He published a number of Edgar Allan Poe-inspired collections, as well as two sequels to Dumas' popular classic *The Count of Monte-Cristo,* which were titled *The Son of Monte-Cristo* (1881) and *The Treasure of Monte-Cristo* (1885).

Jules Lermina

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VOLUME I

CHAPTER I

A MARRIAGE CONTRACT AND ITS END

In the month of July of the year 1829, a man created a great sensation in Paris, and even attracted the attention of the lions of society. Where he came from — who he was — what was his past life — none knew; and the mystery surrounding him only tended to make the hero of the season more interesting.

The Count of Monte-Cristo, from Italy — from Malta — no one knew whence — had unlimited credit with the banking house of Danglars, one of the largest in Paris; owned the finest mansion — a superb villa — at Auteuil, and the handsomest turnout on the road, which he presented to a banker's wife, without letting any one know his reason for doing so; all this was sufficient to make him the central point around which revolved the social gossip of the day. But, besides this, the handsome stranger makes his appearance at the theatres in the company of a lady in Grecian dress, whose transcendent beauty and countless diamonds awake alike admiration and cupidity. Like moths around the flame, society flutters about the legendary count, and it is principally the golden youth who find in him their centre of attraction. Among the latter were more especially Albert Morcerf, the son of a general, Debray, a young and talented attaché at the Foreign Office, Beauchamp, and Chateau-Renaud, who served as the asteroids of the new star in the Parisian sky.

Sometimes they were joined at those famous dinners which only a Monte-Cristo understood how to give, by a Count Andrea Cavalcanti, who at first appeared there with his father, Major Cavalcanti. Although he was a stranger, he was received in society through his acquaintance with Monte-Cristo and with Baron Danglars, in whose banking house he had a large sum on deposit.

The young count, a perfect Apollo, with classically-cut features, did not fail to produce an impression upon Eugenie, a proud, black-eyed brunette, the only daughter of the millionnaire Danglars; and as the millions of the father, in conjunction with the peculiar beauty of the daughter, began to interest the count, it was not long before they thought of marriage. Danglars, who had been a heavy loser in certain speculations of which the public was ignorant, hoped to rehabilitate himself with the millions of his prospective son-in-law, and therefore there was nothing to prevent the marriage of the proud Eugenie and the handsome Andrea.

One July evening, representatives of the high financial society, and a few members of the aristocracy, were invited to Danglars’ house to witness the signing of the marriage contract of the only daughter of the house with the Italian, Count Andrea Cavalcanti, of the princely house of Cavalcanti. At five o’clock, when the guests arrived, they found all the rooms in the mansion brilliant with wax-lights.

The bride was simply yet tastefully attired: a white satin dress trimmed with lace of the same color; a single white rose, which was half hidden in her raven black hair, formed the only ornament of the young lady, whose jewels, it was well known, represented a fortune. The young count was surrounded by representatives of the gilded youth, who give the tone in the Jockey Club, and are the recognized authorities for all Europe in questions of taste, fashion, and sport.

Baron Danglars was the centre of a group of bankers, to whom he developed his celebrated projects which had increased his millions, taking good care, however, not to mention his losses. Madame Danglars, the handsome mother of the pretty Eugenie, was surrounded by a circle of young and old cavaliers, who paid court to her with the greatest ceremony, and whose adorations were accepted by the lady as a tribute due her, although it could not be denied that she favored the young attaché Debray.

The lawyers were already there, yet the ceremony appeared to be purposely delayed, as if they were waiting for the arrival of a missing guest. And this was indeed the case.

When the footman announced the Count of Monte-Cristo a stir was created among the guests. The star of the evening was overwhelmed with questions, which he paid no attention to, but quietly busied himself with the three representatives of the Danglars family.

The way he observed the young Count Cavalcanti was very strange, though very few noticed it, as the Count of Monte-Cristo was relating a robbery which had been committed in his house, in which one of the thieves had been murdered, most probably by his own comrade. No one noticed the pallor of Count Cavalcanti, as they were too much interested in Monte-Cristo's story. When he had finished, the ceremony was proceeded with.

The marriage contract between Mademoiselle Eugenie and Count Andrea Cavalcanti was read, the millions mentioned therein causing a sensation even among the cream of the financial and aristocratic world, and the signing of the paper was next in order. This circumstance recalled to Madame Danglars the absence of a friend of the house, the procureur du roi Villefort, and she asked Monte-Cristo whether he knew where he was.

"I am indirectly the cause of the absence of the procureur du roi," said the count, as if to apologize. "The man who was murdered in my house was recognized as a former galley-slave named Caderousse, and a letter was found in his pocket which bore a remarkable address."

Every one crowded around the count, while the young bridegroom slowly walked toward a neighboring room.

"Could you tell us the address?" asked Madame Danglars.

"Certainly," replied the count. "You will all laugh over it. It was none other than that of the hero of our reunion to-night — Count Andrea Cavalcanti."

The surprised guests turned around as if to exact an explanation from the latter. He had, however, already left the room. The servants were searching all over the house for him, when a new commotion was heard.

The dazed servants returned from their search, and behind them appeared a detective accompanied by several policemen.

"I am looking for a man named Andrea Cavalcanti," said the detective, in the well-known monotonous way which never fails to make an impression even upon those who are not principals.

"By what right?" asked Danglars, who could not suppress his uneasiness.

"Andrea Cavalcanti is charged with having murdered the galley-slave Caderousse, with whom he was formerly chained in the galleys."

Like lightning from a clear sky this announcement fell upon the aristocratic assembly. Madame Danglars fainted, the policemen searched the house, but could not find the culprit, the guests ran here and there like a flock of sheep surprised by a fox, the servants stood motionless with dazed faces, consternation and confusion reigned supreme.

CHAPTER II

A CALM BRIDE

No one among all the company in Danglars' house possessed their self-possession so much as just the one who was the least expected to do so.

Two days after the catastrophe, when Eugenie's most intimate friend, the music teacher, Louise d'Armilly, came to condole with her, the proud daughter of the banker repulsed her with a disdainful laugh.

"I am not made for marriage," she said; "at first I was engaged to Monsieur de Morcerf, whose father shot himself a few days ago, in a fit of remorse at having acquired his wealth by dishonorable means; then I was to be married to Prince Cavalcanti, to add to the millions which my father possesses, or which he perhaps does not call his own, the imaginary wealth of a — jail-bird."

"What should be done now?" asked her modest friend in an anxious tone.

"Fate shows my path," answered Eugenie, firmly. "I am not intended to become the slave of a hypocritical and egotistical man. You are aware that my inclination pushes me toward the stage, where my voice, my beauty, and my independent spirit will assure me success. The time has now arrived when I must decide: here, the scandal and contempt of the crowd; there, applause, fame, and honor. I foresaw it all, though I did not think it would come in such a shameful way. I have fifty thousand francs pin-money, and my jewels are worth as much more. Order a carriage; I have passports for both of us; in an hour we depart for Belgium."

Louise listened to her friend speechless with astonishment; although she knew the firmness of her character, she was not prepared for so much independence.

"But we two girls alone," she hesitatingly said, "cannot — "

"I have looked out for that, too," replied Eugenie, calmly; "the passport is made out in the name of Monsieur Leon d'Armilly and sister; while you go for the carriage I will pack the trunks, and change myself into Monsieur Leon d'Armilly."

Louise mechanically left the room to order the carriage to come to Danglars' house. When she came back an elegant young man stood near the trunks, whom no one would have recognized at the first glance as the proud and courted beauty, Eugenie Danglars. With great difficulty the two girls carried the trunk through a side door of the house and deposited it at the next street corner. There the coachman awaited them, and in a quarter of an hour they had left Paris.

Let us now return to Prince Cavalcanti, *alias* Benedetto, the hero of the interrupted party at the banker Danglars' house.

With that cunning peculiar to criminals who scent danger from afar, he had made his exit at the right time. After he had pocketed the diamonds which formed a part of Eugenie's *trousseau*, and which were exposed in the parlor, he scaled the window, slipped an overcoat over his dress, and made his way out of the house. In thirty minutes he reached an out-of-the-way suburb of Paris. Without losing a minute of his precious time, he took a carriage, and left the city under the pretence of having to catch a friend, who had departed for the chase on the previous day. The big tip he gave the driver spurred the latter on, and at the end of an hour Benedetto found himself at Loures, where he discharged his driver, saying that he would spend the night there.

Benedetto now formed a decisive plan. He did not remain in Loures, but went on foot to Chapelle-en-Serval, a mile distant, where he arrived covered with dirt and dust, and entered the nearest inn, telling the host that he had fallen from his horse. "If you could get me a coach or a horse, so that I could return to Compiegne, I would be very grateful to you."

The host really had a horse at his disposal, and in a quarter of an hour Benedetto, accompanied by the host's son, was on the road to Compiegne, which he reached about midnight. After he had discharged the boy at the market-place of the little city, he went to the inn called the Bell and Bottle, which he had patronized in former times, and to which he was admitted now.

After Benedetto had eaten a hearty supper, he inquired if he could get a room on the ground floor, but was forced to accept one on the first story, as the other had been taken by a young man who had just arrived with his sister.

The hunted culprit was so tired out by his exertions that he fell into a deep sleep, and did not wake up early next morning, as he had intended, but at nine o’clock. Struck by an indescribable fear, he quickly dressed himself and peered through the window blinds. He recoiled in terror, for his first glance had fallen upon two policemen who leaned against the doors with their guns in their hands. His first thoughts were that he was followed and was lost. He quickly collected himself, suppressed his excitement, and seizing a piece of paper, scribbled these words on it with a lead pencil:

“I have no money, but do not desire to owe anything. The inclosed diamond pin will fully pay for my bill. I was ashamed to acknowledge this, and therefore left at five o’clock.”

After he had attached the pin to the paper, he opened the door and crawled up the chimney with the agility of a chimney-sweep. Here, however, the difficulty was to continue his way without being perceived by any one. He therefore returned and entered another chimney, intending to wait there until all danger was over. He already began to think himself saved, when he lost his balance and crashed with a loud noise through the opening and into a room which was occupied, as was betrayed by a sudden scream.

A young man and a lady were in the room. The latter had uttered the cry, while the former pulled vigorously at the bell-rope.

“Rescue me — hide me!” were the first words the villain spoke. He was about to say more, but the words stuck in his throat, for he had recognized the young man as Eugenie Danglars.

“Andrea, the murderer!” exclaimed the two women.

“Have mercy! rescue me!” implored Benedetto.

“It is too late,” replied Eugenie, “the door is being opened.”

At the same moment, the policemen, followed by the whole inn staff, entered the room. Benedetto saw he was lost. He pulled out a dagger, as if he wished to attack his captors, but desisted when he saw it would be fruitless.

“Kill yourself!” exclaimed Eugenie, with the accent of a tragedy queen.

“Bah!” replied Benedetto, “it is too early yet; the whole thing is a misunderstanding, and I have friends.”

With great coolness he held out his hands to the policemen, who put handcuffs on them.

“Give my regards to your father, Mademoiselle Danglars, and do not be ashamed. You are my bride, and we ought to have been man and wife to-day,” said Benedetto, sarcastically, as he left the room with the policemen, leaving Eugenie exposed to the curious and contemptuous glances of the waiters.

CHAPTER III

A FAMILY TRAGEDY

The procureur du roi, Villefort, was one of the most respected and influential men in Paris, and his reputation as district-attorney was spotless. Married the second time to a handsome and refined lady, Monsieur de Villefort spent his leisure time in the society of his wife, a grown daughter by his first marriage, named Valentine, his little son, Edouard, presented to him by his second wife, and his old father, Noirtier de Villefort, in an elegant mansion in the Faubourg St. Honore. The only grief he had was the condition of his father, who had been stricken with paralysis, which had not only robbed him of the use of his limbs, but of his speech too. The old man could only make himself understood by his beloved grandchild Valentine, and by a faithful servant named Barrois, by the rising and falling of his eyelids.

In the house of this immensely respected man, certain things had happened within a few months which attracted general attention, though no one could explain them. The parents of the deceased Madame de Villefort, who had been staying at their son-in-law’s house on a visit, had died suddenly one after the other, the doctors being unable to assign any other cause for their deaths than apoplexy. These facts would not have caused any talk, since the two persons who had died were both very old, had they not been followed almost immediately by the deaths of the old servant of Monsieur Noirtier and of Valentine, the blooming daughter of the procureur du roi, and the bride of a young officer named Morrel, under circumstances which looked very much like poisoning.

It was a terrible time for Monsieur de Villefort, who saw himself obliged, in his official capacity, to investigate his own household. After long observation, he had a terrible suspicion, which was confirmed by a hundred little things, that his own wife was the four-times murderess!

The reasons which actuated her to commit these terrible crimes were very clear. Valentine, the step-daughter, possessed a large fortune which she had inherited from her dead mother; she was the sole heiress of the grandparents who had died so suddenly; upon the death of Valentine all her wealth would revert to Monsieur de Villefort, and his sole heir would be his son.

Villefort, the husband, struggled terribly with Villefort, the district-attorney; he tried to ward off the guilt from his wife, but his efforts were fruitless. It was the same day on which the sensational case of Prince Cavalcanti, *alias* Benedetto, was before the Court of Special Sessions, and Monsieur de Villefort was forced to attend the sitting in his official capacity as district-attorney. Before he went he sent for his wife, who wished to attend the trial of a case which caused great excitement all over Paris.

Madame de Villefort came to his room fully dressed for the street, being under the impression that her husband would ask her to accompany him to the court-house. She trembled, however, when she noticed his face, which was torn by conflicting passions.

“Where do you get the poison from, madame, which you are in the habit of using?” asked the procureur du roi, in a tone of command.

Madame de Villefort turned deathly pale.

“I do not understand what you mean,” she stammered.

“I mean,” said the man of the law, “where do you keep the poison with which you murdered my parents-in-law, Barrois, and my daughter, Valentine?”

Stunned by this terrible charge Madame de Villefort fell to the floor; she no longer dared to deny the accusation, and was oppressed by a feeling of deep despair.

“Every crime, madame,” continued the procureur du roi, “has its penalty; yours will be the scaffold. This expiation, however, would be as terrible for me as for you. Fate has left you to pay for your deeds by your own hand. You have, perhaps, still a few drops of poison left, which will save both you and me the scandal of a public hanging. I am going to the court-house, and I hope that when I return you will have expiated your crimes.”

With a cry, the unhappy woman became unconscious, while Monsieur de Villefort, hardly able to collect his thoughts, left the room and rode to attend the Cavalcanti-Benedetto case.

CHAPTER IV

A PECULIAR TRIAL

All Paris was excited over the case of the handsome Andrea Cavalcanti, who was to descend from the heights of society into the depths of the criminal world. The lion of the day was to change himself into a common convict.

Large sums of money were paid for seats in the court-house, and long before the proceedings began every seat in the room was occupied by representatives of the most aristocratic families.

After the usual preliminaries, the judge, the jury, and the district-attorney took their places. Upon an order from the judge the policemen brought in the prisoner. Instead of a man borne down by shame, Cavalcanti showed himself to the crowd dressed in a ball suit, his face beaming with good humor.

The complaint was read without making the slightest impression upon the prisoner, who sat on his seat with the same ease and grace as he did, but a few days before, in the famous restaurant The Golden House.

“Prisoner,” said the judge, “stand up and answer the questions I shall put to you. What is your full name?”

“I am very sorry,” replied Andrea, without the slightest embarrassment, “that I am unable to answer the question just now; you can continue, however, and later on I will take an opportunity to give you information about the matter.”

The people were dazed at the audacity of the prisoner.

“How old are you?” continued the judge.

“I was born on the night between the 27th and the 28th of September, 1807, at Auteuil, near Paris.”

“What is your business?”

“I never bothered about the usual trades of the general run of people. I was first a counterfeiter, then a thief, and afterward committed my first murder.”

A storm of anger ran through the assembly, even the judge and the jury could not suppress their loathing at the unheard of cynicism of the prisoner.

“Are you going to give your name now?” asked the judge.

“I am not able to give you my own name, but I know that of my father.”

“Name it, then.”

“My father is a district-attorney,” continued the prisoner with great calmness, glancing at Monsieur de Villefort, who turned deathly pale.

“District-attorney?” exclaimed the judge, greatly astonished. “And his name is?”

“His name is Monsieur de Villefort, and he is sitting in front of you.”

“You are fooling with the court,” said the judge angrily. “I warn you for the last time and command you to tell the truth.”

“I am speaking the truth,” replied the prisoner, “and can prove it. Listen, and then judge. I was born on the first floor of the house No. 28 Rue de la Fontaine, at Auteuil, on the night of the 27th to the 28th of September, 1807. My father, Monsieur de Villefort, told my mother I was dead, wrapped me in a napkin marked H. 15, put me in a small box and buried me alive in the garden of the house. At the same moment he received a thrust in the side with a knife held by a person who was concealed, and he sank to the ground unconscious. The man who attacked my father dug out the box which had been buried, and which he supposed contained money, and thereby saved my life. He brought me to the foundling asylum, where I was inscribed as No. 37. Three months later I was taken from the asylum by the sister-in-law of the man, who was a Corsican, and brought me to Corsica, where I was brought up, and in spite of the care of my foster-parents acquired vices which steeped me in crime.”

“And who was your mother?” asked the judge.

“My mother thought I was dead; I am a child of sin; I do not know my mother and do not wish to know her.”

A cry rang through the court-room at this point; a lady had fainted, and was carried out of the hall by several bystanders.

At this cry the procureur du roi arose, and showed his ghastly face to the crowd.

“How are you going to prove these astounding revelations?” asked the judge of the prisoner.

With a malicious look the latter pointed to Monsieur de Villefort.

“Father, they wish to have proofs; do you also want me to give them?”

“No, it is unnecessary; everything you have said is true. I resign my office, and desire the court to appoint my successor as procureur du roi,” said Monsieur de Villefort, in a faint voice.

“What!” exclaimed the judge, “you, a man whose character is above suspicion, allow yourself to be intimidated by the crazy declarations of a criminal! Collect yourself, and crush the malicious accusations with a word.”

Villefort shook his head. With trembling limbs he left the court-room a broken-down man. The crowd respectfully made way for him, the extent of his misfortune making a deep impression upon all hearts.

“The court is adjourned until further notice,” said the judge. “Policemen, take your prisoner back to jail.”

CHAPTER V

THE RESULT OF THE CATASTROPHE

On the 14th day of January, 1830, three months after the incidents related in the last chapter, Benedetto's trial was again before the Court of Special Sessions. Then, as now, life beat rapidly in Paris, one important thing followed the other, and it came about that the affair of the handsome "Prince Cavalcanti" was in danger of being tried before an audience consisting only of lawyers and policemen.

The weather was miserable. The snow fell in thick flakes, and the cold was so penetrating that it became impossible to remain long out of doors.

It was about eleven o'clock in the morning when an elegant carriage stopped in front of the court-house. A gentleman stepped out, and was about to ascend the broad steps of the building, when he suddenly stood still. He clapped his monocle to his eye, and loudly exclaimed:

"Ah, Chateau-Renaud!"

"Beauchamp," came back the answer; and the two friends cordially shook hands.

"Really," said Chateau-Renaud, laughing, "I must be grateful to chance, which threw me in your way."

"What brings you here?"

"The trial of his highness Prince Benedetto de Cavalcanti, of course."

"I'm here for the same reason. I also wish to see the concluding act of the drama which has interested Paris so long. Do you think the poor devil has a chance of escaping the hangman's noose?"

"Hardly — but here we are. Why, the hall is about empty," exclaimed Beauchamp, wonderingly.

"Does that astonish you? Paris has always been ungrateful, and has long since forgotten that the Benedetto affair was once an important topic," replied Chateau-Renaud in a tone of indifference.

"Perhaps the trial has been postponed," said the journalist, and turning to a reporter of his acquaintance, he hurriedly asked: "Does Benedetto's trial take place to-day?"

“Benedetto’s trial,” answered the reporter, musingly: “ah, yes, now I know — the murder in Monte-Cristo’s garden, and, if my memory is right, I believe the murderer pretends that he is the son of the procureur du roi, Monsieur de Villefort.”

“Perfectly right; you have an enviable memory,” laughingly said Beauchamp. “Well, does the trial take place?”

“Certainly, it’s the third day of the case.”

“Thank you. We can get some refreshments now and pass the time until the Benedetto case comes up,” said Chateau-Renaud.

“If you desire to attend the trial, I will inform you when it’s time,” said the reporter, politely.

“You are very kind,” answered Beauchamp, as he departed with his friend.

As they were leaving the corridor, Beauchamp nudged his companion lightly.

“Every one is not so ungrateful as to forget Benedetto. Debray is here too.”

“Why not?” said Chateau-Renaud. “Debray has plenty of time to himself since the Ministry was overturned and carried a poor *attaché* along with it in its fall.”

“Well, he rescued his millions anyway,” replied Beauchamp, indifferently, “Though, come to think of it,” he continued maliciously, “it is quite natural for Debray to interest himself in Benedetto — the latter was half and half his son-in-law.”

“Oh, Beauchamp, you are cynical; the relationship reminds one of a morganatic marriage,” Chateau-Renaud laughingly interposed.

“By the way, has anything new been found out about the Baroness Danglars?”

“H’m — they say she has disappeared.”

“And her good, honest husband?”

“Is knocking about somewhere. God only knows.”

“Well, I must say there is nothing like Parisian life. The house of Danglars breaks. Father and mother Danglars disappear, in consequence of which Debray is without his flame; and the daughter — is anything known of her? To my taste, she was the best of the lot.”

“Mademoiselle d’Armilly undoubtedly knows where she is — they were inseparable companions. They will come to the surface again; from what I know of Mademoiselle Danglars, she has about as much talent for singing as a lioness.”

“A beautiful constellation. What became of Monsieur de Villefort?”

“He is an incurable maniac, and is in Dr. d’Avigny’s private asylum.”

“Not a bad business for the old gentleman. The house of Villefort has had a terrible end. Madame de Villefort and her son are dead, and poor Valentine — I am not generally sentimental, but I confess the death of the young girl was a terrible shock to me.”

“Beauchamp, do you believe in miracles?” asked Chateau-Renaud, suddenly.

“That depends. Why do you ask?”

“Well, one of my friends gave me his word of honor that he saw Mademoiselle Valentine in Marseilles.”

“Before or after the funeral?”

“After, certainly.”

“That seems rather wonderful, but one is already accustomed to look upon everything with which the Count of Monte-Cristo has any connection as something miraculous.”

“Have you heard the fable that the count was a vampire?”

“Who could have said such a thing? What is old Noirtier doing?”

“He has gone to the South; and the Morcerf family — ”

“Well, what of them?”

“Nothing new. The father a suicide, the son in Africa, and the mother has disappeared.”

“Just like Baroness Danglars.”

“Yes, only with this difference, that Madame de Morcerf and her son gave their whole fortune to the poor.”

“I am glad for the poor — I — ”

“The Benedetto affair is now on,” broke in the voice of the reporter, interrupting their conversation.

“Ah — thank you.” And with this they all entered the court-room.

“Beauchamp,” whispered Chateau-Renaud, pointing to a veiled lady who sat near them, “if I wasn’t sure that the Baroness Dangl — ”

“Hush! Do not mention any names. I think you are right, but I cannot understand why she comes in such disreputable company.”

The lady spoken about, heavily veiled, held her head on her hand and awaited the beginning of the case. Her companion, a thin, yellow, dried-up old man, whose bald head in form and color recalled a ripe melon, sat as straight as a stick, and kept his eyes on the crucifix opposite him.

“Bring in the prisoner,” ordered the judge.

A shudder ran through the lady, but she did not look up as Benedetto entered.

CHAPTER VI

BENEDETTO, THE MURDERER

In the meantime the room had become almost filled, as a death sentence would probably be given. Almost half the spectators were ladies. A murmur of curiosity ran about the room, and many who were present remembered the moment in the former sitting when the prisoner, with the air of a stage hero, let fall the weighty words: “My father is the royal district-attorney, Monsieur Villefort.” Unconsciously all eyes were turned to the ministerial box, as if hoping to encounter the pale, confused face of the all-powerful judge, who had himself been judged, but only the substitute of the procureur was seen.

Benedetto now entered. Beauchamp and Chateau-Renaud could hardly restrain their astonishment, for very seldom has a man changed so much in three months. When they had seen Cavalcanti Benedetto last, he was the type of a parlor hero, and fascinated every one by his pleasing appearance; but the man who stood now before the judge was another — a broken-down man.

His curly hair had been shaved close to the skin, his eyes, which had formerly sparkled with life, were now dim. The small, finely formed hands were meekly crossed over the breast, and even the prisoner’s clothes harmonized with his general appearance.

A policeman gruffly showed him to his seat. Benedetto bowed deeply, and sat on the edge of the hard wooden bench.

The prisoner’s lawyer, a celebrated advocate, bent down and whispered a few encouraging words to him. Benedetto listened attentively to them and murmured half aloud:

“May God have mercy on me.”

“And the devil, too,” whispered Beauchamp to Chateau-Renaud. “Benedetto has become a howling coward. It’s a great pity!”

The judge beckoned to the actuary and ordered him to read the indictment. It was short and compact; it recited the murder of Caderousse, the robbery in the Count of Monte-Cristo’s house, the revelations made by the prisoner with regard to M. de Villefort, the latter’s confession, his insanity, and finally the suicide of his wife.

“Prisoner, stand up!” said the judge, in a soft voice, “and tell me your name.”

“Benedetto,” replied the former bandit in a modest, almost frightened voice.

“Are you guilty of the murder of Caderousse?”

“Judge,” stammered Benedetto, “I must acknowledge my guilt.” And burying his face in his hands, he tried to suppress his sobs.

“What kind of a comedy is the rascal playing?” grumbled Beauchamp.

“Hush!” replied Chateau-Renaud, “the proceedings are becoming interesting.”

Benedetto answered all questions put to him without hesitation.

“I know,” he said, “I am a great sinner, and bow to the justice of the people, as I do to the justice of God.”

The duty of the jury was thus rendered easy, the murder was acknowledged, the antecedents of the prisoner were very bad, and the counterfeiter and murderer was as good as convicted at this stage of the proceedings.

“Call the witnesses,” said the judge.

“Count of Monte-Cristo,” cried the clerk.

No one answered.

“It is singular,” said the judge, “that Monsieur de Monte-Cristo” (he purposely left out the title of count), “who is interested in this trial, has refused to obey the order of the court. Has he received a subpœna?”

The assistant district-attorney looked over his papers.

“The gentleman named,” he said, with a malicious twirl of his lips, “has sold his property in France and has disappeared, no one knows where.”

“Call the other witnesses,” said the judge; “we shall attend to Monsieur de Monte-Cristo’s case later on.”

The other witnesses, mainly people who had come to Caderousse’s assistance when he had called for help, were not slow in coming forward. Their testimony was short and precise. They confirmed the fact of Caderousse’s being found with a knife in his heart.

“Have you anything to say, prisoner?” asked the judge.

“No, sir, these honest people unfortunately tell the truth,” said Benedetto, meekly.

A murmur of applause ran round the room. When all was calm again the clerk exclaimed:

“Monsieur Noirtier de Villefort!”

“What!” exclaimed Beauchamp, springing up, as if electrified, “are they going to be so cruel as to make this unfortunate man testify again?”

“Gentlemen of the jury,” said the judge, as if in answer to Beauchamp’s question, “we have thought it necessary to call Monsieur de Villefort, although in the present state of his health there is little chance of his being able to clear up those points which are still obscure.”

Deep silence reigned — the door was opened, and Monsieur de Villefort appeared on the threshold.

CHAPTER VII

A MIRACLE

The Count of Monte-Cristo had indeed left Paris shortly after the first sitting of the Benedetto case had been so strangely interrupted. In his company was the young officer, Maximilian Morrel, who was so shocked at the death of his beloved Valentine as not to be any longer recognizable as the gay young officer who, with Chateau-Renaud, Beauchamp and Debray formed the leading cavaliers of the capital. A sympathy, which he could not account for himself, brought Morrel into a bond of friendship with the Count of Monte-Cristo, and he told him of his love for Valentine de Villefort and his grief at the sudden death of his idol.

But even Monte-Cristo's consolations brought no relief to the young man, and he resolved to put an end to his life, so as to be joined at least in death with his cherished darling.

He had already written the letter, the weapon lay on his table, when he was disturbed by an unwelcome visit from the Count of Monte-Cristo.

"What were you going to do, Maximilian?" asked Monte-Cristo, sternly.

"The one thing which is left to an unfortunate who has been robbed of the one most dear to him on earth," the young man replied, in a tone of resignation.

"I understand you; he who has known Valentine as I have could readily excuse the abominable step you were about to take."

"And do you not approve of it?" asked the young man, in a tone of astonishment.

"That depends on circumstances; these circumstances are, however, not yet here, much as you may wonder. I make you the following proposition: If, at the end of a month, you do not declare that you regard this suicide as a crime against yourself and all those dear to you, then I will give you a powder which will put an end to your life without leaving such ugly traces as that pistol on your desk."

"If you can wake the dead, then you can help me. But this miraculous power I do not believe even you have. Nevertheless, I have never refused you a favor, and accede to your request, on condition that you promise not to make any new attempts to prevent me from carrying out my design."

"Accepted," said the count, as he stretched out his hand affectionately toward the young man, who grasped it without hesitation.

"To-day a month," he continued, "I shall await you on the island of Monte-Cristo."

With these words Monte-Cristo left his friend.

Maximilian remained true to his word. Five days before the expiration of the fateful month he went from Paris to Marseilles and embarked from there on one of the yachts belonging to the count for the little island of Monte-Cristo, which he reached on the appointed day. Ali, the black servant of the count, met him on the wharf and conducted him to the count's apartments.

"Here I am, count, to receive the powder from your hands which will realize my hope to meet Valentine in another world."

"Nothing can induce you to give up your design then?" asked Monte-Cristo.

"Nothing, not even you," answered Morrel, firmly.

"Well, then, let it be so," said Monte-Cristo sternly, as he took a greenish, strongly smelling pastil from a box cut from an opal.

"It is hashish. Death is painless and recalls to the person taking it the most beautiful memories of his life."

Maximilian embraced his friend and swallowed the pastil.

The effect was wonderful. A delightful languor took possession of Maximilian. All the scenes of his childhood came back to him, only the form of his darling was missing. Suddenly the back part of the room appeared to open and a female form strode toward him with arms outstretched; it was the purified form of his beloved.

"Oh, how sweet is such a death," whispered Maximilian.

The figure strode nearer to him, embraced him and kissed his burning forehead.

"My poor lover," murmured a well-known voice.

"Valentine," exclaimed Maximilian, "Valentine, is it possible! I am not dreaming, you are alive! I clasp you in my arms, only to die myself!"

"I am alive, my dear friend, and bring you new life; it is no dream, we are at the realization of our hopes, we are united on earth forever."

Gradually Maximilian became conscious. He lay in the arms of his beloved Valentine and his faithful friend Monte-Cristo stood near him.

"Valentine and Maximilian," said the count solemnly, "my dear friends, from now on nothing shall separate you; I give you life back again, I now join your hands in the bonds which nothing can separate but the grave! May God bless you both as I do."

Overpowered with emotion the newly united couple sank at the feet of this curious man to thank him from the depths of their hearts. Monte-Cristo lifted Valentine tenderly from the ground and turning to her said:

"I shall leave you alone now, and go back to my apartments, where my wife, the Countess of Monte-Cristo, awaits me."

As soon as the count had gone the two lovers embraced each other again. Then the young man led the young girl to a divan, and asked her to tell him the wonderful story of her rescue and her return from the grave.

"I was," related Valentine, "as you know, very ill; but yet I hoped to become convalescent again! One night, as I lay on my bed of sickness, a door which I had never before perceived was opened. A man entered and approached my bed; I was just about to scream when I perceived that the spectre was none other than the Count of Monte-Cristo, who made signs to me to keep silent. He sat beside me and told me I was being gradually poisoned by my step-mother, and that she had already poisoned my grandparents Barrois in the same manner. He had himself given me an antidote. But the means he had were not sufficient to shield me from all danger, and he begged me to drink a potion, which would put me in a trance for the space of three days. I took the potion which the count gave me; I lost my senses. How long I lay thus I do not know, but when I woke I found myself in a coffin in a church, and the count standing beside me. A new and powerful potion restored me to my former vitality. The count brought me to his house, where I found everything necessary to a journey. After I had rested for a few days, I rode to Marseilles with the count, and from there to this lonely island, where I have found you, my dear Maximilian."

A new embrace ended this conversation, and they both left the apartment to go in search of the count, to thank him again for his trouble.

They went to the grotto and asked Jacopo, who had brought Maximilian to the island, where the count was.

"I have a letter for both of you from my master."

"Where is the Count of Monte-Cristo?" they both asked simultaneously.

"He has just left the island with his wife and his servant, Ali. You can still see the ship over there," replied Jacopo, pointing to a small boat on which could be described three persons. It was the count, Haydee, and Ali. Maximilian quickly opened the letter, which read as follows:

“My dear Maximilian — A ship is lying at anchor for you. Jacopo will bring you to Livorno, where Monsieur Noirtier awaits his grandchild, whom he wishes to bless before you lead her to the altar. Everything you find in this grotto and my house in Paris are the wedding presents of a faithful friend, whom you will never see again. My last words are: Waiting and hoping. May you both live happy and think now and then of your devoted friend,

“Edmond Dantes, Count of Monte-Cristo.”

Meanwhile the count’s vessel departed further and further from the island; a fresh breeze filled the sail and it disappeared from view. Valentine and Maximilian waved a cordial farewell to the travellers with their hands. Then the ship vanished from the horizon.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SENTENCE OF DEATH

Monsieur de Villefort was not alone — Dr. d’Avigny accompanied his patient, and whispered a word in his ear now and then.

Villefort was only a ruin now. His hanging lower lip and glassy eyes impressed the spectators and the bench sadly, and even those who were accustomed to be attacked by him in the days of his power as a district-attorney now only felt pity for the man who had fallen so low.

The judge was moved when he arose and delivered the following address to the jury:

“Gentlemen of the jury! Dr. d’Avigny, who pays the greatest care to Monsieur de Villefort, was so kind as to accompany his patient to-day. Before I subpœnaed Monsieur de Villefort I inquired of his physician whether he could attend court without injury to himself. Doctor, will you confirm this statement to the gentlemen of the jury?”

“Certainly, judge,” said the old physician, deeply moved. “Monsieur de Villefort’s condition is hopeless, and would not be changed in any way by his appearing in court — the apathy of my patient is beyond description.”

Thereupon Dr. d’Avigny turned to his patient and led him to a chair. Deep silence reigned throughout the room. The veiled lady looked keenly at the man, before whose gaze criminals were wont to tremble, and who had now sunk lower than the wretched beings he had formerly prosecuted.

Benedetto, in great excitement, had outstretched his arms toward Monsieur de Villefort, and almost immediately after fell back again in his seat crushed and annihilated.

“Monsieur de Villefort,” said the judge, “tell us — ” He proceeded no further. Villefort tried to rise, and made strenuous efforts to stammer forth some words. The judge waited a short while and then continued:

“Monsieur de Villefort, are you able to answer a few questions I shall address to you?”

Villefort nodded and stammered with some difficulty: “Yes.”

“Benedetto,” said the judge, turning toward the prisoner, “stand up.”

Benedetto obeyed the order.

"Look at Monsieur de Villefort," continued the judge, "and tell me, upon your conscience, whether you uphold the accusations made by you at a former trial of this case."

Benedetto was either, as pious souls say, "touched by compassion," or else the most accomplished hypocrite in existence. He clasped both hands to his face and murmured in a voice choked with tears:

"Pardon, father — pardon!"

"What does the man want of me?" asked Monsieur de Villefort, who was gradually recovering his voice, and to the astonishment of the spectators was soon in possession of his speech.

"He calls you father," replied the judge, "you yourself have acknowledged him as your son."

Villefort put his hand to his forehead.

"My son? And he is alive? It is impossible — my children were killed in my house — my son is dead."

"Have you forgotten the night of the 27th and 28th of September, 1807?"

"No, I have forgotten nothing — that son I killed too."

"Yes, but he escaped death by a miracle, don't you know!"

"Ah, yes, I remember; it was no miracle; he owes his life to an attempt at assassination, and the murderer thought he was lifting up a treasure when he picked up the box containing the child."

"Then you acknowledge your son?"

Villefort laughed maliciously.

"Yes, certainly he is my son. How would he have been a counterfeiter and murderer otherwise? Oh, it is all right — the house in Auteuil, the napkin marked H; Villefort's son must become a murderer."

He stretched out his lean hand toward Benedetto and hissed ironically:

"You are my son. You have murdered already and will murder again."

"No, no," gasped Benedetto; "I have sinned terribly, but nothing on earth could make me increase my crimes! Father, I forgive you, and may God have mercy on both our souls."

A murmur of emotion ran through the room, and Benedetto, encouraged, continued in a sobbing voice:

"And you, too, my mother, whom I have never known, I forgive. If I could only have stammered your name and danced on your knee, I would never have become a criminal."

Deep sobbing was heard in the room and the veiled lady sank half unconscious in her seat. Her companion busied himself with her, and as soon as she had regained consciousness he whispered in her ear:

“Prudence — or all is lost.”

“Monsieur de Villefort,” said the judge solemnly, “you are discharged! Whatever your faults have been God has made you pay dear for them.”

D’Avigny laid his hand on Villefort’s arm and wished to take his patient with him, but the former district-attorney shook his head vigorously and said, rather sharply:

“I do not wish to go yet, I have something to say.”

“Speak then, we are listening,” said the judge, surprised.

“Judge and gentlemen of the jury,” Villefort solemnly began, “you have heard the contrite words of the man who is unfortunately my son. Do not believe him — he lies!”

“Monsieur de Villefort,” exclaimed the judge, warningly.

“Oh, let me finish,” continued the ex-procureur du roi; “I am supposed to be insane, yet I see things clearer than a great many whose reason is unclouded! You believe I would have committed a sin had I killed him — you are wrong, it would have been the only good action of my life if I had freed the world of such a rascal and monster. Benedetto neither regrets nor forgives. I, his father, ought to know him. He is playing a well-studied part. Gentlemen of the jury, be careful! The responsibility which weighs on you is great. When a tiger escapes from his cage, he is shot down. Take the sword of justice and let it fall on his neck — I, the father of this man, move that he be condemned to death!”

A murmur of affright ran through the room; people forgot that a maniac stood before them, and only saw the district-attorney, who, like a second Brutus, delivered over his own son to the law. Like the judgment day the words rang through the room, “I move that he be condemned to death.” As soon as the echo of the words died away, Villefort arose, and leaning on D’Avigny’s arm, he bowed to the judge and slowly left the court-room.

“Upon my word,” whispered Beauchamp to Chateau-Renaud, “Villefort is insane.”

“Did you notice that Madame Danglars was struggling with a fainting fit?” asked Chateau-Renaud.

“Ah, bah! Benedetto is a handsome youth, and Madame Danglars is not a model of virtue; who knows what relations they have had with each other?”

“Perhaps Debray might know more, he — ”

“Hush! the procureur du roi is speaking. I’ll wager that his speech will be less shrewd than that of the maniac.”

The procureur du roi arose amid the hushed silence of the court-room, and began to speak, throwing all the blame on Monsieur de Villefort rather than on Benedetto.

“Let us not be carried away by pity,” he said, “for these unscrupulous men, who soil their judicial ermine in the lowest passions of mankind, and thereby endanger the lives and sacrifice the honor of their wives and children.”

After the prisoner’s counsel had summed up eloquently for his client and the judge had charged the jury, the latter went out, but returned in a short time.

“Gentlemen of the jury, have you agreed upon a verdict?” asked the judge.

There was intense excitement in the court-room, the spectators literally holding their breath.

“Yes,” answered the foreman; “we find the prisoner guilty, with extenuating circumstances.”

The spectators clapped their hands.

“Prisoner, have you anything to say?” asked the judge.

“No,” replied Benedetto, in a calm, dignified manner.

“The sentence of the court is, that you be sent to the galleys for life.”

No sooner had the sentence been pronounced than the man who had accompanied Madame Danglars glided toward the bar where Benedetto stood, and whispered something in his ear.

“We have kept our word, have we not?”

“Yes; but the galleys?”

“We have saved your head. More we cannot do at present. Have patience.”

The court officials coming up to take the prisoner interrupted the conversation. Benedetto was placed in a coach and driven to Bicetre. He was placed in a filthy jail, and then left to himself. He had not been long there when he felt a hand touch him and a voice whisper close to his ear.

“You are in luck, comrade,” said the unknown. “Some rich lady is interested in you. You don’t remember me, perhaps. ‘Twas I who brought you that note two months ago. I got two gold pieces for doing so.”

“Who was the lady, and how did you get here?”

“I don’t know who she is, but she appears to be over forty. As for me, I am a priest, and committed wrong — ”

At this moment the door was opened, and a voice called:

“Benedetto! Benedetto!”

Benedetto arose, and peering through the grated cell-door saw a woman.

“What do you want?” he gruffly asked.

“I am your mother.”

“My mother?”

“Yes.”

“I have one favor to ask of you.”

“I am willing to do anything for you.”

“Are you going to stay in Paris?”

“No, I shall leave France on the 26th of February.”

“And you sail from Marseilles?”

“Yes.”

“Then you will be near Toulon. I know that you do not wish me to see your face or learn your secret. But if you have any love for me, come and see me there.”

The poor woman yearned to embrace her son, whose hypocritical words awoke the dormant love in her bosom.

“I promise to see you before I sail on the 26th.”

“Come to Toulon, then, on the 24th. And, by the way, here is a letter from one of my comrades to whom I am under deep obligations. On your way home drop it into the letter-box.”

She could not decline to do him this service. Her usual caution deserted her, and as she slipped the note in her bosom the light fell full on her face.

Benedetto recognized her at once as Madame Danglars, the wife of Baron Danglars, and the mother of the girl he was to have married. He could hardly restrain a cry of rage and astonishment.

“Good-by,” he said. “Do not forget the 24th.”

CHAPTER IX

THE EDITORIAL ROOMS

“Well, my dear Chateau-Renaud, is there anything new?” asked Beauchamp of his friend, who had paid him a visit to his office.

“Bah — not much! It’s the same old story in the Orient, and outside of that place nothing ever happens in the world.”

“Nothing? What will you give me if I tell you something which will interest you, my dear Chateau-Renaud?”

“That depends. Who is the party?”

“Our friend, Albert de Morcerf.”

“That is worth listening to: how is the poor fellow getting along?”

“Oh, splendidly! He distinguishes himself in every battle, and will one day become a famous general.”

“I hope so. Do you still recollect the hard times poor Morcerf had when the first article from Yanina appeared in your paper?”

“I do. I went myself on the strength of it to Yanina, and the news I brought from there was perfectly crushing from our old friend.”

“And Count Monte-Cristo has disappeared?”

“For the present, yes. Though I am sure that sooner or later he will show up again.”

At this moment a loud uproar was heard near the door, and as Beauchamp opened it, a young man was seen who was struggling with the office boy to gain admission.

“What is the meaning of this?” asked Beauchamp, in a tone of surprise, as he opened the door.

“Ah, Beauchamp!” exclaimed the stranger, “I knew you would admit me.”

“At present I have not the honor of your acquaintance,” replied Beauchamp, bowing.

“Permit me to refresh your memory; I am the man who called you into the court-room during the Benedetto trial. You were at the refreshment counter, and — ”

"Ah, now I remember," said Beauchamp, in a friendly tone. "What can I do for you?"

"Pardon me, Monsieur Beauchamp, but I think I can do you a service."

"Then come into my office, Monsieur — what is your name now?"

"Gratillet, Monsieur Beauchamp," said the young man, following him into the office. After he had taken a chair proffered him he laughed to himself and in a tone of importance said:

"If I am not mistaken, you interest yourself for Benedetto?"

"A little, Monsieur Gratillet."

"When you have heard my report, you will do so more. I took good notice of Benedetto and have come to the conclusion that he has been picked out to do great things!"

"Really? Is he going to become a minister, or perhaps a king?"

"Laugh away; he will not die in the galleys."

"Then, perhaps, on the gallows; that is sometimes the end of a career like his."

"No, Benedetto is more ambitious than that. I will only give you the facts and tell you what I heard yesterday. Last night Benedetto received a visit in prison."

"A visit?"

"Just as I tell you. A veiled lady visited him and remained an hour with him. Her face I could not recognize."

"Have you got wings with which to pursue Benedetto?"

"No, Monsieur Beauchamp. At the end of the proceedings I took a carriage and arrived at the prison only a quarter of an hour after Benedetto."

"I call that promptness. You saw the lady then?"

"Yes; I did not recognize her perfectly, but imagine she is the wife of a banker who left for parts unknown about three months ago."

Beauchamp and Chateau-Renaud looked knowingly at one another, while Gratillet continued:

"The lady in question left the prison at ten o'clock and got into her carriage."

"A carriage?"

"No, a hackney coach she had hired."

"And you followed her again?"

"This time the matter was much easier; I got upon the box with the driver and arrived at her destination as soon as the occupant herself. The carriage drove to No. 8 Rue Contrescarpe. I looked closely at the house and read a sign near the door with the following card: ‘Monsieur Magloire, taxidermist.’ The lady got out and rang the bell, but to no purpose. Becoming bolder she knocked at the door. A sliding window was opened and a gruff voice asked:

"‘Well, what do you want?’

"‘I have a letter to deliver,’ said the lady softly.

"‘From whom?’

"I could not make out what she said. A hand was put through the opening and took the letter, whereupon the sliding window was again closed. The lady waited a while longer and then rode off."

"Did you follow her?"

"Oh, no, why should I have done that? I am interested in Benedetto, and the lady is only a side character. First of all, Monsieur Beauchamp, do you think the story suitable for your paper?"

"Hm! that could be talked over. In the meantime take a cigar."

"Thanks. Have you ever seen the departure of the galley-slaves from Bicetre?"

"No, but I imagine it must be a curious sight."

"It is. This morning I was in Bicetre to see Benedetto depart, and I must confess I almost pitied him. The handsome Andrea Cavalcanti was undressed and his clothes cut in the usual way."

"Why do they do that?" asked Chateau-Renaud.

"To prevent the flight of a convict. Whoever sees these cut clothes knows they belong to a galley-slave. The other prisoners said nothing while the operation was being performed; Benedetto, however, cried out aloud when the jailer cut his elegant coat, and when the rattle of the chains was heard in another room he gritted his teeth and cast such a look around him that I instinctively shuddered."

"Were you present during the chaining of the convicts, Monsieur Gratillet?"

"Certainly; I never do things by halves. The prisoners were brought into the courtyard and placed in rows of two each, who were tied to each other by a chain six feet long."

"Are you nearly finished with your story, Monsieur Gratillet?" said Beauchamp, thoughtfully.

“Directly. Just as the door opened through which the convicts have to pass to leave the courtyard, I noticed among the crowd assembled to see them off a small humpbacked man. On his crooked shoulders a monkey balanced, a poodle in uniform sat on its hind legs beside him, in his right hand he held a bird-cage, and along his left arm a large rat promenaded up and down. The rat had a wonderfully pointed nose and long tail. It ran up and down the whole time, looking in every direction with its sharp eyes. The prisoners, the jailers and spectators laughed at its antics. The hunchback drew nearer, and, as it seemed to me, looked at Benedetto. The latter, however, did not notice him, and now I perceived I had made a mistake, and that the gaze of the ratcatcher was directed to Benedetto’s comrade in chains.”

“Did you know this comrade in chains?” asked Beauchamp, hurriedly.

“Yes; it was a former priest named Anselmo, if you have ever heard anything of him.”

“Certainly. The priest was a disgrace to the cloth,” said Beauchamp. “So he is Benedetto’s companion. A worthy pair.”

“I thought so, too,” continued Gratillet, laughing. “Suddenly the rat sprang from the arm of its master on to that of the ex-priest, and rubbing its pointed nose on his sleeve it fawned about him.

“‘Oh, what a beautiful animal!’ exclaimed Anselmo; ‘present it to me.’

“‘I would be a fool,’ replied the hunchback, gruffly. ‘I sell my animals, but I never give them away.’

“‘But I have no money.’

“‘You have a nice ring on your finger, give it to me and you can have my rat.’

“Now I am ready to swear to it,” said Gratillet, solemnly, “that Anselmo had no ring on his finger before, whereas he had one now. He looked at the jailer and said: ‘In case it is allowed, I should like to exchange my ring for the rat.’

“The jailer made no objection to this. The hunchback claimed that his rat was a wonderful animal, and he would show the tricks it could do. The rat sprang through little paper balloons, nodded and shook its head, just as it was asked, and finally crawled up Anselmo’s sleeve. The prisoners were enthusiastic in their praises. Anselmo and the hunchback whispered softly together; finally, the jailer put a stop to the thing by shutting the gate and driving the prisoners back.

“‘One word more,’ exclaimed Anselmo, ‘I do not know the name of my rat!’

“‘The animal is called “Rat King,”‘ said the hunchback, putting his head once more through the door.

“I followed the hunchback; when he turned down a narrow street I cried to him: ‘Au revoir, Monsieur Magloire,’ and the look he gave me told me I had guessed right.”

“You believe then — ” said Chateau-Renaud.

“That the letter which the lady delivered in the Rue Contrescarpe was written by Anselmo and given to the lady through Benedetto, the letter inclosed the order for the rat, and everything went smoothly. The final act in the drama will not permit itself to be long waited for.”

“As soon as we are ready,” said Beauchamp, “Monsieur Gratillet can write it up for our paper. Can I count you, Monsieur Gratillet, from to-day on as one of my staff?”

“I desire no greater honor,” replied Gratillet, his face beaming with joy.

CHAPTER X

PONTOON NO. 2

The galley-slaves were shipped from Chalons to Lyons. No accident marred the trip, and all the prisoners were in good humor, with the exception of Benedetto. Anselmo tried his best to arouse his comrade, but his efforts were fruitless. Benedetto remained silent and gloomy. When the convicts were leaving the ship at Lyons, Anselmo whispered to his companion:

"Magloire is a good fellow: the file he sent me is sharp."

"The file?" repeated Benedetto, not understanding the allusion; "he did not give you any instrument!"

"What a stupid fellow you are. But keep patience; later on I will tell you more."

Benedetto, since the journey from Paris, was no longer recognizable; he no longer resembled the proud Andrea Cavalcanti, and sometimes even thought he was going crazy.

What sustained him was the thought of the million his mother intended to give the Jesuits on the 25th of February. This million he must secure for himself; but how he was to do so he did not know himself.

At first he thought Anselmo would keep his word and free him; but gradually this hope vanished, and as the column marched into Toulon on the 28th of January, Benedetto was on the verge of despair.

In Toulon the iron necklace was taken off of the prisoners and replaced by an iron ball fastened to the leg. The prisoners were brought to the lavatory, given a bath, and then dressed in the historical clothing of a galley-slave.

As Anselmo and Benedetto were of the same stature, it was only natural that they were both chained together. They were placed in pontoon No. 2, and the little rat-king was their companion.

The rat soon made itself at home with all the prison officials and the prisoners, and not a night passed but what it played its tricks. Anselmo had taught it a great deal more, and when he asked it:

"Little rat-king, what are your feelings for the king, the law, and the turnkeys?" the little animal would bow at every side, cross its front feet over its breast, and move its pointed nose as if it were murmuring prayers, at the same time casting its eyes to the floor. If Anselmo would then ask:

"What is the penalty for those condemned to death?"

The rat would throw itself flat on the ground, and lie motionless, as if to appear dead.

Benedetto was the only one who was not amused. Whenever the rat came near him he would tremble violently. If Anselmo saw it he would make sarcastic remarks about princely ways, which caused Benedetto to grind his teeth with rage. His only desire now was to get away from his comrades in chains. But there was little hope for this, more especially as he heard a jailer one day tell Anselmo he should get rid of his grumbling companion; if the rat were to support the petition it would not be difficult, and the ex-priest laughingly replied:

"Not a bit of it; Benedetto is just as agreeable to me as another; let us leave things as they are!"

As soon as the jailer turned away, Benedetto, mad with rage, turned to the ex-priest and said:

"Why won't you free me from your society?"

"Because I do not wish to have any strange face about me," was the indifferent reply. "You do not embarrass me in the least, and as I do not embarrass you — "

"On the contrary, you are distasteful to me," interrupted Benedetto, violently.

"Really? Your candor pleases me. Under all circumstances, we shall stay together."

"And suppose I kill you?" hissed Benedetto.

"Hem, my boy, that is easier said than done. Besides, I can tell you why you hate me."

"I am curious to know! I hardly know myself why I hate you," said Benedetto, maliciously.

"Because you think I lied to you, because in prison I spoke of escape, and have not said a word about that since."

Benedetto stammered a few unintelligible words, and was ashamed to have had his thoughts read so easily.

“Do you know the story of Brutus, who pretended to be a simpleton, so as to bring about the downfall of Tarquin the more effectually?” asked Anselmo, with a malicious smile.

“You are making fun of me,” Benedetto gruffly answered. “Did you deceive me when you gave me the letter for Monsieur Magloire?”

“Do you really think so?”

“What a question! Do you think Monsieur Magloire could aid us in escaping?”

“Suppose he has already done so.”

Benedetto looked at his comrade with wide open mouth.

“Are you really so anxious to escape?” continued Anselmo.

“Really anxious? I would give my right hand were I able to escape from prison on a certain day!”

“And when is that?”

“I must leave Toulon on the night of the 24th of April.”

“You must! That settles it.”

“Do not be sarcastic — I must be at liberty or else — ”

“Well? or else — ”

“Then, you will not betray me, will you?”

“Your anxiety on that point comes rather late,” said Anselmo dryly. “To reassure you, however, let me tell you that it is not to my interest to betray you. Look at me. Just as I stand here, I have the power to set you free on the spot.”

Benedetto uttered a cry.

“Are you speaking the truth?” he breathlessly asked.

“And why should I deceive you? Let me give you my conditions, and if you accept them you will be free on the evening of the 24th of February.”

“What are your conditions?” asked Benedetto faintly.

“Give me half of the million you are seeking to get, and we are quits.”

The Corsican looked tremblingly at the ex-priest.

“How do you know?” he stammered.

“That you are seeking to get a million — well, out of your dreams. The words ‘the 24th of February,’ and ‘one million,’ form the Alpha and Omega of your thoughts, and in your sleep you constantly repeat these words. You want to be free on the 24th, so as to steal this million. Steal it, but give me my share!”

“And you want?” stammered Benedetto.

“One quarter! I could demand half, but I will be modest.”

“How are you going to secure our freedom?” asked Benedetto after a pause.

“That is my affair! I have an accomplice whom I can trust.”

“An accomplice? Who can it be?”

“Swear to me that you will give me a quarter part of your million, and I will show him to you.”

Benedetto took the oath. Anselmo whistled for his rat, and, pointing to the little animal, solemnly said:

“Here is our savior — the little rat-king will free us!”

CHAPTER XI

THE DEAD LIVE

Dr. D’Avigny sat in his private office and studied the sick-list of his asylum. A servant entered, and announced a young man who desired to speak with him.

“You know, Jean, that I do not like to receive visitors so late at night,” said the physician.

“The gentleman gave me his card and told me you would receive him.”

The doctor threw a glance at the card. No sooner had he read the name, Maximilian Morrel, than he hurriedly rose and said:

“Bring the gentleman in at once.”

Dr. D’Avigny had only seen young Morrel once — at the time Valentine de Villefort sank apparently lifeless to the ground. As Maximilian entered, both men remembered the sorrowful circumstances under which they had met before, and, deeply moved, they shook each other’s hand.

“Doctor,” said Maximilian in a solemn voice, “I do not come to the physician but to the friend of the Villefort family.”

D’Avigny bowed and Morrel continued:

“Can you tell me how Monsieur de Villefort is getting on?”

“His condition is hopeless,” said the doctor sorrowfully; “as his attendant just informed me, he is again in possession of his senses, but I fear it is the last glimmering before the final extinguishment. He begged me to send for the district-attorney, as he wished to make an important communication to him, and as I hesitated he hurriedly said:

“‘D’Avigny, I have no time to lose; Death is already sitting on my tongue.’“

“Then we must be quick,” murmured Maximilian to himself, and then speaking aloud he said: “Doctor, would a great excitement injure your patient?”

“That depends upon the nature of the excitement,” answered D’Avigny. “There can hardly be any more joys for Villefort, and troubles I would keep aloof from him.”

"It is a question of a great joy, which, however, is not free from certain anxieties."

"You are speaking in riddles, Monsieur Morrel."

"Then let me unravel these riddles to you. Valentine de Villefort lives."

The old physician swayed from side to side and would have fallen to the ground had not Morrel caught him in his arms. Hot tears rolled over D'Avigny's cheeks, and sobbing he asked:

"Is it no dream? Does Valentine live?"

"She lives, and yearns to shake her old friend's hand," replied Morrel.

He then narrated to the astonished physician the extraordinary circumstance of Valentine's rescue from death. He told the dangers Monte-Cristo had undergone for her; how he had made the poisoned goblet of Madame de Villefort harmless, and how he had rescued him, too, from a suicide's death.

"And who is this Count of Monte-Cristo?" asked D'Avigny when Maximilian had ended.

"Doctor," said Morrel solemnly, "here my story ends. Who and what the Count of Monte-Cristo is I am not at liberty to tell. He has a mission to fulfil, rewards here and punishes there, and I myself have been at times moved to believe him a divine person. There is a mystery surrounding him, which he alone can clear up; but this I know, he is a noble man."

"Where is Valentine now?" asked D'Avigny after a short pause.

"Since the fall of the house of Villefort, Valentine has lived with her grandfather, Monsieur Noirtier, on his estate near Marseilles."

"That is the reason, then, why Monsieur Noirtier disappeared so suddenly from Paris?" said D'Avigny.

"Yes, the Count of Monte-Cristo informed the old man that Valentine lived, and was in need of his protection. Monsieur Noirtier immediately arranged his affairs, and up to five days ago they were both living quietly at Oliolles, near Marseilles."

"And since then?" asked the physician, uneasily.

"About five days ago Valentine received this note. Please read it and tell me what you think of it."

Morrel handed the following letter to the doctor:

"Mademoiselle Valentine — In Paris, in the house of Dr. D'Avigny, a dying man awaits your consolation. If you wish to see your father alive, hurry to him.

"M. C."

"The Count of Monte-Cristo must have written this note," said D'Avigny. "The initials M. C. prove it."

"We thought so, too," said Maximilian.

"Do you know where the count is now?"

"No."

"Where could he have found out that Monsieur de Villefort is dying? I myself have only known it since two days," said D'Avigny, meditatively.

"Oh, the count sometimes appears to be endowed with miraculous powers!" exclaimed Morrel, enthusiastically. "Valentine immediately travelled here under my protection. I — "

At this moment the door opened, and a young man about twenty-five years of age, with a fine open face, entered the room. Monsieur d'Avigny took pride in introducing him to Maximilian as his son Fritz.

"Papa," he said to the old gentleman, "Monsieur de Villefort is sinking rapidly."

"You have come at the right time," said D'Avigny, turning toward Maximilian; "where is Valentine?"

"At the home of my sister Madame d'Herbault."

"Then tell the two ladies, please, to come here at once," said the old gentleman. "Valentine can be at hand to come to her father when I call."

Morrel went away, and the father and son went to Monsieur de Villefort.

CHAPTER XII

THE CONFESSION

With his head between his hands, Monsieur de Villefort sat in his easy-chair, as if an uninterested spectator. When the door opened he rose in his chair, and, looking expectantly at the two physicians who entered, said:

“Well, is the district-attorney coming?”

“He will be here soon,” replied D’Avigny, to quiet the old man.

“But I have no more time,” exclaimed Villefort, passionately.

“Monsieur de Villefort,” said the physician earnestly, “you know that the district-attorney can only be informed in cases of the utmost importance, and — ”

“And is it not an important case when a man who has himself filled the office of district-attorney for years wishes to speak to his successor before he dies?” said Villefort, sharply. “What is the name of the new district-attorney?”

“Monsieur de Flambois.”

“Oh, my former assistant,” muttered the sick man, with a bitter smile. “Doctor, it is a question of rehabilitation. Tell Monsieur de Flambois to hurry up.”

“I will do so,” said Fritz, after an interchange of looks with his father, and he immediately left the room.

The old physician also went away, and immediately afterward Morrel conducted his sister and Valentine into the private office of the doctor.

Monsieur d’Avigny with deep emotion drew the young girl, who was attired in deep mourning, to his bosom, while the tears fell on Valentine’s cheeks.

“My dearly beloved child,” he said, with tenderness. “Thank God that my old eyes are permitted to see you once more.”

“And my father?” asked Valentine, sobbing.

“You will see him, Valentine. Remain patient for a little while longer; he wants to see the district-attorney, and, as far as I understand, it is about some former injustice which he wishes to repair. Confide in me, I shall call you when the time comes. In the meantime take some refreshment, as you must be weak from the journey.”

Valentine and Julie withdrew to an apartment which had been prepared for them, and d’Avigny and Morrel remained alone.

“If I could only understand,” said the old man meditatively, “how Monsieur de Villefort ever could have such a daughter.”

“Perhaps Valentine’s mother, Mademoiselle de St. Meran, had a noble nature.”

“I hardly think so. Of course I did not know Monsieur de Villefort’s first wife, but, from what I have heard of her, she was very miserly, and a fit companion for her husband. Old Madame de St. Meran, too, was not exactly a tender-hearted woman.”

“But she loved Valentine dearly,” Morrel remarked.

“I admit that; although this love did not prevent her from trying to force Valentine into an obnoxious marriage. Monsieur d’Epinay was of an old aristocratic family, and that was why the old lady thought he would be a good match for her granddaughter. No, they were all selfish, and Valentine can congratulate herself for not being like them.”

The entrance of the servant, who announced the arrival of Monsieur de Flambois and Monsieur d’Avigny, put an end to the conversation. The old physician immediately conducted Monsieur de Flambois to the bedside of his patient, whose eyes lighted up when he recognized the district-attorney.

“Monsieur de Villefort,” began the district-attorney, bowing low, “you desired to speak to me to tell me something important. Do you wish our interview to be private?”

“No,” said Villefort, solemnly. “I desire Monsieur d’Avigny to remain and act as a witness.”

The physician seated himself on the bed, while Monsieur de Flambois took up a position at the writing desk.

“Monsieur de Villefort, we are ready.”

“Gentlemen,” said the sick man, in a clear, firm voice, “thanks to me and thanks to my wife, Heloise de Villefort, my family name has become infamous and I am not surprised my father no longer wishes to bear it.”

“But, Monsieur de Villefort,” interrupted the official.

“Let me speak. What would you think of a man who, to save himself, condemns another in cold blood to imprisonment for life.”

“I would call him a criminal,” said Flambois solemnly.

“Well, I am such a criminal. In the year 1814, I condemned a young man to life imprisonment and the heavens did not fall; I rose step by step, and for twenty-five years was looked upon as an honorable official whose reputation was above suspicion, although in my own heart I knew I was a rogue. But the man I thought had rotted away in jail was alive and revenged himself upon me. The first wife who bore my name was my accomplice, the second was a poisoner. She murdered every one who stood in her way; my son and Valentine became her victims; my other son sprung from a criminal attachment. I tried to kill him by burying him alive; as a punishment for me, he was rescued to die on the gallows.”

“No, Monsieur de Villefort, Benedetto’s sentence was commuted to life imprisonment,” said Monsieur de Flambois.

“That is worse than the gallows,” stammered the sick man. “My first and my second wife, Benedetto and myself deserved to have our names looked upon with loathing, but Valentine, my poor innocent Valentine, did not deserve this shame, and on her account I speak to-day.”

“I do not understand you,” said the district-attorney. “Your daughter Valentine — ”

“Ah, what fools!” exclaimed Villefort. “How could you imagine that Valentine was my daughter? No, gentlemen, Valentine is not a Villefort! How could an angel be a member of such a sinful race!”

“I thought as much,” muttered d’Avigny to himself, while Flambois looked at his former chief as if the latter were talking Sanscrit.

“When I married Renee de St. Meran,” continued Monsieur de Villefort, after a short pause, “I was a young and ambitious official. My wife was also ambitious, and we were fitted in that respect for one another. Unfortunately for us both, there was a clause in the marriage contract, by which Monsieur and Madame de St. Meran pledged themselves to give our first child on its baptism a present of three hundred thousand francs. As soon as I was in possession of such a fortune, I could go to Paris, and once in the capital, I was sure to make my way. Renee was of the same mind as myself, she yearned to come to court and play a part in the world of society; Marseilles was too small for her. When Renee became *enceinte* we were both overjoyed. The birth of a child would smooth our path, and we only thought of the first smile of the little being, to arrange our plans. The event so anxiously awaited by us was to take place at the beginning of May, 1816. To have you understand what followed, I must go back to April, 1815. I was sitting at work on the evening of the 4th of April, when loud screams attracted my attention. I opened the window; it was ten o’clock, and in the moonlight I observed that the street in front of our house was filled with a noisy and turbulent crowd of people. Collecting my thoughts, I blew out my lamp. I saw a man running rapidly along the street, followed by a great crowd shouting, ‘Down with the Englishman.’ The man ran so quickly that he distanced all his pursuers, and I already thought that he was saved, when I saw him stagger and fall. In a moment his pursuers were upon him, a loud cry was heard, and the next moment the unfortunate man was thrown into the river. Not long after all was still again. I lighted my lamp again and was about to continue my work, when I heard a slight tap at the window. I became frightened. Who could want me at this hour? Grasping a pistol, I walked cautiously into the garden, from whence proceeded cries for help. I listened, and could now hear a soft voice with a foreign accent whisper:

“‘Help, my lord. For pity’s sake help me.’

“I immediately thought of the cry, ‘Down with the Englishman,’ which I had heard before. This must be the man who had been thrown in the water. I grasped the man, who was shivering with cold and dripping with water, and led him into my library. By the light of the lamp I saw he was about thirty years old.

“‘You have rescued me, sir,’ he said in a soft voice, with a peculiar accent, ‘but you will not find me ungrateful.’

“‘Who are you, and what am I to do for you?’ I asked him.

“‘I was thought to be an English spy in the service of the royalists,’ he said, laughing sorrowfully, ‘and the excited crowd threw me into the river. Fortunately, I did not lose my senses; I dived under, swam a short distance and then gained the bank.’

“‘Then you are not an Englishman?’ I asked.

“‘I, an Englishman?’ he repeated, with his eyes sparkling with rage; ‘what are you thinking of?’

“‘But who then are you?’ I exclaimed.

“He looked searchingly at me.

“‘You are young,’ he then said, ‘you do not know what betrayal is; I will confide in you! Besides, you are a Frenchman and hate the English as I do. Tell me where is the Emperor Napoleon at present?’

“‘In Paris.’

“‘Are you sure?’

"'Positive.'

"'You love the emperor?'

"'I am his faithful servant.'

"'Thank Heaven. Would you assist me to reach Paris?'

"'Paris?' I repeated in astonishment.

"'Yes, I must reach the capital as soon as possible. I must rescue the emperor.'

"'The roads are not safe,' I hesitatingly replied, 'and if you have no passport — '

"'You are an official,' he interrupted me, 'perhaps a judge?'

"'I am what is called in England attorney for the crown.'

"'Ah, in England there are no judges,' he violently said. 'In England are only hangmen! Thank God I am in France; and my ancestors were French.'

"'And your home?'

"'Is the Orient, the land of the sun,' he said with emotion, as his eyes filled with tears. 'I am an Indian prince.'

"'That is the reason you hate England!' I suddenly exclaimed, as a light dawned on me.

"'Hate it! I curse it!' he said, in a choking voice. 'It is the home of traitors and murderers.'

"'But did you not tell me a little while ago that you were of French descent?'

"'Yes. Have you forgotten the names of those Frenchmen who fought so gloriously for India's independence? Dupleix, Labourdonnaye and Lally came with an army to India. My father belonged to Lally's detachment, and fell on the 27th of October, 1803, in the battle of Laswari. During his stay in India, he married a Mahratta at Scindia's court; two children resulted therefrom, a boy and a girl, and the son is the one you have rescued to-day.'

"'Then you are really a Frenchman?'

"'No; I call myself Mahratta; the blood of my mother betrays itself in my veins, for she was the daughter of a prince.'

"'And her name?'

"'I have almost forgotten it myself, as I was not permitted to pronounce it for such a long time. About five years ago Scindia began anew the struggle against English tyranny. We were defeated in the battle of Gwalior, and I and my sister Naya, a beautiful girl of fifteen, were taken prisoners by the English. For five years we suffered martyrdom; we were brought to

England, and finally separated. About two months ago I managed to escape. I reached the coast, was taken on board a Spanish ship, and finally set foot on French ground. Paris is the place I desire to go to. Napoleon has promised us help if we assist him against the English. The whole of India will rise up and crush England, and Napoleon's throne will be secured forever.'

"The handsome youth stood before me like a prophet, and I enthusiastically exclaimed:

"'Whatever I can do to assist your plans shall be done. Tell me your name, and I will fill out your passport.'

"'I am the Rajah Siwadji Daola,' he said.

"'And your sister?' I asked; 'is she free, too?'

"'No; but she soon will be. A prince of the Mahrattas followed Naya to England; he loves her, and will soon bring her to France.'

"'To France? Have they a place to go to here?' I eagerly asked.

"'Let my sister and her husband find protection in your house,' he simply said, 'and the gods will reward you.'

"I hesitated for a moment, and then I cordially answered:

"'Let it be as you say — my house shall be open to your sister!'

"'A thousand thanks,' he joyfully cried. 'And so that you know my sister, look here.'

"He took out of his silk belt the half of a peculiarly formed bracelet, and handed it to me with the words:

"'Look at this bracelet! Whoever brings you the other half, receive in your house as a favor to me. I cannot leave the bracelet with you, but if you have a piece of wax I can make an impression which will answer the same purpose.'

"Wax was soon found, the broad gold plate, with its numerous hieroglyphics, was pressed in it, and after the impression had been secured the rajah hid the bracelet in his belt.

"'When can I get the pass?' he asked.

"'To-morrow morning. What name shall I put in?'

"'The name of my father — Jean d'Arras.'

"The rajah, upon my solicitation, threw himself on my bed and slept a few hours. As soon as the day dawned he left the house with me, enveloped in a wide mantle, and as we had no difficulty in getting the necessary passports from the prefecture, he was already that same morning on his way to Paris.”

“Monsieur de Villefort,” said D’Avigny, anxiously, “you are exerting yourself too much; postpone the continuation until to-morrow.”

“No, no,” replied Villefort, “I must speak to-day; to-morrow would be too late.

“Three months later, Renee de St. Meran became my wife, the battle of Waterloo followed, and Napoleon was deposed forever. On the 6th of May, 1816, my wife gave birth to a child — a daughter. It was very sickly, though, and my mother-in-law feared it would not live until the next day. On the night following the birth of the child I was sitting reading at my wife’s bedside, when I heard my name being softly called from the direction of the garden. At first I thought I was mistaken, but the cry was repeated, and I quietly slipped out. Near the garden hedge lay a white form; the moon was shining brightly, and I saw a woman’s face of extraordinary beauty. Giving vent to a low murmur of astonishment, I drew near to the figure; when I perceived the glistening eyes and the satiny dark curls, I no longer doubted but what the woman who lay before me was Naya, the sister of the Rajah Siwadji.

“‘You are Monsieur de Villefort?’ she said, in a gentle voice.

“‘Yes, and you are Naya,’ I said, to make sure.

“‘I am. My husband, the Rajah Duttjah, is dead. Save my child!’

“At these words the woman opened the white mantle which covered her, and I saw a new-born babe, which was wrapped up in a silk cloth. The poor mother looked anxiously at me. I took the child in my arms and a happy smile passed over the pale face.

“‘Now I can die peacefully,’ she whispered; ‘my husband died as we were about to leave England — I felt myself a mother — I had to live. Night and day I have wandered. Barely two hours ago my child was born; I dragged myself to the house, but my strength failed me — here — is — the — bracelet — ’

“She paused suddenly — I bent over her — she was dead. From her cold hand I took the half of the gold bracelet, and ran into the house. My wife was fast asleep. I laid the child in the cradle near my little daughter, and just thinking whether I should call the nurse who slept in the next room, when I perceived that I had laid the living child next to a dead one. Our little daughter had breathed her last!

"I stood as if struck by lightning. All the proud hopes we had built on the child's birth were gone. Suddenly the strange child began to cry, and my plan was quickly made. With trembling hands I dressed the strange child — it was a girl, too — in the clothes of my own daughter, and gathering the silk cloth about the latter, I carried her to the garden and placed her in Naya's arms.

"One hour later my wife awoke, and when she asked for our child, I gave her Naya's daughter!"

"Did not Madame de Villefort ever hear of the change which had been made?" asked the district-attorney.

"Oh, yes; my wife had placed a small chain with a golden cross around our child's neck just after it was born; in my hurry I had forgotten to put this talisman on the strange child; I first denied, then confessed, everything. Instead of heaping reproaches on me, she acquiesced in the fraud. The next day my father-in-law came; Naya's daughter was baptized under the name of Valentine de Villefort, and on the bed of the child, my happy parents-in-law laid my appointment as district-attorney in Paris, and bonds to the value of three hundred thousand francs. Naya, with the dead child in her arms, was found the next day at our door. They were both buried in the potter's field. The papers Naya carried were written in the Indian language; they were given to me as a high official, and since then they, together with the wax impression and the half of the bracelet, have lain in my private portfolio which always stands near my bed."

Upon a wink from Villefort, Monsieur de Flambois opened the portfolio designated; everything was found there as he had said.

"Did you never hear again from Daola?" said d'Avigny after a pause.

"Yes; three years later the rajah wrote me from India. He had fought at Waterloo, was again a captive of the English, and only had an opportunity at the end of a year to escape. Together with the Rajah Scindia, who later on went over to England, he had again begun the struggle for independence; he is now living in the interior of Hindustan, waiting for a better opportunity. He asked me for news from Naya; I wrote him I knew nothing of her, and that ended our correspondence.

"This is my confession. Now use justice and erase from the headstone under which Naya's daughter rests the name of Valentine de Villefort."

"Suppose Valentine de Villefort is still alive?" asked D'Avigny solemnly.

CHAPTER XIII

FORGIVENESS

Both Villefort and Monsieur de Flambois uttered a cry of astonishment, and while the latter stammered forth an “Impossible,” the sick man whispered: “To-day miracles do not occur any more!”

“Gentlemen,” said the physician quietly, “you know I am a sensible man; why should I try to tell you a fable?”

“But I was at the funeral,” stammered Flambois.

“I also, and yet I tell you the dead woman lives,” persisted D’Avigny, “or if we want to call it by its proper name, Valentine de Villefort is dead and the daughter of Naya and the Rajah Duttjah lives.”

“Then Valentine must have been buried alive,” muttered Villefort, fixing his eyes upon the physician.

“And if that were the case?” said D’Avigny solemnly.

“Then I would say God has done a miracle to save the innocent,” said Villefort, the tears starting in his eyes.

“Monsieur de Villefort,” said the physician, earnestly, “do you know how Valentine died?”

“Too well — she was poisoned by my wife.”

“What for?”

“Madame de Villefort wished to have Valentine’s fortune go to her son.”

“That is dastardly,” said the district-attorney.

“Do you remember, Monsieur de Villefort,” continued D’Avigny, “to have seen a mysterious man in your house some time prior to Valentine’s death, whose mission it appears is to reward the good and punish the guilty?”

“Yes, I remember; you mean the Count of Monte-Cristo,” said Villefort, with emotion.

“The Count of Monte-Cristo,” repeated the district-attorney, contemptuously, “the adventurer?”

“Sir, do not blaspheme!” exclaimed Villefort, passionately; “if Valentine is saved she owes it to that God in the form of man — the Count of Monte-

Cristo! He alone has the power to change the dead into the living. If Valentine lives, I will believe God has pardoned a portion of my sins.”

“Gentlemen,” said the district-attorney, doubtingly, “I only believe what I see; if Valentine de Villefort lives, let her show herself.”

“Maximilian,” called D’Avigny, opening the door, “tell Valentine to come in.”

“Whom did you just call?” asked Villefort, when D’Avigny had closed the door again.

“Maximilian Morrel, Valentine’s betrothed, the son of the shipping merchant Morrel, of Marseilles.”

“Morrel — Marseilles — Edmond Dantes,” murmured Villefort. “Ah, there is justice in Heaven!”

The door was now opened, and Valentine entered. She strode to Villefort’s bed and sank on her knees beside it.

“Oh, father,” she sobbed, embracing him tenderly. “Thank God, I see you again!”

Villefort gazed at Valentine as if she were a spectre; but tears fell on the young girl’s cheeks, and his lean hands were crossed as if in prayer.

“Father, dearly beloved father!” stammered Valentine, weepingly, “why do you not speak? Have you no word of welcome for your Valentine?”

“Monsieur de Flambois, do you still doubt?” asked d’Avigny, softly.

“Yes, not your statement, but my reason,” said the district-attorney, wiping the tears from his eyes.

“Valentine,” whispered Villefort, in a broken voice, “kiss me. Now I can die easy.”

“Oh, father, father, you must not die!” she weepingly cried.

“I must, darling, but I die happy, since I know you will be well taken care of. Monsieur Morrel,” he said, turning to the young man, “you know what unhappiness I once caused your father?”

“No, Monsieur de Villefort, I have forgotten everything, and only know that you are Valentine’s father,” said Maximilian, cordially. “Give us your blessing.”

“No, no!” said Villefort, anxiously; “I dare not — I am not worthy of it! But one thing I can do; I can tell Valentine who she is, and Monsieur de Flambois and Monsieur d’Avigny will corroborate my words. Valentine, you, whom I have so often called daughter, look at me and listen to my words. You are the daughter of the Rajah Duttjah and his wife Naya. The marriage of your parents was celebrated at Epping Forest, in England, by a Brahmin, who was also a prisoner there; in the portfolio there you will find the paper relating to the marriage. Do not look at me so fearfully, my poor darling, I am speaking the truth, and these gentlemen will tell you later on all the details. Your parents are both dead. There is a letter in the portfolio from your mother's brother, the Rajah Siwadji Daola. It was written in 1818. If Daola still lives, he will find out that I deceived him; that I saw his sister die, and that Naya's child still lives."

"But, father," said Valentine, passionately, "if my parents are both dead, and you brought me up, I am nevertheless your daughter."

"Thanks, Valentine. But before my strength gives way, I must perform another duty. Doctor, a glass of wine; I have one more favor to ask of Valentine."

D'Avigny poured out a glass of red wine for Monsieur de Villefort, and Valentine put her arm around the dying man's neck, and rested his head against her bosom.

"I want you to look after my son, Valentine," whispered Villefort. "Oh, what would I not give if I could wear the chains instead of him — what is death to the life led by a galley-slave? If it is in your power to do anything for Benedetto, do not fail to do it. He is a scoundrel, but I was the cause of his downfall. Have mercy on him, and I die peacefully!"

"Father," said Valentine, solemnly, "your wish shall be sacred to me. I shall go in search of Benedetto, and bring him your last wishes."

"You are — an — angel," stammered Villefort. "Farewell. Ah — this — is — death!"

A shiver ran through Villefort's frame — a deep groan — a long breath — he was dead.

As soon as Valentine's first grief subsided, the physician persuaded her to stay in her room for the rest of the night, while the gentlemen conferred about the wonderful confession they had heard.

"If I only knew," said Flambois, thoughtfully, "what the papers written in the Indian language contain — I — "

"Monsieur de Flambois," interrupted young D'Avigny, modestly, "if you give me the documents I will translate them for you."

"Really? How can you do it?" asked the district-attorney, doubtingly.

"Very easily. Besides my profession as a doctor, I am an enthusiastic Orientalist. I am always in hopes of being able to go to India: the home of the lotus flower has always had attractions for me. Give me the papers and I will give you the translation to-morrow."

"Here are the papers," said Flambois, thoughtfully.

They then separated.

The next day, as D'Avigny was sitting with his daughter, Julie, Valentine and Maximilian at table, a light knock was heard at the door, and in obedience to the summons to come in, Ali, Monte-Cristo's black servant, appeared on the threshold.

Valentine and Maximilian uttered a cry of surprise. Ali bowed deeply, handed the physician a letter, and disappeared.

D'Avigny opened it and read the following:

"Waiting and hoping! In these two words lies the mystery of life. Be courageous and God will help."

As soon as Monsieur de Villefort's remains were buried, Valentine, Maximilian and Julie returned to Marseilles. Valentine wished to make the journey to Toulon, and then go to Italy for the remainder of the winter with Maximilian, her grandfather, and the Herbaults. D'Avigny's last words at the parting were:

"Beware of Benedetto!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE RAT-KING

The days at the Bagnio passed monotonously. The rat furnished the evening’s amusement, and in the same degree as Benedetto was excited, Anselmo remained calm and cool. On the evening of the 24th of February, the young man’s patience was exhausted, and he forgot himself so much as to call Anselmo a liar and traitor, even threatening him with death.

“Come, come,” said Anselmo indifferently, “don’t be so violent. Instead of exciting yourself you had better be calm and tell me what relation it has with the million.”

“That means,” hissed Benedetto, “I should tell you my secret.”

“You are a fool,” said Anselmo, laughing; “remember that you can never get the million without my aid, and therefore leave off your sulks and speak.”

“You are always right,” growled Benedetto. “You have my fate in your hands and I must speak. The million, of course, must first be earned — ”

“I am not so foolish as to imagine that the million will fly into my mouth like a broiled pigeon,” interrupted Anselmo; “but first of all, I must know if you have some right to this million?”

“Certainly,” replied Benedetto; “if the million should slip from my grasp, I should look upon myself as being robbed.”

“Really — who is the thief?”

“A woman!”

“I thought so; the lady no doubt who took charge of the letter?”

“The same.”

“And you must be set free punctually on the 24th?”

“Yes, on the 25th the money would be irredeemably lost.”

“H’m! that would be fatal. Well, I shall arrange it.”

“You arrange it? Are you ever going to tell me how you intend to set us free?”

Anselmo peered cautiously about. The jailers were sleeping in the corners, and the other prisoners, as it was Sunday, were amusing themselves with the rat, which ran from board to board, performing the most difficult tricks.

“I will call our savior at once,” whispered Anselmo, and, whistling softly, he called the little rat-king to him.

The rat immediately came to its master and climbed upon his knee. Anselmo took the animal in his hand, put it on its back, and took from under its thick, hairy skin a small, thin instrument called in galley-slave slang “cow’s tail.”

Benedetto uttered a cry of astonishment. Anselmo waved before his comrade’s eyes a narrow little tooth-saw.

“Do you believe in my promise now?” the ex-priest triumphantly exclaimed: “the jailers call our little animal ‘rat!’ I call him ‘necessary.’“

Benedetto laughed aloud. Anselmo placed the instrument back in its place and the little rat-king sprang away, while Benedetto looked at him deaf and dumb with astonishment.

“I am convinced now,” he finally said, breathing deeply, “and now you shall hear how the million is to be got. A lady will come here on the 24th — ”

“Are you sure of it?”

“Positive. On the 25th this woman will draw one million to give to others.”

“You are joking — she intends to give away a million?”

“Yes, and we two will prevent her,” said Benedetto, firmly.

“And who is to get the million?”

“The Church, of course; you understand, now, that I must be free on the 24th, so as to be able to follow the lady and take the million from her.”

“Yes, I understand. Who is the woman?”

Benedetto shrugged his shoulders.

“Do not bother yourself about that, that is my affair.” He answered indifferently.

“Is it a former girl of yours?”

“No.”

“A relative?”

“No.”

“Good. Keep your secret. Tell me one thing more. Will it be a stabbing case?”

“What do you mean?”

"Don't make yourself so green. From what I know of the world, this woman, who intends to give the money to the Church, will not offer it to you. You will take it from her, and if she resists — " He finished the sentence with a suggestive gesture.

Benedetto became pale as death. He bit his lips and in a hollow voice replied:

"What is necessary will occur."

"Good. I am pleased with you; but look — there comes a lady on our pontoon. Perhaps that is your millionnairess."

Benedetto looked in the direction indicated. A lady, leaning on the arm of a gentleman and accompanied by several high officials, was coming toward him.

The Corsican gave vent to an oath and made a movement as if he intended to throw himself upon the party. "Redhead," said the jailer, letting his heavy stick fall on Benedetto's shoulders, "you are trying to fly away?" Benedetto gritted his teeth. He had recognized Valentine, and as she was a Villefort, and occupied the place he thought ought to have been his own, he would have liked to have wrung her neck. He recognized Morrel, whom he had seen in Monte-Cristo's house at Auteuil, and he, too, made his anger rise. He thought they had both come to gloat over his shame. The head officer whispered a few words to the jailer, and immediately afterward Benedetto and Anselmo were ushered into the presence of the visitors.

"They take me along too because they can't help it," said Anselmo wickedly, pointing to the chain which bound them.

The jailer nodded, and the ex-priest whispered in Benedetto's ear:

"Commit no follies. You look as if you would like to poison every one."

"That is what I should like to do. But have no fear, I will be circumspect."

"Which one of you is named Benedetto?" asked the inspector, gruffly, turning to the convicts.

"I," said the former Prince Cavalcanti, modestly.

"You are wanted. Follow me, but do not speak a word or else you will be put in the black hole."

Benedetto bowed silently, and the next minute stood with his comrade before Valentine.

The young girl drew back in terror, as she saw him whom she had thought was her brother. She soon collected herself and gently said:

"Sir, Monsieur de Villefort is dead."

Benedetto's eyes shone. He felt a wild joy at the death of the man he so bitterly hated.

"On his death-bed," continued Valentine with emotion, "he thought of you, and the officials have carried out his last wishes, and allowed me to bring you his regards and certain ameliorations for you. From this day on you are freed from double chains, and if you conduct yourself well in the future, you can hope for other mercies. Farewell, and may God be with you."

Valentine's voice broke, Maximilian laid his arm protectingly around the young girl and led her away, while Benedetto and Anselmo were brought back to their comrades.

"Who is the lady?" asked Anselmo. "She is very handsome."

Benedetto remained silent and the ex-priest looked distrustfully at him.

Toward evening the blacksmith came, and Benedetto was freed from Anselmo.

"Keep up your spirits," said the jailer to the ex-priest, "and I will see what can be done for you. In a few days a new column will arrive, and if you conduct yourself properly, I will see that you get no new comrade."

"I will let my little rat-king intercede for me," said Anselmo, laughing, and the jailer nodded.

The 24th of February dawned, and Benedetto, who had not closed an eye during the night, looked so miserable in the morning that Anselmo became frightened.

"Come, now, you are frightened, perhaps?" he maliciously asked. The look he received from his comrade made him pause.

The prisoners went as usual to work, and gradually Benedetto calmed down. The night was to bring the decision, and if Anselmo lied he would make him pay dearly for it.

During this time a carriage with four horses rode from Aubagne to Beaussuet. At the inn of the latter place it stopped, and while the guard put fresh horses in the traces, the occupant of the coach, a heavily veiled woman, got out and asked of the postmaster who advanced how far it was to the nearest vicarage.

"About fifty steps from the inn," he said.

"Then please let some one come along with me to show me the way," begged the lady.

"Directly, madame. Jean, lead this lady to the vicarage."

"Yes, Monsieur Etienne," was the servant's reply, "but the priest is not at home."

"What?" said the lady, astonished. "Where is he, then?"

"I do not know. He rode past me this morning. Perhaps the housekeeper can tell us," added the servant.

"Good. Let us go there," said the lady, and before the end of five minutes they were at the vicarage.

The door was opened by an elderly woman. She made a courtesy when she saw the lady, and politely said: "Ah, madame — you are here."

"Were you expecting me?" asked the lady, astonished.

"Certainly; his reverence was unfortunately obliged to go on a journey, but there is a letter here for Madame Danglars, if you are the lady."

"I am Madame Danglars," said the lady, quickly.

The old woman handed her a letter, and invited her to make herself at home. Upon which she left.

As soon as the lady found herself alone, she hastily tore open the letter. It contained a sealed packet, and these lines:

"Madame — I am, unfortunately, not able to receive you personally. A journey obliges me to be disrespectful. Nevertheless I hope to see you to-morrow, and beg you to make yourself comfortable in my house. All your conditions have been fulfilled. I inclose a note addressed to the port inspector at Toulon and hope everything will turn out as you desire.

"Jean Balais, Curate of Beaussuet."

The lady put the letter and the note in her pocket, and as the old lady entered with a cup of steaming bouillon, she hesitatingly said:

"Did the priest tell you I was going to stay here over night?"

"Yes, madame! Your room is ready, and I hope you will sleep soundly," replied the woman, cordially.

"The house is safe?" asked Madame Danglars, looking anxiously about.

"Certainly, madame; we are hid here as if in Abraham's bosom."

The lady drank the bouillon, and then said:

"Will you please show me my room?"

"Yes, madame! I hope it will please you," replied the woman, as she walked up the stairs, followed by the lady.

Here she opened a door, and the stranger looked in and saw a large, plainly furnished room. At one side stood a snow-white bed, a washstand, some chairs, and an old-fashioned bureau.

“Does this closet lock?” asked Madame Danglars, examining the lock. “I have a jewel-case in the coach which I would like to bring to a place of security.”

“Ah, the closet is as safe as the poor-box,” the old lady assured her.

The lady nodded her pleasure at this, and, after she had convinced herself that the door of the room was in order, she went back to the coach, took a portfolio from the jewel-casket, and brought it to the vicarage. The old lady awaited her at the door; Madame Danglars walked past her and went to the upper story, opened the closet, put the box in it, closed the door carefully, and put both keys in her pocket. She then went downstairs again, and, turning to the old woman, said:

“For the present, good-by; I shall probably be back again before night.”

“Good-by, madame; but do not stay out too late. A storm is coming up, and the roads of Oliolles are dangerous at night.”

“I will try to be back soon. Adieu.”

Madame Danglars got into her carriage and drove off in the direction of Toulon.

The feelings of the poor woman, who was going to the Bagnio to see Benedetto as she had promised, can be imagined. She had seen all her hopes reduced to nothing. Her husband had fled after a shameful bankruptcy, her lover had deserted her, her daughter had disappeared without leaving a word behind her, and what was left to her? The child of her shame, who had been sentenced to the galleys for murder.

She had sacrificed everything for this son, whom she loved dearly; the Jesuits had taken her million, and saved Benedetto from the gallows. Though, to her idea, the galleys was worse than death; but there was a chance of his getting free. No, she did not wish to think any more; she would bury herself in a convent in Asia Minor, and forget everything.

Toulon was at length reached; the driver took the road to the port, and she felt her heart cease beating. In a little while she would see Benedetto; the carriage stopped; the driver got out and opened the door.

“Will you please step out? Here is the Bagnio.”

With trembling limbs, Madame Danglars left the coach, and slipping a few gold pieces into his hand, she said:

“Make yourself comfortable in the nearest saloon; in about three hours we shall return home.”

“To-day, madame?” asked the man; “that would be impossible.”

“Why impossible? Get fresh horses, I will pay you for everything.”

“I am very sorry, madame, but the storm, the mistral will come very soon, and while the mistral lasts we cannot ride.”

“Then I must look for another driver; I cannot delay my return.”

“Madame, believe me, you will not find any one who will drive you while the storm lasts. Wait till to-morrow. I will put up my horses at the Black Eagle and await your commands there.”

“I will think about it, but doubt whether I shall follow your advice. Adieu.”

Madame Danglars entered the office of the port inspector and the driver drove off.

CHAPTER XV

IN THE BAGNIO

"Well, what is the matter now?" asked the inspector, gruffly, as Madame Danglars handed him the priest's letter. He grumblingly opened the letter, but when he had read its contents his face lighted up and, making a respectful bow, he said:

"Madame, after reading these lines, I can only carry out all your wishes, as far as they are confined within the limits of the rules in force here. You desire to see one of our prisoners?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are aware that such an interview can only take place in the presence of the chaplain?"

Madame Danglars became frightened. She had not expected this.

"I will have the chaplain informed," continued the official. "In fact, I shall let him come into my office. This is a special favor. Yesterday there was a lady here to see Benedetto, who was not permitted to converse with him except in the presence of the port inspector and the jailer."

"A lady?" exclaimed Madame Danglars, vivaciously. "Can you tell me who she was?"

"Oh, certainly, it was Mademoiselle de Villefort, the daughter of the recently deceased district-attorney."

"Monsieur de Villefort is dead?" said Madame Danglars in a choking voice.

"Yes, madame, he died in a private lunatic asylum in Paris. Did you know the gentleman?"

"Yes, slightly," replied Madame Danglars, restraining her emotion. "If you would let the gentleman be informed now — "

"At once, madame," said the official.

He wrote a few lines and went away, promising to return shortly. In about half an hour the chaplain appeared. He bowed respectfully, and said:

"Madame, I am aware of the reason which brings you here."

"What, you know?" exclaimed Madame Danglars, frightened.

“Calm yourself, madame; the secrets which are intrusted to me are buried. I must witness your interview as a matter of form, but I shall neither hear nor see.”

Madame Danglars with tears in her eyes thanked the chaplain. The next minute the door opened and Benedetto appeared, accompanied by the jailer. When the poor mother saw the yellow and red clothing, the green cap, and the chain which led from the waist to the ankle, she uttered a low cry and clutched the arm of a chair to prevent herself from fainting. Upon a wink from the chaplain, who wore the dress of a Jesuit priest, the jailer departed, and after the priest had closed the door, he turned toward Benedetto, and said:

“My son, thank God for his mercy, and try to show yourself worthy of it.”

Neither Madame Danglars nor the priest noticed the smile which flitted across the convict’s face. Benedetto collected himself immediately, and taking off his hat he bent his knee to his mother and crossed his eyes with his hand. The priest sat in the window alcove, pulled a prayer-book out of his pocket and began to read; Madame Danglars threw a look around, then she took the bald-shaved head of Benedetto in her hands and sobbingly murmured:

“My poor, poor son!”

“A thousand thanks, mother, for coming,” said the hypocritical convict.

“Oh, I desired to come, it was necessary for me to see you again,” stammered the poor woman.

“How good you are! Are you aware that my father pursued me even on his death-bed? He sent his daughter, my sister, here; she brought me his last regards, but she did not give me her hand nor call me brother.”

“My son, forget everything bad that has been done to you; forgive your enemies, as you desire to be yourself forgiven,” implored the poor mother.

“For your sake, then. But, tell me, mother, are you really going to leave France?”

“Yes; to-morrow, at this hour, I shall sail.”

“But you are not going alone; the journey is so far, and I fear danger for you.”

“Thanks, Benedetto, for your anxiety. How happy you make me. But calm yourself, I shall dwell in the society of pious women, who will protect me.”

"Yes, I forgot. You gave your fortune to buy this protection — the price you paid was pretty steep."

"Benedetto, you blaspheme. Your life is not too dear for me to purchase."

"I wish I could earn your love," murmured Benedetto, apparently annihilated; "you gave up a million to rescue me. If you had more money, I am sure you would sacrifice it to secure my full pardon."

"Oh, I do not give up all hope yet," exclaimed Madame Danglars, vivaciously.

"What? Have you still got the million?" asked Benedetto, hastily.

"I shall not deliver the money before to-morrow. But that has nothing to do with the matter. What I have promised, I keep."

Benedetto remained silent, while a thousand confused ideas ran through his mind. He stood with downcast eyes, his left hand carelessly stroking his chain and his right crumpling his green cap.

"Mother," he finally said, in a low voice, "there is no use speaking of the past — let us think of the future. You are going to depart to-morrow; where are you staying now?"

"I live at the vicarage of Beaussuet. The Jesuit fathers recommended me there, and I am staying there over-night, although the priest is absent."

"Oh, God!" sobbed Benedetto, "if I could only accompany you."

"I would be glad, too; I have a rough road to go back to Beaussuet. The mistral blows, and the roads of Oliolles are said to be so dangerous that my driver refuses to take me back to-night. Well, I will find another one."

"But why do you not stay in Toulon until the morning?"

"Impossible. I must hurry back to Beaussuet. I left the money at the vicarage."

"Wasn't that careless? A lonely vicarage, whose owner is absent — "

"I took good care of it; the portfolio containing the money is stowed safely away in a tight closet, the key of which I carry."

"But the portfolio must be a large one. It is not so easy to wrap up a million," said Benedetto, inquisitively.

"Yes, if I had to deliver the whole sum in coin; but that is not the case. Only a small part of the million is in gold, the rest is in bank-notes."

Benedetto nodded. He knew now exactly what he had desired to find out, and as the chaplain rose, and gently hinted that the time for the interview had expired, the convict turned to his mother, and weepingly said:

"Bless me, mother."

Madame Danglars placed her trembling hands on his head, and tenderly whispered:

“God be with you!”

Her strength deserted her; and while Benedetto was being led out by a jailer, she leaned faintingly against a chair.

The priest consoled her. She sorrowfully shook her head, collected herself, slipped a thousand-franc note into the priest’s hand, and murmured:

“Give that to those who are as unhappy as I am.”

The next moment she wrapped her cloak firmly about her, and strode toward the inn where the driver awaited her.

CHAPTER XVI

THE ESCAPE

“Well,” said Anselmo to his comrade as the latter returned, “how do things stand?”

Benedetto did not answer at first, but seated himself on a block of wood and looked steadfastly before him.

“Well, has the million been stolen?” asked Anselmo, growing impatient.

“No, the million is safe for us,” replied Benedetto.

“So much the better. This mistral is very favorable to us. It helps our escape.”

“Really? Anselmo, we must be free in two hours.”

“I shall look out for that — but what will happen then? Have you a plan?”

“Yes. Do you know the village of Beaussuet?”

“Yes. It is near the gorge of Oliolles.”

“Right. We must reach this village to-night, even though we run the danger of being caught and brought back, if we escape by daylight.”

“What are you talking about? There is no daylight to-day. One can hardly see one’s hand now, and in two hours it will be night.”

“But suppose we should be locked up in the pontoons?”

“That is what I desire. We must flee by way of the pontoons.”

“And our chains?”

“Have you forgotten our little Rat King?”

“You are talking nonsense again.”

“Listen, Benedetto. When a million is involved, I never joke. The saw our necessary carries will cut our chains in ten minutes. And now to work. Here comes the overseer.”

The convicts grasped one of the heavy logs and pretended to be working hard peeling off the rind. As Anselmo had rightly predicted, one could not see one’s own hand, and no one observed Anselmo and his companion glide toward the pontoon, which was empty.

“Lie flat on the ground,” Anselmo ordered, “and feel about with your hands.”

Benedetto did as he was told. Suddenly he uttered a low cry as his hand came in contact with a dark object, which flitted about.

“What a noise you make,” grumbled Anselmo. “You have disturbed our poor little Rat King from his work.”

“Ah, now I feel a split, too. Has the rat gnawed it through?” whispered Benedetto, gleefully.

“Certainly. The courageous animal has been working to free us for over a month. As you might have noticed, I smeared the floor of our pontoon with grease, in consequence of which our shrewd rat has spent all his spare moments here, and now his business is ended. The boards are gnawed through.”

“Ah! then we are to escape by swimming?” asked Benedetto, surprised.

“Have you finally found out? You are not afraid, are you?”

“No, no!” exclaimed Benedetto hastily. “Freedom at any price.”

“Now you please me! Let us go now and take up our work again before our absence is noticed.”

“One word more! Have you thought of our clothes?”

“I have thought of everything. Trust in me.”

The convicts returned to their work, but soon after the weather became so bad that the jailers stopped work and formed the prisoners in columns to return them to the pontoons. The storm broke with such fury that the masts snapped and the sails flew about. A piece of a mast knocked a convict overboard, and when he was fished up his skull was found to be fractured. A cry of terror ran through the lines and the jailers hastened to bring the columns to the pontoons. Benedetto and Anselmo cowered in their corners and listened to the roar of the mistral. The louder it became, the more their hearts beat with joy.

“Are you ready?” whispered Anselmo to his comrade.

“Yes.”

“Then forward! It is a question of life or death.”

They both lay flat on the ground and Anselmo drew from a hole a package wrapped in sail cloth. “Here, take this package,” the ex-priest told his companion, “and give it to me as soon as I am in the water. Do you see the plank which our little pet gnawed through? Well, it can be shoved aside, and by that way we come to a cave where instruments and nails are kept. In this cave is a door, to which I have the key which locks it. Now pay attention; I am turning the key. Forward, in the devil’s name!” Through the open door Anselmo carefully glided into the water, which surged and roared. Benedetto handed him the package and glided likewise into the river, and while the pontoon creaked and groaned, torn by the force of the storm, the two convicts disappeared in the darkness.

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE MOUNTAIN PASS OF OLIOLLES

Madame Danglars had returned to the inn and asked feverishly for fresh horses, so as to be able to drive to Beaussuet. The innkeeper politely assured her it was impossible to carry out her wishes. Madame Danglars, without changing a muscle, looked steadily at the man. To her idea money could do anything, and she therefore opened her purse, and placing five hundred francs on the table, asked once more for fresh horses. The innkeeper immediately remembered that there was a man in Toulon who would risk his own and his horses' lives for money, and he sent a messenger for him. Two long hours passed before the messenger returned. He brought a favorable answer. Father Jacob, that was the man's name, would come at four o'clock with two good horses.

"Who is this Father Jacob?" asked Madame Danglars of the innkeeper.

"Oh, he is a former city boarder," replied the host, laughing, as he gave a suggestive glance in the direction of the Bagnio.

Madame Danglars shuddered.

"Does he know how to drive?" she asked.

"Like Satan. He used to be a driver of the mail coach, but got a few years in the galleys for assisting robbers to plunder the mails. He is now, however, a good, honest man, and you can safely trust yourself to his care."

What was the baroness to do? She patiently sat down, and breathed more freely when the clock struck four, and the expected coachman arrived with two splendid horses.

"So you want to drive me to Beaussuet?" asked Madame Danglars, vivaciously.

"Yes, madame, for five hundred francs."

"Then harness your horses at once."

"But," stammered the ex-convict, scratching his head, "I make it a rule to take money in advance."

"Good! Here is the money, and go quick, because I am in a hurry."

“I am in a hurry to go too. The roads will not get any better, and the mountain passes of Oliolles are not easy to ride over, even in good weather.”

In less than a quarter of an hour, the baroness sat in the coach. The innkeeper stood at the door, and, as the horses started, he whispered to the coachman: “Take care of yourself, old fellow. You know you have every reason to be prudent.”

“I will be so,” replied Jacob, as he whipped the horses and drove off.

In the meantime, the storm continued with unabated vigor, tearing up trees, rolling the waves mountains high, and sometimes shaking the heavy coach as if it had been a feather. The horses seemed to care as little for the weather as the coachman. Madame Danglars, however, became terribly excited, and, sobbing bitterly, cowered in a corner of the carriage. Around about her, as within her, all was dark. She still thought she heard the rattling of Benedetto’s chains in the roar and fury of the storm — she thought she could distinguish the soft voice of Benedetto. Suddenly a sharp jolt was felt, the coachman uttered an oath, and Madame Danglars sank in a semi-unconscious condition against the cushions of the coach.

When she recovered herself she became aware that one of the horses had stumbled; the coachman was still swearing, and tried to raise the animal up. Suddenly he came to the carriage door, and grumblingly said:

“Madame, I must give you your money back. We will not be able to reach Beaussuet.”

The storm whistled and roared with bitter fury. Madame Danglars looked anxiously at the man, and in a hollow voice asked:

“Where are we?”

“The devil only knows. These passes look all alike.”

“But we cannot remain here. What would become of us?” said the poor woman sobbing.

“Come, come, do not carry on so,” Jacob consolingly said.

“These passes have always been dangerous. Thirty years ago I met with a misfortune at this same place; oh, when I think of that time — ”

The face of the ex-convict darkened; Madame Danglars looked anxiously at him, and murmured softly:

“May God have mercy upon me!”

The man paused for a moment and then said:

"I know another way out of the difficulty. We could return to Oliolles, which is fifteen minutes distant, and some one there would fix my axle, which the horse in falling broke. We could wait at Oliolles until the storm subsides. It won't rage so furiously long. I know the mistral well."

"And you promise me you will go ahead again as soon as the storm is over?"

"As true as I stand here," the man replied.

Madame Danglars rose up and got out, while Jacob unharnessed the horses and took one of the coach lamps in his hand.

"Now follow me," he said, holding the lantern aloft.

He threw the reins about his arm and strode bravely along, while Madame Danglars slowly walked behind.

As Jacob had said, the storm had decreased in intensity. A fine rain poured down, and the poor woman strode on with renewed courage.

Suddenly the storm cast a curiously formed thing at the feet of the pedestrians. Jacob picked it up and laughed loudly, as he put a convict's green cap, for such it was, upon his head.

"Almighty God!" exclaimed Madame Danglars in terror.

"Madame," said Jacob, confused, "I did not want to frighten you. I was only glad to see such a cap after so long a time."

"How did the cap get here?" asked Madame Danglars, excitedly.

"That is easy to say. A convict has thought fit to free himself from the kindly care of the Bagnio attendants, and as the beautiful costume of the galley slaves is universally known, he has changed his toilet and thrown his cap, jacket and trousers to the winds."

Madame Danglars became excited, but she kept silent. They soon reached the house at Oliolles. The church bell of the village struck eight o'clock. Jacob went to the nearest inn, and, tying his horses to a tree, he entered the smoky little saloon, accompanied by his companion.

The innkeeper immediately hurried toward them, and while Madame Danglars ordered a glass of brandy for the coachman, the latter went to the kitchen to get the nails and cords he required to fix his broken axle. He threw the green cap carelessly on the table. Several people who sat there threw curious glances at the despised head-dress. Finally one of them said:

"Where did you get that pretty cap?"

"My coachman found it," said Madame Danglars softly.

"On the road?" exclaimed the men, rising as if electrified.

“We must hurry! Who is going along?”

“I — I!” came from all sides, and, as Madame Danglars looked from one to the other, the innkeeper said:

“There is a reward, madame, given by the city of Toulon for the capture of an escaped convict, and where a convict’s cap is found they naturally conclude that the owner must be near at hand. At present wages are low, and one must not blame our peasants if they try to make something extra. I can guarantee you that the prisoner will be captured before two hours more have passed.”

“The escaped convict cannot have been long in the Bagnio!” exclaimed a peasant looking closely at the cap. “The thing is almost new.”

“Is there no name on the lining?” asked another.

“No, only a number — 88!”

Madame Danglars gave a loud scream and with difficulty stammered:

“Show me the cap?”

Yes, there could be no doubt, the cap bore the number 88, the same which she had noticed on Benedetto’s clothing. Had he escaped? And now these people wished to hunt him down like a wild animal, and he would not be able to hide from them.

“We must be going,” said one of the peasants; “the convict cannot be far away, and who knows but we shall have luck and find two. It seldom happens that one escapes alone, the double chain is a good invention. Are you all ready?”

“Listen to me, gentlemen,” said Madame Danglars firmly; “I will make you a proposition. Let the convict escape.”

“And our hundred francs?”

“You will lose nothing! I will give you two hundred francs. It might be a humor, but I cannot reconcile myself to the thought of having a man pursued as if he were a wild animal.”

The men looked up.

“The weather is terrible,” said one.

“And a bird in the hand is worth two in a bush,” said another.

“But we are three?” said the third, with a look of cupidity.

“You shall have three hundred francs, but let the convict escape.”

“Good, madame! Your wish shall be fulfilled,” said the men, after a pause; “but suppose he should be captured by some one else?”

“That cannot be helped,” said Madame Danglars. “Who knows but what the poor fellow might get free this time. I saw the Bagnio to-day, and since then I am terribly nervous. It was frightful.”

At this minute a shot was heard, and a firm voice cried:

“Help! help! Hold him!”

The innkeeper ran out, followed by the men. Madame Danglars crouched in a corner, and prayed to God to let her die before she should see her son.

The door was now torn open, and a great crowd entered the room.

“Forward, you horse thief,” Jacob’s rough voice was heard saying; “we just captured you in time.”

A man whose face was covered with blood was pushed into the room. He fought desperately, throwing chairs and tables about, and falling flat on the ground.

“Let me alone,” he cried, breathlessly. “I am tied already. I cannot escape.”

Madame Danglars muttered a prayer of gratitude. No, that was not Benedetto’s voice.

“Yes, we have got you,” replied Jacob; “but the other one who took my horse has escaped! Would you believe it,” he said, turning to the people, “that the other rascal ran off with my horse? While I was getting cord and nails I heard a noise in the courtyard. I ran to the spot, and saw two men getting on the backs of my horses. Quick as thought I pulled out my pistol and fired. One of them fell, but before I could load again the other had disappeared! But I shall get him, and may God have mercy on him. Quick, a glass of brandy, and may the devil take him!”

While the people crowded about Jacob, Madame Danglars drew near to the convict.

“Did Benedetto accompany you?” asked Madame Danglars, softly.

Anselmo looked up surprised.

“Ha! the lady who gave me the letter for Benedetto,” he murmured. —”Yes, Benedetto accompanied me.”

“I want to save him; help me, and I will make you rich.”

Lo! that was the lady with the million. Anselmo looked cautiously about, then whispered softly:

“Cut my cords. A knife lies over there.”

Madame Danglars let her handkerchief fall on the table; when she picked it up she held a knife in her trembling hands; one cut and Anselmo was free.

At the same moment she got up and stood in front of the door.

“Now, good-night,” said Jacob, putting the empty glass down and drawing his pistol from his pocket.

At the same instant Anselmo sprang forward, and, seizing the pistol, he clutched Madame Danglars under the arm as if she were a child, and ran out of the room with her. Madame Danglars at once realized the situation. While Anselmo pressed against the door with all his strength, Madame Danglars, who was a splendid horsewoman, sprang into the saddle. Anselmo then let go of the door, fired a shot into the crowd which surrounded him, and likewise bounded on to the back of the horse. The animal reared, but receiving a slight cut with the knife Madame Danglars still held in her hand, it flew like the wind, bearing the two far from their pursuers.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MOTHER

Benedetto, who had been told the way to Beaussuet by Anselmo, whipped his horse severely, making it fly over the stones and pavement. The vicarage was situated at the entrance to the village; the horse was covered with blood and foam, but Benedetto knew no mercy. Like a flash of lightning horse and rider flew along, and when the horse finally broke down, the first houses in the village had been reached.

Benedetto jumped off, but did not throw a look at the dying horse; he only thought of himself and his safety. He thought Anselmo had fallen into the hands of the people at Oliolles. That his companion would not betray him he knew, but the coachman had seen him and he would be pursued. There was no way out of it. He must get possession of the million, and then try to reach the coast.

Benedetto recognized the vicarage at the first glance, as his mother had described it accurately to him. An olive-tree stood inside the wall near the entrance. Benedetto took between his teeth the knife Anselmo had given him, and swung himself over the wall and thence on to the window-sill. The wretch hesitated a moment before he broke the pane. Suppose his mother uttered a cry.

"Ah, bah," he thought, "it will be her own fault."

With a quick movement he broke the glass.

Taking out a small thieves'-lantern and some matches, which Anselmo had also given him, he struck a light and looked around. The bed was empty.

"The mistral delayed her," muttered Benedetto; "I must be quick."

Hastily plunging his knife into the closet, he opened the door, and was soon in possession of the portfolio. He put it on the table and tried to open the lock with his knife. But in vain; it would not open.

At this moment his sharp ear detected the sound of horses' hoofs.

"The pursuers," he muttered, and for a moment he was dazed.

He collected himself rapidly. He did not wish to be caught, yet did not desire to lose the million. Taking the portfolio in his hand, he opened the window and was about to spring out when he paused. Unless he had the use of both of his hands, he could not hope to reach the wall, and he did not think of leaving his plunder behind him. Now he heard voices. His pursuers must have halted under the olive-tree; a horse whinnied, there was no chance of escape! He ran to the door. It was shut tight, and now it recurred to him that his mother had told him she carried the key in her pocket.

What was he to do? Alive he would not be captured, and the bandit who hesitated to draw his knife against his pursuers was a coward. He himself dreaded death, and he therefore carefully tried to remove the lock with his knife. Perhaps he could escape anyhow!

He had just removed two screws, when he heard heavy steps coming up the stairs. His pursuers were at his heels.

With the portfolio under his arm and his knife held aloof in his hand, he waited. A key was inserted in the lock now, the door opened, and a figure entered the room.

But it did not proceed far. Benedetto’s knife sank down and a hot stream of blood squirted into the face of the murderer, who had struck his victim in the breast. At the same moment Benedetto felt himself seized by a hand of iron and thrown down, while a well-known voice cried in his ear:

“Miserable scoundrel, it was your mother — your mother, and you knew it!”

The man who said this in a voice of thunder was none other than Anselmo, the galley slave, the ex-priest who had disgraced his cloth, but who was innocent in comparison to his comrade Benedetto.

He shook the Corsican like a madman, and continually repeated the words:

“Scoundrel! Murderer! Monster! It is your mother!”

Madame Danglars lay groaning on the floor, the knife was buried up to the hilt in her breast, and yet she did not utter a cry as she recognized her murderer. She restrained herself with superhuman power, fearing to give the alarm to Benedetto’s pursuers.

“Benedetto,” she faintly whispered, “you have killed me — but you did not know it was I, did you? Oh, sir,” she added, turning to Anselmo, “leave him alone, he must escape — quick!”

Anselmo obeyed. During their desperate ride, he had been told by the poor mother what Benedetto was to her. He knew Benedetto would go to the extreme, and his heart stopped beating as he thought of the unnatural son! He had urged the horse on at a wild gallop, so as to bring Benedetto's mother to the vicarage in safety. His own safety was of secondary importance to him, when it was a question of protecting a mother from the knife of her son. He intended to alarm the house; that Benedetto would arrive there before them he had not imagined.

"Sir," muttered the baroness, faintly, "swear to me that you will let Benedetto escape. Do not pursue him, and I die peacefully."

"I swear it," said Anselmo, in a hollow voice.

"Thanks, a thousand thanks! Benedetto, embrace me and fly."

The bandit stood as if transfixed, and gazed at the dying woman, and only when Anselmo touched him by the arm and drew him to the groaning woman, exclaiming: "Do as she says, or I will kill you," did he condescend to press his forehead to her cold lips.

"Benedetto," she whispered faintly.

Her breath ceased — she was dead.

"I have the million," said Benedetto, after a pause, "come!"

Instead of answering, Anselmo tore the knife from out of the breast of the dead woman and, holding it toward the son, hissed:

"Go, monster, or I shall break my oath and kill you."

Benedetto hesitated no longer, took the portfolio which lay on the floor, and bounded down the stairs.

CHAPTER XIX

ON THE SEA

Since that eventful evening at the vicarage of Beaussuet eight days have passed. On the evening of the eighth day a sharp northeast wind blew and whipped the waves of the Mediterranean Sea so violently that they rose mountain high and almost buried a small frigate under their white caps. The captain of the frigate stood at the helm and hoarsely roared out his commands to the sailors, but they did not understand him, and when the storm tore off the mainmast a loud outcry was heard. The captain was the only one who did not lose his senses. With his axe he chopped off the remaining pieces of the mast, and turning to his crew, his face convulsed with passion, he said:

“Thunder and lightning! what do you mean by disobeying my orders? Have you got cotton in your ears?”

“No, captain,” replied the oldest sailor, “we do not disobey your orders, but why should we carry them out, since we are lost anyhow?”

As if in confirmation of his words a terrific wind threw the frigate on its side, and even the captain could hardly sustain himself on his feet.

“You are miserable cowards,” he cried to the sailors; “one would imagine you had never seen a storm before! Do you still remember how the frigate was almost wrecked off Malta, and yet we saved our lives then? — ”

“Yes, captain,” interrupted a sailor, “but that was different.”

“How so? What do you mean? Open your mouth, or — ”

“That time we did not have any branded men on board,” said the sailor, firmly.

“No branded men? Are you mad?”

“No, captain; but so long as we have these unhappy men on board the storm rages, and neither God nor the devil can save us. Look over there; there he lies on the floor, and, Jesus, Mary and Joseph! — another such a crash and we shall be food for the sharks!”

Unconsciously the captain looked in the direction indicated. A man, whose face could not be seen, lay flat on the vessel, his arms nervously clutching a package enveloped in a piece of sail-cloth. Now and then a tremor ran through his frame. He was apparently greatly frightened.

“What’s the matter with the man?” asked the captain, gruffly.

“When he came on board at St. Tropez he was covered with blood, and — ”

“Well, what then?”

“Well, his hair is shaved clean to the skin, as if he just came from the Bagnio.”

“One would think,” exclaimed the captain, loudly, “you are all saints. Do you remember, Pietro, what you had done before I shipped you?”

“Bah! I killed a Custom House officer, that is no crime.”

“So, and what was the matter with you, Rosario?”

“Captain,” answered Rosario, proudly, “you ought to know what a vendetta is.”

“Didn’t I say so? You are all as innocent as newborn babes. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves.”

In spite of his apparent indifference, the captain felt inwardly uneasy, and the sailors’ statements appeared to him to be well founded.

About four days before, as the frigate lay at anchor at St. Tropez, a man had approached the captain and offered him three thousand francs if he would take him along and land him on the Italian coast. Gennaro, the captain and owner of a smuggling vessel, did not hesitate long. Three thousand francs was a large sum, and as the passenger paid cash he overlooked certain things which he might otherwise have noticed. The closely shaved head pointed to a former galley slave, but as he conducted himself well on board and kept out of every one’s way, the captain no longer thought about it.

The sailors, however, thought differently. With that superstition peculiar to Italians, they blamed the strange passenger for all the mishaps which had befallen the vessel since the “Shaven Redhead,” as they called him, had come on board the vessel. On the first night a sudden storm carried away the rudder, on the second day one of the planks near the helm split, and the storm kept on increasing, finally reaching such a height that even Gennaro, the veteran sailor, could not remember to have ever seen one like it.

The boatswain now approached Gennaro.

“Well, Mello,” said the captain, trying to appear indifferent, “do you also think the frigate is lost because the branded man is on board?”

"Yes," replied Mello, briefly, "if God does not perform a miracle."

At this moment a terrific crash was heard, and with loud cries the sailors rushed on deck.

"A waterspout; we are sinking!" they exclaimed, terror-stricken. "Help, captain, help!"

Immense waves of water poured over the deck and tore away part of the stern, making a deep hole in the frigate, which rapidly filled with water.

"To the pumps, men!" exclaimed Gennaro — "to the pumps!"

This time his command was immediately obeyed. The feeling of self-protection was stronger than their superstition, and the sailors were soon hard at work at the pumps.

Only two persons remained behind.

"Pietro," said one of them to the other, "are you anxious to swallow water?"

"*Corpo di Dio,* no!"

"How do you expect to save yourself?"

"Oh, there is still a remedy!"

The men exchanged knowing looks, and then one of them whispered:

"Be careful; do not let the captain hear of it; he might hinder us."

"He would be foolish enough to do so. We are heading straight for Elba, on the rocks of which we will be hopelessly dashed, if we do not take our steps beforehand. Let me attend to it as soon as she lies in the water."

As he said this, he looked toward the stranger, who was still lying motionless on the deck.

"Comrade," said Pietro to the stranger, "are you aware that we are sinking?"

A look of horror met the speaker, and then Benedetto, for it was he, said:

"Is there no rescue possible?"

"Oh, yes; with money you can do anything."

"Then rescue me, and I will pay you what you ask."

"Then listen. The frigate has but one boat. Follow us and make no noise. We will get into the boat and push off. For the rest, may God look out."

Benedetto nodded. When had he ever said no to any deviltry?

With staggering steps he followed the two sailors.

"Here!" exclaimed Pietro.

Benedetto could not see his hands before his eyes and blindly followed his guides. Suddenly he felt himself grasped by strong arms, and the next minute he was hurled headlong into the sea. The sailors had thrown him overboard to save the ship!

The package enveloped in sail cloth, and which contained his fortune, the wretch firmly clasped.

The waves threw him here and there. He lost consciousness. Suddenly he came to; a wave had thrown him upon a rock, and his forehead struck violently on a sharp stone. A dark stream of blood flowed over the pale face of the parricide, and heaving a deep sigh he lost consciousness anew.

CHAPTER XX

MONTE-CRISTO

The storm had subsided and the stars shone clear and bright upon the softly rippling sea as a yacht plowed swiftly through the blue waters. A man enveloped in a long cloak leaned with folded arms against the railing and thoughtfully peered into the stream. He shuddered slightly as a small white hand was softly laid upon his arm. The next minute, however, he grasped the hand, pressed it to his lips, and gazed tenderly with his sparkling eyes, which shone like dark stars, upon a handsome young woman.

The young woman wore the costume of the inhabitants of Epirus; the fine white silk dress, which inclosed the slim, beautifully shaped form, looked like freshly fallen snow, and the embroidered flowers on her broad belt could hardly be distinguished from real plants.

"My darling," said the man softly, as he pressed a kiss upon the raven-black hair.

"Oh, how I love you, my friend, my husband," she whispered in the same tone.

"Did the storm frighten you, Haydee?" asked the man anxiously.

"I am never frightened when you are near me," the pretty Greek laughingly replied; "you ought to know me better."

"Nature, Haydee, is sometimes stronger than the will of man."

"But God supervises the actions of nature, as he does the hearts of men," said Haydee, casting a look full of childish confidence at the starry sky.

"Are you aware, Haydee, that we shall reach our destination in an hour?"

"Yes, and when we land at Monte-Cristo you will tell me the story of your life, and I shall then find out the nature of the sorrow you have undergone."

"Haydee, the sorrow belongs to the past; the future at your side has in store for me only joy and happiness. From your pure lips the sentence, whether I am to be damned or saved, must come."

At this moment an old sailor approached them and in a tone of awe said:

"Count, are we going to Monte-Cristo?"

"Yes, Jacopo; you and your men stay on board, while Bertuccio and Ali accompany us. We shall only stay a few hours. Send Ali to me, and see to it that the yacht reaches its destination soon."

Jacopo bowed, and shortly afterward Ali appeared.

"Ali," said the count, turning to the Nubian, "have you carried out my orders?"

Ali folded his arms across his breast and nodded his head.

"And you know that your life is at stake?"

Ali again nodded.

"Good; you can go."

"You frighten me," said Haydee, clinging to the count. "Ali is so devoted to you, and if we should lose him — "

"Have no fear, child; we will not lose him if he does his duty."

Like lightning the Ice Bird — for such was the name of the yacht — flew over the hot waves, which were bathed in the first rays of the morning sun, and soon the rude rocks of the island of Monte-Cristo were in view of the travellers. Haydee stood leaning against her husband's shoulder, and watched the play of the glistening waves, while before Monte-Cristo's eyes the past rose like a vision.

Ten years before, in February, 1829, Jacopo had taken him, who had passed fourteen long years in the Chateau d'If, into his service. Caderousse, Ferdinand, Danglars, and Villefort had been his enemies, and now justice had overtaken all of them. The treasure of the Abbe Faria had placed Edmond Dantes in a position to play an important part in the world as the Count of Monte-Cristo, and, now that he saw his plans realized, and the traitors punished, Monte-Cristo felt his soul stirred by doubts. Faria had intended to establish the unity of Italy with the legendary wealth of the Spadas. Later on he had given his treasure to Edmond Dantes to do with as he pleased; like the angel with the fiery sword, Monte-Cristo had punished the guilty, and now —

"Count," said Bertuccio, "we shall land directly. Have you any new order for me?"

"No, Bertuccio; you know my orders for Ali; they suffice."

Bertuccio departed, and immediately afterward the ship came to anchor.

The count laid his arm on the shoulder of the pretty Greek, and tenderly led her to the boat in waiting. Ali and Bertuccio followed, and the little vessel, driven by four strong oarsmen, flew like an arrow through the water.

The boat soon reached the beach, and Monte-Cristo carried Haydee in his arms to land. He motioned to Bertuccio and Ali, and, turning to the sailors, said:

“Come back for us in two hours.”

The bark disappeared, and Monte-Cristo walked in the direction of the grotto. Haydee followed him, feeling as if she were entering some sanctuary, since it was at Monte-Cristo that she became the wife of the man whom she loved above everything else in the world.

The count divined the young woman’s thoughts and drawing her toward him, he whispered: “My darling, at this place you became mine. To-day I wish to hear from your own lips whether I really deserve my happiness.”

The subterranean palace housed the travellers. Fragrant perfumes filled the magnificent halls, and in the light of the wax candles the gold and silver service shone with fairy-like splendor.

Monte-Cristo conducted Haydee to a charming boudoir; her feet sank in wavy carpets, and after she had seated herself with incomparable grace on a divan, the count stood beside her and proceeded to relate the story of his life. It was a long time before he had finished his tale. Haydee felt with him the horrors of his prison, she sobbed as he described the death of Faria, whom he called his spiritual father, and cried out in terror as she heard that the cemetery of Chateau d’If was the wide sea! Then he had dug out Faria’s treasure. How rich he thought himself then, and how poor he was at the moment when he set foot on the land and heard that his father had died of starvation, and that Mercedes, his bride, had forgotten him and married the man who had betrayed him.

He had sworn then that he would revenge himself and punish all those who had sinned against him. Villefort, Caderousse, Danglars and Morcerf had succumbed to him, and he could now triumphantly exclaim: “I am your master; I have punished all of you as you have deserved.”

“Haydee,” said Monte-Cristo finally, “what is your decision?”

“That you have fulfilled the mission which God has placed in your hands according to his wish and desire. God was with you, for you have dealt out justice,” exclaimed Haydee, her eyes sparkling.

“And now, Haydee — now — ”

“Now justice is satisfied and you will become merciful,” whispered the young woman softly.

"I wish to do so, Haydee, so help me God; for each act of revenge I will place a good deed in the eternal scales, and the years which still remain to me shall be devoted to the noblest aims of humanity. I — "

Suddenly Monte-Cristo paused, a slight motion from Ali showed that something unexpected had happened, and, hastily drawing Haydee with him, he left the grotto.

"What's the matter, Ali?" he asked, turning to the Nubian, who stood uneasily on a sharp ledge of the rock.

Ali threw himself at full length on the ground and closed his eyes.

"Ah!" exclaimed the count, "you have a man on this rock?"

Ali nodded gleefully.

"And do you know who he is?"

Ali's look expressed doubt. He put his hand to his forehead and shook his head to indicate that his memory had deserted him.

"Is the man wounded?"

"Yes," nodded Ali.

"Dead?"

"No," shaking his head.

"But he is not able to move?"

Ali's face lighted up again when he saw he was understood.

"Haydee," said the count, turning to his wife, "I look upon it as a good sign that God has permitted me at this minute to do an act of charity. Remain here, while I go with Ali to save the poor fellow."

"I shall accompany you," said Haydee, pleadingly; "let me take part in your good deeds."

"Then come, my darling," said Monte-Cristo, in whose eye a tear glistened, and they both followed Ali, who hurried toward the beach.

As they passed by the entrance to the grotto, Haydee noticed that Bertuccio was making a hole in the rock with his pickaxe.

"What is Bertuccio doing?" asked Haydee, curiously.

"You shall find out later on," replied the count, and, turning to Bertuccio, he asked in a low voice:

"Is the work nearly finished?"

"Almost, count. I have just one thing more to do, and as soon as you give the sign, all will be over."

"Very well, Bertuccio, and now follow us."

The Corsican looked wonderingly at the count, and, taking his pick in his hand, walked behind. When they had reached the rear part of the little island, Ali paused and pointed to a rock which projected into the sea.

Monte-Cristo's eyes followed the Nubian's direction, and he recognized a human body lying at full length upon a rock. The face was turned aside, and a dark pool of blood indicated a wound. The man's right hand convulsively clutched a package. With a bound Monte-Cristo had reached the side of the motionless man, and taking him in his strong arms, he carried him to a small grass plot and carefully laid him down.

"Ali," he ordered, "run to the grotto and get some rum. Do not lose a minute, it is a question of life and death."

The Nubian departed, and Monte-Cristo laid his hand upon the wounded man's breast.

"He still lives," he exclaimed, breathing more freely, "and with God's help we will save him."

Suddenly a terrible cry was heard behind him, and Bertuccio stammeringly exclaimed:

"Oh, sir, it is the wretch, the murderer! Do you not recognize him?"

The count bent over the wounded man, and washing the blood from his face he exclaimed in horror:

"Really, it is Benedetto!"

"Back, sir," cried Bertuccio in a rage, as he swung his pickaxe, "I will crush the viper's skull."

The pick cleaved through the air, but before it descended on Benedetto's head, the count had grasped it, and with a powerful movement hurled it into the sea.

"Bertuccio," he said coldly, "what right have you to play the judge in my presence?"

"Oh, sir, pardon. Anger overcame me. Benedetto burned Assunta, my sister-in-law and his foster mother, so as to get her money; he only lived from robbery and murder."

"He is a man, he must be saved."

Ali came now with the rum. The count poured a few drops into Benedetto's throat, Haydee rubbed his temples, and in a few minutes the wretch uttered a deep sigh and his lips moved, though his eyes still remained closed.

The count examined the wound.

"He will live," he said decisively. "The wound is not dangerous."

"It would be better for society if he died," hissed Bertuccio.

"Bertuccio," said the count sternly, "get some water and wash out this wound."

"But, count, I — "

"Yes, you! Either you obey, or we shall separate."

Bertuccio hurried away and soon returned with some water. He trembled with rage, as he washed Benedetto's wound, but he did not dare to say a word.

Haydee had in the meantime loosened a cord from the package and discovered a small oaken box, which she tried in vain to open. The count noticed it, and after he had carefully examined the lock, he murmured:

"I will try to open it with my key."

He really succeeded in doing it. The cover flew open, and the count could not repress a cry of surprise when he saw the pile of gold and bank-notes.

"Count," said Bertuccio, approaching, "he is opening his eyes."

"Did he recognize you?"

"Oh, no, he is still confused."

"So much the better. Keep yourself at a distance. He will recover."

"What is this?" exclaimed Bertuccio, catching a glimpse of the contents of the box. "It must be the spoils of some new robbery."

"Undoubtedly," said the count; "but, stay, there is a letter under these bank-notes which might clear up the mystery."

"My son," ran the letter, "I will send this letter to you on the eve of my departure from France. You have forgiven me. To-morrow I shall see you for the last time. May God be with you and place you under his protection. Your mother, H. D."

Monte-Cristo shuddered.

"Hermine Danglars," he muttered to himself. "Poor, poor woman!"

Shoving Bertuccio aside, he bent over Benedetto, and said, in a voice which penetrated the deepest depths of the soul:

"Benedetto, hear me!"

A shiver ran through the wretch, but the dark eyes remained closed.

"Benedetto," continued Monte-Cristo, sternly, "you have killed your mother. Shame upon you, parricide."

This time Benedetto opened his eyes in terror, and in a faint voice murmured:

“My mother! Yes, yes. Mercy!”

Monte-Cristo rose. His gaze met that of Bertuccio, in which he read a silent question.

“Are you still going to be charitable?” asked Bertuccio’s eye. “The wretch has murdered the mother who bore him? Does he deserve mercy?”

Just then a merry sailor-song was heard. The bark of the Ice Bird appeared on the beach to fetch the passengers.

“Jacopo,” exclaimed Monte-Cristo aloud, “listen!”

Jacopo stood up in the bark, and looked closely at the count, who called out some words in Maltese dialect to him.

Immediately a sailor jumped from the bark into the sea and swam toward the Ice Bird, while Jacopo with the two other sailors jumped on land.

“Bring some provisions from the grotto,” ordered the count.

Jacopo and Ali did as they were told, and while the sailors carried the provisions to the bark, the count whispered a few words to the Nubian. Ali approached the wounded man, and, taking him in his strong arms, he carried him to the bark and placed him on the floor of the same. The count then took the box and threw it near Benedetto; he then took Haydee’s arm in his own and went back with her, while Ali plunged into the water up to his waist and laid hold of the bark.

“Benedetto,” cried the count aloud, “you have blasphemed God. You have trodden under foot all human and divine laws. Men cannot punish you; may God weigh guilt and punishment with each other! Ali, do your duty.”

Ali, with a powerful movement, pushed the bark from the shore. The tide seized the light vessel, and in a short while it disappeared from the horizon.

“Oh, count,” stammered Bertuccio, beside himself, “you have given him his life.”

“If Almighty God wishes him to be saved, let it be so. He has the right to punish and forgive,” replied the count, solemnly.

The yacht was now approaching the shore, in obedience to the command the sailor had brought, and, with Haydee and the seaman, the count got on board, and solemnly said:

“Bertuccio and Ali, do your duty!”

Haydee looked wonderingly at her husband; he took her head in his hands and earnestly said:

“My darling, I bury the past at this hour — the grottoes of Monte-Cristo are no more.”

A column of fire rose from the island — a loud report was heard, and the treasure chamber of the Cardinal Spada was annihilated.

Ali and Bertuccio hurried to the yacht, and the Ice Bird flew with all sails toward the open sea.

“Oh, darling,” whispered Haydee, blushing deeply, “you have been merciful, and I thank you doubly for it. What you do for your fellow-men God will return to your child. Yes, I speak the truth. God has given me the great happiness to become a mother. Kiss me, my beloved.”

CHAPTER XXI

WITH THE PANDURS

In the forties, Signora Aurora Vertelli was the owner of a place near the Scala, at Milan, called the Casino. The Casino was the meeting-place of the Austrian officers, for at that time the old Lombardian city was garrisoned by Austrians, under the special command of Marshal Radetzky.

Count Joseph Wenzel Radetzky is a celebrated historical personage, and the words of a contemporary: “Radetzky is a great hunter before the Lord; he drives the people before him like the hunter game,” describe him sufficiently. If Radetzky was a tyrant, his officers were a torture to Italy, and it often happened that the Bohemian and Croatian officers whipped women and children on the open streets, or else ran a dagger through the body of some peaceful citizen.

Aurora Vertelli, however, enjoyed the protection of the Austrian police! What the services were that she rendered the State is not known; but, nevertheless, the “handsome Aurora,” as she was called, was in great favor at police headquarters. The eating at the Casino was celebrated, the wines were second to none, and dice and cards were provided for the “spiritual” amusement of the guests.

An Italian was seldom seen in the Casino, and those that came were generally those who had taken to the Austrian army.

On the night of the 15th to the 16th of March, 1848, lively scenes were being enacted in the Casino, and neither Aurora Vertelli herself nor old Major Bartolomeo Batto, who was one of the regular customers at the place, could restrain the excited guests.

“What is going on at Vienna, Lieutenant Pasky?” asked a young officer. “Have the riots there any importance?”

“No, thank God,” replied the lieutenant; “the *canaille* will soon be brought to their senses.”

“H’m, if the emperor would only be strict,” said another.

“Ah, bah! the mob has no importance.”

“And the cannons generally prove it.”

“Comrades,” said an elderly officer, approaching the group, “I think the affair is serious.”

“How so? What has happened?”

“Well, the emperor has made concessions.”

“But that would be a shame.”

“They want to repeal the censorship — ”

“That’s good. The newspapers could then print what they pleased.”

“The new press-bill is said to be very liberal.”

“A bullet and a rope are the best laws.”

“Besides that, the delegates of the German kingdom and the Lombardian-Venetian kingdom are going to be called in — ”

A storm of anger rose, and a rough Austrian nobleman, Hermann von Kirchstein, passionately exclaimed:

“Comrades, the emperor can do what he wishes, but we shall do what we wish, and if the Italians make a move we shall crush them.”

As if to add strength to his words, Herr von Kirchstein crushed the wineglass he held in his hand, amid the applause of his comrades.

“Bravo!” they cried.

Count Hermann looked proudly about and said:

“Only as late as yesterday I had an opportunity to show the Milanese who is master here.”

“Tell us, comrade; tell us all about it,” came from all sides.

“Well, last evening, about six o’clock, I was going across the Piazza Fontana, when two confounded Italians — a lady about forty years of age, dressed in deep mourning, and a young sixteen-year-old boy — approached me. They took one side of the pavement and did not stir to let me pass. I was walking along smoking a cigar, and did not look up; the lady did not move, and you can understand — ”

The count made a gesture signifying that the lady had lost her balance, and, amid the coarse laughter of his comrades, he continued:

“I went ahead, but the young booby ran after me, cursed me, and tore my cigar out of my mouth. I drew my sword, but the woman clutched my arm and cried: ‘You killed the father on the 3d of January, on the Corsa dei Servi — spare the son.’

“With my sword,” continued Count Hermann, “I struck the woman over the hands until she let go of my arm, and then I broke the young fellow’s skull. The people crowded around, and the police arrived, to whom I told the affair.”

“Did the dastardly wretch lie dead on the ground?” asked a young officer.

“No, the police took him away; but after the explanations I gave, I think he must be tried at once; in urgent cases a criminal can be hanged inside of twenty-four hours.”

“Antonio Balbini was strangled this morning, and nailed to the wall of the prison,” said a deep voice, suddenly.

Every one turned toward the speaker, who continued in a calm voice:

“As I tell you, Count Hermann — nailed to the wall. Ah, we have splendid methods here to humiliate the mob. About eight days ago two traitors were fried in hot oil, and if they are to be buried alive *a la proviguere* — ”

“What is that?” asked a captain, sipping sorbet.

“What? You don’t know what that is?” said the first speaker, in hard metallic tones. “One would think you had just come from another world.”

The speaker was an Italian, about thirty years of age, of extraordinary beauty. Deep black, sparkling eyes lighted up the finely-chiselled features, and perfect white teeth looked from under the fresh rosy lips and raven black mustache.

The Marquis Aslitta was since two months in Milan, and, as was said, had formerly lived at Naples. He carefully refrained from meeting his countrymen, and appeared to be a faithful servant of foreign tyrants.

While he spoke the officers appeared to feel uncomfortable, and if they laughed, it sounded forced and unnatural.

“To come back to the *proviguere*,” said Aslitta, laughing loudly. “The prisoners are chained, their legs are broken, and they are hurled head foremost into a pit about four feet deep. Then the pit is filled with dirt, leaving the legs exposed up to the knees. It recalls little trees and looks comical.”

Aslitta laughed again; but, singular thing, the laugh sounded like long-drawn sobs.

Count Hermann felt his hair stand on end.

“Let us play cards,” he proposed; but before his comrades could say anything, a thunderous noise came from the direction of the Scala, mingled with loud cries.

“Long live La Luciola! Long live Italy!”

The officers hurried out. As soon as the hall was cleared, Aslitta strode toward Major Bartolomeo, and whispered in his ear:

“To-night in the little house on the Porta Tessina.”

CHAPTER XXII

THE QUEEN OF FLOWERS

The Italians have always been born musicians, and in Milan, too, there are plenty of artists. Among the latter, Maestro Ticellini occupied the first place. He had a great deal of talent, wrote charming cavatinas, and his songs were much sought after. He had not composed an opera as yet; and what was the cause of this? Simply because he could find no fitting libretto; the strict censorship always had something to say, and the most innocent verses were looked upon as an insult to his majesty, the emperor.

Since a few weeks Ticellini was in a state of great excitement. Salvani, the impresario of the Scala and a friend of Ticellini, had engaged La Luciola, the star of the opera at Naples, for Milan, and the maestro had not been able to find a libretto.

Dozens of text books had been sent back by the censor; the subjects out of the old and new history were looked down upon, because in all of them allusions were made to tyrants and oppressed people, and while La Luciola achieved triumphs each evening in the operas of Bellini and Donizetti, Ticellini grew desperate.

One night as he returned to his home in the Via de Monte an unexpected surprise awaited him. His faithful servant stood in front of the door and triumphantly waved a roll of paper before his eyes. Ticellini indifferently unrolled the package, but suddenly he broke into a cry of joy. He held a libretto in his trembling hands.

Shutting himself in his room, Ticellini flew over the manuscript. He did not notice that the binding which held the libretto was tricolored. And yet they were the Italian colors, white, green and red, the tricolor which was looked down upon.

The title already pleased the maestro. It was “The Queen of Flowers.” The verses were very lucid and melodious, and the subject agreeable. The queen of flowers was the rose, which loved a pink, whereas the pink was enamored of a daisy. After many entanglings the allegory closed with the union of the pink and the daisy, and the rose generously blessed the bond.

All was joy and happiness, and as soon as Ticellini had finished reading, he began to compose.

The part of the daisy was made for the high soprano of La Luciola, the pink must be sung by Signor Tino, the celebrated baritone, and Signora Ronita, the famous contralto, would secure triumphs as the rose. The subordinate characters were soon filled, and the next morning, when Ticellini breathlessly hurried to Salvani, he was in a position to lay the outline of the opera before him.

Salvani, of course, was at first distrustful, but after he assured himself that there was nothing treasonable in it, he put the manuscript in his pocket and went to see the censor.

The censor received Salvani cordially, and taking his ominous red pencil in his hand, he glanced over the libretto. But no matter how much he sought, he could not find a single libellous sentence, and at the end of an hour Salvani was able to bring his friend the news that the performance of the opera was allowed.

Ticellini was overjoyed; he worked night and day, and at the end of a week he appeared before Salvani, waving the completed score triumphantly in the air.

While the two friends were sitting at the piano, and Ticellini marked several songs and duets, a knock was heard.

“No one can enter,” said Salvani, springing up; “we wish to be alone.”

“Oh, how polite!” exclaimed a clear, bright voice, and as Salvani and Ticellini looked up in surprise they uttered a cry of astonishment:

“Luciola!”

La Luciola was very beautiful. She was slim and tall, about twenty-seven years of age, with beautiful black hair and finely-formed features. Her almond-shaped eyes were likewise dark, but had a phosphorescent gleam, which gave her the name of Luciola, or the fire-fly. She was dressed in a red satin dress, and wore a jaunty black felt hat. There was quite a romantic legend connected with the pretty girl: no one knew from what country she came, since she spoke all the European tongues with equal facility, and steadfastly refused to say a word about the land of her birth. She possessed the elegance of a Parisian, the grace of a Creole, and the vivacity of an Italian. Her real name was unknown. She was called the heroine of several romantic adventures, though no one could say which one of her numerous admirers she preferred. La Luciola appeared to have no heart.

Very often La Luciola, dressed in men’s clothes, would cross the Neapolitan plains, accompanied by her only friend, a tender, tall blonde. The latter was just as modest as La Luciola was audacious, and she clung to the proud Amazon like the ivy to the oak.

A few days before her departure from Naples, a Croatian officer had insulted her, and instead of asking a gentleman of her acquaintance to revenge the coarse remark, she herself sought the ruffian, dressed in men’s clothes, and boxed his ears as he sat in a café. Amid the laughter of his comrades the officer left the café, and La Luciola triumphed.

Such was the person upon whom the fate of the new opera depended, for she reigned supreme at the Scala, and Salvani as well as Ticellini knew this.

While they were both meditating how to secure the Luciola in the easiest way, the songstress said:

“My visit seems to be unwelcome to the gentlemen?”

“Unwelcome?” repeated Salvani. “Signora, what are you thinking of? On the contrary, we were just speaking about you and wishing you were here.”

“Flatterer,” said La Luciola, laughing, and pointing her finger warningly at him.

“No, signora, Salvani says the truth,” Ticellini said, earnestly. “We wish to ask a great favor of you.”

“That is excellent. I also come to ask for a favor,” replied the diva, springing up hurriedly. “You speak first, and then you shall hear what brought me to your office.”

“Oh, signora,” said Ticellini, crossing his hands and falling on one knee, “my fate lies in your hands.”

“That sounds quite tragical! One would imagine I was Marshal Radetzky. But are you ever going to tell me what is the matter?”

“We — I — ” began Salvani, stammering.

“My dear impresario,” interrupted La Luciola, laughing, “let us make short work of it. I will tell you why I came, and, in the meantime, you can collect your thoughts. Well, then, I am growing tired at La Scala; Donizetti, Bellini, and whatever other names your great composers bear, are very good fellows, but, you know, *toujours perdrix*.”

“Well — and — ” asked Salvani, breathlessly, as the diva paused.

“Well, I must have a new *rôle* in a new opera or I shall run away,” said La Luciola, firmly.

Both men uttered a cry of joy. Luciola looked from one to the other and finally said:

“Does my demand embarrass you?”

“No, luck alone makes us dumb. We intended, signora, to ask you to-day to take a part in a new opera.”

“Is it possible?” exclaimed La Luciola, clapping her hands with joy. “Who is the composer of the new opera? Gioberto, Palmerelli, or perhaps you, Ticellini? But stay! before we go any further, I make one condition: the subject must not be tragical.”

“Oh, tragic opera has long since gone out of fashion.”

“Thank God, you have the same opinion as I. What I should like now would be a spectacular piece, an allegory or something like it — pretty music and bright verses.”

“Oh, signora!” exclaimed Ticellini, joyfully, “I have got what you want. The new opera is called the ‘Queen of Flowers.’“

“What a pretty title!”

“Your part will be that of the daisy.”

“Beautiful, beautiful!”

“Permit me to play you the first cavatina.”

Ticellini hurried to the piano and began to play.

Luciola listened attentively and nodded satisfaction as Ticellini sung the verses.

“That will do,” she said. “Get everything ready for the rehearsals; I shall sing the part.”

She went out, and the next day the rehearsals began for the new opera, the first performance of which was to take place on the 15th of May, 1848.

CHAPTER XXIII

GREEN, WHITE AND RED

The night of the 15th of May arrived, and both Salvani and Ticellini were very nervous about the first performance of the “Queen of Flowers.” La Luciola was certainly the pet of the public, but the situation at Milan was such that it was a question whether the performance at the Scala would receive any attention. Even the day before, there had been very little call for tickets, and Salvani, who had spared no expense to mount the new opera properly, had awful dreams on the night of the 14th about deficits and bankruptcy.

At length, on the morning of the 15th, the demand became heavier, and after a few boxes had been taken, a negro appeared at the box-office about eleven o’clock, and pointed at a pack of tickets.

“Ah — your master desires a box?” asked Salvani, who did not disdain on special days to take charge of the box-office.

The negro laughed, so that the impresario could wonder at his white teeth, and shook his head, pointing once more at the tickets.

“You want two boxes, perhaps?”

Again the negro shook his head.

“Three boxes?”

“No.”

“My God, are you dumb?”

An expressive look from the Nubian confirmed the insinuation. He put a roll of bank-notes on the package, and made a motion as if he wished to put the latter in his pocket.

“Do you want to buy the whole package?” asked Salvani, breathlessly.

“Yes,” nodded the negro.

The impresario looked doubtingly at him, and said:

“But that is eleven boxes on the first tier, each of which costs fifty lire — ”

“Yes.”

“Twenty-two boxes on the third tier, at thirty-six lire; and all the boxes on the fourth tier, thirty boxes at twenty-five lire.”

Again the Nubian nodded. Salvani began to reckon, and excitedly exclaimed:

“But that is impossible. Are you aware that this is a matter of 2,848 lire?”

Without hesitating, the negro laid the sum of 3,000 lire in bank-notes on the window and put the tickets in his pocket. Thereupon he drew his arm under that of the impresario and pointed to the stage.

“I do not understand,” stammered Salvani. “You want to go on the stage?”

“Yes.”

“Then follow me.”

Salvani walked down a small stairway and soon stood, with the negro, on the dimly lighted stage. The Nubian walked in front of the prompter’s box and pointed so expressively toward the parterre and the parquet, that the impresario at once knew what he wanted.

“You want to buy the rest of the seats unsold?” he hastily asked.

“Yes.”

“The places cost originally five, four and three lire.”

“Yes.”

“Well, I would be a fool if I did not take a hand in.”

Before the Nubian had departed, he had purchased all of the seats still to be had, for the round sum of 6,000 lire, and with head proudly erect he strode through the streets.

When Ticellini appeared, Salvani triumphantly pointed to the pile of bank-notes, and when the maestro anxiously remarked that he thought it must be a trick of one of his rivals to ruin him, the impresario coolly said:

“Ticellini, would you be able to raise 6,000 lire to annihilate Gioberto and Palmerelli?”

The composer was silent. This kind of logic convinced him.

When the eventful evening came, the Scala looked magnificent.

For the first time since the Austrian occupation, all the aristocratic ladies appeared in full dress. Salvani, as well as the maestro, looked wonderingly at the audience. Very soon, however, their wonder changed to curiosity, for the toilets of the ladies were arranged in a peculiar way. Some were dressed entirely in green satin, with green leaves in their hair; others wore red satin, with red roses, and others again white satin and white flowers; and then the ladies were grouped together in such a way that the tricolor green, white and red always appeared. Ticellini was a patriot from head to foot, and his heart beat loudly when he saw the Italian tricolor.

What could it all mean? A revolution? That would destroy all chances of the success of his opera, but Ticellini did not think of himself, when the fatherland was in question, and he enthusiastically hummed the first lines of the national hymn:

“Chi per la patria muore
Vessuto ha assai!”

(He who has died for his country has lived long enough.)

The parquet and balcony were filled with students, and only one proscenium box was still empty.

A murmur ran through the theatre; the door of the proscenium box was opened and three persons entered it.

A tall, majestic man, whose dark locks inclosed a pale face, led a lady of extraordinary beauty. He was dressed in a frock suit, the lady in purple silk, with a white sash. A diadem of sparkling emeralds ornamented the finely shaped head, and on her neck and arms diamonds of the purest water shone.

A remarkably handsome child, a boy about eight or nine years, took a seat between the lady and gentleman, and it only needed a casual look upon the features of the youth to recognize him as the son of the pair. The box just opposite to them was Radetzky’s, and was occupied by his adjutant. Observant of everything which looked like a manifestation or a demonstration, they threw threatening glances at the color constellation, and the confidant of Radetzky immediately sent for Salvani.

The impresario appeared, excited and trembling. Suppose the adjutant should forbid the performance?

“What does this mean?” the officer angrily exclaimed. “Have you noticed the three colors?”

“Your Excellency, I — ”

“Well, are you going to answer me?”

“Will your excellency condescend to take a look over the house — ”

At the same moment, as Salvani had entered the box, the gentleman in the opposite box had arisen and placed a light blue band over the lady’s shoulders. Simultaneously all the other ladies in the house threw sashes over their shoulders; yellow, blue, black, and brown were the colors which met the astonished gaze of the adjutant, and he grumblingly said:

“Wait, *canaille*, I will not be deceived.”

Salvani had hurriedly left. The first notes of the overture ran through the house, and loud applause was heard. This time, too, the gentleman in the proscenium box gave the signal for the applause, but no one appeared to notice it.

Ticellini hurried to La Luciola’s dressing-room. The diva was already dressed for her part, and looked so transcendently beautiful that the maestro held his breath.

“Well, maestro,” said the diva, laughing, “do I please you, and do you think the opera will be a success?”

“Oh, signora, I have never doubted it, since you consented to take the part of Marguerite.”

A dark form came from the rear of the dressing-room, and the Marquis Aslitta went toward Ticellini.

“Let me congratulate you, maestro,” he cordially said, offering Ticellini his hand.

Ticellini hesitated before he took it. Aslitta was looked upon in Milan as a renegade, and therefore Ticellini was very glad when he was called away. Bidding good-by to the diva, he hurried back to the stage, and Aslitta remained alone with Luciola.

“Giorgio,” whispered Luciola, giving the marquis her hand, “the eventful hour has arrived.”

“Thanks, my darling,” murmured the young man; “you are staking your existence to save my country — a whole life would not suffice to reward you.”

Luciola threw herself into the outstretched arms of Aslitta.

“You love me, Giorgio?”

“Dearly; you are my goddess, my all.”

“Oh, Giorgio; nothing shall be too difficult for me to do for you. But go now, the time has come.”

“And you have forgotten nothing, and will observe the sign?”

“Be easy, I will think of everything.”

“Then farewell; have courage.”

“And hope,” added Luciola, kissing Aslitta.

At this moment a heavy hand was laid upon Aslitta's shoulder, and a clear voice said:

"Marquis, you should have closed the door."

Aslitta turned hurriedly about. A man stood in front of him, whose appearance was very repulsive.

Count San Pietro had short, red-brown hair, and one of his eyes was always closed; a deep blue scar, reaching from the eye to the left ear, disfigured his otherwise handsome face in a horrible manner. A diabolical smile played upon his lips, and Aslitta grew pale as he recognized the count.

La Luciola, measuring the count with a stern look, said:

"Count, by what right have you come here?"

A malicious smile was the answer, and then San Pietro audaciously said:

"Who will prevent me from coming in?"

"I!" exclaimed Luciola, passionately. "Depart at once."

"Ah, you are defending the marquis."

Aslitta was moved to become angry, but he restrained himself, and laughingly said:

"Why should not others have the right to admire La Luciola?"

The diva trembled, but a look from Aslitta gave her courage, and, trying to appear cool, she said:

"Really, count, you frightened me; I hardly recognized you."

"And the marquis has no need to hide; he can leave that to the conspirators," remarked the count, with a piercing look.

Aslitta met the gaze fearlessly, and indifferently answered, evading the question:

"Count, have you a box for to-night's performance?"

"No, every place was taken when my servant went to the box-office."

"Then do me the honor to take a seat in my box."

"Ah, you were more fortunate than I."

The manager opened the door leading to the stage-row, and exclaimed:

"Signora, your scene begins."

"I am coming," said Luciola, and, passing by the gentlemen, she laughingly said:

"Good-by, and do not forget to applaud."

As soon as she had gone, the gentlemen went toward the auditorium, and on the stairs leading to the boxes Pietro paused and hissed:

“Marquis, you know I shall kill you the first chance I have.”

“Really?” asked Aslitta; “have you become so bloodthirsty all of a sudden?”

“No evasions,” replied the count. “You love Luciola?”

“Why not?”

“And Luciola loves you?”

“I am not vain enough to imagine your statement to be true.”

“Beware, marquis,” said the count; “I have eyes.”

“So much the better for you.”

“And in the dungeons of Milan there are cells, in which patriots are broken on the wheel and forced to name their accomplices — ”

“Count,” interrupted Aslitta, “there are also dark places in Milan, where Italians who betray their country to the oppressor are shot.”

Stepping into his box, Aslitta closed the door in the count’s face, and San Pietro was forced to go to the marshal’s box.

As San Pietro took his place, La Luciola just appeared on the scene; deafening applause greeted her, and she gratefully bowed.

“Colonel,” said San Pietro, turning to the adjutant, “I have to give you the name of a traitor.”

“But not now,” said the colonel, impatiently; “just listen to that beautiful duet.”

The duet between the rose and the daisy was magnificently sung. No one noticed, however, that Luciola threw a look at the gentleman in the proscenium box, directing his attention to that occupied by Radetzky’s adjutant. The unknown arose, and cast his sparkling eyes at San Pietro. He then looked down at the stage again, and La Luciola laughed with satisfaction. The duet finished amid applause.

“Colonel,” repeated the count again, “Aslitta conspires with the patriots, and — ”

“To-morrow — to-morrow, count.”

“To-morrow would be too late.”

“Then, in the devil’s name, speak now and be done with it. What do you wish?”

“That Aslitta be arrested this evening.”

“Ah, La Luciola is divine; we must secure her for Vienna!” exclaimed the colonel, enthusiastically. “Will you arrange it?”

“What, your excellency?”

"Are you deaf? We must secure Luciola for Vienna."

"Have Aslitta arrested, and La Luciola will be a member of the Vienna Opera."

"Stupid, what interest has La Luciola in Aslitta?"

"She loves him," hissed the count.

"What! La Luciola disdains our advances, and falls in love with this Neapolitan! That is treason."

"Then your excellency — "

"I give you *carte blanche*; bring Aslitta to the citadel, but not before the close of the performance; I wish to hear the opera to the end."

The adjutant tore a piece of paper from a note-book, wrote a few lines upon it and gave it to San Pietro. The count gave a diabolical laugh. His course was easy now.

As much as San Pietro had tried, he could not remember whom La Luciola looked like. Thanks to his wound, a blank had occurred in his memory, and certain episodes of his former life were covered with a heavy veil. As he now threw a glance at the opposite box, a part of this veil was torn asunder, and like a dazed person he looked at the gentleman dressed in black. The latter transfixed him likewise. Instinctively the count coughed and hid his face in his handkerchief. He could not meet the gaze of those coal-black eyes.

"No, no," he muttered, anxiously. "No one knows my former name; I would be a fool to get frightened."

As soon as the first act was over, San Pietro turned to an officer and said:

"Do you know the gentleman sitting in the opposite box?"

"Not personally, but from reputation. He is said to be enormously rich."

"What is his name?"

"The Count of Monte-Cristo; his wife, who is sitting next to him, is wonderfully handsome; they say she is a Greek. The pretty boy is their son."

"Thanks," said San Pietro; and then he muttered to himself: "'Tis he; he has a son! This time he will not escape me."

"Do you know the count's political opinions?" said San Pietro, after a pause.

"I only know that immediately after the gentleman's arrival from Naples he sent his negro with his card to Radetzky, asking the marshal to allow him to pay his respects to him."

“That is decisive.”

The opera had in the meantime been proceeded with; when the third act began a messenger appeared with an order which called the adjutant to the marshal’s house. What could the officers do? The service went before everything else, and they disappeared just as La Luciola, Ruinta, and Signor Tino were singing a beautiful trio.

At length the last scene came; the rose, the proud queen of flowers, assented to the marriage of the pink and the daisy, and a bower of green vines was raised before an altar constructed of evergreens.

Red, white and green! The national colors!

At this moment Monte-Cristo arose and gave the signal. Immediately every one rose and clapped their hands, and he joyously exclaimed:

“Long live Italy! Long live the national flag!”

And then a loud voice thundered above the tumult:

“*Fuori i barbari!* Away with the foreigners!”

The next minute the students climbed on to the stage and divided the palms. A roar of a thousand voices was heard singing the national hymn:

“Chi per la patria muore
Vessuto ha assai!”

La Luciola was carried in triumph to her coach by the students; the enthusiastic young men took the horses out of the traces and bore the carriage along themselves, shouting through the night air:

“Long live La Luciola! Long live Italy!”

CHAPTER XXIV

A FIGHT IN THE STREETS

When the Major von Kirchstein and his comrades, attracted by the noise, rushed out into the street, they saw La Luciola's carriage covered with flags bearing the national colors; the diva and her friend were seated therein, and La Luciola enthusiastically cried:

"Oh, Milla, Milla, this is great and sublime!"

"Comrades!" shouted the major in a rage, "follow me. We will capture La Luciola, and bring her to the citadel!"

Loud applause greeted the major's words, but before he had reached the coach a hand grasped him by the throat, and a hoarse voice cried in his ear:

"If you touch a hair of La Luciola's head, you are a dead man."

It was Aslitta. Our readers have already guessed that the marquis was playing the part of a Brutus, and La Luciola, who loved him dearly, supported him in his plans. The two fiery natures had become acquainted at Naples. Luciola's friend, the gentle Milla, had written the mysterious libretto and Aslitta had sent it to Ticellini. Edmond Dantes had kept the oath he made upon Monte-Cristo, to be the warm friend of the oppressed. He was an admirer of Aslitta, and placed himself at his service and the cause he represented.

Up till now he had never met La Luciola, but when the diva saw at the Scala that evening the man whom her lover had talked to her about, she was seized with a deep emotion. Yes, she recognized and knew the man who took up the cause of Italy's misery, and had confidence in his ability to carry out whatever project he undertook.

As the major uttered the threat against La Luciola, Aslitta recognized the danger his love was in. He had already grasped the coach door with his hand, when he felt himself seized by strong arms and borne to the ground. A well-known voice hissed in his ear — the voice of San Pietro:

"We have got you."

A gag was inserted between Aslitta's lips, his arms and limbs were bound, and two pandours dragged him away, while the count said:

“You know the order; take good care of him! You must answer for the prisoner with your life.”

One of the pandours pressed the muzzle of his gun against Aslitta’s forehead and threateningly said:

“Do not stir or I will blow your brains out.”

Aslitta was obliged to obey. The carriage in which he had been placed stopped, the marquis was lifted out, and the doors of a subterranean dungeon closed behind him.

CHAPTER XXV

THE MASKS FALL

When the hated Austrian uniforms appeared in the brilliantly lighted streets, a threatening noise was uttered by the mob, and the students who surrounded Luciola’s carriage threw themselves upon the officers.

It was a foolish beginning, for they had no weapons — they only possessed burning patriotism, and their hatred of the foreign oppressor.

A shot now fell, and at the same time the tall form of Count San Pietro loomed up, giving commands to the soldiers to make the attack — an attack against a defenceless crowd of human beings. As soon as the students heard the shot, they surrounded the carriage of the diva again. The latter tried to encourage the trembling Milla. As for herself, she had no fear, and though she could not understand Aslitta’s absence, she was far from imagining the truth.

Suddenly San Pietro’s repulsive features appeared at the carriage window, and Luciola’s heart ceased beating.

Had he betrayed Aslitta?

The count had arranged things well. Narrower and narrower grew the circle about the patriots, and the students tried in vain to draw the carriage away from the soldiers.

“Luciola,” said the count, maliciously, “do you still think you can escape me?”

Luciola drew herself up, and casting a look of contempt at the count, she cried, in loud, clear tones:

“Miserable coward!”

San Pietro uttered a cry of rage, and lifted his sword aloof.

Luciola looked coolly at him; not a muscle of her fine face quivered, but her hand grasped the jewelled hilt of a dagger.

She did not intend to fall into the villain’s hands alive.

Suddenly, above the roar of the multitude, a voice thundered:

“Benedetto! Murderer! Escaped galley slave — beware! God cannot be mocked at! Shame over you!”

And as these words were heard, Count San Pietro, the favorite of Radetzky, tremblingly looked in the direction from whence the words came, and which sounded to him like the call of the judgment day. On the pedestal of a marble statue opposite to him stood the man he had recognized at the Scala, who pointed threateningly at him, and Benedetto, wild with rage, pulled a pistol from his pocket and fired at Monte-Cristo. When the smoke cleared away, Monte-Cristo still stood there; at the same time the crowd separated in the centre, and two harnessed horses were shoved in front of Luciola's carriage. How it happened no one knew — in an instant the traces were fastened to the shafts, the negro who sat on the box whipped up the horses, and in a second the carriage rolled away.

The shots fired after them did not reach them, and in a few minutes they had disappeared.

"Death and thunder," hissed Benedetto, "this one at least shall not escape me"; and foaming with rage, he threw himself upon the count.

The latter let him come. Benedetto put the muzzle of his pistol to the count's breast, but at the same moment the iron arm of the latter had clutched the scoundrel by the throat, and with a hoarse laugh Benedetto let his weapon fall and sank upon his knees. Quick as thought the count seized the weapon, and placing it against Benedetto's forehead, said in a loud, clear voice:

"All you people who are with this villain whom you call Count San Pietro ought, at least, to know whom your ally is. Listen attentively, gentlemen. The man to whom you bend the knee is an escaped galley slave — he murdered his mother!"

A cry of horror came from the lips of the crowd, and the Croatians, whose roughness was proverbial, turned with horror from the scoundrel.

Monte-Cristo threw the pistol on the ground, and, getting down from the pedestal, he walked slowly through the lines of the retreating soldiers.

As soon as Benedetto felt himself free he sprang up, and, turning to the crowd, he hissed:

"Do not believe him, he lied; he is an enemy of Austria! How will you be able to look Marshal Radetzky in the face, if you allow him to escape?"

The name of Radetzky acted like magic upon the soldiers. They turned pale and rushed in pursuit of Monte-Cristo.

They had caught up to the count, when he suddenly vanished from their gaze. To the bystanders it seemed as if a wall had opened to give him protection.

But soon the riddle was solved. The wall through which the Count of Monte-Cristo had escaped belonged to the Vertelli house, and all the officers knew that the building contained several secret passages.

“Follow me,” said Benedetto, angrily, entering the Casino.

On the threshold Major Bartolomeo met him. Benedetto grasped the old veteran by the throat, and shaking him like a leaf, he exclaimed:

“Wretch, you have betrayed us; but you shall pay for it!”

“I,” stammered the major, “I — am — innocent.”

“Oh, no deception. I know you. How long is it since you called yourself Cavalcanti, and played the part of my father? Come, men, take this man prisoner. I will report to the marshal about it.”

CHAPTER XXVI

LOVE OF COUNTRY

Led by Ali’s strong hands the noble steeds flew along the streets of Milan like the wind. La Luciola appeared now to have changed roles with Milla, for she wept bitterly.

“Oh, Milla,” groaned the diva, “Aslitta is surely dead, or else he would have kept his word, and if I have lost him my life will be at an end.”

“But, Eugenie,” consoled Milla, “why fear the worst always? I — ”

The sudden stoppage of the coach caused Milla to pause. The negro sprang from the box, opened the door and motioned with his hand to the ladies to descend.

“Come, Milla,” said La Luciola, “wherever we are, we are under the protection of a powerful friend.”

They were ushered into a beautifully furnished hallway, which led to a room furnished with heavy velvet draperies. A man with gray hair and aquiline nose, our old friend Bertuccio, received the ladies with a deep bow.

“Signora,” he said, turning to Luciola, “have no fear; you are in the house of a friend. Follow me.”

La Luciola and Milla accepted the invitation and uttered a cry of surprise. They had entered a room decorated with the finest frescoes and hung with the richest silk and satin tapestries. In the centre of the room was a tent of blue silk under which sat a lady of extraordinary beauty, the same one who had attracted such attention at the Scala.

“Welcome, sisters,” said Haydee in a gentle voice as she came toward them, “I was expecting you.”

La Luciola and Milla bent over to kiss the white hand she extended toward them, but Haydee would not permit it, and pressing her lips to the young girl’s forehead she drew them both to the divan.

“You have acted courageously, sister,” said Haydee, turning to Luciola, “but I was not anxious about you. He told me he would watch over you.”

La Luciola understood whom she meant by this “he,” and she timidly replied:

“Madame, you seem to know all about the terrible affair. Would you permit me a question?”

“Gladly. Ask without fear; I will answer you.”

La Luciola hesitated a moment and then firmly said:

“Madame, there is a patriot in Milan who is putting his life at stake for the freedom of Italy. He offered his breast to the minions of Radetzky — ”

“You are speaking of the Marquis Aslitta,” said Haydee, gently.

“Yes, of him, and if you knew my past you would understand that it is the love I bear for him which keeps me alive.”

“Speak freely, sister,” whispered the handsome Greek, “perhaps I can help you.”

“I am a Frenchwoman by birth,” said the diva, timidly. “My youth was passed in the capital. I was courted and petted, and yet I was not happy. My father, occupied with his financial operations, did not bother himself about me. My mother was just as unhappy as I was. I would have become desperate if a dear friend had not clung to me,” and putting her arm about Milla’s waist, the diva continued:

“We were both devoted to music. It was a substitute for happiness to me, and in the empire of harmony I tried to forget my barren life. A certain trouble happened to me; in a twinkling all the ties which bound me to home were broken, and I fled, with misery and desperation in my heart! Madame, I was then hardly twenty, but virtue, honesty and love were already to me empty words!”

“Poor sister,” murmured Haydee, “how you must have suffered.”

“Yes, I suffered greatly,” continued Luciola, with tears in her eyes. “The world appeared to be a desert, and so I devoted myself to art. In Naples I discovered that there was something besides the applause of the crowd and one’s own ambition! A group of young Italian noblemen had come to Naples to free their brothers from the tyranny of the Austrian oppressors. One night we heard a loud noise. Not having anything to lose, I had my horse harnessed and rode in the direction of the cry. Milla insisted upon accompanying me. When we reached the spot, a bloody fight was going on. We saw shining uniforms. It was at Crotona in Calabria. On a ledge stood a young man, swinging a sword and urging his comrades on against the Austrians. A shot was fired and the young man fell. I urged my horse on toward the spot where I had last seen him. The unhappy man had fallen down a precipice. With the help of my strong tunic, Milla and I succeeded in drawing him up. We brought him to my house and I cared for him tenderly. Giorgio Aslitta awoke to new life. His first words, as he gained sensibility, were:

“Chi per la patria muore
Vessuto ha assai!”

“Ah, the battle hymn of the Italians,” interrupted Haydee, her eyes glistening.

“Yes; and when I heard these words I was saved! I believed in man again, and no love song ever sounded so sweet to me as that patriotic hymn.”

CHAPTER XXVII

SHADOWS OF THE PAST

Hardly had Luciola uttered the last words, than a deep voice said:

“Eugenie Danglars, I thank you in the name of humanity! The past is forgiven!”

The diva turned affrightedly around. The Count of Monte-Cristo stood before her, leading his son by the hand.

“Oh, how grateful I am to you,” said Luciola, sobbing. “You recognized me?”

“I have never lost sight of you,” replied Monte-Cristo, earnestly; “and the name you bear makes me a debtor to you.”

“You shame me, count — you my debtor?”

“Rest satisfied with what I have told you. I am not at liberty to reveal the sorrowful past to you. But be assured that if I have ever caused you grief, it was because I am the instrument of a higher power.”

“You know something about my parents. I beseech you, do not hide anything from me,” implored Luciola. “I know that my father lives, and — ”

“One moment,” interrupted Monte-Cristo, giving Haydee a wink.

Immediately the young woman put her hand upon the boy’s shoulder and led him out.

“I know that my father is doing Stock Exchange business in Germany,” continued Luciola, “but my poor mother — ”

“Your mother lives too,” interrupted the count, sorrowfully, “though I do not know whether you will ever see her again.”

“I do not understand,” stammered La Luciola.

“Listen, my child, and be strong. Have you recognized the wretch who calls himself Count San Pietro?”

“Recognized? No; he is a wretch who merits the contempt of every one.”

“I thought Eugenie Danglars was shrewder than that. Of course his scar disfigures his face so much as to make it almost unrecognizable. Who was it, Eugenie, who, in former years, had the audacity to ask your hand in marriage, and then — ”

“Prince Cavalcanti!” exclaimed La Luciola, horror-stricken.

“Yes, if you wish to call him thus; in reality, though, he is the escaped galley slave and murderer, Benedetto.”

“But what has the wretch to do with my mother?”

“Unfortunately, more than you think; to rob your mother of her treasure, a full million, the monster plunged a dagger in her breast — ”

“Oh, the miserable coward! But you told me my mother lived — ”

“Yes, she lives! The murderer did not strike the heart as he had intended, and, after months of agony, the poor woman recovered.”

“Thank God! But where is she? I want to go to her and throw myself at her feet. My love will make her forget her grief,” exclaimed Luciola, passionately.

“That is impossible just now. Your mother had intended to enter a convent, but chance just happened to throw her in Valentine de Villefort’s way. You know her?”

“Oh, certainly; Valentine, the only one whom I love to remember among all my past acquaintances.”

“Well, then, Valentine is now Madame Morrel. They left France and went to India. They needed a governess for their little daughters, and so she asked Madame Danglars to take the position.”

“Poor mother,” muttered Luciola, sorrowfully. “How hard it must have been for her to take a dependent position.”

“Madame Danglars,” said the count, “accepted the offer with thanks, and she tenderly loves Valentine and her daughters.”

“How long has my mother been in India?”

“About three years.”

“And do you know where she is?”

“I do not know Morrel’s present address, but expect a letter from him soon.”

Just then the deep tones of a bell were heard, and Monte-Cristo arose.

“My child,” he solemnly said, “whatever your past has been, you have expiated it a thousand times, and you deserve the love of a humane and honest man.”

“Ah, you recall Aslitta to me — where is he?”

Monte-Cristo sorrowfully shook his head.

“Eugenie, the Marquis d’Aslitta was arrested two hours ago.”

“Arrested. Oh, my God! That is worse than death.”

“All is not lost yet.”

“Where is he?”

“In the citadel.”

“Count, rescue him. You are superhuman. But tell me who betrayed him?”

“Benedetto.”

Luciola uttered a cry of horror.

“I will do what I can,” continued the count, “to rescue him.”

“A thousand thanks; I believe you.”

The count went to the door and called:

“Spero.”

The handsome boy immediately appeared, and looked inquiringly at his father.

“Come with me,” said the count. “You are still a child, but from this day forth you enter life. Courage and devotion to a just cause make the weak strong. Should I die before my work is done, then take my place.”

A pressure of a silver bell brought Ali to the count.

“Are all here?” he asked.

The Nubian nodded.

“Ali, you know what you have to do. As soon as the slightest traitorous voice is heard, you give the signal.”

Ali again nodded; the count shoved the curtain aside and disclosed a secret staircase.

“Spero, conduct La Luciola,” he ordered, as he descended the stairs, followed by Spero and the diva.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE CONSPIRATORS

Arriving at the foot of the stairs, Monte-Cristo entered a large hall, in which several hundred men were assembled. They all rose up from their seats, and, taking off their hats, greeted the count with loud cries of:

"Long live Italy!"

Monte-Cristo approached a white-haired old man, the Marquis of Sante-Croce, and asked him to preside over the assembly. Sante-Croce nodded, and began his address:

"Friends and patriots," he said, "the long-wished-for day has come. Are you ready to defend the flag?"

"So help us God! Out with the foreigners!" was shouted from all sides.

"Good! Now listen to what our noble friend, the Count of Monte-Cristo, has to tell us!"

The marquis took his seat, and the count, unrolling a paper, said in an earnest voice:

"I can bring you a piece of news which Marshal Radetzky has just received; a revolution has broken out in Vienna, and at this very hour the viceroy is leaving Milan."

A murmur of astonishment ran through the assembly.

"My couriers," continued the count, "were quicker than the emperor's, and in consequence of that I am better informed than the officials. The emperor has bowed to the necessity of the situation, and made important concessions — "

"No concessions!" said a voice; "we want freedom!"

"Patience," said Monte-Cristo. "The emperor has repealed the censorship; the new press law is very liberal, and the representatives of the German and Lombard-Venetian provinces have been convoked."

The astonishment was now general. Loud cries of "Impossible! impossible!" were heard.

"And when will the convocation take place?" asked Sante-Croce.

"Unfortunately not so soon — on the 3d of July," said the count, sorrowfully.

Angry murmurs arose.

"They wish to mock us," said a young man. "Radetzky's minions have murdered my brother; I demand revenge!"

"My mother was wounded at Corsa," said a second. "No compromises: war!"

"Yes, war to the knife!" shouted the whole assembly.

"One moment!" exclaimed Monte-Cristo, in a tone of command. "I know how angry you all are, and yet counsel you to reflect. A nation which is eager for independence, is strong and powerful, but your oppressors are as numerous as sands in the sea. You will conquer, Milan will be free; but when you have spilled your blood, and piled your bodies up like a wall, the allies upon whom you count will desert you. You will fall again into the hands of the enemy, and the heavy yoke will become heavier. Charles Albert, the king of Sardinia, will betray you as soon as his ends have been served. Do you still desire to carry out your ideas?"

Monte-Cristo's words sounded prophetic. The patriots could not dissimulate the impression they made. But their opinions did not change.

"And if the worst should come!" said one, courageously, "I would rather die than hesitate any longer. To arms!"

"To arms, then!" repeated the Marquis of Sante-Croce, solemnly, "and may God be with us!"

"But where is Aslitta? He must lead us," some cried.

La Luciola advanced.

"The patriot Aslitta has been imprisoned," she sorrowfully said; "he is lying in the citadel."

A cry of rage arose.

"Let us rescue him," came from all sides. "Let us storm the citadel before they murder him."

"Yes, let us rescue him," said Monte-Cristo. "Let the fight begin to-morrow! To arms in the name of humanity and freedom!"

Suddenly a man arose from the crowd, who had heretofore remained silent, and casting a look at the count, he slowly said:

"We hardly know you. What guarantee will you give us that you won't betray us?"

“The man is right,” the count replied. “Sante-Croce, here is my own child. Take Spero with you. Let him vouch for his father with his head!”

Sante-Croce refused to accept the guarantee, but Monte-Cristo was firm. The boy, with proudly uplifted head, strode toward the old man and said:

“I shall accompany you. My father has taught me to do my duty.”

With enthusiastic cries the patriots crowded about the handsome lad, and Monte-Cristo felt his heart throb with joy as he looked at Spero.

“And I, too, will accompany you!” exclaimed La Luciola. “Italy must be freed, and Aslitta rescued.”

CHAPTER XXIX

FATHER AND SON

Benedetto, who had been pushed into the open sea in a frail bark by the Count of Monte-Cristo, had been miraculously rescued by some fishermen, and when the murderer recovered consciousness his first glance fell on the box which stood near his bed. The contents were undisturbed, the poor fishermen had not thought of opening the box which the Count of Monte-Cristo had closed again, and thus the world stood open to the wretch.

His viperous instincts had not deserted him. One evening as Benedetto lay faint and weak on the straw, he heard low murmurs of conversation in the neighboring room. He discovered that his benefactors belonged to a patriotic league similar to the Carbonari, whose object was to free Italy. On this particular evening they were discussing the question of shipping arms and ammunition to their countrymen.

The next day Benedetto, with tears in his eyes, told them that he had to depart at once, as he was expected at Lucca by a friend of his. The honest fishermen took cordial leave of him. He arrived at Lucca, got some elegant clothing there, and went to Milan, where he represented himself as Count San Pietro. His first visit was to Radetzky, to whom he denounced the fishermen who had saved his life. Radetzky took advantage of the traitor’s story, captured the fishermen, had them tried by court-martial, and then shot. From that moment San Pietro became a favorite of the marshal.

The Major Bartolomeo had been formerly a croupier in a large gambling house at Lucca. Where he got his major’s title from, no one knew; even his mistress, the beautiful Aurora Vertelli, was reticent on this point. When Bartolomeo came back from Paris and threw his winnings, amounting to fifty thousand francs, into the lap of the handsome Aurora Vertelli, the practical beauty said:

“Bartolomeo, suppose we open a dining-room too. You have been a croupier long enough — let us try to turn over the fifty thousand francs.”

Bartolomeo gleefully assented to this proposal. They opened a magnificent place, and were soon making money hand over fist. Yet — no luck without a shadow — one evening, as Bartolomeo was receiving his guests, a tall, slim young man, whose face was disfigured by a scar, approached him, and laying his hand upon his shoulder, whispered in his ear:

“Good-evening, father.”

The major trembled, and, looking with affright at the stranger, stammered:

“I do not know you, sir — it would be a great honor to me — but — ”

The stranger laughed loudly, and, conducting the major to a neighboring room, impressively said:

“My dear sir, let us be candid — do you remember the name of Cavalcanti which you once wrongfully bore?”

The major grew pale, and the stranger continued unmercifully:

“If the officials were to find out that you were once a counterfeiter, it might go hard with you. Your license would be revoked, and besides — well, you understand.”

The major looked about him in astonishment — who was the man who knew the secrets of his past life?

“Well, father?” mockingly said Benedetto.

“Father, father,” repeated the major, dazed. “You are not — ”

He mechanically opened his arms to press Benedetto to his heart.

“Not necessary,” said the latter, laughing. “We are not in the Count of Monte-Cristo’s house, and can dispense with tenderness.”

The major sighed — for a further sum of fifty thousand francs he would have embraced ten Andreas.

“But who are you, anyhow?” he finally asked. “I thought I had heard that you — ”

“Beware!” exclaimed Benedetto. “Do not refer to the past; here I am the Count of San Pietro!”

“The confidant — ” stammered the major.

“Of Radetzky,” added Benedetto.

“But as an Italian — ”

“Keep silent and listen to me. Either you do as I say, or else I denounce you to the marshal,” said Benedetto in a rough voice, and as the major bowed his head, the wretch explained to him what he wished of him. It was nothing less than to play the part of a spy.

One can call one’s self a major, even play the part of a loving father for a sum of fifty thousand francs, and yet not be a traitor to one’s country, and Bartolomeo, in spite of his being a criminal, was an ardent patriot; but when the count calmly said he would have Radetzky close the Casino, he gave in.

From that day the major tried to drive the Italians away from his Casino. He was pompous and disrespectful to his countrymen and polite and cordial to the Austrian officers, so that the latter were at length the only ones who came, and San Pietro’s spy had very little news to report.

Aslitta, who was playing a double game, was the only one who could not be driven away. One day he took Bartolomeo aside, told him he knew his position exactly and would help him to deceive San Pietro and free Milan of the tyrant.

Bartolomeo, who until now found himself despised by his countrymen, was overjoyed; he threw himself at the feet of Aslitta, acknowledged him as his deity and vowed that he would follow him at command.

Bartolomeo arose, and as he did so he secretly resolved to square his account with Benedetto in such a way as to serve his country. He soon became the most clever of Aslitta’s emissaries, and soon pictured himself as one of the most illustrious patriots of his country bedecked with laurels.

But fortune makes rapid strides. Through certain peculiar events Benedetto turned his attention to Bartolomeo and caused a strict watch to be kept upon him, and when on the evening of the 15th of March he saw him vanish from the Casino he realized all.

Night was already far advanced when he reached the damp subterranean cell of Bartolomeo and rattled the rusty hooks that held the bolts. The major having fallen into a pleasant revery in which he beheld visions of his future greatness as a martyr to duty’s cause, raised his eyes and shrank back as he saw the three men, one of whom carried a cane tipped with hair of an unusual design.

“Get up, you old fool,” cried the one who carried the cane, addressing the prisoner, “follow us!”

Bartolomeo rose without a murmur, and, arranging his disordered uniform, stepped between the two soldiers, who bore torches, and who rudely pushed him down a dark stair.

He was no coward, but yet he felt as though he would rather ascend to where he could at least enjoy the sunshine than go further down where it became darker and colder. They walked a considerable distance along dark passages, and halted in front of a rickety iron door. A huge key was thrust into the keyhole and slowly the bolts sprang back.

Accompanied by his guides, Bartolomeo stepped into a gloomy cavern — the torture-chamber. Heavy chains hung on the walls, blocks, tourniquets, thumbscrews, and other implements of torture lay upon the floor, while the corners contained a variety of others which the major could not recognize.

“Sit down,” commanded the bearer of the cane, pointing to a block; as Bartolomeo hesitated, a well-directed blow caused him to accelerate his movements. Thereupon the man withdrew, leaving the major and the soldiers behind. The prisoner gazed timidly upon his jailers, and murmured:

“Poor prospects for me.”

Although the remark was scarcely audible, a heavy blow from one of the soldiers caused him to stagger, and for the next fifteen minutes he remained silent.

At last the door was again opened and Benedetto entered; at a sign the soldiers withdrew; to his dismay, Bartolomeo saw his former son standing before him.

Benedetto wore the uniform of an Austrian officer, a kalpak was strapped over his forehead and his coat bedecked with costly gold lace. From his belt hung a dagger, whose handle was inlaid with jewels, which was partly concealed by the flowing mantle that covered his shoulders. As soon as he entered he threw off the mantle and posed, as if to dazzle Bartolomeo with the splendor of his attire.

“You know,” he began, without wasting any words, “that you need expect no mercy from me.”

The major remained silent, his speech failed him through the brusque manner in which he was addressed. Taking advantage of the situation, Benedetto continued:

“You have betrayed me. Don’t deny it — I know all.”

“I!” stammered the major, confused.

“Yes, you! — the virago has exposed you.”

This remark roused the nobler qualities of Bartolomeo. He was astounded at the impudence of the knave who dared to call Aurora a virago.

“Be silent!” he cried, angrily; “and do not malign the character of a pure woman — you red-headed scoundrel!”

Benedetto moved as if to rise, but on second thoughts he remained seated, and burst into a hearty laugh.

“Your immutable confidence in your wife is to be envied, but really it is out of place here. Aurora Vertelli has confessed to me what you will doubtless deny. I forced her to admit the truth at the point of the pistol.”

The major grew pale, and beneath his clinched lips a terrible feeling raged.

“Base coward! to wring a confession from a woman in such a way.”

“Enough — cease your idle talk,” cried Benedetto, stamping his foot nervously. “Tell me, where do the so-called patriots hold their meetings? Do not hesitate. Aslitta is a prisoner like yourself, and I desire to know the truth.”

“I do not know,” replied the major, with a sinister smile.

“You don’t say so. I am sorry for you, for I believed that your memory would come to the rescue,” said Benedetto, casting a knowing glance at the implements of torture.

Bartolomeo’s heart beat fast. He knew that Benedetto was capable of any crime. Not a muscle of his face trembled as Benedetto said threateningly:

“So you will not speak!”

Bartolomeo cast a look of contempt toward him, and exclaimed: “Go to the devil!”

Benedetto clinched his fist and held it in the face of the major.

“Did you not understand me? Look here! You see those beautiful toys?” pointing to the implements of torture. “I will dismember you if you hesitate longer!”

“Tell me, what did you want,” demanded the major, with a shrug of his shoulders, “at the time when you introduced me into the salon of the Count of Monte-Cristo?”

A cry of rage, uttered by Benedetto, interrupted him.

“Do not mention that name!” exclaimed the bandit, gritting his teeth. “If I kill you off and slay Aslitta it will only be to wreak my vengeance upon that man, whom I despise. Oh, he called me a galley slave once — the murderer!”

And he stopped short, his voice half choked with rage. Bartolomeo trembled visibly; and to humble him the more, Benedetto spat in his face.

The major scarcely regarded this last insult. He was busied with many reflections. How would it be if he tried to overpower Benedetto?

“Well, I am waiting,” said San Pietro, after a pause; “will you speak?”

“No.”

“You know that Aslitta is in my power, and you will die like him if you remain headstrong.”

“Listen to me, Benedetto,” said the major, earnestly. “I have lied and defrauded, but never will I consent to become a traitor to my country!”

“Well, then, come along!” cried Benedetto, seizing the major by the shoulder and shoving him to a corner of the closet. There stood an old wardrobe. Benedetto opened the door, and, by the flickering light of the torches, Bartolomeo saw the dim outlines of a human head, which stood out like a silhouette from the wall.

“Do you see that apparatus?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“And do you know its purpose?”

“No.”

“Then mark well what I say — you shall soon know! About a century ago an Italian nobleman was deceived by his wife, who had a liaison with one of his pages. The nobleman discovered it, but pretended ignorance in order to complete his plans for the destruction of both. One day he presented the page with a beautifully wrought helmet. As soon as the present was received, the page placed it upon his head, and, lo! it fitted him so perfectly that he could not take it off, and he died a horrible death; for as soon as it touched the forehead a concealed spring loosened and caused the helmet to drop over the head, thus choking him.”

“Well,” replied Bartolomeo, in suspense.

“Well, in this closet you will find the counterpart of that beautiful helmet. If you refuse to accede to my demands I shall summon aid and have you placed in the closet. A delicate attachment will push the helmet into place, and after your head has been placed inside, you will die a most horrible slow death by starvation, and that indeed is a terrible way to die.”

“I am resigned,” was the quick response of the major. With a strong grasp he seized Benedetto, who was unprepared for the attack, and pushed him into the wardrobe. The ominous helmet encircled his head, and, despite his struggles, he could not free himself.

Bartolomeo stopped for a moment; being a prudent man, he at once foresaw what was to be done. Throwing his green coat across his shoulders, he approached Benedetto. He tore the embroidered coat from his body, and replaced it by his own, and, together with the kalpak, which Benedetto had thrown aside, completed his toilet.

Hastily strapping the dagger to his side, he left the torture chamber. At the door he met the soldiers, who did not recognize him, and saluted him as he passed. His thoughts were not regarding his own safety — he desired to rescue Aslitta if possible.

CHAPTER XXX

IN THE WELL

The subterranean prison into which Aslitta had been thrown was dark as pitch, and it was a long time before his eyes became accustomed to the darkness and he could make out his surroundings. He remembered that he had descended many steps, and he supposed that his cell was in the casemates of the citadel.

He soon discovered that the cell was very narrow but high; about ten feet above his head he found an opening, secured by iron bars. All attempts to reach this proved futile, and he could secure no foothold on the slippery walls.

What should he do? At any moment the door might be opened, and his captors enter and lead him to the torture-chamber, or, perhaps, to his doom. He did not fear death itself — but what would become of Luciola in case he died? The last meeting of the patriots was to take place this very evening. As it was, there were but a few of these in comparison to the number of their oppressors, and if but one remained away the good work might be seriously hampered.

He paced the floor deeply absorbed in thought, when suddenly he stumbled and fell, as it appeared, into a vast empty space. Instinctively extending his arms, he caught hold of one of the projecting ledges, and so hung suspended in mid-air.

What was to be done? Aslitta strove to secure a foothold, but the relation of his accident to his imprisonment soon dawned upon him.

In the centre of the floor he had discovered an opening, which evidently was the passage leading to a well, or perhaps, as he thought, to one of the unused drains, such as there are many in the old castles. A low stone fence surrounded the opening, and it was this over which he had stumbled. Aslitta reflected for a moment — perhaps it was once covered with a stone, which, slipping out of place, dropped below. The opening was not very wide, and it was only after a great effort that he succeeded in jumping over the rail.

If he could only have seen whether there was water in the well which might aid him in his escape. What would he not have given for a match? But that was out of the question.

Suddenly he stopped short; it appeared as though he heard a noise proceed from the well. He listened, but again everything was quiet. He bent over the opening, and now he could distinctly hear a sound. It was a human voice — it was a curse he had heard uttered.

Placing his hands about his mouth he cried out:

“Is anybody here?”

No answer came. The prisoner waited and then called out once more.

Again no answer came.

Presently he heard a voice cry out, “You are a prisoner; are you not?”

“Yes, I am. Whoever you may be, have no fear; I am not your enemy,” returned the voice of Aslitta.

“I am down in the water half drowned.”

“Peculiar,” thought Aslitta; “I ought to know that voice, it sounds so familiar;” and in a loud tone he asked, “Who are you?”

Yet no answer came; evidently the voice in the well doubted his sincerity. To his good fortune he found a match which he lighted. With a suppressed cry he shrank back; he recognized the uniform of the Austrian officer.

Before he could recover his surprise, he heard words in pure Italian proceeding from the well.

“Keep me up! I am sinking deeper and deeper.”

Now there was no reason for doubt; were he friend or enemy he would save him. Quickly unfastening his scarf, he held one end firmly while he threw the other over into the well.

“Catch hold of the scarf,” he called down, “the stuff is firm and will bear you.”

Immediately thereafter he felt that his order had been obeyed — the heavy silk became taut.

“Pull up,” a voice now cried from below, “I will hold tight.”

Aslitta was young and powerful, but he had to exert himself terribly to pull up the heavy load and lift it over the rim of the well.

“Thank Heaven,” the words reached his ear, “for the present we are saved. Ah, what would my poor Aurora say if she knew this?”

Aurora! This name seemed like a revelation to Aslitta, and, in glad surprise, he exclaimed:

"Bartolomeo — is it you?"

"Why, of course; but with whom have I the honor — It is as dark here as in a sack."

"I am Giorgio Aslitta."

"Heaven be praised that I have found you. I was looking for you."

"Indeed? Where, in truth, do you come from?"

"Oh, that would take us too far to-day. I fell into the clutches of that cursed San Pietro and escaped from him only through a miracle. Well, for that he's now got his deserts."

"Is he dead?"

"Oh, no. That sort of vermin has a very tough life, but he's locked up for the present, and therefore we must hurry up to clear out."

"I'm with you, only tell me how and in which way, and, besides, I would like to know how you obtained that Croatian uniform."

"Oh, that was a rare joke! It was San Pietro's uniform which I took from him. I will tell you the particulars later on — or do you mistrust me?"

"No, Bartolomeo, I know you as a good patriot."

"Thanks for this word. I come, besides, direct from the torture-chamber. After I had escaped from my torturer I was standing in a damp, narrow, totally dark passage. By groping along I reached a descending staircase; I slowly walked on and only stopped when I felt the moisture under my feet. But what could I do? I cautiously groped ahead, and soon my shoes were filled with water. It shortly afterward rose to my calves; and then, oh joy! I could again rise to my full height. The steps were at an end and I stood in a capacious vault, as I could perceive by the light of a match. At the same time I felt a strong draught, and then I heard your question whether anybody was down there. I answered for luck — whether I was captured or drowned in the gradually rising water would, in the end, amount to the same thing."

"But why were you arrested?"

"Later on you shall hear all."

"Can you not at least tell me whether Luciola has been saved?"

"Yes, she is in safety in the Count of Monte-Cristo's house."

"Heaven be praised! Now I can die calmly," whispered Aslitta.

"Nonsense! who is speaking of dying? Think of our rescue. It is not safe to remain here, and the sooner we get out of this hole the better. Where is this cell?"

“Ah, if I knew that! I have no matches, and, therefore, could not very well fix where I was.”

“Good; we will find out.”

Bartolomeo drew a match from his pocket, and soon a bright light illuminated the cell, without, however, revealing a consoling prospect.

“Humph!” growled the major, “it was, after all, better down there.”

“But there, also, you did not find an exit.”

“True; but I was, perhaps, awkward. You may do better. Let us descend.”

“As if that was so easy. If one holds the scarf, the other can descend, and that’s the end of the chapter,” said Aslitta, calmly.

“Well, one’s enough,” thought the major, after a few moments’ deliberation.

“How so?”

“Well, I don’t amount to much, and if I go under, my poor wife will be taken care of. You will give Aurora a small annuity, will you not, marquis, should she fall in need, and you will tell her that I died for my country? You, on the other hand, must preserve yourself. What would become of Italy without you? Come, I will hold the scarf, and you can descend by it. The more I consider it, the surer I am that there’s a canal down there, by means of which we can get into the moat of the fortress. Well, won’t you do it?”

“No,” replied Aslitta, with emotion. “I would be a scoundrel to save myself at your expense.”

“But there’s no other way. Were I in your place I would not hesitate an instant. Think of your friends; you are to lead them, and if you are missing, they are lost.”

Tears rose to Aslitta’s eyes, but he resisted no longer, and, cordially shaking the major’s hand, he said: “Friend, I accept your sacrifice, and if I find an exit, I will save you.”

It seemed to Bartolomeo as if Aslitta’s clasp was the most precious thing he had gained, and he was almost overcome with emotion. But he quickly recovered when he heard footsteps close at hand, and urged Aslitta to leave.

The young man embraced the major.

“Thanks, in the name of Italy!” he ardently exclaimed. Then, tying the scarf around his waist, he swung himself from the rim of the well.

Bartolomeo held the other end of the scarf with all his might. Aslitta must now have reached the bottom. At the moment when the major let go of the silken stuff, a key was turned in the lock and the door opened. The major had crouched on the floor; but, as he threw a glance at those who entered, he almost uttered a loud ejaculation, for before him stood — Benedetto. "I thought so," muttered Bartolomeo, in a rage; "some cursed chance has rescued him. Such a scoundrel's soul is too bad for the devil himself."

"Get up, vagabond," roughly exclaimed Benedetto.

He had looked up Aslitta to avenge Bartolomeo's escape on him, and he was in a very bad humor.

As the major did not stir, Benedetto uttered an oath and cried:

"Are you deaf, Aslitta?"

He then snatched a torch from one of the soldiers who accompanied him and looked around. As if struck by lightning he started when a well-known voice tauntingly said:

"Good-day, Andrea Cavalcanti."

"You and always you!" cried the bandit furiously. "Where is the other one?"

The major shrugged his shoulders, while the soldiers looked in every corner and Benedetto angrily gnawed his under lip.

"He has probably escaped through the well," said one of the soldiers at last.

"Oh, then we have him sure," laughed another.

"Light here," ordered Benedetto, bending over the opening. The soldier obeyed as directed and Bartolomeo felt his heart cease beating.

"We have him sure," one of the soldiers had said. Was the well a trap? A strange sound was now heard. The major sank on his knees. He recognized the noise. The water was slowly rising in the well and soon stood hand-high under the stone curbing.

"Where does the water come from?" asked Benedetto, stepping back.

"About a quarter of an hour ago," replied one of the soldiers, "the commander gave the order to open the sluices of Santa Maria. Canals run from the aqueduct under the citadel, and that's why I said before we had our prisoner sure. He is drowned."

"Speak, wretch!" said San Pietro, turning to the major. "Did Aslitta escape through the well?"

But Bartolomeo made no reply. A dull sob escaped his lips, and his eyes, filled with hot tears, fixed themselves, in horror, on the silk scarf which the rising flood wafted to and fro.

“One has escaped,” cried Benedetto, from between his gritted teeth, “but the other shall suffer for it. Take the prisoner with you,” he added, addressing the soldiers; “to-morrow at daybreak he shall be shot.”

He walked toward the door. Bartolomeo slowly rose to his feet and muttered only a single word:

“Villain!”

CHAPTER XXXI

SPERO

The morning of the 16th of March had come, and Milan had a martial appearance. Placards were attached to all the walls, informing the Imperial authorities of the ultimatum of the people of Lombardy; a great throng was gathered around these placards, and the streets were crowded with Austrian troops.

Grenadiers were on guard before the official buildings, but the sentinels were suddenly disarmed, and, without being able to tell how it happened, the palace was occupied by the citizens. The municipal councillors fled in every direction; only the president of the Senate remained firm, and only when the tumult became greater, he, too, went, guarded by an escort, to the Brobetto palace, which was situated in the centre of the city.

In the Via Del Monte the crowd was the greatest, and all passage was soon entirely cut off. Rifle shots were suddenly heard, deafening shouts followed, and there was a terrible confusion. Radetzky had ordered his soldiers to load heavily and to fire into the crowd. A howl of rage followed the first discharge, and numberless wounded fell to the ground. That was no honest combat, but an infamous massacre.

Monte-Cristo stood at one of the lofty arched windows in the Vidiserti palace, and, with a dark frown, observed the terrible massacre which Radetzky's minions created in the streets. Spero stood at his father's side.

"See, papa," he said, with tear-choked utterance, "that wounded woman carrying a dead child. It was shot in her arms. Oh, the poor wretches, what did they do to the soldiers?"

"My child," sadly replied Monte-Cristo, "man's worst enemy is man!"

"Papa!" suddenly exclaimed Spero, "see, there, the flag!"

The count glanced in the direction indicated. A young Italian had just climbed up the tower of a church opposite the Vidiserti palace, and there unfurled the national standard. The tricolor fluttered gayly in the wind. Suddenly, however, the young man was seen to totter; he sought to hold himself, turned a somersault and fell crushed to the pavement. A bullet had hit him.

At this moment Bertuccio entered the hall.

“Well?” asked the count.

“Count, one of our emissaries has penetrated to the citadel. The Marquis Aslitta is no longer there!”

“What can that mean? Had he escaped he would have looked for us here,” exclaimed the count uneasily.

“The man could learn nothing further,” said Bertuccio, sadly; “but he was informed that some one else was found in the marquis’s cell.”

“Some one else? Who?”

“You know him. In Paris he called himself Major Cavalcanti, and here — ”

“What about this substitute?” eagerly interrupted the count.

“He was sentenced to death; whether the sentence had been already executed our emissary could not ascertain.”

“Bertuccio,” said the count anxiously, “if Aslitta — ”

“Aslitta is dead!” cried Luciola, who had entered unperceived and sank to her knees sobbing.

“Who dares to allege that?” exclaimed the count, turning pale.

“Step to the window,” stammered Luciola.

The count did so and staggered back, for the sight he saw confirmed the poor girl’s words; four men, with uncovered heads, carried a bier on which lay a motionless body. It was the Marquis Aslitta, and Monte-Cristo’s heart swelled as he recognized him.

“How could this calamity have happened?” whispered Spero, clinging anxiously to Luciola.

Bertuccio, in the meantime, had run down into the street to direct the carriers. He now returned and tremblingly said:

“A quarter of an hour ago our men found the body in the moat of the fortifications; how Aslitta got there is a riddle.”

Loud cries were heard from the street.

“Revenge on the murderers! Death to the miserable cowards.”

A crowd numbered by hundreds gathered around the bier, and the carriers had trouble to reach the palace gate.

Luciola had dragged herself with difficulty to the staircase, but there she swooned away, and while Spero bedewed her beautiful pale face with his tears, he appealingly whispered to his father:

“Papa, you have already aided so many people, aid her too!”

Monte-Cristo started. He had promised Luciola to save Aslitta, and now —

The next moment he was standing beside the bier; his gaze rested searchingly, with unspeakable terror, on the pale features of the drowned man, and with trembling hands he bared the bosom and placed his ear to Aslitta’s breast.

At this instant the beating of drums was heard and a Croatian battalion turned the corner of the street.

“Men,” exclaimed Monte-Cristo, “carry the Marquis Aslitta into the Vidiserti palace, and if you love your leader, who has staked his life for you, see to it that no soldier enters the building! Turn the palace into a bulwark against which the soldiers smash their skulls, and who knows whether Italy and Aslitta may not, together, become resurrected?”

Luciola had heard the prophetic words; she rose up, and, approaching the bier, exclaimed enthusiastically:

“You hear his words; he always keeps what he promises. To arms, friends! Long live Italy and Liberty.”

A shout of joy answered Luciola. The next instant the street was blocked by turned wagons, logs and other obstacles, the pavement was torn up, and as the Croatians approached they found a raging multitude ready for defence. At a first-story window of the Palace Vidiserti Luciola stood and encouraged the patriots. She had seized a flag, and, unmindful of the bullets which whistled around her, waved the tricolor in the air.

The spark had dropped into the powder barrel; from all sides the patriots rallied around the national standard, and, amid the ringing of the alarm bells, the insurrection kept growing in dimensions.

Luciola had long ago left her place at the window and stood on a barricade, waving her flag and spurring on the combatants. The Croatians retreated after about an hour. Surrounded on all sides by the Italians, they sought safety in flight, and the patriots followed them with shouts of joy.

Luciola now left the barricade, and, hastening into the palace, sank on her knees beside the bier, on which Aslitta still lay extended motionless. She raised her clasped hands to Monte-Cristo, who was busying himself about the lifeless man, and imploringly exclaimed:

“Count, I have kept my word — the tricolor waves in freedom in Milan; restore Giorgio to me.”

The count did not reply; he held in his hand a small vial containing a dark-red liquid, and slowly he dropped single drops on Aslitta’s compressed lips.

At this instant Sante-Croce rushed into the apartment and excitedly exclaimed:

“Things are bad, count. Radetzky has retreated with his troops into the citadel and begins to bombard the city! You have promised to assist us with act and counsel, and, instead of redeeming your word, you are wasting the time in useless revivification experiments. Let the dead alone and take care of the living.”

Monte-Cristo’s flashing eyes fixed themselves on the old patriot, and with ringing tones he retorted:

“Marquis, I have as yet always kept my word.”

“But when? It may soon be too late. We are lacking in arms and ammunition, and the superiority of numbers will crush us if we are defenceless.”

“Ali,” ordered the count.

The Nubian appeared and glanced inquiringly at his master.

“You have the key of the vault which contains the arms and ammunition?”

Ali nodded.

“Go and show the Marquis of Sante-Croce the way to the vaults. Arm the patriots, marquis, and believe my words, before night Radetzky will give up the fight and to-morrow will leave Milan. Stop, one instant yet; I told the patriots that the Marquis Aslitta would lead them. I have kept my word. See for yourself. Aslitta opens his eyes; he lives.”

The dark eyelids really opened, and with a dreamy look Aslitta surveyed the people who surrounded him.

“Thanks be to God, he lives!” exclaimed Luciola, gleefully.

“Calm yourself, Eugenie,” said the Count. “Aslitta must be spared for the present any excitement! Leave him to me, he will soon recover.”

“Oh, you have performed a miracle,” said Luciola, enthusiastically.

Monte-Cristo bowed his head and a tear glistened in his eye.

It was in memory of his friend and teacher, the Abbe Faria.

Sante-Croce looked wonderingly at the count.

“You are a god!” he exclaimed; “forgive the words I spoke before.”

“I have nothing to forgive,” replied the count, gently; “I have only to keep what I have promised. Spero, come here.”

“Here I am, papa,” called the boy.

“Good, my son. You know your duty. Accompany the patriots; take my place until Aslitta’s condition permits me to relieve you.”

A cannon-shot caused the house to shake to its foundations, and Haydee, pale and trembling, entered.

“The bombardment begins,” she whispered to her husband. “Oh, the cruelty!”

Monte-Cristo threw his arm about his handsome wife, and giving the boy a wink, he consolingly said:

“Spero will be worthy of you and me. Come, Spero, say good-by and go.”

Spero pressed a kiss on Haydee’s lips, threw his arms about his father’s neck and whispered in his ear:

“I will do my duty.”

Turning to the marquis he put his hand in that of the old man and said:

“Let us go!”

A half-hour passed by. Monte-Cristo and Haydee were still busied with Aslitta, when a servant entered bearing a sealed letter on a silver salver.

“A courier who has come from France has just brought it,” said the servant, in answer to a question of the count’s.

“Did he give his name?”

“Yes; he said his name was Penelon, and that he came from Marseilles.”

“From Marseilles!” exclaimed Haydee, anxiously; “oh, quick! see what the letter says.”

Monte-Cristo broke the seal. The letter only contained a few words:

“I am dying from grief. Come at once!

“Mercedes.”

The count handed the letter to Haydee. The latter read it and then said:

“When do we go?”

“Thanks, Haydee,” said the count, tenderly. “We go as soon as my duty here is ended! Give the necessary orders. Let Bertuccio inform Jacopo and rest easy! See, Aslitta has recovered — God will protect Spero!”

CHAPTER XXXII

ECARTE

Bartolomeo was thrown into a subterranean dungeon of the citadel, and now that Aslitta was lost he accepted his fate calmly. He could not be of any further service to the fatherland.

As he was sitting meditatively in his cell, the door opened and a corporal entered.

“What do you wish?” asked the major politely. “What time is it?”

“Three o’clock in the morning,” replied the corporal, a handsome young fellow with blue eyes and blond hair.

“Only three o’clock. Then I have three long hours still to live. Can’t I be shot at once?”

“No, no chance whatever.”

“How awkward. What shall I do with myself? It’s so monotonous here!”

“Oh, you can remedy that,” said the corporal, laughing.

“How so? What do you mean?” asked Bartolomeo.

“Well, you see, I know that you are a good card-player. To-morrow I must shoot you, and before doing so I came here to ask you to do me a favor. Will you please teach me *ecarte*?”

“With pleasure,” replied the major.

“Good; then let us begin,” said the soldier, gleefully, and pulling a pack of cards out of his pocket, he threw them on a chair and went away, returning shortly afterward with a drum.

The major seated himself on a chair, the corporal on the bed, and the drum served as a table.

The corporal was a good scholar and soon learned the elements of the game. Bartolomeo was delighted. He dealt, picked up, trumped, and forgot entirely that in a few hours he would be shot.

When the clock struck four, the young man had won twice, and he proudly exclaimed:

“If my luck continues, I will be ahead of you soon. Couldn’t we play for money?”

“No, that would be unfair,” replied the major, “I am so superior to you.”

“Oh, that could be tested by a trial. But first I will get some rum. I am thirsty, and you are so also, no doubt.”

“Thanks, I will take some too,” replied Bartolomeo.

The corporal disappeared. As soon as the footsteps died away, the major took the cards and stacked them. When the soldier returned with the rum, the major had already taken his place.

“Ah, that tastes good,” he said, after he had taken a deep draught.

The corporal drank also and then they sat down again. This time the game was for money, the stakes being a few pennies. After a while, the soldier in the meantime having won repeatedly, the stakes were increased. The major continued to lose, and soon the soldier had won all of Bartolomeo’s cash. While the play was going on they drank often, and when Bartolomeo refused to play any more because his money was all gone, the corporal said he would lend him a few lire.

“Ah, if I lose these too,” remarked the major, “the time will have gone by for a revenge. It is already past five o’clock.”

“Bah — let us play anyhow!” exclaimed the corporal, exhilarated by the money he had won and the liquor he had swallowed.

A slight smile crossed the major’s lips. The play began again, but this time the prisoner won. It did not take long before the major had not only won back all his money, but that of the corporal’s too, and just as the latter had asked him for a loan a knock was heard at the door.

“Confound it!” exclaimed the corporal, “who is disturbing us now?”

In answer to a harsh “Come in,” the door opened and a soldier appeared. He announced that it was time to go to the barracks in the Piazza Poliziotti.

“It is all right; I shall be there directly,” answered the corporal.

The soldier departed, and the corporal now turned to Bartolomeo, who had arisen from his chair.

“One more game,” begged the Austrian.

“Not for the world. I must collect my thoughts now, and close my account with God,” replied the major.

“But you won my money and ought to give me a revenge.”

“Gladly, if I only had time to do so.”

The corporal, who was very tight, swore roundly.

The major gazed at him for a moment, and then in a hesitating way said:

“I know a way out of the difficulty.”

“What is it?” asked the corporal, breathlessly.

“Your order is to shoot me, and then to go to the barracks; postpone the execution half an hour — take me with you to the Poliziotti barracks, and I will give you your revenge there,” proposed Bartolomeo.

“Certainly,” cried the corporal, gleefully.

He strode in advance of Bartolomeo, and ordered his men to take the major along to the barracks.

The soldiers looked at one another in astonishment, but none dared to say a word, and at a quick step they were on their way to the barracks.

“Time won — everything won,” muttered the major. “I have not played cards a lifetime for nothing.”

CHAPTER XXXIII

FORWARD!

In the streets of Milan the battle raged. The Italians resembled lions in courage, and soon one bulwark after another fell into their hands. The ladies of the aristocracy were busy in the Casa Borromeo melting lead and making cannon-balls. All the druggists and chemists manufactured powder and gun-cotton, and the gunsmiths gave up their stocks of firearms.

In spite of the brave resistance of the Austrians, the Borletto Palace had been conquered again by the patriots. Radetzky demanded an armistice, but his proposition was declined. The enemy were not allowed time to collect themselves.

One barrack after the other was captured, and then the great mass of the patriots turned toward the Casa Santa Margarita, where the *elite* of the artillery had taken up a position, and a bitter struggle ensued. The battle raged indecisively for a long time, when suddenly a bright flame issued from the gate. A patriot, Pasquale Sottocorni, had stealthily reached the palace and set it on fire. He was the first victim of his heroic deed, and died with the cry on his lips:

"Long live Italy!"

But his boldness helped the patriots materially. The escaping soldiers were taken prisoners, and the ranks of the people were recruited in numbers. The Poliziotti barracks still remained to be captured. The Poliziotti was intensely hated in Milan because it was mainly filled with renegades — Italians who sold themselves to Radetzky.

While the fight was going on about the building, Bartolomeo and the corporal were sitting in a room playing cards. The major permitted his pupil to win and lose at times. Every minute he gained was precious to him, and the corporal did not dream of shooting his teacher while they were playing *ecarte*.

From time to time a soldier put his head in the room to ask when the execution was going to take place.

Every time he did so he was told to be off.

The corporal had just finished dealing the cards, when the soldier again appeared.

"Corporal," he said, breathlessly, "the Poliziotti are giving way, the Croatians are decimated — shall we go to their rescue?"

"Bah! we are only a handful," growled the corporal. "Let us await the result."

The door closed behind the soldier. Bartolomeo now sprang up, took the sword and gun from the drunken corporal, and cried in his ear:

"Obey my order, or you are a dead man!"

"What — should — I — do?" stammered the corporal, partly sobered.

"Hoist the white flag — quick!"

"But I — have — no — authority — here!"

"Who cares?" exclaimed Bartolomeo, "give the order — the people will be needlessly sacrificed — are you going now?"

The corporal still hesitated, but just then a police sergeant ran in and cried:

"Corporal — let your men get shot — the scoundrels refuse to fight!"

Bartolomeo had placed himself behind the corporal; the muzzle of the gun lay against his knee, and this fact made the Austrian obedient.

"My people are right," he said, gruffly; "I have given the order to hoist the white flag."

"The white flag? What for?"

"Special order from the marshal," replied the corporal.

"Which reached you?" asked the sergeant, distrustfully.

"Yes; do not consider any longer!" thundered Bartolomeo, coming forward: "I have brought the order myself."

The sergeant saw the Austrian uniform; he disappeared hurriedly, and Bartolomeo called after him:

"God help you if the flag is not hoisted before two minutes have passed."

Suddenly the firing ceased, a loud noise was heard. The Italians saluted the white flag — the signal of peace.

In the barracks itself loud curses were heard — Count San Pietro had discovered that the white flag had been hoisted, and was heaping insults upon the officers. No one admitted having given the order. Benedetto, though, did not look kindly upon the proposition of an old colonel to have the flag removed. With a diabolical smile he said:

"If the patriots have any confidence in the flag then it's their own fault. Follow my commands punctually, and I will forget your stupidity."

A few minutes later a terrible crash was heard, followed by a loud cry. From all the windows the bullets flew; the cannons threw death and destruction into the ranks of the trusting patriots.

The confusion only lasted a moment.

"Surround the rat-hole! Not a single one must escape — down with the poliziotti!" exclaimed the Italians, wildly.

In firm columns they advanced against the barracks, and then they paused. Suppose treachery was in store for them?

The patriots now retreated to the right and left, to make room for two persons: a white-haired old man and a handsome dark-featured boy. The old man turned to the Italians, and said in a loud voice:

"Friends and brothers! The barracks of San Francisco, San Vittore and the military hospital are in our possession. Radetzky's palace has been stormed, and the marshal's baton has fallen into the hands of the conquerors. Forward, with God! We two, an old man and a weak child, will show you the way!"

Proudly erect, the old man strode toward the door, and Spero walked hurriedly behind him, and a fanatical, enthusiastic crowd followed.

On the threshold stood an Austrian officer. He lifted his gun, and triumphantly exclaimed:

"Ha, Monte-Cristo — to-day I shall strike you through the heart! Curses on you and your race!"

The gun directed against Spero's breast went off. When the smoke had cleared away, the boy stood there unharmed, while a man tumbled down at his feet. It was Bartolomeo! Taking advantage of the confusion, he ran away and came just in the nick of time to receive Benedetto's murderous bullet in his breast.

A quarter of an hour later Aslitta appeared accompanied by Monte-Cristo and La Luciola. He was still pale and exhausted, but he swung his sword and joyfully exclaimed: "Radetzky has fled. The citadel has surrendered."

The Italians embraced each other. Their dream was realized. Milan was free.

"Papa," whispered Spero, "come with me. There is a man lying over there who sacrificed himself for me."

Monte-Cristo bent over the major, whose pale face lighted up joyfully when he saw the count.

“Let me see the wound,” said Monte-Cristo. “Who knows but — ”

“Unnecessary,” whispered Bartolomeo; “my adopted son understands — how — to — aim!”

“Ha! then it was Benedetto!” exclaimed the count.

“His bullet was intended for me,” said Spero. “He said he wished to strike you through the heart.”

“The monster!” said Monte-Cristo, and turning to Bartolomeo, he added: “and how shall I thank you?”

“Ah! — that — does good,” stammered Bartolomeo. “Count — care for — Aurora. Ah! — I am dying. Your hand — farewell — child. Italy — is — free!”

The major stretched himself out and his eyes became glassy.

Spero sobbed bitterly, and the count whispered:

“May the earth be light to you. If you have sinned, your love for your country has made atonement!”

One hour later the count, Haydee and Spero bade adieu to Aslitta and Luciola in the Café Vidiserti.

“Farewell, marquis,” said the count, throwing a knowing glance at Aslitta, who held the diva in his arms.

Aslitta nodded.

“To-day Luciola will be my bride,” he gently said.

“Why do you wish to leave us?” exclaimed Luciola, sobbing.

“Because others need me. Come, Haydee, Mercedes is waiting.”

CHAPTER XXXIV

SERGEANT COUCOU

Ten years had passed since Mercedes had bade her only son good-by. She lived in the small house in the Allee de Meillan at Marseilles, which formerly belonged to old Dantes, and though her face was pale and her eyes no longer sparkled as of yore, the widow of General de Morcerf was still a wonderfully handsome woman. Mercedes was standing at the window, gazing out upon the sea. Behind her stood a man in the uniform of a Zouave. Small, brown and thin, he looked like the type of what a Zouave is generally thought to be.

What the Zouave's name was no one exactly knew. He had many sobriquets, the most popular of which was "Sergeant Coucou," so that after a while he was never called otherwise.

The sergeant's cradle, in spite of his brown skin, had not stood in Africa, but in the Faubourg Merceau in Paris.

Coucou was the son of a poor washerwoman. His first studies were made on the curbstone and in the gutter, and pretty soon he became the toughest boy in the neighborhood. His mother decided the time had come for her son to enter the army. Coucou did not hesitate long; only he made it a condition that he be allowed to enter an African regiment. The mother was satisfied. A regiment which bore the trusting name, the "Jackals," was just on the point of sailing to Algiers, and so Coucou became a Jackal.

When the time for saying good-by came, the mother began to weep, but Coucou consoled her.

"You see, mamma," he said, confidently, "I will make a name for myself, and when you read about my heroic deeds in the papers, you will be proud of me."

The mother laughed between her sobs. The few pennies she had saved she used to buy a pair of spectacles to read the forthcoming chronicles; for she was one of that class of innocent people who believe that the faculty of reading rests in spectacles.

About the year 1843 the Zouave regiment, to which Coucou belonged, made a sortie under General Cavaignac against the Kabyles in Beni Djaad. Among the few who escaped was the Sheik Sidi ben Abed. No one knew where he had disappeared to, and when the call to retreat had been sounded, Coucou declared he would remain behind to find out where the Kabyles were.

“They will kill you,” his comrades warned him.

“Bah! a Parisian child does not fear the devil!” said Coucou, laughing.

In a few minutes he had disappeared. The soldiers feared the worst; but, to their astonishment, Coucou came back in a few hours, dragging the sheik by his long beard behind him. The Kabyle was armed to the teeth, but nevertheless Coucou had forced him to succumb without a struggle.

Six months later Coucou was struck over the head by a yataghan, and, but for the timely interference of a comrade, would have been killed. How the sergeant came to the little house in the Allee de Meillan we will relate further on. One thing was certain, Mercedes’ silence made him feel uncomfortable; but his eye lighted up when the door opened, and a small white hand was laid on Mercedes’ shoulder, and a clear, bright voice said:

“Good-day, my dear little woman.”

CHAPTER XXXV

MISS CLARY

Mercedes trembled and shrunk away, although the possessor of the small white hand was a charming young girl.

A pretty little head with ash-blond hair, deep blue eyes and fresh red lips made Miss Clary Ellis — that was the name of the eighteen-year-old girl — a very beautiful picture, and the sergeant drew back respectfully, while Mercedes said:

“Good-day, my darling — always joyful, always happy.”

“And you are always sorrowful, and have tears in your eyes. Better take me for a model, who, as a consumptive, have far more reason to be melancholy than you have.”

“I am waiting,” said Mercedes, sorrowfully, “for him, and he will surely come if he lives.”

“And who is he?”

“He is a faithful friend in need,” replied Mercedes, solemnly, “and I love him as if he were divine. But tell me what brought you here to-day? Curiosity?”

“Ungrateful woman,” pouted the English girl, “as if I did not like to come here. But if you are so solemn, why — ”

“Oh, Clary, I am not solemn — I am melancholy, and at times desperate.”

“Desperate? How can you say such a thing?”

“If you had lost everything, as I have, you would understand me,” said Mercedes, gently. “Ah, Clary, I have seen everything about me tumble, but I remained easy so long as my son was with me! Since he has left me the world has no pleasures for me, and should I never see him again — ”

“But, madam,” interrupted Coucou, “how can you talk that way! Why should you not see my brave captain again? My captain is not one of those who are eaten by Kabyles for supper. He defends his life, and if he should be in the bowels of the earth I will find him. I — ”

“Brave sergeant!” exclaimed Clary, and turning to Mercedes, she said:

"You must not despair, little woman. As far back as I can remember people always said about me: 'Ah, the poor child, to have to die so young — it is terrible — she must go to the south!' My father and brother made me sign all kinds of documents in case of my death. What was the use of my fortune if I died, and it was a settled fact I was to die?"

With a gay laugh Clary arose, and, bidding Mercedes a cordial farewell, left the house. The light-hearted girl's full name was Clara Ellis, and three months before, she, and her French governess, the widow of a police sergeant, had settled down in Nice. Madame Caraman, or, as Clary called her, Mamma Caraman, was of sound health, while her young ward, according to the opinion of eminent English physicians, was in an indifferent state of health. They sent her, because she suffered from a slight cough, and as being incurable and consumptive, to the south. Nice was the Eldorado of all chest complaints, and thus the ladies took up their residence in that place.

Lord Ellis, Clary's father, had inherited from his parents a large fortune, which, however, he squandered in noble passions, and it was feared that his son Sir Edward, the heir-at-law, would one day inherit only the empty title. But it happened that owing to the sudden death of a rich aunt residing in India, Sir Edward's sister, Miss Clary Ellis, inherited an immense fortune, and from that day Lord Ellis began to pay attention and took care of his daughter to a much greater extent than he used to do. Clary since her eighth year had lived in a world of her own imagination; fantastic ideas and representations were the fruits of her education, which pompous governesses had inculcated at an early age, and the education recommended to Clary was for the sole purpose of increasing her romantic inclinations. The heroines of Byron and Lamartine were enviously looked upon by Clary — the "Sorrows of Werther" were continually lying upon her desk ready for perusal, and the young enthusiast was soon convinced that there was no nicer death than that of Marie Beaumarchais.

Almost with joy she welcomed her sickness, looking upon it as a forerunner of approaching dissolution. Wrapped in furs, she spent her days upon her couch, and from an "imaginary patient" she was becoming a real sick person; inasmuch as the want of exercise, as well as the continual strain on the whole nervous system, did not fail to have its effect.

Lord Ellis faced with manly courage the hard lot of losing his daughter at an early age. It was indeed a great pity that Clary could not make use of and enjoy her wealth, but what else could be done? As a careful father the lord prepared for any emergency; he urged Clary to sign various papers, which entitled him and his sons to make use of her immense wealth. The sum thus turned over for his use amounted to above one million sterling — but what good did it do? If Clary died, she could not, after all, take away her great wealth; and the million sterling was only a share of the still larger sum thus to be expected in case of her demise.

The physicians all agreed that Clary should at least hold out and die in the south, and a companion had to be procured. She soon found one in the person of Madame Caraman, a lady of about forty-five years, who showed a sincere interest in her suffering ward, and thus they entered on their journey. But soon Madame Caraman found reason to doubt the incurability of her patient — she noticed that Clary, when leaving her carriage, or performing any other movement of the body, usually painful for chest complaints, never felt pain or the slightest inconvenience.

This lasted for some time, and then Madame Caraman one day said quite earnestly:

“My dear child — now it is enough — you are as much sick as I am! You will be kind enough from this day to try to eat heartily, in order to regain your strength; you will drink daily a glass of Bordeaux and take a walk with me, and not, like a sick bird in its cage, remain wrapped up in the corner of a carriage. No — no objections. You will also never cough again as you get accustomed to it; and after the lapse of a month we will see what further to do.”

Clary sighed and sobbed, but it was no use — Madame Caraman stuck to her will, and, trembling and hesitating, the young lady was persuaded to eat her first beefsteak, and to her great surprise she was not suffocated by the unaccustomed food; the wine she found excellent, and Madame Caraman triumphed.

An accident happened which also brought help. One night some robbers tried to enter their villa; the servants slept in a building close by, and in this emergency Madame Caraman took to arms as soon as she heard a suspicious noise. With a heavy silver candlestick in her hand she entered the parlor from whence the noise proceeded. She knocked a person down, but ere she could pick up the heavy candlestick the second one had got hold of her throat and she would have been lost had not a shot been fired at the same moment, and her assailant with a loud shriek fell to the ground.

When Madame Caraman turned around she saw Clary, pale, but with a pair of beaming eyes, standing at the entrance of the room, and in her tiny white hand the yet smoking pistol.

The servants rushed in — the wounded were made prisoners, and Madame Caraman had to thank Clary with tears in her eyes for her assistance.

"Well, for one already half dead you certainly possess a great deal of strength and energy," she said afterward, with cunning look; "only courage, dear child — we will soon see who is in the right."

Clary was, to all appearance, from this day continually becoming more cheerful, and her strength increased gradually. It is no wonder that sometimes she still clung to her painful ideas, and thought it not worth while to live, while Madame Caraman tried hard to teach her better principles.

"You must have some kind of occupation," she said; "you must give your life some aim, some purpose."

"But how? Nobody stands in need of me," sobbed Clary.

"Oh, that is only your own belief, but it is not so. There is much sorrow and misery in the world, but in large and fine streets you cannot meet with it, and only in narrow streets and lanes and alleys can you find it. I am, for instance, a native of Paris, and I know that in the beautiful town every day many die of hunger, if not in the Rue de la Paix and on the Boulevard des Italiens."

"Alas," sobbed Clary; "if I could help them!"

"And why should it be impossible?" said Madame Caraman, in an amiable voice; "misery is easily found — one must only look for it."

"Madame Caraman, I should like to call you Mamma Caraman; will you allow me?"

"With pleasure, dear child."

"Well, then, Mamma Caraman, I am getting tired of Nice."

"I am also tired of it," nodded the companion.

"How should you like to go to Marseilles?"

"With pleasure, my dear child."

"And, Mamma Caraman, I should like to do the journey on horseback," added Clary, in a hesitating voice.

"Still better, dear child — when we reach Marseilles you will be sound in health."

Eight days later we find Clary and her companion settled down in Marseilles. Madame Caraman was in the right — the young patient got round gradually now, as she felt a real desire to get better, and whoever saw the fresh, blooming girl on horseback thought her rather to be anything else than a sufferer from consumption.

In Marseilles Clary got to know misery and sickness in every form and shape, and now she began to see the blessing of being wealthy. She gave with full hands, and Madame Caraman was proud of her conquests since her first journey undertaken under such discouraging circumstances.

Upon a walk in the Meillan alley Clary noticed Mercedes — that beautiful pale face, with its dark, deep-set, sorrowful eyes, which attracted the young girl's attention in an irresistible manner, and a pocket-handkerchief which Mercedes dropped offered her ample and good opportunity to enter upon a conversation with the owner.

Mercedes admired the lovely young girl, whose mirth showed nothing of the rudeness which, especially to mourners, becomes very disagreeable. They often met, and after a few days Clary was quite at home in the little house in which Mercedes resided.

Mercedes very soon became acquainted with the past life of the young English lady — she assisted Madame Caraman in all her work to give to Clary's life, up to now aimless, a fixed object and satisfaction, and it stands to reason that the young girl also felt great interest for Mercedes. Mercedes was only too happy to find an opportunity to speak about Albert — during the ten years he sojourned in Algiers, his letters had been the joy of his mother. Albert called himself Joliette — the name of Morcerf contained for him, the same as for Mercedes, terrible recollections — and soon Clary admired and looked upon Captain Joliette as something of a higher being.

Albert's letters, which, up to now, had always regularly reached Marseilles, now remained away altogether, and a time of indescribable anguish commenced for Mercedes — the arrival of the Jackal Coucou only increased her troubles, for the news which he brought was unsatisfactory, and thus the mother resolved at length to send that call for help to Monte-Cristo.

While Mercedes spoke to Clary the sergeant stood at the window, and he called out suddenly:

“Just now a beautiful yacht, in full sail, is entering the harbor — ah, now I can read the inscription on the vessel; it is the Ice Bird.”

“God be blessed,” sobbed Mercedes, falling on her knees. “Ah, I was aware that he would come!”

“I shall go, dear mother,” said Clary, rising, “but mind, if anything of importance happens, I hope I shall also know of it?”

“At once,” nodded Mercedes, “Monsieur Coucou, pray accompany Mademoiselle Clary, and return immediately in case you are wanted.”

The sergeant nodded and both went away.

Soon after a carriage stopped before the door. A man got out and hastened up the narrow staircase.

“Mercedes,” he called aloud, with faltering voice; it resounded upon him — ”Edmond, Edmond!”

CHAPTER XXXVI

A MOTHER

For a moment Mercedes and the count stood motionless opposite each other; then Monte-Cristo extended his hand to the sobbing woman, and in a faltering voice he begged:

"Mercedes — to-day I know that I have sinned — I have punished harder than I had a right to do, and I can only supplicate you to forgive me. Take my life and I shall not murmur. I thought to fulfil my duty, and have executed revenge!"

"No, Edmond — do not talk like this!" said Mercedes, softly; "the lot which met me I deserved even more than — Broken faithfulness must always revenge itself bitterly. The misfortune which nowadays pulls me down has nothing to do with the past, and therefore I ask your help."

"Then speak, Mercedes — I hear," replied Monte-Cristo, simply.

"Edmond," began Mercedes, without further apologies, "you know what was the intention of my son, for whom I was attached to life when everything around was destroyed. Alas! Albert is the favorite of my heart; do not think me foolish, if I tell you he was worthy of you! His letters, which, breathe of his uninterrupted, faithful filial love, have kept me alive ten long, lonesome and weary years; when I read his tender words, when he embraced me, all my hopes centred in the moment when we should meet again! But suddenly all letters ceased to arrive. I waited many a long day, weeks, months, but all in vain — no news came.

"I anxiously read all papers — I inquired and hoped, but I could bring nothing to light. At length I resolved to write to Paris to the Minister of War — I received no answer, and my despair increased daily.

"Then an accident led Monsieur Beauchamp to Marseilles — I took heart to look for him, and acquainted him with my sorrow. He received me very kindly, listened to me, and promised to exert himself to obtain some information for me. After eight days I received the sad news — "

"Then Albert is dead?" said the count, sorrowfully.

“Oh, God, no — say not so — he cannot, he dare not be dead!” sobbed Mercedes. “The news which Beauchamp acquainted me with was disheartening enough. My poor son, captain in the first Zouave regiment, or the so-called Jackals, about three months ago, after an expedition against the Kabyles, disappeared; they fear the wild horde has taken him away!”

Monte-Cristo reflected a moment and then inquired: “Did it happen before or after the submission of Abd-el-Kader?”

“After, as much as I can tell. Monsieur Beauchamp, however, was not satisfied with the uncertain reports — he informed me that a Zouave from Albert’s regiment was on furlough in Paris, and he would not fail to have the Zouave sent to Marseilles to inform me of all, in a more particular way.”

“And has this Zouave arrived?” inquired Monte-Cristo, animatedly.

“Yes, a few days since.”

“And what does he say?”

“He maintains Albert is still alive.”

“Then we may yet hope for the best, Mercedes,” said Monte-Cristo, consolingly. “God owes you a recompense, and you will see your son again!”

“If you say so, I believe it,” replied Mercedes sincerely.

“May I also speak with the Zouave?”

“Certainly — he is downstairs now.”

“Then let him come up; I should like to ask him a few questions.”

Mercedes called the sergeant; Monte-Cristo looked at her pitifully and then whispered:

“Mercedes — here this has reference to my life — you have known me from childhood — have I ever broken my word?”

“Oh, no — only I am guilty of it!”

“I did not wish to hear of that — you have my oath, and with the help of God I shall keep the same!”

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE RING

Cap in hand, the Zouave appeared, and, throwing an inquisitive glance at the count, he said politely:

“What is your pleasure, madame?”

“Dear friend,” was the kind reply of Monte-Cristo, “madame has called you, because I intend to ask you a few questions; I know you love your captain, and therefore — ”

“Well, I do love him,” replied Coucou, enthusiastically. “I am ready to be cut in pieces for him.”

“With that we need not make any haste,” said Monte-Cristo, smiling. “You believe then that Captain Joliette is still alive?”

“Yes, colonel.”

“I am no colonel,” said the count.

“Then I must say general?”

“That is unnecessary — I am in no way a soldier.”

“But that is hardly possible,” cried Coucou, disappointed; “such a nice brave gentleman, and not a soldier?”

“I cannot help you; but now tell me plainly whether you can render me any assistance in finding the captain?”

“A thousand times, marshal, or as otherwise your title may be. You see, sir, I am a man of few words, but if you demand my heart’s blood, it is at your service — the Jackal Coucou always keeps his word.”

Monte-Cristo smiled — the man suited him.

“Sit down here next to me,” he said, in a friendly manner, “and tell me all you know.”

“To seat myself — no, that would be disrespectful; I shall remain standing; and now question me.”

“Just as you like. Since when has the captain disappeared, and what do you know concerning him?”

“Accurately I cannot point out the time. On the last day of December, Abd-el-Kader, of whom so much is said, and who, I must here remark, much resembles you — ”

“Quite a compliment,” smilingly said the count, bowing.

“For Abd-el-Kader,” interrupted Coucou, promptly. “Well, then, after Abd-el-Kader laid down his arms, subdued by Generals Lamoriciere and Cavaignac, we thought the war was ended; but God forbid, it had commenced in earnest. In confidence, sir, I believe in Algiers you will never hear of its end. That the Jackals at the affair played their game well is too well known; it was they who checked Abd-el-Kader.

“Well, on one occasion, we undertook a trifling skirmish, in order to send out some scouts; we had about twenty men, and Captain Joliette led us. ‘Comrades,’ he said, ‘before we start, let us finally take care that the cursed Africans leave us at peace in future!’ and then he called my name — you must know he had always a little order for me to execute — ”

“I conclude therefrom, that you found an opportunity to render him a service once,” interrupted the count, in a friendly manner.

“H’m — the marshal knows his people,” nodded the sergeant, proudly; “it was, in fact, but a trifle — a brown devil brandished his yataghan at the captain, and I cut off his hand to prevent the execution of his plan. Now, the captain also called:

“‘Sergeant Coucou!’

“‘Here,’ said I.

“‘Coucou,’ he commenced, quietly, ‘one never knows how these skirmishes may end, and for the sake of life and death listen to me. Behold — I have yet a mother — she lives in Marseilles, in the Allee de Meillan, and is called Madame Joliette. In case something should befall me, demand a furlough, go to France and deliver this ring to my mother.’“

“A ring?” said Monte-Cristo, wonderfully moved, while he cast a hasty glance at Mercedes.

In a gloomy manner, but without saying a single word, Mercedes took a simple-looking silver ring from her finger, and handed it to the count, who looked at the simple precious thing with a tear in his eye — it was the wedding-ring which Edmond Dantes once presented to the Catalan, Mercedes.

“Pardon, Edmond,” stammered the poor mother, with trembling voice, “I gave Albert the ring as a talisman — it was to bring him back!”

“I would not take the ring,” continued Coucou. “I knew that nobody would so easily kill the captain, and if misfortune should come to pass, it may, just the same, fall on me as well. But my refusing it was in vain, and so I consented to it. Discipline goes above all! We started and soon reached the defile; not a Bedouin could be discovered, and only a few distant barren rocks looked rather suspicious. Night set in: we thought of preparing our supper, but suddenly a curious noise could be heard, and the next moment we were surrounded by a swarm of Bedouins. A desperate combat began — the shots, following in quick succession, were enough to rouse the dead; but continually fresh combatants appeared, and we had trouble enough to fight for our lives. Upon a bare rock I suddenly espied a Bedouin, who had the barrel of his musket — God knows from whom he had stolen it — just pointed at the captain. I made a leap, reached the rock, and took hold of the brown devil, but at that very moment both of us tumbled down more than twenty feet, and I became senseless."

"But the captain?" asked the count.

"Only a little patience, you will know all I know. When I awoke again, it was just the dawn of day — how it happened that I did not break my neck is to me even now inexplicable. I looked about for my comrades; they ought to have been in the neighborhood. I called out — everything remained quiet; and thus I rose with painful limbs and reached the place where we had encamped. Here a terrible sight met me; before me lay all my comrades, bleeding and mutilated — they had all been beheaded! Even to this day I feel the terrible horror which overcame me at this sight — a dark pool of blood surrounded the rigid bodies, and if I were to live to see a hundred years, never shall I forget the awful spectacle.

"After a while I began to look about among the various bodies, and suddenly, in all my distress, I rejoiced aloud — the captain was not among the slain. Had the Bedouins carried him away? I called out. And only the hoarse cry of the hyena, which waited solely for my departure to fall upon the corpses, was the answer I received. I could not attempt to bury my comrades, for the ground was rocky and I possessed no tools for that purpose. I spoke a short prayer for the slain, supplied myself from their knapsacks with plentiful ammunition, and got back to the camp as well as I could.

"When I related there what had happened, nobody at first would believe me — they reproached me with cowardice and scolded me for having left my comrades! I became vexed; I demanded a detachment to accompany me and returned to the scene of horror. There a still more horrible sight met me

— the animals of the desert had already eaten the corpses, and only bloody bones and portions of uniforms indicated the spot where the surprise had taken place. Now, of course, they all were ready to believe me; we sent out scouts to all sides in order to obtain traces of the captain. Large amounts were offered to Arabian deserters if they would deliver up their prisoners, but to no purpose; the earth seemingly must have swallowed up our captain. Only once I thought I had found some trace of him: a marabout — one of those brawny devils who are regarded as sorcerers by their countrymen — came to our camp to beg, or as we supposed as a spy. An officer inquired of the man in my presence about Captain Joliette, but he pretended to know nothing, saying he had never heard the name, yet his eyes betrayed his treachery — oh, these Kabyles are all desperate fellows, scoundrels of the worst description.”

“Did you communicate your opinion to the officer?” inquired the count.

“Certainly; he at first laughed at me, and when he at last resolved upon the man being called a second time, he had already disappeared.”

“What was the name of the marabout?”

“If I recollect aright it was Elak Achel, or something like it.”

“Can you describe his appearance — had he bony cheeks, large, projecting ears, and a long, pointed beard?”

“Truly, I could almost believe the marshal must have seen the scamp,” said Coucou, quite astonished.

“Ah, no, I only guessed at it. I know some races in the desert which correspond to the description you give. But another question: does it sound perhaps like Radjel el Achem?”

“Sapristi, that was the name! And now as we know his name, we will soon find him again,” said Coucou, quite delighted.

Mercedes rose, encouraged by fresh hopes, but Monte-Cristo put his hand softly upon her arm and said:

“Mercedes, beware of being deceived. The words I have just spoken signify nothing — nothing but ‘great sorcerer,’ and are the general appellation of the people who operate in the south of the Algeric Sahara.”

The words which Monte-Cristo quietly spoke did not fail to take effect upon Mercedes. She dropped her hands and stared sorrowfully through the window.

“Is that all you know?” — the count turned toward the Zouave.

"Unfortunately, no more," said Coucou. At the same time, however, being noticed by Mercedes, he made a sign and placed his finger upon the lips.

"In order to fulfil my promise," continued the Zouave, "I took a furlough and came to France. I had scarcely arrived in Paris when I was ordered to this place. I brought Madame Joliette the ring, and told her what I had experienced. Alas! if I could only find our captain again; but, I am afraid, it is almost impossible."

"Impossible!" called out Mercedes, throwing a supplicating look at the count.

"Sergeant Coucou," said Monte-Cristo, with earnest mien, "a man should never speak of impossibilities. I have often accomplished things which others thought impossible."

"Yes, if you, as our commander, would take the matter in hand, that would be quite a different thing," thought the Zouave, confidently.

"Well then, I shall do my best."

"Hurrah! — is it not so, I'm allowed to call you commander?"

"But I have already told you — "

"Let me only say so, and if you wish to oblige me, call me simply Coucou, and all will be well."

"I shall consider the matter. Now go down and wait for me in the street, I shall be there almost immediately."

"At your service, commander," said the Zouave, putting his hand to his cap, whereupon he left.

"Well?" inquired Mercedes, when alone with the count.

"Mercedes," said Monte-Cristo, with sincerity, "do not despair. All my energy shall be devoted toward finding your son, and perhaps God will be merciful."

"I will believe it and not give way to despair."

"Then farewell, Mercedes! We will soon meet again. Now I am ready to look for Beauchamp, who, as I have heard, is again in Marseilles."

A knock interrupted the count — the door was quietly opened and a clear voice inquired:

"Are you alone, dear mother?"

Receiving a wink from the count, Mercedes said:

"Yes, Clary, you may enter."

The young English lady skipped over the threshold, but she stood still and blushed as soon as she saw the stranger.

“My dear little friend,” said Mercedes, presenting the girl, “keeps me company in my desolation, and thus helps me to pass away many a weary hour.”

The count bowed respectfully, whereupon he extended his hand to Mercedes and went away.

“Who is the gentleman?” asked Clary, as soon as the door closed behind Monte-Cristo.

“The Count of Monte-Cristo,” said Mercedes.

“Was he the person whom you expected?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, then be of good cheer,” said Clary, putting her tiny hand upon her heaving breast; “something tells me that this man is almighty! Hope, Mother Mercedes — hope!”

CHAPTER XXXVIII

“SEARCH FOR THE WIFE!”

The count found the Zouave outside the house in animated conversation with Madame Caraman. Coucou had a special predilection for the “female sex,” and the widow of the sergeant saw in every blue-coat a comrade of her “blessed one.”

“How do you do, madame? Surely you are the companion of the beautiful little one up-stairs?” and he pointed at the house.

Madame Caraman nodded.

“Well, the little one is well cared for; I often wished that as much had been done for my education,” continued the Zouave obligingly. The companion laughed and soon a lively conversation commenced. Both were very fond of chatting together, and when the count made his appearance, the Zouave grew timid and muttered:

“Dear me, the commander.”

Madame Caraman responded respectfully to the Count of Monte-Cristo’s kind salute; the count walked along the street and hailed a passer-by. Immediately a beautiful carriage with two splendid horses approached, and after the count had ordered Ali, who sat in front, “to drive around the town,” he and Coucou got inside, where began the conversation in a friendly manner.

“So — now tell me all you know.”

“Immediately, commander, but allow me in the meantime to remark that I never have ridden in such a splendid carriage.”

“One must try all things,” replied the count laughing; “if I have understood you rightly before it is concerning a report which has come to the knowledge of Madame Joliette.”

“Quite right, commander. Do you see, in some things the ladies are very distrustful — ”

“The long preface makes me conclude that it is concerning a woman,” interrupted the count.

“Not exactly a woman, she was but a child not more than fifteen years at the utmost.”

“And this child was Captain Joliette’s sweetheart?”

“Alas, God forbid — no, that was not the case.”

“Well make it short and tell the story.”

“At once, sir,” began the Zouave bowing. “One evening we had pursued a troop of Bedouins, and when night set in we were too far away from camp to reach it. We lay down in a hollow; the terrible howling of panthers and hyenas was the song to put us to sleep. Toward two o’clock in the morning I awoke suddenly — the moon had risen and I saw a large dark body close to the hollow pass by rapidly. I soon got my gun ready and fired. The sound woke the captain up and he inquired the reason. Ere I had time to answer, I heard a cry of anguish proceeding from above the hollow — in two leaps the captain reached the top of the rock and I followed him. The sight which presented itself was terrible. On the ground lay a white figure and close by was an enormous panther. The yellow glowing eyes of the animal and its wide-open blood-red jaws terrified me — the captain held his poniard in the right hand and hit at all sides. I intended to fire at the beast, but man and beast rolled over and over again and I was afraid that I might hit the captain. Now the iron grasp of the captain had hold of the panther’s neck — the animal howled fearfully, and the next moment the weapon of the man slit the body of the beast open. The panther turned over, a streak of blood drenching the ground; the captain, breathing heavily, sank down quite exhausted. I hastened to his assistance; the panther’s paw had torn his breast and the wound caused him a great deal of pain, but when I tried to dress it he refused and said firmly:

“Look after the little one, Coucou, don’t mind me.”

I bent over the white figure; it was a beautiful girl, whose pale, wax-like face seemed to have become motionless from fright. Long dark hair hung over her tender cheeks, and on her white shoulder the paw of the panther had made a large open wound, from which the blood was flowing.

In the meantime our comrades had hastened to the spot: with their help the captain rose and his wound was washed and dressed. I did all I could to revive the child, but was unsuccessful. As soon as the captain could move again, he ceased thinking of himself, but continually aided me in my endeavor; bending over the wounded one, he whispered:

“‘I hope she is not dead.’“

"He is not the son of his father, but of his mother," muttered Monte-Cristo to himself, but in a louder tone he then said:

"Who was the girl?"

"I cannot answer who she was," replied the Zouave; "she could scarcely be persuaded to speak, and only after many cross-questions put to her we found out that she belonged to one of the tribes in the Sahara which we continually pursued. Her people ill-treated her, and she resolved to run away. While seated among the shrubs to rest herself, all at once she heard the growling of the animal close to her.

"What further happened," continued the Zouave, "I cannot tell; her wound was, thank God! not dangerous, and we took the poor child with us to the camp. Our camp was at that time at Laghouat, a small oasis, the springs of which were considered to possess medicinal properties, and the captain, together with the little one, were removed thither in sedans. Heavens! both were surprisingly beautiful — even unto this day I see this poor young child slowly lift her large dark lashes, and open her dark almond-shaped eyes. And the captain — oh, commander, his equal cannot easily be met with — he was in every respect quite different from his comrades! With him there were no love affairs, no debts; he never thought about himself, and in battle he was always at the head — a very pearl of an officer!"

A strange feeling came over the count as he listened to the praiseworthy words of the Zouave. Had Albert been his son he could not have been more proud of him. Monte-Cristo was not a man of ordinary nature, otherwise he would have shown bitter hatred toward the son of Fernand Mandego; but it appeared to him that the good qualities of the young man atoned for the faults of the father.

"What was the name of the girl?" he inquired afterward.

"Medje, commander; as soon as she was able to speak the captain inquired after her name. But when he observed that she, perhaps, might wish to return to her tribe, she sobbed bitterly, and tried to show in every respect how much she dreaded it. Who she really was we could never make out. In that cursed country it is quite different than with us. As soon as they can muster together ten people they imagine that they are a nation, and in need of a sultan. From some expressions of Medje we could form the idea that she was the daughter of such a sultan. The captain placed his hand over her, and I was present when he said to her:

"'Medje, you do not seem to have a longing for your father; if you wish to remain with us I will take you under my protection, and I will care for you as if you were my own daughter.'"

"And what answer did Medje give to that?" inquired the count, eagerly.

"Oh, she kissed his hands, she cried for joy, and was really treated well by him. He acted toward her as though she were a little queen. She had her servants, and when the captain went out skirmishing he always reminded the comrades to take care of her, who accordingly were ready and willing to put their hands under her feet!"

"What became of her afterward?"

"Yes, that is the great point at issue. When the last expedition, from which the captain was not to return, was planned, Medje threw herself around the neck of her protector, and adjured him to remain back. The captain laughed at her. She had no idea what discipline signified, and, sobbing, she repeated constantly:

"'Not go away, little papa — not going!'

"Ah, what would not I have given afterward had we taken her advice! When I alone returned from this unfortunate expedition, I was informed that Medje had disappeared the same night, almost at the same hour."

"Then the child was a spy!" exclaimed the count, displeased. "She knew about the expedition, and informed her people accordingly."

"At first I was of the same opinion, but later I changed it, because I found out that already previous to the expedition suspicious forms were swarming about our tents. Medje had accidentally seen one of these men, and, shrieking terribly, she ran away."

"Why did she not give warning to the captain?"

"Who could fathom that? Sure it was that a bold Bedouin, whose name was quite sufficient to set the whole camp in commotion, and who had been seen in the neighborhood, and — "

"What was the name of this Bedouin?" inquired Monte-Cristo, eagerly.

"Mohammed ben Abdallah."

"He? Are you not mistaken?" the count inquired, rather excitedly.

"Oh, no, I have heard the name often enough."

"And you do not know who this man really was?"

"No — probably also a marabout, a kind of juggler or sorcerer."

"Did you acquaint your superiors of this sorcerer?" asked the count after a while.

“No,” replied Coucou, rather hesitatingly.

“Then I am surprised that you acquaint me of this,” said Monte-Cristo, while he threw a penetrating glance at the Zouave.

Coucou was silent — he could not explain even to himself wherein lay the great influence Monte-Cristo had over him.

“You saw Medje constantly,” the count took up the topic once more; “have you never noticed anything striking about her?”

Almost frightened, Coucou looked at the count.

“Yes,” said he, then, hesitating; “upon her two cheeks and on her forehead one could perceive a small red cross; it was tattooed by a skilful hand, and seemed to become her very well.”

Monte-Cristo began to tremble.

“Do you know,” he then said, “that Mohammed ben Abdallah is the most cruel enemy of France, and that he has taken an oath to take vengeance for Abd-el-Kader? If the captain has fallen into his hands then we shall never see him again, unless by a miracle.”

“Commander, if you take the matter in hand, then a miracle will happen,” said Coucou, confidently.

“We hope so — and now I shall ride to the hotel, and this evening at ten o’clock you may there inquire for me,” said the count, quite loud; but he gently whispered: “Mercedes, I must save your son!”

CHAPTER XXXIX

DEPEND ONLY ON YOURSELF

Arrived at the Hotel de l’Univers, the count sent his card to Monsieur Beauchamp, and as the answer of the journalist was that the count’s visit would be very agreeable to him, he went at once to Monsieur Beauchamp.

“Welcome in Marseilles, count,” was the salute he received from the Parisian. “I am glad to see you again.”

“I am also glad,” returned the count, taking the proffered hand and shaking it heartily. “Well, what news in the political world?”

“Pah! let us not speak about that. On the 24th of February, as you are aware of, the Republic was proclaimed, and at first I really believed we had made an excellent bargain; but the joy was only of short duration. The people are but a makeshift to the leaders; they are asked to make sacrifices, yet not for themselves, but for others, and in the end — No, I had better drop this topic, for I really get vexed for nothing at all, and I only came here in order to forget! Tell me, rather, how I can serve you; and, if I am not mistaken, you take an interest in Madame de Morcerf?”

“Yes; but how do you come to know all this?”

“Oh — I know you, dear count. Wherever there is any grief to alleviate, a heroic act to accomplish, the Count of Monte-Cristo is always on the spot.”

“You have a good opinion of me,” said the count, deprecatingly; “and then, who was it that took care that the Zouave Coucou was sent here in order to console the poor mother?”

“Pah, that was only Christian duty; and besides, Captain Joliette bears among his superiors an excellent name. He was always the first in the midst of the enemy’s fire, and his modesty, in spite of his bravery, has become proverbial among his comrades.”

“And his disappearance?”

“For myself and all others this disappearance is really a puzzle. The Arabs seldom take prisoners, and I greatly fear that he has been dragged into the desert and killed.”

"Do you, perhaps, know of what race the Bedouins were who attacked the expedition?" inquired Monte-Cristo, considering.

"If I am not mistaken, they were Yavaregs."

"Tell me what you think of the capture of Abd-el-Kader. Are you now of opinion that Algiers will be pacified?"

"Oh, no; either early or late there will probably be found another leader who, under pretence of avenging Abd-el-Kader, will renew the combat, for the Bedouins never submit."

"Your views tally exactly with mine, and I may almost say, to my sorrow, you are in the right. The leader whose appearance you expect is already announced!"

"You joke — should I be such a good prophet? But what is the reason that the ministry knows nothing of his existence?"

"Oh, a ministry fares in this respect the same as the husband of a frivolous woman: all others know more of what concerns him most than he himself."

"You may be right. What is the name of the new Bedouin leader?"

"Mohammed ben Abdallah."

"This name is quite strange to me. Are you not, perhaps, mistaken?"

"No," replied Monte-Cristo, coolly, "I know what I am speaking about. The man whose name I mentioned has sworn to accept the bloody heirloom of Abd-el-Kader and before four weeks have elapsed the revolutionary flag will again wave throughout all parts of the desert."

"Well, I shall not doubt any further; but tell me, in what connection does the soon-expected rising of the Kabyles stand with the disappearance of Albert?"

"Who is able to tell, Monsieur Beauchamp? But now I come to the chief point of my visit. You have influence in Paris?"

"Oh, dear count, had you only something to ask!"

"Perhaps I have. I should like to obtain an indefinite furlough for the Zouave Coucou."

"That shall be granted to you, you may rest assured."

"Thanks, more I do not want."

"But it is hardly worth while your applying to one who am in power for the moment, a support of the Republic, in order to obtain such a bagatelle. Consider, you may perhaps think of something else."

“Yes, and have almost forgotten it,” said the count smiling, while he tore a leaf from his pocketbook and quickly wrote a few words.

“So,” turning to Beauchamp, “permit me to hand you a small contribution for the poor of Paris — ”

“Dear count,” interrupted the journalist, quite moved, “if you consider a million francs a small contribution, then I should like to see your large ones.”

“My dear friend,” said the count, almost sorrowfully, “what is a million to me with my great wealth? The sun of a poor person overweighs my gift a thousandfold.”

“Are you indeed so very rich?”

“So rich that in this respect I envy those who have yet anything to wish for.”

“Well, who knows whether you may not one day find somebody richer than you. In the meantime I thank you in the name of our working-women, for while the men in the service of the Republic sacrifice their time the families at home are obliged to suffer.”

“Distribute this money according as you think proper, and if you wish to favor me do not bestow any of it toward public collections. I dislike this ostentatious mode of benevolence.”

“I am of the same opinion. But now tell me how will you be able to console Madame de Morcerf?”

“First step here to the window, Monsieur Beauchamp; do you see the yacht which has her steam up?”

“Yes. What is the matter with that fine ship?”

“It will depart for foreign parts to-morrow morning.”

“And what is her destination?”

“Algiers.”

“Ah, now I understand — you are sending emissaries for the discovery of poor Albert.”

Monte-Cristo smiled and then said:

“Monsieur Beauchamp, if you desired to accomplish a certain thing to your satisfaction, how would you go to work?”

“Well, that is very simple, because I should attend to it myself.”

“Then you will know whom I am sending to Algiers to find Captain Joliette.”

“Have I understood you right? You are ready to venture into the desert? Count, you have undertaken a difficult task, and although I do not doubt your courage nor energy, I must nevertheless say that your resolution is a very bold one. In Algiers it is not only necessary to combat with men who hardly deserve the appellation, but also all the dangers of nature are there arrayed in battle against you! The simoom, the fatal breath of the desert, has put many a one there under the sand, and bleached bones caution the wanderer not to set his step on the deceptive ground of the Sahara!”

“Monsieur Beauchamp,” replied the count earnestly, “if you were to know what I have already gone through you would not discourage me from doing my duty. What is that to the combat with beasts in human shape which I have stood victoriously? No, let me go and do my duty; I am not afraid of the Sahara.”

“But the countess and her son?”

A shadow fell across Monte-Cristo’s face, but his voice sounded clear and steady when he replied:

“Visit me this evening, and you shall have my answer.”

“With pleasure. Where do you live? Here in some hotel?”

“Oh, no,” said Monte-Cristo, smiling; “since a law-court has condemned me to pay a heavy fine because I had no domicile in France, I have come to a different conclusion.”

“How is that?”

“Well, I possess now in every large town in France a house, and in Paris and Lyons and other chief towns a palace.”

“Excellent — it is only a pity that this expedient is not at everybody’s command. But when did this fine in money take effect? It was not I suppose in the lawsuits you had against Andrea Cavalcanti, alias Benedetto? Yes? But do you know what I have heard? Benedetto is said to have escaped from Toulon. Take care of him; if there is a tiger in human shape, it is surely Benedetto!”

“I know it, Monsieur Beauchamp,” replied the count, reluctantly; “Benedetto is the embodiment of evil principles — Satan in person! But one day I shall stretch out my hand and order him to stop — even if I have to go to the corners of the world to find him, he will not escape me.”

“To that I respond amen. As to the Jackal Coucou, take him quietly with you. I shall take care to get him an indefinite furlough — he will render you good service, in the hell of Algiers which he knows as well as his pocket.

But something struck me just now: accident, which often plays wonderful tricks, might bring you in contact with one of our co-workers, who, Heaven knows, roves about perhaps in Timbuctoo or even Zanzibar; he sent me once a few good sketches about Abd-el-Kader, and then became an adventurer somewhere else."

"And this gentleman's name?"

"Gratillet."

Monte-Cristo wrote the name in his pocketbook and then said:

"If I should happen to find Gratillet, I shall not forget your recommendation."

"Thanks beforehand. Gratillet is a curious fellow, and I shall not feel surprised if you meet him in peaceful transactions with a panther. He is not afraid of any kind of devil."

"Then he is the man for me."

"And if you can prevent his entering upon further follies, you will, no doubt, do it? I should like to establish a large journal, and Gratillet is in this case indispensable to me."

"I shall do my utmost; although — the Sahara is great."

"But God is greater. Then I shall be with you this evening. Where can I find you?"

"Only inquire for the Palace Monte-Cristo, and now adieu till later. Who knows whether you will not now accompany me to Algeria!"

"Oh, I should certainly not feel indisposed, but my duties chain me to France; the battles which are still to be fought here require my presence."

The gentlemen separated, and while the count ordered the porter to show the Zouave, should he inquire for him, to the palace of Monte-Cristo, Beauchamp muttered: "If there are any magicians then I have seen one to-day!"

CHAPTER XL

THE SACRIFICE

Not far from the harbor, with a beautiful view of the sea, the Villa Monte-Cristo lay. It was like all dwellings of the count, rich and elegantly furnished, and a splendid terrace with exotic plants could readily induce the inhabitants to believe they were really in a tropical region. Parrots of many colors swung on the branches of tamarind-trees — the sycamore rustled, and leafy bananas and beautiful palm-trees reflected their branches in the blue waters of the Mediterranean sea.

On the evening of the day Monte-Cristo arrived in Marseilles, the count sat with Haydee on the terrace. Both seemed delighted with the splendid panorama before them, and from time to time the count rose to look after Spero, who, bending over a book, sat reading in the adjacent conservatory. Now, Monte-Cristo remained with Haydee, who in her usual way was leaning back in an ottoman, and putting his arm around the young woman’s neck, he whispered:

“Haydee, look at me!”

The shining dark eyes which beamed like stars gazed steadfastly upon the noble face of her husband, and the small white hand glided softly into his.

“Haydee,” said Monte-Cristo, earnestly, “do you believe in me?”

Haydee raised herself half sorrowfully.

“Do I believe in you?” she repeated, rather vexed; “are you not my master, my god? do we ask the slave if he believes in his employer?”

“Haydee, I am not your employer, and you are not my slave.”

“You are my husband, my all! Oh, could you read in my soul, you would not question me in this manner. Listen. I was present when my father was betrayed and murdered — they tore me from his corpse and dragged me to the slave market, where grief and death awaited me.”

Haydee continued: “Then you appeared — like a god you stepped before my tearful eyes, and from that moment I lived for you only in the world! You purchased me and I became yours — yours in body and soul, and daily I bless the hour when first I saw you!”

Haydee drew her husband’s hand to her lips, and then in a low tone continued:

“All my thoughts and contemplations since then were centred in you — at that time, being afraid you would remove me from you, I was on the point of taking my own life!”

“Haydee, what are you talking about?” muttered Monte-Cristo, confused.

“In truth — do not try to deceive me — you intended to give me in marriage and bestow my hand on somebody else!”

“Who knows whether it would not have proved fortunate for you?” whispered the count sorrowfully.

“Oh, Edmond, you break my heart with such words! How could I, separated from you, be happy? I live, I breathe for you only, I honor you not only as my husband, but as the greatest, noblest man!”

“Haydee, you make me blush — I am weak and sinful the same as others!”

“No, oh, no! If you, as a chastening angel, caused the guilty to vindicate themselves, and recompensed what is good; you seemed to me almost god-like. You raised me to be your wife; to you I am indebted for the greatest happiness of a woman, the happiness of possessing a darling child, and Spero is the more dear to me as he promises to be your very image.”

Monte-Cristo threw a timid glance at Spero, who was still diligently reading by his lamp, and then cordially said:

“Haydee, then you never regretted having bestowed your hand on me?”

“Never.”

“I have never caused you any pain?”

“None — I am the happiest of women.”

“And if circumstances occurred which would compel me to give you pain?”

“Then I would submit to your intelligence and not complain.”

“Also if I were to destroy your happiness forever?”

“Even then — I would live in the past and be rich.”

“Then listen to me, Haydee — we must separate.”

“Separate?” repeated Haydee, leaping up terrified and her eyes filling with tears.

“Yes — for some time — a few months.”

“Thy will be done,” uttered Haydee sighing; “I know that a sacred duty calls you away, and God will strengthen me to bear the trial!”

“Thanks, Haydee, for this word — it will accompany me when I am away from you!”

“And to what place does your duty call you?”

“To Algiers — in the desert! I am obliged to return a son to his mother, or even die, if circumstances should become mightier than my will.”

“To Algiers? But why am I not allowed to accompany you? You know that with you I am not afraid of any danger, and — ”

Haydee became suddenly silent. She noticed that her husband’s eye, remarkably sorrowful, turned from her and Spero, and bending her little head she whispered:

“Forgive me. I know that I dare not leave Spero.”

Monte-Cristo trembled. The most difficult was to come yet.

“Haydee,” he then said, softly, “you cannot accompany me. I shall explain to you immediately why it cannot be. Not because you dare not leave Spero — ”

He stopped short. The expression of terror in Haydee’s beautiful eyes benumbed him.

“What do you mean by that?” she ejaculated, pale and trembling. “You do not intend to rob me of my last consolation, do you?”

“Compose yourself, Haydee. Remember the words which you uttered just now. Yes, I leave you, and take Spero with me.”

“Spero — to go away with you!” groaned the young wife, with panting breast; “oh, my lord and master, that you cannot really mean! You do not wish to kill me, and — ”

“Haydee, you once told me your life is in my hands.”

“That I am still ready to acknowledge. Here is my poniard. Kill me, but leave me my child!”

In consternation the young wife pulled a dagger sparkling with diamonds out of her waist, and offered it to Monte-Cristo.

“Strike!” she said, with faltering voice. “What good am I in this world if you and Spero leave me? Well, why are you hesitating? Take my heart out of me, but leave me Spero.”

She knelt at Monte-Cristo’s feet, and embraced his knee.

Suddenly her eye flashed, and she cried, animated with fresh hopes:

“Indeed, my beloved, I think you only intended to try me. You will not crush me; you will be persuaded. Oh, make an end of this torment. Tell me that you do not wish my death.”

"Haydee," replied Monte-Cristo, with stern forehead, "you know that I only fulfil my duty, and instead of assisting me to smooth the path for me, you refuse to bear your share of the burden."

"I do not understand you," uttered Haydee.

"I must depart, and Spero has to accompany me; but if I do not consent, my dear Haydee, for you to accompany us, it is for the reason that you have a mission to fulfil here."

Haydee remained on her knees, but her tears ceased.

Oh, what mastery did not this man exercise over her! The heart was ready to break, and yet she could not do otherwise; she was obliged to obey him.

"Haydee," remarked Monte-Cristo, quietly, "surely you do not believe that I give you pain unless compelled to do so?"

"No, oh, no," sighed the young wife, throwing herself in his arms. "Speak, what is to happen?"

"Listen. Behold, ten years ago I brought you to Monte-Cristo, and there disclosed to you my past. I explained to you how I punished the guilty, and you told me I acted rightly. At that time I vowed to be efficacious henceforth wherever I am able to protect the innocent in order to atone in case I carried my zeal too far. Among others who suffered much from my vengeance were Mercedes and her son. You know the love I bestowed upon this Catalonian, and I have not concealed from you that the rage of being disappointed in her furnished my arm with weapons against Ferdinand Mandego, the murderer of your father.

"I stretched out my hand, the avenging flash of lightning struck, and Ferdinand Mandego died — his wife and his son felt the heavy blow in all its bitterness, but the further consequences of my deed I had not considered! Albert de Morcerf has disappeared, his mother despairs, and it is myself who have chased him to death! Haydee, should you like to see your husband a hangman?"

"Oh, Edmond, do not speak thus! You did not intend anything wrong; you are great and noble!"

"No, I profess to be so, and that is my crime. I made Albert de Morcerf suffer for the deed of his father; I clothed myself with divine majesty and exercised justice with human hands! Do you now understand, Haydee, that I must stake my life, in order to restore to Mercedes her son, that I, who punished others, may become reconciled with myself?"

Haydee sighed — she was conquered.

“But,” commencing anew with trembling voice, “also I am a mother, and my son — ”

“Your son, Haydee,” interrupted Monte-Cristo, with flaming eyes, “your son shall be made worthy of you. The world calls him the son of the Count of Monte-Cristo — let him be deserving of this title! Spero is noble and courageous; he knows what is good and evil, and his pure heart I am proud of. To be just he believes to be his aim — to be just means to combat for what is good. In the midst of approaching dangers you never saw me trembling; with firm step I faced all danger and death; and Spero shall be trained to act in the same manner. The terror of the desert shall not make him turn pale — he is to face danger and learn to become worthy of the mission his father began, in order to accomplish it. ‘Noble be man, efficacious and good’ — may this poetical phrase be his shield, and may God guide him in his ways! Answer me, Haydee — is Spero to accompany me?”

“Yes,” escaped in a low tone, like a breath, from the lips of the young wife.

“Thanks, Haydee; now listen as to what your mission consists of. You are yourself a mother — and you will know how to console a mother. Mercedes — enter!”

The door leading to the terrace opened, and Mercedes with tottering steps approached Haydee.

“Haydee,” said Monte-Cristo, turning toward his wife, “here is Mercedes, whom you have known through me for some time.”

Haydee hastened toward Mercedes with extended arms.

“Be welcome, dear friend,” she accosted her with a sweet, melodious voice.

“Oh, how beautiful you are,” muttered Mercedes, looking at the young wife admiringly.

“Madame,” stammered Haydee, blushing, “I give you my most valuable possessions, my husband and my son.”

“Your son?” repeated Mercedes, with emotion.

“Spero — come this way,” said the count.

The boy sprang toward him — Mercedes looked at him and sobbed bitterly.

“Papa, why is she crying?” whispered Spero.

“Because she is reminded of her son who is in peril of death,” replied the count significantly.

“In danger of death?” Spero repeated quickly; “oh, papa, why do we not hasten to his rescue?”

Monte-Cristo lifted the boy joyfully in his arms and kissed him passionately.

“How is it,” said Haydee, alike proud and sorrowful, “will you leave me, Spero?”

“Oh, mamma — to hasten to aid the unfortunate is our first duty, and you yourself have taught me it,” replied Spero, embracing the young wife.

Now Bertuccio appeared.

“Count,” said he, “here is a soldier who desires to speak to you!”

“Ah — the Zouave Coucou — let him come in!”

The Jackal entered and inquiringly looked around — yes, here it was almost as nice as in Africa.

“Coucou,” the count commenced, “I have obtained for you an unlimited furlough.”

Coucou scratched his head.

“Well — is it, perhaps, not acceptable to you?”

“Not exactly that, commander, but what am I to do in the intervening time? Africa’s sun, the Bedouins, the Jackals, nay even the Hyenas I shall miss.”

“Well, perhaps we can find a remedy — to-morrow at daybreak we depart for Algiers.”

“To Algiers — is that true?” joyfully exclaimed Coucou, throwing his cap in the air and making a salute, which perhaps was not fashionable, but nevertheless significant.

“Excuse me, commander,” he stammered, placing his hand on his cap, “I am overcome with joy! God be praised, now we shall find my good captain!”

“That I also hope, Coucou.”

“But how is it with her ladyship, commander?” asked Coucou doubtfully; “is she satisfied?”

“Ask her yourself,” said Monte-Cristo.

“Madame,” Coucou said turning toward Haydee, “you have a brave husband, and as long as Coucou lives nobody shall touch a hair of his head!”

Haydee smiled amid her tears, and the count said:

“Coucou — here is my son, he will accompany us!”

“The little fellow — *Sapristi* — that is grand! the young gentleman is the little corporal — do you like the title, my young master?”

Spero, clapping his hand joyfully into the proffered one of the Zouave, cried out laughingly:

“I shall do my best to earn my epaulets!”

“Go now, Coucou,” said Monte-Cristo, “and do not fail to be at the harbor at six o’clock to-morrow morning.”

“I will not fail, commander.”

The Zouave, placing his hand to his cap, went away.

CHAPTER XLI

HOW AND WHERE COUCOU TOOK LEAVE

In a beautiful garden, adjacent to a small splendid villa, Clary Ellis this evening walked irresolutely to and fro. Madam Caraman, with whom the young girl had a lively conversation, had retired, as she stated, to work on the veranda, and Clary was reflecting on the conversation.

When the young girl had, in the afternoon, seen the count at Mercedes’, she had become quite inquisitive to know something more about the stranger; the way and manner, however, Mercedes answered her questions in nowise satisfied her curiosity.

The count was an old friend of the family, was Mercedes’ answer; he had known her son, previous to going to Africa, and he had always felt a lively interest for him.

Clary had accepted this explanation without putting confidence in it; she saw that Mercedes tried to hide something from her and that vexed her.

Madame Caraman had the next day called for her *protégée*, and in walking home together, she said:

“Do you know, Clary, what I have heard to-day — the Count of Monte Cristo is said to be in Marseilles.”

“Well, what is there remarkable in that?” Clary calmly asked. “Have you not seen him then?”

“Seen him — where?” responded Madame Caraman, stupefied.

“Dear me, he just left as I came to Madame Joliette. You were waiting outside the house and could not have failed to see him.”

“Oh, Lord! could the gentleman who rode off with the Zouave have been the count?” remarked Madame Caraman, quickly.

“No doubt; a slender, pale man, with dark hair.”

“That I should not have known it! — where must my eyes have been?” lamented Madame Caraman, and in the meantime both had reached the villa, and Clary said carelessly:

“Please come with me in the garden, Madame Caraman; I like to hear more particulars about this Count of Monte-Cristo.”

"But, Clary," said the French lady with astonishment, "have you never heard of the count? What do they read yonder in England?"

"Oh, various matters — but what has this to do with the count?"

"More than you think of; you have stocked in your little heart a great deal of ballast, and neglected the most necessary things. Do you know the author Alexandre Dumas?"

"Only as far as the name is concerned."

"H'm — I thought so; yes — France does not for no purpose possess the credit of being at the head of civilization."

"But Mamma Caraman, when are we then to return to our subject, the count?" asked Clary, impatiently.

"At once. Alexandre Dumas has written many romances, and one of the most interesting is 'The Count of Monte-Cristo.'"

"Mamma Caraman," said Clary, vexed, "how is it that you intend to dish up for me such a childish fable?"

"But I am speaking seriously; Dumas has rendered more service for the general education of the people than ten ministers. In his 'Three Guardsmen,' for instance, one gets thoroughly acquainted with the histories of Richelieu, Anna of Austria and Louis XIII., in a very interesting manner. In the 'Count of Monte-Cristo' the shortcomings and faults of the government after the overthrow of the great emperor are unsparingly exposed, and in the same way every work of the great novelist offers special merits. The more I think of it the more clearly I understand it, that we also have in your friend, Madame Joliette, a character of the novel before us. Her name is Mercedes, and she is no doubt Madame de Morcerf. And the name of her son?"

"Albert."

"Well, there it is; the father was a scamp, who shot himself, the son and the wife resigned their possessions and then disappeared from society. It will perhaps be best if I send the servant to a library to get the romance; I wager that you will not put the book aside till you have perused it all through?"

Clary nodded and ten minutes later she sat with glowing cheeks and beating heart absorbed in the reading of this interesting novel. She sympathized with Edmond Dantes and Faria, she wept with Mercedes, she hated Villefort, lamented for Madame Danglars, was enthusiastic for Valentine, admired Maximilian and breathed much easier when Madame de

Villefort, the inhuman poisoner, had ended her evil career. And over all these personages hovered in wonderful glory the modern knight without fear and blame, the chastising judge, the noble benefactor. Monte-Cristo seemed to the young girl like a god, and when darkness set in and Madame Caraman looked about for her *protégée*, Clary embraced her and said, sobbing:

"Oh, Mamma Caraman, how beautiful is the romance and how happy do I feel to have seen the count! Yes, so, just so, he ought to appear; oh, Alexandre Dumas is a great man!"

Madame Caraman smiled; she did not expect anything else. Both ladies conversed then more explicitly of the various persons in the romance, and afterward the companion withdrew, as already mentioned, to the veranda to work, and Clary remained, absorbed in a reverie, sitting in a little pavilion ornamented with flowers.

How long she had been meditating she was unable to tell, when all at once without the garden wall a curious noise was heard. Clary lifted her head and listened; the reading had excited her to the extent that at this moment a spectral appearance would have come not unexpectedly and yet she quite plainly noticed a sparkling pair of eyes, which inquiringly turned in all directions. Clary did not stir. A cloud, which up to that moment hid the moon, broke, and the girl recognized the Zouave, who sat upon the wall and then slipped down into the garden. Coucou seemed to know that he was trespassing upon strange ground; he listened for a while, and as everything seemed quiet he selected the walk which led to the veranda.

At the veranda a lamp was burning, and close by stood a basket filled with various skeins and balls of wool, while Madame Caraman sat in her chair snoring comfortably. The Jackal remained motionless at the foot of the veranda and looked up, and as nothing seemed to move, he soon resolved to climb the fence, which was closed by the stairs leading into the garden.

As soon as the Jackal saw Madame Caraman, he became rather agitated; he thought of his mother, and yet he was aware that this lady appeared far younger and more elegant than his mother, even were she alive. With his hands folded over his breast, he looked at the sleeping woman; he did not anticipate that Clary, hid behind a tamarind-tree, watched all his movements and almost broke her head in considering what motive brought the Zouave to this spot.

Now Coucou approached the companion, but the noise woke Madame Caraman, and uttering a half-suppressed shriek she jumped up and looked drowsily at the intruder. She recognized only the form of a man, and instinctively grasping after the first object at hand, she took hold of the work-basket and threw it with all her might at the Zouave. The basket hit Coucou's head and clapped itself like a helmet over his face, while the wool skeins became entangled in his hair, tickling his nose and causing a violent cough and continual sneezing.

The lady now first recognized the brave Jackal, and considering the awkward situation he was placed in, she could not help bursting into a loud laugh. In vain Coucou tried to rid himself of the wool threads; he coughed and sneezed uninterruptedly, and the basket seemed to cling more tightly to his face. At length the French lady took pity on him and helped him to remove the basket, and then in a voice of merriment which she could not suppress she said:

"Well, Monsieur Jackal, you will perhaps tell me what induced you to come here?"

Coucou was ready to answer, but the wool threads prevented him, and while Madame Caraman again broke out laughing, and Clary, below in the garden, suffered from suffocation, because she felt obliged to suppress her laughter in order not to betray her presence, the Zouave breathlessly gasped:

"One — drop — of water — I suffocate!"

Madame Caraman was not cruel. She handed the Jackal a glassful of water, and as the cough would not stop, she took from the sideboard a bottle filled with cordial and offered it to the soldier with these words:

"There, drink a drop, you big scamp, and then explain your presence here."

The Zouave cast a grateful glance at the lady and took a long draught out of the bottle.

"Sapristi!" he then exclaimed, smacking his tongue, "that is an excellent drop!"

"Bah, never mind the drop now, but answer my question," rejoined the lady. "What are you looking for here?"

"I — intended — "

"Quick, and do not stutter so awfully. Is it lawful at night and in darkness to enter a strange abode and to frighten people?"

“Alas, I shall certainly never do it again,” stammered poor Coucou, crestfallen. “I came here, because — ”

“Dear me, I almost believe you have lost your power of speech,” laughingly interrupted Madame Caraman.

“Not exactly, madame, but behold, there are moments in the life of a soldier — ”

“In which he proves himself especially stupid,” added Madame Caraman impatiently; “stick to your subject.”

Coucou bowed, as if a compliment were paid him.

“Madame,” he commenced again, “Providence permitted us to-day to meet each other — ”

“Providence?” repeated the lady in great merriment; “Mr. Zouave, you seem to me to be getting a little crazy!”

“Oh, madame,” said Coucou ardently, “it will not offend you, if I tell you that I find you exceedingly — and, speaking plainly, consider you quite lovely! Call me impertinent, madame: but believe my assurance that I speak the real truth. I have seen ladies in all parts of the world, blondes and brunettes, black and white, but I never met one who understood how to win my heart till I this day met you!”

Madame Caraman was, indeed, Clary’s governess, but she was, first of all, a wife, and Coucou’s words were repugnant to her.

“Monsieur Zouave,” she replied, “I am forty-two years old” (unwittingly she skipped a few), “and you may call yourself lucky that I do not mind a joke — ”

“A joke? But I can take an oath — ”

“Do not swear,” interrupted the lady, in a menacing manner, “but let me speak. First, you ought to know that I have always been an honest wife, and only loved my husband, who is now in heaven. Secondly, I am employed by a greatly esteemed and amiable young girl, and as you have without the slightest pretext entered here, you have forfeited the respect which you owe the owner of this villa. Thus you know now what you ought to know, and mark it down for the future, Monsieur Zouave.”

Coucou felt as if it were best for him to sink into the ground; red like a peony he began to stutter:

“Pardon me, I intended nothing wrong!”

The widow of the gendarme officer had compassion on his embarrassment.

"Well, do not take it to heart too much," she said, kindly. "I do not bite anybody! You are, after all, a soldier, and if you do your duty, you cannot always touch everything with kid gloves. My dear departed husband often told me so, and therefore console yourself and listen to me. I am ready to pardon you, but only under one condition."

"Oh, under all conditions, even ever so difficult," ejaculated Coucou, lively. "Speak, please; what am I to do?"

"Not much, but to tell me, quite openly, why you have come to this place this evening?"

"Only to see you."

"Indeed! Well, I must confess I like you! So you have fallen in love with me, like a student at a boarding-school, and in order to satisfy your suddenly aroused desires you creep at night into other people's houses! Do you know how these fellows are generally styled?"

Coucou bent his head, and Madame Caraman earnestly continued:

"Would it not be more simple and also more becoming, if you were to come here to-morrow by daylight, and ask for admittance?"

"But that is just the thing," despairingly exclaimed Coucou, "for me there is no morning!"

"What does that all mean?"

"Well, what I say is, that for me there is no morning here!"

"Lord and Saviour, how am I to understand this nonsense?" said Madame Caraman, impatiently.

Coucou changed his tactics.

"Madame," said he with emphasis, "I will admit that my uncalled-for entrance here was certainly quite wrong, but you ought not to consider it in the light of an offence."

"I hope so," replied the companion respectfully, "and I am ready to look for any proofs thereof."

The Zouave again looked down quite abashed.

"It passed previously through my head," he commenced, rather discouraged, "that you perhaps would show a little interest for me — "

"Always worse — you are getting impertinent!"

"No, no, madame, that I am not; only allow me to explain. Consider, I am a soldier; the regiment is my home, and I have neither father nor mother who care for me. Taking it all in all, I do not mind that; I fight with the Kabyles, and when one day my end approaches, nobody will have to mourn for me. But you appear to me so kind and trustworthy, that Satan urged me on, and as I shall probably never see you again — ”

“Ah, and why not?”

“I bid you farewell, for to-morrow morning it will be all over.”

“Well, not so hasty; don’t jump immediately from one extreme to another,” scolded Madame Caraman, who against her own desire felt some sympathy, although she tried to hide it; “tell me now exactly the whole proceeding; otherwise you seem to be a brave fellow, and it would be a pity for the uniform you wear were it not so. Well, then, speak out; what is the matter to-morrow?”

“Alas, madame, your kindness encourages me. Only consider, if a man is on the point of leaving his home, and perhaps forever, he is longing to say to somebody good-by, and when on such an occasion a beautiful woman shakes hands and says, ‘Farewell, my boy,’ then it surely brings luck!”

“But, Monsieur Zouave, you speak in riddles to me. Where are you going, if I may put the question?”

“To Algiers, in the desert, and then further.”

“But you are returning to your regiment?”

“God forbid. I have an unlimited furlough.”

“By my life, it requires a corkscrew in order to get the words out of your mouth! Plainly told, what mean all these preliminaries?”

“Well, you know already that the son of Madame Mercedes, Captain Joliette, has disappeared. I am attached to my captain and — ”

“Quick, make haste, I am fast losing all patience!”

“To-day a pale-looking man with sparkling dark eyes, and coal-black hair and beard, told me that he starts to-morrow morning in order to search for Captain Joliette, and intends to take me with him!”

Neither the Zouave nor Madame Caraman heard the half-suppressed exclamation, which had just occurred close to the veranda; Madame Caraman felt astonished, and rising suddenly asked almost breathlessly:

“If I understand rightly, then, the Count of Monte-Cristo intends searching the Sahara for Captain Joliette?”

“Yes, that is the case, and I accompany him. For such an expedition courage is the first requirement, and, as I do not lack any, the count has selected me. Now, you know all and wherefore I came; I did not wish to vex you, and now I depart again. Adieu, Madame Caraman!”

The Zouave swung his cap and turned round ready to depart. The lady looked at him with mingled feelings; she was a kind-hearted soul and the brave Zouave amused her. She never had a son, but she thought, if God had presented her with one, he ought to have resembled the Jackal. That he came to bid her good-by, moved her, and she said in a half-audible voice:

"Monsieur Zouave!"

Coucou remained standing.

"Come this way! Are you, perhaps, afraid of me? On previous occasions you were less timid."

Coucou's hesitating steps justified this suspicion, and Madame Caraman continued, smilingly:

"I shall not hurt you; there, put your hand into mine — " Coucou blushed like a girl.

"What? I should be allowed to put my ugly paw into your hand!" he stuttered quite confounded, and then he perceived that he had been again rude and tried to excuse himself.

"I spoke of my ugly paw — I — "

"Never mind that," the lady interrupted him; "there, shake hands and think that I am your mother!"

"You my mother?" said Coucou laughing, with tears in his eyes; "oh, no such thing; then you must act differently! When I took leave of my poor mother, she took hold of my head and kissed me heartily on both cheeks! I believe I have to thank these kisses that I still carry my head between my shoulders!"

Madame Caraman wiped a tear from her eye, and then she took the head of the Zouave between her hands and did exactly like his mother.

"Hurrah, Mother Caraman," called out Coucou joyfully; "you are an excellent mother! Farewell, and if God spares me, I hope we may meet again!"

"I hope so, my boy," said Madame Caraman with faltering voice. "God protect you and grant that you may again find your captain! It will all be right in course of time — adieu!"

The Zouave made two long strides in getting downstairs, and in a moment he had reached and climbed the garden-wall. Placing himself upon it, he swung his cap, and calling aloud, "Adieu, Mother Caraman," disappeared.

“A real Parisian boy,” muttered Madame Caraman to herself: “a hot-headed fellow with a golden heart. It would grieve me should I not see him again.”

A soft hand now touched the lady’s shoulder, and looking up she perceived her *protégée*, who stood before her smiling.

“Is it you, Clary,” said the companion rather awkwardly, while she changed color and became red and white, by turns, “you have then — ”

“Seen and heard the Zouave,” rejoined the young girl, laughing.

“But I can assure you — he came — I am not answerable — the garden-wall — ”

“I know, I know, Mamma Caraman,” interrupted Clary. “You do not think that I am going to reproach you? So Coucou goes to Algiers?”

“Yes, in order to search for Captain Joliette; the count — ”

“I know all,” said Clary, hastily placing her finger upon the governess’s lips; “they are going, but it is all chance — ”

“Yes, all chance work in a desert. It is terrible! Think only of the simoom, the sand, the Kabyles, and the wild animals!”

“Have you the map of Algiers at hand?”

“Yes, here is the atlas.”

Clary knelt close to the chair of the governess, who had the atlas on her lap, and after they had studied minutely all the mountains and deserts of Africa, she suddenly inquired:

“How do people travel in the Sahara?”

“In caravans, with camels and negroes. It is a troublesome journey, dear child, and — ”

“Mamma Caraman, how much money have we at present in hand?” suddenly interrupted Clary.

The governess drew a pocketbook out of her work-basket, and, examining the contents, said:

“About three hundred pounds sterling, or seven thousand five hundred francs.”

“That is very little,” said Clary.

“We have besides bills of exchange to the amount of one hundred thousand francs.”

“What may be the time now?”

“Nearly ten o’clock, Clary.”

“Well, then, please have our horses ready.”

“Our horses, at this time?” said the governess, alarmed.

“Yes, at once. Hurry your toilet; I shall do the same, and then good-by.”

“But, Clary, what do you intend to do?”

“Mamma Caraman, I am not yet quite clear upon that point, but on the road to Marseilles you shall know everything. Apropos, take the three hundred pounds with you.”

“You are not thinking, surely, of spending the money this very evening?”

“H’m, who knows. At any rate take also the bills of exchange, and now go and make haste.”

Clary soon got away, and the astonished governess had no other alternative than to obey the orders of the spoiled child. Ten minutes later both ladies sat in their saddles, and rode, accompanied by a groom, toward the town.

CHAPTER XLII

IN THE SPIDER’S WEB

If one passes in Marseilles from Main Street across Villeneuve Place, and turns into Prison Street, there appears a dirty old house just opposite this street, which upon a signboard bears the appellation: “The Big Spider.” This house is a resort for sailors of the worst kind, and, as soon as darkness sets in, becomes crowded with customers, whose physiognomies are anything but encouraging. The worst of vices found here in the Big Spider their formation, and the scum of all parts of the world used to assemble here. In fact, the whole surroundings of that quarter were nicknamed “The Spider Quarter,” and many a one who had entered the quarter with well-filled pockets never left it again. The “Spider’s web” closed upon him, and he was lost; for the walls never betrayed what passed behind them, nor did the inhabitants feel any desire to do so.

In the dark smoky rooms alcoholic drinks were the principal beverage, and characterless women shared and indulged in the drunken revels. Continual strife and quarrels in which the knife was the chief weapon were always going on, while the police took good care not to come into contact with the guests of the Spider. At present, of course, the Spider’s Quarter has ceased to exist, and one who nowadays perceives the well-lighted streets will hardly believe what a place it formerly was — *tempora mutantur*. While the Zouave Coucou took leave in the villa, a mixed company, like on all other nights, had gathered together in the Spider. English, French, Maltese, Italians and Spanish sailors sat round the heavy oak tables; girls in curious dresses, whose painted cheeks showed plainly the traces of debauchery, thronged around a female card conjurer, who in a corner was performing her black art, while a woman with a harp was waiting with her old instrument till called upon to play or sing before the company. Here and there sat groups of men and women on whose foreheads vice was plainly written, and according as the dice rolled and the cards dropped, there could be heard curses and imprecations, as well as shouts of joy. The atmosphere was impregnated with the filthy oil of the dimly lighted lamps, the odor of alcoholic drinks, and the poisonous smell of tobacco.

It was almost midnight when a new-comer entered. The man wore a short jacket, a red girdle held the dark trousers around the waist, and a broad-brimmed oilcloth hat sat at an angle upon a head full of rich red-blond hair. The beard of the man was red and thick, while his form showed that he was possessed of great muscular power.

It was plain that the stranger was an English sailor, and the sharp accent with which he gave his orders to the morose landlord, of whom he demanded a mixture of rum and cordial, testified to this supposition. The host, who was a suspicious-looking individual with piercing black eyes, which wickedly squinted from under a pair of peculiar thick eyelashes, soon brought the drink to the sailor, and while placing the tin can containing the hot beverage on the table, he held out his right hand to receive payment; for in the Spider the rule is: “First pay and then you may drink.” The sailor did not seem to relish this custom; he drew a heavy purse from his pocket, took out a gold piece and threw it on the table.

While the host took the gold piece, a louis d’or, and curiously looked at it, more than twenty eyes turned greedily upon the sailor; the customers of the Spider knew well the sound of the gold pieces. Out of pure mischief the host tried the sound of the gold piece again on the tin can, and then smilingly placed it in his pocket: again, suspicious looks turned upon the man who paid in gold, and their bewilderment was increased as the stranger refused the change. “Keep it for yourself,” said he, loud enough to be heard. The landlord, who understood many languages, shook his head and dryly replied:

“Keep your money, old fellow — I only take my due.”

The Englishman felt vexed, struck with his fist on the table, took hold of the tin can and emptied the drink with one draught.

“You decline my money?” he asked with a strong English accent.

“I do not say so,” added the host, in a half-satisfactory tone, “but to-day and to-morrow do not resemble each other, and what you bestow on me to-day you may rue to-morrow.”

“That concerns no one but myself,” exclaimed the sailor; “if I like to be generous, I have a right to be so. Yes or no — will you accept the money?”

“No, braggart, I do not need your money! The host of the Big Spider is richer than you!”

"Richer than I am? Who the dickens can say so?" ejaculated the sailor in a rage, and pulling out his purse and opening it he threw all its contents on the table. A heap of gold rolled on the oaken surface, and with loud shouting the guests around the table jumped up.

Only the landlord looked upon it indifferently.

"Englishman, you are a fool," he muttered half aloud; "you wish to be duped under all circumstances! Beware!"

"Shut up," shouted the sailor, and turning toward the rest, he said in a low voice:

"Do you know what the host has just whispered to me? He cautions me to be on my guard; he seemingly believes that you intend to murder me in order to get my money!"

A death-like silence followed these bold words, and the eyes of all present turned with unmistakable eagerness upon the heap of gold. Most of these miserable beings had already often bathed themselves knee-deep in blood; and therefore to commit murder was a bagatelle, as long as it brought profit.

The landlord, shrugging his shoulders, returned to his place near the door; he would let the sailor take his own part, if he really wanted to be stupid.

Now, a large fellow, a Provencal, approached and placed himself on a seat right before the Englishman, and was at once ready to take hold of the money.

"Old fellow," said he, grumbling, "is that lot of money really your own property?"

"Yes, all honestly earned money."

"H'm — that I care for but very little. Do you know, I am just at present short of cash, and I suppose you will not hesitate to lend a friend a helping hand, eh? Well, then, I'll take just what I am in want of."

The hand of the Provencal selected a few gold pieces, but almost at the same time he shouted aloud and staggered back.

The sailor, with a vise-like grip, grasped the wrist of the intruder and he soon dropped the gold pieces.

The Provencal gnashed his teeth in rage, and, rubbing his bruised wrist, muttered:

"If you do not wish your sinful money to be touched, then you should not expose it so boastingly! You will not even assist me a little? It stands to reason that later on I will pay you everything back: well, are you satisfied?"

“No,” replied the sailor coolly, “go to the devil! Away — do not touch my money; I can skin you!”

“Ah, that we shall soon see,” loudly exclaimed the Provencal, and putting his hand in his pocket he produced a large knife. At the same time he uttered a few words to his comrades in their own jargon, and immediately the sailor was surrounded by a dozen men whose hands were armed with glittering knives.

The Englishman seemed, however, not in the least affected; he put the money all in one heap, and placing himself with his back toward the wall, he crossed his arms over his chest, and asked, scornfully:

“What do you mean to do? Are you really ready to murder me?”

“Keep your peace, braggart! You wish to entice us with your money. Give us half of it, or you will not fare very well here. Well, are you willing to divide?”

“I don’t know about that. If anybody in my part of the country says ‘I will,’ then he must prove that he is also able.”

“What does this all mean? Do you think of defying us?”

“I am ready for you. Just come on, if you think proper!”

“Stand back, comrades!” exclaimed the Provencal, “I will teach him something better. Just wait, John Bull, you will soon know me; I’ll get the best of you, and then we will divide the spoils.”

“Yes, yes!” the others cried, “let us divide!”

“Keep quiet,” said the Englishman, coolly. “You want a regular fight with knives, do you? Pah, I have no objection; but you will allow me, instead of using a knife, to make use of this weapon!” and thereupon he drew from his pocket a small, brightly polished poniard about three or four inches long, which looked more like a lady’s plaything than anything else.

The shabby lot laughed at him loudly; and, comparing the Catalonian knives they handled with the sailor’s poniard, it appeared like a sewing-needle.

“Perhaps you think I am a tailor?” said the Provencal, scornfully; “and have you not also a measure in your pocket?”

“Large words, large knives, and that is all,” said the sailor, contemptuously. “Listen. I make you an offer: if you can touch me, the money is yours; and, mark well, not only half, but the whole of it!”

“Agreed. Comrades, step aside!”

With a push of his foot the Provencal cleared one of the tables; the rest did the same in putting tables and chairs aside for an open space. The host alone remained passive; he had seen enough of these occurrences, and was in nowise astonished. Even the female portion of the guests seemed to take an interest in the combat; everywhere you could see glittering eyes awaiting the spectacle to come, and now and then the call went forth: "The impertinent fool!" "Well, the Provencal will teach him better!" "Just look, the poniard is set with diamonds!" "Where could he have stolen it?" "Perhaps from his sweetheart. Ha! ha! ha!"

One of the guests, however, did not share in the general noise. He was a man who sat at a side table, his head resting in both his hands, so that his face could not exactly be recognized. Raven black long hair, slightly tinged with gray, fell down on his broad shoulders; the man wore sailor's clothes, but they looked tattered and worn out. Before him stood a large, half-emptied bottle of liquor. He sat motionless, and, in spite of the noise around him, remained at the table without stirring. The glance of the English sailor was at different times directed toward him, and it even seemed as if he wanted to speak to him, but nobody noticed it.

Now the Provencal approached the Englishman. It was quite a sight to see him standing with spread-out legs, half-naked, hairy arms, muscular chest, the knife lifted up in his right hand, and a vulgar smile on his thick lips, and many a one would have considered twice before he ventured on such a task. His age was, no doubt, about forty, and his glaring eyes glanced continually from the Englishman to the gold, and then again at his comrades, as if intending to say:

"Just be a little patient, I'll procure the prize for us."

The Englishman too had arisen. His slender figure appeared almost meagre when compared with his opponent, and yet his dark eyes looked around steadily and quietly. Either he plays with the danger threatening him, or he is not able to see it; one stroke of the Provencal was sufficient to batter down the Englishman, and what use is the neat little weapon in comparison with the terrible large knife?

"Are you ready?" shouted aloud the Provencal.

"Yes, bandit," sounded loudly in reply.

The sailor leaned with his back to the wall; a retrograde movement was impossible, and yet — yet the Provencal began to press him closely. The knife glittered — a jump — and the Provencal shrieked with pain and sank to the ground. The poniard of the Englishman had penetrated deeply into the hand which held the knife; a dark stream of blood flowed from the wound, when the sailor drew out the point of the blade, and the Provencal screamed in his agony:

"Wait, miserable juggler, you will suffer for it."

Breathing heavily he stepped back a few paces, and again swinging his knife, he threw it quickly at the face of the sailor. The sailor had lifted his left hand, and in a second struck the weapon as it fell; the knife whirled around, and the next moment the Englishman caught it in his hand. Triumphantly he swung round the knife in his left, and the poniard in his right hand; the Provencal uttered a heavy curse, and withdrawing the knife from a comrade standing behind him, he prepared to again attack his opponent.

The Englishman allowed him to approach; but as soon as he was ready to jump at him, he threw away poniard and knife, took hold of the Provencal by his wrists, and as easily as if he were but a child, pitched him right in the midst of bottles and glasses, placed upon a table some distance off.

The Provencal howled with rage; and the breaking of the bottles and glasses scattered glass all over the place, causing many bloody hands and heads. The giant bled from a wound on his forehead, and, turning to his comrades, he called aloud:

"Kill him, ye *canaille*! Can you look on quietly when he is killing me?"

Irresolute, the crowd stared at the sailor, and he, taking advantage of the momentary quietness, jumped over tables and benches into a corner, where the solitary guest sat, and placed his hand upon his shoulder:

"Up!" he called with penetrating voice, "up in the name of Manuelita!"

As if touched by an electric shock, the man jumped up, and, throwing one single glance at the sailor, he gave a yell and leaped right in the midst of the vagabonds, and with herculean power he knocked down all who were near him, crying with rage:

"Away with you, bandits! Whoever touches a hair on this man's head dies!"

As soon as the men heard the voice, they remained standing as if petrified, and even the most courageous turned pale.

"Jacopo!" went from mouth to mouth. "What the devil brought him here? Let us hasten to depart. See only how his eyes are rolling; he is once more in a passion!"

The other must have been aware of his ruling power over these miserable vagabonds, for he pulled the door open and peremptorily ordered them to leave the room, saying threateningly:

“March off, or I’ll get you all on the galleys again, which you ought never to have left!”

“We are going; pardon us!” cringingly replied the men; and like beaten dogs they all left quite hastily.

The Provencal lingered a while at the door.

“How about the money?” he inquired, in dog-like submission.

“Throw it to the bandits outside the door, Jacopo,” said the sailor, despisingly.

Jacopo took the money in both hands and scattered it in a large circle on the street.

Howling, shrieking, and with a tremendous noise, the bandits fought for the booty. Jacopo locked the door, closed the latch, and kneeling before the sailor, whispered: “Master, what is it you demand of me?”

CHAPTER XLIII

MANUELITA

Who was Jacopo?

About nineteen years before, in February, 1829, Edmond Dantes — a prisoner for life in the Castle d’If — owing to his energy, escaped from his jailers, sewed up in a sack which had contained the corpse of his friend, the Abbe Faria. He was dragged by the jailers to the churchyard of the Castle d’If, and there buried. The churchyard of the Castle d’If, however, was the ocean! The waves were more merciful than man; they gave the deserted one a friendly reception, and washed him close to a ship, a genuine tartane, where in despair he called out for help. He waved the red sailor’s cap which a sympathizing gust of wind had thrown down from a rock, and the men on board of the tartane saw it. “Courage!” they called to him. With a weak, despairing grasp he took hold of the rope which had been thrown toward him, and then became insensible.

When he came to he lay on the deck, and sympathizing sailors bent over him. They administered rum, they rubbed his benumbed body, and he who had first seen the unfortunate man put his own woollen jacket around the man’s shivering shoulders. This sympathizing sailor was called Jacopo; he was a powerful young fellow, with laughing blue eyes. When Edmond Dantes had recourse to stratagem, and, in order to remain alone at Monte-Cristo, leaped from the rock, it was Jacopo who picked him up, and only against his will left him again.

“Who knows whether you will not one time become a captain? Has not your countryman Bonaparte become emperor?”

Hereupon Jacopo almost went into hysterics; how could he become captain? no, so high he never climbed even in his boldest dreams; he felt satisfied if he only continued to have a place on the deck of a ship; then the ocean was his home, his family, his all!

Edmond Dantes has the name Jacopo fixed in his memory. He will, no doubt, have an after opportunity to reward the brave fellow.

Years had passed when the Count of Monte-Cristo began to recollect the brave Corsican. He searched for him and said:

“Do you remember a sailor whose life you once saved, and who prophesied that you would become a captain?”

Jacopo blushed; no, he has not yet forgotten this prophecy.

“I knew this sailor,” continued the count, “and received of him the commission to cancel his debt to you.”

“His debt?” exclaimed Jacopo, not knowing the meaning thereof.

“Yes, your dream points to a captaincy, and I have the order to realize this dream.”

“You! oh, do not make fun of me — ”

“What are you thinking of? Look here, Jacopo, do you see this yacht which is now riding on the waves?”

“I see her. She appears to me slender and beautiful — she is a pearl of a vessel.”

“I am glad that the yacht is to your taste; she is my property, and I appoint you as captain, if you have no objection!”

Jacopo became almost wild with joy. During the next few months the elegant yacht, called the Ice Bird, moved her wings actively, crossing every sea, and the captain was delighted with her.

When the count came to Paris to investigate the fate of the families Villefort and Danglars, Jacopo received his dismissal, or rather his temporary freedom.

“Master,” he asked, sorrowfully, “why do you send me away? Have you to complain of anything concerning me?”

“No, Jacopo; but at present I do not need the yacht any further; I intend for a time to remain in Paris.”

“Well, at any rate, I will always be ready to obey your least hint,” said the Corsican, with enthusiasm. “Command me, and I shall at once honor your call.”

“How who knows?” said Monte-Cristo, laughingly.

“What do you wish to say by that assertion, master? Do you believe Jacopo will be remiss in fulfilling his promise?”

“Who knows?” repeated the count, still laughing, and then, drawing out his pocketbook, he said in an earnest tone: “Jacopo, you have a secret.”

“I?”

"Why avoid my question? Your blushing cheeks convict you of untruth, and then you ought to know me sufficiently; you know that my looks can penetrate the innermost depths of thy soul."

Jacopo bent down his head, turned the cap in his hand confusedly, and became red like a red garden flower.

"Am I to tell you that I am able to read you to the bottom of your heart?"

"Master — "

"I read there a name — "

Jacopo trembled, and grasped a chair to support himself.

"It is the name of a woman."

"Master, master, I entreat you not to mention the name. I suffer enough without that."

The count's countenance grew gloomy.

"Jacopo," said he, peremptorily, "I am forbearing if anybody places confidence in me; irreconcilable if any one seeks to deceive me. I keep silent if you wish it, but we are forever separated. Farewell, you will never see me more!"

He turned to go, but the power which this singular man exercised over others was so great that Jacopo broke out into loud lamentations. He preferred to suffer anything rather than consent to perpetual separation.

"Say, master," he said, with a sigh, "am I able to leave you?"

Monte-Cristo smiled.

"You are a child," he then said. "You cannot bear to hear anybody speaking of your love, because you are forever separated from her."

"Oh, master, then you know everything."

"Listen to me, I am ready to tell you all that I know. There below, in the Catalonian quarter of Marseilles, lives a fisherman's family. Brave and diligent, they were never ashamed of their calling. They have worked day and night with boat and net, and accumulated a nice amount of property. The family consists of ten persons: father, mother, seven sons, and one daughter live in the modest but decent hut. The sons are strong and courageous fellows, who are not afraid of anybody; the daughter is charming with her dark curly hair, her glowing sloe-black eyes, and her marble white skin. Jacopo, am I to tell you the name of the little one?"

"Manuelita" — it sounded gently like a breath from the lips of Jacopo.

"You have liked this beautiful child since you first saw her, and one day you took heart and you went to Manuelita's father — "

“Who turned me out like a beggar,” interrupted Jacopo, gloomily.

“That he did not do,” continued the count, coolly. “He told you quietly, Manuelita will not become a poor man’s wife.”

“And perhaps that was no insult?” continued Jacopo, vehemently. “All people cannot be rich.”

“But Manuelita’s father has also told you something else?” asked Monte-Cristo, quietly.

“Oh, yes,” replied Jacopo, bitterly; “he called after me that if I came back with twenty thousand francs, then Manuelita should be mine. I earn such wealth! He was making sport of me.”

And Jacopo stamped angrily and uttered a heavy curse.

Monte-Cristo looked at him reflectively. Then he took a leaf from his pocket-book, which he held in his hand, and offering it to Jacopo, said:

“Here, take this.”

“What am I to do with it, master?” asked Jacopo, astonished.

“Well, can’t you read any more?”

“Oh, yes; I read an order for 20,000 francs to which your name is affixed.”

“And payable at — ”

“Thomson & French, in Rome.”

“You perhaps doubt whether these gentlemen will honor my signature.”

“Oh, master, your signature is as good as ready cash!”

“Well, then, go to the first banker you can find and have the check cashed.”

Jacopo looked at the count quite bewildered, and thus the conversation about Manuelita was ended, and his master gave him simply an order.

“Am I to deliver the cash to you, master?” he asked, not being certain yet.

“No, not to me.”

“To whom, then, otherwise, master?”

“To nobody.”

“Yes, but, dear me, what is the money for?”

“You shall keep it.”

“I?”

“Yes, you yourself.”

“And what am I to do with it?”

“You have to look for Manuelita’s father, show him the money, and remind him of his pledge.”

Pale, not able to utter a word, Jacopo stared at the count; Monte-Cristo waited a moment, and then said, smilingly:

“Have you now understood me?”

“No, master — I do not comprehend — ”

“Nay, one might almost believe that you have not a grain of sense. The amount is your property — you have deserved it honestly.”

“I deserve it? Oh, you make sport of me! If I have done my duty, that is my best recompense.”

“Yes, for your services as captain of the yacht. But there are also other services which cannot be paid for; submission, honesty, and courage cannot be paid for in gold, and in spite of the 20,000 francs I remain still your debtor.”

“Oh, master, you make me feel ashamed!”

“Jacopo,” said the count, sorrowfully, “do not speak like that. Of what value is money to me? I can give you still more, but to what purpose? You have enough to be happy; you have had a dream of domestic happiness, try to realize it! Your desires are moderate; you intend to work and be useful from morning to night, and as the only reward for your labor you require Manuelita’s love. Have you any further wishes, my brave man?”

“No, none; only Manuelita!”

“Then take her, and be happy!”

Jacopo stared yet at his master rather doubtfully.

“What is it to be, Jacopo, yes or no?”

Instead of answering, Jacopo kissed the hand of his master.

“All right, Jacopo,” said Monte-Cristo. “I only require one thing of you.”

“Oh, speak — speak only!”

“I know, in case I came in a few months to Marseilles, you will hesitate to accompany me.”

“I hesitate, master? How can you believe that? My life belongs to you!”

“No, Jacopo; from the moment you call Manuelita yours your life belongs to her. Do not take any oath, for you will never keep it. Did not even Peter deny the Lord three times? and Peter had no loving wife. In six, in twelve months, the thought of leaving Manuelita will surely make you unhappy; I know man, and I know you.”

Jacopo looked toward the ground rather ashamed; he was aware that the count had spoken the truth.

“Nor do I demand that you should leave her.”

Jacopo breathed a great deal easier.

"What am I to do?" he inquired hastily.

"Swear to me that, at any day or any hour I should call on you in Manuelita's name to assist me, you will follow my orders!"

Jacopo lifted his right hand on high.

"Master, I swear it to you," said he, solemnly.

"I trust to your oath; go and be happy."

Overcome with joy, Jacopo hastened to Marseilles, soon reached the Catalonian quarter, and greeted Manuelita with a bright smile.

The father of the beautiful Catalonian was on the point of becoming vexed when he saw Jacopo, but soon became almost dumb when the Corsican waved a well-filled purse and reminded him of his promise.

Scarcely a month elapsed before the marriage was celebrated, and happy Jacopo led the beautiful Manuelita to the neat abode which he had prepared for her.

There have passed days and months full of undisturbed happiness. Jacopo has bought a barge and baptized her Manuelita; he has sailed on the blue ocean and returned with a rich harvest of fish; prosperity reigns in the little cottage on the strand, and Manuelita is beautiful as the young day.

The count appeared one morning, when Jacopo was just ready for his fishing excursion.

"Will you accompany me?" he asked, laughingly.

The Corsican flushed, and Monte-Cristo said in a consoling tone: "Quiet yourself, I am only joking; what I want of you to-day will take only a short time."

That was at the time when the count ordered Jacopo to bring his farewell wishes to Valentine and Maximilian.

When the Ice Bird with sails unfurled left Marseilles, Jacopo felt somewhat dissatisfied with himself, and sometimes it appeared to him as if Manuelita had changed. Beautiful and lovely she still appeared, but her manner made some impression on Jacopo, and by degrees he found that others also thought his young, lovely wife had undergone a change. First, it was only hinted at, but afterward the talk spread and became louder that Manuelita deceived her husband; she loved another, Jacopo's friend. Jacopo did not at first mind this talk, but one evening he saw Manuelita fly at Parlo and offer him her sweet lips to kiss, and it enraged him to think that the people were in the right. He mastered with superhuman exertion all the thoughts that surged within him, and nobody might know that he was aware of the disgrace of his wife, nor that he contemplated an awful revenge. Why Manuelita betrayed him none could tell! He was a most faithful and indulgent husband; he would have gone for the beautiful Catalonian into the fire, and she — the lips which she offered him were soiled from the adulterous kisses of Parlo — the arm which she placed round his neck had also embraced Judas lovingly — she was a monster in enticing form. From this time, when Jacopo realized Manuelita's faithlessness he resolved to destroy her and her lover, and that the boat which bore the name of the faithless wife should become the instrument to carry out his revenge!

One morning Jacopo said to Manuelita:

"The weather is delightful; I think I shall take a fishing cruise. Will you accompany me?"

Manuelita hesitated; she thought perhaps Parlo might visit her.

Jacopo noticed her hesitation, and said with a smile that tore his heart into pieces:

"I have also asked Parlo to accompany us, because he is such good company!"

Manuelita's countenance began to beam, and Jacopo suffered the pains of torment when he perceived it, but took heart and said coolly:

"I shall in the meantime go to the shore to see whether the nets are all in proper condition."

He went, and when he returned after a while, and accidentally threw a glance at the window, he found Parlo in Manuelita's arms.

Pale as death and with tottering knees the unfortunate remained almost petrified on the spot; and when he revived a little and came ten minutes later into the house he appeared gay, and nobody could guess what anguish of soul he suffered.

"Are you ready?" he inquired quietly.

"Yes," nodded Manuelita.

"Then let us go; the nets are all ready."

Like an automaton Jacopo walked along the shore between the guilty pair; he mechanically answered questions, and when Manuelita offered her lips for a kiss after being helped into the boat, he had sufficient power over himself to touch with his lips the false mouth.

The boat glided through the blue waves of the ocean; Manuelita's dark curls played with the wind, and Parlo was intoxicated with joy as he looked at her. Jacopo sat at the rudder and looked inquiringly at a small dark cloud which appeared on the horizon some distance off and quickly neared them.

The Corsican allowed the boat to go with full sail before the wind, and soon nothing but the sky and water could be seen.

Parlo and Manuelita, engaged with each other, did not perceive the change in the weather, and when they heard in the distance a hollow, rolling sound they quickly arose to their feet.

Manuelita trembled, and lifting her beautiful eyes to Jacopo she inquired anxiously:

“Jacopo, is there a storm coming on?”

“Pah,” replied the Corsican reassuringly, as he threw his net into the sea; “it is of no importance.”

Jacopo was an experienced seaman; when he said the storm did not signify, you could depend on it that he was right. Manuelita saw that Jacopo was quite unconcerned, and looking at the roaring, rising waves she again grew calm and again watched Parlo. He also seemed careless; he laughed and joked, and, behind Jacopo’s back, stole many a kiss from his beloved.

A bright flash of lightning came down; the thunder rolled, and the black, cloudy wall rose ever higher on the blue horizon. Jacopo, however, did not mind it; he hummed a Corsican fisher-song and dipped his net into the sea. That he always drew it out empty did not trouble him; from time to time he threw unnoticed a glance at the others and gnashed his teeth.

Suddenly a heavy gale caught the foresail and tore it to shreds; the mainsail was also destroyed, then the foresail fell to the deck.

With a loud cry Manuelita sank on her knees and Parlo cried out terrified:

“Jacopo, we are lost!”

“Save us, Jacopo,” sobbed the Catalonian; and then she made the sign of the cross and muttered a prayer, while the storm increased in fury.

Jacopo remained motionless. He took an axe and lifted it high in his right hand, while the boat tossed like a nutshell and the noise of the storm deadened all other sounds.

“The boat is too heavy,” muttered Jacopo to himself, and swinging his axe he cut off the mizzen-mast close to the deck. Neither Parlo nor Manuelita said a word, and, engaged only with each other, believed that Jacopo was trying to save them, and only as the mast heavily struck the waves realized their peril.

The storm now absolutely controlled the light boat and twisted her round here and there. Jacopo lifted his axe again and cut down also the foremast.

“Parlo,” shrieked Manuelita, despairingly, “save us — we drown!”

Parlo pretended that he did not hear these words, for Jacopo’s curious fixed look had put him on his guard. Manuelita, overcome with fright, forgot everything, and, clasping her hands around Parlo’s neck, she sobbed out:

“Save me — oh, save me, Parlo!”

Jacopo swung his axe afresh, but this time it remained deep in the keel of the ship, and now light dawned on Parlo. Jacopo meant to destroy them.

“Hold on, Jacopo,” he called aloud despairingly, and tried to take hold of the axe.

The Corsican said not a word, but he, with his axe uplifted, kept Parlo at a distance, and then cut again into the keel, till a loud creaking was audible.

Jacopo had at last succeeded in his object — gurgling and roaring, the agitated waters rose through the leak in the ship, and Parlo shrieked like a madman.

“Jacopo — you carry us to destruction!”

Jacopo’s pale features became at last animated; he threw himself on Parlo, grasped his shoulders, and, forcing him on the floor of the boat, pressed his knee on his chest.

“Manuelita,” he called, with a voice which sounded through the storm like a trumpet, “you shall be happy with your lover, miserable woman!”

Manuelita heard the words — she saw the quick rising flood — she saw Jacopo kneeling upon Parlo’s chest, and she understood all — all!

Higher and higher still rose the water, and now Jacopo laughingly left his rival — he was drowning in the waves.

Manuelita raised her folded hands in entreaty — then came a last shriek, a hoarse laugh, and the boat sank, never to be seen again.

The next day the sea was serene and calm in the splendor of the rising sun, and a man engaged in fishing noticed a motionless body lying on the strand. Alarmed he hastened to lift up the body and recognized Jacopo!

Singularly enough, life was not quite extinct; the fisher brought the half-dead man to his house, and under the careful treatment of kind neighbors Jacopo soon revived as far as his body was concerned, but his mind remained affected.

A few days later the corpses of Parlo and Manuelita were driven on the strand, and now what had caused Jacopo to become insane was no more a riddle — had he not in one day lost the wife and the friend?

Jacopo’s madness was of a quiet kind; for hours he could sit on the shore and watch the playful movements of the waves; sometimes he bent over the blue waters as if he were in search of something, and then he shook his head sorrowfully. One day he sat again during a heavy gale on the strand; he saw a boat in which two men and a woman were sitting fighting with the waves. In his eyes light began to dawn all at once. He plunged into the water and soon had reached the boat. Breathless stood the people who saw it and noticed all his movements, and now they found him swimming toward the shore, holding a human figure in his arms, and loud hurrahs and rejoicing met him for his courage.

He had succeeded in saving the woman; the two men found a watery grave. In expectation of something, he knelt down by the woman, and when she opened her eyes Jacopo uttered sorrowfully:

“It is not her,” and then departed.

From this day Jacopo’s madness was broken; he certainly roamed about for days on the strand, but the veil which had clouded his mind was torn, and only when a storm raged it came over him like inspiration, and he ventured courageously upon saving the lives of those in danger.

Thus not a week passed in which Jacopo had not found opportunity to save people from shipwreck: the inhabitants on the strand surrounded him with a godlike veneration, and whenever a vessel was in danger there he was on the spot. Heaven seemingly favored him; hundreds he saved from a watery grave, and soon his word on the strand became quite an authority.

In course of time Jacopo began clearly to remember the entire affair as it happened on that eventful morning, and in order to drown those recollections he became a drunkard. In this state he was found by the English sailor, in whom, no doubt, the reader must have recognized the Count of Monte-Cristo; also Jacopo knew the voice of his beloved master, and his heart became animated with fresh hopes when he called him to his help. As Jacopo knelt before the count, Monte-Cristo put aside the long, entangled hair which hung down over the Corsican’s face, and, in a sorrowful tone and compassionately moved by the sight, said to him:

“Jacopo, you have suffered heavily!”

The Corsican sobbed bitterly, and the count continued: “How long it is since I saw your bright face on the strand; at that time you were happy in the possession of Manuelita, and to-day I find you broken, despairing, and — alone!”

Jacopo could only go on sobbing, and hot tears came down his pale, haggard cheeks.

“You have killed Manuelita,” whispered the count softly.

Jacopo trembled.

“Who has told you, master?”

“Don’t you know that I can read your soul?”

“Yes,” nodded Jacopo. “I have killed her!”

“And do you regret the deed?”

“This question I cannot exactly answer,” observed Jacopo timidly. “I was for a time insane, and often I wish I were so even now; the clouded mind was bliss compared with the terrible recollections which now break my heart! Oh, what wouldn’t I give to have courage enough to take my own life; but I lack that courage; I suffer terribly, I cry, I wring my hands, and yet I live. Oh, the cowardice! who will save me from myself?”

“I,” said Monte-Cristo, earnestly.

“You, master? Yes, you are almighty, and if you like you are able to pull out of my bleeding wounds the painful darts which are tearing my heart. Pity me, count, and I am free!”

Monte-Cristo’s look rested pitifully upon the unfortunate, and his voice sounded soft and mild when saying:

“Jacopo, only to save you I came here.”

“I feel it, I know it; oh, how kind you are!”

“Jacopo, when man is carried away by his passions and has done evil — what you have done was bad, because you did not possess the right to judge Manuelita, and you feel it by your remorse — then there is only one remedy, to atone for the sin — ”

“Oh, mention the remedy, master! It is singular, but since I have looked into your eyes and heard your voice, I have the feeling that the bloody fog which darkened my eyes had disappeared. I breathe again more freely, and my head is clear as it was previously, when I passed days on the ocean and saw nothing above me but heaven and sun. Master, tell me, what am I to do?”

“So much good, that the evil may disappear before it.”

"Alas, if I could do that! I have killed, and I am lacking the power to raise the dead."

"And if you could nevertheless atone for your crime?"

"Master, I hear your words, but their meaning is clouded for me; please speak plain to me, that I may understand you."

"Jacopo, life and death are related together, which, however, a secret and indissoluble union connect with each other. Not for nothing have I put you to the test; when I visited this cursed place, when I sounded my gold pieces, it was only because I wanted to find out whether misery had also corrupted your soul."

"Oh," replied Jacopo, contemptuously, "it does not say much to have remained an honest man."

"You are too modest, Jacopo; I have found you again as I left you ten years ago; now, listen, will you accompany me?"

Jacopo trembled all over.

"Leave Marseilles?" muttered he, in half-suppressed words; "oh, master, if you only knew that it is my sole and only joy to wander on the strand, and to contemplate that blue ocean which swallowed her up!"

"Jacopo, I have come here for the purpose of fetching you, as I am in want of you. I have to undertake difficulties; my way leads into foreign lands, on ways where death and crime are on the watch, and I have counted on your assistance. Shall I have been mistaken?"

Instead of an answer Jacopo made a bow, and taking the hands of his master, kissed them.

"Thanks, master," muttered he; "I am yours in body and soul!"

"Good, Jacopo, I know you!"

"When do we depart?"

"To-morrow morning."

"And where am I to meet you?"

"On board of the Ice Bird."

"I shall be there."

"I depend on your word; remember my prophecy, that death is the fountain of life, and that your sin disappears when God gives you grace to save the lives of others! Farewell for to-day, by daybreak we meet again."

Monte-Cristo left the liquor store, the Spider and Jacopo looked after him with a glimpse of new awakening hope in their eyes.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE HUMORS OF A LADY-MILLIONNAIRE

While Clary and her governess rode to Marseilles at a late hour, Madame Caraman was devoured with curiosity; but she was, nevertheless, sensible enough not to ask any question of her stubborn ward. When, however, the young girl spurred the horses continually on the governess felt uneasy; she had, besides, often the sensibility of a hen who has to bring up a young duck, and therefore she ventured to make slight objections against the uncommon maddening speed which, owing to her heavy size, became every moment more troublesome to her.

"Clary, at this hour to ride to Marseilles! What would Lord Ellis say to it? I have undertaken a sacred cause, and — "

"Do not trouble yourself, Mamma Caraman. I shall answer for all."

"Also when we break our necks?"

"Even then."

The governess was silent, not because she felt convinced, but owing to the want of breath. By degrees she got used to her present situation, and one does not read Alexandre Dumas in vain. Could there be anything more romantic than this night trip? The moon lighted up trees and shrubs with a fine white light, and they thus appeared as spectres, who in a maddening quick fear fly along.

"It is a great pity that he of blessed memory cannot behold me thus," muttered Madame Caraman to herself; "he would, no doubt, have rejoiced over me."

Now the town was reached, and Clary adopted a more moderate pace, while she and her companion turned into Troailles Street. Before a palace-like house a halt was made, and through Madame Caraman's head passed suddenly a correct supposition.

"Ah, we intend then to pay a visit to the firm of Mortimer & Co.," said she, with surprise; "a strange hour, and the bank will probably not be open yet."

Clary did not mind the remark, and she ordered the groom to get down from his horse and to knock. John, being used to obey punctually the orders of his young mistress, knocked with both fists at the closed gates, and Clary nodded her consent to it.

"Listen, Clary," said Madame Caraman, suddenly; "there is dancing in the house."

Indeed they could now plainly hear the sound of excellent music, and in the well lighted windows of the first story one could perceive here and there something like light shadows passing by.

Ere Clary could answer, the porter appeared and opened the gates, asking the pleasure of the cavalcade.

"Tell your master," said Clary, imperiously, "that I wish to speak to him at once."

"Oh, dear, that is impossible," stuttered the servant, stupefied; "the office is closed, and will only be opened again to-morrow morning at eight o'clock."

The porter was now ready to lock the gates again, but John had already, at a wink from his mistress, placed his horse between the gates, and, good or bad, they had to be left open.

"Please ask your master to be kind enough to come down at once," said Mademoiselle Ellis, peremptorily.

"Excuse me, mademoiselle, do you belong to the ball guests?" asked the man, shyly.

"Ah, is there a ball in the house?"

"Yes, mademoiselle; Mortimer & Co. give their only daughter in marriage to-day; if, then, mademoiselle is invited?"

"No."

"Then mademoiselle came upon business matters?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Then I am really sorry that I cannot announce mademoiselle; my orders are very strict."

"You refuse to obey me?"

"I regret very much, but — "

"In this case I must myself try to procure a hearing. Back!"

Ere the frightened porter could hinder it, Clary had given the horse the spurs and they crossed the threshold. Madame Caraman followed courageously, and then they stopped in the midst of the vestibule, ornamented with exotic plants, candelabra, and various hangings of the richest and rarest description. A number of lackeys felt perplexed when they perceived so unexpectedly the beautiful horses stepping on the carpets placed in the fore-court; some dozens of hands were stretched out in order to stay the horses, but they played a wrong game.

Not in vain was an ancestor of Miss Clary victorious in a combat with the Highlanders; her grandfather as well as her uncle had manfully subdued Tippoo Sahib, and her father had carried the victory at the last Derby. With her horsewhip she frightened the intruders, and Clary gave her horse the spurs again; in a moment the young girl and her governess rode upstairs! In the hall where the ball was given the *elite* of the most elegant society in Marseilles were gathered together; all the notables which the English colony of that place could muster were there, as well as all those in high office, and also the moneyed aristocracy; in fact, everybody of standing felt glad to attend the marriage feast of the house of Mortimer & Co. Just now the sounds of a quadrille commenced, and the various pairs began to arrange themselves for the occasion, when the lackey in attendance was pushed aside and a horse's head looked inquisitively into the ball-room.

It was a horse, surely and truly a horse — there was no doubt about that! The animal that put its proud-holding head into the ball-room had a silver bit, and its fine, cunning eye rested quite astonished upon the elegant company; who also, almost petrified with astonishment, came to a general standstill.

The lady of the house broke into shrieks, while Mortimer with his hands prevented further intrusion.

And yet what he saw was after all not so terrible, for an exquisitely beautiful young lady sat gracefully on the four-footed intruder, and a pair of provocative eyes shone brightly under a riding hat ornamented with rich feathers.

The wife of Lot, however, could not have been more torpid than the company in Palais Mortimer, especially when behind the first horse's head a second one appeared, and Madame Caraman became visible.

Mortimer thought he was dreaming. Was his ball-room then turned into a riding-school?

Miss Ellis did not give him much time to become horrified; she bowed politely before the banker, and said:

"Mr. Mortimer, if you please, I have to speak to you!"

Well, although the banker was an Englishman he was not a friend of horses, and while he with some anxiety looked at the splendid horse and its rider, Clary's animal forgot its manners so far that it commenced without the least ceremony to scrape upon the heavy carpet as if it were in Hyde Park or Rotten Row, and also Madame Caraman's horse neglected the rules of etiquette in that manner that the trainers of his youth deserve punishment for having only partly fulfilled their duty.

The dancing pairs stood, as far as it could be accomplished, quite safe in the background, and the older ladies and gentlemen quietly returned thanks to God, that it was Mr. Mortimer's house, and not theirs, in which this scene was played.

"Mr. Mortimer," Clary began anew, "please come this way."

The banker so far overcame his timidity that he put his eyeglass closer to his eye in order to look more exactly at the horses and their riders; and as soon as he recognized Clary he came forth resolutely. Oh, one is not a banker for nothing, and one knows what wealth amounting to a million pounds sterling really signifies!

Mr. Mortimer forgot that two horses were in his ball-room destroying his carpets; he forgot that hundreds of eyes were turned expectantly toward him, and, waiting for the moment when he would show the bold intruders to the door. He made a low bow to Clary and inquired almost submissively:

"I am at your service, Miss Ellis."

"I have to speak to you, Mr. Mortimer; the affair cannot be put off."

"I am ready for you," and pointing to the left, he continued: "Pray will you kindly accompany me to my office?"

"With pleasure, but I should first like to leave the saddle."

Ready to serve, the banker assisted the ladies to descend from their horses and walked in front of them to the office. The governess found the whole affair very amusing, and when Clary whispered to her to order John to take the horses in the yard, she nodded quite pleased; it was almost more interesting than a romance.

In the meantime Mr. Mortimer's partner had risen from the whist-table, and wishing to be of some assistance, he saw that the horses in the stable were properly cared for, and then waited patiently to be called by his partner.

This, however, did not immediately take place. Mr. Mortimer sat with his beautiful customer, for as such he considered Clary, whose bills he honored, and when she attempted some excuses for her “peculiar” intrusion, he replied smilingly:

“If anybody is possessed of wealth such as Mademoiselle Clary can boast of, every eccentricity is excusable.”

“I am exceedingly obliged,” said Clary laughing. “I should nevertheless not have chosen this course except through necessity. But in order to return to our business, I have to inform you of my demands.”

“No doubt: in the first instance, money! How much do you stand in need of?”

“Am I at liberty to draw upon you for the sum of two hundred and fifty thousand francs, Mr. Mortimer?”

“Pooh! a mere bagatelle; to-morrow morning it is at your disposal.”

“To-morrow morning? No, Mr. Mortimer, I am in want of it at once.”

“At once, mademoiselle? Impossible! The bank is closed.”

“Then order it to be opened.”

“But this is against the rules of our establishment!”

“You will have to deviate from this rule on my account, unless you prefer to decline altogether to do business with me. Mr. Bradwood will, no doubt, be ready to take your place!”

Bradwood, the rival, the *bete noire* of the banking-house of Mortimer & Co.

Mr. Mortimer’s hair stood on end. No, that can and dare not be. Should he erase from his books the name of Lord Ellis of Crainburton? It would be a crime to think of such a thing! The transaction was certainly opposed to all rule and law; it was eleven o’clock in the evening, and at a time of the celebration of a festival, but what was to be done? Mr. Mortimer wrote a line, rang the bell, and when the servant entered gave him the note to deliver to Mr. Edwards.

Mr. Edwards was the bridegroom, and if he said yes, then the banker would also say the same.

“Your wish will be complied with, mademoiselle,” said he, obligingly. “Have you, perhaps, any further requests to make?”

“Not very many — only mere bagatelles. I depart to-morrow morning for Algiers,” said Clary, with indifference, as if speaking about taking a walk somewhere.

“For Algiers? H’m! the country is not bad, but the Frenchmen do not know much of colonization.”

Madame Caraman opened her eyes very wide; she began to understand.

"I depart to-morrow morning early!" Clary coolly repeated.

Mortimer put his finger thoughtfully across his forehead.

"At daybreak, mademoiselle? Are you sure of it that to-morrow morning a vessel sails for that port? I am well acquainted with the departures of the various steamers — "

"And you know, therefore, that none of them sails for Algiers," interrupted Clary, laughing.

"Well, then?" asked the banker in an animated manner.

"Well, then, just on that account I have been looking for you."

"Looking for me?"

"Yes, indeed, you know all ship-brokers, and you will easily be able to help me out of my difficulties."

"But I do not exactly understand."

"Dear me, I am not speaking in the Coptic dialect!" exclaimed Clary, laughing. "I intend sailing to-morrow morning for Algiers. I have no vessel, and for that reason you will have to get me one."

"What? You desire a vessel — "

"Yes, yes. I am in want of a ship with captain, mate, sailors and boys — in short, with everything necessary for such an undertaking. To-morrow morning the ship, with steam up, must be ready for sailing, at the wharf of Marseilles. And now, please consider the matter; I am willing to allow you five minutes to do so."

The banker thought he was dreaming. Was it possible for anybody to demand of him, of the firm of Mortimer & Co., a complete, well-equipped steamer as if he could shake it out of his sleeve?

"Three minutes have already passed," reminded Clary, threatening with her finger.

Mortimer was scratching his forehead almost despairingly. It was close upon midnight, all offices closed. Where could he procure a vessel?

"The five minutes have passed," said Clary, coolly, rising to her feet.

Madame Caraman breathed more easily when she took hold of the door-handle; now the nonsensical plan was defeated.

"Pray do not trouble your cashier any further," remarked Clary, standing on the threshold. "I shall find somewhere else what I am in need of."

"But, mademoiselle," groaned Mortimer, before whose eyes Bradwood's figure appeared like a spectre, "you are demanding impossibilities of me."

"Mr. Mortimer," said Clary, with indifference, "two hundred years ago one of my ancestors pointed to the city of Edinburgh and said to his captain:

"'In two hours I desire to dine at the bishop's palace in Edinburgh!'

"The city was fortified, and from the walls the cannons spread their deadly fire; but the captain did not say it was impossible, but he inquired:

"'What does your lordship desire to have for dinner?'

"Two hours later my ancestor dined in the bishop's palace; the captain, of course, lost his life in the combat. Come, Madame Caraman."

"With pleasure," replied the governess, and both ladies left the office.

"Mademoiselle," sounded despairingly behind them.

"Well?" asked Clary, stopping.

"I do not promise for certain," stammered Mortimer, "but I believe — "

"Vessel, captain, mate, and sailors."

"Yes, dear me, yes," groaned Mortimer, dropping exhausted into a chair.

"And to-morrow at daybreak — "

"It will, no doubt, be possible to comply with your request."

"Especially be careful in selecting a captain; and the broker will have to sell me the ship."

"This transaction also will be carried out."

"Well, then, please arrange everything; my time is very limited."

Madame Caraman gazed despairingly at the banker; he was really ready to lend his hand to such a stupid affair?

"No, I do not give my permission," she at length resolutely declared. "I have obligations toward Lord Ellis, and I object to it."

Clary took the governess's head, kissed her heartily, and whispered to her:

"Be persuaded, Mamma Caraman. I desire it, and therefore we depart."

Submitting to Providence, she bent her head down; she was consoled.

"Do not lose time, Mr. Mortimer," she then said, respectfully, "it has to be."

Now a slender-built man, with rosy cheeks and red beard, entered the office; it was the bridegroom.

"Here is the amount required," said he, handing the banker a packet of bank-notes.

"Are the bank-notes legal tender in Algiers?" asked Clary.

Father-in-law and son-in-law looked upon her pitifully; they were Bank of England notes, which even a Greenlander would expect to have cashed on sight.

"Edwards," said the banker, vivaciously, "is Wharton in the ball-room?"

"Yes, father."

"Tell him to come here directly."

"Who is Wharton?" asked Clary.

"The only man I can trust to leave a ball at midnight to get a ship ready for sailing. It will be a dear affair though."

Clary laughed.

"Mr. Mortimer, am I rich enough to pay this Wharton?"

"Oh, with your fortune you could buy a thousand Whartons."

"And he will do all I ask of him?"

"Yes."

"Good! Wharton is my man. One thing more, Mr. Mortimer. You have the confidence of my family. I will give you a power of attorney to do with my fortune what you wish in case — "

"In case?"

"I do not return from Algeria."

"Oh, mademoiselle!" exclaimed Mortimer, with emotion. "Are you going to run such dangers?"

"I do not say that, but business is business, and I always like to have things in order."

"Here is Mr. Wharton," said the son-in-law.

The person who entered was a man of herculean stature. His thick head was covered with bushy red hair.

Clary looked curiously at the giant.

"Are you an Englishman, Mr. Wharton?" she asked.

"No, an American from Baltimore, miss, and your humble servant."

"Mademoiselle," interrupted Mortimer, "will you please explain to Mr. Wharton the nature of the business?"

"Willingly. Will you take a seat, please?"

"Thank you," replied the Yankee, "I prefer to stand."

"Mr. Wharton, you have a ship at anchor at Marseilles?"

"A ship, no, a pearl — the Crocodile — which is famous all over the world for its stanchness and rapidity."

"You own it?"

"Yes."

"How much did it cost you, Mr. Wharton?"

“How much did it cost me? That is a peculiar question,” muttered the American.

“Captain,” said Clary, rising, “I am rich, very rich. I am going to make you a proposition, and hope you will accept it. What price do you ask for the Crocodile?”

“But the Crocodile is not for sale. I would rather die than give up my ship.”

The captain paced up and down the room with giant strides and struck his forehead with his fist. The proposition, together with the liquors he had drunk, excited him.

“Let us say 100,000 francs,” said Clary.

The captain continued to strike his forehead.

“One hundred and twenty thousand francs.”

The strokes became weaker.

“A good business,” said Mortimer.

“And you shall not be separated from your beloved Crocodile,” said Clary, laughingly; “for as soon as I become the owner of the vessel, I shall make you its captain.”

“I’ll accept the offer.”

“Good; Mr. Mortimer will pay you the money.”

“Willingly,” said the banker, “as soon as everything is arranged.”

“That shall be done at once,” exclaimed the giant, gleefully; “and, miss, give me your hand to bind the bargain.”

The young girl became frightened; if the giant were to grasp her slender fingers he might crush them, and yet she knew that the shake of the hand was the usual mode sailors chose to bind a bargain. Hesitatingly she held forth her hand, but Wharton, who guessed her anxiety, laid his fist in hers in as gentle a manner as possible. The girl laughed and said:

“Captain, have steam up at once!”

“Yes, miss; but the ball?”

“The ball is a secondary matter. You are my captain, and, naturally — ”

“You are right. I didn’t care for the ball, anyhow. It was only the fine brandy I thought of.”

“I will tell Mr. Mortimer to let you have a few bottles. Captain, when does the sun rise to-morrow?”

“At 6.18 a.m.”

“Good; at 6.19 you can depart.”

“You will be satisfied with me. You have got a good captain, a boatswain and eight sailors. I am the smallest of the lot. Where are we going to, anyway?”

“To Algiers, captain. There is one thing more I wish to say.”

“Speak, commodore.”

“Have you noticed a yacht in the harbor? the flag is a gold mountain on a red field.”

“Yes, the little peanut-shell,” he said, disdainfully, “which is called the Ice Bird.”

“Yes, the Ice Bird. This peanut-shell, as you call it, starts to-morrow morning for Algeria. Whether it intends to stop at Bona or Algiers I do not know. You would do well to find out.”

“I will do so,” said Wharton.

“Then good-by, and remember to-morrow.”

When the ladies rode home the governess sighed.

“Oh, miss, what will Lord Ellis say?”

“That my brother has now a chance to come into the inheritance,” laughed Miss Clary.

CHAPTER XLV

MALDAR

Haydee and Mercedes were seated in a magnificently furnished boudoir, engaged in a lively conversation. Spero's dark head lay in his mother's lap. They were both talking of their beloved ones. Mercedes said, that if Albert died her life would be at an end. Haydee only thought of Spero.

Spero, too, thought about the seriousness of his position, and was in this, as in other things, far in advance of his age. He felt deep despair at the idea of a separation from his mother, but the halo which surrounded his father gave the boy courage.

Six o'clock had now struck. Haydee's arm clung tighter to Spero, and a tear fell upon the youth's dark locks.

Monte-Cristo softly opened the door and entered. His face looked pale and careworn. Spero ran to meet his father. The count took him in his arms and softly asked:

"Are you ready, my son?"

"Yes, father," replied Spero, simply; "where you go, I follow."

Haydee hurriedly dried her tears as Monte-Cristo drew nearer. She clung to his bosom, and whispered:

"Am I to lose you both? If I only knew when you were going to return."

The count turned to Mercedes.

"Mercedes," he said to Albert's mother, "you see I do not shrink from any sacrifice when it is a question of duty. Love my Haydee and console her. She needs it."

"I swear it," replied Mercedes, solemnly; and, clasping Haydee in her arms, she added: "There is still time, Haydee; tell me, 'My husband and my child should stay here,' and I shall acquiesce in it."

"You hear her words, Haydee," said Monte-Cristo, casting an anxious look at Ali Tebelen's daughter. "What is your answer?"

Haydee's beautiful face was illuminated with a halo as she took Spero's arm and led him to his father.

"Be worthy of him," she whispered, with emotion.

Mercedes sank sobbing at the young wife’s feet, and exclaimed:

“Now I shall get my son back again; I feel it.”

The count finished all his preparations and chose the best weapons. He went with Spero to the dock the next morning, and was met by Jacopo, who looked like a different person.

“Have you inspected everything?” asked Monte-Cristo of the Corsican. “And are you satisfied?”

“Yes, master.”

“How many men have you?”

“Ten, sir; they are all trustworthy and have travelled in Africa before. I can answer for them.”

“Good. Ah! there you are, Coucou,” said the count, turning to the Zouave. “I am glad that you are punctual.”

The count inspected the yacht and expressed his delight to Jacopo.

The Crocodile was also lying, ready to sail, in the harbor. Wharton, confident of overtaking the Ice Bird, paced up and down the deck, rubbing his hands and from time to time casting contemptuous glances at the yacht.

From all the towers of Marseilles the seventh morning hour was rung. The count gave the signal for the departure, and the Ice Bird glided gracefully through the waters.

Monte-Cristo stood on deck looking back at France, where a part of his heart was left behind.

He had been talking with Spero for over an hour about their future plans, when a sudden commotion was heard, and the count, who was a strict disciplinarian, looked angrily about. Before he had time to inquire about the cause of the noise, a heavy mass came rolling down the cabin stairs. The count opened the door and saw the Zouave and another strange looking person, lying like a ball of cord on the floor. They both rose, but the Zouave would not let go of the other’s throat at any price. The stranger was dressed in rags, and his thin, haggard face and glaring eyes made a disagreeable impression.

“What is the meaning of this, Coucou?” asked the count, angrily.

“Captain,” the Zouave breathlessly replied, “I know I did wrong, but I could not help it. Just look at the face of this fellow.”

Monte-Cristo looked searchingly at the man.

“Where did you pick him up?” he asked of the Zouave.

“In the engine room, close to the boiler. His brain must be half roasted already.”

A cloud passed over the count’s face.

“Who are you?” he said, turning to the stranger.

The man remained motionless. It was plain he did not understand the question.

The count now saw that the man was an Arabian, and repeated the question in that tongue.

“I am a poor man,” the stranger submissively replied.

“How did you get to the ship?”

The Arabian was silent.

Monte-Cristo looked at the man again, and soon comprehended that the man was a hypocrite and an impostor.

Either the man was poor and had no money to go back to his home or else he was a spy.

“You were in France?” the count suddenly said to the Arabian; “how did you get there?”

“In one of the ships of your nation.”

“How long ago is that?”

“Woe to him who counts the days and hours.”

“Why did you not come to me? Were you afraid I would refuse to take you on board?”

“Was I to beg?” asked the Arabian, disdainfully.

“What would you do if I were to put you adrift in a bark?”

“Allah is great!”

Coucou understood enough of Arabian to comprehend the pride which lay in the stranger’s words. He would have given anything to have been able to carry out the count’s threats; he advanced a step, but Monte-Cristo saw his intention and motioned him back.

“Man,” he said to the Arab, “you did wrong to put yourself in my power. Nevertheless, I shall be hospitable to you. Go!”

Turning to Coucou, he said:

“This man is my guest, and as such he must be sacred to you.”

The Arab bowed, put his hand to his forehead, and turned toward the stairs.

“One question more,” said the count; “what is your name?”

“I am called Maldar.”

“You said you were poor, and yet your name signifies riches.”

“He whom Allah protects is rich,” replied the Arab, in veiled tones.

CHAPTER XLVI

MISS CLARY’S SECRET

For any one else but Miss Clary Ellis, it would be no small matter to make such a journey; but she knew no fear, and in spite of the frail expression of her face, there was no hindrance she could not overcome when she wished to carry out a project. Her governess murmured when she ordered her to get everything ready. According to her it was madness to go to a “monkey-land,” as she termed Africa. But Miss Clary paid no attention to her, but went right on packing her trunks, and at four o’clock she was all ready.

She now called for John. This paragon of a servant would rather have cut off his tongue and hands than ask a question.

“John,” said Clary, “have the horses harnessed.”

“Yes, my lady.”

“See that these trunks are carried down to the carriage.”

“Yes, my lady.”

“We shall leave Marseilles.”

“Yes, my lady.”

“We go to Algeria; if you have any preparations to make, do so.”

“Yes, my lady.”

Had John been told that they were to start on a voyage to the moon, he would have answered in his stereotyped way: “Yes, my lady.”

Five minutes later the carriage was at the door.

“It is serious, then,” sighed the governess. “We are going to Algeria, then. Do you know, Clary, I have been weak to give in so?”

Clary did not reply, and Madame Caraman, encouraged by her silence, continued:

“Suppose an accident should happen to you, I would not survive the blow, for I love you. Wait another day, and if you still persist in your determination, I am satisfied.”

When the governess had ended, Clary offered her her hand, and mockingly said:

“If you do not survive the shock of my death, you will not have to answer for it.”

“No, no; prove to me that I am wrong.”

“God forbid! You are right; but nevertheless — ”

“Stick to your plan, then; but suppose I do not accompany you?”

“It would cause me great grief, but could not alter my resolution. I am young, Madame Caraman, very rich, and wish to enjoy life for once — no one loves me — ”

“Ah, Clary, you have a heart of gold,” sobbed Madame Caraman.

“Accompany me to Algeria, Madame Caraman; I need your consolation and comforting care. I go there to perform a good action.”

Madame Caraman looked keenly at Clary. The latter blushed, and continued:

“Mercedes deplores the loss of her son, and I desire to restore him to her if it is possible. Think what joy will be mine if Albert flies to the arms of his mother and I can proudly say: ‘This is my work.’“

The governess pondered deeply, and Clary, who was deceived by her silence, impetuously exclaimed:

“Mamma Caraman, answer me. Have I not expressed myself clearly? I have never been of service to any one. Yet, while there are people who offer up their lives and their energies to help others, is it a sin for me to desire to do likewise?”

“You mean, by that, the Count of Monte-Cristo?” replied Madame Caraman, thoughtfully.

Clary blushed.

“Yes,” she said, softly. “The count is my model.”

“And you wish to follow this ‘model’ to Africa?”

“There is a good deed to be done there, and I, who have nothing to lose, shall follow him.”

Madame Caraman looked smilingly at her.

“I see,” she said, simply, “there is nothing to be done but to let you have your way.”

Clary had expected more resistance. She burst into tears, and threw her arms around Madame Caraman’s neck, and the governess tenderly kissed the young girl.

John now opened the door, and told them the carriage was ready.

“Forward!” exclaimed Madame Caraman, cheerfully, “and let us pray to God that we return again in good health.”

On the way to the harbor, Clary wept silently. Madame Caraman wisely kept her thoughts to herself.

“I was once young myself,” she muttered to herself, “and I know how it looks in an eighteen-year-old girl’s heart. Yes, if I were twenty years younger, I don’t know but that I would fall in love with this Count of Monte-Cristo myself.”

Had Madame Caraman discovered Clary’s secret?

CHAPTER XLVII

AN AMERICAN WAGER

Jack Wharton was not one of those men who mean something else than what they say. His whole vocabulary was either “Yes” or “No,” just as the circumstances were. When Clary arrived at the harbor at seven o’clock, she found a troop of giants awaiting her, who stood in line like Prussian grenadiers. Wharton moved his hat, and said:

“You see, my lady, we are punctual.”

“I did not expect anything else,” Clary simply replied, “and please see that my luggage is carefully brought on board — and nothing broken,” she added, as she cast a glance at the broad forms of the sailors.

Wharton promised to carry out her orders faithfully.

“Have you never had any adventures, captain?” she asked. “I should like to know something about your wife.”

“Mrs. Wharton is a pearl — she was a widow when I married her — ”

“Ah!”

“Yes,” continued Wharton, indifferently; “I ate up her first husband; he was a splendid fellow.”

Saying which he opened the carriage door and assisted the ladies on board the boat. Clary, as she stood on deck, noticed a gold-colored flag flying from a staff.

“What does the color of that flag mean?” she asked.

“Ah, my lady, as our commodore has gold blond hair, I permitted myself to hoist up flags of the same color.”

“Well, I must say,” said Madame Caraman, “that beats Sir Walter Raleigh’s gallantry; you know he placed his gold-embroidered mantle in the mud for Queen Elizabeth to walk upon.”

At this moment a tall, lean figure as graceful as a mast loomed up on deck.

“Mrs. Wharton,” said the captain, proudly.

Clary and her governess shuddered as they looked at Mrs. Wharton.

The copper-colored face of the woman looked like the broken hilt of a knife; her coal-black hair gleaming with oil was tied in a knot at the back of her head; the large mouth did not hide the still larger yellow teeth and the flat nose was bored with holes. Her ears were decorated with three gold rings apiece. Her dress consisted of a dark red skirt, fastened at the waist by a gold cord. Her decollete waist allowed the brown skin to be perceived, and her flat feet were inclosed in moccasins. Yet, in spite of Minnie Wharton's repulsive appearance, her husband loved her.

As soon as Mrs. Wharton saw the two ladies she invited them, in a voice which sounded like the croak of a raven, to her cabin. They were both astonished when they entered it to find it a beautifully furnished boudoir, whose silk hangings and bric-a-brac made it look more like a parlor of the Faubourg St. Germain than a ship's cabin.

"The ladies will excuse me," said Minnie, "but the time was short and I could do no better."

"You do not mean," exclaimed Clary, surprised, "that you did everything during the night?"

"The captain did not get back until midnight, and I hurriedly purchased the things in the stores of Marseilles."

Clary thought it was a tale out of the "Arabian Nights."

Wharton had thought it a question of honor to show the young lady that she had not paid too dearly for the Crocodile, and had he been able to take down the moon, he would have hung it as a night-lamp in her cabin. The captain and his wife had scoured the shops of Marseilles at one in the morning and bought all the things, paying dearly for them. The room of Madame Caraman was also a model of neatness. Next to the bed stood a small table, upon which was a silver service with a bottle of brandy on it. Madame Caraman was delighted, and when her sense of smell detected the fine quality of the brandy, she was almost moved to tears.

A head appeared in the doorway, and the captain said:

"My lady, the Ice Bird left ten minutes ago, and five minutes later the Crocodile lifted anchor."

"Good, captain. You are sure of being able to over-take the Ice Bird?"

"Leave that to me, my lady."

The captain now thought that the time for dining had come, and invited the ladies into a charming little room.

"Captain, you are a magician," exclaimed the young girl, laughing. "Such a beautiful dining-room, and flowers too," she added, as she perceived a huge bank of flowers.

"Oh, what lovely flowers," she exclaimed delightedly.

"Mrs. Wharton is the magician, my lady," replied the captain; "and now please be seated."

"Directly," replied Clary laughing; "but first permit me to beg your wife and yourself to join us."

Two more covers were placed on the table.

The breakfast was a substantial English meal, and consisted of tea, coffee, eggs and ham. They were all tasty dishes. The conversation was very lively until Mrs. Wharton arose and begged to be excused as she had other duties to perform.

"Ah, my Minnie is a pearl," murmured Wharton, looking tenderly back at her.

"You seem to be much attached to each other," said Clary, cordially.

"Oh, my lady, how could it be otherwise? We have not been separated from each other since twenty years; we have common remembrances which we can never forget."

"If I am not mistaken, you said before that Mrs. Wharton was a widow?"

"Yes, the widow of a Sioux."

"And did she belong to the same tribe?"

"Yes, my lady, but she is long since a Christian."

"And who was her husband?"

"A Sioux, poor Tu-Sam-Ba."

"And how did he die, you say?"

"I ate him up, my lady."

"Ah, really?"

"Yes," said Wharton, sorrowfully; "his wife and I ate him up, and through this circumstance Minnie became a widow."

Natural as it seemed to the captain, Madame Caraman gazed in open horror, and as soon as she could recover the use of her tongue, she asked for explanations.

The captain was not loth to tell his story, and just as he was settling himself comfortably in a chair, Clary exclaimed:

"Before you begin, captain, take a look at the yacht."

"I shall," said Wharton, "but you can rest easy and trust in the Crocodile."

The captain disappeared, and Madame Caraman, turning to Clary, said:

"We have come among strange people."

"We had no other choice, and we might have fared worse."

"Well, I'm much obliged for the consolation — cannibals!"

Clary was silent. What could she have answered?

In about ten minutes the captain returned out of breath.

"Think of it," he said; "these stupid firemen have not put on enough steam, and when I came on deck — "

"The Ice Bird was far away," interrupted Clary.

"I cannot deny it, but it will be all right."

"And your promise?"

"Ah, my lady, I would like to make you a wager."

"A wager?"

"Yes, that when we arrive at Bona, the Ice Bird will not be visible."

"Good."

"And now let me continue with the story of my marriage — "

"Oh, yes; I should like to know more about your wedding supper," said Madame Caraman.

The captain lighted a cigar and began:

"In the first place, ladies, you must know that I have not always been rich. I have not got a million yet, but I am in comfortable circumstances, so to speak. Twenty-five years ago I had not a dollar in the world. I did everything, but could not succeed in anything. In November, 1825, I was absolutely penniless, and one of my comrades, Dick Merton, who was as badly off as myself, made a proposition to me to go to California. At that time California was still hardly explored.

"'I will go along,' I said, in answer to Dick's proposition.

"'You know the peril, Jack,' he replied. 'You might be in danger of being captured by the Indians and eaten up.'

"At any other time, and under different circumstances, I might have hesitated, but my position was a desperate one, and I accepted. The next day, armed to the teeth, we started. We were eight when we started. When we reached San Francisco only five of us were left. One was killed by the bite of a snake, and the rest fell down the precipices of the Rocky Mountains. At that time none of the comforts and luxuries to be found there to-day existed. We worked with pick and axe, and stilled our hunger with the wild animals we killed. Two weeks later trouble arose in the camp. Some of our party maintained that we had chosen a bad place, because the gold did not pan out as well as they had hoped. Others again persisted in upholding the spot selected. The upshot of the matter was, that we parted. I and two others remained, the rest departing in a westerly direction.

"We built a block-house. It was situated under the shadow of a gigantic cedar-tree and protected us from the wind and rain. All went along swimmingly until one day I heard a yell of joy from Dick. I ran toward him, and to my surprise I saw a vein of gold, which, at a superficial calculation, must be worth a million dollars. We danced about for joy. Very soon Osborne, our third companion, came. We returned to our hut, and after drinking a large quantity of whiskey in honor of the event, we went to bed. As usual, we were fully dressed with our weapons in our hands ready for any emergency. How long I slept I do not know, but I was suddenly awakened by a loud yell, which still rings in my ears. Starting up, I looked around and beheld Osborne staring with wide-open mouth at something which lay in a corner.

"'What is the matter?' I asked.

"Osborne did not reply, but pointed to a corner near the door. I looked in the direction indicated, and by the dim light of the lamp saw to my horror — a rattlesnake. I looked around for Dick; he was leaning against the wall, his face ghastly pale. Before I was aware of it Dick had kicked in the strong door. Osborne must have had the same idea for he too rushed for the door. They both reached the threshold at the same time.

"The door was too narrow to allow them both to pass; Dick seized Osborne by the throat; a struggle ensued, and the next minute Osborne sank to the ground with Dick's bowie-knife plunged up to the hilt in his breast. The snake, aroused by the noise, sprang up and struck Dick a deadly blow.

"In a moment he was in convulsions."

Wharton paused. The perspiration stood on his forehead and the muscles of his lips twitched. Clary buried her face in her hands, and Madame Caraman prevented herself from fainting by taking a glass of brandy.

"I beg your pardon, ladies," the captain proceeded, "but the memory of that awful time overcame me. I am no coward, but the terrible sight unmanned me. The rattlesnake looked at me with its hideous eyes. The fear of death nerved me, and seizing my gun I discharged it full at the monster and then lost consciousness. When I recovered next morning and saw the dead bodies of Dick and Osborne I broke into tears."

"Captain," interrupted Clary, "your tale is so interesting that one is apt to forget, but — "

"But what?" asked Wharton expectantly.

"I am anxious to know how many knots the Crocodile is making."

"Ah! I was not thinking of that. I am sure of my ship."

"So much the better; let us go on deck."

"And my story?"

"Can be continued later on; I am to know yet how the Indian's widow became your wife."

Wharton preceded the ladies to the deck. He knew his ship and had no fears. The weather was magnificent and the vessel's sails were swelled by the breeze. Clary looked in every direction to catch a glimpse of the Ice Bird, but could not see it.

"Captain, where is the Ice Bird?" she said, turning to Wharton.

"The Ice Bird? It's far behind. How could it compare in speed with the Crocodile?"

"Are you sure of it?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Please ask one of the sailors!"

Wharton did so, and was astonished when he was told that the "peanut-shell," as he called the Ice Bird, made twenty-three knots an hour, whereas the Crocodile made only twelve. The long face he made at this announcement caused Clary to burst into a loud laugh.

"You see it is folly to attempt to overtake the Count of Monte-Cristo," said Madame Caraman to Clary; "if you follow my advice, return to Marseilles, where we can wait for news of the Ice Bird and — "

"Go back?" interrupted Clary. "Never!"

"But Monte-Cristo will arrive before us, and two hours after his arrival at Bona he will be on his way to the desert, and you do not intend to follow him there among the lions, tigers and jackals, do you?"

"Mamma Caraman, if you are afraid, you can go back to France," said Clary, gently.

Captain Wharton now came back.

"Well," said Clary to him, "what's to be done?"

“We will overtake the Ice Bird, and all of us will be at your service and not leave you until you discharge us yourself. Will that do?”

“Captain,” said Clary, “I am afraid you are promising too much again.”

“Oh, no; this time I am confident of success.”

“But can you answer for your men?”

Wharton blew a whistle. All the crew appeared.

“Men,” he said, turning to the sailors, “are you going to stand by me and follow me wherever the ship goes?”

“Yes!” they cried in chorus.

“Are you satisfied, my lady?” asked the captain, triumphantly.

“Yes.”

“Where are we to go?” asked the captain.

“To the interior of Africa, in fact in the neighborhood of the Sahara.”

“Good, commodore,” replied the captain.

“The captain,” she said, turning to the men, “shall pay you whatever you demand. All I ask of you is devotion.”

“We swear it!” shouted the sailors, enthusiastically swinging their caps.

Mrs. Wharton approached the young lady and said:

“Have you forgiven the captain, miss?”

“Long since, Mrs. Wharton,” replied Clary, grasping her hand.

Clary and Madame Caraman withdrew to their boudoir.

“Don’t you think it rather dangerous to be in the society of these people?” asked Madame Caraman.

“Have no fear, Mamma Caraman; I answer for everything.”

“One question more, dear child. What was the cause of your apparent indifference to-day, when you heard that the Ice Bird had distanced the Crocodile?”

Clary blushed deeply, and throwing her arms about Madame Caraman’s neck, whispered:

“I confess it did not surprise me. I did not wish to wound Monte-Cristo by overtaking him.”

“Monte-Cristo,” murmured Madame Caraman; “ah, my darling, take care.”

CHAPTER XLVIII

THE WEDDING BREAKFAST

The Crocodile sped swiftly along that day. Clary, who had become tired, went to sleep, while the governess sat in a chair near the bed and dreamed.

The night passed, and the next morning Clary asked the captain whether they were in sight of land.

“Yes,” replied the captain.

“And how long will it be before we enter the harbor?”

“About two hours.”

“Good. Let me make you a proposition. We can dine now, and you can tell us the conclusion of your story.”

An hour later dinner was concluded, and the captain continued his narrative.

“At the moment I put foot on the threshold of the cabin I heard a peculiar noise, and at the same moment an arrow flew past my head and lodged itself in the door. Where had the arrow come from? What to do I knew not. Suddenly an inspiration came to me. The cabin was pretty solidly built, and the roof was constructed of thick canewood. Around the four sides were thick planks, which offered me shelter in case of an attack. That my enemies were Indians I felt sure. I locked the door, barricaded it from the inside, and felt sorry that the rattlesnake was dead, for it would have been a splendid weapon against the Indians. Going up to the roof, and lying flat on my stomach, I peered out. I shuddered when I saw my enemies. They were Indians of the worst kind. With the Sioux and Chippewas we had kept up friendly relations, but these were Arikaras, our bitterest foes. This tribe were deadly enemies of the whites, and the refined cruelty with which they tortured their prisoners made them feared by all. They were all armed with muskets, and numbered about fifty warriors. At the rear of the group I saw two Sioux. One was a man and the other a woman. The man was Tu-Sam-Ba; the woman, his wife, the ‘Prairie Flower,’ the present Mrs. Wharton. They seemed to be prisoners, and when I thought of the custom of the Arikaras to roast their prisoners alive, a thrill of horror ran through my veins. The attitude of the ‘Prairie Flower’ was so noble that she immediately won my heart. ‘Either you or no one,’ I thought, and firmly resolved to attempt the rescue of my angel.”

The “angel” tried in vain to allay her husband’s excitement. Madame Caraman could hardly restrain her laughter whenever she looked at the angel. Clary, on the other hand, preserved her gravity, and calmly said:

“I appreciate your feelings, captain; continue.”

Wharton bowed profoundly and proceeded.

“The Arikaras surrounded the cabin, while I lay motionless, with my hand on the trigger of my gun. The savages now began to break in the door and soon effected an entrance. Immediately I heard a loud noise. They had discovered the two dead bodies and the rattlesnake. They thought the two whites had killed the rattlesnake, which is regarded as a sacred animal by them, and that Manitou, their god, had struck them dead. A place which Manitou visits is sacred to them, and I thought that they would leave the hut. An ugly Indian, who seemed to be the chief, commanded silence and delivered a long speech to his subjects. At its conclusion the Indians moved about and began to gather brushwood. They piled it in heaps on the floor of the cabin and the chief set fire to it. Presently the smell of burning flesh reached me. They were burning Dick and Osborne’s bodies. At the same moment a bright flame licked the roof, my gun exploded in consequence of the heat, and, half dead with fright, I fell into the middle of the group. My fate was settled now. They surrounded me, bound me with cords, and with wild yells they rushed out bearing me along. I — ”

“Captain,” interrupted Clary, “don’t you think we have reached Bona yet?”

“No,” replied Wharton, vivaciously, “not before the next two hours.”

Clary laughed loudly, and the captain saw that he had committed a blunder.

“I fainted,” continued the captain, “and when I came to my senses it was pitch dark and I lay on the ground, bound hand and foot. By the flickering light of a camp-fire I saw the Arikaras sitting around and calmly smoking their pipes. Tu-Sam-Ba was tied to a post, while the Prairie Flower crouched at his feet. I determined to speak to the Indians, and gathering courage, I exclaimed in the English language:

“‘Comrades, do you intend to let me starve? Have I done you any wrong?’

"'You are an enemy of our race. You killed the sacred serpent.'

"'Should I have waited then until it had killed me?'

"'You have killed,' exclaimed one redskin, 'and you will be killed in your turn.'

"The chief now claimed my scalp. It was awarded to him. While the redskins were carrying on a war-dance, I again lost consciousness. I did not awake until I felt a hand pressed lightly on my forehead. It was the 'Prairie Flower.'

"'Tu-Sam-Ba is dead,' she softly whispered; 'he was roasted. Arikaras surprised — escaped!'

"She raised me from the ground, and, carrying me in her arms as if I had been a child, she brought me to a glade in the forest.

"'I am hungry,' I said, pointing to my mouth.

"The woman looked at me for a moment in despair, and shrugged her shoulders to indicate to me that there was no hotel in the neighborhood."

At this point of the story Mrs. Wharton disappeared, and Madame Caraman took advantage of her absence to ask a question.

"Has Minnie changed much since that time?"

"Oh, yes," replied the captain, his face lighting up with pleasure, "she has grown much handsomer."

This was too much for Madame Caraman's composure, and, coughing loudly, she pressed a handkerchief to her lips and vanished through the door.

The captain looked wonderingly after her, and, turning to Clary, said:

"My lady, I had much rather be alone with you! Not every one is able to appreciate the sacrifice Mrs. Wharton made for me."

"Please continue your story."

"Suddenly," said Wharton, taking up the thread of his story, "the squaw vanished, but returned soon after with a package carefully enveloped in leaves. She removed the leaves, and, with a light sob, handed me several pieces of roasted meat.

"I took them eagerly and ate ravenously of the food, which was very tasty. Seeing her melancholy looks, I asked her to partake of some. She shook her head.

"'I am not hungry,' she softly murmured.

"'Then I shall not eat any more,' I declared.

“Seeing me determined, she hesitated no longer, and joined me in the meal. When we had finished, I asked her where she had procured the meat, and, with bowed head, she replied:

“‘Tu-Sam-Ba roasted — Arikaras disturbed — did not eat — Tu-Sam-Ba, Sioux — my husband.’

“Good God! I had eaten her husband, and the Prairie Flower had not hesitated to serve him up roasted to me! My lady, is there anything in history equal to this!”

“No, I know of none,” replied Clary, hurriedly.

“Ah, I knew it; I — ”

“Captain,” said a sailor, opening the door, “we are nearing the harbor of Bona.”

Clary rose hastily; she felt as if a terrible burden had been lifted off her shoulders.

“Do you not approve of my marriage?” asked Wharton, anxiously; “she is a Sioux, but has become a Christian?”

“Certainly, I can understand your case perfectly.”

Wharton went away and Clary was left behind. She pondered deeply, whether she had done right in trusting herself to the care of these cannibals.

CHAPTER XLIX

MALDAR'S FAREWELL

The Ice Bird flew like an arrow over the glistening waters, and in a few hours land was in sight. Monte-Cristo went on deck with his son, and was delighted at the latter's enthusiasm.

"Spero," he said, solemnly placing his hand on the boy's head, "in less than two hours you will set foot in a new world. Great dangers await you. Will you have the courage to brave them?"

"Oh, papa, when you are near me, I have no fear."

"Do not speak thus; circumstances may happen which may separate us. The desert is still unexplored, and the horrors of nature are not always the greatest dangers which threaten mankind."

"But why do you speak of such things, papa?" said Spero, terrified.

"Because I am not immortal. I may be conquered. Spero, look me in the eye, and swear to me that, should anything occur, you will not despair. You must never forget that you owe everything to your mother. Love her like one of those sainted women, for she deserves it."

"What do you fear, father?"

"Nothing. Rest easy, my son; I live and watch over you."

The next minute Monte-Cristo was giving his orders as usual to the sailors. Yet he was inwardly uneasy; a heavy load seemed to bear him down, and the air he breathed threatened to choke him.

And yet he was surrounded by faithful servants, who would willingly have given up their lives for him — Jacopo, Bertuccio, and Coucou. They were all ready to brave any danger, and the breast of each of them was a wall of protection about him.

The town rose before the gaze of the travellers. Monte-Cristo leaned against the prow, and gazed enthusiastically at the harbor where the Carthaginian barks had hidden Hannibal's plunder.

Suddenly Jacopo hurried on deck, and excitedly exclaimed:

"Master — come quickly — your cabin door is open."

"What of that?"

“The safe is open, too.”

“Impossible!”

“Master, I saw with my own eyes the contents of the safe lying on the ground. Gold and diamonds are scattered about the floor.”

Monte-Cristo frowned. Was there a thief on board?

“Come, Spero,” he said, and, followed by Jacopo, father and son hurried to the cabin.

As the Corsican had said, the cabin was indeed open, and the carpet was strewn with emeralds, rubies, and other precious stones. Monte-Cristo at first examined the lock, the secret spring of which he alone knew how to open.

“It was not a thief who opened the safe,” he said to Jacopo.

“But the jewels — ”

“Just so. A thief would have taken them with him.”

Jacopo was silent; the truth of this assertion was evident to him.

“Has any one besides you known about it?” asked Monte-Cristo, after a pause.

“No one, master; I called you directly.”

“Good, Jacopo. Speak to no one about this matter.”

“But, master; if we have a thief on board — ”

Monte-Cristo frowned; he did not brook the least opposition.

“Go now, Jacopo, and keep quiet.”

When Jacopo had gone, Monte-Cristo called Spero, and bade him examine the lock to see if he could discover anything.

Spero obeyed, but found nothing.

Monte-Cristo laughed.

“You are still young,” he said. “Your eyes must first be taught how to see. There is a scratch on the lock which must have been made by a dagger.”

“But, father, who could have tried to open the lock with a dagger?”

“A man, whose name I will tell you later on. With great skill he put the dagger in the lock and opened it. The cleverest locksmith could not have done better. Look!”

Monte-Cristo shoved the point of his own sword in the lock, and opened it easily.

“Really it is so,” said Spero.

“And now let us look at the safe, which, I presume, was opened in the same way.”

Spero looked carefully at the lock, and then said:

"It has not been opened with a dagger, I am sure of it."

"How do you know this?"

"I see it, papa; the man must have had a spiral spring."

"A spiral spring?"

"Yes; such as is used in pocket watches."

"You are right."

"And he did his work carelessly, for he left this little piece sticking in the lock." And with these words Spero triumphantly held up a small piece of steel.

Monte-Cristo clasped the boy in his arms. Spero was the worthy pupil of the man whose powers of observation had been sharpened during his intercourse with the Abbe Faria.

"And now you shall know who the man was that broke in here," said the count, pushing aside the diamonds which more than half filled the middle drawer of the safe. "Look here! what is this?"

"A dagger, father," said Spero, in affright.

"And on this dagger a piece of parchment is fastened."

Monte-Cristo carefully unrolled the scrap of paper and read the following, written with blood, in Arabian characters:

"Maldar to Monte-Cristo. The poor man who trusts in Allah is richer than the nobleman who fights against him. Beware of the Khouans!"

"Who are the Khouans, papa?"

"I shall tell you later on — there is no time to lose now. Come!"

Hurriedly going on deck with Spero, the count accosted Jacopo.

"When did the Arab leave the ship?" he asked.

"He is still here, master, in the custody of Coucou."

"Are you sure, Jacopo? Tell him to come to me."

Jacopo disappeared, but soon returned.

"Master," he said, "the Zouave is fast asleep."

"And the Arab?"

"Has disappeared."

"Really?"

"Yes, but we will find him. Come, now! Search every corner of the ship."

Monte-Cristo stopped the sailors.

"It is useless," he said, pointing to the shore, "look there!"

Maldar stood on the beach, shaking his fist angrily at the yacht.

“Comrades, listen,” said Monte-Cristo, “the Arab is our deadly enemy. In Algeria every bush conceals a danger, every foot of ground carries an assassin! Do your duty, but look out for yourselves!”

The next minute the yacht reached the harbor — they were in Africa!

CHAPTER L

THE HOLY SIGNAL

At the southern end of the province of Oran, at the entrance to the Great Sahara, is the Salt Mountain, called by the Arabs Khenegel Melch. A solitary horseman rode slowly along the road. A white hood covered his head and a long gun was slung over his shoulder. Suddenly he halted and gazed around. On the left of him was the dark-red monolith called the Rock of Blood. Many murders had been committed at this place. On still nights faint groans are heard; they are like the cries of the spirits of the murdered ones, and the traveller who hears the sounds commends his soul to Allah and hurries away from the horrible spot. The solitary horseman threw back his hood from his face and lifted up his long thin arms in prayer. He sprang from his horse and examined the Rock of Blood carefully. On the stone near the base of the monolith was a star similar to those on his horse. The traveller prostrated himself on the ground, murmured a prayer and got on horseback again. The horse sped along like the wind, and was soon at the desert of the Great Sahara. Here all is light, not a shadow intercepts the rays of the sun, not a sound is heard here, all is silent. The horseman rode on, his eye gazing at the sun's disk, which was gradually setting. He did not seem to mind the glare, and upon a closer examination of his person one would have found this natural. He was scarred all over and appeared to have undergone every bodily ill. His bernouse flew aside and from the open breast the handle of a yataghan peeped; no cord or belt held it. It was attached to the man's skin. The man was a martyr. Not a part of his body was whole. He was a mass of cuts and bruises. His brothers called him a saint. He spoke to Allah and Allah listened to his speech. The desert was his empire, and a smile broke over his lips when he found himself on his territory. How he kept in his way without a path to guide him was a mystery. The sun had disappeared from the horizon. The man now rose in the stirrups and, taking his gun, laid his finger on the trigger. He seemed to be expecting something. Was it an enemy from heaven? His gun was pointed in that direction. The moon now rose pale and clear. A loud report was heard. The saint greeted the moon, and said these words from the Koran in a loud, firm voice:

"The time will come for those who are to appear before Allah's throne."

"The time has come," answered another voice.

"Swear by the wise Koran that you are sent to show the right road," continued the saint.

"I swear it by the wise Koran," replied the same voice.

"Are you he whom I expect?"

"I am he whom Allah sent."

"Have you the sacred signal?"

"Look!" replied the stranger, throwing his bernouse aside and showing his lean, naked breast, and on his brown breast shone a star with six points.

The saint got off his horse, kissed the ground, and muttered half aloud:

"Allah is Allah, and Mahomet is his prophet."

"Rise," said the other; "the true believer only kneels to Allah."

"Are you not Allah's messenger? Have you not come to chastise the infidel oppressors of the holy island?"

"I am he, but yet I say rise. The brothers know that I am here. They knew I would appear in the fourth month, at the hour when the moon rose before the setting sun had disappeared from the horizon. The brothers, then, have sent you?"

"Yes."

"Are they ready to obey the messenger of Allah? Are they ready to sacrifice their own and their wives' lives?"

"Look at me! I have torn my limbs with pincers. The brothers have done likewise. We are ready to obey."

"Then I say to you, Maldar Mohammed ben Abdallah, the hour for revenge has come. Death to the Giaours!"

He paused for a moment; then continued:

"Where are the Khouans?"

"At Uargla."

"Where are the Christian prisoners? Have my commands been obeyed?"

"Yes, master, not a hair of their heads has been touched; but the believers grumbled at showing them mercy and demanded their deaths, especially in the case of one, a French captain."

"What does a man's death signify — the drops of blood are lost in the sands, and their trails lost forever. Go tell the brothers that before the moon has reached its twentieth course, I shall be in their midst, and blood will flow in streams! Go!”

With an imperious wave of the hand Maldar pointed toward the horizon, and the Mekkadem prostrated himself anew.

“Yes,” said Maldar to himself when the saint had gone, “they shall all die, and the stream of their blood will be the spring out of which Allah’s warriors shall drink courage.”

CHAPTER LI

UARGLA

Lost in the immensity of the desert, Uargla, the queen of the oases, was, up to thirty years ago, little known. On the day Maldar had conversed with the saint a dense mass of people crowded about one of the chief gates of Uargla, and loud voices arose in the air. A horrible monster, all tattered and torn, had swung himself on a pile of stones, and begun to harangue the crowd.

"You think you are acting wisely," he cried, "and yet you are only fools. In the prisons of Kiobeh you keep the enemies of Islam, and while you are pondering over the mysteries of the Koran, the infidel dogs are murdering your wives and children. Arise, believers of Islam, and kill the Giaours!"

The crowd yelled like savages.

For more than six months prisoners had been kept in the fortress, and in spite of all the protestations of the inhabitants, their lives had been spared. It was time, many thought, to kill them and expose their heads to the birds of prey. The marabout was right, they said, and the crowd demanded the lives of the unfortunates. The marabout was delighted at the effect of his words, and uttering a cry he sprang from his perch and disappeared in the crowd. He knew the excited fanatics would follow him to the Kiobeh, and while he was walking on he pictured to himself the agonies the victims would have to endure. They must all die for the glory of Allah. In their blind hatred of the Christians, the Aratins, whose deep black color is not found in any other tribe, allied themselves with the Arabs, the Soudanese with the Mozambites, and yelling and shouting and armed with knives, guns and daggers, the savages marched toward the Kiobeh. Woe to the unfortunates who fell victims to such blind fanaticism — woe to the prisoners who were pining away in the Kiobeh!

CHAPTER LII

CAPTAIN JOLIETTE

Twenty feet under the Kiobeh were the cells hewn out of the rock. In one of the darkest of these dungeons lay a young man with a ball and chain around his ankles. Rags covered the emaciated form of the man, and only from small strips of the rotten and withered clothing could it be seen that he wore the uniform of a French soldier. From the left shoulder part of an epaulet hung, and a scabbard without any sword in it was tied around his waist.

A dark form appeared in the doorway, shoved some food toward the prisoner, and disappeared without saying a word.

Ten years before the prisoner was the bearer of a proud name. Young, rich and courted, Albert de Morcerf was the lion of the Parisian salons and the joy of his parents. One day a crash came like lightning from a clear sky, and destroyed his whole existence. His father was denounced in the Chamber of Peers as a traitor and an assassin. Count de Morcerf could not defend himself, for what he was charged with was the truth. The Countess of Morcerf buried herself at Marseilles under the name of Madame Joliette, while her son entered the army of Algeria or Chasseurs d’Afrique. In three years Albert Joliette had become a captain. As he lay now in his cell the past rose before him. He recollected his insult and challenge to the Count of Monte-Cristo, and his subsequent apology when he had heard Mercedes’ story. That day on coming home he discovered his father dead with a bullet in his brain, inflicted by his own hand.

But now the past had been atoned for. The bravery of the son expiated the old father’s crimes. When Albert returned home, Mercedes enjoyed new life at his side. But alas! The proud hopes soon vanished. All news from Albert ceased, and at the end of three months Mercedes, in despair, had written to the Count of Monte-Cristo.

Three months before Albert had been captured by the rebels, and incarcerated in the dungeon in which he still was. Not a human voice was ever heard. The black slave who served him with coffee could not be induced to say a word to him. Mercedes had told him the story of the Count of Monte-Cristo; he knew that Edmond Dantes had spent fourteen years in the Chateau d’If, and trembled when he thought of it. Yet if he were only able to escape! But Albert soon became convinced that this was impossible. There was no way out of these gloomy walls. He then made up his mind to starve himself, and for several days he had eaten nothing, so that he was astonished at finding himself still alive. When the slave withdrew on this particular day, Albert felt his head turn and he muttered half aloud:

“Mother, mother, forgive me, but I cannot do otherwise.”

At this moment a loud noise was heard, and the assassins led by the marabout entered Joliette’s dungeon.

He resolved to die bravely as became a French soldier.

Heavy blows were rained against his cell, and at the same moment Joliette heard a voice call to him:

“Captain, captain! Do not despair — help is at hand!”

Just then his cell door was burst open and the murderers rushed in.

CHAPTER LIII

THE LION IN CONFLICT WITH THE LION

We must go back with our story four days. Sixty leagues from Uargla an immense caravan was encamped. Not a tree or a green leaf could be seen for miles around, and yet it was here that Monte-Cristo cast his tent. Hardly had he arrived at Bona than he regained the vigor of his youthful days, and two hours after his landing Monte-Cristo was already on his way to the desert with a well-organized caravan. One hundred energetic men accompanied him, and his train consisted of two hundred horses and eight hundred camels. He and Spero were at the head of the party; Bertuccio, Jacopo and Coucou followed behind. Before he had left the ship, the count had called his son aside, and putting a map before him, he pointed with his finger to Uargla and said:

"This is the place we must go to — in Uargla we shall find what we are looking for."

Monte-Cristo knew that in the centre of the desert the queen of the oases, Uargla, lay, and that it was the principal refuge of sedition. He had known that Abd-el-Kader's imprisonment was but the commencement of a long and bloody war. The name given him by the Zouave, Mohammed ben Abdallah, he knew to be that of a treacherous villain. How did it happen, then, that Monte-Cristo had not recognized in the Arab who enjoyed his hospitality Mohammed ben Abdallah? The count had been rewarded for his generosity by having his cabin broken open, the contents of his safe scattered about, and being told to beware of the Khouans.

What the Fenians are to Ireland, the Thugs to India, the Khouans are to Arabia. They formed a brotherhood whose object was the murder and annihilation of all Europeans and Christians. Monte-Cristo knew the savage nature of these enemies. He was now within four days' journey of Uargla, and began to hope that perhaps he would find what he was seeking. When night came, Monte-Cristo withdrew with Spero to his tent. The count wrote to Haydee. A courier went north every day, but Monte-Cristo had not yet been able to send Mercedes any consolation. Spero, tired out by the fatigues of the day, had fallen asleep, and the father often gazed with pleasure at the finely chiselled face. How many dreams and hopes rested on this son! Yes, when he gazed at Spero, he had to confess that he had dealt too harshly with Morcerf. If he had been a father at that time, he would have hesitated before he had carried out his plan of vengeance. Ah! he must hurry and bring back to Mercedes her son, so that the punishment should not fall on Spero's head.

Suddenly Spero uttered a cry in his sleep, and looked wildly about him.

"No, no; let me go! Papa, help — they are carrying me away — help me!"

Monte-Cristo, frightened, bent over the sleeping boy.

"What is the matter, Spero?" he asked, tenderly; "have you been dreaming?"

"Oh, how glad I am it was only a dream! I will tell it to you."

"Speak, Spero, I am listening. You know," he consolingly added, "dreams are untrue."

"Yes, you have often told me that, and yet — "

The child paused and looked timidly in the corner of the tent.

"Why do you look so timidly over there?" asked the count, anxiously.

"Papa, do not laugh at me," whispered Spero, "but I do not think I was asleep. A little while ago, I saw the curtains of the tent part and a dark form appeared at the aperture."

"When was it, Spero?"

"At the moment when you laid the pen down and came to me."

"You saw me then? You were not sleeping?"

"I do not know, papa; I have read of the eye of the serpent, which frightens the little birds and prevents them from making a single movement. I could not move, and the two men drew near me. They pressed their long hands upon my forehead and wished to drag me off. Then finally I screamed and they disappeared."

Monte-Cristo embraced the excited child and reassuringly murmured:

"Keep quiet, Spero, I am with you."

Monte-Cristo looked thoughtful. Suppose his boy should be taken from him? No, it was nonsense. Spero must have been dreaming.

"Spero," he said, turning to the child, "I shall watch over your slumbers! Lie down again and have no fear. Come, I will kiss you; think of your mother and go to sleep."

The boy smiled now and his pale cheeks grew rosy. His father's voice gave him courage, and, laying his head upon Monte-Cristo's shoulder, he fell asleep, murmuring: "Dear, dear mother."

When he was fast asleep, Monte-Cristo gently withdrew his arm and softly walked to the corner of the tent. The cloth of which the tent was made was very strong and thick, and withstood the rays of the sun and the rain. When the count let his hand glide over it, he almost uttered a cry of astonishment. Spero had not been dreaming! The tent had been cut from top to bottom as if with a sharp sword.

Who had any interest in breaking into his tent? Did they wish to kill him or Spero?

The count turned deadly pale. He had tried to reassure Spero by telling him that dreams were untruths, but he himself felt disturbed. Throwing the curtains of the tent aside, Monte-Cristo went out into the night. The pale moonlight shone full upon the dark rocks. With the sharp glance of an eagle Monte-Cristo gazed about. It seemed hardly possible to him that two men had gone through the camp unhindered and undisturbed, and yet it was so. The cut in the canvas was the best proof of this. Shaking his head, the count returned to the tent and mended the tear in the cloth with fine wire thread. Thereupon he shoved the table near the wall and began to write. Spero could sleep peacefully; his father was watching. Haydee had intrusted the child to him, and he had to bring it back to her in safety. Suddenly he was aroused by the roar of a lion. The count seized a gun, flung his arm about Spero, whom he would not have left alone for the world, and hurried out. The Arabs, stricken with terror, had fled in all directions.

"Let no one stir!" shouted the count above the din. "I will answer for your life, but you must obey my orders."

"Here I am," said Coucou, coming forward. "Master, let me follow you. I know the lion and understand how to fight him."

"Master, take my life, but spare your own," implored Jacopo.

"Jacopo, Coucou," said the count, "I intrust Spero to you, and let no one fire until I do. The first shot belongs to me. If I should miss the lion, then you can take your turn."

A new uproar was heard, followed by the report of a gun.

"A man seems to have attacked the beast," said the count, running in the direction whence the sound proceeded.

To his horror he saw a man lying on the ground, and the lion standing over him with one paw on his breast. It was Bertuccio, Benedetto’s foster-father. Carefully, fearlessly, looking into the yellow eye of the king of beasts, Monte-Cristo advanced. The lion growled. The slightest movement would have caused Bertuccio’s death. With a bound it sprang at the count. Quick as thought the latter fired. With a roar of pain the majestic beast turned in the air and fell to the ground, dead. The next minute the count knelt at Bertuccio’s side. The latter was unconscious. The count raised his pale face, and, dashing some water over it, gradually restored the old man to his senses.

“Bertuccio,” he softly said, “do you know me?”

“Yes, master. Ah, the lion has finished me! Its claws were buried like daggers in my breast.”

“Have you nothing to say to me? Have you no wish to be carried out? Speak, you know I am your friend.”

“Quick, quick!” he whispered, breathlessly; “one more — drop — Spero — you — ”

“Drink!” said the count, placing a bottle to his lips.

“Master, beware of your enemies. I saw them, I followed them, and then I met the lion.”

“Enemies, you say? How many were there?”

“Two. They were Arabs. Ajassuas, as I believe. Oh, beware of them!”

“Bertuccio, since twenty years you have been a faithful friend to me. Speak, and I swear on my honor I will do what you say.”

“My dear master — it is — about — that wretch.”

“You speak of Benedetto?”

“Yes. I would have killed him then if you had not held me back, but yet I am glad I did not do it. I ask you as a favor to — ”

“To what?”

“To let Benedetto live, if he should ever cross your path. He must not die by your hand.”

“I swear not to kill him, Bertuccio; by the head of my child.”

Bertuccio muttered his thanks, and passed silently away.

“The lion has conquered the lion,” whispered a voice close to the count.

Monte-Cristo turned around and saw a delicate young girl in a white bernouse.

“Who are you?” he gently asked.

CHAPTER LIV

MEDJE

At the count's question, the girl passed her small white hand slowly across her forehead, and in a low voice said:

"I am she who no longer has any family, for her family has been tortured; she has no native country, for it has exiled her; no friend, for her only one is in the power of his enemies."

"Then your name is Medje?" exclaimed the count in a sudden fit of joyful inspiration.

"Yes, I am Medje," she proudly answered, throwing back her veil and revealing a countenance of superb beauty.

Coucou now hastened up, and as he beheld the young Arabian, he excitedly exclaimed:

"Medje, commander, it is Medje. Ask her where her 'little papa' is."

Medje turned deathly pale as she heard these words.

She stretched her arms toward the south and mournfully said:

"Little papa is down there, in the sultana's dungeon."

"Do you mean Captain Joliette, whom you call little papa?" asked Monte-Cristo.

"Yes."

"And the sultana is Uargla, the mysterious city?"

The young girl shivered as she replied:

"Yes, Uargla. There he suffers and there, too, he will be killed."

Monte-Cristo waved back those around, and then asked her in a whisper:

"Why did you come here?"

"To look for you."

"For me? Do you know me?"

"No."

"Somebody has told you my name?"

"No."

"Explain yourself more plainly."

"I will tell you everything, but let these men go away."

“Follow me,” said the count.

The count ordered Coucou to take charge of the dead lion, and of Bertuccio’s body, which would be buried in the morning. He then gazed intently at the girl, and recognized two pale six-cornered stars in dead gold color on her cheeks. This filled him with new hope.

“Poor Bertuccio,” sighed the Jackal, “he was a good comrade.”

“And a faithful soul,” added Monte-Cristo.

Spero came running up, and winding his arm around his father’s neck, whisperingly asked:

“Papa, why could I not accompany you?”

“My child, it was a fight with a lion.”

“You were not afraid? Why should I have been?”

The handsome boy now, for the first time, perceived Medje, who smiled at him.

“Who is that, papa?” he asked in a whisper.

“A friend, Spero; offer her your hand.”

The boy obeyed and Medje raised his hand to her lips, murmuring:

“Son of him who kills lions, may God measure your years by the kisses which your father gives you.”

Monte-Cristo clasped his arms around Spero’s shoulders and, accompanied by him and Medje, approached the tent. But before he reached it an Arab excitedly ran toward him with outstretched arms.

“Oh, master, hear me. Do not let this woman cross the threshold of the camp.”

“Why not?”

“Did you not see the sign on her cheek? She is accursed.”

Involuntarily Medje covered her face with her hands.

Monte-Cristo angrily retorted:

“Silence. The weaker have a right to the hospitality of the stronger.”

“Oh, my lord. Heed my warning. She is a witch, an accursed fortune-teller. You will be sorry if she enters the camp. She will cast a spell over camels and men.”

“All the same, leave me. Medje has placed herself under my protection and I will not deceive her confidence.”

The Arabian girl clung weeping to the count.

“Do not grieve,” he said, “you have mentioned a name which renders you holy in my eyes.”

He then turned to the Arab, and sternly continued:

"You may have your liberty if you desire. But if you have not only spoken in your own name but also in that of your comrades, tell them that Monte-Cristo, the lion-tamer, is afraid of nobody. They may all leave. The desert with its terrors cannot alter my will."

The other Arabs, who had drawn near, heard these words, and enthusiastically exclaimed:

"We will not leave you, lion-killer."

The count nodded and, addressing the Corsican, said:

"Give him double what he claims. In my home no attention is paid to magic; we honor God and laugh at demons."

He slowly entered his tent, and gazing at Spero and Medje, in a friendly tone of voice said:

"Do not be afraid, I am protecting you. Draw nearer, Medje, and answer my questions."

The young girl bowed low in token of obedience, and the count began:

"So you know Captain Joliette?"

"Yes, he saved my life, and thereby became my lord and master."

"You know who has captured him?"

"Yes, they are the enemies of my race as they are of yours. They are called the Ajassuas and fear nothing and nobody — oh, they are the emissaries from the regions below!"

"Are they masters of Uargla?"

"Yes."

"And you assert that Captain Joliette is still alive?"

"Yes, he still lives, I swear it; but he is suffering untold tortures in a damp, dark, subterranean dungeon. Oh, would I could suffer his anguish and terrors for him; he has saved me, and now that he should miserably die!"

Hot tears ran over Medje's brown cheeks, and her small hands were clasped convulsively. Monte-Cristo watched her narrowly, and Coucou's tale that the Arabian girl had disappeared almost at the same time as the captain again came into his mind.

"You love Captain Joliette?" he asked.

"Does not the weak child love its father who guides its tottering footsteps? Yes, I love him whose name you have mentioned. He is the strong trunk which gives support to the clinging vine."

“And why do the Arabs refuse to permit you to remain in camp? Your cheeks bear the sign of an accursed caste, the brand of the murderous Khouans.”

Medje’s face became fiery red.

“Hear me,” she said, “before you condemn me. You will be just to me not only on account of your brother but also for the sake of this child.”

She pointed to Spero, who had again fallen asleep, and Monte-Cristo, frightened in spite of himself, said:

“Speak. I will not interrupt you again.”

“My father,” began Medje hastily, “was a mighty Kabyle chief. He was a wise man and his tribe was industrious and prosperous.

“Then came the day when your countrymen, the French, set foot on our sacred shores. My father summoned his tribe to arms, and took part in the battle against the invaders. During a bitter fight between the Europeans and the Arabs a traitor showed the enemy a secret path through the defile, and, taken by surprise, my father saw himself surrounded by the enemy. Our troops had been so decimated by the murderous fire that scarcely more than a hundred remained. A marabout who was in the camp induced them to seek refuge in a cave, and hardly had my father entered it with his troops when the treacherous marabout betrayed his hiding-place to the enemy. They stationed themselves before the opening and fired in on the helpless Arabs, who were caught like rats in a hole.

“In less than half an hour only half of the number were still surviving, and the French called upon them to surrender. My father, all bleeding from his wounds, had an interview with the French general, in which he offered his own life and pledged that none of the tribe of Ben-Ali-Smah would ever again take up arms against the French. This he did on condition that his men were to be let go free. The general accepted the offer and my father took the solemn pledge; then he bared his bosom to be shot.

“But the Frenchman was a noble man, and, taking my father’s hand, said that France sought friends and allies in Africa, not slaves. He did not want his life, but his friendship. We lived very happy and peaceful after that, only we were called renegades by the other tribes, and especially the Khouans, that murderous class which believes that it pleases Allah if they shed their fellow beings’ blood.

“Five years had elapsed, and I was then twelve years old, when my father gave a great feast in honor of a celebrated French commander who visited our settlement. Suddenly, at midnight, when the festivities were over, and we were all lying in a deep sleep, the Khouans made an attack on our village. My father was assassinated and my mother and I taken prisoners. We were carried into the desert with other prisoners of my tribe. Reaching an oasis, the captives were tied to the trunks of trees, and their limbs hacked off by the murderous Khouans with their yataghans. My mother was one of those tortured to death in this way. Her last words were: 'Medje, avenge us, and remember your father's oath.' I swooned as she died. I was recalled to life by sharp pain on my cheeks. With a shriek I opened my eyes, and saw standing before me a man holding a white-hot iron in his hand, with which he had just branded me.

"'By Allah,' he exclaimed, 'I forbid you to touch this maiden; she carries the sacred sign.'

"All stepped reverently back, and while the terrible pain forced the hot tears out of my eyes they fell on their knees before me and murmured unintelligible words. The man who had saved me was a powerful sheik of the Khouans. I did not then understand the motive of his action. Some old women took me in charge, and I was conveyed still further into the desert. From time to time I fell into a semi-comatose condition, and while my limbs became convulsed I uttered incoherent words, which the old women proclaimed to be prophecies. Much later I discovered that they had put me in this terrible condition by means of opiates. That is how they wanted to make me a Khouan priestess.

"Finally, when I was sixteen years of age, the sheik who had saved my life wanted to make me his wife. He was my father's and mother's assassin, and I hated him. To escape his odious addresses, I plunged a dagger in my breast. I would rather die than belong to him. For weeks I lay between life and death, and when I recovered I determined to flee. A midnight attack on the Ajassuas tribe, as the Khouan caste was termed, gave me the opportunity. I made good my escape, and wandered on and on until I sank senseless from exhaustion on the ground.

"When I recovered my senses I found myself in an oasis near a rippling brook, the clear, cool water of which slaked my thirst, and the fruit of a date-tree stilled my hunger. Guiding myself by the stars I took a northern direction, hoping to find some Frenchman who had been my father's friend. Suddenly, however, I saw a panther's eye gleaming at me from the bushes. I wanted to cry for help, but I could not. The next minute I felt the sharp claws of the wild beast on my back and with a groan sank to the ground.

"I awoke under the kind care of a man who was binding the wound on my shoulder. That man who had saved me from the panther's clutches was Captain Joliette. Days of ineffable bliss followed. The captain took me into his French camp and surrounded me with every care and attention. I called him my 'little papa.' Oh, how I love him! I could place my hands under his feet. He became my teacher, and I soon learned to speak his language. The other soldiers were also kind to me and especially Coucou, who has now recognized me again. The days I spent in the French camp were as if spent in paradise. But alas, misfortune soon threw its black shadow over me.

"One night I awoke in my tent on account of a strange noise. For an instant I saw the black face and gleaming eyes of an Ajassua, then they disappeared and I discovered that the canvas of my tent had been slit from top to bottom with a keen dagger."

As Medje related this incident Monte-Cristo could not repress a slight shudder. Had not Spero had the same experience, and was not the canvas of his tent slit in the same manner? What if the same danger threatened him?

"I could not sleep any more," continued Medje, "and as soon as day came I hastened to the captain's tent. He was on the point of starting out on an expedition with twenty men. I begged him on my knees not to leave me alone behind, but he only laughed at my fears, kissed me on the forehead, and rode off at the head of his small detachment.

"The day seemed to me interminable. When night came and the captain did not return I became terribly anxious. I rushed to the outer posts and gazed fixedly down the roadway. Suddenly I felt myself thrown to the ground, a gag forced in my mouth, my hands and feet were bound with silken cords, and then powerful hands lifted me up on the back of a horse which dashed off at headlong speed.

"How long the mad ride lasted I cannot tell. Finally the gag was taken from my mouth, and through the folds of my veil I recognized the sheik of the Ajassuas, who was bending over me.

"'This time you shall not escape from me,' he declared, and the ride was continued for three days and three nights before we came to a final halt.

"I found myself in Uargla, that terrible city in whose streets blood flows in streams. I was brought into a solid tower of Kiobeh, and the fearful attendants, who saw in me a priestess of Allah, again surrounded me.

“At first I refused all food, wishing to starve to death, but I laid aside this idea, as I had a presentiment that I would still be of some service to my friend. Two days later I heard a terrible noise in the street, and hastening to the grated window of my cell, gazed out.

“I saw a sight which froze my blood with horror. Dark forms clad in long brown cloaks carried a bier made of twigs of trees, and on it, pale, bleeding, and with closed eyes, lay my protector, Captain Joliette.

“I shook my prison bars; I wanted to get out and die with my friend. In vain; the grating did not shake or give way. At this instant I felt myself pulled back, and the man who had dared to make love to me stood before me.

“‘Medje,’ he said, ‘the Frenchman who stole you is in our hands.’

“‘And you will kill him, coward,’ I cried.

“‘No, not yet,’ he replied with a smile; ‘look!’

“I did so, and saw the captain carried on the bier through the low iron gate.

“‘They will put this Christian, as you call him, in a dark cell and keep him there month after month until he longs for death.’

“‘And what will you do with me?’ I asked.

“‘Keep you for myself.’

“I then made an infamous bargain; God forgive me for doing so. I told him I would be his if he would set the captain at liberty. He hesitated at first, but finally accepted. I made him take a solemn oath, and he, in turn, obliged me to do the same.

“‘Leave me,’ I then said, ‘and when you have fulfilled your word, return.’

“He went, and I stood at the window hour after hour. The fatal door did not open. On the fourth day I learned the reason. An order had been issued prohibiting the setting at liberty of any prisoner, and the man to whom I had sworn the oath had quarrelled with the others on account of the order, and had been killed. My hope to serve my friend was blasted. A strange rumor next reached me that a marabout was preaching immediate massacre, and I knew not whether Captain Joliette was alive or dead. I could now walk about Uargla where I pleased, and I determined one evening to wrap myself in my veil and take advantage of the strange superstition in which I was still held. The sentinel trembled when he saw me. I approached him and said some strange words which came into my head. He threw down his weapons and fled. I passed out of Uargla and strayed into the desert. Allah has guided my footsteps to you. You will save him, I feel it, I know it."

"May Heaven grant your wishes!" said Monte-Cristo, as, leaving the tent, he summoned Jacopo and ordered him to get ready to depart at once.

"Hurrah! we're off at last!" cried Coucou, throwing his cap in the air.

At this instant a discharge of musketry was heard. Monte-Cristo hastened in the direction of the sound, followed by Coucou and about fifty men. The camp appeared to be surrounded, yet, at a shrill cry, which seemed to be a signal, the horsemen suddenly wheeled about and dashed away.

What did it mean? A sudden thought darted through Monte-Cristo's brain. He rushed back to his tent. The couch was empty — Spero was not there! The terrible truth burst on his mind. The attack had been only feigned. The bandits had stolen his boy!

The strong man wept; but, as a hot tear fell on his hand, he shook his head like a lion aroused from his sleep, and shouted:

"To horse! To horse! To Uargla!"

CHAPTER LV

"DO NOT DIE, CAPTAIN!"

We left Captain Joliette at the moment when the savages commanded by the marabout entered his cell, and a voice had called to him:

"Do not die, captain!"

"Kill him! kill him!" shouted the crowd.

The marabout now advanced toward the captain, and, placing his lean hand on the prisoner's shoulder, said:

"There is but one God, and Mahomet is his prophet!"

The effect of these words on the populace was most magical. They all fell back and opened a space for the approach of a motley group of horsemen.

"The Khouans! the Khouans!" was whispered from one to the other.

They all crowded around and kissed the mantle of the chief.

"You are all cowardly murderers!" cried Albert. "Make an end of it."

"You want to die?" said the chief. "All right; but I warn you that your agonies will be terrible!"

Upon a wink from the chief the captain was tied to a post.

"Bring out the other prisoners!" commanded the Arab chieftain.

They were thirty in number, all French soldiers, and upon the direction of the chief they were led past the post to which Albert was tied.

"Long live our captain!" they cried, as they caught a glimpse of his uniform.

Tears started in Albert's eyes, and he loudly joined in the cry.

The rear of the procession was brought up by a strange-looking person. His walk betrayed the Parisian boulevardier, and the remnants of his clothing confirmed the opinion. When he passed the marabout he cried aloud in French:

"You old fool, you, what are you staring at? You don't want me to admire your ugly face, do you?"

The marabout, who did not understand French, looked at him in astonishment, while the soldiers burst out laughing.

The stranger looked sharply at Albert, and said:

“Captain, by all the saints, you must not die.”

“What?” exclaimed Albert, surprised, “it was you who — ”

“Yes, I, Gratillet, journalist, Beauchamp’s friend and your friend,” continued Gratillet. “Captain, we must escape out of this to-night; to-morrow it might be too late.”

Albert was encouraged by the journalist’s words, and began to hope. But just then a wild tumult arose; the Arabs, yataghans in hand, rushed upon the three nearest prisoners, and literally chopped them in pieces. Having tasted blood, they butchered right and left. Only a few prisoners still remained, and among them was the reporter.

Albert, in a daze, gazed at the massacre and the pools of blood which already threatened to reach his feet.

Gratillet now fell. No shot had struck him. Horror had no doubt put an end to the poor fellow’s life.

Before Albert had time to realize the imminent danger of his situation, the scene changed as if by magic. The sheik and his subjects, followed by the marabout, took to their horses and suddenly disappeared. None of them thought of their principal victim, and the captain tried in vain to guess the riddle.

Darkness set in, and by the dying rays of the sun Albert saw a cavalcade coming up the road to Uargla. At the head of the procession rode a tall man, whose green turban denoted that the wearer had made a pilgrimage to Mecca, for only those who visit the Kaaba have the right to decorate themselves with the sacred emblem.

Who could this man be? Albert had never seen him, and yet the green turban appeared to him to be a sign of approaching rescue.

The man who wore this green turban was Maldar. He had been gone a year, and his return had been the signal for the revolt to break out. All the prisoners that were taken he had ordered to be confined until his return from Mecca. He was very angry when he heard that the prisoners had been massacred.

“Unfaithful, traitorous people!” he exclaimed at the mosque at Uargla. “Who told you to disobey my orders?”

The Khouans begged pitifully for mercy.

“Allah demands obedience,” continued Maldar; “and now bring the young prisoner, who is waiting in front of the mosque, for the sentence.”

The sheik departed, and soon returned with Spero, who was tightly bound. The lad was pale, but courage shone from his dark eyes.

“Come nearer,” said Maldar, “and tell me your name.”

“Why do you wish to know, and by what right?” asked Spero, folding his arms.

Maldar gnashed his teeth.

“By right of the strong, and with the right to punish you for the sins of your country. What is your name?”

“Spero.”

“Spero means hope. Tell me now the name of your father?”

“My father is the Count of Monte-Cristo!”

“I know. Your father is one of those brainless fools who imagine every one must bend the knee to them. What rank does he occupy in your country?”

“He is a prince who governs the souls of men.”

“Your father is rich — very rich?”

“What does that concern you?”

“You are brave, and your father must love you.”

Spero did not answer, but his eyes sparkled when Maldar spoke his father’s name.

“I will know how to strike your proud father; he shall grovel in the dust at my feet. I — ”

He stopped short. A new idea seemed to have taken possession of him.

“All the prisoners are dead, are they not?” he asked, turning to a sheik.

“No, master, one still lives, a French officer.”

“His name?”

“Captain Joliette.”

In spite of his self-control, Spero gave a cry of astonishment, for he knew that it was to rescue the captain that Monte-Cristo had set out for Africa.

“Go,” said Maldar, “bring the prisoner here.”

The sheik left, and Maldar walked up and down with his big strides.

“Master!” cried the sheik, running in breathlessly.

“Well?”

“Captain Joliette is gone.”

“Gone!” screamed Maldar in a rage. “Within one hour he must be brought back to the Kiobeh. If not you must answer with your head; and now bring the lad to the iron chamber, and see that he does not escape!”

CHAPTER LVI

THE FLIGHT

By what miracle had Albert escaped?

The reader will recollect that Gratillet had fallen into the sea of blood which had streamed from the wounds of the victims. As soon as the Khouans had gone a flock of vultures immediately encircled the scene of the massacre and began to hover about the dead bodies.

Albert was leaning with closed eyes against the post, when a well-known voice angrily cried:

“Captain, let us think now of our rescue.”

It was Gratillet.

“Let me die,” murmured Albert, wearily. “I do not care to live any more.”

“You are talking nonsense. Die, forsooth! Shake off your torpor and be a man.”

“Through what miracle did you recover your life?”

“None, I tell you. I never was dead; only shamming. Oh, if I only had a knife.”

While Gratillet was talking he worked at Albert’s cords with his teeth and nails, and finally succeeded in freeing him.

“And now,” he said, “let’s decamp, and that as soon as possible.”

The two men were soon on the road, the journalist peering about and keeping up a lively conversation.

“Here is a narrow pathway!” exclaimed the reporter suddenly. “Captain, lie down on the ground near me, and we can continue our little walk on all-fours.”

Albert followed the journalist’s orders, and the next minute was lying on the ground near his companion.

“Well done,” said Gratillet. “Now we must be very careful, for it is pitch dark and banisters are unknown in Uargla. Ah, now I know where the pathway comes from. It is a ditch which gets the rain from the rocks.”

“Do you need a cord?” asked Albert. “If so, I have a scarf which answers the same purpose.”

“Is it strong?”

“Best of wool and perfectly new.”

“How long is it?”

“Four yards.”

“Then give it to me.”

Albert handed it to him and he bound it about his arms. This done, Gratillet swung himself over a precipice and began his dangerous journey.

“Flying is not so bad after all,” said the reporter. “It is doing splendidly and I — ”

The scarf broke and Gratillet fell to the bottom, carrying Albert along, who had held one end of it.

At the same moment the discharge of musketry was heard. Had they escaped from Scylla to fall into Charybdis?

CHAPTER LVII

AT THE FOOT OF THE KIOBEH

"Forward — to Uargla!" Monte-Cristo had exclaimed when he became aware of the loss of his son. Medje urged her horse close to that of the count; he noticed her, and a dark suspicion took possession of him.

"Go back, you traitress!" he angrily exclaimed. "You have delivered my son over to the Khouans."

A deadly pallor overspread Medje's fine features, and sobbing bitterly she let her head fall on the horse's neck.

"Oh, master!" she said, "why do you accuse me?"

"Pardon me, child," said Monte-Cristo gently; "sorrow for the loss of my dear son has made me crazy. Oh, if I could only find him again."

"Courage, dear master, courage! Our horses are as swift as the wind. You will conquer the Khouans. The lion-killer is invincible!"

After an exhausting ride of three long hours they beheld the minarets of Uargla. Monte-Cristo divided his men in two companies; one he commanded with Jacopo and Medje, the other he placed in charge of Coucou. Their muskets were loaded, and hardly had the count arranged his plan of attack, than the gates of Uargla were opened and a band of horsemen rode forward to meet him. The Frenchmen allowed the Arabs to approach close to them and then fired their first salvo. A second one followed, and through the narrow streets the Count of Monte-Cristo and his men entered Uargla. A scene of indescribable confusion ensued. The Arabs fled in all directions.

In the meantime Coucou at the head of his little company had entered through the eastern door, and, having to avenge the murder of his friends, he struck blows to the right and left.

"This for Jacques! This for Pierre! This for Jean! Back, you brown devils!"

When Monte-Cristo had reached the foot of the Kiobeh, Medje said:

"It is here."

"Light the torches!" commanded Monte-Cristo.

It was done.

"In the name of Allah, the merciful and charitable God," exclaimed the count.

Three times he repeated the words. For a time all was silent. After a while the door of the fortress opened and Maldar appeared on the threshold.

"Who are you, who comes here as an enemy?"

"Let us not fight with words," replied Monte-Cristo. "It was your people who first attacked us."

"Blood has flowed," replied Maldar, coldly; "and it falls back upon your head."

"Your people have made prisoners; sneakingly surprised people at night and carried them away. What have you done with these prisoners?"

"They are dead."

"All?"

"All!"

"All dead?" exclaimed Monte-Cristo, trembling. "Woe to you, if you have spoken the truth."

"You are false servants of the prophet," cried Medje, "and Allah's eternal curse will rest upon you. Have you heard?" she added, turning to Monte-Cristo's companions; "the wretch says he has murdered all the prisoners."

"In the devil's name!" exclaimed Coucou. "He shall pay for that."

"You acknowledge that you were cowardly enough to murder defenceless men," said Monte-Cristo, after a pause, to Maldar; "have you been so base as to kill an innocent child?"

"Are you speaking of your own son?"

"Yes. Is my son dead?"

"Your son still lives," replied Maldar.

Monte-Cristo uttered a cry. His son lived and was behind these walls.

"You are Maldar. You have enjoyed my hospitality. What crime have I committed that you should punish me through my child?"

"The crime of your race! You are a son of France."

"You say I am a son of France. Have you not served that country too?"

"Only dissimulation. I waited for a favorable opportunity."

"What will you do with my son?"

"The decision depends on you."

"What do you mean by that?"

“Come with confidence to us,” replied Maldar, earnestly. “In the citadel I will discuss your son’s ransom with you.”

“Do not go, master,” cried Coucou; “they are laying a trap for you.”

Monte-Cristo strode, nevertheless, toward the door.

CHAPTER LVIII

MONTE-CRISTO BECOMES EDMOND DANTES

“Maldar,” the count cried aloud, “I am here.”

The door was opened. Monte-Cristo went into a large courtyard. Maldar was waiting for him.

“Here I am,” said the count. “You have called me about the ransom for my son. What is the sum you ask?”

“I did not say it should be money.”

“Then take my life — anything you wish.”

“What I want of you is neither gold nor your life. I know who you are, and the position you occupy in your country. Your countrymen have confidence in you, and I — ”

“Go on — go on,” urged Monte-Cristo.

“Have patience. Come here and write.”

Maldar went toward a table upon which were writing materials, and, pressing a pen in Monte-Cristo’s hand, he shoved a piece of paper toward him.

The count was silent, and seated himself at the table.

“I, the Count of Monte-Cristo,” the Arabian began to dictate, “inform the Governor of Themcen that I am at Uargla, and have won the confidence of the Sultan Maldar. More than one hundred French prisoners are in the Kiobeh. The Khouans are not numerous and do not anticipate an attack. The defile of Bab-el-Zhur is easy to reach and only poorly defended. A force of bold soldiers could secure possession of the city in an easy manner. Success is certain.”

Monte-Cristo, without hesitation, had written the words down, and the Arabian, looking sharply at him, continued:

“Put your name under what you have just written — ”

“One word more,” interrupted the count. “I understand your aim. You want to lead a French detachment in ambush?”

“Yes. For the head of your son, I require those of a hundred Frenchmen.”

"Spero," cried the count, "my darling boy, should I, your father, ensnare one hundred Frenchmen into an ambush? I have written the letter, the signature alone is missing; hear me, while I read it to you."

Monte-Cristo, in a trembling voice, read the letter.

"Spero, my son, choose between life and death. Shall I sign the letter?"

"You cannot hear his voice," said Maldar; "but wait a moment, and I will have him brought here."

He motioned with his hand. The door was thrown open, and the next minute Spero lay in his father's arms.

"Speak, Spero, what shall I do?"

The boy took the paper and tore it into pieces.

"Let them kill us," he said, firmly.

When Maldar heard these words, he gave a wild yell and sprang upon the boy.

"Wretched worm!" he hissed; "are you aware that I can break every bone in your body?"

Saying this, Maldar drew a long pistol from his belt and pointed it at the boy's face. Quick as thought Monte-Cristo seized the Arab by the throat, and threw him among the Khouans.

"Fire — fire!" shouted Maldar.

The men obeyed, but not a bullet entered the room.

"Put your arms about my neck, Spero," said the count, "and have no fear. Away with the Count of Monte-Cristo," he added in a vibrating voice; "Edmond Dantes, arise from out of the past, and help a father to rescue his son."

CHAPTER LIX

EDMOND DANTES

He placed himself in a winding of the narrow stairs. Here no ball could reach him. A Khouan appeared, but the iron bar with which Monte-Cristo had armed himself descended on his head with terrific force. A second and third received the same reception. Maldar, wild with rage, continually screamed:

“Kill him, in the name of Allah!”

Monte-Cristo was struck by a ball, and a dagger was thrust in his foot. But he paid no attention to it. He dared not retreat if he wished to save Spero. His arm threatened to become lame, his powers were fast failing him, and he thought all was up with him. Suddenly he heard loud curses uttered in the French language. He recognized them as belonging to Coucou and Jacopo. Thank God! they had remembered him and effected an entrance.

“Count of Monte-Cristo!” came a loud voice through the night.

Not believing his ears, the count walked to the edge of the roof, and saw a sight which nearly caused him to lose his senses. At the foot of the tower a troop of horsemen had gathered. The voice he had heard belonged to a woman, and by the light of the lightning he recognized Miss Clary Ellis, the young girl he had seen at Mercedes’ house.

“Count of Monte-Cristo!” Clary exclaimed, in a clear, bright voice, “courage! Help is coming.”

“Count of Monte-Cristo,” came from another voice, “thanks, in the name of my mother.”

Breathless, with his arm about Spero’s neck, the count leaned against the wall, and he whom nothing surprised uttered an exclamation of astonishment when he looked down.

A man was climbing up the smooth wall. So interested were the count and Spero in the picture that they did not hear the stealthy steps behind them. Maldar was the man, and he had stretched forth his hands toward the boy. The count perceived him in the nick of time, and clutching him by the throat, threw him headlong down into the courtyard. The next minute the bold climber had jumped over the wall and anxiously cried:

"Count of Monte-Cristo, we must first rescue the child."

He took a long rope and bound it round Spero's waist. Then he let the boy gently over the parapet.

"Papa," came Spero's voice from below, "I am safe."

The stranger pulled the rope up anew, and said as he turned to the count:

"It is your turn now."

"But you?"

"Oh, never mind me; in case of necessity I will jump off. But be quick, we have no time to lose."

Monte-Cristo grasped the cord and was let down by the stranger. Looking up, he saw his rescuer sliding down the wall. As soon as he had touched the ground, the count went to him and, shaking him by the hand, said:

"You have saved my life, sir, and that of my son. Tell me your name, please, that I may know to whom I owe our rescue."

"I am a French colonist, count, and my name is Fanfaro."

Coucou and Albert now ran up to the count.

"The gentleman is evidently a monkey?" he asked the Zouave.

Fanfaro laughed.

Mademoiselle Clary now approached the count.

"How thankful I am," she said, "to have arrived so opportunely."

"And what brought you here?" asked the count.

"I swore to follow you," replied Clary, blushing, "but was delayed so many times, that I gave up all hope of rescuing your son. Fortunately I came across Monsieur Fanfaro. To him belongs the credit and — "

"And now, I thank God, the matter is over," interrupted Madame Caraman.

"And it was for me, count, that you incurred all these dangers?" asked Albert.

Monte-Cristo looked tenderly at the young man.

"I thank God I found you," he said, extending his arms to the young man.

"And now," Albert said, "let me present you to my other rescuer."

Gratillet advanced and, bowing gracefully, said:

"Count, excuse me, please, if my clothes are not exactly fashionable, but we have had no time to make our toilet."

Albert and the journalist, instead of having fallen down a precipice, had fallen into a lake. When Monte-Cristo heard Gratillet's name, he uttered a cry of surprise.

"Monsieur Gratillet," he said, "are you not a friend of Beauchamp?"

"Yes, his friend and reporter."

"But where is Jacopo?" asked the count, looking about for the Corsican.

"Jacopo is dead," said the Zouave; "a bullet shot him through the heart."

Monte-Cristo hurried with Coucou and Albert to the spot where Jacopo had fallen. Suddenly he struck his forehead.

"What has become of Medje?" he asked.

"Medje?" asked Albert.

"Yes, she brought us here, and — merciful Heaven! here she lies," the count exclaimed.

Medje was lying motionless on the ground, with a dagger wound in the shoulder.

"Poor Medje!" said Albert.

"Little father," whispered Medje when she had regained consciousness.

She stroked Albert's hand. Then her dark eyelashes closed over her eyes. Medje was dead.

CHAPTER LX

SECRETS

Monte-Cristo and Albert rode slowly near Fanfaro, while Coucou and Gratillet kept the ladies company. The Zouave spoke continually with Madame Caraman.

“Tell me,” said Coucou, “how did you come to Africa?”

“Because my lady wished it.”

“That is a bitter disappointment. I had imagined that it was on account of — ”

“You — you stupid fool!”

“I will be good, Madame Caraman, if you will tell me how you came to Uargla.”

“We followed the Count of Monte-Cristo.”

“You are in love with him.”

“We followed the count because we wished to aid him in rescuing Captain Joliette.”

“But tell me about the Americans.”

“They deserted us as soon as we reached the land. The Arabs had previously stolen our camels.”

“Infamous race,” growled Coucou.

“We were thus all alone in the desert. We suffered from hunger and thirst, and had we not fortunately reached the oasis on the second day, we would probably lie now buried in the desert. At the oasis we made the acquaintance of Monsieur Fanfaro, a handsome man of forty.”

“You noticed that,” said the Zouave, ironically.

“Monsieur Fanfaro brought us to his farm, where his wife, a charming woman, received us. Between ourselves, I do not think Fanfaro has ever been a rope-dancer. His manners and features show he must be of good family, and I am tempted to call him a second Monte-Cristo.”

This Fanfaro, as Madame Caraman had rightfully said, was a remarkably distinguished-looking gentleman. Monte-Cristo looked attentively at the colonist; he guessed that there was some mystery surrounding the man, and that something had caused him to seek a home in the desert. Finally they all reached the oasis, and Monte-Cristo breathed more freely. Three persons came to meet the travellers: a woman, who led a child by the hand, and a strangely formed creature which hopped about and looked more like a frog than a human being.

"What is that?" asked the count.

"Oh," replied Fanfaro, laughing, "that is Bobichel."

"Bobichel?"

"Yes, he was once a clown when I was an acrobat. He amuses my little son now, by imitating the frog."

Bobichel uttered a cry of joy as he saw the party approach.

"Thank God, master," he gleefully cried, "that you are home again. Caillette, Firejaws!" he cried aloud, "he is just returned!"

A woman and a giant hurried at Bobichel's call.

Fanfaro jumped from his horse, and embraced his wife and daughter.

"Irene, have a bed prepared. The child will be intrusted to your care."

Madame Caraman carried Spero into the house. Monte-Cristo examined the patient carefully, and breathed more lightly.

"A few days' rest will set him all right again," he said, turning to Fanfaro, "and if we can make use of your friendship — "

"Count, what I possess is yours. But let me introduce you to the colony," said Fanfaro.

Upon his call his wife appeared, a charming brunette about thirty years of age.

"Madame Fanfaro," said the colonist, "followed me to the desert."

"This is Firejaws, the king of athletes. And now it is the turn of Bobichel, the clown."

"It looks to me like a fairy tale," said the count. "Were you really a tight-rope walker and acrobat before?"

"Yes, count, and I am the only one of us who has given up the profession for good."

Monte-Cristo gazed interestedly at the speaker and his wife. Fanfaro, as we have before observed, was a fine-looking man, and Madame Irene looked like a marquise.

"Monsieur Fanfaro," said Monte-Cristo at table one day, "I do not know who you are, but I drink to your health and that of all the other members of the colony. May God always protect you and yours!"

“Oh, Monsieur Fanfaro,” exclaimed Madame Caraman, “won’t you tell us your history? I am curious to know it.”

“What does Irene say to the proposition?” asked Fanfaro tenderly.

“Oh, I am satisfied,” replied the handsome woman, laughing.

“Good, then I shall begin,” said Fanfaro.

And while Spero slept Fanfaro began to relate the story of his life. As it is long, we shall narrate it in Part II. of “The Son of Monte-Cristo.”

VOLUME II

CHAPTER I

FANFARO’S ADVENTURES

Spero, the son of Monte-Cristo, was peacefully sleeping in another room, while, gathered around the table in the dining-room of Fanfaro’s house, were Monte-Cristo, Miss Clary, Madame Caraman, Coucou, and Albert de Morcerf, ready to listen to the story of Fanfaro’s adventures, which, as narrated at the close of the preceding volume, he was about to begin.

The following is Fanfaro’s narrative:

It was about the middle of December, 1813, that a solitary horseman was pursuing the road which leads through the Black Forest from Breisach to Freiburg. The rider was a man in the prime of life. He wore a long brown overcoat, reaching to his knees, and shoes fastened with steel buckles. His powdered hair was combed back and tied with a black band, while his head was covered with a cap that had a projecting peak. The evening came, and darkness spread over the valley: the Black Forest had not received its name in vain. A few miles from Freiburg there stands a lonely hill, named the Emperor’s Chair. Dark masses of basalt form the steps of this natural throne; tall evergreens stretch their branches protectingly over the hill. A fresh mountain air is cast about by the big trees, and the north wind is in eternal battle with this giant, which it bends but can never break.

Pierre Labarre, the solitary horseman, was the confidential servant of the Marquis de Fougereuse, and the darker the road became the more uncomfortable he felt. He continually spurred on his horse, but the tired animal at every stride struck against tree roots which lined the narrow path.

“Quick, Margotte,” said Pierre to the animal, “you know how anxiously we are awaited, and besides we are the bearers of good news.”

The animal appeared to understand the words, began to trot again at a smart pace, and for a time all went well.

Darker and darker grew the night, the storm raged fiercer and fiercer, and the roar of the distant river sounded like the tolling of church-bells.

Pierre had now reached a hill, upon which century-old lindens stretched their leafless branches toward heaven; the road parted at this point, and the rider suddenly reined in his horse. One of the paths led to Breisach, the other to Gundebfingen. Pierre rose in the stirrups and cautiously glanced about, but then he shook his head and muttered:

"Curious, I can discover nothing, and yet I thought I heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs."

He mechanically put his hand in his breast-pocket and nodded his head in a satisfied way.

"The portfolio is still in the right place," he whispered. "Forward, Margotte — we must get under shelter."

But just as the steed was about to start, the rider again heard the sound of a horse's hoofs on the frozen ground, and in a twinkling a horse bounded past Pierre like the wind. It was the second rider who had rushed past the servant at such a rapid gait.

Pierre was not superstitious, yet he felt his heart move quickly when the horseman galloped past him, and old legends about spectres rose up in his mind. Perhaps the rider was the wild huntsman of whom he had heard so much, or what was more likely, it was no spectre, but a robber. This last possibility frightened Pierre very much. He bent down and took a pistol out of the saddle-bag. He cocked the trigger and continued on his way, while he muttered to himself:

"Courage, old boy; if it should come to the worst you will kill your man."

Pierre rode on unembarrassed, and had reached a road which would bring him to Freiburg in less than half an hour. Suddenly a report was heard, and Pierre uttered a hollow groan. A bullet had struck his breast.

Bending with pain over his horse's neck he looked about. The bushes parted and a man enveloped in a long cloak sprung forth and rushed upon the servant. The moment he put his hand on the horse's rein, Pierre raised himself and in an angry voice exclaimed:

"Not so quickly, bandits!"

At the same moment he aimed his pistol and fired. The bandit uttered a moan and recoiled. But he did not sink to the ground as Pierre had expected. He disappeared in the darkness. A second shot fired after him struck in the nearest tree, and Pierre swore roundly.

"Confound the Black Forest," he growled as he rode along; "if I had not fortunately had my leather portfolio in my breast-pocket, I would be a dead man now! The scoundrel must have eyes like an owl: he aimed as well as if he had been on a rifle range. Hurry along, Margotte, or else a second highwayman may come and conclude what the other began.”

The horse trotted along, and Pierre heard anew the gallop of a second animal. The bandit evidently desired to keep his identity unknown.

“Curious,” muttered Pierre, “I did not see his face, but his voice seemed familiar.”

CHAPTER II

THE GOLDEN SUN

Mr. Schwan, the host of the Golden Sun at Sainte-Ame, a market town in the Vosges, was very busy. Although the month of February was not an inviting one, three travellers had arrived that morning at the Golden Sun, and six more were expected.

Schwan had that morning made an onslaught on his chicken coop, and, while his servants were robbing the murdered hens of their feathers, the host walked to the door of the inn and looked at the sky.

A loud laugh, which shook the windows of the inn, made Schwan turn round hurriedly: at the same moment two muscular arms were placed upon his shoulders, and a resounding kiss was pressed upon his brown cheek.

“What is the meaning of this?” stammered the host, trying in vain to shake off the arms which held him. “The devil take me, but these arms must belong to my old friend Firejaws,” exclaimed Schwan, now laughing; and hardly had he spoken the words than the possessor of the arms, a giant seven feet tall, cheerfully said:

“Well guessed, Father Schwan. Firejaws in *propria persona*.”

While the host was cordially welcoming the new arrival, several servants hurried from the kitchen, and soon a bottle of wine and two glasses stood upon the cleanly scoured inn table.

“Make yourself at home, my boy,” said Schwan, gayly, as he filled the glasses.

The giant, whose figure was draped in a fantastical costume, grinned broadly, and did justice to the host’s invitation. The sharply curved nose and the large mouth with dazzling teeth, the full blond hair, and the broad, muscular shoulders, were on a colossal scale. The tight-fitting coat of the athlete was dark red, the trousers were of black velvet, and richly embroidered shirt-sleeves made up the wonderful appearance of the man.

“Father Schwan, I must embrace you once more,” said the giant after a pause, as he stretched out his arms.

“Go ahead, but do not crush me,” laughed the host.

“Are you glad to see me again?”

“I should say so. How are you getting along?”

“Splendidly, as usual; my breast is as firm still as if it were made of iron,” replied the giant, striking a powerful blow upon his breast.

“Has business been good?”

“Oh, I am satisfied.”

“Where are your people?”

“On their way here. The coach was too slow for me, so I left them behind and went on in advance.”

“Well, and — your wife?” asked the host, hesitatingly.

The giant closed his eyes and was silent; Schwan looked down at his feet, and after a pause continued:

“Things don’t go as they should, I suppose?”

“Let me tell you something,” replied the giant, firmly; “if it is just the same to you, I would rather not talk on that subject.”

“Ah, really? Poor fellow! Yes, these women!”

“Not so quickly, cousin — my deceased wife was a model of a woman.”

“True; when she died I knew you would never find another one to equal her.”

“My little Caillette is just like her.”

“Undoubtedly. When I saw the little one last, about six years ago, she was as pretty as a picture.”

“She is seventeen now, and still very handsome.”

“What are the relations between your wife and you?”

“They couldn’t be better; Rolla cannot bear the little one.”

The host nodded.

“Girdel,” he said, softly, “when you told me that day that you were going to marry the ‘Cannon Queen,’ I was frightened. The woman’s look displeased me. Does she treat Caillette badly?”

“She dare not touch a hair of the child’s head,” hissed the giant, “or — ”

“Do not get angry; but tell me rather whether Bobichel is still with you?”

“Of course.”

“And Robeckal?”

“His time is about up.”

“That would be no harm; and the little one?”

“The little one?” laughed Girdel. “Well, he is about six feet.”

“You do not say so! Is he still so useful?”

“Cousin,” said the giant, slowly, “Fanfaro is a treasure! Do you know, he is of a different breed from us; no, do not contradict me, I know what I am speaking about. I am an athlete; I have arms like logs and hands like claws, therefore it is no wonder that I perform difficult exercises; but Fanfaro is tender and fine; he has arms and hands like a girl, and skin like velvet, yet he can stand more than I can. He can down two of me, yet he is soft and shrewd, and has a heart of gold.”

“Then you love him as much as you used to do?” laughed the host, in a satisfied way.

“Much more if it is possible; I — ”

The giant stopped short, and when Schwan followed the direction of his eye, he saw that the wagon which carried the fortune of Cesar Girdel had rolled into the courtyard.

Upon four high wheels a large open box swung to and fro; on its four sides were various colored posts, which served to carry the curtains, which shut out the interior of the box from the eyes of the curious world. The red and white curtains were now cast aside, and one could see a mass of iron poles, rags, weights, empty barrels, hoops with and without purple silk paper, the use of which was not clear to profane eyes.

The driver was dressed in yellow woollen cloth, and could at once be seen to be a clown; he wore a high pasteboard cap adorned with bells, and while he swung the whip with his right hand he held a trumpet in his left, which he occasionally put to his lips and blew a blast loud enough to wake the very stones. The man’s face was terribly thin, his nose was long and straight, and small dark eyes sparkled maliciously from under his bushy eyebrows.

Behind Bobichel, for this was the clown’s name, Caillette, the giant’s daughter, was seated. Her father had not overpraised his daughter: the tender, rosy face of the young girl had wonderfully refined features; deep blue soulful eyes lay half hidden under long, dark eyelashes, and gold-blond locks fell over her white neck. Caillette appeared to be enjoying herself, for her silvery laugh sounded continually, while she was conversing with Bobichel.

At the rear of the wagon upon a heap of bedding sat a woman whose dimensions were fabulous. She was about forty-five years of age; her face looked as if it had been chopped with an axe; the small eyes almost disappeared beneath the puffed cheeks, and the broad breast as well as the thick, red arms and claw-like hands were repulsive in the extreme. Bushy hair of a dirty yellow color hung in a confused mass over the shoulders of the virago, and her blue cloth jacket and woollen dress were full of grease spots.

Robeckal walked beside the wagon. He was of small stature, but nervous and muscular. The small face lighted up by shrewd eyes had a yellowish color; the long, thin arms would have done honor to a gorilla, and the elasticity of his bones was monkeyish in the extreme. He wore a suit of faded blue velvet, reddish brown hair only half covered his head, and a mocking laugh lurked about the corners of his lips while he was softly speaking to Rolla.

Bobichel now jumped from the wagon. Girdel hurried from the house and cordially exclaimed:

“Welcome, children; you have remained out long and are not hungry, are you?”

“I could eat pebblestones,” replied Bobichel, laughing. “Ah, there is Schwan too. Well, old boy, how have you been getting along?”

While the host and the clown were holding a conversation, Girdel went to the wagon and stretched out his arms.

“Jump, daughter,” he laughingly said.

Caillette did not hesitate long; she rose on her pretty toes and swung herself over the edge of the wagon into her father’s arms. The latter kissed her heartily on both cheeks, and then placed her on the ground. He then glanced around, and anxiously asked:

“Where is Fanfaro?”

“Here, Papa Firejaws,” came cheerfully from the interior of the wagon, and at the same moment a dark head appeared in sight above a large box. The head was followed by a beautifully formed body, and placing his hand lightly on the edge of the wagon, Fanfaro swung gracefully to the ground.

“Madcap, can’t you stop turning?” scolded Girdel, laughingly; “go into the house and get your breakfast!”

Caillette, Fanfaro, and Bobichel went away; Girdel turned to his wife and pleasantly said:

“Rolla, I will now help you down.”

Rolla looked at him sharply, and then said in a rough, rasping voice:

“Didn’t I call you, Robeckal? Come and help me down!”

Robeckal, who had been observing the chickens in the courtyard, slowly approached the wagon.

“What do you want?” he asked.

“Help me down,” repeated Rolla.

Girdel remained perfectly calm, but a careful observer might have noticed the veins on his forehead swell. He measured Rolla and Robeckal with a peculiar look, and before his look Rolla’s eyes fell.

“Robeckal, are you coming?” cried the virago, impatiently.

“What do you wish here?” asked Girdel, coolly, as Robeckal turned to Rolla.

“What do I wish here?” replied Robeckal; “Madame Girdel has done me the honor to call me, and — ”

“And you are thinking rather long about it,” interrupted Rolla, gruffly.

“I am here,” growled Robeckal, laying his hand upon the edge of the wagon.

“No further!” commanded Girdel, in a threatening voice.

“Ha! who is going to prevent me?”

“I, wretch!” thundered Firejaws, in whose eyes a warning glance shone.

“Bah! you are getting angry about nothing,” said Robeckal, mockingly, placing his other hand on the edge of the wagon.

“Strike him, Robeckal!” cried Rolla, urgingly.

Robeckal raised his right hand, but at the same moment the athlete stretched him on the ground with a blow of his fist; he could thank his stars that Girdel had not struck him with his full force, or else Robeckal would never have got up again. With a cry of rage he sprung up and threw himself upon the giant, who waited calmly for him with his arms quietly folded over his breast; a sword shone in Robeckal’s hand, and how it happened neither he nor Rolla knew, but immediately after he lay on top of the wagon, close to the Cannon Queen.

“Enough of your rascality, Robeckal,” said the voice of him who had thrown the angry man upon the wagon.

“I thought the wretched boy would come between us again,” hissed Rolla; and without waiting for any further help she sprung from the wagon and rushed upon Fanfaro, for he it was who had come to Girdel’s assistance.

“Back, Rolla!” exclaimed Firejaws, hoarsely, as he laid his iron fist upon his wife’s shoulder. Schwan came to the door and cordially said:

“Where are your comrades? The soup is waiting.”

Robeckal hurriedly glided from the wagon, and approaching close to Rolla, he whispered a few words in her ear.

“Let me go, Girdel,” said the giantess. “Who would take such a stupid joke in earnest? Come, I am hungry.”

Firejaws looked at his wife in amazement. Her face, which had been purple with anger, was now overspread by a broad grin, and shrugging his shoulders, Girdel walked toward the house. Fanfaro followed, and Robeckal and Rolla remained alone.

“We must make an end of it, Rolla,” grumbled Robeckal.

“I am satisfied. The sooner the better!”

“Good. I shall do it to-night. See that you take a little walk afterward on the country road. I will meet you there and tell you my plan.”

“Do so. Let us go to dinner now, I am hungry.”

When Rolla and Robeckal entered the dining-room, Girdel, Caillette, Bobichel, and Fanfaro were already sitting at table, and Schwan was just bringing in a hot, steaming dish.

CHAPTER III

OLD AND NEW ACQUAINTANCES

While the hungry guests were eating, the door at the back of the large dining-room was very softly opened. None of the strangers observed this, but the host, whose eyes were all over, went toward the door, at the threshold of which stood a man about forty years of age. The man was small and lean, and wore a brown overcoat trimmed with fur; the coat was cut out at the bosom and allowed a yellow vest and sky-blue tie to be seen. Trousers of dark-blue cloth reached to the knee, and his riding-boots, with spurs, completed the wonderfully made toilet.

The man’s face had a disagreeable expression. He had deep squinting eyes, a large mouth, a broad nose, and long, bony fingers.

When the host approached the stranger he bowed and respectfully asked:

“How can I serve you, sir?”

The stranger did not reply; his gaze was directed toward the table and the guests, and the host, who had observed his look, again repeated the question.

The stranger walked into the middle of the room, and, seating himself at a table, said:

“Bring me a glass of brandy.”

“I thought — I believed — ” began the host.

“Do as I told you. I am expecting some one. Get a good dinner ready, and as soon as — the other one arrives, you can serve it.”

“It shall be attended to,” nodded Schwan, who thought the man was the steward of some big lord.

Just as the host was about to leave the room, the door was opened again and two more travellers entered. The first comer threw a look at the new arrivals, and a frown crossed his ugly face.

The last two who entered were entirely dissimilar. One of them, to judge from his upright bearing, must have formerly been a soldier. He was dressed plainly in civilian’s clothes, and his bushy white mustache gave his face a threatening look; the deep blue eyes, however, served to soften the features. The other man was evidently a carman; he wore a blue linen blouse, leathern shoes, knee-breeches and a large round hat. When the host praised his kitchen to the new-comers, his words fell on fertile ground, for when he asked the first guest whether he would like to have some ham and eggs, the proposition was at once accepted.

"Where shall I serve the gentlemen?"

For a moment there was deep silence. The guests had just perceived the first comer and did not seem to be impressed by his appearance. Nevertheless, the man who looked like a soldier decided that they should be served at one of the side tables. When he said this Girdel looked up, and his features showed that the new-comers were not strangers to him. The man in the brown overcoat laughed mockingly when he perceived that the two strangers chose a table as far away from his as possible. He looked fixedly at them, and when Schwan brought him the brandy he had ordered, he filled his glass and emptied it at one gulp. He then took some newspapers out of his pocket and began to read, holding the pages in such a way as to conceal his face.

The host now brought the ham and eggs. As he placed them on the table, the carman hastily asked:

"How far is it, sir, from here to Remiremont?"

"To Remiremont? Ah, I see the gentlemen do not belong to the vicinity. To Remiremont is about two hours."

"So much the better; we can get there then in the course of the afternoon."

"That is a question," remarked Schwan.

"How so? What do you mean?"

"The road is very bad," he replied.

"That won't be so very dangerous."

"Oh, but the floods!"

"What's the matter with the floods?" said the old soldier.

"The enormous rainfall of the last few weeks has swollen all the mountain lakes," said the host, vivaciously, "and the road to Remiremont is under water, so that it would be impossible for you to pass."

"That would be bad," exclaimed the carman, excitedly.

"It would be dangerous," remarked the old soldier.

"Oh, yes, sir; last year two travellers were drowned between Sainte-Ame and Remiremont; to tell the truth, the gentlemen looked like you!"

“Thanks for the compliment!”

“The gentlemen probably had no guide,” said the carman.

“No.”

“Well, we shall take a guide along; can you get one for us?”

“To-morrow, but not to-day.”

“Why not?”

“Because my people are busy; but to-morrow it can be done.”

In the meantime, the acrobats had finished their meal. Girdel arose, and, drawing close to the travellers, said:

“If the gentlemen desire, they can go with us to-morrow to Remiremont.”

“Oh, that is a good idea,” said the host gleefully; “accept, gentlemen. If Girdel conducts you, you can risk it without any fear.”

In spite of the uncommon appearance of the athlete, the strangers did not hesitate to accept Girdel’s offer; they exchanged glances, and the soldier said:

“Accepted, sir. We are strangers here, and would have surely lost ourselves. When do you expect to go?”

“To-morrow morning. To-night we give a performance here, and with the dawn of day we start for Remiremont.”

“Good. Can I invite you now to join us in a glass of wine?”

Girdel protested more politely than earnestly; Schwan brought a bottle and glasses, and the giant sat down by the strangers.

While this was going on, the first comer appeared to be deeply immersed in the paper, though he had not lost a word of the conversation, and as Firejaws took a seat near the strangers, he began again to laugh mockingly.

Robeckal and Rolla now left the dining-room, while Fanfaro, Caillette and Bobichel still remained seated; a minute later Robeckal returned, and drawing near to Girdel, softly said to him:

“Master.”

“Well?”

“Do you need me?”

“What for?”

“To erect the booth?”

“No, Fanfaro and Bobichel will attend to it.”

“Then good-by for the present.”

Robeckal left. Hardly had the door closed behind him than the man in the brown overcoat stopped reading his paper and left the room too.

“One word, friend,” he said to Robeckal.

“Quick, what does it concern?”

“Twenty francs for you, if you answer me properly.”

“Go ahead.”

“What is this Firejaws?”

“Athlete, acrobat, wrestler — anything you please.”

“What is his right name?”

“Girdel, Cesar Girdel.”

“Do you know the men with whom he just spoke?”

“No.”

“You hate Girdel?”

“Who told you so, and what is it your business?”

“Ah, a great deal. If you hate him we can make a common thing of it. You belong to his troupe?”

“Yes, for the present.”

“Bah, long enough to earn a few gold pieces.”

“What is asked of me for that?”

“You? Not much. You shall have an opportunity to pay back the athlete everything you owe him in the way of hate, and besides you will be well rewarded.”

Robeckal shrugged his shoulders.

“Humbug,” he said, indifferently.

“No, I mean it seriously.”

“I should like it to be done,” replied Robeckal, dryly.

“Here are twenty francs in advance.”

Robeckal stretched out his hand for the gold piece, let it fall into his pocket, and disappeared without a word.

“You have come too late, my friend,” he laughed to himself. “Girdel will be a dead man before the morrow comes, as sure as my name is Robeckal.”

In the meantime Girdel continued to converse with the two gentlemen; Schwan went here and there, and Fanfaro, Caillette and Bobichel were waiting for the athlete’s orders for the evening performance.

“How goes it?” asked the carman, now softly.

“Good,” replied Girdel, in the same tone.

“The peasants are prepared?”

“Yes. The seed is ripe. They are only waiting for the order to begin to sow.

“We must speak about this matter at greater length, but not here. Did you notice the man who was reading the paper over there a little while ago?”

“Yes; he did not look as if he could instil confidence into any one; I think he must be a lackey.”

“He could be a spy too; when can we speak to one another undisturbed?”

“This evening after the performance, either in your room or in mine.”

“Let it be in yours; we can wait until the others sleep; let your door remain open, Girdel.”

“I will not fail to do so.”

“Then it is settled; keep mum. No one must know of our presence here.”

“Not even Fanfaro?”

“No, not for any price.”

“But you do not distrust him? He is a splendid fellow — ”

“So much the better for him; nevertheless, he must not know anything. I can tell you the reason; we wish to speak about him; we desire to intrust certain things with him.”

“You couldn’t find a better person.”

“I believe it. Good-by, now, until to-night.”

“*Au revoir!*”

“Sir,” said the carman, now aloud, “we accept your proposal with thanks, and hope to reach Remiremont to-morrow with your help.”

“You shall.”

Girdel turned now to Fanfaro, and gayly cried:

“To work, my son; we must dazzle the inhabitants of Sainte-Ame! Cousin Schwan, have we got permission to give our performance? You are the acting mayor.”

“I am,” replied Schwan; “hand in your petition; here is some stamped paper.”

“Fanfaro, write what is necessary,” ordered Girdel; “you know I’m not much in that line.”

“If you are not a man of the pen, you are a man of the heart,” laughed Fanfaro, as he quickly wrote a few lines on the paper.

“Flatterer,” scolded Girdel. “Forward, Bobichel; bring me the work-box; the people will find out to-night that they will see something.”

CHAPTER IV

BROTHER AND SISTER

Half an hour later the inhabitants of Sainte-Ame crowded about the open place in front of the Golden Sun. They seldom had an opportunity of seeing anything like this, for very few travelling shows ever visited the small Lorraine village; and with almost childish joy the spectators gazed at Bobichel, Fanfaro, and Girdel, who were engaged in erecting the booth. The work went on briskly. The posts which had been run into the ground were covered with many-colored cloths, and a hurriedly arranged wooden roof protected the interior of the tent from the weather. Four wooden stairs led to the right of the entrance, where the box-office was; this latter was made of a primitive wooden table, on which was a faded velvet cover embroidered with golden arabesques and cabalistic signs. All the outer walls of the booth were covered with yellow bills, upon which could be read that "Signor Firejaws" would lift with his teeth red-hot irons of fabulous weight, swallow burning lead, and perform the most startling acrobatic tricks. Rolla, the Cannon Queen, would catch cannon balls shot from a gun, and do other tricks; at the same time the bill said she would eat pigeons alive, and with their feathers on. Caillette, the "daughter of the air," as she was called, would send the spectators into ecstasies by her performance on the tight rope, and sing songs. Robeckal, the "descendant of the old Moorish kings," would swallow swords, eat glass, shave kegs with his teeth; and Fanfaro would perform on the trapeze, give his magic acts, and daze the public with his extraordinary productions. A pyramid, formed of all the members of the troupe, at the top of which Caillette shone with a rose in her hand, stood at the bottom of the bills in red colors, and was gazed upon by the peasants in open-mouthed wonder. The hammering which went on in the interior of the booth sounded to them like music, and they could hardly await the night, which was to bring them so many magnificent things.

Girdel walked up and down in a dignified way and the crowd respectfully made way for him, while the giant, in stentorian tones, gave the orders to Fanfaro and Bobichel.

Bobichel’s name was not on the bills; he was to surprise the public as a clown, and therefore his name was never mentioned. He generally amused the spectators in a comical way, and always made them laugh; even now, when he had finished his work, he mingled with the peasants and delighted them with his jokes.

Fanfaro and Caillette were still engaged constructing the booth. The young man arranged the wooden seats and the giant’s daughter hung the colored curtains, which covered the bare walls, putting here and there artificial flowers on them. Sometimes Caillette would pause in her work, to look at Fanfaro with her deep blue eyes.

Fanfaro was now done with the seats and began to fasten two trapezes. They hung to a centre log by iron hooks, and were about twelve feet from the ground and about as far distant from each other.

Fanfaro lightly swung upon the centre log and hammered in the iron hooks with powerful blows.

The wonderfully fine-shaped body was seen to advantage in this position, and a sculptor would have enthusiastically observed the classical outlines of the young man, whose dark tights fitted him like a glove.

Fanfaro’s hands and feet were as small as those of a woman, but, as Girdel had said, his muscles and veins were as hard as iron.

The iron hooks were fast now, and the young man swung himself upon a plank; he then glided down one trapeze, and with a quick movement grasped the other.

Like an arrow the slim body shot through the air, and then Fanfaro sprung lightly to the ground, while the trapeze flew back.

At the very moment the young man let go of the trapeze a faint scream was heard, and Caillette, deadly pale, stood next to Fanfaro.

“How you frightened me, you wicked fellow,” said the young girl, drawing a deep breath.

“Were you really frightened, Caillette? I thought you would have got used to my exercises long ago.”

“I ought to be so,” pouted Caillette, pressing her hands to her fast-beating heart, “but every time I see you fly, fear seizes hold of me and I unconsciously cry aloud. Oh, Fanfaro, if an accident should happen to you — I would not survive it.”

“Little sister, you are needlessly alarming yourself.”

Caillette held down her pretty little head and the hot blood rushed to her velvety cheeks, while her hands nervously clutched each other.

“Caillette, what ails you?” asked Fanfaro.

“Oh — tell me, Fanfaro, why do you always call me ‘little sister’?”

“Does the expression displease you, mademoiselle?” laughingly said the young man; “is it the word ‘little,’ or the word ‘sister’?”

“I did not say the expression displeased me.”

“Should I call you my big sister?”

“Why do you call me sister at all?”

A cloud spread over the young man’s face.

“Did we not grow up together like brother and sister?” he asked; “you were six years old when your father took the deserted boy to his home.”

“But you are not my brother,” persisted Caillette.

“Perhaps not in the sense commonly associated with the term, but yet I love you like a brother. Doesn’t this explanation please you?”

“Yes and no. I wished — ”

“What would you wish?”

“I had rather not say it,” whispered Caillette, and hastily throwing her arms about Fanfaro she kissed him heartily.

Fanfaro did not return the kiss; on the contrary he turned away and worked at the trapeze cord. He divined what was going on in Caillette, as many words hastily spoken had told the young man that the young girl loved him not as the sister loves the brother, but with a more passionate love. Caillette was still unaware of it, but every day, every hour could explain her feelings to her, and Fanfaro feared that moment, for he — did not love her.

How was this possible? He could hardly account for it himself. Caillette was so charming, and yet he could not think of the lovely creature as his wife; and as an honest man it did not enter his mind to deceive the young girl as to his feelings.

“Caillette,” he said, now trying to appear cheerful, “we must hurry up with our preparations, or the performance will begin before we are done.”

Caillette nodded, and taking her artificial flowers again in her hand, she began to separate them. At the same time the door opened and Firejaws appeared in company with two ladies. Fanfaro and Caillette glanced at the unexpected guests and heard the elderly lady say:

"Irene, what new caprice is it that brings you here, and what will the countess say if she hears of it?"

"Madame Ursula, spare your curtain lectures," laughed the young lady; "and if you cannot do so, you are free to return to the castle."

"God forbid," exclaimed Madame Ursula in affright.

She was a perfect type of the governess, with long thin features, pointed nose, small lips, gray locks, and spectacles. She wore a hat which fell to her neck, and a long colored shawl hung over her shoulders.

The appearance of the young lady compared very favorably with that of the duenna. A dark-blue riding costume sat tightly on a magnificent form; a brown velvet hat with a long white feather sat coquettishly on her dark locks; fresh red lips, sparkling black eyes, a classically formed nose, and finely curved lips completed her charming appearance. The young lady appeared to be about eighteen or nineteen years old; a proud smile hovered about her lips and the dark eyes looked curiously about.

Fanfaro and Caillette paused at their work, and now the young girl exclaimed in a clear bell-like voice:

"Monsieur Girdel, would it be possible for me to secure a few places for this evening, that is, some that are hid from the rest of the spectators?"

"H'm — that would be difficult," said Girdel, looking about.

"Of course I shall pay extra for the seats," continued the young lady.

"We have only one price for the front rows," said Firejaws, simply; "they cost twenty sous and the rear seats ten sous."

The governess sighed sorrowfully; Irene took an elegant purse from her pocket and pressed it in Girdel's hand.

"Take the money," she said, "and do what I say."

"I will try to get you the seats you desire, mademoiselle," he said politely, "but only for the usual price. Fanfaro," he said, turning to the young man, "can't we possibly fix up a box?"

Fanfaro drew near, and the young lady with open wonder gazed at the beautiful youth.

"What's the trouble, Papa Girdel?" he said.

Before the giant could speak Irene said:

"I do not ask very much. I would like to look at the performance, but naturally would not like to sit with the crowd. You know, peasants and such common people — "

"H'm!" growled Girdel.

“It is impossible,” said Fanfaro, coolly.

“Impossible?” repeated the young lady in amazement.

“But, Fanfaro,” interrupted Girdel, “I should think we could do it. A few boards, a carpet, and the thing is done.”

“Perhaps, but I shall not touch a finger to it.”

“You refuse?” exclaimed Irene. “Why, if I may ask?”

“Bravo, Fanfaro!” whispered Caillette, softly.

“Will you answer my question, monsieur — — I do not know your name?” said Irene, impatiently.

“I am called Fanfaro,” remarked the young man.

“Well then, Monsieur Fanfaro,” began Irene, with a mocking laugh, “why do you refuse to lend your master a helping hand?”

“His master?” replied Girdel, with flaming eyes; “excuse me, mademoiselle, but you have been incorrectly informed.”

“Come, Papa Girdel,” laughed Fanfaro, “I will tell the young lady my reasons, and I think you will approve of them. The public of ‘peasants,’ and such ‘common people,’ who are so repulsive to you, mademoiselle, that you do not desire to touch them with the seam of your dress, admire us and provide us with our sustenance. The hands which applaud us are coarse, I cannot deny it; but in spite of this, we regard their applause just as highly as that given to us by people whose hands are incased in fine kid gloves. To give you an especial box, mademoiselle, would be an insult to the peasants, and why should we do such a thing? Am I right or not?”

While Fanfaro was speaking, Irene looked steadily at his handsome face. The governess muttered something about impertinence. When the young man looked up, Irene softly said:

“That was a sharp lesson.”

“No; I merely told you my opinion.”

“Good. Now let me give you my answer; I will come this evening!”

“I thought so,” replied Fanfaro simply.

CHAPTER V

MASTER AND SERVANT

When the young lady and her governess left the booth and wended their way along the country road, the peasants respectfully made way for them and even Bobichel paused in his tricks. Irene held her little head sidewise as she walked through the crowd, while the governess marched with proudly uplifted head.

“Thank God,” said Madame Ursula, “there is the carriage.”

An elegant equipage came in sight, and a groom led a beautiful racer by the bridle.

“Step in, Madame Ursula,” said Irene, laughing, as she vaulted into the saddle.

“But you promised me — ”

“To be at the castle the same time as you,” added the young lady. “And I shall keep my promise. Forward, Almanser!”

The horse flew along like an arrow, and Madame Ursula, sighing, got into the carriage, which started off in the same direction.

“Who is the handsome lady?” asked Bobichel.

“The richest heiress in Alsace and Lorraine, Mademoiselle de Salves,” was the answer.

“Ah, she suits me,” said the clown.

“Bah, she is as proud as a peacock,” growled an old peasant.

“It is all the same to me,” said a second peasant; “she is going to be married to a gentleman in Paris, and there she fits better.”

A heavy mail-coach, which halted at the Golden Sun, interrupted the conversation. Mr. Schwan ran to the door to receive the travellers, and at the same moment the man in the brown overcoat appeared at the threshold of the door. Hardly had he seen the mail-coach than he hurried to open the door, and in a cringing voice said:

“Welcome, Monsieur le Marquis; my letter arrived, then, opportunely?”

The occupant of the coach nodded, and leaning on the other’s arm, he got out. It was the Marquis of Fougereuse. He looked like a man prematurely old, whose bent back and wrinkled features made him look like a man of seventy, while in reality he was hardly fifty.

In the marquis's company was a servant named Simon, who, in the course of years, had advanced from the post of valet to that of steward.

"What does the gentleman desire?" asked the host, politely.

"Let the dinner be served in my room," ordered Simon; and, giving the marquis a nod, he strode to the upper story in advance of him.

The door which Simon opened showed an elegantly furnished room according to Schwan's ideas, yet the marquis appeared to pay no attention to his surroundings, for he hardly gazed around, and in a state of exhaustion sank into a chair. Simon stood at the window and looked out, while the host hurriedly set the table; when this was finished, Simon winked to Schwan and softly said:

"Leave the room now, and do not enter it until I call for you."

"If the gentlemen wish anything — "

"I know, I know," interrupted Simon, impatiently. "Listen to what I say. You would do well to keep silent about the purpose of my master's visit here. In case any one asks you, simply say you know nothing."

"Neither I do," remarked Schwan.

"So much the better, then you do not need to tell a lie; I advise you in your own interest not to say anything."

The host went away and growled on the stairs:

"Confound big people and their servants. I prefer guests like Girdel and his troupe."

As soon as the door had closed behind Schwan, Simon approached the marquis.

"We are alone, master," he said timidly.

"Then speak; have you discovered Pierre Labarre's residence?"

"Yes, master."

"But you have not gone to see him yet?"

"No, I kept within your orders."

"You were right. I must daze the old scoundrel through my sudden appearance; I hope to get the secret from him."

"Is everything better now, master?" asked Simon, after a pause.

"Better? What are you thinking of?" exclaimed the marquis, angrily. "Every one has conspired against me, and ruin is near at hand."

"But the protection of his majesty — "

“Bah! the protection of the king is useless, if the cabinet hate me. Besides, I have had the misfortune to anger Madame de Foucheres, and since then everything has gone wrong.”

“The king cannot have forgotten what you did for him,” said Simon.

“A few weeks ago I was driven to the wall by my creditors, and I went to the king and stated my case to him. Do you know what his answer was? ‘Monsieur,’ he said, earnestly, ‘a Fougereuse should not demean himself by begging,’ and with that he gave me a draft for eighty thousand francs! What are eighty thousand francs for a man in my position? A drop of water on a hot stove.”

Simon nodded.

“But the vicomte,” he observed; “his majesty showers favors upon him — ”

“I am much obliged for the favors! Yes, my son is spoken of, but in what a way! The vicomte gambles, the vicomte is always in a scrape, the vicomte is the hero of the worst adventures — and kind friends never fail to tell me all about it! I hope his marriage will put a stop to all this business. Have you heard anything further of the De Salves ladies?”

“Not much, but enough. The estate of the young heiress is the largest for miles about, and she herself is a beauty of the first class.”

“So much the better. Think of it, four millions! Oh, if this should be lost to us!”

“That will hardly be the case, Monsieur le Marquis; the marriage has been decided upon.”

“Certainly, certainly, but then — if the old countess should find out about our pecuniary embarrassments all would be lost. But no, I will not despair; Pierre Labarre must talk, and then — ”

“Suppose he won’t? Old people are sometimes obstinate.”

“Have no fear, Simon, my methods have subdued many wills.”

“Yes, yes, you are right, sir,” laughed Simon.

“I can rely on you, then?”

“Perfectly so, sir. If it were necessary I would pick it up with ten Pierres!”

“You will find me grateful,” said the marquis. “If Pierre Labarre gives the fortune to the Fougereuse and the vicomte becomes the husband of the countess, we will be saved.”

"I know that you have brilliant prospects, my lord," replied Simon, "and I hope to win your confidence. The last few weeks I had an opportunity to do a favor to the family of my honored master."

"Really? You arouse my curiosity."

"My lord, Monsieur Franchet honored me with his confidence."

The marquis looked in amazement at his steward; Franchet was the superintendent of police. Recommended by the Duke of Montmorency, he was an especial favorite of the Society of Jesus. The Jesuits had spun their nets over the whole of France, and the secret orders emanated from the Rue de Vaugirard. Franchet had the reins of the police department in his hands, and used his power for the furtherance of the Jesuits' plans. The amazement which seized the marquis when he heard that his steward was the confidant of Franchet, was only natural; that Simon would make a good spy, Fougereuse knew very well.

"Go on," he softly said, when Simon paused.

"Thanks to the superintendent's confidence in me," said Simon, "I am able to secure a much more influential position at court for Monsieur le Marquis than he has at present."

"And how are you going to perform the miracle?" asked the marquis, sceptically.

"By allowing Monsieur le Marquis to take part in my projects for the good of the monarchy."

"Speak more clearly," ordered the marquis, briefly.

"Directly."

Simon went close to his master, and whispered:

"There exists a dangerous conspiracy against the state. People wish to overturn the government and depose the king."

"Folly! that has been often desired."

"But this time it is serious. A republican society — "

"Do not speak to me about republicans!" exclaimed Fougereuse, angrily.

"Let me finish, Monsieur le Marquis. My news is authentic. The attempt will perhaps be made in a few weeks, and then it will be a question of *sauve qui peut*! Through a wonderful chain of circumstances the plans of the secret society came into my hands. I could go to the king now and name him all the conspirators who threaten his life, but what would be my reward? With a servant little ado is made. His information is taken, its truth secretly looked into and he is given a small sum of money with a letter saying that he must have been deceived. If the Marquis of Fougereuse, on the other hand, should come, he is immediately master of the situation. The matter is investigated, the king calls him his savior, and his fortune is made.”

The marquis sprung up in excitement.

“And you are in a position to give me the plans of this society? You know who the conspirators are?” he exclaimed, with sparkling eyes.

“Yes, my lord.”

“You would allow me to reap the profit of your discovery?”

“Yes, my lord; I am in the first place a faithful servant.”

“Simon, let us stop this talk with turned down cards. What do you wish in return?”

“Nothing, my lord; I depend upon your generosity.”

“You shall not have cause to regret it,” said the marquis, drawing a deep breath. “Should I succeed in securing an influential position at court, you shall be the first to profit by it.”

“Thanks, my lord. I know I can count on your word. To come back to Pierre Labarre, I think we should hunt him up as soon as possible.”

“I am ready; where does he live?”

“At Vagney, about three hours distant.”

“It is now three o’clock,” said the marquis, pulling out his watch. “If we start now, we will be able to return to-night.”

“Then I shall order horses at once!”

Simon went away, and the marquis remained behind thinking. No matter where he looked, the past, present and future were alike blue to him.

The old marquis had died in 1817, and the vicomte had immediately set about to have the death of his brother, which had taken place at Leigoutte in 1814, confirmed. Both the wife and the children of Jules Fougere had disappeared since that catastrophe, and so the Vicomte of Talizac, now Marquis of Fougereuse, claimed possession of his father’s estate.

But, strange to say, the legacy was far less than the vicomte and Madeleine had expected, and, as they both had contracted big debts on the strength of it, nothing was left to them but to sell a portion of the grounds.

Had the marquis and his wife not lived so extravagantly they would not have tumbled from one difficulty into the other, but the desire to cut a figure in the Faubourg St. Germain consumed vast sums, and what the parents left over, the son gambled away and dissipated.

Petted and spoiled by his mother, the Vicomte de Talizac was a fast youth before he had attained his fifteenth year. No greater pleasure could be given his mother than to tell her, that her son was the leader of the *jeunesse dorée*. He understood how to let the money fly, and when the marquis, alarmed at his son's extravagance, reproached his wife, the latter cut him short by saying:

"Once for all, Jean, my son was not made to save; he is the heir of the Fougereuse, and must keep up his position."

"But in this way we shall soon be beggars," complained the marquis.

"Is that my fault?" asked Madame Madeleine, sharply. "What good is it that you — put your brother out of the way? His portion of the fortune is kept from you, and if you do not force Pierre Labarre to speak you will have to go without it."

"Then you think Pierre Labarre knows where the major part of my father's fortune is?" asked the marquis.

"Certainly. He and no one else has it in safe keeping, and if you do not hurry up, the old man might die, and we can look on."

The marquis sighed. This was not the first time Madeleine provoked him against Pierre Labarre, but the old man had disappeared since the death of his master, and it required a long time before Simon, the worthy assistant of the marquis, found out his residence.

In the meantime the position of the Fougereuses was getting worse and worse. At court murmurs were heard about swindling speculations with which the marquis's name was connected, and the vicomte did his best to drag the proud old name in the dust. A rescue was at hand, in a marriage of the vicomte with the young Countess of Salves, but this rescue rested on a weak footing, as a new escapade of "The Talizac Buckle," as the heir of the Fougereuse was mockingly called, might destroy the planned union.

Talizac was the hero of all the scandals of Paris; he sought and found his companions in very peculiar regions, and several duels he had fought had made his name, if not celebrated, at least disreputable.

This was the position of the marquis's affairs when Simon found Pierre Labarre; the marquis was determined not to return to Paris without first having settled the affair, and as Simon now returned to the room with the host, his master exclaimed:

"Are the horses ready?"

“No, my lord; the Cure has overflowed in consequence of the heavy rains, and the road from here to Vagney is impassable.”

“Can we not reach Vagney by any other way?”

“No, my lord.”

“Bah! the peasants exaggerate the danger so as to get increased prices for their services. Have you tried to get horses?”

“Yes, my lord; but unfortunately no one in the village except the host owns any.”

“Then buy the host’s horses.”

“He refuses to give me the animals. An acrobat who came here this morning, and who owns two horses, refused to sell them to me.”

“That looks almost like a conspiracy!” exclaimed the marquis.

“I think so too, and if I am permitted an advice — ”

“Speak freely; what do you mean?”

“That the best thing we can do is to start at once on foot. If we hurry, we can reach Vagney this evening, and the rest will take care of itself.”

“You are right,” replied the marquis; “let us go.”

Schwan was frightened when he heard of their intention, but the marquis remained determined, and the two were soon on the road.

“If no accident happens,” growled the host to himself, “the Cure is a treacherous sheet of water; I wish they were already back again.”

CHAPTER VI

THE PERFORMANCE

While the marquis and Simon were starting on their journey, Robeckal and Rolla had met on the country road as appointed, and in a long whispered conversation had made their plans. They both hated Girdel, Caillette, Fanfaro and Bobichel, and their idea was to kill both Girdel and Fanfaro that very evening. Caillette could be attended to afterward, and Bobichel was of no importance. Rolla loved Robeckal, as far as it was possible for a person like her to love any one, and desired to possess him. Robeckal, on his side, thought it would not be a bad idea to possess Girdel's business along with its stock, with which he ungallantly reckoned Rolla and Caillette. Caillette especially he admired, but he was smart enough not to say a word to Rolla.

"Enter, ladies and gentlemen, enter," exclaimed Bobichel, as he stood at the box-office and cordially greeted the crowds of people.

"I wonder whether she will come?" muttered Caillette to herself.

"Everything is ready," whispered Robeckal to Rolla; the Cannon Queen nodded and threw dark scowls at Girdel and Fanfaro.

The quick gallop of a horse was now heard, and the next minute Irene de Salves stepped into the booth.

"Really, she has come," muttered Caillette in a daze, as she pressed her hand to her heart and looked searchingly at Fanfaro.

The latter looked neither to the right nor left. He was busy arranging Girdel's weights and iron poles, and Caillette, calmed by the sight, turned around.

When Irene took her seat a murmur ran through the crowded house. The Salves had always occupied an influential position in the country; the great estate of the family insured them power and influence at court, and they were closely attached to the monarchy.

Irene's grandfather, the old Count of Salves, had been guillotined in 1793; his son had served under Napoleon, and was killed in Russia when his daughter had hardly reached her third year. The count's loss struck the countess to the heart; she retired to her castle in the neighborhood of Remiremont and attended to the education of her child.

Irene grew up, and when she often showed an obstinacy and wildness strange in a girl, her mother would say, with tears in her eyes:

“Thank God, she is the picture of her father.”

That nothing was done under the circumstances to curb Irene’s impetuosity is easily understood. Every caprice of the young heiress was satisfied, and so it came about that the precocious child ruled the castle. She thought with money anything could be done, and more than once it happened that the young girl while hunting trod down the peasants’ fields, consoling herself with the thought:

“Mamma gives these people money, and therefore it is all right.”

When Irene was about fifteen years old her mother became dangerously ill, and remained several months in bed. She never recovered the use of her limbs, and day after day she remained in her arm-chair, only living in the sight of her daughter. When Irene entered the room the poor mother thought the sun was rising, and she never grew tired of looking in her daughter’s clear eyes and listening to her silvery voice. The most singular contradictions reigned in Irene’s soul; she could have cried bitterly one minute, and laughed aloud the next; for hours at a time she would sit dreaming at the window, and look out at the autumnal forest scenery, then spring up, hurry out, jump into the saddle and bound over hill and valley. Sometimes she would chase a beggar from the door, the next day overload him with presents; she spent nights at the bedside of a sick village child, and carried an old woman at the risk of her life, from a burning house; in short, she was an original.

A few months before, the lawyer who administered the countess’s fortune had appeared at the castle and had locked himself up with her mother. When he left the castle the next day, the young lady was informed that she was to be married off, and received the news with the greatest unconcern. She did not know her future husband, the Vicomte de Talizac, but thought she would be able to get along with him. That she would have to leave her castle and her woods displeased her; she had never had the slightest longing for Paris, and the crowded streets of the capital were intolerable to her; but seeing that it must be she did not complain.

It was a wild caprice which had induced the young girl to attend Girdel’s performance; Fanfaro’s lecture had angered her at first, but later on, when she thought about it, she had to confess that he was right. She was now looking expectantly at the young man, who was engaged with Bobichel in lighting the few lamps, and when he drew near to her, she whispered to him:

"Monsieur Fanfaro, are you satisfied with me?"

Fanfaro looked at her in amazement, but a cordial smile flew over his lips, and Irene felt that she could stand many more insults if she could see him smile oftener.

Madame Ursula, who sat next to her pupil, moved up and down uneasily in her chair. Irene did not possess the least *savoir vivre*. How could she think of addressing the young acrobat? and now — no, it surpassed everything — he bent over her and whispered a few words in her ear. The governess saw Irene blush, then let her head fall and nod. What could he have said to her?

Caillette, too, had noticed the young lady address Fanfaro, and she became violently jealous.

What business had the rich heiress with the young man, whom she was accustomed to look upon as her own property?

For Caillette, as well as Madame Ursula, it was fortunate that they had not heard Fanfaro's words, and yet it was only good advice which the young man had given Irene.

"Mademoiselle, try to secure the love of those who surround you," he had earnestly said. And Irene had, at first impatiently and with astonishment, finally guiltily, listened to him. Really, when she thought with what indifference her coming and going in the village was looked upon, and with what hesitation she was greeted, she began to think Fanfaro was right; the young man had been gone long, and yet his words still sounded in her ears. Yes, she would try to secure love.

In the meantime the performance had begun. Girdel played with his weights, Rolla swallowed stones and pigeons, Robeckal knives and swords, and Caillette danced charmingly on the tight-rope. During all these different productions, Fanfaro was continually assisting the performers; he handed Girdel the weights and took them from him; he accompanied Robeckal's sword exercise with hollow beats on a tambourine; he played the violin while Caillette danced on the rope, and acted as Bobichel's foil in his comic acts. Fanfaro himself was not to appear before the second part; for the conclusion of the first part a climax was to be given in which Girdel would perform a piece in which he had everywhere appeared with thunders of applause; the necessary apparatus was being prepared.

This apparatus consisted of a plank supported by two logs which stood upright in the centre of the circus. In the centre of the plank was a windlass, from which hung an iron chain with a large hook.

Fanfaro rolled an empty barrel under the plank and filled it with irons and stones weighing about three thousand pounds. Thereupon the barrel was nailed up and the chain wound about it; strong iron rings, through which the chain was pulled, prevented it from slipping off.

Girdel now walked up. He wore a costume made of black tights, and a chin-band from which an iron hook hung. He bowed to the spectators, seized the barrel with his chin hook and laid himself upon his back. Fanfaro stood next to his foster-father, and from time to time blew a blast with his trumpet. At every tone the heavy cask rose a few inches in the air, and breathlessly the crowd looked at Girdel's performance. The cask had now reached a height on a level with Girdel; the spectators cheered, but suddenly an ominous breaking was heard, and while a cry of horror ran through the crowd, Fanfaro, quick as thought, sprung upon the cask and caught it in his arms.

What had happened? Girdel lay motionless on the ground. Fanfaro let the heavy cask glide gently to the floor and then stood pale as death near the athlete. The chain had broken, and had it not been for Fanfaro's timely assistance Girdel would have been crushed to pieces by the heavy barrel.

The violent shock had thrown Girdel some distance away. For a moment all were too frightened to stir, but soon spectators from all parts of the house came running up and loud cries were heard.

Caillette had thrown herself sobbing at her father's feet; Bobichel and Fanfaro busied themselves trying to raise the fallen man from the ground, and Rolla uttered loud, roaring cries which no doubt were intended to express her grief. Robeckal alone was not to be seen.

"Oh, Fanfaro, is he dead?" sobbed Caillette.

Fanfaro was silent and bent anxiously over Girdel; Rolla, on the other hand, looked angrily at the young man and hissed in his ear:

"Do not touch him. I will restore him myself."

Instead of giving the virago an answer, Fanfaro looked sharply at her. The wretched woman trembled and recoiled, while the young man, putting his ear to Girdel's breast, exclaimed:

“Thank God, he lives!”

Caillette uttered a low moan and became unconscious; two soft hands were laid tenderly on her shoulders, and when the tight-rope dancer opened her eyes, she looked in Irene’s face, who was bending anxiously over her.

Girdel still remained motionless; the young countess handed Fanfaro an elegantly carved bottle filled with smelling-salts, but even this was of no avail.

“Wait, I know what will help him!” exclaimed Bobichel, suddenly, and hurrying out he returned with a bottle of strong brandy.

With the point of a knife Fanfaro opened Girdel’s tightly compressed lips; the clown poured a few drops of the liquid down his throat, and in a few moments Girdel slowly opened his eyes and a deep sigh came from his breast. When Bobichel put the bottle to his mouth again, he drank a deep draught.

“Hurrah, he is rescued!” exclaimed the clown, as he wiped the tears from his eyes. He then walked to Rolla and mockingly whispered: “This time you reckoned without your host.”

Rolla shuddered, and a look flew from Bobichel to Fanfaro.

Robeckal now thought it proper to appear and come from behind a post. He said in a whining voice:

“Thank God that our brave master lives. I dreaded the worst.”

Schwan, who was crying like a child, threw a sharp look at Robeckal, and Fanfaro now said:

“Is there no physician in the neighborhood?”

“No, there is no physician in Sainte-Ame, and Vagney is several miles distant.”

“No matter, I shall go to Vagney.”

“Impossible, the floods have destroyed all the roads; you risk your life, Fanfaro,” said Schwan.

“And if that is so, I am only doing my duty,” replied the young man. “I owe it to my foster-father that I did not die of cold and starvation.”

“You are an honest fellow. Take one of my horses and ride around the hill. It is certainly an out-of-the-way road, but it is safe. Do not spare the horse; it is old, but when driven hard it still does its duty.”

“Monsieur Fanfaro,” said Irene, advancing, “take my riding horse; it flies like the wind, and will carry you to Vagney in a short time.”

“She is foolish,” complained Madame Ursula, while Fanfaro accepted Irene’s offer without hesitating; “the riding horse is an English thoroughbred and cost two thousand francs.”

No one paid any attention to her. Fanfaro swung himself into the saddle, and, throwing a cloak over his shoulders, he cordially said:

“Mademoiselle, I thank you.”

“Don’t mention it; I am following your advice,” laughed Irene.

CHAPTER VII

PIERRE LABARRE

The marquis and his steward had likewise hurried along the road to Vagney. They were often forced to halt to find the right direction, as the overflowing Cure had flooded the road at different points, but yet they reached the hill on which the city rests before night.

"The danger is behind us now," said Simon.

A quarter of an hour later they stopped before a small solitary house. Simon shook the knocker, and then they both waited impatiently to get in.

For a short time all was still, and Simon was about to strike again, when a window was opened and a voice asked:

"Who is there?"

The two men exchanged quick glances; Pierre Labarre was at home, and, as it seemed, alone.

"I am the Marquis of Fougereuse," said the marquis, finally.

No sooner had the words been spoken than the window was closed. The bolt of the house door was shoved back in a few moments and a lean old man appeared on the threshold.

Ten years had passed since Pierre Labarre rode alone through the Black Forest, and saved himself from the bullet of the then Vicomte de Talizac by his portfolio. Pierre's hair had grown gray now, but his eyes looked as fearlessly on the world as if he had been thirty.

"Come in, vicomte," said the old man, earnestly.

The marquis and Simon followed Pierre into a small, plainly furnished room; the only decoration was a black piece of mourning almost covering one of the walls. While the old man turned up the small lamp, Simon, without being noticed, closed the door. Pierre pointed to a straw chair and calmly said:

"Monsieur le Vicomte, will you please take a seat?"

The marquis angrily said:

"Pierre Labarre, it surprises me that in the nine years which have passed since the death of my father, the Marquis of Fougereuse, you should have forgotten what a servant’s duties are! Since seven years I bear the title of my father; why do you persist in calling me Monsieur le Vicomte?”

Pierre Labarre stroked the white hair from his forehead with his long bony hand and slowly said:

“I know only one Marquis of Fougereuse.”

“And who should bear this title if not I?” cried the marquis, angrily.

“The son of the man who was murdered at Leigoutte in the year 1805,” replied Pierre.

“Murdered?” exclaimed the marquis, mockingly: “that man fell fighting against the legitimate masters of the country.”

“Your brother, Monsieur le Vicomte, was the victim of a well-laid plan; those persons who were interested in his death made their preparations with wonderful foresight.”

The marquis frothed with anger, and it did not require very much more until he would have had the old man by the throat. He restrained himself, though; what good would it do him if he strangled Pierre before he knew the secret?

“Let us not discuss that matter,” he hastily said; “other matters have brought me here — ”

As Pierre remained silent, the marquis continued:

“I know perfectly well that that affair disturbed you. As the old servitor of my father you naturally were attached to the dead man. Yet, who could avert the catastrophe? The father, the mother and the two children were all slain at the same hour by the Cossacks, and — ”

“You are mistaken, vicomte,” interrupted Pierre, sharply; “the father fell in a struggle with paid assassins, the mother was burned to death, but the children escaped.”

“You are fooling, old man,” exclaimed the marquis, growing pale; “Jules’s two children are dead.”

The old man crossed his arms over his breast, and, looking steadily at the marquis, he firmly said:

“Monsieur le Vicomte, the children live.”

The marquis could no longer restrain himself.

“You know where they are?” he excitedly exclaimed.

“No, vicomte, but it cheers me to hear from your words that you yourself do not believe the children are dead.”

The marquis bit his lips. He had betrayed himself. Simon shrugged his shoulders and thought in his heart that the marquis was not the proper person to intrust with diplomatic missions for the Society of Jesus.

“Monsieur le Marquis,” he hurriedly said, “what is the use of these long discussions? Put the question which concerns you most to the obstinate old man, and if he does not answer, I will make him speak.”

“You are right,” nodded the marquis; and turning to Pierre again he threateningly said:

“Listen, Pierre Labarre; I will tell you the object of my visit. It is a question of the honor of the Fougereuse.”

A sarcastic laugh played about the old man’s lips, and half muttering to himself, he repeated:

“The honor of the Fougereuse — I am really curious to know what I shall hear.”

The marquis trembled, and, casting a timid look at Simon, he said:

“Simon, leave us to ourselves.”

“What, Monsieur le Marquis?” asked Simon in amazement.

“You should leave us alone,” repeated the marquis, adding in a whisper: “Go, I have my reasons.”

“But, Monsieur le Marquis!”

“Do not say anything; go!”

Simon went growlingly away, and opening the door he had so carefully locked, he strode into the hall; taking care, however, to overhear the conversation.

As soon as the nobleman was alone with Pierre, his demeanor changed. He approached close to the old man, took his hand and cordially shook it. Pierre looked at the marquis in amazement, and quickly withdrawing his hand, he dryly said:

“To business, vicomte.”

“Pierre,” the marquis began, in a voice he tried to render as soft and moving as possible, “you were the confidant of my father; you knew all his secrets, and were aware that he did not love me. Do not interrupt me — I know my conduct was not such as he had a right to expect from a son. Pierre, I was not wicked, I was weak and could not withstand any temptation, and my father often had cause to be dissatisfied with me. Pierre, what I am telling you no human ear has ever heard; I look upon you as my father confessor and implore you not to judge too harshly.”

Pierre held his eyes down, and even the marquis paused — he did not look up.

“Pierre, have you no mercy?” exclaimed the nobleman, in a trembling voice.

“Speak further, my lord,” said Pierre; “I am listening.”

The marquis felt like stamping with his foot. He saw, however, that he had to control himself.

“If you let me implore hopelessly to-day, Pierre,” he whispered, gritting his teeth, “the name of Fougereuse will be eternally dishonored.”

“The name of Fougereuse?” asked Pierre, with faint malice; “thank God, my lord, that it is not in your power to stain it; you are only the Vicomte de Talizac.”

The marquis stamped his foot angrily when he heard the old man’s cutting words; it almost surpassed his strength to continue the conversation to an end, and yet it must be if he wished to gain his point.

“I see, I must explain myself more clearly,” he said after a pause. “Pierre, I am standing on the brink of a precipice. My fortune and my influence are gone; neither my wife nor my son imagines how I am situated, but if help does not come soon — ”

“Well, what will happen?” asked Pierre, indifferently.

“Then I will not be able to keep my coat of arms, which dates from the Crusades, clean and spotless.”

“I do not understand you, vicomte. Is it only a question of your fortune?”

“No, Pierre, it is a question of the honor of the Fougereuse. Oh, God! You do not desire to understand me; you want me to disclose my shame. Listen then,” continued the marquis, placing his lips to the old man’s ears: “to rescue myself from going under, I committed an act of despair, and if assistance does not come to me, the name of the Fougereuse will be exposed to the world, with the brand of the forger upon it.”

The old man’s face showed no traces of surprise. He kept silent for a moment, and then asked in cold tones:

“Monsieur le Vicomte, what do you wish of me?”

“I will tell you,” said the marquis, hastily, while a gleam of hope strayed over his pale face; “I know that my father, to have the major part of his fortune go to his eldest son, made a will and gave it to you — ”

“Go on,” said Pierre, as the marquis paused.

"The will contains many clauses," continued the nobleman. "My father hid a portion of his wealth, and in his last will named the spot where it lies buried, providing that it should be given to his eldest son or his descendants! Pierre, Jules is dead, his children have disappeared, and therefore nothing hinders you from giving up this wealth. It must be at least two millions. Can you hesitate to give me the money which will save the name of Fougereuse from shame and exposure?"

The marquis hesitated; Pierre rose slowly and, turning to a side wall, grasped the mourning cloth and shoved it aside.

The nobleman wonderingly observed the old man, who now took a lamp and solemnly said:

"Vicomte, look here!"

The marquis approached the wall, and in the dim light of the lamp he saw a tavern sign, upon which a few letters could be seen. The sign had evidently been burned.

"Monsieur le Vicomte, do you know what that is?" asked Pierre, threateningly.

"No," replied the marquis.

"Then I will tell you, vicomte," replied Pierre. "The inscription on this sign once read, 'To the Welfare of France.' Do you still wish me to give you the will and the fortune?"

"I do not understand you," stammered the nobleman, in a trembling voice.

"Really, vicomte, you have a short memory, but I, the old servant of your father, am able to refresh it! This sign hung over the door of the tavern at Leigoutte; your brother, the rightful heir of Fougereuse, was the landlord and the bravest man for miles around. In the year 1805 Jules Fougere, as he called himself, fell. The world said Cossacks had murdered him. I, though, vicomte, I cry it aloud in your ear — his murderer was — you!"

"Silence, miserable lackey!" exclaimed the marquis, enraged, "you lie!"

"No, Cain, the miserable lackey does not lie," replied Pierre, calmly; "he even knows more! In the year 1807 the old Marquis of Fougereuse died; in his last hours his son, the Vicomte of Talizac, sneaked into the chamber of death and, sinking on his knees beside the bedside of the dying man, implored his father to make him his sole heir. The marquis hardly had strength enough to breathe, but his eyes looked threateningly at the scoundrel who dared to imbitter his last hours, and with his last gasp he hurled at the kneeling man these words: ‘May you be eternally damned, miserable fratricide!’

“The vicomte, as if pursued by the furies, escaped; the dying man gave one more gasp and then passed away, and I, who was behind the curtains, a witness of this terrible scene — I shall so far forget myself as to deliver to the man who did not spare his father the inheritance of his brother? No, vicomte, Pierre Labarre knows his duty, and if to-morrow the name of the Fougereuse should be trampled in the dust and the present bearer of the name be placed in the pillory as a forger and swindler, then I will stand up and say:

“‘He is not a Fougereuse, he is only a Talizac. He murdered the heir, and let no honest man ever touch his blood-stained hand!’ Get out of here, Vicomte Talizac, my house has no room for murderers!”

Pale as death, with quaking knees, the marquis leaned against the wall. When Pierre was silent he hissed in a low voice:

“Then you refuse to help me?”

“Yes, a thousand times, yes.”

“You persist in keeping the fortune of the Fougereuse for Jules’s son, who has been dead a long time?”

“I keep the fortune for the living.”

“And if he were dead, nevertheless?”

Pierre suddenly looked up — suppose the murderer were to prove his assertion?

“Would you, if Jules’s son were really dead, acknowledge me as the heir?”

“I cannot tell.”

“For the last time, will you speak?”

“No; the will and fortune belong to the Marquis of Fougereuse, Jules’s son.”

“Enough; the will is here in your house; the rest will take care of itself.”

Hereupon the marquis gave a penetrating whistle, and when Simon appeared his master said to him:

“Take hold of this scoundrel!”

“Bravo! force is the only thing,” cried Simon, as he rushed upon the old man. But he had reckoned without his host; with a shove Pierre Labarre threw the audacious rascal to the ground, and the next minute the heavy old table lay between him and his enemies. Thereupon the old man took a pistol from the wall, and, cocking the trigger, cried:

"Vicomte Talizac, we still have an old score to settle! Years ago you attempted to kill me in the Black Forest; take care you do not arouse my anger again."

The vicomte, who had no weapon, recoiled: Simon, however, seized a pocket-pistol from his breast, and mockingly replied: "Oh, two can play at that game!"

He pressed his hand to the trigger, but Pierre Labarre put his pistol down, and contemptuously said:

"Bah! for the lackey the dog will do. Catch him, Sultan!"

As he said these words he opened a side door; a large Vosges dog, whose glowing eyes and crispy hair made him look like a wolf, sprang upon Simon, and, clutching him by the throat, threw him to the ground.

"Help, my lord marquis!" cried the steward.

"Let go, Sultan," commanded Pierre.

The dog shook his opponent once more and then let him loose.

"Get out of here, miscreants!" exclaimed Pierre now, with threatening voice, as he opened the door, "and never dare to come into my house again."

The wretches ran as if pursued by the Furies. Pierre caressed the dog and then laughed softly; he was rid of his guests.

CHAPTER VIII

A MEETING

Fanfaro had urged Irene’s horse on at great speed, and while it flew along like a bird, the most stormy feelings raged in his heart.

The gaze of the pretty girl haunted him; he heard her gentle voice and tried in vain to shake off these thoughts. What was he, that he should indulge in such wild fancies? A foundling, the adopted son of an acrobat, who had picked him up upon the way, and yet —

Further and further horse and rider flew; before Fanfaro’s eyes stood Girdel’s pale, motionless face, and he thought he could hear Caillette’s bitter sobs. No, he must bring help or else go under, and ceaselessly, like lightning, he pushed on toward the city.

The marquis and Simon ran breathlessly along. Their only thought was to get far from the neighborhood of the old man and his wolf-hound. Neither of the two spoke a word. The stormy, roaring Cure was forgotten, the danger to life was forgotten; on, on they went, like deer pursued by a pack of bloodthirsty hounds, and neither of them paid any attention to the ominous noise of the overflowing mountain streams.

Suddenly Simon paused and seized the marquis’s arm.

“Listen,” he whispered, tremblingly, “what is that?”

A thunderous noise, ceaseless, rolling, and crashing, reached their ears from all sides; from all sides frothy, bubbling masses of water dashed themselves against the rocks, and now — now an immense rock fell crashing in the flood, which overflowed into the wide plain like a storm-whipped sea.

Despair seized the men; before, behind, and around them roared and foamed the turbulent waters; they turned to the right, where a huge rock, which still projected above the waves, assured them safety, but just then the marquis struck his foot against a stone — he tumbled and fell with a half-smothered cry for help, “Help — I am sinking!” into the dark depths.

Simon did not think of lending his master a helping hand; he sprang from rock to rock, from stone to stone, and soon reached a high point which protected him from the oncoming waters.

The marquis had been borne a short distance along by the raging waters, until he succeeded in clambering upon a branch of an evergreen tree. The flood still rolled along above his body, but with superhuman strength he managed to keep his head above water and despairingly cry, “Help, Simon! Rescue me!”

Suddenly it seemed to the half-unconscious man as if he heard a human voice calling to him from above:

“Courage — keep up.”

With the remainder of his strength the marquis gazed in the direction from which it came, and recognized a human form which seemed to be hanging in the air.

“Attention, I will soon be with you,” cried the voice, now coming nearer.

The marquis saw the form spring, climb, and then the water spurted up and the marquis lost consciousness.

Fanfaro, for naturally he was the rescuer, who appeared at the hour of the greatest need, now stood up to his knees in water, and had just stretched his hand out toward the marquis, when the latter, with a groan, let go of the tree branch, and the next minute he was borne along by the turbulent waters.

Fanfaro uttered a slight cry, but he did not hesitate a moment. Plunging into the seething waves, he parted them with muscular strokes, and succeeded in grasping the drowning man. Throwing his left arm about him, he swam to the rocky projection upon which the evergreen tree stood. Inch by inch he climbed toward the pathway which was upon the top of the hill. Perspiration dripped from his forehead, and his wind threatened to give out, but Fanfaro went on, and finally stood on top. Putting the marquis softly on the ground, Fanfaro took out a small pocket-lantern which he always carried with him. With great trouble he lighted the wet wick, and then let the rays fall full on the pale face of the motionless man. Seized by an indescribable emotion, the young man leaned over the marquis. Did he suspect that the man whom he had rescued from the stormy waters, at the risk of his life, was the brother of the man who had taken mercy on the helpless orphan, and was at the same time his father? The marquis now opened his eyes, heaved a deep sigh, and looked wildly around him.

“Where am I?” he faintly stammered. “The water — ah!”

“You are saved,” said Fanfaro, gently.

The sound of the voice caused all the blood to rush to the marquis’s heart.

“Did you save me?”

“Yes.”

“Who are you?”

“My name is Fanfaro, and I am a member of Girdel’s troupe, which is at present in Sainte-Ame. Can you raise yourself?”

With the young man’s assistance, the marquis raised himself up, but uttered a cry of pain when he put his feet on the ground.

“Are you wounded?” asked Fanfaro, anxiously.

“No, I do not think so; the water knocked me against trees and stones, and my limbs hurt me from that.”

“That will soon pass away. Now put your arm about my neck and trust yourself to me; I will bring you to a place of safety.”

The marquis put his arms tightly about the young man’s neck, and the latter strode along the narrow pathway which led to the heights.

Soon the road became broader, the neighing of a horse was heard, and drawing a deep breath the young man stood still.

“Now we are safe,” he said, consolingly; “I will take you on the back of my horse, and in less than a quarter of an hour we will be in Sainte-Ame. I rode from there to Vagney, to get a physician for my foster-father, Girdel, who injured himself, but unfortunately he was not at home, and so I had to return alone. Get up, the road is straight ahead, and the mountains now lie between us and the water.”

In the meantime Fanfaro had helped the marquis on the back of the horse, and now he raised his lantern to untie the knot of the rope with which he had bound the animal to a tree. The light of the lamp fell full upon his face, and the marquis uttered a slight cry; his rescuer resembled in a startling way the old Marquis of Fougereuse.

Had he Jules’s son before him?

A satanic idea flashed through the brain of the noble rogue, and when Fanfaro, after putting out his lantern, attempted to get on the horse’s back, the marquis pressed heavily against the horse’s flank and they were both off like the wind in the direction of the village.

Fanfaro, who only thought that the horse had run away with the marquis, cried in vain to the rider, and so he had to foot the distance, muttering as he went:

“If the poor fellow only doesn’t get hurt; he is still feeble, and the horse needs a competent rider.”

CHAPTER IX

THE GRATITUDE OF A NOBLEMAN

Fanfaro was hardly a hundred feet away from Sainte-Ame, when Girdel opened his eyes and looked about him.

"What, my little Caillette is weeping!" he muttered, half-laughing. "Child, you probably thought I was dead?"

"Oh, God be praised and thanked!" cried Caillette, springing up and falling upon her father's neck.

Bobichel almost sprung to the ceiling, and Schwan, between laughing and crying, exclaimed:

"What a fright you gave us, old boy. The poor fellow rode away in the night to get a physician, and — "

"A physician? For me?" laughed Girdel. "Thank God, we are not so far gone."

"But you were unconscious more than half an hour; we became frightened, and Fanfaro rode to Vagney."

"He rode? On our old mare, perhaps? If he only returns," said Girdel, anxiously. "The water must be dangerous about Vagney."

"He has a good horse; the Countess of Salves gave Fanfaro her thoroughbred," said Bobichel.

"Ah! that is different. Now, children, let me alone. Cousin Schwan, send me the two men whom I am to bring to Remiremont to-morrow; I must speak to them."

Caillette, Bobichel, Schwan and Rolla went away. In the dark corridor a figure passed by Rolla, and a hoarse voice said:

"Well?"

"All for nothing," growled Rolla; "he lives, and is as healthy as a fish in the water."

"You don't say so," hissed Robeckal.

"It was your own fault," continued the virago. "A good stab in the right place, and all is over; but you have no courage."

“Silence, woman!” growled Robeckal. “I have attended to that in another way; he shall not trouble us long. Tell me, does he ever receive any letters?”

“A great pile,” said Rolla.

“And you cannot tell me their contents?”

“No; I never read them.”

This discretion had good grounds. Rolla could not read, but she did not wish to admit it to him. Whether Robeckal suspected how things were, we do not know; anyhow, he did not pursue the subject any further, but said:

“Schwan brought two men to Girdel a little while ago; come with me to the upper story; we can listen at the door there and find out what they say.”

When Robeckal and Rolla, after listening nearly two hours, slipped downstairs they had heard all that Girdel and the two gentlemen had said. They knew Fanfaro had been deputed to take important papers to Paris and give them to a certain person who had been designated; Girdel had guaranteed that Fanfaro would fill the mission promptly.

When Robeckal returned to the inn, Simon rushed in pale and trembling. He could hardly reply to the landlord’s hurried questions; the words, “In the water — the flood — dead — my poor master!” came from his trembling lips, and immediately afterward he sank to the floor unconscious.

While Schwan was busy with him, the sound of a horse’s hoofs was heard.

“Thank God, here comes Fanfaro!” exclaimed Bobichel and Caillette, simultaneously, and they both rushed to the door.

Who can describe their astonishment when they saw the marquis, dripping with water and half frozen, get down from the horse and enter the room?

“Where is Fanfaro?” asked Bobichel, anxiously.

“He will soon be here,” replied the marquis; “the horse ran away with me, and I could not hold him.”

“Then the brave fellow is not injured?” asked Schwan, vivaciously.

“God forbid; quick, give me a glass of brandy and lead me to Girdel; I must speak to him at once.”

While the host went to get the brandy, Simon and the marquis exchanged looks; the next minute Schwan returned and the nobleman drank a large glass of brandy at a gulp.

“Ah, that warms,” he said, smacking his lips, “and now let us look for Girdel.”

As soon as the marquis left the room, Robeckal drew near to the steward and whispered:

"Follow me, I must speak to you."

They both went into the hall and held a conversation in low tones.

Suddenly a cry of joy reached their ears, and the next minute they saw Bobichel, who, in his anxiety about Fanfaro, had hurried along the road, enter the house with the young man.

"There he is," whispered Robeckal, "God knows how it is, but neither fire nor water seems to have the slightest effect on him."

"We will get rid of him, never fear," said Simon, wickedly.

From the upper story loud cries were heard. Rolla danced with a brandy bottle in her hand, and Girdel was asking himself how he ever could have made such a low woman his wife.

A knock was now heard on his door; Girdel cried, "Come in," in powerful tones, and a man, a stranger to him, crossed the threshold.

"Have I the honor of addressing Monsieur Girdel?" the stranger politely asked.

"At your service; that is my name."

"I am the Marquis of Fougereuse, and would like to have an interview with you."

"Take a seat, my lord marquis, and speak," said Girdel, looking expectantly at his visitor.

"I will not delay you long, Monsieur Girdel," the marquis began; "I know you have met with a misfortune — "

"Oh, it was not serious," said the athlete.

"Monsieur Girdel," continued the nobleman, "about one hour ago I was in peril of my life, and one of your men rescued me at the risk of his."

"You don't say so? How did it happen?" cried Girdel.

"I was in danger of drowning in the Cure; a young man seized me from out of the turbulent waters and carried me in his arms to a place of safety."

"Ah, I understand, the young man of whom you spoke — "

"Was your son, Fanfaro!"

"I thought so," said the athlete; "if Fanfaro is alone only one second, he generally finds time to save somebody. Where is the boy now?"

"He will be here soon. He asked me to get on the back of the horse with him. I got up first, and hardly had the fiery steed felt some one on his back than he flew away like an arrow. I was too feeble to check the horse, and so my rescuer was forced to follow on foot."

"Fanfaro doesn't care for that; he walks miles at a time without getting tired, and in less than fifteen minutes he will be here."

"Then it is the right time for me to ask you a few questions which I do not wish him to hear. You are probably aware what my position at court is?"

"Candidly, no; the atmosphere of the court has never agreed with me."

"Then let me tell you that my position is a very influential one, and consequently it would be easy for me to do something for you and your — son."

The marquis pronounced the word "son" in a peculiar way, but Girdel shook his head.

"I wish Fanfaro was my son," he sighed; "I know of no better luck."

"If the young man is not your son," said the marquis, "then he would need my assistance the more. His parents are, perhaps, poor people, and my fortune — "

"Fanfaro has no parents any more, my lord marquis."

"Poor young man!" said the nobleman, pityingly; "but what am I saying?" he interrupted himself with well-played anger. "Fanfaro has no doubt found a second father in you; I would like to wager that you were a friend of his parents, and have bestowed your friendship upon the son."

"You are mistaken, my lord; I found Fanfaro on the road."

"Impossible! What singular things one hears! Where did you find the boy?"

"Ah! that is an old story, but if it interests you I will relate it to you: One cold winter day, I rode with my wagon — in which was, besides my stock, my family and some members of my troupe — over a snow-covered plain in the Vosges, when I suddenly heard loud trumpet tones. At first I did not pay any attention to them. It was in the year 1814, and such things were not uncommon then. However, the tones were repeated, and I hurried in the direction from whence they proceeded. I shall never forget the sight which met me. A boy about ten years of age lay unconscious over a dead trumpeter, and his small hands were nervously clutched about the trumpet. It was plain that he had blown the notes I had heard and then fallen to the ground in a faint. I took the poor little fellow in my arms; all around lay the bodies of many French soldiers, and the terrors of the neighborhood had no doubt been too much for the little rogue. We covered him in the wagon with warm cloaks, and because the poor fellow had blown such fanfares upon the trumpet, we had called him Fanfaro."

"Didn't he have any name?" asked the marquis, nervously.

"That, my dear sir, wasn't so easy to find out. Hardly had we taken the boy to us than he got the brain-fever, and for weeks lay on the brink of the grave. When he at length recovered, he had lost his memory entirely, and only after months did he regain it. At last he could remember the name of the village where he had formerly lived — "

"What was the name of this village?" interrupted the marquis, hurriedly.

"Leigoutte, my lord."

The nobleman had almost uttered a cry, but he restrained himself in time, and Girdel did not notice his guest's terrible excitement.

"His name, too, and those of his parents and sister, we found out after a time," continued Girdel; "his father's name was Jules, his mother's Louise, his sister's Louison, and his own Jacques. On the strength of his information I went to Leigoutte, but found out very little. The village had been set on fire by the Cossacks and destroyed. Of the inhabitants only a few women and children had been rescued, and the only positive thing I heard was that Jacques's mother had been burned to death in a neighboring farmhouse. The men of Leigoutte had made a stand against the Cossacks, but had been fairly blown into the air by them. I returned home dissatisfied. Fanfaro remained with us; he learned our tricks, and we love him very much. Where he managed to procure the knowledge he has is a riddle to me; he never went to a regular school, and yet he knows a great deal. He is a genius, my lord marquis, and a treasure for our troupe."

Cold drops of perspiration stood on the nobleman's forehead. No, there was no longer any doubt: Fanfaro was his brother's son!

"Have you never been able to find out his family name?" he asked, after a pause.

"No; the Cossacks set fire to the City Hall at Weissenbach and all the records there were destroyed. An old shepherd said he had once been told that Jules was the scion of an old noble family. Anything positive on this point, I could not find out — I — "

At this point the door was hastily opened and Fanfaro entered. He rushed upon Girdel and enthusiastically cried:

"Thank God, Papa Girdel, that you are well again."

“You rascal, you,” laughed Girdel, looking proudly at the young man. “You have found time again to rescue some one.”

“Monsieur Fanfaro,” said the marquis now, “permit me once more to thank you for what you have done for me. I can never repay you.”

“Don’t mention it, sir,” replied Fanfaro, modestly, “I have only done my duty.”

“Well I hope if you should ever need me you will let me know. The Marquis of Fougereuse is grateful.”

When the marquis went downstairs shortly afterward, he found Simon awaiting him.

“Simon,” he said, hurriedly, “do you know who Fanfaro is?”

“No, my lord.”

“He is the son of my brother, Jules de Fougereuse.”

“Really?” exclaimed Simon, joyfully, “that would be splendid.”

“Listen to my plan; the young man must die, but under such circumstances as to have his identity proved, so that Pierre Labarre can be forced to break his silence. You understand me, Simon?”

“Perfectly so, my lord; and I can tell you now that I already know the means and way to do the job. A little while ago a man, whom I can trust, informed me that Fanfaro is going to play a part in the conspiracy against the government which I have already spoken to you about.”

“So much the better; but can he be captured in such a way that there will be no outlet for him?”

“I hope so.”

“Who gave you this information?” asked the marquis, after Simon had told him all that Robeckal had overheard.

“A man called Robeckal; he is a member of Girdel’s troupe.”

“Good.”

The marquis took out a note-book, wrote a few lines, and then said:

“Here, take this note, Simon, and accompany Robeckal at once to Remiremont. There you will go to the Count of Vernac, the police superintendent, and give him the note. The count is a faithful supporter of the monarchy, and will no doubt accede to my request to send some policemen here this very night to arrest Girdel and Fanfaro. The rest I shall see to.”

“My lord, I congratulate you,” said Simon, respectfully.

CHAPTER X

ESCAPED

Before Robeckal had gone with Simon, he had hurried to Rolla and told her that he was going to Remiremont now to get some policemen.

“Our score will be settled now on one board,” he said, with a wink.

The fat woman had looked at him with swimming eyes, and in a maudlin voice replied:

“That — is — right — all — must — suffer — Caillette — also!”

“Certainly, Caillette, too,” replied Robeckal, inwardly vowing to follow his own ideas with respect to this last, and then he hurried after the steward.

Caillette and Rolla slept in the same room; when the young girl entered it she saw the Cannon Queen sitting in an intoxicated condition at the table surrounded by empty bottles. The horrible woman greeted the young girl with a coarse laugh, and as Caillette paid no attention to her, Rolla placed her arms upon the table, and threateningly exclaimed:

“Don’t put on such airs, you tight-rope princess; what will you do when they take your Fanfaro away?”

“Take Fanfaro away? What do you mean?” asked Caillette, frightened, overcoming her repulsion, and looking at Rolla.

“Ha! ha! ha! Now the pigeon thaws — yes, there is nothing like love,” mocked the drunken woman. “Ah, the policemen won’t let themselves be waited for; Robeckal and the others will look out for that.”

Caillette, horror-stricken, listened to the virago’s words. Was she right, and were her father and Fanfaro in danger?

“I am going to sleep now,” said Rolla, “and when I wake up Fanfaro and Girdel will have been taken care of.”

Leaning back heavily in the chair, the woman closed her eyes. Caillette waited until loud snoring told her Rolla was fast asleep, and then she silently slipped out of the room, locked it from the outside, and tremblingly hurried to wake her father.

As she reached Girdel’s door, a dark form, which had been crouching near the threshold, arose.

“Who’s there?” asked Caillette softly.

“I, little Caillette,” replied Bobichel’s voice. “I am watching, because I do not trust Robeckal.”

“Oh, Bobichel, there is danger. I must waken father at once.”

“What is the matter?”

“Go, wake father and tell him I must speak to him; do not lose a minute,” urged Caillette.

The clown did not ask any more questions. He hurried to wake Girdel and Fanfaro, and then called Caillette. The young girl hastily told what she had heard. At first Girdel shook his head doubtingly, but he soon became pensive, and when Caillette finally said Rolla even muttered in her sleep about an important conspiracy and papers, he could no longer doubt.

“What shall we do?” he asked, turning to Fanfaro.

“Fly,” said the young man quickly. “We owe our lives and our strength to the fatherland and the good cause; to stay here would be to put them both rashly at stake. Let us pray to God that it even now may not be too late.”

“So be it, let us fly. We can leave the wagon go, and take only the horses. Is Robeckal at home?” asked Girdel, suddenly turning to Bobichel.

“No, master, he has gone.”

“Then forward,” said the athlete firmly. “I will take Caillette on my horse and you two, Fanfaro and Bobichel, mount the second animal.”

“No, master, that won’t do,” remarked the clown, “you alone are almost too heavy for a horse; Fanfaro must take Caillette upon his and I shall go on foot. Do not say otherwise. My limbs can stand a great deal, and I won’t lose sight of you. Where are we going?”

“We must reach Paris as soon as possible,” said Fanfaro. “Shall we wake the landlord?”

“Not for any money,” said Girdel; “we would only bring him into trouble.”

“You are right,” replied Fanfaro; “we must not open the house door either, we must go by way of the window.”

“That won’t be very difficult for such veterans as we are,” laughed Girdel. “Bobichel, get down at once and saddle the horses. You will find the saddles in the large box in the wagon. But one minute — what will become of my wife?”

The others remained silent, only Fanfaro said:

“Her present condition is such that we cannot take her along; and, besides, there is no danger in store for her.”

Girdel scratched his head in embarrassment.

“I will look after her,” he finally said, and hurried out.

In about two minutes he returned.

“She is sleeping like a log,” he said; “we must leave her here. Schwan will take care of her.”

In the meantime Bobichel had tied the bedclothes, opened the window, and fastened the clothes to the window hinges. He then whispered jovially: “Good-evening, ladies and gentlemen,” and let himself slide down the improvised rope. Caillette followed the clown, then came Girdel, and finally Fanfaro.

“Let the clothes hang,” ordered Girdel.

They all crept softly to the stable and in about five minutes were on the street.

Bobichel ran alongside Girdel. Suddenly he stopped and hurriedly said:

“I hear the sound of horses’ hoofs; we escaped just in time.”

The noise Bobichel heard really came from the policemen, who had hurried from Remiremont to Sainte-Ame and were now surrounding the Golden Sun. Robeckal and Simon were smart enough to keep in the background. The brigadier, a veteran soldier, knocked loudly at the house-door, and soon the host appeared and asked what was the matter.

“Open in the name of the king,” cried the brigadier impatiently.

“Policemen, oh my God!” groaned Schwan, more dead than alive. “There must be a mistake here.”

“Haven’t arrested any one yet who didn’t say the same thing,” growled the brigadier. “Quick, open the door and deliver up the malefactors.”

“Whom shall I deliver?” asked Schwan, terror-stricken.

“Two acrobats, named Girdel and Fanfaro,” was the answer.

“Girdel and Fanfaro? Oh, Mr. Brigadier, you are mistaken. What are they accused of?”

“Treason! They are members of a secret organization, which is directed against the monarchy.”

“Impossible; it cannot be!” groaned Schwan.

“I will conduct the gentlemen,” said Robeckal, coming forward.

“Scoundrel!” muttered the host, while Robeckal preceded the policemen up the stairs, and pointed to Girdel’s room.

"Open!" cried the brigadier, knocking at the door with the hilt of his sword.

As no answer came, he burst open the door, and then uttered an oath.

"Confound them — they have fled!" exclaimed Robeckal.

"Yes, the nest is empty," said the brigadier; "look, there at the window, the bed-sheets are still hanging with which they made their escape."

"You are right," growled Robeckal; "but they cannot be very far off yet."

"No; quick — to horse!" cried the brigadier to his men; and while they got into the saddle, Robeckal looked in the stables and discovered the loss of the two horses. The tracks were soon found, and the pursuers, with Robeckal at the head, quickly gained the forest. But here something singular happened. The brigadier's horse stumbled and fell, the horse of the second policeman met with the same accident, and before the end of two seconds two more horses, together with their riders, lay on the ground. All four raged and cried in a horrible manner; one of them had broken a leg, the brigadier's sword had run into his left side, and two horses were so badly hurt that they had to be killed on the spot.

"The devil take them!" cried Robeckal, who was looking about with his lantern to discover the cause of these accidents, "the scoundrels have drawn a net of thin cords from one tree to the other."

"Yes, the scoundrels happened to be smarter than other people," came a mocking voice from the branch of an oak-tree, and looking up, Robeckal saw the clown, who, with the quickness of an ape, had now slid down the tree and disappeared in the bush.

"Villain!" exclaimed Robeckal, angrily, and taking a gun from one of the policemen he fired a shot at Bobichel.

Did the shot take effect?

CHAPTER XI

IN PARIS

On the 29th of February, 1824, a great crowd of laughing, noisy people wandered up and down the streets of the French capital, for it was the last Sunday of the carnival; the boulevards in the neighborhood of the Palais-Royal especially being packed with promenaders of both sexes.

An elegant carriage drawn by two thoroughbreds halted at the edge of the pavement, and three young men got out. They had cigars in their mouths, which at that time was something extraordinary; white satin masks hid their faces, and dark (so-called) Venetian mantles, with many colored bands on their shoulders, covered their forms.

The young men answered the jokes and guys of the crowd in a jolly manner, and then took seats in the Cafe de la Rotonde. Darkness came on, the lights gleamed, and one of the young men said, sorrowfully:

“The carnival is coming to an end; it’s a great pity — we had such fun.”

“Fernando, are you getting melancholy?” laughed the second young man.

“Fernando is right,” remarked the third; “the last day of the carnival is so dull and spiritless that one can plainly see it is nearing the end. For more than two hours we have been strolling about the boulevards, but have not met with one adventure. Everywhere the stereotyped faces and masks; the same jokes as last year; even the coffee and the cake look stale to me. Arthur, don’t you agree with me?”

“You demand too much,” cried Arthur, indifferently; “we still have the night before us, and it would not be good if we could not find something to make the hours fly. As a last resort we could get up a scandal.”

“Hush! that smells of treason. The dear mob nowadays is not so easy to lead, and the police might take a hand in the fight,” warned Fernando.

“So much the better; the scandal would be complete then. The police are naturally on our side, and our motto — ’after us the deluge’ — has always brought us luck.”

The young men laughed loudly. They were evidently in good humor. The one whom his companions called Arthur was the son of the Count of

Montferrand, who made a name for himself in the House of Deputies on account of his great speech in favor of the murderers of Marshal Brune; the second, Gaston de Ferrette, was related to the first families of the kingdom; he had accompanied the Duke of Angoulême to Spain, and was known as an expert fencer. He was hardly twenty years of age, but had already come out victorious in several duels.

The third young man was a foreigner, but having the very best recommendations he was soon at home in the capital. His name was Fernando de Velletri, and he was by birth an Italian of the old nobility; he was received in all the palaces of the Faubourg St. Germain, and was acquainted with everything that went on in the great world.

“Where is Frederic?” asked Arthur now.

“Really, he seems to have forgotten us,” replied Fernando, “I cannot understand what delays him so long.”

“Stop!” exclaimed Gaston de Ferrette. “Come to think of it, I understand that he was going to accompany the Countess of Salves to some ceremony at Notre Dame.”

“Poor fellow!”

“He is not to be pitied. The Countess of Salves is a charming girl.”

“Bah, she is going to become his wife.”

“So much the more reason that he should love her before the marriage; afterward, it isn’t considered good form to have such feelings.”

“He loves her, then?”

“I am very grateful to you, gentlemen; even in my absence you occupy yourselves with my affairs,” said a clear, sharp voice now.

“Frederic, at last; where have you been?”

“Oh, I have been standing over five minutes behind you, and heard your conversation.”

“Has it insulted you?” asked Gaston, laughing.

Frederic did not answer immediately; he let his gaze fall pityingly over his companion, and Gaston hastily said:

“Really, Frederic, your splendor throws us in the shade; look at him, he has no mask, and is dressed after the latest fashion.”

The costume of the last comer was, indeed, much more elegant than those of the other young men. A long overcoat, made of fine brown cloth, sat tightly about the body and reached to the knees; the sleeves, wide at the shoulder, narrowed down toward the wrists and formed cuffs, which fell over the gloved hand. A white satin handkerchief peeped out coquettishly from the left breast pocket. White trousers, of the finest cloth, reached to the soles of his shoes, which were pointed and spurred. A tall, silk hat, with an almost invisible brim, covered his head.

Frederic allowed himself to be admired by his friends, and then said:

“Take my advice and put off your masks at once, and dress yourselves as becomes young noblemen; let the mob run around with masks on.”

“Frederic is right,” said Gaston, “let us hurry to do so.”

“I shall await you here and bring you then to Robert; or better still, you can meet me at the Cafe Valois.”

The three masks left, and the Vicomte Talizac, for he was the last comer, remained alone.

His external appearance was very unsympathetic. The sharply-cut face had a disagreeable expression, the squinting eyes and rolling look were likewise repulsive, and if his back was not as much bent as usual, it was due to the art of Bernard, the tailor of the dandies.

The Cafe de Valois, toward which the vicomte was now going, was generally the meeting-place of old soldiers, and the dandies called it mockingly the cafe of the grayheads. Rumor had it that it was really the meeting-place of republicans, and it was a matter of surprise why Delevan, the head of the police department, never took any notice of these rumors.

When the vicomte entered the gallery of the cafe, he looked observingly about him, and then approached a group of young men who all wore plain black clothing and whose manners were somewhat military.

The young men moved backward at both sides when the vicomte approached them. Not one of them gazed at the dandy. The latter, however, stepped up to one of them, and laying his hand lightly upon his shoulder, said:

“Sir, can I see you for a moment?”

The person addressed, a man about twenty-five years of age with classically formed features, turned hurriedly around; seeing the vicomte, he said in a cold voice:

“I am at your service, sir.”

The vicomte walked toward the street and the man followed. On a deserted corner they both stopped, and the vicomte began:

“Monsieur, first I must ask you to tell me your name; I am the Vicomte de Talizac.”

“I know it,” replied the young man coldly.

“So much the better; as soon as I know who you are I will be able to tell whether I should speak to you as an equal or punish you as a lackey.”

The young man grew pale but he replied with indomitable courage:

“I don’t know what we two could ever have in common.”

“Sir!” exclaimed Talizac angrily, “in a month I shall lead the Countess de Salves to the altar; therefore it will not surprise you if I stigmatize your conduct as outrageous. You rode to-day at noon past the De Salves palace, and threw a bouquet over the wall and into the garden.”

“Well, what else?”

“You have probably good reasons not to give your name, the name of an adventurer, but in spite of all I must inform you that in case you repeat the scene I shall be obliged to punish you. I — ”

The vicomte was unable to proceed; the iron fist of the young man was laid upon his shoulder, and so powerful was the pressure of his hand that the vicomte was hardly able to keep himself on his feet. The young man gave a whistle, upon which signal the friends who had followed him hurried up. When they were near by, Talizac’s opponent said:

“Vicomte, before I provoke a scene, I wish to lay the matter before my friends; have patience for a moment. Gentlemen,” he said, turning to his companions, “this man insulted me. Shall I fight a duel with him? It is the Vicomte de Talizac.”

“The Vicomte de Talizac?” replied one of the men addressed, who wore the cross of the Legion of Honor. “With a Talizac one does not fight duels.”

The vicomte uttered a hoarse cry of rage, and turned under the iron fist which was still pressed on his shoulder and held him tight; the young man gave him a look which made his cowardly heart quake, and earnestly said:

“Vicomte, we only fight with people we honor. If you do not understand my words, ask your father the meaning of them; he can give you the necessary explanations. Perhaps a day may come when I myself may not refuse to oppose you, and then you may kill me if you are able to do so! I have told you now what you ought to know, and now go and look up your dissipated companions, and take your presence out of the society of respectable people.”

Wild with rage, his features horribly distorted, unable to utter a word, the Vicomte de Talizac put his hand in his pocket, and threw a pack of cards at his opponent’s face. The young man was about to rush upon the nobleman, but one of his companions seized his arm and whispered:

“Don’t be too hasty, you must not put your life and liberty at stake just now — you are not your own master;” saying which, he pointed to three masked faces who had just approached the group.

The young man shook his head affirmatively, and Talizac took advantage of this to disappear. He had hardly gone a few steps, when an arm was thrown under his own and a laughing voice exclaimed:

“You are punctual, vicomte; your friends can vouch for that.”

The vicomte kept silent, and Fernando, lowering his voice, continued:

“What was the difficulty between you and the young man? You wanted to kill him. Are you acquainted with him?”

“No, I hardly know him; you overheard us?”

“Excuse me, my dear fellow; your opponent spoke so loudly that we were not obliged to exert ourselves to hear his estimate of you. Anyhow I only heard the conclusion of the affair; you will no doubt take pleasure in relating the commencement to me!”

The words, and the tone in which they had been said, wounded Talizac’s self-love, and he sharply replied:

“If it pleases me, Signor Velletri!”

The Italian laughed, and then said, in an indifferent tone:

“My dear vicomte, in the position in which you find yourself, it would be madness for me to imagine that you intend to insult me, and therefore I do not consider your words as spoken.”

“What do you mean, signor?”

“Oh, nothing, except that yesterday was the day of presentation for a certain paper, which you, in a fit of abstraction, no doubt, signed with another name than your own!”

The vicomte grew pale, and he mechanically clinched his fist.

“How — do — you — know — this?” he finally stammered.

The Italian drew an elegant portfolio from his pocket, and took a piece of stamped paper from it.

“Here is the *corpus delicti*,” he said, laughing.

“But how did it get into your hands?”

“Oh, in a very simple way: I bought and paid for it.”

“You, signor? For what purpose?”

“Could it not be for the purpose of doing you a service?”

The vicomte shrugged his shoulders; he had no faith in his fellow-men.

"You are right," said Fernando, replying to the dumb protest, "I will be truthful with you. I would not want the Vicomte de Talizac to go under, because my fate is closely attached to his, and because the vicomte's father, the Marquis de Fougereuse, has done great service for the cause I serve. Therefore if I earnestly ask you not to commit such follies any more, you will thank me for it and acknowledge that this small reciprocation is worth the favor I am showing you."

"Then you will return the paper to me?" cried the vicomte, stretching out his hand for it.

"No, the paper does not belong to me."

"But you just said — "

"That I bought it, certainly. I paid the price for it only because I received the amount from several friends."

"And these friends — "

"Are the defenders and supporters of the monarchy; they will not harm you."

Talizac became pensive.

"Let us not speak about the matter," continued Fernando; "I only wished to show you that I have a right to ask your confidence, and I believe you will no longer look upon it as idle curiosity if I ask you what business you had with that man."

The Italian's words confirmed to Talizac the opinion of the world that Velletri was a tool of the Jesuits. However, he had done him a great service, and he no longer hesitated to inform Velletri of the occurrence.

"I accompanied the Countess de Salves and her daughter to a party at Tivoli," he began, as he walked slowly along with his companion, "and we were enjoying ourselves, when suddenly loud cries were heard and the crowd rushed wildly toward the exits. The platform where dancing was indulged in gave way, and the young countess, in affright, let go of my arm and ran into the middle of the crowd. I hurried after her, but could not catch up with her; she was now in the neighborhood of the scene of the accident, and, horror-stricken, I saw a huge plank which hung directly over her head get loose and tumble down. I cried aloud; the plank would crush her to death. At the right minute I saw a man grasp the plank and hold it in the air. How he did it I have never been able to tell; the plank weighed at least several hundred pounds, but he balanced it as if it had been a feather. The young countess had fainted away. When I finally reached her, the young man held her in his arms, and from the way in which she looked at him when she opened her eyes, I at once concluded that that wasn't the first time she had seen him. The old countess thanked him with tears in her eyes; I asked him for his name, for I had to find out first if it were proper for me to speak with him. He gave me no answer, but disappeared in the crowd. The only reward he took was a ribbon which the lady wore on her bosom and which he captured. The ribbon had no intrinsic value, but yet I thought it my duty to inform Irene about it. Do you know what answer she gave me?"

"No," replied Velletri, calmly.

"None at all. She turned her back to me."

"Impossible," observed the Italian, laughing; "well, I suspect that the knight without fear or reproach followed up the thing?"

"He did; he permits himself to ride past the Salves's palace every day, throws flowers over the wall, and I really believe the young countess picks up the flowers and waits at the window until he appears. Should I stand this?"

"No," replied Velletri, laughing; "you must, under all circumstances, get rid of this gallant. For your consolation, I can tell you it is not a difficult job."

"Then you know the man? I sent my servant after him, but could not find out anything further than that he visits the Cafe Valois every day at this hour, and that is the reason I went there to-day."

"Without having been able to accomplish your object. My dear vicomte, I place my experience at your service. The man is no rival, cannot be any; and if the young countess has built any air-castles in her romantic brain, I can give you the means to crumble them to pieces."

"And the means?"

"Simply tell her the name of her admirer."

"Yes; but he didn't mention his name to me."

"That does not surprise me. He was formerly an acrobat, and his name is Fanfaro."

The vicomte laughed boisterously. Fanfaro, a former acrobat, ran after young, noble ladies — it was too comical!

"So that is why the young man did not wish to fight me," he finally cried; "it doesn't surprise me any more, and is cowardly too."

The Italian, who had witnessed the scene in which Fanfaro had refused to cross weapons with a Talizac, laughed maliciously.

“The companions of the former acrobat are, no doubt, ignorant of whom they are dealing with?” asked Talizac.

“On the contrary, they know him well.”

“I don’t understand it! They speak to him, shake hands with him; it is extraordinary.”

The vicomte’s stupidity excited the Italian’s pity, but he did not allow his feelings to be perceived, and said:

“I think we have discussed this Fanfaro long enough. Let us not forget that we are still in the Carnival, and that we must hurry if we still wish to seek some distraction; forget the fatal scene of a short while ago.”

The vicomte had forgotten long ago that he and his father had been stigmatized as dishonorable rogues, and in great good humor he accompanied his companion toward the Rue Vivienne.

They had not gone far when the vicomte paused and nudged his friend.

Leaning against the balustrade of a house, a young girl, whose features were illuminated by the rays of a street lamp, sang in a clear voice to the accompaniment of a guitar. A large crowd of passers-by had assembled around the singer, who was a perfect vision of beauty.

Chestnut brown hair framed a finely cut face, and deep black eyes looked innocently from underneath long eyelashes. The fingers which played on the instrument were long and tapering, and every movement of the body was the personification of grace.

When the song was finished loud applause was heard. The young songstress bowed at all sides, and a flush of pleasure lighted up the charming face. Every one put a penny on the instrument. When the vicomte’s turn came, he threw forty francs on the guitar, and approached close to the songstress.

“You are alone to-day?” he boldly asked.

The young girl trembled from head to foot and walked on. The vicomte gazed after her, and the Italian laughingly observed:

“The ‘Marquise’ is very strict to-day.”

Thereupon he bent down and picked something up from the ground.

“Here, vicomte, is your money; the little one threw it away.”

The vicomte uttered a cry of rage.

“The impertinent hussy!” he hissed.

“The affair has been going on in this way for the last two months,” said the Italian, dryly; “and you could have known long ago, vicomte, that the ‘Marquise’ spurns your attentions.”

“Fernando, I really believe you play the spy upon me!” exclaimed Talizac; “have a care, my patience has its limits.”

“You are too tragical,” replied Velletri, shrugging his shoulders; “instead of pursuing the little one with platonic declarations, you ought to try to break her spirit.”

“Velletri, you are right,” replied Talizac; “yes, I will revenge myself upon Fanfaro and possess this girl. What am I peer of France for?”

“Bravo, vicomte, you please me now — let us go to dinner, and then — ”

“But the ‘Marquise’?”

“Have patience. You will be satisfied with me.”

CHAPTER XII

THE “MARQUISE.”

Mardi-Gras had come and folly reigned supreme at Paris. Opposite the Café Turque, which had already at that time a European reputation, stood a small poverty-stricken house. It was No. 48 Boulevard du Temple, and was inhabited by poor people.

In a small but cleanly room on the fifth story a young girl stood before a mirror arranging her toilet. The “Marquise,” for it was she, looked curiously out of place in her humble surroundings.

A dark, tightly fitting dress showed her form to perfection, and the dark rose in her hair was no redder than the fresh lips of the young girl. The little singer gave a last glance in the mirror, smoothed back a rebellious curl, and seized her guitar to tune it.

A low moan came from a neighboring room. The street-singer immediately opened the curtained door and slipped into the room from which a cry now came.

“Louison — little Louison!”

“The poor thing — she has woke up,” sighed the girl as she approached the small bed which stood in the equally small space.

“Mamma, how goes it?” she asked.

The form which lay on the bed looked almost inhuman. The cadaverous face was half burned and the bloodshot eyes, destitute of eyebrows, could not stand the least ray of light. The hands were horribly burned, and her laugh exposed her toothless gums.

“Thirst, Louison,” stammered the woman, pulling her long gray hair over her eyes.

“There, mamma, drink,” said Louison, bending tenderly over the poor woman.

The woman drank eagerly the glass of milk offered, and then muttered softly to herself.

“It is so warm, I am burning, everywhere there are flames.”

The poor woman was crazy, and no one would have ever recognized in her, Louise, the wife of the landlord Jules Fougeres.

The reader will have guessed long since that Louison, the street-singer, was none other than Fanfaro's lost sister. The young girl, however, did not know that the poor woman she so tenderly nursed was her mother.

Louison had once lost herself in the woods, and in her blind fear had run farther and farther until she finally reached an exit. As she stood in a field sobbing bitterly, a man approached her and asked her who she was and where she had come from. The child, exhausted by the excitement of the last few days, could not give a clear answer, and so the man took her on his arm and brought her to his wife, who was waiting for him in a thicket. The man and his wife carried on a terrible trade; they hovered about battlefields to seek prey, and more than one wounded man had been despatched by them if his purse or his watch attracted the robbers' attention. Nevertheless, these "Hyenas of the battlefield" were good and kind to the lost child; they treated her just like their own children, of whom they had three, and at the end of the war, in consequence of the good crop they had secured on the battlefield, they were possessed of sufficient competence to buy a little place in Normandy.

Louison grew up. An old musician, who discovered that she had a magnificent voice, took pride in teaching the child how to sing, and when on Sundays she would sing in the choir, he would enthusiastically exclaim, "Little Louison will be a good songstress some day, her voice sounds far above the others."

An epidemic came to the village soon after, and at the end of two days her foster-parents were carried away, and Louison was once more alone in the world.

The nuns of the neighboring convent took the child, taught it what they knew themselves, and a few years passed peacefully for Louison.

A thirst to see the world took hold of her; the convent walls stifled her, and she implored the nuns to let her wander again. Naturally her request was refused, and so Louison tried to help herself.

One dark, stormy night she clambered over the garden wall, and when the nuns came to wake her next morning for early mass, they found her bed empty and the room vacant.

Singing and begging, the child wandered through Normandy. In many farmhouses she was kept a week as a guest, and one old woman even presented her with a guitar, which a stranger had left behind.

The proverb “all roads lead to Rome” would be more true in many cases if it said they lead to Paris; and thus it was with Louison. After a long and difficult journey she reached the capital, the El Dorado of street singers from Savoy; and, with the sanguine temperament of youth, the fifteen-year-old girl no longer doubted that she would support herself honestly.

In a miserable quarter of the great city, in the midst of people as poor as herself, Louison found a habitation. The wondrous beauty of the girl soon attracted attention, and when she sang songs on some street-corner she never failed to reap a harvest. At the end of four weeks she had her special public, and could now carry out a project she had long thought of. She went to the inspector of the quarter and begged him to name her some poor, sickly old woman whom she could provide for.

“I do not wish to be alone,” she said, as the inspector looked at her in amazement, “and it seems to me that my life would have an aim if I could care for some one.”

Petitions of this kind are quickly disposed of, and on the next day Louison received an order to go to another house in the same quarter and visit an old mad woman whose face had been terribly disfigured by fire.

Louison did not hesitate a moment to take the woman, whose appearance was so repulsive, to her home. When she asked the crazy woman, who gazed at her, “Mother, do you wish to go with me?” the deserted woman nodded, and from that day on she was sheltered.

Who could tell but that Louison’s voice recalled to that clouded memory the recollection of happier days? Anyhow the maniac was tender and obedient to the young girl, and a daughter could not have nursed and cared for the poor old woman better than Louison did.

The sobriquet of the “Marquise” had been given to Louison by the people of the quarter. She was so different from her companions; she looked refined and aristocratic, although her clothes were of the cheapest material, and no one would have dared to say an unkind or bold word to the young girl.

As the old woman handed the empty glass back to the girl, Louison cheerfully said:

“Mother, I must go out; promise me that you will be good during my absence.”

“Good,” repeated the maniac.

“Then you can put on your new cap to-morrow.”

“The one with the ribbons?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, then I will be good.”

The poor thing clapped her hands, but suddenly she uttered a cry of pain.

“Ah! — my head — it is burning!”

Louison, with heavenly patience, caressed her gray hair and calmed her.

“Ah! where is the box?” the maniac complained after a while.

“To-morrow I will bring it to you,” said the songstress, who knew the whims of the sick woman.

“Do not forget it,” said the old woman; “in that box is luck. Oh, where did I put it?”

She continued to mutter softly to herself. Louison allowed her to do so, and slipped into the other room. It was time for her to go about her business. This being Mardi-Gras, she expected to reap a rich harvest. As she was about to open the door, she suddenly paused; she thought she heard a voice, and listened. A knock now sounded at the door, and Louison asked:

“Who is there?”

“A friend,” came back in a loud voice.

“Your name?”

“You do not know me.”

“Tell me your name.”

“Robeckal; please admit me.”

The young girl did not open at once; an indefinable fear seized her. Suppose the vicomte, who had followed her all over, had at last found out where she lived?

“Well, are you going to open?” cried Robeckal, becoming impatient.

Hesitatingly Louison pushed back the bolt, and with a sigh of relief she saw Robeckal’s face; no, that was not the vicomte.

“H’m, mademoiselle, you thought perhaps that I was a beggar?” asked Robeckal, mockingly.

“Please tell me quickly what you want,” cried Louison, hurriedly. “I must go out, and have no time to lose.”

“You might offer me a chair, anyway,” growled Robeckal, looking steadily at the handsome girl.

“I told you before I am in a hurry,” replied Louison, coldly; “therefore please do not delay me unnecessarily.”

Robeckal saw that the best thing he could do would be to come to the point at once, and grinning maliciously, he said:

“Mademoiselle, would you like to earn some money?”

“That depends — go on.”

“Let me first speak about myself. I am an extra waiter. Do you know what that is?”

“Yes, you assist in saloons on Sundays and holidays.”

“Right. For the past three days I have been at The Golden Calf, just in the street above.”

“Ah, by Monsieur Aube?”

“Yes. The landlord would like to treat his guests to-day to some special amusement, and so he said to me last night, ‘Robeckal, do you know of anything new and piquant!’

“‘The “Marquise,” master,’ I replied.

“‘But will she come?’

“‘H’m, we must ask her. How much do you intend to spend?’

“‘Twenty francs.’

“‘Good,’ I said, ‘I will ask her,’ and here I am.”

Louison had allowed Robeckal to finish. The man displeased her, but his offer was worth considering. Twenty francs! For the young girl the sum was a small fortune, and her heart ceased to beat when she thought of the many little comforts she could provide her *protégée* with it.

“Did not Monsieur Aube give you a letter for me?” she asked, still hesitating.

“No, mademoiselle. Do you mistrust me?”

“I did not say that, but I cannot decide so hastily. I will be at the Golden Calf in a little while, and give the gentleman my answer.”

“Mademoiselle, tell me at once that you don’t care to go, and I will get the man without arms, who will do just as well. He won’t refuse, I warrant you.”

With these words, Robeckal took out a card and pointed to two addresses thereon. The first was Louison’s address, the second that of a street-singer who was well known to the young girl. Louison no longer doubted.

“I shall come,” she said firmly; “when shall I make my appearance?”

“At eight o’clock.”

“And when will I be done?”

A peculiar smile, unnoticed by Louison, played about Robeckal’s lips.

"I really do not know," he finally replied, "but it will be between ten and eleven. With such good pay a minute more or less won't make much difference."

"No, but it must not be later than midnight."

"On no account, mademoiselle; if you are afraid, why, I will see you home," Robeckal gallantly cried.

"Good — tell Monsieur Aube I shall be punctual."

"Done. I suppose, mademoiselle, you will not forget to give me a portion of the twenty francs? I was the one, you know, who brought it about."

"With pleasure."

"Then good-by until this evening."

Robeckal hurried down the five flights of stairs. In front of the house a man enveloped in a wide mantle walked up and down.

When he saw Robeckal, he anxiously asked:

"Well?"

"It is settled."

"Really? Will she come?"

"Certainly."

The man in the cloak, who was no other than Fernando de Velletri, let some gold pieces slip into Robeckal's hand.

"If everything goes all right, you will get five hundred francs more," he cried.

"It is as good as if I had the money already in my pocket. Besides, the racket is rather cheap, for the little one is a picture."

"So much the better," laughed the Italian.

While the worthy pair were discussing their plans, Louison went as usual to the boulevards and sang her pretty songs.

In the Golden Calf, Monsieur Aube's restaurant, things were very lively. The guests fairly swarmed in. The landlord ran busily to and fro, now in the kitchen turning over the roast, then again giving orders to the waiters, pulling a tablecloth here, uncorking a bottle there, and then again greeting new guests. On days like this the place was too narrow, and it always made Aube angry that he could not use the first story. The house belonged to an old man, who had until recently lived on the first floor, but since then new tenants had moved in, who were a thorn in the saloon-keeper's side. He had tried his best to get rid of them, advanced the rent, implored, chicaned, but all in vain. They stayed.

If they had only been tenants one could be proud of; but no! The family consisted of an athlete who called himself Firejaws; his daughter Caillette, a tight-rope dancer, a clown called Mario, and a young acrobat, Fanfaro. Every day the troupe performed on the Place du Chateau d’Eau, and, besides this, people visited the house under the pretence of taking lessons from Fanfaro in parlor magic.

These visitors, strange to say, looked very respectable; most of them appeared to be old soldiers. They certainly had no need to learn magic.

The large hall was filled to the last seat, and the waiters ran here and there with dishes, when an elegant equipage drove up and immediately afterward the stentorian voice of the landlord cried:

“Jean, the gentlemen who have ordered room No. 11 have arrived. Conduct them upstairs.”

The gentlemen were the Vicomte de Talizac, Arthur de Montferrand and Fernando de Velletri. Jean led them to the room, and began to set the table.

“Tell me, Frederic,” began Arthur, as he threw himself lazily in a chair, “how you got the idea of inviting us to this hole for dinner?”

The waiter threw an angry look at Arthur, who had dared to call the Golden Calf a hole.

“My dear Arthur,” said the vicomte, coldly, “have patience yet a while. It is not my fashion to speak about my affairs in the presence of servants.”

Jean hastily drew back, and only the thought of losing his tip prevailed upon him to serve his customers.

“Now we are alone,” said Arthur, “and we’ll finally find out all about it — ”

“I must beg your pardon once more,” interrupted the vicomte, “but before dessert I never bother about serious affairs.”

“Ah, it is serious then,” remarked Arthur. He knew that Talizac was often short and feared that he was about to ask for a loan. The young men dined with good appetite, and as the waiter placed the dessert upon the table, the vicomte threw a glass filled with red wine against the wall and exclaimed:

“Champagne, bring champagne!”

“Well, I must say that you end the Carnival in a worthy way,” laughed Velletri.

“Bah! I must drown my troubles in champagne,” replied the vicomte, shrugging his shoulders. “I tell you, my friends, I had a conversation with my father to-day which made me wild.”

“Ah, it was about your marriage, no doubt!” said the Italian.

“Yes. The marquis wants me to go to the altar in fourteen days. That would be a fine thing.”

“But I thought the marriage was a good one for both sides; the fortune of the Salves — ”

“Oh, bother with the fortune!” interrupted the vicomte.

“And, besides, the young countess is very beautiful,” continued Arthur.

“Beautiful?” repeated the vicomte, mockingly; “not that I can see. She puts on airs, as if the whole world lay at her feet, and poses as such a virtuous being. And yet I really believe she is no better than other people; I — ”

“Frederic,” interrupted Velletri, warningly; he feared that the vicomte would inform young Montferrand what had occurred between his bride and the acrobat.

“Well,” said Arthur, hastily, “I hope that when Irene de Salves becomes your bride you will be more pleasant to her.”

“Really, Arthur, you have such antediluvian notions,” laughed the vicomte; “formerly we said that marriage was the grave of love; but if there has been no love beforehand, it follows that the grave will remain empty. No, my friends, if I am bound by marriage ties, I authorize you both to hunt on my ground, and it will give me pleasure if you score a success. Who knows? The countess is, perhaps, less prudish than she seems.”

“Perhaps I shall make use of the permission,” laughed Arthur, carelessly.

“I wish you joy. I haven’t the stuff of a jealous husband in me, and the freedom I ask for myself I grant to others!”

“That is unselfish,” said the Italian; “not every one is so liberal with his wife.”

“Bah! the wife of a friend is decidedly more piquant than one’s own, and who knows but that I may revenge myself later on. I — ”

At this moment a clear, fresh girlish voice was heard coming from downstairs, and the first verse of a ballad by Romagnesi was delightfully phrased. The young men listened attentively to the simple song, and when at the end of the same a storm of applause followed, Arthur clapped his hands too.

“What a pity,” he said, “that one cannot hear this nightingale nearer.”

“Why should not that be possible?” cried the vicomte, springing up as if electrified.

Fernando grew frightened. This idea might disturb his plan.

“What is there in a street-singer?” he contemptuously asked.

Talizac, however, who was under the influence of the champagne he had drunk, did not understand the hint, and angrily exclaimed:

“Now she shall just come upstairs; first she must sing to us, and then — ”

“And then?” repeated Arthur curiously.

“Ah, it is merely a little surprise we arranged for the little one,” observed Velletri, with a cynical laugh.

“What! a surprise?”

“Yes.”

“And she does not suspect anything?”

“Nothing.”

“Well, I am curious to see the little one; let us call Aube, he can show his singer to us.”

“Gentlemen, no folly,” warned Velletri, “we are not in the Palais Royal here, and in some things the mob does not see any fun.”

“I will attend to the people downstairs,” said Arthur, while the vicomte rang loudly.

When the waiter came he received the order to send the landlord up, and in less than five minutes the latter came and bowed respectfully to the guests who had drunk so much champagne.

“Monsieur Aube,” began the vicomte, “who is the little bird that sings so beautifully downstairs?”

“A young, modest, and very respectable girl, gentlemen.”

The young men burst into loud laughter.

“A saint, then?” exclaimed Arthur.

“Really, gentlemen, she is very virtuous and respectable.”

“So much the better,” said the young men to Aube. “We would like to take a good look at the little one. Send her up to us so that she can sing a few songs for us, and at the same time put a few more bottles on the ice.”

Monsieur Aube did not know what to do.

“What are you waiting for?” asked the vicomte, in a maudlin voice.

“Gentlemen, the little one is so pure,” said the landlord, earnestly.

“Are we going to ruin her?” exclaimed Talizac, with a laugh. “She shall sing, and we will pay her well for it. She shall get a hundred francs; is that enough?”

The landlord considered. He knew Louison was poor, and he said to himself he had no right to prevent the pretty girl from earning so much money. Moreover, she was not called “The Marquise” for nothing, and Velletri’s mien reassured the host. So he came to the conclusion that there was no danger to be feared for his *protégée*. Even if the other two were drunk, the Italian was sober; and so the host finally said:

“I will send the little one.”

As the landlord entered the hall, Louison was just going about and collecting. The crop was a rich one, and with sparkling eyes the songstress returned to her place, to give a few more songs, when Aube drew her into a corner.

“Louison,” he softly said, “I have got a good business to propose to you.”

“What is it, Father Aube?”

The landlord, somewhat embarrassed, stammeringly answered:

“If you desire you can make one hundred francs in fifteen minutes.”

“So much? You are joking?”

“Not at all; you sing two or three songs, and the money is earned.”

“Where shall I sing?”

“Here in my house, on the first story.”

At this minute the hall-door opened and loud laughter came from above. Louison looked anxiously at the host and asked:

“Who wants to hear me?”

“Some guests, Louison; high-toned guests.”

“Are they ladies and gentlemen, or only gentlemen?”

“Gentlemen, jolly young gentlemen.”

“And if I go up will you stay in the neighborhood?”

“Certainly; this house is my house, and you are under my protection.”

Louison considered. One hundred francs was a treasure with which she could do wonders. A comfortable chair could be bought for the invalid, wine and other strengthening things kept in the house, and —

“I agree,” she said, picking up her guitar; “when shall I go up?”

“Directly, Louison, I will accompany you.”

“H’m, what does that mean?” exclaimed a solid-looking citizen as he saw Louison go up the stairs; “is the performance over?”

“No,” said Aube to his guests, “Louison will sing more later on. Have a little patience.”

When the landlord and the young girl entered the room of the young men, Aube was agreeably surprised at seeing that the vicomte had disappeared. He was perfectly calm now. It had been the vicomte of whom Aube had been afraid, and with a light heart he left the apartment.

"'Marquise,' will you be so kind as to sing us a song?" asked Arthur, politely.

Louison's modesty began to have a good influence on him, and he already regretted having assisted Talizac in his plan.

Louison tuned her instrument and then began to sing a pretty little air. Montferrand and Velletri listened attentively, and when she had ended they both asked her in the most polite way imaginable to sing another song. Louison did not wait to be coaxed; she began a simple ballad and sang it with melting sweetness. Suddenly she uttered a loud scream and let her guitar fall. Frederic de Talizac stood before her.

"Continue your song, my pretty child," giggled the vicomte; "I hope I have not frightened you?"

As he said this he tried to put his arm around Louison's waist.

She recoiled as if stung by a rattlesnake.

"I will not sing any more," she said firmly; "let me go."

"Nonsense, my little pigeon, you remain here," said the vicomte huskily, placing himself in front of the door, "and for each note you sing I will give you a kiss."

The poor child was paralyzed with fear. She threw an agonizing look upon the drunken man's companions, and when she saw them both sit there so calm and indifferent, her eyes sparkled with anger.

"Miserable cowards!" she contemptuously exclaimed. "Will you permit a drunken scoundrel to insult a defenceless girl?"

Arthur sprang up. A flash of shame was on his classically formed features, and turning to Talizac he hastily said:

"She is right, vicomte; are you not ashamed?"

"Are you speaking to me?" laughed Talizac, mockingly. "I really believe you wish to be the Don Quixote of this virtuous Dulcinea del Toboso! No, my friend, we did not bet that way; the girl must be mine, and I should like to see the man who will oppose me."

He grasped Louison's arm; the young girl cried aloud for help, and the next minute the vicomte tumbled back struck by a powerful blow of the fist. Montferrand had come to the street-singer's rescue.

The vicomte roared like a wild bull, and, seizing a knife from the table, rushed upon Arthur. The two men struggled with one another. The table fell over; and while Louison unsuccessfully tried to separate the combatants, Velletri looked coolly at the fray.

"Help! murder!" cried Louison in desperation. She did not think of escape. She hoped Aube would make his appearance.

The landlord had really hastened up at the first cry, but at the head of the stairs Robeckal had held him tight and uttered a peculiar whistle. Two powerful men came in answer to the signal, and seizing the host in their arms, they bore him to a small room where the brooms were kept. Aube imagined his house had been entered by burglars. He threw himself with all his force against the door, he cried for help, and soon a few guests who had been sitting in the restaurant came to his assistance and rescued him.

"Follow me, gentlemen," cried the landlord, angrily. "It is a dastardly conspiracy! Upstairs there they are driving a poor, innocent girl to despair. Help me to rescue her. It's the 'Marquise.' Oh, heavens! her cries have ceased, she must be dead!"

Twenty men, in company with the landlord, rushed into the young men's rooms. Louison was no longer there, and in the centre Montferrand and the vicomte were still fighting with one another. Montferrand had already taken the knife away from the drunken man, when the vicomte angrily rushed at Arthur and hit him in the neck. A stream of blood gushed from the wound, and with a low moan the wounded man sank to the ground.

Before he could rise to his feet again, Velletri had seized the vicomte by the arm, and in spite of his resistance dragged him down the stairs. When Aube looked around for them, they had already left and not a trace of Louison could be found.

"Merciful God!" he despairingly cried, "where is the poor child? I promised her I would protect her, and now — "

"The scoundrels have abducted her!" exclaimed Arthur, who had in the meantime recovered. "It was a shrewdly planned piece of business."

"Abducted her? Impossible!" cried the landlord, looking at Arthur in amazement. "Who are the men?"

A crowd of guests had gathered about Arthur and the landlord, and while a barber tried to stanch the still bleeding wound, Montferrand bitterly said:

"One of the scoundrels bears a noble old name. Shame over the nobility of France that it tolerates a Talizac and Fougereuse in its ranks."

“Who speaks of Talizac and Fougereuse?” cried a fresh voice, and a very handsome man approached Monsieur Aube.

“Ah, Monsieur Fanfaro,” said the landlord vivaciously, “Heaven sends you at the right time. Forget all the troubles and the cares I have caused you; I will never say another word against athletes and acrobats, but help us!”

“What has happened?” asked Fanfaro in astonishment. “I just came home and found every one in the restaurant excited. I asked, but no one knew anything, so I hurried here. Tell me what I can do for you; I am ready.”

“May God reward you, Monsieur Fanfaro; oh, if it is only not too late.”

“Monsieur Aube,” asked Fanfaro, politely, “what is the matter?”

“A young girl — it will bring me to my grave when I think that such a thing should happen in my house — I — ”

“Landlord,” interrupted Arthur, “let me tell the story to the gentleman.

“Unfortunately,” continued Montferrand, turning to Fanfaro, “I am mixed up in the affair myself. I let myself be persuaded by the Vicomte de Talizac — ”

“I thought so,” growled Fanfaro.

“And his friend Velletri to accompany them here — ”

“Velletri? The Italian spy? The tool of the Jesuits, who treacherously betrayed his own countrymen, the Carbonari?” asked Fanfaro, contemptuously.

“Really, you are telling me something new,” replied Arthur, “but it served me right. Why wasn’t I more particular in the choice of my companions! Well, this worthy pair have abducted a young girl, a street-singer.”

“The scoundrels! Where have they carried the poor child to?”

“God alone knows! I only heard here about the plan, but the scoundrels did not inform me where they intended to bring the poor child,” replied Arthur, feeling ashamed at having had even the slightest connection with the affair, and inwardly vowing never again to have anything to do with the scoundrels who bear noble names.

“But the girl, no doubt, has relatives, parents or friends, who will follow her traces?”

“No,” replied Aube, “she is an orphan, and is called the ‘Marquise.’“

“Why has she received that sobriquet?”

“I do not know. She is a very respectable girl.”

“Where does she live?”

“Not far from here, No. 42 Boulevard du Temple, fifth story. Robeckal, an extra waiter, who, as I have since found out, is a cunning scoundrel, had engaged her for to-night.”

“If Robeckal had a hand in the affair then it can only be a scoundrelly one!” exclaimed Fanfaro, with a frown.

“Do you know him?”

“Unfortunately, yes; tell me what more do you know?”

“Not much. The ‘Marquise’ lives with an old, poor crazy woman, who lost her reason and the use of her limbs at a fire. The young girl, whose name is Louison — ”

“Louison?” cried Fanfaro, in affright.

“Yes; why, what is the matter with you?”

“Nothing; tell me how old is the girl?”

“About sixteen.”

“My God, that would just be right; but no, it cannot be.”

“Monsieur Fanfaro,” said Montferrand, gently, “can I do anything for you, you seem to be in trouble?”

“Oh, I have a horrible suspicion, I cannot explain it to you now, but the age and the name agree. Ah, that infamous Talizac! again and again he crosses my path; but if I catch him now, I will stamp upon him like a worm!”

“Do you intend to follow the robbers?”

“Certainly, I must rescue the girl.”

“Monsieur Fanfaro,” said Montferrand, “do with me what you will, I will help you!”

CHAPTER XIII

THE PURSUIT

Fanfaro looked gratefully at the young nobleman and then said:

“Please tell me your name, so that I may know whom I am under obligations to?”

“My name is Arthur de Montferrand,” said the nobleman, handing his card to the young man, whose profession he knew, with the same politeness as if he were a peer of France.

Fanfaro bowed and then hurriedly said:

“Let us not lose any more time; I — ”

Loud knocking at the house-door and the murmur of several voices, which came from below, made the young man pause. The planting of muskets on the pavement was now heard and a coarse voice cried:

“Open in the name of the law!”

Fanfaro trembled.

“The police!” exclaimed Aube, breathing more freely; “perhaps the robbers have already been captured.”

Fanfaro laid his hand upon Aube’s shoulder.

“Monsieur Aube,” he said bitterly, “the police to-day do not bother about such trivial affairs. The minions of Louis XVIII. hunt different game.”

“Open,” came louder than before, “or we shall burst in the door.”

“My God! my God! what a day this is,” complained Aube, sinking helplessly on a chair; “what do the police want in my house?”

“Monsieur Aube, they seek conspirators, heroes of freedom and justice,” said Fanfaro earnestly.

“How so? What do you mean?” asked Aube, opening wide his eyes and looking at the young man.

“I am one of the men the police are looking for,” exclaimed Fanfaro coolly.

“You!” exclaimed Montferrand in terror, “then you are lost.”

“Not yet,” laughed Fanfaro. “Monsieur Aube, hurry and open the door and try to detain the people. That is all that is necessary. Good-by for the present, and do not forget to hunt for the girl; with the aid of God we will find her.”

He ran out, and the nobleman and the landlord heard him bound up the stairs. Aube now began to push back the iron bolt of the street door, and when it opened several policemen and an inspector entered.

“I must say, Monsieur Aube,” cried the inspector angrily, “you took a long time to obey his majesty’s order.”

“But at this time of night,” stammered Aube. “What are you looking for, inspector?”

“Ask rather whom I am looking for?” retorted the inspector.

His gaze fell on Arthur, who did not look very attractive with his bloody clothes and torn shirt.

“Who is this tramp?” asked the inspector roughly.

“The tramp will have you thrown out if you are impertinent. My name is Arthur de Montferrand, and I am the son of the Marquis of Montferrand.”

The inspector opened his eyes wide with astonishment. How could such a mistake happen to him? The son of the Marquis of Montferrand. The inspector would have preferred just now to hide himself in a corner. He stammered apology upon apology, and then in an embarrassed way muttered:

“I have got a painful mission. I am to look for a ‘suspect’ in this house.”

“A ‘suspect’?” whispered Aube, anxiously.

“Yes; conspirators who threaten the sacred person of the king.”

“And you are looking for these people in my house?” asked Aube, apparently overwhelmed at the intelligence.

“Yes, they are said to live here; two acrobats, named Girdel and Fanfaro.”

“Inspector, I am inconsolable; but I will not oppose you; do your duty,” said Aube, with the mien of a man who gives a kingdom away.

Arthur and the landlord exchanged knowing looks as the inspector strode toward the door. Fanfaro must be in safety by this time.

“The house is surrounded,” said the inspector, as he went away, “and I think we shall have little to do.”

Montferrand trembled. Suppose Fanfaro had been captured! The policemen went to the upper story, which had been pointed out to them by the landlord as the residence of Girdel and Fanfaro.

“Open, in the name of the law!” thundered a voice, which shook the house; and then followed, hardly less loud, the angry exclamation:

"By Jupiter, the nest is empty; the birds have flown!"

At this moment a voice cried from the street:

"Inspector, they are escaping over the roofs."

It was Simon, the worthy steward of the Marquis of Fougereuse, who assisted the police to-day. He had stationed himself, with several officers, in front of the house, and had noticed two shadows gliding over the roofs.

"Forward, men," cried the inspector. "We must catch them, dead or alive."

In a moment, Simon had bounded up the stairs and now stood near the official at the skylight.

"How slanting that roof is!" growled the inspector. "One misstep and you lie in the street."

He carefully climbed out; Simon followed, and then they both looked around for the escaped conspirators.

"There they are!" exclaimed the steward, hastily. "Look, they have reached the edge of the roof and are going to swing themselves over to the neighboring roof! They are fools; the distance must be at least ten feet. They will either fall down and smash their heads on the pavement, or else fall into our hands."

Simon had seen aright. Girdel and Fanfaro were at the edge of the roof, and now the young man bent down and swung something his pursuers could not make out.

"Surrender!" cried the inspector, holding himself on a chimney.

Fanfaro now rose upright. He made a jump and the next minute he was on the neighboring roof.

The inspector and Simon uttered a cry of rage, and redoubled it when they saw Fanfaro busying himself tying a stout rope to an iron hook which he connected with another hook on the roof he had just left.

Girdel now clambered to the edge of the roof, grasped the rope with both hands, and began to work his way across to Fanfaro.

"Quick, a knife!" cried the inspector.

Simon handed him his pocket-knife and the policeman began to saw the rope through. Luckily for Girdel, the work went very slow, for the knife was as dull as the rope was thick, and Simon, who only now began to remember that Girdel must not be killed at any price, loudly exclaimed:

"Stop, inspector, are you out of your senses?"

The policeman was no longer able to heed the warning. The knife had done its duty, the rope was cut!

Girdel did not fall to the pavement though. At the decisive moment Fanfaro bent far over the roof, and with superhuman strength held on to the rope on which Girdel was, at the same time crying to him:

“Attention, the rope is cut, take your teeth.”

Girdel understood at once, and his mighty jaws held the rope firmly.

Fanfaro had bent far forward to hinder Girdel from being dashed against the wall, and kept in that position, until the athlete could work himself with his hands and teeth to the edge of the roof.

The roof was at length reached. Fanfaro swung his arms about Girdel, and the next minute they both disappeared behind a tall chimney!

“Papa Girdel, we have nothing to fear now,” said Fanfaro, laughing; but soon he thought of Louison, and he sighed heavily.

“What is the matter with you, my boy?” asked Girdel, in amazement.

“I will tell you some other time. Let us try to reach the street first, for our pursuers will surely try to get into the house and begin the hunt anew.”

The athlete saw he was right, and they both began their perilous flight over the roofs. For a time everything went right, but suddenly Fanfaro paused and said:

“We are at a street corner.”

“That is a fatal surprise,” growled Girdel; “what shall we do now?”

“We must try to reach a roof-pipe and glide down.”

“That is easier said than done. Where will you find a roof-pipe able to sustain my weight?”

Fanfaro looked at Girdel in amazement. He had not thought of that.

“Then let us try to find a skylight and get into some house,” he said, after a pause.

“Suppose the window leads to an inhabited room?” observed Girdel.

“Then we can explain our perilous position. We will not be likely to tumble into a policeman’s house.”

“Let us hope for the best,” replied Girdel.

At the same moment a terrific crash was heard and Fanfaro saw his foster-father sink away. Girdel had unconsciously trodden on a window-pane and fallen through!

“That is a new way of paying visits,” cried a voice which Fanfaro thought he recognized, and while Girdel made desperate attempts to swing himself again on the roof, a hand armed with a tallow candle appeared in the opening.

"I will light the gentlemen," continued the voice.

"Bobichel, is it you?" cried Fanfaro, joyously.

"Certainly, and I ought to know you," was the reply; "really, the master and Fanfaro."

"Bobichel," said Girdel, greatly astonished, "is it really you? We thought you were dead!"

"Bah! a clown can stand a scratch; but come quickly into my room, it is cold outside."

Girdel and Fanfaro entered the small attic and Bobichel received his old comrades cordially.

"The ball did not hit you, then?" asked Girdel; "we thought you were gone."

"Almost," replied the clown; "I dragged myself a few steps further, with the bullet in my side, and then sank down unconscious. When I awoke I found myself in the hospital at Remiremont, where I remained until a week ago. Later on I will give you all the details. For to-day I will only say that I arrived in Paris yesterday and rented this room here. I expected to find you here, and I intended to look about to-morrow morning. What happy accident brought you here?"

"In the first place, the police," replied Fanfaro; "they hunted us like a pack of dogs a wild animal, and if we had not escaped over the roofs we would now be behind lock and key."

"But why are you pursued?" asked Bobichel, anxiously. "Do you belong to the conspiracy of which there is so much talk?"

"Probably," replied Girdel.

"Is there a place for me in the conspiracy?" asked the clown, vivaciously, "I am without employment just now, and if you wish to take me in tow, I —"

"We shall attend to it," said Fanfaro, cordially.

"How is little Caillette getting on?" asked Bobichel, after a pause.

"Very well, thank you. We shall let her know to-morrow morning that we are safe."

"Then she is in Paris, too?"

"Certainly. We lived up till now in the Golden Calf. However, we must look for other rooms now. We can speak about that to-morrow. Let us go to sleep now, it must be very late," said Girdel; and looking at his watch, he added: "Really it is two o'clock."

"Bobichel's eyes knew that long ago," laughed Fanfaro. "Go to bed, old friend, you are tired."

"Oh, I am not tired," said the clown, yawning in spite of himself. "I will not go to bed after I have found you again."

"You must do so, Bobichel," said Fanfaro, earnestly. "You are still weak and must husband your strength. Go calmly to bed. Girdel and I have still a great deal to consider, and we are both glad that we need not camp in the street."

Bobichel hesitated no longer; he threw himself on his hard couch and in less than five minutes he was fast asleep.

As soon as Girdel found himself alone with Fanfaro, he said, in an anxious voice:

"Fanfaro, tell me what ails you. I know you too well not to be aware that something extraordinary has happened. Place confidence in me; perhaps I can help you."

"If you only could," sighed Fanfaro; "but you are right, I will tell you all. First, Papa Girdel, I must ask you a few questions about my past — "

"Speak; what do you wish to know?"

"What did you find out about my mother?"

"That she was the victim of a conflagration. She was in a farmhouse which had been set fire to by Cossacks."

"And my father?"

"He died the death of a hero, fighting for his country."

"As far as my memory goes," said Fanfaro, pensively, "I was in a large, dark room. It must have been a subterranean chamber. My parents had intrusted my little sister to my care. I held her by the hand, but suddenly I lost her and could never find her again."

"I know, I know," said Girdel, sorrowfully.

"Since this evening," continued the young man, "I have been thinking of my poor little Louison. I have not been able to tell you yet that a respectable young girl, who earns her living by singing, was forcibly abducted from the Golden Calf this evening."

"Impossible! Monsieur Aube is a brave man," exclaimed Girdel, impatiently.

"Ah! Aube knows nothing of the matter. He is innocent. The villain who did it is a bad man, who has already crossed our path."

"And his name?"

"Vicomte de Talizac."

"Talizac? Has this family got a thousand devils in its service? It was the vicomte's father, the Marquis of Fougereuse, who wished to kill us at Sainte-Ame; his steward ran to Remiremont to get the police."

"Like father like son. The proverb says that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. The young girl whom Talizac abducted is named Louison, and I — "

"My poor boy, you do not really think — "

"That this Louison is my poor lost sister? Yes, I fear so, Papa Girdel. When I heard the name, I trembled in every limb, and since then the thought haunts me. If I knew that Louison were dead I would thank God on my knees, but it is terrible to think that she is in the power of that scoundrel. The fact that Robeckal has a hand in the affair stamps it at once as a piece of villany."

"Robeckal is the vicomte's accomplice?" cried Girdel, springing up. "Oh, Fanfaro, why did you not say so at once? We must not lose a minute! Ah, now I understand all! Robeckal abducted the poor child and brought it to Rolla. I know they are both in Paris, and I will move heaven and earth to find them!"

"May God reward you, Papa Girdel," said Fanfaro, with deep emotion. "I will in the meantime try to find the invalid with whom the street-singer lives, and — "

"Is there nothing for Bobichel to do?" asked the clown, sitting up in his bed.

"Oh, Bobichel!" exclaimed Fanfaro, gratefully, "if you want to help us?"

"Of course I do. I will accompany master to Robeckal, for I also have a bone to pick with the scoundrel."

CHAPTER XIV

LOUISE

Louison’s crazy mother had passed a miserable night. Accustomed to see Louison before going to sleep and hear her gentle voice, and not having her cries answered on this particular evening, the poor woman, who had not been able to move a step for years, dragged herself on her hands and feet into the next room and shoved the white curtains aside.

The painful cry of the invalid as she saw the bed empty, drowned a loud knock at the door, and only when the knocking was repeated and a voice imploringly cried: “Open, for God’s sake, open quick!” did the burned woman listen. Where had she heard the voice?

“Quick, open — it is on account of Louison,” came again from the outside. It was Fanfaro who demanded entrance.

A cry which was no longer human came from the breast of the burned woman, and, collecting all her strength, she crawled to the door and tore so long at the curtains which covered the pane of glass that they came down and Fanfaro could see into the room. As soon as he saw the position of the poor woman, he understood at once that she could not open the door, and making up his mind quickly, he pressed in the window, and the next minute he was in the room.

“Where is Louison, madame?” he exclaimed.

The woman did not answer; she looked steadily at him and plunged her fingers in her gray hair.

“Madame, listen to me. Louison has been abducted. Don’t you know anything?”

The poor thing still remained silent, even though her lips trembled convulsively, and the deep-set eyes gazed steadily at the young man.

“Madame,” began Fanfaro, desperately, “listen to my words. Can you not remember where Louison told you she was going? You know who Louison is; she nurses and cares for you. Can you not tell me anything?”

At length a word came from the burned woman’s breast.

“Jacques, Jacques!” she stammered, clutching the young man’s knees and looking at him.

Fanfaro trembled. Who was this horrible woman who called him by the name of his childhood?

“Louison! Jacques!” uttered the toothless lips, and hot, scalding tears rolled over the scarred cheeks.

A flood of never-before-felt emotions rushed over Fanfaro; he tenderly bent over the poor woman, and gently said:

“You called me Jacques. I was called that once. What do you know of me?”

The burned woman looked hopelessly at him; she tried hard to understand him, but her clouded mind could not at first grasp what he meant.

“I will tell you what I know of the past,” continued Fanfaro, slowly. “I formerly lived at Leigoutte in the Vosges. My father’s name was Jules, my mother’s Louise, and my little sister Louison — where is Louison?”

At last a ray of reason broke from the disfigured eyes, and she whispered:

“Jacques, my dear Jacques! I am Louise, your mother, and the wife of Jules Fougeres!”

“My mother!” stammered Fanfaro with emotion, and taking the broken woman in his arms, he fervently kissed her disfigured face. The poor woman clung to him. The veil of madness was torn aside and stroking the handsome face of the young man with her broken fingers, she softly murmured:

“I have you again. God be thanked!”

“But where is Louison?” broke in Fanfaro, anxiously.

Still the brain of the sick woman could not grasp all the new impressions she had received, and although she looked again and again at Fanfaro, she left the question unanswered.

At any other time Fanfaro would have left the sick woman alone, but his anxiety about Louison gave him no peace. He did not doubt a minute but that his mother had recognized Louison long ago as her daughter, and so he asked more urgently:

“Mother, where is Louison? Your little Louison, my sister?”

“Louison?” repeated the sick woman, with flaming eyes. “Oh, she is good; she brings me fruit and flowers.”

“But where is she now?”

“Gone,” moaned the invalid.

“Gone? Where to?”

“I do not know. Her bed is empty.”

“Then I was not deceived. She has been abducted by that scoundrel, Talizac!”

“Talizac?” repeated the maniac, with a foolish laugh. “Oh, I know him, do not let him in; he brings unhappiness — unhappiness!”

“Then he has been here?” cried Fanfaro, terror-stricken.

“No, not here — in — Sachemont — I — oh! my poor head.”

With a heart-rending cry the poor woman sank to the ground unconscious. The excitement of the last hour had been too much for her. Fanfaro looked at the fainting woman, not knowing what to do. He took her in his arms and was about to place her on the bed when the door was softly opened and three forms glided in.

“Girdel, thank Heaven!” cried Fanfaro, recognizing the athlete, “have you found Robeckal?”

“No, the wretches moved out of their former residence in the Rue Vinaigrier, yesterday, and no one could tell us where they went.”

“I thought so,” groaned Fanfaro, and then he hastily added: “Girdel, the unhappy woman I hold in my arms is my mother. No, do not think I am crazy, it is the truth; and the girl who was abducted is my sister Louison.”

“Impossible!” stammered Girdel.

“His mother!” came a whisper behind Fanfaro, and turning hastily round he saw Caillette — who stood at the door with tears in her eyes — with Bobichel, who said:

“Caillette will take care of the invalid until we have found Louison; I say that we move heaven and earth so that we find her.”

“You are right, Bobichel,” said Fanfaro, and, pressing a kiss upon his mother’s forehead, he ran off with Girdel and the clown.

CHAPTER XV

SWINDLED

While Montferrand and Talizac were struggling, Robeckal slipped up to the door and winked to Louison. She hurried out and implored Robeckal to bring her out of this miserable house. This was just what the wretch had been waiting for, and hardly five minutes later he was in a small street with the betrayed girl. In this street a carriage stood. Robeckal seized the unsuspecting girl by the waist, lifted her into the carriage, and sprang in himself. The driver whipped up the horses and away they went at a rapid gait.

"Where are you bringing me to?" cried Louison in terror, as she saw the carriage take a wrong direction.

"Keep still, my little pigeon," laughed Robeckal, "I am bringing you to a place where it will please you."

Louison for a moment was speechless; she soon recovered herself, however, comprehended her position at a glance, hastily pulled down the carriage window, and cried aloud for help.

"Silence, minx!" exclaimed Robeckal roughly, and pulling a cloth out of his pocket he held it in front of Louison's face.

"Ah, now you are getting tame," he mockingly laughed, as the young girl, moaning softly, fell back in the cushions. The carriage hurried along and finally stopped in an obscure street of the Belleville Quarter.

Robeckal sprang out, and taking the unconscious Louison in his arms, he carried her up the stairs of a small house, and pulled the bell, while the carriage rolled on.

"Ah, here you are; let me see the chicken!"

With these words Rolla received her comrade.

She put the lamp close to Louison's face, and then said:

"Your Talizac hasn't got bad taste; the little one is handsome."

"Is everything in order?" asked Robeckal, going up the stairs after the "Cannon Queen."

"Certainly, look for yourself."

Robeckal entered an elegantly furnished room, and, placing Louison on a sofa, he said in a commendatory tone:

"It's pretty fair."

"Don't you think so? Leave the rest to me; I have a grand idea."

"An idea?" repeated Robeckal, doubtingly.

"Yes, an idea that will bring us in a nice sum of money."

"Then I am satisfied. If the little one only does not cause us any embarrassment."

"No fear of that. In the first place she should sleep."

The virago poured a few drops of a watery liquid in a spoon and approached Louison. The latter had her lips parted, but her teeth were tightly drawn together. Robeckal carefully put the blade of his knife between them, and Rolla poured the liquid down Louison's throat.

"Now come downstairs with me," she said, turning to Robeckal, "and if your vicomte comes you will praise me."

The worthy pair now left Louison, who was sleeping; and after Rolla had tightly locked the door and put the key in her pocket, they both strode to the basement. Here they entered a small, dirty room, and Rolla had just filled two glasses with rum when a carriage stopped in front of the door.

"Here they are," said Robeckal, hastily emptying his glass and going to the street door, from whence came the sound of loud knocks.

Shortly afterward he returned in company with Talizac and Velletri. The vicomte's face was flushed with the wine he had been drinking; spots of blood were on his clothes, and his walk was uneven and unsteady. Velletri, on the other hand, showed not a trace of excitement, and his dress was neat and select.

"A glass of water!" commanded the vicomte, in a rough voice, turning to Rolla.

The fat woman looked angrily at him, and while she brought the water she muttered to herself:

"Wait now. You shall pay dearly for your coarseness."

Talizac drank, and then said:

"Is the little one here?"

"Yes."

"You haven't done anything to her, have you?"

"What do you take me for?" growled Rolla.

“Bring me some wash water,” said the vicomte, without noticing Rolla’s sensitiveness, and turning to Velletri, he added: “Montferrand handled me roughly; I look as if I had been torn from the gallows.”

“As if you won’t get there one of these days,” growled Rolla; and, lighting a candle, she said aloud, “If the gentlemen wish I will conduct them to the ‘Marquise.’“

“Go on; where is she?”

“In the upper story — she is sleeping.”

“So much the better. I will lavish my affection on her, and see if she is still as prudish.”

Rolla preceded the vicomte up the stairs. As she went past she exchanged a quick glance with Robeckal, and the latter growled to himself:

“There is something up with her; I will watch and help her should it be necessary.”

Rolla and Talizac were now in front of the door which led to Louison’s room. The vicomte looked inquiringly at his companion and said:

“Open it.”

“One moment, we are not as far as that yet. Just look at the little one first.”

With these words Rolla opened a sliding window in the door and stepped back, while the vicomte bent down and looked into the partly lighted room.

Louison lay fast asleep on the sofa. The pretty head rested on the left arm, while the right hung carelessly down, and the long eyelashes lay tightly on the slightly flushed cheeks. The small, delicate mouth was slightly compressed, and the mass of silky hair fell in natural curls about the white forehead.

“Isn’t she charming?” giggled Rolla.

Talizac was a libertine, a dissipated man, and yet when he saw the sleeping girl, a feeling he could not account for overcame him. He forgot where he was, that the miserable woman at his side had helped to carry out his dastardly plans, and all his longing now was to throw himself at Louison’s feet, and say to her:

“I love you dearly!”

“Open,” he hastily ordered.

Rolla let the window fall again and looked impertinently at him.

“My lord,” she said, with a courtesy, “before I open this door you will pay me twenty thousand francs.”

“Woman, are you mad?”

“Bah! you would shout so! I said twenty thousand francs, and I mean it. Here is my hand. Count in the money and I will get the key.”

“Enough of this foolish talk,” cried the vicomte, in a rage. “I paid your comrade the sum he demanded, and that settles it.”

“You are more stupid than I thought,” laughed Rolla. “If you do not pay, nothing will come of the affair.”

“But this is a swindle,” said the vicomte.

“Do not shout such language through the whole house,” growled Rolla. “Do you think it is a pleasure to abduct girls? Robeckal had enough trouble with the little one and — ”

What Rolla said further was drowned by the noise Talizac made as he threw himself against the door. It did not move an inch though; and before the vicomte could try again, Robeckal hurried up with a long knife in his hand.

“What is the matter?” he angrily cried.

“Your friend the vicomte forgot his purse and thinks he can get the girl on credit,” mockingly replied Rolla.

The noise brought Velletri up too; but as soon as he saw Robeckal’s long knife, he turned about again. The vicomte too became pacified.

“I will give you all the money I have with me,” he said, as he turned the contents of his purse into Rolla’s big hand. “Count and see how much it is.”

“Ten, twenty, eight hundred francs,” counted the Cannon Queen; “we shall keep the money on account, and when you bring the rest, you can get the key.”

“This is miserable,” hissed Talizac, as he turned to go; “who will vouch to me that you won’t ask me again for the money?”

“Our honor, vicomte,” replied Rolla, grinning. “We think as much of our reputation as high-toned people.”

“Scoundrels,” muttered Talizac, as he went away with Velletri. “If we could only do without them!”

CHAPTER XVI

MACHIAVELLI AND COMPANY

The Marquis of Fougereuse was sitting in his study, and Simon stood beside him.

“So he has escaped from us again?” remarked the marquis frowning.

“God knows how it happened, my lord; my plans were all so well laid that I cannot understand how the affair fell through?”

“Postponed is not given up,” observed the nobleman; “and as Fanfaro does not yet suspect who he really is, he can go on compromising himself. Have you any further details with regard to the conspiracy?”

“Yes, my lord, we have trustworthy witnesses, who can swear, in case of need, that Fanfaro planned an attempt upon the sacred person of the king.”

“Very good; but still the attempt must be really made, so that Fanfaro could be convicted.”

“I have attended to that. One of our agents will set the harmless attempt in motion, and the individual selected — who, by the way, has escaped the gallows more than once — will swear in court that Fanfaro is the intellectual head of the assassination and chief conspirator.”

Before the marquis could express his satisfaction, the Marquis of Montferrand was announced.

“A visit at this hour!” cried Fougereuse, in amazement; “it is hardly seven o’clock.”

“The gentleman comes on important business, as he informed me,” said the servant.

“Bring the marquis in,” ordered the nobleman; and as the servant went away he hastily said to Simon: “Hide behind the curtain, and remain there until the interview is over; perhaps you might hear something that will further our plans.” Simon nodded and disappeared, while the marquis was led in.

Arthur’s father was a man of imposing presence. He looked down upon the beggar nobility which fawned about the court, to receive money or favors.

The old man looked pale. He hastily approached the marquis and said:

“Marquis, you imagine you are a faithful adherent of the monarchy, but scandals such as take place to-day are not calculated to raise the Fougereuse and Talizacs in the estimation of the court.”

“You are speaking in riddles, marquis!” exclaimed Fougereuse, in amazement.

“So much the worse for you, if your son’s conduct must be told you by another party,” said the old man, sternly.

“What is the matter with my son?”

“The Vicomte de Talizac has dishonored himself and the cause you serve.”

“My son is young and wild. Has he again committed one of his stupid follies?” asked the marquis, uneasily.

“If it only were a stupid folly! The vicomte had a quarrel last night with my son, because my son wished to hinder him from committing a dastardly act. My son boxed the vicomte’s ears, upon which the latter tried to stab him with a knife.”

“Impossible!” cried Fougereuse, in a rage.

“I am speaking the truth,” declared the old gentleman, calmly.

“What was the nature of this dastardly act?”

“The vicomte was drunk and employed people to abduct a respectable young girl, a street-singer. My son was in the society of yours, in a restaurant of a low order. When he heard what the affair was, he energetically protested and tried to hinder the vicomte and his friend Velletri from carrying out their plot. They quarrelled, the vicomte was boxed on the ears and my son was stabbed. They both received what they deserved. What brought me here is another matter. You are aware that I consented to speak to my cousin the Comtesse of Salves in relation to the marriage of her daughter with your son. From what happened last night, I should regard it as a misfortune for Irene if she becomes the vicomte’s wife. I came here to tell you this.”

Fougereuse became pale and clutched the back of a chair to keep from falling. At this moment the rustle of a silk dress was heard, and Madeleine, the marquis’s wife, entered the room.

The marquis excitedly approached her.

“The vicomte is a scoundrel!” he cried, in a rage; “he has dragged the old noble name in the mud, thanks to his mother’s bringing up. You have never refused him a wish."

Madeleine's blue eyes shot gleams of fire; she looked above her husband as if he had been empty air, and turned to the Marquis of Montferrand.

"Monsieur le Marquis," she politely said, "my son desired me to offer you his apologies."

"Apology?" repeated Montferrand, coldly, "for the box on the ear he got?"

"No, my lord, but because he was so intoxicated as to raise the ire of your son. He would not have gone so far if he had been sober. As to the affair with the street-singer, it is not so serious as you imagine. My son regrets very much that such a trivial affair has been the means of causing a rupture between him and your son. He has already taken steps to indemnify the girl for the wrong he did her, and I am positive the little one will have her liberty restored to her before many hours have passed. Is the word of the Marquise de Fougereuse sufficient for you, my lord?"

"Perfectly sufficient," said Montferrand, gallantly kissing the marquise's hand.

"Then we can count on seeing you to-night at our house?" asked Madeleine. "I have a surprise in store for my friends."

"Can one find out in advance the nature of it?" asked Montferrand, while Fougereuse looked anxiously at Madeleine.

"Oh, yes; his majesty has condescended to appoint the vicomte a captain in the Life Guards with the decoration of St. Louis," said the marquise proudly.

"Oh, I call that a surprise," cried Fougereuse, more freely, and Montferrand hastened to extend his congratulations.

"The Countess of Salves and her daughter have signified their intention of being present," continued Madeleine, "and as soon as my son receives his commission, the engagement of the young couple will be announced."

"It is only what one might expect from the Marquise of Fougereuse," said Montferrand politely, as he rose. "Good-by then, until this evening."

The marquis accompanied the old man to the door, then returned to his wife and excitedly asked:

"Madeleine, is all this true?"

Instead of answering, the marquise contemptuously shrugged her shoulders and left the room to hunt up her son.

“It is all settled,” she said; “here are the twenty thousand francs you need to silence the girl; and now try to bring honor to your new position.”

Madeleine placed a pocket-book on the table and went away. Talizac laughed in his sleeve. He did not think he could obtain the money so easily.

CHAPTER XVII

LOUISON

Toward noon Louison awoke from the lethargic sleep in which Rolla's liquid had thrown her, and her first look fell upon the virago, who was sitting in a half-drunken condition near the window. The young girl unconsciously uttered a cry when she saw the repulsive woman, and this cry aroused Rolla from out of her dreams about well-filled brandy bottles into reality.

"Well, my pigeon, how goes it?" she asked, grinning.

"My head hurts," replied Louison faintly, and throwing an anxious look about the strange apartment, she timidly added: "Where am I?"

"Where are you? Among good people certainly, who have become interested in you and will do what's right."

Louison was silent and tried to collect her thoughts. But it was no use, she had to close her eyes again from exhaustion.

"Ah, you are sensible I see; that pleases me," said Rolla, giggling. "Robeckal thought you would stamp and cry, but I said right away: 'The little one is smart, she will not throw her fortune away.' What is the use of virtue, anyway? It hardly brings one dry bread, so the sooner you throw it overboard the better it is. Oh, you will make your way, never fear. Your face is handsome, and who knows but that you will have your own elegant house and carriage one of these days? The little vicomte is certainly no Adonis, with his high shoulder, but one cannot have everything and — "

Louison had listened to Rolla's words with increasing loathing, and when she heard the name of the vicomte pronounced, her memory returned to her. Hastily springing up, she uttered a loud cry, and clutching Rolla tightly about the shoulder she exclaimed:

"Let me go or you shall be sorry for it!"

Rolla looked at the street-singer with a foolish laugh, and, shaking her thick head, she laconically said:

"Stay here."

“But I will not stay here,” declared Louison firmly. “I will go away! Either you let me go or I shall cry for help. I am a respectable girl, and you ought to be ashamed to treat me in this way.”

“So you — are a respectable girl,” said the woman, in a maudlin voice. “What conceit — you have! You might have been so yesterday, but to-day — try it — tell the people that you spent a few hours in the Cannon Queen’s house in Belleville and are still a respectable girl. Ha! ha! They will laugh at you, or spit in your face. No, no, my pretty dear, no one will believe that fairy story, and if an angel from heaven came down and took rooms in my house, it would be ruined. Give in, my chicken, and don’t show the white feather! No one will believe that you are respectable and virtuous, and I think you ought to save yourself the trouble. It is too late now.”

“You lie!” cried Louison, in desperation.

“So — I lie — it is about time that I shut your bold mouth,” growled the virago, and raising her voice, she cried: “Robeckal, bring me the bottle.”

The next minute hurried steps were heard coming up the stairs, and Rolla hastened to open the locked door. It was Robeckal, who entered with a small bottle in his hand. When Louison saw him she turned deathly pale, and running to the window she burst the panes with her clinched fist and called loudly for help.

“Minx!” hissed Robeckal, forcibly holding her back and throwing her to the ground.

With Rolla’s assistance he now poured the contents of the bottle down her throat. When he tried to open the tightly compressed lips, Louison bit him in the finger. He uttered an oath, put a piece of wood between her teeth, and triumphantly exclaimed:

“For the next few hours you are done for, you little hussy.”

“If it were only not too much,” said Rolla, as Louison, groaning loudly, sank backward and closed her eyes.

“Have no fear; I know my methods,” laughed Robeckal. “I am not so foolish as to kill the little one before we have the vicomte’s money in our hands. She will sleep a few hours, and wake up tamed. Come, let us put her on the sofa and leave her alone.”

The worthy pair laid the unconscious girl on the sofa and went away. Rolla, on closing the door, put the key in her pocket. They began to play cards in the basement, a pursuit which agreed with them, and at the same time swallowed deep draughts of brandy.

Toward six o’clock the vicomte entered. He threw a well-filled pocket-book on the table, and in a tone of command said: “The key!”

“First we will count,” growled Rolla; and opening the pocket-book with her fat hands she passed the contents in review.

“It is correct,” she finally said; and taking the key out of her pocket she handed it to the vicomte.

As soon as the latter had left the room, Rolla shoved the pocket-book in her dirty dress, and hastily said:

“Come, Robeckal, the little one might make a noise. Let him see how he will get through with her.”

Robeckal acquiesced, and they both quickly left the house, leaving all the doors open behind them.

They had hardly been gone, when a cry of rage rang through the house, and immediately afterward the vicomte burst into the room.

“You have deceived me,” he cried, in a rage; “the window is open and the girl is gone!”

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CANAL

By what miracle had Louison escaped? In his anxiety to make the young girl harmless, Robeckal had given her such a strong dose that the narcotic had just the opposite effect, and before an hour had passed, a hammering and beating of her temples awakened her again. The excited state in which she was made her unable to grasp a clear thought; but one thing stood plainly before her — she must leave this horrible house at any price.

Slowly rising, she felt for the door; it was locked. She then walked softly to the window and looked at the street. It was deserted and empty of pedestrians, a fog hung over it, and if Louison could only reach the street she would be safe.

Through the broken pane the fresh air entered, and she tried then to collect her thoughts. The horrible woman had spoken about Belleville; if she were only in the street she would soon reach the Boulevard du Temple, and then — further than this she did not get with her plans. Away, only away, the rest would take care of itself.

What had the virago said? “Too late, too late, too late!” The horrible words rang in her ears like a death-knell; every pulse-beat repeated, “Too late!”

Pressing her hand to her temples, Louison began to sob. Just then the coarse laughter of her torturers sounded from the basement and her tears immediately dried.

Softly, very softly, she opened the window, stood on the sill and swung herself to the outer sill. A pole which served to support a grapevine gave her a hold. She carefully climbed down its side, reached the street and ran as if pursued by the Furies.

The fog grew denser, and more than once Louison knocked against a wall or ran against passers-by, but these obstacles did not hinder her from running on.

How long she had been going in this way she did not know, but suddenly a blast of cold air grazed her burning face, and looking up she perceived that she had reached the Canal St. Martin. She had only to cross the bridge to reach those quarters of the great city which were known to her, but still she did not do it. A short while she stood there not knowing what to do. Then she strode on, timidly looking around her and walked down the damp stone steps leading to the water.

For a long time she stood on the last step. All around everything was still, and only the monotonous ripple of the waves reached the deserted girl's ears. With her arms folded across her bosom, she gazed at the black waters; the murmuring waves played about her feet and then she paused so long — long —

Robeckal and Rolla hurried through the streets with feverish haste. The ground burned under their feet, and they did not dare to breathe before they had turned their back upon the capital. They were just turning into the Rue St. Denis, when an iron fist was laid upon Robeckal's shoulder, and forced the frightened man to stand still.

"What does this mean?" he angrily cried, as he turned around, "a — "

He paused, for he had recognized Fanfaro. Bobichel had clutched Rolla at the same time, and shaking her roughly, he cried:

"Monster, where is the street-singer?"

"What do I know of a street-singer?" cried Rolla, boldly. "Let me go or I shall cry out."

"Cry away," replied Bobichel. "You must know best yourself whether you desire the interference of the police or not."

Rolla thought of the well-filled pocket-book and kept silent. Robeckal, in the meantime, had almost died of strangulation, for Fanfaro's fingers pressed his throat together; and when he was asked if he intended to answer, he could only nod with his head.

"Where is Louison?" asked Fanfaro, in a voice of thunder.

"No. 16 Rue de Belleville."

"Alone?"

"I do not know."

"Scoundrels, God help you, if all is not right," hissed Fanfaro, "bring us quickly to the house named."

"Oh, it is very easy to find," began Rolla, but Bobichel threatened her with his fist and cried:

"So much the better for you, forward march!"

Robeckal and the Cannon Queen, held in the grips of Fanfaro and the clown, proceeded on the way to Belleville. They stopped in front of No. 16, and it required the application of force to get them to enter.

Rolla, in advance of the others, went to the top story. The door was wide open and the room empty.

"Really, he has taken her along?" she exclaimed in amazement.

"Of whom are you speaking?" asked Fanfaro, trembling with fear.

"Of whom else but the little vicomte."

"His name?"

"Talizac."

"The villain!" muttered Fanfaro to himself.

Bobichel was still holding Rolla by the arm. His gaze, roving about the room, had espied a note on the table. Rolla saw it, too, but before she could take it the clown had called Fanfaro's attention to it.

"You have swindled me," the young man read; "you have helped her to escape, confound you!"

"Thank God all is not lost yet," whispered Fanfaro, handing Bobichel the paper.

"One moment," said the clown; "I have an idea which I would like to carry out."

With a quick movement Bobichel threw Robeckal to the ground, bound him with a thick rope and threw him into a closet. He locked it and putting the key in his pocket, he turned to Rolla.

"March, away with you," he said, roughly, "and do not attempt to free him; he can ponder over his sins."

Rolla hurried to leave the house. If Robeckal died she would be the sole possessor of the twenty thousand francs. Bobichel and Fanfaro left the house likewise, and Robeckal remained crying behind.

CHAPTER XIX

SPLENDOR

The Fougereuse mansion was resplendent with light. Madeleine intended to celebrate the vicomte’s appointment to a captaincy in a fitting way, and hundreds of invitations had been issued and accepted.

One fine carriage after another rolled up; the marquise, dressed in princely style, received her guests in the fairy-like parlors, and soon a brilliant assembly crowded the rooms.

The marquis and his wife looked proudly at the vicomte, who, however, could hardly restrain his disappointment. He did not know what hurt him most, the loss of Louison or the twenty thousand francs, and he railed against himself for being so foolish as to imagine that Robeckal and Rolla would keep their word.

“Do not frown so,” whispered Madeleine to her son, “here comes Irene.”

The vicomte bit his lips until they bled, and then approached Irene de Salves, who had just entered, accompanied by her mother and the Marquis de Montferrand.

Irene was dazzlingly beautiful, and her rich dress enhanced her charming appearance. There was, however, a melancholy look in her dark eyes, but her voice sounded clear and strong as she replied to the vicomte’s greeting.

Brought up in the traditions of the nobility, Irene did not think of resisting her mother when the latter told her that her engagement with the Vicomte de Talizac would be announced that evening. Irene loved Fanfaro with all the fervor of her soul, but she would never have dared to tell her mother of her attachment for the acrobat.

When the vicomte pressed her hand upon his arm, she trembled violently, and a gleam of rage shot out of the dark eyes, while Talizac thought to himself that the young girl had every reason to be proud of him. Captain in the Life Guards and Knight of St. Louis. The more he considered it the more he came to the conclusion that he could demand more, and only the circumstance that the young countess possessed several millions caused him to submit to the match.

The first notes of a polonaise were heard now, and the guests, grouping themselves in pairs, strode through the wide halls. A quadrille followed the polonaise, and it was a charming sight to see all these graceful women and young girls dance. Irene kept up a cross-fire of words with the vicomte and Velletri. Talizac had just whispered some gallant sentence to her, when a high officer of the Royal Life Guards appeared and handed the vicomte his commission.

Great enthusiasm arose. The vicomte and his parents were congratulated from all sides, and the young girls envied Irene, for it was an open secret that she would be the future Vicomtesse de Talizac.

Arthur de Montferrand was the only one who could not force himself to congratulate the vicomte. It was only on his father's account that he came at all, and while Talizac was being surrounded on all sides, Arthur's thoughts went back to the scene of the previous evening. He saw Louison's pleading looks, he heard her contemptuous words, and could never forgive himself for having given her good reason to believe that he was one of Talizac's accomplices.

The vicomte's voice aroused him from his dreams.

"Well, Arthur," said Talizac laughing, "have you no congratulation for me?"

Arthur looked penetratingly at the vicomte, and in a low voice replied:

"Vicomte, if I cannot discover any traces of the punishment you received yesterday on your cheeks, I hope to be able to pay up for what I have lost. For to-day you must excuse me."

Deathly pale, Talizac looked at Montferrand, but before he had a chance to reply, a commotion was heard in the corridor, followed by a war of words.

The marquis looked uneasily at the door, and was about to give an order to a servant to inquire after the cause of the disturbance, when the folding doors were thrown open and a man who carried the lifeless, dripping form of a young girl in his arms rushed into the ballroom.

"Fanfaro!" cried Montferrand in amazement.

Fanfaro, for it was really he, laid the young girl's body tenderly upon the ground, and, turning to the assembled guests, cried with threatening voice:

"Ladies and gentlemen, here is the corpse of a young girl whom the Vicomte de Talizac murdered."

The women uttered cries of terror and the men looked threateningly at Talizac, who was trembling and trying hard to appear indifferent.

The Marquis of Fougereuse was as white as a spectre. Was this Fanfaro going to pursue him forever?

“Who is the bold fellow?” he audaciously said. “Throw him out.”

“Don’t be so quick, marquis,” said Fanfaro earnestly; “it is a question of a terrible crime, and your son the Vicomte de Talizac is the criminal! Oh, the shame of it! Does he think that because he is a nobleman he can do what he pleases? This young girl lived modestly and plainly; she was pure and innocent. The Vicomte de Talizac regarded her as his prey. He bribed a couple of scoundrels and had the poor child abducted.

“Half crazed with horror and despairing of humanity, the victim sought peace and forgetfulness in suicide. Marquis, do you know of any infamy equal to this?”

Proud, with head erect like an avenger of innocence, Fanfaro stood in the centre of the room and his eyes shot forth rays of contempt.

Montferrand hurried toward him and cordially shook him by the hand.

“Is she dead — is she really dead?” he asked.

“I fear so,” replied the young man, slowly, “yet I do not like to give up all hope. Is there no lady here who will take care of the poor child and try to soften the vicomte’s crime?” continued Fanfaro, raising his voice. “Does not a heart beat under these silks and satins?”

From the group of timid ladies came a tall figure clad in a white silk dress, and kneeling next to Louison she softly said:

“Here I am.”

“The farce is becoming uproarious,” cried the Marquis of Fougereuse, nervously laughing.

“Do not call it a farce; it is a drama, a terrible drama, my lord,” replied Fanfaro, earnestly. “Ask your son, who is leaning pale and trembling against the wall, whether I am telling you the truth or not?”

“Yes, it is a lie!” exclaimed Talizac, hoarsely.

“It is no lie,” declared Arthur de Montferrand, stepping in front of Talizac. “Vicomte, you have a bad memory, and if my hand had not fortunately stamped your face you might have even denied it to my face. Look at the vicomte, gentlemen; the traces which burn on his pale cheeks he owes to me, for I was present when he made the first attempt to scandalize this poor girl. I chastised him, and he stabbed me.”

“He lies! He is crazy!” cried the vicomte, in despair.

But none of those who had a quarter of an hour before overwhelmed him with congratulations condescended to look at the wretch, and with a moan Talizac sank back in a chair.

In the meantime Irene had busied herself with Louison, and now triumphantly exclaimed:

“She lives, she breathes, she can still be saved! Mamma,” she said, turning quickly to her mother, “we will take the poor child home with us and nurse her.”

The countess assented with tears in her eyes; she was proud of her daughter.

“The poor thing is my sister,” said Fanfaro in a low voice to Irene.

Irene bent over Louison and kissed her pale forehead. This was her answer to Fanfaro’s information.

Talizac had now recovered his senses. He tore open the door and angrily cried:

“Is there no one here who will show this impudent fellow out? Come in, lackeys and servants; lay hands on him!”

“I would advise no one to touch me,” said Fanfaro, coldly.

At this moment a hand was laid on Fanfaro’s shoulder, and a deep voice said:

“In the name of the king, you are my prisoner!”

As if struck by lightning, the young man gazed upon an old man who wore a dark uniform with a white and gold scarf. All the entrances to the ballroom were occupied by soldiers, and Fanfaro saw at once that he was lost.

“My lord marquis,” said the officer, turning to the master of the house, “I regret very much to disturb you, but I must obey my order. Less than an hour ago a man with a knife in his hand entered the apartments of his majesty and said that he intended to kill the king.”

A cry of horror followed these words, and, pale and trembling, the guests crowded about the officer, who continued after a short pause:

“Asked about his accomplice, the would-be murderer declared that he was an agent for a secret society whose chief the prisoner Fanfaro is.”

“Oh, what a monstrous lie!” exclaimed Fanfaro, beside himself with rage, while Irene de Salves rose upright and with flaming eyes said:

“He a murderer? Impossible!”

“Prudence,” whispered Arthur to the young woman, “what I can do for him I will.”

“Save my sister, Irene,” said Fanfaro softly, and sorrowfully turning to the official, he declared with a loud voice: “Sir, I must deny the accusation that I am a murderer. I have openly fought against the present government, but have never employed any assassin! Do your duty, I will follow you without resistance and calmly await the judge’s sentence.”

With head erect Fanfaro strode toward the door and disappeared in company with the soldiers. Montferrand approached Talizac and hissed in his ear:

“It might be doing you an honor, but if there is no other remedy I will fight a duel with you to rid the world of a scoundrel — I await your seconds.”

“You shall pay for this,” said the vicomte, “I will kill you.”

Half an hour later the splendid halls of the Fougereuse mansion were deserted; the guests hurried to leave a house where such things had occurred.

CHAPTER XX

IN LEIGOUTTE

Like so many other places, Leigoutte had risen from the ashes after the war was over. A great sensation was caused one day by the appearance in the village of an old gray-headed man. He said he intended to erect a new building on the spot where the school and tavern house formerly stood. The old man paid without any haggling the price asked for the ground, and shortly afterward workmen were seen busily carting the ruins away and digging a foundation.

The villagers thought a new and elegant house would replace the old one now, but they deceived themselves. Strange to say, the new building resembled the old one even to the smallest details. In the basement was the kitchen from which a door led to the low narrow tavern-room, and in the upper story were two bedrooms and the large schoolroom.

When the house was finished, a sign half destroyed by fire was fastened to one end, and the peasants swore it was the sign of the former innkeeper, Jules Fougeres. In the right corner the words “To the welfare of France” could be clearly seen.

The new owner did not live in the house himself. He gave it free of charge to the poorest family in the village, with the condition that he be allowed to live there a few weeks each year. A schoolmaster was soon found in the person of a former sergeant, and as Pierre Labarre — such was the name of the new owner — undertook to look out for the teacher’s salary, the inhabitants of Leigoutte had every reason to be thankful to him. When Pierre came to the village, which was generally in spring, the big and little ones surrounded him, and the old man would smile at the children, play with them, and assemble the parents at evening in the large tavern-room, and relate stories of the Revolution.

He had come this spring to Leigoutte and the children gleefully greeted him. On the evening of a March day he was sitting pensively at the window of the tavern, when he suddenly saw two curious figures coming up the road. One of the figures, apparently a young, strong girl, had her arm about a bent old woman, who could hardly walk along, and had to be supported by her companion.

Pierre felt his heart painfully moved when he saw the two women, and following an indefinable impulse he left the room and seated himself on a bench in front of the house.

The wanderers did not notice him. When they were opposite the house the old woman raised her head, and Pierre now saw a fearfully disfigured face. The woman whispered a few words to her companion; the young girl nodded and began to walk in the direction of the school-house. The paralyzed woman climbed the few steps which led into the house, and walking along the corridor she entered the parlor.

Pierre could not sit still any more. He noiselessly arose and entered the corridor. The parlor door was wide open, and he saw the gray-haired woman sitting at a table and looking all around her. Her small, fleshless lips parted, and half aloud she muttered:

"Where can Jules be? The dinner has been ready a long time, the children are getting impatient, and still he does not come! Come here, Jacques; father will be here soon. Louison, do not cry or I shall scold! Ah, little fool, I did not mean it: be quiet, he will soon be here!"

Pierre Labarre felt his heart stand still. The crippled, disfigured woman who sat there could be none other than Louise, Jules's wife! But who could her companion be?

No longer able to control himself, he softly entered the room. The young girl immediately perceived him, and folding her hands, she said, in a pleading tone:

"Do not get angry, sir! We shall not trouble you long."

"Make yourselves at home," replied Pierre, cordially; "but tell me," he continued, "who is this woman?"

Caillette, for she was the young woman, put her finger to her forehead, and looked significantly at the old woman.

"She is crazy," she whispered.

Pierre Labarre laid his hand over his eyes to hide his tears, but he could not prevent a nervous sob from shaking his broad frame.

"Tell me," he repeated softly, "who is the woman?"

"Ah! the poor woman has gone through a great deal of trouble," replied Caillette, sorrowfully. "She has lost her husband and her children, and was badly injured at a fire. Only a few weeks ago she could hardly move a limb, but since a short time her condition has wonderfully improved, and she can now walk, though not without assistance."

"But her name — what is she called?"

"Ah, my dear sir, I do not know her real name; the people who live in her neighborhood in Paris call her the 'Burned Woman,' and Louison calls her mamma or mother."

"Louison? Who is that?"

"A young girl who has taken care of her. She earns her living through singing, and is a charming girl. Her brother is named Fanfaro. Ah! it is a curious story, full of misfortune and crime."

Pierre was silent for a moment, and then asked:

"Who is this Fanfaro whom you just spoke about?"

Caillette did not answer immediately. Fanfaro was to her the incarnation of all that was good and noble in the world, but of course she could not tell the old man this.

"Fanfaro is a foundling," she finally said; "of course he is a man now, and just as energetic and brave as any one."

"Fanfaro, Fanfaro," repeated the old man, pensively; "where have I heard the name before?"

The maniac now raised her eyes, and, seeing Pierre, she politely said:

"Excuse the plain service, sir; it is very little, but comes from our hearts."

Pierre Labarre uttered a cry of astonishment.

"Louise — Louise Fougeres!" he cried, beside himself.

The invalid looked sharply at Pierre, and tremblingly said:

"Who called me? Who pronounced my name just now?"

"I, Louise," replied Pierre. "Louise Fougeres, do you not recollect your husband, Jules, and your children, Jacques and Louison?"

"Of course I remember them. Ah, how glad I would be if I could see them again! Where can Jules be? and Jacques — Jacques — "

The maniac was silent, and ran her crippled fingers through her gray hair, as if she were trying to recollect something.

"Yes, I know," she murmured pensively, "Louison is here, she sleeps in a neat white bed, but she is away now — and — and — "

Expectantly Pierre gazed at the poor woman, who was palpably confounding imagination with reality, and after a pause she continued:

"Oh, the door opens now, and Jacques enters! Welcome, my dear child. How handsome you have become. Thank God, I have you again!"

"Has she really found Jacques again?" asked Labarre, tremblingly, and turning to Caillette. "Is he living?"

"Yes, he is the same person as Fanfaro."

"God be praised. And Louison?"

"Louison has been abducted and — "

"Abducted? By whom?"

"By the Vicomte of Talizac."

"By Talizac? O my God!" stammered Labarre, in horror.

Louise, too, had heard the name, and raising herself with difficulty, she whispered:

"Talizac? He must know it! Jacques — the box, O God! where is the box?"

* * * * *

How did these two women get to Leigoutte?

When Fanfaro went to search for Louison, his mother had remained behind under the protection of Caillette. The day passed, night came, but neither Fanfaro, Girdel nor Bobichel returned. The maniac screamed and cried. She wanted to see Jacques, and Caillette could hardly calm her. Finally long past midnight she fell into a slumber, and Caillette, too, exhausted by the excitement of the last few hours, closed her eyes.

When she awoke it was daylight. She glanced at the maniac's bed. Merciful Heaven, it was empty!

Trembling with fear, Caillette hurried downstairs and asked the janitress whether she had seen anything of the "Burned Woman." The janitress looked at her in amazement and said she had thought at once when she saw the old crippled woman creeping down the stairs two hours before that all was not right in her head.

"But she cannot walk at all, how could she get out?" groaned Caillette. "Suppose Fanfaro came now and found that his mother was gone?"

"A milk-wagon stopped in front of the door," said the janitress, "and the driver let the old woman get in. I thought it had been arranged beforehand and was all right."

Caillette wrung her hands and then hurried to the station house and announced the disappearance of the "Burned Woman."

If her father and Bobichel, even Fanfaro, had come, she would have felt at ease. But no one showed himself, and Caillette, who knew that Girdel and Fanfaro were wanted, did not dare to make any inquiries.

She ran about in desperation. The only clew was the milkman, but where could she find him? Caillette passed hours of dreadful anxiety, and when a ragpicker told her that he saw a woman who answered her description pass the Barriere d'Italie on a milk-wagon, she thought him a messenger of God.

As quick as she could go, she ran to the place designated; a hundred times on the way, she said to herself that the wagon must have gone on; and yet it struck like a clap of thunder when she found it was really so. What now? Caillette asked from house to house; every one had seen the woman, but she had gone in a different direction; and so the poor child wandered onward, right and left, forward and backward, always hoping to discover them. Finally, after she had been thirty-six hours on the way, she found the maniac in a little tavern by the roadside. She was crouching near the threshold, and smiled when she saw Caillette.

"God be praised! I have found you," cried the young girl, sobbing; and when the hostess, who had been standing in the background, heard these words, she joyfully said:

"I am glad I did not leave the poor woman go; she spoke so funny, I thought at once that she had run away from her family."

"What did she say?" asked Caillette, while the "Burned Woman" clung to her.

"Oh, she asked for bread, and then inquired the way to the Vosges."

"Yes, to the Vosges," said the maniac, hastily.

"But, mother, what should we do in the Vosges?" asked Caillette, in surprise.

"To Leigoutte — Leigoutte," repeated the maniac, urgently.

"Leigoutte — that is Fanfaro's home!" exclaimed the young girl, hastily.

"Not Fanfaro — Jacques," corrected the old woman.

"But what should we do in Leigoutte, mother?"

"The box — Jacques — Talizac — the papers," the woman replied.

And so we find Caillette and her patient, after weary wanderings, in Leigoutte. The young girl had sold, on the way, a gold cross, the only jewel she possessed, to pay the expenses of the journey. Charitable peasants had given the women short rides at times; kind-hearted farmers' wives had offered them food and drink, or else a night's lodging. Yet Caillette thanked God when she arrived at Leigoutte. What would happen now, she did not know. Nothing could induce the maniac to return, and the young girl thought it best not to oppose her wish. Little by little, she began to suspect herself that the journey might be important for Fanfaro; who could tell what thoughts were agitating the mad woman's brain; and, perhaps, the unexpected recovery of her son might have awakened recollections of the past.

"I must speak to old Laison," said the "Burned Woman," suddenly; "he must help me."

She arose, shoved Caillette and Pierre aside, and hobbled toward the back door. Opening it, she reached the open field, and without looking around, she walked on and on. Pierre and Caillette followed her unnoticed. She had now reached the spot on which the old farmhouse of Laison stood, and, looking timidly around her, she turned to the right.

Suddenly she uttered a loud scream, and when Caillette and Pierre hurried in affright to her, they found the maniac deathly pale, leaning against a hollow tree, while her crippled fingers held a box, which she had apparently dug out of the earth; for close to the hollow tree was a deep hole, and the box was covered with dirt and earth.

"There it is!" she cried to Pierre, and from the eyes in which madness had shone before, reason now sparkled. "Jacques is not my son, but Vicomte de Talizac, and Louison is the Marquise of Fougereuse — here are the proofs."

She clutched a number of papers from the box and held them triumphantly uplifted; but then nature demanded her right, and, exhausted by the great excitement, she sank senseless into Caillette's arms.

CHAPTER XXI

EXCITED

The street-singer was resting in the beautiful boudoir of the young countess, Irene de Salves. The poor child lay under lace covers, and Irene’s tenderness and attachment had banished her melancholy.

After the terrible scene in the Fougereuse mansion, the young countess, with the help of Arthur, brought Louison to a carriage, and, to Madame Ursula’s horror, she gave the young girl her own room and bed. For Fanfaro’s sister nothing could be good enough, and the young countess made Louison as comfortable as possible.

After the young girl had rested a few hours, she felt much stronger, but with this feeling the recollection of what she had gone through returned, and in a trembling voice she asked Irene:

“Who saved me?”

“Don’t you know?” asked the countess, blushing. “It was Fanfaro.”

“Fanfaro? Who is that?”

Irene looked at her in astonishment. Was it possible that Louison did not know her own brother, or had the excitement of the last days crazed her mind?

“Won’t you tell me who Fanfaro is?” asked Louison, urgently.

“Don’t you really know your own brother?” asked Irene in surprise.

“My brother?”

Louison laid her hand on her head and became thoughtful.

“I had a brother once,” she said, pensively; “he was a few years older than I, and did everything to please me, but it is long ago since I saw Jacques — many, many years.”

“Jacques and Fanfaro are identical,” replied Irene, softly.

She had been told this by her cousin Arthur, who took a great interest in the brother and sister.

“Fanfaro,” repeated Louison, pensively. “Ah! now I know who this man is. He belongs to a company of acrobats who give performances in the

Place du Chateau d’Eau. They have all such peculiar names. One of them is named Firejaws — ”

“Perfectly right; he is Fanfaro’s foster-father, and Fanfaro is your brother.”

“Who told you so?”

“He, himself; he begged me to care for his sister.”

“But why does he not come? I long to see him.”

Irene, too, longed to see Fanfaro.

“Let me speak a little about him,” said Louison, vivaciously; “perhaps Fanfaro is identical with Jacques; he must be twenty years of age.”

“That may be so.”

“And then he must be very handsome. Jacques was a very pretty boy.”

“That is correct, too,” replied Irene, blushing.

“Has he black eyes and dark, curly hair?”

“I think so,” stammered Irene, who knew all these details, yet did not wish to confess it.

“You think so,” repeated Louison; “you haven’t looked carefully at him?”

“I — I — ” stammered the countess, in confusion; “what do you look at me for?”

A smile flitted across Louison’s lips, but she kept silent, and Irene thanked God, as Madame Ursula now came in and softly said:

“Irene, a word.”

“What is the matter?” asked the countess, hastily.

“There is a man outside who would like to speak to you.”

“His name?”

“Bobichel — ”

“Bobichel? Ah! bring him in the next room directly!”

Madame Ursula nodded and disappeared, while Irene turned to Louison and said in explanation:

“Excuse me a moment; I will not leave you long alone.”

She went to the next room, where Bobichel was already awaiting her. He did not look as jolly as usual, and, twirling his cap between his fingers in an embarrassed way, he began:

“Mademoiselle, excuse me for disturbing you, but — ”

“You come from him — from Fanfaro?” said Irene, blushing.

“Unfortunately no,” replied Bobichel, sorrowfully; “I was not allowed to see him.”

"Who sent you here?"

"His foster-father — Girdel."

"Why does he not come personally?"

"I do not know. I have something to give you."

"What is it?"

"Here it is," said Bobichel, pulling a small package out of his pocket and handing it to Irene.

The young countess hastily unfolded the package. It contained two letters, one of which was addressed to "Mademoiselle Irene," while the other bore, in clear, firm letters, her full name, "Countess Irene de Salves."

Without accounting for her feelings, Irene feverishly broke the last letter. Did she suspect from whom it came?

"Countess, you are brave and noble!" wrote Fanfaro, "and therefore I dare to ask you to take care of my sister, whom I barely rescued from death. The hour is near at hand in which my sentence will be pronounced. You have never doubted me, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart! I have fought for the rights of humanity, and I hope at some future time to be enrolled among those to whom right is preferable to material things. One thing, however, I know now: a powerful enemy pursues me with his hatred, and if the sentence should turn out differently from what this enemy expects, he will find the means to make me harmless. I therefore say farewell to you — if forever, who can say? Irene, do not despair, eternal heavenly justice stands above human passions. But if I should succumb, I will die peacefully, knowing that my mother and my sister will not be deserted."

The letter bore no signature. Irene read again and again the words of her beloved, and hot tears fell on the paper.

Bobichel, deeply affected, observed the young girl, and to console her he said:

"Who knows, he might not be found guilty anyhow?"

"Whom are you talking of? Who will be found guilty?" came from a frightened voice behind Irene, and as the latter hastily turned round, she saw Louison, who, enveloped in a soft shawl and pale as a spectre, stood in the doorway.

"Louison, how did you get here?" cried Irene, beside herself. "O God! I am neglecting you. Quick, go to your room again, you shall know all to-morrow."

“Sister,” whispered Louison, softly, “why do you wish to conceal something from me which I already know? Tell me what has happened to Fanfaro? I know danger threatens him, and two can bear the heaviest burden easier than one.”

“Yes, you are right,” replied Irene, embracing Louison, and, gently leading her to her room, she sat down beside her and hastily told her what she knew about the conspiracy and the part Fanfaro took in it. Bobichel put in a word here and there, and when Irene had finished he said with a smile:

“Mademoiselle, in your eagerness to read one of the letters you forgot to open the other.”

“That’s so!” exclaimed Irene blushing, and unfolding Girdel’s letter she read the following words, written in an original orthographical style:

“We must reskue Fanfaro and this is only posibel in one way. You have great inflooence; try to make the thing which Popichel will give you all right, but not until after the trial, which will take place in two days. I trust in you.

Girdel.”

“What answer shall I bring master!” asked the clown after Irene had read the letter.

“That I will do as he says,” replied Irene. “Where is the thing Girdel intrusted to you?”

“Here,” said Bobichel, handing the young lady a pin with a pretty large head; and as Irene, amazed, looked inquiringly at him, he quickly tore off the head and showed her a small hollow in which a note lay.

“You see, mademoiselle,” he laughingly said, “prestidigitation is sometimes of use. And now good-by. I will tell master that he struck the right person.”

He disappeared, and the two young girls looked after him filled with new hope.

From the time that the old Countess of Salves had informed the Marquise of Fougereuse that under existing circumstances a marriage between her daughter and the Vicomte de Talizac was out of the question, violent scenes had taken place in the Fougereuse mansion.

Financial ruin could now hardly be averted, and, far from accusing her son of being the cause of this shipwreck of her plans, Madeleine placed the blame entirely on her husband. It was already whispered in court circles that the newly appointed captain in the Life Guards and Knight of St. Louis would lose his position, and though the other young noblemen were no better than the vicomte, they had the advantage that this was not universally known.

The marquis and Madeleine had just been having a quarrel, and the marquis, pale and exhausted, lay back in his chair, when Count Fernando de Velletri was announced. The marquis bathed his face and forehead in cold water, and ordered the Italian to be sent up. He attached great importance to this visit, for Simon had told him that Velletri was a member of the Society of Jesus, and a man of great influence.

Velletri entered and his appearance was so different from what it ordinarily was that the marquis looked at him in amazement. He wore a long black coat, a black cravat, and a round hat of the same color. These things marked Velletri at once as a member of an ecclesiastical society. The dark cropped hair lay thick at the temples, and his eyes were cast down. The Italian was inch by inch a typical Jesuit, and his sharp look made the marquis tremble. He knew Loyola’s pupils and their “energy.”

Velletri bowed slightly to the marquis, and then said in a cold voice:

“Marquis, I begged for an interview with you which I desire principally for your own good. Are we undisturbed here?”

“Entirely so,” replied the marquis, coldly.

The Italian sat down in a chair which the marquis had shoved toward him, and began in a business tone:

“Marquis, it is probably not unknown to you that the conduct of your son, the Vicomte de Talizac, compromises his own position and that of his family. I — ”

“But, count,” interrupted the marquis vivaciously, “you were the chum of my son, and you even encouraged his dissipations.”

Velletri laughed maliciously.

“The Vicomte of Talizac,” he said, weighing each word, “is no child any more, and not influenced either in a bad or good way by any of his companions. If I have apparently taken part in his dissipations, it was in the first place to prevent something worse and to shield the honor of the Fougereuse, which was often at stake.”

“You, count — but I really do not understand,” stammered the marquis.

“It seems to me,” interrupted the Italian, sharply, “that we are swerving from the real object of our interview. Let me speak, marquis. A powerful society, with which I have the honor of being associated, has had its eye on you for a long time. Your influence, your opinions and your family connections are such that the society hopes to have in you a useful auxiliary, and I have therefore received the order to make arrangements with you. The society — ”

“You are no doubt speaking of the Society of Jesus?” interrupted the marquis.

Velletri bowed and continued:

“Thanks to the assistance of the pious fathers, his majesty has foregone his original intention of stripping the Vicomte de Talizac of all his honors — ”

The marquis made a gesture of astonishment, and Velletri went on:

“The society is even ready to give you the means to put your shattered fortune on a firm basis again.”

“And the conditions?” stammered Fougereuse hoarsely.

“I will tell them to you directly; they are not very difficult to fulfil.”

“And should I refuse them?”

“Do you really intend to refuse them?” asked the Jesuit, softly.

Fougereuse bit his lips; he had already said too much. The Jesuit was a worthy pupil of his master, and the marquis felt that should he oppose him he would be the loser.

“What does the society ask of me?” he said, after a pause.

“Two things — an important service and a guarantee.”

“And what does it offer?”

“The position of his majesty the king’s prime minister.”

The marquis sprang up as if electrified.

“I have misunderstood you,” he said.

“Not at all; it is a question of the premiership.”

Cold drops of perspiration stood on the marquis’s forehead; he knew the society had the power to keep its promises. Prime minister! Never in his dreams had he even thought so high. The position guaranteed to him riches, influence and power.

“You spoke of an important service and a guarantee,” he said, breathing heavily; “please explain yourself more clearly.”

“I will first speak of the service,” replied Velletri, calmly; “it is of such a nature that the one intrusted with it can be thankful, for he will be able to do a great deal of good to His Holiness the Pope and the Catholic world.”

Fougereuse closed his eyes — this outlook was dazzling.

Fernando de Velletri continued with:

“Marquis, you are no doubt aware that the Jesuits have been expelled from France under the law of 1764. About two years ago, in January, 1822, his majesty the king allowed them to stay temporarily in his kingdom. The good prince did not dare at that time to do more for us. The time has now come to put an end to the oppression under which the Jesuits have so long suffered. What we desire is the solemn restoration of all their rights to the fathers. They should hold up their heads under their true names and enjoy anew all their former privileges. To secure this end we must have a law — not a royal edict, a sound constitutional law — which must be passed by the Chamber of Peers. It is a bold undertaking, and we do not deceive ourselves with regard to the difficulties to be encountered, and the man who does it must be quick and energetic, but the reward is a magnificent one. The man we shall elevate to the prime ministership will be in possession of great power. Marquis, do you think you have the necessary strength to be this man?”

Fougereuse had arisen. Excited, flushed with enthusiasm, he looked at Velletri.

“Yes, I am the man!” he firmly exclaimed, “I will easily overcome every obstacle, conquer every opposition — ”

“With our assistance,” added the Jesuit. “We are already in possession of a respectable minority, and it will be easy for you, with the aid of promises and shrewd insinuations, to win over those who are on the fence. Marquis, the work intrusted to you is a sublime one — ”

“I am yours body and soul,” interrupted the marquis impatiently. “And to-day — ”

“One moment,” said the Jesuit, placing his hand lightly on the marquis’s shoulder; “I also spoke about a guarantee.”

“Really,” cried Fougereuse sincerely, “I forgot all about that, but I should think my word of honor would be sufficient.”

Velletri did not reply to his last observation, but coolly said:

“The man in whom the society places such entire confidence as to give him the weapons which must lead to victory must be bound to us by ties which cannot be torn asunder.”

The marquis’s face expressed naïve astonishment.

“The strongest chains,” continued the Jesuit, “are, as is well known, the golden ones, and the guarantee we desire is based on this fact. Marquis, I am the secretary of the general of the order, and it is my mission to ask you whether you are ready to assist the society financially by founding new colonies such as the Montrouge and Saint-Acheul houses in Parma and Tuscany?"

"Certainly," stammered Fougereuse, "I am ready to help the Society of Jesus to the extent of my means, and should like to know beforehand how high the sum is that is required. My finances are at present exhausted and — "

"Have no fear," interrupted Velletri dryly; "the sum in question is not so immense that you need be frightened about it."

Fougereuse breathed more freely.

"To found the houses named only a very modest sum is necessary, not more than a million!"

"A million!" stammered the marquis, "a million!"

"The sum is very small in comparison to the office you buy with it, and only the particular friendship our order had for you caused it to give you the preference, to the exclusion of numerous applicants."

"But a million!" groaned Fougereuse, "the sum is impossible to secure! If I were to sell or pawn everything, I would not succeed in raising a quarter of this sum."

"Then you refuse?" asked Velletri.

"God forbid, only I do not know how I shall satisfy the demand of the society. A million is, under the circumstances, a terrible sum!"

"Marquis, the house of Fougereuse possesses a fortune which is fabulous in comparison to the demands of the society."

"If it were only so," groaned Fougereuse, "but unfortunately you are mistaken; I am ruined, totally ruined!"

"Impossible! The fortune your father left behind him was too immense to have been spent in a few years! No matter what your embarrassments previously were, the fortune must have been sufficient to cover them and enrich you enormously besides!" replied Velletri.

"Count, I was robbed of my legacy — dastardly robbed," whined Fougereuse.

The Italian rose up angrily.

"Marquis," said he, "I am not used to bargaining and haggling. I ask you for the last time, what is your decision? I offer you peace or war. Peace means for you power and influence, while war — "

"War?" repeated Fougereuse, confused. "I — do not understand you!"

"Then I will express myself more clearly. When the society reposes its confidence in a man like you and discloses its most secret plans, it always has a weapon in the background, to be used in case of necessity. A comrade sometimes becomes an opponent — "

"I — should I ever become an enemy of the fathers? Oh, you do not believe that yourself!"

"Our measures are such that it cannot be done very easily, anyhow," replied Velletri, with faint malice; "this is our ultimatum: Either you accept my proposition and hand over the sum named within five days, or one of our emissaries will place certain papers in the hands of the district-attorney!"

Fougereuse trembled with fear and his teeth chattered as he stammeringly said:

"I — do not — understand — you."

"Then listen. The papers are drafts whose signatures have been forged by the Vicomte de Talizac, and which are in our hands."

"Drafts? Forged drafts? Impossible — my son is not a criminal!" cried the marquis, desperately.

"Ask the vicomte," replied Velletri, coldly, and rising, he added: "Marquis, I give you time to consider. As soon as you have made up your mind, please be so kind as to let me know."

"One moment, count. Are your conditions unchangeable?"

"Perfectly so. Inside of the next five days the preliminary steps must be taken in the Chamber of Peers — "

"I will do them to-morrow," cried the marquis, hastily.

"But only in case you are able to give the necessary guarantee. Marquis, adieu!"

The Italian went away, and Fougereuse, entirely broken down, remained behind.

He was still sitting thinking deeply, when Simon, who had remained behind the curtain and overheard the interview, softly stepped forth, and said:

"Courage, marquis; there is no reason for despair. Write to the pious fathers that you will satisfy their demands within the required five days."

"But I do not understand — "

"And yet it is very clear. Fanfaro is in prison — "

“Even so — he will not be condemned to death.”

“If the judges do not kill him, there are other means.”

“Other means?”

“Yes, my lord; the legacy of the Fougereuse will fall into your hands, and then the cabinet position is sure.”

“Simon, are you mad?”

“No, my lord. I will kill Fanfaro!”

CHAPTER XXII

THE TRIAL

Political trials are in all ages similar; and then, as now, the verdict is decided upon long before the proceedings have begun.

It was only after Fanfaro had been brought to the courtroom that he caught a glimpse of the man who had allowed himself to be used as a tool to set the assassination of the king in motion. A contemptuous smile played about the young man's lips when he saw it was Robeckal. The wretch looked like the personification of fear; his knees quaked together, his face was covered with cold perspiration, and his teeth chattered audibly.

Robeckal had been still half intoxicated when he undertook to carry out Simon's proposition to play the regicide. Not until now, when he found himself in the presence of his judges, had he comprehended that it might cost him his head, and his bold assurance gave way to cowardly despair.

Fanfaro answered the questions put to him briefly and clearly. He described Robeckal's actions during the time he had been a member of Girdel's troupe. He declared that the wretch had cut the chain in Sainte-Ame for the purpose of killing the athlete, and said everything in such a passionless way that the judges became convinced that he was speaking the truth. As soon as the indictment had been read, the proceedings began. Robeckal whiningly declared that he bitterly regretted what he had done. He had been seduced by Fanfaro, and would give his right hand if he could blot out the recollection of the attempted assassination.

"Thanks be to God that Providence protected our king!" he concluded, bursting into tears, the presence of which were a surprise even to himself, while a murmur of sympathy ran through the courtroom. He certainly deserved a light punishment, poor fellow, and —

Now came Fanfaro's turn.

"You are a member of a secret society which bears the proud title of 'Heroes of Justice'?" asked the presiding judge.

"I am a Frenchman," replied Fanfaro, "and as such I joined with the men who desire to free their country."

“And to do this you attempted assassination?” asked the judge, sharply.

“I am not an assassin,” replied the young man, coldly; “these men who negotiated with foreign powers to cut France in pieces for the sake of conquering a crown sunk in mud have more right to the title.”

“Bravo!” came from the rear of the hall, and then a terrible tumult arose. With the help of the policemen, several dozen men were hustled out of the room, while the man who had uttered the cry was let alone. It was Girdel, who wore the dress of a lackey and consequently aroused no suspicion.

Irene de Salves was also one of the spectators. Her sparkling eyes were directed at Fanfaro, and whenever he spoke, a look of pride shone in them.

When quiet had been restored, the judge turned once more to Fanfaro. He asked him to tell everything he knew about the attempt, and shook his head when the young man declared on his honor that he was the victim of a conspiracy.

“My father,” Fanfaro concluded, “fell in defence of his country, and it would be a bad way of honoring his memory were I to stain his name with the shame of regicide.”

Fanfaro’s defender was a very able lawyer, but he was stopped in the middle of his speech, and when he protested he was forced to leave the courtroom.

Fifteen minutes later the verdict was given. Robeckal was condemned to death by strangulation, and Fanfaro to the galleys for life.

But at the moment the sentence was pronounced a terrible thing occurred.

Fanfaro arose, opened his mouth as if he wished to speak, stretched out his arms, turned around in a circle, and then fell heavily to the floor!

Loud cries broke forth.

“He has committed suicide,” some cried.

“He has been poisoned,” came from others, and all rushed toward the unconscious man.

Irene de Salves had hurried toward Girdel, she wished to ask him a question; but when she finally reached the place where she had seen the athlete he had disappeared. All attempts at recovery remained fruitless, and Fanfaro was carried off. Robeckal, too, was almost dead from fright. The sentence came upon him like a stroke of lightning.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE CRISIS

"At last," cried the Marquis of Fougereuse, when he heard of Fanfaro's sudden death, and in great good humor he went in search of his wife.

"Madeleine!" he exclaimed, "all our troubles are at an end now; he who stood between us and fortune is dead."

"Of whom are you speaking?"

"Of whom else but that common regicide."

"What, of that Fanfaro who lately had the audacity to come into our parlor and create that terrible scene?"

"Of him — he is dead."

"Heaven be praised. We shall now receive the legacy."

"Without a doubt. All that is now necessary is to get Girdel to speak, and that can be easily arranged. He has only to repeat before witnesses what he has told me already."

"I had hardly dared to hope any more that this dream would be realized," said Madeleine. "The cabinet position is now sure, and our son has a brilliant future before him. Where is Frederic staying? He has been gone already several hours."

The marquis paid no attention to Madeleine's last words. He was thinking about Simon and the great service the latter had done for him.

"Where can Simon be?" he uneasily remarked, "I have not seen him in two days."

"Bah! he will turn up, let us rather speak about our son. I — "

A knock was heard at the door.

"Come in," said the marquis expectantly; but instead of Simon, as he thought, a servant entered.

"My lord," he stammered, "the vicomte — "

"Ah, he is outside!" cried the marquise eagerly; "tell the vicomte we are awaiting him."

Saying which she advanced toward the door. The servant, however, prevented her from opening it, and placing his hand on the knob, he hesitatingly said:

“Madame — I — ”

“What do you mean?” cried the marquise, angrily. “You announce the vicomte and lock the door instead of opening it?”

“My lord,” said the servant, turning to the marquis.

The expression of the man’s face was such that the nobleman felt his heart stand still with terror, and in a faint voice he stammered:

“Madeleine, let Baptiste speak.”

“The — vicomte — is dead,” stammered Baptiste.

A cry of despair came from the marquise’s lips, while the unfortunate father looked at the messenger in a daze. He did not seem to know what was the matter.

But soon the terrible significance of the words was made clear to him. Heavy steps were heard in the corridor. They ceased at the door, and now — now four men entered the parlor and laid gently on the floor the burden they had been carrying. The burden was a bier, covered with a cloth, under which could be seen the outlines of a human form.

Neither the marquis nor Madeleine had the courage to raise the cover. In a daze they both stared at the bier and the pallbearers, and only when Gaston de Ferrette, Talizac’s friend, stepped on the threshold of the door did life return to the unhappy parents.

“Gaston, what has happened?” cried the marquis in despair, as he imploringly held his hand toward the young man.

“He is dead,” replied Gaston, in a hollow voice.

“Who is dead? For Heaven’s sake speak!” moaned Madeleine.

“Your son, the Vicomte de Talizac, fell in a duel,” said Gaston, earnestly.

Madeleine uttered a loud cry and sank unconscious to the floor. While Baptiste and the marquise’s maid hurried to her assistance, Fougereuse gazed vacantly before him, and then raising his head, he passionately exclaimed:

“You lie — my son had no duel!”

“Would to God you were right, marquis,” replied Gaston, sorrowfully; “unfortunately it is the truth. The vicomte and Arthur de Montferrand fought a duel, and the sword of the latter ran through Talizac’s heart!”

The marquis still remained unconvinced, and carefully gliding toward the bier, he shoved the cloth aside with a trembling hand.

Yes, it was his son who lay on the bier. The pale face was stiff and cold. The eyes were glassy and on the breast was a deep red wound.

The marquis uttered a hoarse cry and his hand nervously grasped the cloth. His eyes shone feverishly and he stammered forth disconnected sentences.

Gaston de Ferrette consoled the unhappy father, but his words made no impression, and as Madeleine had in the meantime been brought back to consciousness by her maid, Gaston thought it best to go away for the present.

He softly strode to the door, but had hardly reached it when the marquis sprang up, and, laying his hand heavily on the young man's shoulder, said:

"Do not leave this room. I must know how he died."

A wink from Gaston sent the servants away, and as soon as he was alone with the parents he began his story.

"The vicomte sent his seconds to Arthur de Montferrand," he said; "the motive for the duel was to be kept secret by both combatants, and I of course had nothing to say to this. The meeting was agreed upon for this morning and took place in the Bois de Boulogne. When the vicomte arrived on the spot, he was so terribly excited that the seconds thought it their duty to ask for a postponement of the affair. This proposition was agreed to by Monsieur de Montferrand, but the vicomte firmly opposed it. We tried in vain to change his determination. He became angry, accused his seconds of cowardice, and threatened to horsewhip them. Under such circumstances nothing could be done. The distance was measured off and the duel began. The vicomte was already lost after the first tourney. In his passion he ran upon his opponent's sword, the blade of which penetrated his heart, and death immediately followed."

Pale, with eyes wide open, the marquis and Madeleine listened to Gaston's story. The marquise clinched her fist and angrily exclaimed:

"My son has been murdered, and I will avenge him!"

The marquis remained silent, but his silence made a deeper impression on the young man than Madeleine's anger.

"Did my son leave any letter?" asked the marquise, suddenly.

"Yes, my lady. Before we rode to the Bois de Boulogne the vicomte gave me a sealed letter, which I was to give to his parents in case of his death."

The young man thereupon handed the marquise the letter. Madeleine tore the envelope with a trembling hand. There were only a few lines:

"You have brought me up badly. You are the cause of my death. I hate you!"

A terrible laugh, the laugh of madness, came from the marquise's breast, and, rushing upon her husband, she held the paper before his eyes.

"Read," she cried, "read these words, which our only child sends us from his grave. He hates us — ha, ha, ha! — hates — hates!"

The cup of sorrow caused the marquise to become unconscious again, and this time Gaston ordered the servants to take her away. Madeleine was carried to her bedroom, and Gaston, who saw the marquis kneeling at his son's bier, noiselessly went away.

Hardly had he left the room, when the door was slowly opened and a gray-haired man entered. He saw the grief-stricken father beside his son's corpse, and an expression of deep sympathy crossed his stony face. Softly walking behind the marquis, he laid his hand upon his shoulder. Fougereuse looked up and an expression of dumb terror appeared on his features, while he tremblingly murmured: "Pierre Labarre!"

Yes, it was really Pierre Labarre who had accompanied Caillette and Louise to Paris, and had heard there that Fanfaro's trial had begun. As soon as he could he hurried to the court house and heard there what had happened. Several physicians stood about the so suddenly deceased young man, and they declared that death was brought about by the bursting of a vein.

Crushed and annihilated, Pierre Labarre hurried to the Fougereuse mansion, and the marquis trembled at sight of him, as if he were a spectre.

"Pierre Labarre," he cried in a hollow voice, "you come to gloat over my grief. Ah, you can triumph now. I know you are glad at my misfortune. Get out!" he suddenly exclaimed in angry tones, "get out, I have nothing to do with you!"

"But I have with you, marquis," replied Pierre calmly. "I have something to tell you, and you will listen to me!"

"Aha! have you finally become reasonable?" mockingly laughed the marquis. "Now you will no longer dare to prevent me from claiming my rights or dispute my legal title."

"No," replied Pierre, sorrowfully; "the real Vicomte de Talizac is dead, and from to-day on you are for me the Marquis of Fougereuse."

"I do not understand you," said the marquis, confused. "What has the death of my son got to do with my title?"

“I do not speak of the son who lies here a corpse, but of the other — ”

“Which other?” asked the nobleman, more and more surprised.

“You will soon understand me — it is about Fanfaro — ”

“Ah, I could have thought so; to his death I owe the fact that Pierre Labarre calls me the Marquis of Fougereuse, and that now that no one is living to whom he can give the hidden millions he must necessarily deliver them up to me!”

With a mixture of surprise and horror Pierre looked at the man, who could still think of money and money matters in the presence of his dead son.

“Why do you not speak?” continued the marquis, mockingly. “You are, no doubt, sorrowful at the death of Fanfaro, whom you imagine to be the legitimate heir of the Fougereuse? Yes, I cannot help you; gone is gone; and if it interests you, you can learn how Fanfaro came to his death. I killed him!”

“Impossible — do not say that!” cried Pierre Labarre in terror. “Say that it was a joke, my lord, or a misunderstanding. You did not kill him!”

“And why not?” asked the nobleman. “Yes, I got rid of him; I hired the murderer, who freed me of him! Ha! ha! ha! I knew who Fanfaro was — I recognized him immediately on account of his resemblance to my father and my brother, and as he stood in my way I got rid of him by means of poison! What are you staring at? I really believe you are getting childish in your old age!”

Pale as a ghost, Pierre leaned against the wall, and his hand was clasped over his eyes, as if he wished to shut the marquis out of his sight.

“Unhappy father,” he murmured, in a broken voice; “would to God somebody took the duty off my hands of telling you what you have done.”

“Spare your pity,” said Fougereuse, proudly; “if anything can console me for the death of my son, it is the knowledge that my brother Jules’s son, who was always a thorn in my side, is at last out of the way.”

“For Heaven’s sake be silent: this Fanfaro was not your brother’s son!”

“So much the worse!”

“My lord, in the presence of this corpse which lies before us, I beseech you do not blaspheme, and listen to what I have to say. Do you recollect the village of Sachemont?”

“Sachemont?” repeated Fougereuse, pensively.

"Yes — Sachemont. On the 16th of May, 1804, you and another officer took lodgings in the cottage of a peasant in Sachemont. You were running away from France. You had taken part in Cadoudal's conspiracy, and barely escaped from the hands of the officers of the law. The peasant received you hospitably, and, in return, the wretches insulted their host's daughters. One of the officers, a German, was repulsed by the young girl he had impudently approached, but the other one, a Frenchman, took advantage of the other sister, and after committing the dastardly outrage, he ran away with his companion. Marquis, shall I name you the man who acted so meanly? It was the then Vicomte de Talizac!"

Fougereuse looked at the old servant in amazement. Where had Pierre Labarre found all this out?

"The nobleman left the cottage like a thief in the night, and left behind him despair and shame," continued Pierre; "and this despair increased when the unhappy victim of the Vicomte de Talizac gave birth to a son, about the commencement of the year 1805 — "

"Go on! What else?" asked Fougereuse, mockingly, as Pierre paused.

"The unhappy girl died, and the child, which had neither father nor mother, stood alone in the world," said the old man softly; "it would have died wretchedly if a brave and noble man had not made good the misfortune another caused. Jules de Fougereuse, the brother of the Vicomte de Talizac, married, under the name of Jules Fougeres, the sister of the dead woman, and both of them took care of the child. They brought the boy up as if he had been their own, and in the village of Leigoutte no one suspected that little Jacques was only an adopted child. In the year 1814 you induced the Cossacks to destroy Leigoutte. Jules Fougeres, your only brother, died the death of a hero, and if the wife and children of the victim did not get burned to death, as was intended, it was not the fault of the instigator of the bloody drama."

This time the nobleman did not reply mockingly; pale and trembling he gazed at Pierre Labarre, and cold drops of perspiration stood on his forehead.

"My information is at an end," said the old man now, as he advanced a step nearer to the nobleman. "Fanfaro and Jacques Fougeres are identical with the Vicomte de Talizac's son."

"It is a lie," hissed Fougereuse, "this Fanfaro was my brother's son; tell your fables to others."

Instead of answering, Pierre Labarre searched in his breast-pocket and handed the marquis a package of papers. With trembling hands Fougereuse opened the ones on top and tried to read, but a veil was before his eyes and he tremblingly said:

"Read them, Pierre, I cannot see anything."

Pierre read the following aloud:

"I, Jules de Fougereuse, elder son of the marquis of the same name, swear that the child, Jacques Fougeres, which is supposed to be my own and bears the name of Fougeres, which I at present answer to, is not my son, but the son of my sister-in-law Therese Lemaire, and my brother, the Vicomte de Talizac.

"Jules Fougeres."

"Those words have been written by some unmitigated liar!" cried the marquis. "Pierre Labarre, say that it is not true, or else — I must have poisoned my own son!"

"Would to God I could say no," replied Pierre, shuddering, "but I cannot! Fanfaro was your son — his blood lies on your head!"

"No! no!" cried the marquis, pale as death; "his blood will not fall upon me, but upon the devil who led me to do the dastardly deed."

"His name?" asked Pierre.

"Is Simon — my steward! He advised me to poison Fanfaro, so that I could force you to give up the legacy. I acceded to his proposition, and he committed the deed."

Pierre looked contemptuously at the coward who did not hesitate to throw the responsibility of the terrible deed on his servant.

"I am going now," he said, coldly; "I have nothing more to do here."

"No, remain. Do not leave me alone with the dead — I am frightened!" whined the marquis.

"I must go. I want to look after your other dead son," replied Pierre.

"Ah, take me along! Let me see him, let me beg forgiveness of the corpse against which I have sinned so," implored the broken-down man.

Pierre thought for a while, and then said earnestly:

"Come then — you are right."

"Thanks, a thousand thanks! But tell me, Pierre, what will become of the fortune you have in safe keeping. It exists yet, I hope?"

Labarre trembled with contemptuous rage; the man before him was more mercenary and wicked than he thought could be possible. He buried both his sons almost at the same hour, but he still found time and opportunity to inquire about the legacy for which he had made so many sacrifices.

“Well,” exclaimed Fougereuse impatiently, “tell me, where are the millions of my father?”

“In a safe place,” replied Pierre dryly.

“God be praised! I could draw a million then this evening?”

“My God, marquis! do you need a million to confess your sins?”

“Later! Later! Now answer me, when can I get the million?”

“To-morrow; the documents and bonds are deposited with a lawyer here.”

“So much the better.”

The marquis hurried to his writing-table, wrote a few lines and rang.

“Here, this note must be brought at once to Count Fernando de Velletri,” he said to Baptiste. “Wait for an answer and bring it at once to me; you will find me in the court-house.”

While the servant was hurrying away, the marquis hastily put on a cloak, and left the house with Labarre.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE AUTOPSY

In a House opposite the court-house, which stood at the corner of a street which has long since disappeared, were two men who were earnestly conversing.

“Doctor,” said one of them, “you guarantee a success?”

“Have no fear; I have often made such experiments, and always with success. I haven’t grown gray in the service of science for nothing. I know what I am speaking about.”

“But the long time,” said the other anxiously. “You know we can operate only at night, and forty hours are sometimes an eternity.”

“Before I entered upon the plan I weighed everything carefully,” said the physician earnestly, “otherwise I should not have taken the responsibility. Have confidence in me; what my knowledge and care can do will be done to bring everything to a good end.”

The other man shook the physician’s hand heartily.

“Thank you, faithful friend,” he cordially said. “I wish I could stop the uneasy beating of my heart, but I suppose it is only natural that I am anxious.”

“That’s it exactly,” replied the doctor; “and to quiet you I will stay here from now on until the decisive hour. Good-by, I must go. You know where I am to be found.”

The doctor went, while the other man struck his face with his hands and softly murmured:

“God grant that he be right. I would rather die a thousand deaths than lose the dear boy in this way.”

Hot tears ran over the man’s brown cheeks, and his broad breast rose and fell, torn by convulsive sobs.

“Shame yourself, Firejaws!” he murmured, “if any one saw you now! Let us hope everything will be all right, and then — ”

A loud knock at the door interrupted Girdel’s self-conversation, and upon a hasty “Come in,” Bobichel entered the room.

“Well, Bobi, how goes it?” asked the athlete.

“She is downstairs,” said the clown, with a significant gesture.

Without asking another question, Girdel hurried out, while Bobichel looked observantly around the room, and soon found a well-filled bottle of wine and a glass; he filled the glass and emptied it with one swallow.

In the meantime Girdel had met Irene de Salves in the corridor of the house.

The young lady wore a black dress, and when she saw the athlete she ran to meet him and sobbingly cried:

“He’s not dead, is he?”

“No, he is not dead,” confirmed Girdel; and seeing Irene’s pale face, he said, more to himself: “I knew how the news would work, and yet it could not be helped — as God pleases, it will all be right again.”

“But where is he?” asked Irene anxiously.

“Countess,” began the athlete, somewhat embarrassed, “at present he is a corpse on a bier and whoever sees him thinks he is dead; but to-morrow at this time he will be well and at liberty.”

“Ah, if I could only believe it — ”

“You can do so,” cried Girdel, hastily; “if I had not thought you were more courageous than women in general, I would have kept silent; but I thought to myself you were in despair, and I therefore concluded to speak.”

“A thousand thanks for your confidence, but tell me everything that has happened — I can hardly understand the whole thing.”

“I believe you. If you were to accompany me to the cellar now you would see one of the chief actors in the drama. Downstairs in a cage lies a wild beast which we have captured. I just want to call Bobichel and give him a message, then I will accompany you downstairs.”

A low whistle from the athlete brought the clown directly to him, and Girdel ordered him to slip into the court-house and watch what occurred there. He then accompanied Irene into the damp cellar. Lighting a pocket lantern and holding it aloft, he said:

“Follow me, countess; we will soon be there.”

The countess followed her guide without hesitation; she had perfect confidence in Girdel, and after a short journey they both stood in front of a heavy iron door.

“Here we are,” said the athlete, triumphantly; and taking an iron bar which stood in a corner in his hand, he cried in stentorian tones:

“Get up, scoundrel, let us look at you!”

Low moans answered the gruff command, and Irene uttered a cry of terror, for in the cell a human form moved.

“Step nearer, mademoiselle,” said Girdel, putting on the manners of a circus proprietor; “the wild beast is pretty tame now — we have taken out its teeth and chained it.”

“But I do not understand — ” stammered Irene.

“Who this beast is? You shall know it at once; the magnificent personage is Simon, the factotum of the Marquis Fougereuse. In his leisure hours the miserable wretch occupies himself with poisoning experiments, and it would not be a loss to humanity if he should never see daylight again. Come, boy, play your tricks; the performance begins.”

“Mercy,” whispered Simon, for he was really the prisoner, “let me free.”

“Really? Perhaps later on, but now you must obey. Quick, tell us what brought you here.”

“I am hungry,” growled Simon.

“Really? Well, if you answer my questions probably you shall have food and drink. Why did you want to poison Fanfaro?”

“I do not know,” stammered the steward.

“How bad your memory is. What interest did your master, the Marquis of Fougereuse, have in Fanfaro’s death?”

Simon was silent. Girdel nudged him gently in the ribs with the iron bar, and turning to Irene, said:

“Would you believe, mademoiselle, that this fellow was very talkative a few days ago when he tried to bribe Fanfaro’s jailer. Growl away, it is true, anyway! You promised fabulous sums to the jailer if he would mix a small white powder in Fanfaro’s food. Fortunately I have eyes and ears everywhere, so I immediately took my measures. With Bobichel’s assistance I captured this monster here, and then I went to the bribed jailer and gave him, in the name of his employer, the white powder. He took it without any objection. That I had changed the powder in the meantime for another he was unaware of. If I only knew,” he concluded with a frown, “what object this marquis has to injure Fanfaro. This beast won’t talk, and — ”

“Let me speak to him,” said the countess, softly. And turning to the grating, she urged Simon to confess his master’s motives and thereby free himself. At first Simon looked uneasily at the young girl; he made an attempt to speak, but reconsidered it and closed his lips.

"Let us leave him alone, mademoiselle," said Girdel; "solitude will do him good."

When Simon saw that Girdel and Irene were about to depart, he groaned loudly, but the athlete ordered him to keep still if he did not wish to be gagged, and this warning had the desired effect.

When Girdel and Irene reached the room, the latter sank, sobbing, upon a chair, and "the brave athlete" tried his best to console her.

"It will be all right," he assured her; "Fanfaro has swallowed a strong narcotic which makes him appear as if dead. To-morrow he will be buried; we shall dig him up again, and then bring him away as soon as possible."

At this moment Bobichel breathlessly rushed into the room, and Irene uttered a cry of terror when she saw his pale face.

"What has happened?" she cried, filled with gloomy forebodings.

"O God — he is lost!" stammered the clown.

"Who is lost?"

"Fanfaro."

"Speak clearly," cried Girdel, beside himself.

"They have brought — Fanfaro — to the — Hotel Dieu," said Bobichel, sobbing.

"Well, that isn't such a misfortune," said the athlete, breathing more freely. "You need not have frightened us."

"But the worst is to come — they want to hold an autopsy over him to find out the cause of death."

"Merciful God! that must not be," cried Irene, wringing her hands. "We must run to the hospital and tell all."

"Who is the physician that is going to undertake the autopsy?" asked Girdel.

"Doctor Albaret, as I was informed."

"Then rely on me, countess," cried the athlete, rushing away; "either I rescue Fanfaro or else I die with him."

CHAPTER XXV

FROM SCYLLA TO CHARYBDIS

Bobichel unfortunately had not said too much. The fact that Fanfaro had dropped dead so suddenly had caused great excitement in the scientific world, and Dr. Albaret, the king's private physician, was the first to propose the autopsy. His colleagues immediately consented, and Fanfaro was at once brought to the Hotel Dieu and placed upon the marble table in the anatomy room. The attendants busily rushed here and there, and while they brought in the necessary instruments — lances, needles, knives, saws and bandages, — numerous disciples of Esculapius stood about the dead man and admired his beautiful proportions and strong muscles.

"He could have lived to a hundred years," said the physician, as he beat Fanfaro's breast, and his colleagues agreed with him. Fanfaro lay like a marble statue upon the table; the dark locks covered the pale forehead, and a painful expression lay over the firmly closed lips. Did the poor fellow suspect that he would become a victim of science and be delivered over to the knife?

In the meantime the hall had become crowded, and when Dr. Albaret appeared a murmur of expectation ran through the ranks of the students and physicians.

Dr. Albaret, a sturdy old man, bowed to all sides, and hastily taking off his coat he took the dissecting knife in his hand and began to speak: "Gentlemen! a death so sudden as this in a person apparently in the best of health demands the attention of all physicians, and I hope that we will be able to discover the cause of this surprising phenomenon. There are different ways of beginning an autopsy such as this. The German professors, for instance, make a cut from the chin to the pit of the stomach, the Italians from the underlip to the breast-bone, while the French — "

"Dr. Albaret," cried a stentorian voice at this moment — "where is Dr. Albaret?"

The physician frowned, he did not like such interruptions, but when he saw that the man who was hurriedly pressing through the rows of listeners wore the livery of a royal lackey, his face became clear again.

“A message from his majesty the king,” said the man breathlessly.

“A message from his majesty?” repeated the physician eagerly, as he grasped the note the messenger gave him.

Hurriedly running over the few lines, Albaret nodded, and quickly putting his coat on again, he said, in a tone of importance:

“Gentlemen, much to my regret I must leave you; an urgent matter requires my immediate attendance at the Tuileries, and I shall go there directly.”

“But the autopsy?” remarked an elderly colleague.

“It isn’t worth the trouble to postpone it,” replied Albaret, indifferently; “let the poor fellow, who is stone-dead, be buried. Death undoubtedly was produced by the bursting of a blood vessel in the brain, and the excitement under which the deceased was laboring proves this very clearly. Adieu, gentlemen, next time we shall make up for what we have lost now.”

He hurried out. In the corridor he was stopped by the superintendent of the hospital, who asked him to put his signature under the burial certificate. Albaret signed it standing, got into the carriage which was waiting at the door, and rode rapidly away, while the royal servant, who was no other than Girdel, ran in an opposite direction, and took off his livery in a little house where Bobichel was awaiting him.

“Bobi, just in time,” he breathlessly cried, “five minutes more and Fanfaro would have been done for.”

Girdel’s further arrangements were made with the utmost prudence. Irene de Salves had given him unlimited credit, and the well-known proverb that a golden key opens all doors was conclusively proved in this particular case. The man whose duty it was to bury those who died in the Hotel Dieu had, for a good round sum, consented to allow Girdel to do his work, and so the athlete had nothing else to do than to clothe himself appropriately and hurry back to the hospital.

The superintendent had just ordered the hearse to be put in readiness, when the Marquis of Fougereuse was announced. On the upper corner of the visiting card was a peculiar mark, and hardly had he seen it than he hurried to meet the marquis.

The nobleman leaned on Pierre Labarre’s arm, and returning the superintendent’s greeting, he tried to speak, but his voice was broken by sobs, and so he handed the official a folded paper and looked inquiringly at him.

Hardly had the official read the paper, than he respectfully observed that the marquis's wish should be complied with, and that he would give the necessary orders at once.

The note contained an order from the Minister of Justice to hand over to the Marquis of Fougereuse the body of Fanfaro; thus it will be seen that the marquis's present of a million to the Society of Jesus had already borne fruit, and Pierre Labarre felt his anger diminish when he saw for what purpose the marquis had demanded the money. He no longer thought of the cabinet position, he had bought the right with his million to have the son who had never stood near to him in life buried in the Fougereuse family vault.

"I should like — to see — the deceased," stammered the broken-down father.

The official bowed, and accompanied his guide up to the operating room where Fanfaro's body still lay.

The marquis sank on his knees beside the dead man, and murmured a silent prayer; how different was the son who had fallen in a duel to the brother whom the father had sacrificed for him.

"Marquis, shall I call the carriers?" asked Pierre, gently.

The nobleman nodded, and soon Fanfaro's body was laid upon a bier, which was carried to the Fougereuse mansion by four men. The marquis and Pierre followed the procession with uncovered heads. When they arrived at the Fougereuse mansion, Fanfaro was laid beside his brother, and the marquis then said:

"There is only one thing left for me — I must bury my sons and then die myself."

"But Madame la Marquise," said Pierre, anxiously.

"The marquise will have the same wish as I have to suffer for our sins," said the marquis, frowning; "and — "

At this moment Baptiste rushed into the room, and with a frightened look exclaimed:

"Madame la Marquise is nowhere to be seen, and her maid fears she has done herself an injury — she was talking so strangely."

Pierre and the marquis exchanged a silent look, and then the nobleman gently said:

"She did right. Of what further use was she in the world? Oh, I envy her!"

* * * * *

Girdel and Bobichel waited almost a full hour at the rear entrance of the Hotel Dieu. The athlete finally became impatient. He went inside of the house and asked if the body wasn't going to be put in the hearse.

"I really forgot all about it," cried the superintendent to whom Girdel had gone for information. "The body has been taken away long ago."

"Taken away?" repeated the athlete, astonished.

"Yes; the Marquis of Fougereuse claimed him and took him along. I believe he intends to bury him in his family vault."

"Almighty God! Is that true?" asked Girdel, horror-stricken.

"Yes, certainly; he brought carriers along, and that settled the matter."

"Where is the family vault of the Fougereuse?" asked Girdel.

"Oh, far from Paris; somewhere in Alsace, if I remember aright."

"God have mercy on me!" muttered Girdel to himself.

The official looked at him with amazement. What was the matter with the man?

CHAPTER XXVI

MISTAKEN

Before Robeckal had consented to play the part of a regicide, he had made his conditions, and not before they were accepted had he undertaken the job. He had been told that he would be condemned to death *pro forma*, and set free at the right moment. He would then be given an amount necessary for him to go to England or America and live there.

Notwithstanding these promises, Robeckal felt a cold shudder run down his back when he heard the death sentence, and when he was taken back to jail again he impatiently awaited further developments. He thought it very strange that he should be left to his fate, and when hour after hour had passed and neither Simon nor any one else came to his cell, he began to feel seriously uneasy.

Suppose they no longer remembered the compact?

Cold drops of perspiration stood on the wretch's forehead, and his hands clinched nervously as these thoughts ran through his mind, and he tried to banish them. No, that must not be done to him. The rescue must come — he had not committed the fatal act for nothing. At last, the heavy iron door swung open, and Vidocq, the great detective, entered his cell. Robeckal knew him, and breathed more freely. Vidocq, no doubt, came to release him.

"Thank God you have come, Monsieur Vidocq," cried Robeckal to the official; "the time was becoming rather long for me."

"I am sorry that I have kept you waiting," replied Vidocq, quietly; "but there were certain formalities to be settled, and I — "

"Ah! no doubt in regard to the money?" said Robeckal, laughing. "Have you brought the yellow birds along?"

"Slowly, slowly — first let me inform you that the death sentence has been torn up."

"Really? I did not expect anything else."

"You do not say so," observed the official, ironically. "Then you already know your fate?"

“Yes, I am going to England and from there to America.”

“I don’t know anything about that; my information is that you will not leave France.”

Robeckal’s face became a shade paler, still he did not lose courage.

“Where am I to be sent?” he hastily asked.

“For the present to the south of France.”

“To — the — south — of — France,” repeated Robeckal.

“To Toulon.”

“To Toulon?” cried the wretch, in terror. “That is impossible!”

“And why should it be impossible?” asked Vidocq, smiling maliciously.

“Because — because,” stammered Robeckal, faintly, “the sentence — ”

“Was death by strangulation. Thanks to the efforts of your friends, it has been commuted to the galleys for life, and I think you ought to be satisfied with the change.”

“But — the — promise?” whined the criminal. “But, come, now, you are only joking?”

“I never joke,” said the detective, earnestly; “besides, you must have been very innocent to imagine any one would make a compact with a scoundrel like you. It would be a crime against society to allow you to continue your bad course. No, thank God, the judges in France know their duty.”

With these words, Vidocq beckoned to four muscular men to enter the cell. They seized Robeckal and put handcuffs and chains on him, in spite of his cries and entreaties. As the wretch continued to shout louder, a gag was put in his mouth, and in less than a quarter of an hour he was on the way to Toulon, which place he never left alive.

CHAPTER XXVII

FREEDOM

In a poor fisherman’s cottage in Havre a young man was walking up and down in feverish uneasiness. From time to time he looked through the window which opened on to the sea. The waves ran high, the wind whistled, while dark clouds rolled over the starless sky.

A slight knock was now heard at the door of the cottage.

“Who is there?” asked the young man, anxiously.

“We are looking for Fanfaro,” came from the outside; and, when the man hastily shoved back the bolt, two slim female forms, enveloped in dark cloaks, crossed the threshold.

Before the young man had time to greet the strangers, another knock was heard, and upon the question, “Who is there?” the answer came this time, in a soft, trembling voice:

“We have been sent here to find Fanfaro.”

“Come in,” cried the young man, eagerly; and two more female forms entered the cottage. One of them was young and strong; the other, old, gray-haired and broken-down, clung to her companion, who almost carried her.

They all looked silently at each other; finally, one of those who had first entered let her cloak, the hood of which she wore over her head, sink down, and, turning to the young man, she vivaciously said:

“Arthur, have you sent me this invitation?”

With these words, she handed Arthur de Montferrand, for he was the young man, the following note:

“Whoever wants to see Fanfaro once more should come to the fisherman’s cottage of Antoine Michel, in Havre, on the 18th day of March.”

“I received a similar invitation,” said Arthur. “I was told, at the same time, to come in the afternoon; to answer any inquiries that might be made; and to see that no stranger be admitted. Who invited us here, I do not know; but I think we shall not be kept waiting long for an explanation.”

“As God pleases, this hope may be confirmed,” replied Irene de Salves, and turning to her companion, who was softly sobbing, she whispered consolingly to her: “Courage, Louison, you will soon embrace your brother.”

The two other women were Caillette and Louise; the latter looked vacantly before her, and all of Louison’s caresses were of no avail to cheer her.

“Jacques — where is Jacques?” she incessantly repeated, and the fact that Louison was really her daughter seemed to have entirely escaped her.

Arthur de Montferrand never turned his eyes from the girl for whose honor he had fought so bravely, and every time Louison looked up she met the eyes of the young nobleman.

A skyrocket now shot up in the dark sky; it exploded aloft with a loud noise, and a golden rain lighted up the horizon for a while.

“That was undoubtedly a good sign,” thought Arthur, hastily opening the cottage door.

Loud oar-sounds were now heard, and a light boat struck for the shore with the rapidity of an arrow.

The keel now struck the sand and a slim form sprang quickly out of the bark and hurried toward the cottage.

“Fanfaro!” joyously exclaimed the inmates of the cottage, and the young man who had been rescued from the grave was soon surrounded on all sides. He, however, had eyes alone for the broken-down old woman who clung to Caillette in great excitement and gently implored:

“Jacques — where is Jacques? I do not see him!”

“Here I am, my poor dear mother,” sobbed Fanfaro, sinking on his knees in front of the old lady.

With trembling hands she caressed his hair, pressed her lips upon her son’s forehead, and then sank, with a smile, to the floor. Death had released her from her sufferings after she had been permitted to enjoy the last, and, to her, highest earthly joy.

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Here Fanfaro’s story ended. Girdel knew something to add to it after Fanfaro had closed. He and Bobichel had succeeded in overtaking the funeral cortege which the marquis and Pierre Labarre conducted to the family vault. In a few words Pierre was informed of the condition of things, and as the marquis had become thoroughly exhausted, the faithful old servant had undertaken to bring Fanfaro's body to a place of safety. Girdel had been prudent enough to take along the physician who had given him the narcotic, and soon Fanfaro opened his eyes.

As soon as he had sufficiently recovered, Pierre told him, in short outlines, who he was. The young man listened with deep emotion to the story, and then he swore a sacred oath that he would never call another man father than the one who had taken pity on him, the helpless child; the Marquis of Fougereuse had no right to him, and he would rather have died than touch a penny of his money. No power on earth could induce him to have anything to do with the marquis. He would leave France, and try to forget, in a foreign country, what he had suffered.

That very night Fanfaro travelled, in company with his sister, Girdel, Bobichel, and Caillette, to Algiers. Before the ship lifted anchor, Fanfaro had received from Irene's lips the promise that she would become his wife. Her mother's life hung on a thread, and as long as she remained on earth the daughter could not think of leaving her.

The old countess died about six months afterward, and as soon as Irene had arranged her affairs, she prepared herself for the journey to Africa.

She was not surprised when Arthur offered to accompany her. She was aware that a powerful magnet in the person of Louison attracted him across the ocean, and when the young nobleman landed in France again, after the lapse of a few months, he was accompanied by a handsome young wife, whom the old Marquis of Montferrand warmly welcomed to the home of his fathers — for was she not a scion of the house of Fougereuse, and the sole heiress of all the property of that family? Louison's uncle, the Marquis Jean de Fougereuse, had ended his dreary life shortly after the Vicomte de Talizac's death, and it was not difficult for Arthur, with Pierre Labarre's assistance, to maintain Louison's claims as the daughter of Jules de Fougereuse and sole heiress of the legacy. Of course, the Society of Jesus was much put out by the sudden apparition of an heiress, for it had hoped to come into possession of the millions some day.

Bobichel had become Caillette's husband; and though the handsome wife did not conceal the fact from him that not he, but Fanfaro, had been her first love, the supremely happy clown was satisfied. He knew Caillette was good to him and that he had no ground any more to be jealous of Irene's husband.

The life which the colonists led in Africa was full of dangers, but had also its pleasures and joys, and through Louison and her husband they remained in connection with their fatherland, whose children they remained in spite of everything.

* * * * *

At the end of a week Spero had entirely recovered, and the count prepared to depart for France. Before he parted from his kind host, he turned to Fanfaro and begged him in a solemn tone to stand by his son with his assistance and advice, should he ever need them, and Fanfaro cheerfully complied with his request.

“Rely on my word,” he said, as the little caravan was about to start. “The son of the Count of Monte-Cristo is under the protection of all of us, and if he should ever call us to his assistance, whether by day or night, we shall obey the call!”

CHAPTER XXVII

BENEDETTO’S REVENGE

A Letter of the Count of Monte-Cristo to his son, Vicomte Spero

“My Dearly Beloved Son — To-day is the anniversary of your rescue from the hands of that terrible Maldar, and although twelve years have passed since then, I still feel the effects of the fright I sustained. Thanks to faithful friends, you were saved to us; God bless them for it, and give you and me an opportunity to repay them for what they have done for us.

“In regard to myself this opportunity must come soon, for I have passed my sixtieth year, and my strength is failing.

“Yes, my dear Spero, your father, who was to you the incarnation of energy, is now only a broken-down man; since my poor wife died, all is over with the Count of Monte-Cristo. Five years, five long years, have passed since your dear mother breathed her last in my arms, and I, who never wept before, have cried like a child. How insignificant, how feeble I thought myself when I saw the cheeks of my dear wife become paler day by day and her beautiful eyes lose their sparkle. What good was all the art and science I had learned from the Abbé Faria to me if I could not rescue her? Like avenging spirits, the shades of all those upon whom I had taken revenge rose up before me: Villefort, Danglars, Morcerf, Benedetto, Maldar, had all been overcome by me, but death was stronger than I am — it took her from me!

“My blood, my life, I would have given for that of your mother, but it was all of no use, death would not give up its prey. At that time, my dear son, you were sixteen years old. Your tears mingled with mine and you cried out in deep grief: ‘Ah, mother, if I could only die for you!’

“Spero, do you know what it is to feel that a person has deceived himself? I spent my life to carry out what I thought to be right, the punishment of wrong-doers and the rewarding of those who do good. I was all-powerful as long as it was a question of punishing the guilty, but as weak and feeble as a child when I attempted to make good the wrong I did in an excess of zeal, and all my tears and entreaties were of no avail.

"What good did it do that I rescued Albert, the son of the Countess Mercedes, from the murderous flames of Uargla? Two years later he was shot in the *coup d'état* of December, and his mother died of a broken heart.

"Maximilian Morrel and Valentine de Villefort met an early and a fearful death — they fell victims to the insurrection of the Sepoys in India, in the year 1859.

"You inherited from your mother everything that is good, noble, and sublime; from me a thirst for knowledge, energy, and activity. Would to God I could say that you did not also inherit my arrogance, my venomous arrogance. Spero, by the time you receive this letter, I shall be far away; yes, I am going away, and voluntarily place upon myself the heaviest burden, but it must be.

"Will you be able to understand me and my motives? Ah, Spero, I cannot help domineering over those about me, and that is why I am going.

"So long as you are at my side, you are not yourself. You look at life with my eyes, you judge according to my ideas, and my opinion is decisive for you in everything you do and think.

"You do not regard me as a man, but as a supernatural being. Far from me you will learn the meaning of responsibility for one's acts, and if not now, later on, you will be grateful to me for this temporary separation.

"Spero, I have furnished you with the best weapons for the struggle of life, and it is about time that you take up your arms and begin your first battle with life.

"You are now twenty-one years of age. You are brave and courageous, and will not shrink from any obstacle. You are rich, you have knowledge — now it must be seen whether you possess the will which guarantees success.

"Your path is smooth — no enemy threatens you, and a crowd of friends stand at your side. I have never had a real friend. Those who acted as such were either servants or poor people, and only those who are situated similarly and think alike can understand the blessings of friendship.

"My son! give generously, believe in humanity, and do not distrust any one; real experience is gained only by mistakes.

"Murder is the worst crime, for it can never be made good again. Of the old servants, I shall leave only Coucou with you. He is devoted to you and loves you enthusiastically. The brave Zouave will yearn for me, but console him by telling him I have gone for your good and tell yourself the same thing, should you feel likewise. With best love,

Your Father.”

CHAPTER XXVIII

SPERO

The Vicomte of Monte-Cristo was a wonderfully handsome man. The grace of his mother and the stalwart build of his father were united in him. His dark hair fell in wavy locks over his high white forehead, and the long eyelashes lay like veils upon his cheeks.

The young man’s surroundings were in every particular arranged with consummate taste. The vicomte had inherited from his parents a taste for Oriental things, and his study looked like a costly tent, while his bedroom was furnished with the simplicity of a convent cell. The Count of Monte-Cristo had taught his son to be strict to himself and not become effeminate in any way. Nice pictures and statues were in the parlors, the bookcase was filled with selected volumes and he spent many hours each day in serious studies. Spero was a master in all physical accomplishments. His father’s iron muscles were his legacy, and the count often proudly thought that his son, in case of need, would also have found the means and the way to escape from the Chateau d’If.

The vicomte sat at his writing-desk and was reading his father’s letter when Coucou entered. The Zouave had changed somewhat. He no longer wore a uniform or the little cap of a Jackal, but had changed them for a dark brown overcoat. His eyes, however, still sparkled as merrily as ever, and Coucou could laugh as heartily as ever.

“When did the count leave the house?” asked Spero, whose voice reminded one of his father’s.

“This evening, vicomte,” replied Coucou, with military briefness.

“Why was I not called?”

“The count forbade it. He ordered me to place the letter which you found on the writing-table and — ”

“Did the count go alone?”

“No, Ali accompanied him.”

“In what direction did he go?”

"I do not know. I was called to the count at two o'clock this morning, and after I had received the letter, I went away."

"Without asking any questions?"

"Oh, vicomte, no one asks the Count of Monte-Cristo for a reason," cried Coucou, vivaciously. "I am not a coward, but — "

"I know you possess courage," replied the young man.

"*Sapristi* — there, now, I have allowed myself to go again. I know that my way of speaking displeases you, vicomte, and I will try next time to do better."

"What makes you think that your language displeases me?" asked Spero, laughing.

"Because — excuse me, vicomte, but sometimes you look so stern — "

"Nonsense," interrupted Spero; "I may sometimes look troubled, but certainly not stern, and I beg you not to speak differently from what you were taught — speak to me as you do to my father."

"Ah, it is easy to speak to the count," said Coucou, unthinkingly; "he has such a cheering smile — "

A frown passed over Spero's face, and he gently said:

"My father is good — he is much better than I am — I knew it long ago."

"Vicomte, I did not say that," cried the Zouave, embarrassed.

"No, but you thought so, and were perfectly right, my dear Auguste; if you wish to have me for a friend, always tell the truth."

"Yes, sir," replied Coucou, "and now I have a special favor to ask you, vicomte."

"Speak, it is already granted."

"Vicomte, the count never calls me Auguste, which is my baptismal name, but Coucou. If you would call me Coucou, I — "

"With pleasure. Well, then, Coucou, you know nothing further?"

"Nothing."

"It is good. You can go."

The Zouave turned toward the door. When he had nearly reached it, Spero cried:

"Coucou, stay a moment."

"Just as you say, vicomte."

"I only wished to beg you again," said Spero, in a low, trembling voice, "not to think me stern or ungrateful. I shall never forget that it was you who accompanied my father and me to Africa, and that you placed your own life in danger to rescue mine."

"Ah, vicomte," stammered the Zouave, deeply moved, "that was only my duty."

"That a good many would have shirked this duty, and that you did not, is why I thank you still to-day. Give me your hand in token of our friendship. Now we are good friends again, are we not?"

With tears in his laughing eyes, Coucou laid his big brown hand in the delicate hand of the vicomte. The latter cordially shook it, and was almost frightened, when the Zouave uttered a faint cry and hastily withdrew his fingers.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Spero, in amazement.

"Oh, nothing, but — "

"Well, but — "

"You see, vicomte, my hand is almost crushed, and because I was not prepared for it, I gave a slight cry. Who would have thought that such a fine, white, delicate hand could give you a squeeze like a piston-rod?"

Spero looked wonderingly at his hands, and then dreamily said:

"I am stronger than I thought."

"I think so, too," said Coucou. "Only the count understands how to squeeze one's hand in that way. I almost forgot to ask you, vicomte, where you intend to take breakfast?"

"Downstairs in the dining-room."

"Are you going to breakfast alone?"

"That depends. Perhaps one of my friends may drop in, though I haven't invited any one."

"Please ring the bell in case you want to be served," said Coucou, as he left the room.

Spero stood at the writing-desk for a time, and his dark eyes were humid. He shoved a brown velvet curtain aside and entered a small, dark room which opened from his study. A pressure of the finger upon the blinds caused them to spring open, and the broad daylight streamed through the high windows. The walls, which were hung with brown velvet, formed an octagon, and opposite the broad windows were two pictures in gold frames. The vicomte's look rested on these pictures. They were the features of his parents which had been placed upon the canvas by the hand of an artist. In all her goodness, Haydee, Ali Tebelen's daughter, looked down upon her son, and the bold, proud face of Edmond Dantes greeted his heir with a speaking look.

"Ah, my mother," whispered Spero, softly, "if you were only with me now that father has left me. How shall I get along in life without him? The future looks blank and dark to me, the present sad, and only the past is worth having lived for! What a present the proud name is that was laid in my cradle. Others see bright light where the shadow threatens to suffocate me, and my heart trembles when I think that I am standing in the labyrinth of life without a guide!"

From this it can be seen that the count had not exaggerated in his letter to his son. He domineered, consciously or unconsciously, over his surroundings, and so it happened that Spero hardly dared to express a thought of his own.

Spero was never heard to praise or admire this or that, before he had first inquired whether such an opinion would be proper to express. The father recognized too late that his son lacked independence of thought. He had, as he thought, schooled his son for the battle of life. He had taught him how to carry the weapons, but in his anxiety about exterior and trivial things he had forgotten to make allowance for the inward yearning. The form was more to him than the contents, and this was revenging itself now in a telling way. The demands of ordinary life were unknown to Spero. He had put his arm in the burning flame with the courage of a Mucius Scævola, and quailed before the prick of a needle.

Suddenly the door-bell rang, and breathing more freely the vicomte left the little room. When he returned to his study he found Coucou awaiting him. The Zouave presented a visiting card to the vicomte on a silver salver, and hardly had Spero thrown a look at it, when he joyfully cried:

"Bring the gentleman to the dining-room, Coucou, and put two covers on; we shall dine together."

CHAPTER XXIX

FORWARD, MARCH

When Spero entered the dining-room, a handsome young man about twenty-five years of age hurried toward him with outstretched arms.

“How are you, my dear Spero?” he vivaciously cried.

“Oh, thank you, very well. Do you know, Gontram, that you couldn’t have come at a more appropriate hour?”

“Really? That pleases me,” said the new-comer, a painter who in spite of his youth enjoyed a great reputation. Laying his hand on Spero’s shoulder, he looked steadily at him and earnestly asked: “Has anything disagreeable happened to you?”

“No; what makes you think so?” replied Spero, confused.

“Your appearance is different from usual. Your eyes sparkle, and you are feverishly excited. Perhaps you have some secret to intrust to me?”

In the meantime the young men had seated themselves at table, and while they were eating they indulged in general conversation.

“Do you know that my father has left Paris suddenly?” asked Spero in the course of the conversation.

“No. Where has the count gone to?”

“I do not know,” said the vicomte.

Gontram Sabran had been acquainted with Spero for two years.

He had attracted the vicomte’s attention through a picture he had exhibited, and as Spero admired painting, he paid a visit to the creator of the wonderfully natural painting.

The picture represented a young gypsy who was playing the violin. The vicomte sent his father’s steward to the artist with an order to buy the canvas at any price. Gontram Sabran had refused to sell the painting, and the vicomte went personally to the painter.

“Sir,” said Gontram, politely, “you offered me twenty thousand francs for a picture which is worth far less; that I have nevertheless refused to sell the picture needs an explanation, and if you are willing, I shall be happy to give it to you.”

Spero had become curious, and upon his acquiescence Gontram told him the following.

“I had a girl once who suffered from an incurable disease. We were very happy together, enjoyed the present, and thought very little of the future. One day, as was customary with us, we undertook a little promenade. It led us however further than we intended to go, and before we knew it we were in the woods of Meudon. Curious and wonderful sounds awoke us from our reveries, and going to an opening, we saw a young gypsy who was playing the violin and moving her body to and fro to the time of the instrument. Aimee listened attentively to the heavenly playing of the almost childish girl, but suddenly I felt her head lean heavily on my shoulder — she had fainted, and I brought a very sick girl back to Paris.

“One week later death knocked at her door. Aimee knew she was going to die, and with tears in her eyes she begged me to hunt up the gypsy girl and have her play a song to her before she died.

“What was I to do? I could not find the gypsy, and was almost in despair. On the morning of the fourth day, the invalid suddenly rose in her bed and cried aloud:

“‘There she is, I hear the gypsy’s violin — oh, now I can die peacefully! Open the window, Gontram, so that I can hear the music better.’

“I did as she said, and now the tones of the violin reached my ears. The dying girl listened breathlessly to the sweet sounds. When the song was over, Aimee took my hand and whispered:

“‘Bring her up and beg her to play at my bedside.’

“I hurried into the street and asked the gypsy to fulfil the wish of the dying girl. She did so at once, and sitting beside Aimee she played upon her instrument. How long she played I do not know, but I was thrilled by the sudden cessation of the music, and when I looked in terror at Aimee, I saw she had drawn her last breath — she had gone to her eternal slumber to the music of the violin.

“The gypsy disappeared, and I have never seen her since. But I have put her features on canvas as they are engraved in my memory, and you can understand now why I do not wish to sell the picture.”

“Monsieur Sabran,” said Spero when the painter had finished, “your little romance is interesting, and I am now ready to pay fifty thousand francs for the picture.”

Gontram looked pityingly at the vicomte and dryly replied:

“I stick to my refusal.”

Spero went away disappointed. Two days later he hurried to the painter’s studio and hesitatingly said:

“Monsieur Sabran, I treated you the other day in a mean way. Please excuse me.”

Gontram was surprised. Taking the vicomte’s hand, he cordially said:

“I am glad I was mistaken in you; if features such as yours are deceitful, then it is bad for humanity.”

From that day on they became firm friends. When the painter saw Spero’s disturbed features on this particular day, and heard that the count had departed, he had an idea that it would do him good.

“Where did your father go to?” he asked.

“I do not know,” replied Spero, uneasily.

“What? Your father did not inform you?” asked Gontram.

“No,” replied Spero; “he departed this evening and left a letter for me behind him.”

“Ah, really, every one does as he pleases,” said Gontram. “Do you know I came here to-day to ask a favor of you?”

“You couldn’t do me a greater pleasure,” replied Spero, cheerfully; “everything I possess is at your disposal.”

“I thought so; the next time you will offer me your millions,” cried Gontram, laughing.

“I hope you will ask me for something besides wretched money,” said Spero, warmly. “I could gladly fight for you, or do some other important service for you.”

“And suppose I was to keep you at your word?” asked Gontram, seriously; “suppose I came here only to demand a sacrifice of you?”

“Oh, speak!” cried the vicomte, eagerly.

“H’m, would you for my sake get on top of a stage?” asked Gontram, earnestly. “No, do not look so curiously at me. I know you never did such a thing before, and knew what I was talking about when I said I would ask a sacrifice of you.”

“I — would — do it — to please you,” replied Spero, hesitatingly.

“I thought so,” cried the painter, laughing; “yet I made you the proposition, because I thought you were boring yourself to death here.”

“But — ”

"No, do not protest. You are not happy because you are the slave of propriety, and if you were to get in a stage with me it would be a heroic act on your part. If you want to go out, a carriage is at the door, the horses already harnessed. You have your own box at the theatre, and so on. Nowhere do you come in contact with the great world; your life is no life."

Spero gazed at the painter in astonishment.

"Why have you not told me all that long ago?" he slowly asked.

"Because a great deal depends on time and opportunity. If I had told you this at the commencement of our friendship you would have thought me impertinent, and I did not come here to-day either to give you a lecture. The words came unconsciously to my lips. Your life is that of a drop of oil which when put in a bottle of water feels itself in a strange element and decidedly uncomfortable."

Spero bit his lip.

"Am I ever going to hear what service I can do for you?" he asked with a calmness which reflected honor on his powers of self-control.

"Bravo, you have already learned something. First fill your wine-glass, otherwise I shall drink all your fine sherry alone."

The habit of drinking moderately Spero had also learned from his father.

Upon the remark of the painter, he filled his glass and impatiently said:

"Well?"

"I would like to make a loan. Don't laugh, but hear what I have to say. I intend to give a little party in my studio — "

"In your studio?" said Spero in surprise.

"Yes, it is certainly not as large as the Place Vendome, but that doesn't matter. Diogenes lived in a hogshead, and a dozen good friends will find plenty of room in my house. Let me tell you what gave me the idea. While I was studying in Rome, an aristocratic Italian, Count Vellini, took an interest in me. He was my friend, my Macænas, and I owe a great deal to him. The day before yesterday he arrived in Paris, and I should like to revenge myself for his kindness. As he is a millionnaire — not a millionnaire like you, for he has, at the utmost, five or six millions — I must offer him certain pleasures which cannot be obtained with money. I am going to turn my studio into a picture gallery and exhibit the best works of my numerous friends and my own. He shall see that I have become something in the meantime, and from what I know of him he will be delighted with my idea. I want to furnish my house properly, and for this I need some costly tapestries. You have real treasures of this description. Would you loan me a few pieces?”

“Is that all?” said Spero, cordially. “You give me joy, and I hope you will allow me to attend to it.”

“That depends. What do you intend to do?”

“I would like to ask you to let my decorator take charge of the furnishing of your studio. To-morrow morning he can select from my storehouse whatever he thinks best — ”

“And spoil my fun?” interrupted Gontram, frowning. “No, no, I cannot consent to that. Your decorator may be a very able man, but that isn’t the question. I know of no greater pleasure than to do everything according to my own taste. But I had almost forgotten the principal thing; I count on your appearance.”

“I generally work at night,” replied Spero, hesitating.

“No rule without an exception,” declared the painter; “I have invited ladies too, and I hope you will enjoy yourself.”

CHAPTER XXX

JANE ZILD

On the night of the party, Gontram’s room looked lovely, and when the guests arrived they could not refrain from expressing their admiration. The Oriental hangings gave the whole a piquant appearance, and Gontram knew where to stop, an art which few understand. The society which assembled in the painter’s studio was a very exceptional one. Many a rich banker would have given a great deal if he could have won some of the artists who assembled here for his private *soirées*, for the first stars of the opera, the drama and literature had accepted the invitation. Rachel had offered to do the honors; Emma Bouges, a sculptress, assisted her, and Gontram was satisfied.

The painter had told the vicomte that he desired to revenge himself upon Count Vellini. The other reason he had for giving this party he said nothing of, and yet it was the one which did honor to his heart. Under the pretence of surprising the count, he had asked his numerous friends to loan him their pictures, and had hung them in splendid style. Of his own works he only exhibited the gypsy, and when the guests strode up and down the studio to the music of a small orchestra, it was natural that they criticised or admired this and that painting.

Count Vellini, a splendid old gentleman, was enthusiastic over the cause of the party. He gave the secretary who accompanied him directions to buy several of the exhibited paintings, and the secretary carefully noted everything.

Signor Fagiano, the secretary, was not a very agreeable-looking gentleman. A blood-red scar ran clear across his face, his deep black eyes had a sharp, restless look, and one of the young partners jokingly said:

“If I did not know that Signor Fagiano had charge of the count’s finances, I would suspect him of robbing his employer — he has a bad look.”

While the young man uttered these joking remarks, new guests were announced, and their names, “Monsieur de Larsagny and Mademoiselle de Larsagny,” created surprise among the guests. Monsieur de Larsagny was the manager of the new credit-bank, and every one was astonished at Gontram's acquaintance with him. However, as soon as Mademoiselle de Larsagny was seen to enter the room leaning on her father's arm, the riddle was solved. The classical head of the young girl graced the last *salon*, and as Gontram had painted the picture, no one wondered any longer at seeing the handsome Carmen and her father in the studio.

The young girl appeared to be somewhat eccentric, a thing which was not looked upon as strange in the daughter of a millionnaire. Nevertheless, the pranks of the young heiress never overstepped the bounds of propriety, and the numerous admirers of the beautiful Carmen thought her on this account all the more piquant. Her ash-blond hair fell in a thousand locks over a dazzling white forehead, and the small, finely formed mouth understood how to talk.

Hanging to Gontram's arm, Carmen walked up and down the studio. She sometimes directed her dark-blue eyes at the young painter, and who could scold Gontram if he loved to look in those magnificent stars?

"I am thankful to you, mademoiselle, for having come here," said Gontram, sparkling with joy, as he walked by the young girl's side.

"How could I have refused your cordial invitation?" replied Carmen, laughing; "even princesses have visited the studios of their court painters."

"The Duchess of Ferrara, for instance," said a young sculptor who had overheard the remark.

Gontram frowned, and whispered softly to the young artist:

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Raoul."

Carmen, however, laughed, and carelessly said:

"Let him alone; I knew the story long ago."

To make this little scene understood, we must observe that the young sculptor's words referred to that Duchess of Ferrara whom Titian painted in the primitive costume of Mother Eve, and it stung the young painter to the heart when he heard Carmen confess that she had heard the story before — who could have told it to the nineteen-year-old girl?

"What about the surprise you were going to give your guests?" asked Carmen, after an uncomfortable pause.

"I will keep my word," replied the painter, laughing. "Have you ever heard the name of Jane Zild, mademoiselle?"

"Jane Zild? That wonderful songstress who comes from the north, either Lapland or Finland? What is the matter with her?"

“Well, this songstress, who, by the way, comes from Russia, has promised to be here to-night,” declared Gontram, triumphantly.

“Ah, really?” replied Carmen, breathing heavily, while her eyes shot forth threatening gleams.

“What ails you, mademoiselle?” asked Gontram uneasily, “have I hurt you in any way?”

“No; what makes you think so? But let us go to the parlor; my father is already looking for me, and you know he can’t be long without me.”

A curious laugh issued from the pale lips, and it seemed to Gontram as if she had accented the words “my father” in a peculiar way.

Just as Gontram and his companion re-entered the parlor, a short but unpleasant scene was being acted there. An accident had brought Signor Fagiano and Monsieur de Larsagny together. Hardly had the secretary caught a glimpse of the banker than he recoiled in affright and nearly fell to the ground. Larsagny sprang to his rescue, but Fagiano muttered an excuse and hastily left the parlor.

Carmen and her companion were witnesses of the meeting, and Gontram felt the young girl’s arm tremble. Before he could ask for the cause of this, she laughed aloud and mockingly said:

“A good host has generally several surprises *in petto* for his guests; are you an exception to the general rule?”

Gontram was about to reply when the door was opened and the servant announced:

“Mademoiselle Jane Zild, the Vicomte of Monte-Cristo!”

“There you have my second surprise,” said the painter, laughing; “are you satisfied now?”

Gontram did not find out whether this was the case, for the broker uttered a cry at the same moment and stretched his hands out as if to ward off a spectre.

“What has happened to you, Monsieur de Larsagny?” asked Gontram in amazement. “You are so pale and you tremble. Can I do anything for you?”

“No, thank you — it is the heat,” stammered Larsagny. “Will you permit me to go on the terrace? I will recover in the fresh air.”

Without deigning to notice Carmen, the banker turned toward the glass door which led to the terrace and disappeared. The young girl bit her lips, and the next minute she was the centre of a gay crowd of admirers.

Gontram in the meantime had gone to meet the young lady who had just entered. She was a wonderfully handsome girl, and taking the painter’s arm she slowly walked through the decorated rooms.

Who Jane Zild was no one knew. Two months previously she had made her appearance in Paris society, and since then it was considered good form to patronize Jane Zild.

The members of the Opera and other theatres had arranged a performance for the relief of the inhabitants of a village which had been destroyed by fire, and the elegant world of the capital fairly grew wild with enthusiasm over the coming event.

The climax of the performance was to be a duet, to be sung by the great Roger and a diva who was past her youth. Half an hour before the number was to be sung a messenger arrived who announced the sickness of the diva. Roger immediately declared his willingness to sing alone, and loud applause ran through the crowded auditorium when he sang the charming song from the “White Lady,” “Ah, what a joy it is to be a soldier!”

The success of the first part of the concert was assured. Before the second part began a strange young lady went to the celebrated singer and offered to take the part of Madame X — — , and sing several songs.

“What is your name, mademoiselle?” asked Roger.

“My name will be unknown to you, as I have only been two days in Paris,” replied the stranger, laughing. “I am Jane Zild. Perhaps you will allow me to sing something to you first. Will the beggar aria from the ‘Prophet’ be agreeable to you?”

Without waiting for answer Jane Zild went to the piano.

The accompanist struck the first notes of the well-known aria, and hardly had Roger heard the magnificent contralto of the stranger than he enthusiastically exclaimed:

“Thank God, Madame X — — is sick!”

“That is treason!” scolded the young lady; but the public seemed to be of the same opinion as Roger, and rewarded the young songstress, when she had finished, with round after round of applause. Encouraged by the applause, she sang the aria from “Orpheus” — ”Ah, I have lost her, all my happiness is gone.” This set the audience wild.

For two days nothing else was talked of in Paris but the young songstress. Jane Zild lived in a house in the Champs-Elysées. She had arrived, as she said, but a few days before from Russia, in company with an elderly man, who was looked upon as her steward, and whom she called Melosan.

The reporters had seized upon these meagre details and magnified them. According to them, Jane Zild was the daughter of a rich Russian nobleman. An unconquerable yearning for the stage brought her in conflict with her father, and, burdened with his curse, she ran away from home. If in spite of this she did not go on the stage it was not the reporters' fault.

The young lady was very capricious, and had refused the most tempting offers from the management of the Opera. She also refused to sing for the Emperor at Compiegne, and it therefore caused a sensation among Gontram's guests when Jane Zild suddenly appeared.

"Gontram's luck is really extraordinary," said a colleague of the young painter laughingly, as he saw the majestic figure of the diva enter the room. What would he have said if he had heard in what way Gontram had secured Jane Zild as one of his guests?

While the young painter was breakfasting with Spero, a perfumed note was sent up to his residence in the Rue Montaigne, wherein Jane Zild declared her willingness to appear in the painter's parlors and sing a few songs.

Gontram did not say no, and immediately hurried to the diva's house to thank her.

Spero had entered just behind the songstress, and Gontram smiled when he saw the vicomte. Spero's carriage had driven up in front of the house almost simultaneously with that of the diva, and Spero assisted the young lady to alight.

When the vicomte entered the parlor, he felt humiliated when he saw all eyes turned in the direction of the diva. No one seemed to care to notice the heir of the Count of Monte-Cristo.

Jane Zild strode the rooms with the dignity of a queen.

"Heavenly! Admirable! Beautiful!" Such were the epithets which were murmured half aloud, and later when she sat down at the piano and sang a simple ballad, loud applause ran through the room. The ballad was followed by an aria; Jane then sang a Russian melody, and closed with a magnificent tarantella.

"Monsieur Sabran," said a low voice to Gontram, "I must confess that you are an obliging host! You are forgetting all your other guests on account of the beautiful songstress, and I will reflect upon a suitable punishment."

The one who spoke was Carmen de Larsagny. Gontram blushed and made excuses, but it took some time to appease the young lady's wrath.

"Well," she finally said, "I will forgive you, but only upon one condition. Have you a moment's time?"

"For you always," replied the painter, warmly.

"Good; then conduct me to the terrace."

"To the terrace?" repeated Gontram in surprise. "How do you know I have a terrace?"

"Oh, I heard my father mention it a little while ago."

"That's so," replied the painter. "Will you please accompany me?"

They both walked through the studio and turned into the gallery.

Suddenly Gontram paused, and uttered a low cry of astonishment.

Spero was leaning against a door sunk in thought.

"Can I introduce the young man to you?" asked Gontram softly of his companion.

"Who is he?" replied Carmen.

"The Vicomte of Monte-Cristo!"

"What? The son of the celebrated count?" asked the young lady, looking at Spero with increased interest.

"Yes. I have a high regard for the vicomte."

"I could have thought so," said Carmen, laughing.

"What do you mean by that, mademoiselle?" asked Gontram in surprise.

"Oh, you see you have the habit of caring very little for those whom you pretend to honor," replied the young girl, looking at the painter in such a way as made his heart beat fast.

"I hope to be able soon to prove my esteem for you," whispered the young man.

Carmen was for a moment silent, and then vivaciously said:

"Introduce me; I am curious to know your little vicomte."

Just then Spero raised his head, and, seeing Gontram, he cordially said:

"Gontram, am I not deserving of praise? You see I have accepted your invitation."

"I am very grateful to you," replied the painter warmly, and turning to Carmen he said:

"Mademoiselle de Larsagny, permit me to introduce the Vicomte of Monte-Cristo to you."

Spero bowed deeply. The young lady gazed steadily at the handsome cavalier, and admiration shone in her eyes.

“I really have not had the pleasure of seeing the vicomte. I should not have forgotten him.”

“I believe you,” said the painter; “the vicomte is, by the way, a man of serious ideas, an ascetic, who does not care for worldly pleasures.”

Spero protested with a shake of the head, and muttered some disconnected words. Carmen, however, noticed that his thoughts were elsewhere.

“Mademoiselle de Larsagny,” said Gontram, laughing now, “I hope that you and the other ladies here will succeed in converting the hermit.”

Carmen was dissatisfied with the vicomte’s indifference, and, bowing coldly, she went away, drawing the painter with her.

“Well, how does my eccentric please you?” asked Gontram.

“H’m, he is very handsome; whether he is intellectual, I cannot tell. Is the father of the little vicomte really the knight without fear and reproach, the hero of Dumas’ novel?”

“The same.”

“And has this man — Edmond Dantes was his right name — really had all the adventurous wanderings imputed to him?”

“I am sure of it.”

“One more question. It might appear strange to you, but I must ask it nevertheless. Do you know whether Monsieur de Larsagny ever had any relations with the count?”

“I do not know, in fact I hardly think so. Your father has been living in Paris but a few years, and the count has not been in Paris for any great length of time during the past ten years. He is almost always travelling. I believe there is no country on earth which he has not visited, and he is again absent. However, if it interests you, I will make inquiries and — ”

“Not for any price,” interrupted Carmen, laughing; “let us drop the subject and hurry to the terrace before others get there ahead of us.”

“We are there already,” said Gontram, laughing, as he shoved a Japanese drapery aside and stepped upon a small balcony with his companion. A beautiful view of the Champs-Elysées was had from here.

At that time the many mansions which now fill the Champs-Elysées were not yet built, and the eye reached far down the beautiful lanes to the Place de la Concorde.

The two young persons stood upon the little terrace, and the spring wind played with Carmen’s golden locks and fanned Gontram’s cheeks.

The young girl now leaned over the railing, and, breathing the balsamic air, she sighed:

“Ah, how beautiful and peaceful it is here.”

Gontram had his arm about the young girl’s slim waist, and carried away by his feelings he pressed a kiss upon Carmen’s coral-red lips. The young girl returned the kiss, and who knows but that they would have continued their osculatory exercise had not a voice close to the terrace said:

“Take care, Monsieur de Larsagny, that you do not try to find out my name. You will know it sooner than will be agreeable to you.”

Carmen shuddered, and leaning far over, she tried to espy the speakers. However, she could not see any one, though some passionate words reached her from below; Gontram, on the other hand, felt like strangling the disturbers.

“Let us go back to the parlor,” said the young girl, and it seemed to Gontram that her voice had changed in tone.

He silently opened the drapery and brought his companion back to the studio; when they entered it, the vicomte hurried to the painter, and said in a low tone:

“Gontram, have you a minute for me? I must speak to you.”

CHAPTER XXXI

A THUNDERBOLT

The vicomte’s disturbed features and the tone of his voice caused Gontram to become anxious, and leading Carmen into the music-room, he stammered an excuse, and then returned to Spero.

“What has happened to you?” he asked, as he saw the young man was still excited. “I am afraid I am a very inattentive host.”

“Oh, that is not it,” said Spero, hesitating; “but — ”

“Well, speak. You frighten me,” said Gontram, uneasily.

“Gontram,” began the vicomte, “you have confidence in me?”

“Certainly; but what have we to do with that now? You know that I esteem you — ”

“And you do not think me capable of deceiving or lying to you?”

“Spero, I do not know you any more,” cried Gontram, more and more confused.

“Have patience, you will soon learn to understand me,” said the vicomte, smiling curiously; “let me now tell you what has happened to me.”

Spero took a long breath, and then continued:

“About ten minutes ago I was standing here, listening to the wonderful singing of that beautiful creature whom you call Jane Zild. The melody transported me to another world, and I saw and heard very little of what was going on about me. Suddenly I heard a slight noise behind the drapery, and these words reached my ears: ‘Vicomte of Monte-Cristo, take care of yourself. A trap has been set for you, and woe to you if you are foolish enough not to notice it.’“

“A trap laid? What does that mean, and who was it that gave you this warning?” asked Gontram, in amazement.

“I do not know. Springing up I ran in the direction whence the words came. I shoved the drapery aside, but could see no one.”

“No one?” repeated the painter, breathing more freely. “That looks like magic! Are you sure, Spero, that you didn’t deceive yourself?”

“You do not believe me,” said the vicomte, smiling sorrowfully.

“Spero, you misunderstand me. Let us proceed to work thoroughly, and, if possible, find out what has occurred. You yourself confessed that you were plunged in thought. In such half-dreamy conditions it often happens that we imagine we see things which have no foundation in fact. We believe we see persons, hear voices — ”

“You speak of imagination,” interrupted Spero, “while I told you of something that I actually have experienced. I heard the words clearly and legibly; the voice was strange to me, and yet there was something sincere in it which struck me.”

“Curious! Perhaps some one has played a joke upon you.”

“That would not be improbable, yet I do not believe it. The words were spoken seriously.”

“But you are mad! A trap, if laid for you, could only be done by me. I must now ask you the same question you put to me: Have you confidence in me?”

“Perfect confidence,” said the vicomte, warmly.

“God be praised! Now follow me to the parlor, and forget your black thoughts,” and, shoving his arm under the vicomte’s, he led him into the music-room.

“And where should the trap be?” asked Gontram, as they walked on; “not in Jane Zild’s heavenly tones? Just look how the dark eyes are looking at you — really you are in luck.”

Jane Zild had risen after the song was ended, and while the applause sounded about her, she looked steadily at the vicomte.

“Banish the black thoughts,” whispered Gontram to the young man, “come and talk a little to the diva; she appears to expect it.”

“Mademoiselle,” he said, turning to Jane, “here is one of your most enthusiastic admirers, who would consider himself happy if you would make a tour of the gallery with him.”

Gontram turned to other guests, and Spero timidly drew near to the young girl and offered her his arm. Jane hesitated for a moment to take it, and looked expectantly at the vicomte. She waited, no doubt, for a compliment or some word from him. As Spero remained silent, a satisfied smile crossed the classical features of the diva, and placing her hand on his arm she carelessly said: “Let us go.”

Just then something unexpected happened. A burning candle fell down from the chandelier, and a flame licked the black lace dress of the diva and enveloped her.

A cry of horror came from the lips of the bystanders, and they all rushed away. Spero was the only one who showed self-possession. Quick as thought, he tore one of the draperies from the wall, and placing the thick cloth around the shoulders of the diva, he pressed her tightly to his bosom.

The next minute Jane stood with pale face, but otherwise uninjured, before her rescuer, and holding her little hand to him, she whispered cordially:

“Thanks, a thousand thanks!”

Spero took the long fingers and pressed his lips as respectfully upon them as if Jane Zild were a queen and he her subject. The diva, with the drapery still about her shoulders, looked really like a queen, and all eyes were turned admiringly toward her.

A man dressed in plain dark clothes hurried through the crowd, and looking anxiously at Jane he cried in a vibrating voice:

“Are you injured?”

The diva trembled when she heard the voice, and blushing deeply, she hastily replied:

“No, thank God, I am not hurt. The coolness of the Vicomte of Monte-Cristo prevented a misfortune.”

The vicomte, too, trembled when he heard the unknown’s words, for he felt certain that the voice was the same as that which had given him the mysterious warning.

The man bowed respectfully to the vicomte, and Jane, turning to Spero, said in cordial tones:

“Complete your good work, vicomte, and conduct me to my carriage.”

Spero laid her little hand upon his arm and led her out. As Spero assisted her in the carriage she bowed again to him and whispered:

“I hope we shall see each other again.”

Jane’s companion looked at the vicomte in an embarrassed way; he evidently wished to say something to him, but had not the courage to do so. The next minute the horses started and the carriage rolled away.

Spero looked after the equipage as long as it could be seen and then called for his coachman, as he wished to go home too. Just as he was about to enter the carriage, the coachman, in surprise, exclaimed:

“You have forgotten your hat, vicomte. Jean, quick, go and get it.”

Spero, in astonishment, felt his head; it was true, the coachman was right.

"Stay, Jean, I shall go myself," he briefly said, as he hurried back to the house.

Just as he reached the stairs, Monsieur de Larsagny and his daughter, whom Gontram escorted, and Count Vellini and his secretary came down.

"Vicomte," said Carmen, vivaciously, "you are a hero, and the rest of the gentlemen can take you for an example."

Monsieur de Larsagny coughed slightly, while Fagiano loudly cried:

"The vicomte is the worthy son of his father, the great count."

These words, although spoken in a respectful tone, displeased Spero, yet he kept silent and the guests departed.

"Stay a minute longer," begged Gontram, "I will take a walk with you, if it is agreeable; I am too much excited yet to go to bed."

"That is my position, too," replied the vicomte.

The servant brought them their hats and cloaks, and they both walked in the direction of the Champs-Elysées. Neither of them noticed a dark form which stood at a street corner and looked after them.

"Have a care," hissed Fagiano's voice, "you shall suffer for being his son."

CHAPTER XXXII

OLD ACQUAINTANCES

Jane Zild lived in a modest room in a small house on the Champs-Elysées. The interior was furnished in the ordinary style of a private house. In the basement was the reception-room, the sitting-room and dining-room. The owner of the house was Madame Vollard, the widow of an officer. One of her principles was, that it was better to have her rooms empty than to let them out to people whose reputation was not of the best.

She did not care much either for artists or actresses, but made some exceptions, and when Melosan, Jane Zild's secretary, offered her a considerable sum for a room on the first floor, she immediately accepted.

The bells of Notre-Dame struck one o'clock, when a carriage, which contained Jane and her companion, stopped in front of Madame Vollard's house.

In spite of the late hour, the landlady hurried to the street door to greet the young girl. When she saw the latter's disordered toilet, she uttered a cry of horror. Jane had thrown off the cloak, and the burned dress with the withered and crushed roses could be seen.

"What is the matter, my dear?" asked the worthy lady.

"Oh, nothing," replied Jane; "I am only tired."

"Then you tell me, at least, what has occurred," said Madame Vollard, turning to Melosan.

"Later on, later on. The young lady is excited and needs rest."

"Oh, I will give her some drops," said the good-hearted lady, "I — "

"Good-night, Madame Vollard," said the secretary, and taking a light from the lady's hands, he hurried up the stairs with Jane.

The young girl sank back in a chair exhausted. Melosan, a man about sixty years of age, with white hair and sunburned face, stood with folded hands before his mistress, and his dark eyes looked anxiously at Jane's pale face.

"You are suffering?" he said, after a pause.

Jane shuddered. "Ah, no," she said, "I am feeling perfectly well."

“But the fright?”

“Oh, that is nothing,” replied Jane, sorrowfully; and, rising up wildly, she passionately added: “Why am I forced to enter a world which is not my own, and never can be! And it shall not be either,” she sobbingly concluded, “never — never!”

Melosan held down his head.

“A queen would have been proud at the reception you had to-night.”

“Why do you tell me this?” she exclaimed. “A queen? I? Oh, what bitter mockery!”

“But your eminent talent — your voice?”

“Would to God I had none! I — but go now, I want to be alone.”

The man sorrowfully approached the door; on the threshold he paused and imploringly murmured:

“Pardon me, Jane, I did not wish to hurt you.”

“I know it. I am sometimes hard and cruel, but my unhappy situation is the cause of it. Why did not the wretched fire consume me? Then all grief would have been at an end. O my God! my God!”

She sobbed as if her heart would break, and Melosan wrung his hands in despair.

“Jane, tell me what has happened,” he said, in despair. “I have never seen you this way before. Has any one insulted you?”

“No one,” said Jane, softly, “no one.”

“Your fate is dreary and burdensome, but you are young and strong. You have life before you, and in time you’ll forget the past and be happy.”

Melosan’s words caused the young girl to dry her tears.

“You are right,” she said, half ashamed, “I was foolish and ungrateful. I will forget the past. Forgive me — grief overwhelmed me.”

“You are an angel,” cried Melosan, enthusiastically; “but now you must really go to bed. Good-night, Jane.”

“Good-night,” said the young girl, cordially, and then the door closed behind Melosan.

As the secretary was about to go to his room, Madame Vollard intercepted him on the stairs.

“Well, how goes it?” she asked; “has the poor child recovered?”

“Yes, thank you.”

“What occurred?”

“She was almost burned to death; her dress had already caught fire.”

“What a lucky accident — ”

“Lucky accident?” repeated Melosan, not understanding.

“I do not mean the fire, but the fact that I just possess a walking suit, such as Mademoiselle Zild needs, and which I can let her have at a very moderate price. A silk dress with pomegranate leaves — ”

“To-morrow, Madame Vollard, to-morrow,” Melosan interrupted her. “I really feel fatigued, and should like to go to my room.”

“You are right. I ought to have known it.”

She disappeared, and Melosan walked up the stairs. On entering his room he locked the door, threw himself into a chair, and burying his face in his hands he sobbed bitterly.

“What is going to happen now,” he muttered to himself; “my money is nearly all gone, and — ”

Hastily springing up, he opened the bureau and took a torn portfolio out of it. Opening it, he sorrowfully counted its contents and shook his gray head.

“It is useless,” he muttered in a hollow voice, “the day after to-morrow the rent is due, and what then remains to us is not worth speaking about. If I only could begin something, but everywhere my horrible past stares me in the face. I dare not go out in the broad daylight. I myself would be satisfied with dry bread, but Jane, the poor, poor thing! With her talent she could have had a brilliant life, and reign everywhere like a queen if it were not for the terrible past. Like a spectre, it stands in our path, and while she is innocent, the curse of being the cause of both our wretchedness strikes me. I — ”

A slight noise caused Melosan to pause and listen. For a while all was silent, and then the noise recommenced. He hurried to the door, but could not see any one, and returning to the room he shook his head and resumed his seat.

“I must have been deceived,” he murmured uneasily, “and yet I thought — ”

The knock was repeated, and this time so loudly that Melosan discovered from whence it came. Hastily going to the attic window he threw the curtain aside and peered out. A dark shadow moved here and there on the roof, and Melosan reached for his pistol.

“Who’s there?” he cried.

“Some one who desires to speak to you,” came back in firm tones.

"To me? At this hour?" asked the secretary in a daze.

"Yes, to you — open quickly or I shall burst in the window."

Melosan saw that it could not be a thief, and so he hesitatingly shoved back the bolt.

A powerful hand raised the window from the outside, and Melosan raised his weapon threateningly; but at this moment the light from the room fell full on the man's face, and the secretary let the pistol fall, and cried in a faint, trembling voice:

"You! You! O God! how did you get here?"

"Ha! ha! ha! Don't you see I came from the roof?" cried the man, mockingly.

"But you shall not come in," cried Melosan, angrily, as he cocked his pistol. "Get out of here, or I shall blow your brains out."

"You won't do any such thing," said the other, coolly. "Do you think because you are posing as an honest man that other people will imagine you are one? Ha! is the situation clear to you? A good memory is a good thing to have, and if one does not like to hear names it is better to acquiesce. Well, what do you say? Shall we talk over matters peacefully, or do you persist in firing off your pistol and attracting the attention of the police?"

A shudder ran through Melosan, and he looked at the floor in despair.

"Can I offer you a cigar?" continued the man. "No? Then permit me to light my own;" and turning himself in his chair, and reclining comfortably against the back of the fauteuil, the speaker lighted a cigar, and with the utmost calm of mind puffed blue clouds of smoke in the air.

Melosan was evidently struggling with himself. At last he had made up his mind, and, angrily approaching the other, said:

"Listen to me. The sooner we get rid of each other the better it will be for both of us. Why did you hunt me up? You ought to have known long ago that I did not wish to have anything to do with you. You go your way and I will go mine; let neither of us bother the other, and as I am called Melosan, I shall forget that you ever bore any other name than Fagiano."

"You have become proud!" exclaimed the man who called himself Fagiano, laughing mockingly; "upon my word, Anselmo, if I did not know that you were a former galley-slave, I would think you were a prince!"

"And I would hold you now and always for the incarnation of everything that is bad," replied Anselmo (for it was he). "You ought to be called Lucifer instead of Benedetto!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE CATASTROPHE

The two men looked at each other with flaming eyes. In Toulon they were chained together, and now —

Anselmo had reversed the letters of his name and called himself Melosan. In Toulon they were both on the same moral plane, but since then their ways as well as their characters had changed. Benedetto sank lower and lower day by day, while Anselmo worked hard to obliterate the stigma of a galley-slave.

Benedetto, bold and impudent, looked at his former chain-companion, and a mocking smile played about his lips. Anselmo, however, lost little by little his assurance, and finally implored Benedetto to leave, saying:

"We two have nothing in common any more."

"That is a question. Sit down and listen to me."

"No, Benedetto, we are done with each other."

"Nonsense — you have become virtuous all of a sudden," mocked Count Vellini's secretary.

"Would to God it were so. When we were in Toulon an unfortunate accident brought us together; a far more unfortunate one separated us. Since then it has been my endeavor to have the sins which led me to the Bagnio atoned for by an honest life. I do not care to know what kind of a life you have led. All I ask is that in the future we meet as strangers, and I hope you will consent to my wish!"

"And if I do not do so?" asked Benedetto, laying his hand upon his former comrade's shoulder. "Suppose I will not forget you nor want to be forgotten by you?"

Anselmo moaned aloud.

"Moan away," continued Benedetto. "I know all the details of your past life, and if you have forgotten anything I am in a position to refresh your memory."

"I — do not — understand you," stammered Anselmo.

"Think of the past," replied Benedetto, frowning.

"Of the time when the smith fastened us to the same chain?"

"Oh, think again."

Anselmo trembled.

"Do you speak of the moment when we jumped into the sea and escaped from the galleys?" he softly asked.

"No; your memory seems to be weak."

"I do not know what you mean."

"Really? You seem to have drunk from the spring of Lethe," said Benedetto, contemptuously. "Anselmo, have you forgotten our meeting at Beaussuet?"

"Scoundrel! miserable wretch! Do you really dare to remind me of that?" cried Anselmo, beside himself.

"Why not?"

"If you can do so — no power on earth can induce me to say another word about that horrible affair," said Anselmo, shuddering.

"My nerves are better than yours," laughed Benedetto. "It was only to speak to you about that particular night that I braved the danger of hunting you up. I need you as a witness, and that is why you see me here."

"As a witness?" exclaimed Anselmo, in surprise. "Either you are crazy or else I shall become so. Benedetto, if I open my mouth the gallows will be your fate!"

"That is my business and need not worry you at all. Do you remember the night of the 24th of February, 1839? Yes or no?"

"Yes," groaned Anselmo.

"No jeremiads! Do you also remember the vicarage at Beaussuet?"

"Yes."

"Well, a certain person came expressly from Toulon to see about a sum of money, a million — "

"I have not touched a penny of the money," interrupted Anselmo, shuddering.

"No, certainly not, you were always unselfish. Well, do not interrupt me. The person who came from Toulon (*recte* Benedetto) was just about to put the sum of money in his pocket, when the devil sent a stranger who — "

"Benedetto, if you are a human being and not a devil, keep silent," cried Anselmo, beside himself.

Benedetto shrugged his shoulders.

"You are a fool," he said, contemptuously. "I heard two persons on the stairs. I hid behind the door, with a knife in my right hand. The door opened. The shadow of a form appeared in the door, and I struck. I felt the knife sink deep into a human breast."

"Wretch! It was the breast of your mother!" stammered Anselmo.

"Ah, your memory is returning to you," mocked Benedetto, with a cynical smile. "Yes, it was my mother. But how did you know it?"

"I met the unfortunate woman on the way in the gorges of Oliolles — "

"Ah! and there she told you the story of her life."

"She begged me to help her save her son, and I promised to do so; I knew that you were that wretched son."

"Did she tell you her name?" said Benedetto, uneasily.

"She hid nothing from me. I found out that the son she wished to save intended to murder her — "

"Facts," said Benedetto, roughly, "and less talk."

"And that this son was a child of sin."

"Ah, really; and her name?"

"She made me swear to keep it secret."

"So much the better! She really thought, then, that a galley-slave was a man of his word?"

"Galley-slave or not, I have kept silent, and will do so further."

"You are a hero! Nevertheless, you can tell me the name."

"No!"

"And if I demand it?"

"I won't tell you, either."

"Anselmo, have a care!" hissed Benedetto, angrily. "Tell me the name, or — "

"I am silent," declared Anselmo; "you do not know the name, and you will never learn it from me."

Benedetto broke into a coarse laugh.

"You are either very naïve," he said, "or think I am. I only wished to see if you had not forgotten the name. The lady was Madame Danglars."

Anselmo uttered a cry of rage.

"Well, preacher of words, what do you say now?" asked Benedetto, politely.

"Since you know the name, we are done with each other," said Anselmo, "and I think you will now leave me in peace."

"You are wrong, my dear Anselmo; do you know that you are very disrespectful?"

Anselmo began to ponder whether it would not be better to appear more friendly to the hated comrade.

"Benedetto," he said, in a gentle voice, "why should we be enemies? I know you had reason to be angry a little while ago, but the recollection of that fearful night unmanned me, and I did not know what I was speaking about. At that time, too, I was terribly excited — "

"As I had reason to notice," interrupted Benedetto. "You were ready to kill me."

"Let us forget all that," said Anselmo, hastily. "You came here to ask a favor of me and I was a fool to refuse. We have both the same interests in keeping our past history from the world. Therefore speak. If what you desire is within the limits of reason, it shall be done."

"Bravo! you please me now, Anselmo," cried Benedetto, laughing. "At length you have become sensible. But tell me, is the little one handsome? For it is natural that your reform has been brought about by a woman; you always were an admirer and connoisseur of the fair sex."

Anselmo sprang upon Benedetto and, holding his clinched fist in his face, he said:

"Benedetto, if you care to live, don't say another word!"

"And why?" asked the wretch, with silent contempt.

"Because I shall not stand it," replied Anselmo, coldly. "You have me in your power, Benedetto. With an anonymous letter you could denounce me to-morrow as an escaped galley-slave and have me sent back to the galleys. I would not care a snap for that, but I most emphatically forbid you to throw a slur upon the reputation of the woman who lives with me under this roof."

"You forbid me? Come now, Anselmo, you speak in a peculiar tone," hissed Benedetto.

"I speak exactly in the tone the matter demands. You know my opinion; conduct yourself accordingly."

"And if I did not care to obey you?"

"Then I would denounce you, even though I put my own neck in danger."

"Ha! ha! I tell you you won't do anything of the kind."

"Listen," said Anselmo, "you do not know me. Yes, I was a wretch, a perjurer, worse than any highwayman. But I have suffered, suffered terribly for my sins, and since years it has been my only ambition to lead a blameless life as repentance for my crimes. I have taken care of a poor helpless being, and to defend her I will sacrifice my life. I bear everything to shield her from grief and misery; in fact, if it were necessary, I would accept her contempt, for if she ever found out who I am, she would despise me.”

“Have you pen, ink and paper?” asked Benedetto, after Anselmo had concluded.

“Yes. What do you want to do with them?”

“You shall soon find out.”

Anselmo silently pointed to a table upon which writing materials lay. Benedetto dipped the pen in the ink, and, grinning, said:

“My friend, have the kindness to take this pen and write what I dictate.”

“I?”

“Yes, you. I only want you to write a few lines.”

“What shall I write?”

“The truth.”

“I do not understand you.”

“It is very simple; you will write down what you have just said.”

“Explain yourself more clearly.”

“With pleasure; better still, write what I dictate.”

Anselmo looked uneasily at the wretch; Benedetto quietly walked behind the ex-priest’s chair, and began:

“On the 24th of February, 1839, Benedetto, an escaped convict from the galleys of Toulon, murdered Madame Danglars, his mother.”

“That is horrible!” cried Anselmo, throwing the pen down; “I shall not write that.”

“You will write; you know I can force you; therefore — ”

Anselmo sighed, and took up the pen again.

“So, I am done now,” he said, after a pause; “must it be signed, too?”

“Certainly; though the name has nothing to do with it. You can put any one you please under it.”

It sounded very simple, and yet Anselmo hesitated.

“No,” he firmly said, “I will not do it. I know you are up to some trick, and I do not intend to assist you.”

Benedetto laughed in a peculiar way.

“I know you are not rich,” said the pretended secretary, “and — ”

Anselmo made a threatening gesture, but Benedetto continued:

“I was at this window for some time. Count Vellini’s house is next door to this, and I had no difficulty in getting here. I saw you counting your secret treasure, and consequently — ”

Unconsciously Anselmo glanced at the portfolio which lay on the table. Benedetto noticed it and laughed maliciously.

“Yes, there lies your fortune,” he said contemptuously. “The lean bank-notes you counted a little while ago will not keep you long above board.”

“But I have not asked for anything,” murmured Anselmo.

“I offer you a price.”

Benedetto drew an elegant portfolio from his pocket, and took ten thousand-franc notes out of it which he laid upon the table. “Finish and sign the paper I dictated,” he coldly said, “and the money is yours.”

Anselmo grew pale. Did Benedetto know of his troubles? Had he read his thoughts?

“I will not do it,” he said, rising up. “Keep your money, Benedetto; it would bring me misfortune.”

Benedetto uttered a cry of rage, and, grasping the pen, he seated himself at the table and wrote a few words.

“So,” he said, with a satanic gleam in his eyes as he held the paper under Anselmo’s nose, “either you do what I say or else these lines which I have just written will be sent to the papers to-morrow.”

Anselmo read, and the blood rushed to his head. He felt his brain whirl, and, beating his face with his hands, he groaned aloud. What had Benedetto written? Only a few words: “The lady who is known as Jane Zild is — ”

“You will not send these lines off,” cried Anselmo, springing up suddenly and clutching Benedetto by the throat. The latter, however, was too strong for him; in a minute he had thrown the ex-priest upon the bed.

“No nonsense,” he sternly said, “either you write or I will send the notice to the papers to-morrow.”

The ex-priest took the pen and with a trembling hand wrote what Benedetto had asked of him.

“Here,” he said, in a choking voice, “swear to me — but no — you do not believe in anything — I — ”

“My dear friend,” interrupted Benedetto, “do not take the thing so seriously. I have no intention of disturbing your peace.”

Anselmo sank upon a chair, and his eyes filled with hot tears.

Benedetto hastily ran over the paper and his lips curled contemptuously when he saw the signature.

"The fool wrote his own name," he murmured as he rubbed his hands, "may it do him good."

The next minute the secretary of Count Vellini disappeared, and Anselmo breathed more freely.

Suddenly an idea flew through his brain as his gaze fell upon the bank-notes.

"We will fly," he muttered to himself, "now, this very hour! This demon knows everything; we are not safe from him, and if an accident happens to Jane — "

In desperation he walked up and down the room and disconnected words came from his lips.

"Who will guarantee me that he will keep silent? Oh, he was always a wretch — to-morrow at four o'clock we can take the train — we will go to England and from there to America."

He paused, and, going to the window, listened. Everything was quiet and Anselmo noticed that a rain shed connected the count's house with that of Madame Vollard. Benedetto's visit was probably undiscovered, and a great deal depended on that.

"I will wake Jane," said Anselmo after a short pause, "I will tell her an excuse, and since she believes in me, she will be ready at once to follow me! I will tell her I am in danger and must leave France."

Anselmo carefully opened the door and listened. All was still in the house, and, going on tiptoe, he glided up to the next story and into Jane's room. Merciful God, it was empty!

Uttering a cry he rushed out of the room and down the stairs, and, a prey to despair, hurried out into the dark night.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A SHOT

In deep silence Gontram and Spero walked along the Champs-Elysées, which at this time of the day was deserted. They were both indulging in day-dreams and permitted the magical spring air to affect them.

“Confound the slow pokes,” cried the painter at length, after the two young men had been walking up and down for over an hour; “I will go directly to the point.”

Spero looked up in amazement. Buried in thought, he believed his friend had spoken to him, and so he said confusedly:

“Excuse me, Gontram, I was thinking of something else and didn’t catch your meaning.”

“Oh, I was only thinking aloud,” replied the painter, laughing, “but it is best if I talk the matter over with you. I will sooner reach a decision.”

“I do not understand,” stammered Spero.

“I believe you; but do you know that we are both in the same boat?”

“How so?”

“Oh, I do not wish to pry into your secrets, but hope that you will listen quietly to my confession and then give me your opinion.”

“A confession? Have you any debts? You know very well — ”

“That your purse is open to me I know, but I want to make a loan with your heart.”

“Speak quickly; what is the matter?”

“It is about the solution of a problem which has already brought many a man to the brink of despair.”

“Gontram!”

“Yes, look at me; it is unfortunately true. One of the most interesting chapters in Rabelais’s ‘Pantagruel’ is devoted to the theme.”

Spero was not in the humor for any literary discussion, and so he firmly said:

“If Rabelais handled this theme, he did it undoubtedly in a more worthy way than I could possibly have done.”

"H'm, Rabelais merely gives the question, but does not answer it."

"You are speaking in riddles," said the vicomte, laughing, "and, as you know, I have very little acquaintance with practical life."

"But you know 'Pantagruel'?"

"Yes, but — "

"Panurge asks his master, 'Shall I marry or shall I not marry?' and Pantagruel replies, 'Marry or do not marry, just as you feel inclined.'"

"Ah, so that is the question you wish to place before me?" said Spero.

"Yes."

"But why do you come to me for my advice in such a delicate matter?"

"Because I have confidence in you," replied the painter, warmly.

"Thank you," said the vicomte, cordially; "in questions of ordinary life I know as little as a child. I think it is a misfortune to always live alone."

"Then you advise me to marry?"

"If the woman you have selected is worthy to be your wife."

For a time they were both silent, and then Spero continued:

"I think marriage must be based upon unlimited mutual esteem."

"You are right. You have, no doubt, observed that the young lady whom I conducted through the parlor this evening — "

Spero trembled and uttered a low cry. The painter looked suspiciously at him, but the vicomte laughingly said that he had knocked against a stone, and so the painter continued:

"The young lady has captivated me — "

"Of which lady are you speaking?" asked the vicomte, uneasily.

"Of the pretty blonde, Mademoiselle de Larsagny!"

"Ah! she is certainly very handsome," cried Spero, breathing more freely.

"Don't you think so?" exclaimed Gontram, enthusiastically. "That is the young lady I mean."

"In that case I can only congratulate you on the choice you have made."

"Thank you. Then you think Carmen de Larsagny charming?"

"Yes. From what I have seen of the young lady she deserves the love of such a splendid fellow as you are."

"If I were to obey the voice of love," said Gontram, "I would go to her now and say: 'I love you — be mine!'"

"And why do you hesitate? You love her, do you not?"

"I suppose so; Carmen is charming. This evening I was at the point of proposing — "

"Well? and — "

"That is just the point. Spero, have you never had a feeling which caused you to leave undone something which your heart prompted you to do? Several times this evening a feeling of coming misfortune overcame me, so that I had great trouble to retain my cheerfulness."

"Such things are sometimes deceiving," said Spero.

"That may be, but every time I think of a marriage with Carmen a feeling of uneasiness overcomes me."

"That is merely nervous excitement."

"I am in love and — "

"Well, you hesitate?"

"I have not told you everything yet. I committed an indiscretion."

"Of what nature?"

"I embraced Mademoiselle de Larsagny and kissed her."

"Ah! and the young girl?"

"Did not repulse me. Now shall I marry or not?"

"What does your heart tell you?"

"My heart is like Pantagruel. It knows no decided answer."

"Good. If you follow my advice, marry the girl. A kiss between two good young people is as binding as an engagement."

"You are right, a hundred times right, and yet the moment I pressed my lips to hers I felt a pain in my heart. If I only knew the cause of this fright which seizes me every time I think of Carmen."

"Perhaps it is her father, Monsieur de Larsagny, who does not inspire you with confidence?" said Spero after a pause.

In the meantime the two friends reached the Arc de Triomphe and walked up and down the woods.

"Perhaps you are right," said Gontram, answering the vicomte's last question. "I know very little of Monsieur de Larsagny, and yet I could swear that there are some dark spots in his past."

At this moment a shot sounded in the still night, and the friends stood still and looked at each other in surprise.

"What was that?" cried Spero.

"A shot, and, as I fear, a crime," said Gontram, softly.

The young men hurried in the direction from which the shot came, and were soon in a small pathway which was lighted up by the faint gleam of the moon. On the ground a motionless form lay. Spero bent over it, and, uttering a hollow cry, he took it in his arms and clasped the head with its long, black, streaming hair to his bosom. It was Jane Zild whom the vicomte held in his arms. Near her lay a revolver.

CHAPTER XXXV

WILL SHE LIVE?

Spero hurried with his burden to the street, and Gontram could hardly keep up with him. Finally he overtook him, and, placing his hand on the vicomte’s shoulder, he urgently cried:

“Spero, where are you going with this corpse?”

“She is not dead,” replied the vicomte, tremblingly. “She lives; she must live — she dare not die!”

“And who is she?” asked Gontram, as he tried to get a glimpse of the face. Yes, he recognized her now as she lay in Spero’s arms.

“Jane! Jane Zild?” stammered the painter, terror-stricken. “O my God!”

They had now reached the Place de l’Etoile, and Gontram looked around for a carriage.

“What shall we do?” he asked, turning in desperation to Spero. “Are you going to bring the poor thing to your house? I shall go and arouse the servants.”

“Do so, Gontram, and hurry — every minute counts.”

Soon the Monte-Cristo mansion was reached. Spero carried the unconscious girl up the stairs and gently laid her on the divan. He then got on his knees beside Jane, and, hiding his face in his hands, he sobbed bitterly.

Gontram now approached his friend.

“Spero,” he said, “calm yourself; we must rescue the poor child.”

The vicomte sprang up.

“You are right, Gontram,” he replied; “but if she is dead, I shall die, too, for I love her — I love her more than my life.”

“She is no doubt wounded,” said Gontram softly.

“Yes, just hold a light here,” cried the vicomte. “I will examine her. I have not studied medicine for nothing.”

The vicomte laid his ear to her bosom, and then said:

“She lives, but to tell whether there is any hope I must examine her more closely. Gontram, go to my study and bring me the cedar box which stands on my writing-desk.”

Gontram left the room, and Spero was alone with the unconscious girl. Placing his hand upon her white forehead, he bent over the young girl and tenderly murmured:

“Poor dear child! Why did you wish to die? Oh, Jane, Jane! you must live — live for me, and no power on earth shall tear you from me!”

He pressed his lips upon her pale mouth, and with this kiss his soul was bound to that of the young girl.

Gontram now returned; Spero opened the box and took an instrument from it.

“Feel if my hand trembles,” he said, turning to the painter; “only if that is not the case can I dare to probe for the bullet.”

Gontram took hold of the white hand. It did not tremble, and Spero began to probe for the bullet.

“The ball has not touched a vital part,” whispered the vicomte at length; “it lies in the muscles. I touched it with the instrument.”

“Do you think you can remove the bullet?” asked the painter.

“I hope so.”

The vicomte motioned to Gontram to hand him the box again, and taking a bistoury and a pincette he bent over the unconscious girl again.

An anxious moment passed and then Spero triumphantly exclaimed:

“Saved!”

“Saved,” repeated Gontram as he took the murderous lead from the vicomte’s hand.

“Then we can call the housekeeper,” said Spero, after he had poured a liquid down the young girl’s throat.

He hurried out, and returned in less than five minutes with Madame Caraman.

The last time we saw the worthy governess she was in Africa, in company with Miss Clary. The latter fell in love with Captain Joliette and married him in spite of Lord Ellis’s opposition. The young couple were very happy until the *coup d’état* of the 2d of December, 1851, when Albert de Morcerf was killed by a murderous ball. Six months later Miss Clary died of grief. Four weeks after her death Madame Caraman became the housekeeper of the Monte-Cristo mansion. Thus it came about that Spero hurried to her for aid for the sick girl. She asked no questions, but, with the vicomte’s assistance, placed a bandage upon the young girl’s wound and wished to discreetly retire.

“Mamma Caraman,” said Spero, imploringly, “stay here and watch over the young girl whom I place under your protection. Let no one know that she is in this house.”

Spero thereupon withdrew, while Jane Zild remained under the care of the good-hearted woman.

CHAPTER XXXVI

MELOSAN’S SECRET

We left Melosan as he ran into the street in despair, hoping to find the missing girl. Had Jane run away? Had she been abducted?

Two policemen were patrolling the Champs-Elysées, and Anselmo went up to them and politely asked them whether they had not seen his mistress, a young lady?

The officials looked suspiciously at him, and remarked that the young lady would have something else to do than wander in the streets at this time of night. Anselmo sorrowfully bowed his head, and, after thanking them, continued on his way.

He had reached the polygon and listened attentively. He heard steps, but not the right ones. Suppose Jane had committed suicide?

She had been so painfully excited this evening, and Anselmo, who knew her past, shuddered when he thought that the Seine was not far away.

Without a pause he ran to the edge of the water; the dawning day was raw and chilly, and Anselmo shuddered as he looked in the dark waves. Were they taking his dearest treasure on earth along in their course?

What mysterious tie bound him to Jane Zild? the former galley-slave to the beautiful, talented creature?

* * * * *

Twenty-one years had passed since Anselmo had witnessed the killing of Madame Danglars by her son Benedetto and the latter’s flight with the treasure. Anselmo was, of course, a scoundrel, too; but his whole being rose up in anger at such inhuman cruelty, and, grasping the knife, he had threatened to kill the parricide if he did not depart at once.

Benedetto was thrown into the sea, and was rescued upon the island of Monte-Cristo.

Anselmo had remained behind, half dazed, and only little by little did he recover his senses sufficiently to think over his own situation. It was a desperate one; yet he would not have exchanged with Benedetto for any price.

Suddenly, a faint glimmer of daylight shone through the open window, and Anselmo trembled when his gaze fell on the pale face of the murdered woman. Suppose she was not dead? Anselmo bent over her and listened; not the slightest sign of breathing was visible, and yet the convict thought he felt an almost imperceptible beating of the heart.

Should he call for help? That would be equivalent to delivering himself over to the hangman. If he hesitated, the woman would die, under all circumstances. Who would believe him, if he said that the woman's own son was the murderer? Appearances were against him, and, if the murdered woman really recovered consciousness again, and she should be asked who raised the knife against her, she would much sooner accuse him than the son whom she madly loved.

While Anselmo was still debating the question in his mind, he heard a noise in front of the house, and, hurrying to the window, he perceived the priest, who had just returned home from his journey. The convict uttered a cry of relief. He could now leave without having a murder upon his soul; for the clergyman would, no doubt, immediately discover what had happened, and take care of the victim. He waited until he had heard the priest's steps on the stairs, and then swung himself through the window on to the tree which had helped Benedetto to enter the room, and disappeared at the very moment that the horrified clergyman entered the room. Anselmo determined to leave France in an easterly direction. After great trials and difficulties he reached Switzerland, and from there he journeyed to Germany. Intelligent and active, he soon found a means of earning an honest living; he settled in Munich, and, under the name of Melosan, gave lessons in French.

Fifteen years passed in this way. Anselmo worked hard, and was satisfied with the reward of his activity. His scholars esteemed him. During this time an entire change had taken place in the former convict. But then a yearning to see France once more seized him, and he resolved to return to the fatherland.

He first went to Lyons, where he gave lessons in German and Italian. He lived in a modest apartment in the Faubourg St. Antoine. One evening Anselmo was walking along the quay when he heard quarrelling voices. A woman's voice cried aloud:

“Let me go! I want to go for my daughter. I have nothing to do with you. Help, help!”

Anselmo stood still. A woman was no doubt struggling with some men, and when her cries redoubled, he forgot his prudence and hurried toward the group.

As he suspected, he found three drunken workmen trying to force a sixteen-year-old girl from the grasp of an elderly woman.

The woman cried loudly for help and struck angrily around her. The young girl, however, silently defended herself.

“Don’t be so prudish, Zilda,” said one of the men. “You make as much noise as if we were going to hang the little one.”

The speaker, as he said this, threw his arms around the slim waist of the young girl and tried to draw her to him. At this moment Anselmo appeared, and with a terrible blow he struck the fellow to the ground.

The young girl sobbed, and taking the hand of her rescuer she pressed a kiss upon it. Then turning to the old lady, who was leaning against the wall moaning, she cried, beside herself:

“Oh, mother, mother! What is the matter with you? My God, she is dying!”

This really seemed to be the case; the poor woman had become deathly pale, and sank to the ground.

“Let me help you,” said Anselmo to the young girl. He bent down and took the unconscious woman in his arms. “Where do you live?”

As simple as the question was, the girl appeared to be embarrassed by it.

“Won’t you tell me where you live?” said Anselmo, as the girl remained silent.

“We do not live far from here, in the Rue Franchefoin.”

“I do not know that street.”

“Ah, I believe you,” stammered the poor child, shuddering; “I shall proceed in advance.”

“Do so,” said Anselmo.

The ex-priest followed her, bearing the unconscious woman in his muscular arms, and only gradually did he perceive that his companion was leading him into one of the most disreputable streets in the city.

The young girl stopped in front of a small house. A robust woman stood in the doorway, and when she saw the young girl she venomously said:

“Zilda has taken time. She stayed away a good two hours to get her daughter.”

“My mother is dangerously ill, perhaps dying,” said the young girl in a sharp voice.

“It won’t be so serious,” replied the woman, with a coarse laugh.

“Have you not heard that the woman is dangerously ill?” said the ex-priest.

“Is she sick?” asked the woman, coldly. “Well, if she dies, it won’t be a great misfortune. I — ”

“Madame, for God’s sake!” implored the young girl.

“Show me to a room where I can lay the invalid down,” said Anselmo roughly.

“Yes, yes, directly. Follow me if you are in such a hurry,” growled the woman.

Just then two men who were intoxicated staggered into the hallway.

“Ah, there is Zilda,” cried one of them; “quick, old woman; come in and sing us a song.”

The woman opened a door and winked to the ex-priest to enter. The room was small and dirty. In the corner stood a slovenly bed upon which Anselmo deposited the invalid.

“Is there a physician in the neighborhood?” he asked.

“A physician? That is hardly worth the trouble,” mocked the virago, “she is only drunk.”

The ex-priest took a five-franc piece from his pocket and said:

“Get a physician, I insist upon it.”

The next minute the virago was on the way.

Anselmo remained alone with the two women. The young girl sobbed silently, and the invalid remained motionless.

“Mademoiselle,” he began, “I think you might loosen your mother’s dress; the fainting fit lasts rather long.”

The young girl looked at him, seeming not to understand.

“She is your mother, is she not?”

The young girl nodded, and, rising, pressed her lips upon the woman’s forehead. Thereupon she loosened her mother’s dress and held a glass of water to her lips. The invalid mechanically drank a few drops, but soon waved it back and whispered:

“No more, no water, leave me!”

“Mother,” said the young girl, “mother, it is I; do you not know me?”

“No, I do not know who you are!” cried the invalid. “Away, I cannot sing to-day — my breast pains me. Oh — ”

“Oh, mother,” sobbed the poor child.

“Yes — I am cold — why do you put ice on my feet?” complained the invalid, and with a quick movement she raised herself up in bed.

Suddenly the delirious woman caught sight of Anselmo, and with a terrible cry she sprung at him with clinched fists.

“There you are, you wretch,” she hissed; “where have you put your black coat?”

Just then the virago returned with the doctor.

The latter looked contemptuously at her, and in a gruff voice said:

“Lie down!”

He then beat her bosom, counted her pulse, and shook his head.

“Nothing can be done,” he dryly declared; “her strength has been impaired by a fast and dissipated life, and — ”

“But, doctor,” interrupted Anselmo, “have some compunction for the poor woman. You see she is conscious and understands every word.”

“Ah, you are probably a relative of hers, or has your warm interest in her some other ground?”

“Doctor, I only speak as a human being,” replied Anselmo, sternly, “and if you do not do your duty as a physician I will notify the proper authorities.”

This threat had the desired effect. The doctor drew his note-book from his pocket, rapidly wrote a prescription, and went away.

Anselmo took the prescription and hurried to the nearest drug-store. As he walked along the snow-covered streets, he muttered to himself:

“Merciful God, do not punish me so hard!”

When he returned he found the virago awaiting him at the door.

“Monsieur,” she said, “it seems that Zilda interests you.”

“Yes, like any other unhappy creature.”

“Well, I have her papers. Her name is Zild — Jane Zild.”

“Give them to me,” said Anselmo, firmly; “I will take care of her.”

“May God reward you; the sooner you get her out of my house the happier I shall be.”

The woman hurried into the house, and Anselmo handed the invalid’s daughter the medicine he had bought and waited for the return of the virago. In less than five minutes she returned and handed the ex-priest a package of papers.

“Where can I look through them?” he asked, uneasily.

“Oh, come into the kitchen.”

Anselmo accepted her invitation, and by the flickering light of a tallow candle he unfolded the yellow and withered papers.

One of the papers contained a passport for the work-man, Jean Zild, and his daughter Jane, made out by the commune of Sitzheim in Alsace. When Anselmo read this he grew pale and nearly fell to the floor in a faint.

“The reading seems to overtax your strength,” said the woman giggling. “Zilda has travelled a great deal, and maybe you have met her before.”

“I hardly think so,” stammered Anselmo.

In company with the virago, Anselmo re-entered the sick-room, and, laying his hand on the young girl’s shoulder, he said:

“My dear child, your mother is much better now, and if you follow my advice you will go to bed and take a rest. I shall stay with the invalid. The housekeeper here has kindly consented to give you a room.”

“Not for any price,” cried the little one in terror. “I cannot stay in this house overnight.”

Little by little he managed to calm the poor child and make her understand his aim. She hesitatingly consented to stay overnight in the house, and the housekeeper conducted her to a little room. With inward terror the little one gazed at the unclean walls, and only her love for her mother induced her to stay and not return even now.

“Good-night, mother,” she said, sobbing.

The woman looked vacantly at her and gave no sign of recognition of her daughter.

“Do not wake your mother up,” said Anselmo, hastily. “Sleep is necessary to her and I will call you if she asks for you.”

“Then you really intend to stay here?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know us?”

“No,” stammered Anselmo; “but go to bed now, it is late.”

“You will surely call me?” asked the little one.

“Certainly; go now and rely on me.”

She went, and Anselmo was alone with the invalid — the dying woman, as he shudderingly said to himself.

From time to time the sick woman would wake up in her sleep and utter a low moan.

Anselmo looked in terror at the face, which showed traces of former beauty. Whose fault was it that her life ended so early and so sadly?

Suddenly the invalid opened her big black eyes, and gazed at the ex-convict who was sitting by her bedside with folded hands.

“How did you get here?” she asked, timidly.

“You are sick, keep quiet; later on you shall learn everything,” replied Anselmo.

“I am sick! Ha! ha! ha! I am cursed — cursed!” she cried.

“Keep still; go to sleep,” begged Anselmo, frightened. “No one has cursed you.”

“But he — my father — oh, I have brought shame and sorrow upon him; but it was not my fault — no, not my fault! Oh, I was so young and innocent. Father said, pray earnestly and often, and so I prayed. Oh, how nice it was in Sitzheim; the church lay upon a hill, hid in ivy, from which a view of the peaceful village could be had. A well was also in the village. Evenings we young girls used to go there to get water, and then — then he went past. How he frowned. He wore a black coat, and the bald spot on his shaved head shone like ivory. When he came near, we made the sign of the cross. We must honor the embassadors of God!”

The dying woman with trembling hands made the sign of the cross, and Anselmo groaned and moaned.

“I had not yet gone to confession,” continued the delirious woman; “my father used to laugh at me and say: ‘Stay at home, little Jane, you haven’t any sins to confess yet.’ I stayed. I was only sixteen. But one day as I was sitting in front of our door the man addressed me.

“‘Why do you not come to confession?’ he asked sternly.

“‘Because my father said I was too young, and have no sins to confess.’

“‘We are all sinners in God,’ he earnestly replied. ‘Do not forget that you will be eternally damned if you do not confess.’

“I got frightened; no, I did not wish to be damned, and so I went secretly to confession. He always gave me absolution and I was happy. He sometimes met me when I went walking, and was always very friendly to me.”

Anselmo leaned his head against the hard bed-post and sobbed — they were the bitterest tears he had ever wept.

"He told me I was so pretty," continued the woman. "He promised me dresses, books and sweetmeats — my father must not know that I saw his reverence almost every day, and then — then he suddenly disappeared from the village — his superiors had transferred him, and I — I wept until my eyes were red. And then — then came a terrible time. The girls at the well pointed their fingers in scorn at me — my father threw me out of the house! I ran as far as my feet would carry me — I suffered from hunger and thirst — I froze, for it was a bitter cold winter; and when I could no longer sustain my misery, I sprang into the water.

"I was rescued," she laughingly continued, "and then my child, my little Jane, was born, and to nurse her I had to keep on living. Yes, I lived, but how? The fault was not mine, but that of the hypocrite and scoundrel in clergyman's dress!"

"Mercy," implored Anselmo. "Mercy, Jane!"

"Ha! who — is it that — calls me?" stammered the dying woman, faintly. "I should know — that — voice!"

"Oh, Jane, it is I — the wretched priest!" whispered Anselmo; "forgive me for my crimes against you and tell me if that girl there is," he pointed to the other room — "my — our daughter?"

But the invalid could not speak any more; she only nodded, and then closed her eyes forever.

When day dawned a broken-down man rose from the bedside of the deceased. He had spent the night in torture, and now went to wake the daughter of the dead woman — wake his daughter! He must take care of her without letting her know that he was her father.

When he told the girl her mother was dead, she threw herself upon the corpse, covered the pale face with tears and kisses, and yet — curious phase of this girl's soul — when she thought she was not observed, she whispered faintly:

"God be thanked that your troubles are over, poor mother — now I can love you without blushing for you."

Anselmo ordered a respectable funeral, and when he returned from the cemetery with the young girl he said with deep emotion:

"Jane, I knew your mother — I promised her that I would look out for you. Will you stay with me?"

Jane Zild sorrowfully said "Yes." Anselmo left Lyons in company with the lonely child. He worked hard to place Jane above want, and tenderly loved her. Gradually he tried to win the young girl's confidence; he comprehended that Jane was on the brink of despair, and to distract her he began to educate her.

The result was well worth the work. Jane learned with the greatest facility, and took pleasure in study. Yet she remained pale and melancholy, and Anselmo knew what troubled her — the memory of the horrible past. It seemed as if she were branded — as if every one could read on her forehead whose daughter she was.

An accident revealed to Anselmo that Jane possessed eminent musical talents, and a magnificent contralto voice. He worked, saved and economized to be able to give Jane the best teachers. He removed with the young girl to a German city which possessed a celebrated conservatory; there Jane studied music and singing.

Three years father and daughter remained in Leipsic, and then Jane felt homesick — homesick for France. Anselmo selected Paris as their place of residence, and hoped that she would succeed in conquering a position at the Opera.

But Jane refused all offers from the managers, and when Anselmo reproached her she said, in bitter tones:

"If I were not my mother's daughter the matter would be different. Shame would kill me if some one were to discover in me the daughter of Jane Zild. No, I must remain in seclusion until God sees fit to end my miserable existence!"

It therefore surprised him when the young girl told him she thought of visiting the young painter's soiree and singing there. Was she in love with the painter, or did she expect to meet some one in his parlor?

Anselmo declared that he would not go to any party in Paris, and would only bring her to the Rue Montaigne and then call for her again. He was, however, not prepared for the surprise which awaited him in Gontram Sabran's parlor. He recognized in Count Vellini's secretary the demon Benedetto, and his heart ceased beating when he saw the wretch. He hoped Benedetto would not recognize him, but he was destined to be deceived, as we have seen.

When Anselmo heard the name of the Vicomte of Monte-Cristo, he recollected the oath which the convict Benedetto had sworn against the Count of Monte-Cristo.

Hidden by the drapery, he had given Spero the mysterious warning. After the soiree was over he was surprised at the excited condition of Jane. He attributed it to a recurrence of her thoughts to her horrible past.

And while he was promising to assist the former galley-slave in carrying out some deviltry to save himself from being unmasked, Jane disappeared. Anselmo regarded it as a new evidence of the wrath of God.

How long he lay crouched in a corner of the quay, buried in thought, he knew not; all he knew was that the sound of hurried footsteps, which were coming toward him, had aroused him.

Suppose it was Jane who wished to seek oblivion in the waters of the Seine? Anselmo listened. The footsteps drew near now — the spectral apparition of a woman went past him and swung itself on the bridge railing.

“Jane — my child!” cried the despairing father; but when he reached the spot where he had seen the apparition it was empty.

He bent over the railing. Something dark swam about. Anselmo thought he recognized Jane’s black dress, and only filled with a desire to rescue his child, he plunged into the turbulent waters.

With a few powerful strokes he had reached the place where he had last seen the figure. Thank God! it was in front of him. He stretched out his arm — clutched the hand of the drowning person, and tried to swim back to shore with his dear burden.

But the shore was still far away, the body lay heavy as lead on his left arm, and much as he tried to cleave the ice-cold water with his right he could not succeed in doing it. He felt his strength grow feeble — was he going to be overcome at the last moment?

“Help! help! we are sinking!” he cried aloud, and as he felt himself seized at that moment by a huge wave, whose power he could not resist — the water entered his mouth — he cried again:

“Help! help!”

“Patience! Keep up a moment longer! I am coming!” came back in a loud voice.

The water was parted with powerful strokes, four arms were stretched toward the drowning persons, and Anselmo and his burden were brought to the shore by two men.

“Confound the cold,” said one of the men, shaking himself as if he were a poodle. “I should like to know what reason induced these two people to take a cold bath so early in the morning?”

“Bring them to my house, Bobichel,” said the other, a strong, handsome man, “and everything will be explained there.”

“Yes, if they are still alive,” replied Bobichel. “I think, Fanfaro, that we came just at the right moment. What will Madame Irene say when we arrive home?”

“She will at once prepare for everything,” said Fanfaro, laughing.

After they had both walked along with their burdens in their arms for about a quarter of an hour, they stopped in front of a small house which lay back of a pretty garden.

Five minutes later both the unfortunates lay in a comfortably warmed room, and Fanfaro, his wife, and Bobichel busily attended to them.

“Who can they be?” asked Irene, gently, of her husband.

“God knows,” replied Fanfaro; “anyhow, I am glad that they both still live.”

But the woman Anselmo had rescued at the risk of his life was not Jane, but a gray-haired old lady.

CHAPTER XXXVII

CARMEN

In a magnificently furnished house in the Rue de Rivoli sat Carmen, the handsome daughter of the bank director Larsagny. She was pensively gazing at the carpet, and from time to time uttered a low sigh.

“Aha, bah!” she muttered; “he shall tell me all.”

She rang a silver bell, and immediately after a maid appeared.

“Where is Monsieur de Larsagny?”

“In his office.”

“Since when?”

“Since eight o’clock.”

“And what time is it now?”

“Ten.”

“Good. Tell Jean to serve breakfast here in my boudoir, and then go and tell Monsieur de Larsagny that I await him.”

A quarter of an hour later the banker appeared in the boudoir.

He ate so greedily that Carmen impatiently exclaimed:

“Are you not yet satisfied?”

“Really, I have a good appetite this morning,” nodded Larsagny.

“Do you know how your phenomenal appetite appears to me?” asked Carmen, laughing.

“No. What do you mean?”

“Well, I mean that you must have been starving at one time, and since then you always feel greedy.”

Larsagny shuddered and his brow contracted.

“Do not speak of such things; I cannot bear it,” he said, with a frown.

“Why not? Not every one comes to the world as a millionnaire. I, for instance, as a child, have suffered more than once from hunger, and — ”

“Carmen, be silent,” said the banker, sternly; “you’ll spoil my appetite if you talk so.”

“I should think your appetite would be stilled by this time. What you have already eaten would have fed an army.”

Larsagny did not answer. He was busy eating an Edam cheese, and not until all the plates were empty did lie lay his knife and fork on the table, and, breathing more freely, say:

“So, now I can stand it for a little while.”

Carmen rang the bell. The table was cleared off, and as soon as the servant had brought the cigarettes and cigars, the girl motioned to him to leave.

Carmen lighted a cigarette, and, leaning back in her chair, said:

“I have something important to say to you.”

“What is it?” asked Larsagny.

“Oh! different things,” replied Carmen.

“About money? Do not be timid.”

“It is not about money, but about an information.”

“An information?” asked the banker.

“Yes.”

“Really, Carmen, you are speaking in riddles to-day — ”

“Which you will, I hope, solve for me,” interrupted the young lady, dryly. “In the first place, what is the meaning of your gigantic appetite?”

“Ah! that’s very simple; I am hungry.”

“That isn’t it. I have seen a great many hungry people. In fact, I have often suffered from hunger when mother had no money to buy bread.”

“Carmen, how often have I told you that I do not like these reminiscences?”

“Why not? Take an example from me, and tell me a little of your past.”

“Enough — enough!” cried Larsagny, growing pale.

“Answer my questions, and then you shall have quiet.”

“Carmen, you are bothering yourself and me unnecessarily. I give you the assurance — ”

“As if your assurances had the slightest value for me,” interrupted Carmen.

Larsagny smiled in a sickly fashion.

“Carmen, you are childish,” he said. “I should think you ought to have known enough of me by this time to — ”

“To be able to hate you thoroughly. You have cheated me of my youth and innocence.”

“Carmen, for God’s sake, not so loud! Suppose some one heard you?” cried the banker, anxiously.

"What do I care? You are a baron, live in Florence, and have a good housekeeper, whose only joy is her eighteen-year-old daughter. One night the mother is away. The baron uses the opportunity to take advantage of the young girl. When the mother returns the next day and learns the truth, she becomes so frightened that she falls dead on the spot. The unhappy girl tries to throw herself into the river, but is prevented from doing so, and finally becomes the mistress of the villain."

"Carmen!"

"Yes, yes, I know I am no better than you. Monsieur de Larsagny, tell me why you do not make me your wife?"

"My God, because — "

"Well? Why do you pause? Do you know what I believe? You are a married man with a dreadful past!"

"Carmen, you are doing me an injury."

"Ha! ha! If I do you a wrong, I am at the most too easy with you."

"Carmen, what is the matter with you?" exclaimed Larsagny, in despair. "Only yesterday you were so affectionate, and now — "

"Bah! Yesterday is yesterday, and to-day is to-day. Either I find out from you who you really are, or — "

"Or?"

"Or I shall find out myself, and should I discover that you have committed some unpunished crime, I shall denounce you, even though you take revenge upon me for it."

Larsagny had sprung up, and looking at Carmen in amazement, he stammered:

"You — would — dare — to do — that?"

"Yes. And if you look at yourself in the glass, you will see that my wildest declarations are far behind the reality. Your answer shines in every color."

"Listen to me, Carmen," said the banker, in a tender voice. "It is time you dropped the subject. I am not an Adonis, and as you have rightly suspected, I have seen a great deal and gone through many troubles, but in spite of all that — "

"Well, in spite of all that?"

"I do not deserve your unjust accusations. Can you, for instance, reproach me for the hunger which bothers me continually?"

"No, only I should like to learn the cause."

“The cause?” repeated Larsagny.

“Yes.”

“Then listen. I will tell you everything, even though you should laugh at me. Years ago I was travelling in Italy, and as I had a large sum of money in my pocket, I was attacked by robbers. The wretches locked me in a cell and let me starve. One day I asked for food, and to mock me they made the bandit who guarded me eat his meal in my presence.

“‘Can I get a meal here?’ I asked of the bandit, who was swallowing some peas.

“‘Is your excellency hungry?’ asked the fellow (his name was Peppino) in surprise.

“I was angry.

“‘What!’ I exclaimed in a rage, ‘since twenty-four hours I have not eaten a thing, and you ask me if I am hungry.’

“‘Then you wish to eat?’

“‘Yes, at once, if it is possible.’

“‘If you pay for it.’

“‘I will pay what you ask,’ I cried.

“‘What do you wish?’

“‘Anything, a chicken or a partridge.’

“‘Good. Let us say a chicken.’

“‘But have you a cook here?’

“‘Certainly,’ nodded the bandit, and, raising his voice, he cried: ‘A chicken for the gentleman.’

“Ten minutes later a chicken was brought in by a waiter in a frock suit. For a moment I thought I was in the Café de Paris.

“I ate the chicken with my eyes, and asked for a knife and fork. Peppino gave them to me, but just as I was about to attack the chicken, he held my hand and said:

“‘Pardon me, your excellency, but we get paid here before things are eaten.’

“I looked at him in astonishment.

“‘What does the chicken cost?’ I asked.

“‘Five thousand louis d’ors, or one hundred thousand francs.’

“‘Are you crazy? One hundred thousand francs for a chicken?’

“‘Your excellency is not aware how hard it is to get chickens in this neighborhood.’“

“Well, and how did the matter end?” asked Carmen.

“I sent the chicken back, and asked for a piece of bread. It was brought to me by Battista, another bandit, on a silver salver.

“‘How dear is the bread?’ I asked, trembling.

“‘One hundred thousand francs.’

“‘What! A piece of bread one hundred thousand francs?’ I cried in amazement.

“‘One hundred thousand francs.’

“‘But you asked no more for the chicken?’

“‘Prices here are fixed,’ replied Peppino; ‘pay and you can eat.’

“‘But with what should I pay?’ I cried in desperation; ‘the money I have with me — ’

“‘Is your whole fortune,’ interrupted Peppino. ‘You have five million and fifty thousand francs in your portfolio in drafts, and you can get fifty chickens and a half for it.’

“I was astounded. The robbers knew exactly how much money I had, and I saw I had either to pay or to starve.

“‘Will I be able to eat in silence?’ I asked, ‘if I pay?’

“‘Certainly.’

“‘Good, then bring me some writing materials.’

“I wrote out a draft on Rome for one hundred thousand francs, and received the chicken.”

“What was their motive?” asked Carmen.

“Merely to plunder and blackmail me.”

“Then they demanded more?” asked Carmen.

“Oh, no. After I had eaten the chicken, I felt thirsty. I called Peppina and told him.

“‘You wish to drink something?’ he asked.

“‘Yes. I am dying with thirst.’

“‘I am very sorry to hear it. The wine this year is very bad and very dear.’

“‘Then bring me water,’ I cried.

“‘Oh, water is still dearer.’

“‘Then give me a glass of wine.’

“‘We only sell by the bottle.’

“‘Then bring me a bottle of Orreto.’

“‘Directly.’

“‘And the wine costs?’

"'Twenty-five thousand francs per bottle.'

"'Swindler! Robber!' I cried, beside myself.

"'Do not talk so loud, master might hear you.'

"'I don't care. Who is your master?'

"'Luigi Vampa.'

"'Can I speak to him?'

"'Yes.'

"Peppino went away, and two minutes later a slimly built, fine-looking man, with dark hair and eyes, stood before me!

"'You want to speak to me?' he asked, politely.

"'Are you the chief of the people who brought me here?' I said.

"'Yes.'

"'What ransom do you wish of me?'

"'Only the five million francs you possess.'

"'Take my life,' I cried, 'but leave me my money.'

"'Your death wouldn't do us any good,' replied the bandit, 'but your money would.'

"'Take a million then?'

"'No.'

"'Two?'

"'No.'

"'Three?'

"'No.'

"'Four?'

"'We leave haggling to usurers.'

"'Then take everything from me and kill me!' I cried in despair.

"'We do not wish to do that.'

"'And suppose I die of hunger?'

"'Then we are not responsible for that.'

"'Keep your wine and I will keep my money.'

"'Just as you please,' laughed Vampa, and went away.

"Two days later I asked for food. A fine dinner was served. I paid a million and stilled my hunger. This continued three days longer, and when I finally counted the contents of my portfolio, I found I had only fifty thousand francs left. I considered what I should do with this sum, and fell asleep over my plans. When I awoke, I was on the road to Rome. When I suddenly looked at myself in a mirror I found to my horror that my hair had turned gray. Since that time I have always feared that I would never have sufficient to eat; and now you know the cause of my ravenous appetite."

"Yet I cannot understand why they should have wanted to torture you so. It must have been an act of revenge," said Carmen.

"You are mistaken," replied Larsagny, "I fear no one and every one esteems me; I — "

"One moment," interrupted Carmen, as she looked fixedly at the banker. "Why did you get frightened at the *soiree* recently, when the servant announced the Vicomte of Monte-Cristo? I thought you feared no one, baron?"

Larsagny stared at the young girl as if she had been a spectre. Carmen continued:

"I have not finished yet. In the evening I stood on the terrace and heard these words:

"'Monsieur de Larsagny, take care you do not learn my name too soon.'"

"Ah, you are spying on me," cried Larsagny angrily; "have a care or — "

"I do not fear you," said Carmen, calmly; "I will be the first to urge your punishment, if some suspicious circumstance should arise and — "

"Be silent, wretched creature!" cried Larsagny angrily, "be silent, or — "

He grasped a knife and rushed upon Carmen. The latter stared at him in such a way that he dropped the weapon and stammered:

"Carmen, you will drive me crazy!"

At this moment the door opened, and the servant brought in a card which he handed to Larsagny.

"The gentleman is waiting in the parlor," he said; "will the baron receive him?"

Before Larsagny could throw a look at the card, Carmen had grasped it.

"Signor Fagiano," she read aloud, and as the banker with trembling voice said he would be down, she nodded to the servant to go away, and then mockingly said:

"Signor Fagiano has no doubt come to tell the baron his name. Good luck to him!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII

RECOLLECTIONS

Signor Fagiano stood in the beautiful parlor, and a malicious smile played about his lips.

The banker entered now. The scene in the painter's garden would not vanish from his mind. Fagiano had approached him then and triumphantly whispered:

“Monsieur de Larsagny, I know your past.”

Larsagny had uttered a cry of terror.

“If I am to remain silent,” Fagiano had added, “I must have money.”

“But who are you?”

Whereupon the answer had come:

“Take care that you do not find out my name too soon.”

With inward fear the banker approached the Italian to-day.

“Signor Fagiano, what brings you here to-day? This is the second time that you have crossed my path, and I hope it will be the last. I do not know you, you do not know me, and I cannot understand to what I am indebted for the honor of your visit. I am very patient, but everything has its limits, and only the position I occupy prevents me from throwing you out.”

“Call your servants, Monsieur de Larsagny. I have no fear of publicity,” said Fagiano, boldly.

The banker grasped the bell-rope, but let his hand fall again, and Fagiano, who noticed this, mockingly observed:

“Why do you hesitate? Would you prefer to finish our interview without witnesses?”

“Impudent puppy!” hissed Larsagny.

“Do not get excited! Let us come to the point.”

“I have been waiting for that a long time,” growled Larsagny; “tell me, first of all, who are you?”

Fagiano drew nearer to the banker, and, grinning, said:

“You really do not recognize me?”

“No.”

The Italian laughed loudly.

“Then give me two hundred thousand francs,” said Fagiano, “and I will disappear forever.”

“I would be a fool to give an unknown person a single sou.”

“You really do not know my name, then?”

“No.”

“H’m; but I know yours.”

“That isn’t a great thing. My name is known on the street and at Court.”

“Yes, the name of Larsagny; as Monsieur Danglars you are also known, though in a different way.”

Larsagny trembled and was about to fall.

“You lie!” he hissed.

“What would you say if I told your sovereign that the man he put at the head of the syndicate is only one of that crowd of unhanged thieves who roam about in the world?”

“Wretch, you will say nothing of the kind,” cried Danglars (for it was really he); and putting his hand in his breast-pocket he drew forth a revolver and held it at the Italian’s breast.

“Softly, softly,” said Fagiano, as he took the weapon away from the banker and put it in his pocket. “A little while ago I asked for two hundred thousand francs; now I must increase my demand to half a million.”

“You are a fool,” said Danglars, pale with rage. “You will never get a sou from me.”

“Have no fear about that; as soon as I threaten to expose you, you will submit; I have some piquant details *in petto*.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Well, I will announce your name at the same time as mine.”

“What has that got to do with me?”

“More than you think. Don’t you really know me?”

“No.”

“So much the worse. But tell me, baron, is Carmen really your daughter?”

“But — who — gives — you — the right — ” said Danglars, stammering.

“Next you will deny that you ever had a wife?”

“Leave my wife’s name alone.”

"Good. Then let us talk of your daughter who is much older and does not bear the name of Carmen."

Danglars hid his face in his hands.

"Baron, you are the friend of the emperor and are very rich, and no one suspects that Baron Larsagny is the former forger and swindler Danglars. One word from me and you sink deep in the mud. It depends on you whether I am to be your friend or your enemy."

"Ah, now I know who you are," said the banker, springing up. "You are Andrea Cavalcanti."

"Right," laughed Fagiano.

"Now I remember. You put a title to your name, played the heir of a great fortune, and entered into near relations with my family. An impudence which the avenging arm of the law punished."

"Yes, I am Benedetto the murderer — Benedetto the criminal. But do you know who my father was?"

"Yes, I heard about the scandalous trial; I was not in France at the time, but — Go on, you," urged Danglars.

"And do you also know the name of my mother, baron?"

"No."

"Well, then, my mother was — the Baroness Danglars."

"The miserable creature — the wretch!" cried Danglars, hoarsely. "But no — you lie, it cannot be so."

"She was my mother," said Benedetto, accenting the word *was*.

"She was? Is she dead?" asked Danglars, softly.

"Yes, I killed her."

"Horrible," groaned Danglars, wringing his hands.

"If you want proofs," continued Benedetto, coldly, "here they are."

He took Anselmo's writing out of his pocket and handed it to the banker.

"Read," he said, indifferently.

"What do you want from me?" murmured Danglars, hoarsely.

"First, money, and then let us talk further."

"You shall have what you want," replied Danglars.

"Good; now comes the second point."

"Do not torture me any longer," said Danglars.

"Have you forgotten who it was that humiliated you, trod you in the dust?" said Benedetto, laying his hand on the banker's shoulder. "That man is your bad genius as well as mine. It was the Count of Monte-Cristo who taught me the pleasures of life only to throw me back to the Bagnio again. Since I have been free I dream of revenge against him. I know the spot where he is mortal. Can I count on your support?”

“Yes; but I fear our attempts will be fruitless.”

“Fruitless? I swear to you that we shall be successful.”

“But he is a supernatural man. You might as well attack God.”

“And yet he has an Achilles heel! Once more, will you help me?”

“Yes; but I do not understand you.”

“The whole of the Count of Monte-Cristo’s affection is centred in his son, and through this son we must strike him. He shall suffer all the tortures of hell, and in his son, whom he idolizes, we shall punish him.”

“Now I understand you,” said Danglars.

“In the first place, you must give me money, and then wait until I call you.”

“And you guarantee that the grief will kill him?”

“Yes, I guarantee it.”

“Then I am yours.”

CHAPTER XXXIX

DISAPPEARED

Let us return to the Vicomte Spero.

Three days had passed since Jane Zild had been taken to the elegant house. She still lay motionless and pale, and Madame Caraman never left her bedside.

A slight moan from the invalid caused Mamma Caraman to bend over her.

“Poor child,” she sorrowfully murmured, “she looks as if she were going to die. God knows what way she got the wound — I always fear that she herself fired the shot.”

Jane moaned louder and felt her heart with her hand.

“Be still, my dear,” whispered Mamma Caraman. She poured a few drops of liquor into a cup and told the girl to drink it.

“No, I will not drink!” said Jane, passionately. “Leave me, I do not want to live,” she suddenly cried. “Oh, why did you take the weapon from me? I cannot live with this pressure on the breast. The horrible secret pulls me to the ground — I am sinking — I am sinking! Ah, and she was nevertheless my mother — I loved her so — I love her yet.”

With tears in her eyes Mamma Caraman tried to quiet the excited girl, but she could not do so. She pressed lightly on a silver bell which stood near the bed.

In less than five minutes the vicomte appeared.

“Is she worse?” he anxiously asked.

“Yes, she is feverish again, and I thought it might be better to send for a physician.”

Spero drew near to the invalid’s couch and took her arm to feel her pulse. Strange to say, Jane became calmer as soon as he touched her. The wild-looking eyes lost their frightened look; the lips which had muttered disconnected words closed, and the small hands lay quietly on the silk cover.

"She is sleeping," said Mamma Caraman, "I am sorry now that I called you."

"On the contrary I am glad I came. I will take your place and you can sleep a little."

"Not for the world," cried Mamma Caraman. "I am not tired at all."

"That is very funny; for three days you haven't closed an eye," said the vicomte. "Lie down for an hour, Mamma Caraman. I promise to call you as soon as the invalid stirs."

Mamma Caraman thereupon laid herself upon a sofa, and the next minute she was fast asleep.

An hour later the young girl opened her eyes and looked about her.

"Where am I?" she murmured.

"With me — under my protection," replied Spero, and pressing Jane's hand to his lips he added, "Ah, Jane, why did you wish to die? Did you not know that your soul would take mine along?"

The young girl listened as if in a dream, and unconsciously looked at the vicomte with sparkling eyes.

"Jane, before I saw you I hadn't lived," continued Spero, "but now I know that life is worth living for, and I thank God that he allowed me to find you."

A smile of pleasure flitted across Jane's lips. She did not speak, but Spero felt a warm pressure of the hand, and enthusiastically cried:

"Jane, I love you — love you dearly; Jane, my darling, tell me only once that you love me!"

Jane looked silently at him and then buried her face in her hands, faintly murmuring:

"Yes, Spero, I love you."

"Thanks, my darling, for that word, and now I will leave you. Good-night, Jane — my Jane — oh, how I love you!"

The vicomte left the room and Jane closed her tired eyes.

Suddenly the heavy drapery which covered the door leading to the corridor was thrown aside, a man's form issued therefrom, and his sparkling eyes gazed at the two women.

The man took a vial out of his pocket, and, dropping the contents on a piece of white cloth, he held it to Jane's lips. Jane breathed fainter and fainter — then her breathing ceased — her arms sank by her side — her cheeks became pale as death.

The man watched these terrible changes without the slightest sign of anxiety. Bending down he wrapped her tightly in the silk cover and carried her out of the room in his muscular arms, while Mamma Caraman slept tightly and Spero was dreaming.

*   *   *   *   *

The reader will remember that Firejaws, who has died in the meantime, once jokingly compared Fanfaro to a Newfoundland dog, as he found means everywhere to rescue some one.

Fanfaro's presence in Paris is soon explained. His wife and his two children could not stand the Algerian climate long, and so they all came to Paris. Monte-Cristo had begged him to keep an eye on Spero. Since the count's departure not a day had passed but that either Fanfaro or his faithful Bobichel watched every movement of the vicomte, and the night the young man and the painter were walking in the Champs-Elysées, the former clown had followed them as far as the Rue Montaigne. Bobichel then went home.

It was three o'clock when he silently opened the street door. To his surprise Fanfaro met him as he entered, and told him that as he could not work he thought he would take a walk. Bobichel immediately declared that he would accompany him. It was in this way that they had rescued Anselmo and the old woman. Fanfaro very soon found out that the old lady was crazy. Fanfaro believed that there was some connection between the two persons he had saved from a watery grave, and Bobichel thought so too.

The crazy woman sometimes became terribly excited. In such moments she sprang out of the bed, and hiding behind the door silently whined:

"Spare me — I am your mother!"

Irene in such moments tried in vain to quiet her. When the physician examined her, he found a blood-red scar on her bosom, which, no doubt, came from a knife stab.

On the night of the third day after the rescue, Fanfaro sat at Anselmo's bedside. Bobichel had disappeared since forty-eight hours to make inquiries about Spero. Fanfaro heard through him that Spero had not left the Monte-Cristo palace for three days, and could not imagine what was the cause of it.

Anselmo now began to groan. Fanfaro bent over the invalid, and thought he heard the words:

"My daughter — my poor child — ah, is she dead?"

"Who is dead?" asked Fanfaro.

“Ah, she plunged into the water — she is drowned,” groaned Anselmo.

Fanfaro could not believe his ears. Did the sick man imagine that the gray-haired woman was his daughter?

“Have you a daughter?” he asked.

“Yes, my Jane — my darling.”

Just then the door opened, and Bobichel entered.

“Well?” cried Fanfaro expectantly.

“Ah, Fanfaro, a great misfortune!”

“A misfortune? Does it concern the vicomte?”

“Yes; he has disappeared.”

“But, Bobichel, why should that be a misfortune? Perhaps he went on a short journey.”

“No, both Coucou and Madame Caraman maintain that his disappearance is a misfortune.”

“Tell me all that has happened.”

“Then listen. On the evening that the vicomte came back from the *soiree,* he did not go home directly, but first took an opportunity to rescue a wounded girl.”

“A wounded girl?” repeated Fanfaro.

“Yes, a young girl who had been shot in the breast. She was brought by the vicomte to his house.”

“I can hardly believe it,” muttered Fanfaro.

“Madame Caraman and Coucou are in the corridor; they will confirm my statement.”

“Bring them in.”

The next minute the Zouave and Caraman were in the room.

“The fault is mine! Ah, I will never forgive myself,” cried Mamma Caraman, wringing her hands; and then she went on and told how Spero and Gontram had brought the wounded girl into the house, the care that had been taken of her, and how, at the suggestion of the vicomte, she had lain down on the sofa to rest for an hour.

“When I awoke,” she continued, “it was broad daylight. On going over to the bed where the young girl lay, I found, to my surprise, that it was empty. I went to the vicomte’s room and told him the girl had disappeared. The vicomte, without saying a word, hurried out of the house in a state of great excitement. Twenty-four hours have passed since then, and he has not been back since, and — ”

"What bothers me most," interrupted Coucou, "is the fact that the vicomte took his pistols along."

Fanfaro became pensive.

"Have you any idea how the young girl was wounded?" he asked after a pause, turning to Madame Caraman.

"No, but Monsieur Sabran knows."

"The painter? I shall go to him directly."

"We have been to his house already, but he has not been home since this morning."

"That is bad," murmured Fanfaro. "Do you know the lady's name?"

"No, but I found this note in her pocket. If it is addressed to the young girl, then her name is Jane," said Mamma Caraman, handing Fanfaro an elegant little note.

"Dear Mademoiselle Jane," Fanfaro read, and, penetrated by a recollection, he repeated aloud:

"Jane — Mademoiselle Jane — if it is — but no — it can't be possible — "

A loud cry from the invalid's couch made him pause. Anselmo had gotten up, and, gazing at Fanfaro, stammeringly repeated:

"Jane — my Jane."

"Do you know the young lady?" cried Fanfaro.

"Certainly. Then it wasn't she whom I rescued from the river?"

"No; but for God's sake calm yourself," said Fanfaro, as he saw Anselmo make a motion to spring out of bed.

"I could have imagined that the return of that scoundrel, Benedetto, would bring me misfortune!" cried Anselmo, with flaming eyes.

"Benedetto — who speaks of Benedetto?" asked a hoarse voice.

All turned in the direction from whence the words came. At the door stood the crazy woman. When Anselmo caught sight of her, he uttered a terrible cry.

"Merciful God, where does she come from?" he groaned in terror. "Has the grave given up its dead?"

The crazy woman drew near to him, and grazed his forehead with her bony hand. She laughed aloud, and in a heart-rending voice exclaimed:

"The galley-slave — he — Toulon — the Bagnio — oh! 'tis he!"

Anselmo trembled, and could not turn his eyes away from the old lady, who now wildly called:

“Benedetto! Who mentioned his name? I want to know it!”

“What can this mean?” whispered Fanfaro, shuddering.

“I will acknowledge everything,” stammered Anselmo, and hanging his head down he told how he had been a galley-slave at Toulon.

“Who wounded you?” he then asked, turning to the crazy woman.

“My son. He was called Benedetto! Ha! ha! ha! Who could have given him that name? I do not know, for I thought the child was dead, and his father buried him alive in the garden. Benedetto — Benedetto,” she suddenly cried, “come and kill me. I cannot live with this bleeding wound in my heart!”

Fanfaro hurried out of the room in search of his wife, and Irene’s entreaties had the effect of causing the invalid to follow her. They had already reached the threshhold when the old lady paused, and, turning to Fanfaro, hastily said:

“He has forgiven me long ago, and will not punish me any more. God sent him to the earth to reward and punish, and he has punished them all — all with their own sins. Do you know him? It is the Count of Monte-Cristo!”

She left the room and those who had remained behind looked confusedly at one another.

“I do not understand everything,” said Anselmo, faintly; “but what I know I shall confess. Benedetto is a scoundrel and a murderer, and it was he who stabbed his own mother, this poor crazy woman. He is at present in Paris, where he came expressly to revenge himself upon the Count of Monte-Cristo.”

“Do you know it positively?” asked Fanfaro uneasily.

Anselmo then related all he knew, and only kept silent with regard to the fact of his being Jane’s father.

Fanfaro listened attentively to his words, and then said:

“I shall inform the Count of Monte-Cristo of this. In three days he will be here. You, Anselmo,” he added, turning to the ex-convict, “are too weak and sick to take part in our work, but we shall keep you informed if anything important turns up, and — ”

“For Heaven’s sake,” interrupted Anselmo, “do not leave me behind. Let us go at once, every minute is precious! O God, if she lives no more!”

“Let us hope for the best,” said Fanfaro, earnestly; “forward then with God for Monte-Cristo and his son!”

“And for my Jane,” muttered Anselmo to himself. “God in heaven take my life, but save hers!”

CHAPTER XL

A CONFESSION

Gontram was in love; night and day he only thought of Carmen.

“Either she or no one,” he said to himself.

One morning, as he was returning home from a visit, the janitor addressed him.

“Monsieur Sabran,” he said, “I have something to tell you.”

“Well, what is it?” asked Gontram, expectantly.

“H’m, Monsieur Sabran, it is about a lady,” murmured the man.

“A lady? Which lady?”

“I do not know her, and my discretion did not permit me to ask her.”

Gontram, in spite of his impatience, laughed. He knew the janitor to be the most inquisitive person in the world, and judged his discretion accordingly.

“Monsieur Alain, won’t you tell me what the lady wanted of me?” asked the painter.

“The lady was elegantly dressed, and asked me whether you were at home. When I told her you were not, she took a letter from her pocket and told me to give it to you at once.”

“Where is the letter?”

“Here, Monsieur Sabran,” said the janitor, taking a perfumed note from his pocket and handing it to the painter.

The latter hastily tore it from his hand and went back to his residence. In his study he threw his gloves and hat on the table, and looked at the note from all sides. It was signed “Carmen,” and ran as follows:

“Monsieur Gontram — Or may I say, my dear friend — I would like to speak to you about a matter of some importance, and beg you to visit me this evening. I expect you at seven o’clock. Ring the garden bell. Be punctual. It concerns the fate of those you love.

“Carmen.”

What did Carmen mean by the expression, “The fate of those you love?” What did she know of his connections? Why should he have to go to the back door? How came it that Carmen asked him to meet her in this peculiar manner?

Punctually at seven o’clock the painter was at the garden gate, and with a trembling hand Gontram pulled the bell-rope and was immediately let in by a maid.

“The lady is waiting,” she said.

The maid opened the door of a charming boudoir and allowed Gontram to enter. With his hat in his hand the painter stood still in the centre of the room. The door was now opened, and Carmen, simply attired in black silk, entered. She was pale, but extremely handsome, and Gontram looked admiringly at her.

“Thank you,” she said, offering her hand to the painter. “I hardly dared to hope you would come.”

“You sent for me, and I have come,” replied Gontram.

“Please sit down and listen to me.”

Gontram took a seat next to Carmen.

“Monsieur Gontram, do you love me?” she suddenly asked.

Gontram trembled.

“Mademoiselle Carmen,” he earnestly said, “I will answer your question candidly. Yes, I love you, love you warmly and tenderly, and if I have hesitated to tell you so, it was because I did not think myself worthy of you. I — ”

“Oh, keep still — keep still!”

“But, Mademoiselle Carmen,” said Gontram, “you know you can rely on me!”

For a time they were both silent.

“Listen to me,” she finally said; “I hope you will not misunderstand me. Monsieur Gontram, I know that you are a brave, honest man. When you kissed me on the little balcony three days ago, I felt that you regarded it as a — silent engagement?”

“Yes!” cried Gontram.

“And yet,” said Carmen, slowly, “you postponed asking Monsieur de Larsagny for my hand.”

“I did not dare — ”

“Thank God that you did not do it,” cried Carmen, breathing more freely. “No, Gontram, I can never — never be your wife!”

Gontram sprang up.

"Impossible, Carmen!" he cried, passionately. "Tell me that you are joking!"

"No, Gontram, I am not joking," said Carmen, earnestly. "I can never become your wife. Only an honest girl has the right to put her hand in yours."

"Explain yourself more clearly," said Gontram, deadly pale.

"Gontram, I love you, love you tenderly, and if ever there was a pure love, it is mine for you. Before I made your acquaintance I went carelessly through life. Good and bad were unknown meanings to me, and I did not know what blushing was."

Carmen sank exhausted in a chair and burst into tears.

"Carmen, why do you cry?"

"Gontram, these tears are for me — for my lost youth — my tainted soul," whispered Carmen. "Oh, Gontram, I am not what I appear to be. I am not the daughter but the friend of Monsieur de Larsagny!"

Gontram uttered a wild cry, and, beating his face with his hands, he gasped for air; the shot had struck him to the heart.

"Yes, it is the truth," continued Carmen; "I am the friend of an old man. Ah, Gontram, how have I struggled with myself before I found courage enough to inform you of this."

Carmen had fallen to the floor. Clutching Gontram's knee she wept bitterly.

Gontram felt deep pity for her. He placed his hand on her hair, and gently said:

"Carmen, the confession I have just heard has shocked me very much; but, at the same time, it has also pleased me. That you did not wish to hear me, before you told me your story, raises you in my estimation, and let him who is without sin cast the first stone!"

"You do not curse me? Do not cast me off?" asked Carmen, in surprise.

"Carmen, God knows your confession tore my heart; but, the more painful the blow was, the more I comprehended the great extent of my love for you."

Carmen's tears still poured down. Gontram bent over her and tenderly raised her up.

"Carmen," he earnestly said, "tell me, what can I do for you?"

Carmen raised her eyes, which were still full of tears, and tenderly whispered to the young man:

"How good you are! Do you love the Vicomte of Monte-Cristo?" she suddenly asked.

"I love and esteem him. But what makes you speak of the vicomte?"

"Because danger threatens him, and I want you to warn him."

"What is the nature of the danger?" asked Gontram.

"Powerful enemies are united against him, and if we are not more prudent they will crush both him and us."

"Enemies! Who could be an enemy of Spero?"

"One of the enemies is Monsieur de Larsagny!"

"And the other?"

"Have you noticed the Count of Vellini's secretary?"

"Signor Fagiano? Yes, I know him."

"Fagiano is not his real name."

"Do you know it?"

"Not yet, but I hope to very soon. Signor Fagiano and Monsieur Larsagny have met before. When the Vicomte of Monte-Cristo was announced at your *soiree* the other evening, Monsieur de Larsagny became pale as death, his eyes stared at the young man as if he had been a spectre, and, under pretence of seeking a cooler spot, he hurriedly left the room."

"Yes, I remember," said Gontram.

"As you know, shortly afterward we went out on the balcony and heard two voices quarrelling. One of the voices said: 'Monsieur de Larsagny, take care that you do not know my name too soon.' The next day I asked Monsieur de Larsagny about it, but he gave me evasive replies. Just then the visit of Signor Fagiano was announced and our conversation ended. That day I learned nothing; but two days later, when Signor Fagiano came again, I hid behind the drapery and listened. Don't think bad of me that I did such a thing, but there was no other choice. As soon as the two exchanged their first words, I saw at once they were partners in crime. I heard the Italian say:

"'I have taken the preliminary steps, and guarantee the success of the plan. Revenge is assured for us, but I must have some more money.'

"'Here is what I promised you,' replied Larsagny.

"I heard the crumpling of bank-notes. For a while all was still, and then Monsieur de Larsagny said:

"'What do you intend to do now?'

"'Oh, I have already struck the young fool a blow,' replied the Italian. 'She is in my power, and it will be easy for me to entrap him.'

"'But be careful, the slightest haste might ruin us.'

"'The Vicomte of Monte-Cristo shall suffer; he shall crawl and bend in tortures I shall prepare for him, and my plans are so made that the law cannot reach us.'

"'Then I am satisfied. Ah, if he only suffers for one hour the tortures his father made me undergo,' hissed Larsagny.

"'You shall be satisfied. I have also a debt to settle with him.'

"The conversation was now carried on in such a low tone that I could not understand what was being said. I hurried to my room and made up my mind to draw you into my confidence."

"I thank you, Carmen," cried Gontram; "Spero is a friend, a brother, and I would gladly offer up my life to save his."

"Of whom could Fagiano have spoken when he said: 'She is in my power?'" asked Carmen.

"I hardly know. God help the scoundrels if they touch a hair of his head!" Gontram had risen. He put his arm about the young girl's waist and gently drew her toward him.

"Carmen," he whispered, tenderly, "your confession was a bitter pill for me, but my love for you is the same as ever. Tell me once more that you love me, too!"

"Oh, Gontram, I do not deserve so much kindness," sobbed Carmen.

"Now good-by," said Gontram. "You shall soon hear from me."

A last kiss and they separated.

CHAPTER XLI

ON THE TRAIL

Half dreaming, Gontram strode through the streets. It was ten o’clock when the painter reached the Monte-Cristo palace. To his surprise all was dark, and hesitatingly Gontram pulled the bell.

The footman opened it. When asked if the vicomte was at home, he said he had gone out.

“Gone out? Will he soon return?” asked Gontram.

“We do not know.”

“H’m! Can I speak to Madame Caraman?”

“She is also out.”

“And the Zouave Coucou?”

“He has gone out, too; and none of them has yet returned.”

Just then a carriage rolled up, and Madame Caraman and Coucou got out, followed by Fanfaro and Anselmo.

“Ah, here is Monsieur Gontram,” cried Madame Caraman, joyfully, as she caught sight of the painter.

“That is what I call luck,” said Fanfaro. “Monsieur Gontram, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Fanfaro. I am an honest man, and devoted to the Count of Monte-Cristo and his son. I fear all is not right with our friends.”

“Why not? What has happened?” asked Gontram.

“You shall soon find out, but first let us go inside.”

With these words Fanfaro preceded the others and entered the vestibule. The footman ran to him and anxiously cried:

“Monsieur Fanfaro, the vicomte is not at home.”

“I know it.”

Turning to Coucou, he said:

“Can you remember when the vicomte left the house?”

“Last night.”

“About what time?”

“I do not know, I was asleep.”

"And I too," sobbed Madame Caraman.

"Coucou, please tell the footman to come here."

The footman came immediately.

"When did Vicomte Spero leave the house?" asked Fanfaro, turning to the man.

"I — I — do not know," stammered the footman.

"You do not know when the vicomte went out?"

"I — that is — well, the vicomte did leave the house, but he returned within an hour."

"Then he must be in the house?" they all repeated.

"I do not know. He has not left it."

"How do you know?" asked Coucou. "The vicomte might have gone out by way of the garden."

"That is not possible," declared the footman. "I locked the gate myself yesterday while the vicomte was in his study."

"We must search every nook and corner," said Gontram.

"We shall do so," said Fanfaro. "Anselmo can remain under Madame Caraman's care, while Coucou can look in the garden and yard, and we in the house."

Coucou disappeared, but soon returned, accompanied by Bobichel.

"I am glad you've come, Bobichel," exclaimed Fanfaro. "We have some fine detective work to do here, and that was always your hobby."

"What is it?" asked Bobichel.

Fanfaro told him the whole story in a few words.

In the meantime Gontram had learned from Mamma Caraman that Jane Zild had disappeared, and the thought flashed through his mind like lightning that Signor Fagiano's remark, which Carmen had overheard, related to her. He told Fanfaro about it, and they both resolved to examine Jane's room.

"There must be a third exit," said Fanfaro; "both the vicomte and Jane have disappeared without the footman's knowing anything about it. We can begin our work now, and may God grant that we find some trail."

Thereupon Fanfaro, Gontram, and Bobichel went to the room Jane had occupied. Gontram walked in advance, and soon all three stood in the beautifully furnished apartment. Bobichel crawled into every corner, and raised the heavy carpet which covered the floor, to see if there were any secret stairs. Then he got on top of Fanfaro's shoulders and knocked at the ceiling. But all was in vain. Nothing could be discovered.

Suddenly Fanfaro's eye rested on a small white spot in the blue, decorated wall. Drawing near to the spot, he saw that a small piece of white silk had been pressed in an almost imperceptible crack.

"Bobichel, your knife," cried Fanfaro, breathlessly.

"Master," said Bobichel, modestly, "there is a secret door there, and they generally have a spring attached to them."

"You are right," replied Fanfaro, "but how discover the spring?"

"I think," remarked Gontram, "that the spring is under one of the small blue buttons with which the wall is decorated. Let us search."

All three began to finger the numerous buttons, and finally Bobichel uttered a cry of triumph. He had turned a button aside and a little iron door noiselessly swung itself on its hinges.

"There is the secret way in which Jane and Spero have disappeared," cried Gontram; "Jane has, no doubt, been abducted. The piece of white satin in the crack must have belonged to the bed-cover, for Madame Caraman told me the cover had disappeared at the same time as the girl. Spero knew of this exit and probably had reasons for leaving the house secretly. Let us go the same way, and perhaps we may find out where the vicomte is."

"So be it," cried Fanfaro, "and then, in Heaven's name, forward!"

Gontram had in the meanwhile sent a note with Coucou to Carmen.

Each one of the three carried a three-armed bronze lamp, and the light they gave forth illuminated the marble steps of a staircase.

Gontram was the first to reach the top stair. At the same moment a hollow noise was heard, and when the comrades turned around to find out the cause of it, they saw that the iron door had closed behind them. They tried in vain to open it again. It did not budge.

"We cannot return," said Fanfaro finally, "therefore forward with God's help."

CHAPTER XLII

THE TRAP

Madame Caraman and Coucou had not exaggerated when they said that the vicomte’s condition after Jane’s disappearance was terrible. He rushed about madly, and when he could not find the young girl a deep despair took hold of him.

The young man’s love for Jane was very great, and when he saw the young girl lying wounded, almost dying, in his arms the world faded from the sight of his intoxicated eyes. Either he must rescue her or go under himself. There was no third road for him.

Madame Caraman’s information that Jane had disappeared paralyzed him. She must be sought for and found at any price, even though the world be torn in pieces for it.

But the world did not tear, not an atom moved on his account; and deep night settled about Spero. One night as the vicomte was sitting in the room Jane had occupied, buried in thought, he saw the drapery move slowly and a part of the wall glide slowly back.

In a moment he had sprung up and gone to the spot. A dark opening yawned before him, and as he knew not what fear was, he walked into the corridor which opened before him. Without hesitating, he walked down the marble staircase; the door closed behind him, and he found himself on strange ground.

After Spero had gone down twenty steps he found himself on level ground. He went further and further, and finally stood at the foot of a staircase which led toward the left. Without taking time to consider he ascended it and soon stood before a door — he put his hand on the knob and it opened.

A room furnished in dark red silk lay before the vicomte.

On a black marble table Spero espied an open letter.

The Count of Monte-Cristo had always seen to it that his house was connected in a mysterious way with other buildings. It was only in this way that he was enabled to play the part of a *deus ex machina* — as Edmond Dantes, Count of Monte-Cristo and Lord Wilmore.

Spero had never heard of this secret passage. Like a man in a dream he strode toward the table, and seizing the note read the following:

“If the son of the Count of Monte-Cristo is not a coward, and wishes to find her whom he has lost, let him go at once to Courberode and hunt up a man named Malvernet, who lives at the so-called Path of Thorns. Here he will find out what he wants to know, and perhaps a little more.”

There was no signature to the letter, and Spero cared very little for that. Suddenly his glance happened to fall on a large mirror and he gave a cry of alarm.

Was the pale man with the deep blue rings about his eyes the twenty-one-year-old son of the great count?

“One would think that the few days I have been away from my father had aged me many years,” he bitterly muttered. “But no,” he added, flaming up; “the enemies of the great count shall not say that his son is not a worthy scion! I will crush them if they touch a hair of Jane’s head. My father did not name me Spero for nothing. So long as I breathe I can hope. I will not despair, I will conquer!”

He pulled out his two pistols and examined them, and with a soft, tender “Father, help me,” he left the secret chamber.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE PATH OF THORNS

Twenty years ago the village of Courberode looked different from what it does to-day. It consisted of a few miserable fishermen’s cabins. One hundred feet from the beach a path filled with thorns led far into the country. The thorns in the course of time had become impenetrable walls, and this gave rise to the name, “The Path of Thorns.”

Just behind it stood an old tumble-down house. The basement of this house consisted of a smoky room furnished with one table, two chairs and a flickering oil lamp. A man was walking up and down the low apartment.

“I wonder whether he will come,” he muttered to himself.

At this moment a slight noise was heard outside. A knock came at the door.

“Who’s there?” asked the man roughly.

“Does a man named Malvernet live here?” came back in reply.

“Yes. Come right in.”

Spero entered, his clothes dripping wet, and blue-black hair hanging over his forehead.

“My name is Malvernet,” said the other sharply; “what do you wish?”

“Do you know me?” he asked in a firm tone.

“No, I was told to come here and await a man. I was to do as he said and ask no questions. So I came and await your orders.”

“Then listen to me. My father is the Count of Monte-Cristo. I am rich, very rich, and I can reward every service rendered me in a princely manner.”

A mocking laugh came from the man’s lips.

“What do you mean by offering me money?” he gruffly asked. “I have not asked you for payment yet, and perhaps it will not be in cash. Tell me now what you want of me.”

“Robbers entered my house last night and robbed me of the dearest jewel I possess — a young girl whom I love.”

“What’s her name?”

“Jane! You promised to obey my orders, and I only ask you to lead me to Jane.”

“And if I refuse?”

“Then I will kill you.”

“Ha! ha! ha!” laughed the man, “that is well said.”

“Do you refuse to obey me?”

“I did not say that. You need me, while I can get along without you. The game is therefore unequal.”

“You are right, and I beg you to forgive me.”

“Well then, vicomte, what do you command?”

“Then you really wish to help me?”

“Follow me,” said Benedetto (for he was the man), as he opened a door.

“Anywhere,” cried Spero, “if I can only find Jane again.”

“I will go on in advance, and follow me closely, for the night is pitch dark and we might lose each other.”

Spero nodded, and they both walked out into the pouring rain. Oh, why was the Count of Monte-Cristo far away? Why had he spared the wretch, when the sea cast him up? Why had he prevented Bertuccio from crushing the head of the poisonous reptile?

For a time the criminal and his company walked on in silence.

Suddenly it appeared to Spero as if the end of the way had been reached, and, pausing, he asked:

“Where are we?”

“On the banks of the Seine; in a few minutes we will be at the place.”

“My poor Jane,” murmured Spero, “how terrible it is to look for you in this deserted quarter.”

“Are you afraid?” asked Benedetto mockingly.

Spero did not answer the impudent question.

“Go on,” he coldly said.

Benedetto turned into a narrow path. Suddenly he stopped short and said:

“Here we are!”

Spero looked about him! In front of him rose a tall, gloomy building, and it appeared to him as if rough singing were going on within.

“Is this really the house?” asked the vicomte, unconsciously shuddering.

“Yes.”

“It looks like a low den, and who guarantees me that I am not being led into a trap?”

“Vicomte of Monte-Cristo,” replied Benedetto, “if I desired to murder you I could have done so long ago.”

“You are right.”

Just then coarse laughter and the noise of a falling body came from the inside of the house.

“Let us go into the house,” cried Spero excitedly. “God knows what may be going on there.”

Benedetto shoved his arm under the vicomte’s and opening the door said:

“You will find more here than will please you.”

They both entered a dark corridor now, the door fell back in the lock and Spero asked:

“Where are we?”

“On the spot,” mockingly said Benedetto.

At the same time Spero felt the arm of his companion slip from under his, and he was alone. The room in which he was had neither windows nor doors, and gritting his teeth the young man said:

“The wretch has ensnared me in a trap.”

Something extraordinary happened now. The wall before him opened, and an open space came to view. The room lighted up, and Spero saw — Jane, but, merciful God, in what company!

She formed the centre of a wild orgy; glasses rang, coarse songs and oaths were heard from the lips of a crowd of shameless men and women who surrounded Jane, and uttering a loud cry Spero buried his face in his hands.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE PASHA

As we have stated, Gontram had given a note to Coucou to deliver to Carmen. When the Jackal reached the palace in the Rue Rivoli he stopped in amazement. The doors were wide open and the whole front of the house swam in light.

The Zouave entered a restaurant opposite, ordered a bottle of wine, and began a conversation with the waiter.

"What is going on to-day in the Larsagny palace?" he asked.

"Oh, the banker is giving a great ball," said the waiter.

"He is very rich, I suppose."

"Enormously so."

At this moment a soldier entered the restaurant and, approaching the waiter, asked:

"Can you not tell me, good friend, where Monsieur de Larsagny lives?"

"About a hundred feet away in that brilliantly illuminated house — you cannot miss it."

"Thanks," said the soldier. As he was about to turn away, a well-known voice cried to him:

"Well, Galoret, what do the dear Bedouins do now?"

"Hello, Coucou — where do you hail from?" cried the soldier, joyously.

"Rather tell me where you come from?"

"Ah, I have been only three days in Paris."

"What business have you in the Larsagny palace?" he asked.

"Oh, I must deliver a letter."

"So must I; from whom, if I may ask?"

"Oh, it is no secret. I have a Bedouin prince for a friend who accompanied me to Paris. About two hours ago my pasha fell down the stairs of his hotel and broke his right leg. The doctor says that it will take six weeks for the leg to be cured. As he was invited to a ball at the Larsagny palace to-night — "

"Does he know the banker?" interrupted Coucou.

“No — Mohammed Ben Omar is in Paris for the first time. As the pasha is unable to attend the ball, I have to bring his letter of excuse, and now I must really go on my way.”

Coucou pretended not to hear these last words. He gazed at a group of men who sat at a side table, and whispered to Galoret:

“Look at those fools. How they stare at you. One would think they had never seen a Chasseur d’Afrique.”

“Impertinent scoundrels,” growled Galoret, and, turning to the gentlemen, he cried in an angry tone of voice:

“You boobies, have you looked at my uniform long enough?”

The gentlemen answered in not very polite tones. Galoret couldn’t stand this. One word led to another, and finally chairs were taken up to settle the discussion.

Policemen now interfered. Galoret and two others with bloody heads were locked up, and then only did the chasseur remember his errand.

Coucou was waiting for this moment. He introduced himself to the policemen and offered to carry the letter himself. The policemen offered no opposition, Galoret thanked him, and Coucou satisfied his conscience with the maxim of Loyola, that “the end justifies the means.”

“Now I can enter the Larsagny palace,” he said to himself; “as the pasha they will admit me.”

Coucou jumped into a carriage and told the coachman to drive to the Rue de Pelletier.

A quarter of an hour later a Bedouin clad all in white, whose brown complexion and coal-black eyes betrayed his Oriental origin, left the store of an elegant place in the Rue de Pelletier and, stepping into the coach which stood at the door, he cried to the coachman:

“Rue de Rivoli, Palais Larsagny!”

The horses started off, the carriage rolled along, and the Bedouin, in whose turban a ruby glittered, muttered to himself:

“One can get through the world with cheek!”

CHAPTER XLV

HOW CARMEN KEEPS HER WORD

If Carmen had not hoped to serve Gontram and his friends she would have left the Larsagny palace at once, but under existing circumstances prudence prompted her to stay and not to repulse the banker entirely; for she suspected that Larsagny held in his hand the threads of the mystery which threatened the Vicomte of Monte-Cristo. Carmen did not have much time to think, for hardly an hour after Gontram had gone, the banker appeared in the boudoir, and looking with astonishment at her, he said:

“What does this mean, Carmen? Our guests will soon be here, and you are not yet dressed.”

“Our guests?” repeated Carmen, in amazement.

“Yes. Have you forgotten that the ball for which you yourself sent out invitations ten days ago, takes place to-night?”

“Really, I had forgotten all about it,” stammered Carmen. “It is all the same, though; I have a headache and shall remain in my room.”

“But, Carmen, what shall we do if you do not appear?”

“That is not my affair,” replied Carmen, laconically.

The banker ran his hands through his hair in despair.

“Carmen, be reasonable,” he implored, as he tried to take her hand.

“Don’t touch me,” said Carmen.

Larsagny bit his lips.

“What have I done to you?” he groaned. “Think of the shame if the ladies appear and find out that my daughter has retired to her room.”

Carmen became pensive. Perhaps it might be better if she took part in the ball; she might hear something of interest to Gontram.

“Well, if you desire it, I will appear, but under one condition,” she said, coldly.

“Name it.”

“I demand that you shall not present me to any one as your daughter.”

“But what shall I say?”

“Anything else. And now go, I must make my toilet.”

“Carmen, I have one more favor to ask of you.”

“Well?”

“I must leave the house about twelve o’clock for one or more hours — ”

“He lies,” thought Carmen to herself.

“To do this,” continued Larsagny, “I must pretend some sudden sickness. You will have me brought to my room, and then — ”

“Since when are the bankers and the money-brokers at night in their offices?” asked Carmen.

“But — ”

“Do you mean to tell me that you have business on the Bourse at midnight?”

“Carmen, I swear to you that — ”

“If you imagine that you can make me your accomplice in some crime that you are planning, you are mistaken. I will be the first one to deliver you over to the law.”

Larsagny trembled, but he tried to smile, and with a hasty *au revoir* he went away.

Carmen hastily dressed herself; she didn’t pay much attention to her toilet, and went down to the parlors, where a number of guests were already assembled.

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The greatest names of the empire had been announced by the lackeys.

Suddenly a murmur ran through the assembly. “Mohammed Ben Omar,” the lackey had called, and all crowded about the reception-room to see the pasha.

With genuine Oriental grandeur the pasha slowly walked toward the host. Larsagny bowed deeply; the Bedouin answered the greeting by placing his right hand over his heart. That ended the conversation for the present, for Mohammed made a sign that he did not understand a word of French. Only when he saw a remarkably handsome woman he would say:

“Pretty woman.”

Carmen had been distinguished in this way, and Larsagny, who felt flattered by it, tried to make the pasha comprehend that she was his daughter.

“Ah, pretty, pretty,” repeated the Mussulman, and the banker, his face lighted up with joy, said:

"May I introduce her?"

Mohammed nodded.

Carmen bowed politely when the introduction was made, and said nothing. Omar offered her his arm, and murmured as he pointed to some pictures.

"Allah il Allah. I come from the painter Gontram. Mohammed resoul il Allah."

"The pasha evidently wishes you to show him the picture-gallery," said Larsagny.

"Then come," said the young girl to the Oriental.

As soon as Omar was alone with his companion, he whispered:

"Pardon me, I have to speak to you."

"Who are you?" asked Carmen.

"A friend, a former Zouave in the service of the Count of Monte-Cristo."

"Well, what have you?"

"A note from the painter Gontram."

"Give it to me — quickly."

Coucou drew the letter from the folds of his bernouse and gave it to the young girl. It read as follows:

"Carmen, my friends are in danger; Jane Zild has been abducted and Spero has disappeared. If every sign does not deceive, the banker must know something about it. Perhaps you may be able to find out the secret.

"In great haste,

"G. S."

Carmen breathed more freely after she had read the lines.

"Well?" said the Zouave, expectantly.

"Go back to Monsieur Sabran and tell him I will move heaven and earth to find out the secret. Gontram is still in the Monte-Cristo palace, is he not?"

"Yes."

"If I have occasion to go there will I be admitted?"

"Yes."

At this moment a servant rushed into the parlor and exclaimed:

"Mademoiselle, Monsieur de Larsagny has suddenly become ill."

"I shall come soon," said Carmen, coldly, and nodding to Coucou, she went away.

In the banker’s room great confusion reigned. The master of the house lay motionless, with closed eyes, on a divan. A physician who happened to be present, suggested opening a vein, and Carmen stood at the bedside, not knowing what to do.

At length she consented, and while the operation was being performed, Carmen searched all of Monsieur de Larsagny’s pockets. She soon discovered a letter, and hurried with it to her room. The note read as follows:

“Our revenge is assured. Fanfaro, Gontram, and a former clown determined to discover the vic.’s whereabout, and thanks to their curiosity they have fallen into a trap in the M. C. palace. The little one is in the house in Courb., and the son of the man against whom we have sworn eternal hate will come too late.

“C.”

Carmen at once understood the meaning of these lines. She knew the house in Courbevoie spoken about, and throwing a long black cloak over her shoulders she left the palace by the rear door.

CHAPTER XLVI

IN COURBEVOIE

We left Spero at the moment when the walls of the room he was in opened and presented the horrible spectacle which met his eyes. In what way had the poor child got in such company? Benedetto, of course, had done this dastardly act. He had drugged her after he had abducted her from Monte-Cristo’s house, and the poor girl was unable to give utterance to a cry. She saw everything that went on about her, but was unable to say a word. And Spero had to gaze at these terrible scenes; he could not keep his eyes away. He tried in vain to find a means of entering the hall. The whole scene had been arranged by Benedetto and Larsagny in a satanic spirit. Larsagny owned the house in Courbevoie, and had often presided at its bacchanalian revels. Carmen had not called him a master of immorality for nothing. While Spero was beating the iron railing in despair, the light suddenly went out and all was still. The vicomte strained his eyes to see what was going on in the hall, and not seeing anything, waited in the agony of fear for what was coming.

In about ten minutes it became light again in the hall, and now the young man saw Jane again, but this time she was alone.

Spero breathed more freely, and, beside himself, he called:

“Jane! Jane! come to me!”

At the rear of the hall a door opened, and Spero recognized in a man who crossed the threshold — Monsieur de Larsagny.

Larsagny drew near to Jane, and, sinking upon his knees, he pressed his lips to the young girl’s hand. Spero breathlessly followed Larsagny’s movements, and when he saw that Jane made no resistance, he became violent. With all his strength, he threw himself against the iron railing; it gave way, and with a cry Spero rushed upon Monsieur de Larsagny. In a second the banker lay on the floor. Throwing his arms about Jane, Spero cried:

“Jane, my darling, do you not know me? I am — Monte-Cristo.”

“Monte-Cristo!” cried Larsagny, in terror, and with a gasp he fell back dead — a stroke of apoplexy had put an end to his life.

Spero did not know that he was the living picture of his father. Edmond Dantes had just looked like that when he was arrested at Marseilles through the intrigues of Danglars, Fernand and Villefort, and Danglars-Larsagny had thought it was Monte-Cristo who stood before him.

Jane still lay motionless in Spero’s arms. The vicomte called despairingly for help, but none came.

Suddenly it occurred to him that Jane’s condition was due to some narcotic, and with a cry of joy he pulled a small crystal vial from his breast pocket. It contained a liquid the Abbé Faria had taught Edmond Dantes how to make. Putting the vial to Jane’s lips, he poured a few drops down her throat.

The effect was instantaneous. Jane uttered a deep sigh, and looked at the young man with returning consciousness.

“Spero!” she cried. “You here in this terrible place? Oh, go — go away; you must not stay here.”

“Jane, I have come to take you with me.”

“No! — oh, no! I am accursed! I must not accompany you!” sobbed the young girl.

“What nonsense, child. You have been abducted from my house and brought here against your will. Come with me; I will bring you away, or else die with you!”

“Not for any price,” groaned Jane. “Go — leave this place, and let me die! I cannot live any longer — the shame kills me.”

“Jane, do not speak so. Jane, my Jane, do you really refuse to accompany me?”

“God forgive me if I do wrong; I cannot leave you,” she murmured, as she threw herself into the young man’s arms.

But at this moment the coarse songs sounded again, and a man entered the hall. It was Benedetto!

CHAPTER XLVII

THE DEVOTED

Coucou had not taken time to change his clothes when he presented himself to Madame Caraman on his return home, and the worthy woman uttered a cry of astonishment.

“What is the meaning of this?” she asked. “I think that we have more serious things to think of than masquerading.”

“Come, do not speak before you know everything,” replied the Zouave; and in a few words he told her the story of his disguise.

“Where can Monsieur Sabran be?” asked Madame Caraman.

“What!” exclaimed Coucou, “where is he then?”

“I haven’t seen him, nor Fanfaro, nor Bobichel since.”

“Impossible! Are they still in Jane’s room?”

“Perhaps.”

“I cannot understand it, and — ”

A hollow noise caused Coucou to keep silent. He and Madame Caraman looked at each other in terror.

“What can that be?” asked Madame Caraman.

Before Coucou could answer the question, the noise was repeated.

“The noise comes from the right side,” said Coucou, who had been listening; “let us hurry to Gontram and Fanfaro, and call their attention to it.”

Mamma Caraman nodded, and they both went to Jane’s room.

It was empty!

“This is getting worse and worse,” cried Coucou, anxiously. “Do you know what I think? This room has a secret exit, and through it Jane, the vicomte, and Gontram and his comrades have disappeared.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Break down the house if necessary,” said Coucou, beginning to trample upon the floor.

“But you are ruining the carpet!” cried Mamma Caraman.

The sound of the door-bell at this minute prevented Coucou from replying. In front of the door stood Carmen.

“Thank Heaven you have come, mademoiselle.”

“You haven’t found Gontram yet?”

“No.”

“Monsieur Gontram and his comrades are in subterranean chambers in this house.”

“Knock at the walls, Coucou,” said Madame Caraman, “and then we can wait for an answer.”

Coucou knocked three times with a hammer against the wall. At the end of the second knock came back in answer twenty-five.

“What does that mean?” asked Coucou, in affright.

“I know,” cried Carmen; “twenty-five knocks signify the letters of the alphabet!”

“Then we must answer to show that we understand the language,” said Madame Caraman. “Coucou — quick — twenty-five knocks.”

The Zouave did as he was told, and the answer came back in one knock which meant “yes.”

Nine further knocks followed.

“I,” said Carmen.

Nineteen knocks.

“S,” whispered Carmen.

Seven knocks.

“G.”

Ten knocks.

“J.”

Two knocks.

“B.”

Twenty knocks.

“T.”

Carmen now read the meaning of this:

“There is an iron door under the wall decoration.”

Coucou soon found the secret door.

At the end of five minutes Fanfaro, Bobichel and Gontram were again with their friends. In a few words Carmen related what had brought her there, and showed the letter she had taken from Larsagny.

“In Courbevoie!” cried Gontram. “How shall we find Spero there?”

"I know the house," said Carmen; "it belongs to the banker, and I believe we shall find the vicomte there."

"May God grant it."

Ten minutes later they were all on the road to Courbevoie.

CHAPTER XLVIII

UNITED IN DEATH

When Benedetto entered the hall he was neither Malvernet, Cavalcanti or Fagiano. He was simply Benedetto.

“Whoever you are,” cried the vicomte, “I implore you to help me bring this poor child out of here.”

“Vicomte,” replied Benedetto, coldly, “I will not help you, and you’ll not bring this woman away from here.”

“I will shoot you down like a dog,” said Spero, contemptuously.

With these words he pulled out a pistol and held it toward Benedetto.

“You wish to commit murder, vicomte!”

“Do not speak of murder, wretch? You robbed me of my freedom, and this poor child, whose innocence ought to be sacred to you, you — ”

“The poor innocent child,” interrupted the ex-convict. “You told me it was brought here against its will!”

“Scoundrel, you lie!” cried Spero, angrily.

Benedetto laughed coarsely.

“Jane Zild,” he then said, drawing back a step, “tell the Vicomte of Monte-Cristo that you are worthy of him. Don’t you remember who your mother was, what your mother was, and where she died?”

“Mercy,” cried Jane, throwing herself at Benedetto’s feet. “Mercy!”

“Jane Zild, shall I tell the vicomte who your father was?”

“My father?” stammered Jane, confused.

“Yes, your father. Do you not remember a man who took care of you after your mother died? The man was formerly a galley-slave named Anselmo. Before that he wore the dress of a priest. Jane Zild is the daughter of the convict of Toulon and the woman of Lyons.”

“Miserable scoundrel,” cried Spero, “you lie! If you have weapons, let us fight. Only one of us dare leave this room alive.”

“Just my idea,” said Benedetto, as he took two swords from under his cloak. “Choose, and now *vogue ma galere*.”

“The motto is no doubt derived from your past,” said Spero.

"You shall pay for that, boy," hissed Benedetto as he placed himself in position.

A hot struggle ensued, and Benedetto was finally driven against the wall.

"Wretch!" exclaimed Spero, "your life is in my hands; beg for mercy, or I shall stab you through the heart."

"I beg for mercy? Fool, you do not know what you are speaking of! I hate you — I hate your father — take my life, or, as true as I stand here, I shall take yours!"

"Then die," replied Spero, and with a quick movement he knocked Benedetto's sword out of his hand and made a lunge at him!

But the lunge did not reach Benedetto's heart, but that of the young girl! At the same moment a shot rang through the hall, and Jane and Spero sank lifeless to the floor.

How had this horrible thing happened?

At the moment Benedetto saw Spero's sword turned toward his heart, he seized the pistol the vicomte had carelessly laid aside, and fired at his opponent. Jane saw the wretch seize the pistol. She threw herself into Spero's arms to save her lover, and received the death-blow from his hand!

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The moment Spero breathed his last, loud cries were heard throughout the house, and many voices called Spero's name.

Benedetto grew pale. How could he save himself? Only one way was left to him, and he hesitated to carry it out.

Hasty steps were now heard coming along the corridor. Tearing the window open, Benedetto swung himself on the sill. He looked into the dark waters of the Seine, and firmly muttered: "Forward! Down there is hope; here, death!"

Fanfaro, Gontram, Carmen, Bobichel and Coucou now hurried into the hall. Benedetto looked at them with flaming eye, and mockingly cried:

"You are too late! I have killed Monte-Cristo's son!"

The next minute he had disappeared, and, while the waves rushed over him, Fanfaro and Gontram rushed toward Spero's body, and Fanfaro sobbingly exclaimed:

"Too late! Too late! Oh, poor, poor father!"

CHAPTER XLIX

THE SPECTRE

Just as Benedetto had uttered the mocking words to the friends of Spero, the form of a man appeared in the doorway. He threw one horror-stricken look at the bodies, a second one at the ex-convict, swung himself also on the window-sill, and plunged in after Benedetto. It was Anselmo.

The water was ice-cold, but neither of them paid any attention to it. Benedetto only thought of saving himself, and Anselmo of his revenge. Benedetto did not know he was being pursued. Who would risk his own life to follow him? No, it was madness to imagine so. But now he heard some one swimming behind him. If he could reach the bushes of Nemilly he would be safe. He did not dare turn about — he felt frightened and his teeth chattered.

At length the long-looked-for bank was seen — a few more strokes and he would be saved. Now — now he pressed upon the sand. Dripping, trembling with cold, he swung himself upon dry land and looked back at the dark waters. He could see nothing: his pursuer had evidently given up the project.

Anselmo had really lost courage. He had the greatest difficulty to keep himself afloat. Suddenly his almost paralyzed hand grasped a plank; he clambered on it, and reached the shore with its aid. He landed about one hundred feet away from Benedetto. Now he saw the hated wretch. But was it a vision, a play of his excited fancy? It seemed to him as if Benedetto were hurrying toward the water again! Behind him moved a white shadow; it seemed to be pursuing the scoundrel, and they were both flying toward the shore.

Benedetto did not turn around. Did he fear to see the white form? Both came toward Anselmo. Benedetto looked neither to the right nor to the left. Now his foot touched the water. Then came a soft, trembling voice on the still night air:

“Benedetto — my son! Benedetto — wait for me!”

With a cry of terror, Benedetto turned around. There stood his mother whom he had murdered. She pressed her hand to the breast her son’s steel had penetrated. Now she stretched out her long, bony fingers toward him — she threw her lean arm around his neck, and he could not cry out. Slowly they both walked toward the river. They set foot on the dark space — they sank deeper and deeper, and now — now the waves rushed over them! Outraged nature was done penance to. The mother, whom Benedetto had stabbed in the breast, had drawn her son with her into a watery grave.

* * * * *

The next morning fishermen found the body of an unknown man in the bushes — it was Anselmo. He had breathed his last as the sun just began to rise — his last word was:

“Jane!”

CHAPTER L

Deep silence reigned in the Monte-Cristo palace — the silence of death. Everything was draped in mourning, and on a catafalque rested the bodies of Spero and Jane.

They were all dead — Danglars, Villefort, Mondego, Caderousse and Benedetto — but Monte-Cristo was alive to close the eyes of his dearly beloved son.

Mockery of fate! The two men who watched the corpses waited with anxiety for the moment when the Count of Monte-Cristo should enter.

Before the vision of the older man rose the atrocious scenes at Uargla. He saw Spero, a bold, brave boy, scaling the towers — he heard his firm words, “Papa, let us die” — and felt the soft, childish arms wind about his neck. This was Fanfaro.

The other watcher was Gontram. Coucou, Bobichel and Madame Caraman were paralyzed with grief. The Zouave would willingly have died a thousand deaths if he only could have saved the life of his young master.

The third day dawned, and Gontram and Fanfaro looked anxiously at each other. To-day the count must come.

Toward evening the door was suddenly opened. Slowly, with a heavy tread, a tall man approached the catafalque, and, sinking on his knees beside it, hid his pale face in the folds of the burial cloth. The count looked neither to the right nor to the left; he saw only his son. Not a sound issued from his troubled breast; but with a cold shiver Fanfaro and Gontram noticed that the count’s black hair was slowly becoming snow-white, and with profound pity the friends gazed upon the grief-stricken man, who had become old in an hour.

Monte-Cristo now bent over his son and clasped the dear corpse in his powerful arms. He went slowly and noiselessly to the door. Fanfaro and Gontram stood as if in a daze; and not until the door had closed behind the count did they recover their self-possession. They hurried after him, they tried to follow his track; but it was useless. The count had disappeared together with his son’s body.

EPILOGUE

THE ABBE DANTES

Fifty years ago a solitary man stood on a lonely rock.

The night was horrible! The storm drove the snow and rain into the face of the solitary man and whipped the black hair around his temples; but he paid no attention to this — he dug into the hard, rocky soil with pickaxe and spade.

Suddenly he uttered an ejaculation of joy. The brittle rock had revealed its secret to him. Unexpected treasures, incalculable fortunes, lay before his eager gaze.

Then the man stood erect; he glanced wildly around him toward all the four quarters of the globe, and cried aloud:

“All you, who have kept me imprisoned for fourteen long years in a subterranean vault into which neither sun nor moon could penetrate, who would have condemned my body to eternal decline, and enshrouded my mind with the night of insanity — you whose names I do not yet know, beware! I swear to be revenged — revenged! Edmond Dantes has risen from his grave, he has risen to chastise his torturers, and as sure as there is a God in heaven you shall learn to know me.”

About whom was this solitary man speaking? He did not yet know, but he was soon to discover it.

Fourteen years before, Edmond Dantes, the young sailor, was joyously returning to the harbor of Marseilles on board the Pharaon, belonging to Monsieur Morrel. His captain had died on the trip and he was promised the vacant place. As soon as he had landed he hastened to his bride, the Catalan Mercedes, to announce to her that he could now lead her to the altar.

Then he was suddenly arrested. He was accused of transmitting letters to the Emperor Napoleon, then a prisoner on the Island of Elba.

He did not deny the fact. It was his captain’s dying wish. He was ignorant of the contents of the missive, and of the one he had in his possession given him by the captive emperor to deliver to a Monsieur Noirtier in Paris.

Monsieur Noirtier’s full name was Noirtier de Villefort, and his son Monsieur de Villefort was the deputy procureur du roi to whom Edmond Dantes handed the letter to prove his innocence.

The son suppressed the letter, in order not to be compromised by the acts of his father, and had the young man torn from the arms of his betrothed and incarcerated in the subterranean dungeon of the Chateau d’If.

Here he remained fourteen long years, his only companion the Abbé Faria, who was deemed to be insane. The abbé on his deathbed intrusted to him the secret that an enormous fortune was concealed in a grotto on the island of Monte-Cristo in the Mediterranean Sea. Edmond Dantes escaped from his dungeon and discovered the buried treasure.

He then left the island to accomplish the revenge he had sworn.

He found that his father had died of starvation and that Mercedes had married another. Who was this other one?

Fernand Mondego, now the Count de Morcerf, had become the husband of the beautiful Catalan. Formerly a simple fisherman, he had risen to become a member of the French Chamber of Deputies.

The second in whose way Edmond Dantes had stood was a man named Danglars. An officer on board the Pharaon, he had hoped to obtain the position of captain. Now he had become one of the principal bankers of the capital.

The third, Caderousse, an envious tailor, had allowed himself to be made a tool of to bring to the notice of the authorities the denunciation against the young sailor which Danglars had dictated and Mondego written down.

His worst enemy was Villefort, who had now become the procureur du roi at Paris.

Was Edmond Dantes to be blamed if he, after he had discovered all this, took the law in his own hands and began to execute his vengeance?

Danglars was his first victim. He ruined him and made him suffer the pangs of hunger which Edmond’s father had suffered.

Fernand Mondego, Count de Morcerf, was the second. At first Dantes, who now called himself the Count of Monte-Cristo, wanted to kill Fernand’s son, Albert de Morcerf, but he spared the young man for Mercedes’ sake.

He looked up Mondego’s past history. The latter had risen to power through crime and treachery. He had betrayed Ali Tebelen, Pasha of Yanina, and sold the latter’s wife Vassiliki and daughter Haydee into slavery.

Haydee herself denounced De Morcerf's infamy in the Chamber of Deputies. De Morcerf, forever dishonored, and knowing the blow came from Monte-Cristo, sought to pick a quarrel with the latter. But the count, glancing him full in the face, said:

"Look at me well, Fernand, and you will understand it all. I am Edmond Dantes."

Then De Morcerf fled, and an hour afterward blew out his brains.

De Villefort's turn was next. Monte-Cristo discovered that he had buried alive a child of Madame Danglars and himself. Bertuccio the Corsican had saved the child and reared it to manhood. The boy had become the bandit Benedetto.

Monte-Cristo found him in the galleys at Toulon. He aided in his escape, and Benedetto assassinated Caderousse. Tried for this murder, Benedetto found himself confronted with his father, the procureur du roi. He boldly announced his relationship, and de Villefort fled from the courtroom only to find on reaching home that his wife had poisoned herself and her son. In that moment of agony Monte-Cristo appeared before him and told him that he was Edmond Dantes. The blow struck home. De Villefort went mad.

His work of vengeance was now accomplished. Monte-Cristo was rich and all-powerful. He married Haydee, and they had a son, Spero. Now, alas! Haydee was dead! Spero was dead!

* * * * *

It was ten years since Monte-Cristo, on that fearful night, bore off the corpse of his only son.

Again he stood alone on the rock on the island of Monte-Cristo. He had lived on this rock for ten years. He saw no one, heard no one, except when occasionally men came ashore for water. Then he concealed himself, watching them and hearing their gay laughter.

But the rumor that the island was haunted spread around, and the superstitious Italians claimed that it was inhabited by a spirit whom they called the Abbé of Monte-Cristo.

All these years Monte-Cristo had lived on herbs and roots. He had sworn never to touch money again while he lived.

One night Monte-Cristo entered the subterranean cave where the marble sarcophagus of his son was:

“Spero,” he earnestly said, “is it time?”

A long silence ensued. Then — was it a reality? — Spero’s lips appeared to move and utter the word:

“Come.”

“I thought so,” muttered the Count. “I shall come, my child, as soon as my affairs are settled.”

He took a package from his pocket, and unfolding it read it aloud:

“My Last Will and Testament

“The person who signed this paper, and who is about to die, has been more powerful than the greatest ruler on earth. He has loved and hated strongly. All is forgotten, all is dead to him except the souvenir of the son who was dear to him. This man possessed millions, but dies of hunger. He desired to domineer over every one, made a judge of himself and rewarded the just and punished the guilty. He has no heir, but he thinks it would be wrong for him to destroy the wealth he possesses. It is in existence, though hid away. He bequeaths it to Providence. It will bear this paper together with these mysterious signs.

“Will the money be found?

“Whoever reads this paper will do a wise act if he annihilates it. May he who finds this paper listen and heed to the words of a dying man.

“The Abbé Dantes.”

“February 25th, 1865.”

Below this signature was a curious design. Monte-Cristo examined it.

“Ah, Faria!” he exclaimed, “may your money fall into better hands than mine!”

He felt singularly feeble and laid his hand on his heart. He entered the tomb of Spero and reclined beside him. His arms were crossed on his breast. His eyes shut. He was dead.

* * * * *

All those who ever knew him never speak of him or hear his name uttered without being deeply affected. One thing has remained a secret for them up to this day. Where did Edmond Dantes, Count of Monte-Cristo, perish?

THE END

The Short Stories

MONSIEUR DE CHAUVELIN’S WILL

Translated by Alfred Allinson

This long short story was a part of Dumas’ short story series *Les Mille et un Fantômes*, on which he collaborated with several other authors. The story boasts a supernatural twist and is set at the time of the death of Louis XV in 1774.

In the narrative, a fortune-teller has prophesied that Louis XV and the Marquis de Chauvelin, Louis' favourite courtier, will die in the same month. When the Marquis receives a premonition of death, he withdraws from the court to return to his family, confess his sins, and prepare a will that will secure the imperilled fortunes of his wife and children.

The three introductory chapters of *Monsieur Chauvelin’s Will* form one of Dumas' delightful reminiscences, concerning his friendship in early years with M. de Villenave, a renowned bibliophile.

Dumas, close to the time of publication

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CHAPTER I.

THE HOUSE IN THE RUE DE VAUGIRARD.

ANYONE going from the Rue du Cherche-Midi to the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs will see on his left hand, opposite a public fountain marking the corner of the Rue du Regard and the Rue de Vaugirard, a small house inscribed as No. 84 in the municipal registers of Paris.

But first, before proceeding farther, for a confession which I am loth to make. This house, where I was accorded the frankest of welcomes almost ere I had shaken the dust of the provinces from off my feet, this house where for three years I was looked upon as a brother, this house where, in every disaster and every triumph of my life, I could in those days have knocked with the certainty of seeing the door open to my tears or my joy, — the situation of this house I have just been obliged to verify on a plan of the city, before I could make my readers understand its exact topographical position!

Twenty years ago God knows I should not have believed this possible.

The truth is in these same twenty years so many stirring events, like an ever rising tide, have effaced from the minds of the men of our generation the recollections of their youth that it is no longer their memory they must trust, — memory has a twilight of its own in which far-off recollections fade away, — but to their heart.

So, when I abandon my memory to fall back on my heart, I find enshrined there, as in a holy tabernacle, all the dear recollections that have disappeared from my life one by one, as water escapes drop by drop from a cracked vase; no twilight is there, growing ever darker and darker, but dawn brightening more and more to the perfect day. Memory merges into darkness and nullity; the heart aspires to the light, to God.

Well, there it stands, the house I spoke of, a small building shut in and half hidden away behind a dark grey wall, for sale now they tell me, ready to escape, alas! from the friendly hands that once threw open its doors to me.

Let me tell you how I first crossed that threshold; the tale will bring us, in a roundabout way I know, to the history I purpose to relate. But no matter, come with me, we will talk as we go, and I will do what I can to make the way seem less tedious than it is in reality.

It was towards the end of 1826, to the best of my belief. There you see, I said only twenty years ago, and lo! it is twenty-two. I was just twenty then myself at the time.

In connexion with poor James Rousseau, I have told you about my literary dreams and aspirations. Already in I826 they had grown more ambitious. It was no longer the *Chasse et l'Amour* I was inditing in collaboration with Adolphe de Leuven, or the *Noce et l'Enterrement* I was composing in conjunction with Vulplan and Lassagne; it was *Christine* I was planning, alone and unassisted. Glorious, shining vision, that in my youthful hopes, was to open that garden of the Hesperides to me, that garden with the golden apples, whereof criticism is the sleepless dragon.

Meantime, poor Hercules that I was, Necessity had laid a world upon my unfortunate shoulders. Ill-conditioned Goddess, who had not in my case even the pretext she had with Atlas of resting for an hour while burdening me with the crushing weight.

No, Necessity was crushing me and how many others, as I crush an ant-hill. Why? who can tell? perhaps because I happened to be under her heel and because with her blindfolded eyes, cold goddess of the iron wedges, she never saw me.

The world she had set upon my shoulders was my office. I was paid 125 francs a month; and this is what I had to do for my 125 francs a month:

I began work about ten, and left off at five; but in the summer I had to go back again from seven till ten.

Why this overtime in the summer and at this hour of the day, — just when it would have been so good to breathe the pure country air or the stimulating atmosphere of the playhouse?

I will tell you why; there was the Duke of Orleans' despatch box to see to. "Duke of Orleans," — such was the style and title in those days of this man of many parts, Dumouriez's aide-de-camp at Jemmapes and Valmy, proscribed in 1792, teacher of mathematics at Reichenau, sailor round the Horn, citizen of America, princely friend of Foy, Manuel, Lafitte, Lafayette, King in 1830, dethroned and banished in 1848.

It was the happiest period of his life; I had my dream, and my patron had his. Mine was a success in literature, his was the Throne of France.

Pity for a fallen Monarch! Peace for an old man's declining days! God grant a husband and father all that may yet remain for him of paternal and conjugal happiness in the infinite treasures of His loving-kindness! Alas! at Dreux I have beheld this Royal father weeping bitterly over the tomb of a son who was to have worn a Crown. The loss of your sceptre, Sire, has not cost you, I ween, so many tears as the death of your child.

But to return to the Duke's despatch- box. Its contents consisted of the day's letters and the evening papers, which had to be sent in to Neuilly. Then these documents duly forwarded by mounted messenger, the next thing was to wait for the answer.

The junior clerk was entrusted with these duties, and as I was the last comer to the office, they had fallen to my share. My comrade, Ernest Banet, superintended the morning despatches, while the Sunday mail we took turn and turn about in alternate weeks.

Well, one evening in the interval between getting off the despatch-box and receiving the return one, I was scribbling down some lines for *Christine* when the door of the office-room opened; a head of light curly hair and a delicate clear-cut face appeared, and a rather shrill voice enunciated in a tone not untinged with gentle raillery the three monosyllables:

"Are you there?"

"Yes," I answered eagerly; "come in, do! "I had recognised Cordelier Delanoue, son, like myself, of an ex-Republican General, and, like myself, a budding poet. Why, I wonder, in pursuing our careers side by side in after life, has he been less successful than I? I cannot tell; he has as much intelligence and talent and he writes better verses, there is no question about that.

'Tis all a matter of chance, — fortune or misfortune in this world; only when we come to die, shall we know which of us two, he or I, has been really fortunate or misfortunate.

Cordelier Delanoue's visit was a perfect godsend. Like all the people I have ever loved, I loved him then and I love him still; only I love him even better to-day, and I feel convinced it is the same on his side.

He had come to ask me if I would go with him to the "Athénée "to hear a lecture on something or other, — I have forgotten what.

The lecturer was M. de Villenave. I knew the name only; I had heard of the man as having executed a translation of Ovid which was well thought of, as having formerly been secretary to Monsieur de Malesherbes, and tutor to the children of the Marquis de Chauvelin.

At that time plays and such-like amusements very seldom came my way. Theatres and drawing rooms all threw their doors wide later on for the author of *Henri III.* and *Christine*, but they were shut to the junior clerk on fifteen hundred livres a year who took charge of the Duke of Orleans' despatch box.

I therefore accepted gladly, only begging Delanoue to stay with me and wait the messenger's return. Meantime, he read me an ode he had just composed, — by way of fitting preparation for the meeting at the "Athénée." Presently the man arrived; I was free for the night, and we set off for the Rue de Valois.

Whereabouts in the said street the Athénée held its sittings I have not the faintest notion; this was, I think, the only time I ever attended one of them. To tell the truth, I have never cared very greatly for meetings of this sort, — where one individual speaks and all the rest listen. The subject spoken of must be exceptionally interesting, or exceptionally unhackneyed; the speaker there must be uncommonly eloquent or uncommonly picturesque, if I am to find much gratification in an unchallenged monologue of this nature, where to differ is to be discourteous, to criticise is an indiscretion.

I have never in all my life succeeded in hearing out an orator or a preacher to the end. There is always an angle somewhere in the discourse that catches hold of me and stops me dead, to follow out a train of thought of my own, while the speaker goes on his way without me. Once left behind, naturally enough I look into the subject from my own individual point of view, — the result being that while our friend is speechifying or preachifying aloud, I am making my own silent discourse a sermon to myself. Arrived at the finish, the two of us are often a hundred miles apart, albeit we started originally from the same point.

It is just the same with stage plays. Except at a first night of a piece written for Arnal, or Grassot, or Ravel, that is to say a work utterly foreign to my customary line and one which I frankly and freely admit myself incapable of emulating, I am the worst first-nighter ever known. If it is a drama of the imagination, no sooner are the characters set on the stage and their general outlines sketched than presto! they cease to be the author's puppets to become mine. By the time the first interval is over, I have appropriated them. Instead of waiting and watching for unexpected developments in Acts II., III., IV. and V., I am finding them places in four Acts of my own composition, making what I can of their idiosyncrasies, turning their originality to advantage for myself. Then if the interval lasts but ten minutes, that is longer than I need to build the house of cards I give them to live in.

Well, it is the same with my theatrical house of cards as with the speech or the sermon I spoke of just now. *My* house of cards is hardly ever the same as the author's; hence, as I have made a reality out of my dream, so the reality seems a dream to me, — one which I follow out, ever on the alert to raise objections. "But that's not right, Monsieur Arthur; that's not the way, Mademoiselle Honorine; you go too fast, or you go too slow; you turn to the right when you ought to turn to the left; you say yes when you should say no. Upon my word, what mistakes; it's past all bearing!"

As for historical plays the case is still worse. Once I know the title, of course I construct my own piece, the materials of which I bring all ready made with me; then, equally of course, seeing it is constructed with all my characteristic faults, to wit superabundance of detail, stiffness of characterisation, double, treble, quadruple intrigue, it is very, very seldom my play bears the smallest resemblance to the one they are acting on the boards. All this simply makes a first night, which is a pleasure to most people, a veritable torture to me.

Well, my fellow authors are fairly warned. If they invite me to their first nights, they know what to expect.

That evening at the "Athénée "I behaved to Monsieur de Villenave as I do to everybody; only, as he was three parts through with his lecture when we arrived, I began by looking at the man instead of listening to what he was saying.

He was in those days a tall old man of sixty four or sixty five, with fine silvery- white hair, a pale complexion and dark flashing eyes. His dress showed that sort of careless carefulness peculiar to busy men who make a regular toilet two or three times in the week at the outside, spending all the rest of their time in dressing-gown and slippers amid the dust of their working-room. His gala costume, with its frilled shirt and white cravat freshly ironed is the work of wife or daughter, whoever looks after the house in fact, whose business it is to make him look respectable. Hence the sort of mute protest the well-brushed coat and neatly pressed trousers seem to enter on these occasions against the everyday, working garments which for their part have a perfect horror of clothes- brush and all such superfluities.

Monsieur de Villenave wore a blue coat with gilt buttons, black trousers, a white waistcoat and white tie.

Verily a curious piece of mechanism our thinking apparatus, an intellectual engine that goes on or stops short in spite of ourselves, because it is God's hand winds it up, a clock that strikes, at its own sweet will and pleasure, the hours of the past and sometimes those of the future.

Now what did my thoughts attach themselves to when I looked at Monsieur de Villenave? Was it to an angle of his speech, as I put it just now? No, this time it was to an angle, a salient incident, of his life.

I had read somewhere, I have no notion where, a pamphlet by Monsieur de Villenave, published in 1794 and entitled, *Relation de Voyage de 132 Nantais* (Account of the Journey of 132 Men of Nantes). Well, it was upon this episode in Monsieur de Villenave's life that my mind fastened when I set eyes for the first time on that gentleman.

Monsieur de Villenave was actually living at Nantes, it seems, in 1793, that is at the very time when Jean-Baptiste Carrier, of bloody memory, was there. He had seen with his own eyes the terrible Proconsul, who, finding the courts too dilatory and the guillotine too slow, had abolished legal trial altogether (quite superfluous indeed, as the accused were never acquitted), and replaced the guillotine by those barges of his invention with sliding valves. He may have stood on the Nantes quays when, November 15, 1793, Carrier, by way of first trial of his *Republican bathing-boats* and his *expatriations vertically* (these were the facetious names he gave this new method of capital punishment which he had devised), embarked ninety four priests, under the pretence of deporting them to Belle-Isle; he may have been walking on the Loire banks when the horror-stricken river cast up on its shores the ninety four corpses of the men of God; he may have shuddered at the sight which, repeated night after night, had ended by corrupting the water to such a degree that the citizens were forbidden to drink it; he may, more rashly still, have helped to bury one of these first victims, soon to be followed by so many others. Be this as it may, it fell out one morning that Monsieur de Villenave was arrested, cast into prison, and condemned like his fellows to add his quota to the corruption of the stream.

But by this time Carrier had changed his mind. He chose out a hundred and thirty two prisoners, all under penalty of death, and despatched them to Paris, — an offering of beings from the scaffolds of La Vendée to the guillotine of Paris. Then, once they had started, Carrier changed his mind afresh. Apparently the offering struck him as too insignificant, and he sent orders to Captain Boussard, in command of the escort, to shoot his hundred and thirty two prisoners on reaching Ancenis.

But Boussard was a gallant soldier; he ignored the savage order and simply went on his way towards Paris.

On learning this, Carrier sent despatches to Hentz, Commissioner of Convention at Angers, bidding him arrest Boussard as he passed through that town and throw the hundred and thirty two Nantese into the river.

Hentz duly arrested Boussard; but when it came to drowning the hundred and thirty two prisoners, the bronze of his Republican heart melted — it was not triple it would appear, — and he directed his victims to continue their march on Paris. It made Carrier shake his head in pained surprise and ejaculate contemptuously: “*Poor drowner* this Hentz, a very *poor drowner.*”

The prisoners accordingly continued their route. Out of the hundred and thirty two thirty six died before reaching the capital; but the ninety six who did arrive there, did so, fortunately for themselves, just in the nick of time to give evidence as witnesses at Carrier’s trial instead of appearing before the judges on their own account.

The ninth Thermider had come, the day of vengeance had dawned, the turn of the judges had arrived to be judged; after a month of debate and hesitation, the Convention had just put the *grand drowner* on his trial.

The recollection of this pamphlet, which M. de Villenave published thirty- four years ago when in prison, had thus carried me back into the past, and what I saw and heard was no longer a lecture on a literary subject delivered by a professor of the “Athénée,” but an act of accusation, an appeal formidable, strenuous, a matter of life and death, of the weak against the strong, the prisoner against the judge, the victim against the executioner.

Such is the power of imagination that lecture-hall, lecturer and listeners, speakers, all underwent a metamorphosis, — the hall of the “Athénée” being that of the Convention, the peaceful and placid audience were turned into angry men clamouring for vengeance, while the erudite, honey-mouthed Professor was thundering forth a public accusation, demanding the penalty of death, complaining that Carrier had only one life wherewith to pay for the fifteen thousand human lives he had cut short.

Then I saw Carrier, scowling down the accuser with his dark looks, I heard him calling upon his former colleagues in his loud, harsh voice:

“Why blame me to-day for carrying out your orders of yesterday? Accusing me, the Convention is accusing itself. My condemnation will be your condemnation, everyone of you; be sure of this, you will all be involved in the proscription that shall include me. If I am guilty, every man here is guilty, — every man and every thing, down to the President’s bell.”

Yet in spite of this, votes were taken; in spite of this, he was condemned. Terror drove men frantic now, as it had then, and the guillotine, after drinking the blood of the condemned was to drink that of judges and headsmen with the same indifference.

I had buried my face in my hands, as though shocked, atrocious murderer as the fellow was, to see him meet the death he had dealt out so recklessly to others.

Delanoue dropped his hand on my shoulder. “It is all over,” he remarked. “Ah! “I said, “so he is executed?”

“Who executed?”

“Why, that monster, Carrier.”

“Yes, yes, yes,” Delanoue assured me; “indeed it is thirty-four years ago now since he met with the little accident you refer to!”

“Ah! “I told him, “how glad I am you awoke me; I was having a nightmare.”

“So you were asleep, eh?”

“I was dreaming at any rate.”

“The deuce! I must not tell Monsieur de Villenave that. I am going to take you for a cup of tea to his house.”

“Oh! you may tell him. I will repeat my dreams to him; he will not be offended.”

Thereupon Delanoue, still doubtful about my temper on waking, drew me out of the public hall and into a waiting room, where Monsieur de Villenave was receiving his friends’ congratulations. Arrived there,. I was first of all presented to Monsieur de Villenave, then to Madame Mélanie Waldor, her daughter, finally to Monsieur Théodore de Villenave, his son.

Presently everybody set out on foot, by way of the Pont des Arts, in the direction of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. After half an hour’s walk we reached our destination; whereupon we disappeared, one after the other, into the house in the Rue de Vaugirard I spoke of at the beginning of the chapter. I will now endeavour to give a description of its interior, having already sketched the outside.

CHAPTER II.

A PASTEL BY LATOUR.

THE house possessed a character of its own, borrowed from that of its master.

We said the walls were grey, it would have been truer and more accurate to describe them as black.

You entered by a large door pierced in the wall, by the side of the concierge's lodge; inside you found yourself in a garden that was all hard earth without flower-borders or flowers; there were summer-houses but no shade, vine trellises, but no grapes, trees but almost no leaves. If by any chance a blossom did blow in an odd corner, it was some wild flower that seemed almost ashamed to bloom amid city streets. It had surely mistaken this dark, damp enclosure for a desert place, deeming the habitations of mankind far away instead of close at hand. At any rate it found itself speedily culled by a charming, rosy-cheeked little girl with fair curly ringlets, — a cherub from the skies that had wandered unawares into this forlorn corner of earth.

From this garden, which might contain some forty or fifty square feet and ended in a broad strip of flags along the house front, you passed into a paved corridor.

On this corridor, which led to a staircase at its extremity, four doors opened, — first on the left the dining-room, then to the right a small sitting-room. Beyond these, to the left again, came the kitchen, faced by the larder and kitchen offices. These ground floor rooms were dark and damp, and were hardly used except at meal times.

The living rooms proper, to which we were taken, were on the first floor. They comprised, besides the landing, a large drawing-room, a back-drawing, Madame Waldor's bedroom and Madame Villenave's.

The drawing-room was noteworthy for its shape and its furniture. It was an oblong, and in each corner was a console table and on it a bust, one of which represented Monsieur de Villenave. Between the two busts at the further end and facing the fireplace was another console bearing the most important ornament, of artistic and antiquarian interest, in the room. This was the bronze urn, which had contained the heart of Bayard; its rim bore a miniature bas-relief showing the “Chevalier sans peur et sans reproche “kissing the hilt of his sword. Two large canvases came next, — one, a Holbein, represented Anne Boleyn, the other was an Italian landscape by Claude Lorraine. The two corresponding frames on the opposite wall held, I think, the first a portrait of Madame de Montespan, the other of either Madame de Sévigné or Madame de Grignan. The furniture was in Utrecht velvet, great sofas with thin, white arms, for the families of the house, and chairs and armchairs for ordinary guests.

This floor was the especial domain of Madame Waldor; there she exercised her vice-royalty. We say vice-royalty advisedly, for as a matter of fact, spite of the surrender her father had made of the drawing-room to her, she reigned there only as Vice-Queen. The instant M. de Villenave entered the room, he resumed his royalty, and henceforward the reins of the conversation were in his hands.

Monsieur de Villenave had something of the despot in his character, and this applied not to his own family only, but included strangers as well. You felt, on crossing his threshold, that you became a part of the personal property, as it were, of this man, who had seen so much, read so deeply, in a word had such a range of knowledge. This despotism, tempered as it was by the great man’s courtesy of manner, yet weighed oppressively on the company as a whole that assembled in his *salon.* It may be, when the master of the house was present, the conversation was *better guided*, to use an old-fashioned phrase, but assuredly it was not so free, not so diverting, not so bright and witty, as when he was away.

The exact opposite was the case with Charles Nodier’s *salon.* The more Nodier was at his house, the more at home everybody felt.

Fortunately it was but seldom Monsieur de Villenave came down to the drawing- room. He confined himself as a rule to the second floor, and on common days only appeared for dinner. Then, after dinner, and a little talk, a little lecturing to his son, a little scolding to his wife, he would stretch himself in his armchair, shut his eyes, and have his hair put in curl-papers by his daughter, — and this operation completed, mount again to his own apartments. This fifteen minutes, during which the comb softly scratched his head, was the fifteen minutes of daily bliss and beatitude which M. de Villenave allowed himself.

But why curl-papers? the reader may well ask.

In the first place, it may be they were merely a pretext and excuse for getting his head scratched.

In the second, Monsieur de Villenave was a noble figure of an old man, we have said so before, and must have been extremely handsome in his younger days. His face, strongly-marked and bold- featured, was framed to great advantage by his flowing white locks, which brought out admirably the imposing flash of his great dark eyes.

The fact is, we must admit that, learned scholar as he was, Monsieur de Villenave was vain, — but vain as to the head, and nothing else. The rest of his person was of no importance. Whether his coat were blue or black, his trousers full, or narrow, his boots round or square- toed, this concerned his tailor or his bootmaker, or rather, as a matter of fact, his daughter, who looked after all such details. Provided his hair was in curl and he had a good hat, he was satisfied.

So soon as his daughter had fixed his curl-papers, — an operation which was performed every evening without fail between eight and nine, Monsieur de Villenave took up his candlestick, and went upstairs to his own quarters.

These quarters, this *at home,* of Monsieur de Villenave we propose to depict, though without much hope of producing more than an imperfect sketch.

The second floor on which they were situated was divided into a far greater number of separate rooms than the first, and comprised, first, a landing decorated with plaster busts, an ante-room and four other rooms. These apartments we shall not classify as drawing-room, bedroom, working-room, dressing-room, etc., etc. What had Monsieur de Villenave to do with suchlike superfluous luxuries? He had five book-rooms, five print-rooms, and that was all he wanted. The five rooms contained perhaps forty thousand books and four thousand portfolios of prints.

The antechamber by itself formed a huge library. It had two doors, — opening, the one to the right into Monsieur de Villenave’s bedroom, which again gave access by means of a passage behind the bed-recess to a large closet lighted by windows in the partition wall. The little end door led to a large room, itself again opening into a smaller one.

The large room in question opening into a smaller one, not only had, like its neighbour, its four walls fitted with bookcases crammed with books on the higher shelves and with portfolios in the lower compartments, but besides this a highly ingenious contrivance had been fixed in the middle of both rooms, somewhat resembling the erections we often see in the centre of a drawing-room, affording seats for guests all round it. Thanks to this construction, the middle of the room, which thus offered a second library inside the first, left very little free space, in fact only so minute a quadrangular area as sufficed for one person's moving about at a time. A second would have blocked the way; hence it was a very rare occurrence for Monsieur de Villenave to admit anyone, even the most intimate of friends, into this *sanctum sanctorum.*

Some few privileged individuals had pushed their heads in at the door, and across the learned dust that danced incessantly in the sparse sunbeams that penetrated this tabernacle, had obtained a fugitive glance at Monsieur de Villenave's bibliographical mysteries, much as Clodius, thanks to his disguise in woman's weeds, had contrived from the atrium of the Temple of Isis to catch a glimpse of the mysteries of the Bona Dea.

There were kept the autographs; the age of Louis XIV. alone filled five hundred portfolios. There were kept the papers of Louis XV., the correspondence of Malesherbes, four hundred autographs of Voltaire, two hundred of Bossuet. There were preserved the genealogies of all the noble houses of France, with particulars of their alliances and documentary proofs of their claims. There were stored the drawings by Rafael, Giulio Romano, Leonardo da Vinci, Andrea del Sarto, by Lebrun, Lesueur, David, Lethière, the collections of minerals and rare herbs, the priceless manuscripts, some of them unique.

There in a word was the result of fifty years' incessant labour, mitigated by one controlling idea, stimulated day by day and hour by hour by one absorbing passion, — the passion at once so mild and so fervent of the collector, to which he dedicates his intellect and on which he stakes his joy, his happiness, his very life.

These two were the rooms of price. It is very certain that Monsieur de Villenave, who had on more than one occasion come near giving his life for nothing, would not have parted with the contents of these two rooms for a hundred thousand crowns.

The only rooms left to mention are the bedrooms and the dark closet, lying to the right of the antechamber and parallel with the two apartments we have just described. The first of the two was Monsieur de Villenave's bedroom, a bedroom wherein the bed was by far the least conspicuous object, concealed as it was in a recess closed by wooden folding doors.

It was here Monsieur de Villenave used to receive his friends. Here it was possible at a pinch to walk about, and even under difficulties to sit down. We will describe how the latter fact could be performed, and under what circumstances the former was practicable.

The old servant-maid, — I have forgotten her name, — would announce a visitor to Monsieur de Villenave, half opening the door of his room. The action invariably surprised Monsieur de Villenave in the middle of classifying a new acquisition or dreaming a day dream or taking a nap.

“Eh! what is it, Françoise? “(We will assume her name was Françoise.) “Good God! can’t I be left a minute in peace?”

“La, Sir! “Françoise would answer, “I’m bound to come...”

“Well, well; quick, say what you want. I wonder why this always happens just when I am particularly busy?... Well? “ — and Monsieur de Villenave would raise his great eyes to heaven with an expression of despair, folding his hands and uttering a sigh of resignation.

Françoise for her part was familiar with the whole performance, and waited quietly till Monsieur de Villenave had duly completed his pantomime and his stage asides. Then, when he had done, “Sir,” she would say, “it is Monsieur *So-and-so*, who has come to pay you a little visit.”

“I am not at home; so be off with you.”

Françoise would close the door slowly and gradually; she knew the way of it.

“Wait a moment, Françoise,” Monsieur de Villenave would call after her.

“Sir?”

Françoise would push the door open again.

“You say it is Monsieur So-and-so, Françoise, eh?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, well! ask him to come in; then, if he stays too long, you can come and tell me I am wanted. Off with you, my girl.”

Françoise would release the door.

“Monstrous, monstrous, by the Lord!” Monsieur de Villenave would grumble to himself; “I never go disturbing people, yet they must always be disturbing me.”

Françoise would open the door once more, to admit the visitor.

“Ah, good-day, my dear friend,” Monsieur de Villenave would exclaim, “Welcome, welcome, come in. It is ages since I have seen you. Sit down, do.”

“What on?” the visitor would ask.

“Why, on whatever you like, egad!... on the sofa.”

“Willingly, only...”

Monsieur de Villenave would glance at the sofa.

“Ah, true, true! it is full up with books,” he would say, “Well then, draw up an armchair.”

“I would with pleasure, but you see...”

Monsieur de Villenave would make a survey of his armchairs.

“True again!” he would go on; “but what would you have, my dear fellow? I don’t know where to put my books. Take an ordinary chair.

“I should be delighted, but, — but..

“But what? you are in a hurry?”

“Not I; but I cannot see a vacant chair any more than I can an unoccupied armchair.”

“Monstrous, monstrous! “Monsieur de Villenave would groan, lifting his two arms to heaven; “monstrous! but wait a moment.”

Then he would leave his place, grumbling and groaning, carefully remove from a chair the books that obstructed it, put these on the floor, where they added yet another mole-hill to twenty or thirty other similar mole-hills encumbering the floor of the room; after which he would bring the said chair to the side of his own armchair which stood at the chimney-corner.

This is how you managed to sit down in this singular room. Now I must detail the circumstances under which you could walk about in it.

It would sometimes occur that, when, the visitor came in, and after the indispensable preamble we have just described, had finally sat down, it would sometimes occur I say that, by a twofold chance, the door of the bed recess and the door of the passage, which led to the closet behind the recess, were both open at the same time. Then, by this double combination of chances, through these two open doorways, it became possible to see hanging in the recess a pastel drawing representing a young and pretty woman holding a letter in her hand, the picture being lighted by the gleam of daylight which entered by the passage window.

Then, unless the visitor had no idea of art whatever, — and it was seldom Monsieur de Villenave’s friends were not artistic in one direction or another, — he would spring up, crying:

“Ah, sir! what a perfectly delightful pastel “ — and he would make as if to pass from the fireside to the recess.

“Wait, wait! “Monsieur de Villenave would protest. “One moment!”

Indeed, on closer inspection, you would observe that two or three mole-hills of books, tumbling one over the other, formed a sort of irregularly shaped counterscarp that had to be cleared in order to reach the recess.

Then Monsieur de Villenave would rise, and walking first, would open new cutting, like a skilled miner excavating a trench, through the typographical obstacle, thus making it possible to arrive in front of the drawing, which itself was in front of his bed.

Arrived there, the visitor could only repeat: “Ah, what a perfectly charming pastel!”

“Yes “Monsieur de Villenave would answer with that air of old fashioned courtesy I have only known in him and two or three old men of fashion like himself; “Yes, it is a pastel by Latour. It represents an old and dear friend of mine; she is no longer young, for, as well as I can recollect, she was in 1784, the date when I knew her, my elder by five or six years. We have not seen each other again since 1802, which fact in no way prevents our writing to each other every week, and receiving each other’s periodical letters with corresponding pleasure. Yes, you are right, the pastel is indeed charming; but the original was very much more charming still.”

As he pronounced the words, a ray of youth, soft as a sunbeam, would pass over the glowing face of the old man, who looked for the moment forty years younger.

Very often, when this had happened, Françoise found no need to bring any pretended message, for if the visitor were a man of tact and good feeling, he would take his departure in a few moments and leave Monsieur de Villenave alone to the reverie which the sight of Latour’s beautiful pastel had awakened in the old man’s breast.

CHAPTER III.

THE LETTER.

NOW how had Monsieur de Villenave got this fine library of books? How had he formed this collection of autographs, unique in the world of collectors?

The answer is by the labour of his whole life.

To begin with, Monsieur de Villenave had never burnt a paper or torn up a letter. Invitations to the meetings of learned societies, to weddings and funerals, he had kept them all, and had classified them and assigned a place to each. He had a collection of every conceivable thing, — even including volumes which on the 14th July had been rescued half consumed from the bonfire that was devouring them in the great Court of the Bastille.

Two autograph hunters were kept continually employed by Monsieur de Villenave. One was a certain M. Fontaine, whom I knew personally, and who was himself author of a book entitled the *Manuel des Autographes;* the other was a clerk in the War Office. All the grocers in Paris knew these two indefatigable searchers, and put on one side for their examination all the odds and ends of paper they bought. Amongst these they used to make a selection for which they paid at the rate of fifteen’ sous the pound, and which Monsieur de Villenave purchased from them for thirty sous.

Sometimes, too, Monsieur de Villenave went his rounds in person. There was not a grocer in Paris but knew him, who did not, when he saw him, bring together for his learned investigation the materials for his future paper bags.

Needless to add that the days Monsieur de Villenave devoted to autograph hunting, were given likewise to book hunting. He would follow the line of the quays, the most indefatigable of bibliophiles, and then, his two hands in his breeches pockets, his tall body bent, his fine, intelligent face lit up with desire, he would plunge his ardent gaze to the deepest depths of the show-cases. There he would search for the hidden treasure, and after fingering it a while, if the book were indeed what he had been coveting, if the edition were really the one he was in search of, would carry it off in triumph. So it went to swell Monsieur de Villenave's library, the reader opines? Not at all. In Monsieur de Villenave's library there was no room left, and had not been for years, — unless exchanges against autographs or prints made such room for the time being. No, the book found its home in the garret, which was divided into three compartments, — that of the octavos, that of the quartos, that of the folios between the other two.

This was the chaos out of which one day Monsieur de Villenave was to construct a new world, — a new continent like Australia or New Zealand. Meantime there they lay pell-mell, one atop of another, almost indistinguishable in the semi-darkness. This garret was the limbo where were imprisoned the souls God sends neither to heaven nor hell, because He has His designs to work out upon them.

One day this fine house, without apparent cause, trembled to its foundations, groaned and cracked ominously; the terrified occupants thought it was an earthquake and dashed out into the garden. But everything was peaceful above and below; the fountain went on playing at the street corner, a bird continued its song in the highest branches of the tallest tree.

The accident was plainly local, coming from some secret, unsuspected, unknown cause. They sent for the architect, who proceeded to examine and sound and question and cross-question the poor house, and finally announced that the subsidence could only come from an overload.

Consequently he asked leave to visit the garrets; but in this point he encountered a stubborn resistance on the part of Monsieur de Villenave.

Whence this reluctance, which however had to give way before the architect's persistency. The fact is, Monsieur de Villenave felt that his buried treasure, only the more precious to his heart because he hardly knew himself what it contained, ran no small risk from this visitation.

Yes, in the centre compartment alone there were found to be twelve hundred folios weighing nearly eight thousand pounds. Alas! these twelve hundred folios, which had made the building yield and threatened to bring it to the ground, had to be sold. The painful operation took place in 1822, and in 1826, the year when I came to know Monsieur de Villenave, he had not yet entirely got over the agony of it, and many a sigh, whereof his family could divine no sufficient reason, went after his dear folios, collected so carefully and laboriously, and now, like children driven from the paternal roof, orphaned, vagabond, scattered over the face of the earth.

I have said already how good and kind and hospitable the household in the Rue de Vaugirard was to me, — on the part of Madame de Villenave, because she was naturally affectionate, on the part of Madame de Waldor, because a poetess herself, she had a kindly feeling towards poets, on the part of Théodore de Villenave, because we were both of the same age, and an age when there is an instinctive desire to give a share of one's heart in return for a share of someone else's.

Last but not least on the part of Monsieur de Villenave, because, without being a collector of autographs, I yet owned, thanks to my father's portfolio of despatches and other military documents, a collection of autographs of no little interest. Indeed my father, having held from 1791 to 1800 high posts in the army, having been three times General Commanding-in-Chief, had been in correspondence with all the great personages who had played a part in history during those years.

The most interesting autographs belonging to this correspondence were those of General *Buonaparte*. Napoleon did not long retain this Italianized form of the name. Within three months of the 13th Vendémiaire he adopts the more French spelling *Bonaparte*, and so signs himself. Now, in this short interval my father had received five or six letters from the young General of the Interior, — such was the title he assumed after the 13th Vendémiaire.

One of these signatures I presented to Monsieur de Villenave, supplemented by an autograph of Saint-George and one of the Maréchal de Richelieu. Thanks to this sacrifice, which was no sacrifice to me, but rather a pleasure, I secured my entrée to the second floor.

Little by little I reached such a footing in the household that Françoise no longer troubled to announce me to Monsieur de Villenave, and I marched upstairs unattended. I would knock at the door, open it at the word "Come in!" and was nearly always well received.

I say *nearly always*, because great 'passions have of course their hours of storm and stress. Take the case of a collector of autographs who has marked down a precious signature, such a one as Robespierre's, who has left only three or four, or Molière's, who has left only one or two, or Shakespeare's, who I believe has left none at all; now, just as he is on the point of putting his hand on this unique or all but unique signature, the said signature escapes him by some accident and falls to a rival collector, —

well, is it to be wondered at if he is distraught with rage and despair.

Call upon him at such a crisis, and, were you his father, his brother, an angel, an archangel, you will soon see what sort of a reception you may expect, — unless, of course, the archangel by his arch-angelic power duplicates the signature that was unique or creates one that never existed at all.

Under such circumstances I should have been as ill received by Monsieur de Villenave as another. Otherwise I was sure to find a kind face, a complacent disposition and an obliging memory, even on week-days.

I say “week-days “because the Sunday was reserved by Monsieur de Villenave for scientific visitors. No foreign bibliophile, no cosmopolitan collector, ever came to Paris without paying a visit to Monsieur de Villenave, as vassals come to pay homage to their Suzerain. Sunday therefore was the day of exchanges, — exchanges thanks to which Monsieur de Villenave used to complete his foreign collections, for which the grocers’ supplies were not adequate, by graciously sacrificing to the German, English or American amateurs some fragments from his wealth of French treasures.

Thus I had penetrated into the house; I had been received, to begin with on the first floor, in course of time on the second; I had got my entrée on any Sunday; last of all I had been admitted when and as often as I pleased, — a privilege I shared with two or three others at the most.

Well, one week-day — it was a Tuesday I think — I came to the house to ask Monsieur de Villenave to let me examine an autograph of Queen Christina (the reader will know my crotchet for judging of people’s character by their handwriting), one day, I say, I came to the house with this object, — it was about five o’clock on a March afternoon — and rang the bell. I asked the concierge if Monsieur de Villenave were at home, and passed in. Just as I was going to enter the house itself, Françoise called me to stop.

“What is it, Françoise?” I asked her.

“Are you going to see the ladies, sir, or to the master’s rooms?”

“I am going to visit the master, Françoise.”

“Well, if you would be so good and save my poor legs two flights of stairs, you might give this letter which has just come for him to Monsieur de Villenave.”

“With pleasure I will, Françoise.”

The servant gave me the letter, which I took and made my way upstairs. On reaching the door I knocked as usual, but received no answer. I knocked again, louder, only to be met with the same silence. Finally I knocked a third time, this time with some little fear and anxiety, for the key was in the lock, and its being so invariably implied that Monsieur de Villenave was within.

Accordingly I took it upon myself to open the door, and then I saw Monsieur de Villenave asleep in his armchair.

Roused by the noise I made, or perhaps by the inrush of air which accompanied my entrance and broke some magnetic influence, Monsieur de Villenave gave a smothered cry.

“A thousand pardons,” I cried; “I have been indiscreet, I have disturbed you.”

“Who are you? what do you want?”

“I am Alexandre Dumas.”

“Ah! “Monsieur de Villenave drew a breath of relief.

“Really, I am desperately sorry,” I went on, “I will leave you in peace.”

“No, no,” returned Monsieur de Villenave, giving a sigh and passing his hand across his brow, “come in!”

This I did, and he told me to sit down. By a rare chance a chair was vacant, which I took.

“You see,” he murmured, “I had dropped asleep. It is very strange. The twilight crept in, and my fire went out. Then you woke me; I found myself in the dark, not knowing what noise it was broke my repose. Doubtless it was the wind from the door that blew across my face; but I seemed to see a great white sheet, a shroud it looked like. Strange, very strange, don’t you think so? “Monsieur de Villenave went on, with that shiver of the whole body that means a man is chilled to the bone. “However, it’s all over, thank goodness.”

“You say that to make me forget my awkwardness in intruding.”

“No, indeed no. I am very glad to see you. What have you there?”

“Ah, I beg pardon, I was forgetting; a letter for you.”

“Ah ha, an autograph, and whose?”

“No, it is not an autograph, and it is, I imagine so at least, just simply and solely a letter.”

“Ah yes, a letter!”

“A letter the postman left, and which Françoise asked me to bring up to you; here it is.”

“Thank you. Now, do you mind just reaching out your hand and giving me a match? Really I feel quite dull and dazed still. If I were superstitious, I should think it a premonition.”

He took the match I offered him and kindled it at the still faintly glowing embers in the hearth. As it burnt brighter, it became possible to distinguish objects in the room by the increasing light.

“Oh, good God!” I suddenly exclaimed.

“What is wrong with you? “Monsieur de Villenave asked me, proceeding to light the candle.

“Why, good God! your beautiful pastel, what has happened to it?”

“Ah, yes,” returned Monsieur de Villenave sadly, “I have put it down there by the chimney-piece, as you see; I am expecting the glazier and the frame- maker.

“Yes, I see the frame is broken and the glass in a thousand pieces.”

“Yes,” said Monsieur de Villenave, looking disconsolately at the portrait, and forgetting all about his letter; “yes, the whole thing is incomprehensible.”

“I suppose it met with an accident?”

“Just think; the day before yesterday I had been at work all the evening; it was a quarter before midnight, and I got into bed. Putting my candle on my night table, I am settling down to revise the proofs of a little pocket edition of my Ovid, when by chance my eyes fall upon my poor friend’s portrait. I nod a goodnight to her, according to custom; there was a little wind blowing in at the window, which had no doubt been left partly open, and this wind sets the flame of my candle flickering so that the portrait -seems to answer my goodnight by a little nod of its own. You may suppose I regarded the idea as foolishness; still I do not know how it is, but I find my mind filled with the thought and my eyes unable to leave the picture. You know of course that this pastel goes back to the early days of my youth, and calls up many, many associations. So I am launched on a very sea of memories of five and twenty. I speak to my portrait. My memory answers for it, and though I knew this to be so, yet I seem to see the picture move its lips, the features blanch and the white face assume an expression of grief and sadness. At this moment midnight begins to strike from the tower of the Carmelites, and at the gloomy sound my poor friend’s countenance grows even more and more grief-stricken. The wind was blowing outside. At the last stroke of midnight the window burst violently open, I hear a wailing cry, and the eyes of the pictured face appear to close. The nail sustaining the portrait breaks; the picture falls, and my candle goes out.

"I get up to relight it, not at all afraid, but yet deeply impressed. As ill luck will have it, I cannot find a match; it was too late to call anybody, and I did not know where to go for a light, so I shut the window of the closet and get to bed again in the dark.

"All these incidents had moved me; I felt sad and an extraordinary desire to weep possessed me. Then I thought I heard something like the rustling of a silk dress in the room. Several times over I asked: 'Is there anyone there? 'At last I went to sleep, but at a very late hour; when I woke, I found my poor pastel in the state you see."

"Strange, very strange," I said; "tell me, have you received your weekly letter, — the one the original of the portrait always writes you?"

"No, and that is just what troubles me, and the reason I told Françoise to bring up or send up without delay any letters that should come for me."

"Well, there is the one I brought..."

"It is not her way of folding hers."

"Ah!"

"But still, it is from Angers."

"The lady lives at Angers."

"Yes; oh, great God; it is sealed with black! Poor lady, can some evil have befallen her? " — and Monsieur de Villenave turned pale as he broke open the missive.

At the first words he read his eyes filled with tears.

He took up a second letter, that broke off at the fourth line and was enclosed in the first.

He lifted this broken letter to his lips and handed me the other.

"Read it," he said, — and I read as follows:

"Sir, — It is with grief on my own part, further increased by that which I know you will feel, that I write to tell you that Madame — died last Sunday, as the last stroke of midnight sounded.

"She had been seized, two days before, just as she was writing to you, with an attack of indisposition which we thought little of at first, but which grew worse and worse till it terminated fatally.

“I have the honour to send you, unfinished as it is, the letter she had begun to write to you. This letter will show you that to the day of her death the sentiments she entertained for you remained unaltered.

“I am, sir, in great sorrow, as you may suppose, always your humble servant, “THERESE MIRAUD.”

Monsieur de Villenave had kept his eyes on mine as I read.

“At midnight!” he exclaimed when I had finished; “it was at midnight, look you, that the portrait fell and was broken. Not only does the day tally, but the very minute.”

“Yes,” I answered, “that is so.”

“You believe in the supernatural then?” cried Monsieur de Villenave.

“Why, of course I do.”

“Oh! very well then, come one day, will you, one day when I am something less agitated, and I will tell you of something far more strange than this.”

“Something that happened to you?”

“No, but of which I was an eye-witness.”

“When was it?”

“Oh! a long time ago. It occurred in 1774, at the time I was tutor to the children of Monsieur de Chauvelin.”

“And you say you will...”

“Yes, I will tell you the story; in the meantime you understand....”

“I understand you need to be alone,” — and with the word I got up and prepared to go.

“By the way,” added Monsieur de Villenave, “tell the ladies as you pass not to be anxious about me; I shall not come down to night.”

I nodded in sign of acquiescence.

Then Monsieur de Villenave wheeled round his armchair, so as to bring himself exactly face to face with the portrait, and as I was closing the door, “Poor Sophie! “I heard him murmur softly to himself.

The story I am now going to reproduce is the same which later on Monsieur de Villenave told me.

CHAPTER IV.

THE KING’S CHIRURGEON.

APRIL 25, 1774, King Louis XV. lay abed in the Blue Room of the Château of Versailles; by his bedside, on a truckle-bed, slept the surgeon Lamartinière.

The clock in the Great Court was striking five o’clock in the morning, and the Château was just beginning to get astir. Folks were moving to and fro like restless phantoms, stepping discreetly so as not to disturb the Monarch’s slumbers. For some time now Louis XV., wearied with late hours and dissipation, could only win a brief repose by the abuse of protracted periods of sleeplessness, and by help of narcotics, when the former means failed to produce any effect.

The King was no longer young; he was entering his sixty-fifth year. After draining to the dregs every possible form of pleasure, diversion and flattery, he had nothing new left to experience, and he felt sick to death of everything. It was the worst of all his maladies, this fever of life-weariness; acute under Madame de Châteauroux, it had become intermittent under Madame de Pompadour, and chronic under Madame du Barry.

To those who have nothing left to know there sometimes remains something to love; it is a sovereign resource against the disease that had attacked Louis XV. Rendered indifferent towards individual affection by the attention he had inspired in a whole nation and which had been exaggerated to a sort of frenzy, this habit of the heart had seemed to him too commonplace for a King of France to yield to. Louis XV. had been loved by his People, his wife and his mistresses; but Louis XV. himself had never loved anyone.

There remains yet another rousing preoccupation for men grown *blasé* with life, — to wit pain. But Louis XV., apart from the two or three illnesses he had suffered from, had never felt pain; and now, favoured mortal that he was, the sole premonition of old age he experienced was an increasing sensation of fatigue, which the physicians told him was a warning to prepare for old age.

Sometimes at those famous Choisy suppers, where the tables rose ready furnished through the floor, where the waiting was done by the pages of the private household, where the Comtesse du Barry challenged the King with naughty innuendos, the Duc d'Ayen strove to rouse him with his great laugh, and the bon-vivant Marquis de Chauvelin plied him with dainty raillery, Louis XV. would be surprised to find his hand slack to lift the glass of the sparkling wine he had once loved so well, his brow loth to pucker in that inextinguishable laughter which the sallies of Jeanne Vaubernier had of old evoked, Autumn flowers of merriment on the frontiers of his prime. His brain remained obstinately cold to the seductive pictures of life and love and pleasure within reach of the happy possessors of sovereign power, unlimited wealth and excellent health.

Louis XV. was not of an open disposition; he was one who brooded over joy and sorrow. It may be, thanks to this self-concentration, he would have made a great Politician, if as he used to say himself, he had ever had the time. No sooner therefore did he observe the change that was beginning in him than, instead of making up his mind and inhaling philosophically these first breezes of old age that furrow the brow and whiten the hair, he turned his thoughts inwards and began to note his own symptoms.

This is a thing to make the most light- hearted of men dismal, this analysis of joy and grief; analysis is a silence interposed between laughter and weeping. Till then the King had only been bored, now he was a prey to positive melancholy. He had ceased to laugh at Madame du Barry's broad jokes, he could not raise a smile at the Duc d'Ayen's wicked stories, he was unmoved at the most friendly advances of Monsieur de Chauvelin, his bosom friend, the *fidus Achates* of his Royal escapades. Madame du Barry felt particularly aggrieved at this mournful attitude, which expressed itself by an especial coldness towards her.

The change set the doctors talking, and they declared that if the King were not already ill, he was certainly on the road to be so.

Accordingly, on the 15th of the preceding April, Lamartinière, First Surgeon to the King, after administering to his Majesty his monthly dose of medicine, had ventured to make certain observations which he deemed highly necessary.

"Sire," the worthy Lamartinière had asked him, "Your Majesty having left off drinking, and eating, and.... amusing yourself, what does your Majesty propose to do?"

“Why, bless me, my good sir,” the Monarch had replied, “whatever I may find most diverting, outside all these pastimes.”

“The truth is I do not know much in the way of novelty to offer your Majesty. Your Majesty has made war, your Majesty has tried patronising learned men and artists, your Majesty has loved women and champagne. Now, when a man has already tasted glory, flattery, love and wine, I protest to your Majesty that I search in vain for a muscle, a tissue, a nervous ganglion displaying the existence of any further aptitude for any fresh distraction.”

“Ah! really,” cried the King, “you really believe that, Lamartinière?”

“Sire, just think; Sardanapalus was a king of great intelligence, almost as great as your Majesty, albeit he lived something like two thousand eight hundred years ago. He loved life and pondered deeply on how to use it to the best advantage. I seem to have heard that he made minute investigations as to the means of so exercising body and mind as to lead to the discovery of new pleasures the least suspected. Well, I have never read in history that he discovered one single gratification you have not found out yourself.”

“Alas, yes! Lamartinière.”

“I make one exception, Sire — in favour of champagne, a wine which Sardanapalus did not know. On the contrary his beverage was the thick, heavy, sticky wines of Asia Minor, liquid flames that ooze from the pulp of the Greek grapes, wines that intoxicate to mad frenzy, while champagne produces but a gay insanity.”

“True, my dear Lamartinière, very true; the wine of Champagne is a pretty wine, and I have loved it well. But tell me, did he not end by burning himself on a funeral pyre, this Sardanapalus of yours?”

“Yes, Sire; it was the sole sort of pleasure he had not yet essayed; he kept it for the last.”

“And doubtless it was to make this pleasure as keen as might be that he burned himself along with his Palace, his treasures, his favourite Queen.”

“It was so, Sire.”

“Would you by any chance advise me then, my dear Lamartinière, to burn down Versailles, and with it to burn myself, together with Madame du Barry?”

“No, no, Sire. You have fought battles, you have witnessed conflagrations, you were yourself within the range of the guns of Fontenoy.

Fire and flame therefore would be no new diversion for you. Come, let us go through your resources of defence against ennui."

"Oh! Lamartinière, I am very, very ill armed."

"You have, to begin with, Monsieur de Chauvelin, your friend... a man of wit,... a..."

"Chauvelin has no wit now, dear sir."

"Since when has that been so?"

"Why, since I have felt this weight of boredom, egad!"

"Pooh!" cried Lamartinière, "'tis as though you were to say Madame du Barry is no longer a fine woman since--"

"Since what? "... asked the King, reddening somewhat.

"Oh! I am no fool!" retorted the Surgeon roughly.

"So," said the King with a deep sigh, "it is finally decided I am going to be ill."

"I am afraid so, Sire."

"A remedy, then, Lamartinière, suggest a remedy; let us anticipate the evil."

"Rest, Sire; I know no better."

"Good!"

"Diet."

"Good!"

"Amusement."

"Stop, stop, Lamartinière."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"You prescribe amusement, but you never tell me how I am to amuse myself. Well, I call you an ignoramus, a thick-headed ignoramus! do you hear me, sir?"

"And you are wrong, Sire. 'Tis your fault and not mine."

"How do you mean?"

"No one can amuse people who are bored when they have Monsieur de Chauvelin for their friend and Madame du Barry for their mistress."

A silence followed, seeming to show that the King admitted there was some sense in Lamartinière's last observation." Presently the King resumed: "Well, well, Lamartinière, my friend, since we are on the subject of illness, let us discuss the thing thoroughly anyway. You say I have enjoyed every amusement there is in the world, do you not?"

"I do, and I speak the truth."

“War for instance?”

“War! when you have won the battle of Fontenoy?”

“Yes, truly an amusing spectacle, men torn to tatters, four leagues long and a league broad reeking with blood, a stench of carnage to turn a man’s stomach.”

“In a word, glory.”

“Then, besides, was it I who won the battle? was it not rather the Maréchal de Saxe? or the Duc de Richelieu? or better still Pecquigny with his four guns?”

“No matter; who but you was given the triumph of it all, nevertheless?”

“I grant that; so that you think a sufficient reason for my loving glory. Ah! my good Lamartinière,” added the King with a groan, “if you only knew how uncomfortable my bed was the night before Fontenoy!”

“Well, so be it; we will say no more of personal glory; but surely, without caring to gain it yourself, you can have it given you, be glorified, by painters and poets and historians.”

“Lamartinière, I have a perfect horror of all those fellows, who are either boobies as dull and commonplace as my own lackeys or else such monsters of self- conceit that my grandfather’s triumphal arches would be too low for them. That Voltaire beats them all; did not the fellow clap me on the shoulder one evening, calling me Trajan, if you please? They tell him he is king of my kingdom, and the noodle believes it. I will have nothing to do, I tell you, with immortality such as these folk could give me; one must pay too dear for it in this perishable world, and perhaps even in the next.”

“In that case, what *do* you wish, Sire? tell me that.”

“I wish to make my life last as long as ever I can. I wish that life to contain the greatest possible number of things I love; and for that it is neither to the poets nor the philosophers nor the warriors I shall go. No, Lamartinière, after God, understand, I only esteem (my mind is made up on the point) the doctors, — when they are good ones of course.”

“Indeed!”

“So tell me the truth frankly, dear Lamartinière.”

“I will, Sire.”

“What is it I have to fear?”

“Apoplexy.”

“It is a fatal complaint?”

“Yes, unless the patient is bled in time.”

“Lamartinière, you shall never leave me.”

“Impossible, Sire; I have my patients, my private patients.”

“Very good! but it appears to me that my health, my private health, is as important to France and to Europe as that of all your patients put together. Every night your bed shall be made next to mine.”

“Sire!...”

“What difference can it make to you whether you sleep here or elsewhere? You will reassure me by the mere fact of your presence, my dear Lamartinière; you will frighten away the disease, I tell you, for disease knows you and knows it has no more redoubtable foe than you.”

This is why the Surgeon Lamartinière found himself, on April 25, 1774, lying on a truckle-bed in the Blue Room at Versailles about five o’clock in the morning, fast asleep, while the King for his part was lying awake.

Louis XV. who, as we have just stated, was lying awake, gave vent to a heavy sigh; but seeing that a sigh has no positive meaning by itself apart from what signification the utterer thereof attaches to it, Lamartinière, who was sleeping instead of sighing, heard it between his snores, but paid it, or rather appeared to pay it, not the smallest attention.

The King, finding that his Surgeon-in- Ordinary was insensible to this appeal, leant over the edge of the bed and by the light of the great wax candle that burned in its marble socket, gazed down at his medical attendant, whose face a thick soft blanket, drawn up to the very brim of his night-cap, hid from the most scrutinizing of looks.

“Oh dear!” moaned the King, “oh dear!”

Lamartinière heard this too; but seeing that an ejaculation may often escape a man in his sleep, there is no adequate reason for its rousing another from *his* slumbers. So the surgeon went on snoring.

“Lucky dog to be able to sleep like that!” muttered Louis XV. Then he added:

“What coarse, material fellows these doctors are! “ — and therewith he made up his mind to wait a little longer. But after waiting a quarter of an hour to no purpose, “Halloa, Lamartinière!” he called at last.

“Well, what is it, Sire?” asked his Majesty’s doctor with a growl.

“Ah! my poor Lamartinière,” repeated the King, groaning as dismally as he could.

“Well, what is it? “ — and the surgeon, grumbling and grunting like a man who is sure his position will shield him, slipped out of bed, — to find the King seated on the side of his.

“Well, Sire, are you ill?” he asked.

“I think I am, my dear Lamartinière,” replied his Majesty.

“Ah! I see you are somewhat agitated.”

“Very much agitated, yes.”

“What at?”

“I have no notion.”

“But *I* have,” muttered the surgeon; “it is fear that is the matter with you.”

“Feel my pulse, Lamartinière.”

“Exactly what I am doing.”

“Well?”

“Well, Sire, it beats eighty four to the minute, — which is very good for an old man.”

“For an old man, Lamartinière?”

“Certainly.”

“I am only sixty four; at sixty four a man is not old yet.”

“A man is no longer young at any rate.”

“Come now, what do you prescribe?”

“First, what do you feel?”

“I am stifling, I seem to be stifling.”

“On the contrary you are cold.”

“I must be red in the face.”

“Nonsense, you are quite pale. One piece of advice, Sire, — try to get to sleep; it would really oblige us.”

“I am not sleepy now.”

“Come now, what does this excitement mean?”

“Egad! I think you ought to know, Lamartinière, or where is the use of being a doctor?”

“Have you had a bad dream?”

“Well, yes, I have.”

“Just a dream!” cried Lamartinière, lifting his hands to heaven, “a dream!”

“Egad!” protested the King, “there are some dreams!”

“Well, well! come tell us your dream, Sire.”

“It cannot be told, my friend.”

“Why not? everything can be told.”

“To a Confessor, yes.”

“Then send for your Confessor, quick; meantime I will take my lancet away with me.”

“A dream is sometimes a secret.”

“Yes, and sometimes a question of remorse. Your Majesty is right; I will take my leave, Sire,” — and the doctor began to draw on his stockings and get into his breeches.

“Come, Lamartinière, come, never get angry, old friend. Well then, I dreamt... I dreamt they were carrying me to Saint- Denis.”

“And that the hearse jolted you... Bah! when you come to make that journey, Sire, you will never notice it.”‘

“How can you jest on such subjects?” the King expostulated with a shudder. “No, I dreamt they were taking me to Saint-Denis, and that I was buried alive in the velvet of my coffin.”

“Did you feel incommoded in the coffin, eh?”

“Yes, a little.”

“Vapours, black humours, difficult digestion.”

“Oh! but I ate no supper, yesterday.”

“An empty stomach then.”

“You think so?”

“Ah! now I have it; at what o’clock did you leave Madame la Comtesse yesterday?”

“Why, it is two days since I have so much as seen her.”

“You are sulking, — black humours, you see, as I said.”

“On the contrary it is she who is sulking at me. I promised her something I have failed to give her.

“Quick, give her this something, and find your cheerfulness again.”

“I cannot, I am overwhelmed with melancholy.”

“Ah, an idea! Go and breakfast with Monsieur de Chauvelin.”

“Breakfast!” cried the King, “ah! that was all very well in the days when I had an appetite.”

“This will never do!” expostulated the surgeon, folding his arms. “You will have nothing more to do with your friends, nothing more to do with your mistress, nothing more to do with your breakfast, and you think I am going to allow that? Well, Sire, I will tell you one thing, and that is, that if you change your habits at this time of day, you are a lost man.”

“Lamartinière! my friend sets me yawning, my mistress sends me to sleep, my breakfast chokes me.”

“Good! it is very certain you are ill then.”

“Ah! Lamartinière,” cried the King; “I have had many years of happiness.”

“And you make that a grievance? what things men are!”

“No, I make no complaint of the past, it is the present I hate. The stoutest cart feels the wear and tear at least,” — and the King heaved a sigh.

“True, wear and tear, wear and tear,” the surgeon repeated sententiously.”

“So that the springs grow stiff and rusty,” sighed the King, “and I long for rest.”

“Very well then, go to sleep, go to sleep!” cried Lamartinière, getting into bed again.

“Let me complete my simile, my dear doctor.”

“Can I be mistaken, or are you turning poet, Sire? Another nasty complaint that!”

“Not I! on the contrary you know I loathe them all, your poets. To gratify Madame de Pompadour, I made that common fellow Voltaire a gentleman; but since the day he dared to speak to me as an equal, calling me Titus or Trajan, — I don’t know which it was, I have done with the business. I only mean to say, poetry apart, that I believe my time is come to put on the drag.”

“You want to hear my advice, Sire?”

“I do, my friend.”

Well then, Sire, my advice is, — don’t do that, but take out the horse and give him a rest.”

“It’s hard,” muttered Louis XV.

“But so it is, Sire, when I speak to the King, I call him Your Majesty; when I am dealing with my patient, I do not so much as say ‘Sir ‘to him. So now, Sir, give the nag a rest, and quick about it. Now the thing is settled, we have still an hour and a half left for sleep, Sire; so let us get to sleep.”

So saying the Surgeon buried himself again under his blanket, and five minutes afterwards was snoring in so plebeian a fashion, that the rafters of the Blue Room positively quivered with indignation.

CHAPTER V.

THE KING RISES.

THE King thus left to himself, made no attempt to interrupt the self-willed doctor, whose snores went on, as regular as clockwork, for the full time he had mentioned. Half-past six struck. As the *valet de chambre* was about to enter, Lamartinière got up and slipped away into a neighbouring closet, while they removed his bed. Then he wrote a paper of directions for the assistant doctors, and took his departure.

The King ordered his personal attendants to come in first, and then to admit those privileged to enjoy the *grande entree.* He bowed without speaking and then stretched out his legs for the valets to put on his stockings, fasten his garters and throw his dressing-gown about his shoulders.

This done, he knelt down at his *prie-dieu,* sighing audibly several times in the midst of the general silence. Every one had followed the King's example, and all were engaged in prayer, — though it must be admitted with an attention that was apt to wander.

The King meantime kept turning round from time to time to gaze at the balustrade behind which usually gathered the most favoured and most cherished of his courtiers.

"What is the King looking for?" the Duc de Richelieu and the Duc d'Ayen asked each other in a whisper.

"He is not looking for us anyway; he could find us readily enough "said the Duc d'Ayen; "but stay, the King is getting up!"

In fact Louis XV. had finished his prayers, or rather had been so much preoccupied in mind that he had said none.

"I do not see my Master of the Wardrobe," said the King, looking about him.

"Monsieur de Chauvelin?" asked the Duc de Richelieu.

"The same."

"But, Sire, he *is* here."

"Where, pray?"

“Yonder!” declared the Duke, turning round.

Then suddenly he ejaculated an “Ah “of great surprise.

“What now?” demanded the King.

“Monsieur de Chauvelin is still at his prayers!”

It was true; the Marquis de Chauvelin, that amiable Pagan, that gay companion of the Monarch’s little impieties, that witty enemy of the gods in general and of God in particular, had remained on his knees, not only against his habit, but also against etiquette, now that the King had finished *his* prayers.

“Well, well, Marquis,” the King asked him with a laugh, “are you asleep?”

The Marquis rose slowly from his knees, made the sign of the cross and bowed to the King with deep respect.

Everybody was accustomed to laugh whenever Monsieur de Chauvelin was in a laughing mood; they thought now he was making fun and laughed as usual, the King amongst the number.

But almost immediately recovering his seriousness, “Come, come, Marquis,” said Louis XV., “you know I do not like jesting with sacred subjects. However, as you wish, I presume, to divert me, I must forgive you for the wish’s sake; only I give you fair warning you have your work before you,” he added with a sigh; “for indeed I am as dismal as a death’s head.”

“You dismal, Sire?” exclaimed the Duc d’Ayen, “and pray, what can it be saddens your Majesty?”

“My health, Duke! my health which is failing! I have Lamartinière to sleep in my chamber to give me confidence; but the maniac makes it his business to frighten me instead. Happily you seem in a laughing mood here, — eh, Chauvelin?’

But the King’s challenge fell flat. The Marquis de Chauvelin himself, whose keen, mocking face was generally so ready to reflect the King’s merry mood, the Marquis, so finished a courtier that he had never been known to lag behind, whatever wish the King expressed, the Marquis for once, instead of fulfilling the King’s desire to be amused, remained stern and solemn, utterly absorbed in a fit of inexplicable gravity.

Some of those present, so remote was this gloom from Monsieur de Chauvelin’s habitual bearing, thought the Marquis was but carrying on a jest, and that this gravity was the prelude to a wild burst of uproarious laughter. But the King this morning had no patience for waiting; so he began at once to rally the favourite on his melancholy.

“Why, what the deuce is wrong with you, Chauvelin?” asked the Monarch; “are you by way of continuing my last night’s dream? Do *you* want to have yourself buried too, you of all people?”

“Oh!.... can your Majesty really have been dreaming such horrid things?” asked Richelieu.

“Yes, a nightmare, Duke. But egad! What I have to bear in my sleep, I should much prefer not to come across again when I am awake. Now, come, Chauvelin, what is wrong?”

But the Marquis only bowed by way of answer.

“Speak, man, speak, I order you to!” cried the King.

“Sire,” answered the Marquis, “I have been reflecting.”

“On what?” asked the astonished Monarch.

“On God! Sire”; is it not the beginning of wisdom? ‘‘

This preface, so cold and austere, made the poor King shudder. Bestowing a more attentive look on the Marquis, he discovered in his tired, age-worn features the probable reason for this unwonted melancholy.

“The beginning of wisdom?” he said. “Well, well, I shall not be much surprised if this beginning has no sequel; it is too tiresome altogether. But you were not reflecting on God and nothing else. What else were you reflecting on?”

“On my wife and children, whom I have not seen for many a long day, Sire.”

“True, true, Chauvelin, you are married and the father of a family; I had forgotten the fact; and you must have too, I should think, for during all the fifteen years we have enjoyed each other’s society every day, this is the first time you have ever mentioned them to me. Well, well, if you are so enamoured of family life, bring them here; I will raise no objection, and your quarters in the Château are big enough, I should suppose.”

“Sire,” replied the Marquis, “Madame de Chauvelin lives in great retirement and in the strict exercise of her religion, and...”

“And she would be shocked at our Versailles doings, eh? I understand. ‘Tis like my daughter Louise, whom I cannot get away from Saint-Denis. In that case I can see no way out of the difficulty, my dear Marquis.

“I crave the King’s pardon; there is one.”

“To wit?”

“My term of service is up to-night; if the King would permit me to go to Grosbois to spend a few hours with my family.”

“You are joking, Marquis. What, leave me?”

“I will come back, Sire; but I should not like to die without having made some testamentary arrangements.”

“Die! devil take the man! what business has he to talk of dying? How old are you, Marquis?”

“Sire, I am ten years younger than your Majesty, though I look ten years older.”

The King turned his back on the unfortunate wit, and addressing himself to the Duc de Coigny, who was standing close to the Royal dais.

“Ah! there you are, Duke,” he said; “you come at the very right moment; they were talking about you the other evening at supper. Is it true you have given hospitality, in my Castle of Choisy, to that poor fellow Gentil-Bernard, — a good deed, and a praiseworthy. Still, if all the Governors of my Castles did the same and sheltered poets run mad, there would be nothing left for me but to go and live at Bicêtre. How is the poor wretch?”

“Still very bad, Sire.”

“And how did this happen to him?”

‘‘Why, because he lived a bit too merry a life in former days, and above all because he *would* play the young man quite recently.”

“Ah yes! I understand. Of course, he is a very old man.”

“I ask the King’s pardon, but he is only a year older than your Majesty.”

“Really and truly this is unbearable,” cried the King, turning his back on the Duc de Coigny; “not content with being gloomy as tombstones to-day, they must be as stupid as owls into the bargain.”

The Duc d’Ayen, one of the wittiest men of that witty age, saw the King’s growing ill-humour, and fearing to feel some of the effects of it himself, he determined to put an end to it as soon as might be, and stepped two paces forward to bring his presence to the King’s notice. He wore on waistcoat, gaiters and coat gold embroideries *so* large and splendid they could not fail to attract attention. The King soon noticed him, and cried:

“Why, upon my word, Duke, you shine like the sun. What, have you robbed a coach? I thought all the broiderers in Paris were ruined since the Comte de Provence’s marriage, when never a Courtier paid them and the Princes deemed it best not to come, — for want of money, or want of credit, no doubt.”

"So they are all ruined, Sire."

"Who? the Princes, the broiderers, or the Courtiers."

"Why, all of them, I think, more or less. But the broiderers are the cleverest; they will get out of their difficulties."

"How?"

"By the new invention you see here," — and he pointed to his finery.

"I don't understand."

"Yes, Sire, these clothes embroidered like this are called *à la chancellière.*"

"I am as much in the dark as ever."

"There is only one way to make your Majesty understand the riddle; that would be to quote the verses these scamps of Parisians have made, but I dare not do that."

"You dare not, you, Duke," laughed the King.

"My word! no, Sire; unless I have the King's express orders."

"You have them."

"Your Majesty will at any rate remember that I am only obeying orders. Well, here are the lines:

"On fait certains galons de nouvelle matière;
Mais ils ne sont que pour jours de galas.

On les nomme à la chancellière.

Pourquoi? C'est qu'ils sont faux et ne rougissent pas.

("They are making Court braids of a new kind of stuff, but they are only for gala days. They call them *à la chancellière.* But why? Why, because they are shams, and are no whit ashamed.")

The Courtiers looked at each other, astounded at such audacity, then all turned with one accord towards Louis XV. in order to mould the expression of their faces on his. The Chancellor Maupeou, then at the height of his favour and supported by the King's favourite mistress, was too lofty a personage for men to dare listen to the epigrams which were constantly being directed against him. The Monarch smiled, after that all lips smiled; he made no reply, so no one said a word either.

Louis XV. was strangely constituted. He was horribly afraid of death, and forbid any mention of his own. At the same time he found a curious pleasure in seizing every opportunity of jeering at the foible almost all people have for hiding their age and infirmities. He loved to tell a Courtier:

"You are getting an old man, you look wretched and ill, your time will soon be here."

He made a system of it, and this very day when he had already received two crushing blows, he deliberately exposed himself to the risk of a third. By way of renewing the interrupted conversation with the Duc d'Ayen, he asked him suddenly:

"How is the Chevalier de Noailles? is it true he is sick?"

"Sire, we had the calamity to lose him yesterday."

"Ah! I told him what was coming." Then staring round the ranks of courtiers, now swollen by the advent of those admitted only to the *petite entrée*, he caught sight of the Abbé de Broglio, a harsh, rough, crabbed character, and addressed him thus:

"Your turn next, Abbé; you were just two days his junior."

"Sire," retorted Monsieur de Broglio, white with anger, "Your Majesty was out a-hunting yesterday. A storm of rain came on, and the King got wet just like the rest," — and pushing his way through the crowd he went away in a rage.

The King watched his departure with mournful eyes, adding:

"You see how he is, that Abbé de Broglio, — always losing his temper."

Next, noticing at the door his physician Bounard, and with him Bordeu, a protégé of Madame du Barry and an aspirant to his colleague's post, he called them both to his side.

"Come here, gentlemen; they are talking of nothing else but death here this morning, and that is your business. Which of you will find us the Fountain of Youth? 'It would be a wondrous fine discovery, and I guarantee him a fortune for life. Are you the man by any chance, Bordeu? Nay, Aesculapius as you are to Venus, I see you have not had occasion to think of these little renewals yet."

"I crave pardon, Sire; on the contrary I have a system that should bring us back to the Golden Age of history."

"Of fable, you mean," interrupted Bounard tartly.

"You think so," went on the King. "You think so, my poor Bounard? The fact is that, but for your care, my youth is nothing else but a sorry fable, and the man who would make me young again now should be historiographer of France into the bargain; for indeed he would have tread the finest pages of my reign. Do it, Bordeu, — a cure worthy of immortal fame indeed. Meanwhile, just feel Monsieur de Chauvelin's pulse. There he stands all pale and sad. Give me your opinion as to his health, which is very precious to our pleasures... and to my heart," he added rapidly.

Chauvelin smiled bitterly as he offered his wrist to the doctors.

"Which of you two is it to be, gentlemen?" he asked.

"Both of them," said the King, laughing; "but not Lamartinière; he would as likely as not threaten you with apoplexy, as he did me."

"Well, you first, Monsieur Bounard; the past comes before the future. What is your opinion?"

"Monsieur le Marquis is very ill; there is plethora, congestion of the vessels of the brain. He would do well to be bled, and that without the smallest delay."

"And you, Monsieur Bordeu, what say you?"

"I pray my learned colleague to pardon me; but I am not in agreement with what his experience suggests. If I were talking to a pretty woman, I should say he had the vapours. What he wants is cheerfulness, rest, no worries, no anxieties, a life of perfect ease, — in one word all he enjoys as the friend of the august Sovereign whom he has the honour to serve. I prescribe a continuation of the self-same treatment,"

"Verily two very instructive opinions! Monsieur de Chauvelin must needs feel much enlightened! My poor Marquis, if you die, Bordeu is a dishonoured man."

"Not at all, Sire, the vapours prove fatal, when not attended to."

"Sire, if I die, I ask God to grant it may be at your feet."

"Heaven forfend! you would give me a horrid fright. But is it not time for mass? Here I think come my lord the Bishop of Séez and the Curé of Saint-Louis, our parish. Now at any rate I shall get some satisfaction. 'Good-day, Monsieur le Curé, how goes it with your flock? Are there many sick, many poor? '"

"Alas, yes! Sire, very many."

"But are not alms abundant? Is bread dearer? Is the number of those in want increased."

"Ah, yes! Sire."

"How does that come about? Where do they come from?"

“Why, Sire, the very footmen of your Palace come to me asking charity.”

“I can well believe it; they don’t pay them their wages. Do you hear, Monsieur de Richelieu? Cannot this be set right? Deuce take it, you are First Gentleman of the Bedchamber for the year.”

“Sire, the footmen are out of my department; they come under the regulation of the General Interdance.”

“And the General Interdance will refer them on to someone else!” cried the King, moved to pity for a moment; “but after all I cannot see to everything myself. We will to mass,” he added, turning to the Abbé de Beauvais, Bishop of Séez, who was preaching his Lenten sermons before the Court.

“I am at Your Majesty’s orders,” replied the Bishop with a bow. “But I have heard very grave and solemn words here. The talk has been of death; yet no one thinks of it seriously; no one thinks how it comes at its appointed hour, when least expected; how it surprises us in the midst of our pleasures, and mows down small and great alike with its inexorable scythe. No one thinks how there comes an age when repentance and penitence are no less a necessity than a duty, when the fires of concupiscence must burn low before the great thought of salvation.”

“Richelieu,” broke in the King, smiling, “methinks the Bishop is throwing a fine shower of stones into your garden.”

“Yes, Sire, and he throws them so hard that some rebound into your own Park of Versailles.”

Ah, ha! well answered, Duke; you are as quick of fence as if you were twenty still. Your discourse opens well, my lord Bishop; we will hear the rest of it on Sunday in Chapel; I promise you I will listen. Chauvelin, to ease your melancholy we will dispense with your attendance. Go wait for me in the Countess’s apartments,” he added beneath his breath. “She has just received her gold mirror, Rotiers’ masterpiece. We must have a look at that.”

“Sire, I would rather go to Gros- bois.”

“Enough, you grow tiresome, my friend; go to the Countess, she will exorcise your blue devils. Gentlemen, to mass! Egad! here’s a day begun mighty ill. What a thing it is to be growing old!”

CHAPTER VI.

MADAME DU BARRY’S MIRROR.

THE Marquis was bound to obey the King and, much against his will, betook himself to the Favourite’s apartments. He found that lady in a state of wild delight, dancing round the room like a child. The moment the Marquis de Chauvelin was announced, she ran to him, and without giving him time to utter a single word.

“Oh! my dear Marquis, my dear Marquis,” she cried, “I am so glad to see you. To-day I am the happiest woman in all the world! I have just had the most charming present anyone could receive! To begin with, Rotiers has sent me my mirror; that no doubt is what you have come to see, but we must wait for the King. There, — good fortunes, like misfortunes, never come single you know, — the famous coach has arrived too, the coach, you remember, that Monsieur d’Aiguillon is giving me.”

“Ah! yes,” said the Marquis, “the vis-à-vis everyone is talking about; he certainly owed you that much, Madame.”

“Oh! I know they are talking about it; why, good Lord! I even know what they are saying.”

“Really, you know everything!”

“Yes, pretty nearly; but, let me tell you, I don’t care! Look, here are some lines I found this morning actually in the carriage pockets. I might have the poor coachbuilder put in prison; but there, that would be only worthy of Madame de Pompadour. I am too pleased to want to punish anybody. Besides, the verses are not at all bad, and if they always spoke as well of me, upon my word’! I should not complain,” — and so saying, she handed the paper to Monsieur de Chauvelin.

The latter took it and read:

“Pourquoi ce brillant vis-à-vis?
Est ce le char d’une déese,
Ou de quelque jeune princesse?
S’écriait un badaud surpris.

Non.... de la foule curieuse
Lui répond un caustique,... non,
C’est le char de la blanchisseuse
De cet infâme d’Aiguillon!”

(“Why this gorgeous vis-à-vis? Is it the car of a goddess or of some young princess? ‘cried a surprised spectator. ‘Not it! ‘a critic from the gaping crowd replied; ‘No! it is the car that infamous fellow d’Aiguillon gives his laundry- maid! ‘“)

And the hair-brained beauty burst into a peal of laughter, and presently observed:

“*That infamous fellow of Aiguillon,* you hear that, *gives his laundry-maid.* My life! but the author is right, it is not saying too much; but for me, really and truly, the poor Duke, spite of the flour he was smothered with at the battle of... I can never remember the names of battles, — but for me the poor Duke would have still been black as night. Pooh! what care I? As my predecessor, Monsieur de Mazarin, used to say, ‘they sing, and they sall pay’; I tell you my vis-à-vis is worth — any single one of its panels — more than all the epigrams written at me for the last four years. Now I am going to show it you. Come with me, Marquis, do.”

Then the Countess, forgetting she was no longer Jeanne Vaubernier and equally heedless of the Marquis’s age, sprang singing down the steps of a back staircase leading to a small courtyard in which were situated her stables.

“Look,” she asked the Marquis, panting and out of breath, “is it handsome enough for a laundry-maid to ride in, think you?”

The Marquis stood amazed. Nothing at once more splendid and more elegant had ever met his eyes. The four main panels bore the arms of the Du Barrys and their motto, the famous war-cry, *Boute en avant.* On each of the side panels was depicted a basket of roses, on which perched two doves billing and cooing, — the whole in that ‘vernis Martin,’ of which the secret is now lost. The coach had cost fifty six thousand livres.

“Has the King seen this superb present, Madame?” asked the Marquis de Chauvelin.

“Not yet; but I am certain of one thing, — that he will be delighted.”

“H’m, h’m!...”

“What do you mean by ‘h’m, h’m! ‘“

“I have my doubts. — I even wager he will not allow you to accept it.”

“Why, pray?”

“Because you could never use it.”

“Pooh! really!” she said scornfully. “Ah! you are surprised at such trifles.”

“Perhaps I am.”

“You shall see something much more surprising, not to mention the gold mirror, — and this,” she added, drawing a paper from her pocket, “but no! you shall *not* see this.”

“As you please, Madame,” returned the Marquis with a bow.

“Still, you are, after that old ape of a Richelieu, the King’s oldest friend. You know him thoroughly, and he listens to what you say. You might help us if you would, and then... Let us go upstairs again to my room, Marquis.”

“I am at your orders, Madame.”

“You are very cross and disagreeable to-day. What is the matter with you?”

“I am sad, Madame.”

“Ah! so much the worse. ‘Tis a stupid thing to be! “ — and Madame du Barry remounted, but with a more sedate step, the private staircase she had just come down tripping airily and singing like a bird.

She re-entered her closet, Monsieur de Chauvelin still following her. Then she shut the door, and turning eagerly to the Marquis, “Now come,” she asked, “are you my friend, Chauvelin?”

“You cannot doubt the respect and devotion I feel towards you, Madame.”

“You would help me against anybody and everybody.”

“Yes, except against the King.”

“At any rate, if you do not approve what you are going to hear, you will remain neutral.”

“Yes, I promise to, if you will have it so.”

“On your word?”

“On my word of honour!”

“Then read this,” — and the Countess gave him a document, the most extraordinary at once in its daring and its absurdity, that ever startled a sober gentleman. The Marquis did not at first grasp the whole significance of the thing.

It was an appeal addressed to the Pope for the annulling of her marriage with the Comte du Barry, under pretext that, having been his brother's mistress, and the canons of the Church forbidding any marriage in such a case, the marriage in question was *ipso facto* null and void. It stated further that no sooner was the nuptial benediction pronounced than she had been warned of the sacrilege she was on the point of committing, and which she had never suspected till that moment; consequently she had been terrified and the marriage had not been consummated.

Twice over the Marquis read this strange petition; then returning it to the Countess, he asked her what she proposed to do.

"Why, send it, I should imagine," she replied with her usual insolent frankness.

"To whom?"

"To the Pope; is it not addressed to him?"

"And then?"

"You cannot guess."

"No."

"Heavens! how heavy-headed you are to-day."

"Very likely; but as a matter of fact I cannot guess."

"So you really suppose I protected Mademoiselle de Maintenon without any ulterior object? So you have forgotten the Grand Dauphin and Mademoiselle Choin, Louis XIV. and Madame de Maintenon? They are all day long urging the King to imitate his illustrious grandfather; so they can make no objections. I am as good as the Widow Scarron, I suppose; and I am not sixty, into the bargain."

"Oh! Madame, Madame, what is this I have just heard!" cried Monsieur de Chauvelin, turning pale and falling back a step.

At this moment the door opened, and Zamore announced:

"The King."

"The King!" cried Madame du Barry, seizing Monsieur de Chauvelin's hand; "the King! Not a word. We will resume the subject another time."

The King entered; his eyes travelled straight to Madame du Barry, yet it was the Marquis he first accosted.

"Ah! Chauvelin, Chauvelin!" exclaimed the King, struck by the alteration in the Marquis's features, "are you really and truly going to die. 'Pon my life, you look like a ghost, my friend."

“Die! Monsieur de Chauvelin die!” cried the light-hearted young Countess with a laugh; “no, I forbid that positively. So you forget, Sire, the horoscope they drew him, five years ago, at the Fair of the Loges de Saint-Germain?”

“What horoscope?” asked the King.

“Must I repeat it?”

“Certainly.”

“You do not believe in horoscopes, Sire, I hope.”

“No; besides, if I did, I should ask you to tell me all the same.”

“Well, it was predicted that Monsieur de Chauvelin would die two months before your Majesty.”

“And who is the fool who predicted that?” the King asked with a tinge of anxiety in his voice.

“Why a very skilful sorcerer, the same man who predicted that I...”

“‘Tis all foolishness together all this,” broke in the King with an unmistakable gesture of annoyance. “Come, let us look at the mirror.”

“In that case, Sire, we must pass into the next room.”

“Let us do so.”

“Show us the way, Sire; you know it, for it leads to the bedchamber of your very humble servant.”

It was quite true; the King was perfectly well acquainted with the way, and took the lead.

The mirror stood on the dressing-table, hidden under a heavy drapery, which was removed by the King’s order, leaving open to admiration a veritable masterpiece worthy of Benvenuto Cellini. The frame was of massive gold and was surmounted by two Cupids in full relief holding up a Royal crown, just under which came naturally the head of the person looking in the glass.

“Magnificent, magnificent!” cried the King. “Really Rotiers has surpassed himself. I will tell him how fine I think it is. It is I who make you this present, Countess, you understand.”

“You give it me complete.”

“Of course I do.”

“Glass and frame?”

“Yes, glass and frame.”

“Including this?” persisted the Countess with a cajoling smile that horrified the Marquis, especially after what he had just read, and pointing to the Royal crown.

"That gewgaw?" said the King. "Oh! you can play with it as much as ever you please, Countess; only I warn you, it is heavy. Now shame on you, Chauvelin! you won't unbend, even when you have the Countess to look at, *and* the Countess's mirror; why, man 'tis a double favour she bestows on you, for you see her twice over."

This graceful compliment from the King was rewarded by a kiss from the fair Countess's lips; but the Marquis made no sign.

"What do you think of the mirror, Marquis? Give us the benefit of your opinion, come."

"Why should I, Sire?" asked the Marquis.

"Why? because you are a man of taste, egad!"

"I wish I had never seen it."

"So! now why do you say that?"

"Because I could at any rate have denied its existence then."

"Which means?"

"Sire, the Royal crown is ill placed in the hands of Cupid," replied the Marquis, bowing low.

Madame du Barry grew purple with anger, while the King, at a loss what to say, pretended not to see the point.

"Nay, but on the contrary those Cupids are charming," returned Louis XV.; "they hold the crown with an unparalleled grace. Look at their little arms; you would think they were carrying a wreath of flowers."

"That is just what they should carry; Cupids are only good for such work."

"Cupids are good for any task, Monsieur de Chauvelin," said the Countess; "you knew it well enough once, but at your age one forgets these things."

"No doubt; and it belongs to young men like me to remember them," put in the King with a smile. "But, once for all, is not the mirror to your taste?"

"It is not the mirror I dislike, Sire?"

"Well, what is it then? Surely not the charming face reflected therein? Deuce and all, you are hard to please, Marquis!"

"On the contrary no one pays more sincere homage to the Countess's beauty."

"But," asked Madame du Barry, losing patience, "if it is not the mirror, nor yet the face it reflects, what is it, pray?"

“It is the place it occupies.”

“But surely it could not be better than on that dressing-table, which is likewise a present from His Majesty?”

“Yes, it would be better elsewhere.”

“But where, pray? You really annoy me with your difficulties. I have never known you like this before.”

“It would be better in Madame la Dauphine’s chamber.”

“What do you mean, sir?”

“I mean that the crown with the fleur- de-lis of France cannot be worn but by her who has been, or is, or will be Queen of France.”

Madame du Barry’s eyes flashed fire. The King’s face loomed black and terrible as he rose from his seat and said:

“You are right, Marquis de Chauvelin; your brain is sick. Go and seek repose at Grosbois, since you find yourself so ill at ease in our society. Go, Marquis, go.”

Monsieur de Chauvelin bowed to the ground for sole answer, stepped backwards out of the room, as he might have done on leaving the state apartments of the Palace, and strictly observing the rules of etiquette which forbid a courtier to salute any other person in the King’s presence, disappeared without so much as casting a glance at the Countess, who bit her lips in fury.

The King strove to calm her anger, saying soothingly:

‘‘Poor Chauvelin! the Marquis must have had a bad dream like me. Really all these clever, sceptical fellows knock under the instant the dark angel touches them with the tip of his wings. Chauvelin is ten years younger than I, but I think I am still more than a match for him.”

“Oh! yes, Sire, you are a match for all the world. You are cleverer than your Ministers, and younger than your children.”

The King beamed at this flattering compliment, and did his best to prove how well he deserved it, — in spite of Lamartinière’s warnings.

CHAPTER VII.

MONK, PRECEPTOR AND INTENDANT.

THE next day after the King had given Monsieur de Chauvelin leave to retire to his estates, the Marquise his wife was walking in the Park of Grosbois with her children and their tutor.

A good and noble woman, who dwelling beneath the shade of those great oaks, had known nothing of the corruption gnawing at the heart of France for the past fifty years, Madame de Chauvelin had still her God who smiled on her and to whom she prayed, her children who loved her and whom she adored, her dependents who revered her and whom she succoured.

Always interested in what interested her husband, she followed him in thought through the stormy scenes of court life, as the sailor’s wife pursues with her love the poor mariner tossing far away amid misty seas and tempestuous waters.

The Marquis loved his wife tenderly. Courtier and first favourite, he had never risked, in that game which Kings always win against courtiers, his last stake, to wit the happiness of his domestic life, the bright flame of home to which he looked longingly from afar. It was to him what the lighthouse is to the shipwrecked mariner. At its beams he hoped to warm and refresh himself when the storm and stress were well over.

It was a virtue to Monsieur de Chauvelin’s credit never to have forced the Marquise to come and reside at Versailles. The pious lady would have obeyed, if he had ordered her, but it would have been a sore sacrifice. But as a matter of fact the Marquis had never said a word on the subject except once. Then at the first look of dismay in his wife’s eyes, he had given up the idea. The reason was not, as ill-natured people would have it, that Monsieur de Chauvelin dreaded his wife’s curtain-lectures; there is not a debauchee at Court grovelling before the King and the King’s mistress but can find spirit enough to domineer over his wife and take his children to task.

No, Monsieur de Chauvelin had simply left the Marquise to enjoy her pious thoughts in peace.

“I am gaining acres enough of ground in hell,” he used to say; “let our good Marquise gain some few inches of blue in the skies.”

He never now came to Grosbois except once a year, on St. Andrew’s day, when his wife held high holiday. The proceedings were always the same; Monsieur de Chauvelin embraced his children at two, dined in company, got into his coach at six and was back at Versailles in time for the King’s “coucher.” For four years he had never varied this routine. During four years he had kissed the Marquise’s hand four times. Every New Year’s Day his boys came to see him at Versailles with their tutor.

Monsieur de Chauvelin entrusted his wife with the duty of bringing up his children. The Abbé V..., young and erudite, (he had not yet taken orders, but was generally given the title of Abbé by courtesy), zealously seconded the Marquise’s efforts, and gave all his time and all his heart to these children whom their father had forsaken.

Life ran smoothly at Grosbois. The Marquise divided her day between the management of her fortune, confided to the care of an old intendant by name Bonbonne, the practice of a rigorous piety, under the surveillance of a judicious director, the Père Delar, a Camaldulensian monk, and the education of her two sons who already promised to bear worthily a name made illustrious by many conspicuous services to the State.

Now and again a letter penned by the Marquis in an hour of idleness or discouragement would arrive to console the family and revive in the Marquise’s bosom a tenderness she often reproached herself with not devoting entirely to God. Madame de Chauvelin still loved her husband fondly, and when she had been at her prayers all the day, Father Delar her director would call her attention to the fact that she had spoken to God of nothing else whatever but her beloved consort.

The Marquise had come at last not to entertain a hope for any more of her husband’s society in this world. She aspired, good pious lady, to deserve well enough of God to find Monsieur de Chauvelin once more in the abode of eternal joys.

The Monk blamed Monsieur Bonbonne, and Monsieur Bonbonne the Abbé V...., whenever the children, looking sad or doing penance, seemed to be regretting their father, whom however they knew so little of.

“We cannot but admit,” the Monk would say to his penitent, “that the life he leads there will damn Monsieur de Chauvelin’s soul.”

“We must allow,” the old Intendant would complain, “that this extravagance will ruin the house.”

“Confess,” the Preceptor would declare, “that these children will never win fame, having had no one to stir their emulation.”

Then the Marquise would smile with angelic patience at all three, promising the Monk that Monsieur de Chauvelin would reform in time, telling the Intendant that the economies effected at Grosbois would relieve the deficit of the budget so severely strained at Paris, assuring the Tutor that the lads were of good blood, and that good blood will out.

And all the while the great secular oaks were growing at Grosbois and the young saplings sprouting, both drawing life and sap from the fecund bosom of God.

A day of gloom came, when the flowers in the park, the fruits in the garden, faded and withered, the waters of the fountain ran dry, and the stones of the château crumbled, and all grew sad and bitter. It was a time of disaster and disorder. The Intendant Bonbonne presented accounts that terrified the Marquise, predicting ruin for her children, if Monsieur de Chauvelin did not quickly set himself to the task of ordering his affairs better.

“Madame,” he began after breakfast, “allow me to say twenty words to you.”

“By all means, my good Bonbonne,” returned the Marquise.

“Pray do not forget, Madame,” broke in Père Delar, “that I expect you in the Chapel.”

“May I have the honour to remind the Marquise,” protested the Abbé V..., “that we had fixed to-day for an examination in the mathematics and in grammar; without this my two young friends will not work as they should.”

The fact is, the two lads were beginning rebel against Latin and learning, under pretence that their father cared not a straw whether they were scholars or no.

The Marquise began by taking Père Delar’s, arm.

“Father,” she said, “I am going to begin with you. My confession will not take long, thank God; yesterday I let my thoughts wander during mass.”

“What made them wander, my daughter?”

“I am expecting a letter from Monsieur de Chauvelin, and it has not come.”

“I absolve you, daughter, if that is all your fault.”

“Yes, that is all,” declared the Marquise with the smile of a seraph, — and the Monk withdrew.

“Your turn, Monsieur l’Abbé. The examination would be long and tiresome. If the children are discontented, ’tis because they do not know their lessons. If this is so, and you show me it is so, I shall be forced to scold and punish them. Spare them and spare me; let us put off the trial till a time when it may prove satisfactory for all of us.”

The Abbé agreed that the Marquise was right, and disappeared as the Monk had done, whose form could already be seen vanishing beneath the shadows of the long-drawn avenues.

“Your turn now, Bonbonne,” said the Marquise; “there is only you left. Shall I find your ruffled brow as easy to smooth and your sad sighs to stifle?”

“I fear not.”

“Well, let us see.”

“‘Tis easy said, but my figures are really terrifying.”

“Well, terrify me; you have never yet succeeded in frightening my privy purse.”

“This month your purse *will* be frightened, Madame; it will be worse than frightened, it will die of the blow.”

“Come, come; have you reckoned up my private savings too?” expostulated the Marquise in a tone that was meant to be bantering.

“Have I reckoned up your savings, Madame? Of course I have; where was the difficulty?”

“But I never told a soul, Bonbonne.”

“‘Twere better if you had. But I need not to be told to know.”

“To know what?”

“The grand total of your economies.”

“I defy you to tell me!” cried the Marquise, turning red.

“If you say so, I need not hesitate; you have twenty-five thousand five hundred crowns as near as may be.”

“Oh! Bonbonne,” ejaculated the Marquise, as much chagrined as if the Intendant had indiscreetly discovered some painful secret.

“Madame la Marquise does not suspect me, I trust, of having searched her strong-box.”

“But then... how...?”

"How much have you a year for household expenses? Ten thousand crowns, is not that the sum?"

"Yes."

"And how much do you spend? Eight thousand crowns, I think."

"Yes."

"And is it not ten years that you have been hoarding, seeing it is ten years ago since Monsieur de Chauvelin took up his abode at Court?"

"Yes, again."

"Very well, madame, when the interest is added to the principal you have twenty- five thousand crowns; you must have them."

"Bonbonne!"

"So much for my guessing! — now, having this money, you will give it to Monsieur de Chauvelin; he has only to ask for it. Then, if you give it him, there will be nothing left for your children, supposing the Marquis should die suddenly.

"Bonbonne!"

"Let us look the thing in the face! Your property is pledged to other uses; Monsieur de Chauvelin's estate owes seven hundred thousand livres."

"He has a fortune of sixteen hundred thousand."

"Granted, but the overplus of the seven hundred thousand will not suffice merely to satisfy the creditors."

"You alarm me!"

"I want to."

"What is to be done?"

"Urge Monsieur de Chauvelin, who spends too much, to make over at once for the benefit of his children, the nine hundred thousand livres remaining; get him to assign them to you as jointure, or arrange for their return to you by making a will..."

"Making a will? how dreadful!"

"There you are with your silly scruples! does a man die because he writes a will?"

"But to speak of making a will to Monsieur de Chauvelin!"

"That's it; you are afraid to interrupt Monsieur le Marquis in his pleasures, to trouble his digestion, to vex his serenity, with that horrid word 'the future,' which always sounds like a death-knell in happy ears. Well, if you are deterred by this fear, you will ruin your children, — all to spare the Marquis's susceptibilities."

“Bonbonne!”

“My figures speak for me; read them.”

“‘Tis too dreadful.”

“It would be more dreadful to wait for the disaster I prophesy. Play the judicious counsellor; get into your travelling coach and away to see the Marquis.”

“To Paris?”

“No, to Versailles.”

“And meet the society my husband frequents? Never, never!...

“Write to him then.”

“Will he so much as read my letter? Alas! when I write to congratulate him or wish him luck, he never reads what I say; is he likely to when I write about tiresome business matters?”

“Then a friend must undertake the task, — myself for instance.”

“You?”

“You think he will not listen to me? but I can assure you, Madame, he will.”

“You will make him ill, Bonbonne.”

“His doctor will cure the illness.”

“You will put him in a passion, and then agitation will kill him.”

“Not so; I am far too anxious for him to live. If I did kill him, it would be after getting him to sign a will,” and the worthy man broke into a loud laugh that was very painful to the Marquise.

“Bonbonne,” she moaned, “when you speak so, it is I you are like to kill.”

The Intendant took her hand respectfully. “Forgive me,” he said, “I forget myself, Madame la Marquise; tell them to put the horses in the coach, I am going to Versailles.”

“Thank God for it! You will take my account books with you, and... look, look!”

“What is it?”

“Can my orders have been attended to already?”

“In what way?”

“You spoke of my coach, and lo! there it is, in the Grand Avenue.”

“Can it be?”

“Sir, the Chauvelin liveries!”

“It is the Marquis’s dark greys.”

“Madame, Madame!” the Abbé V... was heard calling, echoed by another “Madame, Madame!” from Père Delar.

“Madame, Madame!” shouted a score of voices, in the gardens, pleasances and park.

“Mother, mother!” shrilled the children.

“The Marquis, here, at Grosbois, today? It cannot be true,” faltered the Marquise.

“Good day to you, Madame,” called the Marquis from the carriage window. It had just come to a halt and he was getting out with looks and gestures of alacrity.

“Himself! it is himself, sound in body and cheerful in mind; God be thanked for this!”

“God be thanked! God be thanked!” repeated the same twenty voices, all eager to welcome the master, husband and father.

CHAPTER VIII.

‘LIKE DICERS’ OATHS’.

IT was indeed the Marquis in person.

Tenderly he embraced the two boys, who had given a shout of joy on seeing him, and kissed with heartfelt affection the hand of the astonished Marquise.

“You here, sir! you!” she cried, taking possession of his arm.

‘‘Yes, it is I... But these lads were at play or at work; I am loth to interrupt their studies, and still more their games.”

‘‘Ah! sir, for the brief time they have to see you, let them have full enjoyment of your dear presence.”

“God be thanked! they will have plenty of time to enjoy the sight of me.”

“Plenty of time, — what, till to-morrow night? You will not be leaving us till to-morrow night?”

“Better still, Madame.”

“You will be sleeping two nights at Grosbois?”

“Two nights, four nights, always.”

“Ah! sir, what has happened then?” cried the Marquise eagerly, without a thought that the expression of so much surprise might well imply some reproach to Monsieur de Chauvelin as to his behaviour in the past.

The Marquis frowned in momentary annoyance; then suddenly:

“Have you not sometimes asked God to restore me to my family?” he asked with a smile.

“Oh! yes, sir, constantly.”

“Very well, Madame, your prayers have been answered. I seemed to hear a voice calling me; and I have obeyed the voice.”

“And you are leaving Court?”

“I am going to settle down at Gros- bois,” struck in the Marquis, stifling a sigh.

“What bliss for us all, — for me, for the children, for the vassals. Is it true, sir, is it true? Can we credit such happiness?”

“Your satisfaction, Madame, is a balm that heals all my wounds. But now, tell me, are you willing to talk over household matters a little?”

“By all means, by all means,” assented the Marquise, pressing her husband’s hands.

“I caught a glimpse, I think, of some very sorry nags at the cross roads at the park gates; are they yours?”

“Yes, they are, sir.”

“Beasts too old for a lady’s use, ugh!”

“Sir, they are the horses you gave me when our boy was born.”

“They were rising four and a half then; it is nine years ago, so they are fourteen now!.. Fie, Marquise, is such a team what you ought to have?”

“Ah! sir, when I go to mass, they can still continue to jog along so far.”

“I saw three, I think.”

“I gave the fourth, being the least broken-down, to my son for his riding lessons.”

“Riding lessons on a coach-horse! Oh! Marquise, Marquise, what sort of a horseman do you expect to make of him?”

The Marquise dropped her eyes in some confusion.

“So, you never drive four in hand now? You have eight in all, have you not, and two saddle horses?”

I had, sir; but as hunting parties and state rides have become things of the past since you went away, I thought if I put down four carriage horses, a couple of grooms and the saddle-horses, it would save at least six thousand livres a year.”

“What is six thousand livres after all, Marquise?” growled Monsieur de Chauvelin.

“It is food and keep for a dozen families,” she retorted.

He took her hand in his. “Always good and kind! Surely God instructs you from on high what to do on earth. Only the Marquise de Chauvelin has no cause to save.”

She raised her head and looked her husband in the eyes.

“You mean to say I spend extravagantly,” he cried; “yes, I do spend a great deal of money, and you, you feel the want of it?”

“I never said that, sir.”

“Marquise, it must needs be so. Noble and generous as you are, you would never have dismissed men in my service except under dire necessity. A groom out of place is a pauper the more. You have lacked money; I will speak to Bonbonne about it. But henceforth you shall have plenty. What I used to spend at Court I will spend at Grosbois; instead of feeding a dozen families, you shall feed two hundred.”

“Sir...”

“And, thank God! I hope there will be coin enough left for a dozen good horses of my own, which from to-morrow shall be lodged in your stables. Have you not been speaking of repairing the château?”

“The reception rooms would want refurnishing.”

“All my furniture from Paris will arrive this week. I shall invite guests to dinner twice a week... there will be hunting...”

“You know, sir, I am rather shy of society,” said the Marquise, terrified at the idea of meeting all her husband’s Versailles friends, whom she looked upon much as if they were the deadly sins incarnate.

“You shall write the invitations yourself, Marquise. Now Bonbonne will give you the books; you will have the kindness to amalgamate in one the Paris expenses and the Grosbois ones.”

The Marquise, frantic with delight, tried to answer and could not. She seized Monsieur de Chauvelin’s hands and kissed them, gazing tenderly in his eyes as if she would fathom the depths of his soul, feeling herself softly enfolded in that warm atmosphere of pure love which vivifies all it touches and carries life and happiness to the chilliest extremities.

“To come to the children,” he resumed; “what is your system with them?”

“One that answers excellently; the Abbé is a man of wit, intelligence and profound learning. Shall I present him to you?”

“Yes, I should like to know all members of the household.”

The Marquise waived her hand, and there entered from the dark pathway to which he had withdrawn with his charges, the young tutor, a hand on either lad’s shoulder. In walk and look, a young oak between two reeds, there was something tender and fatherly in the man and his attitude that quite took the Marquis’s fancy.

“Monsieur l’Abbé,” began the Marquise, “I have good news to tell you. Our lord the Marquis is for taking up his residence among us.”

“God be praised!” returned the Abbé. “But alas! sir, this does not mean that the King is dead?”

“No, thank Heaven! But I have said farewell to the Court and the great world. I shall stay here with my children. I am weary of living for amusement and self- advancement only, and would fain make some sacrifice for affection’s sake. So I am come to dwell at home. Now to begin with, are you satisfied, Monsieur l’Abbé, with your pupils?”

“As well content, Monsieur le Marquis, as a man can be.”

“So much the better. Make them good Christians, like their mother; honest and true, like their grandfather, and...”

“Clever, able and talented, like their father,” put in the Abbé; “I hope to succeed in all this.”

“You are one of a thousand, Abbé. And you, old friend,” he went on, turning to Bonbonne, “are you the same grumbler you always were? When I was their age, you wanted even then to initiate me into business ways. If I had followed your advice, I should not want your help so badly as I do to-day.”

The children had joined hands and were dancing on the grass with the light- hearted gaiety of their age. Their father’s eyes filled with tears, and after a moment’s silence, he murmured softly:

“Dear lads, I will never leave you any more.”

“I pray you may be saying true, Monsieur le Marquis!” broke in a deep, grave voice behind him.

Monsieur de Chauvelin turned and found himself face to face with a stern- faced, white-robed monk, who saluted him with the calm reserve of a man of religion.

“This holy father, who and what is he?” the Marquis asked his wife.

“This is Father Delar, my confessor.”

“Ah! your confessor,” he repeated the word turning a trifle pale. Then in a lower tone, “I have need of a confessor, that is very true; you are welcome, sir.”

The Monk, a man of tact and well accustomed to associate with great people, took no immediate notice of the offer; but he registered the words in his memory. He had been taken into his confidence by the Intendant a day or two before, and was prepared to undertake the necessary negotiations with the newly-arrived Marquis. He was resolved not to neglect so favourable an opportunity as the present for acting in God’s interest, in that of the Marquise, and perhaps, of his own too.

“Might I venture to ask you news of the King, Monsieur le Marquis?” inquired the Monk.

“Why so, my father?”

“A rumour has gone abroad that Louis XV. was soon about to render to God an account of his reign. Such reports are generally but the precursors of Providence. His Majesty has not long to live, believe me!”

“You think so, my father?” asked Monsieur de Chauvelin, feeling more and more discouraged.

“It were therefore much to be desired that he should repent his scandalous life and do penance and...”

“Sir,” broke in Monsieur de Chauvelin with some heat, “‘tis a confessor’s duty to wait in silence till he is called in by his penitent.”

“Death will not wait, sir; I have been long wearying for a word from you, but it fails to come.’’

“From me! Oh! my confession will be a long one, but the time is not yet ripe.”

“The virtue of confession lies all in repentance, in sorrow for having sinned; and the greatest of all sins, I have just told you is scandalous living.”

“Oh! but all the world lives so. There is not one of us but affords matter for evil tongues. Surely heaven does not think right to punish us for the maliciousness of others.”

“Heaven punishes disobedience to its laws, it punishes indifference. It sends us warnings; if we neglect them, nothing can save us any more.”

Monsieur de Chauvelin made no answer, but began to reflect deeply. Meantime the Marquise, seeing the conversation well begun, discreetly withdrew, praying God from the bottom of her heart that it might bear good fruit. After a long silent pause, during which the Monk watched his face, Monsieur de Chauvelin turned suddenly to him:

“Look you, my father, you are right; I repent of having been over long young, and I would fain confess to you, for I feel, I do feel, that death is near.”

“You think so; and yet you take no measures either for your soul’s salvation or the preservation of your fortune. You fear you are going to die; yet you never give a thought to the will you are bound to make, considering the position you will leave your heirs in. Forgive me, Monsieur le Marquis, if perhaps my zeal and my devotion to your house carry me too far.”

“No, you are right in this too, my father; however, rest assured the will you speak of is drawn up, and only lacks my signature.”

“You fear you are going to die, and you are in no state to appear before God.”

“May He have mercy upon me; I was born in the Christian faith, and I would fain die a Christian. Come to-morrow, I beg you; we will resume this discourse of ours, which will give me back my peace of mind.”

“To-morrow! why to-morrow? Death does not turn back nor stay his course.”

“I need time for thought and self communion, I cannot so soon forget the life I have led, however much I may regret it. I thank you for your counsel, my father; it will not be unfruitful.”

“God grant it! but you know the wise man’s axiom, — never put off till to-morrow what you can do to-day.”

“I already owe you my thanks; I was discouraged and you have comforted my spirits. One cannot do everything at once, my father.”

“Oh! Monsieur le Marquis,” replied the Monk, with a respectful bow, “it needs but a minute to turn a sinner into a penitent, a lost soul into one of the elect. If only you would...”

“Well and good, my father, to-morrow. There I hear the dinner bell,” — and he dismissed him with a wave of the hand, and plunged down a side path.

The tutor came up to Père Delar. “What is wrong with the Marquis? He is quite changed; usually so light- hearted, he is grown anxious, gloomy, haggard.”

“He feels a presentiment of his approaching end, and thinks of amending his life; ‘tis a very fine conversion, that will do great honour to my Order. Ah! if only the King...”

“Ah ha! ‘appetite grows by what it feeds on,’ as they say, father; yet I greatly fear your wishes will remain unfulfilled in this case. His Majesty is hard to persuade. Besides he has his official converters; the Bishop of Séez is spoken of as a very doughty champion.”

“Oh! the King is not so great an unbeliever as people think; remember his illness at Metz and how he sent Madame de Châteauroux packing.”

“Yes, but at that date Louis XV. was still young, and it was not a question of expelling Jeanne Vaubernier, — two circumstances which alter the case enormously. Well, you have time enough to see to it, my dear Monsieur Delar; meantime, as the dinner bell has rung, the point is not to keep

Monsieur le Marquis waiting. He does not often afford us the happiness of dining with us.”

The dinner, for which the Père Delar and the Abbé V... arrived in good time, was enlivened by the presence of father, mother and children, as had been expected. Never had the Marquise looked so gay and happy; never had she been more obliging in doing the honours of her table. The cook had surpassed himself. The best fish of the fishponds, the finest poultry of the poultry- yard, the juiciest fruit of the greenhouses and vineries reminded the Marquis how well-stocked was his house when it became a question of fêting a beloved lord and master. The servants, proud to be serving once more so distinguished a master, strutted in their freshest liveries, watching their master’s eye to satisfy the smallest want and obviate the slightest inconvenience, But the Marquis soon lost the healthy appetite he had boasted about on his first arrival. The table seemed a lonely desert, the silence of respect and pleasure to express only gloom and apprehension. Little by little melancholy filled his mind and darkened his face; he let his hand fall lifeless beside his scarcely touched plate, and forgot the goblet where flashed in diamonds the wine of all and glowed the ruby nectar of old Burgundy.

Mere sadness grew into black despondency, and all followed with affright the progressive darkening of his mood. Suddenly a tear fell from his eyes. The Marquise sighed deeply, but he did not so much as notice her distress.

“I have been thinking,” he observed presently to his wife, without preface or warning, “and I wish to be buried, not at Boissy-Saint-Léger, like my father and mother, but at Paris, in the Carmelite Church in the Place Maubert, with my ancestors.”

“Why think of these things now, sir?” asked the Marquise, her voice choked with grief. “Surely we have time enough before us.”

“Who can tell? Tell them to summon Bonbonne and bid him wait for me in my study. I wish to do an hour’s work with him. Father Delar has convinced me how necessary it is. You have an excellent confessor in him, Madame.”

“I am happy to find he pleases you, sir! you may put full confidence in him.”

“I mean to apply to him, and that tomorrow. Now with your permission, Madame, I am going upstairs to my own rooms.”

The Marquise raised her eyes to heaven and thanked God silently in her heart. Gazing after her husband as he left the room with Bonbonne, then turning to her sons, she said:

“In your prayers to-night, my children, ask God to inspire your father with the wish to reside amongst us for always, to strengthen his present good dispositions and give him grace to put them in practice.”

Meantime the Marquis, arrived in his private room, said feverishly, “Now, my good Bonbonne, now, to work, to work! “ — and he shook the papers littering the desk with an eager, trembling hand, as if to classify and master them all on the spot.

“Come, come,” interposed the old man; “we are on the right road, so do not let us hurry too fast; ‘more haste, less speed,’ you know.”

“Time presses, Bonbonne; I tell you, time presses.”

“You don’t say so!”

“I say that the man to whom God grants the joy of arranging duly for the last voyage of all can never work too fast to complete those preparations. Quick, Bonbonne, to work.”

“At this rate, with this heat, sir, you will get a pleurisy, or a congestion, or a bad fever, and so justify yourself as having made your will just in the nick of time.”

“A truce to delay. Where are the accounts of income?”

“Here they are.”

“And those of expenditure?”

“Here.”

“Deficit, sixteen hundred thousand livres. The Deuce!”

“Two years’ savings will fill the gap.”

“I have not two years to save in.”

“Oh! you will drive me mad; what nonsense, with health like yours!”

“I think you told me that the Notary had drawn out a draft will, very cleverly expressed so as to secure to my sons the whole of the assets on their majority?”

“Yes, sir, on condition of your renouncing for six years a quarter of the income from the landed estates alone.”

“Let me see the draft.”

“Here it is.”

“I am a trifle near-sighted. Kindly read it out to me.”

Bonbonne proceeded to read each of the several provisions in order, the Marquis testifying from time to time his lively sense of satisfaction.

“It is an excellent scheme,” he pronounced eventually, — ” the more so, as it j leaves Madame de Chauvelin in possession of a yearly income of three hundred thousand livres, twice what she enjoys now.”

“So you approve?”

“Yes, in every respect.”

“And I may engross the document?”

“Pray do so.”

“That done, you will have to execute it by appending your signature.”

“Quick, Bonbonne, get it done quick!”

“There you are again asking impossibilities. It has taken me half an hour to read the paper over to you, and I shall require at least an hour to make a fair copy.”

“If you only know what a hurry I am in! Look here, you dictate to me, and I will write out the whole will in my own hand.”

“No, no, no, sir! Your eyes look red and inflamed already; before you have been at it ten minutes, you will be in a high fever on top of the headache you have brought on already.

“What am I to do for the hour you say will be needed.”

“Why, walk up and down the lawn in the fresh air with Madame la Marquise. Meantime I will butt and cut my pens; then woe to the paper! I shall blacken more all by myself than three lawyer’s clerks put together.”

The Marquis did as he was told, but reluctantly; he felt somehow oppressed and disturbed in mind.

“Calm yourself,” Bonbonne told him soothingly; “are you afraid you won’t have time to sign? I say an hour; deuce take it, Marquis, you are good to live another one and sixty minutes!”

“You are quite right,” the Marquis agreed, and he went down into the garden, to find the Marquise waiting for him.

Seeing him more composed and looking less unhappy, “Well, sir!” she asked, “have you worked to good purpose?”

“Oh! yes, Marquise, yes, an excellent piece of work, for which you and your boys will be thankful, I hope and believe.”

“Very good! Your arm; the conservatories are open, shall we pay them a visit?”

“Whatever you wish, Marquise, whatever you wish.”

"You will sleep all the better for our little walk. If you could only see how delighted your valets were to make the great state bed."

"Marquise, I am going to sleep as I have not done this ten years; I tremble with joy at the mere thought of it."

"You don't think you will find life too tiresome with us here?"

"No, no, Marquise, no."

"And you will get used to our country neighbours?"

"Yes, very easily. And if the King [I fear I treated him rather unceremoniously perhaps), if the King forgets me, so much the better."

"The King? ah! Marquis," said Madame de Chauvelin softly, "you gave a sigh when you spoke of the King."

"I love His Majesty, Marquise; but rest assured..."

The sentence remained unfinished. The crack of a whip and the jingle of a horse's bells interrupted the Marquis.

"What is that?" he asked.

"A mounted messenger; they are opening the gates for him now," the Marquise replied. "Did you send him?"

"No. Very strange; a messenger to whom everybody bows low and who is admitted to the private gardens can only come from..."

"From the King," faltered the Marquise, turning pale.

"In the King's name!" cried the horseman in a loud, clear voice.

"In the King's name! " — and Monsieur de Chauvelin ran forward to meet the horseman, who had already handed his letter to the major domo.

"A letter from the King!" cried the Marquis to Père Delar, whom the news of the despatch had brought to the spot with the rest of the household.

The Marquis offered to the courier wine in a silver cup, — a compliment justified by the respect paid by every man of birth to the King, even when represented by a servant. Then he opened the letter, which was written wholly in the Monarch's own hand, and ran as follows:

"MY FRIEND, — It is scarce four and twenty hours since you left us; yet I feel as though I had not seen you for months. Old people who love each other should not part, as they may never have the time to come together again. I am fit to die of melancholy. I need you, so you must come. Never rob me of a friend under pretext of wishing to defend my crown. No, you are going the surest way to attack it; so long as you sustain it by your presence, I shall know it is firmer and stronger than ever. Let me see you to-morrow when I meet my Court on rising; it will be the signal for a happy day. Your friend, Louis."

"The King recalls me to his side," exclaimed Chauvelin, deeply moved. "I must set off this very instant; he cannot do without me. Bid them put to the horses."

"Oh!" protested the Marquise, "so soon, after so many delightful promises."

"You shall soon hear from me, Madame."

"Monsieur le Marquis, my copy is finished! "Bonbonne called from afar as he came running up, "Good, very good!"

"There is nothing now but to read it through again and sign."

"I have not the time now, I will another day."

"Another day? But do you forget what you were saying just now?"

"I remember, I remember."

"A truce to delay, you said."

"The King cannot wait."

"But you forget your children, and the future of your house."

"I forget nothing, Bonbonne; I only go because I am obliged to. My children, the future of my line, — everything, you must remember, Bonbonne, is now secured."

"Your signature, only your signature is wanted."

"Look you, old friend," declared the Marquis, radiant with delight, "so firmly am I resolved duly to complete this matter that if I were to die before signing, I swear I would come back here from the other world, — and 'tis a long journey, — on purpose to append my signature. Now have I satisfied you? Then farewell."

So saying he hurriedly embraced his wife and children, and oblivious of all but King and Court, leapt into his coach, a younger man by twenty years, and rolled away for Paris.

But the Marquise and all the household, so happy a moment before, were left standing by the gates, sad, forsaken, dumb and despairing.

CHAPTER IX.

VENUS AND PSYCHE.

THE morning after his despatch to Grosbois, Louis XV.’s first word was to ask for the Marquis de Chauvelin and his first look to see if he had arrived. The Marquis had travelled all night and appeared at the King’s first ‘lever.’

“Good, Marquis, good,” cried the King, “so here you are. Good Lord! what a long time you have been away!”

“Sire, ‘tis the first, and it shall be the last time of my leaving you; if I quit you again, it will be for ever... But indeed the King is very gracious to think I have been long absent; I have been but four and twenty hours away.”

“You think so, dear friend; well, well, it is that confounded prophecy that keeps knelling in my ears. So, not seeing you at your usual post, I imagined you were dead, and then, you understand...?”

“I understand perfectly, Sire.”

“However, let us say no more about it. Here you are, that is the main point. Very true the Countess still bears us a grudge; she is angry with you for having said what you did to her, and annoyed with me for having recalled you to Court after insulting her so outrageously. But never heed her ill humour; time will smooth every difficulty, and the King will give time a helping hand.”

“I thank you, Sire.”

“Now tell me, what have you been doing during your exile?”

“Just think, Sire, I came very near being converted.”

“I understand you are beginning to repent having sung the seven mortal sins in verse.”

“Oh! if I had never done worse than sing them!”

“My cousin of Conti was talking to me of your lines only yesterday; he was delighted with them.”

“Sire, I was a young man then, and impromptus came easy to me. I was there, at the Ile-Adam, alone with seven charming women. The Prince de Conti was away at the chase, while *I* was left at home at the Château, and made the ladies... verses. Ah! ‘twas a fine time, a glorious time, Sire.”

“Marquis, do you take me for your Father Confessor, and is this what you mean by your repentance?”

“My Confessor, — ah! yes, Your Majesty is right; this very morning I had appointed to confer with a Camaldulensian father at Grosbois.”

“Alas! poor man, what an opportunity for worming out your secrets he has missed! Should you have told him everything, Chauvelin?”

“Everything, without exception, Sire.”

“Truly, ‘twould have been a long sitting!”

“My God! Sire, besides my own particular sins, I have so many sins of other folks’ upon my conscience, above all I have...”

“You have mine, you would say? Those, Chauvelin, I dispense you from revealing; a man need only confess his own faults.”

“Still, Sire, sin is appallingly epidemic at Court. I am but just come, and already I have heard speak of a strange adventure.”

“An adventure, Chauvelin, and whom have they credited with this adventure of yours, pray?”

“Whom *do* they credit with most happy adventures, Sire?”

“Egad!” it should be myself.”

“Or perhaps...”

“Or perhaps the Comtesse du Barry, eh?”

“You have guessed, Sire?”

“What! the Comtesse du Barry has been sinning? Plague on’t, tell me about it, Chauvelin.”

“I don’t say that the escapade is exactly a sin in itself, I only say it came into my head in talking of sins.”

“Now, Marquis, what is this escapade? tell me directly.”

“What! directly, Sire?”

“Yes; you know kings are not fond of waiting.”

“Sire, the thing is serious.”

“Pooh! perhaps a difference of opinion with my little daughter-in-law?”

“Sire, I cannot deny it.”

“There, the Countess will end in quarrelling with the Dauphine, and then, my word...”

“Sire, I think the Countess is by this time in full quarrel.”

“With the Dauphine?”

“No; but with another little daughter- in-law of yours.”

“What, the Comtesse de Provence?”

“Precisely.”

“Good! a pretty kettle of fish we have now? Look here, Chauvelin; is it the Comtesse de Provence who brings this complaint?”

“So they tell me.”

“In that case the Comte de Provence will write the most odious epigrams on my poor Countess. Do what she will, she will be whipped in fine style.”

“Then, Sire, ‘twill only be a Roland for an Oliver, after all.”

“What do you mean?”

“Just think, the Marquise de Rosen...”

“That pretty little brunette, eh? the Comtesse de Provence’s friend?”

“Yes, the lady Your Majesty has looked at so often in the last month.”

“Oh! I have had scolding enough about it from a certain quarter, Marquis? Well, you say...”

“Who scolded you, Sire?”

“Egad! the Countess of course.”

Well, Sire, if the Countess has scolded *you*, she has done more than scold somebody else!”

“Explain yourself, Marquis; you frighten me.”

“Egad! Sire, I wish to frighten you.”

“What! it is really serious then?”

“Most serious.”

“Tell me.”

“Well, it seems that... that — do you know, Sire, it is harder to tell about than it was to do.”

“Really you frighten me, Marquis. Till now I supposed you were joking. But if there is something really serious that has happened, come, let us be serious about it.”

At this moment the Duc de Richelieu entered.

“News, Sire,” he announced with a smile both ingratiating and uneasy, — the former by way of currying favour with the Monarch, the latter because it was a difficult and doubtful matter to break the influence of this favourite who had been recalled to Versailles after one day’s exile.

“News, — and where from, my dear Duke?” inquired the King.

Then, looking round, he saw the Marquis de Chauvelin laughing in his sleeve.

“You are laughing, old friend; but you don’t look merry,” he called to him.

“Sire, the storm is going to break; I can see it by the mournful looks the Duc de Richelieu wears.”

“You are mistaken, Marquis; I said I had news; very true, but I do not undertake to tell it.”

“But how, pray, am I to know it else?”

“A page of Madame de Provence’s household is in your antechamber with a letter from his mistress; Your Majesty has only to give your orders.”

“Oh, ho!” cried the King, who would have been only too glad to refer all the blame to the Comte or Comtesse de Provence, whom he disliked, “since when, pray, have the sons of France or their wives been used to write letters to the King instead of appearing in person at his ‘lever ‘?”

“Presumably the letter will give Your Majesty the reason for this breach of etiquette.”

“Get the letter, Duke, and give it me.” The Duke bowed and left the presence; then returning in a moment and handing the letter to the King, “Sire,” he said, “do not forget that I am Madame du Barry’s friend, and that by anticipation I constitute myself her advocate.”

The King threw a glance at Richelieu and opened the letter. His face darkened perceptibly as he mastered the contents.

“Oh!” he muttered, “this is going too far; you have undertaken a thankless task, Duke. Upon my word, Madame du Barry is a perfect madwoman.”

Then turning towards the officers of his household, “Go some of you this very instant and greet Madame de Rosen from me; ask after her health and tell her I will receive her immediately after my ‘lever,’ before going to mass. Poor Marquise! dear little woman!”

Each looked at the other. Was a new planet about to rise on the horizon of Royal favour? Nothing more likely. The Marquise was young and pretty. Appointed twelve months before this date a lady in attendance on Madame de Provence she had struck up an intimacy with the reigning favourite and attended all her private entertainments, where the King had often seen her. However, at the instigation of the Princess, who felt aggrieved at these friendly relations, she had suddenly left off frequenting Madame du Barry’s society, whereat the latter had exhibited no small annoyance. So much the Count already knew.

The present letter, the contents of which were a secret to everybody else, had affected the King profoundly. He looked thoughtful, spoke only a word or two to a few special intimates, and dismissed the company sooner than usual, after bidding Monsieur de Chauvelin to remain behind.

The ceremonial ended, everybody quitted the King's chamber, and his Majesty being informed that Madame de Rosen was at the door, he ordered her to be admitted. She entered in the most pathetic guise, her eyes streaming with tears, and threw herself on her knees before the King, who at once raised her from that humble posture.

"Forgive me, Sire," she began, "for having invoked such august protection in order to win access to Your Majesty; but indeed, indeed I felt so desperate..."

"Oh! I forgive you with all my heart, Madame; I have to thank my grandson for using his influence to unlock a door for you which henceforward shall be always open for your admission. But for the matter of complaint... the main point."

The Marquise only dropped her eyes.

"Come, I am pressed for time," resumed the King; "they wait my coming to mass. Is it really true what you write here? Can the Countess have actually allowed herself to..."

"Oh! Sire, my cheeks still burn with shame at the thought. I am here to crave justice of the King. Never was a lady of quality so treated before."

"What! really and truly," asked the Monarch, smiling in spite of himself, "treated like a disobedient little girl, without any mitigation at all?"

"Yes, Sire, at the hands of four waiting- maids, under her own eyes, in her own boudoir," the young Marquise assured him, her eyes still fixed on the ground.

"Plague on't!" returned the King, whose mind ran riot among these piquant details, "the Countess never said a word about this little plan of hers." Then with the leer of a satyr, "and how did it all happen? tell me about it, Marquise."

"Sire," replied the poor girl, blushing more hotly than ever, "she invited me to breakfast. I excused myself on the plea of being so much occupied with my duties about the person of her Royal Highness, which begin at eight o'clock in the morning. She sent word I was to come at seven and that she would not detain me long; as a matter of fact, Sire, it was not half an hour before I left her apartments."

"You may make your mind easy, Madame, I will have an explanation with the Countess, and justice shall be done you. But in your own interests, I beg you not to talk overmuch about your mishap. Above all your husband must not hear a word of it; husbands are devilish prudish about such things.”

“Oh! Sire, Your Majesty may be assured that for my part I shall know how to hold my tongue; but my enemy the Countess, I feel convinced she has already boasted of her exploit to all her most intimate friends, and to-morrow all the Court will be in the secret... Oh God! oh God! what an unhappy woman I am,” — and the fair Marquise hid her face in her hands, at the imminent risk of washing away the rouge with her tears.

“Be comforted, Marquise,” said the King soothingly; “the Court could not find a prettier *sonffre-donletir* than you. If they talk about the thing, it is only because they are sorry to have missed the sight, just as the gods did in Olympus once à propos of the same little mishap befalling Psyché. I could mention some of our fine ladies who could not find the same consolation so easily as you. You, Marquise, have nothing to regret in what happened.”

The Marquise curtsied and blushed more furiously still, if such a thing were possible. The King gazed entranced at her scarlet cheeks and becoming tears.

“Now then,” he went on, “go back to your room and dry those pretty eyes. To-night at the tables we will arrange the whole matter, I pledge you my word,” — and with the gallantry and grace that marked his blood, the King conducted the young Marquise back to the door, whence she had to make her way through the crowd of staring, wondering, inquisitive courtiers.

The Duc d’Ayen, captain of the King’s Bodyguard, stepped up to the Monarch and bowing silently before him, awaited His Majesty’s commands.

“To mass, Duke, to mass, — now I have done my part as Father Confessor,” ordered the Sovereign.

“So charming a penitent can have committed none but charming faults, Sire.”

“Alas! poor child, ‘tis not her own sins she expiates,” observed the King, as he strode down the Great Gallery on his way to the Chapel Royal.

The Duc d’Ayen followed his master, keeping one step in the rear, — near enough to hear and answer questions, but without actually walking side by side with the Sovereign, according to the rules of etiquette.

“A man would be too happy to be her accomplice, even in a crime, Sire.”

“Her sin is really the Countess’s.”

“Oh! the King knows what to think in that quarter.”

“Doubtless they calumniate the good Countess. She is extravagant, sometimes even, as on the present occasion, a perfect madcap, and I mean to take her to task about it, but she has an excellent heart. Say what ill they like of her, I shall not believe a word. Lord! I know very well I am not her first lover, and that in her good graces I succeeded Radix de Sainte-Foy.”

“Yes, Sire,” retorted the Duke, with the spice of malice concealed under the most urbane manner that was characteristic of the man, “as Your Majesty succeeded Pharamond, — after an interval.”

The King, for all his wit, was no match for so hard a hitter, if he confined himself to mere repartee. He felt the stab, but pretended not to see the point. He hastened to accost a Chevalier of Saint Louis whom he happened to see as he passed. Louis XV. was good-natured and condescending, permitting a great deal of licence to his intimates, and provided he was amused, caring little about anything else. The Duc d’Ayen in particular was privileged to say whatever came to the tip of his tongue. Madame du Barry, all powerful as she was, never dreamt of combating his influence; his name, his position, his wit raised him above attack.

During mass the King’s thoughts often wandered to the tempest this new escapade of Madame du Barry’s would raise, if it were to reach the Dauphin’s ears. That Prince had indeed only the day before spoken his mind pretty freely to the Countess, who in spite of his wishes had pushed her nephew the Vicomte du Barry into an equerry’s post in his household.

“Don’t let him come near me,” the Dauphin had declared, “or I shall order my people to turn him out.”

Obviously this state of mind did not promise much complaisance towards the coarse practical joke the Countess had indulged in. Louis XV. accordingly left the Chapel Royal in a state of no small embarrassment. Before proceeding to the council chamber, he paid a visit to the Dauphine, whom he found superbly dressed and wearing in her hair a diamond spray beautifully mounted.

“That is a magnificent ornament in your hair,” observed the King.

“You think so, Sire? Strange Your Majesty does not recognise it?”

“Recognise it? I recognise it?”

“Of course, for was it not Your Majesty who ordered them to bring it to my rooms.”

"I don't know what you mean."

"Yet the thing lies in a nutshell. Yesterday a jeweller came to the Palace with this ornament of fleurs-de-lis and surmounted with the crown of France, which Your Majesty had commissioned. Since the day God took the Queen from us, I alone, he supposed, had the right to wear such a jewel. So he offered it to me, after your orders and no doubt according to your intentions."

The King reddened, but said nothing.

"More storms brewing," he thought to himself. "The Countess might surely have avoided giving fresh cause for trouble with this silly Marquise affair."

— " Shall you be at the cards this evening, Madame?" he added aloud.

"If Your Majesty so commands."

"Command you, my daughter! Nay, I ask you to come, it will give me pleasure."

The Dauphine bowed coldly. The King saw she did not mean to unbend; so he left her, saying he had to attend a council.

"My children do not love me," he said to the Duc d'Ayen, who had been by his side all along.

"The King is mistaken," the latter replied. "I can assure Your Majesty you are at least as much beloved by your august children as you love them yourself."

Louis XV. understood the *double entendre*, but showed no sign of vexation. Such was his established custom. Otherwise he would have to banish the Duc d'Ayen ten times a day, and since the grief and annoyance Monsieur de Chauvelin's absence had caused him, he realized more than ever how indispensable the society of his favourite courtiers was to him.

"Pooh!" he would say, "they may tickle me as much as they please, my hide is tough enough. It will last out my time; my successor must do as he can."

Strange such apathy and indifference, — for which the unhappy Louis XVI. was to pay the fatal penalty.

CHAPTER X.

AT THE KING’S CARD-TABLE.

THE King was determined to take the Countess severely to task and for this purpose made his way to that lady’s apartments. He was received with the blackest of looks, which he felt portended a storm of anger ready to burst out at a moment’s notice.

Louis XV. was a weak man. He dreaded scenes of recrimination, whether with his daughters, his grandsons, his daughters-in-law, or his mistress; nevertheless, as was inevitable in the case of one standing between a mistress on the one hand and a family on the other, he was continually laying himself open to these unpleasantnesses.

On this occasion he was anxious to prepare for the coming struggle by providing himself with an ally. So after casting one glance at the Countess to consult the barometer of her mood, whether fair or foul, he looked about him and demanded, “Where is Chauvelin?”

“Monsieur de Chauvelin, Sire!” exclaimed the Countess.

“Yes, Monsieur de Chauvelin.”

“Now I really do think, and you must know it better than anybody, that I am not the person to ask for news of Monsieur de Chauvelin, Sire.”

“And why, pray?”

“Why! because he is not one of my friends; and that being the case, it is plain you should look for him anywhere but here in my rooms.”

“But I told him to wait for me here.”

“Well, I suppose he has thought it judicious not to obey the King’s orders,... and upon my word! that is better than coming here, as he did the last time, to insult me.”

“Come, come, I want you to make it up and live in peace.”

“With Monsieur de Chauvelin?”

“With everybody, egad! ‘‘

Then turning to the Countess’s sister, who was making a pretence of arranging a row of china ornaments on a console- table, “Chon, my girl, come here," he called, — and when she had obeyed, "Be so good, my dear, as to tell them to send for Monsieur de Chauvelin at once."

Chon bowed and left the room to carry out the King's commands, *While* Madame du Barry tossed her head and turned her back upon his Majesty.

"Well, what have I done to annoy you now?" asked the King.

"Oh! I quite understand," the Countess retorted, "I quite understand that Monsieur de Chauvelin enjoys all your favour, and that you cannot do without him. He is so anxious to please you and so respectful to those who love you."

Louis felt the hurricane was upon him, and tried to break the waterspout with a well-aimed shot.

"Chauvelin is not the only one," he said, "who fails in the respect due to me and mine."

"Oh! I know all that," cried Madame du Barry; "your Parisians, your parliament, your courtiers even, to say nothing of others whom I had rather not name, fail in their duty to their King, — whenever and wherever, and as often as they please."

The Monarch looked at the reckless speaker with a feeling that was not un- mingled with pity.

"Do you realise this, Countess," he said, "that I am not immortal, and that you are playing pranks to get yourself clapped in the Bastille or banished the country the moment I have closed my eyes?"

"Pooh!" was all the reply vouchsafed.

"Oh! you may laugh, but it is as I say."

"Really, Sire, and how do you make that out?"

"I will tell you in two words."

"Pray do, Sire."

"What is this affair of the Marquise de Rosen? what is this liberty — in the worst possible taste — you have taken with the poor lady? You forget she has the honour to belong to the household of the Comtesse de Provence."

"Forget, Sire? Oh! no, Sire, not I!"

"Well, then, tell me this. How did you dare to inflict this degrading punishment on her, on the Marquise de Rosen, — chastising her as if she were a little girl?"

"I, Sire?"

"Yes, you," stormed the King, losing patience.

"Well, well, well!" broke out the Countess, "I never expected to be blamed for executing your Majesty's orders."

"My orders!"

"Certainly. Does the King deign to remember what answer he made me when I complained of the Marquise's rudeness?"

"Faith! no. I have no recollection of it."

"Well, the King told me, 'What do you expect, Countess, the Marquise is a child who should be whipped.'"

"But 'zounds! that was no reason for doing it," cried the King, reddening in spite of himself, for he remembered having spoken, word for word, the sentence the Marquise had just quoted.

"So you see," resumed the Countess, "your Majesty's slightest wishes being commands for your very devoted servant, she hastened to carry out this particular one amongst the rest."

The King could not help laughing at the imperturbably serious air which the Countess wore.

"So it is I who am to blame?" he asked.

"No doubt of it, Sire."

"Then it is for me to expiate the fault?"

"Apparently."

"Good! that being so, you will convey an invitation to the Marquise from me to supper, and put under her plate the Colonel's commission, which her husband has been petitioning for this last six months and which I should certainly not have given him so soon but for what has occurred. In this way the affront will be made good."

"Very well! So much for the Marquise's wounded feelings; and now about mine?"

"What, yours?"

"Yes, who is to make good the affront put upon me?"

"Why! what affront have you suffered, I should like to know."

"Oh, delicious! pretend you are astonished, do!"

"I am not pretending, dear; I am really and genuinely at a loss."

"You have just come from Madame la Dauphine, have you not?"

"Yes, I have."

"Then you must know the trick she has played me."

"Upon my word I don't; tell me."

"Well, yesterday my jeweller came to Versailles on two errands, — to bring the Dauphine a diamond necklace and me a diamond spray."

"So?"

"So, after taking her necklace, she asked to see my spray."

"Ah, yes!"

"And as my spray was ornamented with fleurs-de-lis, she told the man:

"You have made a mistake, my good Monsieur Boehmer, this diamond spray is not for the Countess. It is for me, and the proof is before your eyes, — the fleurs-de-lis of France there, which since the Queen's death I alone have the right to wear."

"And then?"

"And then the jeweller was frightened and dared not refuse to do what the Dauphine demanded. So he left the diamond spray with her, and came hurrying to me to tell me my property had been stopped *en route.*"

"Well, and what would you have me do?"

"Why, I would have you make them give me back my spray, of course."

"Make them give you back your spray?"

"Certainly!"

"Make the Dauphine, that is to say? You must be mad, my dear."

"Mad? I mad?"

"Yes; I would rather give you another instead."

"Good! may I count on what you say?"

"Upon my honour, you may."

"Yes! and I shall get it, I suppose, in a year's time, or six months hence at earliest, — a pleasant prospect truly!"

"The delay will serve as a warning to you."

"A warning, — how a warning?"

"A warning to be less ambitious in future."

"I ambitious?"

"Certainly. You remember what Monsieur de Chauvelin said the other day?"

"Chauvelin indeed, he talked nothing but foolishness."

"But tell me, who authorised you to bear the arms of France?"

"Who authorised me; why! you did."

"I did!"

"Yes, you! The spaniel you gave me the other day bore them on his collar; why should not I wear them on my head. But there, I know the meaning of it all; I have been told."

"What else have you been told? come."

"Your plans, to be sure."

"Well, tell me my plans, Countess. Upon my word, I should be glad to hear them."

"Can you deny there is a project on foot for your marrying the Princesse de Lamballe, and that Monsieur de Chauvelin and all the Dauphin and Dauphine's clique are urging you to make this alliance?"

"Madame," answered the King in a severe voice, "I will not deny there is some truth in what you say, and I will go so far as to add I might do worse. You know this better that I do myself, Countess, you who have had me sounded as to another marriage."

This speech stopped the Countess's mouth, and she went and sat down at the further end of the room in a rage, and broke two of the china ornaments.

"Ah, yes! Chauvelin was quite right," muttered the King, "the crown is ill placed in the hands of cupids."

Then ensued a moment of sultry silence, during which Mademoiselle du Barry returned to the room, to say:

"Sire, Monsieur de Chauvelin cannot be found anywhere. They think he is shut up in his own rooms; but though I went myself and rang and asked for him at his door, he refused to take any notice."

"Alas! alas!" ejaculated the King, "can he have met with an accident? is he ill? Quick, quick, tell them to break in the door."

"Oh! no, Sire, he is not ill," the Countess declared sourly, "for on leaving the Prince de Soubise and my brother Jean just now in the Œil-de-Boeuf, he announced he was going to be at work all day on urgent business, but that he would make a point of being present this evening at Your Majesty's card tables."

The King took advantage of the Countess's return to a more yielding attitude to patch up a truce.

"Perhaps he is writing his confession," he laughed, "for the edification of his Monk at Grosbois."

Then turning to the Countess, "By-the-bye, Madame," he said, "do you know, Bordeu's medicine works miracles? I mean to take no other. A fig for Bonnard and Lamartinière and all I their systems! My new doctor is going to make me young again, he is upon my word!

“Bah! sire,” put in Chon, “what ails your Majesty to be always talking about growing old? ‘Od’s life! Your Majesty is the same age as everybody else, I suppose.”

“Come now!” cried the King gleefully, “now you talk like that scamp D’Aumont. I regretted to him the other day I had no teeth left, and he answered, showing me as fine a set of grinders as ever a market-porter had, “Why, good Lord, Sire, who has any teeth nowadays?”

“I have,” broke in the Countess, “and what’s more, I tell you I will bite you, — bite you till the blood comes, — if you go on sacrificing me like this to everybody.”

So saying, she came and sat close to the King, showing him a row of pearls that plainly belied her threatening words. Thereupon the Monarch, braving all risks, put his own to the Conutess’s rosy lips. The latter nodded to Chon, who picked up the fragments of the two broken ornaments.

“Good!” murmured the girl, “all that falls in the trenches is the soldier’s.” Then after casting a parting look at the King and Countess. “Undoubtedly,” she said to herself, “Bordeu is a great man; I do think he is,” — and she slipped out of the room, leaving her sister fairly on the road to a reconciliation.

The same evening at six o’clock play began at the King’s tables. Monsieur Chauvelin had kept his promise and was one of the first to arrive. The Countess also was there in the fullest of full dress, because she knew the Dauphine was to be present.

Marquis and Countess met and greeted one another with the utmost amiability.

“Gracious God! Monsieur de Chauvelin,” exclaimed the Countess with one of those double-edged smiles courtiers know so well how to assume,” how red you are in the face! One might think you were going to have a fit of apoplexy. Marquis, Marquis, consult Bordeu; Bordeu is your only hope.”

Then looking at the King with a smile to drive a Pope into mortal sin, she added, “Ask the King if it is not so.”

Monsieur de Chauvelin bowed and answered, “I will not fail to follow your advice, Madame.”

“You will only be doing what a loyal subject should,” she returned.”

“you are bound to be very careful of your health, my dear Marquis, as you are to be only two month’s before....”

"I only wish it were the other way and I had to precede *you,"* put in the King; "you would be sure of a hundred years of life then, Chauvelin. Well, I can only repeat the Countess's good counsel, — go to Bordeu, old friend, go to Bordeu."

"Sire, whatsoever the hour destined for my death, — and God alone knows the hour of every man's death, — I have promised the King to die at his feet."

"Nonsense, Chauvelin; there are some promises people make and don't keep; ask these ladies if it is not so. But if you are so melancholy as all this, dear friend, we shall all be dying of the dismals only to look at you. Come, Chauvelin, are we to play to-night?"

"As your Majesty pleases."

"Do you care to win a game of ombre from me?"

"I am at the King's orders," — and thereupon the Court took their places for play.

Monsieur de Chauvelin and the King sat down facing each other at a special table.

"Now, Chauvelin, look out," cried the King heartily, "and be careful how you play; you may be ill, but *I* have never felt better. I am in the highest of high spirits. Hold tight to your money, whatever you do; I have a mirror to pay for to Rottiers, and a diamond spray to Boehmer."

Madame du Barry compressed her lips significantly at the words.

Instead of answering, however, the Marquis rose painfully from his chair, muttering, "It is very hot, Sire."

"True," replied the King, instead of being annoyed, as Louis XIV. would have been, at this breach of the laws of etiquette; he got over the difficulty by adroitly applying the remark to himself; "yes, Chauvelin, it is very hot, and I am glad of it, for often in April the evenings are chilly."

The Marquis forced a smile, and gathered up his cards with a painful effort.

"Come, you are *ombre*, Chauvelin."

"Yes, Sire," stammered the Marquis, bowing over the table.

"Have you a good hand, come now? Ah! *ventre saint gris* as my ancestor Henry IV. used to say, how dull and disagreeable you are to-night!"

Then, after glancing over his own cards, "Ah, ha! my friend, I think you are done for this time."

The Marquis made a violent effort to speak, and turned so red in the face that the King stopped short panic stricken.

“Why, what is the matter, Chauvelin?” he asked; “speak, man, speak!”

But Monsieur de Chauvelin only put out his hands blindly, dropped his cards, heaved a sigh, and fell face downwards on the floor.

“Great God!” cried the King. “A stroke! an apoplectic stroke!” whispered the courtiers who had hurried to the spot, They lifted the Marquis from the ground, but he never moved a limb.

“Take that away, take it away, I tell you,” the terrified King ordered.

Trembling and twitching with fear, he left the table and seized Madame du Barry’s arm, who drew him away into her private apartments. He had not once turned his head to look back at the friend from whom only the day before he had found it impossible to be parted.”

The King gone, no one gave another thought to the Marquis, lying there lifeless. His body remained awhile reclining in an armchair, into which they had lifted him to see if life were extinct or no, and then let it fall back an inert mass.

The corpse had a weird effect, thus left all alone in the great deserted room, amidst the flashing lustres and the perfumed flowers.

Before long a man appeared on the threshold of the empty *salon,* looked all about him, saw the Marquis lying back in the chair, walked up to him, laid a hand over his heart, and in a hard, dry, clear voice, pronounced exactly as the great Palace clock struck seven:

“He is gone. A fine death, by God! a very fine death!”

Such was Monsieur de Chauvelin’s only funeral oration, and it was no other than Lamartinière who spoke it.

CHAPTER XI.

THE APPARITION.

AT an early hour of the same day Père Delar had arrived at Grosbois, purposing to say mass in the Chapel and not to allow the Marquis's good and christianlike dispositions of the day before to cool. But Madame de Chauvelin informed him how their promising neophyte had slipped through their fingers at the first friendly word from the King, and with tears in her eyes expressed many fears for his eventual salvation.

She invited her Confessor to stay and dine with her, that she might have further opportunity of conversing with him and deriving from his wise advice the courage she needed so sorely after this fresh disappointment.' After leaving the table, Madame de Chauvelin and the Monk walked in the park till it began to grow late, after which they had seats brought out and spent some time by the side of a fine sheet of water to enjoy the cooling evening breeze after the heat of the day.

"For all your comforting and consoling words, Reverend Father," declared the Marquise, "this sudden departure of Monsieur de Chauvelin makes me terribly anxious. I know what strong ties he has binding him to Court life; I know the King is all powerful to influence not his head only but his heart, and his Majesty's conduct is so very ill regulated. — It is not a sin, is it, Father, to say so? alas! the scandal of it is but too notorious!"

"I do assure you, Madame, that the Marquis has received a most salutary impression; 'tis the first battle won, Providence will complete the campaign. I spoke of the matter this morning to our Reverend Prior, and he ordered his Brethren of the House to pray for a happy consummation. You must pray likewise, my daughter, you who are most concerned of any in this blessed work; your children must pray; we must all pray. With the same intent I offered up this morning in the Chapel the holy sacrifice of the mass, and I mean to do the same every day."

"For twenty years, — ever since my marriage with Monsieur de Chauvelin," returned the Marquise, "I have never let an hour pass without asking God to touch his heart. Hitherto the Lord has not answered my prayers. I have lived alone, most often in grief and tears, as you know, Father. I have groaned in solitude over errors I could not prevent; God, it would seem, did not hold me firm enough to deserve the victory. I had to bear more suffering to purchase this gift of grace. Well, I will suffer gladly! The Almighty's will be done!"

Meantime, behind the Marquise and Père Delar, the Tutor was walking with his two charges. Scarcely older than they — the Abbé was only eighteen — he took part in all their amusements.

"Brother," began the older, "do you know what is the fashionable game now at Court?"

"Of course I do, my father told me yesterday at supper; it is called ombre."

"Well then, let us play at ombre."

"Impossible; to begin with, we must have cards, and besides, we don't know how to play."

"One player is the ombre "(shade).

"And the other?"

"Faith! the other is afraid, I suppose, and so he loses."

"Now, brother," went on the elder, "let us say no more about cards; you know our mother does not like it, she thinks cards bring misfortune."

At that moment Madame de Chauvelin rose from her seat.

"My mother is going away into the park," replied the younger lad, following her with his eyes; "so she will never see us. Besides, the Abbé, who is with us, would warn us if it were wrong."

"It is always wrong," said the Tutor, "to grieve one's mother."

"Oh! but my father plays cards at Court," retorted the child with that pitiless logic that like all weak things clings to any and every support. "My father plays, so we can."

The Abbé could find nothing to say, and the child went on:

"Look, my mother is bidding good-bye to Father Delar; she is going with him as far as the gate... he is on the point of going. Only wait a bit; once Father Delar is gone, my mother will return to her oratory; we will go into the Château after her, ask for cards and have a game."

The children watched their mother's form growing fainter and fainter in the deepening shadow of the trees beneath which she finally disappeared.

It was one of those delightful evenings that come before the heats of May. The trees were still leafless, but the swelling buds showed they would soon assume their summer garb. Some, like the chestnuts and lindens, more precocious than the rest, were already clothed in the first tender green of springtide. The still air was filled with the first swarms of the myriad winged insects that are born with the Spring to perish in the Autumn. They could be seen dancing in millions in the last rays of the setting sun, which turned the river into a riband of gold and purple, while to the eastward, that is the direction in which Madame de Chauvelin had plunged into the depths of the park, all objects were beginning to merge into that lovely bluish haze that is seen only at certain specially favoured seasons of the year. Infinite peace and beauty reigned supreme over the twilight landscape.

Amidst this silence seven o’clock sounded from the castle clock, the strokes vibrating long on the evening breeze.

Suddenly the Marquise, who was saying farewell to her Monkish Confessor, uttered a loud cry.

“What is it?” asked the Reverend Father, returning to her side; “what ails you, Marquise?”

“Ails me? Oh! nothing, nothing. But, oh God...!” and the Marquise blanched visibly.

“But you cried out!... You felt some pang or pain!... At this very moment you are growing paler and paler! What is the matter? in heaven’s name, what is the matter?”

“Impossible! my eyes deceive me!”

“What do you see? speak, Madame, speak!”

“No, there is nothing,” and on the Monk’s still pressing her, “nothing, nothing,” she repeated emphatically.

But her voice died between her lips, and her eyes stared fixedly into the gloom, while her hand, white as ivory, was lifted slowly to point towards something her companion could not see.

“For pity’s sake, Madame,” urged Père Delar eagerly, “tell me what it is you see.”

“Nothing, I see nothing! No, no, it is sheer folly,” cried Madame de Chauvelin, “and yet... oh! look, look!”

“Look where?”

“Yonder, yonder, do you see?”

“I see nothing.”

“You see nothing... there, there!”

“Nothing, nothing whatsoever; but you, Madame, tell me what *you* see.”

“Oh! I see, I see... but no, it cannot be.”

“What do you see?”

“I see Monsieur de Chauvelin in Court dress, but pale and walking feebly; he passed yonder, yonder.”

“Great God!”

“Without seeing me, — mark that; or if he did see me, without speaking, — which is stranger still.”

“And now, do you see him still?”

“Yes, I see him still,” — and with finger and eyes the Marquise indicated the direction taken by the Marquis, whose form was all the time invisible to Père Delar.

“And whither is he going, Madame?”

“Towards the Château; there, he is passing the great oak; there, he is close by the stone bench. Oh! look, look! he is going straight towards the children; he steps round yonder clump of trees; he disappears. If the children are still where they were, they cannot help but see him.”

Even as she spoke, a cry rang out that made Madame de Chauvelin tremble. The sound came from the two boys, and had a singularly mournful and solemn effect echoing through the spacious gloom. The Marquise nearly fainted and would have fallen, had not Father Delar caught her in his arms.

“Do you hear?” she faltered, “do you hear?”

“Yes,” replied the Monk, “I did indeed hear a cry.”

Next moment the Marquise saw, or rather became intuitively aware of without seeing, her two children running towards her. The patter of their feet, as they dashed breathlessly forward, could be heard on the gravel of the path.

“Mother, mother! did you see?” cried the elder lad, and the younger re-echoed the words.

“Oh! Madame, do not listen to what they say,” called the Abbé, hurrying up behind them, breathless with the efforts he had made to overtake them.

“Well, children, what is it? “Madame de Chauvelin asked them. But the two boys, instead of answering, only pressed closer to her side.

“Come, tell me what happened,” she said fondling their curly heads, “speak, speak!”

The two children looked at each other.

“You tell her,” said the elder to the younger.

“No, you; you tell her.”

“But, mother,” said the older at last, “did you not see him the same as we did?”

“Dou you hear what he says, Father, do you hear?” cried the Marquise, raising her arms to heaven, then pressing the Monk’s trembling hand between her icy palms.

“See him! see whom?” the latter asked with a shudder.

“Why, my father, of course,” answered the younger child; “did you not see him, mother? Yet he came from your direction; he must have passed quite near you.”

“Oh! how delightful,” cried the elder, clapping his hands, “here is my father come back again!”

Madame de Chauvelin turned to the Abbé.

“Madame,” said the latter in reply to her questioning look, “I can assure you my pupils are mistaken in thinking they saw Monsieur le Marquis. I was close by them, and I declare that no one...”

“And I, Monsieur,” said the elder boy, “I tell you I have just seen my father as plainly as I see you.”

“Fie, fie, Monsieur l’Abbé! how sinful it is to tell lies!” cried the younger of the two lads.

“It is very, very strange,” observed Père Delar.

The Marquise only shook her head.

“They have not seen anything,” the Tutor reiterated, “not anything at all.”

“Wait!” was the Marquise’s sole answer.

Then turning to her two boys with the ineffably tender smile of a mother:

“You say,” she questioned, “you saw your father?”

“Yes, we did,” both answered with one voice.

“How was he dressed?”

“He wore his red Court coat, his blue riband, a white waistcoat embroidered with gold, velvet breeches to match the coat, and silk stockings. He had buckled shoes and carried his sword at his side.”

While the elder thus described his father’s costume, the younger kept nodding his head in sign of acquiescence, and all the time poor Madame de Chauvelin was pressing the Monk’s hand with her own, which grew more and more icy cold every moment. Just so dressed and accoutred *she* too had seen her husband pass by.

“And was there nothing out of the common noticeable about your father, tell me?”

“He was very pale,” said the elder.

“Oh! yes, very, very pale,” added the younger, “like a dead man.”

All present shuddered, mother, Abbé, Confessor; so acute was the note of terror in the child’s words.

“Which way was he going?” asked the Marquise at last in a voice that she strove in vain to steady.

“To the Château,” replied the elder boy.

“I looked round,’’ said the younger, “as I ran, and I saw him going up the great steps to the front door.”

“Do you hear? do you hear?” faltered the distracted mother in the Monk’s ear.

“Yes, Madame, I hear; but I confess I do not understand. How should Monsieur de Chauvelin have passed in at the gate on foot without stopping to greet you? How should he have walked by his sons without stopping a second time? Then how should he have entered the house without any of the domestics noticing him, without his asking for anyone.”

“You are right,” said the Abbé, “what you point out is obviously true.”

“In any case,” went on Père Delar, “it can easily be put to the test.”

“We will go and find out,” cried the two children, starting to run to the Chateau.

“And I will go too,” declared the Abbé.

“And I, too,” faltered the Marquise.

“Madame,” protested the Monk, “you are agitated and white with terror; even if it should be Monsieur de Chauvelin, granting this to be possible, what is there to be afraid of?”

“Father,” returned the Marquise, looking in the Monk’s face, “his coming thus, supposing he has come, mysteriously and alone, does it not strike you as very extraordinary?”

“The more reason for thinking we have all made a mistake. Doubtless some stranger has slipped in, perhaps a burglar.”

“But a burglar, let him be as expert as he may,” objected the Abbé, “has a body, and this body you and I should have seen, Father. But this is just the unaccountable part of it, that Madame la Marquise and my two pupils saw him, while we, and only we, saw nothing.”

“No matter,” returned the Monk; “whichever proves to be true, it would be best perhaps for Madame la Marquise and her children to withdraw to the Orangery, while we make our way to the Château. We will call the servants together and make sure of what has occurred. Now, Madame.”

The Marquise was at the end of her strength, and obeyed mechanically. She retired to the Orangery along with her two sons, but without once losing sight of the Château windows.

Arrived at the shelter indicated, she fell on her knees, saying:

“We can pray at any rate; there is a soul in pain at this moment urging me to pray.”

Meantime the Monk and the Abbé had pursued their way to the Château. Arrived within sight of the main entrance, they had halted to debate the question whether they should not first go round to the offices and summon the domestics, at that hour assembled at supper, to join them in making an exploration of the house.

The suggestion had emanated from the prudent Monk, and the Abbé was on the point of agreeing to it, when they saw a small side-door open and Bonbonne appear at it. The old Intendant came running towards them as fast as his advanced age allowed. He was pale and trembling, — gesticulating violently and muttering to himself as he advanced.

“What is the matter?” asked the Abbé, stepping forward to meet him.

“Oh God! Oh God!” was all Bonbonne could articulate at first.

“What has happened to you?” questioned the Monk.

“What has happened to me? I have seen an awful apparition.”

Monk and Tutor exchanged glances.

“An apparition!” echoed the former incredulously.

“Come, come, it is an impossibility,” said the Abbé.

“It is a fact, I tell you,” insisted Bonbonne.

“And what was the apparition? tell us that.”

“Yes, what did you see?”

“I saw, — I cannot tell you yet exactly what, but I certainly saw...”

“Come, explain yourself.”

“Well, I was sitting in my usual working-room, underneath the Marquis’s great study, and communicating with it, as you know, by a private staircase. I was examining once more the clauses of the will to make sure we had forgotten nothing in drafting it, in view of its supreme importance for the future well- being of the house. Seven o’clock had just struck; suddenly I hear the sound of footsteps in the room above, which I had locked yesterday behind my master the Marquis, and the key of which I had in my pocket. I listen again. Yes, it is certainly footsteps, — some one walking about the room above. More than that, I can hear the drawers of Monsieur de Chauvelin's desk being opened. I can hear the armchair standing in front of the desk being moved, — and that without any attempt to deaden the sound, which strikes me as more than ever extraordinary. My first idea is that thieves have broken into the house; but if so, they are either very reckless or very confident of success. What to do for the best? shall I call the servants? they are in the offices at the other end of the vast building. While I am going to fetch them, the intruders will have ample time to escape. So I take my double-barrelled gun instead, and creep up the little staircase that leads from my room to the Marquis's study on tiptoe. The nearer I come to the top of the stairs, the more eagerly do I strain my ears. Not only can I catch the sound of more moving about, but I hear groans and sobs and inarticulate noises that moved me only too profoundly. For I must tell you frankly, the nearer I came, the more convinced was I that it was my master the Marquis I heard."

"Strange!" exclaimed the Abbé.

"Yes, most strange indeed!" echoed the Monk.

"Go on, Bonbonne, go on!"

"Finally," resumed the Intendant, coming closer to his two hearers, as if to seek safety in their proximity, "at last I looked through the keyhole, Then I saw a bright light flooding the room, though it was night by this time and the shutters were closed. Indeed I had fastened them myself."

"And then?"

"The noises went on — groans that were like the rattle in the throat of a dying man. My blood seemed to stand still in my veins, but I was resolved to see the thing out. I made a supreme effort, and looked into the room again. I saw a circle of tall candles surrounding a coffin.'

"Oh! you are mad, mad, my dear Monsieur Bonbonne," cried the Monk, shuddering in spite of himself.

"I saw it, my Father, I saw it with my own eyes."

"But perhaps your eyes deceived you," put in the Abbé.

"I tell you, Abbé, I saw it all as plainly as I see you; I assure you I lost neither my judgment nor my presence of mind."

"And yet you ran away in a panic!"

“Not at all; I did exactly the contrary, I stayed where I was, praying God and my patron Saint to give me strength. Suddenly however, I heard a crash, and the candles went out, leaving all in darkness once more. It was only then I came downstairs, left the house and saw you. We are three together now. Here is the key of the Marquis’s room. You are Churchmen, and therefore proof against superstitious terrors. Will you come with me? We will satisfy ourselves by personal inspection what has happened.”

“Let us do so,” assented Monk and Abbé with one voice.

All three entered the Château, not by the side door from which Bonbonne had issued, but by the main portal by which the Marquis had gone in.

As they crossed the vestibule and passed in front of a great timepiece, a family heirloom, surmounted by the Chauvelin coat of arms, the Intendant held aloft the candle he had just lighted.

“Well, well! but that is curious! Some one must have meddled with this clock and put it out of order.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Because it has been there ever since I was a child, and I have never known it vary a second.”

“Well?”

“Well, don’t you see it has stopped?”

“At seven o’clock!” observed the Monk.

“Yes, at seven o’clock!” echoed the Abbé.

The two men looked at each once more. The Abbé muttered a “Now for it!” while the Monk repeated some words that sounded like a prayer.

Then they ascended the state staircase and passed through the Marquis’s apartments. The vast rooms, all shut up and empty, lighted only by the trembling light of a single candle which the Intendant carried, had a solemn, almost terrifying, aspect.

Coming to the door of the study they stopped and listened, their hearts beating wildly with excitement.

“Do you hear?” asked the Intendant.

“Perfectly well,” said the Abbé.

“Hear what?” asked the Monk.

“What! you don’t hear those groans, more like a man’s death-rattle than anything else?”

“Quite true,” the Intendant’s two companions agreed with one voice.

“You see I was not mistaken?” resumed the latter.

“Give me the key,” said Father Delar, making the sign of the cross, “we are men, of honourable and Christian life; we have no right to be afraid; let us go in.”

He proceeded to open the door; but for all the trust the man of God reposed in his Divine Master, his hand trembled as he put the key in the lock.

The door opened, and all three halted in amazement on the threshold. The room was empty!

Slowly they advanced into the great apartment, with its walls all covered with books and pictures. Everything was in its place, — except only the portrait of the Marquis, which had broken the nail from which it hung and fallen from the wall. There it lay on the ground, a hole through the canvas where the head was.

The Abbé pointed out the picture to the Intendant.

“There lies the cause of your terror,” he said, with a sigh of relief.

“Yes, that accounts for the crash,” returned the Intendant; “but the groans we heard, did the picture utter them?”

“We certainly did hear groans,” the Monk assented.

“Look there, on this table! what do you make of that?” suddenly exclaimed Bonbonne.

“What? what is there on the table?” asked the Abbé.

“Look at that candle only just extinguished,” cried Bonbonne; “why, the wick is still smoking; feel the wax, it is still warm.”

“It is so indeed!” admitted the two other witnesses of these facts, which certainly seemed supernatural.

“And,” went on the Intendant, “here is the Marquis’s seal, which he wore on his watch-chain, and with which this envelope addressed to his Notary is sealed without being fastened down.”

The Abbé fell back more dead than alive in a seat; he had not strength left to fly.

The Monk remained standing; and without any visible signs of fear, like a man detached from the things of this world, he endeavoured to fathom this mystery, the cause of which he did not know, though he saw the effect without comprehending the final object.

Meantime the Intendant, whom devotion to his master’s house inspired with courage, was turning over one by one the pages of the will which he had examined the day before with his master.

He reached the last, and a cold sweat broke out upon his forehead.

“The will is signed!” he muttered low.

The Abbé started violently where he sat, the Monk bent over the table, the Intendant gazed from one to the other of his companions.

A moment of tense, grim silence fell between the three men, and the bravest of them felt his hair bristle on his head.

Presently all three bent their eyes once more on the document. A codicil had been added — the ink was still wet — conceived in these words:

“My wish is for my body to be buried at the Carmelite Church in the Place Maubert, beside my ancestors.

“Executed at my Château of Grosbois, this 27th April, 1774, at seven o’clock in the evening.

“CHAUVELIN.”

The two signatures, that of the will and that of the codicil, together with the codicil itself, were written in a hand less firm than was the general text of the will, but still perfectly legible.

“Let us say a *De profundis*, gentlemen,” said the Intendant gravely; “it is very evident the Marquis is dead.”

The three men knelt down reverently, and repeated together the orison of the dead, and afterwards remained for minutes wrapt in meditation before finally rising to their feet.

“My poor master!” said Bonbonne, “he had given me his word of honour to come back and sign the will, and he has kept his promise; God have pity on his soul!”

So saying, the Intendant put back the will in the envelope, and taking up his candle, gestured to his companions to follow him out of the room.

Then aloud:

“We have nothing more to do here,” he added; “let us go back to the widow and orphans.”

“You are surely not going to give that paper to the Marquise,” protested the Abbé. “In Heaven’s name! in God’s name! never do such a thing.”

“Calm yourself,” replied the Intendant; this packet shall not leave my hands till I pass it on to the Notary; my master has chosen me executor, inasmuch as he has suffered me to see what I have seen, and hear what I have heard. I shall not rest till his last wishes are carried out; that done, I shall go to join him in the other world. Eyes that have witnessed such things should be closed without delay."

With these solemn words on his lips Bonbonne left the Marquis's study, the other two preceding him, and locked the door. The three then descended the stairs, cast a trembling look in passing at the clock which had stopped at seven o'clock, and issuing by the main entrance, made for the Orangery, where the Marquise and her two children were waiting for them.

The three were still at prayer, — the mother kneeling, her two sons standing by her.

"Well?" she cried, rising hastily at sight of the three men, "well?"

"Continue your prayers, Madame," it was Père Delar who spoke; "you were not deceived. By special grace, accorded doubtless to your peculiar piety, God has permitted that Monsieur de Chauvelin's soul should come back to bid you farewell.

"Oh! my Father," cried the Marquise, raising her clasped hands to heaven, "you see now I was not mistaken," — and falling to her knees once more, she resumed her interrupted prayers, signing the two boys to copy her example.

Two hours later the tinkling of a horse's bells in the Courtyard made Madame de Chauvelin lift her head, where she sat watching between the two beds of her sleeping children.

A voice rang out on the stairs, crying; "A King's messenger! a King's messenger!"

Next moment a footman entered and handed the Marquise a great letter sealed with black.

It contained the official intimation that the Marquis had died at seven o'clock in the evening of an apoplectic stroke while at cards with the King.

CHAPTER XII.

DEATH OF LOUIS XV.

FROM the day that Monsieur de Chauvelin died the King was seldom seen to smile. Every step he took, it seemed as though the Marquis's phantom walked beside him. Only travelling did something towards relieving his gloom, and consequently he was continually on the move, — from Rambouillet to Compiègne, from Compiègne to Fontainebleau, from Fontainebleau to Versailles. Paris Louis XV. never visited; he had a horror of his capital, ever since it had risen in revolt against the supposed baths of children's blood.

But all these noble residences, instead of distracting him from his grief, only recalled the past and its associations and turned his thoughts to sorrowful themes. These dismal reflections only Madame du Barry could chase away, and it was really pitiful to watch the efforts the young and charming favourite made to rekindle the warmth not only of the body, but of the heart of the aged Monarch.

All the time Society was falling to pieces no less surely than Monarchy. Voltaire, D'Alembert, Diderot had undermined the edifice with the waters of philosophic scepticism, and now came the torrents of Beaumarchais' scandal and scurrility to complete the ruin. Beaumarchais issued his notorious *Mémoire* against the Councillor Goezmann, and that magistrate, a member of the powerful Maupeou junta, was compelled to give up his office. The same author was rehearsing his *Barbier de Seville,* and the public was already excited over the daring criticisms of society in general and the government in particular which the philosophical Figaro was expected to utter from the boards.

A scandalous adventure of Monsieur de Fronsac's had shocked, and two abominable adventures of the Marquis de Sade's had appalled, the world.

Society was on the road to the abyss, — no, not to the abyss, to the sewer rather.

Shameful, odious, atrocious these anecdotes one and all; yet they are the only ones to divert the King. Monsieur de Sartines combines them into a daily bulletin, — another ingenious idea of Madame du Barry's, — which his Majesty reads in bed of a morning. It is written and edited in the brothels of Paris, especially in the establishment of the notorious Madame Gourdan.

One day the King reads in the said journal how Monseigneur de Lorry, Bishop of Tarbes, had had the effrontery to drive into Paris in an open carriage with Madame Gourdan and two of her protégées sitting beside him. This was too much; the King informs the Grand Almoner, who summons the Bishop to an interview.

Happily the whole thing admits of an explanation favourable at once to the modesty and the benevolence of the Prelate. Returning from Versailles, the Bishop of Tarbes had seen three women on foot in the highway beside a disabled coach; pitying their predicament, he had offered them seats in his carriage. La Gourdan had seen the diverting side of the situation and had accepted the proposition.

Of course nobody would credit such simplicity on the part of the worthy Prelate, and he was overwhelmed with questions and remarks. "What! you don't know La Gourdan? You mean to tell me that? Nonsense, impossible!"

In the midst of all this the famous musical war between the Gluckists and the Piccinists broke out, and the Court is divided into two hostile camps.

The Dauphine, young, poetical, musically gifted, a pupil of Gliick's, could see nothing in the native French operas but a collection of trivial airs more or less pretty and insignificant. Attending representations of Racine's tragedies, she conceived the idea of sending the text of the *Iphigénie en Aulide* to her master, and inviting him to clothe the verses of Racine in the equally melodious harmonies of his music. In six months the score was complete, and Glück brought it in person to Paris.

The German maestro instantly rose high in the Dauphine's favour, and was granted the entrée to her private apartments at any hour.

Nothing can be properly appreciated without some preliminary training, — and least of all the grand style. Glück's music by no means produced all the effect it should have done just at first. Empty hearts and tired brains have no wish to think, noise is all they want; thought is an effort, noise a distraction. Accordingly the old-fashioned section of Society preferred Italian music, — the tinkling cymbal to the pealing organ.

Madame du Barry, in a spirit of contradiction, just because the Dauphine had brought German music into prominence, took sides for Italian, and sent librettos to Puccini. The latter duly returned the scores, and the new and the old society separated into two rival factions.

The truth is, an entirely new order of ideas was coming to the front and changing the face of old-fashioned French society, like the unfamiliar wild flowers that spring between the cracked paving- stones of a dark courtyard or among the crumbling ruins of an old castle.

These new ideas came from England, and included many novelties unthought of before. There were gardens with intricate winding walks, and interspersed with lawns and clumps of trees and beds of flowers and stretches of turf; there were rustic cottages, and morning walks without powder or rouge, wearing a plain straw hat with a broad brim and a simple blue cornflower or a daisy stuck in it; there were gallops on well-bred horses, followed by grooms wearing black caps and short jackets and buckskins; there were four-wheeled phaetons, for a time prodigiously popular; Princesses dressed like shepherdesses, and actresses like Queens. There were women such as Duthé, Guimard, Sophie Arnould, Prairie, Cléophile, blazing with diamonds, while the Dauphine, the Princesse de Lamballe, Mesdames de Polignac, de Langeac and d’Adhémar asked no finer jewels than a parure of flowers.

At sight of all these new-fangled notions of a society marching recklessly towards a new and unknown future Louis XV. bowed his head in deeper and deeper despondency. In vain did the madcap Countess buzz about him like a bee, light as a butterfly, brilliant-plumaged as a humming-bird: the most the King could do was now and again to raise for a moment his heavy head, on which seemed to be set more visibly every hour the seal of death.

The fact is, time was passing, and the second month opening since the death of the Marquis de Chauvelin.

It was the 3rd May, and by the 28th of the same month it would be exactly two months since that nobleman died.

Then, as if everything concurred to deepen the lugubrious impression of coming disaster, the Abbé de Beauvais had been preaching before the Court, and in a sermon on the duty of preparing for death, and the peril of impenitence at the last, he had cried:

“Yet another forty days, Sire, and Nineveh shall be destroyed.”

The result of all this was that from brooding over Monsieur de Chauvelin’s sudden death the King turned to ponder on the Abbé de Beauvais’ terrifying words, — that after reminding the Duc d’Ayen that by the end of May it would be just two months since Chauvelin died, he would mutter in the Duc de Richelieu's ear, "It was forty days that confounded Abbé de Beauvais said, was it not? " — adding plaintively, "I wish, I wish the forty days were over!"

Nor was this all. The *Almanack de Liege*, under the month April, prophesied: "In April of this year a lady in the highest favour at Court will play her last card."

This set Madame du Barry echoing the King's lamentations, and declaring of this fatal month what the King had said of the forty days: "I wish, I wish this cursed month were well ended!"

But in the said month of April which so terrified Madame du Barry, and during these forty days which the King so dreaded, omens and portents only multiplied. The Genoese Ambassador, whom the King was in the habit of seeing frequently, died with appalling suddenness. The Abbé de Laville, coming to the King's "lever "to tender his thanks for the post of Director of Foreign Affairs to which he had just been appointed, fell dead at the Monarch's feet, struck down by an apoplectic fit. To complete the tale, one day when the King was out hunting, a thunderbolt fell close beside him.

All these circumstances combined to render Louis XV. more and more gloomy. Still, Spring was come back, and might work some alleviation of the Monarch's sad condition. The new birth of Nature shaking off her winter winding-sheet, the re-clothing of the earth in green, the fresh leafage of the trees, the warm breezes that seem like fiery souls in search of corporeal habitations, the fragrant air peopled with a myriad living atoms, — all this would surely restore some life to the inert mass, some movement to the worn- out machine.

About the middle of April Lebel had been struck by the remarkable beauty of a miller's daughter, whom he had chanced to see at her father's mill. He thought so dainty a morsel might stimulate the King's jaded appetite, and spoke in enthusiastic terms to his master of what he had seen. The latter gave a careless consent to this new attempt being tried to divert his melancholy.

As a general rule the girls who were to be honoured — or dishonoured — by the Royal favour went through certain preliminaries before arriving at the King's bedchamber. They were examined by the doctors and they passed through Lebel's hands; only after these formalities had been duly fulfilled, were they deemed eligible.

This time, however, so fresh and pretty was the child that all such precautions were omitted. Even had they been taken as usual, it would hardly have been possible for the most experienced physician to discover that a few hours before she had caught the small-pox.

The King had had the disease in his boyhood; yet two days after he had enjoyed the girl's society, he was attacked by it a second time, a malignant fever supervening on the top of everything, further to complicate matters.

On April 29th the first eruption declared itself, and the Archbishop of Paris, Christophe de Beaumont, hurried to Versailles.

The situation was of the strangest. The administration of the Last Sacraments, if the necessity should arise, could not take place till *after the dismissal of the Royal concubine,* and this same concubine, who was attached to the Jesuit faction whereof Christophe de Beaumont was the chief, this same concubine had rendered, by the overthrow of the Minister Choiseul and the defeat of the Parlement, such important services to the Church — services which the Archbishop himself admitted, — that it was out of the question to disgrace and degrade her by canonical censure.

The chiefs of the party were, besides Monsieur de Beaumont and Madame du Barry, the Duc d'Aiguillon, the Duc de Richelieu, the Duc de Fronsac, Maupeou and Terray. All would fall by the same blow that overthrew Madame du Barry; so they had every motive not to declare against her.

On the other side, the party of Monsieur de Choiseul, which was everywhere, even in the very bedchamber, clamoured for the favourite's expulsion and a speedy confession on the King's part. It was indeed a curious spectacle; here was the party of philosophers, Jansenists and free-thinkers urging the King to confess, while the Archbishop of Paris, the priests and the men of piety were eager for the Royal penitent to refuse to take this step.

Such was the paradoxical condition of mind of those most interested in the question when, on May 1st, at eleven in the morning, the Archbishop arrived to see the sick Monarch. Without awaiting further developments, poor Madame du Barry fled at once, on learning that the Archbishop was in the Palace.

It was the Duc de Richelieu who received the Prelate, of whose intentions he was still in ignorance.

“Monseigneur,” began the Duke, “I pray and beseech you not to terrify the King with this inopportune *theological dogma,* which has been the death of so many sick men. If you are curious to hear a list of pretty, dainty sins, sit down there, and I will confess instead of the King; I’ll tell you some tales the like of which you have not heard since you were Archbishop of Paris. But now, if my offer does not please you, if you are really resolved to confess the King and repeat at Versailles the scenes the Bishop of Soissons provoked at Metz, if you *will* dismiss Madame du Barry publicly and scandalously, just think of the consequences and how these will affect your own interests. You thereby assure the triumph of the Duc de Choiseul, your bitterest enemy, from whom Madame du Barry has done so much to deliver you; you persecute your friend to benefit your enemy, — yes, Monseigneur I repeat, your friend, and so good a friend that only yesterday she was saying to me, and not for the first time either: ‘If the Archbishop will only leave us in peace, he shall have his Cardinal’s hat, I undertake to get it for him and I promise he shall not be disappointed.’”

The Archbishop let Monsieur de Richelieu say out his say, because although of the same opinion in his inmost heart, he felt he must make a show of being over-persuaded. Fortunately the Duc d’Aumont, Madame Adélaïde and the Bishop of Senlis joined their instances to the Marshal’s and gave the Prelate further arms against himself. He promised not to press the matter, and on entering the King’s chamber said never a word about confession. This so greatly reassured the august patient that he had Madame du Barry recalled without a moment’s delay, and when she arrived kissed her lovely hands with tears of pleasure in his eyes.

The next day, May 2nd, the King felt somewhat better; in place of Lamartinière, his ordinary medical attendant, Madame du Barry had sent him her own two doctors, Lorry and Bordeu. They had been instructed, first to hide from the King the true nature of his malady, to say nothing of the seriousness of his present condition, and above all to disabuse him of any notion that he was so ill as to require the services of the Priests.

This temporary improvement in the King’s health enabled the Countess to resume for the moment her usual unconstrained behaviour, her general style of conversation and cajolery. But just as she had succeeded by dint of vivacity and wit in calling up a smile to the sick man’s face, Lamartinière, who still enjoyed his right of entrée, appeared at the threshold, and deeply offended at the preference accorded to Lorry and Bordeu, marched straight up to the King, felt his pulse and solemnly shook his head.

The King had raised no objections, only gazing at him with terrified eyes. His fear was redoubled when he saw the great man shake his head so discouragingly.

“Well, Lamartinière?” asked the Monarch.

“Well, Sire, if my colleagues have not told you by this time how serious the case is, they are fools and liars.”

“What is the matter with me in your opinion, Lamartinière?” the King inquired.

“Od’s life! Sire, that is easy seen; Your Majesty has the small pox.”

“And you say there is no hope of recovery?”

“No, I do not say that, Sire; a doctor never despairs. I only say this, that if Your Majesty is the most Christian King in anything more than name, Your Majesty should bethink you of your duties as a Christian.”

“Very well,” said the King. Then calling Madame du Barry, he went on:

“You hear, my sweet, I have the small-pox, and my condition is especially dangerous, first because of my age, and secondly because of my bad state of health in other respects. Lamartinière has just reminded me that I am the most Christian King and the eldest son of the Church. It may be we shall have to part. I want to avoid a scene like that at Metz; so inform the Duc d’Aiguillon of what I tell you, that he may make arrangements with you, if my state grows worse, for our separating without noise or scandal.”

At the very time when the King was thus expressing himself, all the party of the Duc de Choiseul was beginning to make open complaint and accuse the Archbishop of weak complaisance, declaring that rather than incommode Madame du Barry he would let the King die without the sacraments of the Church.

These accusations soon reached the ears of Monsieur de Beaumont, who determined, in order to stop his enemies’ mouths, to take up his residence at Versailles, in the house of the Lazarist Fathers. This he did at once to impress the public and to be in a position to choose the most favourable moment for fulfilling the ordinances of religion and sacrificing Madame du Barry only when the Monarch’s condition should have become altogether desperate. It was on May 5th the Archbishop returned to Versailles and took up his abode there to await events.

Meantime scandalous scenes occurred at the King’s bedside. The Cardinal de la Roche-Aymon agreed with the Archbishop of Paris in wishing everything to be managed without noise and publicity; but the Bishop of Carcassone thought otherwise, and was minded to play the zealot and revive the Metz incident. He proclaimed openly, “That the King ought to be confessed, the concubine expelled the Palace, the Canons of the Church obeyed; that the Monarch should afford an example to Europe and to the Christian land of France, which he had scandalized.”

“And by what right do you impose advice on me?” demanded Monsieur de la Roche-Aymon angrily.

The Bishop unfastened the pastoral cross from his neck and shoving it almost under the Prelate’s nose:

“By the right this cross gives me,” he said solemnly. “Learn, Monseigneur, to respect this right, and never suffer your King to die without the sacraments of the Church whose eldest son he is.”

All this was said in the presence of Monsieur d’Aiguillon. Realizing all the scandal that must result from such a scene of disputation if it became public, he hurried to the King’s bedside.

“Well, Duke,” the Monarch asked him, “have you carried out my orders?”

“With regard to Madame du Barry you mean, Sire?”

“Precisely.”

“I preferred to wait till they were repeated by your Majesty. I shall never be in too violent a hurry to part the King from those who love him.”

“Thank you, Duke, but it has to be; take the poor Countess and conduct her quietly to your country estate of Rueil. I shall be grateful to Madame d’Aiguillon for any kindness she will be good enough to show her.”

Despite these formal instructions Monsieur d’Aiguillon was unwilling even now to hurry the favourite’s departure, and concealed her in the Château, announcing her final going for the next day, and in this way appeasing to some extent the claims of the ecclesiastical conscience.

After all it was a good thing the Duc d’Aiguillon had kept Madame du Barry at Versailles, for in the course of next day, May 4th, the King asked to see her once more with such eager insistence that the Duke at last admitted she was still at Versailles.

“Tell her to come here then, tell her to come here,” cried the King excitedly, — - and presently Madame du Barry entered the King’s bedchamber for the last time.

She left the presence bathed in tears.

The poor woman, a good-natured, light-hearted, amiable, easy creature, loved Louis XV. as a daughter loves a father.

Madame d’Aiguillon packed her into her travelling coach along with Mademoiselle du Barry the elder, and carried her away to Rueil to wait events.

Hardly was she outside the Palace precincts ere the King asked for her again.

“She is gone,” he was told.

“Gone?” muttered the King; “then it is high time for me to go too. Bid them offer up prayers to St. Geneviève.

Monsieur de Vrillière wrote at once to the Parlement, which in cases of supreme importance, possessed the right of opening or not opening the time-honoured reliquary.

May 5th and 6th passed without a word being spoken of confession, *viaticum* or extreme unction.

The Curé of Versailles came to the Palace with a view to preparing the King for the pious ceremony; but he encountered the Duc de Fronsac, who gave him *his word as a gentleman of birth* that he would pitch him out of the window at the first syllable he might utter on this subject.

“If I am not killed by the fall,” was the Curé’s answer, “I will come in again by the door, as I have the right to do.”

However on the 7th, at three o’clock in the morning, it was the King himself who peremptorily demanded the Abbé Mandoux to be sent for, a poor priest who knew nothing of Court intrigues, a simple- minded ecclesiastic who had been made the King’s Confessor, and who was blind.

His Majesty’s confession lasted seventeen minutes. This ended, the Ducs de la Vrillière and d’Aiguillon were for still deferring the *viaticum*; but Lamartinière, the bitter enemy of Madame du Barry, who had introduced Lorry and Bordeu to the King’s favour, approaching his Royal master:

“Sire,” said he, “I have seen your Majesty in many difficult straits, but never have I admired your conduct so highly as I do to-day. If you follow my advice, you will complete forthwith what you have so well begun,”

The result was the King had Mandoux recalled, and received absolution at his hands.

As for the proposed public and conspicuous act of repentance that was solemnly to annihilate Madame Du Barry, this was not so much as mentioned. The grand Almoner and the Archbishop had together drawn up the following form of declaration which was made in the presence of the *viaticum:*

“Albeit the King is accountable for his conduct to God alone, he hereby declares his repentance for having been the occasion of scandal to his subjects, and his desire to live henceforward only for the maintenance of true religion and the happiness of his subjects.”

The Royal family, including Madame Louise, who had quitted her Convent to attend upon her father, assembled at the foot of the staircase to receive the blessed sacrament.

While His Majesty was receiving the consolations of Religion, the Dauphin, who was not allowed to see his father as he had not had the smallpox, was writing to the Abbé Terray in the following terms:

“To the Controller General, “Sir, — I beg you to see to the distribution amongst the poor of the different parishes of Paris of two hundred thousand livres for prayers for the King’s recovery. If you think the sum excessive, deduct it from our allowances, Madame la Dauphine’s and mine.

“LOUIS-AUGUSTE.”

In the course of May 7th and 8th the disease went from bad to worse. The King felt his body literally falling to pieces as he lay. Deserted by his courtiers, who dared not stay beside this living corpse, he had none to watch over him but his three daughters, who never left his side for an instant.

The King was appalled and conscience stricken. In this horrible corruption which was destroying him bodily he saw a direct punishment from Heaven. In his eyes the invisible hand that was disfiguring his person with loathsome plague spots, was the hand of God. In a delirium that was more of the mind than of the body, and the more dreadful for that very reason, he saw the flames of the burning pit, and screamed for his Confessor, the poor blind Priest, his only hope and refuge, to hold the crucifix betwixt him and the lake of fire. Then with his own hands he would take the holy water, and lifting sheets and blankets, drench himself from head to foot with the blessed liquid, uttering groans of terror the while. Next he would ask for the crucifix, and seizing it with both hands, kiss it again and again, crying: “Lord! Lord! intercede for me, for me the chiefest of all sinners that have ever lived.”

In these terrible accesses of despairing anguish the King passed the 8th day of the month. All day long, — and all day was one agonized confession, — neither the Priest nor his daughters ever left his side. His body was a prey to the most hideous corruption and the living corpse of the doomed King exhaled so fearful a stench that two lackeys fell down stifled, one of whom died.

By the morning of the 10th the bones of the thighs could be seen through the gaping rents in the flesh. Three more lackeys fainted. Terror seized the Palace, and all its inhabitants took to flight, not a living soul was left in the vast pile save the three devoted women and the good Priest.

The whole day of the 10th was one long death struggle; the King would not die, though he lay practically a dead man already in his bed, which was virtually a tomb. At last, at five minutes to three, he sprang up, stretched out his arms, fixed his eyes on a corner of the bedchamber, and cried:

“Chauvelin! Chauvelin! but I tell you it is not two months yet..., “ — and fell back a corpse.

God had granted courage to the three Princesses and the devoted Priest to nurse the living King, but the Monarch once dead, their task no less than his was ended. Moreover all three were already stricken with the disease that had just killed their father.

The funeral arrangements were left to the Grand Master, who completed all his preparations without setting foot inside the Palace. The nightsoilmen of Versailles were the only persons to be found to undertake the risk of putting the King’s body in the leaden coffin destined for its reception. In this he was laid without balms or aromatics, simply wrapped in the sheets of the bed whereon he had died. Then the leaden coffin was placed inside an oak shell, and the whole carried into the Chapel Royal.

On the 12th, what had once been Louis XV. was carried to Saint-Denis. The coffin was in a great hunting coach; a second carriage was occupied by the Duc d’Ayen and the Duc d’Aumont; in a third rode the Grand Almoner and the Curé of Versailles. A score of pages and fifty grooms, mounted and bearing torches, formed the funeral cortège.

The procession, starting from Versailles at eight in the evening, reached Saint- Denis at eleven. The body was lowered into the Royal vault, which it was not to quit till the day when the Basilica was profaned by the Revolutionary mob; this done, the entrance was immediately closed, the door walled up and every chink stopped, that no emanation from this:

human dung-heap might filter through from the lodging of the dead to pollute the homes of the living.

We have described elsewhere the delight of the Parisians at the death of Louis XIV. Their satisfaction was equally great when they found themselves rid of him whom thirty years before they had surnamed *The well- beloved.*

The Curé of Sainte-Geneviève was rallied on the small effect produced by the wonder-working shrine of the Patron Saint of Paris. “Why, what have you to complain of,” was his sardonic answer, “is not the King dead?”

Next day Madame du Barry received at Rueil a letter banishing her the country.

Sophie Arnould heard the news simultaneously of the King’s death and Madame du Barry’s banishment. “Alas!” she exclaimed, “behold us orphaned of father and mother both!”

It was the only funeral oration pronounced over the tomb of the grandson of Louis XIV.

THE END

SOLANGE

DR. LEDRU’S STORY OF THE REIGN OF TERROR

Leaving l’Abbaye, I walked straight across the Place Turenne to the Rue Tournon, where I had lodgings, when I heard a woman scream for help.

It could not be an assault to commit robbery, for it was hardly ten o’clock in the evening. I ran to the corner of the place whence the sounds proceeded, and by the light of the moon, just then breaking through the clouds, I beheld a woman in the midst of a patrol of sans-culottes.

The lady observed me at the same instant, and seeing, by the character of my dress, that I did not belong to the common order of people, she ran toward me, exclaiming:

“There is M. Albert! He knows me! He will tell you that I am the daughter of Mme. Ledieu, the laundress.”

With these words the poor creature, pale and trembling with excitement, seized my arm and clung to me as a shipwrecked sailor to a spar.

“No matter whether you are the daughter of Mme. Ledieu or some one else, as you have no pass, you must go with us to the guard-house.”

The young girl pressed my arm. I perceived in this pressure the expression of her great distress of mind. I understood it.

“So it is you, my poor Solange?” I said. “What are you doing here?”

“There, messieurs!” she exclaimed in tones of deep anxiety; “do you believe me now?”

“You might at least say ‘citizens!’“

“Ah, sergeant, do not blame me for speaking that way,” said the pretty young girl; “my mother has many customers among the great people, and taught me to be polite. That’s how I acquired this bad habit — the habit of the aristocrats; and, you know, sergeant, it’s so hard to shake off old habits!”

This answer, delivered in trembling accents, concealed a delicate irony that was lost on all save me. I asked myself, who is this young woman? The mystery seemed complete. This alone was clear; she was not the daughter of a laundress.

"How did I come here, Citizen Albert?" she asked. "Well, I will tell you. I went to deliver some washing. The lady was not at home, and so I waited; for in these hard times every one needs what little money is coming to him. In that way it grew dark, and so I fell among these gentlemen — beg pardon, I would say citizens. They asked for my pass. As I did not have it with me, they were going to take me to the guard-house. I cried out in terror, which brought you to the scene; and as luck would have it, you are a friend. I said to myself, as M. Albert knows my name to be Solange Ledieu, he will vouch for me; and that you will, will you not, M. Albert?"

"Certainly, I will vouch for you."

"Very well," said the leader of the patrol; "and who, pray, will vouch for you, my friend?"

"Danton! Do you know him? Is he a good patriot?"

"Oh, if Danton will vouch for you, I have nothing to say."

"Well, there is a session of the Cordeliers to-day. Let us go there."

"Good," said the leader. "Citizens, let us go to the Cordeliers."

The club of the Cordeliers met at the old Cordelier monastery in the Rue l'Observance. We arrived there after scarce a minute's walk. At the door I tore a page from my note-book, wrote a few words upon it with a lead pencil, gave it to the sergeant, and requested him to hand it to Danton, while I waited outside with the men.

The sergeant entered the clubhouse and returned with Danton.

"What!" said he to me; "they have arrested you, my friend? You, the friend of Camilles — you, one of the most loyal republicans? Citizens," he continued, addressing the sergeant, "I vouch for him. Is that sufficient?"

"You vouch for him. Do you also vouch for her?" asked the stubborn sergeant.

"For her? To whom do you refer?"

"This girl."

"For everything; for everybody who may be in his company. Does that satisfy you?"

"Yes," said the man; "especially since I have had the privilege of seeing you."

With a cheer for Danton, the patrol marched away. I was about to thank Danton, when his name was called repeatedly within.

“Pardon me, my friend,” he said; “you hear? There is my hand; I must leave you — the left. I gave my right to the sergeant. Who knows, the good patriot may have scrofula?”

“I’m coming!” he exclaimed, addressing those within in his mighty voice with which he could pacify or arouse the masses. He hastened into the house.

I remained standing at the door, alone with my unknown.

“And now, my lady,” I said, “whither would you have me escort you? I am at your disposal.”

“Why, to Mme. Ledieu,” she said with a laugh. “I told you she was my mother.”

“And where does Mme. Ledieu reside?”

“Rue Ferou, 24.”

“Then, let us proceed to Rue Ferou, 24.”

On the way neither of us spoke a word. But by the light of the moon, enthroned in serene glory in the sky, I was able to observe her at my leisure. She was a charming girl of twenty or twenty-two — brunette, with large blue eyes, more expressive of intelligence than melancholy — a finely chiseled nose, mocking lips, teeth of pearl, hands like a queen’s, and feet like a child’s; and all these, in spite of her costume of a laundress, betokened an aristocratic air that had aroused the sergeant’s suspicions not without justice.

Arrived at the door of the house, we looked at each other a moment in silence.

“Well, my dear M. Albert, what do you wish?” my fair unknown asked with a smile.

“I was about to say, my dear Mlle. Solange, that it was hardly worth while to meet if we are to part so soon.”

“Oh, I beg ten thousand pardons! I find it was well worth the while; for if I had not met you, I should have been dragged to the guard-house, and there it would have been discovered that I am not the daughter of Mme. Ledieu — in fact, it would have developed that I am an aristocrat, and in all likelihood they would have cut off my head.”

“You admit, then, that you are an aristocrat?”

“I admit nothing.”

“At least you might tell me your name.”

“Solange.”

"I know very well that this name, which I gave you on the inspiration of the moment, is not your right name."

"No matter; I like it, and I am going to keep it — at least for you."

"Why should you keep it for me? if we are not to meet again?"

"I did not say that. I only said that if we should meet again it will not be necessary for you to know my name any more than that I should know yours. To me you will be known as Albert, and to you I shall always be Solange."

"So be it, then; but I say, Solange," I began.

"I am listening, Albert," she replied.

"You are an aristocrat — that you admit."

"If I did not admit it, you would surmise it, and so my admission would be divested of half its merit."

"And you were pursued because you were suspected of being an aristocrat?"

"I fear so."

"And you are hiding to escape persecution?"

"In the Rue Ferou, No. 24, with Mme. Ledieu, whose husband was my father's coachman. You see, I have no secret from you."

"And your father?"

"I shall make no concealment, my dear Albert, of anything that relates to me. But my fathers secrets are not my own. My father is in hiding, hoping to make his escape. That is all I can tell you."

"And what are you going to do?"

"Go with my father, if that be possible. If not, allow him to depart without me until the opportunity offers itself to me to join him."

"Were you coming from your father when the guard arrested you to-night?"

"Yes."

"Listen, dearest Solange."

"I am all attention."

"You observed all that took place to-night?"

"Yes. I saw that you had powerful influence."

"I regret my power is not very great. However, I have friends."

"I made the acquaintance of one of them."

"And you know he is not one of the least powerful men of the times."

"Do you intend to enlist his influence to enable my father to escape?"

“No, I reserve him for you.”

“But my father?”

“I have other ways of helping your father.”

“Other ways?” exclaimed Solange, seizing my hands and studying me with an anxious expression.

“If I serve your father, will you then sometimes think kindly of me?”

“Oh, I shall all my life hold you in grateful remembrance!”

She uttered these words with an enchanting expression of devotion. Then she looked at me beseechingly and said:

“But will that satisfy you?”

“Yes,” I said.

“Ah, I was not mistaken. You are kind, generous. I thank you for my father and myself. Even if you should fail, I shall be grateful for what you have already done!”

“When shall we meet again, Solange?”

“When do you think it necessary to see me again?”

“To-morrow, when I hope to have good news for you.”

“Well, then, to-morrow.”

“Where?”

“Here.”

“Here in the street?”

“Well, mon Dieu!” she exclaimed. “You see, it is the safest place. For thirty minutes, while we have been talking here, not a soul has passed.”

“Why may I not go to you, or you come to me?”

“Because it would compromise the good people if you should come to me, and you would incur serious risk if I should go to you.”

“Oh, I would give you the pass of one of my relatives.”

“And send your relative to the guillotine if I should be accidentally arrested!”

“True. I will bring you a pass made out in the name of Solange.”

“Charming! You observe Solange is my real name.”

“And the hour?”

“The same at which we met to-night — ten o’clock, if you please.”

“All right; ten o’clock. And how shall we meet?”

“That is very simple. Be at the door at five minutes of ten, and at ten I will come down.”

“Then, at ten to-morrow, dear Solange.”

“To-morrow at ten, dear Albert.”

I wanted to kiss her hand; she offered me her brow.

The next day I was in the street at half past nine. At a quarter of ten Solange opened the door. We were both ahead of time.

With one leap I was by her side.

“I see you have good news,” she said.

“Excellent! First, here is a pass for you.”

“First my father!”

She repelled my hand.

“Your father is saved, if he wishes.”

“Wishes, you say? What is required of him?”

“He must trust me.”

“That is assured.”

“Have you seen him?”

“Yes.”

“You have discussed the situation with him?”

“It was unavoidable. Heaven will help us.”

“Did you tell your father all?”

“I told him you had saved my life yesterday, and that you would perhaps save his to-morrow.”

“To-morrow! Yes, quite right; to-morrow I shall save his life, if it is his will.”

“How? What? Speak! Speak! If that were possible, how fortunately all things have come to pass!”

“However — ” I began hesitatingly.

“Well?”

“It will be impossible for you to accompany him.”

“I told you I was resolute.”

“I am quite confident, however, that I shall be able later to procure a passport for you.”

“First tell me about my father; my own distress is less important.”

“Well, I told you I had friends, did I not?”

“Yes.”

“To-day I sought out one of them.”

“Proceed.”

“A man whose name is familiar to you; whose name is a guarantee of courage and honor.”

“And this man is?”

“Marceau.”

“General Marceau?”

“Yes.”

“True, he will keep a promise.”

“Well, he has promised.”

“Mon Dieu! How happy you make me! What has he promised? Tell me all.”

“He has promised to help us.”

“In what manner?”

“In a very simple manner. Kléber has just had him promoted to the command of the western army. He departs to-morrow night.”

“To-morrow night! We shall have no time to make the smallest preparation.”

“There are no preparations to make.”

“I do not understand.”

“He will take your father with him.”

“My father?”

“Yes, as his secretary. Arrived in the Vendée, your father will pledge his word to the general to undertake nothing against France. From there he will escape to Brittany, and from Brittany to England. When he arrives in London, he will inform you; I shall obtain a passport for you, and you will join him in London.”

“To-morrow,” exclaimed Solange; “my father departs tomorrow!”

“There is no time to waste.”

“My father has not been informed.”

“Inform him.”

“To-night?”

“To-night.”

“But how, at this hour?”

“You have a pass and my arm.”

“True. My pass.”

I gave it to her. She thrust it into her bosom.

“Now? your arm?”

I gave her my arm, and we walked away. When we arrived at the Place Turenne — that is, the spot where we had met the night before — she said: “Await me here.”

I bowed and waited.

She disappeared around the corner of what was formerly the Hôtel Malignon.

After a lapse of fifteen minutes she returned.

“Come,” she said, “my father wishes to receive and thank you.”

She took my arm and led me up to the Rue St. Guillaume, opposite the Hôtel Mortemart. Arrived here, she took a bunch of keys from her pocket, opened a small, concealed door, took me by the hand, conducted me up two flights of steps, and knocked in a peculiar manner.

A man of forty-eight or fifty years opened the door. He was dressed as a working man and appeared to be a bookbinder. But at the first utterance that burst from his lips, the evidence of the seigneur was unmistakable.

“Monsieur,” he said, “Providence has sent you to us. I regard you an emissary of fate. Is it true that you can save me, or, what is more, that you wish to save me?”

I admitted him completely to my confidence. I informed him that Marceau would take him as his secretary, and would exact no promise other than that he would not take up arms against France.

“I cheerfully promise it now, and will repeat it to him.”

“I thank you in his name as well as in my own.”

“But when does Marceau depart?”

“To-morrow.”

“Shall I go to him to-night?”

“Whenever you please; he expects you.”

Father and daughter looked at each other.

“I think it would be wise to go this very night,” said Solange.

“I am ready; but if I should be arrested, seeing that I have no permit?”

“Here is mine.”

“But you?”

“Oh, I am known.”

“Where does Marceau reside?”

“Rue de l’Université, 40, with his sister, Mlle. Dégraviers-Marceau.”

“Will you accompany me?”

“I shall follow you at a distance, to accompany mademoiselle home when you are gone.”

“How will Marceau know that I am the man of whom you spoke to him?”

"You will hand him this tri-colored cockade; that is the sign of identification."

"And how shall I reward my liberator?"

"By allowing him to save your daughter also."

"Very well."

He put on his hat and extinguished the lights, and we descended by the gleam of the moon which penetrated the stair-windows.

At the foot of the steps he took his daughter's arm, and by way of the Rue des Saints Pères we reached Rue de l'Université. I followed them at a distance of ten paces. We arrived at No. 40 without having met any one. I rejoined them there.

"That is a good omen," I said; "do you wish me to go up with you?"

"No. Do not compromise yourself any further. Await my daughter here."

I bowed.

"And now, once more, thanks and farewell," he said, giving me his hand. "Language has no words to express my gratitude. I pray that heaven may some day grant me the opportunity of giving fuller expression to my feelings."

I answered him with a pressure of the hand.

He entered the house. Solange followed him; but she, too, pressed my hand before she entered.

In ten minutes the door was reopened.

"Well?" I asked.

"Your friend," she said, "is worthy of his name; he is as kind and considerate as yourself. He knows that it will contribute to my happiness to remain with my father until the moment of departure. His sister has ordered a bed placed in her room. To-morrow at three o'clock my father will be out of danger. To-morrow evening at ten I shall expect you in the Rue Ferou, if the gratitude of a daughter who owes her father's life to you is worth the trouble."

"Oh, be sure I shall come. Did your father charge you with any message for me?"

"He thanks you for your pass, which he returns to you, and begs you to join him as soon as possible."

"Whenever it may be your desire to go," I said, with a strange sensation at my heart.

"At least, I must know where I am to join him," she said. "Ah, you are not yet rid of me!"

I seized her hand and pressed it against my heart, but she offered me her brow, as on the previous evening, and said: "Until to-morrow."

I kissed her on the brow; but now I no longer strained her hand against my breast, but her heaving bosom, her throbbing heart.

I went home in a state of delirious ecstasy such as I had never experienced. Was it the consciousness of a generous action, or was it love for this adorable creature? I know not whether I slept or woke. I only know that all the harmonies of nature were singing within me; that the night seemed endless, and the day eternal; I know that though I wished to speed the time, I did not wish to lose a moment of the days still to come.

The next day I was in the Rue Ferou at nine o'clock. At half-past nine Solange made her appearance.

She approached me and threw her arms around my neck.

"Saved!" she said; "my father is saved! And this I owe you. Oh, how I love you!"

Two weeks later Solange received a letter announcing her father's safe arrival in England.

The next day I brought her a passport.

When Solange received it she burst into tears.

"You do not love me!" she exclaimed.

"I love you better than my life," I replied; "but I pledged your father my word, and I must keep it."

"Then, I will break mine," she said. "Yes, Albert; if you have the heart to let me go, I have not the courage to leave you."

Alas, she remained!

Three months had passed since that night on which we talked of her escape, and in all that time not a word of parting had passed her lips.

Solange had taken lodgings in the Rue Turenne. I had rented them in her name. I knew no other, while she always addressed me as Albert. I had found her a place as teacher in a young ladies' seminary solely to withdraw her from the espionage of the revolutionary police, which had become more scrutinizing than ever.

Sundays we passed together in the small dwelling, from the bedroom of which we could see the spot where we had first met. We exchanged letters daily, she writing to me under the name of Solange, and I to her under that of Albert.

Those three months were the happiest of my life.

In the meantime I was making some interesting experiments suggested by one of the guillotiniers. I had obtained permission to make certain scientific tests with the bodies and heads of those who perished on the scaffold. Sad to say, available subjects were not wanting. Not a day passed but thirty or forty persons were guillotined, and blood flowed so copiously on the Place de la Révolution that it became necessary to dig a trench three feet deep around the scaffolding. This trench was covered with deals. One of them loosened under the feet of an eight-year-old lad, who fell into the abominable pit and was drowned.

For self-evident reasons I said nothing to Solange of the studies that occupied my attention during the day. In the beginning my occupation had inspired me with pity and loathing, but as time wore on I said: “These studies are for the good of humanity,” for I hoped to convince the lawmakers of the wisdom of abolishing capital punishment.

The Cemetery of Clamart had been assigned to me, and all the heads and trunks of the victims of the executioner had been placed at my disposal. A small chapel in one corner of the cemetery had been converted into a kind of laboratory for my benefit. You know, when the queens were driven from the palaces, God was banished from the churches.

Every day at six the horrible procession filed in. The bodies were heaped together in a wagon, the heads in a sack. I chose some bodies and heads in a haphazard fashion, while the remainder were thrown into a common grave.

In the midst of this occupation with the dead, my love for Solange increased from day to day; while the poor child reciprocated my affection with the whole power of her pure soul.

Often I had thought of making her my wife; often we had mutually pictured to ourselves the happiness of such a union. But in order to become my wife, it would be necessary for Solange to reveal her name; and this name, which was that of an emigrant, an aristocrat, meant death.

Her father had repeatedly urged her by letter to hasten her departure, but she had informed him of our engagement. She had requested his consent, and he had given it, so that all had gone well to this extent.

The trial and execution of the queen, Marie Antoinette, had plunged me, too, into deepest sadness. Solange was all tears, and we could not rid ourselves of a strange feeling of despondency, a presentiment of approaching danger, that compressed our hearts. In vain I tried to whisper courage to Solange. Weeping, she reclined in my arms, and I could not comfort her, because my own words lacked the ring of confidence.

We passed the night together as usual, but the night was even more depressing than the day. I recall now that a dog, locked up in a room below us, howled till two o'clock in the morning. The next day we were told that the dog's master had gone away with the key in his pocket, had been arrested on the way, tried at three, and executed at four.

The time had come for us to part. Solange's duties at the school began at nine o'clock in the morning. Her school was in the vicinity of the Botanic Gardens. I hesitated long to let her go; she, too, was loath to part from me. But it must be. Solange was prone to be an object of unpleasant inquiries.

I called a conveyance and Accompanied her as far as the Rue des Fosses-Saint-Bernard, where I got out and left her to pursue her way alone. All the way we lay mutely wrapped in each other's arms, mingling tears with our kisses.

After leaving the carriage, I stood as if rooted to the ground. I heard Solange call me, but I dared not go to her, because her face, moist with tears, and her hysterical manner were calculated to attract attention.

Utterly wretched, I returned home, passing the entire day in writing to Solange. In the evening I sent her an entire volume of love-pledges.

My letter had hardly gone to the post when I received one from her.

She had been sharply reprimanded for coming late; had been subjected to a severe cross-examination, and threatened with forfeiture of her next holiday. But she vowed to join me even at the cost of her place. I thought I should go mad at the prospect of being parted from her a whole week. I was more depressed because a letter which had arrived from her father appeared to have been tampered with.

I passed a wretched night and a still more miserable day.

The next day the weather was appalling. Nature seemed to be dissolving in a cold, ceaseless rain — a rain like that which announces the approach of winter. All the way to the laboratory my ears were tortured with the criers announcing the names of the condemned, a large number of men, women, and children. The bloody harvest was over-rich. I should not lack subjects for my investigations that day.

The day ended early. At four o’clock I arrived at Clamart; it was almost night.

The view of the cemetery, with its large, new-made graves; the sparse, leafless trees that swayed in the wind, was desolate, almost appalling.

A large, open pit yawned before me. It was to receive to-day’s harvest from the Place de la Révolution. An exceedingly large number of victims was expected, for the pit was deeper than usual.

Mechanically I approached the grave. At the bottom the water had gathered in a pool; my feet slipped; I came within an inch of falling in. My hair stood on end. The rain had drenched me to the skin. I shuddered and hastened into the laboratory.

It was, as I have said, an abandoned chapel. My eyes searched — I know not why — to discover if some traces of the holy purpose to which the edifice had once been devoted did not still adhere to the walls or to the altar; but the walls were bare, the altar empty.

I struck a light and deposited the candle on the operating-table on which lay scattered a miscellaneous assortment of the strange instruments I employed. I sat down and fell into a reverie. I thought of the poor queen, whom I had seen in her beauty, glory, and happiness, yesterday carted to the scaffold, pursued by the execrations of a people, to-day lying headless on the common sinners’ bier — she who had slept beneath the gilded canopy of the throne of the Tuileries and St. Cloud.

As I sat thus, absorbed in gloomy meditation, wind and rain without redoubled in fury. The rain-drops dashed against the window-panes, the storm swept with melancholy moaning through the branches of the trees. Anon there mingled with the violence of the elements the sound of wheels.

It was the executioner’s red hearse with its ghastly freight from the Place de la Révolution.

The door of the little chapel was pushed ajar, and two men, drenched with rain, entered, carrying a sack between them.

“There, M. Ledru,” said the guillotinier; “there is what your heart longs for! Be in no hurry this night! We’ll leave you to enjoy their society alone. Orders are not to cover them up till to-morrow, and so they’ll not take cold.”

With a horrible laugh, the two executioners deposited the sack in a corner, near the former altar, right in front of me. Thereupon they sauntered out, leaving open the door, which swung furiously on its hinges till my candle flashed and flared in the fierce draft.

I heard them unharness the horse, lock the cemetery, and go away.

I was strangely impelled to go with them, but an indefinable power fettered me in my place. I could not repress a shudder. I had no fear; but the violence of the storm, the splashing of the rain, the whistling sounds of the lashing branches, the shrill vibration of the atmosphere, which made my candle tremble — all this filled me with a vague terror that began at the roots of my hair and communicated itself to every part of my body.

Suddenly I fancied I heard a voice! A voice at once soft and plaintive; a voice within the chapel, pronouncing the name of “Albert!”

I was startled.

“Albert!”

But one person in all the world addressed me by that name!

Slowly I directed my weeping eyes around the chapel, which, though small, was not completely lighted by the feeble rays of the candle, leaving the nooks and angles in darkness, and my look remained fixed on the blood-soaked sack near the altar with its hideous contents.

At this moment the same voice repeated the same name, only it sounded fainter and more plaintive.

“Albert!”

I bolted out of my chair, frozen with horror.

The voice seemed to proceed from the sack!

I touched myself to make sure that I was awake; then I walked toward the sack with my arms extended before me, but stark and staring with horror. I thrust my hand into it. Then it seemed to me as if two lips, still warm, pressed a kiss upon my fingers!

I had reached that stage of boundless terror where the excess of fear turns into the audacity of despair. I seized the head and collapsing in my chair, placed it in front of me.

Then I gave vent to a fearful scream. This head, with its lips still warm, with the eyes half closed, was the head of Solange!

I thought I should go mad.

Three times I called:

“Solange! Solange! Solange!”

At the third time she opened her eyes and looked at me. Tears trickled down her cheeks; then a moist glow darted from her eyes, as if the soul were passing, and the eyes closed, never to open again.

I sprang to my feet a raving maniac, I wanted to fly; I knocked against the table; it fell. The candle was extinguished; the head rolled upon the floor, and I fell prostrate, as if a terrible fever had stricken me down — an icy-shudder convulsed me, and, with a deep sigh, I swooned.

The following morning at six the grave-diggers found me, cold as the flagstones on which I lay.

Solange, betrayed by her father’s letter, had been arrested the same day, condemned, and executed.

The head that had called me, the eyes that had looked at me, were the head, the eyes, of Solange!

DELAPORTE’S LITTLE PRESENTS

Were you astonished yesterday evening not to hear my knock at your door for a little talk? You said, “Good! it is the Carnival; he has some dinner on in town, or some ball at the Opera. It is Saturday night; he is amusing himself instead of working, the idle fellow.”

Did I tell not you, though, that it was in working that I was amusing myself? I have neither dined in town, nor have I been to the Opera.

I have been to the Jardin des Plantes and to the Rue d’Erfurth.

From this moment I take you into my confidence. You have the right to ask me what I was doing.

Perhaps you may have heard of the arrival a short time ago at the Jardin of a hippopotamus, two lions, three giraffes, five antelopes, and twenty monkeys. And perhaps you have also heard that a gift has been made to the Louvre of a complete Nigritian museum, and in consequence have made up your mind to go and see all that your first free day.

Well, when you visit the museum at the Louvre, when you see the hippopotamus in his tank, the giraffes behind their palings, the antelopes in their enclosure, and the monkeys in their palace, you will say of the museum, “How strange!” and of the animals, “How curious! “But you will not have an inkling of something connected with both which is the most curious and the most strange of all.

I mean the manner in which the giver, by the exercise of great determination and much patience, got possession of this wonderful gift to the State, worth more than 150,000fr. But I am going to tell you all about that, for the donor is one of my friends.

You must be told that I have friends in the four quarters of the globe, and even in the fifth, since the appointment of Count C-- to the consulship of Oceania.

By the way, have you read my account of my voyage to Tunis? If you have not, it is a matter of regret, for, on my word, it is one of the most amusing things I have ever written. If you had read it, you would know that when we arrived at Tunis, M. Delaporte was French Consul there, and one of the first visits we paid was, of course, to him.

It chanced to be his day of reception, and we found him seated on a throne such as few kings possess. This throne was covered with the skins of twelve lions. Two stuffed lions, crouching down as if in act to spring, their eyes shining, their claws unsheathed like the claws of a sphinx, formed the arms of the seat.

A magnificently handsome Jewess, in Eastern costume, knelt before the Consul, and with a blush held out to him her slipper with the heel towards him. What the slipper presented in this manner meant I have already explained in the *Vèloce.*

We did not disturb Delaporte in his part as Cadi, which, in spite of our presence, he played with the utmost gravity until the last suitor had been seen out by the janissaries, when, throwing aside Eastern solemnity, we rushed into each other’s arms.

Next day Delaporte took us to see his excavations, for he always felt he should have something to give the Government, and he had come there to excavate, seated like Marius among the ruins of Carthage. By perseveringly excavating he had at last struck a fragment of marble with his pick. He was not yet quite sure what this block from which the steel drew sparks formed part of. Was it a capital, a basin, or a fountain? We were going to find out, for it was almost certain that we should find the rubbish had been cleared away before our arrival.

We covered the two or three leagues between Tunis and Carthage as quickly as our horses could carry us, and in less than three-quarters of an hour we reached the excavations. Just as Delaporte had anticipated, the men had made a great advance in the work since the day before, and a colossal head, measuring six feet from the chin to the roots of the hair, had been uncovered.

It was the head of Lusilla, the daughter of Marcus Aurelius, and stands to-day in the Hall of Antiquities, near the Venus of Milo.

After the revolution of February Delaporte was sent to Cairo, and while there he took it into his head to discover what till then no one had ever discovered, viz., some Coptic manuscripts. He found nine and sent them to the Library.

One day there had been some disagreement between a Christian and a slave-dealer about a woman from Burun. Delaporte summoned all the parties before him and settled the matter by buying the woman and setting her at liberty. Then as the slave-dealer, everything “considered, seemed to be, for a slave-dealer, fairly honest and intelligent, Delaporte asked him a good deal about those lands of fable into which he penetrated in pursuit of his trade.

This trade is not unimportant, Egypt alone requiring every year nearly 20,000 slaves, who are drawn from Darfur, Sennaar, Abyssinia, Nubia, the banks of the White and Blue Nile, and from the foot of the Mountains of the Moon.

The slave-dealer mentioned six or seven provinces one after another, situated between 6° and 2°, and the names of which were not to be found even on the enormous map which Delaporte spread out in order to look for them.

“Would you undertake,” said Delaporte to the trader, “to buy and bring me back a complete collection of every article used by these peoples, whose names are unknown to geographers, in connexion with music, toilet, war, cooking, ornament, and work, in short, everything you can pick up from a needle to lances and shields, from the mat on which the king sleeps to the porringer out of which the soldiers eat?”

“It would be difficult,” said the slave-dealer, shaking his head.

“But not impossible?”

“No, with the help of the Prophet nothing is impossible; but.”

“But what?”

“It would cost a great deal.”

“No matter; tell me how much money you would need.”

“I should need neither gold nor silver; such people have never seen a para (a Turkish penny).”

“Then what would you take with you?”

“Venetian glass, shells from the Red Sea.”

“How many quintals? “(= 100lbs.) “One hundred.”

“Then come with me.”

And Delaporte took the trader to Mouski and bought one hundred quintals of glass and shells, adding thereto five or six blocks of salt, which is so precious a commodity in the interior of Africa that it can be exchanged for its weight in gold dust. He then wished his agent a successful journey, and they parted.

Three years passed by, from 1849 till 1851; the first Delaporte looked out for his trader with impatience, the second with anxiety, and the third he gave him up. But one morning a man made his appearance at the French Consulate.

“What do you want?” asked Delaporte.

“It is I.”

“But who are you?”

“The slave-merchant.”

“Ah! And what about my collection?”

“It is at Bulak; come with me there, and you will see.”

They ordered a couple of asses and rode to Bulak, which is a quarter of a league from Cairo. On their arrival the trader showed Delaporte an immense canga, so overloaded that it seemed ready to sink. It contained the Nigritian collection, and a very complete collection it was, I can tell you. For everything was there, from the needle to the lance and shield; from those peculiar bracelets put on the arms of a bride to the great drums as big as a cask on which an ascending and descending scale can be played by passing with the drumstick from one to another.

When you see all this, you will be astonished at the intelligence displayed by the slave-trader; he had left nothing out, from the lizard four feet long, of which the silvery skin is used to ornament the bows of the chiefs, to the lyre of Orpheus made-of a turtle-shell and four strings. Of everything he had procured examples, of barbed arrows and necklaces, of men’s drawers and women’s, of maces, the form of which was copied from those used by the Crusaders; of poleaxes which might have come from the Sandwich Islands. In this collection there was such a variety of pipes that the painter in “La Vie de Bohème,” who had only two, one for friends and one for acquaintances, might have revelled in them. Did you wish for flutes, there they were; or for conches, horns, and trumpets, behold them; and then there were daggers of every possible kind and shape, curved swords to cut off heads with, gourd bottles for brandy, elephants’ tusks, the teeth of hippopotami, rhinoceros horns, and gold dust in plenty.

For I tell you there was some of everything.

When Delaporte began to ask the trader about what he had seen and done, and what kept him so long, this is what he learned.

Three years before four fishermen had been sent to the banks of the Nile, about sixty leagues higher than the junction of the two branches, one of which coming from the Mountains of the Moon, is called the Blue Nile, the other, the source of which is lost in the interior of Africa, bears the name of

Bahr-el-Abiad, or the White Nile, Now, what were those four fishermen doing, camped among the reeds for three years by order of Abbas Pasha? They were waiting till a female hippopotamus should give birth to a young one.

"I beg your pardon ?"

Just what I said, they were waiting, by the order of Abbas Pasha, till a baby hippopotamus should arrive, that they might capture it.

Alas! Hippopotami, which were so numerous under the Caesars, have become rare in our day. It is with them as with whales. Formerly whales were so abundant all round Newfoundland that a pilot was almost as much afraid of the living archipelago formed by a school as if it had been an archipelago of rocky islands; and now, if we desire to come across one, we must go as far as the Polar Seas.

What has made the hippopotamus so rare? Perhaps the great demand there is for their tusks, out of which artificial human teeth are made, for the ivory of the hippopotamus never grows yellow.

And what did Abbas Pasha want with a baby hippopotamus?

England, the rival of France, possessed among many other advantages a male hippopotamus, and greatly desired a female also. So she applied to Abbas Pasha, who being unable to refuse anything to England, placed the four fishermen on the banks of the White Nile, that they might secure for him the first young hippopotamus that its mother might drop on one of the innumerable islets in the river. For as to capturing an adult animal of the kind, there was no use thinking of it. Hippopotami die, but never surrender.

This account gave Delaporte a new idea. He would add a menagerie to his museum. He applied to the proper quarters and ordered two lions, three or four giraffes, five or six antelopes, and as many monkeys as could be got.

But you will ask, How does one go about the catching of lions, giraffes, antelopes, or monkeys, especially monkeys? For if they let themselves be caught, what becomes of the old saying, "As cunning as a monkey?"

I am going to tell you all about it.

As soon as the tracks of a lion are seen a hole from ten to fifteen feet deep is dug and hidden by branches. A goat is killed and laid on the deceitful surface which covers the hole. The lion, which is too proud to fear a snare, comes along against the wind, scents the goat at fifteen paces, beats his sides with his tail, licks his lips, roars for joy, and springs upon the offered dainty. The floor of branches sinking beneath his weight he is thrown to the bottom of the trench.

The first, and perhaps the second day, he is too uneasy to eat, but before the third day is over he devours the goat. He is left for four days longer in the hole so that he has full leisure to digest his meal. On the fifth day he is ravenous. Then a large cage made of wood and iron is let down with the door, which is a sliding one, lifted. At the back of the cage is a quarter of a carcass. The lion without hesitation enters the cage; the door slides down and the lion is caught.

It is all very simple, you see.

As to giraffes — in certain regions in the centre of Africa they are very common and go about in herds. They are hunted by means of dromedaries. The big ones out-distance pursuit, but the young ones are run down. They are captured and petted and treated with such kindness that in less than a week they become quite tame.

Antelopes are animals whose intelligence is very moderately developed. I am always indignant when a poet compares the eyes of his mistress to the fine eyes of these animals, for the Arab proverb says, “As stupid as an antelope.” They can be caught in a thousand different manners, but the most usual is a springe.

Now for the monkeys. Yes, we have got to them at last.

To be stupid is a defect; to be greedy is a vice.

Monkeys are greedy and in spite of all their intelligence their greediness is their ruin. They are above all given to drink. But what else was to be expected of them, resembling man as they do? Man would be the only animal to get tipsy, were it not for the monkeys, whose favourite tipple is a kind of beer brewed in Darfur and Sennaar. Calabashes full of this drink are placed about where monkeys most do congregate.

As soon as a monkey tastes this beer he utters a cry of joy which attracts all his companions to him. Then begins a regular orgy, every single monkey trying to drink more than the others. When they are all quite drunk negroes appear, but the drinkers show no mistrust, for being no longer able to see clearly they take the new arrivals for monkeys of a larger growth, so that the negroes have only the trouble of carrying or leading their booty home. If they carry them the monkeys embrace them, weeping and covering them with kisses. For monkeys are sentimental in their cups.

If the negroes lead them it is only necessary to take one by the hand, he in his turn takes the hand of his, neighbour, and so on till there is a long row all abreast. As they are all unsteady on their feet they are glad of each other's support and hold tight, staggering as they advance like so many satyrs. Not seldom does a negro arrive at home with ten or twelve of these creatures in his care, just as with us we often see a tutor accompanied by ten or twelve pupils.

Arrived at their destination, they are put into cages that they may grow sober by degrees. Each day an ever-lessening quantity of beer is given them till they grow used to captivity. Not until the supply quite ceases and they have only water to drink do they realize that they are prisoners.

Six months after his order had been placed Delaporte was in possession of his two lions, three giraffes (one of which was about to become a mother), five antelopes, and twenty monkeys. The menagerie was thus complete except for the hippopotamus.

Now, Delaporte had taken an oath that he would have his hippopotamus.

It would never occur to any of you, my dear readers, would it, to take such an oath.

But you are wrong. A hippopotamus is worth 100,000 francs if it is worth a centime.

It is quite true that if in lieu of his income of 5,000 francs entered in his account-book a small capitalist of the Marais were to be given a hippopotamus and told that was his capital, he would find himself very much perplexed and would cry out that he was robbed. But a Consul at Cairo knows the true value of such an animal.

Just as Abbas Pasha had placed fishermen on the White Nile to spy out the arrival of the hippopotamus which England desired Delaporte kept two negroes at Bukah whose sole mission was to spy on the fishermen of Abbas Pasha.

One day one of the negroes arrived quite breathless at the Consulate.

"Well, what's the matter?" asked Delaporte.

"The hippopotamus has arrived."

Delaporte put on his hat and hurried to Bulak.

"Is it a male or a female?" he asked the fishermen.

"It is a male," they replied.

Delaporte laughed that laugh of a true Parisian that the Arabs have never been able to understand. "Never mind," he said, "I am very glad."

“Why are you glad?” demanded the Arabs.

“Because it is a male.”

For it was a female England desired.

Delaporte put further questions in order to find out how they had got possession of the animal and learned that one day they had noticed a hippopotamus come out of the water and climb up on one of the river islands. There she lay down, and shortly after they saw a young one beside her. Almost immediately she got up and took a plunge-bath in the river, and the fishermen, without losing any time, emerged from the reeds, jumped into the boat, and made for the island. The young one offered no hindrance to being lifted on board, except by being very heavy and helpless, and they rowed to shore as quickly as possible.

But quickly as they rowed, they soon heard behind them the terrible snorting of the father and mother, who followed in the wake of the boat, one about fifty feet behind the other, like the Curiatii, and with evident signs of hostile intentions.

The mother opened her mouth wide enough to swallow a bull of ordinary dimensions, and made her jaws rattle in a terrifying manner. She was overtaking the boat so rapidly that, although they were only thirty yards from the shore, the rowers saw that she would be on them before they could land.

“Let us get rid of the mother first,” said one of the men, and the boat stopped short.

The man who had spoken took his bow and a poisoned arrow, and waited in act to draw.

“Make ready!” he cried.

The three remaining rowers held their oars in readiness to take the water.

The hippopotamus was rapidly approaching. The archer standing in the bow drew his arrow to the head and let fly.

Now, a hippopotamus has only two vulnerable spots, the neck and between its eyes. The arrow penetrated the latter. A cry gave the signal, and the three rowers, taking a vigorous stroke, shot twenty yards ahead. The wounded animal followed for a few seconds, but suddenly the terrible poison, which is as sudden as prussic acid or brucine, took effect.

The poor mother beat the water blindly with her fore feet, turned over and over, and then disappeared in the middle of the whirlpool which its expiring struggles had formed.

Meantime, the boat had touched land, to be followed in a moment by the papa hippopotamus, for the loss of his mate had not made him relax the pursuit.

Then the same Arab who had already shot the female with his arrow now-took one of those lances, a dozen feet long, which you will see, my dear readers, when the Nigritian Exhibition is opened and given over to your curiosity — lances with keen iron points, poisoned like the arrows — and, crouching down right in the path of the hippopotamus, held the lance as a boar spear is held, with the sharp end towards the animal, thus aiming at the throat. This the iron entered to the depth of two feet.

If the hunter had missed his aim nothing could have saved him from being crushed under the enormous feet of the pachyderm; but now he sprang suddenly to one side out of the way of the monster, which, carried on by the impetus of the pursuit, passed right over the spot on which the hunter had crouched half a second before.

The man rose up as if on springs, and rapidly put twenty paces between him and his enemy. The hippopotamus stopped, stunned by the blow, then he made an effort to turn on his antagonist, but already the poison was at work.

Giving a terrible roar, the struggling beast threw up a shower of stones and sand into the air as his mate had made the water fly, then fell heavily to the earth, turned over twice or thrice, uttered one groan, and gave up the ghost. Not till then could the Arabs feel that the young one was really in their power.

Unfortunately it was a male.

Nevertheless, they resolved to take it to Abbas Pasha, reasoning within themselves that, although not a female, it was a hippopotamus, and therefore better than nothing at all.

Now that I have told you how Delaporte came into possession of the hippopotamus, the two lions, the three giraffes, the five antelopes, and the twenty monkeys which he has presented to the Jardin des Plantes, I am going to tell you how he got the four magnificent serpents with which he has enriched the Marseilles Museum.

There are to be found at Cairo as in India many of those men called serpent-charmers. I think I have already told you about them somewhere; they are the men whom you may see in Cairo walking up and down the streets with boxes, bags, or baskets full of reptiles of every sort. When they find a place which they consider favourable for a display of their art they seat themselves on the ground and two or three of them begin to beat drums, which emit a monotonous note, another fills his mouth with a herb, the fragrance of which resembles mint, and sends puffs of perfumed breath in every direction. Having made this preparation, they open their bags, baskets, and boxes, the serpents uncoil themselves, hiss, and raising themselves to two-thirds of their length, begin to dance a kind of *gigue,* which delights the descendants of the Pharaohs at Cairo and of the Ptolemies at Alexandria.

Besides this, the charmers enter the houses, look around, sniff, poke into everything, and tell the occupants with most disinterested anxiety that they have serpents in some of their rooms.

The neighbourhood of crawling animals is not often appreciated. Women, from Eve to Cleopatra, have sometimes played with serpents, and have met with such a bad return that when a serpent-charmer' of reputation declares that a house is infested by one or more of these reptiles, he is generally sent for and promised for every reptile, small and great (often the small ones are the most dangerous), a score of piastres, that is to say, one hundred sous plus the animal itself, which from that moment takes up its abode in the bag of the charmer and forms part of his *corps de ballet.*

Several times already the head of the serpent-charmers of Cairo, by name Abd-el-Kerim — i e., the slave of him who gives — had been seen prowling round the Consulate, sniffing at the doors and windows, and shaking his head with an air that was far from reassuring to the occupants of the French Legation. Sinister rumours were carried to Delaporte from every side, and it became widely known that the Consulate was overrun with serpents.

Delaporte made investigations, and found no small number of millipedes and some scorpions but not one tiny asp; so he was very doubtful as to the perspicacity of the serpent-charmer. However, yielding to the solicitations of his friends who trembled at the danger he was running while sharing his dwelling with such guests, he decided to send for Abd-el-Kerim.

Abd-el-Kerim responded to the summons of the French Consul, who, thanks to his familiarity with the Arab language, could converse with the serpent-charmer without having recourse to an interpreter.

Now, Abd-el-Kerim was, or rather is — for, despite his dangerous occupation, he is still in full vigour — of true Arab type. He was a man of between fifty and sixty, wearing the green turban of the descendants of Ali, and clothed in a black silk tunic confined at the waist by a cord made of camels' hair. He had an air of gravity which accorded well with his calling.

He saluted Delaporte, making a deep inclination, both hands crossed on his breast, and waited to be spoken to.

"I have asked you to come," said Delaporte, "because it is currently reported that the Consulate is full of serpents."

The Arab turned towards the point from which the wind came, sniffed several times, and said gravely:

"Yes, there are some."

"Oh, are there really?"

"Yes." And the charmer sniffed once more.

"There are even very many," he added; "six at least."

"Deuce take them!" exclaimed Delaporte. "Will you undertake to destroy them?"

"I shall call them, and they will come."

"I should like to see them."

"Very well, you shall."

All this took place in Delaporte's bedroom.

Abd-el-Kerim left the room to fetch his assistants, who had remained in the ante-chamber, and soon returned followed by three men, who seating themselves on the ground with their drums between their knees, filled their mouths with fragrant herbs, and while crying "Allah! Allah! Allah!" sent their perfumed breath, in all directions.

Meantime, Abd-el-Kerim gave vent to a kind of hiss, meant to awake friendly feelings in the breasts of the reptiles.

For two or three minutes there was no apparent result, then Delaporte saw gliding down the walls and from beneath the furniture about twenty scorpions, which, in obedience to the call of Abd-el-Kerim, approached him from every side.

This strange procession began to make Delaporte waver in his scepticism, for there they were coming down the wall, the mosquito nets, the window curtains. It was enough to make one shudder to think of having slept in such a room.

All these scorpions gathered round Abd-el-Kerim as sheep around a shepherd; he picked them up in heaps and put them into a buckskin bag.

"Well, do you see?" he asked Delaporte.

“Yes, I see — I see scorpions, and many at that; but I see no serpents.”

“You are going to see them,” answered Abd-el-Kerim, beginning to hiss in another key, while his companions redoubled their puffing, and cried with all their strength, “Allah! Allah! Allah!”

Thereupon, to the great astonishment of Delaporte, a hiss similar to that emitted by Abd-el-Kerim issued from the recess in which stood the bed, and from underneath a serpent four feet long appeared, and, unrolling his green and yellow coils, made his way towards Abd-el-Kerim.

Delaporte recognized the species at once; it was one of those reptiles called by the Arabs *taboue* and by the Spaniards *cobra di capello.*

Abd-el-Kerim caught it unceremoniously by the neck and was about to stuff it into his buckskin when Delaporte interfered.

“Wait an instant,” said he.

“What is it?” said Abd-el-Kerim.

“This serpent was really in my house, was it?”

“As you have seen.”

“Well, everything in this house belongs to me; be so good, then, as to put the serpent into this glass jar instead of into your buckskin bag.”

And Delaporte held out to Abd-el-Kerim a vessel full of spirits of wine which he had kept in readiness to preserve some of the rare and curious fishes which from time to time the fellahs in their fishing caught and brought to him.

“But “said Abd-el-Kerim.

“But me no buts,” said Delaporte, “the serpent was in my house; it therefore belongs to me by rights, but I am going to give you twenty piastres for it. Take care! if you make any objection I shall say that you let it loose beforehand and that it obeyed your call because it was tamed.”

Abd-el-Kerim stifled his objections and slipped the serpent into the jar.

Delaporte had cork and string at hand, the cork was put in and bound down, and the serpent, despite much struggling and hissing, was compelled to remain in his new abode.

“Are there any more?” asked Delaporte.

“Yes,” said Abd-el-Kerim, who was ashamed to own that he had been found out.

And the puffs, and the Cries, and the hisses began anew, and a second serpent not quite so big as the first emerged from under the chest of drawers and glided up to where Abd-el-Kerim sat.

Delaporte held out a second jar. “How glad I am,” he said. “That makes a pair.”

Abd-el-Kerim made a face, but, being fairly caught, he was obliged to let the second serpent go the way of the first.

The ceremony of the introduction of the cobra into the jar being completed, Delaporte asked whether that were all.

“There are no more in this room,” was the reply.

“Where do you, then, detect the presence of others?”

“There is one in here,” said the serpent-charmer, indicating the next apartment, which was the reception room.

“Let us try there, then,” said Delaporte, and, placing; a jar under each arm, he handed two more to his negro attendant, and led the way.

And the charmer was quite right, there was a serpent there, probably one who loved music, for he had taken refuge under the piano.

An instant, and he was safe in the jar, despite the evident reluctance of Abd-el-Kerim to part with him.

“That’s done,” said Delaporte, “and now for the others.”

“There are three more in the kitchen,” said Abd-el-Kerim, sadly.

“That’s all right,” said Delaporte, “that will just make up my half-dozen. Let us go to the kitchen.” At the first signal a serpent made its appearance from under the sink, and a fourth bottle received its inmate under the despairing glances of Abd-el-Kerim.

“Come, come! Take heart! I want my half-dozen.”

“*Enta tafessed el senaa!*” exclaimed Abd-el-Kerim, which is as much to say, “You are very ready to take the bread out of our mouths.”

So the serpent-charmer gave in, and to save the last two serpents, avowed himself a cheat in the presence of the French Consul.

Delaporte, taking pity on him, gave him forty francs, and as Abd-el-Kerim put them in his pocket he murmured:

“Four serpents which could dance so well were worth a great deal more than eight *taloris.*”

Delaporte, to console him, promised to keep his secret. You see how he has kept it.

The Non-Fiction

CELEBRATED CRIMES

Translated by I. G. Burnham,

From 1839 to 1841, Dumas, with the assistance of several friends, compiled this eight-volume collection of essays on famous criminals and crimes from European history, including Beatrice Cenci, Martin Guerre, Cesare and Lucrezia Borgia as well as more recent incidents, including the cases of executed alleged murderers Karl Ludwig Sand and Antoine François Desrues.

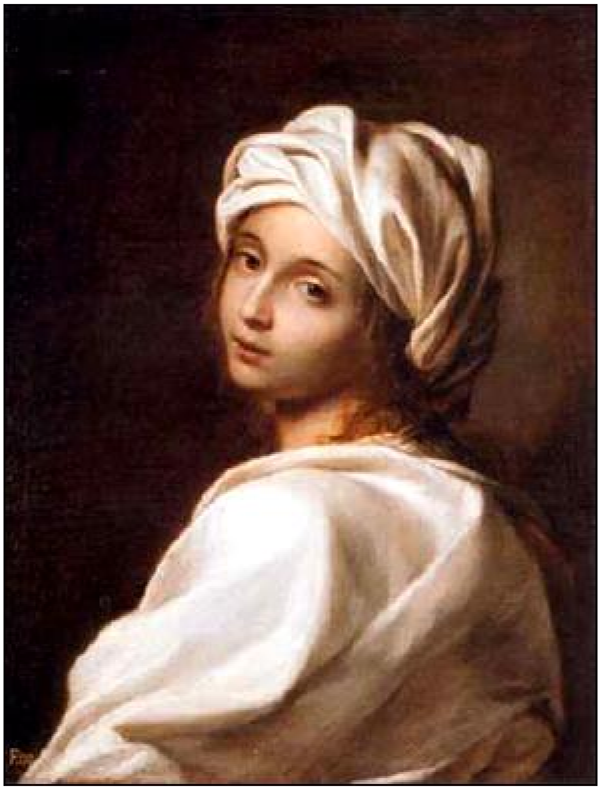

Beatrice Cenci (1577 – 1599) an Italian noblewoman, who features in one of the lurid murder trials in the collection

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NOTE:

Dumas’s ‘Celebrated Crimes’ was not written for children. The novelist has spared no language — has minced no words — to describe the violent scenes of a violent time.

“In some instances facts appear distorted out of their true perspective, and in others the author makes unwarranted charges. It is not within our province to edit the historical side of Dumas, any more than it would be to correct the obvious errors in Dickens’s Child’s History of England. The careful, mature reader, for whom the books are intended, will recognize, and allow for, this fact.

INTRODUCTION

The contents of these volumes of ‘Celebrated Crimes’, as well as the motives which led to their inception, are unique. They are a series of stories based upon historical records, from the pen of Alexandre Dumas, pere, when he was not “the elder,” nor yet the author of D’Artagnan or Monte Cristo, but was a rising young dramatist and a lion in the literary set and world of fashion.

Dumas, in fact, wrote his ‘Crimes Celebres’ just prior to launching upon his wonderful series of historical novels, and they may therefore be considered as source books, whence he was to draw so much of that far-reaching and intimate knowledge of inner history which has perennially astonished his readers. The Crimes were published in Paris, in 1839-40, in eight volumes, comprising eighteen titles — all of which now appear in the present carefully translated text. The success of the original work was instantaneous. Dumas laughingly said that he thought he had exhausted the subject of famous crimes, until the work was off the press, when he immediately became deluged with letters from every province in France, supplying him with material upon other deeds of violence! The subjects which he has chosen, however, are of both historic and dramatic importance, and they have the added value of giving the modern reader a clear picture of the state of semi-lawlessness which existed in Europe, during the middle ages. “The Borgias, the Cenci, Urbain Grandier, the Marchioness of Brinvilliers, the Marchioness of Ganges, and the rest — what subjects for the pen of Dumas!” exclaims Garnett.

Space does not permit us to consider in detail the material here collected, although each title will be found to present points of special interest. The first volume comprises the annals of the Borgias and the Cenci. The name of the noted and notorious Florentine family has become a synonym for intrigue and violence, and yet the Borgias have not been without stanch defenders in history.

Another famous Italian story is that of the Cenci. The beautiful Beatrice Cenci — celebrated in the painting of Guido, the sixteenth century romance of Guerrazi, and the poetic tragedy of Shelley, not to mention numerous succeeding works inspired by her hapless fate — will always remain a shadowy figure and one of infinite pathos.

The second volume chronicles the sanguinary deeds in the south of France, carried on in the name of religion, but drenching in blood the fair country round about Avignon, for a long period of years.

The third volume is devoted to the story of Mary Queen of Scots, another woman who suffered a violent death, and around whose name an endless controversy has waged. Dumas goes carefully into the dubious episodes of her stormy career, but does not allow these to blind his sympathy for her fate. Mary, it should be remembered, was closely allied to France by education and marriage, and the French never forgave Elizabeth the part she played in the tragedy.

The fourth volume comprises three widely dissimilar tales. One of the strangest stories is that of Urbain Grandier, the innocent victim of a cunning and relentless religious plot. His story was dramatised by Dumas, in 1850. A famous German crime is that of Karl-Ludwig Sand, whose murder of Kotzebue, Councillor of the Russian Legation, caused an international upheaval which was not to subside for many years.

An especially interesting volume is number six, containing, among other material, the famous “Man in the Iron Mask.” This unsolved puzzle of history was later incorporated by Dumas in one of the D’Artagnan Romances a section of the Vicomte de Bragelonne, to which it gave its name. But in this later form, the true story of this singular man doomed to wear an iron vizor over his features during his entire lifetime could only be treated episodically. While as a special subject in the Crimes, Dumas indulges his curiosity, and that of his reader, to the full. Hugo’s unfinished tragedy,’Les Jumeaux’, is on the same subject; as also are others by Fournier, in French, and Zschokke, in German.

Other stories can be given only passing mention. The beautiful poisoner, Marquise de Brinvilliers, must have suggested to Dumas his later portrait of Miladi, in the Three Musketeers, the mast celebrated of his woman characters. The incredible cruelties of Ali Pacha, the Turkish despot, should not be charged entirely to Dumas, as he is said to have been largely aided in this by one of his “ghosts,” Mallefille.

“Not a mere artist” — writes M. de Villemessant, founder of the Figaro, — ”he has nevertheless been able to seize on those dramatic effects which have so much distinguished his theatrical career, and to give those sharp and distinct reproductions of character which alone can present to the reader the mind and spirit of an age. Not a mere historian, he has nevertheless carefully consulted the original sources of information, has weighed testimonies, elicited theories, and . . . has interpolated the poetry of history with its most thorough prose.”

THE BORGIAS

PROLOGUE

On the 8th of April, 1492, in a bedroom of the Carneggi Palace, about three miles from Florence, were three men grouped about a bed whereon a fourth lay dying.

The first of these three men, sitting at the foot of the bed, and half hidden, that he might conceal his tears, in the gold-brocaded curtains, was Ermolao Barbaro, author of the treatise ‘On Celibacy’, and of ‘Studies in Pliny’: the year before, when he was at Rome in the capacity of ambassador of the Florentine Republic, he had been appointed Patriarch of Aquileia by Innocent VIII.

The second, who was kneeling and holding one hand of the dying man between his own, was Angelo Poliziano, the Catullus of the fifteenth century, a classic of the lighter sort, who in his Latin verses might have been mistaken for a poet of the Augustan age.

The third, who was standing up and leaning against one of the twisted columns of the bed-head, following with profound sadness the progress of the malady which he read in the face of his departing friend, was the famous Pico della Mirandola, who at the age of twenty could speak twenty-two languages, and who had offered to reply in each of these languages to any seven hundred questions that might be put to him by the twenty most learned men in the whole world, if they could be assembled at Florence.

The man on the bed was Lorenzo the Magnificent, who at the beginning of the year had been attacked by a severe and deep-seated fever, to which was added the gout, a hereditary ailment in his family. He had found at last that the draughts containing dissolved pearls which the quack doctor, Leoni di Spoleto, prescribed for him (as if he desired to adapt his remedies rather to the riches of his patient than to his necessities) were useless and unavailing, and so he had come to understand that he must part from those gentle-tongued women of his, those sweet-voiced poets, his palaces and their rich hangings; therefore he had summoned to give him absolution for his sins — in a man of less high place they might perhaps have been called crimes — the Dominican, Giralamo Francesco Savonarola.

It was not, however, without an inward fear, against which the praises of his friends availed nothing, that the pleasure-seeker and usurper awaited that severe and gloomy preacher by whose word's all Florence was stirred, and on whose pardon henceforth depended all his hope far another world.

Indeed, Savonarola was one of those men of stone, coming, like the statue of the Commandante, to knock at the door of a Don Giovanni, and in the midst of feast and orgy to announce that it is even now the moment to begin to think of Heaven. He had been born at Ferrara, whither his family, one of the most illustrious of Padua, had been called by Niccolo, Marchese d'Este, and at the age of twenty-three, summoned by an irresistible vocation, had fled from his father's house, and had taken the vows in the cloister of Dominican monks at Florence. There, where he was appointed by his superiors to give lessons in philosophy, the young novice had from the first to battle against the defects of a voice that was both harsh and weak, a defective pronunciation, and above all, the depression of his physical powers, exhausted as they were by too severe abstinence.

Savonarala from that time condemned himself to the most absolute seclusion, and disappeared in the depths of his convent, as if the slab of his tomb had already fallen over him. There, kneeling on the flags, praying unceasingly before a wooden crucifix, fevered by vigils and penances, he soon passed out of contemplation into ecstasy, and began to feel in himself that inward prophetic impulse which summoned him to preach the reformation of the Church.

Nevertheless, the reformation of Savonarola, more reverential than Luther's, which followed about five-and-twenty years later, respected the thing while attacking the man, and had as its aim the altering of teaching that was human, not faith that was of God. He did not work, like the German monk, by reasoning, but by enthusiasm. With him logic always gave way before inspiration: he was not a theologian, but a prophet. Yet, although hitherto he had bowed his head before the authority of the Church, he had already raised it against the temporal power. To him religion and liberty appeared as two virgins equally sacred; so that, in his view, Lorenzo in subjugating the one was as culpable as Pope Innocent VIII in dishonouring the other. The result of this was that, so long as Lorenzo lived in riches, happiness, and magnificence, Savonarola had never been willing, whatever entreaties were made, to sanction by his presence a power which he considered illegitimate. But Lorenzo on his deathbed sent for him, and that was another matter. The austere preacher set forth at once, bareheaded and barefoot, hoping to save not only the soul of the dying man but also the liberty of the republic.

Lorenzo, as we have said, was awaiting the arrival of Savonarola with an impatience mixed with uneasiness; so that, when he heard the sound of his steps, his pale face took a yet more deathlike tinge, while at the same time he raised himself on his elbow and ordered his three friends to go away. They obeyed at once, and scarcely had they left by one door than the curtain of the other was raised, and the monk, pale, immovable, solemn, appeared on the threshold. When he perceived him, Lorenzo dei Medici, reading in his marble brow the inflexibility of a statue, fell back on his bed, breathing a sigh so profound that one might have supposed it was his last.

The monk glanced round the room as though to assure himself that he was really alone with the dying man; then he advanced with a slow and solemn step towards the bed. Lorenzo watched his approach with terror; then, when he was close beside him, he cried:

"O my father, I have been a very great sinner!"

"The mercy of God is infinite," replied the monk; "and I come into your presence laden with the divine mercy."

"You believe, then, that God will forgive my sins?" cried the dying man, renewing his hope as he heard from the lips of the monk such unexpected words.

"Your sins and also your crimes, God will forgive them all," replied Savonarola. "God will forgive your vanities, your adulterous pleasures, your obscene festivals; so much for your sins. God will forgive you for promising two thousand florins reward to the man who should bring you the head of Dietisalvi, Nerone Nigi, Angelo Antinori, Niccalo Soderini, and twice the money if they were handed over alive; God will forgive you for dooming to the scaffold or the gibbet the son of Papi Orlandi, Francesco di Brisighella, Bernardo Nardi, Jacopo Frescobaldi, Amoretto Baldovinetti, Pietro Balducci, Bernardo di Banding, Francesco Frescobaldi, and more than three hundred others whose names were none the less dear to Florence because they were less renowned; so much for your crimes." And at each of these names which Savonarala pronounced slowly, his eyes fixed on the dying man, he replied with a groan which proved the monk's memory to be only too true. Then at last, when he had finished, Lorenzo asked in a doubtful tone:

“Then do you believe, my father, that God will forgive me everything, both my sins and my crimes?”

“Everything,” said Savonarola, “but on three conditions.”

“What are they?” asked the dying man.

“The first,” said Savonarola, “is that you feel a complete faith in the power and the mercy of God.”

“My father,” replied Lorenzo eagerly, “I feel this faith in the very depths of my heart.”

“The second,” said Savonarola, “is that you give back the property of others which you have unjustly confiscated and kept.”

“My father, shall I have time?” asked the dying man.

“God will give it to you,” replied the monk.

Lorenzo shut his eyes, as though to reflect more at his ease; then, after a moment’s silence, he replied:

“Yes, my father, I will do it.”

“The third,” resumed Savonarola, “is that you restore to the republic her ancient independence and her farmer liberty.”

Lorenzo sat up on his bed, shaken by a convulsive movement, and questioned with his eyes the eyes of the Dominican, as though he would find out if he had deceived himself and not heard aright. Savonarola repeated the same words.

“Never! never!” exclaimed Lorenzo, falling back on his bed and shaking his head, — ”never!”

The monk, without replying a single word, made a step to withdraw.

“My father, my father,” said the dying man, “do not leave me thus: have pity on me!”

“Have pity on Florence,” said the monk.

“But, my father,” cried Lorenzo, “Florence is free, Florence is happy.”

“Florence is a slave, Florence is poor,” cried Savonarola, “poor in genius, poor in money, and poor in courage; poor in genius, because after you, Lorenzo, will come your son Piero; poor in money, because from the funds of the republic you have kept up the magnificence of your family and the credit of your business houses; poor in courage, because you have robbed the rightful magistrates of the authority which was constitutionally theirs, and diverted the citizens from the double path of military and civil life, wherein, before they were enervated by your luxuries, they had displayed the virtues of the ancients; and therefore, when the day shall dawn which is not far distant," continued the mark, his eyes fixed and glowing as if he were reading in the future, "whereon the barbarians shall descend from the mountains, the walls of our towns, like those of Jericho, shall fall at the blast of their trumpets."

"And do you desire that I should yield up on my deathbed the power that has made the glory of my whole life?" cried Lorenzo dei Medici.

"It is not I who desire it; it is the Lord," replied Savonarola coldly.

"Impossible, impossible!" murmured Lorenzo.

"Very well; then die as you have lived!" cried the monk, "in the midst of your courtiers and flatterers; let them ruin your soul as they have ruined your body!" And at these words, the austere Dominican, without listening to the cries of the dying man, left the room as he had entered it, with face and step unaltered; far above human things he seemed to soar, a spirit already detached from the earth.

At the cry which broke from Lorenzo dei Medici when he saw him disappear, Ermolao, Poliziano, and Pico delta Mirandola, who had heard all, returned into the room, and found their friend convulsively clutching in his arms a magnificent crucifix which he had just taken dawn from the bed-head. In vain did they try to reassure him with friendly words. Lorenzo the Magnificent only replied with sobs; and one hour after the scene which we have just related, his lips clinging to the feet of the Christ, he breathed his last in the arms of these three men, of whom the most fortunate — though all three were young — was not destined to survive him more than two years. "Since his death was to bring about many calamities," says Niccolo Macchiavelli, "it was the will of Heaven to show this by omens only too certain: the dome of the church of Santa Regarata was struck by lightning, and Roderigo Borgia was elected pope."

CHAPTER I

Towards the end of the fifteenth century — that is to say, at the epoch when our history opens the Piazza of St. Peter’s at Rome was far from presenting so noble an aspect as that which is offered in our own day to anyone who approaches it by the Piazza dei Rusticucci.

In fact, the Basilica of Constantine existed no longer, while that of Michael Angelo, the masterpiece of thirty popes, which cost the labour of three centuries and the expense of two hundred and sixty millions, existed not yet. The ancient edifice, which had lasted for eleven hundred and forty-five years, had been threatening to fall in about 1440, and Nicholas V, artistic forerunner of Julius II and Leo X, had had it pulled down, together with the temple of Probus Anicius which adjoined it. In their place he had had the foundations of a new temple laid by the architects Rossellini and Battista Alberti; but some years later, after the death of Nicholas V, Paul II, the Venetian, had not been able to give more than five thousand crowns to continue the project of his predecessor, and thus the building was arrested when it had scarcely risen above the ground, and presented the appearance of a still-born edifice, even sadder than that of a ruin.

As to the piazza itself, it had not yet, as the reader will understand from the foregoing explanation, either the fine colonnade of Bernini, or the dancing fountains, or that Egyptian obelisk which, according to Pliny, was set up by the Pharaoh at Heliopolis, and transferred to Rome by Caligula, who set it up in Nero’s Circus, where it remained till 1586. Now, as Nero’s Circus was situate on the very ground where St. Peter’s now stands, and the base of this obelisk covered the actual site where the vestry now is, it looked like a gigantic needle shooting up from the middle of truncated columns, walls of unequal height, and half-carved stones.

On the right of this building, a ruin from its cradle, arose the Vatican, a splendid Tower of Babel, to which all the celebrated architects of the Roman school contributed their work for a thousand years: at this epoch the two magnificent chapels did not exist, nor the twelve great halls, the two-and-twenty courts, the thirty staircases, and the two thousand bedchambers; for Pope Sixtus V, the sublime swineherd, who did so many things in a five years’ reign, had not yet been able to add the immense building which on the eastern side towers above the court of St. Damasius; still, it was truly the old sacred edifice, with its venerable associations, in which Charlemagne received hospitality when he was crowned emperor by Pope Leo III.

All the same, on the 9th of August, 1492, the whole of Rome, from the People's Gate to the Coliseum and from the Baths of Diocletian to the castle of Sant' Angelo, seemed to have made an appointment on this piazza: the multitude thronging it was so great as to overflow into all the neighbouring streets, which started from this centre like the rays of a star. The crowds of people, looking like a motley moving carpet, were climbing up into the basilica, grouping themselves upon the stones, hanging on the columns, standing up against the walls; they entered by the doors of houses and reappeared at the windows, so numerous and so densely packed that one might have said each window was walled up with heads. Now all this multitude had its eyes fixed on one single point in the Vatican; for in the Vatican was the Conclave, and as Innocent VIII had been dead for sixteen days, the Conclave was in the act of electing a pope.

Rome is the town of elections: since her foundation down to our own day — that is to say, in the course of nearly twenty-six centuries — she has constantly elected her kings, consuls, tribunes, emperors, and popes: thus Rome during the days of Conclave appears to be attacked by a strange fever which drives everyone to the Vatican or to Monte Cavallo, according as the scarlet-robed assembly is held in one or the other of these two palaces: it is, in fact, because the raising up of a new pontiff is a great event far everybody; for, according to the average established in the period between St. Peter and Gregory XVI, every pope lasts about eight years, and these eight years, according to the character of the man who is elected, are a period either of tranquillity or of disorder, of justice or of venality, of peace or of war.

Never perhaps since the day when the first successor of St. Peter took his seat on the, pontifical throne until the interregnum which now occurred, had so great an agitation been shown as there was at this moment, when, as we have shown, all these people were thronging on the Piazza of St. Peter and in the streets which led to it. It is true that this was not without reason; for Innocent VIII — who was called the father of his people because he had added to his subjects eight sons and the same number of daughters — had, as we have said, after living a life of self-indulgence, just died, after a death-struggle during which, if the journal of Stefano Infessura may be believed, two hundred and twenty murders were committed in the streets of Rome. The authority had then devolved in the customary way upon the Cardinal Camerlengo, who during the interregnum had sovereign powers; but as he had been obliged to fulfil all the duties of his office — that is, to get money coined in his name and bearing his arms, to take the fisherman's ring from the finger of the dead pope, to dress, shave and paint him, to have the corpse embalmed, to lower the coffin after nine days' obsequies into the provisional niche where the last deceased pope has to remain until his successor comes to take his place and consign him to his final tomb; lastly, as he had been obliged to wall up the door of the Conclave and the window of the balcony from which the pontifical election is proclaimed, he had not had a single moment for busying himself with the police; so that the assassinations had continued in goodly fashion, and there were loud cries for an energetic hand which should make all these swords and all these daggers retire into their sheaths.

Now the eyes of this multitude were fixed, as we have said, upon the Vatican, and particularly upon one chimney, from which would come the first signal, when suddenly, at the moment of the 'Ave Maria' — that is to say, at the hour when the day begins to decline — great cries went up from all the crowd mixed with bursts of laughter, a discordant murmur of threats and raillery, the cause being that they had just perceived at the top of the chimney a thin smoke, which seemed like a light cloud to go up perpendicularly into the sky. This smoke announced that Rome was still without a master, and that the world still had no pope; for this was the smoke of the voting tickets which were being burned, a proof that the cardinals had not yet come to an agreement.

Scarcely had this smoke appeared, to vanish almost immediately, when all the innumerable crowd, knowing well that there was nothing else to wait for, and that all was said and done until ten o'clock the next morning, the time when the cardinals had their first voting, went off in a tumult of noisy joking, just as they would after the last rocket of a firework display; so that at the end of one minute nobody was there where a quarter of an hour before there had been an excited crowd, except a few curious laggards, who, living in the neighbourhood or on the very piazza itself; were less in a hurry than the rest to get back to their homes; again, little by little, these last groups insensibly diminished; for half-past nine had just struck, and at this hour the streets of Rome began already to be far from safe; then after these groups followed some solitary passer-by, hurrying his steps; one after another the doors were closed, one after another the windows were darkened; at last, when ten o’clock struck, with the single exception of one window in the Vatican where a lamp might be seen keeping obstinate vigil, all the houses, piazzas, and streets were plunged in the deepest obscurity.

At this moment a man wrapped in a cloak stood up like a ghost against one of the columns of the uncompleted basilica, and gliding slowly and carefully among the stones which were lying about round the foundations of the new church, advanced as far as the fountain which, formed the centre of the piazza, erected in the very place where the obelisk is now set up of which we have spoken already; when he reached this spot he stopped, doubly concealed by the darkness of the night and by the shade of the monument, and after looking around him to see if he were really alone, drew his sword, and with its point rapping three times on the pavement of the piazza, each time made the sparks fly. This signal, for signal it was, was not lost: the last lamp which still kept vigil in the Vatican went out, and at the same instant an object thrown out of the window fell a few paces off from the young man in the cloak: he, guided by the silvery sound it had made in touching the flags, lost no time in laying his hands upon it in spite of the darkness, and when he had it in his possession hurried quickly away.

Thus the unknown walked without turning round half-way along the Borgo Vecchio; but there he turned to the right and took a street at the other end of which was set up a Madonna with a lamp: he approached the light, and drew from his pocket the object he had picked up, which was nothing else than a Roman crown piece; but this crown unscrewed, and in a cavity hollowed in its thickness enclosed a letter, which the man to whom it was addressed began to read at the risk of being recognised, so great was his haste to know what it contained.

We say at the risk of being recognised, for in his eagerness the recipient of this nocturnal missive had thrown back the hood of his cloak; and as his head was wholly within the luminous circle cast by the lamp, it was easy to distinguish in the light the head of a handsome young man of about five or six and twenty, dressed in a purple doublet slashed at the shoulder and elbow to let the shirt come through, and wearing on his head a cap of the same colour with a long black feather falling to his shoulder. It is true that he did not stand there long; for scarcely had he finished the letter, or rather the note, which he had just received in so strange and mysterious a manner, when he replaced it in its silver receptacle, and readjusting his cloak so as to hide all the lower part of his face, resumed his walk with a rapid step, crossed Borgo San Spirito, and took the street of the Longara, which he followed as far as the church of Regina Coeli. When he arrived at this place, he gave three rapid knocks on the door of a house of good appearance, which immediately opened; then slowly mounting the stairs he entered a room where two women were awaiting him with an impatience so unconcealed that both as they saw him exclaimed together:

"Well, Francesco, what news?"

"Good news, my mother; good, my sister," replied the young man, kissing the one and giving his hand to the other. "Our father has gained three votes to-day, but he still needs six to have the majority."

"Then is there no means of buying them?" cried the elder of the two women, while the younger, instead of speaking, asked him with a look.

"Certainly, my mother, certainly," replied the young man; "and it is just about that that my father has been thinking. He is giving Cardinal Orsini his palace at Rome and his two castles of Monticello and Soriano; to Cardinal Colanna his abbey of Subiaca; he gives Cardinal Sant' Angelo the bishopric of Porto, with the furniture and cellar; to the Cardinal of Parma the town of Nepi; to the Cardinal of Genoa the church of Santa Maria-in-Via-Lata; and lastly, to Cardinal Savelli the church of Santa Maria Maggiore and the town of Civita Castellana; as to Cardinal Ascanio-Sforza, he knows already that the day before yesterday we sent to his house four mules laden with silver and plate, and out of this treasure he has engaged to give five thousand ducats to the Cardinal Patriarch of Venice."

"But how shall we get the others to know the intentions of Roderigo?" asked the elder of the two women.

"My father has provided for everything, and proposes an easy method; you know, my mother, with what sort of ceremonial the cardinals' dinner is carried in."

"Yes, on a litter, in a large basket with the arms of the cardinal far whom the meal is prepared."

"My father has bribed the bishop who examines it: to-morrow is a feast-day; to the Cardinals Orsini, Colonna, Savelli, Sant' Angelo, and the Cardinals of Parma and of Genoa, chickens will be sent for hot meat, and each chicken will contain a deed of gift duly drawn up, made by me in my father’s name, of the houses, palaces, or churches which are destined for each.”

“Capital!” said the elder of the two women; “now, I am certain, all will go well.”

“And by the grace of God,” added the younger, with a strangely mocking smile, “our father will be pope.”

“Oh, it will be a fine day for us!” cried Francesco.

“And for Christendom,” replied his sister, with a still more ironical expression.

“Lucrezia, Lucrezia,” said the mother, “you do not deserve the happiness which is coming to us.”

“What does that matter, if it comes all the same? Besides, you know the proverb; mother: ‘Large families are blessed of the Lord’; and still more so our family, which is so patriarchal.”

At the same time she cast on her brother a look so wanton that the young man blushed under it: but as at the moment he had to think of other things than his illicit loves, he ordered that four servants should be awakened; and while they were getting armed to accompany him, he drew up and signed the six deeds of gift which were to be carried the next day to the cardinals; for, not wishing to be seen at their houses, he thought he would profit by the night-time to carry them himself to certain persons in his confidence who would have them passed in, as had been arranged, at the dinner-hour. Then, when the deeds were quite ready and the servants also, Francesco went out with them, leaving the two women to dream golden dreams of their future greatness.

From the first dawn of day the people hurried anew, as ardent and interested as on the evening before, to the Piazza of the Vatican, where; at the ordinary time, that is, at ten o’clock in the morning, — the smoke rose again as usual, evoking laughter and murmuring, as it announced that none of the cardinals had secured the majority. A report, however, began to be spread about that the chances were divided between three candidates, who were Roderigo Borgia, Giuliano delta Rovera, and Ascanio Sforza; for the people as yet knew nothing of the four mules laden with plate and silver which had been led to Sforza’s house, by reason of which he had given up his own votes to his rival. In the midst of the agitation excited in the crowd by this new report a solemn chanting was heard; it proceeded from a procession, led by the Cardinal Camerlengo, with the object of obtaining from Heaven the speedy election of a pope: this procession, starting from the church of Ara Coeli at the Capitol, was to make stations before the principal Madannas and the most frequented churches. As soon as the silver crucifix was perceived which went in front, the most profound silence prevailed, and everyone fell on his knees; thus a supreme calm followed the tumult and uproar which had been heard a few minutes before, and which at each appearance of the smoke had assumed a more threatening character: there was a shrewd suspicion that the procession, as well as having a religious end in view, had a political object also, and that its influence was intended to be as great on earth as in heaven. In any case, if such had been the design of the Cardinal Camerlengo, he had not deceived himself, and the effect was what he desired: when the procession had gone past, the laughing and joking continued, but the cries and threats had completely ceased.

The whole day passed thus; for in Rome nobody works. You are either a cardinal or a lacquey, and you live, nobody knows how. The crowd was still extremely numerous, when, towards two o’clock in the afternoon, another procession, which had quite as much power of provoking noise as the first of imposing silence, traversed in its turn the Piazza of St. Peter’s: this was the dinner procession. The people received it with the usual bursts of laughter, without suspecting, for all their irreverence, that this procession, more efficacious than the former, had just settled the election of the new pope.

The hour of the Ave Maria came as on the evening before; but, as on the evening before, the waiting of the whole day was lost; for, as half-past eight struck, the daily smoke reappeared at the top of the chimney. But when at the same moment rumours which came from the inside of the Vatican were spread abroad, announcing that, in all probability, the election would take place the next day, the good people preserved their patience. Besides, it had been very hot that day, and they were so broken with fatigue and roasted by the sun, these dwellers in shade and idleness, that they had no strength left to complain.

The morning of the next day, which was the 11th of August, 1492, arose stormy and dark; this did not hinder the multitude from thronging the piazzas, streets, doors, houses, churches. Moreover, this disposition of the weather was a real blessing from Heaven; for if there were heat, at least there would be no sun. Towards nine o’clock threatening storm-clouds were heaped up over all the Trastevere; but to this crowd what mattered rain, lightning, or thunder? They were preoccupied with a concern of a very different nature; they were waiting for their pope: a promise had been made them for to-day, and it could be seen by the manner of all, that if the day should pass without any election taking place, the end of it might very well be a riot; therefore, in proportion as the time advanced, the agitation grew greater. Nine o'clock, half-past nine, a quarter to ten struck, without anything happening to confirm or destroy their hopes. At last the first stroke of ten was heard; all eyes turned towards the chimney: ten o'clock struck slowly, each stroke vibrating in the heart of the multitude. At last the tenth stroke trembled, then vanished shuddering into space, and, a great cry breaking simultaneously frog a hundred thousand breasts followed the silence "Non v'e fumo! There is no smoke!" In other words, "We have a pope."

At this moment the rain began to fall; but no one paid any attention to it, so great were the transports of joy and impatience among all the people. At last a little stone was detached from the walled window which gave on the balcony and upon which all eyes were fixed: a general shout saluted its fall; little by little the aperture grew larger, and in a few minutes it was large enough to allow a man to come out on the balcony.

The Cardinal Ascanio Sforza appeared; but at the moment when he was on the point of coming out, frightened by the rain and the lightning, he hesitated an instant, and finally drew back: immediately the multitude in their turn broke out like a tempest into cries, curses, howls, threatening to tear down the Vatican and to go and seek their pope themselves. At this noise Cardinal Sforza, more terrified by the popular storm than by the storm in the heavens, advanced on the balcony, and between two thunderclaps, in a moment of silence astonishing to anyone who had just heard the clamour that went before, made the following proclamation:

"I announce to you a great joy: the most Eminent and most Reverend Signor Roderigo Lenzuolo Borgia, Archbishop of Valencia, Cardinal-Deacon of San Nicolao-in-Carcere, Vice-Chancellor of the Church, has now been elected Page, and has assumed the name of Alexander VI."

The news of this nomination was received with strange joy. Roderigo Borgia had the reputation of a dissolute man, it is true, but libertinism had mounted the throne with Sixtus IV and Innocent VIII, so that for the Romans there was nothing new in the singular situation of a pope with a mistress and five children. The great thing for the moment was that the power fell into strong hands; and it was more important for the tranquillity of Rome that the new pope inherited the sword of St. Paul than that he inherited the keys of St. Peter.

And so, in the feasts that were given on this occasion, the dominant character was much more warlike than religious, and would have appeared rather to suit with the election of some young conqueror than the exaltation of an old pontiff: there was no limit to the pleasantries and prophetic epigrams on the name of Alexander, which for the second time seemed to promise the Romans the empire of the world; and the same evening, in the midst of brilliant illuminations and bonfires, which seemed to turn the town into a lake of flame, the following epigram was read, amid the acclamation of the people:

“Rome under Caesar’s rule in ancient story
 At home and o’er the world victorious trod;
 But Alexander still extends his glory:
 Caesar was man, but Alexander God.”

As to the new pope, scarcely had he completed the formalities of etiquette which his exaltation imposed upon him, and paid to each man the price of his simony, when from the height of the Vatican he cast his eyes upon Europe, a vast political game of chess, which he cherished the hope of directing at the will of his own genius.

CHAPTER II

The world had now arrived at one of those supreme moments of history when every thing is transformed between the end of one period and the beginning of another: in the East Turkey, in the South Spain, in the West France, and in the North German, all were going to assume, together with the title of great Powers, that influence which they were destined to exert in the future over the secondary States. Accordingly we too, with Alexander VI, will cast a rapid glance over them, and see what were their respective situations in regard to Italy, which they all coveted as a prize.

Constantine, Palaeologos Dragozes, besieged by three hundred thousand Turks, after having appealed in vain for aid to the whole of Christendom, had not been willing to survive the loss of his empire, and had been found in the midst of the dead, close to the Tophana Gate; and on the 30th of May, 1453, Mahomet II had made his entry into Constantinople, where, after a reign which had earned for him the surname of ‘Fatile’, or the Conqueror, he had died leaving two sons, the elder of whom had ascended the throne under the name of Bajazet II.

The accession of the new sultan, however, had not taken place with the tranquillity which his right as elder brother and his father’s choice of him should have promised. His younger brother, D’jem, better known under the name of Zizimeh, had argued that whereas he was born in the purple — that is, born during the reign of Mahomet — Bajazet was born prior to his epoch, and was therefore the son of a private individual. This was rather a poor trick; but where force is all and right is naught, it was good enough to stir up a war. The two brothers, each at the head of an army, met accordingly in Asia in 1482. D’jem was defeated after a seven hours’ fight, and pursued by his brother, who gave him no time to rally his army: he was obliged to embark from Cilicia, and took refuge in Rhodes, where he implored the protection of the Knights of St. John. They, not daring to give him an asylum in their island so near to Asia, sent him to France, where they had him carefully guarded in one of their commanderies, in spite of the urgency of Cait Bey, Sultan of Egypt, who, having revolted against Bajazet, desired to have the young prince in his army to give his rebellion the appearance of legitimate warfare. The same demand, moreover, with the same political object, had been made successively by Mathias Corvinus, King of Hungary, by Ferdinand, King of Aragon and Sicily, and by Ferdinand, King of Naples.

On his side Bajazet, who knew all the importance of such a rival, if he once allied himself with any one of the princes with whom he was at war, had sent ambassadors to Charles VIII, offering, if he would consent to keep D'jem with him, to give him a considerable pension, and to give to France the sovereignty of the Holy Land, so soon as Jerusalem should be conquered by the Sultan of Egypt. The King of France had accepted these terms.

But then Innocent VIII had intervened, and in his turn had claimed D'jem, ostensibly to give support by the claims of the refugee to a crusade which he was preaching against the Turks, but in reality to appropriate the pension of 40,000 ducats to be given by Bajazet to any one of the Christian princes who would undertake to be his brother's gaoler. Charles VIII had not dared to refuse to the spiritual head of Christendom a request supported by such holy reasons; and therefore D'jem had quitted France, accompanied by the Grand Master d'Aubusson, under whose direct charge he was; but his guardian had consented, for the sake of a cardinal's hat, to yield up his prisoner. Thus, on the 13th of March, 1489, the unhappy young man, cynosure of so many interested eyes, made his solemn entry into Rome, mounted on a superb horse, clothed in a magnificent oriental costume, between the Prior of Auvergne, nephew of the Grand Master d'Aubusson, and Francesco Cibo, the son of the pope.

After this he had remained there, and Bajazet, faithful to promises which it was so much his interest to fulfil, had punctually paid to the sovereign pontiff a pension of 40,000 ducats.

So much for Turkey.

Ferdinand and Isabella were reigning in Spain, and were laying the foundations of that vast power which was destined, five-and-twenty years later, to make Charles V declare that the sun never set on his dominions. In fact, these two sovereigns, on whom history has bestowed the name of Catholic, had reconquered in succession nearly all Spain, and driven the Moors out of Granada, their last entrenchment; while two men of genius, Bartolome Diaz and Christopher Columbus, had succeeded, much to the profit of Spain, the one in recovering a lost world, the other in conquering a world yet unknown. They had accordingly, thanks to their victories in the ancient world and their discoveries in the new, acquired an influence at the court of Rome which had never been enjoyed by any of their predecessors.

So much for Spain.

In France, Charles VIII had succeeded his father, Louis XI, on the 30th of August, 1483. Louis by dint of executions, had tranquillised his kingdom and smoothed the way for a child who ascended the throne under the regency of a woman. And the regency had been a glorious one, and had put down the pretensions of princes of the blood, put an end to civil wars, and united to the crown all that yet remained of the great independent fiefs. The result was that at the epoch where we now are, here was Charles VIII, about twenty-two years of age, a prince (if we are to believe La Tremouille) little of body but great of heart; a child (if we are to believe Commines) only now making his first flight from the nest, destitute of both sense and money, feeble in person, full of self-will, and consorting rather with fools than with the wise; lastly, if we are to believe Guicciardini, who was an Italian, might well have brought a somewhat partial judgment to bear upon the subject, a young man of little wit concerning the actions of men, but carried away by an ardent desire for rule and the acquisition of glory, a desire based far more on his shallow character and impetuosity than on any consciousness of genius: he was an enemy to all fatigue and all business, and when he tried to give his attention to it he showed himself always totally wanting in prudence and judgment. If anything in him appeared at first sight to be worthy of praise, on a closer inspection it was found to be something nearer akin to vice than to virtue. He was liberal, it is true, but without thought, with no measure and no discrimination. He was sometimes inflexible in will; but this was through obstinacy rather than a constant mind; and what his flatterers called goodness deserved far more the name of insensibility to injuries or poverty of spirit.

As to his physical appearance, if we are to believe the same author, it was still less admirable, and answered marvellously to his weakness of mind and character. He was small, with a large head, a short thick neck, broad chest, and high shoulders; his thighs and legs were long and thin; and as his face also was ugly — and was only redeemed by the dignity and force of his glance — and all his limbs were disproportionate with one another, he had rather the appearance of a monster than a man. Such was he whom Fortune was destined to make a conqueror, for whom Heaven was reserving more glory than he had power to carry.

So much for France.

The Imperial throne was occupied by Frederic III, who had been rightly named the Peaceful, not for the reason that he had always maintained peace, but because, having constantly been beaten, he had always been forced to make it. The first proof he had given of this very philosophical forbearance was during his journey to Rome, whither he betook himself to be consecrated. In crossing the Apennines he was attacked by brigands. They robbed him, but he made no pursuit. And so, encouraged by example and by the impunity of lesser thieves, the greater ones soon took part in the robberies. Amurath seized part of Hungary. Mathias Corvinus took Lower Austria, and Frederic consoled himself for these usurpations by repeating the maxim, Forgetfulness is the best cure for the losses we suffer. At the time we have now reached, he had just, after a reign of fifty-three years, affianced his son Maximilian to Marie of Burgundy and had put under the ban of the Empire his son-in-law, Albert of Bavaria, who laid claim to the ownership of the Tyrol. He was therefore too full of his family affairs to be troubled about Italy. Besides, he was busy looking for a motto for the house of Austria, an occupation of the highest importance for a man of the character of Frederic III. This motto, which Charles V was destined almost to render true, was at last discovered, to the great joy of the old emperor, who, judging that he had nothing more to do on earth after he had given this last proof of sagacity, died on the 19th of August, 1493; leaving the empire to his son Maximilian.

This motto was simply founded on the five vowels, a, e, i, o, u, the initial letters of these five words

“AUSTRIAE EST IMPERARE ORBI UNIVERSO.”

This means

“It is the destiny of Austria to rule over the whole world.”

So much for Germany.

Now that we have cast a glance over the four nations which were on the way, as we said before, to become European Powers, let us turn our attention to those secondary States which formed a circle more contiguous to Rome, and whose business it was to serve as armour, so to speak, to the spiritual queen of the world, should it please any of these political giants whom we have described to make encroachments with a view to an attack, on the seas or the mountains, the Adriatic Gulf or the Alps, the Mediterranean or the Apennines.

These were the kingdom of Naples, the duchy of Milan, the magnificent republic of Florence, and the most serene republic of Venice.

The kingdom of Naples was in the hands of the old Ferdinand, whose birth was not only illegitimate, but probably also well within the prohibited degrees. His father, Alfonso of Aragon, received his crown from Giovanna of Naples, who had adopted him as her successor. But since, in the fear of having no heir, the queen on her deathbed had named two instead of one, Alfonso had to sustain his rights against Rene. The two aspirants for some time disputed the crown. At last the house of Aragon carried the day over the house of Anjou, and in the course of the year 1442, Alfonso definitely secured his seat on the throne. Of this sort were the claims of the defeated rival which we shall see Charles VIII maintaining later on. Ferdinand had neither the courage nor the genius of his father, and yet he triumphed over his enemies, one after another he had two rivals, both far superior in merit to him self. The one was his nephew, the Count of Viana, who, basing his claim on his uncle’s shameful birth, commanded the whole Aragonese party; the other was Duke John of Calabria, who commanded the whole Angevin party. Still he managed to hold the two apart, and to keep himself on the throne by dint of his prudence, which often verged upon duplicity. He had a cultivated mind, and had studied the sciences — above all, law. He was of middle height, with a large handsome head, his brow open and admirably framed in beautiful white hair, which fell nearly down to his shoulders. Moreover, though he had rarely exercised his physical strength in arms, this strength was so great that one day, when he happened to be on the square of the Mercato Nuovo at Naples, he seized by the horns a bull that had escaped and stopped him short, in spite of all the efforts the animal made to escape from his hands. Now the election of Alexander had caused him great uneasiness, and in spite of his usual prudence he had not been able to restrain himself from saying before the bearer of the news that not only did he fail to rejoice in this election, but also that he did not think that any Christian could rejoice in it, seeing that Borgia, having always been a bad man, would certainly make a bad pope. To this he added that, even were the choice an excellent one and such as would please everybody else, it would be none the less fatal to the house of Aragon, although Roderigo was born her subject and owed to her the origin and progress of his fortunes; for wherever reasons of state come in, the ties of blood and parentage are soon forgotten, and, ‘a fortiori’, relations arising from the obligations of nationality.

Thus, one may see that Ferdinand judged Alexander VI with his usual perspicacity; this, however, did not hinder him, as we shall soon perceive, from being the first to contract an alliance with him.

The duchy of Milan belonged nominally to John Galeazzo, grandson of Francesco Sforza, who had seized it by violence on the 26th of February, 1450, and bequeathed it to his son, Galeazzo Maria, father of the young prince now reigning; we say nominally, because the real master of the Milanese was at this period not the legitimate heir who was supposed to possess it, but his uncle Ludovico, surnamed ‘il Moro’, because of the mulberry tree which he bore in his arms. After being exiled with his two brothers, Philip who died of poison in 1479, and Ascanio who became the cardinal, he returned to Milan some days after the assassination of Galeazzo Maria, which took place on the 26th of December 1476, in St. Stephen’s Church, and assumed the regency for the young duke, who at that time was only eight years old. From now onward, even after his nephew had reached the age of two-and-twenty, Ludovico continued to rule, and according to all probabilities was destined to rule a long time yet; for, some days after the poor young man had shown a desire to take the reins himself, he had fallen sick, and it was said, and not in a whisper, that he had taken one of those slow but mortal poisons of which princes made so frequent a use at this period, that, even when a malady was natural, a cause was always sought connected with some great man’s interests. However it may have been, Ludovico had relegated his nephew, now too weak to busy himself henceforward with the affairs of his duchy, to the castle of Pavia, where he lay and languished under the eyes of his wife Isabella, daughter of King Ferdinand of Naples.

As to Ludovico, he was an ambitious man, full of courage and astuteness, familiar with the sword and with poison, which he used alternately, according to the occasion, without feeling any repugnance or any predilection for either of them; but quite decided to be his nephew’s heir whether he died or lived.

Florence, although she had preserved the name of a republic, had little by little lost all her liberties, and belonged in fact, if not by right, to Piero dei Medici, to whom she had been bequeathed as a paternal legacy by Lorenzo, as we have seen, at the risk of his soul’s salvation.

The son, unfortunately, was far from having the genius of his father: he was handsome, it is true, whereas Lorenzo, on the contrary, was remarkably ugly; he had an agreeable, musical voice, whereas Lorenzo had always spoken through his nose; he was instructed in Latin and Greek, his conversation was pleasant and easy, and he improvised verses almost as well as the so-called Magnificent; but he was both ignorant of political affairs and haughtily insolent in his behaviour to those who had made them their study. Added to this, he was an ardent lover of pleasure, passionately addicted to women, incessantly occupied with bodily exercises that should make him shine in their eyes, above all with tennis, a game at which he very highly excelled: he promised himself that, when the period of mourning was fast, he would occupy the attention not only of Florence but of the whole of Italy, by the splendour of his courts and the renown of his fetes. Piero dei Medici had at any rate formed this plan; but Heaven decreed otherwise.

As to the most serene republic of Venice, whose doge was Agostino Barbarigo, she had attained, at the time we have reached, to her highest degree of power and splendour. From Cadiz to the Palus Maeotis, there was no port that was not open to her thousand ships; she possessed in Italy, beyond the coastline of the canals and the ancient duchy of Venice, the provinces of Bergamo, Brescia, Crema, Verona, Vicenza, and Padua; she owned the marches of Treviso, which comprehend the districts of Feltre, Belluno, Cadore, Polesella of Rovigo, and the principality of Ravenna; she also owned the Friuli, except Aquileia; Istria, except Trieste; she owned, on the east side of the Gulf, Zara, Spalatra, and the shore of Albania; in the Ionian Sea, the islands of Zante and Corfu; in Greece, Lepanto and Patras; in the Morea, Morone, Corone, Neapolis, and Argos; lastly, in the Archipelago, besides several little towns and stations on the coast, she owned Candia and the kingdom of Cyprus.

Thus from the mouth of the Po to the eastern extremity of the Mediterranean, the most serene republic was mistress of the whole coastline, and Italy and Greece seemed to be mere suburbs of Venice.

In the intervals of space left free between Naples, Milan, Florence, and Venice, petty tyrants had arisen who exercised an absolute sovereignty over their territories: thus the Colonnas were at Ostia and at Nettuna, the Montefeltri at Urbino, the Manfredi at Faenza, the Bentivogli at Bologna, the Malatesta family at Rimini, the Vitelli at Citta di Castello, the Baglioni at Perugia, the Orsini at Vicovaro, and the princes of Este at Ferrara.

Finally, in the centre of this immense circle, composed of great Powers, of secondary States, and of little tyrannies, Rome was set on high, the most exalted, yet the weakest of all, without influence, without lands, without an army, without gold. It was the concern of the new pope to secure all this: let us see, therefore, what manner of man was this Alexander VI, for undertaking and accomplishing such a project.

CHAPTER III

RODERIGO LENZUOLO was barn at Valencia, in Spain, in 1430 or 1431, and on his mother’s side was descended, as some writers declare, of a family of royal blood, which had cast its eyes on the tiara only after cherishing hopes of the crowns of Aragon and Valencia. Roderigo from his infancy had shown signs of a marvellous quickness of mind, and as he grew older he exhibited an intelligence extremely apt far the study of sciences, especially law and jurisprudence: the result was that his first distinctions were gained in the law, a profession wherein he soon made a great reputation by his ability in the discussion of the most thorny cases. All the same, he was not slow to leave this career, and abandoned it quite suddenly far the military profession, which his father had followed; but after various actions which served to display his presence of mind and courage, he was as much disgusted with this profession as with the other; and since it happened that at the very time he began to feel this disgust his father died, leaving a considerable fortune, he resolved to do no more work, but to live according to his own fancies and caprices. About this time he became the lover of a widow who had two daughters. The widow dying, Roderigo took the girls under his protection, put one into a convent, and as the other was one of the loveliest women imaginable, made her his mistress. This was the notorious Rosa Vanozza, by whom he had five children — Francesco, Caesar, Lucrezia, and Goffredo; the name of the fifth is unknown.

Roderigo, retired from public affairs, was given up entirely to the affections of a lover and a father, when he heard that his uncle, who loved him like a son, had been elected pope under the name of Calixtus III. But the young man was at this time so much a lover that love imposed silence on ambition; and indeed he was almost terrified at the exaltation of his uncle, which was no doubt destined to force him once more into public life. Consequently, instead of hurrying to Rome, as anyone else in his place would have done, he was content to indite to His Holiness a letter in which he begged for the continuation of his favours, and wished him a long and happy reign.

This reserve on the part of one of his relatives, contrasted with the ambitious schemes which beset the new pope at every step, struck Calixtus

III in a singular way: he knew the stuff that was in young Roderigo, and at a time when he was besieged on all sides by mediocrities, this powerful nature holding modestly aside gained new grandeur in his eyes so he replied instantly to Roderigo that on the receipt of his letter he must quit Spain for Italy, Valencia for Rome.

This letter uprooted Roderigo from the centre of happiness he had created for himself, and where he might perhaps have slumbered on like an ordinary man, if fortune had not thus interposed to drag him forcibly away. Roderigo was happy, Roderigo was rich; the evil passions which were natural to him had been, if not extinguished, — at least lulled; he was frightened himself at the idea of changing the quiet life he was leading for the ambitious, agitated career that was promised him; and instead of obeying his uncle, he delayed the preparations for departure, hoping that Calixtus would forget him. It was not so: two months after he received the letter from the pope, there arrived at Valencia a prelate from Rome, the bearer of Roderigo’s nomination to a benefice worth 20,000 ducats a year, and also a positive order to the holder of the post to come and take possession of his charge as soon as possible.

Holding back was no longer feasible: so Roderigo obeyed; but as he did not wish to be separated from the source whence had sprung eight years of happiness, Rosa Vanozza also left Spain, and while he was going to Rome, she betook herself to Venice, accompanied by two confidential servants, and under the protection of a Spanish gentleman named Manuel Melchior.

Fortune kept the promises she had made to Roderigo: the pope received him as a son, and made him successively Archbishop of Valencia, Cardinal-Deacon, and Vice-Chancellor. To all these favours Calixtus added a revenue of 20,000 ducats, so that at the age of scarcely thirty-five Roderigo found himself the equal of a prince in riches and power.

Roderigo had had some reluctance about accepting the cardinalship, which kept him fast at Rome, and would have preferred to be General of the Church, a position which would have allowed him more liberty for seeing his mistress and his family; but his uncle Calixtus made him reckon with the possibility of being his successor some day, and from that moment the idea of being the supreme head of kings and nations took such hold of Roderigo, that he no longer had any end in view but that which his uncle had made him entertain.

From that day forward, there began to grow up in the young cardinal that talent for hypocrisy which made of him the most perfect incarnation of the devil that has perhaps ever existed; and Roderigo was no longer the same man: with words of repentance and humility on his lips, his head bowed as though he were bearing the weight of his past sins, disparaging the riches which he had acquired and which, according to him, were the wealth of the poor and ought to return to the poor, he passed his life in churches, monasteries, and hospitals, acquiring, his historian tells us, even in the eyes of his enemies, the reputation of a Solomon for wisdom, of a Job for patience, and of a very Moses for his promulgation of the word of God: Rosa Vanozza was the only person in the world who could appreciate the value of this pious cardinal's conversion.

It proved a lucky thing for Roderiga that he had assumed this pious attitude, for his protector died after a reign of three years three months and nineteen days, and he was now sustained by his own merit alone against the numerous enemies he had made by his rapid rise to fortune: so during the whole of the reign of Pius II he lived always apart from public affairs, and only reappeared in the days of Sixtus IV, who made him the gift of the abbacy of Subiaco, and sent him in the capacity of ambassador to the kings of Aragon and Portugal. On his return, which took place during the pontificate of Innocent VIII, he decided to fetch his family at last to Rome: thither they came, escorted by Don Manuel Melchior, who from that moment passed as the husband of Rosa Vanozza, and took the name of Count Ferdinand of Castile. The Cardinal Roderigo received the noble Spaniard as a countryman and a friend; and he, who expected to lead a most retired life, engaged a house in the street of the Lungara, near the church of Regina Coeli, on the banks of the Tiber. There it was that, after passing the day in prayers and pious works, Cardinal Roderigo used to repair each evening and lay aside his mask. And it was said, though nobody could prove it, that in this house infamous scenes passed: Report said the dissipations were of so dissolute a character that their equals had never been seen in Rome. With a view to checking the rumours that began to spread abroad, Roderigo sent Caesar to study at Pisa, and married Lucrezia to a young gentleman of Aragon; thus there only remained at home Rosa Vanozza and her two sons: such was the state of things when Innocent VIII died and Roderigo Borgia was proclaimed pope.

We have seen by what means the nomination was effected; and so the five cardinals who had taken no part in this simony — namely, the Cardinals of Naples, Sierra, Portugal, Santa Maria-in-Porticu, and St. Peter-in-Vinculis — protested loudly against this election, which they treated as a piece of jobbery; but Roderigo had none the less, however it was done, secured his majority; Roderigo was none the less the two hundred and sixtieth successor of St. Peter.

Alexander VI, however, though he had arrived at his object, did not dare throw off at first the mask which the Cardinal Bargia had worn so long, although when he was apprised of his election he could not dissimulate his joy; indeed, on hearing the favourable result of the scrutiny, he lifted his hands to heaven and cried, in the accents of satisfied ambition, “Am I then pope? Am I then Christ’s vicar? Am I then the keystone of the Christian world?”

“Yes, holy father,” replied Cardinal Ascanio Sforza, the same who had sold to Roderigo the nine votes that were at his disposal at the Conclave for four mules laden with silver; “and we hope by your election to give glory to God, repose to the Church, and joy to Christendom, seeing that you have been chosen by the Almighty Himself as the most worthy among all your brethren.”

But in the short interval occupied by this reply, the new pope had already assumed the papal authority, and in a humble voice and with hands crossed upon his breast, he spoke:

“We hope that God will grant us His powerful aid, in spite of our weakness, and that He will do for us that which He did for the apostle when aforetime He put into his hands the keys of heaven and entrusted to him the government of the Church, a government which without the aid of God would prove too heavy a burden for mortal man; but God promised that His Spirit should direct him; God will do the same, I trust, for us; and for your part we fear not lest any of you fail in that holy obedience which is due unto the head of the Church, even as the flock of Christ was bidden to follow the prince of the apostles.”

Having spoken these words, Alexander donned the pontifical robes, and through the windows of the Vatican had strips of paper thrown out on which his name was written in Latin. These, blown by the wind, seemed to convey to the whole world the news of the great event which was about to change the face of Italy. The same day couriers started far all the courts of Europe.

Caesar Borgia learned the news of his father’s election at the University of Pisa, where he was a student. His ambition had sometimes dreamed of such good fortune, yet his joy was little short of madness. He was then a young man, about twenty-two or twenty-four years of age, skilful in all bodily exercises, and especially in fencing; he could ride barebacked the most fiery steeds, could cut off the head of a bull at a single sword-stroke; moreover, he was arrogant, jealous, and insincere. According to Tammasi, he was great among the godless, as his brother Francesco was good among the great. As to his face, even contemporary authors have left utterly different descriptions; for same have painted him as a monster of ugliness, while others, on the contrary, extol his beauty. This contradiction is due to the fact that at certain times of the year, and especially in the spring, his face was covered with an eruption which, so long as it lasted, made him an object of horror and disgust, while all the rest of the year he was the sombre, black-haired cavalier with pale skin and tawny beard whom Raphael shows us in the fine portrait he made of him. And historians, both chroniclers and painters, agree as to his fixed and powerful gaze, behind which burned a ceaseless flame, giving to his face something infernal and superhuman. Such was the man whose fortune was to fulfil all his desires. He had taken for his motto, ‘Aut Caesar, aut nihil’: Caesar or nothing.

Caesar posted to Rome with certain of his friends, and scarcely was he recognised at the gates of the city when the deference shown to him gave instant proof of the change in his fortunes: at the Vatican the respect was twice as great; mighty men bowed down before him as before one mightier than themselves. And so, in his impatience, he stayed not to visit his mother or any other member of his family, but went straight to the pope to kiss his feet; and as the pope had been forewarned of his coming, he awaited him in the midst of a brilliant and numerous assemblage of cardinals, with the three other brothers standing behind him. His Holiness received Caesar with a gracious countenance; still, he did not allow himself any demonstration of his paternal love, but, bending towards him, kissed him an the forehead, and inquired how he was and how he had fared on his journey. Caesar replied that he was wonderfully well, and altogether at the service of His Holiness: that, as to the journey, the trifling inconveniences and short fatigue had been compensated, and far mare than compensated, by the joy which he felt in being able to adore upon the papal throne a pope who was so worthy. At these words, leaving Caesar still on his knees, and reseating himself — for he had risen from his seat to embrace him — the pope assumed a grave and composed expression of face, and spoke as follows, loud enough to be heard by all, and slowly enough far everyone present to be able to ponder and retain in his memory even the least of his words:

"We are convinced, Caesar, that you are peculiarly rejoiced in beholding us on this sublime height, so far above our deserts, whereto it has pleased the Divine goodness to exalt us. This joy of yours is first of all our due because of the love we have always borne you and which we bear you still, and in the second place is prompted by your own personal interest, since henceforth you may feel sure of receiving from our pontifical hand those benefits which your own good works shall deserve. But if your joy — and this we say to you as we have even now said to your brothers — if your joy is founded on ought else than this, you are very greatly mistaken, Caesar, and you will find yourself sadly deceived. Perhaps we have been ambitious — we confess this humbly before the face of all men — passionately and immoderately ambitious to attain to the dignity of sovereign pontiff, and to reach this end we have followed every path that is open to human industry; but we have acted thus, vowing an inward vow that when once we had reached our goal, we would follow no other path but that which conduces best to the service of God and to the advancement of the Holy See, so that the glorious memory of the deeds that we shall do may efface the shameful recollection of the deeds we have already done. Thus shall we, let us hope, leave to those who follow us a track where upon if they find not the footsteps of a saint, they may at least tread in the path of a true pontiff. God, who has furthered the means, claims at our hands the fruits, and we desire to discharge to the full this mighty debt that we have incurred to Him; and accordingly we refuse to arouse by any deceit the stern rigour of His judgments. One sole hindrance could have power to shake our good intentions, and that might happen should we feel too keen an interest in your fortunes. Therefore are we armed beforehand against our love, and therefore have we prayed to God beforehand that we stumble not because of you; for in the path of favouritism a pope cannot slip without a fall, and cannot fall without injury and dishonour to the Holy See. Even to the end of our life we shall deplore the faults which have brought this experience home to us; and may it please Gad that our uncle Calixtus of blessed memory bear not this day in purgatory the burden of our sins, more heavy, alas, than his own! Ah, he was rich in every virtue, he was full of good intentions; but he loved too much his own people, and among them he loved me chief. And so he suffered this love to lead him blindly astray, all this love that he bore to his kindred, who to him were too truly flesh of his flesh, so that he heaped upon the heads of a few persons only, and those perhaps the least worthy, benefits which would more fittingly have rewarded the deserts of many. In truth, he bestowed upon our house treasures that should never have been amassed at the expense of the poor, or else should have been turned to a better purpose. He severed from the ecclesiastical State, already weak and poor, the duchy of Spoleto and other wealthy properties, that he might make them fiefs to us; he confided to our weak hands the vice-chancellorship, the vice-prefecture of Rome, the generalship of the Church, and all the other most important offices, which, instead of being monopolised by us, should have been conferred on those who were most meritorious. Moreover, there were persons who were raised on our recommendation to posts of great dignity, although they had no claims but such as our undue partiality accorded them; others were left out with no reason for their failure except the jealousy excited in us by their virtues. To rob Ferdinand of Aragon of the kingdom of Naples, Calixtus kindled a terrible war, which by a happy issue only served to increase our fortune, and by an unfortunate issue must have brought shame and disaster upon the Holy See. Lastly, by allowing himself to be governed by men who sacrificed public good to their private interests, he inflicted an injury, not only upon the pontifical throne and his own reputation, but what is far worse, far more deadly, upon his own conscience. And yet, O wise judgments of God! hard and incessantly though he toiled to establish our fortunes, scarcely had he left empty that supreme seat which we occupy to-day, when we were cast down from the pinnacle whereon we had climbed, abandoned to the fury of the rabble and the vindictive hatred of the Roman barons, who chose to feel offended by our goodness to their enemies. Thus, not only, we tell you, Caesar, not only did we plunge headlong from the summit of our grandeur, losing the worldly goods and dignities which our uncle had heaped at our feet, but for very peril of our life we were condemned to a voluntary exile, we and our friends, and in this way only did we contrive to escape the storm which our too good fortune had stirred up against us. Now this is a plain proof that God mocks at men’s designs when they are bad ones. How great an error is it for any pope to devote more care to the welfare of a house, which cannot last more than a few years, than to the glory of the Church, which will last for ever! What utter folly for any public man whose position is not inherited and cannot be bequeathed to his posterity, to support the edifice of his grandeur on any other basis than the noblest virtue practised for the general good, and to suppose that he can ensure the continuance of his own fortune otherwise than by taking all precautions against sudden whirlwinds which are want to arise in the midst of a calm, and to blow up the storm-clouds I mean the host of enemies. Now any one of these enemies who does his worst can cause injuries far more powerful than any help that is at all likely to come from a hundred friends and their lying promises. If you and your brothers walk in the path of virtue which we shall now open for you, every wish of your heart shall be instantly accomplished; but if you take the other path, if you have ever hoped that our affection will wink at disorderly life, then you will very soon find out that we are truly pope, Father of the Church, not father of the family; that, vicar of Christ as we are, we shall act as we deem best for Christendom, and not as you deem best for your own private good. And now that we have come to a thorough understanding, Caesar, receive our pontifical blessing." And with these words, Alexander VI rose up, laid his hands upon his son's head, for Caesar was still kneeling, and then retired into his apartments, without inviting him to follow.

The young man remained awhile stupefied at this discourse, so utterly unexpected, so utterly destructive at one fell blow to his most cherished hopes. He rose giddy and staggering like a drunken man, and at once leaving the Vatican, hurried to his mother, whom he had forgotten before, but sought now in his despair. Rosa Vanozza possessed all the vices and all the virtues of a Spanish courtesan; her devotion to the Virgin amounted to superstition, her fondness for her children to weakness, and her love for Roderigo to sensuality. In the depth of her heart she relied on the influence she had been able to exercise over him for nearly thirty years; and like a snake, she knew haw to envelop him in her coils when the fascination of her glance had lost its power. Rosa knew of old the profound hypocrisy of her lover, and thus she was in no difficulty about reassuring Caesar.

Lucrezia was with her mother when Caesar arrived; the two young people exchanged a lover-like kiss beneath her very eyes: and before he left Caesar had made an appointment for the same evening with Lucrezia, who was now living apart from her husband, to whom Roderigo paid a pension in her palace of the Via del Pelegrino, opposite the Campo dei Fiori, and there enjoying perfect liberty.

In the evening, at the hour fixed, Caesar appeared at Lucrezia’s; but he found there his brother Francesco. The two young men had never been friends. Still, as their tastes were very different, hatred with Francesco was only the fear of the deer for the hunter; but with Caesar it was the desire for vengeance and that lust for blood which lurks perpetually in the heart of a tiger. The two brothers none the less embraced, one from general kindly feeling, the other from hypocrisy; but at first sight of one another the sentiment of a double rivalry, first in their father’s and then in their sister’s good graces, had sent the blood mantling to the cheek of Francesco, and called a deadly pallor into Caesar’s. So the two young men sat on, each resolved not to be the first to leave, when all at once there was a knock at the door, and a rival was announced before whom both of them were bound to give way: it was their father.

Rosa Vanazza was quite right in comforting Caesar. Indeed, although Alexander VI had repudiated the abuses of nepotism, he understood very well the part that was to be played for his benefit by his sons and his daughter; for he knew he could always count on Lucrezia and Caesar, if not on Francesco and Goffredo. In these matters the sister was quite worthy of her brother. Lucrezia was wanton in imagination, godless by nature, ambitious and designing: she had a craving for pleasure, admiration, honours, money, jewels, gorgeous stuffs, and magnificent mansions. A true Spaniard beneath her golden tresses, a courtesan beneath her frank looks, she carried the head of a Raphael Madonna, and concealed the heart of a Messalina. She was dear to Roderigo both as daughter and as mistress, and he saw himself reflected in her as in a magic mirror, every passion and every vice. Lucrezia and Caesar were accordingly the best beloved of his heart, and the three composed that diabolical trio which for eleven years occupied the pontifical throne, like a mocking parody of the heavenly Trinity.

Nothing occurred at first to give the lie to Alexander’s professions of principle in the discourse he addressed to Caesar, and the first year of his pontificate exceeded all the hopes of Rome at the time of his election. He arranged for the provision of stores in the public granaries with such liberality, that within the memory of man there had never been such astonishing abundance; and with a view to extending the general prosperity to the lowest class, he organised numerous doles to be paid out of his private fortune, which made it possible for the very poor to participate in the general banquet from which they had been excluded for long enough. The safety of the city was secured, from the very first days of his accession, by the establishment of a strong and vigilant police force, and a tribunal consisting of four magistrates of irreproachable character, empowered to prosecute all nocturnal crimes, which during the last pontificate had been so common that their very numbers made impunity certain: these judges from the first showed a severity which neither the rank nor the purse of the culprit could modify. This presented such a great contrast to the corruption of the last reign, — in the course of which the vice-chamberlain one day remarked in public, when certain people were complaining of the venality of justice, "God wills not that a sinner die, but that he live and pay," — that the capital of the Christian world felt for one brief moment restored to the happy days of the papacy. So, at the end of a year, Alexander VI had reconquered that spiritual credit, so to speak, which his predecessors lost. His political credit was still to be established, if he was to carry out the first part of his gigantic scheme. To arrive at this, he must employ two agencies — alliances and conquests. His plan was to begin with alliances. The gentleman of Aragon who had married Lucrezia when she was only the daughter of Cardinal Roderigo Borgia was not a man powerful enough, either by birth and fortune or by intellect, to enter with any sort of effect into the plots and plans of Alexander VI; the separation was therefore changed into a divorce, and Lucrezia Borgia was now free to remarry. Alexander opened up two negotiations at the same time: he needed an ally to keep a watch on the policy of the neighbouring States. John Sforza, grandson of Alexander Sforza, brother of the great Francis I, Duke of Milan, was lord of Pesaro; the geographical situation of this place, an the coast, on the way between Florence and Venice, was wonderfully convenient for his purpose; so Alexander first cast an eye upon him, and as the interest of both parties was evidently the same, it came about that John Sforza was very soon Lucrezia's second husband.

At the same time overtures had been made to Alfonso of Aragon, heir presumptive to the crown of Naples, to arrange a marriage between Dana Sancia, his illegitimate daughter, and Goffreda, the pope's third son; but as the old Ferdinand wanted to make the best bargain he could out of it; he dragged on the negotiations as long as possible, urging that the two children were not of marriageable age, and so, highly honoured as he felt in such a prospective alliance, there was no hurry about the engagement. Matters stopped at this point, to the great annoyance of Alexander VI, who saw through this excuse, and understood that the postponement was nothing more or less than a refusal. Accordingly Alexander and Ferdinand remained in statu quo, equals in the political game, both on the watch till events should declare for one or other. The turn of fortune was for Alexander.

Italy, though tranquil, was instinctively conscious that her calm was nothing but the lull which goes before a storm. She was too rich and too happy to escape the envy of other nations. As yet the plains of Pisa had not been reduced to marsh-lands by the combined negligence and jealousy of the Florentine Republic, neither had the rich country that lay around Rome been converted into a barren desert by the wars of the Colonna and Orsini families; not yet had the Marquis of Marignan razed to the ground a hundred and twenty villages in the republic of Siena alone; and though the Maremma was unhealthy, it was not yet a poisonous marsh: it is a fact that Flavio Blando, writing in 1450, describes Ostia as being merely less flourishing than in the days of the Romans, when she had numbered 50,000 inhabitants, whereas now in our own day there are barely 30 in all.

The Italian peasants were perhaps the most blest on the face of the earth: instead of living scattered about the country in solitary fashion, they lived in villages that were enclosed by walls as a protection for their harvests, animals, and farm implements; their houses — at any rate those that yet stand — prove that they lived in much more comfortable and beautiful surroundings than the ordinary townsman of our day. Further, there was a community of interests, and many people collected together in the fortified villages, with the result that little by little they attained to an importance never acquired by the boorish French peasants or the German serfs; they bore arms, they had a common treasury, they elected their own magistrates, and whenever they went out to fight, it was to save their common country.

Also commerce was no less flourishing than agriculture; Italy at this period was rich in industries — silk, wool, hemp, fur, alum, sulphur, bitumen; those products which the Italian soil could not bring forth were imported, from the Black Sea, from Egypt, from Spain, from France, and often returned whence they came, their worth doubled by labour and fine workmanship. The rich man brought his merchandise, the poor his industry: the one was sure of finding workmen, the other was sure of finding work.

Art also was by no means behindhand: Dante, Giotto, Brunelleschi, and Donatello were dead, but Ariosto, Raphael, Bramante, and Michael Angelo were now living. Rome, Florence, and Naples had inherited the masterpieces of antiquity; and the manuscripts of AEschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides had come (thanks to the conquest of Mahomet II) to rejoin the statue of Xanthippus and the works of Phidias and Praxiteles. The principal sovereigns of Italy had come to understand, when they let their eyes dwell upon the fat harvests, the wealthy villages, the flourishing manufactories, and the marvellous churches, and then compared with them the poor and rude nations of fighting men who surrounded them on all sides, that some day or other they were destined to become for other countries what America was for Spain, a vast gold-mine for them to work. In consequence of this, a league offensive and defensive had been signed, about 1480, by Naples, Milan, Florence, and Ferrara, prepared to take a stand against enemies within or without, in Italy or outside. Ludovico Sforza, who was more than anyone else interested in maintaining this league, because he was nearest to France, whence the storm seemed to threaten, saw in the new pope’s election means not only of strengthening the league, but of making its power and unity conspicuous in the sight of Europe.

CHAPTER IV

On the occasion of each new election to the papacy, it is the custom for all the Christian States to send a solemn embassy to Rome, to renew their oath of allegiance to the Holy Father. Ludovico Sforza conceived the idea that the ambassadors of the four Powers should unite and make their entry into Rome on the same day, appointing one of their envoy, viz. the representative of the King of Naples, to be spokesman for all four. Unluckily, this plan did not agree with the magnificent projects of Piero dei Medici. That proud youth, who had been appointed ambassador of the Florentine Republic, had seen in the mission entrusted to him by his fellow-citizens the means of making a brilliant display of his own wealth. From the day of his nomination onwards, his palace was constantly filled with tailors, jewellers, and merchants of priceless stuffs; magnificent clothes had been made for him, embroidered with precious stones which he had selected from the family treasures. All his jewels, perhaps the richest in Italy, were distributed about the liveries of his pages, and one of them, his favourite, was to wear a collar of pearls valued by itself at 100,000 ducats, or almost, a million of our francs. In his party the Bishop of Arezzo, Gentile, who had once been Lorenzo dei Medici's tutor, was elected as second ambassador, and it was his duty to speak. Now Gentile, who had prepared his speech, counted on his eloquence to charm the ear quite as much as Piero counted on his riches to dazzle the eye. But the eloquence of Gentile would be lost completely if nobody was to speak but the ambassador of the King of Naples; and the magnificence of Piero dei Medici would never be noticed at all if he went to Rome mixed up with all the other ambassadors. These two important interests, compromised by the Duke of Milan's proposition, changed the whole face of Italy.

Ludovico Sforza had already made sure of Ferdinand's promise to conform to the plan he had invented, when the old king, at the solicitation of Piero, suddenly drew back. Sforza found out how this change had come about, and learned that it was Piero's influence that had overmastered his own. He could not disentangle the real motives that had promised the change, and imagined there was some secret league against himself: he attributed the changed political programme to the death of Lorenzo dei

Medici. But whatever its cause might be, it was evidently prejudicial to his own interests: Florence, Milan’s old ally, was abandoning her for Naples. He resolved to throw a counter weight into the scales; so, betraying to Alexander the policy of Piero and Ferdinand, he proposed to form a defensive and offensive alliance with him and admit the republic of Venice; Duke Hercules III of Ferrara was also to be summoned to pronounce for one or other of the two leagues. Alexander VI, wounded by Ferdinand’s treatment of himself, accepted Ludovico Sforza’s proposition, and an Act of Confederation was signed on the 22nd of April, 1493, by which the new allies pledged themselves to set on foot for the maintenance of the public peace an army of 20,000 horse and 6,000 infantry.

Ferdinand was frightened when he beheld the formation of this league; but he thought he could neutralise its effects by depriving Ludovico Sforza of his regency, which he had already kept beyond the proper time, though as yet he was not strictly an usurper. Although the young Galeazzo, his nephew, had reached the age of two-and-twenty, Ludovico Sforza none the less continued regent. Now Ferdinand definitely proposed to the Duke of Milan that he should resign the sovereign power into the hands of his nephew, on pain of being declared an usurper.

This was a bold stroke; but there was a risk of inciting Ludovico Sforza to start one of those political plots that he was so familiar with, never recoiling from any situation, however dangerous it might be. This was exactly what happened: Sforza, uneasy about his duchy, resolved to threaten Ferdinand’s kingdom.

Nothing could be easier: he knew the warlike nations of Charles VIII, and the pretensions of the house of France to the kingdom of Naples. He sent two ambassadors to invite the young king to claim the rights of Anjou usurped by Aragon; and with a view to reconciling Charles to so distant and hazardous an expedition, offered him a free and friendly passage through his own States.

Such a proposition was welcome to Charles VIII, as we might suppose from our knowledge of his character; a magnificent prospect was opened to him as by an enchanter: what Ludovica Sforza was offering him was virtually the command of the Mediterranean, the protectorship of the whole of Italy; it was an open road, through Naples and Venice, that well might lead to the conquest of Turkey or the Holy Land, if he ever had the fancy to avenge the disasters of Nicapolis and Mansourah. So the proposition was accepted, and a secret alliance was signed, with Count Charles di Belgiojasa and the Count of Cajazza acting for Ludovica Sforza, and the Bishop of St. Malo and Seneschal de Beaucaire far Charles VIII. By this treaty it was agreed: —

That the King of France should attempt the conquest of the kingdom of Naples;

That the Duke of Milan should grant a passage to the King of France through his territories, and accompany him with five hundred lances;

That the Duke of Milan should permit the King of France to send out as many ships of war as he pleased from Genoa;

Lastly, that the Duke of Milan should lend the King of France 200,000 ducats, payable when he started.

On his side, Charles VIII agreed: —

To defend the personal authority of Ludowico Sforza over the duchy of Milan against anyone who might attempt to turn him out;

To keep two hundred French lances always in readiness to help the house of Sforza, at Asti, a town belonging to the Duke of Orleans by the inheritance of his mother, Valentina Visconti;

Lastly, to hand over to his ally the principality of Tarentum immediately after the conquest of Naples was effected.

This treaty was scarcely concluded when Charles VIII, who exaggerated its advantages, began to dream of freeing himself from every let or hindrance to the expedition. Precautions were necessary; for his relations with the great Powers were far from being what he could have wished.

Indeed, Henry VII had disembarked at Calais with a formidable army, and was threatening France with another invasion.

Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, if they had not assisted at the fall of the house of Anjou, had at any rate helped the Aragon party with men and money.

Lastly, the war with the emperor acquired a fresh impetus when Charles VIII sent back Margaret of Burgundy to her father Maximilian, and contracted a marriage with Anne of Brittany.

By the treaty of Etaples, on the 3rd of November, 1492, Henry VII cancelled the alliance with the King of the Romans, and pledged himself not to follow his conquests.

This cost Charles VIII 745,000 gold crowns and the expenses of the war with England.

By the treaty of Barcelona, dated the 19th of January, 1493, Ferdinand the Catholic and Isabella agreed never to grant aid to their cousin, Ferdinand of Naples, and never to put obstacles in the way of the French king in Italy.

This cost Charles VIII Perpignan, Roussillon, and the Cerdagne, which had all been given to Louis XI as a hostage for the sum of 300,000 ducats by John of Aragon; but at the time agreed upon, Louis XI would not give them up for the money, for the old fox knew very well how important were these doors to the Pyrenees, and proposed in case of war to keep them shut.

Lastly, by the treaty of Senlis, dated the 23rd of May, 1493, Maximilian granted a gracious pardon to France for the insult her king had offered him.

It cost Charles VIII the counties of Burgundy, Artois, Charalais, and the seigniory of Noyers, which had come to him as Margaret's dowry, and also the towns of Aire, Hesdin, and Bethune, which he promised to deliver up to Philip of Austria on the day he came of age.

By dint of all these sacrifices the young king made peace with his neighbours, and could set on foot the enterprise that Ludavico Sforza had proposed. We have already explained that the project came into Sforza's mind when his plan about the deputation was refused, and that the refusal was due to Piero dei Medici's desire to make an exhibition of his magnificent jewels, and Gentile's desire to make his speech.

Thus the vanity of a tutor and the pride of his scholar together combined to agitate the civilized world from the Gulf of Tarentum to the Pyrenees.

Alexander VI was in the very centre of the impending earthquake, and before Italy had any idea that the earliest shocks were at hand he had profited by the perturbed preoccupation of other people to give the lie to that famous speech we have reported. He created cardinal John Borgia, a nephew, who during the last pontificate had been elected Archbishop of Montreal and Governor of Rome. This promotion caused no discontent, because of John's antecedents; and Alexander, encouraged by the success of this, promised to Caesar Borgia the archbishopric of Valencia, a benefice he had himself enjoyed before his elevation to the papacy. But here the difficulty arose an the side of the recipient. The young man, full-blooded, with all the vices and natural instincts of a captain of condottieri, had very great trouble in assuming even the appearance of a Churchman's virtue; but as he knew from his own father's mouth that the highest secular dignities were reserved far his elder brother, he decided to take what he could get, for fear of getting nothing; but his hatred for Francesco grew stronger, for from henceforth he was doubly his rival, both in love and ambition.

Suddenly Alexander beheld the old King Ferdinand returning to his side, and at the very moment when he least expected it. The pope was too clever a politician to accept a reconciliation without finding out the cause of it; he soon learned what plots were hatching at the French court against the kingdom of Naples, and the whole situation was explained.

Now it was his turn to impose conditions.

He demanded the completion of a marriage between Goffreda, his third son, and Dada Sancia, Alfonso’s illegitimate daughter.

He demanded that she should bring her husband as dowry the principality of Squillace and the county of Cariati, with an income of 10,000 ducats and the office of protonotary, one of the seven great crown offices which are independent of royal control.

He demanded for his eldest son, whom Ferdinand the Catholic had just made Duke of Gandia, the principality of Tricarico, the counties of Chiaramonte, Lauria, and Carinola, an income of 12,000 ducats, and the first of the seven great offices which should fall vacant.

He demanded that Virginio Orsini, his ambassador at the Neapolitan court, should be given a third great office, viz. that of Constable, the most important of them all.

Lastly, he demanded that Giuliano delta Rovere, one of the five cardinals who had opposed his election and was now taking refuge at Ostia, where the oak whence he took his name and bearings is still to be seen carved on all the walls, should be driven out of that town, and the town itself given over to him.

In exchange, he merely pledged himself never to withdraw from the house of Aragon the investiture of the kingdom of Naples accorded by his predecessors. Ferdinand was paying somewhat dearly for a simple promise; but on the keeping of this promise the legitimacy of his power wholly depended. For the kingdom of Naples was a fief of the Holy See; and to the pope alone belonged the right of pronouncing on the justice of each competitor’s pretensions; the continuance of this investiture was therefore of the highest conceivable importance to Aragon just at the time when Anjou was rising up with an army at her back to dispossess her.

For a year after he mounted the papal throne, Alexander VI had made great strides, as we see, in the extension of his temporal power. In his own hands he held, to be sure, only the least in size of the Italian territories; but by the marriage of his daughter Lucrezia with the lord of Pesaro he was stretching out one hand as far as Venice, while by the marriage of the Prince of Squillace with Dona Sancia, and the territories conceded to the Duke of Sandia, he was touching with the other hand the boundary of Calabria.

When this treaty, so advantageous for himself, was duly signed, he made Caesar Cardinal of Santa Maria Novella, for Caesar was always complaining of being left out in the distribution of his father's favours.

Only, as there was as yet no precedent in Church history for a bastard's donning the scarlet, the pope hunted up four false witnesses who declared that Caesar was the son of Count Ferdinand of Castile; who was, as we know, that valuable person Don Manuel Melchior, and who played the father's part with just as much solemnity as he had played the husband's.

The wedding of the two bastards was most splendid, rich with the double pomp of Church and King. As the pope had settled that the young bridal pair should live near him, Caesar Borgia, the new cardinal, undertook to manage the ceremony of their entry into Rome and the reception, and Lucrezia, who enjoyed at her father's side an amount of favour hitherto unheard of at the papal court, desired on her part to contribute all the splendour she had it in her power to add. He therefore went to receive the young people with a stately and magnificent escort of lords and cardinals, while she awaited them attended by the loveliest and noblest ladies of Rome, in one of the halls of the Vatican. A throne was there prepared for the pope, and at his feet were cushions far Lucrezia and Dona Sancia. "Thus," writes Tommaso Tommasi, "by the look of the assembly and the sort of conversation that went on for hours, you would suppose you were present at some magnificent and voluptuous royal audience of ancient Assyria, rather than at the severe consistory of a Roman pontiff, whose solemn duty it is to exhibit in every act the sanctity of the name he bears. But," continues the same historian, "if the Eve of Pentecost was spent in such worthy functions, the celebrations of the coming of the Holy Ghost on the following day were no less decorous and becoming to the spirit of the Church; for thus writes the master of the ceremonies in his journal:

"'The pope made his entry into the Church of the Holy Apostles, and beside him on the marble steps of the pulpit where the canons of St. Peter are wont to chant the Epistle and Gospel, sat Lucrezia his daughter and Sancia his son's wife: round about them, a disgrace to the Church and a public scandal, were grouped a number of other Roman ladies far more fit to dwell in Messalina’s city than in St. Peter’s.’“

So at Rome and Naples did men slumber while ruin was at hand; so did they waste their time and squander their money in a vain display of pride; and this was going on while the French, thoroughly alive, were busy laying hands upon the torches with which they would presently set Italy on fire.

Indeed, the designs of Charles VIII for conquest were no longer for anybody a matter of doubt. The young king had sent an embassy to the various Italian States, composed of Perrone dei Baschi, Brigonnet, d’Aubigny, and the president of the Provencal Parliament. The mission of this embassy was to demand from the Italian princes their co-operation in recovering the rights of the crown of Naples for the house of Anjou.

The embassy first approached the Venetians, demanding aid and counsel for the king their master. But the Venetians, faithful to their political tradition, which had gained for them the sobriquet of “the Jews of Christendom,” replied that they were not in a position to give any aid to the young king, so long as they had to keep ceaselessly on guard against the Turks; that, as to advice, it would be too great a presumption in them to give advice to a prince who was surrounded by such experienced generals and such able ministers.

Perrone dei Baschi, when he found he could get no other answer, next made for Florence. Piero dei Medici received him at a grand council, for he summoned on this occasion not only the seventy, but also the gonfalonieri who had sat for the last thirty-four years in the Signoria. The French ambassador put forward his proposal, that the republic should permit their army to pass through her States, and pledge herself in that case to supply for ready money all the necessary victual and fodder. The magnificent republic replied that if Charles VIII had been marching against the Turks instead of against Ferdinand, she would be only too ready to grant everything he wished; but being bound to the house of Aragon by a treaty, she could not betray her ally by yielding to the demands of the King of France.

The ambassadors next turned their steps to Siena. The poor little republic, terrified by the honour of being considered at all, replied that it was her desire to preserve a strict neutrality, that she was too weak to declare beforehand either for or against such mighty rivals, for she would naturally be obliged to join the stronger party. Furnished with this reply, which had at least the merit of frankness, the French envoys proceeded to Rome, and were conducted into the pope’s presence, where they demanded the investiture of the kingdom of Naples for their king.

Alexander VI replied that, as his predecessors had granted this investiture to the house of Aragon, he could not take it away, unless it were first established that the house of Anjou had a better claim than the house that was to be dispossessed. Then he represented to Perrone dei Baschi that, as Naples was a fief of the Holy See, to the pope alone the choice of her sovereign properly belonged, and that in consequence to attack the reigning sovereign was to attack the Church itself.

The result of the embassy, we see, was not very promising for Charles VIII; so he resolved to rely on his ally Ludovico Sforza alone, and to relegate all other questions to the fortunes of war.

A piece of news that reached him about this time strengthened him in this resolution: this was the death of Ferdinand. The old king had caught a severe cold and cough on his return from the hunting field, and in two days he was at his last gasp. On the 25th of January, 1494, he passed away, at the age of seventy, after a thirty-six years’ reign, leaving the throne to his elder son, Alfonso, who was immediately chosen as his successor.

Ferdinand never belied his title of “the happy ruler.” His death occurred at the very moment when the fortune of his family was changing.

The new king, Alfonso, was not a novice in arms: he had already fought successfully against Florence and Venice, and had driven the Turks out of Otranto; besides, he had the name of being as cunning as his father in the tortuous game of politics so much in vogue at the Italian courts. He did not despair of counting among his allies the very enemy he was at war with when Charles VIII first put forward his pretensions, we mean Bajazet II. So he despatched to Bajazet one of his confidential ministers, Camillo Pandone, to give the Turkish emperor to understand that the expedition to Italy was to the King of France nothing but a blind for approaching the scene of Mahomedan conquests, and that if Charles VIII were once at the Adriatic it would only take him a day or two to get across and attack Macedonia; from there he could easily go by land to Constantinople. Consequently he suggested that Bajazet for the maintenance of their common interests should supply six thousand horse and six thousand infantry; he himself would furnish their pay so long as they were in Italy. It was settled that Pandone should be joined at Tarentum by Giorgia Bucciarda, Alexander VI’s envoy, who was commissioned by the pope to engage the Turks to help him against the Christians. But while he was waiting for Bajazet's reply, which might involve a delay of several months, Alfonso requested that a meeting might take place between Piero dei Medici, the pope, and himself, to take counsel together about important affairs. This meeting was arranged at Vicovaro, near Tivoli, and the three interested parties duly met on the appointed day.

The intention of Alfonso, who before leaving Naples had settled the disposition of his naval forces, and given his brother Frederic the command of a fleet that consisted of thirty-six galleys, eighteen large and twelve small vessels, with injunctions to wait at Livorno and keep a watch on the fleet Charles VIII was getting ready at the port of Genoa, was above all things to check with the aid of his allies the progress of operations on land. Without counting the contingent he expected his allies to furnish, he had at his immediate disposal a hundred squadrons of heavy cavalry, twenty men in each, and three thousand bowmen and light horse. He proposed, therefore, to advance at once into Lombardy, to get up a revolution in favour of his nephew Galeazzo, and to drive Ludovico Sforza out of Milan before he could get help from France; so that Charles VIII, at the very time of crossing the Alps, would find an enemy to fight instead of a friend who had promised him a safe passage, men, and money.

This was the scheme of a great politician and a bold commander; but as everybody had came in pursuit of his own interests, regardless of the common this plan was very coldly received by Piero dei Medici, who was afraid lest in the war he should play only the same poor part he had been threatened with in the affair of the embassy; by Alexander VI it was rejected, because he reckoned on employing the troops of Alfonso an his own account. He reminded the King of Naples of one of the conditions of the investiture he had promised him, viz. that he should drive out the Cardinal Giuliano delta Rovere from the town of Ostia, and give up the town to him, according to the stipulation already agreed upon. Besides, the advantages that had accrued to Virginio Orsini, Alexander's favourite, from his embassy to Naples had brought upon him the ill-will of Prospero and Fabrizio Colonna, who owned nearly all the villages round about Rome. Now the pope could not endure to live in the midst of such powerful enemies, and the most important matter was to deliver him from all of them, seeing that it was really of moment that he should be at peace who was the head and soul of the league whereof the others were only the body and limbs.

Although Alfonso had clearly seen through the motives of Piero’s coldness, and Alexander had not even given him the trouble of seeking his, he was none the less obliged to bow to the will of his allies, leaving the one to defend the Apennines against the French, and helping the other to shake himself free of his neighbours in the Romagna. Consequently he, pressed on the siege of Ostia, and added to Virginio’s forces, which already amounted to two hundred men of the papal army, a body of his own light horse; this little army was to be stationed round about Rome, and was to enforce obedience from the Colonnas. The rest of his troops Alfonso divided into two parties: one he left in the hands of his son Ferdinand, with orders to scour the Romagna and worry, the petty princes into levying and supporting the contingent they had promised, while with the other he himself defended the defiles of the Abruzzi.

On the 23rd of April, at three o’clock in the morning, Alexander VI was freed from the first and fiercest of his foes; Giuliano delta Rovere, seeing the impossibility of holding out any longer against Alfonso’s troops, embarked on a brigantine which was to carry him to Savona.

From that day forward Virginio Orsini began that famous partisan warfare which reduced the country about Rome to the most pathetic desolation the world has ever seen. During all this time Charles VIII was at Lyons, not only uncertain as to the route he ought to take for getting into Italy, but even beginning to reflect a little on the chances and risks of such an expedition. He had found no sympathy anywhere except with Ludovico Sforza; so it appeared not unlikely that he would have to fight not the kingdom of Naples alone, but the whole of Italy to boot. In his preparations for war he had spent almost all the money at his disposal; the Lady of Beaujeu and the Duke of Bourbon both condemned his enterprise; Briconnet, who had advised it, did not venture to support it now; at last Charles, more irresolute than ever, had recalled several regiments that had actually started, when Cardinal Giuliano delta Rovere, driven out of Italy by the pope, arrived at Lyons, and presented himself before the king.

The cardinal, full of hatred, full of hope, hastened to Charles, and found him on the point of abandoning that enterprise on which, as Alexander’s enemy, delta Rovere rested his whole expectation of vengeance. He informed Charles of the quarrelling among his enemies; he showed him that each of them was seeking his own ends — Piero dei Medici the gratification of his pride, the pope the aggrandisement of his house. He pointed out that armed fleets were in the ports of Villefranche, Marseilles, and Genoa, and that these armaments would be lost; he reminded him that he had sent Pierre d'Urfe, his grand equerry, on in advance, to have splendid accommodation prepared in the Spinola and Doria palaces. Lastly, he urged that ridicule and disgrace would fall on him from every side if he renounced an enterprise so loudly vaunted beforehand, for whose successful execution, moreover, he had been obliged to sign three treaties of peace that were all vexatious enough, viz. with Henry VII, with Maximilian, and with Ferdinand the Catholic. Giuliano della Rovere had exercised true insight in probing the vanity of the young king, and Charles did not hesitate for a single moment. He ordered his cousin, the Duke of Orleans (who later on became Louis XII) to take command of the French fleet and bring it to Genoa; he despatched a courier to Antoine de Bessay, Baron de Tricastel, bidding him take to Asti the 2000 Swiss foot-soldiers he had levied in the cantons; lastly, he started himself from Vienne, in Dauphine, on the 23rd of August, 1494, crossed the Alps by Mont Genevre, without encountering a single body of troops to dispute his passage, descended into Piedmont and Monferrato, both just then governed by women regents, the sovereigns of both principalities being children, Charles John Aime and William John, aged respectively six and eight.

The two regents appeared before Charles VIII, one at Turin, one at Casale, each at the head of a numerous and brilliant court, and both glittering with jewels and precious stones. Charles, although he quite well knew that for all these friendly demonstrations they were both bound by treaty to his enemy, Alfonso of Naples, treated them all the same with the greatest politeness, and when they made protestations of friendship, asked them to let him have a proof of it, suggesting that they should lend him the diamonds they were covered with. The two regents could do no less than obey the invitation which was really a command. They took off necklaces, rings, and earrings. Charles VIII gave them a receipt accurately drawn up, and pledged the jewels for 20,000 ducats. Then, enriched by this money, he resumed his journey and made his way towards Asti. The Duke of Orleans held the sovereignty of Asti, as we said before, and hither came to meet Charles both Ludovico Sforza and his father-in-law, Hercules d'Este, Duke of Ferrara. They brought with them not only the promised troops and money, but also a court composed of the loveliest women in Italy.

The balls, fetes, and tourneys began with a magnificence surpassing anything that Italy had ever seen before. But suddenly they were interrupted by the king's illness. This was the first example in Italy of the disease brought by Christopher Columbus from the New World, and was called by Italians the French, by Frenchmen the Italian disease. The probability is that some of Columbus's crew who were at Genoa or thereabouts had already brought over this strange and cruel complaint that counter balanced the gains of the American gold-mines.

The king's indisposition, however, did not prove so grave as was at first supposed. He was cured by the end of a few weeks, and proceeded on his way towards Pavia, where the young Duke John Galeazzo lay dying. He and the King of France were first cousins, sons of two sisters of the house of Savoy. So Charles VIII was obliged to see him, and went to visit him in the castle where he lived more like prisoner than lord. He found him half reclining on a couch, pale and emaciated, some said in consequence of luxurious living, others from the effects of a slow but deadly poison. But whether or not the poor young man was desirous of pouring out a complaint to Charles, he did not dare say a word; for his uncle, Ludovico Sforza, never left the King of France for an instant. But at the very moment when Charles VIII was getting up to go, the door opened, and a young woman appeared and threw herself at the king's feet; she was the wife of the unlucky John Galeazzo, and came to entreat his cousin to do nothing against her father Alfonso, nor against her brother Ferdinand. At sight of her; Sforza scowled with an anxious and threatening aspect, far he knew not what impression might be produced on his ally by this scene. But he was soon reassured; far Charles replied that he had advanced too far to draw back now, and that the glory of his name was at stake as well as the interests of his kingdom, and that these two motives were far too important to be sacrificed to any sentiment of pity he might feel, however real and deep it might be and was. The poor young woman, who had based her last hope an this appeal, then rose from her knees and threw herself sobbing into her husband's arms. Charles VIII and Ludavico Sforza, took their leave: John Galeazzo was doomed.

Two days after, Charles VIII left for Florence, accompanied by his ally; but scarcely had they reached Parma when a messenger caught them up, and announced to Ludovico that his nephew was just dead: Ludovico at once begged Charles to excuse his leaving him to finish the journey alone; the interests which called him back to Milan were so important, he said, that he could not under the circumstances stay away a single day longer. As a fact he had to make sure of succeeding the man he had assassinated.

But Charles VIII continued his road not without some uneasiness. The sight of the young prince on his deathbed had moved him deeply, for at the bottom of his heart he was convinced that Ludovico Sforza was his murderer; and a murderer might very well be a traitor. He was going forward into an unfamiliar country, with a declared enemy in front of him and a doubtful friend behind: he was now at the entrance to the mountains, and as his army had no store of provisions and only lived from hand to mouth, a forced delay, however short, would mean famine. In front of him was Fivizzano, nothing, it is true, but a village surrounded by walls, but beyond Fivizzano lay Sarzano and Pietra Santa, both of them considered impregnable fortresses; worse than this, they were coming into a part of the country that was especially unhealthy in October, had no natural product except oil, and even procured its own corn from neighbouring provinces; it was plain that a whole army might perish there in a few days either from scarcity of food or from the unwholesome air, both of which were more disastrous than the impediments offered at every step by the nature of the ground. The situation was grave; but the pride of Piero dei Medici came once more to the rescue of the fortunes of Charles VIII.

CHAPTER V

PIERO DEI MEDICI had, as we may remember, undertaken to hold the entrance to Tuscany against the French; when, however, he saw his enemy coming dawn from the Alps, he felt less confident about his own strength, and demanded help from the pope; but scarcely had the rumour of foreign invasion began to spread in the Romagna, than the Colonna family declared themselves the French king's men, and collecting all their forces seized Ostia, and there awaited the coming of the French fleet to offer a passage through Rome. The pope, therefore, instead of sending troops to Florence, was obliged to recall all his soldiers to be near the capital; the only promise he made to Piero was that if Bajazet should send him the troops that he had been asking for, he would despatch that army for him to make use of. Piero dei Medici had not yet taken any resolution or formed any plan, when he suddenly heard two startling pieces of news. A jealous neighbour of his, the Marquis of Torderiovo, had betrayed to the French the weak side of Fivizzano, so that they had taken it by storm, and had put its soldiers and inhabitants to the edge of the sword; on another side, Gilbert of Montpensier, who had been lighting up the sea-coast so as to keep open the communications between the French army and their fleet, had met with a detachment sent by Paolo Orsini to Sarzano, to reinforce the garrison there, and after an hour's fighting had cut it to pieces. No quarter had been granted to any of the prisoners; every man the French could get hold of they had massacred.

This was the first occasion on which the Italians, accustomed as they were to the chivalrous contests of the fifteenth century, found themselves in contact with savage foreigners who, less advanced in civilisation, had not yet come to consider war as a clever game, but looked upon it as simply a mortal conflict. So the news of these two butcheries produced a tremendous sensation at Florence, the richest city in Italy, and the most prosperous in commerce and in art. Every Florentine imagined the French to be like an army of those ancient barbarians who were wont to extinguish fire with blood. The prophecies of Savonarola, who had predicted the foreign invasion and the destruction that should follow it, were recalled to the minds of all; and so much perturbation was evinced that Piero dei Medici, bent on getting peace at any price, forced a decree upon the republic whereby she was to send an embassy to the conqueror; and obtained leave, resolved as he was to deliver himself in person into the hands of the French monarch, to act as one of the ambassadors. He accordingly quitted Florence, accompanied by four other messengers, and an his arrival at Pietra Santa, sent to ask from Charles VIII a safe-conduct for himself alone. The day after he made this request, Brigonnet and de Piennes came to fetch him, and led him into the presence of Charles VIII.

Piero dei Medici, in spite of his name and influence, was in the eyes of the French nobility, who considered it a dishonourable thing to concern oneself with art or industry, nothing more than a rich merchant, with whom it would be absurd to stand upon any very strict ceremony. So Charles VIII received him on horseback, and addressing him with a haughty air, as a master might address a servant, demanded whence came this pride of his that made him dispute his entrance into Tuscany. Piero dei Medici replied, that, with the actual consent of Louis XI, his father Lorenzo had concluded a treaty of alliance with Ferdinand of Naples; that accordingly he had acted in obedience to prior obligations, but as he did, not wish to push too far his devotion to the house of Aragon or his opposition to France, he was ready to do whatever Charles VIII might demand of him. The king, who had never looked for such humility in his enemy, demanded that Sarzano should be given up to him: to this Piero dei Medici at once consented. Then the conqueror, wishing to see how far the ambassador of the magnificent republic would extend his politeness, replied that this concession was far from satisfying him, and that he still must have the keys of Pietra Santa, Pisa, Librafatta, and Livorno. Piero saw no more difficulty about these than about Sarzano, and consented on Charles’s mere promise by word of mouth to restore the town when he had achieved the conquest of Naples. At last Charles VIII, seeing that this man who had been sent out to negotiate with him was very easy to manage, exacted as a final condition, a ‘sine qua non’, however, of his royal protection, that the magnificent republic should lend him the sum of 200,000 florins. Piero found it no harder to dispose of money than of fortresses, and replied that his fellow-citizens would be happy to render this service to their new ally. Then Charles VIII set him on horseback, and ordered him to go on in front, so as to begin to carry out his promises by yielding up the four fortresses he had insisted on having. Piero obeyed, and the French army, led by the grandson of Cosimo the Great and the son of Lorenzo the Magnificent, continued its triumphal march through Tuscany.

On his arrival at Lucca, Piero dei Medici learnt that his concessions to the King of France were making a terrible commotion at Florence. The magnificent republic had supposed that what Charles VIII wanted was simply a passage through her territory, so when the news came there was a general feeling of discontent, which was augmented by the return of the other ambassadors, whom Piero had not even consulted when he took action as he did. Piero considered it necessary that he should return, so he asked Charles's permission to precede him to the capital. As he had fulfilled all his promises, except the matter of the loan, which could not be settled anywhere but at Florence, the king saw no objection, and the very evening after he quitted the French army Piero returned incognito to his palace in the Via Largo.

The next day he proposed to present himself before the Signoria, but when he arrived at the Piazza del Palazzo Vecchio, he perceived the gonfaloniere Jacopo de Nerli coming towards him, signalling to him that it was useless to attempt to go farther, and pointing out to him the figure of Luca Corsini standing at the gate, sword in hand: behind him stood guards, ordered, if need-were, to dispute his passage. Piero dei Medici, amazed by an opposition that he was experiencing for the first time in his life, did not attempt resistance. He went home, and wrote to his brother-in-law, Paolo Orsini, to come and help him with his gendarmes. Unluckily for him, his letter was intercepted. The Signoria considered that it was an attempt at rebellion. They summoned the citizens to their aid; they armed hastily, sallied forth in crowds, and thronged about the piazza of the palace. Meanwhile Cardinal Gian dei Medici had mounted on horseback, and under the impression that the Orsini were coming to the rescue, was riding about the streets of Florence, accompanied by his servants and uttering his battle cry, “Palle, Palle.” But times had changed: there was no echo to the cry, and when the cardinal reached the Via dei Calizaioli, a threatening murmur was the only response, and he understood that instead of trying to arouse Florence he had much better get away before the excitement ran too high. He promptly retired to his own palace, expecting to find there his two brothers, Piero and Giuliano. But they, under the protection of Orsini and his gendarmes, had made their escape by the Porto San Gallo. The peril was imminent, and Gian dei Medici wished to follow their example; but wherever he went he was met by a clamour that grew more and more threatening. At last, as he saw that the danger was constantly increasing, he dismounted from his horse and ran into a house that he found standing open. This house by a lucky chance communicated with a convent of Franciscans; one of the friars lent the fugitive his dress, and the cardinal, under the protection of this humble incognito, contrived at last to get outside Florence, and joined his two brothers in the Apennines.

The same day the Medici were declared traitors and rebels, and ambassadors were sent to the King of France. They found him at Pisa, where he was granting independence to the town which eighty-seven years ago had fallen under the rule of the Florentines. Charles VIII made no reply to the envoys, but merely announced that he was going to march on Florence.

Such a reply, one may easily understand, terrified the republic. Florence, had no time to prepare a defence, and no strength in her present state to make one. But all the powerful houses assembled and armed their own servants and retainers, and awaited the issue, intending not to begin hostilities, but to defend themselves should the French make an attack. It was agreed that if any necessity should arise for taking up arms, the bells of the various churches in the town should ring a peal and so serve as a general signal. Such a resolution was perhaps of more significant moment in Florence than it could have been in any other town. For the palaces that still remain from that period are virtually fortresses and the eternal fights between Guelphs and Ghibellines had familiarised the Tuscan people with street warfare.

The king appeared, an the 17th of November, in the evening, at the gate of San Friano. He found there the nobles of Florence clad in their most magnificent apparel, accompanied by priests chanting hymns, and by a mob who were full of joy at any prospect of change, and hoped for a return of liberty after the fall of the Medici. Charles VIII stopped for a moment under a sort of gilded canopy that had been prepared for him, and replied in a few evasive words to the welcoming speeches which were addressed to him by the Signoria; then he asked for his lance, he set it in rest, and gave the order to enter the town, the whole of which he paraded with his army following him with arms erect, and then went down to the palace of the Medici, which had been prepared for him.

The next day negotiations commenced; but everyone was out of his reckoning. The Florentines had received Charles VIII as a guest, but he had entered the city as a conqueror. So when the deputies of the Signoria spoke of ratifying the treaty of Piero dei Medici, the king replied that such a treaty no longer existed, as they had banished the man who made it; that he had conquered Florence, as he proved the night before, when he entered lance in hand; that he should retain the sovereignty, and would make any further decision whenever it pleased him to do so; further, he would let them know later on whether he would reinstate the Medici or whether he would delegate his authority to the Signoria: all they had to do was to come back the next day, and he would give them his ultimatum in writing.

This reply threw Florence into a great state of consternation; but the Florentines were confirmed in their resolution of making a stand. Charles, for his part, had been astonished by the great number of the inhabitants; not only was every street he had passed through thickly lined with people, but every house from garret to basement seemed overflowing with human beings. Florence indeed, thanks to her rapid increase in population, could muster nearly 150,000 souls.

The next day, at the appointed hour, the deputies made their appearance to meet the king. They were again introduced into his presence, and the discussion was reopened. At last, as they were coming to no sort of understanding, the royal secretary, standing at the foot of the throne upon which Charles viii sat with covered head, unfolded a paper and began to read, article by article, the conditions imposed by the King of France. But scarcely had he read a third of the document when the discussion began more hotly than ever before. Then Charles VIII said that thus it should be, or he would order his trumpets to be sounded. Hereupon Piero Capponi, secretary to the republic, commonly called the Scipio of Florence, snatched from the royal secretary’s hand the shameful proposal of capitulation, and tearing it to pieces, exclaimed: —

“Very good, sire; blow your trumpets, and we will ring our bells.”

He threw the pieces in the face of the amazed reader, and dashed out of the room to give the terrible order that would convert the street of Florence into a battlefield.

Still, against all probabilities, this bold answer saved the town. The French supposed, from such audacious words, addressed as they were to men who so far had encountered no single obstacle, that the Florentines were possessed of sure resources, to them unknown: the few prudent men who retained any influence over the king advised him accordingly to abate his pretensions; the result was that Charles VIII offered new and more reasonable conditions, which were accepted, signed by both parties, and proclaimed on the 26th of November during mass in the cathedral of Santa Maria Del Fiore.

These were the conditions:

The Signoria were to pay to Charles VIII, as subsidy, the sum of 120,000 florins, in three instalments;

The Signoria were to remove the sequestration imposed upon the property of the Medici, and to recall the decree that set a price on their heads;

The Signoria were to engage to pardon the Pisans, on condition of their again submitting to the rule of Florence;

Lastly, the Signoria were to recognise the claims of the Duke of Milan over Sarzano and Pietra Santa, and these claims thus recognised, were to be settled by arbitration.

In exchange for this, the King of France pledged himself to restore the fortresses that had been given up to him, either after he had made himself master of the town of Naples, or when this war should be ended by a peace or a two years’ truce, or else when, for any reason whatsoever, he should have quitted Italy.

Two days after this proclamation, Charles VIII, much to the joy of the Signoria, left Florence, and advanced towards Rome by the route of Poggibondi and Siena.

The pope began to be affected by the general terror: he had heard of the massacres of Fivizzano, of Lunigiane, and of Imola; he knew that Piero dei Medici had handed over the Tuscan fortresses, that Florence had succumbed, and that Catherine Sforza had made terms with the conqueror; he saw the broken remnants of the Neapolitan troops pass disheartened through Rome, to rally their strength in the Abruzzi, and thus he found himself exposed to an enemy who was advancing upon him with the whole of the Romagna under his control from one sea to the other, in a line of march extending from Piombina to Ancona.

It was at this juncture that Alexander VI received his answer from Bajazet II: the reason of so long a delay was that the pope’s envoy and the Neapolitan ambassador had been stopped by Gian della Rovere, the

Cardinal Giuliano's brother, just as they were disembarking at Sinigaglia. They were charged with a verbal answer, which was that the sultan at this moment was busied with a triple war, first with the Sultan of Egypt, secondly with the King of Hungary, and thirdly with the Greeks of Macedonia and Epirus; and therefore he could not, with all the will in the world, help His Holiness with armed men. But the envoys were accompanied by a favourite of the sultan's bearing a private letter to Alexander VI, in which Bajazet offered on certain conditions to help him with money. Although, as we see, the messengers had been stopped on the way, the Turkish envoy had all the same found a means of getting his despatch sent to the pope: we give it here in all its naivete.

"Bajazet the Sultan, son of the Sultan Mahomet II, by the grace of God Emperor of Asia and Europe, to the Father and Lord of all the Christians, Alexander VI, Roman pontiff and pope by the will of heavenly Providence, first, greetings that we owe him and bestow with all our heart. We make known to your Highness, by the envoy of your Mightiness, Giorgio Bucciarda, that we have been apprised of your convalescence, and received the news thereof with great joy and comfort. Among other matters, the said Bucciarda has brought us word that the King of France, now marching against your Highness, has shown a desire to take under his protection our brother D'jem, who is now under yours — a thing which is not only against our will, but which would also be the cause of great injury to your Highness and to all Christendom. In turning the matter over with your envoy Giorgio we have devised a scheme most conducive to peace and most advantageous and honourable for your Highness; at the same time satisfactory to ourselves personally; it would be well if our aforesaid brother D'jem, who being a man is liable to death, and who is now in the hands of your Highness, should quit this world as soon as possible, seeing that his departure, a real good to him in his position, would be of great use to your Highness, and very conducive to your peace, while at the same time it would be very agreeable to us, your friend. If this proposition is favourably received, as we hope, by your Highness, in your desire to be friendly towards us, it would be advisable both in the interests of your Highness and for our own satisfaction that it should occur rather sooner than later, and by the surest means you might be pleased to employ; so that our said brother D'jem might pass from the pains of this world into a better and more peaceful life, where at last he may find repose. If your Highness should adapt this plan and send us the body of our brother, We, the above-named Sultan Bajazet, pledge ourselves to send to your Highness, wheresoever and by whatsoever hands you please, the sum of 300,000 ducats, With which sum you could purchase some fair domain for your children. In order to facilitate this purchase, we would be willing, while awaiting the issue, to place the 300,000 ducats in the hands of a third party, so that your Highness might be quite certain of receiving the money on an appointed day, in return for the despatch of our brother's body. Moreover, we promise your Highness herewith, for your greater satisfaction, that never, so long as you shall remain on the pontifical throne, shall there be any hurt done to the Christians, neither by us, nor by our servants, nor by any of our compatriots, of whatsoever kind or condition they may be, neither on sea nor on land. And for the still further satisfaction of your Highness, and in order that no doubt whatever may remain concerning the fulfilment of our promises, we have sworn and affirmed in the presence of Bucciarda, your envoy, by the true God whom we adore and by our holy Gospels, that they shall be faithfully kept from the first point unto the last. And now for the final and complete assurance of your Highness, in order that no doubt may still remain in your heart, and that you may be once again and profoundly convinced of our good faith, we the aforesaid Sultan Bajazet do swear by the true God, who has created the heavens and the earth and all that therein is, that we will religiously observe all that has been above said and declared, and in the future will do nothing and undertake nothing that may be contrary to the interests of your Highness.

"Given at Constantinople, in our palace, on the 12th of September A.D. 1494."

This letter was the cause of great joy to the Holy Father: the aid of four or five thousand Turks would be insufficient under the present circumstances, and would only serve to compromise the head of Christendom, while the sum of 300,000 ducats — that is, nearly a million francs — was good to get in any sort of circumstances. It is true that, so long as D'jem lived, Alexander was drawing an income of 180,000 livres, which as a life annuity represented a capital of nearly two millions; but when one needs ready mangy, one ought to be able to make a sacrifice in the way of discount. All the same, Alexander formed no definite plan, resolved on acting as circumstances should indicate.

But it was a more pressing business to decide how he should behave to the King of France: he had never anticipated the success of the French in Italy, and we have seen that he laid all the foundations of his family’s future grandeur upon his alliance with the house of Aragon. But here was this house tattering, and a volcano more terrible than her own Vesuvius was threatening to swallow up Naples. He must therefore change his policy, and attach himself to the victor, — no easy matter, for Charles VIII was bitterly annoyed with the pope for having refused him the investiture and given it to Aragon.

In consequence, he sent Cardinal Francesco Piccolomini as an envoy to the king. This choice looked like a mistake at first, seeing that the ambassador was a nephew of Pius II, who had vigorously opposed the house of Anjou; but Alexander in acting thus had a second design, which could not be discerned by those around him. In fact, he had divined that Charles would not be quick to receive his envoy, and that, in the parleyings to which his unwillingness must give rise, Piccolomini would necessarily be brought into contact with the young king’s advisers. Now, besides his ostensible mission to the king, Piccalamini had also secret instructions for the more influential among his counsellors. These were Briconnet and Philippe de Luxembourg; and Piccolomini was authorised to promise a cardinal’s hat to each of them. The result was just what Alexander had foreseen: his envoy could not gain admission to Charles, and was obliged to confer with the people about him. This was what the pope wished. Piccolomini returned to Rome with the king’s refusal, but with a promise from Briconnet and Philippe de Luxembourg that they would use all their influence with Charles in favour of the Holy Father, and prepare him to receive a fresh embassy.

But the French all this time were advancing, and never stopped more than forty-eight hours in any town, so that it became more and more urgent to get something settled with Charles. The king had entered Siena and Viterbo without striking a blow; Yves d’ Alegre and Louis de Ligny had taken over Ostia from the hands of the Colonnas; Civita Vecchia and Corneto had opened their gates; the Orsini had submitted; even Gian Sforza, the pope’s son-in-law, had retired from the alliance with Aragon. Alexander accordingly judged that the moment had came to abandon his ally, and sent to Charles the Bishops of Concordia and Terni, and his confessor, Mansignore Graziano. They were charged to renew to Briconnet and

Philippe de Luxembourg the promise of the cardinalship, and had full powers of negotiation in the name of their master, both in case Charles should wish to include Alfonso II in the treaty, and in case he should refuse to sign an agreement with any other but the pope alone. They found the mind of Charles influenced now by the insinuation of Giuliano della Ravere, who, himself a witness of the pope's simony, pressed the king to summon a council and depose the head of the Church, and now by the secret support given him by the Bishops of Mans and St. Malo. The end of it was that the king decided to form his own opinion about the matter and settle nothing beforehand, and continued this route, sending the ambassadors back to the pope, with the addition of the Marechal de Gie, the Seneschal de Beaucaire, and Jean de Gannay, first president of the Paris Parliament. They were ordered to say to the pope —

1. That the king wished above all things to be admitted into Rome without resistance; that, an condition of a voluntary, frank, and loyal admission, he would respect the authority of the Holy Father and the privileges of the Church;
2. That the king desired that D'jem should be given up to him, in order that he might make use of him against the sultan when he should carry the war into Macedonia or Turkey or the Holy Land;
3. That the remaining conditions were so unimportant that they could be brought forward at the first conference.

The ambassadors added that the French army was now only two days distant from Rome, and that in the evening of the day after next Charles would probably arrive in person to demand an answer from His Holiness.

It was useless to think of parleying with a prince who acted in such expeditious fashion as this. Alexander accordingly warned Ferdinand to quit Rome as soon as possible, in the interests of his own personal safety. But Ferdinand refused to listen to a word, and declared that he would not go out at one gate while Charles VIII came in at another. His sojourn was not long. Two days later, about eleven o'clock in the morning, a sentinel placed on a watch-tower at the top of the Castle S. Angelo, whither the pope had retired, cried out that the vanguard of the enemy was visible on the horizon. At once Alexander and the Duke of Calabria went up an the terrace which tops the fortress, and assured themselves with their own eyes that what the soldier said was true. Then, and not till then, did the duke of Calabria mount an horseback, and, to use his own words, went out at the gate of San

Sebastiana, at the same moment that the French vanguard halted five hundred feet from the Gate of the People. This was on the 31st of December 1494.

At three in the afternoon the whole army had arrived, and the vanguard began their march, drums beating, ensigns unfurled. It was composed, says Paolo Giove, an eye-witness (book ii, p. 41 of his History), of Swiss and German soldiers, with short tight coats of various colours: they were armed with short swords, with steel edges like those of the ancient Romans, and carried ashen lances ten feet long, with straight and sharp iron spikes: only one-fourth of their number bore halberts instead of lances, the spikes cut into the form of an axe and surmounted by a four-cornered spike, to be used both for cutting like an axe and piercing like a bayonet: the first row of each battalion wore helmets and cuirasses which protected the head and chest, and when the men were drawn up for battle they presented to the enemy a triple array of iron spikes, which they could raise or lower like the spines of a porcupine. To each thousand of the soldiery were attached a hundred fusiliers: their officers, to distinguish them from the men, wore lofty plumes on their helmets.

After the Swiss infantry came the archers of Gascony: there were five thousand of them, wearing a very simple dress, that contrasted with the rich costume of the Swiss soldiers, the shortest of whom would have been a head higher than the tallest of the Gascons. But they were excellent soldiers, full of courage, very light, and with a special reputation for quickness in stringing and drawing their iron bows.

Behind them rode the cavalry, the flower of the French nobility, with their gilded helmets and neck bands, their velvet and silk surcoats, their swords each of which had its own name, their shields each telling of territorial estates, and their colours each telling of a lady-love. Besides defensive arms, each man bore a lance in his hand, like an Italian gendarme, with a solid grooved end, and on his saddle bow a quantity of weapons, some for cutting and same for thrusting. Their horses were large and strong, but they had their tails and ears cropped according to the French custom. These horses, unlike those of the Italian gendarmes, wore no caparisons of dressed leather, which made them more exposed to attack. Every knight was followed by three horses — the first ridden by a page in armour like his own, the two others by equerries who were called lateral auxiliaries, because in a fray they fought to right and left of their chief. This troop was not only the most magnificent, but the most considerable in the whole army; for as there were 2500 knights, they formed each with their three followers a total of 10,000 men. Five thousand light horse rode next, who carried huge wooden bows, and shot long arrows from a distance like English archers. They were a great help in battle, for moving rapidly wherever aid was required, they could fly in a moment from one wing to another, from the rear to the van, then when their quivers were empty could go off at so swift a gallop that neither infantry or heavy cavalry could pursue them. Their defensive armour consisted of a helmet and half-cuirass; some of them carried a short lance as well, with which to pin their stricken foe to the ground; they all wore long cloaks adorned with shoulder-knots, and plates of silver whereon the arms of their chief were emblazoned.

At last came the young king’s escort; there were four hundred archers, among whom a hundred Scots formed a line on each side, while two hundred of the most illustrious knights marched on foot beside the prince, carrying heavy arms on their shoulders. In the midst of this magnificent escort advanced Charles VIII, both he and his horse covered with splendid armour; an his right and left marched Cardinal Ascanio Sforza, the Duke of Milan’s brother, and Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere, of whom we have spoken so often, who was afterwards Pope Julius II. The Cardinals Colonna and Savelli followed immediately after, and behind them came Prospero and Fabrizia Colonna, and all the Italian princes and generals who had thrown in their lot with the conqueror, and were marching intermingled with the great French lords.

For a long time the crowd that had collected to see all these foreign soldiers go by, a sight so new and strange, listened uneasily to a dull sound which got nearer and nearer. The earth visibly trembled, the glass shook in the windows, and behind the king’s escort thirty-six bronze cannons were seen to advance, bumping along as they lay on their gun-carriages. These cannons were eight feet in length; and as their mouths were large enough to hold a man’s head, it was supposed that each of these terrible machines, scarcely known as yet to the Italians, weighed nearly six thousand pounds. After the cannons came culverins sixteen feet long, and then falconets, the smallest of which shot balls the size of a grenade. This formidable artillery brought up the rear of the procession, and formed the hindmost guard of the French army.

It was six hours since the front guard entered the town; and as it was now night and for every six artillery-men there was a torch-bearer, this illumination gave to the objects around a more gloomy character than they would have shown in the sunlight. The young king was to take up his quarters in the Palazzo di Venezia, and all the artillery was directed towards the plaza and the neighbouring streets. The remainder of the army was dispersed about the town. The same evening, they brought to the king, less to do honour to him than to assure him of his safety, the keys of Rome and the keys of the Belvedere Garden just the same thing had been done for the Duke of Calabria.

The pope, as we said, had retired to the Castle S. Angelo with only six cardinals, so from the day after his arrival the young king had around him a court of very different brilliance from that of the head of the Church. Then arose anew the question of a convocation to prove Alexander's simony and proceed to depose him; but the king's chief counsellors, gained over, as we know, pointed out that this was a bad moment to excite a new schism in the Church, just when preparations were being made for war against the infidels. As this was also the king's private opinion, there was not much trouble in persuading him, and he made up his mind to treat with His Holiness.

But the negotiations had scarcely begun when they had to be broken off; for the first thing Charles VIII demanded was the surrender of the Castle S. Angelo, and as the pope saw in this castle his only refuge, it was the last thing he chose to give up. Twice, in his youthful impatience, Charles wanted to take by force what he could not get by goodwill, and had his cannons directed towards the Holy Father's dwelling-place; but the pope was unmoved by these demonstrations; and obstinate as he was, this time it was the French king who gave way.

This article, therefore, was set aside, and the following conditions were agreed upon:

That there should be from this day forward between His Majesty the King of France and the Holy Father a sincere friendship and a firm alliance;

Before the completion of the conquest of the kingdom of Naples, the King of France should occupy, for the advantage and accommodation of his army, the fortresses of Civita Vecchia, Terracina, and Spoleto;

Lastly, the Cardinal Valentino (this was now the name of Caesar Borgia, after his archbishopric of Valencia) should accompany the king in the capacity of apostolic ambassador, really as a hostage.

These conditions fixed, the ceremonial of an interview was arranged. The king left the Palazzo di Venezia and went to live in the Vatican. At the appointed time he entered by the door of a garden that adjoined the palace, while the pope, who had not had to quit the Castle S. Angelo, thanks to a corridor communicating between the two palaces, came down into the same garden by another gate. The result of this arrangement was that the king the next moment perceived the pope, and knelt down, but the pope pretended not to see him, and the king advancing a few paces, knelt a second time; as His Holiness was at that moment screened by some masonry, this supplied him with another excuse, and the king went on with the performance, got up again, once mare advanced several steps, and was on the point of kneeling down the third time face to face, when the Holy Father at last perceived him, and, walking towards him as though he would prevent him from kneeling, took off his own hat, and pressing him to his heart, raised him up and tenderly kissed his forehead, refusing to cover until the king had put his cap upon his head, with the aid of the pope’s own hands. Then, after they had stood for a moment, exchanging polite and friendly speeches, the king lost no time in praying His Holiness to be so good as to receive into the Sacred College William Bricannet, the Bishop of St. Malo. As this matter had been agreed upon beforehand by that prelate and His Holiness, though the king was not aware of it, Alexander was pleased to get credit by promptly granting the request; and he instantly ordered one of his attendants to go to the house of his son, Cardinal Valentino, and fetch a cape and hat. Then taking the king by the hand, he conducted him into the hall of Papagalli, where the ceremony was to take place of the admission of the new cardinal. The solemn oath of obedience which was to be taken by Charles to His Holiness as supreme head of the Christian Church was postponed till the following day.

When that solemn day arrived, every person important in Rome, noble, cleric, or soldier, assembled around His Holiness. Charles, on his side, made his approach to the Vatican with a splendid following of princes, prelates, and captains. At the threshold of the palace he found four cardinals who had arrived before him: two of them placed themselves one on each side of him, the two others behind him, and all his retinue following, they traversed a long line of apartments full of guards and servants, and at last arrived in the reception-room, where the pope was seated on his throne, with his son, Caesar Borgia; behind him. On his arrival at the door, the King of France began the usual ceremonial, and when he had gone on from genuflexions to kissing the feet, the hand, and the forehead, he stood up, while the first president of the Parliament of Paris, in his turn stepping forward, said in a loud voice:

“Very Holy Father, behold my king ready to offer to your Holiness that oath of obedience that he owes to you; but in France it is customary that he who offers himself as vassal to his lord shall receive in exchange therefor such boons as he may demand. His Majesty, therefore, while he pledges himself for his own part to behave unto your Holiness with a munificence even greater than that wherewith your Holiness shall behave unto him, is here to beg urgently that you accord him three favours. These favours are: first, the confirmation of priveleges already granted to the king, to the queen his wife, and to the dauphin his son; secondly, the investiture, for himself and his successors, of the kingdom of Naples; lastly, the surrender to him of the person of the sultan D’jem, brother of the Turkish emperor.”

At this address the pope was for a moment stupefied, for he did not expect these three demands, which were moreover made so publicly by Charles that no manner of refusal was possible. But quickly recovering his presence of mind, he replied to the king that he would willingly confirm the privileges that had been accorded to the house of France by his predecessors; that he might therefore consider his first demand granted; that the investiture of the kingdom was an affair that required deliberation in a council of cardinals, but he would do all he possibly could to induce them to accede to the king’s desire; lastly, he must defer the affair of the sultan’s brother till a time more opportune for discussing it with the Sacred College, but would venture to say that, as this surrender could not fail to be for the good of Christendom, as it was demanded for the purpose of assuring further the success of a crusade, it would not be his fault if on this point also the king should not be satisfied.

At this reply, Charles bowed his head in sign of satisfaction, and the first president stood up, uncovered, and resumed his discourse as follows.

“Very Holy Father, it is an ancient custom among Christian kings, especially the Most Christian kings of France, to signify, through their ambassadors, the respect they feel for the Holy See and the sovereign pontiffs whom Divine Providence places thereon; but the Most Christian king, having felt a desire to visit the tombs of the holy apostles, has been pleased to pay this religious debt, which he regards as a sacred duty, not by ambassadors or by delegates, but in his own person. This is why, Very Holy Father, His Majesty the King of France is here to acknowledge you as the true vicar of Christ, the legitimate successor of the apostles St. Peter and St. Paul, and with promise and vow renders you that filial and respectful devotion which the kings his predecessors have been accustomed to promise and vow, devoting himself and all his strength to the service of your Holiness and the interests of the Holy See."

The pope arose with a joyful heart; for this oath, so publicly made, removed all his fears about a council; so inclined from this moment to yield to the King of France anything he might choose to ask, he took him by his left hand and made him a short and friendly reply, dubbing him the Church's eldest son. The ceremony over, they left the hall, the pope always holding the king's hand in his, and in this way they walked as far as the room where the sacred vestments are put off; the pope feigned a wish to conduct the king to his own apartments, but the king would not suffer this, and, embracing once more, they separated, each to retire to his own domicile.

The king remained eight days longer at the Vatican, then returned to the Palazzo San Marco. During these eight days all his demands were debated and settled to his satisfaction. The Bishop of Mans was made cardinal; the investiture of the kingdom of Naples was promised to the conqueror; lastly, it was agreed that on his departure the King of France should receive from the pope's hand the brother of the Emperor of Constantinople, for a sum of 120,000 livres. But — the pope, desiring to extend to the utmost the hospitality he had been bestowing, invited D'jem to dinner on the very day that he was to leave Rome with his new protector.

When the moment of departure arrived, Charles mounted his horse in full armour, and with a numerous and brilliant following made his way to the Vatican; arrived at the door, he dismounted, and leaving his escort at the Piazza of St. Peter, went up with a few gentlemen only. He found His Holiness waiting for him, with Cardinal Valentino on his right, and on his left D'jem, who, as we said before, was dining with him, and round the table thirteen cardinals. The king at once, bending on his knee, demanded the pope's benediction, and stooped to kiss his feet. But this Alexander would not suffer; he took him in his arms, and with the lips of a father and heart of an enemy, kissed him tenderly on his forehead. Then the pope introduced the son of Mahomet II, who was a fine young man, with something noble and regal in his air, presenting in his magnificent oriental costume a great contrast in its fashion and amplitude to the narrow, severe cut of the Christian apparel. D’jem advanced to Charles without humility and without pride, and, like an emperor’s son treating with a king, kissed his hand and then his shoulder; then, turning towards the Holy Father, he said in Italian, which he spoke very well, that he entreated he would recommend him to the young king, who was prepared to take him under his protection, assuring the pontiff that he should never have to repent giving him his liberty, and telling Charles that he hoped he might some day be proud of him, if after taking Naples he carried out his intention of going on to Greece. These words were spoken with so much dignity and at the same time with such gentleness, that the King of France loyally and frankly grasped the young sultan’s hand, as though he were his companion-in-arms. Then Charles took a final farewell of the pope, and went down to the piazza. There he was awaited by Cardinal Valentino, who was about to accompany him, as we know, as a hostage, and who had remained behind to exchange a few words with his father. In a moment Caesar Borgia appeared, riding on a splendidly harnessed mule, and behind him were led six magnificent horses, a present from the Holy Father to the King of France. Charles at once mounted one of these, to do honour to the gift. The pope had just conferred on him, and leaving Rome with the rest of his troops, pursued his way towards Marino, where he arrived the same evening.

He learned there that Alfonso, belying his reputation as a clever politician and great general, had just embarked with all his treasures in a flotilla of four galleys, leaving the care of the war and the management of his kingdom to his son Ferdinand. Thus everything went well for the triumphant march of Charles: the gates of towns opened of themselves at his approach, his enemies fled without waiting for his coming, and before he had fought a single battle he had won for himself the surname of Conqueror.

The day after at dawn the army started once more, and after marching the whole day, stopped in the evening at Velletri. There the king, who had been on horseback since the morning, with Cardinal Valentine and D’jem, left the former at his lodging, and taking D’jem with him, went on to his own. Then Caesar Borgia, who among the army baggage had twenty very heavy waggons of his own, had one of these opened, took out a splendid cabinet with the silver necessary for his table, and gave orders for his supper to be prepared, as he had done the night before. Meanwhile, night had come on, and he shut himself up in a private chamber, where, stripping off his cardinal's costume, he put on a groom's dress. Thanks to this disguise, he issued from the house that had been assigned for his accommodation without being recognised, traversed the streets, passed through the gates, and gained the open country. Nearly half a league outside the town, a servant awaited him with two swift horses. Caesar, who was an excellent rider, sprang to the saddle, and he and his companion at full gallop retraced the road to Rome, where they arrived at break of day. Caesar got down at the house of one Flores, auditor of the rota, where he procured a fresh horse and suitable clothes; then he flew at once to his mother, who gave a cry of joy when she saw him; for so silent and mysterious was the cardinal for all the world beside, and even for her, that he had not said a word of his early return to Rome. The cry of joy uttered by Rosa Vanozza when she beheld her son was far mare a cry of vengeance than of love. One evening, while everybody was at the rejoicings in the Vatican, when Charles VIII and Alexander VI were swearing a friendship which neither of them felt, and exchanging oaths that were broken beforehand, a messenger from Rosa Vanozza had arrived with a letter to Caesar, in which she begged him to come at once to her house in the Via delta Longara. Caesar questioned the messenger, but he only replied that he could tell him nothing, that he would learn all he cared to know from his mother's own lips. So, as soon as he was at liberty, Caesar, in layman's dress and wrapped in a large cloak, quitted the Vatican and made his way towards the church of Regina Coeli, in the neighbourhood of which, it will be remembered, was the house where the pope's mistress lived.

As he approached his mother's house, Caesar began to observe the signs of strange devastation. The street was scattered with the wreck of furniture and strips of precious stuffs. As he arrived at the foot of the little flight of steps that led to the entrance gate, he saw that the windows were broken and the remains of torn curtains were fluttering in front of them. Not understanding what this disorder could mean, he rushed into the house and through several deserted and wrecked apartments. At last, seeing light in one of the rooms, he went in, and there found his mother sitting on the remains of a chest made of ebony all inlaid with ivory and silver. When she saw Caesar, she rose, pale and dishevelled, and pointing to the desolation around her, exclaimed:

“Look, Caesar; behold the work of your new friends.”

“But what does it mean, mother?” asked the cardinal. “Whence comes all this disorder?”

“From the serpent,” replied Rosa Vanozza, gnashing her teeth, — ”from the serpent you have warmed in your bosom. He has bitten me, fearing no doubt that his teeth would be broken on you.”

“Who has done this?” cried Caesar. “Tell me, and, by Heaven, mother, he shall pay, and pay indeed!”

“Who?” replied Rosa. “King Charles VIII has done it, by the hands of his faithful allies, the Swiss. It was well known that Melchior was away, and that I was living alone with a few wretched servants; so they came and broke in the doors, as though they were taking Rome by storm, and while Cardinal Valentino was making holiday with their master, they pillaged his mother’s house, loading her with insults and outrages which no Turks or Saracens could possibly have improved upon.”

“Very good, very good, mother,” said Caesar; “be calm; blood shall wash out disgrace. Consider a moment; what we have lost is nothing compared with what we might lose; and my father and I, you may be quite sure, will give you back more than they have stolen from you.”

“I ask for no promises,” cried Rosa; “I ask for revenge.”

“My mother,” said the cardinal, “you shall be avenged, or I will lose the name of son.”

Having by these words reassured his mother, he took her to Lucrezia’s palace, which in consequence of her marriage with Pesaro was unoccupied, and himself returned to the Vatican, giving orders that his mother’s house should be refurnished more magnificently than before the disaster. These orders were punctually executed, and it was among her new luxurious surroundings, but with the same hatred in her heart, that Caesar on this occasion found his mother. This feeling prompted her cry of joy when she saw him once more.

The mother and son exchanged a very few words; then Caesar, mounting on horseback, went to the Vatican, whence as a hostage he had departed two days before. Alexander, who knew of the flight beforehand, and not only approved, but as sovereign pontiff had previously absolved his son of the perjury he was about to commit, received him joyfully, but all the same advised him to lie concealed, as Charles in all probability would not be slow to reclaim his hostage:

Indeed, the next day, when the king got up, the absence of Cardinal Valentino was observed, and as Charles was uneasy at not seeing him, he sent to inquire what had prevented his appearance. When the messenger arrived at the house that Caesar had left the evening before, he learned that he had gone out at nine o’clock in the evening and not returned since. He went back with this news to the king, who at once suspected that he had fled, and in the first flush of his anger let the whole army know of his perjury. The soldiers then remembered the twenty waggons, so heavily laden, from one of which the cardinal, in the sight of all, had produced such magnificent gold and silver plate; and never doubting that the cargo of the others was equally precious, they fetched them down and broke them to pieces; but inside they found nothing but stones and sand, which proved to the king that the flight had been planned a long time back, and incensed him doubly against the pope. So without loss of time he despatched to Rome Philippe de Bresse, afterwards Duke of Savoy, with orders to intimate to the Holy Father his displeasure at this conduct. But the pope replied that he knew nothing whatever about his son’s flight, and expressed the sincerest regret to His Majesty, declaring that he knew nothing of his whereabouts, but was certain that he was not in Rome. As a fact, the pope was speaking the truth this time, for Caesar had gone with Cardinal Orsino to one of his estates, and was temporarily in hiding there. This reply was conveyed to Charles by two messengers from the pope, the Bishops of Nepi and of Sutri, and the people also sent an ambassador in their own behalf. He was Monsignore Porcari, dean of the rota, who was charged to communicate to the king the displeasure of the Romans when they learned of the cardinal’s breach of faith. Little as Charles was disposed to content himself with empty words, he had to turn his attention to mare serious affairs; so he continued his march to Naples without stopping, arriving there on Sunday, the 22nd of February, 1495.

Four days later, the unlucky D’jem, who had fallen sick at Capua died at Castel Nuovo. When he was leaving, at the farewell banquet, Alexander had tried on his guest the poison he intended to use so often later on upon his cardinals, and whose effects he was destined to feel himself, — such is poetical justice. In this way the pope had secured a double haul; for, in his twofold speculation in this wretched young man, he had sold him alive to Charles for 120,000 livres and sold him dead to Bajazet for 300,00 ducats....

But there was a certain delay about the second payment; for the Turkish emperor, as we remember, was not bound to pay the price of fratricide till he received the corpse, and by Charles's order the corpse had been buried at Gaeta.

When Caesar Borgia learned the news, he rightly supposed that the king would be so busy settling himself in his new capital that he would have too much to think of to be worrying about him; so he went to Rome again, and, anxious to keep his promise to his mother, he signalised his return by a terrible vengeance.

Cardinal Valentino had in his service a certain Spaniard whom he had made the chief of his bravoes; he was a man of five-and-thirty or forty, whose whole life had been one long rebellion against society's laws; he recoiled from no action, provided only he could get his price. This Don Michele Correglia, who earned his celebrity for bloody deeds under the name of Michelotto, was just the man Caesar wanted; and whereas Michelotto felt an unbounded admiration for Caesar, Caesar had unlimited confidence in Michelotto. It was to him the cardinal entrusted the execution of one part of his vengeance; the other he kept for himself.

Don Michele received orders to scour the Campagna and cut every French throat he could find. He began his work at once; and very few days elapsed before he had obtained most satisfactory results: more than a hundred persons were robbed or assassinated, and among the last the son of Cardinal de St. Malo, who was en his way back to France, and on whom Michelotto found a sum of 3000 crowns.

For himself, Caesar reserved the Swiss; for it was the Swiss in particular who had despoiled his mother's house. The pope had in his service about a hundred and fifty soldiers belonging to their nation, who had settled their families in Rome, and had grown rich partly by their pay and partly in the exercise of various industries. The cardinal had every one of them dismissed, with orders to quit Rome within twenty-four hours and the Roman territories within three days. The poor wretches had all collected together to obey the order, with their wives and children and baggage, on the Piazza of St. Peter, when suddenly, by Cardinal Valentino's orders, they were hemmed in on all sides by two thousand Spaniards, who began to fire on them with their guns and charge them with their sabres, while Caesar and his mother looked down upon the carnage from a window. In this way they killed fifty or perhaps sixty; but the rest coming up, made a charge at the assassins, and then, without suffering any loss, managed to beat a retreat to a house, where they stood a siege, and made so valiant a defense that they gave the pope time — he knew nothing of the author of this butchery — to send the captain of his guard to the rescue, who, with a strong detachment, succeeded in getting nearly forty of them safely out of the town: the rest had been massacred on the piazza or killed in the house.

But this was no real and adequate revenge; for it did not touch Charles himself, the sole author of all the troubles that the pope and his family had experienced during the last year. So Caesar soon abandoned vulgar schemes of this kind and busied himself with loftier concerns, bending all the force of his genius to restore the league of Italian princes that had been broken by the defection of Sforza, the exile of Piero dei Medici, and the defeat of Alfonso. The enterprise was more easily accomplished than the pope could have anticipated. The Venetians were very uneasy when Charles passed so near, and they trembled lest, when he was once master of Naples, he might conceive the idea of conquering the rest of Italy. Ludovico Sforza, on his side, was beginning to tremble, seeing the rapidity with which the King of France had dethroned the house of Aragon, lest he might not make much difference between his allies and his enemies. Maximilian, for his part, was only seeking an occasion to break the temporary peace which he had granted for the sake of the concession made to him. Lastly, Ferdinand and Isabella were allies of the dethroned house. And so it came about that all of them, for different reasons, felt a common fear, and were soon in agreement as to the necessity of driving out Charles VIII, not only from Naples, but from Italy, and pledged themselves to work together to this end, by every means in their power, by negotiations, by trickery, or by actual force. The Florentines alone refused to take part in this general levy of arms, and remained faithful to their promises.

According to the articles of the treaty agreed upon by the confederates, the alliance was to last for five-and-twenty years, and had for ostensible object the upholding of the majority of the pope, and the interests of Christendom; and these preparations might well have been taken for such as would precede a crusade against the Turks, if Bajazet’s ambassador had not always been present at the deliberations, although the Christian princes could not have dared for very shame to admit the, sultan by name into their league. Now the confederates had to set on foot an army of 30,000 horse and 20,000 infantry, and each of them was taxed for a contingent; thus the pope was to furnish 4000 horse, Maximilian 6000, the King of Spain, the Duke of Milan, and the republic of Venice, 8000 each. Every confederate was, in addition to this, to levy and equip 4000 infantry in the six weeks following the signature of the treaty. The fleets were to be equipped by the Maritime States; but any expenses they should incur later on were to be defrayed by all in equal shares.

The formation of this league was made public on the 12th of April, 1495, Palm Sunday, and in all the Italian States, especially at Rome, was made the occasion of fetes and immense rejoicings. Almost as soon as the publicly known articles were announced the secret ones were put into execution. These obliged Ferdinand and Isabella to send a fleet of sixty galleys to Ischia, where Alfonso's son had retired, with six hundred horsemen on board and five thousand infantry, to help him to ascend the throne once more. Those troops were to be put under the command of Gonzalvo of Cordova, who had gained the reputation of the greatest general in Europe after the taking of Granada. The Venetians with a fleet of forty galleys under the command of Antonio Grimani, were to attack all the French stations on the coast of Calabria and Naples. The Duke of Milan promised for his part to check all reinforcements as they should arrive from France, and to drive the Duke of Orleans out of Asti.

Lastly, there was Maximilian, who had promised to make invasions on the frontiers, and Bajazet, who was to help with money, ships, and soldiers either the Venetians or the Spaniards, according as he might be appealed to by Barberigo or by Ferdinand the Catholic.

This league was all the more disconcerting for Charles, because of the speedy abatement of the enthusiasm that had hailed his first appearance. What had happened to him was what generally happens to a conqueror who has more good luck than talent; instead of making himself a party among the great Neapolitan and Calabrian vassals, whose roots would be embedded in the very soil, by confirming their privileges and augmenting their power, he had wounded their feelings by bestowing all the titles, offices, and fiefs on those alone who had followed him from France, so that all the important positions in the kingdom were filled by strangers.

The result was that just when the league was made known, Tropea and Amantea, which had been presented by Charles to the Seigneur de Precy, rose in revolt and hoisted the banner of Aragon; and the Spanish fleet had only to present itself at Reggio, in Calabria, for the town to throw open its gates, being more discontented with the new rule than the old; and Don Federiga, Alfonso’s brother and Ferdinand’s uncle, who had hitherto never quitted Brindisi, had only to appear at Tarentum to be received there as a liberator.

CHAPTER VI

CHARLES learned all this news at Naples, and, tired of his late conquests, which necessitated a labour in organisation for which he was quite unfitted, turned his eyes towards France, where victorious fetes and rejoicings were awaiting the victor's return. So he yielded at the first breath of his advisers, and retraced his road to his kingdom, threatened, as was said, by the Germans on the north and the Spaniards on the south. Consequently, he appointed Gilbert de Montpensier, of the house of Bourbon, viceroy; d'Aubigny, of the Scotch Stuart family, lieutenant in Calabria; Etienne de Vese, commander at Gaeta; and Don Juliano, Gabriel de Montfaucon, Guillaume de Villeneuve, George de Lilly, the bailiff of Vitry, and Graziano Guerra respectively governors of Sant' Angelo, Manfredonia, Trani, Catanzaro, Aquila, and Sulmone; then leaving behind in evidence of his claims the half of his Swiss, a party of his Gascons, eight hundred French lances, and about five hundred Italian men-at-arms, the last under the command of the prefect of Rome, Prospero and Fabrizio Colonna, and Antonio Savelli, he left Naples on the 20th of May at two o'clock in the afternoon, to traverse the whole of the Italian peninsula with the rest of his army, consisting of eight hundred French lances, two hundred gentlemen of his guard, one hundred Italian men-at-arms, three thousand Swiss infantry, one thousand French and one thousand Gascon. He also expected to be joined by Camillo Vitelli and his brothers in Tuscany, who were to contribute two hundred and fifty men-at-arms.

A week before he left Naples, Charles had sent to Rome Monseigneur de Saint-Paul, brother of Cardinal de Luxembourg; and just as he was starting he despatched thither the new Archbishop of Lyons. They both were commissioned to assure Alexander that the King of France had the most sincere desire and the very best intention of remaining his friend. In truth, Charles wished for nothing so much as to separate the pope from the league, so as to secure him as a spiritual and temporal support; but a young king, full of fire, ambition, and courage, was not the neighbour to suit Alexander; so the latter would listen to nothing, and as the troops he had demanded from the doge and Ludavico Sforza had not been sent in sufficient number for the defense of Rome, he was content with provisioning the castle of S. Angelo, putting in a formidable garrison, and leaving Cardinal Sant' Anastasio to receive Charles while he himself withdrew with Caesar to Orvieto. Charles only stayed in Rome three days, utterly depressed because the pope had refused to receive him in spite of his entreaties. And in these three days, instead of listening to Giuliano delta Rovere, who was advising him once more to call a council and depose the pope, he rather hoped to bring the pope round to his side by the virtuous act of restoring the citadels of Terracina and Civita Vecchia to the authorities of the Romagna, only keeping for himself Ostia, which he had promised Giuliano to give back to him. At last, when the three days had elapsed, he left Rome, and resumed his march in three columns towards Tuscany, crossed the States of the Church, and on the 13th reached Siena, where he was joined by Philippe de Commines, who had gone as ambassador extraordinary to the Venetian Republic, and now announced that the enemy had forty thousand men under arms and were preparing for battle. This news produced no other effect an the king and the gentlemen of his army than to excite their amusement beyond measure; for they had conceived such a contempt for their enemy by their easy conquest, that they could not believe that any army, however numerous, would venture to oppose their passage.

Charles, however, was forced to give way in the face of facts, when he heard at San Teranza that his vanguard, commanded by Marechal de Gie, and composed of six hundred lances and fifteen hundred Swiss, when it arrived at Fornova had come face to face with the confederates, who had encamped at Guiarole. The marechal had ordered an instant halt, and he too had pitched his tents, utilising for his defence the natural advantages of the hilly ground. When these first measures had been taken, he sent out, first, a herald to the enemy's camp to ask from Francesco di Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua, generalissimo of the confederate troops, a passage for his king's army and provisions at a reasonable price; and secondly, he despatched a courier to Charles VIII, pressing him to hurry on his march with the artillery and rearguard. The confederates had given an evasive answer, for they were pondering whether they ought to jeopardise the whole Italian force in a single combat, and, putting all to the hazard, attempt to annihilate the King of France and his army together, so overwhelming the conqueror in the ruins of his ambition. The messenger found Charles busy superintending the passage of the last of his cannon over the mountain of

Pontremoli. This was no easy matter, seeing that there was no sort of track, and the guns had to be lifted up and lowered by main farce, and each piece needed the arms of as many as two hundred men. At last, when all the artillery had arrived without accident on the other side of the Apennines, Charles started in hot haste for Fornovd, where he arrived with all his following on the morning of the next day.

From the top of the mountain where the Marechai de Gie had pitched his tents, the king beheld both his own camp and the enemy's. Both were on the right bank of the Taro, and were at either end of a semicircular chain of hills resembling an amphitheatre; and the space between the two camps, a vast basin filled during the winter floods by the torrent which now only marked its boundary, was nothing but a plain covered with gravel, where all manoeuvres must be equally difficult for horse and infantry. Besides, on the western slope of the hills there was a little wood which extended from the enemy's army to the French, and was in the possession of the Stradiotes, who, by help of its cover, had already engaged in several skirmishes with the French troops during the two days of halt while they were waiting for the king.

The situation was not reassuring. From the top of the mountain which overlooked Fornovo, one could get a view, as we said before, of the two camps, and could easily calculate the numerical difference between them. The French army, weakened by the establishment of garrisons in the various towns and fortresses they had won in Italy, were scarcely eight thousand strong, while the combined forces of Milan and Venice exceeded a total of thirty-five thousand. So Charles decided to try once more the methods of conciliation, and sent Commines, who, as we know, had joined him in Tuscany, to the Venetian 'proveditori', whose acquaintance he had made when on his embassy; he having made a great impression on these men, thanks to a general high opinion of his merits. He was commissioned to tell the enemy's generals, in the name of the King of France, that his master only desired to continue his road without doing or receiving any harm; that therefore he asked to be allowed a free passage across the fair plains of Lombardy, which he could see from the heights where he now stood, stretching as far as the eye could reach, away to the foot of the Alps. Commines found the confederate army deep in discussion: the wish of the Milanese and Venetian party being to let the king go by, and not attack him; they said they were only too happy that he should leave Italy in this way, without causing any further harm; but the ambassadors of Spain and Germany took quite another view. As their masters had no troops in the army, and as all the money they had promised was already paid, they must be the gainer in either case from a battle, whichever way it went: if they won the day they would gather the fruits of victory, and if they lost they would experience nothing of the evils of defeat. This want of unanimity was the reason why the answer to Commines was deferred until the following day, and why it was settled that on the next day he should hold another conference with a plenipotentiary to be appointed in the course of that night. The place of this conference was to be between the two armies.

The king passed the night in great uneasiness. All day the weather had threatened to turn to rain, and we have already said how rapidly the Taro could swell; the river, fordable to-day, might from tomorrow onwards prove an insurmountable obstacle; and possibly the delay had only been asked for with a view to putting the French army in a worse position. As a fact the night had scarcely come when a terrible storm arose, and so long as darkness lasted, great rumblings were heard in the Apennines, and the sky was brilliant with lightning. At break of day, however, it seemed to be getting a little calmer, though the Taro, only a streamlet the day before, had become a torrent by this time, and was rapidly rising. So at six in the morning, the king, ready armed and on horseback, summoned Commines and bade him make his way to the rendezvous that the Venetian ‘proveditori’ had assigned. But scarcely had he contrived to give the order when loud cries were heard coming from the extreme right of the French army. The Stradiotes, under cover of the wood stretching between the two camps, had surprised an outpost, and first cutting the soldiers’ throats, were carrying off their heads in their usual way at the saddle-bow. A detachment of cavalry was sent in pursuit; but, like wild animals, they had retreated to their lair in the woods, and there disappeared.

This unexpected engagement, in all probability arranged beforehand by the Spanish and German envoys, produced on the whole army the effect of a spark applied to a train of gunpowder. Commines and the Venetian ‘proveditori’ each tried in vain to arrest the combat an either side. Light troops, eager for a skirmish, and, in the usual fashion of those days, prompted only by that personal courage which led them on to danger, had already come to blows, rushing down into the plain as though it were an amphitheatre where they might make a fine display of arms. Far a moment the young king, drawn on by example, was an the point of forgetting the responsibility of a general in his zeal as a soldier; but this first impulse was checked by Marechal de Gie, Messire Claude de la Chatre de Guise, and M. de la Trimauille, who persuaded Charles to adopt the wiser plan, and to cross the Taro without seeking a battle, — at the same time without trying to avoid it, should the enemy cross the river from their camp and attempt to block his passage. The king accordingly, following the advice of his wisest and bravest captains, thus arranged his divisions.

The first comprised the van and a body of troops whose duty it was to support them. The van consisted of three hundred and fifty men-at-arms, the best and bravest of the army, under the command of Marechal de Gie and Jacques Trivulce; the corps following them consisted of three thousand Swiss, under the command of Engelbert der Cleves and de Larnay, the queen’s grand equerry; next came three hundred archers of the guard, whom the king had sent to help the cavalry by fighting in the spaces between them.

The second division, commanded by the king in person and forming the middle of the army, was composed of the artillery, under Jean de Lagrange, a hundred gentlemen of the guard with Gilles Carrone far standard-bearer, pensioners of the king’s household under Aymar de Prie, some Scots, and two hundred cross-bowmen an horseback, with French archers besides, led by M. de Crussol.

Lastly, the third division, i.e. the rear, preceded by six thousand beasts of burden bearing the baggage, was composed of only three hundred men-at-arms, commanded by de Guise and by de la Trimouille: this was the weakest part of the army.

When this arrangement was settled, Charles ordered the van to cross the river, just at the little town of Fornovo. This was done at once, the riders getting wet up to their knees, and the footmen holding to the horses’ tails. As soon as he saw the last soldiers of his first division on the opposite bank, he started himself to follow the same road and cross at the same ford, giving orders to de Guise and de la Trimouille to regulate the march of the rear guard by that of the centre, just as he had regulated their march by that of the van. His orders were punctually carried out; and about ten o’clock in the morning the whole French army was on the left bank of the Taro: at the same time, when it seemed certain from the enemy’s arrangements that battle was imminent, the baggage, led by the captain, Odet de Reberac, was separated from the rear guard, and retired to the extreme left.

Now, Francisco de Gonzaga, general-in-chief of the confederate troops, had modelled his plans on those of the King of France; by his orders, Count de Cajazzo, with four hundred men-at-arms and two thousand infantry, had crossed the Taro where the Venetian camp lay, and was to attack the French van; while Gonzaga himself, following the right bank as far as Fornovo, would go over the river by the same ford that Charles had used, with a view to attacking his rear. Lastly, he had placed the Stradiotes between these two fords, with orders to cross the river in their turn, so soon as they saw the French army attacked both in van and in the rear, and to fall upon its flank. Not content with offensive measures, Gonzaga had also made provision for retreat by leaving three reserve corps on the right bank, one to guard the camp under the instruction of the Venetian ‘provveditori’, and the other two arranged in echelon to support each other, the first commanded by Antonio di Montefeltro, the second by Annibale Bentivoglio.

Charles had observed all these arrangements, and had recognised the cunning Italian strategy which made his opponents the finest generals in the world; but as there was no means of avoiding the danger, he had decided to take a sideway course, and had given orders to continue the match; but in a minute the French army was caught between Count di Cajazzo, barring the way with his four hundred men-at-arms and his two thousand infantry, and Gonzaga in pursuit of the rear, as we said before; leading six hundred men-at-arms, the flower of his army, a squadron of Stradiotes, and more than five thousand infantry: this division alone was stronger than the whole of the French army.

When, however, M. de Guise and M. de la Trimouille found themselves pressed in this way, they ordered their two hundred men-at-arms to turn right about face, while at the opposite end — that is, at the head of the army-Marechal de Gie and Trivulce ordered a halt and lances in rest. Meanwhile, according to custom, the king, who, as we said, was in the centre, was conferring knighthood on those gentlemen who had earned the favour either by virtue of their personal powers or the king’s special friendship.

Suddenly there was heard a terrible clash behind it was the French rearguard coming to blows with the Marquis of Mantua. In this encounter, where each man had singled out his own foe as though it were a tournament, very many lances were broken, especially those of the Italian knights; for their lances were hollowed so as to be less heavy, and in consequence had less solidity. Those who were thus disarmed at once seized their swords. As they were far more numerous than the French, the king saw them suddenly outflanking his right wing and apparently prepared to surround it; at the same moment loud cries were heard from a direction facing the centre: this meant that the Stradiotes were crossing the river to make their attack.

The king at once ordered his division into two detachments, and giving one to Bourbon the bastard, to make head against the Stradiotes, he hurried with the second to the rescue of the van, flinging himself into the very midst of the melee, striking out like a king, and doing as steady work as the lowest in rank of his captains. Aided by the reinforcement, the rearguard made a good stand, though the enemy were five against one, and the combat in this part continued to rage with wonderful fury.

Obeying his orders, Bourbon had thrown himself upon the Stradiotes; but unfortunately, carried off by his horse, he had penetrated so far into the enemy's ranks that he was lost to sight: the disappearance of their chief, the strange dress of their new antagonists, and the peculiar method of their fighting produced a considerable effect on those who were to attack them; and for the moment disorder was the consequence in the centre, and the horse men scattered instead of serrying their ranks and fighting in a body. This false move would have done them serious harm, had not most of the Stradiotes, seeing the baggage alone and undefended, rushed after that in hope of booty, instead of following up their advantage. A great part of the troop nevertheless stayed behind to fight, pressing on the French cavalry and smashing their lances with their fearful scimitars. Happily the king, who had just repulsed the Marquis of Mantua's attack, perceived what was going on behind him, and riding back at all possible speed to the succour of the centre, together with the gentlemen of his household fell upon the Stradiotes, no longer armed with a lance, for that he had just broken, but brandishing his long sword, which blazed about him like lightning, and — either because he was whirled away like Bourbon by his own horse, or because he had allowed his courage to take him too far — he suddenly found himself in the thickest ranks of the Stradiotes, accompanied only by eight of the knights he had just now created, one equerry called Antoine des Ambus, and his standard-bearer. "France, France!" he cried aloud, to rally round him all the others who had scattered; they, seeing at last that the danger was less than they had supposed, began to take their revenge and to pay back with interest the blows they had received from the Stradiotes. Things were going still better, for the van, which the Marquis de Cajazzo was to attack; for although he had at first appeared to be animated with a terrible purpose, he stopped short about ten or twelve feet from the French line and turned right about face without breaking a single lance. The French wanted to pursue, but the Marechal de Gie, fearing that this flight might be only a trick to draw off the vanguard from the centre, ordered every man to stay in his place. But the Swiss, who were German, and did not understand the order, or thought it was not meant for them, followed upon their heels, and although on foot caught them up and killed a hundred of them. This was quite enough to throw them into disorder, so that some were scattered about the plain, and others made a rush for the water, so as to cross the river and rejoin their camp.

When the Marechal de Gie saw this, he detached a hundred of his own men to go to the aid of the king, who was continuing to fight with unheard-of courage and running the greatest risks, constantly separated as he was from his gentlemen, who could not follow him; for wherever there was danger, thither he rushed, with his cry of “France,” little troubling himself as to whether he was followed or not. And it was no longer with his sword that he fought; that he had long ago broken, like his lance, but with a heavy battle-axe, whose every blow was mortal whether cut or pierced. Thus the Stradiotes, already hard pressed by the king’s household and his pensioners, soon changed attack for defence and defence for flight. It was at this moment that the king was really in the greatest danger; for he had let himself be carried away in pursuit of the fugitives, and presently found himself all alone, surrounded by these men, who, had they not been struck with a mighty terror, would have had nothing to do but unite and crush him and his horse together; but, as Commines remarks, “He whom God guards is well guarded, and God was guarding the King of France.”

All the same, at this moment the French were sorely pressed in the rear; and although de Guise and de la Trimouille held out as firmly as it was possible to hold, they would probably have been compelled to yield to superior numbers had not a double aid arrived in time: first the indefatigable Charles, who, having nothing more to do among the fugitives, once again dashed into the midst of the fight, next the servants of the army, who, now that they were set free from the Stradiotes and saw their enemies put to flight, ran up armed with the axes they habitually used to cut down wood for building their huts: they burst into the middle of the fray, slashing at the horses' legs and dealing heavy blows that smashed in the visors of the dismounted horsemen.

The Italians could not hold out against this double attack; the 'furia francese' rendered all their strategy and all their calculations useless, especially as for more than a century they had abandoned their fights of blood and fury for a kind of tournament they chose to regard as warfare; so, in spite of all Gonzaga's efforts, they turned their backs upon the French rear and took to flight; in the greatest haste and with much difficulty they recrossed the torrent, which was swollen even more now by the rain that had been falling during the whole time of the battle.

Some thought fit to pursue the vanquished, for there was now such disorder in their ranks that they were fleeing in all directions from the battlefield where the French had gained so glorious a victory, blocking up the roads to Parma and Bercetto. But Marechal de Gie and de Guise and de la Trimouille, who had done quite enough to save them from the suspicion of quailing before imaginary dangers, put a stop to this enthusiasm, by pointing out that it would only be risking the loss of their present advantage if they tried to push it farther with men and horses so worn out. This view was adopted in spite of the opinion of Trivulce, Camillo Vitelli, and Francesco Secco, who were all eager to follow up the victory.

The king retired to a little village an the left bank of the Taro, and took shelter in a poor house. There he disarmed, being perhaps among all the captains and all the soldiers the man who had fought best.

During the night the torrent swelled so high that the Italian army could not have pursued, even if they had laid aside their fears. The king did not propose to give the appearance of flight after a victory, and therefore kept his army drawn up all day, and at night went on to sleep at Medesano, a little village only a mile lower down than the hamlet where he rested after the fight. But in the course of the night he reflected that he had done enough for the honour of his arms in fighting an army four times as great as his own and killing three thousand men, and then waiting a day and a half to give them time to take their revenge; so two hours before daybreak he had the fires lighted, that the enemy might suppose he was remaining in camp; and every man mounting noiselessly, the whole French army, almost out of danger by this time, proceeded on their march to Borgo San Donnino.

While this was going on, the pope returned to Rome, where news highly favourable to his schemes was not slow to reach his ears. He learned that Ferdinand had crossed from Sicily into Calabria with six thousand volunteers and a considerable number of Spanish horse and foot, led, at the command of Ferdinand and Isabella, by the famous Gonzalva de Cordova, who arrived in Italy with a great reputation, destined to suffer somewhat from the defeat at Seminara. At almost the same time the French fleet had been beaten by the Aragonese; moreover, the battle of the Taro, though a complete defeat for the confederates, was another victory for the pope, because its result was to open a return to France for that man whom he regarded as his deadliest foe. So, feeling that he had nothing more to fear from Charles, he sent him a brief at Turin, where he had stopped for a short time to give aid to Novara, therein commanding him, by virtue of his pontifical authority, to depart out of Italy with his army, and to recall within ten days those of his troops that still remained in the kingdom of Naples, on pain of excommunication, and a summons to appear before him in person.

Charles VIII replied:

1. That he did not understand how the pope, the chief of the league, ordered him to leave Italy, whereas the confederates had not only refused him a passage, but had even attempted, though unsuccessfully, as perhaps His Holiness knew, to cut off his return into France;
2. That, as to recalling his troops from Naples, he was not so irreligious as to do that, since they had not entered the kingdom without the consent and blessing of His Holiness;
3. That he was exceedingly surprised that the pope should require his presence in person at the capital of the Christian world just at the present time, when six weeks previously, at the time of his return from Naples, although he ardently desired an interview with His Holiness, that he might offer proofs of his respect and obedience, His Holiness, instead of according this favour, had quitted Rome so hastily on his approach that he had not been able to come up with him by any efforts whatsoever. On this point, however, he promised to give His Holiness the satisfaction he desired, if he would engage this time to wait for him: he would therefore return to Rome so soon as the affairs

> that brought him back to his own kingdom had been satisfactorily, settled.

Although in this reply there was a touch of mockery and defiance, Charles was none the less compelled by the circumstances of the case to obey the pope's strange brief. His presence was so much needed in France that, in spite of the arrival of a Swiss reinforcement, he was compelled to conclude a peace with Ludovico Sforza, whereby he yielded Novara to him; while Gilbert de Montpensier and d'Aubigny, after defending, inch by inch, Calabria, the Basilicate, and Naples, were obliged to sign the capitulation of Atella, after a siege of thirty-two days, on the 20th of July, 1496. This involved giving back to Ferdinand II, King of Naples, all the palaces and fortresses of his kingdom; which indeed he did but enjoy for three months, dying of exhaustion on the 7th of September following, at the Castello della Somma, at the foot of Vesuvius; all the attentions lavished upon him by his young wife could not repair the evil that her beauty had wrought.

His uncle Frederic succeeded; and so, in the three years of his papacy, Alexander VI had seen five kings upon the throne of Naples, while he was establishing himself more firmly upon his own pontifical seat — Ferdinand I, Alfonso I, Charles VIII, Ferdinand II, and Frederic. All this agitation about his throne, this rapid succession of sovereigns, was the best thing possible for Alexander; for each new monarch became actually king only on condition of his receiving the pontifical investiture. The consequence was that Alexander was the only gainer in power and credit by these changes; for the Duke of Milan and the republics of Florence and Venice had successively recognised him as supreme head of the Church, in spite of his simony; moreover, the five kings of Naples had in turn paid him homage. So he thought the time had now come for founding a mighty family; and for this he relied upon the Duke of Gandia, who was to hold all the highest temporal dignities; and upon Caesar Borgia, who was to be appointed to all the great ecclesiastical offices. The pope made sure of the success of these new projects by electing four Spanish cardinals, who brought up the number of his compatriots in the Sacred College to twenty-two, thus assuring him a constant and certain majority.

The first requirement of the pope's policy was to clear away from the neighbourhood of Rome all those petty lords whom most people call vicars of the Church, but whom Alexander called the shackles of the papacy. We saw that he had already begun this work by rousing the Orsini against the

Colonna family, when Charles VIII’s enterprise compelled him to concentrate all his mental resources, and also the forces of his States, so as to secure his own personal safety.

It had come about through their own imprudent action that the Orsini, the pope’s old friends, were now in the pay of the French, and had entered the kingdom of Naples with them, where one of them, Virginio, a very important member of their powerful house, had been taken prisoner during the war, and was Ferdinand II’s captive. Alexander could not let this opportunity escape him; so, first ordering the King of Naples not to release a man who, ever since the 1st of June, 1496, had been a declared rebel, he pronounced a sentence of confiscation against Virginio Orsini and his whole family in a secret consistory, which sat on the 26th of October following — that is to say, in the early days of the reign of Frederic, whom he knew to be entirely at his command, owing to the King’s great desire of getting the investiture from him; then, as it was not enough to declare the goods confiscated, without also dispossessing the owners, he made overtures to the Colonna family, saying he would commission them, in proof of their new bond of friendship, to execute the order given against their old enemies under the direction of his son Francesco, Duke of Gandia. In this fashion he contrived to weaken his neighbours each by means of the other, till such time as he could safely attack and put an end to conquered and conqueror alike.

The Colonna family accepted this proposition, and the Duke of Gandia was named General of the Church: his father in his pontifical robes bestowed on him the insignia of this office in the church of St. Peter’s at Rome.

CHAPTER VII

Matters went forward as Alexander had wished, and before the end of the year the pontifical army had, seized a great number of castles and fortresses that belonged to the Orsini, who thought themselves already lost when Charles VIII came to the rescue. They had addressed themselves to him without much hope that he could be of real use to there, with his want of armed troops and his preoccupation with his own affairs. He, however, sent Carlo Orsini, son of Virginio, the prisoner, and Vitellozzo Vitelli, brother of Camillo Vitelli, one of the three valiant Italian condottieri who had joined him and fought for him at the crossing of the Taro: These two captains, whose courage and skill were well known, brought with them a considerable sum of money from the liberal coffers of Charles VIII. Now, scarcely had they arrived at Citta di Castello, the centre of their little sovereignty, and expressed their intention of raising a band of soldiers, when men presented themselves from all sides to fight under their banner; so they very soon assembled a small army, and as they had been able during their stay among the French to study those matters of military organisation in which France excelled, they now applied the result of their learning to their own troops: the improvements were mainly certain changes in the artillery which made their manoeuvres easier, and the substitution for their ordinary weapons of pikes similar in form to the Swiss pikes, but two feet longer. These changes effected, Vitellozzo Vitelli spent three or four months in exercising his men in the management of their new weapons; then, when he thought them fit to make good use of these, and when he had collected more or less help from the towns of Perugia, Todi, and Narni, where the inhabitants trembled lest their turn should come after the Orsini’s, as the Orsini’s had followed on the Colonnas’, he marched towards Braccianno, which was being besieged by the Duke of Urbino, who had been lent to the pope by the Venetians, in virtue of the treaty quoted above.

The Venetian general, when he heard of Vitelli’s approach, thought he might as well spare him half his journey, and marched out to confront him: the two armies met in the Soriano road, and the battle straightway began. The pontifical army had a body of eight hundred Germans, on which the Dukes of Urbino and Gandia chiefly relied, as well they might, for they were the best troops in the world; but Vitelli attacked these picked men with his infantry, who, armed with their formidable pikes, ran them through, while they with arms four feet shorter had no chance even of returning the blows they received; at the same time Vitelli’s light troops wheeled upon the flank, following their most rapid movements, and silencing the enemy’s artillery by the swiftness and accuracy of their attack. The pontifical troops were put to flight, though after a longer resistance than might have been expected when they had to sustain the attack of an army so much better equipped than their own; with them they bore to Ronciglione the Duke of Gandia, wounded in the face by a pike-thrust, Fabrizia Calonna, and the envoy; the Duke of Urbino, who was fighting in the rear to aid the retreat, was taken prisoner with all his artillery and the baggage of the conquered army. But this success, great as it was, did not so swell the pride of Vitellozza Vitelli as to make him oblivious of his position. He knew that he and the Orsini together were too weak to sustain a war of such magnitude; that the little store of money to which he owed the existence of his army would very soon be expended and his army would disappear with it. So he hastened to get pardoned far the victory by making propositions which he would very likely have refused had he been the vanquished party; and the pope accepted his conditions without demur; during the interval having heard that Trivulce had just recrossed the Alps and re-entered Italy with three thousand Swiss, and fearing lest the Italian general might only be the advance guard of the King of France. So it was settled that the Orsini should pay 70,000 florins for the expenses of the war, and that all the prisoners on both sides should be exchanged without ransom with the single exception of the Duke of Urbino. As a pledge for the future payment of the 70,000 florins, the Orsini handed over to the Cardinals Sforza and San Severino the fortresses of Anguillara and Cervetri; then, when the day came and they had not the necessary money, they gave up their prisoner, the Duke of Urbino, estimating his worth at 40,000 ducats — nearly all the sum required — and handed him over to Alexander on account; he, a rigid observer of engagements, made his own general, taken prisoner in his service, pay, to himself the ransom he owed to the enemy.

Then the pope had the corpse of Virginio sent to Carlo Orsini and Vitellozzo Vitelli, as he could not send him alive. By a strange fatality the prisoner had died, eight days before the treaty was signed, of the same malady — at least, if we may judge by analogy — that had carried off Bajazet’s brother.

As soon as the peace was signed, Prospero Calonna and Gonzalvo de Cordova, whom the Pope had demanded from Frederic, arrived at Rome with an army of Spanish and Neapolitan troops. Alexander, as he could not utilise these against the Orsini, set them the work of recapturing Ostia, not desiring to incur the reproach of bringing them to Rome far nothing. Gonzalvo was rewarded for this feat by receiving the Rose of Gold from the pope’s hand — that being the highest honour His Holiness can grant. He shared this distinction with the Emperor Maximilian, the King of France, the Doge of Venice, and the Marquis of Mantua.

In the midst of all this occurred the solemn festival of the Assumption; in which Ganzalvo was invited to take part. He accordingly left his palace, proceeded in great pomp in the front of the pontifical cavalry, and took his place on the Duke of Gandia’s left hand. The duke attracted all eyes by his personal beauty, set off as it was by all the luxury he thought fit to display at this festival. He had a retinue of pages and servants, clad in sumptuous liveries, incomparable for richness with anything heretofore seen in Rome, that city of religious pomp. All these pages and servants rode magnificent horses, caparisoned in velvet trimmed with silver fringe, and bells of silver hanging down every here and there. He himself was in a robe of gold brocade, and wore at his neck a string of Eastern pearls, perhaps the finest and largest that ever belonged to a Christian prince, while on his cap was a gold chain studded with diamonds of which the smallest was worth more than 20,000 ducats. This magnificence was all the more conspicuous by the contrast it presented to Caesar’s dress, whose scarlet robe admitted of no ornaments. The result was that Caesar, doubly jealous of his brother, felt a new hatred rise up within him when he heard all along the way the praises of his fine appearance and noble equipment. From this moment Cardinal Valentino decided in his own mind the fate of this man, this constant obstacle in the path of his pride, his love, and his ambition. Very good reason, says Tommaso, the historian, had the Duke of Gandia to leave behind him an impression on the public mind of his beauty and his grandeur at this fete, for this last display was soon to be followed by the obsequies of the unhappy young man.

Lucrezia also had come to Rome, on the pretext of taking part in the solemnity, but really, as we shall see later, with the view of serving as a new instrument for her father’s ambition. As the pope was not satisfied with an empty triumph of vanity and display for his son, and as his war with the Orsini had failed to produce the anticipated results, he decided to increase the fortune of his firstborn by doing the very thing which he had accused Calixtus in his speech of doing for him, viz., alienating from the States of the Church the cities of Benevento, Terracino, and Pontecorvo to form, a duchy as an appanage to his son’s house. Accordingly this proposition was put forward in a full consistory, and as the college of cardinals was entirely Alexander’s, there was no difficulty about carrying his point. This new favour to his elder brother exasperated Caesar, although he was himself getting a share of the paternal gifts; for he had just been named envoy ‘a latere’ at Frederic’s court, and was appointed to crown him with his own hands as the papal representative. But Lucrezia, when she had spent a few days of pleasure with her father and brothers, had gone into retreat at the convent of San Sisto. No one knew the real motive of her seclusion, and no entreaties of Caesar, whose love for her was strange and unnatural, had induced her to defer this departure from the world even until the day after he left for Naples. His sister’s obstinacy wounded him deeply, for ever since the day when the Duke of Gandia had appeared in the procession so magnificently attired, he fancied he had observed a coldness in the mistress of his illicit affection, and so far did this increase his hatred of his rival that he resolved to be rid of him at all costs. So he ordered the chief of his sbirri to come and see him the same night.

Michelotto was accustomed to these mysterious messages, which almost always meant his help was wanted in some love affair or some act of revenge. As in either case his reward was generally a large one, he was careful to keep his engagement, and at the appointed hour was brought into the presence of his patron.

Caesar received him leaning against a tall chimney-piece, no longer wearing his cardinal’s robe and hat, but a doublet of black velvet slashed with satin of the same colour. One hand toyed mechanically with his gloves, while the other rested an the handle of a poisoned dagger which never left his side. This was the dress he kept for his nocturnal expeditions, so Michelotto felt no surprise at that; but his eyes burned with a flame more gloomy than their want, and his cheeks, generally pale, were now livid. Michelotto had but to cast one look upon his master to see that Caesar and he were about to share some terrible enterprise.

He signed to him to shut the door. Michelotto obeyed. Then, after a moment's silence, during which the eyes of Borgia seemed to burn into the soul of the bravo, who with a careless air stood bareheaded before ham, he said, in a voice whose slightly mocking tone gave the only sign of his emotion.

"Michelotto, how do you think this dress suits me?"

Accustomed as he was to his master's tricks of circumlocution, the bravo was so far from expecting this question, that at first he stood mute, and only after a few moments' pause was able to say:

"Admirably, monsignore; thanks to the dress, your Excellency has the appearance as well as the true spirit of a captain."

"I am glad you think so," replied Caesar. "And now let me ask you, do you know who is the cause that, instead of wearing this dress, which I can only put an at night, I am forced to disguise myself in the daytime in a cardinal's robe and hat, and pass my time trotting about from church to church, from consistory to consistory, when I ought properly to be leading a magnificent army in the battlefield, where you would enjoy a captain's rank, instead of being the chief of a few miserable sbirri?"

"Yes, monsignore," replied Michelotto, who had divined Caesar's meaning at his first word; "the man who is the cause of this is Francesco, Duke of Gandia, and Benevento, your elder brother."

"Do you know," Caesar resumed, giving no sign of assent but a nod and a bitter smile, — "do you know who has all the money and none of the genius, who has the helmet and none of the brains, who has the sword and no hand to wield it?"

"That too is the Duke of Gandia," said Michelotto.

"Do you know;" continued Caesar, "who is the man whom I find continually blocking the path of my ambition, my fortune, and my love?"

"It is the same, the Duke of Gandia," said Michelotto.

"And what do you think of it?" asked Caesar.

"I think he must die," replied the man coldly.

"That is my opinion also, Michelotto," said Caesar, stepping towards him and grasping his hand; "and my only regret is that I did not think of it sooner; for if I had carried a sword at my side in stead of a crosier in my hand when the King of France was marching through Italy, I should now have been master of a fine domain. The pope is obviously anxious to aggrandise his family, but he is mistaken in the means he adopts: it is I who ought to have been made duke, and my brother a cardinal. There is no doubt at all that, had he made me duke, I should have contributed a daring and courage to his service that would have made his power far weightier than it is. The man who would make his way to vast dominions and a kingdom ought to trample under foot all the obstacles in his path, and boldly grasp the very sharpest thorns, whatever reluctance his weak flesh may feel; such a man, if he would open out his path to fortune, should seize his dagger or his sword and strike out with his eyes shut; he should not shrink from bathing his hands in the blood of his kindred; he should follow the example offered him by every founder of empire from Romulus to Bajazet, both of whom climbed to the throne by the ladder of fratracide. Yes, Michelotto, as you say, such is my condition, and I am resolved I will not shrink. Now you know why I sent for you: am I wrong in counting upon you?"

As might have been expected, Michelotto, seeing his own fortune in this crime, replied that he was entirely at Caesar's service, and that he had nothing to do but to give his orders as to time, place, and manner of execution. Caesar replied that the time must needs be very soon, since he was on the point of leaving Rome for Naples; as to the place and the mode of execution, they would depend on circumstances, and each of them must look out for an opportunity, and seize the first that seemed favourable.

Two days after this resolution had been taken, Caesar learned that the day of his departure was fixed for Thursday the 15th of June: at the same time he received an invitation from his mother to come to supper with her on the 14th. This was a farewell repast given in his honour. Michelotto received orders to be in readiness at eleven o'clock at night.

The table was set in the open air in a magnificent vineyard, a property of Rosa Vanozza's in the neighbourhood of San Piero-in-Vinculis: the guests were Caesar Borgia, the hero of the occasion; the Duke of Gandia; Prince of Squillace; Dona Sancha, his wife; the Cardinal of Monte Reale, Francesco Borgia, son of Calixtus III; Don Roderigo Borgia, captain of the apostolic palace; Don Goffredo, brother of the cardinal; Gian Borgia, at that time ambassador at Perugia; and lastly, Don Alfonso Borgia, the pope's nephew: the whole family therefore was present, except Lucrezia, who was still in retreat, and would not come.

The repast was magnificent: Caesar was quite as cheerful as usual, and the Duke of Gandia seemed more joyous than he had ever been before.

In the middle of supper a man in a mask brought him a letter. The duke unfastened it, colouring up with pleasure; and when he had read it answered in these words, “I will come”: then he quickly hid the letter in the pocket of his doublet; but quick as he was to conceal it from every eye, Caesar had had time to cast a glance that way, and he fancied he recognised the handwriting of his sister Lucrezia. Meanwhile the messenger had gone off with his answer, no one but Caesar paying the slightest attention to him, for at that period it was the custom for have messages to be conveyed by men in domino or by women whose faces were concealed by a veil.

At ten o’clock they rose from the table, and as the air was sweet and mild they walked about a while under the magnificent pine trees that shaded the house of Rosa Vanozza, while Caesar never for an instant let his brother out of his sight. At eleven o’clock the Duke of Gandia bade good-night to his mother. Caesar at once followed suit, alleging his desire to go to the Vatican to bid farewell to the pope, as he would not be able to fulfil this duty an the morrow, his departure being fixed at daybreak. This pretext was all the more plausible since the pope was in the habit of sitting up every night till two or three o’clock in the morning.

The two brothers went out together, mounted their horses, which were waiting for them at the door, and rode side by side as far as the Palazzo Borgia, the present home of Cardinal Ascanio Sforza, who had taken it as a gift from Alexander the night before his election to the papacy. There the Duke of Gandia separated from his brother, saying with a smile that he was not intending to go home, as he had several hours to spend first with a fair lady who was expecting him. Caesar replied that he was no doubt free to make any use he liked best of his opportunities, and wished him a very good night. The duke turned to the right, and Caesar to the left; but Caesar observed that the street the duke had taken led in the direction of the convent of San Sisto, where, as we said, Lucrezia was in retreat; his suspicions were confirmed by this observation, and he directed his horse’s steps to the Vatican, found the pope, took his leave of him, and received his benediction.

From this moment all is wrapped in mystery and darkness, like that in which the terrible deed was done that we are now to relate.

This, however, is what is believed.

The Duke of Gandia, when he quitted Caesar, sent away his servants, and in the company of one confidential valet alone pursued his course towards the Piazza della Giudecca. There he found the same man in a mask who had come to speak to him at supper, and forbidding his valet to follow any farther, he bade him wait on the piazza where they then stood, promising to be on his way back in two hours' time at latest, and to take him up as he passed. And at the appointed hour the duke reappeared, took leave this time of the man in the mask, and retraced his steps towards his palace. But scarcely had he turned the corner of the Jewish Ghetto, when four men on foot, led by a fifth who was on horseback, flung themselves upon him. Thinking they were thieves, or else that he was the victim of some mistake, the Duke of Gandia mentioned his name; but instead of the name checking the murderers' daggers, their strokes were redoubled, and the duke very soon fell dead, his valet dying beside him.

Then the man on horseback, who had watched the assassination with no sign of emotion, backed his horse towards the dead body: the four murderers lifted the corpse across the crupper, and walking by the side to support it, then made their way down the lane that leads to the Church of Santa Maria-in-Monticelli. The wretched valet they left for dead upon the pavement. But he, after the lapse of a few seconds, regained some small strength, and his groans were heard by the inhabitants of a poor little house hard by; they came and picked him up, and laid him upon a bed, where he died almost at once, unable to give any evidence as to the assassins or any details of the murder.

All night the duke was expected home, and all the next morning; then expectation was turned into fear, and fear at last into deadly terror. The pope was approached, and told that the Duke of Gandia had never come back to his palace since he left his mother's house. But Alexander tried to deceive himself all through the rest of the day, hoping that his son might have been surprised by the coming of daylight in the midst of an amorous adventure, and was waiting till the next night to get away in that darkness which had aided his coming thither. But the night, like the day, passed and brought no news. On the morrow, the pope, tormented by the gloomiest presentiments and by the raven's croak of the 'vox populi', let himself fall into the depths of despair: amid sighs and sobs of grief, all he could say to any one who came to him was but these words, repeated a thousand times: "Search, search; let us know how my unhappy son has died."

Then everybody joined in the search; for, as we have said, the Duke of Gandia was beloved by all; but nothing could be discovered from scouring the town, except the body of the murdered man, who was recognised as the duke's valet; of his master there was no trace whatever: it was then thought, not without reason, that he had probably been thrown into the Tiber, and they began to follow along its banks, beginning from the Via della Ripetta, questioning every boatman and fisherman who might possibly have seen, either from their houses or from their boats, what had happened on the river banks during the two preceding nights. At first all inquiries were in vain; but when they had gone up as high as the Via del Fantanone, they found a man at last who said he had seen something happen on the night of the 14th which might very possibly have some bearing on the subject of inquiry. He was a Slav named George, who was taking up the river a boat laden with wood to Ripetta. The following are his own words:

"Gentlemen," he said, "last Wednesday evening, when I had set down my load of wood on the bank, I remained in my boat, resting in the cool night air, and watching lest other men should come and take away what I had just unloaded, when, about two o'clock in the morning, I saw coming out of the lane on the left of San Girolamo's Church two men on foot, who came forward into the middle of the street, and looked so carefully all around that they seemed to have come to find out if anybody was going along the street. When they felt sure that it was deserted, they went back along the same lane, whence issued presently two other men, who used similar precautions to make sure that there was nothing fresh; they, when they found all as they wished, gave a sign to their companions to come and join them; next appeared one man on a dapple-grey horse, which was carrying on the crupper the body of a dead man, his head and arms hanging over on one side and his feet on the other. The two fellows I had first seen exploring were holding him up by the arms and legs. The other three at once went up to the river, while the first two kept a watch on the street, and advancing to the part of the bank where the sewers of the town are discharged into the Tiber, the horseman turned his horse, backing on the river; then the two who were at either side taking the corpse, one by the hands, the other by the feet, swung it three times, and the third time threw it out into the river with all their strength; then at the noise made when the body splashed into the water, the horseman asked, 'Is it done?' and the others answered, 'Yes, sir,' and he at once turned right about face; but seeing the dead man's cloak floating, he asked what was that black thing swimming about. 'Sir,' said one of the men, 'it is his cloak'; and then another man picked up some stones, and running to the place where it was still floating, threw them so as to make it sink under; as soon, as it had quite disappeared, they went off, and after walking a little way along the main road, they went into the lane that leads to San Giacomo. That was all I saw, gentlemen, and so it is all I can answer to the questions you have asked me.”

At these words, which robbed of all hope any who might yet entertain it, one of the pope’s servants asked the Slav why, when he was witness of such a deed, he had not gone to denounce it to the governor. But the Slav replied that, since he had exercised his present trade on the riverside, he had seen dead men thrown into the Tiber in the same way a hundred times, and had never heard that anybody had been troubled about them; so he supposed it would be the same with this corpse as the others, and had never imagined it was his duty to speak of it, not thinking it would be any more important than it had been before.

Acting on this intelligence, the servants of His Holiness summoned at once all the boatmen and fishermen who were accustomed to go up and down the river, and as a large reward was promised to anyone who should find the duke’s body, there were soon mare than a hundred ready for the job; so that before the evening of the same day, which was Friday, two men were drawn out of the water, of whom one was instantly recognised as the hapless duke. At the very first glance at the body there could be no doubt as to the cause of death. It was pierced with nine wounds, the chief one in the throat, whose artery was cut. The clothing had not been touched: his doublet and cloak were there, his gloves in his waistband, gold in his purse; the duke then must have been assassinated not for gain but for revenge.

The ship which carried the corpse went up the Tiber to the Castello Sant’ Angelo, where it was set down. At once the magnificent dress was fetched from the duke’s palace which he had worn on the day of the procession, and he was clothed in it once more: beside him were placed the insignia of the generalship of the Church. Thus he lay in state all day, but his father in his despair had not the courage to came and look at him. At last, when night had fallen, his most trusty and honoured servants carried the body to the church of the Madonna del Papala, with all the pomp and ceremony that Church and State combined could devise for the funeral of the son of the pope.

Meantime the bloodstained hands of Caesar Borgia were placing a royal crown upon the head of Frederic of Aragon.

This blow had pierced Alexander’s heart very deeply. As at first he did not know on whom his suspicions should fall, he gave the strictest orders for the pursuit of the murderers; but little by little the infamous truth was forced upon him. He saw that the blow which struck at his house came from that very house itself and then his despair was changed to madness: he ran through the rooms of the Vatican like a maniac, and entering the consistory with torn garments and ashes on his head, he sobbingly avowed all the errors of his past life, owning that the disaster that struck his offspring through his offspring was a just chastisement from God; then he retired to a secret dark chamber of the palace, and there shut himself up, declaring his resolve to die of starvation. And indeed for more than sixty hours he took no nourishment by day nor rest by night, making no answer to those who knocked at his door to bring him food except with the wailings of a woman or a roar as of a wounded lion; even the beautiful Giulia Farnese, his new mistress, could not move him at all, and was obliged to go and seek Lucrezia, that daughter doubly loved to conquer his deadly resolve. Lucrezia came out from the retreat were she was weeping for the Duke of Gandia, that she might console her father. At her voice the door did really open, and it was only then that the Duke of Segovia, who had been kneeling almost a whole day at the threshold, begging His Holiness to take heart, could enter with servants bearing wine and food.

The pope remained alone with Lucrezia for three days and nights; then he reappeared in public, outwardly calm, if not resigned; for Guicciardini assures us that his daughter had made him understand how dangerous it would be to himself to show too openly before the assassin, who was coming home, the immoderate love he felt for his victim.

CHAPTER VIII

Caesar remained at Naples, partly to give time to the paternal grief to cool down, and partly to get on with another business he had lately been charged with, nothing else than a proposition of marriage between Lucrezia and Don Alfonso of Aragon, Duke of Bicelli and Prince of Salerno, natural son of Alfonso II and brother of Dona Sancha. It was true that Lucrezia was already married to the lord of Pesaro, but she was the daughter of an father who had received from heaven the right of uniting and disuniting. There was no need to trouble about so trifling a matter: when the two were ready to marry, the divorce would be effected. Alexander was too good a tactician to leave his daughter married to a son-in-law who was becoming useless to him.

Towards the end of August it was announced that the ambassador was coming back to Rome, having accomplished his mission to the new king to his great satisfaction. And thither he returned an the 5th of September, — that is, nearly three months after the Duke of Gandia's death, — and on the next day, the 6th, from the church of Santa Maria Novella, where, according to custom, the cardinals and the Spanish and Venetian ambassadors were awaiting him on horseback at the door, he proceeded to the Vatican, where His Holiness was sitting; there he entered the consistory, was admitted by the pope, and in accordance with the usual ceremonial received his benediction and kiss; then, accompanied once more in the same fashion by the ambassadors and cardinals, he was escorted to his own apartments. Thence he proceeded to, the pope's, as soon as he was left alone; for at the consistory they had had no speech with one another, and the father and son had a hundred things to talk about, but of these the Duke of Gandia was not one, as might have been expected. His name was not once spoken, and neither on that day nor afterwards was there ever again any mention of the unhappy young man: it was as though he had never existed.

It was the fact that Caesar brought good news, King Frederic gave his consent to the proposed union; so the marriage of Sforza and Lucrezia was dissolved on a pretext of nullity. Then Frederic authorised the exhumation of D'jem's body, which, it will be remembered, was worth 300,000 ducats.

After this, all came about as Caesar had desired; he became the man who was all-powerful after the pope; but when he was second in command it was soon evident to the Roman people that their city was making a new stride in the direction of ruin. There was nothing but balls, fetes, masquerades; there were magnificent hunting parties, when Caesar — who had begun to cast off is cardinal’s robe, — weary perhaps of the colour, appeared in a French dress, followed, like a king by cardinals, envoys and bodyguard. The whole pontifical town, given up like a courtesan to orgies and debauchery, had never been more the home of sedition, luxury, and carnage, according to the Cardinal of Viterba, not even in the days of Nero and Heliogabalus. Never had she fallen upon days more evil; never had more traitors done her dishonour or sbirri stained her streets with blood. The number of thieves was so great, and their audacity such, that no one could with safety pass the gates of the town; soon it was not even safe within them. No house, no castle, availed for defence. Right and justice no longer existed. Money, farce, pleasure, ruled supreme.

Still, the gold was melting as in a furnace at these Fetes; and, by Heaven’s just punishment, Alexander and Caesar were beginning to covet the fortunes of those very men who had risen through their simony to their present elevation. The first attempt at a new method of coining money was tried upon the Cardinal Cosenza. The occasion was as follows. A certain dispensation had been granted some time before to a nun who had taken the vows: she was the only surviving heir to the throne of Portugal, and by means of the dispensation she had been wedded to the natural son of the last king. This marriage was more prejudicial than can easily be imagined to the interests of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain; so they sent ambassadors to Alexander to lodge a complaint against a proceeding of this nature, especially as it happened at the very moment when an alliance was to be formed between the house of Aragon and the Holy See. Alexander understood the complaint, and resolved that all should be set right. So he denied all knowledge of the papal brief though he had as a fact received 60,000 ducats for signing it — and accused the Archbishop of Cosenza, secretary for apostolic briefs, of having granted a false dispensation. By reason of this accusation, the archbishop was taken to the castle of Sant’ Angelo, and a suit was begun.

But as it was no easy task to prove an accusation of this nature, especially if the archbishop should persist in maintaining that the dispensation was really granted by the pope, it was resolved to employ a trick with him which could not fail to succeed. One evening the Archbishop of Cosenza saw Cardinal Valentino come into his prison; with that frank air of affability which he knew well how to assume when it could serve his purpose, he explained to the prisoner the embarrassing situation in which the pope was placed, from which the archbishop alone, whom His Holiness looked upon as his best friend, could save him.

The archbishop replied that he was entirely at the service of His Holiness.

Caesar, on his entrance, found the captive seated, leaning his elbows on a table, and he took a seat opposite him and explained the pope's position: it was an embarrassing one. At the very time of contracting so important an alliance with the house of Aragon as that of Lucrezia and Alfonso, His Holiness could not avow to Ferdinand and Isabella that, for the sake of a few miserable ducats, he had signed a dispensation which would unite in the husband and wife together all the legitimate claims to a throne to which Ferdinand and Isabella had no right at all but that of conquest. This avowal would necessarily put an end to all negotiations, and the pontifical house would fall by the overthrow of that very pedestal which was to have heightened its grandeur. Accordingly the archbishop would understand what the pope expected of his devotion and friendship: it was a simple and straight avowal that he had supposed he might take it upon himself to accord the dispensation. Then, as the sentence to be passed on such an error would be the business of Alexander, the accused could easily imagine beforehand how truly paternal such a sentence would be. Besides, the reward was in the same hands, and if the sentence was that of a father, the recompense would be that of a king. In fact, this recompense would be no less than the honour of assisting as envoy, with the title of cardinal, at the marriage of Lucrezia and Alfonso — a favour which would be very appropriate, since it would be thanks to his devotion that the marriage could take place.

The Archbishop of Cosenza knew the men he was dealing with; he knew that to save their own ends they would hesitate at nothing; he knew they had a poison like sugar to the taste and to the smell, impossible to discover in food — a poison that would kill slowly or quickly as the poisoner willed and would leave no trace behind; he knew the secret of the poisoned key that lay always on the pope's mantelpiece, so that when His Holiness wished to destroy some one of his intimates, he bade him open a certain cupboard: on the handle of the key there was a little spike, and as the lock of the cupboard turned stiffly the hand would naturally press, the lock would yield, and nothing would have come of it but a trifling scratch: the scratch was mortal. He knew, too, that Caesar wore a ring made like two lions’ heads, and that he would turn the stone on the inside when he was shaking hands with a friend. Then the lions’ teeth became the teeth of a viper, and the friend died cursing Borgia. So he yielded, partly through fear, partly blinded by the thought of the reward; and Caesar returned to the Vatican armed with a precious paper, in which the Archbishop of Cosenza admitted that he was the only person responsible for the dispensation granted to the royal nun.

Two days later, by means of the proofs kindly furnished by the archbishop, the pope; in the presence of the governor of Rome, the auditor of the apostolic chamber, the advocate, and the fiscal attorney, pronounced sentence, condemning the archbishop to the loss of all his benefices and ecclesiastical offices, degradation from his orders, and confiscation of his goods; his person was to be handed over to the civil arm. Two days later the civil magistrate entered the prison to fulfil his office as received from the pope, and appeared before the archbishop, accompanied by a clerk, two servants, and four guards. The clerk unrolled the paper he carried and read out the sentence; the two servants untied a packet, and, stripping the prisoner of his ecclesiastical garments, they reclothed him in a dress of coarse white cloth which only reached down to his knees, breeches of the same, and a pair of clumsy shoes. Lastly, the guards took him, and led him into one of the deepest dungeons of the castle of Sant’ Angelo, where for furniture he found nothing but a wooden crucifix, a table, a chair, and a bed; for occupation, a Bible and a breviary, with a lamp to read by; for nourishment, two pounds of bread and a little cask of water, which were to be renewed every three days, together with a bottle of oil for burning in his lamp.

At the end of a year the poor archbishop died of despair, not before he had gnawed his own arms in his agony.

The very same day that he was taken into the dungeon, Caesar Borgia, who had managed the affair so ably, was presented by the pope with all the belongings of the condemned prisoner.

But the hunting parties, balls, and masquerades were not the only pleasures enjoyed by the pope and his family: from time to time strange spectacles were exhibited. We will only describe two — one of them a case of punishment, the other no more nor less than a matter of the stud farm. But as both of these give details with which we would not have our readers credit our imagination, we will first say that they are literally translated from Burchard’s Latin journal.

“About the same time — that is, about the beginning of 1499 — a certain courtesan named La Corsetta was in prison, and had a lover who came to visit her in woman’s clothes, a Spanish Moor, called from his disguise ‘the Spanish lady from Barbary!’ As a punishment, both of them were led through the town, the woman without petticoat or skirt, but wearing only the Moor’s dress unbuttoned in front; the man wore his woman’s garb; his hands were tied behind his back, and the skirt fastened up to his middle, with a view to complete exposure before the eyes of all. When in this attire they had made the circuit of the town, the Corsetta was sent back to the prison with the Moor. But on the 7th of April following, the Moor was again taken out and escorted in the company of two thieves towards the Campo dei Fiori. The three condemned men were preceded by a constable, who rode backwards on an ass, and held in his hand a long pole, on the end of which were hung, still bleeding, the amputated limbs of a poor Jew who had suffered torture and death for some trifling crime. When the procession reached the place of execution, the thieves were hanged, and the unfortunate Moor was tied to a stake piled round with wood, where he was to have been burnt to death, had not rain fallen in such torrents that the fire would not burn, in spite of all the efforts of the executioner.”

This unlooked for accident, taken as a miracle by the people, robbed Lucrezia of the most exciting part of the execution; but her father was holding in reserve another kind of spectacle to console her with later. We inform the reader once more that a few lines we are about to set before him are a translation from the journal of the worthy German Burchard, who saw nothing in the bloodiest or most wanton performances but facts for his journal, which he duly registered with the impassibility of a scribe, appending no remark or moral reflection.

“On the 11th of November a certain peasant was entering Rome with two stallions laden with wood, when the servants of His Holiness, just as he passed the Piazza of St. Peter’s, cut their girths, so that their loads fell on the ground with the pack-saddles, and led off the horses to a court between the palace and the gate; then the stable doors were opened, and four stallions, quite free and unbridled, rushed out and in an instant all six animals began kicking, biting and fighting each other until several were killed. Roderigo and Madame Lucrezia, who sat at the window just over the palace gate, took the greatest delight in the struggle and called their courtiers to witness the gallant battle that was being fought below them.”

Now Caesar’s trick in the matter of the Archbishop of Cosenza had had the desired result, and Isabella and Ferdinand could no longer impute to Alexander the signature of the brief they had complained of: so nothing was now in the way of the marriage of Lucrezia and Alfonso; this certainty gave the pope great joy, for he attached all the more importance to this marriage because he was already cogitating a second, between Caesar and Dona Carlota, Frederic’s daughter.

Caesar had shown in all his actions since his brother’s death his want of vocation for the ecclesiastical life; so no one was astonished when, a consistory having been summoned one morning by Alexander, Caesar entered, and addressing the pope, began by saying that from his earliest years he had been drawn towards secular pursuits both by natural inclination and ability, and it had only been in obedience to the absolute commands of His Holiness that he entered the Church, accepted the cardinal’s scarlet, other dignities, and finally the sacred order of the diaconate; but feeling that in his situation it was improper to follow his passions, and at his age impossible to resist them, he humbly entreated His Holiness graciously to yield to the desire he had failed to overcome, and to permit him to lay aside the dress and dignities of the Church, and enter once more into the world, thereto contract a lawful marriage; also he entreated the lord cardinals to intercede for him with His Holiness, to whom he would freely resign all his churches, abbeys, and benefices, as well as every other ecclesiastical dignity and preferment that had been accorded him. The cardinals, deferring to Caesar’s wishes, gave a unanimous vote, and the pope, as we may suppose, like a good father, not wishing to force his son’s inclinations, accepted his resignation, and yielded to the petition; thus Caesar put off the scarlet robe, which was suited to him, says his historian Tommaso Tommasi, in one particular only — that it was the colour of blood.

In truth, the resignation was a pressing necessity, and there was no time to lose. Charles VIII one day after he had came home late and tired from the hunting-field, had bathed his head in cold water; and going straight to table, had been struck dawn by an apoplectic seizure directly after his supper; and was dead, leaving the throne to the good Louis XII, a man of two conspicuous weaknesses, one as deplorable as the other: the first was the wish to make conquests; the second was the desire to have children. Alexander, who was on the watch far all political changes, had seen in a moment what he could get from Louis XII's accession to the throne, and was prepared to profit by the fact that the new king of France needed his help for the accomplishment of his twofold desire. Louis needed, first, his temporal aid in an expedition against the duchy of Milan, on which, as we explained before, he had inherited claims from Valentina Visconti, his grandmother; and, secondly, his spiritual aid to dissolve his marriage with Jeanne, the daughter of Louis XI; a childless and hideously deformed woman, whom he had only married by reason of the great fear he entertained far her father. Now Alexander was willing to do all this far Louis XII and to give in addition a cardinal's hat to his friend George d'Amboise, provided only that the King of France would use his influence in persuading the young Dona Carlota, who was at his court, to marry his son Caesar.

So, as this business was already far advanced on the day when Caesar doffed his scarlet and donned a secular garb, thus fulfilling the ambition so long cherished, when the lord of Villeneuve, sent by Louis and commissioned to bring Caesar to France, presented himself before the ex-cardinal on his arrival at Rome, the latter, with his usual extravagance of luxury and the kindness he knew well how to bestow on those he needed, entertained his guest for a month, and did all the honours of Rome. After that, they departed, preceded by one of the pope's couriers, who gave orders that every town they passed through was to receive them with marks of honour and respect. The same order had been sent throughout the whole of France, where the illustrious visitors received so numerous a guard, and were welcomed by a populace so eager to behold them, that after they passed through Paris, Caesar's gentlemen-in-waiting wrote to Rome that they had not seen any trees in France, or houses, or walls, but only men, women and sunshine.

The king, on the pretext of going out hunting, went to meet his guest two leagues outside the town. As he knew Caesar was very fond of the name of Valentine, which he had used as cardinal, and still continued to employ with the title of Count, although he had resigned the archbishopric which gave him the name, he there and then bestowed an him the investiture of Valence, in Dauphine, with the title of Duke and a pension of 20,000 francs; then, when he had made this magnificent gift and talked with him for nearly a couple of hours, he took his leave, to enable him to prepare the splendid entry he was proposing to make.

It was Wednesday, the 18th of December 1498, when Caesar Borgia entered the town of Chinon, with pomp worthy of the son of a pope who is about to marry the daughter of a king. The procession began with four-and-twenty mules, caparisoned in red, adorned with escutcheons bearing the duke's arms, laden with carved trunks and chests inlaid with ivory and silver; after them came four-and-twenty mare, also caparisoned, this time in the livery of the King of France, yellow and red; next after these came ten other mules, covered in yellow satin with red crossbars; and lastly another ten, covered with striped cloth of gold, the stripes alternately raised and flat gold.

Behind the seventy mules which led the procession there pranced sixteen handsome battle-horses, led by equerries who marched alongside; these were followed by eighteen hunters ridden by eighteen pages, who were about fourteen or fifteen years of age; sixteen of them were dressed in crimson velvet, and two in raised gold cloth; so elegantly dressed were these two children, who were also the best looking of the little band, that the sight of them gave rise to strange suspicions as to the reason for this preference, if one may believe what Brantome says. Finally, behind these eighteen horses came six beautiful mules, all harnessed with red velvet, and led by six valets, also in velvet to match.

The third group consisted of, first, two mules quite covered with cloth of gold, each carrying two chests in which it was said that the duke's treasure was stored, the precious stones he was bringing to his fiancee, and the relics and papal bulls that his father had charged him to convey for him to Louis XII. These were followed by twenty gentlemen dressed in cloth of gold and silver, among whom rode Paul Giordano Orsino and several barons and knights among the chiefs of the state ecclesiastic.

Next came two drums, one rebeck, and four soldiers blowing trumpets and silver clarions; then, in the midst of a party of four-and-twenty lacqueys, dressed half in crimson velvet and half in yellow silk, rode Messire George d'Amboise and Monseigneur the Duke of Valentinois. Caesar was mounted on a handsome tall courser, very richly harnessed, in a robe half red satin and half cloth of gold, embroidered all over with pearls and precious stones; in his cap were two rows of rubies, the size of beans, which reflected so brilliant a light that one might have fancied they were the famous carbuncles of the Arabian Nights; he also wore on his neck a collar worth at least 200,000 livres; indeed, there was no part of him, even down to his boots, that was not laced with gold and edged with pearls. His horse was covered with a cuirass in a pattern of golden foliage of wonderful workmanship, among which there appeared to grow, like flowers, nosegays of pearls and clusters of rubies.

Lastly, bringing up the rear of the magnificent cortege, behind the duke came twenty-four mules with red caparisons bearing his arms, carrying his silver plate, tents, and baggage.

What gave to all the cavalcade an air of most wonderful luxury and extravagance was that the horses and mules were shod with golden shoes, and these were so badly nailed on that more than three-quarters of their number, were lost on the road For this extravagance Caesar was greatly blamed, for it was thought an audacious thing to put on his horses’ feet a metal of which king’s crowns are made.

But all this pomp had no effect on the lady for whose sake it had been displayed; for when Dona Carlota was told that Caesar Bargia had come to France in the hope of becoming her husband, she replied simply that she would never take a priest far her husband, and, moreover, the son of a priest; a man who was not only an assassin, but a fratricide; not only a man of infamous birth, but still more infamous in his morals and his actions.

But, in default of the haughty lady of Aragon, Caesar soon found another princess of noble blood who consented to be his wife: this was Mademoiselle d’Albret, daughter of the King of Navarre. The marriage, arranged on condition that the pope should pay 200,000 ducats dowry to the bride, and should make her brother cardinal, was celebrated on the 10th of May; and on the Whitsunday following the Duke of Valentois received the order of St. Michael, an order founded by Louis XI, and esteemed at this period as the highest in the gift of the kings of France. The news of this marriage, which made an alliance with Louis XII certain, was received with great joy by the pope, who at once gave orders far bonfires and illuminations all over the town.

Louis XII was not only grateful to the pope for dissolving his marriage with Jeanne of France and authorizing his union with Anne of Brittany, but he considered it indispensable to his designs in Italy to have the pope as his ally. So he promised the Duke of Valentinois to put three hundred lances at his disposal, as soon as he had made an entry into Milan, to be used to further his own private interests, and against whomsoever he pleased except only the allies of France. The conquest of Milan should be undertaken so soon as Louis felt assured of the support of the Venetians, or at least of their neutrality, and he had sent them ambassadors authorised to promise in his name the restoration of Cremona and Ghiera d’Adda when he had completed the conquest of Lombardy.

CHAPTER IX

Everything from without was favouring Alexander’s encroaching policy, when he was compelled to turn his eyes from France towards the centre of Italy: in Florence dwelt a man, neither duke, nor king, nor soldier, a man whose power was in his genius, whose armour was his purity, who owned no offensive weapon but his tongue, and who yet began to grow more dangerous for him than all the kings, dukes, princes, in the whole world could ever be; this man was the poor Dominican monk Girolamo Savonarola, the same who had refused absolution to Lorenzo dei Medici because he would not restore the liberty of Florence.

Girolamo Savonarola had prophesied the invasion of a force from beyond the Alps, and Charles VIII had conquered Naples; Girolamo Savonarola had prophesied to Charles VIII that because he had failed to fulfil the mission of liberator entrusted to him by God, he was threatened with a great misfortune as a punishment, and Charles was dead; lastly, Savonarola had prophesied his own fall like the man who paced around the holy city for eight days, crying, “Woe to Jerusalem!” and on the ninth day, “Woe be on my own head!” None the less, the Florentine reformer, who could not recoil from any danger, was determined to attack the colossal abomination that was seated on St. Peter’s holy throne; each debauch, each fresh crime that lifted up its brazen face to the light of day or tried to hide its shameful head beneath the veil of night, he had never failed to paint out to the people, denouncing it as the off spring of the pope’s luxurious living and lust of power. Thus had he stigmatised Alexander’s new amour with the beautiful Giulia Farnese, who in the preceding April a added another son to the pope’s family; thus had he cursed the Duke of Gandia’s murderer, the lustful, jealous fratricide; lastly, he had pointed out to the Florentines, who were excluded from the league then forming, what sort of future was in store far them when the Borgias should have made themselves masters of the small principalities and should come to attack the duchies and republics. It was clear that in Savonarola, the pope had an enemy at once temporal and spiritual, whose importunate and threatening voice must be silenced at any cost.

But mighty as the pope’s power was, to accomplish a design like this was no easy matter. Savonarola, preaching the stern principles of liberty, had united to his cause, even in the midst of rich, pleasure-loving Florence, a party of some size, known as the ‘Piagnoni’, or the Penitents: this band was composed of citizens who were anxious for reform in Church and State, who accused the Medici of enslaving the fatherland and the Borgias of upsetting the faith, who demanded two things, that the republic should return to her democratic principles, and religion to a primitive simplicity. Towards the first of these projects considerable progress had been made, since they had successively obtained, first, an amnesty for all crimes and delinquencies committed under other governments; secondly, the abolition of the ‘balia’, which was an aristocratic magistracy; thirdly, the establishment of a sovereign council, composed of 1800 citizens; and lastly, the substitution of popular elections for drawing by lot and for oligarchical nominations: these changes had been effected in spite of two other factions, the ‘Arrabiati’, or Madmen, who, consisting of the richest and noblest youths of the Florentine patrician families, desired to have an oligarchical government; and the ‘Bigi’, or Greys, so called because they always held their meetings in the shade, who desired the return of the Medici.

The first measure Alexander used against the growing power of Savonarola was to declare him heretic, and as such banished from the pulpit; but Savonarola had eluded this prohibition by making his pupil and friend, Domenico Bonvicini di Pescia, preach in his stead. The result was that the master’s teachings were issued from other lips, and that was all; the seed, though scattered by another hand, fell none the less on fertile soil, where it would soon burst into flower. Moreover, Savonarola now set an example that was followed to good purpose by Luther, when, twenty-two years later, he burned Leo X’s bull of excommunication at Wittenberg; he was weary of silence, so he declared, on the authority of Pope Pelagius, that an unjust excommunication had no efficacy, and that the person excommunicated unjustly did not even need to get absolution. So on Christmas Day, 1497, he declared that by the inspiration of God he renounced his obedience to a corrupt master; and he began to preach once more in the cathedral, with a success that was all the greater for the interruption, and an influence far more formidable than before, because it was strengthened by that sympathy of the masses which an unjust persecution always inspires.

Then Alexander made overtures to Leonardo dei Medici, vicar of the archbishopric of Florence, to obtain the punishment of the rebel: Leonardo, in obedience to the orders he received, from Rome, issued a mandate forbidding the faithful to attend at Savonarola's sermons. After this mandate, any who should hear the discourses of the excommunicated monk would be refused communion and confession; and as when they died they would be contaminated with heresy, in consequence of their spiritual intercourse with a heretic, their dead bodies would be dragged on a hurdle and deprived of the rights of sepulture. Savonarola appealed from the mandate of his superior both to the people and to the Signoria, and the two together gave orders to the episcopal vicar to leave Florence within two hours: this happened at the beginning of the year 1498.

The expulsion of Leonard's dei Medici was a new triumph for Savonarola, so, wishing to turn to good moral account his growing influence, he resolved to convert the last day of the carnival, hitherto given up to worldly pleasures, into a day of religious sacrifice. So actually on Shrove Tuesday a considerable number of boys were collected in front of the cathedral, and there divided into bands, which traversed the whole town, making a house-to-house visitation, claiming all profane books, licentious paintings, lutes, harps, cards and dice, cosmetics and perfumes — in a word, all the hundreds of products of a corrupt society and civilisation, by the aid of which Satan at times makes victorious war on God. The inhabitants of Florence obeyed, and came forth to the Piazza of the Duoma, bringing these works of perdition, which were soon piled up in a huge stack, which the youthful reformers set on fire, singing religious psalms and hymns the while. On this pile were burned many copies of Boccaccio and of Margante Maggiore, and pictures by Fro Bartalommeo, who from that day forward renounced the art of this world to consecrate his brush utterly and entirely to the reproduction of religious scenes.

A reform such as this was terrifying to Alexander; so he resolved on fighting Savonarola with his own weapons — that is, by the force of eloquence. He chose as the Dominican's opponent a preacher of recognised talent, called Fra Francesco di Paglia; and he sent him to Florence, where he began to preach in Santa Croce, accusing Savonarola of heresy and impiety. At the same time the pope, in a new brief, announced to the Signaria that unless they forbade the arch-heretic to preach, all the goods of Florentine merchants who lived on the papal territory would be confiscated, and the republic laid under an interdict and declared the spiritual and temporal enemy of the Church. The Signoria, abandoned by France, and aware that the material power of Rome was increasing in a frightful manner, was forced this time to yield, and to issue to Savonarola an order to leave off preaching. He obeyed, and bade farewell to his congregation in a sermon full of strength and eloquence.

But the withdrawal of Savonarola, so far from calming the ferment, had increased it: there was talk about his prophecies being fulfilled; and some zealots, more ardent than their mastery added miracle to inspiration, and loudly proclaimed that Savonarola had offered to go down into the vaults of the cathedral with his antagonist, and there bring a dead man to life again, to prove that his doctrine was true, promising to declare himself vanquished if the miracle were performed by his adversary. These rumours reached the ears of Fra Francesco, and as he was a man of warm blood, who counted his own life as nothing if it might be spent to help his cause, he declared in all humility that he felt he was too great a sinner for God to work a miracle in his behalf; but he proposed another challenge: he would try with Savonarola the ordeal of fire. He knew, he said, that he must perish, but at least he should perish avenging the cause of religion, since he was certain to involve in his destruction the tempter who plunged so many souls beside his own into eternal damnation.

The proposition made by Fra Francesco was taken to Savanarola; but as he had never proposed the earlier challenge, he hesitated to accept the second; hereupon his disciple, Fra Domenico Bonvicini, more confident than his master in his own power, declared himself ready to accept the trial by fire in his stead; so certain was he that God would perform a miracle by the intercession of Savonarola, His prophet.

Instantly the report spread through Florence that the mortal challenge was accepted; Savonarola’s partisans, all men of the strongest convictions, felt no doubt as to the success of their cause. His enemies were enchanted at the thought of the heretic giving himself to the flames; and the indifferent saw in the ordeal a spectacle of real and terrible interest.

But the devotion of Fra Bonvicini of Pescia was not what Fra Francesco was reckoning with. He was willing, no doubt, to die a terrible death, but on condition that Savanarola died with him. What mattered to him the death of an obscure disciple like Fra Bonvicini? It was the master he would strike, the great teacher who must be involved in his own ruin. So he refused to enter the fire except with Savonarola himself, and, playing this terrible game in his own person, would not allow his adversary to play it by proxy.

Then a thing happened which certainly no one could have anticipated. In the place of Fra Francesco, who would not tilt with any but the master, two Franciscan monks appeared to tilt with the disciple. These were Fra Nicholas de Pilly and Fra Andrea Rondinelli. Immediately the partisans of Savonarala, seeing this arrival of reinforcements for their antagonist, came forward in a crowd to try the ordeal. The Franciscans were unwilling to be behindhand, and everybody took sides with equal ardour for one or other party. All Florence was like a den of madmen; everyone wanted the ordeal, everyone wanted to go into the fire; not only did men challenge one another, but women and even children were clamouring to be allowed to try. At last the Signoria, reserving this privilege for the first applicants, ordered that the strange duel should take place only between Fra Domenico Bonvicini and Fra Andrea Rondinelli; ten of the citizens were to arrange all details; the day was fixed for the 7th of April, 1498, and the place the Piazza del Palazzo.

The judges of the field made their arrangements conscientiously. By their orders scaffolding was erected at the appointed place, five feet in height, ten in width, and eighty feet long. This scaffolding was covered with faggots and heath, supported by cross-bars of the very driest wood that could be found. Two narrow paths were made, two feet wide at most, their entrance giving an the Loggia dei Lanzi, their exit exactly opposite. The loggia was itself divided into two by a partition, so that each champion had a kind of room to make his preparations in, just as in the theatre every actor has his dressing-room; but in this instance the tragedy that was about to be played was not a fictitious one.

The Franciscans arrived on the piazza and entered the compartment reserved for them without making any religious demonstration; while Savonarola, on the contrary, advanced to his own place in the procession, wearing the sacerdotal robes in which he had just celebrated the Holy Eucharist, and holding in his hand the sacred host for all the world to see, as it was enclosed in a crystal tabernacle. Fra Domenico di Pescia, the hero of the occasion, followed, bearing a crucifix, and all the Dominican monks, their red crosses in their hands, marched behind singing a psalm; while behind them again followed the most considerable of the citizens of their party, bearing torches, for, sure as they were of the triumph of their cause, they wished to fire the faggots themselves. The piazza was so crowded that the people overflowed into all the streets around. In every door and window there was nothing to be seen but heads ranged one above the other; the terraces were covered with people, and curious spectators were observed an the roof of the Duomo and on the tap of the Campanile.

But, brought face to face with the ordeal, the Franciscans raised such difficulties that it was very plain the heart of their champion was failing him. The first fear they expressed was that Fra Bonvicini was an enchanter, and so carried about him some talisman or charm which would save him from the fire. So they insisted that he should be stripped of all has clothes and put on others to be inspected by witnesses. Fra Bonvicini made no objection, though the suspicion was humiliating; he changed shirt, dress, and cowl. Then, when the Franciscans observed that Savanarola was placing the tabernacle in his hands, they protested that it was profanation to expose the sacred host to the risk of burning, that this was not in the bond, and if Bonvicini would not give up this supernatural aid, they far their part would give up the trial altogether. Savonarola replied that it was not astonishing that the champion of religion who put his faith in God should bear in his hands that very God to whom he entrusted his salvation. But this reply did not satisfy the Franciscans, who were unwilling to let go their contention. Savonarola remained inflexible, supporting his own right, and thus nearly four hours passed in the discussion of points which neither party would give up, and affairs remained in ‘statu quo’. Meanwhile the people, jammed together in the streets, on the terraces, on the roofs, since break of day, were suffering from hunger and thirst and beginning to get impatient: their impatience soon developed into loud murmurs, which reached even the champions’ ears, so that the partisans of Savonarala, who felt such faith in him that they were confident of a miracle, entreated him to yield to all the conditions suggested. To this Savonarola replied that if it were himself making the trial he would be less inexorable; but since another man was incurring the danger; he could not take too many precautions. Two more hours passed, while his partisans tried in vain to combat his refusals. At last, as night was coming on and the people grew ever more and more impatient and their murmurs began to assume a threatening tone, Bonvicini declared that he was ready to walk through the fire, holding nothing in his hand but a crucifix. No one could refuse him this; so Fra Rondinelli was compelled to accept his proposition. The announcement was made to the populace that the champions had come to terms and the trial was about to take place. At this news the people calmed down, in the hope of being compensated at last for their long wait; but at that very moment a storm which had long been threatening brake over Florence with such fury that the faggots which had just been lighted were extinguished by the rain, leaving no possibility of their rekindling. From the moment when the people suspected that they had been fooled, their enthusiasm was changed into derision. They were ignorant from which side the difficulties had arisen that had hindered the trial, so they laid the responsibility on both champions without distinction. The Signoria, foreseeing the disorder that was now imminent, ordered the assembly to retire; but the assembly thought otherwise, and stayed on the piazza, waiting for the departure of the two champions, in spite of the fearful rain that still fell in torrents. Rondinelli was taken back amid shouts and hootings, and pursued with showers of stones. Savonarola, thanks to his sacred garments and the host which he still carried, passed calmly enough through the midst of the mob — a miracle quite as remarkable as if he had passed through the fire unscathed.

But it was only the sacred majesty of the host that had protected this man, who was indeed from this moment regarded as a false prophet: the crowd allowed Savonarola to return to his convent, but they regretted the necessity, so excited were they by the Arrabbiati party, who had always denounced him as a liar and a hypocrite. So when the next morning, Palm Sunday, he stood up in the pulpit to explain his conduct, he could not obtain a moment's silence for insults, hooting, and loud laughter. Then the outcry, at first derisive, became menacing: Savonarola, whose voice was too weak to subdue the tumult, descended from his pulpit, retired into the sacristy, and thence to his convent, where he shut himself up in his cell. At that moment a cry was heard, and was repeated by everybody present:

"To San Marco, to San Marco!" The rioters, few at first, were recruited by all the populace as they swept along the streets, and at last reached the convent, dashing like an angry sea against the wall.

The doors, closed on Savonarala's entrance, soon crashed before the vehement onset of the powerful multitude, which struck down on the instant every obstacle it met: the whole convent was quickly flooded with people, and Savonarola, with his two confederates, Domenico Bonvicini and Silvestro Maruffi, was arrested in his cell, and conducted to prison amid the insults of the crowd, who, always in extremes, whether of enthusiasm or hatred, would have liked to tear them to pieces, and would not be quieted till they had exacted a promise that the prisoners should be forcibly compelled to make the trial of fire which they had refused to make of their own free will.

Alexander VI, as we may suppose, had not been without influence in bringing about this sudden and astonishing reaction, although he was not present in person; and had scarcely learned the news of Savonarola's fall and arrest when he claimed him as subject to ecclesiastical jurisdiction. But in spite of the grant of indulgences wherewith this demand was accompanied, the Signoria insisted that Savonarola's trial should take place at Florence, adding a request so as not to appear to withdraw the accused completely from the pontifical authority — that the pope would send two ecclesiastical judges to sit in the Florentine tribunal. Alexander, seeing that he would get nothing better from the magnificent republic, sent as deputies Gioacchino Turriano of Venice, General of the Dominicans, and Francesco Ramolini, doctor in law: they practically brought the sentence with them, declaring Savonarola and his accomplices heretics, schismatics, persecutors of the Church and seducers of the people.

The firmness shown by the Florentines in claiming their rights of jurisdiction were nothing but an empty show to save appearances; the tribunal, as a fact, was composed of eight members, all known to be fervent haters of Savonarola, whose trial began with the torture. The result was that, feeble in body constitutionally nervous and irritable, he had not been able to endure the rack, and, overcome by agony just at the moment when the executioner had lifted him up by the wrists and then dropped him a distance of two feet to the ground, he had confessed, in order to get some respite, that his prophecies were nothing mare than conjectures. If is true that, so soon as he went back to prison, he protested against the confession, saying that it was the weakness of his bodily organs and his want of firmness that had wrested the lie from him, but that the truth really was that the Lord had several times appeared to him in his ecstasies and revealed the things that he had spoken. This protestation led to a new application of the torture, during which Savonarola succumbed once more to the dreadful pain, and once more retracted. But scarcely was he unbound, and was still lying on the bed of torture, when he declared that his confessions were the fault of his torturers, and the vengeance would recoil upon their heads; and he protested yet once mare against all he had confessed and might confess again. A third time the torture produced the same avowals, and the relief that followed it the same retractions. The judges therefore, when they condemned him and his two disciples to the flames, decided that his confession should not be read aloud at the stake, according to custom, feeling certain that an this occasion also he would give it the lie, and that publicly, which, as anyone must see who knew the versatile spirit of the public, would be a most dangerous proceeding.

On the 23rd of May, the fire which had been promised to the people before was a second time prepared on the Piazza del Palazzo, and this time the crowd assembled quite certain that they would not be disappointed of a spectacle so long anticipated. And towards eleven o’clock in the morning, Girolamo Savonarola, Domenico Bonvicini, and Silvestro Maruffi were led to the place of execution, degraded of their orders by the ecclesiastical judges, and bound all three to the same stake in the centre of an immense pile of wood. Then the bishop Pagnanoli told the condemned men that he cut them off from the Church. “Ay, from the Church militant,” said Savonarola, who from that very hour, thanks to his martyrdom, was entering into the Church triumphant. No other words were spoken by the condemned men, for at this moment one of the Arrabbiati, a personal enemy of Savonarola, breaking through the hedge of guards around the scaffold, snatched the torch from the executioner’s hand and himself set fire to the four corners of the pile. Savonarola and his disciples, from the moment when they saw the smoke arise, began to sing a psalm, and the flames enwrapped them on all sides with a glowing veil, while their religious song was yet heard mounting upward to the gates of heaven.

Pope Alexander VI was thus set free from perhaps the most formidable enemy who had ever risen against him, and the pontifical vengeance pursued the victims even after their death: the Signoria, yielding to his wishes, gave orders that the ashes of the prophet and his disciples should be thrown into the Arno. But certain half-burned fragments were picked up by the very soldiers whose business it was to keep the people back from approaching the fire, and the holy relics are even now shown, blackened by the flames, to the faithful, who if they no longer regard Savonarola as a prophet, revere him none the less as a martyr.

CHAPTER X

The French army was now preparing to cross the Alps a second time, under the command of Trivulce. Louis XII had come as far as Lyons in the company of Caesar Borgia and Giuliano della Rovere, on whom he had forced a reconciliation, and towards the beginning of the month of May had sent his vanguard before him, soon to be followed by the main body of the army. The forces he was employing in this second campaign of conquest were 1600, lances, 5000 Swiss, 9000 Gascons, and 3500 infantry, raised from all parts of France. On the 13th of August this whole body, amounting to nearly 15,000 men, who were to combine their forces with the Venetians, arrived beneath the walls of Arezzo, and immediately laid siege to the town.

Ludovico Sforza's position was a terrible one: he was now suffering from his imprudence in calling the French into Italy; all the allies he had thought he might count upon were abandoning him at the same moment, either because they were busy about their own affairs, or because they were afraid of the powerful enemy that the Duke of Milan had made for himself. Maximilian, who had promised him a contribution of 400 lances, to make up for not renewing the hostilities with Louis XII that had been interrupted, had just made a league with the circle of Swabia to war against the Swiss, whom he had declared rebels against the Empire. The Florentines, who had engaged to furnish him with 300 men-at-arms and 2000 infantry, if he would help them to retake Pisa, had just retracted their promise because of Louis XII's threats, and had undertaken to remain neutral. Frederic, who was holding back his troops for the defence of his own States, because he supposed, not without reason, that, Milan once conquered, he would again have to defend Naples, sent him no help, no men, no money, in spite of his promises. Ludovico Sforza was therefore reduced to his own proper forces.

But as he was a man powerful in arms and clever in artifice, he did not allow himself to succumb at the first blow, and in all haste fortified Annona, Novarro, and Alessandria, sent off Cajazzo with troops to that part of the Milanese territory which borders on the states of Venice, and collected on the Po as many troops as he could. But these precautions availed him nothing against the impetuous onslaught of the French, who in a few days had taken Annona, Arezzo, Novarro, Voghiera, Castelnuovo, Ponte Corona, Tartone, and Alessandria, while Trivulce was on the march to Milan.

Seeing the rapidity of this conquest and their numerous victories, Ludovico Sforza, despairing of holding out in his capital, resolved to retire to Germany, with his children, his brother, Cardinal Ascanio Sforza, and his treasure, which had been reduced in the course of eight years from 1,500,000 to 200,000 ducats. But before he went he left Bernardino da Carte in charge of the castle of Milan. In vain did his friends warn him to distrust this man, in vain did his brother Ascanio offer to hold the fortress himself, and offer to hold it to the very last; Ludovico refused to make any change in his arrangements, and started on the 2nd of September, leaving in the citadel three thousand foot and enough provisions, ammunition, and money to sustain a siege of several months.

Two days after Ludovico’s departure, the French entered Milan. Ten days later Bernardino da Come gave up the castle before a single gun had been fired. Twenty-one days had sufficed for the French to get possession of the various towns, the capital, and all the territories of their enemy.

Louis XII received the news of this success while he was at Lyons, and he at once started for Milan, where he was received with demonstrations of joy that were really sincere. Citizens of every rank had come out three miles’ distance from the gates to receive him, and forty boys, dressed in cloth of gold and silk, marched before him singing hymns of victory composed by poets of the period, in which the king was styled their liberator and the envoy of freedom. The great joy of the Milanese people was due to the fact that friends of Louis had been spreading reports beforehand that the King of France was rich enough to abolish all taxes. And so soon as the second day from his arrival at Milan the conqueror made some slight reduction, granted important favours to certain Milanese gentlemen, and bestowed the town of Vigavano on Trivulce as a reward for his swift and glorious campaign. But Caesar Borgia, who had followed Louis XII with a view to playing his part in the great hunting-ground of Italy, scarcely waited for him to attain his end when he claimed the fulfilment of his promise, which the king with his accustomed loyalty hastened to perform. He instantly put at the disposal of Caesar three hundred lances under the command of Yves d’Alegre, and four thousand Swiss under the command of the bailiff of Dijon, as a help in his work of reducing the Vicars of the Church.

We must now explain to our readers who these new personages were whom we introduce upon the scene by the above name.

During the eternal wars of Guelphs and Ghibelines and the long exile of the popes at Avignon, most of the towns and fortresses of the Romagna had been usurped by petty tyrants, who for the most part hard received from the Empire the investiture of their new possessions; but ever since German influence had retired beyond the Alps, and the popes had again made Rome the centre of the Christian world, all the small princes, robbed of their original protector, had rallied round the papal see, and received at the hands of the pope a new investiture, and now they paid annual dues, for which they received the particular title of duke, count, or lord, and the general name of Vicar of the Church.

It had been no difficult matter for Alexander, scrupulously examining the actions and behaviour of these gentlemen during the seven years that had elapsed since he was exalted to St. Peter's throne, to find in the conduct of each one of them something that could be called an infraction of the treaty made between vassals and suzerain; accordingly he brought forward his complaints at a tribunal established for the purpose, and obtained sentence from the judges to the effect that the vicars of the Church, having failed to fulfil the conditions of their investiture, were despoiled of their domains, which would again become the property of the Holy See. As the pope was now dealing with men against whom it was easier to pass a sentence than to get it carried out, he had nominated as captain-general the new Duke of Valentinois, who was commissioned to recover the territories for his own benefit. The lords in question were the Malatesti of Rimini, the Sforza of Pesaro, the Manfredi of Faenza, the Riarii of Imola and Farli, the Variani of Camerina, the Montefeltri of Urbino, and the Caetani of Sermoneta.

But the Duke of Valentinois, eager to keep as warm as possible his great friendship with his ally and relative Louis XII, was, as we know, staying with him at Milan so long as he remained there, where, after a month's occupation, the king retraced his steps to his own capital, the Duke of Valentinois ordered his men-at-arms and his Swiss to await him between Parma and Modena, and departed posthaste for Rome, to explain his plans to his father viva voce and to receive his final instructions. When he arrived, he found that the fortune of his sister Lucrezia had been greatly augmented in his absence, not from the side of her husband Alfonso, whose future was very uncertain now in consequence of Louis's successes, which had caused some coolness between Alfonso and the pope, but from her father's side, upon whom at this time she exercised an influence mare astonishing than ever. The pope had declared Lucrezia Borgia of Aragon life-governor of Spoleto and its duchy, with all emoluments, rights, and revenues accruing thereunto. This had so greatly increased her power and improved her position, that in these days she never showed herself in public without a company of two hundred horses ridden by the most illustrious ladies and noblest knights of Rome. Moreover, as the twofold affection of her father was a secret to nobody, the first prelates in the Church, the frequenters of the Vatican, the friends of His Holiness, were all her most humble servants; cardinals gave her their hands when she stepped from her litter or her horse, archbishops disputed the honour of celebrating mass in her private apartments.

But Lucrezia had been obliged to quit Rome in order to take possession of her new estates; and as her father could not spend much time away from his beloved daughter, he resolved to take into his hands the town of Nepi, which on a former occasion, as the reader will doubtless remember, he had bestowed on Ascanio Sforza in exchange for his suffrage. Ascanio had naturally lost this town when he attached himself to the fortunes of the Duke of Milan, his brother; and when the pope was about to take it again, he invited his daughter Lucrezia to join him there and be present at the rejoicings held in honour of his resuming its possession.

Lucrezia's readiness in giving way to her father's wishes brought her a new gift from him: this was the town and territory of Sermoneta, which belonged to the Caetani. Of course the gift was as yet a secret, because the two owners of the seigneury, had first to be disposed of, one being Monsignore Giacomo Caetano, apostolic protonotary, the other Prospero Caetano, a young cavalier of great promise; but as both lived at Rome, and entertained no suspicion, but indeed supposed themselves to be in high favour with His Holiness, the one by virtue of his position, the other of his courage, the matter seemed to present no great difficulty. So directly after the return of Alexander to Rome, Giacomo Caetano was arrested, on what pretext we know not, was taken to the castle of Sant' Angelo, and there died shortly after, of poison: Prospero Caetano was strangled in his own house. After these two deaths, which both occurred so suddenly as to give no time for either to make a will, the pope declared that Sermoneta and all of her property appertaining to the Caetani devolved upon the apostolic chamber;

and they were sold to Lucrezia for the cum of 80,000 crowns, which her father refunded to her the day after. Though Caesar hurried to Rome, he found when he arrived that his father had been beforehand with him, and had made a beginning of his conquests.

Another fortune also had been making prodigious strides during Caesar’s stay in France, viz. the fortune of Gian Borgia, the pope’s nephew, who had been one of the most devoted friends of the Duke of Gandia up to the time of his death. It was said in Rome, and not in a whisper, that the young cardinal owed the favours heaped upon him by His Holiness less to the memory of the brother than to the protection of the sister. Both these reasons made Gian Borgia a special object of suspicion to Caesar, and it was with an inward vow that he should not enjoy his new dignities very long that the Duke of Valentinois heard that his cousin Gian had just been nominated cardinal ‘a latere’ of all the Christian world, and had quitted Rome to make a circuit through all the pontifical states with a suite of archbishops, bishops, prelates, and gentlemen, such as would have done honour to the pope himself.

Caesar had only come to Rome to get news; so he only stayed three days, and then, with all the troops His Holiness could supply, rejoined his forces on the borders of the Euza, and marched at once to Imola. This town, abandoned by its chiefs, who had retired to Forli, was forced to capitulate. Imola taken, Caesar marched straight upon Forli. There he met with a serious check; a check, moreover, which came from a woman. Caterina Sforza, widow of Girolamo and mother of Ottaviano Riario, had retired to this town, and stirred up the courage of the garrison by putting herself, her goods and her person, under their protection. Caesar saw that it was no longer a question of a sudden capture, but of a regular siege; so he began to make all his arrangements with a view to it, and placing a battery of cannon in front of the place where the walls seemed to him weakest, he ordered an uninterrupted fire, to be continued until the breach was practicable.

When he returned to the camp after giving this order, he found there Gian Borgia, who had gone to Rome from Ferrara and was unwilling to be so near Caesar without paying him a visit: he was received with effusion and apparently the greatest joy, and stayed three days; on the fourth day all the officers and members of the court were invited to a grand farewell supper, and Caesar bade farewell to his cousin, charging him with despatches for the pope, and lavishing upon him all the tokens of affection he had shown on his arrival.

Cardinal Gian Bargia posted off as soon as he left the supper-table, but on arriving at Urbino he was seized with such a sudden and strange indisposition that he was forced to stop; but after a few minutes, feeling rather better, he went an; scarcely, however, had he entered Rocca Cantrada when he again felt so extremely ill that he resolved to go no farther, and stayed a couple of days in the town. Then, as he thought he was a little better again, and as he had heard the news of the taking of Forli and also that Caterina Sforza had been taken prisoner while she was making an attempt to retire into the castle, he resolved to go back to Caesar and congratulate him on his victory; but at Fassambrane he was forced to stop a third time, although he had given up his carriage for a litter. This was his last halt: the same day he sought his bed, never to rise from it again; three days later he was dead.

His body was taken to Rome and buried without any ceremony in the church of Santa Maria del Populo, where lay awaiting him the corpse of his friend the Duke of Gandia; and there was now no more talk of the young cardinal, high as his rank had been, than if he had never existed. Thus in gloom and silence passed away all those who were swept to destruction by the ambition of that terrible trio, Alexander, Lucrezia, and Caesar.

Almost at the same time Rome was terrified by another murder. Don Giovanni Cerviglione, a gentleman by birth and a brave soldier, captain of the pope’s men-at-arms, was attacked one evening by the sbirri, as he was on his way home from supping with Dan Elisio Pignatelli. One of the men asked his name, and as he pronounced it, seeing that there was no mistake, plunged a dagger into his breast, while a second man with a back stroke of his sword cut off his head, which lay actually at his feet before his body had time to fall.

The governor of Rome lodged a complaint against this assassination with the pope; but quickly perceiving, by the way his intimation was received, that he would have done better to say nothing, he stopped the inquiries he had started, so that neither of the murderers was ever arrested. But the rumour was circulated that Caesar, in the short stay he had made at Rome, had had a rendezvous with Cerviglione’s wife, who was a Borgia by birth, and that her husband when he heard of this infringement of conjugal duty had been angry enough to threaten her and her lover, too: the threat had reached Caesar’s ears, who, making a long arm of Michelotto, had, himself at Forli, struck down Cerviglione in the streets of Rome.

Another unexpected death followed so quickly on that of Don Giovanni Cerviglione that it could not but be attributed to the same originator, if not to the same cause. Monsignore Agnelli of Mantua, archbishop of Cosenza, clerk of the chamber and vice-legate of Viterbo, having fallen into disgrace with His Holiness, how it is not known, was poisoned at his own table, at which he had passed a good part of the night in cheerful conversation with three or four guests, the poison gliding meanwhile through his veins; then going to bed in perfect health, he was found dead in the morning. His possessions were at once divided into three portions: the land and houses were given to the Duke of Valentinois; the bishopric went to Francesco Borgia, son of Calixtus III; and the office of clerk of the chamber was sold for 5000 ducats to Ventura Bonnassai, a merchant of Siena, who produced this sum for Alexander, and settled down the very same day in the Vatican.

This last death served the purpose of determining a point of law hitherto uncertain: as Monsignore Agnelli’s natural heirs had made some difficulty about being disinherited, Alexander issued a brief; whereby he took from every cardinal and every priest the right of making a will, and declared that all their property should henceforth devolve upon him.

But Caesar was stopped short in the midst of his victories. Thanks to the 200,000 ducats that yet remained in his treasury, Ludovico Sforza had levied 500 men-at-arms from Burgundy and 8000 Swiss infantry, with whom he had entered Lombardy. So Trivulce, to face this enemy, had been compelled to call back Yves d’Alegre and the troops that Louis XII had lent to Caesar; consequently Caesar, leaving behind a body of pontifical soldiery as garrison at Forli and Imola, betook himself with the rest of his force to Rome.

It was Alexander’s wish that his entry should be a triumph; so when he learned that the quartermasters of the army were only a few leagues from the town, he sent out runners to invite the royal ambassadors, the cardinals, the prelates, the Roman barons, and municipal dignitaries to make procession with all their suite to meet the Duke of Valentinois; and as it always happens that the pride of those who command is surpassed by the baseness of those who obey, the orders were not only fulfilled to the letter, but beyond it.

The entry of Caesar took place on the 26th of February, 1500. Although this was the great Jubilee year, the festivals of the carnival began none the less for that, and were conducted in a manner even more extravagant and licentious than usual; and the conqueror after the first day prepared a new display of ostentation, which he concealed under the veil of a masquerade. As he was pleased to identify himself with the glory, genius, and fortune of the great man whose name he bore, he resolved on a representation of the triumph of Julius Caesar, to be given on the Piazzi di Navona, the ordinary place for holding the carnival fetes. The next day, therefore, he and his retinue started from that square, and traversed all the streets of Rome, wearing classical costumes and riding in antique cars, on one of which Caesar stood, clad in the robe of an emperor of old, his brow crowned with a golden laurel wreath, surrounded by lictors, soldiers, and ensign-bearers, who carried banners whereon was inscribed the motto, ‘Aut Caesar aut nihil’.

Finally, an the fourth Sunday, in Lent, the pope conferred upon Caesar the dignity he had so long coveted, and appointed him general and gonfaloniere of the Holy Church.

In the meanwhile Sforza had crossed the Alps and passed the Lake of Como, amid acclamations of joy from his former subjects, who had quickly lost the enthusiasm that the French army and Louis’s promises had inspired. These demonstrations were so noisy at Milan, that Trivulce, judging that there was no safety for a French garrison in remaining there, made his way to Navarra. Experience proved that he was not deceived; for scarcely had the Milanese observed his preparations for departure when a suppressed excitement began to spread through the town, and soon the streets were filled with armed men. This murmuring crowd had to be passed through, sword in hand and lance in rest; and scarcely had the French got outside the gates when the mob rushed out after the army into the country, pursuing them with shouts and hooting as far as the banks of the Tesino. Trivulce left 400 lances at Novarra as well as the 3000 Swiss that Yves d’Alegre had brought from the Romagna, and directed his course with the rest of the army towards Mortara, where he stopped at last to await the help he had demanded from the King of France. Behind him Cardinal Ascanio and Ludovico entered Milan amid the acclamations of the whole town.

Neither of them lost any time, and wishing to profit by this enthusiasm, Ascanio undertook to besiege the castle of Milan while Ludovico should cross the Tesino and attack Novarra.

There besiegers and besieged were sons of the same nation; for Yves d’Alegre had scarcely as many as 300 French with him, and Ludovico 500 Italians. In fact, for the last sixteen years the Swiss had been practically the only infantry in Europe, and all the Powers came, purse in hand, to draw from the mighty reservoir of their mountains. The consequence was that these rude children of William Tell, put up to auction by the nations, and carried away from the humble, hardy life of a mountain people into cities of wealth and pleasure, had lost, not their ancient courage, but that rigidity of principle for which they had been distinguished before their intercourse with other nations. From being models of honour and good faith they had become a kind of marketable ware, always ready for sale to the highest bidder. The French were the first to experience this venality, which later-on proved so fatal to Ludovico Sforza.

Now the Swiss in the garrison at Novarra had been in communication with their compatriots in the vanguard of the ducal army, and when they found that they, who as a fact were unaware that Ludavico’s treasure was nearly exhausted, were better fed as well as better paid than themselves, they offered to give up the town and go over to the Milanese, if they could be certain of the same pay. Ludovico, as we may well suppose, closed with this bargain. The whole of Novarra was given up to him except the citadel, which was defended by Frenchmen: thus the enemy’s army was recruited by 3000 men. Then Ludovico made the mistake of stopping to besiege the castle instead of marching on to Mortara with the new reinforcement. The result of this was that Louis XII, to whom runners had been sent by Trivulce, understanding his perilous position, hastened the departure of the French gendarmerie who were already collected to cross into Italy, sent off the bailiff of Dijon to levy new Swiss forces, and ordered Cardinal Amboise, his prime minister, to cross the Alps and take up a position at Asti, to hurry on the work of collecting the troops. There the cardinal found a nest-egg of 3000 men. La Trimouille added 1500 lances and 6000 French infantry; finally, the bailiff of Dijon arrived with 10,000 Swiss; so that, counting the troops which Trivulce had at Mortara, Louis XII found himself master on the other side of the Alps of the first army any French king had ever led out to battle. Soon, by good marching, and before Ludovico knew the strength or even the existence of this army, it took up a position between Novarra and Milan, cutting off all communication between the duke and his capital. He was therefore compelled, in spite of his inferior numbers, to prepare for a pitched battle.

But it so happened that just when the preparations for a decisive engagement were being made on both sides, the Swiss Diet, learning that the sons of Helvetia were on the paint of cutting one another's throats, sent orders to all the Swiss serving in either army to break their engagements and return to the fatherland. But during the two months that had passed between the surrender of Novarra and the arrival of the French army before the town, there had been a very great change in the face of things, because Ludovico Sforza's treasure was now exhausted. New confabulations had gone on between the outposts, and this time, thanks to the money sent by Louis XII, it was the Swiss in the service of France who were found to be the better fed and better paid. The worthy Helvetians, since they no longer fought far their own liberty, knew the value of their blood too well to allow a single drop of it to be spilled for less than its weight in gold: the result was that, as they had, betrayed Yves d'Alegre, they resolved to betray Ludovico Sforza too; and while the recruits brought in by the bailiff of Dijon were standing firmly by the French flag, careless of the order of the Diet, Ludovico's auxiliaries declared that in fighting against their Swiss brethren they would be acting in disobedience to the Diet, and would risk capital punishment in the end — a danger that nothing would induce them to incur unless they immediately received the arrears of their pay. The duke, who a spent the last ducat he had with him, and was entirely cut off from his capital, knew that he could not get money till he had fought his way through to it, and therefore invited the Swiss to make one last effort, promising them not only the pay that was in arrears but a double hire. But unluckily the fulfilment of this promise was dependent on the doubtful issue of a battle, and the Swiss replied that they had far too much respect for their country to disobey its decree, and that they loved their brothers far too well to consent to shed their blood without reward; and therefore Sforza would do well not to count upon them, since indeed the very next day they proposed to return to their homes. The duke then saw that all was lost, but he made a last appeal to their honour, adjuring them at least to ensure his personal safety by making it a condition of capitulation. But they replied that even if a condition of such a kind, would not make capitulation impossible, it would certainly deprive them of advantages which they had aright to expect, and on which they counted as indemnification for the arrears of their pay. They pretended, however, at last that they were touched by the prayers of the man whose orders they had obeyed so long, and offered to conceal him dressed in their clothes among their ranks. This proposition was barely plausible; far Sforza was short and, by this time an old man, and he could not possibly escape recognition in the midst of an army where the oldest was not past thirty and the shortest not less than five foot six. Still, this was his last chance, and he did not reject it at once, but tried to modify it so that it might help him in his straits. His plan was to disguise himself as a Franciscan monk, so that mounted an a shabby horse he might pass for their chaplain; the others, Galeazzo di San Severing, who commanded under him, and his two brothers, were all tall men, so, adopting the dress of common soldiers, they hoped they might escape detection in the Swiss ranks.

Scarcely were these plans settled when the duke heard that the capitulation was signed between Trivulce and the Swiss, who had made no stipulation in favour of him and his generals. They were to go over the next day with arms and baggage right into the French army; so the last hope of the wretched Ludovico and his generals must needs be in their disguise. And so it was. San Severino and his brothers took their place in the ranks of the infantry, and Sforza took his among the baggage, clad in a monk’s frock, with the hood pulled over his eyes.

The army marched off; but the Swiss, who had first trafficked in their blood, now trafficked in their honour. The French were warned of the disguise of Sforza and his generals, and thus they were all four recognised, and Sforza was arrested by Trimouille himself. It is said that the price paid for this treason was the town of Bellinzona; far it then belonged to the French, and when the Swiss returned to their mountains and took possession of it, Louis XII took no steps to get it back again.

When Ascanio Sforza, who, as we know, had stayed at Milan, learned the news of this cowardly desertion, he supposed that his cause was lost and that it would be the best plan for him to fly, before he found himself a prisoner in the hand’s of his brother’s old subjects: such a change of face on the people’s part would be very natural, and they might propose perhaps to purchase their own pardon at the price of his liberty; so he fled by night with the chief nobles of the Ghibelline party, taking the road to Piacenza, an his way to the kingdom of Naples. But when he arrived at Rivolta, he remembered that there was living in that town an old friend of his childhood, by name Conrad Lando, whom he had helped to much wealth in his days of power; and as Ascanio and his companions were extremely; tired, he resolved to beg his hospitality for a single night. Conrad received them with every sign of joy, putting all his house and servants at their disposal. But scarcely had they retired to bed when he sent a runner to Piacenza, to inform Carlo Orsini, at that time commanding the Venetian garrison, that he was prepared to deliver up Cardinal Ascanio and the chief men of the Milanese army. Carlo Orsini did not care to resign to another so important an expedition, and mounting hurriedly with twenty-five men, he first surrounded Conrads house, and then entered sword in hand the chamber wherein Ascanio and his companions lay, and being surprised in the middle of their sleep, they yielded without resistance. The prisoners were taken to Venice, but Louis XII claimed them, and they were given up. Thus the King of France found himself master of Ludovico Sforza and of Ascania, of a legitimate nephew of the great Francesco Sforza named Hermes, of two bastards named Alessandro and Cortino, and of Francesco, son of the unhappy Gian Galeazza who had been poisoned by his uncle.

Louis XII, wishing to make an end of the whole family at a blow, forced Francesco to enter a cloister, shut up Cardinal Ascanio in the tower of Baurges, threw into prison Alessandro, Cartino, and Hermes, and finally, after transferring the wretched Ludovico from the fortress of Pierre-Eucise to Lys-Saint-George he relegated him for good and all to the castle of Loches, where he lived for ten years in solitude and utter destitution, and there died, cursing the day when the idea first came into his head of enticing the French into Italy.

The news of the catastrophe of Ludovica and his family caused the greatest joy at Rome, for, while the French were consolidating their power in Milanese territory, the Holy See was gaining ground in the Romagna, where no further opposition was offered to Caesar’s conquest. So the runners who brought the news were rewarded with valuable presents, and it was published throughout the whole town of Rome to the sound of the trumpet and drum. The war-cry of Louis, France, France, and that of the Orsini, Orso, Orso, rang through all the streets, which in the evening were illuminated, as though Constantinople or Jerusalem had been taken. And the pope gave the people fetes and fireworks, without troubling his head the least in the world either about its being Holy Week, or because the Jubilee had attracted more than 200,000 people to Rome; the temporal interests of his family seeming to him far more important than the spiritual interests of his subjects.

CHAPTER XI

One thing alone was wanting to assure the success of the vast projects that the pope and his son were founding upon the friendship of Louis and an alliance with him — that is, — money. But Alexander was not the man to be troubled about a paltry worry of that kind; true, the sale of benefices was by now exhausted, the ordinary and extraordinary taxes had already been collected for the whole year, and the prospect of inheritance from cardinals and priests was a poor thing now that the richest of them had been poisoned; but Alexander had other means at his disposal, which were none the less efficacious because they were less often used.

The first he employed was to spread a, report that the Turks were threatening an invasion of Christendom, and that he knew for a positive fact that before the end of the summer Bajazet would land two considerable armies, one in Romagna, the other in Calabria; he therefore published two bulls, one to levy tithes of all ecclesiastical revenues in Europe of whatever nature they might be, the other to force the Jews into paying an equivalent sum: both bulls contained the severest sentences of excommunication against those who refused to submit, or attempted opposition.

The second plan was the selling of indulgences, a thing which had never been done before: these indulgences affected the people who had been prevented by reasons of health or business from coming to Rome for the Jubilee; the journey by this expedient was rendered unnecessary, and sins were pardoned for a third of what it would have cost, and just as completely as if the faithful had fulfilled every condition of the pilgrimage. For gathering in this tax a veritable army of collectors was instituted, a certain Ludovico delta Torre at their head. The sum that Alexander brought into the pontifical treasury is incalculable, and same idea of it may be gathered from the fact that 799,000 livres in gold was paid in from the territory of Venice alone.

But as the Turks did as a fact make some sort of demonstration from the Hungarian side, and the Venetians began to fear that they might be coming in their direction, they asked for help from the pope, who gave orders that at twelve o’clock in the day in all his States an Ave Maria should be said, to pray God to avert the danger which was threatening the most serene republic. This was the only help the Venetians got from His Holiness in exchange for the 799,000 livres in gold that he had got from them.

But it seemed as though God wished to show His strange vicar on earth that He was angered by the mockery of sacred things, and on the Eve of St. Peter's Day, just as the pope was passing the Capanile on his way to the tribune of benedictions, a enormous piece of iron broke off and fell at his feet; and then, as though one warning had not been enough, on the next day, St. Peter's, when the pope happened to be in one of the rooms of his ordinary dwelling with Cardinal Capuano and Monsignare Poto, his private chamberlain, he saw through the open windows that a very black cloud was coming up. Foreseeing a thunderstorm, he ordered the cardinal and the chamberlain to shut the windows. He had not been mistaken; for even as they were obeying his command, there came up such a furious gust of wind that the highest chimney of the Vatican was overturned, just as a tree is rooted up, and was dashed upon the roof, breaking it in; smashing the upper flooring, it fell into the very room where they were. Terrified by the noise of this catastrophe, which made the whole palace tremble, the cardinal and Monsignore Poto turned round, and seeing the room full of dust and debris, sprang out upon the parapet and shouted to the guards at the gate, "The pope is dead, the pope is dead!" At this cry, the guards ran up and discovered three persons lying in the rubbish on the floor, one dead and the other two dying. The dead man was a gentleman of Siena ailed Lorenzo Chigi, and the dying were two resident officials of the Vatican. They had been walking across the floor above, and had been flung down with the debris. But Alexander was not to be found; and as he gave no answer, though they kept on calling to him, the belief that he had perished was confirmed, and very soon spread about the town. But he had only fainted, and at the end of a certain time he began to come to himself, and moaned, whereupon he was discovered, dazed with the blow, and injured, though not seriously, in several parts of his body. He had been saved by little short of a miracle: a beam had broken in half and had left each of its two ends in the side walls; and one of these had formed a sort of roof aver the pontifical throne; the pope, who was sitting there at the time, was protected by this overarching beam, and had received only a few contusions.

The two contradictory reports of the sudden death and the miraculous preservation of the pope spread rapidly through Rome; and the Duke of Valentinois, terrified at the thought of what a change might be wrought in his own fortunes by any slight accident to the Holy Father, hurried to the Vatican, unable to assure himself by anything less than the evidence of his own eyes. Alexander desired to render public thanks to Heaven for the protection that had been granted him; and on the very same day was carried to the church of Santa Maria del Popalo, escorted by a numerous procession of prelates and men-at arms, his pontifical seat borne by two valets, two equerries, and two grooms. In this church were buried the Duke of Gandia and Gian Borgia, and perhaps Alexander was drawn thither by same relics of devotion, or may be by the recollection of his love for his former mistress, Rosa Vanazza, whose image, in the guise of the Madonna, was exposed for the veneration of the faithful in a chapel on the left of the high altar. Stopping before this altar, the pope offered to the church the gift of a magnificent chalice in which were three hundred gold crowns, which the Cardinal of Siena poured out into a silver paten before the eyes of all, much to the gratification of the pontifical vanity.

But before he left Rome to complete the conquest of the Romagna, the Duke of Valentinois had been reflecting that the marriage, once so ardently desired, between Lucrezia and Alfonso had been quite useless to himself and his father. There was more than this to be considered: Louis XII’s rest in Lombardy was only a halt, and Milan was evidently but the stage before Naples. It was very possible that Louis was annoyed about the marriage which converted his enemy’s nephew into the son-in-law of his ally. Whereas, if Alfonso were dead, Lucrezia would be the position to marry some powerful lord of Ferrara or Brescia, who would be able to help his brother-in-law in the conquest of Romagna. Alfonso was now not only useless but dangerous, which to anyone with the character of the Borgias perhaps seemed worse, the death of Alfonso was resolved upon. But Lucrezia’s husband, who had understand for a long time past what danger he incurred by living near his terrible father-in-law, had retired to Naples. Since, however, neither Alexander nor Caesar had changed in their perpetual dissimulation towards him, he was beginning to lose his fear, when he received an invitation from the pope and his son to take part in a bull-fight which was to be held in the Spanish fashion in honour of the duke before his departure: In the present precarious position of Naples it would not have been good policy far Alfonso to afford Alexander any sort of pretext for a rupture, so he could not refuse without a motive, and betook himself to Rome. It was thought of no use to consult Lucrezia in this affair, for she had two or three times displayed an absurd attachment for her husband, and they left her undisturbed in her government of Spoleto.

Alfonso was received by the pope and the duke with every demonstration of sincere friendship, and rooms in the Vatican were assigned to him that he had inhabited before with Lucrezia, in that part of the building which is known as the Torre Nuova.

Great lists were prepared on the Piazza of St. Peter’s; the streets about it were barricaded, and the windows of the surrounding houses served as boxes for the spectators. The pope and his court took their places on the balconies of the Vatican.

The fete was started by professional toreadors: after they had exhibited their strength and skill, Alfonso and Caesar in their turn descended to the arena, and to offer a proof of their mutual kindness, settled that the bull which pursued Caesar should be killed by Alfonso, and the bull that pursued Alfonso by Caesar.

Then Caesar remained alone an horseback within the lists, Alfonso going out by an improvised door which was kept ajar, in order that he might go back on the instant if he judged that his presence was necessary. At the same time, from the opposite side of the lists the bull was introduced, and was at the same moment pierced all over with darts and arrows, some of them containing explosives, which took fire, and irritated the bull to such a paint that he rolled about with pain, and then got up in a fury, and perceiving a man on horseback, rushed instantly upon him. It was now, in this narrow arena, pursued by his swift enemy, that Caesar displayed all that skill which made him one of the finest horsemen of the period. Still, clever as he was, he could not have remained safe long in that restricted area from an adversary against whom he had no other resource than flight, had not Alfonso appeared suddenly, just when the bull was beginning to gain upon him, waving a red cloak in his left hand, and holding in his right a long delicate Aragon sword. It was high time: the bull was only a few paces distant from Caesar, and the risk he was running appeared so imminent that a woman’s scream was heard from one of the windows. But at the sight of a man on foot the bull stopped short, and judging that he would do better business with the new enemy than the old one, he turned upon him instead. For a moment he stood motionless, roaring, kicking up the dust with his hind feet, and lashing his sides with his tail. Then he rushed upon Alfonso, his eyes all bloodshot, his horns tearing up the ground. Alfonso awaited him with a tranquil air; then, when he was only three paces away, he made a bound to one sides and presented instead of his body his sword, which disappeared at once to the hilt; the bull, checked in the middle of his onslaught, stopped one instant motionless and trembling, then fell upon his knees, uttered one dull roar, and lying down on the very spot where his course had been checked, breathed his last without moving a single step forward.

Applause resounded an all sides, so rapid and clever had been the blow. Caesar had remained on horseback, seeking to discover the fair spectator who had given so lively a proof of her interest in him, without troubling himself about what was going on: his search had not been unrewarded, far he had recognized one of the maids of honour to Elizabeth, Duchess of Urbino, who was betrothed to Gian Battista Carraciualo, captain-general of the republic of Venice.

It was now Alfonso’s turn to run from the bull, Caesar’s to fight him: the young men changed parts, and when four mules had reluctantly dragged the dead bull from the arena, and the valets and other servants of His Holiness had scattered sand over the places that were stained with blood, Alfonso mounted a magnificent Andalusian steed of Arab origin, light as the wind of Sahara that had wedded with his mother, while Caesar, dismounting, retired in his turn, to reappear at the moment when Alfonso should be meeting the same danger from which he had just now rescued him.

Then a second bull was introduced upon the scene, excited in the same manner with steeled darts and flaming arrows. Like his predecessor, when he perceived a man on horseback he rushed upon him, and then began a marvellous race, in which it was impossible to see, so quickly did they fly over the ground, whether the horse was pursuing the bull or the bull the horse. But after five or six rounds, the bull began to gain upon the son of Araby, for all his speed, and it was plain to see who fled and who pursued; in another moment there was only the length of two lances between them, and then suddenly Caesar appeared, armed with one of those long two handed swords which the French are accustomed to use, and just when the bull, almost close upon Don Alfonso, came in front of Caesar he brandished the sword, which flashed like lightning, and cut off his head, while his body, impelled by the speed of the run, fell to the ground ten paces farther on. This blow was so unexpected, and had been performed with such dexterity, that it was received not with mere clapping but with wild enthusiasm and frantic outcry. Caesar, apparently remembering nothing else in his hour of triumph but the scream that had been caused by his former danger, picked up the bull’s head, and, giving it to one of his equerries, ordered him to lay it as an act of homage at the feet of the fair Venetian who had bestowed upon him so lively a sign of interest. This fete, besides affording a triumph to each of the young men, had another end as well; it was meant to prove to the populace that perfect goodwill existed between the two, since each had saved the life of the other. The result was that, if any accident should happen to Caesar, nobody would dream of accusing Alfanso; and also if any accident should happen to Alfonso, nobody would dream, of accusing Caesar.

There was a supper at the Vatican. Alfonso made an elegant toilet, and about ten o’clock at night prepared to go from the quarters he inhabited into those where the pope lived; but the door which separated the two courts of the building was shut, and knock as he would, no one came to open it. Alfonso then thought that it was a simple matter for him to go round by the Piazza of St. Peter’s; so he went out unaccompanied through one of the garden gates of the Vatican and made his way across the gloomy streets which led to the stairway which gave on the piazza. But scarcely had he set his foot on the first step when he was attacked by a band of armed men. Alfonso would have drawn his sword; but before it was out of the scabbard he had received two blows from a halberd, one on his head, the other on his shoulder; he was stabbed in the side, and wounded both in the leg and in the temple. Struck down by these five blows, he lost his footing and fell to the ground unconscious; his assassins, supposing he was dead, at once remounted the stairway, and found on the piazza forty horsemen waiting for them: by them they were calmly escorted from the city by the Porta Portesa. Alfonso was found at the point of death, but not actually dead, by some passers-by, some of whom recognised him, and instantly conveyed the news of his assassination to the Vatican, while the others, lifting the wounded man in their arms, carried him to his quarters in the Torre Nuova. The pope and Caesar, who learned this news just as they were sitting down to table, showed great distress, and leaving their companions, at once went to see Alfonso, to be quite certain whether his wounds were fatal or not; and an the next morning, to divert any suspicion that might be turned towards themselves, they arrested Alfonso’s maternal uncle, Francesco Gazella, who had come to Rome in his nephew's company. Gazella was found guilty on the evidence of false witnesses, and was consequently beheaded.

But they had only accomplished half of what they wanted. By some means, fair or foul, suspicion had been sufficiently diverted from the true assassins; but Alfonso was not dead, and, thanks to the strength of his constitution and the skill of his doctors, who had taken the lamentations of the pope and Caesar quite seriously, and thought to please them by curing Alexander's son-in-law, the wounded man was making progress towards convalescence: news arrived at the same time that Lucrezia had heard of her husband's accident, and was starting to come and nurse him herself. There was no time to lose, and Caesar summoned Michelotto.

"The same night," says Burcardus, "Don Alfonso, who would not die of his wounds, was found strangled in his bed."

The funeral took place the next day with a ceremony not unbecoming in itself, though, unsuited to his high rank. Dan Francesca Bargia, Archbishop of Cosenza, acted as chief mourner at St. Peter's, where the body was buried in the chapel of Santa Maria delle Febbre.

Lucrezia arrived the same evening: she knew her father and brother too well to be put on the wrong scent; and although, immediately after Alfonso's death, the Duke of Valentinois had arrested the doctors, the surgeons, and a poor deformed wretch who had been acting as valet, she knew perfectly well from what quarter the blow had proceeded. In fear, therefore, that the manifestation of a grief she felt this time too well might alienate the confidence of her father and brother, she retired to Nepi with her whole household, her whole court, and more than six hundred cavaliers, there to spend the period of her mourning.

This important family business was now settled, and Lucrezia was again a widow, and in consequence ready to be utilized in the pope's new political machinations. Caesar only stayed at Rome to receive the ambassadors from France and Venice; but as their arrival was somewhat delayed, and consider able inroads had been made upon the pope's treasury by the recent festivities, the creation of twelve new cardinals was arranged: this scheme was to have two effects, viz., to bring 600,000 ducats into the pontifical chest, each hat having been priced at 50,000 ducats, and to assure the pope of a constant majority in the sacred council.

The ambassadors at last arrived: the first was M. de Villeneuve, the same who had come before to see the Duke of Valentinois in the name of France.

Just as he entered Rome, he met on the road a masked man, who, without removing his domino, expressed the joy he felt at his arrival. This man was Caesar himself, who did not wish to be recognised, and who took his departure after a short conference without uncovering his face. M. de Villeneuve then entered the city after him, and at the Porta del Populo found the ambassadors of the various Powers, and among them those of Spain and Naples, whose sovereigns were not yet, it is true, in declared hostility to France, though there was already some coolness. The last-named, fearing to compromise themselves, merely said to their colleague of France, by way of complimentary address, "Sir, you are welcome"; whereupon the master of the ceremonies, surprised at the brevity of the greeting, asked if they had nothing else to say. When they replied that they had not, M. de Villeneuve turned his back upon them, remarking that those who had nothing to say required no answer; he then took his place between the Archbishop of Reggia, governor of Rome, and the Archbishop of Ragusa, and made his way to the palace of the Holy Apostles, which had been, got ready far his reception.

Same days later, Maria Giorgi, ambassador extraordinary of Venice, made his arrival. He was commissioned not only to arrange the business on hand with the pope, but also to convey to Alexander and Caesar the title of Venetian nobles, and to inform them that their names were inscribed in the Golden Book — a favour that both of them had long coveted, less far the empty honour's sake than for the new influence that this title might confer. Then the pope went on to bestow the twelve cardinals' hats that had been sold. The new princes of the Church were Don Diego de Mendoza, archbishop of Seville; Jacques, archbishop of Oristagny, the Pope's vicar-general; Thomas, archbishop of Strigania; Piero, archbishop of Reggio, governor of Rome; Francesco Bargia, archbishop of Cosenza, treasurer-general; Gian, archbishop of Salerno, vice-chamberlain; Luigi Bargia, archbishop of Valencia, secretary to His Holiness, and brother of the Gian Borgia whom Caesar had poisoned; Antonio, bishop of Coma; Gian Battista Ferraro, bishop of Modem; Amedee d'Albret, son of the King of Navarre, brother-in-law of the Duke of Valentinois; and Marco Cornaro, a Venetian noble, in whose person His Holiness rendered back to the most serene republic the favour he had just received.

Then, as there was nothing further to detain the Duke of Valentinois at Rome, he only waited to effect a loan from a rich banker named Agostino

Chigi, brother of the Lorenzo Chigi who had perished on the day when the pope had been nearly killed by the fall of a chimney, and departed far the Romagna, accompanied by Vitellozzo Vitelli, Gian Paolo Baglione, and Jacopo di Santa Croce, at that time his friends, but later on his victims.

His first enterprise was against Pesaro: this was the polite attention of a brother-in-law, and Gian Sforza very well knew what would be its consequences; for instead of attempting to defend his possessions by taking up arms, or to venture an negotiations, unwilling moreover to expose the fair lands he had ruled so long to the vengeance of an irritated foe, he begged his subjects, to preserve their former affection towards himself, in the hope of better days to come; and he fled into Dalmatia. Malatesta, lord of Rimini, followed his example; thus the Duke of Valentinois entered both these towns without striking a single blow. Caesar left a sufficient garrison behind him, and marched on to Faenza.

But there the face of things was changed: Faenza at that time was under the rule of Astor Manfredi, a brave and handsome young man of eighteen, who, relying on the love of his subjects towards his family, had resolved on defending himself to the uttermost, although he had been forsaken by the Bentivagli, his near relatives, and by his allies, the Venetian and Florentines, who had not dared to send him any aid because of the affection felt towards Caesar by the King of France. Accordingly, when he perceived that the Duke of Valentinois was marching against him, he assembled in hot haste all those of his vassals who were capable of bearing arms, together with the few foreign soldiers who were willing to come into his pay, and collecting victual and ammunition, he took up his position with them inside the town.

By these defensive preparations Caesar was not greatly, disconcerted; he commanded a magnificent army, composed of the finest troops of France and Italy; led by such men as Paolo and Giulio Orsini, Vitellozzo Vitelli and Paolo Baglione, not to steak of himself — that is to say, by the first captains of the period. So, after he had reconnoitred, he at once began the siege, pitching his camp between the two rivers, Amana and Marziano, placing his artillery on the side which faces on Forli, at which point the besieged party had erected a powerful bastion.

At the end of a few days busy with entrenchments, the breach became practicable, and the Duke of Valentinois ordered an assault, and gave the example to his soldiers by being the first to march against the enemy. But in spite of his courage and that of his captains beside him, Astor Manfredi made so good a defence that the besiegers were repulsed with great loss of men, while one of their bravest leaders, Honario Savella; was left behind in the trenches.

But Faenza, in spite of the courage and devotion of her defenders, could not have held out long against so formidable an army, had not winter come to her aid. Surprised by the rigour of the season, with no houses for protection and no trees for fuel, as the peasants had destroyed both beforehand, the Duke of Valentinois was forced to raise the siege and take up his winter quarters in the neighbouring towns, in order to be quite ready for a return next spring; for Caesar could not forgive the insult of being held in check by a little town which had enjoyed a long time of peace, was governed by a mere boy, and deprived of all outside aid, and had sworn to take his revenge. He therefore broke up his army into three sections, sent one-third to Imola, the second to Forli, and himself took the third to Cesena, a third-rate town, which was thus suddenly transformed into a city of pleasure and luxury.

Indeed, for Caesar’s active spirit there must needs be no cessation of warfare or festivities. So, when war was interrupted, fetes began, as magnificent and as exciting as he knew how to make them: the days were passed in games and displays of horsemanship, the nights in dancing and gallantry; for the loveliest women of the Romagna — and that is to say of the whole world had come hither to make a seraglio for the victor which might have been envied by the Sultan of Egypt or the Emperor of Constantinople.

While the Duke of Valentinois was making one of his excursions in the neighbourhood of the town with his retinue of flattering nobles and titled courtesans, who were always about him, he noticed a cortege an the Rimini road so numerous that it must surely indicate the approach of someone of importance. Caesar, soon perceiving that the principal person was a woman, approached, and recognised the very same lady-in-waiting to the Duchess of Urbino who, on the day of the bull-fight, had screamed when Caesar was all but touched by the infuriated beast. At this time she was betrothed, as we mentioned, to Gian Carracciuola, general of the Venetians. Elizabeth of Gonzaga, her protectress and godmother, was now sending her with a suitable retinue to Venice, where the marriage was to take place.

Caesar had already been struck by the beauty of this young girl, when at Rome; but when he saw her again she appeared more lovely than on the first occasion, so he resolved on the instant that he would keep this fair flower of love for himself: having often before reproached himself for his indifference in passing her by. Therefore he saluted her as an old acquaintance, inquired whether she were staying any time at Cesena, and ascertained that she was only passing through, travelling by long stages, as she was awaited with much impatience, and that she would spend the coming night at Forli. This was all that Caesar cared to knew; he summoned Michelotto, and in a low voice said a few wards to him, which were heard by no one else.

The cortege only made a halt at the neighbouring town, as the fair bride had said, and started at once for Forli, although the day was already far advanced; but scarcely had a league been revered when a troop of horsemen from Cesena overtook and surrounded them. Although the soldiers in the escort were far from being in sufficient force, they were eager to defend their general’s bride; but soon same fell dead, and ethers, terrified, took to flight; and when the lady came dawn from her litter to try to escape, the chief seized her in his arms and set her in front of him on his horse; then, ordering his men to return to Cesena without him, he put his horse to the gallop in a cross direction, and as the shades of evening were now beginning to fall, he soon disappeared into the darkness.

Carracciuolo learned the news through one of the fugitives, who declared that he had recognised among the ravishers the Duke of Valentinois’ soldiers. At first he thought his ears had deceived him, so hard was it to believe this terrible intelligence; but it was repeated, and he stood for one instant motionless, and, as it were, thunderstruck; then suddenly, with a cry of vengeance, he threw off his stupor and dashed away to the ducal palace, where sat the Doge Barberigo and the Council of Ten; unannounced, he rushed into their midst, the very moment after they had heard of Caesar’s outrage.

“Most serene lords,” he cried, “I am come to bid you farewell, for I am resolved to sacrifice my life to my private vengeance, though indeed I had hoped to devote it to the service of the republic. I have been wounded in the soul’s noblest part — in my honour. The dearest thing I possessed, my wife, has been stolen from me, and the thief is the most treacherous, the most impious, the most infamous of men, it is Valentinois! My lords, I beg you will not be offended if I speak thus of a man whose boast it is to be a member of your noble ranks and to enjoy your protection: it is not so; he lies, and his loose and criminal life has made him unworthy of such honours, even as he is unworthy of the life whereof my sword shall deprive him. In truth, his very birth was a sacrilege; he is a fratricide, an usurper of the goods of other men, an oppressor of the innocent, and a highway assassin; he is a man who will violate every law, even, the law of hospitality respected by the veriest barbarian, a man who will do violence to a virgin who is passing through his own country, where she had every right to expect from him not only the consideration due to her sex and condition, but also that which is due to the most serene republic, whose condottiere I am, and which is insulted in my person and in the dishonouring of my bride; this man, I say, merits indeed to die by another hand than mine. Yet, since he who ought to punish him is not for him a prince and judge, but only a father quite as guilty as the son, I myself will seek him out, and I will sacrifice my own life, not only in avenging my own injury and the blood of so many innocent beings, but also in promoting the welfare of the most serene republic, on which it is his ambition to trample when he has accomplished the ruin of the other princes of Italy."

The doge and the senators, who, as we said, were already apprised of the event that had brought Carracciuolo before them, listened with great interest and profound indignation; for they, as he told them, were themselves insulted in the person of their general: they all swore, on their honour, that if he would put the matter in their hands, and not yield to his rage, which could only work his own undoing, either his bride should be rendered up to him without a smirch upon her bridal veil, or else a punishment should be dealt out proportioned to the affront. And without delay, as a proof of the energy wherewith the noble tribunal would take action in the affair, Luigi Manenti, secretary to the Ten, was sent to Imola, where the duke was reported to be, that he might explain to him the great displeasure with which the most serene republic viewed the outrage perpetrated upon their candottiere. At the same time the Council of Ten and the doge sought out the French ambassador, entreating him to join with them and repair in person with Manenti to the Duke of Valentinois, and summon him, in the name of King Louis XII, immediately to send back to Venice the lady he had carried off.

The two messengers arrived at Imola, where they found Caesar, who listened to their complaint with every mark of utter astonishment, denying that he had been in any way connected with the crime, nay, authorising Manenti and the French ambassador to pursue the culprits and promising that he would himself have the most active search carried on. The duke appeared to act in such complete good faith that the envoys were for the moment hoodwinked, and themselves undertook a search of the most careful nature. They accordingly repaired to the exact spot and began to procure information. On the highroad there had been found dead and wounded. A man had been seen going by at a gallop, carrying a woman in distress on his saddle; he had soon left the beaten track and plunged across country. A peasant coming home from working in the fields had seen him appear and vanish again like a shadow, taking the direction of a lonely house. An old woman declared that she had seen him go into this house. But the next night the house was gone, as though by enchantment, and the ploughshare had passed over where it stood; so that none could say, what had become of her whom they sought, far those who had dwelt in the house, and even the house itself, were there no longer.

Manenti and the French ambassador returned to Venice, and related what the duke had said, what they had done, and how all search had been in vain. No one doubted that Caesar was the culprit, but no one could prove it. So the most serene republic, which could not, considering their war with the Turks, be embroiled with the pope, forbade Caracciuala to take any sort of private vengeance, and so the talk grew gradually less, and at last the occurrence was no more mentioned.

But the pleasures of the winter had not diverted Caesar’s mind from his plans about Faenza. Scarcely did the spring season allow him to go into the country than he marched anew upon the town, camped opposite the castle, and making a new breach, ordered a general assault, himself going up first of all; but in spite of the courage he personally displayed, and the able seconding of his soldiers, they were repulsed by Astor, who, at the head of his men, defended the breach, while even the women, at the top of the rampart, rolled down stones and trunks of trees upon the besiegers. After an hour’s struggle man to man, Caesar was forced to retire, leaving two thousand men in the trenches about the town, and among the two thousand one of his bravest condottieri, Valentino Farnese.

Then, seeing that neither excommunications nor assaults could help him, Caesar converted the siege into a blockade: all the roads leading to Faenza were cut off, all communications stopped; and further, as various signs of revolt had been remarked at Cesena, a governor was installed there whose powerful will was well known to Caesar, Ramiro d'Orco, with powers of life and death over the inhabitants; he then waited quietly before Faenza, till hunger should drive out the citizens from those walls they defended with such vehement enthusiasm. At the end of a month, during which the people of Faenza had suffered all the horrors of famine, delegates came out to parley with Caesar with a view to capitulation. Caesar, who still had plenty to do in the Romagna, was less hard to satisfy than might have been expected, and the town yielded an condition that he should not touch either the persons or the belongings of the inhabitants, that Astor Manfredi, the youthful ruler, should have the privilege of retiring whenever he pleased, and should enjoy the revenue of his patrimony wherever he might be.

The conditions were faithfully kept so far as the inhabitants were concerned; but Caesar, when he had seen Astor, whom he did not know before, was seized by a strange passion for this beautiful youth, who was like a woman: he kept him by his side in his own army, showing him honours befitting a young prince, and evincing before the eyes of all the strongest affection for him: one day Astor disappeared, just as Caracciuolo's bride had disappeared, and no one knew what had become of him; Caesar himself appeared very uneasy, saying that he had no doubt made his escape somewhere, and in order to give credence to this story, he sent out couriers to seek him in all directions.

A year after this double disappearance, there was picked up in the Tiber, a little below the Castle Sant' Angelo, the body of a beautiful young woman, her hands bound together behind her back, and also the corpse of a handsome youth with the bowstring he had been strangled with tied round his neck. The girl was Caracciuolo's bride, the young man was Astor.

During the last year both had been the slaves of Caesar's pleasures; now, tired of them, he had had them thrown into the Tiber.

The capture of Faenza had brought Caesar the title of Duke of Romagna, which was first bestowed on him by the pope in full consistory, and afterwards ratified by the King of Hungary, the republic of Venice, and the Kings of Castile and Portugal. The news of the ratification arrived at Rome on the eve of the day on which the people are accustomed to keep the anniversary of the foundation of the Eternal City; this fete, which went back to the days of Pomponius Laetus, acquired a new splendour in their eyes from the joyful events that had just happened to their sovereign: as a sign of joy cannon were fired all day long; in the evening there were illuminations and bonfires, and during part of the night the Prince of Squillace, with the chief lords of the Roman nobility, marched about the streets, bearing torches, and exclaiming, “Long live Alexander! Long live Caesar! Long live the Borgias! Long live the Orsini! Long live the Duke of Romagna!”

CHAPTER XII

Caesar’s ambition was only fed by victories: scarcely was he master of Faenza before, excited by the Mariscotti, old enemies of the Bentivoglio family, he cast his eyes upon Bologna; but Gian di Bentivoglio, whose ancestors had possessed this town from time immemorial, had not only made all preparations necessary for a long resistance, but he had also put himself under the protection of France; so, scarcely had he learned that Caesar was crossing the frontier of the Bolognese territory with his army, than he sent a courier to Louis XII to claim the fulfilment of his promise. Louis kept it with his accustomed good faith; and when Caesar arrived before Bologna, he received an intimation from the King of France that he was not to enter on any undertaking against his ally Bentivoglio; Caesar, not being the man to have his plans upset for nothing, made conditions for his retreat, to which Bentivoglio consented, only too happy to be quit of him at this price: the conditions were the cession of Castello Bolognese, a fortress between Imola and Faenza, the payment of a tribute of 9000 ducats, and the keeping for his service of a hundred men-at-arms and two thousand infantry. In exchange for these favours, Caesar confided to Bentivoglio that his visit had been due to the counsels of the Mariscotti; then, reinforced by his new ally’s contingent, he took the road for Tuscany. But he was scarcely out of sight when Bentivoglio shut the gates of Bologna, and commanded his son Hermes to assassinate with his own hand Agamemnon Mariscotti, the head of the family, and ordered the massacre of four-and-thirty of his near relatives, brothers, sons, daughters, and nephews, and two hundred other of his kindred and friends. The butchery was carried out by the noblest youths of Bologna; whom Bentivoglio forced to bathe their hands in this blood, so that he might attach them to himself through their fear of reprisals.

Caesar’s plans with regard to Florence were now no longer a mystery: since the month of January he had sent to Pisa ten or twelve hundred men under the Command of Regniero della Sassetta and Piero di Gamba Corti, and as soon as the conquest of the Romagna was complete, he had further despatched Oliverotto di Fermo with new detachments. His own army he had reinforced, as we have seen, by a hundred men-at-arms and two thousand infantry; he had just been joined by Vitellozzo Vitelli, lord of Citta, di Castello, and by the Orsini, who had brought him another two or three thousand men; so, without counting the troops sent to Pisa, he had under his control seven hundred men-at-arms and five thousand infantry.

Still, in spite of this formidable company, he entered Tuscany declaring that his intentions were only pacific, protesting that he only desired to pass through the territories of the republic on his way to Rome, and offering to pay in ready money for any victual his army might require. But when he had passed the defiles of the mountains and arrived at Barberino, feeling that the town was in his power and nothing could now hinder his approach, he began to put a price on the friendship he had at first offered freely, and to impose his own conditions instead of accepting those of others. These were that Piero dei Medici, kinsman and ally of the Orsini, should be reinstated in his ancient power; that six Florentine citizens, to be chosen by Vitellozzo, should be put into his hands that they might by their death expiate that of Paolo Vitelli, unjustly executed by the Florentines; that the Signoria should engage to give no aid to the lord of Piombino, whom Caesar intended to dispossess of his estates without delay; and further, that he himself should be taken into the service of the republic, for a pay proportionate to his deserts. But just as Caesar had reached this point in his negotiations with Florence, he received orders from Louis XII to get ready, so soon as he conveniently could, to follow him with his army and help in the conquest of Naples, which he was at last in a position to undertake. Caesar dared not break his word to so powerful an ally; he therefore replied that he was at the king’s orders, and as the Florentines were not aware that he was quitting them on compulsion, he sold his retreat for the sum of 36,000 ducats per annum, in exchange for which sum he was to hold three hundred men-at-arms always in readiness to go to the aid of the republic at her earliest call and in any circumstances of need.

But, hurried as he was, Caesar still hoped that he might find time to conquer the territory of Piombino as he went by, and take the capital by a single vigorous stroke; so he made his entry into the lands of Jacopo IV of Appiano. The latter, he found, however, had been beforehand with him, and, to rob him of all resource, had laid waste his own country, burned his fodder, felled his trees, torn down his vines, and destroyed a few fountains that produced salubrious waters. This did not hinder Caesar from seizing in the space of a few days Severeto, Scarlino, the isle of Elba, and La Pianosa;

but he was obliged to stop short at the castle, which opposed a serious resistance. As Louis XII’s army was continuing its way towards Rome, and he received a fresh order to join it, he took his departure the next day, leaving behind him, Vitellozzo and Gian Paolo Bagliani to prosecute the siege in his absence.

Louis XII was this time advancing upon Naples, not with the incautious ardour of Charles VIII, but, on the contrary, with that prudence and circumspection which characterised him. Besides his alliance with Florence and Rome, he had also signed a secret treaty with Ferdinand the Catholic, who had similar pretensions, through the house of Duras, to the throne of Naples to those Louis himself had through the house of Anjou. By this treaty the two kings were sharing their conquests beforehand: Louis would be master of Naples, of the town of Lavore and the Abruzzi, and would bear the title of King of Naples and Jerusalem; Ferdinand reserved for his own share Apulia and Calabria, with the title of Duke of these provinces; both were to receive the investiture from the pope and to hold them of him. This partition was all the more likely to be made, in fact, because Frederic, supposing all the time that Ferdinand was his good and faithful friend, would open the gates of his towns, only to receive into his fortresses conquerors and masters instead of allies. All this perhaps was not very loyal conduct on the part of a king who had so long desired and had just now received the surname of Catholic, but it mattered little to Louis, who profited by treasonable acts he did not have to share.

The French army, which the Duke of Valentinois had just joined, consisted of 1000 lances, 4000 Swiss, and 6000 Gascons and adventurers; further, Philip of Rabenstein was bringing by sea six Breton and Provencal vessels, and three Genoese caracks, carrying 6500 invaders.

Against this mighty host the King of Naples had only 700 men-at-arms, 600 light horse, and 6000 infantry under the command of the Colonna, whom he had taken into his pay after they were exiled by the pope from the States of the Church; but he was counting on Gonsalvo of Cordova, who was to join him at Gaeta, and to whom he had confidingly opened all his fortresses in Calabria.

But the feeling of safety inspired by Frederic’s faithless ally was not destined to endure long: on their arrival at Rome, the French and Spanish ambassadors presented to the pope the treaty signed at Grenada on the 11th of November, 1500, between Louis XII and Ferdinand the Catholic, a treaty which up, to that time had been secret. Alexander, foreseeing the probable future, had, by the death of Alfonso, loosened all the bonds that attached him to the house of Aragon, and then began by making some difficulty about it. It was demonstrated that the arrangement had only been undertaken to provide the Christian princes with another weapon for attacking the Ottoman Empire, and before this consideration, one may readily suppose, all the pope’s scruples vanished; on the 25th of June, therefore, it was decided to call a consistory which was to declare Frederic deposed from the throne of Naples. When Frederic heard all at once that the French army had arrived at Rome, that his ally Ferdinand had deceived him, and that Alexander had pronounced the sentence of his downfall, he understood that all was lost; but he did not wish it to be said that he had abandoned his kingdom without even attempting to save it. So he charged his two new condottieri, Fabrizio Calonna and Ranuzia di Marciano, to check the French before Capua with 300 men-at-arms, some light horse, and 3000 infantry; in person he occupied Aversa with another division of his army, while Prospero Colonna was sent to defend Naples with the rest, and make a stand against the Spaniards on the side of Calabria.

These dispositions were scarcely made when d’Aubigny, having passed the Volturno, approached to lay siege to Capua, and invested the town on both sides of the river. Scarcely were the French encamped before the ramparts than they began to set up their batteries, which were soon in play, much to the terror of the besieged, who, poor creatures, were almost all strangers to the town, and had fled thither from every side, expecting to find protection beneath the walls. So, although bravely repulsed by Fabrizio Colonna, the French, from the moment of their first assault, inspired so great and blind a terror that everyone began to talk of opening the gates, and it was only with great difficulty that Calonna made this multitude understand that at least they ought to reap some benefit from the check the besiegers had received and obtain good terms of capitulation. When he had brought them round to his view, he sent out to demand a parley with d’Aubigny, and a conference was fixed for the next day but one, in which they were to treat of the surrender of the town.

But this was not Caesar Borgia’s idea at all: he had stayed behind to confer with the pope, and had joined the French army with some of his troops on the very day on which the conference had been arranged for two days later: and a capitulation of any nature would rob him of his share of the booty and the promise of such pleasure as would come from the capture of a city so rich and populous as Capua. So he opened up negotiations on his own account with a captain who was on guard at one of the gates such negotiations, made with cunning supported by bribery, proved as usual more prompt and efficacious than any others. At the very moment when Fabrizio Colonna in a fortified outpost was discussing the conditions of capitulation with the French captains, suddenly great cries of distress were heard. These were caused by Borgia, who without a word to anyone had entered the town with his faithful army from Romagna, and was beginning to cut the throats of the garrison, which had naturally somewhat relaxed their vigilance in the belief that the capitulation was all but signed. The French, when they saw that the town was half taken, rushed on the gates with such impetuosity that the besieged did not even attempt to defend themselves any longer, and forced their way into Capua by three separate sides: nothing more could be done then to stop the issue. Butchery and pillage had begun, and the work of destruction must needs be completed: in vain did Fabrizio Colonna, Ranuzio di Marciano, and Don Ugo di Cardona attempt to make head against the French and Spaniards with such men as they could get together. Fabrizia Calonna and Don Ugo were made prisoners; Ranuzia, wounded by an arrow, fell into the hands of the Duke of Valentinois; seven thousand inhabitants were massacred in the streets among them the traitor who had given up the gate; the churches were pillaged, the convents of nuns forced open; and then might be seen the spectacle of some of these holy virgins casting themselves into pits or into the river to escape the soldiers. Three hundred of the noblest ladies of the town took refuge in a tower. The Duke of Valentinois broke in the doors, chased out for himself forty of the most beautiful, and handed over the rest to his army.

The pillage continued for three days.

Capua once taken, Frederic saw that it was useless any longer to attempt defence. So he shut himself up in Castel Nuovo and gave permission to Gaeta and to Naples to treat with the conqueror. Gaeta bought immunity from pillage with 60,000 ducats; and Naples with the surrender of the castle. This surrender was made to d’Aubigny by Frederic himself, an condition that he should be allowed to take to the island of Ischia his money, jewels, and furniture, and there remain with his family for six months secure from all hostile attack. The terms of this capitulation were faithfully adhered to on both sides: d’Aubigny entered Naples, and Frederic retired to Ischia.

Thus, by a last terrible blow, never to rise again, fell this branch of the house of Aragon, which had now reigned for sixty-five years. Frederic, its head, demanded and obtained a safe-conduct to pass into France, where Louis XII gave him the duchy of Anjou and 30,000 ducats a year, an condition that he should never quit the kingdom; and there, in fact, he died, an the 9th of September 1504. His eldest son, Dan Ferdinand, Duke of Calabria, retired to Spain, where he was permitted to marry twice, but each time with a woman who was known to be barren; and there he died in 1550. Alfonso, the second son, who had followed his father to France, died, it is said, of poison, at Grenoble, at the age of twenty-two; lastly Caesar, the third son, died at Ferrara, before he had attained his eighteenth birthday.

Frederic’s daughter Charlotte married in France Nicholas, Count of Laval, governor and admiral of Brittany; a daughter was born of this marriage, Anne de Laval, who married Francois de la Trimauille. Through her those rights were transmitted to the house of La Trimouille which were used later on as a claim upon the kingdom of the Two Sicilies.

The capture of Naples gave the Duke of Valentinois his liberty again; so he left the French army, after he had received fresh assurances on his own account of the king’s friendliness, and returned to the siege of Piombino, which he had been forced to interrupt. During this interval Alexander had been visiting the scenes of his son’s conquests, and traversing all the Romagna with Lucrezia, who was now consoled for her husband’s death, and had never before enjoyed quite so much favour with His Holiness; so, when she returned to Rome. She no longer had separate rooms from him. The result of this recrudescence of affection was the appearance of two pontifical bulls, converting the towns of Nepi and Sermoneta into duchies: one was bestowed on Gian Bargia, an illegitimate child of the pope, who was not the son of either of his mistresses, Rosa Vanozza or Giulia Farnese, the other an Don Roderigo of Aragon, son of Lucrezia and Alfonso: the lands of the Colonna were in appanage to the two duchies.

But Alexander was dreaming of yet another addition to his fortune; this was to came from a marriage between Lucrezia and Don Alfonso d’Este, son of Duke Hercules of Ferrara, in favour of which alliance Louis XII had negotiated.

His Holiness was now having a run of good fortune, and he learned on the same day that Piombino was taken and that Duke Hercules had given the King of France his assent to the marriage. Both of these pieces of news were good for Alexander, but the one could not compare in importance with the other; and the intimation that Lucrezia was to marry the heir presumptive to the duchy of Ferrara was received with a joy so great that it smacked of the humble beginnings of the Borgian house. The Duke of Valentinois was invited to return to Rome, to take his share in the family rejoicing, and on the day when the news was made public the governor of St. Angelo received orders that cannon should be fired every quarter of an hour from noon to midnight. At two o'clock, Lucrezia, attired as a fiancee, and accompanied by her two brothers, the Dukes of Valentinois and Squillace, issued from the Vatican, followed by all the nobility of Rome, and proceeded to the church of the Madonna del Papalo, where the Duke of Gandia and Cardinal Gian Borgia were buried, to render thanks for this new favour accorded to her house by God; and in the evening, accompanied by the same cavalcade, which shone the more brightly under the torchlight and brilliant illuminations, she made procession through the whale town, greeted by cries of "Long live Pope Alexander VI! Lang live the Duchess of Ferrara!" which were shouted aloud by heralds clad in cloth of gold.

The next day an announcement was made in the town that a racecourse for women was opened between the castle of Sant' Angelo and the Piazza of St. Peter's; that on every third day there would be a bull-fight in the Spanish fashion; and that from the end of the present month, which was October, until the first day of Lent, masquerades would be permitted in the streets of Rome.

Such was the nature of the fetes outside; the programme of those going on within the Vatican was not presented to the people; for by the account of Bucciardo, an eye-witness, this is what happened —

"On the last Sunday of the month of October, fifty courtesans supped in the apostolic palace in the Duke of Valentinois' rooms, and after supper danced with the equerries and servants, first wearing their usual garments, afterwards in dazzling draperies; when supper was over, the table was removed, candlesticks were set on the floor in a symmetrical pattern, and a great quantity of chestnuts was scattered on the ground: these the fifty women skilfully picked up, running about gracefully, in and out between the burning lights; the pope, the Duke of Valentinois, and his sister

Lucrezia, who were looking on at this spectacle from a gallery, encouraged the most agile and industrious with their applause, and they received prizes of embroidered garters, velvet boots, golden caps, and laces; then new diversions took the place of these.”

We humbly ask forgiveness of our readers, and especially of our lady readers; but though we have found words to describe the first part of the spectacle, we have sought them in vain for the second; suffice it to say that just as there had been prizes for feats of adroitness, others were given now to the dancers who were most daring and brazen.

Some days after this strange night, which calls to mind the Roman evenings in the days of Tiberius, Nero, and Heliogabalus, Lucrezia, clad in a robe of golden brocade, her train carried by young girls dressed in white and crowned with roses, issued from her palace to the sound of trumpets and clarions, and made her way over carpets that were laid down in the streets through which she had to pass. Accompanied by the noblest cavaliers and the loveliest women in Rome, she betook herself to the Vatican, where in the Pauline hall the pope awaited her, with the Duke of Valentinois, Don Ferdinand, acting as proxy for Duke Alfonso, and his cousin, Cardinal d’Este. The pope sat on one side of the table, while the envoys from Ferrara stood on the other: into their midst came Lucrezia, and Don Ferdinand placed on her finger the nuptial ring; this ceremony over, Cardinal d’Este approached and presented to the bride four magnificent rings set with precious stones; then a casket was placed on the table, richly inlaid with ivory, whence the cardinal drew forth a great many trinkets, chains, necklaces of pearls and diamonds, of workmanship as costly as their material; these he also begged Lucrezia to accept, before she received those the bridegroom was hoping to offer himself, which would be more worthy of her. Lucrezia showed the utmost delight in accepting these gifts; then she retired into the next room, leaning on the pope’s arm, and followed by the ladies of her suite, leaving the Duke of Valentinois to do the honours of the Vatican to the men. That evening the guests met again, and spent half the night in dancing, while a magnificent display of fireworks lighted up the Piazza of San Paolo.

The ceremony of betrothal over, the pope and the Duke busied themselves with making preparations for the departure. The pope, who wished the journey to be made with a great degree of splendour, sent in his daughter’s company, in addition to the two brothers-in-law and the gentlemen in their suite, the Senate of Rome and all the lords who, by virtue of their wealth, could display most magnificence in their costumes and liveries. Among this brilliant throng might be seen Olivero and Ramiro Mattei, sons of Piero Mattel, chancellor of the town, and a daughter of the pope whose mother was not Rosa Vanozza; besides these, the pope nominated in consistory Francesco Borgia, Cardinal of Sosenza, legate a latere, to accompany his daughter to the frontiers of the Ecclesiastical States.

Also the Duke of Valentinois sent out messengers into all the cities of Romagna to order that Lucrezia should be received as sovereign lady and mistress: grand preparations were at once set on foot for the fulfilment of his orders. But the messengers reported that they greatly feared that there would be some grumbling at Cesena, where it will be remembered that Caesar had left Ramiro d'Orco as governor with plenary powers, to calm the agitation of the town. Now Ramiro d'Orco had accomplished his task so well that there was nothing more to fear in the way of rebellion; for one-sixth of the inhabitants had perished on the scaffold, and the result of this situation was that it was improbable that the same demonstrations of joy could be expected from a town plunged in mourning that were looked for from Imala, Faenza, and Pesaro. The Duke of Valentinais averted this inconvenience in the prompt and efficacious fashion characteristic of him alone. One morning the inhabitants of Cesena awoke to find a scaffold set up in the square, and upon it the four quarters of a man, his head, severed from the trunk, stuck up on the end of a pike.

This man was Ramiro d'Orco.

No one ever knew by whose hands the scaffold had been raised by night, nor by what executioners the terrible deed had been carried out; but when the Florentine Republic sent to ask Macchiavelli, their ambassador at Cesena, what he thought of it, he replied:

“MAGNIFICENT LORDS,-I can tell you nothing concerning the execution of Ramiro d'Orco, except that Caesar Borgia is the prince who best knows how to make and unmake men according to their deserts. NICCOLO MACCHIAVELLI”

The Duke of Valentinois was not disappointed, and the future Duchess of Ferrara was admirably received in every town along her route, and particularly at Cesena.

While Lucrezia was on her way to Ferrara to meet her fourth husband, Alexander and the Duke of Valentinois resolved to make a progress in the region of their last conquest, the duchy of Piombino. The apparent object of this journey was that the new subjects might take their oath to Caesar, and the real object was to form an arsenal in Jacopo d'Appiano's capital within reach of Tuscany, a plan which neither the pope nor his son had ever seriously abandoned. The two accordingly started from the port of Corneto with six ships, accompanied by a great number of cardinals and prelates, and arrived the same evening at Piombina. The pontifical court made a stay there of several days, partly with a view of making the duke known to the inhabitants, and also in order to be present at certain ecclesiastical functions, of which the most important was a service held on the third Sunday in Lent, in which the Cardinal of Cosenza sang a mass and the pope officiated in state with the duke and the cardinals. After these solemn functions the customary pleasures followed, and the pope summoned the prettiest girls of the country and ordered them to dance their national dances before him.

Following on these dances came feasts of unheard of magnificence, during which the pope in the sight of all men completely ignored Lent and did not fast. The abject of all these fetes was to scatter abroad a great deal of money, and so to make the Duke of Valentinois popular, while poor Jacopo d'Appiano was forgotten.

When they left Piombino, the pope and his son visited the island of Elba, where they only stayed long enough to visit the old fortifications and issue orders for the building of new ones.

Then the illustrious travellers embarked on their return journey to Rome; but scarcely had they put out to sea when the weather became adverse, and the pope not wishing to put in at Porto Ferrajo, they remained five days on board, though they had only two days' provisions. During the last three days the pope lived on fried fish that were caught under great difficulties because of the heavy weather. At last they arrived in sight of Corneto, and there the duke, who was not on the same vessel as the pope, seeing that his ship could not get in, had a boat put out, and so was taken ashore. The pope was obliged to continue on his way towards Pontercole, where at last he arrived, after encountering so violent a tempest that all who were with him were utterly subdued either by sickness or by the terror of death. The pope alone did not show one instant's fear, but remained on the bridge during the storm, sitting on his arm-chair, invoking the name of Jesus and making the sign of the cross. At last his ship entered the roads of Pontercole, where he landed, and after sending to Corneto to fetch horses, he rejoined the duke, who was there awaiting him. They then returned by slow stages, by way of Civita Vecchia and Palo, and reached Rome after an absence of a month. Almost at the same time d’Albret arrived in quest of his cardinal’s hat. He was accompanied by two princes of the house of Navarre, who were received with not only those honours which beseemed their rank, but also as brothers-in-law to whom the, duke was eager to show in what spirit he was contracting this alliance.

CHAPTER XIII

The time had now come for the Duke of Valentinois to continue the pursuit of his conquests. So, since on the 1st of May in the preceding year the pope had pronounced sentence of forfeiture in full consistory against Julius Caesar of Varano, as punishment for the murder of his brother Rudolph and for the harbouring of the pope’s enemies, and he had accordingly been mulcted of his fief of Camerino, which was to be handed over to the apostolic chamber, Caesar left Rome to put the sentence in execution. Consequently, when he arrived on the frontiers of Perugia, which belonged to his lieutenant, Gian Paolo Baglioni, he sent Oliverotta da Fermo and Orsini of Gravina to lay waste the March of Camerino, at the same time petitioning Guido d’Ubaldo di Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino, to lend his soldiers and artillery to help him in this enterprise. This the unlucky Duke of Urbino, who enjoyed the best possible relations with the pope, and who had no reason for distrusting Caesar, did not dare refuse. But on the very same day that the Duke of Urbina’s troops started for Camerino, Caesar’s troops entered the duchy of Urbino, and took possession of Cagli, one of the four towns of the little State. The Duke of Urbino knew what awaited him if he tried to resist, and fled incontinently, disguised as a peasant; thus in less than eight days Caesar was master of his whole duchy, except the fortresses of Maiolo and San Leone.

The Duke of Valentinois forthwith returned to Camerino, where the inhabitants still held out, encouraged by the presence of Julius Caesar di Varano, their lord, and his two sons, Venantio and Hannibal; the eldest son, Gian Maria, had been sent by his father to Venice.

The presence of Caesar was the occasion of parleying between the besiegers and besieged. A capitulation was arranged whereby Varano engaged to give up the town, on condition that he and his sons were allowed to retire safe and sound, taking with them their furniture, treasure, and carriages. But this was by no means Caesar’s intention; so, profiting by the relaxation in vigilance that had naturally come about in the garrison when the news of the capitulation had been announced, he surprised the town in the night preceding the surrender, and seized Caesar di Varano and his two sons, who were strangled a short time after, the father at La Pergola and the sons at Pesaro, by Don Michele Correglio, who, though he had left the position of sbirro for that of a captain, every now and then returned to his first business.

Meanwhile Vitellozzo Vitelli, who had assumed the title of General of the Church, and had under him 800 men-at-arms and 3,000 infantry, was following the secret instructions that he had received from Caesar by word of mouth, and was carrying forward that system of invasion which was to encircle Florence in a network of iron, and in the end make her defence an impossibility. A worthy pupil of his master, in whose school he had learned to use in turn the cunning of a fox and the strength of a lion, he had established an understanding between himself and certain young gentlemen of Arezzo to get that town delivered into his hands. But the plot had been discovered by Guglielma dei Pazzi, commissary of the Florentine Republic, and he had arrested two of the conspirators, whereupon the others, who were much more numerous than was supposed; had instantly dispersed about the town summoning the citizens to arms. All the republican faction, who saw in any sort of revolution the means of subjugating Florence, joined their party, set the captives at liberty, and seized Guglielmo; then proclaiming the establishment of the ancient constitution, they besieged the citadel, whither Cosimo dei Pazzi, Bishop of Arezzo, the son of Guglielmo, had fled for refuge; he, finding himself invested on every side, sent a messenger in hot haste to Florence to ask for help.

Unfortunately for the cardinal, Vitellozzo’s troops were nearer to the besiegers than were the soldiers of the most serene republic to the besieged, and instead of help — the whole army of the enemy came down upon him. This army was under the command of Vitellozzo, of Gian Paolo Baglioni, and of Fabio Orsino, and with them were the two Medici, ever ready to go wherever there was a league against Florence, and ever ready at the command of Borgia, on any conditions whatever, to re-enter the town whence they had been banished. The next day more help in the form of money and artillery arrived, sent by Pandolfo Petrucci, and on the 18th of June the citadel of Arezzo, which had received no news from Florence, was obliged to surrender.

Vitellozzo left the men of Arezzo to look after their town themselves, leaving also Fabio Orsina to garrison the citadel with a thousand men. Then, profiting by the terror that had been spread throughout all this part of Italy by the successive captures of the duchy of Urbino, of Camerino, and of Arezzo, he marched upon Monte San Severino, Castiglione, Aretino, Cortone, and the other towns of the valley of Chiana, which submitted one after the other almost without a struggle. When he was only ten or twelve leagues from Florence, and dared not an his own account attempt anything against her, he made known the state of affairs to the Duke of Valentinois. He, fancying the hour had came at last far striking the blow so long delayed, started off at once to deliver his answer in person to his faithful lieutenants.

But the Florentines, though they had sent no help to Guglielmo dei Pazzi, had demanded aid from Chaumont dumbest, governor of the Milanese, an behalf of Louis XII, not only explaining the danger they themselves were in but also Caesar’s ambitious projects, namely that after first overcoming the small principalities and then the states of the second order, he had now, it seemed, reached such a height of pride that he would attack the King of France himself. The news from Naples was disquieting; serious differences had already occurred between the Count of Armagnac and Gonzalva di Cordova, and Louis might any day need Florence, whom he had always found loyal and faithful. He therefore resolved to check Caesar’s progress, and not only sent him orders to advance no further step forwards, but also sent off, to give effect to his injunction, the captain Imbaut with 400 lances. The Duke of Valentinais on the frontier of Tuscany received a copy of the treaty signed between the republic and the King of France, a treaty in which the king engaged to help his ally against any enemy whatsoever, and at the same moment the formal prohibition from Louis to advance any further. Caesar also learned that beside the 400 lances with the captain Imbaut, which were on the road to Florence, Louis XII had as soon as he reached Asti sent off to Parma Louis de la Trimouille and 200 men-at-arms, 3000 Swiss, and a considerable train of artillery. In these two movements combined he saw hostile intentions towards himself, and turning right about face with his usual agility, he profited by the fact that he had given nothing but verbal instructions to all his lieutenants, and wrote a furious letter to Vitellozzo, reproaching him for compromising his master with a view to his own private interest, and ordering the instant surrender to the Florentines of the towns and fortresses he had taken, threatening to march down with his own troops and take them if he hesitated for a moment.

As soon as this letter was written, Caesar departed for Milan, where Louis XII had just arrived, bringing with him proof positive that he had been calumniated in the evacuation of the conquered towns. He also was entrusted with the pope’s mission to renew for another eighteen months the title of legate ‘a latere’ in France to Cardinal dumbest, the friend rather than the minister of Louis XII. Thus, thanks to the public proof of his innocence and the private use of his influence, Caesar soon made his peace with the King of France.

But this was not all. It was in the nature of Caesar’s genius to divert an impending calamity that threatened his destruction so as to come out of it better than before, and he suddenly saw the advantage he might take from the pretended disobedience of his lieutenants. Already he had been disturbed now and again by their growing power, and coveted their towns, now he thought the hour had perhaps came for suppressing them also, and in the usurpation of their private possessions striking a blow at Florence, who always escaped him at the very moment when he thought to take her. It was indeed an annoying thing to have these fortresses and towns displaying another banner than his own in the midst of the beautiful Romagna which he desired far his own kingdom. For Vitellozzo possessed Citta di Castello, Bentivoglio Bologna, Gian Paolo Baglioni was in command of Perugia, Oliverotto had just taken Fermo, and Pandolfo Petrucci was lord of Siena; it was high time that all these returned: into his own hands. The lieutenants of the Duke of Valentinois, like Alexander’s, were becoming too powerful, and Borgia must inherit from them, unless he were willing to let them become his own heirs. He obtained from Louis XII three hundred lances wherewith to march against them. As soon as Vitellozzo Vitelli received Caesar’s letter he perceived that he was being sacrificed to the fear that the King of France inspired; but he was not one of those victims who suffer their throats to be cut in the expiation of a mistake: he was a buffalo of Romagna who opposed his horns to the knife of the butcher; besides, he had the example of Varano and the Manfredi before him, and, death for death, he preferred to perish in arms.

So Vitellozzo convoked at Maggione all whose lives or lands were threatened by this new reversal of Caesar’s policy. These were Paolo Orsino, Gian Paolo Baglioni, Hermes Bentivoglio, representing his father Gian, Antonio di Venafro, the envoy of Pandolfo Petrucci, Olivertoxo da Fermo, and the Duke of Urbino: the first six had everything to lose, and the last had already lost everything.

A treaty of alliance was signed between the confederates: they engaged to resist whether he attacked them severally or all together.

Caesar learned the existence of this league by its first effects: the Duke of Urbino, who was adored by his subjects, had come with a handful of soldiers to the fortress of San Leone, and it had yielded at once. In less than a week towns and fortresses followed this example, and all the duchy was once more in the hands of the Duke of Urbino.

At the same time, each member of the confederacy openly proclaimed his revolt against the common enemy, and took up a hostile attitude.

Caesar was at Imola, awaiting the French troops, but with scarcely any men; so that Bentivoglio, who held part of the country, and the Duke of Urbino, who had just reconquered the rest of it, could probably have either taken him or forced him to fly and quit the Romagna, had they marched against him; all the more since the two men on whom he counted, viz., Don Ugo di Cardona, who had entered his service after Capua was taken, and Michelotto had mistaken his intention, and were all at once separated from him. He had really ordered them to fall back upon Rimini, and bring 200 light horse and 500 infantry of which they had the command; but, unaware of the urgency of his situation, at the very moment when they were attempting to surprise La Pergola and Fossombrone, they were surrounded by Orsino of Gravina and Vitellozzo. Ugo di Cardona and Michelotto defended themselves like lions; but in spite of their utmost efforts their little band was cut to pieces, and Ugo di Cardona taken prisoner, while Michelotto only escaped the same fate by lying down among the dead; when night came on, he escaped to Fano.

But even alone as he was, almost without troops at Imola, the confederates dared attempt nothing against Caesar, whether because of the personal fear he inspired, or because in him they respected the ally of the King of France; they contented themselves with taking the towns and fortresses in the neighbourhood. Vitellozzo had retaken the fortresses of Fossombrone, Urbino, Cagli, and Aggobbio; Orsino of Gravina had reconquered Fano and the whole province; while Gian Maria de Varano, the same who by his absence had escaped being massacred with the rest of his family, had re-entered Camerino, borne in triumph by his people. Not even all this could destroy Caesar's confidence in his own good fortune, and while he was on the one hand urging on the arrival of the French troops and calling into his pay all those gentlemen known as "broken lances," because they went about the country in parties of five or six only, and attached themselves to anyone who wanted them, he had opened up negotiations with his enemies, certain that from that very day when he should persuade them to a conference they were undone. Indeed, Caesar had the power of persuasion as a gift from heaven; and though they perfectly well knew his duplicity, they had no power of resisting, not so much his actual eloquence as that air of frank good-nature which Macchiavelli so greatly admired, and which indeed more than once deceived even him, wily politician as he was. In order to get Paolo Orsino to treat with him at Imola, Caesar sent Cardinal Borgia to the confederates as a hostage; and on this Paolo Orsino hesitated no longer, and on the 25th of October, 1502, arrived at Imola.

Caesar received him as an old friend from whom one might have been estranged a few days because of some slight passing differences; he frankly avowed that all the fault was no doubt on his side, since he had contrived to alienate men who were such loyal lords and also such brave captains; but with men of their nature, he added, an honest, honourable explanation such as he would give must put everything once more in statu quo. To prove that it was goodwill, not fear, that brought him back to them, he showed Orsino the letters from Cardinal Amboise which announced the speedy arrival of French troops; he showed him those he had collected about him, in the wish, he declared, that they might be thoroughly convinced that what he chiefly regretted in the whole matter was not so much the loss of the distinguished captains who were the very soul of his vast enterprise, as that he had led the world to believe, in a way so fatal to his own interest, that he could for a single instant fail to recognise their merit; adding that he consequently relied upon him, Paolo Orsino, whom he had always cared for most, to bring back the confederates by a peace which would be as much for the profit of all as a war was hurtful to all, and that he was ready to sign a treaty in consonance with their wishes so long as it should not prejudice his own honour.

Orsino was the man Caesar wanted: full of pride and confidence in himself, he was convinced of the truth of the old proverb that says, “A pope cannot reign eight days, if he has hath the Colonnas and the Orsini against him.” He believed, therefore, if not in Caesar’s good faith, at any rate in the necessity he must feel for making peace; accordingly he signed with him the following conventions — which only needed ratification — on the 18th of October, 1502, which we reproduce here as Macchiavelli sent them to the magnificent republic of Florence.

"Agreement between the Duke of Valentinois and the Confederates.

"Let it be known to the parties mentioned below, and to all who shall see these presents, that His Excellency the Duke of Romagna of the one part and the Orsini of the other part, together with their confederates, desiring to put an end to differences, enmities, misunderstandings, and suspicions which have arisen between them, have resolved as follows:

"There shall be between them peace and alliance true and perpetual, with a complete obliteration of wrongs and injuries which may have taken place up to this day, both parties engaging to preserve no resentment of the same; and in conformity with the aforesaid peace and union, His Excellency the Duke of Romagna shall receive into perpetual confederation, league, and alliance all the lords aforesaid; and each of them shall promise to defend the estates of all in general and of each in particular against any power that may annoy or attack them for any cause whatsoever, excepting always nevertheless the Pope Alexander VI and his Very Christian Majesty Louis XII, King of France: the lords above named promising on the other part to unite in the defence of the person and estates of His Excellency, as also those of the most illustrious lards, Don Gaffredo Bargia, Prince of Squillace, Don Roderigo Bargia, Duke of Sermaneta and Biselli, and Don Gian Borgia, Duke of Camerino and Negi, all brothers or nephews of the Duke of Romagna.

"Moreover, since the rebellion and usurpation of Urbino have occurred during the above-mentioned misunderstandings, all the confederates aforesaid and each of them shall bind themselves to unite all their forces for the recovery of the estates aforesaid and of such other places as have revolted and been usurped.

"His Excellency the Duke of Romagna shall undertake to continue to the Orsini and Vitelli their ancient engagements in the way of military service and an the same conditions.

"His Excellency promises further not to insist on the service in person of more than one of them, as they may choose: the service that the others may render shall be voluntary.

"He also promises that the second treaty shall be ratified by the sovereign pontiff, who shall not compel Cardinal Orsino to reside in Rome longer than shall seem convenient to this prelate.

“Furthermore, since there are certain differences between the Pope and the lord Gian Bentivoglio, the confederates aforesaid agree that they shall be put to the arbitration of Cardinal Orsino, of His Excellency the Duke of Romagna, and of the lord Pandolfo Petrucci, without appeal.

“Thus the confederates engage, each and all, so soon as they may be required by the Duke of Romagna, to put into his hands as a hostage one of the legitimate sons of each of them, in that place and at that time which he may be pleased to indicate.

“The same confederates promising moreover, all and each, that if any project directed against any one of them come to their knowledge, to give warning thereof, and all to prevent such project reciprocally.

“It is agreed, over and above, between the Duke of Romagna and the confederates aforesaid, to regard as a common enemy any who shall fail to keep the present stipulations, and to unite in the destruction of any States not conforming thereto.

“(Signed) CAESAR, PAOLO ORSINO.

“AGAPIT, Secretary.”

At the same time, while Orsino was carrying to the confederates the treaty drawn up between him and the duke, Bentivoglio, not willing to submit to the arbitration indicated, made an offer to Caesar of settling their differences by a private treaty, and sent his son to arrange the conditions: after some parleying, they were settled as follows: —

Bentivaglio should separate his fortunes from the Vitelli and Orsini;

He should furnish the Duke of Valentinois with a hundred men-at-arms and a hundred mounted archers for eight years;

He should pay 12,000 ducats per annum to Caesar, for the support of a hundred lances;

In return for this, his son Hannibal was to marry the sister of the Archbishop of Enna, who was Caesar’s niece, and the pope was to recognise his sovereignty in Bologna;

The King of France, the Duke of Ferrara, and the republic of Florence were to be the guarantors of this treaty.

But the convention brought to the confederates by Orsino was the cause of great difficulties on their part. Vitellozza Vitelli in particular, who knew Caesar the best, never ceased to tell the other condottieri that so prompt and easy a peace must needs be the cover to some trap; but since Caesar had meanwhile collected a considerable army at Imala, and the four hundred lances lent him by Louis XII had arrived at last, Vitellozzo and Oliverotto decided to sign the treaty that Orsino brought, and to let the Duke of Urbino and the lord of Camerino know of it; they, seeing plainly that it was henceforth impassible to make a defence unaided, had retired, the one to Citta di Castello and the other into the kingdom of Naples.

But Caesar, saying nothing of his intentions, started on the 10th of December, and made his way to Cesena with a powerful army once more under his command. Fear began to spread on all sides, not only in Romagna but in the whole of Northern Italy; Florence, seeing him move away from her, only thought it a blind to conceal his intentions; while Venice, seeing him approach her frontiers, despatched all her troops to the banks of the Po. Caesar perceived their fear, and lest harm should be done to himself by the mistrust it might inspire, he sent away all French troops in his service as soon as he reached Cesena, except a hundred men with M. de Candale, his brother-in-law; it was then seen that he only had 2000 cavalry and 2000 infantry with him. Several days were spent in parleying, for at Cesena Caesar found the envoys of the Vitelli and Orsini, who themselves were with their army in the duchy of Urbino; but after the preliminary discussions as to the right course to follow in carrying on the plan of conquest, there arose such difficulties between the general-in-chief and these agents, that they could not but see the impossibility of getting anything settled by intermediaries, and the urgent necessity of a conference between Caesar and one of the chiefs. So Oliverotto ran the risk of joining the duke in order to make proposals to him, either to march an Tuscany or to take Sinigaglia, which was the only place in the duchy of Urbino that had not again fallen into Caesar’s power. Caesar’s reply was that he did not desire to war upon Tuscany, because the Tuscans were his friends; but that he approved of the lieutenants’ plan with regard to Sinigaglia, and therefore was marching towards Fano.

But the daughter of Frederic, the former Duke of Urbino, who held the town of Sinigaglia, and who was called the lady-prefect, because she had married Gian delta Rovere, whom his uncle, Sixtus IV, had made prefect of Rome, judging that it would be impossible to defend herself against the forces the Duke of Valentinais was bringing, left the citadel in the hands of a captain, recommending him to get the best terms he could for the town, and took boat for Venice.

Caesar learned this news at Rimini, through a messenger from Vitelli and the Orsini, who said that the governor of the citadel, though refusing to yield to them, was quite ready to make terms with him, and consequently they would engage to go to the town and finish the business there. Caesar's reply was that in consequence of this information he was sending some of his troops to Cesena and Imola, for they would be useless to him, as he should now have theirs, which together with the escort he retained would be sufficient, since his only object was the complete pacification of the duchy of Urbino. He added that this pacification would not be possible if his old friends continued to distrust him, and to discuss through intermediaries alone plans in which their own fortunes were interested as well as his. The messenger returned with this answer, and the confederates, though feeling, it is true, the justice of Caesar's remarks, none the less hesitated to comply with his demand. Vitellozzo Vitelli in particular showed a want of confidence in him which nothing seemed able to subdue; but, pressed by Oliverotto, Gravina, and Orsino, he consented at last to await the duke's coming; making concession rather because he could not bear to appear more timid than his companions, than because of any confidence he felt in the return of friendship that Borgia was displaying.

The duke learned the news of this decision, so much desired, when he arrived at Fano on the 20th of December 1502. At once he summoned eight of his most faithful friends, among whom were d'Enna, his nephew, Michelotto, and Ugo di Cardona, and ordered them, as soon as they arrived at Sinigaglia, and had seen Vitellozzo, Gravina, Oliveratta, and Orsino come out to meet them, on a pretext of doing them honour, to place themselves on the right and left hand of the four generals, two beside each, so that at a given signal they might either stab or arrest them; next he assigned to each of them his particular man, bidding them not quit his side until he had reentered Sinigaglia and arrived at the quarters prepared far him; then he sent orders to such of the soldiers as were in cantonments in the neighbourhood to assemble to the number of 8000 on the banks of the Metaurus, a little river of Umbria which runs into the Adriatic and has been made famous by the defeat of Hannibal.

The duke arrived at the rendezvous given to his army on the 31st of December, and instantly sent out in front two hundred horse, and immediately behind them his infantry; following close in the midst of his men-at-arms, following the coast of the Adriatic, with the mountains on his right and the sea on his left, which in part of the way left only space for the army to march ten abreast.

After four hours' march, the duke at a turn of the path perceived Sinigaglia, nearly a mile distant from the sea, and a bowshot from the mountains; between the army and the town ran a little river, whose banks he had to follow far some distance. At last he found a bridge opposite a suburb of the town, and here Caesar ordered his cavalry to stop: it was drawn up in two lines, one between the road and the river, the other on the side of the country, leaving the whole width of the road to the infantry: which latter defiled, crossed the bridge, and entering the town, drew themselves up in battle array in the great square.

On their side, Vitellazzo, Gravina, Orsino, and Oliverotto, to make room for the duke's army, had quartered their soldiers in little towns or villages in the neighbourhood of Sinigaglia; Oliverotto alone had kept nearly 1000 infantry and 150 horse, who were in barracks in the suburb through which the duke entered.

Caesar had made only a few steps towards the town when he perceived Vitellozzo at the gate, with the Duke of Gravina and Orsina, who all came out to meet him; the last two quite gay and confident, but the first so gloomy and dejected that you would have thought he foresaw the fate that was in store for him; and doubtless he had not been without same presentiments; for when he left his army to came to Sinigaglia, he had bidden them farewell as though never to meet again, had commended the care of his family to the captains, and embraced his children with tears — a weakness which appeared strange to all who knew him as a brave condottiere.

The duke marched up to them holding out his hand, as a sign that all was over and forgotten, and did it with an air at once so loyal and so smiling that Gravina and Orsina could no longer doubt the genuine return of his friendship, and it was only Vitellozza still appeared sad. At the same moment, exactly as they had been commanded, the duke's accomplices took their pasts on the right and left of those they were to watch, who were all there except Oliverotto, whom the duke could not see, and began to seek with uneasy looks; but as he crossed the suburb he perceived him exercising his troops on the square. Caesar at once despatched Michelotto and d'Enna, with a message that it was a rash thing to have his troops out, when they might easily start some quarrel with the duke's men and bring about an affray: it would be much better to settle them in barracks and then come to join his companions, who were with Caesar. Oliverotto, drawn by the same fate as his friends, made no abjection, ordered his soldiers indoors, and put his horse to the gallop to join the duke, escorted on either side by d'Enna and Michelotto. Caesar, on seeing him, called him, took him by the hand, and continued his march to the palace that had been prepared for him, his four victims following after.

Arrived on the threshold, Caesar dismounted, and signing to the leader of the men-at-arms to, await his orders, he went in first, followed by Oliverotto, Gravina, Vitellozzo Vitelli, and Orsino, each accompanied by his two satellites; but scarcely had they gone upstairs and into the first room when the door was shut behind them, and Caesar turned round, saying, “The hour has come!” This was the signal agreed upon. Instantly the former confederates were seized, thrown down, and forced to surrender with a dagger at their throat. Then, while they were being carried to a dungeon, Caesar opened the window, went out on the balcony and cried out to the leader of his men-at-arms, “Go forward!” The man was in the secret, he rushed on with his band towards the barracks where Oliverotto's soldiers had just been consigned, and they, suddenly surprised and off their guard, were at once made prisoners; then the duke's troops began to pillage the town, and he summoned Macchiavelli.

Caesar and the Florentine envoy were nearly two hours shut up together, and since Macchiavelli himself recounts the history of this interview, we will give his own words.

“He summoned me,” says the Florentine ambassador, “and in the calmest manner showed me his joy at the success of this enterprise, which he assured me he had spoken of to me the evening before; I remember that he did, but I did not at that time understand what he meant; next he explained, in terms of much feeling and lively affection for our city, the different motives which had made him desire your alliance, a desire to which he hopes you will respond. He ended with charging me to lay three proposals before your lordships: first, that you rejoice with him in the destruction at a single blow of the mortal enemies of the king, himself, and you, and the consequent disappearance of all seeds of trouble and dissension likely to waste Italy: this service of his, together with his refusal to allow the prisoners to march against you, ought, he thinks, to excite your gratitude towards him; secondly, he begs that you will at this juncture give him a striking proof of your friendliness, by urging your cavalry's advance towards Borgo, and there assembling some infantry also, in order that they may march with him, should need arise, on Castello or on Perugia. Lastly, he desires — and this is his third condition — that you arrest the Duke of Urbino, if he should flee from Castello into your territories, when he learns that Vitellozzo is a prisoner.

"When I objected that to give him up would not beseem the dignity of the republic, and that you would never consent, he approved of my words, and said that it would be enough for you to keep the duke, and not give him his liberty without His Excellency's permission. I have promised to give you all this information, to which he awaits your reply."

The same night eight masked men descended to the dungeon where the prisoners lay: they believed at that moment that the fatal hour had arrived for all. But this time the executioners had to do with Vitellozzo and Oliverotto alone. When these two captains heard that they were condemned, Oliverotto burst forth into reproaches against Vitellozzo, saying that it was all his fault that they had taken up arms against the duke: not a word Vitellozzo answered except a prayer that the pope might grant him plenary indulgence for all his sins. Then the masked men took them away, leaving Orsino and Gravina to await a similar fate, and led away the two chosen out to die to a secluded spot outside the ramparts of the town, where they were strangled and buried at once in two trenches that had been dug beforehand.

The two others were kept alive until it should be known if the pope had arrested Cardinal Orsino, archbishop of Florence and lord of Santa Croce; and when the answer was received in the affirmative from His Holiness, Gravina and Orsina, who had been transferred to a castle, were likewise strangled.

The duke, leaving instructions with Michelotto, set off for Sinigaglia as soon as the first execution was over, assuring Macchiavelli that he had never had any other thought than that of giving tranquillity to the Romagna and to Tuscany, and also that he thought he had succeeded by taking and putting to death the men who had been the cause of all the trouble; also that any other revolt that might take place in the future would be nothing but sparks that a drop of water could extinguish.

The pope had barely learned that Caesar had his enemies in his power, when, eager to play the same winning game himself, he announced to Cardinal Orsino, though it was then midnight, that his son had taken

Sinigaglia, and gave him an invitation to come the next morning and talk over the good news. The cardinal, delighted at this increase of favour, did not miss his appointment. So, in the morning, he started an horseback for the Vatican; but at a turn of the first street he met the governor of Rome with a detachment of cavalry, who congratulated himself on the happy chance that they were taking the same road, and accompanied him to the threshold of the Vatican. There the cardinal dismounted, and began to ascend the stairs; scarcely, however, had he reached the first landing before his mules and carriages were seized and shut in the palace stables. When he entered the hall of the Perropont, he found that he and all his suite were surrounded by armed men, who led him into another apartment, called the Vicar's Hall, where he found the Abbate Alviano, the protonotary Orsino, Jacopo Santa Croce, and Rinaldo Orsino, who were all prisoners like himself; at the same time the governor received orders to seize the castle of Monte Giardino, which belonged to the Orsini, and take away all the jewels, all the hangings, all the furniture, and all the silver that he might find.

The governor carried out his orders conscientiously, and brought to the Vatican everything he seized, down to the cardinal's account-book. On consulting this book, the pope found out two things: first, that a sum of 2000 ducats was due to the cardinal, no debtor's name being mentioned; secondly, that the cardinal had bought three months before, for 1500 Roman crowns, a magnificent pearl which could not be found among the objects belonging to him: on which Alexander ordered that from that very moment until the negligence in the cardinal's accounts was repaired, the men who were in the habit of bringing him food twice a day on behalf of his mother should not be admitted into the Castle Sant' Angelo. The same day, the cardinal's mother sent the pope the 2000 ducats, and the next day his mistress, in man's attire, came in person to bring the missing pearl. His Holiness, however, was so struck with her beauty in this costume, that, we are told, he let her keep the pearl for the same price she had paid for it.

Then the pope allowed the cardinal to have his food brought as before, and he died of poison on the 22nd of February — that is, two days after his accounts had been set right.

That same night the Prince of Squillace set off to take possession, in the pope's name, of the lands of the deceased.

CHAPTER XIV

The Duke of Valentinois had continued, his road towards Citta di Castello and Perugia, and had seized these two towns without striking a blow; for the Vitelli had fled from the former, and the latter had been abandoned by Gian Paolo Baglione with no attempt whatever at resistance. There still remained Siena, where Pandolfo Petrucci was shut up, the only man remaining of all who had joined the league against Caesar.

But Siena was under the protection of the French. Besides, Siena was not one of the States of the Church, and Caesar had no rights there. Therefore he was content with insisting upon Pandolfo Petrucci's leaving the town and retiring to Lucca, which he accordingly did.

Then all on this side being peaceful and the whole of Romagna in subjection, Caesar resolved to return to Rome and help the pope to destroy all that was left of the Orsini.

This was all the easier because Louis XII, having suffered reverses in the kingdom of Naples, had since then been much concerned with his own affairs to disturb himself about his allies. So Caesar, doing for the neighbourhood of the Holy See the same thing that he had done far the Romagna, seized in succession Vicovaro, Cera, Palombera, Lanzano, and Cervetti; when these conquests were achieved, having nothing else to do now that he had brought the pontifical States into subjection from the frontiers of Naples to those of Venice, he returned to Rome to concert with his father as to the means of converting his duchy into a kingdom.

Caesar arrived at the right moment to share with Alexander the property of Cardinal Gian Michele, who had just died, having received a poisoned cup from the hands of the pope.

The future King of Italy found his father preoccupied with a grand project: he had resolved, for the Feast of St. Peter's, to create nine cardinals. What he had to gain from these nominations is as follows:

First, the cardinals elected would leave all their offices vacant; these offices would fall into the hands of the pope, and he would sell them;

Secondly, each of them would buy his election, more or less dear according to his fortune; the price, left to be settled at the pope's fancy, would vary from 10,000 to 40,000 ducats;

Lastly, since as cardinals they would by law lose the right of making a will, the pope, in order to inherit from them, had only to poison them: this put him in the position of a butcher who, if he needs money, has only to cut the throat of the fattest sheep in the flock.

The nomination came to pass: the new cardinals were Giovanni Castellaro Valentine, archbishop of Trani; Francesco Remolini, ambassador from the King of Aragon; Francesco Soderini, bishop of Volterra; Melchiore Copis, bishop of Brissina; Nicolas Fiesque, bishop of Frejus; Francesco di Sprate, bishop of Leome; Adriano Castellense, clerk of the chamber, treasurer-general, and secretary of the briefs; Francesco Boris, bishop of Elva, patriarch of Constantinople, and secretary to the pope; and Giacomo Casanova, protonotary and private chamberlain to His Holiness.

The price of their simony paid and their vacated offices sold, the pope made his choice of those he was to poison: the number was fixed at three, one old and two new; the old one was Cardinal Casanova, and the new ones Melchiore Copis and Adriano Castellense, who had taken the name of Adrian of Carneta from that town where he had been born, and where, in the capacity of clerk of the chamber, treasurer-general, and secretary of briefs, he had amassed an immense fortune.

So, when all was settled between Caesar and the pope, they invited their chosen guests to supper in a vineyard situated near the Vatican, belonging to the Cardinal of Corneto. In the morning of this day, the 2nd of August, they sent their servants and the steward to make all preparations, and Caesar himself gave the pope’s butler two bottles of wine prepared with the white powder resembling sugar whose mortal properties he had so often proved, and gave orders that he was to serve this wine only when he was told, and only to persons specially indicated; the butler accordingly put the wine an a sideboard apart, bidding the waiters on no account to touch it, as it was reserved for the pope’s drinking.

[The poison of the Borgias, say contemporary writers, was of two kinds, powder and liquid. The poison in the form of powder was a sort of white flour, almost impalpable, with the taste of sugar, and called Contarella. Its composition is unknown.

The liquid poison was prepared, we are told in so strange a fashion that we cannot pass it by in silence. We repeat here what we read, and vouch for nothing ourselves, lest science should give us the lie.

A strong dose of arsenic was administered to a boar; as soon as the poison began to take effect, he was hung up by his heels; convulsions supervened, and a froth deadly and abundant ran out from his jaws; it was this froth, collected into a silver vessel and transferred into a bottle hermetically sealed, that made the liquid poison.]

Towards evening Alexander VI walked from the Vatican leaning on Caesar's arm, and turned his steps towards the vineyard, accompanied by Cardinal Caraffa; but as the heat was great and the climb rather steep, the pope, when he reached the top, stopped to take breath; then putting his hand on his breast, he found that he had left in his bedroom a chain that he always wore round his neck, which suspended a gold medallion that enclosed the sacred host. He owed this habit to a prophecy that an astrologer had made, that so long as he carried about a consecrated wafer, neither steel nor poison could take hold upon him. Now, finding himself without his talisman, he ordered Monsignors Caraffa to hurry back at once to the Vatican, and told him in which part of his room he had left it, so that he might get it and bring it him without delay. Then, as the walk had made him thirsty, he turned to a valet, giving signs with his hand as he did so that his messenger should make haste, and asked for something to drink. Caesar, who was also thirsty, ordered the man to bring two glasses. By a curious coincidence, the butler had just gone back to the Vatican to fetch some magnificent peaches that had been sent that very day to the pope, but which had been forgotten when he came here; so the valet went to the under butler, saying that His Holiness and Monsignors the Duke of Romagna were thirsty and asking for a drink. The under butler, seeing two bottles of wine set apart, and having heard that this wine was reserved for the pope, took one, and telling the valet to bring two glasses on a tray, poured out this wine, which both drank, little thinking that it was what they had themselves prepared to poison their guests.

Meanwhile Caraffa hurried to the Vatican, and, as he knew the palace well, went up to the pope's bedroom, a light in his hand and attended by no servant. As he turned round a corridor a puff of wind blew out his lamp; still, as he knew the way, he went on, thinking there was no need of seeing to find the object he was in search of; but as he entered the room he recoiled a step, with a cry of terror: he beheld a ghastly apparition; it seemed that there before his eyes, in the middle of the room, between the door and the cabinet which held the medallion, Alexander VI, motionless and livid, was lying on a bier at whose four corners there burned four torches. The cardinal stood still for a moment, his eyes fixed, and his hair standing on end, without strength to move either backward or forward; then thinking it was all a trick of fancy or an apparition of the devil's making, he made the sign of the cross, invoking God's holy name; all instantly vanished, torches, bier, and corpse, and the seeming mortuary, chamber was once more in darkness.

Then Cardinal Caraffa, who has himself recorded this strange event, and who was afterwards Pope Paul IV, entered baldly, and though an icy sweat ran dawn his brow, he went straight to the cabinet, and in the drawer indicated found the gold chain and the medallion, took them, and hastily went out to give them to the pope. He found supper served, the guests arrived, and His Holiness ready to take his place at table; as soon as the cardinal was in sight, His Holiness, who was very pale, made one step towards him; Caraffa doubled his pace, and handed the medallion to him; but as the pope stretched forth his arm to take it, he fell back with a cry, instantly followed by violent convulsions: an instant later, as he advanced to render his father assistance, Caesar was similarly seized; the effect of the poison had been more rapid than usual, for Caesar had doubled the dose, and there is little doubt that their heated condition increased its activity.

The two stricken men were carried side by side to the Vatican, where each was taken to his own rooms: from that moment they never met again.

As soon as he reached his bed, the pope was seized with a violent fever, which did not give way to emetics or to bleeding; almost immediately it became necessary to administer the last sacraments of the Church; but his admirable bodily constitution, which seemed to have defied old age, was strong enough to fight eight days with death; at last, after a week of mortal agony, he died, without once uttering the name of Caesar or Lucrezia, who were the two poles around which had turned all his affections and all his crimes. His age was seventy-two, and he had reigned eleven years.

Caesar, perhaps because he had taken less of the fatal beverage, perhaps because the strength of his youth overcame the strength of the poison, or maybe, as some say, because when he reached his own rooms he had swallowed an antidote known only to himself, was not so prostrated as to lose sight for a moment of the terrible position he was in: he summoned his faithful Michelotto, with those he could best count on among his men, and disposed this band in the various rooms that led to his own, ordering the chief never to leave the foot of his bed, but to sleep lying on a rug, his hand upon the handle of his sward.

The treatment had been the same for Caesar as for the pope, but in addition to bleeding and emetics strange baths were added, which Caesar had himself asked for, having heard that in a similar case they had once cured Ladislaus, King of Naples. Four posts, strongly welded to the floor and ceiling, were set up in his room, like the machines at which farriers shoe horses; every day a bull was brought in, turned over on his back and tied by his four legs to the four posts; then, when he was thus fixed, a cut was made in his belly a foot and a half long, through which the intestines were drawn out; then Caesar slipped into this living bath of blood: when the bull was dead, Caesar was taken out and rolled up in burning hot blankets, where, after copious perspirations, he almost always felt some sort of relief.

Every two hours Caesar sent to ask news of his father: he hardly waited to hear that he was dead before, though still at death’s door himself, he summoned up all the force of character and presence of mind that naturally belonged to him. He ordered Michelotto to shut the doors of the Vatican before the report of Alexander’s decease could spread about the town, and forbade anyone whatsoever to enter the pope’s apartments until the money and papers had been removed. Michelotto obeyed at once, went to find Cardinal Casanova, held a dagger at his throat, and made him deliver up the keys of the pope’s rooms and cabinets; then, under his guidance, took away two chests full of gold, which perhaps contained 100,000 Roman crowns in specie, several boxes full of jewels, much silver and many precious vases; all these were carried to Caesar’s chamber; the guards of the room were doubled; then the doors of the Vatican were once more thrown open, and the death of the pope was proclaimed.

Although the news was expected, it produced none the less a terrible effect in Rome; for although Caesar was still alive, his condition left everyone in suspense: had the mighty Duke of Romagna, the powerful condottiere who had taken thirty towns and fifteen fortresses in five years, been seated, sword in hand, upon his charger, nothing would have been uncertain of fluctuating even for a moment; far, as Caesar afterwards told Macchiavelli, his ambitious soul had provided for all things that could occur on the day of the pope’s death, except the one that he should be dying himself; but being nailed down to his bed, sweating off the effects the poison had wrought; so, though he had kept his power of thinking he could no longer act, but must needs wait and suffer the course of events, instead of marching on in front and controlling them.

Thus he was forced to regulate his actions no longer by his own plans but according to circumstances. His most bitter enemies, who could press him hardest, were the Orsini and the Colonnas: from the one family he had taken their blood, from the other their goods.

So he addressed himself to those to whom he could return what he had taken, and opened negotiations with the Colonnas.

Meanwhile the obsequies of the pope were going forward: the vice-chancellor had sent out orders to the highest among the clergy, the superiors of convents, and the secular orders, not to fail to appear, according to regular custom, on pain of being despoiled of their office and dignities, each bringing his own company to the Vatican, to be present at the pope's funeral; each therefore appeared on the day and at the hour appointed at the pontifical palace, whence the body was to be conveyed to the church of St. Peter's, and there buried. The corpse was found to be abandoned and alone in the mortuary chamber; for everyone of the name of Borgia, except Caesar, lay hidden, not knowing what might come to pass. This was indeed well justified; for Fabio Orsino, meeting one member of the family, stabbed him, and as a sign of the hatred they had sworn to one another, bathed his mouth and hands in the blood.

The agitation in Rome was so great, that when the corpse of Alexander VI was about to enter the church there occurred a kind of panic, such as will suddenly arise in times of popular agitation, instantly causing so great a disturbance in the funeral cortege that the guards drew up in battle array, the clergy fled into the sacristy, and the bearers dropped the bier.

The people, tearing off the pall which covered it, disclosed the corpse, and everyone could see with impunity and close at hand the man who, fifteen days before, had made princes, kings and emperors tremble, from one end of the world to the other.

But in accordance with that religious feeling towards death which all men instinctively feel, and which alone survives every other, even in the heart of the atheist, the bier was taken up again and carried to the foot of the great altar in St. Peter's, where, set on trestles, it was exposed to public view; but the body had become so black, so deformed and swollen, that it was horrible to behold; from its nose a bloody matter escaped, the mouth gaped hideously, and the tongue was so monstrously enlarged that it filled the whole cavity; to this frightful appearance was added a decomposition so great that, although at the pope's funeral it is customary to kiss the hand which bore the Fisherman's ring, not one approached to offer this mark of respect and religious reverence to the representative of God on earth.

Towards seven o'clock in the evening, when the declining day adds so deep a melancholy to the silence of a church, four porters and two working carpenters carried the corpse into the chapel where it was to be interred, and, lifting it off the catafalque, where it lay in state, put it in the coffin which was to be its last abode; but it was found that the coffin was too short, and the body could not be got in till the legs were bent and thrust in with violent blows; then the carpenters put on the lid, and while one of them sat on the top to force the knees to bend, the others hammered in the nails: amid those Shakespearian pleasantries that sound as the last orison in the ear of the mighty; then, says Tommaso Tommasi, he was placed on the right of the great altar of St. Peter's, beneath a very ugly tomb.

The next morning this epitaph was found inscribed upon the tomb:

"VENDIT ALEXANDER CLAVES, ALTARIA, CHRISTUM:
EMERAT ILLE PRIUS, VENDERE JUKE POTEST";

that is,

"Pope Alexander sold the Christ, the altars, and the keys:
But anyone who buys a thing may sell it if he please."

CHAPTER XV

From the effect produced at Rome by Alexander’s death, one may imagine what happened not only in the whole of Italy but also in the rest of the world: for a moment Europe swayed, for the column which supported the vault of the political edifice had given way, and the star with eyes of flame and rays of blood, round which all things had revolved for the last eleven years, was now extinguished, and for a moment the world, on a sudden struck motionless, remained in silence and darkness.

After the first moment of stupefaction, all who had an injury to avenge arose and hurried to the chase. Sforza retook Pesaro, Bagloine Perugia, Guido and Ubaldo Urbino, and La Rovere Sinigaglia; the Vitelli entered Citta di Castello, the Appiani Piombino, the Orsini Monte Giordano and their other territories; Romagna alone remained impassive and loyal, for the people, who have no concern with the quarrels of the great, provided they do not affect themselves, had never been so happy as under the government of Caesar.

The Colonnas were pledged to maintain a neutrality, and had been consequently restored to the possession of their castles and the cities of Chiuzano, Capo d’Anno, Frascati, Rocca di Papa, and Nettuno, which they found in a better condition than when they had left them, as the pope had had them embellished and fortified.

Caesar was still in the Vatican with his troops, who, loyal to him in his misfortune, kept watch about the palace, where he was writhing on his bed of pain and roaring like a wounded lion. The cardinals, who had in their first terror fled, each his own way, instead of attending the pope’s obsequies, began to assemble once more, some at the Minerva, others around Cardinal Caraffa. Frightened by the troops that Caesar still had, especially since the command was entrusted to Michelotto, they collected all the money they could to levy an army of 2000 soldiers with. Charles Taneo at their head, with the title of Captain of the Sacred College. It was then hoped that peace was re-established, when it was heard that Prospero Colonna was coming with 3000 men from the side of Naples, and Fabio Orsino from the side of Viterbo with 200 horse and more than 1000 infantry. Indeed, they entered Rome at only one day's interval one from another, by so similar an ardour were they inspired.

Thus there were five armies in Rome: Caesar's army, holding the Vatican and the Borgo; the army of the Bishop of Nicastro, who had received from Alexander the guardianship of the Castle Sant' Angelo and had shut himself up there, refusing to yield; the army of the Sacred College, which was stationed round about the Minerva; the army of Prospero Colonna, which was encamped at the Capitol; and the army of Fabio Orsino, in barracks at the Ripetta.

On their side, the Spaniards had advanced to Terracino, and the French to Nepi. The cardinals saw that Rome now stood upon a mine which the least spark might cause to explode: they summoned the ambassadors of the Emperor of Germany, the Kings of France and Spain, and the republic of Venice to raise their voice in the name of their masters. The ambassadors, impressed with the urgency of the situation, began by declaring the Sacred College inviolable: they then ordered the Orsini, the Colonnas, and the Duke of Valentinois to leave Rome and go each his own, way.

The Orsini were the first to submit: the next morning their example was followed by the Colonnas. No one was left but Caesar, who said he was willing to go, but desired to make his conditions beforehand: the Vatican was undermined, he declared, and if his demands were refused he and those who came to take him should be blown up together.

It was known that his were never empty threats they came to terms with him.

[Caesar promised to remain ten miles away from Rome the whole time the Conclave lasted, and not to take any action against the town or any other of the Ecclesiastical States: Fabio Orsino and. Prospero Colonna had made the same promises.]

[It was agreed that Caesar should quit Rome with his army, artillery, and baggage; and to ensure his not being attacked or molested in the streets, the Sacred College should add to his numbers 400 infantry, who, in case of attack or insult, would fight for him. The Venetian ambassador answered for the Orsini, the Spanish ambassador for the Colonnas, the ambassador of France for Caesar.]

At the day and hour appointed Caesar sent out his artillery, which consisted of eighteen pieces of cannon, and 400 infantry of the Sacred

College, on each of whom he bestowed a ducat: behind the artillery came a hundred chariots escorted by his advance guard.

The duke was carried out of the gate of the Vatican: he lay on a bed covered with a scarlet canopy, supported by twelve halberdiers, leaning forward on his cushions so that no one might see his face with its purple lips and bloodshot eyes: beside him was his naked sword, to show that, feeble as he was, he could use it at need: his finest charger, caparisoned in black velvet embroidered with his arms, walked beside the bed, led by a page, so that Caesar could mount in case of surprise or attack: before him and behind, both right and left, marched his army, their arms in rest, but without beating of drums or blowing of trumpets: this gave a sombre, funereal air to the whole procession, which at the gate of the city met Prospero Colonna awaiting it with a considerable band of men.

Caesar thought at first that, breaking his word as he had so often done himself, Prospero Colonna was going to attack him. He ordered a halt, and prepared to mount his horse; but Prospera Colonna, seeing the state he was in, advanced to his bedside alone: he came, against expectation, to offer him an escort, fearing an ambuscade on the part of Fabio Orsino, who had loudly sworn that he would lose his honour or avenge the death of Paolo Orsina, his father. Caesar thanked Colanna, and replied that from the moment that Orsini stood alone he ceased to fear him. Then Colonna saluted the duke, and rejoined his men, directing them towards Albano, while Caesar took the road to Citta Castellana, which had remained loyal.

When there, Caesar found himself not only master of his own fate but of others as well: of the twenty-two votes he owned in the Sacred College twelve had remained faithful, and as the Conclave was composed in all of thirty-seven cardinals, he with his twelve votes could make the majority incline to whichever side he chose. Accordingly he was courted both by the Spanish and the French party, each desiring the election of a pope of their own nation. Caesar listened, promising nothing and refusing nothing: he gave his twelve votes to Francesco Piccolomini, Cardinal of Siena, one of his father’s creatures who had remained his friend, and the latter was elected on the 8th of October and took the name of Pius III.

Caesar’s hopes did not deceive him: Pius III was hardly elected before he sent him a safe-conduct to Rome: the duke came back with 250 men-at-arms, 250 light horse, and 800 infantry, and lodged in his palace, the soldiers camping round about.

Meanwhile the Orsini, pursuing their projects of vengeance against Caesar, had been levying many troops at Perugia and the neighbourhood to bring against him to Rome, and as they fancied that France, in whose service they were engaged, was humouring the duke for the sake of the twelve votes which were wanted to secure the election of Cardinal Amboise at the next Conclave, they went over to the service of Spain.

Meanwhile Caesar was signing a new treaty with Louis XII, by which he engaged to support him with all his forces, and even with his person, so soon as he could ride, in maintaining his conquest of Naples: Louis, on his side, guaranteed that he should retain possession of the States he still held, and promised his help in recovering those he had lost.

The day when this treaty was made known, Gonzalvo di Cordovo proclaimed to the sound of a trumpet in all the streets of Rome that every Spanish subject serving in a foreign army was at once to break his engagement on pain of being found guilty of high treason.

This measure robbed Caesar of ten or twelve of his best officers and of nearly 300 men.

Then the Orsini, seeing his army thus reduced, entered Rome, supported by the Spanish ambassador, and summoned Caesar to appear before the pope and the Sacred College and give an account of his crimes.

Faithful to his engagements, Pius III replied that in his quality of sovereign prince the duke in his temporal administration was quite independent and was answerable for his actions to God alone.

But as the pope felt he could not much longer support Caesar against his enemies for all his goodwill, he advised him to try to join the French army, which was still advancing on Naples, in the midst of which he would alone find safety. Caesar resolved to retire to Bracciano, where Gian Giordano Orsino, who had once gone with him to France, and who was the only member of the family who had not declared against him, offered him an asylum in the name of Cardinal dumbest: so one morning he ordered his troops to march for this town, and, taking his place in their midst, he left Rome.

But though Caesar had kept his intentions quiet, the Orsini had been forewarned, and, taking out all the troops they had by the gate of San Pancracio, they had made along detour and blocked Caesar’s way; so, when the latter arrived at Storta, he found the Orsini’s army drawn up awaiting him in numbers exceeding his own by at least one-half.

Caesar saw that to come to blows in his then feeble state was to rush on certain destruction; so he ordered his troops to retire, and, being a first-rate strategist, echelonned his retreat so skilfully that his enemies, though they followed, dared not attack him, and he re-entered the pontifical town without the loss of a single man.

This time Caesar went straight to the Vatican, to put himself more directly under the pope's protection; he distributed his soldiers about the palace, so as to guard all its exits. Now the Orsini, resolved to make an end of Caesar, had determined to attack him wheresoever he might be, with no regard to the sanctity of the place: this they attempted, but without success, as Caesar's men kept a good guard on every side, and offered a strong defence.

Then the Orsini, not being able to force the guard of the Castle Sant' Angelo, hoped to succeed better with the duke by leaving Rome and then returning by the Torione gate; but Caesar anticipated this move, and they found the gate guarded and barricaded. None the less, they pursued their design, seeking by open violence the vengeance that they had hoped to obtain by craft; and, having surprised the approaches to the gate, set fire to it: a passage gained, they made their way into the gardens of the castle, where they found Caesar awaiting them at the head of his cavalry.

Face to face with danger, the duke had found his old strength: and he was the first to rush upon his enemies, loudly challenging Orsino in the hope of killing him should they meet; but either Orsino did not hear him or dared not fight; and after an exciting contest, Caesar, who was numerically two-thirds weaker than his enemy, saw his cavalry cut to pieces; and after performing miracles of personal strength and courage, was obliged to return to the Vatican. There he found the pope in mortal agony: the Orsini, tired of contending against the old man's word of honour pledged to the duke, had by the interposition of Pandolfo Petrucci, gained the ear of the pope's surgeon, who placed a poisoned plaster upon a wound in his leg.

The pope then was actually dying when Caesar, covered with dust and blood, entered his room, pursued by his enemies, who knew no check till they reached the palace walls, behind which the remnant of his army still held their ground.

Pius III, who knew he was about to die, sat up in his bed, gave Caesar the key of the corridor which led to the Castle of Sant' Angelo, and an order addressed to the governor to admit him and his family, to defend him to the last extremity, and to let him go wherever he thought fit; and then fell fainting on his bed.

Caesar took his two daughters by the hand, and, followed by the little dukes of Sermaneta and Nepi, took refuge in the last asylum open to him.

The same night the pope died: he had reigned only twenty-six days.

After his death, Caesar, who had cast himself fully dressed upon his bed, heard his door open at two o'clock in the morning: not knowing what anyone might want of him at such an hour, he raised himself on one elbow and felt for the handle of his sword with his other hand; but at the first glance he recognised in his nocturnal visitor Giuliano della Rovere.

Utterly exhausted by the poison, abandoned by his troops, fallen as he was from the height of his power, Caesar, who could now do nothing for himself, could yet make a pope: Giuliano delta Rovere had come to buy the votes of his twelve cardinals.

Caesar imposed his conditions, which were accepted.

If elected, Giuliano delta Ravere was to help Caesar to recover his territories in Romagna; Caesar was to remain general of the Church; and Francesco Maria delta Rovere, prefect of Rome, was to marry one of Caesar's daughters.

On these conditions Caesar sold his twelve cardinals to Giuliano.

The next day, at Giuliano's request, the Sacred College ordered the Orsini to leave Rome for the whole time occupied by the Conclave.

On the 31st of October 1503, at the first scrutiny, Giuliano delta Rovere was elected pope, and took the name of Julius II.

He was scarcely installed in the Vatican when he made it his first care to summon Caesar and give him his former rooms there; then, since the duke was fully restored to health, he began to busy himself with the re-establishment of his affairs, which had suffered sadly of late.

The defeat of his army and his own escape to Sant' Angelo, where he was supposed to be a prisoner, had brought about great changes in Romagna. Sesena was once more in the power of the Church, as formerly it had been; Gian Sforza had again entered Pesaro; Ordelafi had seized Forli; Malatesta was laying claim to Rimini; the inhabitants of Imola had assassinated their governor, and the town was divided between two opinions, one that it should be put into the hands of the Riani, the other, into the hands of the Church; Faenza had remained loyal longer than any other place; but at last, losing hope of seeing Caesar recover his power, it had summoned

Francesco, a natural son of Galeotto Manfredi, the last surviving heir of this unhappy family, all whose legitimate descendants had been massacred by Borgia.

It is true that the fortresses of these different places had taken no part in these revolutions, and had remained immutably faithful to the Duke of Valentinois.

So it was not precisely the defection of these towns, which, thanks to their fortresses, might be reconquered, that was the cause of uneasiness to Caesar and Julius II, it was the difficult situation that Venice had thrust upon them. Venice, in the spring of the same year, had signed a treaty of peace with the Turks: thus set free from her eternal enemy, she had just led her forces to the Romagna, which she had always coveted: these troops had been led towards Ravenna, the farthermost limit of the Papal estates, and put under the command of Giacopo Venieri, who had failed to capture Cesena, and had only failed through the courage of its inhabitants; but this check had been amply compensated by the surrender of the fortresses of Val di Lamane and Faenza, by the capture of Farlimpopoli, and the surrender of Rimini, which Pandolfo Malatesta, its lard, exchanged for the seigniory of Cittadella, in the State of Padua, and far the rank of gentleman of Venice.

Then Caesar made a proposition to Julius II: this was to make a momentary cession to the Church of his own estates in Romagna, so that the respect felt by the Venetians for the Church might save these towns from their aggressors; but, says Guicciardini, Julius II, whose ambition, so natural in sovereign rulers, had not yet extinguished the remains of rectitude, refused to accept the places, afraid of exposing himself to the temptation of keeping them later on, against his promises.

But as the case was urgent, he proposed to Caesar that he should leave Rome, embark at Ostia, and cross over to Spezia, where Michelotto was to meet him at the head of 100 men-at-arms and 100 light horse, the only remnant of his magnificent army, thence by land to Ferrara, and from Ferrara to Imala, where, once arrived, he could utter his war-cry so loud that it would be heard through the length and breadth of Romagna.

This advice being after Caesar’s own heart, he accepted it at once.

The resolution submitted to the Sacred College was approved, and Caesar left for Ostia, accompanied by Bartolommeo della Rovere, nephew of His Holiness.

Caesar at last felt he was free, and fancied himself already on his good charger, a second time carrying war into all the places where he had formerly fought. When he reached Ostia, he was met by the cardinals of Sorrento and Volterra, who came in the name of Julius II to ask him to give up the very same citadels which he had refused three days before: the fact was that the pope had learned in the interim that the Venetians had made fresh aggressions, and recognised that the method proposed by Caesar was the only one that would check them. But this time it was Caesar's turn, to refuse, for he was weary of these tergiversations, and feared a trap; so he said that the surrender asked for would be useless, since by God's help he should be in Romagna before eight days were past. So the cardinals of Sorrento and Volterra returned to Rome with a refusal.

The next morning, just as Caesar was setting foot on his vessel, he was arrested in the name of Julius II.

He thought at first that this was the end; he was used to this mode of action, and knew how short was the space between a prison and a tomb; the matter was all the easier in his case, because the pope, if he chose, would have plenty of pretext for making a case against him. But the heart of Julius was of another kind from his; swift to anger, but open to clemency; so, when the duke came back to Rome guarded, the momentary irritation his refusal had caused was already calmed, and the pope received him in his usual fashion at his palace, and with his ordinary courtesy, although from the beginning it was easy for the duke to see that he was being watched. In return for this kind reception, Caesar consented to yield the fortress of Cesena to the pope, as being a town which had once belonged to the Church, and now should return; giving the deed, signed by Caesar, to one of his captains, called Pietro d'Oviedo, he ordered him to take possession of the fortress in the name of the Holy See. Pietro obeyed, and starting at once for Cesena, presented himself armed with his warrant before Don Diego Chinon; a noble condottiere of Spain, who was holding the fortress in Caesar's name. But when he had read over the paper that Pietro d'Oviedo brought, Don Diego replied that as he knew his lord and master was a prisoner, it would be disgraceful in him to obey an order that had probably been wrested from him by violence, and that the bearer deserved to die for undertaking such a cowardly office. He therefore bade his soldiers seize d'Oviedo and fling him down from the top of the walls: this sentence was promptly executed.

This mark of fidelity might have proved fatal to Caesar: when the pope heard how his messenger had been treated, he flew into such a rage that the prisoner thought a second time that his hour was come; and in order to receive his liberty, he made the first of those new propositions to Julius II, which were drawn up in the form of a treaty and sanctioned by a bull. By these arrangements, the Duke of Valentinois was bound to hand over to His Holiness, within the space of forty days, the fortresses of Cesena and Bertinoro, and authorise the surrender of Forli. This arrangement was guaranteed by two bankers in Rome who were to be responsible for 15,000 ducats, the sum total of the expenses which the governor pretended he had incurred in the place on the duke’s account. The pope on his part engaged to send Caesar to Ostia under the sole guard of the Cardinal of Santa Croce and two officers, who were to give him his full liberty on the very day when his engagements were fulfilled: should this not happen, Caesar was to be taken to Rome and imprisoned in the Castle of Sant’ Angelo. In fulfilment of this treaty, Caesar went down the Tiber as far as Ostia, accompanied by the pope’s treasurer and many of his servants. The Cardinal of Santa Croce followed, and the next day joined him there.

But as Caesar feared that Julius II might keep him a prisoner, in spite of his pledged word, after he had yielded up the fortresses, he asked, through the mediation of Cardinals Borgia and Remolina, who, not feeling safe at Rome, had retired to Naples, for a safe-conduct to Gonzalva of Cordova, and for two ships to take him there; with the return of the courier the safe-conduct arrived, announcing that the ships would shortly follow.

In the midst of all this, the Cardinal of Santa Croce, learning that by the duke’s orders the governors of Cesena and Bertinoro had surrendered their fortresses to the captains of His Holiness, relaxed his rigour, and knowing that his prisoner would some day or other be free, began to let him go out without a guard. Then Caesar, feeling some fear lest when he started with Gonzalvo’s ships the same thing might happen as on the occasion of his embarking on the pope’s vessel — that is, that he might be arrested a second time — concealed himself in a house outside the town; and when night came on, mounting a wretched horse that belonged to a peasant, rode as far as Nettuno, and there hired a little boat, in which he embarked for Monte Dragone, and thence gained Naples. Gonzalvo received him with such joy that Caesar was deceived as to his intention, and this time believed that he was really saved. His confidence was redoubled when, opening his designs to Gonzalvo, and telling him that he counted upon gaining Pisa and thence going on into Romagna, Ganzalva allowed him to recruit as many soldiers at Naples as he pleased, promising him two ships to embark with. Caesar, deceived by these appearances, stopped nearly six weeks at Naples, every day seeing the Spanish governor and discussing his plans. But Gonzalvo was only waiting to gain time to tell the King of Spain that his enemy was in his hands; and Caesar actually went to the castle to bid Gonzalvo good-bye, thinking he was just about to start after he had embarked his men on the two ships. The Spanish governor received him with his accustomed courtesy, wished him every kind of prosperity, and embraced him as he left; but at the door of the castle Caesar found one of Gonzalvo's captains, Nuno Campeja by name, who arrested him as a prisoner of Ferdinand the Catholic. Caesar at these words heaved a deep sigh, cursing the ill luck that had made him trust the word of an enemy when he had so often broken his own.

He was at once taken to the castle, where the prison gate closed behind him, and he felt no hope that anyone would come to his aid; for the only being who was devoted to him in this world was Michelotto, and he had heard that Michelotto had been arrested near Pisa by order of Julius II. While Caesar was being taken to prison an officer came to him to deprive him of the safe-conduct given him by Gonzalvo.

The day after his arrest, which occurred on the 27th of May, 1504, Caesar was taken on board a ship, which at once weighed anchor and set sail for Spain: during the whole voyage he had but one page to serve him, and as soon as he disembarked he was taken to the castle of Medina del Campo.

Ten years later, Gonzalvo, who at that time was himself proscribed, owned to Loxa on his dying bed that now, when he was to appear in the presence of God, two things weighed cruelly on his conscience: one was his treason to Ferdinand, the other his breach of faith towards Caesar.

CHAPTER XVI

Caesar was in prison for two years, always hoping that Louis XII would reclaim him as peer of the kingdom of France; but Louis, much disturbed by the loss of the battle of Garigliano, which robbed him of the kingdom of Naples, had enough to do with his own affairs without busying himself with his cousin’s. So the prisoner was beginning to despair, when one day as he broke his bread at breakfast he found a file and a little bottle containing a narcotic, with a letter from Michelotto, saying that he was out of prison and had left Italy for Spain, and now lay in hiding with the Count of Benevento in the neighbouring village: he added that from the next day forward he and the count would wait every night on the road between the fortress and the village with three excellent horses; it was now Caesar’s part to do the best he could with his bottle and file. When the whole world had abandoned the Duke of Romagna he had been remembered by a sbirro.

The prison where he had been shut up for two years was so hateful to Caesar that he lost not a single moment: the same day he attacked one of the bars of a window that looked out upon an inner court, and soon contrived so to manipulate it that it would need only a final push to come out. But not only was the window nearly seventy feet from the ground, but one could only get out of the court by using an exit reserved for the governor, of which he alone had the key; also this key never left him; by day it hung at his waist, by night it was under his pillow: this then was the chief difficulty.

But prisoner though he was, Caesar had always been treated with the respect due to his name and rank: every day at the dinner-hour he was conducted from the room that served as his prison to the governor, who did the honours of the table in a grand and courteous fashion. The fact was that Dan Manuel had served with honour under King Ferdinand, and therefore, while he guarded Caesar rigorously, according to orders, he had a great respect for so brave a general, and took pleasure in listening to the accounts of his battles. So he had often insisted that Caesar should not only dine but also breakfast with him; happily the prisoner, yielding perhaps to some presentiment, had till now refused this favour. This was of great advantage to him, since, thanks to his solitude, he had been able to receive the instruments of escape sent by Michelotto. The same day he received them, Caesar, on going back to his room, made a false step and sprained his foot; at the dinner-hour he tried to go down, but he pretended to be suffering so cruelly that he gave it up. The governor came to see him in his room, and found him stretched upon the bed.

The day after, he was no better; the governor had his dinner sent in, and came to see him, as on the night before; he found his prisoner so dejected and gloomy in his solitude that he offered to come and sup with him: Caesar gratefully accepted.

This time it was the prisoner who did the honours: Caesar was charmingly courteous; the governor thought he would profit by this lack of restraint to put to him certain questions as to the manner of his arrest, and asked him as an Old Castilian, for whom honour is still of some account, what the truth really was as to Gonzalvo's and Ferdinand's breach of faith, with him. Caesar appeared extremely inclined to give him his entire confidence, but showed by a sign that the attendants were in the way. This precaution appeared quite natural, and the governor took no offense, but hastened to send them all away, so as to be sooner alone with his companion. When the door was shut, Caesar filled his glass and the governor's, proposing the king's health: the governor honoured the toast: Caesar at once began his tale; but he had scarcely uttered a third part of it when, interesting as it was, the eyes of his host shut as though by magic, and he slid under the table in a profound sleep.

After half a hour had passed, the servants, hearing no noise, entered and found the two, one on the table, the other under it: this event was not so extraordinary that they paid any great attention to it: all they did was to carry Don Manuel to his room and lift Caesar on the bed; then they put away the remnant of the meal for the next day's supper, shut the door very carefully, and left their prisoner alone.

Caesar stayed for a minute motionless and apparently plunged in the deepest sleep; but when he had heard the steps retreating, he quietly raised his head, opened his eyes, slipped off the bed, walked to the door, slowly indeed, but not to all appearance feeling the accident of the night before, and applied his ear for some minutes to the keyhole; then lifting his head with an expression of indescribable pride, he wiped his brow with his hand, and for the first time since his guards went out, breathed freely with full-drawn breaths.

There was no time to lose: his first care was to shut the door as securely on the inside as it was already shut on the outside, to blow out the lamp, to open the window, and to finish sawing through the bar. When this was done, he undid the bandages on his leg, took down the window and bed curtains, tore them into strips, joined the sheets, table napkins and cloth, and with all these things tied together end to end, formed a rope fifty or sixty feet long, with knots every here and there. This rope he fixed securely to the bar next to the one he had just cut through; then he climbed up to the window and began what was really the hardest part of his perilous enterprise, clinging with hands and feet to this fragile support. Luckily he was both strong and skilful, and he went down the whole length of the rope without accident; but when he reached the end and was hanging on the last knot, he sought in vain to touch the ground with his feet; his rope was too short.

The situation was a terrible one: the darkness of the night prevented the fugitive from seeing how far off he was from the ground, and his fatigue prevented him from even attempting to climb up again. Caesar put up a brief prayer, whether to Gad or Satan he alone could say; then letting go the rope, he dropped from a height of twelve or fifteen feet.

The danger was too great for the fugitive to trouble about a few trifling contusions: he at once rose, and guiding himself by the direction of his window, he went straight to the little door of exit; he then put his hand into the pocket of his doublet, and a cold sweat damped his brow; either he had forgotten and left it in his room or had lost it in his fall; anyhow, he had not the key.

But summoning his recollections, he quite gave up the first idea for the second, which was the only likely one: again he crossed the court, looking for the place where the key might have fallen, by the aid of the wall round a tank on which he had laid his hand when he got up; but the object of search was so small and the night so dark that there was little chance of getting any result; still Caesar sought for it, for in this key was his last hope: suddenly a door was opened, and a night watch appeared, preceded by two torches. Caesar far the moment thought he was lost, but remembering the tank behind him, he dropped into it, and with nothing but his head above water anxiously watched the movements of the soldiers, as they advanced beside him, passed only a few feet away, crossed the court, and then disappeared by an opposite door. But short as their luminous apparition had been, it had lighted up the ground, and Caesar by the glare of the torches had caught the glitter of the long-sought key, and as soon as the door was shut behind the men, was again master of his liberty.

Half-way between the castle and the village two cavaliers and a led horse were waiting for him: the two men were Michelotto and the Count of Benevento. Caesar sprang upon the riderless horse, pressed with fervour the hand of the count and the sbirro; then all three galloped to the frontier of Navarre, where they arrived three days later, and were honourably received by the king, Jean d'Albret, the brother of Caesar's wife.

From Navarre he thought to pass into France, and from France to make an attempt upon Italy, with the aid of Louis XII; but during Caesar's detention in the castle of Medina del Campo, Louis had made peace with the King of Spain; and when he heard of Caesar's flight; instead of helping him, as there was some reason to expect he would, since he was a relative by marriage, he took away the duchy of Valentinois and also his pension. Still, Caesar had nearly 200,000 ducats in the charge of bankers at Genoa; he wrote asking for this sum, with which he hoped to levy troops in Spain and in Navarre, and make an attempt upon Pisa: 500 men, 200,000 ducats, his name and his word were more than enough to save him from despair.

The bankers denied the deposit.

Caesar was at the mercy of his brother-in-law.

One of the vassals of the King of Navarre, named Prince Alarino, had just then revolted: Caesar then took command of the army which Jean d'Albret was sending out against him, followed by Michelotto, who was as faithful in adversity as ever before. Thanks to Caesar's courage and skilful tactics, Prince Alarino was beaten in a first encounter; but the day after his defeat he rallied his army, and offered battle about three o'clock in the afternoon. Caesar accepted it.

For nearly four hours they fought obstinately on both sides; but at length, as the day was going down, Caesar proposed to decide the issue by making a charge himself, at the head of a hundred men-at-arms, upon a body of cavalry which made his adversary's chief force. To his great astonishment, this cavalry at the first shock gave way and took flight in the direction of a little wood, where they seemed to be seeking refuge. Caesar followed close on their heels up to the edge of the forest; then suddenly the pursued turned right about face, three or four hundred archers came out of the wood to help them, and Caesar’s men, seeing that they had fallen into an ambush, took to their heels like cowards, and abandoned their leader.

Left alone, Caesar would not budge one step; possibly he had had enough of life, and his heroism was rather the result of satiety than courage: however that may be, he defended himself like a lion; but, riddled with arrows and bolts, his horse at last fell, with Caesar’s leg under him. His adversaries rushed upon him, and one of them thrusting a sharp and slender iron pike through a weak place in his armour, pierced his breast; Caesar cursed God and died.

But the rest of the enemy’s army was defeated, thanks to the courage of Michelotto, who fought like a valiant condottiere, but learned, on returning to the camp in the evening, from those who had fled; that they had abandoned Caesar and that he had never reappeared. Then only too certain, from his master’s well-known courage, that disaster had occurred, he desired to give one last proof of his devotion by not leaving his body to the wolves and birds of prey. Torches were lighted, for it was dark, and with ten or twelve of those who had gone with Caesar as far as the little wood, he went to seek his master. On reaching the spot they pointed out, he beheld five men stretched side by side; four of them were dressed, but the fifth had been stripped of his clothing and lay completely naked. Michelotto dismounted, lifted the head upon his knees, and by the light of the torches recognised Caesar.

Thus fell, on the 10th of March, 1507, on an unknown field, near an obscure village called Viane, in a wretched skirmish with the vassal of a petty king, the man whom Macchiavelli presents to all princes as the model of ability, diplomacy, and courage.

As to Lucrezia, the fair Duchess of Ferrara, she died full of years, and honours, adored as a queen by her subjects, and sung as a goddess by Ariosto and by Bembo.

EPILOGUE

There was once in Paris, says Boccaccio, a brave and good merchant named Jean de Civigny, who did a great trade in drapery, and was connected in business with a neighbour and fellow-merchant, a very rich man called Abraham, who, though a Jew, enjoyed a good reputation. Jean de Civigny, appreciating the qualities of the worthy Israelite; feared lest, good man as he was, his false religion would bring his soul straight to eternal perdition; so he began to urge him gently as a friend to renounce his errors and open his eyes to the Christian faith, which he could see for himself was prospering and spreading day by day, being the only true and good religion; whereas his own creed, it was very plain, was so quickly diminishing that it would soon disappear from the face of the earth. The Jew replied that except in his own religion there was no salvation, that he was born in it, proposed to live and die in it, and that he knew nothing in the world that could change his opinion. Still, in his proselytising fervour Jean would not think himself beaten, and never a day passed but he demonstrated with those fair words the merchant uses to seduce a customer, the superiority of the Christian religion above the Jewish; and although Abraham was a great master of Mosaic law, he began to enjoy his friend’s preaching, either because of the friendship he felt for him or because the Holy Ghost descended upon the tongue of the new apostle; still obstinate in his own belief, he would not change. The more he persisted in his error, the more excited was Jean about converting him, so that at last, by God’s help, being somewhat shaken by his friend’s urgency, Abraham one day said —

“Listen, Jean: since you have it so much at heart that I should be converted, behold me disposed to satisfy you; but before I go to Rome to see him whom you call God’s vicar on earth, I must study his manner of life and his morals, as also those of his brethren the cardinals; and if, as I doubt not, they are in harmony with what you preach, I will admit that, as you have taken such pains to show me, your faith is better than mine, and I will do as you desire; but if it should prove otherwise, I shall remain a Jew, as I was before; for it is not worth while, at my age, to change my belief for a worse one.”

Jean was very sad when he heard these words; and he said mournfully to himself, “Now I have lost my time and pains, which I thought I had spent so well when I was hoping to convert this unhappy Abraham; for if he unfortunately goes, as he says he will, to the court of Rome, and there sees the shameful life led by the servants of the Church, instead of becoming a Christian the Jew will be more of a Jew than ever.” Then turning to Abraham, he said, “Ah, friend, why do you wish to incur such fatigue and expense by going to Rome, besides the fact that travelling by sea or by land must be very dangerous for so rich a man as you are? Do you suppose there is no one here to baptize you? If you have any doubts concerning the faith I have expounded, where better than here will you find theologians capable of contending with them and allaying them? So, you see, this voyage seems to me quite unnecessary: just imagine that the priests there are such as you see here, and all the better in that they are nearer to the supreme pastor. If you are guided by my advice, you will postpone this toil till you have committed some grave sin and need absolution; then you and I will go together.”

But the Jew replied —

“I believe, dear Jean, that everything is as you tell me; but you know how obstinate I am. I will go to Rome, or I will never be a Christian.”

Then Jean, seeing his great wish, resolved that it was no use trying to thwart him, and wished him good luck; but in his heart he gave up all hope; for it was certain that his friend would come back from his pilgrimage more of a Jew than ever, if the court of Rome was still as he had seen it.

But Abraham mounted his horse, and at his best speed took the road to Rome, where on his arrival he was wonderfully well received by his coreligionists; and after staying there a good long time, he began to study the behaviour of the pope, the cardinals and other prelates, and of the whole court. But much to his surprise he found out, partly by what passed under his eyes and partly by what he was told, that all from the pope downward to the lowest sacristan of St. Peter’s were committing the sins of luxurious living in a most disgraceful and unbridled manner, with no remorse and no shame, so that pretty women and handsome youths could obtain any favours they pleased. In addition to this sensuality which they exhibited in public, he saw that they were gluttons and drunkards, so much so that they were more the slaves of the belly than are the greediest of animals. When he looked a little further, he found them so avaricious and fond of money that they sold for hard cash both human bodies and divine offices, and with less conscience than a man in Paris would sell cloth or any other merchandise. Seeing this and much more that it would not be proper to set down here, it seemed to Abraham, himself a chaste, sober, and upright man, that he had seen enough. So he resolved to return to Paris, and carried out the resolution with his usual promptitude. Jean de Civigny held a great fete in honour of his return, although he had lost hope of his coming back converted. But he left time for him to settle down before he spoke of anything, thinking there would be plenty of time to hear the bad news he expected. But, after a few days of rest, Abraham himself came to see his friend, and Jean ventured to ask what he thought of the Holy Father, the cardinals, and the other persons at the pontifical court. At these words the Jew exclaimed, “God damn them all! I never once succeeded in finding among them any holiness, any devotion, any good works; but, on the contrary, luxurious living, avarice, greed, fraud, envy, pride, and even worse, if there is worse; all the machine seemed to be set in motion by an impulse less divine than diabolical. After what I saw, it is my firm conviction that your pope, and of course the others as well, are using all their talents, art, endeavours, to banish the Christian religion from the face of the earth, though they ought to be its foundation and support; and since, in spite of all the care and trouble they expend to arrive at this end, I see that your religion is spreading every day and becoming more brilliant and more pure, it is borne in upon me that the Holy Spirit Himself protects it as the only true and the most holy religion; this is why, deaf as you found me to your counsel and rebellious to your wish, I am now, ever since I returned from this Sodom, firmly resolved on becoming a Christian. So let us go at once to the church, for I am quite ready to be baptized.”

There is no need to say if Jean de Civigny, who expected a refusal, was pleased at this consent. Without delay he went with his godson to Notre Dame de Paris, where he prayed the first priest he met to administer baptism to his friend, and this was speedily done; and the new convert changed his Jewish name of Abraham into the Christian name of Jean; and as the neophyte, thanks to his journey to Rome, had gained a profound belief, his natural good qualities increased so greatly in the practice of our holy religion, that after leading an exemplary life he died in the full odour of sanctity.

This tale of Boccaccio’s gives so admirable an answer to the charge of irreligion which some might make against us if they mistook our intentions, that as we shall not offer any other reply, we have not hesitated to present it entire as it stands to the eyes of our readers.

And let us never forget that if the papacy has had an Innocent VIII and an Alexander VI who are its shame, it has also had a Pius VII and a Gregory XVI who are its honour and glory.

THE CENCI — 1598

Should you ever go to Rome and visit the villa Pamphili, no doubt, after having sought under its tall pines and along its canals the shade and freshness so rare in the capital of the Christian world, you will descend towards the Janiculum Hill by a charming road, in the middle of which you will find the Pauline fountain. Having passed this monument, and having lingered a moment on the terrace of the church of St. Peter Montorio, which commands the whole of Rome, you will visit the cloister of Bramante, in the middle of which, sunk a few feet below the level, is built, on the identical place where St. Peter was crucified, a little temple, half Greek, half Christian; you will thence ascend by a side door into the church itself. There, the attentive cicerone will show you, in the first chapel to the right, the Christ Scourged, by Sebastian del Piombo, and in the third chapel to the left, an Entombment by Fiammingo; having examined these two masterpieces at leisure, he will take you to each end of the transverse cross, and will show you — on one side a picture by Salviati, on slate, and on the other a work by Vasari; then, pointing out in melancholy tones a copy of Guido's Martyrdom of St. Peter on the high altar, he will relate to you how for three centuries the divine Raffaelle's Transfiguration was worshipped in that spot; how it was carried away by the French in 1809, and restored to the pope by the Allies in 1814. As you have already in all probability admired this masterpiece in the Vatican, allow him to expatiate, and search at the foot of the altar for a mortuary slab, which you will identify by a cross and the single word; Orate; under this gravestone is buried Beatrice Cenci, whose tragical story cannot but impress you profoundly.

She was the daughter of Francesco Cenci. Whether or not it be true that men are born in harmony with their epoch, and that some embody its good qualities and others its bad ones, it may nevertheless interest our readers to cast a rapid glance over the period which had just passed when the events which we are about to relate took place. Francesco Cenci will then appear to them as the diabolical incarnation of his time.

On the 11th of August, 1492, after the lingering death-agony of Innocent VIII, during which two hundred and twenty murders were committed in the streets of Rome, Alexander VI ascended the pontifical throne. Son of a sister of Pope Calixtus III, Roderigo Lenzuoli Borgia, before being created cardinal, had five children by Rosa Vanozza, whom he afterwards caused to be married to a rich Roman. These children were:

Francis, Duke of Gandia;

Caesar, bishop and cardinal, afterwards Duke of Valentinois;

Lucrezia, who was married four times: her first husband was Giovanni Sforza, lord of Pesaro, whom she left owing to his impotence; the second, Alfonso, Duke of Bisiglia, whom her brother Caesar caused to be assassinated; the third, Alfonso d'Este, Duke of Ferrara, from whom a second divorce separated her; finally, the fourth, Alfonso of Aragon, who was stabbed to death on the steps of the basilica of St. Peter, and afterwards, three weeks later, strangled, because he did not die soon enough from his wounds, which nevertheless were mortal;

Giofre, Count of Squillace, of whom little is known;

And, finally, a youngest son, of whom nothing at all is known.

The most famous of these three brothers was Caesar Borgia. He had made every arrangement a plotter could make to be King of Italy at the death of his father the pope, and his measures were so carefully taken as to leave no doubt in his own mind as to the success of this vast project. Every chance was provided against, except one; but Satan himself could hardly have foreseen this particular one. The reader will judge for himself.

The pope had invited Cardinal Adrien to supper in his vineyard on the Belvidere; Cardinal Adrien was very rich, and the pope wished to inherit his wealth, as he already had acquired that of the Cardinals of Sant' Angelo, Capua, and Modena. To effect this, Caesar Borgia sent two bottles of poisoned wine to his father's cup-bearer, without taking him into his confidence; he only instructed him not to serve this wine till he himself gave orders to do so; unfortunately, during supper the cup-bearer left his post for a moment, and in this interval a careless butler served the poisoned wine to the pope, to Caesar Borgia, and to Cardinal Corneto.

Alexander VI died some hours afterwards; Caesar Borgia was confined to bed, and sloughed off his skin; while Cardinal Corneto lost his sight and his senses, and was brought to death's door.

Pius III succeeded Alexander VI, and reigned twenty-five days; on the twenty-sixth he was poisoned also.

Caesar Borgia had under his control eighteen Spanish cardinals who owed to him their places in the Sacred College; these cardinals were entirely his creatures, and he could command them absolutely. As he was in a moribund condition and could make no use of them for himself, he sold them to Giuliano della Rovere, and Giuliano della Rovere was elected pope, under the name of Julius II. To the Rome of Nero succeeded the Athens of Pericles.

Leo X succeeded Julius II, and under his pontificate Christianity assumed a pagan character, which, passing from art into manners, gives to this epoch a strange complexion. Crimes for the moment disappeared, to give place to vices; but to charming vices, vices in good taste, such as those indulged in by Alcibiades and sung by Catullus. Leo X died after having assembled under his reign, which lasted eight years, eight months, and nineteen days, Michael Angelo, Raffaelle, Leonardo da Vinci, Correggio, Titian, Andrea del Sarto, Fra Bartolommeo, Giulio Romano, Ariosto, Guicciardini, and Macchiavelli.

Giulio di Medici and Pompeo Colonna had equal claims to succeed him. As both were skilful politicians, experienced courtiers, and moreover of real and almost equal merit, neither of them could obtain a majority, and the Conclave was prolonged almost indefinitely, to the great fatigue of the cardinals. So it happened one day that a cardinal, more tired than the rest, proposed to elect, instead of either Medici or Colonna, the son, some say of a weaver, others of a brewer of Utrecht, of whom no one had ever thought till then, and who was for the moment acting head of affairs in Spain, in the absence of Charles the Fifth. The jest prospered in the ears of those who heard it; all the cardinals approved their colleague’s proposal, and Adrien became pope by a mere accident.

He was a perfect specimen of the Flemish type a regular Dutchman, and could not speak a word of Italian. When he arrived in Rome, and saw the Greek masterpieces of sculpture collected at vast cost by Leo X, he wished to break them to pieces, exclaiming, “Suet idola anticorum.” His first act was to despatch a papal nuncio, Francesco Cherigato, to the Diet of Nuremberg, convened to discuss the reforms of Luther, with instructions which give a vivid notion of the manners of the time.

“Candidly confess,” said he, “that God has permitted this schism and this persecution on account of the sins of man, and especially those of priests and prelates of the Church; for we know that many abominable things have taken place in the Holy See.”

Adrien wished to bring the Romans back to the simple and austere manners of the early Church, and with this object pushed reform to the minutest details. For instance, of the hundred grooms maintained by Leo X, he retained only a dozen, in order, he said, to have two more than the cardinals.

A pope like this could not reign long: he died after a year's pontificate. The morning after his death his physician's door was found decorated with garlands of flowers, bearing this inscription: "To the liberator of his country."

Giulio di Medici and Pompeo Colonna were again rival candidates. Intrigues recommenced, and the Conclave was once more so divided that at one time the cardinals thought they could only escape the difficulty in which they were placed by doing what they had done before, and electing a third competitor; they were even talking about Cardinal Orsini, when Giulio di Medici, one of the rival candidates, hit upon a very ingenious expedient. He wanted only five votes; five of his partisans each offered to bet five of Colonna's a hundred thousand ducats to ten thousand against the election of Giulio di Medici. At the very first ballot after the wager, Giulio di Medici got the five votes he wanted; no objection could be made, the cardinals had not been bribed; they had made a bet, that was all.

Thus it happened, on the 18th of November, 1523, Giulio di Medici was proclaimed pope under the name of Clement VII. The same day, he generously paid the five hundred thousand ducats which his five partisans had lost.

It was under this pontificate, and during the seven months in which Rome, conquered by the Lutheran soldiers of the Constable of Bourbon, saw holy things subjected to the most frightful profanations, that Francesco Cenci was born.

He was the son of Monsignor Nicolo Cenci, afterwards apostolic treasurer during the pontificate of Pius V. Under this venerable prelate, who occupied himself much more with the spiritual than the temporal administration of his kingdom, Nicolo Cenci took advantage of his spiritual head's abstraction of worldly matters to amass a net revenue of a hundred and sixty thousand piastres, about f32,000 of our money. Francesco Cenci, who was his only son, inherited this fortune.

His youth was spent under popes so occupied with the schism of Luther that they had no time to think of anything else. The result was, that

Francesco Cenci, inheriting vicious instincts and master of an immense fortune which enabled him to purchase immunity, abandoned himself to all the evil passions of his fiery and passionate temperament. Five times during his profligate career imprisoned for abominable crimes, he only succeeded in procuring his liberation by the payment of two hundred thousand piastres, or about one million francs. It should be explained that popes at this time were in great need of money.

The lawless profligacy of Francesco Cenci first began seriously to attract public attention under the pontificate of Gregory XIII. This reign offered marvellous facilities for the development of a reputation such as that which this reckless Italian Don Juan seemed bent on acquiring. Under the Bolognese Buoncampagno, a free hand was given to those able to pay both assassins and judges. Rape and murder were so common that public justice scarcely troubled itself with these trifling things, if nobody appeared to prosecute the guilty parties. The good Gregory had his reward for his easygoing indulgence; he was spared to rejoice over the Massacre of St. Bartholomew.

Francesco Cenci was at the time of which we are speaking a man of forty-four or forty-five years of age, about five feet four inches in height, symmetrically proportioned, and very strong, although rather thin; his hair was streaked with grey, his eyes were large and expressive, although the upper eyelids drooped somewhat; his nose was long, his lips were thin, and wore habitually a pleasant smile, except when his eye perceived an enemy; at this moment his features assumed a terrible expression; on such occasions, and whenever moved or even slightly irritated, he was seized with a fit of nervous trembling, which lasted long after the cause which provoked it had passed. An adept in all manly exercises and especially in horsemanship, he sometimes used to ride without stopping from Rome to Naples, a distance of forty-one leagues, passing through the forest of San Germano and the Pontine marshes heedless of brigands, although he might be alone and unarmed save for his sword and dagger. When his horse fell from fatigue, he bought another; were the owner unwilling to sell he took it by force; if resistance were made, he struck, and always with the point, never the hilt. In most cases, being well known throughout the Papal States as a free-handed person, nobody tried to thwart him; some yielding through fear, others from motives of interest. Impious, sacrilegious, and atheistical, he never entered a church except to profane its sanctity. It was said of him that he had a morbid appetite for novelties in crime, and that there was no outrage he would not commit if he hoped by so doing to enjoy a new sensation.

At the age of about forty-five he had married a very rich woman, whose name is not mentioned by any chronicler. She died, leaving him seven children — five boys and two girls. He then married Lucrezia Petroni, a perfect beauty of the Roman type, except for the ivory pallor of her complexion. By this second marriage he had no children.

As if Francesco Cenci were void of all natural affection, he hated his children, and was at no pains to conceal his feelings towards them: on one occasion, when he was building, in the courtyard of his magnificent palace, near the Tiber, a chapel dedicated to St. Thomas, he remarked to the architect, when instructing him to design a family vault, “That is where I hope to bury them all.” The architect often subsequently admitted that he was so terrified by the fiendish laugh which accompanied these words, that had not Francesco Cenci’s work been extremely profitable, he would have refused to go on with it.

As soon as his three eldest boys, Giacomo, Cristoforo, and Rocco, were out of their tutors’ hands, in order to get rid of them he sent them to the University of Salamanca, where, out of sight, they were out of mind, for he thought no more about them, and did not even send them the means of subsistence. In these straits, after struggling for some months against their wretched plight, the lads were obliged to leave Salamanca, and beg their way home, tramping barefoot through France and Italy, till they made their way back to Rome, where they found their father harsher and more unkind than ever.

This happened in the early part of the reign of Clement VIII, famed for his justice. The three youths resolved to apply to him, to grant them an allowance out of their father’s immense income. They consequently repaired to Frascati, where the pope was building the beautiful Aldobrandini Villa, and stated their case. The pope admitted the justice of their claims, and ordered Francesco, to allow each of them two thousand crowns a year. He endeavoured by every possible means to evade this decree, but the pope’s orders were too stringent to be disobeyed.

About this period he was for the third time imprisoned for infamous crimes. His three sons them again petitioned the pope, alleging that their father dishonoured the family name, and praying that the extreme rigour of the law, a capital sentence, should be enforced in his case. The pope pronounced this conduct unnatural and odious, and drove them with ignominy from his presence. As for Francesco, he escaped, as on the two previous occasions, by the payment of a large sum of money.

It will be readily understood that his sons' conduct on this occasion did not improve their father's disposition towards them, but as their independent pensions enabled them to keep out of his way, his rage fell with all the greater intensity on his two unhappy daughters. Their situation soon became so intolerable, that the elder, contriving to elude the close supervision under which she was kept, forwarded to the pope a petition, relating the cruel treatment to which she was subjected, and praying His Holiness either to give her in marriage or place her in a convent. Clement VIII took pity on her; compelled Francesco Cenci to give her a dowry of sixty thousand crowns, and married her to Carlo Gabrielli, of a noble family of Gubbio. Francesco driven nearly frantic with rage when he saw this victim released from his clutches.

About the same time death relieved him from two other encumbrances: his sons Rocco and Cristoforo were killed within a year of each other; the latter by a bungling medical practitioner whose name is unknown; the former by Paolo Corso di Massa, in the streets of Rome. This came as a relief to Francesco, whose avarice pursued his sons even after their death, far he intimated to the priest that he would not spend a farthing on funeral services. They were accordingly borne to the paupers' graves which he had caused to be prepared for them, and when he saw them both interred, he cried out that he was well rid of such good-for-nothing children, but that he should be perfectly happy only when the remaining five were buried with the first two, and that when he had got rid of the last he himself would burn down his palace as a bonfire to celebrate the event.

But Francesco took every precaution against his second daughter, Beatrice Cenci, following the example of her elder sister. She was then a child of twelve or thirteen years of age, beautiful and innocent as an angel. Her long fair hair, a beauty seen so rarely in Italy, that Raffaelle, believing it divine, has appropriated it to all his Madonnas, curtained a lovely forehead, and fell in flowing locks over her shoulders. Her azure eyes bore a heavenly expression; she was of middle height, exquisitely proportioned; and during the rare moments when a gleam of happiness allowed her natural character to display itself, she was lively, joyous, and sympathetic, but at the same time evinced a firm and decided disposition.

To make sure of her custody, Francesco kept her shut up in a remote apartment of his palace, the key of which he kept in his own possession. There, her unnatural and inflexible gaoler daily brought her some food. Up to the age of thirteen, which she had now reached, he had behaved to her with the most extreme harshness and severity; but now, to poor Beatrice's great astonishment, he all at once became gentle and even tender. Beatrice was a child no longer; her beauty expanded like a flower; and Francesco, a stranger to no crime, however heinous, had marked her for his own.

Brought up as she had been, uneducated, deprived of all society, even that of her stepmother, Beatrice knew not good from evil: her ruin was comparatively easy to compass; yet Francesco, to accomplish his diabolical purpose, employed all the means at his command. Every night she was awakened by a concert of music which seemed to come from Paradise. When she mentioned this to her father, he left her in this belief, adding that if she proved gentle and obedient she would be rewarded by heavenly sights, as well as heavenly sounds.

One night it came to pass that as the young girl was reposing, her head supported on her elbow, and listening to a delightful harmony, the chamber door suddenly opened, and from the darkness of her own room she beheld a suite of apartments brilliantly illuminated, and sensuous with perfumes; beautiful youths and girls, half clad, such as she had seen in the pictures of Guido and Raffaelle, moved to and fro in these apartments, seeming full of joy and happiness: these were the ministers to the pleasures of Francesco, who, rich as a king, every night revelled in the orgies of Alexander, the wedding revels of Lucrezia, and the excesses of Tiberius at Capri. After an hour, the door closed, and the seductive vision vanished, leaving Beatrice full of trouble and amazement.

The night following, the same apparition again presented itself, only, on this occasion, Francesco Cenci, undressed, entered his daughter's roam and invited her to join the fete. Hardly knowing what she did, Beatrice yet perceived the impropriety of yielding to her father's wishes: she replied that, not seeing her stepmother, Lucrezia Petroni, among all these women, she dared not leave her bed to mix with persons who were unknown to her. Francesco threatened and prayed, but threats and prayers were of no avail.

Beatrice wrapped herself up in the bedclothes, and obstinately refused to obey.

The next night she threw herself on her bed without undressing. At the accustomed hour the door opened, and the nocturnal spectacle reappeared. This time, Lucrezia Petroni was among the women who passed before Beatrice’s door; violence had compelled her to undergo this humiliation. Beatrice was too far off to see her blushes and her tears. Francesco pointed out her stepmother, whom she had lacked for in vain the previous evening; and as she could no longer make any opposition, he led her, covered with blushes and confusion, into the middle of this orgy.

Beatrice there saw incredible and infamous things....

Nevertheless, she resisted a long time: an inward voice told her that this was horrible; but Francesco had the slaw persistence of a demon. To these sights, calculated to stimulate her passions, he added heresies designed to warp her mind; he told her that the greatest saints venerated by the Church were the issue of fathers and daughters, and in the end Beatrice committed a crime without even knowing it to be a sin.

His brutality then knew no bounds. He forced Lucrezia and Beatrice to share the same bed, threatening his wife to kill her if she disclosed to his daughter by a single word that there was anything odious in such an intercourse. So matters went on for about three years.

At this time Francesco was obliged to make a journey, and leave the women alone and free. The first thing Lucrezia did was to enlighten Beatrice an the infamy of the life they were leading; they then together prepared a memorial to the pope, in which they laid before him a statement of all the blows and outrages they had suffered. But, before leaving, Francesco Cenci had taken precautions; every person about the pope was in his pay, or hoped to be. The petition never reached His Holiness, and the two poor women, remembering that Clement VIII had on a farmer occasion driven Giacomo, Cristaforo, and Rocco from his presence, thought they were included in the same proscription, and looked upon themselves as abandoned to their fate.

When matters were in this state, Giacomo, taking advantage of his father’s absence, came to pay them a visit with a friend of his, an abbe named Guerra: he was a young man of twenty-five or twenty-six, belonging to one of the most noble families in Rome, of a bold, resolute, and courageous character, and idolised by all the Roman ladies for his beauty.

To classical features he added blue eyes swimming in poetic sentiment; his hair was long and fair, with chestnut beard and eyebrows; add to these attractions a highly educated mind, natural eloquence expressed by a musical and penetrating voice, and the reader may form some idea of Monsignor the Abbe Guerra.

No sooner had he seen Beatrice than he fell in love with her. On her side, she was not slow to return the sympathy of the young priest. The Council of Trent had not been held at that time, consequently ecclesiastics were not precluded from marriage. It was therefore decided that on the return of Francesco the Abbe Guerra should demand the hand of Beatrice from her father, and the women, happy in the absence of their master, continued to live on, hoping for better things to come.

After three or four months, during which no one knew where he was, Francesco returned. The very first night, he wished to resume his intercourse with Beatrice; but she was no longer the same person, the timid and submissive child had become a girl of decided will; strong in her love for the abbe, she resisted alike prayers, threats, and blows.

The wrath of Francesco fell upon his wife, whom he accused of betraying him; he gave her a violent thrashing. Lucrezia Petroni was a veritable Roman she-wolf, passionate alike in love and vengeance; she endured all, but pardoned nothing.

Some days after this, the Abbe Guerra arrived at the Cenci palace to carry out what had been arranged. Rich, young, noble, and handsome, everything would seem to promise him success; yet he was rudely dismissed by Francesco. The first refusal did not daunt him; he returned to the charge a second time and yet a third, insisting upon the suitableness of such a union. At length Francesco, losing patience, told this obstinate lover that a reason existed why Beatrice could be neither his wife nor any other man’s. Guerra demanded what this reason was. Francesco replied:

“Because she is my mistress.”

Monsignor Guerra turned pale at this answer, although at first he did not believe a word of it; but when he saw the smile with which Francesco Cenci accompanied his words, he was compelled to believe that, terrible though it was, the truth had been spoken.

For three days he sought an interview with Beatrice in vain; at length he succeeded in finding her. His last hope was her denial of this horrible story: Beatrice confessed all. Henceforth there was no human hope for the two lovers; an impassable gulf separated them. They parted bathed in tears, promising to love one another always.

Up to that time the two women had not formed any criminal resolution, and possibly the tragical incident might never have happened, had not Frances one night returned into his daughter's room and violently forced her into the commission of fresh crime.

Henceforth the doom of Francesco was irrevocably pronounced.

As we have said, the mind of Beatrice was susceptible to the best and the worst influences: it could attain excellence, and descend to guilt. She went and told her mother of the fresh outrage she had undergone; this roused in the heart of the other woman the sting of her own wrongs; and, stimulating each other's desire for revenge, they, decided upon the murder of Francesco.

Guerra was called in to this council of death. His heart was a prey to hatred and revenge. He undertook to communicate with Giacomo Cenci, without whose concurrence the women would not act, as he was the head of the family, when his father was left out of account.

Giacomo entered readily into the conspiracy. It will be remembered what he had formerly suffered from his father; since that time he had married, and the close-fisted old man had left him, with his wife and children, to languish in poverty. Guerra's house was selected to meet in and concert matters.

Giacomo hired a sbirro named Marzio, and Guerra a second named Olympio.

Both these men had private reasons for committing the crime — one being actuated by love, the other by hatred. Marzio, who was in the service of Giacomo, had often seen Beatrice, and loved her, but with that silent and hopeless love which devours the soul. When he conceived that the proposed crime would draw him nearer to Beatrice, he accepted his part in it without any demur.

As for Olympio, he hated Francesco, because the latter had caused him to lose the post of castellan of Rocco Petrella, a fortified stronghold in the kingdom of Naples, belonging to Prince Colonna. Almost every year Francesco Cenci spent some months at Rocco Petrella with his family; for Prince Colonna, a noble and magnificent but needy prince, had much esteem for Francesco, whose purse he found extremely useful. It had so happened that Francesco, being dissatisfied with Olympio, complained about him to Prince Colonna, and he was dismissed.

After several consultations between the Cenci family, the abbe and the sbirri, the following plan of action was decided upon.

The period when Francesco Cenci was accustomed to go to Rocco Petrella was approaching: it was arranged that Olympio, conversant with the district and its inhabitants, should collect a party of a dozen Neapolitan bandits, and conceal them in a forest through which the travellers would have to pass. Upon a given signal, the whole family were to be seized and carried off. A heavy ransom was to be demanded, and the sons were to be sent back to Rome to raise the sum; but, under pretext of inability to do so, they were to allow the time fixed by the bandits to lapse, when Francesco was to be put to death. Thus all suspicions of a plot would be avoided, and the real assassins would escape justice.

This well-devised scheme was nevertheless unsuccessful. When Francesco left Rome, the scout sent in advance by the conspirators could not find the bandits; the latter, not being warned beforehand, failed to come down before the passage of the travellers, who arrived safe and sound at Rocco Petreila. The bandits, after having patrolled the road in vain, came to the conclusion that their prey had escaped, and, unwilling to stay any longer in a place where they had already spent a week, went off in quest of better luck elsewhere.

Francesco had in the meantime settled down in the fortress, and, to be more free to tyrannise over Lucrezia and Beatrice, sent back to Rome Giacomo and his two other sons. He then recommenced his infamous attempts upon Beatrice, and with such persistence, that she resolved herself to accomplish the deed which at first she desired to entrust to other hands.

Olympio and Marzio, who had nothing to fear from justice, remained lurking about the castle; one day Beatrice saw them from a window, and made signs that she had something to communicate to them. The same night Olympio, who having been castellan knew all the approaches to the fortress, made his way there with his companion. Beatrice awaited them at a window which looked on to a secluded courtyard; she gave them letters which she had written to her brother and to Monsignor Guerra. The former was to approve, as he had done before, the murder of their father; for she would do nothing without his sanction. As for Monsignor Guerra, he was to pay Olympio a thousand piastres, half the stipulated sum; Marzio acting out of pure love for Beatrice, whom he worshipped as a Madonna; which observing, the girl gave him a handsome scarlet mantle, trimmed with gold lace, telling him to wear it for love of her. As for the remaining moiety, it was to be paid when the death of the old man had placed his wife and daughter in possession of his fortune.

The two sbirri departed, and the imprisoned conspirators anxiously awaited their return. On the day fixed, they were seen again. Monsignor Guerra had paid the thousand piastres, and Giacomo had given his consent. Nothing now stood in the way of the execution of this terrible deed, which was fixed for the 8th of September, the day of the Nativity of the Virgin; but Signora Lucrezia, a very devout person, having noticed this circumstance, would not be a party to the committal of a double sin; the matter was therefore deferred till the next day, the 9th.

That evening, the 9th of September, 1598, the two women, supping with the old man, mixed some narcotic with his wine so adroitly that, suspicious though he was, he never detected it, and having swallowed the potion, soon fell into a deep sleep.

The evening previous, Marzio and Olympio had been admitted into the castle, where they had lain concealed all night and all day; for, as will be remembered, the assassination would have been effected the day before had it not been for the religious scruples of Signora Lucrezia Petroni. Towards midnight, Beatrice fetched them out of their hiding-place, and took them to her father’s chamber, the door of which she herself opened. The assassins entered, and the two women awaited the issue in the room adjoining.

After a moment, seeing the sbirri reappear pale and nerveless, shaking their heads without speaking, they at once inferred that nothing had been done.

“What is the matter?” cried Beatrice; “and what hinders you?”

“It is a cowardly act,” replied the assassins, “to kill a poor old man in his sleep. At the thought of his age, we were struck with pity.”

Then Beatrice disdainfully raised her head, and in a deep firm voice thus reproached them.

“Is it possible that you, who pretend to be brave and strong, have not courage enough to kill a sleeping old man? How would it be if he were awake? And thus you steal our money! Very well: since your cowardice compels me to do so, I will kill my father myself; but you will not long survive him.”

Hearing these words, the sbirri felt ashamed of their irresolution, and, indicating by signs that they would fulfil their compact, they entered the room, accompanied by the two women. As they had said, a ray of moonlight shone through the open window, and brought into prominence the tranquil face of the old man, the sight of whose white hair had so affected them.

This time they showed no mercy. One of them carried two great nails, such as those portrayed in pictures of the Crucifixion; the other bore a mallet: the first placed a nail upright over one of the old man’s eyes; the other struck it with the hammer, and drove it into his head. The throat was pierced in the same way with the second nail; and thus the guilty soul, stained throughout its career with crimes of violence, was in its turn violently torn from the body, which lay writhing on the floor where it had rolled.

The young girl then, faithful to her word, handed the sbirri a large purse containing the rest of the sum agreed upon, and they left. When they found themselves alone, the women drew the nails out of the wounds, wrapped the corpse in a sheet, and dragged it through the rooms towards a small rampart, intending to throw it down into a garden which had been allowed to run to waste. They hoped that the old man’s death would be attributed to his having accidentally fallen off the terrace on his way in the dark to a closet at the end of the gallery. But their strength failed them when they reached the door of the last room, and, while resting there, Lucrezia perceived the two sbirri, sharing the money before making their escape. At her call they came to her, carried the corpse to the rampart, and, from a spot pointed out by the women, where the terrace was unfenced by any parapet, they threw it into an elder tree below, whose branches retained’ it suspended.

When the body was found the following morning hanging in the branches of the elder tree, everybody supposed, as Beatrice and her stepmother had foreseen, that Francesco, stepping over the edge of the 386 terrace in the dark, had thus met his end. The body was so scratched and disfigured that no one noticed the wounds made by the two nails. The ladies, as soon as the news was imparted to them, came out from their rooms, weeping and lamenting in so natural a manner as to disarm any suspicions. The only person who formed any was the laundress to whom Beatrice entrusted the sheet in which her father’s body had been wrapped, accounting for its bloody condition by a lame explanation, which the laundress accepted without question, or pretended to do so; and immediately after the funeral, the mourners returned to Rome, hoping at length to enjoy quietude and peace. For some time, indeed, they did enjoy tranquillity, perhaps poisoned by remorse, but ere long retribution pursued them. The court of Naples, hearing of the sudden and unexpected death of Francesco Cenci, and conceiving some suspicions of violence, despatched a royal commissioner to Petrella to exhume the body and make minute inquiries, if there appeared to be adequate grounds for doing so. On his arrival all the domestics in the castle were placed under arrest and sent in chains to Naples. No incriminating proofs, however, were found, except in the evidence of the laundress, who deposed that Beatrice had given her a bloodstained sheet to wash. This, clue led to terrible consequences; for, further questioned she declared that she could not believe the explanation given to account for its condition. The evidence was sent to the Roman court; but at that period it did not appear strong enough to warrant the arrest of the Cenci family, who remained undisturbed for many months, during which time the youngest boy died. Of the five brothers there only remained Giacomo, the eldest, and Bernardo, the youngest but one. Nothing prevented them from escaping to Venice or Florence; but they remained quietly in Rome.

Meantime Monsignor Guerra received private information that, shortly before the death of Francesco, Marzio and Olympio had been seen prowling round the castle, and that the Neapolitan police had received orders to arrest them.

The monsignor was a most wary man, and very difficult to catch napping when warned in time. He immediately hired two other sbirri to assassinate Marzio and Olympio. The one commissioned to put Olympio out of the way came across him at Terni, and conscientiously did his work with a poniard, but Marzio’s man unfortunately arrived at Naples too late, and found his bird already in the hands of the police.

He was put to the torture, and confessed everything. His deposition was sent to Rome, whither he shortly afterwards followed it, to be confronted with the accused. Warrants were immediately issued for the arrest of Giacomo, Bernardo, Lucrezia, and Beatrice; they were at first confined in the Cenci palace under a strong guard, but the proofs against them becoming stronger and stronger, they were removed to the castle of Corte Savella, where they were confronted with Marzio; but they obstinately denied both any complicity in the crime and any knowledge of the assassin. Beatrice, above all, displayed the greatest assurance, demanding to be the first to be confronted with Marzio; whose mendacity she affirmed with such calm dignity, that he, more than ever smitten by her beauty, determined, since he could not live for her, to save her by his death. Consequently, he declared all his statements to be false, and asked forgiveness from God and from Beatrice; neither threats nor tortures could make him recant, and he died firm in his denial, under frightful tortures. The Cenci then thought themselves safe.

God’s justice, however, still pursued them. The sbirro who had killed Olympio happened to be arrested for another crime, and, making a clean breast, confessed that he had been employed by Monsignor Guerra — to put out of the way a fellow-assassin named Olympio, who knew too many of the monsignor’s secrets.

Luckily for himself, Monsignor Guerra heard of this opportunely. A man of infinite resource, he lost not a moment in timid or irresolute plans, but as it happened that at the very moment when he was warned, the charcoal dealer who supplied his house with fuel was at hand, he sent for him, purchased his silence with a handsome bribe, and then, buying for almost their weight in gold the dirty old clothes which he wore, he assumed these, cut off all his beautiful cherished fair hair, stained his beard, smudged his face, bought two asses, laden with charcoal, and limped up and down the streets of Rome, crying, “Charcoal! charcoal!” Then, whilst all the detectives were hunting high and low for him, he got out of the city, met a company of merchants under escort, joined them, and reached Naples, where he embarked. What ultimately became of him was never known; it has been asserted, but without confirmation, that he succeeded — in reaching France, and enlisted in a Swiss regiment in the pay of Henry IV.

The confession of the sbirro and the disappearance of Monsignor Guerra left no moral doubt of the guilt of the Cenci. They were consequently sent from the castle to the prison; the two brothers, when put to the torture, broke down and confessed their guilt. Lucrezia Petroni’s full habit of body rendered her unable to bear the torture of the rope, and, on being suspended in the air, begged to be lowered, when she confessed all she knew.

As for Beatrice, she continued unmoved; neither promises, threats, nor torture had any effect upon her; she bore everything unflinchingly, and the judge Ulysses Moscati himself, famous though he was in such matters, failed to draw from her a single incriminating word. Unwilling to take any further responsibility, he referred the case to Clement VIII; and the pope, conjecturing that the judge had been too lenient in applying the torture to, a young and beautiful Roman lady, took it out of his hands and entrusted it to another judge, whose severity and insensibility to emotion were undisputed.

This latter reopened the whole interrogatory, and as Beatrice up to that time had only been subjected to the ordinary torture, he gave instructions to apply both the ordinary and extraordinary. This was the rope and pulley, one of the most terrible inventions ever devised by the most ingenious of tormentors.

To make the nature of this horrid torture plain to our readers, we give a detailed description of it, adding an extract of the presiding judge’s report of the case, taken from the Vatican manuscripts.

Of the various forms of torture then used in Rome the most common were the whistle, the fire, the sleepless, and the rope.

The mildest, the torture of the whistle, was used only in the case of children and old persons; it consisted in thrusting between the nails and the flesh reeds cut in the shape of whistles.

The fire, frequently employed before the invention of the sleepless torture, was simply roasting the soles of the feet before a hot fire.

The sleepless torture, invented by Marsilius, was worked by forcing the accused into an angular frame of wood about five feet high, the sufferer being stripped and his arms tied behind his back to the frame; two men, relieved every five hours, sat beside him, and roused him the moment he closed his eyes. Marsilius says he has never found a man proof against this torture; but here he claims more than he is justly entitled to. Farinacci states that, out of one hundred accused persons subjected to it, five only refused to confess — a very satisfactory result for the inventor.

Lastly comes the torture of the rope and pulley, the most in vogue of all, and known in other Latin countries as the strappado.

It was divided into three degrees of intensity — the slight, the severe, and the very severe.

The first, or slight torture, which consisted mainly in the apprehensions it caused, comprised the threat of severe torture, introduction into the torture chamber, stripping, and the tying of the rope in readiness for its appliance. To increase the terror these preliminaries excited, a pang of physical pain was added by tightening a cord round the wrists. This often sufficed to extract a confession from women or men of highly strung nerves.

The second degree, or severe torture, consisted in fastening the sufferer, stripped naked, and his hands tied behind his back, by the wrists to one end of a rope passed round a pulley bolted into the vaulted ceiling, the other end being attached to a windlass, by turning which he could be hoisted, into the air, and dropped again, either slowly or with a jerk, as ordered by the judge. The suspension generally lasted during the recital of a Pater Noster, an Ave Maria, or a Miserere; if the accused persisted in his denial, it was doubled. This second degree, the last of the ordinary torture, was put in practice when the crime appeared reasonably probable but was not absolutely proved.

The third, or very severe, the first of the extraordinary forms of torture, was so called when the sufferer, having hung suspended by the wrists, for sometimes a whole hour, was swung about by the executioner, either like the pendulum of a clock, or by elevating him with the windlass and dropping him to within a foot or two of the ground. If he stood this torture, a thing almost unheard of, seeing that it cut the flesh of the wrist to the bone and dislocated the limbs, weights were attached to the feet, thus doubling the torture. This last form of torture was only applied when an atrocious crime had been proved to have been committed upon a sacred person, such as a priest, a cardinal, a prince, or an eminent and learned man.

Having seen that Beatrice was sentenced to the torture ordinary and extraordinary, and having explained the nature of these tortures, we proceed to quote the official report: —

“And as in reply to every question she would confess nothing, we caused her to be taken by two officers and led from the prison to the torture chamber, where the torturer was in attendance; there, after cutting off her hair, he made her sit on a small stool, undressed her, pulled off her shoes, tied her hands behind her back, fastened them to a rope passed over a pulley bolted into the ceiling of the aforesaid chamber, and wound up at the other end by a four lever windlass, worked by two men.”

“Before hoisting her from the ground we again interrogated her touching the aforesaid parricide; but notwithstanding the confessions of her brother and her stepmother, which were again produced, bearing their signatures, she persisted in denying everything, saying, ‘Haul me about and do what you like with me; I have spoken the truth, and will tell you nothing else, even if I were torn to pieces.'

"Upon this we had her hoisted in the air by the wrists to the height of about two feet from the ground, while we recited a Pater Noster; and then again questioned her as to the facts and circumstances of the aforesaid parricide; but she would make no further answer, only saying, 'You are killing me! You are killing me!'

"We then raised her to the elevation of four feet, and began an Ave Maria. But before our prayer was half finished she fainted away; or pretended to do so.

"We caused a bucketful of water to be thrown over her head; feeling its coolness, she recovered consciousness, and cried, 'My God! I am dead! You are killing me! My God!' But this was all she would say.

"We then raised her higher still, and recited a Miserere, during which, instead of joining in the prayer, she shook convulsively and cried several times, 'My God! My God!'

"Again questioned as to the aforesaid parricide, she would confess nothing, saying only that she was innocent, and then again fainted away.

"We caused more water to be thrown over her; then she recovered her senses, opened her eyes, and cried, 'O cursed executioners! You are killing me! You are killing me!' But nothing more would she say.

"Seeing which, and that she persisted in her denial, we ordered the torturer to proceed to the torture by jerks.

"He accordingly hoisted her ten feet from the ground, and when there we enjoined her to tell the truth; but whether she would not or could not speak, she answered only by a motion of the head indicating that she could say nothing.

"Seeing which, we made a sign to the executioner, to let go the rope, and she fell with all her weight from the height of ten feet to that of two feet; her arms, from the shock, were dislocated from their sockets; she uttered a loud cry, and swooned away.

"We again caused water to be dashed in her face; she returned to herself, and again cried out, 'Infamous assassins! You are killing me; but were you to tear out my arms, I would tell you nothing else.'

"Upon this, we ordered a weight of fifty pounds to be fastened to her feet. But at this moment the door opened, and many voices cried, 'Enough! Enough! Do not torture her any more!'"

These voices were those of Giacomo, Bernardo, and Lucrezia Petroni. The judges, perceiving the obstinacy of Beatrice, had ordered that the accused, who had been separated for five months, should be confronted.

They advanced into the torture chamber, and seeing Beatrice hanging by the wrists, her arms disjointed, and covered with blood, Giacomo cried out: —

"The sin is committed; nothing further remains but to save our souls by repentance, undergo death courageously, and not suffer you to be thus tortured."

Then said Beatrice, shaking her head as if to cast off grief —

"Do you then wish to die? Since you wish it, be it so."

Then turning to the officers: —

"Untie me," said she, "read the examination to me; and what I have to confess, I will confess; what I have to deny, I will deny."

Beatrice was then lowered and untied; a barber reduced the dislocation of her arms in the usual manner; the examination was read over to her, and, as she had promised, she made a full confession.

After this confession, at the request of the two brothers, they were all confined in the same prison; but the next day Giacomo and Bernardo were taken to the cells of Tordinona; as for the women, they remained where they were.

The pope was so horrified on reading the particulars of the crime contained in the confessions, that he ordered the culprits to be dragged by wild horses through the streets of Rome. But so barbarous a sentence shocked the public mind, so much so that many persons of princely rank petitioned the Holy Father on their knees, imploring him to reconsider his decree, or at least allow the accused to be heard in their defence.

"Tell me," replied Clement VIII, "did they give their unhappy father time to be heard in his own defence, when they slew him in so merciless and degrading a fashion?"

At length, overcome by so many entreaties, he respited them for three days.

The most eloquent and skilful advocates in Rome immediately busied themselves in preparing pleadings for so emotional a case, and on the day fixed for hearing appeared before His Holiness.

The first pleader was Nicolo degli Angeli, who spoke with such force and eloquence that the pope, alarmed at the effect he was producing among the audience, passionately interrupted him.

“Are there then to be found,” he indignantly cried, “among the Roman nobility children capable of killing their parents, and among Roman lawyers men capable of speaking in their defence? This is a thing we should never have believed, nor even for a moment supposed it possible!”

All were silent upon this terrible rebuke, except Farinacci, who, nerving himself with a strong sense of duty, replied respectfully but firmly —

“Most Holy Father, we are not here to defend criminals, but to save the innocent; for if we succeeded in proving that any of the accused acted in self-defence, I hope that they will be exonerated in the eyes of your Holiness; for just as the law provides for cases in which the father may legally kill the child, so this holds good in the converse. We will therefore continue our pleadings on receiving leave from your Holiness to do so.”

Clement VIII then showed himself as patient as he had previously been hasty, and heard the argument of Farinacci, who pleaded that Francesco Cenci had lost all the rights of a father from, the day that he violated his daughter. In support of his contention he wished to put in the memorial sent by Beatrice to His Holiness, petitioning him, as her sister had done, to remove her from the paternal roof and place her in a convent. Unfortunately, this petition had disappeared, and notwithstanding the minutest search among the papal documents, no trace of it could be found.

The pope had all the pleadings collected, and dismissed the advocates, who then retired, excepting d’Altieri, who knelt before him, saying —

“Most Holy Father, I humbly ask pardon for appearing before you in this case, but I had no choice in the matter, being the advocate of the poor.”

The pope kindly raised him, saying:

“Go; we are not surprised at your conduct, but at that of others, who protect and defend criminals.”

As the pope took a great interest in this case, he sat up all night over it, studying it with Cardinal di San Marcello, a man of much acumen and great experience in criminal cases. Then, having summed it up, he sent a draft of his opinion to the advocates, who read it with great satisfaction, and entertained hopes that the lives of the convicted persons would be spared; for the evidence all went to prove that even if the children had taken their father’s life, all the provocation came from him, and that Beatrice in particular had been dragged into the part she had taken in this crime by the tyranny, wickedness, and brutality of her father. Under the influence of these considerations the pope mitigated the severity of their prison life, and even allowed the prisoners to hope that their lives would not be forfeited.

Amidst the general feeling of relief afforded to the public by these favours, another tragical event changed the papal mind and frustrated all his humane intentions. This was the atrocious murder of the Marchese di Santa Croce, a man seventy years of age, by his son Paolo, who stabbed him with a dagger in fifteen or twenty places, because the father would not promise to make Paolo his sole heir. The murderer fled and escaped.

Clement VIII was horror-stricken at the increasing frequency of this crime of parricide: for the moment, however, he was unable to take action, having to go to Monte Cavallo to consecrate a cardinal titular bishop in the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli; but the day following, on Friday the 10th of September 1599, at eight o’clock in the morning, he summoned Monsignor Taverna, governor of Rome, and said to him —

“Monsignor, we place in your hands the Cenci case, that you may carry out the sentence as speedily as possible.”

On his return to his palace, after leaving His Holiness, the governor convened a meeting of all the criminal judges in the city, the result of the council being that all the Cenci were condemned to death.

The final sentence was immediately known; and as this unhappy family inspired a constantly increasing interest, many cardinals spent the whole of the night either on horseback or in their carriages, making interest that, at least so far as the women were concerned, they should be put to death privately and in the prison, and that a free pardon should be granted to Bernardo, a poor lad only fifteen years of age, who, guiltless of any participation in the crime, yet found himself involved in its consequences. The one who interested himself most in the case was Cardinal Sforza, who nevertheless failed to elicit a single gleam of hope, so obdurate was His Holiness. At length Farinacci, working on the papal conscience, succeeded, after long and urgent entreaties, and only at the last moment, that the life of Bernardo should be spared.

From Friday evening the members of the brotherhood of the Conforteria had gathered at the two prisons of Corte Savella and Tordinona. The preparations for the closing scene of the tragedy had occupied workmen on the bridge of Sant’ Angelo all night; and it was not till five o’clock in the morning that the registrar entered the cell of Lucrezia and Beatrice to read their sentences to them.

Both were sleeping, calm in the belief of a reprieve. The registrar woke them, and told them that, judged by man, they must now prepare to appear before God.

Beatrice was at first thunderstruck: she seemed paralysed and speechless; then she rose from bed, and staggering as if intoxicated, recovered her speech, uttering despairing cries. Lucrezia heard the tidings with more firmness, and proceeded to dress herself to go to the chapel, exhorting Beatrice to resignation; but she, raving, wrung her, hands and struck her head against the wall, shrieking, “To die! to die! Am I to die unprepared, on a scaffold! on a gibbet! My God! my God!” This fit led to a terrible paroxysm, after which the exhaustion of her body enabled her mind to recover its balance, and from that moment she became an angel of humility and an example of resignation.

Her first request was for a notary to make her will. This was immediately complied with, and on his arrival she dictated its provisions with much calmness and precision. Its last clause desired her interment in the church of San Pietro in Montorio, for which she always had a strong attachment, as it commanded a view of her father’s palace. She bequeathed five hundred crowns to the nuns of the order of the Stigmata, and ordered that her dowry; amounting to fifteen thousand crowns, should be distributed in marriage portions to fifty poor girls. She selected the foot of the high altar as the place where she wished to be buried, over which hung the beautiful picture of the Transfiguration, so often admired by her during her life.

Following her example, Lucrezia in her turn, disposed of her property: she desired to be buried in the church of San Giorgio di Velobre, and left thirty-two thousand crowns to charities, with other pious legacies. Having settled their earthly affairs, they joined in prayer, reciting psalms, litanies, and prayers far the dying.

At eight o’clock they confessed, heard mass, and received the sacraments; after which Beatrice, observing to her stepmother that the rich dresses they wore were out of place on a scaffold, ordered two to be made in nun’s fashion — that is to say, gathered at the neck, with long wide sleeves. That for Lucrezia was made of black cotton stuff, Beatrice’s of taffetas. In addition she had a small black turban made to place on her head. These dresses, with cords for girdles, were brought them; they were placed on a chair, while the women continued to pray.

The time appointed being near at hand, they were informed that their last moment was approaching. Then Beatrice, who was still on her knees, rose with a tranquil and almost joyful countenance. “Mother,” said she, “the moment of our suffering is impending; I think we had better dress in these clothes, and help one another at our toilet for the last time.” They then put on the dresses provided, girt themselves with the cords; Beatrice placed her turban on her head, and they awaited the last summons.

In the meantime, Giacomo and Bernardo, whose sentences had been read to them, awaited also the moment of their death. About ten o’clock the members of the Confraternity of Mercy, a Florentine order, arrived at the prison of Tordinona, and halted on the threshold with the crucifix, awaiting the appearance of the unhappy youths. Here a serious accident had nearly happened. As many persons were at the prison windows to see the prisoners come out, someone accidentally threw down a large flower-pot full of earth, which fell into the street and narrowly missed one of the Confraternity who was amongst the torch-bearers just before the crucifix. It passed so close to the torch as to extinguish the flame in its descent.

At this moment the gates opened, and Giacomo appeared first on the threshold. He fell on his knees, adoring the holy crucifix with great devotion. He was completely covered with a large mourning cloak, under which his bare breast was prepared to be torn by the red-hot pincers of the executioner, which were lying ready in a chafing-dish fixed to the cart. Having ascended the vehicle, in which the executioner placed him so as more readily to perform this office, Bernardo came out, and was thus addressed on his appearance by the fiscal of Rome —

“Signor Bernardo Cenci, in the name of our blessed Redeemer, our Holy Father the Pope spares your life; with the sole condition that you accompany your relatives to the scaffold and to their death, and never forget to pray for those with whom you were condemned to die.”

At this unexpected intelligence, a loud murmur of joy spread among the crowd, and the members of the Confraternity immediately untied the small mask which covered the youth’s eyes; for, owing to his tender age, it had been thought proper to conceal the scaffold from his sight.

Then the executioner; having disposed of Giacomo, came down from the cart to take Bernardo; whose pardon being formally communicated to him, he took off his handcuffs, and placed him alongside his brother, covering him up with a magnificent cloak embroidered with gold, for the neck and shoulders of the poor lad had been already bared, as a preliminary to his decapitation. People were surprised to see such a rich cloak in the possession of the executioner, but were told that it was the one given by Beatrice to Marzio to pledge him to the murder of her father, which fell to the executioner as a perquisite after the execution of the assassin. The sight of the great assemblage of people produced such an effect upon the boy that he fainted.

The procession then proceeded to the prison of Corte Savella, marching to the sound of funeral chants. At its gates the sacred crucifix halted for the women to join: they soon appeared, fell on their knees, and worshipped the holy symbol as the others had done. The march to the scaffold was then resumed.

The two female prisoners followed the last row of penitents in single file, veiled to the waist, with the distinction that Lucrezia, as a widow, wore a black veil and high-heeled slippers of the same hue, with bows of ribbon, as was the fashion; whilst Beatrice, as a young unmarried girl, wore a silk flat cap to match her corsage, with a plush hood, which fell over her shoulders and covered her violet frock; white slippers with high heels, ornamented with gold rosettes and cherry-coloured fringe. The arms of both were untrammelled, except far a thin slack cord which left their hands free to carry a crucifix and a handkerchief.

During the night a lofty scaffold had been erected on the bridge of Sant’ Angelo, and the plank and block were placed thereon. Above the block was hung, from a large cross beam, a ponderous axe, which, guided by two grooves, fell with its whole weight at the touch of a spring.

In this formation the procession wended its way towards the bridge of Sant’ Angela. Lucrezia, the more broken down of the two, wept bitterly; but Beatrice was firm and unmoved. On arriving at the open space before the bridge, the women were led into a chapel, where they were shortly joined by Giacomo and Bernardo; they remained together for a few moments, when the brothers were led away to the scaffold, although one was to be executed last, and the other was pardoned. But when they had mounted the platform, Bernardo fainted a second time; and as the executioner was approaching to his assistance, some of the crowd, supposing that his object was to decapitate him, cried loudly, “He is pardoned!” The executioner reassured them by seating Bernardo near the block, Giacomo kneeling on the other side.

Then the executioner descended, entered the chapel, and reappeared leading Lucrezia, who was the first to suffer. At the foot of the scaffold he tied her hands behind her back, tore open the top of her corsage so as to uncover her shoulders, gave her the crucifix to kiss, and led her to the step ladder, which she ascended with great difficulty, on account of her extreme stoutness; then, on her reaching the platform, he removed the veil which covered her head. On this exposure of her features to the immense crowd, Lucrezia shuddered from head to foot; then, her eyes full of tears, she cried with a loud voice —

“O my God, have mercy upon me; and do you, brethren, pray for my soul!”

Having uttered these words, not knowing what was required of her, she turned to Alessandro, the chief executioner, and asked what she was to do; he told her to bestride the plank and lie prone upon it; which she did with great trouble and timidity; but as she was unable, on account of the fullness of her bust, to lay her neck upon the block, this had to be raised by placing a billet of wood underneath it; all this time the poor woman, suffering even more from shame than from fear, was kept in suspense; at length, when she was properly adjusted, the executioner touched the spring, the knife fell, and the decapitated head, falling on the platform of the scaffold, bounded two or three times in the air, to the general horror; the executioner then seized it, showed it to the multitude, and wrapping it in black taffetas, placed it with the body on a bier at the foot of the scaffold.

Whilst arrangements were being made for the decapitation of Beatrice, several stands, full of spectators, broke down; some people were killed by this accident, and still more lamed and injured.

The machine being now rearranged and washed, the executioner returned to the chapel to take charge of Beatrice, who, on seeing the sacred crucifix, said some prayers for her soul, and on her hands being tied, cried out, “God grant that you be binding this body unto corruption, and loosing this soul unto life eternal!” She then arose, proceeded to the platform, where she devoutly kissed the stigmata; then leaving her slippers at the foot of the scaffold, she nimbly ascended the ladder, and instructed beforehand, promptly lay down on the plank, without exposing her naked shoulders. But her precautions to shorten the bitterness of death were of no avail, for the pope, knowing her impetuous disposition, and fearing lest she might be led into the commission of some sin between absolution and death, had given orders that the moment Beatrice was extended on the scaffold a signal gun should be fired from the castle of Sant' Angelo; which was done, to the great astonishment of everybody, including Beatrice herself, who, not expecting this explosion, raised herself almost upright; the pope meanwhile, who was praying at Monte Cavallo, gave her absolution 'in articulo mortis'. About five minutes thus passed, during which the sufferer waited with her head replaced on the block; at length, when the executioner judged that the absolution had been given, he released the spring, and the axe fell.

A gruesome sight was then afforded: whilst the head bounced away on one side of the block, on the other the body rose erect, as if about to step backwards; the executioner exhibited the head, and disposed of it and the body as before. He wished to place Beatrice's body with that of her stepmother, but the brotherhood of Mercy took it out of his hands, and as one of them was attempting to lay it on the bier, it slipped from him and fell from the scaffold to the ground below; the dress being partially torn from the body, which was so besmeared with dust and blood that much time was occupied in washing it. Poor Bernardo was so overcome by this horrible scene that he swooned away for the third time, and it was necessary to revive him with stimulants to witness the fate of his elder brother.

The turn of Giacomo at length arrived: he had witnessed the death of his stepmother and his sister, and his clothes were covered with their blood; the executioner approached him and tore off his cloak, exposing his bare breast covered with the wounds caused by the grip of red-hot pincers; in this state, and half-naked, he rose to his feet, and turning to his brother, said —

"Bernardo, if in my examination I have compromised and accused you, I have done so falsely, and although I have already disavowed this declaration, I repeat, at the moment of appearing before God, that you are innocent, and that it is a cruel abuse of justice to compel you to witness this frightful spectacle."

The executioner then made him kneel down, bound his legs to one of the beams erected on the scaffold, and having bandaged his eyes, shattered his head with a blow of his mallet; then, in the sight of all, he hacked his body into four quarters. The official party then left, taking with them Bernardo, who, being in a state of high fever, was bled and put to bed.

The corpses of the two ladies were laid out each on its bier under the statue of St. Paul, at the foot of the bridge, with four torches of white wax, which burned till four o'clock in the afternoon; then, along with the remains of Giacomo, they were taken to the church of San Giovanni Decollato; finally, about nine in the evening, the body of Beatrice, covered with flowers, and attired in the dress worn at her execution, was carried to the church of San Pietro in Montorio, with fifty lighted torches, and followed by the brethren of the order of the Stigmata and all the Franciscan monks in Rome; there, agreeably to her wish, it was buried at the foot of the high altar.

The same evening Signora Lucrezia was interred, as she had desired to be, in the church of San Giorgio di Velobre.

All Rome may be said to have been present at this tragedy, carriages, horses, foot people, and cars crowding as it were upon one another. The day was unfortunately so hot, and the sun so scorching, that many persons fainted, others returned home stricken with fever, and some even died during the night, owing to sunstroke from exposure during the three hours occupied by the execution.

The Tuesday following, the 14th of September; being the Feast of the Holy Cross, the brotherhood of San Marcello, by special licence of the pope, set at liberty the unhappy Bernardo Cenci, with the condition of paying within the year two thousand five hundred Roman crowns to the brotherhood of the most Holy Trinity of Pope Sixtus, as may be found to-day recorded in their archives.

Having now seen the tomb, if you desire to form a more vivid impression of the principal actors in this tragedy than can be derived from a narrative, pay a visit to the Barberini Gallery, where you will see, with five other masterpieces by Guido, the portrait of Beatrice, taken, some say the night before her execution, others during her progress to the scaffold; it is the head of a lovely girl, wearing a headdress composed of a turban with a lappet. The hair is of a rich fair chestnut hue; the dark eyes are moistened with recent tears; a perfectly farmed nose surmounts an infantile mouth; unfortunately, the loss of tone in the picture since it was painted has destroyed the original fair complexion. The age of the subject may be twenty, or perhaps twenty-two years.

Near this portrait is that of Lucrezia Petrani the small head indicates a person below the middle height; the attributes are those of a Roman matron in her pride; her high complexion, graceful contour, straight nose, black eyebrows, and expression at the same time imperious and voluptuous indicate this character to the life; a smile still seems to linger an the charming dimpled cheeks and perfect mouth mentioned by the chronicler, and her face is exquisitely framed by luxuriant curls falling from her forehead in graceful profusion.

As for Giacomo and Bernardo, as no portraits of them are in existence, we are obliged to gather an idea of their appearance from the manuscript which has enabled us to compile this sanguinary history; they are thus described by the eye-witness of the closing scene — Giacomo was short, well-made and strong, with black hair and beard; he appeared to be about twenty-six years of age.

Poor Bernardo was the image of his sister, so nearly resembling her, that when he mounted the scaffold his long hair and girlish face led people to suppose him to be Beatrice herself: he might be fourteen or fifteen years of age.

The peace of God be with them!

MASSACRES OF THE SOUTH — 1551-1815

CHAPTER I

It is possible that our reader, whose recollections may perhaps go back as far as the Restoration, will be surprised at the size of the frame required for the picture we are about to bring before him, embracing as it does two centuries and a half; but as everything, has its precedent, every river its source, every volcano its central fire, so it is that the spot of earth on which we are going to fix our eyes has been the scene of action and reaction, revenge and retaliation, till the religious annals of the South resemble an account-book kept by double entry, in which fanaticism enters the profits of death, one side being written with the blood of Catholics, the other with that of Protestants.

In the great political and religious convulsions of the South, the earthquake-like throes of which were felt even in the capital, Nimes has always taken the central place; Nimes will therefore be the pivot round which our story will revolve, and though we may sometimes leave it for a moment, we shall always return thither without fail.

Nimes was reunited to France by Louis VIII, the government being taken from its vicomte, Bernard Athon VI, and given to consuls in the year 1207. During the episcopate of Michel Briconnet the relics of St. Bauzile were discovered, and hardly were the rejoicings over this event at an end when the new doctrines began to spread over France. It was in the South that the persecutions began, and in 1551 several persons were publicly burnt as heretics by order of the Seneschal’s Court at Nimes, amongst whom was Maurice Secenat, a missionary from the Cevennes, who was taken in the very act of preaching. Thenceforth Nimes rejoiced in two martyrs and two patron saints, one revered by the Catholics, and one by the Protestants; St. Bauzile, after reigning as sole protector for twenty-four years, being forced to share the honours of his guardianship with his new rival.

Maurice Secenat was followed as preacher by Pierre de Lavau; these two names being still remembered among the crowd of obscure and forgotten martyrs. He also was put to death on the Place de la Salamandre, all the difference being that the former was burnt and the latter hanged.

Pierre de Lavau was attended in his last moments by Dominique Deyron, Doctor of Theology; but instead of, as is usual, the dying man being converted by the priest, it was the priest who was converted by de Lavau, and the teaching which it was desired should be suppressed burst forth again. Decrees were issued against Dominique Deyron; he was pursued and tracked down, and only escaped the gibbet by fleeing to the mountains.

The mountains are the refuge of all rising or decaying sects; God has given to the powerful on earth city, plain, and sea, but the mountains are the heritage of the oppressed.

Persecution and proselytism kept pace with each other, but the blood that was shed produced the usual effect: it rendered the soil on which it fell fruitful, and after two or three years of struggle, during which two or three hundred Huguenots had been burnt or hanged, Nimes awoke one morning with a Protestant majority. In 1556 the consuls received a sharp reprimand on account of the leaning of the city towards the doctrines of the Reformation; but in 1557, one short year after this admonition, Henri II was forced to confer the office of president of the Presidial Court on William de Calviere, a Protestant. At last a decision of the senior judge having declared that it was the duty of the consuls to sanction the execution of heretics by their presence, the magistrates of the city protested against this decision, and the power of the Crown was insufficient to carry it out.

Henri II dying, Catherine de Medicis and the Guises took possession of the throne in the name of Francois II. There is a moment when nations can always draw a long breath, it is while their kings are awaiting burial; and Nimes took advantage of this moment on the death of Henri II, and on September 29th, 1559, Guillaume Moget founded the first Protestant community.

Guillaume Moget came from Geneva. He was the spiritual son of Calvin, and came to Nimes with the firm purpose of converting all the remaining Catholics or of being hanged. As he was eloquent, spirited, and wily, too wise to be violent, ever ready to give and take in the matter of concessions, luck was on his side, and Guillaume Moget escaped hanging.

The moment a rising sect ceases to be downtrodden it becomes a queen, and heresy, already mistress of three-fourths of the city, began to hold up its head with boldness in the streets. A householder called Guillaume Raymond opened his house to the Calvinist missionary, and allowed him to preach in it regularly to all who came, and the wavering were thus confirmed in the new faith. Soon the house became too narrow to contain the crowds which flocked thither to imbibe the poison of the revolutionary doctrine, and impatient glances fell on the churches.

Meanwhile the Vicomte de Joyeuse, who had just been appointed governor of Languedoc in the place of M. de Villars, grew uneasy at the rapid progress made by the Protestants, who so far from trying to conceal it boasted of it; so he summoned the consuls before him, admonished them sharply in the king's name, and threatened to quarter a garrison in the town which would soon put an end to these disorders. The consuls promised to stop the evil without the aid of outside help, and to carry out their promise doubled the patrol and appointed a captain of the town whose sole duty was to keep order in the streets. Now this captain whose office had been created solely for the repression of heresy, happened to be Captain Bouillargues, the most inveterate Huguenot who ever existed.

The result of this discriminating choice was that Guillaume Moget began to preach, and once when a great crowd had gathered in a garden to hear him hold forth, heavy rain came on, and it became necessary for the people either to disperse or to seek shelter under a roof. As the preacher had just reached the most interesting part of his sermon, the congregation did not hesitate an instant to take the latter alternative. The Church of St. Etienne du Capitole was quite near: someone present suggested that this building, if not the most suitable, as at least the most spacious for such a gathering.

The idea was received with acclamation: the rain grew heavier, the crowd invaded the church, drove out the priests, trampled the Holy Sacrament under foot, and broke the sacred images. This being accomplished, Guillaume Moget entered the pulpit, and resumed his sermon with such eloquence that his hearers' excitement redoubled, and not satisfied with what had already been done, rushed off to seize on the Franciscan monastery, where they forthwith installed Moget and the two women, who, according to Menard the historian of Languedoc, never left him day or night; all which proceedings were regarded by Captain Bouillargues with magnificent calm.

The consuls being once more summoned before M. de Villars, who had again become governor, would gladly have denied the existence of disorder; but finding this impossible, they threw themselves on his mercy. He being unable to repose confidence in them any longer, sent a garrison to the citadel of Nimes, which the municipality was obliged to support, appointed a governor of the city with four district captains under him, and formed a body of military police which quite superseded the municipal constabulary. Moget was expelled from Nimes, and Captain Bouillargues deprived of office.

Francis II dying in his turn, the usual effect was produced, — that is, the persecution became less fierce, — and Moget therefore returned to Nimes. This was a victory, and every victory being a step forward, the triumphant preacher organised a Consistory, and the deputies of Nimes demanded from the States-General of Orleans possession of the churches. No notice was taken of this demand; but the Protestants were at no loss how to proceed. On the 21st December 1561 the churches of Ste. Eugenie, St. Augustin, and the Cordeliers were taken by assault, and cleared of their images in a hand’s turn; and this time Captain Bouillargues was not satisfied with looking on, but directed the operations.

The cathedral was still safe, and in it were entrenched the remnant of the Catholic clergy; but it was apparent that at the earliest opportunity it too would be turned into a meeting-house; and this opportunity was not long in coming.

One Sunday, when Bishop Bernard d’Elbene had celebrated mass, just as the regular preacher was about to begin his sermon, some children who were playing in the close began to hoot the ‘beguinier’ [a name of contempt for friars]. Some of the faithful being disturbed in their meditations, came out of the church and chastised the little Huguenots, whose parents considered themselves in consequence to have been insulted in the persons of their children. A great commotion ensued, crowds began to form, and cries of “To the church! to the church!” were heard. Captain Bouillargues happened to be in the neighbourhood, and being very methodical set about organising the insurrection; then putting himself at its head, he charged the cathedral, carrying everything before him, in spite of the barricades which had been hastily erected by the Papists. The assault was over in a few moments; the priests and their flock fled by one door, while the Reformers entered by another. The building was in the twinkling of an eye adapted to the new form of worship: the great crucifix from above the altar was dragged about the streets at the end of a rope and scourged at every cross-roads. In the evening a large fire was lighted in the place before the cathedral, and the archives of the ecclesiastical and religious houses, the sacred images, the relics of the saints, the decorations of the altar, the sacerdotal vestments, even the Host itself, were thrown on it without any remonstrance from the consuls; the very wind which blew upon Nimes breathed heresy.

For the moment Nimes was in full revolt, and the spirit of organisation spread: Moget assumed the titles of pastor and minister of the Christian Church. Captain Bouillargues melted down the sacred vessels of the Catholic churches, and paid in this manner the volunteers of Nimes and the German mercenaries; the stones of the demolished religious houses were used in the construction of fortifications, and before anyone thought of attacking it the city was ready for a siege. It was at this moment that Guillaume Calviere, who was at the head of the Presidial Court, Moget being president of the Consistory, and Captain Bouillargues commander-in-chief of the armed forces, suddenly resolved to create a new authority, which, while sharing the powers hitherto vested solely in the consuls, should be, even more than they, devoted to Calvin: thus the office of les Messieurs came into being. This was neither more nor less than a committee of public safety, and having been formed in the stress of revolution it acted in a revolutionary spirit, absorbing the powers of the consuls, and restricting the authority of the Consistory to things spiritual. In the meantime the Edict of Amboise, was promulgated, and it was announced that the king, Charles IX, accompanied by Catherine de Medicis, was going to visit his loyal provinces in the South.

Determined as was Captain Bouillargues, for once he had to give way, so strong was the party against him; therefore, despite the murmurs of the fanatics, the city of Nimes resolved, not only to open its gates to its sovereign, but to give him such a reception as would efface the bad impression which Charles might have received from the history of recent events. The royal procession was met at the Pont du Gare, where young girls attired as nymphs emerged from a grotto bearing a collation, which they presented to their Majesties, who graciously and heartily partook of it. The repast at an end, the illustrious travellers resumed their progress; but the imagination of the Nimes authorities was not to be restrained within such narrow bounds: at the entrance to the city the king found the Porte de la Couronne transformed into a mountain-side, covered with vines and olive trees, under which a shepherd was tending his flock. As the king approached the mountain parted as if yielding to the magic of his power, the most beautiful maidens and the most noble came out to meet their sovereign, presenting him the keys of the city wreathed with flowers, and singing to the accompaniment of the shepherd’s pipe. Passing through the mountain, Charles saw chained to a palm tree in the depths of a grotto a monster crocodile from whose jaws issued flames: this was a representation of the old coat of arms granted to the city by Octavius Caesar Augustus after the battle of Actium, and which Francis I had restored to it in exchange for a model in silver of the amphitheatre presented to him by the city. Lastly, the king found in the Place de la Salamandre numerous bonfires, so that without waiting to ask if these fires were made from the remains of the faggots used at the martyrdom of Maurice Secenat, he went to bed very much pleased with the reception accorded him by his good city of Nimes, and sure that all the unfavourable reports he had heard were calumnies.

Nevertheless, in order that such rumours, however slight their foundation, should not again be heard, the king appointed Damville governor of Languedoc, installing him himself in the chief city of his government; he then removed every consul from his post without exception, and appointed in their place Guy-Rochette, doctor and lawyer; Jean Beaudan, burgess; Francois Aubert, mason; and Cristol Ligier, farm labourer — all Catholics. He then left for Paris, where a short time after he concluded a treaty with the Calvinists, which the people with its gift of prophecy called “The halting peace of unsure seat,” and which in the end led to the massacre of St. Bartholomew.

Gracious as had been the measures taken by the king to secure the peace of his good city of Nimes, they had nevertheless been reactionary; consequently the Catholics, feeling the authorities were now on their side, returned in crowds: the householders reclaimed their houses, the priests their churches; while, rendered ravenous by the bitter bread of exile, both the clergy and the laity pillaged the treasury. Their return was not, however; stained by bloodshed, although the Calvinists were reviled in the open street. A few stabs from a dagger or shots from an arquebus might, however, have been better; such wounds heal while mocking words rankle in the memory.

On the morrow of Michaelmas Day — that is, on the 31st September 1567 — a number of conspirators might have been seen issuing from a house and spreading themselves through the streets, crying “To arms! Down with the Papists!” Captain Bouillargues was taking his revenge.

As the Catholics were attacked unawares, they did not make even a show of resistance: a number of Protestants — those who possessed the best arms — rushed to the house of Guy-Rochette, the first consul, and seized the keys of the city. Guy Rochette, startled by the cries of the crowds, had looked out of the window, and seeing a furious mob approaching his house, and feeling that their rage was directed against himself, had taken refuge with his brother Gregoire. There, recovering his courage and presence of mind, he recalled the important responsibilities attached to his office, and resolving to fulfil them whatever might happen, hastened to consult with the other magistrates, but as they all gave him very excellent reasons for not meddling, he soon felt there was no dependence to be placed on such cowards and traitors. He next repaired to the episcopal palace, where he found the bishop surrounded by the principal Catholics of the town, all on their knees offering up earnest prayers to Heaven, and awaiting martyrdom. Guy-Rochette joined them, and the prayers were continued.

A few instants later fresh noises were heard in the street, and the gates of the palace court groaned under blows of axe and crowbar. Hearing these alarming sounds, the bishop, forgetting that it was his duty to set a brave example, fled through a breach in the wall of the next house; but Guy-Rochette and his companions valiantly resolved not to run away, but to await their fate with patience. The gates soon yielded, and the courtyard and palace were filled with Protestants: at their head appeared Captain Bouillargues, sword in hand. Guy-Rochette and those with him were seized and secured in a room under the charge of four guards, and the palace was looted. Meantime another band of insurgents had attacked the house of the vicar-general, John Pebereau, whose body pierced by seven stabs of a dagger was thrown out of a window, the same fate as was meted out to Admiral Coligny eight years later at the hands of the Catholics. In the house a sum of 800 crowns was found and taken. The two bands then uniting, rushed to the cathedral, which they sacked for the second time.

Thus the entire day passed in murder and pillage: when night came the large number of prisoners so imprudently taken began to be felt as an encumbrance by the insurgent chiefs, who therefore resolved to take advantage of the darkness to get rid of them without causing too much excitement in the city. They were therefore gathered together from the various houses in which they had been confined, and were brought to a large hall in the Hotel de Ville, capable of containing from four to five hundred persons, and which was soon full. An irregular tribunal arrogating to itself powers of life and death was formed, and a clerk was appointed to register its decrees. A list of all the prisoners was given him, a cross placed before a name indicating that its bearer was condemned to death, and, list in hand, he went from group to group calling out the names distinguished by the fatal sign. Those thus sorted out were then conducted to a spot which had been chosen beforehand as the place of execution.

This was the palace courtyard in the middle of which yawned a well twenty-four feet in circumference and fifty deep. The fanatics thus found a grave ready-digged as it were to their hand, and to save time, made use of it.

The unfortunate Catholics, led thither in groups, were either stabbed with daggers or mutilated with axes, and the bodies thrown down the well. Guy-Rochette was one of the first to be dragged up. For himself he asked neither mercy nor favour, but he begged that the life of his young brother might be spared, whose only crime was the bond of blood which united them; but the assassins, paying no heed to his prayers, struck down both man and boy and flung them into the well. The corpse of the vicar-general, who had been killed the day before, was in its turn dragged thither by a rope and added to the others. All night the massacre went on, the crimsoned water rising in the well as corpse after corpse was thrown in, till, at break of day, it overflowed, one hundred and twenty bodies being then hidden in its depths.

Next day, October 1st, the scenes of tumult were renewed: from early dawn Captain Bouillargues ran from street to street crying, “Courage, comrades! Montpellier, Pezenas, Aramon, Beaucaire, Saint-Andeol, and Villeneuve are taken, and are on our side. Cardinal de Lorraine is dead, and the king is in our power.” This aroused the failing energies of the assassins. They joined the captain, and demanded that the houses round the palace should be searched, as it was almost certain that the bishop, who had, as may be remembered, escaped the day before, had taken refuge in one of them. This being agreed to, a house-to-house visitation was begun: when the house of M. de Sauvignargues was reached, he confessed that the bishop was in his cellar, and proposed to treat with Captain Bouillargues for a ransom. This proposition being considered reasonable, was accepted, and after a short discussion the sum of 120 crowns was agreed on. The bishop laid down every penny he had about him, his servants were despoiled, and the sum made up by the Sieur de Sauvignargues, who having the bishop in his house kept him caged. The prelate, however, made no objection, although under other circumstances he would have regarded this restraint as the height of impertinence; but as it was he felt safer in M. de Sauvignargues' cellar than in the palace.

But the secret of the worthy prelate's hiding place was but badly kept by those with whom he had treated; for in a few moments a second crowd appeared, hoping to obtain a second ransom. Unfortunately, the Sieur de Sauvignargues, the bishop, and the bishop's servants had stripped themselves of all their ready money to make up the first, so the master of the house, fearing for his own safety, having barricaded the doors, got out into a lane and escaped, leaving the bishop to his fate. The Huguenots climbed in at the windows, crying, "No quarter! Down with the Papists!" The bishop's servants were cut down, the bishop himself dragged out of the cellar and thrown into the street. There his rings and crozier were snatched from him; he was stripped of his clothes and arrayed in a grotesque and ragged garment which chanced to be at hand; his mitre was replaced by a peasant's cap; and in this condition he was dragged back to the palace and placed on the brink of the well to be thrown in. One of the assassins drew attention to the fact that it was already full. "Pooh!" replied another, "they won't mind a little crowding for a bishop." Meantime the prelate, seeing he need expect no mercy from man, threw himself on his knees and commended his soul to God. Suddenly, however, one of those who had shown himself most ferocious during the massacre, Jean Coussinal by name, was touched as if by miracle with a feeling of compassion at the sight of so much resignation, and threw himself between the bishop and those about to strike, and declaring that whoever touched the prelate must first overcome himself, took him under his protection, his comrades retreating in astonishment. Jean Coussinal raising the bishop, carried him in his arms into a neighbouring house, and drawing his sword, took his stand on the threshold.

The assassins, however, soon recovered from their surprise, and reflecting that when all was said and done they were fifty to one, considered it would be shameful to let themselves be intimidated by a single opponent, so they advanced again on Coussinal, who with a back-handed stroke cut off the head of the first-comer. The cries upon this redoubled, and two or three shots were fired at the obstinate defender of the poor bishop, but they all missed aim. At that moment Captain Bouillargues passed by, and seeing one man attacked by fifty, inquired into the cause. He was told of Coussinal's odd determination to save the bishop. "He is quite right," said the captain; "the bishop has paid ransom, and no one has any right to touch him." Saying this, he walked up to Coussinal, gave him his hand, and the two entered the house, returning in a few moments with the bishop between them. In this order they crossed the town, followed by the murmuring crowd, who were, however, afraid to do more than murmur; at the gate the bishop was provided with an escort and let go, his defenders remaining there till he was out of sight.

The massacres went on during the whole of the second day, though towards evening the search for victims relaxed somewhat; but still many isolated acts of murder took place during the night. On the morrow, being tired of killing, the people began to destroy, and this phase lasted a long time, it being less fatiguing to throw stones about than corpses. All the convents, all the monasteries, all the houses of the priests and canons were attacked in turn; nothing was spared except the cathedral, before which axes and crowbars seemed to lose their power, and the church of Ste. Eugenie, which was turned into a powder-magazine. The day of the great butchery was called "La Michelade," because it took place the day after Michaelmas, and as all this happened in the year 1567 the Massacre of St. Bartholomew must be regarded as a plagiarism.

At last, however, with the help of M. Damville; the Catholics again got the upper hand, and it was the turn of the Protestants to fly. They took refuge in the Cevennes. From the beginning of the troubles the Cevennes had been the asylum of those who suffered for the Protestant faith; and still the plains are Papist, and the mountains Protestant. When the Catholic party is in the ascendant at Nimes, the plain seeks the mountain; when the Protestants come into power, the mountain comes down into the plain.

However, vanquished and fugitive though they were, the Calvinists did not lose courage: in exile one day, they felt sure their luck would turn the next; and while the Catholics were burning or hanging them in effigy for contumacy, they were before a notary, dividing the property of their executioners.

But it was not enough for them to buy or sell this property amongst each other, they wanted to enter into possession; they thought of nothing else, and in 1569 — that is, in the eighteenth month of their exile — they attained their wish in the following manner:

One day the exiles perceived a carpenter belonging to a little village called Cauvisson approaching their place of refuge. He desired to speak to M. Nicolas de Calviere, seigneur de St. Cosme, and brother of the president, who was known to be a very enterprising man. To him the carpenter, whose name was Maduron, made the following proposition:

In the moat of Nimes, close to the Gate of the Carmelites, there was a grating through which the waters from the fountain found vent. Maduron offered to file through the bars of this grating in such a manner that some fine night it could be lifted out so as to allow a band of armed Protestants to gain access to the city. Nicolas de Calviere approving of this plan, desired that it should be carried out at once; but the carpenter pointed out that it would be necessary to wait for stormy weather, when the waters swollen by the rain would by their noise drown the sound of the file. This precaution was doubly necessary as the box of the sentry was almost exactly above the grating. M. de Calviere tried to make Maduron give way; but the latter, who was risking more than anyone else, was firm. So whether they liked it or not, de Calviere and the rest had to await his good pleasure.

Some days later rainy weather set in, and as usual the fountain became fuller; Maduron seeing that the favourable moment had arrived, glided at night into the moat and applied his file, a friend of his who was hidden on the ramparts above pulling a cord attached to Maduron’s arm every time the sentinel, in pacing his narrow round, approached the spot. Before break of day the work was well begun. Maduron then obliterated all traces of his file by daubing the bars with mud and wax, and withdrew. For three consecutive nights he returned to his task, taking the same precautions, and before the fourth was at an end he found that by means of a slight effort the grating could be removed. That was all that was needed, so he gave notice to Messire Nicolas de Calviere that the moment had arrived.

Everything was favourable to the undertaking: as there was no moon, the next night was chosen to carry out the plan, and as soon as it was dark Messire Nicolas de Calviere set out with his men, who, slipping down into the moat without noise, crossed, the water being up to their belts, climbed up the other side, and crept along at the foot of the wall till they reached the grating without being perceived. There Maduron was waiting, and as soon as he caught sight of them he gave a slight blow to the loose bars; which fell, and the whole party entered the drain, led by de Calviere, and soon found themselves at the farther end — that is to say, in the Place de la

Fontaine. They immediately formed into companies twenty strong, four of which hastened to the principal gates, while the others patrolled the streets shouting, “The city taken! Down with the Papists! A new world!” Hearing this, the Protestants in the city recognised their co-religionists, and the Catholics their opponents: but whereas the former had been warned and were on the alert, the latter were taken by surprise; consequently they offered no resistance, which, however, did not prevent bloodshed. M. de St. Andre, the governor of the town, who during his short period of office had drawn the bitter hatred of the Protestants on him, was shot dead in his bed, and his body being flung out of the window, was torn in pieces by the populace. The work of murder went on all night, and on the morrow the victors in their turn began an organised persecution, which fell more heavily on the Catholics than that to which they had subjected the Protestants; for, as we have explained above, the former could only find shelter in the plain, while the latter used the Cevennes as a stronghold.

It was about this time that the peace, which was called, as we have said, “the insecurely seated,” was concluded. Two years later this name was justified by the Massacre of St. Bartholomew.

When this event took place, the South, strange as it may seem, looked on: in Nimes both Catholics and Protestants, stained with the other’s blood, faced each other, hand on hilt, but without drawing weapon. It was as if they were curious to see how the Parisians would get through. The massacre had one result, however, the union of the principal cities of the South and West: Montpellier, Uzes, Montauban, and La Rochelle, with Nimes at their head, formed a civil and military league to last, as is declared in the Act of Federation, until God should raise up a sovereign to be the defender of the Protestant faith. In the year 1775 the Protestants of the South began to turn their eyes towards Henri IV as the coming defender.

At that date Nimes, setting an example to the other cities of the League, deepened her moats, blew up her suburbs, and added to the height of her ramparts. Night and day the work of perfecting the means of defence went on; the guard at every gate was doubled, and knowing how often a city had been taken by surprise, not a hole through which a Papist could creep was left in the fortifications. In dread of what the future might bring, Nimes even committed sacrilege against the past, and partly demolished the Temple of Diana and mutilated the amphitheatre — of which one gigantic stone was sufficient to form a section of the wall. During one truce the crops were sown, during another they were garnered in, and so things went on while the reign of the Mignons lasted. At length the prince raised up by God, whom the Huguenots had waited for so long, appeared; Henri IV ascended the, throne.

But once seated, Henri found himself in the same difficulty as had confronted Octavius fifteen centuries earlier, and which confronted Louis Philippe three centuries later — that is to say, having been raised to sovereign power by a party which was not in the majority, he soon found himself obliged to separate from this party and to abjure his religious beliefs, as others have abjured or will yet abjure their political beliefs; consequently, just as Octavius had his Antony, and Louis Philippe was to have his Lafayette, Henri IV was to have his Biron. When monarchs are in this position they can no longer have a will of their own or personal likes and dislikes; they submit to the force of circumstances, and feel compelled to rely on the masses; no sooner are they freed from the ban under which they laboured than they are obliged to bring others under it.

However, before having recourse to extreme measures, Henri IV with soldierly frankness gathered round him all those who had been his comrades of old in war and in religion; he spread out before them a map of France, and showed them that hardly a tenth of the immense number of its inhabitants were Protestants, and that even that tenth was shut up in the mountains; some in Dauphine, which had been won for them by their three principal leaders, Baron des Adrets, Captain Montbrun, and Lesdiguieres; others in the Cevennes, which had become Protestant through their great preachers, Maurice Secenat and Guillaume Moget; and the rest in the mountains of Navarre, whence he himself had come. He recalled to them further that whenever they ventured out of their mountains they had been beaten in every battle, at Jarnac, at Moncontour, and at Dreux. He concluded by explaining how impossible it was for him, such being the case, to entrust the guidance of the State to their party; but he offered them instead three things, viz., his purse to supply their present needs, the Edict of Nantes to assure their future safety, and fortresses to defend themselves should this edict one day be revoked, for with profound insight the grandfather divined the grandson: Henri IV feared Louis XIV.

The Protestants took what they were offered, but of course like all who accept benefits they went away filled with discontent because they had not been given more.

Although the Protestants ever afterwards looked on Henri IV as a renegade, his reign nevertheless was their golden age, and while it lasted Nines was quiet; for, strange to say, the Protestants took no revenge for St. Bartholomew, contenting themselves with debarring the Catholics from the open exercise of their religion, but leaving them free to use all its rites and ceremonies in private. They even permitted the procession of the Host through the streets in case of illness, provided it took place at night. Of course death would not always wait for darkness, and the Host was sometimes carried to the dying during the day, not without danger to the priest, who, however, never let himself be deterred thereby from the performance of his duty; indeed, it is of the essence of religious devotion to be inflexible; and few soldiers, however brave, have equalled the martyrs in courage.

During this time, taking advantage of the truce to hostilities and the impartial protection meted out to all without distinction by the Constable Damville, the Carmelites and Capuchins, the Jesuits and monks of all orders and colours, began by degrees to return to Nines; without any display, it is true, rather in a surreptitious manner, preferring darkness to daylight; but however this may be, in the course of three or four years they had all regained foothold in the town; only now they were in the position in which the Protestants had been formerly, they were without churches, as their enemies were in possession of all the places of worship. It also happened that a Jesuit high in authority, named Pere Coston, preached with such success that the Protestants, not wishing to be beaten, but desirous of giving word for word, summoned to their aid the Rev. Jeremie Ferrier, of Alais, who at the moment was regarded as the most eloquent preacher they had. Needless to say, Alais was situated in the mountains, that inexhaustible source of Huguenot eloquence. At once the controversial spirit was aroused; it did not as yet amount to war, but still less could it be called peace: people were no longer assassinated, but they were anathematised; the body was safe, but the soul was consigned to damnation: the days as they passed were used by both sides to keep their hand in, in readiness for the moment when the massacres should again begin.

CHAPTER II

The death of Henri IV led to new conflicts, in which although at first success was on the side of the Protestants it by degrees went over to the Catholics; for with the accession of Louis XIII Richelieu had taken possession of the throne: beside the king sat the cardinal; under the purple mantle gleamed the red robe. It was at this crisis that Henri de Rohan rose to eminence in the South. He was one of the most illustrious representatives of that great race which, allied as it was to the royal houses of Scotland, France, Savoy, and Lorraine; had taken as their device, “Be king I cannot, prince I will not, Rohan I am.”

Henri de Rohan was at this time about forty years of age, in the prime of life. In his youth, in order to perfect his education, he had visited England, Scotland, and Italy. In England Elizabeth had called him her knight; in Scotland James VI had asked him to stand godfather to his son, afterwards Charles I; in Italy he had been so deep in the confidence of the leaders of men, and so thoroughly initiated into the politics of the principal cities, that it was commonly said that, after Machiavel, he was the greatest authority in these matters. He had returned to France in the lifetime of Henry IV, and had married the daughter of Sully, and after Henri’s death had commanded the Swiss and the Grison regiments — at the siege of Juliers. This was the man whom the king was so imprudent as to offend by refusing him the reversion of the office of governor of Poitou, which was then held by Sully, his father-in-law. In order to revenge himself for the neglect he met with at court, as he states in his Memoires with military ingenuousness, he espoused the cause of Conde with all his heart, being also drawn in this direction by his liking for Conde’s brother and his consequent desire to help those of Conde’s religion.

From this day on street disturbances and angry disputes assumed another aspect: they took in a larger area and were not so readily appeased. It was no longer an isolated band of insurgents which roused a city, but rather a conflagration which spread over the whole South, and a general uprising which was almost a civil war.

This state of things lasted for seven or eight years, and during this time Rohan, abandoned by Chatillon and La Force, who received as the reward of their defection the field marshal's baton, pressed by Conde, his old friend, and by Montmorency, his consistent rival, performed prodigies of courage and miracles of strategy. At last, without soldiers, without ammunition, without money, he still appeared to Richelieu to be so redoubtable that all the conditions of surrender he demanded were granted. The maintenance of the Edict of Nantes was guaranteed, all the places of worship were to be restored to the Reformers, and a general amnesty granted to himself and his partisans. Furthermore, he obtained what was an unheard-of thing until then, an indemnity of 300,000 livres for his expenses during the rebellion; of which sum he allotted 240,000 livres to his co-religionists — that is to say, more than three-quarters of the entire amount — and kept, for the purpose of restoring his various chateaux and setting his domestic establishment, which had been destroyed during the war, again on foot, only 60,000 livres. This treaty was signed on July 27th, 1629.

The Duc de Richelieu, to whom no sacrifice was too great in order to attain his ends, had at last reached the goal, but the peace cost him nearly 40,000,000 livres; on the other hand, Saintonge, Poitou, and Languedoc had submitted, and the chiefs of the houses of La Tremouille, Conde, Bouillon, Rohan, and Soubise had came to terms with him; organised armed opposition had disappeared, and the lofty manner of viewing matters natural to the cardinal duke prevented him from noticing private enmity. He therefore left Nimes free to manage her local affairs as she pleased, and very soon the old order, or rather disorder, reigned once more within her walls. At last Richelieu died, and Louis XIII soon followed him, and the long minority of his successor, with its embarrassments, left to Catholics and Protestants in the South more complete liberty than ever to carry on the great duel which down to our own days has never ceased.

But from this period, each flux and reflux bears more and more the peculiar character of the party which for the moment is triumphant; when the Protestants get the upper hand, their vengeance is marked by brutality and rage; when the Catholics are victorious, the retaliation is full of hypocrisy and greed. The Protestants pull down churches and monasteries, expel the monks, burn the crucifixes, take the body of some criminal from the gallows, nail it on a cross, pierce its side, put a crown of thorns round its temples and set it up in the market-place — an effigy of Jesus on Calvary. The Catholics levy contributions, take back what they had been deprived of, exact indemnities, and although ruined by each reverse, are richer than ever after each victory. The Protestants act in the light of day, melting down the church bells to make cannon to the sound of the drum, violate agreements, warm themselves with wood taken from the houses of the cathedral clergy, affix their theses to the cathedral doors, beat the priests who carry the Holy Sacrament to the dying, and, to crown all other insults, turn churches into slaughter-houses and sewers.

The Catholics, on the contrary, march at night, and, slipping in at the gates which have been left ajar for them, make their bishop president of the Council, put Jesuits at the head of the college, buy converts with money from the treasury, and as they always have influence at court, begin by excluding the Calvinists from favour, hoping soon to deprive them of justice.

At last, on the 31st of December, 1657, a final struggle took place, in which the Protestants were overcome, and were only saved from destruction because from the other side of the Channel, Cromwell exerted himself in their favour, writing with his own hand at the end of a despatch relative to the affairs of Austria, “I Learn that there have been popular disturbances in a town of Languedoc called Nimes, and I beg that order may be restored with as much mildness as possible, and without shedding of blood.” As, fortunately for the Protestants, Mazarin had need of Cromwell at that moment, torture was forbidden, and nothing allowed but annoyances of all kinds. These henceforward were not only innumerable, but went on without a pause: the Catholics, faithful to their system of constant encroachment, kept up an incessant persecution, in which they were soon encouraged by the numerous ordinances issued by Louis XIV. The grandson of Henri IV could not so far forget all ordinary respect as to destroy at once the Edict of Nantes, but he tore off clause after clause.

In 1630 — that is, a year after the peace with Rohan had been signed in the preceding reign — Chalons-sur-Saone had resolved that no Protestant should be allowed to take any part in the manufactures of the town.

In 1643, six months after the accession of Louis XIV, the laundresses of Paris made a rule that the wives and daughters of Protestants were unworthy to be admitted to the freedom of their respectable guild.

In 1654, just one year after he had attained his majority, Louis XIV consented to the imposition of a tax on the town of Nimes of 4000 francs towards the support of the Catholic and the Protestant hospitals; and instead of allowing each party to contribute to the support of its own hospital, the money was raised in one sum, so that, of the money paid by the Protestants, who were twice as numerous as the Catholics, two-sixths went to their enemies. On August 9th of the same year a decree of the Council ordered that all the artisan consuls should be Catholics; on the 16th September another decree forbade Protestants to send deputations to the king; lastly, on the 20th of December, a further decree declared that all hospitals should be administered by Catholic consuls alone.

In 1662 Protestants were commanded to bury their dead either at dawn or after dusk, and a special clause of the decree fixed the number of persons who might attend a funeral at ten only.

In 1663 the Council of State issued decrees prohibiting the practice of their religion by the Reformers in one hundred and forty-two communes in the dioceses of Nimes, Uzes, and Mendes; and ordering the demolition of their meetinghouses.

In 1664 this regulation was extended to the meeting-houses of Alencon and Montauban, as Well as their small place of worship in Nimes. On the 17th July of the same year the Parliament of Rouen forbade the master-mercers to engage any more Protestant workmen or apprentices when the number already employed had reached the proportion of one Protestant, to fifteen Catholics; on the 24th of the same month the Council of State declared all certificates of mastership held by a Protestant invalid from whatever source derived; and in October reduced to two the number of Protestants who might be employed at the mint.

In 1665 the regulation imposed on the mercers was extended to the goldsmiths.

In 1666 a royal declaration, revising the decrees of Parliament, was published, and Article 31 provided that the offices of clerk to the consulates, or secretary to a guild of watchmakers, or porter in a municipal building, could only be held by Catholics; while in Article 33 it was ordained that when a procession carrying the Host passed a place of worship belonging to the so-called Reformers, the worshippers should stop their psalm-singing till the procession had gone by; and lastly, in Article 34 it was enacted that the houses and other buildings belonging to those who were of the Reformed religion might, at the pleasure of the town authorities, be draped with cloth or otherwise decorated on any religious Catholic festival.

In 1669 the Chambers appointed by the Edict of Nantes in the Parliaments of Rouen and Paris were suppressed, as well as the articled clerkships connected therewith, and the clerkships in the Record Office; and in August of the same year, when the emigration of Protestants was just beginning, an edict was issued, of which the following is a clause:

"Whereas many of our subjects have gone to foreign countries, where they continue to follow their various trades and occupations, even working as shipwrights, or taking service as sailors, till at length they feel at home and determine never to return to France, marrying abroad and acquiring property of every description: We hereby forbid any member of the so-called Reformed Church to leave this kingdom without our permission, and we command those who have already left France to return forthwith within her boundaries."

In 1670 the king excluded physicians of the Reformed faith from the office of dean of the college of Rouen, and allowed only two Protestant doctors within its precincts. In 1671 a decree was published commanding the arms of France to be removed from all the places of worship belonging to the pretended Reformers. In 1680 a proclamation from the king closed the profession of midwife to women of the Reformed faith. In 1681 those who renounced the Protestant religion were exempted for two years from all contributions towards the support of soldiers sent to their town, and were for the same period relieved from the duty of giving them board and lodging. In the same year the college of Sedan was closed — the only college remaining in the entire kingdom at which Calvinist children could receive instruction. In 1682 the king commanded Protestant notaries; procurators, ushers, and serjeants to lay down their offices, declaring them unfit for such professions; and in September of the same year three months only were allowed them for the sale of the reversion of the said offices. In 1684 the Council of State extended the preceding regulations to those Protestants holding the title of honorary secretary to the king, and in August of the same year Protestants were declared incapable of serving on a jury of experts.

In 1685 the provost of merchants in Paris ordered all Protestant privileged merchants in that city to sell their privileges within a month. And in October of the same year the long series of persecutions, of which we have omitted many, reached its culminating point — the: Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Henri IV, who foresaw this result, had hoped that it would have occurred in another manner, so that his co-religionists would have been able to retain their fortresses; but what was actually done was that the strong places were first taken away, and then came the Revocation; after which the Calvinists found themselves completely at the mercy of their mortal enemies.

From 1669, when Louis first threatened to aim a fatal blow at the civil rights of the Huguenots, by abolishing the equal partition of the Chambers between the two parties, several deputations had been sent to him praying him to stop the course of his persecutions; and in order not to give him any fresh excuse for attacking their party, these deputations addressed him in the most submissive manner, as the following fragment from an address will prove:

"In the name of God, sire," said the Protestants to the king, "listen to the last breath of our dying liberty, have pity on our sufferings, have pity on the great number of your poor subjects who daily water their bread with their tears: they are all filled with burning zeal and inviolable loyalty to you; their love for your august person is only equalled by their respect; history bears witness that they contributed in no small degree to place your great and magnanimous ancestor on his rightful throne, and since your miraculous birth they have never done anything worthy of blame; they might indeed use much stronger terms, but your Majesty has spared their modesty by addressing to them on many occasions words of praise which they would never have ventured to apply to themselves; these your subjects place their sole trust in your sceptre for refuge and protection on earth, and their interest as well as their duty and conscience impels them to remain attached to the service of your Majesty with unalterable devotion."

But, as we have seen, nothing could restrain the triumvirate which held the power just then, and thanks to the suggestions of Pere Lachaise and Madame de Maintenon, Louis XIV determined to gain heaven by means of wheel and stake.

As we see, for the Protestants, thanks to these numerous decrees, persecution began at the cradle and followed them to the grave.

As a boy, a Huguenot could — enter no public school; as a youth, no career was open to him; he could become neither mercer nor concierge, neither apothecary nor physician, neither lawyer nor consul. As a man, he had no sacred house, of prayer; no registrar would inscribe his marriage or the birth of his children; hourly his liberty and his conscience were ignored.

If he ventured to worship God by the singing of psalms, he had to be silent as the Host was carried past outside. When a Catholic festival occurred, he was forced not only to swallow his rage but to let his house be hung with decorations in sign of joy; if he had inherited a fortune from his fathers, having neither social standing nor civil rights, it slipped gradually out of his hands, and went to support the schools and hospitals of his foes. Having reached the end of his life, his deathbed was made miserable; for dying in the faith of his fathers, he could not be laid to rest beside them, and like a pariah he would be carried to his grave at night, no more than ten of those near and dear to him being allowed to follow his coffin.

Lastly, if at any age whatever he should attempt to quit the cruel soil on which he had no right to be born, to live, or to die, he would be declared a rebel, his goads would be confiscated, and the lightest penalty that he had to expect, if he ever fell into the hands of his enemies, was to row for the rest of his life in the galleys of the king, chained between a murderer and a forger.

Such a state of things was intolerable: the cries of one man are lost in space, but the groans of a whole population are like a storm; and this time, as always, the tempest gathered in the mountains, and the rumblings of the thunder began to be heard.

First there were texts written by invisible hands on city walls, on the signposts and cross-roads, on the crosses in the cemeteries: these warnings, like the ‘Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin’ of Belshazzar, even pursued the persecutors into the midst of their feasts and orgies.

Now it was the threat, “Jesus came not to send peace, but a sword.” Then this consolation, “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.” Or perhaps it was this appeal for united action which was soon to become a summons to revolt, “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us.”

And before these promises, taken from the New Testament, the persecuted paused, and then went home inspired by faith in the prophets, who spake, as St. Paul says in his First Epistle to the Thessalonians, “not the word of men but the word of God.”

Very soon these words became incarnate, and what the prophet Joel foretold came to pass: “Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions,... and I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood and fire,... and it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered.”

In 1696 reports began to circulate that men had had visions; being able to see what was going on in the most distant parts, and that the heavens themselves opened to their eyes. While in this ecstatic state they were insensible to pain when pricked with either pin or blade; and when, on recovering consciousness, they were questioned they could remember nothing.

The first of these was a woman from Vivarais, whose origin was unknown. She went about from town to town, shedding tears of blood. M. de Baville, intendant of Languedoc, had her arrested and brought to Montpellier. There she was condemned to death and burnt at the stake, her tears of blood being dried by fire.

After her came a second fanatic, for so these popular prophets were called. He was born at Mazillon, his name was Laquoite, and he was twenty years of age. The gift of prophecy had come to him in a strange manner. This is the story told about him: — ”One day, returning from Languedoc, where he had been engaged in the cultivation of silkworms, on reaching the bottom of the hill of St. Jean he found a man lying on the ground trembling in every limb. Moved by pity, he stopped and asked what ailed him. The man replied, ‘Throw yourself on your knees, my son, and trouble not yourself about me, but learn how to attain salvation and save your brethren. This can only be done by the communion of the Holy Ghost, who is in me, and whom by the grace of God I can bestow on you. Approach and receive this gift in a kiss.’ At these words the unknown kissed the young man on the mouth, pressed his hand and disappeared, leaving the other trembling in his turn; for the spirit of God was in him, and being inspired he spread the word abroad.”

A third fanatic, a prophetess, raved about the parishes of St. Andeol de Clerguemont and St. Frazal de Vantalon, but she addressed herself principally to recent converts, to whom she preached concerning the Eucharist that in swallowing the consecrated wafer they had swallowed a poison as venomous as the head of the basilisk, that they had bent the knee to Baal, and that no penitence on their part could be great enough to save them. These doctrines inspired such profound terror that the Rev. Father Louvreloeil himself tells us that Satan by his efforts succeeded in nearly emptying the churches, and that at the following Easter celebrations there were only half as many communicants as the preceding year.

Such a state of licence, which threatened to spread farther and farther, awoke the religious solicitude of Messire Francois Langlade de Duchayla, Prior of Laval, Inspector of Missions of Gevaudan, and Arch-priest of the Cevennes. He therefore resolved to leave his residence at Mende and to visit the parishes in which heresy had taken the strongest hold, in order to oppose it by every mean’s which God and the king had put in his power.

The Abbe Duchayla was a younger son of the noble house of Langlade, and by the circumstances of his birth, in spite of his soldierly instincts, had been obliged to leave epaulet and sword to his elder brother, and himself assume cassock and stole. On leaving the seminary, he espoused the cause of the Church militant with all the ardour of his temperament. Perils to encounter; foes to fight, a religion to force on others, were necessities to this fiery character, and as everything at the moment was quiet in France, he had embarked for India with the fervent resolution of a martyr.

On reaching his destination, the young missionary had found himself surrounded by circumstances which were wonderfully in harmony with his celestial longings: some of his predecessors had been carried so far by religious zeal that the King of Siam had put several to death by torture and had forbidden any more missionaries to enter his dominions; but this, as we can easily imagine, only excited still more the abbe’s missionary fervour; evading the watchfulness of the military, and regardless of the terrible penalties imposed by the king, he crossed the frontier, and began to preach the Catholic religion to the heathen, many of whom were converted.

One day he was surprised by a party of soldiers in a little village in which he had been living for three months, and in which nearly all the inhabitants had abjured their false faith, and was brought before the governor of Bankan, where instead of denying his faith, he nobly defended Christianity and magnified the name of God. He was handed over to the executioners to be subjected to torture, and suffered at their hands with resignation everything that a human body can endure while yet retaining life, till at length his patience exhausted their rage; and seeing him become unconscious, they thought he was dead, and with mutilated hands, his breast furrowed with wounds, his limbs half warn through by heavy fetters, he was suspended by the wrists to a branch of a tree and abandoned. A pariah passing by cut him down and succoured him, and reports of his martyrdom having spread, the French ambassador demanded justice with no uncertain voice, so that the King of Siam, rejoicing that the executioners had stopped short in time, hastened to send back to M. de Chaumont, the representative of Louis XIV, a mutilated though still living man, instead of the corpse which had been demanded.

At the time when Louis XIV was meditating the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes he felt that the services of such a man would be invaluable to him, so about 1632, Abbe Duchayla was recalled from India, and a year later was sent to Mende, with the titles of Arch-priest of the Cevennes and Inspector of Missions.

Soon the abbe, who had been so much persecuted, became a persecutor, showing himself as insensible to the sufferings of others as he had been inflexible under his own. His apprenticeship to torture stood him in such good stead that he became an inventor, and not only did he enrich the torture chamber by importing from India several scientifically constructed machines, hitherto unknown in Europe, but he also designed many others. People told with terror of reeds cut in the form of whistles which the abbe pitilessly forced under the nails of malignants; of iron pincers for tearing out their beards, eyelashes, and eyebrows; of wicks steeped in oil and wound round the fingers of a victim’s hands, and then set on fire so as to form a pair of five-flamed candelabra; of a case turning on a pivot in which a man who refused to be converted was sometimes shut up, the case being then made to revolve rapidly till the victim lost consciousness; and lastly of fetters used when taking prisoners from one town to another, and brought to such perfection, that when they were on the prisoner could neither stand nor sit.

Even the most fervent panegyrists of Abbe Duchayla spoke of him with bated breath, and, when he himself looked into his own heart and recalled how often he had applied to the body the power to bind and loose which God had only given him over the soul, he was seized with strange tremors, and falling on his knees with folded hands and bowed head he remained for hours wrapt in thought, so motionless that were it not for the drops of sweat which stood on his brow he might have been taken for a marble statue of prayer over a tomb.

Moreover, this priest by virtue of the powers with which he was invested, and feeling that he had the authority of M. de Baville, intendant of

Languedoc, and M. de Broglie, commander of the troops, behind him, had done other terrible things.

He had separated children from father and mother, and had shut them up in religious houses, where they had been subjected to such severe chastisement, by way of making them do penance for the heresy of their parents, that many of them died under it.

He had forced his way into the chamber of the dying, not to bring consolation but menaces; and bending over the bed, as if to keep back the Angel of Death, he had repeated the words of the terrible decree which provided that in case of the death of a Huguenot without conversion, his memory should be persecuted, and his body, denied Christian burial, should be drawn on hurdles out of the city, and cast on a dungheap.

Lastly, when with pious love children tried to shield their parents in the death-agony from his threats, or dead from his justice, by carrying them, dead or dying, to some refuge in which they might hope to draw their last breath in peace or to obtain Christian burial, he declared that anyone who should open his door hospitably to such disobedience was a traitor to religion, although among the heathen such pity would have been deemed worthy of an altar.

Such was the man raised up to punish, who went on his way, preceded by terror, accompanied by torture, and followed by death, through a country already exhausted by long and bloody oppression, and where at every step he trod on half repressed religious hate, which like a volcano was ever ready to burst out afresh, but always prepared for martyrdom. Nothing held him back, and years ago he had had his grave hollowed out in the church of St. Germain, choosing that church for his last long sleep because it had been built by Pope Urban IV when he was bishop of Mende.

Abbe Duchayla extended his visitation over six months, during which every day was marked by tortures and executions: several prophets were burnt at the stake; Francoise de Brez, she who had preached that the Host contained a more venomous poison than a basilisk’s head, was hanged; and Laquoite, who had been confined in the citadel of Montpellier, was on the point of being broken on the wheel, when on the eve of his execution his cell was found empty. No one could ever discover how he escaped, and consequently his reputation rose higher than ever, it being currently believed that, led by the Holy Spirit as St. Peter by the angel, he had passed through the guards invisible to all, leaving his fetters behind.

This incomprehensible escape redoubled the severity of the Arch-priest, till at last the prophets, feeling that their only chance of safety lay in getting rid of him, began to preach against him as Antichrist, and advocate his death. The abbe was warned of this, but nothing could abate his zeal. In France as in India, martyrdom was his longed-for goal, and with head erect and unfaltering step he "pressed toward the mark."

At last, on the evening of the 24th of July, two hundred conspirators met in a wood on the top of a hill which overlooked the bridge of Montvert, near which was the Arch-priest's residence. Their leader was a man named Laporte, a native of Alais, who had become a master-blacksmith in the pass of Deze. He was accompanied by an inspired man, a former wool-carder, born at Magistavols, Esprit Seguier by name. This man was, after Laquoite, the most highly regarded of the twenty or thirty prophets who were at that moment going up and down the Cevennes in every direction. The whole party was armed with scythes, halberts, and swords; a few had even pistols and guns.

On the stroke of ten, the hour fixed for their departure, they all knelt down and with uncovered heads began praying as fervently as if they were about to perform some act most pleasing to God, and their prayers ended, they marched down the hill to the town, singing psalms, and shouting between the verses to the townspeople to keep within their homes, and not to look out of door or window on pain of death.

The abbe was in his oratory when he heard the mingled singing and shouting, and at the same moment a servant entered in great alarm, despite the strict regulation of the Arch-priest that he was never to be interrupted at his prayers. This man announced that a body of fanatics was coming down the hill, but the abbe felt convinced that it was only an unorganised crowd which was going to try and carry off six prisoners, at that moment in the 'ceps.' [A terrible kind of stocks — a beam split in two, no notches being made for the legs: the victim's legs were placed between the two pieces of wood, which were then, by means of a vice at each end, brought gradually together. Translators Note.]

These prisoners were three young men and three girls in men's clothes, who had been seized just as they were about to emigrate. As the abbe was always protected by a guard of soldiers, he sent for the officer in command and ordered him to march against, the fanatics and disperse them. But the officer was spared the trouble of obeying, for the fanatics were already at hand. On reaching the gate of the courtyard he heard them outside, and perceived that they were making ready to burst it in. Judging of their numbers by the sound of their voices, he considered that far from attacking them, he would have enough to do in preparing for defence, consequently he bolted and barred the gate on the inside, and hastily erected a barricade under an arch leading to the apartments of the abbe. Just as these preparations were complete, Esprit Seguier caught sight of a heavy beam of wood lying in a ditch; this was raised by a dozen men and used as a battering-ram to force in the gate, which soon showed a breach. Thus encouraged, the workers, cheered by the chants of their comrades, soon got the gate off the hinges, and thus the outside court was taken. The crowd then loudly demanded the release of the prisoners, using dire threats.

The commanding officer sent to ask the abbe what he was to do; the abbe replied that he was to fire on the conspirators. This imprudent order was carried out; one of the fanatics was killed on the spot, and two wounded men mingled their groans with the songs and threats of their comrades.

The barricade was next attacked, some using axes, others darting their swords and halberts through the crevices and killing those behind; as for those who had firearms, they climbed on the shoulders of the others, and having fired at those below, saved themselves by tumbling down again. At the head of the besiegers were Laporte and Esprit Seguier, one of whom had a father to avenge and the other a son, both of whom had been done to death by the abbe. They were not the only ones of the party who were fired by the desire of vengeance; twelve or fifteen others were in the same position.

The abbe in his room listened to the noise of the struggle, and finding matters growing serious, he gathered his household round him, and making them kneel down, he told them to make their confession, that he might, by giving them absolution, prepare them for appearing before God. The sacred words had just been pronounced when the rioters drew near, having carried the barricade, and driven the soldiers to take refuge in a hall on the ground floor just under the Arch-priest’s room.

But suddenly, the assault was stayed, some of the men going to surround the house, others setting out on a search for the prisoners. These were easily found, for judging by what they could hear that their brethren had come to their rescue, they shouted as loudly as they could.

The unfortunate creatures had already passed a whole week with their legs caught and pressed by the cleft beams which formed these inexpressibly painful stocks. When the unfortunate victims were released, the fanatics screamed with rage at the sight of their swollen bodies and half-broken bones. None of the unhappy people were able to stand. The attack on the soldiers was renewed, and these being driven out of the lower hall, filled the staircase leading to the abbe’s apartments, and offered such determined resistance that their assailants were twice forced to fall back. Laporte, seeing two of his men killed and five or six wounded, called out loudly, “Children of God, lay down your arms: this way of going to work is too slow; let us burn the abbey and all in it. To work! to work!” The advice was good, and they all hastened to follow it: benches, chairs, and furniture of all sorts were heaped up in the hall, a palliasse thrown on the top, and the pile fired. In a moment the whole building was ablaze, and the Arch-priest, yielding to the entreaties of his servants, fastened his sheets to the window-bars, and by their help dropped into the garden. The drop was so great that he broke one of his thigh bones, but dragging himself along on his hands and one knee, he, with one of his servants, reached a recess in the wall, while another servant was endeavouring to escape through the flames, thus falling into the hands of the fanatics, who carried him before their captain. Then cries of “The prophet! the prophet!” were heard on all sides. Esprit Seguier, feeling that something fresh had taken place, came forward, still holding in his hand the blazing torch with which he had set fire to the pile.

“Brother,” asked Laporte, pointing to the prisoner, “is this man to die?”

Esprit Seguier fell on his knees and covered his face with his mantle, like Samuel, and sought the Lord in prayer, asking to know His will.

In a short time he rose and said, “This man is not to die; for inasmuch as he has showed mercy to our brethren we must show mercy to him.”

Whether this fact had been miraculously revealed to Seguier, or whether he had gained his information from other sources, the newly released prisoners confirmed its truth, calling out that the man had indeed treated them with humanity. Just then a roar as of a wild beast was heard: one of the fanatics, whose brother had been put to death by the abbe, had just caught sight of him, the whole neighbourhood being lit up by the fire; he was kneeling in an angle of the wall, to which he had dragged himself.

“Down with the son of Belial!” shouted the crowd, rushing towards the priest, who remained kneeling and motionless like a marble statue. His valet took advantage of the confusion to escape, and got off easily; for the sight of him on whom the general hate was concentrated made the Huguenots forget everything else:

Esprit Seguier was the first to reach the priest, and spreading his hands over him, he commanded the others to hold back. “God desireth not the death of a sinner,’“ said he, “‘but rather that he turn from his wickedness and live.’“

“No, no!” shouted a score of voices, refusing obedience for the first time, perhaps, to an order from the prophet; “let him die without mercy, as he struck without pity. Death to the son of Belial, death!”

“Silence!” exclaimed the prophet in a terrible voice, “and listen to the word of God from my mouth. If this man will join us and take upon him the duties of a pastor, let us grant him his life, that he may henceforward devote it to the spread of the true faith.”

“Rather a thousand deaths than apostasy!” answered the priest.

“Die, then!” cried Laporte, stabbing him; “take that for having burnt my father in Nimes.”

And he passed on the dagger to Esprit Seguier.

Duchayla made neither sound nor gesture: it would have seemed as if the dagger had been turned by the priest’s gown as by a coat of mail were it not that a thin stream of blood appeared. Raising his eyes to heaven, he repeated the words of the penitential psalm: “Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord! Lord, hear my voice!”

Then Esprit Seguier raised his arm and struck in his turn, saying, “Take that for my son, whom you broke on the wheel at Montpellier.”

And he passed on the dagger.

But this blow also was not mortal, only another stream of blood appeared, and the abbe said in a failing voice, “Deliver me, O my Saviour, out of my well-merited sufferings, and I will acknowledge their justice; far I have been a man of blood.”

The next who seized the dagger came near and gave his blow, saying, “Take that for my brother, whom you let die in the ‘ceps.’“

This time the dagger pierced the heart, and the abbe had only time to ejaculate, “Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy!” before he fell back dead.

But his death did not satisfy the vengeance of those who had not been able to strike him living; one by one they drew near and stabbed, each invoking the shade of some dear murdered one and pronouncing the same words of malediction.

In all, the body of the abbe received fifty-two dagger thrusts, of which twenty-four would have been mortal.

Thus perished, at the age of fifty-five, Messire Francois de Langlade Duchayla, prior of Laval, inspector of missions in Gevaudan, and Arch-priest of the Cevennes and Mende.

Their vengeance thus accomplished, the murderers felt that there was no more safety for them in either city or plain, and fled to the mountains; but in passing near the residence of M. de Laveze, a Catholic nobleman of the parish of Molezon, one of the fugitives recollected that he had heard that a great number of firearms was kept in the house. This seemed a lucky chance, for firearms were what the Huguenots needed most of all. They therefore sent two envoys to M. de Laveze to ask him to give them at, least a share of his weapons; but he, as a good Catholic, replied that it was quite true that he had indeed a store of arms, but that they were destined to the triumph and not to the desecration of religion, and that he would only give them up with his life. With these words, he dismissed the envoys, barring his doors behind them.

But while this parley was going on the conspirators had approached the chateau, and thus received the valiant answer to their demands sooner than M. de Laveze had counted on. Resolving not to leave him time to take defensive measures, they dashed at the house, and by standing on each other’s shoulders reached the room in which M. de Laveze and his entire family had taken refuge. In an instant the door was forced, and the fanatics, still reeking with the life-blood of Abbe Duchayla, began again their work of death. No one was spared; neither the master of the house, nor his brother, nor his uncle, nor his sister, who knelt to the assassins in vain; even his old mother, who was eighty years of age, having from her bed first witnessed the murder of all her family, was at last stabbed to the heart, though the butchers might have reflected that it was hardly worth while thus to anticipate the arrival of Death, who according to the laws of nature must have been already at hand.

The massacre finished, the fanatics spread over the castle, supplying themselves with arms and under-linen, being badly in need of the latter; for when they left their homes they had expected soon to return, and had taken nothing with them. They also carried off the copper kitchen utensils, intending to turn them into bullets. Finally, they seized on a sum of 5000 francs, the marriage-portion of M. de Laveze's sister, who was just about to be married, and thus laid the foundation of a war fund.

The news of these two bloody events soon reached not only Nimes but all the countryside, and roused the authorities to action. M. le Comte de Broglie crossed the Upper Cevennes, and marched down to the bridge of Montvert, followed by several companies of fusiliers. From another direction M. le Comte de Peyre brought thirty-two cavalry and three hundred and fifty infantry, having enlisted them at Marvejols, La Canourgue, Chiac, and Serverette. M. de St. Paul, Abbe Duchayla's brother, and the Marquis Duchayla, his nephew, brought eighty horsemen from the family estates. The Count of Morangiez rode in from St. Auban and Malzieu with two companies of cavalry, and the town of Mende by order of its bishop despatched its nobles at the head of three companies of fifty men each.

But the mountains had swallowed up the fanatics, and nothing was ever known of their fate, except that from time to time a peasant would relate that in crossing the Cevennes he had heard at dawn or dusk, on mountain peak or from valley depths, the sound going up to heaven of songs of praise. It was the fanatic assassins worshipping God.

Or occasionally at night, on the tops of the lofty mountains, fires shone forth which appeared to signal one to another, but on looking the next night in the same direction all was dark.

So M. de Broglie, concluding that nothing could be done against enemies who were invisible, disbanded the troops which had come to his aid, and went back to Montpellier, leaving a company of fusiliers at Collet, another at Ayres, one at the bridge of Montvert, one at Barre, and one at Pompidon, and appointing Captain Poul as their chief.

This choice of such a man as chief showed that M. de Broglie was a good judge of human nature, and was also perfectly acquainted with the situation, for Captain Poul was the very man to take a leading part in the coming struggle. "He was," says Pere Louvreloeil, priest of the Christian doctrine and cure of Saint-Germain de Calberte, "an officer of merit and reputation, born in Ville-Dubert, near Carcassonne, who had when young served in Hungary and Germany, and distinguished himself in Piedmont in several excursions against the Barbets, [A name applied first to the Alpine smugglers who lived in the valleys, later to the insurgent peasants in the

Cevennes. — Translator’s Note.] notably in one of the later ones, when, entering the tent of their chief, Barbanaga, he cut off his head. His tall and agile figure, his warlike air, his love of hard work, his hoarse voice, his fiery and austere character, his carelessness in regard to dress, his mature age, his tried courage, his taciturn habit, the length and weight of his sword, all combined to render him formidable. Therefore no one could have been chosen more suitable for putting down the rebels, for forcing their entrenchments, and for putting them to flight.”

Hardly had he taken up a position in the market town of Labarre, which was to be his headquarters, than he was informed that a gathering of fanatics had been seen on the little plain of Fondmorte, which formed a pass between two valleys. He ordered out his Spanish steed, which he was accustomed to ride in the Turkish manner — that is, with very short stirrups, so that he could throw himself forward to the horse’s ears, or backward to the tail, according as he wished to give or avoid a mortal blow. Taking with him eighteen men of his own company and twenty-five from the town, he at once set off for the place indicated, not considering any larger number necessary to put to rout a band of peasants, however numerous.

The information turned out to be correct: a hundred Reformers led by Esprit Seguier had encamped in the plain of Fondmorte, and about eleven o’clock in the morning one of their sentinels in the defile gave the alarm by firing off his gun and running back to the camp, shouting, “To arms!” But Captain Poul, with his usual impetuosity, did not give the insurgents time to form, but threw himself upon them to the beat of the drum, not in the least deterred by their first volley. As he had expected, the band consisted of undisciplined peasants, who once scattered were unable to rally. They were therefore completely routed. Poul killed several with his own hand, among whom were two whose heads he cut off as cleverly as the most experienced executioner could have done, thanks to the marvellous temper of his Damascus blade. At this sight all who had till then stood their ground took to flight, Poul at their heels, slashing with his sword unceasingly, till they disappeared among the mountains. He then returned to the field of battle, picked up the two heads, and fastening them to his saddlebow, rejoined his soldiers with his bloody trophies, — that is to say, he joined the largest group of soldiers he could find; for the fight had turned into a number of single combats, every soldier fighting for himself. Here he found three prisoners who were about to be shot; but Poul ordered that they should not be touched: not that he thought for an instant of sparing their lives, but that he wished to reserve them for a public execution. These three men were Nouvel, a parishioner of Vialon, Moise Bonnet of Pierre-Male, and Esprit Seguier the prophet.

Captain Poul returned to Barre carrying with him his two heads and his three prisoners, and immediately reported to M. Just de Baville, intendant of Languedoc, the important capture he had made. The prisoners were quickly tried. Pierre Nouvel was condemned to be burnt alive at the bridge of Montvert, Molise Bonnet to be broken on the wheel at Deveze, and Esprit Seguier to be hanged at Andre-de-Lancise. Thus those who were amateurs in executions had a sufficient choice.

However, Moise Bonnet saved himself by becoming Catholic, but Pierre Nouvel and Esprit Seguier died as martyrs, making profession of the new faith and praising God.

Two days after the sentence on Esprit Seguier had been carried out, the body disappeared from the gallows. A nephew of Laporte named Roland had audaciously carried it off, leaving behind a writing nailed to the gibbet. This was a challenge from Laporte to Poul, and was dated from the “Camp of the Eternal God, in the desert of Cevennes,” Laporte signing himself “Colonel of the children of God who seek liberty of conscience.” Poul was about to accept the challenge when he learned that the insurrection was spreading on every side. A young man of Vieljeu, twenty-six years of age, named Solomon Couderc, had succeeded Esprit Seguier in the office of prophet, and two young lieutenants had joined Laporte. One of these was his nephew Roland, a man of about thirty, pock-marked, fair, thin, cold, and reserved; he was not tall, but very strong, and of inflexible courage. The other, Henri Castanet of Massevaques, was a keeper from the mountain of Laygoal, whose skill as a marksman was so well known that it was said he never missed a shot. Each of these lieutenants had fifty men under him.

Prophets and prophetesses too increased apace, so that hardly a day passed without reports being heard of fresh ones who were rousing whole villages by their ravings.

In the meantime a great meeting of the Protestants of Languedoc had been held in the fields of Vauvert, at which it had been resolved to join forces with the rebels of the Cevennes, and to send a messenger thither to make this resolution known.

Laporte had just returned from La Vaunage, where he had been making recruits, when this good news arrived; he at once sent his nephew Roland to the new allies with power to pledge his word in return for theirs, and to describe to them, in order to attract them, the country which he had chosen as the theatre of the coming war, and which, thanks to its hamlets, its woods, its defiles, its valleys, its precipices, and its caves, was capable of affording cover to as many bands of insurgents as might be employed, would be a good rallying-ground after repulse, and contained suitable positions for ambuscades. Roland was so successful in his mission that these new "soldiers of the Lord," as they called themselves, on learning that he had once been a dragoon, offered him the post of leader, which he accepted, and returned to his uncle at the head of an army.

Being thus reinforced, the Reformers divided themselves into three bands, in order to spread abroad their beliefs through the entire district. One went towards Soustele and the neighbourhood of Alais, another towards St. Privat and the bridge of Montvert, while the third followed the mountain slope down to St. Roman le Pompidou, and Barre.

The first was commanded by Castanet, the second by Roland, and the third by Laporte.

Each party ravaged the country as it passed, returning deathblow for deathblow and conflagration for conflagration, so that hearing one after another of these outrages Captain Poul demanded reinforcements from M. de Broglie and M. de Baville, which were promptly despatched.

As soon as Captain Poul found himself at the head of a sufficient number of troops, he determined to attack the rebels. He had received intelligence that the band led by Laporte was just about to pass through the valley of Croix, below Barre, near Temelague. In consequence of this information, he lay in ambush at a favourable spot on the route. As soon as the Reformers who were without suspicion, were well within the narrow pass in which Poul awaited them, he issued forth at the head of his soldiers, and charged the rebels with such courage and impetuosity that they, taken by surprise, made no attempt at resistance, but, thoroughly demoralised, spread over the mountain-side, putting a greater and greater distance at, every instant between themselves and the enemy, despite the efforts of Laporte to make them stand their ground. At last, seeing himself deserted, Laporte began to think of his own safety. But it was already too late, for he was surrounded by dragoons, and the only way of retreat open to him lay over a large rock.

This he successfully scaled, but before trying to get down the other side he raised his hands in supplication to Heaven; at that instant a volley was fired, two bullets struck him, and he fell head foremost down the precipice.

When the dragoons reached the foot of the rock, they found him dead. As they knew he was the chief of the rebels, his body was searched: sixty Louis was found in his pockets, and a sacred chalice which he was in the habit of using as an ordinary drinking-cup. Poul cut off his head and the heads of twelve other Reformers found dead on the field of battle, and enclosing them in a wicker basket, sent them to M. Just de Baville.

The Reformers soon recovered from this defeat and death, joined all their forces into one body, and placed Roland at their head in the place of Laporte. Roland chose a young man called Couderc de Mazel-Rozade, who had assumed the name of Lafleur, as his lieutenant, and the rebel forces were not only quickly reorganised, but made complete by the addition of a hundred men raised by the new lieutenant, and soon gave a sign that they were again on the war-path by burning down the churches of Bousquet, Cassagnas, and Prunet.

Then first it was that the consuls of Mende began to realise that it was no longer an insurrection they had on hand but a war, and Mende being the capital of Gevaudan and liable to be attacked at any moment, they set themselves to bring into repair their counterscarps, ravelins, bastions, gates, portcullises, moats, walls, turrets, ramparts, parapets, watchtowers, and the gear of their cannon, and having laid in a stock of firearms, powder and ball, they formed eight companies each fifty strong, composed of townsmen, and a further band of one hundred and fifty peasants drawn from the neighbouring country. Lastly, the States of the province sent an envoy to the king, praying him graciously to take measures to check the plague of heresy which was spreading from day to day. The king at once sent M. Julien in answer to the petition. Thus it was no longer simple governors of towns nor even chiefs of provinces who were engaged in the struggle; royalty itself had come to the rescue.

M de Julien, born a Protestant, was a, member of the nobility of Orange, and in his youth had served against France and borne arms in England and Ireland when William of Orange succeeded James II as King of England, Julien was one of his pages, and received as a reward for his fidelity in the famous campaign of 1688 the command of a regiment which was sent to the aid of the Duke of Savoy, who had begged both England and Holland to help him. He bore himself so gallantly that it was in great part due to him that the French were forced to raise the siege of Cony.

Whether it was that he expected too much from this success, or that the Duke of Savoy did not recognise his services at their worth, he withdrew to Geneva, where Louis XIV hearing of his discontent, caused overtures to be made to him with a view to drawing him into the French service. He was offered the same rank in the French army as he had held in the English, with a pension of 3000 livres.

M de Julien accepted, and feeling that his religious belief would be in the way of his advancement, when he changed his master he changed his Church. He was given the command of the valley of Barcelonnette, whence he made many excursions against the Barbets; then he was transferred to the command of the Avennes, of the principality of Orange, in order to guard the passes, so that the French Protestants could not pass over the frontier for the purpose of worshipping with their Dutch Protestant brethren; and after having tried this for a year, he went to Versailles to report himself to the king. While he was there, it chanced that the envoy from Gevaudan arrived, and the king being satisfied with de Julien's conduct since he had entered his service, made him major-general, chevalier of the military order of St. Louis; and commander-in-chief in the Vivarais and the Cevennes.

M de Julien from the first felt that the situation was very grave, and saw that his predecessors had felt such great contempt for the heretics that they had not realised the danger of the revolt. He immediately proceeded to inspect in person the different points where M. de Broglie had placed detachments of the Tournon and Marsily regiments. It is true that he arrived by the light of thirty burning village churches.

M de Broglie, M. de Baville, M. de Julien, and Captain Poul met together to consult as to the best means of putting an end to these disorders. It was agreed that the royal troops should be divided into two bodies, one under the command of M. de Julien to advance on Alais, where it was reported large meetings of the rebels were taking place, and the other under M. de Brogue, to march about in the neighbourhood of Nimes.

Consequently, the two chiefs separated. M. le Comte de Broglie at the head of sixty-two dragoons and some companies of foot, and having under him Captain Poul and M. de Dourville, set out from Cavayrac on the 12th of January at 2 a. m., and having searched without finding anything the vineyards of Nimes and La Garrigue de Milhau, took the road to the bridge of Lunel. There he was informed that those he was in search of had been seen at the chateau of Caudiac the day before; he therefore at once set out for the forest which lies around it, not doubting to find the fanatics entrenched there; but, contrary to his expectations, it was vacant. He then pushed on to Vauvert, from Vauvert to Beauvoisin, from Beauvoisin to Generac, where he learned that a troop of rebels had passed the night there, and in the morning had left for Aubore. Resolved to give them no rest, M. de Broglie set out at once for this village.

When half-way there, a member of his staff thought he could distinguish a crowd of men near a house about half a league distant; M. de Broglie instantly ordered Sieur de Gibertin, Captain Paul’s lieutenant, who was riding close by, at the head of his company, to take eight dragoons and make a reconnaissance, in order to ascertain who these men were, while the rest of the troops would make a halt.

This little band, led by its officer, crossed a clearing in the wood, and advanced towards the farmhouse, which was called the Mas de Gafarel, and which now seemed deserted. But when they were within half a gun-shot of the wall the charge was sounded behind it, and a band of rebels rushed towards them, while from a neighbouring house a second troop emerged, and looking round, he perceived a third lying on their faces in a small wood. These latter suddenly stood up and approached him, singing psalms. As it was impossible for M. de Gibertin to hold his ground against so large a force, he ordered two shots to be fired as a warning to de Brogue to advance to meet him, and fell back on his comrades. Indeed, the rebels had only pursued him till they had reached a favourable position, on which they took their stand.

M de Brogue having surveyed the whole position with the aid of a telescope, held a council of war, and it was decided that an attack should be made forthwith. They therefore advanced on the rebels in line: Captain Poul on the right, M. de Dourville on the left, and Count Broglie in the centre.

As they got near they could see that the rebels had chosen their ground with an amount of strategical sagacity they had never till then displayed. This skill in making their dispositions was evidently due to their having found a new leader whom no one knew, not even Captain Poul, although they could see him at the head of his men, carbine in hand.

However, these scientific preparations did not stop M. de Brogue: he gave the order to charge, and adding example to precept, urged his horse to a gallop. The rebels in the first rank knelt on one knee, so that the rank behind could take aim, and the distance between the two bodies of troops disappeared rapidly, thanks to the impetuosity of the dragoons; but suddenly, when within thirty paces of the enemy, the royals found themselves on the edge of a deep ravine which separated them from the enemy like a moat. Some were able to check their horses in time, but others, despite desperate efforts, pressed upon by those behind, were pushed into the ravine, and rolled helplessly to the bottom. At the same moment the order to fire was given in a sonorous voice, there was a rattle of musketry, and several dragoons near M. de Broglie fell.

"Forward!" cried Captain Poul, "forward!" and putting his horse at a part of the ravine where the sides were less steep, he was soon struggling up the opposite side, followed by a few dragoons.

"Death to the son of Belial!" cried the same voice which had given the order to fire. At that moment a single shot rang out, Captain Poul threw up his hands, letting his sabre go, and fell from his horse, which instead of running away, touched his master with its smoking nostrils, then lifting its head, neighed long and low. The dragoons retreated.

"So perish all the persecutors of Israel!" cried the leader, brandishing his carbine. He then dashed down into the ravine, picked up Captain Poul's sabre and jumped upon his horse. The animal, faithful to its old master, showed some signs of resistance, but soon felt by the pressure of its rider's knees that it had to do with one whom it could not readily unseat. Nevertheless, it reared and bounded, but the horseman kept his seat, and as if recognising that it had met its match, the noble animal tossed its head, neighed once more, and gave in. While this was going on, a party of Camisards [Name given to the insurgent Calvinists after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. — Translator's Note.] and one of the dragoons had got down into the ravine, which had in consequence been turned into a battlefield; while those who remained above on either side took advantage of their position to fire down at their enemies. M. de Dourville, in command of the dragoons, fought among the others like a simple soldier, and received a serious wound in the head; his men beginning to lose ground, M. de Brogue tried to rally them, but without avail, and while he was thus occupied his own troop ran away; so seeing there was no prospect of winning the battle, he and a few valiant men who had remained near him dashed forward to extricate M. Dourville, who, taking advantage of the opening thus made, retreated, his wound bleeding profusely. On the other hand, the Camisards perceiving at some distance bodies of infantry coming up to reinforce the royals, instead of pursuing their foes, contented themselves with keeping up a thick and well-directed musketry-fire from the position in which they had won such a quick and easy victory.

As soon as the royal forces were out of reach of their weapons, the rebel chief knelt down and chanted the song the Israelites sang when, having crossed the Red Sea in safety, they saw the army of Pharaoh swallowed up in the waters, so that although no longer within reach of bullets the defeated troops were still pursued by songs of victory. Their thanksgivings ended, the Calvinists withdrew into the forest, led by their new chief, who had at his first assay shown the great extent of his knowledge, coolness, and courage.

This new chief, whose superiors were soon to become his lieutenants, was the famous Jean Cavalier.

Jean Cavalier was then a young man of twenty-three, of less than medium height, but of great strength. His face was oval, with regular features, his eyes sparkling and beautiful; he had long chestnut hair falling on his shoulders, and an expression of remarkable sweetness. He was born in 1680 at Ribaute, a village in the diocese of Alais, where his father had rented a small farm, which he gave up when his son was about fifteen, coming to live at the farm of St. Andeol, near Mende.

Young Cavalier, who was only a peasant and the son of a peasant, began life as a shepherd at the Sieur de Lacombe’s, a citizen of Vezenobre, but as the lonely life dissatisfied a young man who was eager for pleasure, Jean gave it up, and apprenticed himself to a baker of Anduze.

There he developed a great love for everything connected with the military; he spent all his free time watching the soldiers at their drill, and soon became intimate with some of them, amongst others with a fencing-master who gave him lessons, and a dragoon who taught him to ride.

On a certain Sunday, as he was taking a walk with his sweetheart on his arm, the young girl was insulted by a dragoon of the Marquis de Florae’s regiment. Jean boxed the dragoon’s ears, who drew his sword. Cavalier seized a sword from one of the bystanders, but the combatants were prevented from fighting by Jean’s friends. Hearing of the quarrel, an officer hurried up: it was the Marquis de Florae himself, captain of the regiment which bore his name; but when he arrived on the scene he found, not the arrogant peasant who had dared to attack a soldier of the king, but only the young girl, who had fainted, the townspeople having persuaded her lover to decamp.

The young girl was so beautiful that she was commonly called la belle Isabeau, and the Marquis de Florac, instead of pursuing Jean Cavalier, occupied himself in reviving Isabeau.

As it was, however, a serious affair, and as the entire regiment had sworn Cavalier's death, his friends advised him to leave the country for a time. La belle Isabeau, trembling for the safety of her lover, joined her entreaties to those of his friends, and Jean Cavalier yielded. The young girl promised him inviolable fidelity, and he, relying on this promise, went to Geneva.

There he made the acquaintance of a Protestant gentleman called Du Serre, who having glass-works at the Mas Arritas, quite near the farm of St. Andeol, had undertaken several times, at the request of Jean's father, Jerome, to convey money to Jean; for Du Serre went very often to Geneva, professedly on business affairs, but really in the interests of the Reformed faith. Between the outlaw and the apostle union was natural. Du Serre found in Cavalier a young man of robust nature, active imagination, and irreproachable courage; he confided to him his hopes of converting all Languedoc and Vivarais. Cavalier felt himself drawn back there by many ties, especially by patriotism and love. He crossed the frontier once more, disguised as a servant, in the suite of a Protestant gentleman; he arrived one night at Anduze, and immediately directed his steps to the house of Isabeau.

He was just about to knock, although it was one o'clock in the morning, when the door was opened from within, and a handsome young man came out, who took tender leave of a woman on the threshold. The handsome young man was the Marquis de Florac; the woman was Isabeau. The promised wife of the peasant had become the mistress of the noble.

Our hero was not the man to suffer such an outrage quietly. He walked straight up to the marquis and stood right in his way. The marquis tried to push him aside with his elbow, but Jean Cavalier, letting fall the cloak in which he was wrapped, drew his sword. The marquis was brave, and did not stop to inquire if he who attacked him was his equal or not. Sword answered sword, the blades crossed, and at the end of a few instants the marquis fell, Jean's sword piercing his chest.

Cavalier felt sure that he was dead, for he lay at his feet motionless. He knew he had no time to lose, for he had no mercy to hope for. He replaced his bloody sword in the scabbard, and made for the open country; from the open country he hurried into the mountains, and at break of day he was in safety.

The fugitive remained the whole day in an isolated farmhouse whose inmates offered him hospitality. As he very soon felt that he was in the house of a co-religionist, he confided to his host the circumstances in which he found himself, and asked where he could meet with an organised band in which he could enrol himself in order to fight for the propagation of the Reformed religion. The farmer mentioned Generac as being a place in which he would probably find a hundred or so of the brethren gathered together. Cavalier set out the same evening for this village, and arrived in the middle of the Camisards at the very moment when they had just caught sight of M. de Broglie and his troops in the distance. The Calvinists happening to have no leader, Cavalier with governing faculty which some men possess by nature, placed himself at their head and took those measures for the reception of the royal forces of which we have seen the result, so that after the victory to which his head and arm had contributed so much he was confirmed in the title which he had arrogated to himself, by acclamation.

Such was the famous Jean Cavalier when the Royalists first learned of his existence, through the repulse of their bravest troops and the death of their most intrepid captain.

The news of this victory soon spread through the Cevennes, and fresh conflagrations lit up the mountains in sign of joy. The beacons were formed of the chateau de la Bastide, the residence of the Marquis de Chambonnas, the church of Samson, and the village of Grouppieres, where of eighty houses only seven were left standing.

Thereupon M. de Julien wrote to the king, explaining the serious turn things had taken, and telling him that it was no longer a few fanatics wandering through the mountains and flying at the sight of a dragoon whom they had to put down, but organised companies well led and officered, which if united would form an army twelve to fifteen hundred strong. The king replied by sending M. le Comte de Montrevel to Nimes. He was the son of the Marechal de Montrevel, chevalier of the Order of the Holy Spirit, major-general, lieutenant of the king in Bresse and Charolais, and captain of a hundred men-at-arms.

In their struggle against shepherds, keepers, and peasants, M. de Brogue, M. de Julien, and M. de Baville were thus joined together with the head of the house of Beaune, which had already at this epoch produced two cardinals, three archbishops, two bishops, a viceroy of Naples, several marshals of France, and many governors of Savoy, Dauphine, and Bresse.

He was followed by twenty pieces of ordnance, five thousand bullets, four thousand muskets, and fifty thousand pounds of powder, all of which was carried down the river Rhone, while six hundred of the skilful mountain marksmen called ‘miquelets’ from Roussillon came down into Languedoc.

M de Montrevel was the bearer of terrible orders. Louis XIV was determined, no matter what it cost, to root out heresy, and set about this work as if his eternal salvation depended on it. As soon as M. de Baville had read these orders, he published the following proclamation:

“The king having been informed that certain people without religion bearing arms have been guilty of violence, burning down churches and killing priests, His Majesty hereby commands all his subjects to hunt these people down, and that those who are taken with arms in their hands or found amongst their bands, be punished with death without any trial whatever, that their houses be razed to the ground and their goods confiscated, and that all buildings in which assemblies of these people have been held, be demolished. The king further forbids fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, and other relations of the fanatics, or of other rebels, to give them refuge, food, stores, ammunition, or other assistance of any kind, under any pretext whatever, either directly or indirectly, on pain of being reputed accessory to the rebellion, and he commands the Sieur de Baville and whatever officers he may choose to prosecute such and pronounce sentence of death on them. Furthermore, His Majesty commands that all the inhabitants of Languedoc who may be absent at the date of the issue of this proclamation, return home within a week, unless their absence be caused by legitimate business, in which case they shall declare the same to the commandant, the Sieur de Montrevel, or to the intendant, the Sieur de Baville, and also to the mayors and consuls of the places where they may be, receiving from the latter certificates that there is a sufficient reason for their delay, which certificates they shall forward to the above-mentioned commandant or intendant. And His Majesty furthermore commands the said commandant and intendant to admit no foreigner or inhabitant of any other province into Languedoc for commercial purposes or for any other reason whatsoever, unless provided with certificates from the commandants or intendants of the provinces whence they come, or from the judges of the royal courts in the places whence they come, or from the nearest place containing such courts. Foreigners must be provided with passports from the ambassadors or ministers of the king accredited to the countries to which they belong, or from the commandants or intendants of the provinces, or from the judges of the royal courts of the places in which they may be at the date of this proclamation. Furthermore, it is His Majesty's will that those who are found in the, aforesaid province of Languedoc without such certificates be regarded as fanatics and rebels, and that they be prosecuted as such, and punished with death, and that they be brought for this purpose before the aforesaid Sieur de Baville or the officers whom he may choose.

"(Signed) "(Countersigned) "LOUIS PHILIPPEAU

"Given at Versailles the 25th day, of the month of February 1703."

M de Montrevel obeyed this proclamation to the letter. For instance, one day — the 1st of April 1703 — as he was seated at dinner it was reported to him that about one hundred and fifty Reformers were assembled in a mill at Carmes, outside Nimes, singing psalms. Although he was told at the same time that the gathering was composed entirely of old people and children, he was none the less furious, and rising from the table, gave orders that the call to horse should be sounded. Putting himself at the head of his dragoons, he advanced on the mill, and before the Huguenots knew that they were about to be attacked they were surrounded on every side. It was no combat which ensued, for the Huguenots were incapable of resistance, it was simply a massacre; a certain number of the dragoons entered the mill sword in hand, stabbing all whom they could reach, whilst the rest of the force stationed outside before the windows received those who jumped out on the points of their swords. But soon this butchery tired the butchers, and to get over the business more quickly, the marshal, who was anxious to return to his dinner, gave orders that the mill should be set on fire. This being done, the dragoons, the marshal still at their head, no longer exerted themselves so violently, but were satisfied with pushing back into the flames the few unfortunates who, scorched and burnt, rushed out, begging only for a less cruel death.

Only one victim escaped. A beautiful young girl of sixteen was saved by the marshal's valet: both were taken and condemned to death; the young girl was hanged, and the valet was on the point of being executed when some Sisters of Mercy from the town threw themselves at the marshal's feet end begged for his life: after long supplication, he granted their prayer, but he banished the valet not only from his service, but from Nimes.

The very same evening at supper word was brought to the marshal that another gathering had been discovered in a garden near the still smoking mill. The indefatigable marshal again rose from table, and taking with him his faithful dragoons, surrounded the garden, and caught and shot on the spot all those who were assembled in it. The next day it turned out that he had made a mistake: those whom he had shot were Catholics who had gathered together to rejoice over the execution of the Calvinists. It is true that they had assured the marshal that they were Catholics, but he had refused to listen to them. Let us, however, hasten to assure the reader that this mistake caused no further annoyance to the marshal, except that he received a paternal remonstrance from the Bishop of Nimes, begging him in future not to confound the sheep with the wolves.

In requital of these bloody deeds, Cavalier took the chateau of Serras, occupied the town of Sauve, formed a company of horse, and advancing to Nimes, took forcible possession of sufficient ammunition for his purposes. Lastly, he did something which in the eyes of the courtiers seemed the most incredible thing of all, he actually wrote a long letter to Louis XIV himself. This letter was dated from the "Desert, Cevennes," and signed "Cavalier, commander of the troops sent by God"; its purpose was to prove by numerous passages from Holy Writ that Cavalier and his comrades had been led to revolt solely from a sense of duty, feeling that liberty of conscience was their right; and it dilated on the subject of the persecutions under which Protestants had suffered, and asserted that it was the infamous measures put in force against them which had driven them to take up arms, which they were ready to lay down if His Majesty would grant them that liberty in matters of religion which they sought and if he would liberate all who were in prison for their faith. If this were accorded, he assured the king His Majesty would have no more faithful subjects than themselves, and would henceforth be ready to shed their last drop of blood in his service, and wound up by saying that if their just demands were refused they would obey God rather than the king, and would defend their religion to their last breath.

Roland, who, whether in mockery or pride, began now to call himself “Comte Roland,” did not lag behind his young brother either as warrior or correspondent. He had entered the town of Ganges, where a wonderful reception awaited him; but not feeling sure that he would be equally well received at St. Germain and St. Andre, he had written the following letters: —

“Gentlemen and officers of the king’s forces, and citizens of St. Germain, make ready to receive seven hundred troops who have vowed to set Babylon on fire; the seminary and the houses of MM. de Fabregue, de Sarrasin, de Moles, de La Rouviere, de Musse, and de Solier, will be burnt to the ground. God, by His Holy Spirit, has inspired my brother Cavalier and me with the purpose of entering your town in a few days; however strongly you fortify yourselves, the children of God will bear away the victory. If ye doubt this, come in your numbers, ye soldiers of St. Etienne, Barre, and Florac, to the field of Domergue; we shall be there to meet you. Come, ye hypocrites, if your hearts fail not. “COMTE ROLAND.”

The second letter was no less violent. It was as follows: —

“We, Comte Roland, general of the Protestant troops of France assembled in the Cevennes in Languedoc, enjoin on the inhabitants of the town of St. Andre of Valborgne to give proper notice to all priests and missionaries within it, that we forbid them to say mass or to preach in the aforementioned town, and that if they will avoid being burnt alive with their adherents in their churches and houses, they are to withdraw to some other place within three days. “COMTE ROLAND.”

Unfortunately for the cause of the king, though the rebels met with some resistance in the villages of the plain, such as St. Germain and St. Andre, it was otherwise with those situated in the mountains; in those, when beaten, the Protestants found cover, when victorious rest; so that M. de Montrevel becoming aware that while these villages existed heresy would never be extirpated, issued the following ordinance: —

“We, governor for His most Christian Majesty in the provinces of Languedoc and Vivarais, do hereby make known that it has pleased the king to command us to reduce all the places and parishes hereinafter named to such a condition that they can afford no assistance to the rebel troops; no inhabitants will therefore be allowed to remain in them. His Majesty, however, desiring to provide for the subsistence of the afore-mentioned inhabitants, orders them to conform to the following regulations. He enjoins on the afore-mentioned inhabitants of the hereinafter-mentioned parishes to repair instantly to the places hereinafter appointed, with their furniture, cattle, and in general all their movable effects, declaring that in case of disobedience their effects will be confiscated and taken away by the troops employed to demolish their houses. And it is hereby forbidden to any other commune to receive such rebels, under pain of having their houses also razed to the ground and their goods confiscated, and furthermore being regarded and treated as rebels to the commands of His Majesty."

To this proclamation were appended the following instructions: —

"I. The officers who may be appointed to perform the above task shall first of all make themselves acquainted with the position of the parishes and villages which are to be destroyed and depopulated, in order to an effective disposition of the troops, who are to guard the militia engaged in the work of destruction.

"II. The attention of the officers is called to the following: — When two or more villages or hamlets are so near together that they may be protected at the same time by the same troops, then in order to save time the work is to be carried on simultaneously in such villages or hamlets.

"III. When inhabitants are found still remaining in any of the proscribed places, they are to be brought together, and a list made of them, as well as an inventory taken of their stock and corn.

"IV. Those inhabitants who are of the most consequence among them shall be selected to guide the others to the places assigned.

"V. With regard to the live stock, the persons who may be found in charge of it shall drive it to the appointed place, save and except mules and asses, which shall be employed in the transport of corn to whatever places it may be needed in. Nevertheless, asses may be given to the very old, and to women with child who may be unable to walk.

"VI. A regular distribution of the militia is to be made, so that each house to be destroyed may have a sufficient number, for the task; the foundations of such houses may be undermined or any other method employed which may be most convenient; and if the house can be destroyed by no other means, it is to be set on fire.

“VII. No damage is to be done to the houses of former Catholics until further notice, and to ensure the carrying out of this order a guard is to be placed in them, and an inventory of their contents taken and sent to Marechal de Montrevel.

“VIII. The order forbidding the inhabitants to return to their houses is to be read to the inhabitants of each village; but if any do return they shall not be harmed, but simply driven away with threats; for the king does not desire that blood be shed; and the said order shall be affixed to a wall or tree in each village.

“IX. Where no inhabitants are found, the said order shall simply be affixed as above-mentioned in each place.

“(Signed) “MARECHAL DE MONTREVEL”

Under these instructions the list of the villages to be destroyed was given. It was as follows:

18 in the parish of Frugeres,

5 “ “ Fressinet-de-Lozere,

4 “ “ Grizac,

15 “ “ Castagnols,

11 “ “ Vialas,

6 “ “ Saint-Julien,

8 “ “ Saint-Maurice de Vantalon,

14 “ “ Frezal de Vantalon,

7 “ “ Saint-Hilaire de Laret,

6 “ “ Saint-Andeol de Clergues,

28 “ “ Saint-Privat de Vallongues,

10 “ “ Saint-Andre de Lancise,

19 “ “ Saint-Germain de Calberte,

26 “ “ Saint-Etienne de Valfrancesque,

9 “ “ parishes of Prunet and Montvaillant,

16 “ “ parish of Florac.
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A second list was promised, and was shortly afterwards published: it included the parishes of Frugeres, Pompidon, Saint-Martin, Lansuscle, Saint-Laurent, Treves, Vebron, Ronnes, Barre, Montluzon, Bousquet, La Barthes, Balme, Saint-Julien d’Aspaon Cassagnas, Sainte-Croix de Valfrancesque, Cabriac, Moissac, Saint-Roman, Saint Martin de Robaux, La Melouse, le Collet de Deze, Saint-Michel de Deze, and the villages of Salieges, Rampon, Ruas, Chavrieres, Tourgueselle, Ginestous, Fressinet, Fourques, Malbos, Jousanel, Campis, Campredon, Lous-Aubrez, La Croix de Fer, Le Cap de Coste, Marquayres, Le Cazairal, and Le Poujal.

In all, 466 market towns, hamlets, and villages, with 19,500 inhabitants, were included.

All these preparations made Marechal de Montrevel set out for Aix, September 26th, 1703, in order that the work might be carried out under his personal supervision. He was accompanied by MM. de Vergetot and de Marsilly, colonels of infantry, two battalions of the Royal-Comtois, two of the Soissonnais infantry, the Languedoc regiment of dragoons, and two hundred dragoons from the Fimarcon regiment. M. de Julien, on his side, set out for the Pont-de-Montvert at the same time with two battalions from Hainault, accompanied by the Marquis of Canillac, colonel of infantry, who brought two battalions of his own regiment, which was stationed in Rouergue, with him, and Comte de Payre, who brought fifty-five companies of militia from Gevaudan, and followed by a number of mules loaded with crowbars, axes, and other iron instruments necessary for pulling down houses.

The approach of all these troops following close on the terrible proclamations we have given above, produced exactly the contrary effect to that intended. The inhabitants of the proscribed districts were convinced that the order to gather together in certain places was given that they might be conveniently massacred together, so that all those capable of bearing arms went deeper into the mountains, and joined the forces of Cavalier and Roland, thus reinforcing them to the number of fifteen hundred men. Also hardly had M. de Julien set his hand to the work than he received information from M. de Montrevel, who had heard the news through a letter from Flechier, that while the royal troops were busy in the mountains the Camisards had come down into the plain, swarmed over La Camargue, and had been seen in the neighbourhood of Saint-Gilles. At the same time word was sent him that two ships had been seen in the offing, from Cette, and that it was more than probable that they contained troops, that England and Holland were sending to help the Camisards.

M de Montrevel; leaving the further conduct of the expedition to MM. de Julien and de Canillac, hastened to Cette with eight hundred men and ten guns. The ships were still in sight, and were really, as had been surmised, two vessels which had been detached from the combined fleets of England and Holland by Admiral Schowel, and were the bearers of money, arms, and ammunition to the Huguenots. They continued to cruise about and signal, but as the rebels were forced by the presence of M. de Montrevel to keep away from the coast, and could therefore make no answer, they put off at length into the open, and rejoined the fleet. As M. de Montrevel feared that their retreat might be a feint, he ordered all the fishermen’s huts from Aigues-Morte to Saint-Gilles to be destroyed, lest they should afford shelter to the Camisards. At the same time he carried off the inhabitants of the district of Guillan and shut them up in the chateau of Sommerez, after having demolished their villages. Lastly, he ordered all those who lived in homesteads, farms, or hamlets, to quit them and go to some large town, taking with them all the provisions they were possessed of; and he forbade any workman who went outside the town to work to take more than one day’s provisions with him.

These measures had the desired effect, but they were terrible in their results; they deprived the Camisards of shelter indeed, but they ruined the province. M. de Baville, despite his well-known severity tried remonstrances, but they were taken in bad part by M. de Montrevel, who told the intendant to mind his own business, which was confined to civil matters, and to leave military matters in his, M. de Montrevel’s, hands;

whereupon the commandant joined M. de Julien, who was carrying on the work of destruction with indefatigable vigour.

In spite of all the enthusiasm with which M. de Julien went to work to accomplish his mission, and being a new convert, it was, of course, very great. Material hindrances hampered him at every step. Almost all the doomed houses were built on vaulted foundations, and were therefore difficult to lay low; the distance of one house from another, too, their almost inaccessible position, either on the peak of a high mountain or in the bottom of a rocky valley, or buried in the depths of the forest which hid then like a veil, made the difficulty still greater; whole days were often lost by the workmen and militia in searching for the dwellings they came to destroy.

The immense size of the parishes also caused delay: that of Saint-Germain de Calberte, for instance, was nine leagues in circumference, and contained a hundred and eleven hamlets, inhabited by two hundred and seventy-five families, of which only nine were Catholic; that of Saint-Etienne de Valfrancesque was of still greater extent, and its population was a third larger, so that obstacles to the work multiplied in a remarkable manner. For the first few days the soldiers and workmen found food in and around the villages, but this was soon at an end, and as they could hardly expect the peasants to keep up the supply, and the provisions they had brought with them being also exhausted, they were soon reduced to biscuit and water; and they were not even able to make it into a warm mess by heating the water, as they had no vessels; moreover, when their hard day’s work was at an end, they had but a handful of straw on which to lie. These privations, added to their hard and laborious life, brought on an endemic fever, which incapacitated for work many soldiers and labourers, numbers of whom had to be dismissed. Very soon the unfortunate men, who were almost as much to be pitied as those whom they were persecuting, waited no longer to be sent away, but deserted in numbers.

M de Julien soon saw that all his efforts would end in failure if he could not gain the king’s consent to a slight change in the original plan. He therefore wrote to Versailles, and represented to the king how long the work would take if the means employed were only iron tools and the human hand, instead of fire, the only true instrument employed by Heaven in its vengeance. He quoted in support of his petition the case of Sodom and Gomorrah — those cities accursed of the Lord. Louis XIV, impressed by the truth of this comparison, sent him back a messenger post-haste authorising him to employ the suggested means.

"At once," says Pere Louvreloeil, "the storm burst, and soon of all the happy homesteads nothing was left: the hamlets, with their barns and outhouses, the isolated farmhouses, the single huts and cottages, every species of building in short, disappeared before the swift advancing flames as wild flowers, weeds, and roots fall before the ploughshare."

This destruction was accompanied by horrible cruelty. For instance, twenty-five inhabitants of a certain village took refuge in a chateau; the number consisted of children and very old people, and they were all that was left of the entire population. Palmerolle, in command of the miquelets, hearing of this, hastened thither, seized the first eight he could lay hold of, and shot them on the spot, "to teach them," as he says in his report, "not to choose a shelter which was not on the list of those permitted to them."

The Catholics also of St. Florent, Senechas, Rousson, and other parishes, becoming excited at seeing the flames which enveloped the houses of their old enemies, joined together, and arming themselves with everything that could be made to serve as an instrument of death, set out to hunt the conscripts down; they carried off the flocks of Perolat, Fontareche, and Pajolas, burned down a dozen houses at the Collet-de-Deze, and from there went to the village of Brenoux, drunk with the lust of destruction. There they massacred fifty-two persons, among them mothers with unborn children; and with these babes, which they tore from them, impaled on their pikes and halberts, they continued their march towards the villages of St. Denis and Castagnols.

Very soon these volunteers organised themselves into companies, and became known under the name of Cadets de la Croix, from a small white cross which they wore on their coats; so the poor Huguenots had a new species of enemy to contend with, much more bloodthirsty than the dragoons and the miquelets; for while these latter simply obeyed orders from Versailles, Nimes, or Montpellier, the former gratified a personal hate — a hate which had come down to them from their fathers, and which they would pass on to their children.

On the other hand, the young Huguenot leader, who every day gained more influence over his soldiers, tried to make the dragoons and Cadets de la Croix suffer in return everything they inflicted on the Huguenots, except the murders. In the night from the 2nd to the 3rd October, about ten o'clock, he came down into the plain and attacked Sommieres from two different points, setting fire to the houses. The inhabitants seizing their arms, made a sortie, but Cavalier charged them at the head of the Cavalry and forced them to retreat. Thereupon the governor, whose garrison was too small to leave the shelter of the walls, turned his guns on them and fired, less in the hope of inflicting injury on them than in that of being heard by the neighbouring garrisons.

The Camisards recognising this danger, retired, but not before they had burnt down the hotels of the Cheval-Blanc, the Croix-d'Or, the Grand-Louis, and the Luxembourg, as well as a great number of other houses, and the church and the presbytery of Saint-Amand.

Thence the Camisards proceeded to Cayla and Vauvert, into which they entered, destroying the fortifications. There they provided themselves abundantly with provisions for man and beast. In Vauvert, which was almost entirely inhabited by his co-religionists, Cavalier assembled the inhabitants in the market-place, and made them join with him in prayer to God, that He would prevent the king from following evil counsel; he also exhorted his brethren to be ready to sacrifice their goods and their lives for the re-establishment of their religion, affirming that the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that the arm of the Lord, which had always come to their aid, was still stretched out over them.

Cavalier undertook these movements in the hope of interrupting the work of destruction going on in Upper Cevennes; and partly obtained the desired result; for M. de Julien received orders to come down into the open country and disperse the Camisards.

The troops tried to fulfil this task, but, thanks to the knowledge that the rebels had of the country, it was impossible to come up with them, so that Fleshier, who was in the thick of the executions, conflagrations, and massacres, but who still found time to write Latin verse and gallant letters, said, in speaking of them, “They were never caught, and did all the damage they wished to do without let or hindrance. We laid their mountains waste, and they laid waste our plain. There are no more churches left in our dioceses, and not being able either to plough or sow our lands, we have no revenues. We dread serious revolt, and desire to avoid a religious civil war; so all our efforts are relaxing, we let our arms fall without knowing why, and we are told, ‘You must have patience; it is not possible to fight against phantoms.’“ Nevertheless, from time to time, these phantoms became visible. Towards the end of October, Cavalier came down to Uzes, carried off two sentinels who were guarding the gates, and hearing the call to arms within, shouted that he would await the governor of the city, M. de Vergetot, near Lussan.

And indeed Cavalier, accompanied by his two lieutenants, Ravanel and Catinat, took his way towards this little town, between Uzes and Bargeac, which stands upon an eminence surrounded upon all sides by cliffs, which serve it as ramparts and render it very difficult of access. Having arrived within three gun-shots of Lussan, Cavalier sent Ravanel to demand provisions from the inhabitants; but they, proud of their natural ramparts, and believing their town impregnable, not only refused to comply with the requisition, but fired several shots on the envoy, one of which wounded in the arm a Camisard of the name of La Grandeur, who had accompanied Ravanel. Ravanel withdrew, supporting his wounded comrade, followed by shots and the hootings of the inhabitants. When they rejoined Cavalier and made their report, the young commander issued orders to his soldiers to make ready to take the town the next morning; for, as night was already falling, he did not venture to start in the dark. In the meantime the besieged sent post-haste to M. de Vergetot to warn him of their situation; and resolving to defend themselves as long as they could, while waiting for a response to their message they set about barricading their gates, turned their scythes into weapons, fastened large hooks on long poles, and collected all the instruments they could find that could be used in attack or defence. As to the Camisards, they encamped for the night near an old chateau called Fan, about a gun-shot from Lussan.

At break of day loud shouts from the town told the Camisards that the expected relief was in sight, and looking out they saw in the distance a troop of soldiers advancing towards them; it was M. de Vergetat at the head of his regiment, accompanied by forty Irish officers.

The Protestants prepared themselves, as usual, by reciting psalms and prayers, notice without taking of the shouts and threats of any of the townspeople, and having finished their invocations, they marched out to meet the approaching column. The cavalry, commanded by Catinat, made a detour, taking a sheltered way to an unguarded bridge over a small river not far off, so as to outflank the royal forces, which they were to attack in the rear as soon as Cavalier and Ravanel should have engaged them in front.

M de Vergetot, on his side, continued to advance, so that the Calvinists and the Catholics were soon face to face. The battle began on both sides by a volley; but Cavalier having seen his cavalry emerging from a neighbouring wood, and counting upon their assistance, charged the enemy at the double quick. Catinat judging by the noise of the firing that his presence was necessary, charged also at a gallop, falling on the flank of the Catholics.

In this charge, one of M. de Vergetot's captains was killed by a bullet, and the other by a sabre-cut, and the grenadiers falling into disorder, first lost ground and then fled, pursued by Catinat and his horsemen, who, seizing them by the hair, despatched them with their swords. Having tried in vain to rally his men, M. de Vergetot, surrounded by a few Irish, was forced in his turn to fly; he was hotly pursued, and on the point of being taken, when by good luck he reached the height of Gamene, with its walls of rock. Jumping off his horse, he entered the narrow pathway which led to the top, and entrenched himself with about a hundred men in this natural fort. Cavalier perceiving that further pursuit would be dangerous, resolved to rest satisfied with his victory; as he knew by his own experience that neither men nor horses had eaten for eighteen hours, he gave the signal far retreat, and retired on Seyne, where he hoped to find provisions.

This defeat mortified the royal forces very deeply, and they resolved to take their revenge. Having learnt by their spies that on a certain night in November Cavalier and his band intended to sleep on a mountain called Nages, they surrounded the mountain during the night, so that at dawn Cavalier found himself shut in on every side. As he wished to see with his own eyes if the investment was complete, he ordered his troops to fall into rank on the top of the mountain, giving the command to Ravanel and Catinat, and with a pair of pistols in his belt and his carbine on his shoulder, he glided from bush to bush and rock to rock, determined, if any weak spot existed, to discover it; but the information he had received was perfectly correct, every issue was guarded.

Cavalier now set off to rejoin his troops, passing through a ravine, but he had hardly taken thirty steps when he found himself confronted by a cornet and two dragoons who were lying in ambush. There was no time to run away, and indeed such a thought never entered the young commander's head; he walked straight up to them. On their side, the dragoons advanced towards him, and the cornet covering him with his pistol, called out, "Halt!

you are Cavalier; I know you. It is not possible for you to escape; surrender at discretion.” Cavalier’s answer was to blow out the cornet’s brains with a shot from his carbine, then throwing it behind him as of no further use, he drew his two pistols from his belt, walked up to the two dragoons, shot them both dead, and rejoined his comrades unwounded. These, who had believed him lost, welcomed him with cheers.

But Cavalier had something else to do than to celebrate his return; mounting his horse, he put himself at the head of his men, and fell upon the royal troops with such impetuosity that they gave way at the first onset. Then a strange incident occurred. About thirty women who had come to the camp with provisions, carried away by their enthusiasm at the sight of this success, threw themselves upon the enemy, fighting like men. One young girl of about seventeen, Lucrese Guigon by name, distinguished herself amongst the others by her great valour. Not content with encouraging her brethren by the cry of “The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!” she tore sabres from the hands of the dead dragoons to despatch the dying. Catinat, followed by ten of his men, pursued the flying troops as far as the plain of Calvisson. There they were able to rally, thanks to the advance of the garrison to meet them.

Eighty dragoons lay dead on the field of battle, while Cavalier had only lost five men.

As we shall see, Cavalier was not only a brave soldier and a skilful captain, but also a just judge. A few days after the deed of arms which we have just related, he learned that a horrible murder had been committed by four Camisards, who had then retired into the forest of Bouquet. He sent a detachment of twenty men with orders to arrest the murderers and bring them before him. The following are the details of the crime:

The daughter of Baron Meyrargues, who was not long married to a gentleman named M. de Miraman, had set out on the 29th November for Ambroix to join her husband, who was waiting for her there. She was encouraged to do this by her coachman, who had often met with Camisards in the neighbourhood, and although a Catholic, had never received any harm from them. She occupied her own carriage, and was accompanied by a maid, a nurse, a footman, and the coachman who had persuaded her to undertake the journey. Two-thirds of the way already lay safely behind them, when between Lussan and Vaudras she was stopped by four, men, who made her get out of her carriage and accompany them into the neighbouring forest. The account of what then happened is taken from the deposition of the maid. We copy it word for word:

"These wretches having forced us," says she, "to walk into the forest till we were at some distance from the high road, my poor mistress grew so tired that she begged the man who walked beside her to allow her to lean on his shoulder. He looking round and seeing that they had reached a lonely spot, replied, 'We need hardly go any farther,' and made us sit dawn on a plot of grass which was to be the scene of our martyrdom. My poor mistress began to plead with the barbarians in the most touching manner, and so sweetly that she would have softened the heart of a demon. She offered them her purse, her gold waistband, and a fine diamond which she drew from her finger; but nothing could move these tigers, and one of them said, 'I am going to kill all the Catholics at once, and shall be gin with you.' 'What will you gain by my death?' asked my mistress. 'Spare my life.' —'No; shut up!' replied he. 'You shall die by my hand. Say your prayers.' My good mistress threw herself at once on her knees and prayed aloud that God would show mercy to her and to her murderers, and while she was thus praying she received a pistol-shot in her left breast, and fell; a second assassin cut her across the face with his sword, and a third dropped a large stone on her head, while the fourth killed the nurse with a shot from his pistol. Whether it was that they had no more loaded firearms, or that they wished to save their ammunition, they were satisfied with only giving me several bayonet wounds. I pretended to be dead: they thought it was really the case, and went away. Some time after, seeing that everything had become quiet, and hearing no sound, I dragged myself, dying as I was, to where my dear mistress lay, and called her. As it happened, she was not quite dead, and she said in a faint voice, 'Stay with me, Suzon, till I die.' She added, after a short pause, for she was hardly able to speak, 'I die for my religion, and I hope that God will have pity on me. Tell my husband that I confide our little one to his care.' Having said this, she turned her thoughts from the world, praying to God in broken and tender words, and drew her last breath as the night fell."

In obedience to Cavalier's orders, the four criminals were taken and brought before him. He was then with his troops near Saint-Maurice de Casevielle; he called a council of war, and having had the prisoners tried for their atrocious deed, he summed up the evidence in as clear a manner as any lawyer could have done, and called upon the judges to pronounce sentence.

All the judges agreed that the prisoners should be put to death, but just as the sentence was made known one of the assassins pushed aside the two men who guarded him, and jumping down a rock, disappeared in the forest before any attempt could be made to stop him. The three others were shot.

The Catholics also condemned many to be executed, but the trials conducted by then were far from being as remarkable for honour and justice as was that which we have just described. We may instance the trial of a poor boy of fourteen, the son of a miller of Saint-Christol who had been broken the wheel just a month before. For a moment the judges hesitated to condemn so young a boy to death, but a witness presented himself who testified that the little fellow was employed by the fanatics to strangle Catholic children. Although no one believed the evidence, yet it was seized-on as a pretext: the unfortunate boy was condemned to death, and hanged without mercy an hour later.

A great many people from the parishes devastated by M. de Julien had taken refuge in Aussilargues, in the parish of St. Andre. Driven by hunger and misery, they went beyond the prescribed limits in search of means of subsistence. Planque hearing of this, in his burning zeal for the Catholic faith resolved not to leave such a crime unpunished. He despatched a detachment of soldiers to arrest the culprits: the task was easy, for they were all once more inside the barrier and in their beds. They were seized, brought to St. Andre’s Church and shut in; then, without trial of any kind, — they were taken, five at a time, and massacred: some were shot and some cut down with sword or axe; all were killed without exception — old and young women and children. One of the latter, who had received three shots was still able to raise his head and cry, “Where is father? Why doesn’t he come and take me away.”

Four men and a young girl who had taken refuge in the town of Lasalle, one of the places granted to the houseless villagers as an asylum, asked and received formal permission from the captain of the Soissonais regiment, by name Laplace, to go home on important private business, on condition that they returned the same night. They promised, and in the intention of keeping this promise they all met on their way back at a small farmhouse. Just as they reached it a terrible storm came on. The men were for continuing their way in spite of the weather, but the young girl besought them to wait till daylight, as she did not dare to venture out in the dark during such a storm, and would die of fright if left alone at the farm. The men, ashamed to desert their companion, who was related to one of them, yielded to her entreaties and remained, hoping that the storm would be a sufficient excuse for the delay. As soon as it was light, the five resumed their journey. But the news of their crime had reached the ears of Laplace before they got back. They were arrested, and all their excuses were of no avail. Laplace ordered the men to be taken outside the town and shot. The young girl was condemned to be hanged; and the sentence was to be carried out that very day, but some nuns who had been sent for to prepare her for death, having vainly begged Laplace to show mercy, entreated the girl to declare that she would soon become a mother. She indignantly refused to save her life at the cost of her good name, so the nuns took the lie on themselves and made the necessary declaration before the captain, begging him if he had no pity for the mother to spare the child at least, by granting a reprieve till it should be born. The captain was not for a moment deceived, but he sent for a midwife and ordered her to examine the young girl. At the end of half an hour she declared that the assertion of the nuns was true.

"Very well," said the captain: "let them both be kept in prison for three months; if by the end of that time the truth of this assertion is not self-evident, both shall be hanged." When this decision was made known to the poor woman, she was overcome by fear, and asked to see the, captain again, to whom she confessed that, led away by the entreaties of the nuns, she had told a lie.

Upon this, the woman was sentenced to be publicly whipped, and the young girl hanged on a gibbet round which were placed the corpses of the four men of whose death she was the cause.

As may easily be supposed, the "Cadets of the Cross" vied with both Catholics and Protestants in the work of destruction. One of their bands devoted itself to destroying everything belonging to the new converts from Beaucaire to Nimes. They killed a woman and two children at Campuget, an old man of eighty at a farm near Bouillargues, several persons at Cicure, a young girl at Caissargues, a gardener at Nimes, and many other persons, besides carrying off all the flocks, furniture, and other property they could lay hands on, and burning down the farmhouses of Clairan, Loubes, Marine, Carlot, Campoget Miraman, La Bergerie, and Larnac — all near St. Gilies and Manduel. "They stopped travellers on the highways," says Louvreloeil, "and by way of finding out whether they were Catholic or not, made them say in Latin the Lord's Prayer, the Ave Maria, the Symbol of the Faith, and the General Confession, and those who were unable to do this were put to the sword. In Dions nine corpses were found supposed to have been killed by their hands, and when the body of a shepherd who had been in the service of the Sieur de Roussiere, a former minister, was found hanging to a tree, no one doubted who were the murderers. At last they went so far that one of their bands meeting the Abbe de Saint Gilles on the road, ordered him to deliver up to them one of his servants, a new convert, in order to put him to death. It was in vain that the abbe remonstrated with them, telling them it was a shame to put such an affront on a man of his birth and rank; they persisted none the less in their determination, till at last the abbe threw his arms round his servant and presented his own body to the blows directed at the other.”

The author of The Troubles in the Cevennes relates something surpassing all this which took place at Montelus on the 22nd February “There were a few Protestants in the place,” he says, “but they were far outnumbered by the Catholics; these being roused by a Capuchin from Bergerac, formed themselves into a body of ‘Cadets of the Cross,’ and hastened to serve their apprenticeship to the work of assassination at the cost of their countrymen. They therefore entered the house of one Jean Bernoin, cut off his ears and further mutilated him, and then bled him to death like a pig. On coming out of this house they met Jacques Clas, and shot him in the abdomen, so that his intestines obtruded; pushing them back, he reached his house in a terrible condition, to the great alarm of his wife, who was near her confinement, and her children, who hastened to the help of husband and father. But the murderers appeared on the threshold, and, unmoved by the cries and tears of the unfortunate wife and the poor little children, they finished the wounded man, and as the wife made an effort to prevent them, they murdered her also, treating her dead body, when they discovered her condition, in a manner too revolting for description; while a neighbour, called Marie Silliot, who tried to rescue the children, was shot dead; but in her case they did not pursue their vengeance any further. They then went into the open country and meeting Pierre and Jean Bernard, uncle and nephew, one aged forty-five and the other ten, seized on them both, and putting a pistol into the hands of the child, forced him to shoot his uncle. In the meantime the boy’s father had come up, and him they tried to constrain to shoot his son; but finding that no threats had any effect, they ended by killing both, one by the sword, the other by the bayonet.

“The reason why they put an end to father and son so quickly was that they had noticed three young girls of Bagnols going towards a grove of mulberry trees, where they were raising silk-worms. The men followed them, and as it was broad daylight and the girls were therefore not afraid, they soon came up with them. Having first violated them, they hung them by the feet to a tree, and put them to death in a horrible manner.”

All this took place in the reign of Louis the Great, and for the greater glory of the Catholic religion.

History has preserved the names of the five wretches who perpetrated these crimes: they were Pierre Vigneau, Antoine Rey, Jean d’Hugon, Guillaume, and Gontanille.

CHAPTER III

Such crimes, of which we have only described a few, inspired horror in the breasts of those who were neither maddened by fanaticism nor devoured by the desire of vengeance. One of these, a Protestant, Baron d'Aygaliers, without stopping to consider what means he had at his command or what measures were the best to take to accomplish his object, resolved to devote his life to the pacification of the Cevennes. The first thing to be considered was, that if the Camisards were ever entirely destroyed by means of Catholic troops directed by de Baville, de Julien, and de Montrevel, the Protestants, and especially the Protestant nobles who had never borne arms, would be regarded as cowards, who had been prevented by fear of death or persecution from openly taking the part of the Huguenots: He was therefore convinced that the only course to pursue was to get, his co-religionists to put an end to the struggle themselves, as the one way of pleasing His Majesty and of showing him how groundless were the suspicions aroused in the minds of men by the Catholic clergy.

This plan presented, especially to Baron d'Aygaliers, two apparently insurmountable difficulties, for it could only be carried out by inducing the king to relax his rigorous measures and by inducing the Camisards to submit. Now the baron had no connection with the court, and was not personally acquainted with a single Huguenot chief.

The first thing necessary to enable the baron to begin his efforts was a passport for Paris, and he felt sure that as he was a Protestant neither M. de Baville nor M. de Montrevel would give him one. A lucky accident, however, relieved his embarrassment and strengthened his resolution, for he thought he saw in this accident the hand of Providence.

Baron d'Aygaliers found one day at the house of a friend a M. de Paratte, a colonel in the king's army, and who afterwards became major-general, but who at the time we are speaking of was commandant at Uzes. He was of a very impulsive disposition, and so zealous in matters relating to the Catholic religion and in the service of the king, that he never could find himself in the presence of a Protestant without expressing his indignation at those who had taken up arms against their prince, and also those who without taking up arms encouraged the rebels in their designs. M.

d’Aygaliers understood that an allusion was meant to himself, and he resolved to take advantage of it.

So the next day he paid a visit to M. de Paratte, and instead of demanding satisfaction, as the latter quite expected, for the rudeness of his remarks on the previous day, he professed himself very much obliged for what he had said, which had made such a deep impression on him that he had made up his mind to give proof of his zeal and loyalty by going to Paris and petitioning the king for a position at court. De Paratte, charmed with what he had heard, and enchanted with his convert, embraced d’Aygaliers, and gave him, says the chronicler, his blessing; and with the blessing a passport, and wished him all the success that a father could wish for his son. D’Aygaliers had now attained his object, and furnished with the lucky safe-conduct, he set out for Paris, without having communicated his intentions to anyone, not even to his mother.

On reaching Paris he put up at a friend’s house, and drew up a statement of his plan: it was very short and very clear.

“The undersigned has the honour to point out humbly to His Majesty:

“That the severities and the persecutions which have been employed by some of the village priests have caused many people in the country districts to take up arms, and that the suspicions which new converts excited have driven a great many of them to join the insurgents. In taking this step they were also impelled by the desire to avoid imprisonment or removal from their homes, which were the remedies chosen to keep them in the old faith. This being the case, he thinks that the best means of putting an end to this state of things would be to take measures exactly the contrary of those which produced it, such as putting an end to the persecutions and permitting a certain number of those of the Reformed religion to bear arms, that they might go to the rebels and tell them that far from approving of their actions the Protestants as a whole wished to bring them back to the right way by setting them a good example, or to fight against them in order to show the king and France, at the risk of their lives, that they disapproved of the conduct of their co-religionists, and that the priests had been in the wrong in writing to the court that all those of the Reformed religion were in favour of revolt.”

D’Aygaliers hoped that the court would adopt this plan; for if they did, one of two things must happen: either the Camisards, by refusing to accept the terms offered to them, would make themselves odious to their brethren (for d’Aygaliers intended to take with him on his mission of persuasion only men of high reputation among the Reformers, who would be repelled by the Camisards if they refused to submit), or else; by laying down their arms and submitting, they would restore peace to the South of France, obtain liberty of worship, set free their brethren from the prisons and galleys, and come to the help of the king in his war against the allied powers, by supplying him in a moment with a large body of disciplined troops ready to take the field against his enemies; for not only would the Camisards, if they were supplied with officers, be available for this purpose, but also those troops which were at the moment employed in hunting down the Camisards would be set free for this important duty.

This proposition was so clear and promised to produce such useful results, that although the prejudice against the Reformers was very strong, Baron d’Aygaliers found supporters who were at once intelligent and genuine in the Duke de Chevreuse and the Duke de Montfort, his son. These two gentlemen brought about a meeting between the baron and Chamillard, and the latter presented him to the Marechal de Villars, to whom he showed his petition, begging him to bring it to the notice of the king; but M. de Villars, who was well acquainted with the obstinacy of Louis, who, as Baron de Peken says, “only saw the Reformers through the spectacles of Madame de Maintenon,” told d’Aygaliers that the last thing he should do would be to give the king any hint of his plans, unless he wished to see them come to nothing; on the contrary, he advised him to go at once to Lyons and wait there for him, M. de Villars; for he would probably be passing through that town in a few days, being almost certain to be appointed governor of Languedoc in place of M. de Montrevel, who had fallen under the king’s displeasure and was about to be recalled. In the course of the three interviews which d’Aygaliers had had with M. de Villars, he had become convinced that de Villars was a man capable of understanding his object; he therefore followed his advice, as he believed his knowledge of the king to be correct, and left Paris for Lyons.

The recall of M. de Montrevel had been brought about in the following manner: — M. de Montrevel having just come to Uzes, learned that Cavalier and his troops were in the neighbourhood of Sainte-Chatte; he immediately sent M. de La Jonquiere, with six hundred picked marines and some companies of dragoons from the regiment of Saint-Sernin, but half an hour later, it having occurred to him that these forces were not sufficient, he ordered M. de Foix, lieutenant of the dragoons of Fimarqon, to join M. de La Jonquiere at Sainte-Chatte with a hundred soldiers of his regiment, and to remain with him if he were wanted; if not, to return the same night.

M de Foix gave the necessary orders, chose a hundred of his bravest men, put himself at their head, and joined M. de La Jonquiere, showing him his orders; but the latter, confiding in the courage of his soldiers and unwilling to share with anyone the glory of a victory of which he felt assured, not only sent away M. de Foix, but begged him to go back to Uzes, declaring to him that he had enough troops to fight and conquer all the Camisards whom he might encounter; consequently the hundred dragoons whom the lieutenant had brought with him were quite useless at Sainte-Chatte, while on the contrary they might be very necessary somewhere else. M. de Foix did not consider that it was his duty to insist on remaining under these circumstances, and returned to Uzes, while M. de La Jonquiere continued his route in order to pass the night at Moussac. Cavalier left the town by one gate just as M. de La Jonquiere entered at the other. The wishes of the young Catholic commander were thus in a fair way to be fulfilled, for in all probability he would come up with his enemy the next day.

As the village was inhabited for the most part by new converts, the night instead of being spent in repose was devoted to pillage.

The next day the Catholic troops reached Moussac, which they found deserted, so they went on to Lascours-de-Gravier, a little village belonging to the barony of Boucairan, which M. de La Jonquiere gave up to pillage, and where he had four Protestants shot — a man, a woman, and two young girls. He then resumed his route. As it had rained, he soon came on the trail of the Camisards, the terrible game which he was hunting down. For three hours he occupied himself in this pursuit, marching at the head of his troops, lest someone else less careful than he should make some mistake, when, suddenly raising his eyes, he perceived the Camisards on a small eminence called Les Devois de Maraignargues. This was the spot they had chosen to await attack in, being eager for the approaching combat.

As soon as Cavalier saw the royals advancing, he ordered his men, according to custom, to offer up prayers to God, and when these were finished he disposed his troops for battle. His plan was to take up position with the greater part of his men on the other side of a ravine, which would thus form a kind of moat between him and the king’s soldiers; he also ordered about thirty horsemen to make a great round, thus reaching unseen a little wood about two hundred yards to his left, where they could conceal themselves; and lastly, he sent to a point on the right sixty foot-soldiers chosen from his best marksmen, whom he ordered not to fire until the royal forces were engaged in the struggle with him.

M de La Jonquiere having approached to within a certain distance, halted, and sent one of his lieutenants named de Sainte-Chatte to make a reconnaissance, which he did, advancing beyond the men in ambush, who gave no sign of their existence, while the officer quietly examined the ground. But Sainte-Chatte was an old soldier of fortune and not easily taken in, so on his return, while explaining the plan of the ground chosen by Cavalier for the disposition of his troops to M. de La Jonquiere, he added that he should be very much astonished if the young Camisard had not employed the little wood on his left and the lie of the ground on his right as cover for soldiers in ambush; but M. de La Jonquiere returned that the only thing of importance was to know the position of the principal body of troops in order to attack it at once. Sainte-Chatte told him that the principal body was that which was before his eyes, and that on this subject there could be no mistake; for he had approached near enough to recognise Cavalier himself in the front rank.

This was enough for M. de La Jonquiere: he put himself at the head of his men and rode straight to the ravine, beyond which Cavalier and his comrades awaited him in order of battle. Having got within a pistol-shot, M. de La Jonquiere gave the order to fire, but he was so near that Cavalier heard the words and saw the motion made by the men as they made ready; he therefore gave a rapid sign to his men, who threw themselves on their faces, as did their leader, and the bullets passed over them without doing any harm M.M. de La Jonquiere, who believed them all dead, was astonished when Cavalier and his Camisards rose up and rushed upon the royal troops, advancing to the sound of a psalm. At a distance of ten paces they fired, and then charged the enemy at the point of the bayonet. At this moment the sixty men in ambush to the right opened fire, while the thirty horsemen to the left, uttering loud shouts, charged at a gallop. Hearing this noise, and seeing death approach them in three different directions, the royals believed themselves surrounded, and did not attempt to make a stand; the men, throwing away their weapons, took to their heels, the officers alone and a few dragoons whom they had succeeded in rallying making a desperate resistance.

Cavalier was riding over the field of battle, sabring all the fugitives whom he met, when he caught sight of a group, composed of ten naval officers; standing close together and back to back, spontoon in hand, facing the Camisards, who surrounded them. He spurred up to them, passing through the ranks of his soldiers, and not pausing till he was within fifteen paces of them, although they raised their weapons to fire. Then making a sign with his hand that he wished to speak to them, he said, "Gentlemen, surrender. I shall give quarter, and in return for the ten lives I now spare you, will ask that my father, who is in prison at Nimes, be released."

For sole answer, one of the officers fired and wounded the young chief's horse in the head. Cavalier drew a pistol from his belt, took aim at the officer and killed him, then turning again to the others, he asked, "Gentlemen, are you as obstinate as your comrade, or do you accept my offer?" A second shot was the reply, and a bullet grazed his shoulder. Seeing that no other answer was to be hoped for, Cavalier turned to his soldiers. "Do your duty," said he, and withdrew, to avoid seeing the massacre. The nine officers were shot.

M de La Jonquiere, who had received a slight wound in the cheek, abandoned his horse in order to climb over a wall. On the other side he made a dragoon dismount and give him his horse, on which he crossed the river Gardon, leaving behind him on the battlefield twenty-five officers and six hundred soldiers killed. This defeat was doubly disastrous to the royal cause, depriving it of the flower of its officers, almost all of those who fell belonging to the noblest families of France, and also because the Camisards gained what they so badly needed, muskets, swords, and bayonets in great quantities, as well as eighty horses, these latter enabling Cavalier to complete the organisation of a magnificent troop of cavalry.

The recall of the Marechal de Montrevel was the consequence of this defeat, and M. de Villars, as he had anticipated, was appointed in his place. But before giving up his governorship Montrevel resolved to efface the memory of the check which his lieutenant's foolhardiness had caused, but for which, according to the rules of war, the general had to pay the penalty. His plan was by spreading false rumours and making feigned marches to draw the Camisards into a trap in which they, in their turn, would be caught. This was the less difficult to accomplish as their latest great victory had made Cavalier over confident both in himself and his men.

In fact, since the incident connected with the naval officers the troops of Cavalier had increased enormously in numbers, everyone desiring to serve under so brave a chief, so that he had now under him over one thousand infantry and two hundred cavalry; they were furnished, besides, just like regular troops, with a bugler for the cavalry, and eight drums and a fife for the infantry.

The marechal felt sure that his departure would be the signal for some expedition into the level country under Cavalier, so it was given out that he had left for Montpellier, and had sent forward some of his baggage-waggons to that place. On April 15th he was informed that Cavalier, deceived by the false news, had set out on the 16th April, intending to pass the night at Caveyrac, a small town about a league from Nimes, that he might be ready next day to make a descent on La Vannage. This news was brought to M. de Montrevel by a village priest called Verrien, who had in his pay vigilant and faithful spies in whom he had every confidence.

Montrevel accordingly ordered the commandant of Lunel, M. de Grandval, to set out the next day, very early in the morning, with the Charolais regiment and five companies of the Fimarcon and Saint-Sernin dragoons, and to repair to the heights of Boissieres, where instructions would await him. Sandricourt, governor of Nimes, was at the same time directed to withdraw as many men as possible from the garrison, both Swiss and dragoons, and send them by night towards Saint-Come and Clarensac; lastly, he himself set out, as he had said, but instead of going on to Montpellier, he stopped at Sommieres, whence he could observe the movements of Cavalier.

Cavalier, as M. de Montrevel already knew, was to sleep on the 15th at Caveyrac. On this day Cavalier reached the turning-point in his magnificent career. As he entered the town with his soldiers, drums beating and flags flying, he was at the zenith of his power. He rode the splendid horse M. de La Jonquiere had abandoned in his flight; behind him, serving as page, rode his young brother, aged ten, followed by four grooms; he was preceded by twelve guards dressed in red; and as his colleague Roland had taken the title of Comte, he allowed himself to be called Duke of the Cevennes.

At his approach half of the garrison, which was commanded by M. de Maillan, took possession of the church and half of the citadel; but as Cavalier was more bent on obtaining food and rest for his soldiers than of disturbing the town, he billeted his men on the townspeople, and placed sentinels at the church and fortress, who exchanged shots all the night through with the royal troops. The next morning, having destroyed the fortifications, he marched out of the town again, drums beating and flags flying as before. When almost in sight of Nimes he made his troops, which had never before been so numerous or so brilliant, perform a great many evolutions, and then continued his way towards Nages.

M de Montrevel received a report at nine o'clock in the morning of the direction Cavalier and his troops had taken, and immediately left Sommieres, followed by six companies of Fimarqon dragoons, one hundred Irish free-lances, three hundred rank and file of the Hainault regiment, and one company each of the Soissonnais, Charolais, and Menon regiments, forming in all a corps over nine hundred strong. They took the direction of Vaunages, above Clarensac; but suddenly hearing the rattle of musketry behind them, they wheeled and made for Langlade.

They found that Grandval had already encountered the Camisards. These being fatigued had withdrawn into a hollow between Boissieres and the windmill at Langlade, in order to rest. The infantry lay down, their arms beside them; the cavalry placed themselves at the feet of their horses, the bridle on arm. Cavalier himself, Cavalier the indefatigable, broken by the fatigues of the preceding days, had fallen asleep, with his young brother watching beside him. Suddenly he felt himself shaken by the arm, and rousing up, he heard on all sides cries of “Kill! Kill!” and “To arms! To arms!” Grandval and his men, who had been sent to find out where the Camisards were, had suddenly come upon them.

The infantry formed, the cavalry sprang to their saddles, Cavalier leaped on his horse, and drawing his sword, led his soldiers as usual against the dragoons, and these, as was also usual, ran away, leaving twelve of their number dead on the field. The Camisard cavalry soon gave up the pursuit, as they found themselves widely separated from the infantry and from their leader; for Cavalier had been unable to keep up with them, his horse having received a bullet through its neck.

Still they followed the flying dragoons for a good hour, from time to time a wounded dragoon falling from his horse, till at last the Camisard cavalry found itself confronted by the Charolais regiment, drawn up in battle array, and behind them the royal dragoons, who had taken refuge there, and were re-forming.

Carried on by the rapidity of their course, the Camisards could not pull up till they were within a hundred yards of the enemy; they fired once, killing several, then turned round and retreated.

When a third of the way, back had been covered, they met their chief, who had found a fresh horse by the wayside standing beside its dead master. He arrived at full gallop, as he was anxious to unite his cavalry and infantry at once, as he had seen the forces of the marechal advancing, who, as we have already said, had turned in the direction of the firing. Hardly had Cavalier effected the desired junction of his forces than he perceived that his retreat was cut off. He had the royal troops both before and behind him.

The young chief saw that a desperate dash to right or left was all that remained to him, and not knowing this country as well as the Cevennes, he asked a peasant the way from Soudorgues to Nages, that being the only one by which he could escape. There was no time to inquire whether the peasant was Catholic or Protestant; he could only trust to chance, and follow the road indicated. But a few yards from the spot where the road from Doudorgues to Nages joins the road to Nimes he found himself in face of Marechal Montrevel’s troops under the command of Menon. However, as they hardly outnumbered the Camisards, these did not stop to look for another route, but bending forward in their saddles, they dashed through the lines at full gallop, taking the direction of Nages, hoping to reach the plain round Calvisson. But the village, the approaches, the issues were all occupied by royal troops, and at the same time Grandval and the marechal joined forces, while Menon collected his men together and pushed forward. Cavalier was completely surrounded: he gave the situation a comprehensive glance — his foes, were five to one.

Rising in his stirrups, so that he could see over every head, Cavalier shouted so loud that not only his own men heard but also those of the enemy: “My children, if our hearts fail us now, we shall be taken and broken on the wheel. There is only one means of safety: we must cut our way at full gallop through these people. Follow me, and keep close order!”

So speaking, he dashed on the nearest group, followed by all his men, who formed a compact mass; round which the three corps of royal troops closed. Then there was everywhere a hand-to-hand battle there was no time to load and fire; swords flashed and fell, bayonets stabbed, the royals and the Camisards took each other by the throat and hair. For an hour this demoniac fight lasted, during which Cavalier lost five hundred men and slew a thousand of the enemy. At last he won through, followed by about two hundred of his troops, and drew a long breath; but finding himself in the centre of a large circle of soldiers, he made for a bridge, where alone it seemed possible to break through, it being only guarded by a hundred dragoons.

He divided his men into two divisions, one to force the bridge, the other to cover the retreat. Then he faced his foes like a wild boar driven to bay.

Suddenly loud shouts behind him announced that the bridge was forced; but the Camisards, instead of keeping the passage open for their leader, scattered over the plain and sought safety in flight. But a child threw himself before them, pistol in hand. It was Cavalier's young brother, mounted on one of the small wild horses of Camargues of that Arab breed which was introduced into Languedoc by the Moors from Spain. Carrying a sword and carbine proportioned to his size, the boy addressed the flying men. "Where are you going?" he cried, "Instead of running away like cowards, line the river banks and oppose the enemy to facilitate my brother's escape." Ashamed of having deserved such reproaches, the Camisards stopped, rallied, lined the banks of the river, and by keeping up a steady fire, covered Cavalier's retreat, who crossed without having received a single wound, though his horse was riddled with bullets and he had been forced to change his sword three times.

Still the combat raged; but gradually Cavalier managed to retreat: a plain cut by trenches, the falling darkness, a wood which afforded cover, all combined to help him at last. Still his rearguard, harassed by the enemy, dotted the ground it passed over with its dead, until at last both victors and vanquished were swallowed up by night. The fight had lasted ten hours, Cavalier had lost more than five hundred men, and the royals about a thousand.

"Cavalier," says M. de Villars, in his Memoirs, "acted on this day in a way which astonished everyone. For who could help being astonished to see a nobody, inexperienced in the art of warfare, bear himself in such difficult and trying circumstances like some great general? At one period of the day he was followed everywhere by a dragoon; Cavalier shot at him and killed his horse. The dragoon returned the shot, but missed. Cavalier had two horses killed under him; the first time he caught a dragoon's horse, the second time he made one of his own men dismount and go on foot."

M de Montrevel also showed himself to be a gallant soldier; wherever there was danger there was he, encouraging officers and soldiers by his example: one Irish captain was killed at his side, another fatally wounded, and a third slightly hurt. Grandval, on his part, had performed miracles: his horse was shot under him, and M. de Montrevel replaced it by one of great value, on which he joined in the pursuit of the Camisards. After this affair M. de Montrevel gave up his place to M. de Villars, leaving word for Cavalier that it was thus he took leave of his friends.

Although Cavalier came out of this battle with honour, compelling even his enemies to regard him as a man worthy of their steel, it had nevertheless destroyed the best part of his hopes. He made a halt-near Pierredon to gather together the remnant of his troops, and truly it was but a remnant which remained. Of those who came back the greater number were without weapons, for they had thrown them away in their flight. Many were incapacitated for service by their wounds; and lastly, the cavalry could hardly be said to exist any longer, as the few men who survived had been obliged to abandon their horses, in order to get across the high ditches which were their only cover from the dragoons during the flight.

Meantime the royalists were very active, and Cavalier felt that it would be imprudent to remain long at Pierredon, so setting out during the night, and crossing the Gardon, he buried himself in the forest of Hieuzet, whither he hoped his enemies would not venture to follow him. And in fact the first two days were quiet, and his troops benefited greatly by the rest, especially as they were able to draw stores of all kinds — wheat, hay, arms, and ammunition — from an immense cave which the Camisards had used for a long time as a magazine and arsenal. Cavalier now also employed it as a hospital, and had the wounded carried there, that their wounds might receive attention.

Unfortunately, Cavalier was soon obliged to quit the forest, in spite of his hopes of being left in peace; for one day on his way back from a visit to the wounded in the cave, whose existence was a secret, he came across a hundred miquelets who had penetrated thus far, and who would have taken him prisoner if he had not, with his, accustomed presence of mind and courage, sprung from a rock twenty feet high. The miquelets fired at him, but no bullet reached him. Cavalier rejoined his troops, but fearing to attract the rest of the royalists to the place, — retreated to some distance from the cave, as it was of the utmost importance that it should not be discovered, since it contained all his resources.

Cavalier had now reached one of those moments when Fortune, tired of conferring favours, turns her back on the favourite. The royalists had often noticed an old woman from the village of Hieuzet going towards the forest, sometimes carrying a basket in her hand, sometimes with a hamper on her head, and it occurred to them that she was supplying the hidden Camisards with provisions. She was arrested and brought before General Lalande, who began his examination by threatening that he would have her hanged if she did not at once declare the object of her frequent journeys to the forest without reserve. At first she made use of all kinds of pretexts, which only strengthened the suspicions of Lalande, who, ceasing his questions, ordered her to be taken to the gallows and hanged. The old woman walked to the place of execution with such a firm step that the general began to think he would get no information from her, but at the foot of the ladder her courage failed. She asked to be taken back before the general, and having been promised her life, she revealed everything.

M de Lalande put himself at once at the head of a strong detachment of miquelets, and forced the woman to walk before them till they reached the cavern, which they never would have discovered without a guide, so cleverly was the entrance hidden by rocks and brushwood. On entering, the first thing that met their eye was the wounded, about thirty in number. The miquelets threw themselves upon them and slaughtered them. This deed accomplished, they went farther into the cave, which to their great surprise contained a thousand things they never expected to find there — heaps of grain, sacks of flour, barrels of wine, casks of brandy, quantities of chestnuts and potatoes; and besides all this, chests containing ointments, drugs and lint, and lastly a complete arsenal of muskets, swords, and bayonets, a quantity of powder ready-made, and sulphur, saltpetre, and charcoal-in short, everything necessary for the manufacture of more, down to small mills to be turned by hand. Lalande kept his word: the life of an old woman was not too much to give in return for such a treasure.

Meantime M. de Villars, as he had promised, took up Baron d’Aygaliers in passing through Lyons, so that during the rest of the journey the peacemaker had plenty of time to expatiate on his plans. As M. de Villars was a man of tact and a lover of justice, and desired above all things to bring a right spirit to bear on the performance of the duties of his new office, in which his two predecessors had failed, he promised the baron “to keep,” as he expressed himself, his “two ears open” and listen to both sides, and as a first proof of impartiality — he refused to give any opinion until he had heard M. de Julien, who was coming to meet him at Tournon.

When they arrived at Tournon, M. de Julien was there to receive them, and had a very different story to tell from that which M. de Villars had heard from d’Aygaliers. According to him, the only pacific ration possible was the complete extermination of the Camisards. He felt himself very hardly treated in that he had been allowed to destroy only four hundred villages and hamlets in the Upper Cevennes, — assuring de Villars with the confidence of a man who had studied the matter profoundly, that they should all have been demolished without exception, and all the peasants killed to the last man.

So it came to pass that M. de Villars arrived at Beaucaire placed like Don Juan between the spirits of good and evil, the one advising clemency and the other murder. M. de Villars not being able to make up his mind, on reaching Nimes, d’Aygaliers assembled the principal Protestants of the town, told them of his plan, showing them its practicability, so that also joined in the good work, and drew up a document in which they asked the marechal to allow them to take up arms and march against the rebels, as they were determined either to bring them back into the good way by force of example or to fight them as a proof of their loyalty.

This petition, which was signed by several nobles and by almost all the lawyers and merchants of the city of Nimes, was presented to M. de Villars on Tuesday, 22nd April, 1704, by M. de Albenas, at the head of seven or eight hundred persons of the Reformed religion. M. de Villars received the request kindly, thanked its bearer and those who accompanied him, assuring them that he had no doubt of the sincerity of their professions, and that if he were in want of help he would have recourse to them with as much confidence as if they were old Catholics. He hoped, however, to win the rebels back by mildness, and he begged them to second his efforts in this direction by spreading abroad the fact that an amnesty was offered to all those who would lay down arms and return to their houses within a week. The very next day but one, M. de Villars set out from Nimes to visit all the principal towns, in order to make himself acquainted with men, things, and places.

Although the answer to the petition had been a delicate refusal, d’Aygaliers was not discouraged, but followed M. de Villars everywhere. When the latter arrived at Alais, the new governor sent for MM. de Lalande and de Baville, in order to consult them as to the best means of inducing the Camisards to lay down their arms. Baron d’Aygaliers was summoned to this consultation, and described his plan to the two gentlemen. As he expected, both were opposed to it; however, he tried to bring them over to his side by presenting to them what seemed to him to be cogent reasons for its adoption. But de Lalande and de Baville made light of all his reasons, and rejected his proposals with such vehemence, that the marechal, however much inclined to the side of d’Aygaliers, did not venture to act quite alone, and said he would not decide on any course until he reached Uzes.

D’Aygaliers saw clearly that until he had obtained the approbation of either the general or the intendant, he would get nothing from the marechal. He therefore considered which of the two he should try to persuade, and although de Baville was his personal enemy, having several times shown his hatred for him and his family, he decided to address himself to him.

In consequence, the next day, to the great astonishment of M. de Baville, d’Aygaliers paid him a visit. The intendant received him coldly but politely, asked him to sit down, and when he was seated begged to know the motive which had brought him. “Sir,” replied the baron, “you have given my family and me such cause of offence that I had come to the firm resolution never to ask a favour of you, and as perhaps you may have remarked during the journey we have taken with M. le marechal, I would rather have died of thirst than accept a glass of water from you. But I have come here to-day not upon any private matter, to obtain my own ends, but upon a matter which concerns the welfare of the State. I therefore beg you to put out of your mind the dislike which you have to me and mine, and I do this the more earnestly that your dislike can only have been caused by the fact that our religion is different from yours — a thing which could neither have been foreseen nor prevented. My entreaty is that you do not try to set M. le marechal against the course which I have proposed to him, which I am convinced would bring the disorders in our province to an end, stop the occurrence of the many unfortunate events which I am sure you look on with regret, and spare you much trouble and embarrassment.”

The intendant was much touched by this calm speech, and above all by the confidence which M. d’Aygaliers had shown him, and replied that he had only offered opposition to the plan of pacification because he believed it to be impracticable. M. d'Aygaliers then warmly pressed him to try it before rejecting it for ever, and in the end M. de Baville withdrew his opposition.

M d'Aygaliers hastened to the marechal, who finding himself no longer alone in his favourable opinion, made no further delay, but told the baron to call together that very day all the people whom he thought suitable for the required service, and desired that they should be presented to him the next morning before he set out for Nimes.

The next day, instead of the fifty men whom the marachal had thought could be gathered together, d'Aygaliers came to him followed by eighty, who were almost all of good and many of noble family. The meeting took place, by the wish of the baron, in the courtyard of the episcopal palace. "This palace," says the baron in his Memoirs, "which was of great magnificence, surrounded by terraced gardens and superbly furnished, was occupied by Monseigneur Michel Poncet de La Riviere. He was a man passionately devoted to pleasures of all kinds, especially to music, women, and good cheer. There were always to be found in his house good musicians, pretty women, and excellent wines. These latter suited him so well that he never left the table without being in a pleasant humour, and at such a moment if it came into his head that anyone in his diocese was not as good a Christian as himself, he would sit down and write to M. de Baville, urging that the delinquent ought to be sent into exile. He often did this honour to my late father." M. d'Aygaliers goes on to say that "on seeing such a great number of Huguenots in the court who were all declaring that they were better servants of the king than the Catholics, he almost fell from his balcony with vexation and surprise. This vexation increased when he saw M. de Villars and M. de Baville, who had apartments in the palace, come down into the court and talk to these people. One hope still remained to him: it was that the marechal and the intendant had come down to send them away; but this last hope was cruelly disappointed when he heard M. de Villars say that he accepted their service and expected them to obey d'Aygaliers in all matters concerning the service of the king."

But this was not all that had to be accomplished arms were necessary for the Protestants, and though their number was not great, there was a difficulty in finding them weapons. The unfortunate Calvinists had been disarmed so often that even their table-knives had been carried off, so it was useless to search their houses for guns and sabres. D’Aygaliers proposed that they should take the arms of the townspeople, but M. de Villars considered that it would offend the Catholics to have their arms taken from them and given to the Protestants. In the end, however, this was the course that had to be adopted: M. de Paratte was ordered to give fifty muskets and the same number of bayonets to M. d’Aygaliers, who also received, as the reward of his long patience, from M. de Villars, before the latter left for Nimes, the following commission:

“We, Marechal de Villars, general in the armies of the king, etc., etc., have given permission to M. d’Aygaliers, nobleman and Protestant of the town of Uzes, and to fifty men chosen by him, to make war on the Camisards.

“(Signed) “VILLARS

“Given at Uzes, the 4th of May 1704”

Hardly had M. de Villars set out for Nimes than d’Aygaliers met with fresh difficulties. The bishop, who could not forget that his episcopal palace had been turned into barracks for Huguenots, went from house to house threatening those who had promised to countenance d’Aygaliers’ plans, and strictly forbidding the captains of the town troops to deliver any weapons to the Protestants. Fortunately, d’Aygaliers had not accomplished so much without having learned not to draw back when the road grew rough, so he also on his side went about confirming the strong and encouraging the feeble, and called on M. de Paratte to beg him to carry out the orders of M. de Villars. De Paratte was happily an old soldier, whose one idea was that discipline should be maintained, so that he gave the guns and bayonets to d’Aygaliers on the spot, without a word of objection, and thus enabled the latter to start at five o’clock next morning with his little band.

Meantime de Baville and de Lalande had been reflecting what great influence d’Aygaliers would gain in the province should he succeed in his aims, and their jealousy had made them resolve to forestall him in his work, by themselves inducing Cavalier to abandon his present course. They did not conceal from themselves that this would be difficult, but as they could command means of corruption which were not within the power of d’Aygaliers, they did not despair of success.

They therefore sent for a countryman called Lacombe, in order to enlist him on their side; for Cavalier, when a boy, had been his shepherd for two years, and both had remained friends ever since: this man undertook to try and bring about a meeting between the two gentlemen and Cavalier — an enterprise which would have been dangerous for anyone else. He promised first of all to explain to Cavalier the offers of MM. de Baville and de Lalande.

Lacombe kept his word: he set off the same day, and two days later appeared before Cavalier. The first feeling of the young chief was astonishment, the second pleasure. Lacombe could not have chosen a better moment to speak of peace to his former shepherd.

“Indeed,” says Cavalier in his Memoirs, “the loss which I had just sustained at Nages was doubly painful to me because it was irreparable. I had lost at one blow not only a great number of weapons, all my ammunition, and all my money, but also a body of men, inured to danger and fatigue, and capable of any undertaking; — besides all this, I had been robbed of my stores — a loss which made itself felt more than all the others put together, because as long as the secret of the cavern was kept, in all our misfortunes we were never without resources; but from the moment it got into the possession of our enemies we were quite destitute. The country was ravaged, my friends had grown cold, their purses were empty, a hundred towns had been sacked and burned, the prisons were full of Protestants, the fields were uncultivated. Added to all this, the long promised help from England had never arrived, and the new marechal had appeared in the province accompanied by fresh troops.”

Nevertheless, in spite of his desperate position, Cavalier listened to the propositions laid before him by Lacombe with cold and haughty front, and his reply was that he would never lay down arms till the Protestants had obtained the right to the free exercise of their religion.

Firm as was this answer, Lalande did not despair of inducing Cavalier to come to terms: he therefore wrote him a letter with his own hand, asking him for an interview, and pledging his word that if they came to no agreement Cavalier should be free to retire without any harm being done him; but he added that, if he refused this request, he should regard him as an enemy to peace, and responsible for all the blood which might be shed in future.

This overture, made with a soldier’s frankness, had a great effect on Cavalier, and in order that neither his friends nor his enemies should have the least excuse for blaming him, he resolved to show everyone that he was eager to seize the first chance of making peace on advantageous terms.

He therefore replied to Lalande, that he would come to the bridge of Avene on that very day, the 12th May, at noon, and sent his letter by Catinat, ordering him to deliver it into the hands of the Catholic general himself.

Catinat was worthy of his mission. He was a peasant from Cayla, whose real name was Abdias Maurel. He had served under Marshal Catinat in Italy, the same who had maintained so gallant a struggle against Prince Eugene. When Maurel returned home he could talk of nothing but his marshal and his campaigns, so that he soon went among his neighbours by the name of "Catinat." He was, as we have seen, Cavalier's right hand, who had placed him in command of his cavalry, and who now entrusted him with a still more dangerous post, that of envoy to a man who had often said that he would give 2000 livres to him who would bring him the head of Cavalier, and 1000 livres each for the heads of his two lieutenants. Catinat was quite well aware of this offer of Lalande's, yet he appeared before the general perfectly cool and calm; only, either from a feeling of propriety or of pride, he was dressed in full uniform.

The bold and haughty expression of the man who presented Cavalier's letter astonished the general, who asked him his name.

"I am Catinat," he answered.

"Catinat!" exclaimed Lalande in surprise.

"Yes, Catinat, commander of the cavalry of Cavalier."

"What!" said Lalande, "are you the Catinat who massacred so many people in Beaucaire?"

"Yes, I am. I did it, but it was my duty."

"Well," exclaimed M. de Lalande, "you show great hardihood in daring to appear before me."

"I came," said Catinat proudly, "trusting to your honour and to the promise that Brother Cavalier gave me that nothing should happen to me."

"He was quite right," returned Lalande, taking the letter. Having read it, he said, "Go back to Cavalier and assure him that I shall be at the bridge of Avene at noon, accompanied only by a few officers and thirty dragoons. I expect to find him there with a similar number of men."

"But," answered Catinat, "it is possible that Brother Cavalier may not wish-to come with so poor a following."

"If so," returned Lalande, "then tell him that he may bring his whole army if he likes, but that I shall not take a single man with me more than I have said; as Cavalier has confidence in me, I have confidence in him."

Catinat reported Lalande's answer to his chief it was of a kind that he understood and liked, so leaving the rest of his troops at Massanes, he chose sixty men from his infantry, and eight horsemen as escort. On coming in sight of the bridge, he saw Lalande approaching from the other side. He at once ordered his sixty men to halt, went a few steps farther with his eight horsemen, and then ordered them in their turn to stop, and advanced alone towards the bridge. Lalande had acted in the same manner with regard to his dragoons and officers, and now dismounting, came towards Cavalier.

The two met in the middle of the bridge, and saluted with the courtesy of men who had learned to esteem each other on the field of battle. Then after a short silence, during which they examined each other, Lalande spoke.

"Sir," said he, "the king in his clemency desires to put an end to the war which is going on between his subjects, and which can only result in the ruin of his kingdom. As he knows that this war has been instigated and supported by the enemies of France, he hopes to meet no opposition to his wishes among those of his subjects who were momentarily led astray, but to whom he now offers pardon."

"Sir," answered Cavalier, "the war not having been begun by the Protestants, they are always ready for peace — but a real peace, without restriction or reserve. They have no right, I know, to lay down conditions, but I hope they will be permitted to discuss those which may be laid down for them. Speak openly, sir, and let me know what the offers are that you have been authorised to make to us, that I may judge if we can accept them."

"But how would it be," said Lalande, "if you were mistaken, and if the king desired to know what conditions you would consider reasonable?"

"If that is so," answered Cavalier, "I will tell you our conditions at once, in order not to prolong the negotiations; for every minute's delay, as you know, costs someone his life or fortune."

"Then tell me what your conditions are," returned Lalande.

"Well," said Cavalier, "our demands are three first, liberty of conscience; secondly, the release of all prisoners who have been condemned to imprisonment or the galleys because of their religion; and thirdly, that if we are not granted liberty of conscience we may be at least permitted to leave the kingdom."

“As far as I can judge,” replied Lalande, “I do not believe that the king will accept the first proposition, but it is possible that he may accede to the third. In that case, how many Protestants would you take with you?”

“Ten thousand of all ages and both sexes.”

“The number is excessive, sir. I believe that His Majesty is not disposed to go beyond three thousand.”

“Then,” replied Cavalier, “there is nothing more to be said, for I could not accept passports for any smaller number, and I could accept for the ten thousand only on condition that the king would grant us three months in which to dispose of our possessions and withdraw from the country without being molested. Should His Majesty, however, not be pleased to allow us to leave the kingdom, then we beg that our edicts be re-enacted and our privileges restored, whereupon we shall become once more, what we were formerly, His Majesty’s loyal and obedient servants.”

“Sir,” said Lalande, “I shall lay your conditions before M. le Marechal, and if no satisfactory conclusion can be arrived at, it will be to me a matter of profound regret. And now, sir, will you permit me to inspect more closely the gallant men with whose help you have done such astounding deeds?” Cavalier smiled; for these “gallant men” when caught had been broken on the wheel, burnt at the stake, or hanged like brigands. His sole answer was an inclination of the head as he turned and led the way to his little escort. M. de Lalande followed him with perfect confidence, and, passing by the eight horsemen who were grouped on the road, he walked up to the infantry, and taking out of his pocket a handful of gold, he scattered it before them, saying:

“There, my men! that is to drink the king’s health with.”

Not a man stooped to pick the money up, and one of them said, shaking his head,

“It is not money we want, but liberty of conscience.”

“My men,” answered Lalande, “it is unfortunately not in my power to grant your demand, but I advise you to submit to the king’s will and trust in his clemency.”

“Sir,” answered Cavalier, “we are all ready to obey him, provided that he graciously grant us our just demands; if not, we shall die weapon in hand, rather than expose ourselves once more to such outrages as have already been inflicted on us.”

“Your demands shall be transmitted word for word to M. de Villars, who will lay them before the king,” said Lalande, “and you may be sure, sir, that my most sincere wish is that His Majesty may not find them exorbitant.”

With these words, M. de Lalande saluted Cavalier, and turned to rejoin his escort; but Cavalier, wishing to return confidence with confidence, crossed the bridge with him, and accompanied the general to where his soldiers had halted. There, with another salute, the two chiefs parted, M. de Lalande taking the road to Uzes, while Cavalier rejoined his comrades.

Meantime d’Aygaliers, who, as we have seen, had not left Uzes until the 5th May, in order to join Cavalier, did not come up with him until the 13th, that is to say, the day after his conference with Lalande. D’Aygaliers gives us an account of their interview, and we cannot do better than quote it.

“Although it was the first time that we had met face to face, we embraced each other as if we were old acquaintances. My little band mixed with his and sang psalms together, while Cavalier and I talked. I was very much pleased with what, he said, and convinced him without difficulty that he should submit for the sake of the brethren, who could then choose whichever course best suited them, and either leave the kingdom or serve the king. I said that I believed the last course to be the best, provided we were allowed to worship God according to our consciences; because I hoped that, seeing their faithful service, His Majesty would recognise that he had been imposed upon by those who had described us as disloyal subjects, and that we should thus obtain for the whole nation that liberty of conscience which had been granted to us; that in no other way, as far as I could see, could our deplorable condition be ameliorated, for although Cavalier and his men might be able to exist for some time longer in the forests and mountains, they would never be strong enough to save the inhabitants of towns and other enclosed places from perishing.

“Upon this he replied, that although the Catholics seldom kept a promise made to those of our religion, he was willing to risk his life for the welfare of his brethren and the province but that he trusted if he confided in the clemency of the king for whom he had never ceased to pray, no harm would happen him.”

Thereupon d’Aygaliers, delighted to find him so well inclined, begged him to give him a letter for M. de Villars, and as Cavalier knew the marechal to be loyal and zealous, and had great confidence in him, he wrote without any hesitation the following letter:

"MONSEIGNEUR, — Permit me to address your Excellency in order to beg humbly for the favour of your protection for myself and for my soldiers. We are filled with the most ardent desire to repair the fault which we have committed by bearing arms, not against the king, as our enemies have so falsely asserted, but to defend our lives against those who persecuted us, attacking us so fiercely that we believed it was done by order of His Majesty. We know that it was written by St. Paul that subjects ought to submit themselves to their king, and if in spite of these sincere protestations our sovereign should still demand our blood, we shall soon be ready to throw ourselves on his justice or his mercy; but we should, Monseigneur, regard ourselves as happy, if His Majesty, moved by our repentance, would grant us his pardon and receive us into his service, according to the example of the God of mercy whose representative His Majesty is on earth. We trust, Monseigneur, by our faithfulness and zeal to acquire the honour of your protection, and we glory in the thought of being permitted, under the command of such an illustrious and noble-minded general as yourself, to shed our blood for the king; this being so, I hope that your Excellency will be pleased to allow me to inscribe myself with profound respect and humility, Monseigneur, your most humble and obedient servant, "CAVALIER."

D'Aygaliers, as soon as he got possession of this letter, set out for Nimes in the best of spirits; for he felt sure that he was bringing M. de Villars more than he had expected. And, indeed, as soon as the marechal saw how far things had gone, in spite of everything that Lalande could say, who in his jealousy asserted that d'Aygaliers would spoil everything, he sent him back to Cavalier with an invitation to come to Nimes. D'Aygaliers set out at once, promising to bring the young chief back with him, at which Lalande laughed loudly, pretending to be very much amused at the baron's confident way of speaking, and protesting that Cavalier would not come.

In the meantime events were happening in the mountains which might easily have changed the state of mind of the young chief. The Comte de Tournan, who was in command at Florae, had encountered Roland's army in the plain of Fondmortes, and had lost two hundred men, a considerable sum of money, and eighty mules loaded with provisions. The anxiety which this news caused to M. de Villars was soon relieved; for six days after the defeat he received a letter from Cavalier by the hands of Lacombe, the same who had brought about the interview on the bridge of Avenes. In this letter Cavalier expressed the greatest regret for what had just happened.

D'Aygaliers therefore found Cavalier in the best of humours when he joined him at Tarnac. The first feeling that the young chief felt on receiving the invitation was one of stupefaction; for an interview with the marechal was an honour so unexpected and so great, that his impression was that some treason lay behind it; but he was soon reassured when he recalled the character for loyalty which the marechal bore, and how impossible it was that d'Aygaliers should lend himself to treachery. So Cavalier sent back word that he would obey the marechal's orders; and that he put himself entirely into his hands in what concerned the arrangements for the interview. M. de Villars let him know that he would expect him on the 16th in the garden of the convent of the Recollets of Nimes, which lay just outside the city, between the gates of Beaucaire and the Madeleine, and that Lalande would meet him beyond Carayrac to receive him and to bring him hostages.

CHAPTER IV

On the 15th May Cavalier set out from Tarnac at the head of one hundred and sixty foot-soldiers and fifty horse; he was accompanied by his young brother and by d’Aygaliers and Lacombe. They all passed the night at Langlade.

The next day they set out for Nimes, and, as had been agreed upon, were met by Lalande between Saint-Cesaire and Carayrac. Lalande advanced to greet Cavalier and present the hostages to him. These hostages were M. de La Duretiere, captain of the Fimarcon regiment, a captain of infantry, several other officers, and ten dragoons. Cavalier passed them over to his lieutenant, Ravanel, who was in command of the infantry, and left them in his charge at Saint-Cesaire. The cavalry accompanied him to within a musket-shot of Nimes, and encamped upon the heights. Besides this, Cavalier posted sentinels and mounted orderlies at all the approaches to the camp, and even as far off as the fountain of Diana and the tennis-court. These precautions taken, he entered the city, accompanied by his brother, d’Aygaliers, Lacombe, and a body-guard of eighteen cavalry, commanded by Catinat. Lalande rode on before to announce their arrival to the marechal, whom he found waiting with MM. de Baville and Sandricourt, in the garden of the Recollets, dreading every moment to receive word that Cavalier had refused to come; for he expected great results from this interview. Lalande, however, reassured him by telling him the young Huguenot was behind.

In a few minutes a great tumult was heard: it was the people hastening to welcome their hero. Not a Protestant, except paralytic old people and infants in the cradle, remained indoors; for the Huguenots, who had long looked on Cavalier as their champion, now considered him their saviour, so that men and women threw themselves under the feet of his horse in their efforts to kiss the skirts of his coat. It was more like a victor making his entry into a conquered town than a rebel chief coming to beg for an amnesty for himself and his adherents. M. de Villars heard the outcry from the garden of Recollets, and when he learned its cause his esteem for Cavalier rose higher, for every day since his arrival as governor had showed him more and more clearly how great was the young chief’s influence. The tumult increased as Cavalier came nearer, and it flashed through the marechal’s mind that instead of giving hostages he should have claimed them. At this moment Cavalier appeared at the gate, and seeing the marechal’s guard drawn up in line, he caused his own to form a line opposite them. The memoirs of the time tell us that he was dressed in a coffee-coloured coat, with a very full white muslin cravat; he wore a cross-belt from which depended his sword, and on his head a gold-laced hat of black felt. He was mounted on a magnificent bay horse, the same which he had taken from M. de La Jonquiere on the bloody day of Vergenne.

The lieutenant of the guard met him at the gate. Cavalier quickly dismounted, and throwing the bridle of his horse to one of his men, he entered the garden, and advanced towards the expectant group, which was composed, as we have said, of Villars, Baville, and Sandricourt. As he drew near, M. de Villars regarded him with growing astonishment; for he could not believe that in the young man, or rather boy, before him he saw the terrible Cevenol chief, whose name alone made the bravest soldiers tremble. Cavalier at this period had just completed his twenty-fourth year, but, thanks to his fair hair which fell in long locks over his shoulders, and to the gentle expression of his eyes he did not appear more than eighteen. Cavalier was acquainted with none of the men in whose presence he stood, but he noticed M. de Villars’ rich dress and air of command. He therefore saluted him first; afterwards, turning towards the others, he bowed to each, but less profoundly, then somewhat embarrassed and with downcast eyes he stood motionless and silent. The marechal still continued to look at him in silent astonishment, turning from time to time to Baville and Sandricourt, as if to assure himself that there was no mistake and that it was really the man whom they expected who stood before them. At last, doubting still, in spite of the signs they made to reassure him, he asked —

“Are you really Jean Cavalier?”

“Yes, monseigneur,” was the reply, given in an unsteady voice.

“But I mean Jean Cavalier, the Camisard general, he who has assumed the title of Duke of the Cevennes.”

“I have not assumed that title, monseigneur, only some people call me so in joke: the king alone has the right to confer titles, and I rejoice exceedingly, monseigneur, that he has given you that of governor of Languedoc.”

“When you are speaking of the king, why do you not say ‘His Majesty’?” said M. de Baville. “Upon my soul, the king is too good to treat thus with a rebel.”

The blood rushed to Cavalier’s head, his face flamed, and after a moment’s pause, fixing his eye boldly upon M. de Baville, and speaking in a voice which was now as firm as it had been tremulous a moment before, he said, “If you have only brought me here, sir, to speak to me in such a manner, you might better have left me in my mountains, and come there yourself to take a lesson in hospitality. If I am a rebel, it is not I who am answerable, for it was the tyranny and cruelty of M. de Baville which forced us to have recourse to arms; and if history takes exception to anything connected with the great monarch for whose pardon I sue to-day, it will be, I hope, not that he had foes like me, but friends like him.”

M de Baville grew pale with anger; for whether Cavalier knew to whom he was speaking or not, his words had the effect of a violent blow full in his face; but before he could reply M. de Villars interposed.

“Your business is only with me, sir,” he said; “attend to me alone, I beg: I speak in the name of the king; and the king, of his clemency, wishes to spare his subjects by treating them with tenderness.”

Cavalier opened his mouth to reply, but the intendant cut him short.

“I should hope that that suffices,” he said contemptuously: “as pardon is more than you could have hoped for, I suppose you are not going to insist on the other conditions you laid down?”

“But it is precisely those other conditions,” said Cavalier, addressing himself to M. de Villars, and not seeming to see that anyone else was present, “for which we have fought. If I were alone, sir, I should give myself up, bound hand and foot, with entire confidence in your good faith, demanding no assurances and exacting no conditions; but I stand here to defend the interests of my brethren and friends who trust me; and what is more, things have gone so far that we must either die weapon in hand, or obtain our rights.”

The intendant was about to speak, but the marechal stopped him with such an imperative gesture that he stepped back as if to show that he washed his hands of the whole matter.

“What are those rights? Are they those which M. Lalande has transmitted to me by word of mouth?”

“Yes, sir.”

“It would be well to commit them to writing.”

“I have done so, monseigneur, and sent a copy to M. d’Aygaliers.”

“I have not seen it, sir; make me another copy and place it in my hands, I beg.”

“I shall go and set about it directly, monseigneur,” stepping back as if about to withdraw.

“One moment!” said the marechal, detaining him by a smile. “Is it true that you are willing to enter the king’s army?”

“I am more than willing, I desire it with all my heart,” exclaimed Cavalier, with the frank enthusiasm natural to his age, “but I cannot do so till our just demands are granted.”

“But if they were granted — ?”

“Then, sir,” replied Cavalier, “the king has never had more loyal subjects than we shall be.”

“Well, have a little patience and everything will be arranged, I hope.”

“May God grant it!” said Cavalier. “He is my witness that we desire peace beyond everything.” And he took another step backwards.

“You will not go too far away, I hope,” said the marechal.

“We shall remain wherever your excellency may appoint,” said Cavalier.

“Very well,” continued M. de Villars; “halt at Calvisson, and try all you can to induce the other leaders to follow your example.”

“I shall do my best, monseigneur; but while we await His Majesty’s reply shall we be allowed to fulfil our religious duties unimpeded?”

“Yes, I shall give orders that you are to have full liberty in that respect.”

“Thanks, monseigneur.”

Cavalier bowed once more, and was about to go; but M. de Villars accompanied him and Lalande, who had now joined them, and who stood with his hand on Cavalier’s shoulder, a few steps farther. Catinat seeing that the conference was at an end, entered the garden with his men. Thereupon M. de Villars took leave, saying distinctly, “Adieu, Seigneur Cavalier,” and withdrew, leaving the young chief surrounded by a dozen persons all wanting to speak to him at once. For half an hour he was detained by questions, to all of which he replied pleasantly. On one finger was an emerald taken from a naval officer named Didier, whom he had killed with his own hand in the action at Devois de Martignargues; he kept time by a superb watch which had belonged to M. d’Acqueville, the second in command of the marines; and he offered his questioners from time to time perfumed snuff from a magnificent snuffbox, which he had found in the holsters when he took possession of M. de La Jonquiere’s horse. He told everyone who wished to listen that he had never intended to revolt against the king; and that he was now ready to shed the last drop of his blood in his service; that he had several times offered to surrender on condition that liberty of conscience was granted to those of the new faith, but that M. de Montrevel had always rejected his offers, so that he had been obliged to remain under arms, in order to deliver those who were in prison, and to gain permission for those who were free to worship God in their own way.

He said these things in an unembarrassed and graceful manner, hat in hand; then passing through the crowd which had gathered outside the garden of the Recollets, he repaired to the Hotel de la Poste for lunch, and afterwards walked along the Esplanade to the house of one Guy Billard, a gardener, who was his head prophet’s father. As he thus moved about he was preceded by two Camisards with drawn swords, who made way for him; and several ladies were presented to him who were happy to touch his doublet. The visit over, he once again passed along the Esplanade, still preceded by his two Camisards, and just as he passed the Little Convent he and those with him struck up a psalm tune, and continued singing till they reached Saint-Cesaire, where the hostages were. These he at once sent back.

Five hundred persons from Nimes were awaiting him; refreshments were offered to him, which he accepted gratefully, thanking all those who had gathered together to meet him. At last he went off to St. Denoise, where he was to sup and sleep; but before going to bed he offered up supplications in a loud voice for the king, for M. de Villars, for M. de Lalande, and even for M. de Baville.

The next morning, Cavalier, according to promise, sent a copy of his demands to M. de Villars, who caused it to be laid before the king, along with a full report of all that had passed at the interview at Nimes. As soon as the young chief had sent off his missive, he rejoined his troops at Tarnac, and related all that had passed to Roland, urging him to follow his example. That night he slept at Sauves, having passed through Durfort at the head of his men; a captain of dragoons named Montgros, with twenty-five soldiers, accompanying him everywhere, by M. de Villars’ orders, and seeing that the villages through which they passed furnished him with all that was needed. They left Sauves on May 16th very early in the morning, in order to get to Calvisson, which, as our readers may remember, was the place appointed for the residence of Cavalier during the truce. In passing through Quissac, where they stopped for refreshments, they were joined by Castanet who delivered a long sermon, at which all the Protestants of the neighbourhood were present.

The two battalions of the Charolais regiment which were quartered at Calvisson had received orders on the evening of the 17th to march out next morning, so as to make room for the Camisards.

On the 18th the head of the commissary department, Vincel, ordered suitable accommodation to be provided for Cavalier and his troops; the muster roll being in the hands of M. d’Aygaliers, it would be sent by him or brought in the course of the day. In the meantime, vans were arriving filled with all sorts of provisions, followed by droves of cattle, while a commissary and several clerks, charged with the distribution of rations, brought up the rear.

On the 19th, Catinat, accompanied by twelve Camisards, rode into the town, and was met at the barrier by the commandant and eighty townspeople. As soon as the little band came in sight the commandant reiterated his orders that nothing should be said or done in the town, on pain of corporal punishment, that could offend the Camisards.

At one o’clock P. M. Baron d’Aygaliers arrived, followed in his turn by the chief of the commissariat, Vincel, by Captain Cappon, two other officers named Viala and Despuech, and six dragoons. These were the hostages Cavalier had given.

At six o’clock there was heard a great noise; and shouts of “Cavalier! Cavalier!” resounded on all sides. The young Cevenol was in sight, and the whole population hastened to meet him. He rode at the head of his cavalry, the infantry following, and the whole number — about six hundred men — sang psalms in a loud voice.

When they reached the church, Cavalier drew up before it with all his men in review order, and for some time the singing went on. When it stopped, a long prayer was offered up, which was most edifying to all the bystanders; and this being over, Cavalier went to the quarters assigned him, which were in the best house in Calvisson. Arrived there, he sent out for a dozen loaves that he might judge how his men were going to be fed; not finding them white enough, he complained to M. Vincel, whom he sent for, and who promised that in future the bread should be of a better quality. Having received this assurance, Cavalier gave orders that the loaves in hand should be distributed for that day, but probably fearing poison, he first made M. de Vincel and his clerks taste them in his presence. These duties accomplished, he visited in person all the gates of the town, placed guards and posted sentinels at all the entrances and along all the avenues, the most advanced being three-quarters of a league from the town. Besides this, he placed guards in the streets, and a sentinel at each door of the house he occupied; in addition, thirty guards always slept outside the door of his bedroom, and these accompanied him as an escort when he went out; not that he was afraid, for he was not of a mistrustful character, but that he thought it politic to give people an exalted idea of his importance. As to his soldiers, they were billeted on the inhabitants, and received each as daily rations a pound of meat, a quart of wine, and two and a half pounds of bread.

The same day a convocation was held on the site of the old meeting-house which had been destroyed by the Catholics. It was a very numerous assembly, to which crowds of people came from all parts; but on the following days it was still more numerous; for, as the news spread, people ran with great eagerness to hear the preaching of the word of which they had been so long deprived. D'Aygaliers tells us in his Memoirs that — "No one could help being touched to see a whole people just escaped from fire and sword, coming together in multitudes to mingle their tears and sighs. So famished were they for the manna divine, that they were like people coming out of a besieged city, after a long and cruel famine, to whom peace has brought food in abundance, and who, first devouring it with their eyes, then throw themselves on it, devouring it bodily — meat, bread, and fruit — as it comes to hand. So it was with the unfortunate inhabitants of La Vannage, and even of places more distant still. They saw their brethren assembling in the meadows and at the gates of Calvisson, gathering in crowds and pressing round anyone who started singing a psalm, until at last four or five thousand persons, singing, weeping, and praying, were gathered together, and remained there all day, supplicating God with a devotion that went to every heart and made a deep impression. All night the same things went on; nothing was to be heard but preaching, singing, praying, and prophesying."

But if it was a time of joy for the Protestants, it was a time of humiliation for the Catholics. "Certainly," says a contemporary historian, "it was a very surprising thing, and quite a novelty, to see in a province like Languedoc, where so many troops were quartered, such a large number of villains — all murderers, incendiaries, and guilty of sacrilege — gathered together in one place by permission of those in command of the troops; tolerated in their eccentricities, fed at the public expense, flattered by everyone, and courteously, received by people sent specially to meet them.”

One of those who was most indignant at this state of things was M. de Baville. He was so eager to put an end to it that he went to see the governor, and told him the scandal was becoming too great in his opinion: the assemblies ought to be put an end to by allowing the troops to fall upon them and disperse them; but the governor thought quite otherwise, and told Baville that to act according to his advice would be to set fire to the province again and to scatter for ever people whom they had got together with such difficulty. In any case, he reminded Baville that what he objected to would be over in a few days. His opinion was that de Baville might stifle the expression of his dissatisfaction for a little, to bring about a great good. “More than that,” added the marechal, “the impatience of the priests is most ridiculous. Besides your remonstrances, of which I hope I have now heard the last, I have received numberless letters full of such complaints that it would seem as if the prayers of the Camisards not only grated on the ears of the clergy but flayed them alive. I should like above everything to find out the writers of these letters, in order to have them flogged; but they have taken good care to put no signatures. I regard it as a very great impertinence for those who caused these disturbances to grumble and express their disapproval at my efforts to bring them to an end.” After this speech, M. de Baville saw there was nothing for him to do but to let things take their course.

The course that they took turned Cavalier’s head more and more; for thanks to the injunctions of M. de Villars, all the orders that Cavalier gave were obeyed as if they had been issued by the governor himself. He had a court like a prince, lieutenants like a general, and secretaries like a statesman. It was the duty of one secretary to give leave of absence to those Camisards who had business to attend to or who desired to visit their relations. The following is a copy of the form used for these passports:

“We, the undersigned, secretary to Brother Cavalier, generalissimo of the Huguenots, permit by this order given by him to absent himself on business for three days.

“(Signed) DUPONT.

“Calvisson, this — — ”

And these safe-conducts were as much respected as if they had been signed “Marechal de Villars.”

On the 22nd M. de Saint-Pierre arrived from the court, bringing the reply of the king to the proposals which Cavalier had submitted to M. de Lalande. What this reply was did not transpire; probably it was not in harmony with the pacific intentions of the marechal. At last, on the 25th, the answer to the demands which Cavalier had made to M. de Villars himself arrived. The original paper written by the Camisard chief himself had been sent to Louis XIV, and he returned it with notes in his own writing; thus these two hands, to one of which belonged the shepherd’s crook and to the other the sceptre, had rested on the same sheet of paper. The following is the text of the agreement as given by Cavalier in his Memoirs:

“THE HUMBLE PETITION OF THE REFORMERS OF
LANGUEDOC TO THE KING

“1. That it may please the king to grant us liberty of conscience throughout the province, and to permit us to hold religious meetings in every suitable place, except fortified places and walled cities.

‘Granted, on condition that no churches be built.

“2. That all those in prison or at the galleys who have been sent there since the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, because of their religion, be set at liberty within six weeks from the date of this petition.

‘Granted.

“3. That all those who have left the kingdom because of their religion be allowed to return in freedom and safety, and that their goods and privileges be restored to them.

‘Granted on condition that they take the oath of fidelity to the king.

“4. That the Parliament of Languedoc be reestablished on its ancient footing, and with all its former privileges.

‘The king reserves decision on this point.

“5. That the province of Languedoc be exempted from the poll tax for ten years, this to apply, to Catholics and Protestants alike, both sides having equally suffered.

‘Refused.

“6. That the cities of Perpignan, Montpellier, Cette, and Aiguemortes be assigned us as cities of refuge.

‘Refused.

“7. That the inhabitants of the Cevennes whose houses were burnt or otherwise destroyed during the war be exempt from taxes for seven years.

‘Granted.

“8. That it may please His Majesty to permit Cavalier to choose 2000 men, both from among his own troops and from among those who may be delivered from the prisons and galleys, to form a regiment of dragoons for the service of His Majesty, and that this regiment when formed may at once be ordered to serve His Majesty in Portugal.

‘Granted: and on condition that all the Huguenots everywhere lay down their arms, the king will permit them to live quietly in the free exercise of their religion.’“

“I had been a week at Calvisson,” says Cavalier in his Memoirs, “when I received a letter from M. le Marechal de Villars ordering me to repair to Nimes, as he wished to see me, the answer to my demands having arrived. I obeyed at once, and was very much displeased to find that several of my demands, and in particular the one relating to the cities of refuge, had been refused; but M. le marechal assured me that the king’s word was better than twenty cities of refuge, and that after all the trouble we had given him we should regard it as showing great clemency on his part that he had granted us the greater part of what we had asked. This reasoning was not entirely convincing, but as there was no more time for deliberation, and as I was as anxious for peace as the king himself, I decided to accept gracefully what was offered.”

All the further advantage that Cavalier could obtain from M. de Villars was that the treaty should bear the date of the day on which it had been drawn up; in this manner the prisoners who were to be set at liberty in six weeks gained one week.

M de Villars wrote at the bottom of the treaty, which was signed the same day by him and M. de Baville on the part of the king, and by Cavalier and Daniel Billard on the part of the Protestants, the following ratification:

“In virtue of the plenary powers which we have received from the king, we have granted to the Reformers of Languedoc the articles above made known.

“MARECHAL DE VILLARS J. CAVALIER “LAMOIGNON DE BAVILLE DANIEL BILLARD

“Given at Nimes, the 17th of May 1704”

These two signatures, all unworthy as they were to stand beside their own, gave such great delight to MM. de Villars and de Baville, that they at once sent off fresh orders to Calvisson that the wants of the Camisards should be abundantly supplied until the articles of the treaty were executed — that is to say, until the prisoners and the galley slaves were set at liberty, which, according to article 2 of the treaty, would be within the next six weeks. As to Cavalier, the marechal gave him on the spot a commission as colonel, with a pension of 1200 livres attached, and the power of nominating the subordinate officers in his regiment, and at the same time he handed him a captain’s commission for his young brother.

Cavalier drew up the muster-roll of the regiment the same day, and gave it to the marechal. It was to consist of seven hundred and twelve men, forming fifteen companies, with sixteen captains, sixteen lieutenants, a sergeant-major, and a surgeon-major.

While all this was happening, Roland, taking advantage of the suspension of hostilities, was riding up and down the province as if he were viceroy of the Cevennes, and wherever he appeared he had a magnificent reception. Like Cavalier, he gave leave of absence and furnished escorts, and held himself haughtily, sure that he too would soon be negotiating treaties on terms of equality with marshals of France and governors of provinces. But Roland was much mistaken: M. de Villars had made great concessions to the popularity of Cavalier, but they were the last he intended to make. So, instead of being in his turn summoned to Nimes, or Uzes, to confer with M. de Villars, Roland merely received an intimation from Cavalier that he desired to speak with him on important business.

They met near Anduze, and Cavalier, faithful to the promise given to M. de Villars, neglected no argument that he could think of to induce Roland to follow his example; but Roland would listen to nothing. Then, when Cavalier saw that arguments and promises were of no avail, he raised his voice in anger; but Roland, laying his hand on his shoulder, told him that his head was turned, that he should remember that he, Roland, was his senior in command, and therefore bound by nothing that had been promised in his name by his junior, and that he had registered a vow in Heaven that nothing would persuade him to make peace unless complete liberty of conscience were granted to all. The young Cevenol, who was unaccustomed to such language, laid his hand on the hilt of his sword, Roland, stepping back, drew his, and the consultation would have ended in a duel if the prophets had not thrown themselves between them, and succeeded in getting Roland to consent to one of their number, a man much esteemed among the Huguenots, named Salomon, going back to Nimes with Cavalier to learn from M. de Villars' own mouth what the exact terms were which Cavalier had accepted and now offered to Roland.

In a couple of hours Cavalier and Salomon set out together, and arrived at Nimes on the 27th May, escorted by twenty-five men; they halted at the tower of Magne, and the Protestants of the city came out to meet them, bringing refreshments; then, after prayers and a hasty meal, they advanced to the barracks and crossed the courtyards. The concourse of people and the enthusiasm was no whit less than on Cavalier's first entry, more than three hundred persons kissing his hands and knees. Cavalier was dressed on this occasion in a doublet of grey cloth, and a beaver hat, laced with gold, and adorned with a white feather.

Cavalier and his travelling-companion went direct to the garden of the Recollets, and hardly had they got there than MM. de Villars and de Baville, accompanied by Lalande and Sandricourt, came out to meet them: the conference lasted three hours, but all that could be learned of the result was that Salomon had declared that his brethren would never lay down their arms till full liberty of conscience had been secured to them. In consequence of this declaration, it was decided that Cavalier and his regiment should be despatched to Spain without delay, in order to weaken the Calvinist forces to that extent; meantime Salomon was sent back to Roland with a positive promise that if he would surrender, as Cavalier had done, he would be granted the same conditions — that is to say, receive a commission as colonel, have the right to name the officers of his regiment, and receive a pension of 1200 livres. On quitting the garden of the Recollets, Cavalier found as great a crowd as ever waiting for him, and so closely did they press on him that two of his men were obliged to ride before him with drawn sabres to clear a way for him till the Montpellier road was reached. He lay that night at Langlade, in order to rejoin his troops early next morning.

But during his absence things had happened among these men, who had hitherto obeyed him blindly, which he little expected. He had left, as usual, Ravanel in command; but hardly had he ridden away when Ravanel began to take all kinds of precautions, ordering the men not to lay aside their arms. The negotiations with M. de Villars had made him most anxious; he looked upon all the promises given as snares, and he regarded the compromise favoured by his chief as a defection on Cavalier’s part. He therefore called all the officers and men together, told them of his fears, and ended by imbuing them with his suspicions. This was all the more easily done, as it was very well known that Cavalier had joined the Huguenots less from devotion to the cause than to avenge a private wrong, and on many occasions had given rise to the remark that he had more genius than religion.

So, on getting back to Calvisson, the young chief found his principal officers, Ravanel at their head, drawn up in the market-place, waiting for him. As soon as he drew near they told him that they were determined to know at once what were the conditions of the treaty he had signed with the marechal; they had made up their minds to have a plain answer without delay. Such a way of speaking to him was so strange and unexpected, that Cavalier shrugged his shoulders and replied that such matters were no business of theirs, being too high for their intelligence; that it was his business to decide what course to take and theirs to take it; it had always been so in the past, and with the help of God and his own, Cavalier’s, goodwill, it should still be so in future; and having so spoken, he told them to disperse. Ravanel upon this came forward, and in the name of all the others said they would not go away until they knew what orders Cavalier was about to give the troops, that they might consult among themselves whether they should obey them or not. This insubordination was too much for Cavalier’s patience.

“The orders are,” he said, “to put on the uniforms that are being made for you, and to follow me to Portugal.”

The effect of such words on men who were expecting nothing less than the re-enactment of the Edict of Nantes, can be easily imagined; the words “coward” and “traitor” could be distinguished above the murmurs, as Cavalier noticed with increasing astonishment. Raising himself in his stirrups, and glancing round with that look before which they had been used to tremble, he asked in a voice as calm as if all the demons of anger were not raging in his heart, “Who called Jean Cavalier traitor and coward?”

“I,” said Ravanel, crossing his arms on his breast.

Cavalier drew a pistol from his holsters, and striking those near him with the butt end, opened a way towards his lieutenant, who drew his sword; but at this moment the commissary-general, Vincel, and Captain Cappon threw themselves between the two and asked the cause of the quarrel.

"The cause," said Ravanel, "is that the Cadets of the Cross, led by the 'Hermit,' have just knocked out the brains of two of our brethren, who were coming to join us, and are hindering others front attending our meetings to worship God: the conditions of the truce having been thus broken, is it likely they will keep those of the treaty? We refuse to accept the treaty."

"Sir," said Vincel, "if the 'Hermit' has done what you say, it is against the orders of the marachal, and the misdoer will be punished; besides, the large number of strangers at present in Calvisson ought to be sufficient proof that no attempt has been made to prevent the new converts from coming to the town, and it seems to me that you have been too easily led to believe everything that malicious people have told you."

"I believe what I choose to believe," said Ravanel impatiently; "but what I know and say is, that I shall never lay down arms till the king grants us full liberty of conscience, permission to rebuild our places of worship, and sends us back all prisoners and exiles."

"But, judging by your tone," said Cavalier, who had till now remained silent while toying with his pistol, "you seem to be in command here; have we changed, parts without my being aware?"

"It is possible," said Ravanel.

Cavalier burst out laughing.

"It seems to astonish you," said Ravanel, "but it is true. Make peace for yourself, lay down what conditions suit you, sell yourself for whatever you will bring; my only reply is, You are a coward and a traitor. But as to the troops, they will not lay down arms except on the conditions formulated by me."

Cavalier tried to get at Ravanel, but seeing from his paleness and his smile that terrible things would happen if he reached his lieutenant, Vincel and Cappon, backed by some Camisards, threw themselves before his horse. Just then the whole band shouted with one voice, "No peace! no peace! no reconciliation till our temples are restored!" Cavalier then saw for the first time that things were more serious than he had believed, but Vincel, Cappon, Berlie, and about twenty Camisards surrounded the young chief and forced him to enter a house; it was the house of Vincel.

They had hardly got indoors when the 'generale' was sounded: resisting all entreaties, Cavalier sprang to the door, but was detained by Berlie, who said that the first thing he ought to do was to write M. de Villars an account of what had happened, who would then take measures to put things straight.

“You are right,” said Cavalier; “as I have so many enemies, the general might be told if I were killed that I had broken my word. Give me pen and ink.”

Writing materials were brought, and he wrote to M. de Villars.

“Here,” he said, giving the letter unsealed to Vincel, “set out for Nimes and give this to the marechal, and tell him, if I am killed in the attempt I am about to make, I died his humble servant.”

With these words, he darted out of the house and mounted his horse, being met at the door by twelve to fifteen men who had remained faithful to him. He asked them where Ravanel and his troops were, not seeing a single Camisard in the streets; one of the soldiers answered that they were probably still in town, but that they were moving towards Les Garrigues de Calvisson. Cavalier set off at a gallop to overtake them.

In crossing the market-place he met Catinat, walking between two prophets, one called Moses and the other Daniel Guy; Catinat was just back from a visit to the mountains, so that he had taken no part in the scene of insubordination that had so lately been enacted.

Cavalier felt a ray of hope; he was sure he could depend on Catinat as on himself. He hurried to greet him, holding out his hand; but Catinat drew back his.

“What does this mean?” cried Cavalier, the blood mounting to his forehead.

“It means,” answered Catinat, “that you are a traitor, and I cannot give my hand to a traitor.”

Cavalier gave a cry of rage, and advancing on Catinat, raised his cane to strike him; but Moses and Daniel Guy threw themselves between, so that the blow aimed at Catinat fell on Moses. At the same moment Catinat, seeing Cavalier’s gesture, drew a pistol from his belt. As it was at full cock, it went off in his hand, a bullet piercing Guy’s hat, without, however, wounding him.

At the noise of the report shouts were heard about a hundred yards away. It was the Camisards, who had been on the point of leaving the town, but hearing the shot had turned back, believing that some of their brethren were being murdered. On seeing them appear, Cavalier forgot Catinat, and rode straight towards them. As soon as they caught sight of him they halted, and Ravanel advanced before them ready for every danger.

“Brethren,” he cried, “the traitor has come once more to tempt us. Begone, Judas! You have no business here.”

“But I have,” exclaimed Cavalier. “I have to punish a scoundrel called Ravanel, if he has courage to follow me.”

“Come on, then,” cried Ravanel, darting down a small side-street, “and let us have done with it.” The Camisards made a motion as if to follow them, but Ravanel turning towards them ordered them to remain where they were.

They obeyed, and thus Cavalier could see that, insubordinate as they had been towards him, they were ready to obey another.

Just at the moment as he turned into the narrow street where the dispute was to be settled once for all, Moses and Guy came up, and seizing the bridle of his horse stopped him, while the Camisards who were on the side of Cavalier surrounded Ravanel and forced him to return to his soldiers. The troops struck up a psalm, and resumed their march, while Cavalier was held back by force.

At last, however, the young Cevenol succeeded in breaking away from those who surrounded him, and as the street by which the Camisards had retired was blocked, he dashed down another. The two prophets suspecting his intention, hurried after the troops by the most direct route, and got up with them, just as Cavalier, who had made the circuit of the town, came galloping across the plain to intercept their passage. The troops halted, and Ravanel gave orders to fire. The first rank raised their muskets and took aim, thus indicating that they were ready to obey. But it was not a danger of this kind that could frighten Cavalier; he continued to advance. Then Moses seeing his peril, threw himself between the Camisards and him, stretching out his arms and shouting, “Stop! stop! misguided men! Are you going to kill Brother Cavalier like a highwayman and thief? You must pardon him, my brethren! you must pardon him! If he has done wrong in the past, he will do better in future.”

Then those who had taken aim at Cavalier grounded their muskets, and Cavalier changing menace for entreaty, begged them not to break the promise that he had made in their name; whereupon the prophets struck up a psalm, and the rest of the soldiers joining in, his voice was completely drowned. Nevertheless, Cavalier did not lose heart, but accompanied them on their march to Saint-Esteve, about a league farther on, unable to relinquish all hope. On reaching Saint-Esteve the singing ceased for a moment, and he made another attempt to recall them to obedience. Seeing, however, that it was all in vain, he gave up hope, and calling out, “At least defend yourselves as well as you can, for the dragoons will soon be on you,” he set his horse’s head towards the town. Then turning to them for the last time, he said, “Brethren, let those who love me follow me!” He pronounced these words in tones so full of grief and affection that many were shaken in their resolution; but Ravanel and Moses seeing the effect he had produced, began to shout, “The sword of the Lord!” Immediately all the troops turned their back on Cavalier except about forty men who had joined him on his first appearance.

Cavalier went into a house near by, and wrote another letter to M. de Villars, in which he told him what had just taken place, the efforts he had made to win back his troops, and the conditions they demanded. He ended by assuring him that he would make still further efforts, and promised the marechal that he would keep him informed of everything that went on. He then withdrew to Cardet, not venturing to return to Calvisson.

Both Cavalier’s letters reached M. de Villars at the same time; in the first impulse of anger aroused by this unexpected check, he issued the following order:

“Since coming to this province and taking over the government by order of the king, our sole thought has been how to put an end to the disorders we found existing here by gentle measures, and to restore peace and to preserve the property of those who had taken no part in the disturbances. To that end we obtained His Majesty’s pardon for those rebels who had, by the persuasion of their chiefs, been induced to lay down their arms; the only condition exacted being that they should throw themselves on the king’s clemency and beg his permission to expiate their crime by adventuring their lives in his service. But, being informed that instead of keeping the engagements they had made by signing petitions, by writing letters, and by speaking words expressing their intentions, some among them have been trying to delude the minds of the people with false hopes of full liberty for the exercise of this so-called Reformed religion, which there has never been any intention of granting, but which we have always declared as clearly as we could, to be contrary to the will of the king and likely to bring about great evils for which it would be difficult to find a remedy, it becomes necessary to prevent those who give belief to these falsehoods from expecting to escape from well-deserved chastisement. We therefore declare hereby that all religious assemblies are expressly forbidden under the penalties proclaimed in the edicts and ordinances of His Majesty, and that these will be more strictly enforced in the future than in the past.

"Furthermore, we order all the troops under our command to break up such assemblies by force, as having been always illegal, and we desire to impress on the new converts of this province that they are to give their obedience where it is due, and we forbid them to give any credence to the false reports which the enemies of their repose are spreading abroad. If they let themselves be led astray, they will soon find themselves involved in troubles and misfortunes, such as the loss of their lands, the ruin of their families, and the desolation of their country; and we shall take care that the true authors of these misfortunes shall receive punishment proportioned to their crime.

"MARECHAL DE VILLARS

"Given at Nimes the 27th day of May 1704"

This order, which put everything back upon the footing on which it had been in the time of M. de Montrevel, had hardly been issued than d'Aygaliers, in despair at seeing the result of so much labour destroyed in one day, set off for the mountains to try and find Cavalier. He found him at Cardet, whither, as we have said, he had retired after the day of Calvisson. Despite the resolution which Cavalier had taken never to show his face again to the marechal, the baron repeated to him so many times that M. de Villars was thoroughly convinced that what had happened had not been his fault, he having done everything that he could to prevent it, that the young chief began to feel his self-confidence and courage returning, and hearing that the marachal had expressed himself as very much pleased with his conduct, to which Vincel had borne high testimony, made up his mind to return to Nimes. They left Cardet at once, followed by the forty men who had remained true to Cavalier, ten on horse and thirty on foot, and arrived on the 31st May at Saint-Genies, whither M. de Villars had come to meet them.

The assurances of d'Aygaliers were justified. The marechal received Cavalier as if he were still the chief of a powerful party and able to negotiate with him on terms of equality. At Cavalier's request, in order to prove to him that he stood as high in his good opinion as ever, the marechal returned once more to gentle methods, and mitigated the severity of his first proclamation by a second, granting an extension of the amnesty:

"The principal chiefs of the rebels, with the greater number of their followers, having surrendered, and having received the king's pardon, we declare that we give to all those who have taken up arms until next Thursday, the 5th instant inclusive, the opportunity of receiving the like pardon, by surrendering to us at Anduze, or to M. le Marquis de Lalande at Alais, or to M. de Menon at Saint Hippolyte, or to the commandants of Uzes, Nimes, and Lunel. But the fifth day passed, we shall lay a heavy hand on all rebels, pillaging and burning all the places which have given them refuge, provisions, or help of any kind; and that they may not plead ignorance of this proclamation, we order it to be publicly read and posted up in every suitable place.

"MARECHAL DE VILLARS

"At Saint-Genies, the 1st June 1704"

The next day, in order to leave no doubt as to his good intentions, the marechal had the gibbets and scaffolds taken down, which until then had been permanent erections.

At the same time all the Huguenots were ordered to make a last effort to induce the Camisard chiefs to accept the conditions offered them by M. de Villars. The towns of Alais, Anduze, Saint-Jean, Sauve, Saint-Hippolyte, and Lasalle, and the parishes of Cros, Saint-Roman, Manoblet, Saint-Felix, Lacadiere, Cesas, Cambo, Colognac, and Vabre were ordered to send deputies to Durfort to confer as to the best means of bringing about that peace which everyone desired. These deputies wrote at once to M. de Villars to beg him to send them M. d'Aygaliers, and to M. d'Aygaliers to request him to come.

Both consented to do as they were asked, and M. d'Aygaliers arrived at Durfort on the 3rd of June 1704.

The deputies having first thanked him for the trouble which he had taken to serve the common cause during the past year, resolved to divide their assembly into two parts, one of which, was to remain permanently sitting, while the other went to seek Roland and Ravanel to try and obtain a cessation of hostilities. The deputies charged with this task were ordered to make it quite clear to the two chiefs that if they did not accept the proposals made by M. de Villars, the Protestants in general would take up arms and hunt them down, and would cease to supply them with the means of subsistence.

On hearing this, Roland made reply that the deputies were to go back at once to those who sent them, and threatened, should they ever show him their faces again, to fire on them.

This answer put an end to the assembly, the deputies dispersed, and d’Aygaliers returned to the Marechal de Villars to make his report.

Hardly had he done this when a letter from Roland arrived, in which the Camisard chief asked M. de Villars to grant him an interview, such as he had granted to Cavalier. This letter was addressed to d’Aygaliers, who immediately communicated its contents to the marechal, from whom he received orders to set out at once to find Roland and to spare no pains to bring him round.

D’Aygaliers, who was always indefatigable when working for his country, started the same day, and went to a mountain about three-quarters of a league from Anduze, where Roland awaited him. After a conference of two hours, it was agreed that hostages should be exchanged and negotiations entered upon.

Consequently, M. de Villars on his side sent Roland M. de Montrevel, an officer commanding a battalion of marines, and M. de la Maison-Blanche, captain of the Froulay regiment; while Roland in return sent M. de Villars four of his principal officers with the title of plenipotentiaries.

Unskilled in diplomacy as these envoys were, and laughable as they appeared to contemporary historians, they received nevertheless the marechal’s consent to the following conditions:

1. That Cavalier and Roland should each be placed in charge of a regiment serving abroad, and that each of them should be allowed a minister.
2. That all the prisoners should be released and the exiles recalled.
3. That the Protestants should be permitted to leave the kingdom, taking their effects with them.
4. That those Camisards who desired to remain might do so, on giving up their arms.
5. That those who were abroad might return.
6. That no one should be molested on account of his religion provided everyone remained quietly at home.

7. That indemnities should be borne by the whole province, and not exacted specially from the Protestants.
8. That a general amnesty should be granted to all without reserve.

These articles were laid before Roland and Ravanel by d’Aygaliers. Cavalier, who from the day he went back to Nimes had remained in the governor’s suite, asked leave to return with the baron, and was permitted to do so. D’Aygaliers and he set out together in consequence for Anduze, and met Roland and Ravanel about a quarter of a league from the town, waiting to know the result of the negotiations. They were accompanied by MM. de Montbel and de Maison-Blanche, the Catholic hostages.

As soon as Cavalier and Roland met they burst out into recriminations and reproaches, but through the efforts of d’Aygaliers they soon became more friendly, and even embraced on parting.

But Ravanel was made of harder stuff: as soon as he caught sight of Cavalier he called him “traitor,” saying that for his part he would never surrender till the Edict of Nantes was re-enacted; then, having warned them that the governor’s promises were not to be trusted, and having predicted that a day would come when they would regret their too great confidence in him, he left the conference and rejoined his troops, which, with those of Roland, were drawn up on a mountain about three-quarters of a league distant.

The negotiators did not, however, despair. Ravanel had gone away, but Roland had debated with them at some length, so they determined to speak to “the brethren” — that is, to the troops under Roland and Ravanel, whose headquarters at the moment were at Leuzies, in order that they might know exactly what articles had been agreed on between Roland’s envoys and the marechal. Those who made up their minds to take this step were, Cavalier, Roland, Moise, Saint-Paul, Laforet, Maille, and d’Aygaliers. We take the following account of what happened in consequence of this decision from d’Aygaliers’ Memoirs:

“We had no sooner determined on this plan, than, anxious to carry it out, we set off. We followed a narrow mountain path on the face of the cliff which rose up to our right; to our left flowed the Gardon.

“Having gone about a league, we came in sight of the troops, about 3000 strong; an advanced post barred our way.

“Thinking it was placed there in our honour, I was advancing unsuspiciously, when suddenly we found our road cut off by Camisards to right and left, who threw themselves on Roland and forced him in among their troops. Maille and Malplach were dragged from their horses. As to Cavalier, who was somewhat behind, as soon as he saw people coming towards him with uplifted sabres and shouting Traitor! he put spurs to his horse and went off at full gallop, followed by some townspeople from Anduze who had come with us, and who, now that they saw the reception we met with, were ready to die with fear.

“I was too far forward to escape: five or six muskets rested on my breast and a pistol pressed each ear; so I made up my mind to be bold. I told the troopers to fire; I was willing to die in the service of my prince, my country, and my religion, as well as for themselves, whom I was trying to benefit by procuring them the king’s goodwill.

“These words, which I repeated several times in the midst of the greatest uproar, gave them pause.

“They commanded me to retire, as they did not want to kill me. I said I should do nothing of the kind: I was going into the middle of the troops to defend Roland against the charge of treason, or be put to death myself, unless I could convince them that what I had proposed to him and Cavalier was for the good of the country, of our religion, and the brethren; and having thus expostulated at the top of my voice against thirty voices all trying to drown mine for about an hour, I offered to fight the man who had induced them to oppose us.

“At this offer they pointed their muskets at me once more; but Maille, Malplach, and some others threw themselves before me, and although they were unarmed, had enough influence to hinder my being insulted; I was forced, however, to retreat.

“In leaving, I warned them that they were about to bring great misfortunes on the province, whereupon a man named Claris stepped out from among the troops, and approaching me exclaimed, ‘Go on, sir, and God bless you! We know that you mean well, and were the first to be taken in. But go on working for the good of the country, and God will bless you.’“

D’Aygaliers returned to the marechal, who, furious at the turn things had taken, resolved instantly to break off all negotiations and have recourse once more to measures of severity. However, before actually carrying out this determination, he wrote the following letter to the king:

"SIRE, — It is always my glory to execute faithfully your Majesty's orders, whatever those orders may be; but I should have been able, on many occasions since coming here, to display my zeal for your Majesty's service in other ways if I had not had to deal with madmen on whom no dependence could be placed. As soon as we were ready to attack them, they offered to submit, but a little later changed their minds again. Nothing could be a greater proof of madness than their hesitation to accept a pardon of which they were unworthy, and which was so generously offered by your Majesty. If they do not soon make up their minds, I shall bring them back to the paths of duty by force, and thus restore this province to that state of peace which has been disturbed by these fools."

The day after writing this letter to the king, Roland sent Maille to M. de Villars to beg him to wait till Saturday and Sunday the 7th and the 8th June were over, before resorting to severity, that being the end of the truce. He gave him a solemn promise that he would, in the interval, either bring in his troops to the last man, or would himself surrender along with a hundred and fifty followers. The marechal consented to wait till Saturday morning, but as soon as Saturday arrived he gave orders to attack the Camisards, and the next day led a considerable body of troops to Carnoulet, intending to take the Huguenots by surprise, as word had been brought that they were all gathered there. They, however, received intelligence of his plan, and evacuated the village during the night.

The village had to pay dearly for its sin of hospitality; it was pillaged and burnt down: the miquelets even murdered two women whom they found there, and d'Aygaliers failed to obtain any satisfaction for this crime. In this manner M. de Villars kept the fatal promise he had given, and internecine war raged once more.

Furious at having missed the Camisards, de Menon having heard from his scouts that Roland was to sleep next night at the chateau de Prade, went to M. de Villars and asked leave to conduct an expedition against the chief. He was almost sure of taking Roland by surprise, having procured a guide whose knowledge of the country was minute. The marechal gave him carte blanche. In the evening Menon set out with two hundred grenadiers. He had already put three-quarters of the way behind him without being discovered, when an Englishman met them by chance. This man was serving under Roland, but had been visiting his sweetheart in a neighbouring village, and was on his way home when he fell among Menon's grenadiers. Without a thought for his own safety, he fired off his gun, shouting, “Fly! fly! The royals are upon you!”

The sentinels took up the cry, Roland jumped out of bed, and, without staying for clothes or horse, ran off in his shirt, escaping by a postern gate which opened on the forest just as de Menon entered by another. He found Roland’s bed still warm, and took possession of his clothes, finding in a coat pocket a purse containing thirty-five Louis, and in the stables three superb horses. The Camisards answered this beginning of hostilities by a murder. Four of them, thinking they had reasons for displeasure against one of M. de Baville’s subordinates, named Daude, who was both mayor and magistrate; at Le Vigan, hid in a corn-field which he had to pass on his way back from La Valette, his country place. Their measures were successful: Daude came along just as was expected, and as he had not the slightest suspicion of the impending danger, he continued conversing with M. de Mondardier, a gentleman of the neighbourhood who had asked for the; hand of Daude’s daughter in marriage that very day. Suddenly he found himself surrounded by four men, who, upbraiding him for his exactions and cruelties, shot him twice through the head with a pistol. They offered no violence to M. de Mondardier except to deprive him of his laced hat and sword. The day on which M. de Villars heard of its murder he set a price on the heads of Roland, Ravanel, and Catinat. Still the example set by Cavalier, joined to the resumption of hostilities, was not without influence on the Camisards; every day letters arrived from single troopers offering to lay down their arms, and in one day thirty rebels came in and put themselves into Lalande’s hands, while twenty surrendered to Grandval; these were accorded not only pardon, but received a reward, in hopes that they might be able to induce others to do like them; and on the 15th June eight of the troops which had abandoned Cavalier at Calvisson made submission; while twelve others asked to be allowed to return to their old chief to follow him wherever he went. This request was at once granted: they were sent to Valabregues, where they found forty-two of their old comrades, amongst whom were Duplan and Cavalier’s young brother, who had been ordered there a few days before. As they arrived they were given quarters in the barracks, and received good pay — the chiefs forty sous a day, and the privates ten. So they felt as happy as possible, being well fed and well lodged, and spent their time preaching, praying, and psalm-singing, in season and out of season. All this, says La Baume, was so disagreeable to the inhabitants of the place, who were Catholics, that if they had not been guarded by the king’s soldiers they would have been pitched into the Rhone.

CHAPTER V

Meantime the date of Cavalier’s departure drew near. A town was to be named in which he was to reside at a sufficient distance from the theatre of war to prevent the rebels from depending on him any more; in this town he was to organise his regiment, and as soon as it was complete it was to go, under his command, to Spain, and fight for the king. M. de Villars was still on the same friendly terms with him, treating him, not like a rebel, but according to his new rank in the French army. On the 21st June he told him that he was to get ready to leave the next day, and at the same time he handed him an advance on their future pay — fifty Louis for himself, thirty for Daniel Billard, who had been made lieutenant-colonel in the place of Ravanel, ten for each captain, five for each lieutenant, two for each sergeant, and one for each private. The number of his followers had then reached one hundred and fifty, only sixty of whom were armed. M. de Vassiniac, major in the Fimarcn regiment, accompanied them with fifty dragoons and fifty of the rank and file from Hainault.

All along the road Cavalier and his men met with a courteous reception; at Macon they found orders awaiting them to halt. Cavalier at once wrote to M. de Chamillard to tell him that he had things of importance to communicate to him, and the minister sent a courier of the Cabinet called Lavallee to bring Cavalier to Versailles. This message more than fulfilled all Cavalier’s hopes: he knew that he had been greatly talked about at court, and in spite of his natural modesty the reception he had met with at Times had given him new ideas, if not of his own merit, at least of his own importance. Besides, he felt that his services to the king deserved some recognition.

The way in which Cavalier was received by Chamillard did not disturb these golden dreams: the minister welcomed the young colonel like a man whose worth he appreciated, and told him that the great lords and ladies of the court were not less favourably disposed towards him. The next day Chamillard announced to Cavalier that the king desired to see him, and that he was to keep himself prepared for a summons to court. Two days later, Cavalier received a letter from the minister telling him to be at the palace at four o’clock in the afternoon, and he would place him on the grand staircase, up which the king would pass.

Cavalier put on his handsomest clothes, for the first time in his life perhaps taking trouble with his toilet. He had fine features, to which his extreme youth, his long fair hair, and the gentle expression of his eyes lent much charm. Two years of warfare had given him a martial air; in short, even among the most elegant, he might pass as a beau cavalier.

At three o’clock he reached Versailles, and found Chamillard waiting for him; all the courtiers of every rank were in a state of great excitement, for they had learned that the great Louis had expressed a wish to meet the late Cevenol chief, whose name had been pronounced so loud and so often in the mountains of Languedoc that its echoes had resounded in the halls of Versailles. Cavalier had not been mistaken in thinking that everyone was curious to see him, only as no one yet knew in what light the king regarded him, the courtiers dared not accost him for fear of compromising their dignity; the manner of his reception by His Majesty would regulate the warmth of his reception by everyone else.

Met thus by looks of curiosity and affected silence, the young colonel felt some embarrassment, and this increased when Chamillard, who had accompanied him to his appointed place, left him to rejoin the king. However, in a few moments he did what embarrassed people so often do, hid his shyness under an air of disdain, and, leaning on the balustrade, crossed his legs and played with the feather of his hat.

When half an hour had passed in this manner, a great commotion was heard: Cavalier turned in the direction from which it came, and perceived the king just entering the vestibule. It was the first time he had seen him, but he recognized him at once. Cavalier’s knees knocked together and his face flushed.

The king mounted the stairs step by step with his usual dignity, stopping from time to time to say a word or make a sign with head or hand. Behind him, two steps lower, came Chamillard, moving and stopping as the king moved and stopped, and answering the questions which His Majesty put to him in a respectful but formal and precise manner.

Reaching the level on which Cavalier stood, the king stopped under pretext of pointing out to Chamillard a new ceiling which Le Brun had just finished, but really to have a good look at the singular man who had maintained a struggle against two marshals of France and treated with a third on equal terms. When he had examined him quite at his ease, he turned to Chamillard, pretending he had only just caught sight of the stranger, and asked:

“Who is this young gentleman?”

“Sire,” answered the minister, stepping forward to present him to the king, “this is Colonel Jean Cavalier.”

“Ah yes,” said the king contemptuously, “the former baker of Anduze!”

And shrugging his shoulders disdainfully, he passed on.

Cavalier on his side had, like Chamillard, taken a step forward, when the scornful answer of the great king changed him into a statue. For an instant he stood motionless and pale as death, then instinctively he laid his hand on his sword, but becoming conscious that he was lost if he remained an instant longer among these people, whom not one of his motions escaped, although they pretended to despise him too much to be aware of his presence, he dashed down the staircase and through the hall, upsetting two or three footmen who were in his way, hurried into the garden, ran across it at full speed, and regaining his room at the hotel, threw himself on the floor, where he rolled like a maniac, uttering cries of rage, and cursing the hour when, trusting to the promises of M. de Villars, he had abandoned the mountains where he was as much a king as Louis XIV at Versailles. The same evening he received orders to leave Paris and rejoin his regiment at Macon. He therefore set out the next morning, without seeing M. de Chamillard again.

Cavalier on arriving at Macon found that his comrades had had a visit from M. d’Aygaliers, who had come again to Paris, in the hope of obtaining more from the king than M. de Villars could or would grant.

Cavalier, without telling his comrades of the strange manner in which the king had received him, gave them to understand that he was beginning to fear that not only would the promises they had received be broken, but that some strange trick would be played upon them.

Thereupon these men, whose chief and oracle he had been for so long, asked him what they ought to do; Cavalier replied that if they would follow him, their best course and his would be to take the first opportunity of gaining the frontier and leaving the country. They all declared themselves ready to follow him anywhere. This caused Cavalier a new pang of regret, for he could not help recollecting that he had once had under his command fifteen hundred men like these.

The next day Cavalier and his comrades set out on their march without knowing whither they were being taken, not having been able to obtain any information as to their destination from their escort — a silence which confirmed them in their resolution. As soon, therefore, as they reached Onnan, Cavalier declared that he considered that the looked-for opportunity had arrived, asking them if they were still in the same mind: they returned that they would do whatever he advised. Cavalier then ordered them to hold themselves in readiness, Daniel offered up a prayer, and the prayer ended, the whole company deserted in a body, and, crossing Mont Belliard, entered Porentruy, and took the road to Lausanne.

Meantime d’Aygaliers, in his turn, arrived at Versailles, with letters from M. de Villars for the Duke of Beauvilliers, president of the king’s council, and for Chamillard. The evening of his arrival he delivered these letters to those to whom they were addressed, and both gentlemen promised to present him to the king.

Four days later, Chamillard sent word to d’Aygaliers that he was to be next day at the door of the king’s chamber at the time when the council entered. D’Aygaliers was punctual, the king appeared at the usual hour, and as he paused before d’Aygaliers, Chamillard came forward and said:

“Baron d’Aygaliers, sire.”

“I am very glad to see you, sir,” said the king, “for I am very much pleased with the zeal you have displayed in Languedoc in my service — very much pleased indeed.”

“Sire,” answered d’Aygaliers, “I consider myself most unfortunate in that I have been able to accomplish nothing deserving of the gracious words which your Majesty deigns to address me, and I pray God of His grace to grant me in the future an opportunity of proving my zeal and loyalty in your Majesty’s service more clearly than hitherto.”

“Never mind, never mind,” said the king. “I repeat, sir, that I am very much pleased with what you have done.”

And he entered the room where the council was waiting.

D’Aygaliers went away only half satisfied: he had not come so far only to receive commendation from the king, but in the hope of obtaining some concession for his brethren; but with Louis XIV it was impossible either to intercede or complain, one could only wait.

The same evening Chamillard sent for the baron, and told him that as Marechal Villars had mentioned in his letter that the Camisards had great confidence in him, d’Aygaliers, he wished to ask him if he were willing to go once more to them and try and bring them back to the path of duty.

“Certainly I am willing; but I fear things have now got so far that there will be great difficulty in calming the general perturbation of mind.”

“But what can these people want?” asked Chamillard, as if he had just heard them spoken of for the first time, “and by what means can we pacify them?”

“In my opinion,” said the baron, “the king should allow to all his subjects the free exercise of their religion.”

“What! legalise once more the exercise of the so-called Reformed religion!” exclaimed the minister. “Be sure you never mention such a thing again. The king would rather see his kingdom destroyed than consent to such a measure.”

“Monseigneur,” replied the baron, “if that is the case, then I must say with great regret that I know of no other way to calm the discontent which will ultimately result in the ruin of one of the fairest provinces in France.”

“But that is unheard-of obstinacy,” said the minister, lost in astonishment; “these people will destroy themselves, and drag their country down with them. If they cannot conform to our religion, why do they not worship God in their own way at home? No one will disturb them as long as they don’t insist on public worship.”

“At first that was all they wanted, monseigneur; and I am convinced that if people had not been dragged to confession and communion by force, it would have been easy to keep them in that submissive frame of mind from which they were only driven by despair; but at present they say that it is not enough to pray at home, they want to be married, to have their children baptised and instructed, and to die and be buried according to the ordinances of their own faith.”

“Where may you have seen anyone who was ever made to communicate by force?” asked Chamillard.

D’Aygaliers looked at the minister in surprise, thinking he spoke in joke; but seeing he was quite serious, he answered:

“Alas, monseigneur, my late father and my mother, who is still living, are both instances of people subjected to this indignity.”

“Are you, then, not a Catholic?” asked Chamillard.

“No, monseigneur,” replied d’Aygaliers.

“Then how did you manage to return to France?”

“To speak the truth, sir, I only came back to help my mother to escape; but she never could make up her mind to leave France, as such a step was surrounded by many difficulties which she feared she could never surmount. So she asked my other relations to persuade me to remain. I yielded to their importunities on condition that they would never interfere with my beliefs. To accomplish this end they got a priest with whom they were intimate to say that I had changed my views once more, and I did not contradict the report. It was a great sin on my part, and I deeply repent it. I must add, however, that whenever anyone has asked me the question your Excellency asked me just now I have always given the same reply.”

The minister did not seem to take the baron’s frankness in bad part; only he remarked, when dismissing him, that he hoped he would find out some way of ridding the kingdom of those who refused to think in religious matters as His Majesty commanded.

D’Aygaliers replied that it was a problem to which he had given much thought, but without ever being able to find a solution, but that he would think about it more earnestly in future. He then withdrew.

Some days later, Chamillard sent ward to d’Aygaliers that the king would graciously give him a farewell audience. The baron relates what took place at this second interview, as follows.

“His Majesty,” says he, “received me in the council chamber, and was so good as to repeat once more in the presence of all his ministers that he was very much pleased with my services, but that there was one thing about me he should like to correct. I begged His Majesty to tell me what the fault was, and I should try to get rid of it at, the peril of my life.”

“‘It is your religion,’ said the king. ‘I should like to have you become a good Catholic, so that I might be able to grant you favours and enable you to serve me better.’ His Majesty added that I ought to seek instruction, and that then I should one day recognise what a great benefit he desired to bring within my reach.

“I answered that I would esteem myself happy if at the cost of my life I could prove the burning zeal with which I was filled for the service of the greatest of earthly kings, but that I should be unworthy of the least of his favours if I obtained it by hypocrisy or by anything of which my conscience did not approve, but that I was grateful for the goodness which made him anxious for my salvation. I told him also that I had already taken every opportunity of receiving instruction, and had tried to put aside the prejudices arising from my birth, such as often hindered people from recognising the truth, with the result that I had at one time almost lost all sense of religion, until God, taking pity on me, had opened my eyes and brought me out of that deplorable condition, making me see that the faith in which I had been born was the only one for me. ‘And I can assure your Majesty,’ I added, ‘that many of the Languedoc bishops who ought, it seems to me, to try to make us Catholics, are the instruments which Providence uses to prevent us from becoming so. For instead of attracting us by gentleness and good example, they ceaselessly subject us to all kinds of persecutions, as if to convince us that God is punishing us for our cowardice in giving up a religion which we know to be good, by delivering us up to pastors who, far from labouring to assure our salvation, use all their efforts to drive us to despair.”

“At this the king shrugged his shoulders and said, ‘Enough, do not say any more.’ I asked for his blessing as the king and father of all his subjects. The king burst out laughing, and told me that M. de Chamillard would give me his orders.”

In virtue of this intimation d’Aygaliers went next day to the minister’s country house; for Chamillard had given him that address, and there he learned that the king had granted him a pension of 800 livres. The baron remarked that, not having worked for money, he had hoped for a better reward; as far as money was concerned, he desired only the reimbursement of the actual expenses of his journeys to and from, but Chamillard answered that the king expected all that he offered and whatever he offered to be accepted with gratitude. To this there was no possible reply, so the same evening d’Aygaliers set out on his return to Languedoc.

Three months later, Chamillard forwarded him an order to leave the kingdom, telling him that he was to receive a pension of four hundred crowns per annum, and enclosing the first quarter in advance.

As there was no means of evading this command, D’Aygaliers set out for Geneva, accompanied by thirty-three followers, arriving there on the 23rd of September. Once rid of him, Louis the Magnificent thought that he had done his part nobly and that he owed him nothing further, so that d’Aygaliers waited a whole year in vain for the second quarter of his pension.

At the end of this time, as his letters to Chamillard remained unanswered, and finding himself without resources in a foreign country, he believed himself justified in returning to France and taking up his residence on his family estate. Unfortunately, on his way through Lyons, the provost of merchants, hearing of his return, had him arrested, and sent word to the king, who ordered him to be taken to the chateau de Loches. After a year's imprisonment, d'Aygaliers, who had just entered on his thirty-fifth year, resolved to try and escape, preferring to die in the attempt rather than remain a prisoner for life. He succeeded in getting possession of a file with which he removed one of the bars of his window, and by means of knotting his sheets together, he got down, taking the loosened bar with him to serve, in case of need, as a weapon. A sentinel who was near cried, "Who goes there?" but d'Aygaliers stunned him with his bar. The cry, however, had given the alarm: a second sentinel saw a man flying, fired at him, and killed him on the spot.

Such was the reward of the devoted patriotism of Baron d'Aygaliers!

Meantime Roland's troops had increased greatly in number, having been joined by the main body of those who had once been commanded by Cavalier, so that he had, about eight hundred men at his disposal. Some distance away, another chief, named Joanny, had four hundred; Larose, to whom Castanet had transferred his command, found himself at the head of three hundred; Boizeau de Rochegude was followed by one hundred, Saltet de Soustel by two hundred, Louis Coste by fifty, and Catinat by forty, so that, in spite of the victory of Montrevel and the negotiations of M. de Villars, the Camisards still formed an effective force of eighteen hundred and ninety men, not to speak of many single troopers who owned no commander but acted each for himself, and were none the less mischievous for that. All these troops, except these latter, obeyed Roland, who since the defection of Cavalier had been recognised as generalissimo of the forces. M. de Villars thought if he could separate Roland from his troops as he had separated Cavalier, his plans would be more easy to carry out.

So he made use of every means within his reach to gain over Roland, and as soon as one plan failed he tried another. At one moment he was almost sure of obtaining his object by the help of a certain Jourdan de Mianet, a great friend of his, who offered his services as an intermediary, but who failed like all the others, receiving from Roland a positive refusal, so that it became evident that resort must be had to other means than those of persuasion. A sum of 100 Louis had already been set on Roland's head: this sum was now doubled.

Three days afterwards, a young man from Uzes, by name Malarte, in whom Roland had every confidence, wrote to M. de Paratte that the Camisard general intended to pass the night of the 14th of August at the chateau Castelnau.

De Paratte immediately made his dispositions, and ordered Lacoste-Badie, at the head of two companies of dragoons, and all the officers at Uzes who were well mounted, to hold themselves in readiness to start on an expedition at eight o’clock in the evening, but not revealing its object to them till the time came. At eight o’clock, having been told what they had to do, they set off at such a pace that they came in sight of the chateau within an hour, and were obliged to halt and conceal themselves, lest they should appear too soon, before Roland had retired for the night. But they need not have been afraid; the Camisard chief, who was accustomed to rely on all his men as on himself, had gone to bed without any suspicion, having full confidence in the vigilance of one of his officers, named Grimaud, who had stationed himself as sentinel on the roof of the chateau. Led by Malarte, Lacoste-Badie and his dragoons took a narrow covered way, which led them to the foot of the walls, so that when Grimaud saw them it was already too late, the chateau being surrounded on all sides. Firing off his gun, he cried, “To arms!” Roland, roused by the cry and the shot, leaped out of bed, and taking his clothes in one hand and his sword in the other, ran out of his room. At the door he met Grimaud, who, instead of thinking of his own safety, had come to watch over that of his chief. They both ran to the stables to get horses, but three of their men — Marchand, Bourdalie, and Bayos — had been before them and had seized on the best ones, and riding them bare-backed had dashed through the front gates before the dragoons could stop them. The horses that were left were so wretched that Roland felt there was no chance of out-distancing the dragoons by their help, so he resolved to fly on foot, thus avoiding the open roads and being able to take refuge in every ravine and every bush as cover. He therefore hastened with Grimaud and four other officers who had gathered round him towards a small back gate which opened on the fields, but as there was, besides the troops which entered the chateau, a ring of dragoons round it, they fell at once into the hands of some men who had been placed in ambush. Seeing himself surrounded, Roland let fall the clothes which he had not yet had time to put on, placed his back against a tree, drew his sword, and challenged the boldest, whether officer or private, to approach. His features expressed such resolution, that when he thus, alone and half naked, defied them all, there was a moment's hesitation, during which no one ventured to take a forward step; but this pause was broken by the report of a gun: the arm which Roland had stretched out against his adversaries fell to his side, the sword with which he had threatened them escaped from his hand, his knees gave way, so that his body, which was only supported by the tree against which he leaned, after remaining an instant erect, gradually sank to the ground. Collecting all his strength, Roland raised his two hands to Heaven, as if to call down the vengeance of God upon his murderers, then, without having uttered a single word, he fell forward dead, shot through the heart. The name of the dragoon who killed him was Soubeyrand.

Maillie, Grimaud, Coutereau, Guerin, and Ressal, the five Camisard officers, seeing their chief dead, let themselves be taken as if they were children, without thinking of making any resistance.

The dead body of Roland was carried back in triumph to Uzes, and from there to Nimes, where it was put upon trial as if still alive. It was sentenced to be dragged on hurdles and then burnt. The execution of this sentence was carried out with such pomp as made it impossible for the one party to forget the punishment and for the other to forget the martyrdom. At the end the ashes of Roland were scattered to the four winds of heaven.

The execution of the five officers followed close on that of their chief's body; they were condemned to be broken on the wheel, and the sentence was carried out on all at once. But their death, instead of inspiring the Calvinists with terror, gave them rather fresh courage, for, as an eye-witness relates, the five Camisards bore their tortures not only with fortitude, but with a light-heartedness which surprised all present, especially those who had never seen a Camisard executed before.

Malarte received his 200 Louis, but to-day his name is coupled with that of Judas in the minds of his countrymen.

From this time on fortune ceased to smile on the Camisards. Genius had gone with Cavalier, and, faith with Roland. The very day of the death of the latter, one of their stores, containing more than eighty sacks of corn, had been taken at Toiras. The next day, Catinat, who, with a dozen men, was in hiding in a vineyard of La Vaunage, was surprised by a detachment of Soissonnais; eleven of his men were killed, the twelfth made prisoner, and he himself barely escaped with a severe wound. The 25th of the same month, a cavern near Sauve, which the rebels used as a store, and which contained one hundred and fifty sacks of fine wheat, was discovered; lastly, Chevalier de Froulay had found a third hiding-place near Mailet. In this, which had been used not only as a store but as a hospital, besides a quantity of salt beef, wine, and flour, six wounded Camisards were found, who were instantly shot as they lay.

The only band which remained unbroken was Ravanel’s, but since the departure of Cavalier things had not gone well with his lieutenant.

In consequence of this, and also on account of the successive checks which the other bodies of Camisard troops had met with, Ravanel proclaimed a solemn fast, in order to intercede with God to protect the Huguenot cause. On Saturday, the 13th September, he led his entire force to the wood of St. Benazet, intending to pass the whole of the next day with them there in prayer. But treason was rife. Two peasants who knew of this plan gave information to M. Lenoir, mayor of Le Vigan, and he sent word to the marechal and M. de Saville, who were at Anduze.

Nothing could have been more welcome to the governor than this important information: he made the most careful disposition of his forces, hoping to destroy the rebellion at one blow. He ordered M. de Courten, a brigadier-colonel in command at Alais, to take a detachment of the troops under him and patrol the banks of the Gardon between Ners and Castagnols. He was of opinion that if the Camisards were attacked on the other side by a body of soldiers drawn from Anduze, which he had stationed during the night at Dommersargues, they would try to make good their retreat towards the river. The force at Dommersargues might almost be called a small army; for it was composed of a Swiss battalion, a battalion of the Hainault regiment, one from the Charolais regiment, and four companies of dragoons from Fimarcon and Saint-Sernin.

Everything took place as the peasants had said: on Saturday the 13th, the Camisards entered, as we have seen, the wood of St. Benazet, and passed the night there.

At break of day the royals from Dommersargues began their advance. The Camisard outposts soon perceived the movement, and warned Ravanel, who held his little council of war. Everyone was in favour of instant retreat, so they retired towards Ners, intending to cross the Gardon below that town: just as M. de Villars had foreseen, the Camisards did everything necessary for the success of his plans, and ended by walking right into the trap set for them.

On emerging from the wood of St. Benazet, they caught sight of a detachment of royals drawn up and waiting for them between Marvejols and a mill called the Moulin-du-Pont. Seeing the road closed in this direction, they turned sharp to the left, and gained a rocky valley which ran parallel to the Gardon. This they followed till they came out below Marvejols, where they crossed the river. They now thought themselves out of danger, thanks to this manoeuvre, but suddenly they saw another detachment of royals lying on the grass near the mill of La Scie. They at once halted again, and then, believing themselves undiscovered, turned back, moving as noiselessly as possible, intending to recross the river and make for Cardet. But they only avoided one trap to fall into another, for in this direction they were met by the Hainault battalion, which swooped down upon them. A few of these ill-fated men rallied at the sound of Ravanel's voice and made an effort to defend themselves in spite of the prevailing confusion; but the danger was so imminent, the foes so numerous, and their numbers decreased so rapidly under the fierce assault, that their example failed of effect, and flight became general: every man trusted to chance for guidance, and, caring nothing for the safety of others, thought only of his own.

Then it ceased to be a battle and become a massacre, for the royals were ten to one; and among those they encountered, only sixty had firearms, the rest, since the discovery of their various magazines, having been reduced to arm themselves with bad swords, pitchforks, and bayonets attached to sticks. Hardly a man survived the fray. Ravanel himself only succeeded in escaping by throwing himself into the river, where he remained under water between two rocks for seven hours, only coming to the surface to breathe. When night fell and the dragoons had retired, he also fled.

This was the last battle of the war, which had lasted four years. With Cavalier and Roland, those two mountain giants, the power of the rebels disappeared. As the news of the defeat spread, the Camisard chiefs and soldiers becoming convinced that the Lord had hidden His face from them, surrendered one by one. The first to set an example was Castanet. On September 6th, a week after the defeat of Ravanel, he surrendered to the marechal. On the 19th, Catinat and his lieutenant, Franqois Souvayre, tendered their submission; on the 22nd, Amet, Roland's brother, came in; on October 4th, Joanny; on the 9th, Larose, Valette, Salomon, Laforet, Moulieres, Salles, Abraham and Marion; on the 20th, Fidele; and on the 25th, Rochegude.

Each made what terms he could; in general the conditions were favourable. Most of those who submitted received rewards of money, some more, some less; the smallest amount given being 200 livres. They all received passports, and were ordered to leave the kingdom, being sent, accompanied by an escort and at the king's expense, to Geneva. The following is the account given by Marion of the agreement he came to with the Marquis Lalande; probably all the others were of the same nature.

"I was deputed," he says, "to treat with this lieutenant-general in regard to the surrender of my own troops and those of Larose, and to arrange terms for the inhabitants of thirty-five parishes who had contributed to our support during the war. The result of the negotiations was that all the prisoners from our cantons should be set at liberty, and be reinstated in their possessions, along with all the others. The inhabitants of those parishes which had been ravaged by fire were to be exempt from land-tax for three years; and in no parish were the inhabitants to be taunted with the past, nor molested on the subject of religion, but were to be free to worship God in their own houses according to their consciences."

These agreements were fulfilled with such punctuality, that Larose was permitted to open the prison doors of St. Hippolyte to forty prisoners the very day he made submission.

As we have said, the Camisards, according as they came in, were sent off to Geneva. D'Aygaliers, whose fate we have anticipated, arrived there on September 23rd, accompanied by Cavalier's eldest brother, Malpach, Roland's secretary, and thirty-six Camisards. Catinat and Castanet arrived there on the 8th October, along with twenty-two other persons, while Larose, Laforet, Salomon, Moulieres, Salles, Marion, and Fidele reached it under the escort of forty dragoons from Fimarcon in the month of November.

Of all the chiefs who had turned Languedoc for four years into a vast arena, only Ravanel remained, but he refused either to surrender or to leave the country. On the 8th October the marechal issued an order declaring he had forfeited all right to the favour of an amnesty, and offering a reward of 150 Louis to whoever delivered him up living, and 2400 livres to whoever brought in his dead body, while any hamlet, village, or town which gave him refuge would be burnt to the ground and the inhabitants put to the sword.

The revolt seemed to be at an end and peace established. So the marechal was recalled to court, and left Nimes on January the 6th. Before his departure he received the States of Languedoc, who bestowed on him not only the praise which was his due for having tempered severity with mercy, but also a purse of 12,000 livres, while a sum of 8000 livres was presented to his wife. But all this was only a prelude to the favours awaiting him at court. On the day he returned to Paris the king decorated him with all the royal orders and created him a duke. On the following day he received him, and thus addressed him: “Sir, your past services lead me to expect much of those you will render me in the future. The affairs of my kingdom would be better conducted if I had several Villars at my disposal. Having only one, I must always send him where he is most needed. It was for that reason I sent you to Languedoc. You have, while there, restored tranquillity to my subjects, you must now defend them against their enemies; for I shall send you to command my army on the Moselle in the next campaign.”

The, Duke of Berwick arrived at Montpellier on the 17th March to replace Marechal Villars. His first care was to learn from M. de Baville the exact state of affairs. M. de Baville told him that they were not at all settled as they appeared to be on the surface. In fact, England and Holland, desiring nothing so much as that an intestine war should waste France, were making unceasing efforts to induce the exiles to return home, promising that this time they would really support them by lending arms, ammunition, and men, and it was said that some were already on their way back, among the number Castanet.

And indeed the late rebel chief, tired of inaction, had left Geneva in the end of February, and arrived safely at Vivarais. He had held a religious meeting in a cave near La Goree, and had drawn to his side Valette of Vals and Boyer of Valon. Just as the three had determined to penetrate into the Cevennes, they were denounced by some peasants before a Swiss officer named Muller, who was in command of a detachment of troops in the village of Riviere. Muller instantly mounted his horse, and guided by the informers made his way into the little wood in which the Camisards had taken refuge, and fell upon them quite unexpectedly. Boyer was killed in trying to escape; Castanet was taken and brought to the nearest prison, where he was joined the next day by Valette, who had also been betrayed by some peasants whom he had asked for assistance.

The first punishment inflicted on Castanet was, that he was compelled to carry in his hand the head of Boyer all the way from La Goree to Montpellier. He protested vehemently at first, but in vain: it was fastened to his wrist by the hair; whereupon he kissed it on both cheeks, and went through the ordeal as if it were a religious act, addressing words of prayer to the head as he might have done to a relic of a martyr.

Arrived at Montpellier, Castanet was examined, and at first persisted in saying that he had only returned from exile because he had not the wherewithal to live abroad. But when put to the torture he was made to endure such agony that, despite his courage and constancy, he confessed that he had formed a plan to introduce a band of Huguenot soldiers with their officers into the Cevennes by way of Dauphine or by water, and while waiting for their arrival he had sent on emissaries in advance to rouse the people to revolt; that he himself had also shared in this work; that Catinat was at the moment in Languedoc or Vivarais engaged in the same task, and provided with a considerable sum of money sent him by foreigners for distribution, and that several persons of still greater importance would soon cross the frontier and join him.

Castanet was condemned to be broken on the wheel. As he was about to be led to execution, Abbe Tremondy, the cure of Notre-Dame, and Abbe Plomet, canon of the cathedral, came to his cell to make a last effort to convert him, but he refused to speak. They therefore went on before, and awaited him on the scaffold. There they appeared to inspire Castanet with more horror than the instruments of torture, and while he addressed the executioner as “brother,” he called out to the priests, “Go away out of my sight, imps from the bottomless pit! What are you doing here, you accursed tempters? I will die in the religion in which I was born. Leave me alone, ye hypocrites, leave me alone!” But the two abbes were unmoved, and Castanet expired cursing, not the executioner but the two priests, whose presence during his death-agony disturbed his soul, turning it away from things which should have filled it.

Valette was sentenced to be hanged, and was executed on the same day as Castanet.

In spite of the admissions wrung from Castanet in March, nearly a month passed without any sign of fresh intrigues or any attempt at rebellion. But on the 17th of April, about seven o’clock in the evening, M. de Baville received intelligence that several Camisards had lately returned from abroad, and were in hiding somewhere, though their retreat was not known. This information was laid before the Duke of Berwick, and he and M. de Baville ordered certain houses to be searched, whose owners were in their opinion likely to have given refuge to the malcontents. At midnight all the forces which they could collect were divided into twelve detachments, composed of archers and soldiers, and at the head of each detachment was placed a man that could be depended upon. Dumayne, the king’s lieutenant, assigned to each the districts they were to search, and they all set out at once from the town hall, at half-past twelve, marching in silence, and separating at signs from their leaders, so anxious were they to make no noise. At first all their efforts were of no avail, several houses being searched without any result; but at length Jausserand, the diocesan provost, having entered one of the houses which he and Villa, captain of the town troops, had had assigned to them, they found three men sleeping on mattresses laid on the floor. The provost roused them by asking them who they were, whence they came, and what they were doing at Montpellier, and as they, still half asleep, did not reply quite promptly, he ordered them to dress and follow him.

These three men were Flessiere, Gaillard, and Jean-Louis. Flessiere was a deserter from the Fimarcon regiment: he it was who knew most about the plot. Gaillard had formerly served in the Hainault regiment; and Jean-Louis, commonly called “the Genevois,” was a deserter from the Courten regiment.

Flessiere, who was the leader, felt that it would be a great disgrace to let themselves be taken without resistance; he therefore pretended to obey, but in lifting up his clothes, which lay upon a trunk, he managed to secure two pistols, which he cocked. At the noise made by the hammers the provost’s suspicions were aroused, and throwing himself on Flessiere, he seized him round the waist from behind. Flessiere, unable to turn, raised his arm and fired over his shoulder. The shot missed the provost, merely burning a lock of his hair, but slightly wounded one of his servants, who was carrying a lantern. He then tried to fire a second shot, but Jausserand, seizing him by the wrist with one hand, blew out his brains with the other. While Jausserand and Flessiere were thus struggling, Gaillard threw himself on Villa, pinning his arms to his sides. As he had no weapons, he tried to push him to the wall, in order to stun him by knocking his head against it; but when the servant, being wounded, let the lantern fall, he took advantage of the darkness to make a dash for the door, letting go his hold of his antagonist. Unfortunately for him, the doors, of which there were two, were guarded, and the guards, seeing a half-naked man running away at the top of his speed, ran after him, firing several shots. He received a wound which, though not dangerous, impeded his flight, so that he was boon overtaken and captured. They brought him back a prisoner to the town hall, where Flessiere's dead body already lay.

Meanwhile Jean-Louis had had better luck. While the two struggles as related above were going on, he slipped unnoticed to an open window and got out into the street. He ran round the corner of the house, and disappeared like a shadow in the darkness before the eyes of the guards. For a long time he wandered from street to street, running down one and up another, till chance brought him near La Poissonniere. Here he perceived a beggar propped against a post and fast asleep; he awoke him, and proposed that they should exchange clothes. As Jean-Louis' suit was new and the beggar's in rags, the latter thought at first it was a joke. Soon perceiving, however, that the offer was made in all seriousness, he agreed to the exchange, and the two separated, each delighted with his bargain. Jean-Louis approached one of the gates of the town, in order to be able to get out as soon as it was opened, and the beggar hastened off in another direction, in order to get away from the man who had let him have so good a bargain, before he had time to regret the exchange he had made.

But the night's adventures were far from being over. The beggar was taken a prisoner, Jean-Louis' coat being recognised, and brought to the town hall, where the mistake was discovered. The Genevois meantime got into a dark street, and lost his way. Seeing three men approach, one of whom carried a lantern, he went towards the light, in order to find out where he was, and saw, to his surprise, that one of the men was the servant whom Flessiere had wounded, and who was now going to have his wound dressed. The Genevois tried to draw back into the shade, but it was too late: the servant had recognised him. He then tried to fly; but the wounded man soon overtook him, and although one of his hands was disabled, he held him fast with the other, so that the two men who were with him ran up and easily secured him. He also was brought to the town hall, where he found the Duke of Berwick and M. de Baville, who were awaiting the result of the affray.

Hardly had the prisoner caught sight of them than, seeing himself already hanged, which was no wonder considering the marvellous celerity with which executions were conducted at that epoch, he threw himself on his knees, confessed who he was, and related for what reason he had joined the fanatics. He went on to say that as he had not joined them of his own free will, but had been forced to do so, he would, if they would spare his life, reveal important secrets to them, by means of which they could arrest the principal conspirators.

His offer was so tempting and his life of so little worth that the duke and de Baville did not long hesitate, but pledged their word to spare his life if the revelations he was about to make proved to be of real importance. The bargain being concluded, the Genevois made the following statement:

"That several letters having arrived from foreign countries containing promises of men and money, the discontented in the provinces had leagued together in order to provoke a fresh rebellion. By means of these letters and other documents which were scattered abroad, hopes were raised that M. de Miremont, the last Protestant prince of the house of Bourbon, would bring them reinforcements five or six thousand strong. These reinforcements were to come by sea and make a descent on Aigues-Mortes or Cette, — and two thousand Huguenots were to arrive at the same time by way of Dauphine and join the others as they disembarked.

"That in this hope Catinat, Clary, and Jonquet had left Geneva and returned to France, and having joined Ravanel had gone secretly through those parts of the country known to be infected with fanaticism, and made all necessary arrangements, such as amassing powder and lead, munitions of war, and stores of all kinds, as well as enrolling the names of all those who were of age to bear arms. Furthermore, they had made an estimate of what each city, town, and village ought to contribute in money or in kind to the — League of the Children of God, so that they could count on having eight or ten thousand men ready to rise at the first signal. They had furthermore resolved that there should be risings in several places at the same time, which places were already chosen, and each of those who were to take part in the movement knew his exact duty. At Montpellier a hundred of the most determined amongst the disaffected were to set fire in different quarters to the houses of the Catholics, killing all who attempted to extinguish the fires, and with the help of the Huguenot inhabitants were, to slaughter the garrison, seize the citadel, and carry off the Duke of Berwick and M. de Baville. The same things were to be done at Nimes, Uzes, Alais, Anduze, Saint-Hippolyte, and Sommieres. Lastly, he said, this conspiracy had been going on for more than three months, and the conspirators, in order not to be found out, had only revealed their plans to those whom they knew to be ready to join them: they had not admitted a single woman to their confidence, or any man whom it was possible to suspect. Further, they had only met at night and a few persons at a time, in certain country houses, to which admittance was gained by means of a countersign; the 25th of April was the day fixed for the general rising and the execution of these projects."

As may be seen, the danger was imminent, as there was only six days' interval between the revelation and the expected outburst; so the Genevois was consulted, under renewed promises of safety for himself, as to the best means of seizing on the principal chiefs in the shortest possible time. He replied that he saw no other way but to accompany them himself to Nimes, where Catinat and Ravanel were in hiding, in a house of which he did not know the number and in a street of which he did not know the name, but which he was sure of recognising when he saw them. If this advice were to be of any avail, there was no time to be lost, for Ravanel and Catinat were to leave Nimes on the 20th or the 21st at latest; consequently, if they did not set off at once, the chiefs would no longer be there when they arrived. The advice seemed good, so the marechal and the intendant hastened to follow it: the informer was sent to Nimes guarded by six archers, the conduct of the expedition was given to Barnier, the provost's lieutenant, a man of intellect and common sense, and in whom the provost had full confidence. He carried letters for the Marquis of Sandricourt.

As they arrived late on the evening of the 19th, the Genevois was at once led up and down the streets of Nimes, and, as he had promised, he pointed out several houses in the district of Sainte-Eugenie. Sandricourt at once ordered the garrison officers, as well as those of the municipal and Courten regiments, to put all their soldiers under arms and to station them quietly throughout the town so as to surround that district. At ten o'clock, the Marquis of Sandricourt, having made certain that his instructions had been carefully carried out, gave orders to MM. de L'Estrade, Barnier, Joseph Martin, Eusebe, the major of the Swiss regiment, and several other officers, along with ten picked men, to repair to the house of one Alison, a silk merchant, this house having been specially pointed out by the prisoner. This they did, but seeing the door open, they had little hope of finding the chiefs of a conspiracy in a place so badly guarded; nevertheless, determined to obey their instructions, they glided softly into the hall. In a few moments, during which silence and darkness reigned, they heard people speaking rather loudly in an adjoining room, and by listening intently they caught the following words: “It is quite sure that in less than three weeks the king will be no longer master of Dauphine, Vivarais, and Languedoc. I am being sought for everywhere, and here I am in Nimes, with nothing to fear.”

It was now quite clear to the listeners that close at hand were some at least of those for whom they were looking. They ran to the door, which was ajar, and entered the room, sword in hand. They found Ravanel, Jonquet, and Villas talking together, one sitting on a table, another standing on the hearth, and the third lolling on a bed.

Jonquet was a young man from Sainte-Chatte, highly thought of among the Camisards. He had been, it may be remembered, one of Cavalier’s principal officers. Villas was the son of a doctor in Saint-Hippolyte; he was still young, though he had seen ten years’ service, having been cornet in England in the Galloway regiment. As to Ravanel, he is sufficiently known to our readers to make any words of introduction unnecessary.

De l’Estrade threw himself on the nearest of the three, and, without using his sword, struck him with his fist. Ravanel (for it was he) being half stunned, fell back a step and asked the reason of this violent assault; while Barnier exclaimed, “Hold him fast, M. de l’Estrade; it is Ravanel!” “Well, yes, I am Ravanel,” said the Camisard, “but that is no reason for making so much noise.” As he said these words he made an attempt to reach his weapons, but de l’Estrade and Barnier prevented him by throwing themselves on him, and succeeded in knocking him down after a fierce struggle. While, this was going on, his two companions were secured, and the three were removed to the fort, where their guard never left them night or day.

The Marquis of Sandricourt immediately sent off a courier to the Duke of Berwick and M. de Baville to inform them of the important capture he had made. They were so delighted at the news that they came next day to Nimes.

They found the town intensely excited, soldiers with fixed bayonets at every street corner, all the houses shut up, and the gates of the town closed, and no one allowed to leave without written permission from Sandricourt. On the 20th, and during the following night, more than fifty persons were arrested, amongst whom were Alison, the merchant in whose house Ravanel, Villas, and Jonquet were found; Delacroix, Alison's brother-in-law, who, on hearing the noise of the struggle, had hidden on the roof and was not discovered till next day; Jean Lauze, who was accused of having prepared Ravanel's supper; Lauze's mother, a widow; Tourelle, the maid-servant; the host of the Coupe d'Or, and a preacher named La Jeunesse.

Great, however, as was the joy felt by the duke, the marquis, and de Baville, it fell short of full perfection, for the most dangerous man among the rebels was still at large; in spite of every effort, Catinat's hiding-place had not till now been discovered.

Accordingly, the duke issued a proclamation offering a reward of one hundred Louis-d'or to whoever would take Catinat, or cause him to be taken prisoner, and granting a free pardon to anyone who had sheltered him, provided that he was denounced before the house-to-house visitation which was about to be made took place. After the search began, the master of the house in which he might be found would be hung at his own door, his family thrown into prison, his goods confiscated, his house razed to the ground, without any form of trial whatever.

This proclamation had the effect expected by the duke: whether the man in whose house Catinat was concealed grew frightened and asked him to leave, or whether Catinat thought his best course would be to try and get away from the town, instead of remaining shut up in it, he dressed himself one morning in suitable clothes, and went to a barber's, who shaved him, cut his hair, and made up his face so as to give him as much the appearance of a nobleman as possible; and then with wonderful assurance he went out into the streets, and pulling his hat over his eyes and holding a paper in his hand as if reading it, he crossed the town to the gate of St. Antoine. He was almost through when Charreau, the captain of the guard, having his attention directed to Catinat by a comrade to whom he was talking, stopped him, suspecting he was trying to escape. Catinat asked what he wanted with him, and Charreau replied that if he would enter the guard-house he would learn; as under such circumstances any examination was to be avoided, Catinat tried to force his way out; whereupon he was seized by Charreau and his brother-officer, and Catinat seeing that resistance would be not only useless but harmful, allowed himself to be taken to the guard-room.

He had been there about an hour without being recognised by any of those who, drawn by curiosity, came to look at him, when one of the visitors in going out said he bore a strong resemblance to Catinat; some children hearing these words, began to shout, “Catinat is taken! Catinat is taken!” This cry drew a large crowd to the guard-house, among others a man whose name was Anglejas, who, looking closely at the prisoner, recognised him and called him by name.

Instantly the guard was doubled, and Catinat searched: a psalm-book with a silver clasp and a letter addressed to “M. Maurel, called Catinat,” were found on him, leaving no doubt as to his identity; while he himself, growing impatient, and desiring to end all these investigations, acknowledged that he was Catinat and no other.

He was at once taken to the palace, where the Presidial Court was sitting, M. de Baville and the president being occupied in trying Ravanel, Villas, and Jonquet. On hearing the news of this important capture, the intendant, hardly daring to believe his ears, rose and went out to meet the prisoner, in order to convince himself that it was really Catinat.

From the Presidial Court he was brought before the Duke of Berwick, who addressed several questions to him, which Catinat answered; he then told the duke he had something of importance to impart to him and to him alone. The duke was not very anxious for a tete-a-tete with Catinat; however, having ordered his hands to be securely bound, and telling Sandricourt not to go away, he consented to hear what the prisoner had to say.

Catinat then, in the presence of the duke and Sandricourt, proposed that an exchange of prisoners should be made, the Marechal de Tallard, who was a prisoner of war in England, being accepted in his place. Catinat added that if this offer was not accepted, the marechal would meet the same treatment from the English as might be meted out to him, Catinat, in France. The duke, full of the aristocratic ideas to which he was born, found the proposal insolent, and said, “If that is all you have to propose, I can assure you that your hours are numbered.”

Thereupon Catinat was promptly sent back to the palace, where truly his trial did not occupy much time. That of the three others was already finished, and soon his was also at an end, and it only remained to pronounce sentence on all four. Catinat and Ravanel, as the most guilty, were condemned to be burnt at the stake. Some of the councillors thought Catinat should have been torn apart by four horses, but the majority were for the stake, the agony lasting longer, being more violent and more exquisite than in the of other case.

Villars and Jonquet were sentenced to be broken on the wheel alive — the only difference between them being that Jonquet was to be to taken while still living and thrown into the fire lit round Catinat and Ravael. It was also ordered that the four condemned men before their execution should be put to the torture ordinary and extraordinary. Catinat, whose temper was fierce, suffered with courage, but cursed his torturers. Ravanel bore all the torments that could be inflicted on him with a fortitude that was more than human, so that the torturers were exhausted before he was. Jonquet spoke little, and the revelations he made were of slight importance. Villas confessed that the conspirators had the intention of carrying off the duke and M. de Baville when they were out walking or driving, and he added that this plot had been hatched at the house of a certain Boeton de Saint-Laurent-d’Aigozre, at Milhaud, in Rouergue.

Meanwhile all this torturing and questioning had taken so much time that when the stake and the scaffold were ready it was almost dark, so that the duke put off the executions until the next day, instead of carrying them out by torchlight. Brueys says that this was done in order that the most disaffected amongst the fanatics should not be able to say that it was not really Catinat, Ravanel, Villas, and Jonquet who had been executed but some other unknown men; but it is more probable that the duke and Baville were afraid of riots, as was proved by their ordering the scaffold and the stake to be erected at the end of the Cours and opposite the glacis of the fortress, so that the garrison might be at hand in case of any disturbance.

Catinat was placed in a cell apart, and could be, heard cursing and complaining all night through. Ravanel, Villas, and Jonquet were confined together, and passed the night singing and praying.

The next day, the 22nd April, 1705, they were taken from the prison and drawn to the place of execution in two carts, being unable to walk, on account of the severe torture to which they had been subjected, and which had crushed the bones of their legs. A single pile of wood had been prepared for Catinat and Ravanel, who were to be burnt together; they were in one cart, and Villas and Jonquet, for whom two wheels had been prepared, were in the other.

The first operation was to bind Catinat and Ravanel back to back to the same stake, care being taken to place Catinat with his face to windward, so that his agony might last longer, and then the pile was lit under Ravanel.

As had been foreseen, this precaution gave great pleasure to those people who took delight in witnessing executions. The wind being rather high, blew the flames away from Catinat, so that at first the fire burnt his legs only — a circumstance which, the author of the History of the Camisards tells us, aroused Catinat's impatience. Ravanel, however, bore everything to the end with the greatest heroism, only pausing in his singing to address words of encouragement to his companion in suffering, whom he could not see, but whose groans and curses he could hear; he would then return to his psalms, which he continued to sing until his voice was stifled in the flames. Just as he expired, Jonquet was removed from the wheel, and carried, his broken limbs dangling, to the burning pile, on which he was thrown. From the midst of the flames his voice was heard saying, "Courage, Catinat; we shall soon meet in heaven." A few moments later, the stake, being burnt through at the base, broke, and Catinat falling into the flames, was quickly suffocated. That this accident had not been forseen and prevented by proper precautions caused great displeasure to spectators who found that the three-quarter of an hour which the spectacle had lasted was much too brief a time.

Villas lived three hours longer on his wheel, and expired without having uttered a single complaint.

Two days later, there was another trial, at which six persons were condemned to death and one to the galleys; these were the two Alisons, in whose house Villas, Ravanel, and Jonquet had been found; Alegre, who was accused of having concealed Catinat, and of having been the Camisard treasurer; Rougier, an armourer who was found guilty of having repaired the muskets of the rebels; Jean Lauze, an innkeeper who had prepared meals for Ravanel; La Jeunesse, a preacher, convicted of having preached sermons and sung psalms; and young Delacroix, brother-in-law to one of the Alisons. The first three were condemned to be broken on the wheel, their houses demolished, and their goods confiscated. The next three were to be hanged. Jean Delacroix, partly because of his youth, but more because of the revelations he made, was only sent to the galleys. Several years later he was liberated and returned to Arles, and was carried off by the plague in 1720.

All these sentences were carried out with the utmost rigour.

Thus, as may be seen, the suppression of the revolt proceeded apace; only two young Camisard chiefs were still at large, both of whom had formerly served under Cavalier and Catinat. The name of the one was Brun and of the other Francezet. Although neither of them possessed the genius and influence of Catinat and Ravanel, yet they were both men to be feared, the one on account of his personal strength, the other for his skill and agility. Indeed, it was said of him that he never missed a shot, and that one day being pursued by dragoons he had escaped by jumping over the Gardon at a spot where it was twenty-two feet wide.

For a long time all search was in vain, but one day the wife of a miller named Semenil came into town ostensibly to buy provisions, but really to denounce them as being concealed, with two other Camisards, in her husband’s house.

This information was received with an eager gratitude, which showed the importance which the governor of Nimes attached to their capture. The woman was promised a reward of fifty Louis if they were taken, and the Chevalier de la Valla, Grandidier, and fifty Swiss, the major of the Saint-Sernin regiment, a captain, and thirty dragoons, were sent off to make the capture. When they were within a quarter of a league of the mill, La Valla, who was in command of the expedition, made the woman give him all the necessary topographical information.

Having learned that besides the door by which they hoped to effect an entrance, the mill possessed only one other, which opened on a bridge over the Vistre, he despatched ten dragoons and five Swiss to occupy this bridge, whilst he and the rest of the troops bore down on the main entrance. As soon as the four Camisards perceived the approach of the soldiers, their first thought was to escape by the bridge, but one of them having gone up to the roof to make sure that the way was clear, came down exclaiming that the bridge was occupied. On hearing this, the four felt that they were lost, but nevertheless resolved to defend themselves as valiantly and to sell their lives as dearly as possible. As soon as the royals were within musket range of the mill, four shots were fired, and two dragoons, one Swiss, and one horse, fell. M. de Valla thereupon ordered the troops to charge at full gallop, but before the mill door was reached three other shots were heard, and two more men killed. Nevertheless, seeing they could not long hold out against such numbers, Francezet gave the signal for retreat, calling out, “Sauve qui petit!” at the same instant he jumped out of a lattice window twenty feet from the ground, followed by Brun. Neither of them being hurt, both set off across country, one trusting to his strength and the other to his fleetness of foot. The two other Camisards, who had tried to escape by the door, were captured.

The soldiers, horse and foot, being now free to give all their attention to Brun and Francezet, a wonderful race began; for the two fugitives, being strong and active, seemed to play with their pursuers, stopping every now and then, when they had gained sufficient headway, to shoot at the nearest soldiers; when Francezet, proving worthy of his reputation, never missed a single shot. Then, resuming their flight and loading their weapons as they ran, they leaped rivers and ditches, taking advantage of the less direct road which the troops were obliged to follow, to stop and take breath, instead of making for some cover where they might have found safety. Two or three times Brun was on the point of being caught, but each time the dragoon or Swiss who had got up to him fell, struck by Francezet’s unerring bullet. The chase lasted four hours, during which time five officers, thirty dragoons, and fifty Swiss were baffled by two men, one of whom Francezet was almost a boy, being only twenty years old! Then the two Camisards, having exhausted their ammunition, gave each other the name of a village as a rendezvous, and each taking a different direction, bounded away with the lightness of a stag. Francezet ran in the direction of Milhaud with such rapidity that he gained on the dragoons, although they put their horses at full speed. He was within an inch of safety, when a peasant named La Bastide, who was hoeing in a field, whence he had watched the contest with interest from the moment he had first caught sight of it, seeing the fugitive make for an opening in a wall, ran along at the foot of the wall on the other side, and, just as Francezet dashed through the opening like a flash of lightning, struck him such a heavy blow on the head with his hoe that the skull was laid open, and he fell bathed in blood.

The dragoons, who had seen in the distance what had happened, now came up, and rescued Francezet from the hands of his assailant, who had continued to rain blows upon him, desiring to put an end to him. The unconscious Camisard was carried to Milhaud, where his wounds were bandaged, and himself revived by means of strong spirits forced into mouth and nostrils.

We now return to Brun. At first it seemed as if he were more fortunate than his comrade; for, meeting with no obstacle, he was soon not only out of reach, but out of sight of his enemies. He now, however, felt broken by fatigue, and taught caution by the treachery to which he had almost fallen a victim, he dared not ask for an asylum, so, throwing himself down in a ditch, he was soon fast asleep. The dragoons, who had not given up the search, presently came upon him, and falling on him as he lay, overpowered him before he was well awake.

When both Camisards met before the governor, Francezet replied to all interrogations that since the death of brother Catinat his sole desire had been to die a martyr’s death like him; while Brun said that he was proud and happy to die in the cause of the Lord along with such a brave comrade as Francezet. This manner of defence led to the application of the question both ordinary and extraordinary, and to the stake; and our readers already know what such a double sentence meant. Francezet and Brun paid both penalties on the 30th of April, betraying no secrets and uttering no complaints.

Boeton, who had been denounced by Villas when under torture (and who thereby abridged his agony) as the person in whose house the plot to carry off the Duke of Berwick and de Baville had been arranged, still remained to be dealt with.

He was moderate in his religious views, but firm and full of faith; his principles resembled those of the Quakers in that he refused to carry arms; he was, however, willing to aid the good cause by all other means within his reach. He was at home waiting, with that calm which perfect trust in God gives, for the day to come which had been appointed for the execution of the plan, when suddenly his house was surrounded during the night by the royals. Faithful to his principles, he offered no resistance, but held out his hands to be bound. He was taken in triumph to Nimes, and from there to the citadel of Montpellier. On the way he encountered his wife and his son, who were going to the latter town to intercede for him. When they met him, they dismounted from their horse, for the mother was riding on a pillion behind the son, and kneeling on the highroad, asked for Boeton’s blessing. Unfeeling though the soldiers were, they yet permitted their prisoner to stop an instant, while he, raising his fettered hands to heaven, gave the double blessing asked for. So touched was Baron Saint-Chatte by the scene (be it remarked in passing that the baron and Boeton were cousins by marriage) that he permitted them to embrace one another, so for a few moments they stood, the husband and father clasped to the hearts of his dear ones; then, on a sign from Boeton, they tore themselves away, Boeton commanding them to pray for M. de Saint-Chatte, who had given them this consolation. As he resumed his march the prisoner set them the example by beginning to sing a psalm for the benefit of M. de Saint-Chatte.

The next day, despite the intercession of his wife and son, Boeton was condemned to torture both ordinary and extraordinary, and then to be broken on the wheel. On hearing this cruel sentence, he said that he was ready to suffer every ill that God might send him in order to prove the steadfastness of his faith.

And indeed he endured his torture with such firmness, that M. de Baville, who was present in the hope of obtaining a confession, became more impatient than the sufferer, and, forgetting his sacred office, the judge struck and insulted the prisoner. Upon this Baeton raised his eyes to heaven and cried, “Lord, Lord! how long shall the wicked triumph? How long shall innocent blood be shed? How long wilt Thou not judge and avenge our blood with cries to Thee? Remember Thy jealousy, O Lord, and Thy loving-kindness of old!” Then M. de Baville withdrew, giving orders that he was to be brought to the scaffold.

The scaffold was erected on the Esplanade: being, as was usual when this sort of death was to be inflicted, a wooden platform five or six feet high, on which was fastened flat a St. Andrew’s cross, formed of two beams of wood in the form of an X. In each of the four arms two square pieces were cut out to about half the depth of the beam, and about a foot apart, so that when the victim was bound on the cross the outstretched limbs were easy to break by a blow at these points, having no support beneath. Lastly, near the cross, at one corner of the scaffold an upright wooden post was fixed, on which was fastened horizontally a small carriage wheel, as on a pivot, the projecting part of the nave being sawn off to make it flat. On this bed of pain the sufferer was laid, so that the spectators might enjoy the sight of his dying convulsions when, the executioner having accomplished his part, the turn of death arrived.

Boeton was carried to execution in a cart, and drums were beaten that his exhortations might not be heard. But above the roll of drums his voice rose unfalteringly, as he admonished his brethren to uphold their fellowship in Christ.

Half-way to the Esplanade a friend of the condemned man, who happened to be in the street, met the procession, and fearing that he could not support the sight, he took refuge in a shop. When Boeton was opposite the door, he stopped the cart and asked permission of the provost to speak to his friend. The request being granted, he called him out, and as he approached, bathed in tears, Boeton said, “Why do you run away from me? Is it because you see me covered with the tokens of Jesus Christ? Why do you weep because He has graciously called me to Himself, and all unworthy though I be, permits me to seal my faith with my blood?” Then, as the friend threw himself into Boeton’s arms and some signs of sympathetic emotion appeared among the crowd; the procession was abruptly ordered to move on; but though the leave-taking was thus roughly broken short, no murmur passed the lips of Boeton.

In turning out of the first street, the scaffold came in sight; the condemned man raised his hands towards heaven, and exclaimed in a cheerful voice, while a smile lit up his face, “Courage, my soul! I see thy place of triumph, whence, released from earthly bonds, thou shah take flight to heaven.”

When he got to the foot of the scaffold, it was found he could not mount without assistance; for his limbs, crushed in the terrible “boot,” could no longer sustain his weight. While they were preparing to carry him up, he exhorted and comforted the Protestants, who were all weeping round him. When he reached the platform he laid himself of his own accord on the cross; but hearing from the executioner that he must first be undressed, he raised himself again with a smile, so that the executioner’s assistant could remove his doublet and small-clothes. As he wore no stockings, his legs being bandaged the man also unwound these bandages, and rolled up Boeton’s shirts-sleeves to the elbow, and then ordered him to lay himself again on the cross. Boeton did so with unbroken calm. All his limbs were then bound to the beams with cords at every joint; this accomplished, the assistant retired, and the executioner came forward. He held in his hand a square bar of iron, an inch and a half thick, three feet long, and rounded at one end so as to form a handle.

When Boeton saw it he began singing a psalm, but almost immediately the melody was interrupted by a cry: the executioner had broken a bone of

Boeton's right leg; but the singing was at once resumed, and continued without interruption till each limb had been broken in two places. Then the executioner unbound the formless but still living body from the cross, and while from its lips issued words of faith in God he laid it on the wheel, bending it back on the legs in such a manner that the heels and head met; and never once during the completion of this atrocious performance did the voice of the sufferer cease to sound forth the praises of the Lord.

No execution till then had ever produced such an effect on the crowd, so that Abbe Massilla, who was present, seeing the general emotion, hastened to call M. de Baville's attention to the fact that, far from Boeton's death inspiring the Protestants with terror, they were only encouraged to hold out, as was proved by their tears, and the praises they lavished on the dying man.

M de Baville, recognising the truth of this observation, ordered that Boeton should be put out of misery. This order being conveyed to the executioner, he approached the wheel to break in Boeton's chest with one last blow; but an archer standing on the scaffold threw himself before the sufferer, saying that the Huguenot had not yet suffered half enough. At this, Boeton, who had heard the dreadful dispute going on beside him, interrupted his prayers for an instant, and raising his head, which hung down over the edge of the wheel, said, "Friend, you think I suffer, and in truth I do; but He for whom I suffer is beside me and gives me strength to bear everything joyfully." Just then M. de Baville's order was repeated, and the archer, no longer daring to interfere, allowed the executioner to approach. Then Boeton, seeing his last moment had come, said, "My dear friends, may my death be an example to you, to incite you to preserve the gospel pure; bear faithful testimony that I died in the religion of Christ and His holy apostles." Hardly had these words passed his lips, than the death-blow was given and his chest crushed; a few inarticulate sounds, apparently prayers, were heard; the head fell back, the martyrdom was ended.

This execution ended the war in Languedoc. A few imprudent preachers still delivered belated sermons, to which the rebels listened trembling with fear, and for which the preachers paid on the wheel or gibbet. There were disturbances in Vivarais, aroused by Daniel Billard, during which a few Catholics were found murdered on the highway; there were a few fights, as for instance at Sainte-Pierre-Ville, where the Camisards, faithful to the old traditions which had come to them from Cavalier, Catinat, and Ravenal, fought one to twenty, but they were all without importance; they were only the last quiverings of the dying civil strife, the last shudderings of the earth when the eruption of the volcano is over.

Even Cavalier understood that the end had come, for he left Holland for England. There Queen Anne distinguished him by a cordial welcome; she invited him to enter her service, an offer which he accepted, and he was placed in command of a regiment of refugees; so that he actually received in England the grade of colonel, which he had been offered in France. At the battle of Almanza the regiment commanded by Cavalier found itself opposed by a French regiment. The old enemies recognised each other, and with a howl of rage, without waiting for the word of command or executing any military evolutions, they hurled themselves at each other with such fury that, if we may believe the Duke of Berwick, who was present, they almost annihilated each other in the conflict. Cavalier, however, survived the slaughter, in which he had performed his part with energy; and for his courage was made general and governor of the island of Jersey. He died at Chelsea in May 1740, aged sixty years. “I must confess,” says Malesherbes, “that this soldier, who without training became a great general by means of his natural gifts; this Camisard, who dared in the face of fierce troopers to punish a crime similar to those by which the troopers existed; this rude peasant, who, admitted into the best society; adopted its manners and gained its esteem and love; this man, who though accustomed to an adventurous life, and who might justly have been puffed up by success, had yet enough philosophy to lead for thirty-five years a tranquil private existence, appears to me to be one of the rarest characters to be met with in the pages of history.”

CHAPTER VI

At length Louis XIV, bowed beneath the weight of a reign of sixty years, was summoned in his turn to appear before God, from whom, as some said, he looked for reward, and others for pardon. But Nimes, that city with the heart of fire, was quiet; like the wounded who have lost the best part of their blood, she thought only, with the egotism of a convalescent, of being left in peace to regain the strength which had become exhausted through the terrible wounds which Montrevel and the Duke of Berwick had dealt her. For sixty years petty ambition had taken the place of sublime self-sacrifice, and disputes about etiquette succeeded mortal combats. Then the philosophic era dawned, and the sarcasms of the encyclopedists withered the monarchical intolerance of Louis XIV and Charles IX. Thereupon the Protestants resumed their preaching, baptized their children and buried their dead, commerce flourished once more, and the two religions lived side by side, one concealing under a peaceful exterior the memory of its martyrs, the other the memory of its triumphs. Such was the mood on which the blood-red orb of the sun of ‘89 rose. The Protestants greeted it with cries of joy, and indeed the promised liberty gave them back their country, their civil rights, and the status of French citizens.

Nevertheless, whatever were the hopes of one party or the fears of the other, nothing had as yet occurred to disturb the prevailing tranquillity, when, on the 19th and 20th of July, 1789, a body of troops was formed in the capital of La Gard which was to bear the name of the Nimes Militia: the resolution which authorised this act was passed by the citizens of the three orders sitting in the hall of the palace.

It was as follows: —

“Article 10. The Nimes Legion shall consist of a colonel, a lieutenant-colonel, a major, a lieutenant-major, an adjutant, twenty-four captains, twenty-four lieutenants, seventy-two sergeants, seventy-two corporals, and eleven hundred and fifty-two privates — in all, thirteen hundred and forty-nine men, forming eighty companies.

“Article 11. The place of general assembly shall be, the Esplanade.

“Article 12. The eighty companies shall be attached to the four quarters of the town mentioned below — viz., place de l’Hotel-de-Ville, place de la

Maison-Carree, place Saint-Jean, and place du Chateau.

"Article 13. The companies as they are formed by the permanent council shall each choose its own captain, lieutenant, sergeants and corporals, and from the date of his nomination the captain shall have a seat on the permanent council."

The Nimes Militia was deliberately formed upon certain lines which brought Catholics and Protestants closely together as allies, with weapons in their hands; but they stood over a mine which was bound to explode some day, as the slightest friction between the two parties would produce a spark.

This state of concealed enmity lasted for nearly a year, being augmented by political antipathies; for the Protestants almost to man were Republicans, and the Catholics Royalists.

In the interval — that is to say, towards January, 1790 — a Catholic called Francois Froment was entrusted by the Marquis de Foucault with the task of raising, organising, and commanding a Royalist party in the South. This we learn from one of his own letters to the marquis, which was printed in Paris in 1817. He describes his mode of action in the following words: —

It is not difficult to understand that being faithful to my religion and my king, and shocked at the seditious ideas which were disseminated on all sides, I should try to inspire others with the same spirit with which I myself was animated, so, during the year 1789, I published several articles in which I exposed the dangers which threatened altar and throne. Struck with the justice of my criticisms, my countrymen displayed the most zealous ardor in their efforts to restore to the king the full exercise of all his rights. Being anxious to take advantage of this favourable state of feeling, and thinking that it would be dangerous to hold communication with the ministers of Louis XVI, who were watched by the conspirators, I went secretly to Turin to solicit the approbation and support of the French princes there. At a consultation which was held just after my arrival, I showed them that if they would arm not only the partisans of the throne, but those of the altar, and advance the interests of religion while advancing the interests of royalty, it would be easy to save both.

"My plan had for sole object to bind a party together, and give it as far as I was able breadth and stability.

"As the revolutionists placed their chief dependence on force, I felt that they could only be met by force; for then as now I was convinced of this great truth, that one strong passion can only be overcome by another stronger, and that therefore republican fanaticism could only be driven out by religious zeal.

"The princes being convinced of the correctness of my reasoning and the efficacy of my remedies, promised me the arms and supplies necessary to stem the tide of faction, and the Comte d'Artois gave me letters of recommendation to the chief nobles in Upper Languedoc, that I might concert measures with them; for the nobles in that part of the country had assembled at Toulouse to deliberate on the best way of inducing the other Orders to unite in restoring to the Catholic religion its useful influence, to the laws their power, and to the king his liberty and authority.

"On my return to Languedoc, I went from town to town in order to meet those gentlemen to whom the Comte d'Artois had written, among whom were many of the most influential Royalists and some members of the States of Parliament. Having decided on a general plan, and agreed on a method of carrying on secret correspondence with each other, I went to Nimes to wait for the assistance which I had been promised from Turin, but which I never received. While waiting, I devoted myself to awakening and sustaining the zeal of the inhabitants, who at my suggestion, on the 20th April, passed a resolution, which was signed by 5,000 inhabitants."

This resolution, which was at once a religious and political manifesto, was drafted by Viala, M. Froment's secretary, and it lay for signature in his office. Many of the Catholics signed it without even reading it, for there was a short paragraph prefixed to the document which contained all the information they seemed to desire.

"GENTLEMEN, — The aspirations of a great number of our Catholic and patriotic fellow-citizens are expressed in the resolution which we have the honour of laying before you. They felt that under present circumstances such a resolution was necessary, and they feel convinced that if you give it your support, as they do not doubt you will, knowing your patriotism, your religious zeal, and your love for our august sovereign, it will conduce to the happiness of France, the maintenance of the true religion, and the rightful authority of the king.

"We are, gentlemen, with respect, your very humble and obedient servants, the President and Commissioners of the Catholic Assembly of Nimes.

"(Signed):

“FROMENT, Commissioner
LAPIERRE, President
FOLACHER, “
LEVELUT, Commissioner
FAURE,
MELCHIOND, “
ROBIN, “
VIGNE, “ “

At the same time a number of pamphlets, entitled Pierre Roman to the Catholics of Nines, were distributed to the people in the streets, containing among other attacks on the Protestants the following passages:

“If the door to high positions and civil and military honours were closed to the Protestants, and a powerful tribunal established at Nimes to see that this rule were strictly kept, you would soon see Protestantism disappear.

“The Protestants demand to share all the privileges which you enjoy, but if you grant them this, their one thought will then be to dispossess you entirely, and they will soon succeed.

“Like ungrateful vipers, who in a torpid state were harmless, they will when warmed by your benefits turn and kill you.

“They are your born enemies: your fathers only escaped as by a miracle from their blood-stained hands. Have you not often heard of the cruelties practised on them? It was a slight thing when the Protestants inflicted death alone, unaccompanied by the most horrible tortures. Such as they were such they are.”

It may easily be imagined that such attacks soon embittered minds already disposed to find new causes for the old hatred, and besides the Catholics did not long confine themselves to resolutions and pamphlets. Froment, who had already got himself appointed Receiver-General of the Chapter and captain of one of the Catholic companies, insisted on being present at the installation of the Town Council, and brought his company with him armed with pitchforks, in spite of the express prohibition of the colonel of the legion. These forks were terrible weapons, and had been fabricated in a particular form for the Catholics of Nimes, Uzes, and Alais. But Froment and his company paid no attention to the prohibition, and this disobedience made a great impression on the Protestants, who began to divine the hostility of their adversaries, and it is very possible that if the new Town Council had not shut their eyes to this act of insubordination, civil war might have burst forth in Nimes that very day.

The next day, at roll-call, a sergeant of another company, one Allien, a cooper by trade, taunted one of the men with having carried a pitchfork the day before, in disobedience to orders. He replied that the mayor had permitted him to carry it; Allien not believing this, proposed to some of the men to go with him to the mayor’s and ask if it were true. When they saw M. Marguerite, he said that he had permitted nothing of the kind, and sent the delinquent to prison. Half an hour later, however, he gave orders for his release.

As soon as he was free he set off to find his comrades, and told them what had occurred: they, considering that an insult to one was an insult to the whole company, determined on having satisfaction at once, so about eleven o’clock P.M. they went to the cooper’s house, carrying with them a gallows and ropes ready greased. But quietly as they approached, Allien heard them, for his door being bolted from within had to be forced. Looking out of the window, he saw a great crowd, and as he suspected that his life was in danger, he got out of a back window into the yard and so escaped. The militia being thus disappointed, wreaked their vengeance on some passing Protestants, whose unlucky stars had led them that way; these they knocked about, and even stabbed one of them three times with a knife.

On the 22nd April, 1790, the royalists — that is to say, the Catholics — assumed the white cockade, although it was no longer the national emblem, and on the 1st May some of the militia who had planted a maypole at the mayor’s door were invited to lunch with him. On the 2nd, the company which was on guard at the mayor’s official residence shouted several times during the day, “Long live the king! Up with the Cross and down with the black throats!” (This was the name which they had given to the Calvinists.) “Three cheers for the white cockade! Before we are done, it will be red with the blood of the Protestants!” However, on the 5th of May they ceased to wear it, replacing it by a scarlet tuft, which in their patois they called the red pouf, which was immediately adopted as the Catholic emblem.

Each day as it passed brought forth fresh brawls and provocations: libels were invented by the Capuchins, and spread abroad by three of their number. Meetings were held every day, and at last became so numerous that the town authorities called in the aid of the militia-dragoons to disperse them. Now these gatherings consisted chiefly of those tillers of the soil who are called cebets, from a Provencal word cebe, which means “onion,” and they could easily be recognised as Catholics by their red pouf, which they wore both in and out of uniform. On the other hand, the dragoons were all Protestants.

However, these latter were so very gentle in their admonitions, that although the two parties found themselves, so to speak, constantly face to face and armed, for several days the meetings were dispersed without bloodshed. But this was exactly what the cebets did not want, so they began to insult the dragoons and turn them into ridicule. Consequently, one morning they gathered together in great numbers, mounted on asses, and with drawn swords began to patrol the city.

At the same time, the lower classes, who were nearly all Catholics, joined the burlesque patrols in complaining loudly of the dragoons, some saying that their horses had trampled on their children, and others that they had frightened their wives.

The Protestants contradicted them, both parties grew angry, swords were half drawn, when the municipal authorities came on the scene, and instead of apprehending the ringleaders, forbade the dragoons to patrol the town any more, ordering them in future to do nothing more than send twenty men every day to mount guard at the episcopal palace and to undertake no other duty except at the express request of the Town Council. Although it was expected that the dragoons would revolt against such a humiliation, they submitted, which was a great disappointment to the cebets, who had been longing for a chance to indulge in new outrages. For all that, the Catholics did not consider themselves beaten; they felt sure of being able to find some other way of driving their quarry to bay.

Sunday, the 13th of June, arrived. This day had been selected by the Catholics for a great demonstration. Towards ten o’clock in the morning, some companies wearing the red tuft, under pretext of going to mass, marched through the city armed and uttering threats. The few dragoons, on the other hand, who were on guard at the palace, had not even a sentinel posted, and had only five muskets in the guard-house. At two o’clock P.M. there was a meeting held in the Jacobin church, consisting almost exclusively of militia wearing the red tuft. The mayor pronounced a panegyric on those who wore it, and was followed by Pierre Froment, who explained his mission in much the same words as those quoted above. He then ordered a cask of wine to be broached and distributed among the cebets, and told them to walk about the streets in threes, and to disarm all the dragoons whom they might meet away from their post. About six o'clock in the evening a red-tuft volunteer presented himself at the gate of the palace, and ordered the porter to sweep the courtyard, saying that the volunteers were going to get up a ball for the dragoons. After this piece of bravado he went away, and in a few moments a note arrived, couched in the following terms:

"The bishop's porter is warned to let no dragoon on horse or on foot enter or leave the palace this evening, on pain of death.

"13th June 1790."

This note being brought to the lieutenant, he came out, and reminded the volunteer that nobody but the town authorities could give orders to the servants at the palace. The volunteer gave an insolent answer, the lieutenant advised him to go away quietly, threatening if he did not to put him out by force. This altercation attracted a great many of the red-tufts from outside, while the dragoons, hearing the noise, came down into the yard; the quarrel became more lively, stones were thrown, the call to arms was heard, and in a few moments about forty cebets, who were prowling around in the neighbourhood of the palace, rushed into the yard carrying guns and swords. The lieutenant, who had only about a dozen dragoons at his back, ordered the bugle to sound, to recall those who had gone out; the volunteers threw themselves upon the bugler, dragged his instrument from his hands, and broke it to pieces. Then several shots were fired by the militia, the dragoons returned them, and a regular battle began. The lieutenant soon saw that this was no mere street row, but a deliberate rising planned beforehand, and realising that very serious consequences were likely to ensue, he sent a dragoon to the town hall by a back way to give notice to the authorities.

M de Saint-Pons, major of the Nimes legion, hearing some noise outside, opened his window, and found the whole city in a tumult: people were running in every direction, and shouting as they ran that the dragoons were being killed at the palace. The major rushed out into the streets at once, gathered together a dozen to fifteen patriotic citizens without weapons, and hurried to the town hall: There he found two officials of the town, and begged them to go at once to the place de l'Eveche, escorted by the first company, which was on guard at the town hall. They agreed, and set off. On the way several shots were fired at them, but no one was hit. When they arrived at the square, the cebets fired a volley at them with the same negative result. Up the three principal streets which led to the palace numerous red-tufts were hurrying; the first company took possession of the ends of the streets, and being fired at returned the fire, repulsing the assailants and clearing the square, with the loss of one of their men, while several of the retreating cebets were wounded.

While this struggle was going on at the palace, the spirit of murder broke loose in the town.

At the gate of the Madeleine, M. de Jalabert's house was broken into by the red-tufts; the unfortunate old man came out to meet them and asked what they wanted. "Your life and the lives of all the other dogs of Protestants!" was the reply. Whereupon he was seized and dragged through the streets, fifteen insurgents hacking at him with their swords.

At last he managed to escape from their hands, but died two days later of his wounds.

Another old man named Astruc, who was bowed beneath the weight of seventy-two years and whose white hair covered his shoulders, was met as he was on his way to the gate of Carmes. Being recognised as a Protestant, he received five wounds from some of the famous pitchforks belonging to the company of Froment. He fell, but the assassins picked him up, and throwing him into the moat, amused themselves by flinging stones at him, till one of them, with more humanity than his fellows, put a bullet through his head.

Three electors — M. Massador from near Beaucaire, M. Vialla from the canton of Lasalle, and M. Puech of the same place-were attacked by red-tufts on their way home, and all three seriously wounded. The captain who had been in command of the detachment on guard at the Electoral Assembly was returning to his quarters, accompanied by a sergeant and three volunteers of his own company, when they were stopped on the Petit-Cours by Froment, commonly called Damblay, who, pressing the barrel of a pistol to the captain's breast, said, "Stand, you rascal, and give up your arms." At the same time the red-tufts, seizing the captain from behind by the hair, pulled him down. Froment fired his pistol, but missed. As he fell the captain drew his sword, but it was torn from his hands, and he received a cut from Froment's sword. Upon this the captain made a great effort, and getting one of his arms free, drew a pistol from his pocket, drove back his assassins, fired at Froment, and missed him. One of the men by his side was wounded and disarmed.

A patrol of the regiment of Guienne, attached to which was M. Boudon, a dragoon officer, was passing the Calquieres. M. Boudon was attacked by a band of red-tufts and his casque and his musket carried off. Several shots were fired at him, but none of them hit him; the patrol surrounded him to save him, but as he had received two bayonet wounds, he desired revenge, and, breaking through his protectors, darted forward to regain possession of his musket, and was killed in a moment. One of his fingers was cut off to get at a diamond ring which he wore, his pockets were rifled of his purse and watch, and his body was thrown into the moat.

Meantime the place-des-Recollets, the Cours, the place-des-Carmes, the Grand-Rue, and rue de Notre Dame-de-l'Esplanade were filled with men armed with guns, pitchforks, and swords. They had all come from Froment's house, which overlooked that part of Nimes called Les Calquieres, and the entrance to which was on the ramparts near the Dominican Towers. The three leaders of the insurrection — Froment. Folacher, and Descombiez — took possession of these towers, which formed a part of the old castle; from this position the Catholics could sweep the entire quay of Les Calquieres and the steps of the Salle de Spectacle with their guns, and if it should turn out that the insurrection they had excited did not attain the dimensions they expected nor gain such enthusiastic adherents, it would be quite feasible for them to defend themselves in such a position until relief came.

These arrangements were either the result of long meditation or were the inspiration of some clever strategist. The fact is that everything leads one to believe that it was a plan which had been formed with great care, for the rapidity with which all the approaches to the fortress were lined with a double row of militiamen all wearing the red tuft, the care which was taken to place the most eager next the barracks in which the park of artillery was stationed, and lastly, the manner in which the approach to the citadel was barred by an entire company (this being the only place where the patriots could procure arms), combine to prove that this plan was the result of much forethought; for, while it appeared to be only defensive, it enabled the insurrectionists to attack without much, danger; it caused others to believe that they had been first attacked. It was successfully carried out before the citizens were armed, and until then only a part of the foot guard and the twelve dragoons at the palace had offered any resistance to the conspirators.

The red flag round which, in case of civil war, all good citizens were expected to gather, and which was kept at the town hall, and which should have been brought out at the first shot, was now loudly called for. The Abbe de Belmont, a canon, vicar-general, and municipal official, was persuaded, almost forced, to become standard-bearer, as being the most likely on account of his ecclesiastical position to awe rebels who had taken up arms in the name of religion. The abbe himself gives the following account of the manner in which he fulfilled this mandate:

"About seven o'clock in the evening I was engaged with MM. Porthier and Ferrand in auditing accounts, when we heard a noise in the court, and going out on the lobby, we saw several dragoons coming upstairs, amongst whom was M. Paris. They told us that fighting was going on in the place de-l'Eveche, because some one or other had brought a note to the porter ordering him to admit no more dragoons to the palace on pain of death. At this point I interrupted their story by asking why the gates had not been closed and the bearer of the letter arrested, but they replied to me that it had not been possible; thereupon MM. Ferrand and Ponthier put on their scarfs and went out.

"A few instants later several dragoons, amongst whom I recognised none but MM. Lezan du Pontet, Paris junior, and Boudon, accompanied by a great number of the militia, entered, demanding that the red flag should be brought out. They tried to open the door of the council hall, and finding it locked, they called upon me for the key. I asked that one of the attendants should be sent for, but they were all out; then I went to the hall-porter to see if he knew where the key was. He said M. Berding had taken it. Meanwhile, just as the volunteers were about to force an entrance, someone ran up with the key. The door was opened, and the red flag seized and forced into my hands. I was then dragged down into the courtyard, and from thence to the square.

"It was all in vain to tell them that they ought first to get authority, and to represent to them that I was no suitable standard-bearer on account of my profession; but they would not listen to any objection, saying that my life depended upon my obedience, and that my profession would overawe the disturbers of the public peace. So I went on, followed by a detachment of the Guienne regiment, part of the first company of the legion, and several dragoons; a young man with fixed bayonet kept always at my side. Rage was depicted on the faces of all those who accompanied me, and they indulged in oaths and threats, to which I paid no attention.

“In passing through the rue des Greffes they complained that I did not carry the red flag high enough nor unfurl it fully. When we got to the guardhouse at the Crown Gate, the guard turned out, and the officer was commanded to follow us with his men. He replied that he could not do that without a written order from a member of the Town Council. Thereupon those around me told me I must write such an order, but I asked for a pen and ink; everybody was furious because I had none with me. So offensive were the remarks indulged in by the volunteers and some soldiers of the Guienne regiment, and so threatening their gestures, that I grew alarmed. I was hustled and even received several blows; but at length M. de Boudon brought me paper and a pen, and I wrote: — ’I require the troops to assist us to maintain order by force if necessary.’ Upon this, the officer consented to accompany us. We had hardly taken half a dozen steps when they all began to ask what had become of the order I had just written, for it could not be found. They surrounded me, saying that I had not written it at all, and I was on the point of being trampled underfoot, when a militiaman found it all crumpled up in his pocket. The threats grew louder, and once more it was because I did not carry the flag high enough, everyone insisting that I was quite tall enough to display it to better advantage.

“However, at this point the militiamen with the red tufts made their appearance, a few armed with muskets but the greater number with swords; shots were exchanged, and the soldiers of the line and the National Guard arranged themselves in battle order, in a kind of recess, and desired me to go forward alone, which I refused to do, because I should have been between two fires.

“Upon this, curses, threats, and blows reached their height. I was dragged out before the troops and struck with the butt ends of their muskets and the flat of their swords until I advanced. One blow that I received between the shoulders filled my mouth with blood.

“All this time those of the opposite party were coming nearer, and those with whom I was continued to yell at me to go on. I went on until I met them. I besought them to retire, even throwing myself at their feet. But all persuasion was in vain; they swept me along with them, making me enter by the Carmelite Gate, where they took the flag from me and allowed me to enter the house of a woman whose name I have never known. I was spitting such a quantity of blood that she took pity on me and brought me everything she could think of as likely to do me good, and as soon as I was a little revived I asked to be shown the way to M. Ponthier's."

While Abbe de Belmont was carrying the red flag the militia forced the Town Councillors to proclaim martial law. This had just been done when word was brought that the first red flag had been carried off, so M. Ferrand de Missol got out another, and, followed by a considerable escort, took the same road as his colleague, Abbe de Belmont. When he arrived at the Calquieres, the red-tufts, who still adorned the ramparts and towers, began to fire upon the procession, and one of the militia was disabled; the escort retreated, but M. Ferrand advanced alone to the Carmelite Gate, like M. de Belmont, and like him, he too, was taken prisoner.

He was brought to the tower, where he found Froment in a fury, declaring that the Council had not kept its promise, having sent no relief, and having delayed to give up the citadel to him.

The escort, however, had only retreated in order to seek help; they rushed tumultuously to the barracks, and finding the regiment of Guienne drawn up in marching order in command of Lieutenant-Colonel Bonne, they asked him to follow them, but he refused without a written order from a Town Councillor. Upon this an old corporal shouted, "Brave soldiers of Guienne! the country is in danger, let us not delay to do our duty." "Yes, yes," cried the soldiers; "let us march" The lieutenant colonel no longer daring to resist, gave the word of command, and they set off for the Esplanade.

As they came near the rampart with drums beating, the firing ceased, but as night was coming on the new-comers did not dare to risk attacking, and moreover the silence of the guns led them to think that the rebels had given up their enterprise. Having remained an hour in the square, the troops returned to their quarters, and the patriots went to pass the night in an inclosure on the Montpellier road.

It almost seemed as if the Catholics were beginning to recognise the futility of their plot; for although they had appealed to fanaticism, forced the Town Council to do their will, scattered gold lavishly and made wine flow, out of eighteen companies only three had joined them. "Fifteen companies," said M. Alquier in his report to the National Assembly, "although they had adopted the red tuft, took no part in the struggle, and did not add to the number of crimes committed either on that day or during the days that followed. But although the Catholics gained few partisans among their fellow-citizens, they felt certain that people from the country would rally to their aid; but about ten o'clock in the evening the rebel ringleaders, seeing that no help arrived from that quarter either, resolved to apply a stimulus to those without. Consequently, Froment wrote the following letter to M. de Bonzols, under-commandant of the province of Languedoc, who was living at Lunel:

"SIR, Up to the present all my demands, that the Catholic companies should be put under arms, have been of no avail. In spite of the order that you gave at my request, the officials of the municipality were of opinion that it would be more prudent to delay the distribution of the muskets until after the meeting of the Electoral Assembly. This day the Protestant dragoons have attacked and killed several of our unarmed Catholics, and you may imagine the confusion and alarm that prevail in the town. As a good citizen and a true patriot, I entreat you to send an order to the regiment of royal dragoons to repair at once to Nimes to restore tranquillity and put down all who break the peace. The Town Council does not meet, none of them dares to leave his house; and if you receive no requisition from them just now, it is because they go in terror of their lives and fear to appear openly. Two red flags have been carried about the streets, and municipal officers without guards have been obliged to take refuge in patriotic houses. Although I am only a private citizen, I take the liberty of asking for aid from you, knowing that the Protestants have sent to La Vannage and La Gardonninque to ask you for reinforcements, and the arrival of fanatics from these districts would expose all good patriots to slaughter. Knowing as I do of your kindness and justice, I have full trust that my prayer will receive your favourable attention.

"FROMENT, Captain of Company No. 39

"June 13, 1790, 11 o'c. p.m."

Unfortunately for the Catholic party, Dupre and Lieutaud, to whom this letter was entrusted for delivery, and for whom passports were made out as being employed on business connected with the king and the State, were arrested at Vehaud, and their despatches laid before the Electoral Assembly. Many other letters of the same kind were also intercepted, and the red-tufts went about the town saying that the Catholics of Nimes were being massacred.

The priest of Courbessac, among others, was shown a letter saying that a Capuchin monk had been murdered, and that the Catholics were in need of help. The agents who brought this letter to him wanted him to put his name to it that they might show it everywhere, but were met by a positive refusal.

At Bouillargues and Manduel the tocsin was sounded: the two villages joined forces, and with weapons in their hands marched along the road from Beaucaire to Nimes. At the bridge of Quart the villagers of Redressan and Marguerite joined them. Thus reinforced, they were able to bar the way to all who passed and subject them to examination; if a man could show he was a Catholic, he was allowed to proceed, but the Protestants were murdered then and there. We may remind our readers that the "Cadets de la Croix" pursued the same method in 1704.

Meantime Descombiez, Froment, and Folacher remained masters of the ramparts and the tower, and when very early one morning their forces were augmented by the insurgents from the villages (about two hundred men), they took advantage of their strength to force a way into the house of a certain Therond, from which it was easy to effect an entrance to the Jacobin monastery, and from there to the tower adjoining, so that their line now extended from the gate at the bridge of Calquieres to that at the end of College Street. From daylight to dusk all the patriots who came within range were fired at whether they were armed or not.

On the 14th June, at four o'clock in the morning, that part of the legion which was against the Catholics gathered together in the square of the Esplanade, where they were joined by the patriots from the adjacent towns and villages, who came in in small parties till they formed quite an army. At five A.M. M. de St. Pons, knowing that the windows of the Capuchin monastery commanded the position taken up by the patriots, went there with a company and searched the house thoroughly, and also the Amphitheatre, but found nothing suspicious in either.

Immediately after, news was heard of the massacres that had taken place during the night.

The country-house belonging to M. and Mme. Noguies had been broken into, the furniture destroyed, the owners killed in their beds, and an old man of seventy who lived with them cut to pieces with a scythe.

A young fellow of fifteen, named Payre, in passing near the guard placed at the Pont des files, had been asked by a red-tuft if he were Catholic or Protestant. On his replying he was Protestant, he was shot dead on the spot. "That was like killing a lamb," said a comrade to the murderer. "Pooh!"

said he, “I have taken a vow to kill four Protestants, and he may pass for one.”

M Maigre, an old man of eighty-two, head of one of the most respected families in the neighbourhood, tried to escape from his house along with his son, his daughter-in-law, two grandchildren, and two servants; but the carriage was stopped, and while the rebels were murdering him and his son, the mother and her two children succeeded in escaping to an inn, whither the assassins pursued them, Fortunately, however, the two fugitives having a start, reached the inn a few minutes before their pursuers, and the innkeeper had enough presence of mind to conceal them and open the garden gate by which he said they had escaped. The Catholics, believing him, scattered over the country to look for them, and during their absence the mother and children were rescued by the mounted patrol.

The exasperation of the Protestants rose higher and higher as reports of these murders came in one by one, till at last the desire for vengeance could no longer be repressed, and they were clamorously insisting on being led against the ramparts and the towers, when without warning a heavy fusillade began from the windows and the clock tower of the Capuchin monastery. M. Massin, a municipal officer, was killed on the spot, a sapper fatally wounded, and twenty-five of the National Guard wounded more or less severely. The Protestants immediately rushed towards the monastery in a disorderly mass; but the superior, instead of ordering the gates to be opened, appeared at a window above the entrance, and addressing the assailants as the vilest of the vile, asked them what they wanted at the monastery. “We want to destroy it, we want to pull it down till not one stone rests upon another,” they replied. Upon this, the reverend father ordered the alarm bells to be rung, and from the mouths of bronze issued the call for help; but before it could arrive, the door was burst in with hatchets, and five Capuchins and several of the militia who wore the red tuft were killed, while all the other occupants of the monastery ran away, taking refuge in the house of a Protestant called Paulhan. During this attack the church was respected; a man from Sornmieres, however, stole a pyx which he found in the sacristy, but as soon as his comrades perceived this he was arrested and sent to prison.

In the monastery itself, however, the doors were broken in, the furniture smashed, the library and the dispensary wrecked. The sacristy itself was not spared, its presses being broken into, its chests destroyed, and two monstrances broken; but nothing further was touched. The storehouses and the small cloth-factory connected with the monastery remained intact, like the church.

But still the towers held out, and it was round them that the real fighting took place, the resistance offered from within being all the more obstinate that the besieged expected relief from moment to moment, not knowing that their letters had been intercepted by the enemy. On every side the rattling of shot was heard, from the Esplanade, from the windows, from the roofs; but very little effect was produced by the Protestants, for Descombiez had told his men to put their caps with the red tufts on the top of the wall, to attract the bullets, while they fired from the side. Meantime the conspirators, in order to get a better command of the besiegers, reopened a passage which had been long walled up between the tower Du Poids and the tower of the Dominicans. Descombiez, accompanied by thirty men, came to the door of the monastery nearest the fortifications and demanded the key of another door which led to that part of the ramparts which was opposite the place des Carmes, where the National Guards were stationed. In spite of the remonstrances of the monks, who saw that it would expose them to great danger, the doors were opened, and Froment hastened to occupy every post of vantage, and the battle began in that quarter, too, becoming fiercer as the conspirators remarked that every minute brought the Protestants reinforcements from Gardonninque and La Vaunage. The firing began at ten o’clock in the morning, and at four o’clock in the afternoon it was going on with unabated fury.

At four o’clock, however, a servant carrying a flag of truce appeared; he brought a letter from Descombiez, Fremont, and Folacher, who styled themselves “Captains commanding the towers of the Castle.” It was couched in the following words: —

“To the Commandant of the troops of the line, with the request that the contents be communicated to the militia stationed in the Esplanade.

“SIR, — We have just been informed that you are anxious for peace. We also desire it, and have never done anything to break it. If those who have caused the frightful confusion which at present prevails in the city are willing to bring it to an end, we offer to forget the past and to live with them as brothers.

“We remain, with all the frankness and loyalty of patriots and Frenchmen, your humble servants, “The Captains of the Legion of Nimes, in command of the towers of the Castle,

“FROMENT, DESCOMBIEZ, FOLACHER NIMES, the 14th June 1790, 4.00 P.M.”

On the receipt of this letter, the city herald was sent to the towers to offer the rebels terms of capitulation. The three “captains in command” came out to discuss the terms with the commissioners of the electoral body; they were armed and followed by a great number of adherents. However, as the negotiators desired peace before all things, they proposed that the three chiefs should surrender and place themselves in the hands of the Electoral Assembly. This offer being refused, the electoral commissioners withdrew, and the rebels retired behind their fortifications. About five o’clock in the evening, just as the negotiations were broken off, M. Aubry, an artillery captain who had been sent with two hundred men to the depot of field artillery in the country, returned with six pieces of ordnance, determined to make a breach in the tower occupied by the conspirators, and from which they were firing in safety at the soldiers, who had no cover. At six o’clock, the guns being mounted, their thunder began, first drowning the noise of the musketry and then silencing it altogether; for the cannon balls did their work quickly, and before long the tower threatened to fall. Thereupon the electoral commissioners ordered the firing to cease for a moment, in the hope that now the danger had become so imminent the leaders would accept the conditions which they had refused one hour before; and not desiring to drive them to desperation, the commissioners advanced again down College Street, preceded by a bugler, and the captains were once more summoned to a parley. Froment and Descombiez came out to meet them, and seeing the condition of the tower, they agreed to lay down their arms and send them for the palace, while they themselves would proceed to the Electoral Assembly and place themselves under its protection. These proposals being accepted, the commissioners waved their hats as a sign that the treaty was concluded.

At that instant three shots were fired from the ramparts, and cries of “Treachery! treachery!” were heard on every side. The Catholic chiefs returned to the tower, while the Protestants, believing that the commissioners were being assassinated, reopened the cannonade; but finding that it took too long to complete the breach, ladders were brought, the walls scaled, and the towers carried by assault. Some of the Catholics were killed, the others gained Froment’s house, where, encouraged by him, they tried to organise a resistance; but the assailants, despite the oncoming darkness, attacked the place with such fury that doors and windows were shattered in an instant. Froment and his brother Pierre tried to escape by a narrow staircase which led to the roof, but before they reached it Pierre was wounded in the hip and fell; but Froment reached the roof, and sprang upon an adjacent housetop, and climbing from roof to roof, reached the college, and getting into it by a garret window, took refuge in a large room which was always unoccupied at night, being used during the day as a study.

Froment remained hidden there until eleven o’clock. It being then completely dark, he got out of the window, crossed the city, gained the open country, and walking all night, concealed himself during the day in the house of a Catholic. The next night he set off again, and reached the coast, where he embarked on board a vessel for Italy, in order to report to those who had sent him the disastrous result of his enterprise.

For three whole days the carnage lasted. The Protestants losing all control over themselves, carried on the work of death not only without pity but with refined cruelty. More than five hundred Catholics lost their lives before the 17th, when peace was restored.

For a long time recriminations went on between Catholics and Protestants, each party trying to fix on the other the responsibility for those dreadful three days; but at last Franqois Froment put an end to all doubt on the subject, by publishing a work from which are set forth many of the details just laid before our readers, as well as the reward he met with when he reached Turin. At a meeting of the French nobles in exile, a resolution was passed in favour of M. Pierre Froment and his children, inhabitants of Nimes.

We give a literal reproduction of this historic document:

“We the undersigned, French nobles, being convinced that our Order was instituted that it might become the prize of valour and the encouragement of virtue, do declare that the Chevalier de Guer having given us proof of the devotion to their king and the love of their country which have been displayed by M. Pierre Froment, receiver of the clergy, and his three sons, Mathieu Froment citizen, Jacques Froment canon, Francois Froment advocate, inhabitants of Nimes, we shall henceforward regard them and their descendants as nobles and worthy to enjoy all the distinctions which belong to the true nobility. Brave citizens, who perform such distinguished actions as fighting for the restoration of the monarchy, ought to be considered as the equals of those French chevaliers whose ancestors helped to found it. Furthermore, we do declare that as soon as circumstances permit we shall join together to petition His Majesty to grant to this family, so illustrious through its virtue, all the honours and prerogatives which belong to those born noble.

“We depute the Marquis de Meran, Comte d’Espinchal, the Marquis d’Escars, Vicomte de Pons, Chevalier de Guer, and the Marquis de la Feronniere to go to Mgr. le Comte d’Artois, Mgr. le Duc d’Angouleme, Mgr. le Duc de Berry, Mgr. le Prince de Conde, Mgr. le Due de Bourbon, and Mgr. le Duc d’Enghien, to beg them to put themselves at our head when we request His Majesty to grant to MM. Froment all the distinctions and advantages reserved for the true nobility.

“At TURIN, 12th September 1790.”

The nobility of Languedoc learned of the honours conferred on their countryman, M. Froment, and addressed the following letter to him:

“LORCH, July 7, 1792

“MONSIEUR, The nobles of Languedoc hasten to confirm the resolution adopted in your favour by the nobles assembled at Turin. They appreciate the zeal and the courage which have distinguished your conduct and that of your family; they have therefore instructed us to assure you of the pleasure with which they will welcome you among those nobles who are under the orders of Marshal de Castries, and that you are at liberty to repair to Lorch to assume your proper rank in one of the companies.

“We have the honour to be, monsieur, your humble and obedient servants,

“COMTE DE TOULOUSE-LAUTREC

“MARQUIS DE LA JONQUIERE “ETC.”

CHAPTER VII

The Protestants, as we have said, hailed the golden dawn of the revolution with delight; then came the Terror, which struck at all without distinction of creed. A hundred and thirty-eight heads fell on the scaffold, condemned by the revolutionary tribunal of the Gard. Ninety-one of those executed were Catholic, and forty-seven Protestants, so that it looked as if the executioners in their desire for impartiality had taken a census of the population.

Then came the Consulate: the Protestants being mostly tradesmen and manufacturers, were therefore richer than the Catholics, and had more to lose; they seemed to see more chance of stability in this form of government than in those preceding it, and it was evident that it had a more powerful genius at its head, so they rallied round it with confidence and sincerity. The Empire followed, with its inclination to absolutism, its Continental system, and its increased taxation; and the Protestants drew back somewhat, for it was towards them who had hoped so much from him that Napoleon in not keeping the promises of Bonaparte was most perjured.

The first Restoration, therefore, was greeted at Nimes with a universal shout of joy; and a superficial-observer might have thought that all trace of the old religious leaven had disappeared. In fact, for seventeen years the two faiths had lived side by side in perfect peace and mutual good-will; for seventeen years men met either for business or for social purposes without inquiring about each other’s religion, so that Nimes on the surface might have been held up as an example of union and fraternity.

When Monsieur arrived at Nimes, his guard of honour was drawn from the city guard, which still retained its organisation of 1812, being composed of citizens without distinction of creed. Six decorations were conferred on it — three on Catholics, and three on Protestants. At the same time, M. Daunant, M. Olivier Desmonts, and M. de Seine, the first the mayor, the second the president of the Consistory, and the third a member of the Prefecture, all three belonging to the Reformed religion, received the same favour.

Such impartiality on the part of Monsieur almost betrayed a preference, and this offended the Catholics. They muttered to one another that in the past there had been a time when the fathers of those who had just been decorated by the hand of the prince had fought against his faithful adherents. Hardly had Monsieur left the town, therefore, than it became apparent that perfect harmony no longer existed.

The Catholics had a favorite cafe, which during the whole time the Empire lasted was also frequented by Protestants without a single dispute caused by the difference of religion ever arising. But from this time forth the Catholics began to hold themselves aloof from the Protestants; the latter perceiving this, gave up the cafe by degrees to the Catholics, being determined to keep the peace whatever it might cost, and went to a cafe which had been just opened under the sign of the "Isle of Elba." The name was enough to cause them to be regarded as Bonapartists, and as to Bonapartists the cry "Long live the king!" was supposed to be offensive, they were saluted at every turn with these words, pronounced in a tone which became every day more menacing. At first they gave back the same cry, "Long live the king!" but then they were called cowards who expressed with their lips a sentiment which did not come from their hearts. Feeling that this accusation had some truth in it, they were silent, but then they were accused of hating the royal family, till at length the cry which at first had issued from full hearts in a universal chorus grew to be nothing but an expression of party hatred, so that on the 21st February, 1815, M. Daunant the mayor, by a decree, prohibited the public from using it, as it had become a means of exciting sedition. Party feeling had reached this height at Nimes when, on the 4th March, the news of the landing of Napoleon arrived.

Deep as was the impression produced, the city remained calm, but somewhat sullen; in any case, the report wanted confirmation. Napoleon, who knew of the sympathy that the mountaineers felt for him, went at once into the Alps, and his eagle did not as yet take so high a flight that it could be seen hovering above Mount Geneve.

On the 12th, the Duc d'Angouleme arrived: two proclamations calling the citizens to arms signalised his presence. The citizens answered the call with true Southern ardour: an army was formed; but although Protestants and Catholics presented themselves for enrolment with equal alacrity, the Protestants were excluded, the Catholics denying the right of defending their legitimate sovereign to any but themselves.

This species of selection apparently went on without the knowledge of the Duc d'Angouleme. During his stay in Nimes he received Protestants and Catholics with equal cordiality, and they set at his table side by side. It happened once, on a Friday, at dinner, that a Protestant general took fish and a Catholic general helped himself to fowl. The duke being amused, drew attention to this anomaly, whereupon the Catholic general replied, “Better more chicken and less treason.” This attack was so direct, that although the Protestant general felt that as far as he was concerned it had no point, he rose from table and left the room. It was the brave General Gilly who was treated in this cruel manner.

Meanwhile the news became more disastrous every day: Napoleon was moving about with the rapidity of his eagles. On the 24th March it was reported in Nimes that Louis XVIII had left Paris on the 19th and that Napoleon had entered on the 20th. This report was traced to its source, and it was found that it had been spread abroad by M. Vincent de Saint-Laurent, a councillor of the Prefecture and one of the most respected men in Nimes. He was summoned at once before the authorities and asked whence he had this information; he replied, “From a letter received from M. Bragueres,” producing the letter. But convincing as was this proof, it availed him nothing: he was escorted from brigade to brigade till he reached the Chateau d’If. The Protestants sided with M. Vincent de Saint-Laurent, the Catholics took the part of the authorities who were persecuting him, and thus the two factions which had been so long quiescent found themselves once more face to face, and their dormant hatred awoke to new life. For the moment, however, there was no explosion, although the city was at fever heat, and everyone felt that a crisis was at hand.

On the 22nd March two battalions of Catholic volunteers had already been enlisted at Nimes, and had formed part of the eighteen hundred men who were sent to Saint-Esprit. Just before their departure fleurs-de-lys had been distributed amongst them, made of red cloth; this change in the colour of the monarchical emblem was a threat which the Protestants well understood.

The prince left Nimes in due course, taking with him the rest of the royal volunteers, and leaving the Protestants practically masters of Nimes during the absence of so many Catholics. The city, however, continued calm, and when provocations began, strange to say they came from the weaker party.

On the 27th March six men met in a barn; dined together, and then agreed to make the circuit of the town. These men were Jacques Dupont, who later acquired such terrible celebrity under the name of Trestaillons, Truphemy the butcher, Morenet the dog shearer, Hours, Servant, and Gilles. They got opposite the cafe “Isle of Elba,” the name of which indicated the opinion of those who frequented it. This cafe was faced by a guard-house which was occupied by soldiers of the 67th Regiment. The six made a halt, and in the most insulting tones raised the cry of “Long live the king!” The disturbance that ensued was so slight that we only mention it in order to give an idea of the tolerance of the Protestants, and to bring upon the stage the men mentioned above, who were three months later to play such a terrible part.

On April 1st the mayor summoned to a meeting at his official residence the municipal council, the members of all the variously constituted administrative bodies in Nimes, the officers of the city guards, the priests, the Protestant pastors, and the chief citizens. At this meeting, M. Trinquelague, advocate of the Royal Courts, read a powerful address, expressing the love, of the citizens for their king and country, and exhorting them to union and peace. This address was unanimously adopted and signed by all present, and amongst the signatures were those of the principal Protestants of Nimes. But this was not all: the next day it was printed and published, and copies sent to all the communes in the department over which the white flag still floated. And all this happened, as we have said, on April and, eleven days after Napoleon’s return to Paris.

The same day word arrived that the Imperial Government had been proclaimed at Montpellier.

The next day, April 3rd, all the officers on half-pay assembled at the fountain to be reviewed by a general and a sub-inspector, and as these officers were late, the order of the, day issued by General Ambert, recognising the Imperial Government, was produced and passed along the ranks, causing such excitement that one of the officers drew his sword and cried, “Long live the emperor!” These magic words were re-echoed from every side, and they all hastened to the barracks of the 63rd Regiment, which at once joined the officers. At this juncture Marshal Pelissier arrived, and did not appear to welcome the turn things had taken; he made an effort to restrain the enthusiasm of the crowd, but was immediately arrested by his own soldiers. The officers repaired in a body to the headquarters of General Briche, commandant of the garrison, and asked for the official copy of the order of the day. He replied that he had received none, and when questioned as to which side he was on he refused to answer. The officers upon this took him prisoner. Just as they had consigned him to the barracks for confinement, a post-office official arrived bringing a despatch from General

Ambert. Learning that General Briche was a prisoner, the messenger carried his packet to the colonel of the 63rd Regiment, who was the next in seniority after the general. In opening it, it was found to contain the order of the day.

Instantly the colonel ordered the ‘gineyale’ to sound: the town guards assumed arms, the troops left the barracks and formed in line, the National Guards in the rear of the regular troops, and when they were all thus drawn up; the order of the day was read; it was then snatched out of the colonel’s hands, printed on large placards, and in less time than seemed possible it was posted up in every street and at every street corner; the tricolour replaced the white cockade, everyone being obliged to wear the national emblem or none at all, the city was proclaimed in a state of seige, and the military officers formed a vigilance committee and a police force.

While the Duc d’Angouleme had been staying at Nimes, General Gilly had applied for a command in that prince’s army, but in spite of all his efforts obtained nothing; so immediately after the dinner at which he was insulted he had withdrawn to Avernede, his place in the country. He was awoke in the night of the 5th-6th April by a courier from General Ambert, who sent to offer him the command of the 2nd Subdivision. On the 6th, General Gilly went to Nimes, and sent in his acceptance, whereby the departments of the Gard, the Lozere, and Ardeche passed under his authority.

Next day General Gilly received further despatches from General Ambert, from which he learned that it was the general’s intention, in order to avoid the danger of a civil war, to separate the Duc d’Angouleme’s army from the departments which sympathised with the royal cause; he had therefore decided to make Pont-Saint-Esprit a military post, and had ordered the 10th Regiment of mounted chasseurs, the 13th artillery, and a battalion of infantry to move towards this point by forced marches. These troops were commanded by Colonel Saint-Laurent, but General Ambert was anxious that if it could be done without danger, General Gilly should leave Nimes, taking with him part of the 63rd Regiment, and joining the other forces under the command of Colonel Saint-Laurent, should assume the chief command. As the city was quite tranquil, General Gilly did not hesitate to obey this order: he set out from Nimes on the 7th, passed the night at Uzes, and finding that town abandoned by the magistrates, declared it in a state of siege, lest disturbances should arise in the absence of authority. Having placed M. de Bresson in command, a retired chief of battalion who was born in Uzes, and who usually lived there, he continued his march on the morning of the 8th.

Beyond the village of Conans, General Gilly met an orderly sent to him by Colonel Saint-Laurent to inform him that he, the colonel, had occupied Pont Saint-Esprit, and that the Duc d'Angouleme, finding himself thus caught between two fires, had just sent General d'Aultanne, chief of staff in the royal army, to him, to enter into negotiations for a surrender. Upon this, General Gilly quickened his advance, and on reaching Pont-Saint-Esprit found General d'Aultanne and Colonel Saint-Laurent conferring together at the Hotel de la Poste.

As Colonel Saint-Laurent had received his instructions directly from the commander-in-chief, several points relating to the capitulation had already been agreed upon; of these General Gilly slightly altered some, and approved of the others, and the same day the following convention was signed:

"Convention concluded between General Gilly and Baron de Damas

"S.A.R. Mgr. le Duc d'Angouleme, Commander-in-Chief of the royal army in the South, and Baron de Gilly, General of Division and Commander-in-Chief of the first corps of the Imperial Army, being most anxiously desirous to prevent any further effusion of French blood, have given plenary powers to arrange the terms of a convention to S.A.R. M. le Baron de Damas, Field-Marshal and Under-Chief of Staff, and General de Gilly and Adjutant Lefevre, Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, and Chief of the Staff of the first Army Corps; who, having shown each other their respective credentials, have agreed on the following terms: —

"Art. 1. The royal army is to be disbanded; and the National Guards which are enrolled in it, under whatever name they may have been levied, will return to their homes, after laying down their arms. Safe conducts will be provided, and the general of division commanding-in-chief guarantees that they shall never be molested for anything they may have said or done in connection with the events preceding the present convention.

"The officers will retain their swords; the troops of the line who form part of this army will repair to such garrisons as may be assigned to them.

"Art. 2. The general officers, superior staff officers and others of all branches of the service, and the chiefs and subordinates of the administrative departments, of whose names a list will be furnished to the general-in-chief, will retire to their homes and there await the orders of His Majesty the Emperor.

"Art. 3. Officers of every rank who wish to resign their commissions are competent to do so. They will receive passports for their homes.

"Art. 4. The funds of the army and the lists of the paymaster-general will be handed over at once to commissioners appointed for that purpose by the commander-in-chief.

"Art. 5. The above articles apply to the corps commanded by Mgr. le Duc d'Angouleme in person, and also to those who act separately but under his orders, and as forming part of the royal army of the South.

"Art. 6. H.R.H. will post to Cette, where the vessels necessary for him and his suite will be waiting to take him wherever he may desire. Detachments of the Imperial Army will be placed at all the relays on the road to protect His Royal Highness during the journey, and the honours due to his rank will be everywhere paid him, if he so desire.

"Art. 7. All the officers and other persons of His Royal Highness' suite who desire to follow him will be permitted to do so, and they may either embark with him at once or later, should their private affairs need time for arrangement.

"Art. 8. The present treaty will be kept secret until His Royal Highness have quitted the limits of the empire.

"Executed in duplicate and agreed upon between the above-mentioned plenipotentiaries the 8th day of April in the year 1815, with the approval of the general commanding-in-chief, and signed,

"At the headquarters at Pont-Saint-Esprit on the day and year above written.

"(Signed) LEFEVRE Adjutant and Chief of Staff of the First Corps of the Imperial Army of the South

"(Signed) BARON DE DAMAS Field-Marshal and Under-Chief of Staff

"The present convention is approved of by the General of Division Commanding-in-Chief the Imperial Army of the South.

"(Signed) GILLY"

After some discussion between General Gilly and General Grouchy, the capitulation was carried into effect. On the 16th April, at eight o'clock in the morning, the Duc d'Angouleme arrived at Cette, and went on board the Swedish vessel Scandinavia, which, taking advantage of a favourable wind, set sail the same day.

Early in the morning of the 9th an officer of high rank had been sent to La Palud to issue safe-conducts to the troops, who according to Article I of the capitulation were to return home "after laying down their arms." But during the preceding day and night some of the royal volunteers had evaded this article by withdrawing with their arms and baggage. As this infraction of the terms led to serious consequences, we propose, in order to establish the fact, to cite the depositions of three royal volunteers who afterwards gave evidence.

"On leaving the army of the Duc d'Angouleme after the capitulation," says Jean Saunier, "I went with my officers and my corps to Saint-Jean-des-Anels. From there we marched towards Uzes. In the middle of a forest, near a village, the name of which I have forgotten, our General M. de Vogue told us that we were all to return to our own homes. We asked him where we should deposit the flag. Just then Commandant Magne detached it from the staff and put it in his pocket. We then asked the general where we should deposit our arms; he replied, that we had better keep them, as we should probably find use for them before long, and also to take our ammunition with us, to ensure our safety on the road.

"From that time on we all did what we thought best: sixty-four of us remained together, and took a guide to enable us to avoid Uzes."

Nicholas Marie, labourer, deposed as follows:

"On leaving the army of the Duc d'Angouleme after the capitulation, I went with my officers and my corps to Saint-Jean-des-Anels. We marched towards Uzes, but when we were in the middle of a forest, near a village the name of which I have forgotten, our general, M. de Vogue, told us that we were to go to our own homes as soon as we liked. We saw Commandant Magne loose the flag from its staff, roll it up and put it in his pocket. We asked the general what we were to do with our arms; he replied that we were to keep both them and our ammunition, as we should find them of use. Upon this, our chiefs left us, and we all got away as best we could."

"After the capitulation of the Duc d'Angouleme I found myself," deposes Paul Lambert, lace-maker of Nimes, "in one of several detachments under the orders of Commandant Magne and General Vogue. In the middle of a forest near a village, the name of which I do not know, M. de Vogue and the other officer, told us we might go home. The flag was folded up, and M. Magne put it in his pocket. We asked our chiefs what we were to do with our arms. M. de Vogue told us that we had better keep them, as we should need them before very long; and in any case it would be well to have them with us on the road, lest anything should happen to us."

The three depositions are too much alike to leave room for any doubt. The royal volunteers contravened Article I of the convention.

Being thus abandoned by their chiefs, without general and without flag, M. de Vogue's soldiers asked no further counsel of anyone but themselves, and, as one of them has already told us, sixty-four of them joined together to hire a guide who was to show them how to get by Uzes without going through it, for they were afraid of meeting with insult there. The guide brought them as far as Montarem without anyone opposing their passage or taking notice of their arms.

Suddenly a coachman named Bertrand, a confidential servant of Abbe Rafin, former Grand-Vicar of Alais, and of Baroness Arnaud-Wurmeser (for the abbe administered the estate of Aureillac in his own name and that of the baroness), galloped into the village of Arpaillargues, which was almost entirely Protestant and consequently Napoleonist, announcing that the miquelets (for after one hundred and ten years the old name given to the royal troops was revived) were on the way from Montarem, pillaging houses, murdering magistrates, outraging women, and then throwing them out of the windows. It is easy to understand the effect of such a story. The people gathered together in groups; the mayor and his assistant being absent, Bertrand was taken before a certain Boucarut, who on receiving his report ordered the generale to be beaten and the tocsin to be rung. Then the consternation became general: the men seized their muskets, the women and children stones and pitchforks, and everyone made ready to face a danger which only existed in the imagination of Bertrand, for there was not a shadow of foundation for the story he had told.

While the village was in this state of feverish excitement the royal volunteers came in sight. Hardly were they seen than the cry, "There they are! There they are!" arose on all sides, the streets were barricaded with carts, the tocsin rang out with redoubled frenzy, and everyone capable of carrying arms rushed to the entrance of the village.

The volunteers, hearing the uproar and seeing the hostile preparations, halted, and to show that their intentions were peaceful, put their shakos on their musket stocks and waved them above their heads, shouting that no one need fear, for they would do no harm to anyone. But alarmed as they were by the terrible stories told by Bertrand, the villagers shouted back that they could not trust to such assurances, and that if they wanted to pass through the village they must first give up their weapons. It may easily be imagined that men who had broken the convention in order to keep their weapons were not likely to give them up to these villagers — in fact, they obstinately refused to let them out of their hands, and by doing so increased the suspicions of the people. A parley of a very excited character took place between M. Fournier for the royal guards and M. Boucarut, who was chosen spokesman by the villagers. From words they came to deeds: the miquelets tried to force their way through, some shots were fired, and two miquelets, Calvet and Fournier, fell. The others scattered, followed by a lively discharge, and two more miquelets were slightly wounded. Thereupon they all took to flight through the fields on either side of the road, pursued for a short distance by the villagers, but soon returned to examine the two wounded men, and a report was drawn up by Antoine Robin, advocate and magistrate of the canton of Uzes, of the events just related.

This accident was almost the only one of its kind which happened during the Hundred Days: the two parties remained face to face, threatening but self-controlled. But let there be no mistake: there was no peace; they were simply awaiting a declaration of war. When the calm was broken, it was from Marseilles that the provocation came. We shall efface ourselves for a time and let an eye-witness speak, who being a Catholic cannot be suspected of partiality for the Protestants.

“I was living in Marseilles at the time of Napoleon’s landing, and I was a witness of the impression which the news produced upon everyone. There was one great cry; the enthusiasm was universal; the National Guard wanted to join him to the last man, but Marshal Massena did not give his consent until it was too late, for Napoleon had already reached the mountains, and was moving with such swiftness that it would have been impossible to overtake him. Next we heard of his triumphal entry into Lyons, and of his arrival in Paris during the night. Marseilles submitted like the rest of France; Prince d’Essling was recalled to the capital, and Marshal Brune, who commanded the 6th corps of observation, fixed his headquarters at Marseilles.

“With quite incomprehensible fickleness, Marseilles, whose name during the Terror had been, as one may say, the symbol of the most advanced opinions, had become almost entirely Royalist in 1815. Nevertheless, its inhabitants saw without a murmur the tricolour flag after a year’s absence floating once more above the walls. No arbitrary interference on the part of the authorities, no threats, and no brawling between the citizens and the soldiers, troubled the peace of old Phocea; no revolution ever took place with such quietness and facility.

“It must, however, be said, that Marshal Brune was just the man to accomplish such a transformation without friction; in him the frankness and loyalty of an old soldier were combined with other qualities more solid than brilliant. Tacitus in hand, he looked on at modern revolutions as they passed, and only interfered when the, voice of his country called him to her defence. The conqueror of Harlem and Bakkun had been for four years forgotten in retirement, or rather in exile, when the same voice which sent him away recalled him, and at the summons Cincinnatus left his plough and grasped his weapons. Physically he was at this period a man of about fifty-five, with a frank and open face framed by large whiskers; his head was bald except for a little grizzled hair at the temples; he was tall and active, and had a remarkably soldierly bearing.

“I had been brought into contact with him by a report which one of my friends and I had drawn up on the opinions of the people of the South, and of which he had asked to have a copy. In a long conversation with us, he discussed the subject with the impartiality of a man who brings an open mind to a debate, and he invited us to come often to see him. We enjoyed ourselves so much in his society that we got into the habit of going to his house nearly every evening.

“On his arrival in the South an old calumny which had formerly pursued him again made its appearance, quite rejuvenated by its long sleep. A writer whose name I have forgotten, in describing the Massacres of the Second of September and the death of the unfortunate Princesse de Lamballe, had said, ‘Some people thought they recognised in the man who carried her head impaled on a pike, General Brune in disguise,’ and this accusation; which had been caught up with eagerness under the Consulate, still followed him so relentlessly in 1815, that hardly a day passed without his receiving an anonymous letter, threatening him with the same fate which had overtaken the princess. One evening while we were with him such a letter arrived, and having read it he passed it on to us. It was as follows:

“‘Wretch, — We are acquainted with all your crimes, for which you will soon receive the chastisement you well deserve. It was you who during the revolution brought about the death of the Princesse de Lamballe; it was you who carried her head on a pike, but your head will be impaled on something longer. If you are so rash as to be present at the review of the Allies it is all up with you, and your head will be stuck on the steeple of the Accoules. Farewell, SCOUNDREL!'

"We advised him to trace this calumny to its source, and then to take signal vengeance on the authors. He paused an instant to reflect, and then lit the letter at a candle, and looking at it thoughtfully as it turned to ashes in his hand, said, — Vengeance! Yes, perhaps by seeking that I could silence the authors of these slanders and preserve the public tranquillity which they constantly imperil. But I prefer persuasion to severity. My principle is, that it is better to bring men's heads back to a right way of thinking than to cut them off, and to be regarded as a weak man rather than as a bloodthirsty one.'

"The essence of Marshal Brune's character was contained in these words.

"Public tranquillity was indeed twice endangered at Marseilles during the Hundred Days, and both times in the same manner. The garrison officers used to gather at a coffee-house in the place Necker, and sing songs suggested by passing events. This caused an attack by the townspeople, who broke the windows by throwing stones, some of which struck the officers. These rushed out, crying, 'To arms!' The townspeople were not slow to respond, but the commandant ordered the 'geneydle' to beat, sent out numerous patrols, and succeeded in calming the excitement and restoring quietness without any casualties.

"The day of the Champ du Mai orders for a general illumination were given, and that the tricolour flag should be displayed from the windows. The greater number of the inhabitants paid no attention to the desires of the authorities, and the officers being annoyed at this neglect, indulged in reprehensible excesses, which, however, resulted in nothing mare serious than some broken windows belonging to houses which had not illuminated, and in some of the householders being forced to illuminate according to order.

"In Marseilles as in the rest of France, people began to despair of the success of the royal cause, and those who represented this cause, who were very numerous at Marseilles, gave up annoying the military and seemed to resign themselves to their fate. Marshal Brune had left the city to take up his post on the frontier, without any of the dangers with which he was threatened having come across his path.

"The 25th of June arrived, and the news of the successes obtained at Fleurus and at Ligny seemed to justify the hopes of the soldiers, when, in the middle of the day, muttered reports began to spread in the town, the distant reverberations of the cannon of Waterloo. The silence of the leaders, the uneasiness of the soldiers, the delight of the Royalists, foretold the outbreak of a new struggle, the, results of which it was easy to anticipate. About four o'clock in the afternoon, a man, who had probably got earlier information than his fellow-townspeople, tore off his tricoloured cockade and trampled it under foot, crying, "Long live the king!" The angry soldiers seized him and were about to drag him to the guard-house, but the National Guards prevented them, and their interference led to a fight. Shouts were heard on all sides, a large ring was formed round the soldiers, a few musket shots heard, others answered, three or four men fell, and lay there weltering in their blood. Out of this confused uproar the word "Waterloo" emerged distinct; and with this unfamiliar name pronounced for the first time in the resounding voice of history, the news of the defeat of the French army and the triumph of the Allies spread apace. Then General Verdier, who held the chief command in the absence of Marshal Brune, tried to harangue the people, but his voice was drowned by the shouts of the mob who had gathered round a coffee-house where stood a bust of the emperor, which they insisted should be given up to them. Verdier, hoping to calm, what he took to be a simple street row, gave orders that the bust should be brought out, and this concession, so significant on the part of a general commanding in the emperor's name, convinced the crowd that his cause was lost. The fury of the populace grew greater now that they felt that they could indulge it with impunity; they ran to the Town Hall, and tearing down and burning the tricoloured, raised the white flag. The roll of the generale, the clang of the tocsin were heard, the neighbouring villages poured in their populations and increased the throng in the streets; single acts of violence began to occur, wholesale massacres were approaching. I had arrived in the town with my friend M the very beginning of the tumult, so we had seen the dangerous agitation and excitement grow under our eyes, but we were still ignorant of its true cause, when, in the rue de Noailles, we met an acquaintance, who, although his political opinions did not coincide with ours, had always shown himself very friendly to us. 'Well,' said I, 'what news?’ ‘Good for me and bad for you,’ he answered;’ I advise you to go away at once.’ Surprised and somewhat alarmed at these words, we begged him to explain. ‘Listen,’ said he; ‘there are going to be riots in the town; it is well known that you used to go to Brune’s nearly every evening, and that you are in consequence no favourite with your neighbours; seek safety in the country.’ I addressed some further question to him, but, turning his back on me, he left me without another word.

“M and I were still looking at each other in stupefaction, when the increasing uproar aroused us to a sense that if we desired to follow the advice just given we had not a moment to lose. We hastened to my house, which was situated in the Allees de Meilhan. My wife was just going out, but I stopped her.

“‘We are not safe here,’ I said; ‘we must get away into the country.’

“‘But where can we go?’

“‘Wherever luck takes us. Let us start.’

“She was going to put on her bonnet, but I told her to leave it behind; for it was most important that no one should think we suspected anything, but were merely going for a stroll. This precaution saved us, for we learned the next day that if our intention to fly had been suspected we should have been stopped.

“We walked at random, while behind us we heard musket shots from every part of the town. We met a company of soldiers who were hurrying to the relief of their comrades, but heard later that they had not been allowed to pass the gate.

“We recollected an old officer of our acquaintance who had quitted the service and withdrawn from the world some years before, and had taken a place in the country near the village of Saint-Just; we directed our course towards his house.

“‘Captain,’ said I to him, ‘they are murdering each other in the town, we are pursued and without asylum, so we come to you.’ ‘That’s right, my children,’ said he; ‘come in and welcome. I have never meddled with political affairs, and no one can have anything against me. No one will think of looking for you here.’

“The captain had friends in the town, who, one after another, reached his house, and brought us news of all that went on during that dreadful day. Many soldiers had been killed, and the Mamelukes had been annihilated. A negress who had been in the service of these unfortunates had been taken on the quay. ‘Cry “Long live the king!’ shouted the mob. ‘No,’ she replied. ‘To Napoleon I owe my daily bread; long live Napoleon!’ A bayonet-thrust in the abdomen was the answer. ‘Villains!’ said she, covering the wound with her hand to keep back the protruding entrails. ‘Long live Napoleon!’ A push sent her into the water; she sank, but rose again to the surface, and waving her hand, she cried for the last time, ‘Long live Napoleon!’ a bullet shot putting an end to her life.

“Several of the townspeople had met with shocking deaths. For instance, M. Angles, a neighbour of mine, an old man and no inconsiderable scholar, having unfortunately, when at the palace some days before, given utterance before witnesses to the sentiment that Napoleon was a great man, learned that for this crime he was about to be arrested. Yielding to the prayers of his family, he disguised himself, and, getting into a waggon, set off to seek safety in the country. He was, however, recognised and brought a prisoner to the place du Chapitre, where, after being buffeted about and insulted for an hour by the populace, he was at last murdered.

“It may easily be imagined that although no one came to disturb us we did not sleep much that night. The ladies rested on sofas or in arm-chairs without undressing, while our host, M and myself took turns in guarding the door, gun in hand.

“As soon as it was light we consulted what course we should take: I was of the opinion that we ought to try to reach Aix by unfrequented paths; having friends there, we should be able to procure a carriage and get to Nimes, where my family lived. But my wife did not agree with me. ‘I must go back to town for our things,’ said she; ‘we have no clothes but those on our backs. Let us send to the village to ask if Marseilles is quieter to-day than yesterday.’ So we sent off a messenger.

“The news he brought back was favourable; order was completely restored. I could not quite believe this, and still refused to let my wife return to the town unless I accompanied her. But in that everyone was against me: my presence would give rise to dangers which without me had no existence. Where were the miscreants cowardly enough to murder a woman of eighteen who belonged to no-party and had never injured anyone? As for me, my opinions were well known. Moreover, my mother-in-law offered to accompany her daughter, and both joined in persuading me that there was no danger. At last I was forced to consent, but only on one condition.

"'I cannot say,' I observed, 'whether there is any foundation for the reassuring tidings we have heard, but of one thing you may be sure: it is now seven o'clock in the morning, you can get to Marseilles in an hour, pack your trunks in another hour, and return in a third; let us allow one hour more for unforeseen delays. If you are not back by eleven o'clock, I shall believe something has happened, and take steps accordingly.' 'Very well,' said my wife; 'if I am not back by then, you may think me dead, and do whatever you think best.' And so she and her mother left me.

"An hour later, quite different news came to hand. Fugitives, seeking like ourselves safety in the country, told us that the rioting, far from ceasing, had increased; the streets were encumbered with corpses, and two people had been murdered with unheard-of cruelty.

"An old man named Bessieres, who had led a simple and blameless life, and whose only crime was that he had served under the Usurper, anticipating that under existing circumstances this would be regarded as a capital crime, made his will, which was afterwards found among his papers. It began with the following words:

"'As it is possible that during this revolution I may meet my death, as a partisan of Napoleon, although I have never loved him, I give and bequeath, etc., etc.

"The day before, his brother-in-law, knowing he had private enemies, had come to the house and spent the night trying to induce him to flee, but all in vain. But the next morning, his house being attacked, he yielded, and tried to escape by the back door. He was stopped by some of the National Guard, and placed himself under their protection.

"They took him to the Cours St. Louis, where, being hustled by the crowd and very ineffectually defended by the Guards, he tried to enter the Cafe Mercantier, but the door was shut in his face. Being broken by fatigue, breathless, and covered with dust and sweat, he threw himself on one of the benches placed against the wall, outside the house. Here he was wounded by a musket bullet, but not killed. At the sight of his blood shrieks of joy were heard, and then a young man with a pistol in each hand forced his way through the throng and killed the old man by two shots fired point blank in his face.

"Another still more atrocious murder took place in the course of the same morning. A father and son, bound back to back, were delivered over to the tender mercies of the mob. Stoned and beaten and covered with each other's blood, for two long hours their death-agony endured, and all the while those who could not get near enough to strike were dancing round them.

"Our time passed listening to such stories; suddenly I saw a friend running towards the house. I went to meet him. He was so pale that I hardly dared to question him. He came from the city, and had been at my house to see what had become of me. There was no one in it, but across the door lay two corpses wrapped in a blood-stained sheet which he had not dared to lift.

"At these terrible words nothing could hold me back. I set off for Marseilles. M who would not consent to let me return alone, accompanied me. In passing through the village of Saint-Just we encountered a crowd of armed peasants in the main street who appeared to belong to the free companies. Although this circumstance was rather alarming, it would have been dangerous to turn back, so we continued our way as if we were not in the least uneasy. They examined our bearing and our dress narrowly, and then exchanged some sentences in a low, voice, of which we only caught the word austaniers. This was the name by which the Bonapartists were called by the peasants, and means 'eaters of chestnuts,' this article of food being brought from Corsica to France. However, we were not molested in any way, for as we were going towards the city they did not think we could be fugitives. A hundred yards beyond the village we came up with a crowd of peasants, who were, like us, on the way to Marseilles. It was plain to see that they had just been pillaging some country house, for they were laden with rich stuffs, chandeliers and jewels. It proved to be that of M. R, inspector of reviews. Several carried muskets. I pointed out to my companion a stain of blood on the trousers of one of the men, who began to laugh when he saw what we were looking at. Two hundred yards outside the city I met a woman who had formerly been a servant in my house. She was very much astonished to see me, and said, 'Go away at once; the massacre is horrible, much worse than yesterday.'

"'But my wife,' I cried, 'do you know anything about her?'

"'No, sir,' she replied; 'I was going to knock at the door, but some people asked me in a threatening manner if I could tell them where the friend of that rascal Brine was, as they were going to take away his appetite for bread. So take my advice,' she continued, 'and go back to where you came from.'

"This advice was the last I could make up my mind to follow, so we went on, but found a strong guard at the gate, and saw that it would be impossible to get through without being recognised. At the same time, the cries and the reports of firearms from within were coming nearer; it would therefore have been to court certain death to advance, so we retraced our steps. In passing again through the village of Saint-Just we met once more our armed peasants. But this time they burst out into threats on seeing us, shouting, ‘Let us kill them! Let us kill them!’ Instead of running away, we approached them, assuring them that we were Royalists. Our coolness was so convincing that we got through safe and sound.

“On getting back to the captain’s I threw myself on the sofa, quite overcome by the thought that only that morning my wife had been beside me under my protection, and that I had let her go back to the town to a cruel and inevitable death. I felt as if my heart would break, and nothing that our host and my friend could say gave me the slightest comfort. I was like a madman, unconscious of everything round me.

“M went out to try to pick up some news, but in an instant we heard him running back, and he dashed into the room, calling out:

“‘They are coming! There they are!’

“‘Who are coming?’ we asked.

“‘The assassins!’

“My first feeling, I confess, was one of joy. I pounced upon a pair of double-barrelled pistols, resolved not to let myself be slaughtered like a sheep. Through the window I could see some men climbing over the wall and getting down into the garden. We had just sufficient time to escape by a back staircase which led to a door, through which we passed, shutting it behind us. We found ourselves on a road, at the other side of which was a vineyard. We crossed the road and crept under the vines, which completely concealed us.

“As we learned later, the captain’s house had been denounced as a Bonapartist nest, and the assassins had hoped to take it by surprise; and, indeed, if they had come a little sooner we had been lost, for before we had been five minutes in our hiding-place the murderers rushed out on the road, looking for us in every direction, without the slightest suspicion that we were not six yards distant. Though they did not see us I could see them, and I held my pistols ready cocked, quite determined to kill the first who came near. However, in a short time they went away.

“As soon as they were out of hearing we began to consider our situation and weigh our chances. There was no use in going back to the captain’s, for he was no longer there, having also succeeded in getting away. If we were to wander about the country we should be recognised as fugitives, and the fate that awaited us as such was at that moment brought home to us, for a few yards away we suddenly heard the shrieks of a man who was being murdered. They were the first cries of agony I had ever heard, and for a few moments, I confess, I was frozen with terror. But soon a violent reaction took place within me, and I felt that it would be better to march straight to meet peril than to await its coming, and although I knew the danger of trying to go through Saint-Just again, I resolved to risk it, and to get to Marseilles at all costs. So, turning to M, I said:

"'You can remain here without danger until the evening, but I am going to Marseilles at once; for I cannot endure this uncertainty any longer. If I find Saint-Just clear, I shall come back and rejoin you, but if not I shall get away as best I can alone.'

"Knowing the danger that we were running, and how little chance there was that we should ever see each other again, he held out his hand to me, but I threw myself into his arms and gave him a last embrace.

"I started at once: when I reached Saint-Just I found the freebooters still there; so I walked up to them, trolling a melody, but one of them seized me by the collar and two others took aim at me with their muskets.

"If ever in my life I shouted 'Long live the king!' with less enthusiasm than the cry deserves, it was then: to assume a rollicking air, to laugh with cool carelessness when there is nothing between you and death but the more or less strong pressure of a highwayman's finger on the trigger of a musket, is no easy task; but all this I accomplished, and once more got through the village with a whole skin indeed, but with the unalterable resolution to blow my brains out rather than again try such an experiment.

"Having now a village behind me which I had vowed never to re-enter, and there being no road available by which I could hope to get round Marseilles, the only course open to me was to make my way into the city. At that moment this was a thing of difficulty, for many small bodies of troops, wearing the white cockade, infested the approaches. I soon perceived that the danger of getting in was as great as ever, so I determined to walk up and down till night, hoping the darkness would come to my aid; but one of the patrols soon gave me to understand that my prowling about had aroused suspicion, and ordered me either to go on to the city, in which by all accounts there was small chance of safety for me, or back to the village; where certain death awaited me. A happy inspiration flashed across my mind, I would get some refreshment, and seeing an inn near by, I went in and ordered a mug of beer, sitting down near the window, faintly hoping that before the necessity for a final decision arrived, someone who knew me would pass by. After waiting half an hour, I did indeed see an acquaintance — no other than M, whom I had left in the vineyard. I beckoned him, and he joined me. He told me that, being too impatient to await my return, he had soon made up his mind to follow me, and by joining a band of pillagers was lucky enough to get safely through Saint-Just. We consulted together as to what we had better do next, and having applied to our host, found he could supply us with a trusty messenger, who would carry the news of our whereabouts to my brother-in-law. After an anxious wait of three hours, we saw him coming. I was about to run out to meet him, but M held me back, pointing out the danger of such a step; so we sat still our eyes fixed on the approaching figure. But when my brother-in-law reached the inn, I could restrain my impatience no longer, but rushing out of the room met him on the stairs.

"'My wife?' I cried. 'Have you seen my wife?'

"'She is at my house,' was the reply, and with a cry of joy I threw myself into his arms.

"My wife, who had been threatened, insulted, and roughly treated because of my opinions, had indeed found safety at my brother-in-law's.

"Night was coming on. My brother-in-law, who wore the uniform of the National Guard, which was at that moment a safeguard, took us each by an arm, and we passed the barrier without anyone asking us who we were. Choosing quiet streets, we reached his house unmolested; but in fact the whole city was quiet, for the carnage was practically at an end.

"My wife safe! this thought filled my heart with joy almost too great to bear.

"Her adventures were the following:

"My wife and her mother had gone to our house, as agreed upon, to pack our trunks. As they left their rooms, having accomplished their task, they found the landlady waiting on the staircase, who at once overwhelmed my wife with a torrent of abuse.

"The husband, who until then had known nothing of their tenant's return, hearing the noise, came out of his room, and, seizing his wife by the arm, pulled her in and shut the door. She, however, rushed to the window, and just as my wife and her mother reached the street, shouted to a free band who were on guard across the way, ‘Fire! they are Bonapartists!’ Fortunately the men, more merciful than the woman, seeing two ladies quite alone, did not hinder their passage, and as just then my brother-in-law came by, whose opinions were well known and whose uniform was respected, he was allowed to take them under his protection and conduct them to his house in safety.

“A young man, employed at the Prefecture, who had called at my house the day before, I having promised to help him in editing the Journal des Bouches-du-Rhone, was not so lucky. His occupation and his visit to me laid him under suspicion of possessing dangerous opinions, and his friends urged him to fly; but it was too late. He was attacked at the corner of the rue de Noailles, and fell wounded by a stab from a dagger. Happily, however, he ultimately recovered.

“The whole day was passed in the commission of deeds still more bloody than those of the day before; the sewers ran blood, and every hundred yards a dead body was to be met. But this sight, instead of satiating the thirst for blood of the assassins, only seemed to awaken a general feeling of gaiety. In the evening the streets resounded with song and roundelay, and for many a year to come that which we looked back on as ‘the day of the massacre’ lived in the memory of the Royalists as ‘the day of the farce.’

“As we felt we could not live any longer in the midst of such scenes, even though, as far as we were concerned, all danger was over, we set out for Nimes that same evening, having been offered the use of a carriage.

“Nothing worthy of note happened on the road to Orgon, which we reached next day; but the isolated detachments of troops which we passed from time to time reminded us that the tranquillity was nowhere perfect. As we neared the town we saw three men going about arm in arm; this friendliness seemed strange to us after our recent experiences, for one of them wore a white cockade, the second a tricolour, and the third none at all, and yet they went about on the most brotherly terms, each awaiting under a different banner the outcome of events. Their wisdom impressed me much, and feeling I had nothing to fear from such philosophers, I went up to them and questioned them, and they explained their hopes to me with the greatest innocence, and above all, their firm determination to belong to what ever party got the upper hand. As we drove into Orgon we saw at a glance that the whole town was simmering with excitement. Everybody’s face expressed anxiety. A man who, we were told, was the mayor, was haranguing a group. As everyone was listening, with the greatest attention, we drew near and asked them the cause of the excitement.

"'Gentlemen,' said he, 'you ought to know the news: the king is in his capital, and we have once more hoisted the white flag, and there has not been a single dispute to mar the tranquillity of the day; one party has triumphed without violence, and the other has submitted with resignation. But I have just learned that a band of vagabonds, numbering about three hundred, have assembled on the bridge over the Durance, and are preparing to raid our little town to-night, intending by pillage or extortion to get at what we possess. I have a few guns left which I am about to distribute, and each man will watch over the safety of all.'

"Although he had not enough arms to go round, he offered to supply us, but as I had my double-barrelled pistols I did not deprive him of his weapons. I made the ladies go to bed, and, sitting at their door, tried to sleep as well as I could, a pistol in each hand. But at every instant the noise of a false alarm sounded through the town, and when day dawned my only consolation was that no one else in Orgon had slept any better than I.

"The next day we continued our journey to Tarascon, where new excitements awaited us. As we got near the town we heard the tocsin clanging and drums beating the generale. We were getting so accustomed to the uproar that we were not very much astonished. However, when we got in we asked what was going on, and we were told that twelve thousand troops from Nimes had marched on Beaucaire and laid it waste with fire and sword. I insinuated that twelve thousand men was rather a large number for one town to furnish, but was told that that included troops from the Gardonninque and the Cevennes. Nimes still clung to the tricolour, but Beaucaire had hoisted the white flag, and it was for the purpose of pulling it down and scattering the Royalists who were assembling in numbers at Beaucaire that Nimes had sent forth her troops on this expedition. Seeing that Tarascon and Beaucaire are only separated by the Rhone, it struck me as peculiar that such quiet should prevail on one bank, while such fierce conflict was raging on the other. I did not doubt that something had happened, but not an event of such gravity as was reported. We therefore decided to push on to Beaucaire, and when we got there we found the town in the most perfect order. The expedition of twelve thousand men was reduced to one of two hundred, which had been easily repulsed, with the result that of the assailants one had been wounded and one made prisoner. Proud of this success, the people of Beaucaire entrusted us with a thousand objurgations to deliver to their inveterate enemies the citizens of Nimes.

"If any journey could give a correct idea of the preparations for civil war and the confusion which already prevailed in the South, I should think that without contradiction it would be that which we took that day. Along the four leagues which lie between Beaucaire and Nimes were posted at frequent intervals detachments of troops displaying alternately the white and the tricoloured cockade. Every village upon our route except those just outside of Nimes had definitely joined either one party or the other, and the soldiers, who were stationed at equal distances along the road, were now Royalist and now Bonapartist. Before leaving Beaucaire we had all provided ourselves, taking example by the men we had seen at Orgon, with two cockades, one white, and one tricoloured, and by peeping out from carriage windows we were able to see which was worn by the troops we were approaching in time to attach a similar one to our hats before we got up to them, whilst we hid the other in our shoes; then as we were passing we stuck our heads, decorated according to circumstances, out of the windows, and shouted vigorously, 'Long live the king!' or 'Long live the emperor!' as the case demanded. Thanks to this concession to political opinions on the highway, and in no less degree to the money which we gave by way of tips to everybody everywhere, we arrived at length at the barriers of Nimes, where we came up with the National Guards who had been repulsed by the townspeople of Beaucaire.

"This is what had taken place just before we arrived in the city:

"The National Guard of Nimes and the troops of which the garrison was composed had resolved to unite in giving a banquet on Sunday, the 28th of June, to celebrate the success of the French army. The news of the battle of Waterloo travelled much more quickly to Marseilles than to Nimes, so the banquet took place without interruption. A bust of Napoleon was carried in procession all over the town, and then the regular soldiers and the National Guard devoted the rest of the day to rejoicings, which were followed by no excess.

"But the day was not quite finished before news came that numerous meetings were taking place at Beaucaire, so although the news of the defeat at Waterloo reached Nimes on the following Tuesday, the troops which we had seen returning at the gates of the city had been despatched on

Wednesday to disperse these assemblies. Meantime the Bonapartists, under the command of General Gilly, amongst whom was a regiment of chasseurs, beginning to despair of the success of their cause, felt that their situation was becoming very critical, especially as they learnt that the forces at Beaucaire had assumed the offensive and were about to march upon Nimes. As I had had no connection with anything that had taken place in the capital of the Gard, I personally had nothing to fear; but having learned by experience how easily suspicions arise, I was afraid that the ill-luck which had not spared either my friends or my family might lead to their being accused of having received a refugee from Marseilles, a word which in itself had small significance, but which in the mouth of an enemy might be fatal. Fears for the future being thus aroused by my recollections of the past, I decided to give up the contemplation of a drama which might become redoubtable, asked to bury myself in the country with the firm intention of coming back to Nimes as soon as the white flag should once more float from its towers.

“An old castle in the Cevennes, which from the days when the Albigenses were burnt, down to the massacre of La Bagarre, had witnessed many a revolution and counter revolution, became the asylum of my wife, my mother, M, and myself. As the peaceful tranquillity of our life there was unbroken by any event of interest, I shall not pause to dwell on it. But at length we grew weary, for such is man, of our life of calm, and being left once for nearly a week without any news from outside, we made that an excuse for returning to Nimes in order to see with our own eyes how things were going on.

“When we were about two leagues on our way we met the carriage of a friend, a rich landed proprietor from the city; seeing that he was in it, I alighted to ask him what was happening at Nimes. ‘I hope you do not think of going there,’ said he, ‘especially at this moment; the excitement is intense, blood has already flowed, and a catastrophe is imminent.’ So back we went to our mountain castle, but in a few days became again a prey to the same restlessness, and, not being able to overcome it, decided to go at all risks and see for ourselves the condition of affairs; and this time, neither advice nor warning having any effect, we not only set out, but we arrived at our destination the same evening.

“We had not been misinformed, frays having already taken place in the streets which had heated public opinion. One man had been killed on the

Esplanade by a musket shot, and it seemed as if his death would be only the forerunner of many. The Catholics were awaiting with impatience the arrival of those doughty warriors from Beaucaire on whom they placed their chief reliance. The Protestants went about in painful silence, and fear blanched every face. At length the white flag was hoisted and the king proclaimed without any of the disorders which had been dreaded taking place, but it was plainly visible that this calm was only a pause before a struggle, and that on the slightest pretext the pent-up passions would break loose again.

“Just at this time the memory of our quiet life in the mountains inspired us with a happy idea. We had learned that the obstinate resolution of Marshal Brune never to acknowledge Louis XVIII as king had been softened, and that the marshal had been induced to hoist the white flag at Toulon, while with a cockade in his hat he had formally resigned the command of that place into the hands of the royal authorities.

“Henceforward in all Provence there was no spot where he could live unmarked. His ultimate intentions were unknown to us, indeed his movements seemed to show great hesitation on his part, so it occurred to us to offer him our little country house as a refuge where he could await the arrival of more peaceful times. We decided that M and another friend of ours who had just arrived from Paris should go to him and make the offer, which he would at once accept all the more readily because it came from the hearts which were deeply devoted to him. They set out, but to my great surprise returned the same day. They brought us word that Marshal Brune had been assassinated at Avignon.

“At first we could not believe the dreadful news, and took it for one of those ghastly rumours which circulate with such rapidity during periods of civil strife; but we were not left long in uncertainty, for the details of the catastrophe arrived all too soon.”

CHAPTER VIII

For some days Avignon had its assassins, as Marseilles had had them, and as Nimes was about to have them; for some days all Avignon shuddered at the names of five men — Pointu, Farges, Roquefort, Naudaud, and Magnan.

Pointu was a perfect type of the men of the South, olive-skinned and eagle-eyed, with a hook nose, and teeth of ivory. Although he was hardly above middle height, and his back was bent from bearing heavy burdens, his legs bowed by the pressure of the enormous masses which he daily carried, he was yet possessed of extraordinary strength and dexterity. He could throw over the Loulle gate a 48-pound cannon ball as easily as a child could throw its ball. He could fling a stone from one bank of the Rhone to the other where it was two hundred yards wide. And lastly, he could throw a knife backwards while running at full speed with such strength and precision of aim that this new kind of Parthian arrow would go whistling through the air to hide two inches of its iron head in a tree trunk no thicker than a man’s thigh. When to these accomplishments are added an equal skill with the musket, the pistol, and the quarter-staff, a good deal of mother wit, a deep hatred for Republicans, against whom he had vowed vengeance at the foot of the scaffold on which his father and mother had perished, an idea can be formed of the terrible chief of the assassins of Avignon, who had for his lieutenants, Farges the silk-weaver, Roquefort the porter, Naudaud the baker, and Magnan the secondhand clothes dealer.

Avignon was entirely in the power of these five men, whose brutal conduct the civil and military authorities would not or could not repress, when word came that Marshal Brune, who was at Luc in command of six thousand troops, had been summoned to Paris to give an account of his conduct to the new Government.

The marshal, knowing the state of intense excitement which prevailed in the South, and foreseeing the perils likely to meet him on the road, asked permission to travel by water, but met with an official refusal, and the Duc de Riviere, governor of Marseilles, furnished him with a safe-conduct. The cut-throats bellowed with joy when they learned that a Republican of ‘89, who had risen to the rank of marshal under the Usurper, was about to pass through Avignon. At the same time sinister reports began to run from mouth to mouth, the harbingers of death. Once more the infamous slander which a hundred times had been proved to be false, raised its voice with dogged persistence, asserting that Brune, who did not arrive at Paris until the 5th of September, 1792, had on the 2nd, when still at Lyons, carried the head of the Princesse de Lamballe impaled on a pike. Soon the news came that the marshal had just escaped assassination at Aix, indeed he owed his safety to the fleetness of his horses. Pointu, Forges, and Roquefort swore that they would manage things better at Avignon.

By the route which the marshal had chosen there were only two ways open by which he could reach Lyons: he must either pass through Avignon, or avoid it by taking a cross-road, which branched off the Pointet highway, two leagues outside the town. The assassins thought he would take the latter course, and on the 2nd of August, the day on which the marshal was expected, Pointu, Magnan, and Naudaud, with four of their creatures, took a carriage at six o’clock in the morning, and, setting out from the Rhone bridge, hid themselves by the side of the high road to Pointet.

When the marshal reached the point where the road divided, having been warned of the hostile feelings so rife in Avignon, he decided to take the cross-road upon which Pointu and his men were awaiting him; but the postillion obstinately refused to drive in this direction, saying that he always changed horses at Avignon, and not at Pointet. One of the marshal’s aides-de-camp tried, pistol in hand, to force him to obey; but the marshal would permit no violence to be offered him, and gave him orders to go on to Avignon.

The marshal reached the town at nine o’clock in the morning, and alighted at the Hotel du Palais Royal, which was also the post-house. While fresh horses were being put to and the passports and safe-conduct examined at the Loulle gate, the marshal entered the hotel to take a plate of soup. In less than five minutes a crowd gathered round the door, and M. Moulin the proprietor noticing the sinister and threatening expression many of the faces bore, went to the marshal’s room and urged him to leave instantly without waiting for his papers, pledging his word that he would send a man on horseback after him, who would overtake him two or three leagues beyond the town, and bring him his own safe-conduct and the passports of his aides-de-camp. The marshal came downstairs, and finding the horses ready, got into the carriage, on which loud murmurs arose from the populace, amongst which could be distinguished the terrible word ‘zaou!’ that excited cry of the Provencal, which according to the tone in which it is uttered expresses every shade of threat, and which means at once in a single syllable, “Bite, rend, kill, murder!”

The marshal set out at a gallop, and passed the town gates unmolested, except by the howlings of the populace, who, however, made no attempt to stop him. He thought he had left all his enemies behind, but when he reached the Rhone bridge he found a group of men armed with muskets waiting there, led by Farges and Roquefort. They all raised their guns and took aim at the marshal, who thereupon ordered the postillion to drive back. The order was obeyed, but when the carriage had gone about fifty yards it was met by the crowd from the “Palais Royal,” which had followed it, so the postillion stopped. In a moment the traces were cut, whereupon the marshal, opening the door, alighted, followed by his valet, and passing on foot through the Loulle gate, followed by a second carriage in which were his aides-de-camp, he regained the “Palais Royal,” the doors of which were opened to him and his suite, and immediately secured against all others.

The marshal asked to be shown to a room, and M. Moulin gave him No. 1, to the front. In ten minutes three thousand people filled the square; it was as if the population sprang up from the ground. Just then the carriage, which the marshal had left behind, came up, the postillion having tied the traces, and a second time the great yard gates were opened, and in spite of the press closed again and barricaded by the porter Vernet, and M. Moulin himself, both of whom were men of colossal strength. The aides-de-camp, who had remained in the carriage until then, now alighted, and asked to be shown to the marshal; but Moulin ordered the porter to conceal them in an outhouse. Vernet taking one in each hand, dragged them off despite their struggles, and pushing them behind some empty barrels, over which he threw an old piece of carpet, said to them in a voice as solemn as if he were a prophet, “If you move, you are dead men,” and left them. The aides-de-camp remained there motionless and silent.

At that moment M. de Saint-Chamans, prefect of Avignon, who had arrived in town at five o’clock in the morning, came out into the courtyard. By this time the crowd was smashing the windows and breaking in the street door. The square was full to overflowing, everywhere threatening cries were heard, and above all the terrible zaou, which from moment to moment became more full of menace. M. Moulin saw that if they could not hold out until the troops under Major Lambot arrived, all was lost; he therefore told Vernet to settle the business of those who were breaking in the door, while he would take charge of those who were trying to get in at the window. Thus these two men, moved by a common impulse and of equal courage, undertook to dispute with a howling mob the possession of the blood for which it thirsted.

Both dashed to their posts, one in the hall, the other in the dining-room, and found door and windows already smashed, and several men in the house. At the sight of Vernet, with whose immense strength they were acquainted, those in the hall drew back a step, and Vernet, taking advantage of this movement, succeeded in ejecting them and in securing the door once more. Meantime M. Moulin, seizing his double-barrelled gun, which stood in the chimney-corner, pointed it at five men who had got into the dining-room, and threatened to fire if they did not instantly get out again. Four obeyed, but one refused to budge; whereupon Moulin, finding himself no longer outnumbered, laid aside his gun, and, seizing his adversary round the waist, lifted him as if he were a child and flung him out of the window. The man died three weeks later, not from the fall but from the squeeze.

Moulin then dashed to the window to secure it, but as he laid his hand on it he felt his head seized from behind and pressed violently down on his left shoulder; at the same instant a pane was broken into splinters, and the head of a hatchet struck his right shoulder. M. de Saint-Chamans, who had followed him into the room, had seen the weapon thrown at Moulin’s head, and not being able to turn aside the iron, had turned aside the object at which it was aimed. Moulin seized the hatchet by the handle and tore it out of the hands of him who had delivered the blow, which fortunately had missed its aim. He then finished closing the window, and secured it by making fast the inside shutters, and went upstairs to see after the marshal.

Him he found striding up and down his room, his handsome and noble face as calm as if the voices of all those shouting men outside were not demanding his death. Moulin made him leave No. 1 for No. 3, which, being a back room and looking out on the courtyard, seemed to offer more chances of safety than the other. The marshal asked for writing materials, which Moulin brought, whereupon the marshal sat down at a little table and began to write.

Just then the cries outside became still more uproarious. M. de Saint-Chamans had gone out and ordered the crowd to disperse, whereupon a thousand people had answered him with one voice, asking who he was that he should give such an order. He announced his rank and authority, to which the answer was, “We only know the prefect by his clothes.” Now it had unfortunately happened that M. de Chamans having sent his trunks by diligence they had not yet arrived, and being dressed in a green coat; nankeen trousers, and a pique vest, it could hardly be expected that in such a suit he should overawe the people under the circumstances; so, when he got up on a bench to harangue the populace, cries arose of “Down with the green coat! We have enough of charlatans like that!” and he was forced to get down again. As Vernet opened the door to let him in, several men took advantage of the circumstance to push in along with him; but Vernet let his fist fall three times, and three men rolled at his feet like bulls struck by a club. The others withdrew. A dozen champions such as Vernet would have saved the marshal. Yet it must not be forgotten that this man was a Royalist, and held the same opinions as those against whom he fought; for him as for them the marshal was a mortal enemy, but he had a noble heart, and if the marshal were guilty he desired a trial and not a murder. Meantime a certain onlooker had heard what had been said to M. de Chamans about his unofficial costume, and had gone to put on his uniform. This was M. de Puy, a handsome and venerable old man, with white hair, pleasant expression, and winning voice. He soon came back in his mayor’s robes, wearing his scarf and his double cross of St. Louis and the Legion of Honour. But neither his age nor his dignity made the slightest impression on these people; they did not even allow him to get back to the hotel door, but knocked him down and trampled him under foot, so that he hardly escaped with torn clothes and his white hair covered with dust and blood. The fury of the mob had now reached its height.

At this juncture the garrison of Avignon came in sight; it was composed of four hundred volunteers, who formed a battalion known as the Royal Angouleme. It was commanded by a man who had assumed the title of Lieutenant-General of the Emancipating Army of Vaucluse. These forces drew up under the windows of the “Palais Royal.” They were composed almost entirely of Provenceaux, and spoke the same dialect as the people of the lower orders. The crowd asked the soldiers for what they had come, why they did not leave them to accomplish an act of justice in peace, and if they intended to interfere. “Quite the contrary,” said one of the soldiers; “pitch him out of the window, and we will catch him on the points of our bayonets.” Brutal cries of joy greeted this answer, succeeded by a short silence, but it was easy to see that under the apparent calm the crowd was in a state of eager expectation. Soon new shouts were heard, but this time from the interior of the hotel; a small band of men led by Forges and Roquefort had separated themselves from the throng, and by the help of ladders had scaled the walls and got on the roof of the house, and, gliding down the other side, had dropped into the balcony outside the windows of the rooms where the marshal was writing.

Some of these dashed through the windows without waiting to open them, others rushed in at the open door. The marshal, thus taken by surprise, rose, and not wishing that the letter he was writing to the Austrian commandant to claim his protection should fall into the hands of these wretches, he tore it to pieces. Then a man who belonged to a better class than the others, and who wears to-day the Cross of the Legion of Honour, granted to him perhaps for his conduct on this occasion, advanced towards the marshal, sword in hand, and told him if he had any last arrangements to make, he should make them at once, for he had only ten minutes to live.

"What are you thinking of?" exclaimed Forges. "Ten minutes! Did he give the Princesse de Lamballe ten minutes?" and he pointed his pistol at the marshal's breast; but the marshal striking up the weapon, the shot missed its aim and buried itself in the ceiling.

"Clumsy fellow!" said the marshal, shrugging his shoulders, "not to be able to kill a man at such close range."

"That's true," replied Roquefort in his patois. "I'll show you how to do it"; and, receding a step, he took aim with his carbine at his victim, whose back was partly towards him. A report was heard, and the marshal fell dead on the spot, the bullet which entered at the shoulder going right through his body and striking the opposite wall.

The two shots, which had been heard in the street, made the howling mob dance for joy. One cowardly fellow, called Cadillan, rushed out on one of the balconies which looked on the square, and, holding a loaded pistol in each hand, which he had not dared to discharge even into the dead body of the murdered man, he cut a caper, and, holding up the innocent weapons, called out, "These have done the business!" But he lied, the braggart, and boasted of a crime which was committed by braver cutthroats than he.

Behind him came the general of the "Emancipating Army of Vaucluse," who, graciously saluting the crowd, said, "The marshal has carried out an act of justice by taking his own life." Shouts of mingled joy, revenge, and hatred rose from the crowd, and the king’s attorney and the examining magistrate set about drawing up a report of the suicide.

Now that all was over and there was no longer any question of saving the marshal, M. Moulin desired at least to save the valuables which he had in his carriage. He found in a cash box 40,000 francs, in the pockets a snuff-box set with diamonds, and a pair of pistols and two swords; the hilt of one of these latter was studded with precious stones, a gift from the ill-starred Selim. M. Moulin returned across the court, carrying these things. The Damascus blade was wrenched from his hands, and the robber kept it five years as a trophy, and it was not until the year 1820 that he was forced to give it up to the representative of the marshal’s widow. Yet this man was an officer, and kept his rank all through the Restoration, and was not dismissed the army till 1830. When M. Moulin had placed the other objects in safety, he requested the magistrate to have the corpse removed, as he wished the crowds to disperse, that he might look after the aides-de camp. While they were undressing the marshal, in order to certify the cause of death, a leathern belt was found on him containing 5536 francs. The body was carried downstairs by the grave-diggers without any opposition being offered, but hardly had they advanced ten yards into the square when shouts of “To the Rhone! to the Rhone!” resounded on all sides. A police officer who tried to interfere was knocked down, the bearers were ordered to turn round; they obeyed, and the crowd carried them off towards the wooden bridge. When the fourteenth arch was reached, the bier was torn from the bearers’ hands, and the corpse was flung into the river. “Military honours!” shouted some one, and all who had guns fired at the dead body, which was twice struck. “Tomb of Marshal Brune” was then written on the arch, and the crowd withdrew, and passed the rest of the day in holiday-making.

Meanwhile the Rhone, refusing to be an accomplice in such a crime, bore away the corpse, which the assassins believed had been swallowed up for ever. Next day it was found on the sandy shore at Tarascon, but the news of the murder had preceded it, and it was recognised by the wounds, and pushed back again into the waters, which bore it towards the sea.

Three leagues farther on it stopped again, this time by a grassy bank, and was found by a man of forty and another of eighteen. They also recognised it, but instead of shoving it back into the current, they drew it up gently on the bank and carried it to a small property belonging to one of them, where they reverently interred it. The elder of the two was M. de Chartruse, the younger M. Amedee Pichot.

The body was exhumed by order of the marshal’s widow, and brought to her castle of Saint-Just, in Champagne; she had it embalmed, and placed in a bedroom adjoining her own, where it remained, covered only by a veil, until the memory of the deceased was cleansed from the accusation of suicide by a solemn public trial and judgment. Then only it was finally interred, along with the parchment containing the decision of the Court of Riom.

The ruffians who killed Marshal Brune, although they evaded the justice of men, did not escape the vengeance of God: nearly every one of them came to a miserable end. Roquefort and Farges were attacked by strange and hitherto unknown diseases, recalling the plagues sent by God on the peoples whom He desired to punish in bygone ages. In the case of Farges, his skin dried up and became horny, causing him such intense irritation, that as the only means of allaying it he had to be kept buried up to the neck while still alive. The disease under which Roquefort suffered seemed to have its seat in the marrow, for his bones by degrees lost all solidity and power of resistance, so that his limbs refused to bear his weight, and he went about the streets crawling like a serpent. Both died in such dreadful torture that they regretted having escaped the scaffold, which would have spared them such prolonged agony.

Pointu was condemned to death, in his absence, at the Assizes Court of La Drome, for having murdered five people, and was cast off by his own faction. For some time his wife, who was infirm and deformed, might be seen going from house to house asking alms for him, who had been for two months the arbiter of civil war and assassination. Then came a day when she ceased her quest, and was seen sitting, her head covered by a black rag: Pointu was dead, but it was never known where or how. In some corner, probably, in the crevice of a rock or in the heart of the forest, like an old tiger whose talons have been clipped and his teeth drawn.

Naudaud and Magnan were sentenced to the galleys for ten years. Naudaud died there, but Magnan finished his time and then became a scavenger, and, faithful to his vocation as a dealer of death, a poisoner of stray dogs.

Some of these cut-throats are still living, and fill good positions, wearing crosses and epaulets, and, rejoicing in their impunity, imagine they have escaped the eye of God.

We shall wait and see!

CHAPTER IX

It was on Saturday that the white flag was hoisted at Nimes. The next day a crowd of Catholic peasants from the environs marched into the city, to await the arrival of the Royalist army from Beaucaire. Excitement was at fever heat, the desire of revenge filled every breast, the hereditary hatred which had slumbered during the Empire again awoke stronger than ever. Here I may pause to say that in the account which follows of the events which took place about this time, I can only guarantee the facts and not the dates: I relate everything as it happened; but the day on which it happened may sometimes have escaped my memory, for it is easier to recollect a murder to which one has been an eye-witness, than to recall the exact date on which it happened.

The garrison of Nimes was composed of one battalion of the 13th Regiment of the line, and another battalion of the 79th Regiment, which not being up to its full war-strength had been sent to Nimes to complete its numbers by enlistment. But after the battle of Waterloo the citizens had tried to induce the soldiers to desert, so that of the two battalions, even counting the officers, only about two hundred men remained.

When the news of the proclamation of Napoleon II reached Nimes, Brigadier-General Malmont, commandant of the department, had him proclaimed in the city without any disturbance being caused thereby. It was not until some days later that a report began to be circulated that a royal army was gathering at Beaucaire, and that the populace would take advantage of its arrival to indulge in excesses. In the face of this two-fold danger, General Malmont had ordered the regular troops, and a part of the National Guard of the Hundred Days, to be drawn up under arms in the rear of the barracks upon an eminence on which he had mounted five pieces of ordnance. This disposition was maintained for two days and a night, but as the populace remained quiet, the troops returned to the barracks and the Guards to their homes.

But on Monday a concourse of people, who had heard that the army from Beaucaire would arrive the next day, made a hostile demonstration before the barracks, demanding with shouts and threats that the five cannons should be handed over to them. The general and the officers who were quartered in the town, hearing of the tumult, repaired at once to the barracks, but soon came out again, and approaching the crowd tried to persuade it to disperse, to which the only answer they received was a shower of bullets. Convinced by this, as he was well acquainted with the character of the people with whom he had to deal, that the struggle had begun in earnest and must be fought out to the bitter end, the general retreated with his officers, step by step, to the barracks, and having got inside the gates, closed and bolted them.

He then decided that it was his duty to repulse force by force, for everyone was determined to defend, at no matter what cost, a position which, from the first moment of revolt, was fraught with such peril. So, without waiting for orders, the soldiers, seeing that some of their windows had been broken by shots from without, returned the fire, and, being better marksmen than the townspeople, soon laid many low. Upon this the alarmed crowd retired out of musket range, and entrenched themselves in some neighbouring houses.

About nine o'clock in the evening, a man bearing something resembling a white flag approached the walls and asked to speak to the general. He brought a message inquiring on what terms the troops would consent to evacuate Nimes. The general sent back word that the conditions were, that the troops should be allowed to march out fully armed and with all their baggage; the five guns alone would be left behind. When the forces reached a certain valley outside the city they would halt, that the men might be supplied with means sufficient to enable them either to rejoin the regiments to which they belonged, or to return to their own homes.

At two o'clock A. M. the same envoy returned, and announced to the general that the conditions had been accepted with one alteration, which was that the troops, before marching out, should lay down their arms. The messenger also intimated that if the offer he had brought were not quickly accepted — say within two hours — the time for capitulation would have gone by, and that he would not be answerable for what the people might then do in their fury. The general accepted the conditions as amended, and the envoy disappeared.

When the troops heard of the agreement, that they should be disarmed before being allowed to leave the town, their first impulse was to refuse to lay down their weapons before a rabble which had run away from a few musket shots; but the general succeeded in soothing their sense of humiliation and winning their consent by representing to them that there could be nothing dishonourable in an action which prevented the children of a common fatherland from shedding each other's blood.

The gendarmerie, according to one article of the treaty, were to close in at, the rear of the evacuating column; and thus hinder the populace from molesting the troops of which it was composed. This was the only concession obtained in return for the abandoned arms, and the farce in question was already drawn up in field order, apparently waiting to escort the troops out of the city.

At four o'clock P.M. the troops got ready, each company stacking its arms in the courtyard before: marching out; but hardly had forty or fifty men passed the gates than fire was opened on them at such close range that half of them were killed or disabled at the first volley. Upon this, those who were still within the walls closed the courtyard gates, thus cutting off all chance of retreat from their comrades. In the event; however, it turned out that several of the latter contrived to escape with their lives and that they lost nothing through being prevented from returning; for as soon as the mob saw that ten or twelve of their victims had slipped through their hands they made a furious attack on the barracks, burst in the gates, and scaled the walls with such rapidity, that the soldiers had no time to repossess themselves of their muskets, and even had they succeeded in seizing them they would have been of little use, as ammunition was totally wanting. The barracks being thus carried by assault, a horrible massacre ensued, which lasted for three hours. Some of the wretched men, being hunted from room to room, jumped out of the first window they could reach, without stopping to measure its height from the ground, and were either impaled on the bayonets held in readiness below, or, falling on the pavement, broke their limbs and were pitilessly despatched.

The gendarmes, who had really been called out to protect the retreat of the garrison, seemed to imagine they were there to witness a judicial execution, and stood immovable and impassive while these horrid deeds went on before their eyes. But the penalty of this indifference was swiftly exacted, for as soon as the soldiers were all done with, the mob, finding their thirst for blood still unslacked, turned on the gendarmes, the greater number of whom were wounded, while all lost their horses, and some their lives.

The populace was still engaged at its bloody task when news came that the army from Beaucaire was within sight of the town, and the murderers, hastening to despatch some of the wounded who still showed signs of life, went forth to meet the long expected reinforcements.

Only those who saw the advancing army with their own eyes can form any idea of its condition and appearance, the first corps excepted. This corps was commanded by M. de Barre, who had put himself at its head with the noble purpose of preventing, as far as he could, massacre and pillage. In this he was seconded by the officers under him, who were actuated by the same philanthropic motives as their general in identifying themselves with the corps. Owing to their exertions, the men advanced in fairly regular order, and good discipline was maintained. All the men carried muskets.

But the first corps was only a kind of vanguard to the second, which was the real army, and a wonderful thing to see and hear. Never were brought together before or since so many different kinds of howl, so many threats of death, so many rags; so many odd weapons, from the matchlock of the time of the Michelade to the steel-tipped goad of the bullock drovers of La Camargue, so that when the Nimes mob; which in all conscience was howling and ragged enough, rushed out to offer a brotherly welcome to the strangers, its first feeling was one of astonishment and dismay as it caught sight of the motley crew which held out to it the right hand of fellowship.

The new-comers soon showed that it was through necessity and not choice that their outer man presented such a disreputable appearance; for they were hardly well within the gates before demanding that the houses of the members of the old Protestant National Guard should be pointed out to them.

This being done, they promptly proceeded to exact from each household a musket, a coat, a complete kit, or a sum of money, according to their humour, so that before evening those who had arrived naked and penniless were provided with complete uniforms and had money in their pockets. These exactions were levied under the name of a contribution, but before the day was ended naked and undisguised pillage began.

Someone asserted that during the assault on the barracks a certain individual had fired out of a certain house on the assailants. The indignant people now rushed to the house indicated, and soon left nothing of it in existence but its walls. A little later it was clearly proved that the individual accused was quite innocent of the crime laid to his charge.

The house of a rich merchant lay in the path of the advancing army. A cry arose that the owner was a Bonapartist, and nothing more was needed. The house was broken into and pillaged, and the furniture thrown out of the windows.

Two days later it turned out that not only was the merchant no Bonapartist, but that his son had been one of those who had accompanied the Duc d’Angouleme to Cette when he left the country. The pillagers excused themselves by saying they had been misled by a resemblance between two names, and this excuse, as far as appears, was accepted as valid by the authorities.

It was not long before the populace of Nimes began to think they might as well follow the example set them by their brothers from Beaucaire. In twenty-four hours free companies were formed, headed by Trestaillons, Trupheny, Graffan, and Morinet. These bands arrogated to themselves the title of National Guard, and then what took place at Marseilles in the excitement of the moment was repeated at Nimes with deliberation and method, inspired by hate and the desire of vengeance. A revolt broke out which followed the ordinary course: first pillage, then fire, then murder, laid waste the city.

M V’s house, which stood in the middle of the town, was sacked and then burnt to the ground, without a hand being raised to prevent the crime.

M T’s house, on the road to Montpellier, was sacked and wrecked and a bonfire made of the furniture, round which the crowd danced; as if it had been an occasion of public rejoicing. Then cries were raised for the proprietor, that he might be killed, and as he could not be found the baffled fury of the mob vented itself on the dead. A child three months buried was dragged from its grave, drawn by the feet through the sewers and wayside puddles, and then flung on a dung-heap; and, strange to say, while incendiarism and sacrilege thus ran riot, the mayor of the place slept so sound that when he awoke he was “quite astonished,” to use his own expression, to hear what had taken place during the night.

This expedition completed, the same company which had brought this expedition to a successful issue next turned their attention to a small country house occupied by a widow, whom I had often begged to take refuge with us. But, secure in her insignificance, she had always declined our offers, preferring to live solitary and retired in her own home. But the freebooters sought her out, burst in her doors, drove her away with blows and insults, destroyed her house and burnt her furniture. They then proceeded to the vault in which lay the remains of her family, dragged them out of their coffins and scattered them about the fields. The next day the poor woman-ventured back, collected the desecrated remains with pious care, and replaced them in the vault. But this was counted to her as a crime; the company returned, once more cast forth the contents of the coffins, and threatened to kill her should she dare to touch them again. She was often seen in the days that followed shedding bitter tears and watching over the sacred relics as they lay exposed on the ground.

The name of this widow was Pepin, and the scene of the sacrilege was a small enclosure on the hill of the Moulins-a-Vent.

Meantime the people in the Faubourg des Bourgades had invented a new sort of game, or rather, had resolved to vary the serious business of the drama that was being enacted by the introduction of comic scenes. They had possessed themselves of a number of beetles such as washerwomen use, and hammered in long nails, the points of which projected an inch on the other side in the form of a fleur-de-lis. Every Protestant who fell into their hands, no matter what his age or rank, was stamped with the bloody emblem, serious wounds being inflicted in many cases.

Murders were now becoming common. Amongst other names of victims mentioned were Loriol, Bigot, Dumas, Lhermet, Heritier, Domaison, Combe, Clairon, Begomet, Poujas, Imbert, Vigal, Pourchet, Vignole. Details more or less shocking came to light as to the manner in which the murderers went to work. A man called Dalbos was in the custody of two armed men; some others came to consult with them. Dalbos appealed for mercy to the new-comers. It was granted, but as he turned to go he was shot dead. Another of the name of Rambert tried to escape by disguising himself as a woman, but was recognised and shot down a few yards outside his own door. A gunner called Saussine was walking in all security along the road to Uzes, pipe in mouth, when he was met by five men belonging to Trestaillon’s company, who surrounded him and stabbed him to the heart with their knives. The elder of two brothers named Chivas ran across some fields to take shelter in a country house called Rouviere, which, unknown to him, had been occupied by some of the new National Guard. These met him on the threshold and shot him dead.

Rant was seized in his own house and shot. Clos was met by a company, and seeing Trestaillons, with whom he had always been friends, in its ranks, he went up to him and held out his hand; whereupon Trestaillons drew a pistol from his belt and blew his brains out. Calandre being chased down the rue des Soeurs-Grises, sought shelter in a tavern, but was forced to come out, and was killed with sabres. Courbet was sent to prison under the escort of some men, but these changed their minds on the way as to his punishment, halted, and shot him dead in the middle of the street.

A wine merchant called Cabanot, who was flying from Trestaillons, ran into a house in which there was a venerable priest called Cure Bonhomme. When the cut-throat rushed in, all covered with blood, the priest advanced and stopped him, crying:

“What will happen, unhappy man, when you come to the confessional with blood-stained hands?”

“Pooh!” replied Trestaillons, “you must put on your wide gown; the sleeves are large enough to let everything pass.”

To the short account given above of so many murders I will add the narrative of one to which I was an eye-witness, and which made the most terrible impression on me of, anything in my experience.

It was midnight. I was working beside my wife’s bed; she was just becoming drowsy, when a noise in the distance caught our attention. It gradually became more distinct, and drums began to beat the ‘generale’ in every direction. Hiding my own alarm for fear of increasing hers, I answered my wife, who was asking what new thing was about to happen, that it was probably troops marching in or out of garrison. But soon reports of firearms, accompanied by an uproar with which we were so familiar that we could no longer mistake its meaning, were heard outside. Opening my window, I heard bloodcurdling imprecations, mixed with cries of “Long live the king!” going on. Not being able to remain any longer in this uncertainty, I woke a captain who lived in the same house. He rose, took his arms, and we went out together, directing our course towards the point whence the shouts seemed to come. The moon shone so bright that we could see everything almost as distinctly as in broad daylight.

A concourse of people was hurrying towards the Cours yelling like madmen; the greater number of them, half naked, armed with muskets, swords, knives, and clubs, and swearing to exterminate everything, waved their weapons above the heads of men who had evidently been torn from their houses and brought to the square to be put to death. The rest of the crowd had, like ourselves, been drawn thither by curiosity, and were asking what was going on. “Murder is abroad,” was the answer; “several people have been killed in the environs, and the patrol has been fired on.” While this questioning was going on the noise continued to increase. As I had really no business to be on a spot where such things were going on, and feeling that my place was at my wife’s side, to reassure her for the present and to watch over her should the rioters come our way, I said good-bye to the captain, who went on to the barracks, and took the road back to the suburb in which I lived.

I was not more than fifty steps from our house when I heard loud talking behind me, and, turning, saw gun barrels glittering in the moonlight. As the speakers seemed to be rapidly approaching me, I kept close in the shadow of the houses till I reached my own door, which I laid softly to behind me, leaving myself a chink by which I could peep out and watch the movements of the group which was drawing near. Suddenly I felt something touch my hand; it was a great Corsican dog, which was turned loose at night, and was so fierce that it was a great protection to our house. I felt glad to have it at my side, for in case of a struggle it would be no despicable ally.

Those approaching turned out to be three armed men leading a fourth, disarmed and a prisoner. They all stopped just opposite my door, which I gently closed and locked, but as I still wished to see what they were about, I slipped into the garden, which lay towards the street, still followed by my dog. Contrary to his habit, and as if he understood the danger, he gave a low whine instead of his usual savage growl. I climbed into a fig tree the branches of which overhung the street, and, hidden by the leaves, and resting my hands on the top of the wall, I leaned far enough forward to see what the men were about.

They were still on the same spot, but there was a change in their positions. The prisoner was now kneeling with clasped hands before the cut-throats, begging for his life for the sake of his wife and children, in heartrending accents, to which his executioners replied in mocking tones, “We have got you at last into our hands, have we? You dog of a Bonapartist, why do you not call on your emperor to come and help you out of this scrape?” The unfortunate man’s entreaties became more pitiful and their mocking replies more pitiless. They levelled their muskets at him several times, and then lowered them, saying; “Devil take it, we won’t shoot yet; let us give him time to see death coming,” till at last the poor wretch, seeing there was no hope of mercy, begged to be put out of his misery.

Drops of sweat stood on my forehead. I felt my pockets to see if I had nothing on me which I could use as a weapon, but I had not even a knife. I looked at my dog; he was lying flat at the foot of the tree, and appeared to be a prey to the most abject terror. The prisoner continued his supplications, and the assassins their threats and mockery. I climbed quietly down out of the fig tree, intending to fetch my pistols. My dog followed me with his eyes, which seemed to be the only living things about him. Just as my foot touched the ground a double report rang out, and my dog gave a plaintive and prolonged howl. Feeling that all was over, and that no weapons could be of any use, I climbed up again into my perch and looked out. The poor wretch was lying face downwards writhing in his blood; the assassins were reloading their muskets as they walked away.

Being anxious to see if it was too late to help the man whom I had not been able to save, I went out into the street and bent over him. He was bloody, disfigured, dying, but was yet alive, uttering dismal groans. I tried to lift him up, but soon saw that the wounds which he had received from bullets fired at close range were both mortal, one being in the head, and the other in the loins. Just then a patrol, of the National Guard turned round the corner of the street. This, instead of being a relief, awoke me to a sense of my danger, and feeling I could do nothing for the wounded man, for the death rattle had already begun, I entered my house, half shut the door, and listened.

“Qui vive?” asked the corporal.

“Idiot!” said someone else, “to ask ‘Qui vive?’ of a dead man!”

“He is not dead,” said a third voice; “listen to him singing”; and indeed the poor fellow in his agony was giving utterance to dreadful groans.

“Someone has tickled him well,” said a fourth, “but what does it matter? We had better finish the job.”

Five or six musket shots followed, and the groans ceased.

The name of the man who had just expired was Louis Lichaire; it was not against him, but against his nephew, that the assassins had had a grudge, but finding the nephew out when they burst into the house, and a victim being indispensable, they had torn the uncle from the arms of his wife, and, dragging him towards the citadel, had killed him as I have just related.

Very early next morning I sent to three commissioners of police, one after the other, for permission to have the corpse carried to the hospital, but these gentlemen were either not up or had already gone out, so that it was not until eleven o’clock and after repeated applications that they condescended to give me the needed authorisation.

Thanks to this delay, the whole town came to see the body of the unfortunate man. Indeed, the day which followed a massacre was always kept as a holiday, everyone leaving his work undone and coming out to stare at the slaughtered victims. In this case, a man wishing to amuse the crowd took his pipe out of his mouth and put it between the teeth of the corpse — a joke which had a marvellous success, those present shrieking with laughter.

Many murders had been committed during the night; the companies had scoured the streets singing some doggerel, which one of the bloody wretches, being in poetic vein, had composed, the chorus of which was:

“Our work’s well done,
We spare none!”

Seventeen fatal outrages were committed, and yet neither the reports of the firearms nor the cries of the victims broke the peaceful slumbers of M. le Prefet and M. le Commissaire General de la Police. But if the civil authorities slept, General Lagarde, who had shortly before come to town to take command of the city in the name of the king, was awake. He had sprung from his bed at the first shot, dressed himself, and made a round of the posts; then sure that everything was in order, he had formed patrols of chasseurs, and had himself, accompanied by two officers only, gone wherever he heard cries for help. But in spite of the strictness of his orders the small number of troops at his disposition delayed the success of his efforts, and it was not until three o’clock in the morning that he succeeded in securing Trestaillons. When this man was taken he was dressed as usual in the uniform of the National Guard, with a cocked hat and captain’s epaulets. General Lagarde ordered the gens d’armes who made the capture to deprive him of his sword and carbine, but it was only after a long struggle that they could carry out this order, for Trestaillons protested that he would only give up his carbine with his life. However, he was at last obliged to yield to numbers, and when disarmed was removed to the barracks; but as there could be no peace in the town as long as he was in it, the general sent him to the citadel of Montpellier next morning before it was light.

The disorders did not, however, cease at once. At eight o’clock A.M. they were still going on, the mob seeming to be animated by the spirit of

Trestaillons, for while the soldiers were occupied in a distant quarter of the town a score of men broke into the house of a certain Scipion Chabrier, who had remained hidden from his enemies for a long time, but who had lately returned home on the strength of the proclamations published by General Lagarde when he assumed the position of commandant of the town. He had indeed been sure that the disturbances in Nimes were over, when they burst out with redoubled fury on the 16th of October; on the morning of the 17th he was working quietly at home at his trade of a silk weaver, when, alarmed by the shouts of a parcel of cut-throats outside his house, he tried to escape. He succeeded in reaching the “Coupe d’Or,” but the ruffians followed him, and the first who came up thrust him through the thigh with his bayonet. In consequence of this wound he fell from top to bottom of the staircase, was seized and dragged to the stables, where the assassins left him for dead, with seven wounds in his body.

This was, however, the only murder committed that day in the town, thanks to the vigilance and courage of General Lagarde.

The next day a considerable crowd gathered, and a noisy deputation went to General Lagarde’s quarters and insolently demanded that Trestaillons should be set at liberty. The general ordered them to disperse, but no attention was paid to this command, whereupon he ordered his soldiers to charge, and in a moment force accomplished what long-continued persuasion had failed to effect. Several of the ringleaders were arrested and taken to prison.

Thus, as we shall see, the struggle assumed a new phase: resistance to the royal power was made in the name of the royal power, and both those who broke or those who tried to maintain the public peace used the same cry, “Long live the king!”

The firm attitude assumed by General Lagarde restored Nimes to a state of superficial peace, beneath which, however, the old enmities were fermenting. An occult power, which betrayed itself by a kind of passive resistance, neutralised the effect of the measures taken by the military commandant. He soon became cognisant of the fact that the essence of this sanguinary political strife was an hereditary religious animosity, and in order to strike a last blow at this, he resolved, after having received permission from the king, to grant the general request of the Protestants by reopening their places of worship, which had been closed for more than four months, and allowing the public exercise of the Protestant religion, which had been entirely suspended in the city for the same length of time.

Formerly there had been six Protestant pastors resident in Nimes, but four of them, had fled; the two who remained were MM. Juillerat and Olivier Desmonts, the first a young man, twenty-eight years of age, the second an old man of seventy.

The entire weight of the ministry had fallen during this period of proscription on M. Juillerat, who had accepted the task and religiously fulfilled it. It seemed as if a special providence had miraculously protected him in the midst of the many perils which beset his path. Although the other pastor, M. Desmonts, was president of the Consistory, his life was in much less danger; for, first, he had reached an age which almost everywhere commands respect, and then he had a son who was a lieutenant in, one of the royal corps levied at Beaucaire, who protected him by his name when he could not do so by his presence. M. Desmonts had therefore little cause for anxiety as to his safety either in the streets of Nimes or on the road between that and his country house.

But, as we have said, it was not so with M. Juillerat. Being young and active, and having an unfaltering trust in God, on him alone devolved all the sacred duties of his office, from the visitation of the sick and dying to the baptism of the newly born. These latter were often brought to him at night to be baptized, and he consented, though unwillingly, to make this concession, feeling that if he insisted on the performance of the rite by day he would compromise not only his own safety but that of others. In all that concerned him personally, such as consoling the dying or caring for the wounded, he acted quite openly, and no danger that he encountered on his way ever caused him to flinch from the path of duty.

One day, as M. Juillerat was passing through the rue des Barquettes on his way to the prefecture to transact some business connected with his ministry, he saw several men lying in wait in a blind alley by which he had to pass. They had their guns pointed at him. He continued his way with tranquil step and such an air of resignation that the assassins were overawed, and lowered their weapons as he approached, without firing a single shot. When M. Juillerat reached the prefecture, thinking that the prefect ought to be aware of everything connected with the public order, he related this incident to M. d’Arbaud-Jouques, but the latter did not think the affair of enough importance to require any investigation.

It was, as will be seen, a difficult enterprise to open once again the Protestant places of worship, which had been so long closed, in present circumstances, and in face of the fact that the civil authorities regarded such a step with disfavour, but General Lagarde was one of those determined characters who always act up to their convictions. Moreover, to prepare people's minds for this stroke of religious policy, he relied on the help of the Duc d'Angouleme, who in the course of a tour through the South was almost immediately expected at Nimes.

On the 5th of November the prince made his entry into the city, and having read the reports of the general to the King Louis XVIII, and having received positive injunctions from his uncle to pacify the unhappy provinces which he was about to visit, he arrived full of the desire to displays whether he felt it or not, a perfect impartiality; so when the delegates from the Consistory were presented to him, not only did he receive them most graciously, but he was the first to speak of the interests of their faith, assuring them that it was only a few days since he had learned with much regret that their religious services had been; suspended since the 16th of July. The delegates replied that in such a time of agitation the closing of their places of worship was, a measure of prudence which they had felt ought to be borne, and which had been borne, with resignation. The prince expressed his approval of this attitude with regard to the past, but said that his presence was a guarantee for the future, and that on Thursday the 9th inst. the two meeting-houses should be reopened and restored to their proper use. The Protestants were alarmed at, having a favour accorded to them which was much more than they would have dared to ask and for which they were hardly prepared. But the prince reassured them by saying that all needful measures would be taken to provide against any breach of the public peace, and at the same time invited M. Desmonts, president, and M. Roland-Lacoste, member of the Consistory, to dine with him.

The next deputation to arrive was a Catholic one, and its object was to ask that Trestaillons might be set at liberty. The prince was so indignant at this request that his only answer was to turn his back on those who proffered it.

The next day the duke, accompanied by General Lagarde, left for Montpellier; and as it was on the latter that the Protestants placed their sole reliance for the maintenance of those rights guaranteed for the future by the word of the prince, they hesitated to take any new step in his absence, and let the 9th of November go by without attempting to resume public worship, preferring to wait for the return of their protector, which took place on Saturday evening the 11th of November.

When the general got back, his first thought was to ask if the commands of the prince had been carried out, and when he heard that they had not, without waiting to hear a word in justification of the delay, he sent a positive order to the president of the Consistory to open both places of worship the next morning.

Upon this, the president carrying self-abnegation and prudence to their extreme limits, went to the general's quarters, and having warmly thanked him, laid before him the dangers to which he would expose himself by running counter to the opinions of those who had had their own way in the city for the last four months. But General Lagarde brushed all these considerations aside: he had received an order from the prince, and to a man of his military cast of mind no course was open but to carry that order out.

Nevertheless, the president again expressed his doubts and fears.

"I will answer with my head," said the general, "that nothing happens." Still the president counselled prudence, asking that only one place of worship at first be opened, and to this the general gave his consent.

This continued resistance to the re-establishment of public worship on the part of those who most eagerly desired it enabled the general at last to realise the extent of the danger which would be incurred by the carrying out of this measure, and he at once took all possible precautions. Under the pretext that he was going to-have a general review, he brought the entire civil and military forces of Nimes under his authority, determined, if necessary, to use the one to suppress the other. As early as eight o'clock in the morning a guard of gens d'armes was stationed at the doors of the meeting-house, while other members of the same force took up their positions in the adjacent streets. On the other hand, the Consistory had decided that the doors were to be opened an hour sooner than usual, that the bells were not to be rung, and that the organ should be silent.

These precautions had both a good and a bad side. The gens d'armes at the door of the meetinghouse gave if not a promise of security at least a promise of support, but they showed to the citizens of the other party what was about to be done; so before nine o'clock groups of Catholics began to form, and as it happened to be Sunday the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages arriving constantly by twos and threes soon united these groups into a little army. Thus the streets leading to the church being thronged, the Protestants who pushed their way through were greeted with insulting remarks, and even the president of the Consistory, whose white, hair and dignified expression had no effect upon the mob, heard the people round him saying, “These brigands of Protestants are going again to their temple, but we shall soon give them enough of it.”

The anger of the populace soon grows hot; between the first bubble and the boiling-point the interval is short. Threats spoken in a low voice were soon succeeded by noisy objurgations. Women, children, and men brake out into yells, “Down with the broilers!” (for this was one of the names by which the Protestants were designated). “Down with the broilers! We do not want to see them using our churches: let them give us back our churches; let them give us back our churches, and go to the desert. Out with them! Out with them! To the desert! To the desert!”

As the crowd did not go beyond words, however insulting, and as the Protestants were long inured to much worse things, they plodded along to their meeting-house, humble and silent, and went in, undeterred by the displeasure they aroused, whereupon the service commenced.

But some Catholics went in with them, and soon the same shouts which had been heard without were heard also within. The general, however, was on the alert, and as soon as the shouts arose inside the gens d’armes entered the church and arrested those who had caused the disturbance. The crowds tried to rescue them on their way to prison, but the general appeared at the head of imposing forces, at the sight of which they desisted. An apparent cam succeeded the tumult, and the public worship went on without further interruption.

The general, misled by appearances, went off himself to attend a military mass, and at eleven o’clock returned to his quarters for lunch. His absence was immediately perceived and taken advantage of. In the: twinkling of an eye, the crowds, which had dispersed, gathered together in even greater numbers and the Protestants, seeing themselves once more in danger, shut the doors from within, while the gens d’armes guarded them without. The populace pressed so closely round the gens d’armes, and assumed such a threatening attitude, that fearing he and his men would not be able to hold their own in such a throng, the captain ordered M. Delbose, one of his officers, to ride off and warn the general. He forced his way through the crowd with great trouble, and went off at a gallop. On seeing this, the people felt there was no time to be lost; they knew of what kind the general was, and that he would be on the spot in a quarter of an hour. A large crowd is invincible through its numbers; it has only to press forward, and everything gives way, men, wood, iron. At this moment the crowd, swayed by a common impulse, swept forward, the gens d'armes and their horses were crushed against the wall, doors gave way, and instantly with a tremendous roar a living wave flooded the church. Cries of terror and frightful imprecations were heard on all sides, everyone made a weapon of whatever came to hand, chairs and benches were hurled about, the disorder was at its height; it seemed as if the days of the Michelade and the Bagarre were about to return, when suddenly the news of a terrible event was spread abroad, and assailants and assailed paused in horror. General Lagarde had just been assassinated.

As the crowd had foreseen, no sooner did the messenger deliver his message than the general sprang on his horse, and, being too brave, or perhaps too scornful, to fear such foes, he waited for no escort, but, accompanied by two or three officers, set off at full gallop towards the scene of the tumult. He had passed through the narrow streets which led to the meeting-house by pushing the crowd aside with his horse's chest, when, just as he got out into the open square, a young man named Boisson, a sergeant in the Nimes National Guard, came up and seemed to wish to speak to him. The general seeing a man in uniform, bent down without a thought of danger to listen to what he had to say, whereupon Boisson drew a pistol out and fired at him. The ball broke the collar-bone and lodged in the neck behind the carotid artery, and the general fell from his horse.

The news of this crime had a strange and unexpected effect; however excited and frenzied the crowd was, it instantly realised the consequences of this act. It was no longer like the murder of Marshal Brune at Avignon or General Ramel at Toulouse, an act of vengeance on a favourite of Napoleon, but open and armed rebellion against the king. It was not a simple murder, it was high treason.

A feeling of the utmost terror spread through the town; only a few fanatics went on howling in the church, which the Protestants, fearing still greater disasters, had by this time resolved to abandon. The first to come out was President Olivier Desmonts, accompanied by M. Vallongues, who had only just arrived in the city, but who had immediately hurried to the spot at the call of duty.

M Juillerat, his two children in his arms, walked behind them, followed by all the other worshippers. At first the crowd, threatening and ireful, hooted and threw stones at them, but at the voice of the mayor and the dignified aspect of the president they allowed them to pass. During this strange retreat over eighty Protestants were wounded, but not fatally, except a young girl called Jeannette Cornilliere, who had been so beaten and ill-used that she died of her injuries a few days later.

In spite of the momentary slackening of energy which followed the assassination of General Lagarde, the Catholics did not remain long in a state of total inaction. During the rest of the day the excited populace seemed as if shaken by an earthquake. About six o'clock in the evening, some of the most desperate characters in the town possessed themselves of a hatchet, and, taking their way to the Protestant church, smashed the doors, tore the pastors' gowns, rifled the poor-box, and pulled the books to pieces. A detachment of troops arrived just in time to prevent their setting the building on fire.

The next day passed more quietly. This time the disorders were of too important a nature for the prefect to ignore, as he had ignored so many bloody acts in the past; so in due time a full report was laid before the king. It became know the same evening that General Lagarde was still living, and that those around him hoped that the wound would not prove mortal. Dr. Delpech, who had been summoned from Montpellier, had succeeded in extracting the bullet, and though he spoke no word of hope, he did not expressly declare that the case was hopeless.

Two days later everything in the town had assumed its ordinary aspect, and on the 21st of November the king issued the following edict: —

"Louis, by the grace of God, King of France and of Navarre,

"To all those to whom these presents shall come, greeting:

"An abominable crime has cast a stain on Our city of Nimes. A seditious mob has dared to oppose the opening of the Protestant place of worship, in contempt of the constitutional charter, which while it recognises the Catholic religion as the religion of the State, guarantees to the other religious bodies protection and freedom of worship. Our military commandant, whilst trying to disperse these crowds by gentle means before having resort to force, was shot down, and his assassin has till now successfully evaded the arm of the law. If such an outrage were to remain unpunished, the maintenance of good government and public order would be impossible, and Our ministers would be guilty of neglecting the law.

“Wherefore We have ordered and do order as follows:

“Art. 1. Proceedings shall be commenced without delay by Our attorney, and the attorney-general, against the perpetrator of the murderous attack on the person of Sieur Lagarde, and against the authors, instigators, and accomplices of the insurrection which took place in the city of Nimes on the 12th of the present month.

“Art. 2. A sufficient number of troops shall be quartered in the said city, and shall remain there at the cost of the inhabitants, until the assassin and his accomplices have been produced before a court of law.

“Art. 3. All those citizens whose names are not entitled to be on the roll of the National Guard shall be disarmed.

“Our Keeper of the Seals, Our Minister of War, Our Minister of the Interior, and Our Minister of Police, are entrusted with the execution of this edict.

“Given at Paris at Our Castle of the Tuileries on the 21st of November in the year of grace 1815, and of Our reign the 21st.

“(Signed) Louis”

Boissin was acquitted.

This was the last crime committed in the South, and it led fortunately to no reprisals.

Three months after the murderous attempt to which he had so nearly fallen a victim, General Lagarde left Nimes with the rank of ambassador, and was succeeded as prefect by M. d’Argont.

During the firm, just, and independent administration of the latter, the disarming of the citizens decreed by the royal edict was carried out without bloodshed.

Through his influence, MM. Chabot-Latour, Saint-Aulaire, and Lascour were elected to the Chamber of Deputies in place of MM. De Calviere, De Vogue, and De Trinquelade.

And down to the present time the name of M. d’Argont is held in veneration at Nimes, as if he had only quitted the city yesterday.

MARY STUART — 1587

CHAPTER I

Some royal names are predestined to misfortune: in France, there is the name “Henry”. Henry I was poisoned, Henry II was killed in a tournament, Henry III and Henry IV were assassinated. As to Henry V, for whom the past is so fatal already, God alone knows what the future has in store for him.

In Scotland, the unlucky name is “Stuart”. Robert I, founder of the race, died at twenty-eight of a lingering illness. Robert II, the most fortunate of the family, was obliged to pass a part of his life, not merely in retirement, but also in the dark, on account of inflammation of the eyes, which made them blood-red. Robert III succumbed to grief, the death of one son and the captivity of other. James I was stabbed by Graham in the abbey of the Black Monks of Perth. James II was killed at the siege of Roxburgh, by a splinter from a burst cannon. James III was assassinated by an unknown hand in a mill, where he had taken refuge during the battle of Sauchie. James IV, wounded by two arrows and a blow from a halberd, fell amidst his nobles on the battlefield of Flodden. James V died of grief at the loss of his two sons, and of remorse for the execution of Hamilton. James VI, destined to unite on his head the two crowns of Scotland and England, son of a father who had been assassinated, led a melancholy and timorous existence, between the scaffold of his mother, Mary Stuart, and that of his son, Charles I. Charles II spent a portion of his life in exile. James II died in it. The Chevalier Saint-George, after having been proclaimed King of Scotland as James VIII, and of England and Ireland as James III, was forced to flee, without having been able to give his arms even the lustre of a defeat. His son, Charles Edward, after the skirmish at Derby and the battle of Culloden, hunted from mountain to mountain, pursued from rock to rock, swimming from shore to shore, picked up half naked by a French vessel, betook himself to Florence to die there, without the European courts having ever consented to recognise him as a sovereign. Finally, his brother, Henry Benedict, the last heir of the Stuarts, having lived on a pension of three thousand pounds sterling, granted him by George III, died completely forgotten, bequeathing to the House of Hanover all the crown jewels which James II had carried off when he passed over to the Continent in 1688 — a tardy but complete recognition of the legitimacy of the family which had succeeded his.

In the midst of this unlucky race, Mary Stuart was the favourite of misfortune. As Brantome has said of her, “Whoever desires to write about this illustrious queen of Scotland has, in her, two very, large subjects, the one her life, the other her death,” Brantome had known her on one of the most mournful occasions of her life — at the moment when she was quitting France for Scotland.

It was on the 9th of August, 1561, after having lost her mother and her husband in the same year, that Mary Stuart, Dowager of France and Queen of Scotland at nineteen, escorted by her uncles, Cardinals Guise and Lorraine, by the Duke and Duchess of Guise, by the Duc d’Aumale and M. de Nemours, arrived at Calais, where two galleys were waiting to take her to Scotland, one commanded by M. de Mevillon and the other by Captain Albize. She remained six days in the town. At last, on the 15th of the month, after the saddest adieus to her family, accompanied by Messieurs d’Aumale, d’Elboeuf, and Damville, with many nobles, among whom were Brantome and Chatelard, she embarked in M. Mevillon’s galley, which was immediately ordered to put out to sea, which it did with the aid of oars, there not being sufficient wind to make use of the sails.

Mary Stuart was then in the full bloom of her beauty, beauty even more brilliant in its mourning garb — a beauty so wonderful that it shed around her a charm which no one whom she wished to please could escape, and which was fatal to almost everyone. About this time, too, someone made her the subject of a song, which, as even her rivals confessed, contained no more than the truth. It was, so it was said, by M. de Maison-Fleur, a cavalier equally accomplished in arms and letters: Here it is: —

“In robes of whiteness, lo, Full sad and mournfully, Went pacing to and fro Beauty’s divinity; A shaft in hand she bore From Cupid’s cruel store, And he, who fluttered round, Bore, o’er his blindfold eyes And o’er his head uncrowned, A veil of mournful guise, Whereon the words were wrought: ‘You perish or are caught.’“

Yes, at this moment, Mary Stuart, in her deep mourning of white, was more lovely than ever; for great tears were trickling down her cheeks, as, weaving a handkerchief, standing on the quarterdeck, she who was so grieved to set out, bowed farewell to those who were so grieved to remain.

At last, in half an hour's time, the harbour was left behind; the vessel was out at sea. Suddenly, Mary heard loud cries behind her: a boat coming in under press of sail, through her pilot's ignorance had struck upon a rock in such a manner that it was split open, and after having trembled and groaned for a moment like someone wounded, began to be swallowed up, amid the terrified screams of all the crew. Mary, horror-stricken, pale, dumb, and motionless, watched her gradually sink, while her unfortunate crew, as the keel disappeared, climbed into the yards and shrouds, to delay their death-agony a few minutes; finally, keel, yards, masts, all were engulfed in the ocean's gaping jaws. For a moment there remained some black specks, which in turn disappeared one after another; then wave followed upon wave, and the spectators of this horrible tragedy, seeing the sea calm and solitary as if nothing had happened, asked themselves if it was not a vision that had appeared to them and vanished.

"Alas!" cried Mary, falling on a seat and leaning both arms an the vessel's stern, "what a sad omen for such a sad voyage!" Then, once more fixing on the receding harbour her eyes, dried for a moment by terror, and beginning to moisten anew, "Adieu, France!" she murmured, "adieu, France!" and for five hours she remained thus, weeping and murmuring, "Adieu, France! adieu, France!"

Darkness fell while she was still lamenting; and then, as the view was blotted out and she was summoned to supper, "It is indeed now, dear France," said she, rising, "that I really lose you, since jealous night heaps mourning upon mourning, casting a black veil before my sight. Adieu then, one last time, dear France; for never shall I see you more."

With these words, she went below, saying that she was the very opposite of Dido, who, after the departure of AEneas, had done nothing but look at the waves, while she, Mary, could not take her eyes off the land. Then everyone gathered round her to try to divert and console her. But she, growing sadder, and not being able to respond, so overcome was she with tears, could hardly eat; and, having had a bed got ready on the stern deck, she sent for the steersman, and ordered him if he still saw land at daybreak, to come and wake her immediately. On this point Mary was favoured; for the wind having dropped, when daybreak came the vessel was still within sight of France.

It was a great joy when, awakened by the steersman, who had not forgotten the order he had received, Mary raised herself on her couch, and through the window that she had had opened, saw once more the beloved shore. But at five o’clock in the morning, the wind having freshened, the vessel rapidly drew farther away, so that soon the land completely disappeared. Then Mary fell back upon her bed, pale as death, murmuring yet once again — ”Adieu, France! I shall see thee no more.”

Indeed, the happiest years of her life had just passed away in this France that she so much regretted. Born amid the first religious troubles, near the bedside of her dying father, the cradle mourning was to stretch for her to the grave, and her stay in France had been a ray of sunshine in her night. Slandered from her birth, the report was so generally spread abroad that she was malformed, and that she could not live to grow up, that one day her mother, Mary of Guise, tired of these false rumours, undressed her and showed her naked to the English ambassador, who had come, on the part of Henry VIII, to ask her in marriage for the Prince of Wales, himself only five years old. Crowned at nine months by Cardinal Beaton, archbishop of St. Andrews, she was immediately hidden by her mother, who was afraid of treacherous dealing in the King of England, in Stirling Castle. Two years later, not finding even this fortress safe enough, she removed her to an island in the middle of the Lake of Menteith, where a priory, the only building in the place, provided an asylum for the royal child and for four young girls born in the same year as herself, having like her the sweet name which is an anagram of the word “aimer,” and who, quitting her neither in her good nor in her evil fortune, were called the “Queen’s Marys”. They were Mary Livingston, Mary Fleming, Mary Seyton, and Mary Beaton. Mary stayed in this priory till Parliament, having approved her marriage with the French dauphin, son of Henry II, she was taken to Dumbarton Castle, to await the moment of departure. There she was entrusted to M. de Breze, sent by Henry II to-fetch her. Having set out in the French galleys anchored at the mouth of the Clyde, Mary, after having been hotly pursued by the English fleet, entered Brest harbour, 15th August, 1548, one year after the death of Francis! Besides the queen’s four Marys, the vessels also brought to France three of her natural brothers, among whom was the Prior of St. Andrews, James Stuart, who was later to abjure the Catholic faith, and with the title of Regent, and under the name of the Earl of Murray, to become so fatal to poor Mary. From Brest, Mary went to St. Germain-en-Laye, where Henry II, who had just ascended the throne, overwhelmed her with caresses, and then sent her to a convent where the heiresses of the noblest French houses were brought up. There Mary's happy qualities developed. Born with a woman's heart and a man's head, Mary not only acquired all the accomplishments which constituted the education of a future queen, but also that real knowledge which is the object of the truly learned.

Thus, at fourteen, in the Louvre, before Henry II, Catherine de Medici, and the whole court, she delivered a discourse in Latin of her own composition, in which she maintained that it becomes women to cultivate letters, and that it is unjust and tyrannical to deprive flowery of their perfumes, by banishing young girls from all but domestic cares. One can imagine in what manner a future queen, sustaining such a thesis, was likely to be welcomed in the most lettered and pedantic court in Europe. Between the literature of Rabelais and Marot verging on their decline, and that of Ronsard and Montaigne reaching their zenith, Mary became a queen of poetry, only too happy never to have to wear another crown than that which Ronsard, Dubellay, Maison-Fleur, and Brantome placed daily on her head. But she was predestined. In the midst of those fetes which a waning chivalry was trying to revive came the fatal joust of Tournelles: Henry II, struck by a splinter of a lance for want of a visor, slept before his time with his ancestors, and Mary Stuart ascended the throne of France, where, from mourning for Henry, she passed to that for her mother, and from mourning for her mother to that for her husband. Mary felt this last loss both as woman and as poet; her heart burst forth into bitter tears and plaintive harmonies. Here are some lines that she composed at this time: —

"Into my song of woe, Sung to a low sad air, My cruel grief I throw, For loss beyond compare; In bitter sighs and tears Go by my fairest years.

Was ever grief like mine Imposed by destiny? Did ever lady pine, In high estate, like me, Of whom both heart and eye Within the coffin lie?

Who, in the tender spring And blossom of my youth, Taste all the sorrowing Of life's extremest ruth, And take delight in nought Save in regretful thought.

All that was sweet and gay Is now a pain to see; The sunniness of day Is black as night to me; All that was my delight Is hidden from my sight.

My heart and eye, indeed, One face, one image know, The which this mournful weed On my sad face doth show, Dyed with the violet's tone That is the lover's own.

Tormented by my ill, I go from place to place, But wander as I will My woes can nought efface; My most of bad and good I find in solitude.

But wheresoe'er I stay, In meadow or in copse, Whether at break of day Or when the twilight drops, My heart goes sighing on, Desiring one that's gone.

If sometimes to the skies My weary gaze I lift, His gently shining eyes Look from the cloudy drift, Or stooping o'er the wave I see him in the grave.

Or when my bed I seek, And-sleep begins to steal, Again I hear him speak, Again his touch I feel; In work or leisure, he Is ever near to me.

No other thing I see, However fair displayed, By which my heart will be A tributary made, Not having the perfection Of that, my lost affection.

Here make an end, my verse, Of this thy sad lament, Whose burden shall rehearse Pure love of true intent, Which separation's stress Will never render less."

"It was then," says Brantorne, "that it was delightful to see her; for the whiteness of her countenance and of her veil contended together; but finally the artificial white yielded, and the snow-like pallor of her face vanquished the other. For it was thus," he adds, "that from the moment she became a widow, I always saw her with her pale hue, as long as I had the honour of seeing her in France, and Scotland, where she had to go in eighteen months' time, to her very great regret, after her widowhood, to pacify her kingdom, greatly divided by religious troubles. Alas! she had neither the wish nor the will for it, and I have often heard her say so, with a fear of this journey like death; for she preferred a hundred times to dwell in France as a dowager queen, and to content herself with Touraine and Poitou for her jointure, than to go and reign over there in her wild country; but her uncles, at least some of them, not all, advised her, and even urged her to it, and deeply repented their error."

Mary was obedient, as we have seen, and she began her journey under such auspices that when she lost sight of land she was like to die. Then it was that the poetry of her soul found expression in these famous lines:

"Farewell, delightful land of France,
My motherland,
The best beloved!
Foster-nurse of my young years!
Farewell, France, and farewell my happy days!

The ship that separates our loves
Has borne away but half of me;
One part is left thee and is throe,
And I confide it to thy tenderness,
That thou may’st hold in mind the other part.”‘

[Translator’s note.-It has not been found possible to make a rhymed version of these lines without sacrificing the simplicity which is their chief charm.]

This part of herself that Mary left in France was the body of the young king, who had taken with him all poor Mary’s happiness into his tomb.

Mary had but one hope remaining, that the sight of the English fleet would compel her little squadron to turn back; but she had to fulfil her destiny. This same day, a fog, a very unusual occurrence in summer-time, extended all over the Channel, and caused her to escape the fleet; for it was such a dense fog that one could not see from stern to mast. It lasted the whole of Sunday, the day after the departure, and did not lift till the following day, Monday, at eight o’clock in the morning. The little flotilla, which all this time had been sailing haphazard, had got among so many reefs that if the fog had lasted some minutes longer the galley would certainly have grounded on some rock, and would have perished like the vessel that had been seen engulfed on leaving port. But, thanks to the fog’s clearing, the pilot recognised the Scottish coast, and, steering his four boats with great skill through all the dangers, on the 20th August he put in at Leith, where no preparation had been made for the queen’s reception. Nevertheless, scarcely had she arrived there than the chief persons of the town met together and came to felicitate her. Meanwhile, they hastily collected some wretched nags, with harness all falling in pieces, to conduct the queen to Edinburgh.

At sight of this, Mary could not help weeping again; for she thought of the splendid palfreys and hackneys of her French knights and ladies, and at this first view Scotland appeared to-her in all its poverty. Next day it was to appear to her in all its wildness.

After having passed one night at Holyrood Palace, “during which,” says Brantome, “five to six hundred rascals from the town, instead of letting her sleep, came to give her a wild morning greeting on wretched fiddles and little rebecks,” she expressed a wish to hear mass. Unfortunately, the people of Edinburgh belonged almost entirely to the Reformed religion; so that, furious at the queen’s giving such a proof of papistry at her first appearance, they entered the church by force, armed with knives, sticks and stones, with the intention of putting to death the poor priest, her chaplain. He left the altar, and took refuge near the queen, while Mary’s brother, the Prior of St. Andrews, who was more inclined from this time forward to be a soldier than an ecclesiastic, seized a sword, and, placing himself between the people and the queen, declared that he would kill with his own hand the first man who should take another step. This firmness, combined with the queen’s imposing and dignified air, checked the zeal of the Reformers.

As we have said, Mary had arrived in the midst of all the heat of the first religious wars. A zealous Catholic, like all her family on the maternal side, she inspired the Huguenots with the gravest fears: besides, a rumour had got about that Mary, instead of landing at Leith, as she had been obliged by the fog, was to land at Aberdeen. There, it was said, she would have found the Earl of Huntly, one of the peers who had remained loyal to the Catholic faith, and who, next to the family of Hamilton, was, the nearest and most powerful ally of the royal house. Seconded by him and by twenty thousand soldiers from the north, she would then have marched upon Edinburgh, and have re-established the Catholic faith throughout Scotland. Events were not slow to prove that this accusation was false.

As we have stated, Mary was much attached to the Prior of St. Andrews, a son of James V and of a noble descendant of the Earls of Mar, who had been very handsome in her youth, and who, in spite of the well-known love for her of James V, and the child who had resulted, had none the less wedded Lord Douglas of Lochleven, by whom she had had two other sons, the elder named William and the younger George, who were thus half-brothers of the regent. Now, scarcely had she reascended the throne than Mary had restored to the Prior of St. Andrews the title of Earl of Mar, that of his maternal ancestors, and as that of the Earl of Murray had lapsed since the death of the famous Thomas Randolph, Mary, in her sisterly friendship for James Stuart, hastened to add, this title to those which she had already bestowed upon him.

But here difficulties and complications arose; for the new Earl of Murray, with his character, was not a man to content himself with a barren title, while the estates which were crown property since the extinction of the male branch of the old earls, had been gradually encroached upon by powerful neighbours, among whom was the famous Earl of Huntly, whom we have already mentioned: the result was that, as the queen judged that in this quarter her orders would probably encounter opposition, under pretext of visiting her possessions in the north, she placed herself at the head of a small army, commanded by her brother, the Earl of Mar and Murray.

The Earl of Huntly was the less duped by the apparent pretext of this expedition, in that his son, John Cordon, for some abuse of his powers, had just been condemned to a temporary imprisonment. He, notwithstanding, made every possible submission to the queen, sending messengers in advance to invite-her to rest in his castle; and following up the messengers in person, to renew his invitation viva voce. Unfortunately, at the very moment when he was about to join the queen, the governor of Inverness, who was entirely devoted to him, was refusing to allow Mary to enter this castle, which was a royal one. It is true that Murray, aware that it does not do to hesitate in the face of such rebellions, had already had him executed for high treason.

This new act of firmness showed Huntly that the young queen was not disposed to allow the Scottish lords a resumption of the almost sovereign power humbled by her father; so that, in spite of the extremely kind reception she accorded him, as he learned while in camp that his son, having escaped from prison, had just put himself at the head of his vassals, he was afraid that he should be thought, as doubtless he was, a party to the rising, and he set out the same night to assume command of his troops, his mind made up, as Mary only had with her seven to eight thousand men, to risk a battle, giving out, however, as Buccleuch had done in his attempt to snatch James V from the hands of the Douglases, that it was not at the queen he was aiming, but solely at the regent, who kept her under his tutelage and perverted her good intentions.

Murray, who knew that often the entire peace of a reign depends on the firmness one displays at its beginning, immediately summoned all the northern barons whose estates bordered on his, to march against Huntly. All obeyed, for the house of Cordon was already so powerful that each feared it might become still more so; but, however, it was clear that if there was hatred for the subject there was no great affection for the queen, and that the greater number came without fixed intentions and with the idea of being led by circumstances.

The two armies encountered near Aberdeen. Murray at once posted the troops he had brought from Edinburgh, and of which he was sure, on the top of rising ground, and drew up in tiers on the hill slope all his northern allies. Huntly advanced resolutely upon them, and attacked his neighbours the Highlanders, who after a short resistance retired in disorder. His men immediately threw away their lances, and, drawing their swords, crying, “Cordon, Cordon!” pursued the fugitives, and believed they had already gained the battle, when they suddenly ran right against the main body of Murray’s army, which remained motionless as a rampart of iron, and which, with its long lances, had the advantage of its adversaries, who were armed only with their claymores. It was then the turn of the Cordons to draw back, seeing which, the northern clans rallied and returned to the fight, each soldier having a sprig of heather in his cap that his comrades might recognise him. This unexpected movement determined the day: the Highlanders ran down the hillside like a torrent, dragging along with them everyone who could have wished to oppose their passage. Then Murray seeing that the moment had come for changing the defeat into a rout, charged with his entire cavalry: Huntly, who was very stout and very heavily armed, fell and was crushed beneath the horses’ feet; John Cordon, taken prisoner in his flight, was executed at Aberdeen three days afterwards; finally, his brother, too young to undergo the same fate at this time, was shut up in a dungeon and executed later, the day he reached the age of sixteen.

Mary had been present at the battle, and the calm and courage she displayed had made a lively impression on her wild defenders, who all along the road had heard her say that she would have liked to be a man, to pass her days on horseback, her nights under a tent, to wear a coat of mail, a helmet, a buckler, and at her side a broadsword.

Mary made her entry into Edinburgh amid general enthusiasm; for this expedition against the Earl of Huntly, who was a Catholic, had been very popular among the inhabitants, who had no very clear idea of the real motives which had caused her to undertake it: They were of the Reformed faith, the earl was a papist, there was an enemy the less; that is all they thought about. Now, therefore; the Scotch, amid their acclamations, whether viva voce or by written demands, expressed the wish that their queen, who was without issue by Francis II, should re-marry: Mary agreed to this, and, yielding to the prudent advice of those about her, she decided to consult upon this marriage Elizabeth, whose heir she was, in her title of granddaughter of Henry VII, in the event of the Queen of England’s dying without posterity. Unfortunately, she had not always acted with like circumspection; for at the death of Mary Tudor, known as Bloody. Mary, she had laid claim to the throne of Henry VIII, and, relying on the illegitimacy of Elizabeth's birth, had with the dauphin assumed sovereignty over Scotland, England, and Ireland, and had had coins struck with this new title, and plate engraved with these new armorial bearings.

Elizabeth was nine years older than Mary — that is to say, that at this time she had not yet attained her thirtieth year; she was not merely her rival as queen, then, but as woman. As regards education, she could sustain comparison with advantage; for if she had less charm of mind, she had more solidity of judgment: versed in politics, philosophy, history; rhetoric, poetry and music, besides English, her maternal tongue, she spoke and wrote to perfection Greek, Latin, French, Italian and Spanish; but while Elizabeth excelled Mary on this point, in her turn Mary was more beautiful, and above all more attractive, than her rival. Elizabeth had, it is true, a majestic and agreeable appearance, bright quick eyes, a dazzlingly white complexion; but she had red hair, a large foot, — [Elizabeth bestowed a pair of her shoes on the University of Oxford; their size would point to their being those of a man of average stature.] — and a powerful hand, while Mary, on the contrary, with her beautiful ashy-fair hair, — [Several historians assert that Mary Stuart had black hair; but Brantome, who had seen it, since, as we have said, he accompanied her to Scotland, affirms that it was fair. And, so saying, he (the executioner) took off her headdress, in a contemptuous manner, to display her hair already white, that while alive, however, she feared not to show, nor yet to twist and frizz as in the days when it was so beautiful and so fair.] — her noble open forehead, eyebrows which could be only blamed for being so regularly arched that they looked as if drawn by a pencil, eyes continually beaming with the witchery of fire, a nose of perfect Grecian outline, a mouth so ruby red and gracious that it seemed that, as a flower opens but to let its perfume escape, so it could not open but to give passage to gentle words, with a neck white and graceful as a swan's, hands of alabaster, with a form like a goddess's and a foot like a child's, Mary was a harmony in which the most ardent enthusiast for sculptured form could have found nothing to reproach.

This was indeed Mary's great and real crime: one single imperfection in face or figure, and she would not have died upon the scaffold. Besides, to Elizabeth, who had never seen her, and who consequently could only judge by hearsay, this beauty was a great cause of uneasiness and of jealousy, which she could not even disguise, and which showed itself unceasingly in eager questions. One day when she was chatting with James Melville about his mission to her court, Mary's offer to be guided by Elizabeth in her choice of a husband, — a choice which the queen of England had seemed at first to wish to see fixed on the Earl of Leicester, — she led the Scotch ambassador into a cabinet, where she showed him several portraits with labels in her own handwriting: the first was one of the Earl of Leicester. As this nobleman was precisely the suitor chosen by Elizabeth, Melville asked the queen to give it him to show to his mistress; but Elizabeth refused, saying that it was the only one she had. Melville then replied, smiling, that being in possession of the original she might well part with the copy; but Elizabeth would on no account consent. This little discussion ended, she showed him the portrait of Mary Stuart, which she kissed very tenderly, expressing to Melville a great wish to see his mistress. "That is very easy, madam," he replied: "keep your room, on the pretext that you are indisposed, and set out incognito for Scotland, as King James V set out for France when he wanted to see Madeleine de Valois, whom he afterwards married."

"Alas!" replied Elizabeth, "I would like to do so, but it is not so easy as you think. Nevertheless, tell your queen that I love her tenderly, and that I wish we could live more in friendship than we have done up to the present". Then passing to a subject which she seemed to have wanted to broach for a long time, "Melville," she continued, "tell me frankly, is my sister as beautiful as they say?"

"She has that reputation," replied Melville; "but I cannot give your Majesty any idea of hex beauty, having no point of comparison."

"I will give you one," the queen said. "Is she more beautiful than I?"

"Madam," replied Melville, "you are the most beautiful woman in England, and Mary Stuart is the most beautiful woman in Scotland."

"Then which of the two is the taller?" asked Elizabeth, who was not entirely satisfied by this answer, clever as it was.

"My mistress, madam," responded Melville; "I am obliged to confess it."

"Then she is too tall," Elizabeth said sharply, "for I am tall enough. And what are her favourite amusements?" she continued.

"Madam," Melville replied, "hunting, riding, performing on the lute and the harpischord."

“Is she skilled upon the latter?” Elizabeth inquired. “Oh yes, madam,” answered Melville; “skilled enough for a queen.”

There the conversation stopped; but as Elizabeth was herself an excellent musician, she commanded Lord Hunsdon to bring Melville to her at a time when she was at her harpischord, so that he could hear her without her seeming to have the air of playing for him. In fact, the same day, Hunsdon, agreeably to her instructions, led the ambassador into a gallery separated from the queen’s apartment merely by tapestry, so that his guide having raised it. Melville at his leisure could hear Elizabeth, who did not turn round until she had finished the piece, which, however, she was playing with much skill. When she saw Melville, she pretended to fly into a passion, and even wanted to strike him; but her anger calmed down by little and little at the ambassador’s compliments, and ceased altogether when he admitted that Mary Stuart was not her equal. But this was not all: proud of her triumph, Elizabeth desired also that Melville should see her dance. Accordingly, she kept back her despatches for two days that he might be present at a ball that she was giving. These despatches, as we have said, contained the wish that Mary Stuart should espouse Leicester; but this proposal could not be taken seriously. Leicester, whose personal worth was besides sufficiently mediocre, was of birth too inferior to aspire to the hand of the daughter of so many kings; thus Mary replied that such an alliance would not become her. Meanwhile, something strange and tragic came to pass.

CHAPTER II

Among the lords who had followed Mary Stuart to Scotland was, as we have mentioned, a young nobleman named Chatelard, a true type of the nobility of that time, a nephew of Bayard on his mother’s side, a poet and a knight, talented and courageous, and attached to Marshal Damville, of whose household he formed one. Thanks to this high position, Chatelard, throughout her stay in France, paid court to Mary Stuart, who, in the homage he rendered her in verse, saw nothing more than those poetical declarations of gallantry customary in that age, and with which she especially was daily overwhelmed. But it happened that about the time when Chatelard was most in love with the queen she was obliged to leave France, as we have said. Then Marshal Damville, who knew nothing of Chatelard’s passion, and who himself, encouraged by Mary’s kindness, was among the candidates to succeed Francis II as husband, set out for Scotland with the poor exile, taking Chatelard with him, and, not imagining he would find a rival in him, he made a confidant of him, and left him with Mary when he was obliged to leave her, charging the young poet to support with her the interests of his suit. This post as confidant brought Mary and Chatelard more together; and, as in her capacity as poet, the queen treated him like a brother, he made bold in his passion to risk all to obtain another title. Accordingly, one evening he got into Mary Stuart’s room, and hid himself under the bed; but at the moment when the queen was beginning to undress, a little dog she had began to yelp so loudly that her women came running at his barking, and, led by this indication, perceived Chatelard. A woman easily pardons a crime for which too great love is the excuse: Mary Stuart was woman before being queen — she pardoned.

But this kindness only increased Chatelard’s confidence: he put down the reprimand he had received to the presence of the queen’s women, and supposed that if she had been alone she would have forgiven him still more completely; so that, three weeks after, this same scene was repeated. But this time, Chatelard, discovered in a cupboard, when the queen was already in bed, was placed under arrest.

The moment was badly chosen: such a scandal, just when the queen was about to re-marry, was fatal to Mary, let alone to Chatelard. Murray took the affair in hand, and, thinking that a public trial could alone save his sister’s reputation, he urged the prosecution with such vigour, that Chatelard, convicted of the crime of lese-majeste, was condemned to death. Mary entreated her brother that Chatelard might be sent back to France; but Murray made her see what terrible consequences such a use of her right of pardon might have, so that Mary was obliged to let justice take its course: Chatelard was led to execution. Arrived on the scaffold, which was set up before the queen’s palace, Chatelard, who had declined the services of a priest, had Ronsard’s Ode on Death read; and when the reading, which he followed with evident pleasure, was ended, he turned — towards the queen’s windows, and, having cried out for the last time, “Adieu, loveliest and most cruel of princesses!” he stretched out his neck to the executioner, without displaying any repentance or uttering any complaint. This death made all the more impression upon Mary, that she did not dare to show her sympathy openly.

Meanwhile there was a rumour that the queen of Scotland was consenting to a new marriage, and several suitors came forward, sprung from the principal reigning families of Europe: first, the Archduke Charles, third son of the Emperor of Germany; then the Duke of Anjou, who afterwards became Henry III. But to wed a foreign prince was to give up her claims to the English crown. So Mary refused, and, making a merit of this to Elizabeth, she cast her eyes on a relation of the latter’s, Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley, son of the Earl of Lennox. Elizabeth, who had nothing plausible to urge against this marriage, since the Queen of Scotland not only chose an Englishman for husband, but was marrying into her own family, allowed the Earl of Lennox and his son to go to the Scotch court, reserving it to herself, if matters appeared to take a serious turn, to recall them both — a command which they would be constrained to obey, since all their property was in England.

Darnley was eighteen years of age: he was handsome, well-made, elegant; he talked in that attractive manner of the young nobles of the French and English courts that Mary no longer heard since her exile in Scotland; she let herself be deceived by these appearances, and did not see that under this brilliant exterior Darnley hid utter insignificance, dubious courage, and a fickle and churlish character. It is true that he came to her under the auspices of a man whose influence was as striking as the risen fortune which gave him the opportunity to exert it. We refer to David Rizzio.

David Rizzio, who played such a great part in the life of Mary Stuart, whose strange favour for him has given her enemies, probably without any cause, such cruel weapons against her, was the son of a Turin musician burdened with a numerous family, who, recognising in him a pronounced musical taste, had him instructed in the first principles of the art. At the age of fifteen he had left his father’s house and had gone on foot to Nice, where the Duke of Savoy held his court; there he entered the service of the Duke of Moreto, and this lord having been appointed, some years afterwards, to the Scottish embassy, Rizzio followed him to Scotland. As this young man had a very fine voice, and accompanied on the viol and fiddle songs of which both the airs and the words were of his own composition, the ambassador spoke of him to Mary, who wished to see him. Rizzio, full of confidence in himself, and seeing in the queen’s desire a road to success, hastened to obey her command, sang before her, and pleased her. She begged him then of Moreto, making no more of it than if she had asked of him a thoroughbred dog or a well-trained falcon. Moreta presented him to her, delighted at finding such an opportunity to pay his court; but scarcely was Rizzio in her service than Mary discovered that music was the least of his gifts, that he possessed, besides that, education if not profound at least varied, a supple mind, a lively imagination, gentle ways, and at the same time much boldness and presumption. He reminded her of those Italian artists whom she had seen at the French court, and spoke to her the tongue of Marot and Ronsard, whose most beautiful poems he knew by heart: this was more than enough to please Mary Stuart. In a short time he became her favourite, and meanwhile the place of secretary for the French despatches falling vacant, Rizzio was provided for with it.

Darnley, who wished to succeed at all costs, enlisted Rizzio in his interests, unconscious that he had no need of this support; and as, on her side, Mary, who had fallen in love with him at first sight, fearing some new intrigue of Elizabeth’s, hastened on this union so far as the proprieties permitted, the affair moved forward with wonderful rapidity; and in the midst of public rejoicing, with the approbation of the nobility, except for a small minority, with Murray at its head, the marriage was solemnised under the happiest auspices, 29th July 1565. Two days before, Darnley and his father, the Earl of Lennox, had received a command to return to London, and as they had not obeyed it, a week after the celebration of the marriage they learned that the Countess of Lennox, the only one of the family remaining in Elizabeth’s power, had been arrested and taken to the Tower. Thus Elizabeth, in spite of her dissimulation, yielding to that first impulse of violence that she always had such trouble to overcome, publicly displayed her resentment.

However, Elizabeth was not the woman to be satisfied with useless vengeance: she soon released the countess, and turned her eyes towards Murray, the most discontented of the nobles in opposition, who by this marriage was losing all his personal influence. It was thus easy for Elizabeth to put arms in his hand. In fact, when he had failed in his first attempt to seize Darnley, he called to his aid the Duke of Chatellerault, Glencairn, Argyll, and Rothes, and collecting what partisans they could, they openly rebelled against the queen. This was the first ostensible act of that hatred which was afterwards so fatal to Mary.

The queen, on her side, appealed to her nobles, who in response hastened to rally to her, so that in a month’s time she found herself at the head of the finest army that ever a king of Scotland had raised. Darnley assumed the command of this magnificent assembly, mounted on a superb horse, arrayed in gilded armour; and accompanied by the queen, who, in a riding habit, with pistols at her saddle-bow, wished to make the campaign with him, that she might not quit his side for a moment. Both were young, both were handsome, and they left Edinburgh amidst the cheers of the people and the army.

Murray and his accomplices did not even try to stand against them, and the campaign consisted of such rapid and complex marches and counter-marches, that this rebellion is called the Run-about Raid-that is to say, the run in every sense of the word. Murray and the rebels withdrew into England, where Elizabeth, while seeming to condemn their unlucky attempt, afforded them all the assistance they needed.

Mary returned to Edinburgh delighted at the success of her two first campaigns, not suspecting that this new good fortune was the last she would have, and that there her short-lived prosperity would cease. Indeed, she soon saw that in Darnley she had given herself not a devoted and very attentive husband, as she had believed, but an imperious and brutal master, who, no longer having any motive for concealment, showed himself to her just as he was, a man of disgraceful vices, of which drunkenness and debauchery was the least. Accordingly, serious differences were not long in springing up in this royal household.

Darnley in wedding Mary had not become king, but merely the queen’s husband. To confer on him authority nearly equalling a regent’s, it was necessary that Mary should grant him what was termed the crown matrimonial — a crown Francis II had worn during his short royalty, and that Mary, after Darnley’s conduct to herself, had not the slightest intention of bestowing on him. Thus, to whatever entreaties he made, in whatever form they were wrapped, Mary merely replied with an unvaried and obstinate refusal. Darnley, amazed at this force of will in a young queen who had loved him enough to raise him to her, and not believing that she could find it in herself, sought in her entourage for some secret and influential adviser who might have inspired her with it. His suspicions fell on Rizzio.

In reality, to whatever cause Rizzio owed his power (and to even the most clear-sighted historians this point has always remained obscure), be it that he ruled as lover, be it that he advised as minister, his counsels as long as he lived were always given for the greater glory of the queen. Sprung from so low, he at least wished to show himself worthy, of having risen so high, and owing everything to Mary, he tried to repay her with devotion. Thus Darnley was not mistaken, and it was indeed Rizzio who, in despair at having helped to bring about a union which he foresaw must become so unfortunate, gave Mary the advice not to give up any of her power to one who already possessed much more than he deserved, in possessing her person.

Darnley, like all persons of both weak and violent character, disbelieved in the persistence of will in others, unless this will was sustained by an outside influence. He thought that in ridding himself of Rizzio he could not fail to gain the day, since, as he believed, he alone was opposing the grant of this great desire of his, the crown matrimonial. Consequently, as Rizzio was disliked by the nobles in proportion as his merits had raised him above them, it was easy for Darnley to organise a conspiracy, and James Douglas of Morton, chancellor of the kingdom, consented to act as chief.

This is the second time since the beginning of our narrative that we inscribe this name Douglas, so often pronounced, in Scottish history, and which at this time, extinct in the elder branch, known as the Black Douglases, was perpetuated in the younger branch, known as the Red

Douglases. It was an ancient, noble, and powerful family, which, when the descent in the male line from Robert Bruce had lapsed, disputed the royal title with the first Stuart, and which since then had constantly kept alongside the throne, sometimes its support, sometimes its enemy, envying every great house, for greatness made it uneasy, but above all envious of the house of Hamilton, which, if not its equal, was at any rate after itself the next most powerful.

During the whole reign of James V, thanks to the hatred which the king bore them, the Douglases had: not only lost all their influence, but had also been exiled to England. This hatred was on account of their having seized the guardianship of the young prince and kept him prisoner till he was fifteen. Then, with the help of one of his pages, James V had escaped from Falkland, and had reached Stirling, whose governor was in his interests. Scarcely was he safe in the castle than he made proclamation that any Douglas who should approach within a dozen miles of it would be prosecuted for high treason. This was not all: he obtained a decree from Parliament, declaring them guilty of felony, and condemning them to exile; they remained proscribed, then, during the king’s lifetime, and returned to Scotland only upon his death. The result was that, although they had been recalled about the throne, and though, thanks to the past influence of Murray, who, one remembers, was a Douglas on the mother’s side, they filled the most important posts there, they had not forgiven to the daughter the enmity borne them by the father.

This was why James Douglas, chancellor as he was, and consequently entrusted with the execution of the laws, put himself at the head of a conspiracy which had for its aim the violation of all laws; human and divine.

Douglas’s first idea had been to treat Rizzio as the favourites of James III had been treated at the Bridge of Lauder — that is to say, to make a show of having a trial and to hang him afterwards. But such a death did not suffice for Darnley’s vengeance; as above everything he wished to punish the queen in Rizzio’s person, he exacted that the murder should take place in her presence.

Douglas associated with himself Lord Ruthven, an idle and dissolute sybarite, who under the circumstances promised to push his devotion so far as to wear a cuirass; then, sure of this important accomplice, he busied himself with finding other agents.

However, the plot was not woven with such secrecy but that something of it transpired; and Rizzio received several warnings that he despised. Sir James Melville, among others, tried every means to make him understand the perils a stranger ran who enjoyed such absolute confidence in a wild, jealous court like that of Scotland. Rizzio received these hints as if resolved not to apply them to himself; and Sir James Melville, satisfied that he had done enough to ease his conscience, did not insist further. Then a French priest, who had a reputation as a clever astrologer, got himself admitted to Rizzio, and warned him that the stars predicted that he was in deadly peril, and that he should beware of a certain bastard above all. Rizzio replied that from the day when he had been honoured with his sovereign's confidence, he had sacrificed in advance his life to his position; that since that time, however, he had had occasion to notice that in general the Scotch were ready to threaten but slow to act; that, as to the bastard referred to, who was doubtless the Earl of Murray, he would take care that he should never enter Scotland far enough for his sword to reach him, were it as long as from Dumfries to Edinburgh; which in other words was as much as to say that Murray should remain exiled in England for life, since Dumfries was one of the principal frontier towns.

Meanwhile the conspiracy proceeded, and Douglas and Ruthven, having collected their accomplices and taken their measures, came to Darnley to finish the compact. As the price of the bloody service they rendered the king, they exacted from him a promise to obtain the pardon of Murray and the nobles compromised with him in the affair of the "run in every sense". Darnley granted all they asked of him, and a messenger was sent to Murray to inform him of the expedition in preparation, and to invite him to hold himself in readiness to reenter Scotland at the first notice he should receive. Then, this point settled, they made Darnley sign a paper in which he acknowledged himself the author and chief of the enterprise. The other assassins were the Earl of Morton, the Earl of Ruthven, George Douglas the bastard of Angus, Lindley, and Andrew, Carew. The remainder were soldiers, simple murderers' tools, who did not even know what was afoot. Darnley reserved it for himself to appoint the time.

Two days after these conditions were agreed upon, Darnley having been notified that the queen was alone with Rizzio, wished to make himself sure of the degree of her favour enjoyed by the minister. He accordingly went to her apartment by a little door of which he always kept the key upon him;

but though the key turned in the lock, the door did not open. Then Darnley knocked, announcing himself; but such was the contempt into which he had fallen with the queen, that Mary left him outside, although, supposing she had been alone with Rizzio, she would have had time to send him away. Darnley, driven to extremities by this, summoned Morton, Ruthven, Lennox, Lindley, and Douglas's bastard, and fixed the assassination of Rizzio for two days later.

They had just completed all the details, and had, distributed the parts that each must play in this bloody tragedy, when suddenly, and at the moment when they least expected it, the door opened and, Mary Stuart appeared on the threshold.

"My lords," said she, "your holding these secret counsels is useless. I am informed of your plots, and with God's help I shall soon apply a remedy".

With these words, and before the conspirators hid had time to collect themselves, she shut the door again, and vanished like a passing but threatening vision. All remained thunderstruck. Morton was the first to find his tongue.

"My lords," said he, "this is a game of life and death, and the winner will not be the cleverest or the strongest, but the readiest. If we do not destroy this man, we are lost. We must strike him down, this very evening, not the day after to-morrow."

Everyone applauded, even Ruthven, who, still pale and feverish from riotous living, promised not to be behindhand. The only point changed, on Morton's suggestion, was that the murder should take place next day; for, in the opinion of all, not less than a day's interval was needed to collect the minor conspirators, who numbered not less than five hundred.

The next day, which was Saturday, March 9th, 1566, Mary Stuart, who had inherited from her father, James V, a dislike of ceremony and the need of liberty, had invited to supper with her six persons, Rizzio among the number. Darnley, informed of this in the morning, immediately gave notice of it to the conspirators, telling them that he himself would let them into the palace between six and seven o'clock in the evening. The conspirators replied that they would be in readiness.

The morning had been dark and stormy, as nearly all the first days of spring are in Scotland, and towards evening the snow and wind redoubled in depth and violence. So Mary had remained shut up with Rizzio, and Darnley, who had gone to the secret door several times, could hear the sound of instruments and the voice of the favourite, who was singing those sweet melodies which have come down to our time, and which Edinburgh people still attribute to him. These songs were for Mary a reminder of her stay in France, where the artists in the train of the Medicis had already brought echoes from Italy; but for Darnley they were an insult, and each time he had withdrawn strengthened in his design.

At the appointed time, the conspirators, who had been given the password during the day, knocked at the palace gate, and were received there so much the more easily that Darnley himself, wrapped in a great cloak, awaited them at the postern by which they were admitted. The five hundred soldiers immediately stole into an inner courtyard, where they placed themselves under some sheds, as much to keep themselves from the cold as that they might not be seen on the snow-covered ground. A brightly lighted window looked into this courtyard; it was that of the queen's study: at the first signal give them from this window, the soldiers were to break in the door and go to the help of the chief conspirators.

These instructions given, Darnley led Morton, Ruthven, Lennox, Lindley, Andrew Carew, and Douglas's bastard into the room adjoining the study, and only separated from it by a tapestry hanging before the door. From there one could overhear all that was being said, and at a single bound fall upon the guests.

Darnley left them in this room, enjoining silence; then, giving them as a signal to enter the moment when they should hear him cry, "To me, Douglas!" he went round by the secret passage, so that seeing him come in by his usual door the queen's suspicions might not be roused by his unlooked-for visit.

Mary was at supper with six persons, having, say de Thou and Melville, Rizzio seated on her right; while, on the contrary, Carapden assures us that he was eating standing at a sideboard. The talk was gay and intimate; for all were giving themselves up to the ease one feels at being safe and warm, at a hospitable board, while the snow is beating against the windows and the wind roaring in the chimneys. Suddenly Mary, surprised that the most profound silence had succeeded to the lively and animated flow of words among her guests since the beginning of supper, and suspecting, from their glances, that the cause of their uneasiness was behind her, turned round and saw Darnley leaning on the back of her chair. The queen shuddered; for although her husband was smiling when looking at Rizzio, this smile lead assumed such a strange expression that it was clear that something terrible was about to happen. At the same moment, Mary heard in the next room a heavy, dragging step drew near the cabinet, then the tapestry was raised, and Lord Ruthven, in armour of which he could barely support the weight, pale as a ghost, appeared on the threshold, and, drawing his sword in silence, leaned upon it.

The queen thought he was delirious.

"What do you want, my lord?" she said to him; "and why do you come to the palace like this?"

"Ask the king, madam," replied Ruthven in an indistinct voice. "It is for him to answer."

"Explain, my lord," Mary demanded, turning again towards Darnley; "what does such a neglect of ordinary propriety mean?"

"It means, madam," returned Darnley, pointing to Rizzio, "that that man must leave here this very minute."

"That man is mine, my lord," Mary said, rising proudly, "and consequently takes orders only from me."

"To me, Douglas!" cried Darnley.

At these words, the conspirators, who for some moments had drawn nearer Ruthven, fearing, so changeable was Darnley's character, lest he had brought them in vain and would not dare to utter the signal — at these words, the conspirators rushed into the room with such haste that they overturned the table. Then David Rizzio, seeing that it was he alone they wanted, threw himself on his knees behind the queen, seizing the hem of her robe and crying in Italian, "Giustizia! giustizia!" Indeed, the queen, true to her character, not allowing herself to be intimidated by this terrible irruption, placed herself in front of Rizzio and sheltered him behind her Majesty. But she counted too much on the respect of a nobility accustomed to struggle hand to hand with its kings for five centuries. Andrew Carew held a dagger to her breast and threatened to kill her if she insisted on defending any longer him whose death was resolved upon. Then Darnley, without consideration for the queen's pregnancy, seized her round the waist and bore her away from Rizzio, who remained on his knees pale and trembling, while Douglas's bastard, confirming the prediction of the astrologer who had warned Rizzio to beware of a certain bastard, drawing the king's own dagger, plunged it into the breast of the minister, who fell wounded, but not dead. Morton immediately took him by the feet and dragged him from the cabinet into the larger room, leaving on the floor that long track of blood which is still shown there; then, arrived there, each rushed upon him as upon a quarry, and set upon the corpse, which they stabbed in fifty-six places. Meanwhile Darnley held the queen, who, thinking that all was not over, did not cease crying for mercy. But Ruthven came back, paler than at first, and at Darnley’s inquiry if Rizzio were dead, he nodded in the affirmative; then, as he could not bear further fatigue in his convalescent state, he sat down, although the queen, whom Darnley had at last released, remained standing on the same spot. At this Mary could not contain herself.

“My lord,” cried she, “who has given you permission to sit down in my presence, and whence comes such insolence?”

“Madam,” Ruthven answered, “I act thus not from insolence, but from weakness; for, to serve your husband, I have just taken more exercise than my doctors allow”. Then turning round to a servant, “Give me a glass of wine,” said he, showing Darnley his bloody dagger before putting it back in its sheath, “for here is the proof that I have well earned it”. The servant obeyed, and Ruthven drained his glass with as much calmness as if he had just performed the most innocent act.

“My lord,” the queen then said, taking a step towards him, “it may be that as I am a woman, in spite of my desire and my will, I never find an opportunity to repay you what you are doing to me; but,” she added, energetically striking her womb with her hand, “he whom I bear there, and whose life you should have respected, since you respect my Majesty so little, will one day revenge me for all these insults”. Then, with a gesture at once superb and threatening, she withdrew by Darnley’s door, which she closed behind her.

At that moment a great noise was heard in the queen’s room. Huntly, Athol, and Bothwell, who, we are soon about to see, play such an important part in the sequel of this history, were supping together in another hall of the palace, when suddenly they had heard outcries and the clash of arms, so that they had run with all speed. When Athol, who came first, without knowing whose it was, struck against the dead body of Rizzio, which was stretched at the top of the staircase, they believed, seeing someone assassinated, that the lives of the king and queen were threatened, and they had drawn their swords to force the door that Morton was guarding. But directly Darnley understood what was going on, he darted from the cabinet, followed by Ruthven, and showing himself to the newcomers —

“My lords,” he said, “the persons of the queen and myself are safe, and nothing has occurred here but by our orders. Withdraw, then; you will know more about it in time. As to him,” he added, holding up Rizzio’s head by the hair, whilst the bastard of Douglas lit up the face with a torch so that it could be recognised, “you see who it is, and whether it is worth your while to get into trouble for him”.

And in fact, as soon as Huntly, Athol, and Bothwell had recognised the musician-minister, they sheathed their swords, and, having saluted the king, went away.

Mary had gone away with a single thought in her heart, vengeance. But she understood that she could not revenge herself at one and the same time on her husband and his companions: she set to work, then, with all the charms of her wit and beauty to detach the kind from his accomplices. It was not a difficult task: when that brutal rage which often carried Darnley beyond all bounds was spent, he was frightened himself at the crime he had committed, and while the assassins, assembled by Murray, were resolving that he should have that greatly desired crown matrimonial, Darnley, as fickle as he was violent, and as cowardly as he was cruel, in Mary’s very room, before the scarcely dried blood, made another compact, in which he engaged to deliver up his accomplices. Indeed, three days after the event that we have just related, the murderers learned a strange piece of news — that Darnley and Mary, accompanied by Lord Seyton, had escaped together from Holyrood Palace. Three days later still, a proclamation appeared, signed by Mary and dated from Dunbar, which summoned round the queen, in her own name and the king’s, all the Scottish lords and barons, including those who had been compromised in the affair of the “run in every sense,” to whom she not only granted full and complete pardon, but also restored her entire confidence. In this way she separated Murray’s cause from that of Morton and the other assassins, who, in their turn, seeing that there was no longer any safety for them in Scotland, fled to England, where all the queen’s enemies were always certain to find a warm welcome, in spite of the good relations which reigned in appearance between Mary and Elizabeth. As to Bothwell, who had wanted to oppose the assassination, he was appointed Warden of all the Marches of the Kingdom.

Unfortunately for her honour, Mary, always more the woman than the queen, while, on the contrary, Elizabeth was always more the queen than the woman, had no sooner regained her power than her first royal act was to exhume Rizzio, who had been quietly buried on the threshold of the chapel nearest Holyrood Palace, and to have him removed to the burial-place of the Scottish kings, compromising herself still more by the honours she paid him dead than by the favour she had granted him living.

Such an imprudent demonstration naturally led to fresh quarrels between Mary and Darnley: these quarrels were the more bitter that, as one can well understand, the reconciliation between the husband and wife, at least on the latter’s side, had never been anything but a pretence; so that, feeling herself in a stronger position still on account of her pregnancy, she restrained herself no longer, and, leaving Darnley, she went from Dunbar to Edinburgh Castle, where on June 19th, 1566, three months after the assassination of Rizzio, she gave birth to a son who afterwards became James VI.

CHAPTER III

Directly she was delivered, Mary sent for James Melville, her usual envoy to Elizabeth, and charged him to convey this news to the Queen of England, and to beg her to be godmother to the royal child at the same time. On arriving in London, Melville immediately presented himself at the palace; but as there was a court ball, he could not see the queen, and contented himself with making known the reason for his journey to the minister Cecil, and with begging him to ask his mistress for an audience next day. Elizabeth was dancing in a quadrille at the moment when Cecil, approaching her, said in a low voice, “Queen Mary of Scotland has just given birth to a son”. At these words she grew frightfully pale, and, looking about her with a bewildered air, and as if she were about to faint, she leaned against an arm-chair; then, soon, not being able to stand upright, she sat down, threw back her head, and plunged into a mournful reverie. Then one of the ladies of her court, breaking through the circle which had formed round the queen, approached her, ill at ease, and asked her of what she was thinking so sadly. “Ah! madam,” Elizabeth replied impatiently, “do you not know that Mary Stuart has given birth to a son, while I am but a barren stock, who will die without offspring?”

Yet Elizabeth was too good a politician, in spite of her liability to be carried away by a first impulse, to compromise herself by a longer display of her grief. The ball was not discontinued on that account, and the interrupted quadrille was resumed and finished.

The next day, Melville had his audience. Elizabeth received him to perfection, assuring him of all the pleasure that the news he brought had caused her, and which, she said, had cured her of a complaint from which she had suffered for a fortnight. Melville replied that his mistress had hastened to acquaint her with her joy, knowing that she had no better friend; but he added that this joy had nearly cost Mary her life, so grievous had been her confinement. As he was returning to this point for the third time, with the object of still further increasing the queen of England’s dislike to marriage —

“Be easy, Melville,” Elizabeth answered him; “you need not insist upon it. I shall never marry; my kingdom takes the place of a husband for me, and my subjects are my children. When I am dead, I wish graven on my tombstone: ‘Here lies Elizabeth, who reigned so many years, and who died a virgin.’“

Melville availed himself of this opportunity to remind Elizabeth of the desire she had shown to see Mary, three or four years before; but Elizabeth said, besides her country’s affairs, which necessitated her presence in the heart of her possessions, she did not care, after all she had heard said of her rival’s beauty, to expose herself to a comparison disadvantageous to her pride. She contented herself, then, with choosing as her proxy the Earl of Bedford, who set out with several other noblemen for Stirling Castle, where the young prince was christened with great pomp, and received the name of Charles James.

It was remarked that Darnley did not appear at this ceremony, and that his absence seemed to scandalise greatly the queen of England’s envoy. On the contrary, James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, had the most important place there.

This was because, since the evening when Bothwell, at Mary’s cries, had run to oppose the murder of Rizzio, he had made great way in the queen’s favour; to her party he himself appeared to be really attached, to the exclusion of the two others, the king’s and the Earl of Murray’s. Bothwell was already thirty-five years old, head of the powerful family of Hepburn, which had great influence in East Lothian and the county of Berwick; for the rest, violent, rough, given to every kind of debauchery, and capable of anything to satisfy an ambition that he did not even give himself the trouble to hide. In his youth he had been reputed courageous, but for long he had had no serious opportunity to draw the sword.

If the king’s authority had been shaken by Rizzio’s influence, it was entirely upset by Bothwell’s. The great nobles, following the favourite’s example, no longer rose in the presence of Darnley, and ceased little by little to treat him as their equal: his retinue was cut down, his silver plate taken from him, and some officers who remained about him made him buy their services with the most bitter vexations. As for the queen, she no longer even took the trouble to conceal her dislike for him, avoiding him without consideration, to such a degree that one day when she had gone with Bothwell to Alway, she left there again immediately, because Darnley came to join her. The king, however, still had patience; but a fresh imprudence of

Mary’s at last led to the terrible catastrophe that, since the queen’s liaison with Bothwell, some had already foreseen.

Towards the end of the month of October, 1566, while the queen was holding a court of justice at Jedburgh, it was announced to her that Bothwell, in trying to seize a malefactor called John Elliot of Park, had been badly wounded in the hand; the queen, who was about to attend the council, immediately postponed the sitting till next day, and, having ordered a horse to be saddled, she set out for Hermitage Castle, where Bothwell was living, and covered the distance at a stretch, although it was twenty miles, and she had to go across woods, marshes, and rivers; then, having remained some hours tete-a-tete with him, she set out again with the same sped for Jedburgh, to which she returned in the night.

Although this proceeding had made a great deal of talk, which was inflamed still more by the queen’s enemies, who chiefly belonged to the Reformed religion, Darnley did not hear of it till nearly two months afterwards — that is to say, when Bothwell, completely recovered, returned with the queen to Edinburgh.

Then Darnley thought that he ought not to put up any longer with such humiliations. But as, since his treason to his accomplices, he had not found in all Scotland a noble who would have drawn the sword for him, he resolved to go and seek the Earl of Lennox, his father, hoping that through his influence he could rally the malcontents, of whom there were a great number since Bothwell had been in favour. Unfortunately, Darnley, indiscreet and imprudent as usual, confided this plan to some of his officers, who warned Bothwell of their master’s intention. Bothwell did not seem to oppose the journey in any way; but Darnley was scarcely a mile from Edinburgh when he felt violent pains none the less, he continued his road, and arrived very ill at Glasgow. He immediately sent for a celebrated doctor, called James Abrenets, who found his body covered with pimples, and declared without any hesitation that he had been poisoned. However, others, among them Walter Scott, state that this illness was nothing else than smallpox.

Whatever it may have been, the queen, in the presence of the danger her husband ran, appeared to forget her resentment, and at the risk of what might prove troublesome to herself, she went to Darnley, after sending her doctor in advance. It is true that if one is to believe in the following letters, dated from Glasgow, which Mary is accused of having written to Bothwell, she knew the illness with which he was attacked too well to fear infection. As these letters are little known, and seem to us very singular we transcribe them here; later we shall tell how they fell into the power of the Confederate lords, and from their hands passed into Elizabeth's, who, quite delighted, cried on receiving them, "God's death, then I hold her life and honour in my hands!"

FIRST LETTER

"When I set out from the place where I had left my heart, judge in what a condition I was, poor body without a soul: besides, during the whole of dinner I have not spoken to anyone, and no one has dared to approach me, for it was easy to see that there was something amiss. When I arrived within a league of the town, the Earl of Lennox sent me one of his gentlemen to make me his compliments, and to excuse himself for not having come in person; he has caused me to be informed, moreover, that he did not dare to present himself before me after the reprimand that I gave Cunningham. This gentleman begged me, as if of his own accord, to examine his master's conduct, to ascertain if my suspicions were well founded. I have replied to him that fear was an incurable disease, that the Earl of Lennox would not be so agitated if his conscience reproached him with nothing, and that if some hasty words had escaped me, they were but just reprisals for the letter he had written me.

"None of the inhabitants visited me, which makes me think they are all in his interests; besides, they speak of him very favourably, as well as of his son. The king sent for Joachim yesterday, and asked him why I did not lodge with him, adding that my presence would soon cure him, and asked me also with what object I had come: if it were to be reconciled with him; if you were here; if I had taken Paris and Gilbert as secretaries, and if I were still resolved to dismiss Joseph? I do not know who has given him such accurate information. There is nothing, down to the marriage of Sebastian, with which he has not made himself acquainted. I have asked him the meaning of one of his letters, in which he complains of the cruelty of certain people. He replied that he was — stricken, but that my presence caused him so much joy that he thought he should die of it. He reproached me several times for being dreamy; I left him to go to supper; he begged me to return: I went back. Then he told me the story of his illness, and that he wished to make a will leaving me everything, adding that I was a little the cause of his trouble, and that he attributed it to my coldness. 'You ask me,' added he, ‘who are the people of whom I complain: it is of you, cruel one, of you, whom I have never been able to appease by my tears and my repentance. I know that I have offended you, but not on the matter that you reproach me with: I have also offended some of your subjects, but that you have forgiven me. I am young, and you say that I always relapse into my faults; but cannot a young man like me, destitute of experience, gain it also, break his promises, repent directly, and in time improve? If you will forgive me yet once more, I will promise to offend you never again. All the favour I ask of you is that we should live together like husband and wife, to have but one bed and one board: if you are inflexible, I shall never rise again from here. I entreat you, tell me your decision: God alone knows what I suffer, and that because I occupy myself with you only, because I love and adore only you. If I have offended you sometimes, you must bear the reproach; for when someone offends me, if it were granted me to complain to you, I should not confide my griefs to others; but when we are on bad terms, I am obliged to keep them to myself, and that maddens me.’

“He then urged me strongly to stay with him and lodge in his house; but I excused myself, and replied that he ought to be purged, and that he could not be, conveniently, at Glasgow; then he told me that he knew I had brought a letter for him, but that he would have preferred to make the journey with me. He believed, I think, that I meant to send him to some prison: I replied that I should take him to Craigmiller, that he would find doctors there, that I should remain near him, and that we should be within reach of seeing my son. He has answered that he will go where I wish to take him, provided that I grant him what he has asked. He does not, however, wish to be seen by anyone.

“He has told me more than a hundred pretty things that I cannot repeat to you, and at which you yourself would be surprised: he did not want to let me go; he wanted to make me sit up with him all night. As for me, I pretended to believe everything, and I seemed to interest myself really in him. Besides, I have never seen him so small and humble; and if I had not known how easily his heart overflows, and how mine is impervious to every other arrow than those with which you have wounded it, I believe that I should have allowed myself to soften; but lest that should alarm you, I would die rather than give up what I have promised you. As for you, be sure to act in the same way towards those traitors who will do all they can to separate you from me. I believe that all those people have been cast in the same mould: this one always has a tear in his eye; he bows down before everyone, from the greatest to the smallest; he wishes to interest them in his favour, and make himself pitied. His father threw up blood to-day through the nose and mouth; think what these symptoms mean. I have not seen him yet, for he keeps to the house. The king wants me to feed him myself; he won't eat unless I do. But, whatever I may do, you will be deceived by it no more than I shall be deceiving myself. We are united, you and I, to two kinds of very detestable people [Mary means Miss Huntly, Bothwell's wife, whom he repudiated, at the king's death, to marry the queen.]: that hell may sever these knots then, and that heaven may form better ones, that nothing can break, that it may make of us the most tender and faithful couple that ever was; there is the profession of faith in which I would die.

"Excuse my scrawl: you must guess more than the half of it, but I know no help for this. I am obliged to write to you hastily while everyone is asleep here: but be easy, I take infinite pleasure in my watch; for I cannot sleep like the others, not being able to sleep as I would like — that is to say, in your arms.

"I am going to get into bed; I shall finish my letter tomorrow: I have too many things to tell to you, the night is too far advanced: imagine my despair. It is to you I am writing, it is of myself that I converse with you, and I am obliged to make an end.

"I cannot prevent myself, however, from filling up hastily the rest of my paper. Cursed be the crazy creature who torments me so much! Were it not for him, I could talk to you of more agreeable things: he is not greatly changed; and yet he has taken a great deal o f %t. But he has nearly killed me with the fetid smell of his breath; for now his is still worse than your cousin's: you guess that this is a fresh reason for my not approaching him; on the contrary, I go away as far as I can, and sit on a chair at the foot of his bed.

"Let us see if I forget anything:

"His father's messenger on the road;
The question about Joachim;
The-state of my house;
The people of my suite;
Subject of my arrival;
Joseph;
Conversation between him and me;

His desire to please me and his repentance;
The explanation of his letter;
Mr. Livingston.

"Ah! I was forgetting that. Yesterday Livingston during supper told de Rere in a low voice to drink to the health of one I knew well, and to beg me to do him the honour. After supper, as I was leaning on his shoulder near the fire, he said to me, 'Is it not true that there are visits very agreeable for those who pay them and those who receive them? But, however satisfied they seem with your arrival, I challenge their delight to equal the grief of one whom you have left alone to-day, and who will never be content till he sees you again.' I asked him of whom he wished to speak to me. He then answered me by pressing my arm: 'Of one of those who have not followed you; and among those it is easy for you to guess of whom I want to speak.'

"I have worked till two o'clock at the bracelet; I have enclosed a little key which is attached by two strings: it is not as well worked as I should like, but I have not had time to make it better; I will make you a finer one on the first occasion. Take care that it is not seen on you; for I have worked at it before everyone, and it would be recognised to a certainty.

"I always return, in spite of myself, to the frightful attempt that you advise. You compel me to concealments, and above all to treacheries that make me shudder; I would rather die, believe me, than do such things; for it makes my heart bleed. He does not want to follow me unless I promise him to have the selfsame bed and board with him as before, and not to abandon him so often. If I consent to it, he says he will do all I wish, and will follow me everywhere; but he has begged me to put off my departure for two days. I have pretended to agree to all he wishes; but I have told him not to speak of our reconciliation to anyone, for fear it should make some lords uneasy. At last I shall take him everywhere I wish.... Alas! I have never deceived anyone; but what would I not do to please you? Command, and whatever happens, I shall obey. But see yourself if one could not contrive some secret means in the shape of a remedy. He must purge himself at Craigmiller and take baths there; he will be some days without going out. So far as I can see, he is very uneasy; but he has great trust in what I tell him: however, his confidence does not go so far as to allow him to open his mind to me. If you like, I will tell him every thing: I can have no pleasure in deceiving someone who is trusting. However, it will be just as you wish: do not esteem me the less for that. It is you advised it; never would vengeance have taken me so far. Sometimes he attacks me in a very sensitive place, and he touches me to the quick when he tells me that his crimes are known, but that every day greater ones are committed that one uselessly attempts to hide, since all crimes, whatsoever they be, great or small, come to men's knowledge and form the common subject of their discourse. He adds sometimes, in speaking to me of Madame de Rere, 'I wish her services may do you honour.' He has assured me that many people thought, and that he thought himself, that I was not my own mistress; this is doubtless because I had rejected the conditions he offered me. Finally, it is certain that he is very uneasy about you know what, and that he even suspects that his life is aimed at. He is in despair whenever the conversation turns on you, Livingston, and my brother. However, he says neither good nor ill of absent people; but, on the contrary, he always avoids speaking of them. His father keeps to the house: I have not seen him yet. A number of the Hamiltons are here, and accompany me everywhere; all the friends of the other one follow me each time I go to see him. He has begged me to be at his rising to-morrow. My messenger will tell you the rest.

"Burn my letter: there would be danger in keeping it. Besides, it is hardly worth the trouble, being filled only with dark thoughts.

"As for you, do not be offended if I am sad and uneasy to-day, that to please you I rise above honour, remorse, and dangers. Do not take in bad part what I tell you, and do not listen to the malicious explanations of your wife's brother; he is a knave whom you ought not to hear to the prejudice of the most tender and most faithful mistress that ever was. Above all, do not allow yourself to be moved by that woman: her sham tears are nothing in comparison with the real tears that I shed, and with what love and constancy make me suffer at succeeding her; it is for that alone that in spite of myself I betray all those who could cross my love. God have mercy on me, and send you all the prosperity that a humble and tender friend who awaits from you soon another reward wishes you. It is very late; but it is always with regret that I lay down my pen when I write to you; however, I shall not end my letter until I shall have kissed your hands. Forgive me that it is so ill-written: perhaps I do so expressly that you may be obliged to re-read it several times: I have transcribed hastily what I had written down on my tablets, and my paper has given out. Remember a tender friend, and write to her often: love me as tenderly as I love you, and remember:

"Madame de Rere's words;

The English;
His mother;
The Earl of Argyll;
The Earl of Bothwell;
The Edinburgh dwelling."

SECOND LETTER

"It seems that you have forgotten me during your absence, so much the more that you had promised me, at setting out, to let me know in detail everything fresh that should happen. The hope of receiving your news was giving me almost as much delight as your return could have brought me: you have put it off longer than you promised me. As for me, although you do not write, I play my part always. I shall take him to Craigmiller on Monday, and he will spend the whole of Wednesday there. On that day I shall go to Edinburgh to be bled there, unless you arrange otherwise at least. He is more cheerful than usual, and he is better than ever.

"He says everything he can to persuade me that he loves me; he has a thousand attentions for me, and he anticipates me in everything: all that is so pleasant for me, that I never go to him but the pain in my side comes on again, his company weighs on me so much. If Paris brought me what I asked him, I should be soon cured. If you have not yet returned when I go you know where, write to me, I beg you, and tell me what you wish me to do; for if you do not manage things prudently, I foresee that the whole burden will fall on me: look into everything and weigh the affair maturely. I send you my letter by Beaton, who will set out the day which has been assigned to Balfour. It only remains for me to beg you to inform me of your journey.

"Glasgow, this Saturday morning."

THIRD LETTER

"I stayed you know where longer than I should have done, if it had not been to get from him something that the bearer of these presents will tell you it was a good opportunity for covering up our designs: I have promised him to bring the person you know to-morrow. Look after the rest, if you think fit. Alas! I have failed in our agreement, for you have forbidden me to write to you, or to despatch a messenger to you. However, I do not intend to offend you: if you knew with what fears I am agitated, you would not have yourself so many doubts and suspicions. But I take them in good part, persuaded as I am that they have no other cause than love — love that I esteem more than anything on earth.

"My feelings and my favours are to me sure warrants for that love, and answer to me for your heart; my trust is entire on this head: but explain yourself, I entreat you, and open your soul to me; otherwise, I shall fear lest, by the fatality of my star, and by the too fortunate influence of the stars on women less tender and less faithful than I, I may be supplanted in your heart as Medea was in Jason's; not that I wish to compare you to a lover as unfortunate as Jason, and to parallel myself with a monster like Medea, although you have enough influence over me to force me to resemble her each time our love exacts it, and that it concerns me to keep your heart, which belongs to me, and which belongs to me only. For I name as belonging to me what I have purchased with the tender and constant love with which I have burned for you, a love more alive to-day than ever, and which will end only with my life; a love, in short, which makes me despise both the dangers and the remorse which will be perhaps its sad sequel. As the price of this sacrifice, I ask you but one favour, it is to remember a spot not far from here: I do not exact that you should keep your promise to-morrow; but I want to see you to disperse your suspicions. I ask of God only one thing: it is that He should make you read my heart, which is less mine than yours, and that He should guard you from every ill, at least during my life: this life is dear to me only in so far as it pleases you, and as I please you myself. I am going to bed: adieu; give me your news to-morrow morning; for I shall be uneasy till I have it. Like a bird escaped from its cage, or the turtle-dove which has lost her mate, I shall be alone, weeping your absence, short as it may be. This letter, happier than I, will go this evening where I cannot go, provided that the messenger does not find you asleep, as I fear. I have not dared to write it in the presence of Joseph, of Sebastian, and of Joachim, who had only just left me when I began it."

Thus, as one sees, and always supposing these letters to be genuine, Mary had conceived for Bothwell one of those mad passions, so much the stronger in the women who are a prey to them, that one the less understands what could have inspired them. Bothwell was no longer young, Bothwell was not handsome, and yet Mary sacrificed for him a young husband, who was considered one of the handsomest men of his century. It was like a kind of enchantment. Darnley, the sole obstacle to the union, had been already condemned for a long time, if not by Mary, at least by Bothwell; then, as his strong constitution had conquered the poison, another kind of death was sought for.

The queen, as she announces in her letter to Bothwell, had refused to bring back Darnley with her, and had returned alone to Edinburgh. Arrived there, she gave orders for the king to be moved, in his turn, in a litter; but instead of taking him to Stirling or Holyrood, she decided to lodge him in the abbey of the Kirk of Field. The king made some objections when he knew of this arrangement; however, as he had no power to oppose it, he contented himself with complaining of the solitude of the dwelling assigned him; but the queen made answer that she could not receive him at that moment, either at Holyrood or at Stirling, for fear, if his illness were infectious, lest he might give it to his son: Darnley was then obliged to make the best of the abode allotted him.

It was an isolated abbey, and little calculated by its position to dissipate the fears that the king entertained; for it was situated between two ruined churches and two cemeteries: the only house, which was distant about a shot from a cross-bow, belonged to the Hamiltons, and as they were Darnley’s mortal enemies the neighbourhood was none the more reassuring: further, towards the north, rose some wretched huts, called the “Thieves’ cross-roads”. In going round his new residence, Darnley noticed that three holes, each large enough for a man to get through, had been made in the walls; he asked that these holes, through which ill-meaning persons could get in, should be stopped up: it was promised that masons should be sent; but nothing was done, and the holes remained open.

The day after his arrival at Kirk of Field, the king saw a light in that house near his which lie believed deserted; next day he asked Alexander Durham whence it came, and he heard that the Archbishop of St. Andrew’s had left his palace in Edinburgh and had housed there since the preceding evening, one didn’t know why: this news still further increased the king’s uneasiness; the Archbishop of St. Andrew’s was one of his most declared enemies.

The king, little by little abandoned by all his servants lived on the first floor of an isolated pavilion, having about him only this same Alexander Durham, whom we have mentioned already, and who was his valet. Darnley, who had quite a special friendship for him, and who besides, as we have said, feared some attack on his life at every moment, had made him move his bed into his own apartment, so that both were sleeping in the same room.

On the night of the 8th February, Darnley awoke Durham: he thought he heard footsteps in the apartment beneath him. Durham rose, took a sword in one hand, a taper in the other, and went down to the ground floor; but although Darnley was quite certain he had not been deceived, Durham came up again a moment after, saying he had seen no one.

The morning of the next day passed without bringing anything fresh. The queen was marrying one of her servants named Sebastian: he was an Auvergnat whom she had brought with her from France, and whom she liked very much. However, as the king sent word that he had not seen her for two days, she left the wedding towards six o'clock in the evening, and came to pay him a visit, accompanied by the Countess of Argyll and the Countess of Huntly. While she was there, Durham, in preparing his bed, set fire to his palliasse, which was burned as well as a part of the mattress; so that, having thrown them out of the window all in flames, for fear lest the fire should reach the rest of the furniture, he found himself without a bed, and asked permission to return to the town to sleep; but Darnley, who remembered his terror the night before, and who was surprised at the promptness that had made Durham throw all his bedding out of the window, begged him not to go away, offering him one of his mattresses, or even to take him into his own bed. However, in spite of this offer, Durham insisted, saying that he felt unwell, and that he should like to see a doctor the same evening. So the queen interceded for Durham, and promised Darnley to send him another valet to spend the night with him: Darnley was then obliged to yield, and, making Mary repeat that she would send him someone, he gave Durham leave for that evening. At that moment Paris; of whom the queen speaks in her letters, came in: he was a young Frenchman who had been in Scotland for some years, and who, after having served with Bothwell and Seyton, was at present with the queen. Seeing him, she got up, and as Darnley still wished to keep her —

"Indeed, my lord, it is impossible," said she, "to come and see you. I have left this poor Sebastian's wedding, and I must return to it; for I promised to came masked to his ball."

The king dared not insist; he only reminded her of the promise that she had made to send him a servant: Mary renewed it yet once again, and went away with her attendants. As for Durham, he had set out the moment he received permission.

It was nine o’clock in the evening. Darnley, left alone, carefully shut the doors within, and retired to rest, though in readiness to rise to let in the servant who should come to spend the night with him. Scarcely was he in bed than the same noise that he had heard the night before recommenced; this time Darnley listened with all the attention fear gives, and soon he had no longer any doubt but that several men were walking about beneath him. It was useless to call, it was dangerous to go out; to wait was the only course that remained to the king. He made sure again that the doors were well fastened, put his sword under his pillow, extinguished his lamp for fear the light might betray him, and awaited in silence for his servant’s arrival; but the hours passed away, and the servant did not come. At one o’clock in the morning, Bothwell, after having talked some while with the queen, in the presence of the captain of the guard, returned home to change his dress; after some minutes, he came out wrapped up in the large cloak of a German hussar, went through the guard-house, and had the castle gate opened. Once outside, he took his way with all speed to Kirk of Field, which he entered by the opening in the wall: scarcely had he made a step in the garden than he met James Balfour, governor of the castle.

“Well,” he said to him, “how far have we got?

“Everything is ready,” replied Balfour, “and we were waiting for you to set fire to the fuse”. “That is well,” Bothwell answered — ”but first I want to make sure that he is in his room.”

At these words, Bothwell opened the pavilion door with a false key, and, having groped his way up the stairs; he went to listen at Darnley’s door. Darnley, hearing no further noise, had ended by going to sleep; but he slept with a jerky breathing which pointed to his agitation. Little mattered it to Bothwell what kind of sleep it was, provided that he was really in his room. He went down again in silence, then, as he had come up, and taking a lantern from one of the conspirators, he went himself into the lower room to see if everything was in order: this room was full of barrels of powder, and a fuse ready prepared wanted but a spark to set the whole on fire. Bothwell withdrew, then, to the end of the garden with Balfour, David, Chambers, and three or four others, leaving one man to ignite the fuse. In a moment this man rejoined them.

There ensued some minutes of anxiety, during which the five men looked at one another in silence and as if afraid of themselves; then, seeing that nothing exploded, Bothwell impatiently turned round to the engineer, reproaching him for having, no doubt through fear, done his work badly. He assured his master that he was certain everything was all right, and as Bothwell, impatient, wanted to return to the house himself, to make sure, he offered to go back and see how things stood. In fact, he went back to the pavilion, and, putting his head through a kind of air-hole, he saw the fuse, which was still burning. Some seconds afterwards, Bothwell saw him come running back, making a sign that all was going well; at the same moment a frightful report was heard, the pavilion was blown to pieces, the town and the firth were lit up with a clearness exceeding the brightest daylight; then everything fell back into night, and the silence was broken only by the fall of stones and joists, which came down as fast as hail in a hurricane.

Next day the body of the king was found in a garden in the neighbourhood: it had been saved from the action of the fire by the mattresses on which he was lying, and as, doubtless, in his terror he had merely thrown himself on his bed wrapped in his dressing-gown and in his slippers, and as he was found thus, without his slippers, which were flung some paces away, it was believed that he had been first strangled, then carried there; but the most probable version was that the murderers simply relied upon powder — an auxiliary sufficiently powerful in itself for them to have no fear it would fail them.

Was the queen an accomplice or not? No one has ever known save herself, Bothwell, and God; but, yes or no, her conduct, imprudent this time as always, gave the charge her enemies brought against her, if not substance, at least an appearance of truth. Scarcely had she heard the news than she gave orders that the body should be brought to her, and, having had it stretched out upon a bench, she looked at it with more curiosity than sadness; then the corpse, embalmed, was placed the same evening, without pomp, by the side of Rizzio’s.

Scottish ceremonial prescribes for the widows of kings retirement for forty days in a room entirely closed to the light of day: on the twelfth day Mary had the windows opened, and on the fifteenth set out with Bothwell for Seaton, a country house situated five miles from the capital, where the French ambassador, Ducroc, went in search of her, and made her remonstrances which decided her to return to Edinburgh; but instead of the cheers which usually greeted her coming, she was received by an icy silence, and a solitary woman in the crowd called out, “God treat her as she deserves!”

The names of the murderers were no secret to the people. Bothwell having brought a splendid coat which was too large for him to a tailor, asking him to remake it to his measure, the man recognised it as having belonged to the king. “That’s right,” said he; “it is the custom for the executioner to inherit from the-condemned”. Meanwhile, the Earl of Lennox, supported by the people’s murmurs, loudly demanded justice for his son’s death, and came forward as the accuser of his murderers. The queen was then obliged, to appease paternal clamour and public resentment, to command the Earl of Argyll, the Lord Chief Justice of the kingdom, to make investigations; the same day that this order was given, a proclamation was posted up in the streets of Edinburgh, in which the queen promised two thousand pounds sterling to whoever would make known the king’s murderers. Next day, wherever this letter had been affixed, another placard was found, worded thus:

“As it has been proclaimed that those who should make known the king’s murderers should have two thousand pounds sterling, I, who have made a strict search, affirm that the authors of the murder are the Earl of Bothwell, James Balfour, the priest of Flisk, David, Chambers, Blackmester, Jean Spens, and the queen herself.”

This placard was torn down; but, as usually happens, it had already been read by the entire population.

The Earl of Lennox accused Bothwell, and public opinion, which also accused him, seconded the earl with such violence, that Mary was compelled to bring him to trial: only every precaution was taken to deprive the prosecutor of the power of convicting the accused. On the 28th March, the Earl of Lennox received notice that the 12th April was fixed for the trial: he was granted a fortnight to collect decisive proofs against the most powerful man in all Scotland; but the Earl of Lennox, judging that this trial was a mere mockery, did not appear. Bothwell, on the contrary, presented himself at the court, accompanied by five thousand partisans and two hundred picked fusiliers, who guarded the doors directly he had entered; so that he seemed to be rather a king who is about to violate the law than an accused who comes to submit to it. Of course there happened what was certain to happen — that is to say, the jury acquitted Bothwell of the crime of which everyone, the judges included, knew him to be guilty.

The day of the trial, Bothwell had this written challenge placarded:

"Although I am sufficiently cleared of the murder of the king, of which I have been falsely accused, yet, the better to prove my innocence, I am, ready to engage in combat with whomsoever will dare to maintain that I have killed the king."

The day after, this reply appeared:

"I accept the challenge, provided that you select neutral ground."

However, judgment had been barely given, when rumours of a marriage between the queen and the Earl of Bothwell were abroad. However strange and however mad this marriage, the relations of the two lovers were so well known that no one doubted but that it was true. But as everyone submitted to Bothwell, either through fear or through ambition, two men only dared to protest beforehand against this union: the one was Lord Herries, and the other James Melville.

Mary was at Stirling when Lord Herries, taking advantage of Bothwell's momentary absence, threw himself at her feet, imploring her not to lose her honour by marrying her husband's murderer, which could not fail to convince those who still doubted it that she was his accomplice. But the queen, instead of thanking Herries for this devotion, seemed very much surprised at his boldness, and scornfully signing to him to rise, she coldly replied that her heart was silent as regarded the Earl of Bothwell, and that, if she should ever re-marry, which was not probable, she would neither forget what she owed to her people nor what she owed to herself.

Melville did not allow himself to be discouraged by this experience, and pretended, to have received a letter that one of his friends, Thomas Bishop, had written him from England. He showed this letter to the queen; but at the first lines Mary recognised the style, and above all the friendship of her ambassador, and giving the letter to the Earl of Livingston, who was present, "There is a very singular letter," said she. "Read it. It is quite in Melvine's manner."

Livingston glanced through the letter, but had scarcely read the half of it when he took Melville by the hand, and drawing him into the embrasure of a window,

"My dear Melville," said he, "you were certainly mad when you just now imparted this letter to the queen: as soon as the Earl of Bothwell gets wind of it, and that will not be long, he will have you assassinated. You have behaved like an honest man, it is true; but at court it is better to behave as a clever man. Go away, then, as quickly as possible; it is I who recommend it."

Melville did not require to be told twice, and stayed away for a week. Livingston was not mistaken: scarcely had Bothwell returned to the queen than he knew all that had passed. He burst out into curses against Melville, and sought for him everywhere; but he could not find him.

This beginning of opposition, weak as it was, none the less disquieted Bothwell, who, sure of Mary's love, resolved to make short work of things. Accordingly, as the queen was returning from Stirling to Edinburgh some days after the scenes we have just related, Bothwell suddenly appeared at the Bridge of Grammont with a thousand horsemen, and, having disarmed the Earl of Huntly, Livingston, and Melville, who had returned to his mistress, he seized the queen's horse by the bridle, and with apparent violence he forced Mary to turn back and follow him to Dunbar; which the queen did without any resistance — a strange thing for one of Mary's character.

The day following, the Earls of Huntly, Livingston, Melville, and the people in their train were set at liberty; then, ten days afterwards, Bothwell and the queen, perfectly reconciled, returned to Edinburgh together.

Two days after this return, Bothwell gave a great dinner to the nobles his partisans in a tavern. When the meal was ended, on the very same table, amid half-drained glasses and empty bottles, Lindsay, Ruthven, Morton, Maitland, and a dozen or fifteen other noblemen signed a bond which not only set forth that upon their souls and consciences Bothwell was innocent, but which further denoted him as the most suitable husband for the queen. This bond concluded with this sufficiently strange declaration:

"After all, the queen cannot do otherwise, since the earl has carried her off and has lain with her."

Yet two circumstances were still opposed to this marriage: the first, that Bothwell had already been married three times, and that his three wives were living; the second, that having carried off the queen, this violence might cause to be regarded as null the alliance which she should contract with him: the first of these objections was attended to, to begin with, as the one most difficult to solve.

Bothwell's two first wives were of obscure birth, consequently he scorned to disquiet himself about them; but it was not so with the third, a daughter of that Earl of Huntly who been trampled beneath the horses' feet, and a sister of Gordon, who had been decapitated. Fortunately for Bothwell, his past behaviour made his wife long for a divorce with an eagerness as great as his own. There was not much difficulty, then, in persuading her to bring a charge of adultery against her husband. Bothwell confessed that he had had criminal intercourse with a relative of his wife, and the Archbishop of St. Andrews, the same who had taken up his abode in that solitary house at Kirk of Field to be present at Darnley's death, pronounced the marriage null. The case was begun, pushed on, and decided in ten days.

As to the second obstacle, that of the violence used to the queen, Mary undertook to remove it herself; for, being brought before the court, she declared that not only did she pardon Bothwell for his conduct as regarded her, but further that, knowing him to be a good and faithful subject, she intended raising him immediately to new honours. In fact, some days afterwards she created him Duke of Orkney, and on the 15th of the same month — that is to say, scarcely four months after the death of Darnley — with levity that resembled madness, Mary, who had petitioned for a dispensation to wed a Catholic prince, her cousin in the third degree, married Bothwell, a Protestant upstart, who, his divorce notwithstanding, was still bigamous, and who thus found himself in the position of having four wives living, including the queen.

The wedding was dismal, as became a festival under such outrageous auspices. Morton, Maitland, and some base flatterers of Bothwell alone were present at it. The French ambassador, although he was a creature of the House of Guise, to which the queen belonged, refused to attend it.

Mary's delusion was short-lived: scarcely was she in Bothwell's power than she saw what a master she had given herself. Gross, unfeeling, and violent, he seemed chosen by Providence to avenge the faults of which he had been the instigator or the accomplice. Soon his fits of passion reached such a point, that one day, no longer able to endure them, Mary seized a dagger from Erskine, who was present with Melville at one of these scenes, and would have struck herself, saying that she would rather die than continue living unhappily as she did; yet, inexplicable as it seems, in spite of these miseries, renewed without ceasing, Mary, forgetting that she was wife and queen, tender and submissive as a child, was always the first to be reconciled with Bothwell.

Nevertheless, these public scenes gave a pretext to the nobles, who only sought an opportunity for an outbreak. The Earl of Mar, the young prince’s tutor, Argyll, Athol, Glencairn, Lindley, Boyd, and even Morton and Maitland themselves, those eternal accomplices of Bothwell, rose, they said, to avenge the death of the king, and to draw the son from hands which had killed the father and which were keeping the mother captive. As to Murray, he had kept completely in the background during all the last events; he was in the county of Fife when the king was assassinated, and three days before the trial of Bothwell he had asked and obtained from his sister permission to take a journey on the Continent.

The insurrection took place in such a prompt and instantaneous manner, that the Confederate lords, whose plan was to surprise and seize both Mary and Bothwell, thought they would succeed at the first attempt.

The king and queen were at table with Lord Borthwick, who was entertaining them, when suddenly it was announced that a large body of armed men was surrounding the castle: Bothwell and Mary suspected that they were aimed at, and as they had no means of resistance, Bothwell dressed himself as a squire, Mary as a page, and both immediately taking horse, escaped by one door just as the Confederates were coming in by the other. The fugitives withdrew to Dunbar.

There they called together all Bothwell’s friends, and made them sign a kind of treaty by which they undertook to defend the queen and her husband. In the midst of all this, Murray arrived from France, and Bothwell offered the document to him as to the others; but Murray refused to put his signature to it, saying that it was insulting him to think he need be bound by a written agreement when it was a question of defending his sister and his queen. This refusal having led to an altercation between him and Bothwell, Murray, true to his system of neutrality, withdrew into his earldom, and let affairs follow without him the fatal decline they had taken.

In the meantime the Confederates, after having failed at Borthwick, not feeling strong enough to attack Bothwell at Dunbar, marched upon Edinburgh, where they had an understanding with a man of whom Bothwell thought himself sure. This man was James Balfour, governor of the citadel, the same who had presided over the preparation of the mine which had blown up Darnley, and whom Bothwell had, met on entering the garden at

Kirk of Field. Not only did Balfour deliver Edinburgh Castle into the hands of the Confederates, but he also gave them a little silver coffer of which the cipher, an “F” crowned, showed that it had belonged to Francis II; and in fact it was a gift from her first husband, which the queen had presented to Bothwell. Balfour stated that this coffer contained precious papers, which in the present circumstances might be of great use to Mary’s enemies. The Confederate lords opened it, and found inside the three genuine or spurious letters that we have quoted, the marriage contract of Mary and Bothwell, and twelve poems in the queen’s handwriting. As Balfour had said, therein lay, for her enemies, a rich and precious find, which was worth more than a victory; for a victory would yield them only the queen’s life, while Balfour’s treachery yielded them her honour.

CHAPTER IV

Meanwhile Bothwell had levied some troops, and thought himself in a position to hold the country: accordingly, he set out with his army, without even waiting for the Hamiltons, who were assembling their vassals, and June 15th, 1567, the two opposed forces were face to face. Mary, who desired to try to avoid bloodshed, immediately sent the French ambassador to the Confederate lords to exhort them to lay aside their arms; but they replied “that the queen deceived herself in taking them for rebels; that they were marching not against her, but against Bothwell.” Then the king’s friends did what they could to break off the negotiations and give battle: it was already too late; the soldiers knew that they were defending the cause of one man, and that they were going to fight for a woman’s caprice, and not for the good of the country: they cried aloud, then, that “since Bothwell alone was aimed at, it was for Bothwell to defend his cause”. And he, vain and blustering as usual, gave out that he was ready to prove his innocence in person against whomsoever would dare to maintain that he was guilty. Immediately everyone with any claim to nobility in the rival camp accepted the challenge; and as the honour was given to the bravest, Kirkcaldy of Grange, Murray of Tullibardine, and Lord Lindsay of Byres defied him successively. But, be it that courage failed him, be it that in the moment of danger he did not himself believe in the justice of his cause, he, to escape the combat, sought such strange pretexts that the queen herself was ashamed; and his most devoted friends murmured.

Then Mary, perceiving the fatal humour of men’s minds, decided not to run the risk of a battle. She sent a herald to Kirkcaldy of Grange, who was commanding an outpost, and as he was advancing without distrust to converse with the queen, Bothwell, enraged at his own cowardice, ordered a soldier to fire upon him; but this time Mary herself interposed, forbidding him under pain of death to offer the least violence. In the meanwhile, as the imprudent order given by Bothwell spread through the army, such murmurs burst forth that he clearly saw that his cause was for ever lost.

That is what the queen thought also; for the result of her conference with Lord Kirkcaldy was that she should abandon Bothwell’s cause, and pass over into the camp of the Confederates, on condition that they would lay down their arms before her and bring her as queen to Edinburgh. Kirkcaldy left her to take these conditions to the nobles, and promised to return next day with a satisfactory answer. But at the moment of leaving Bothwell, Mary was seized again with that fatal love for him that she was never able to surmount, and felt herself overcome with such weakness, that, weeping bitterly, and before everyone, she wanted Kirkcaldy to be told that she broke off all negotiations; however, as Bothwell had understood that he was no longer safe in camp, it was he who insisted that things should remain as they were; and, leaving Mary in tears, he mounted, and setting off at full speed, he did not stop till he reached Dunbar.

Next day, at the time appointed, the arrival of Lord Kirkcaldy of Grange was announced by the trumpeters preceding him. Mary mounted directly and went to meet him; them, as he alighted to greet her, “My lord;” said she, “I surrender to you, on the conditions that you have proposed to me on the part of the nobles, and here is my hand as a sign of entire confidence”. Kirkcaldy then knelt down, kissed, the queen’s hand respectfully; and, rising, he took her horse by the bridle and led it towards the Confederates’ camp.

Everyone of any rank in the army received her with such marks of respect as entirely to satisfy her; but it was not so at all with the soldiers and common people. Hardly had the queen reached the second line, formed by them, than great murmurs arose, and several voices cried, “To the stake, the adulteress! To the stake, the parricide!” However, Mary bore these outrages stoically enough but a more terrible trial yet was in store for her. Suddenly she saw rise before her a banner, on which was depicted on one side the king dead and stretched out in the fatal garden, and on the other the young prince kneeling, his hands joined and his eyes raised to heaven, with this inscription, “O Lord! judge and revenge my cause!” Mary reined in her horse abruptly at this sight, and wanted to turn back; but she had scarcely moved a few paces when the accusing banner again blocked her passage. Wherever she went, she met this dreadful apparition. For two hours she had incessantly under her eyes the king’s corpse asking vengeance, and the young prince her son praying God to punish the murderers. At last she could endure it no longer, and, crying out, she threw herself back, having completely lost consciousness, and would have fallen, if someone had not caught hold of her. In the evening she entered Edinburgh, always preceded by the cruel banner, and she already had rather the air of a prisoner than of a queen; for, not having had a moment during the day to attend to her toilet, her hair was falling in disorder about her shoulders, her face was pale and showed traces of tears; and finally, her clothes were covered with dust and mud. As she proceeded through the town, the hootings of the people and the curses of the crowd followed her. At last, half dead with fatigue, worn out with grief, bowed down with shame, she reached the house of the Lord Provost; but scarcely had she got there when the entire population of Edinburgh crowded into the square, with cries that from time to time assumed a tone of terrifying menace. Several times, then, Mary wished to go to the window, hoping that the sight of her, of which she had so often proved the influence, would disarm this multitude; but each time she saw this banner unfurling itself like a bloody curtain between herself and the people — a terrible rendering of their feelings.

However, all this hatred was meant still more for Bothwell than for her: they were pursuing Bothwell in Darnley’s widow. The curses were for Bothwell: Bothwell was the adulterer, Bothwell was the murderer, Bothwell was the coward; while Mary was the weak, fascinated woman, who, that same evening, gave afresh proof of her folly.

In fact, directly the falling night had scattered the crowd and a little quiet was regained, Mary, ceasing to be uneasy on her own account, turned immediately to Bothwell, whom she had been obliged to abandon, and who was now proscribed and fleeing; while she, as she believed, was about to reassume her title and station of queen. With that eternal confidence of the woman in her own love, by which she invariably measures the love of another, she thought that Bothwell’s greatest distress was to have lost, not wealth and power, but to have lost herself. So she wrote him a long letter, in which, forgetful of herself, she promised him with the most tender expressions of love never to desert him, and to recall him to her directly the breaking up of the Confederate lords should give her power to do so; then, this letter written, she called a soldier, gave him a purse of gold, and charged him to take this letter to Dunbar, where Bothwell ought to be, and if he were already gone, to follow him until he came up with him.

Then she went to bed and slept more calmly; for, unhappy as she was, she believed she had just sweetened misfortunes still greater than hers.

Next day the queen was awakened by the step of an armed man who entered her room. Both astonished and frightened at this neglect of propriety, which could augur nothing good, Mary sat up in bed, and parting the curtains, saw standing before her Lord Lindsay of Byres: she knew he was one of her oldest friends, so she asked him in a voice which she vainly tried to make confident, what he wanted of her at such a time.

"Do you know this writing, madam?" Lord Lindsay asked in a rough voice, presenting to the queen the letter she had written to Bothwell at night, which the soldier had carried to the Confederate lords, instead of taking to its address.

"Yes, doubtless, my lord," the queen answered; "but am I already a prisoner, then, that my correspondence is intercepted? or is it no longer allowed to a wife to write to her husband?"

"When the husband is a traitor," replied Lindsay, "no, madam, it is no longer allowed to a wife to write to her husband — at least, however, if this wife have a part in his treason; which seems to me, besides, quite proved by the promise you make to this wretch to recall him to you."

"My lord," cried Mary, interrupting Lindsay, "do you forget that you are speaking to your queen."

"There was a time, madam," Lindsay replied, "when I should have spoken to you in a more gentle voice, and bending the knee, although it is not in the nature of us old Scotch to model ourselves on your French courtiers; but for some time, thanks to your changing loves, you have kept us so often in the field, in harness, that our voices are hoarse from the cold night air, and our stiff knees can no longer bend in our armour: you must then take me just as I am, madam; since to-day, for the welfare of Scotland, you are no longer at liberty to choose your favourites."

Mary grew frightfully pale at this want of respect, to which she was not yet accustomed; but quickly containing her anger, as far as possible —

"But still, my lord," said she, "however disposed I may be to take you as you are, I must at least know by what right you come here. That letter which you are holding in your hand would lead me to think it is as a spy, if the ease with which you enter my room without being asked did not make me believe it is as a gaoler. Have the goodness, then, to inform me by which of these two names I must call you."

"Neither by one nor the other, madam; for I am simply your fellow-traveller, chef of the escort which is to take you to Lochleven Castle, your future residence. And yet, scarcely have I arrived there than I shall be obliged to leave you to go and assist the Confederate lords choose a regent for the kingdom."

“So,” said Mary, “it was as prisoner and not as queen that I surrendered to Lord Kirkcaldy. It seems to me that things were agreed upon otherwise; but I am glad to see how much time Scotch noblemen need to betray their sworn undertakings”.

“Your Grace forgets that these engagements were made on one condition,” Lindsay answered.

“On which?” Mary asked.

“That you should separate for ever from your husband’s murderer; and there is the proof,” he added, showing the letter, “that you had forgotten your promise before we thought of revoking ours.”

“And at what o’clock is my departure fixed?” said Mary, whom this discussion was beginning to fatigue.

“At eleven o’clock, madam.”

“It is well, my lord; as I have no desire to make your lordship wait, you will have the goodness, in withdrawing, to send me someone to help me dress, unless I am reduced to wait upon myself.”

And, in pronouncing these words, Mary made a gesture so imperious, that whatever may have been Lindsay’s wish to reply, he bowed and went out. Behind him entered Mary Seyton.

CHAPTER V

At the time appointed the queen was ready: she had suffered so much at Edinburgh that she left it without any regret. Besides, whether to spare her the humiliations of the day before, or to conceal her departure from any partisans who might remain to her, a litter had been made ready. Mary got into it without any resistance, and after two hours' journey she reached Duddington; there a little vessel was waiting for her, which set sail directly she was on board, and next day at dawn she disembarked on the other side of the Firth of Forth in the county of Fife.

Mary halted at Rosythe Castle only just long enough to breakfast, and immediately recommenced her journey; for Lord Lindsay had declared that he wished to reach his destination that same evening. Indeed, as the sun was setting, Mary perceived gilded with his last rays the high towers of Lochleven Castle, situated on an islet in the midst of the lake of the same name.

No doubt the royal prisoner was already expected at Lochleven Castle, for, on reaching the lake side, Lord Lindsay's equerry unfurled his banner, which till then had remained in its case, and waved it from right to left, while his master blew a little hunting bugle which he wore hanging from his neck. A boat immediately put off from the island and came towards the arrivals, set in motion by four vigorous oarsmen, who had soon propelled it across the space which separated it from the bank. Mary silently got into it, and sat down at the stern, while Lord Lindsay and his equerry stood up before her; and as her guide did not seem any more inclined to speak than she was herself to respond, she had plenty of time to examine her future dwelling.

The castle, or rather the fortress of Lochleven, already somewhat gloomy in its situation and architecture, borrowed fresh mournfulness still from the hour at which it appeared to the queen's gaze. It was, so far as she could judge amid the mists rising from the lake, one of those massive structures of the twelfth century which seem, so fast shut up are they, the stone armour of a giant. As she drew near, Mary began to make out the contours of two great round towers, which flanked the corners and gave it the severe character of a state prison. A clump of ancient trees enclosed by a high wall, or rather by a rampart, rose at its north front, and seemed vegetation in stone, and completed the general effect of this gloomy abode, while, on the contrary, the eye wandering from it and passing from islands to islands, lost itself in the west, in the north, and in the south, in the vast plain of Kinross, or stopped southwards at the jagged summits of Ben Lomond, whose farthest slopes died down on the shores of the lake.

Three persons awaited Mary at the castle door: Lady Douglas, William Douglas her son, and a child of twelve who was called Little Douglas, and who was neither a son nor a brother of the inhabitants of the castle, but merely a distant relative. As one can imagine, there were few compliments between Mary and her hosts; and the queen, conducted to her apartment, which was on the first floor, and of which the windows overlooked the lake, was soon left with Mary Seyton, the only one of the four Marys who had been allowed to accompany her.

However, rapid as the interview had been, and short and measured the words exchanged between the prisoner and her gaolers, Mary had had time, together with what she knew of them beforehand, to construct for herself a fairly accurate idea of the new personages who had just mingled in her history.

Lady Lochleven, wife of Lord William Douglas, of whom we have already said a few words at the beginning of this history, was a woman of from fifty-five to sixty years of age, who had been handsome enough in her youth to fix upon herself the glances of King James V, and who had had a son by him, who was this same Murray whom we have already seen figuring so often in Mary’s history, and who, although his birth was illegitimate, had always been treated as a brother by the queen.

Lady Lochleven had had a momentary hope, so great was the king’s love for her, of becoming his wife, which upon the whole was possible, the family of Mar, from which she was descended, being the equal of the most ancient and the noblest families in Scotland. But, unluckily, perhaps slanderously, certain talk which was circulating among the young noblemen of the time came to James’s ears; it was said that together with her royal lover the beautiful favourite had another, whom she had chosen, no doubt from curiosity, from the very lowest class. It was added that this Porterfeld, or Porterfield, was the real father of the child who had already received the name of James Stuart, and whom the king was educating as his son at the monastery of St. Andrews. These rumours, well founded or not, had therefore stopped James V at the moment when, in gratitude to her who had given him a son, he was on the point of raising her to the rank of queen; so that, instead of marrying her himself, he had invited her to choose among the nobles at court; and as she was very handsome, and the king's favour went with the marriage, this choice, which fell on Lord William Douglas of Lochleven, did not meet with any resistance on his part. However, in spite of this direct protection, that James V preserved for her all his life, Lady Douglas could never forget that she had fingered higher fortune; moreover, she had a hatred for the one who, according to herself, had usurped her place, and poor Mary had naturally inherited the profound animosity that Lady Douglas bore to her mother, which had already come to light in the few words that the two women had exchanged. Besides, in ageing, whether from repentance for her errors or from hypocrisy, Lady Douglas had become a prude and a puritan; so that at this time she united with the natural acrimony of her character all the stiffness of the new religion she had adopted.

William Douglas, who was the eldest son of Lord Lochleven, on his mother's side half-brother of Murray, was a man of from thirty-five to thirty-six years of age, athletic, with hard and strongly pronounced features, red-haired like all the younger branch, and who had inherited that paternal hatred that for a century the Douglases cherished against the Stuarts, and which was shown by so many plots, rebellions, and assassinations. According as fortune had favoured or deserted Murray, William Douglas had seen the rays of the fraternal star draw near or away from him; he had then felt that he was living in another's life, and was devoted, body and soul, to him who was his cause of greatness or of abasement. Mary's fall, which must necessarily raise Murray, was thus a source of joy for him, and the Confederate lords could not have chosen better than in confiding the safe-keeping of their prisoner to the instinctive spite of Lady Douglas and to the intelligent hatred of her son.

As to Little Douglas, he was, as we have said, a child of twelve, for some months an orphan, whom the Lochlevens had taken charge of, and whom they made buy the bread they gave him by all sorts of harshness. The result was that the child, proud and spiteful as a Douglas, and knowing, although his fortune was inferior, that his birth was equal to his proud relatives, had little by little changed his early gratitude into lasting and profound hatred: for one used to say that among the Douglases there was an age for loving, but that there was none for hating. It results that, feeling his weakness and isolation, the child was self-contained with strength beyond his years, and, humble and submissive in appearance, only awaited the moment when, a grown-up young man, he could leave Lochleven, and perhaps avenge himself for the proud protection of those who dwelt there. But the feelings that we have just expressed did not extend to all the members of the family: as much as from the bottom of his heart the little Douglas detested William and his mother, so much he loved George, the second of Lady Lochleven’s sons, of whom we have not yet spoken, because, being away from the castle when the queen arrived, we have not yet found an opportunity to present him to our readers.

George, who at this time might have been about twenty-five or twenty-six years old, was the second son of Lord Lochleven; but by a singular chance, that his mother’s adventurous youth had caused Sir William to interpret amiss, this second son had none of the characteristic features of the Douglases’ full cheeks, high colour, large ears, and red hair. The result was that poor George, who, on the contrary, had been given by nature pale cheeks, dark blue eyes, and black hair, had been since coming into the world an object of indifference to his father and of dislike to his elder brother. As to his mother, whether she were indeed in good faith surprised like Lord Douglas at this difference in race, whether she knew the cause and inwardly reproached herself, George had never been, ostensibly at least, the object of a very lively maternal affection; so the young man, followed from his childhood by a fatality that he could not explain, had sprung up like a wild shrub, full of sap and strength, but uncultivated and solitary. Besides, from the time when he was fifteen, one was accustomed to his motiveless absences, which the indifference that everyone bore him made moreover perfectly explicable; from time to time, however, he was seen to reappear at the castle, like those migratory birds which always return to the same place but only stay a moment, then take their way again without one’s knowing towards what spot in the world they are directing their flight.

An instinct of misfortune in common had drawn Little Douglas to George. George, seeing the child ill-treated by everyone, had conceived an affection for him, and Little Douglas, feeling himself loved amid the atmosphere of indifference around him, turned with open arms and heart to George: it resulted from this mutual liking that one day, when the child had committed I do not know what fault, and that William Douglas raised the whip he beat his dogs with to strike him, that George, who was sitting on a stone, sad and thoughtful, had immediately sprung up, snatched the whip from his brother’s hands and had thrown it far from him. At this insult William had drawn his sword, and George his, so that these two brothers, who had hated one another for twenty years like two enemies, were going to cut one another’s throats, when Little Douglas, who had picked up the whip, coming back and kneeling before William, offered him the ignominious weapon, saying,

“Strike, cousin; I have deserved it.”

This behaviour of the child had caused some minutes’ reflection to the two young men, who, terrified at the crime they were about to commit, had returned their swords to their scabbards and had each gone away in silence. Since this incident the friendship of George and Little Douglas had acquired new strength, and on the child’s side it had become veneration.

We dwell upon all these details somewhat at length, perhaps, but no doubt our readers will pardon us when they see the use to be made of them.

This is the family, less George, who, as we have said, was absent at the time of her arrival, into the midst of which the queen had fallen, passing in a moment from the summit of power to the position of a prisoner; for from the day following her arrival Mary saw that it was by such a title she was an inmate of Lochleven Castle. In fact, Lady Douglas presented herself before her as soon as it was morning, and with an embarrassment and dislike ill disguised beneath an appearance of respectful indifference, invited Mary to follow her and take stock of the several parts of the fortress which had been chosen beforehand for her private use. She then made her go through three rooms, of which one was to serve as her bedroom, the second as sitting-room, and the third as ante-chamber; afterwards, leading the way down a spiral staircase, which looked into the great hall of the castle, its only outlet, she had crossed this hall, and had taken Mary into the garden whose trees the queen had seen topping the high walls on her arrival: it was a little square of ground, forming a flower-bed in the midst of which was an artificial fountain. It was entered by a very low door, repeated in the opposite wall; this second door looked on to the lake and, like all the castle doors, whose keys, however, never left the belt or the pillow of William Douglas, it was guarded night and day by a sentinel. This was now the whole domain of her who had possessed the palaces, the plains, and the mountains of an entire kingdom.

Mary, on returning to her room, found breakfast ready, and William Douglas standing near the table he was going to fulfil about the queen the duties of carver and taster.

In spite of their hatred for Mary, the Douglases would have considered it an eternal blemish on their honour if any accident should have befallen the queen while she was dwelling in their castle; and it was in order that the queen herself should not entertain any fear in this respect that William Douglas, in his quality of lord of the manor, had not only desired to carve before the queen, but even to taste first in her presence, all the dishes served to her, as well as the water and the several wines to be brought her. This precaution saddened Mary more than it reassured her; for she understood that, while she stayed in the castle, this ceremony would prevent any intimacy at table. However, it proceeded from too noble an intention for her to impute it as a crime to her hosts: she resigned herself, then, to this company, insupportable as it was to her; only, from that day forward, she so cut short her meals that all the time she was at Lochleven her longest dinners barely lasted more than a quarter of an hour.

Two days after her arrival, Mary, on sitting down to table for breakfast, found on her plate a letter addressed to her which had been put there by William Douglas. Mary recognised Murray's handwriting, and her first feeling was one of joy; for if a ray of hope remained to her, it came from her brother, to whom she had always been perfectly kind, whom from Prior of St. Andrew's she had made an earl in bestowing on him the splendid estates which formed part of the old earldom of Murray, and to whom, which was of more importance, she had since pardoned, or pretended to pardon, the part he had taken in Rizzio's assassination.

Her astonishment was great, then, when, having opened the letter, she found in it bitter reproaches for her conduct, an exhortation to do penance, and an assurance several times repeated that she should never leave her prison. He ended his letter in announcing to her that, in spite of his distaste for public affairs, he had been obliged to accept the regency, which he had done less for his country than for his sister, seeing that it was the sole means he had of standing in the way of the ignominious trial to which the nobles wished to bring her, as author, or at least as chief accomplice, of Darnley's death. This imprisonment was then clearly a great good fortune for her, and she ought to thank Heaven for it, as an alleviation of the fate awaiting her if he had not interceded for her.

This letter was a lightning stroke for Mary: only, as she did not wish to give her enemies the delight of seeing her suffer, she contained her grief, and, turning to William Douglas —

“My lord,” said she, “this letter contains news that you doubtless know already, for although we are not children by the same mother, he who writes to me is related to us in the same degree, and will not have desired to write to his sister without writing to his brother at the same time; besides, as a good son, he will have desired to acquaint his mother with the unlooked-for greatness that has befallen him.”

“Yes, madam,” replied William, “we know since yesterday that, for the welfare of Scotland, my brother has been named regent; and as he is a son as respectful to his mother as he is devoted to his country, we hope that he will repair the evil that for five years favourites of every sort and kind have done to both.”

“It is like a good son, and at the same time like a courteous host, to go back no farther into the history of Scotland,” replied Mary Stuart, “and not to make the daughter blush for the father’s errors; for I have heard say that the evil which your lordship laments was prior to the time to which you assign it, and that King James V. also had formerly favourites, both male and female. It is true that they add that the ones as ill rewarded his friendship as the others his love. In this, if you are ignorant of it, my lord, you can be instructed, if he is still living, by a certain. Porterfeld or Porterfield, I don’t know which, understanding these names of the lower classes too ill to retain and pronounce them, but about which, in my stead, your noble mother could give you information.”

With these words, Mary Stuart rose, and, leaving William Douglas crimson with rage, she returned into her bedroom, and bolted the door behind her.

All that day Mary did not come down, remaining at her window, from which she at least enjoyed a splendid view over the plains and village of Kinross; but this vast extent only contracted her heart the more, when, bringing her gaze back from the horizon to the castle, she beheld its walls surrounded on all sides by the deep waters of the lake, on whose wide surface a single boat, where Little Douglas was fishing, was rocking like a speck. For some moments Mary’s eyes mechanically rested on this child, whom she had already seen upon her arrival, when suddenly a horn sounded from the Kinross side. At the same moment Little Douglas threw away his line, and began to row towards the shore whence the signal had come with skill and strength beyond his years. Mary, who had let her gaze rest on him absently, continued to follow him with her eyes, and saw him make for a spot on the shore so distant that the boat seemed to her at length but an imperceptible speck; but soon it reappeared, growing larger as it approached, and Mary could then observe that it was bringing back to the castle a new passenger, who, having in his turn taken the oars, made the little skiff fly over the tranquil water of the lake, where it left a furrow gleaming in the last rays of the sun. Very soon, flying on with the swiftness of a bird, it was near enough for Mary to see that the skilful and vigorous oarsman was a young man from twenty-five to twenty-six years of age, with long black hair, clad in a close coat of green cloth, and wearing a Highlander's cap, adorned with an eagle's feather; then, as with his back turned to the window he drew nearer, Little Douglas, who was leaning on his shoulder, said a few words which made him turn round towards the queen: immediately Mary, with an instinctive movement rather than with the dread of being an object of idle curiosity, drew back, but not so quickly, however, but that she had been able to see the handsome pale face of the unknown, who, when she returned to the window, had disappeared behind one of the corners of the castle.

Everything is a cause of conjecture to a prisoner: it seemed to Mary that this young man's face was not unknown to her, and that he had seen her already; but though great the care with which she questioned her memory, she could not recall any distinct remembrance, so much so that the queen ended in thinking it the play of her imagination, or that some vague and distinct resemblance had deceived her.

However, in spite of Mary, this idea had taken an important place in her mind: she incessantly saw this little boat skimming the water, and the young man and the child who were in it drawing near her, as if to bring her help. It followed that, although there had been nothing real in all these captive's dreams, she slept that night a calmer sleep than she had yet done since she had been in Lochleven Castle.

Next day, on rising, Mary ran to her window: the weather was fine, and everything seemed to smile on her, the water, the heavens and the earth. But, without being able to account for the restraining motive, she did not want to go down into the ga den before breakfast. When the door opened, ‘she turned quickly round: it was, as on the day before, William Douglas, who came to fulfil his duty as taster.

The breakfast was a short and silent one; then, as soon as Douglas had withdrawn, Mary descended in her turn: in crossing the courtyard she saw two horses ready saddled, which pointed to the near departure of a master and a squire. Was it the young man with the black hair already setting out again? This is what Mary did not dare or did not wish to ask. She consequently went her way, and entered the garden: at the first glance she took it in in its full extent; it was deserted.

Mary walked there a moment; then, soon tiring of the promenade, she went up again to her room: in passing back through the courtyard she had noticed that the horses were no longer there. Directly she returned into her apartment, she went then to the window to see if she could discover anything upon the lake to guide her in her conjectures: a boat was in fact receding, and in this boat were the two horses and the two horsemen; one was William Douglas, the other a simple squire from the house.

Mary continued watching the boat until it had touched the shore. Arrived there, the two horsemen got out, disembarked their horses, and went away at full gallop, taking the same road by which the queen had come; so that, as the horses were prepared for a long journey, Mary thought that William Douglas was going to Edinburgh. As to the boat, scarcely had it landed its two passengers on the opposite shore than it returned towards the castle.

At that moment Mary Seyton announced to the queen that Lady Douglas was asking permission to visit her.

It was the second time, after long hatred on Lady Douglas’s part and contemptuous indifference on the queen’s, that the two women were face to face; therefore the queen, with that instinctive impulse of coquetry which urges women, in whatever situation they find themselves, to desire to be beautiful, above all for women, made a sign to Mary Seyton, and, going to a little mirror fastened to the wall in a heavy Gothic frame, she arranged her curls, and readjusted the lace of her collar; then; having seated herself in the pose most favourable to her, in a great arm-chair, the only one in her sitting-room, she said smilingly to Mary Seyton that she might admit Lady Douglas, who was immediately introduced.

Mary’s expectation was not disappointed: Lady Douglas, in spite of her hatred for James Vs daughter, and mistress of herself as she thought she as, could not prevent herself from showing by a movement of surprise the impression that this marvelous beauty was making on her: she thought she should find Mary crushed by her unhappiness, pallid from her fatigues, humbled by captivity, and she saw hers calm, lovely, and haughty as usual. Mary perceived the effect that she was producing, and addressing herself with an ironical smile partly to Mary Seyton, who was leaning on the back of her chair, and partly to her who was paying her this unforeseen visit.

"We are fortunate to-day," said she, "for we are going as it seems to enjoy the society of our good hostess, whom we thank besides for having kindly maintained with us the empty ceremony of announcing herself — a ceremony with which, having the keys of our apartment, she could have dispensed."

"If my presence is inconvenient to your grace," replied Lady Lochleven, "I am all the more sorry for it, as circumstances will oblige me to impose it twice daily, at least during the absence of my son, who is summoned to Edinburgh by the regent; this is of what I came to inform your grace, not with the empty ceremonial of the court, but with the consideration which Lady Lochleven owes to everyone who has received hospitality in her castle."

"Our good hostess mistakes our intention," Mary answered, with affected good-nature; "and the regent himself can bear witness to the pleasure we have always had in bringing nearer to us the persons who can recall to us, even indirectly, our well-beloved father, James V. It will be therefore unjustly that Lady Douglas will interpret in a manner disagreeable to herself our surprise at seeing her; and the hospitality that she offers us so obligingly does not promise us, in spite of her goodwill, sufficient distractions that we should deprive ourselves of those that her visits cannot fail to procure us."

"Unfortunately, madam," replied Lady Lochleven, whom Mary was keeping standing before her, "whatever pleasure I myself derive from these visits, I shall be obliged to deprive myself of, except at the times I have mentioned. I am now too old to bear fatigue, and I have, always been too proud to endure sarcasms."

"Really, Seyton," cried Mary, seeming to recollect herself, "we had not dreamed that Lady Lochleven, having won her right to a stool at the court of the king my father, would have need to preserve it in the prison of the queen his daughter. Bring forward a seat, Seyton, that we be not deprived so soon, and by a failure of memory on our part, of our gracious hostess's company; or even," went on Mary, rising and pointing out her own seat to

Lady Lochleven, who was making a motion to withdraw, "if a stool does not suit you, my lady, take this easy-chair: you will not be the first member of your family to sit in my place."

At this last allusion, which recalled to her Murray's usurpation, Lady Lochleven was no doubt about to make some exceedingly bitter reply, when the young man with the dark hair appeared on the threshold, without being announced, and, advancing towards Lady Lochleven, without saluting Mary —

"Madam," said he, bowing to the former, "the boat which took my brother has just returned, and one of the men in it is charged with a pressing charge that Lord William forgot to make to you himself."

Then, saluting the old lady with the same respect, he immediately went out of the room, without even glancing at the queen, who, hurt by this impertinence, turned round to Mary Seyton, and, with her usual calm —

"What have they told us, Seyton, of injurious rumours which were spread about our worthy hostess apropos of a child with a pale face and dark hair? If this child, as I have every reason to believe, has become the young man who just went out of the room, I am ready to affirm to all the incredulous that he is a true Douglas, if not for courage, of which we cannot judge, then for insolence, of which he has just given us proofs. Let us return, darling," continued the queen, leaning on Mary Seyton's arm; "for our good hostess, out of courtesy, might think herself obliged to keep us company longer, while we know that she is impatiently awaited elsewhere."

With these words, Mary went into her bedroom; while the old lady, still quite stunned with the shower of sarcasms that the queen had rained on her, withdrew, murmuring, "Yes, yes, he is a Douglas, and with God's help he will prove it, I hope."

The queen had had strength as long as she was sustained by her enemy's presence, but scarcely was she alone than she sank into a chair, and no longer having any witness of her weakness than Mary Seyton, burst into tears. Indeed, she had just been cruelly wounded: till then no man had come near her who had not paid homage either to the majesty of her rank or to the beauty of her countenance. But precisely he, on whom she had reckoned, without knowing why, with instinctive hopes, insulted her at one and the same time in her double pride of queen and woman: thus she remained shut up till evening.

At dinner-time, just as Lady Lochleven had informed Mary, she ascended to the queen's apartment, in her dress of honour, and preceding four servants who were carrying the several dishes composing the prisoner's repast, and who, in their turn, were followed by the old castle steward, having, as on days of great ceremony, his gold chain round his neck and his ivory stick in his hand. The servants' placed the dishes on the table, and waited in silence for the moment when it should please the queen to come out of her room; but at this moment the door opened, and in place of the queen Mary Seyton appeared.

"Madam," said she on entering, "her grace was indisposed during the day, and will take nothing this evening; it will be useless, then, for you to wait longer."

"Permit me to hope," replied Lady Lochleven, "that she will change her decision; in any case, see me perform my office."

At these words, a servant handed Lady Lochleven bread and salt on a silver salver, while the old steward, who, in the absence of William Douglas, fulfilled the duties of carver, served to her on a plate of the same metal a morsel from each of the dishes that had been brought; then, this transaction ended.

"So the queen will not appear to-day?" Lady Lochleven inquired.

"It is her Majesty's resolve," replied Mary Seyton.

"Our presence is then needless," said the old lady; "but in any case the table is served, and if her grace should have need of anything else, she would have but to name it."

With these words, Lady Lochleven, with the same stiffness and the same dignity with which she had come, withdrew, followed by her four servants and her steward.

As Lady Lochleven had foreseen, the queen, yielding to the entreaties of Mary Seyton, came out of her room at last, towards eight o'clock in the evening, sat down to table, and, served by the only maid of honour left her, ate a little; then, getting up, she went to the window.

It was one of those magnificent summer evenings on which the whole of nature seems making holiday: the sky was studded with stars, which were reflected in the lake, and in their midst, like a more fiery star, the flame of the chafing-dish shone, burning at the stern of a little boat: the queen, by the gleam of the light it shed, perceived George Douglas and Little Douglas, who were fishing. However great her wish to profit by this fine evening to breathe the pure night air, the sight of this young man who had so grossly insulted her this very day made such a keen impression on her that she shut her window directly, and, retiring into her room, went to bed, and made her companion in captivity read several prayers aloud; then, not being able to sleep, so greatly was she agitated, she rose, and throwing on a mantle went again to the window the boat had disappeared.

Mary spent part of the night gazing into the immensity of the heavens, or into the depths of the lake; but in spite of the nature of the thoughts agitating her, she none the less found very great physical alleviation in contact with this pure air and in contemplation of this peaceful and silent night: thus she awoke next day calmer and more resigned. Unfortunately, the sight of Lady Lochleven, who presented herself at breakfast-time, to fulfil her duties as taster, brought back her irritability. Perhaps, however, things would have gone on smoothly if Lady Lochleven, instead of remaining standing by the sideboard, had withdrawn after having tasted the various dishes of the courses; but this insisting on remaining throughout the meal, which was at bottom a mark of respect, seemed to the queen unbearable tyranny.

“Darling,” said she, speaking to Mary Seyton, “have you already forgotten that our good hostess complained yesterday of the fatigue she felt inn standing? Bring her, then, one of the two stools which compose our royal furniture, and take care that it is not the one with the leg broken”. “If the furniture of Lochleven Castle is in such bad condition, madam,” the old lady replied, “it is the fault of the kings of Scotland: the poor Douglases for nearly a century have had such a small part of their sovereigns’ favour, that they have not been able to keep up the splendour of their ancestors to the level of that of private individuals, and because there was in Scotland a certain musician, as I am informed, who spent their income for a whole year in one month.”

“Those who know how to take so well, my lady,” the queen answered, “have no need of being given to: it seems to me the Douglases have lost nothing by waiting, and there is not a younger son of this noble family who might not aspire to the highest alliances; it is truly vexatious that our sister the queen of England has taken a vow of virginity; as is stated.”

“Or rather,” interrupted Lady Lochleven, “that the Queen of Scotland is not a widow by her third husband. But,” continued the old lady, pretending to recollect herself, “I do not say that to reproach your grace. Catholics look upon marriage as a sacrament, and on this head receive it as often as they can.”

“This, then,” returned Mary, “is the difference between them and the Huguenots; for they, not having the same respect for it, think it is allowed them to dispense with it in certain circumstances.”

At this terrible sarcasm Lady Lochleven took a step towards Mary Stuart, holding in her hand the knife which she had just been using to cut off a piece of meat brought her to taste; but the queen rose up with so great a calm and with such majesty, that either from involuntary respect or shame of her first impulse, she let fall the weapon she was holding, and not finding anything sufficiently strong in reply to express her feelings, she signed to the servants to follow her, and went out of the apartment with all the dignity that anger permitted her to summon to her aid.

Scarcely had Lady Lochleven left the room than the queen sat down again, joyful and triumphant at the victory she had just gained, and ate with a better appetite than she had yet done since she was a prisoner, while Mary Seyton deplored in a low tone and with all possible respect this fatal gift of repartee that Mary had received, and which, with her beauty, was one of the causes of all her misfortunes; but the queen did nothing but laugh at all her observations, saying she was curious to see the figure her good hostess would cut at dinnertime.

After breakfast, the queen went down into the garden: her satisfied pride had restored some of her cheerfulness, so much so that, seeing, while crossing the hall, a mandolin lying forgotten on a chair, she told Mary Seyton to take it, to see, she said, if she could recall her old talent. In reality the queen was one of the best musicians of the time, and played admirably, says Brantome, on the lute and viol d’amour, an instrument much resembling the mandolin.

Mary Seyton obeyed.

Arrived in the garden, the queen sat down in the deepest shade, and there, having tuned her instrument, she at first drew from it lively and light tones, which soon darkened little by little, at the same time that her countenance assumed a hue of deep melancholy. Mary Seyton looked at her with uneasiness, although for a long time she had been used to these sudden changes in her mistress’s humour, and she was about to ask the reason of this gloomy veil suddenly spread over her face, when, regulating her harmonies, Mary began to sing in a low voice, and as if for herself alone, the following verses:

"Caverns, meadows, plains and mounts,
Lands of tree and stone,
Rivers, rivulets and founts,
By which I stray alone,
Bewailing as I go,
With tears that overflow,
Sing will I
The miserable woe
That bids me grieve and sigh.

Ay, but what is here to lend
Ear to my lament?
What is here can comprehend
My dull discontent?
Neither grass nor reed,
Nor the ripples heed,
Flowing by,
While the stream with speed
Hastens from my eye.

Vainly does my wounded heart
Hope, alas, to heal;
Seeking, to allay its smart,
Things that cannot feel.
Better should my pain
Bitterly complain,
Crying shrill,
To thee who dost constrain
My spirit to such ill.

Goddess, who shalt never die,
List to what I say;
Thou who makest me to lie
Weak beneath thy sway,
If my life must know

Ending at thy blow,
Cruellest!
Own it perished so
But at thy behest.

Lo! my face may all men see
Slowly pine and fade,
E’en as ice doth melt and flee
Near a furnace laid.
Yet the burning ray
Wasting me away
Passion’s glow,
Wakens no display
Of pity for my woe.

Yet does every neighbour tree,
Every rocky wall,
This my sorrow know and see;
So, in brief, doth all
Nature know aright
This my sorry plight;
Thou alone
Takest thy delight
To hear me cry and moan.

But if it be thy will,
To see tormented still
Wretched me,
Then let my woful ill
Immortal be.”

This last verse died away as if the queen were exhausted, and at the same time the mandolin slipped from her hands, and would have fallen to the ground had not Mary Seyton thrown herself on her knees and prevented it. The young girl remained thus at her mistress’s feet for some time, gazing at her silently, and as she saw that she was losing herself more and more in gloomy reverie —

“Have those lines brought back to your Majesty some sad remembrance?” she asked hesitatingly.

“Oh, yes,” answered the queen; “they reminded me of the unfortunate being who composed them.”

“And may I, without indiscretion, inquire of your grace who is their author?”

“Alas! he was a noble, brave, and handsome young man, with a faithful heart and a hot head, who would defend me to-day, if I had defended him then; but his boldness seemed to me rashness, and his fault a crime. What was to be done? I did not love him. Poor Chatelard! I was very cruel to him.”

“But you did not prosecute him, it was your brother; you did not condemn him, the judges did.”

“Yes, yes; I know that he too was Murray’s victim, and that is no doubt the reason that I am calling him to mind just now. But I was able to pardon him, Mary, and I was inflexible; I let ascend the scaffold a man whose only crime was in loving me too well; and now I am astonished and complain of being abandoned by everyone. Listen, darling, there is one thing that terrifies me: it is, that when I search within myself I find that I have not only deserved my fate, but even that God did not punish me severely enough.”

“What strange thoughts for your grace!” cried Mary; “and see where those unlucky lines which returned to your mind have led you, the very day when you were beginning to recover a little of your cheerfulness.”

“Alas!” replied the queen, shaking her head and uttering a deep sigh, “for six years very few days have passed that I have not repeated those lines to myself, although it may be for the first time to-day that I repeat them aloud. He was a Frenchman too, Mary: they have exiled from me, taken or killed all who came to me from France. Do you remember that vessel which was swallowed up before our eyes when we came out of Calais harbour? I exclaimed then that it was a sad omen: you all wanted to reassure me. Well, who was right, now, you or I?”

The queen was in one of those fits of sadness for which tears are the sole remedy; so Mary Seyton, perceiving that not only would every consolation be vain, but also unreasonable, far from continuing to react against her mistress’s melancholy, fully agreed with her: it followed that the queen, who was suffocating, began to weep, and that her tears brought her comfort;

then little by little she regained self-control, and this crisis passed as usual, leaving her firmer and more resolute than ever, so that when she went up to her room again it was impossible to read the slightest alteration in her countenance.

The dinner-hour was approaching, and Mary, who in the morning was looking forward impatiently to the enjoyment of her triumph over Lady Lochleven, now saw her advance with uneasiness: the mere idea of again facing this woman, whose pride one was always obliged to oppose with insolence, was, after the moral fatigues of the day, a fresh weariness. So she decided not to appear for dinner, as on the day before: she was all the more glad she had taken this resolution, that this time it was not Lady Lochleven who came to fulfil the duties enjoined on a member of the family to make the queen easy, but George Douglas, whom his mother in her displeasure at the morning scene sent to replace her. Thus, when Mary Seyton told the queen that she saw the young man with dark hair cross the courtyard on his way to her, Mary still further congratulated herself on her decision; for this young man’s insolence had wounded her more deeply than all his mother’s haughty insults. The queen was not a little astonished, then, when in a few minutes Mary Seyton returned and informed her that George Douglas, having sent away the servants, desired the honour of speaking to her on a matter of importance. At first the queen refused; but Mary Seyton told her that the young man’s air and manner this time were so different from what she had seen two days before, that she thought her mistress would be wrong to refuse his request.

The queen rose then, and with the pride and majesty habitual to her, entered the adjoining room, and, having taken three steps, stopped with a disdainful air, waiting for George to address her.

Mary Seyton had spoken truly: George Douglas was now another man. To-day he seemed to be as respectful and timid as the preceding day he had seemed haughty and proud. He, in his turn, made a step towards the queen; but seeing Mary Seyton standing behind her —

“Madam,” said he, “I wished to speak with your Majesty alone: shall I not obtain this favour?”

“Mary Seyton is not a stranger to me, Sir: she is my sister, my friend; she is more than all that, she is my companion in captivity.”

“And by all these claims, madam, I have the utmost veneration for her; but what I have to tell you cannot be heard by other ears than yours. Thus, madam, as the opportunity furnished now may perhaps never present itself again, in the name of what is dearest to you, grant me what I ask.”

There was such a tone of respectful prayer in George’s voice that Mary turned to the young girl, and, making her a friendly sign with her hand —

“Go, then, darling,” said she; “but be easy, you will lose nothing by not hearing. Go.”

Mary Seyton withdrew; the queen smilingly looked after her, till the door was shut; then, turning to George —

“Now, sir,” said she, “we are alone, speak.”

But George, instead of replying, advanced to the queen, and, kneeling on one knee, drew from his breast a paper which he presented to her. Mary took it with amazement, unfolded it, glancing at Douglas, who remained in the same posture, and read as follows:

We, earls, lords, and barons, in consideration that our queen is detained at Lochleven, and that her faithful subjects cannot have access to her person; seeing, on the other hand, that our duty pledges us to provide for her safety, promise and swear to employ all reasonable means which will depend on us to set her at liberty again on conditions compatible with the honour of her Majesty, the welfare of the kingdom, and even with the safety of those who keep her in prison, provided that they consent to give her up; that if they refuse, we declare that we are prepared to make use of ourselves, our children, our friends, our servants, our vassals, our goods, our persons, and our lives, to restore her to liberty, to procure the safety of the prince, and to co-operate in punishing the late king’s murderers. If we are assailed for this intent, whether as a body or in private, we promise to defend ourselves, and to aid one another, under pain of infamy and perjury. So may God help us.

“Given with our own hands at Dumbarton,

“St. Andrews, Argyll, Huntly, Arbroath, Galloway, Ross, Fleming, Herries, Stirling, Kilwinning, Hamilton, and Saint-Clair, Knight.”

“And Seyton!” cried Mary, “among all these signatures, I do not see that of my faithful Seyton.”

Douglas, still kneeling, drew from his breast a second paper, and presented it to the queen with the same marks of respect. It contained only these few words:

“Trust George Douglas; for your Majesty has no more devoted friend in the entire kingdom. “SEYTON.”

Mary lowered her eyes to Douglas with an expression which was hers only; then, giving him her hand to raise him —

“Ah!” said she, with a sigh more of joy than of sadness, “now I see that God, in spite of my faults, has not yet abandoned me. But how is it, in this castle, that you, a Douglas.... oh! it is incredible!”

“Madam,” replied George, “seven years have passed since I saw you in France for the first time, and for seven years I have loved you”. Mary moved; but Douglas put forth his hand and shook his head with an air of such profound sadness, that she understood that she might hear what the young man had to say. He continued: “Reassure yourself, madam; I should never have made this confession if, while explaining my conduct to you, this confession would not have given you greater confidence in me. Yes, for seven years I have loved you, but as one loves a star that one can never reach, a madonna to whom one can only pray; for seven years I have followed you everywhere without you ever having paid attention to me, without my saying a word or making a gesture to attract your notice. I was on the knight of Mevillon’s galley when you crossed to Scotland; I was among the regent’s soldiers when you beat Huntly; I was in the escort which accompanied you when you went to see the sick king at Glasgow; I reached Edinburgh an hour after you had left it for Lochleven; and then it seemed to me that my mission was revealed to me for the first time, and that this love for which till then, I had reproached myself as a crime, was on the contrary a favour from God. I learned that the lords were assembled at Dumbarton: I flew thither. I pledged my name, I pledged my honour, I pledged my life; and I obtained from them, thanks to the facility I had for coming into this fortress, the happiness of bringing you the paper they have just signed. Now, madam, forget all I have told you, except the assurance of my devotion and respect: forget that I am near you; I am used to not being seen: only, if you have need of my life, make a sign; for seven years my life has been yours.”

“Alas!” replied Mary, “I was complaining this morning of no longer being loved, and I ought to complain, on the contrary, that I am still loved; for the love that I inspire is fatal and mortal. Look back, Douglas, and count the tombs that, young as I am, I have already left on my path — Francis II, Chatelard, Rizzio, Darnley.... Oh to attach one’s self to my fortunes more than love is needed now heroism and devotion are requisite so much the more that, as you have said, Douglas, it is love without any possible reward. Do you understand?"

"Oh, madam, madam," answered Douglas, "is it not reward beyond my deserts to see you daily, to cherish the hope that liberty will be restored to you through me, and to have at least, if I do not give it you, the certainty of dying in your sight?"

"Poor young man!" murmured Mary, her eyes raised to heaven, as if she were reading there beforehand the fate awaiting her new defender.

"Happy Douglas, on the contrary," cried George, seizing the queen's hand and kissing it with perhaps still more respect than love, "happy Douglas! for in obtaining a sigh from your Majesty he has already obtained more than he hoped."

"And upon what have you decided with my friends?" said the queen, raising Douglas, who till then had remained on his knees before her.

"Nothing yet," George replied; "for we scarcely had time to see one another. Your escape, impossible without me, is difficult even with me; and your Majesty has seen that I was obliged publicly to fail in respect, to obtain from my mother the confidence which gives me the good fortune of seeing you to-day: if this confidence on my mother's or my brother's part ever extends to giving up to me the castle keys, then you are saved! Let your Majesty not be surprised at anything, then: in the presence of others, I shall ever be always a Douglas, that is an enemy; and except your life be in danger, madam, I shall not utter a word, I shall not make a gesture which might betray the faith that I have sworn you; but, on your side, let your grace know well, that present or absent, whether I am silent or speak, whether I act or remain inert, all will be in appearance only, save my devotion. Only," continued Douglas, approaching the window and showing to the queen a little house on Kinross hill, — "only, look every evening in that direction, madam, and so long as you see a light shine there, your friends will be keeping watch for you, and you need not lose hope."

"Thanks, Douglas, thanks," said the queen; "it does one good to meet with a heart like yours from time to time — oh! thanks."

"And now, madam," replied the young man, "I must leave your Majesty; to remain longer with you would be to raise suspicions, and a single doubt of me, think of it well, madam, and that light which is your sole beacon is extinguished, and all returns into night."

With these words, Douglas bowed more respectfully than he had yet done, and withdrew, leaving Mary full of hope, and still more full of pride; for this time the homage that she had just received was certainly for the woman and not for the queen.

As the queen had told him, Mary Seyton was informed of everything, even the love of Douglas, and, the two women impatiently awaited the evening to see if the promised star would shine on the horizon. Their hope was not in vain: at the appointed time the beacon was lit. The queen trembled with joy, for it was the confirmation of her hopes, and her companion could not tear her from the window, where she remained with her gaze fastened on the little house in Kinross. At last she yielded to Mary Seyton's prayers, and consented to go to bed; but twice in the night she rose noiselessly to go to the window: the light was always shining, and was not extinguished till dawn, with its sisters the stars.

Next day, at breakfast, George announced to the queen the return of his brother, William Douglas: he arrived the same evening; as to himself, George, he had to leave Lochleven next morning, to confer with the nobles who had signed the declaration, and who had immediately separated to raise troops in their several counties. The queen could not attempt to good purpose any escape but at a time when she would be sure of gathering round her an army strong enough to hold the country; as to him, Douglas, one was so used to his silent disappearances and to his unexpected returns, that there was no reason to fear that his departure would inspire any suspicion.

All passed as George had said: in the evening the sound of a bugle announced the arrival of William Douglas; he had with him Lord Ruthven, the son of him who had assassinated Rizzio, and who, exiled with Morton after the murder, died in England of the sickness with which he was already attacked the day of the terrible catastrophe in which we have seen him take such a large share. He preceded by one day Lord Lindsay of Byres and Sir Robert Melville, brother of Mary's former ambassador to Elizabeth: all three were charged with a mission from the regent to the queen.

On the following day everything fell back into the usual routine, and William Douglas reassumed his duties as carver. Breakfast passed without Mary's having learned anything of George's departure or Ruthven's arrival. On rising from the table she went to her window: scarcely was she there than she heard the sound of a horn echoing on the shores of the lake, and saw a little troop of horsemen halt, while waiting for the boat to came and take those who were going to the castle.

The distance was too great for Mary to recognise any of the visitors; but it was clear, from the signs of intelligence exchanged between the little troop and the inhabitants of the fortress, that the newcomers were her enemies. This was a reason why the queen, in her uneasiness, should not lose sight for a moment of the boat which was going to fetch them. She saw only two men get into it; and immediately it put off again for the castle.

As the boat drew nearer, Mary's presentiments changed to real fears, for in one of the men coming towards her she thought she made out Lord Lindsay of Byres, the same who, a week before, had brought her to her prison. It was indeed he himself, as usual in a steel helmet without a visor, which allowed one to see his coarse face designed to express strong passions, and his long black beard with grey hairs here and there, which covered his chest: his person was protected, as if it were in time of war, with his faithful suit of armour, formerly polished and well gilded, but which, exposed without ceasing to rain and mist, was now eaten up with rust; he had slung on his back, much as one slings a quiver, a broadsword, so heavy that it took two hands to manage it, and so long that while the hilt reached the left shoulder the point reached the right spur: in a word, he was still the same soldier, brave to rashness but brutal to insolence, recognising nothing but right and force, and always ready to use force when he believed himself in the right.

The queen was so much taken up with the sight of Lord Lindsay of Byres, that it was only just as the boat reached the shore that she glanced at his companion and recognised Robert Melville: this was some consolation, for, whatever might happen, she knew that she should find in him if not ostensible at least secret sympathy. Besides, his dress, by which one could have judged him equally with Lord Lindsay, was a perfect contrast to his companion's. It consisted of a black velvet doublet, with a cap and a feather of the same hue fastened to it with a gold clasp; his only weapon, offensive or defensive, was a little sword, which he seemed to wear rather as a sign of his rank than for attack or defence. As to his features and his manners, they were in harmony with this peaceful appearance: his pale countenance expressed both acuteness and intelligence; his quick eye was mild, and his voice insinuating; his figure slight and a little bent by habit rather than by years, since he was but forty-five at this time, indicated an easy and conciliatory character.

However, the presence of this man of peace, who seemed entrusted with watching over the demon of war, could not reassure the queen, and as to get to the landing-place, in front of the great door of the castle, the boat had just disappeared behind the corner of a tower, she told Mary Seyton to go down that she might try to learn what cause brought Lord Lindsay to Lochleven, well knowing that with the force of character with which she was endowed, she need know this cause but a few minutes beforehand, whatever it might be, to give her countenance that calm and that majesty which she had always found to influence her enemies.

Left alone, Mary let her glance stray back to the little house in Kinross, her sole hope; but the distance was too great to distinguish anything; besides, its shutters remained closed all day, and seemed to open only in the evening, like the clouds, which, having covered the sky for a whole morning, scatter at last to reveal to the lost sailor a solitary star. She had remained no less motionless, her gaze always fixed on the same object, when she was drawn from this mute contemplation by the step of Mary Seyton.

“Well, darling?” asked the queen, turning round.

“Your Majesty is not mistaken,” replied the messenger: “it really was Sir Robert Melville and Lord Lindsay; but there came yesterday with Sir William Douglas a third ambassador, whose name, I am afraid, will be still more odious to your Majesty than either of the two I have just pronounced.”

“You deceive yourself, Mary,” the queen answered: “neither the name of Melville nor that of Lindsay is odious to me. Melville’s, on the contrary, is, in my present circumstances, one of those which I have most pleasure in hearing; as to Lord Lindsay’s, it is doubtless not agreeable to me, but it is none the less an honourable name, always borne by men rough and wild, it is true, but incapable of treachery. Tell me, then, what is this name, Mary; for you see I am calm and prepared.”

“Alas! madam,” returned Mary, “calm and prepared as you may be, collect all your strength, not merely to hear this name uttered, but also to receive in a few minutes the man who bears it; for this name is that of Lord Ruthven.”

Mary Seyton had spoken truly, and this name had a terrible influence upon the queen; for scarcely had it escaped the young girl’s lips than Mary

Stuart uttered a cry, and turning pale, as if she were about to faint, caught hold of the window-ledge.

Mary Seyton, frightened at the effect produced by this fatal name, immediately sprang to support the queen; but she, stretching one hand towards her, while she laid the other on her heart —

"It is nothing," said she; "I shall be better in a moment. Yes, Mary, yes, as you said, it is a fatal name and mingled with one of my most bloody memories. What such men are coming to ask of me must be dreadful indeed. But no matter, I shall soon be ready to receive my brother's ambassadors, for doubtless they are sent in his name. You, darling, prevent their entering, for I must have some minutes to myself: you know me; it will not take me long."

With these words the queen withdrew with a firm step to her bedchamber.

Mary Seyton was left alone, admiring that strength of character which made of Mary Stuart, in all other respects so completely woman-like, a man in the hour of danger. She immediately went to the door to close it with the wooden bar that one passed between two iron rings, but the bar had been taken away, so that there was no means of fastening the door from within. In a moment she heard someone coming up the stairs, and guessing from the heavy, echoing step that this must be Lord Lindsay, she looked round her once again to see if she could find something to replace the bar, and finding nothing within reach, she passed her arm through the rings, resolved to let it be broken rather than allow anyone to approach her mistress before it suited her. Indeed, hardly had those who were coming up reached the landing than someone knocked violently, and a harsh voice cried:

"Come, come, open the door; open directly."

"And by what right," said Mary Seyton, "am I ordered thus insolently to open the Queen of Scotland's door?"

"By the right of the ambassador of the regent to enter everywhere in his name. I am Lord Lindsay, and I am come to speak to Lady Mary Stuart."

"To be an ambassador," answered Mary Seyton, "is not to be exempted from having oneself announced in visiting a woman, and much more a queen; and if this ambassador is, as he says, Lord Lindsay, he will await his sovereign's leisure, as every Scottish noble would do in his place."

"By St. Andrew!" cried Lord Lindsay, "open, or I will break in the door."

"Do nothing to it, my lord, I entreat you," said another voice, which Mary recognised as Meville's. "Let us rather wait for Lord Ruthven, who is not yet ready.”

“Upon my soul,” cried Lindsay, shaking the door, “I shall not wait a second”. Then, seeing that it resisted, “Why did you tell me, then, you scamp,” Lindsay went on, speaking to the steward, “that the bar had been removed?

“It is true,” replied he.

“Then,” returned Lindsay, “with what is this silly wench securing the door?”

“With my arm, my lord, which I have passed through the rings, as a Douglas did for King James I, at a time when Douglases had dark hair instead of red, and were faithful instead of being traitors.”

“Since you know your history so well,” replied Lindsay, in a rage,” you should remember that that weak barrier did not hinder Graham, that Catherine Douglas’s arm was broken like a willow wand, and that James I was killed like a dog.”

“But you, my lord,” responded the courageous young girl, “ought also to know the ballad that is still sung in our time —

“‘Now, on Robert Gra’am, The king’s destroyer, shame! To Robert Graham cling Shame, who destroyed our king.’“

“Mary,” cried the queen, who had overheard this altercation from her bedroom, — ”Mary, I command you to open the door directly: do you hear?”

Mary obeyed, and Lord Lindsay entered, followed by Melville, who walked behind him, with slow steps and bent head. Arrived in the middle of the second room, Lord Lindsay stopped, and, looking round him —

“Well, where is she, then?” he asked; “and has she not already kept us waiting long enough outside, without making us wait again inside? Or does she imagine that, despite these walls and these bars, she is always queen?”

“Patience, my lord,” murmured Sir Robert: “you see that Lord Ruthven has not come yet, and since we can do nothing without him, let us wait.”

“Let wait who will,” replied Lindsay, inflamed with anger; “but it will not be I, and wherever she may be, I shall go and seek her.”

With these words, he made some steps towards Mary Stuart’s bedroom; but at the same moment the queen opened the door, without seeming moved either at the visit or at the insolence of the visitors, and so lovely and so full of majesty, that each, even Lindsay himself, was silent at her appearance, and, as if in obedience to a higher power, bowed respectfully before her.

"I fear I have kept you waiting, my lord," said the queen, without replying to the ambassador's salutation otherwise than by a slight inclination of the head; "but a woman does not like to receive even enemies without having spent a few minutes over her toilet. It is true that men are less tenacious of ceremony," added she, throwing a significant glance at Lord Lindsay's rusty armour and soiled and pierced doublet. "Good day, Melville," she continued, without paying attention to some words of excuse stammered by Lindsay; "be welcome in my prison, as you were in my palace; for I believe you as devoted to the one as to the other".

Then, turning to Lindsay, who was looking interrogatively at the door, impatient as he was for Ruthven to come —

"You have there, my lord," said she, pointing to the sword he carried over his shoulder, "a faithful companion, though it is a little heavy: did you expect, in coming here, to find enemies against whom to employ it? In the contrary case, it is a strange ornament for a lady's presence. But no matter, my lord, I, am too much of a Stuart to fear the sight of a sword, even if it were naked, I warn you."

"It is not out of place here, madam," replied Lindsay, bringing it forward and leaning his elbow on its cross hilt, "for it is an old acquaintance of your family."

"Your ancestors, my lord, were brave and loyal enough for me not to refuse to believe what you tell me. Besides, such a good blade must have rendered them good service."

"Yes, madam, yes, surely it has done so, but that kind of service that kings do not forgive. He for whom it was made was Archibald Bell-the-Cat, and he girded himself with it the day when, to justify his name, he went to seize in the very tent of King James III, your grandfather, his un worthy favourites, Cochran, Hummel, Leonard, and Torpichen, whom he hanged on Louder Bridge with the halters of his soldiers' horses. It was also with this sword that he slew at one blow, in the lists, Spens of Kilspindie, who had insulted him in the presence of King James IV, counting on the protection his master accorded him, and which did not guard him against it any more than his shield, which it split in two. At his master's death, which took place two years after the defeat of Flodden, on whose battlefield he left his two sons and two hundred warriors of the name of Douglas, it passed into the hands of the Earl of Angus, who drew it from the scabbard when he drove the Hamiltons out of Edinburgh, and that so quickly and completely that the affair was called the ‘sweeping of the streets.’ Finally, your father James V saw it glisten in the fight of the bridge over the Tweed, when Buccleuch, stirred up by him, wanted to snatch him from the guardianship of the Douglases, and when eighty warriors of the name of Scott remained on the battlefield.”

“But,” said the queen, “how is it that this weapon, after such exploits, has not remained as a trophy in the Douglas family? No doubt the Earl of Angus required a great occasion to decide him to-renounce in your favour this modern Excalibur”. [History of Scotland, by Sir Walter Scott. — ”The Abbott”: historical part.]

“Yes, no doubt, madam, it was upon a great occasion,” replied Lindsay, in spite of the imploring signs made by Melville, “and this will have at least the advantage of the others, in being sufficiently recent for you to remember. It was ten days ago, on the battlefield of Carberry Hill, madam, when the infamous Bothwell had the audacity to make a public challenge in which he defied to single combat whomsoever would dare to maintain that he was not innocent of the murder of the king your husband. I made him answer then, I the third, that he was an assassin. And as he refused to fight with the two others under the pretext that they were only barons, I presented myself in my turn, I who am earl and lord. It was on that occasion that the noble Earl of Morton gave me this good sword to fight him to the death. So that, if he had been a little more presumptuous or a little less cowardly, dogs and vultures would be eating at this moment the pieces that, with the help of this good sword, I should have carved for them from that traitor’s carcass.”

At these words, Mary Seyton and Robert Melville looked at each other in terror, for the events that they recalled were so recent that they were, so to speak, still living in the queen’s heart; but the queen, with incredible impassibility and a smile of contempt on her lips —

“It is easy, my lord,” said she, “to vanquish an enemy who does not appear in the lists; however, believe me, if Mary had inherited the Stuarts’ sword as she has inherited their sceptre, your sword, long as it is, would yet have seemed to you too short. But as you have only to relate to us now, my lord, what you intended doing, and not what you have done, think it fit that I bring you back to something of more reality; for I do not suppose you have given yourself the trouble to come here purely and simply to add a chapter to the little treatise Des Rodomontades Espagnolles by M. de Brantome.”

"You are right, madam," replied Lindsay, reddening with anger, "and you would already know the object of our mission if Lord Ruthven did not so ridiculously keep us waiting. But," added he, "have patience; the matter will not be long now, for here he is."

Indeed, at that moment they heard steps mounting the staircase and approaching the room, and at the sound of these steps, the queen, who had borne with such firmness Lindsay's insults, grew so perceptibly paler, that Melville, who did not take his eyes off her, — put out his hand towards the arm-chair as if to push it towards her; but the queen made a sign that she had no need of it, and gazed at the door with apparent calm. Lord Ruthven appeared; it was the first time that she had seen the son since Rizzio had been assassinated by the father.

Lord Ruthven was both a warrior and a statesman, and at this moment his dress savoured of the two professions: it consisted of a close coat of embroidered buff leather, elegant enough to be worn as a court undress, and on which, if need were, one could buckle a cuirass, for battle: like his father, he was pale; like his father, he was to die young, and, even more than his father, his countenance wore that ill-omened melancholy by which fortune-tellers recognise those who are to die a violent death.

Lord Ruthven united in himself the polished dignity of a courtier and the inflexible character of a minister; but quite resolved as he was to obtain from Mary Stuart, even if it were by violence, what he had come to demand in the regent's name, he none the less made her, on entering, a cold but respectful greeting, to which the queen responded with a courtesy; then the steward drew up to the empty arm-chair a heavy table on which had been prepared everything necessary for writing, and at a sign from the two lords he went out, leaving the queen and her companion alone with the three ambassadors. Then the queen, seeing that this table and this arm-chair were put ready for her, sat down; and after a moment, herself breaking this silence more gloomy than any word could have been —

"My lords," said she, "you see that I wait: can it be that this message which you have to communicate to me is so terrible that two soldiers as renowned as Lord Lindsay and Lord Ruthven hesitate at the moment of transmitting it?"

"Madam," answered Ruthven, "I am not of a family, as you know, which ever hesitates to perform a duty, painful as it may be; besides, we hope that your captivity has prepared you to hear what we have to tell you on the part of the Secret Council."

"The Secret Council!" said the queen. "Instituted by me, by what right does it act without me? No matter, I am waiting for this message: I suppose it is a petition to implore my mercy for the men who have dared to reach to a power that I hold only from God."

"Madam," replied Ruthven, who appeared to have undertaken the painful role of spokesman, while Lindsay, mute and impatient, fidgeted with the hilt of his long sword, "it is distressing to me to have to undeceive you on this point: it is not your mercy that I come to ask; it is, on the contrary, the pardon of the Secret Council that I come to offer you."

"To me, my lord, to me!" cried Mary: "subjects offer pardon to their queen! Oh! it is such a new and wonderful thing, that my amazement outweighs my indignation, and that I beg you to continue, instead of stopping you there, as perhaps I ought to do."

"And I obey you so much the more willingly, madam," went on Ruthven imperturbably, "that this pardon is only granted on certain conditions, stated in these documents, destined to re-establish the tranquillity of the State, so cruelly compromised by the errors that they are going to repair."

"And shall I be permitted, my lord, to read these documents, or must I, allured by my confidence in those who present them to me, sign them with my eyes shut?"

"No, madam," Ruthven returned; "the Secret Council desire, on the contrary, that you acquaint yourself with them, for you must sign them freely."

"Read me these documents, my lord; for such a reading is, I think, included in the strange duties you have accepted."

Lord Ruthven took one of the two papers that he had in his hand, and read with the impassiveness of his usual voice the following:

"Summoned from my tenderest youth to the government of the kingdom and to the crown of Scotland, I have carefully attended to the administration; but I have experienced so much fatigue and trouble that I no longer find my mind free enough nor my strength great enough to support the burden of affairs of State: accordingly, and as Divine favour has granted us a son whom we desire to see during our lifetime bear the crown which he has acquired by right of birth, we have resolved to abdicate, and we abdicate in his favour, by these presents, freely and voluntarily, all our rights to the crown and to the government of Scotland, desiring that he may immediately ascend the throne, as if he were called to it by our natural death, and not as the effect of our own will; and that our present abdication may have a more complete and solemn effect, and that no one should put forward the claim of ignorance, we give full powers to our trusty and faithful cousins, the lords Lindsay of Byres and William Ruthven, to appear in our name before the nobility, the clergy, and the burgesses of Scotland, of whom they will convoke an assembly at Stirling, and to there renounce, publicly and solemnly, on our part, all our claims to the crown and to the government of Scotland.

“Signed freely and as the testimony of one of our last royal wishes, in our castle of Lochleven, the June 1567”. (The date was left blank.)

There was a moment’s silence after this reading, then

“Did you hear, madam?” asked Ruthven.

“Yes,” replied Mary Stuart, — ”yes, I have heard rebellious words that I have not understood, and I thought that my ears, that one has tried to accustom for some time to a strange language, still deceived me, and that I have thought for your honour, my lord William Ruthven, and my lord Lindsay of Byres.”

“Madam,” answered Lindsay, out of patience at having kept silence so long, “our honour has nothing to do with the opinion of a woman who has so ill known how to watch over her own.”

“My lord!” said Melville, risking a word.

“Let him speak, Robert,” returned the queen. “We have in our conscience armour as well tempered as that with which Lord Lindsay is so prudently covered, although, to the shame of justice, we no longer have a sword. Continue, my lord,” the queen went on, turning to Lord Ruthven: “is this all that my subjects require of me? A date and a signature? Ah! doubtless it is too little; and this second paper, which you have kept in order to proceed by degrees, probably contains some demand more difficult to grant than that of yielding to a child scarcely a year old a crown which belongs to me by birthright, and to abandon my sceptre to take a distaff.”

“This other paper,” replied Ruthven, without letting himself be intimidated by the tone of bitter irony adopted by the queen, “is the deed by which your Grace confirms the decision of the Secret Council which has named your beloved brother, the Earl of Murray, regent of the kingdom.”

“Indeed!” said Mary. “The Secret Council thinks it needs my confirmation to an act of such slight importance? And my beloved brother, to bear it without remorse, needs that it should be I who add a fresh title to those of Earl of Mar and of Murray that I have already bestowed upon him? But one cannot desire anything more respectful and touching than all this, and I should be very wrong to complain. My lords,” continued the queen, rising and changing her tone, “return to those who have sent you, and tell them that to such demands Mary Stuart has no answer to give.”

“Take care, madam,” responded Ruthven; “for I have told you it is only on these conditions that your pardon can be granted you.”

“And if I refuse this generous pardon,” asked Mary, “what will happen?”

“I cannot pronounce beforehand, madam; but your Grace has enough knowledge of the laws, and above all of the history of Scotland and England, to know that murder and adultery are crimes for which more than one queen has been punished with death.”

“And upon what proofs could such a charge be founded, my lord? Pardon my persistence, which takes up your precious time; but I am sufficiently interested in the matter to be permitted such a question.”

“The proof, madam?” returned Ruthven. “There is but one, I know; but that one is unexceptionable: it is the precipitate marriage of the widow of the assassinated with the chief assassin, and the letters which have been handed over to us by James Balfour, which prove that the guilty persons had united their adulterous hearts before it was permitted them to unite their bloody hands.”

“My lord,” cried the queen, “do you forget a certain repast given in an Edinburgh tavern, by this same Bothwell, to those same noblemen who treat him to-day as an adulterer and a murderer; do you forget that at the end of that meal, and on the same table at which it had been given, a paper was signed to invite that same woman, to whom to-day you make the haste of her new wedding a crime, to leave off a widow’s mourning to reassume a marriage robe? for if you have forgotten it, my lords, which would do no more honour to your sobriety than to your memory, I undertake to show it to you, I who have preserved it; and perhaps if we search well we shall find among the signatures the names of Lindsay of Byres and William Ruthven. O noble Lord Herries,” cried Mary, “loyal James Melville, you alone were right then, when you threw yourselves at my feet, entreating me not to conclude this marriage, which, I see it clearly to-day, was only a trap set for an ignorant woman by perfidious advisers or disloyal lords."

"Madam," cried Ruthven, in spite of his cold impassivity beginning to lose command of himself, while Lindsay was giving still more noisy and less equivocal signs of impatience, "madam, all these discussions are beside our aim: I beg you to return to it, then, and inform us if, your life and honour guaranteed, you consent to abdicate the crown of Scotland."

"And what safeguard should I have that the promises you here make me will be kept?"

"Our word, madam," proudly replied Ruthven.

"Your word, my lord, is a very feeble pledge to offer, when one so quickly forgets one's signature: have you not some trifle to add to it, to make me a little easier than I should be with it alone?"

"Enough, Ruthven, enough," cried Lindsay. "Do you not see that for an hour this woman answers our proposals only by insults?"

"Yes, let us go," said Ruthven; "and thank yourself only, madam, for the day when the thread breaks which holds the sword suspended over your head."

"My lords," cried Melville, "my lords, in Heaven's name, a little patience, and forgive something to her who, accustomed to command, is today forced to obey."

"Very well," said Lindsay, turning round, "stay with her, then, and try to obtain by your smooth words what is refused to our frank and loyal demand. In a quarter of an hour we shall return: let the answer be ready in a quarter of an hour!"

With these words, the two noblemen went out, leaving Melville with the queen; and one could count their footsteps, from the noise that Lindsay's great sword made, in resounding on each step of the staircase.

Scarcely were they alone than Melville threw himself at the queen's feet.

"Madam," said he, "you remarked just now that Lord Herries and my brother had given your Majesty advice that you repented not having followed; well, madam, reflect on that I in my turn give you; for it is more important than the other, for you will regret with still more bitterness not having listened to it. Ah! you do not know what may happen, you are ignorant of what your brother is capable."

"It seems to me, however," returned the queen, "that he has just instructed me on that head: what more will he do than he has done already?

A public trial! Oh! it is all I ask: let me only plead my cause, and we shall see what judges will dare to condemn me."

"But that is what they will take good care not to do, madam; for they would be mad to do it when they keep you here in this isolated castle, in the care of your enemies, having no witness but God, who avenges crime, but who does not prevent it. Recollect, madam, what Machiavelli has said, 'A king's tomb is never far from his prison.' You come of a family in which one dies young, madam, and almost always of a sudden death: two of your ancestors perished by steel, and one by poison."

"Oh, if my death were sudden and easy," cried Mary, "yes, I should accept it as an expiation for my faults; for if I am proud when I compare myself with others, Melville, I am humble when I judge myself. I am unjustly accused of being an accomplice of Darnley's death, but I am justly condemned for having married Bothwell."

"Time presses, madam; time presses," cried Melville, looking at the sand, which, placed on the table, was marking the time. "They are coming back, they will be here in a minute; and this time you must give them an answer. Listen, madam, and at least profit by your situation as much as you can. You are alone here with one woman, without friends, without protection, without power: an abdication signed at such a juncture will never appear to your people to have been freely given, but will always pass as having been torn from you by force; and if need be, madam, if the day comes when such a solemn declaration is worth something, well, then you will have two witnesses of the violence done you: the one will be Mary Seyton, and the other," he added in a low voice and looking uneasily about him, — "the other will be Robert Melville."

Hardly had he finished speaking when the footsteps of the two nobles were again heard on the staircase, returning even before the quarter of an hour had elapsed; a moment afterwards the door opened, and Ruthven appeared, while over his shoulder was seen Lindsay's head.

"Madam," said Ruthven, "we have returned. Has your Grace decided? We come for your answer."

"Yes," said Lindsay, pushing aside Ruthven, who stood in his way, and advancing to the table, — "yes, an answer, clear, precise, positive, and without dissimulation."

"You are exacting, my lord," said the queen: "you would scarcely have the right to expect that from me if I were in full liberty on the other side of the lake and surrounded with a faithful escort; but between these walls, behind these bars, in the depths of this fortress, I shall not tell you that I sign voluntarily, lest you should not believe it. But no matter, you want my signature; well, I am going to give it to you. Melville, pass me the pen.”

“But I hope,” said Lord Ruthven, “that your Grace is not counting on using your present position one day in argument to protest against what you are going to do?”

The queen had already stooped to write, she had already set her hand to the paper, when Ruthven spoke to her. But scarcely had he done so, than she rose up proudly, and letting fall the pen, “My lord,” said she, “what you asked of me just now was but an abdication pure and simple, and I was going to sign it. But if to this abdication is joined this marginal note, then I renounce of my own accord, and as judging myself unworthy, the throne of Scotland. I would not do it for the three united crowns that I have been robbed of in turn.”

“Take care, madam,” cried Lord Lindsay, seizing the queen’s wrist with his steel gauntlet and squeezing it with all his angry strength — ”take care, for our patience is at an end, and we could easily end by breaking what would not bend.”

The queen remained standing, and although a violent flush had passed like a flame over her countenance, she did not utter a word, and did not move: her eyes only were fixed with such a great expression of contempt on those of the rough baron, that he, ashamed of the passion that had carried him away, let go the hand he had seized and took a step back. Then raising her sleeve and showing the violet marks made on her arm by Lord Lindsay’s steel gauntlet.

“This is what I expected, my lords,” said she, “and nothing prevents me any longer from signing; yes, I freely abdicate the throne and crown of Scotland, and there is the proof that my will has not been forced.”

With these words, she took the pen and rapidly signed the two documents, held them out to Lord Ruthven, and bowing with great dignity, withdrew slowly into her room, accompanied by Mary Seyton. Ruthven looked after her, and when she had disappeared, “It doesn’t matter,” he said; “she has signed, and although the means you employed, Lindsay, may be obsolete enough in diplomacy, it is not the less efficacious, it seems.”

“No joking, Ruthven,” said Lindsay; “for she is a noble creature, and if I had dared, I should have thrown myself at her feet to ask her forgiveness.”

“There is still time,” replied Ruthven, “and Mary, in her present situation, will not be severe upon you: perhaps she has resolved to appeal to the judgment of God to prove her innocence, and in that case a champion such as you might well change the face of things.”

“Do not joke, Ruthven,” Lindsay answered a second time, with more violence than the first; “for if I were as well convinced of her innocence as I am of her crime, I tell you that no one should touch a hair of her head, not even the regent.”

“The devil! my lord,” said Ruthven. “I did not know you were so sensitive to a gentle voice and a tearful eye; you know the story of Achilles’ lance, which healed with its rust the wounds it made with its edge: do likewise my lord, do likewise.”

“Enough, Ruthven, enough,” replied Lindsay; “you are like a corselet of Milan steel, which is three times as bright as the steel armour of Glasgow, but which is at the same time thrice as hard: we know one another, Ruthven, so an end to railleries or threats; enough, believe me, enough.”

And after these words, Lord Lindsay went out first, followed by Ruthven and Melville, the first with his head high and affecting an air of insolent indifference, and the second, sad, his brow bent, and not even trying to disguise the painful impression which this scene had made on him.’ [“History of Scotland, by Sir Walter Scott. — ’The Abbott”: historical part.]

CHAPTER VI

The queen came out of her room only in the evening, to take her place at the window which looked over the lake: at the usual time she saw the light which was henceforth her sole hope shine in the little house in Kinross; for a whole long month she had no other consolation than seeing it, every night, fixed and faithful.

At last, at the end of this time, and as she was beginning to despair of seeing George Douglas again, one morning, on opening the window, she uttered a cry. Mary Seyton ran to her, and the queen, without having strength to speak, showed her in the middle of the lake the tiny boat at anchor, and in the boat Little Douglas and George, who were absorbed in fishing, their favourite amusement. The young man had arrived the day before, and as everyone was accustomed to his unexpected returns, the sentinel had not even blown the horn, and the queen had not known that at last a friend had come.

However, she was three days yet without seeing this friend otherwise than she had just done-that is, on the lake. It is true that from morning till evening he did not leave that spot, from which he could view the queen’s windows and the queen herself, when, to gaze at a wider horizon, she leaned her face against the bars. At last, on the morning of the fourth day, the queen was awakened by a great noise of dogs and horns: she immediately ran to the window, for to a prisoner everything is an event, and she saw William Douglas, who was embarking with a pack of hounds and some huntsmen. In fact, making a truce, for a day, with his gaoler’s duties, to enjoy a pleasure more in harmony with his rank and birth, he was going to hunt in the woods which cover the last ridge of Ben Lomond, and which, ever sinking, die down on the banks of the lake.

The queen trembled with delight, for she hoped that Lady Lochleven would maintain her ill-will, and that then George would replace his brother: this hope was not disappointed. At the usual time the queen heard the footsteps of those who were bringing her her breakfast; the door opened, and she saw George Douglas enter, preceded by the servants who were carrying the dishes. George barely bowed; but the queen, warned by him not to be surprised at anything, returned him his greeting with a disdainful air; then the servants performed their task and went out, as they were accustomed.

"At last," said the queen, "you are back again, then."

George motioned with his finger, went to the door to listen if all the servants had really gone away, and if no one had remained to spy. Then, returning more at ease, and bowing respectfully —

"Yes, madam," returned he; "and, Heaven be thanked, I bring good news."

"Oh, tell me quickly!" cried the queen; "for staying in this castle is hell. You knew that they came, did you not, and that they made me sign an abdication?"

"Yes, madam," replied Douglas; "but we also knew that your signature had been obtained from you by violence alone, and our devotion to your Majesty is increased thereby, if possible."

"But, after all, what have you done?"

"The Seytons and the Hamiltons, who are, as your Majesty knows, your most faithful servants," — Mary turned round, smiling, and put out her hand to Mary Seyton, — "have already," continued George, "assembled their troops, who keep themselves in readiness for the first signal; but as they alone would not be sufficiently numerous to hold the country, we shall make our way directly to Dumbarton, whose governor is ours, and which by its position and its strength can hold out long enough against all the regent's troops to give to the faithful hearts remaining to you time to come and join us."

"Yes, yes," said the queen; "I see clearly what we shall do once we get out of this; but how are we to get out?"

"That is the occasion, madam," replied Douglas, "for which your Majesty must call to your aid that courage of which you have given such great proofs."

"If I have need only of courage and coolness," replied the queen, "be easy; neither the one nor the other will fail me."

"Here is a file," said George, giving Mary Seyton that instrument which he judged unworthy to touch the queen's hands, "and this evening I shall bring your Majesty cords to construct a ladder. You will cut through one of the bars of this window, it is only at a height of twenty feet; I shall come up to you, as much to try it as to support you; one of the garrison is in my pay, he will give us passage by the door it is his duty to guard, and you will be free."

"And when will that be?" cried the queen.

"We must wait for two things, madam," replied Douglas: "the first, to collect at Kinross an escort sufficient for your Majesty's safety; the second, that the turn for night watch of Thomas Warden should happen to be at an isolated door that we can reach without being seen."

"And how will you know that? Do you stay at the castle, then?"

"Alas! no, madam," replied George; "at the castle I am a useless and even a dangerous fried for you, while once beyond the lake I can serve you in an effectual manner."

"And how will you know when Warden's turn to mount guard has come?"

"The weathercock in the north tower, instead of turning in the wind with the others, will remain fixed against it."

"But I, how shall I be warned?"

"Everything is already provided for on that side: the light which shines each night in the little house in Kinross incessantly tells you that your friends keep watch for you; but when you would like to know if the hour of your deliverance approaches or recedes, in your turn place a light in this window. The other will immediately disappear; then, placing your hand on your breast, count your heartbeats: if you reach the number twenty without the light reappearing, nothing is yet settled; if you only reach ten, the moment approaches; if the light does not leave you time to count beyond five, your escape is fixed for the following night; if it reappears no more, it is fixed for the same evening; then the owl's cry, repeated thrice in the courtyard, will be the signal; let down the ladder when you hear it".

"Oh, Douglas," cried the queen, "you alone could foresee and calculate everything thus. Thank you, thank you a hundred times!" And she gave him her hand to kiss.

A vivid red flushed the young man's cheeks; but almost directly mastering his emotion, he kneeled down, and, restraining the expression of that love of which he had once spoken to the queen, while promising her never more to speak of it, he took the hand that Mary extended, and kissed it with such respect that no one could have seen in this action anything but the homage of devotion and fidelity.

Then, having bowed to the queen, he went out, that a longer stay with her should not give rise to any suspicions.

At the dinner-hour Douglas brought, as he had said, a parcel of cord. It was not enough, but when evening came Mary Seyton was to unroll it and let fall the end from the window, and George would fasten the remainder to it: the thing was done as arranged, and without any mishap, an hour after the hunters had returned.

The following day George left the castle.

The queen and Mary Seyton lost no time in setting about the rope ladder, and it was finished on the third day. The same evening, the queen in her impatience, and rather to assure herself of her partisans' vigilance than in the hope that the time of her deliverance was so near, brought her lamp to the window: immediately, and as George Douglas had told her, the light in the little house at Kinross disappeared: the queen then laid her hand on her heart and counted up to twenty-two; then the light reappeared; they were ready for everything, but nothing was yet settled. For a week the queen thus questioned the light and her heart-beats without their number changing; at last, on the eighth day, she counted only as far as ten; at the eleventh the light reappeared.

The queen believed herself mistaken: she did not dare to hope what this announced. She withdrew the lamp; then, at the end of a quarter of an hour, showed it again: her unknown correspondent understood with his usual intelligence that a fresh trial was required of him, and the light in the little house disappeared in its turn. Mary again questioned the pulsations of her heart, and, fast as it leaped, before the twelfth beat the propitious star was shining on the horizon: there was no longer any doubt; everything was settled.

Mary could not sleep all night: this persistency of her partisans inspired her with gratitude to the point of tears. The day came, and the queen several times questioned her companion to assure herself that it was not all a dream; at every sound it seemed to her that the scheme on which her liberty hung was discovered, and when, at breakfast and at dinner time, William Douglas entered as usual, she hardly dared look at him, for fear of reading on his face the announcement that all was lost.

In the evening the queen again questioned the light: it made the same answer; nothing had altered; the beacon was always one of hope.

For four days it thus continued to indicate that the moment of escape was at hand; on the evening of the fifth, before the queen had counted five beats, the light reappeared: the queen leaned upon Mary Seyton; she was nearly fainting, between dread and ‘delight. Her escape was fixed for the next evening.

The queen tried once more, and obtained the same reply: there was no longer a doubt; everything was ready except the prisoner’s courage, for it failed her for a moment, and if Mary Seyton had not drawn up a seat in time, she would have fallen prone; but, the first moment over, she collected herself as usual, and was stronger and more resolute than ever.

Till midnight the queen remained at the window, her eyes fixed on that star of good omen: at last Mary Seyton persuaded her to go to bed, offering, if she had no wish to sleep, to read her some verses by M. Ronsard, or some chapters from the Mer des Histoires; but Mary had no desire now for any profane reading, and had her Hours read, making the responses as she would have done if she had been present at a mass said by a Catholic priest: towards dawn, however, she grew drowsy, and as Mary Seyton, for her part, was dropping with fatigue, she fell asleep directly in the arm-chair at the head of the queen’s bed.

Next day she awoke, feeling that someone was tapping her on the shoulder: it was the queen, who had already arisen.

“Come and see, darling,” said she, — ”come and see the fine day that God is giving us. Oh! how alive is Nature! How happy I shall be to be once more free among those plains and mountains! Decidedly, Heaven is on our side.”

“Madam,” replied Mary, “I would rather see the weather less fine: it would promise us a darker night; and consider, what we need is darkness, not light.”

“Listen,” said the queen; “it is by this we are going to see if God is indeed for us; if the weather remains as it is, yes, you are right, He abandons us; but if it clouds over, oh! then, darling, this will be a certain proof of His protection, will it not?”

Mary Seyton smiled, nodding that she adopted her mistress’s superstition; then the queen, incapable of remaining idle in her great preoccupation of mind, collected the few jewels that she had preserved, enclosed them in a casket, got ready for the evening a black dress, in order to be still better hidden in the darkness: and, these preparations made, she sat down again at the window, ceaselessly carrying her eyes from the lake to the little house in Kinross, shut up and dumb as usual.

The dinner-hour arrived: the queen was so happy that she received William Douglas with more goodwill than was her wont, and it was with difficulty she remained seated during the time the meal lasted; but she restrained herself, and William Douglas withdrew, without seeming to have noticed her agitation.

Scarcely had he gone than Mary ran to the window; she had need of air, and her gaze devoured in advance those wide horizons which she was about to cross anew; it seemed to her that once at liberty she would never shut herself up in a palace again, but would wander about the countryside continually: then, amid all these tremors of delight, from time to time she felt unexpectedly heavy at heart. She then turned round to Mary Seyton, trying to fortify her strength with hers, and the young girl kept up her hopes, but rather from duty than from conviction.

But slow as they seemed to the queen, the hours yet passed: towards the afternoon some clouds floated across the blue sky; the queen remarked upon them joyfully to her companion; Mary Seyton congratulated her upon them, not on account of the imaginary omen that the queen sought in them, but because of the real importance that the weather should be cloudy, that darkness might aid them in their flight. While the two prisoners were watching the billowy, moving vapours, the hour of dinner arrived; but it was half an hour of constraint and dissimulation, the more painful that, no doubt in return for the sort of goodwill shown him by the queen in the morning, William Douglas thought himself obliged, in his turn, to accompany his duties with fitting compliments, which compelled the queen to take a more active part in the conversation than her preoccupation allowed her; but William Douglas did not seem in any way to observe this absence of mind, and all passed as at breakfast.

Directly he had gone the queen ran to the window: the few clouds which were chasing one another in the sky an hour before had thickened and spread, and — all the blue was blotted out, to give place to a hue dull and leaden as pewter. Mary Stuart’s presentiments were thus realised: as to the little house in Kinross, which one could still make out in the dusk, it remained shut up, and seemed deserted.

Night fell: the light shone as usual; the queen signalled, it disappeared. Mary Stuart waited in vain; everything remained in darkness: the escape was for the same evening. The queen heard eight o’clock, nine o’clock, and ten o’clock strike successively. At ten o’clock the sentinels were relieved; Mary Stuart heard the patrols pass beneath her windows, the steps of the watch recede: then all returned to silence. Half an hour passed away thus; suddenly the owl’s cry resounded thrice, the queen recognised George Douglas’s signal: the supreme moment had come.

In these circumstances the queen found all her strength revive: she signed to Mary Seyton to take away the bar and to fix the rope ladder, while, putting out the lamp, she felt her way into the bedroom to seek the casket which contained her few remaining jewels. When she came back, George Douglas was already in the room.

“All goes well, madam,” said he. “Your friends await you on the other side of the lake, Thomas Warden watches at the postern, and God has sent us a dark night.”

The queen, without replying, gave him her hand. George bent his knee and carried this hand to his lips; but on touching it, he felt it cold and trembling.

“Madam,” said he, “in Heaven’s name summon all your courage, and do not let yourself be downcast at such a moment.”

“Our Lady-of-Good-Help,” murmured Seyton, “come to our aid!”

“Summon to you the spirit of the kings your ancestors,” responded George, “for at this moment it is not the resignation of a Christian that you require, but the strength and resolution of a queen”

“Oh, Douglas! Douglas,” cried Mary mournfully, “a fortune-teller predicted to me that I should die in prison and by a violent death: has not the hour of the prediction arrived?”

“Perhaps,” George said, “but it is better to die as a queen than to live in this ancient castle calumniated and a prisoner.”

“You are right, George,” the queen answered; “but for a woman the first step is everything: forgive me”. Then, after a moment’s pause, “Come,” said she; “I am ready.”

George immediately went to the window, secured the ladder again and more firmly, then getting up on to the sill and holding to the bars with one hand, he stretched out the other to the queen, who, as resolute as she had been timid a moment before, mounted on a stool, and had already set one foot on the window-ledge, when suddenly the cry, “Who goes there?” rang out at the foot of the tower. The queen sprang quickly back, partly instinctively and partly pushed by George, who, on the contrary, leaned out of the window to see whence came this cry, which, twice again renewed, remained twice unanswered, and was immediately followed by a report and the flash of a firearm: at the same moment the sentinel on duty on the tower blew his bugle, another set going the alarm bell, and the cries, “To arms, to arms!” and “Treason, treason!” resounded throughout the castle.

“Yes, yes, treason, treason!” cried George Douglas, leaping down into the room. “Yes, the infamous Warden has betrayed us!” Then, advancing to Mary, cold and motionless as a statue, “Courage, madam,” said he, “courage! Whatever happens, a friend yet remains for you in the castle; it is Little Douglas.”

Scarcely had he finished speaking when the door of the queen’s apartment opened, and William Douglas and Lady Lochleven, preceded by servants carrying torches and armed soldiers, appeared on the threshold: the room was immediately filled with people and light.

“Mother,” said William Douglas, pointing to his brother standing before Mary Stuart and protecting her with his body, “do you believe me now? Look!”

The old lady was for a moment speechless; then finding a word at last, and taking a step forward —

“Speak, George Douglas,” cried she, “speak, and clear yourself at once of the charge which weighs on your honour; say but these words, ‘A Douglas was never faithless to his trust,’ and I believe you”.

“Yes, mother,” answered William, “a Douglas!... but he — he is not a Douglas.”

“May God grant my old age the strength needed to bear on the part of one of my sons such a misfortune, and on the part of the other such an injury!” exclaimed Lady Lochleven. “O woman born under a fatal star,” she went on, addressing the queen, “when will you cease to be, in the Devil’s hands, an instrument of perdition and death to all who approach you? O ancient house of Lochleven, cursed be the hour when this enchantress crossed thy threshold!”

“Do not say that, mother, do not say that,” cried George; “blessed be, on the contrary, the moment which proves that, if there are Douglases who no longer remember what they owe to their sovereigns, there are others who have never forgotten it.”

“Douglas! Douglas!” murmured Mary Stuart, “did I not tell you?”

“And I, madam,” said George, “what did I reply then? That it was an honour and a duty to every faithful subject of your Majesty to die for you.”

“Well, die, then!” cried William Douglas, springing on his brother with raised sword, while he, leaping back, drew his, and with a movement quick as thought and eager as hatred defended himself. But at the same moment Mary Stuart darted between the two young people.

“Not another step, Lord Douglas,” said she. “Sheathe your sword, George, or if you use it, let be to go hence, and against everyone but your b other. I still have need of your life; take care of it.”

“My life, like my arm and my honour, is at your service, madam, and from the moment you command it I shall preserve it for you.”

With these words, rushing to the door with a violence and resolve which prevented anyone’s stopping him —

“Back!” cried he to the domestics who were barring the passage; “make way for the young master of Douglas, or woe to you!”.

“Stop him!” cried William. “Seize him, dead or alive! Fire upon him! Kill him like a dog!”

Two or three soldiers, not daring to disobey William, pretended to pursue his brother. Then some gunshots were heard, and a voice crying that George Douglas had just thrown himself into the lake.

“And has he then escaped?” cried William.

Mary Stuart breathed again; the old lady raised her hands to Heaven.

“Yes, yes,” murmured William, — ”yes, thank Heaven for your son’s flight; for his flight covers our entire house with shame; counting from this hour, we shall be looked upon as the accomplices of his treason.”

“Have pity on me, William!” cried Lady Lochleven, wringing her hands. “Have compassion o your old mother! See you not that I am dying?”

With these words, she fell backwards, pale and tottering; the steward and a servant supported er in their arms.

“I believe, my lord,” said Mary Seyton, coming forward, “that your mother has as much need of attention just now as the queen has need of repose: do you not consider it is time for you to withdraw?”

“Yes, yes,” said William, “to give you time to spin fresh webs, I suppose, and to seek what fresh flies you can take in them? It is well, go on with your work; but you have just seen that it is not easy to deceive William Douglas. Play your game, I shall play mine”. Then turning to the servants, “Go out, all of you,” said he; “and you, mother, come.”

The servants and the soldiers obeyed; then William Douglas went out last, supporting Lady Lochleven, and the queen heard him shut behind him and double-lock the two doors of her prison.

Scarcely was Mary alone, and certain that she was no longer seen or heard, than all her strength deserted her, and, sinking into an arm-chair, she burst out sobbing.

Indeed, all her courage had been needed to sustain her so far, and the sight of her enemies alone had given her this courage; but hardly had they gone than her situation appeared before her in all its fatal hardship. Dethroned, a prisoner, without another fiend in this impregnable castle than a child to whom she had scarce given attention, and who was the sole and last thread attaching her past hopes to her hopes for the future, what remained to Mary Stuart of her two thrones and her double power? Her name, that was all; her, name with which, free, she had doubtless stirred Scotland, but which little by little was about to be effaced in the hearts of her adherents, and which during her lifetime oblivion was to cover perhaps as with a shroud. Such an idea was insupportable to a soul as lofty as Mary Stuart's, and to an organisation which, like that of the flowers, has need, before everything, of air, light, and sun.

Fortunately there remained to her the best beloved of her four Marys, who, always devoted and consoling, hastened to succour and comfort her; but this time it was no easy matter, and the queen let her act and speak without answering her otherwise than with sobs and tears; when suddenly, looking through the window to which she had drawn up her mistress's armchair —

"The light!" cried she, "madam, the light!"

At the same time she raised the queen, and with arm outstretched from the window, she showed her the beacon, the eternal symbol of hope, relighted in the midst of this dark night on Kinross hill: there was no mistake possible, not a star was shining in the sky.

"Lord God, I give Thee thanks," said the queen, falling on her knees and raising her arms to heaven with a gesture of gratitude: "Douglas has escaped, and my friends still keep watch."

Then, after a fervent prayer, which restored to her a little strength, the queen re-entered her room, and, tired out by her varied successive emotions, she slept an uneasy, agitated sleep, over which the indefatigable Mary Seyton kept watch till daybreak.

As William Douglas had said, from this time forward the queen was a prisoner indeed, and permission to go down into the garden was no longer granted but under the surveillance of two soldiers; but this annoyance seemed to her so unbearable that she preferred to give up the recreation, which, surrounded with such conditions, became a torture. So she shut herself up in her apartments, finding a certain bitter and haughty pleasure in the very excess of her misfortune.

CHAPTER VII

A week after the events we have related, as nine o’clock in the evening had just sounded from the castle bell, and the queen and Mary Seyton were sitting at a table where they were working at their tapestry, a stone thrown from the courtyard passed through the window bars, broke a pane of glass, and fell into the room. The queen’s first idea was to believe it accidental or an insult; but Mary Seyton, turning round, noticed that the stone was wrapped up in a paper: she immediately picked it up. The paper was a letter from George Douglas, conceived in these terms:

“You have commanded me to live, madam: I have obeyed, and your Majesty has been able to tell, from the Kinross light, that your servants continue to watch over you. However, not to raise suspicion, the soldiers collected for that fatal night dispersed at dawn, and will not gather again till a fresh attempt makes their presence necessary. But, alas! to renew this attempt now, when your Majesty’s gaolers are on their guard, would be your ruin. Let them take every precaution, then, madam; let them sleep in security, while we, we, in our devotion, shall go on watching.

“Patience and courage!”

“Brave and loyal heart!” cried Mary, “more constantly devoted to misfortune than others are to prosperity! Yes, I shall have patience and courage, and so long as that light shines I shall still believe in liberty.”

This letter restored to the queen all her former courage: she had means of communication with George through Little Douglas; for no doubt it was he who had thrown that stone. She hastened, in her turn, to write a letter to George, in which she both charged him to express her gratitude to all the lords who had signed the protestation; and begged them, in the name of the fidelity they had sworn to her, not to cool in their devotion, promising them, for her part, to await the result with that patience and courage they asked of her.

The queen was not mistaken: next day, as she was at her window, Little Douglas came to play at the foot of the tower, and, without raising his head, stopped just beneath her to dig a trap to catch birds. The queen looked to see if she were observed, and assured that that part of the courtyard was deserted, she let fall the stone wrapped in her letter: at first she feared to have made a serious error; for Little Douglas did not even turn at the noise, and it was only after a moment, during which the prisoner's heart was torn with frightful anxiety, that indifferently, and as if he were looking for something else, the child laid his hand on the stone, and without hurrying, without raising his head, without indeed giving any sign of intelligence to her who had thrown it, he put the letter in his pocket, finishing the work he had begun with the greatest calm, and showing the queen, by this coolness beyond his years, what reliance she could place in him.

From that moment the queen regained fresh hope; but days, weeks, months passed without bringing any change in her situation: winter came; the prisoner saw snow spread over the plains and mountains, and the lake afforded her, if she had only been able to pass the door, a firm road to gain the other bank; but no letter came during all this time to bring her the consoling news that they were busy about her deliverance; the faithful light alone announced to her every evening that a friend was keeping watch.

Soon nature awoke from her death-sleep: some forward sun-rays broke through the clouds of this sombre sky of Scotland; the snow melted, the lake broke its ice-crust, the first buds opened, the green turf reappeared; everything came out of its prison at the joyous approach of spring, and it was a great grief to Mary to see that she alone was condemned to an eternal winter.

At last; one evening, she thought she observed in the motions of the light that something fresh was happening: she had so often questioned this poor flickering star, and she had so often let it count her heart-beats more than twenty times, that to spare herself the pain of disappointment, for a long time she had no longer interrogated it; however, she resolved to make one last attempt, and, almost hopeless, she put her light near the window, and immediately took it away; still, faithful to the signal, the other disappeared at the same moment, and reappeared at the eleventh heart-beat of the queen. At the same time, by a strange coincidence, a stone passing through the window fell at Mary Seyton's feet. It was, like the first, wrapped in a letter from George: the queen took it from her companion's hands, opened it, and read:

"The moment draws near; your adherents are assembled; summon all your courage."

"To-morrow, at eleven o'clock in the evening, drop a cord from your window, and draw up the packet that will be fastened to it."

There remained in the queen’s apartments the rope over and above what had served for the ladder taken away by the guards the evening of the frustrated escape: next day, at the appointed hour, the two prisoners shut up the lamp in the bedroom, so that no light should betray them, and Mary Seyton, approaching the window, let down the cord. After a minute, she felt from its movements that something was being attached to it. Mary Seyton pulled, and a rather bulky parcel appeared at the bars, which it could not pass on account of its size. Then the queen came to her companion’s aid. The parcel was untied, and its contents, separately, got through easily. The two prisoners carried them into the bedroom, and, barricaded within, commenced an inventory. There were two complete suits of men’s clothes in the Douglas livery. The queen was at a loss, when she saw a letter fastened to the collar of one of the two coats. Eager to know the meaning of this enigma, she immediately opened it, and read as follows:

“It is only by dint of audacity that her Majesty can recover her liberty: let her Majesty read this letter, then, and punctually follow, if she deign to adopt them, the instructions she will find therein.

“In the daytime the keys of the castle do not leave the belt of the old steward; when curfew is rung and he has made his rounds to make sure that all the doors are fast shut, he gives them up to William Douglas, who, if he stays up, fastens them to his sword-belt, or, if he sleeps, puts them under his pillow. For five months, Little Douglas, whom everyone is accustomed to see working at the armourer’s forge of the castle, has been employed in making some keys like enough to the others, once they are substituted for them, for William to be deceived. Yesterday Little Douglas finished the last.

“On the first favourable opportunity that her Majesty will know to be about to present itself, by carefully questioning the light each day, Little Douglas will exchange the false keys for the true, will enter the queen’s room, and will find her dressed, as well as Miss Mary Seyton, in their men’s clothing, and he will go before them to lead them, by the way which offers the best chances for their escape; a boat will be prepared and will await them.

“Till then, every evening, as much to accustom themselves to these new costumes as to give them an appearance of having been worn, her Majesty and Miss Mary Seyton will dress themselves in the suits, which they must keep on from nine o’clock till midnight. Besides, it is possible that, without having had time to warn them, their young guide may suddenly come to seek them: it is urgent, then, that he find them ready.

“The garments ought to fit perfectly her Majesty and her companion, the measure having been taken on Miss Mary Fleming and Miss Mary Livingston, who are exactly their size.

“One cannot too strongly recommend her Majesty to summon to her aid on the supreme occasion the coolness and courage of which she has given such frequent proofs at other times.”

The two prisoners were astounded at the boldness of this plan: at first they looked at one another in consternation, for success seemed impossible. They none the less made trial of their disguise: as George had said, it fitted each of them as if they had been measured for it.

Every evening the queen questioned the light, as George had urged, and that for a whole long month, during which each evening the queen and Mary Seyton, although the light gave no fresh tidings, arrayed themselves in their men’s clothes, as had been arranged, so that they both acquired such practice that they became as familiar to them as those of their own sex.

At last, the 2nd May, 1568, the queen was awakened by the blowing of a horn: uneasy as to what it announced, she slipped on a cloak and ran to the window, where Mary Seyton joined her directly. A rather numerous band of horsemen had halted on the side of the lake, displaying the Douglas pennon, and three boats were rowing together and vying with each other to fetch the new arrivals.

This event caused the queen dismay: in her situation the least change in the castle routine was to be feared, for it might upset all the concerted plans. This apprehension redoubled when, on the boats drawing near, the queen recognised in the elder Lord Douglas, the husband of Lady Lochleven, and the father of William and George. The venerable knight, who was Keeper of the Marches in the north, was coming to visit his ancient manor, in which he had not set foot for three years.

It was an event for Lochleven; and, some minutes after the arrival of the boats, Mary Stuart heard the old steward’s footsteps mounting the stairs: he came to announce his master’s arrival to the queen, and, as it must needs be a time of rejoicing to all the castle inhabitants when its master returned, he came to invite the queen to the dinner in celebration of the event: whether instinctively or from distaste, the queen declined.

All day long the bell and the bugle resounded: Lord Douglas, like a true feudal lord, travelled with the retinue of a prince. One saw nothing but new soldiers and servants passing and repassing beneath the queen's windows: the footmen and horsemen were wearing, moreover, a livery similar to that which the queen and Mary Seyton had received.

Mary awaited the night with impatience. The day before, she had questioned her light, and it had informed her as usual, in reappearing at her eleventh or twelfth heart-beat, that the moment of escape was near; but she greatly feared that Lord Douglas's arrival might have upset everything, and that this evening's signal could only announce a postponement. But hardly had she seen the light shine than she placed her lamp in the window; the other disappeared directly, and Mary Stuart, with terrible anxiety, began to question it. This anxiety increased when she had counted more than fifteen beats. Then she stopped, cast down, her eyes mechanically fixed on the spot where the light had been. But her astonishment was great when, at the end of a few minutes, she did not see it reappear, and when, half an hour having elapsed, everything remained in darkness. The queen then renewed her signal, but obtained no response: the escape was for the same evening.

The queen and Mary Seyton were so little expecting this issue, that, contrary to their custom, they had not put on their men's clothes that evening. They immediately flew to the queen's bed-chamber, bolted the door behind them, and began to dress.

They had hardly finished their hurried toilette when they heard a key turn in the lock: they immediately blew out the lamp. Light steps approached the door. The two women leaned one against the other; for they both were near falling. Someone tapped gently. The queen asked who was there, and Little Douglas's voice answered in the two first lines of an old ballad —

"Douglas, Douglas, Tender and true."

Mary opened, directly: it was the watchword agreed upon with George Douglas.

The child was without a light. He stretched out his hand and encountered the queen's: in the starlight, Mary Stuart saw him kneel down; then she felt the imprint of his lips on her fingers.

"Is your Majesty ready to follow me?" he asked in a low tone, rising.

"Yes, my child," the queen answered: "it is for this evening, then?"

"With your Majesty's permission, yes, it is for this evening."

"Is everything ready?"

“Everything.”

“What are we to do?”

“Follow me everywhere.”

“My God! my God!” cried Mary Stuart, “have pity on us!” Then, having breathed a short prayer in a low voice, while Mary Seyton was taking the casket in which were the queen’s jewels, “I am ready,” said she: “and you, darling?”

“I also,” replied Mary Seyton.

“Come, then,” said Little Douglas.

The two prisoners followed the child; the queen going first, and Mary Seyton after. Their youthful guide carefully shut again the door behind him, so that if a warder happened to pass he would see nothing; then he began to descend the winding stair. Half-way down, the noise of the feast reached them, a mingling of shouts of laughter, the confusion of voices, and the clinking of glasses. The queen placed her hand on her young guide’s shoulder.

“Where are you leading us?” she asked him with terror.

“Out of the castle,” replied the child.

“But we shall have to pass through the great hall?”

“Without a doubt; and that is exactly what George foresaw. Among the footmen, whose livery your Majesty is wearing, no one will recognise you.”

“My God! my God!” the queen murmured, leaning against the wall.

“Courage, madam,” said Mary Seyton in a low voice, “or we are lost.”

“You are right,” returned the queen; “let us go”. And they started again still led by their guide.

At the foot of the stair he stopped, and giving the queen a stone pitcher full of wine —

“Set this jug on your right shoulder, madam,” said he; “it will hide your face from the guests, and your Majesty will give rise to less suspicion if carrying something. You, Miss Mary, give me that casket, and put on your head this basket of bread. Now, that’s right: do you feel you have strength?”

“Yes,” said the queen.

“Yes,” said Mary Seyton.

“Then follow me.”

The child went on his way, and after a few steps the fugitives found themselves in a kind of antechamber to the great hall, from which proceeded noise and light. Several servants were occupied there with different duties; not one paid attention to them, and that a little reassured the queen. Besides, there was no longer any drawing back: Little Douglas had just entered the great hall.

The guests, seated on both sides of a long table ranged according to the rank of those assembled at it, were beginning dessert, and consequently had reached the gayest moment of the repast. Moreover, the hall was so large that the lamps and candles which lighted it, multiplied as they were, left in the most favourable half-light both sides of the apartment, in which fifteen or twenty servants were coming and going. The queen and Mary Seyton mingled with this crowd, which was too much occupied to notice them, and without stopping, without slackening, without looking back, they crossed the whole length of the hall, reached the other door, and found themselves in the vestibule corresponding to the one they had passed through on coming in. The queen set down her jug there, Mary Seyton her basket, and both, still led by the child, entered a corridor at the end of which they found themselves in the courtyard. A patrol was passing at the moment, but he took no notice of them.

The child made his way towards the garden, still followed by the two women. There, for no little while, it was necessary to try which of all the keys opened the door; it — was a time of inexpressible anxiety. At last the key turned in the lock, the door opened; the queen and Mary Seyton rushed into the garden. The child closed the door behind them.

About two-thirds of the way across, Little Douglas held out his hand as a sign to them to stop; then, putting down the casket and the keys on the ground, he placed his hands together, and blowing into them, thrice imitated the owl’s cry so well that it was impossible to believe that a human voice was uttering the sounds; then, picking up the casket and the keys, he kept on his way on tiptoe and with an attentive ear. On getting near the wall, they again stopped, and after a moment’s anxious waiting they heard a groan, then something like the sound of a falling body. Some seconds later the owl’s cry was — answered by a tu-whit-tu-whoo.

“It is over,” Little Douglas said calmly; “come.”

“What is over?” asked the queen; “and what is that groan we heard?”

“There was a sentry at the door on to the lake,” the child answered, “but he is no longer there.”

The queen felt her heart’s blood grow cold, at the same tine that a chilly sweat broke out to the roots of her hair; for she perfectly understood: an unfortunate being had just lost his life on her account. Tottering, she leaned on Mary Seyton, who herself felt her strength giving way. Meanwhile Little Douglas was trying the keys: the second opened the door.

"And the queen?" said in a low voice a man who was waiting on the other side of the wall.

"She is following me," replied the child.

George Douglas, for it was he, sprang into the garden, and, taking the queen's arm on one side and Mary Seyton's on the other, he hurried them away quickly to the lake-side. When passing through the doorway Mary Stuart could not help throwing an uneasy look about her, and it seemed to her that a shapeless object was lying at the bottom of the wall, and as she was shuddering all over.

"Do not pity him," said George in a low voice, "for it is a judgment from heaven. That man was the infamous Warden who betrayed us."

"Alas!" said the queen, "guilty as he was, he is none the less dead on my account."

"When it concerned your safety, madam, was one to haggle over drops of that base blood? But silence! This way, William, this way; let us keep along the wall, whose shadow hides us. The boat is within twenty steps, and we are saved."

With these words, George hurried on the two women still more quickly, and all four, without having been detected, reached the banks of the lake. 'As Douglas had said, a little boat was waiting; and, on seeing the fugitives approach, four rowers, couched along its bottom, rose, and one of them, springing to land, pulled the chain, so that the queen and Mary Seyton could get in. Douglas seated them at the prow, the child placed himself at the rudder, and George, with a kick, pushed off the boat, which began to glide over the lake.

"And now," said he, "we are really saved; for they might as well pursue a sea swallow on Solway Firth as try to reach us. Row, children, row; never mind if they hear us: the main thing is to get into the open."

"Who goes there?" cried a voice above, from the castle terrace.

"Row, row," said Douglas, placing himself in front of the queen.

"The boat! the boat!" cried the same voice; "bring to the boat!" Then, seeing that it continued to recede, "Treason! treason!" cried the sentinel. "To arms!"

At the same moment a flash lit up the lake; the report of a firearm was heard, and a ball passed, whistling. The queen uttered a little cry, although she had run no danger, George, as we have said, having placed himself in front of her, quite protecting her with his body.

The alarm bell now rang, and all the castle lights were seen moving and glancing about, as if distracted, in the rooms.

“Courage, children!” said Douglas. “Row as if your lives depended on each stroke of the oar; for ere five minutes the skiff will be out after us.”

“That won’t be so easy for them as you think, George,” said Little Douglas; “for I shut all the doors behind me, and some time will elapse before the keys that I have left there open them. As to these,” added he, showing those he had so skilfully abstracted, “I resign them to the Kelpie, the genie of the lake, and I nominate him porter of Lochleven Castle.”

The discharge of a small piece of artillery answered William’s joke; but as the night was too dark for one to aim to such a distance as that already between the castle and the boat, the ball ricochetted at twenty paces from the fugitives, while the report died away in echo after echo. Then Douglas drew his pistol from his belt, and, warning the ladies to have no fear, he fired in the air, not to answer by idle bravado the castle cannonade, but to give notice to a troop of faithful friends, who were waiting for them on the other shore of the lake, that the queen had escaped. Immediately, in spite of the danger of being so near Kinross, cries of joy resounded on the bank, and William having turned the rudder, the boat made for land at the spot whence they had been heard. Douglas then gave his hand to the queen, who sprang lightly ashore, and who, falling on her knees, immediately began to give thanks to God for her happy deliverance.

On rising, the queen found herself surrounded by her most faithful servants — Hamilton, Herries, and Seyton, Mary’s father. Light-headed with joy, the queen extended her hands to them, thanking them with broken words, which expressed her intoxication and her gratitude better than the choicest phrases could have done, when suddenly, turning round, she perceived George Douglas, alone and melancholy. Then, going to him and taking him by the hand —

“My lords,” said she, presenting George to them, and pointing to William, “behold my two deliverers: behold those to whom, as long as I live, I shall preserve gratitude of which nothing will ever acquit me.”

"Madam," said Douglas, "each of us has only done what he ought, and he who has risked most is the happiest. But if your Majesty will believe me, you will not lose a moment in needless words."

"Douglas is right," said Lord Seyton. "To horse! to horse!"

Immediately, and while four couriers set out in four different directions to announce to the queen's friends her happy escape, they brought her a horse saddled for her, which she mounted with her usual skill; then the little troop, which, composed of about twenty persons, was escorting the future destiny of Scotland, keeping away from the village of Kinross, to which the castle firing had doubtless given the alarm, took at a gallop the road to Seyton's castle, where was already a garrison large enough to defend the queen from a sudden attack.

The queen journeyed all night, accompanied on one side by Douglas, on the other by Lord Seyton; then, at daybreak, they stopped at the gate of the castle of West Niddrie, belonging to Lord Seyton, as we have said, and situated in West Lothian. Douglas sprang from his horse to offer his hand to Mary Stuart; but Lord Seyton claimed his privilege as master of the house. The queen consoled Douglas with a glance, and entered the fortress.

"Madam," said Lord Seyton, leading her into a room prepared for her for nine months, "your Majesty must have need of repose, after the fatigue and the emotions you have gone through since yesterday morning; you may sleep here in peace, and disquiet yourself for nothing: any noise you may hear will be made by a reinforcement of friends which we are expecting. As to our enemies, your Majesty has nothing to fear from them so long as you inhabit the castle of a Seyton."

The queen again thanked all her deliverers, gave her hand to Douglas to kiss one last time, kissed Little William on the forehead, and named him her favourite page for the future; then, profiting by the advice given her, entered her room where Mary Seyton, to the exclusion of every other woman, claimed the privilege of performing about her the duties with which she had been charged during their eleven months' captivity in Lochleven Castle.

On opening her eyes, Mary Stuart thought she had had one of those dreams so gainful to prisoners, when waking they see again the bolts on their doors and the bars on their windows. So the queen, unable to believe the evidence of her senses, ran, half dressed, to the window. The courtyard was filled with soldiers, and these soldiers all friends who had hastened at the news of her escape; she recognised the banners of her faithful friends, the Seytons, the Arbroaths, the Herries, and the Hamiltons, and scarcely had she been seen at the window than all these banners bent before her, with the shouts a hundred times repeated of “Long live Mary of Scotland! Long live our queen!” Then, without giving heed to the disarray of her toilet, lovely and chaste with her emotion and her happiness, she greeted them in her turn, her eyes full of tears; but this time they were tears of joy. However, the queen recollected that she was barely covered, and blushing at having allowed herself to be thus carried away in her ecstasy, she abruptly drew back, quite rosy with confusion.

Then she had an instant’s womanly fright: she had fled from Lochleven Castle in the Douglas livery, and without either the leisure or the opportunity for taking women’s clothes with her. But she could not remain attired as a man; so she explained her uneasiness to Mary Seyton, who responded by opening the closets in the queen’s room. They were furnished, not only with robes, the measure for which, like that of the suit, had been taken from Mary Fleming, but also with all the necessaries for a woman’s toilet. The queen was astonished: it was like being in a fairy castle.

“Mignonne,” said she, looking one after another at the robes, all the stuffs of which were chosen with exquisite taste, “I knew your father was a brave and loyal knight, but I did not think him so learned in the matter of the toilet. We shall name him groom of the wardrobe.”

“Alas! madam,” smilingly replied Mary Seyton, “you are not mistaken: my father has had everything in the castle furbished up to the last corselet, sharpened to the last sword, unfurled to the last banner; but my father, ready as he is to die for your Majesty, would not have dreamed for an instant of offering you anything but his roof to rest under, or his cloak to cover you. It is Douglas again who has foreseen everything, prepared everything — everything even to Rosabelle, your Majesty’s favourite steed, which is impatiently awaiting in the stable the moment when, mounted on her, your Majesty will make your triumphal re-entry into Edinburgh.”

“And how has he been able to get her back again?” Mary asked. “I thought that in the division of my spoils Rosabelle had fallen to the fair Alice, my brother’s favourite sultana?”

“Yes, yes,” said Mary Seyton, “it was so; and as her value was known, she was kept under lock and key by an army of grooms; but Douglas is the man of miracles, and, as I have told you, Rosabelle awaits your Majesty.”

“Noble Douglas!” murmured the queen, with eyes full of tears; then, as if speaking to herself, “And this is precisely one of those devotions that we can never repay. The others will be happy with honours, places, money; but to Douglas what matter all these things?”

“Come, madam, come,” said Mary Seyton, “God takes on Himself the debts of kings; He will reward Douglas. As to your Majesty, reflect that they are waiting dinner for you. I hope,” added she, smiling, “that you will not affront my father as you did Lord Douglas yesterday in refusing to partake of his feast on his fortunate home-coming.”

“And luck has come to me for it, I hope,” replied Mary. “But you are right, darling: no more sad thoughts; we will consider when we have indeed become queen again what we can do for Douglas.”

The queen dressed and went down. As Mary Seyton had told her, the chief noblemen of her party, already gathered round her, were waiting for her in the great hall of the castle. Her arrival was greeted with acclamations of the liveliest enthusiasm, and she sat down to table, with Lord Seyton on her right hand, Douglas on her left, and behind her Little William, who the same day was beginning his duties as page.

Next morning the queen was awakened by the sound of trumpets and bugles: it had been decided the day before that she should set out that day for Hamilton, where reinforcements were looked for. The queen donned an elegant riding-habit, and soon, mounted on Rosabelle, appeared amid her defenders. The shouts of joy redoubled: her beauty, her grace, and her courage were admired by everyone. Mary Stuart became her own self once more, and she felt spring up in her again the power of fascination she had always exercised on those who came near her. Everyone was in good humour, and the happiest of all was perhaps Little William, who for the first time in his life had such a fine dress and such a fine horse.

Two or three thousand men were awaiting the queen at Hamilton, which she reached the same evening; and during the night following her arrival the troops increased to six thousand. The 2nd of May she was a prisoner, without another friend but a child in her prison, without other means of communication with her adherents than the flickering and uncertain light of a lamp, and three days afterwards — that is to say, between the Sunday and the Wednesday — she found herself not only free, but also at the head of a powerful confederacy, which counted at its head nine earls, eight peers, nine bishops, and a number of barons and nobles renowned among the bravest of Scotland.

The advice of the most judicious among those about the queen was to shut herself up in the strong castle of Dumbarton, which, being impregnable, would give all her adherents time to assemble together, distant and scattered as they were: accordingly, the guidance of the troops who were to conduct the queen to that town was entrusted to the Earl of Argyll, and the 11th of May she took the road with an army of nearly ten thousand men.

Murray was at Glasgow when he heard of the queen's escape: the place was strong; he decided to hold it, and summoned to him his bravest and most devoted partisans. Kirkcaldy of Grange, Morton, Lindsay of Byres, Lord Lochleven, and William Douglas hastened to him, and six thousand of the best troops in the kingdom gathered round them, while Lord Ruthven in the counties of Berwick and Angus raised levies with which to join them.

The 13th May, Morton occupied from daybreak the village of Langside, through which the queen must pass to get to Dumbarton. The news of the occupation reached the queen as the two armies were yet seven miles apart. Mary's first instinct was to escape an engagement: she remembered her last battle at Carberry Hill, at the end of which she had been separated from Bothwell and brought to Edinburgh; so she expressed aloud this opinion, which was supported by George Douglas, who, in black armour, without other arms, had continued at the queen's side.

"Avoid an engagement!" cried Lord Seyton, not daring to answer his sovereign, and replying to George as if this opinion had originated with him. "We could do it, perhaps, if we were one to ten; but we shall certainly not do so when we are three to two. You speak a strange tongue, my young master," continued he, with some contempt; "and you forget, it seems to me, that you are a Douglas and that you speak to a Seyton."

"My lord," returned George calmly, "when we only hazard the lives of Douglases and Seytons, you will find me, I hope, as ready to fight as you, be it one to ten, be it three to two; but we are now answerable for an existence dearer to Scotland than that of all the Seytons and all the Douglases. My advice is then to avoid battle."

"Battle! battle!" cried all the chieftains.

"You hear, madam?" said Lord Seyton to Mary Stuart: "I believe that to wish to act against such unanimity would be dangerous. In Scotland, madam, there is an ancient proverb which has it that ‘there is most prudence in courage.’“

“But have you not heard that the regent has taken up an advantageous position?” the queen said.

“The greyhound hunts the hare on the hillside as well as in the plain,” replied Seyton: “we will drive him out, wherever he is.”

“Let it be as you desire, then, my lords. It shall not be said that Mary Stuart returned to the scabbard the sword her defenders had drawn for her.”

Then, turning round to Douglas

“George,” she said to him, “choose a guard of twenty men for me, and take command of them: you will not quit me.”

George bent low in obedience, chose twenty from among the bravest men, placed the queen in their midst, and put himself at their head; then the troops, which had halted, received the order to continue their road. In two hours’ time the advance guard was in sight of the enemy; it halted, and the rest of the army rejoined it.

The queen’s troops then found themselves parallel with the city of Glasgow, and the heights which rose in front of them were already occupied by a force above which floated, as above that of Mary, the royal banners of Scotland, On the other side, and on the opposite slope, stretched the village of Langside, encircled with enclosures and gardens. The road which led to it, and which followed all the variations of the ground, narrowed at one place in such a way that two men could hardly pass abreast, then, farther on, lost itself in a ravine, beyond which it reappeared, then branched into two, of which one climbed to the village of Langside, while the other led to Glasgow.

On seeing the lie of the ground, the Earl of Argyll immediately comprehended the importance of occupying this village, and, turning to Lord Seyton, he ordered him to gallop off and try to arrive there before the enemy, who doubtless, having made the same observation as the commander of the royal forces, was setting in motion at that very moment a considerable body of cavalry.

Lord Seyton called up his men directly, but while he was ranging them round his banner, Lord Arbroath drew his sword, and approaching the Earl of Argyll —

“My lord,” said he, “you do me a wrong in charging Lord Seyton to seize that post: as commander of the vanguard, it is to me this honour belongs.

Allow me, then, to use my privilege in claiming it."

"It is I who received the order to seize it; I will seize it!" cried Seyton.

"Perhaps," returned Lord Arbroath, "but not before me!"

"Before you and before every Hamilton in the world!" exclaimed Seyton, putting his horse to the gallop and rushing down into the hollow road —

"Saint Bennet! and forward!"

"Come, my faithful kinsmen!" cried Lord Arbroath, dashing forward on his side with the same object; "come, my men-at-arms! For God and the queen!"

The two troops precipitated themselves immediately in disorder and ran against one another in the narrow way, where, as we have said, two men could hardly pass abreast. There was a terrible collision there, and the conflict began among friends who should have been united against the enemy. Finally, the two troops, leaving behind them some corpses stifled in the press, or even killed by their companions, passed through the defile pell-mell and were lost sight of in the ravine. But during this struggle Seyton and Arbroath had lost precious time, and the detachment sent by Murray, which had taken the road by Glasgow, had reached the village beforehand; it was now necessary not to take it, but to retake it.

Argyll saw that the whole day's struggle would be concentrated there, and, understanding more and more the importance of the village, immediately put himself at the head of the body of his army, commanding a rearguard of two thousand men to remain there and await further orders to take part in the fighting. But whether the captain who commanded them had ill understood, or whether he was eager to distinguish himself in the eyes of the queen, scarcely had Argyll vanished into the ravine, at the end of which the struggle had already commenced between Kirkcaldy of Grange and Morton on the one side, and on the other between Arbroath and Seyton, than, without regarding the cries of Mary Stuart, he set off in his turn at a gallop, leaving the queen without other guard than the little escort of twenty men which Douglas had chosen for her. Douglas sighed.

"Alas!" said the queen, hearing him, "I am not a soldier, but there it seems to me is a battle very badly begun."

"What is to be done?" replied Douglas. "We are every one of us infatuated, from first to last, and all these men are behaving to-day like madmen or children."

“Victory! victory!” said the queen; “the enemy is retreating, fighting. I see the banners of Seyton and Arbroath floating near the first houses in the village. Oh! my brave lords,” cried she, clapping her hands. “Victory! victory!”

But she stopped suddenly on perceiving a body of the enemy’s army advancing to charge the victors in flank.

“It is nothing, it is nothing,” said Douglas; “so long as there is only cavalry we have nothing much to fear, and besides the Earl of Argyll will fall in in time to aid them.”

“George,” said Little William.

“Well?” asked Douglas.

“Don’t you see?” the child went on, stretching out his arms towards the enemy’s force, which was coming on at a gallop.

“What?”

“Each horseman carries a footman armed with an arquebuse behind him, so that the troop is twice as numerous as it appears.”

“That’s true; upon my soul, the child has good sight. Let someone go at once full gallop and take news of this to the Earl or Argyll.”

“I! I!” cried Little William. “I saw them first; it is my right to bear the tidings.”

“Go, then, my child,” said Douglas; “and may God preserve thee!”

The child flew, quick as lightning, not hearing or feigning not to hear the queen, who was recalling him. He was seen to cross the gorge and plunge into the hollow road at the moment when Argyll was debouching at the end and coming to the aid of Seyton and Arbroath. Meanwhile, the enemy’s detachment had dismounted its infantry, which, immediately formed up, was scattering on the sides of the ravine by paths impracticable for horses.

“William will come too late!” cried Douglas, “or even, should he arrive in time, the news is now useless to them. Oh madmen, madmen that we are! This is how we have always lost all our battles!”

“Is the battle lost, then?” demanded Mary, growing pale.

“No, madam, no,” cried Douglas; “Heaven be thanked, not yet; but through too great haste we have begun badly.”

“And William?” said Mary Stuart.

“He is now serving his apprenticeship in arms; for, if I am not mistaken, he must be at this moment at the very spot where those marksmen are making such quick firing.”

“Poor child!” cried the queen; “if ill should befall him, I shall never console myself.”

“Alas! madam,” replied Douglas, “I greatly fear that his first battle is his last, and that everything is already over for him; for, unless I mistake, there is his horse returning riderless.”

“Oh, my God! my God!” said the queen, weeping, and raising her hands to heaven, “it is then decreed that I should be fatal to all around me!”

George was not deceived: it was William’s horse coming back without his young master and covered with blood.

“Madam,” said Douglas, “we are ill placed here; let us gain that hillock on which is the Castle of Crookstone: from thence we shall survey the whole battlefield.”

“No, not there! not there!” said the queen in terror: “within that castle I came to spend the first days of my marriage with Darnley; it will bring me misfortune.”

“Well, beneath that yew-tree, then,” said George, pointing to another slight rise near the first; “but it is important for us to lose no detail of this engagement. Everything depends perhaps for your Majesty on an ill-judged manoeuvre or a lost moment.”

“Guide me, then,” the queen said; “for, as for me, I no longer see it. Each report of that terrible cannonade echoes to the depths of my heart.”

However well placed as was this eminence for overlooking from its summit the whole battlefield, the reiterated discharge of cannon and musketry covered it with such a cloud of smoke that it was impossible to make out from it anything but masses lost amid a murderous fog. At last, when an hour had passed in this desperate conflict, through the skirts of this sea of smoke the fugitives were seen to emerge and disperse in all directions, followed by the victors. Only, at that distance, it was impossible to make out who had gained or lost the battle, and the banners, which on both sides displayed the Scottish arms, could in no way clear up this confusion.

At that moment there was seen coming down from the Glasgow hillsides all the remaining reserve of Murray’s army; it was coming at full speed to engage in the fighting; but this manoeuvre might equally well have for its object the support of defeated friends as to complete the rout of the enemy. However, soon there was no longer any doubt; for this reserve charged the fugitives, amid whom it spread fresh confusion. The queen’s army was beaten. At the same time, three or four horsemen appeared on the hither side of the ravine, advancing at a gallop. Douglas recognised them as enemies.

"Fly, madam," cried George, "fly without loss of a second; for those who are coming upon us are followed by others. Gain the road, while I go to check them. And you," added he, addressing the escort, "be killed to the last man rather than let them take your queen."

"George! George!" cried the queen, motionless, and as if riveted to the spot.

But George had already dashed away with all his horse's speed, and as he was splendidly mounted, he flew across the space with lightning rapidity, and reached the gorge before the enemy. There he stopped, put his lance in rest, and alone against five bravely awaited the encounter.

As to the queen, she had no desire to go; but, on the contrary, as if turned to stone, she remained in the same place, her eyes fastened on this combat which was taking place at scarcely five hundred paces from her. Suddenly, glancing at her enemies, she saw that one of them bore in the middle of his shield a bleeding heart, the Douglas arms. Then she uttered a cry of pain, and drooping her head —

"Douglas against Douglas; brother against brother!" she murmured: "it only wanted this last blow."

"Madam, madam," cried her escort, "there is not an instant to lose: the young master of Douglas cannot hold out long thus alone against five; let us fly! let us fly!" And two of them taking the queen's horse by the bridle, put it to the gallop, at the moment when George, after having beaten down two of his enemies and wounded a third, was thrown down in his turn in the dust, thrust to the heart by a lance-head. The queen groaned on seeing him fall; then, as if he alone had detained her, and as if he being killed she had no interest in anything else, she put Rosabelle to the gallop, and as she and her troop were splendidly mounted, they had soon lost sight of the battlefield.

She fled thus for sixty miles, without taking any rest, and without ceasing to weep or to sigh: at last, having traversed the counties of Renfrew and Ayr, she reached the Abbey of Dundrennan, in Galloway, and certain of being, for the time at least, sheltered from every danger, she gave the order to stop. The prior respectfully received her at the gate of the convent.

“I bring you misfortune and ruin, father,” said the queen, alighting from her horse.

“They are welcome,” replied the prior, “since they come accompanied by duty.”

The queen gave Rosabelle to the care of one of the men-at-arms who had accompanied her, and leaning on Mary Seyton, who had not left her for a moment, and on Lord Herries, who had rejoined her on the road, she entered the convent.

Lord Herries had not concealed her position from Mary Stuart: the day had been completely lost, and with the day, at least for the present, all hope of reascending the throne of Scotland. There remained but three courses for the queen to take to withdraw into France, Spain or England. On the advice of Lord Herries, which accorded with her own feeling, she decided upon the last; and that same night she wrote this double missive in verse and in prose to Elizabeth:

“MY DEAR SISTER, — I have often enough begged you to receive my tempest-tossed vessel into your haven during the storm. If at this pass she finds a safe harbour there, I shall cast anchor there for ever: otherwise the bark is in God’s keeping, for she is ready and caulked for defence on her voyage against all storms. I have dealt openly with you, and still do so: do not take it in bad part if I write thus; it is not in defiance of you, as it appears, for in everything I rely on your friendship.”

“This sonnet accompanied the letter: —

“One thought alone brings danger and delight; Bitter and sweet change places in my heart, With doubt, and then with hope, it takes its part, Till peace and rest alike are put to flight.

Therefore, dear sister, if this card pursue That keen desire by which I am oppressed, To see you, ‘tis because I live distressed, Unless some swift and sweet result ensue.

Beheld I have my ship compelled by fate To seek the open sea, when close to port, And calmest days break into storm and gale; Wherefore full grieved and fearful is my state, Not for your sake, but since, in evil sort, Fortune so oft snaps strongest rope and sail.”

Elizabeth trembled with joy at receiving this double letter; for the eight years that her enmity had been daily increasing to Mary Stuart, she had followed her with her eyes continually, as a wolf might a gazelle; at last the gazelle sought refuge in the wolf’s den. Elizabeth had never hoped as much:

she immediately despatched an order to the Sheriff of Cumberland to make known to Mary that she was ready to receive her. One morning a bugle was heard blowing on the sea-shore: it was Queen Elizabeth's envoy come to fetch Queen Mary Stuart.

Then arose great entreaties to the fugitive not to trust herself thus to a rival in power, glory, and beauty; but the poor dispossessed queen was full of confidence in her she called her good sister, and believed herself going, free and rid of care, to take at Elizabeth's court the place due to her rank and her misfortunes: thus she persisted, in spite of all that could be said. In our time, we have seen the same infatuation seize another royal fugitive, who like Mary Stuart confided himself to the generosity of his enemy England: like Mary Stuart, he was cruelly punished for his confidence, and found in the deadly climate of St. Helena the scaffold of Fotheringay.

Mary Stuart set out on her journey, then, with her little following. Arrived at the shore of Solway Firth, she found there the Warden of the English Marches: he was a gentleman named Lowther, who received the queen with the greatest respect, but who gave her to understand that he could not permit more than three of her women to accompany her. Mary Seyton immediately claimed her privilege: the queen held out to her her hand.

"Alas! mignonne," said she, "but it might well be another's turn: you have already suffered enough for me and with me."

But Mary, unable to reply, clung to her hand, making a sign with her head that nothing in the world should part her from her mistress. Then all who had accompanied the queen renewed their entreaties that she should not persist in this fatal resolve, and when she was already a third of the way along the plank placed for her to enter the skiff, the Prior of Dundrennan, who had offered Mary Stuart such dangerous and touching hospitality, entered the water up to his knees, to try to detain her; but all was useless: the queen had made up her mind.

At that, moment Lowther approached her. "Madam," said he, "accept anew my regrets that I cannot offer a warm welcome in England to all who would wish to follow you there; but our queen has given us positive orders, and we must carry them out. May I be permitted to remind your Majesty that the tide serves?"

"Positive orders!" cried the prior. "Do you hear, madam? Oh! you are lost if you quit this shore! Back, while there is yet time! Back; madam, in Heaven's name! To me, sir knights, to me!" he cried, turning to Lord

Herries and the other lords who had accompanied Mary Stuart; "do not allow your queen to abandon you, were it needful to struggle with her and the English at the same time. Hold her back, my lords, in Heaven's name! withhold her!"

"What means this violence, sir priest?" said the Warden of the Marches. "I came here at your queen's express command; she is free to return to you, and there is no need to have recourse to force for that". Then, addressing the queen —

"Madam," said he, "do you consent to follow me into England in full liberty of choice? Answer, I entreat you; for my honour demands that the whole world should be aware that you have followed me freely."

"Sir," replied Mary Stuart, "I ask your pardon, in the name of this worthy servant of God and his queen, for what he may have said of offence to you. Freely I leave Scotland and place myself in your hands, trusting that I shall be free either to remain in England with my royal sister, or to return to France to my worthy relatives". Then, turning to the priest, "Your blessing, father, and God protect you!"

"Alas! alas!" murmured the abbot, obeying the queen, "it is not we who are in need of God's protection, but rather you, my daughter. May the blessing of a poor priest turn aside from you the misfortunes I foresee! Go, and may it be with you as the Lord has ordained in His wisdom and in His mercy!"

Then the queen gave her hand to the sheriff, who conducted her to the skiff, followed by Mary Seyton and two other women only. The sails were immediately unfurled, and the little vessel began to recede from the shores of Galloway, to make her way towards those of Cumberland. So long as it could be seen, they who had accompanied the queen lingered on the beach, waving her signs of adieu, which, standing on the deck of the shallop which was bearing her, away, she returned with her handkerchief. Finally, the boat disappeared, and all burst into lamentations or into sobbing. They were right, for the good Prior of Dundrennan's presentiments were only too true, and they had seen Mary Stuart for the last time.

CHAPTER VIII

On landing on the shores of England, the Queen of Scotland found messengers from Elizabeth empowered to express to her all the regret their mistress felt in being unable to admit her to her presence, or to give her the affectionate welcome she bore her in her heart. But it was essential, they added, that first of all the queen should clear herself of the death of Darnley, whose family, being subjects of the Queen of England, had a right to her protection and justice.

Mary Stuart was so blinded that she did not see the trap, and immediately offered to prove her innocence to the satisfaction of her sister Elizabeth; but scarcely had she in her hands Mary Stuart's letter, than from arbitress she became judge, and, naming commissioners to hear the parties, summoned Murray to appear and accuse his sister. Murray, who knew Elizabeth's secret intentions with regard to her rival, did not hesitate a moment. He came to England, bringing the casket containing the three letters we have quoted, some verses and some other papers which proved that the queen had not only been Bothwell's mistress during the lifetime of Darnley, but had also been aware of the assassination of her husband. On their side, Lord Herries and the Bishop of Ross, the queen's advocates, maintained that these letters had been forged, that the handwriting was counterfeited, and demanded, in verification, experts whom they could not obtain; so that this great controversy, remained pending for future ages, and to this hour nothing is yet affirmatively settled in this matter either by scholars or historians.

After a five months' inquiry, the Queen of England made known to the parties, that not having, in these proceedings, been able to discover anything to the dishonour of accuser or accused, everything would remain in statu quo till one or the other could bring forward fresh proofs.

As a result of this strange decision, Elizabeth should have sent back the regent to Scotland, and have left Mary Stuart free to go where she would. But, instead of that, she had her prisoner removed from Bolton Castle to Carlisle Castle, from whose terrace, to crown her with grief, poor Mary Stuart saw the blue mountains of her own Scotland.

However, among the judges named by Elizabeth to examine into Mary Stuart's conduct was Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk. Be it that he was convinced of Mary's innocence, be it that he was urged by the ambitious project which since served as a ground for his prosecution, and which was nothing else than to wed Mary Stuart, to affiance his daughter to the young king, and to become regent of Scotland, he resolved to extricate her from her prison. Several members of the high nobility of England, among whom were the Earls of Westmoreland and Northumberland, entered into the plot and under, took to support it with all their forces. But their scheme had been communicated to the regent: he denounced it to Elizabeth, who had Norfolk arrested. Warned in time, Westmoreland and Northumberland crossed the frontiers and took refuge in the Scottish borders which were favourable to Queen Mary. The former reached Flanders, where he died in exile; the latter, given up to Murray, was sent to the castle of Lochleven, which guarded him more faithfully than it had done its royal prisoner. As to Norfolk, he was beheaded. As one sees, Mary Stuart's star had lost none of its fatal influence.

Meanwhile the regent had returned to Edinburgh, enriched with presents from Elizabeth, and having gained, in fact, his case with her, since Mary remained a prisoner. He employed himself immediately in dispersing the remainder of her adherents, and had hardly shut the gates of Lochleven Castle upon Westmoreland than, in the name of the young King James VI, he pursued those who had upheld his mother's cause, and among them more particularly the Hamiltons, who since the affair of "sweeping the streets of Edinburgh," had been the mortal enemies of the Douglases personally; six of the chief members of this family were condemned to death, and only obtained commutation of the penalty into an eternal exile on the entreaties of John Knox, at that time so powerful in Scotland that Murray dared not refuse their pardon.

One of the amnestied was a certain Hamilton of Bothwellhaugh, a man of ancient Scottish times, wild and vindictive as the nobles in the time of James I. He had withdrawn into the highlands, where he had found an asylum, when he learned that Murray, who in virtue of the confiscation pronounced against exiles had given his lands to one of his favourites, had had the cruelty to expel his sick and bedridden wife from her own house, and that without giving her time to dress, and although it was in the winter cold. The poor woman, besides, without shelter, without clothes, and without food, had gone out of her mind, had wandered about thus for some time, an object of compassion but equally of dread; for everyone had been afraid of compromising himself by assisting her. At last, she had returned to expire of misery and cold on the threshold whence she had been driven.

On learning this news, Bothwellhaugh, despite the violence of his character, displayed no anger: he merely responded, with a terrible smile, “It is well; I shall avenge her.”

Next day, Bothwellhaugh left his highlands, and came down, disguised, into the plain, furnished with an order of admission from the Archbishop of St. Andrews to a house which this prelate — who, as one remembers, had followed the queen’s fortunes to the last moment — had at Linlithgow. This house, situated in the main street, had a wooden balcony looking on to the square, and a gate which opened out into the country. Bothwellhaugh entered it at night, installed himself on the first floor, hung black cloth on the walls so that his shadow should not be seen from without, covered the floor with mattresses so that his footsteps might not be heard on the ground floor, fastened a racehorse ready saddled and bridled in the garden, hollowed out the upper part of the little gate which led to the open country so that he could pass through it at a gallop, armed himself with a loaded arquebuse, and shut himself up in the room.

All these preparations had been made, one imagines, because Murray was to spend the following day in Linlithgow. But, secret as they were, they were to be rendered useless, for the regent’s friends warned him that it would not be safe for him to pass through the town, which belonged almost wholly to the Hamiltons, and advised him to go by it. However, Murray was courageous, and, accustomed not to give way before a real danger, he did nothing but laugh at a peril which he looked upon as imaginary, and boldly followed his first plan, which was not to go out of his way. Consequently, as the street into which the Archbishop of St. Andrews’ balcony looked was on his road, he entered upon it, not going rapidly and preceded by guards who would open up a passage for him, as his friends still counselled, but advancing at a foot’s pace, delayed as he was by the great crowd which was blocking up the streets to see him. Arrived in front of the balcony, as if chance had been in tune with the murderer, the crush became so great that Murray was obliged to halt for a moment: this rest gave Bothwellhaugh time to adjust himself for a steady shot. He leaned his arquebuse on the balcony, and, having taken aim with the necessary leisure and coolness, fired. Bothwellhaugh had put such a charge into the arquebuse, that the ball, having passed through the regent's heart, killed the horse of a gentleman on his right. Murray fell directly, saying, "My God! I am killed."

As they had seen from which window the shot was fired, the persons in the regent's train had immediately thrown themselves against the great door of the house which looked on to the street, and had smashed it in; but they only arrived in time to see Bothwellhaugh fly through the little garden gate on the horse he had got ready: they immediately remounted the horses they had left in the street, and, passing through the house, pursued him. Bothwellhaugh had a good horse and the lead of his enemies; and yet, four of them, pistol in hand, were so well mounted that they were beginning to gain upon him. Then Bothwellhaugh; seeing that whip and spur were not enough, drew his dagger and used it to goad on his horse. His horse, under this terrible stimulus, acquired fresh vigour, and, leaping a gully eighteen feet deep, put between his master and his pursuers a barrier which they dared not cross.

The murderer sought an asylum in France, where he retired under the protection of the Guises. There, as the bold stroke he had attempted had acquired him a great reputation, some days before the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, they made him overtures to assassinate Admiral Coligny. But Bothwellhaugh indignantly repulsed these proposals, saying that he was the avenger of abuses and not an assassin, and that those who had to complain of the admiral had only to come and ask him how he had done, and to do as he.

As to Murray, he died the night following his wound, leaving the regency to the Earl of Lennox, the father of Darnley: on learning the news of his death, Elizabeth wrote that she had lost her best friend.

While these events were passing in Scotland, Mary Stuart was still a prisoner, in spite of the pressing and successive protests of Charles IX and Henry III. Taking fright at the attempt made in her favour, Elizabeth even had her removed to Sheffield Castle, round which fresh patrols were incessantly in motion.

But days, months, years passed, and poor Mary, who had borne so impatiently her eleven months' captivity in Lochleven Castle, had been already led from prison to prison for fifteen or sixteen years, in spite of her protests and those of the French and Spanish ambassadors, when she was finally taken to Tutbury Castle and placed under the care of Sir Amyas

Paulet, her last gaoler: there she found for her sole lodging two low and damp rooms, where little by little what strength remained to her was so exhausted that there were days on which she could not walk, on account of the pain in all her limbs. Then it was that she who had been the queen of two kingdoms, who was born in a gilded cradle and brought up in silk and velvet, was forced to humble herself to ask of her gaoler a softer bed and warmer coverings. This request, treated as an affair of state, gave rise to negotiations which lasted a month, after which the prisoner was at length granted what she asked. And yet the unhealthiness, cold, and privations of all kinds still did not work actively enough on that healthy and robust organisation. They tried to convey to Paulet what a service he would render the Queen of England in cutting short the existence of her who, already condemned in her rival's mind, yet delayed to die. But Sir Amyas Paulet, coarse and harsh as he was to Mary Stuart, declared that, so long as she was with him she would have nothing to fear from poison or dagger, because he would taste all the dishes served to his prisoner, and that no one should approach her but in his presence. In fact, some assassins, sent by Leicester, the very same who had aspired for a moment to the hand of the lovely Mary Stuart, were driven from the castle directly its stern keeper had learned with what intentions they had entered it. Elizabeth had to be patient, then, in contenting herself with tormenting her whom she could not kill, and still hoping that a fresh opportunity would occur for bringing her to trial. That opportunity, so long delayed, the fatal star of Mary Stuart at length brought.

A young Catholic gentleman, a last scion of that ancient chivalry which was already dying out at that time, excited by the excommunication of Pius V, which pronounced Elizabeth fallen from her kingdom on earth and her salvation in heaven, resolved to restore liberty to Mary, who thenceforth was beginning to be looked upon, no longer as a political prisoner, but as a martyr for her faith. Accordingly, braving the law which Elizabeth had had made in 1585, and which provided that, if any attempt on her person was meditated by, or for, a person who thought he had claims to the crown of England, a commission would be appointed composed of twenty-five members, which, to the exclusion of every other tribunal, would be empowered to examine into the offence, and to condemn the guilty persons, whosoever they might be. Babington, not at all discouraged by the example of his predecessors, assembled five of his friends, Catholics as zealous as himself, who engaged their life and honour in the plot of which he was the head, and which had as its aim to assassinate Elizabeth, and as a result to place Mary Stuart on the English throne. But this scheme, well planned as it was, was revealed to Walsingham, who allowed the conspirators to go as far as he thought he could without danger, and who, the day before that fixed for the assassination, had them arrested.

This imprudent and desperate attempt delighted Elizabeth, for, according to the letter of the law, it finally gave her rival’s life into her hands. Orders were immediately given to Sir Amyas Paulet to seize the prisoner’s papers and to move her to Fotheringay Castle. The gaoler, then, hypocritically relaxing his usual severity, suggested to Mary Stuart that she should go riding, under the pretext that she had need of an airing. The poor prisoner, who for three years had only seen the country through her prison bars, joyfully accepted, and left Tutbury between two guards, mounted, for greater security, on a horse whose feet were hobbled. These two guards took her to Fotheringay Castle, her new habitation, where she found the apartment she was to lodge in already hung in black. Mary Stuart had entered alive into her tomb. As to Babington and his accomplices, they had been already beheaded.

Meanwhile, her two secretaries, Curle and Nau, were arrested, and all her papers were seized and sent to Elizabeth, who, on her part, ordered the forty commissioners to assemble, and proceed without intermission to the trial of the prisoner. They arrived at Fotheringay the 14th October 1586; and next day, being assembled in the great hall of the castle, they began the examination.

At first Mary refused to appear before them, declaring that she did not recognise the commissioners as judges, they not being her peers, and not acknowledging the English law, which had never afforded her protection, and which had constantly abandoned her to the rule of force. But seeing that they proceeded none the less, and that every calumny was allowed, no one being there to refute it, she resolved to appear before the commissioners. We quote the two interrogatories to which Mary Stuart submitted as they are set down in the report of M. de Bellievre to M. de Villeroy. M. de Bellievre, as we shall see later, had been specially sent by King Henry III to Elizabeth. [Intelligence for M. Villeroy of what was done in England by M. de Bellievre about the affairs of the Queen of Scotland, in the months of November and December 1586 and January 1587.]

The said lady being seated at the end of the table in the said hall, and the said commissioners about her —

The Queen of Scotland began to speak in these terms:

“I do not admit that any one of you here assembled is my peer or my judge to examine me upon any charge. Thus what I do, and now tell you, is of my own free will, taking God to witness that I am innocent and pure in conscience of the accusations and slanders of which they wish to accuse me. For I am a free princess and born a queen, obedient to no one, save to God, to whom alone I must give an account of my actions. This is why I protest yet again that my appearance before you be not prejudicial either to me, or to the kings, princes and potentates, my allies, nor to my son, and I require that my protest be registered, and I demand the record of it.”

Then the chancellor, who was one of the commissioners, replied in his turn, and protested against the protestation; then he ordered that there should be read over to the Queen of Scotland the commission in virtue of which they were proceeding — a commission founded on the statutes and law of the kingdom.

But to this Mary Stuart made answer that she again protested; that the said statutes and laws were without force against her, because these statutes and laws are not made for persons of her condition.

To this the chancellor replied that the commission intended to proceed against her, even if she refused to answer, and declared that the trial should proceed; for she was doubly subject to indictment, the conspirators having not only plotted in her favour, but also with her consent: to which the said Queen of Scotland responded that she had never even thought of it.

Upon this, the letters it was alleged she had written to Babington and his answers were read to her.

Mary Stuart then affirmed that she had never seen Babington, that she had never had any conference with him, had never in her life received a single letter from him, and that she defied anyone in the world to maintain that she had ever done anything to the prejudice of the said Queen of England; that besides, strictly guarded as she was, away from all news, withdrawn from and deprived of those nearest her, surrounded with enemies, deprived finally of all advice, she had been unable to participate in or to consent to the practices of which she was accused; that there are, besides, many persons who wrote to her what she had no knowledge of, and that she had received a number of letters without knowing whence they came to her.

Then Babington's confession was read to her; but she replied that she did not know what was meant; that besides, if Babington and his accomplices had said such things, they were base men, false and liars.

"Besides," added she, "show me my handwriting and my signature, since you say that I wrote to Babington, and not copies counterfeited like these which you have filled at your leisure with the falsehoods it has pleased you to insert."

Then she was shown the letter that Babington, it was said, had written her. She glanced at it; then said, "I have no knowledge of this letter". Upon this, she was shown her reply, and she said again, "I have no more knowledge of this answer. If you will show me my own letter and my own signature containing what you say, I will acquiesce in all; but up to the present, as I have already told you, you have produced nothing worthy of credence, unless it be the copies you have invented and added to with what seemed good to you."

With these words, she rose, and with her eyes full of tears —

"If I have ever," said she, "consented to such intrigues, having for object my sister's death, I pray God that He have neither pity nor mercy on me. I confess that I have written to several persons, that I have implored them to deliver me from my wretched prisons, where I languished, a captive and ill-treated princess, for nineteen years and seven months; but it never occurred to me, even in thought, to write or even to desire such things against the queen. Yes, I also confess to having exerted myself for the deliverance of some persecuted Catholics, and if I had been able, and could yet, with my own blood, protect them and save them from their pains, I would have done it, and would do it for them with all my power, in order to save them from destruction."

Then, turning to the secretary, Walsingham —

"But, my lord," said she, "from the moment I see you here, I know whence comes this blow: you have always been my greatest enemy and my son's, and you have moved everyone against me and to my prejudice."

Thus accused to his face, Walsingham rose.

"Madam," he replied, "I protest before God, who is my witness, that you deceive yourself, and that I have never done anything against you unworthy of a good man, either as an individual or as a public personage."

This is all that was said and done that day in the proceedings, till the next day, when the queen was again obliged to appear before the commissioners.

And, being seated at the end of the table of the said hall, and the said commissioners about her, she began to speak in a loud voice.

“You are not unaware, my lords and gentlemen, that I am a sovereign queen, anointed and consecrated in the church of God, and cannot, and ought not, for any reason whatever, be summoned to your courts, or called to your bar, to be judged by the law and statutes that you lay down; for I am a princess and free, and I do not owe to any prince more than he owes to me; and on everything of which I am accused towards my said sister, I cannot, reply if you do not permit me to be assisted by counsel. And if you go further, do what you will; but from all your procedure, in reiterating my protestations, I appeal to God, who is the only just and true judge, and to the kings and princes, my allies and confederates.”

This protestation was once more registered, as she had required of the commissioners. Then she was told that she had further written several letters to the princes of Christendom, against the queen and the kingdom of England.

“As to that,” replied Mary Stuart, “it is another matter, and I do not deny it; and if it was again to do, I should do as I have done, to gain my liberty; for there is not a man or woman in the world, of less rank than I, who would not do it, and who would not make use of the help and succour of their friends to issue from a captivity as harsh as mine was. You charge me with certain letters from Babington: well, I do not deny that he has written to me and that I have replied to him; but if you find in my answers a single word about the queen my sister, well, yes, there will be good cause to prosecute me. I replied to him who wrote to me that he would set me at liberty, that I accepted his offer, if he could do it without compromising the one or the other of us: that is all.

“As to my secretaries,” added the queen, “not they, but torture spoke by their mouths: and as to the confessions of Babington and his accomplices, there is not much to be made of them; for now that they are dead you can say all that seems good to you; and let who will believe you.”

With these words, the queen refused to answer further if she were not given counsel, and, renewing her protestation, she withdrew into her apartment; but, as the chancellor had threatened, the trial was continued despite her absence.

However, M. de Chateauneuf, the French ambassador to London, saw matters too near at hand to be deceived as to their course: accordingly, at the first rumour which came to him of bringing Mary Stuart to trial, he wrote to King Henry III, that he might intervene in the prisoner's favour. Henry III immediately despatched to Queen Elizabeth an embassy extraordinary, of which M. de Bellievre was the chief; and at the same time, having learned that James VI, Mary's son, far from interesting himself in his mother's fate, had replied to the French minister, Courcelles, who spoke to him of her, "I can do nothing; let her drink what she has spilled," he wrote him the following letter, to decide the young prince to second him in the steps he was going to take:

"21st November, 1586.

"COURCELLES, I have received your letter of the 4th October last, in which I have seen the discourse that the King of Scotland has held with you concerning what you have witnessed to him of the good affection I bear him, discourse in which he has given proof of desiring to reciprocate it entirely; but I wish that that letter had informed me also that he was better disposed towards the queen his mother, and that he had the heart and the desire to arrange everything in a way to assist her in the affliction in which she now is, reflecting that the prison where she has been unjustly detained for eighteen years and more has induced her to lend an ear to many things which have been proposed to her for gaining her liberty, a thing which is naturally greatly desired by all men, and more still by those who are born sovereigns and rulers, who bear being kept prisoners thus with less patience. He should also consider that if the Queen of England, my good sister, allows herself to be persuaded by the counsels of those who wish that she should stain herself with Queen Mary's blood, it will be a matter which will bring him to great dishonour, inasmuch as one will judge that he will have refused his mother the good offices that he should render her with the said Queen of England, and which would have perhaps been sufficient to move her, if he would have employed them, as warmly, and as soon as his natural duty commanded him. Moreover, it is to be feared for him, that, his mother dead, his own turn may come, and that one may think of doing as much for him, by some violent means, to make the English succession easier to seize for those who are likely to have it after the said Queen Elizabeth, and not only to defraud the said King of Scotland of the claim he can put forward, but to render doubtful even that which he has to his own crown. I do not know in what condition the affairs of my said sister-in-law will be when you receive this letter; but I will tell you that in every case I wish you to rouse strongly the said King of Scotland, with remonstrances, and everything else which may bear on this subject, to embrace the defence and protection of his said mother, and to express to him, on my part, that as this will be a matter for which he will be greatly praised by all the other kings and sovereign princes, he must be assured that if he fails in it there will be great censure for him, and perhaps notable injury to himself in particular. Furthermore, as to the state of my own affairs, you know that the queen, madam and mother, is about to see very soon the King of Navarre, and to confer with him on the matter of the pacification of the troubles of this kingdom, to which, if he bear as much good affection as I do for my part, I hope that things may come to a good conclusion, and that my subjects will have some respite from the great evils and calamities that the war occasions them: supplicating the Creator, Courcelles, that He may have you in His holy keeping.

"Written at St. Germain-en-Laye, the 21st day of November 1586. (Signed) HENRI,

"And below, BRULART."

This letter finally decided James VI to make a kind of demonstration in his mother's favour: he sent Gray, Robert Melville, and Keith to Queen Elizabeth. But although London was nearer Edinburgh than was Paris, the French envoys reached it before the Scotch.

It is true that on reaching Calais, the 27th of November, M. de Bellievre had found a special messenger there to tell him not to lose an instant, from M. de Chateauneuf, who, to provide for every difficulty, had chartered a vessel ready in the harbour. But however great the speed these noble lords wished to make, they were obliged to await the wind's good-will, which did not allow them to put to sea till Friday 28th at midnight; next day also, on reaching Dover at nine o'clock, they were so shaken by sea-sickness that they were forced to stay a whole day in the town to recover, so that it was not till Sunday 30th that M. de Bellievre was able to set out in the coach that M. Chateauneuf sent him by M. de Brancaleon, and take the road to London, accompanied by the gentlemen of his suite, who rode on post-horses; but resting only a few hours on the way to make up for lost time, they at last arrived in London, Sunday the 1st of December at midday. M. de Bellievre immediately sent one of the gentlemen of his suite, named M.

de Villiers, to the Queen of England, who was holding her court at Richmond Castle: the decree had been secretly pronounced already six days, and submitted to Parliament, which was to deliberate upon it with closed doors.

The French ambassadors could not have chosen a worse moment to approach Elizabeth; and to gain time she declined to receive M. de Villiers, returning the answer that he would himself know next day the reason for this refusal. And indeed, next day, the rumour spread in London that the French Embassy had contagion, and that two of the lords in it having died of the plague at Calais, the queen, whatever wish she might have to be agreeable to Henry III, could not endanger her precious existence by receiving his envoys. Great was the astonishment of M. de Bellievre at learning this news he protested that the queen was led into error by a false report, and insisted on being received. Nevertheless, the delays lasted another six days; but as the ambassadors threatened to depart without waiting longer, and as, upon the whole, Elizabeth, disquieted by Spain, had no desire to embroil herself with France, she had M. de Bellievre informed on the morning of the 7th of December that she was ready to receive him after dinner at Richmond Castle, together with the noblemen of his suite.

At the appointed time the French ambassadors presented themselves at the castle gates, and, having been brought to the queen, found her seated on her throne and surrounded by the greatest lords in her kingdom. Then MM. de Chateauneuf and de Bellievre, the one the ambassador in ordinary and the other the envoy extraordinary, having greeted her on the part of the King of France, began to make her the remonstrances with which they were charged. Elizabeth replied, not only in the same French tongue, but also in the most beautiful speech in use at that time, and, carried away by passion, pointed out to the envoys of her brother Henry that the Queen of Scotland had always proceeded against her, and that this was the third time that she had wished to attempt her life by an infinity of ways; which she had already borne too long and with too much patience, but that never had anything so profoundly cut her to the heart as her last conspiracy; that event, added she with sadness, having caused her to sigh more and to shed more tears than the loss of all her relations, so much the more that the Queen of Scotland was her near relative and closely connected with the King of France; and as, in their remonstrances, MM. de Chateauneuf and de Bellievre had brought forward several examples drawn from history, she assumed, in reply to them on this occasion, the pedantic style which was usual with her, and told them that she had seen and read a great many books in her life, and a thousand more than others of her sex and her rank were wont to, but that she had never found in them a single example of a deed like that attempted on her — a deed pursued by a relative, whom the king her brother could not and ought not to support in her wickedness, when it was, on the contrary, his duty to hasten the just punishment of it: then she added, addressing herself specially to M. de Bellievre, and coming down again from the height of her pride to a gracious countenance, that she greatly regretted he was not deputed for a better occasion; that in a few days she would reply to King Henry her brother, concerning whose health she was solicitous, as well as that of the queen mother, who must experience such great fatigue from the trouble she took to restore peace to her son’s kingdom; and then, not wishing to hear more, she withdrew into her room.

The envoys returned to London, where they awaited the promised reply; but while they were expecting it unavailingly, they heard quietly the sentence of death given against Queen Mary, which decided them to return to Richmond to make fresh remonstrances to Queen Elizabeth. After two or three fruitless journeys, they were at last, December 15th, admitted for the second time to the royal presence.

The queen did not deny that the sentence had been pronounced, and as it was easy to see that she did not intend in this case to use her right of pardon, M. de Bellievre, judging that there was nothing to be done, asked for a safe-conduct to return to his king: Elizabeth promised it to him within two or three days.

On the following Tuesday, the 17th of the same month of December, Parliament as well as the chief lords of the realm were convoked at the Palace of Westminster, and there, in full court and before all, sentence of death was proclaimed and pronounced against Mary Stuart: then this same sentence, with great display and great solemnity, was read in the squares and at the cross-roads of London, whence it spread throughout the kingdom; and upon this proclamation the bells rang for twenty-four hours, while the strictest orders were given to each of the inhabitants to light bonfires in front of their houses, as is the custom in France on the Eve of St. John the Baptist.

Then, amid this sound of bells, by the light of these bonfires, M. de Bellievre, wishing to make a last effort, in order to have nothing with which to reproach himself, wrote the following letter to Queen Elizabeth:

"MADAM: — We quitted your Majesty yesterday, expecting, as it had pleased you to inform us, to receive in a few days your reply touching the prayer that we made you on behalf of our good master, your brother, for the Queen of Scotland, his sister in-law and confederate; but as this morning we have been informed that the judgment given against the said queen has been proclaimed in London, although we had promised ourselves another issue from your clemency and the friendship your bear to the said lord king your good brother, nevertheless, to neglect no part of our duty, and believing in so doing to serve the intentions of the king our master, we have not wanted to fail to write to you this present letter, in which we supplicate you once again, very humbly, not to refuse his Majesty the very pressing and very affectionate prayer that he has made you, that you will be pleased to preserve the life of the said lady Queen of Scotland, which the said lord king will receive as the greatest pleasure your Majesty could do him; while, on the contrary, he could not imagine anything which would cause him more displeasure, and which would wound him more, than if he were used harshly with regard to the said lady queen, being what she is to him: and as, madam, the said king our master, your good brother, when for this object he despatched us to your Majesty, had not conceived that it was possible, in any case, to determine so promptly upon such an execution, we implore you, madam, very humbly, before permitting it to go further, to grant us some time in which we can make known to him the state of the affairs of the said Queen of Scotland, in order that before your Majesty takes a final resolution, you may know what it may please his very Christian Majesty to tell you and point out to you on the greatest affair which, in our memory, has been submitted to men's judgment. Monsieur de Saint-Cyr, who will give these presents to your Majesty, will bring us, if it pleases you, your good reply.

"London, this 16th day of December 1586.

"(Signed) DE BELLIEVRE,

"And DE L'AUBESPINE CHATEAUNEUF."

The same day, M. de Saint-Cyr and the other French lords returned to Richmond to take this letter; but the queen would not receive them, alleging indisposition, so that they were obliged to leave the letter with Walsingham, her first Secretary of State, who promised them to send the queen's answer the following day.

In spite of this promise, the French lords waited two days more: at last, on the second day, towards evening, two English gentlemen sought out M. de Fellievre in London, and, viva voce, without any letter to confirm what they were charged to say, announced to him, on behalf of their queen, that in reply to the letter that they had written her, and to do justice to the desire they had shown to obtain for the condemned a reprieve during which they would make known the decision to the King of France, her Majesty would grant twelve days. As this was Elizabeth's last word, and it was useless to lose time in pressing her further, M. de Genlis was immediately despatched to his Majesty the King of France, to whom, besides the long despatch of M. de Chateauneuf and de Bellievre which he was charged to remit, he was to say 'viva voce' what he had seen and heard relative to the affairs of Queen Mary during the whole time he had been in England.

Henry III responded immediately with a letter containing fresh instructions for MM. de Chateauneuf and de Bellievre; but in spite of all the haste M. de Genlis could make, he did not reach London till the fourteenth day — that is to say, forty-eight hours after the expiration of the delay granted; nevertheless, as the sentence had not yet been put into execution, MM. de Bellievre and de Chateauneuf set out at once for Greenwich Castle, some miles from London, where the queen was keeping Christmas, to beg her to grant them an audience, in which they could transmit to her Majesty their king's reply; but they could obtain nothing for four or five days; however, as they were not disheartened, and returned unceasingly to the charge, January 6th, MM. de Bellievre and de Chateauneuf were at last sent for by the queen.

As on the first occasion, they were introduced with all the ceremonial in use at that time, and found Elizabeth in an audience-chamber. The ambassadors approached her, greeted her, and M. de Bellievre began to address to her with respect, but at the same time with firmness, his master's remonstrances. Elizabeth listened to them with an impatient air, fidgeting in her seat; then at last, unable to control herself, she burst out, rising and growing red with anger —

"M. de Bellievre," said she, "are you really charged by the king, my brother, to speak to me in such a way?"

"Yes, madam," replied M. de Bellievre, bowing; "I am expressly commanded to do so."

"And have you this command under his hand?" continued Elizabeth.

“Yes, madam,” returned the ambassador with the same calmness; “and the king, my master, your good brother, has expressly charged me, in letters signed by his own hand, to make to your Majesty the remonstrances which I have had the honour to address to you.”

“Well,” cried Elizabeth, no longer containing herself, “I demand of you a copy of that letter, signed by you; and reflect that you will answer for each word that you take away or add.”

“Madam,” answered M. de Bellievre, “it is not the custom of the kings of France, or of their agents, to forge letters or documents; you will have the copies you require to-morrow morning, and I pledge their accuracy on my honour.”

“Enough, sir, enough!” said the queen, and signing to everyone in the room to go out, she remained nearly an hour with MM. de Chateauneuf and de Bellievre. No one knows what passed in that interview, except that the queen promised to send an ambassador to the King of France, who, she promised, would be in Paris, if not before, at least at the same time as M. de Bellievre, and would be the bearer of her final resolve as to the affairs of the Queen of Scotland; Elizabeth then withdrew, giving the French envoys to understand that any fresh attempt they might make to see her would be useless.

On the 13th of January the ambassadors received their passports, and at the same time notice that a vessel of the queen’s was awaiting them at Dover.

The very day of their departure a strange incident occurred. A gentleman named Stafford, a brother of Elizabeth’s ambassador to the King of France, presented himself at M. de Trappes’s, one of the officials in the French chancellery, telling him that he was acquainted with a prisoner for debt who had a matter of the utmost importance to communicate to him, and that he might pay the greater attention to it, he told him that this matter was connected with the service of the King of France, and concerned the affairs of Queen Mary of Scotland. M. de Trappes, although mistrusting this overture from the first, did not want, in case his suspicions deceived him, to have to reproach himself for any neglect on such a pressing occasion. He repaired, then, with; Mr. Stafford to the prison, where he who wished to converse with him was detained. When he was with him, the prisoner told him that he was locked up for a debt of only twenty crowns, and that his desire to be at liberty was so great that if M. de Chateauneuf would pay that sum for him he would undertake to deliver the Queen of Scotland from her danger, by stabbing Elizabeth: to this proposal, M. de Trappes, who saw the pitfall laid for the French ambassador, was greatly astonished, and said that he was certain that M. de Chateauneuf would consider as very evil every enterprise having as its aim to threaten in any way the life of Queen Elizabeth or the peace of the realm; then, not desiring to hear more, he returned to M. de Chateauneuf and related to him what had just happened. M. de Chateauneuf, who perceived the real cause of this overture, immediately said to Mr. Stafford that he thought it strange that a gentleman like himself should undertake with another gentleman such treachery, and requested him to leave the Embassy at once, and never to set foot there again. Then Stafford withdrew, and, appearing to think himself a lost man, he implored M. de Trappes to allow him to cross the Channel with him and the French envoys. M. de Trappes referred him to M. de Chateauneuf, who answered Mr. Stafford directly that he had not only forbidden him his house, but also all relations with any person from the Embassy, that he must thus very well see that his request could not be granted; he added that if he were not restrained by the consideration he desired to keep for his brother, the Earl of Stafford, his colleague, he would at once denounce his treason to Elizabeth. The same day Stafford was arrested.

After this conference, M. de Trappes set out to rejoin his travelling companions, who were some hours in advance of him, when, on reaching Dover he was arrested in his turn and brought hack to prison in London. Interrogated the same day, M. de Trappes frankly related what had passed, appealing to M. de Chateauneuf as to the truth of what he said.

The day following there was a second interrogatory, and great was his amazement when, on requesting that the one of the day before should be shown him, he was merely shown, according to custom in English law, counterfeit copies, in which were avowals compromising him as well as M. de Chateauneuf: he objected and protested, refused to answer or to sign anything further, and was taken back to the Tower with redoubled precaution, the object of which was the appearance of an important accusation.

Next day, M. de Chateauneuf was summoned before the queen, and there confronted with Stafford, who impudently maintained that he had treated of a plot with M. de Trappes and a certain prisoner for debt — a plot which aimed at nothing less than endangering the Queen’s life. M. de Chateauneuf defended himself with the warmth of indignation, but Elizabeth had too great an interest in being unconvinced even to attend to the evidence. She then said to M. de Chateauneuf that his character of ambassador alone prevented her having him arrested like his accomplice M. de Trappes; and immediately despatching, as she had promised, an ambassador to King Henry III, she charged him not to excuse her for the sentence which had just been pronounced and the death which must soon follow, but to accuse M. de Chateauneuf of having taken part in a plot of which the discovery alone had been able to decide her to consent to the death of the Queen of Scotland, certain as she was by experience, that so long as her enemy lived her existence would be hourly threatened.

On the same day, Elizabeth made haste to spread, not only in London, but also throughout England, the rumour of the fresh danger from which she had just escaped, so that, when, two days after the departure of the French envoys, the Scottish ambassadors, who, as one sees, had not used much speed, arrived, the queen answered them that their request came unseasonably, at a time when she had just had proof that, so long as Mary Stuart existed, her own (Elizabeth's) life was in danger. Robert Melville wished to reply to this; but Elizabeth flew into a passion, saying that it was he, Melville, who had given the King of Scotland the bad advice to intercede for his mother, and that if she had such an adviser she would have him beheaded. To which Melville answered —

"That at the risk of his life he would never spare his master good advice; and that, on the contrary, he who would counsel a son to let his mother perish, would deserve to be beheaded."

Upon this reply, Elizabeth ordered the Scotch envoys to withdrew, telling them that she would let them have her answer.

Three or four days passed, and as they heard nothing further, they asked again for a parting audience to hear the last resolve of her to whom they were sent: the queen then decided to grant it, and all passed, as with M. de Bellievre, in recriminations and complaints. Finally, Elizabeth asked them what guarantee they would give for her life in the event of her consenting to pardon the Queen of Scotland. The envoys responded that they were authorised to make pledges in the name of the King of Scotland, their master, and all the lords of his realm, that Mary Stuart should renounce in favour of her son all her claims upon the English crown, and that she should give as security for this undertaking the King of France, and all the princes and lords, his relations and friends.

To this answer, the queen, without her usual presence of mind, cried, “What are you saying, Melville? That would be to arm my enemy with two claims, while he has only one”.

“Does your Majesty then regard the king, my master, as your enemy?” replied Melville. “He believed himself happier, madam, and thought he was your ally.”

“No, no,” Elizabeth said, blushing; “it is a way of speaking: and if you find a means of reconciling everything, gentlemen, to prove to you, on the contrary, that I regard King James VI as my good and faithful ally, I am quite ready to incline to mercy. Seek, then, on your side” added she, “while I seek on mine.”

With these words, she went out of the room, and the ambassadors retired, with the light of the hope of which she had just let them catch a glimpse.

The same evening, a gentleman at the court sought out the Master of Gray, the head of the Embassy, as if to pay him a civil visit, and while conversing said to him, “That it was very difficult to reconcile the safety of Queen Elizabeth with the life of her prisoner; that besides, if the Queen of Scotland were pardoned, and she or her son ever came to the English throne, there would be no security for the lords commissioners who had voted her death; that there was then only one way of arranging everything, that the King of Scotland should himself give up his claims to the kingdom of England; that otherwise, according to him, there was no security for Elizabeth in saving the life of the Scottish queen”. The Master of Gray then, looking at him fixedly, asked him if his sovereign had charged him to come to him with this talk. But the gentleman denied it, saying that all this was on his own account and in the way of opinion.

Elizabeth received the envoys from Scotland once more, and then told them —

“That after having well considered, she had found no way of saving the life of the Queen of Scotland while securing her own, that accordingly she could not grant it to them”. To this declaration, the Master of Gray replied: “That since it was thus, he was, in this case, ordered by his master to say that they protested in the name of King James that all that had been done against his mother was of no account, seeing that Queen Elizabeth had no authority over a queen, as she was her equal in rank and birth; that accordingly they declared that immediately after their return, and when their master should know the result of their mission, he would assemble his Parliament and send messengers to all the Christian princes, to take counsel with them as to what could be done to avenge her whom they could not save."

Then Elizabeth again flew into a passion, saying that they had certainly not received from their king a mission to speak to her in such a way; but they thereupon offered to give her this protest in writing under their signatures; to which Elizabeth replied that she would send an ambassador to arrange all that with her good friend and ally, the King of Scotland. But the envoys then said that their master would not listen to anyone before their return. Upon which Elizabeth begged them not to go away at once, because she had not yet come to her final decision upon this matter. On the evening following this audience, Lord Hingley having come to see the Master of Gray, and having seemed to notice some handsome pistols which came from Italy, Gray, directly he had gone, asked this nobleman's cousin to take them to him as a gift from him. Delighted with this pleasant commission, the young man wished to perform it the same evening, and went to the queen's palace, where his relative was staying, to give him the present which he had been told to take to him. But hardly had he passed through a few rooms than he was arrested, searched, and the arms he was taking were found upon him. Although these were not loaded, he was immediately arrested; only he was not taken to the Tower, but kept a prisoner in his own room.

Next day there was a rumour that the Scotch ambassadors had wanted to assassinate the queen in their turn, and that pistols, given by the Master of Gray himself, had been found on the assassin.

This bad faith could not but open the envoys' eyes. Convinced at last that they could do nothing for poor Mary Stuart, they left her to her fate, and set out next day for Scotland.

Scarcely were they gone than Elizabeth sent her secretary, Davison, to Sir Amyas Paulet. He was instructed to sound him again with regard to the prisoner; afraid, in spite of herself, of a public execution, the queen had reverted to her former ideas of poisoning or assassination; but Sir Amyas Paulet declared that he would let no one have access to Mary but the executioner, who must in addition be the bearer of a warrant perfectly in order, Davison reported this answer to Elizabeth, who, while listening to him, stamped her foot several times, and when he had finished, unable to control herself, cried, “God’s death! there’s a dainty fellow, always talking of his fidelity and not knowing how to prove it!”

Elizabeth was then obliged to make up her mind. She asked Davison for the warrant; he gave it to her, and, forgetting that she was the daughter of a queen who had died on the scaffold, she signed it without any trace of emotion; then, having affixed to it the great seal of England, “Go,” said she, laughing, “tell Walsingham that all is ended for Queen Mary; but tell him with precautions, for, as he is ill, I am afraid he will die of grief when he hears it.”

The jest was the more atrocious in that Walsingham was known to be the Queen of Scotland’s bitterest enemy.

Towards evening of that day, Saturday the 14th, Beale, Walsingham’s brother-in-law, was summoned to the palace! The queen gave into his hands the death warrant, and with it an order addressed to the Earls of Shrewsbury, Kent, Rutland, and other noblemen in the neighbourhood of Fotheringay, to be present at the execution. Beale took with him the London executioner, whom Elizabeth had had dressed in black velvet for this great occasion; and set out two hours after he had received his warrant.

CHAPTER IX

Queen Mary had known the decree of the commissioners these two months. The very day it had been pronounced she had learned the news through her chaplain, whom they had allowed her to see this once only. Mary Stuart had taken advantage of this visit to give him three letters she had just written-one for Pope Sixtus V, the other to Don Bernard Mendoza, the third to the Duke of Guise. Here is that last letter: —

14th December, 1586

“My Good Cousin, whom I hold dearest in the world, I bid you farewell, being prepared to be put to death by an unjust judgment, and to a death such as no one of our race, thanks to God, and never a queen, and still less one of my rank, has ever suffered. But, good cousin, praise the Lord; for I was useless to the cause of God and of His Church in this world, prisoner as I was; while, on the contrary, I hope that my death will bear witness to my constancy in the faith and to my willingness to suffer for the maintenance and the restoration of the Catholic Church in this unfortunate island. And though never has executioner dipped his hand in our blood, have no shame of it, my friend; for the judgment of heretics who have no authority over me, a free queen, is profitable in the sight of God to the children of His Church. If I adhered, moreover, to what they propose to me, I should not suffer this stroke. All of our house have been persecuted by this sect, witness your good father, through whose intercession I hope to be received with mercy by the just judge. I commend to you, then, my poor servants, the discharge of my debts, and the founding of some annual mass for my soul, not at your expense, but that you may make the arrangements, as you will be required when you learn my wishes through my poor and faithful servants, who are about to witness my last tragedy. God prosper you, your wife, children, brothers and cousins, and above all our chief, my good brother and cousin, and all his. The blessing of God and that which I shall give to my children be on yours, whom I do not commend less to God than my own son, unfortunate and ill-treated as he is. You will receive some rings from me, which will remind you to pray God for the soul of your poor cousin, deprived of all help and counsel except that of the Lord, who gives me strength and courage to alone to resist so many wolves howling after me. To God be the glory.

“Believe particularly what will be told you by a person who will give you a ruby ring from me; for I take it on my conscience that the truth will be told you of what I have charged him to tell, and especially in what concerns my poor servants and the share of any. I commend this person to you for his simple sincerity and honesty, that he may be placed in some good place. I have chosen him as the least partial and as the one who will most simply bring you my commands. Ignore, I beg you, that he told you anything in particular; for envy might injure him. I have suffered a great deal for two years and more, and have not been able to let you know, for an important reason. God be praised for all, and give you grace to persevere in the service of His Church as long as you live, and never may this honour pass from our race, while so many men and women are ready to shed their blood to maintain the fight for the faith, all other worldly considerations set aside. And as to me, I esteem myself born on both father’s and mother’s sides, that I should offer up my blood for this cause, and I have no intention of degenerating. Jesus, crucified for us, and all the holy martyrs, make us by their intercession worthy of the voluntary offering we make of our bodies to their glory!

“From Fotheringay, this Thursday, 24th November.

“They have, thinking to degrade me, pulled down my canopy of state, and since then my keeper has come to offer to write to their queen, saying this deed was not done by his order, but by the advice of some of the Council. I have shown them instead of my arms on the said canopy the cross of Our Lord. You will hear all this; they have been more gentle since. — Your affectionate cousin and perfect friend,

“MARY, Queen of Scotland, Dowager of France”

From this day forward, when she learned the sentence delivered by the commissioners, Mary Stuart no longer preserved any hope; for as she knew Elizabeth’s pardon was required to save her, she looked upon herself thenceforward as lost, and only concerned herself with preparing to die well. Indeed, as it had happened to her sometimes, from the cold and damp in her prisons, to become crippled for some time in all her limbs, she was afraid of being so when they would come to take her, which would prevent her going resolutely to the scaffold, as she was counting on doing. So, on Saturday the 14th February, she sent for her doctor, Bourgoin, and asked him, moved by a presentiment that her death was at hand, she said, what she must do to prevent the return of the pains which crippled her. He replied that it would be good for her to medicine herself with fresh herbs. “Go, then,” said the queen, “and ask Sir Amyas Paulet from me permission to seek them in the fields.”

Bourgoin went to Sir Amyas, who, as he himself was troubled with sciatica, should have understood better than anyone the need of the remedies for which the queen asked. But this request, simple as it was, raised great difficulties. Sir Amyas replied that he could do nothing without referring to his companion, Drury; but that paper and ink might be brought, and that he, Master Bourgoin, could then make a list of the needful plants, which they would try to procure. Bourgoin answered that he did not know English well enough, and that the village apothecaries did not know enough Latin, for him to risk the queen’s life for some error by himself or others. Finally, after a thousand hesitations, Paulet allowed Bourgoin to go out, which he did, accompanied by the apothecary Gorjon; so that the following day the queen was able to begin to doctor herself.

Mary Stuart’s presentiments had not deceived her: Tuesday, February 17th, at about two o’clock in the afternoon, the Earls of Kent and Shrewsbury, and Beale sent word to the queen that they desired to speak with her. The queen answered that she was ill and in bed, but that if notwithstanding what they had to tell her was a matter of importance, and they would give her a little time, she would get up. They made answer that the communication they had to make admitted of no delay, that they begged her then to make ready; which the queen immediately did, and rising from her bed and cloaking herself, she went and seated herself at a little table, on the same spot where she was wont to be great part of the day.

Then the two earls, accompanied by Beale, Arnyas Paulet, and Drue Drury, entered. Behind them, drawn by curiosity, full of terrible anxiety, came her dearest ladies and most cherished servants. These were, of womenkind, the Misses Renee de Really, Gilles Mowbray, Jeanne Kennedy, Elspeth Curle, Mary Paget, and Susan Kercady; and of men-kind, Dominique Bourgoin her doctor, Pierre Gorjon her apothecary, Jacques Gervais her surgeon, Annibal Stewart her footman, Dither Sifflart her butler, Jean Laudder her baker, and Martin Huet her carver.

Then the Earl of Shrewsbury, with head bared like all those present, who remained thus as long as they were in the queen’s room, began to say in

English, addressing Mary —

“Madam, the Queen of England, my august mistress, has sent me to you, with the Earl of Kent and Sir Robert Beale, here present, to make known to you that after having honourably proceeded in the inquiry into the deed of which you are accused and found guilty, an inquiry which has already been submitted to your Grace by Lord Buckhurst, and having delayed as long as it was in her power the execution of the sentence, she can no longer withstand the importunity of her subjects, who press her to carry it out, so great and loving is their fear for her. For this purpose we have come the bearers of a commission, and we beg very humbly, madam, that it may please you to hear it read.”

“Read, my lord; I am listening,” replied Mary Stuart, with the greatest calmness. Then Robert Beale unrolled the said commission, which was on parchment, sealed with the Great Seal in yellow wax, and read as follows:

“Elizabeth, by the grace of God, Queen of England, France, and Ireland, etc., to our beloved and faithful cousins, George, Earl of Shrewsbury, Grand Marshal of England; Henry, Earl of Kent; Henry, Earl of Derby; George, Earl of Cumberland; Henry, Earl of Pembroke, greeting: [The Earls of Cumberland, Derby, and Pembroke did not attend to the queen’s orders, and were present neither at the reading of the sentence nor at the execution.]

“Considering the sentence by us given, and others of our Council, nobility, and judges, against the former Queen of Scotland, bearing the name of Mary, daughter and heiress of James v, King of Scotland, commonly called Queen of Scotland and Dowager of France, which sentence all the estates of our realm in our last Parliament assembled not only concluded, but, after mature deliberation, ratified as being just and reasonable; considering also the urgent prayer and request of our subjects, begging us and pressing us to proceed to the publication thereof, and to carry it into execution against her person, according as they judge it duly merited, adding in this place that her detention was and would be daily a certain and evident danger, not only to our life, but also to themselves and their posterity, and to the public weal of this realm, as much on account of the Gospel and the true religion of Christ as of the peace and tranquillity of this State, although the said sentence has been frequently delayed, so that even until this time we abstained from issuing the commission to execute it: yet, for the complete satisfaction of the said demands made by the Estates of our Parliament, through which daily we hear that all our friends and subjects, as well as the nobility, the wisest, greatest, and most pious, nay, even those of inferior condition, with all humility and affection from the care they have of our life, and consequently from the fear they have of the destruction of the present divine and happy state of the realm if we spare the final execution, consenting and desiring the said execution; though the general and continual demands, prayers, counsels, and advice were in such things contrary to our natural inclination; yet, being convinced of the urgent weight of their continual intercessions tending to the safety of our person, and also to the public and private state of our realm, we have at last consented and suffered that justice have its course, and for its execution, considering the singular confidence we have in your fidelity and loyalty together for the love and affection that you have toward us, particularly to the safe-guarding of our person and our country of which you are very noble and chief members; we summon, and, for the discharge of it we enjoin you, that at sight of these presents you go to the castle of Fotheringay, where the former Queen of Scotland is, in the care of our friend and faithful servant and counsellor, Sir Amyas Paulet, and there take into your keeping and do that by your command execution be done on her person, in the presence of yourselves and the said Sir Amyas Paulet, and of all the other officers of justice whom you command to be there: in the meantime we have for this end and this execution given warrant in such a way and manner, and in such a time and place, and by such persons, that you five, four, three, or two, find expedient in your discretion; notwithstanding all laws, statutes, and ordinances whatsoever, contrary to these presents, sealed with our Great Seal of England, which will serve for each of you, and all those who are present, or will make by your order anything pertaining to the execution aforesaid full and sufficient discharge for ever.

"Done and given in our house at Greenwich, the first day of February (10th February New Style), in the twenty-ninth year of our reign."

Mary listened to this reading with great calmness and great dignity; then, when it was ended, making the sign of the cross —

"Welcome," said she, "to all news which comes in the name of God! Thanks, Lord, for that You deign to put an end to all the ills You have seen me suffer for nineteen years and more."

"Madam," said the Earl of Kent, "have no ill-will towards us on account of your death; it was necessary to the peace of the State and the progress of the new religion.”

“So,” cried Mary with delight, “so I shall have the happiness of dying for the faith of my fathers; thus God deigns to grant me the glory of martyrdom. Thanks, God,” added she, joining her hands with less excitement but with more piety, “thanks that You have deigned to destine for me such an end, of which I was not worthy. That, O my God, is indeed a proof of Your love, and an assurance that You will receive me in the number of Your servants; for although this sentence had been notified to me, I was afraid, from the manner in which they have dealt with me for nineteen years, of not yet being so near as I am to such a happy end, thinking that your queen would not dare to lay a hand on me, who, by the grace of God, am a queen as she is, the daughter of a queen as she is, crowned as she is, her near relative, granddaughter of King Henry VII, and who has had the honour of being Queen of France, of which I am still Dowager; and this fear was so much the greater,” added she, laying her hand on a New Testament which was near her on the little table, “that, I swear on this holy book, I have never attempted, consented to, or even desired the death of my sister, the Queen of England.”

“Madam,” replied the Earl of Kent, taking a step towards her and pointing to the New Testament; “this book on which you have sworn is not genuine, since it is the papist version; consequently, your oath cannot be considered as any more genuine than the book on which it has been taken.”

“My lord,” answered the queen, “what you say may befit you, but not me, who well know that this book is the true and faithful version of the word of the Lord, a version made by a very wise divine, a very good man, and approved by the Church.”

“Madam,” the Earl of Kent returned, “your Grace stopped at what you were taught in your youth, without inquiry as to whether it was good or bad: it is not surprising, then, that you have remained in your error, for want of having heard anyone who could make known the truth to you; this is why, as your Grace has but a few hours longer to remain in this world, and consequently has no time to lose, with your permission we shall send for the Dean of Peterborough, the most learned man there is on the subject of religion, who, with his word, will prepare you for your salvation, which you risk to our great grief and that of our august queen, by all the papistical follies, abominations, and childish nonsense which keep Catholics away from the holy word of God and the knowledge of the truth.”

"You mistake, my lord," replied the queen gently, "if you have believed that I have grown up careless in the faith of my fathers, and without seriously occupying myself with a matter so important as religion. I have, on the contrary, spent my life with learned and wise men who taught me what one must learn on this subject, and I have sustained myself by reading their works, since the means of hearing them has been taken from me. Besides, never having doubted in my lifetime, doubt is not likely to seize me in my death-hour. And there is the Earl of Shrewsbury, here present, who will tell you that, since my arrival in England, I have, for an entire Lent, of which I repent, heard your wisest doctors, without their arguments having made any impression on my mind. It will be useless, then, my lord," she added, smiling, "to summon to one so hardened as I the Dean of Peterborough, learned as he is. The only thing I ask you in exchange, my lord, and for which I shall be grateful to you beyond expression, is that you will send me my almoner, whom you keep shut up in this house, to console me and prepare me for death, or, in his stead, another priest, be he who he may; if only a poor priest from a poor village, I being no harder to please than God, and not asking that he have knowledge, provided that he has faith."

"It is with regret, madam," replied the Earl of Kent, "that I find myself obliged to refuse your Grace's, request; but it would be contrary to our religion and our conscience, and we should be culpable in doing it; this is why we again offer you the venerable Dean of Peterborough, certain that your Grace will find more consolation and content in him than in any bishop, priest, or vicar of the Catholic faith."

"Thank you, my lord," said the queen again, "but I have nothing to-do with him, and as I have a conscience free of the crime for which I am about to die, with God's help, martyrdom will take the place of confession for me. And now, I will remind you, my lord, of what you told me yourself, that I have but a few hours to live; and these few hours, to profit me, should be passed in prayer and meditation, and not in idle disputes."

With these words, she rose, and, bowing to the earls, Sir Robert Beale, Amyas, and Drury, she indictated, by a gesture full of dignity, that she wished to be alone and in peace; then, as they prepared to go out —

"Apropos, my lords," said she, "for what o'clock should I make ready to die?"

“For eight o’clock to-morrow, madam,” answered the Earl of Shrewsbury, stammering.

“It is well,” said Mary; “but have you not some reply to make me, from my sister Elizabeth, relative to a letter which I wrote to her about a month ago?”

“And of what did this letter treat, if it please you, madam?” asked the Earl of Kent.

“Of my burial and my funeral ceremony, my lord: I asked to be interred in France, in the cathedral church of Rheims, near the late queen my mother.”

“That may not be, madam,” replied the Earl of Kent; “but do not trouble yourself as to all these details: the queen, my august mistress, will provide for them as is suitable. Has your grace anything else to ask us?”

“I would also like to know,” said Mary, “if my servants will be allowed to return, each to his own country, with the little that I can give him; which will hardly be enough, in any case, for the long service they have done me, and the long imprisonment they have borne on my account.”

“We have no instructions on that head, madam,” the Earl of Kent said, “but we think that an order will be given for this as for the other things, in accordance with your wishes. Is this all that your Grace has to say to us?”

“Yes, my lord,” replied the queen, bowing a second time, “and now you may withdraw.”

“One moment, my lords, in Heaven’s name, one moment!” cried the old physician, coming forward and throwing himself on his knees before the two earls.

“What do you want?” asked Lord Shrewsbury.

“To point out to you, my lords,” replied the aged Bourgoin, weeping, “that you have granted the queen but a very short time for such an important matter as this of her life. Reflect, my lords, what rank and degree she whom you have condemned has held among the princes of this earth, and consider if it is well and seemly to treat her as an ordinary condemned person of middling estate. And if not for the sake of this noble queen, my lords, do this for the sake of us her poor servants, who, having had the honour of living near her so long, cannot thus part from her so quickly and without preparation. Besides, my lords, think of it, a woman of her state and position ought to have some time in which to set in order her last affairs. And what will become of her, and of us, if before dying, our mistress has not time to regulate her jointure and her accounts and to put in order her papers and her title-deeds? She has services to reward and offices of piety to perform. She should not neglect the one or the other. Besides, we know that she will only concern herself with us, and, through this, my lords, neglect her own salvation. Grant her, then, a few more days, my lords; and as our mistress is too proud to ask of you such a favour, I ask you in all our names, and implore you not to refuse to poor servants a request which your august queen would certainly not refuse them, if they had the good fortune to be able to lay it at her feet."

"Is it then true, madam," Sir Robert Beale asked, "that you have not yet made a will?"

"I have not, sir," the queen answered.

"In that case, my lords," said Sir Robert Beale, turning to the two earls, "perhaps it would be a good thing to put it off for a day or two."

"Impossible, sir," replied the Earl of Shrewsbury: "the time is fixed, and we cannot change anything, even by a minute, now."

"Enough, Bourgoin, enough," said the queen; "rise, I command you."

Bourgoin obeyed, and the Earl of Shrewsbury, turning to Sir Amyas Paulet, who was behind him —

"Sir Amyas," said he, "we entrust this lady to your keeping: you will charge yourself with her, and keep her safe till our return."

With these words he went out, followed by the Earl of Kent, Sir Robert Beale, Amyas Paulet, and Drury, and the queen remained alone with her servants.

Then, turning to her women with as serene a countenance as if the event which had just taken place was of little importance —

"Well, Jeanne," said she, speaking to Kennedy, "have I not always told you, and was I not right, that at the bottom of their hearts they wanted to do this? and did I not see clearly through all their procedure the end they had in view, and know well enough that I was too great an obstacle to their false religion to be allowed to live? Come," continued she, "hasten supper now, that I may put my affairs in order". Then, seeing that instead of obeying her, her servants were weeping and lamenting, "My children," said she, with a sad smile, but without a tear in her eye, "it is no time for weeping, quite the contrary; for if you love me, you ought to rejoice that the Lord, in making me die for His cause, relieves me from the torments I have endured for nineteen years. As for me, I thank Him for allowing me to die for the glory of His faith and His Church. Let each have patience, then, and while the men prepare supper, we women will pray to God."

The men immediately went out, weeping and sobbing, and the queen and her women fell on their knees. When they had recited some prayers, Mary rose, and sending for all the money she had left, she counted it and divided it into portions, which she put into purses with the name of the destined recipient, in her handwriting, with the money.

At that moment, supper being served, she seated herself at table with her women as usual, the other servants standing or coming and going, her doctor waiting on her at table as he was accustomed since her steward had been taken from her. She ate no more nor less than usual, speaking, throughout supper, of the Earl of Kent, and of the way in which he betrayed himself with respect to religion, by his insisting on wanting to give the queen a pastor instead of a priest. "Happily," she added, laughing, "one more skilful than he was needed to change me". Meanwhile Bourgoin was weeping behind the queen, for he was thinking that he was serving her for the last time, and that she who was eating, talking, and laughing thus, next day at the same hour would be but a cold and insensible corpse.

When the meal was over, the queen sent for all her servants; then; before the table was cleared of anything, she poured out a cup of wine, rose and drank to their health, asking them if they would not drink to her salvation. Then she had a glass given to each one: all kneeled down, and all, says the account from which we borrow these details, drank, mingling their tears with the wine, and asking pardon of the queen for any wrongs they had done her. The queen granted it heartily, and asked them to do as much for her, and to forget her impatient ways, which she begged them to put down to her imprisonment. Then, having given them a long discourse, in which she explained to them their duties to God, and exhorted them to persevere in the Catholic faith, she begged them, after her death, to live together in peace and charity, forgetting all the petty quarrels and disputes which they had had among one another in the past.

This speech ended, the queen rose from table, and desired to go into her wardrobe-room, to see the clothes and jewels she wished to dispose of; but Bourgoin observed that it would be better to have all these separate objects brought into her chamber; that there would be a double advantage in this, she would be less tired for one thing, and the English would not see them for another. This last reason decided her, and while the servants were supping, she had brought into her ante-room, first of all, all her robes, and took the inventory from her wardrobe attendant, and began to write in the margin beside each item the name of the person it was to be given to. Directly, and as fast as she did it, that person to whom it was given took it and put it aside. As for the things which were too personal to her to be thus bestowed, she ordered that they should be sold, and that the purchase-money should be used for her servants' travelling expenses, when they returned to their own countries, well knowing how great the cost would be and that no one would have sufficient means. This memorandum finished, she signed it, and gave it as a discharge to her wardrobe attendant.

Then, that done, she went into her room, where had been brought her rings, her jewels, and her most valuable belongings; inspected them all, one after the other, down to the very least; and distributed them as she had done her robes, so that, present or absent, everyone had something. Then she furthermore gave, to her most faithful people, the jewels she intended for the king and queen of France, for the king her son, for the queen-mother, for Messieurs de Guise and de Lorraine, without forgetting in this distribution any prince or princess among her relatives. She desired, besides, that each should keep the things then in his care, giving her linen to the young lady who looked after it, her silk embroideries to her who took charge of them, her silver plate to her butler, and so on with the rest.

Then, as they were asking her for a discharge, "It is useless," said she; "you owe an account to me only, and to-morrow, therefore, you will no longer owe it to anyone"; but, as they pointed out that the king her son could claim from them, "You are right," said she; and she gave them what they asked.

That done, and having no hope left of being visited by her confessor, she wrote him this letter:

"I have been tormented all this day on account of my religion, and urged to receive the consolations of a heretic: you will learn, through Bourgoin and the others, that everything they could say on this matter has been useless, that I have faithfully made protestation of the faith in which I wish to die. I requested that you should be allowed to receive my confession and to give me the sacrament, which has been cruelly refused, as well as the removal of my body, and the power to make my will freely; so that I cannot write anything except through their hands, and with the good pleasure of their mistress. For want of seeing you, then, I confess to you my sins in general, as I should have done in particular, begging you, in God’s name, to watch and pray this night with me, for the remission of my sins, and to send me your absolution and forgiveness for all the wrongs I have done you. I shall try to see you in their presence, as they permitted it to my steward; and if it is allowed, before all, and on my knees, I shall ask your blessing. Send me the best prayers you know for this night and for to-morrow morning; for the time is short, and I have not the leisure to write; but be calm, I shall recommend you like the rest of my servants, and your benefices above all will be secured to you. Farewell, for I have not much more time. Send to me in writing everything you can find, best for my salvation, in prayers and exhortations, I send you my last little ring.”

Directly she had written this letter the queen began to make her will, and at a stroke, with her pen running on and almost without lifting it from the paper, she wrote two large sheets, containing several paragraphs, in which no one was forgotten, present as absent, distributing the little she had with scrupulous fairness, and still more according to need than according to service. The executors she chose were: the Duke of Guise, her first cousin; the Archbishop of Glasgow, her ambassador; the Bishop of Ross, her chaplain in chief; and M. du Ruysseau, her chancellor, all four certainly very worthy of the charge, the first from his authority; the two bishops by piety and conscience, and the last by his knowledge of affairs. Her will finished, she wrote this letter to the King of France:

SIR MY BROTHER-IN-LAW, — Having, by God’s permission and for my sins, I believe, thrown myself into the arms of this queen, my cousin, where I have had much to endure for more than twenty years, I am by her and by her Parliament finally condemned to death; and having asked for my papers, taken from me, to make my will, I have not been able to obtain anything to serve me, not even permission to write my last wishes freely, nor leave that after my death my body should be transported, as was my dearest desire, into your kingdom, where I had had the honour of being queen, your sister and your ally. To-day, after dinner, without more respect, my sentence has been declared to me, to be executed to-morrow, like a criminal, at eight o’clock in the morning. I have not the leisure to give you a full account of what has occurred; but if it please you to believe my doctor and these others my distressed servants, you will hear the truth, and that, thanks to God, I despise death, which I protest I receive innocent of every crime, even if I were their subject, which I never was. But my faith in the

Catholic religion and my claims to the crown of England are the real causes for my condemnation, and yet they will not allow me to say that it is for religion I die, for my religion kills theirs; and that is so true, that they have taken my chaplain from me, who, although a prisoner in the same castle, may not come either to console me, or to give me the holy sacrament of the eucharist; but, on the contrary, they have made me urgent entreaties to receive the consolations of their minister whom they have brought for this purpose. He who will bring you this letter, and the rest of my servants, who are your subjects for the most part, will bear you witness of the way in which I shall have performed my last act. Now it remains to me to implore you, as a most Christian king, as my brother-in-law, as my ancient ally, and one who has so often done me the honour to protest your friendship for me, to give proof of this friendship, in your virtue and your charity, by helping me in that of which I cannot without you discharge my conscience — that is to say, in rewarding my good distressed servants, by giving them their dues; then, in having prayers made to God for a queen who has been called most Christian, and who dies a Catholic and deprived of all her goods. As to my son, I commend him to you as much as he shall deserve, for I cannot answer for him; but as to my servants, I commend them with clasped hands. I have taken the liberty of sending you two rare stones good for the health, hoping that yours may be perfect during a long life; you will receive them as coming from your very affectionate sister-in-law, at the point of death and giving proof of her, good disposition towards you.

“I shall commend my servants to you in a memorandum, and will order you, for the good of my soul, for whose salvation it will be employed, to pay me a portion of what you owe me, if it please you, and I conjure you for the honour of Jesus, to whom I shall pray to-morrow at my death, that you leave me the wherewithal to found a mass and to perform the necessary charities.

“This Wednesday, two hours after midnight — Your affectionate and good sister, “MARY, R....”

Of all these recommendations, the will and the letters, the queen at once had copies made which she signed, so that, if some should be seized by the English, the others might reach their destination. Bourgoin pointed out to her that she was wrong to be in such a hurry to close them, and that perhaps in two or three hours she would remember that she had left something out. But the queen paid no attention, saying she was sure she had not forgotten anything, and that if she had, she had only time now to pray and to look to her conscience. So she shut up all the several articles in the drawers of a piece of furniture and gave the key to Bourgoin; then sending for a foot-bath, in which she stayed for about ten minutes, she lay down in bed, where she was not seen to sleep, but constantly to repeat prayers or to remain in meditation.

Towards four o'clock in the morning, the queen, who was accustomed, after evening prayers, to have the story of some male or female saint read aloud to her, did not wish to depart from this habit, and, after having hesitated among several for this solemn occasion, she chose the greatest sinner of all, the penitent thief, saying humbly —

"If, great sinner as he was, he has yet sinned less than I, I desire to beg of him, in remembrance of the passion of Jesus Christ; to, have pity on me in the hour of my death, as Our Lord had pity on him."

Then, when the reading was over, she had all her handkerchiefs brought, and chose the finest, which was of delicate cambric all embroidered in gold, to bandage her eyes with.

At daybreak, reflecting that she had only two hours to live, she rose and began dressing, but before she had finished, Bourgoin came into her room, and, afraid lest the absent servants might murmur against the queen, if by chance they were discontented at the will, and might accuse those who had been present of having taken away from their share to add to their own, he begged Mary to send for them all and to read it in their presence; to which Mary agreed, and consented to do so at once.

All the servants were then summoned, and the queen read her testament, saying that it was done of her own free, full and entire will, written and signed with her own hand, and that accordingly she begged those present to give all the help in their power in seeing it carried out without change or omission; then, having read it over, and having received a promise from all, she gave it to Bourgoin, charging him to send it to M. de Guise, her chief executor, and at the same time to forward her letters to the king and her principal papers and memorandums: after this, she had the casket brought in which she had put the purses which we mentioned before; she opened them one after another, and seeing by the ticket within for whom each was intended, she distributed them with her own hand, none of the recipients being aware of their contents. These gifts varied from twenty to three hundred crowns; and to these sums she added seven hundred livres for the poor, namely, two hundred for the poor of England and five hundred for the poor of France; then she gave to each man in her suite two rose nobles to be distributed in alms for her sake, and finally one hundred and fifty crowns to Bourgoin to be divided among them all when they should separate; and thus twenty-six or twenty-seven people had money legacies.

The queen performed all this with great composure and calmness, with no apparent change of countenance; so that it seemed as if she were only preparing for a journey or change of dwelling; then she again bade her servants farewell, consoling them and exhorting them to live in peace, all this while finishing dressing as well and as elegantly as she could.

Her toilet ended, the queen went from her reception-room to her ante-room, where there was an altar set up and arranged, at which, before he had been taken from her, her chaplain used to say mass; and kneeling on the steps, surrounded by all her servants, she began the communion prayers, and when they were ended, drawing from a golden box a host consecrated by Pius V, which she had always scrupulously preserved for the occasion of her death, she told Bourgoin to take it, and, as he was the senior, to take the priest’s place, old age being holy and sacred; and in this manner in spite of all the precautions taken to deprive her of it, the queen received the holy sacrament of the eucharist.

This pious ceremony ended, Bourgoin told the queen that in her will she had forgotten three people — Mesdemoiselles Beauregard, de Montbrun, and her chaplain. The queen was greatly astonished at this oversight, which was quite involuntary, and, taking back her will, she wrote her wishes with respect to them in the first empty margin; then she kneeled down again in prayer; but after a moment, as she suffered too much in this position, she rose, and Bourgoin having had brought her a little bread and wine, she ate and drank, and when she had finished, gave him her hand and thanked him for having been present to help her at her last meal as he was accustomed; and feeling stronger, she kneeled down and began to pray again.

Scarcely had she done so, than there was a knocking at the door: the queen understood what was required of her; but as she had not finished praying, she begged those who were come to fetch her to wait a moment, and in a few minutes’ she would be ready.

The Earls of Kent and Shrewsbury, remembering the resistance she had made when she had had to go down to the commissioners and appear before the lawyers, mounted some guards in the ante-room where they were waiting themselves, so that they could take her away by force if necessary, should she refuse to come willingly, or should her servants want to defend her; but it is untrue that the two barons entered her room, as some have said. They only set foot there once, on the occasion which we have related, when they came to apprise her of her sentence.

They waited some minutes, nevertheless, as the queen had begged them; then, about eight o'clock, they knocked again, accompanied by the guards; but to their great surprise the door was opened immediately, and they found Mary on her knees in prayer. Upon this, Sir Thomas Andrew, who was at the time sheriff of the county of Nottingham, entered alone, a white wand in his hand, and as everyone stayed on their knees praying, he crossed the room with a slow step and stood behind the queen: he waited a moment there, and as Mary Stuart did not seem to see him —

"Madam," said he, "the earls have sent me to you."

At these words the queen turned round, and at once rising in the middle of her prayer, "Let us go," she replied, and she made ready to follow him; then Bourgoin, taking the cross of black wood with an ivory Christ which was over the altar, said —

"Madam, would you not like to take this little cross?"

"Thank you for having reminded me," Mary answered; "I had intended to, but I forgot". Then, giving it to Annibal Stewart, her footman, that he might present it when she should ask for it, she began to move to the door, and on account of the great pain in her limbs, leaning on Bourgoin, who, as they drew near, suddenly let her go, saying —

"Madam, your Majesty knows if we love you, and all, such as we are, are ready to obey you, should you command us to die for you; but I, I have not the strength to lead you farther; besides, it is not becoming that we, who should be defending you to the last drop of our blood, should seem to be betraying you in giving you thus into the hands of these infamous English."

"You are right, Bourgoin," said the queen; "moreover, my death would be a sad sight for you, which I ought to spare your age and your friendship. Mr. Sheriff," added she, "call someone to support me, for you see that I cannot walk."

The sheriff bowed, and signed to two guards whom he had kept hidden behind the door to lend him assistance in case the queen should resist, to approach and support her; which they at once did; and Mary Stuart went on her way, preceded and followed by her servants weeping and wringing their hands. But at the second door other guards stopped them, telling them they must go no farther. They all cried out against such a prohibition: they said that for the nineteen years they had been shut up with the queen they had always accompanied her wherever she went; that it was frightful to deprive their mistress of their services at the last moment, and that such an order had doubtless been given because they wanted to practise some shocking cruelty on her, of which they desired no witnesses. Bourgoin, who was at their head, seeing that he could obtain nothing by threats or entreaties, asked to speak with the earls; but this claim was not allowed either, and as the servants wanted to pass by force, the soldiers repulsed them with blows of their arquebuses; then, raising her voice —

“It is wrong of you to prevent my servants following me,” said the queen, “and I begin to think, like them, that you have some ill designs upon me beyond my death.”

The sheriff replied, “Madam, four of your servants are chosen to follow you, and no more; when you have come down, they will be fetched, and will rejoin you.”

“What!” said the queen, “the four chosen persons cannot even follow me now?”

“The order is thus given by the earls,” answered the sheriff, “and, to my great regret, madam, I can do nothing.”

Then the queen turned to them, and taking the cross from Annibal Stewart, and in her other hand her book of Hours and her handkerchief, “My children,” said she, “this is one more grief to add to our other griefs; let us bear it like Christians, and offer this fresh sacrifice to God.”

At these words sobs and cries burst forth on all sides: the unhappy servants fell on their knees, and while some rolled on the ground, tearing their hair, others kissed her hands, her knees, and the hem of her gown, begging her forgiveness for every possible fault, calling her their mother and bidding her farewell. Finding, no doubt, that this scene was lasting too long, the sheriff made a sign, and the soldiers pushed the men and women back into the room and shut the door on them; still, fast as was the door, the queen none the less heard their cries and lamentations, which seemed, in spite of the guards, as if they would accompany her to the scaffold.

At the stair-head, the queen found Andrew Melville awaiting her: he was the Master of her Household, who had been secluded from her for some time, and who was at last permitted to see her once more to say farewell.

The queen, hastening her steps, approached him, and kneeling down to receive his blessing, which he gave her, weeping —

“Melville,” said she, without rising, and addressing him as “thou” for the first time, “as thou hast been an honest servant to me, be the same to my son: seek him out directly after my death, and tell him of it in every detail; tell him that I wish him well, and that I beseech God to send him His Holy Spirit.”

“Madam,” replied Melville, “this is certainly the saddest message with which a man can be charged: no matter, I shall faithfully fulfil it, I swear to you.”

“What sayest thou, Melville?” responded the queen, rising; “and what better news canst thou bear, on the contrary, than that I am delivered from all my ills? Tell him that he should rejoice, since the sufferings of Mary Stuart are at an end; tell him that I die a Catholic, constant in my religion, faithful to Scotland and France, and that I forgive those who put me to death. Tell him that I have always desired the union of England and Scotland; tell him, finally, that I have done nothing injurious to his kingdom, to his honour, or to his rights. And thus, good Melville, till we meet again in heaven.”

Then, leaning on the old man, whose face was bathed in tears, she descended the staircase, at the foot of which she found the two earls, Sir Henry Talbot, Lord Shrewsbury’s son, Amyas Paulet, Drue Drury, Robert Beale, and many gentlemen of the neighbourhood: the queen, advancing towards them without pride, but without humility, complained that her servants had been refused permission to follow her, and asked that it should be granted. The lords conferred together; and a moment after the Earl of Kent inquired which ones she desired to have, saying she might be allowed six. So the queen chose from among the men Bourgoin, Gordon, Gervais, and Didier; and from the women Jeanne Kennedy and Elspeth Curle, the ones she preferred to all, though the latter was sister to the secretary who had betrayed her. But here arose a fresh difficulty, the earls saying that this permission did not extend to women, women not being used to be present at such sights, and when they were, usually upsetting everyone with cries and lamentations, and, as soon as the decapitation was over, rushing to the scaffold to staunch the blood with their handkerchiefs — a most unseemly proceeding.

“My lords,” then said the queen, “I answer and promise for my servants, that they will not do any of the things your honours fear. Alas! poor people! they would be very glad to bid me farewell; and I hope that your mistress, being a maiden queen, and accordingly sensitive for the honour of women, has not given you such strict orders that you are unable to grant me the little I ask; so much the more,” added she in a profoundly mournful tone, “that my rank should be taken into consideration; for indeed I am your queen’s cousin, granddaughter of Henry VII, Queen Dowager of France and crowned Queen of Scotland.”

The lords consulted together for another moment, and granted her demands. Accordingly, two guards went up immediately to fetch the chosen individuals.

The queen then moved on to the great hall, leaning on two of Sir Amyas Paulet’s gentlemen, accompanied and followed by the earls and lords, the sheriff walking before her, and Andrew Melville bearing her train. Her dress, as carefully chosen as possible, as we have said, consisted of a coif of fine cambric, trimmed with lace, with a lace veil thrown back and falling to the ground behind. She wore a cloak of black stamped satin lined with black taffetas and trimmed in front with sable, with a long train and sleeves hanging to the ground; the buttons were of jet in the shape of acorns and surrounded with pearls, her collar in the Italian style; her doublet was of figured black satin, and underneath she wore stays, laced behind, in crimson satin, edged with velvet of the same colour; a gold cross hung by a pomander chain at her neck, and two rosaries at her girdle: it was thus she entered the great hall where the scaffold was erected.

It was a platform twelve feet wide, raised about two feet from the floor, surrounded with barriers and covered with black serge, and on it were a little chair, a cushion to kneel on, and a block also covered in black. Just as, having mounted the steps, she set foot on the fatal boards, the executioner came forward, and; asking forgiveness for the duty he was about to perform, kneeled, hiding behind him his axe. Mary saw it, however, and cried —

“Ah! I would rather have been beheaded in the French way, with a sword!...”

“It is not my fault, madam,” said the executioner, “if this last wish of your Majesty cannot be fulfilled; but, not having been instructed to bring a sword, and having found this axe here only, I am obliged to use it. Will that prevent your pardoning me, then?"

"I pardon you, my friend," said Mary, "and in proof of it, here is my hand to kiss."

The executioner put his lips to the queen's hand, rose and approached the chair. Mary sat down, and the Earls of Kent and Shrewsbury standing on her left, the sheriff and his officers before her, Amyas Paulet behind, and outside the barrier the lords, knights, and gentlemen, numbering nearly two hundred and fifty, Robert Beale for the second time read the warrant for execution, and as he was beginning the servants who had been fetched came into the hall and placed themselves behind the scaffold, the men mounted upon a bench put back against the wall, and the women kneeling in front of it; and a little spaniel, of which the queen was very fond, came quietly, as if he feared to be driven away, and lay down near his mistress.

The queen listened to the reading of the warrant without seeming to pay much attention, as if it had concerned someone else, and with a countenance as calm and even as joyous as if it had been a pardon and not a sentence of death; then, when Beale had ended, and having ended, cried in a loud voice, "God save Queen Elizabeth!" to which no one made any response, Mary signed herself with the cross, and, rising without any change of expression, and, on the contrary, lovelier than ever —

"My lords," said she, "I am a queen-born sovereign princess, and not subject to law, — a near relation of the Queen of England, and her rightful heir; for a long time I have been a prisoner in this country, I have suffered here much tribulation and many evils that no one had the right to inflict, and now, to crown all, I am about to lose my life. Well, my lords, bear witness that I die in the Catholic faith, thanking God for letting me die for His holy cause, and protesting, to-day as every day, in public as in private, that I have never plotted, consented to, nor desired the queen's death, nor any other thing against her person; but that, on the contrary, I have always loved her, and have always offered her good and reasonable conditions to put an end to the troubles of the kingdom and deliver me from my captivity, without my having ever been honoured with a reply from her; and all this, my lords, you well know. Finally, my enemies have attained their end, which was to put me to death: I do not pardon them less for it than I pardon all those who have attempted anything against me. After my, death, the authors of it will be known. But I die without accusing anyone, for fear the Lord should hear me and avenge me."

Upon this, whether he was afraid that such a speech by so great a queen should soften the assembly too much, or whether he found that all these words were making too much delay, the Dean of Peterborough placed himself before Mary, and, leaning on the barrier —

"Madam," he said, "my much honoured mistress has commanded me to come to you — " But at these words, Mary, turning and interrupting him:

"Mr. Dean," she answered in a loud voice, "I have nothing to do with you; I do not wish to hear you, and beg you to withdraw."

"Madam," said the dean, persisting in spite of this resolve expressed in such firm and precise terms, "you have but a moment longer: change your opinions, abjure your errors, and put your faith in Jesus Christ alone, that you may be saved through Him."

"Everything you can say is useless," replied the queen, "and you will gain nothing by it; be silent, then, I beg you, and let me die in peace."

And as she saw that he wanted to go on, she sat down on the other side of the chair and turned her back to him; but the dean immediately walked round the scaffold till he faced her again; then, as he was going to speak, the queen turned about once more, and sat as at first. Seeing which the Earl of Shrewsbury said —

"Madam, truly I despair that you are so attached to this folly of papacy: allow us, if it please you, to pray for you."

"My lord," the queen answered, "if you desire to pray for me, I thank you, for the intention is good; but I cannot join in your prayers, for we are not of the same religion."

The earls then called the dean, and while the queen, seated in her little chair, was praying in a low tone, he, kneeling on the scaffold steps, prayed aloud; and the whole assembly except the queen and her servants prayed after him; then, in the midst of her orison, which she said with her Agnus Dei round her neck, a crucifix in one hand, and her book of Hours in the other, she fell from her seat on to, her knees, praying aloud in Latin, whilst the others prayed in English, and when the others were silent, she continued in English in her turn, so that they could hear her, praying for the afflicted Church of Christ, for an end to the persecution of Catholics, and for the happiness of her son's reign; then she said, in accents full of faith and fervour, that she hoped to be saved by the merits of Jesus Christ, at the foot of whose cross she was going to shed her blood.

At these words the Earl of Kent could no longer contain himself, and without respect for the sanctity of the moment —

“Oh, madam,” said he, “put Jesus Christ in your heart, and reject all this rubbish of popish deceptions.”

But she, without listening, went on, praying the saints to intercede with God for her, and kissing the crucifix, she cried —

“Lord! Lord! receive me in Thy arms out stretched on the cross, and forgive me all my sins!”

Thereupon, — she being again seated in the chair, the Earl of Kent asked her if she had any confession to make; to which she replied that, not being guilty of anything, to confess would be to give herself, the lie.

“It is well,” the earl answered; “then, madam, prepare.”

The queen rose, and as the executioner approached to assist her disrobe —

“Allow me, my friend,” said she; “I know how to do it better than you, and am not accustomed to undress before so many spectators, nor to be served by such valets.”

And then, calling her two women, she began to unpin her coiffure, and as Jeanne Kennedy and Elspeth Curle, while performing this last service for their mistress, could not help weeping bitterly —

“Do not weep,” she said to them in French; “for I have promised and answered for you.”

With these words, she made the sign of the cross upon the forehead of each, kissed them, and recommended them to pray for her.

Then the queen began to undress, herself assisting, as she was wont to do when preparing for bed, and taking the gold cross from her neck, she wished to give it to Jeanne, saying to the executioner —

“My friend, I know that all I have upon me belongs to you; but this is not in your way: let me bestow it, if you please, on this young lady, and she will give you twice its value in money.”

But the executioner, hardly allowing her to finish, snatched it from her hands with —

“It is my right.”

The queen was not moved much by this brutality, and went on taking off her garments until she was simply in her petticoat.

Thus rid of all her garb, she again sat down, and Jeanne Kennedy approaching her, took from her pocket the handkerchief of gold-embroidered cambric which she had prepared the night before, and bound her eyes with it; which the earls, lords; and gentlemen looked upon with great surprise, it not being customary in England, and as she thought that she was to be beheaded in the French way — that is to say, seated in the chair — she held herself upright, motionless, and with her neck stiffened to make it easier for the executioner, who, for his part, not knowing how to proceed, was standing, without striking, axe in hand: at last the man laid his hand on the queen's head, and drawing her forward, made her fall on her knees: Mary then understood what was required of her, and feeling for the block with her hands, which were still holding her book of Hours and her crucifix, she laid her neck on it, her hands joined beneath her chin, that she might pray till the last moment: the executioner's assistant drew them away, for fear they should be cut off with her head; and as the queen was saying, "In manes teas, Domine," the executioner raised his axe, which was simply an axe far chopping wood, and struck the first blow, which hit too high, and piercing the skull, made the crucifix and the book fly from the condemned's hands by its violence, but which did not sever the head. However, stunned with the blow, the queen made no movement, which gave the executioner time to redouble it; but still the head did not fall, and a third stroke was necessary to detach a shred of flesh which held it to the shoulders.

At last, when the head was quite severed, the executioner held it up to show to the assembly, saying:

"God save Queen Elizabeth!"

"So perish all Her Majesty's enemies!" responded the Dean of Peterborough.

"Amen," said the Earl of Kent; but he was the only one: no other voice could respond, for all were choked with sobs.

At that moment the queen's headdress falling, disclosed her hair, cut very short, and as white as if she had been aged seventy: as to her face, it had so changed during her death-agony that no one would have recognised it had he not known it was hers. The spectators cried out aloud at this sign; for, frightful to see, the eyes were open, and the lids went on moving as if they would still pray, and this muscular movement lasted for more than a quarter of an hour after the head had been cut off.

The queen’s servants had rushed upon the scaffold, picking up the book of Hours and the crucifix as relics; and Jeanne Kennedy, remembering the little dog who had come to his mistress, looked about for him on all sides, seeking him and calling him, but she sought and called in vain. He had disappeared.

At that moment, as one of the executioners was untying the queen’s garters, which were of blue satin embroidered in silver, he saw the poor little animal, which had hidden in her petticoat, and which he was obliged to bring out by force; then, having escaped from his hands, it took refuge between the queen’s shoulders and her head, which the executioner had laid down near the trunk. Jeanne took him then, in spite of his howls, and carried him away, covered with blood; for everyone had just been ordered to leave the hall. Bourgoin and Gervais stayed behind, entreating Sir Amyas Paulet to let them take the queen’s heart, that they might carry it to France, as they had promised her; but they were harshly refused and pushed out of the hall, of which all the doors were closed, and there there remained only the executioner and the corpse.

Brantome relates that something infamous took place there!

CHAPTER X

Two hours after the execution, the body and the head were taken into the same hall in which Mary Stuart had appeared before the commissioners, set down on a table round which the judges had sat, and covered over with a black serge cloth; and there remained till three o'clock in the afternoon, when Waters the doctor from Stamford and the surgeon from Fotheringay village came to open and embalm them — an operation which they carried out under the eyes of Amyas Paulet and his soldiers, without any respect for the rank and sex of the poor corpse, which was thus exposed to the view of anyone who wanted to see it: it is true that this indignity did not fulfil its proposed aim; for a rumour spread about that the queen had swollen limbs and was dropsical, while, on the contrary, there was not one of the spectators but was obliged to confess that he had never seen the body of a young girl in the bloom of health purer and lovelier than that of Mary Stuart, dead of a violent death after nineteen years of suffering and captivity.

When the body was opened, the spleen was in its normal state, with the veins a little livid only, the lungs yellowish in places, and the brain one-sixth larger than is usual in persons of the same age and sex; thus everything promised a long life to her whose end had just been so cruelly hastened.

A report having been made of the above, the body was embalmed after a fashion, put in a leaden coffin and that in another of wood, which was left on the table till the first day of August — that is, for nearly five months — before anyone was allowed to come near it; and not only that, but the English having noticed that Mary Stuart's unhappy servants, who were still detained as prisoners, went to look at it through the keyhole, stopped that up in such a way that they could not even gaze at the coffin enclosing the body of her whom they had so greatly loved.

However, one hour after Mary Stuart's death, Henry Talbot, who had been present at it, set out at full speed for London, carrying to Elizabeth the account of her rival's death; but at the very first lines she read, Elizabeth, true to her character, cried out in grief and indignation, saying that her orders had been misunderstood, that there had been too great haste, and that all this was the fault of Davison the Secretary of State, to whom she had given the warrant to keep till she had made up her mind, but not to send to Fotheringay. Accordingly, Davison was sent to the Tower and condemned to pay a fine of ten thousand pounds sterling, for having deceived the queen. Meanwhile, amid all this grief, an embargo was laid on all vessels in all the ports of the realm, so that the news of the death should not reach abroad, especially France, except through skilful emissaries who could place the execution in the least unfavourable light for Elizabeth. At the same time the scandalous popular festivities which had marked the announcement of the sentence again celebrated the tidings of the execution. London was illuminated, bonfires lit, and the enthusiasm was such that the French Embassy was broken into and wood taken to revive the fires when they began to die down.

Crestfallen at this event, M. de Chateauneuf was still shut up at the Embassy, when, a fortnight later, he received an invitation from Elizabeth to visit her at the country house of the Archbishop of Canterbury. M. de Chateauneuf went thither with the firm resolve to say no word to her on what had happened; but as soon as she saw him, Elizabeth, dressed in black, rose, went to him, and, overwhelming him with kind attentions, told him that she was ready to place all the strength of her kingdom at Henry III's disposal to help him put down the League. Chateauneuf received all these offers with a cold and severe expression, without saying, as he had promised himself, a single word about the event which had put both the queen and himself into mourning. But, taking him by the hand, she drew him aside, and there, with deep sighs, said —

"Ah! sir, since I saw you the greatest misfortune which could befall me has happened: I mean the death of my good sister, the Queen of Scotland, of which I swear by God Himself, my soul and my salvation, that I am perfectly innocent. I had signed the order, it is true; but my counsellors have played me a trick for which I cannot calm myself; and I swear to God that if it were not for their long service I would have them beheaded. I have a woman's frame, sir, but in this woman's frame beats a man's heart."

Chateauneuf bowed without a response; but his letter to Henry III and Henry's answer prove that neither the one nor the other was the dupe of this female Tiberius.

Meanwhile, as we have said, the unfortunate servants were prisoners, and the poor body was in that great hall waiting for a royal interment. Things remained thus, Elizabeth said, to give her time to order a splendid funeral for her good sister Mary, but in reality because the queen dared not place in juxtaposition the secret and infamous death and the public and royal burial; then, was not time needed for the first reports which it pleased Elizabeth to spread to be credited before the truth should be known by the mouths of the servants? For the queen hoped that once this careless world had made up its mind about the death of the Queen of Scots, it would not take any further trouble to change it. Finally, it was only when the warders were as tired as the prisoners, that Elizabeth, having received a report stating that the ill-embalmed body could no longer be kept, at last ordered the funeral to take place.

Accordingly, after the 1st of August, tailors and dressmakers arrived at Fotheringay Castle, sent by Elizabeth, with cloth and black silk stuffs, to clothe in mourning all Mary's servants. But they refused, not having waited for the Queen of England's bounty, but having made their funeral garments at their own expense, immediately after their mistress's death. The tailors and dressmakers, however, none the less set so actively to work that on the 7th everything was finished.

Next day, at eight o'clock in the evening, a large chariot, drawn by four horses in mourning trappings, and covered with black velvet like the chariot, which was, besides, adorned with little streamers on which were embroidered the arms of Scotland, those of the queen, and the arms of Aragon, those of Darnley, stopped at the gate of Fotheringay Castle. It was followed by the herald king, accompanied by twenty gentlemen on horseback, with their servants and lackeys, all dressed in mourning, who, having alighted, mounted with his whole train into the room where the body lay, and had it brought down and put into the chariot with all possible respect, each of the spectators standing with bared head and in profound silence.

This visit caused a great stir among the prisoners, who debated a while whether they ought not to implore the favour of being allowed to follow their mistress's body, which they could not and should not let go alone thus; but just as they were about to ask permission to speak to the herald king, he entered the room where they were assembled, and told them that he was charged by his mistress, the august Queen of England, to give the Queen of Scotland the most honourable funeral he could; that, not wishing to fail in such a high undertaking, he had already made most of the preparations for the ceremony, which was to take place on the 10th of August, that is to say, two days later, — but that the leaden shell in which the body was enclosed being very heavy, it was better to move it beforehand, and that night, to where the grave was dug, than to await the day of the interment itself; that thus they might be easy, this burial of the shell being only a preparatory ceremony; but that if some of them would like to accompany the corpse, to see what was done with it, they were at liberty, and that those who stayed behind could follow the funeral pageant, Elizabeth's positive desire being that all, from first to last, should be present in the funeral procession. This assurance calmed the unfortunate prisoners, who deputed Bourgoin, Gervais, and six others to follow their mistress's body: these were Andrew Melville, Stewart, Gorjon, Howard, Lauder, and Nicholas Delamarre.

At ten o'clock at night they set out, walking behind the chariot, preceded by the herald, accompanied by men on foot, who carried torches to light the way, and followed by twenty gentlemen and their servants. In this manner, at two o'clock in the morning, they reached Peterborough, where there is a splendid cathedral built by an ancient Saxon king, and in which, on the left of the choir, was already interred good Queen Catharine of Aragon, wife of Henry VIII, and where was her tomb, still decked with a canopy bearing her arms.

On arriving, they found the cathedral all hung with black, with a dome erected in the middle of the choir, much in the way in which 'chapelles ardentes' are set up in France, except that there were no lighted candles round it. This dome was covered with black velvet, and overlaid with the arms of Scotland and Aragon, with streamers like those on the chariot yet again repeated. The state coffin was already set up under this dome: it was a bier, covered like the rest in black velvet fringed with silver, on which was a pillow of the same supporting a royal crown.

To the right of this dome, and in front of the burial-place of Queen Catharine of Aragon, Mary of Scotland's sepulchre had been dug: it was a grave of brick, arranged to be covered later with a slab or a marble tomb, and in which was to be deposited the coffin, which the Bishop of Peterborough, in his episcopal robes, but without his mitre, cross, or cope, was awaiting at the door, accompanied by his dean and several other clergy. The body was brought into the cathedral, without chant or prayer, and was let down into the tomb amid a profound silence. Directly it was placed there, the masons, who had stayed their hands, set to work again, closing the grave level with the floor, and only leaving an opening of about a foot and a half, through which could be seen what was within, and through which could be thrown on the coffin, as is customary at the obsequies of kings, the broken staves of the officers and the ensigns and banners with their arms. This nocturnal ceremony ended, Melville, Bourgoin, and the other deputies were taken to the bishop’s palace, where the persons appointed to take part in the funeral procession were to assemble, in number more than three hundred and fifty, all chosen, with the exception of the servants, from among the authorities, the nobility, and Protestant clergy.

The day following, Thursday, August the 9th, they began to hang the banqueting halls with rich and sumptuous stuffs, and that in the sight of Melville, Bourgoin, and the others, whom they had brought thither, less to be present at the interment of Queen Mary than to bear witness to the magnificence of Queen Elizabeth. But, as one may suppose, the unhappy prisoners were indifferent to this splendour, great and extraordinary as it was.

On Friday, August 10th, all the chosen persons assembled at the bishop’s palace: they ranged themselves in the appointed order, and turned their steps to the cathedral, which was close by. When they arrived there, they took the places assigned them in the choir, and the choristers immediately began to chant a funeral service in English and according to Protestant rites. At the first words of this service, when he saw it was not conducted by Catholic priests, Bourgoin left the cathedral, declaring that he would not be present at such sacrilege, and he was followed by all Mary’s servants, men and women, except Melville and Barbe Mowbray, who thought that whatever the tongue in which one prayed, that tongue was heard by the Lord. This exit created great scandal; but the bishop preached none the less.

The sermon ended, the herald king went to seek Bourgoin and his companions, who were walking in the cloisters, and told them that the almsgiving was about to begin, inviting them to take part in this ceremony; but they replied that being Catholics they could not make offerings at an altar of which they disapproved. So the herald king returned, much put out at the harmony of the assembly being disturbed by this dissent; but the alms-offering took place no less than the sermon. Then, as a last attempt, he sent to them again, to tell them that the service was quite over, and that accordingly they might return for the royal ceremonies, which belonged only to the religion of the dead; and this time they consented; but when they arrived, the staves were broken, and the banners thrown into the grave through the opening that the workmen had already closed.

Then, in the same order in which it had come, the procession returned to the palace, where a splendid funeral repast had been prepared. By a strange contradiction, Elizabeth, who, having punished the living woman as a criminal, had just treated the dead woman as a queen, had also wished that the honours of the funeral banquet should be for the servants, so long forgotten by her. But, as one can imagine, these ill accommodated themselves to that intention, did not seem astonished at this luxury nor rejoiced at this good cheer, but, on the contrary, drowned their bread and wine in tears, without otherwise responding to the questions put to them or the honours granted them. And as soon as the repast was ended, the poor servants left Peterborough and took the road back to Fotheringay, where they heard that they were free at last to withdraw whither they would. They did not need to be told twice; for they lived in perpetual fear, not considering their lives safe so long as they remained in England. They therefore immediately collected all their belongings, each taking his own, and thus went out of Fotheringay Castle on foot, Monday, 13th August, 1587.

Bourgoin went last: having reached the farther side of the drawbridge, he turned, and, Christian as he was, unable to forgive Elizabeth, not for his own sufferings, but for his mistress's, he faced about to those regicide walls, and, with hands outstretched to them, said in a loud and threatening voice, those words of David: “Let vengeance for the blood of Thy servants, which has been shed, O Lord God, be acceptable in Thy sight”. The old man's curse was heard, and inflexible history is burdened with Elizabeth's punishment.

We said that the executioner's axe, in striking Mary Stuart's head, had caused the crucifix and the book of Hours which she was holding to fly from her hands. We also said that the two relics had been picked up by people in her following. We are not aware of what became of the crucifix, but the book of Hours is in the royal library, where those curious about these kinds of historical souvenirs can see it: two certificates inscribed on one of the blank leaves of the volume demonstrate its authenticity. These are they:

FIRST CERTIFICATE

“We the undersigned Vicar Superior of the strict observance of the Order of Cluny, certify that this book has been entrusted to us by order of the defunct Dom Michel Nardin, a professed religious priest of our said observance, deceased in our college of Saint-Martial of Avignon, March 28th, 1723, aged about eighty years, of which he has spent about thirty among us, having lived very religiously: he was a German by birth, and had served as an officer in the army a long time.

“He entered Cluny, and made his profession there, much detached from all this world’s goods and honours; he only kept, with his superior’s permission, this book, which he knew had been in use with Mary Stuart, Queen of England and Scotland, to the end of her life.

“Before dying and being parted from his brethren, he requested that, to be safely remitted to us, it should be sent us by mail, sealed. Just as we have received it, we have begged M. L’abbe Bignon, councillor of state and king’s librarian, to accept this precious relic of the piety of a Queen of England, and of a German officer of her religion as well as of ours.

“(Signed)BROTHER GERARD PONCET, “Vicar-General Superior.”

SECOND CERTIFICATE

“We, Jean-Paul Bignon, king’s librarian, are very happy to have an opportunity of exhibiting our zeal, in placing the said manuscript in His Majesty’s library.

“8th July, 1724.”

“(Signed) JEAN-PAUL BIGNAN.”

This manuscript, on which was fixed the last gaze of the Queen of Scotland, is a duodecimo, written in the Gothic character and containing Latin prayers; it is adorned with miniatures set off with gold, representing devotional subjects, stories from sacred history, or from the lives of saints and martyrs. Every page is encircled with arabesques mingled with garlands of fruit and flowers, amid which spring up grotesque figures of men and animals.

As to the binding, worn now, or perhaps even then, to the woof, it is in black velvet, of which the flat covers are adorned in the centre with an enamelled pansy, in a silver setting surrounded by a wreath, to which are diagonally attached from one corner of the cover to the other, two twisted silver-gilt knotted cords, finished by a tuft at the two ends.

KARL-LUDWIG SAND — 1819

On the 22nd of March, 1819, about nine o’clock in the morning, a young man, some twenty-three or twenty-four years old, wearing the dress of a German student, which consists of a short frock-coat with silk braiding, tight trousers, and high boots, paused upon a little eminence that stands upon the road between Kaiserthal and Mannheim, at about three-quarters of the distance from the former town, and commands a view of the latter. Mannheim is seen rising calm and smiling amid gardens which once were ramparts, and which now surround and embrace it like a girdle of foliage and flowers. Having reached this spot, he lifted his cap, above the peak of which were embroidered three interlaced oak leaves in silver, and uncovering his brow, stood bareheaded for a moment to feel the fresh air that rose from the valley of the Neckar. At first sight his irregular features produced a strange impression; but before long the pallor of his face, deeply marked by smallpox, the infinite gentleness of his eyes, and the elegant framework of his long and flowing black hair, which grew in an admirable curve around a broad, high forehead, attracted towards him that emotion of sad sympathy to which we yield without inquiring its reason or dreaming of resistance. Though it was still early, he seemed already to have come some distance, for his boots were covered with dust; but no doubt he was nearing his destination, for, letting his cap drop, and hooking into his belt his long pipe, that inseparable companion of the German Borsch, he drew from his pocket a little note-book, and wrote in it with a pencil: “Left Wanheim at five in the morning, came in sight of Mannheim at a quarter-past nine.” Then putting his note-book back into his pocket, he stood motionless for a moment, his lips moving as though in mental prayer, picked up his hat, and walked on again with a firm step towards Mannheim.

This young Student was Karl-Ludwig Sand, who was coming from Jena, by way of Frankfort aid Darmstadt, in order to assassinate Kotzebue.

Now, as we are about to set before our readers one of those terrible actions for the true appreciation of which the conscience is the sole judge, they must allow us to make them fully acquainted with him whom kings regarded as an assassin, judges as a fanatic, and the youth of Germany as a hero. Charles Louis Sand was born on the 5th of October, 1795, at

Wonsiedel, in the Fichtel Wald; he was the youngest son of Godfrey Christopher Sand, first president and councillor of justice to the King of Prussia, and of Dorothea Jane Wilheltmina Schapf, his wife. Besides two elder brothers, George, who entered upon a commercial career at St, Gall, and Fritz, who was an advocate in the Berlin court of appeal, he had an elder sister named Caroline, and a younger sister called Julia.

While still in the cradle he had been attacked by smallpox of the most malignant type. The virus having spread through all his body, laid bare his ribs, and almost ate away his skull. For several months he lay between life and death; but life at last gained the upper hand. He remained weak and sickly, however, up to his seventh year, at which time a brain fever attacked him; and again put his life in danger. As a compensation, however, this fever, when it left him, seemed to carry away with it all vestiges of his former illness. From that moment his health and strength came into existence; but during these two long illnesses his education had remained very backward, and it was not until the age of eight that he could begin his elementary studies; moreover, his physical sufferings having retarded his intellectual development, he needed to work twice as hard as others to reach the same result.

Seeing the efforts that young Sand made, even while still quite a child, to conquer the defects of his organisation, Professor Salfranck, a learned and distinguished man, rector of the Hof gymnasium [college], conceived such an affection for him, that when, at a later time, he was appointed director of the gymnasium at Ratisbon, he could not part from his pupil, and took him with him. In this town, and at the age of eleven years, he gave the first proof of his courage and humanity. One day, when he was walking with some young friends, he heard cries for help, and ran in that direction: a little boy, eight or nine years old, had just fallen into a pond. Sand immediately, without regarding his best clothes, of which, however, he was very proud, sprang into the water, and, after unheard-of efforts for a child of his age, succeeded in bringing the drowning boy to land.

At the age of twelve or thirteen, Sand, who had become more active, skilful, and determined than many of his elders, often amused himself by giving battle to the lads of the town and of the neighbouring villages. The theatre of these childish conflicts, which in their pale innocence reflected the great battles that were at that time steeping Germany in blood, was generally a plain extending from the town of Wonsiedel to the mountain of

St. Catherine, which had ruins at its top, and amid the ruins a tower in excellent preservation. Sand, who was one of the most eager fighters, seeing that his side had several times been defeated on account of its numerical inferiority, resolved, in order to make up for this drawback, to fortify the tower of St. Catherine, and to retire into it at the next battle if its issue proved unfavourable to him. He communicated this plan to his companions, who received it with enthusiasm. A week was spent, accordingly, in collecting all possible weapons of defence in the tower and in repairing its doors and stairs. These preparations were made so secretly that the army of the enemy had no knowledge of them.

Sunday came: the holidays were the days of battle. Whether because the boys were ashamed of having been beaten last time, or for some other reason, the band to which Sand belonged was even weaker than usual. Sure, however, of a means of retreat, he accepted battle, notwithstanding. The struggle was not a long one; the one party was too weak in numbers to make a prolonged resistance, and began to retire in the best order that could be maintained to St. Catherine's tower, which was reached before much damage had been felt. Having arrived there, some of the combatants ascended to the ramparts, and while the others defended themselves at the foot of the wall, began to shower stones and pebbles upon the conquerors. The latter, surprised at the new method of defence which was now for the first time adopted, retreated a little; the rest of the defenders took advantage of the moment to retire into the fortress and shut the door. Great was the astonishment an the part of the besiegers: they had always seen that door broken down, and lo! all at once it was presenting to them a barrier which preserved the besieged from their blows. Three or four went off to find instruments with which to break it down and meanwhile the rest of the attacking farce kept the garrison blockaded.

At the end of half an hour the messengers returned not only with levers and picks, but also with a considerable reinforcement composed of lads from, the village to which they had been to fetch tools.

Then began the assault: Sand and his companions defended themselves desperately; but it was soon evident that, unless help came, the garrison would be forced to capitulate. It was proposed that they should draw lots, and that one of the besieged should be chosen, who in spite of the danger should leave the tower, make his way as best he might through the enemy's army, and go to summon the other lads of Wonsiedel, who had faintheartedly remained at home. The tale of the peril in which their Comrades actually were, the disgrace of a surrender, which would fall upon all of them, would no doubt overcome their indolence and induce them to make a diversion that would allow the garrison to attempt sortie. This suggestion was adopted; but instead of leaving the decision to chance, Sand proposed himself as the messenger. As everybody knew his courage, his skill, and his lightness of foot, the proposition was unanimously accepted, and the new Decius prepared to execute his act of devotion. The deed was not free from danger: there were but two means of egress, one by way of the door, which would lead to the fugitive's falling immediately into the hands of the enemy; the other by jumping from a rampart so high that the enemy had not set a guard there. Sand without a moment's hesitation went to the rampart, where, always religious, even in his childish pleasures, he made a short prayer; then, without fear, without hesitation, with a confidence that was almost superhuman, he sprang to the ground: the distance was twenty-two feet. Sand flew instantly to Wonsiedel, and reached it, although the enemy had despatched their best runners in pursuit. Then the garrison, seeing the success of their enterprise, took fresh courage, and united their efforts against the besiegers, hoping everything from Sand's eloquence, which gave him a great influence over his young companions. And, indeed, in half an hour he was seen reappearing at the head of some thirty boys of his own age, armed with slings and crossbows. The besiegers, on the point of being attacked before and behind, recognised the disadvantage of their position and retreated. The victory remained with Sand's party, and all the honours of the day were his.

We have related this anecdote in detail, that our readers may understand from the character of the child what was that of the man. Besides, we shall see him develop, always calm and superior amid small events as amid large ones.

About the same time Sand escaped almost miraculously from two dangers. One day a hod full of plaster fell from a scaffold and broke at his feet. Another day the Price of Coburg, who during the King of Prussia's stay at the baths of Alexander, was living in the house of Sand's parents, was galloping home with four horses when he came suddenly upon young Karl in a gateway; he could not escape either on the right or the left, without running the risk of being crushed between the wall and the wheels, and the coachman could not, when going at such a pace, hold in his horses:

Sand flung himself on his face, and the carriage passed over him without his receiving so much as a single scratch either from the horses or the wheels. From that moment many people regarded him as predestined, and said that the hand of God was upon him.

Meanwhile political events were developing themselves around the boy, and their seriousness made him a man before the age of manhood. Napoleon weighed upon Germany like another Sennacherib. Staps had tried to play the part of Mutius Scaevola, and had died a martyr. Sand was at Hof at that time, and was a student of the gymnasium of which his good tutor Salfranck was the head. He learned that the man whom he regarded as the antichrist was to come and review the troops in that town; he left it at once and went home to his parents, who asked him for what reason he had left the gymnasium.

"Because I could not have been in the same town with Napoleon," he answered, "without trying to kill him, and I do not feel my hand strong enough for that yet."

This happened in 1809; Sand was fourteen years old. Peace, which was signed an the 15th of October, gave Germany some respite, and allowed the young fanatic to resume his studies without being distracted by political considerations; but in 1811 he was occupied by them again, when he learned that the gymnasium was to be dissolved and its place taken by a primary school. To this the rector Salfranck was appointed as a teacher, but instead of the thousand florins which his former appointment brought him, the new one was worth only five hundred. Karl could not remain in a primary school where he could not continue his education; he wrote to his mother to announce this event and to tell her with what equanimity the old German philosopher had borne it. Here is the answer of Sand's mother; it will serve to show the character of the woman whose mighty heart never belied itself in the midst of the severest suffering; the answer bears the stamp of that German mysticism of which we have no idea in France: —

"MY DEAR KARL, — You could not have given me a more grievous piece of news than that of the event which has just fallen upon your tutor and father by adoption; nevertheless, terrible though it may be, do not doubt that he will resign himself to it, in order to give to the virtue of his pupils a great example of that submission which every subject owes to the king wham God has set over him. Furthermore, be well assured that in this world there is no other upright and well calculated policy than that which grows out of the old precept, ‘Honour God, be just and fear not.’ And reflect also that when injustice against the worthy becomes crying, the public voice makes itself heard, and uplifts those who are cast down.

“But if, contrary to all probability, this did not happen, — if God should impose this sublime probation upon the virtue of our friend, if the world were to disown him and Providence were to became to that, degree his debtor, — yet in that case there are, believe me, supreme compensations: all the things and all the events that occur around us and that act upon us are but machines set in motion by a Higher Hand, so as to complete our education for a higher world, in which alone we shall take our true place. Apply yourself, therefore, my dear child, to watch over yourself unceasingly and always, so that you may not take great and fine isolated actions for real virtue, and may be ready every moment to do all that your duty may require of you. Fundamentally nothing is great, you see, and nothing small, when things are, looked at apart from one another, and it is only the putting of things together that produces the unity of evil or of good.

“Moreover, God only sends the trial to the heart where He has put strength, and the manner in which you tell me that your master has borne the misfortune that has befallen him is a fresh proof of this great and eternal truth. You must form yourself upon him, my dear child, and if you are obliged to leave Hof for Bamberg you must resign yourself to it courageously. Man has three educations: that which he receives from his parents, that which circumstances impose upon him, and lastly that which he gives himself; if that misfortune should occur, pray to God that you may yourself worthily complete that last education, the most important of all.

“I will give you as an example the life and conduct of my father, of whom you have not heard very much, for he died before you were born, but whose mind and likeness are reproduced in you only among all your brothers and sisters. The disastrous fire which reduced his native town to ashes destroyed his fortune and that of his relatives; grief at having lost everything — for the fire broke out in the next house to his — cost his father his life; and while his mother, who for six years had been stretched an a bed of pain, where horrible convulsions held her fast, supported her three little girls by the needlework that she did in the intervals of suffering, he went as a mere clerk into one of the leading mercantile houses of Augsburg, where his lively and yet even temper made him welcome; there he learned a calling, for which, however, he was not naturally adapted, and came back to the home of his birth with a pure and stainless heart, in order to be the support of his mother and his sisters.

“A man can do much when he wishes to do much: join your efforts to my prayers, and leave the rest in the hands of God.”

The prediction of this Puritan woman was fulfilled: a little time afterwards rector Salfranck was appointed professor at Richembourg, whither Sand followed him; it was there that the events of 1813 found him. In the month of March he wrote to his mother: —

“I can scarcely, dear mother, express to you how calm and happy I begin to feel since I am permitted to believe in the enfranchisement of my country, of which I hear on every side as being so near at hand, — of that country which, in my faith in God, I see beforehand free and mighty, that country for whose happiness I would undergo the greatest sufferings, and even death. Take strength for this crisis. If by chance it should reach our good province, lift your eyes to the Almighty, then carry them back to beautiful rich nature. The goodness of God which preserved and protected so many men during the disastrous Thirty Years’ War can do and will do now what it could and did then. As for me, I believe and hope.”

Leipzig came to justify Sand’s presentiments; then the year 1814 arrived, and he thought Germany free.

On the 10th of December in the same year he left Richembourg with this certificate from his master: —

“Karl Sand belongs to the small number of those elect young men who are distinguished at once by the gifts of the mind and the faculties of the soul; in application and work he surpasses all his fellow-students, and this fact explains his rapid progress in all the philosophical and philological sciences; in mathematics only there are still some further studies which he might pursue. The most affectionate wishes of his teacher follow him on his departure.

“J. A. KEYN, “Rector, and master of the first class. “Richembourg, Sept. 15, 1814”

But it was really the parents of Sand, and in particular his mother, who had prepared the fertile soil in which his teachers had sowed the seeds of learning; Sand knew this well, for at the moment of setting out for the university of Tubingen, where he was about to complete the theological studies necessary for becoming a pastor, as he desired to do, he wrote to them: —

“I confess that, like all my brothers and sisters, I owe to you that beautiful and great part of my education which I have seen to be lacking to most of those around me. Heaven alone can reward you by a conviction of having so nobly and grandly fulfilled your parental duties, amid many others.”

After having paid a visit to his brother at St. Gall, Sand reached Tubingen, to which he had been principally attracted by the reputation of Eschenmayer; he spent that winter quietly, and no other incident befell than his admission into an association of Burschen, called the Teutonic; then came tester of 1815, and with it the terrible news that Napoleon had landed in the Gulf of Juan. Immediately all the youth of Germany able to bear arms gathered once more around the banners of 1813 and 1814. Sand followed the general example; but the action, which in others was an effect of enthusiasm, was in him the result of calm and deliberate resolution. He wrote to Wonsiedel on this occasion: —

“April 22, 1813

“MY DEAR PARENTS, — Until now you have found me submissive to your parental lessons and to the advice of my excellent masters; until now I have made efforts to render myself worthy of the education that God has sent me through you, and have applied myself to become capable of spreading the word of the Lord through my native land; and for this reason I can to-day declare to you sincerely the decision that I lave taken, assured that as tender and affectionate parents you will calm yourselves, and as German parents and patriots you will rather praise my resolution than seek to turn me from it.

“The country calls once more for help, and this time the call is addressed to me, too, for now I have courage and strength. It cast me a great in ward struggle, believe me, to abstain when in 1813 she gave her first cry, and only the conviction held me back that thousands of others were then fighting and conquering for Germany, while I had to live far the peaceful calling to which I was destined. Now it is a question of preserving our newly re-established liberty, which in so many places has already brought in so rich a harvest. The all-powerful and merciful Lord reserves for us this great trial, which will certainly be the last; it is for us, therefore, to show that we are worthy of the supreme gift which He has given us, and capable of upholding it with strength and firmness.

“The danger of the country has never been so great as it is now, that is why, among the youth of Germany, the strong should support the wavering, that all may rise together. Our brave brothers in the north are already assembling from all parts under their banners; the State of Wurtemburg is, proclaiming a general levy, and volunteers are coming in from every quarter, asking to die for their country. I consider it my duty, too, to fight for my country and for all the dear ones whom I love. If I were not profoundly convinced of this truth, I should not communicate my resolution to you; but my family is one that has a really German heart, and that would consider me as a coward and an unworthy son if I did not follow this impulse. I certainly feel the greatness of the sacrifice; it costs me something, believe me, to leave my beautiful studies and go to put myself under the orders of vulgar, uneducated people, but this only increases my courage in going to secure the liberty of my brothers; moreover, when once that liberty is secured, if God deigns to allow, I will return to carry them His word.

“I take leave, therefore, for a time of you, my most worthy parents, of my brothers, my sisters, and all who are dear to me. As, after mature deliberation, it seems the most suitable thing for me to serve with the Bavarians. I shall get myself enrolled, for as long as the war may last, with a company of that nation. Farewell, then; live happily; far away from you as I shall be, I shall follow your pious exhortations. In this new track I shall still I hope, remain pure before God, and I shall always try to walk in the path that rises above the things of earth and leads to those of heaven, and perhaps in this career the bliss of saving some souls from their fall may be reserved for me.

“Your dear image will always be about me; I will always have the Lord before my eyes and in my heart, so that I may endure joyfully the pains and fatigues of this holy war. Include me in your Prayers; God will send you the hope of better times to help you in bearing the unhappy time in which we now are. We cannot see one another again soon, unless we conquer; and if we should be conquered (which God forbid!), then my last wish, which I pray you, I conjure you, to fulfil, my last and supreme wish would be that you, my dear and deserving German relatives, should leave an enslaved country for some other not yet under the yoke.

“But why should we thus sadden one another’s hearts? Is not our cause just and holy, and is not God just and holy? How then should we not be victors? You see that sometimes I doubt, so, in your letters, which I am impatiently expecting, have pity on me and do not alarm my soul, far in any case we shall meet again in another country, and that one will always be free and happy.

"I am, until death, your dutiful and grateful son, "KARL SAND."

These two lines of Korner's were written as a postscript:

"Perchance above our foeman lying dead
We may behold the star of liberty."

With this farewell to his parents, and with Korner's poems on his lips, Sand gave up his books, and on the 10th of May we find him in arms among the volunteer chasseurs enrolled under the command of Major Falkenhausen, who was at that time at Mannheim; here he found his second brother, who had preceded him, and they underwent all their drill together.

Though Sand was not accustomed to great bodily fatigues, he endured those of the campaign with surprising strength, refusing all the alleviations that his superiors tried to offer him; for he would allow no one to outdo him in the trouble that he took for the good of the country. On the march he invariably shared: anything that he possessed fraternally with his comrades, helping those who were weaker than himself to carry their burdens, and, at once priest and soldier, sustaining them by his words when he was powerless to do anything more.

On the 18th of June, at eight o'clock in the evening, he arrived upon the field of battle at Waterloo, On the 14th of July he entered Paris.

On the 18th of December, 1815, Karl Sand and his brother were back at Wonsiedel, to the great joy of their family. He spent the Christmas holidays and the end of the year with them, but his ardour for his new vacation did not allow him to remain longer, and an the 7th of January he reached Erlangen. Then, to make up for lost time, he resolved to subject his day to fixed and uniform rules, and to write down every evening what he had done since the morning. It is by the help of this journal that we are able to follow the young enthusiast, not only in all the actions of his life, but also in all the thoughts of his mind and all the hesitations of his conscience. In it we find his whole self, simple to naivete, enthusiastic to madness, gentle even to weakness towards others, severe even to asceticism towards himself. One of his great griefs was the expense that his education occasioned to his parents, and every useless and costly pleasure left a remorse in his heart. Thus, on the 9th of February 1816, he wrote: —

“I meant to go and visit my parents. Accordingly I went to the ‘Commers-haus’, and there I was much amused. N. and T. began upon me with the everlasting jokes about Wonsiedel; that went on until eleven o’clock. But afterwards N. and T. began to torment me to go to the wine-shop; I refused as long as I could. But as, at last, they seemed to think that it was from contempt of them that I would not go and drink a glass of Rhine wine with them, I did not dare resist longer. Unfortunately, they did not stop at Braunberger; and while my glass was still half full, N. ordered a bottle of champagne. When the first had disappeared, T. ordered a second; then, even before this second battle was drunk, both of them ordered a third in my name and in spite of me. I returned home quite giddy, and threw myself on the sofa, where I slept for about an hour, and only went to bed afterwards.

“Thus passed this shameful day, in which I have not thought enough of my kind and worthy parents, who are leading a poor and hard life, and in which I suffered myself to be led away by the example of people who have money into spending four florins — an expenditure which was useless, and which would have kept the whole family for two days. Pardon me, my God, pardon me, I beseech Thee, and receive the vow that I make never to fall into the same fault again. In future I will live even more abstemiously than I usually do, so as to repair the fatal traces in my poor cash-box of my extravagance, and not to be obliged to ask money of my mother before the day when she thinks of sending me some herself.”

Then, at the very time when the poor young man reproaches himself as if with a crime with having spent four florins, one of his cousins, a widow, dies and leaves three orphan children. He runs immediately to carry the first consolations to the unhappy little creatures, entreats his mother to take charge of the youngest, and overjoyed at her answer, thanks her thus: —

“Far the very keen joy that you have given me by your letter, and for the very dear tone in which your soul speaks to me, bless you, O my mother! As I might have hoped and been sure, you have taken little Julius, and that fills me afresh with the deepest gratitude towards you, the rather that, in my constant trust in your goodness, I had already in her lifetime given our good little cousin the promise that you are fulfilling for me after her death.”

About March, Sand, though he did not fall ill, had an indisposition that obliged him to go and take the waters; his mother happened at the time to be at the ironworks of Redwitz, same twelve or fifteen miles from Wonsiedel, where the mineral springs are found. Sand established himself there with his mother, and notwithstanding his desire to avoid interrupting his work, the time taken up by baths, by invitations to dinners, and even by the walks which his health required, disturbed the regularity of his usual existence and awakened his remorse. Thus we find these lines written in his journal for April 13th:

"Life, without some high aim towards which all thoughts and actions tend, is an empty desert: my day yesterday is a proof of this; I spent it with my own people, and that, of course, was a great pleasure to me; but how did I spend it? In continual eating, so that when I wanted to work I could do nothing worth doing. Full of indolence and slackness, I dragged myself into the company of two or three sets of people, and came from them in the same state of mind as I went to them."

Far these expeditions Sand made use of a little chestnut horse which belonged to his brother, and of which he was very fond. This little horse had been bought with great difficulty; for, as we have said, the whole family was poor. The following note, in relation to the animal, will give an idea of Sand's simplicity of heart: —

"19th April "To-day I have been very happy at the ironworks, and very industrious beside my kind mother. In the evening I came home on the little chestnut. Since the day before yesterday, when he got a strain and hurt his foot, he has been very restive and very touchy, and when he got home he refused his food. I thought at first that he did not fancy his fodder, and gave him some pieces of sugar and sticks of cinnamon, which he likes very much; he tasted them, but would not eat them. The poor little beast seems to have same other internal indisposition besides his injured foot. If by ill luck he were to become foundered or ill, everybody, even my parents, would throw the blame on me, and yet I have been very careful and considerate of him. My God, my Lord, Thou who canst do things both great and small, remove from me this misfortune, and let him recover as quickly as possible. If, however, Thou host willed otherwise, and if this fresh trouble is to fall upon us, I will try to bear it with courage, and as the expiation of same sin. Meanwhile, O my Gad, I leave this matter in Thy hands, as I leave my life and my soul."

On the 20th of April he wrote: — "The little horse is well; God has helped me."

German manners and customs are so different from ours, and contrasts occur so frequently in the same man, on the other side of the Rhine, that anything less than all the quotations which we have given would have been insufficient to place before our readers a true idea of that character made up of artlessness and reason, childishness and strength, depression and enthusiasm, material details and poetic ideas, which renders Sand a man incomprehensible to us. We will now continue the portrait, which still wants a few finishing touches.

When he returned to Erlangen, after the completion of his “cure,” Sand read Faust far the first time. At first he was amazed at that work, which seemed to him an orgy of genius; then, when he had entirely finished it, he reconsidered his first impression, and wrote: —

“4th May

“Oh, horrible struggle of man and devil! What Mephistopheles is in me I feel far the first time in this hour, and I feel it, O God, with consternation!

“About eleven at night I finished reading the tragedy, and I felt and saw the fiend in myself, so that by midnight, amid my tears and despair, I was at last frightened at myself.”

Sand was falling by degrees into a deep melancholy, from which nothing could rouse him except his desire to purify and preach morality to the students around him. To anyone who knows university life such a task will seem superhuman. Sand, however, was not discouraged, and if he could not gain an influence over everyone, he at least succeeded in forming around him a considerable circle of the most intelligent and the best; nevertheless, in the midst of these apostolic labours strange longings for death would overcome him; he seemed to recall heaven and want to return to it; he called these temptations “homesickness for the soul’s country.”

His favourite authors were Lessing, Schiller, Herder, and Goethe; after re-reading the two last for the twentieth time, this is what he wrote:

“Good and evil touch each other; the woes of the young Werther and Weisslingen’s seduction, are almost the same story; no matter, we must not judge between what is good and what is evil in others; for that is what God will do. I have just been spending much time over this thought, and have become convinced that in no circumstances ought we to allow ourselves to seek for the devil in others, and that we have no right to judge; the only creature over wham we have received the power to judge and condemn is ourself, and that gives us enough constant care, business, and trouble.

“I have again to-day felt a profound desire to quit this world and enter a higher world; but this desire is rather dejection than strength, a lassitude than an upsoaring.”

The year 1816 was spent by Sand in these pious attempts upon his young comrades, in this ceaseless self-examination, and in the perpetual battle which he waged with the desire for death that pursued him; every day he had deeper doubts of himself; and on the 1st of January, 1817, he wrote this prayer in his diary: —

“Grant to me, O Lord, to me whom Thou halt endowed, in sending me on earth, with free will, the grace that in this year which we are now beginning I may never relax this constant attention, and not shamefully give up the examination of my conscience which I have hitherto made. Give me strength to increase the attention which I turn upon my own life, and to diminish that which I turn upon the life of others; strengthen my will that it may become powerful to command the desires of the body and the waverings of the soul; give me a pious conscience entirely devoted to Thy celestial kingdom, that I may always belong to Thee, or after failing, may be able to return to Thee.”

Sand was right in praying to God for the year 1817, and his fears were a presentiment: the skies of Germany, lightened by Leipzig and Waterloo, were once more darkened; to the colossal and universal despotism of Napoleon succeeded the individual oppression of those little princes who made up the Germanic Diet, and all that the nations had gained by overthrowing the giant was to be governed by dwarfs. This was the time when secret societies were organised throughout Germany; let us say a few words about them, for the history that we are writing is not only that of individuals, but also that of nations, and every time that occasion presents itself we will give our little picture a wide horizon.

The secret societies of Germany, of which, without knowing them, we have all heard, seem, when we follow them up, like rivers, to originate in some sort of affiliation to those famous clubs of the ‘illumines’ and the freemasons which made so much stir in France at the close of the eighteenth century. At the time of the revolution of ‘89 these different philosophical, political, and religious sects enthusiastically accepted the republican doctrines, and the successes of our first generals have often been attributed to the secret efforts of the members. When Bonaparte, who was acquainted with these groups, and was even said to have belonged to them, exchanged his general’s uniform for an emperor’s cloak, all of them, considering him as a renegade and traitor, not only rose against him at home, but tried to raise enemies against him abroad; as they addressed themselves to noble and generous passions, they found a response, and princes to whom their results might be profitable seemed for a moment to encourage them. Among others, Prince Louis of Prussia was grandmaster of one of these societies.

The attempted murder by Stops, to which we have already referred, was one of the thunderclaps of the storm; but its morrow brought the peace of Vienna, and the degradation of Austria was the death-blow of the old Germanic organisation. These societies, which had received a mortal wound in 1806 and were now controlled by the French police, instead of continuing to meet in public, were forced to seek new members in the dark. In 1811 several agents of these societies were arrested in Berlin, but the Prussian authorities, following secret orders of Queen Louisa, actually protected them, so that they were easily able to deceive the French police about their intentions. About February 1815 the disasters of the French army revived the courage of these societies, for it was seen that God was helping their cause: the students in particular joined enthusiastically in the new attempts that were now begun; many colleges enrolled themselves almost entire, anal chose their principals and professors as captains; the poet, Korner, killed on the 18th of October at Liegzig, was the hero of this campaign.

The triumph of this national movement, which twice carried the Prussian army — largely composed of volunteers — to Paris, was followed, when the treaties of 1815 and the new Germanic constitution were made known, by a terrible reaction in Germany. All these young men who, exiled by their princes, had risen in the name of liberty, soon perceived that they had been used as tools to establish European despotism; they wished to claim the promises that had been made, but the policy of Talleyrand and Metternich weighed on them, and repressing them at the first words they uttered, compelled them to shelter their discontent and their hopes in the universities, which, enjoying a kind of constitution of their own, more easily escaped the investigations made by the spies of the Holy Alliance; but, repressed as they were, these societies continued nevertheless to exist, and kept up communications by means of travelling students, who, bearing verbal messages, traversed Germany under the pretence of botanising, and, passing from mountain to mountain, sowed broadcast those luminous and hopeful words of which peoples are always greedy and kings always fear.

We have seen that Sand, carried away by the general movement, had gone through the campaign of 1815 as a volunteer, although he was then only nineteen years old. On his return, he, like others, had found his golden hopes deceived, and it is from this period that we find his journal assuming the tone of mysticism and sadness which our readers must have remarked in it. He soon entered one of these associations, the Teutonia; and from that moment, regarding the great cause which he had taken up as a religious one, he attempted to make the conspirators worthy of their enterprise, and thus arose his attempts to inculcate moral doctrines, in which he succeeded with some, but failed with the majority. Sand had succeeded, however, in forming around him a certain circle of Puritans, composed of about sixty to eighty students, all belonging to the group of the 'Burschenschaft' which continued its political and religious course despite all the jeers of the opposing group — the 'Landmannschaft'. One of his friends called Dittmar and he were pretty much the chiefs, and although no election had given them their authority, they exercised so much influence upon what was decided that in any particular case their fellow-adepts were sure spontaneously to obey any impulse that they might choose to impart. The meetings of the Burschen took place upon a little hill crowned by a ruined castle, which was situated at some distance from Erlangen, and which Sand and Dittmar had called the Ruttli, in memory of the spot where Walter Furst, Melchthal, and Stauffacher had made their vow to deliver their country; there, under the pretence of students' games, while they built up a new house with the ruined fragments, they passed alternately from symbol to action and from action to symbol.

Meanwhile the association was making such advances throughout Germany that not only the princes and kings of the German confederation, but also the great European powers, began to be uneasy. France sent agents to bring home reports, Russia paid agents on the spot, and the persecutions that touched a professor and exasperated a whole university often arose from a note sent by the Cabinet of the Tuileries or of St. Petersburg.

It was amid the events that began thus that Sand, after commending himself to the protection of God, began the year 1817, in the sad mood in which we have just seen him, and in which he was kept rather by a disgust for things as they were than by a disgust for life. On the 8th of May, preyed upon by this melancholy, which he cannot conquer, and which comes from the disappointment of all his political hopes, he writes in his diary:

“I shall find it impossible to set seriously to work, and this idle temper, this humour of hypochondria which casts its black veil over everything in life, — continues and grows in spite of the moral activity which I imposed on myself yesterday.”

In the holidays, fearing to burden his parents with any additional expense, he will not go home, and prefers to make a walking tour with his friends. No doubt this tour, in addition to its recreative side, had a political aim. Be that as it may, Sand’s diary, during the period of his journey, shows nothing but the names of the towns through which he passed. That we may have a notion of Sand’s dutifulness to his parents, it should be said that he did not set out until he had obtained his mother’s permission. On their return, Sand, Dittmar, and their friends the Burschen, found their Ruttli sacked by their enemies of the Landmannschaft; the house that they had built was demolished and its fragments dispersed. Sand took this event for an omen, and was greatly depressed by it.

“It seems to me, O my God!” he says in his journal, “that everything swims and turns around me. My soul grows darker and darker; my moral strength grows less instead of greater; I work and cannot achieve; walk towards my aim and do not reach it; exhaust myself, and do nothing great. The days of life flee one after another; cares and uneasiness increase; I see no haven anywhere for our sacred German cause. The end will be that we shall fall, for I myself waver. O Lord and Father! protect me, save me, and lead me to that land from which we are for ever driven back by the indifference of wavering spirits.”

About this time a terrible event struck Sand to the heart; his friend Dittmar was drowned. This is what he wrote in his diary on the very morning of the occurrence:

“Oh, almighty God! What is going to become of me? For the last fortnight I have been drawn into disorder, and have not been able to compel myself to look fixedly either backward or forward in my life, so that from the 4th of June up to the present hour my journal has remained empty. Yet every day I might have had occasion to praise Thee, O my God, but my soul is in anguish. Lord, do not turn from me; the more are the obstacles the more need is there of strength.”

In the evening he added these few words to the lines that he had written in the morning: —

"Desolation, despair, and death over my friend, over my very deeply loved Dittmar."

This letter which he wrote to his family contains the account of the tragic event: —

"You know that when my best friends, A., C., and Z., were gone, I became particularly intimate with my well-beloved Dittmar of Anspach; Dittmar, that is to say a true and worthy German, an evangelical Christian, something more, in short, than a man! An angelic soul, always turned toward the good, serene, pious, and ready for action; he had come to live in a room next to mine in Professor Grunler's house; we loved each other, upheld each other in our efforts, and, well or ill, bare our good or evil fortune in common. On this last spring evening, after having worked in his room and having strengthened ourselves anew to resist all the torments of life and to advance towards the aim that we desired to attain; we went, about seven in the evening, to the baths of Redwitz. A very black storm was rising in the sky, but only as yet appeared on the horizon. E., who was with us, proposed to go home, but Dittmar persisted, saying that the canal was but a few steps away. God permitted that it should not be I who replied with these fatal words. So he went on. The sunset was splendid: I see it still; its violet clouds all fringed with gold, for I remember the smallest details of that evening.

"Dittmar went down first; he was the only one of us who knew how to swim; so he walked before us to show us the depth. The water was about up to our chests, and he, who preceded us, was up to his shoulders, when he warned us not to go farther, because he was ceasing to feel the bottom. He immediately gave up his footing and began to swim, but scarcely had he made ten strokes when, having reached the place where the river separates into two branches, he uttered a cry, and as he was trying to get a foothold, disappeared. We ran at once to the bank, hoping to be able to help him more easily; but we had neither poles nor ropes within reach, and, as I have told you, neither of us could swim. Then we called for help with all our might. At that moment Dittmar reappeared, and by an unheard-of effort seized the end of a willow branch that was hanging over the water; but the branch was not strong enough to resist, and our friend sank again, as though he had been struck by apoplexy. Can you imagine the state in which we were, we his friends, bending over the river, our fixed and haggard eyes trying to pierce its depth? My God, my God! how was it we did not go mad?

"A great crowd, however, had run at our cries. For two hours they sought far him with boats and drag-hooks; and at last they succeeded in drawing his body from the gulf. Yesterday we bore it solemnly to the field of rest.

"Thus with the end of this spring has begun the serious summer of my life. I greeted it in a grave and melancholy mood, and you behold me now, if not consoled, at least strengthened by religion, which, thanks to the merits of Christ, gives me the assurance of meeting my friend in heaven, from the heights of which he will inspire me with strength to support the trials of this life; and now I do not desire anything more except to know you free from all anxiety in regard to me."

Instead of serving to unite the two groups of students in a common grief, this accident, on the contrary, did but intensify their hatred of each other. Among the first persons who ran up at the cries of Sand and his companion was a member of the Landmannschaft who could swim, but instead of going to Dittmar's assistance he exclaimed, "It seems that we shall get rid of one of these dogs of Burschen; thank God!" Notwithstanding this manifestation of hatred, which, indeed, might be that of an individual and not of the whole body, the Burschen invited their enemies to be present at Dittmar's funeral. A brutal refusal, and a threat to disturb the ceremony by insults to the corpse, formed their sole reply. The Burschen then warned the authorities, who took suitable measures, and all Dittmar's friends followed his coffin sword in hand. Beholding this calm but resolute demonstration, the Landmannschaft did not dare to carry out their threat, and contented themselves with insulting the procession by laughs and songs.

Sand wrote in his journal:

"Dittmar is a great loss to all of us, and particularly to me; he gave me the overflow of his strength and life; he stopped, as it were, with an embankment, the part of my character that is irresolute and undecided. From him it is that I have learned not to dread the approaching storm, and to know how to fight and die."

Some days after the funeral Sand had a quarrel about Dittmar with one of his former friends, who had passed over from the Burschen to the Landmannschaft, and who had made himself conspicuous at the time of the funeral by his indecent hilarity. It was decided that they should fight the next day, and on the same day Sand wrote in his journal.

"To-morrow I am to fight with P. G.; yet Thou knowest, O my God, what great friends we formerly were, except for a certain mistrust with which his coldness always inspired me; but on this occasion his odious conduct has caused me to descend from the tenderest pity to the profoundest hatred.

“My God, do not withdraw Thy hand either from him or from me, since we are both fighting like men! Judge only by our two causes, and give the victory to that which is the more just. If Thou shouldst call me before Thy supreme tribunal, I know very well that I should appear burdened with an eternal malediction; and indeed it is not upon myself that I reckon but upon the merits of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

“Come what may, be praised and blessed, O my God!

“My dear parents, brothers, and friends, I commend you to the protection of God.”

Sand waited in vain for two hours next day: his adversary did not come to the meeting place.

The loss of Dittmar, however, by no means produced the result upon Sand that might have been expected, and that he himself seems to indicate in the regrets he expressed for him. Deprived of that strong soul upon which he rested, Sand understood that it was his task by redoubled energy to make the death of Dittmar less fatal to his party. And indeed he continued singly the work of drawing in recruits which they had been carrying on together, and the patriotic conspiracy was not for a moment impeded.

The holidays came, and Sand left Erlangen to return no more. From Wonsiedel he was to proceed to Jena, in order to complete his theological studies there. After some days spent with his family, and indicated in his journal as happy, Sand went to his new place of abode, where he arrived some time before the festival of the Wartburg. This festival, established to celebrate the anniversary of the battle of Leipzig, was regarded as a solemnity throughout Germany, and although the princes well knew that it was a centre for the annual renewal of affiliation to the various societies, they dared not forbid it. Indeed, the manifesto of the Teutonic Association was exhibited at this festival and signed by more than two thousand deputies from different universities in Germany. This was a day of joy for Sand; for he found in the midst of new friends a great number of old ones.

The Government, however, which had not ‘dared to attack the Association by force, resolved to undermine it by opinion. M. de Stauren published a terrible document, attacking the societies, and founded, it was said, upon information furnished by Kotzebue. This publication made a great stir, not only at Jena, but throughout all Germany. Here is the trace of this event that we find in Sand's journal: —

24th November "Today, after working with much ease and assiduity, I went out about four with E. As we crossed the market-place we heard Kotzebue's new and venomous insult read. By what a fury that man is possessed against the Burschen and against all who love Germany!"

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On the 29th, in the evening, Sand writes again:

"To-morrow I shall set out courageously and joyfully from this place for a pilgrimage to Wonsiedel; there I shall find my large-hearted mother and my tender sister Julia; there I shall cool my head and warm my heart. Probably I shall be present at my good Fritz's marriage with Louisa, and at the baptism of my very dear Durchmith's first-born. God, O my Father, as Thou hast been with me during my sad course, be with me still on my happy road."

This journey did in fact greatly cheer Sand. Since Dittmar's death his attacks of hypochondria had disappeared. While Dittmar lived he might die; Dittmar being dead, it was his part to live.

On the 11th of December he left Wonsiedel, to return to Jena, and on the 31st of the same month he wrote this prayer in his journal.

"O merciful Saviour! I began this year with prayer, and in these last days I have been subject to distraction and ill-disposed. When I look backward, I find, alas! that I have not become better; but I have entered more profoundly into life, and, should occasion present, I now feel strength to act.

“It is because Thou hast always been with me, Lord, even when I was not with Thee.”

If our readers have followed with some attention the different extracts from the journal that we have placed before them, they must have seen Sand’s resolution gradually growing stronger and his brain becoming excited. From the beginning of the year 1818, one feels his view, which long was timid and wandering, taking in a wider horizon and fixing itself on a nobler aim. He is no longer ambitious of the pastor’s simple life or of the narrow influence which he might gain in a little community, and which, in his juvenile modesty, had seemed the height of good fortune and happiness; it is now his native land, his German people, nay, all humanity, which he embraces in his gigantic plans of political regeneration. Thus, on the flyleaf of his journal for the year 1818, he writes:

“Lord, let me strengthen myself in the idea that I have conceived of the deliverance of humanity by the holy sacrifice of Thy Son. Grant that I may be a Christ of Germany, and that, like and through Jesus, I may be strong and patient in suffering.”

But the anti-republican pamphlets of Kotzebue increased in number and gained a fatal influence upon the minds of rulers. Nearly all the persons who were attacked in these pamphlets were known and esteemed at Jena; and it may easily be comprehended what effects were produced by such insults upon these young heads and noble hearts, which carried conviction to the paint of blindness and enthusiasm to that of fanaticism.

Thus, here is what Sand wrote in his diary on the 5th of May.

“Lord, what causes this melancholy anguish which has again taken possession of me? But a firm and constant will surmounts everything, and the idea of the country gives joy and courage to the saddest and the weakest. When I think of that, I am always amazed that there is none among us found courageous enough to drive a knife into the breast of Kotzebue or of any other traitor.”

Still dominated by the same thought, he continues thus on the 18th of May: —

“A man is nothing in comparison with a nation; he is a unity compared with millions, a minute compared with a century. A man, whom nothing precedes and nothing follows, is born, lives, and dies in a longer or shorter time, which, relatively to eternity, hardly equals the duration of a lightning flash. A nation, on the contrary, is immortal.”

From time to time, however, amid these thoughts that bear the impress of that political fatality which was driving him towards the deed of bloodshed, the kindly and joyous youth reappears. On the 24th of June he writes to his mother: —

“I have received your long and beautiful letter, accompanied by the very complete and well-chosen outfit which you send me. The sight of this fine linen gave me back one of the joys of my childhood. These are fresh benefits. My prayers never remain unfulfilled, and I have continual cause to thank you and God. I receive, all at once, shirts, two pairs of fine sheets, a present of your work, and of Julia’s and Caroline’s work, dainties and sweetmeats, so that I am still jumping with joy and I turned three times on my heels when I opened the little parcel. Receive the thanks of my heart, and share, as giver, in the joy of him who has received.

“Today, however, is a very serious day, the last day of spring and the anniversary of that on which I lost my noble and good Dittmar. I am a prey to a thousand different and confused feelings; but I have only two passions left in me which remain upright and like two pillars of brass support this whole chaos — the thought of God and the love of my country.”

During all this time Sand’s life remains apparently calm and equal; the inward storm is calmed; he rejoices in his application to work and his cheerful temper. However, from time to time, he makes great complaints to himself of his propensity to love dainty food, which he does not always find it possible to conquer. Then, in his self-contempt, he calls himself “fig-stomach” or “cake-stomach.” But amid all this the religious and political exaltation and visits all the battlefields near to the road that he follows. On the 18th of October he is back at Jena, where he resumes his studies with more application than ever. It is among such university studies that the year 1818 closes far him, and we should hardly suspect the terrible resolution which he has taken, were it not that we find in his journal this last note, dated the 31st of December:

“I finish the last day of this year 1818, then, in a serious and solemn mood, and I have decided that the Christmas feast which has just gone by will be the last Christmas feast that I shall celebrate. If anything is to come of our efforts, if the cause of humanity is to assume the upper hand in our country, if in this faithless epoch any noble feelings can spring up afresh and make way, it can only happen if the wretch, the traitor, the seducer of youth, the infamous Kotzebue, falls! I am fully convinced of this, and until I have accomplished the work upon which I have resolved, I shall have no rest. Lord, Thou who knowest that I have devoted my life to this great action, I only need, now that it is fixed in my mind, to beg of Thee true firmness and courage of soul."

Here Sand's diary ends; he had begun it to strengthen himself; he had reached his aim; he needed nothing more. From this moment he was occupied by nothing but this single idea, and he continued slowly to mature the plan in his head in order to familiarise himself with its execution; but all the impressions arising from this thought remained in his own mind, and none was manifested on the surface. To everyone else he was the same; but for some little time past, a complete and unaltered serenity, accompanied by a visible and cheerful return of inclination towards life, had been noticed in him. He had made no charge in the hours or the duration of his studies; but he had begun to attend the anatomical classes very assiduously. One day he was seen to give even more than his customary attention to a lesson in which the professor was demonstrating the various functions of the heart; he examined with the greatest care the place occupied by it in the chest, asking to have some of the demonstrations repeated two or three times, and when he went out, questioning some of the young men who were following the medical courses, about the susceptibility of the organ, which cannot receive ever so slight a blow without death ensuing from that blow: all this with so perfect an indifference and calmness that no one about him conceived any suspicion.

Another day, A. S., one of his friends, came into his room. Sand, who had heard him coming up, was standing by the table, with a paper-knife in his hand, waiting for him; directly the visitor came in, Sand flung himself upon him, struck him lightly on the forehead; and then, as he put up his hands to ward off the blow, struck him rather more violently in the chest; then, satisfied with this experiment, said: —

"You see, when you want to kill a man, that is the way to do it; you threaten the face, he puts up his hands, and while he does so you thrust a dagger into his heart."

The two young men laughed heartily over this murderous demonstration, and A. S. related it that evening at the wine-shop as one of the peculiarities of character that were common in his friend. After the event, the pantomime explained itself.

The month of March arrived. Sand became day by day calmer, more affectionate, and kinder; it might be thought that in the moment of leaving his friends for ever he wished to leave them an ineffaceable remembrance of him. At last he announced that on account of several family affairs he was about to undertake a little journey, and set about all his preparations with his usual care, but with a serenity never previously seen in him. Up to that time he had continued to work as usual, not relaxing for an instant; for there was a possibility that Kotzebue might die or be killed by somebody else before the term that Sand had fixed to himself, and in that case he did not wish to have lost time. On the 7th of March he invited all his friends to spend the evening with him, and announced his departure for the next day but one, the 9th. All of them then proposed to him to escort him for some leagues, but Sand refused; he feared lest this demonstration, innocent though it were, might compromise them later on. He set forth alone, therefore, after having hired his lodgings for another half-year, in order to obviate any suspicion, and went by way of Erfurt and Eisenach, in order to visit the Wartburg. From that place he went to Frankfort, where he slept on the 17th, and on the morrow he continued his journey by way of Darmstadt. At last, on the 23rd, at nine in the morning, he arrived at the top of the little hill where we found him at the beginning of this narrative. Throughout the journey he had been the amiable and happy young man whom no one could see without liking.

Having reached Mannheim, he took a room at the Weinberg, and wrote his name as “Henry” in the visitors’ list. He immediately inquired where Kotzebue lived. The councillor dwelt near the church of the Jesuits; his house was at the corner of a street, and though Sand’s informants could not tell him exactly the letter, they assured him it was not possible to mistake the house. [At Mannheim houses are marked by letters, not by numbers.]

Sand went at once to Kotzebue’s house: it was about ten o’clock; he was told that the councillor went to walk for an hour or two every morning in the park of Mannheim. Sand inquired about the path in which he generally walked, and about the clothes he wore, for never having seen him he could only recognise him by the description. Kotzebue chanced to take another path. Sand walked about the park for an hour, but seeing no one who corresponded to the description given him, went back to the house.

Kotzebue had come in, but was at breakfast and could not see him.

Sand went back to the Weinberg, and sat down to the midday table d’hote, where he dined with an appearance of such calmness, and even of such happiness, that his conversation, which was now lively, now simple, and now dignified, was remarked by everybody. At five in the afternoon he returned a third time to the house of Kotzebue, who was giving a great dinner that day; but orders had been given to admit Sand. He was shown into a little room opening out of the anteroom, and a moment after, Kotzebue came in.

Sand then performed the drama which he had rehearsed upon his friend A. S. Kotzebue, finding his face threatened, put his hands up to it, and left his breast exposed; Sand at once stabbed him to the heart; Kotzebue gave one cry, staggered, and fell back into an arm-chair: he was dead.

At the cry a little girl of six years old ran in, one of those charming German children, with the faces of cherubs, blue-eyed, with long flowing hair. She flung herself upon the body of Kotzebue, calling her father with piercing cries. Sand, standing at the door, could not endure this sight, and without going farther, he thrust the dagger, still covered with Kotzebue’s blood, up to the hilt into his own breast. Then, seeing to his surprise that notwithstanding the terrible wound — he had just given himself he did not feel the approach of death, and not wishing to fall alive into the hands of the servants who were running in, he rushed to the staircase. The persons who were invited were just coming in; they, seeing a young man, pale and bleeding with a knife in his breast, uttered loud cries, and stood aside, instead of stopping him. Sand therefore passed down the staircase and reached the street below; ten paces off, a patrol was passing, on the way to relieve the sentinels at the castle; Sand thought these men had been summoned by the cries that followed him; he threw himself on his knees in the middle of the street, and said, “Father, receive my soul!”

Then, drawing the knife from the wound, he gave himself a second blow below the former, and fell insensible.

Sand was carried to the hospital and guarded with the utmost strictness; the wounds were serious, but, thanks to the skill of the physicians who were called in, were not mortal; one of them even healed eventually; but as to the second, the blade having gone between the costal pleura and the pulmonary pleura, an effusion of blood occurred between the two layers, so that, instead of closing the wound, it was kept carefully open, in order that the blood extravasated during the night might be drawn off every morning by means of a pump, as is done in the operation for empyaemia.

Notwithstanding these cares, Sand was for three months between life and death.

When, on the 26th of March, the news of Kotzebue's assassination came from Mannheim to Jena, the academic senate caused Sand's room to be opened, and found two letters — one addressed to his friends of the Burschenschaft, in which he declared that he no longer belonged to their society, since he did not wish that their brotherhood should include a man about to die an the scaffold. The other letter, which bore this superscription, "To my nearest and dearest," was an exact account of what he meant to do, and the motives which had made him determine upon this act. Though the letter is a little long, it is so solemn and so antique in spirit, that we do not hesitate to present it in its entirety to our readers: —

"To all my own "Loyal and eternally cherished souls

"Why add still further to your sadness? I asked myself, and I hesitated to write to you; but my silence would have wounded the religion of the heart; and the deeper a grief the more it needs, before it can be blotted out, to drain to the dregs its cup of bitterness. Forth from my agonised breast, then; forth, long and cruel torment of a last conversation, which alone, however, when sincere, can alleviate the pain of parting.

"This letter brings you the last farewell of your son and your brother.

"The greatest misfortune of life far any generous heart is to see the cause of God stopped short in its developments by our fault; and the most dishonouring infamy would be to suffer that the fine things acquired bravely by thousands of men, and far which thousands of men have joyfully sacrificed themselves, should be no more than a transient dream, without real and positive consequences. The resurrection of our German life was begun in these last twenty years, and particularly in the sacred year 1813, with a courage inspired by God. But now the house of our fathers is shaken from the summit to the base. Forward! let us raise it, new and fair, and such as the true temple of the true God should be.

"Small is the number of those who resist, and who wish to oppose themselves as a dyke against the torrent of the progress of higher humanity among the German people. Why should vast whole masses bow beneath the yoke of a perverse minority? And why, scarcely healed, should we fall back into a worse disease than that which we are leaving behind?

"Many of these seducers, and those are the most infamous, are playing the game of corruption with us; among them is Kotzebue, the most cunning and the worst of all, a real talking machine emitting all sorts of detestable speech and pernicious advice. His voice is skillful in removing from us all anger and bitterness against the most unjust measures, and is just such as kings require to put us to sleep again in that old hazy slumber which is the death of nations. Every day he odiously betrays his country, and nevertheless, despite his treason, remains an idol for half Germany, which, dazzled by him, accepts unresisting the poison poured out by him in his periodic pamphlets, wrapped up and protected as he is by the seductive mantle of a great poetic reputation. Incited by him, the princes of Germany, who have forgotten their promises, will allow nothing free or good to be accomplished; or if anything of the kind is accomplished in spite of them, they will league themselves with the French to annihilate it. That the history of our time may not be covered with eternal ignominy, it is necessary that he should fall.

"I have always said that if we wish to find a great and supreme remedy for the state of abasement in which we are, none must shrink from combat nor from suffering; and the real liberty of the German people will only be assured when the good citizen sets himself or some other stake upon the game, and when every true son of the country, prepared for the struggle for justice, despises the good things of this world, and only desires those celestial good things which death holds in charge.

"Who then will strike this miserable hireling, this venal traitor?

"I have long been waiting in fear, in prayer, and in tears — I who am not born for murder — for some other to be beforehand with me, to set me free, and suffer me to continue my way along the sweet and peaceful path that I had chosen for myself. Well, despite my prayers and my tears, he who should strike does not present himself; indeed, every man, like myself, has a right to count upon some other, and everyone thus counting, every hour's delay, but makes our state worse; far at any moment — and how deep a shame would that be for us! Kotzebue may leave Germany, unpunished, and go to devour in Russia the treasures for which he has exchanged his honour, his conscience, and his German name. Who can preserve us from this shame, if every man, if I myself, do not feel strength to make myself the chosen instrument of God's justice? Therefore, forward! It shall be I who will courageously rush upon him (do not be alarmed), on him, the loathsome seducer; it shall be I who will kill the traitor, so that his misguiding voice, being extinguished, shall cease to lead us astray from the lessons of history and from the Spirit of God. An irresistible and solemn duty impels me to this deed, ever since I have recognised to what high destinies the German; nation may attain during this century, and ever since I have come to know the dastard and hypocrite who alone prevents it from reaching them; for me, as for every German who seeks the public good, this desire has became a strict and binding necessity. May I, by this national vengeance, indicate to all upright and loyal consciences where the true danger lies, and save our vilified and calumniated societies from the imminent danger that threatens them! May I, in short, spread terror among the cowardly and wicked, and courage and faith among the good! Speeches and writings lead to nothing; only actions work.

"I will act, therefore; and though driven violently away from my fair dreams of the future, I am none the less full of trust in God; I even experience a celestial joy, now that, like the Hebrews when they sought the promised land, I see traced before me, through darkness and death, that road at the end of which I shall have paid my debt to my country.

"Farewell, then, faithful hearts: true, this early separation is hard; true, your hopes, like my wishes, are disappointed; but let us be consoled by the primary thought that we have done what the voice of our country called upon us to do; that, you knew, is the principle according to which I have always lived. You will doubtless say among yourselves, 'Yes, thanks to our sacrifices, he had learned to know life and to taste the joys of earth, and he seemed: deeply to love his native country and the humble estate to which he was called'. Alas, yes, that is true! Under your protection, and amid your numberless sacrifices, my native land and life had become profoundly dear to me. Yes, thanks to you, I have penetrated into the Eden of knowledge, and have lived the free life of thought; thanks to you, I have looked into history, and have then returned to my own conscience to attach myself to the solid pillars of faith in the Eternal.

"Yes, I was to pass gently through this life as a preacher of the gospel; yes, in my constancy to my calling I was to be sheltered from the storms of this existence. But would that suffice to avert the danger that threatens Germany? And you yourselves, in your infinite lave, should you not rather push me on to risk my life for the good of all? So many modern Greeks have fallen already to free their country from the yoke of the Turks, and have died almost without any result and without any hope; and yet thousands of fresh martyrs keep up their courage and are ready to fall in their turn; and should I, then, hesitate to die?

“That I do not recognise your love, or that your love is but a trifling consideration with me, you will not believe. What else should impel me to die if not my devotion to you and to Germany, and the need of proving this devotion to my family and my country?

“You, mother, will say, ‘Why have I brought up a son whom I loved and who loved me, for whom I have undergone a thousand cares and toils, who, thanks to my prayers and my example, was impressionable to good influences, and from whom, after my long and weary course, I hoped to receive attentions like those which I have given him? Why does he now abandon me?’

“Oh, my kind and tender mother! Yes, you will perhaps say that; but could not the mother of anyone else say the same, and everything go off thus in words when there is need to act for the country? And if no one would act, what would become of that mother of us all who is called Germany?

“But no; such complaints are far from you, you noble woman! I understood your appeal once before, and at this present hour, if no one came forward in the German cause, you yourself would urge me to the fight. I have two brothers and two sisters before me, all noble and loyal. They will remain to you, mother; and besides you will have for sons all the children of Germany who love their country.

“Every man has a destiny which he has to accomplish: mine is devoted to the action that I am about to undertake; if I were to live another fifty years, I could not live more happily than I have done lately. Farewell, mother: I commend you to the protection of God; may He raise you to that joy which misfortunes can no longer trouble! Take your grandchildren, to whom I should so much have liked to be a loving friend, to the top of our beautiful mountains soon. There, on that altar raised by the Lord Himself in the midst of Germany, let them devote themselves, swearing to take up the sword as soon as they have strength to lift it, and to lay it down only when our brethren are all united in liberty, when all Germans, having a liberal constitution; are great before the Lord, powerful against their neighbours, and united among themselves.

"May my country ever raise her happy gaze to Thee, Almighty Father! May Thy blessing fall abundantly upon her harvests ready to be cut and her armies ready for battle, and recognising the blessings that Thou host showered upon us, may the German nation ever be first among nations to rise and uphold the cause of humanity, which is Thy image upon earth!

"Your eternally attached son, brother and friend, "KARL-LUDWIG SAND. "JENA, the beginning of March, 1819."

Sand, who, as we have said, had at first been taken to the hospital, was removed at the end of three months to the prison at Mannheim, where the governor, Mr. G — — , had caused a room to be prepared for him. There he remained two months longer in a state of extreme weakness: his left arm was completely paralysed; his voice was very weak; every movement gave him horrible pain, and thus it was not until the 11th of August — that is to say, five months after the event that we have narrated — that he was able to write to his family the following letter: —

"MY VERY DEAR PARENTS: — The grand-duke's commission of inquiry informed me yesterday that it might be possible I should have the intense joy of a visit from you, and that I might perhaps see you here and embrace you — you, mother, and some of my brothers and sisters.

"Without being surprised at this fresh proof of your motherly love, I have felt an ardent remembrance reawaken of the happy life that we spent gently together. Joy and grief, desire and sacrifice, agitate my heart violently, and I have had to weigh these various impulses one against the other, and with the force of reason, in order to resume mastery of myself and to take a decision in regard to my wishes.

"The balance has inclined in the direction of sacrifice.

"You know, mother, how much joy and courage a look from your eyes, daily intercourse with you, and your pious and high-minded conversation, might bring me during my very short time. But you also know my position, and you are too well acquainted with the natural course of all these painful inquiries, not to feel as I do, that such annoyance, continually recurring, would greatly trouble the pleasure of our companionship, if it did not indeed succeed in entirely destroying it. Then, mother, after the long and fatiguing journey that you would be obliged to make in order to see me, think of the terrible sorrow of the farewell when the moment came to part in this world. Let us therefore abide by the sacrifice, according to God's will, and let us yield ourselves only to that sweet community of thought which distance cannot interrupt, in which I find my only joys, and which, in spite of men, will always be granted us by the Lord, our Father.

"As for my physical state, I knew nothing about it. You see, however, since at last I am writing to you myself, that I have come past my first uncertainties. As for the rest, I know too little of the structure of my own body to give any opinion as to what my wounds may determine for it. Except that a little strength has returned to me, its state is still the same, and I endure it calmly and patiently; for God comes to my help, and gives me courage and firmness. He will help me, believe me, to find all the joys of the soul and to be strong in mind. Amen.

"May you live happy! — Your deeply respectful son, "KARL-LUDWIG SAND."

A month after this letter came tender answers from all the family. We will quote only that of Sand's mother, because it completes the idea which the reader may have formed already of this great-hearted woman, as her son always calls her.

"DEAR, INEXPRESSIBLY DEAR KARL, — How Sweet it was to me to see the writing of your beloved hand after so long a time! No journey would have been so painful and no road so long as to prevent me from coming to you, and I would go, in deep and infinite love, to any end of the earth in the mere hope of catching sight of you.

"But, as I well know both your tender affection and your profound anxiety for me, and as you give me, so firmly and upon such manly reflection, reasons against which I can say nothing, and which I can but honour, it shall be, my well-beloved Karl, as you have wished and decided. We will continue, without speech, to communicate our thoughts; but be satisfied, nothing can separate us; I enfold you in my soul, and my material thoughts watch over you.

"May this infinite love which upholds us, strengthens us, and leads us all to a better life, preserve, dear Karl, your courage and firmness.

"Farewell, and be invariably assured that I shall never cease to love you strongly and deeply.

"Your faithful mother, who loves you to eternity."

Sand replied: —

January 1820, from my isle of Patmos. "MY DEAR PARENTS, BROTHERS, AND SISTERS, —

“In the middle of the month of September last year I received, through the grand-duke’s special commission of inquiry, whose humanity you have already appreciated, your dear letters of the end of August and the beginning of September, which had such magical influence that they inundated me with joy by transporting me into the inmost circle of your hearts.

“You, my tender father, you write to me on the sixty-seventh anniversary of your birth, and you bless me by the outpouring of your most tender love.

“You, my well-beloved mother, you deign to promise the continuance of your maternal affection, in which I have at all times constantly believed; and thus I have received the blessings of both of you, which, in my present position, will exercise a more beneficent influence upon me than any of the things that all the kings of the earth, united together, could grant me. Yes, you strengthen me abundantly by your blessed love, and I render thanks to you, my beloved parents, with that respectful submission that my heart will always inculcate as the first duty of a son.

“But the greater your love and the more affectionate your letters, the more do I suffer, I must acknowledge, from the voluntary sacrifice that we have imposed upon ourselves in not seeing one another; and the only reason, my dear parents, why I have delayed to reply to you, was to give myself time to recover the strength which I have lost.

“You too, dear brother-in-law and dear sister, assure me of your sincere and uninterrupted attachment. And yet, after the fright that I have spread among you all, you seem not to know exactly what to think of me; but my heart, full of gratitude for your past kindness, comforts itself; for your actions speak and tell me that, even if you wished no longer to love me as I love you, you would not be able to do otherwise. These actions mean more to me at this hour than any possible protestations, nay, than even the tenderest words.

“And you also, my kind brother, you would have consented to hurry with our beloved mother to the shores of the Rhine, to this place where the real links of the soul were welded between us, where we were doubly brothers; but tell me, are you not really here, in thought and in spirit, when I consider the rich fountain of consolation brought me by your cordial and tender letter?

“And, you, kind sister-in-law, as you showed yourself from the first, in your delicate tenderness, a true sister, so I find you again at present. There are still the same tender relations, still the same sisterly affection; your consolations, which emanate from a deep and submissive piety, have fallen refreshingly into the depths of my heart. But, dear sister-in-law, I must tell you, as well as the others, that you are too liberal towards me in dispensing your esteem and praises, and your exaggeration has cast me back face to face with my inmost judge, who has shown me in the mirror of my conscience the image of my every weakness.

"You, kind Julia, you desire nothing else but to save me from the fate that awaits me; and you assure me in your own name and in that of you all, that you, like the others, would rejoice to endure it in my place; in that I recognise you fully, and I recognise, too, those sweet and tender relations in which we have been brought up from childhood. Oh, be comforted, dear Julia; thanks to the protection of God, I promise you: that it will be easy for me, much easier than I should have thought, to bear what falls to my lot. Receive, then, all of you, my warm and sincere thanks for having thus rejoiced my heart.

"Now that I know from these strengthening letters that, like the prodigal son, the love and goodness of my family are greater on my return than at my departure, I will, as carefully as possible, paint for you my physical and moral state, and I pray God to supplement my words by His strength, so that my letter may contain an equivalent of what yours brought to me, and may help you to reach that state of calm and serenity to which I have myself attained.

"Hardened, by having gained power over myself, against the good and ill of this earth, you knew already that of late years I have lived only for moral joys, and I must say that, touched by my efforts, doubtless, the Lord, who is the sacred fount of all that is good, has rendered me apt in seeking them and in tasting them to the full. God is ever near me, as formerly, and I find in Him the sovereign principle of the creation of all things; in Him, our holy Father, not only consolation and strength, but an unalterable Friend, full of the holiest love, who will accompany me in all places where I may need His consolations. Assuredly, if He had turned from me, or if I had turned away my eyes from Him, I should now find myself very unfortunate and wretched; but by His grace, on the contrary, lowly and weak creature as I am, He makes me strong and powerful against whatever can befall me.

"What I have hitherto revered as sacred, what I have desired as good what I have aspired to as heavenly, has in no respect changed now. And I thank God for it, for I should now be in great despair if I were compelled to recognise that my heart had adored deceptive images and enwrapped itself in fugitive chimeras. Thus my faith in these ideas and my pure love far them, guardian angels of my spirit as they are, increase moment by moment, and will go on increasing to my end, and I hope that I may pass all the more easily from this world into eternity. I pass my silent life in Christian exaltation and humility, and I sometimes have those visions from above through which I have, from my birth, adored heaven upon earth, and which give me power to raise myself to the Lord upon the eager wings of my prayers. My illness, though long, painful, and cruel, has always been sufficiently mastered by my will to let me busy myself to some result with history, positive sciences, and the finer parts of religious education, and when my suffering became more violent and for a time interrupted these occupations, I struggled successfully, nevertheless, against ennui; for the memories of the past, my resignation to the present, and my faith in the future were rich enough and strong enough in me and round me to prevent my falling from my terrestrial paradise. According to my principles, I would never, in the position in which I am and in which I have placed myself, have been willing to ask anything for my own comfort; but so much kindness and care have been lavished upon me, with so much delicacy and humanity, — which alas! I am unable to return — by every person with whom I have been brought into contact, that wishes which I should not have dared to frame in the mast private recesses of my heart have been more than exceeded. I have never been so much overcome by bodily pains that I could not say within myself, while I lifted my thoughts to heaven, ‘Come what may of this ray.’ And great as these gains have been, I could not dream of comparing them with those sufferings of the soul that we feel so profoundly and poignantly in the recognition of our weaknesses and faults.

“Moreover, these pains seldom now cause me to lose consciousness; the swelling and inflammation never made great headway, and the fever has always been moderate, though for nearly ten months I have been forced to remain lying on my back, unable to raise myself, and although more than forty pints of matter have come from my chest at the place where the heart is. No, an the contrary, the wound, though still open, is in a good state; and I owe that not only to the excellent nursing around me, but also to the pure blood that I received from you, my mother. Thus I have lacked neither earthly assistance nor heavenly encouragement. Thus, on the anniversary of my birth, I had every reason — oh, not to curse the hour in which I was born, but, on the contrary, after serious contemplation of the world, to thank God and you, my dear parents, for the life that you have given me! I celebrated it, on the 18th of October, by a peaceful and ardent submission to the holy will of God. On Christmas Day I tried to put myself into the temper of children who are devoted to the Lord; and with God's help the new year will pass like its predecessor, in bodily pain, perhaps, but certainly in spiritual joy. And with this wish, the only one that I form, I address myself to you, my dear parents, and to you and yours, my dear brothers and sisters.

"I cannot hope to see a twenty-fifth new year; so may the prayer that I have just made be granted! May this picture of my present state afford you some tranquillity, and may this letter that I write to you from the depths of my heart not only prove to you that I am not unworthy of the inexpressible love that you all display, but, on the contrary, ensure this love to me for eternity.

"Within the last few days I have also received your dear letter of the 2nd of December, my kind mother, and the grind-duke's commission has deigned to let me also read my kind brother's letter which accompanied yours. You give me the best of news in regard to the health of all of you, and send me preserved fruits from our dear home. I thank you for them from the bottom of my heart. What causes me most joy in the matter is that you have been solicitously busy about me in summer as in winter, and that you and my dear Julia gathered them and prepared them for me at home, and I abandon my whole soul to that sweet enjoyment.

"I rejoice sincerely at my little cousin's coming into the world; I joyfully congratulate the good parents and the grandparents; I transport myself, for his baptism, into that beloved parish, where I offer him my affection as his Christian brother, and call down on him all the blessings of heaven.

"We shall be obliged, I think, to give up this correspondence, so as not to inconvenience the grand-duke's commission. I finish, therefore, by assuring you, once more, but for the last time, perhaps, of my profound filial submission and of my fraternal affection. — Your most tenderly attached
"KARL-LUDWIG SAND."

Indeed, from that moment all correspondence between Karl and his family ceased, and he only wrote to them, when he knew his fate, one more letter, which we shall see later on.

We have seen by what attentions Sand was surrounded; their humanity never flagged for an instant. It is the truth, too, that no one saw in him an ordinary murderer, that many pitied him under their breath, and that some excused him aloud. The very commission appointed by the grand-duke prolonged the affair as much as possible; for the severity of Sand's wounds had at first given rise to the belief that there would be no need of calling in the executioner, and the commission was well pleased that God should have undertaken the execution of the judgment. But these expectations were deceived: the skill of the doctor defeated, not indeed the wound, but death: Sand did not recover, but he remained alive; and it began to be evident that it would be needful to kill him.

Indeed, the Emperor Alexander, who had appointed Kotzebue his councillor, and who was under no misapprehension as to the cause of the murder, urgently demanded that justice should take its course. The commission of inquiry was therefore obliged to set to work; but as its members were sincerely desirous of having some pretext to delay their proceedings, they ordered that a physician from Heidelberg should visit Sand and make an exact report upon his case; as Sand was kept lying down and as he could not be executed in his bed, they hoped that the physician's report, by declaring it impossible for the prisoner to rise, would come to their assistance and necessitate a further respite.

The chosen doctor came accordingly to Mannheim, and introducing himself to Sand as though attracted by the interest that he inspired, asked him whether he did not feel somewhat better, and whether it would be impossible to rise. Sand looked at him for an instant, and then said, with a smile —

"I understand, sir; they wish to know whether I am strong enough to mount a scaffold: I know nothing about it myself, but we will make the experiment together."

With these words he rose, and accomplishing, with superhuman courage, what he had not attempted for fourteen months, walked twice round the room, came back to his bed, upon which he seated himself, and said:

"You see, sir, I am strong enough; it would therefore be wasting precious time to keep my judges longer about my affair; so let them deliver their judgment, for nothing now prevents its execution."

The doctor made his report; there was no way of retreat; Russia was becoming more and more pressing, and an the 5th of May 1820 the high court of justice delivered the following judgment, which was confirmed on the 12th by His Royal Highness the Grand-Duke of Baden:

"In the matters under investigation and after administration of the interrogatory and hearing the defences, and considering the united opinions of the court of justice at Mannheim and the further consultations of the court of justice which declare the accused, Karl Sand of Wonsiedel, guilty of murder, even on his own confession, upon the person of the Russian imperial Councillor of State, Kotzebue; it is ordered accordingly, for his just punishment and for an example that may deter other people, that he is to be put from life to death by the sword.

"All the costs of these investigations, including these occasioned by his public execution, will be defrayed from the funds of the law department, on account of his want of means."

We see that, though it condemned the accused to death, which indeed could hardly be avoided, the sentence was both in form and substance as mild as possible, since, though Sand was convicted, his poor family was not reduced by the expenses of a long and costly trial to complete ruin.

Five days were still allowed to elapse, and the verdict was not announced until the 17th. When Sand was informed that two councillors of justice were at the door, he guessed that they were coming to read his sentence to him; he asked a moment to rise, which he had done but once before, in the instance already narrated, during fourteen months. And indeed he was so weak that he could not stand to hear the sentence, and after having greeted the deputation that death sent to him, he asked to sit down, saying that he did so not from cowardice of soul but from weakness of body; then he added, "You are welcome, gentlemen; far I have suffered so much for fourteen months past that you come to me as angels of deliverance."

He heard the sentence quite unaffectedly and with a gentle smile upon his lips; then, when the reading was finished, he said —

"I look for no better fate, gentlemen, and when, more than a year ago, I paused on the little hill that overlooks the town, I saw beforehand the place where my grave would be; and so I ought to thank God and man far having prolonged my existence up to to-day."

The councillors withdrew; Sand stood up a second time to greet them on their departure, as he had done on their entrance; then he sat down again pensively in his chair, by which Mr. G, the governor of the prison, was standing. After a moment of silence, a tear appeared at each of the condemned man’s eyelids, and ran down his cheeks; then, turning suddenly to Mr. G — — , whom he liked very much, he said, “I hope that my parents would rather see me die by this violent death than of some slow and shameful disease. As for me, I am glad that I shall soon hear the hour strike in which my death will satisfy those who hate me, and those wham, according to my principles, I ought to hate.”

Then he wrote to his family.

“MANNHEIM

“17th of the month of spring, 1820

“DEAR PARENTS, BROTHERS, AND SISTERS, — You should have received my last letters through the grand-duke’s commission; in them I answered yours, and tried to console you for my position by describing the state of my soul as it is, the contempt to which I have attained for everything fragile and earthly, and by which one must necessarily be overcome when such matters are weighed against the fulfilment of an idea, or that intellectual liberty which alone can nourish the soul; in a word, I tried to console you by the assurance that the feelings, principles, and convictions of which I formerly spoke are faithfully preserved in me and have remained exactly the same; but I am sure all this was an unnecessary precaution on my part, for there was never a time when you asked anything else of me than to have God before my eyes and in my heart; and you have seen how, under your guidance, this precept so passed into my soul that it became my sole object of happiness for this world and the next; no doubt, as He was in and near me, God will be in and near you at the moment when this letter brings you the news of my sentence. I die willingly, and the Lord will give me strength to die as one ought to die.

“I write to you perfectly quiet and calm about all things, and I hope that your lives too will pass calmly and tranquilly until the moment when our souls meet again full of fresh force to love one another and to share eternal happiness together.

“As for me, such as I have lived as long as I have known myself — that is to say, in a serenity full of celestial desires and a courageous and indefatigable love of liberty, such I am about to die.

“May God be with you and with me! — Your son, brother, and friend,
“KARL-LUDWIG SAND.”

From that moment his serenity remained un troubled; during the whole day he talked more gaily than usual, slept well, did not awake until half-past seven, said that he felt stronger, and thanked God for visiting him thus.

The nature of the verdict had been known since the day before, and it had been learned that the execution was fixed for the 20th of May — that is to say, three full days after the sentence had been read to the accused.

Henceforward, with Sand's permission, persons who wished to speak to him and whom he was not reluctant to see, were admitted: three among these paid him long and noteworthy visits.

One was Major Holzungen, of the Baden army, who was in command of the patrol that had arrested him, or rather picked him up, dying, and carried him to the hospital. He asked him whether he recognised him, and Sand's head was so clear when he stabbed himself, that although he saw the major only for a moment and had never seen him again since, he remembered the minutest details of the costume which he had been wearing fourteen months previously, and which was the full-dress uniform. When the talk fell upon the death to which Sand was to submit at so early an age, the major pitied him; but Sand answered, with a smile, "There is only one difference between you and me, major; it is that I shall die far my convictions, and you will die for someone else's convictions."

After the major came a young student from Jena whom Sand had known at the university. He happened to be in the duchy of Baden and wished to visit him. Their recognition was touching, and the student wept much; but Sand consoled him with his usual calmness and serenity.

Then a workman asked to be admitted to see Sand, on the plea that he had been his schoolfellow at Wonsiedel, and although he did not remember his name, he ordered him to be let in: the workman reminded him that he had been one of the little army that Sand had commanded on the day of the assault of St. Catherine's tower. This indication guided Sand, who recognised him perfectly, and then spoke with tender affection of his native place and his dear mountains. He further charged him to greet his family, and to beg his mother, father, brothers, and sisters once more not to be grieved on his account, since the messenger who undertook to deliver his last wards could testify in how calm and joyful a temper he was awaiting death.

To this workman succeeded one of the guests whom Sand had met on the staircase directly after Kotzebue's death. He asked him whether he acknowledged his crime and whether he felt any repentance. Sand replied, "I had thought about it during a whole year. I have been thinking of it for fourteen months, and my opinion has never varied in any respect: I did what I should have done.”

After the departure of this last visitor, Sand sent for Mr. G — — , the governor of the prison, and told him that he should like to talk to the executioner before the execution, since he wished to ask for instructions as to how he should hold himself so as to render the operation most certain and easy. Mr. G — — made some objections, but Sand insisted with his usual gentleness, and Mr. G — — at last promised that the man in question should be asked to call at the prison as soon as he arrived from Heidelberg, where he lived.

The rest of the day was spent in seeing more visitors and in philosophical and moral talks, in which Sand developed his social and religious theories with a lucidity of expression and an elevation of thought such as he had, perhaps, never before shown. The governor of the prison from whom I heard these details, told me that he should all his life regret that he did not know shorthand, so that he might have noted all these thoughts, which would have formed a pendant to the Phaedo.

Night came. Sand spent part of the evening writing; it is thought that he was composing a poem; but no doubt he burned it, for no trace of it was found. At eleven he went to bed, and slept until six in the morning. Next day he bore the dressing of his wound, which was always very painful, with extraordinary courage, without fainting, as he sometimes did, and without suffering a single complaint to escape him: he had spoken the truth; in the presence of death God gave him the grace of allowing his strength to return. The operation was over; Sand was lying down as usual, and Mr. G — — was sitting on the foot of his bed, when the door opened and a man came in and bowed to Sand and to Mr. G — — . The governor of the prison immediately stood up, and said to Sand in a voice the emotion of which he could not conceal, “The person who is bowing to you is Mr. Widemann of Heidelberg, to whom you wished to speak.”

Then Sand’s face was lighted up by a strange joy; he sat up and said, “Sir, you are welcome.” Then, making his visitor sit down by his bed, and taking his hand, he began to thank him for being so obliging, and spoke in so intense a tone and so gentle a voice, that Mr. Widemann, deeply moved, could not answer. Sand encouraged him to speak and to give him the details for which he wished, and in order to reassure him, said, “Be firm, sir; for I, on my part, will not fail you: I will not move; and even if you should need two or three strokes to separate my head from my body, as I am told is sometimes the case, do not be troubled on that account.”

Then Sand rose, leaning on Mr. G — — , to go through with the executioner the strange and terrible rehearsal of the drama in which he was to play the leading part on the morrow. Mr. Widemann made him sit in a chair and take the required position, and went into all the details of the execution with him. Then Sand, perfectly instructed, begged him not to hurry and to take his time. Then he thanked him beforehand; “for,” added he, “afterwards I shall not be able.” Then Sand returned to his bed, leaving the executioner paler and more trembling than himself. All these details have been preserved by Mr. G — — ; for as to the executioner, his emotion was so great that he could remember nothing.

After Mr. Widemann, three clergymen were introduced, with whom Sand conversed upon religious matters: one of them stayed six hours with him, and on leaving him told him that he was commissioned to obtain from him a promise of not speaking to the people at the place of execution. Sand gave the promise, and added, “Even if I desired to do so, my voice has become so weak that people could not hear it.”

Meanwhile the scaffold was being erected in the meadow that extends on the left of the road to Heidelberg. It was a platform five to six feet high and ten feet wide each way. As it was expected that, thanks to the interest inspired by the prisoner and to the nearness to Whitsuntide, the crowd would be immense, and as some movement from the universities was apprehended, the prison guards had been trebled, and General Neustein had been ordered to Mannheim from Carlsruhe, with twelve hundred infantry, three hundred and fifty cavalry, and a company of artillery with guns.

On, the afternoon of the 19th there arrived, as had been foreseen, so many students, who took up their abode in the neighbouring villages, that it was decided to put forward the hour of the execution, and to let it take place at five in the morning instead of at eleven, as had been arranged. But Sand’s consent was necessary for this; for he could not be executed until three full days after the reading of his sentence, and as the sentence had not been read to him till half-past ten Sand had a right to live till eleven o’clock.

Before four in the morning the officials went into the condemned man’s room; he was sleeping so soundly that they were obliged to awaken him. He opened his eyes with a smile, as was his custom, and guessing why they came, asked, “Can I have slept so well that it is already eleven in the morning?” They told him that it was not, but that they had come to ask his permission to put forward the time; for, they told him, same collision between the students and the soldiers was feared, and as the military preparations were very thorough, such a collision could not be otherwise than fatal to his friends. Sand answered that he was ready that very moment, and only asked time enough to take a bath, as the ancients were accustomed to do before going into battle. But as the verbal authorisation which he had given was not sufficient, a pen and paper were given to Sand, and he wrote, with a steady hand and in his usual writing:

“I thank the authorities of Mannheim for anticipating my most eager wishes by making my execution six hours earlier.

“Sit nomen Domini benedictum.

“From the prison room, May 20th, day of my deliverance. “KARL-LUDWIG SAND.”

When Sand had given these two lines to the recorder, the physician came to him to dress his wound, as usual. Sand looked at him with a smile, and then asked, “Is it really worth the trouble?”

“You will be stronger for it,” answered the physician.

“Then do it,” said Sand.

A bath was brought. Sand lay down in it, and had his long and beautiful hair arranged with the greatest care; then his toilet being completed, he put on a frock-coat of the German shape — that is to say, short and with the shirt collar turned back aver the shoulders, close white trousers, and high boots. Then Sand seated himself on his bed and prayed some time in a low voice with the clergy; then, when he had finished, he said these two lines of Korner’s:

“All that is earthly is ended,
 And the life of heaven begins.”

He next took leave of the physician and the priests, saying to them, “Do not attribute the emotion of my voice to weakness but to gratitude.” Then, upon these gentlemen offering to accompany him to the scaffold, he said, “There is no need; I am perfectly prepared, at peace with God and with my conscience. Besides, am I not almost a Churchman myself?” And when one of them asked whether he was not going out of life in a spirit of hatred, he returned, “Why, good heavens! have I ever felt any?”

An increasing noise was audible from the street, and Sand said again that he was at their disposal and that he was ready. At this moment the executioner came in with his two assistants; he was dressed in a long wadded black coat, beneath which he hid his sword. Sand offered him his hand affectionately; and as Mr. Widemann, embarrassed by the sword which he wished to keep Sand from seeing, did not venture to come forward, Sand said to him, “Come along and show me your sword; I have never seen one of the kind, and am curious to know what it is like.”

Mr. Widemann, pale and trembling, presented the weapon to him; Sand examined it attentively, and tried the edge with his finger.

“Come,” said he, “the blade is good; do not tremble, and all will go well.” Then, turning to Mr. G — — , who was weeping, he said to him, “You will be good enough, will you not, to do me the service of leading me to the scaffold?”

Mr. G — — made a sign of assent with his head, for he could not answer. Sand took his arm, and spoke for the third time, saying once more, “Well, what are you waiting for, gentlemen? I am ready.”

When they reached the courtyard, Sand saw all the prisoners weeping at their windows. Although he had never seen them, they were old friends of his; for every time they passed his door, knowing that the student who had killed Kotzebue lay within, they used to lift their chain, that he might not be disturbed by the noise.

All Mannheim was in the streets that led to the place of execution, and many patrols were passing up and down. On the day when the sentence was announced the whole town had been sought through for a chaise in which to convey Sand to the scaffold, but no one, not even the coach-builders, would either let one out or sell one; and it had been necessary, therefore, to buy one at Heidelberg without saying for what purpose.

Sand found this chaise in the courtyard, and got into it with Mr. G — — . Turning to him, he whispered in his ear, “Sir, if you see me turn pale, speak my name to me, my name only, do you hear? That will be enough.”

The prison gate was opened, and Sand was seen; then every voice cried with one impulse, “Farewell, Sand, farewell!”

And at the same time flowers, some of which fell into the carriage, were thrown by the crowd that thronged the street, and from the windows. At these friendly cries and at this spectacle, Sand, who until then had shown no moment of weakness, felt tears rising in spite of himself, and while he returned the greetings made to him on all sides, he murmured in a low voice, “O my God, give me courage!”

This first outburst over, the procession set out amid deep silence; only now and again same single voice would call out, “Farewell, Sand!” and a handkerchief waved by some hand that rose out of the crowd would show from what paint the last call came. On each side of the chaise walked two of the prison officials, and behind the chaise came a second conveyance with the municipal authorities.

The air was very cold: it had rained all night, and the dark and cloudy sky seemed to share in the general sadness. Sand, too weak to remain sitting up, was half lying upon the shoulder of Mr. G — — -, his companion; his face was gentle, calm and full of pain; his brow free and open, his features, interesting though without regular beauty, seemed to have aged by several years during the fourteen months of suffering that had just elapsed. The chaise at last reached the place of execution, which was surrounded by a battalion of infantry; Sand lowered his eyes from heaven to earth and saw the scaffold. At this sight he smiled gently, and as he left the carriage he said, “Well, God has given me strength so far.”

The governor of the prison and the chief officials lifted him that he might go up the steps. During that short ascent pain kept him bowed, but when he had reached the top he stood erect again, saying, “Here then is the place where I am to die!”

Then before he came to the chair on which he was to be seated for the execution, he turned his eyes towards Mannheim, and his gaze travelled over all the throng that surrounded him; at that moment a ray of sunshine broke through the clouds. Sand greeted it with a smile and sat down.

Then, as, according to the orders given, his sentence was to be read to him a second time, he was asked whether he felt strong enough to hear it standing. Sand answered that he would try, and that if his physical strength failed him, his moral strength would uphold him. He rose immediately from the fatal chair, begging Mr. G — — to stand near enough to support him if he should chance to stagger. The precaution was unnecessary, Sand did not stagger.

After the judgment had been read, he sat down again and said in a laud voice, “I die trusting in God.”

But at these words Mr. G — — — interrupted him.

“Sand,” said he, “what did you promise?”

“True,” he answered; “I had forgotten.” He was silent, therefore, to the crowd; but, raising his right hand and extending it solemnly in the air, he said in a low voice, so that he might be heard only by those who were around him, “I take God to witness that I die for the freedom of Germany.”

Then, with these words, he did as Conradin did with his glove; he threw his rolled-up handkerchief over the line of soldiers around him, into the midst of the people.

Then the executioner came to cut off his hair; but Sand at first objected.

“It is for your mother,” said Mr. Widemann.

“On your honour, sir?” asked Sand.

“On my honour.”

“Then do it,” said Sand, offering his hair to the executioner.

Only a few curls were cut off, those only which fell at the back, the others were tied with a ribbon on the top of the head. The executioner then tied his hands on his breast, but as that position was oppressive to him and compelled him an account of his wound to bend his head, his hands were laid flat on his thighs and fixed in that position with ropes. Then, when his eyes were about to be bound, he begged Mr. Widemann to place the bandage in such a manner that he could see the light to his last moment. His wish was fulfilled.

Then a profound and mortal stillness hovered over the whole crowd and surrounded the scaffold. The executioner drew his sword, which flashed like lightning and fell. Instantly a terrible cry rose at once from twenty thousand bosoms; the head had not fallen, and though it had sunk towards the breast still held to the neck. The executioner struck a second time, and struck off at the same blow the head and a part of the hand.

In the same moment, notwithstanding the efforts of the soldiers, their line was broken through; men and women rushed upon the scaffold, the blood was wiped up to the last drop with handkerchiefs; the chair upon which Sand had sat was broken and divided into pieces, and those who could not obtain one, cut fragments of bloodstained wood from the scaffold itself.

The head and body were placed in a coffin draped with black, and carried back, with a large military escort, to the prison. At midnight the body was borne silently, without torches or lights, to the Protestant cemetery, in which Kotzebue had been buried fourteen months previously. A grave had been mysteriously dug; the coffin was lowered into it, and those who were present at the burial were sworn upon the New Testament not to reveal the spot where Sand was buried until such time as they were freed from their oath. Then the grave was covered again with the turf, that had been skilfully taken off, and that was relaid on the same spat, so that no new grave could be perceived; then the nocturnal gravediggers departed, leaving guards at the entrance.

There, twenty paces apart, Sand and Kotzebue rest: Kotzebue opposite the gate in the most conspicuous spot of the cemetery, and beneath a tomb upon which is engraved this inscription:

“The world persecuted him without pity, Calumny was his sad portion, He found no happiness save in the arms of his wife, And no repose save in the bosom of death. Envy dogged him to cover his path with thorns, Love bade his roses blossom; May Heaven pardon him As he pardons earth!”

In contrast with this tall and showy monument, standing, as we have said, in the most conspicuous spot of the cemetery, Sand’s grave must be looked far in the corner to the extreme left of the entrance gate; and a wild plum tree, some leaves of which every passing traveller carries away, rises alone upon the grave, which is devoid of any inscription.

As far the meadow in which Sand was executed, it is still called by the people “Sand’s Himmelsfartsweise,” which signifies “The manner of Sand’s ascension.”

Toward the end of September, 1838, we were at Mannheim, where I had stayed three days in order to collect all the details I could find about the life and death of Karl-Ludwig Sand. But at the end of these three days, in spite of my active investigations, these details still remained extremely incomplete, either because I applied in the wrong quarters, or because, being a foreigner, I inspired same distrust in those to whom I applied. I was leaving Mannheim, therefore, somewhat disappointed, and after having visited the little Protestant cemetery where Sand and Kotzebue are buried at twenty paces from each other, I had ordered my driver to take the road to Heidelberg, when, after going a few yards, he, who knew the object of my inquiries, stopped of himself and asked me whether I should not like to see the place where Sand was executed. At the same time he pointed to a little mound situated in the middle of a meadow and a few steps from a brook. I assented eagerly, and although the driver remained on the highroad with my travelling companions, I soon recognised the spot indicated, by means of some relics of cypress branches, immortelles, and forget-me-nots scattered upon the earth. It will readily be understood that this sight, instead of diminishing my desire for information, increased it. I was feeling, then, more than ever dissatisfied at going away, knowing so little, when I saw a man of some five-and-forty to fifty years old, who was walking a little distance from the place where I myself was, and who, guessing the cause that drew me thither, was looking at me with curiosity. I determined to make a last effort, and going up to him, I said, “Oh, sir, I am a stranger; I am travelling to collect all the rich and poetic traditions of your Germany. By the way in which you look at me, I guess that you know which of them attracts me to this meadow. Could you give me any information about the life and death of Sand?”

“With what object, sir?” the person to whom I spoke asked me in almost unintelligible French.

“With a very German object, be assured, sir,” I replied. “From the little I have learned, Sand seems to me to be one of those ghosts that appear only the greater and the more poetic for being wrapped in a shroud stained with blood. But he is not known in France; he might be put on the same level there with a Fieschi or a Meunier, and I wish, to the best of my ability, to enlighten the minds of my countrymen about him.”

“It would be a great pleasure to me, sir, to assist in such an undertaking; but you see that I can scarcely speak French; you do not speak German at all; so that we shall find it difficult to understand each other.”

“If that is all,” I returned, “I have in my carriage yonder an interpreter, or rather an interpretress, with whom you will, I hope, be quite satisfied, who speaks German like Goethe, and to whom, when you have once begun to speak to her, I defy you not to tell everything.”

“Let us go, then, sir,” answered the pedestrian. “I ask no better than to be agreeable to you.”

We walked toward the carriage, which was still waiting on the highroad, and I presented to my travelling companion the new recruit whom I had just gained. The usual greetings were exchanged, and the dialogue began in the purest Saxon. Though I did not understand a word that was said, it was easy for me to see, by the rapidity of the questions and the length of the answers, that the conversation was most interesting. At last, at the end of half an hours growing desirous of knowing to what point they had come, I said, “Well?”

“Well,” answered my interpreter, “you are in luck’s way, and you could not have asked a better person.”

“The gentleman knew Sand, then?”

“The gentleman is the governor of the prison in which Sand was confined.”

“Indeed?”

“For nine months — that is to say, from the day he left the hospital — this gentleman saw him every day.”

“Excellent!”

“But that is not all: this gentleman was with him in the carriage that took him to execution; this gentleman was with him on the scaffold; there’s only one portrait of Sand in all Mannheim, and this gentleman has it.”

I was devouring every word; a mental alchemist, I was opening my crucible and finding gold in it.

“Just ask,” I resumed eagerly, “whether the gentleman will allow us to take down in writing the particulars that he can give me.”

My interpreter put another question, then, turning towards me, said, “Granted.”

Mr. G — — got into the carriage with us, and instead of going on to Heidelberg, we returned to Mannheim, and alighted at the prison.

Mr. G — -did not once depart from the ready kindness that he had shown. In the most obliging manner, patient over the minutest trifles, and remembering most happily, he went over every circumstance, putting himself at my disposal like a professional guide. At last, when every particular about Sand had been sucked dry, I began to ask him about the manner in which executions were performed. “As to that,” said he, “I can offer you an introduction to someone at Heidelberg who can give you all the information you can wish for upon the subject.”

I accepted gratefully, and as I was taking leave of Mr. G — — , after thanking him a thousand times, he handed me the offered letter. It bore this superscription: “To Herr-doctor Widemann, No. III High Street, Heidelberg.”

I turned to Mr. G — — once more.

“Is he, by chance, a relation of the man who executed Sand?” I asked.

“He is his son, and was standing by when the head fell.”.

“What is his calling, then?”

“The same as that of his father, whom he succeeded.”

“But you call him ‘doctor’?”

“Certainly; with us, executioners have that title.”

“But, then, doctors of what?”

“Of surgery.”

“Really?” said I. “With us it is just the contrary; surgeons are called executioners.”

“You will find him, moreover,” added Mr. G — — , “a very distinguished young man, who, although he was very young at that time, has retained a vivid recollection of that event. As for his poor father, I think he would as willingly have cut off his own right hand as have executed Sand; but if he had refused, someone else would have been found. So he had to do what he was ordered to do, and he did his best.”

I thanked Mr. G — — , fully resolving to make use of his letter, and we left for Heidelberg, where we arrived at eleven in the evening.

My first visit next day was to Dr. Widernann. It was not without some emotion, which, moreover, I saw reflected upon, the faces of my travelling companions, that I rang at the door of the last judge, as the Germans call him. An old woman opened the door to us, and ushered us into a pretty little study, on the left of a passage and at the foot of a staircase, where we waited while Mr. Widemann finished dressing. This little room was full of curiosities, madrepores, shells, stuffed birds, and dried plants; a double-barrelled gun, a powder-flask, and a game-bag showed that Mr. Widemann was a hunter.

After a moment we heard his footstep, and the door opened. Mr. Widemann was a very handsome young man, of thirty or thirty-two, with black whiskers entirely surrounding his manly and expressive face; his morning dress showed a certain rural elegance. He seemed at first not only embarrassed but pained by our visit. The aimless curiosity of which he seemed to be the object was indeed odd. I hastened to give him Mr. G — — ’s letter and to tell him what reason brought me. Then he gradually recovered himself, and at last showed himself no less hospitable and obliging towards us than he to whom we owed the introduction had been, the day before.

Mr. Widemann then gathered together all his remembrances; he, too, had retained a vivid recollection of Sand, and he told us among other things that his father, at the risk of bringing himself into ill odour, had asked leave to have a new scaffold made at his own expense, so that no other criminal might be executed upon the altar of the martyr’s death. Permission had been given, and Mr. Widemann had used the wood of the scaffold for the doors and windows of a little country house standing in a vineyard. Then for three or four years this cottage became a shrine for pilgrims; but after a time, little by little, the crowd grew less, and at the present day, when some of those who wiped the blood from the scaffold with their handkerchiefs have became public functionaries, receiving salaries from Government, only foreigners ask, now and again, to see these strange relics.

Mr. Widemann gave me a guide; for, after hearing everything, I wanted to see everything. The house stands half a league away from Heidelberg, on the left of the road to Carlsruhe, and half-way up the mountain-side. It is perhaps the only monument of the kind that exists in the world.

Our readers will judge better from this anecdote than from anything more we could say, what sort of man he was who left such a memory in the hearts of his gaoler and his executioner.

URBAIN GRANDIER — 1634

CHAPTER I

On Sunday, the 26th of November, 1631, there was great excitement in the little town of Loudun, especially in the narrow streets which led to the church of Saint-Pierre in the marketplace, from the gate of which the town was entered by anyone coming from the direction of the abbey of Saint-Jouin-les-Marmes. This excitement was caused by the expected arrival of a personage who had been much in people’s mouths latterly in Loudun, and about whom there was such difference of opinion that discussion on the subject between those who were on his side and those who were against him was carried on with true provincial acrimony. It was easy to see, by the varied expressions on the faces of those who turned the doorsteps into improvised debating clubs, how varied were the feelings with which the man would be welcomed who had himself formally announced to friends and enemies alike the exact date of his return.

About nine o’clock a kind of sympathetic vibration ran through the crowd, and with the rapidity of a flash of lightning the words, “There he is! there he is!” passed from group to group. At this cry some withdrew into their houses and shut their doors and darkened their windows, as if it were a day of public mourning, while others opened them wide, as if to let joy enter. In a few moments the uproar and confusion evoked by the news was succeeded by the deep silence of breathless curiosity.

Then, through the silence, a figure advanced, carrying a branch of laurel in one hand as a token of triumph. It was that of a young man of from thirty-two to thirty-four years of age, with a graceful and well-knit frame, an aristocratic air and faultlessly beautiful features of a somewhat haughty expression. Although he had walked three leagues to reach the town, the ecclesiastical garb which he wore was not only elegant but of dainty freshness. His eyes turned to heaven, and singing in a sweet voice praise to the Lord, he passed through the streets leading to the church in the market-place with a slow and solemn gait, without vouchsafing a look, a word, or a gesture to anyone. The entire crowd, falling into step, marched behind him as he advanced, singing like him, the singers being the prettiest girls in Loudun, for we have forgotten to say that the crowd consisted almost entirely of women.

Meanwhile the object of all this commotion arrived at length at the porch of the church of Saint-Pierre. Ascending the steps, he knelt at the top and prayed in a low voice, then rising he touched the church doors with his laurel branch, and they opened wide as if by magic, revealing the choir decorated and illuminated as if for one of the four great feasts of the year, and with all its scholars, choir boys, singers, beadles, and vergers in their places. Glancing around, he for whom they were waiting came up the nave, passed through the choir, knelt for a second time at the foot of the altar, upon which he laid the branch of laurel, then putting on a robe as white as snow and passing the stole around his neck, he began the celebration of the mass before a congregation composed of all those who had followed him. At the end of the mass a Te Deum was sung.

He who had just rendered thanks to God for his own victory with all the solemn ceremonial usually reserved for the triumphs of kings was the priest Urbain Grandier. Two days before, he had been acquitted, in virtue of a decision pronounced by M. d’Escoubleau de Sourdis, Archbishop of Bordeaux, of an accusation brought against him of which he had been declared guilty by a magistrate, and in punishment of which he had been condemned to fast on bread and water every Friday for three months, and forbidden to exercise his priestly functions in the diocese of Poitiers for five years and in the town of Loudun for ever.

These are the circumstances under which the sentence had been passed and the judgment reversed.

Urbain Grandier was born at Rovere, a village near Sable, a little town of Bas-Maine. Having studied the sciences with his father Pierre and his uncle Claude Grandier, who were learned astrologers and alchemists, he entered, at the age of twelve, the Jesuit college at Bordeaux, having already received the ordinary education of a young man. The professors soon found that besides his considerable attainments he had great natural gifts for languages and oratory; they therefore made of him a thorough classical scholar, and in order to develop his oratorical talent encouraged him to practise preaching. They soon grew very fond of a pupil who was likely to bring them so much credit, and as soon as he was old enough to take holy orders they gave him the cure of souls in the parish of Saint-Pierre in Loudun, which was in the gift of the college. When he had been some months installed there as a priest-in-charge, he received a prebendal stall, thanks to the same patrons, in the collegiate church of Sainte-Croix.

It is easy to understand that the bestowal of these two positions on so young a man, who did not even belong to the province, made him seem in some sort a usurper of rights and privileges belonging to the people of the country, and drew upon him the envy of his brother-ecclesiastics. There were, in fact, many other reasons why Urbain should be an object of jealousy to these: first, as we have already said, he was very handsome, then the instruction which he had received from his father had opened the world of science to him and given him the key to a thousand things which were mysteries to the ignorant, but which he fathomed with the greatest ease. Furthermore, the comprehensive course of study which he had followed at the Jesuit college had raised him above a crowd of prejudices, which are sacred to the vulgar, but for which he made no secret of his contempt; and lastly, the eloquence of his sermons had drawn to his church the greater part of the regular congregations of the other religious communities, especially of the mendicant orders, who had till then, in what concerned preaching, borne away the palm at Loudun. As we have said, all this was more than enough to excite, first jealousy, and then hatred. And both were excited in no ordinary degree.

We all know how easily the ill-natured gossip of a small town can rouse the angry contempt of the masses for everything which is beyond or above them. In a wider sphere Urbain would have shone by his many gifts, but, cooped up as he was within the walls of a little town and deprived of air and space, all that might have conduced to his success in Paris led to his destruction at Loudun.

It was also unfortunate for Urbain that his character, far from winning pardon for his genius, augmented the hatred which the latter inspired. Urbain, who in his intercourse with his friends was cordial and agreeable, was sarcastic, cold, and haughty to his enemies. When he had once resolved on a course, he pursued it unflinchingly; he jealously exacted all the honour due to the rank at which he had arrived, defending it as though it were a conquest; he also insisted on enforcing all his legal rights, and he resented the opposition and angry words of casual opponents with a harshness which made them his lifelong enemies.

The first example which Urbain gave of this inflexibility was in 1620, when he gained a lawsuit against a priest named Meunier. He caused the sentence to be carried out with such rigour that he awoke an inextinguishable hatred in Meunier's mind, which ever after burst forth on the slightest provocation.

A second lawsuit, which he likewise gained; was one which he undertook against the chapter of Sainte-Croix with regard to a house, his claim to which the chapter, disputed. Here again he displayed the same determination to exact his strict legal rights to the last iota, and unfortunately Mignon, the attorney of the unsuccessful chapter, was a revengeful, vindictive, and ambitious man; too commonplace ever to arrive at a high position, and yet too much above his surroundings to be content with the secondary position which he occupied. This man, who was a canon of the collegiate church of Sainte-Croix and director of the Ursuline convent, will have an important part to play in the following narrative. Being as hypocritical as Urbain was straightforward, his ambition was to gain wherever his name was known a reputation for exalted piety; he therefore affected in his life the asceticism of an anchorite and the self-denial of a saint. As he had much experience in ecclesiastical lawsuits, he looked on the chapter's loss of this one, of which he had in some sort guaranteed the success, as a personal humiliation, so that when Urbain gave himself airs of triumph and exacted the last letter of his bond, as in the case of Meunier, he turned Mignon into an enemy who was not only more relentless but more dangerous than the former.

In the meantime, and in consequence of this lawsuit, a certain Barot, an uncle of Mignon and his partner as well, got up a dispute with Urbain, but as he was a man below mediocrity, Urbain required in order to crush him only to let fall from the height of his superiority a few of those disdainful words which brand as deeply as a red-hot iron. This man, though totally wanting in parts, was very rich, and having no children was always surrounded by a horde of relatives, every one of whom was absorbed in the attempt to make himself so agreeable that his name would appear in Barot's will. This being so, the mocking words which were rained down on Barot spattered not only himself but also all those who had sided with him in the quarrel, and thus added considerably to the tale of Urbain's enemies.

About this epoch a still graver event took place. Amongst the most assiduous frequenters of the confessional in his church was a young and pretty girl, Julie by name, the daughter of the king's attorney, Trinquant — Trinquant being, as well as Barot, an uncle of Mignon. Now it happened that this young girl fell into such a state of debility that she was obliged to keep her room. One of her friends, named Marthe Pelletier, giving up society, of which she was very fond, undertook to nurse the patient, and carried her devotion so far as to shut herself up in the same room with her. When Julie Trinquant had recovered and was able again to take her place in the world, it came out that Marthe Pelletier, during her weeks of retirement, had given birth to a child, which had been baptized and then put out to nurse. Now, by one of those odd whims which so often take possession of the public mind, everyone in Loudun persisted in asserting that the real mother of the infant was not she who had acknowledged herself as such — that, in short, Marthe Pelletier had sold her good name to her friend Julie for a sum of money; and of course it followed as a matter about which there could be no possible doubt, that Urbain was the father.

Trinquant hearing of the reports about his daughter, took upon himself as king’s attorney to have Marthe Pelletier arrested and imprisoned. Being questioned about the child, she insisted that she was its mother, and would take its maintenance upon herself. To have brought a child into the world under such circumstances was a sin, but not a crime; Trinquant was therefore obliged to set Marthe at liberty, and the abuse of justice of which he was guilty served only to spread the scandal farther and to strengthen the public in the belief it had taken up.

Hitherto, whether through the intervention of the heavenly powers, or by means of his own cleverness, Urbain Grandier had come out victor in every struggle in which he had engaged, but each victor had added to the number of his enemies, and these were now so numerous that any other than he would have been alarmed, and have tried either to conciliate them or to take precautions against their malice; but Urbain, wrapped in his pride, and perhaps conscious of his innocence, paid no attention to the counsels of his most faithful followers, but went on his way unheeding.

All the opponents whom till now Urbain had encountered had been entirely unconnected with each other, and had each struggled for his own individual ends. Urbain’s enemies, believing that the cause of his success was to be found in the want of cooperation among themselves, now determined to unite in order to crush him. In consequence, a conference was held at Barot’s, at which, besides Barot himself, Meunier, Trinquant, and Mignon took part, and the latter had also brought with him one Menuau, a king’s counsel and his own most intimate friend, who was, however, influenced by other motives than friendship in joining the conspiracy. The fact was, that Menuau was in love with a woman who had steadfastly refused to show him any favour, and he had got firmly fixed in his head that the reason for her else inexplicable indifference and disdain was that Urbain had been beforehand with him in finding an entrance to her heart. The object of the meeting was to agree as to the best means of driving the common enemy out of Loudon and its neighbourhood.

Urbain's life was so well ordered that it presented little which his enemies could use as a handle for their purpose. His only foible seemed to be a predilection for female society; while in return all the wives and daughters of the place, with the unerring instinct of their sex, seeing, that the new priest was young, handsome, and eloquent, chose him, whenever it was possible, as their spiritual director. As this preference had already offended many husbands and fathers, the decision the conspirators arrived at was that on this side alone was Grandier vulnerable, and that their only chance of success was to attack him where he was weakest. Almost at once, therefore, the vague reports which had been floating about began to attain a certain definiteness: there were allusions made, though no name was mentioned, to a young girl in Loudun; who in spite of Grandier's frequent unfaithfulness yet remained his mistress-in-chief; then it began to be whispered that the young girl, having had conscientious scruples about her love for Urbain, he had allayed them by an act of sacrilege — that is to say, he had, as priest, in the middle of the night, performed the service of marriage between himself and his mistress. The more absurd the reports, the more credence did they gain, and it was not long till everyone in Loudun believed them true, although no one was able to name the mysterious heroine of the tale who had had the courage to contract a marriage with a priest; and considering how small Loudun was, this was most extraordinary.

Resolute and full of courage as was Grandier, at length he could not conceal from himself that his path lay over quicksands: he felt that slander was secretly closing him round, and that as soon as he was well entangled in her shiny folds, she would reveal herself by raising her abhorred head, and that then a mortal combat between them would begin. But it was one of his convictions that to draw back was to acknowledge one's guilt; besides, as far as he was concerned, it was probably too late for him to retrace his steps. He therefore went on his way, as unyielding, as scornful, and as haughty as ever.

Among those who were supposed to be most active in spreading the slanders relative to Urbain was a man called Duthibaut, a person of importance in the province, who was supposed by the townspeople to hold very advanced views, and who was a “Sir Oracle” to whom the commonplace and vulgar turned for enlightenment. Some of this man’s strictures on Grandier were reported to the latter, especially some calumnies to which Duthibaut had given vent at the Marquis de Bellay’s; and one day, Grandier, arrayed in priestly garments, was about to enter the church of Sainte-Croix to assist in the service, he encountered Duthibaut at the entrance, and with his usual haughty disdain accused him of slander. Duthibaut, who had got into the habit of saying and doing whatever came into his head without fear of being called to account, partly because of his wealth and partly because of the influence he had gained over the narrow-minded, who are so numerous in a small provincial town, and who regarded him as being much above them, was so furious at this public reprimand, that he raised his cane and struck Urbain.

The opportunity which this affront afforded Grandier of being revenged on all his enemies was too precious to be neglected, but, convinced, with too much reason, that he would never obtain justice from the local authorities, although the respect due to the Church had been infringed, in his person he decided to appeal to King Louis XIII, who deigned to receive him, and deciding that the insult offered to a priest robed in the sacred vestments should be expiated, sent the cause to the high court of Parliament, with instructions that the case against Duthibaut should be tried and decided there.

Hereupon Urbain’s enemies saw they had no time to lose, and took advantage of his absence to make counter accusations against him. Two worthies beings, named Cherbonneau and Bugrau, agreed to become informers, and were brought before the ecclesiastical magistrate at Poitiers. They accused Grandier of having corrupted women and girls, of indulging in blasphemy and profanity, of neglecting to read his breviary daily, and of turning God’s sanctuary into a place of debauchery and prostitution. The information was taken down, and Louis Chauvet, the civil lieutenant, and the archpriest of Saint-Marcel and the Loudenois, were appointed to investigate the matter, so that, while Urbain was instituting proceedings against Duthibaut in Paris, information was laid against himself in Loudun. This matter thus set going was pushed forward with all the acrimony so common in religious prosecutions; Trinquant appeared as a witness, and drew many others after him, and whatever omissions were found in the depositions were interpolated according to the needs of the prosecution. The result was that the case when fully got up appeared to be so serious that it was sent to the Bishop of Poitiers for trial. Now the bishop was not only surrounded by the friends of those who were bringing the accusations against Grandier, but had himself a grudge against him. It had happened some time before that Urbain, the case being urgent, had dispensed with the usual notice of a marriage, and the bishop, knowing this, found in the papers laid before him, superficial as they were, sufficient evidence against Urbain to justify him in issuing a warrant for his apprehension, which was drawn up in the following words:

“Henri-Louis, Chataignier de la Rochepezai, by divine mercy Bishop of Poitiers, in view of the charges and informations conveyed to us by the archpriest of Loudun against Urbain Grandier, priest-in-charge of the Church of Saint-Pierre in the Market-Place at Loudun, in virtue of a commission appointed by us directed to the said archpriest, or in his absence to the Prior of Chassaignes, in view also of the opinion given by our attorney upon the said charges, have ordered and do hereby order that Urbain Grandier, the accused, be quietly taken to the prison in our palace in Poitiers, if it so be that he be taken and apprehended, and if not, that he be summoned to appear at his domicile within three days, by the first apparitor-priest, or tonsured clerk, and also by the first royal sergeant, upon this warrant, and we request the aid of the secular authorities, and to them, or to any one of them, we hereby give power and authority to carry out this decree notwithstanding any opposition or appeal, and the said Grandier having been heard, such a decision will be given by our attorney as the facts may seem to warrant.

“Given at Dissay the 22nd day of October 1629, and signed in the original as follows:

“HENRI-LOUIS, Bishop of Poitiers.”

Grandier was, as we have said, at Paris when these proceedings were taken against him, conducting before the Parliament his case against Duthibaut. The latter received a copy of the decision arrived at by the bishop, before Grandier knew of the charges that had been formulated against him, and having in the course of his defence drawn a terrible picture of the immorality of Grandier’s life, he produced as a proof of the truth of his assertions the damning document which had been put into his hands. The court, not knowing what to think of the turn affairs had taken, decided that before considering the accusations brought by Grandier, he must appear before his bishop to clear himself of the charges, brought against himself. Consequently he left Paris at once, and arrived at Loudun, where he only stayed long enough to learn what had happened in his absence, and then went on to Poitiers in order to draw up his defence. He had, however, no sooner set foot in the place than he was arrested by a sheriff's officer named Chatry, and confined in the prison of the episcopal palace.

It was the middle of November, and the prison was at all times cold and damp, yet no attention was paid to Grandier's request that he should be transferred to some other place of confinement. Convinced by this that his enemies had more influence than he had supposed, he resolved to possess his soul in patience, and remained a prisoner for two months, during which even his warmest friends believed him lost, while Duthibaut openly laughed at the proceedings instituted against himself, which he now believed would never go any farther, and Barot had already selected one of his heirs, a certain Ismael Boulieau, as successor to Urbain as priest and prebendary.

It was arranged that the costs of the lawsuit should be defrayed out of a fund raised by the prosecutors, the rich paying for the poor; for as all the witnesses lived at Loudun and the trial was to take place at Poitiers, considerable expense would be incurred by the necessity of bringing so many people such a distance; but the lust of vengeance proved stronger than the lust of gold; the subscription expected from each being estimated according to his fortune, each paid without a murmur, and at the end of two months the case was concluded.

In spite of the evident pains taken by the prosecution to strain the evidence against the defendant, the principal charge could not be sustained, which was that he had led astray many wives and daughters in Loudun. No one woman came forward to complain of her ruin by Grandier; the name of no single victim of his alleged immorality was given. The conduct of the case was the most extraordinary ever seen; it was evident that the accusations were founded on hearsay and not on fact, and yet a decision and sentence against Grandier were pronounced on January 3rd, 1630. The sentence was as follows: For three months to fast each Friday on bread and water by way of penance; to be inhibited from the performance of clerical functions in the diocese of Poitiers for five years, and in the town of Loudun for ever.

Both parties appealed from this decision: Grandier to the Archbishop of Bordeaux, and his adversaries, on the advice of the attorney to the diocese, pleading a miscarriage of justice, to the Parliament of Paris; this last appeal being made in order to overwhelm Grandier and break his spirit. But Grandier's resolution enabled him to face this attack boldly: he engaged counsel to defend his case before the Parliament, while he himself conducted his appeal to the Archbishop of Bordeaux. But as there were many necessary witnesses, and it was almost impossible to bring them all such a great distance, the archiepiscopal court sent the appeal to the presidial court of Poitiers. The public prosecutor of Poitiers began a fresh investigation, which being conducted with impartiality was not encouraging to Grandier's accusers. There had been many conflicting statements made by the witnesses, and these were now repeated: other witnesses had declared quite openly that they had been bribed; others again stated that their depositions had been tampered with; and amongst these latter was a certain priest named Mechin, and also that Ishmael Boulieau whom Barot had been in such a hurry to select as candidate for the reversion of Grandier's preferments. Boulieau's deposition has been lost, but we can lay Mechin's before the reader, for the original has been preserved, just as it issued from his pen:

"I, Gervais Mechin, curate-in-charge of the Church of Saint-Pierre in the Market Place at Loudun, certify by these presents, signed by my hand, to relieve my conscience as to a certain report which is being spread abroad, that I had said in support of an accusation brought by Gilles Robert, archpriest, against Urbain Grandier, priest-in-charge of Saint-Pierre, that I had found the said Grandier lying with women and girls in the church of Saint Pierre, the doors being closed.

"ITEM. that on several different occasions, at unsuitable hours both day and night, I had seen women and girls disturb the said Grandier by going into his bedroom, and that some of the said women remained with him from one o'clock in the after noon till three o'clock the next morning, their maids bringing them their suppers and going away again at once.

"ITEM. that I had seen the said Grandier in the church, the doors being open, but that as soon as some women entered he closed them.

"As I earnestly desire that such reports should cease, I declare by these presents that I have never seen the said Grandier with women or girls in the church, the doors being closed; that I have never found him there alone with women or girls; that when he spoke to either someone else was always present, and the doors were open; and as to their posture, I think I made it sufficiently clear when in the witness-box that Grandier was seated and the women scattered over the church; furthermore, I have never seen either women or girls enter Grandier's bedroom either by day or night, although it is true that I have heard people in the corridor coming and going late in the evening, who they were I cannot say, but a brother of the said Grandier sleeps close by; neither have I any knowledge that either women or girls, had their suppers brought to the said room. I have also never said that he neglected the reading of his breviary, because that would be contrary to the truth, seeing that on several occasions he borrowed mine and read his hours in it. I also declare that I have never seen him close the doors of the church, and that whenever I have seen him speaking to women I have never noticed any impropriety; I have not ever seen him touch them in any way, they have only spoken together; and if anything is found in my deposition contrary to the above, it is without my knowledge, and was never read to me, for I would not have signed it, and I say and affirm all this in homage to the truth.

"Done the last day of October 1630, "(Signed) G. MECHIN."

In the face of such proofs of innocence none of the accusations could be considered as established and so, according to the decision of the presidial court of Poitiers, dated the 25th of May 1634, the decision of the bishop's court was reversed, and Grandier was acquitted of the charges brought against him. However, he had still to appear before the Archbishop of Bordeaux, that his acquittal might be ratified. Grandier took advantage of a visit which the archbishop paid to his abbey at Saint-Jouin-les-Marmes, which was only three leagues from Loudun, to make this appearance; his adversaries, who were discouraged by the result of the proceedings at Poitiers, scarcely made any defence, and the archbishop, after an examination which brought clearly to light the innocence of the accused, acquitted and absolved him.

The rehabilitation of Grandier before his bishop had two important results: the first was that it clearly established his innocence, and the second that it brought into prominence his high attainments and eminent qualities.

The archbishop seeing the persecutions to which he was subjected, felt a kindly interest in him, and advised him to exchange into some other diocese, leaving a town the principal inhabitants of which appeared to have vowed him a relentless hate. But such an abandonment of his rights was foreign to the character of Urbain, and he declared to his superior that, strong in His Grace’s approbation and the testimony of his own conscience, he would remain in the place to which God had called him. Monseigneur de Sourdis did not feel it his duty to urge Urbain any further, but he had enough insight into his character to perceive that if Urbain should one day fall, it would be, like Satan, through pride; for he added another sentence to his decision, recommending him to fulfil the duties of his office with discretion and modesty, according to the decrees of the Fathers and the canonical constitutions. The triumphal entry of Urbain into Loudun with which we began our narrative shows the spirit in which he took his recommendation.

CHAPTER II

Urbain Granadier was not satisfied with the arrogant demonstration by which he signalised his return, which even his friends had felt to be ill advised; instead of allowing the hate he had aroused to die away or at least to fall asleep by letting the past be past, he continued with more zeal than ever his proceedings against Duthibaut, and succeeded in obtaining a decree from the Parliament of La Tournelle, by which Duthibaut was summoned before it, and obliged to listen bareheaded to a reprimand, to offer apologies, and to pay damages and costs.

Having thus got the better of one enemy, Urbain turned on the others, and showed himself more indefatigable in the pursuit of justice than they had been in the pursuit of vengeance. The decision of the archbishop had given him a right to a sum of money for compensation, and interest thereon, as well as to the restitution of the revenues of his livings, and there being some demur made, he announced publicly that he intended to exact this reparation to the uttermost farthing, and set about collecting all the evidence which was necessary for the success of a new lawsuit for libel and forgery which he intended to begin. It was in vain that his friends assured him that the vindication of his innocence had been complete and brilliant, it was in vain that they tried to convince him of the danger of driving the vanquished to despair, Urbain replied that he was ready to endure all the persecutions which his enemies might succeed in inflicting on him, but as long as he felt that he had right upon his side he was incapable of drawing back.

Grandier’s adversaries soon became conscious of the storm which was gathering above their heads, and feeling that the struggle between themselves and this man would be one of life or death, Mignon, Barot, Meunier, Duthibaut, and Menuau met Trinquant at the village of Pindadane, in a house belonging to the latter, in order to consult about the dangers which threatened them. Mignon had, however, already begun to weave the threads of a new intrigue, which he explained in full to the others; they lent a favourable ear, and his plan was adopted. We shall see it unfold itself by degrees, for it is the basis of our narrative.

We have already said that Mignon was the director of the convent of Ursulines at Loudun: Now the Ursuline order was quite modern, for the historic controversies to which the slightest mention of the martyrdom of St. Ursula and her eleven thousand virgins gave rise, had long hindered the foundation of an order in the saint’s honour. However, in 1560 Madame Angele de Bresse established such an order in Italy, with the same rules as the Augustinian order. This gained the approbation of Pope Gregory XIII in 1572. In 1614, Madeleine Lhuillier, with the approval of Pope Paul V, introduced this order into France, by founding a convent at Paris, whence it rapidly spread over the whole kingdom, so-that in 1626, only six years before the time when the events just related took place, a sisterhood was founded in the little town of Loudun.

Although this community at first consisted entirely of ladies of good family, daughters of nobles, officers, judges, and the better class of citizens, and numbered amongst its founders Jeanne de Belfield, daughter of the late Marquis of Cose, and relative of M. de Laubardemont, Mademoiselle de Fazili, cousin of the cardinal-duke, two ladies of the house of Barbenis de Nogaret, Madame de Lamothe, daughter of the Marquis Lamothe-Barace of Anjou, and Madame d’Escoubleau de Sourdis, of the same family as the Archbishop of Bordeaux, yet as these nuns had almost all entered the convent because of their want of fortune, the community found itself at the time of its establishment richer in blood than in money, and was obliged instead of building to purchase a private house. The owner of this house was a certain Moussaut du Frene, whose brother was a priest. This brother, therefore, naturally became the first director of these godly women. Less than a year after his appointment he died, and the directorship became vacant.

The Ursulines had bought the house in which they lived much below its normal value, for it was regarded as a haunted house by all the town. The landlord had rightly thought that there was no better way of getting rid of the ghosts than to confront them with a religious sisterhood, the members of which, passing their days in fasting and prayer, would be hardly likely to have their nights disturbed by bad spirits; and in truth, during the year which they had already passed in the house, no ghost had ever put in an appearance — a fact which had greatly increased the reputation of the nuns for sanctity.

When their director died, it so happened that the boarders took advantage of the occasion to indulge in some diversion at the expense of the older nuns, who were held in general detestation by the youth of the establishment on account of the rigour with which they enforced the rules of the order. Their plan was to raise once more those spirits which had been, as everyone supposed, permanently relegated to outer darkness. So noises began to be heard on the roof of the house, which resolved themselves into cries and groans; then growing bolder, the spirits entered the attics and garrets, announcing their presence by clanking of chains; at last they became so familiar that they invaded the dormitories, where they dragged the sheets off the sisters and abstracted their clothes.

Great was the terror in the convent, and great the talk in the town, so that the mother superior called her wisest, nuns around her and asked them what, in their opinion, would be the best course to take in the delicate circumstances in which they found themselves. Without a dissentient voice, the conclusion arrived at was, that the late director should be immediately replaced by a man still holier than he, if such a man could be found, and whether because he possessed a reputation for sanctity, or for some other reason, their choice fell on Urbain Grandier. When the offer of the post was brought to him, he answered that he was already responsible for two important charges, and that he therefore had not enough time to watch over the snow-white flock which they wished to entrust to him, as a good shepherd should, and he recommended the lady superior to seek out another more worthy and less occupied than himself.

This answer, as may be supposed, wounded the self-esteem of the sisters: they next turned their eyes towards Mignon, priest and canon of the collegiate church of Sainte-Croix, and he, although he felt deeply hurt that they had not thought first of him, accepted the position eagerly; but the recollection that Grandier had been preferred before himself kept awake in, him one of those bitter hatreds which time, instead of soothing, intensifies. From the foregoing narrative the reader can see to what this hate led.

As soon as the new director was appointed, the mother superior confided to him the kind of foes which he would be expected to vanquish. Instead of comforting her by the assurance that no ghosts existing, it could not be ghosts who ran riot in the house, Mignon saw that by pretending to lay these phantoms he could acquire the reputation for holiness he so much desired. So he answered that the Holy Scriptures recognised the existence of ghosts by relating how the witch of Endor had made the shade of Samuel appear to Saul. He went on to say that the ritual of the Church possessed means of driving away all evil spirits, no matter how persistent they were, provided that he who undertook the task were pure in thought and deed, and that he hoped soon, by the help of God, to rid the convent of its nocturnal visitants, whereupon as a preparation for their expulsion he ordered a three days' fast, to be followed by a general confession.

It does not require any great cleverness to understand how easily Mignon arrived at the truth by questioning the young penitents as they came before him. The boarders who had played at being ghosts confessed their folly, saying that they had been helped by a young novice of sixteen years of age, named Marie Aubin. She acknowledged that this was true; it was she who used to get up in the middle of the night, and open the dormitory door, which her more timid room-mates locked most carefully from within every night, before going to bed — a fact which greatly increased their terror when, despite their precautions, the ghosts still got in. Under pretext of not exposing them to the anger of the superior, whose suspicions would be sure to be awakened if the apparitions were to disappear immediately after the general confession, Mignon directed them to renew their nightly frolics from time to time, but at longer and longer intervals. He then sought an interview with the superior, and assured her that he had found the minds of all those under her charge so chaste and pure that he felt sure through his earnest prayers he would soon clear the convent of the spirits which now pervaded it.

Everything happened as the director had foretold, and the reputation for sanctity of the holy man, who by watching and praying had delivered the worthy Ursulines from their ghostly assailants, increased enormously in the town of Loudun.

CHAPTER III

Hardly had tranquillity been restored when Mignon, Duthibaut, Menuau, Meunier, and Barot, having lost their cause before the Archbishop of Bordeaux, and finding themselves threatened by Grandier with a prosecution for libel and forgery, met together to consult as to the best means of defending themselves before the unbending severity of this man, who would, they felt, destroy them if they did not destroy him.

The result of this consultation was that very shortly afterwards queer reports began to fly about; it was whispered that the ghosts whom the pious director had expelled had again invaded the convent, under an invisible and impalpable form, and that several of the nuns had given, by their words and acts, incontrovertible proofs of being possessed.

When these reports were mentioned to Mignon, he, instead of denying their truth, cast up his eyes to heaven and said that God was certainly a great and merciful God, but it was also certain that Satan was very clever, especially when he was barked by that false human science called magic. However, as to the reports, though they were not entirely without foundation, he would not go so far as to say that any of the sisters were really possessed by devils, that being a question which time alone could decide.

The effect of such an answer on minds already prepared to listen to the most impossible things, may easily be guessed. Mignon let the gossip go its rounds for several months without giving it any fresh food, but at length, when the time was ripe, he called on the priest of Saint-Jacques at Chinon, and told him that matters had now come to such a pass in the Ursuline convent that he felt it impossible to bear up alone under the responsibility of caring for the salvation of the afflicted nuns, and he begged him to accompany him to the convent. This priest, whose name was Pierre Barre, was exactly the man whom Mignon needed in such a crisis. He was of melancholy temperament, and dreamed dreams and saw visions; his one ambition was to gain a reputation for asceticism and holiness. Desiring to surround his visit with the solemnity befitting such an important event, he set out for Loudun at the head of all his parishioners, the whole procession going on foot, in order to arouse interest and curiosity; but this measure was quite needless it took less than that to set the town agog.

While the faithful filled the churches offering up prayers for the success of the exorcisms, Mignon and Barre entered upon their task at the convent, where they remained shut up with the nuns for six hours. At the end of this time Barre appeared and announced to his parishioners that they might go back to Chinon without him, for he had made up his mind to remain for the present at Loudun, in order to aid the venerable director of the Ursuline convent in the holy work he had undertaken; he enjoined on them to pray morning and evening, with all possible fervour, that, in spite of the serious dangers by which it was surrounded, the good cause might finally triumph. This advice, unaccompanied as it was by any explanation, redoubled the curiosity of the people, and the belief gained ground that it was not merely one or two nuns who were possessed of devils, but the whole sisterhood. It was not very long before the name of the magician who had worked this wonder began to be mentioned quite openly: Satan, it was said, had drawn Urbain Grandier into his power, through his pride. Urbain had entered into a pact with the Evil Spirit by which he had sold him his soul in return for being made the most learned man on earth. Now, as Urbain’s knowledge was much greater than that of the inhabitants of Loudun, this story gained general credence in the town, although here and there was to be found a man sufficiently enlightened to shrug his shoulders at these absurdities, and to laugh at the mummeries, of which as yet he saw only the ridiculous side.

For the next ten or twelve days Mignon and Barre spent the greater part of their time at the convent; sometimes remaining there for six hours at a stretch, sometimes the entire day. At length, on Monday, the 11th of October, 1632, they wrote to the priest of Venier, to Messire Guillaume Cerisay de la Gueriniere, bailiff of the Loudenois, and to Messire Louis Chauvet, civil lieutenant, begging them to visit the Ursuline convent, in order to examine two nuns who were possessed by evil spirits, and to verify the strange and almost incredible manifestations of this possession. Being thus formally appealed to, the two magistrates could not avoid compliance with the request. It must be confessed that they were not free from curiosity, and felt far from sorry at being able to get to the bottom of the mystery of which for some time the whole town was talking. They repaired, therefore, to the convent, intending to make a thorough investigation as to the reality of the possession and as to the efficacy of the exorcisms employed. Should they judge that the nuns were really possessed, and that those who tried to deliver them were in earnest, they would authorise the continuation of the efforts at exorcism; but if they were not satisfied on these two points, they would soon put an end to the whole thing as a comedy. When they reached the door, Mignon, wearing alb and stole, came to meet them. He told them that the feelings of the nuns had for more than two weeks been harrowed by the apparition of spectres and other blood-curdling visions, that the mother superior and two nuns had evidently been possessed by evil spirits for over a week; that owing to the efforts of Barre and same Carmelite friars who were good enough to assist him against their common enemies, the devils had been temporarily driven out, but on the previous Sunday night, the 10th of October, the mother superior, Jeanne de Belfield, whose conventual name was Jeanne des Anges, and a lay sister called Jeanne Dumagnoux, had again been entered into by the same spirits. It had, however, been discovered by means of exorcisms that a new compact, of which the symbol and token was a bunch of roses, had been concluded, the symbol and token of the first having been three black thorns. He added that during the time of the first possession the demons had refused to give their names, but by the power of his exorcisms this reluctance had been overcome, the spirit which had resumed possession of the mother superior having at length revealed that its name was Ashtaroth, one of the greatest enemies of God, while the devil which had entered into the lay sister was of a lower order, and was called Sabulon. Unfortunately, continued Mignon, just now the two afflicted nuns were resting, and he requested the bailiff and the civil lieutenant to put off their inspection till a little later. The two magistrates were just about to go away, when a nun appeared, saying that the devils were again doing their worst with the two into whom they had entered. Consequently, they accompanied Mignon and the priest from Venier to an upper room, in which were seven narrow beds, of which two only were occupied, one by the mother superior and the other by the lay sister. The superior, who was the more thoroughly possessed of the two, was surrounded by the Carmelite monks, the sisters belonging to the convent, Mathurin Rousseau, priest and canon of Sainte-Croix, and Mannouri, a surgeon from the town.

No sooner did the two magistrates join the others than the superior was seized with violent convulsions, writhing and uttering squeals in exact imitation of a sucking pig. The two magistrates looked on in profound astonishment, which was greatly increased when they saw the patient now bury herself in her bed, now spring right out of it, the whole performance being accompanied by such diabolical gestures and grimaces that, if they were not quite convinced that the possession was genuine, they were at least filled with admiration of the manner in which it was simulated. Mignon next informed the bailiff and the civil lieutenant, that although the superior had never learned Latin she would reply in that language to all the questions addressed to her, if such were their desire. The magistrates answered that as they were there in order to examine thoroughly into the facts of the case, they begged the exorcists to give them every possible proof that the possession was real. Upon this, Mignon approached the mother superior, and, having ordered everyone to be silent, placed two of his fingers in her mouth, and, having gone through the form of exorcism prescribed by the ritual, he asked the following questions word for word as they are given,

D Why have you entered into the body of this young girl?

R Causa animositatis. Out of enmity.

D Per quod pactum? By what pact?

R Per flores. By flowers.

D Quales? What flowers?

R Rosas. Roses.

D Quis misfit? By whom wert thou sent?

At this question the magistrates remarked that the superior hesitated to reply; twice she opened her mouth in vain, but the third time she said in a weak voice —

D Dic cognomen? What is his surname?

R Urbanus. Urbain.

Here there was again the same hesitation, but as if impelled by the will of the exorcist she answered:

R.	Grandier.	Grandier.
D.	Dic qualitatem?	What is his profession?
R.	Sacerdos.	A priest.
D.	Cujus ecclesiae?	Of what church?
R.	Sancti Petri.	Saint-Pierre.
D.	Quae persona attulit flores?	Who brought the flowers?
R.	Diabolica.	Someone sent by the devil.

As the patient pronounced the last word she recovered her senses, and having repeated a prayer, attempted to swallow a morsel of bread which was offered her; she was, however, obliged to spit it out, saying it was so dry she could not get it down.

Something more liquid was then brought, but even of that she could swallow very little, as she fell into convulsions every few minutes.

Upon this the two officials, seeing there was nothing more to be got out of the superior, withdrew to one of the window recesses and began to converse in a low tone; whereupon Mignon, who feared that they had not been sufficiently impressed, followed them, and drew their attention to the fact that there was much in what they had just seen to recall the case of Gaufredi, who had been put to death a few years before in consequence of a decree of the Parliament of Aix, in Provence. This ill-judged remark of Mignon showed so clearly what his aim was that the magistrates made no reply. The civil lieutenant remarked that he had been surprised that Mignon had not made any attempt to find out the cause of the enmity of which the superior had spoken, and which it was so important to find out; but Mignon excused himself by saying that he had no right to put questions merely to gratify curiosity. The civil lieutenant was about to insist on the matter being investigated, when the lay sister in her turn went into a fit, thus extricating Mignon from his embarrassment. The magistrates approached the lay sister's bed at once, and directed Mignon to put the same questions to her as to the superior: he did so, but all in vain; all she would reply was, "To the other! To the other!"

Mignon explained this refusal to answer by saying that the evil spirit which was in her was of an inferior order, and referred all questioners to Ashtaroth, who was his superior. As this was the only explanation, good or bad, offered them by Mignon, the magistrates went away, and drew up a report of all they had seen and heard without comment, merely appending their signatures.

But in the town very few people showed the same discretion and reticence as the magistrates. The bigoted believed, the hypocrites pretended to believe; and the worldly-minded, who were numerous, discussed the doctrine of possession in all its phases, and made no secret of their own entire incredulity. They wondered, and not without reason it must be confessed, what had induced the devils to go out of the nuns' bodies for two days only, and then come back and resume possession, to the confusion of the exorcists; further, they wanted to know why the mother superior's devil spoke Latin, while the lay sister's was ignorant of that tongue; for a mere difference of rank in the hierarchy of hell did not seem a sufficient explanation of such a difference in education; Mignon’s refusal to go on with his interrogations as to the cause of the enmity made them, they said, suspect that, knowing he had reached the end of Ashtaroth’s classical knowledge, he felt it useless to try to continue the dialogue in the Ciceronian idiom. Moreover, it was well known that only a few days before all Urbain’s worst enemies had met in conclave in the village of Puidardane; and besides, how stupidly Mignon had shown his hand by mentioning Gaufredi, the priest who had been executed at Aix: lastly, why had not a desire for impartiality been shown by calling in other than Carmelite monks to be present at the exorcism, that order having a private quarrel with Grandier? It must be admitted that this way of looking at the case was not wanting in shrewdness.

On the following day, October 12th, the bailiff and the civil lieutenant, having heard that exorcisms had been again tried without their having been informed beforehand, requested a certain Canon Rousseau to accompany them, and set out with him and their clerk for the convent. On arriving, they asked for Mignon, and on his appearance they told him that this matter of exorcism was of such importance that no further steps were to be taken in it without the authorities being present, and that in future they were to be given timely notice of every attempt to get rid of the evil spirits. They added that this was all the more necessary as Mignon’s position as director of the sisterhood and his well-known hate for Grandier would draw suspicions on him unworthy of his cloth, suspicions which he ought to be the first to wish to see dissipated, and that quickly; and that, therefore, the work which he had so piously begun would be completed by exorcists appointed by the court.

Mignon replied that, though he had not the slightest objection to the magistrates being present at all the exorcisms, yet he could not promise that the spirits would reply to anyone except himself and Barre. Just at that moment Barre came on the scene, paler and more gloomy than ever, and speaking with the air of a man whose word no one could help believing, he announced that before their arrival some most extraordinary things had taken place. The magistrates asked what things, and Barre replied that he had learned from the mother superior that she was possessed, not by one, but by seven devils, of whom Ashtaroth was the chief; that Grandier had entrusted his pact with the devil, under the symbol of a bunch of roses, to a certain Jean Pivart, to give to a girl who had introduced it into the convent garden by throwing it over the wall; that this took place in the night between Saturday and Sunday “hora secunda nocturna” (two hours after midnight); that those were the very words the superior had used, but that while she readily named Pivart, she absolutely refused to give the name of the girl; that on asking what Pivart was; she had replied, “Pauper magus” (a poor magician); that he then had pressed her as to the word magus, and that she had replied “Magicianus et civis” (magician and citizen); and that just as she said those words the magistrates had arrived, and he had asked no more questions.

The two officials listened to this information with the seriousness befitting men entrusted with high judicial functions, and announced to the two priests that they proposed to visit the possessed women and witness for themselves the miracles that were taking place. The clerics offered no opposition, but said they feared that the devils were fatigued and would refuse to reply; and, in fact, when the officials reached the sickroom the two patients appeared to have regained some degree of calm. Mignon took advantage of this quiet moment to say mass, to which the two magistrates listened devoutly and tranquilly, and while the sacrifice was being offered the demons did not dare to move. It was expected that they would offer some opposition at the elevation of the Host, but everything passed off without disturbance, only the lay sister’s hands and feet twitched a great deal; and this was the only fact which the magistrates thought worthy of mention in their report for that morning. Barre assured them, however, that if they would return about three o’clock the devils would probably have recovered sufficiently from their fatigue to give a second performance.

As the two gentlemen had determined to see the affair to the end, they returned to the convent at the hour named, accompanied by Messire Irenee de Sainte-Marthe, sieur Deshurneaux; and found the room in which the possessed were lying full of curious spectators; for the exorcists had been true prophets — the devils were at work again.

The superior, as always, was the more tormented of the two, as was only to be expected, she having seven devils in her all at once; she was terribly convulsed, and was writhing and foaming at the mouth as if she were mad. No one could long continue in such a condition without serious injury to health; Barre therefore asked the devil-in-chief how soon he would come out. “Cras mane” (To-morrow morning), he replied. The exorcist then tried to hurry him, asking him why he would not come out at once; whereupon the superior murmured the word “Pactum” (A pact); and then “Sacerdos” (A priest), and finally “Finis,” or “Finit,” for even those nearest could not catch the word distinctly, as the devil, afraid doubtless of perpetrating a barbarism, spoke through the nun’s closely clenched teeth. This being all decidedly unsatisfying, the magistrates insisted that the examination should continue, but the devils had again exhausted themselves, and refused to utter another word. The priest even tried touching the superior’s head with the pyx, while prayers and litanies were recited, but it was all in vain, except that some of the spectators thought that the contortions of the patient became more violent when the intercessions of certain saints were invoked, as for instance Saints Augustine Jerome, Antony, and Mary Magdalene. Barre next directed the mother superior to dedicate her heart and soul to God, which she did without difficulty; but when he commanded her to dedicate her body also, the chief devil indicated by fresh convulsions that he was not going to allow himself to be deprived of a domicile without resistance, and made those who had heard him say that he would leave the next morning feel that he had only said so under compulsion; and their curiosity as to the result became heightened. At length, however, despite the obstinate resistance of the demon, the superior succeeded in dedicating her body also to God, and thus victorious her features resumed their usual expression, and smiling as if nothing had happened, she turned to Barre and said that there was no vestige of Satan left in her. The civil lieutenant then asked her if she remembered the questions she had been asked and the answers she had given, but she replied that she remembered nothing; but afterwards, having taken some refreshment, she said to those around her that she recollected perfectly how the first possession, over which Mignon had triumphed, had taken place: one evening about ten o’clock, while several nuns were still in her room, although she was already in bed, it seemed to her that someone took her hand and laid something in it, closing her fingers; at that instant she felt a sharp pain as if she had been pricked by three pins, and hearing her scream, the nuns came to her bedside to ask what ailed her. She held out her hand, and they found three black thorns sticking in it, each having made a tiny wound. Just as she had told this tale, the lay sister, as if to prevent all commentary, was seized with convulsions, and Barre recommenced his prayers and exorcisms, but was soon interrupted by shrieks; for one of the persons present had seen a black cat come down the chimney and disappear. Instantly everyone concluded it must be the devil, and began to seek it out. It was not without great difficulty that it was caught; for, terrified at the sight of so many people and at the noise, the poor animal had sought refuge under a canopy; but at last it was secured and carried to the superior's bedside, where Barre began his exorcisms once more, covering the cat with signs of the cross, and adjuring the devil to take his true shape. Suddenly the 'touriere', (the woman who received the tradespeople,) came forward, declaring the supposed devil to be only her cat, and she immediately took possession of it, lest some harm should happen to it.

The gathering had been just about to separate, but Barry fearing that the incident of the cat might throw a ridiculous light upon the evil spirits, resolved to awake once more a salutary terror by announcing that he was going to burn the flowers through which the second spell had been made to work. Producing a bunch of white roses, already faded, he ordered a lighted brazier to be brought. He then threw the flowers on the glowing charcoal, and to the general astonishment they were consumed without any visible effect: the heavens still smiled, no peal of thunder was heard, and no unpleasant odour diffused itself through the room. Barre feeling that the baldness of this act of destruction had had a bad effect, predicted that the morrow would bring forth wondrous things; that the chief devil would speak more distinctly than hitherto; that he would leave the body of the superior, giving such clear signs of his passage that no one would dare to doubt any longer that it was a case of genuine possession. Thereupon the criminal lieutenant, Henri Herve, who had been present during the exorcism, said they must seize upon the moment of his exit to ask about Pivart, who was unknown at Loudun, although everyone who lived there knew everybody else. Barre replied in Latin, "Et hoc dicet epuellam nominabit" (He will not only tell about him, but he will also name the young girl). The young girl whom the devil was to name was, it may be recollected, she who had introduced the flowers into the convent, and whose name the demon until now had absolutely refused to give. On the strength of these promises everyone went home to await the morrow with impatience.

CHAPTER IV

That evening Grandier asked the bailiff for an audience. At first he had made fun of the exorcisms, for the story had been so badly concocted, and the accusations were so glaringly improbable, that he had not felt the least anxiety. But as the case went on it assumed such an important aspect, and the hatred displayed by his enemies was so intense, that the fate of the priest Gaufredi, referred to by Mignon, occurred to Urbain's mind, and in order to be beforehand with his enemies he determined to lodge a complaint against them. This complaint was founded on the fact that Mignon had performed the rite of exorcism in the presence of the civil lieutenant, the bailiff, and many other persons, and had caused the nuns who were said to be possessed, in the hearing of all these people, to name him, Urbain, as the author of their possession. This being a falsehood and an attack upon his honour, he begged the bailiff, in whose hands the conduct of the affair had been specially placed, to order the nuns to be sequestered, apart from the rest of the sisterhood and from each other, and then to have each separately examined. Should there appear to be any evidence of possession, he hoped that the bailiff would be pleased to appoint clerics of well-known rank and upright character to perform whatever exorcisms were needful; such men having no bias against him would be more impartial than Mignon and his adherents. He also called upon the bailiff to have an exact report drawn up of everything that took place at the exorcisms, in order that, if necessary, he as petitioner might be able to lay it before anyone to whose judgment he might appeal. The bailiff gave Grandier a statement of the conclusions at which he had arrived, and told him that the exorcisms had been performed that day by Barre, armed with the authority of the Bishop of Poitiers himself. Being, as we have seen, a man of common sense and entirely unprejudiced in the matter, the bailiff advised Grandier to lay his complaint before his bishop; but unfortunately he was under the authority of the Bishop of Poitiers, who was so prejudiced against him that he had done everything in his power to induce the Archbishop of Bordeaux to refuse to ratify the decision in favour of Grandier, pronounced by the presidial court. Urbain could not hide from the magistrate that he had nothing to hope for from this quarter, and it was decided that he should wait and see what the morrow would bring forth, before taking any further step.

The impatiently expected day dawned at last, and at eight o’clock in the morning the bailiff, the king’s attorney, the civil lieutenant, the criminal lieutenant, and the provost’s lieutenant, with their respective clerks, were already at the convent. They found the outer gate open, but the inner door shut. In a few moments Mignon came to them and brought them into a waiting-room. There he told them that the nuns were preparing for communion, and that he would be very much obliged to them if they would withdraw and wait in a house across the street, just opposite the convent, and that he would send them word when they could come back. The magistrates, having first informed Mignon of Urbain’s petition, retired as requested.

An hour passed, and as Mignon did not summon them, in spite of his promise, they all went together to the convent chapel, where they were told the exorcisms were already over. The nuns had quitted the choir, and Mignon and Barre came to the grating and told them that they had just completed the rite, and that, thanks to their conjurations, the two afflicted ones were now quite free from evil spirits. They went on to say that they had been working together at the exorcism from seven o’clock in the morning, and that great wonders, of which they had drawn up an account, had come to pass; but they had considered it would not be proper to allow any one else to be present during the ceremony besides the exorcists and the possessed. The bailiff pointed out that their manner of proceedings was not only illegal, but that it laid them under suspicion of fraud and collusion, in the eyes of the impartial: Moreover, as the superior had accused Grandier publicly, she was bound to renew and prove her accusation also publicly, and not in secret; furthermore, it was a great piece of insolence on the part of the exorcists to invite people of their standing and character to come to the convent, and having kept them waiting an hour, to tell them that they considered them unworthy to be admitted to the ceremony which they had been requested to attend; and he wound up by saying that he would draw up a report, as he had already done on each of the preceding days, setting forth the extraordinary discrepancy between their promises and their performance. Mignon replied that he and Barre had had only one thing in view, viz. the expulsion of the, demons, and that in that they had succeeded, and that their success would be of great benefit to the holy Catholic faith, for they had got the demons so thoroughly into their power that they had been able to command them to produce within a week miraculous proofs of the spells cast on the nuns by Urbain Grandier and their wonderful deliverance therefrom; so that in future no one would be able to doubt as to the reality of the possession. Thereupon the magistrates drew up a report of all that had happened, and of what Barre and Mignon had said. This was signed by all the officials present, except the criminal lieutenant, who declared that, having perfect confidence in the statements of the exorcists, he was anxious to do nothing to increase the doubting spirit which was unhappily so prevalent among the worldly.

The same day the bailiff secretly warned Urbain of the refusal of the criminal lieutenant to join with the others in signing the report, and almost at the same moment he learned that the cause of his adversaries was strengthened by the adhesion of a certain Messire Rene Memin, seigneur de Silly, and prefect of the town. This gentleman was held in great esteem not only on account of his wealth and the many offices which he filled, but above all on account of his powerful friends, among whom was the cardinal-duke himself, to whom he had formerly been of use when the cardinal was only a prior. The character of the conspiracy had now become so alarming that Grandier felt it was time to oppose it with all his strength. Recalling his conversation with the bailiff the preceding day, during which he had advised him to lay his complaint before the Bishop of Poitiers, he set out, accompanied by a priest of Loudun, named Jean Buron, for the prelate’s country house at Dissay. The bishop, anticipating his visit, had already given his orders, and Grandier was met by Dupuis, the intendant of the palace, who, in reply to Grandier’s request to see the bishop, told him that his lordship was ill. Urbain next addressed himself to the bishop’s chaplain, and begged him to inform the prelate that his object in coming was to lay before him the official reports which the magistrates had drawn up of the events which had taken place at the Ursuline convent, and to lodge a complaint as to the slanders and accusations of which he was the victim. Grandier spoke so urgently that the chaplain could not refuse to carry his message; he returned, however, in a few moments, and told Grandier, in the presence of Dupuis, Buron, and a certain sieur Labrasse, that the bishop advised him to take his case to the royal judges, and that he earnestly hoped he would obtain justice from them. Grandier perceived that the bishop had been warned against him, and felt that he was becoming more and more entangled in the net of conspiracy around him; but he was not a man to flinch before any danger. He therefore returned immediately to Loudun, and went once more to the bailiff, to whom he related all that had happened at Dissay; he then, a second time, made a formal complaint as to the slanders circulated with regard to him, and begged the magistrates to have recourse to the king's courts in the business. He also said that he desired to be placed under the protection of the king and his justice, as the accusations made against him were aimed at his honour and his life. The bailiff hastened to make out a certificate of Urbain's protest, which forbade at the same time the repetition of the slanders or the infliction on Urbain of any injury.

Thanks to this document, a change of parts took place: Mignon, the accuser, became the accused. Feeling that he had powerful support behind him, he had the audacity to appear before the bailiff the same day. He said that he did not acknowledge his jurisdiction, as in what concerned Grandier and himself, they being both priests, they could only be judged by their bishop; he nevertheless protested against the complaint lodged by Grandier, which characterised him as a slanderer, and declared that he was ready to give himself up as a prisoner, in order to show everyone that he did not fear the result of any inquiry. Furthermore, he had taken an oath on the sacred elements the day before, in the presence of his parishioners who had come to mass, that in all he had hitherto done he had been moved, not by hatred of Grandier, but by love of the truth, and by his desire for the triumph of the Catholic faith; and he insisted that the bailiff should give him a certificate of his declaration, and served notice of the same on Grandier that very day.

CHAPTER V

Since October 13th, the day on which the demons had been expelled, life at the convent seemed to have returned to its usual quiet; but Grandier did not let himself be lulled to sleep by the calm: he knew those with whom he was contending too well to imagine for an instant that he would hear no more of them; and when the bailiff expressed pleasure at this interval of repose, Grandier said that it would not last long, as the nuns were only conning new parts, in order to carry on the drama in a more effective manner than ever. And in fact, on November 22nd, Rene Mannouri, surgeon to the convent, was sent to one of his colleagues, named Gaspard Joubert, to beg him to come, bringing some of the physicians of the town with him, to visit the two sisters, who were again tormented by evil spirits. Mannouri, however, had gone to the wrong man, for Joubert had a frank and loyal character, and hated everything that was underhand. Being determined to take no part in the business, except in a public and judicial manner, he applied at once to the bailiff to know if it was by his orders that he was called in. The bailiff said it was not, and summoned Mannouri before him to ask him by whose authority he had sent for Joubert. Mannouri declared that the ‘touriere’ had run in a fright to his house, saying that the nuns had never been worse possessed than now, and that the director, Mignon, begged him to come at once to the convent, bringing with him all the doctors he could find.

The bailiff, seeing that fresh plots against Grandier were being formed, sent for him and warned him that Barre had come over from Chinon the day before, and had resumed his exorcisms at the convent, adding that it was currently reported in the town that the mother superior and Sister Claire were again tormented by devils. The news neither astonished nor discouraged Grandier, who replied, with his usual smile of disdain, that it was evident his enemies were hatching new plots against him, and that as he had instituted proceedings against them for the former ones, he would take the same course with regard to these. At the same time, knowing how impartial the bailiff was, he begged him to accompany the doctors and officials to the convent, and to be present at the exorcisms, and should any sign of real possession manifest itself, to sequester the afflicted nuns at once, and cause them to be examined by other persons than Mignon and Barre, whom he had such good cause to distrust.

The bailiff wrote to the king’s attorney, who, notwithstanding his bias against Grandier, was forced to see that the conclusions arrived at were correct, and having certified this in writing, he at once sent his clerk to the convent to inquire if the superior were still possessed. In case of an affirmative reply being given, the clerk had instructions to warn Mignon and Barre that they were not to undertake exorcisms unless in presence of the bailiff and of such officials and doctors as he might choose to bring with him, and that they would disobey at their peril; he was also to tell them that Grandier’s demands to have the nuns sequestered and other exorcists called in were granted.

Mignon and Barre listened while the clerk read his instructions, and then said they refused to recognise the jurisdiction of the bailiff in this case; that they had been summoned by the mother superior and Sister Claire when their strange illness returned, an illness which they were convinced was nothing else than possession by evil spirits; that they had hitherto carried out their exorcisms under the authority of a commission given them by the Bishop of Poitiers; and as the time for which they had permission had not yet expired; they would continue to exorcise as often as might be necessary. They had, however, given notice to the worthy prelate of what was going on, in order that he might either come himself or send other exorcists as best suited him, so that a valid opinion as to the reality, of the possession might be procured, for up to the present the worldly and unbelieving had taken upon themselves to declare in an off-hand manner that the whole affair was a mixture of fraud and delusion, in contempt of the glory of God and the Catholic religion. As to the rest of the message, they would not, in any way prevent the bailiff and the other officials, with as many medical men as they chose to bring, from seeing the nuns, at least until they heard from the bishop, from whom they expected a letter next day. But it was for the nuns themselves to say whether it was convenient for them to receive visitors; as far as concerned themselves, they desired to renew their protest, and declared they could not accept the bailiff as their judge, and did not think that it could be legal for them to refuse to obey a command from their ecclesiastical superiors, whether with relation to exorcism or any other thing of which the ecclesiastical courts properly took cognisance. The clerk brought this answer to the bailiff, and he, thinking it was better to wait for the arrival of the bishop or of fresh orders from him, put off his visit to the convent until the next day. But the next day came without anything being heard of the prelate himself or of a messenger from him.

Early in the morning the bailiff went to the convent, but was not admitted; he then waited patiently until noon, and seeing that no news had arrived from Dissay, and that the convent gates were still closed against him, he granted a second petition of Grandier's, to the effect that Byre and Mignon should be prohibited from questioning the superior and the other nuns in a manner tending to blacken the character of the petitioner or any other person. Notice of this prohibition was served the same day on Barre and on one nun chosen to represent the community. Barre did not pay the slightest attention to this notice, but kept on asserting that the bailiff had no right to prevent his obeying the commands of his bishop, and declaring that henceforward he would perform all exorcisms solely under ecclesiastical sanction, without any reference to lay persons, whose unbelief and impatience impaired the solemnity with which such rites should be conducted.

The best part of the day having gone over without any sign of either bishop or messenger, Grandier presented a new petition to the bailiff. The bailiff at once summoned all the officers of the bailiwick and the attorneys of the king, in order to lay it before them; but the king's attorneys refused to consider the matter, declaring upon their honour that although they did not accuse Grandier of being the cause, yet they believed that the nuns were veritably possessed, being convinced by the testimony of the devout ecclesiastics in whose presence the evil spirits had come out. This was only the ostensible reason for their refusal, the real one being that the advocate was a relation of Mignon's, and the attorney a son-in-law of Trinquant's, to whose office he had succeeded. Thus Grandier, against whom were all the ecclesiastical judges, began to feel as if he were condemned beforehand by the judges of the royal courts, for he knew how very short was the interval between the recognition of the possession as a fact and the recognition of himself as its author.

Nevertheless, in spite of the formal declarations of the king's advocate and attorney, the bailiff ordered the superior and the lay sister to be removed to houses in town, each to be accompanied by a nun as companion. During their absence from the convent they were to be looked after by exorcists, by women of high character and position, as well as by physicians and attendants, all of whom he himself would appoint, all others being forbidden access to the nuns without his permission.

The clerk was again sent to the convent with a copy of this decision, but the superior having listened to the reading of the document, answered that in her own name and that of the sisterhood she refused to recognise the jurisdiction of the bailiff; that she had already received directions from the Bishop of Poitiers, dated 18th November, explaining the measures which were to be taken in the matter, and she would gladly send a copy of these directions to the bailiff, to prevent his pleading ignorance of them; furthermore, she demurred to the order for her removal, having vowed to live always secluded in a convent, and that no one could dispense her from this vow but the bishop. This protest having been made in the presence of Madame de Charnisay, aunt of two of the nuns, and Surgeon Mannouri, who was related to another, they both united in drawing up a protest against violence, in case the bailiff should insist on having his orders carried out, declaring that, should he make the attempt, they would resist him, as if he were a mere private individual. This document being duly signed and witnessed was immediately sent to the bailiff by the hand of his own clerk, whereupon the bailiff ordered that preparations should be made with regard to the sequestration, and announced that the next day, the 24th November, he would repair to the convent and be present at the exorcisms.

The next day accordingly, at the appointed hour, the bailiff summoned Daniel Roger, Vincent de Faux, Gaspard Joubert, and Matthieu Fanson, all four physicians, to his presence, and acquainting them with his reasons for having called them, asked them to accompany him to the convent to examine, with the most scrupulous impartiality, two nuns whom he would point out, in order to discover if their illness were feigned, or arose from natural or supernatural causes. Having thus instructed them as to his wishes, they all set out for the convent.

They were shown into the chapel and placed close to the altar, being separated by a grating from the choir, in which the nuns who sang usually sat. In a few moments the superior was carried in on a small bed, which was laid down before the grating. Barre then said mass, during which the superior went into violent convulsions. She threw her arms about, her fingers were clenched, her cheeks enormously inflated, and her eyes turned up so that only the whites could be seen.

The mass finished, Barre approached her to administer the holy communion and to commence the exorcism. Holding the holy wafer in his hand, he said —

“Adora Deum tuum, creatorem tuum” (Adore God, thy Creator).

The superior hesitated, as if she found great difficulty in making this act of love, but at length she said —

“Adoro te” (I adore Thee).

“Quem adoras?” (Whom dost thou adore?)

“Jesus Christus” (Jesus Christ), answered the nun, quite unconscious that the verb adorn governs accusative.

This mistake, which no sixth-form boy would make, gave rise to bursts of laughter in the church; and Daniel Douin, the provost’s assessor, was constrained to say aloud —

“There’s a devil for you, who does not know much about transitive verbs.”

Barre perceiving the bad impression that the superior’s nominative had made, hastened to ask her —

“Quis est iste quem adoras?” (Who is it whom thou dost adore?)

His hope was that she would again reply “Jesus Christus,” but he was disappointed.

“Jesu Christe,” was her answer.

Renewed shouts of laughter greeted this infraction of one of the most elementary rules of syntax, and several of those present exclaimed:

“Oh, your reverence, what very poor Latin!”

Barre pretended not to hear, and next asked what was the name of the demon who had taken possession of her. The poor superior, who was greatly confused by the unexpected effect of her last two answers, could not speak for a long time; but at length with great trouble she brought out the name Asmodee, without daring to latinise it. The exorcist then inquired how many devils the superior had in her body, and to this question she replied quite fluently:

“Sex” (Six).

The bailiff upon this requested Barre to ask the chief devil how many evil spirits he had with him. But the need for this answer had been foreseen, and the nun unhesitatingly returned —

“Quinque” (Five).

This answer raised Asmodee somewhat in the opinion of those present; but when the bailiff adjured the superior to repeat in Greek what she had just said in Latin she made no reply, and on the adjuration being renewed she immediately recovered her senses.

The examination of the superior being thus cut short, a little nun who appeared for the first time in public was brought forward. She began by twice pronouncing the name of Grandier with a loud laugh; then turning to the bystanders, called out —

“For all your number, you can do nothing worth while.”

As it was easy to see that nothing of importance was to be expected from this new patient, she was soon suppressed, and her place taken by the lay sister Claire who had already made her debut in the mother superior’s room.

Hardly had she entered the choir than she uttered a groan, but as soon as they placed her on the little bed on which the other nuns had lain, she gave way to uncontrollable laughter, and cried out between the paroxysms —

“Grandier, Grandier, you must buy some at the market.”

Barre at once declared that these wild and whirling words were a proof of possession, and approached to exorcise the demon; but Sister Claire resisted, and pretending to spit in the face of the exorcist, put out her tongue at him, making indecent gestures, using a word in harmony with her actions. This word being in the vernacular was understood by everyone and required no interpretation.

The exorcist then conjured her to give the name of the demon who was in her, and she replied —

“Grandier.”

But Barre by repeating his question gave her to understand that she had made a mistake, whereupon she corrected herself and said —

“Elimi.”

Nothing in the world could induce her to reveal the number of evil spirits by whom Elimi was accompanied, so that Barre, seeing that it was useless to press her on this point, passed on to the next question.

“Quo pacto ingressus est daemon”(By what pact did the demon get in?).

“Duplex” (Double), returned Sister Claire.

This horror of the ablative, when the ablative was absolutely necessary, aroused once more the hilarity of the audience, and proved that Sister Claire’s devil was just as poor a Latin scholar as the superior’s, and Barre, fearing some new linguistic eccentricity on the part of the evil spirit, adjourned the meeting to another day.

The paucity of learning shown in the answers of the nuns being sufficient to convince any fairminded person that the whole affair was a ridiculous comedy, the bailiff felt encouraged to persevere until he had unravelled the whole plot. Consequently, at three o'clock in the afternoon, he returned to the convent, accompanied by his clerk, by several magistrates, and by a considerable number of the best known people of Loudun, and asked to see the superior. Being admitted, he announced to Barre that he had come to insist on the superior being separated from Sister Claire, so that each could be exorcised apart. Barre dared not refuse before such a great number of witnesses, therefore the superior was isolated and the exorcisms begun all over again. Instantly the convulsions returned, just as in the morning, only that now she twisted her feet into the form of hooks, which was a new accomplishment.

Having adjured her several times, the exorcist succeeded in making her repeat some prayers, and then sounded her as to the name and number of the demons in possession, whereupon she said three times that there was one called Achaos. The bailiff then directed Barre to ask if she were possessed 'ex pacto magi, aut ex Aura voluntate Dei' (by a pact with a sorcerer or by the pure will of God), to which the superior answered

"Non est voluutas Dei" (Not by the will of God).

Upon this, Barre dreading more questions from the bystanders, hastily resumed his own catechism by asking who was the sorcerer.

"Urbanus," answered the superior.

"Est-ne Urbanus papa" (Is it Pope Urban?), asked the exorcist.

"Grandier," replied the superior.

"Quare ingressus es in corpus hujus puellae" (Why did you enter the body of this maiden?), said Barre.

"Propter praesentiam tuum" (Because of your presence), answered the superior.

At this point the bailiff, seeing no reason why the dialogue between Barre and the superior should ever come to an end, interposed and demanded that questions suggested by him and the other officials present should be put to the superior, promising that if she answered three of four such questions correctly, he, and those with him, would believe in the reality of the possession, and would certify to that effect. Barre accepted the challenge, but unluckily just at that moment the superior regained consciousness, and as it was already late, everyone retired.

CHAPTER VI

The next day, November 25th, the bailiff and the majority of the officers of the two jurisdictions came to the convent once more, and were all conducted to the choir. In a few moments the curtains behind the grating were drawn back, and the superior, lying on her bed, came to view. Barre began, as usual, by the celebration of mass, during which the superior was seized with convulsions, and exclaimed two or three times, “Grandier! Grandier! false priest!” When the mass was over, the celebrant went behind the grating, carrying the pyx; then, placing it on his head and holding it there, he protested that in all he was doing he was actuated by the purest motives and the highest integrity; that he had no desire to harm anyone on earth; and he adjured God to strike him dead if he had been guilty of any bad action or collusion, or had instigated the nuns to any deceit during the investigation.

The prior of the Carmelites next advanced and made the same declaration, taking the oath in the same manner, holding the pyx over his head; and further calling down on himself and his brethren the curse of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram if they had sinned during this inquiry. These protestations did not, however, produce the salutary effect intended, some of those present saying aloud that such oaths smacked of sacrilege.

Barre hearing the murmurs, hastened to begin the exorcisms, first advancing to the superior to offer her the holy sacrament: but as soon as she caught sight of him she became terribly convulsed, and attempted to drag the pyx from his hands. Barre, however, by pronouncing the sacred words, overcame the repulsion of the superior, and succeeded in placing the wafer in her mouth; she, however, pushed it out again with her tongue, as if it made her sick; Barge caught it in his fingers and gave it to her again, at the same time forbidding the demon to make her vomit, and this time she succeeded in partly swallowing the sacred morsel, but complained that it stuck in her throat. At last, in order to get it down, Barge three times gave her water to drink; and then, as always during his exorcisms, he began by interrogating the demon.

“Per quod pactum ingressus es in corpus hujus puellae?” (By what pact didst thou enter the body of this maiden?)

“Aqua” (By water), said the superior.

One of those who had accompanied the bailiff was a Scotchman called Stracan, the head of the Reformed College of Loudun. Hearing this answer, he called on the demon to translate aqua into Gaelic, saying if he gave this proof of having those linguistic attainments which all bad spirits possess, he and those with him would be convinced that the possession was genuine and no deception. Barre, without being in the least taken aback, replied that he would make the demon say it if God permitted, and ordered the spirit to answer in Gaelic. But though he repeated his command twice, it was not obeyed; on the third repetition the superior said —

“Nimia curiositas” (Too much curiosity), and on being asked again, said —

“Deus non volo.”

This time the poor devil went astray in his conjugation, and confusing the first with the third person, said, “God, I do not wish,” which in the context had no meaning. “God does not wish,” being the appointed answer.

The Scotchman laughed heartily at this nonsense, and proposed to Barre to let his devil enter into competition with the boys of his seventh form; but Barre, instead of frankly accepting the challenge in the devil’s name, hemmed and hawed, and opined that the devil was justified in not satisfying idle curiosity.

“But, sir, you must be aware,” said the civil lieutenant, “and if you are not, the manual you hold in your hand will teach you, that the gift of tongues is one of the unfailing symptoms of true possession, and the power to tell what is happening at a distance another.”

“Sir,” returned Barre, “the devil knows the language very well, but, does not wish to speak it; he also knows all your sins, in proof of which, if you so desire, I shall order him to give the list.”

“I shall be delighted to hear it,” said the civil lieutenant; “be so good as to try the experiment.”

Barre was about to approach the superior, when he was held back by the bailiff, who remonstrated with him on the impropriety of his conduct, whereupon Barre assured the magistrate that he had never really intended to do as he threatened.

However, in spite of all Barre’s attempts to distract the attention of the bystanders from the subject, they still persisted in desiring to discover the extent of the devil’s knowledge of foreign languages, and at their suggestion the bailiff proposed to Barre to try him in Hebrew instead of Gaelic. Hebrew being, according to Scripture, the most ancient language of all, ought to be familiar to the demon, unless indeed he had forgotten it. This idea met with such general applause that Barre was forced to command the possessed nun to say aqua in Hebrew. The poor woman, who found it difficult enough to repeat correctly the few Latin words she had learned by rote, made an impatient movement, and said —

"I can't help it; I retract" (Je renie).

These words being heard and repeated by those near her produced such an unfavourable impression that one of the Carmelite monks tried to explain them away by declaring that the superior had not said "Je renie," but "Zaquay," a Hebrew word corresponding to the two Latin words, "Effudi aquam" (I threw water about). But the words "Je renie" had been heard so distinctly that the monk's assertion was greeted with jeers, and the sub-prior reprimanded him publicly as a liar. Upon this, the superior had a fresh attack of convulsions, and as all present knew that these attacks usually indicated that the performance was about to end, they withdrew, making very merry over a devil who knew neither Hebrew nor Gaelic, and whose smattering of Latin was so incorrect.

However, as the bailiff and civil lieutenant were determined to clear up every doubt so far as they still felt any, they went once again to the convent at three o'clock the same afternoon. Barre came out to meet them, and took them for a stroll in the convent grounds. During their walk he said to the civil lieutenant that he felt very much surprised that he, who had on a former occasion, by order of the Bishop of Poitiers, laid information against Grandier should be now on his side. The civil lieutenant replied that he would be ready to inform against him again if there were any justification, but at present his object was to arrive at the truth, and in this he felt sure he should be successful. Such an answer was very unsatisfactory to Barre; so, drawing the bailiff aside, he remarked to him that a man among whose ancestors were many persons of condition, several of whom had held positions of much dignity in the Church, and who himself held such an important judicial position, ought to show less incredulity in regard to the possibility of a devil entering into a human body, since if it were proved it would redound to the glory of God and the good of the Church and of religion. The bailiff received this remonstrance with marked coldness, and replied that he hoped always to take justice for his guide, as his duty commanded. Upon this, Barre pursued the subject no farther, but led the way to the superior’s apartment.

Just as they entered the room, where a large number of people were already gathered, the superior, catching sight of the pyx which Barre had brought with him, fell once more into convulsions. Barre went towards her, and having asked the demon as usual by what pact he had entered the maiden’s body, and received the information that it was by water, continued his examination as follows:

“Quis finis pacti” (What is the object of this pact?)

“Impuritas” (Unchastity).

At these words the bailiff interrupted the exorcist and ordered him to make the demon say in Greek the three words, ‘finis, pacti, impuritas’. But the superior, who had once already got out of her difficulties by an evasive answer, had again recourse to the same convenient phrase, “Nimia curiositas,” with which Barre agreed, saying that they were indeed too much given to curiosity. So the bailiff had to desist from his attempt to make the demon speak Greek, as he had before been obliged to give up trying to make him speak Hebrew and Gaelic. Barre then continued his examination.

“Quis attulit pactum?” (Who brought the pact?)

“Magus” (The sorcerer).

“Quale nomen magi?” (What is the sorcerer’s name?)

“Urbanus” (Urban).

“Quis Urbanus? Est-ne Urbanus papa?”

(What Urban? Pope Urban?)

“Grandier.”

“Cujus qualitatis?” (What is his profession?)

“Curcatus.”

The enriching of the Latin language by this new and unknown word produced a great effect on the audience; however, Barre did not pause long enough to allow it to be received with all the consideration it deserved, but went on at once.

“Quis attulit aquam pacti?” (Who brought the water of the pact?)

“Magus” (The magician).

“Qua hora?” (At what o’clock?)

“Septima” (At seven o’clock).

“An matutina?” (In the morning?)

"Sego" (In the evening).

"Quomodo intravit?" (How did he enter?)

"Janua" (By the door).

"Quis vidit?" (Who saw him?)

"Tres" (Three persons).

Here Barre stopped, in order to confirm the testimony of the devil, assuring his hearers that the Sunday after the superior's deliverance from the second possession he along with Mignon and one of the sisters was sitting with her at supper, it being about seven o'clock in the evening, when she showed them drops of water on her arm, and no one could tell where they came from. He had instantly washed her arm in holy water and repeated some prayers, and while he was saying them the breviary of the superior was twice dragged from her hands and thrown at his feet, and when he stooped to pick it up for the second time he got a box on the ear without being able to see the hand that administered it. Then Mignon came up and confirmed what Barre had said in a long discourse, which he wound up by calling down upon his head the most terrible penalties if every word he said were not the exact truth. He then dismissed the assembly, promising to drive out the evil spirit the next day, and exhorting those present to prepare themselves, by penitence and receiving the holy communion, for the contemplation of the wonders which awaited them.

CHAPTER VII

The last two exorcisms had been so much talked about in the town, that Grandier, although he had not been present, knew everything that had happened, down to the smallest detail, so he once more laid a complaint before the bailiff, in which he represented that the nuns maliciously continued to name him during the exorcisms as the author of their pretended possession, being evidently influenced thereto by his enemies, whereas in fact not only had he had no communication with them, but had never set eyes on them; that in order to prove that they acted under influence it was absolutely necessary that they should be sequestered, it being most unjust that Mignon and Barre, his mortal enemies, should have constant access to them and be able to stay with them night and day, their doing so making the collusion evident and undeniable; that the honour of God was involved, and also that of the petitioner, who had some right to be respected, seeing that he was first in rank among the ecclesiastics of the town.

Taking all this into consideration, he consequently prayed the bailiff to be pleased to order that the nuns buffering from the so-called possession should at once be separated from each other and from their present associates, and placed under the control of clerics assisted by physicians in whose impartiality the petitioner could have confidence; and he further prayed that all this should be performed in spite of any opposition or appeal whatsoever (but without prejudice to the right of appeal), because of the importance of the matter. And in case the bailiff were not pleased to order the sequestration, the petitioner would enter a protest and complaint against his refusal as a withholding of justice.

The bailiff wrote at the bottom of the petition that it would be at once complied with.

After Urbain Grandier had departed, the physicians who had been present at the exorcisms presented themselves before the bailiff, bringing their report with them. In this report they said that they had recognised convulsive movements of the mother superior’s body, but that one visit was not sufficient to enable them to make a thorough diagnosis, as the movements above mentioned might arise as well from a natural as from supernatural causes; they therefore desired to be afforded opportunity for a thorough examination before being called on to pronounce an opinion. To this end they required permission to spend several days and nights uninterruptedly in the same room with the patients, and to treat them in the presence of other nuns and some of the magistrates. Further, they required that all the food and medicine should pass through the doctors' hands, and that no one, should touch the patients except quite openly, or speak to them except in an audible voice. Under these conditions they would undertake to find out the true cause of the convulsions and to make a report of the same.

It being now nine o'clock in the morning, the hour when the exorcisms began, the bailiff went over at once to the convent, and found Barre half way through the mass, and the superior in convulsions. The magistrate entered the church at the moment of the elevation of the Host, and noticed among the kneeling Catholics a young man called Dessentier standing up with his hat on. He ordered him either to uncover or to go away. At this the convulsive movements of the superior became more violent, and she cried out that there were Huguenots in the church, which gave the demon great power over her. Barre asked her how many there were present, and she replied, "Two," thus proving that the devil was no stronger in arithmetic than in Latin; for besides Dessentier, Councillor Abraham Gauthier, one of his brothers, four of his sisters, Rene Fourneau, a deputy, and an attorney called Angevin, all of the Reformed faith, were present.

As Barre saw that those present were greatly struck, by this numerical inaccuracy, he tried to turn their thoughts in another direction by asking the superior if it were true that she knew no Latin. On her replying that she did not know a single word, he held the pyx before her and ordered her to swear by the holy sacrament. She resisted at first, saying loud enough for those around her to hear —

"My father, you make me take such solemn oaths that I fear God will punish me."

To this Barre replied —

"My daughter, you must swear for the glory of God."

And she took the oath.

Just then one of the bystanders remarked that the mother superior was in the habit of interpreting the Catechism to her scholars. This she denied, but acknowledged that she used to translate the Paternoster and the Creed for them. As the superior felt herself becoming somewhat confused at this long series of embarrassing questions, she decided on going into convulsions again, but with only moderate success, for the bailiff insisted that the exorcists should ask her where Grandier was at that very moment. Now, as the ritual teaches that one of the proofs of possession is the faculty of telling, when asked, where people are, without seeing them, and as the question was propounded in the prescribed terms, she was bound to answer, so she said that Grandier was in the great hall of the castle.

“That is not correct,” said the bailiff, “for before coming here I pointed out a house to Grandier and asked him to stay in it till I came back. If anybody will go there, they will be sure to find him, for he wished to help me to discover the truth without my being obliged to resort to sequestration, which is a difficult measure to take with regard to nuns.”

Barre was now ordered to send some of the monks present to the castle, accompanied by a magistrate and a clerk. Barre chose the Carmelite prior, and the bailiff Charles Chauvet, assessor of the bailiwick, Ismael Boulieau a priest, and Pierre Thibaut, an articled clerk, who all set out at once to execute their commission, while the rest of those present were to await their return.

Meanwhile the superior, who had not spoken a word since the bailiff’s declaration, remained, in spite of repeated exorcisms, dumb, so Barre sent for Sister Claire, saying that one devil would encourage the other. The bailiff entered a formal protest against this step, insisting that the only result of a double exorcism would be to cause confusion, during which suggestions might be conveyed to the superior, and that the proper thing to do was, before beginning new conjurations, to await the return of the messengers. Although the bailiff’s suggestion was most reasonable, Barre knew better than to adopt it, for he felt that no matter what it cost he must either get rid of the bailiff and all the other officials who shared his doubts, or find means with the help of Sister Claire to delude them into belief. The lay sister was therefore brought in, in spite of the opposition of the bailiff and the other magistrates, and as they did not wish to seem to countenance a fraud, they all withdrew, declaring that they could no longer look on at such a disgusting comedy. In the courtyard they met their messengers returning, who told them they had gone first to the castle and had searched the great hall and all the other rooms without seeing anything of Grandier; they had then gone to the house mentioned by the bailiff, where they found him for whom they were looking, in the company of Pere Veret, the confessor of the nuns, Mathurin Rousseau, and Nicolas Benoit, canons, and Conte, a doctor, from whom they learned that Grandier had not been an instant out of their sight for the last two hours. This being all the magistrates wanted to know, they went home, while their envoys went upstairs and told their story, which produced the effect which might be expected. Thereupon a Carmelite brother wishing to weaken the impression, and thinking that the devil might be more lucky in his, second guess than the first, asked the superior where Grandier was just then. She answered without the slightest hesitation that he was walking with the bailiff in the church of Sainte-Croix. A new deputation was at once sent off, which finding the church empty, went on to the palace, and saw the bailiff presiding at a court. He had gone direct from the convent to the palace, and had not yet seen Grandier. The same day the nuns sent word that they would not consent to any more exorcisms being performed in the presence of the bailiff and the officials who usually accompanied him, and that for the future they were determined to answer no questions before such witnesses.

Grandier learning of this piece of insolence, which prevented the only man on whose impartiality he could reckon from being henceforward present at the exorcisms, once more handed in a petition to the bailiff, begging for the sequestration of the two nuns, no matter at what risk. The bailiff, however, in the interests of the petitioner himself, did not dare to grant this request, for he was afraid that the ecclesiastical authorities would nullify his procedure, on the ground that the convent was not under his jurisdiction.

He, however, summoned a meeting of the principal inhabitants of the town, in order to consult with them as to the best course to take for the public good. The conclusion they arrived at was to write to the attorney-general and to the Bishop of Poitiers, enclosing copies of the reports which had been drawn up, and imploring them to use their authority to put an end to these pernicious intrigues. This was done, but the attorney-general replied that the matter being entirely ecclesiastical the Parliament was not competent to take cognisance of it. As for the bishop, he sent no answer at all.

He was not, however, so silent towards Grandier’s enemies; for the ill-success of the exorcisms of November 26th having made increased precautions necessary, they considered it would be well to apply to the bishop for a new commission, wherein he should appoint certain ecclesiastics to represent him during the exorcisms to come. Barre himself went to Poitiers to make this request. It was immediately granted, and the bishop appointed Bazile, senior-canon of Champigny, and Demorans, senior canon of Thouars, both of whom were related to some of Grandier's adversaries. The following is a copy of the new commission:

"Henri-Louis le Chataignier de la Rochepezai, by the divine will Bishop of Poitiers, to the senior canons of the Chatelet de Saint-Pierre de Thouars et de Champigny-sur-Vese, greeting:

"We by these presents command you to repair to the town of Loudun, to the convent of the nuns of Sainte-Ursule, to be present at the exorcisms which will be undertaken by Sieur Barre upon some nuns of the said convent who are tormented by evil spirits, we having thereto authorised the said Barre. You are also to draw up a report of all that takes place, and for this purpose are to take any clerk you may choose with you.

"Given and done at Poitiers, November 28th, 1632.

"(Signed) HENRI LOUIS, Bishop of Poitiers. "(Countersigned) By order of the said Lord Bishop, "MICHELET"

These two commissioners having been notified beforehand, went to Loudun, where Marescot, one of the queen's chaplains, arrived at the same time; for the pious queen, Anne of Austria, had heard so many conflicting accounts of the possession of the Ursuline nuns, that she desired, for her own edification, to get to the bottom of the affair. We can judge what importance the case was beginning to assume by its being already discussed at court.

In spite of the notice which had been sent them that the nuns would not receive them, the bailiff and the civil lieutenant fearing that the royal envoy would allow himself to be imposed on, and would draw up an account which would cast doubt on the facts contained in their reports, betook themselves to the convent on December 1st, the day on which the exorcisms were to recommence, in the presence of the new commissioners. They were accompanied by their assessor, by the provost's lieutenant, and a clerk. They had to knock repeatedly before anyone seemed to hear them, but at length a nun opened the door and told them they could not enter, being suspected of bad faith, as they had publicly declared that the possession was a fraud and an imposture. The bailiff, without wasting his time arguing with the sister, asked to see Barre, who soon appeared arrayed in his priestly vestments, and surrounded by several persons, among whom was the queen’s chaplain. The bailiff complained that admittance had been refused to him and those with him, although he had been authorised to visit the convent by the Bishop of Poitiers. Barre’ replied that he would not hinder their coming in, as far as it concerned him.

“We are here with the intention of entering,” said the bailiff, “and also for the purpose of requesting you to put one or two questions to the demon which we have drawn up in terms which are in accordance with what is prescribed in the ritual. I am sure you will not refuse,” he added, turning with a bow to Marescot, “to make this experiment in the presence of the queen’s chaplain, since by that means all those suspicions of imposture can be removed which are unfortunately so rife concerning this business.”

“In that respect I shall do as I please, and not as you order me,” was the insolent reply of the exorcist.

“It is, however, your duty to follow legal methods in your procedure,” returned the bailiff, “if you sincerely desire the truth; for it would be an affront to God to perform a spurious miracle in His honour, and a wrong to the Catholic faith, whose power is in its truth, to attempt to give adventitious lustre to its doctrines by the aid of fraud and deception.”

“Sir,” said Barre, “I am a man of honour, I know my duty and I shall discharge it; but as to yourself, I must recall to your recollection that the last time you were here you left the chapel in anger and excitement, which is an attitude of mind most unbecoming in one whose duty it is to administer justice.”

Seeing that these recriminations would have no practical result, the magistrates cut them short by reiterating their demand for admittance; and on this being refused, they reminded the exorcists that they were expressly prohibited from asking any questions tending to cast a slur on the character of any person or persons whatever, under pain of being treated as disturbers of the public peace. At this warning Barre, saying that he did not acknowledge the bailiff’s jurisdiction, shut the door in the faces of the two magistrates.

As there was no time to lose if the machinations of his enemies were to be brought to nought, the bailiff and the civil lieutenant advised Grandier to write to the Archbishop of Bordeaux, who had once already extricated him from imminent danger, setting forth at length his present predicament; this letter; accompanied by the reports drawn up by the bailiff and the civil lieutenant, were sent off at once by a trusty messenger to His Grace of

Escoubleau de Sourdis. As soon as he received the despatches, the worthy prelate seeing how grave was the crisis, and that the slightest delay might be fatal to Grandier, set out at once for his abbey of Saint-Jouinles-Marmes, the place in which he had already vindicated in so striking a manner the upright character of the poor persecuted priest by a fearless act of justice.

It is not difficult to realise what a blow his arrival was to those who held a brief for the evil spirits in possession; hardly had he reached Saint-Jouin than he sent his own physician to the convent with orders to see the afflicted nuns and to test their condition, in order to judge if the convulsions were real or simulated. The physician arrived, armed with a letter from the archbishop, ordering Mignon to permit the bearer to make a thorough examination into the position of affairs. Mignon received the physician with all the respect due to him who sent him, but expressed great regret that he had not come a little sooner, as, thanks to his (Mignon's) exertions and those of Barre, the devils had been exorcised the preceding day. He nevertheless introduced the archbishop's envoy to the presence of the superior and Sister Claire, whose demeanour was as calm as if they had never been disturbed by any agitating' experiences. Mignon's statement being thus confirmed, the doctor returned to Saint-Jouin, the only thing to which he could bear testimony being the tranquillity which reigned at the moment in the convent.

The imposture being now laid so completely bare, the archbishop was convinced that the infamous persecutions to which it had led would cease at once and for ever; but Grandier, better acquainted with the character of his adversaries, arrived on the 27th of December at the abbey and laid a petition at the archbishop's feet. In this document he set forth that his enemies having formerly brought false and slanderous accusations, against him of which, through the justice of the archbishop, he had been able to clear himself, had employed themselves during the last three months in inventing and publishing as a fact that the petitioner had sent evil spirits into the bodies of nuns in the Ursuline convent of Loudun, although he had never spoken to any of the sisterhood there; that the guardianship of the sisters who, it was alleged, were possessed, and the task of exorcism, had been entrusted to Jean Mignon and Pierre Barre, who had in the most unmistakable manner shown themselves to be the mortal enemies of the petitioner; that in the reports drawn up by the said Jean Mignon and Pierre Barre, which differed so widely from those made by the bailiff and the civil lieutenant, it was boastfully alleged that three or four times devils had been driven out, but that they had succeeded in returning and taking possession of their victims again and again, in virtue of successive pacts entered into between the prince of darkness and the petitioner; that the aim of these reports and allegations was to destroy the reputation of the petitioner and excite public opinion against him; that although the demons had been put to flight by the arrival of His Grace, yet it was too probable that as soon as he was gone they would return to the charge; that if, such being the case, the powerful support of the archbishop were not available, the innocence of the petitioner, no matter how strongly established, would by the cunning tactics of his inveterate foes be obscured and denied: he, the petitioner, therefore prayed that, should the foregoing reasons prove on examination to be cogent, the archbishop would be pleased to prohibit Barre, Mignon, and their partisans, whether among the secular or the regular clergy, from taking part in any future exorcisms, should such be necessary, or in the control of any persons alleged to be possessed; furthermore, petitioner prayed that His Grace would be pleased to appoint as a precautionary measure such other clerics and lay persons as seemed to him suitable, to superintend the administration of food and medicine and the rite of exorcism to those alleged to be possessed, and that all the treatment should be carried out in the presence of magistrates.

The archbishop accepted the petition, and wrote below it:

“The present petition having been seen by us and the opinion of our attorney having been taken in the matter, we have sent the petitioner in advance of our said attorney back to Poitiers, that justice may be done him, and in the meantime we have appointed Sieur Barre, Pere l’Escaye, a Jesuit residing in Poitiers, Pere Gaut of the Oratory, residing at Tours, to conduct the exorcisms, should such be necessary, and have given them an order to this effect.

“It is forbidden to all others to meddle with the said exorcisms, on pain of being punished according to law.”

It will be seen from the above that His Grace the Archbishop of Bordeaux, in his enlightened and generous exercise of justice, had foreseen and provided for every possible contingency; so that as soon as his orders were made known to the exorcists the possession ceased at once and completely, and was no longer even talked of. Barre withdrew to Chinon, the senior canons rejoined their chapters, and the nuns, happily rescued for the time, resumed their life of retirement and tranquillity. The archbishop nevertheless urged on Grandier the prudence of effecting an exchange of benefices, but he replied that he would not at that moment change his simple living of Loudun for a bishopric.

CHAPTER VIII

The exposure of the plot was most prejudicial to the prosperity of the Ursuline community: spurious possession, far from bringing to their convent an increase of subscriptions and enhancing their reputation, as Mignon had promised, had ended for them in open shame, while in private they suffered from straitened circumstances, for the parents of their boarders hastened to withdraw their daughters from the convent, and the nuns in losing their pupils lost their sole source of income. Their, fall in the estimation of the public filled them with despair, and it leaked out that they had had several altercations with their director, during which they reproached him for having, by making them commit such a great sin, overwhelmed them with infamy and reduced them to misery, instead of securing for them the great spiritual and temporal advantages he had promised them. Mignon, although devoured by hate, was obliged to remain quiet, but he was none the less as determined as ever to have revenge, and as he was one of those men who never give up while a gleam of hope remains, and whom no waiting can tire, he bided his time, avoiding notice, apparently resigned to circumstances, but keeping his eyes fixed on Grandier, ready to seize on the first chance of recovering possession of the prey that had escaped his hands. And unluckily the chance soon presented itself.

It was now 1633: Richelieu was at the height of his power, carrying out his work of destruction, making castles fall before him where he could not make heads fall, in the spirit of John Knox’s words, “Destroy the nests and the crows will disappear.” Now one of these nests was the crenellated castle of Loudun, and Richelieu had therefore ordered its demolition.

The person appointed to carry out this order was a man such as those whom Louis XI. had employed fifty years earlier to destroy the feudal system, and Robespierre one hundred and fifty years later to destroy the aristocracy. Every woodman needs an axe, every reaper a sickle, and Richelieu found the instrument he required in de Laubardemont, Councillor of State.

But he was an instrument full of intelligence, detecting by the manner in which he was wielded the moving passion of the wielder, and adapting his whole nature with marvellous dexterity to gratify that passion according to the character of him whom it possessed; now by a rough and ready impetuosity, now by a deliberate and hidden advance; equally willing to strike with the sword or to poison by calumny, as the man who moved him lusted for the blood or sought to accomplish the dishonour of his victim.

M de Laubardemont arrived at Loudun during the month of August 1633, and in order to carry out his mission addressed himself to Sieur Memin de Silly, prefect of the town, that old friend of the cardinal's whom Mignon and Barre, as we have said, had impressed so favourably. Memin saw in the arrival of Laubardemont a special intimation that it was the will of Heaven that the seemingly lost cause of those in whom he took such a warm interest should ultimately triumph. He presented Mignon and all his friends to M. Laubardemont, who received them with much cordiality. They talked of the mother superior, who was a relation, as we have seen, of M. de Laubardemont, and exaggerated the insult offered her by the decree of the archbishop, saying it was an affront to the whole family; and before long the one thing alone which occupied the thoughts of the conspirators and the councillor was how best to draw down upon Grandier the anger of the cardinal-duke. A way soon opened.

The Queen mother, Marie de Medici, had among her attendants a woman called Hammon, to whom, having once had occasion to speak, she had taken a fancy, and given a post near her person. In consequence of this whim, Hammon came to be regarded as a person of some importance in the queen's household. Hammon was a native of Loudun, and had passed the greater part of her youth there with her own people, who belonged to the lower classes. Grandier had been her confessor, and she attended his church, and as she was lively and clever he enjoyed talking to her, so that at length an intimacy sprang up between them. It so happened at a time when he and the other ministers were in momentary disgrace, that a satire full of biting wit and raillery appeared, directed especially against the cardinal, and this satire had been attributed to Hammon, who was known to share, as was natural, her mistress's hatred of Richelieu. Protected as she was by the queen's favour, the cardinal had found it impossible to punish Hammon, but he still cherished a deep resentment against her.

It now occurred to the conspirators to accuse Grandier of being the real author of the satire; and it was asserted that he had learned from Hammon all the details of the cardinal's private life, the knowledge of which gave so much point to the attack on him; if they could once succeed in making Richelieu believe this, Grandier was lost.

This plan being decided on, M. de Laubardemont was asked to visit the convent, and the devils knowing what an important personage he was, flocked thither to give him a worthy welcome. Accordingly, the nuns had attacks of the most indescribably violent convulsions, and M. de Laubardemont returned to Paris convinced as to the reality of their possession.

The first word the councillor of state said to the cardinal about Urbain Grandier showed him that he had taken useless trouble in inventing the story about the satire, for by the bare mention of his name he was able to arouse the cardinal’s anger to any height he wished. The fact was, that when Richelieu had been Prior of Coussay he and Grandier had had a quarrel on a question of etiquette, the latter as priest of Loudun having claimed precedence over the prior, and carried his point. The cardinal had noted the affront in his bloodstained tablets, and at the first hint de Laubardemont found him as eager to bring about Grandier’s ruin as was the councillor himself.

De Laubardemont was at once granted the following commission:

“Sieur de Laubardemont, Councillor of State and Privy Councillor, will betake himself to Loudun, and to whatever other places may be necessary, to institute proceedings against Grandier on all the charges formerly preferred against him, and on other facts which have since come to light, touching the possession by evil spirits of the Ursuline nuns of Loudun, and of other persons, who are said like wise to be tormented of devils through the evil practices of the said Grandier; he will diligently investigate everything from the beginning that has any bearing either on the said possession or on the exorcisms, and will forward to us his report thereon, and the reports and other documents sent in by former commissioners and delegates, and will be present at all future exorcisms, and take proper steps to obtain evidence of the said facts, that they may be clearly established; and, above all, will direct, institute, and carry through the said proceedings against Grandier and all others who have been involved with him in the said case, until definitive sentence be passed; and in spite of any appeal or countercharge this cause will not be delayed (but without prejudice to the right of appeal in other causes), on account of the nature of the crimes, and no regard will be paid to any request for postponement made by the said

Grandier. His majesty commands all governors, provincial lieutenant-generals, bailiffs, seneschals, and other municipal authorities, and all subjects whom it may concern, to give every assistance in arresting and imprisoning all persons whom it may be necessary to put under constraint, if they shall be required so to do."

Furnished with this order, which was equivalent to a condemnation, de Laubardemont arrived at Laudun, the 5th of December, 1633, at nine o'clock in the evening; and to avoid being seen he alighted in a suburb at the house of one maitre Paul Aubin, king's usher, and son-in-law of Memin de Silly. His arrival was kept so secret that neither Grandier nor his friends knew of it, but Memin, Herve Menuau, and Mignon were notified, and immediately called on him. De Laubardemont received them, commission in hand, but broad as it was, it did not seem to them sufficient, for it contained no order for Grandier's arrest, and Grandier might fly. De Laubardemont, smiling at the idea that he could be so much in fault, drew from his pocket an order in duplicate, in case one copy should be lost, dated like the commission, November 30th, signed LOUIS, and countersigned PHILIPPEAUX. It was conceived in the following terms:

LOUIS, etc. etc. "We have entrusted these presents to Sieur de Laubardemont, Privy Councillor, to empower the said Sieur de Laubardemont to arrest Grandier and his accomplices and imprison them in a secure place, with orders to all provosts, marshals, and other officers, and to all our subjects in general, to lend whatever assistance is necessary to carry out above order; and they are commanded by these presents to obey all orders given by the said Sieur; and all governors and lieutenants-general are also hereby commanded to furnish the said Sieur with whatever aid he may require at their hands."

This document being the completion of the other, it was immediately resolved, in order to show that they had the royal authority at their back, and as a preventive measure, to arrest Grandier at once, without any preliminary investigation. They hoped by this step to intimidate any official who might still be inclined to take Grandier's part, and any witness who might be disposed to testify in his favour. Accordingly, they immediately sent for Guillaume Aubin, Sieur de Lagrange and provost's lieutenant. De Laubardemont communicated to him the commission of the cardinal and the order of the king, and requested him to arrest Grandier early next morning. M. de Lagrange could not deny the two signatures, and answered that he would obey; but as he foresaw from their manner of going to work that the proceedings about to be instituted would be an assassination and not a fair trial, he sent, in spite of being a distant connection of Memin, whose daughter was married to his (Lagrange's) brother, to warn Grandier of the orders he had received. But Grandier with his usual intrepidity, while thanking Lagrange for his generous message, sent back word that, secure in his innocence and relying on the justice of God, he was determined to stand his ground.

So Grandier remained, and his brother, who slept beside him, declared that his sleep that night was as quiet as usual. The next morning he rose, as was his habit, at six o'clock, took his breviary in his hand, and went out with the intention of attending matins at the church of Sainte-Croix. He had hardly put his foot over the threshold before Lagrange, in the presence of Memin, Mignon, and the other conspirators, who had come out to gloat over the sight, arrested him in the name of the king. He was at once placed in the custody of Jean Pouguet, an archer in His Majesty's guards, and of the archers of the provosts of Loudun and Chinon, to be taken to the castle at Angers. Meanwhile a search was instituted, and the royal seal affixed to the doors of his apartments, to his presses, his other articles of furniture-in fact, to every thing and place in the house; but nothing was found that tended to compromise him, except an essay against the celibacy of priests, and two sheets of paper whereon were written in another hand than his, some love-poems in the taste of that time.

CHAPTER IX

For four months Grandier languished in prison, and, according to the report of Michelon, commandant of Angers, and of Pierre Bacher, his confessor, he was, during the whole period, a model of patience and firmness, passing his days in reading good books or in writing prayers and meditations, which were afterwards produced at his trial. Meanwhile, in spite of the urgent appeals of Jeanne Esteye, mother of the accused, who, although seventy years of age, seemed to recover her youthful strength and activity in the desire to save her son, Laubardemont continued the examination, which was finished on April 4th. Urbain was then brought back from Angers to Loudun.

An extraordinary cell had been prepared for him in a house belonging to Mignon, and which had formerly been occupied by a sergeant named Bontems, once clerk to Trinquant, who had been a witness for the prosecution in the first trial. It was on the topmost story; the windows had been walled up, leaving only one small slit open, and even this opening was secured by enormous iron bars; and by an exaggeration of caution the mouth of the fireplace was furnished with a grating, lest the devils should arrive through the chimney to free the sorcerer from his chains. Furthermore, two holes in the corners of the room, so formed that they were unnoticeable from within, allowed a constant watch to be kept over Grandier’s movements by Bontem’s wife, a precaution by which they hoped to learn something that would help them in the coming exorcisms. In this room, lying on a little straw, and almost without light, Grandier wrote the following letter to his mother:

“MY MOTHER, — I received your letter and everything you sent me except the woollen stockings. I endure any affliction with patience, and feel more pity for you than for myself. I am very much inconvenienced for want of a bed; try and have mine brought to me, for my mind will give way if my body has no rest: if you can, send me a breviary, a Bible, and a St. Thomas for my consolation; and above all, do not grieve for me. I trust that, God will bring my innocence to light. Commend me to my brother and sister, and all our good friends. — I am, mother, your dutiful son and servant, “GRANDIER”

While Grandier had been in prison at Angers the cases of possession at the convent had miraculously multiplied, for it was no longer only the superior and Sister Claire who had fallen a prey to the evil spirits, but also several other sisters, who were divided into three groups as follows, and separated: —

The superior, with Sisters Louise des Anges and Anne de Sainte-Agnes, were sent to the house of Sieur Delaville, advocate, legal adviser to the sisterhood; Sisters Claire and Catherine de la Presentation were placed in the house of Canon Maurat; Sisters Elisabeth de la Croix, Monique de Sainte-Marthe, Jeanne du Sainte-Esprit, and Seraphique Archer were in a third house.

A general supervision was undertaken by Memin's sister, the wife of Moussant, who was thus closely connected with two of the greatest enemies of the accused, and to her Bontems' wife told all that the superior needed to know about Grandier. Such was the manner of the sequestration!

The choice of physicians was no less extraordinary. Instead of calling in the most skilled practitioners of Angers, Tours, Poitiers, or Saumur, all of them, except Daniel Roger of Loudun, came from the surrounding villages, and were men of no education: one of them, indeed, had failed to obtain either degree or licence, and had been obliged to leave Saumur in consequence; another had been employed in a small shop to take goods home, a position he had exchanged for the more lucrative one of quack.

There was just as little sense of fairness and propriety shown in the choice of the apothecary and surgeon. The apothecary, whose name was Adam, was Mignon's first cousin, and had been one of the witnesses for the prosecution at Grandier's first trial; and as on that occasion — he had libelled a young girl of Loudun, he had been sentenced by a decree of Parliament to make a public apology. And yet, though his hatred of Grandier in consequence of this humiliation was so well known, — perhaps for that very reason, it was to him the duty of dispensing and administering the prescriptions was entrusted, no one supervising the work even so far as to see that the proper doses were given, or taking note whether for sedatives he did not sometimes substitute stimulating and exciting drugs, capable of producing real convulsions. The surgeon Mannouri was still more unsuitable, for he was a nephew of Memin de Silly, and brother of the nun who had offered the most determined opposition to Grandier's demand for sequestration of the possessed sisters, during the second series of exorcisms. In vain did the mother and brother of the accused present petitions setting forth the incapacity of the doctors and the hatred of Grandier professed by the apothecary; they could not, even at their own expense, obtain certified copies of any of these petitions, although they had witnesses ready to prove that Adam had once in his ignorance dispensed crocus metallorum for crocus mantis — a mistake which had caused the death of the patient for whom the prescription was made up. In short, so determined were the conspirators that this time Grandier should be done to death, that they had not even the decency to conceal the infamous methods by which they had arranged to attain this result.

The examination was carried on with vigour. As one of the first formalities would be the identification of the accused, Grandier published a memorial in which he recalled the case of Saint-Anastasius at the Council of Tyre, who had been accused of immorality by a fallen woman whom he had never seen before. When this woman entered the hall of justice in order to swear to her deposition, a priest named Timothy went up to her and began to talk to her as if he were Anastasius; falling into the trap, she answered as if she recognised him, and thus the innocence of the saint was shown forth. Grandier therefore demanded that two or three persons of his own height and complexion should be dressed exactly like himself, and with him should be allowed to confront the nuns. As he had never seen any of them, and was almost certain they had never seen him, they would not be able, he felt sure, to point him out with certainty, in spite of the allegations of undue intimacy with themselves they brought against him. This demand showed such conscious innocence that it was embarrassing to answer, so no notice was taken of it.

Meanwhile the Bishop of Poitiers, who felt much elated at getting the better of the Archbishop of Bordeaux, who of course was powerless against an order issued by the cardinal-duke, took exception to Pere l’Escaye and Pere Gaut, the exorcists appointed by his superior, and named instead his own chaplain, who had been judge at Grandier’s first trial, and had passed sentence on him, and Pere Lactance, a Franciscan monk. These two, making no secret of the side with which they sympathised, put up on their arrival at Nicolas Moussant’s, one of Grandier’s most bitter enemies; on the following day they went to the superior’s apartments and began their exorcisms. The first time the superior opened her lips to reply, Pere Lactance perceived that she knew almost no Latin, and consequently would not shine during the exorcism, so he ordered her to answer in French, although he still continued to exorcise her in Latin; and when someone was bold enough to object, saying that the devil, according to the ritual, knew all languages living and dead, and ought to reply in the same language in which he was addressed, the father declared that the incongruity was caused by the pact, and that moreover some devils were more ignorant than peasants.

Following these exorcists, and two Carmelite monks, named Pierre de Saint-Thomas and Pierre de Saint-Mathurin, who had, from the very beginning, pushed their way in when anything was going on, came four Capuchins sent by Pere Joseph, head of the Franciscans, “His grey Eminence,” as he was called, and whose names were Peres Luc, Tranquille, Potais, and Elisee; so that a much more rapid advance could be made than hitherto by carrying on the exorcisms in four different places at once — viz., in the convent, and in the churches of Sainte-Croix, Saint-Pierre du Martroy, and Notre-Dame du Chateau. Very little of importance took place, however, on the first two occasions, the 15th and 16th of April; for the declarations of the doctors were most vague and indefinite, merely saying that the things they had seen were supernatural, surpassing their knowledge and the rules of medicine.

The ceremony of the 23rd April presented, however, some points of interest. The superior, in reply to the interrogations of Pere Lactance, stated that the demon had entered her body under the forms of a cat, a dog, a stag, and a buck-goat.

“Quoties?” (How often?), inquired the exorcist.

“I didn’t notice the day,” replied the superior, mistaking the word quoties for quando (when).

It was probably to revenge herself for this error that the superior declared the same day that Grandier had on his body five marks made by the devil, and that though his body was else insensible to pain, he was vulnerable at those spots. Mannouri, the surgeon, was therefore ordered to verify this assertion, and the day appointed for the verification was the 26th.

In virtue of this mandate Mannouri presented himself early on that day at Grandier’s prison, caused him to be stripped naked and cleanly shaven, then ordered him to be laid on a table and his eyes bandaged. But the devil was wrong again: Grandier had only two marks, instead of five — one on the shoulder-blade, and the other on the thigh.

Then took place one of the most abominable performances that can be imagined. Mannouri held in his hand a probe, with a hollow handle, into which the needle slipped when a spring was touched: when Mannouri applied the probe to those parts of Grandier's body which, according to the superior, were insensible, he touched the spring, and the needle, while seeming to bury itself in the flesh, really retreated into the handle, thus causing no pain; but when he touched one of the marks said to be vulnerable, he left the needle fixed, and drove it in to the depth of several inches. The first time he did this it drew from poor Grandier, who was taken unprepared, such a piercing cry that it was heard in the street by the crowd which had gathered round the door. From the mark on the shoulder-blade with which he had commenced, Mannouri passed to that on the thigh, but though he plunged the needle in to its full depth Grandier uttered neither cry nor groan, but went on quietly repeating a prayer, and notwithstanding that Mannouri stabbed him twice more through each of the two marks, he could draw nothing from his victim but prayers for his tormentors.

M de Laubardemont was present at this scene.

The next day the devil was addressed in such forcible terms that an acknowledgment was wrung from him that Grandier's body bore, not five, but two marks only; and also, to the vast admiration of the spectators, he was able this time to indicate their precise situation.

Unfortunately for the demon, a joke in which he indulged on this occasion detracted from the effect of the above proof of cleverness. Having been asked why he had refused to speak on the preceding Saturday, he said he had not been at Loudun on that day, as the whole morning he had been occupied in accompanying the soul of a certain Le Proust, attorney to the Parliament of Paris, to hell. This answer awoke such doubts in the breasts of some of the laymen present that they took the trouble to examine the register of deaths, and found that no one of the name of Le Proust, belonging to any profession whatever, had died on that date. This discovery rendered the devil less terrible, and perhaps less amusing.

Meantime the progress of the other exorcisms met with like interruptions. Pere Pierre de Saint Thomas, who conducted the operations in the Carmelite church, asked one of the possessed sisters where Grandier's books of magic were; she replied that they were kept at the house of a certain young girl, whose name she gave, and who was the same to whom Adam had been forced to apologise. De Laubardemont, Moussant, Herve, and Meunau hastened at once to the house indicated, searched the rooms and the presses, opened the chests and the wardrobes and all the secret places in the house, but in vain. On their return to the church, they reproached the devil for having deceived them, but he explained that a niece of the young woman had removed the books. Upon this, they hurried to the niece's dwelling, but unluckily she was not at home, having spent the whole day at a certain church making her devotions, and when they went thither, the priests and attendants averred that she had not gone out all day; so notwithstanding the desire of the exorcists to oblige Adam they were forced to let the matter drop.

These two false statements increased the number of unbelievers; but it was announced that a most interesting performance would take place on May 4th; indeed, the programme when issued was varied enough to arouse general curiosity. Asmodeus was to raise the superior two feet from the ground, and the fiends Eazas and Cerberus, in emulation of their leader, would do as much for two other nuns; while a fourth devil, named Beherit, would go farther still, and, greatly daring, would attack M. de Laubardemont himself, and, having spirited his councillor's cap from his head, would hold it suspended in the air for the space of a Misereye. Furthermore, the exorcists announced that six of the strongest men in the town would try to prevent the contortions of the, weakest of the convulsed nuns, and would fail.

It need hardly be said that the prospect of such an entertainment filled the church on the appointed day to overflowing. Pere Lactance began by calling on Asmodeus to fulfil his promise of raising the superior from the ground. She began, hereupon, to perform various evolutions on her mattress, and at one moment it seemed as if she were really suspended in the air; but one of the spectators lifted her dress and showed that she was only standing on tiptoe, which, though it might be clever, was not miraculous. Shouts of laughter rent the air, which had such an intimidating effect on Eazas and Cerberus that not all the adjurations of the exorcists could extract the slightest response. Beherit was their last hope, and he replied that he was prepared to lift up M. de Laubardemont's cap, and would do so before the expiration of a quarter of an hour.

We must here remark that this time the exorcisms took place in the evening, instead of in the morning as hitherto; and it was now growing dark, and darkness is favourable to illusions. Several of the unbelieving ones present, therefore, began to call attention to the fact that the quarter of an hour's delay would necessitate the employment of artificial light during the next scene. They also noticed that M. de Laubardemont had seated himself apart and immediately beneath one of the arches in the vaulted roof, through which a hole had been drilled for the passage of the bell-rope. They therefore slipped out of the church, and up into the belfry, where they hid. In a few moments a man appeared who began to work at something. They sprang on him and seized his wrists, and found in one of his hands a thin line of horsehair, to one end of which a hook was attached. The holder being frightened, dropped the line and fled, and although M. de Laubardemont, the exorcists, and the spectators waited, expecting every moment that the cap would rise into the air, it remained quite firm on the owner's head, to the no small confusion of Pere Lactance, who, all unwitting of the fiasco, continued to adjure Beherit to keep his word — of course without the least effect.

Altogether, this performance of May 4th, went anything but smoothly. Till now no trick had succeeded; never before had the demons been such bunglers. But the exorcists were sure that the last trick would go off without a hitch. This was, that a nun, held by six men chosen for their strength, would succeed in extricating herself from their grasp, despite their utmost efforts. Two Carmelites and two Capuchins went through the audience and selected six giants from among the porters and messengers of the town.

This time the devil answered expectations by showing that if he was not clever he was strong, for although the six men tried to hold her down upon her mattress, the superior was seized with such terrible convulsions that she escaped from their hands, throwing down one of those who tried to detain her. This experiment, thrice renewed, succeeded thrice, and belief seemed about to return to the assembly, when a physician of Saumur named Duncan, suspecting trickery, entered the choir, and, ordering the six men to retire, said he was going to try and hold the superior down unaided, and if she escaped from his hands he would make a public apology for his unbelief. M. de Laubardemont tried to prevent this test, by objecting to Duncan as an atheist, but as Duncan was greatly respected on account of his skill and probity, there was such an outcry at this interference from the entire audience that the commissioner was forced to let him have his way. The six porters were therefore dismissed, but instead of resuming their places among the spectators they left the church by the sacristy, while

Duncan approaching the bed on which the superior had again lain down, seized her by the wrist, and making certain that he had a firm hold, he told the exorcists to begin.

Never up to that time had it been so clearly shown that the conflict going on was between public opinion and the private aims of a few. A hush fell on the church; everyone stood motionless in silent expectancy.

The moment Pere Lactance uttered the sacred words the convulsions of the superior recommenced; but it seemed as if Duncan had more strength than his six predecessors together, for twist and writhe and struggle as she would, the superior's wrist remained none the less firmly clasped in Duncan's hand. At length she fell back on her bed exhausted, exclaiming!"

"It's no use, it's no use! He's holding me!"

"Release her arm!" shouted Pere Lactance in a rage. "How can the convulsions take place if you hold her that way?"

"If she is really possessed by a demon," answered Duncan aloud, "he should be stronger than I; for it is stated in the ritual that among the symptoms of possession is strength beyond one's years, beyond one's condition, and beyond what is natural."

"That is badly argued," said Lactance sharply: "a demon outside the body is indeed stronger than you, but when enclosed in a weak frame such as this it cannot show such strength, for its efforts are proportioned to the strength of the body it possesses."

"Enough!" said M. de Laubardemont; "we did not come here to argue with philosophers, but to build up the faith of Christians."

With that he rose up from his chair amidst a terrible uproar, and the assembly dispersed in the utmost disorder, as if they were leaving a theatre rather than a church.

The ill success of this exhibition caused a cessation of events of interest for some days. The result was that a great number of noblemen and other people of quality who had come to Loudun expecting to see wonders and had been shown only commonplace transparent tricks, began to think it was not worth while remaining any longer, and went their several ways — a defection much bewailed by Pere Tranquille in a little work which he published on this affair.

"Many," he says, "came to see miracles at Loudun, but finding the devils did not give them the signs they expected, they went away dissatisfied, and swelled the numbers of the unbelieving."

It was determined, therefore, in order to keep the town full, to predict some great event which would revive curiosity and increase faith. Pere Lactance therefore announced that on the 20th of May three of the seven devils dwelling in the superior would come out, leaving three wounds in her left side, with corresponding holes in her chemise, bodice, and dress. The three parting devils were Asmodeus, Gresil des Trones, and Aman des Puissances. He added that the superior's hands would be bound behind her back at the time the wounds were given.

On the appointed day the church of Sainte-Croix was filled to overflowing with sightseers curious to know if the devils would keep their promises better this time than the last. Physicians were invited to examine the superior's side and her clothes; and amongst those who came forward was Duncan, whose presence guaranteed the public against deception; but none of the exorcists ventured to exclude him, despite the hatred in which they held him — a hatred which they would have made him feel if he had not been under the special protection of Marshal Breze. The physicians having completed their examination, gave the following certificate: —

"We have found no wound in the patient's side, no rent in her vestments, and our search revealed no sharp instrument hidden in the folds of her dress."

These preliminaries having been got through, Pere Lactance questioned her in French for nearly two hours, her answers being in the same language. Then he passed from questions to adjurations: on this, Duncan came forward, and said a promise had been given that the superior's hands should be tied behind her back, in order that there might be no room for suspicion of fraud, and that the moment had now arrived to keep that promise. Pere Lactance admitted the justice of the demand, but said as there were many present who had never seen the superior in convulsions such as afflicted the possessed, it would be only fair that she should be exorcised for their satisfaction before binding her. Accordingly he began to repeat the form of exorcism, and the superior was immediately attacked by frightful convulsions, which in a few minutes produced complete exhaustion, so that she fell on her face to the ground, and turning on her left arm and side, remained motionless some instants, after which she uttered a low cry, followed by a groan. The physicians approached her, and Duncan seeing her take away her hand from her left side, seized her arm, and found that the tips of her fingers were stained with blood. They then examined her clothing and body, and found her dress, bodice, and chemise cut through in three places, the cuts being less than an inch long. There were also three scratches beneath the left breast, so slight as to be scarcely more than skin deep, the middle one being a barleycorn in length; still, from all three a sufficient quantity of blood had oozed to stain the chemise above them.

This time the fraud was so glaring that even de Laubardemont exhibited some signs of confusion because of the number and quality of the spectators. He would not, however, allow the doctors to include in their report their opinion as to the manner in which the wounds were inflicted; but Grandier protested against this in a Statement of Facts, which he drew up during the night, and which was distributed next day.

It was as follows:

“That if the superior had not groaned the physicians would not have removed her clothes, and would have suffered her to be bound, without having the least idea that the wounds were already made; that then the exorcists would have commanded the devils to come forth, leaving the traces they had promised; that the superior would then have gone through the most extraordinary contortions of which she was capable, and have had a long fit of, convulsions, at the end of which she would have been delivered from the three demons, and the wounds would have been found in her body; that her groans, which had betrayed her, had by God’s will thwarted the best-laid plans of men and devils. Why do you suppose,” he went on to ask, “that clean incised wounds, such as a sharp blade would make, ‘were chosen for a token, seeing that the wounds left by devils resemble burns? Was it not because it was easier for the superior to conceal a lancet with which to wound herself slightly, than to conceal any instrument sufficiently heated to burn her? Why do you think the left side was chosen rather than the forehead and nose, if not because she could not give herself a wound in either of those places without being seen by all the spectators? Why was the left side rather than the right chosen, if it were not that it was easier for the superior to wound herself with her right hand, which she habitually used, in the left side than in the right? Why did she turn on her left side and arm and remain so long in that position, if it were not to hide from the bystanders the instrument with which she wounded herself? What do you think caused her to groan, in spite of all her resolution, if it were not the pain of the wound she gave herself? for the most courageous cannot repress a shudder when the surgeon opens a vein.

Why were her finger-tips stained with blood, if it were not that the secreted blade was so small that the fingers which held it could not escape being reddened by the blood it caused to flow? How came it that the wounds were so superficial that they barely went deeper than the cuticle, while devils are known to rend and tear demoniacs when leaving them, if it were not that the superior did not hate herself enough to inflict deep and dangerous wounds?"

Despite this logical protest from Grandier and the barefaced knavery of the exorcist, M. de Laubardemont prepared a report of the expulsion of the three devils, Asmodeus, Gresil, and Aman, from the body of sister Jeanne des Anges, through three wounds below the region of the heart; a report which was afterwards shamelessly used against Grandier, and of which the memorandum still exists, a monument, not so much of credulity and superstition, as of hatred and revenge. Pere Lactance, in order to allay the suspicions which the pretended miracle had aroused among the eye-wittnesses, asked Balaam, one of the four demons who still remained in the superior's body, the following day, why Asmodeus and his two companions had gone out against their promise, while the superior's face and hands were hidden from the people.

"To lengthen the incredulity of certain people," answered Balaam.

As for Pere Tranquille, he published a little volume describing the whole affair, in which, with the irresponsible frivolity of a true Capuchin, he poked fun at those who could not swallow the miracles wholesale.

"They had every reason to feel vexed," he said, "at the small courtesy or civility shown by the demons to persons of their merit and station; but if they had examined their consciences, perhaps they would have found the real reason of their discontent, and, turning their anger against themselves, would have done penance for having come to the exorcisms led by a depraved moral sense and a prying spirit."

Nothing remarkable happened from the 20th May till the 13th June, a day which became noteworthy by reason of the superior's vomiting a quill a finger long. It was doubtless this last miracle which brought the Bishop of Poitiers to Loudun, "not," as he said to those who came to pay their respects to him, "to examine into the genuineness of the possession, but to force those to believe who still doubted, and to discover the classes which Urbain had founded to teach the black art to pupils of both sexes."

Thereupon the opinion began to prevail among the people that it would be prudent to believe in the possession, since the king, the cardinal-duke, and the bishop believed in it, and that continued doubt would lay them open to the charges of disloyalty to their king and their Church, and of complicity in the crimes of Grandier, and thus draw down upon them the ruthless punishment of Laubardemont.

“The reason we feel so certain that our work is pleasing to God is that it is also pleasing to the king,” wrote Pere Lactance.

The arrival of the bishop was followed by a new exorcism; and of this an eye-witness, who was a good Catholic and a firm believer in possession, has left us a written description, more interesting than any we could give. We shall present it to our readers, word for word, as it stands: —

“On Friday, 23rd June 1634, on the Eve of Saint John, about 3 p.m., the Lord Bishop of Poitiers and M. de Laubardemont being present in the church of Sainte-Croix of Loudun, to continue the exorcisms of the Ursuline nuns, by order of M. de Laubardemont, commissioner, Urbain Grandier, priest-in-charge, accused and denounced as a magician by the said possessed nuns, was brought from his prison to the said church.

“There were produced by the said commissioner to the said Urbain Grandier four pacts mentioned several times by the said possessed nuns at the preceding exorcisms, which the devils who possessed the nuns declared they had made with the said Grandier on several occasions: there was one in especial which Leviathan gave up on Saturday the 17th inst., composed of an infant’s heart procured at a witches’ sabbath, held in Orleans in 1631; the ashes of a consecrated wafer, blood, etc., of the said Grandier, whereby Leviathan asserted he had entered the body of the sister, Jeanne des Anges, the superior of the said nuns, and took possession of her with his coadjutors Beherit, Eazas, and Balaam, on December 8th, 1632. Another such pact was composed of the pips of Grenada oranges, and was given up by Asmodeus and a number of other devils. It had been made to hinder Beherit from keeping his promise to lift the commissioner’s hat two inches from his head and to hold it there the length of a Miseyere, as a sign that he had come out of the nun. On all these pacts being shown to the said Grandier, he said, without astonishment, but with much firmness and resolution, that he had no knowledge of them whatever, that he had never made them, and had not the skill by which to make them, that he had held no communication with devils, and knew nothing of what they were talking about. A report of all this being made and shown to him, he signed it.

“This done, they brought all the possessed nuns, to the number of eleven or twelve, including three lay sisters, also possessed, into the choir of the said church, accompanied by a great many monks, Carmelites, Capuchins, and Franciscans; and by three physicians and a surgeon. The sisters on entering made some wanton remarks, calling Grandier their master, and exhibiting great delight at seeing him.

“Thereupon Pere Lactance and Gabriel, a Franciscan brother, and one of the exorcists, exhorted all present with great fervour to lift up their hearts to God and to make an act of contrition for the offences committed against His divine majesty, and to pray that the number of their sins might not be an obstacle to the fulfilment of the plans which He in His providence had formed for the promotion of His glory on that occasion, and to give outward proof of their heartfelt grief by repeating the Confiteor as a preparation for the blessing of the Lord Bishop of Poitiers. This having been done, he went on to say that the matter in question was of such moment and so important in its relation to the great truths of the Roman Catholic Church, that this consideration alone ought to be sufficient to excite their devotion; and furthermore, that the affliction of these poor sisters was so peculiar and had lasted so long, that charity impelled all those who had the right to work for their deliverance and the expulsion of the devils, to employ the power entrusted to them with their office in accomplishing so worthy a task by the forms of exorcism prescribed by the Church to its ministers; then addressing Grandier, he said that he having been anointed as a priest belonged to this number, and that he ought to help with all his power and with all his energy, if the bishop were pleased to allow him to do so, and to remit his suspension from authority. The bishop having granted permission, the Franciscan friar offered a stole to Grandier, who, turning towards the prelate, asked him if he might take it. On receiving a reply in the affirmative, he passed it round his neck, and on being offered a copy of the ritual, he asked permission to accept it as before, and received the bishop’s blessing, prostrating himself at his feet to kiss them; whereupon the Veni Creator Spiritus having been sung, he rose, and addressing the bishop, asked —

“‘My lord, whom am I to exorcise?’“

The said bishop having replied —

“‘These maidens.’

“Grandier again asked —

"'What maidens?'

"'The possessed maidens,' was the answer.

"'That is to say, my lord,' said he; 'that I am obliged to believe in the fact of possession. The Church believes in it, therefore I too believe; but I cannot believe that a sorcerer can cause a Christian to be possessed unless the Christian consent.'

"Upon this, some of those present exclaimed that it was heretical to profess such a belief; that the contrary was indubitable, believed by the whole Church and approved by the Sorbonne. To which he replied that his mind on that point was not yet irrevocably made up, that what he had said was simply his own idea, and that in any case he submitted to the opinion of the whole body of which he was only a member; that nobody was declared a heretic for having doubts, but only for persisting in them, and that what he had advanced was only for the purpose of drawing an assurance from the bishop that in doing what he was about to do he would not be abusing the authority of the Church. Sister Catherine having been brought to him by the Franciscan as the most ignorant of all the nuns, and the least open to the suspicion of being acquainted with Latin, he began the exorcism in the form prescribed by the ritual. But as soon as he began to question her he was interrupted, for all the other nuns were attacked by devils, and uttered strange and terrible noises. Amongst the rest, Sister Claire came near, and reproached him for his blindness and obstinacy, so that he was forced to leave the nun with whom he had begun, and address his words to the said Sister Claire, who during the entire duration of the exorcism continued to talk at random, without paying any heed to Grandier's words, which were also interrupted by the mother superior, to whom he of last gave attention, leaving Sister Claire. But it is to be noted that before beginning to exorcise the superior, he said, speaking in Latin as heretofore, that knowing she understood Latin, he would question her in Greek. To which the devil replied by the mouth of the possessed:

"'Ah! how clever you are! You know it was one of the first conditions of our pact that I was not to answer in Greek.'

"Upon this, he cried, 'O pulchra illusio, egregica evasio!' (O superb fraud, outrageous evasion!)

"He was then told that he was permitted to exorcise in Greek, provided he first wrote down what he wished to say, and the superior hereupon said that he should be answered in what language he pleased; but it was impossible, for as soon as he opened his mouth all the nuns recommenced their shrieks and paroxysms, showing unexampled despair, and giving way to convulsions, which in each patient assumed a new form, and persisting in accusing Grandier of using magic and the black art to torment them; offering to wring his neck if they were allowed, and trying to outrage his feelings in every possible way. But this being against the prohibitions of the Church, the priests and monks present worked with the utmost zeal to calm the frenzy which had seized on the nuns. Grandier meanwhile remained calm and unmoved, gazing fixedly at the maniacs, protesting his innocence, and praying to God for protection. Then addressing himself to the bishop and M. de Laubardemont, he implored them by the ecclesiastical and royal authority of which they were the ministers to command these demons to wring his neck, or at least to put a mark in his forehead, if he were guilty of the crime of which they accused him, that the glory of God might be shown forth, the authority of the Church vindicated, and himself brought to confusion, provided that the nuns did not touch him with their hands. But to this the bishop and the commissioner would not consent, because they did not want to be responsible for what might happen to him, neither would they expose the authority of the Church to the wiles of the devils, who might have made some pact on that point with Grandier. Then the exorcists, to the number of eight, having commanded the devils to be silent and to cease their tumult, ordered a brazier to be brought, and into this they threw the pacts one by one, whereupon the convulsions returned with such awful violence and confused cries, rising into frenzied shrieks, and accompanied by such horrible contortions, that the scene might have been taken for an orgy of witches, were it not for the sanctity of the place and the character of those present, of whom Grandier, in outward seeming at least, was the least amazed of any, although he had the most reason. The devils continued their accusations, citing the places, the days, and the hours of their intercourse with him; the first spell he cast on them, his scandalous behaviour, his insensibility, his abjurations of God and the faith. To all this he calmly returned that these accusations were calumnies, and all the more unjust considering his profession; that he renounced Satan and all his fiends, having neither knowledge nor comprehension of them; that in spite of all he was a Christian, and what was more, an anointed priest; that though he knew himself to be a sinful man, yet his trust was in God and in His Christ;

that he had never indulged in such abominations, end that it would be impossible to furnish any pertinent and convincing proof of his guilt.

"At this point no words could express what the senses perceived; eyes and ears received an impression of being surrounded by furies such as had never been gathered together before; and unless accustomed to such ghastly scenes as those who sacrifice to demons, no one could keep his mind free from astonishment and horror in the midst of such a spectacle. Grandier alone remained unchanged through it all, seemingly insensible to the monstrous exhibitions, singing hymns to the Lord with the rest of the people, as confident as if he were guarded by legions of angels. One of the demons cried out that Beelzebub was standing between him and Pere Tranquille the Capuchin, upon which Grandier said to the demon —

"'Obmutescas!' (Hold thy peace).

"Upon this the demon began to curse, and said that was their watchword; but they could not hold their peace, because God was infinitely powerful, and the powers of hell could not prevail against Him. Thereupon they all struggled to get at Grandier, threatening to tear him limb from limb, to point out his marks, to strangle him although he was their master; whereupon he seized a chance to say he was neither their master nor their servant, and that it was incredible that they should in the same breath acknowledge him for their master and express a desire to strangle him: on hearing this, the frenzy of the nuns reached its height, and they kicked their slippers into his face.

"'Just look!' said he; 'the shoes drop from the hoofs of their own accord.'

"At length, had it not been for the help and interposition of people in the choir, the nuns in their frenzy would have taken the life of the chief personage in this spectacle; so there was no choice but to take him away from the church and the furies who threatened his life. He was therefore brought back to prison about six o'clock in the evening, and the rest of the day the exorcists were employed in calming the poor sisters — a task of no small difficulty."

Everyone did not regard the possessed sisters with the indulgent eye of the author of the above narrative, and many saw in this terrible exhibition of hysteria and convulsions an infamous and sacrilegious orgy, at which revenge ran riot. There was such difference of opinion about it that it was considered necessary to publish the following proclamation by means of placards on July 2nd:

“All persons, of whatever rank or profession, are hereby expressly forbidden to traduce, or in any way malign, the nuns and other persons at Loudun possessed by evil spirits; or their exorcists; or those who accompany them either to the places appointed for exorcism or elsewhere; in any form or manner whatever, on pain of a fine of ten thousand livres, or a larger sum and corporal punishment should the case so require; and in order that no one may plead ignorance hereof, this proclamation will be read and published to-day from the pulpits of all the churches, and copies affixed to the church doors and in other suitable public places.

“Done at Loudun, July 2nd, 1634.”

This order had great influence with worldly folk, and from that moment, whether their belief was strengthened or not, they no longer dared to express any incredulity. But in spite of that, the judges were put to shame, for the nuns themselves began to repent; and on the day following the impious scene above described, just as Pere Lactanee began to exorcise Sister Claire in the castle chapel, she rose, and turning towards the congregation, while tears ran down her cheeks, said in a voice that could be heard by all present, that she was going to speak the truth at last in the sight of Heaven. Thereupon she confessed that all that she had said during the last fortnight against Grandier was calumnious and false, and that all her actions had been done at the instigation of the Franciscan Pere Lactance, the director, Mignon, and the Carmelite brothers. Pere Lactance, not in the least taken aback, declared that her confession was a fresh wile of the devil to save her master Grandier. She then made an urgent appeal to the bishop and to M. de Laubardemont, asking to be sequestered and placed in charge of other priests than those who had destroyed her soul, by making her bear false witness against an innocent man; but they only laughed at the pranks the devil was playing, and ordered her to be at once taken back to the house in which she was then living. When she heard this order, she darted out of the choir, trying to escape through the church door, imploring those present to come to her assistance and save her from everlasting damnation. But such terrible fruit had the proclamation borne that noon dared respond, so she was recaptured and taken back to the house in which she was sequestered, never to leave it again.

CHAPTER X

The next day a still more extraordinary scene took place. While M. de Laubardemont was questioning one of the nuns, the superior came down into the court, barefooted; in her chemise, and a cord round her neck; and there she remained for two hours, in the midst of a fearful storm, not shrinking before lightning, thunder, or rain, but waiting till M. de Laubardemont and the other exorcists should come out. At length the door opened and the royal commissioner appeared, whereupon Sister Jeanne des Anges, throwing herself at his feet, declared she had not sufficient strength to play the horrible part they had made her learn any longer, and that before God and man she declared Urbain Grandier innocent, saying that all the hatred which she and her companions had felt against him arose from the baffled desires which his comeliness awoke — desires which the seclusion of conventional life made still more ardent. M. de Laubardemont threatened her with the full weight of his displeasure, but she answered, weeping bitterly, that all she now dreaded was her sin, for though the mercy of the Saviour was great, she felt that the crime she had committed could never be pardoned. M. de Laubardemont exclaimed that it was the demon who dwelt in her who was speaking, but she replied that the only demon by whom she had even been possessed was the spirit of vengeance, and that it was indulgence in her own evil thoughts, and not a pact with the devil, which had admitted him into her heart.

With these words she withdrew slowly, still weeping, and going into the garden, attached one end of the cord round her neck to the branch of a tree, and hanged herself. But some of the sisters who had followed her cut her down before life was extinct.

The same day an order for her strict seclusion was issued for her as for Sister Claire, and the circumstances that she was a relation of M. de Laubardemont did not avail to lessen her punishment in view of the gravity of her fault.

It was impossible to continue the exorcisms other nuns might be tempted to follow the example, of the superior and Sister Claire, and in that case all would be lost. And besides, was not Urbain Grandier well and duly convicted? It was announced, therefore, that the examination had proceeded far enough, and that the judges would consider the evidence and deliver judgment.

This long succession of violent and irregular breaches of law procedure, the repeated denials of his claim to justice, the refusal to let his witnesses appear, or to listen to his defence, all combined to convince Grandier that his ruin was determined on; for the case had gone so far and had attained such publicity that it was necessary either to punish him as a sorcerer and magician or to render a royal commissioner, a bishop, an entire community of nuns, several monks of various orders, many judges of high reputation, and laymen of birth and standing, liable to the penalties incurred by calumniators. But although, as this conviction grew, he confronted it with resignation, his courage did not fail, — and holding it to be his duty as a man and a Christian to defend his life and honour to the end, he drew up and published another memorandum, headed Reasons for Acquittal, and had copies laid before his judges. It was a weighty and, impartial summing up of the whole case, such as a stranger might have written, and began, with these words.

"I entreat you in all humility to consider deliberately and with attention what the Psalmist says in Psalm 82, where he exhorts judges to fulfil their charge with absolute rectitude; they being themselves mere mortals who will one day have to appear before God, the sovereign judge of the universe, to give an account of their administration. The Lord's Anointed speaks to you to-day who are sitting in judgment, and says —

"'God standeth in the congregation of the mighty: He judgeth among the gods.

"'How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked?

"'Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy.

"'Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked.

"'I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the Most High.

"'But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes.'"

But this appeal, although convincing and dignified, had no influence upon the commission; and on the 18th of August the following verdict and sentence was pronounced: —

"We have declared, and do hereby declare, Urbain Grandier duly accused and convicted of the crimes of magic and witchcraft, and of causing the persons of certain Ursuline nuns of this town and of other females to become possessed of evil spirits, wherefrom other crimes and offences have resulted. By way of reparation therefor, we have sentenced, and do hereby sentence, the said Grandier to make public apology, bareheaded, with a cord around his neck, holding a lighted torch of two pounds weight in his hand, before the west door of the church of Saint-Pierre in the Market Place and before — that of Sainte-Ursule, both of this town, and there on bended knee to ask pardon of God and the king and the law, and this done, to be taken to the public square of Sainte-Croix and there to be attached to a stake, set in the midst of a pile of wood, both of which to be prepared there for this purpose, and to be burnt alive, along with the pacts and spells which remain in the hands of the clerk and the manuscript of the book written by the said Grandier against a celibate priesthood, and his ashes, to be scattered to the four winds of heaven. And we have declared, and do hereby declare, all and every part of his property confiscate to the king, the sum of one hundred and fifty livres being first taken therefrom to be employed in the purchase of a copper plate whereon the substance of the present decree shall be engraved, the same to be exposed in a conspicuous place in the said church of Sainte-Ursule, there to remain in perpetuity; and before this sentence is carried out, we order the said Grandier to be put to the question ordinary and extraordinary, so that his accomplices may become known.

"Pronounced at Loudun against the said Grandier this 18th day of August 1634."

On the morning of the day on which this sentence was passed, M. de Laubardemont ordered the surgeon Francois Fourneau to be arrested at his own house and taken to Grandier's cell, although he was ready to go there of his own free will. In passing through the adjoining room he heard the voice of the accused saying: —

"What do you want with me, wretched executioner? Have you come to kill me? You know how cruelly you have already tortured my body. Well I am ready to die."

On entering the room, Fourneau saw that these words had been addressed to the surgeon Mannouri.

One of the officers of the 'grand privot de l'hotel', to whom M. de Laubardemont lent for the occasion the title of officer of the king's guard, ordered the new arrival to shave Grandier, and not leave a single hair on his whole body. This was a formality employed in cases of witchcraft, so that the devil should have no place to hide in; for it was the common belief that if a single hair were left, the devil could render the accused insensible to the pains of torture. From this Urbain understood that the verdict had gone against him and that he was condemned to death.

Fourneau having saluted Grandier, proceeded to carry out his orders, whereupon a judge said it was not sufficient to shave the body of the prisoner, but that his nails must also be torn out, lest the devil should hide beneath them. Grandier looked at the speaker with an expression of unutterable pity, and held out his hands to Fourneau; but Forneau put them gently aside, and said he would do nothing of the kind, even were the order given by the cardinal-duke himself, and at the same time begged Grandier's pardon for shaving him. At, these words Grandier, who had for so long met with nothing but barbarous treatment from those with whom he came in contact, turned towards the surgeon with tears in his eyes, saying —

"So you are the only one who has any pity for me."

"Ah, sir," replied Fourneau, "you don't see everybody."

Grandier was then shaved, but only two marks found on him, one as we have said on the shoulder blade, and the other on the thigh. Both marks were very sensitive, the wounds which Mannouri had made not having yet healed. This point having been certified by Fourneau, Grandier was handed, not his own clothes, but some wretched garments which had probably belonged to some other condemned man.

Then, although his sentence had been pronounced at the Carmelite convent, he was taken by the grand provost's officer, with two of his archers, accompanied by the provosts of Loudun and Chinon, to the town hall, where several ladies of quality, among them Madame de Laubardemont, led by curiosity, were sitting beside the judges, waiting to hear the sentence read. M. de Laubardemont was in the seat usually occupied by the clerk, and the clerk was standing before him. All the approaches were lined with soldiers.

Before the accused was brought in, Pere Lactance and another Franciscan who had come with him exorcised him to oblige the devils to leave him; then entering the judgment hall, they exorcised the earth, the air, "and the other elements." Not till that was done was Grandier led in.

At first he was kept at the far end of the hall, to allow time for the exorcisms to have their full effect, then he was brought forward to the bar and ordered to kneel down. Grandier obeyed, but could remove neither his hat nor his skull-cap, as his hands were bound behind his back, whereupon the clerk seized on the one and the provost's officer on the other, and flung them at de Laubardemont’s feet. Seeing that the accused fixed his eyes on the commissioner as if waiting to see what he was about to do, the clerk said:

“Turn your head, unhappy man, and adore the crucifix above the bench.”

Grandier obeyed without a murmur and with great humility, and remained sunk in silent prayer for about ten minutes; he then resumed his former attitude.

The clerk then began to read the sentence in a trembling voice, while Grandier listened with unshaken firmness and wonderful tranquillity, although it was the most terrible sentence that could be passed, condemning the accused to be burnt alive the same day, after the infliction of ordinary and extraordinary torture. When the clerk had ended, Grandier said, with a voice unmoved from its usual calm —

“Messeigneurs, I aver in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and the Blessed Virgin, my only hope, that I have never been a magician, that I have never committed sacrilege, that I know no other magic than that of the Holy Scriptures, which I have always preached, and that I have never held any other belief than that of our Holy Mother the Catholic Apostolic Church of Rome; I renounce the devil and all his works; I confess my Redeemer, and I pray to be saved through the blood of the Cross; and I beseech you, messeigneurs, to mitigate the rigour of my sentence, and not to drive my soul to despair.”

The concluding words led de Laubardemont to believe that he could obtain some admission from Grandier through fear of suffering, so he ordered the court to be cleared, and, being left alone with Maitre Houmain, criminal lieutenant of Orleans, and the Franciscans, he addressed Grandier in a stern voice, saying there was only one way to obtain any mitigation of his sentence, and that was to confess the names of his accomplices and to sign the confession. Grandier replied that having committed no crime he could have no accomplices, whereupon Laubardemont ordered the prisoner to be taken to the torture chamber, which adjoined the judgment hall — an order which was instantly obeyed.

CHAPTER XI

The mode of torture employed at Loudun was a variety of the boot, and one of the most painful of all. Each of the victim’s legs below the knee was placed between two boards, the two pairs were then laid one above the other and bound together firmly at the ends; wedges were then driven in with a mallet between the two middle boards; four such wedges constituted ordinary and eight extraordinary torture; and this latter was seldom inflicted, except on those condemned to death, as almost no one ever survived it, the sufferer’s legs being crushed to a pulp before he left the torturer’s bands. In this case M. de Laubardemont on his own initiative, for it had never been done before, added two wedges to those of the extraordinary torture, so that instead of eight, ten were to be driven in.

Nor was this all: the commissioner royal and the two Franciscans undertook to inflict the torture themselves.

Laubardemont ordered Grandier to be bound in the usual manner, I and then saw his legs placed between the boards. He then dismissed the executioner and his assistants, and directed the keeper of the instruments to bring the wedges, which he complained of as being too small. Unluckily, there were no larger ones in stock, and in spite of threats the keeper persisted in saying he did not know where to procure others. M. de Laubardemont then asked how long it would take to make some, and was told two hours; finding that too long to wait, he was obliged to put up with those he had.

Thereupon the torture began. Pere Lactance having exorcised the instruments, drove in the first wedge, but could not draw a murmur from Grandier, who was reciting a prayer in a low voice; a second was driven home, and this time the victim, despite his resolution, could not avoid interrupting his devotions by two groans, at each of which Pere Lactance struck harder, crying, “Dicas! dicas!” (Confess, confess!), a word which he repeated so often and so furiously, till all was over, that he was ever after popularly called “Pere Dicas.”

When the second wedge was in, de Laubardemont showed Grandier his manuscript against the celibacy of the priests, and asked if he acknowledged it to be in his own handwriting. Grandier answered in the affirmative. Asked what motive he had in writing it, he said it was an attempt to restore peace of mind to a poor girl whom he had loved, as was proved by the two lines written at the end:

“Si ton gentil esprit prend bien cette science,
Tu mettras en repos ta bonne conscience.”

[If thy sensitive mind imbibe this teaching,
It will give ease to thy tender conscience]

Upon this, M. de Laubardemont demanded the girl’s name; but Grandier assured him it should never pass his lips, none knowing it but himself and God. Thereupon M. de Laubardemont ordered Pere Lactance to insert the third wedge. While it was being driven in by the monk’s lusty arm, each blow being accompanied by the word “‘Dicas’!” Grandier exclaimed —

“My God! they are killing me, and yet I am neither a sorcerer nor sacrilegious!”

At the fourth wedge Grandier fainted, muttering —

“Oh, Pere Lactance, is this charity?”

Although his victim was unconscious, Pere Lactance continued to strike; so that, having lost consciousness through pain, pain soon brought him back to life.

De Laubardemont took advantage of this revival to take his turn at demanding a confession of his crimes; but Grandier said —

“I have committed no crimes, sir, only errors. Being a man, I have often gone astray; but I have confessed and done penance, and believe that my prayers for pardon have been heard; but if not, I trust that God will grant me pardon now, for the sake of my sufferings.”

At the fifth wedge Grandier fainted once more, but they restored him to consciousness by dashing cold water in his face, whereupon he moaned, turning to M. de Laubardemont —

“In pity, sir, put me to death at once! I am only a man, and I cannot answer for myself that if you continue to torture me so I shall not give way to despair.”

“Then sign this, and the torture shall cease,” answered the commissioner royal, offering him a paper.

“My father,” said Urbain, turning towards the Franciscan, “can you assure me on your conscience that it is permissible for a man, in order to escape suffering, to confess a crime he has never committed?”

“No,” replied the monk; “for if he die with a lie on his lips he dies in mortal sin.”

“Go on, then,” said Grandier; “for having suffered so much in my body, I desire to save my soul.”

As Pere Lactance drove in the sixth wedge Grandier fainted anew.

When he had been revived, Laubardemont called upon him to confess that a certain Elisabeth Blanchard had been his mistress, as well as the girl for whom he had written the treatise against celibacy; but Grandier replied that not only had no improper relations ever existed between them, but that the day he had been confronted with her at his trial was the first time he had ever seen her.

At the seventh wedge Grandier’s legs burst open, and the blood spurted into Pere Lactance’s face; but he wiped it away with the sleeve of his gown.

“O Lord my God, have mercy on me! I die!” cried Grandier, and fainted for the fourth time. Pere Lactance seized the opportunity to take a short rest, and sat down.

When Grandier had once more come to himself, he began slowly to utter a prayer, so beautiful and so moving that the provost’s lieutenant wrote it down; but de Laubardemont noticing this, forbade him ever to show it to anyone.

At the eighth wedge the bones gave way, and the marrow oozed out of the wounds, and it became useless to drive in any more wedges, the legs being now as flat as the boards that compressed them, and moreover Pere Lactance was quite worn out.

Grandier was unbound and laid upon the flagged floor, and while his eyes shone with fever and agony he prayed again a second prayer — a veritable martyr’s prayer, overflowing with faith and enthusiasm; but as he ended his strength failed, and he again became unconscious. The provost’s lieutenant forced a little wine between his lips, which brought him to; then he made an act of contrition, renounced Satan and all his works once again, and commended his soul to God.

Four men entered, his legs were freed from the boards, and the crushed parts were found to be a mere inert mass, only attached to the knees by the sinews. He was then carried to the council chamber, and laid on a little straw before the fire.

In a corner of the fireplace an Augustinian monk was seated. Urbain asked leave to confess to him, which de Laubardemont refused, holding out the paper he desired to have signed once more, at which Grandier said —

“If I would not sign to spare myself before, am I likely to give way now that only death remains?”

“True,” replied Laubardemont; “but the mode of your death is in our hands: it rests with us to make it slow or quick, painless or agonising; so take this paper and sign?”

Grandier pushed the paper gently away, shaking his head in sign of refusal, whereupon de Laubardemont left the room in a fury, and ordered Peres Tranquille and Claude to be admitted, they being the confessors he had chosen for Urbain. When they came near to fulfil their office, Urbain recognised in them two of his torturers, so he said that, as it was only four days since he had confessed to Pere Grillau, and he did not believe he had committed any mortal sin since then, he would not trouble them, upon which they cried out at him as a heretic and infidel, but without any effect.

At four o’clock the executioner’s assistants came to fetch him; he was placed lying on a bier and carried out in that position. On the way he met the criminal lieutenant of Orleans, who once more exhorted him to confess his crimes openly; but Grandier replied —

“Alas, sir, I have avowed them all; I have kept nothing back.”

“Do you desire me to have masses said for you?” continued the lieutenant.

“I not only desire it, but I beg for it as a great favour,” said Urbain.

A lighted torch was then placed in his hand: as the procession started he pressed the torch to his lips; he looked on all whom he met with modest confidence, and begged those whom he knew to intercede with God for him. On the threshold of the door his sentence was read to him, and he was then placed in a small cart and driven to the church of St. Pierre in the market-place. There he was awaited by M. de Laubardemont, who ordered him to alight. As he could not stand on his mangled limbs, he was pushed out, and fell first on his knees and then on his face. In this position he remained patiently waiting to be lifted. He was carried to the top of the steps and laid down, while his sentence was read to him once more, and just as it was finished, his confessor, who had not been allowed to see him for four days, forced a way through the crowd and threw himself into Grandier’s arms. At first tears choked Pere Grillau’s voice, but at last he said, “Remember, sir, that our Saviour Jesus Christ ascended to His Father through the agony of the Cross: you are a wise man, do not give way now and lose everything. I bring you your mother's blessing; she and I never cease to pray that God may have mercy on you and receive you into Paradise."

These words seemed to inspire Grandier with new strength; he lifted his head, which pain had bowed, and raising his eyes to heaven, murmured a short prayer. Then turning towards the worthy, friar, he said —

"Be a son to my mother; pray to God for me constantly; ask all our good friars to pray for my soul; my one consolation is that I die innocent. I trust that God in His mercy may receive me into Paradise."

"Is there nothing else I can do for you?" asked Pere Grillau.

"Alas, my father!" replied Grandier, "I am condemned to die a most cruel death; ask the executioner if there is no way of shortening what I must undergo."

"I go at once," said the friar; and giving him absolution in 'articulo mortis', he went down the steps, and while Grandier was making his confession aloud the good monk drew the executioner aside and asked if there were no possibility of alleviating the death-agony by means of a shirt dipped in brimstone. The executioner answered that as the sentence expressly stated that Grandier was to be burnt alive, he could not employ an expedient so sure to be discovered as that; but that if the friar would give him thirty crowns he would undertake to strangle Grandier while he was kindling the pile. Pere Grillau gave him the money, and the executioner provided himself with a rope. The Franciscan then placed himself where he could speak to his penitent as he passed, and as he embraced him for the last time, whispered to him what he had arranged with the executioner, whereupon Grandier turned towards the latter and said in a tone of deep gratitude —

"Thanks, my brother."

At that moment, the archers having driven away Pere Grillau, by order of M. de Laubardemont, by beating him with their halberts, the procession resumed its march, to go through the same ceremony at the Ursuline church, and from there to proceed to the square of Sainte-Croix. On the way Urbain met and recognised Moussant, who was accompanied by his wife, and turning towards him, said —

"I die your debtor, and if I have ever said a word that could offend you I ask you to forgive me."

When the place of execution was reached, the provost’s lieutenant approached Grandier and asked his forgiveness.

“You have not offended me,” was the reply; “you have only done what your duty obliged you to do.”

The executioner then came forward and removed the back board of the cart, and ordered his assistants to carry Grandier to where the pile was prepared. As he was unable to stand, he was attached to the stake by an iron hoop passed round his body. At that moment a flock of pigeons seemed to fall from the sky, and, fearless of the crowd, which was so great that the archers could not succeed even by blows of their weapons in clearing a way for the magistrates, began to fly around Grandier, while one, as white as the driven snow, alighted on the summit of the stake, just above his head. Those who believed in possession exclaimed that they were only a band of devils come to seek their master, but there were many who muttered that devils were not wont to assume such a form, and who persisted in believing that the doves had come in default of men to bear witness to Grandier’s innocence.

In trying next day to combat this impression, a monk asserted that he had seen a huge fly buzzing round Grandier’s head, and as Beelzebub meant in Hebrew, as he said, the god of flies, it was quite evident that it was that demon himself who, taking upon him the form of one of his subjects, had come to carry off the magician’s soul.

When everything was prepared, the executioner passed the rope by which he meant to strangle him round Grandier’s neck; then the priests exorcised the earth, air, and wood, and again demanded of their victim if he would not publicly confess his crimes. Urbain replied that he had nothing to say, but that he hoped through the martyr’s death he was about to die to be that day with Christ in Paradise.

The clerk then read his sentence to him for the fourth time, and asked if he persisted in what he said under torture.

“Most certainly I do,” said Urbain; “for it was the exact truth.”

Upon this, the clerk withdrew, first informing Grandier that if he had anything to say to the people he was at liberty to speak.

But this was just what the exorcists did not want: they knew Grandier’s eloquence and courage, and a firm, unshaken denial at the moment of death would be most prejudicial to their interests. As soon, therefore, as Grandier opened his lips to speak, they dashed such a quantity of holy water in his face that it took away his breath. It was but for a moment, however, and he recovered himself, and again endeavoured to speak, a monk stooped down and stifled the words by kissing him on the lips. Grandier, guessing his intention, said loud enough for those next the pile to hear, “That was the kiss of Judas!”

At these words the monks become so enraged that one of them struck Grandier three times in the face with a crucifix, while he appeared to be giving it him to kiss; but by the blood that flowed from his nose and lips at the third blow those standing near perceived the truth: all Grandier could do was to call out that he asked for a Salve Regina and an Ave Maria, which many began at once to repeat, whilst he with clasped hands and eyes raised to heaven commended himself to God and the Virgin. The exorcists then made one more effort to get him to confess publicly, but he exclaimed —

“My fathers, I have said all I had to say; I hope in God and in His mercy.”

At this refusal the anger of the exorcists surpassed all bounds, and Pere Lactance, taking a twist of straw, dipped it in a bucket of pitch which was standing beside the pile, and lighting it at a torch, thrust it into his face, crying —

“Miserable wretch! will nothing force you to confess your crimes and renounce the devil?”

“I do not belong to the devil,” said Grandier, pushing away the straw with his hands; “I have renounced the devil, I now renounce him and all his works again, and I pray that God may have mercy on me.”

At this, without waiting for the signal from the provost’s lieutenant, Pere Lactance poured the bucket of pitch on one corner of the pile of wood and set fire to it, upon which Grandier called the executioner to his aid, who, hastening up, tried in vain to strangle him, while the flames spread apace.

“Ah! my brother,” said the sufferer, “is this the way you keep your promise?”

“It’s not my fault,” answered the executioner; “the monks have knotted the cord, so that the noose cannot slip.”

“Oh, Father Lactance! Father Lactance! have you no charity?” cried Grandier.

The executioner by this time was forced by the increasing heat to jump down from the pile, being indeed almost overcome; and seeing this, Grandier stretched forth a hand into the flames, and said —

“Pere Lactance, God in heaven will judge between thee and me; I summon thee to appear before Him in thirty days.”

Grandier was then seen to make attempts to strangle himself, but either because it was impossible, or because he felt it would be wrong to end his life by his own hands, he desisted, and clasping his hands, prayed aloud —

“Deus meus, ad te vigilo, miserere me.”

A Capuchin fearing that he would have time to say more, approached the pile from the side which had not yet caught fire, and dashed the remainder of the holy water in his face. This caused such smoke that Grandier was hidden for a moment from the eyes of the spectators; when it cleared away, it was seen that his clothes were now alight; his voice could still be heard from the midst of the flames raised in prayer; then three times, each time in a weaker voice, he pronounced the name of Jesus, and giving one cry, his head fell forward on his breast.

At that moment the pigeons which had till then never ceased to circle round the stake, flew away, and were lost in the clouds.

Urbain Grandier had given up the ghost.

CHAPTER XII

This time it was not the man who was executed who was guilty, but the executioners; consequently we feel sure that our readers will be anxious to learn something of their fate.

Pere Lactance died in the most terrible agony on September 18th, 1634, exactly a month from the date of Grandier’s death. His brother-monks considered that this was due to the vengeance of Satan; but others were not wanting who said, remembering the summons uttered by Grandier, that it was rather due to the justice of God. Several attendant circumstances seemed to favour the latter opinion. The author of the History of the Devils of Loudzin gives an account of one of these circumstances, for the authenticity of which he vouches, and from which we extract the following:

“Some days after the execution of Grandier, Pere Lactance fell ill of the disease of which he died. Feeling that it was of supernatural origin, he determined to take a pilgrimage to Notre Dame des Andilliers de Saumur, where many miracles were wrought, and which was held in high estimation in the neighbourhood. A place in the carriage of the Sieur de Canaye was offered him for the journey; for this gentleman, accompanied by a large party on pleasure bent, was just then setting out for his estate of Grand Fonds, which lay in the same direction. The reason for the offer was that Canaye and his friends, having heard that the last words of Grandier had affected Pere Lactance’s mind, expected to find a great deal of amusement in exciting the terrors of their travelling-companion. And in truth, for a day or two, the boon companions sharpened their wits at the expense of the worthy monk, when all at once, on a good road and without apparent cause, the carriage overturned. Though no one was hurt, the accident appeared so strange to the pleasure-seekers that it put an end to the jokes of even the boldest among them. Pere Lactance himself appeared melancholy and preoccupied, and that evening at supper refused to eat, repeating over and over again —

“‘It was wrong of me to deny Grandier the confessor he asked for; God is punishing me, God is punishing me!’

“On the following morning the journey was resumed, but the evident distress of mind under which Pere Lactance laboured had so damped the spirits of the party that all their gaiety had disappeared. Suddenly, just outside Fenet, where the road was in excellent condition and no obstacle to their progress apparent, the carriage upset for the second time. Although again no one was hurt, the travellers felt that there was among them someone against whom God's anger was turned, and their suspicions pointing to Pere Lactance, they went on their way, leaving him behind, and feeling very uncomfortable at the thought that they had spent two or three days in his society.

"Pere Lactance at last reached Notre-Dame des Andilliers; but however numerous were the miracles there performed, the remission of the doom pronounced by the martyr on Pere Lactance was not added to their number; and at a quarter-past six on September 18th, exactly a month to the very minute after Grandier's death, Pere Lactance expired in excruciating agony."

Pere Tranquille's turn came four years later. The malady which attacked him was so extraordinary that the physicians were quite at a loss, and forced to declare their ignorance of any remedy. His shrieks and blasphemies were so distinctly heard in the streets, that his brother Franciscans, fearing the effect they would have on his after-reputation, especially in the minds of those who had seen Grandier die with words of prayer on his lips, spread abroad the report that the devils whom he had expelled from the bodies of the nuns had entered into the body of the exorcist. He died shrieking —

"My God! how I suffer! Not all the devils and all the damned together endure what I endure!" His panegyrist, in whose book we find all the horrible details of his death employed to much purpose to illustrate the advantages of belonging to the true faith, remarks —

"Truly big generous heart must have been a hot hell for those fiends who entered his body to torment it."

The following epitaph which was placed over his grave was interpreted, according to the prepossessions of those who read it, either as a testimony to his sanctity or as a proof of his punishment: —

"Here lies Pere Tranquille, of Saint-Remi; a humble Capuchin preacher. The demons no longer able to endure his fearlessly exercised power as an exorcist, and encouraged by sorcerers, tortured him to death, on May 31st, 1638."

But a death about which there could be no doubt as to the cause was that of the surgeon Mannouri, the same who had, as the reader may recollect, been the first to torture Grandier. One evening about ten o’clock he was returning from a visit to a patient who lived on the outskirts of the town, accompanied by a colleague and preceded by his surgery attendant carrying a lantern. When they reached the centre of the town in the rue Grand-Pave, which passes between the walls of the castle grounds and the gardens of the Franciscan monastery, Mannouri suddenly stopped, and, staring fixedly at some object which was invisible to his companions, exclaimed with a start —

“Oh! there is Grandier!

“Where? where?” cried the others.

He pointed in the direction towards which his eyes were turned, and beginning to tremble violently, asked —

“What do you want with me, Grandier? What do you want?”

A moment later he added

“Yes-yes, I am coming.”

Immediately it seemed as if the vision vanished from before his eyes, but the effect remained. His brother-surgeon and the servant brought him home, but neither candles nor the light of day could allay his fears; his disordered brain showed him Grandier ever standing at the foot of his bed. A whole week he continued, as was known all over the town, in this condition of abject terror; then the spectre seemed to move from its place and gradually to draw nearer, for he kept on repeating, “He is coming! he is coming!” and at length, towards evening, at about the same hour at which Grandier expired, Surgeon Mannouri drew his last breath.

We have still to tell of M. de Laubardemont. All we know is thus related in the letters of M. de Patin: —

“On the 9th inst., at nine o’clock in the evening, a carriage was attacked by robbers; on hearing the noise the townspeople ran to the spot, drawn thither as much by curiosity as by humanity. A few shots were exchanged and the robbers put to flight, with the exception of one man belonging to their band who was taken prisoner, and another who lay wounded on the paving-stones. This latter died next day without having spoken, and left no clue behind as to who he was. His identity was, however, at length made clear. He was the son of a high dignitary named de Laubardemont, who in 1634, as royal commissioner, condemned Urbain Grandier, a poor, priest of Loudun, to be burnt alive, under the pretence that he had caused several nuns of Loudun to be possessed by devils. These nuns he had so tutored as to their behaviour that many people foolishly believed them to be demoniacs. May we not regard the fate of his son as a chastisement inflicted by Heaven on this unjust judge — an expiation exacted for the pitilessly cruel death inflicted on his victim, whose blood still cries unto the Lord from the ground?”

Naturally the persecution of Urbain Grandier attracted the attention not only of journalists but of poets. Among the many poems which were inspired by it, the following is one of the best. Urbain speaks:

“From hell came the tidings that by horrible sanctions
I had made a pact with the devil to have power over women:
Though not one could be found to accuse me.
In the trial which delivered me to torture and the stake,
The demon who accused me invented and suggested the crime,
And his testimony was the only proof against me.

The English in their rage burnt the Maid alive;
Like her, I too fell a victim to revenge;
We were both accused falsely of the same crime;
In Paris she is adored, in London abhorred;
In Loudun some hold me guilty of witchcraft,
Some believe me innocent; some halt between two minds.

Like Hercules, I loved passionately;
Like him, I was consumed by fire;
But he by death became a god.
The injustice of my death was so well concealed
That no one can judge whether the flames saved or destroyed me;
Whether they blackened me for hell, or purified me for heaven.

In vain did I suffer torments with unshaken resolution;
They said that I felt no pain, being a sorcerer died unrepentant;
That the prayers I uttered were impious words;
That in kissing the image on the cross I spat in its face;
That casting my eyes to heaven I mocked the saints;
That when I seemed to call on God, I invoked the devil

Others, more charitable, say, in spite of their hatred of my crime,

That my death may be admired although my life was not blameless;
That my resignation showed that I died in hope and faith;
That to forgive, to suffer without complaint or murmur,
Is perfect love; and that the soul is purified
From the sins of life by a death like mine.”

NISIDA — 1825

If our readers, tempted by the Italian proverb about seeing Naples and then dying, were to ask us what is the most favourable moment for visiting the enchanted city, we should advise them to land at the mole, or at Mergellina, on a fine summer day and at the hour when some solemn procession is moving out of the cathedral. Nothing can give an idea of the profound and simple-hearted emotion of this populace, which has enough poetry in its soul to believe in its own happiness. The whole town adorns herself and attires herself like a bride for her wedding; the dark facades of marble and granite disappear beneath hangings of silk and festoons of flowers; the wealthy display their dazzling luxury, the poor drape themselves proudly in their rags. Everything is light, harmony, and perfume; the sound is like the hum of an immense hive, interrupted by a thousandfold outcry of joy impossible to describe. The bells repeat their sonorous sequences in every key; the arcades echo afar with the triumphal marches of military bands; the sellers of sherbet and water-melons sing out their deafening flourish from throats of copper. People form into groups; they meet, question, gesticulate; there are gleaming looks, eloquent gestures, picturesque attitudes; there is a general animation, an unknown charm, an indefinable intoxication. Earth is very near to heaven, and it is easy to understand that, if God were to banish death from this delightful spot, the Neapolitans would desire no other paradise.

The story that we are about to tell opens with one of these magical pictures. It was the Day of the Assumption in the year 1825; the sun had been up some four or five hours, and the long Via da Forcella, lighted from end to end by its slanting rays, cut the town in two, like a ribbon of watered silk. The lava pavement, carefully cleaned, shone like any mosaic, and the royal troops, with their proudly waving plumes, made a double living hedge on each side of the street. The balconies, windows, and terraces, the stands with their unsubstantial balustrades, and the wooden galleries set up during the night, were loaded with spectators, and looked not unlike the boxes of a theatre. An immense crowd, forming a medley of the brightest colours, invaded the reserved space and broke through the military barriers, here and there, like an overflowing torrent. These intrepid sightseers, nailed to their places, would have waited half their lives without giving the least sign of impatience.

At last, about noon, a cannon-shot was heard, and a cry of general satisfaction followed it. It was the signal that the procession had crossed the threshold of the church. In the same moment a charge of carabineers swept off the people who were obstructing the middle of the street, the regiments of the line opened floodgates for the overflowing crowd, and soon nothing remained on the causeway but some scared dog, shouted at by the people, hunted off by the soldiers, and fleeing at full speed. The procession came out through the Via di Vescovato. First came the guilds of merchants and craftsmen, the hatters, weavers, bakers, butchers, cutlers, and goldsmiths. They wore the prescribed dress: black coats, knee breeches, low shoes and silver buckles. As the countenances of these gentlemen offered nothing very interesting to the multitude, whisperings arose, little by little, among the spectators, then some bold spirits ventured a jest or two upon the fattest or the baldest of the townsmen, and at last the boldest of the lazzaroni slipped between the soldiers’ legs to collect the wax that was running down from the lighted tapers.

After the craftsmen, the religious orders marched past, from the Dominicans to the Carthusians, from the Carmelites to the Capuchins. They advanced slowly, their eyes cast down, their step austere, their hands on their hearts; some faces were rubicund and shining, with large cheek-hones and rounded chins, herculean heads upon bullnecks; some, thin and livid, with cheeks hollowed by suffering and penitence, and with the look of living ghosts; in short, here were the two sides of monastic life.

At this moment, Nunziata and Gelsomina, two charming damsels, taking advantage of an old corporal’s politeness, pushed forward their pretty heads into the first rank. The break in the line was conspicuous; but the sly warrior seemed just a little lax in the matter of discipline.

“Oh, there is Father Bruno!” said Gelsomina suddenly. “Good-day, Father Bruno.”

“Hush, cousin! People do not talk to the procession.”

“How absurd! He is my confessor. May I not say good-morning to my confessor?”

“Silence, chatterboxes!”

“Who was that spoke?”

“Oh, my dear, it was Brother Cucuzza, the begging friar.”

“Where is he? Where is he?”

“There he is, along there, laughing into his beard. How bold he is!”

“Ah, God in heaven! If we were to dream of him — -”

While the two cousins were pouring out endless comments upon the Capuchins and their beards, the capes of the canons and the surplices of the seminarists, the ‘feroci’ came running across from the other side to re-establish order with the help of their gun-stocks.

“By the blood of my patron saint,” cried a stentorian voice, “if I catch you between my finger and thumb, I will straighten your back for the rest of your days.”

“Who are you falling out with, Gennaro?”

“With this accursed hunchback, who has been worrying my back for the last hour, as though he could see through it.”

“It is a shame,” returned the hunchback in a tone of lamentation; “I have been here since last night, I slept out of doors to keep my place, and here is this abominable giant comes to stick himself in front of me like an obelisk.”

The hunchback was lying like a Jew, but the crowd rose unanimously against the obelisk. He was, in one way, their superior, and majorities are always made up of pigmies.

“Hi! Come down from your stand!”

“Hi! get off your pedestal!”

“Off with your hat!”

“Down with your head!”

“Sit down!”

“Lie down!”

This revival of curiosity expressing itself in invectives evidently betokened the crisis of the show. And indeed the chapters of canons, the clergy and bishops, the pages and chamberlains, the representatives of the city, and the gentlemen of the king’s chamber now appeared, and finally the king himself, who, bare-headed and carrying a taper, followed the magnificent statue of the Virgin. The contrast was striking: after the grey-headed monks and pale novices came brilliant young captains, affronting heaven with the points of their moustaches, riddling the latticed windows with killing glances, following the procession in an absent-minded way, and interrupting the holy hymns with scraps of most unorthodox conversation.

“Did you notice, my dear Doria, how like a monkey the old Marchesa d’Acquasparta takes her raspberry ice?”

“Her nose takes the colour of the ice. What fine bird is showing off to her?”

“It is the Cyrenian.”

“I beg your pardon! I have not seen that name in the Golden Book.”

“He helps the poor marquis to bear his cross.”

The officer’s profane allusion was lost in the prolonged murmur of admiration that suddenly rose from the crowd, and every gaze was turned upon one of the young girls who was strewing flowers before the holy Madonna. She was an exquisite creature. Her head glowing in the sun shine, her feet hidden amid roses and broom-blossom, she rose, tall and fair, from a pale cloud of incense, like some seraphic apparition. Her hair, of velvet blackness, fell in curls half-way down her shoulders; her brow, white as alabaster and polished as a mirror, reflected the rays of the sun; her beautiful and finely arched black eye-brows melted into the opal of her temples; her eyelids were fast down, and the curled black fringe of lashes veiled a glowing and liquid glance of divine emotion; the nose, straight, slender, and cut by two easy nostrils, gave to her profile that character of antique beauty which is vanishing day by day from the earth. A calm and serene smile, one of those smiles that have already left the soul and not yet reached the lips, lifted the corners of her mouth with a pure expression of infinite beatitude and gentleness. Nothing could be more perfect than the chin that completed the faultless oval of this radiant countenance; her neck of a dead white, joined her bosom in a delicious curve, and supported her head gracefully like the stalk of a flower moved by a gentle breeze. A bodice of crimson velvet spotted with gold outlined her delicate and finely curved figure, and held in by means of a handsome gold lace the countless folds of a full and flowing skirt, that fell to her feet like those severe robes in which the Byzantine painters preferred to drape their angels. She was indeed a marvel, and so rare and modest of beauty had not been seen within the memory of man.

Among those who had gazed most persistently at her was observed the young Prince of Brancaleone, one of the foremost nobles of the kingdom. Handsome, rich, and brave, he had, at five-and-twenty, outdone the lists of all known Don Juans. Fashionable young women spoke very ill of him and adored him in secret; the most virtuous made it their rule to fly from him, so impossible did resistance appear. All the young madcaps had chosen him for their model; for his triumphs robbed many a Miltiades of sleep, and with better cause. In short, to get an idea of this lucky individual, it will be enough to know that as a seducer he was the most perfect thing that the devil had succeeded in inventing in this progressive century. The prince was dressed out for the occasion in a sufficiently grotesque costume, which he wore with ironic gravity and cavalier ease. A black satin doublet, knee breeches, embroidered stockings, and shoes with gold buckles, formed the main portions of his dress, over which trailed a long brocaded open-sleeved robe lined with ermine, and a magnificent diamond-hilted sword. On account of his rank he enjoyed the rare distinction of carrying one of the six gilded staves that supported the plumed and embroidered canopy.

As soon as the procession moved on again, Eligi of Brancaleone gave a side glance to a little man as red as a lobster, who was walking almost at his side, and carrying in his right hand, with all the solemnity that he could muster, his excellency's hat. He was a footman in gold-laced livery, and we beg leave to give a brief sketch of his history. Trespolo was the child of poor but thieving parents, and on that account was early left an orphan. Being at leisure, he studied life from an eminently social aspect. If we are to believe a certain ancient sage, we are all in the world to solve a problem: as to Trespolo, he desired to live without doing anything; that was his problem. He was, in turn, a sacristan, a juggler, an apothecary's assistant, and a cicerone, and he got tired of all these callings. Begging was, to his mind, too hard work, and it was more trouble to be a thief than to be an honest man. Finally he decided in favour of contemplative philosophy. He had a passionate preference for the horizontal position, and found the greatest pleasure in the world in watching the shooting of stars. Unfortunately, in the course of his meditations this deserving man came near to dying of hunger; which would have been a great pity, for he was beginning to accustom himself not to eat anything. But as he was predestined by nature to play a small part in our story, God showed him grace for that time, and sent to his assistance — not one of His angels, the rogue was not worthy of that, but — one of Brancaleone's hunting dogs. The noble animal sniffed round the philosopher, and uttered a little charitable growl that would have done credit to one of the brethren of Mount St. Bernard. The prince, who was returning in triumph from hunting, and who, by good luck, had that day killed a bear and ruined a countess, had an odd inclination to do a good deed. He approached the plebeian who was about to pass into the condition of a corpse, stirred the thing with his foot, and seeing that there was still a little hope, bade his people bring him along.

From that day onward, Trespolo saw the dream of his life nearly realised. Something rather above a footman and rather below a house steward, he became the confidant of his master, who found his talents most useful; for this Trespolo was as sharp as a demon and almost as artful as a woman. The prince, who, like an intelligent man as he was, had divined that genius is naturally indolent, asked nothing of him but advice; when tiresome people wanted thrashing, he saw to that matter himself, and, indeed, he was the equal of any two at such work. As nothing in this lower world, however, is complete, Trespolo had strange moments amid this life of delights; from time to time his happiness was disturbed by panics that greatly diverted his master; he would mutter incoherent words, stifle violent sighs, and lose his appetite. The root of the matter was that the poor fellow was afraid of going to hell. The matter was very simple: he was afraid of everything; and, besides, it had often been preached to him that the Devil never allowed a moment's rest to those who were ill-advised enough to fall into his clutches. Trespolo was in one of his good moods of repentance, when the prince, after gazing on the young girl with the fierce eagerness of a vulture about to swoop upon its prey, turned to speak to his intimate adviser. The poor servant understood his master's abominable design, and not wishing to share the guilt of a sacrilegious conversation, opened his eyes very wide and turned them up to heaven in ecstatic contemplation. The prince coughed, stamped his foot, moved his sword so as to hit Trespolo's legs, but could not get from him any sign of attention, so absorbed did he appear in celestial thoughts. Brancaleone would have liked to wring his neck, but both his hands were occupied by the staff of the canopy; and besides, the king was present.

At last they were drawing nearer to the church of St. Clara, where the Neapolitan kings were buried, and where several princesses of the blood, exchanging the crown for the veil, have gone to bury themselves alive. The nuns, novices, and abbess, hidden behind shutters, were throwing flowers upon the procession. A bunch fell at the feet of the Prince of Brancaleone.

"Trespolo, pick up that nosegay," said the prince, so audibly that his servant had no further excuse. "It is from Sister Theresa," he added, in a low voice; "constancy is only to be found, nowadays, in a convent."

Trespolo picked up the nosegay and came towards his master, looking like a man who was being strangled.

“Who is that girl?” the latter asked him shortly.

“Which one?” stammered the servant.

“Forsooth! The one walking in front of us.”

“I don’t know her, my lord.”

“You must find out something about her before this evening.”

“I shall have to go rather far afield.”

“Then you do know her, you intolerable rascal! I have half a mind to have you hanged like a dog.”

“For pity’s sake, my lord, think of the salvation of your soul, of your eternal life.”

“I advise you to think of your temporal life. What is her name?”

“She is called Nisida, and is the prettiest girl in the island that she is named after. She is innocence itself. Her father is only a poor fisherman, but I can assure your excellency that in his island he is respected like a king.”

“Indeed!” replied the prince, with an ironical smile. “I must own, to my great shame, that I have never visited the little island of Nisida. You will have a boat ready for me to-morrow, and then we will see.”

He interrupted himself suddenly, for the king was looking at him; and calling up the most sonorous bass notes that he could find in the depths of his throat, he continued with an inspired air, “Genitori genitoque laus et jubilatio.”

“Amen,” replied the serving-man in a ringing voice.

Nisida, the beloved daughter of Solomon, the fisherman, was, as we have said, the loveliest flower of the island from which she derived her name. That island is the most charming spot, the most delicious nook with which we are acquainted; it is a basket of greenery set delicately amid the pure and transparent waters of the gulf, a hill wooded with orange trees and oleanders, and crowned at the summit by a marble castle. All around extends the fairy-like prospect of that immense amphitheatre, one of the mightiest wonders of creation. There lies Naples, the voluptuous syren, reclining carelessly on the seashore; there, Portici, Castellamare, and Sorrento, the very names of which awaken in the imagination a thousand thoughts of poetry and love; there are Pausilippo, Baiae, Puozzoli, and those vast plains, where the ancients fancied their Elysium, sacred solitudes which one might suppose peopled by the men of former days, where the earth echoes under foot like an empty grave, and the air has unknown sounds and strange melodies.

Solomon’s hut stood in that part of the island which, turning its back to the capital, beholds afar the blue crests of Capri. Nothing could be simpler or brighter. The brick walls were hung with ivy greener than emeralds, and enamelled with white bell-flowers; on the ground floor was a fairly spacious apartment, in which the men slept and the family took their meals; on the floor above was Nisida’s little maidenly room, full of coolness, shadows, and mystery, and lighted by a single casement that looked over the gulf; above this room was a terrace of the Italian kind, the four pillars of which were wreathed with vine branches, while its vine-clad arbour and wide parapet were overgrown with moss and wild flowers. A little hedge of hawthorn, which had been respected for ages, made a kind of rampart around the fisherman’s premises, and defended his house better than deep moats and castellated walls could have done. The boldest roisterers of the place would have preferred to fight before the parsonage and in the precincts of the church rather than in front of Solomon’s little enclosure. Otherwise, this was the meeting place of the whole island. Every evening, precisely at the same hour, the good women of the neighbourhood came to knit their woollen caps and tell the news. Groups of little children, naked, brown, and as mischievous as little imps, sported about, rolling on the grass and throwing handfuls of sand into the other’s eyes, heedless of the risk of blinding, while their mothers were engrossed in that grave gossip which marks the dwellers in villages. These gatherings occurred daily before the fisherman’s house; they formed a tacit and almost involuntary homage, consecrated by custom, and of which no one had ever taken special account; the envy that rules in small communities would soon have suppressed them. The influence which old Solomon had over his equals had grown so simply and naturally, that no one found any fault with it, and it had only attracted notice when everyone was benefiting by it, like those fine trees whose growth is only observed when we profit by their shade. If any dispute arose in the island, the two opponents preferred to abide by the judgment of the fisherman instead of going before the court; he was fortunate enough or clever enough to send away both parties satisfied. He knew what remedies to prescribe better than any physician, for it seldom happened that he or his had not felt the same ailments, and his knowledge, founded on personal experience, produced the most excellent results. Moreover, he had no interest, as ordinary doctors have, in prolonging illnesses. For many years past the only formality recognised as a guarantee for the inviolability of a contract had been the intervention of the fisherman. Each party shook hands with Solomon, and the thing was done. They would rather have thrown themselves into Vesuvius at the moment of its most violent eruption than have broken so solemn an agreement. At the period when our story opens, it was impossible to find any person in the island who had not felt the effects of the fisherman's generosity, and that without needing to confess to him any necessities. As it was the custom for the little populace of Nisida to spend its leisure hours before Solomon's cottage, the old man, while he walked slowly among the different groups, humming his favourite song, discovered moral and physical weaknesses as he passed; and the same evening he or his daughter would certainly be seen coming mysteriously to bestow a benefit upon every sufferer, to lay a balm upon every wound. In short, he united in his person all those occupations whose business is to help mankind. Lawyers, doctors, and the notary, all the vultures of civilisation, had beaten a retreat before the patriarchal benevolence of the fisherman. Even the priest had capitulated.

On the morrow of the Feast of the Assumption, Solomon was sitting, as his habit was, on a stone bench in front of his house, his legs crossed and his arms carelessly stretched out. At the first glance you would have taken him for sixty at the outside, though he was really over eighty. He had all his teeth, which were as white as pearls, and showed them proudly. His brow, calm and restful beneath its crown of abundant white hair, was as firm and polished as marble; not a wrinkle ruffled the corner of his eye, and the gem-like lustre of his blue orbs revealed a freshness of soul and an eternal youth such as fable grants to the sea-gods. He displayed his bare arms and muscular neck with an old man's vanity. Never had a gloomy idea, an evil prepossession, or a keen remorse, arisen to disturb his long and peaceful life. He had never seen a tear flow near him without hurrying to wipe it; poor though he was, he had succeeded in pouring out benefits that all the kings of the earth could not have bought with their gold; ignorant though he was, he had spoken to his fellows the only language that they could understand, the language of the heart. One single drop of bitterness had mingled with his inexhaustible stream of happiness; one grief only had clouded his sunny life — the death of his wife — and moreover he had forgotten that.

All the affections of his soul were turned upon Nisida, whose birth had caused her mother’s death; he loved her with that immoderate love that old people have for the youngest of their children. At the present moment he was gazing upon her with an air of profound rapture, and watching her come and go, as she now joined the groups of children and scolded them for games too dangerous or too noisy; now seated herself on the grass beside their mothers and took part with grave and thoughtful interest in their talk. Nisida was more beautiful thus than she had been the day before; with the vaporous cloud of perfume that had folded her round from head to foot had disappeared all that mystic poetry which put a sort of constraint upon her admirers and obliged them to lower their glances. She had become a daughter of Eve again without losing anything of her charm. Simply dressed, as she usually was on work-days, she was distinguishable among her companions only by her amazing beauty and by the dazzling whiteness of her skin. Her beautiful black hair was twisted in plaits around the little dagger of chased silver, that has lately been imported into Paris by that right of conquest which the pretty women of Paris have over the fashions of all countries, like the English over the sea.

Nisida was adored by her young friends, all the mothers had adopted her with pride; she was the glory of the island. The opinion of her superiority was shared by everyone to such a degree, that if some bold young man, forgetting the distance which divided him from the maiden, dared speak a little too loudly of his pretensions, he became the laughing-stock of his companions. Even the past masters of tarentella dancing were out of countenance before the daughter of Solomon, and did not dare to seek her as a partner. Only a few singers from Amalfi or Sorrento, attracted by the rare beauty of this angelic creature, ventured to sigh out their passion, carefully veiled beneath the most delicate allusions. But they seldom reached the last verse of their song; at every sound they stopped short, threw down their triangles and their mandolines, and took flight like scared nightingales.

One only had courage enough or passion enough to brave the mockery; this was Bastiano, the most formidable diver of that coast. He also sang, but with a deep and hollow voice; his chant was mournful and his melodies full of sadness. He never accompanied himself upon any instrument, and never retired without concluding his song. That day he was gloomier than usual; he was standing upright, as though by enchantment, upon a bare and slippery rock, and he cast scornful glances upon the women who were looking at him and laughing. The sun, which was plunging into the sea like a globe of fire, shed its light full upon his stern features, and the evening breeze, as it lightly rippled the billows, set the fluttering reeds waving at his feet. Absorbed by dark thoughts, he sang, in the musical language of his country, these sad words: —

"O window, that wert used to shine in the night like an open eye, how dark thou art! Alas, alas! my poor sister is ill.

"Her mother, all in tears, stoops towards me and says, 'Thy poor sister is dead and buried.'

"Jesus! Jesus! Have pity on me! You stab me to the heart.

"Tell me, good neighbours, how it happened; repeat to me her last words.

"She had a burning thirst, and refused to drink because thou wast not there to give her water from thy hand.

"Oh, my sister! Oh, my sister!

"She refused her mother's kiss, because thou wast not there to embrace her.

"Oh, my sister! Oh, my sister!

"She wept until her last breath, because thou wast not there to dry her tears.

"Oh, my sister! Oh, my sister!

"We placed on her brow her wreath of orangeflowers, we covered her with a veil as white as snow; we laid her gently in her coffin.

"Thanks, good neighbours. I will go and be with her.

"Two angels came down from heaven and bore her away on their wings. Mary Magdalene came to meet her at the gate of heaven.

"Thanks, good neighbours. I will go and be with her.

"There, she was seated in a place of glory, a chaplet of rubies was given to her, and she is singing her rosary with the Virgin.

"Thanks, good neighbours. I will go and be with her."

As he finished the last words of his melancholy refrain, he flung himself from the top of his rock into the sea, as though he really desired to engulf himself. Nisida and the other women gave a cry of terror, for during some minutes the diver failed to reappear upon the surface.

"Are you out of your senses?" cried a young man who had suddenly appeared, unobserved among the women. "Why, what are you afraid of? You know very well that Bastiano is always doing things of this sort. But do not be alarmed: all the fishes in the Mediterranean will be drowned before any harm comes to him. Water is his natural element. Good-day, sister; good-day, father."

The young fisherman kissed Nisida on the forehead, drew near to his father, and, bowing his handsome head before him, took off his red cap and respectfully kissed the old man's hand. He came thus to ask his blessing every evening before putting out to sea, where he often spent the night fishing from his boat.

"May God bless thee, my Gabriel!" said the old man in a tone of emotion, as he slowly passed his hand over his son's black curls, and a tear came into his eye. Then, rising solemnly and addressing the groups around him, he added in a voice full of dignity and of gentleness. "Come, my children, it is time to separate. The young to work, the old to rest. There is the angelus ringing."

Everybody knelt, and after a short prayer each went on his way. Nisida, after having given her father the last daily attentions, went up to her room, replenished the oil in the lamp that burned day and night before the Virgin, and, leaning her elbow on the window ledge, divided the branches of jasmine which hung like perfumed curtains, began to gaze out at the sea, and seemed lost in a deep, sweet reverie.

At this very time, a little boat, rowed silently by two oarsmen, touched shore on the other side of the island. It had become quite dark. A little man first landed cautiously, and respectfully offered his hand to another individual, who, scorning that feeble support, leapt easily ashore.

"Well, knave," he cried, "are my looks to your taste?"

"Your lordship is perfect."

"I flatter myself I am. It is true that, in order to make the transformation complete, I chose the very oldest coat that displayed its rags in a Jew's shop."

"Your lordship looks like a heathen god engaged in a love affair. Jupiter has sheathed his thunderbolts and Apollo has pocketed his rays."

"A truce to your mythology. And, to begin with, I forbid you to call me 'your lordship.'"

"Yes, your lordship."

"If my information that I have procured during the day is correct, the house must be on the other side of the island, in a most remote and lonely spot. Walk at a certain distance, and do not trouble yourself about me, for I know my part by heart."

The young Prince of Brancaleone, whom, in spite of the darkness of the night, our readers will already have recognised, advanced towards the fisherman's house, with as little noise as possible, walked up and down several times upon the shore, and, after having briefly reconnoitred the place that he wished to attack, waited quietly for the moon to rise and light up the scene that he had prepared. He was not obliged to exercise his patience very long, for the darkness gradually disappeared, and Solomon's little house was bathed in silvery light. Then he approached with timid steps, lifted towards the casement a look of entreaty, and began to sigh with all the power of his lungs. The young girl, called suddenly from her meditations by the appearance of this strange person, raised herself sharply and prepared to close the shutters.

"Stay, charming Nisida!" cried the prince, in the manner of a man overcome by irresistible passion.

"What do you want with me, signor?" answered the maiden, amazed to hear herself called by name.

"To adore you as a Madonna is adored, and to make you aware of my sighs."

Nisida looked at him steadily, and, after a moment or two of reflection, asked suddenly, as though in response to some secret thought, "Do you belong to this country, or are you a foreigner?"

"I arrived in this island," replied the prince without hesitation, "at the moment when the sun was writing his farewell to the earth and dipping the rays that serves as his pen into the shadow that serves as his inkstand."

"And who are you?" returned the young girl, not at all understanding these strange words.

"Alas! I am but a poor student, but I may become a great poet like Tasso, whose verses you often hear sung by a departing fisherman who sends his thrilling music as a last farewell that returns to die on the beach."

"I do not know whether I am doing wrong to speak to you, but at least I will be frank with you," said Nisida, blushing; "I have the misfortune to be the richest girl on the island."

"Your father will not be inexorable," returned the prince ardently; "one word from you, light of my eyes, goddess of my heart, and I will work night and day, never pausing nor slackening, and will render myself worthy to possess the treasure that God has revealed to my dazzled eyes, and, from being poor and obscure as you see me, I will become rich and powerful."

"I have stayed too long listening to talk that a maiden should not hear; permit me, signor, to withdraw."

"Have pity on me, my cruel enemy! What have I done to you that you should thus leave me with death in my soul? You do not know that, for months past, I have been following you everywhere like a shadow, that I prowl round your home at night, stifling my sighs lest they should disturb your peaceful slumber. You are afraid, perhaps, to let yourself be touched, at a first meeting, by a poor wretch who adores you. Alas! Juliet was young and beautiful like you, and she did not need many entreaties to take pity on Romeo."

Nisida suffered a sad and thoughtful look to fall upon this handsome young man who spoke to her in so gentle a voice, and withdrew without further reply, that she might not humiliate his poverty.

The prince made great efforts to suppress a strong inclination towards laughter, and, very well satisfied with this opening, turned his steps towards the spot where he had left his servant. Trespolo, after having emptied a bottle of lacryma with which he had provided himself for any emergency, had looked long around him to choose a spot where the grass was especially high and thick, and had laid himself down to a sound sleep, murmuring as he did so, this sublime observation, "O laziness, but for the sin of Adam you would be a virtue!"

The young girl could not close her eyes during the whole night after the conversation that she had held with the stranger. His sudden appearance, his strange dress and odd speech, had awakened in her an uncertain feeling that had been lying asleep in the bottom of her heart. She was at this time in all the vigour of her youth and of her resplendent beauty. Nisida was not one of the weak and timid natures that are broken by suffering or domineered over by tyranny. Far otherwise: everything around her had contributed towards shaping for her a calm and serene destiny; her simple, tender soul had unfolded in an atmosphere of peace and happiness. If she had not hitherto loved, it was the fault, not of her coldness but of the extreme timidity shown by the inhabitants of her island. The blind depth of respect that surrounded the old fisherman had drawn around his daughter a barrier of esteem and submission that no one dared to cross. By means of thrift and labour Solomon had succeeded in creating for himself a prosperity that put the poverty of the other fishermen to the blush. No one had asked for Nisida because no one thought he deserved her. The only admirer who had dared to show his passion openly was Bastiano, the most devoted and dearest friend of Gabriel; but Bastiano did not please her. So, trusting in her beauty, upheld by the mysterious hope that never deserts youth, she had resigned herself to wait, like some princess who knows that her betrothed will come from a far country.

On the day of the Assumption she had left her island for the first time in her life, chance having chosen her among the maidens of the kingdom vowed by their mothers to the special protection of the Virgin. But, overwhelmed by the weight of a position so new to her, blushing and confused under the eyes of an immense crowd, she had scarcely dared to raise her wondering looks, and the splendours of the town had passed before her like a dream, leaving but a vague remembrance.

When she perceived the presence of this handsome young man, so slenderly and elegantly built, whose noble and calm demeanour contrasted with the timidity and awkwardness of her other admirers, she felt herself inwardly disturbed, and no doubt she would have believed that her prince had come, if she had been unpleasantly struck by the poverty of his dress. She had, nevertheless, allowed herself to listen to him longer than she ought to have done, and she drew back with her bosom heavy, her cheek on fire, and her heart rent by an ache that was both dull and sharp.

“If my father does not wish me to marry him,” she said to herself, tormented by the first remorseful feeling of her life. “I shall have done wrong to speak to him. And yet he is so handsome!”

Then she knelt before the Virgin, who was her only confidante, the poor child having never known her mother, and tried to tell her the torments of her soul; but she could not achieve her prayer. The thoughts became entangled within her brain, and she surprised herself uttering strange words. But, assuredly, the Holy Virgin must have taken pity upon her lovely devotee, for she rose with the impression of a consoling thought, resolved to confide everything to her father.

“I cannot have a moment’s doubt,” she said to herself, as she unlaced her bodice, “of my father’s affection. Well, then, if he forbids me to speak to him, it will be for my good. And indeed, I have seen him but this once,” she added, as she threw herself upon the bed, “and now I think of it, I consider him very bold to dare to speak to me. I am almost inclined to laugh at him.

How confidently he brought out his nonsense, how absurdly he rolled his eyes! They are really very fine, those eyes of his, and so is his mouth, and his forehead and his hair. He does not suspect that I noticed his hands, which are really very white, when he raised them to heaven, like a madman, as he walked up and down by the sea. Come, come, is he going to prevent my sleeping? I will not see him again!” she cried, drawing the sheet over her head like an angry child. Then she began to laugh to herself over her lover’s dress, and meditated long upon what her companions would say to it. Suddenly her brow contracted painfully, a frightful thought had stolen into her mind, she shuddered from head to foot. “Suppose he were to think someone else prettier than me? Men are so foolish! Certainly, it is too hot, and I shall not sleep to-night.”

Then she sat up in her bed, and continued her monologue — which we will spare the reader — till the morning. Scarcely had the first rays of light filtered through the interlacing branches of jasmine and wavered into the room, when Nisida dressed herself hurriedly, and went as usual to present her forehead to her father’s kiss. The old man at once observed the depression and weariness left by a sleepless night upon his daughter’s face, and parting with an eager and anxious hand the beautiful black hair that fell over her cheeks, he asked her, “What is the matter, my child? Thou hast not slept well?”

“I have not slept at all,” answered Nisida, smiling, to reassure her father; “I am perfectly well, but I have something to confess to you.”

“Speak quickly, child; I am dying with impatience.”

“Perhaps I have done wrong; but I want you to promise beforehand not to scold me.”

“You know very well that I spoil you,” said the old man, with a caress; “I shall not begin to be stern to-day.”

“A young man who does not belong to this island, and whose name I do not know, spoke to me yesterday evening when I was taking the air at my window.”

“And what was he so eager to say to you, my dear Nisida?”

“He begged me to speak to you in his favour.”

“I am listening. What can I do for him?”

“Order me to marry him.”

“And should you obey willingly?”

"I think so, father," the girl candidly replied. "As to other things, you yourself must judge in your wisdom; for I wanted to speak to you before coming to know him, so as not to go on with a conversation that you might not approve. But there is a hindrance."

"You know that I do not recognise any when it is a question of making my daughter happy."

"He is poor, father."

"Well, all the more reason for me to like him. There is work here for everybody, and my table can spare a place for another son. He is young, he has arms; no doubt he has some calling."

"He is a poet."

"No matter; tell him to come and speak to me, and if he is an honest lad, I promise you, my child, that I will do anything in the world to promote your happiness."

Nisida embraced her father effusively, and was beside herself with joy all day, waiting impatiently for the evening in order to give the young man such splendid news. Eligi Brancaleone was but moderately flattered, as you will easily believe, by the fisherman's magnanimous intentions towards him; but like the finished seducer that he was, he appeared enchanted at them. Recollecting his character as a fantastical student and an out-at-elbows poet, he fell upon his knees and shouted a thanksgiving to the planet Venus; then, addressing the young girl, he added, in a calmer voice, that he was going to write immediately to his own father, who in a week's time would come to make his formal proposal; until then, he begged, as a favour, that he might not present himself to Solomon nor to any person at all in the island, and assigned as a pretext a certain degree of shame which he felt on account of his old clothes, assuring his beloved that his father would bring him a complete outfit for the wedding-day.

While the ill-starred girl was thus walking in terrifying security at the edge of the precipice, Trespolo, following his master's wishes, had established himself in the island as a pilgrim from Jerusalem. Playing his part and sprinkling his conversation with biblical phrases, which came to him readily, in his character of ex-sacristan, he distributed abundance of charms, wood of the true Cross and milk of the Blessed Virgin, and all those other inexhaustible treasures on which the eager devotion of worthy people daily feeds. His relics were the more evidently authentic in that he did not sell any of them, and, bearing his poverty in a holy manner, thanked the faithful and declined their alms. Only, out of regard for the established virtue of Solomon, he had consented to break bread with the fisherman, and went to take meals with him with the regularity of a cenobite. His abstinence aroused universal surprise: a crust dipped in water, a few nuts or figs sufficed to keep this holy man alive — to prevent him, that is to say, from dying. Furthermore, he entertained Nisida by his tales of his travels and by his mysterious predictions. Unfortunately, he only appeared towards evening; for he spent the rest of the day in austerities and in prayers — in other words, in drinking like a Turk and snoring like a buffalo.

On the morning of the seventh day, after the promise given by the prince to the fisherman's daughter, Brancaleone came into his servant's room, and, shaking hint roughly, cried in his ear, "Up, odious marmot!"

Trespolo, awakened suddenly, rubbed his eyes in alarm. The dead, sleeping peacefully at the bottom of their coffins, will be less annoyed at the last day when the trump of Judgment comes to drag them from their slumbers. Fear having, however, immediately dispersed the dark clouds that overspread his countenance, he sat up, and asked with an appearance of bewilderment —

"What is the matter, your excellency?"

"The matter is that I will have you flayed alive a little if you do not leave off that execrable habit of sleeping twenty hours in the day."

"I was not asleep, prince!" cried the servant boldly, as he sprang out of bed; "I was reflecting — -"

"Listen to me," said the prince in a severe tone; "you were once employed, I believe, in a chemist's shop?"

"Yes, my lord, and I left because my employer had the scandalous barbarity to make me pound drugs, which tired my arms horribly."

"Here is a phial containing a solution of opium."

"Mercy!" cried Trespolo, falling on his knees.

"Get up, idiot, and pay great attention to what I am going to say to you. This little fool of a Nisida persists in wanting me to speak to her father. I made her believe that I was going away this evening to fetch my papers. There is no time to lose. They know you very well at the fisherman's. You will pour this liquid into their wine; your life will answer for your not giving them a larger dose than enough to produce a deep sleep. You will take care to prepare me a good ladder for to-night; after which you will go and wait for me in my boat, where you will find Numa and Bonaroux. They have my orders. I shall not want you in scaling the fortress; I have my Campo Basso dagger."

"But, my lord — -" stammered Trespolo, astounded.

"No difficulties!" cried the prince, stamping his foot furiously, "or, by my father's death, I will cure you, once for all, of your scruples." And he turned on his heel with the air of a man who is certain that people will be very careful not to disobey his orders.

The unhappy Trespolo fulfilled his master's injunctions punctually. With him fear was the guiding principle. That evening the fisherman's supper table was hopelessly dull, and the sham pilgrim tried in vain to enliven it by factitious cheerfulness. Nisida was preoccupied by her lover's departure, and Solomon, sharing unconsciously in his daughter's grief, swallowed but a drop or two of wine, to avoid resisting the repeated urgency of his guest. Gabriel had set out in the morning for Sorrento and was not to return for two or three days; his absence tended to increase the old man's melancholy. As soon as Trespolo had retired, the fisherman yielded to his fatigue. Nisida, with her arms hanging by her sides, her head heavy and her heart oppressed by a sad presentiment, had scarcely strength to go up to her room, and after having mechanically trimmed the lamp, sank on her bed as pale and stiff as a corpse.

The storm was breaking out with violence; one of those terrible storms seen only in the South, when the congregated clouds, parting suddenly, shed torrents of rain and of hail, and threaten another deluge. The roar of the thunder drew nearer and was like the noise of a cannonade. The gulf, lately so calm and smooth that the island was reflected as in a mirror, had suddenly darkened; the furiously leaping waves flung themselves together like wild horses; the island quaked, shaken by terrible shocks. Even the boldest fishermen had drawn their boats ashore, and, shut within their cabins, encouraged as best they could their frightened wives and children.

Amid the deep darkness that overspread the sea Nisida's lamp could be seen gleaming clear and limpid, as it burned before the Madonna. Two boats, without rudders, sails, or oars, tossed by the waves, beaten by the winds, were whirling above the abyss; two men were in these two boats, their muscles tense, their breasts bare, their hair flying. They gazed haughtily on the sea, and braved the tempest.

"Once more, I beg you," cried one of these men, "fear not for me, Gabriel; I promise you that with my two broken oars and a little perseverance I shall get to Torre before daybreak."

"You are mad, Bastiano; we have not been able ever since the morning to get near Vico, and have been obliged to keep tacking about; your skill and strength have been able to do nothing against this frightful hurricane which has driven us back to this point."

"It is the first time you have ever refused to go with me," remarked the young man.

"Well, yes, my dear Bastiano, I do not know how it is, but to-night I feel drawn to the island by an irresistible power. The winds have been unchained to bring me back to it in spite of myself, and I will own to you, even though it should make me seem like a madman in your eyes, that this simple and ordinary event appears to me like an order from heaven. Do you see that lamp shining over there?"

"I know it," answered Bastiano, suppressing a sigh.

"It was lighted before the Virgin one the day when my sister was born, and for eighteen year it has never ceased to burn, night and day. It was my mother's vow. You do not know, my dear Bastiano, you cannot know how many torturing thoughts that vow recalls to me. My poor mother called me to her deathbed and told me a frightful tale, a horrible secret, which weighs on my soul like a cloak of lead, and of which I can only relieve myself by confiding it to a friend. When her painful story was ended she asked to see and to embrace my sister, who was just born; then with her trembling hand, already chilled by the approach of death, she desired to light the lamp herself. 'Remember,' these were her last words, 'remember, Gabriel, that your sister is vowed to the Madonna. As long as this light shines before the blessed image of the Virgin, your sister will be in no danger.' You can understand now why, at night, when we are crossing the gulf, my eyes are always fixed on that lamp. I have a belief that nothing could shake, which is that on the day that light goes out my sister's soul will have taken flight to heaven."

"Well," cried Bastiano in an abrupt tone that betrayed the emotion of his heart, "if you prefer to stay, I will go alone."

"Farewell," said Gabriel, without turning aside his eyes from the window towards which he felt himself drawn by a fascination for which he could not account. Bastiano disappeared, and Nisida's brother, assisted by the waves, was drawing nearer and nearer to the shore, when, at all once, he uttered a terrible cry which sounded above the noise of the tempest.

The star had just been extinguished; the lamp had been blown out.

“My sister is dead!” cried Gabriel and, leaping into the sea, he cleft the waves with the rapidity of lightning.

The storm had redoubled its intensity; long lines of lightning, rending the sides of the clouds, bathed everything in their tawny and intermittent light. The fisherman perceived a ladder leaning against the front of his home, seized it with a convulsive hand, and in three bounds flung himself into the room. The prince felt himself strangely moved on making his way into this pure and silent retreat. The calm and gentle gaze of the Virgin who seemed to be protecting the rest of the sleeping girl, that perfume of innocence shed around the maidenly couch, that lamp, open-eyed amid the shadows, like a soul in prayer, had inspired the seducer with an unknown distress. Irritated by what he called an absurd cowardice, he had extinguished the obtrusive light, and was advancing towards the bed, and addressing unspoken reproaches to himself, when Gabriel swooped upon him with a wounded tiger’s fierce gnashing of the teeth.

Brancaleone, by a bold and rapid movement that showed no common degree of skill and bravery, while struggling in the grasp of his powerful adversary, drew forth in his right hand a long dagger with a fine barbed blade. Gabriel smiled scornfully, snatched the weapon from him, and even as he stooped to break it across his knee, gave the prince a furious blow with his head that made him stagger and sent him rolling on the floor, three paces away; then, leaning over his poor sister and gazing on her with hungry eyes, by the passing gleam of a flash, “Dead!” he repeated, wringing his arms in despair, — ”dead!”

In the fearful paroxysm that compressed his throat he could find no other words to assuage his rage or to pour forth his woe. His hair, which the storm had flattened, rose on his head, the marrow of his bones was chilled, and he felt his tears rush back upon his heart. It was a terrible moment; he forgot that the murderer still lived.

The prince, however, whose admirable composure did not for a moment desert him, had risen, bruised and bleeding. Pale and trembling with rage, he sought everywhere for a weapon with which to avenge himself. Gabriel returned towards him gloomier and more ominous than ever, and grasping his neck with an iron hand, dragged him into the room where the old man was sleeping.

“Father! father! father!” he cried in a piercing voice, “here is the Bastard who Has just murdered Nisida!”

The old man, who had drunk but a few drops of the narcotic potion, was awakened by this cry which echoed through his soul; he arose as though moved by a spring, flung off his coverings, and with that promptitude of action that God has bestowed upon mothers in moments of danger, event up to his daughter’s room, found a light, knelt on the edge of the bed, and began to test his child’s pulse and watch her breathing with mortal anxiety.

All! this had passed in less time than we have taken in telling it. Brancaleone by an unheard-of effort had freed himself from the hands of the young fisherman, and suddenly resuming his princely pride, said in a loud voice, “You shall not kill me without listening to me.”

Gabriel would have overwhelmed him with Bitter reproaches, but, unable to utter a single word, he burst into tears.

“Your sifter is not dead,” said the prince, with cold dignity; “she is merely asleep. You can assure yourself of it, and meanwhile I undertake, upon my Honour, not to move a single step away.”

These words were pronounced with such an accent of truth that the fisherman was struck by them. An unexpected gleam of hope suddenly dawned in his thoughts; he cast upon the stranger a glance of hate and distrust, and muttered in a muffled voice, “Do not flatter yourself, in any case, that you will be able to escape me.”

Then he went up to his sister’s room, and approaching the old man, asked tremblingly, “Well, father?”

Solomon thrust him gently aside with the solicitude of a mother removing some buzzing insect from her child’s cradle, and, making a sign to enjoin silence, added in a low voice, “She is neither dead nor poisoned. Some philtre has been given to her for a bad purpose. Her breathing is even, and she cannot fail to recover from her lethargy.”

Gabriel, reassured about Nisida’s life, returned silently to the ground floor where he had left the seducer. His manner was grave and gloomy; he was coming now not to rend the murderer of his sister with his hands, but to elucidate a treacherous and infamous mystery, and to avenge his honour which had been basely attacked. He opened wide the double entrance door that admitted daylight to the apartment in which, on the few nights that he spent at home, he was accustomed to sleep with his father. The rain had just stopped, a ray of moonlight pierced the clouds, and all at once made its way into the room. The fisherman adjusted his dripping garments, walked towards the stranger, who awaited him without stirring, and after having gazed upon him haughtily, said, “Now you are going to explain your presence in our house.”

“I confess,” said the prince, in an easy tone and with the most insolent assurance, “that appearances are against me. It is the fate of lovers to be treated as thieves. But although I have not the advantage of being known to you, I am betrothed to the fair Nisida — with your father’s approval, of course. Now, as I have the misfortune to possess very hardhearted parents, they have had the cruelty to refuse me their consent. Love led me astray, and I was about to be guilty of a fault for which a young man like you ought to have some indulgence. Furthermore, it was nothing but a mere attempt at an abduction, with the best intentions in the world, I swear, and I am ready to atone for everything if you will agree to give me your hand and call me your brother.”

“I will agree to call you a coward and a betrayer!” replied Gabriel, whose face had begun to glow, as he heard his sister spoken of with such impudent levity. “If it is thus that insults are avenged in towns, we fishers have a different plan. Ah! so you flattered yourself with the thought of bringing desolation aid disgrace into our home, and of paying infamous assassins to come and share an old man’s bread so as to poison his daughter, of stealing by night, like a brigand, armed with a dagger, into my sister’s room, and of being let off by marrying the most beautiful woman in the kingdom!”

The prince made a movement.

“Listen,” continued Gabriel: “I could break you as I broke your dagger just now; but I have pity on you. I see that you can do nothing with your hands, neither defend yourself nor work. Go, I begin to understand; you are a braggart, my fine sir; your poverty is usurped; you have decked yourself in these poor clothes, but you are unworthy of them.”

He suffered a glance of crushing contempt to fall upon the prince, then going to a cupboard hidden in the wall, he drew out a rifle and an axe.

“Here,” said he, “are all the weapons in the house; choose.”

A flash of joy illuminated the countenance of the prince, who had hitherto suppressed his rage. He seized the rifle eagerly, drew three steps backward, and drawing himself up to his full height, said, “You would have done better to lend me this weapon at the beginning; for then I would have been spared from witnessing your silly vapourings and frantic convulsions.

Thanks, young-man; one of my servants will bring you back your gun. Farewell.”

And he threw him his purse, which fell heavily at the fisherman’s feet.

“I lent you that rifle to fight with me,” cried Gabriel, whom surprise had rooted to the spot.

“Move aside, my lad; you are out of your senses,” said the prince, taking a step towards the door.

“So you refuse to defend yourself?” asked Gabriel in a determined voice.

“I have told you already that I cannot fight with you.”

“Why not?”

“Because such is the will of God; because you were born to crawl and I to trample you under my feet; because all the blood that I could shed in this island would not purchase one drop of my blood; because a thousand lives of wretches like you are not equal to one hour of mine; because you will kneel at my name that I, am now going to utter; because, in short, you are but a poor fisherman and my name is Prince of Brancaleone.”

At this dreaded name, which the young nobleman flung, like a thunderbolt, at his head, the fisherman bounded like a lion. He drew a deep breath, as though he had lifted a weight that had long rested on his heart.

“Ah!” he cried, “you have given yourself into my hands, my lord! Between the poor fisherman and the all-powerful prince there is a debt of blood. You shall pay for yourself and for your father. We are going to settle our accounts, your excellency,” he added, rising his axe over the head of the prince, who was aiming at him. “Oh! you were in too great haste to choose: the rifle is not loaded.” The prince turned pale.

“Between our two families,” Gabriel continued, “there exists a horrible secret which my mother confided to me on the brink of the grave, of which my father himself is unaware, and that no man in the world must learn. You are different, you are going to die.”

He dragged him into the space outside the house.

“Do you know why my sister, whom you wished to dishonour, was vowed to the Madonna? Because your father, like you, wished to dishonour my mother. In your accursed house there is a tradition of infamy. You do not know what slow and terrible torments my poor mother endured-torments that broke her strength and caused her to die in early youth, and that her angelic soul dared confide to none but her son in that supreme hour and in order to bid me watch over my sister.”

The fisherman wiped away a burning tear. “One day, before we were born, a fine lady, richly dressed, landed in our island from a splendid boat; she asked to see my mother, who was as young and beautiful as my Nisida is to-day. She could not cease from admiring her; she blamed the blindness of fate which had buried this lovely jewel in the bosom of an obscure island; she showered praises, caresses, and gifts upon my mother, and after many indirect speeches, finally asked her parents for her, that she might make her her lady-in-waiting. The poor people, foreseeing in the protection of so great a lady a brilliant future for their daughter, were weak enough to yield. That lady was your mother; and do you know why she came thus to seek that poor innocent maiden? Because your mother had a lover, and because she wished to make sure, in this infamous manner, of the prince’s indulgence.”

“Silence, wretch!”

“Oh, your excellency will hear me out. At the beginning, my poor mother found herself surrounded by the tenderest care: the princess could not be parted from her for a moment; the most flattering words, the finest clothes, the richest ornaments were hers; the servants paid her as much respect as though she were a daughter of the house. When her parents went to see her and to inquire whether she did not at all regret having left them, they found her so lovely and so happy, that they blessed the princess as a good angel sent them from God. Then the prince conceived a remarkable affection for my mother; little by little his manners became more familiar and affectionate. At last the princess went away for a few days, regretting that she could not take with her her dear child, as she called her. Then the prince’s brutality knew no further barriers; he no longer concealed his shameful plans of seduction; he spread before the poor girl’s eyes pearl necklaces and caskets of diamonds; he passed from the most glowing passion to the blackest fury, from the humblest prayers to the most horrible threats. The poor child was shut up in a cellar where there was hardly a gleam of daylight, and every morning a frightful gaoler came and threw her a bit of black bread, repeating with oaths that it only depended upon herself to alter all this by becoming the prince’s mistress. This cruelty continued for two years. The princess had gone on a long journey, and my mother’s poor parents believed that their daughter was still happy with her protectress. On her return, having; no doubt fresh sins for which she needed forgiveness, she took my mother from her dungeon, assumed the liveliest indignation at this horrible treatment, about which she appeared to have known nothing, wiped her tears, and by an abominable refinement of perfidy received the thanks of the victim whom she was about to sacrifice.

"One evening — I have just finished, my lord — the princess chose to sup alone with her lady-in-waiting: the rarest fruits, the most exquisite dishes, and the most delicate wines were served to my poor mother, whose prolonged privations had injured her health and weakened her reason; she gave way to a morbid gaiety. Diabolical philtres were poured into her cup; that is another tradition in your family. My mother felt uplifted, her eyes shone with feverish brilliance, her cheeks were on fire. Then the prince came in — oh! your excellency will see that God protects the poor. My darling mother, like a frightened dove, sheltered herself in the bosom of the princess, who pushed her away, laughing. The poor distraught girl, trembling, weeping, knelt down in the midst of that infamous room. It was St. Anne's Day; all at once the house shook, the walls cracked, cries of distress rang out in the streets. My mother was saved. It was the earthquake that destroyed half Naples. You know all about it, my lord, since your old palace is no longer habitable."

"What are you driving at?" cried Brancaleone in terrible agitation.

"Oh, I merely wish to persuade you that you must fight with me," answered the fisherman coldly, as he offered him a cartridge. "And now," he added, in an excited tone, "say your prayers, my lord; for I warn you, you will die by my hand; justice must be done."

The prince carefully examined the powder and shot, made sure that his rifle was in good condition; loaded it, and, eager to make an end, took aim at the fisherman; but, either because he had been so much disturbed by his opponent's terrible tale, or, because the grass was wet from the storm, at the moment when he put forward his left foot to steady his shot, he slipped, lost his balance and fell on one knee. He fired into the air.

"That does not count, my lord," cried Gabriel instantly, and handed him a second charge.

At the noise of the report Solomon had appeared at the window, and, understanding what was going on, had lifted his hands to heaven, in order to address to God a dumb and fervent prayer. Eligi uttered a frightful inprecation, and hastily reloaded his rifle; but, struck by the calm confidence of the young man, who stood motionless before him, and by the old man, who, impassive and undisturbed, seemed to be conjuring God in the name of a father’s authority, disconcerted by his fall, his knees shaking and his arm jarred, he felt the chills of death running in his veins. Attempting, nevertheless, to master his emotion, he took aim a second time; the bullet whistled by the fisherman’s ear and buried itself in the stem of a poplar.

The prince, with the energy of despair, seized the barrel of his weapon in both hands; but Gabriel was coming forward with his axe, a terrible foe, and his first stroke carried away the butt of the rifle. He was still hesitating, however, to kill a defenceless man, when two armed servants appeared at the end of the pathway. Gabriel did not see them coming; but at the moment when they would have seized him by the shoulders, Solomon uttered a cry and rushed to his son’s assistance.

“Help, Numa! help, Bonaroux! Death to the ruffians! They want to murder me.”

“You lie, Prince of Brancaleone!” cried Gabriel, and with one blow of the axe he cleft his skull.

The two bravoes who were coming to their master’s assistance, when they saw him fall, took flight; Solomon and his son went up to Nisida’s room. The young girl had just shaken off her heavy slumber; a slight perspiration moistened her brow, and she opened her eyes slowly to the dawning day.

“Why are you looking at me in that way, father?” she said, her mind still wandering a littler and she passed her hand over her forehead.

The old man embraced her tenderly.

“You have just passed through a great danger, my poor Nisida,” said he; “arise, and let us give thanks to the Madonna.”

Then all three, kneeling before the sacred image of the Virgin, began to recite litanies. But at that very instant a noise of arms sounded in the enclosure, the house was surrounded by soldiers, and a lieutenant of gendarmes, seizing Gabriel, said in a loud voice, “In the name of the law, I arrest you for the murder that you have just committed upon the person of his excellency and illustrious lordship, the Prince of Brancaleone.”

Nisida, struck by these words, remained pale and motionless like a marble statue kneeling on a tomb; Gabriel was already preparing to make an unreasoning resistance, when a gesture from his father stopped him.

“Signor tenente,” said the old man, addressing himself to the officer, “my son killed the prince in lawful defence, for the latter had scaled our house and made his way in at night and with arms in his hand. The proofs are before your eyes. Here is a ladder set up against the window; and here," he proceeded, picking up the two pieces of the broken blade, "is a dagger with the Brancaleone arms. However, we do not refuse to follow you."

The last words of the fisherman were drowned by cries of "Down with the sbirri! down with the gendarmes!" which were repeated in every direction. The whole island was up in arms, and the fisher-folk would have suffered themselves to be cut up to the last man before allowing a single hair of Solomon or of his son to be touched; but the old man appeared upon his threshold, and, stretching out his arm with a calm and grave movement that quieted the anger of the crowd, he said, "Thanks, my children; the law must be respected. I shall be able, alone, to defend the innocence of my son before the judges."

Hardly three months have elapsed since the day upon which we first beheld the old fisherman of Nisida sitting before the door of his dwelling, irradiated by all the happiness that he had succeeded in creating around him, reigning like a king, on his throne of rock, and blessing his two children, the most beautiful creatures in the island. Now the whole existence of this man, who was once so happy and so much envied, is changed. The smiling cottage, that hung over the gulf like a swan over a transparent lake, is sad and desolate; the little enclosure, with its hedges of lilac and hawthorn, where joyous groups used to come and sit at the close of day, is silent and deserted. No human sound dares to trouble the mourning of this saddened solitude. Only towards evening the waves of the sea, compassionating such great misfortunes, come to murmur plaintive notes upon the beach.

Gabriel has been condemned. The news of the high-born Prince of Brancaleone's death, so young, so handsome, and so universally adored, not only fluttered the aristocracy of Naples, but excited profound indignation in all classes of people. He was mourned by everybody, and a unanimous cry for vengeance was raised against the murderer.

The authorities opened the inquiry with alarming promptness. The magistrates whom their office called to judge this deplorable affair displayed, however, the most irreproachable integrity. No consideration outside their duty, no deference due to so noble and powerful a family, could shake the convictions of their conscience. History has kept a record of this memorable trial; and has, no reproach to make to men which does not apply equally to the imperfection of human laws. The appearance of things, that fatal contradiction which the genius of evil so often here on earth gives to truth, overwhelmed the poor fisherman with the most evident proofs.

Trespolo, in whom fear had destroyed all scruples, being first examined, as having been the young prince's confidant, declared with cool impudence that, his master having shown a wish to escape for a few days from the importunities of a young married lady whose passion was beginning to tire him, had followed him to the island with three or four of his most faithful servants, and that he himself had adopted the disguise of a pilgrim, not wishing to betray his excellency's incognito to the fisher-people, who would certainly have tormented so powerful a person by all sorts of petitions. Two local watch men, who had happened to be on the hillside at the moment of the crime, gave evidence that confirmed the valet's lengthy statement; hidden by some under wood, they had seen Gabriel rush upon the prince, and had distinctly heard the last words of the dying man; calling "Murder!" All the witnesses, even those summoned at the request of the prisoner, made his case worse by their statements, which they tried to make favourable. Thus the court, with its usual perspicacity and its infallible certainty, succeeded in establishing the fact that Prince Eligi of Brancaleone, having taken a temporary dislike to town life, had retired to the little island of Nisida, there to give himself up peaceably to the pleasure of fishing, for which he had at all times had a particular predilection (a proof appeared among the documents of the case that the prince had regularly been present every other year at the tunny-fishing on his property at Palermo); that when once he was thus hidden in the island, Gabriel might have recognised him, having gone with his sister to the procession, a few days before, and had, no doubt, planned to murder him. On the day before the night of the crime, the absence of Gabriel and the discomposure of his father and sister had been remarked. Towards evening the prince had dismissed his servant, and gone out alone, as his custom was, to walk by the seashore. Surprised by the storm and not knowing the byways of the island, he had wandered round the fisherman's house, seeking a shelter; then Gabriel, encouraged by the darkness and by the noise of the tempest, which seemed likely to cover the cries of his victim, had, after prolonged hesitation, resolved to commit his crime, and having fired two shots at the unfortunate young man without succeeding in wounding him, had put an end to him by blows of the axe; lastly, at the moment when, with Solomon's assistance, he was about to throw the body into the sea, the prince's servants having appeared, they had gone up to the girl's room, and, inventing their absurd tale, had cast themselves on their knees before the Virgin, in order to mislead the authorities. All the circumstances that poor Solomon cited in his son's favour turned against him: the ladder at Nisida's window belonged to the fisherman; the dagger which young Brancaleone always carried upon him to defend himself had evidently been taken from him after his death, and Gabriel had hastened to break it, so as to destroy, to the best of his power, the traces of his crime. Bastiano's evidence did not receive a minute's consideration: he, to destroy the idea of premeditation, declared that the young fisherman had left him only at the moment when the storm broke over the island; but, in the first place, the young diver was known to be Gabriel's most devoted friend and his sister's warmest admirer, and, in the second, he had been seen to land at Torre during the same hour in which he had affirmed that he was near to Nisida. As for the prince's passion for the poor peasant girl, the magistrates simply shrugged their shoulders at the ridiculous assertion of that, and especially at the young girl's alleged resistance and the extreme measures to which the prince was supposed to have resorted to conquer the virtue of Nisida. Eligi of Brancaleone was so young, so handsome, so seductive, and at the same time so cool amid his successes, that he had never been suspected of violence, except in getting rid of his mistresses. Finally, an overwhelming and unanswerable proof overthrew all the arguments for the defence: under the fisherman's bed had been found a purse with the Brancaleone arms, full of gold, the purse which, if our readers remember, the prince had flung as a last insult at Gabriel's feet.

The old man did not lose heart at this fabric of lies; after the pleadings of the advocates whose ruinous eloquence he had bought with heavy gold, he defended his son himself, and put so much truth, so much passion, and so many tears into his speech, that the whole audience was moved, and three of the judges voted for an acquittal; but the majority was against it, and the fatal verdict was pronounced.

The news at once spread throughout the little island, and caused the deepest dejection there. The fishers who, at the first irruption of force, had risen as one man to defend their comrade's cause, bowed their heads without a murmur before the unquestioned authority of a legal judgment. Solomon received unflinchingly the stab that pierced his heart. No sigh escaped his breast; no tear came to his eyes; his wound did not bleed. Since his son's arrest he had sold all he possessed in the world, even the little silver cross left by his wife at her death, even the pearl necklace that flattered his fatherly pride by losing its whiteness against his dear Nisida's throat; the pieces of gold gained by the sale of these things he had sewn into his coarse woollen cap, and had established himself in the city. He ate nothing but the bread thrown to him by the pity of passers-by, and slept on the steps of churches or at the magistrates' door.

To estimate at its full value the heroic courage of this unhappy father, one must take a general view of the whole extent of his misfortune. Overwhelmed by age and grief, he looked forward with solemn calmness to the terrible moment which would bear his son, a few days before him, to the grave. His sharpest agony was the thought of the shame that would envelop his family. The first scaffold erected in that gently mannered island would arise for Gabriel, and that ignominious punishment tarnish the whole population and imprint upon it the first brand of disgrace. By a sad transition, which yet comes so easily in the destiny of man, the poor father grew to long for those moments of danger at which he had formerly trembled, those moments in which his son might have died nobly. And now all was lost: a long life of work, of abnegation, and of good deeds, a pure and stainless reputation that had extended beyond the gulf into distant countries, and the traditional admiration, rising almost to worship, of several generations; all these things only served to deepen the pit into which the fisherman had fallen, at one blow, from his kingly height. Good fame, that divine halo without which nothing here on earth is sacred, had disappeared. Men no longer dared to defend the poor wretch, they pitied him. His name would soon carry horror with it, and Nisida, poor orphan, would be nothing to anyone but the sister of a man who had been condemned to death. Even Bastiano turned away his face and wept. Thus, when every respite was over, when poor Solomon's every attempt had failed, people in the town who saw him smile strangely, as though under the obsession of some fixed idea, said to one another that the old man had lost his reason.

Gabriel saw his last day dawn, serenely and calmly. His sleep had been deep; he awoke full of unknown joy; a cheerful ray of sunlight, falling through the loophole, wavered over the fine golden straw in his cell; an autumn breeze playing around him, brought an agreeable coolness to his brow, and stirred in his long hair. The gaoler, who while he had had him in his charge had always behaved humanely, struck by his happy looks, hesitated to announce the priest's visit, in fear of calling the poor prisoner from his dream. Gabriel received the news with pleasure; he conversed for two hours with the good priest, and shed sweet tears on receiving the last absolution. The priest left the prison with tears in his eyes, declaring aloud that he had never in his life met with a more beautiful, pure, resigned, and courageous spirit.

The fisherman was still under the influence of this consoling emotion when his sister entered. Since the day when she had been carried, fainting, from the room where her brother had just been arrested, the poor girl, sheltered under the roof of an aunt, and accusing herself of all the evil that had befallen, had done nothing but weep at the feet of her holy protectress. Bowed by grief like a young lily before the storm, she would spend whole hours, pale, motionless, detached from earthly things, her tears flowing silently upon her beautiful clasped hands. When the moment came to go and embrace her brother for the last time, Nisida arose with the courage of a saint. She wiped away the traces of her tears, smoothed her beautiful black hair, and put on her best white dress. Poor child, she tried to hide her grief by an angelic deception. She had the strength to smile! At the sight of her alarming pallor Gabriel felt his heart wrung, a cloud passed over his eyes; he would have run to meet her, but, held back by the chain which fettered him to a pillar of his prison, stepped back sharply and stumbled. Nisida flew to her brother and upheld him in her arms. The young girl had understood him; she assured him that she was well. Fearing to remind him of his terrible position, she spoke volubly of all manner of things — her aunt, the weather, the Madonna. Then she stopped suddenly, frightened at her own words, frightened at her own silence; she fixed her burning gaze upon her brother's brow as though to fascinate him. Little by little animation returned to her; a faint colour tinted her hollowed cheeks, and Gabriel, deceived by the maiden's super human efforts, thought her still beautiful, and thanked God in his heart for having spared this tender creature. Nisida, as though she had followed her brother's secret thoughts, came close to him, pressed his hand with an air of understanding, and murmured low in his ear, "Fortunately our father has been away for two days; he sent me word that he would be detained in town. For us, it is different; we are young, we have courage!"

The poor young girl was trembling like a leaf.

“What will become of you, my poor Nisida?”

“Bah! I will pray to the Madonna. Does she not watch over us?” The girl stopped, struck by the sound of her own words, which the circumstances so cruelly contradicted. But looking at her brother, she went on in a low tone: “Assuredly she does watch over us. She appeared to me last night in a dream. She held her child Jesus on her arm, and looked at me with a mother’s tenderness. She wishes to make saints of us, for she loves us; and to be a saint, you see, Gabriel, one must suffer.”

“Well, go and pray for me, my kind sister; go away from the view of this sad place, which will eventually shake your firmness, and perhaps mine. Go; we shall see each other again in heaven above, where our mother is waiting for us — our mother whom you have not known, and to whom I shall often speak of you. Farewell, my sister, until we meet again!”

And he kissed her on the forehead.

The young girl called up all her strength into her heart for this supreme moment; she walked with a firm step; having reached the threshold, she turned round and waved him a farewell, preventing herself by a nervous contraction from bursting into tears, but as soon as she was in the corridor, a sob broke from her bosom, and Gabriel, who heard it echo from the vaulted roof, thought that his heart would break.

Then he threw himself on his knees, and, lifting his hands to heaven, cried, “I have finished suffering; I have nothing more that holds me to life. I thank Thee, my God! Thou hast kept my father away, and hast been willing to spare the poor old man a grief that would have been beyond his strength.”

It was at the hour of noon, after having exhausted every possible means, poured out his gold to the last piece, and embraced the knees of the lowest serving man, that Solomon the fisherman took his way to his son’s prison. His brow was so woebegone that the guards drew back, seized with pity, and the gaoler wept as he closed the door of the cell upon him. The old man remained some moments without advancing a step, absorbed in contemplation of his son. By the tawny gleam of his eye might be divined that the soul of the man was moved at that instant by some dark project. He seemed nevertheless struck by the-beauty of Gabriel’s face. Three months in prison had restored to his skin the whiteness that the sun had turned brown; his fine dark hair fell in curls around his neck, his eyes rested on his father with a liquid and brilliant gaze. Never had this head been so beautiful as now, when it was to fall.

“Alas, my poor son!” said the old man, “there is no hope left; you must die.”

“I know it,” answered Gabriel in a tone of tender reproach, “and it is not that which most afflicts me at this moment. But you, too, why do you wish to give me pain, at your age? Why did you not stay in the town?”

“In the town,” the old man returned, “they have no pity; I cast myself at the king’s feet, at everybody’s feet; there is no pardon, no mercy for us.”

“Well, in God’s name, what is death to me? I meet it daily on the sea. My greatest, my only torment is the pain that they are causing you.”

“And I, do you think, my Gabriel, that I only suffer in seeing you die? Oh, it is but a parting for a few days; I shall soon go to join you. But a darker sorrow weighs upon me. I am strong, I am a man”. He stopped, fearing that he had said too much; then drawing near to his son, he said in a tearful voice, “Forgive me, my Gabriel; I am the cause of your death. I ought to have killed the prince with my own hand. In our country, children and old men are not condemned to death. I am over eighty years old; I should have been pardoned; they told me that when, with tears, I asked pardon for you; once more, forgive me, Gabriel; I thought my daughter was dead; I thought of nothing else; and besides, I did not know the law.”

“Father, father!” cried Gabriel, touched, “what are you saying? I would have given my life a thousand times over to purchase one day of yours. Since you are strong enough to be present at my last hour, fear not; you will not see me turn pale; your son will be worthy of you.”

“And he is to die, to die!” cried Solomon, striking his forehead in despair, and casting on the walls of the dungeon a look of fire that would fain have pierced them.

“I am resigned, father,” said Gabriel gently; did not Christ ascend the cross?”

“Yes,” murmured the old man in a muffled voice, “but He did not leave behind a sister dishonoured by His death.”

These words, which escaped the old fisherman in spite of himself, threw a sudden and terrible light into the soul of Gabriel. For the first time he perceived all the infamous manner of his death: the shameless populace crowding round the scaffold, the hateful hand of the executioner taking him by the Hair, and the drops of his blood besprinkling the white raiment of his sister and covering her with shame.

“Oh, if I could get a weapon!” cried Gabriel, his haggard eyes roaming around.

“It is not the weapon that is lacking,” answered Solomon, carrying his hand to the hilt of a dagger that he had hidden in his breast.

“Then kill me, father,” said Gabriel in a low tone, but with an irresistible accent of persuasion and entreaty; “oh yes, I confess it now, the executioner’s hand frightens me. My Nisida, my poor Nisida, I have seen her; she was here just now, as beautiful and as pale as the Madonna Dolorosa; she smiled to hide from me her sufferings. She was happy, poor girl, because she believed you away. Oh, how sweet it will be to me to die by your hand! You gave me life; take it back, father, since God will have it so. And Nisida will be saved. Oh, do not hesitate! It would be a cowardice on the part of both of us; she is my sister, she is your daughter.”

And seeing that his powerful will had subjugated the old man, he said, “Help! help, father!” and offered his breast to the blow. The poor father lifted his hand to strike; but a mortal convulsion ran through all his limbs; he fell into his son’s arms, and both burst into tears.

“Poor father!” said Gabriel. “I ought to have foreseen that. Give me that dagger and turn away; I am young and my arm will not tremble.”

“Oh no!” returned Solomon solemnly, “no, my son, for then you would be a suicide! Let your soul ascend to heaven pure! God will give me His strength. Moreover, we have time yet.”

And a last ray of hope shone in the eyes of the fisherman.

Then there passed in that dungeon one of those scenes that words can never reproduce. The poor father sat down on the straw at his son’s side and laid his head gently upon his knees. He smiled to him through his tears, as one smiles to a sick child; he passed his hand slowly through the silky curls of his hair, and asked him countless questions, intermingled with caresses. In order to give him a distaste for this world he kept on talking to him of the other. Then, with a sudden change, he questioned him minutely about all sorts of past matters. Sometimes he stopped in alarm, and counted the beatings of his heart, which were hurriedly marking the passage of time.

“Tell me everything, my child; have you any desire, any wish that could be satisfied before you die? Are you leaving any woman whom you loved secretly? Everything we have left shall be hers.”

“I regret nothing on earth but you and my sister. You are the only persons whom I have loved since my mother’s death.”

“Well, be comforted. Your sister will be saved.”

“Oh, yes! I shall die happy.”

“Do you forgive our enemies?”

“With all the strength of my heart. I pray God to have mercy on the witnesses who accused me. May He forgive me my sins!”

“How old is it that you will soon be?” the old man asked suddenly, for his reason was beginning to totter, and his memory had failed him.

“I was twenty-five on All Hallows’ Day.”

“True; it was a sad day, this year; you were in prison.”

“Do you remember how, five years ago, on that same day I got the prize in the regatta at Venice?”

“Tell me about that, my child.”

And he listened, his neck stretched forward, his mouth half open, his hands in his son’s. A sound of steps came in from the corridor, and a dull knock was struck upon the door. It was the fatal hour. The poor father had forgotten it.

The priests had already begun to sing the death hymn; the executioner was ready, the procession had set out, when Solomon the fisherman appeared suddenly on the threshold of the prison, his eyes aflame and his brow radiant with the halo of the patriarchs. The old man drew himself up to his full height, and raising in one hand the reddened knife, said in a sublime voice, “The sacrifice is fulfilled. God did not send His angel to stay the hand of Abraham.”

The crowd carried him in triumph!

[The details of this case are recorded in the archives of the Criminal Court at Naples. We have changed nothing in the age or position of the persons who appear in this narrative. One of the most celebrated advocates at the Neapolitan bar secured the acquittal of the old man.]

DERUES

One September afternoon in 1751, towards half-past five, about a score of small boys, chattering, pushing, and tumbling over one another like a covey of partridges, issued from one of the religious schools of Chartres. The joy of the little troop just escaped from a long and wearisome captivity was doubly great: a slight accident to one of the teachers had caused the class to be dismissed half an hour earlier than usual, and in consequence of the extra work thrown on the teaching staff the brother whose duty it was to see all the scholars safe home was compelled to omit that part of his daily task. Therefore not only thirty or forty minutes were stolen from work, but there was also unexpected, uncontrolled liberty, free from the surveillance of that black-cassocked overseer who kept order in their ranks. Thirty minutes! at that age it is a century, of laughter and prospective games! Each had promised solemnly, under pain of severe punishment, to return straight to his paternal nest without delay, but the air was so fresh and pure, the country smiled all around! The school, or preferably the cage, which had just opened, lay at the extreme edge of one of the suburbs, and it only required a few steps to slip under a cluster of trees by a sparkling brook beyond which rose undulating ground, breaking the monotony of a vast and fertile plain. Was it possible to be obedient, to refrain from the desire to spread one's wings? The scent of the meadows mounted to the heads of the steadiest among them, and intoxicated even the most timid. It was resolved to betray the confidence of the reverend fathers, even at the risk of disgrace and punishment next morning, supposing the escapade were discovered.

A flock of sparrows suddenly released from a cage could not have flown more wildly into the little wood. They were all about the same age, the eldest might be nine. They flung off coats and waistcoats, and the grass became strewn with baskets, copy-books, dictionaries, and catechisms. While the crowd of fair-haired heads, of fresh and smiling faces, noisily consulted as to which game should be chosen, a boy who had taken no part in the general gaiety, and who had been carried away by the rush without being able to escape sooner, glided slyly away among the trees, and, thinking himself unseen, was beating a hasty retreat, when one of his comrades cried out —

“Antoine is running away!”

Two of the best runners immediately started in pursuit, and the fugitive, notwithstanding his start, was speedily overtaken, seized by his collar, and brought back as a deserter.

“Where were you going?” the others demanded.

“Home to my cousins,” replied the boy; “there is no harm in that.”

“You canting sneak!” said another boy, putting his fist under the captive’s chin; “you were going to the master to tell of us.”

“Pierre,” responded Antoine, “you know quite well I never tell lies.”

“Indeed! — only this morning you pretended I had taken a book you had lost, and you did it because I kicked you yesterday, and you didn’t dare to kick me back again.”

Antoine lifted his eyes to heaven, and folding his arms on his breast —

“Dear Buttel,” he said, “you are mistaken; I have always been taught to forgive injuries.”

“Listen, listen! he might be saying his prayers!” cried the other boys; and a volley of offensive epithets, enforced by cuffs, was hurled at the culprit.

Pierre Buttel, whose influence was great, put a stop to this onslaught.

“Look here, Antoine, you are a bad lot, that we all know; you are a sneak and a hypocrite. It’s time we put a stop to it. Take off your coat and fight it out. If you like, we will fight every morning and evening till the end of the month.”

The proposition was loudly applauded, and Pierre, turning up his sleeves as far as his elbows, prepared to suit actions to words.

The challenger assuredly did not realise the full meaning, of his words; had he done so, this chivalrous defiance would simply have been an act of cowardice on his part, for there could be no doubt as to the victor in such a conflict. The one was a boy of alert and gallant bearing, strong upon his legs, supple and muscular, a vigorous man in embryo; while the other, not quite so old, small, thin, of a sickly leaden complexion, seemed as if he might be blown away by a strong puff of wind. His skinny arms and legs hung on to his body like the claws of a spider, his fair hair inclined to red, his white skin appeared nearly bloodless, and the consciousness of weakness made him timid, and gave a shifty, uneasy look to his eyes. His whole expression was uncertain, and looking only at his face it was difficult at first sight to decide to which sex he belonged. This confusion of two natures, this indefinable mixture of feminine weakness without grace, and of abortive boyhood, seemed to stamp him as something exceptional, unclassable, and once observed, it was difficult to take one's eyes from him. Had he been endowed with physical strength he would have been a terror to his comrades, exercising by fear the ascendancy which Pierre owed to his joyous temper and unwearied gaiety, for this mean exterior concealed extraordinary powers of will and dissimulation. Guided by instinct, the other children hung about Pierre and willingly accepted his leadership; by instinct also they avoided Antoine, repelled by a feeling of chill, as if from the neighbourhood of a reptile, and shunning him unless to profit in some way by their superior strength. Never would he join their games without compulsion; his thin, colourless lips seldom parted for a laugh, and even at that tender age his smile had an unpleasantly sinister expression.

"Will you fight?" again demanded Pierre.

Antoine glanced hastily round; there was no chance of escape, a double ring enclosed him. To accept or refuse seemed about equally risky; he ran a good chance of a thrashing whichever way he decided. Although his heart beat loudly, no trace of emotion appeared on his pallid cheek; an unforeseen danger would have made him shriek, but he had had time to collect himself, time to shelter behind hypocrisy. As soon as he could lie and cheat he recovered courage, and the instinct of cunning, once roused, prevailed over everything else. Instead of answering this second challenge, he knelt down and said to Pierre —

"You are much stronger than I am."

This submission disarmed his antagonist. "Get up," he replied; "I won't touch you, if you can't defend yourself.

"Pierre," continued Antoine, still on his knees, "I assure you, by God and the Holy Virgin, I was not going to tell. I was going home to my cousins to learn my lessons for to-morrow; you know how slow I am. If you think I have done you any harm, I ask your forgiveness."

Pierre held out his hand and made him get up.

"Will you be a good fellow, Antoine, and play with us?"

"Yes, I will."

"All right, then; let us forget all about it."

"What are we to play at?" asked Antoine, taking off his coat.

"Thieves and archers," cried one of the boys....

"Splendid!" said Pierre; and using his acknowledged authority, he divided them into two sides — ten highwaymen, whom he was to command, and ten archers of the guard, who were to pursue them; Antoine was among the latter.

The highwaymen, armed with swords and guns obtained from the willows which grew along the brook, moved off first, and gained the valleys between the little hills beyond the wood. The fight was to be serious, and any prisoner on either side was to be tried immediately. The robbers divided into twos and threes, and hid themselves in the ravines.

A few minutes later the archers started in pursuit. There were encounters, surprises, skirmishes; but whenever it came to close quarters, Pierre's men, skilfully distributed, united on hearing his whistle, and the Army of justice had to retreat. But there came a time when this magic signal was no longer heard, and the robbers became uneasy, and remained crouching in their hiding-places. Pierre, over-daring, had undertaken to defend alone the entrance of a dangerous passage and to stop the whole hostile troop there. Whilst he kept them engaged, half of his men, concealed on the left, were to come round the foot of the hill and make a rush on hearing his whistle; the other half, also stationed at some, little distance, were to execute the same manoeuvre from above. The archers would be caught in a trap, and attacked both in front and rear, would be obliged to surrender at discretion. Chance, which not unfrequently decides the fate of a battle, defeated this excellent stratagem. Watching intently; Pierre failed to perceive that while his whole attention was given to the ground in front, the archers had taken an entirely different road from the one they ought to have followed if his combination were to succeed. They suddenly fell upon him from behind, and before he could blow his whistle, they gagged him with a handkerchief and tied his hands. Six remained to keep the field of battle and disperse the hostile band, now deprived of its chief; the remaining four conveyed Pierre to the little wood, while the robbers, hearing no signal, did not venture to stir. According to agreement, Pierre Buttel was tried by the archers, who promptly transformed themselves into a court of justice, and as he had been taken red-handed, and did not condescend to defend himself, the trial was not a long affair. He was unanimously sentenced to be hung, and the execution was then and there carried out, at the request of the criminal himself, who wanted the game to be properly played to the end, and who actually selected a suitable tree for his own execution.

"But, Pierre," said one of the judges, "how can you be held up there?"

“How stupid you are!” returned the captive. “I shall only pretend to be hung, of course. See here!” and he fastened together several pieces strong string which had tied some of the other boys’ books, piled the latter together, and standing on tiptoe on this very insecure basis, fastened one end of the cord to a horizontal bough, and put his neck into a running knot at the other end, endeavouring to imitate the contortions of an actual sufferer. Shouts of laughter greeted him, and the victim laughed loudest of all. Three archers went to call the rest to behold this amusing spectacle; one, tired out, remained with the prisoner.

“Ah, Hangman,” said Pierre, putting out his tongue at him, “are the books firm? I thought I felt them give way.”

“No,” replied Antoine; it was he who remained. “Don’t be afraid, Pierre.”

“It is a good thing; for if they fell I don’t think the cord is long enough.”

“Don’t you really think so?”

A horrible thought showed itself like a flash on the child’s face. He resembled a young hyena scenting blood for the first time. He glanced at the pile of books Pierre was standing on, and compared it with the length of the cord between the branch and his neck. It was already nearly dark, the shadows were deepening in the wood, gleams of pale light penetrated between the trees, the leaves had become black and rustled in the wind. Antoine stood silent and motionless, listening if any sound could be heard near them.

It would be a curious study for the moralist to observe how the first thought of crime develops itself in the recesses of the human heart, and how this poisoned germ grows and stifles all other sentiments; an impressive lesson might be gathered from this struggle of two opposing principles, however weak it may be, in perverted natures. In cases where judgment can discern, where there is power to choose between good and evil, the guilty person has only himself to blame, and the most heinous crime is only the action of its perpetrator. It is a human action, the result of passions which might have been controlled, and one’s mind is not uncertain, nor one’s conscience doubtful, as to the guilt. But how can one conceive this taste for murder in a young child, how imagine it, without being tempted to exchange the idea of eternal sovereign justice for that of blind-fatality? How can one judge without hesitation between the moral sense which has given way and the instinct which displays itself? how not exclaim that the designs of a Creator who retains the one and impels the other are sometimes mysterious and inexplicable, and that one must submit without understanding?

“Do you hear them coming?” asked Pierre.

“I hear nothing,” replied Antoine, and a nervous shiver ran through all his members.

“So much the worse. I am tired of being dead; I shall come to life and run after them. Hold the books, and I will undo the noose.”

“If you move, the books will separate; wait, I will hold them.”

And he knelt down, and collecting all his strength, gave the pile a violent push.

Pierre endeavoured to raise his hands to his throat. “What are you doing?” he cried in a suffocating voice.

“I am paying you out;” replied Antoine, folding his arms.

Pierre’s feet were only a few inches from the ground, and the weight of his body at first bent the bough for a moment; but it rose again, and the unfortunate boy exhausted himself in useless efforts. At every movement the knot grew tighter, his legs struggled, his arms sought vainly something to lay hold of; then his movements slackened, his limbs stiffened, and his hands sank down. Of so much life and vigour nothing remained but the movement of an inert mass turning round and round upon itself.

Not till then did Antoine cry for help, and when the other boys hastened up they found him crying and tearing his hair. So violent indeed were his sobs and his despair that he could hardly be understood as he tried to explain how the books had given way under Pierre, and how he had vainly endeavoured to support him in his arms.

This boy, left an orphan at three years old, had been brought up at first by a relation who turned him out for theft; afterwards by two sisters, his cousins, who were already beginning to take alarm at his abnormal perversity. This pale and fragile being, an incorrigible thief, a consummate hypocrite, and a cold-blooded assassin, was predestined to an immortality of crime, and was to find a place among the most execrable monsters for whom humanity has ever had to blush; his name was Antoine-Francois Derues.

Twenty years had gone by since this horrible and mysterious event, which no one sought to unravel at the time it occurred. One June evening, 1771, four persons were sitting in one of the rooms of a modestly furnished, dwelling on the third floor of a house in the rue Saint-Victor. The party consisted of three women and an ecclesiastic, who boarded, for meals only, with the woman who tenanted the dwelling; the other two were near neighbours. They were all friends, and often met thus in the evening to play cards. They were sitting round the card-table, but although it was nearly ten o’clock the cards had not yet been touched. They spoke in low tones, and a half-interrupted confidence had, this evening, put a check on the usual gaiety.

Someone knocked gently at the door, although no sound of steps on the creaking wooden staircase had been heard, and a wheedling voice asked for admittance. The occupier of the room, Madame Legrand, rose, and admitted a man of about six-and-twenty, at whose appearance the four friends exchanged glances, at once observed by the new-comer, who affected, however, not to see them. He bowed successively to the three women, and several times with the utmost respect to the abbe, making signs of apology for the interruption caused by his appearance; then, coughing several times, he turned to Madame Legrand, and said in a feeble voice, which seemed to betoken much suffering —

“My kind mistress, will you and these other ladies excuse my presenting myself at such an hour and in such a costume? I am ill, and I was obliged to get up.”

His costume was certainly singular enough: he was wrapped in a large dressing-gown of flowered chintz; his head was adorned by a nightcap drawn up at the top and surmounted by a muslin frill. His appearance did not contradict his complaint of illness; he was barely four feet six in height, his limbs were bony, his face sharp, thin, and pale. Thus attired, coughing incessantly, dragging his feet as if he had no strength to lift them, holding a lighted candle in one hand and an egg in the other, he suggested a caricature-some imaginary invalid just escaped from M. Purgon. Nevertheless, no one ventured to smile, notwithstanding his valetudinarian appearance and his air of affected humility. The perpetual blinking of the yellow eyelids which fell over the round and hollow eyes, shining with a sombre fire which he could never entirely suppress, reminded one of a bird of prey unable to face the light, and the lines of his face, the hooked nose, and the thin, constantly quivering, drawn-in lips suggested a mixture of boldness and baseness, of cunning and sincerity. But there is no book which can instruct one to read the human countenance correctly; and some special circumstance must have roused the suspicions of these four persons so much as to cause them to make these observations, and they were not as usual deceived by the humbug of this skilled actor, a past master in the art of deception.

He continued after a moment’s silence, as if he did not wish to interrupt their mute observation —

“Will you oblige me by a neighbourly kindness?”

“What is it, Derues?” asked Madame Legrand. A violent cough, which appeared to rend his chest, prevented him from answering immediately. When it ceased, he looked at the abbe, and said, with a melancholy smile —

“What I ought to ask in my present state of health is your blessing, my father, and your intercession for the pardon of my sins. But everyone clings to the life which God has given him. We do not easily abandon hope; moreover, I have always considered it wrong to neglect such means of preserving our lives as are in our power, since life is for us only a time of trial, and the longer and harder the trial the greater our recompense in a better world. Whatever befalls us, our answer should be that of the Virgin Mary to the angel who announced the mystery of the Incarnation: ‘Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word.’“

“You are right,” said the abbe, with a severe and inquisitorial look, under which Derues remained quite untroubled; “it is an attribute of God to reward and to punish, and the Almighty is not deceived by him who deceives men. The Psalmist has said, ‘Righteous art Thou, O Lord, and upright are Thy judgments.’“

“He has said also, ‘The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether,’“ Derues promptly replied. This exchange of quotations from Scripture might have lasted for hours without his being at a loss, had the abbe thought fit to continue in this strain; but such a style of conversation, garnished with grave and solemn words, seemed almost sacrilegious in the mouth of a man of such ridiculous appearance — a profanation at once sad and grotesque. Derues seemed to comprehend the impression it produced, and tuning again to Madame Legrand, he said —

“We have got a long way from what I came to ask you, my kind friend. I was so ill that I went early to bed, but I cannot sleep, and I have no fire. Would you have the kindness to have this egg mulled for me?”

“Cannot your servant do that for you?” asked Madame Legrand.

“I gave her leave to go out this evening, and though it is late she has not yet returned. If I had a fire, I would not give you so much trouble, but I do not care to light one at this hour. You know I am always afraid of accidents, and they so easily happen!”

“Very well, then,” replied Madame Legrand; “go back to your room, and my servant will bring it to you.”

“Thank you,” said Derues, bowing, — ”many thanks.”

As he turned to depart, Madame Legrand spoke again.

“This day week, Derues, you have to pay me half the twelve hundred livres due for the purchase of my business.”

“So soon as that?”

“Certainly, and I want the money. Have you forgotten the date, then?”

“Oh dear, I have never looked at the agreement since it was drawn up. I did not think the time was so near, it is the fault of my bad memory; but I will contrive to pay you, although trade is very bad, and in three days I shall have to pay more than fifteen thousand livres to different people.”

He bowed again and departed, apparently exhausted by the effort of sustaining so long a conversation.

As soon as they were alone, the abbe exclaimed —

“That man is assuredly an utter rascal! May God forgive him his hypocrisy! How is it possible we could allow him to deceive us for so long?”

“But, my father,” interposed one of the visitors, “are you really sure of what you have just said?”

“I am not now speaking of the seventy-nine Louis d’or which have been stolen from me, although I never mentioned to anyone but you, and he was then present, that I possessed such a sum, and although that very day he made a false excuse for coming to my rooms when I was out. Theft is indeed infamous, but slander is not less so, and he has slandered you disgracefully. Yes, he has spread a report that you, Madame Legrand, you, his former mistress and benefactress, have put temptation in his way, and desired to commit carnal sin with him. This is now whispered the neighbourhood all round us, it will soon be said aloud, and we have been so completely his dupes, we have helped him so much to acquire a reputation for uprightness, that it would now be impossible to destroy our own work; if I were to accuse him of theft, and you charged him with lying, probably neither of us would be believed. Beware, these odious tales have not been spread without a reason. Now that your eyes are open, beware of him.”

“Yes,” replied Madame Legrand, “my brother-in-law warned me three years ago. One day Derues said to my sister-in-law, — I remember the words perfectly, — ’I should like to be a druggist, because one would always be able to punish an enemy; and if one has a quarrel with anyone it would be easy to get rid of him by means of a poisoned draught.’ I neglected these warnings. I surmounted the feeling of repugnance I first felt at the sight of him; I have responded to his advances, and I greatly fear I may have cause to repent it. But you know him as well as I do, who would not have thought his piety sincere? — who would not still think so? And notwithstanding all you have said, I still hesitate to feel serious alarm; I am unwilling to believe in such utter depravity.”

The conversation continued in this strain for some time, and then, as it was getting late, the party separated.

Next morning early, a large and noisy crowd was assembled in the rue Saint-Victor before Derues’ shop of drugs and groceries. There was a confusion of cross questions, of inquiries which obtained no answer, of answers not addressed to the inquiry, a medley of sound, a pell-mell of unconnected words, of affirmations, contradictions, and interrupted narrations. Here, a group listened to an orator who held forth in his shirt sleeves, a little farther there were disputes, quarrels, exclamations of “Poor man!” “Such a good fellow!” “My poor gossip Derues!” “Good heavens! what will he do now?” “Alas! he is quite done for; it is to be hoped his creditors will give him time!” Above all this uproar was heard a voice, sharp and piercing like a cat’s, lamenting, and relating with sobs the terrible misfortune of last night. At about three in the morning the inhabitants of the rue St. Victor had been startled out of their sleep by the cry of “Fire, fire!” A conflagration had burst forth in Derues’ cellar, and though its progress had been arrested and the house saved from destruction, all the goods stored therein had perished. It apparently meant a considerable loss in barrels of oil, casks of brandy, boxes of soap, etc., which Derues estimated at not less than nine thousand livres.

By what unlucky chance the fire had been caused he had no idea. He recounted his visit to Madame Legrand, and pale, trembling, hardly able to sustain himself, he cried —

“I shall die of grief! A poor man as ill as I am! I am lost! I am ruined!”

A harsh voice interrupted his lamentations, and drew the attention of the crowd to a woman carrying printed broadsides, and who forced a passage through the crowd up to the shop door. She unfolded one of her sheets, and cried as loudly and distinctly as her husky voice permitted —

“Sentence pronounced by the Parliament of Paris against John Robert Cassel, accused and convicted of Fraudulent Bankruptcy!”

Derues looked up and saw a street-hawker who used to come to his shop for a drink, and with whom he had had a violent quarrel about a month previously, she having detected him in a piece of knavery, and abused him roundly in her own style, which was not lacking in energy. He had not seen her since. The crowd generally, and all the gossips of the quarter, who held Derues in great veneration, thought that the woman’s cry was intended as an indirect insult, and threatened to punish her for this irreverence. But, placing one hand on her hip, and with the other warning off the most pressing by a significant gesture —

“Are you still befooled by his tricks, fools that you are? Yes, no doubt there was a fire in the cellar last night, no doubt his creditors will be geese enough to let him off paying his debts! But what you don’t know is, that he didn’t really lose by it at all!”

“He lost all his goods!” the crowd cried on all sides. “More than nine thousand livres! Oil and brandy, do you think those won’t burn? The old witch, she drinks enough to know! If one put a candle near her she would take fire, fast enough!”

“Perhaps,” replied the woman, with renewed gesticulations, “perhaps; but I don’t advise any of you to try. Anyhow, this fellow here is a rogue; he has been emptying his cellar for the last three nights; there were only old empty casks in it and empty packing-cases! Oh yes! I have swallowed his daily lies like everybody else, but I know the truth by now. He got his liquor taken away by Michael Lambourne’s son, the cobbler in the rue de la Parcheminerie. How do I know? Why, because the young man came and told me!”

“I turned that woman out of my shop a month ago, for stealing,” said Derues.

Notwithstanding this retaliatory accusation, the woman’s bold assertion might have changed the attitude of the crowd and chilled the enthusiasm, but at that moment a stout man pressed forward, and seizing the hawker by the arm, said —

“Go, and hold your tongue, backbiting woman!”

To this man, the honour of Derues was an article of faith; he had not yet ceased to wonder at the probity of this sainted person, and to doubt it in the least was as good as suspecting his own.

"My dear friend," he said, "we all know what to think of you. I know you well. Send to me tomorrow, and you shall have what goods you want, on credit, for as long as is necessary. Now, evil tongue, what do you say to that?"

"I say that you are as great a fool as the rest. Adieu, friend Derues; go on as you have begun, and I shall be selling your 'sentence' some day"; and dispersing the crowd with a few twirls of her right arm, she passed on, crying —

"Sentence pronounced by the Parliament of Paris against John Robert Cassel, accused and convicted of Fraudulent Bankruptcy!"

This accusation emanated from too insignificant a quarter to have any effect on Derues' reputation. However resentful he may have been at the time, he got over it in consequence of the reiterated marks of interest shown by his neighbours and all the quarter on account of his supposed ruin, and the hawker's attack passed out of his mind, or probably she might have paid for her boldness with her life.

But this drunken woman had none the less uttered a prophetic word; it was the grain of sand on which, later, he was to be shipwrecked.

"All passions," says La Bruyere, — "all passions are deceitful; they disguise themselves as much as possible from the public eye; they hide from themselves. There is no vice which has not a counterfeit resemblance to some virtue, and which does not profit by it."

The whole life of Derues bears testimony to the truth of this observation. An avaricious poisoner, he attracted his victims by the pretence of fervent and devoted piety, and drew them into the snare where he silently destroyed them. His terrible celebrity only began in 1777, caused by the double murder of Madame de Lamotte and her son, and his name, unlike those of some other great criminals, does not at first recall a long series of crimes, but when one examines this low, crooked, and obscure life, one finds a fresh stain at every step, and perhaps no one has ever surpassed him in dissimulation, in profound hypocrisy, in indefatigable depravity. Derues was executed at thirty-two, and his whole life was steeped in vice; though happily so short, it is full of horror, and is only a tissue of criminal thoughts and deeds, a very essence of evil. He had no hesitation, no remorse, no repose, no relaxation; he seemed compelled to lie, to steal, to poison! Occasionally suspicion is aroused, the public has its doubts, and vague rumours hover round him; but he burrows under new impostures, and punishment passes by. When he falls into the hands of human justice his reputation protects him, and for a few days more the legal sword is turned aside. Hypocrisy is so completely a part of his nature, that even when there is no longer any hope, when he is irrevocably sentenced, and he knows that he can no longer deceive anyone, neither mankind nor Him whose name he profanes by this last sacrilege, he yet exclaims, “O Christ! I shall suffer even as Thou.” It is only by the light of his funeral pyre that the dark places of his life can be examined, that this bloody plot is unravelled, and that other victims, forgotten and lost in the shadows, arise like spectres at the foot of the scaffold, and escort the assassin to his doom.

Let us trace rapidly the history of Derues’ early years, effaced and forgotten in the notoriety of his death. These few pages are not written for the glorification of crime, and if in our own days, as a result of the corruption of our manners, and of a deplorable confusion of all notions of right and wrong, it has been sought to make him an object; of public interest, we, on our part, only wish to bring him into notice, and place him momentarily on a pedestal, in order to cast him still lower, that his fall may be yet greater. What has been permitted by God may be related by man. Decaying and satiated communities need not be treated as children; they require neither diplomatic handling nor precaution, and it may be good that they should see and touch the putrescent sores which canker them. Why fear to mention that which everyone knows? Why dread to sound the abyss which can be measured by everyone? Why fear to bring into the light of day unmasked wickedness, even though it confronts the public gaze unblushingly? Extreme turpitude and extreme excellence are both in the schemes of Providence; and the poet has summed up eternal morality for all ages and nations in this sublime exclamation:

“Abstulit hunc tandem Rufini poem tumultum.”

Besides, and we cannot insist too earnestly that our intention must not be mistaken, if we had wished to inspire any other sentiment than that of horror, we should have chosen a more imposing personage from the annals of crime. There have been deeds which required audacity, a sort of grandeur, a false heroism; there have been criminals who held in check all the regular and legitimate forces of society, and whom one regarded with a mixture of terror and pity. There is nothing of that in Derues, not even a trace of courage; nothing but a shameless cupidity, exercising itself at first in the theft of a few pence filched from the poor; nothing but the illicit gains and rascalities of a cheating shopkeeper and vile money-lender, a depraved cowardice which dared not strike openly, but slew in the dark. It is the story of an unclean reptile which drags itself underground, leaving everywhere the trail of its poisonous saliva.

Such was the man whose life we have undertaken to narrate, a man who represents a complete type of wickedness, and who corresponds to the most hideous sketch ever devised by poet or romance-writer: Facts without importance of their own, which would be childish if recorded of anyone else, obtain a sombre reflection from other facts which precede them, and thenceforth cannot be passed over in silence. The historian is obliged to collect and note them, as showing the logical development of this degraded being: he unites them in sequence, and counts the successive steps of the ladder mounted by the criminal.

We have seen the early exploit of this assassin by instinct; we find him, twenty years later, an incendiary and a fraudulent bankrupt. What had happened in the interval? With how much treachery and crime had he filled this space of twenty years? Let us return to his infancy.

His unconquerable taste for theft caused him to be expelled by the relations who had taken charge of him. An anecdote is told which shows his impudence and incurable perversity. One day he was caught taking some money, and was soundly whipped by his cousins. When this was over, the child, instead of showing any sorrow or asking forgiveness, ran away with a sneer, and seeing they were out of breath, exclaimed —

“You are tired, are you? Well, I am not!”

Despairing of any control over this evil disposition, the relations refused to keep him, and sent him to Chartres, where two other cousins agreed to have him, out of charity. They were simpleminded women, of great and sincere piety, who imagined that good example and religious teaching might have a happy influence on their young relation. The result was contrary to their expectation: the sole fruit of their teaching was that Derues learnt to be a cheat and a hypocrite, and to assume the mask of respectability.

Here also repeated thefts insured him sound corrections. Knowing his cousins’ extreme economy, not to say avarice, he mocked them when they broke a lath over his shoulders: “There now, I am so glad; that will cost you two farthings!”

His benefactresses’ patience becoming exhausted, he left their house, and was apprenticed to a tinman at Chartres. His master died, and an ironmonger of the same town took him as shop-boy, and from this he passed on to a druggist and grocer. Until now, although fifteen years old, he had shown no preference for one trade more than another, but it was now necessary he should choose some profession, and his share in the family property amounted to the modest sum of three thousand five hundred livres. His residence with this last master revealed a decided taste, but it was only another evil instinct developing itself: the poisoner had scented poison, being always surrounded with drugs which were health-giving or hurtful, according to the use made of them. Derues would probably have settled at Chartres, but repeated thefts obliged him to leave the town. The profession of druggist and grocer being one which presented most chances of fortune, and being, moreover, adapted to his tastes, his family apprenticed him to a grocer in the rue Comtesse d’Artois, paying a specified premium for him.

Derues arrived in Paris in 1760. It was a new horizon, where he was unknown; no suspicion attached to him, and he felt much at his ease. Lost in the noise and the crowd of this immense receptacle for every vice, he had time to found on hypocrisy his reputation as an honest man. When his apprenticeship expired, his master proposed to place him with his sister-in-law, who kept a similar establishment in the rue St. Victor, and who had been a widow for several years. He recommended Derues as a young man whose zeal and intelligence might be useful in her business, being ignorant of various embezzlements committed by his late apprentice, who was always clever enough to cast suspicion on others. But the negotiation nearly fell through, because, one day, Derues so far forgot his usual prudence and dissimulation as to allow himself to make the observation recorded above to his mistress. She, horrified, ordered him to be silent, and threatened to ask her husband to dismiss him. It required a double amount of hypocrisy to remove this unfavourable impression; but he spared no pains to obtain the confidence of the sister-in-law, who was much influenced in his favour. Every day he inquired what could be done for her, every evening he took a basket-load of the goods she required from the rue Comtesse d’Artois; and it excited the pity of all beholders to see this weakly young man, panting and sweating under his heavy burden, refusing any reward, and labouring merely for the pleasure of obliging, and from natural kindness of heart! The poor widow, whose spoils he was already coveting, was completely duped. She rejected the advice of her brother-in-law, and only listened to the concert of praises sung by neighbours much edified by Derues’ conduct, and touched by the interest he appeared to show her. Often he found occasion to speak of her, always with the liveliest expressions of boundless devotion. These remarks were repeated to the good woman, and seemed all the more sincere to her as they appeared to have been made quite casually, and she never suspected they were carefully calculated and thought out long before.

Derues carried dishonesty as far as possible, but he knew how to stop when suspicion was likely to be aroused, and though always planning either to deceive or to hurt, he was never taken by surprise. Like the spider which spreads the threads of her web all round her, he concealed himself in a net of falsehood which one had to traverse before arriving at his real nature. The evil destiny of this poor woman, mother of four children, caused her to engage him as her shopman in the year 1767, thereby signing the warrant for her own ruin.

Derues began life under his new mistress with a master-stroke. His exemplary piety was the talk of the whole quarter, and his first care had been to request Madame Legrand to recommend him a confessor. She sent him to the director of her late husband, Pere Cartault, of the Carmelite order, who, astonished at the devotion of his penitent, never failed, if he passed the shop, to enter and congratulate Madame Legrand on the excellent acquisition she had made in securing this young man, who would certainly bring her a blessing along with him. Derues affected the greatest modesty, and blushed at these praises, and often, when he saw the good father approaching, appeared not to see him, and found something to do elsewhere; whereby the field was left clear for his too credulous panegyrists.

But Pere Cartault appeared too indulgent, and Derues feared that his sins were too easily pardoned; and he dared not find peace in an absolution which was never refused. Therefore, before the year was out, he chose a second confessor, Pere Denys, a Franciscan, consulting both alternately, and confiding his conscientious scruples to them. Every penance appeared too easy, and he added to those enjoined by his directors continual mortifications of his own devising, so that even Tartufe himself would have owned his superiority.

He wore about him two shrouds, to which were fastened relics of Madame de Chantal, also a medal of St. Francois de Saps, and occasionally scourged himself. His mistress related that he had begged her to take a sitting at the church of St. Nicholas, in order that he might more easily attend service when he had a day out, and had brought her a small sum which he had saved, to pay half the expense.

Moreover, he had slept upon straw during the whole of Lent, and took care that Madame Legrand heard of this through the servant, pretending at first to hide it as if it were something wrong. He tried to prevent the maid from going into his room, and when she found out the straw he forbade her to mention it — which naturally made her more anxious to relate her discovery. Such a piece of piety, combined with such meritorious humility, such dread of publicity, could only increase the excellent opinion which everyone already had of him.

Every day was marked by some fresh hypocrisy. One of his sisters, a novice in the convent of the Ladies of the Visitation of the Virgin, was to take the veil at Easter. Derues obtained permission to be present at the ceremony, and was to start on foot on Good Friday. When he departed, the shop happened to be full of people, and the gossips of the neighbourhood inquired where he was going. Madame Legrand desired him to have a glass of liqueur (wine he never touched) and something to eat before starting.

“Oh, madame!” he exclaimed, “do you think I could eat on a day like this, the day on which Christ was crucified! I will take a piece of bread with me, but I shall only eat it at the inn where I intend to sleep: I mean to fast the whole way.”

But this kind of thing was not sufficient. He wanted an opportunity to establish a reputation for honesty on a firm basis. Chance provided one, and he seized it immediately, although at the expense of a member of his own family.

One of his brothers, who kept a public-house at Chartres, came to see him. Derues, under pretence of showing him the sights of Paris, which he did not know, asked his mistress to allow him to take in the brother for a few days, which she granted. The last evening of his stay, Derues went up to his room, broke open the box which contained his clothes, turned over everything it contained, examined the clothes, and discovering two new cotton nightcaps, raised a cry which brought up the household. His brother just then returned, and Derues called him an infamous thief, declaring that he had stolen the money for these new articles out of the shop the evening before. His brother defended himself, protesting his innocence, and, indignant at such incomprehensible treachery, endeavoured to turn the tables by relating some of Antoine's early misdeeds. The latter, however, stopped him, by declaring on his honour that he had seen his brother the evening before go to the till, slip his hand in, and take out some money. The brother was confounded and silenced by so audacious a lie; he hesitated, stammered, and was turned out of the house. Derues worthily crowned this piece of iniquity by obliging his mistress to accept the restitution of the stolen money. It cost him three livres, twelve sons, but the interest it brought him was the power of stealing unsuspected. That evening he spent in prayer for the pardon of his brother's supposed guilt.

All these schemes had succeeded, and brought him nearer to the desired goal, for not a soul in the quarter ventured to doubt the word of this saintly individual. His fawning manners and insinuating language varied according to the people addressed. He adapted himself to all, contradicting no one, and, while austere himself, he flattered the tastes of others. In the various houses where he visited his conversation was serious, grave, and sententious; and, as we have seen, he could quote Scripture with the readiness of a theologian. In the shop, when he had to deal with the lower classes, he showed himself acquainted with their modes of expression, and spoke the Billingsgate of the market-women, which he had acquired in the rue Comtesse d'Artois, treating them familiarly, and they generally addressed him as "gossip Denies." By his own account he easily judged the characters of the various people with whom he came in contact.

However, Pere Cartault's prophecy was not fulfilled: the blessing of Heaven did not descend on the Legrand establishment. There seemed to be a succession of misfortunes which all Derues' zeal and care as shopman could neither prevent nor repair. He by no means contented himself with parading an idle and fruitless hypocrisy, and his most abominable deceptions were not those displayed in the light of day. He watched by night: his singular organisation, outside the ordinary laws of nature, appeared able to dispense with sleep. Gliding about on tiptoe, opening doors noiselessly, with all the skill of an accomplished thief, he pillaged shop and cellar, and sold his plunder in remote parts of the town under assumed names. It is difficult to understand how his strength supported the fatigue of this double existence; he had barely arrived at puberty, and art had been obliged to assist the retarded development of nature. But he lived only for evil, and the Spirit of Evil supplied the physical vigour which was wanting. An insane love of money (the only passion he knew) brought him by degrees back to his starting-point of crime; he concealed it in hiding-places wrought in the thick walls, in holes dug out by his nails. As soon as he got any, he brought it exactly as a wild beast brings a piece of bleeding flesh to his lair; and often, by the glimmer of a dark lantern, kneeling in adoration before this shameful idol, his eyes sparkling with ferocious joy, with a smile which suggested a hyena's delight over its prey, he would contemplate his money, counting and kissing it.

These continual thefts brought trouble into the Legrand affairs, cancelled all profits, and slowly brought on ruin. The widow had no suspicion of Derues' disgraceful dealings, and he carefully referred the damage to other causes, quite worthy of himself. Sometimes it was a bottle of oil, or of brandy, or some other commodity, which was found spilt, broken, or damaged, which accidents he attributed to the enormous quantity of rats which infested the cellar and the house. At length, unable to meet her engagements, Madame Legrand made the business over to him in February, 1770. He was then twenty-five years and six months old, and was accepted as a merchant grocer in August the same year. By an agreement drawn up between them, Derues undertook to pay twelve hundred livres for the goodwill, and to lodge her rent free during the remainder of her lease, which had still nine years to run. Being thus obliged to give up business to escape bankruptcy, Madame Legrand surrendered to her creditors any goods remaining in her warehouse; and Derues easily made arrangements to take them over very cheaply. The first step thus made, he was now able to enrich himself safely and to defraud with impunity under the cover of his stolen reputation.

One of his uncles, a flour merchant at Chartres, came habitually twice a year to Paris to settle accounts with his correspondents. A sum of twelve hundred francs, locked up in a drawer, was stolen from him, and, accompanied by his nephew, he went to inform the police. On investigation being made, it was found that the chest of drawers had been broken at the top. As at the time of the theft of the seventy-nine Louis from the abbe, Derues was the only person known to have entered his uncle's room. The innkeeper swore to this, but the uncle took pains to justify his nephew, and showed his confidence shortly after by becoming surety for him to the extent of five thousand livres. Derues failed to pay when the time expired, and the holder of the note was obliged to sue the surety for it.

He made use of any means, even the most impudent, which enabled him to appropriate other people's property. A provincial grocer on one occasion sent him a thousand-weight of honey in barrels to be sold on commission. Two or three months passed, and he asked for an account of the sale. Derues replied that he had not yet been able to dispose of it advantageously, and there ensued a fresh delay, followed by the same question and the same reply. At length, when more than a year had passed, the grocer came to Paris, examined his barrels, and found that five hundred pounds were missing. He claimed damages from Derues, who declared he had never received any more, and as the honey had been sent in confidence, and there was no contract and no receipt to show, the provincial tradesman could not obtain compensation.

As though having risen by the ruin of Madame Legrand and her four children was not enough, Derues grudged even the morsel of bread he had been obliged to leave her. A few days after the fire in the cellar, which enabled him to go through a second bankruptcy, Madame Legrand, now undeceived and not believing his lamentations, demanded the money due to her, according to their agreement. Derues pretended to look for his copy of the contract, and could not find it. "Give me yours, madame," said he; "we will write the receipt upon it. Here is the money."

The widow opened her purse and took out her copy; Derues snatched it, and tore it up. "Now," he exclaimed, "you are paid; I owe you nothing now. If you like, I will declare it on oath in court, and no one will disbelieve my word."

"Wretched man," said the unfortunate widow, "may God forgive your soul; but your body will assuredly end on the gallows!"

It was in vain that she complained, and told of this abominable swindle; Derues had been beforehand with her, and the slander he had disseminated bore its fruits. It was said that his old mistress was endeavouring by an odious falsehood to destroy the reputation of a man who had refused to be her lover. Although reduced to poverty, she left the house where she had a right to remain rent free, preferring the hardest and dreariest life to the torture of remaining under the same roof with the man who had caused her ruin.

We might relate a hundred other pieces of knavery, but it must not be supposed that having begun by murder, Derues would draw back and remain contented with theft. Two fraudulent bankruptcies would have sufficed for most people; for him they were merely a harmless pastime. Here we must place two dark and obscure stories, two crimes of which he is accused, two victims whose death groans no one heard.

The hypocrite's excellent reputation had crossed the Parisian bounds. A young man from the country, intending to start as a grocer in the capital, applied to Derues for the necessary information and begged for advice. He arrived at the latter's house with a sum of eight thousand livres, which he placed in Derues' hands, asking him for assistance in finding a business. The sight of gold was enough to rouse the instinct of crime in Derues, and the witches who hailed Macbeth with the promise of royalty did not rouse the latter's ambitious desires to a greater height than the chance of wealth did the greed of the assassin; whose hands, once closed over the eight thousand livres, were never again relaxed. He received them as a deposit, and hid them along with his previous plunder, vowing never to return them. Several days had elapsed, when one afternoon Derues returned home with an air of such unusual cheerfulness that the young man questioned him. "Have you heard some good news for me?" he asked, "or have you had some luck yourself?"

"My young friend," answered Derues, "as for me, success depends on my own efforts, and fortune smiles on me. But I have promised to be useful to you, your parents have trusted me, and I must prove that their confidence is well founded. I have heard to-day of a business for disposal in one of the best parts of Paris. You can have it for twelve thousand livres, and I wish I could lend you the amount you want. But you must write to your father, persuade him, reason with him; do not lose so good a chance. He must make a little sacrifice, and he will be grateful to me later."

In accordance with their son's request, the young man's parents despatched a sum of four thousand livres, requesting Derues to lose no time in concluding the purchase.

Three weeks later, the father, very uneasy, arrived in Paris. He came to inquire about his son, having heard nothing from him. Derues received him with the utmost astonishment, appearing convinced that the young man had returned home. One day, he said, the youth informed him that he had heard from his father, who had given up all idea of establishing him in Paris, having arranged an advantageous marriage for him near home; and he had taken his twelve thousand livres, for which Derues produced a receipt, and started on his return journey.

One evening, when nearly dark, Derues had gone out with his guest, who complained of headache and internal pains. Where did they go? No one knew; but Denies only returned at daybreak, alone, weary and exhausted, and the young man was never again heard of.

One of his apprentices was the constant object of reproof. The boy was accused of negligence, wasting his time, of spending three hours over a task which might have been done in less than one. When Derues had convinced the father, a Parisian bourgeois, that his son was a bad boy and a good-for-nothing, he came to this man one day in a state of wild excitement.

“Your son,” he said, “ran away yesterday with six hundred livres, with which I had to meet a bill to-day. He knew where I kept this money, and has taken it.”

He threatened to go before a magistrate and denounce the thief, and was only appeased by being paid the sum he claimed to have lost. But he had gone out with the lad the evening before, and returned alone in the early hours of the morning.

However, the veil which concealed the truth was becoming more and more transparent every day. Three bankruptcies had diminished the consideration he enjoyed, and people began to listen to complaints and accusations which till now had been considered mere inventions designed to injure him. Another attempt at trickery made him feel it desirable to leave the neighbourhood.

He had rented a house close to his own, the shop of which had been tenanted for seven or eight years by a wine merchant. He required from this man, if he wished to remain where he was, a sum of six hundred livres as a payment for goodwill. Although the wine merchant considered it an exorbitant charge, yet on reflection he decided to pay it rather than go, having established a good business on these premises, as was well known. Before long a still mare arrant piece of dishonesty gave him an opportunity for revenge. A young man of good family, who was boarding with him in order to gain some business experience, having gone into Derues’ shop to make some purchases, amused himself while waiting by idly writing his name on a piece of blank paper lying on the counter; which he left there without thinking more about it. Derues, knowing the young man had means, as soon as he had gone, converted the signed paper into a promissory note for two thousand livres, to his order, payable at the majority of the signer. The bill, negotiated in trade, arrived when due at the wine merchant's, who, much surprised, called his young boarder and showed him the paper adorned with his signature. The youth was utterly confounded, having no knowledge of the bill whatever, but nevertheless could not deny his signature. On examining the paper carefully, the handwriting was recognised as Derues'. The wine merchant sent for him, and when he arrived, made him enter a room, and having locked the door, produced the promissory note. Derues acknowledged having written it, and tried various falsehoods to excuse himself. No one listened to him, and the merchant threatened to place the matter in the hands of the police. Then Derues wept, implored, fell on his knees, acknowledged his guilt, and begged for mercy. He agreed to restore the six hundred livres exacted from the wine merchant, on condition that he should see the note destroyed and that the matter should end there. He was then about to be married, and dreaded a scandal.

Shortly after, he married Marie-Louise Nicolais; daughter of a harness-maker at Melun.

One's first impression in considering this marriage is one of profound sorrow and utmost pity for the young girl whose destiny was linked with that of this monster. One thinks of the horrible future; of youth and innocence blighted by the tainting breath of the homicide; of candour united to hypocrisy; of virtue to wickedness; of legitimate desires linked to disgraceful passions; of purity mixed with corruption. The thought of these contrasts is revolting, and one pities such a dreadful fate. But we must not decide hastily. Madame Denies has not been convicted of any active part in her husband's later crimes, but her history, combined with his, shows no trace of suffering, nor of any revolt against a terrible complicity. In her case the evidence is doubtful, and public opinion must decide later.

In 1773, Derues relinquished retail business, and left the Saint Victor neighbourhood, having taken an apartment in the rue des Deux Boules, near the rue Bertin-Poiree, in the parish of St. Germain l'Auxerrois, where he had been married. He first acted on commission for the Benedictine-Camalduian fathers of the forest of Senart, who had heard of him as a man wholly given to piety; then, giving himself up to usury, he undertook what is known as “business affairs,” a profession which, in such hands, could not fail to be lucrative, being aided by his exemplary morals and honest appearance. It was the more easy for him to impose on others, as he could not be accused of any of the deadly vices which so often end in ruin — gaming, wine, and women. Until now he had displayed only one passion, that of avarice, but now another developed itself, that of ambition. He bought houses and land, and when the money was due, allowed himself to be sued for it; he bought even lawsuits, which he muddled with all the skill of a rascally attorney. Experienced in bankruptcy, he undertook the management of failures, contriving to make dishonesty appear in the light of unfortunate virtue. When this demon was not occupied with poison, his hands were busy with every social iniquity; he could only live and breathe in an atmosphere of corruption.

His wife, who had already presented him with a daughter, gave birth to a son in February 1774. Derues, in order to better support the airs of grandeur and the territorial title which he had assumed, invited persons of distinction to act as sponsors. The child was baptized Tuesday, February 15th. We give the text of the baptismal register, as a curiosity: —

“Antoine-Maximilian-Joseph, son of Antoine-Francois Derues, gentleman, seigneur of Gendeville, Herchies, Viquemont, and other places, formerly merchant grocer; and of Madame Marie-Louise Nicolais, his wife. Godfathers, T. H. and T. P., lords of, etc. etc. Godmothers, Madame M. Fr. C. D. V., etc. etc.

“(Signed)

A F. DERUES, Senior.”

But all this dignity did not exclude the sheriff’s officers, whom, as befitted so great a man, he treated with the utmost insolence, overwhelming them with abuse when they came to enforce an execution. Such scandals had several times aroused the curiosity of his neighbours, and did not redound to his credit. His landlord, wearied of all this clamour, and most especially weary of never getting any rent without a fight for it, gave him notice to quit. Derues removed to the rue Beaubourg, where he continued to act as commission agent under the name of Cyrano Derues de Bury.

And now we will concern ourselves no more with the unravelling of this tissue of imposition; we will wander no longer in this labyrinth of fraud, of low and vile intrigue, of dark crime of which the clue disappears in the night, and of which the trace is lost in a doubtful mixture of blood and mire;

we will listen no longer to the cry of the widow and her four children reduced to beggary, to the groans of obscure victims, to the cries of terror and the death-groan which echoed one night through the vaults of a country house near Beauvais. Behold other victims whose cries are yet louder, behold yet other crimes and a punishment which equals them in terror! Let these nameless ghosts, these silent spectres, lose themselves in the clear daylight which now appears, and make room for other phantoms which rend their shrouds and issue from the tomb demanding vengeance.

Derues was now soon to have a chance of obtaining immortality. Hitherto his blows had been struck by chance, henceforth he uses all the resources of his infernal imagination; he concentrates all his strength on one point — conceives and executes his crowning piece of wickedness. He employs for two years all his science as cheat, forger, and poisoner in extending the net which was to entangle a whole family; and, taken in his own snare, he struggles in vain; in vain does he seek to gnaw through the meshes which confine him. The foot placed on the last rung of this ladder of crime, stands also on the first step by which he mounts the scaffold.

About a mile from Villeneuve-le-Roi-les-Sens, there stood in 1775 a handsome house, overlooking the windings of the Yonne on one side, and on the other a garden and park belonging to the estate of Buisson-Souef. It was a large property, admirably situated, and containing productive fields, wood, and water; but not everywhere kept in good order, and showing something of the embarrassed fortune of its owner. During some years the only repairs had been those necessary in the house itself and its immediate vicinity. Here and there pieces of dilapidated wall threatened to fall altogether, and enormous stems of ivy had invaded and stifled vigorous trees; in the remoter portions of the park briers barred the road and made walking almost impossible. This disorder was not destitute of charm, and at an epoch when landscape gardening consisted chiefly in straight alleys, and in giving to nature a cold and monotonous symmetry, one’s eye rested with pleasure on these neglected clumps, on these waters which had taken a different course to that which art had assigned to them, on these unexpected and picturesque scenes.

A wide terrace, overlooking the winding river, extended along the front of the house. Three men were walking on it-two priests, and the owner of Buisson-Souef, Monsieur de Saint-Faust de Lamotte. One priest was the cure of Villeneuve-le-Roi-lez-Sens, the other was a Camaldulian monk, who had come to see the cure about a clerical matter, and who was spending some days at the presbytery. The conversation did not appear to be lively. Every now and then Monsieur de Lamotte stood still, and, shading his eyes with his hand from the brilliant sunlight which flooded the plain, and was strongly reflected from the water, endeavoured to see if some new object had not appeared on the horizon, then slowly resumed his walk with a movement of uneasy impatience. The tower clock struck with a noisy resonance.

"Six o'clock already!" he exclaimed. "They will assuredly not arrive to-day."

"Why despair?" said the cure. "Your servant has gone to meet them; we might see their boat any moment."

"But, my father," returned Monsieur de Lamotte, "the long days are already past. In another hour the mist will rise, and then they would not venture on the river."

"Well, if that happens, we shall have to be patient; they will stay all night at some little distance, and you will see them to-morrow morning."

"My brother is right," said the other priest. "Come, monsieur; do not be anxious."

"You both speak with the indifference of persons to whom family troubles are unknown."

"What!" said the cure, "do you really think that because our sacred profession condemns us both to celibacy, we are therefore unable to comprehend an affection such as yours, on which I myself pronounced the hallowing benediction of the Church — if you remember — nearly fifteen years ago?"

"Is it perhaps intentionally, my father, that you recall the date of my marriage? I readily admit that the love of one's neighbour may enlighten you as to another love to which you have yourself been a stranger. I daresay it seems odd to you that a man of my age should be anxious about so little, as though he were a love-sick youth; but for some time past I have had presentiments of evil, and I am really becoming superstitious!"

He again stood still, gazing up the river, and, seeing nothing, resumed his place between the two priests, who had continued their walk.

"Yes," he continued, "I have presentiments which refuse to be shaken off. I am not so old that age can have weakened my powers and reduced me to childishness, I cannot even say what I am afraid of, but separation is painful and causes an involuntary terror. Strange, is it not? Formerly, I used to leave my wife for months together, when she was young and my son only, an infant; I loved her passionately, yet I could go with pleasure. Why, I wonder, is it so different now? Why should a journey to Paris on business, and a few hours’ delay, make, me so terribly uneasy? Do you remember, my father,” he resumed, after a pause, turning to the cure, “do you remember how lovely Marie looked on our wedding-day? Do you remember her dazzling complexion and the innocent candour of her expression? — the sure token of the most truthful and purest of minds! That is why I love her so much now; we do not now sigh for one another, but the second love is stronger than the first, for it is founded on recollection, and is tranquil and confident in friendship . . . . It is strange that they have not returned; something must have happened! If they do not return this evening, and I do not now think it possible, I shall go to Paris myself to-morrow.”

“I think;” said the other priest, “that at twenty you must indeed have been excitable, a veritable tinder-box, to have retained so much energy! Come, monsieur, try to calm yourself and have patience: you yourself admit it can only be a few hours’ delay.”

“But my son accompanied his mother, and he is our only one, and so delicate! He alone remains of our three children, and you do not realise how the affection of parents who feel age approaching is concentrated on an only child! If I lost Edouard I should die!”

“I suppose, then, as you let him go, his presence at Paris was necessary?”

“No; his mother went to obtain a loan which is needed for the improvements required on the estate.”

“Why, then, did you let him go?”

“I would willingly have kept him here, but his mother wished to take him. A separation is as trying to her as to me, and we all but quarrelled over it. I gave way.”

“There was one way of satisfying all three — you might have gone also.”

“Yes, but Monsieur le cure will tell you that a fortnight ago I was chained to my arm-chair, swearing under my breath like a pagan, and cursing the follies of my youth! — Forgive me, my father; I mean that I had the gout, and I forgot that I am not the only sufferer, and that it racks the old age of the philosopher quite as much as that of the courtier.”

The fresh wind which often rises just at sunset was already rustling in the leaves; long shadows darkened the course of the Yonne and stretched across the plain; the water, slightly troubled, reflected a confused outline of its banks and the clouded blue of the sky. The three gentlemen stopped at the end of the terrace and gazed into the already fading distance. A black spot, which they had just observed in the middle of the river, caught a gleam of light in passing a low meadow between two hills, and for a moment took shape as a barge, then was lost again, and could not be distinguished from the water. Another moment, and it reappeared more distinctly; it was indeed a barge, and now the horse could be seen towing it against the current. Again it was lost at a bend of the river shaded by willows, and they had to resign themselves to incertitude for several minutes. Then a white handkerchief was waved on the prow of the boat, and Monsieur de Lamotte uttered a joyful exclamation.

"It is indeed they!" he cried. "Do you see them, Monsieur le cure? I see my boy; he is waving the handkerchief, and his mother is with him. But I think there is a third person — yes, there is a man, is there not? Look well."

"Indeed," said the cure, "if my bad sight does not deceive me, I should say there was someone seated near the rudder; but it looks like a child."

"Probably someone from the neighbourhood, who has profited by the chance of a lift home."

The boat was advancing rapidly; they could now hear the cracking of the whip with which the servant urged on the tow-horse. And now it stopped, at an easy landing-place, barely fifty paces from the terrace. Madame de Lamotte landed with her son and the stranger, and her husband descended from the terrace to meet her. Long before he arrived at the garden gate, his son's arms were around his neck.

"Are you quite well, Edouard ?"

"Oh yes, perfectly."

"And your mother?"

"Quite well too. She is behind, in as great a hurry to meet you as I am. But she can't run as I do, and you must go half-way."

"Whom have you brought with you?"

"A gentleman from Paris."

"From Paris?"

"Yes, a Monsieur Derues. But mamma will tell you all about that. Here she is."

The cure and the monk arrived just as Monsieur de Lamotte folded his wife in his arms. Although she had passed her fortieth year, she was still beautiful enough to justify her husband’s eulogism. A moderate plumpness had preserved the freshness and softness of her skin; her smile was charming, and her large blue eyes expressed both gentleness and goodness. Seen beside this smiling and serene countenance, the appearance of the stranger was downright repulsive, and Monsieur de Lamotte could hardly repress a start of disagreeable surprise at the pitiful and sordid aspect of this diminutive person, who stood apart, looking overwhelmed by conscious inferiority. He was still more astonished when he saw his son take him by the hand with friendly kindness, and heard him say —

“Will you come with me, my friend? We will follow my father and mother.”

Madame de Lamotte, having greeted the cure, looked at the monk, who was a stranger to her. A word or two explained matters, and she took her husband’s arm, declining to answer any questions until she reached the louse, and laughing at his curiosity.

Pierre-Etienne de Saint-Faust de Lamotte, one of the king’s equerries, seigneur of Grange-Flandre, Valperfond, etc., had married Marie-Francoise Perier in 1760. Their fortune resembled many others of that period: it was more nominal than actual, more showy than solid. Not that the husband and wife had any cause for self-reproach, or that their estates had suffered from dissipation; unstained by the corrupt manners of the period, their union had been a model of sincere affection, of domestic virtue and mutual confidence. Marie-Francoise was quite beautiful enough to have made a sensation in society, but she renounced it of her own accord, in order to devote herself to the duties of a wife and mother. The only serious grief she and her husband had experienced was the loss of two young children. Edouard, though delicate from his birth, had nevertheless passed the trying years of infancy and early adolescence; he was them nearly fourteen. With a sweet and rather effeminate expression, blue eyes and a pleasant smile, he was a striking likeness of his mother. His father’s affection exaggerated the dangers which threatened the boy, and in his eyes the slightest indisposition became a serious malady; his mother shared these fears, and in consequence of this anxiety Edouard’s education had been much neglected. He had been brought up at Buisson-Souef, and allowed to run wild from morning till night, like a young fawn, exercising the vigour and activity of its limbs. He had still the simplicity and general ignorance of a child of nine or ten.

The necessity of appearing at court and suitably defraying the expenses of his office had made great inroads on Monsieur de Lamotte's fortune. He had of late lived at Buisson-Souef in the most complete retirement; but notwithstanding this too long deferred attention to his affairs, his property was ruining him, for the place required a large expenditure, and absorbed a large amount of his income without making any tangible return. He had always hesitated to dispose of the estate on account of its associations; it was there he had met, courted, and married his beloved wife; there that the happy days of their youth had been spent; there that they both wished to grow old together.

Such was the family to which accident had now introduced Derues. The unfavourable impression made on Monsieur de Lamotte had not passed unperceived by him; but, being quite accustomed to the instinctive repugnance which his first appearance generally inspired, Derues had made a successful study of how to combat and efface this antagonistic feeling, and replace it by confidence, using different means according to the persons he had to deal with. He understood at once that vulgar methods would be useless with Monsieur de Lamotte, whose appearance and manners indicated both the man of the world and the man of intelligence, and also he had to consider the two priests, who were both observing him attentively. Fearing a false step, he assumed the most simple and insignificant deportment he could, knowing that sooner or later a third person would rehabilitate him in the opinion of those present. Nor did he wait long.

Arrived at the drawing-room, Monsieur de Lamotte requested the company to be seated. Derues acknowledged the courtesy by a bow, and there was a moment of silence, while Edouard and his mother looked at each other and smiled. The silence was broken by Madame de Lamotte.

"Dear Pierre," she said, "you are surprised to see us accompanied by a stranger, but when you hear what he has done for us you will thank me for having induced him to return here with us."

"Allow me," interrupted Derues, "allow me to tell you what happened. The gratitude which madame imagines she owes me causes her to exaggerate a small service which anybody would have been delighted to render."

"No, monsieur; let me tell it."

"Let mamma tell the story," said Edouard.

"What is it, then? What happened?" said Monsieur de Lamotte.

"I am quite ashamed," answered Derues; "but I obey your wishes, madame."

"Yes," replied Madame de Lamotte, "keep your seat, I wish it. Imagine, Pierre, just six days ago, an accident happened to Edouard and me which might have had serious consequences."

"And you never wrote to me, Marie?"

"I should only have made you anxious, and to no purpose. I had some business in one of the most crowded parts of Paris; I took a chair, and Edouard walked beside me. In the rue Beaubourg we were suddenly surrounded by a mob of low people, who were quarrelling. Carriages stopped the way, and the horses of one of these took fright in the confusion and uproar, and bolted, in spite of the coachman's endeavours to keep them in hand. It was a horrible tumult, and I tried to get out of the chair, but at that moment the chairmen were both knocked down, and I fell. It is a miracle I was not crushed. I was dragged insensible from under the horses' feet and carried into the house before which all this took place. There, sheltered in a shop and safe from the crowd which encumbered the doorway, I recovered my senses, thanks to the assistance of Monsieur Derues, who lives there. But that is not all: when I recovered I could not walk, I had been so shaken by the fright, the fall, and the danger I had incurred, and I had to accept his offer of finding me another chair when the crowd should disperse, and meanwhile to take shelter in his rooms with his wife, who showed me the kindest attention."

"Monsieur — " said Monsieur de Lamotte, rising. But his wife stopped him.

"Wait a moment; I have not finished yet. Monsieur Derues came back in an hour, and I was then feeling better; but before, I left I was stupid enough to say that I had been robbed in the confusion; my diamond earrings, which had belonged to my mother, were gone. You cannot imagine the trouble Monsieur Derues took to discover the thief, and all the appeals he made to the police — I was really ashamed!"

Although Monsieur de Lamotte did not yet understand what motive, other than gratitude, had induced his wife to bring this stranger home with her, he again rose from his seat, and going to Derues, held out his hand.

"I understand now the attachment my son shows for you. You are wrong in trying to lessen your good deed in order to escape from our gratitude, Monsieur Derues."

“Monsieur Derues?” inquired the monk.

“Do you know the name, my father?” asked Madame de Lamotte eagerly.

“Edouard had already told me,” said the monk, approaching Derues.

“You live in the, rue Beaubourg, and you are Monsieur Derues, formerly a retail grocer?”

“The same, my brother.”

“Should you require a reference, I can give it. Chance, madame, has made you acquainted with a man whose, reputation for piety and honour is well established; he will permit me to add my praises to yours.”

“Indeed, I do not know how I deserve so much honour.”

“I am, Brother Marchois, of the Camaldulian order. You see that I know you well.”

The monk then proceeded to explain that his community had confided their affairs to Derues’ honesty, he undertaking to dispose of the articles manufactured by the monks in their retreat. He then recounted a number of good actions and of marks of piety, which were heard with pleasure and admiration by those present. Derues received this cloud of incense with an appearance of sincere modesty and humility, which would have deceived the most skilful physiognomist.

When the eulogistic warmth of the good brother began to slacken it was already nearly dark, and the two priests had barely time to regain the presbytery without incurring the risk of breaking their necks in the rough road which led to it. They departed at once, and a room was got ready for Derues.

“To-morrow,” said Madame de Lamotte as they separated, “you can discuss with my husband the business on which you came: to-morrow, or another day, for I beg that you will make yourself at home here, and the longer you will stay the better it will please us.”

The night was a sleepless one for Derues, whose brain was occupied by a confusion of criminal plans. The chance which had caused his acquaintance with Madame de Lamotte, and even more the accident of Brother Marchois appearing in the nick of time, to enlarge upon the praises which gave him so excellent a character, seemed like favourable omens not to be neglected. He began to imagine fresh villanies, to outline an unheard-of crime, which as yet he could not definitely trace out; but anyhow there would be plunder to seize and blood to spill, and the spirit of murder excited and kept him awake, just as remorse might have troubled the repose of another.

Meanwhile Madame de Lamotte, having retired with her husband, was saying to the latter —

“Well, now! what do you think of my protege, or rather, of the protector which Heaven sent me?”

“I think that physiognomy is often very deceptive, for I should have been quite willing to hang him on the strength of his.”

“It is true that his appearance is not attractive, and it led me into a foolish mistake which I quickly regretted. When I recovered consciousness, and saw him attending on me, much worse and more carelessly dressed than he is to-day.”

“You were frightened?”

“No, not exactly; but I thought I must be indebted to a man of the lowest class, to some poor fellow who was really starving, and my first effort at gratitude was to offer him a piece of gold.”

“Did he refuse it?”

“No; he accepted it for the poor of the parish. Then he told me his name, Cyrano Derues de Bury, and told me that the shop and the goods it contained were his own property, and that he occupied an apartment in the house. I floundered in excuses, but he replied that he blessed the mistake, inasmuch as it would enable him to relieve some unfortunate people. I was so touched with his goodness that I offered him a second piece of gold.”

“You were quite right, my dear; but what induced you to bring him to Buisson? I should have gone to see and thank him the first time I went to Paris, and meanwhile a letter would have been sufficient. Did he carry his complaisance and interest so far as to offer you his escort?”

“Ah! I see you cannot get over your first impression — honestly, is it not so?”

“Indeed,” exclaimed Monsieur de Lamotte, laughing heartily, “it is truly unlucky for a decent man to have such a face as that! He ought to give Providence no rest until he obtains the gift of another countenance.”

“Always these prejudices! It is not the poor man’s fault that he was born like that.”

“Well, you said something about business we were to discuss together — what is it?”

“I believe he can help us to obtain the money we are in want of.”

“And who told him that we wanted any?”

“I did.”

"You! Come, it certainly seems that this gentleman is to be a family friend. And pray what induced you to confide in him to this extent?"

"You would have known by now, if you did not interrupt. Let me tell you all in order. The day after my accident I went out with Edouard about midday, and I went to again express my gratitude for his kindness. I was received by Madame Derues, who told me her husband was out, and that he had gone to my hotel to inquire after me and my son, and also to see if anything had been heard of my stolen earrings. She appeared a simple and very ordinary sort of person, and she begged me to sit down and wait for her husband. I thought it would be uncivil not to do so, and Monsieur Derues appeared in about two hours. The first thing he did, after having saluted me and inquired most particularly after my health, was to ask for his children, two charming little things, fresh and rosy, whom he covered with kisses. We talked about indifferent matters, then he offered me his services, placed himself at my disposal, and begged me to spare neither his time nor his trouble. I then told him what had brought me to Paris, and also the disappointments I had encountered, for of all the people I had seen not one had given me a favourable answer. He said that he might possibly be of some use to me, and the very next day told 'me that he had seen a capitalist, but could do nothing without more precise information. Then I thought it might be better to bring him here, so that he might talk matters over with you. When I first asked him, he refused altogether, and only yielded to my earnest entreaties and Edouard's. This is the history, dear, of the circumstances under which I made Monsieur Derues' acquaintance. I hope you do not think I have acted foolishly?"

"Very well," said Monsieur de Lamotte, "I will talk to him to-morrow, and in any case I promise you I will be civil to him. I will not forget that he has been useful to you." With which promise the conversation came to a close.

Skilled in assuming any kind of mask and in playing every sort of part, Derues did not find it difficult to overcome Monsieur de Lamotte's prejudices, and in order to obtain the goodwill of the father he made a skilful use of the friendship which the, son had formed with him. One can hardly think that he already meditated the crime which he carried out later; one prefers to believe that these atrocious plots were not invented so long beforehand. But he was already a prey to the idea, and nothing henceforth could turn him from it. By what route he should arrive at the distant goal which his greed foresaw, he knew not as yet, but he had said to himself, “One day this property shall be mine.” It was the death-warrant of those who owned it.

We have no details, no information as to Derues’ first visit to Buisson-Souef, but when he departed he had obtained the complete confidence of the family, and a regular correspondence was carried on between him and the Lamottes. It was thus that he was able to exercise his talent of forgery, and succeeded in imitating the writing of this unfortunate lady so as to be able even to deceive her husband. Several months passed, and none of the hopes which Derues had inspired were realised; a loan was always on the point of being arranged, and regularly failed because of some unforeseen circumstance. These pretended negotiations were managed by Derues with so much skill and cunning that instead of being suspected, he was pitied for having so much useless trouble. Meanwhile, Monsieur de Lamotte’s money difficulties increased, and the sale of Buisson-Souef became inevitable. Derues offered himself as a purchaser, and actually acquired the property by private contract, dated December, 1775. It was agreed between the parties that the purchase-money of one hundred and thirty thousand livres should not be paid until 1776, in order to allow Derues to collect the various sums at his disposal. It was an important purchase, which, he said, he only made on account of his interest in Monsieur de Lamotte, and his wish to put an end to the latter’s difficulties.

But when the period agreed on arrived, towards the middle of 1776, Derues found it impossible to pay. It is certain that he never meant to do so; and a special peculiarity of this dismal story is the avarice of the man, the passion for money which overruled all his actions, and occasionally caused him to neglect necessary prudence. Enriched by three bankruptcies, by continual thefts, by usury, the gold he acquired promptly seemed to disappear. He stuck at nothing to obtain it, and once in his grasp, he never let it go again. Frequently he risked the loss of his character for honest dealing rather than relinquish a fraction of his wealth. According to many credible people, it was generally believed by his contemporaries that this monster possessed treasures which he had buried in the ground, the hiding-place of which no one knew, not even his wife. Perhaps it is only a vague and unfounded rumour, which should be rejected; or is it; perhaps, a truth which failed to reveal itself? It would be strange if after the lapse of half a century the hiding-place were to open and give up the fruit of his rapine.

Who knows whether some of this treasure, accidentally discovered, may not have founded fortunes whose origin is unknown, even to their possessors?

Although it was of the utmost importance not to arouse Monsieur de Lamotte's suspicions just at the moment when he ought to be paying him so large a sum, Derues was actually at this time being sued by his creditors. But in those days ordinary lawsuits had no publicity; they struggled and died between the magistrates and advocates without causing any sound. In order to escape the arrest and detention with which he was threatened, he took refuge at Buisson-Souef with his family, and remained there from Whitsuntide till the end of November. After being treated all this time as a friend, Derues departed for Paris, in order, he said, to receive an inheritance which would enable him to pay the required purchase-money.

This pretended inheritance was that of one of his wife's relations, Monsieur Despeignes-Duplessis, who had been murdered in his country house, near Beauvais. It has been strongly suspected that Derues was guilty of this crime. There are, however, no positive proofs, and we prefer only to class it as a simple possibility.

Derues had made formal promises to Monsieur de Lamotte, and it was no longer possible for him to elude them. Either the payment must now be made, or the contract annulled. A new correspondence began between the creditors and the debtor; friendly letters were exchanged, full of protestations on one side and confidence on the other. But all Derues' skill could only obtain a delay of a few months. At length Monsieur de Lamotte, unable to leave Buisson-Souef himself, on account of important business which required his presence, gave his wife a power of attorney, consented to another separation, and sent her to Paris, accompanied by Edouard, and as if to hasten their misfortunes, sent notice of their coming to the expectant murderer.

We have passed quickly over the interval between the first meeting of Monsieur de Lamotte and Derues, and the moment when the victims fell into the trap: we might easily have invented long conversations, and episodes which would have brought Derues' profound hypocrisy into greater relief; but the reader now knows all that we care to show him. We have purposely lingered in our narration in the endeavour to explain the perversities of this mysterious organisation; we have over-loaded it with all the facts which seem to throw any light upon this sombre character. But now, after these long preparations, the drama opens, the scenes become rapid and lifelike; events, long impeded, accumulate and pass quickly before us, the action is connected and hastens to an end. We shall see Derues like an unwearied Proteus, changing names, costumes, language, multiplying himself in many forms, scattering deceptions and lies from one end of France to the other; and finally, after so many efforts, such prodigies of calculation and activity, end by wrecking himself against a corpse.

The letter written at Buisson-Souef arrived at Paris the morning of the 14th of December. In the course of the day an unknown man presented himself at the hotel where Madame de Lamotte and her son had stayed before, and inquired what rooms were vacant. There were four, and he engaged them for a certain Dumoulin, who had arrived that morning from Bordeaux, and who had passed through Paris in order to meet, at some little distance, relations who would return with him. A part of the rent was paid in advance, and it was expressly stipulated that until his return the rooms should not be let to anyone, as the aforesaid Dumoulin might return with his family and require them at any moment. The same person went to other hotels in the neighbourhood and engaged vacant rooms, sometimes for a stranger he expected, sometimes for friends whom he could not accommodate himself.

At about three o’clock, the Place de Greve was full of people, thousands of heads crowded the windows of the surrounding houses. A parricide was to pay the penalty of his crime — a crime committed under atrocious circumstances, with an unheard-of refinement of barbarity. The punishment corresponded to the crime: the wretched man was broken on the wheel. The most complete and terrible silence prevailed in the multitude eager for ghastly emotions. Three times already had been heard the heavy thud of the instrument which broke the victim’s limbs, and a loud cry escaped the sufferer which made all who heard it shudder with horror, One man only, who, in spite of all his efforts, could not get through the crowd and cross the square, remained unmoved, and looking contemptuously towards the criminal, muttered, “Idiot! he was unable to deceive anyone!”

A few moments later the flames began to rise from the funeral pile, the crowd began to move, and the than was able to make his way through and reach one of the streets leading out of the square.

The sky was overcast, and the grey daylight hardly penetrated the narrow lane, hideous and gloomy as the name it bore, and which; only a few years ago, still wound like a long serpent through the mire of this quarter. Just then it was deserted, owing to the attraction of the execution close by. The man who had just left the square proceeded slowly, attentively reading all the inscriptions on the doors. He stopped at Number 75, where on the threshold of a shop sat a stout woman busily knitting, over whom one read in big yellow letters, “Widow Masson.” He saluted the woman, and asked —

“Is there not a cellar to let in this house?”

“There is, master,” answered the widow.

“Can I speak to the owner?”

“And that is myself, by your leave.”

“Will you show me the cellar? I am a provincial wine merchant, my business often brings me to Paris, and I want a cellar where I could deposit wine which I sell on commission.”

They went down together. After examining the place, and ascertaining that it was not too damp for the expensive wine which he wished to leave there, the man agreed about the rent, paid the first term in advance, and was entered on the widow Masson’s books under the name of Ducoudray. It is hardly necessary to remark that it should have been Derues.

When he returned home in the evening, his wife told him that a large box had arrived.

“It is all right,” he said, “the carpenter from whom I ordered it is a man of his word.” Then he supped, and caressed his children. The next day being Sunday, he received the communion, to the great edification of the devout people of the neighbourhood.

On Monday the 16th Madame de Lamotte and Edouard, descending from the Montereau stagecoach, were met by Derues and his wife.

“Did my husband write to you, Monsieur Derues?” inquired Madame de Lamotte.

“Yes, madame, two days ago; and I have arranged our dwelling for your reception.”

“What! but did not Monsieur de Lamotte ask you to engage the rooms I have had before at the Hotel de France?”

“He did not say so, and if that was your idea I trust you will change it. Do not deprive me of the pleasure of offering you the hospitality which for so long I have accepted from you. Your room is quite ready, also one for this dear boy,” and so saying he took Edouard’s hand; “and I am sure if you ask his opinion, he will say you had better be content to stay with me.”

“Undoubtedly,” said the boy; “and I do not see why there need be any hesitation between friends.”

Whether by accident, or secret presentiment, or because she foresaw a possibility of business discussions between them, Madame de Lamotte objected to this arrangement. Derues having a business appointment which he was bound to keep, desired his wife to accompany the Lamottes to the Hotel de France, and in case of their not being able to find rooms there, mentioned three others as the only ones in the quarter where they could be comfortably accommodated. Two hours later Madame de Lamotte and her son returned to his house in the rue Beaubourg.

The house which Derues occupied stood opposite the rue des Menoriers, and was pulled down quite lately to make way for the rue Rambuteau. In 1776 it was one of the finest houses of the rue Beaubourg, and it required a certain income to be able to live there, the rents being tolerably high. A large arched doorway gave admittance to a passage, lighted at the other end by a small court, on the far side of which was the shop into which Madame de Lamotte had been taken on the occasion of the accident. The house staircase was to the right of the passage; and the Derues’ dwelling on the entresol. The first room, lighted by a window looking into the court, was used as a dining room, and led into a simply furnished sitting-room, such as was generally found among the bourgeois and tradespeople of this period. To the right of the sitting-room was a large closet, which could serve as a small study or could hold a bed; to the left was a door opening into the Derues’ bedroom, which had been prepared for Madame de Lamotte. Madame Derues would occupy one of the two beds which stood in the alcove. Derues had a bed made up in the sitting-room, and Edouard was accommodated in the little study.

Nothing particular happened during the first few days which followed the Lamottes’ arrival. They had not come to Paris only on account of the Buisson-Souef affairs. Edouard was nearly sixteen, and after much hesitation his parents had decided on placing him in some school where his hitherto neglected education might receive more attention. Derues undertook to find a capable tutor, in whose house the boy would be brought up in the religious feeling which the cure of Buisson and his own exhortations had already tended to develop. These proceedings, added to Madame de Lamotte’s endeavours to collect various sums due to her husband, took some time. Perhaps, when on the point of executing a terrible crime, Derues tried to postpone the fatal moment, although, considering his character, this seems unlikely, for one cannot do him the honour of crediting him with a single moment of remorse, doubt, or pity. Far from it, it appears from all the information which can be gathered, that Derues, faithful to his own traditions, was simply experimenting on his unfortunate guests, for no sooner were they in his house than both began to complain of constant nausea, which they had never suffered from before. While he thus ascertained the strength of their constitution, he was able, knowing the cause of the malady, to give them relief, so that Madame de Lamotte, although she grew daily weaker, had so much confidence in him as to think it unnecessary to call in a doctor. Fearing to alarm her husband, she never mentioned her sufferings, and her letters only spoke of the care and kind attention which she received.

On the 15th of January, 1777, Edouard was placed in a school in the rue de l’Homme Arme. His mother never saw him again. She went out once more to place her husband’s power of attorney with a lawyer in the rue de Paon. On her return she felt so weak and broken-down that she was obliged to go to bed and remain there for several days. On January 29th the unfortunate lady had risen, and was sitting near the window which overlooked the deserted rue des Menetriers, where clouds of snow were drifting before the wind. Who can guess the sad thoughts which may have possessed her? — all around dark, cold, and silent, tending to produce painful depression and involuntary dread. To escape the gloomy ideas which besieged her, her mind went back to the smiling times of her youth and marriage. She recalled the time when, alone at Buisson during her husband’s enforced absences, she wandered with her child in the cool and shaded walks of the park, and sat out in the evening, inhaling the scent of the flowers, and listening to the murmur of the water, or the sound of the whispering breeze in the leaves. Then, coming back from these sweet recollections to reality, she shed tears, and called on her husband and son. So deep was her reverie that she did not hear the room door open, did not perceive that darkness had come on. The light of a candle, dispersing the shadows, made her start; she turned her head, and saw Derues coming towards her. He smiled, and she made an effort to keep back the tears which were shining in her eyes, and to appear calm.

“I am afraid I disturb you,” he said. “I came to ask a favour, madame.”

“What is it, Monsieur Derues?” she inquired.

“Will you allow me to have a large chest brought into this room? I ought to pack some valuable things in it which are in my charge, and are now in this cupboard. I am afraid it will be in your way.”

“Is it not your own house, and is it not rather I who am in the way and a cause of trouble? Pray have it brought in, and try to forget that I am here. You are most kind to me, but I wish I could spare you all this trouble and that I were fit to go back to Buisson. I had a letter from my husband yesterday — — ”

“We will talk about that presently, if you wish it,” said Derues. “I will go and fetch the servant to help me to carry in this chest. I have put it off hitherto, but it really must be sent in three days.”

He went away, and returned in a few minutes. The chest was carried in, and placed before the cupboard at the foot of the bed. Alas! the poor lady little thought it was her own coffin which stood before her!

The maid withdrew, and Derues assisted Madame de Lamotte to a seat near the fire, which he revived with more fuel. He sat down opposite to her, and by the feeble light of the candle placed on a small table between them could contemplate at leisure the ravages wrought by poison on her wasted features.

“I saw your son to-day,” he said: “he complains that you neglect him, and have not seen him for twelve days. He does not know you have been ill, nor did I tell him. The dear boy! he loves you so tenderly.”

“And I also long to see him. My friend, I cannot tell you what terrible presentiments beset me; it seems as if I were threatened with some great misfortune; and just now, when you came in, I could think only of death. What is the cause of this languor and weakness? It is surely no temporary ailment. Tell me the truth: am I not dreadfully altered? and do you not think my husband will be shocked when he sees me like this?”

“You are unnecessarily anxious,” replied Derues; “it is rather a failing of yours. Did I not see you last year tormenting yourself about Edouard’s health, when he was not even thinking of being ill? I am not so soon alarmed. My own old profession, and that of chemistry, which I studied in my youth, have given me some acquaintance with medicine. I have frequently been consulted, and have prescribed for patients whose condition was supposed to be desperate, and I can assure you I have never seen a better and stronger constitution than yours. Try to calm yourself, and do not call up chimeras; because a mind at ease is the greatest enemy of illness. This depression will pass, and then you will regain your strength.”

“May God grant it! for I feel weaker every day.”

“We have still some business to transact together. The notary at Beauvais writes that the difficulties which prevented his paying over the inheritance of my wife’s relation, Monsieur Duplessis, have mostly disappeared. I have a hundred thousand livres at my disposal, — that is to say, at yours, — and in a month at latest I shall be able to pay off my debt. You ask me to be sincere,” he continued, with a tinge of reproachful irony; “be sincere in your turn, madame, and acknowledge that you and your husband have both felt uneasy, and that the delays I have been obliged to ask for have not seemed very encouraging to you?”

“It is true,” she replied; “but we never questioned your good faith.”

“And you were right. One is not always able to carry out one’s intentions; events can always upset our calculations; but what really is in our power is the desire to do right — to be honest; and I can say that I never intentionally wronged anyone. And now. I am happy in being able to fulfil my promises to you. I trust when I am the owner of Buisson-Souef you will not feel obliged to leave it.”

“Thank you; I should like to come occasionally, for all my happy recollections are connected with it. Is it necessary for me to accompany you to Beauvais?”

“Why should you not? The change would do you good.”

She looked up at him and smiled sadly. “I am not in a fit state to undertake it.”

“Not if you imagine that you are unable, certainly. Come, have you any confidence in me?”

“The most complete confidence, as you know.”

“Very well, then: trust to my care. This very evening I will prepare a draught for you to take to-morrow morning, and I will even now fix the duration of this terrible malady which frightens you so much. In two days I shall fetch Edouard from his school to celebrate the beginning of your convalescence, and we will start, at latest, on February 1st. You are astonished at what I say, but you shall see if I am not a good doctor, and much cleverer than many who pass for such merely because the have obtained a diploma.”

“Then, doctor, I will place myself in your hands.”

“Remember what I say. You will leave this on February 1st.”

“To begin this cure, can you ensure my sleeping to-night?”

“Certainly. I will go now, and send my wife to you. She will bring a draught, which you must promise to take.”

“I will exactly follow your prescriptions. Goodnight, my friend.”

“Good-night, madame; and take courage”; and bowing low, he left the room.

The rest of the evening was spent in preparing the fatal medicine. The next morning, an hour or two after Madame de Lamotte had swallowed it, the maid who had given it to her came and told Derues the invalid was sleeping very heavily and snoring, and asked if she ought to be awoke. He went into the room, and, opening the curtains, approached the bed. He listened for some time, and recognised that the supposed snoring was really he death-rattle. He sent the servant off into the country with a letter to one of his friends, telling her not to return until the Monday following, February 3rd. He also sent away his wife, on some unknown pretext, and remained alone with his victim.

So terrible a situation ought to have troubled the mind of the most hardened criminal. A man familiar with murder and accustomed to shed blood might have felt his heart sink, and, in the absence of pity, might have experienced disgust at the sight of this prolonged and useless torture; but Derues, calm and easy, as if unconscious of evil, sat coolly beside the bed, as any doctor might have done. From time to time he felt the slackening pulse, and looked at the glassy and sightless eyes which turned in their orbits, and he saw without terror the approach of night, which rendered this awful ‘tete-a-tete’ even more horrible. The most profound silence reigned in the house, the street was deserted, and the only sound heard was caused by an icy rain mixed with snow driven against the glass, and occasionally the howl of the wind, which penetrated the chimney and scattered the ashes. A single candle placed behind the curtains lighted this dismal scene, and the irregular flicker of its flame cast weird reflections and dancing shadows an the walls of the alcove. There came a lull in the wind, the rain ceased, and during this instant of calm someone knocked, at first gently, and then sharply, at the outer door. Derues dropped the dying woman’s hand and bent forward to listen. The knock was repeated, and he grew pale. He threw the sheet, as if it were a shroud, over his victim’s head drew the curtains of the alcove, and went to the door. “Who is there?” he inquired.

“Open, Monsieur Derues,” said a voice which he recognised as that of a woman of Chartres whose affairs he managed, and who had entrusted him with sundry deeds in order that he might receive the money due to her. This woman had begun to entertain doubts as to Derues’ honesty, and as she was leaving Paris the next day, had resolved to get the papers out of his hands.

“Open the door,” she repeated. “Don’t you know my voice?”

“I am sorry I cannot let you in. My servant is out: she has taken the key and locked the door outside.”

“You must let me in,” the woman continued; “it is absolutely necessary I should speak to you.”

“Come to-morrow.”

“I leave Paris to-morrow, and I must have those papers to-night.”

He again refused, but she spoke firmly and decidedly. “I must come in. The porter said you were all out, but, from the rue des Menetriers I could see the light in your room. My brother is with me, and I left him below. I shall call him if you don’t open the door.”

“Come in, then,” said Derues; “your papers are in the sitting-room. Wait here, and I will fetch them.” The woman looked at him and took his hand. “Heavens! how pale you are! What is the matter?”

“Nothing is the matter: will you wait here? “But she would not release his arm, and followed him into the sitting-room, where Derues began to seek hurriedly among the various papers which covered a table. “Here they are,” he said; “now you can go.”

“Really,” said the woman, examining her deeds carefully, “never yet did I see you in such a hurry to give up things which don’t belong to you. But do hold that candle steadily; your hand is shaking so that I cannot see to read.”

At that moment the silence which prevailed all round was broken by a cry of anguish, a long groan proceeding from the chamber to the right of the sitting-room.

“What is that?” cried the woman. “Surely it is a dying person!”

The sense of the danger which threatened made Derues pull himself together. “Do not be alarmed,” he said. “My wife has been seized with a violent fever; she is quite delirious now, and that is why I told the porter to let no one come up.”

But the groans in the next room continued, and the unwelcome visitor, overcome by terror which she could neither surmount nor explain, took a hasty leave, and descended the staircase with all possible rapidity. As soon as he could close the door, Derues returned to the bedroom.

Nature frequently collects all her expiring strength at the last moment of existence. The unhappy lady struggled beneath her coverings; the agony she suffered had given her a convulsive energy, and inarticulate sounds proceeded from her mouth. Derues approached and held her on the bed. She sank back on the pillow, shuddering convulsively, her hands plucking and twisting the sheets, her teeth chattering and biting the loose hair which fell over her face and shoulders. “Water! water!” she cried; and then, “Edouard, — my husband! — Edouard! — is it you?” Then rising with a last effort, she seized her murderer by the arm, repeating, “Edouard! — oh!” and then fell heavily, dragging Derues down with her. His face was against hers; he raised his head, but the dying hand, clenched in agony, had closed upon him like a vise. The icy fingers seemed made of iron and could not be opened, as though the victim had seized on her assassin as a prey, and clung to the proof of his crime.

Derues at last freed himself, and putting his hand on her heart, “It is over,” he remarked; “she has been a long time about it. What o’clock is it? Nine! She has struggled against death for twelve hours!”

While the limbs still retained a little warmth, he drew the feet together, crossed the hands on the breast, and placed the body in the chest. When he had locked it up, he remade the bed, undressed himself, and slept comfortably in the other one.

The next day, February 1st, the day he had fixed for the “going out” of Madame de Lamotte, he caused the chest to be placed on a hand-cart and carried at about ten o’clock in the morning to the workshop of a carpenter of his acquaintance called Mouchy, who dwelt near the Louvre. The two commissionaires employed had been selected in distant quarters, and did not know each other. They were well paid, and each presented with a bottle of wine. These men could never be traced. Derues requested the carpenter’s wife to allow the chest to remain in the large workshop, saying he had forgotten something at his own house, and would return to fetch it in three hours. But, instead of a few hours, he left it for two whole days — why, one does not know, but it may be supposed that he wanted the time to dig a trench in a sort of vault under the staircase leading to the cellar in the rue de la Mortellerie. Whatever the cause, the delay might have been fatal, and did occasion an unforeseen encounter which nearly betrayed him. But of all the actors in this scene he alone knew the real danger he incurred, and his coolness never deserted him for a moment.

The third day, as he walked alongside the handcart on which the chest was being conveyed, he was accosted at Saint Germain l'Auxerrois by a creditor who had obtained a writ of execution against him, and at the imperative sign made by this man the porter stopped. The creditor attacked Derues violently, reproaching him for his bad faith in language which was both energetic and uncomplimentary; to which the latter replied in as conciliatory a manner as he could assume. But it was impossible to silence the enemy, and an increasing crowd of idlers began to assemble round them.

"When will you pay me?" demanded the creditor. "I have an execution against you. What is there in that box? Valuables which you cart away secretly, in order to laugh at my just claims, as you did two years ago?"

Derues shuddered all over; he exhausted himself in protestations; but the other, almost beside himself, continued to shout.

"Oh!" he said, turning to the crowd, "all these tricks and grimaces and signs of the cross are no good. I must have my money, and as I know what his promises are worth, I will pay myself! Come, you knave, make haste. Tell me what there is in that box; open it, or I will fetch the police."

The crowd was divided between the creditor and debtor, and possibly a free fight would have begun, but the general attention was distracted by the arrival of another spectator. A voice heard above all the tumult caused a score of heads to turn, it was the voice of a woman crying:

"The abominable history of Leroi de Valine, condemned to death at the age of sixteen for having poisoned his entire family!"

Continually crying her wares, the drunken, staggering woman approached the crowd, and striking out right and left with fists and elbows, forced her way to Derues.

"Ah! ah!" said she, after looking him well over, "is it you, my gossip Derues! Have you again a little affair on hand like the one when you set fire to your shop in the rue Saint-Victor?"

Derues recognised the hawker who had abused him on the threshold of his shop some years previously, and whom he had never seen since. "Yes, yes," she continued, "you had better look at me with your little round cat's eyes. Are you going to say you don't know me?"

Derues appealed to his creditor. “You see,” he said, “to what insults you are exposing me. I do not know this woman who abuses me.”

“What! — you don’t know me! You who accused me of being a thief! But luckily the Maniffets have been known in Paris as honest people for generations, while as for you — — ”

“Sir,” said Derues, “this case contains valuable wine which I am commissioned to sell. To-morrow I shall receive the money for it; to-morrow, in the course of the day, I will pay what I owe you. But I am waited for now, do not in Heaven’s name detain me longer, and thus deprive me of the means of paying at all.”

“Don’t believe him, my good man,” said the hawker; “lying comes natural to him always.”

“Sir, I promise on my oath you shall be paid tomorrow; you had better trust the word of an honest man rather than the ravings of a drunken woman.”

The creditor still hesitated, but, another person now spoke in Derues’ favour; it was the carpenter Mouchy, who had inquired the cause of the quarrel.

“For God’s sake,” he exclaimed, “let the gentleman go on. That chest came from my workshop, and I know there is wine inside it; he told my wife so two days ago.”

“Will you be surety for me, my friend?” asked Derues.

“Certainly I will; I have not known you for ten years in order to leave you in trouble and refuse to answer for you. What the devil are respectable people to be stopped like this in a public place? Come, sir, believe his word, as I do.”

After some more discussion, the porter was at last allowed to proceed with his hand-cart. The hawker wanted to interfere, but Mouchy warned her off and ordered her to be silent. “Ah! ah!” she cried, “what does it matter to me? Let him sell his wine if he can; I shall not drink any on his premises. This is the second time he has found a surety to my knowledge; the beggar must have some special secret for encouraging the growth of fools. Good-bye, gossip Derues; you know I shall be selling your history some day. Meanwhile — —

“The abominable history of Leroi de Valine, condemned to death at the age of sixteen for having poisoned his entire family!”

Whilst she amused the people by her grimaces and grotesque gestures, and while Mouchy held forth to some of them, Derues made his escape. Several times between Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois and the rue de la Mortellerie he nearly fainted, and was obliged to stop. While the danger lasted, he had had sufficient self-control to confront it coolly, but now that he calculated the depth of the abyss which for a moment had opened beneath his feet, dizziness laid hold on him.

Other precautions now became necessary. His real name had been mentioned before the commissionaire, and the widow Masson, who owned the cellar, only knew him as Ducoudray. He went on in front, asked for the keys, which till then had been left with her, and the chest was got downstairs without any awkward questions. Only the porter seemed astonished that this supposed wine, which was to be sold immediately, should be put in such a place, and asked if he might come the next day and move it again. Derues replied that someone was coming for it that very day. This question, and the disgraceful scene which the man had witnessed, made it necessary to get rid of him without letting him see the pit dug under the staircase. Derues tried to drag the chest towards the hole, but all his strength was insufficient to move it. He uttered terrible imprecations when he recognised his own weakness, and saw that he would be obliged to bring another stranger, an informer perhaps, into this charnel-house, where; as yet, nothing betrayed his crimes. No sooner escaped from one peril than he encountered another, and already he had to struggle against his own deeds. He measured the length of the trench, it was too short. Derues went out and repaired to the place where he had hired the labourer who had dug it out, but he could not find the man, whom he had only seen once, and whose name he did not know. Two whole days were spent in this fruitless search, but on the third, as he was wandering on one of the quays at the time labourers were to be found there, a mason, thinking he was looking for someone, inquired what he wanted. Derues looked well at the man, and concluding from his appearance that he was probably rather simpleminded, asked —

“Would you like to earn a crown of three livres by an easy job?”

“What a question, master!” answered the mason. “Work is so scarce that I am going back into the country this very evening.”

“Very well! Bring your tools, spade, and pickaxe, and follow me.”

They both went down to the cellar, and the mason was ordered to dig out the pit till it was five and a half feet deep. While the man worked, Derues sat beside the chest and read. When it was half done, the mason stopped for breath, and leaning on his spade, inquired why he wanted a trench of such a depth. Derues, who had probably foreseen the question, answered at once, without being disconcerted —

"I want to bury some bottled wine which is contained in this case."

"Wine!" said the other. "Ah! you are laughing at me, because you think I look a fool! I never yet heard of such a recipe for improving wine."

"Where do you come from?"

"D'Alencon."

"Cider drinker! You were brought up in Normandy, that is clear. Well, you can learn from me, Jean-Baptiste Ducoudray, a wine grower of Tours, and a wine merchant for the last ten years, that new wine thus buried for a year acquires the quality and characteristics of the oldest brands."

"It is possible," said the mason, again taking his spade, "but all the same it seems a little odd to me."

When he had finished, Derues asked him to help to drag the chest alongside the trench, so that it might be easier to take out the bottles and arrange them: The mason agreed, but when he moved the chest the foetid odour which proceeded from it made him draw back, declaring that a smell such as that could not possibly proceed from wine. Derues tried to persuade him that the smell came from drains under the cellar, the pipe of which could be seen. It appeared to satisfy him, and he again took hold of the chest, but immediately let it go again, and said positively that he could not execute Derues' orders, being convinced that the chest must contain a decomposing corpse. Then Derues threw himself at the man's feet and acknowledged that it was the dead body of a woman who had unfortunately lodged in his house, and who had died there suddenly from an unknown malady, and that, dreading lest he should be accused of having murdered her, he had decided to conceal the death and bury her here.

The mason listened, alarmed at this confidence, and not knowing whether to believe it or not. Derues sobbed and wept at his feet, beat his breast and tore out his hair, calling on God and the saints as witnesses of his good faith and his innocence. He showed the book he was reading while the mason excavated: it was the Seven Penitential Psalms. "How unfortunate I am!" he cried. "This woman died in my house, I assure you — died suddenly, before

I could call a doctor. I was alone; I might have been accused, imprisoned, perhaps condemned for a crime I did not commit. Do not ruin me! You leave Paris to-night, you need not be uneasy; no one would know that I employed you, if this unhappy affair should ever be discovered. I do not know your name, I do not wish to know it, and I tell you mine, it is Ducoudray. I give myself up to you, but have some pity! — if not for me, yet for my wife and my two little children — for these poor creatures whose only support I am!"

Seeing that the mason was touched, Derues opened the chest.

"Look," he said, "examine the body of this woman, does it show any mark of violent death? My God!" he continued, joining his hands and in tones of despairing agony, — "my God, Thou who readest all hearts, and who knowest my innocence, canst Thou not ordain a miracle to save an honest man? Wilt Thou not command this dead body to bear witness for me?"

The mason was stupefied by this flow of language. Unable to restrain his tears, he promised to keep silence, persuaded that Derues was innocent, and that appearances only were against him. The latter, moreover, did not neglect other means of persuasion; he handed the mason two gold pieces, and between them they buried the body of Madame de Lamotte.

However extraordinary this fact, which might easily be supposed imaginary, may appear, it certainly happened. In the examination at his trial. Derues himself revealed it, repeating the story which had satisfied the mason. He believed that this man had denounced him: he was mistaken, for this confidant of his crime, who might have been the first to put justice on his track, never reappeared, and but for Derues' acknowledgment his existence would have remained unknown.

This first deed accomplished, another victim was already appointed. Trembling at first as to the consequences of his forced confession, Derues waited some days, paying, however, his creditor as promised. He redoubles his demonstrations of piety, he casts a furtive glance on everyone he meets, seeking for some expression of distrust. But no one avoids him, or points him out with a raised finger, or whispers on seeing him; everywhere he encounters the customary expression of goodwill. Nothing has changed; suspicion passes over his head without alighting there. He is reassured, and resumes his work. Moreover, had he wished to remain passive, he could not have done so; he was now compelled to follow that fatal law of crime which demands that blood must be effaced with blood, and which is compelled to appeal again to death in order to stifle the accusing voice already issuing from the tomb.

Edouard de Lamotte, loving his mother as much as she loved him, became uneasy at receiving no visits, and was astonished at this sudden indifference. Derues wrote to him as follows:

"I have at length some good news for you, my dear boy, but you must not tell your mother I have betrayed her secret; she would scold me, because she is planning a surprise for you, and the various steps and care necessary in arranging this important matter have caused her absence. You were to know nothing until the 11th or 12th of this month, but now that all is settled, I should blame myself if I prolonged the uncertainty in which you have been left, only you must promise me to look as much astonished as possible. Your mother, who only lives for you, is going to present you with the greatest gift a youth of your age can receive — that of liberty. Yes, dear boy, we thought we had discovered that you have no very keen taste for study, and that a secluded life will suit neither your character nor your health. In saying this I utter no reproach, for every man is born with his own decided tastes, and the way to success and happiness is-often-to allow him to follow these instincts. We have had long discussions on this subject — your mother and I — and we have thought much about your future; she has at last come to a decision, and for the last ten days has been at Versailles, endeavouring to obtain your admission as a royal page. Here is the mystery, this is the reason which has kept her from you, and as she knew you would hear it with delight, she wished to have the pleasure of telling you herself. Therefore, once again, when you see her, which will be very soon, do not let her see I have told you; appear to be greatly surprised. It is true that I am asking you to tell a lie, but it is a very innocent one, and its good intention will counteract its sinfulness — may God grant we never have worse upon our consciences! Thus, instead of lessons and the solemn precepts of your tutors, instead of a monotonous school-life, you are going to enjoy your liberty; also the pleasures of the court and the world. All that rather alarms me, and I ought to confess that I at first opposed this plan. I begged your mother to reflect, to consider that in this new existence you would run great risk of losing the religious feeling which inspires you, and which I have had the happiness, during my sojourn at Buisson-Souef, of further developing in your mind. I still recall with emotion your fervid and sincere aspirations towards the Creator when you approached the Sacred Table for the first time, and when, kneeling beside you, and envying the purity of heart and innocence of soul which appeared to animate your countenance as with a divine radiance, I besought God that, in default of my own virtue, the love for heavenly Truth with which I have inspired you might be reckoned to my account. Your piety is my work, Edouard, and I defended it against your mother's plans; but she replied that in every career a man is master of his own good or evil actions; and as I have no authority over you, and friendship only gives me the right to advise, I must give way. If this be your vocation, then follow it.

"My occupations are so numerous (I have to collect from different sources this hundred thousand livres intended to defray the greater part of the Buisson purchase) that I have not a moment in which to come and see you this week. Spend the time in reflection, and write to me fully what you think about this plan. If, like me, you feel any scruples, you must tell them to your mother, who decidedly wants only to make you happy. Speak to me freely, openly. It is arranged that I am to fetch you on the 11th of this month, and escort you to Versailles, where Madame de Lamotte will be waiting to receive you with the utmost tenderness. Adieu, dear boy; write to me. Your father knows nothing as yet; his consent will be asked after your decision."

The answer to this letter did not have to be waited for: it was such as Derues expected; the lad accepted joyfully. The answer was, for the murderer, an arranged plea of defence, a proof which, in a given case, might link the present with the past.

On the morning of February 11th, Shrove Tuesday, he went to fetch the young de Lamotte from his school, telling the master that he was desired by the youth's mother to conduct him to Versailles. But, instead, he took him to his own house, saying that he had a letter from Madame de Lamotte asking them not to come till the next day; so they started on Ash Wednesday, Edouard having breakfasted on chocolate. Arrived at Versailles, they stopped at the Fleur-de-lys inn, but there the sickness which the boy had complained of during the journey became very serious, and the innkeeper, having young children, and believing that he recognised symptoms of smallpox, which just then was ravaging Versailles, refused to receive them, saying he had no vacant room. This might have disconcerted anyone but Derues, but his audacity, activity, and resource seemed to increase with each fresh obstacle. Leaving Edouard in a room on the ground floor which had no communication with the rest of the inn, he went at once to look for lodgings, and hastily explored the town. After a fruitless search, he found at last, at the junction of the rue Saint-Honore with that of the Orangerie, a cooper named Martin, who had a furnished room to spare. This he hired at thirty sous per day for himself and his nephew, who had been taken suddenly ill, under the name of Beaupre. To avoid being questioned later, he informed the cooper in a few words that he was a doctor; that he had come to Versailles in order to place his nephew in one of the offices of the town; that in a few days the latter’s mother would arrive to join him in seeing and making application to influential persons about the court, to whom he had letters of introduction. As soon as he had delivered this fable with all the appearance of truth with which he knew so well how to disguise his falsehoods, he went back to the young de Lamotte, who was already so exhausted that he was hardly able to drag himself as far as the cooper’s house. He fainted on arrival, and was carried into the hired room, where Derues begged to be left alone with him, and only asked for certain beverages which he told the people how to prepare.

Whether it was that the strength of youth fought against the poison, or that Derues took pleasure in watching the sufferings of his victim, the agony of the poor lad was prolonged until the fourth day. The sickness continuing incessantly, he sent the cooper’s wife for a medicine which he prepared and administered himself. It produced terrible pain, and Edouard’s cries brought the cooper and his wife upstairs. They represented to Derues that he ought to call in a doctor and consult with him, but he refused decidedly, saying that a doctor hastily fetched might prove to be an ignorant person with whom he could not agree, and that he could not allow one so dear to him to be prescribed for and nursed by anyone but himself.

“I know what the malady is,” he continued, raising his eyes to heaven; “it is one that has to be concealed rather than acknowledged. Poor youth! whom I love as my own son, if God, touched by my tears and thy suffering, permits me to save thee, thy whole life will be too short for thy blessings and thy gratitude!” And as Madame Martin asked what this malady might be, he answered with hypocritical blushes —

“Do not ask, madame; there are things of which you do not know even the name.”

At another time, Martin expressed his surprise that the young man’s mother had not yet appeared, who, according to Derues, was to have met him at Versailles. He asked how she could know that they were lodging in his house, and if he should send to meet her at any place where she was likely to arrive.

“His mother,” said Derues, looking compassionately at Edouard, who lay pale, motionless, and as if insensible, — ”his mother! He calls for her incessantly. Ah! monsieur, some families are greatly to be pitied! My entreaties prevailed on her to decide on coming hither, but will she keep her promise? Do not ask me to tell you more; it is too painful to have to accuse a mother of having forgotten her duties in the presence of her son . . . there are secrets which ought not to be told — unhappy woman!”

Edouard moved, extended his arms, and repeated, “Mother! . . . mother!”

Derues hastened to his side and took his hands in his, as if to warm them.

“My mother!” the youth repeated. “Why have I not seen her? She was to have met me.”

You shall soon see her, dear boy; only keep quiet.”

“But just now I thought she was dead.”

“Dead!” cried Derues. “Drive away these sad thoughts. They are caused by the fever only.”

“No! oh no! . . . I heard a secret voice which said, ‘Thy mother is dead!’ . . . And then I beheld a livid corpse before me . . . It was she! . . . I knew her well! and she seemed to have suffered so much — — ”

“Dear boy, your mother is not dead . . . . My God! what terrible chimeras you conjure up! You will see her again, I assure you; she has arrived already. Is it not so, madame?” he asked, turning towards the Martins, who were both leaning against the foot of the bed, and signing to them to support this pious falsehood, in order to calm the young man. “Did she not arrive and come to his bedside and kiss him while he slept, and she will soon come again?”

“Yes, yes,” said Madame Martin, wiping her eyes; “and she begged my husband and me to help your uncle to take great care of you — ”

The youth moved again, and looking round him with a dazed expression, said, “My uncle — ?”

“You had better go,” said Derues in a whisper to the Martins. “I am afraid he is delirious again; I will prepare a draught, which will give him a little rest and sleep.”

“Adieu, then, adieu,” answered Madame Martin; “and may Heaven bless you for the care you bestow on this poor young man!”

On Friday evening violent vomiting appeared to have benefited the sufferer. He had rejected most of the poison, and had a fairly quiet night. But on the Saturday morning Derues sent the cooper’s little girl to buy more medicine, which he prepared, himself, like the first. The day was horrible, and about six in the evening, seeing his victim was at the last gasp, he opened a little window overlooking the shop and summoned the cooper, requesting him to go at once for a priest. When the latter arrived he found Derues in tears, kneeling at the dying boy’s bedside. And now, by the light of two tapers placed on a table, flanking the holy water-stoup, there began what on one side was an abominable and sacrilegious comedy, a disgraceful parody of that which Christians consider most sacred and most dear; on the other, a pious and consoling ceremony. The cooper and his wife, their eyes bathed in tears, knelt in the middle of the room, murmuring such prayers as they could remember.

Derues gave up his place to the priest, but as Edouard did not answer the latter’s questions, he approached the bed, and bending over the sufferer, exhorted him to confession.

“Dear boy,” he said, “take courage; your sufferings here will be counted to you above: God will weigh ahem in the scales of His infinite mercy. Listen to the words of His holy minister, cast your sins into His bosom, and obtain from Him forgiveness for your faults.”

“I am in such terrible pain!” cried Edouard. “Water! water! Extinguish the fire which consumes me!”

A violent fit came on, succeeded by exhaustion and the death-rattle. Derues fell on his knees, and the priest administered extreme unction. There was then a moment of absolute silence, more impressive than cries and sobs. The priest collected himself for a moment, crossed himself, and began to pray. Derues also crossed himself, and repeated in a low voice, apparently choked by grief

“Go forth, O Christian soul, from this world, in the name of God the Father Almighty, who created thee; in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, who suffered for thee; in the name of the Holy Ghost, who was poured out upon thee.”

The youth struggled in his bed, and a convulsive movement agitated his limbs. Derues continued —

“When thy soul departs from this body may it be admitted to the holy Mountain of Sion, to the Heavenly Jerusalem, to the numerous company of Angels, and to the Church of the First-born, whose names are written in Heaven — — ”

“Mother! . . . My mother!” cried Edouard. Derues resumed —

“Let God arise, and let the Powers of Darkness be dispersed! let the Spirits of Evil, who reign over the air, be put to flight; let them not dare to attack a soul redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ.”

“Amen,” responded the priest and the Martins.

There was another silence, broken only by the stifled sobs of Derues. The priest again crossed himself and took up the prayer.

“We beseech Thee, O beloved and only Son of God, by the merits of Thy sacred Passion, Thy Cross and Thy Death, to deliver this Thy servant from the pains of Hell, and to lead him to that happy place whither Thou didst vouchsafe to lead the thief, who, with Thee, was bound upon the Cross: Thou, who art God, living and reigning with the Father and the Holy Ghost.”

“Amen,” repeated those present. Derues now took up the prayer, and his voice mingled with the dying gasps of the sufferer.

“And there was a darkness over all the earth — —

“To Thee, O Lord, we commend the soul of this Thy servant, that, being dead to the world, he may, live to Thee: and the sins he hath committed through the frailty of his mortal nature, do Thou in Thy most merciful goodness, forgive and wash away. Amen.”

After which all present sprinkled holy water on the body....

When the priest had retired, shown out by Madame Martin, Derues said to her husband —

“This unfortunate young man has died without the consolation of beholding his mother.... His last thought was for her.... There now remains the last duty, a very painful one to accomplish, but my poor nephew imposed it on me. A few hours ago, feeling that his end was near, he asked me, as a last mark of friendship, not to entrust these final duties to the hands of strangers.”

While he applied himself to the necessary work in presence of the cooper, who was much affected by the sight of such sincere and profound affliction, Derues added, sighing —

“I shall always grieve for this dear boy. Alas! that evil living should have caused his early death!”

When he had finished laying out the body, he threw some little packets into the fire which he professed to have found in the youth’s pockets, telling Martin, in order to support this assertion, that they contained drugs suitable to this disgraceful malady.

He spent the night in the room with the corpse, as he had done in the case of Madame de Lamotte, and the next day, Sunday, he sent Martin to the parish church of St. Louis, to arrange for a funeral of the simplest kind; telling him to fill up the certificate in the name of Beaupre, born at Commercy, in Lorraine. He declined himself either to go to the church or to appear at the funeral, saying that his grief was too great. Martin, returning from the funeral, found him engaged in prayer. Derues gave him the dead youth’s clothes and departed, leaving some money to be given to the poor of the parish, and for masses to be said for the repose of the soul of the dead.

He arrived at home in the evening, found his wife entertaining some friends; and told them he had just come from Chartres, where he had been summoned on business. Everyone noticed his unusual air of satisfaction, and he sang several songs during supper.

Having accomplished these two crimes, Derues did not remain idle. When the murderer’s part of his nature was at rest, the thief reappeared. His extreme avarice now made him regret the expense’ caused by the deaths of Madame de Lamotte and her son, and he wished to recoup himself. Two days after his return from Versailles, he ventured to present himself at Edouard’s school. He told the master that he had received a letter from Madame de Lamotte, saying that she wished to keep her son, and asking him to obtain Edouard’s belongings. The schoolmaster’s wife, who was present, replied that that could not be; that Monsieur de Lamotte would have known of his wife’s intention; that she would not have taken such a step without consulting him; and that only the evening before, they had received a present of game from Buisson-Souef, with a letter in which Monsieur de Lamotte entreated them to take great, care of his son.

“If what you say is true,” she continued, “Madame de Lamotte is no doubt acting on your advice in taking away her son. But I will write to Buisson.”

“You had better not do anything in the matter;” said Derues, turning to the schoolmaster. “It is quite possible that Monsieur de Lamotte does not know. I am aware that his wife does not always consult him. She is at

Versailles, where I took Edouard to her, and I will inform her of your objection."

To insure impunity for these murders, Derues had resolved on the death of Monsieur de Lamotte; but before executing this last crime, he wished for some proof of the recent pretended agreements between himself and Madame de Lamotte. He would not wait for the disappearance of the whole family before presenting himself as the lawful proprietor, of Buisson-Souef. Prudence required him to shelter himself behind a deed which should have been executed by that lady. On February 27th he appeared at the office of Madame de Lamotte's lawyer in the rue du Paon, and, with all the persuasion of an artful tongue, demanded the power of attorney on that lady's behalf, saying that he had, by private contract, just paid a hundred thousand livres on the total amount of purchase, which money was now deposited with a notary. The lawyer, much astonished that an affair of such importance should have been arranged without any reference to himself, refused to give up the deed to anyone but Monsieur or Madame de Lamotte, and inquired why the latter did not appear herself. Derues replied that she was at Versailles, and that he was to send the deed to her there. He repeated his request and the lawyer his refusal, until Derues retired, saying he would find means to compel him to give up the deed. He actually did, the same day, present a petition to the civil authority, in which Cyrano Derues de Bury sets forth arrangements, made with Madame de Lamotte, founded on the deed given by her husband, and requires permission to seize and withdraw said deed from the custody in which it remains at present. The petition is granted. The lawyer objects that he can only give up the deed to either Monsieur or Madame de Lamotte, unless he be otherwise ordered. Derues has the effrontery to again appeal to the civil authority, but, for the reasons given by that public officer, the affair is adjourned.

These two futile efforts might have compromised Derues had they been heard of at Buisson-Souef; but everything seemed to conspire in the criminal's favour: neither the schoolmaster's wife nor the lawyer thought of writing to Monsieur de Lamotte. The latter, as yet unsuspecting, was tormented by other anxieties, and kept at home by illness.

In these days, distance is shortened, and one can travel from Villeneuve-le-Roi-les-Sens to Paris in a few hours. This was not the case in 1777, when private industry and activity, stifled by routine and privilege, had not yet experienced the need of providing the means for rapid communication. Half a day was required to go from the capital to Versailles; a journey of twenty leagues required at least two days and a night, and bristled with obstacles ind delays of all kinds. These difficulties of transport, still greater during bad weather, and a long and serious attack of gout, explain why Monsieur ale Lamotte, who was so ready to take alarm, had remained separated from his wife from the middle of December to the end of February. He had received reassuring letters from her, written at first with freedom and simplicity; but he thought he noticed a gradual change in the later ones, which appeared to proceed more from the mind than the heart. A style which aimed at being natural was interspersed with unnecessary expressions of affection, unusual between married people well assured of their mutual love. Monsieur de Lamotte observed and exaggerated these peculiarities, and though endeavouring to persuade himself that he was mistaken, he could not forget them, or regain his usual tranquility. Being somewhat ashamed of his anxiety, he kept his fears to himself.

One morning, as he was sunk in a large armchair by the fire, his sitting-room door opened, and the cure entered, who was surprised by his despondent, sad, and pale appearance. “What is the matter?” he inquired, “Have you had an extra bad night?”

“Yes,” answered Monsieur de Lamotte.

“Well, have you any news from Paris?”

“Nothing for a whole week: it is odd, is it not?”

“I am always hoping that this sale may fall through; it drags on for so very long; and I believe that Monsieur Derues, in spite of what your wife wrote a month ago, has not as much money as he pretends to have. Do you know that it is said that Monsieur Despeignes-Duplessis, Madame Derues’ relative, whose money they inherited, was assassinated?”

“Where did you hear that?”

“It is a common report in the country, and was brought here by a man who came recently from Beauvais.”

“Have the murderers been discovered?”

“Apparently not; justice seems unable to discover anything at all.”

Monsieur de Lamotte hung his head, and his countenance assumed an expression of painful thought, as though this news affected him personally.

“Frankly,” resumed the cure, “I believe you will remain Seigneur du Buisson-Souef, and that I shall be spared the pain of writing another name over your seat in the church of Villeneuve.”

“The affair must be settled in a few days, for I can wait no longer; if the purchaser be not Monsieur Derues, it will have to be someone else. What makes you think he is short of money?”

“Oh! oh!” said the cure, “a man who has money either pays his debts, or is a cheat. Now Heaven preserve me from suspecting Monsieur Derues’ honesty!”

“What do you know about him?”

“Do you remember Brother Marchois of the Camaldulians, who came to see me last spring, and who was here the day Monsieur Derues arrived, with your wife and Edouard?”

“Perfectly. Well?”

“Well, I happened to tell him in one of my letters that Monsieur Derues had become the purchaser of Buisson-Souef, and that I believed the arrangements were concluded. Thereupon Brother Marchois wrote asking me to remind him that he owes them a sum of eight hundred livres, and that, so far, they have not seen a penny of it.”

“Ah!” said Monsieur de Lamotte, “perhaps I should have done better not to let myself be deluded by his fine promises. He certainly has money on his tongue, and when once one begins to listen to him, one can’t help doing what he wants. All the same, I had rather have had to deal with someone else.”

“And is it this which worries you, and makes you seem so anxious?”

“This and other things.”

“What, then?”

“I am really ashamed to own it, but I am a credulous and timid as any old woman. Now do not laugh at me too much. Do you believe in dreams?”

“Monsieur,” said the cure, smiling, “you should never ask a coward whether he is afraid, you only risk his telling a lie. He will say ‘No,’ but he means ‘Yes.’“

“And are you a coward, my father?”

“A little. I don’t precisely believe all the nursery, tales, or in the favourable or unfavourable meaning of some object seen during our sleep, but — ”

A sound of steps interrupted them, a servant entered, announcing Monsieur Derues.

On hearing the name, Monsieur de Lamotte felt troubled in spite of himself, but, overcoming the impression, he rose to meet the visitor.

"You had better stay," he said to the cure, who was also rising to take leave. "Stay; we have probably nothing to say which cannot be said before you."

Derues entered the room, and, after the usual compliments, sat down by the fire, opposite Monsieur de Lamotte.

"You did not expect me," he said, "and I ought to apologise for surprising you thus."

"Give me some news of my wife," asked Monsieur de Lamotte anxiously.

"She has never been better. Your son is also to perfect health."

"But why are you alone? Why does not Marie accompany you? It is ten weeks since she went to Paris."

"She has not yet quite finished the business with which you entrusted her. Perhaps I am partly the cause of this long absence, but one cannot transact business as quickly as one would wish. But, you have no doubt heard from her, that all is finished, or nearly so, between us. We have drawn up a second private contract, which annuls the former agreement, and I have paid over a sum of one hundred thousand livres."

"I do not comprehend," said Monsieur de Lamotte. "What can induce my wife not to inform me of this?"

"You did not know?"

"I know nothing. I was wondering just now with Monsieur le cure why I did not hear from her."

"Madame de Lamotte was going to write to you, and I do not know what can have hindered her."

"When did you leave her?"

"Several days ago. I have not been at Paris; I am returning from Chartres. I believed you were informed of everything."

Monsieur de Lamotte remained silent for some moments. Then, fixing his eyes upon Derues' immovable countenance, he said, with some emotion —

"You are a husband and father, sir; in the name of this double and sacred affection which is, not unknown to you, do not hide anything from me: I fear some misfortune has happened to my wife which you are concealing."

Derues' physiognomy expressed nothing but a perfectly natural astonishment.

"What can have suggested such ideas to you; dear sir?" In saying this he glanced at the cure; wishing to ascertain if this distrust was Monsieur de Lamotte's own idea, or had been suggested to him. The movement was so rapid that neither of the others observed it. Like all knaves, obliged by their actions to be continually on the watch, Derues possessed to a remarkable extent the art of seeing all round him without appearing to observe anything in particular. He decided that as yet he had only to combat a suspicion unfounded on proof, and he waited till he should be attacked more seriously.

“I do not know,” he said, “what may have happened during my absence; pray explain yourself, for you are making me share your disquietude.”

“Yes, I am exceedingly anxious; I entreat you, tell me the whole truth. Explain this silence, and this absence prolonged beyond all expectation. You finished your business with Madame de Lamotte several days ago: once again, why did she not write? There is no letter, either from her or my son! To-morrow I shall send someone to Paris.”

“Good heavens!” answered Derues, “is there nothing but an accident which could cause this delay? . . . Well, then,” he continued, with the embarrassed look of a man compelled to betray a confidence, — ”well, then, I see that in order to reassure you, I shall have to give up a secret entrusted to me.”

He then told Monsieur de Lamotte that his wife was no longer at Paris, but at Versailles, where she was endeavouring to obtain an important and lucrative appointment, and that, if she had left him in ignorance of her efforts in this direction; it was only to give him an agreeable surprise. He added that she had removed her son from the school, and hoped to place him either in the riding school or amongst the royal pages. To prove his words, he opened his paper-case, and produced the letter written by Edouard in answer to the one quoted above.

All this was related so simply, and with such an appearance of good faith, that the cure was quite convinced. And to Monsieur de Lamotte the plans attributed to his wife were not entirely improbably. Derues had learnt indirectly that such a career for Edouard had been actually under consideration. However, though Monsieur de Lamotte’s entire ignorance prevented him from making any serious objection, his fears were not entirely at rest, but for the present he appeared satisfied with the explanation.

The cure resumed the conversation. “What you tell us ought to drive away gloomy ideas. Just now, when you were announced, Monsieur de Lamotte was confiding his troubles to me. I was as concerned as he was, and I could say nothing to help him; never did visitor arrive more apropos. Well, my friend, what now remains of your vain terrors? What was it you were saying just as Monsieur Derues arrived? . . . Ah! we were discussing dreams, you asked if I believed in them."

Monsieur, de Lamotte, who had sunk back in his easy-chair and seemed lost in his reflections, started on hearing these words. He raised his head and looked again at Derues. But the latter had had time to note the impression produced by the cure's remark, and this renewed examination did not disturb him.

"Yes," said Monsieur de Lamotte, "I had asked that question."

"And I was going to answer that there are certain secret warnings which can be received by the soul long before they are intelligible to the bodily senses-revelations not understood at first, but which later connect themselves with realities of which they are in some way the precursors. Do you agree with me, Monsieur Derues?"

"I have no opinion on such a subject, and must leave the discussion to more learned people than myself. I do not know whether such apparitions really mean anything or not, and I have not sought to fathom these mysteries, thinking them outside the realm of human intelligence."

"Nevertheless," said the cure, "we are obliged to recognise their existence."

"Yes, but without either understanding or explaining them, like many other eternal truths. I follow the rule given in the Imitation o f Jesus Christ: 'Beware, my son, of considering too curiously the things beyond thine intelligence.'"

"And I also submit, and avoid too curious consideration. But has not the soul knowledge of many wondrous things which we can yet neither see nor touch? I repeat, there are things which cannot be denied."

Derues listened attentively, continually on his guard; and afraid, he knew not why, of becoming entangled in this conversation, as in a trap. He carefully watched Monsieur de Lamotte, whose eyes never left him. The cure resumed —

"Here is an instance which I was bound to accept, seeing it happened to myself. I was then twenty, and my mother lived in the neighbourhood of Tours, whilst I was at the seminary of Montpellier. After several years of separation, I had obtained permission to go and see her. I wrote, telling her of this good news, and I received her answer — full of joy and tenderness.

My brother and sister were to be informed, it was to be a family meeting, a real festivity; and I started with a light and joyous heart. My impatience was so great, that, having stopped for supper at a village inn some ten leagues from Tours, I would not wait till the next morning for the coach which went that way, but continued the journey on foot and walked all night. It was a long and difficult road, but happiness redoubled my strength. About an hour after sunrise I saw distinctly the smoke and the village roofs, and I hurried on to surprise my family a little sooner. I never felt more active, more light-hearted and gay; everything seemed to smile before and around me. Turning a corner of the hedge, I met a peasant whom I recognised. All at once it seemed as if a veil spread over my sight, all my hopes and joy suddenly vanished, a funereal idea took possession of me, and I said, taking the hand of the man, who had not yet spoken —

"'My mother is dead, I am convinced my mother is dead!'

"He hung down his head and answered —

"'She is to be buried this morning!'

"Now whence came this revelation? I had seen no one, spoken to no one; a moment before I had no idea of it!"

Derues made a gesture of surprise. Monsieur de Lamotte put his hand to his eyes, and said to the cure —

"Your presentiments were true; mine, happily, are unfounded. But listen, and tell me if in the state of anxiety which oppressed me I had not good reason for alarm and for fearing some fatal misfortune."

His eyes again sought Derues. "Towards the middle of last night I at length fell asleep, but, interrupted every moment, this sleep was more a fatigue than a rest; I seemed to hear confused noises all round me. I saw brilliant lights which dazzled me, and then sank back into silence and darkness. Sometimes I heard someone weeping near my bed; again plaintive voices called to me out of the darkness. I stretched out my arms, but nothing met them, I fought with phantoms; at length a cold hand grasped mine and led me rapidly forward. Under a dark and damp vault a woman lay on the ground, bleeding, inanimate — it was my wife! At the same moment, a groan made me look round, and I beheld a man striking my son with a dagger. I cried out and awoke, bathed in cold perspiration, panting under this terrible vision. I was obliged to get up, walk about, and speak aloud, in order to convince myself it was only a dream. I tried to go to sleep again, but the same visions still pursued me. I saw always the same man armed with two daggers streaming with blood; I heard always the cries of his two victims. When day came, I felt utterly broken, worn-out; and this morning, you, my father, could see by my despondency what an impression this awful night had made upon me.”

During this recital Derues’ calmness never gave way for a single moment, and the most skilful physiognomist could only have discovered an expression of incredulous curiosity on his countenance.

“Monsieur le cure’s story,” said he, “impressed me much; yours only brings back my uncertainty. It is less possible than ever to deliver any opinion on this serious question of dreams, since the second instance contradicts the first.”

“It is true,” answered the cure, “no possible conclusion can be drawn from two facts which contradict each other, and the best thing we can do is to choose a less dismal subject of conversation.”

“Monsieur Derues;” asked Monsieur de Lamatte, “if you are not too tired with your journey, shall we go and look at the last improvements I have made? It is now your affair to decide upon them, since I shall shortly be only your guest here.”

“Just as I have been yours for long enough, and I trust you will often give me the opportunity of exercising hospitality in my turn. But you are ill, the day is cold and damp; if you do not care to go out, do not let me disturb you. Had you not better stay by the fire with Monsieur le cure? For me, Heaven be thanked! I require no assistance. I will look round the park, and come back presently to tell you what I think. Besides, we shall have plenty of time to talk about it. With your permission, I should like to stay two or three days.”

“I shall be pleased if you will do so.”

Derues went out, sufficiently uneasy in his mind, both on account of his reception of Monsieur de Lamotte’s fears and of the manner in which the latter had watched him during the conversation. He walked quickly up and down the park —

“I have been foolish, perhaps; I have lost twelve or fifteen days, and delayed stupidly from fear of not foreseeing everything. But then, how was I to imagine that this simple, easily deceived man would all at once become suspicious? What a strange dream! If I had not been on my guard, I might have been disconcerted. Come, come, I must try to disperse these ideas and give him something else to think about.”

He stopped, and after a few minutes consideration turned back towards the house.

As soon as he had left the room, Monsieur de Lamotte had bent over towards the cure, and had said —

“He did not show any emotion, did — he?”

“None whatever.”

“He did not start when I spoke of the man armed with those two daggers?”

“No. But put aside these ideas; you must see they are mistaken.”

“I did not tell everything, my father: this murderer whom I saw in my dream — was Derues himself! I know as well as you that it must be a delusion, I saw as well as you did that he remained quite calm, but, in spite of myself, this terrible dream haunts me . . . .There, do not listen to me, do not let me talk about it; it only makes me blush for myself.”

Whilst Derues remained at Buisson-Souef, Monsieur de Lamotte received several letters from his wife, some from Paris, some from Versailles. She remarked that her son and herself were perfectly well.... The writing was so well imitated that no one could doubt their genuineness. However, Monsieur de Lamotte’s suspicions continually increased and he ended by making the cure share his fears. He also refused to go with Derues to Paris, in spite of the latter’s entreaties. Derues, alarmed at the coldness shown him, left Buisson-Souef, saying that he intended to take possession about the middle of spring.

Monsieur de Lamotte was, in spite of himself, still detained by ill-health. But a new and inexplicable circumstance made him resolve to go to Paris and endeavour to clear up the mystery which appeared to surround his wife and son. He received an unsigned letter in unknown handwriting, and in which Madame de Lamotte’s reputation was attacked with a kind of would-be reticence, which hinted that she was an unfaithful wife and that in this lay the cause of her long absence. Her husband did not believe this anonymous denunciation, but the fate of the two beings dearest to him seemed shrouded in so much obscurity that he could delay no longer, and started for Paris.

His resolution not to accompany Derues had saved his life. The latter could not carry out his culminating crime at Buisson-Souef; it was only in Paris that his victims would disappear without his being called to account. Obliged to leave hold of his prey, he endeavoured to bewilder him in a labyrinth where all trace of truth might be lost. Already, as he had arranged beforehand, he had called calumny to his help, and prepared the audacious lie which was to vindicate himself should an accusation fall upon his head. He had hoped that Monsieur de Lamotte would fall defenceless into his hands; but now a careful examination of his position, showing the impossibility of avoiding an explanation had become inevitable, made him change all his plans, and compelled him to devise an infernal plot, so skilfully laid that it bid fair to defeat all human sagacity.

Monsieur de Lamotte arrived in Paris early in March. Chance decided that he should lodge in the rue de la Mortellerie, in a house not far from the one where his wife's body lay buried. He went to see Derues, hoping to surprise him, and determined to make him speak, but found he was not at home. Madame Derues, whether acting with the discretion of an accomplice or really ignorant of her husband's proceedings, could not say where he was likely to be found. She said that he told her nothing about his actions, and that Monsieur de Lamotte must have observed during their stay at Buisson (which was true) that she never questioned him, but obeyed his wishes in everything; and that he had now gone away without saying where he was going. She acknowledged that Madame de Lamotte had lodged with them for six weeks, and that she knew that lady had been at Versailles, but since then she had heard nothing. All Monsieur de Lamotte's questions, his entreaties, prayers, or threats, obtained no other answer. He went to the lawyer in the rue de Paon, to the schoolmaster, and found the same uncertainty, the same ignorance. His wife and his son had gone to Versailles, there the clue ended which ought to guide his investigations. He went to this town; no one could give him any information, the very name of Lamotte was unknown. He returned to Paris, questioned and examined the people of the quarter, the proprietor of the Hotel de France, where his wife had stayed on her former visit; at length, wearied with useless efforts, he implored help from justice. Then his complaints ceased; he was advised to maintain a prudent silence, and to await Derues' return.

The latter thoroughly understood that, having failed to dissipate Monsieur de Lamotte's fears, there was no longer an instant to lose, and that the pretended private contract of February 12th would not of itself prove the existence of Madame de Lamotte. This is how he employed the time spent by the unhappy husband in fruitless investigation.

On March 12th, a woman, her face hidden in the hood of her cloak, or “Therese,” as it was then called, appeared in the office of Maitre N — — -, a notary at Lyons. She gave her name as Marie Francoise Perffier, wife of Monsieur Saint-Faust de Lamotte, but separated, as to goods and estate, from him. She caused a deed to be drawn up, authorising her husband to receive the arrears of thirty thousand livres remaining from the price of the estate of Buisson-Souef, situated near Villeneuve-le-Roi-lez-Sens. The deed was drawn up and signed by Madame de Lamotte, by the notary, and one of his colleagues.

This woman was Derues. If we remember that he only arrived at Buisson February 28th, and remained there for some days, it becomes difficult to understand how at that period so long a journey as that from Paris to Lyons could have been accomplished with such rapidity. Fear must have given him wings. We will now explain what use he intended to make of it, and what fable, a masterpiece of cunning and of lies, he had invented.

On his arrival in Paris he found a summons to appear before the magistrate of police. He expected this, and appeared quite tranquil, ready to answer any questions. Monsieur de Lamotte was present. It was a formal examination, and the magistrate first asked why he had left Paris.

“Monsieur,” replied Derues, “I have nothing to hide, and none of my actions need fear the daylight, but before replying, I should like to understand my position. As a domiciled citizen I have a right to require this. Will you kindly inform me why I have been summoned to appear before you, whether on account of anything personal to myself, or simply to give information as to something which may be within my knowledge?”

“You are acquainted with this gentleman, and cannot therefore be ignorant of the cause of the present inquiry.”

“I am, nevertheless, quite in ignorance of it.”

“Be good enough to answer my question. Why did you leave Paris? And where have you been?”

“I was absent for business reasons.”

“What business?”

“I shall say no more.”

“Take care! you have incurred serious suspicions, and silence will not tend to clear you.”

Derues hung down his head with an air of resignation; and Monsieur de Lamotte, seeing in this attitude a silent confession of crime, exclaimed, “Wretched man! what have you done with my wife and my son?”

“Your son! — ” said Derues slowly and with peculiar emphasis. He again cast down his eyes.

The magistrate conducting the inquiry was struck by the expression of Derues’ countenance and by this half answer, which appeared to hide a mystery and to aim at diverting attention by offering a bait to curiosity. He might have stopped Derues at the moment when he sought to plunge into a tortuous argument, and compelled him to answer with the same clearness and decision which distinguished Monsieur de Lamotte’s question; but he reflected that the latter’s inquiries, unforeseen, hasty, and passionate, were perhaps more likely to disconcert a prepared defence than cooler and more skilful tactics. He therefore changed his plans, contenting “himself for the moment with the part of an observer only, and watching a duel between two fairly matched antagonists.

“I require: you to tell me what has become of them,” repeated Monsieur de Lamotte. “I have been to Versailles, you assured me they were there.”

“And I told you the truth, monsieur.”

“No one has seen them, no one knows them; every trace is lost. Your Honour, this man must be compelled to answer, he must say what has become of my wife and son!”

“I excuse your anxiety, I understand your trouble, but why appeal to me? Why am I supposed to know what may have happened to them?”

“Because I confided them to your care.”

“As a friend, yes, I agree. Yes, it is quite true that last December I received a letter from you informing me of the impending arrival of your wife and son. I received them in my own house, and showed them the same hospitality which I had received from you. I saw them both, your son often, your wife every day, until the day she left me to go to Versailles. Yes, I also took Edouard to his mother, who was negotiating an appointment for him. I have already told you all this, and I repeat it because it is the truth. You believed me then: why do you not believe me now? Why has what I say become strange and incredible? If your wife and your son have disappeared, am I responsible? Did you transmit your authority to me? And now, in what manner are you thus calling me to account? Is it to the friend who might have pitied, who might have aided your search, that you thus address yourself? Have you come to confide in me, to ask for advice, for consolation? No, you accuse me; very well! then I refuse to speak, because, having no proofs, you yet accuse an honest man; because your fears, whether real or imaginary, do not excuse you for casting, I know not what odious suspicions, on a blameless reputation, because I have the right to be offended. Monsieur" he continued, turning to the magistrate, "I believe you will appreciate my moderation, and will allow me to retire. If charges are brought against me, I am quite ready to meet them, and to show what they are really worth. I shall remain in Paris, I have now no business which requires my presence elsewhere."

He emphasised these last words, evidently intending to draw attention to them. It did not escape the magistrate, who inquired —

"What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing beyond my words, your Honour, Have I your permission to retire?"

"No, remain; you are pretending not to understand."

"I do not understand these insinuations so covertly made."

Monsieur de Lamotte rose, exclaiming —

"Insinuations! What more can I say to compel you to answer? My wife and son have disappeared. It is untrue that, as you pretend, they have been at Versailles. You deceived me at Buisson-Souef, just as you are deceiving me now, as you are endeavouring to deceive justice by inventing fresh lies. Where are they? What has become of them? I am tormented by all the fears possible to a husband and father; I imagine all the most terrible misfortunes, and I accuse you to your face of having caused their death! Is this sufficient, or do you still accuse me of covert insinuations?"

Derues turned to the magistrate. "Is this charge enough to place me in the position of a criminal if I do not give a satisfactory explanation?"

"Certainly; you should have thought of that sooner."

"Then," he continued, addressing Monsieur de Lamotte, "I understand you persist in this odious accusation?"

"I certainly persist in it."

"You have forgotten our friendship, broken all bonds between us: I am in your eyes only a miserable assassin? You consider my silence as guilty, you will ruin me if I do not speak?"

"It is true."

"There is still time for reflection; consider what you are doing; I will forget your insults and your anger. Your trouble is great enough without my reproaches being added to it. But you desire that I should speak, you desire it absolutely?"

"I do desire it."

"Very well, then; it shall be as you wish."

Derues surveyed Monsieur de Lamotte with a look which seemed to say, "I pity you." He then added, with a sigh —

"I am now ready to answer. Your Honour, will you have the kindness to resume my examination?"

Derues had succeeded in taking up an advantageous position. If he had begun narrating the extraordinary romance he had invented, the least penetrating eye must have perceived its improbability, and one would have felt it required some support at every turn. But since he had resisted being forced to tell it, and apparently only ceded to Monsieur de Lamotte's violent persistency, the situation was changed; and this refusal to speak, coming from a man who thereby compromised his personal safety, took the semblance of generosity, and was likely to arouse the magistrate's curiosity and prepare his mind for unusual and mysterious revelations. This was exactly what Derues wanted, and he awaited the interrogation with calm and tranquillity.

"Why did you leave Paris?" the magistrate demanded a second time.

"I have already had the honour to inform you that important business necessitated my absence."

"But you refused to explain the nature of this business. Do you still persist in this refusal?"

"For the moment, yes. I will explain it later."

"Where have you been? Whence do you return?"

"I have been to Lyons, and have returned thence."

"What took you there?

"I will tell you later."

"In the month of December last, Madame de Lamotte and her son came to Paris?

"That is so."

"They both lodged in your house?"

"I have no reason to deny it."

"But neither she herself, nor Monsieur de Lamotte, had at first intended that she should accept a lodging in the house which you occupied."

"That is quite true. We had important accounts to settle, and Madame de Lamotte told me afterwards that she feared some dispute on the question of money might arise between us — at least, that is the reason she gave me. She was mistaken, as the event proved, since I always intended to pay, and I have paid. But she may have had another reason which she preferred not to give."

"It was the distrust of this man which she felt," exclaimed Monsieur de Lamotte. Derues answered only with a melancholy smile.

"Silence, monsieur," said the magistrate, "silence; do not interrupt." Then addressing Derues —

"Another motive? What motive do you suppose?"

"Possibly she preferred to be more free, and able to receive any visitor she wished."

"What do you mean?"

"It is only supposition on my part, I do not insist upon it."

"But the supposition appears to contain a hint injurious to Madame de Lamotte's reputation?"

"No, oh no!" replied Derues, after a moment's silence.

This sort of insinuation appeared strange to the magistrate, who resolved to try and force Derues to abandon these treacherous reticences behind which he sheltered himself. Again recommending silence to Monsieur de Lamotte, he continued to question Derues, not perceiving that he was only following the lead skilfully given by the latter, who drew him gradually on by withdrawing himself, and that all the time thus gained was an advantage to the accused.

"Well," said the magistrate, "whatever Madame de Lamotte's motives may have been, it ended in her coming to stay with you. How did you persuade her to take this step?"

"My wife accompanied her first to the Hotel de France, and then to other hotels. I said no more than might be deemed allowable in a friend; I could not presume to persuade her against her will. When I returned home, I was surprised to find her there with her son. She could not find a disengaged room in any of the hotels she tried, and she then accepted my offer."

"What date was this?"

"Monday, the 16th of last December."

"And when did she leave your house?"

"On the 1st of February."

“The porter cannot remember having seen her go out on that day.”

“That is possible. Madame de Lamotte went and came as her affairs required. She was known, and no more attention would be paid to her than to any other inmate.”

“The porter also says that for several days before this date she was ill, and obliged to keep her room?”

“Yes, it was a slight indisposition, which had no results, so slight that it seemed unnecessary to call in a doctor. Madame de Lamotte appeared preoccupied and anxious. I think her mental attitude influenced her health.”

“Did you escort her to Versailles?”

“No; I went there to see her later.”

“What proof can you give of her having actually stayed there?”

“None whatever, unless it be a letter which I received from her.”

“You told Monsieur de, Lamotte that she was exerting herself to procure her son’s admission either as a king’s page or into the riding school. Now, no one at Versailles has seen this lady, or even heard of her.”

“I only repeated what she told me.”

“Where was she staying?”

“I do not know.”

“What! she wrote to you, you went to see her, and yet you do not know where she was lodging?”

“That is so.”

“But it is impossible.”

“There are many things which would appear impossible if I were to relate them, but which are true, nevertheless.”

“Explain yourself.”

“I only received one letter from Madame de Lamotte, in which she spoke of her plans for Edouard, requesting me to send her her son on a day she fixed, and I told Edouard of her projects. Not being able to go to the school to see him, I wrote, asking if he would like to give up his studies and become a royal page. When I was last at Buisson-Souef, I showed his answer to Monsieur de Lamotte; it is here.”

And he handed over a letter to the magistrate, who read it, and passing it on to Monsieur de Lamotte, inquired —

“Did you then, and do you now, recognise your son’s handwriting?”

“Perfectly, monsieur.”

“You took Edouard to Versailles?”

“I did.”

“On what day?”

“February 11th, Shrove Tuesday. It is the only time I have been to Versailles. The contrary might be supposed; for I have allowed it to be understood that I have often seen Madame de Lamotte since she left my house, and was acquainted with all her actions, and that the former confidence and friendship still existed between us. In allowing this, I have acted a lie, and transgressed the habitual sincerity of my whole life.”

This assertion produced a bad impression on the magistrate. Derues perceived it, and to avert evil consequences, hastened to add —

“My conduct can only be appreciated when it is known in entirety. I misunderstood the meaning of Madame de Lamotte’s letter. She asked me to send her her son, I thought to oblige her by accompanying him, and not leaving him to go alone. So we travelled together, and arrived at Versailles about midday. As I got down from the coach I saw Madame de Lamotte at the palace gate, and observed, to my astonishment, that my presence displeased her. She was not alone.”

He stopped, although he had evidently reached the most interesting point of his story.

“Go on,” said the magistrate; “why do you stop now?”

“Because what I have to say is so painful — not to me, who have to justify myself, but for others, that I hesitate.”

“Go on.”

“Will you then interrogate me, please?”

“Well, what happened in this interview?”

Derues appeared to collect himself for a moment, and then said with the air of a man who has decide on speaking out at last —

“Madame de Lamotte was not alone; she was attended by a gentleman whom I did not know, whom I never saw either at Buisson-Souef or in Paris, and whom I have never seen again since. I will ask you to allow me to recount everything; even to the smallest details. This man’s face struck me at once, on account of a singular resemblance; he paid no attention to me at first, and I was able to examine him at leisure. His manners were those of a man belonging to the highest classes of society, and his dress indicated wealth. On seeing Edouard, he said to Madame de Lamotte —

“‘So this is he?’ and he then kissed him tenderly. This and the marks of undisguised pleasure which he evinced surprised me, and I looked at

Madame de Lamotte, who then remarked with some asperity —

"'I did not expect to see you, Monsieur Derues. I had not asked you to accompany my son.'

"Edouard seemed quite as much surprised as I was. The stranger gave me a look of haughty annoyance, but seeing I did not avoid his glance his countenance assumed a more gentle expression, and Madame de Lamotte introduced him as a person who took great interest in Edouard."

"It is a whole tissue of imposture!" exclaimed Monsieur de Lamotte.

"Allow me to finish," answered Derues. "I understand your doubts, and that you are not anxious to believe what I say, but I have been brought here by legal summons to tell the truth, and I am going to tell it. You can then weigh the two accusations in the balance, and choose between them. The reputation of an honourable man is as sacred, as important, as worthy of credit as the reputation of a woman, and I never heard that the virtue of the one was more fragile than that of the other."

Monsieur de Lamotte, thunderstruck by such a revelation, could not contain his impatience and indignation.

"This, then," he said, "is the explanation of an anonymous letter which I received, and of the injurious suggestions' concerning my wife's honour which it contained; it was written to give an appearance of probability to this infamous legend. The whole thing is a disgraceful plot, and no doubt Monsieur Derues wrote the letter himself."

"I know nothing about it," said Derues unconcernedly, "and the explanation which you profess to find in it I should rather refer to something else I am going to mention. I did not know a secret warning had been sent to you: I now learn it from you, and I understand perfectly that such a letter, may have been written. But that you have received such a warning ought surely to be a reason for listening patiently and not denouncing all I say as imposture."

While saying this Derues mentally constructed the fresh falsehood necessitated by the interruption, but no variation of countenance betrayed his thought. He had an air of dignity natural to his position. He saw that, in spite of clear-headedness and long practice in studying the most deceptive countenances, the magistrate so far had not scented any of his falsehoods, and was getting bewildered in the windings of this long narrative, through which Derues led him as he chose; and he resumed with confidence —

"You know that I made Monsieur de Lamotte's acquaintance more than a year ago, and I had reason to believe his friendship as sincere as my own. As a friend, I could not calmly accept the suspicion which then entered my mind, nor could I conceal my surprise. Madame de Lamotte saw this, and understood from my looks that I was not satisfied with the explanation she wished me to accept. A glance of intelligence passed between her and her friend, who was still holding Edouard's hand. The day, though cold, was fine, and she proposed a walk in the park. I offered her my arm, and the stranger walked in front with Edouard. We had a short conversation, which has remained indelibly fixed in my memory.

"'Why did you come?' she inquired.

"I did not answer, but looked sternly at her, in order to discompose her. At length I said —

"'You should have written, madame, and warned me that my coming would be indiscreet.'

"She seemed much disconcerted, and exclaimed —

"'I am lost! I see you guess everything, and will tell my husband. I am an unhappy woman, and a sin once committed can never be erased from the pages of a woman's life! Listen, Monsieur Derues, listen, I implore you! You see this man, I shall not tell you who he is, I shall not give his name . . . but I loved him long ago; I should have been his wife, and had he not been compelled to leave France, I should have married no one else.'"

Monsieur de Lamotte started, and grew pale.

"What is the matter?" the magistrate inquired.

"Oh! this dastardly wretch is profiting by his knowledge of secrets which a long intimacy has enabled him to discover. Do not believe him, I entreat you, do not believe him!"

Derues resumed. "Madame de Lamotte continued: 'I saw him again sixteen years ago, always in hiding, always proscribed. To-day he reappears under a name which is not his own: he wishes to link my fate with his; he has insisted on seeing Edouard. But I shall escape him. I have invented this fiction of placing my son among the, royal pages to account for my stay here. Do not contradict me, but help me; for a little time ago I met one of Monsieur de Lamotte's friends, I am afraid he suspected something. Say you have seen me several times; as you have come, let it be known that you brought Edouard here. I shall return to Buisson as soon as possible, but will you go first, see my husband, satisfy him if he is anxious? I am in your hands; my honour, my reputation, my very life, are at your mercy; you can either ruin or help to save me. I may be guilty, but I am not corrupt. I have wept for my sin day after day, and I have already cruelly expiated it.'“

This execrable calumny was not related without frequent interruptions on the part of Monsieur de Lamotte. He was, however, obliged to own to himself that it was quite true that Marie Perier had really been promised to a man whom an unlucky affair had driven into exile, and whom he had supposed to be dead. This revelation, coming from Derues, who had the strongest interest in lying, by no means convinced him of his wife's dishonour, nor destroyed the feelings of a husband and father; but Derues was not speaking for him lone, and what appeared incredible to Monsieur de Lamotte might easily seem less improbable to the colder and less interested judgment of the magistrate.

“I was wrong,” Derues continued, “in allowing myself to be touched by her tears, wrong in believing in her repentance, more wrong still in going to Buisson to satisfy her husband. But I only consented on conditions: Madame de Lamotte promised me to return shortly to Paris, vowing that her son should never know the truth, and that the rest of her life should be devoted to atoning for her sin by a boundless devotion. She then begged me to leave her, and told me she would write to me at Paris to fix the day of her return. This is what happened, and this is why I went to Buissan and gave my support to a lying fiction. With one word I might have destroyed the happiness of seventeen years. I did not wish to do so. I believed in the remorse; I believe in it still, in spite of all appearances; I have refused to speak this very day, and made every effort to prolong an illusion which I know it will be terrible to lose.”

There was a moment of silence. This fable, so atrociously ingenious, was simply and impressively narrated, and with an air of candour well contrived to impose on the magistrate, or, at least, to suggest grave doubts to his mind. Derues, with his usual cunning, had conformed his language to the quality of his listener. Any tricks, profession of piety, quotations from sacred books, so largely indulged in when he wished to bamboozle people of a lower class, would here have told against him. He knew when to abstain, and carried the art of deception far enough to be able to lay aside the appearance of hypocrisy. He had described all the circumstances without affectation, and if this unexpected accusation was wholly unproved, it yet rested on a possible fact, and did not appear absolutely incredible. The magistrate went through it all again, and made him repeat every detail, without being able to make him contradict himself or show the smallest embarrassment. While interrogating Derues, he kept his eyes fixed upon him; and this double examination being quite fruitless, only increased his perplexity. However, he never relaxed the incredulous severity of his demeanour, nor the imperative and threatening tone of his voice.

“You acknowledge having been at Lyons?” he asked.

“I have been there.”

“At the beginning of this examination you said you would explain the reason of this journey later.”

“I am ready to do so, for the journey is connected with the facts I have just narrated; it was caused by them.”

“Explain it.”

“I again ask permission to relate fully. I did not hear from Versailles: I began to fear Monsieur de Lamotte’s anxiety would bring him to Paris. Bound by the promise I had made to his wife to avert all suspicion and to satisfy any doubts he might conceive, and, must I add, also remembering that it was important for me to inform him of our new arrangements, and of this payment of a hundred thousand livres.”

“That payment is assuredly fictitious,” interrupted Monsieur de Lamotte; “we must have some proof of it.”

“I will prove it presently,” answered Derues. “So I went to Buisson, as I have already told you. On my return I found a letter from Madame de Lamotte, a letter with a Paris stamp, which had arrived that morning. I was surprised that she should write, when actually in Paris; I opened the letter, and was still more surprised. I have not the letter with me, but I recollect the sense of it perfectly, if not the wording, and I can produce it if necessary. Madame de Lamotte was at Lyons with her son and this person whose name I do not know, and whom I do not care to mention before her husband. She had confided this letter to a person who was coming to Paris, and who was to bring it me; but this individual, whose name was Marquis, regretted that having to start again immediately, he was obliged to entrust it to the post. This is the sense of its contents. Madame de Lamotte wrote that she found herself obliged to follow this nameless person to Lyons; and she begged me to send her news of her husband and of the state of his affairs, but said not one single word of any probable return. I became very uneasy at the news of this clandestine departure. I had no security except a private contract annulling our first agreement on the payment of one hundred thousand livres, and that this was not a sufficient and regular receipt I knew, because the lawyer had already refused to surrender Monsieur de Lamotte’s power of attorney. I thought over all the difficulties which this flight, which would have to be kept secret, was likely to produce, and I started for Lyons without writing or giving any notice of my intention. I had no information, I did not even know whether Madame de Lamotte was passing by another name, as at Versailles, but chance decreed that I met her the very day of my arrival. She was alone, and complained bitterly of her fate, saying she had been compelled to follow this individual to Lyons, but that very soon she would be free and would return to Paris. But I was struck by the uncertainty of her manner, and said I should not leave her without obtaining a deed in proof of our recent arrangements. She refused at first, saying it was unnecessary, as she would so soon return; but I insisted strongly. I told her I had already com promised myself by telling Monsieur de Lamotte that she was at Versailles, endeavouring to procure an appointment for her son; that since she had been compelled to come to Lyons, the same person might take her elsewhere, so that she might disappear any day, might leave France without leaving any trace, without any written acknowledgment of her own dishonour; and that when all these falsehoods were discovered, I should appear in the light of an accomplice. I said also that, as she had unfortunately lodged in my house in Paris, and had requested me to remove her son from his school, explanations would be required from me, and perhaps I should be accused of this double disappearance. Finally, I declared that if she did not give me some proofs of her existence, willingly or unwillingly, I would go at once to a magistrate. My firmness made her reflect. ‘My good Monsieur Derues,’ she said, ‘I ask your forgiveness for all the trouble I have caused you. I will give you this deed to-morrow, to-day it is too late; but come to this same place to-morrow, and you shall see me again.’ I hesitated, I confess, to let her go. ‘Ah,’ she said, grasping my hands, ‘do not suspect me of intending to deceive you! I swear that I will meet you here at four o’clock. It is enough that I have ruined myself, and perhaps my son, without also entangling you in my unhappy fate. Yes, you are right; this deed is important, necessary for you, and you shall have it. But do not show yourself here; if you were seen, I might not be able to do what I ought to do. To-morrow you shall see me again, I swear it.’ She then left me. The next day, the 12th, of March, I was exact at the rendezvous, and Madame de Lamotte arrived a moment later. She gave me a deed, authorising her husband to receive the arrears of thirty thousand livres remaining from the purchase-money of Buisson-Souef. I endeavoured again to express my opinion of her conduct; she listened in silence, as if my words affected her deeply. We were walking together, when she told me she had some business in a house we were passing, and asked me to wait for her. I waited more than an hour, and then discovered that this house, like many others in Lyons, had an exit in another street; and I understood that Madame de Lamotte had escaped by this passage, and that I might wait in vain. Concluding that trying to follow her would be useless, and seeing also that any remonstrance would be made in vain, I returned to Paris, deciding to say nothing as yet, and to conceal the truth as long as possible. I still had hopes, and I did not count on being so soon called on to defend myself: I thought that when I had to speak, it would be as a friend, and not as an accused person. This, sir, is the explanation of my conduct, and I regret that this justification, so easy for myself, should be so cruelly painful for another. You have seen the efforts which I made to defer it."

Monsieur de Lamotte had heard this second part of Derues' recital with a more silent indignation, not that he admitted its probability, but he was confounded by this monstrous imposture, and, as it were, terror-stricken by such profound hypocrisy. His mind revolted at the idea of his wife being accused of adultery; but while he repelled this charge with decision, he saw the confirmation of his secret terrors and presentiments, and his heart sank within him at the prospect of exploring this abyss of iniquity. He was pale, gasping for breath, as though he himself had been the criminal, while scorching tears furrowed his cheeks. He tried to speak, but his voice failed; he wanted to fling back at Derues the names of traitor and assassin, and he was obliged to bear in silence the look of mingled grief and pity which the latter bestowed upon him.

The magistrate, calmer, and master of his emotions, but tolerably bewildered in this labyrinth of cleverly connected lies, thought it desirable to ask some further questions.

"How," said he, "did you obtain this sum of a hundred thousand livres which you say you paid over to Madame de Lamotte?"

"I have been engaged in business for several years, and have acquired some fortune."

“Nevertheless, you have postponed the obligation of making this payment several times, so that Monsieur de Lamotte had begun to feel uneasiness on the subject. This was the chief reason of his wife’s coming to Paris.”

“One sometimes experiences momentary difficulties, which presently disappear.”

“You say you have a deed given you at Lyons by Madame de Lamotte, which you were to give to her husband?”

“It is here.”

The magistrate examined the deed carefully, and noted the name of the lawyer in whose office it had been drawn up.

“You may go,” he said at last.

“What!” exclaimed Monsieur de Lamotte.

Derues stopped, but the magistrate signed to him to go, intimating, however, that he was on no account to leave Paris.

“But,” said Monsieur de Lamotte, when they were alone, “this man is indeed guilty. My wife has not betrayed me! She! — forget her duties as a wife! she was virtue incarnate! Ah! I assure you these terrible calumnies are invented to conceal double crime! I throw myself at your feet, — I implore your justice!”

“Rise, monsieur. This is only a preliminary examination, and I confess that, so far, he comes well out of it, for imagination can hardly understand such a depth of deceit. I watched him closely the whole time, and I could discover no sign of alarm, no contradiction, in either face or language; if guilty, he must be the greatest hypocrite that ever existed. But I shall neglect nothing: if a criminal is allowed to flatter himself with impunity, he frequently forgets to be prudent, and I have seen many betray themselves when they thought they had nothing to fear. Patience, and trust to the justice of both God and man.”

Several days passed, and Derues flattered him self the danger was over: his every action mean while was most carefully watched, but so that he remained unaware of the surveillance. A police officer named Mutel, distinguished for activity and intelligence beyond his fellows, was charged with collecting information and following any trail. All his bloodhounds were in action, and hunted Paris thoroughly, but could trace nothing bearing on the fate of Madame de Lamotte and her son. Mutel, however, soon discovered that in the rue Saint Victor, Derues had failed — three successive times, that he had been pursued by numerous creditors, and been often near imprisonment for debt, and that in 1771 he had been publicly accused of incendiarism. He reported on these various circumstances, and then went himself to Derues' abode, where he obtained no results. Madame Derues declared that she knew nothing whatever, and the police, having vainly searched the whole house, had to retire. Derues himself was absent; when he returned he found another order to appear before the magistrate.

His first success had encouraged him. He appeared before the magistrate accompanied by a lawyer and full of confidence, complaining loudly that the police, in searching during his absence, had offended against the rights of a domiciled burgess, and ought to have awaited his return. Affecting a just indignation at Monsieur de Lamotte's conduct towards him, he presented a demand that the latter should be declared a calumniator, and should pay damages for the injury caused to his reputation. But this time his effrontery and audacity were of little avail, the magistrate easily detected him in flagrant lies. He declared at first that he had paid the hundred thousand livres with his own money but when reminded of his various bankruptcies, the claims of his creditors, and the judgments obtained against him as an insolvent debtor, he made a complete volte-face, and declared he had borrowed the money from an advocate named Duclos, to whom he had given a bond in presence of a notary. In spite of all his protestations, the magistrate committed him to solitary confinement at Fort l'Eveque.

As yet, nothing was publicly known; but vague reports and gossip, carried from shop to shop, circulated among the people, and began to reach the higher classes of society. The infallible instinct which is aroused among the masses is truly marvellous; a great crime is committed, which seems at first likely to defeat justice, and the public conscience is aroused. Long before the tortuous folds which envelop the mystery can be penetrated, while it is still sunk in profound obscurity, the voice of the nation, like an excited hive, buzzes around the secret; though the magistrates doubt, the public curiosity fixes itself, and never leaves go; if the criminal's hiding-place is changed, it follows the track, points it out, descries it in the gloom. This is what happened on the news of Derues' arrest. The affair was everywhere discussed, although the information was incomplete, reports inexact, and no real publicity to be obtained. The romance which Derues had invented by way of defence, and which became known as well as

Monsieur de Lamotte’s accusation, obtained no credence whatever; on the contrary, all the reports to his discredit were eagerly adopted. As yet, no crime could be traced, but the public presentiment divined an atrocious one. Have we not often seen similar agitations? The names of Bastide, of Castaing, of Papavoine, had hardly been pronounced before they completely absorbed all the public attention, and this had to be satisfied, light had to be thrown on the darkness: society demanded vengeance.

Derues felt some alarm in his dungeon, but his presence of mind and his dissimulation in no wise deserted him, and he swore afresh every day to the truth of his statements. But his last false assertion turned against him: the bond for a hundred thousand livres which he professed to have given to Duclos was a counterfeit which Duclos had annulled by a sort of counter declaration made the same day. Another circumstance, intended to ensure his safety, only redoubled suspicion. On April 8th, notes payable to order to the amount of seventy-eight thousand livres, were received by Monsieur de Lamotte’s lawyer, as if coming from Madame de Lamotte. It appeared extraordinary that these notes, which arrived in an ordinary stamped envelope, should not be accompanied by any letter of advice, and suspicion attached to Madame Derues, who hitherto had remained unnoticed. An inquiry as to where the packet had been posted soon revealed the office, distinguished by a letter of the alphabet, and the postmaster described a servant-maid who had brought the letter and paid for it. The description resembled the Derues’ servant; and this girl, much alarmed, acknowledged, after a great deal of hesitation, that she had posted the letter in obedience to her mistress’s orders. Whereupon Madame Derues was sent as a prisoner to Fort l’Eveque, and her husband transferred to the Grand-Chatelet. On being interrogated, she at length owned that she had sent these notes to Monsieur de Lamotte’s lawyer, and that her husband had given them her in an envelope hidden in the soiled linen for which she had brought him clean in exchange.

All this certainly amounted to serious presumptive evidence of guilt, and if Derues had shown himself to the multitude, which followed every phase of the investigation with increasing anxiety, a thousand arms would have willingly usurped the office of the executioner; but the distance thence to actual proof of murder was enormous for the magistracy. Derues maintained his tranquillity, always asserting that Madame de Lamotte and her son were alive, and would clear him by their reappearance. Neither threats nor stratagems succeeded in making him contradict himself, and his assurance shook the strongest conviction. A new difficulty was added to so much uncertainty.

A messenger had been sent off secretly with all haste to Lyons; his return was awaited for a test which it was thought would be decisive.

One morning Derues was fetched from his prison and taken to a lower hall of the Conciergerie. He received no answers to the questions addressed to his escort, and this silence showed him the necessity of being on his guard and preserving his imperturbable demeanour whatever might happen. On arriving, he found the commissioner of police, Mutel, and some other persons. The hall being very dark, had been illuminated with several torches, and Derues was so placed that the light fell strongly on his face, and was then ordered to look towards a particular part of the hall. As he did so, a door opened, and a man entered. Derues beheld him with indifference, and seeing that the stranger was observing him attentively, he bowed to him as one might bow to an unknown person whose curiosity seems rather unusual.

It was impossible to detect the slightest trace of emotion, a hand placed on his heart would not have felt an increased pulsation, yet this stranger's recognition would be fatal!

Mutel approached the new-comer and whispered —

"Do you recognise him?"

"No, I do not."

"Have the kindness to leave the room for a moment; we will ask you to return immediately."

This individual was the lawyer in whose office at Lyons the deed had been drawn up which Derues had signed, disguised as a woman, and under the name of Marie-Francoise Perier, wife of the Sieur de Lamotte.

A woman's garments were brought in, and Derues was ordered to put them on, which he did readily, affecting much amusement. As he was assisted to disguise himself, he laughed, stroked his chin and assumed mincing airs, carrying effrontery so far as to ask for a mirror.

"I should like to see if it is becoming," he said; "perhaps I might make some conquests."

The lawyer returned: Derues was made to pass before him, to sit at a table, sign a paper, in fact to repeat everything it was imagined he might have said or done in the lawyer's office. This second attempt at identification succeeded no better than the first. The lawyer hesitated; then, understanding all the importance of his deposition, he refused to swear to anything, and finally declared that this was not the person who had come to him at Lyons.

"I am sorry, sir," said Derues, as they removed him, "that you should have been troubled by having to witness this absurd comedy. Do not blame me for it; but ask Heaven to enlighten those who do not fear to accuse me. As for me, knowing that my innocence will shortly be made clear, I pardon them henceforth."

Although justice at this period was generally expeditious, and the lives of accused persons were by no means safe-guarded as they now are, it was impossible to condemn Derues in the absence of any positive proofs of guilt. He knew this, and waited patiently in his prison for the moment when he should triumph over the capital accusation which weighed against him. The storm no longer thundered over his head, the most terrible trials were passed, the examinations became less frequent, and there were no more surprises to dread. The lamentations of Monsieur de Lamotte went to the hearts of the magistrates, but his certainty could not establish theirs, and they pitied, but could not avenge him. In certain minds a sort of reaction favourable to the prisoner began to set in. Among the dupes of Derues' seeming piety, many who at first held their peace under these crushing accusations returned to their former opinion. The bigots and devotees, all who made a profession of kneeling in the churches, of publicly crossing themselves and dipping their fingers in the holy water, and who lived on cant and repetitions of "Amen" and "Alleluia," talked of persecution, of martyrdom, until Derues nearly became a saint destined by the Almighty to find canonisation in a dungeon. Hence arose quarrels and arguments; and this abortive trial, this unproved accusation, kept the public imagination in a constant ferment.

To the greater part of those who talk of the "Supreme Being," and who expect His intervention in human affairs, "Providence" is only a word, solemn and sonorous, a sort of theatrical machine which sets all right in the end, and which they glorify with a few banalities proceeding from the lips, but not from the heart. It is true that this unknown and mysterious Cause which we call "God" or "Chance" often appears so exceedingly blind and deaf that one may be permitted to wonder whether certain crimes are really set apart for punishment, when so many others apparently go scot-free.

How many murders remain buried in the night of the tomb! how many outrageous and avowed crimes have slept peacefully in an insolent and audacious prosperity! We know the names of many criminals, but who can tell the number of unknown and forgotten victims? The history of humanity is twofold, and like that of the invisible world, which contains marvels unexplored by the science of the visible one, the history recounted in books is by no means the most curious and strange. But without delaying over questions such as these, without protesting here against sophistries which cloud the conscience and hide the presence of an avenging Deity, we leave the facts to the general judgment, and have now to relate the last episode in this long and terrible drama.

Of all the populous quarters of Paris which commented on the "affaire Derues," none showed more excitement than that of the Greve, and amongst all the surrounding streets none could boast more numerous crowds than the rue de la Mortellerie. Not that a secret instinct magnetised the crowd in the very place where the proof lay buried, but that each day its attention was aroused by a painful spectacle. A pale and grief-stricken man, whose eyes seemed quenched in tears, passed often down the street, hardly able to drag himself along; it was Monsieur de Lamotte, who lodged, as we have said, in the rue de la Mortellerie, and who seemed like a spectre wandering round a tomb. The crowd made way and uncovered before him, everybody respected such terrible misfortune, and when he had passed, the groups formed up again, and continued discussing the mystery until nightfall.

On April 17th, about four in the afternoon, a score of workmen and gossiping women had collected in front of a shop. A stout woman, standing on the lowest step, like an orator in the tribune, held forth and related for the twentieth time what she knew, or rather, did not know. There were listening ears and gaping mouths, even a slight shudder ran through the group; for the widow Masson, discovering a gift of eloquence at the age of sixty, contrived to mingle great warmth and much indignation in her recital. All at once silence fell on the crowd, and a passage was made for Monsieur de Lamotte. One man ventured to ask —

"Is there anything fresh to-day?"

A sad shake of the head was the only answer, and the unhappy man continued his way.

"Is that Monsieur de Lamotte?" inquired a particularly dirty woman, whose cap, stuck on the side of her, head, allowed locks of grey hair to straggle from under it. “Ah! is that Monsieur de Lamotte?”

“Dear me!” said a neighbour, “don’t you know him by this time? He passes every day.”

“Excuse me! I don’t belong to this quarter, and — no offence — but it is not so beautiful as to bring one out of curiosity! Nothing personal — but it is rather dirty.”

Madame is probably accustomed to use a carriage.”

“That would suit you better than me, my dear, and would save your having to buy shoes to keep your feet off the ground!”

The crowd seemed inclined to hustle the speaker, —

“Wait a moment!” she continued, “I didn’t mean to offend anyone. I am a poor woman, but there’s no disgrace in that, and I can afford a glass of liqueur. Eh, good gossip, you understand, don’t you? A drop of the best for Mother Maniffret, and if my fine friend there will drink with me to settle our difference, I will stand her a glass.”

The example set by the old hawker was contagious, and instead of filling two little glasses only, widow Masson dispensed a bottleful.

“Come, you have done well,” cried Mother Maniffret; “my idea has brought you luck.”

“Faith! not before it was wanted, either!”

“What! are you complaining of trade too?”

“Ah! don’t mention it; it is miserable!”

“There’s no trade at all. I scream myself hoarse all day, and choke myself for twopence halfpenny. I don’t know what’s to come of it all. But you seem to have a nice little custom.”

“What’s the good of that, with a whole house on one’s hands? It’s just my luck; the old tenants go, and the new ones don’t come.”

“What’s the matter, then?”

“I think the devil’s in it. There was a nice man on the first floor-gone; a decent family on the third, all right except that the man beat his wife every night, and made such a row that no one could sleep — gone also. I put up notices — no one even looks at them! A few months ago — it was the middle of December, the day of the last execution — ”

“The 15th, then,” said the hawker. “I cried it, so I know; it’s my trade, that.”

“Very well, then, the 15th,” resumed widow Masson. “On that day, then, I let the cellar to a man who said he was a wine merchant, and who paid a term in advance, seeing that I didn’t know him, and wouldn’t have lent him a farthing on the strength of his good looks. He was a little bit of a man, no taller than that,” — contemptuously holding out her hand, — ”and he had two round eyes which I didn’t like at, all. He certainly paid, he did that, but we are more than half through the second term and I have no news of my tenant.”

“And have you never seen him since?”

“Yes, once — no, twice. Let’s see — three times, I am sure. He came with a hand-cart and a commissionaire, and had a big chest taken downstairs — a case which he said contained wine in bottles....

“No, he came before that, with a workman I think.

“Really, I don’t know if it was before or after — doesn’t matter. Anyhow, it was bottled wine. The third time he brought a mason, and I am sure they quarreled. I heard their voices. He carried off the key, and I have seen neither him nor his wine again. I have another key, and I went down one day; perhaps the rats have drunk the wine and eaten the chest, for there certainly is nothing there any more than there is in my hand now. Nevertheless, I saw what I saw. A big chest, very big, quite new, and corded all round with strong rope.”

“Now, what day was that?” asked the hawker.

“What day? Well, it was — no, I can’t remember.”

“Nor I either; I am getting stupid. Let’s have another little glass-shall we? just to clear our memories!”

The expedient was not crowned with success, the memories failed to recover themselves. The crowd waited, attentive, as may be supposed. Suddenly the hawker exclaimed:

“What a fool I am! I am going to find that, if only I have still got it.”

She felt eagerly in the pocket of her underskirt, and produced several pieces of dirty, crumpled paper. As she unfolded one after another, she asked:

“A big chest, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, very big.”

“And quite new?”

“Quite new.”

“And corded?”

“Yes, I can see it now.”

“So can I, good gracious! It was the day when I sold the history of Leroi de Valines, the 1st of February.”

“Yes, it was a Saturday; the next day was Sunday.”

“That’s it, that’s it! — Saturday, February 1st. Well, I know that chest too! I met your wine merchant on the Place du Louvre, and he wasn’t precisely enjoying himself: one of his creditors wanted to seize the chest, the wine, the whole kettle of fish! A little man, isn’t he? — a scarecrow?”

“Just SO.”

“And has red hair?”

“That’s the man.”

“And looks a hypocrite?”

“You’ve hit it exactly.”

“And he is a hypocrite! enough to make one shudder! No doubt he can’t pay his rent! A thief, my dears, a beggarly thief, who set fire to his own cellar, and who accused me of trying to steal from him, while it was he who cheated me, the villain, out of a piece of twenty-four sous. It’s lucky I turned up here! Well, well, we shall have some fun! Here’s another little business on your hands, and you will have to say where that wine has got to, my dear gossip Derues.”

“Derues!” cried twenty voices all at once.

“What! Derues who is in Prison?”

“Why, that’s Monsieur de Lamotte’s man.”

“The man who killed Madame de Lamotte?”

“The man who made away with her son?”

“A scoundrel, my dears, who accused me of stealing, an absolute monster!”

“It is just a little unfortunate,” said widow Masson, “that it isn’t the man. My tenant calls himself Ducoudray. There’s his name on the register.”

“Confound it, that doesn’t look like it at all,” said the hawker: “now that’s a bore! Oh yes, I have a grudge against that thief, who accused me of stealing. I told him I should sell his history some day. When that happens, I’ll treat you all round.”

As a foretaste of the fulfilment of this promise, the company disposed of a second bottle of liqueur, and, becoming excited, they chattered at random for some time, but at length slowly dispersed, and the street relapsed into the silence of night. But, a few hours later, the inhabitants were surprised to see the two ends occupied by unknown people, while other sinister-looking persons patrolled it all night, as if keeping guard. The next morning a carriage escorted by police stopped at the widow Masson's door. An officer of police got out and entered a neighbouring house, whence he emerged a quarter of an hour later with Monsieur de Lamotte leaning on his arm. The officer demanded the key of the cellar which last December had been hired from the widow Masson by a person named Ducoudray, and went down to it with Monsieur de Lamotte and one of his subordinates.

The carriage standing at the door, the presence of the commissioner Mutel, the chatter of the previous evening, had naturally roused everybody's imagination. But this excitement had to be kept for home use: the whole street was under arrest, and its inhabitants were forbidden to leave their houses. The windows, crammed with anxious faces, questioning each other, in the expectation of something wonderful, were a curious sight; and the ignorance in which they remained, these mysterious preparations, these orders silently executed, doubled the curiosity, and added a sort of terror: no one could see the persons who had accompanied the police officer; three men remained in the carriage, one guarded by the two others. When the heavy coach turned into the rue de la Mortellerie, this man had bent towards the closed window and asked —

"Where are we?"

And when they answered him, he said —

"I do not know this street; I was never in it."

After saying this quite quietly, he asked —

"Why am I brought here?"

As no one replied, he resumed his look of indifference, and betrayed no emotion, neither when the carriage stopped nor when he saw Monsieur de Lamotte enter the widow Masson's house.

The officer reappeared on the threshold, and ordered Derues to be brought in.

The previous evening, detectives, mingling with the crowd, had listened to the hawker's story of having met Derues near the Louvre escorting a large chest. The police magistrate was informed in the course of the evening. It was an indication, a ray of light, perhaps the actual truth, detached from obscurity by chance gossip; and measures were instantly taken to prevent anyone either entering or leaving the street without being followed and examined. Mutel thought he was on the track, but the criminal might have accomplices also on the watch, who, warned in time, might be able to remove the proofs of the crime, if any existed.

Derues was placed between two men who each held an arm. A third went before, holding a torch. The commissioner, followed by men also carrying torches, and provided with spades and pickaxes, came behind, and in this order they descended to the vault. It was a dismal and terrifying procession; anyone beholding these dark and sad countenances, this pale and resigned man, passing thus into these damp vaults illuminated by the flickering glare of torches, might well have thought himself the victim of illusion and watching some gloomy execution in a dream. But all was real and when light penetrated this dismal charnel-house it seemed at once to illuminate its secret depths, so that the light of truth might at length penetrate these dark shadows, and that the voice of the dead would speak from the earth and the walls.

“Wretch!” exclaimed Monsieur de Lamotte, when he saw Derues appear, “is it here that you murdered my wife and my son?”

Derues looked calmly at him, and replied —

“I beg you, sir, not to add insult to the misfortunes you have already caused. If you stood in my place and I were in yours, I should feel some pity and respect for so terrible a position. What do you want me? and why am I brought here?”

He did not know the events of last evening, and could only mentally accuse the mason who had helped to bury the chest. He felt that he was lost, but his audacity never forsook him.

“You are here, in the first place, to be confronted with this woman,” said the officer, causing the widow Masson to stand opposite to him.

“I do not know her.”

“But I know you, and know you well. It was you who hired this cellar under the name of Ducoudray.”

Derues shrugged his shoulders and answered bitterly —

“I can understand a man being condemned to the torture if he is guilty, but that in order to accomplish one’s mission as accuser, and to discover a criminal, false witnesses who can give no evidence should be brought a hundred leagues, that the rabble should be roused up, that divers faces and imaginary names should be bestowed on an innocent man, in order to turn a movement of surprise or an indignant gesture to his disadvantage, all this is iniquitous, and goes beyond the right of judgment bestowed upon men by

God. I do not know this woman, and no matter what she says or does, I shall say no more.”

Neither the skill nor threats of the police officer could shake this resolution. It was to no purpose that the widow Masson repeated and asseverated that she recognised him as her tenant Ducoudray, and that he had had a large case of wine taken down into the cellar; Derues folded his arms, and remained as motionless as if he had been blind and deaf.

The walls were sounded, the stones composing them carefully examined, the floor pierced in several places, but nothing unusual was discovered.

Would they have to give it up? Already the officer was making signs to this effect, when the man who had remained at first below with Monsieur de Lamotte, and who, standing in shadow, had carefully watched Derues when he was brought down, came forward, and pointing to the recess under the stairs, said —

“Examine this corner. The prisoner glanced involuntarily in this direction when he came down; I have watched him, and it is the only sign he has given. I was the only person who could see him, and he did not see me. He is very clever, but one can’t be for ever on one’s guard, and may the devil take me if I haven’t scented the hiding-place.”

“Wretch!” said Derues to himself, “then you have had your hand on me for a whole hour, and amused yourself by prolonging my agony! Oh! I ought to have known it; I have found my master. Never mind, you shall learn nothing from my face, nor yet from the decaying body you will find; worms and poison can only have left an unrecognisable corpse.”

An iron rod sunk into the ground, encountered a hard substance some four feet below. Two men set to work, and dug with energy. Every eye was fixed upon this trench increasing in depth with every shovelful of earth which the two labourers cast aside. Monsieur de Lamotte was nearly fainting, and his emotion impressed everyone except Derues. At length the silence was broken by the spades striking heavily on wood, and the noise made everyone shudder. The chest was uncovered and hoisted out of the trench; it was opened, and the body of a woman was seen, clad only in a chemise, with a red and white headband, face downwards. The body was turned over, and Monsieur de Lamotte recognised his wife, not yet disfigured.

The feeling of horror was so great that no one spoke or uttered a sound. Derues, occupied in considering the few chances which remained to him, had not observed that, by the officer’s order, one of the guards had left the cellar before the men began to dig. Everybody had drawn back both from the corpse and the murderer, who alone had not moved, and who was repeating prayers. The flame of the torches placed on the ground cast a reddish light on this silent and terrible scene.

Derues started and turned round on hearing a terrified cry behind him. His wife had just been brought to the cellar. The commissioner seized her with one hand, and taking a torch in the other, compelled her to look down on the body.

“It is Madame de Lamotte!” she exclaimed.

“Yes, yes,” she answered, overwhelmed with terror, — ”yes, I recognise her!”

Unable to support the sight any longer, she grew pale and fainted away. She and her husband were removed separately. One would have supposed the discovery was already known outside, for the people showered curses and cries of “Assassin!” and “Poisoner!” on the carriage which conveyed Derues. He remained silent during the drive, but before re-entering his dungeon, he said —

“I must have been mad when I sought to hide the death and burial of Madame de Lamotte from public knowledge. It is the only sin I have committed, and, innocent of aught else, I resign myself as a Christian to the judgment of God.”

It was the only line of defence which remained open to him, and he clung to it, with the hope of imposing on the magistrates by redoubled hypocrisy and pious observances. But all this laboriously constructed scaffolding of lies was shaken to its base and fell away piece by piece. Every moment brought fresh and overwhelming revelations. He professed that Madame de Lamotte had died suddenly in his house, and that, fearing suspicion, he had buried her secretly. But the doctors called on to examine the body declared that she had been poisoned with corrosive sublimate and opium. The pretended payment was clearly an odious imposture, the receipt a forgery! Then, like a threatening spectre, arose another question, to which he found no reply, and his own invention turned against him.

Why, knowing his mother was no more, had he taken young de Lamotte to Versailles? What had become of the youth? What had befallen, him? Once on the track, the cooper with whom he had lodged on the 12th of February was soon discovered, and an Act of Parliament ordered the exhumation of the corpse buried under the name of Beaupre, which the cooper identified by a shirt which he had given for the burial. Derues, confounded by the evidence, asserted that the youth died of indigestion and venereal disease. But the doctors again declared the presence of corrosive sublimate and opium. All this evidence of guilt he met with assumed resignation, lamenting incessantly for Edouard, whom he declared he had loved as his own son. "Alas!" he said, "I see that poor boy every night! But it softens my grief to know that he was not deprived of the last consolations of religion! God, who sees me, and who knows my innocence, will enlighten the magistrates, and my honour will be vindicated."

The evidence being complete, Derues was condemned by sentence of the Chatelet, pronounced April 30th, and confirmed by Parliament, May 5th. We give the decree as it is found in the archives:

"This Court having considered the trial held before the Provost of Paris, or his Deputy-Lieutenant at the Chatelet, for the satisfaction of the aforesaid Deputy at the aforesaid Chatelet, at the request of the Deputy of the King's Attorney General at the aforesaid Court, summoner and plaintiff, against Antoine-Francois Derues, and Marie-Louise Nicolais, his wife, defendants and accused, prisoners in the prisons of the Conciergerie of the Palace at Paris, who have appealed from the sentence given at the aforesaid trial, the thirtieth day of April 1777, by which the aforesaid Antoine-Francois Derues has been declared duly attainted and convicted of attempting unlawfully to appropriate without payment, the estate of Buissony Souef, belonging to the Sieur and Dame de Saint Faust de Lamotte, from whom he had bought the said estate by private contract on the twenty-second day of December 1775, and also of having unworthily abused the hospitality shown by him since the sixteenth day of December last towards the aforesaid Dame de Lamotte, who arrived in Paris on the aforesaid day in order to conclude with him the bargain agreed on in December 1775, and who, for this purpose, and at his request, lodged with her son in the house of the said Derues, who of premeditated design poisoned the said Dame de Lamotte, whether by a medicine composed and prepared by him on the thirtieth day of January last, or by the beverages and drinks administered by him after the aforesaid medicine (he having taken the precaution to send his servant into the country for two or three days), and to keep away strangers from the room where the said Dame de Lamotte was lying), from the effects of which poison the said Dame de Lamotte died on the night of the said thirty-first day of January last; also of having kept her demise secret, and of having himself enclosed in a chest the body of the said Dame de Lamotte, which he then caused to be secretly transported to a cellar in the rue de la Mortellerie hired by him for this purpose, under the assumed name of Ducoudray, wherein he buried it himself, or caused it to be buried; also of having persuaded the son of the above Dame de Lamotte (who, with his mother, had lodged in his house from the time of their arrival in Paris until the fifteenth day of January, last, — and who had then been placed in a school that the aforesaid Dame de Lamotte was at Versailles and desired him to join her there, and, under this pretence, of having conducted the said younger Sieur de Lamotte, the twelfth day of February (after having given him some chocolate), to the aforesaid town of Versailles, to a lodging hired at a cooper's, and of having there wilfully poisoned him, either in the chocolate taken by the said younger Sieur de Lamotte before starting, or in beverages and medicaments which the said Derues himself prepared, mixed, and administered to the aforesaid Sieur de Lamotte the younger, during the eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth days of February last, having kept him lying ill in the aforesaid hired room, and having refused to call in physicians or surgeons, notwithstanding the progress of the malady, and the representations made to him on the subject, saying that he himself was a physician and surgeon; from which poison the said Sieur de Lamotte the younger died on the fifteenth day of February last, at nine o'clock in the evening, in the arms of the aforesaid Derues, who, affecting the deepest grief, and shedding tears, actually exhorted the aforesaid Sieur de Lamotte to confession, and repeated the prayers for the dying; after which he himself laid out the body for burial, saying that the deceased had begged him to do so, and telling the people of the house that he had died of venereal disease; also of having caused him to be buried the next day in the churchyard of the parish church of Saint Louis at the aforesaid Versailles, and of having entered the deceased in the register of the said parish under a false birthplace, and the false name of Beaupre, which name the said Derues had himself assumed on arriving at the said lodging, and had given to the said Sieur de Lamotte the younger, whom he declared to be his nephew. Also, to cover these atrocities, and in order to appropriate to himself the aforesaid estate of Buisson-Souef, he is convicted of having calumniated the aforesaid Dame de Lamotte, and of having used various manoeuvres and practised several deceptions, to wit —

“First, in signing, or causing to be signed, the names of the above Dame de Lamotte to a deed of private contract between the said Derues and his wife on one side and the aforesaid Dame de Lamotte by right of a power of attorney given by her husband on the other (the which deed is dated the twelfth day of February, and was therefore written after the decease of the said Dame de Lamotte); by which deed the said Dame de Lamotte appears to change the previous conventions agreed on in the first deed of the twenty-second of December in the year 1775, and acknowledges receipt from the said Derues of a sum of one hundred thousand livres, as being the price of the estate of Buisson;

“Secondly, in signing before a notary, the ninth day of February last, a feigned acknowledgment for a third part of a hundred thousand livres, in order to give credence to the pretended payment made by him;

“Thirdly, in announcing and publishing, and attesting even by oath at the time of an examination before the commissioner Mutel, that he had really paid in cash to the aforesaid Dame de Lamotte the aforesaid hundred thousand livres, and that she, being provided with this money, had fled with her son and a certain person unknown;

“Fourthly, in depositing with a notary the deed of private contract bearing the pretended receipt for the above sum of one hundred thousand livres, end pursuing at law the execution of this deed and of his claim to the possession of the said estate;

“Fifthly, in signing or causing to be signed by another person, before the notaries of the town of Lyons, whither he had gone for this purpose, a deed dated the twelfth day of March, by which the supposed Dame de Lamotte appeared to accept the payment of the hundred thousand livres, and to give authority to the Sieur de Lamotte, her husband, to receive the arrears of the remainder of the price of the said estate, the which deed he produced as a proof of the existence of the said Dame de Lamotte;

“Sixthly, in causing to be sent, by other hands, under the name of the aforesaid Dame de Lamotte, to a lawyer, on the eighth day o f April 1777 (at a time when he was in prison, and had been compelled to abandon the fable that he had paid the aforesaid sum of one hundred thousand livres in hard cash, and had substituted a pretended payment made in notes), the notes pretended to have been given by him in payment to the said Dame de Lamotte;

“Seventh, and finally, in maintaining constantly, until the discovery of the body of the aforesaid Dame de Lamotte, that the said Dame was still alive, and that he had seen her at the town of Lyons, as has been stated above.

“In atonement has been condemned, etc. etc. etc.

“His goods are hereby declared acquired and confiscated to the King, or to whomsoever His Majesty shall appoint, first deducting the sum of two hundred livres as fine for the King, in case the confiscation is not to the sole profit of His Majesty; and also the sum of six hundred livres for masses to be said for the repose of the souls of the aforesaid Dame de Lamotte and her son. And, before being executed, the said Antoine-Francois Derues shall suffer the question ordinary and extraordinary, in order that from his mouth may be learned the truth of these facts, and also the names of his accomplices. And the decision of the judges in the proceedings with regard to the above-mentioned Marie-Louise Nicolais, wife of Derues, is delayed until after the execution of the above sentence. It is also decreed that the mortuary act of the aforesaid de Lamotte the younger, dated the sixteenth day of February last, in the register of deaths belonging to the parish church of Saint-Louis at Versailles, be amended, and his correct names be substituted, in order that the said Sieur de Lamotte, the father, and other persons interested, may produce said names before the magistrates if required. And it is also decreed that this sentence be printed and published by the deputy of the Attorney-General at the Chatelet, and affixed to the walls in the usual places and cross roads of the town, provostship and viscounty of Paris, and wherever else requisite.

“With regard to the petition of Pierre-Etienne de Saint-Faust de Lamotte, a Royal Equerry, Sieur de Grange-Flandre, Buisson-Souef, Valperfond, and other places, widower and inheritor of Marie Francois Perier, his wife, according to their marriage contract signed before Baron and partner, notaries at Paris, the fifth day of September 1762, whereby he desires to intervene in the action brought against Derues and his accomplices, concerning the assassination and poisoning committed on the persons of the wife and son of the said Sieur de Saint-Faust de Lamotte, on the accusation made by him to the Deputy Attorney-General of the King at the Chatelet at present pending in the Court, on the report of the final judgment given in the said action the 30th of April last, and which allowed the intervention; it is decreed that there shall be levied on the goods left by the condemned, before the rights of the Treasury, and separate from them, the sum of six thousand livres, or such other sum as it shall please the Court to award; from which sum the said Saint-Faust de Lamotte shall consent to deduct the sum of two thousand seven hundred and forty-eight livres, which he acknowledges has been sent or remitted to him by the said Derues and his wife at different times; which first sum of six thousand livres, or such other, shall be employed by the said Sieur de Saint-Faust de Lamotte, who is authorised to found therewith, in the parish church of Saint Nicholas de Villeneuve-le-Roy, in which parish the estate of Buisson-Souef is situate, and which is mentioned in the action, an annual and perpetual service for the repose of the souls of the wife and son of the said Sieur de Saint-Faust de Lamotte, of which an act shall be inserted in the decree of intervention, and a copy of this act or decree shall be inscribed upon a stone which shall be set in the wall of the said church of Saint Nicholas de Villeneuve-le-Roy, in such place as is expedient. And the deed of contract for private sale, made between the late spouse of the said Sieur de Saint-Faust de Lamotte and the above-named Derues and his wife, is hereby declared null and void, as having had no value in absence of any payment or realisation of contract before a notary; and the pretended agreement of the twelfth day of February last, as also all other deeds fabricated by the said Derues or others, named in the above action, as also any which may hereafter be presented, are hereby declared to be null and void.

"The Court declares the judgment pronounced by the magistrates of the Chatelet against the above named Derues to be good and right, and his appeal against the same to be bad and ill-founded.

"It is decreed that the sentence shall lose its full and entire effect with regard to Marie-Louise Nicolais, who is condemned to the ordinary fine of twelve livres. The necessary relief granted on the petition of Pierre-Etienne de Saint-Faust de Lamotte, the second day of May this present month, and delay accorded until after the suspended judgment pronounced with regard to the said Marie-Louise Nicolais.

"(Signed) De Gourgues, President.

"OUTREMONT, Councillor."

Derues' assurance and calmness never deserted him for one moment. For three-quarters of an hour he harangued the Parliament, and his defence was remarkable both for its presence of mind and the art with which he made the most of any circumstances likely to suggest doubts to the magistrates and soften the severity of the first sentence. Found guilty on every point, he yet protested that he was innocent of poisoning. Remorse, which often merely means fear of punishment, had no place in his soul, and torture he seemed not to dread. As strong in will as he was weak in body, he desired to die like a martyr in the faith of his religion, which was hypocrisy, and the God whom he gloried on the scaffold was the god of lies.

On May 6th, at seven in the morning, the sentence of execution was read to him. He listened calmly, and when it was finished, remarked:

"I had not anticipated so severe a sentence."

A few hours later the instruments of torture were got ready. He was told that this part of his punishment would be remitted if he would confess his crimes and the names of his accomplices. He replied:

"I have no more to say. I know what terrible torture awaits me, I know I must die to-day, but I have nothing to confess."

He made no resistance when his knees and legs were bound, and endured the torture courageously. Only, in a moment of agony, he exclaimed:

"Accursed money! has thou reduced me to this?"

Thinking that pain would overcome his resolution, the presiding magistrate bent towards him, and said:

"Unhappy man! confess thy crime, since death is near at hand."

He recovered his firmness, and, looking at the magistrate, replied:

"I know it, monseigneur; I have perhaps not three hours to live."

Thinking that his apparently feeble frame could not endure the last wedges, the executioner was ordered to stop. He was unbound and laid on a mattress, and a glass of wine was brought, of which he only drank a few drops; after this, he made his confession to the priest. For, dinner, they brought him soup and stew, which he ate eagerly, and inquiring of the gaoler if he could have something more, an entree was brought in addition. One might have thought that this final repast heralded, not death but deliverance. At length three o'clock struck the hour appointed for leaving the prison.

According to the report of credible persons whom we have consulted, Paris on this occasion presented a remarkable appearance, which those who saw it were never able to forget. The great anthill was troubled to its very lowest depth. Whether by accident or design, the same day had been fixed for a function which ought to have proved a considerable counter attraction. A great festival in honour of a German prince was given on the Plaine de Grenelle, at which all the court was present; and probably more than one great lady regretted missing the emotions of the Place de Greve, abandoned to the rabble and the bourgeoisie. The rest of the city was deserted, the streets silent, the houses closed. A stranger transported suddenly into such a solitude might have reasonably thought that during the night the town had been smitten by the Angel of Death, and that only a labyrinth of vacant buildings remained, testifying to the life and turmoil of the preceding day. A dark and dense atmosphere hung over the abandoned town; lightning furrowed the heavy motionless clouds; in the distance the occasional rumble of thunder was heard, answered by the cannon of the royal fete. The crowd was divided between the powers of heaven and earth: the terrible majesty of the Eternal on one side, on the other the frivolous pomp of royalty — eternal punishment and transient grandeur in opposition. Like the waters of a flood leaving dry the fields which they have covered, so the waves of the multitude forsook their usual course. Thousands of men and women crowded together along the route which the death-cart would take; an ocean of heads undulated like the ears in a wheatfield. The old houses, hired at high rates, quivered under the weight of eager spectators, and the window sashes had been removed to afford a better view.

Attired in the shirt worn by condemned criminals, and bearing a placard both in front and behind, with the words “Wilful Poisoner,” Derues descended the great staircase of the Chatelet with a firm step. It was at this moment, on seeing the crucifix, that he exclaimed, “O Christ, I shall suffer like Thee!” He mounted the tumbril, looking right and left amongst the crowd. During the progress he recognised and bowed to several of his old associates, and bade adieu in a clear voice to the former mistress of his ‘prentice days, who has recorded that she never saw him look so pleasant. Arrived at the door of Notre Dame, where the clerk was awaiting him, he descended from the tumbril without assistance, took a lighted wax taper weighing two pounds in his hand, and did penance, kneeling, bareheaded and barefooted, a rope round his neck, repeating the words of the death-warrant. He then reascended the cart in the midst of the cries and execrations of the populace, to which he appeared quite insensible. One voice only, endeavouring to dominate the tumult, caused him to turn his head: it was that of the hawker who was crying his sentence, and who broke off now and then to say —

“Well! my poor gossip Derues, how do you like that fine carriage you’re in? Oh yes, mutter your prayers and look up to heaven as much as you like, you won’t take us in now. Ah! thief who said I stole from you! Wasn’t I right when I said I should be selling your sentence some day?”

Then, adding her own wrongs to the list of crimes, she declared that the Parliament had condemned him as much for having falsely accused her of theft as for having poisoned Madame de Lamotte and her son!

When arrived at the scaffold, he gazed around him, and a sort of shiver of impatience ran through the crowd. He smiled, and as if anxious to trick mankind for the last time, asked to be taken to the Hotel de Ville, which was granted, in the hope that he would at last make some confession; but he only persisted in saying that he was guiltless of poisoning. He had an interview with his wife, who nearly fainted on seeing him, and remained for more than a quarter of an hour unable to say a word. He lavished tender names upon her, and professed much affliction at seeing her in so miserable a condition.

When she was taken away, he asked permission to embrace her, and took a most touching farewell. His last words have been preserved.

“My dear wife,” he said, “I recommend our beloved children to your care: bring them up in the fear of God. You must go to Chartres, you will there see the bishop, on whom I had the honour of waiting when I was there last, and who has always been kind to me; I believe he has thought well of me, and that I may hope he will take pity on you and on our children.”

It was now seven in the evening, and the crowd began to murmur at the long delay. At length the criminal reappeared. An onlooker who saw him go to the Hotel de Ville, and who was carried by the movement of the crowd to the foot of the scaffold, says that when handed over to the executioner he took off his clothes himself. He kissed the instrument of punishment with devotion, then extended himself on the St. Andrew’s cross, asking with a resigned smile that they would make his sufferings as short as possible. As soon as his head was covered, the executioner gave the signal. One would have thought a very few blows would have finished so frail a being, but he seemed as hard to kill as the venomous reptiles which must be crushed and cut to pieces before life is extinct, and the coup de grace was found necessary. The executioner uncovered his head and showed the confessor that the eyes were closed and that the heart had ceased to beat. The body was then removed from the cross, the hands and feet fastened together, and it was thrown on the funeral pile.

While the execution was proceeding the people applauded. On the morrow they bought up the fragments of bone, and hastened to buy lottery tickets, in the firm conviction that these precious relics would bring luck to the fortunate possessors!

In 1777, Madame Derues was sentenced to perpetual imprisonment, and confined at the Salpetriere. She was one of the first victims who perished in the prison massacres.

LA CONSTANTIN — 1660

CHAPTER I

Before beginning our story, we must warn the reader that it will not be worth his while to make researches among contemporary or other records as to the personage whose name it bears. For in truth neither Marie Leroux, widow of Jacques Constantin, nor her accomplice, Claude Perregaud, was of sufficient importance to find a place on any list of great criminals, although it is certain that they were guilty of the crimes with which they were charged. It may seem strange that what follows is more a history of the retribution which overtook the criminals than a circumstantial description of the deeds for which they were punished; but the crimes were so revolting, and so unsuitable for discussion, that it was impossible for us to enter into any details on the subject, so that what we offer in these pages is, we confess quite openly, not a full, true, and particular account of a certain series of events leading up to a certain result; it is not even a picture wherein that result is depicted with artistic completeness, it is only an imperfect narrative imperfectly rounded off. We feel sure, however, that the healthy-minded reader will be grateful for our reticence and total disregard of proportion. In spite of the disadvantage which such a theme imposes on any writer with a deep sense of responsibility, we have resolved to let in some light on these obscure figures; for we can imagine no more effective way of throwing into high relief the low morals and deep corruption into which all classes of society had sunk at the termination of the factious dissensions of the Fronde, which formed such a fitting prelude to the licence of the reign of the grand roi.

After this explanation, we shall, without further preamble, introduce the reader to a little tavern in Paris, situated in the rue Saint-Andre-des-Arts, on an evening in November 1658.

It was about seven o’clock. Three gentlemen were seated at one of the tables in a low, smoky room. They had already emptied several bottles, and one of them seemed to have just suggested some madcap scheme to the others, the thought of which sent them off into shouts of laughter.

“Pardu!” said one of them, who was the first to recover his breath, “I must say it would be an excellent trick.”

"Splendid!" said another; "and if you like, Commander de Jars, we can try it this very evening."

"All right, my worthy king's treasurer, provided my pretty nephew here won't be too much shocked," and as he spoke de Jars gave to the youngest of the three a caressing touch on the cheek with the back of his hand.

"That reminds me, de Jars!" said the treasurer, "that word you have just said piques my curiosity. For some months now this little fellow here, Chevalier de Moranges, follows you about everywhere like your shadow. You never told us you had a nephew. Where the devil did you get him?"

The commander touched the chevalier's knee under the table, and he, as if to avoid speaking, slowly filled and emptied his glass.

"Look here," said the treasurer, "do you want to hear a few plain words, such as I shall rap out when God takes me to task about the peccadilloes of my past life? I don't believe a word about the relationship. A nephew must be the son of either a brother or a sister. Now, your only sister is an abbess, and your late brother's marriage was childless. There is only one way of proving the relationship, and that is to confess that when your brother was young and wild he and Love met, or else Madame l'Abbesse — — ."

"Take care, Treasurer Jeannin! no slander against my sister!"

"Well, then, explain; you can't fool me! May I be hanged if I leave this place before I have dragged the secret out of you! Either we are friends or we are not. What you tell no one else you ought to tell me. What! would you make use of my purse and my sword on occasion and yet have secrets from me? It's too bad: speak, or our friendship is at an end! I give you fair warning that I shall find out everything and publish it abroad to court and city: when I strike a trail there's no turning me aside. It will be best for you to whisper your secret voluntarily into my ear, where it will be as safe as in the grave."

"How full of curiosity you are, my good friend!" said de Jars, leaning one elbow on the table, and twirling the points of his moustache with his hand; "but if I were to wrap my secret round the point of a dagger would you not be too much afraid of pricking your fingers to pull it off?"

"Not I," said the king's treasurer, beginning to twirl his moustache also: "the doctors have always told me that I am of too full a complexion and that it would do me all the good in the world to be bled now and then. But what would be an advantage to me would be dangerous to you. It's easy to see from your jaundiced phiz that for you blood-letting is no cure."

"And you would really go that length? You would risk a duel if I refused to let you get to the bottom of my mystery?"

"Yes, on my honour! Well, how is it to be?"

"My dear boy," said de Jars to the youth, "we are caught, and may as well yield gracefully. You don't know this big fellow as well as I do. He's obstinacy itself. You can make the most obstinate donkey go on by pulling its tail hard enough, but when Jeannin gets a notion into his pate, not all the legions of hell can get it out again. Besides that, he's a skilful fencer, so there's nothing for it but to trust him."

"Just as you like," said the young man; "you know all my circumstances and how important it is that my secret should be kept."

"Oh! among Jeannin's many vices there are a few virtues, and of these discretion is the greatest, so that his curiosity is harmless. A quarter of an hour hence he will let himself be killed rather than reveal what just now he is ready to risk his skin to find out, whether we will or no."

Jeannin nodded approvingly, refilled the glasses, and raising his to his lips, said in a tone of triumph —

"I am listening, commander."

"Well, if it must be, it must. First of all, learn that my nephew is not my nephew at all."

"Go on."

"That his name is not Moranges."

"And the next?"

"I am not going to reveal his real name to you."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't know it myself, and no more does the chevalier."

"What' nonsense!"

"No nonsense at all, but the sober truth. A few months ago the chevalier came to Paris, bringing me a letter of introduction from a German whom I used to know years ago. This letter requested me to look after the bearer and help him in his investigations. As you said just now, Love and someone once met somewhere, and that was about all was known as to his origin. Naturally the young man wants to cut a figure in the world, and would like to discover the author of his existence, that he may have someone at hand to pay the debts he is going to incur. We have brought together every scrap of information we could collect as to this person, hoping to find therein a clue that we could follow up. To be quite open with you, and convince you at the same time how extremely prudent and discreet we must be, I must tell you that we think we have found one, and that it leads to no less a dignitary than a Prince of the Church. But if he should get wind of our researches too soon everything would be at an end, don't you see? So keep your tongue between your teeth."

"Never fear," said Jeannin.

"Now, that's what I call speaking out as a friend should. I wish you luck, my gallant Chevalier de Moranges, and until you unearth your father, if you want a little money, my purse is at your service. On my word, de Jars, you must have been born with a caul. There never was your equal for wonderful adventures. This one promises well-spicy intrigues, scandalous revelations, and you'll be in the thick of it all. You're a lucky fellow! It's only a few months since you had the most splendid piece of good fortune sent you straight from heaven. A fair lady falls in love with you and makes you carry her off from the convent of La Raquette. But why do you never let anyone catch a glimpse of her? Are you jealous? Or is it that she is no such beauty, after all, but old and wrinkled, like that knave of a Mazarin?"

"I know what I'm about," answered de Jars, smiling; "I have my very good reasons. The elopement caused a great deal of indignation, and it's not easy to get fanatics to listen to common sense. No, I am not in the least jealous; she is madly in love with me. Ask my nephew."

"Does he know her?"

"We have no secrets from each other; the confidence between us is without a flaw. The fair one, believe me, is good to look on, and is worth all the ogling, fan-flirting baggages put together that one sees at court or on the balconies of the Palais Roy: ah! I'll answer for that. Isn't she, Moranges?"

"I'm quite of your opinion," said the youth; exchanging with de jars a singularly significant look; "and you had better treat her well, uncle, or I shall play you some trick."

"Ah! ah!" cried Jeannin. "You poor fellow! I very much fear that you are warming a little serpent in your bosom. Have an eye to this dandy with the beardless chin! But joking apart, my boy, are you really on good terms with the fair lady?"

"Certainly I am."

"And you are not uneasy, commander?"

"Not the least little bit."

"He is quite right. I answer for her as for my self, you know; as long as he loves her she will love him; as long as he is faithful she will be faithful. Do you imagine that a woman who insists on her lover carrying her off can so easily turn away from the man of her choice? I know her well; I have had long talks with her, she and I alone: she is feather-brained, given to pleasure, entirely without prejudices and those stupid scruples which spoil the lives of other women; but a good sort on the whole; devoted to my uncle, with no deception about her; but at the same time extremely jealous, and has no notion of letting herself be sacrificed to a rival. If ever she finds herself deceived, good-bye to prudence and reserve, and then — "

A look and a touch of the commander's knee cut this panegyric short, to which the treasurer was listening with open-eyed astonishment.

"What enthusiasm!" he exclaimed. "Well, and then — — "

"Why, then," went on the young man, with a laugh, "if my uncle behaves badly, I, his nephew, will try to make up for his wrong-doing: he can't blame me then. But until then he may be quite easy, as he well knows."

"Oh yes, and in proof of that I am going to take Moranges with me to-night. He is young and inexperienced, and it will be a good lesson for him to see how a gallant whose amorous intrigues did not begin yesterday sets about getting even with a coquette. He can turn it to account later on.

"On my word," said Jeannin, "my notion is that he is in no great need of a teacher; however, that's your business, not mine. Let us return to what we were talking about just now. Are we agreed; and shall we amuse ourselves by paying out the lady in, her own coin?"

"If you like."

"Which of us is to begin?"

De Jars struck the table with the handle of his dagger.

"More wine, gentlemen?" said the drawer, running up.

"No, dice; and be quick about it."

"Three casts each and the highest wins," said Jeannin. "You begin."

"I throw for myself and nephew." The dice rolled on the table.

"Ace and three."

"It's my turn now. Six and five."

"Pass it over. Five and two."

"We're equal. Four and two."

"Now let me. Ace and blank."

"Double six."

“You have won.”

“And I’m off at once,” said Jeannin, rising, and muffling himself in his mantle, “It’s now half-past seven. We shall see each other again at eight, so I won’t say good-bye.”

“Good luck to you!”

Leaving the tavern and turning into the rue Pavee, he took the direction of the river.

CHAPTER II

In 1658, at the corner of the streets Git-le-Coeur and Le Hurepoix (the site of the latter being now occupied by the Quai des Augustins as far as Pont Saint-Michel), stood the great mansion which Francis I had bought and fitted up for the Duchesse d’Etampes. It was at this period if not in ruins at least beginning to show the ravages of time. Its rich interior decorations had lost their splendour and become antiquated. Fashion had taken up its abode in the Marais, near the Place Royale, and it was thither that profligate women and celebrated beauties now enticed the humming swarm of old rakes and young libertines. Not one of them all would have thought of residing in the mansion, or even in the quarter, wherein the king’s mistress had once dwelt. It would have been a step downward in the social scale, and equivalent to a confession that their charms were falling in the public estimation. Still, the old palace was not empty; it had, on the contrary, several tenants. Like the provinces of Alexander’s empire, its vast suites of rooms had been subdivided; and so neglected was it by the gay world that people of the commonest description strutted about with impunity where once the proudest nobles had been glad to gain admittance. There in semi-isolation and despoiled of her greatness lived Angelique-Louise de Guerchi, formerly companion to Mademoiselle de Pons and then maid of honour to Anne of Austria. Her love intrigues and the scandals they gave rise to had led to her dismissal from court. Not that she was a greater sinner than many who remained behind, only she was unlucky enough or stupid enough to be found out. Her admirers were so indiscreet that they had not left her a shred of reputation, and in a court where a cardinal is the lover of a queen, a hypocritical appearance of decorum is indispensable to success. So Angelique had to suffer for the faults she was not clever enough to hide. Unfortunately for her, her income went up and down with the number and wealth of her admirers, so when she left the court all her possessions consisted of a few articles she had gathered together out of the wreck of her former luxury, and these she was now selling one by one to procure the necessaries of life, while she looked back from afar with an envious eye at the brilliant world from which she had been exiled, and longed for better days. All hope was not at an end for her. By a strange law which does not speak well for human nature, vice finds success easier to attain than virtue. There is no courtesan, no matter how low she has fallen, who cannot find a dupe ready to defend against the world an honour of which no vestige remains. A man who doubts the virtue of the most virtuous woman, who shows himself inexorably severe when he discovers the lightest inclination to falter in one whose conduct has hitherto been above reproach, will stoop and pick up out of the gutter a blighted and tarnished reputation and protect and defend it against all slights, and devote his life to the attempt to restore lustre to the unclean thing dulled by the touch of many fingers. In her days of prosperity Commander de Jars and the king’s treasurer had both fluttered round Mademoiselle de Guerchi, and neither had fluttered in vain. Short as was the period necessary to overcome her scruples, in as short a period it dawned on the two candidates for her favour that each had a successful rival in the other, and that however potent as a reason for surrender the doubloons of the treasurer had been, the personal appearance of the commander had proved equally cogent. As both had felt for her only a passing fancy and not a serious passion, their explanations with each other led to no quarrel between them; silently and simultaneously they withdrew from her circle, without even letting her know they had found her out, but quite determined to revenge, themselves on her should a chance ever offer. However, other affairs of a similar nature had intervened to prevent their carrying out this laudable intention; Jeannin had laid siege to a more inaccessible beauty, who had refused to listen to his sighs for less than 30 crowns, paid in advance, and de Jars had become quite absorbed by his adventure with the convent boarder at La Raquette, and the business of that young stranger whom he passed off as his nephew. Mademoiselle de Guerchi had never seen them again; and with her it was out of sight out of mind. At the moment when she comes into our story she was weaving her toils round a certain Duc de Vitry, whom she had seen at court, but whose acquaintance she had never made, and who had been absent when the scandalous occurrence which led to her disgrace came to light. He was a man of from twenty-five to twenty-six years of age, who idled his life away: his courage was undoubted, and being as credulous as an old libertine, he was ready to draw his sword at any moment to defend the lady whose cause he had espoused, should any insolent slanderer dare to hint there was a smirch on her virtue. Being deaf to all reports, he seemed one of those men expressly framed by heaven to be the consolation of fallen women; such a man as in our times a retired opera-dancer or a superannuated professional beauty would welcome with open arms. He had only one fault — he was married. It is true he neglected his wife, according to the custom of the time, and it is probably also true that his wife cared very little about his infidelities. But still she was an insurmountable obstacle to the fulfilment of Mademoiselle de Guerchi's hopes, who but for her might have looked forward to one day becoming a duchess.

For about three weeks, however, at the time we are speaking of, the duke had neither crossed her threshold nor written. He had told her he was going for a few days to Normandy, where he had large estates, but had remained absent so long after the date he had fixed for his return that she began to feel uneasy. What could be keeping him? Some new flame, perhaps. The anxiety of the lady was all the more keen, that until now nothing had passed between them but looks of languor and words of love. The duke had laid himself and all he possessed at the feet of Angelique, and Angelique had refused his offer. A too prompt surrender would have justified the reports so wickedly spread against her; and, made wise by experience, she was resolved not to compromise her future as she had compromised her past. But while playing at virtue she had also to play at disinterestedness, and her pecuniary resources were consequently almost exhausted. She had proportioned the length of her resistance to the length of her purse, and now the prolonged absence of her lover threatened to disturb the equilibrium which she had established between her virtue and her money. So it happened that the cause of the lovelorn Duc de Vitry was in great peril just at the moment when de Jars and Jeannin resolved to approach the fair one anew. She was sitting lost in thought, pondering in all good faith on the small profit it was to a woman to be virtuous, when she heard voices in the antechamber. Then her door opened, and the king's treasurer walked in.

As this interview and those which follow took place in the presence of witnesses, we are obliged to ask the reader to accompany us for a time to another part of the same house.

We have said there were several tenants: now the person who occupied the rooms next to those in which Mademoiselle de Guerchi lived was a shopkeeper's widow called Rapally, who was owner of one of the thirty-two houses which then occupied the bridge Saint-Michel. They had all been constructed at the owner's cost, in return for a lease for ever. The widow Rapally's avowed age was forty, but those who knew her longest added another ten years to that: so, to avoid error, let us say she was forty-five. She was a solid little body, rather stouter than was necessary for beauty; her hair was black, her complexion brown, her eyes prominent and always moving; lively, active, and if one once yielded to her whims, exacting beyond measure; but until then buxom and soft, and inclined to pet and spoil whoever, for the moment, had arrested her volatile fancy. Just as we make her acquaintance this happy individual was a certain Maitre Quennebert, a notary of Saint Denis, and the comedy played between him and the widow was an exact counterpart of the one going on in the rooms of Mademoiselle de Guerchi, except that the roles were inverted; for while the lady was as much in love as the Duc de Vitry, the answering devotion professed by the notary was as insincere as the disinterested attachment to her lover displayed by the whilom maid of honour.

Maitre Quennebert was still young and of attractive appearance, but his business affairs were in a bad way. For long he had been pretending not to understand the marked advances of the widow, and he treated her with a reserve and respect she would fain have dispensed with, and which sometimes made her doubt of his love. But it was impossible for her as a woman to complain, so she was forced to accept with resignation the persistent and unwelcome consideration with which he surrounded her. Maitre Quennebert was a man of common sense and much experience, and had formed a scheme which he was prevented from carrying out by an obstacle which he had no power to remove. He wanted, therefore, to gain time, for he knew that the day he gave the susceptible widow a legal right over him he would lose his independence. A lover to whose prayers the adored one remains deaf too long is apt to draw back in discouragement, but a woman whose part is restricted to awaiting those prayers, and answering with a yes or no, necessarily learns patience. Maitre Quennebert would therefore have felt no anxiety as to the effect of his dilatoriness on the widow, were it not for the existence of a distant cousin of the late Monsieur Rapally, who was also paying court to her, and that with a warmth much greater than had hitherto been displayed by himself. This fact, in view of the state of the notary’s affairs, forced him at last to display more energy. To make up lost ground and to outdistance his rival once more, he now began to dazzle the widow with fine phrases and delight her with compliments; but to tell the truth all this trouble was superfluous; he was beloved, and with one fond look he might have won pardon for far greater neglect.

An hour before the treasurer's arrival there had been a knock at the door of the old house, and Maitre Quennebert, curled, pomaded, and prepared for conquest, had presented himself at the widow's. She received him with a more languishing air than usual, and shot such arrows at him froth her eyes that to escape a fatal wound he pretended to give way by degrees to deep sadness. The widow, becoming alarmed, asked with tenderness —

"What ails you this evening?"

He rose, feeling he had nothing to fear from his rival, and, being master of the field, might henceforth advance or recede as seemed best for his interests.

"What ails me?" he repeated, with a deep sigh. "I might deceive you, might give you a misleading answer, but to you I cannot lie. I am in great trouble, and how to get out of it I don't know."

"But tell me what it is," said the widow, standing up in her turn.

Maitre Quennebert took three long strides, which brought him to the far end of the room, and asked —

"Why do you want to know? You can't help me. My trouble is of a kind a man does not generally confide to women."

"What is it? An affair of honour?

"Yes."

"Good God! You are going to fight!" she exclaimed, trying to seize him by the arm. "You are going to fight!"

"Ah! if it were nothing worse than that!" said Quennebert, pacing up and down the room: "but you need not be alarmed; it is only a money trouble. I lent a large sum, a few months ago, to a friend, but the knave has run away and left me in the lurch. It was trust money, and must be replaced within three days. But where am I to get two thousand francs?"

"Yes, that is a large sum, and not easy to raise at such short notice."

"I shall be obliged to have recourse to some Jew, who will drain me dry. But I must save my good name at all costs."

Madame Rapally gazed at him in consternation. Maitre Quennebert, divining her thought, hastened to add —

"I have just one-third of what is needed."

"Only one-third?"

“With great care, and by scraping together all I possess, I can make up eight hundred livres. But may I be damned in the next world, or punished as a swindler in this, and one’s as bad as the other to me, if I can raise one farthing more.”

“But suppose someone should lend you the twelve hundred francs, what then?”

“Pardieu! I should accept them,” cried the notary as if he had not the least suspicion whom she could mean. “Do you happen to know anyone, my dear Madame Rapally?”

The widow nodded affirmatively, at the same time giving him a passionate glance.

“Tell me quick the name of this delightful person, and I shall go to him to-morrow morning. You don’t know what a service you are rendering me. And I was so near not telling you of the fix I was in, lest you should torment yourself uselessly. Tell me his name.”

“Can you not guess it?”

“How should I guess it?”

“Think well. Does no one occur to you?”

“No, no one,” said Quennebert, with the utmost innocence.

“Have you no friends?”

“One or two.”

“Would they not be glad to help you?”

“They might. But I have mentioned the matter to no one.”

“To no one?”

“Except you.”

“Well?”

“Well, Madame Rapally — I hope I don’t understand you; it’s not possible; you would not humiliate me. Come, come, it’s a riddle, and I am too stupid to solve it. I give it up. Don’t tantalise me any longer; tell me the name.”

The widow, somewhat abashed by this exhibition of delicacy on the part of Maitre Quennebert, blushed, cast down her eyes, and did not venture to speak.

As the silence lasted some time, it occurred to the notary that he had been perhaps too hasty in his supposition, and he began to cast round for the best means of retrieving his blunder.

“You do not speak,” he said; “I see it was all a joke.”

"No," said the widow at last in a timid voice, "it was no joke; I was quite in earnest. But the way you take things is not very encouraging."

"What do you mean?"

"Pray, do you imagine that I can go on while you glare at me with that angry frown puckering your forehead, as if you had someone before you who had tried to insult you?"

A sweet smile chased the frown from the notary's brow. Encouraged by the suspension of hostilities, Madame Rapally with sudden boldness approached him, and, pressing one of his hands in both her own, whispered —

"It is I who am going to lend you the money."

He repulsed her gently, but with an air of great dignity, and said —

"Madame, I thank you, but I cannot accept."

"Why can't you?"

At this he began to walk round and round the room, while the widow, who stood in the middle, turned as upon a pivot, keeping him always in view. This circus-ring performance lasted some minutes before Quennebert stood still and said —

"I cannot be angry with you, Madame Rapally, I know your offer was made out of the kindness of your heart, — but I must repeat that it is impossible for me to accept it."

"There you go again! I don't understand you at all! Why can't you accept? What harm would it do?"

"If there were no other reason, because people might suspect that I confided my difficulties to you in the hope of help."

"And supposing you did, what then? People speak hoping to be understood. You wouldn't have minded asking anyone else."

"So you really think I did come in that hope?"

"Mon Dieu! I don't think anything at all that you don't want. It was I who dragged the confidence from you by my questions, I know that very well. But now that you have told me your secret, how can you hinder me from sympathising with you, from desiring to aid you? When I learned your difficulty, ought I to have been amused, and gone into fits of laughter? What! it's an insult to be in a position to render you a service! That's a strange kind of delicacy!"

"Are you astonished that I should feel so strongly about it?"

"Nonsense! Do you still think I meant to offend you? I look on you as the most honourable man in the world. If anyone were to tell me that he had seen you commit a base action, I should reply that it was a lie. Does that satisfy you?"

"But suppose they got hold of it in the city, suppose it were reported that Maitre Quennebert had taken money from Madame de Rapally, would it be the same as if they said Maitre Quennebert had borrowed twelve hundred livres from Monsieur Robert or some other business man?"

"I don't see what difference it could make."

"But I do."

"What then?"

"It's not easy to express, but — — "

"But you exaggerate both the service and the gratitude you ought to feel. I think I know why you refuse. You're ashamed to take it as a gift, aren't you."

"Yes, I am."

"Well, I'm not going to make you a gift. Borrow twelve hundred livres from me. For how long do you want the money?"

"I really don't know how soon I can repay you."

"Let's say a year, and reckon the interest. Sit down there, you baby, and write out a promissory note."

Maitre Quennebert made some further show of resistance, but at last yielded to the widow's importunity. It is needless to say that the whole thing was a comedy on his part, except that he really needed the money. But he did not need it to replace a sum of which a faithless friend had robbed him, but to satisfy his own creditors, who, out of all patience with him, were threatening to sue him, and his only reason for seeking out Madame de Rapally was to take advantage of her generous disposition towards himself. His feigned delicacy was intended to induce her to insist so urgently, that in accepting he should not fall too much in her esteem, but should seem to yield to force. And his plan met with complete success, for at the end of the transaction he stood higher than ever in the opinion of his fair creditor, on account of the noble sentiments he had expressed. The note was written out in legal form and the money counted down on the spot.

"How glad I am!" said she then, while Quennebert still kept up some pretence of delicate embarrassment, although he could not resist casting a stolen look at the bag of crowns lying on the table beside his cloak. “Do you intend to go back to Saint Denis to-night?”

Even had such been his intention, the notary would have taken very good care not to say so; for he foresaw the accusations of imprudence that would follow, the enumeration of the dangers by the way; and it was quite on the cards even that, having thus aroused his fears, his fair hostess should in deference to them offer him hospitality for the night, and he did not feel inclined for an indefinitely prolonged tete-a-tete.

“No;” he said, “I am going to sleep at Maitre Terrasson’s, rue des Poitevins; I have sent him word to expect me. But although his house is only a few yards distant, I must leave you earlier than I could have wished, on account of this money.”

“Will you think of me?”

“How can you ask?” replied Quennebert, with a sentimental expression. “You have compelled me to accept the money, but — I shall not be happy till I have repaid you. Suppose this loan should make us fall out?”

“You may be quite sure that if you don’t pay when the bill falls due, I shall have recourse to the law.”

“Oh, I know that very well.”

“I shall enforce all my rights as a creditor.”

“I expect nothing else.”

“I shall show no pity.”

And the widow gave a saucy laugh and shook her finger at him.

“Madame Rapally,” said the notary, who was most anxious to bring this conversation to an end, dreading every moment that it would take a languishing tone,-”Madame Rapally, will you add to your goodness by granting me one more favour?”

“What is it?”

“The gratitude that is simulated is not difficult to bear, but genuine, sincere gratitude, such as I feel, is a heavy burden, as I can assure you. It is much easier to give than to receive. Promise me, then, that from now till the year is up there shall be no more reference between us to this money, and that we shall go on being good friends as before. Leave it to me to make arrangements to acquit myself honourably of my obligations towards you. I need say no more; till a year’s up, mum’s the word.”

“It shall be as you desire, Maitre Quennebert,” answered Madame Rapally, her eyes shining with delight. “It was never my intention to lay you under embarrassing obligations, and I leave it all to you. Do you know that I am beginning to believe in presentiments?"

"You becoming superstitious! Why, may I ask?"

"I refused to do a nice little piece of ready-money business this morning."

"Did you?"

"Yes, because I had a sort of feeling that made me resist all temptation to leave myself without cash. Imagine! I received a visit to-day from a great lady who lives in this house — in the suite of apartments next to mine."

"What is her name?"

"Mademoiselle de Guerchi."

"And what did she want with you?"

"She called in order to ask me to buy, for four hundred livres, some of her jewels which are well worth six hundred, for I understand such things; or should I prefer it to lend her that sum and keep the jewels as security? It appears that mademoiselle is in great straits. De Guerchi — do you know the name?"

"I think I have heard it."

"They say she has had a stormy past, and has been greatly talked of; but then half of what one hears is lies. Since she came to live here she has been very quiet. No visitors except one — a nobleman, a duke — wait a moment! What's his name? The Duc-Duc de Vitry; and for over three weeks even he hasn't been near her. I imagine from this absence that they have fallen out, and that she is beginning to feel the want of money."

"You seem to be intimately acquainted with this young woman's affairs."

"Indeed I am, and yet I never spoke to her till this morning."

"How did you get your information, then?"

"By chance. The room adjoining this and one of those she occupies were formerly one large room, which is now divided into two by a partition wall covered with tapestry; but in the two corners the plaster has crumbled away with time, and one can see into the room through slits in the tapestry without being seen oneself. Are you inquisitive?"

"Not more than you, Madame Rapally."

"Come with me. Someone knocked at the street door a few moments ago; there's no one else in the douse likely to have visitors at this hour. Perhaps her admirer has come back."

"If so, we are going to witness a scene of recrimination or reconciliation. How delightful!"

Although he was not leaving the widow’s lodgings, Maitre Quennebert took up his hat and cloak and the blessed bag of crown pieces, and followed Madame Rapally on tiptoe, who on her side moved as slowly as a tortoise and as lightly as she could. They succeeded in turning the handle of the door into the next room without making much noise.

“‘Sh!” breathed the widow softly; “listen, they are speaking.”

She pointed to the place where he would find a peep-hole in one corner of the room, and crept herself towards the corresponding corner. Quennebert, who was by no means anxious to have her at his side, motioned to her to blow out the light. This being done, he felt secure, for he knew that in the intense darkness which now enveloped them she could not move from her place without knocking against the furniture between them, so he glued his face to the partition. An opening just large enough for one eye allowed him to see everything that was going on in the next room. Just as he began his observations, the treasurer at Mademoiselle de Guerchi’s invitation was about to take a seat near her, but not too near for perfect respect. Both of them were silent, and appeared to labour under great embarrassment at finding themselves together, and explanations did not readily begin. The lady had not an idea of the motive of the visit, and her quondam lover feigned the emotion necessary to the success of his undertaking. Thus Maitre Quennebert had full time to examine both, and especially Angelique. The reader will doubtless desire to know what was the result of the notary’s observation.

CHAPTER III

ANGELIQUE-LOUISE DE GUERCHI was a woman of about twenty-eight years of age, tall, dark, and well made. The loose life she had led had, it is true, somewhat staled her beauty, marred the delicacy of her complexion, and coarsened the naturally elegant curves of her figure; but it is such women who from time immemorial have had the strongest attraction for profligate men. It seems as if dissipation destroyed the power to perceive true beauty, and the man of pleasure must be aroused to admiration by a bold glance and a meaning smile, and will only seek satisfaction along the trail left by vice. Louise-Angelique was admirably adapted for her way of life; not that her features wore an expression of shameless effrontery, or that the words that passed her lips bore habitual testimony to the disorders of her existence, but that under a calm and sedate demeanour there lurked a secret and indefinable charm. Many other women possessed more regular features, but none of them had a greater power of seduction. We must add that she owed that power entirely to her physical perfections, for except in regard to the devices necessary to her calling, she showed no cleverness, being ignorant, dull and without inner resources of any kind. As her temperament led her to share the desires she excited, she was really incapable of resisting an attack conducted with skill and ardour, and if the Duc de Vitry had not been so madly in love, which is the same as saying that he was hopelessly blind, silly, and dense to everything around him, he might have found a score of opportunities to overcome her resistance. We have already seen that she was so straitened in money matters that she had been driven to try to sell her jewels that very, morning.

Jeannin was the first to ‘break silence.

“You are astonished at my visit, I know, my charming Angelique. But you must excuse my thus appearing so unexpectedly before you. The truth is, I found it impossible to leave Paris without seeing you once more.”

“Thank you for your kind remembrance,” said she, “but I did not at all expect it.”

“Come, come, you are offended with me.”

She gave him a glance of mingled disdain and resentment; but he went on, in a timid, wistful tone —

“I know that my conduct must have seemed strange to you, and I acknowledge that nothing can justify a man for suddenly leaving the woman he loves — I do not dare to say the woman who loves him — without a word of explanation. But, dear Angelique, I was jealous.”

“Jealous!” she repeated incredulously.

“I tried my best to overcome the feeling, and I hid my suspicions from you. Twenty times I came to see you bursting with anger and determined to overwhelm you with reproaches, but at the sight of your beauty I forgot everything but that I loved you. My suspicions dissolved before a smile; one word from your lips charmed me into happiness. But when I was again alone my terrors revived, I saw my rivals at your feet, and rage possessed me once more. Ah! you never knew how devotedly I loved you.”

She let him speak without interruption; perhaps the same thought was in her mind as in Quennebert’s, who, himself a past master in the art of lying; was thinking —

“The man does not believe a word of what he is saying.”

But the treasurer went on —

“I can see that even now you doubt my sincerity.”

“Does my lord desire that his handmaiden should be blunt? Well, I know that there is no truth in what you say.”

“Oh! I can see that you imagine that among the distractions of the world I have kept no memory of you, and have found consolation in the love of less obdurate fair ones. I have not broken in on your retirement; I have not shadowed your steps; I have not kept watch on your actions; I have not surrounded you with spies who would perhaps have brought me the assurance, ‘If she quitted the world which outraged her, she was not driven forth by an impulse of wounded pride or noble indignation; she did not even seek to punish those who misunderstood her by her absence; she buried herself where she was unknown, that she might indulge in stolen loves.’ Such were the thoughts that came to me, and yet I respected your hiding-place; and to-day I am ready to believe you true, if you will merely say, ‘I love no one else!’“

Jeannin, who was as fat as a stage financier, paused here to gasp; for the utterance of this string of banalities, this rigmarole of commonplaces, had left him breathless. He was very much dissatisfied with his performance; and ready to curse his barren imagination. He longed to hit upon swelling phrases and natural and touching gestures, but in vain. He could only look at Mademoiselle de Guerchi with a miserable, heart-broken air. She remained quietly seated, with the same expression of incredulity on her features.

So there was nothing for it but to go on once more.

"But this one assurance that I ask you will not give. So what I have — been told is true: you have given your love to him."

She could not check a startled movement.

"You see it is only when I speak of him that I can overcome in you the insensibility which is killing me. My suspicions were true after all: you deceived me for his sake. Oh! the instinctive feeling of jealousy was right which forced me to quarrel with that man, to reject the perfidious friendship which he tried to force upon me. He has returned to town, and we shall meet! But why do I say 'returned'? Perhaps he only pretended to go away, and safe in this retreat has flouted with impunity, my despair and braved my vengeance!"

Up to this the lady had played a waiting game, but now she grew quite confused, trying to discover the thread of the treasurer's thoughts. To whom did he refer? The Duc de Vitry? That had been her first impression. But the duke had only been acquainted with her for a few months — since she had — left Court. He could not therefore have excited the jealousy of her whilom lover; and if it were not he, to whom did the words about rejecting "perfidious friendship," and "returned to town," and so on, apply? Jeannin divined her embarrassment, and was not a little proud of the tactics which would, he was almost sure; force her to expose herself. For there are certain women who can be thrown into cruel perplexity by speaking to them of their love-passages without affixing a proper name label to each. They are placed as it were on the edge of an abyss, and forced to feel their way in darkness. To say "You have loved" almost obliges them to ask "Whom?"

Nevertheless, this was not the word uttered by Mademoiselle de Guerchi while she ran through in her head a list of possibilities. Her answer was —

"Your language astonishes me; I don't understand what you mean."

The ice was broken, and the treasurer made a plunge. Seizing one of Angelique's hands, he asked —

"Have you never seen Commander de Jars since then?"

"Commander de Jars!" exclaimed Angelique.

"Can you swear to me, Angelique, that you love him not?"

"Mon Dieu! What put it into your head that I ever cared for him? It's over four months since I saw him last, and I hadn't an idea whether he was alive or dead. So he has been out of town? That's the first I heard of it."

"My fortune is yours, Angelique! Oh! assure me once again that you do not love him — that you never loved him!" he pleaded in a faltering voice, fixing a look of painful anxiety upon her.

He had no intention of putting her out of countenance by the course he took; he knew quite well that a woman like Angelique is never more at her ease than when she has a chance of telling an untruth of this nature. Besides, he had prefaced this appeal by the magic words, "My fortune' is yours!" and the hope thus aroused was well worth a perjury. So she answered boldly and in a steady voice, while she looked straight into his eyes —

"Never!"

"I believe you!" exclaimed Jeannin, going down on his knees and covering with his kisses the hand he still held. "I can taste happiness again. Listen, Angelique. I am leaving Paris; my mother is dead, and I am going back to Spain. Will you follow me thither?"

"I — -follow you?"

"I hesitated long before finding you out, so much did I fear a repulse. I set out to-morrow. Quit Paris, leave the world which has slandered you, and come with me. In a fortnight we shall be man and wife."

"You are not in earnest!"

"May I expire at your feet if I am not! Do you want me to sign the oath with my blood?"

"Rise," she said in a broken voice. "Have I at last found a man to love me and compensate me for all the abuse that has been showered on my head? A thousand times I thank you, not for what you are doing for me, but for the balm you pour on my wounded spirit. Even if you were to say to me now, 'After all, I am obliged to give you up' the pleasure of knowing you esteem me would make up for all the rest. It would be another happy memory to treasure along with my memory of our love, which was ineffaceable, although you so ungratefully suspected me of having deceived you."

The treasurer appeared fairly intoxicated with joy. He indulged in a thousand ridiculous extravagances and exaggerations, and declared himself the happiest of men. Mademoiselle de Guerchi, who was desirous of being prepared for every peril, asked him in a coaxing tone —

“Who can have put it into your head to be jealous of the commander? Has he been base enough to boast that I ever gave him my love?”

“No, he never said anything about you; but someway I was afraid.”

She renewed her assurances. The conversation continued some time in a sentimental tone. A thousand oaths, a thousand protestations of love were, exchanged. Jeannin feared that the suddenness of their journey would inconvenience his mistress, and offered to put it off for some days; but to this she would not consent, and it was arranged that the next day at noon a carriage should call at the house and take Angelique out of town to an appointed place at which the treasurer was to join her.

Maitre Quennebert, eye and ear on the alert, had not lost a word of this conversation, and the last proposition of the treasurer changed his ideas.

“Pardieu!” he said to himself, “it looks as if this good man were really going to let himself be taken in and done for. It is singular how very clear-sighted we can be about things that don’t touch us. This poor fly is going to let himself be caught by a very clever spider, or I’m much mistaken. Very likely my widow is quite of my opinion, and yet in what concerns herself she will remain stone-blind. Well, such is life! We have only two parts to choose between: we must be either knave or fool. What’s Madame Rapally doing, I wonder?”

At this moment he heard a stifled whisper from the opposite corner of the room, but, protected by the distance and the darkness, he let the widow murmur on, and applied his eye once more to his peephole. What he saw confirmed his opinion. The damsel was springing up and down, laughing, gesticulating, and congratulating herself on her unexpected good fortune.

“Just imagine! He loves me like that!” she was saying to herself. “Poor Jeannin! When I remember how I used to hesitate. How fortunate that Commander de Jars, one of the most vain and indiscreet of men, never babbled about me! Yes, we must leave town to-morrow without fail. I must not give him time to be enlightened by a chance word. But the Duc de Vitry? I am really sorry for him. However, why did he go away, and send no word? And then, he’s a married man. Ah! if I could only get back again to court some day!... Who would ever have expected such a thing? Good God! I must keep talking to myself, to be sure I’m not dreaming. Yes, he was there, just now, at my feet, saying to me, ‘Angelique, you are going to become my wife.’ One thing is sure, he may safely entrust his honour to my care. It would be infamous to betray a man who loves me as he does, who will give me his name. Never, no, never will I give him cause to reproach me! I would rather — — ”

A loud and confused noise on the stairs interrupted this soliloquy. At one moment bursts of laughter were heard, and the next angry voices. Then a loud exclamation, followed by a short silence. Being alarmed at this disturbance in a house which was usually so quiet, Mademoiselle de Guerchi approached the door of her room, intending either to call for protection or to lock herself in, when suddenly it was violently pushed open. She recoiled with fright, exclaiming —

“Commander de Jars!”

“On my word!” said Quennebert behind the arras, “‘tis as amusing as a play! Is the commander also going to offer to make an honest woman of her? But what do I see?”

He had just caught sight of the young man on whom de Jars had bestowed the title and name of Chevalier de Moranges, and whose acquaintance the reader has already made at the tavern in the rue Saint-Andre-des-Arts. His appearance had as great an effect on the notary as a thunderbolt. He stood motionless, trembling, breathless; his knees ready to give way beneath him; everything black before his eyes. However, he soon pulled himself together, and succeeded in overcoming the effects of his surprise and terror. He looked once more through the hole in the partition, and became so absorbed that no one in the whole world could have got a word from him just then; the devil himself might have shrieked into his ears unheeded, and a naked sword suspended over his head would not have induced him to change his place.

CHAPTER IV

Before Mademoiselle de Guerchi had recovered from her fright the commander spoke.

“As I am a gentleman, my beauty, if you were the Abbess of Montmartre, you could not be more difficult of access. I met a blackguard on the stairs who tried to stop me, and whom I was obliged to thrash soundly. Is what they told me on my return true? Are you really doing penance, and do you intend to take the veil?”

“Sir,” answered Angelique, with great dignity, “whatever may be my plans, I have a right to be surprised at your violence and at your intrusion at such an hour.”

“Before we go any farther,” said de Jars, twirling round on his heels, “allow me to present to you my nephew, the Chevalier de Moranges.”

“Chevalier de Moranges!” muttered Quennebert, on whose memory in that instant the name became indelibly engraven.

“A young man,” continued the commander, “who has come back with me from abroad. Good style, as you see, charming appearance. Now, you young innocent, lift up your great black eyes and kiss madame’s hand; I allow it.”

“Monsieur le commandeur, leave my room; begone, or I shall call — —”

“Whom, then? Your lackeys? But I have beaten the only one you keep, as I told you, and it will be some time before he’ll be in a condition to light me downstairs: ‘Begone,’ indeed! Is that the way you receive an old friend? Pray be seated, chevalier.”

He approached Mademoiselle de Guerchi, and, despite her resistance, seized hold of one of her hands, and forcing her to sit down, seated himself beside her.

“That’s right, my girl,” said he; “now let us talk sense. I understand that before a stranger you consider yourself obliged to appear astonished at my ways of going on. But he knows all about us, and nothing he may see or hear will surprise him. So a truce to prudery! I came back yesterday, but I could not make out your hiding-place till to-day. Now I’m not going to ask you to tell me how you have gone on in my absence. God and you alone know, and while He will tell me nothing, you would only tell me fibs, and I want to save you from that venial sin at least. But here I am, in as good spirits as ever, more in love than ever, and quite ready to resume my old habits."

Meantime the lady, quite subdued by his noisy entrance and ruffianly conduct, and seeing that an assumption of dignity would only draw down on her some fresh impertinence, appeared to resign herself to her position. All this time Quennebert never took his eyes from the chevalier, who sat with his face towards the partition. His elegantly cut costume accentuated his personal advantages. His jet black hair brought into relief the whiteness of his forehead; his large dark eyes with their veined lids and silky lashes had a penetrating and peculiar expression — a mixture of audacity and weakness; his thin and somewhat pale lips were apt to curl in an ironical smile; his hands were of perfect beauty, his feet of dainty smallness, and he showed with an affectation of complaisance a well-turned leg above his ample boots, the turned down tops of which, garnished with lace, fell in irregular folds aver his ankles in the latest fashion. He did not appear to be more than eighteen years of age, and nature had denied his charming face the distinctive sign of his sex for not the slightest down was visible on his chin, though a little delicate pencilling darkened his upper lip: His slightly effeminate style of beauty, the graceful curves of his figure, his expression, sometimes coaxing, sometimes saucy, reminding one of a page, gave him the appearance of a charming young scapegrace destined to inspire sudden passions and wayward fancies. While his pretended uncle was making himself at home most unceremoniously, Quennebert remarked that the chevalier at once began to lay siege to his fair hostess, bestowing tender and love-laden glances on her behind that uncle's back. This redoubled his curiosity.

"My dear girl," said the commander, "since I saw you last I have come into a fortune of one hundred thousand livres, neither more nor less. One of my dear aunts took it into her head to depart this life, and her temper being crotchety and spiteful she made me her sole heir, in order to enrage those of her relatives who had nursed her in her illness. One hundred thousand livres! It's a round sum — enough to cut a great figure with for two years. If you like, we shall squander it together, capital and interest. Why do you not speak? Has anyone else robbed me by any chance of your heart? If that were so, I should be in despair, upon my word-for the sake of the fortunate individual who had won your favour; for I will brook no rivals, I give you fair warning.”

“Monsieur le commandeur,” answered Angelique, “you forget, in speaking to me in that manner, I have never given you any right to control my actions.”

“Have we severed our connection?”

At this singular question Angelique started, but de Jars continued —

“When last we parted we were on the best of terms, were we not? I know that some months have elapsed since then, but I have explained to you the reason of my absence. Before filling up the blank left by the departed we must give ourselves space to mourn. Well, was I right in my guess? Have you given me a successor?”

Mademoiselle de Guerchi had hitherto succeeded in controlling her indignation, and had tried to force herself to drink the bitter cup of humiliation to the dregs; but now she could bear it no longer. Having thrown a look expressive of her suffering at the young chevalier, who continued to ogle her with great pertinacity, she decided on bursting into tears, and in a voice broken by sobs she exclaimed that she was miserable at being treated in this manner, that she did not deserve it, and that Heaven was punishing her for her error in yielding to the entreaties of the commander. One would have sworn she was sincere and that the words came from her heart. If Maitre Quennebert had not witnessed the scene with Jeannin, if he had not known how frail was the virtue of the weeping damsel, he might have been affected by her touching plaint. The chevalier appeared to be deeply moved by Angelique’s grief, and while his, uncle was striding up and down the room and swearing like a trooper, he gradually approached her and expressed by signs the compassion he felt.

Meantime the notary was in a strange state of mind. He had not yet made up his mind whether the whole thing was a joke arranged between de Jars and Jeannin or not, but of one thing he was quite convinced, the sympathy which Chevalier de Moranges was expressing by passionate sighs and glances was the merest hypocrisy. Had he been alone, nothing would have prevented his dashing head foremost into this imbroglio, in scorn of consequence, convinced that his appearance would be as terrible in its effect as the head of Medusa. But the presence of the widow restrained him. Why ruin his future and dry up the golden spring which had just begun to gush before his eyes, for the sake of taking part in a melodrama? Prudence and self-interest kept him in the side scenes.

The tears of the fair one and the glances of the chevalier awoke no repentance in the breast of the commander; on the contrary, he began to vent his anger in terms still more energetic. He strode up and down the oaken floor till it shook under his spurred heels; he stuck his plumed hat on the side of his head, and displayed the manners of a bully in a Spanish comedy. Suddenly he seemed to have come to a swift resolution: the expression of his face changed from rage to icy coldness, and walking up to Angelique, he said, with a composure more terrible than the wildest fury —

“My rival’s name?”

“You shall never learn it from me!”

“Madame, his name?”

“Never! I have borne your insults too long. I am not responsible to you for my actions.”

“Well, I shall learn it, in spite of you, and I know to whom to apply. Do you think you can play fast and loose with me and my love? No, no! I used to believe in you; I turned, a deaf ear to your traducers. My mad passion for you became known; I was the jest and the butt of the town. But you have opened my eyes, and at last I see clearly on whom my vengeance ought to fall. He was formerly my friend, and I would believe nothing against him; although I was often warned, I took no notice. But now I will seek him out, and say to him, ‘You have stolen what was mine; you are a scoundrel! It must be your life, or mine!’ And if, there is justice in heaven, I shall kill him! Well, madame, you don’t ask me the name of this man! You well know whom I mean!”

This threat brought home to Mademoiselle de Guerchi how imminent was her danger. At first she had thought the commander’s visit might be a snare laid to test her, but the coarseness of his expressions, the cynicism of his overtures in the presence of a third person, had convinced her she was wrong. No man could have imagined that the revolting method of seduction employed could meet with success, and if the commander had desired to convict her of perfidy he would have come alone and made use of more persuasive weapons. No, he believed he still had claims on her, but even if he had, by his manner of enforcing them he had rendered them void. However, the moment he threatened to seek out a rival whose identity he designated quite clearly, and reveal to him the secret it was so necessary to her interests to keep hidden, the poor girl lost her head. She looked at de Jars with a frightened expression, and said in a trembling voice —

“I don’t know whom you mean.”

“You don’t know? Well, I shall commission the king’s treasurer, Jeannin de Castille, to come here to-morrow and tell you, an hour before our duel.”

“Oh no! no! Promise me you will not do that!” cried she, clasping her hands.

“Adieu, madame.”

“Do not leave me thus! I cannot let you go till you give me your promise!”

She threw herself on her knees and clung with both her hands to de Jars’ cloak, and appealing to Chevalier de Moranges, said —

“You are young, monsieur; I have never done you any harm; protect me, have pity on me, help me to soften him!”

“Uncle,” said the chevalier in a pleading tone, “be generous, and don’t drive this woman to despair.”

“Prayers are useless!” answered the commander.

“What do you want me to do?” said Angelique. “Shall I go into a convent to atone? I am ready to go. Shall I promise never to see him again? For God’s sake, give me a little time; put off your vengeance for one single day! To-morrow evening, I swear to you, you will have nothing more to fear from me. I thought myself forgotten by you and abandoned; and how should I think otherwise? You left me without a word of farewell, you stayed away and never sent me a line! And how do you know that I did not weep when you deserted me, leaving me to pass my days in monotonous solitude? How do you know that I did not make every effort to find out why you were so long absent from my side? You say you had left town but how was I to know that? Oh! promise me, if you love me, to give up this duel! Promise me not to seek that man out to-morrow!”

The poor creature hoped to work wonders with her eloquence, her tears, her pleading glances. On hearing her prayer for a reprieve of twenty-four hours, swearing that after that she would never see Jeannin again, the commander and the chevalier were obliged to bite their lips to keep from laughing outright. But the former soon regained his self-possession, and while Angelique, still on her knees before him, pressed his hands to her bosom, he forced her to raise her head, and looking straight into her eyes, said —

“To-morrow, madame, if not this evening, he shall know everything, and a meeting shall take place.”

Then pushing her away, he strode towards the door.

“Oh! how unhappy I am!” exclaimed Angelique.

She tried to rise and rush after him, but whether she was really overcome by her feelings, or whether she felt the one chance of prevailing left her was to faint, she uttered a heartrending cry, and the chevalier had no choice but to support her sinking form.

De Jars, on seeing his nephew staggering under this burden, gave a loud laugh, and hurried away. Two minutes later he was once more at the tavern in the rue Saint-Andre-des-Arts.

“How’s this? Alone?” said Jeannin.

“Alone.”

“What have you done with the chevalier?”

“I left him with our charmer, who was unconscious, overcome with grief, exhausted Ha! ha! ha! She fell fainting into his arms! Ha! ha! ha!”

“It’s quite possible that the young rogue, being left with her in such a condition, may cut me out.”

“Do you think so? — Ha! ha! ha!”

And de Jars laughed so heartily and so infectiously that his worthy friend was obliged to join in, and laughed till he choked.

In the short silence which followed the departure of the commander, Maitre Quennebert could hear the widow still murmuring something, but he was less disposed than ever to attend to her.

“On my word,” said he, “the scene now going on is more curious than all that went before. I don’t think that a man has ever found himself in such a position as mine. Although my interests demand that I remain here and listen, yet my fingers are itching to box the ears of that Chevalier de Moranges. If there were only some way of getting at a proof of all this! Ah! now we shall hear something; the hussy is coming to herself.”

And indeed Angelique had opened her eyes and was casting wild looks around her; she put her hand to her brow several times, as if trying to recall clearly what had happened.

“Is he gone?” she exclaimed at last. “Oh, why did you let him go? You should not have minded me, but kept him here.”

“Be calm,” answered the chevalier, “be calm, for heaven’s sake. I shall speak to my uncle and prevent his ruining your prospects. Only don’t weep any more, your tears break my heart. Ah, my God! how cruel it is to distress you so! I should never be able to withstand your tears; no matter what reason I had for anger, a look from you would make me forgive you everything."

"Noble young man!" said Angelique.

"Idiot!" muttered Maitre Quennebert; "swallow the honey of his words, do But how the deuce is it going to end? Not Satan himself ever invented such a situation."

"But then I could never believe you guilty without proof, irrefutable proof; and even then a word from you would fill my mind with doubt and uncertainty again. Yes, were the whole world to accuse you and swear to your guilt, I should still believe your simple word. I am young, madam, I have never known love as yet — until an instant ago I had no idea that more quickly than an image can excite the admiration of the eye, a thought can enter the heart and stir it to its depths, and features that one may never again behold leave a lifelong memory behind. But even if a woman of whom I knew absolutely nothing were to appeal to me, exclaiming, 'I implore your help, your protection!' I should, without stopping to consider, place my sword and my arm at her disposal, and devote myself to her service. How much more eagerly would I die for you, madam, whose beauty has ravished my heart! What do you demand of me? Tell me what you desire me to do."

"Prevent this duel; don't allow an interview to take place between your uncle and the man whom he mentioned. Tell me you will do this, and I shall be safe; for you have never learned to lie; I know."

"Of course he hasn't, you may be sure of that, you simpleton!" muttered Maitre Quennebert in his corner. "If you only knew what a mere novice you are at that game compared with the chevalier! If you only knew whom you had before you!"

"At your age," went on Angelique, "one cannot feign — the heart is not yet hardened, and is capable of compassion. But a dreadful idea occurs to me — a horrible suspicion! Is it all a devilish trick — a snare arranged in joke? Tell me that it is not all a pretence! A poor woman encounters so much perfidy. Men amuse themselves by troubling her heart and confusing her mind; they excite her vanity, they compass her round with homage, with flattery, with temptation, and when they grow tired of fooling her, they despise and insult her. Tell me, was this all a preconcerted plan? This love, this jealousy, were they only acted?"

“Oh, madame,” broke in the chevalier, with an expression of the deepest indignation, “how can you for an instant imagine that a human heart could be so perverted? I am not acquainted with the man whom the commander accused you of loving, but whoever he may be I feel sure that he is worthy of your love, and that he would never have consented to such a dastardly joke. Neither would my uncle; his jealousy mastered him and drove him mad —

“But I am not dependent on him; I am my own master, and can do as I please. I will hinder this duel; I will not allow the illusion and ignorance of him who loves you and, alas that I must say it, whom you love, to be dispelled, for it is in them he finds his happiness. Be happy with him! As for me, I shall never see you again; but the recollection of this meeting, the joy of having served you, will be my consolation.”

Angelique raised her beautiful eyes, and gave the chevalier a long look which expressed her gratitude more eloquently than words.

“May I be hanged!” thought Maitre Quennebert, “if the baggage isn’t making eyes at him already! But one who is drowning clutches at a straw.”

“Enough, madam,” said the chevalier; “I understand all you would say. You thank me in his name, and ask me to leave you: I obey-yes, madame, I am going; at the risk of my life I will prevent this meeting, I will stifle this fatal revelation. But grant me one last prayer-permit me to look forward to seeing you once more before I leave this city, to which I wish I had never come. But I shall quit it in a day or two, to-morrow perhaps — as soon as I know that your happiness is assured. Oh! do not refuse my last request; let the light of your eyes shine on me for the last time; after that I shall depart — I shall fly far away for ever. But if perchance, in spite of every effort, I fail, if the commander’s jealousy should make him impervious to my entreaties — to my tears, if he whom you love should come and overwhelm you with reproaches and then abandon you, would you drive me from your presence if I should then say, ‘I love you’? Answer me, I beseech you.”

“Go!” said she, “and prove worthy of my gratitude — or my love.”

Seizing one of her hands, the chevalier covered it with passionate kisses.

“Such barefaced impudence surpasses everything I could have imagined!” murmured Quennebert: “fortunately, the play is over for to-night; if it had gone on any longer, I should have done something foolish. The lady hardly imagines what the end of the comedy will be.”

Neither did Quennebert. It was an evening of adventures. It was written that in the space of two hours Angelique was to run the gamut of all the emotions, experience all the vicissitudes to which a life such as she led is exposed: hope, fear, happiness, mortification, falsehood, love that was no love, intrigue within intrigue, and, to crown all, a totally unexpected conclusion.

CHAPTER V

The chevalier was still holding Angelique’s hand when a step resounded outside, and a voice was heard.

“Can it be that he has come back?” exclaimed the damsel, hastily freeing herself from the passionate embrace of the chevalier. “It’s not possible! Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! it’s his voice!”

She grew pale to the lips, and stood staring at the door with outstretched arms, unable to advance or recede.

The chevalier listened, but felt sure the approaching voice belonged neither to the commander nor to the treasurer.

“‘His voice’?” thought Quennebert to himself. “Can this be yet another aspirant to her favour?”

The sound came nearer.

“Hide yourself!” said Angelique, pointing to a door opposite to the partition behind which the widow and the notary were ensconced. “Hide yourself there! — there’s a secret staircase — you can get out that way.”

“I hide myself!” exclaimed Moranges, with a swaggering air. “What are you thinking of? I remain.”

It would have been better for him to have followed her advice, as may very well have occurred to the youth two minutes later, as a tall, muscular young man entered in a state of intense excitement. Angelique rushed to meet him, crying —

“Ah! Monsieur le duc, is it you?”

“What is this I hear, Angelique?” said the Duc de Vitry. “I was told below that three men had visited you this evening; but only two have gone out — where is the third? Ha! I do not need long to find him,” he added, as he caught sight of the chevalier, who stood his ground bravely enough.

“In Heaven’s name!” cried Angelique, — ”in Heaven’s name, listen to me!”

“No, no, not a word. Just now I am not questioning you. Who are you, sir?”

The chevalier’s teasing and bantering disposition made him even at that critical moment insensible to fear, so he retorted insolently —

“Whoever I please to be, sir; and on my word I find the tone in which you put your question delightfully amusing.”

The duke sprang forward in a rage, laying his hand on his sword. Angelique tried in vain to restrain him.

“You want to screen him from my vengeance, you false one!” said he, retreating a few steps, so as to guard the door. “Defend your life, sir!”

“Do you defend yours!”

Both drew at the same moment.

Two shrieks followed, one in the room, the other behind the tapestry, for neither Angelique nor the widow had been able to restrain her alarm as the two swords flashed in air. In fact the latter had been so frightened that she fell heavily to the floor in a faint.

This incident probably saved the young man’s life; his blood had already begun to run cold at the sight of his adversary foaming with rage and standing between him and the door, when the noise of the fall distracted the duke’s attention.

“What was that?” he cried. “Are there other enemies concealed here too?” And forgetting that he was leaving a way of escape free, he rushed in the direction from which the sound came, and lunged at the tapestry-covered partition with his sword. Meantime the chevalier, dropping all his airs of bravado, sprang from one end of the room to the other like a cat pursued by a dog; but rapid as were his movements, the duke perceived his flight, and dashed after him at the risk of breaking both his own neck and the chevalier’s by a chase through unfamiliar rooms and down stairs which were plunged in darkness.

All this took place in a few seconds, like a flash of lightning. Twice, with hardly any interval, the street door opened and shut noisily, and the two enemies were in the street, one pursued and the other pursuing.

“My God! Just to think of all that has happened is enough to make one die of fright!” said Mademoiselle de Guerchi. “What will come next, I should like to know? And what shall I say to the duke when he comes back?”

Just at this instant a loud cracking sound was heard in the room. Angelique stood still, once more struck with terror, and recollecting the cry she had heard. Her hair, which was already loosened, escaped entirely from its bonds, and she felt it rise on her head as the figures on the tapestry moved and bent towards her. Falling on her knees and closing her eyes, she began to invoke the aid of God and all the saints. But she soon felt herself raised by strong arms, and looking round, she found herself in the presence of an unknown man, who seemed to have issued from the ground or the walls, and who, seizing the only light left unextinguished in the scuffle, dragged her more dead than alive into the next room.

This man was, as the reader will have already guessed, Maitre Quennebert. As soon as the chevalier and the duke had disappeared, the notary had run towards the corner where the widow lay, and having made sure that she was really unconscious, and unable to see or hear anything, so that it would be quite safe to tell her any story he pleased next day, he returned to his former position, and applying his shoulder to the partition, easily succeeded in freeing the ends of the rotten laths from the nails which held there, and, pushing them before him, made an aperture large enough to allow of his passing through into the next apartment. He applied himself to this task with such vigour, and became so absorbed in its accomplishment, that he entirely forgot the bag of twelve hundred livres which the widow had given him.

“Who are you? What do you want with me?” cried Mademoiselle de Guerchi, struggling to free herself.

“Silence!” was Quennebert’s answer.

“Don’t kill me, for pity’s sake!”

“Who wants to kill you? But be silent; I don’t want your shrieks to call people here. I must be alone with you for a few moments. Once more I tell you to be quiet, unless you want me to use violence. If you do what I tell you, no harm shall happen to you.”

“But who are you, monsieur?”

“I am neither a burglar nor a murderer; that’s all you need to know; the rest is no concern of yours. Have you writing materials at hand?”

“Yes, monsieur; there they are, on that table.”

“Very well. Now sit down at the table.”

“Why?”

“Sit down, and answer my questions.”

“The first man who visited you this evening was M. Jeannin, was he not?”

“Yes, M. Jeannin de Castille.”

“The king’s treasurer?”

“Yes.”

“All right. The second was Commander de Jars, and the young man he brought with him was his nephew, the Chevalier de Moranges. The last comer was a duke; am I not right?”

“The Duc de Vitry.”

“Now write from my dictation.”

He spoke very slowly, and Mademoiselle de Guerchi, obeying his commands, took up her pen.

“‘To-day,’“ dictated Quennebert, — ”‘to-day, this twentieth day of the month of November, in the year of the Lord 1658, I —

“What is your full name?”

“Angelique-Louise de Guerchi.”

“Go on! ‘I, Angelique-Louise de Guerchi, was visited, in the rooms which — I occupy, in the mansion of the Duchesse d’Etampes, corner of the streets Git-le-Coeur and du Hurepoix, about half-past seven o’clock in the evening, in the first place, by Messire Jeannin de Castille, King’s Treasurer; in the second place, by Commander de Jars, who was accompanied by a young man, his nephew, the Chevalier de Moranges; in the third place, after the departure of Commander de Jars, and while I was alone with the Chevalier de Moranges, by the Duc de Vitry, who drew his sword upon the said chevalier and forced him to take flight.’

“Now put in a line by itself, and use capitals “‘DESCRIPTION OF THE CHEVALIER DE MORANGES.”

“But I only saw him for an instant,” said Angelique, “and I can’t recall — —

“Write, and don’t talk. I can recall everything, and that is all that is wanted.”

“‘Height about five feet.’ The chevalier,” said Quennebert, interrupting himself, “is four feet eleven inches three lines and a half, but I don’t need absolute exactness.” Angelique gazed at him in utter stupefaction.

“Do you know him, then?” she asked.

“I saw him this evening for the first time, but my eye is very accurate.

“‘Height about five feet; hair black, eyes ditto, nose aquiline, mouth large, lips compressed, forehead high, face oval, complexion pale, no beard.’

“Now another line, and in capitals: “‘SPECIAL MARKS.’

“‘A small mole on the neck behind the right ear, a smaller mole on the left hand.’

"Have you written that? Now sign it with your full name."

"What use are you going to make of this paper?"

"I should have told you before, if I had desired you to know. Any questions are quite useless. I don't enjoin secrecy on you, however," added the notary, as he folded the paper and put it into his doublet pocket. "You are quite free to tell anyone you like that you have written the description of the Chevalier de Moranges at the dictation of an unknown man, who got into your room you don't know how, by the chimney or through the ceiling perhaps, but who was determined to leave it by a more convenient road. Is there not a secret staircase? Show me where it is. I don't want to meet anyone on my way out."

Angelique pointed out a door to him hidden by a damask curtain, and Quennebert saluting her, opened it and disappeared, leaving Angelique convinced that she had seen the devil in person. Not until the next day did the sight of the displaced partition explain the apparition, but even then so great was her fright, so deep was the terror which the recollection of the mysterious man inspired, that despite the permission to tell what had happened she mentioned her adventure to no one, and did not even complain to her neighbour, Madame Rapally, of the inquisitiveness which had led the widow to spy on her actions.

CHAPTER VI

We left de Jars and Jeannin, roaring with laughter, in the tavern in the rue Saint Andre-des-Arts.

“What!” said the treasurer, “do you really think that Angelique thought I was in earnest in my offer? — that she believes in all good faith I intend to marry her?”

“You may take my word for it. If it were not so, do you imagine she would have been in such desperation? Would she have fainted at my threat to tell you that I had claims on her as well as you? To get married! Why, that is the goal of all such creatures, and there is not one of them who can understand why a man of honour should blush to give her his name. If you had only seen her terror, her tears! They would have either broken your heart or killed you with laughter.”

“Well,” said Jeannin, “it is getting late. Are we going to wait for the chevalier?”

“Let us call, for him.”

“Very well. Perhaps he has made up his mind to stay. If so, we shall make a horrible scene, cry treachery and perjury, and trounce your nephew well. Let’s settle our score and be off.”

They left the wine-shop, both rather the worse for the wine they had so largely indulged in. They felt the need of the cool night air, so instead of going down the rue Pavee they resolved to follow the rue Saint-Andre-des-Arts as far as the Pont Saint-Michel, so as to reach the mansion by a longer route.

At the very moment the commander got up to leave the tavern the chevalier had run out of the mansion at the top of his speed. It was not that he had entirely lost his courage, for had he found it impossible to avoid his assailant it is probable that he would have regained the audacity which had led him to draw his sword. But he was a novice in the use of arms, had not reached full physical development, and felt that the chances were so much against him that he would only have faced the encounter if there were no possible way of escape. On leaving the house he had turned quickly into the rue Git-le-Coeur; but on hearing the door close behind his pursuer he disappeared down the narrow and crooked rue de l’Hirondelle, hoping to throw the Duc de Vitry off the scent. The duke, however, though for a moment in doubt, was guided by the sound of the flying footsteps. The chevalier, still trying to send him off on a false trail, turned to the right, and so regained the upper end of the rue Saint-Andre, and ran along it as far as the church, the site of which is occupied by the square of the same name to-day. Here he thought he would be safe, for, as the church was being restored and enlarged, heaps of stone stood all round the old pile. He glided in among these, and twice heard Vitry searching quite close to him, and each time stood on guard expecting an onslaught. This marching and counter-marching lasted for some minutes; the chevalier began to hope he had escaped the danger, and eagerly waited for the moment when the moon which had broken through the clouds should again withdraw behind them, in order to steal into some of the adjacent streets under cover of the darkness. Suddenly a shadow rose before him and a threatening voice cried —

“Have I caught you at last, you coward?”

The danger in which the chevalier stood awoke in him a flickering energy, a feverish courage, and he crossed blades with his assailant. A strange combat ensued, of which the result was quite uncertain, depending entirely on chance; for no science was of any avail on a ground so rough that the combatants stumbled at every step, or struck against immovable masses, which were one moment clearly lit up, and the next in shadow. Steel clashed on steel, the feet of the adversaries touched each other, several times the cloak of one was pierced by the sword of the other, more than once the words “Die then!” rang out. But each time the seemingly vanquished combatant sprang up unwounded, as agile and as lithe and as quick as ever, while he in his turn pressed the enemy home. There was neither truce nor pause, no clever feints nor fencer’s tricks could be employed on either side; it was a mortal combat, but chance, not skill, would deal the death-blow. Sometimes a rapid pass encountered only empty air; sometimes blade crossed blade above the wielders’ heads; sometimes the fencers lunged at each other’s breast, and yet the blows glanced aside at the last moment and the blades met in air once more. At last, however, one of the two, making a pass to the right which left his breast unguarded, received a deep wound. Uttering a loud cry, he recoiled a step or two, but, exhausted by the effort, tripped and fell backward over a large stone, and lay there motionless, his arms extended in the form of a cross.

The other turned and fled.

"Hark, de Jars!" said Jeannin, stopping, "There's fighting going on hereabouts; I hear the clash of swords."

Both listened intently.

"I hear nothing now."

"Hush! there it goes again. It's by the church."

"What a dreadful cry!"

They ran at full speed towards the place whence it seemed to come, but found only solitude, darkness, and silence. They looked in every direction.

"I can't see a living soul," said Jeannin, "and I very much fear that the poor devil who gave that yell has mumbled his last prayer."

"I don't know why I tremble so," replied de Jars; "that heart-rending cry made me shiver from head to foot. Was it not something like the chevalier's voice?"

"The chevalier is with La Guerchi, and even if he had left her this would not have been his way to rejoin us. Let us go on and leave the dead in peace."

"Look, Jeannin! what is that in front of us?"

"On that stone? A man who has fallen!"

"Yes, and bathed in blood," exclaimed de Jars, who had darted to his side. "Ah! it's he! it's he! Look, his eyes are closed, his hands cold! My child he does not hear me! Oh, who has murdered him?"

He fell on his knees, and threw himself on the body with every mark of the most violent despair.

"Come, come," said Jeannin, surprised at such an explosion of grief from a man accustomed to duels, and who on several similar occasions had been far from displaying much tenderness of heart, "collect yourself, and don't give way like a woman. Perhaps the wound is not mortal. Let us try to stop the bleeding and call for help."

"No, no — "

"Are you mad?"

"Don't call, for Heaven's sake! The wound is here, near the heart. Your handkerchief, Jeannin, to arrest the flow of blood. There — now help me to lift him."

"What does that mean?" cried Jeannin, who had just laid his hand on the chevalier. "I don't know whether I'm awake or asleep! Why, it's a — -"

“Be silent, on your life! I shall explain everything — but now be silent; there is someone looking at us.”

There was indeed a man wrapped in a mantle standing motionless some steps away.

“What are you doing here?” asked de Jars.

“May I ask what you are doing, gentlemen?” retorted Maitre Quennebert, in a calm and steady voice.

“Your curiosity may cost you dear, monsieur; we are not in the habit of allowing our actions to be spied on.”

“And I am not in the habit of running useless risks, most noble cavaliers. You are, it is true, two against one; but,” he added, throwing back his cloak and grasping the hilts of a pair of pistols tucked in his belt, “these will make us equal. You are mistaken as to my intentions. I had no thought of playing the spy; it was chance alone that led me here; and you must acknowledge that finding you in this lonely spot, engaged as you are at this hour of the night, was quite enough to awake the curiosity of a man as little disposed to provoke a quarrel as to submit to threats.”

“It was chance also that brought us here. We were crossing the square, my friend and I, when we heard groans. We followed the sound, and found this young gallant, who is a stranger to us, lying here, with a wound in his breast.”

As the moon at that moment gleamed doubtfully forth, Maitre Quennebert bent for an instant over the body of the wounded man, and said:

“I know him more than you. But supposing someone were to come upon us here, we might easily be taken for three assassins holding a consultation over the corpse of our victim. What were you going to do?”

“Take him to a doctor. It would be inhuman to leave him here, and while we are talking precious time is being lost.”

“Do you belong to this neighbourhood?”

“No,” said the treasurer.

“Neither do I,” said Quennebert. “but I believe I have heard the name of a surgeon who lives close by, in the rue Hauteville.”

“I also know of one,” interposed de Jars, “a very skilful man.”

“You may command me.”

“Gladly, monsieur; for he lives some distance from here.”

“I am at your service.”

De Jars and Jeannin raised the chevalier’s shoulders, and the stranger supported his legs, and carrying their burden in this order, they set off.

They walked slowly, looking about them carefully, a precaution rendered necessary by the fact that the moon now rode in a cloudless sky. They glided over the Pont Saint-Michel between the houses that lined both sides, and, turning to the right, entered one of the narrow streets of the Cite, and after many turnings, during which they met no one, they stopped at the door of a house situated behind the Hotel-de-Ville.

“Many thanks, monsieur,” said de Jars, — ”many thanks; we need no further help.”

As the commander spoke, Maitre Quennebert let the feet of the chevalier fall abruptly on the pavement, while de Jars and the treasurer still supported his body, and, stepping back two paces, he drew his pistols from his belt, and placing a finger on each trigger, said —

“Do not stir, messieurs, or you are dead men.” Both, although encumbered by their burden, laid their hands upon their swords.

“Not a movement, not a sound, or I shoot.”

There was no reply to this argument, it being a convincing one even for two duellists. The bravest man turns pale when he finds himself face to face with sudden inevitable death, and he who threatened seemed to be one who would, without hesitation, carry out his threats. There was nothing for it but obedience, or a ball through them as they stood.

“What do you want with us, sir?” asked Jeannin.

Quennebert, without changing his attitude, replied —

“Commander de Jars, and you, Messire Jeannin de Castille, king’s treasurer, — you see, my gentles, that besides the advantage of arms which strike swiftly and surely, I have the further advantage of knowing who you are, whilst I am myself unknown, — you will carry the wounded man into this house, into which I will not enter, for I have nothing to do within; but I shall remain here; to await your return. After you have handed over the patient to the doctor, you will procure paper and write — -now pay great attention — that on November 20th, 1658, about midnight, you, aided by an unknown man, carried to this house, the address of which you will give, a young man whom you call the Chevalier de Moranges, and pass off as your nephew — ”

“As he really is.”

“Very well.”

“But who told you — ?”

“Let me go on: who had been wounded in a fight with swords on the same night behind the church of Saint-Andre-des-Arts by the Duc de Vitry.”

“The Duc de Vitry! — How do you know that?”

“No matter how, I know it for a fact. Having made this declaration, you will add that the said Chevalier de Moranges is no other than Josephine-Charlotte Boullenois, whom you, commander, abducted four months ago from the convent of La Raquette, whom you have made your mistress, and whom you conceal disguised as a man; then you will add your signature. Is my information correct?”

De Jars and Jeannin were speechless with surprise for a few instants; then the former stammered —

“Will you tell us who you are?”

“The devil in person, if you like. Well, will you do as I order? Supposing that I am awkward enough not to kill you at two paces, do you want me to ask you in broad daylight and aloud what I now ask at night and in a whisper? And don’t think to put me off with a false declaration, relying on my not being able to read it by the light of the moon; don’t think either that you can take me by surprise when you hand it me: you will bring it to me with your swords sheathed as now. If this condition is not observed, I shall fire, and the noise will bring a crowd about us. To-morrow I shall speak differently from to-day: I shall proclaim the truth at all the street corners, in the squares, and under the windows of the Louvre. It is hard, I know, for men of spirit to yield to threats, but recollect that you are in my power and that there is no disgrace in paying a ransom for a life that one cannot defend. What do you say?”

In spite of his natural courage, Jeannin, who found himself involved in an affair from which he had nothing to gain, and who was not at all desirous of being suspected of having helped in an abduction, whispered to the commander —

“Faith! I think our wisest course is to consent.”

De Jars, however, before replying, wished to try if he could by any chance throw his enemy off his guard for an instant, so as to take him unawares. His hand still rested on the hilt of his sword, motionless, but ready to draw.

“There is someone coming over yonder,” he cried, — ”do you hear?”

“You can’t catch me in that way,” said Quennebert. “Even were there anyone coming, I should not look round, and if you move your hand all is over with you.”

“Well,” said Jeannin, “I surrender at discretion — not on my own account, but out of regard for my friend and this woman. However, we are entitle to some pledge of your silence. This statement that you demand, once written, — you can ruin us tomorrow by its means.”

“I don’t yet know what use I shall make of it, gentlemen. Make up your minds, or you will have nothing but a dead body to place — in the doctor’s hands. There is no escape for you.”

For the first time the wounded man faintly groaned.

“I must save her!” cried de Jars, — ”I yield.”

“And I swear upon my honour that I will never try to get this woman out of your hands, and that I will never interfere with your conquest. Knock, gentlemen, and remain as long as may be necessary. I am patient. Pray to God, if you will, that she may recover; my one desire is that she may die.”

They entered the house, and Quennebert, wrapping himself once more in his mantle, walked up and down before it, stopping to listen from time to time. In about two hours the commander and the treasurer came out again, and handed him a written paper in the manner agreed on.

“I greatly fear that it will be a certificate of death,” said de Jars.

“Heaven grant it, commander! Adieu, messieurs.”

He then withdrew, walking backwards, keeping the two friends covered with his pistols until he had placed a sufficient distance between himself and them to be out of danger of an attack.

The two gentlemen on their part walked rapidly away, looking round from time to time, and keeping their ears open. They were very much mortified at having been forced to let a mere boor dictate to them, and anxious, especially de Jars, as to the result of the wound.

CHAPTER VII

On the day following this extraordinary series of adventures, explanations between those who were mixed up in them, whether as actors or spectators, were the order of the day. It was not till Maitre Quennebert reached the house of the friend who had offered to put him up for the night that it first dawned on him, that the interest which the Chevalier de Moranges had awakened in his mind had made him utterly forget the bag containing the twelve hundred livres which he owed to the generosity of the widow. This money being necessary to him, he went back to her early next morning. He found her hardly recovered from her terrible fright. Her swoon had lasted far beyond the time when the notary had left the house; and as Angelique, not daring to enter the bewitched room, had taken refuge in the most distant corner of her apartments, the feeble call of the widow was heard by no one. Receiving no answer, Madame Rapally groped her way into the next room, and finding that empty, buried herself beneath the bedclothes, and passed the rest of the night dreaming of drawn swords, duels, and murders. As soon as it was light she ventured into the mysterious room once more; without calling her servants, and found the bag of crowns lying open on the floor, with the coins scattered all around, the partition broken, and the tapestry hanging from it in shreds. The widow was near fainting again: she imagined at first she saw stains of blood everywhere, but a closer inspection having somewhat reassured her, she began to pick up the coins that had rolled to right and left, and was agreeably surprised to find the tale complete. But how and why had Maitre Quennebert abandoned them? What had become of him? She had got lost in the most absurd suppositions and conjectures when the notary appeared. Discovering from the first words she uttered that she was in complete ignorance of all that had taken place, he explained to her that when the interview between the chevalier and Mademoiselle de Guerchi had just at the most interesting moment been so unceremoniously interrupted by the arrival of the duke, he had become so absorbed in watching them that he had not noticed that the partition was bending before the pressure of his body, and that just as the duke drew his sword it suddenly gave way, and he, Quennebert, being thus left without support, tumbled head foremost into the next room, among a perfect chaos of overturned furniture and lamps; that almost before he could rise he was forced to draw in self-defence, and had to make his escape, defending himself against both the duke and the chevalier; that they had pursued him so hotly, that when he found himself free he was too far from the house and the hour was too advanced to admit of his returning, Quennebert added innumerable protestations of friendship, devotion, and gratitude, and, furnished with his twelve hundred crowns, went away, leaving the widow reassured as to his safety, but still shaken from her fright.

While the notary was thus soothing the widow, Angelique was exhausting all the expedients her trade had taught her in the attempt to remove the duke’s suspicions. She asserted she was the victim of an unforeseen attack which nothing in her conduct had ever authorised. The young Chevalier de Moranges had, gained admittance, she declared, under the pretext that he brought her news from the duke, the one man who occupied her thoughts, the sole object of her love. The chevalier had seen her lover, he said, a few days before, and by cleverly appealing to things back, he had led her to fear that the duke had grown tired of her, and that a new conquest was the cause of his absence. She had not believed these insinuations, although his long silence would have justified the most mortifying suppositions, the most cruel doubts. At length the chevalier had grown bolder, and had declared his passion for her; whereupon she had risen and ordered him to leave her. Just at that moment the duke had entered, and had taken the natural agitation and confusion of the chevalier as signs of her guilt. Some explanation was also necessary to account for the presence of the two other visitors of whom he had been told below stairs. As he knew nothing at all about them, the servant who admitted them never having seen either of them before, she acknowledged that two gentlemen had called earlier in the evening; that they had refused to send in their names, but as they had said they had come to inquire about the duke, she suspected them of having been in league with the chevalier in the attempt to ruin her reputation, perhaps they had even promised to help him to carry her off, but she knew nothing positive about them or their plans. The duke, contrary to his wont, did not allow himself to be easily convinced by these lame explanations, but unfortunately for him the lady knew how to assume an attitude favourable to her purpose. She had been induced, she said, with the simple confidence born of love, to listen to people who had led her to suppose they could give her news of one so dear to her as the duke. From this falsehood she proceeded to bitter reproaches:

instead of defending herself, she accused him of having left her a prey to anxiety; she went so far as to imply that there must be some foundation for the hints of the chevalier, until at last the duke, although he was not guilty of the slightest infidelity, and had excellent reasons to give in justification of his silence, was soon reduced to a penitent mood, and changed his threats into entreaties for forgiveness. As to the shriek he had heard, and which he was sure had been uttered by the stranger who had forced his way into her room after the departure of the others, she asserted that his ears must have deceived him. Feeling that therein lay her best chance of making things smooth, she exerted herself to convince him that there was no need for other information than she could give, and did all she could to blot the whole affair from his memory; and her success was such that at the end of the interview the duke was more enamoured and more credulous than ever, and believing he had done her wrong, he delivered himself up to her, bound hand and foot. Two days later he installed his mistress in another dwelling....

Madame Rapally also resolved to give up her rooms, and removed to a house that belonged to her, on the Pont Saint-Michel.

The commander took the condition of Charlotte Boullenois very much to heart. The physician under whose care he had placed her, after examining her wounds, had not given much hope of her recovery. It was not that de Jars was capable of a lasting love, but Charlotte was young and possessed great beauty, and the romance and mystery surrounding their connection gave it piquancy. Charlotte’s disguise, too, which enabled de Jars to conceal his success and yet flaunt it in the face, as it were, of public morality and curiosity, charmed him by its audacity, and above all he was carried away by the bold and uncommon character of the girl, who, not content with a prosaic intrigue, had trampled underfoot all social prejudices and proprieties, and plunged at once into unmeasured and unrestrained dissipation; the singular mingling in her nature of the vices of both sexes; the unbridled licentiousness of the courtesan coupled with the devotion of a man for horses, wine, and fencing; in short, her eccentric character, as it would now be called, kept a passion alive which would else have quickly died away in his blase heart. Nothing would induce him to follow Jeannin’s advice to leave Paris for at least a few weeks, although he shared Jeannin’s fear that the statement they had been forced to give the stranger would bring them into trouble. The treasurer, who had no love affair on hand, went off;

but the commander bravely held his ground, and at the end of five or six days, during which no one disturbed him, began to think the only result of the incident would be the anxiety it had caused him.

Every evening as soon as it was dark he betook himself to the doctor’s, wrapped in his cloak, armed to the teeth, and his hat pulled down over his eyes. For two days and nights, Charlotte, whom to avoid confusion we shall continue to call the Chevalier de Moranges, hovered between life and death. Her youth and the strength of her constitution enabled her at last to overcome the fever, in spite of the want of skill of the surgeon Perregaud.

Although de Jars was the only person who visited the chevalier, he was not the only one who was anxious about the patient’s health. Maitre Quennebert, or men engaged by him to watch, for he did not want to attract attention, were always prowling about the neighbourhood, so that he was kept well informed of everything that went on: The instructions he gave to these agents were, that if a funeral should leave the house, they were to find out the name of the deceased, and then to let him know without delay. But all these precautions seemed quite useless: he always received the same answer to all his questions, “We know nothing.” So at last he determined to address himself directly to the man who could give him information on which he could rely.

One night the commander left the surgeon’s feeling more cheerful than usual, for the chevalier had passed a good day, and there was every hope that he was on the road to complete recovery. Hardly had de Jars gone twenty paces when someone laid a hand on his shoulder. He turned and saw a man whom, in the darkness, he did not recognise.

“Excuse me for detaining you, Commander de Jars,” said Quennebert, “but I have a word to say to you.”

“Ali! so it’s you, sir,” replied the commander. “Are you going at last to give me the opportunity I was so anxious for?”

“I don’t understand.”

“We are on more equal terms this time; to-day you don’t catch me unprepared, almost without weapons, and if you are a man of honour you will measure swords with me.”

“Fight a duel with you! why, may I ask? You have never insulted me.”

“A truce to pleasantry, sir; don’t make me regret that I have shown myself more generous than you. I might have killed you just now had I wished. I could have put my pistol to your breast and fired, or said to you, ‘Surrender at discretion!’ as you so lately said to me.”

“And what use would that have been?”

“It would have made a secret safe that you ought never to have known.”

“It would have been the most unfortunate thing for you that could have happened, for if you had killed me the paper would have spoken. So! you think that if you were to assassinate me you would only have to stoop over my dead body and search my pockets, and, having found the incriminating document, destroy it. You seem to have formed no very high opinion of my intelligence and common sense. You of the upper classes don’t need these qualities, the law is on, your side. But when a humble individual like myself, a mere nobody, undertakes to investigate a piece of business about which those in authority are not anxious to be enlightened, precautions are necessary. It’s not enough for him to have right on his side, he must, in order to secure his own safety, make good use of his skill, courage, and knowledge. I have no desire to humiliate you a second time, so I will say no more. The paper is in the hands of my notary, and if a single day passes without his seeing me he has orders to break the seal and make the contents public. So you see chance is still on my side. But now that you are warned there is no need for me to bluster. I am quite prepared to acknowledge your superior rank, and if you insist upon it, to speak to you uncovered.”

“What do you desire to know, sir?”

“How is the Chevalier de Moranges getting on?”

“Very badly, very badly.”

“Take care, commander; don’t deceive me. One is so easily tempted to believe what one hopes, and I hope so strongly that I dare not believe what you say. I saw you coming out of the house, not at all with the air of a man who had just heard bad news, (quite the contrary) you looked at the sky, and rubbed your hands, and walked with a light, quick step, that did not speak of grief.”

“You’re a sharp observer, sir.”

“I have already explained to you, sir, that when one of us belonging to a class hardly better than serfs succeeds by chance or force of character in getting out of the narrow bounds in which he was born, he must keep both eyes and ears open. If I had doubted your word as you have doubted mine on the merest suspicion, you would have said to your servants, ‘Chastise this rascal.’ But I am obliged to prove to you that you did not tell me the truth. Now I am sure that the chevalier is out of danger.”

“If you were so well informed why did you ask me?”

“I only knew it by your asserting the contrary.”

“What do you mean?” cried de Jars, who was growing restive under this cold, satirical politeness.

“Do me justice, commander. The bit chafes, but yet you must acknowledge that I have a light hand. For a full week you have been in my power. Have I disturbed your quiet? Have I betrayed your secret? You know I have not. And I shall continue to act in the same manner. I hope with all my heart, however great would be your grief; that the chevalier may die of his wound. I have not the same reasons for loving him that you have, so much you can readily understand, even if I do not explain the cause of my interest in his fate. But in such a matter hopes count for nothing; they cannot make his temperature either rise or fall. I have told you I have no wish to force the chevalier to resume his real name. I may make use of the document and I may not, but if I am obliged to use it I shall give you warning. Will you, in return, swear to me upon your honour that you will keep me informed as to the fate of the chevalier, whether you remain in Paris or whether you leave? But let this agreement be a secret between us, and do not mention it to the so-called Moranges.”

“I have your oath, monsieur, that you will give me notice before you use the document I have given you against me, have I? But what guarantee have I that you will keep your word?”

“My course of action till to-day, and the fact that I have pledged you my word of my own free will.”

“I see, you hope not to have long to wait for the end.”

“I hope not; but meantime a premature disclosure would do me as much harm as you. I have not the slightest rancour against you, commander; you have robbed me of no treasure; I have therefore no compensation to demand. What you place such value on would be only a burden to me, as it will be to you later on. All I want is, to know as soon as it is no longer in your possession, whether it has been removed by the will of God or by your own, I am right in thinking that to-day there is some hope of the chevalier’s recovery, am I not?”

“Yes, Sir.”

"Do you give me your promise that if ever he leave this house safe and sound you will let me know?"

"I give you my promise."

"And if the result should be different, you will also send me word?"

"Certainly. But to whom shall I address my message?"

"I should have thought that since our first meeting you would have found out all about me, and that to tell you my name would be superfluous. But I have no reason to hide it: Maitre Quennebert, notary, Saint-Denis. I will not detain you any longer now, commander; excuse a simple citizen for dictating conditions to a noble such as you. For once chance has been on my side although a score of times it has gone against me."

De Jars made no reply except a nod, and walked away quickly, muttering words of suppressed anger between his teeth at all the — humiliations to which he had been obliged to submit so meekly.

"He's as insolent as a varlet who has no fear of a larruping before his eyes: how the rapscallion gloried in taking advantage of his position! Taking-off his hat while putting his foot on my neck! If ever I can be even with you, my worthy scrivener, you'll pass a very bad quarter of an hour, I can tell you."

Everyone has his own idea of what constitutes perfect honour. De Jars, for instance, would have allowed himself to be cut up into little pieces rather than have broken the promise he had given Quennebert a week ago, because it was given in exchange for his life, and the slightest paltering with his word under those circumstances would have been dastardly. But the engagement into which he had just entered had in his eyes no such moral sanction; he had not been forced into it by threats, he had escaped by its means no serious danger, and therefore in regard to it his conscience was much more accommodating. What he should best have liked to do, would have been to have sought out the notary and provoked him by insults to send him a challenge.

That a clown such as that could have any chance of leaving the ground alive never entered his head. But willingly as he would have encompassed his death in this manner, the knowledge that his secret would not die with Quennebert restrained him, for when everything came out he felt that the notary's death would be regarded as an aggravation of his original offence, and in spite of his rank he was not at all certain that if he were put on his trial even now he would escape scot free, much less if a new offence were added to the indictment. So, however much he might chafe against the bit, he felt he must submit to the bridle.

"By God!" said he, "I know what the clodhopper is after; and even if I must suffer in consequence, I shall take good care that he cannot shake off his bonds. Wait a bit! I can play the detective too, and be down on him without letting him see the hand that deals the blows. It'll be a wonder if I can't find a naked sword to suspend above his head."

However, while thus brooding over projects of vengeance, Commander de Jars kept his word, and about a month after the interview above related he sent word to Quennebert that the Chevalier de Moranges had left Perregaud's completely recovered from his wound. But the nearly fatal result of the chevalier's last prank seemed to have subdued his adventurous spirit; he was no longer seen in public, and was soon forgotten by all his acquaintances with the exception of Mademoiselle de Guerchi. She faithfully treasured up the memory of his words of passion, his looks of love, the warmth of his caresses, although at first she struggled hard to chase his image from her heart. But as the Due de Vitry assured her that he had killed him on the spot, she considered it no breach of faith to think lovingly of the dead, and while she took the goods so bounteously provided by her living lover, her gentlest thoughts, her most enduring regrets, were given to one whom she never hoped to see again.

CHAPTER VIII

With the reader’s permission, we must now jump over an interval of rather more than a year, and bring upon the stage a person who, though only of secondary importance, can no longer be left behind the scenes.

We have already said that the loves of Quennebert and Madame Rapally were regarded with a jealous eye by a distant cousin of the lady’s late husband. The love of this rejected suitor, whose name was Trumeau, was no more sincere than the notary’s, nor were his motives more honourable. Although his personal appearance was not such as to lead him to expect that his path would be strewn with conquests, he considered that his charms at least equalled those of his defunct relative; and it may be said that in thus estimating them he did not lay himself — open to the charge of overweening vanity. But however persistently he preened him self before the widow, she vouchsafed him not one glance. Her heart was filled with the love of his rival, and it is no easy thing to tear a rooted passion out of a widow’s heart when that widow’s age is forty-six, and she is silly enough to believe that the admiration she feels is equalled by the admiration she inspires, as the unfortunate Trumeau found to his cost. All his carefully prepared declarations of love, all his skilful insinuations against Quennebert, brought him nothing but scornful rebuffs. But Trumeau was nothing if not persevering, and he could not habituate himself to the idea of seeing the widow’s fortune pass into other hands than his own, so that every baffled move only increased his determination to spoil his competitor’s game. He was always on the watch for a chance to carry tales to the widow, and so absorbed did he become in this fruitless pursuit, that he grew yellower and more dried up from day to day, and to his jaundiced eye the man who was at first simply his rival became his mortal enemy and the object of his implacable hate, so that at length merely to get the better of him, to outwit him, would, after so long-continued and obstinate a struggle and so many defeats, have seemed to him too mild a vengeance, too incomplete a victory.

Quennebert was well aware of the zeal with which the indefatigable Trumeau sought to injure him. But he regarded the manoeuvres of his rival with supreme unconcern, for he knew that he could at any time sweep away the network of cunning machinations, underhand insinuations, and malicious hints, which was spread around him, by allowing the widow to confer on him the advantages she was so anxious to bestow. The goal, he knew, was within his reach, but the problem he had to solve was how to linger on the way thither, how to defer the triumphal moment, how to keep hope alive in the fair one’s breast and yet delay its fruition. His affairs were in a bad way. Day by day full possession of the fortune thus dangled before his eyes, and fragments of which came to him occasionally by way of loan, was becoming more and more indispensable, and tantalising though it was, yet he dared not put out his hand to seize it. His creditors dunned him relentlessly: one final reprieve had been granted him, but that at an end, if he could not meet their demands, it was all up with his career and reputation.

One morning in the beginning of February 1660, Trumeau called to see his cousin. He had not been there for nearly a month, and Quennebert and the widow had begun to think that, hopeless of success, he had retired from the contest. But, far from that, his hatred had grown more intense than ever, and having come upon the traces of an event in the past life of his rival which if proved would be the ruin of that rival’s hopes, he set himself to gather evidence. He now made his appearance with beaming looks, which expressed a joy too great for words. He held in one hand a small scroll tied with a ribbon. He found the widow alone, sitting in a large easy-chair before the fire. She was reading for the twentieth time a letter which Quenriebert had written her the evening before. To judge by the happy and contented expression of the widow’s face, it must have been couched in glowing terms. Trumeau guessed at once from whom the missive came, but the sight of it, instead of irritating him, called forth a smile.

“Ah! so it’s you, cousin?” said the widow, folding the precious paper and slipping it into the bosom of her dress. “How do you do? It’s a long time since I saw you, more than a fortnight, I think. Have you been ill?”

“So you remarked my absence! That is very flattering, my dear cousin; you do not often spoil me by such attentions. No, I have not been ill, thank God, but I thought it better not to intrude upon you so often. A friendly call now and then such as to-day’s is what you like, is it not? By the way, tell me about your handsome suitor, Maitre Quennebert; how is he getting along?”

“You look very knowing, Trumeau: have you heard of anything happening to him?”

“No, and I should be exceedingly sorry to hear that anything unpleasant had happened to him.”

Now you are not saying what you think, you know you can’t bear him.”

“Well, to speak the truth, I have no great reason to like him. If it were not for him, I should perhaps have been happy to-day; my love might have moved your heart. However, I have become resigned to my loss, and since your choice has fallen on him,” — and here he sighed, — ”well, all I can say is, I hope you may never regret it.”

“Many thanks for your goodwill, cousin; I am delighted to find you in such a benevolent mood. You must not be vexed because I could not give you the kind of love you wanted; the heart, you know, is not amenable to reason.”

“There is only one thing I should like to ask.”

“What is it?”

“I mention it for your good more than for my own. If you want to be happy, don’t let this handsome quill-driver get you entirely into his hands. You are saying to yourself that because of my ill-success with you I am trying to injure him; but what if I could prove that he does not love you as much as he pretends — ?”

“Come, come, control your naughty tongue! Are you going to begin backbiting again? You are playing a mean part, Trumeau. I have never hinted to Maitre Quennebert all the nasty little ways in which you have tried to put a spoke in his wheel, for if he knew he would ask you to prove your words, and then you would look very foolish.”.

“Not at all, I swear to you. On the contrary, if I were to tell all I know in his presence, it is not I who would be disconcerted. Oh! I am weary of meeting with nothing from you but snubs, scorn, and abuse. You think me a slanderer when I say, ‘This gallant wooer of widows does not love you for yourself but for your money-bags. He fools you by fine promises, but as to marrying you — never, never!’“

“May I ask you to repeat that?” broke in Madame Rapally

“Oh! I know what I am saying. You will never be Madame Quennebert.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

"Jealousy has eaten away whatever brains you used to possess, Trumeau. Since I saw you last, cousin, important changes have taken place: I was just going to send you to-day an invitation to my wedding."

"To your wedding?"

"Yes; I am to be married to-morrow."

"To-morrow? To Quennebert?" stammered Trumeau.

"To Quennebert," repeated the widow in a tone of triumph.

"It's not possible!" exclaimed Trumeau.

"It is so possible that you will see us united tomorrow. And for the future I must beg of you to regard Quennebert no longer as a rival but as my husband, whom to offend will be to offend me."

The tone in which these words were spoken no longer left room for doubt as to the truth of the news. Trumeau looked down for a few moments, as if reflecting deeply before definitely making up his mind. He twisted the little roll of papers between his fingers, and seemed to be in doubt whether to open it and give it to Madame Rapally to read or not. In the end, however, he put it in his pocket, rose, and approaching his cousin, said —

"I beg your pardon, this news completely changes my opinion. From the moment Maitre Quennebert becomes your husband I shall not have a word to say against him. My suspicions were unjust, I confess it frankly, and I hope that in consideration of the motives which prompted me you will forget the warmth of my attacks. I shall make no protestations, but shall let the future show how sincere is my devotion to your interests."

Madame Rapally was too happy, too certain of being loved, not to pardon easily. With the self-complacency and factitious generosity of a woman who feels herself the object of two violent passions, she was so good as to feel pity for the lover who was left out in the cold, and offered him her hand. Trumeau kissed it with every outward mark of respect, while his lips curled unseen in a smite of mockery. The cousins parted, apparently the best of friends, and on the understanding that Trumeau would be present at the nuptial benediction, which was to be given in a church beyond the town hall, near the house in which the newly-married couple were to live; the house on the Pont Saint-Michel having lately been sold to great advantage.

"On my word," said Trumeau, as he went off, "it would have been a great mistake to have spoken. I have got that wretch of a Quennebert into my clutches at last; and there is nobody but himself to blame. He is taking the plunge of his own free will, there is no need for me to shove him off the precipice.”

The ceremony took place next day. Quennebert conducted his interesting bride to the altar, she hung with ornaments like the shrine of a saint, and, beaming all over with smiles, looked so ridiculous that the handsome bridegroom reddened to the roots of his hair with shame. Just as they entered the church, a coffin, on which lay a sword, and which was followed by a single mourner, who from his manners and dress seemed to belong to the class of nobles, was carried in by the same door. The wedding guests drew back to let the funeral pass on, the living giving precedence to the dead. The solitary mourner glanced by chance at Quennebert, and started as if the sight of him was painful.

“What an unlucky meeting!” murmured Madame Rapally; “it is sure to be a bad omen.”

“It’s sure to be the exact opposite,” said Quennebert smiling.

The two ceremonies took place simultaneously in two adjoining chapels; the funeral dirges which fell on the widow’s ear full of sinister prediction seemed to have quite another meaning for Quennebert, for his features lost their look of care, his wrinkles smoothed themselves out, till the guests, among whom was Trumeau, who did not suspect the secret of his relief from suspense, began to believe, despite their surprise, that he was really rejoiced at obtaining legal possession of the charming Madame Rapally.

As for her, she fleeted the daylight hours by anticipating the joyful moment when she would have her husband all to herself. When night came, hardly had she entered the nuptial chamber than she uttered a piercing shriek. She had just found and read a paper left on the bed by Trumeau, who before leaving had contrived to glide into the room unseen. Its contents were of terrible import, so terrible that the new-made wife fell unconscious to the ground.

Quennebert, who, without a smile, was absorbed in reflections on the happiness at last within his grasp, heard the noise from the next room, and rushing in, picked up his wife. Catching sight of the paper, he also uttered a cry of anger and astonishment, but in whatever circumstances he found himself he was never long uncertain how to act. Placing Madame Quennebert, still unconscious, on the bed, he called her maid, and, having impressed on her that she was to take every care of her mistress, and above all to tell her from him as soon as she came to herself that there was no cause for alarm, he left the house at once. An hour later, in spite of the efforts of the servants, he forced his way into the presence of Commander de Jars. Holding out the fateful document to him, he said:

“Speak openly, commander! Is it you who in revenge for your long constraint have done this? I can hardly think so, for after what has happened you know that I have nothing to fear any longer. Still, knowing my secret and unable to do it in any other way, have you perchance taken your revenge by an attempt to destroy my future happiness by sowing dissension and disunion between me and my wife?”

The commander solemnly assured him that he had had no hand in bringing about the discovery.

‘Then if it’s not you, it must be a worthless being called Trumeau, who, with the unerring instinct of jealousy, has run the truth to earth. But he knows only half: I have never been either so much in love or so stupid as to allow myself to be trapped. I have given you my promise to be discreet and not to misuse my power, and as long as was compatible with my own safety I have kept my word. But now you must see that I am bound to defend myself, and to do that I shall be obliged to summon you as a witness. So leave Paris tonight and seek out some safe retreat where no one can find you, for to-morrow I shall speak. Of course if I am quit for a woman’s tears, if no more difficult task lies before me than to soothe a weeping wife, you can return immediately; but if, as is too probable, the blow has been struck by the hand of a rival furious at having been defeated, the matter will not so easily be cut short; the arm of the law will be invoked, and then I must get my head out of the noose which some fingers I know of are itching to draw tight.”

“You are quite right, sir,” answered the commander; “I fear that my influence at court is not strong enough to enable me to brave the matter out. Well, my success has cost me dear, but it has cured me for ever of seeking out similar adventures. My preparations will not take long, and to-morrow’s dawn will find me far from Paris.”

Quennebert bowed and withdrew, returning home to console his Ariadne.

CHAPTER IX

The accusation hanging over the head of Maitre Quennebert was a very serious one, threatening his life, if proved. But he was not uneasy; he knew himself in possession of facts which would enable him to refute it triumphantly.

The platonic love of Angelique de Guerchi for the handsome Chevalier de Moranges had resulted, as we have seen, in no practical wrong to the Duc de Vitry. After her reconciliation with her lover, brought about by the eminently satisfactory explanations she was able to give of her conduct, which we have already laid before our readers, she did not consider it advisable to shut her heart to his pleadings much longer, and the consequence was that at the end of a year she found herself in a condition which it was necessary to conceal from everyone. To Angelique herself, it is true, the position was not new, and she felt neither grief nor shame, regarding the coming event as a means of making her future more secure by forging a new link in the chain which bound the duke to her. But he, sure that but for himself Angelique would never have strayed from virtue's path, could not endure the thought of her losing her reputation and becoming an object for scandal to point her finger at; so that Angelique, who could not well seem less careful of her good name than he, was obliged to turn his song of woe into a duet, and consent to certain measures being taken.

One evening, therefore, shortly before Maitre Quennebert's marriage, the fair lady set out, ostensibly on a journey which was to last a fortnight or three weeks. In reality she only made a circle in a post-chaise round Paris, which she re-entered at one of the barriers, where the duke awaited her with a sedan-chair. In this she was carried to the very house to which de Jars had brought his pretended nephew after the duel. Angelique, who had to pay dearly for her errors, remained there only twenty-four hours, and then left in her coffin, which was hidden in a cellar under the palace of the Prince de Conde, the body being covered with quicklime. Two days after this dreadful death, Commander de Jars presented himself at the fatal house, and engaged a room in which he installed the chevalier.

This house, which we are about to ask the reader to enter with us, stood at the corner of the rue de la Tixeranderie and the rue Deux-Portes. There was nothing in the exterior of it to distinguish it from any other, unless perhaps two brass plates, one of which bore the words MARIE LEROUX-CONSTANTIN, WIDOW, CERTIFIED MIDWIFE, and the other CLAUDE PERREGAUD, SURGEON. These plates were affixed to the blank wall in the rue de la Tixeranderie, the windows of the rooms on that side looking into the courtyard. The house door, which opened directly on the first steps of a narrow winding stair, was on the other side, just beyond the low arcade under whose vaulted roof access was gained to that end of the rue des Deux-Portes. This house, though dirty, mean, and out of repair, received many wealthy visitors, whose brilliant equipages waited for them in the neighbouring streets. Often in the night great ladies crossed its threshold under assumed names and remained there for several days, during which La Constantin and Claude Perregaud, by an infamous use of their professional knowledge, restored their clients to an outward appearance of honour, and enabled them to maintain their reputation for virtue. The first and second floors contained a dozen rooms in which these abominable mysteries were practised. The large apartment, which served as waiting and consultation room, was oddly furnished, being crowded with objects of strange and unfamiliar form. It resembled at once the operating-room of a surgeon, the laboratory of a chemist and alchemist, and the den of a sorcerer. There, mixed up together in the greatest confusion, lay instruments of all sorts, caldrons and retorts, as well as books containing the most absurd ravings of the human mind. There were the twenty folio volumes of Albertus Magnus; the works of his disciple, Thomas de Cantopre, of Alchindus, of Averroes, of Avicenna, of Alchabitius, of David de Plaine-Campy, called L’Edelphe, surgeon to Louis XIII and author of the celebrated book The Morbific Hydra Exterminated by the Chemical Hercules. Beside a bronze head, such as the monk Roger Bacon possessed, which answered all the questions that were addressed to it and foretold the future by means of a magic mirror and the combination of the rules of perspective, lay an eggshell, the same which had been used by Caret, as d’Aubigne tells us, when making men out of germs, mandrakes, and crimson silk, over a slow fire. In the presses, which had sliding-doors fastening with secret springs, stood Jars filled with noxious drugs, the power of which was but too efficacious; in prominent positions, facing each other, hung two portraits, one representing Hierophilos, a Greek physician, and the other Agnodice his pupil, the first Athenian midwife.

For several years already La Constantin and Claude Perregaud had carried on their criminal practices without interference. A number of persons were of course in the secret, but their interests kept them silent, and the two accomplices had at last persuaded themselves that they were perfectly safe. One evening, however, Perregaud came home, his face distorted by terror and trembling in every limb. He had been warned while out that the suspicions of the authorities had been aroused in regard to him and La Constantin. It seemed that some little time ago, the Vicars-General had sent a deputation to the president of the chief court of justice, having heard from their priests that in one year alone six hundred women had avowed in the confessional that they had taken drugs to prevent their having children. This had been sufficient to arouse the vigilance of the police, who had set a watch on Perregaud's house, with the result that that very night a raid was to be made on it. The two criminals took hasty counsel together, but, as usual under such circumstances, arrived at no practical conclusions. It was only when the danger was upon them that they recovered their presence of mind. In the dead of night loud knocking at the street door was heard, followed by the command to open in the name of the king.

"We can yet save ourselves!" exclaimed surgeon, with a sudden flash of inspiration.

Rushing into the room where the pretended chevalier was lying, he called out —

"The police are coming up! If they discover your sex you are lost, and so am I. Do as I tell you."

At a sign from him, La Constantin went down and opened the door. While the rooms on the first floor were being searched, Perregaud made with a lancet a superficial incision in the chevalier's right arm, which gave very little pain, and bore a close resemblance to a sword-cut. Surgery and medicine were at that time so inextricably involved, required such apparatus, and bristled with such scientific absurdities, that no astonishment was excited by the extraordinary collection of instruments which loaded the tables and covered the floors below: even the titles of certain treatises which there had been no time to destroy, awoke no suspicion.

Fortunately for the surgeon and his accomplice, they had only one patient — the chevalier — in their house when the descent was made. When the chevalier's room was reached, the first thing which the officers of the law remarked were the hat, spurred boots, and sword of the patient. Claude

Perregaud hardly looked up as the room was invaded; he only made a sign to those — who came in to be quiet, and went on dressing the wound. Completely taken in, the officer in command merely asked the name of the patient and the cause of the wound. La Constantin replied that it’ was the young Chevalier de Moranges, nephew of Commander de Jars, who had had an affair of honour that same night, and being sightly wounded had been brought thither by his uncle hardly an hour before. These questions and the apparently trustworthy replies elicited by them being duly taken down, the uninvited visitors retired, having discovered nothing to justify their visit.

All might have been well had there been nothing the matter but the wound on the chevalier’s sword-arm. But at the moment when Perregaud gave it to him the poisonous nostrums employed by La Constantin were already working in his blood. Violent fever ensued, and in three days the chevalier was dead. It was his funeral which had met Quennebert’s wedding party at the church door.

Everything turned out as Quennebert had anticipated. Madame Quennebert, furious at the deceit which had been practised on her, refused to listen to her husband’s justification, and Trumeau, not letting the grass grow under his feet, hastened the next day to launch an accusation of bigamy against the notary; for the paper which had been found in the nuptial camber was nothing less than an attested copy of a contract of marriage concluded between Quennebert and Josephine-Charlotte Boullenois. It was by the merest chance that Trumeau had come on the record of the marriage, and he now challenged his rival to produce a certificate of the death of his first wife. Charlotte Boullenois, after two years of marriage, had demanded a deed of separation, which demand Quennebert had opposed. While the case was going on she had retired to the convent of La Raquette, where her intrigue with de Jars began. The commander easily induced her to let herself be carried off by force. He then concealed his conquest by causing her to adopt male attire, a mode of dress which accorded marvellously well with her peculiar tastes and rather masculine frame. At first Quennebert had instituted an active but fruitless search for his missing wife, but soon became habituated to his state of enforced single blessedness, enjoying to the full the liberty it brought with it. But his business had thereby suffered, and once having made the acquaintance of Madame Rapally, he cultivated it assiduously, knowing her fortune would be sufficient to set him straight again with the world, though he was obliged to exercise the utmost caution and reserve in has intercourse with her, as she on her side displayed none of these qualities. At last, however, matters came to such a pass that he must either go to prison or run the risk of a second marriage. So he reluctantly named a day for the ceremony, resolving to leave Paris with Madame Rapally as soon as he had settled with his creditors.

In the short interval which ensued, and while Trumeau was hugging the knowledge of the discovery he had made, a stroke of luck had brought the pretended chevalier to La Constantin. As Quennebert had kept an eye on de Jars and was acquainted with all his movements, he was aware of everything that happened at Perregaud's, and as Charlotte's death preceded his second marriage by one day, he knew that no serious consequences would ensue from the legal proceedings taken against him. He produced the declarations made by Mademoiselle de Guerchi and the commander, and had the body exhumed. Extraordinary and improbable as his defence appeared at first to be, the exhumation proved the truth of his assertions. These revelations, however, drew the eye of justice again on Perregaud and his partner in crime, and this time their guilt was brought home to them. They were condemned by parliamentary decree to "be hanged by the neck till they were dead, on a gallows erected for that purpose at the cross roads of the Croix-du-Trahoir; their bodies to remain there for twenty-four hours, then to be cut down and brought back to Paris, where they were to be exposed an a gibbet," etc., etc.

It was proved that they had amassed immense fortunes in the exercise of their infamous calling. The entries in the books seized at their house, though sparse, would have led, if made public, to scandals, involving many in high places; it was therefore judged best to limit the accusation to the two deaths by blood-poisoning of Angelique de Querchi and Charlotte Boullenois.

JOAN OF NAPLES — 1343-1382

CHAPTER I

In the night of the 15th of January 1343, while the inhabitants of Naples lay wrapped in peaceful slumber, they were suddenly awakened by the bells of the three hundred churches that this thrice blessed capital contains. In the midst of the disturbance caused by so rude a call the first thought in the mind of all was that the town was on fire, or that the army of some enemy had mysteriously landed under cover of night and could put the citizens to the edge of the sword. But the doleful, intermittent sounds of all these fills, which disturbed the silence at regular and distant intervals, were an invitation to the faithful to pray for a passing soul, and it was soon evident that no disaster threatened the town, but that the king alone was in danger.

Indeed, it had been plain for several days past that the greatest uneasiness prevailed in Castel Nuovo; the officers of the crown were assembled regularly twice a day, and persons of importance, whose right it was to make their way into the king's apartments, came out evidently bowed down with grief. But although the king's death was regarded as a misfortune that nothing could avert, yet the whole town, on learning for certain of the approach of his last hour, was affected with a sincere grief, easily understood when one learns that the man about to die, after a reign of thirty-three years, eight months, and a few days, was Robert of Anjou, the most wise, just, and glorious king who had ever sat on the throne of Sicily. And so he carried with him to the tomb the eulogies and regrets of all his subjects.

Soldiers would speak with enthusiasm of the long wars he had waged with Frederic and Peter of Aragon, against Henry VII and Louis of Bavaria; and felt their hearts beat high, remembering the glories of campaigns in Lombardy and Tuscany; priests would gratefully extol his constant defence of the papacy against Ghibelline attacks, and the founding of convents, hospitals, and churches throughout his kingdom; in the world of letters he was regarded as the most learned king in Christendom; Petrarch, indeed, would receive the poet's crown from no other hand, and had spent three consecutive days answering all the questions that Robert had deigned to ask him on every topic of human knowledge. The men of law, astonished by the wisdom of those laws which now enriched the Neapolitan code, had dubbed him the Solomon of their day; the nobles applauded him for protecting their ancient privileges, and the people were eloquent of his clemency, piety, and mildness. In a word, priests and soldiers, philosophers and poets, nobles and peasants, trembled when they thought that the government was to fall into the hands of a foreigner and of a young girl, recalling those words of Robert, who, as he followed in the funeral train of Charles, his only son, turned as he reached the threshold of the church and sobbingly exclaimed to his barons about him, “This day the crown has fallen from my head: alas for me! alas for you!”

Now that the bells were ringing for the dying moments of the good king, every mind was full of these prophetic words: women prayed fervently to God; men from all parts of the town bent their steps towards the royal palace to get the earliest and most authentic news, and after waiting some moments, passed in exchanging sad reflections, were obliged to return as they had come, since nothing that went on in the privacy of the family found its way outside — the castle was plunged in complete darkness, the drawbridge was raised as usual, and the guards were at their post.

Yet if our readers care to be present at the death of the nephew of Saint Louis and the grandson of Charles of Anjou, we may conduct them into the chamber of the dying man. An alabaster lamp suspended from the ceiling serves to light the vast and sombre room, with walls draped in black velvet sewn with golden fleur-de-lys. Near the wall which faces the two entrance doors that at this moment are both shut close, there stands beneath a brocaded canopy an ebony bed, supported on four twisted columns carved with symbolic figures. The king, after a struggle with a violent paroxysm, has fallen swooning in the arms of his confessor and his doctor, who each hold one of his dying hands, feeling his pulse anxiously and exchanging looks of intelligence. At the foot of the bed stands a woman about fifty years of age, her hands clasped, her eyes raised to heaven, in an attitude of resigned grief: this woman is the queen, No tears dim her eyes: her sunken cheek has that waxen yellow tinge that one sees on the bodies of saints preserved by miracle. In her look is that mingling of calm and suffering that points to a soul at once tried by sorrow and imbued with religion. After the lapse of an hour, while no movement had disturbed the profound silence which reigned about the bed of death, the king trembled slightly; opened his eyes, and endeavoured feebly to raise his head. They thanking the physician and priest with a smile, who had both hastened to arrange his pillows, he begged the queen to come near, and told her in a low voice that he would speak with her a moment alone. The doctor and confessor retired, deeply bowing, and the king followed them with his eyes up to the moment when one of the doors closed behind them. He passed his hand across his brow, as though seeking to collect his thoughts, and rallying all his forces for the supreme effort, pronounced these words:

"What I must say to you, Sancha, has no concern with those two good persons who were here a moment ago: their task is ended. One has done all for my body that human science could teach him, and all that has come of it is that my death is yet a little deferred; the other has now absolved me of all my sins, and assured me of God's forgiveness, yet cannot keep from me those dread apparitions which in this terrible hour arise before me. Twice have you seen me battling with a superhuman horror. My brow has been bathed in sweat, my limbs rigid, my cries have been stifled by a hand of iron. Has God permitted the Evil Spirit to tempt me? Is this remorse in phantom shape? These two conflicts I have suffered have so subdued my strength that I can never endure a third. Listen then, my Sandra, for I have instructions to give you on which perhaps the safety of my soul depends."

"My lord and my master," said the queen in the most gentle accents of submission, "I am ready to listen to your orders; and should it be that God, in the hidden designs of His providence, has willed to call you to His glory while we are plunged in grief, your last wishes shall be fulfilled here on earth most scrupulously and exactly. But," she added, with all the solicitude of a timid soul, "pray suffer me to sprinkle drops of holy water and banish the accursed one from this chamber, and let me offer up some part of that service of prayer that you composed in honour of your sainted brother to implore God's protection in this hour when we can ill afford to lose it."

Then opening a richly bound book, she read with fervent devotion certain verses of the office that Robert had written in a very pure Latin for his brother Louis, Bishop of Toulouse, which was in use in the Church as late as the time of the Council of Trent.

Soothed by the charm of the prayers he had himself composed, the king was near forgetting the object of the interview he had so solemnly and eagerly demanded and letting himself lapse into a state of vague melancholy, he murmured in a subdued voice, "Yes, yes, you are right; pray for me, for you too are a saint, and I am but a poor sinful man."

“Say not so, my lord,” interrupted Dona Sancha; “you are the greatest, wisest, and most just king who has ever sat upon the throne of Naples.”

“But the throne is usurped,” replied Robert in a voice of gloom; “you know that the kingdom belonged to my elder brother, Charles Martel; and since Charles was on the throne of Hungary, which he inherited from his mother, the kingdom of Naples devolved by right upon his eldest son, Carobert, and not on me, who am the third in rank of the family. And I have suffered myself to be crowned in my nephew’s stead, though he was the only lawful-king; I have put the younger branch in the place of the elder, and for thirty-three years I have stifled the reproaches of my conscience. True, I have won battles, made laws, founded churches; but a single word serves to give the lie to all the pompous titles showered upon me by the people’s admiration, and this one word rings out clearer in my ears than all the flattery of courtiers, all the songs of poets, all the orations of the crowd: — I am an usurper!”

“Be not unjust towards yourself, my lord, and bear in mind that if you did not abdicate in favour of the rightful heir, it was because you wished to save the people from the worst misfortunes. Moreover,” continued the queen, with that air of profound conviction that an unanswerable argument inspires, “you have remained king by the consent and authority of our Holy Father the sovereign pontiff, who disposes of the throne as a fief belonging to the Church.”

“I have long quieted my scruples thus,” replied the dying man, “and the pope’s authority has kept me silent; but whatever security one may pretend to feel in one’s lifetime, there yet comes a dreadful solemn hour when all illusions needs must vanish: this hour for me has come, and now I must appear before God, the one unfailing judge.”

“If His justice cannot fail, is not His mercy infinite?” pursued the queen, with the glow of sacred inspiration. “Even if there were good reason for the fear that has shaken your soul, what fault could not be effaced by a repentance so noble? Have you not repaired the wrong you may have done your nephew Carobert, by bringing his younger son Andre to your kingdom and marrying him to Joan, your poor Charles’s elder daughter? Will not they inherit your crown?”

“Alas!” cried Robert, with a deep sigh, “God is punishing me perhaps for thinking too late of this just reparation. O my good and noble Sandra, you touch a chord which vibrates sadly in my heart, and you anticipate the unhappy confidence I was about to make. I feel a gloomy presentiment — and in the hour of death presentiment is prophecy — that the two sons of my nephew, Louis, who has been King of Hungary since his father died, and Andre, whom I desired to make King of Naples, will prove the scourge of my family. Ever since Andre set foot in our castle, a strange fatality has pursued and overturned my projects. I had hoped that if Andre and Joan were brought up together a tender intimacy would arise between the two children; and that the beauty of our skies, our civilisation, and the attractions of our court would end by softening whatever rudeness there might be in the young Hungarian's character; but in spite of my efforts all has tended to cause coldness, and even aversion, between the bridal pair. Joan, scarcely fifteen, is far ahead of her age. Gifted with a brilliant and mobile mind, a noble and lofty character, a lively and glowing fancy, now free and frolicsome as a child, now grave and proud as a queen, trustful and simple as a young girl, passionate and sensitive as a woman, she presents the most striking contrast to Andre, who, after a stay of ten years at our court, is wilder, more gloomy, more intractable than ever. His cold, regular features, impassive countenance, and indifference to every pleasure that his wife appears to love, all this has raised between him and Joan a barrier of indifference, even of antipathy. To the tenderest effusion his reply is no more than a scornful smile or a frown, and he never seems happier than when on a pretext of the chase he can escape from the court. These, then, are the two, man and wife, on whose heads my crown shall rest, who in a short space will find themselves exposed to every passion whose dull growl is now heard below a deceptive calm, but which only awaits the moment when I breathe my last, to burst forth upon them."

"O my God, my God!" the queen kept repeating in her grief: her arms fell by her side, like the arms of a statue weeping by a tomb.

"Listen, Dona Sandra. I know that your heart has never clung to earthly vanities, and that you only wait till God has called me to Himself to withdraw to the convent of Santa Maria delta Croce, founded by yourself in the hope that you might there end your days. Far be it from me to dissuade you from your sacred vocation, when I am myself descending into the tomb and am conscious of the nothingness of all human greatness. Only grant me one year of widowhood before you pass on to your bridal with the Lord, one year in which you will watch over Joan and her husband, to keep from them all the dangers that threaten. Already the woman who was the seneschal’s wife and her son have too much influence over our granddaughter; be specially careful, and amid the many interests, intrigues, and temptations that will surround the young queen, distrust particularly the affection of Bertrand d’Artois, the beauty of Louis of Tarentum; and the ambition of Charles of Durazzo.”

The king paused, exhausted by the effort of speaking; then turning on his wife a supplicating glance and extending his thin wasted hand, he added in a scarcely audible voice:

“Once again I entreat you, leave not the court before a year has passed. Do you promise me?”

“I promise, my lord.”

“And now,” said Robert, whose face at these words took on a new animation, “call my confessor and the physician and summon the family, for the hour is at hand, and soon I shall not have the strength to speak my last words.”

A few moments later the priest and the doctor re-entered the room, their faces bathed, in tears. The king thanked them warmly for their care of him in his last illness, and begged them help to dress him in the coarse garb of a Franciscan monk, that God, as he said, seeing him die in poverty, humility, and penitence, might the more easily grant him pardon. The confessor and doctor placed upon his naked feet the sandals worn by mendicant friars, robed him in a Franciscan frock, and tied the rope about his waist. Stretched thus upon his bed, his brow surmounted by his scanty locks, with his long white beard, and his hands crossed upon his breast, the King of Naples looked like one of those aged anchorites who spend their lives in mortifying the flesh, and whose souls, absorbed in heavenly contemplation, glide insensibly from out their last ecstasy into eternal bliss. Some time he lay thus with closed eyes, putting up a silent prayer to God; then he bade them light the spacious room as for a great solemnity, and gave a sign to the two persons who stood, one at the head, the other at the foot of the bed. The two folding doors opened, and the whole of the royal family, with the queen at their head and the chief barons following, took their places in silence around the dying king to hear his last wishes.

His eyes turned toward Joan, who stood next him on his right hand, with an indescribable look of tenderness and grief. She was of a beauty so unusual and so marvellous, that her grandfather was fascinated by the dazzling sight, and mistook her for an angel that God had sent to console him on his deathbed. The pure lines of her fine profile, her great black liquid eyes, her noble brow uncovered, her hair shining like the raven's wing, her delicate mouth, the whole effect of this beautiful face on the mind of those who beheld her was that of a deep melancholy and sweetness, impressing itself once and for ever. Tall and slender, but without the excessive thinness of some young girls, her movements had that careless supple grace that recall the waving of a flower stalk in the breeze. But in spite of all these smiling and innocent graces one could yet discern in Robert's heiress a will firm and resolute to brave every obstacle, and the dark rings that circled her fine eyes plainly showed that her heart was already agitated by passions beyond her years.

Beside Joan stood her younger sister, Marie, who was twelve or thirteen years of age, the second daughter of Charles, Duke of Calabria, who had died before her birth, and whose mother, Marie of Valois, had unhappily been lost to her from her cradle. Exceedingly pretty and shy, she seemed distressed by such an assembly of great personages, and quietly drew near to the widow of the grand seneschal, Philippa, surnamed the Catanese, the princesses' governess, whom they honoured as a mother. Behind the princesses and beside this lady stood her son, Robert of Cabane, a handsome young man, proud and upright, who with his left hand played with his slight moustache while he secretly cast on Joan a glance of audacious boldness. The group was completed by Dona Cancha, the young chamberwoman to the princesses, and by the Count of Terlizzi, who exchanged with her many a furtive look and many an open smile. The second group was composed of Andre, Joan's husband, and Friar Robert, tutor to the young prince, who had come with him from Budapesth, and never left him for a minute. Andre was at this time perhaps eighteen years old: at first sight one was struck by the extreme regularity of his features, his handsome, noble face, and abundant fair hair; but among all these Italian faces, with their vivid animation, his countenance lacked expression, his eyes seemed dull, and something hard and icy in his looks revealed his wild character and foreign extraction. His tutor's portrait Petrarch has drawn for us: crimson face, hair and beard red, figure short and crooked; proud in poverty, rich and miserly; like a second Diogenes, with hideous and deformed limbs barely concealed beneath his friar's frock.

In the third group stood the widow of Philip, Prince of Tarentum, the king's brother, honoured at the court of Naples with the title of Empress of

Constantinople, a style inherited by her as the granddaughter of Baldwin II. Anyone accustomed to sound the depths of the human heart would at one glance have perceived that this woman under her ghastly pallor concealed an implacable hatred, a venomous jealousy, and an all-devouring ambition. She had her three sons about her — Robert, Philip, and Louis, the youngest. Had the king chosen out from among his nephews the handsomest, bravest, and most generous, there can be no doubt that Louis of Tarentum would have obtained the crown. At the age of twenty-three he had already excelled the cavaliers of most renown in feats of arms; honest, loyal, and brave, he no sooner conceived a project than he promptly carried it out. His brow shone in that clear light which seems to serve as a halo of success to natures so privileged as his; his fine eyes, of a soft and velvety black, subdued the hearts of men who could not resist their charm, and his caressing smile made conquest sweet. A child of destiny, he had but to use his will; some power unknown, some beneficent fairy had watched over his birth, and undertaken to smooth away all obstacles, gratify all desires.

Near to him, but in the fourth group, his cousin Charles of Duras stood and scowled. His mother, Agnes, the widow of the Duke of Durazzo and Albania, another of the king’s brothers, looked upon him affrighted, clutching to her breast her two younger sons, Ludovico, Count of Gravina, and Robert, Prince of Morea. Charles, pale-faced, with short hair and thick beard, was glancing with suspicion first at his dying uncle and then at Joan and the little Marie, then again at his cousins, apparently so excited by tumultuous thoughts that he could not stand still. His feverish uneasiness presented a marked contrast with the calm, dreamy face of Bertrand d’Artois, who, giving precedence to his father Charles, approached the queen at the foot of the bed, and so found himself face to face with Joan. The young man was so absorbed by the beauty of the princess that he seemed to see nothing else in the room.

As soon as Joan and Andre, the Princes of Tarentum and Durazzo, the Counts of Artois, and Queen Sancha had taken their places round the bed of death, forming a semicircle, as we have just described, the vice-chancellor passed through the rows of barons, who according to their rank were following closely after the princes of the blood; and bowing low before the king, unfolded a parchment sealed with the royal seal, and read in a solemn voice, amid a profound silence:

“Robert, by the grace of God King of Sicily and Jerusalem, Count of Provence, Forcalquier, and Piedmont, Vicar of the Holy Roman Church, hereby nominates and declares his sole heiress in the kingdom of Sicily on this side and the other side of the strait, as also in the counties of Provence, Forcalquier, and Piedmont, and in all his other territories, Joan, Duchess of Calabria, elder daughter of the excellent lord Charles, Duke of Calabria, of illustrious memory.

“Moreover, he nominates and declares the honourable lady Marie, younger daughter of the late Duke of Calabria, his heiress in the county of Alba and in the jurisdiction of the valley of Grati and the territory of Giordano, with all their castles and dependencies; and orders that the lady thus named receive them in fief direct from the aforesaid duchess and her heirs; on this condition, however, that if the duchess give and grant to her illustrious sister or to her assigns the sum of 10,000 ounces of gold by way of compensation, the county and jurisdiction aforesaid — shall remain in the possession of the duchess and her heirs.

“Moreover, he wills and commands, for private and secret reasons, that the aforesaid lady Marie shall contract a marriage with the very illustrious prince, Louis, reigning King of Hungary. And in case any impediment should appear to this marriage by reason of the union said to be already arranged and signed between the King of Hungary and the King of Bohemia and his daughter, our lord the king commands that the illustrious lady Marie shall contract a marriage with the elder son of the mighty lord Don Juan, Duke of Normandy, himself the elder son of the reigning King of France.”

At this point Charles of Durazzo gave Marie a singularly meaning look, which escaped the notice of all present, their attention being absorbed by the reading of Robert’s will. The young girl herself, from the moment when she first heard her own name, had stood confused and thunderstruck, with scarlet cheeks, not daring to raise her eyes.

The vice-chancellor continued:

“Moreover, he has willed and commanded that the counties of Forcalquier and Provence shall in all perpetuity be united to his kingdom, and shall form one sole and inseparable dominion, whether or not there be several sons or daughters or any other reason of any kind for its partition, seeing that this union is of the utmost importance for the security and common prosperity of the kingdom and counties aforesaid.

"Moreover, he has decided and commanded that in case of the death of the Duchess Joan — which God avert! — without lawful issue of her body, the most illustrious lord Andre, Duke of Calabria, her husband, shall have the principality of Salerno, with the title, fruits, revenues, and all the rights thereof, together with the revenue of 2000 ounces of gold for maintenance.

"Moreover, he has decided and ordered that the Queen above all, and also the venerable father Don Philip of Cabassole, Bishop of Cavaillon, vice-chancellor of the kingdom of Sicily, and the magnificent lords Philip of Sanguineto, seneschal of Provence, Godfrey of Marsan, Count of Squillace, admiral of the kingdom, and Charles of Artois, Count of Aire, shall be governors, regents, and administrators of the aforesaid lord Andre and the aforesaid ladies Joan and Marie, until such time as the duke, the duchess, and the very illustrious lady Marie shall have attained their twenty-fifth year," etc. etc.

When the vice-chancellor had finished reading, the king sat up, and glancing round upon his fair and numerous family, thus spoke:

"My children, you have heard my last wishes. I have bidden you all to my deathbed, that you may see how the glory of the world passes away. Those whom men name the great ones of the earth have more duties to perform, and after death more accounts to render: it is in this that their greatness lies. I have reigned thirty-three years, and God before whom I am about to appear, God to whom my sighs have often arisen during my long and painful life, God alone knows the thoughts that rend my heart in the hour of death. Soon shall I be lying in the tomb, and all that remains of me in this world will live in the memory of those who pray for me. But before I leave you for ever, you, oh, you who are twice my daughters, whom I have loved with a double love, and you my nephews who have had from me all the care and affection of a father, promise me to be ever united in heart and in wish, as indeed you are in my love. I have lived longer than your fathers, I the eldest of all, and thus no doubt God has wished to tighten the bonds of your affection, to accustom you to live in one family and to pay honour to one head. I have loved you all alike, as a father should, without exception or preference. I have disposed of my throne according to the law of nature and the inspiration of my conscience: Here are the heirs of the crown of Naples; you, Joan, and you, Andre, will never forget the love and respect that are due between husband and wife, and mutually sworn by you at the foot of the altar; and you, my nephews all; my barons, my officers, render homage to your lawful sovereigns; Andre of Hungary, Louis of Tarentum, Charles of Durazzo, remember that you are brothers; woe to him who shall imitate the perfidy of Cain! May his blood fall upon his own head, and may he be accursed by Heaven as he is by the mouth of a dying man; and may the blessing of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit descend upon that man whose heart is good, when the Lord of mercy shall call to my soul Himself!"

The king remained motionless, his arms raised, his eyes fixed on heaven, his cheeks extraordinarily bright, while the princes, barons, and officers of the court proffered to Joan and her husband the oath of fidelity and allegiance. When it was the turn of the Princes of Duras to advance, Charles disdainfully stalked past Andre, and bending his knee before the princess, said in a loud voice, as he kissed her hand —

"To you, my queen, I pay my homage."

All looks were turned fearfully towards the dying man, but the good king no longer heard. Seeing him fall back rigid and motionless, Dona Sancha burst into sobs, and cried in a voice choked with tears —

"The king is dead; let us pray for his soul."

At the very same moment all the princes hurried from the room, and every passion hitherto suppressed in the presence of the king now found its vent like a mighty torrent breaking through its banks.

"Long live Joan!" Robert of Cabane, Louis of Tarentum, and Bertrand of Artois were the first to exclaim, while the prince's tutor, furiously breaking through the crowd and apostrophising the various members of the council of regency, cried aloud in varying tones of passion, "Gentlemen, you have forgotten the king's wish already; you must cry, 'Long live Andre!' too;" then, wedding example to precept, and himself making more noise than all the barons together, he cried in a voice of thunder —

"Long live the King of Naples!"

But there was no echo to his cry, and Charles of Durazzo, measuring the Dominican with a terrible look, approached the queen, and taking her by the hand, slid back the curtains of the balcony, from which was seen the square and the town of Naples. So far as the eye could reach there stretched an immense crowd, illuminated by streams of light, and thousands of heads were turned upward towards Castel Nuovo to gather any news that might be announced. Charles respectfully drawing back and indicating his fair cousin with his hand, cried out —

“People of Naples, the King is dead: long live the Queen!”

“Long live Joan, Queen of Naples!” replied the people, with a single mighty cry that resounded through every quarter of the town.

The events that on this night had followed each other with the rapidity of a dream had produced so deep an impression on Joan’s mind, that, agitated by a thousand different feelings, she retired to her own rooms, and shutting herself up in her chamber, gave free vent to her grief. So long as the conflict of so many ambitions waged about the tomb, the young queen, refusing every consolation that was offered her, wept bitterly for the death of her grandfather, who had loved her to the point of weakness. The king was buried with all solemnity in the church of Santa Chiara, which he had himself founded and dedicated to the Holy Sacrament, enriching it with magnificent frescoes by Giotto and other precious relics, among which is shown still, behind the tribune of the high altar, two columns of white marble taken from Solomon’s temple. There still lies Robert, represented on his tomb in the dress of a king and in a monk’s frock, on the right of the monument to his son Charles, the Duke of Calabria.

CHAPTER II

As soon as the obsequies were over, Andre’s tutor hastily assembled the chief Hungarian lords, and it was decided in a council held in the presence of the prince and with his consent, to send letters to his mother, Elizabeth of Poland, and his brother, Louis of Hungary, to make known to them the purport of Robert’s will, and at the same time to lodge a complaint at the court of Avignon against the conduct of the princes and people of Naples in that they had proclaimed Joan alone Queen of Naples, thus overlooking the rights of her husband, and further to demand for him the pope’s order for Andre’s coronation. Friar Robert, who had not only a profound knowledge of the court intrigues, but also the experience of a philosopher and all a monk’s cunning, told his pupil that he ought to profit by the depression of spirit the king’s death had produced in Joan, and ought not to suffer her favourites to use this time in influencing her by their seductive counsels.

But Joan’s ability to receive consolation was quite as ready as her grief had at first been impetuous; the sobs which seemed to be breaking her heart ceased all at once; new thoughts, more gentle, less lugubrious, took possession of the young queen’s mind; the trace of tears vanished, and a smile lit up her liquid eyes like the sun’s ray following on rain. This change, anxiously awaited, was soon observed by Joan’s chamberwoman: she stole to the queen’s room, and falling on her knees, in accents of flattery and affection, she offered her first congratulations to her lovely mistress. Joan opened her arms and held her in a long embrace, for Dona Cancha was far more to her than a lady-in-waiting; she was the companion of infancy, the depositary of all her secrets, the confidante of her most private thoughts. One had but to glance at this young girl to understand the fascination she could scarcely fail to exercise over the queen’s mind. She had a frank and smiling countenance, such as inspires confidence and captivates the mind at first sight. Her face had an irresistible charm, with clear blue eyes, warm golden hair, mouth bewitchingly turned up at the corners, and delicate little chin. Wild, happy, light of heart, pleasure and love were the breath of her being; her dainty refinement, her charming inconstancies, all made her at sixteen as lovely as an angel, though at heart she was corrupt. The whole court was at her feet, and Joan felt more affection for her than for her own sister.

"Well, my dear Cancha," she murmured, with a sigh, "you find me very sad and very unhappy!"

"And you find me, fair queen," replied the confidante, fixing an admiring look on Joan, — "you find me just the opposite, very happy that I can lay at your feet before anyone else the proof of the joy that the people of Naples are at this moment feeling. Others perhaps may envy you the crown that shines upon your brow, the throne which is one of the noblest in the world, the shouts of this entire town that sound rather like worship than homage; but I, madam, I envy you your lovely black hair, your dazzling eyes, your more than mortal grace, which make every man adore you."

"And yet you know, my Cancha, I am much to be pitied both as a queen and as a woman: when one is fifteen a crown is heavy to wear, and I have not the liberty of the meanest of my subjects — I mean in my affections; for before I reached an age when I could think I was sacrificed to a man whom I can never love."

"Yet, madam," replied Cancha in a more insinuating voice, "in this court there is a young cavalier who might by virtue of respect, love, and devotion have made you forget the claims of this foreigner, alike unworthy to be our king and to be your husband."

The queen heaved a heavy sigh.

"When did you lose your skill to read my heart?" she cried. "Must I actually tell you that this love is making me wretched? True, at the very first this unsanctioned love was a keen joy: a new life seemed to wake within my heart; I was drawn on, fascinated by the prayers, the tears, and the despair of this man, by the opportunities that his mother so easily granted, she whom I had always looked upon as my own mother; I have loved him.... O my God, I am still so young, and my past is so unhappy. At times strange thoughts come into my mind: I fancy he no longer loves me, that he never did love me; I fancy he has been led on by ambition, by self-interest, by some ignoble motive, and has only feigned a feeling that he has never really felt. I feel myself a coldness I cannot account for; in his presence I am constrained, I am troubled by his look, his voice makes me tremble: I fear him; I would sacrifice a year of my life could I never have listened to him."

These words seemed to touch the young confidante to the very depths of her soul; a shade of sadness crossed her brow, her eyelids dropped, and for some time she answered nothing, showing sorrow rather than surprise. Then, lifting her head gently, she said, with visible embarrassment —

"I should never have dared to pass so severe a judgment upon a man whom my sovereign lady has raised above other men by casting upon him a look of kindness; but if Robert of Cabane has deserved the reproach of inconstancy and ingratitude, if he has perjured himself like a coward, he must indeed be the basest of all miserable beings, despising a happiness which other men might have entreated of God the whole time of their life and paid for through eternity. One man I know, who weeps both night and day without hope or consolation, consumed by a slow and painful malady, when one word might yet avail to save him, did it come from the lips of my noble mistress."

"I will not hear another word," cried Joan, suddenly rising; "there shall be no new cause for remorse in my life. Trouble has come upon me through my loves, both lawful and criminal; alas! no longer will I try to control my awful fate, I will bow my head without a murmur. I am the queen, and I must yield myself up for the good of my subjects."

"Will you forbid me, madam," replied Dona Cancha in a kind, affectionate tone — "will you forbid me to name Bertrand of Artois in your presence, that unhappy man, with the beauty of an angel and the modesty of a girl? Now that you are queen and have the life and death of your subjects in your own keeping, will you feel no kindness towards an unfortunate one whose only fault is to adore you, who strives with all his mind and strength to bear a chance look of yours without dying of his joy?"

"I have struggled hard never to look on him," cried the queen, urged by an impulse she was not strong enough to conquer: then, to efface the impression that might well have been made on her friend's mind, she added severely, "I forbid you to pronounce his name before me; and if he should ever venture to complain, I bid you tell him from me that the first time I even suspect the cause of his distress he will be banished for ever from my presence."

"Ah, madam, dismiss me also; for I shall never be strong enough to do so hard a bidding: the unhappy man who cannot awake in your heart so much as a feeling of pity may now be struck down by yourself in your wrath, for here he stands; he has heard your sentence, and come to die at your feet."

The last words were spoken in a louder voice, so that they might be heard from outside, and Bertrand of Artois came hurriedly into the room and fell on his knees before the queen. For a long time past the young lady-in-waiting had perceived that Robert of Cabane had, through his own fault, lost the love of Joan; for his tyranny had indeed become more unendurable to her than her husband's.

Dona Cancha had been quick enough to perceive that the eyes of her young mistress were wont to rest with a kind of melancholy gentleness on Bertrand, a young man of handsome appearance but with a sad and dreamy expression; so when she made up her mind to speak in his interests, she was persuaded that the queen already loved him. Still, a bright colour overspread Joan's face, and her anger would have fallen on both culprits alike, when in the next room a sound of steps was heard, and the voice of the grand seneschal's widow in conversation with her son fell on the ears of the three young people like a clap of thunder. Dona Cancha, pale as death, stood trembling; Bertrand felt that he was lost — all the more because his presence compromised the queen; Joan only, with that wonderful presence of mind she was destined to preserve in the most difficult crises of her future life, thrust the young man against the carved back of her bed, and concealed him completely beneath the ample curtain: she then signed to Cancha to go forward and meet the governess and her son.

But before we conduct into the queen's room these two persons, whom our readers may remember in Joan's train about the bed of King Robert, we must relate the circumstances which had caused the family of the Catanese to rise with incredible rapidity from the lowest class of the people to the highest rank at court. When Dona Violante of Aragon, first wife of Robert of Anjou, became the mother of Charles, who was later on the Duke of Calabria, a nurse was sought for the infant among the most handsome women of the people. After inspecting many women of equal merit as regards beauty, youth and health, the princess's choice lighted on Philippa, a young Catanese woman, the wife of a fisherman of Trapani, and by condition a laundress. This young woman, as she washed her linen on the bank of a stream, had dreamed strange dreams: she had fancied herself summoned to court, wedded to a great personage, and receiving the honours of a great lady. Thus when she was called to Castel Nuovo her joy was great, for she felt that her dreams now began to be realised. Philippa was installed at the court, and a few months after she began to nurse the child the fisherman was dead and she was a widow. Meanwhile Raymond of Cabane, the major-domo of King Charles II's house, had bought a negro from some corsairs, and having had him baptized by his own name, had given him his liberty; afterwards observing that he was able and intelligent, he had appointed him head cook in the king's kitchen; and then he had gone away to the war. During the absence of his patron the negro managed his own affairs at the court so cleverly, that in a short time he was able to buy land, houses, farms, silver plate, and horses, and could vie in riches with the best in the kingdom; and as he constantly won higher favour in the royal family, he passed on from the kitchen to the wardrobe. The Catanese had also deserved very well of her employers, and as a reward for the care she had bestowed on the child, the princess married her to the negro, and he, as a wedding gift, was granted the title of knight.

From this day forward, Raymond of Cabane and Philippa the laundress rose in the world so rapidly that they had no equal in influence at court. After the death of Dona Violante, the Catanese became the intimate friend of Dona Sandra, Robert's second wife, whom we introduced to our readers at the beginning of this narrative. Charles, her foster son, loved her as a mother, and she was the confidante of his two wives in turn, especially of the second wife, Marie of Valois. And as the quondam laundress had in the end learned all the manners and customs of the court, she was chosen at the birth of Joan and her sister to be governess and mistress over the young girls, and at this juncture Raymond was created major-domo. Finally, Marie of Valois on her deathbed commended the two young princesses to her care, begging her to look on them as her own-daughters. Thus Philippa the Catanese, honoured in future as foster mother of the heiress to the throne of Naples, had power to nominate her husband grand seneschal, one of the seven most important offices in the kingdom, and to obtain knighthood for her sons. Raymond of Cabane was buried like a king in a marble tomb in the church of the Holy Sacrament, and there was speedily joined by two of his sons. The third, Robert, a youth of extraordinary strength and beauty, gave up an ecclesiastical career, and was himself made major-domo, his two sisters being married to the Count of Merlizzi and the Count of Morcone respectively. This was now the state of affairs, and the influence of the grand seneschal's widow seemed for ever established, when an unexpected event suddenly occurred, causing such injury as might well suffice to upset the edifice of her fortunes that had been raised stone by stone patiently and slowly: this edifice was now undermined and threatened to fall in a single day. It was the sudden apparition of Friar Robert, who followed to the court of Rome his young pupil, who from infancy had been Joan’s destined husband, which thus shattered all the designs of the Catanese and seriously menaced her future. The monk had not been slow to understand that so long as she remained at the court, Andre would be no more than the slave, possibly even the victim, of his wife. Thus all Friar Robert’s thoughts were obstinately concentrated on a single end, that of getting rid of the Catanese or neutralising her influence. The prince’s tutor and the governess of the heiress had but to exchange one glance, icy, penetrating, plain to read: their looks met like lightning flashes of hatred and of vengeance. The Catanese, who felt she was detected, lacked courage to fight this man in the open, and so conceived the hope of strengthening her tottering empire by the arts of corruption and debauchery. She instilled by degrees into her pupil’s mind the poison of vice, inflamed her youthful imagination with precocious desires, sowed in her heart the seeds of an unconquerable aversion for her husband, surrounded the poor child with abandoned women, and especially attached to her the beautiful and attractive Dona Cancha, who is branded by contemporary authors with the name of a courtesan; then summed up all these lessons in infamy by prostituting Joan to her own son. The poor girl, polluted by sin before she knew what life was, threw her whole self into this first passion with all the ardour of youth, and loved Robert of Cabane so violently, so madly, that the Catanese congratulated herself on the success of her infamy, believing that she held her prey so fast in her toils that her victim would never attempt to escape them.

A year passed by before Joan, conquered by her infatuation, conceived the smallest suspicion of her lover’s sincerity. He, more ambitious than affectionate, found it easy to conceal his coldness under the cloak of a brotherly intimacy, of blind submission, and of unswerving devotion; perhaps he would have deceived his mistress for a longer time had not Bertrand of Artois fallen madly in love with Joan. Suddenly the bandage fell from the young girl’s eyes; comparing the two with the natural instinct of a woman beloved which never goes astray, she perceived that Robert of Cabane loved her for his own sake, while Bertrand of Artois would give his life to make her happy. A light fell upon her past: she mentally recalled the circumstances that preceded and accompanied her earliest love; and a shudder went through her at the thought that she had been sacrificed to a cowardly seducer by the very woman she had loved most in the world, whom she had called by the name of mother.

Joan drew back into herself, and wept bitterly. Wounded by a single blow in all her affections, at first her grief absorbed her; then, roused to sudden anger, she proudly raised her head, for now her love was changed to scorn. Robert, amazed at her cold and haughty reception of him, following on so great a love, was stung by jealousy and wounded pride. He broke out into bitter reproach and violent recrimination, and, letting fall the mask, once for all lost his place in Joan's heart.

His mother at last saw that it was time to interfere: she rebuked her son, accusing him of upsetting all her plans by his clumsiness.

"As you have failed to conquer her by love," she said, "you must now subdue her by fear. The secret of her honour is in our hands, and she will never dare to rebel. She plainly loves Bertrand of Artois, whose languishing eyes and humble sighs contrast in a striking manner with your haughty indifference and your masterful ways. The mother of the Princes of Tarentum, the Empress of Constantinople, will easily seize an occasion of helping on the princess's love so as to alienate her more and more from her husband: Cancha will be the go between, and sooner or later we shall find Bertrand at Joan's feet. Then she will be able to refuse us nothing."

While all this was going on, the old king died, and the Catanese, who had unceasingly kept on the watch for the moment she had so plainly foreseen, loudly called to her son, when she saw Bertrand slip into Joan's apartment, saying as she drew him after her —

"Follow me, the queen is ours."

It was thus that she and her son came to be there. Joan, standing in the middle of the chamber, pallid, her eyes fixed on the curtains of the bed, concealed her agitation with a smile, and took one step forward towards her governess, stooping to receive the kiss which the latter bestowed upon her every morning. The Catanese embraced her with affected cordiality, and turning, to her son, who had knelt upon one knee, said, pointing to Robert —

"My fair queen, allow the humblest of your subjects to offer his sincere congratulations and to lay his homage at your feet."

"Rise, Robert," said Joan, extending her hand kindly, and with no show of bitterness. "We were brought up together, and I shall never forget that in our childhood — I mean those happy days when we were both innocent — I called you my brother.”

“As you allow me, madam,” said Robert, with an ironical smile, “I too shall always remember the names you formerly gave me.”

“And I,” said the Catanese, “shall forget that I speak to the Queen of Naples, in embracing once more my beloved daughter. Come, madam, away with care: you have wept long enough; we have long respected your grief. It is now time to show yourself to these good Neapolitans who bless Heaven continually for granting them a queen so beautiful and good; it is time that your favours fall upon the heads of your faithful subjects, and my son, who surpasses all in his fidelity, comes first to ask a favour of you, in order that he may serve you yet more zealously.”

Joan cast on Robert a withering look, and, speaking to the Catanese, said with a scornful air —

“You know, madam, I can refuse your son nothing.”

“All he asks,” continued the lady, “is a title which is his due, and which he inherited from his father — the title of Grand Seneschal of the Two Sicilies: I trust, my daughter, you will have no difficulty in granting this.”

“But I must consult the council of regency.”

“The council will hasten to ratify the queen’s wishes,” replied Robert, handing her the parchment with an imperious gesture: “you need only speak to the Count of Artois.”

And he cast a threatening glance at the curtain, which had slightly moved.

“You are right,” said the queen at once; and going up to a table she signed the parchment with a trembling hand.

“Now, my daughter, I have come in the name of all the care I bestowed on your infancy, of all the maternal love I have lavished on you, to implore a favour that my family will remember for evermore.”

The queen recoiled one step, crimson with astonishment and rage; but before she could find words to reply, the lady continued in a voice that betrayed no feeling —

“I request you to make my son Count of Eboli.”

“That has nothing to do with me, madam; the barons of this kingdom would revolt to a man if I were on my own authority to exalt to one of the first dignities the son of a — -”

"A laundress and a negro; you would say, madam?" said Robert, with a sneer. "Bertrand of Artois would be annoyed perhaps if I had a title like his."

He advanced a step towards the bed, his hand upon the hilt of his sword.

"Have mercy, Robert!" cried the queen, checking him: "I will do all you ask."

And she signed the parchment naming him Count of Eboli.

"And now," Robert went on impudently, "to show that my new title is not illusory, while you are busy about signing documents, let me have the privilege of taking part in the councils of the crown: make a declaration that, subject to your good pleasure, my mother and I are to have a deliberative voice in the council whenever an important matter is under discussion."

"Never!" cried Joan, turning pale. "Philippa and Robert, you abuse my weakness and treat your queen shamefully. In the last few days I have wept and suffered continually, overcome by a terrible grief; I have no strength to turn to business now. Leave me, I beg: I feel my strength gives way."

"What, my daughter," cried the Catanese hypocritically, "are you feeling unwell? Come and lie down at once." And hurrying to the bed, she took hold of the curtain that concealed the Count of Artois.

The queen uttered a piercing cry, and threw herself before Philippa with the fury of a lioness. "Stop!" she cried in a choking voice; "take the privilege you ask, and now, if you value your own life, leave me."

The Catanese and her son departed instantly, not even waiting to reply, for they had got all they wanted; while Joan, trembling, ran desperately up to Bertrand, who had angrily drawn his dagger, and would have fallen upon the two favourites to take vengeance for the insults they had offered to the queen; but he was very soon disarmed by the lovely shining eyes raised to him in supplication, the two arms cast about him, and the tears shed by Joan: he fell at her feet and kissed them rapturously, with no thought of seeking excuse for his presence, with no word of love, for it was as if they had loved always: he lavished the tenderest caresses on her, dried her tears, and pressed his trembling lips upon her lovely head. Joan began to forget her anger, her vows, and her repentance: soothed by the music of her lover's speech, she returned uncomprehending monosyllables: her heart beat till it felt like breaking, and once more she was falling beneath love's resistless spell, when a new interruption occurred, shaking her roughly out of her ecstasy; but this time the young count was able to pass quietly and calmly into a room adjoining, and Joan prepared to receive her importunate visitor with severe and frigid dignity.

The individual who arrived at so inopportune a moment was little calculated to smooth Joan’s ruffled brow, being Charles, the eldest son of the Durazzo family. After he had introduced his fair cousin to the people as their only legitimate sovereign, he had sought on various occasions to obtain an interview with her, which in all probability would be decisive. Charles was one of those men who to gain their end recoil at nothing; devoured by raging ambition and accustomed from his earliest years to conceal his most ardent desires beneath a mask of careless indifference, he marched ever onward, plot succeeding plot, towards the object he was bent upon securing, and never deviated one hair’s-breadth from the path he had marked out, but only acted with double prudence after each victory, and with double courage after each defeat. His cheek grew pale with joy; when he hated most, he smiled; in all the emotions of his life, however strong, he was inscrutable. He had sworn to sit on the throne of Naples, and long had believed himself the rightful heir, as being nearest of kin to Robert of all his nephews. To him the hand of Joan would have been given, had not the old king in his latter days conceived the plan of bringing Andre from Hungary and re-establishing the elder branch in his person, though that had long since been forgotten. But his resolution had never for a moment been weakened by the arrival of Andre in the kingdom, or by the profound indifference wherewith Joan, preoccupied with other passion, had always received the advances of her cousin Charles of Durazzo. Neither the love of a woman nor the life of a man was of any account to him when a crown was weighed in the other scale of the balance.

During the whole time that the queen had remained invisible, Charles had hung about her apartments, and now came into her presence with respectful eagerness to inquire for his cousin’s health. The young duke had been at pains to set off his noble features and elegant figure by a magnificent dress covered with golden fleur-de-lys and glittering with precious stones. His doublet of scarlet velvet and cap of the same showed up, by their own splendour, the warm colouring of his skin, while his face seemed illumined by his black eyes that shone keen as an eagle’s.

Charles spoke long with his cousin of the people’s enthusiasm on her accession and of the brilliant destiny before her; he drew a hasty but truthful sketch of the state of the kingdom; and while he lavished praises on the queen's wisdom, he cleverly pointed out what reforms were most urgently needed by the country; he contrived to put so much warmth, yet so much reserve, into his speech that he destroyed the disagreeable impression his arrival had produced. In spite of the irregularities of her youth and the depravity brought about by her wretched education, Joan's nature impelled her to noble action: when the welfare of her subjects was concerned, she rose above the limitations of her age and sex, and, forgetting her strange position, listened to the Duke of Durazzo with the liveliest interest and the kindliest attention. He then hazarded allusions to the dangers that beset a young queen, spoke vaguely of the difficulty in distinguishing between true devotion and cowardly complaisance or interested attachment; he spoke of the ingratitude of many who had been loaded with benefits, and had been most completely trusted. Joan, who had just learned the truth of his words by sad experience, replied with a sigh, and after a moment's silence added —

"May God, whom I call to witness for the loyalty and uprightness of my intentions, may God unmask all traitors and show me my true friends! I know that the burden laid upon me is heavy, and I presume not on my strength, but I trust that the tried experience of those counsellors to whom my uncle entrusted me, the support of my family, and your warm and sincere friendship above all, my dear cousin, will help me to accomplish my duty."

"My sincerest prayer is that you may succeed, my fair cousin, and I will not darken with doubts and fears a time that ought to be given up to joy; I will not mingle with the shouts of gladness that rise on all sides to proclaim you queen, any vain regrets over that blind fortune which has placed beside the woman whom we all alike adore, whose single glance would make a man more blest than the angels, a foreigner unworthy of your love and unworthy of your throne."

"You forget, Charles," said the queen, putting out her hand as though to check his words, "Andre is my husband, and it was my grandfather's will that he should reign with me."

"Never!" cried the duke indignantly; "he King of Naples! Nay, dream that the town is shaken to its very foundations, that the people rise as one man, that our church bells sound a new Sicilian vespers, before the people of Naples will endure the rule of a handful of wild Hungarian drunkards, a deformed canting monk, a prince detested by them even as you are beloved!”

“But why is Andre blamed? What has he done?”

“What has he done? Why is he blamed, madam? The people blame him as stupid, coarse, a savage; the nobles blame him for ignoring their privileges and openly supporting men of obscure birth; and I, madam,” — here he lowered his voice, “I blame him for making you unhappy.”

Joan shuddered as though a wound had been touched by an unkind hand; but hiding her emotion beneath an appearance of calm, she replied in a voice of perfect indifference —

“You must be dreaming, Charles; who has given you leave to suppose I am unhappy?”

“Do not try to excuse him, my dear cousin,” replied Charles eagerly; “you will injure yourself without saving him.”

The queen looked fixedly at her cousin, as though she would read him through and through and find out the meaning of his words; but as she could not give credence to the horrible thought that crossed her mind, she assumed a complete confidence in her cousin’s friendship, with a view to discovering his plans, and said carelessly —

“Well, Charles, suppose I am not happy, what remedy could you offer me that I might escape my lot?”

“You ask me that, my dear cousin? Are not all remedies good when you suffer, and when you wish for revenge?”

“One must fly to those means that are possible. Andre will not readily give up his pretensions: he has a party of his own, and in case of open rupture his brother the King of Hungary may declare war upon us, and bring ruin and desolation upon our kingdom.”

The Duke of Duras faintly smiled, and his countenance assumed a sinister expression.

“You do not understand me,” he said.

“Then explain without circumlocution,” said the queen, trying to conceal the convulsive shudder that ran through her limbs.

“Listen, Joan,” said Charles, taking his cousin’s hand and laying it upon his heart: “can you feel that dagger?”

“I can,” said Joan, and she turned pale.

“One word from you — and — ”

“Yes?”

“To-morrow you will be free.”

“A murder!” cried Joan, recoiling in horror: “then I was not deceived; it is a murder that you have proposed.”

“It is a necessity,” said the duke calmly: “today I advise; later on you will give your orders.”

“Enough, wretch! I cannot tell if you are more cowardly or more rash: cowardly, because you reveal a criminal plot feeling sure that I shall never denounce you; rash, because in revealing it to me you cannot tell what witnesses are near to hear it all.”

“In any case, madam, since I have put myself in your hands, you must perceive that I cannot leave you till I know if I must look upon myself as your friend or as your enemy.”

“Leave me,” cried Joan, with a disdainful gesture; “you insult your queen.”

“You forget, my dear cousin, that some day I may very likely have a claim to your kingdom.”

“Do not force me to have you turned out of this room,” said Joan, advancing towards the door.

“Now do not get excited, my fair cousin; I am going: but at least remember that I offered you my hand and you refused it. Remember what I say at this solemn moment: to-day I am the guilty man; some day perhaps I may be the judge.”

He went away slowly, twice turning his head, repeating in the language of signs his menacing prophecy. Joan hid her face in her hands, and for a long time remained plunged in dismal reflections; then anger got the better of all her other feelings, and she summoned Dona Cancha, bidding her not to allow anybody to enter, on any pretext whatsoever.

This prohibition was not for the Count of Artois, for the reader will remember that he was in the adjoining room.

CHAPTER III

Night fell, and from the Molo to the Mergellina, from the Capuano Castle to the hill of St. Elmo, deep silence had succeeded the myriad sounds that go up from the noisiest city in the world. Charles of Durazzo, quickly walking away from the square of the Correggi, first casting one last look of vengeance at the Castel Nuovo, plunged into the labyrinth of dark streets that twist and turn, cross and recross one another, in this ancient city, and after a quarter of an hour's walking, that was first slow, then very rapid, arrived at his ducal palace near the church of San Giovanni al Mare. He gave certain instructions in a harsh, peremptory tone to a page who took his sword and cloak. Then Charles shut himself into his room, without going up to see his poor mother, who was weeping, sad and solitary over her son's ingratitude, and like every other mother taking her revenge by praying God to bless him.

The Duke of Durazzo walked up and down his room several times like a lion in a cage, counting the minutes in a fever of impatience, and was on the point of summoning a servant and renewing his commands, when two dull raps on the door informed him that the person he was waiting for had arrived. He opened at once, and a man of about fifty, dressed in black from head to foot, entered, humbly bowing, and carefully shut the door behind him. Charles threw himself into an easy-chair, and gazing fixedly at the man who stood before him, his eyes on the ground and his arms crossed upon his breast in an attitude of the deepest respect and blind obedience, he said slowly, as though weighing each word —

"Master Nicholas of Melazzo, have you any remembrance left of the services I once rendered you?"

The man to whom these words were addressed trembled in every limb, as if he heard the voice of Satan come to claim his soul; then lifting a look of terror to his questioner's face, he asked in a voice of gloom —

"What have I done, my lord, to deserve this reproach?"

"It is not a reproach: I ask a simple question."

"Can my lord doubt for a moment of my eternal gratitude? Can I forget the favours your Excellency showed me? Even if I could so lose my reason and my memory, are not my wife and son ever here to remind me that to you we owe all our life, our honour, and our fortune? I was guilty of an infamous act," said the notary, lowering his voice, "a crime that would not only have brought upon my head the penalty of death, but which meant the confiscation of my goods, the ruin of my family, poverty and shame for my only son — that very son, sire, for whom I, miserable wretch, had wished to ensure a brilliant future by means of my frightful crime: you had in your hands the proofs of this!

"I have them still."

"And you will not ruin me, my lord," resumed the notary, trembling; "I am at your feet, your Excellency; take my life and I will die in torment without a murmur, but save my son since you have been so merciful as to spare him till now; have pity on his mother; my lord, have pity!"

"Be assured," said Charles, signing to him to rise; "it is nothing to do with your life; that will come later, perhaps. What I wish to ask of you now is a much simpler, easier matter."

"My lord, I await your command."

"First," said the duke, in a voice of playful irony, "you must draw up a formal contract of my marriage."

"At once, your Excellency."

"You are to write in the first article that my wife brings me as dowry the county of Alba, the jurisdiction of Grati and Giordano, with all castles, fiefs, and lands dependent thereto."

"But, my lord — " replied the poor notary, greatly embarrassed.

"Do you find any difficulty, Master Nicholas?"

"God forbid, your Excellency, but — "

"Well, what is it?"

"Because, if my lord will permit, because there is only one person in Naples who possesses that dowry your Excellency mentions."

"And so?"

"And she," stammered the notary, embarrassed more and more, " — she is the queen's sister."

"And in the contract you will write the name of Marie of Anjou."

"But the young maiden," replied Nicholas timidly, "whom your Excellency would marry is destined, I thought, under the will of our late king of blessed memory, to become the wife of the King of Hungary or else of the grandson of the King of France."

“Ah, I understand your surprise: you may learn from this that an uncle’s intentions are not always the same as his nephew’s.”

“In that case, sire, if I dared — if my lord would deign to give me leave — if I had an opinion I might give, I would humbly entreat your Excellency to reflect that this would mean the abduction of a minor.”

“Since when did you learn to be scrupulous, Master Nicholas?”

These words were uttered with a glance so terrible that the poor notary was crushed, and had hardly the strength to reply —

“In an hour the contract will be ready.”

“Good: we agree as to the first point,” continued Charles, resuming his natural tone of voice. “You now will hear my second charge. You have known the Duke of Calabria’s valet for the last two years pretty intimately?”

“Tommaso Pace; why, he is my best friend.”

“Excellent. Listen, and remember that on your discretion the safety or ruin of your family depends. A plot will soon be on foot against the queen’s husband; the conspirators no doubt will gain over Andre’s valet, the man you call your best friend; never leave him for an instant, try to be his shadow; day by day and hour by hour come to me and report the progress of the plot, the names of the plotters.”

“Is this all your Excellency’s command?”

“All.”

The notary respectfully bowed, and withdrew to put the orders at once into execution. Charles spent the rest of that night writing to his uncle the Cardinal de Perigord, one of the most influential prelates at the court of Avignon. He begged him before all things to use his authority so as to prevent Pope Clement from signing the bull that would sanction Andre’s coronation, and he ended his letter by earnestly entreating his uncle to win the pope’s consent to his marriage with the queen’s sister.

“We shall see, fair cousin,” he said as he sealed his letter, “which of us is best at understanding where our interest lies. You would not have me as a friend, so you shall have me as an enemy. Sleep on in the arms of your lover: I will wake you when the time comes. I shall be Duke of Calabria perhaps some day, and that title, as you well know, belongs to the heir to the throne.”

The next day and on the following days a remarkable change took place in the behaviour of Charles towards Andre: he showed him signs of great friendliness, cleverly flattering his inclinations, and even persuading Friar Robert that, far from feeling any hostility in the matter of Andre’s coronation, his most earnest desire was that his uncle’s wishes should be respected; and that, though he might have given the impression of acting contrary to them, it had only been done with a view to appeasing the populace, who in their first excitement might have been stirred up to insurrection against the Hungarians. He declared with much warmth that he heartily detested the people about the queen, whose counsels tended to lead her astray, and he promised to join Friar Robert in the endeavour to get rid of Joan’s favourites by all such means as fortune might put at his disposal. Although the Dominican did not believe in the least in the sincerity of his ally’s protestations, he yet gladly welcomed the aid which might prove so useful to the prince’s cause, and attributed the sudden change of front to some recent rupture between Charles and his cousin, promising himself that he would make capital out of his resentment. Be that as it might, Charles wormed himself into Andre’s heart, and after a few days one of them could hardly be seen without the other. If Andre went out hunting, his greatest pleasure in life, Charles was eager to put his pack or his falcons at his disposal; if Andre rode through the town, Charles was always ambling by his side. He gave way to his whims, urged him to extravagances, and inflamed his angry passions: in a word, he was the good angel — or the bad one — who inspired his every thought and guided his every action.

Joan soon understood this business, and as a fact had expected it. She could have ruined Charles with a single word; but she scorned so base a revenge, and treated him with utter contempt. Thus the court was split into two factions: the Hungarians with Friar Robert at their head and supported by Charles of Durazzo; on the other side all the nobility of Naples, led by the Princes of Tarentum. Joan, influenced by the grand seneschal’s widow and her two daughters, the Countesses of Terlizzi and Morcone, and also by Dona Cancha and the Empress of Constantinople, took the side of the Neapolitan party against the pretensions of her husband. The partisans of the queen made it their first care to have her name inscribed upon all public acts without adding Andre’s; but Joan, led by an instinct of right and justice amid all the corruption of her court, had only consented to this last after she had taken counsel with Andre d’Isernia, a very learned lawyer of the day, respected as much for his lofty character as for his great learning. The prince, annoyed at being shut out in this way, began to act in a violent and despotic manner. On his own authority he released prisoners; he showered favours upon Hungarians, and gave especial honours and rich gifts to Giovanni Pipino, Count of Altanuera, the enemy of all others most dreaded and detested by the Neapolitan barons. Then the Counts of San Severino, Mileto, Terlizzi and Balzo, Calanzaro and Sant’ Angelo, and most of the grandees, exasperated by the haughty insolence of Andre’s favourite, which grew every day more outrageous, decided that he must perish, and his master with him, should he persist in attacking their privileges and defying their anger.

Moreover, the women who were about Joan at the court egged her on, each one urged by a private interest, in the pursuit of her fresh passion. Poor Joan, — neglected by her husband and betrayed by Robert of Cabane — gave way beneath the burden of duties beyond her strength to bear, and fled for refuge to the arms of Bertrand of Artois, whose love she did not even attempt to resist; for every feeling for religion and virtue had been destroyed in her own set purpose, and her young inclinations had been early bent towards vice, just as the bodies of wretched children are bent and their bones broken by jugglers when they train them. Bertrand himself felt an adoration for her surpassing ordinary human passion. When he reached the summit of a happiness to which in his wildest dreams he had never dared to aspire, the young count nearly lost his reason. In vain had his father, Charles of Artois (who was Count of Aire, a direct descendant of Philip the Bold, and one of the regents of the kingdom), attempted by severe admonitions to stop him while yet on the brink of the precipice: Bertrand would listen to nothing but his love for Joan and his implacable hatred for all the queen’s enemies. Many a time, at the close of day, as the breeze from Posilippo or Sorrento coming from far away was playing in his hair, might Bertrand be seen leaning from one of the casements of Castel Nuovo, pale and motionless, gazing fixedly from his side of the square to where the Duke of Calabria and the Duke of Durazzo came galloping home from their evening ride side by side in a cloud of dust. Then the brows of the young count were violently contracted, a savage, sinister look shone in his blue eyes once so innocent, like lightning a thought of death and vengeance flashed into his mind; he would all at once begin to tremble, as a light hand was laid upon his shoulder; he would turn softly, fearing lest the divine apparition should vanish to the skies; but there beside him stood a young girl, with cheeks aflame and heaving breast, with brilliant liquid eyes: she had come to tell how her past day had been spent, and to offer her forehead for the kiss that should reward her labours and unwilling absence. This woman, dictator of laws and administrator of justice among grave magistrates and stern ministers, was but fifteen years old; this man; who knew her griefs, and to avenge them was meditating regicide, was not yet twenty: two children of earth, the playthings of an awful destiny!

Two months and a few days after the old king's death, on the morning of Friday the 28th of March of the same year, 1343, the widow of the grand seneschal, Philippa, who, had already contrived to get forgiven for the shameful trick she had used to secure all her son's wishes, entered the queen's apartments, excited by a genuine fear, pale and distracted, the bearer of news that spread terror and lamentation throughout the court: Marie, the queen's younger sister, had disappeared.

The gardens and outside courts had been searched for any trace of her; every corner of the castle had been examined; the guards had been threatened with torture, so as to drag the truth from them; no one had seen anything of the princess, and nothing could be found that suggested either flight or abduction. Joan, struck down by this new blow in the midst of other troubles, was for a time utterly prostrated; then, when she had recovered from her first surprise, she behaved as all people do if despair takes the place of reason: she gave orders for what was already done to be done again, she asked the same questions that could only bring the same answers, and poured forth vain regrets and unjust reproaches. The news spread through the town, causing the greatest astonishment: there arose a great commotion in the castle, and the members of the regency hastily assembled, while couriers were sent out in every direction, charged to promise 12,000 ducats to whomsoever should discover the place where the princess was concealed. Proceedings were at once taken against the soldiers who were on guard at the fortress at the time of the disappearance.

Bertrand of Artois drew the queen apart, telling her his suspicions, which fell directly upon Charles of Durazzo; but Joan lost no time in persuading him of the improbability of his hypothesis: first of all, Charles had never once set his foot in Castel Nuovo since the day of his stormy interview with the queen, but had made a point of always leaving Andre by the bridge when he came to the town with him; besides, it had never been noticed, even in the past, that the young duke had spoken to Marie or exchanged looks with her: the result of all attainable evidence was that no stranger had entered the castle the evening before except a notary named Master Nicholas of Melazzo, an old person, half silly, half fanatical, for whom Tommaso Pace, valet de chambre to the Duke of Calabria, was ready to answer with his life. Bertrand yielded to the queen’s reasoning, and day by day advanced new suggestions, each less probable than the last, to draw his mistress on to feel a hope that he was far from feeling himself.

But a month later, and precisely on the morning of Monday the 30th of April, a strange and unexpected scene took place, an exhibition of boldness transcending all calculations. The Neapolitan people were stupefied in astonishment, and the grief of Joan and her friends was changed to indignation. Just as the clock of San Giovanni struck twelve, the gate of the magnificent palace of the Durazzo flung open its folding doors, and there came forth to the sound of trumpets a double file of cavaliers on richly caparisoned horses, with the duke’s arms on their shields. They took up their station round the house to prevent the people outside from disturbing a ceremony which was to take place before the eyes of an immense crowd, assembled suddenly, as by a miracle, upon the square. At the back of the court stood an altar, and upon the steps lay two crimson velvet cushions embroidered with the fleur-de-lys of France and the ducal crown. Charles came forward, clad in a dazzling dress, and holding by the hand the queen’s sister, the Princess Marie, at that time almost thirteen years of age. She knelt down timidly on one of the cushions, and when Charles had done the same, the grand almoner of the Duras house asked the young duke solemnly what was his intention in appearing thus humbly before a minister of the Church. At these words Master Nicholas of Melazzo took his place on the left of the altar, and read in a firm, clear voice, first, the contract of marriage between Charles and Marie, and then the apostolic letters from His Holiness the sovereign pontiff, Clement VI, who in his own name removing all obstacles that might impede the union, such as the age of the young bride and the degrees of affinity between the two parties, authorised his dearly beloved son Charles, Duke of Durazzo and Albania, to take in marriage the most illustrious Marie of Anjou, sister of Joan, Queen of Naples and Jerusalem, and bestowed his benediction on the pair.

The almoner then took the young girl’s hand, and placing it in that of Charles, pronounced the prayers of the Church. Charles, turning half round to the people, said in a loud voice —

“Before God and man, this woman is my wife.”

“And this man is my husband,” said Marie, trembling.

“Long live the Duke and Duchess of Durazzo!” cried the crowd, clapping their hands. And the young pair, at once mounting two beautiful horses and followed by their cavaliers and pages, solemnly paraded through the town, and re-entered their palace to the sound of trumpets and cheering.

When this incredible news was brought to the queen, her first feeling was joy at the recovery of her sister; and when Bertrand of Artois was eager to head a band of barons and cavaliers and bent on falling upon the cortege to punish the traitor, Joan put up her hand to stop him with a very mournful look.

“Alas!” she said sadly, “it is too late. They are legally married, for the head of the Church — who is moreover by my grandfather’s will the head of our family — has granted his permission. I only pity my poor sister; I pity her for becoming so young the prey of a wretched man who sacrifices her to his own ambition, hoping by this marriage to establish a claim to the throne. O God! what a strange fate oppresses the royal house of Anjou! My father’s early death in the midst of his triumphs; my mother’s so quickly after; my sister and I, the sole offspring of Charles I, both before we are women grown fallen into the hands of cowardly men, who use us but as the stepping-stones of their ambition!” Joan fell back exhausted on her chair, a burning tear trembling on her eyelid.

“This is the second time,” said Bertrand reproachfully, “that I have drawn my sword to avenge an insult offered to you, the second time I return it by your orders to the scabbard. But remember, Joan, the third time will not find me so docile, and then it will not be Robert of Cabane or Charles of Durazzo that I shall strike, but him who is the cause of all your misfortunes.”

“Have mercy, Bertrand! do not you also speak these words; whenever this horrible thought takes hold of me, let me come to you: this threat of bloodshed that is drummed into my ears, this sinister vision that haunts my sight; let me come to you, beloved, and weep upon your bosom, beneath your breath cool my burning fancies, from your eyes draw some little courage to revive my perishing soul. Come, I am quite unhappy enough without needing to poison the future by an endless remorse. Tell me rather to forgive and to forget, speak not of hatred and revenge; show me one ray of hope amid the darkness that surrounds me; hold up my wavering feet, and push me not into the abyss.”

Such altercations as this were repeated as often as any fresh wrong arose from the side of Andre or his party; and in proportion as the attacks made by Bertrand and his friends gained in vehemence — and we must add, in justice — so did Joan's objections weaken. The Hungarian rule, as it became more and more arbitrary and unbearable, irritated men's minds to such a point that the people murmured in secret and the nobles proclaimed aloud their discontent. Andre's soldiers indulged in a libertinage which would have been intolerable in a conquered city: they were found everywhere brawling in the taverns or rolling about disgustingly drunk in the gutters; and the prince, far from rebuking such orgies, was accused of sharing them himself. His former tutor, who ought to have felt bound to drag him away from so ignoble a mode of life, rather strove to immerse him in degrading pleasures, so as to keep him out of business matters; without suspecting it, he was hurrying on the denouement of the terrible drama that was being acted behind the scenes at Castel Nuovo. Robert's widow, Dona Sancha of Aragon, the good and sainted lady whom our readers may possibly have forgotten, as her family had done, seeing that God's anger was hanging over her house, and that no counsels, no tears or prayers of hers could avail to arrest it, after wearing mourning for her husband one whole year, according to her promise, had taken the veil at the convent of Santa Maria delta Croce, and deserted the court and its follies and passions, just as the prophets of old, turning their back on some accursed city, would shake the dust from off their sandals and depart. Sandra's retreat was a sad omen, and soon the family dissensions, long with difficulty suppressed, sprang forth to open view; the storm that had been threatening from afar broke suddenly over the town, and the thunderbolt was shortly to follow.

On the last day of August 1344, Joan rendered homage to Americ, Cardinal of Saint Martin and legate of Clement VI, who looked upon the kingdom of Naples as being a fief of the Church ever since the time when his predecessors had presented it to Charles of Anjou, and overthrown and excommunicated the house of Suabia. For this solemn ceremony the church of Saint Clara was chosen, the burial-place of Neapolitan kings, and but lately the tomb of the grandfather and father of the young queen, who reposed to right and left of the high altar. Joan, clad in the royal robe, with the crown upon her head, uttered her oath of fidelity between the hands of the apostolic legate in the presence of her husband, who stood behind her simply as a witness, just like the other princes of the blood. Among the prelates with their pontifical insignia who formed the brilliant following of the envoy, there stood the Archbishops of Pisa, Bari, Capua, and Brindisi, and the reverend fathers Ugolino, Bishop of Castella, and Philip, Bishop of Cavaillon, chancellor to the queen. All the nobility of Naples and Hungary were present at this ceremony, which debarred Andre from the throne in a fashion at once formal and striking. Thus, when they left the church the excited feelings of both parties made a crisis imminent, and such hostile glances, such threatening words were exchanged, that the prince, finding himself too weak to contend against his enemies, wrote the same evening to his mother, telling her that he was about to leave a country where from his infancy upwards he had experienced nothing but deceit and disaster.

Those who know a mother's heart will easily guess that Elizabeth of Poland was no sooner aware of the danger that threatened her son than she travelled to Naples, arriving there before her coming was suspected. Rumour spread abroad that the Queen of Hungary had come to take her son away with her, and the unexpected event gave rise to strange comments: the fever of excitement now blazed up in another direction. The Empress of Constantinople, the Catanese, her two daughters, and all the courtiers, whose calculations were upset by Andre's departure, hurried to honour the arrival of the Queen of Hungary by offering a very cordial and respectful reception, with a view to showing her that, in the midst of a court so attentive and devoted, any isolation or bitterness of feeling on the young prince's part must spring from his pride, from an unwarrantable mistrust, and his naturally savage and untrained character. Joan received her husband's mother with so much proper dignity in her behaviour that, in spite of preconceived notions, Elizabeth could not help admiring the noble seriousness and earnest feeling she saw in her daughter-in-law. To make the visit more pleasant to an honoured guest, fetes and tournaments were given, the barons vying with one another in display of wealth and luxury. The Empress of Constantinople, the Catanese, Charles of Duras and his young wife, all paid the utmost attention to the mother of the prince. Marie, who by reason of her extreme youth and gentleness of character had no share in any intrigues, was guided quite as much by her natural feeling as by her husband's orders when she offered to the Queen of Hungary those marks of regard and affection that she might have felt for her own mother. In spite, however, of these protestations of respect and love, Elizabeth of Poland trembled for her son, and, obeying a maternal instinct, chose to abide by her original intention, believing that she should never feel safe until Andre was far away from a court in appearance so friendly but in reality so treacherous. The person who seemed most disturbed by the departure, and tried to hinder it by every means in his power, was Friar Robert. Immersed in his political schemes, bending over his mysterious plans with all the eagerness of a gambler who is on the point of gaining, the Dominican, who thought himself on the eve of a tremendous event, who by cunning, patience, and labour hoped to scatter his enemies and to reign as absolute autocrat, now falling suddenly from the edifice of his dream, stiffened himself by a mighty effort to stand and resist the mother of his pupil. But fear cried too loud in the heart of Elizabeth for all the reasonings of the monk to lull it to rest: to every argument he advanced she simply said that while her son was not king and had not entire unlimited power, it was imprudent to leave him exposed to his enemies. The monk, seeing that all was indeed lost and that he could not contend against the fears of this woman, asked only the boon of three days' grace, at the end of which time, should a reply he was expecting have not arrived, he said he would not only give up his opposition to Andre's departure, but would follow himself, renouncing for ever a scheme to which he had sacrificed everything.

Towards the end of the third day, as Elizabeth was definitely making her preparations for departure, the monk entered radiant. Showing her a letter which he had just hastily broken open, he cried triumphantly —

“God be praised, madam! I can at last give you incontestable proofs of my active zeal and accurate foresight.”

Andre's mother, after rapidly running through the document, turned her eyes on the monk with yet some traces of mistrust in her manner, not venturing to give way to her sudden joy.

“Yes, madam,” said the monk, raising his head, his plain features lighted up by his glance of intelligence — ”yes, madam, you will believe your eyes, perhaps, though you would never believe my words: this is not the dream of an active imagination, the hallucination of a credulous mind, the prejudice of a limited intellect; it is a plan slowly conceived, painfully worked out, my daily thought and my whole life's work. I have never ignored the fact that at the court of Avignon your son had powerful enemies; but I knew also that on the very day I undertook a certain solemn engagement in the prince's name, an engagement to withdraw those laws that had caused coldness between the pope and Robert; who was in general so devoted to the Church, I knew very well that my offer would never be rejected, and this argument of mine I kept back for the last. See, madam, my calculations are correct; your enemies are put to shame and your son is triumphant.”

Then turning to Andre, who was just corning in and stood dumbfounded at the threshold on hearing the last words, he added —

“Come, my son, our prayers are at last fulfilled: you are king.”

“King!” repeated Andre, transfixed with joy, doubt, and amazement.

“King of Sicily and Jerusalem: yes, my lord; there is no need for you to read this document that brings the joyful, unexpected news. You can see it in your mother’s tears; she holds out her arms to press you to her bosom; you can see it in the happiness of your old teacher; he falls on his knees at your feet to salute you by this title, which he would have paid for with his own blood had it been denied to you much longer.”

“And yet,” said Elizabeth, after a moment’s mournful reflection, “if I obey my presentiments, your news will make no difference to our plans for departure.”

“Nay, mother,” said Andre firmly, “you would not force me to quit the country to the detriment of my honour. If I have made you feel some of the bitterness and sorrow that have spoiled my own young days because of my cowardly enemies, it is not from a poor spirit, but because I was powerless, and knew it, to take any sort of striking vengeance for their secret insults, their crafty injuries, their underhand intrigues. It was not because my arm wanted strength, but because my head wanted a crown. I might have put an end to some of these wretched beings, the least dangerous maybe; but it would have been striking in the dark; the ringleaders would have escaped, and I should never have really got to the bottom of their infernal plots. So I have silently eaten out my own heart in shame and indignation. Now that my sacred rights are recognised by the Church, you will see, my mother, how these terrible barons, the queen’s counsellors, the governors of the kingdom, will lower their heads in the dust: for they are threatened with no sword and no struggle; no peer of their own is he who speaks, but the king; it is by him they are accused, by the law they shall be condemned, and shall suffer on the scaffold.”

“O my beloved son,” cried the queen in tears, “I never doubted your noble feelings or the justice of your claims; but when your life is in danger, to what voice can I listen but the voice of fear? what can move my counsels but the promptings of love?”

“Mother, believe me, if the hands and hearts alike of these cowards had not trembled, you would have lost your son long ago.”

“It is not violence that I fear, my son, it is treachery.”

“My life, like every man’s, belongs to God, and the lowest of sbirri may take it as I turn the corner of the street; but a king owes something to his people.”

The poor mother long tried to bend the resolution of Andre by reason and entreaties; but when she had spoken her last word and shed her last tear, she summoned Bertram de Baux, chief-justice of the kingdom, and Marie, Duchess of Durazzo. Trusting in the old man’s wisdom and the girl’s innocence, she commended her son to them in the tenderest and most affecting words; then drawing from her own hand a ring richly wrought, and taking the prince aside, she slipped it upon his finger, saying in a voice that trembled with emotion as she pressed him to her heart —

“My son, as you refuse to come with me, here is a wonderful talisman, which I would not use before the last extremity. So long as you wear this ring on your finger, neither sword nor poison will have power against you.”

“You see then, mother,” said the prince, smiling, “with this protection there is no reason at all to fear for my life.”

“There are other dangers than sword or poison,” sighed the queen.

“Be calm, mother: the best of all talismans is your prayer to God for me: it is the tender thought of you that will keep me for ever in the path of duty and justice; your maternal love will watch over me from afar, and cover me like the wings of a guardian angel.”

Elizabeth sobbed as she embraced her son, and when she left him she felt her heart was breaking. At last she made up her mind to go, and was escorted by the whole court, who had never changed towards her for a moment in their chivalrous and respectful devotion. The poor mother, pale, trembling, and faint, leaned heavily upon Andre’s arm, lest she should fall. On the ship that was to take her for ever from her son, she cast her arms for the last time about his neck, and there hung a long time, speechless, tearless, and motionless; when the signal for departure was given, her women took her in their arms half swooning. Andre stood on the shore with the feeling of death at his heart: his eyes were fixed upon the sail that carried ever farther from him the only being he loved in the world.

Suddenly he fancied he beheld something white moving a long way off: his mother had recovered her senses by a great effort, and had dragged herself up to the bridge to give a last signal of farewell: the unhappy lady knew too well that she would never see her son again.

At almost the same moment that Andre’s mother left the kingdom, the former queen of Naples, Robert’s widow, Dona Sancha, breathed her last sigh. She was buried in the convent of Santa Maria delta Croce, under the name of Clara, which she had assumed on taking her vows as a nun, as her epitaph tells us, as follows:

“Here lies, an example of great humility, the body of the sainted sister Clara, of illustrious memory, otherwise Sancha, Queen of Sicily and Jerusalem, widow of the most serene Robert, King of Jerusalem and Sicily, who, after the death of the king her husband, when she had completed a year of widowhood, exchanged goods temporary for goods eternal. Adopting for the love of God a voluntary poverty, and distributing her goods to the poor, she took upon her the rule of obedience in this celebrated convent of Santa Croce, the work of her own hands, in the year 1344, on the gist of January of the twelfth indiction, where, living a life of holiness under the rule of the blessed Francis, father of the poor, she ended her days religiously in the year of our Lord 1345, on the 28th of July of the thirteenth indiction. On the day following she was buried in this tomb.”

The death of Dona Sancha served to hasten on the catastrophe which was to stain the throne of Naples with blood: one might almost fancy that God wished to spare this angel of love and resignation the sight of so terrible a spectacle, that she offered herself as a propitiatory sacrifice to redeem the crimes of her family.

CHAPTER IV

Eight days after the funeral of the old queen, Bertrand of Artois came to Joan, distraught, dishevelled, in a state of agitation and confusion impossible to describe.

Joan went quickly up to her lover, asking him with a look of fear to explain the cause of his distress.

“I told you, madam,” cried the young baron excitedly, “you will end by ruining us all, as you will never take any advice from me.”

“For God’s sake, Bertrand, speak plainly: what has happened? What advice have I neglected?”

“Madam, your noble husband, Andre of Hungary, has just been made King of Jerusalem and Sicily, and acknowledged by the court of Avignon, so henceforth you will be no better than his slave.”

“Count of Artois, you are dreaming.”

“No, madam, I am not dreaming: I have this fact to prove the truth of my words, that the pope’s ambassadors are arrived at Capua with the bull for his coronation, and if they do not enter Castel Nuovo this very evening, the delay is only to give the new king time to make his preparations.”

The queen bent her head as if a thunderbolt had fallen at her feet.

“When I told you before,” said the count, with growing fury, “that we ought to use force to make a stand against him, that we ought to break the yoke of this infamous tyranny and get rid of the man before he had the means of hurting you, you always drew back in childish fear, with a woman’s cowardly hesitation.”

Joan turned a tearful look upon her lover.

“God, my God!” she cried, clasping her hands in desperation, “am I to hear for ever this awful cry of death! You too, Bertrand, you too say the word, like Robert of Cabane, like Charles of Duras? Wretched man, why would you raise this bloody spectre between us, to check with icy hand our adulterous kisses? Enough of such crimes; if his wretched ambition makes him long to reign, let him be king: what matters his power to me, if he leaves me with your love?”

“It is not so sure that our love will last much longer.”

“What is this, Bertrand? You rejoice in this merciless torture.”

“I tell you, madam, that the King of Naples has a black flag ready, and on the day of his coronation it will be carried before him.”

“And you believe,” said Joan, pale as a corpse in its shroud, “ — you believe that this flag is a threat?”

“Ay, and the threat begins to be put in execution.”

The queen staggered, and leaned against a table to save herself from falling.

“Tell me all,” she cried in a choking voice; “fear not to shock me; see, I am not trembling. O Bertrand, I entreat you!”

“The traitors have begun with the man you most esteemed, the wisest counsellor of the crown, the best of magistrates, the noblest-hearted, most rigidly virtuous — — ”

“Andrea of Isernia!”

“Madam, he is no more.”

Joan uttered a cry, as though the noble old man had been slain before her eyes: she respected him as a father; then, sinking back, she remained profoundly silent.

“How did they kill him?” she asked at last, fixing her great eyes in terror on the count.

“Yesterday evening, as he left this castle, on the way to his own home, a man suddenly sprang out upon him before the Porta Petruccia: it was one of Andre’s favourites, Conrad of Gottis chosen no doubt because he had a grievance against the incorruptible magistrate on account of some sentence passed against him, and the murder would therefore be put down to motives of private revenge. The cowardly wretch gave a sign to two or three companions, who surrounded the victim and robbed him of all means of escape. The poor old man looked fixedly at his assassin, and asked him what he wanted. ‘I want you to lose your life at my hands, as I lost my case at yours!’ cried the murderer, and leaving him no time to answer, he ran him through with his sword. Then the rest fell upon the poor man, who did not even try to call for help, and his body was riddled with wounds and horribly mutilated, and then left bathed in its blood.”

“Terrible!” murmured the queen, covering her face.

“It was only their first effort; the proscription lists are already full: Andre must needs have blood to celebrate his accession to the throne of Naples. And do you know, Joan, whose name stands first in the doomed list?”

“Whose?” cried the queen, shuddering from head to foot.

“Mine,” said the count calmly.

“Yours!” cried Joan, drawing herself up to her full height; “are you to be killed next! Oh, be careful, Andre; you have pronounced your own death-sentence. Long have I turned aside the dagger pointing to your breast, but you put an end to all my patience. Woe to you, Prince of Hungary! the blood which you have spilt shall fall on your own head.”

As she spoke she had lost her pallor; her lovely face was fired with revenge, her eyes flashed lightning. This child of sixteen was terrible to behold; she pressed her lover’s hand with convulsive tenderness, and clung to him as if she would screen him with her own body.

“Your anger is awakened too late,” said he gently and sadly; for at this moment Joan seemed so lovely that he could reproach her with nothing. “You do not know that his mother has left him a talisman preserving him from sword and poison?”

“He will die,” said Joan firmly; the smile that lighted up her face was so unnatural that the count was dismayed, and dropped his eyes.

The next day the young Queen of Naples, lovelier, more smiling than ever, sitting carelessly in a graceful attitude beside a window which looked out on the magnificent view of the bay, was busy weaving a cord of silk and gold. The sun had run nearly two-thirds of his fiery course, and was gradually sinking his rays in the clear blue waters where Posilippo’s head is reflected with its green and flowery crown. A warm, balmy breeze that had passed over the orange trees of Sorrento and Amalfi felt deliciously refreshing to the inhabitants of the capital, who had succumbed to torpor in the enervating softness of the day. The whole town was waking from a long siesta, breathing freely after a sleepy interval; the Molo was covered with a crowd of eager people dressed out in the brightest colours; the many cries of a festival, joyous songs, love ditties sounded from all quarters of the vast amphitheatre, which is one of the chief marvels of creation; they came to the ears of Joan, and she listened as she bent over her work, absorbed in deep thought. Suddenly, when she seemed most busily occupied, the indefinable feeling of someone near at hand, and the touch of something on her shoulder, made her start: she turned as though waked from a dream by contact with a serpent, and perceived her husband, magnificently dressed, carelessly leaning against the back of her chair. For a long time past the prince had not come to his wife in this familiar fashion, and to the queen the pretence of affection and careless behaviour augured ill. Andre did not appear to notice the look of hatred and terror that had escaped Joan in spite of herself, and assuming the best expression of gentleness as that his straight hard features could contrive to put on in such circumstances as these, he smilingly asked —

“Why are you making this pretty cord, dear dutiful wife?”

“To hang you with, my lord,” replied the queen, with a smile.

Andre shrugged his shoulders, seeing in the threat so incredibly rash nothing more than a pleasantry in rather bad taste. But when he saw that Joan resumed her work, he tried to renew the conversation.

“I admit,” he said, in a perfectly calm voice, “that my question is quite unnecessary: from your eagerness to finish this handsome piece of work, I ought to suspect that it is destined for some fine knight of yours whom you propose to send on a dangerous enterprise wearing your colours. If so, my fair queen, I claim to receive my orders from your lips: appoint the time and place for the trial, and I am sure beforehand of carrying off a prize that I shall dispute with all your adorers.”

“That is not so certain,” said Joan, “if you are as valiant in war as in love.” And she cast on her husband a look at once seductive and scornful, beneath which the young man blushed up to his eyes.

“I hope,” said Andre, repressing his feelings, “I hope soon to give you such proofs of my affection that you will never doubt it again.”

“And what makes you fancy that, my lord?”

“I would tell you, if you would listen seriously.”

“I am listening.”

“Well, it is a dream I had last night that gives me such confidence in the future.”

“A dream! You surely ought to explain that.”

“I dreamed that there was a grand fete in the town: an immense crowd filled the streets like an overflowing torrent, and the heavens were ringing with their shouts of joy; the gloomy granite facades were hidden by hangings of silk and festoons of flowers; the churches were decorated as though for some grand ceremony. I was riding side by side with you.” Joan made a haughty movement: “Forgive me, madam, it was only a dream: I was on your right, riding a fine white horse, magnificently caparisoned, and the chief-justice of the kingdom carried before me a flag unfolded in sign of honour. After riding in triumph through the main thoroughfares of the city, we arrived, to the sound of trumpets and clarions, at the royal church of

Saint Clara, where your grandfather and my uncle are buried, and there, before the high altar, the pope's ambassador laid your hand in mine and pronounced a long discourse, and then on our two heads in turn placed the crown of Jerusalem and Sicily; after which the nobles and the people shouted in one voice, 'Long live the King and Queen of Naples!' And I, wishing to perpetuate the memory of so glorious a day, proceeded to create knights among the most zealous in our court."

"And do you not remember the names of the chosen persons whom you judged worthy of your royal favours?"

"Assuredly, madam: Bertrand, Count of Artois."

"Enough, my lord; I excuse you from naming the rest: I always supposed you were loyal and generous, but you give me fresh proof of it by showing favour to men whom I most honour and trust. I cannot tell if your wishes are likely soon to be realised, but in any case feel sure of my perpetual gratitude."

Joan's voice did not betray the slightest emotion; her look had became kind, and the sweetest smile was on her lips. But in her heart Andre's death was from that moment decided upon. The prince, too much preoccupied with his own projects of vengeance, and too confident in his all-powerful talisman and his personal valour, had no suspicion that his plans could be anticipated. He conversed a long time with his wife in a chatting, friendly way, trying to spy out her secret, and exposing his own by his interrupted phrases and mysterious reserves. When he fancied that every cloud of former resentment, even the lightest, had disappeared from Joan's brow, he begged her to go with her suite on a magnificent hunting expedition that he was organising for the 20th of August, adding that such a kindness on her part would be for him a sure pledge of their reconciliation and complete forgetfulness of the past. Joan promised with a charming grace, and the prince retired fully satisfied with the interview, carrying with him the conviction that he had only to threaten to strike a blow at the queen's favourite to ensure her obedience, perhaps even her love.

But on the eve of the 20th of August a strange and terrible scene was being enacted in the basement storey of one of the lateral towers of Castel Nuovo. Charles of Durazzo, who had never ceased to brood secretly over his infernal plans, had been informed by the notary whom he had charged to spy upon the conspirators, that on that particular evening they were about to hold a decisive meeting, and therefore, wrapped in a black cloak, he glided into the underground corridor and hid himself behind a pillar, there to await the issue of the conference. After two dreadful hours of suspense, every second marked out by the beating of his heart, Charles fancied he heard the sound of a door very carefully opened; the feeble ray of a lantern in the vault scarcely served to dispel the darkness, but a man coming away from the wall approached him walking like a living statue. Charles gave a slight cough, the sign agreed upon. The man put out his light and hid away the dagger he had drawn in case of a surprise.

"Is it you, Master Nicholas?" asked the duke in a low voice.

"It is I, my lord."

"What is it?"

"They have just fixed the prince's death for tomorrow, on his way to the hunt."

"Did you recognise every conspirator?"

"Every one, though their faces were masked; when they gave their vote for death, I knew them by their voices."

"Could you point out to me who they are?"

"Yes, this very minute; they are going to pass along at the end of this corridor. And see, here is Tommaso Pace walking in front of them to light their way."

Indeed, a tall spectral figure, black from head to foot, his face carefully hidden under a velvet mask, walked at the end of the corridor, lamp in hand, and stopped at the first step of a staircase which led to the upper floors. The conspirators advanced slowly, two by two, like a procession of ghosts, appeared for one moment in the circle of light made by the torch, and again disappeared into shadow.

"See, there are Charles and Bertrand of Artois," said the notary; "there are the Counts of Terlizzi and Catanzaro; the grand admiral and grand seneschal, Godfrey of Marsan, Count of Squillace, and Robert of Cabane, Count of Eboli; the two women talking in a low voice with the eager gesticulations are Catherine of Tarentum, Empress of Constantinople, and Philippa the Catanese, the queen's governess and chief lady; there is Dona Cancha, chamberwoman and confidante of Joan; and there is the Countess of Morcone."

The notary stopped on beholding a shadow alone, its head bowed, with arms hanging loosely, choking back her sobs beneath a hood of black.

“Who is the woman who seems to drag herself so painfully along in their train?” asked the duke, pressing his companion’s arm.

“That woman,” said the notary, “is the queen.” “Ah, now I see,” thought Charles, breathing freely, with the same sort of satisfaction that Satan no doubt feels when a long coveted soul falls at length into his power.

“And now, my lord,” continued Master Nicholas, when all had returned once more into silence and darkness, “if you have bidden me spy on these conspirators with a view to saving the young prince you are protecting with love and vigilance, you must hurry forward, for to-morrow maybe it will be too late.”

“Follow me,” cried the duke imperiously; “it is time you should know my real intention, and then carry out my orders with scrupulous exactness.”

With these words he drew him aside to a place opposite to where the conspirators had just disappeared. The notary mechanically followed through a labyrinth of dark corridors and secret staircases, quite at a loss how to account for the sudden change that had come over his master — crossing one of the ante-chambers in the castle, they came upon Andre, who joyfully accosted them; grasping the hand of his cousin Duras in his affectionate manner, he asked him in a pressing way that would brook no refusal, “Will you be of our hunting party to-morrow, duke?”

“Excuse me, my lord,” said Charles, bowing down to the ground; “it will be impossible for me to go to-morrow, for my wife is very unwell; but I entreat you to accept the best falcon I have.”

And here he cast upon the notary a petrifying glance.

The morning of the 20th of August was fine and calm — the irony of nature contrasting cruelly with the fate of mankind. From break of day masters and valets, pages and knights, princes and courtiers, all were on foot; cries of joy were heard on every side when the queen arrived on a snow-white horse, at the head of the young and brilliant throng. Joan was perhaps paler than usual, but that might be because she had been obliged to rise very early. Andre, mounted on one of the most fiery of all the steeds he had tamed, galloped beside his wife, noble and proud, happy in his own powers, his youth, and the thousand gilded hopes that a brilliant future seemed to offer. Never had the court of Naples shown so brave an aspect: every feeling of distrust and hatred seemed entirely forgotten; Friar Robert himself, suspicious as he was by nature, when he saw the joyous cavalcade go by under his window, looked out with pride, and stroking his beard, laughed at his own seriousness.

Andre's intention was to spend several days hunting between Capua and Aversa, and only to return to Naples when all was in readiness for his coronation. Thus the first day they hunted round about Melito, and went through two or three villages in the land of Labore. Towards evening the court stopped at Aversa, with a view to passing the night there, and since at that period there was no castle in the place worthy of entertaining the queen with her husband and numerous court, the convent of St. Peter's at Majella was converted into a royal residence: this convent had been built by Charles II in the year of our Lord 1309.

While the grand seneschal was giving orders for supper and the preparation of a room for Andre and his wife, the prince, who during the whole day had abandoned himself entirely to his favourite amusement, went up on the terrace to enjoy the evening air, accompanied by the good Isolda, his beloved nurse, who loved him more even than his mother, and would not leave his side for a moment. Never had the prince appeared so animated and happy: he was in ecstasies over the beauty of the country, the clear air, the scent of the trees around; he besieged his nurse with a thousand queries, never waiting for an answer; and they were indeed long in coming, for poor Isolda was gazing upon him with that appearance of fascination which makes a mother absent-minded when her child is talking: Andre was eagerly telling her about a terrible boar he had chased that morning across the woods, how it had lain foaming at his feet, and Isolda interrupted him to say he had a grain of dust in his eye. Then Andre was full of his plans for the future, and Isolda stroked his fair hair, remarking that he must be feeling very tired. Then, heeding nothing but his own joy and excitement, the young prince hurled defiance at destiny, calling by all his gods on dangers to come forward, so that he might have the chance of quelling them, and the poor nurse exclaimed, in a flood of tears, "My child, you love me no longer."

Out of all patience with these constant interruptions, Andre scolded her kindly enough, and mocked at her childish fears. Then, paying no attention to a sort of melancholy that was coming over him, he bade her tell him old tales of his childhood, and had a long talk about his brother Louis, his absent mother, and tears were in his eyes when he recalled her last farewell. Isolda listened joyfully, and answered all he asked; but no fell presentiment shook her heart: the poor woman loved Andre with all the strength of her soul; for him she would have given up her life in this world and in the world to come; yet she was not his mother.

When all was ready, Robert of Cabane came to tell the prince that the queen awaited him; Andre cast one last look at the smiling fields beneath the starry heavens, pressed his nurse's hand to his lips and to his heart, and followed the grand seneschal slowly and, it seemed, with some regret. But soon the brilliant lights of the room, the wine that circulated freely, the gay talk, the eager recitals of that day's exploits served to disperse the cloud of gloom that had for a moment overspread the countenance of the prince. The queen alone, leaning on the table with fixed eyes and lips that never moved, sat at this strange feast pale and cold as a baleful ghost summoned from the tomb to disturb the joy of the party. Andre, whose brain began to be affected by the draughts of wine from Capri and Syracuse, was annoyed at his wife's look, and attributing it to contempt, filled a goblet to the brim and presented it to the queen. Joan visibly trembled, her lips moved convulsively; but the conspirators drowned in their noisy talk the involuntary groan that escaped her. In the midst of a general uproar, Robert of Cabane proposed that they should serve generous supplies of the same wine drunk at the royal table to the Hungarian guards who were keeping watch at the approaches to the convent, and this liberality evoked frenzied applause. The shouting of the soldiers soon gave witness to their gratitude for the unexpected gift, and mingled with the hilarious toasts of the banqueters. To put the finishing touch to Andre's excitement, there were cries on every side of “Long live the Queen! Long live His Majesty the King of Naples!”

The orgy lasted far into the night: the pleasures of the next day were discussed with enthusiasm, and Bertrand of Artois protested in a loud voice that if they were so late now some would not rise early on the morrow. Andre declared that, for his part, an hour or two's rest would be enough to get over his fatigue, and he eagerly protested that it would be well for others to follow his example. The Count of Terlizzi seemed to express some doubt as to the prince's punctuality. Andre insisted, and challenging all the barons present to see who would be up first, he retired with the queen to the room that had been reserved for them, where he very soon fell into a deep and heavy sleep. About two o'clock in the morning, Tommaso Pace, the prince's valet and first usher of the royal apartments, knocked at his master's door to rouse him for the chase. At the first knock, all was silence; at the second, Joan, who had not closed her eyes all night, moved as if to rouse her husband and warn him of the threatened danger; but at the third knock the unfortunate young man suddenly awoke, and hearing in the next room sounds of laughter and whispering, fancied that they were making a joke of his laziness, and jumped out of bed bareheaded, in nothing but his shirt, his shoes half on and half off. He opened the door; and at this point we translate literally the account of Domenico Gravina, a historian of much esteem. As soon as the prince appeared, the conspirators all at once fell upon him, to strangle him with their hands; believing he could not die by poison or sword, because of the charmed ring given him by his poor mother. But Andre was so strong and active, that when he perceived the infamous treason he defended himself with more than human strength, and with dreadful cries got free from his murderers, his face all bloody, his fair hair pulled out in handfuls. The unhappy young man tried to gain his own bedroom, so as to get some weapon and valiantly resist the assassins; but as he reached the door, Nicholas of Melazzo, putting his dagger like a bolt into the lock, stopped his entrance. The prince, calling aloud the whole time and imploring the protection of his friends, returned to the hall; but all the doors were shut, and no one held out a helping hand; for the queen was silent, showing no uneasiness about her husband’s death.

But the nurse Isolda, terrified by the shouting of her beloved son and lord, leapt from her bed and went to the window, filling the house with dreadful cries. The traitors, alarmed by the mighty uproar, although the place was lonely and so far from the centre of the town that nobody could have come to see what the noise was, were on the point of letting their victim go, when Bertrand of Artois, who felt he was more guilty than the others, seized the prince with hellish fury round the waist, and after a desperate struggle got him down; then dragging him by the hair of his head to a balcony which gave upon the garden, and pressing one knee upon his chest, cried out to the others —

“Come here, barons: I have what we want to strangle him with.”

And round his neck he passed a long cord of silk and gold, while the wretched man struggled all he could. Bertrand quickly drew up the knot, and the others threw the body over the parapet of the balcony, leaving it hanging between earth and sky until death ensued. When the Count of

Terlizzi averted his eyes from the horrid spectacle, Robert of Cabane cried out imperiously —

“What are you doing there? The cord is long enough for us all to hold: we want not witnesses, we want accomplices!”

As soon as the last convulsive movements of the dying man had ceased, they let the corpse drop the whole height of the three storeys, and opening the doors of the hall, departed as though nothing had happened.

Isolda, when at last she contrived to get a light, rapidly ran to the queen’s chamber, and finding the door shut on the inside, began to call loudly on her Andre. There was no answer, though the queen was in the room. The poor nurse, distracted, trembling, desperate, ran down all the corridors, knocked at all the cells and woke the monks one by one, begging them to help her look for the prince. The monks said that they had indeed heard a noise, but thinking it was a quarrel between soldiers drunken perhaps or mutinous, they had not thought it their business to interfere. Isolda eagerly, entreated: the alarm spread through the convent; the monks followed the nurse, who went on before with a torch. She entered the garden, saw something white upon the grass, advanced trembling, gave one piercing cry, and fell backward.

The wretched Andre was lying in his blood, a cord round his neck as though he were a thief, his head crushed in by the height from which he fell. Then two monks went upstairs to the queen’s room, and respectfully knocking at the door, asked in sepulchral tones —

“Madam, what would you have us do with your husband’s corpse?”

And when the queen made no answer, they went down again slowly to the garden, and kneeling one at the head, the other at the foot of the dead man, they began to recite penitential psalms in a low voice. When they had spent an hour in prayer, two other monks went up in the same way to Joan’s chamber, repeating the same question and getting no answer, whereupon they relieved the first two, and began themselves to pray. Next a third couple went to the door of this inexorable room, and coming away perturbed by their want of success, perceived that there was a disturbance of people outside the convent, while vengeful cries were heard amongst the indignant crowd. The groups became more and more thronged, threatening voices were raised, a torrent of invaders threatened the royal dwelling, when the queen’s guard appeared, lance in readiness, and a litter closely shut, surrounded by the principal barons of the court, passed through the crowd, which stood stupidly gazing. Joan, wrapped in a black veil, went back to Castel Nuovo, amid her escort; and nobody, say the historians, had the courage to say a word about this terrible deed.

CHAPTER V

The terrible part that Charles of Durazzo was to play began as soon as this crime was accomplished. The duke left the corpse two whole days exposed to the wind and the rain, unburied and dishonoured, the corpse of a man whom the pope had made King of Sicily and Jerusalem, so that the indignation of the mob might be increased by the dreadful sight. On the third he ordered it to be conveyed with the utmost pomp to the cathedral of Naples, and assembling all the Hungarians around the catafalque, he thus addressed them, in a voice of thunder: —

"Nobles and commoners, behold our king hanged like a dog by infamous traitors. God will soon make known to us the names of all the guilty: let those who desire that justice may be done hold up their hands and swear against murderers bloody persecution, implacable hatred, everlasting vengeance."

It was this one man's cry that brought death and desolation to the murderers' hearts, and the people dispersed about the town, shrieking, "Vengeance, vengeance!"

Divine justice, which knows naught of privilege and respects no crown, struck Joan first of all in her love. When the two lovers first met, both were seized alike with terror and disgust; they recoiled trembling, the queen seeing in Bertrand her husband's executioner, and he in her the cause of his crime, possibly of his speedy punishment. Bertrand's looks were disordered, his cheeks hollow, his eyes encircled with black rings, his mouth horribly distorted; his arm and forefinger extended towards his accomplice, he seemed to behold a frightful vision rising before him. The same cord he had used when he strangled Andre, he now saw round the queen's neck, so tight that it made its way into her flesh: an invisible force, a Satanic impulse, urged him to strangle with his own hands the woman he had loved so dearly, had at one time adored on his knees. The count rushed out of the room with gestures of desperation, muttering incoherent words; and as he shewed plain signs of mental aberration, his father, Charles of Artois, took him away, and they went that same evening to their palace of St. Agatha, and there prepared a defence in case they should be attacked.

But Joan's punishment, which was destined to be slow as well as dreadful, to last thirty-seven years and end in a ghastly death, was now only beginning. All the wretched beings who were stained with Andre's death came in turn to her to demand the price of blood. The Catanese and her son, who held in their hands not only the queen's honour but her life, now became doubly greedy and exacting. Dona Cancha no longer put any bridle on her licentiousness, and the Empress of Constantinople ordered her niece to marry her eldest son, Robert, Prince of Tarentum. Joan, consumed by remorse, full of indignation and shame at the arrogant conduct of her subjects, dared scarcely lift her head, and stooped to entreaties, only stipulating for a few days' delay before giving her answer: the empress consented, on condition that her son should come to reside at Castel Nuovo, with permission to see the queen once a day. Joan bowed her head in silence, and Robert of Tarentum was installed at the castle.

Charles of Durazzo, who by the death of Andre had practically become the head of the family, and, would, by the terms of his grandfather's will, inherit the kingdom by right of his wife Marie in the case of Joan's dying without lawful issue, sent to the queen two commands: first, that she should not dream of contracting a new marriage without first consulting him in the choice of a husband; secondly, that she should invest him at once with the title of Duke of Calabria. To compel his cousin to make these two concessions, he added that if she should be so ill advised as to refuse either of them, he should hand over to justice the proofs of the crime and the names of the murderers. Joan, bending beneath the weight of this new difficulty, could think of no way to avoid it; but Catherine, who alone was stout enough to fight this nephew of hers, insisted that they must strike at the Duke of Durazzo in his ambition and hopes, and tell him, to begin with — what was the fact — that the queen was pregnant. If, in spite of this news, he persisted in his plans, she would find some means or other, she said, of causing trouble and discord in her nephew's family, and wounding him in his most intimate affections or closest interests, by publicly dishonouring him through his wife or his mother.

Charles smiled coldly when his aunt came to tell him from the queen that she was about to bring into the world an infant, Andre's posthumous child. What importance could a babe yet unborn possibly have — as a fact, it lived only a few months — in the eyes of a man who with such admirable coolness got rid of people who stood in his wary, and that moreover by the hand of his own enemies? He told the empress that the happy news she had condescended to bring him in person, far from diminishing his kindness towards his cousin, inspired him rather with more interest and goodwill; that consequently he reiterated his suggestion, and renewed his promise not to seek vengeance for his dear Andre, since in a certain sense the crime was not complete should a child be destined to survive; but in case of a refusal he declared himself inexorable. He cleverly gave Catherine to understand that, as she had some interest herself in the prince’s death, she ought for her own sake to persuade the queen to stop legal proceedings.

The empress seemed to be deeply impressed by her nephew’s threatening attitude, and promised to do her best to persuade the queen to grant all he asked, on condition, however, that Charles should allow the necessary time for carrying through so delicate a business. But Catherine profited by this delay to think out her own plan of revenge, and ensure the means of certain success. After starting several projects eagerly and then regretfully abandoning them, she fixed upon an infernal and unheard-of scheme, which the mind would refuse to believe but for the unanimous testimony of historians. Poor Agnes of Duras, Charles’s mother, had for some few days been suffering with an inexplicable weariness, a slow painful malady with which her son’s restlessness and violence may have had not a little to do. The empress resolved that the first effect of her hatred was to fall upon this unhappy mother. She summoned the Count of Terlizzi and Dona Cancha, his mistress, who by the queen’s orders had been attending Agnes since her illness began. Catherine suggested to the young chamberwoman, who was at that time with child, that she should deceive the doctor by representing that certain signs of her own condition really belonged to the sick woman, so that he, deceived by the false indications, should be compelled to admit to Charles of Durazzo that his mother was guilty and dishonoured. The Count of Terlizzi, who ever since he had taken part in the regicide trembled in fear of discovery, had nothing to oppose to the empress’s desire, and Dona Cancha, whose head was as light as her heart was corrupt, seized with a foolish gaiety on any chance of taking her revenge on the prudery of the only princess of the blood who led a pure life at a court that was renowned for its depravity. Once assured that her accomplices would be prudent and obedient, Catherine began to spread abroad certain vague and dubious but terribly serious rumours, only needing proof, and soon after the cruel accusation was started it was repeated again and again in confidence, until it reached the ears of Charles.

At this amazing revelation the duke was seized with a fit of trembling. He sent instantly for the doctor, and asked imperiously what was the cause of his mother’s malady. The doctor turned pale and stammered; but when Charles grew threatening he admitted that he had certain grounds for suspecting that the duchess was enceinte, but as he might easily have been deceived the first time, he would make a second investigation before pronouncing his opinion in so serious a matter. The next day, as the doctor came out of the bedroom, the duke met him, and interrogating him with an agonised gesture, could only judge by the silence that his fears were too well confirmed. But the doctor, with excess of caution, declared that he would make a third trial. Condemned criminals can suffer no worse than Charles in the long hours that passed before that fatal moment when he learned that his mother was indeed guilty. On the third day the doctor stated on his soul and conscience that Agnes of Durazzo was pregnant.

“Very good,” said Charles, dismissing the doctor with no sign of emotion.

That evening the duchess took a medicine ordered by the doctor; and when, half an hour later, she was assailed with violent pains, the duke was warned that perhaps other physicians ought to be consulted, as the prescription of the ordinary doctor, instead of bringing about an improvement in her state, had only made her worse.

Charles slowly went up to the duchess’s room, and sending away all the people who were standing round her bed, on the pretext that they were clumsy and made his mother worse, he shut the door, and they were alone. Then poor Agnes, forgetting her internal agony when she saw her son, pressed his hand tenderly and smiled through her tears.

Charles, pale beneath his bronzed complexion, his forehead moist with a cold sweat, and his eyes horribly dilated, bent over the sick woman and asked her gloomily —

“Are you a little better, mother?”

“Ah, I am in pain, in frightful pain, my poor Charles. I feel as though I have molten lead in my veins. O my son, call your brothers, so that I may give you all my blessing for the last time, for I cannot hold out long against this pain. I am burning. Mercy! Call a doctor: I know I have been poisoned.”

Charles did not stir from the bedside.

“Water!” cried the dying woman in a broken voice, — ”water! A doctor, a confessor! My children — I want my children!”

And as the duke paid no heed, but stood moodily silent, the poor mother, prostrated by pain, fancied that grief had robbed her son of all power of speech or movement, and so, by a desperate effort, sat up, and seizing him by the arm, cried with all the strength she could muster —

“Charles, my son, what is it? My poor boy, courage; it is nothing, I hope. But quick, call for help, call a doctor. Ah, you have no idea of what I suffer.”

“Your doctor,” said Charles slowly and coldly, each word piercing his mother’s heart like a dagger, — ”your doctor cannot come.”

“Oh why?” asked Agnes, stupefied.

“Because no one ought to live who knows the secret of our shame.”

“Unhappy man!” she cried, overwhelmed with, pain and terror, “you have murdered him! Perhaps you have poisoned your mother too! Charles, Charles, have mercy on your own soul!”

“It is your doing,” said Charles, without show of emotion: “you have driven me into crime and despair; you have caused my dishonour in this world and my damnation in the next.”

“What are you saying? My own Charles, have mercy! Do not let me die in this horrible uncertainty; what fatal delusion is blinding you? Speak, my son, speak: I am not feeling the poison now. What have I done? Of what have I been accused?”

She looked with haggard eyes at her son: her maternal love still struggled against the awful thought of matricide; at last, seeing that Charles remained speechless in spite of her entreaties, she repeated, with a piercing cry —

“Speak, in God’s name, speak before I die!”

“Mother, you are with child.”

“What!” cried Agnes, with a loud cry, which broke her very heart. “O God, forgive him! Charles, your mother forgives and blesses you in death.”

Charles fell upon her neck, desperately crying for help: he would now have gladly saved her at the cost of his life, but it was too late. He uttered one cry that came from his heart, and was found stretched out upon his mother’s corpse.

Strange comments were made at the court on the death of the Duchess of Durazzo and her doctor’s disappearance; but there was no doubt at all that grief and gloom were furrowing wrinkles on Charles’s brow, which was already sad enough. Catherine alone knew the terrible cause of her nephew’s depression, for to her it was very plain that the duke at one blow had killed his mother and her physician. But she had never expected a reaction so sudden and violent in a man who shrank before no crime. She had thought Charles capable of everything except remorse. His gloomy, self absorbed silence seemed a bad augury for her plans. She had desired to cause trouble for him in his own family, so that he might have no time to oppose the marriage of her son with the queen; but she had shot beyond her mark, and Charles, started thus on the terrible path of crime, had now broken through the bonds of his holiest affections, and gave himself up to his bad passions with feverish ardour and a savage desire for revenge. Then Catherine had recourse to gentleness and submission. She gave her son to understand that there was only one way of obtaining the queen’s hand, and that was by flattering the ambition of Charles and in some sort submitting himself to his patronage. Robert of Tarentum understood this, and ceased making court to Joan, who received his devotion with cool kindness, and attached himself closely to Charles, paying him much the same sort of respect and deference that he himself had affected for Andre, when the thought was first in his mind of causing his ruin. But the Duke of Durazzo was by no means deceived as to the devoted friendship shown towards him by the heir of the house of Tarentum, and pretending to be deeply touched by the unexpected change of feeling, he all the time kept a strict guard on Robert’s actions.

An event outside all human foresight occurred to upset the calculations of the two cousins. One day while they were out together on horseback, as they often were since their pretended reconciliation, Louis of Tarentum, Robert’s youngest brother, who had always felt for Joan a chivalrous, innocent love, — a love which a young man of twenty is apt to lock up in his heart as a secret treasure, — Louis, we say, who had held aloof from the infamous family conspiracy and had not soiled his hands with Andre’s blood, drawn on by an irrepressible passion, all at once appeared at the gates of Castel Nuovo; and while his brother was wasting precious hours in asking for a promise of marriage, had the bridge raised and gave the soldiers strict orders to admit no one. Then, never troubling himself about Charles’s anger or Robert’s jealousy, he hurried to the queen’s room, and there, says Domenico Gravina, without any preamble, the union was consummated.

On returning from his ride, Robert, astonished that the bridge was not at once lowered for him, at first loudly called upon the soldiers on guard at the fortress, threatening severe punishment for their unpardonable negligence; but as the gates did not open and the soldiers made no sign of fear or regret, he fell into a violent fit of rage, and swore he would hang the wretches like dogs for hindering his return home. But the Empress of Constantinople, terrified at the bloody quarrel beginning between the two brothers, went alone and on foot to her son, and making use of her maternal authority to beg him to master his feelings, there in the presence of the crowd that had come up hastily to witness the strange scene, she related in a low voice all that had passed in his absence.

A roar as of a wounded tiger escaped from Robert's breast: all but blind with rage, he nearly trampled his mother under the feet of his horse, which seemed to feel his master's anger, and plunging violently, breathed blood from his nostrils. When the prince had poured every possible execration on his brother's head, he turned and galloped away from the accursed castle, flying to the Duke of Durazzo, whom he had only just left, to tell him of this outrage and stir him to revenge. Charles was talking carelessly with his young wife, who was but little used to such tranquil conversation and expansiveness, when the Prince of Tarentum, exhausted, out of breath, bathed in perspiration, came up with his incredible tale. Charles made him say it twice over, so impossible did Louis's audacious enterprise appear to him. Then quickly changing from doubt to fury, he struck his brow with his iron glove, saying that as the queen defied him he would make her tremble even in her castle and in her lover's arms. He threw one withering look on Marie, who interceded tearfully for her sister, and pressing Robert's hand with warmth, vowed that so long as he lived Louis should never be Joan's husband.

That same evening he shut himself up in his study, and wrote letters whose effect soon appeared. A bull, dated June 2, 1346, was addressed to Bertram de Baux, chief-justice of the kingdom of Sicily and Count of Monte Scaglioso, with orders to make the most strict inquiries concerning Andre's murderers, whom the pope likewise laid under his anathema, and to punish them with the utmost rigour of the law. But a secret note was appended to the bull which was quite at variance with the designs of Charles: the sovereign pontiff expressly bade the chief-justice not to implicate the queen in the proceedings or the princes of the blood, so as to avoid worse disturbances, reserving, as supreme head of the Church and lord of the kingdom, the right of judging them later on, as his wisdom might dictate.

For this imposing trial Bertram de Baux made great preparations. A platform was erected in the great hall of tribunal, and all the officers of the crown and great state dignitaries, and all the chief barons, had a place behind the enclosure where the magistrates sat. Three days after Clement VI's bull had been published in the capital, the chief-justice was ready for a public examination of two accused persons. The two culprits who had first fallen into the hands of justice were, as one may easily suppose, those whose condition was least exalted, whose lives were least valuable, Tommaso Pace and Nicholas of Melazzo. They were led before the tribunal to be first of all tortured, as the custom was. As they approached the judges, the notary passing by Charles in the street had time to say in a low voice —

“My lord, the time has come to give my life for you: I will do my duty; I commend my wife and children to you.”

Encouraged by a nod from his patron, he walked on firmly and deliberately. The chief-justice, after establishing the identity of the accused, gave them over to the executioner and his men to be tortured in the public square, so that their sufferings might serve as a show and an example to the crowd. But no sooner was Tommaso Pace tied to the rope, when to the great disappointment of all he declared that he would confess everything, and asked accordingly to be taken back before his judges. At these words, the Count of Terlizzi, who was following every movement of the two men with mortal anxiety, thought it was all over now with him and his accomplices; and so, when Tommaso Pace was turning his steps towards the great hall, led by two guards, his hands tied behind his back, and followed by the notary, he contrived to take him into a secluded house, and squeezing his throat with great force, made him thus put his tongue out, whereupon he cut it off with a sharp razor.

The yells of the poor wretch so cruelly mutilated fell on the ears of the Duke of Durazzo: he found his way into the room where the barbarous act had been committed just as the Count of Terlizzi was coming out, and approached the notary, who had been present at the dreadful spectacle and had not given the least sign of fear or emotion. Master Nicholas, thinking the same fate was in store for him, turned calmly to the duke, saying with a sad smile —

"My lord, the precaution is useless; there is no need for you to cut out my tongue, as the noble count has done to my poor companion. The last scrap of my flesh may be torn off without one word being dragged from my mouth. I have promised, my lord, and you have the life of my wife and the future of my children as guarantee for my word."

"I do not ask for silence," said the duke solemnly; "you can free me from all my enemies at once, and I order you to denounce them at the tribunal."

The notary bowed his head with mournful resignation; then raising it in affright, made one step up to the duke and murmured in a choking voice —

"And the queen?"

"No one would believe you if you ventured to denounce her; but when the Catanese and her son, the Count of Terlizzi and his wife and her most intimate friends, have been accused by you, when they fail to endure the torture, and when they denounce her unanimously — "

"I see, my lord. You do not only want my life; you would have my soul too. Very well; once more I commend to you my children."

With a deep sigh he walked up to the tribunal. The chief-justice asked Tommaso Pace the usual questions, and a shudder of horror passed through the assembly when they saw the poor wretch in desperation opening his mouth, which streamed with blood. But surprise and terror reached their height when Nicholas of Melazzo slowly and firmly gave a list of Andre's murderers, all except the queen and the princes of the blood, and went on to give all details of the assassination.

Proceedings were at once taken for the arrest of the grand seneschal, Robert of Cabane, and the Counts of Terlizzi and Morcone, who were present and had not ventured to make any movement in self-defence. An hour later, Philippa, her two daughters, and Dona Cancha joined them in prison, after vainly imploring the queen's protection. Charles and Bertrand of Artois, shut up in their fortress of Saint Agatha, bade defiance to justice, and several others, among them the Counts of Meleto and Catanzaro, escaped by flight.

As soon as Master Nicholas said he had nothing further to confess, and that he had spoken the whole truth and nothing but the truth, the chief-justice pronounced sentence amid a profound silence; and without delay Tommaso Pace and the notary were tied to the tails of two horses, dragged through the chief streets of the town, and hanged in the market place.

The other prisoners were thrown into a subterranean vault, to be questioned and put to the torture on the following day. In the evening, finding themselves in the same dungeon, they reproached one another, each pretending he had been dragged into the crime by someone else. Then Dona Cancha, whose strange character knew no inconsistencies, even face to face with death and torture, drowned with a great burst of laughter the lamentations of her companions, and joyously exclaimed —

“Look here, friends, why these bitter recriminations — this ill-mannered raving? We have no excuses to make, and we are all equally guilty. I am the youngest of all, and not the ugliest, by your leave, ladies, but if I am condemned, at least I will die cheerfully. For I have never denied myself any pleasure I could get in this world, and I can boast that much will be forgiven me, for I have loved much: of that you, gentlemen, know something. You, bad old man,” she continued to the Count of Terlizzi, “do you not remember lying by my side in the queen’s ante-chamber? Come, no blushes before your noble family; confess, my lord, that I am with child by your Excellency; and you know how we managed to make up the story of poor Agnes of Durazzo and her pregnancy — God rest her soul! For my part, I never supposed the joke would take such a serious turn all at once. You know all this and much more; spare your lamentations, for, by my word, they are getting very tiresome: let us prepare to die joyously, as we have lived.”

With these words she yawned slightly, and, lying down on the straw, fell into a deep sleep, and dreamed as happy dreams as she had ever dreamed in her life.

On the morrow from break of day there was an immense crowd on the sea front. During the night an enormous palisade had been put up to keep the people away far enough for them to see the accused without hearing anything. Charles of Durazzo, at the head of a brilliant cortege of knights and pages, mounted on a magnificent horse, all in black, as a sign of mourning, waited near the enclosure. Ferocious joy shone in his eyes as the accused made their way through the crowd, two by two, their wrists tied with ropes; for the duke every minute expected to hear the queen’s name spoken. But the chief-justice, a man of experience, had prevented indiscretion of any kind by fixing a hook in the tongue of each one. The poor creatures were tortured on a ship, so that nobody should hear the terrible confessions their sufferings dragged from them.

But Joan, in spite of the wrongs that most of the conspirators had done her, felt a renewal of pity for the woman she had once respected as a mother, for her childish companions and her friends, and possibly also some remains of love for Robert of Cabane, and sent two messengers to beg Bertram de Baux to show mercy to the culprits. But the chief-justice seized these men and had them tortured; and on their confession that they also were implicated in Andre’s murder, he condemned them to the same punishment as the others. Dona Cancha alone, by reason of her situation, escaped the torture, and her sentence was deferred till the day of her confinement.

As this beautiful girl was returning to prison, with many a smile for all the handsomest cavaliers she could see in the crowd, she gave a sign to Charles of Durazzo as she neared him to come forward, and since her tongue had not been pierced (for the same reason) with an iron instrument, she said some words to him a while in a low voice.

Charles turned fearfully pale, and putting his hand to his sword, cried —

“Wretched woman!”

“You forget, my lord, I am under the protection of the law.”

“My mother! — oh, my poor mother!” murmured Charles in a choked voice, and he fell backward.

The next morning the people were beforehand with the executioner, loudly demanding their prey. All the national troops and mercenaries that the judicial authorities could command were echelonned in the streets, opposing a sort of dam to the torrent of the raging crowd. The sudden insatiable cruelty that too often degrades human nature had awaked in the populace: all heads were turned with hatred and frenzy; all imaginations inflamed with the passion for revenge; groups of men and women, roaring like wild beasts, threatened to knock down the walls of the prison, if the condemned were not handed over to them to take to the place of punishment: a great murmur arose, continuous, ever the same, like the growling of thunder: the queen’s heart was petrified with terror.

But, in spite of the desire of Bertram de Baux to satisfy the popular wish, the preparations for the solemn execution were not completed till midday, when the sun’s rays fell scorchingly upon the town. There went up a mighty cry from ten thousand palpitating breasts when a report first ran through the crowd that the prisoners were about to appear. There was a moment of silence, and the prison doors rolled slowly back on their hinges with a rusty, grating noise. A triple row of horsemen, with lowered visor and lance in rest, started the procession, and amid yells and curses the condemned prisoners came out one by one, each tied upon a cart, gagged and naked to the waist, in charge of two executioners, whose orders were to torture them the whole length of their way. On the first cart was the former laundress of Catana, afterwards wife of the grand seneschal and governess to the queen, Philippa of Cabane: the two executioners at right and left of her scourged her with such fury that the blood spurting up from the wounds left a long track in all the streets passed by the cortege.

Immediately following their mother on separate carts came the Countesses of Terlizzi and Morcone, the elder no more than eighteen years of age. The two sisters were so marvellously beautiful that in the crowd a murmur of surprise was heard, and greedy eyes were fixed upon their naked trembling shoulders. But the men charged to torture them gazed with ferocious smiles upon their forms of seductive beauty, and, armed with sharp knives, cut off pieces of their flesh with a deliberate enjoyment and threw them out to the crowd, who eagerly struggled to get them, signing to the executioners to show which part of the victims' bodies they preferred.

Robert of Cabane, the grand seneschal, the Counts of Terlizzi and Morcone, Raymond Pace, brother of the old valet who had been executed the day before, and many more, were dragged on similar carts, and both scourged with ropes and slashed with knives; their flesh was torn out with red-hot pincers, and flung upon brazen chafing-dishes. No cry of pain was heard from the grand seneschal, he never stirred once in his frightful agony; yet the torturers put such fury into their work that the poor wretch was dead before the goal was reached.

In the centre of the square of Saint Eligius an immense stake was set up: there the prisoners were taken, and what was left of their mutilated bodies was thrown into the flames. The Count of Terlizzi and the grand seneschal's widow were still alive, and two tears of blood ran down the cheeks of the miserable mother as she saw her son's corpse and the palpitating remains of her two daughters cast upon the fire — they by their stifled cries showed that they had not ceased to suffer. But suddenly a fearful noise overpowered the groans of the victims; the enclosure was broken and overturned by the mob. Like madmen, they rushed at the burning pile, — armed with sabres, axes, and knives, and snatching the bodies dead or alive from the flames, tore them to pieces, carrying off the bones to make whistles or handles for their daggers as a souvenir of this horrible day.

CHAPTER VI

The spectacle of this frightful punishment did not satisfy the revenge of Charles of Durazzo. Seconded by the chief-justice, he daily brought about fresh executions, till Andre’s death came to be no more than a pretext for the legal murder of all who opposed his projects. But Louis of Tarentum, who had won Joan’s heart, and was eagerly trying to get the necessary dispensation for legalising the marriage, from this time forward took as a personal insult every act of the high court of justice which was performed against his will and against the queen’s prerogative: he armed all his adherents, increasing their number by all the adventurers he could get together, and so put on foot a strong enough force to support his own party and resist his cousin. Naples was thus split up into hostile camps, ready to come to blows on the smallest pretext, whose daily skirmishes, moreover, were always followed by some scene of pillage or death.

But Louis had need of money both to pay his mercenaries and to hold his own against the Duke of Durazzo and his own brother Robert, and one day he discovered that the queen’s coffers were empty. Joan was wretched and desperate, and her lover, though generous and brave and anxious to reassure her so far as he could, did not very clearly see how to extricate himself from such a difficult situation. But his mother Catherine, whose ambition was satisfied in seeing one of her sons, no matter which, attain to the throne of Naples, came unexpectedly to their aid, promising solemnly that it would only take her a few days to be able to lay at her niece’s feet a treasure richer than anything she had ever dreamed of, queen as she was.

The empress then took half her son’s troops, made for Saint Agatha, and besieged the fortress where Charles and Bertrand of Artois had taken refuge when they fled from justice. The old count, astonished at the sight of this woman, who had been the very soul of the conspiracy, and not in the least understanding her arrival as an enemy, sent out to ask the intention of this display of military force. To which Catherine replied in words which we translate literally:

“My friends, tell Charles, our faithful friend, that we desire to speak with him privately and alone concerning a matter equally interesting to us both, and he is not to be alarmed at our arriving in the guise of an enemy, for this we have done designedly, as we shall explain in the course of our interview. We know he is confined to bed by the gout, and therefore feel no surprise at his not coming out to meet us. Have the goodness to salute him on our part and reassure him, telling him that we desire to come in, if such is his good pleasure, with our intimate counsellor, Nicholas Acciajuoli, and ten soldiers only, to speak with him concerning an important matter that cannot be entrusted to go-betweens."

Entirely reassured by these frank, friendly explanations, Charles of Artois sent out his son Bertrand to the empress to receive her with the respect due to her rank and high position at the court of Naples. Catherine went promptly to the castle with many signs of joy, and inquiring after the count's health and expressing her affection, as soon as they were alone, she mysteriously lowered her voice and explained that the object of her visit was to consult a man of tried experience on the affairs of Naples, and to beg his active cooperation in the queen's favour. As, however, she was not pressed for time, she could wait at Saint Agatha for the count's recovery to hear his views and tell him of the march of events since he left the court. She succeeded so well in gaining the old man's confidence and banishing his suspicions, that he begged her to honour them with her presence as long as she was able, and little by little received all her men within the walls. This was what Catherine was waiting for: on the very day when her army was installed at Saint Agatha, she suddenly entered the count's room, followed by four soldiers, and seizing the old man by the throat, exclaimed wrathfully —

"Miserable traitor, you will not escape from our hands before you have received the punishment you deserve. In the meanwhile, show me where your treasure is hidden, if you would not have me throw your body out to feed the crows that are swooping around these dungeons."

The count, half choking, the dagger at his breast, did not even attempt to call for help; he fell on his knees, begging the empress to save at least the life of his son, who was not yet well from the terrible attack of melancholia that had shaken his reason ever since the catastrophe. Then he painfully dragged himself to the place where he had hidden his treasure, and pointing with his finger, cried —

"Take all; take my life; but spare my son."

Catherine could not contain herself for joy when she saw spread out at her feet exquisite and incredibly valuable cups, caskets of pearls, diamonds and rubies of marvellous value, coffers full of gold ingots, and all the wonders of Asia that surpass the wildest imagination. But when the old man, trembling, begged for the liberty of his son as the price of his fortune and his own life, the empress resumed her cold, pitiless manner, and harshly replied —

“I have already given orders for your son to be brought here; but prepare for an eternal farewell, for he is to be taken to the fortress of Melfi, and you in all probability will end your days beneath the castle of Saint Agatha.”

The grief of the poor count at this violent separation was so great, that a few days later he was found dead in his dungeon, his lips covered with a bloody froth, his hands gnawed in despair. Bertrand did not long survive him. He actually lost his reason when he heard of his father’s death, and hanged himself on the prison grating. Thus did the murderers of Andre destroy one another, like venomous animals shut up in the same cage.

Catherine of Tarentum, carrying off the treasure she had so gained, arrived at the court of Naples, proud of her triumph and contemplating vast schemes. But new troubles had come about in her absence. Charles of Durazzo, for the last time desiring the queen to give him the duchy of Calabria, a title which had always belonged to the heir presumptive, and angered by her refusal, had written to Louis of Hungary, inviting him to take possession of the kingdom, and promising to help in the enterprise with all his own forces, and to give up the principal authors of his brother’s death, who till now had escaped justice.

The King of Hungary eagerly accepted these offers, and got ready an army to avenge Andre’s death and proceed to the conquest of Naples. The tears of his mother Elizabeth and the advice of Friar Robert, the old minister, who had fled to Buda, confirmed him in his projects of vengeance. He had already lodged a bitter complaint at the court of Avignon that, while the inferior assassins had been punished, she who was above all others guilty had been shamefully let off scot free, and though still stained with her husband’s blood, continued to live a life of debauchery and adultery. The pope replied soothingly that, so far as it depended upon him, he would not be found slow to give satisfaction to a lawful grievance; but the accusation ought to be properly formulated and supported by proof; that no doubt Joan’s conduct during and after her husband’s death was blamable; but His Majesty must consider that the Church of Rome, which before all things seeks truth and justice, always proceeds with the utmost circumspection, and in so grave a matter more especially must not judge by appearances only.

Joan, frightened by the preparations for war, sent ambassadors to the Florentine Republic, to assert her innocence of the crime imputed to her by public opinion, and did not hesitate to send excuses even to the Hungarian court; but Andre’s brother replied in a letter laconic and threatening: —

“Your former disorderly life, the arrogation to yourself of exclusive power, your neglect to punish your husband’s murderers, your marriage to another husband, moreover your own excuses, are all sufficient proofs that you were an accomplice in the murder.”

Catherine would not be put out of heart by the King of Hungary’s threats, and looking at the position of the queen and her son with a coolness that was never deceived, she was convinced that there was no other means of safety except a reconciliation with Charles, their mortal foe, which could only be brought about by giving him all he wanted. It was one of two things: either he would help them to repulse the King of Hungary, and later on they would pay the cost when the dangers were less pressing, or he would be beaten himself, and thus they would at least have the pleasure of drawing him down with them in their own destruction.

The agreement was made in the gardens of Castel Nuovo, whither Charles had repaired on the invitation of the queen and her aunt. To her cousin of Durazzo Joan accorded the title so much desired of Duke of Calabria, and Charles, feeling that he was hereby made heir to the kingdom, marched at once on Aquila, which town already was flying the Hungarian colours. The wretched man did not foresee that he was going straight to his destruction.

When the Empress of Constantinople saw this man, whom she hated above all others, depart in joy, she looked contemptuously upon him, divining by a woman’s instinct that mischief would befall him; then, having no further mischief to do, no further treachery on earth, no further revenge to satisfy, she all at once succumbed to some unknown malady, and died suddenly, without uttering a cry or exciting a single regret.

But the King of Hungary, who had crossed Italy with a formidable army, now entered the kingdom from the side of Aquila: on his way he had everywhere received marks of interest and sympathy; and Alberto and Mertino delta Scala, lords of Verona, had given him three hundred horse to prove that all their goodwill was with him in his enterprise. The news of the arrival of the Hungarians threw the court into a state of confusion impossible to describe. They had hoped that the king would be stopped by the pope’s legate, who had come to Foligno to forbid him, in the name of the Holy Father, and on pain of excommunication to proceed any further without his consent; but Louis of Hungary replied to the pope’s legate that, once master of Naples, he should consider himself a feudatory of the Church, but till then he had no obligations except to God and his own conscience. Thus the avenging army fell like a thunderbolt upon the heart of the kingdom, before there was any thought of taking serious measures for defence. There was only one plan possible: the queen assembled the barons who were most strongly attached to her, made them swear homage and fidelity to Louis of Tarentum, whom she presented to them as her husband, and then leaving with many tears her most faithful subjects, she embarked secretly, in the middle of the night, on a ship of Provence, and made for Marseilles. Louis of Tarentum, following the prompting of his adventure-loving character, left Naples at the head of three thousand horse and a considerable number of foot, and took up his post on the banks of the Voltorno, there to contest the enemy’s passage; but the King of Hungary foresaw the stratagem, and while his adversary was waiting for him at Capua, he arrived at Beneventum by the mountains of Alife and Morcone, and on the same day received Neapolitan envoys: they in a magnificent display of eloquence congratulated him on his entrance, offered the keys of the town, and swore obedience to him as being the legitimate successor of Charles of Anjou. The news of the surrender of Naples soon reached the queen’s camp, and all the princes of the blood and the generals left Louis of Tarentum and took refuge in the capital. Resistance was impossible. Louis, accompanied by his counsellor, Nicholas Acciajuoli, went to Naples on the same evening on which his relatives quitted the town to get away from the enemy. Every hope of safety was vanishing as the hours passed by; his brothers and cousins begged him to go at once, so as not to draw down upon the town the king’s vengeance, but unluckily there was no ship in the harbour that was ready to set sail. The terror of the princes was at its height; but Louis, trusting in his luck, started with the brave Acciajuoli in an unseaworthy boat, and ordering four sailors to row with all their might, in a few minutes disappeared, leaving his family in a great state of anxiety till they learned that he had reached Pisa, whither he had gone to join the queen in Provence. Charles of Durazzo and Robert of Tarentum, who were the eldest respectively of the two branches of the royal family, after hastily consulting, decided to soften the Hungarian monarch’s wrath by a complete submission. Leaving their young brothers at Naples, they accordingly set off for Aversa, where the king was. Louis received them with every mark of friendship, and asked with much interest why their brothers were not with them. The princes replied that their young brothers had stayed at Naples to prepare a worthy reception for His Majesty. Louis thanked them for their kind intentions, but begged them to invite the young princes now, saying that it would be infinitely more pleasant to enter Naples with all his family, and that he was most anxious to see his cousins. Charles and Robert, to please the king, sent equerries to bid their brothers come to Aversa; but Louis of Durazzo, the eldest of the boys, with many tears begged the others not to obey, and sent a message that he was prevented by a violent headache from leaving Naples. So puerile an excuse could not fail to annoy Charles, and the same day he compelled the unfortunate boys to appear before the king, sending a formal order which admitted of no delay. Louis of Hungary embraced them warmly one after the other, asked them several questions in an affectionate way, kept them to supper, and only let them go quite late at night.

When the Duke of Durazzo reached his room, Lello of Aquila and the Count of Fondi slipped mysteriously to the side of his bed, and making sure that no one could hear, told him that the king in a council held that morning had decided to kill him and to imprison the other princes. Charles heard them out, but incredulously: suspecting treachery, he dryly replied that he had too much confidence in his cousin’s loyalty to believe such a black calumny. Lello insisted, begging him in the name of his dearest friends to listen; but the duke was impatient, and harshly ordered him to depart.

The next day there was the same kindness on the king’s part, the same affection shown to the children, the same invitation to supper. The banquet was magnificent; the room was brilliantly lighted, and the reflections were dazzling: vessels of gold shone on the table; the intoxicating perfume of flowers filled the air; wine foamed in the goblets and flowed from the flagons in ruby streams; conversation, excited and discursive, was heard on every side; all faces beamed with joy.

Charles of Durazzo sat opposite the king, at a separate table among his brothers. Little by little his look grew fixed, his brow pensive. He was fancying that Andre might have supped in this very hall on the eve of his tragic end, and he thought how all concerned in that death had either died in torment or were now languishing in prison; the queen, an exile and a fugitive, was begging pity from strangers: he alone was free. The thought made him tremble; but admiring his own cleverness in pursuing his infernal schemes, and putting away his sad looks, he smiled again with an expression of indefinable pride. The madman at this moment was scoffing at the justice of God. But Lello of Aquila, who was waiting at the table, bent down, whispering gloomily —

“Unhappy duke, why did you refuse to believe me? Fly, while there is yet time.”

Charles, angered by the man’s obstinacy, threatened that if he were such a fool as to say any more, he would repeat every word aloud.

“I have done my duty,” murmured Lello, bowing his head; “now it must happen as God wills.”

As he left off speaking, the king rose, and as the duke went up to take his leave, his face suddenly changed, and he cried in an awful voice —

“Traitor! At length you are in my hands, and you shall die as you deserve; but before you are handed over to the executioner, confess with your own lips your deeds of treachery towards our royal majesty: so shall we need no other witness to condemn you to a punishment proportioned to your crimes. Between our two selves, Duke of Durazzo, tell me first why, by your infamous manoeuvring, you aided your uncle, the Cardinal of Perigord, to hinder the coronation of my brother, and so led him on, since he had no royal prerogative of his own, to his miserable end? Oh, make no attempt to deny it. Here is the letter sealed with your seal; in secret you wrote it, but it accuses you in public. Then why, after bringing us hither to avenge our brother’s death, of which you beyond all doubt were the cause, — why did you suddenly turn to the queen’s party and march against our town of Aquila, daring to raise an army against our faithful subjects? You hoped, traitor, to make use of us as a footstool to mount the throne withal, as soon as you were free from every other rival. Then you would but have awaited our departure to kill the viceroy we should have left in our place, and so seize the kingdom. But this time your foresight has been at fault. There is yet another crime worse than all the rest, a crime of high treason, which I shall remorselessly punish. You carried off the bride that our ancestor King Robert designed for me, as you knew, by his will. Answer, wretch what excuse can you make for the rape of the Princess Marie?”

Anger had so changed Louis's voice that the last words sounded like the roar of a wild beast: his eyes glittered with a feverish light, his lips were pale and trembling. Charles and his brothers fell upon their knees, frozen by mortal terror, and the unhappy duke twice tried to speak, but his teeth were chattering so violently that he could not articulate a single word. At last, casting his eyes about him and seeing his poor brothers, innocent and ruined by his fault, he regained some sort of courage, and said —

"My lord, you look upon me with a terrible countenance that makes me tremble. But on my knees I entreat you, have mercy on me if I have done wrong, for God is my witness that I did not call you to this kingdom with any criminal intention: I have always desired, and still desire, your supremacy in all the sincerity of my soul. Some treacherous counsellors, I am certain, have contrived to draw down your hatred upon me. If it is true, as you say, that I went with an armed force to Aquila I was compelled by Queen Joan, and I could not do otherwise; but as soon as I heard of your arrival at Fermo I took my troops away again. I hope for the love of Christ I may obtain your mercy and pardon, by reason of my former services and constant loyalty. But as I see you are now angry with me, I say no more waiting for your fury to pass over. Once again, my lord, have pity upon us, since we are in the hands of your Majesty."

The king turned away his head, and retired slowly, confiding the prisoners to the care of Stephen Vayvoda and the Count of Zornic, who guarded them during the night in a room adjoining the king's chamber. The next day Louis held another meeting of his council, and ordered that Charles should have his throat cut on the very spot where poor Andre had been hanged. He then sent the other princes of the blood, loaded with chains, to Hungary, where they were long kept prisoners. Charles, quite thunderstruck by such an unexpected blow, overwhelmed by the thought of his past crimes, trembled like a coward face to face with death, and seemed completely crushed. Bowed, upon his knees, his face half hidden in his hands, from time to time convulsive sobs escaped him, as he tried to fix the thoughts that chased each other through his mind like the shapes of a monstrous dream. Night was in his soul, but every now and then light flashed across the darkness, and over the gloomy background of his despair passed gilded figures fleeing from him with smiles of mockery. In his ears buzzed voices from the other world; he saw a long procession of ghosts, like the conspirators whom Nicholas of Melazzo had pointed out in the vaults of Castel Nuovo. But these phantoms each held his head in his hand, and shaking it by the hair, bespattered him with drops of blood. Some brandished whips, some knives: each threatened Charles with his instrument of torture. Pursued by the nocturnal train, the hapless man opened his mouth for one mighty cry, but his breath was gone, and it died upon his lips. Then he beheld his mother stretching out her arms from afar, and he fancied that if he could but reach her he would be safe. But at each step the path grew more and more narrow, pieces of his flesh were torn off by the approaching walls; at last, breathless, naked and bleeding, he reached his goal; but his mother glided farther away, and it was all to begin over again. The phantoms pursued him, grinning and screaming in his ears: —

"Cursed be he who slayeth his mother!"

Charles was roused from these horrors by the cries of his brothers, who had come to embrace him for the last time before embarking. The duke in a low voice asked their pardon, and then fell back into his state of despair. The children were dragged away, begging to be allowed to share their brother's fate, and crying for death as an alleviation of their woes. At length they were separated, but the sound of their lamentation sounded long in the heart of the condemned man. After a few moments, two soldiers and two equerries came to tell the duke that his hour had come.

Charles followed them, unresisting, to the fatal balcony where Andre had been hanged. He was there asked if he desired to confess, and when he said yes, they brought a monk from the sane convent where the terrible scene had been enacted: he listened to the confession of all his sins, and granted him absolution. The duke at once rose and walked to the place where Andre had been thrown down for the cord to be put round his neck, and there, kneeling again, he asked his executioners —

"Friends, in pity tell me, is there any hope for my life?"

And when they answered no, Charles exclaimed:

"Then carry out your instructions."

At these words, one of the equerries plunged his sword into his breast, and the other cut his head off with a knife, and his corpse was thrown over the balcony into the garden where Andre's body had lain for three days unburied.

CHAPTER VII

The King of Hungary, his black flag ever borne before him, started for Naples, refusing all offered honours, and rejecting the canopy beneath which he was to make his entry, not even stopping to give audience to the chief citizens or to receive the acclamations of the crowd. Armed at all points, he made for Castel Nuovo, leaving behind him dismay and fear. His first act on entering the city was to order Dona Cancha to be burnt, her punishment having been deferred by reason of her pregnancy. Like the others, she was drawn on a cart to the square of St. Eligius, and there consigned to the flames. The young creature, whose suffering had not impaired her beauty, was dressed as for a festival, and laughing like a mad thing up to the last moment, mocked at her executioners and threw kisses to the crowd.

A few days later, Godfrey of Marsana, Count of Squillace and grand admiral of the kingdom, was arrested by the king's orders. His life was promised him on condition of his delivering up Conrad of Catanzaro, one of his relatives, accused of conspiring against Andre. The grand admiral committed this act of shameless treachery, and did not shrink from sending his own son to persuade Conrad to come to the town. The poor wretch was given over to the king, and tortured alive on a wheel made with sharp knives. The sight of these barbarities, far from calming the king's rage, seemed to inflame it the more. Every day there were new accusations and new sentences. The prisons were crowded: Louis's punishments were redoubled in severity. A fear arose that the town, and indeed the whole kingdom, were to be treated as having taken part in Andre's death. Murmurs arose against this barbarous rule, and all men's thoughts turned towards their fugitive queen. The Neapolitan barons had taken the oath of fidelity with no willing hearts; and when it came to the turn of the Counts of San Severino, they feared a trick of some kind, and refused to appear all together before the Hungarian, but took refuge in the town of Salerno, and sent Archbishop Roger, their brother, to make sure of the king's intentions beforehand. Louis received him magnificently, and appointed him privy councillor and grand proto notary. Then, and not till then, did Robert of San Severino and Roger, Count of Chiaramonte, venture into the king's presence; after doing homage, they retired to their homes. The other barons followed their example of caution, and hiding their discontent under a show of respect, awaited a favourable moment for shaking off the foreign yoke. But the queen had encountered no obstacle in her flight, and arrived at Nice five days later. Her passage through Provence was like a triumph. Her beauty, youth, and misfortunes, even certain mysterious reports as to her adventures, all contributed to arouse the interest of the Provencal people. Games and fetes were improvised to soften the hardship of exile for the proscribed princess; but amid the outbursts of joy from every town, castle, and city, Joan, always sad, lived ever in her silent grief and glowing memories.

At the gates of Aix she found the clergy, the nobility, and the chief magistrates, who received her respectfully but with no signs of enthusiasm. As the queen advanced, her astonishment increased as she saw the coldness of the people and the solemn, constrained air of the great men who escorted her. Many anxious thoughts alarmed her, and she even went so far as to fear some intrigue of the King of Hungary. Scarcely had her cortege arrived at Castle Arnaud, when the nobles, dividing into two ranks, let the queen pass with her counsellor Spinelli and two women; then closing up, they cut her off from the rest of her suite. After this, each in turn took up his station as guardian of the fortress.

There was no room for doubt: the queen was a prisoner; but the cause of the manoeuvre it was impossible to guess. She asked the high dignitaries, and they, protesting respectful devotion, refused to explain till they had news from Avignon. Meanwhile all honours that a queen could receive were lavished on Joan; but she was kept in sight and forbidden to go out. This new trouble increased her depression: she did not know what had happened to Louis of Tarentum, and her imagination, always apt at creating disasters, instantly suggested that she would soon be weeping for his loss.

But Louis, always with his faithful Acciajuoli, had after many fatiguing adventures been shipwrecked at the port of Pisa; thence he had taken route for Florence, to beg men and money; but the Florentines decided to keep an absolute neutrality, and refused to receive him. The prince, losing his last hope, was pondering gloomy plans, when Nicholas Acciajuoli thus resolutely addressed him:

“My lord, it is not given to mankind to enjoy prosperity for ever: there are misfortunes beyond all human foresight. You were once rich and powerful, and you are now a fugitive in disguise, begging the help of others. You must reserve your strength for better days. I still have a considerable fortune, and also have relations and friends whose wealth is at my disposal: let us try to make our way to the queen, and at once decide what we can do. I myself shall always defend you and obey you as my lord and master.”

The prince received these generous offers with the utmost gratitude, and told his counsellor that he placed his person in his hands and all that remained of his future. Acciajuoli, not content with serving his master as a devoted servant, persuaded his brother Angelo, Archbishop of Florence, who was in great favour at Clement VI’s court, to join with them in persuading the pope to interest himself in the cause of Louis of Tarentum. So, without further delay, the prince, his counsellor, and the good prelate made their way to the port of Marseilles, but learning that the queen was a prisoner at Aix, they embarked at Acque-Morte, and went straight to Avignon. It soon appeared that the pope had a real affection and esteem for the character of the Archbishop of Florence, for Louis was received with paternal kindness at the court of Avignon; which was far more than he had expected: when he kneeled before the sovereign pontiff, His Holiness bent affectionately towards him and helped him to rise, saluting him by the title of king.

Two days later, another prelate, the Archbishop of Aix, came into the queen’s presence, —

“Most gracious and dearly beloved sovereign, permit the most humble and devoted of your servants to ask pardon, in the name of your subjects, for the painful but necessary measure they have thought fit to take concerning your Majesty. When you arrived on our coast, your loyal town of Aix had learned from a trustworthy source that the King of France was proposing to give our country to one of his own sons, making good this loss to you by the cession of another domain, also that the Duke of Normandy had come to Avignon to request this exchange in person. We were quite decided, madam, and had made a vow to God that we would give up everything rather than suffer the hateful tyranny of the French. But before spilling blood we thought it best to secure your august person as a sacred hostage, a sacred ark which no man dared touch but was smitten to the ground, which indeed must keep away from our walls the scourge of war. We have now read the formal annulment of this hateful plan, in a brief sent by the sovereign pontiff from Avignon; and in this brief he himself guarantees your good faith.

“We give you your full and entire liberty, and henceforth we shall only endeavour to keep you among us by prayers and protestations. Go then, madam, if that is your pleasure, but before you leave these lands, which will be plunged into mourning by your withdrawal, leave with us some hope that you forgive the apparent violence to which we have subjected you, only in the fear that we might lose you; and remember that on the day when you cease to be our queen you sign the death-warrant of all your subjects.”

Joan reassured the archbishop and the deputation from her good town of Aix with a melancholy smile, and promised that she would always cherish the memory of their affection. For this time she could not be deceived as to the real sentiments of the nobles and people; and a fidelity so uncommon, revealed with sincere tears, touched her heart and made her reflect bitterly upon her past. But a league’s distance from Avignon a magnificent triumphal reception awaited her. Louis of Tarentum and all the cardinals present at the court had come out to meet her. Pages in dazzling dress carried above Joan’s head a canopy of scarlet velvet, ornamented with fleur-de-lys in gold and plumes. Handsome youths and lovely girls, their heads crowned with flowers, went before her singing her praise. The streets were bordered with a living hedge of people; the houses were decked out; the bells rang a triple peal, as at the great Church festivals. Clement VI first received the queen at the castle of Avignon with all the pomp he knew so well how to employ on solemn occasions, then she was lodged in the palace of Cardinal Napoleon of the Orsini, who on his return from the Conclave at Perugia had built this regal dwelling at Villeneuve, inhabited later by the popes.

No words could give an idea of the strangely disturbed condition of Avignon at this period. Since Clement V had transported the seat of the papacy to Provence, there had sprung up, in this rival to Rome, squares, churches, cardinals’ palaces, of unparalleled splendour. All the business of nations and kings was transacted at the castle of Avignon. Ambassadors from every court, merchants of every nation, adventurers of all kinds, Italians, Spaniards, Hungarians, Arabs, Jews, soldiers, Bohemians, jesters, poets, monks, courtesans, swarmed and clustered here, and hustled one another in the streets. There was confusion of tongues, customs, and costumes, an inextricable mixture of splendour and rags, riches and misery, debasement and grandeur. The austere poets of the Middle Ages stigmatised the accursed city in their writings under the name of the New Babylon.

There is one curious monument of Joan's sojourn at Avignon and the exercise of her authority as sovereign. She was indignant at the effrontery of the women of the town, who elbowed everybody shamelessly in the streets, and published a notable edict, the first of its kind, which has since served as a model in like cases, to compel all unfortunate women who trafficked in their honour to live shut up together in a house, that was bound to be open every day in the year except the last three days of Holy Week, the entrance to be barred to Jews at all times. An abbess, chosen once a year, had the supreme control over this strange convent. Rules were established for the maintenance of order, and severe penalties inflicted for any infringement of discipline. The lawyers of the period gained a great reputation by this salutary institution; the fair ladies of Avignon were eager in their defence of the queen in spite of the calumnious reports that strove to tarnish her reputation: with one voice the wisdom of Andre's widow was extolled. The concert of praises was disturbed, however, by murmurs from the recluses themselves, who, in their own brutal language, declared that Joan of Naples was impeding their commerce so as to get a monopoly for herself.

Meanwhile Marie of Durazzo had joined her sister. After her husband's death she had found means to take refuge in the convent of Santa Croce with her two little daughters; and while Louis of Hungary was busy burning his victims, the unhappy Marie had contrived to make her escape in the frock of an old monk, and as by a miracle to get on board a ship that was setting sail for Provence. She related to her sister the frightful details of the king's cruelty. And soon a new proof of his implacable hatred confirmed the tales of the poor princess.

Louis's ambassadors appeared at the court of Avignon to demand formally the queen's condemnation.

It was a great day when Joan of Naples pleaded her own cause before the pope, in the presence of all the cardinals then at Avignon, all the ambassadors of foreign powers, and all the eminent persons come from every quarter of Europe to be present at this trial, unique in the annals of history. We must imagine a vast enclosure, in whose midst upon a raised throne, as president of the august tribunal, sat God's vicar on earth, absolute and supreme judge, emblem of temporal and spiritual power, of authority human and divine. To right and left of the sovereign pontiff, the cardinals in their red robes sat in chairs set round in a circle, and behind these princes of the Sacred College stretched rows of bishops extending to the end of the hall, with vicars, canons, deacons, archdeacons, and the whole immense hierarchy of the Church. Facing the pontifical throne was a platform reserved for the Queen of Naples and her suite. At the pope’s feet stood the ambassadors from the King of Hungary, who played the part of accusers without speaking a word, the circumstances of the crime and all the proofs having been discussed beforehand by a committee appointed for the purpose. The rest of the hall was filled by a brilliant crowd of high dignitaries, illustrious captains, and noble envoys, all vying with one another in proud display. Everyone ceased to breathe, all eyes were fixed on the dais whence Joan was to speak her own defence. A movement of uneasy curiosity made this compact mass of humanity surge towards the centre, the cardinals above raised like proud peacocks over a golden harvest-field shaken in the breeze.

The queen appeared, hand in hand with her uncle, the old Cardinal of Perigord, and her aunt, the Countess Agnes. Her gait was so modest and proud, her countenance so melancholy and pure, her looks so open and confident, that even before she spoke every heart was hers. Joan was now twenty years of age; her magnificent beauty was fully developed, but an extreme pallor concealed the brilliance of her transparent satin skin, and her hollow cheek told the tale of expiation and suffering. Among the spectators who looked on most eagerly there was a certain young man with strongly marked features, glowing eyes, and brown hair, whom we shall meet again later on in our narrative; but we will not divert our readers’ attention, but only tell them that his name was James of Aragon, that he was Prince of Majorca, and would have been ready to shed every drop of his blood only to check one single tear that hung on Joan’s eyelids. The queen spoke in an agitated, trembling voice, stopping from time to time to dry her moist and shining eyes, or to breathe one of those deep sighs that go straight to the heart. She told the tale of her husband’s death painfully and vividly, painted truthfully the mad terror that had seized upon her and struck her down at that frightful time, raised her hands to her brow with the gesture of despair, as though she would wrest the madness from her brain — and a shudder of pity and awe passed through the assembled crowd. It is a fact that at this moment, if her words were false, her anguish was both sincere and terrible.

An angel soiled by crime, she lied like Satan himself, but like him too she suffered all the agony of remorse and pride. Thus, when at the end of her speech she burst into tears and implored help and protection against the usurper of her kingdom, a cry of general assent drowned her closing words, several hands flew to their sword-hilts, and the Hungarian ambassadors retired covered with shame and confusion.

That same evening the sentence, to the great joy of all, was proclaimed, that Joan was innocent and acquitted of all concern in the assassination of her husband. But as her conduct after the event and the indifference she had shown about pursuing the authors of the crime admitted of no valid excuse, the pope declared that there were plain traces of magic, and that the wrong-doing attributed to Joan was the result of some baneful charm cast upon her, which she could by no possible means resist. At the same time, His Holiness confirmed her marriage with Louis of Tarentum, and bestowed on him the order of the Rose of Gold and the title of King of Sicily and Jerusalem. Joan, it is true, had on the eve of her acquittal sold the town of Avignon to the pope for the sum of 80,000 florins.

While the queen was pleading her cause at the court of Clement VI, a dreadful epidemic, called the Black Plague — the same that Boccaccio has described so wonderfully — was ravaging the kingdom of Naples, and indeed the whole of Italy. According to the calculation of Matteo Villani, Florence lost three-fifths of her population, Bologna two-thirds, and nearly all Europe was reduced in some such frightful proportion. The Neapolitans were already weary of the cruelties and greed of the Hungarians, they were only awaiting some opportunity to revolt against the stranger’s oppression, and to recall their lawful sovereign, whom, for all her ill deeds, they had never ceased to love. The attraction of youth and beauty was deeply felt by this pleasure-loving people. Scarcely had the pestilence thrown confusion into the army and town, when loud cursing arose against the tyrant and his executioners. Louis of Hungary, suddenly threatened by the wrath of Heaven and the people’s vengeance, was terrified both by the plague and by the riots, and disappeared in the middle of the night. Leaving the government of Naples in the hands of Conrad Lupo, one of his captains, he embarked hastily at Berletta, and left the kingdom in very much the same way as Louis of Tarentum, fleeing from him, had left it a few months before.

This news arrived at Avignon just when the pope was about to send the queen his bull of absolution. It was at once decided to take away the kingdom from Louis's viceroy. Nicholas Acciajuoli left for Naples with the marvellous bull that was to prove to all men the innocence of the queen, to banish all scruples and stir up a new enthusiasm. The counsellor first went to the castle of Melzi, commanded by his son Lorenzo: this was the only fortress that had always held out. The father and son embraced with the honourable pride that near relatives may justly feel when they meet after they have united in the performance of a heroic duty. From the governor of Melzi Louis of Tarentum's counsellor learned that all men were wearied of the arrogance and vexatious conduct of the queen's enemies, and that a conspiracy was in train, started in the University of Naples, but with vast ramifications all over the kingdom, and moreover that there was dissension in the enemy's army. The indefatigable counsellor went from Apulia to Naples, traversing towns and villages, collecting men everywhere, proclaiming loudly the acquittal of the queen and her marriage with Louis of Tarentum, also that the pope was offering indulgences to such as would receive with joy their lawful sovereigns. Then seeing that the people shouted as he went by, "Long live Joan! Death to the Hungarians!" he returned and told his sovereigns in what frame of mind he had left their subjects.

Joan borrowed money wherever she could, armed galleys, and left Marseilles with her husband, her sister, and two faithful advisers, Acciajuoli and Spinelli, on the 10th of September 1348. The king and queen not being able to enter at the harbour, which was in the enemy's power, disembarked at Santa Maria del Carmine, near the river Sebeto, amid the frenzied applause of an immense crowd, and accompanied by all the Neapolitan nobles. They made their way to the palace of Messire Ajutorio, near Porta Capuana, the Hungarians having fortified themselves in all the castles; but Acciajuoli, at the head of the queen's partisans, blockaded the fortresses so ably that half of the enemy were obliged to surrender, and the other half took to flight and were scattered about the interior of the kingdom. We shall now follow Louis of Tarentum in his arduous adventures in Apulia, the Calabrias, and the Abruzzi, where he recovered one by one the fortresses that the Hungarians had taken. By dint of unexampled valour and patience, he at last mastered nearly all the more considerable places, when suddenly everything changed, and fortune turned her back upon him for the second time. A German captain called Warner, who had deserted the Hungarian army to sell himself to the queen, had again played the traitor and sold himself once more, allowed himself to be surprised at Corneto by Conrad Lupo, the King of Hungary's vicar-general, and openly joined him, taking along with him a great party of the adventurers who fought under his orders. This unexpected defection forced Louis of Tarentum to retire to Naples. The King of Hungary soon learning that the troops had rallied round his banner, and only awaited his return to march upon the capital, disembarked with a strong reinforcement of cavalry at the port of Manfredonia, and taking Trani, Canosa, and Salerno, went forward to lay siege to Aversa.

The news fell like a thunder-clap on Joan and her husband. The Hungarian army consisted of 10,000 horse and more than 7000 infantry, and Aversa had only 500 soldiers under Giacomo Pignatelli. In spite of the immense disproportion of the numbers, the Neapolitan general vigorously repelled the attack; and the King of Hungary, fighting in the front, was wounded in his foot by an arrow. Then Louis, seeing that it would be difficult to take the place by storm, determined to starve them out. For three months the besieged performed prodigies of valour, and further assistance was impossible. Their capitulation was expected at any moment, unless indeed they decided to perish every man. Renaud des Baux, who was to come from Marseilles with a squadron of ten ships to defend the ports of the capital and secure the queen's flight, should the Hungarian army get possession of Naples, had been delayed by adverse winds and obliged to stop on the way. All things seemed to conspire in favour of the enemy. Louis of Tarentum, whose generous soul refused to shed the blood of his brave men in an unequal and desperate struggle, nobly sacrificed himself, and made an offer to the King of Hungary to settle their quarrel in single combat. We append the authentic letters that passed between Joan's husband and Andre's brother.

"Illustrious King of Hungary, who has come to invade our kingdom, we, by the grace of God King of Jerusalem and Sicily, invite you to single combat. We know that you are in no wise disturbed by the death of your lancers or the other pagans in your suite, no more indeed than if they were dogs; but we, fearing harm to our own soldiers and men-at-arms, desire to fight with you personally, to put an end to the present war and restore peace to our kingdom. He who survives shall be king. And therefore, to ensure that this duel shall take place, we definitely propose as a site either Paris, in the presence of the King of France, or one of the towns of Perugia, Avignon, or Naples. Choose one of these four places, and send us your reply.”

The King of Hungary first consulted with his council, and then replied:—

“Great King, we have read and considered your letter sent to us by the bearer of these presents, and by your invitation to a duel we are most supremely pleased; but we do not approve of any of the places you propose, since they are all suspect, and for several reasons. The King of France is your maternal grandfather, and although we are also connected by blood with him, the relationship is not so near. The town of Avignon, although nominally belonging to the sovereign pontiff, is the capital of Provence, and has always been subject to your rule. Neither have we any more confidence in Perugia, for that town is devoted to your cause.

“As to the city of Naples, there is no need to say that we refuse that rendezvous, since it is in revolt against us and you are there as king. But if you wish to fight with us, let it be in the presence of the Emperor of Germany, who is lord supreme, or the King of England, who is our common friend, or the Patriarch of Aquilea, a good Catholic. If you do not approve of any of the places we propose, we shall soon be near you with our army, and so remove all difficulties and delays. Then you can come forth, and our duel can take place in the presence of both armies.”

After the interchange of these two letters, Louis of Tarentum proposed nothing further. The garrison at Aversa had capitulated after a heroic resistance, and it was known only too well that if the King of Hungary could get so far as the walls of Naples, he would not have to endanger his life in order to seize that city. Happily the Provencal galleys had reached port at last. The king and the queen had only just time to embark and take refuge at Gaeta. The Hungarian army arrived at Naples. The town was on the point of yielding, and had sent messengers to the king humbly demanding peace; but the speeches of the Hungarians showed such insolence that the people, irritated past endurance, took up arms, and resolved to defend their household gods with all the energy of despair.

CHAPTER VIII

While the Neapolitans were holding out against their enemy at the Porta Capuana, a strange scene was being enacted at the other side of the town, a scene that shows us in lively colours the violence and treachery of this barbarous age. The widow of Charles of Durazzo was shut up in the castle of Ovo, and awaiting in feverish anxiety the arrival of the ship that was to take her to the queen. The poor Princess Marie, pressing her weeping children to her heart, pale, with dishevelled locks, fixed eyes, and drawn lips, was listening for every sound, distracted between hope and fear. Suddenly steps resounded along the corridor; a friendly voice was heard; Marie fell upon her knees with a cry of joy: her liberator had come.

Renaud des Baux, admiral of the Provencal squadron, respectfully advanced, followed by his eldest son Robert and his chaplain.

“God, I thank Thee!” exclaimed Marie, rising to her feet; “we are saved.”

“One moment, madam,” said Renaud, stopping her: “you are indeed saved, but upon one condition.”

“A condition?” murmured the princess in surprise.

“Listen, madam. The King of Hungary, the avenger of Andre’s murderers, the slayer of your husband, is at the gates of Naples; the people and soldiers will succumb, as soon as their last gallant effort is spent — the army of the conqueror is about to spread desolation and death throughout the city by fire and the sword. This time the Hungarian butcher will spare no victims: he will kill the mother before her children’s eyes, the children in their mother’s arms. The drawbridge of this castle is up and there are none on guard; every man who can wield a sword is now at the other end of the town. Woe to you, Marie of Durazzo, if the King of Hungary shall remember that you preferred his rival to him!”

“But have you not come here to save me?” cried Marie in a voice of anguish. “Joan, my sister, did she not command you to take me to her?”

“Your sister is no longer in the position to give orders,” replied Renaud, with a disdainful smile. “She had nothing for me but thanks because I saved her life, and her husband’s too, when he fled like a coward before the man whom he had dared to challenge to a duel.”

Marie looked fixedly at the admiral to assure herself that it was really he who thus arrogantly talked about his masters. But she was terrified at his imperturbable expression, and said gently —

"As I owe my life and my children's lives solely to your generosity, I am grateful to you beyond all measure. But we must hurry, my lord: every moment I fancy I hear cries of vengeance, and you would not leave me now a prey to my brutal enemy?"

"God forbid, madam; I will save you at the risk of my life; but I have said already, I impose a condition."

"What is it?" said Marie, with forced calm.

"That you marry my son on the instant, in the presence of our reverend chaplain."

"Rash man!" cried Marie, recoiling, her face scarlet with indignation and shame; "you dare to speak thus to the sister of your legitimate sovereign? Give thanks to God that I will pardon an insult offered, as I know, in a moment of madness; try by your devotion to make me forget what you have said."

The count, without one word, signed to his son and a priest to follow, and prepared to depart. As he crossed the threshold Marie ran to him, and clasping her hands, prayed him in God's name never to forsake her. Renaud stopped.

"I might easily take my revenge," he said, "for your affront when you refuse my son in your pride; but that business I leave to Louis of Hungary, who will acquit himself, no doubt, with credit."

"Have mercy on my poor daughters!" cried the princess; "mercy at least for my poor babes, if my own tears cannot move you."

"If you loved your children," said the admiral, frowning, "you would have done your duty at once."

"But I do not love your son!" cried Marie, proud but trembling. "O God, must a wretched woman's heart be thus trampled? You, father, a minister of truth and justice, tell this man that God must not be called on to witness an oath dragged from the weak and helpless!"

She turned to the admiral's son; and added, sobbing —

"You are young, perhaps you have loved: one day no doubt you will love. I appeal to your loyalty as a young man, to your courtesy as a knight, to all your noblest impulses; join me, and turn your father away from his fatal project. You have never seen me before: you do not know but that in my secret heart I love another. Your pride should be revolted at the sight of an unhappy woman casting herself at your feet and imploring your favour and protection. One word from you, Robert, and I shall bless you every moment of my life: the memory of you will be graven in my heart like the memory of a guardian angel, and my children shall name you nightly in their prayers, asking God to grant your wishes. Oh, say, will you not save me? Who knows, later on I may love you — with real love.”

“I must obey my father,” Robert replied, never lifting his eyes to the lovely suppliant.

The priest was silent. Two minutes passed, and these four persons, each absorbed in his own thoughts, stood motionless as statues carved at the four corners of a tomb. Marie was thrice tempted to throw herself into the sea. But a confused distant sound suddenly struck upon her ears: little by little it drew nearer, voices were more distinctly heard; women in the street were uttering cries of distress —

“Fly, fly! God has forsaken us; the Hungarians are in the town!”

The tears of Marie’s children were the answer to these cries; and little Margaret, raising her hands to her mother, expressed her fear in speech that was far beyond her years. Renaud, without one look at this touching picture, drew his son towards the door.

“Stay,” said the princess, extending her hand with a solemn gesture: “as God sends no other aid to my children, it is His will that the sacrifice be accomplished.”

She fell on her knees before the priest, bending her head like a victim who offers her neck to the executioner. Robert des Baux took his place beside her, and the priest pronounced the formula that united them for ever, consecrating the infamous deed by a sacrilegious blessing.

“All is over!” murmured Marie of Durazzo, looking tearfully on her little daughters.

“No, all is not yet over,” said the admiral harshly, pushing her towards another room; “before we leave, the marriage must be consummated.”

“O just God!” cried the princess, in a voice torn with anguish, and she fell swooning to the floor.

Renaud des Baux directed his ships towards Marseilles, where he hoped to get his son crowned Count of Provence, thanks to his strange marriage with Marie of Durazzo. But this cowardly act of treason was not to go unpunished. The wind rose with fury, and drove him towards Gaeta, where the queen and her husband had just arrived. Renaud bade his sailors keep in the open, threatening to throw any man into the sea who dared to disobey him. The crew at first murmured; soon cries of mutiny rose on every side. The admiral, seeing he was lost, passed from threats to prayers. But the princess, who had recovered her senses at the first thunder-clap, dragged herself up to the bridge and screamed for help,

“Come to me, Louis! Come, my barons! Death to the cowardly wretches who have outraged my honour!”

Louis of Tarentum jumped into a boat, followed by some ten of his bravest men, and, rowing rapidly, reached the ship. Then Marie told him her story in a word, and he turned upon the admiral a lightning glance, as though defying him to make any defence.

“Wretch!” cried the king, transfixing the traitor with his sword.

Then he had the son loaded with chains, and also the unworthy priest who had served as accomplice to the admiral, who now expiated his odious crime by death. He took the princess and her children in his boat, and re-entered the harbour.

The Hungarians, however, forcing one of the gates of Naples, marched triumphant to Castel Nuovo. But as they were crossing the Piazza delle Correggie, the Neapolitans perceived that the horses were so weak and the men so reduced by all they had undergone during the siege of Aversa that a mere puff of wind would dispense this phantom-like army. Changing from a state of panic to real daring, the people rushed upon their conquerors, and drove them outside the walls by which they had just entered. The sudden violent reaction broke the pride of the King of Hungary, and made him more tractable when Clement VI decided that he ought at last to interfere. A truce was concluded first from the month of February 1350 to the beginning of April 1351, and the next year this was converted into a real peace, Joan paying to the King of Hungary the sum of 300,000 florins for the expenses of the war.

After the Hungarians had gone, the pope sent a legate to crown Joan and Louis of Tarentum, and the 25th of May, the day of Pentecost, was chosen for the ceremony. All contemporary historians speak enthusiastically of this magnificent fete. Its details have been immortalised by Giotto in the frescoes of the church which from this day bore the name of L’Incoronata. A general amnesty was declared for all who had taken part in the late wars on either side, and the king and queen were greeted with shouts of joy as they solemnly paraded beneath the canopy, with all the barons of the kingdom in their train.

But the day’s joy was impaired by an accident which to a superstitious people seemed of evil augury. Louis of Tarentum, riding a richly caparisoned horse, had just passed the Porta Petruccia, when some ladies looking out from a high window threw such a quantity of flowers at the king that his frightened steed reared and broke his rein. Louis could not hold him, so jumped lightly to the ground; but the crown fell at his feet and was broken into three pieces. On that very day the only daughter of Joan and Louis died.

But the king not wishing to sadden the brilliant ceremony with show of mourning, kept up the jousts and tournaments for three days, and in memory of his coronation instituted the order of ‘Chevaliers du Noeud’. But from that day begun with an omen so sad, his life was nothing but a series of disillusions. After sustaining wars in Sicily and Apulia, and quelling the insurrection of Louis of Durazzo, who ended his days in the castle of Ovo, Louis of Tarentum, worn out by a life of pleasure, his health undermined by slow disease, overwhelmed with domestic trouble, succumbed to an acute fever on the 5th of June 1362, at the age of forty-two. His body had not been laid in its royal tomb at Saint Domenico before several aspirants appeared to the hand of the queen.

One was the Prince of Majorca, the handsome youth we have already spoken of: he bore her off triumphant over all rivals, including the son of the King of France. James of Aragon had one of those faces of melancholy sweetness which no woman can resist. Great troubles nobly borne had thrown as it were a funereal veil over his youthful days: more than thirteen years he had spent shut in an iron cage; when by the aid of a false key he had escaped from his dreadful prison, he wandered from one court to another seeking aid; it is even said that he was reduced to the lowest degree of poverty and forced to beg his bread. The young stranger’s beauty and his adventures combined had impressed both Joan and Marie at the court of Avignon. Marie especially had conceived a violent passion for him, all the more so for the efforts she made to conceal it in her own bosom. Ever since James of Aragon came to Naples, the unhappy princess, married with a dagger at her throat, had desired to purchase her liberty at the expense of crime. Followed by four armed men, she entered the prison where Robert des Baux was still suffering for a fault more his father’s than his own.

Marie stood before the prisoner, her arms crossed, her cheeks livid, her lips trembling. It was a terrible interview. This time it was she who threatened, the man who entreated pardon. Marie was deaf to his prayers, and the head of the luckless man fell bleeding at her feet, and her men threw the body into the sea. But God never allows a murder to go unpunished: James preferred the queen to her sister, and the widow of Charles of Durazzo gained nothing by her crime but the contempt of the man she loved, and a bitter remorse which brought her while yet young to the tomb.

Joan was married in turn to James of Aragon, son of the King of Majorca, and to Otho of Brunswick, of the imperial family of Saxony. We will pass rapidly over these years, and come to the denouement of this history of crime and expiation. James, parted from his wife, continued his stormy career, after a long contest in Spain with Peter the Cruel, who had usurped his kingdom: about the end of the year 1375 he died near Navarre. Otho also could not escape the Divine vengeance which hung over the court of Naples, but to the end he valiantly shared the queen’s fortunes. Joan, since she had no lawful heir, adopted her nephew, Charles de la Paix (so called after the peace of Trevisa). He was the son of Louis Duras, who after rebelling against Louis of Tarentum, had died miserably in the castle of Ovo. The child would have shared his father’s fate had not Joan interceded to spare his life, loaded him with kindness, and married him to Margaret, the daughter of her sister Marie and her cousin Charles, who was put to death by the King of Hungary.

Serious differences arose between the queen and one of her former subjects, Bartolommeo Prigiani, who had become pope under the name of Urban VI. Annoyed by the queen’s opposition, the pope one day angrily said he would shut her up in a convent. Joan, to avenge the insult, openly favoured Clement VII, the anti-pope, and offered him a home in her own castle, when, pursued by Pope Urban’s army, he had taken refuge at Fondi. But the people rebelled against Clement, and killed the Archbishop of Naples, who had helped to elect him: they broke the cross that was carried in procession before the anti-pope, and hardly allowed him time to make his escape on shipboard to Provence. Urban declared that Joan was now dethroned, and released her subjects from their oath of fidelity to her, bestowing the crown of Sicily and Jerusalem upon Charles de la Paix, who marched on Naples with 8000 Hungarians. Joan, who could not believe in such base ingratitude, sent out his wife Margaret to meet her adopted son, though she might have kept her as a hostage, and his two children, Ladislaus and Joan, who became later the second queen of that name. But the victorious army soon arrived at the gates of Naples, and Charles blockaded the queen in her castle, forgetting in his ingratitude that she had saved his life and loved him like a mother.

Joan during the siege endured all the worst fatigues of war that any soldier has to bear. She saw her faithful friends fall around her wasted by hunger or decimated by sickness. When all food was exhausted, dead and decomposed bodies were thrown into the castle that they might pollute the air she breathed. Otho with his troops was kept at Aversa; Louis of Anjou, the brother of the King of France whom she had named as her successor when she disinherited her nephew, never appeared to help her, and the Provencal ships from Clement VII were not due to arrive until all hope must be over. Joan asked for a truce of five days, promising that, if Otho had not come to relieve her in that time, she would surrender the fortress.

On the fifth day Otho's army appeared on the side of Piedigrotta. The fight was sharp on both sides, and Joan from the top of a tower could follow with her eyes the cloud of dust raised by her husband's horse in the thickest of the battle. The victory was long uncertain: at length the prince made so bold an onset upon the royal standard, in his eagerness to meet his enemy hand to hand, that he plunged into the very middle of the army, and found himself pressed on every side. Covered with blood and sweat, his sword broken in his hand, he was forced to surrender. An hour later Charles was writing to his uncle, the King of Hungary, that Joan had fallen into his power, and he only awaited His Majesty's orders to decide her fate.

It was a fine May morning: the queen was under guard in the castle of Aversa: Otho had obtained his liberty on condition of his quitting Naples, and Louis of Anjou had at last got together an army of 50,000 men and was marching in hot haste to the conquest of the kingdom. None of this news had reached the ears of Joan, who for some days had lived in complete isolation. The spring lavished all her glory on these enchanted plains, which have earned the name of the blessed and happy country, campagna felite. The orange trees were covered with sweet white blossoms, the cherries laden with ruby fruit, the olives with young emerald leaves, the pomegranate feathery with red bells; the wild mulberry, the evergreen laurel, all the strong budding vegetation, needing no help from man to flourish in this spot privileged by Nature, made one great garden, here and there interrupted by little hidden runlets. It was a forgotten Eden in this corner of the world. Joan at her window was breathing in the perfumes of spring, and her eyes misty with tears rested on a bed of flowery verdure; a light breeze, keen and balmy, blew upon her burning brow and offered a grateful coolness to her damp and fevered cheeks. Distant melodious voices, refrains of well-known songs, were all that disturbed the silence of the poor little room, the solitary nest where a life was passing away in tears and repentance, a life the most brilliant and eventful of a century of splendour and unrest.

The queen was slowly reviewing in her mind all her life since she ceased to be a child — fifty years of disillusionment and suffering. She thought first of her happy, peaceful childhood, her grandfather’s blind affection, the pure joys of her days of innocence, the exciting games with her little sister and tall cousins. Then she shuddered at the earliest thought of marriage, the constraint, the loss of liberty, the bitter regrets; she remembered with horror the deceitful words murmured in her ear, designed to sow the seeds of corruption and vice that were to poison her whole life. Then came the burning memories of her first love, the treachery and desertion of Robert of Cabane, the moments of madness passed like a dream in the arms of Bertrand of Artois — the whole drama up to its tragic denouement showed as in letters of fire on the dark background of her sombre thoughts. Then arose cries of anguish in her soul, even as on that terrible fatal night she heard the voice of Andre asking mercy from his murderers. A long deadly silence followed his awful struggle, and the queen saw before her eyes the carts of infamy and the torture of her accomplices. All the rest of this vision was persecution, flight, exile, remorse, punishments from God and curses from the world. Around her was a frightful solitude: husbands, lovers, kindred, friends, all were dead; all she had loved or hated in the world were now no more; her joy, pain, desire, and hope had vanished for ever. The poor queen, unable to free herself from these visions of woe, violently tore herself away from the awful reverie, and kneeling at a prie-dieu, prayed with fervour. She was still beautiful, in spite of her extreme pallor; the noble lines of her face kept their pure oval; the fire of repentance in her great black eyes lit them up with superhuman brilliance, and the hope of pardon played in a heavenly smile upon her lips.

Suddenly the door of the room where Joan was so earnestly praying opened with a dull sound: two Hungarian barons in armour entered and signed to the queen to follow them. Joan arose silently and obeyed; but a cry of pain went up from her heart when she recognised the place where both Andre and Charles of Durazzo had died a violent death. But she collected her forces, and asked calmly why she was brought hither. For all answer, one of the men showed her a cord of silk and gold....

“May the will of a just God be done!” cried Joan, and fell upon her knees. Some minutes later she had ceased to suffer.

This was the third corpse that was thrown over the balcony at Aversa.

THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK [An Essay]

(This is the essay entitled The Man in the Iron Mask, not the novel

“The Man in the Iron Mask” [The Novel] Dumas #28[nmaskxxx.xxx]2759])

For nearly one hundred years this curious problem has exercised the imagination of writers of fiction — and of drama, and the patience of the learned in history. No subject is more obscure and elusive, and none more attractive to the general mind. It is a legend to the meaning of which none can find the key and yet in which everyone believes. Involuntarily we feel pity at the thought of that long captivity surrounded by so many extraordinary precautions, and when we dwell on the mystery which enveloped the captive, that pity is not only deepened but a kind of terror takes possession of us. It is very likely that if the name of the hero of this gloomy tale had been known at the time, he would now be forgotten. To give him a name would be to relegate him at once to the ranks of those commonplace offenders who quickly exhaust our interest and our tears. But this being, cut off from the world without leaving any discoverable trace, and whose disappearance apparently caused no void — this captive, distinguished among captives by the unexampled nature of his punishment, a prison within a prison, as if the walls of a mere cell were not narrow enough, has come to typify for us the sum of all the human misery and suffering ever inflicted by unjust tyranny.

Who was the Man in the Mask? Was he rapt away into this silent seclusion from the luxury of a court, from the intrigues of diplomacy, from the scaffold of a traitor, from the clash of battle? What did he leave behind? Love, glory, or a throne? What did he regret when hope had fled? Did he pour forth imprecations and curses on his tortures and blaspheme against high Heaven, or did he with a sigh possess his soul in patience?

The blows of fortune are differently received according to the different characters of those on whom they fall; and each one of us who in imagination threads the subterranean passages leading to the cells of Pignerol and Exilles, and incarcerates himself in the Iles Sainte-Marguerite and in the Bastille, the successive scenes of that long-protracted agony will give the prisoner a form shaped by his own fancy and a grief proportioned to his own power of suffering. How we long to pierce the thoughts and feel the heart-beats and watch the trickling tears behind that machine-like exterior, that impassible mask! Our imagination is powerfully excited by the dumbness of that fate borne by one whose words never reached the outward air, whose thoughts could never be read on the hidden features; by the isolation of forty years secured by two-fold barriers of stone and iron, and she clothes the object of her contemplation in majestic splendour, connects the mystery which enveloped his existence with mighty interests, and persists in regarding the prisoner as sacrificed for the preservation of some dynastic secret involving the peace of the world and the stability of a throne.

And when we calmly reflect on the whole case, do we feel that our first impulsively adopted opinion was wrong? Do we regard our belief as a poetical illusion? I do not think so; on the contrary, it seems to me that our good sense approves our fancy’s flight. For what can be more natural than the conviction that the secret of the name, age, and features of the captive, which was so perseveringly kept through long years at the cost of so much care, was of vital importance to the Government? No ordinary human passion, such as anger, hate, or vengeance, has so dogged and enduring a character; we feel that the measures taken were not the expression of a love of cruelty, for even supposing that Louis XIV were the most cruel of princes, would he not have chosen one of the thousand methods of torture ready to his hand before inventing a new and strange one? Moreover, why did he voluntarily burden himself with the obligation of surrounding a prisoner with such numberless precautions and such sleepless vigilance? Must he not have feared that in spite of it all the walls behind which he concealed the dread mystery would one day let in the light? Was it not through his entire reign a source of unceasing anxiety? And yet he respected the life of the captive whom it was so difficult to hide, and the discovery of whose identity would have been so dangerous. It would have been so easy to bury the secret in an obscure grave, and yet the order was never given. Was this an expression of hate, anger, or any other passion? Certainly not; the conclusion we must come to in regard to the conduct of the king is that all the measures he took against the prisoner were dictated by purely political motives; that his conscience, while allowing him to do everything necessary to guard the secret, did not permit him to take the further step of putting an end to the days of an unfortunate man, who in all probability was guilty of no crime.

Courtiers are seldom obsequious to the enemies of their master, so that we may regard the respect and consideration shown to the Man in the Mask by the governor Saint-Mars, and the minister Louvois, as a testimony, not only to his high rank, but also to his innocence.

For my part, I make no pretensions to the erudition of the bookworm, and I cannot read the history of the Man in the Iron Mask without feeling my blood boil at the abominable abuse of power — the heinous crime of which he was the victim.

A few years ago, M. Fournier and I, thinking the subject suitable for representation on the stage, undertook to read, before dramatising it, all the different versions of the affair which had been published up to that time. Since our piece was successfully performed at the Odeon two other versions have appeared: one was in the form of a letter addressed to the Historical Institute by M. Billiard, who upheld the conclusions arrived at by Soulavie, on whose narrative our play was founded; the other was a work by the bibliophile Jacob, who followed a new system of inquiry, and whose book displayed the results of deep research and extensive reading. It did not, however, cause me to change my opinion. Even had it been published before I had written my drama, I should still have adhered to the idea as to the most probable solution of the problem which I had arrived at in 1831, not only because it was incontestably the most dramatic, but also because it is supported by those moral presumptions which have such weight with us when considering a dark and doubtful question like the one before us. It will, be objected, perhaps, that dramatic writers, in their love of the marvellous and the pathetic, neglect logic and strain after effect, their aim being to obtain the applause of the gallery rather than the approbation of the learned. But to this it may be replied that the learned on their part sacrifice a great deal to their love of dates, more or less exact; to their desire to elucidate some point which had hitherto been considered obscure, and which their explanations do not always clear up; to the temptation to display their proficiency in the ingenious art of manipulating facts and figures culled from a dozen musty volumes into one consistent whole.

Our interest in this strange case of imprisonment arises, not alone from its completeness and duration, but also from our uncertainty as to the motives from which it was inflicted. Where erudition alone cannot suffice; where bookworm after bookworm, disdaining the conjectures of his predecessors, comes forward with a new theory founded on some forgotten document he has hunted out, only to find himself in his turn pushed into oblivion by some follower in his track, we must turn for guidance to some other light than that of scholarship; especially if, on strict investigation, we find that not one learned solution rests on a sound basis of fact.

In the question before us, which, as we said before, is a double one, asking not only who was the Man in the Iron Mask, but why he was relentlessly subjected to this torture till the moment of his death, what we need in order to restrain our fancy is mathematical demonstration, and not philosophical induction.

While I do not go so far as to assert positively that Abbe Soulavie has once for all lifted the veil which hid the truth, I am yet persuaded that no other system of research is superior to his, and that no other suggested solution has so many presumptions in its favour. I have not reached this firm conviction on account of the great and prolonged success of our drama, but because of the ease with which all the opinions adverse to those of the abbe may be annihilated by pitting them one against the other.

The qualities that make for success being quite different in a novel and in a drama, I could easily have founded a romance on the fictitious loves of Buckingham and the queen, or on a supposed secret marriage between her and Cardinal Mazarin, calling to my aid a work by Saint-Mihiel which the bibliophile declares he has never read, although it is assuredly neither rare nor difficult of access. I might also have merely expanded my drama, restoring to the personages therein their true names and relative positions, both of which the exigencies of the stage had sometimes obliged me to alter, and while allowing them to fill the same parts, making them act more in accordance with historical fact. No fable however far-fetched, no grouping of characters however improbable, can, however, destroy the interest which the innumerable writings about the Iron Mask excite, although no two agree in details, and although each author and each witness declares himself in possession of complete knowledge. No work, however mediocre, however worthless even, which has appeared on this subject has ever failed of success, not even, for example, the strange jumble of Chevalier de Mouhy, a kind of literary braggart, who was in the pay of Voltaire, and whose work was published anonymously in 1746 by Pierre de Hondt of The Hague. It is divided into six short parts, and bears the title, ‘Le Masque de Fer, ou les Aventures admirables du Prre et du Fils’. An absurd romance by Regnault Warin, and one at least equally absurd by Madame Guenard, met with a like favourable reception. In writing for the theatre, an author must choose one view of a dramatic situation to the exclusion of all others, and in following out this central idea is obliged by the inexorable laws of logic to push aside everything that interferes with its development. A book, on the contrary, is written to be discussed; it brings under the notice of the reader all the evidence produced at a trial which has as yet not reached a definite conclusion, and which in the case before us will never reach it, unless, which is most improbable, some lucky chance should lead to some new discovery.

The first mention of the prisoner is to be found in the ‘Memoires secrets pour servir a l’Histoire de Perse’ in one 12mo volume, by an anonymous author, published by the ‘Compagnie des Libraires Associes d’Amsterdam’ in 1745.

“Not having any other purpose,” says the author (page 20, 2nd edit.), “than to relate facts which are not known, or about which no one has written, or about which it is impossible to be silent, we refer at once to a fact which has hitherto almost escaped notice concerning Prince Giafer (Louis de Bourbon, Comte de Vermandois, son of Louis XIV and Mademoiselle de la Valliere), who was visited by Ali-Momajou (the Duc d’Orleans, the regent) in the fortress of Ispahan (the Bastille), in which he had been imprisoned for several years. This visit had probably no other motive than to make sure that this prince was really alive, he having been reputed dead of the plague for over thirty years, and his obsequies having been celebrated in presence of an entire army.

“Cha-Abas (Louis XIV) had a legitimate son, Sephi-Mirza (Louis, Dauphin of France), and a natural son, Giafer. These two princes, as dissimilar in character as in birth, were always rivals and always at enmity with each other. One day Giafer so far forgot himself as to strike Sephi-Mirza. Cha-Abas having heard of the insult offered to the heir to the throne, assembled his most trusted councillors, and laid the conduct of the culprit before them — conduct which, according to the law of the country, was punishable with death, an opinion in which they all agreed. One of the councillors, however, sympathising more than the others with the distress of Cha-Abas, suggested that Giafer should be sent to the army, which was then on the frontiers of Feidrun (Flanders), and that his death from plague should be given out a few days after his arrival. Then, while the whole army was celebrating his obsequies, he should be carried off by night, in the greatest secrecy, to the stronghold on the isle of Ormus (Sainte-Marguerite), and there imprisoned for life.

"This course was adopted, and carried out by faithful and discreet agents. The prince, whose premature death was mourned by the army, being carried by unfrequented roads to the isle of Ormus, was placed in the custody of the commandant of the island, who, had received orders beforehand not to allow any person whatever to see the prisoner. A single servant who was in possession of the secret was killed by the escort on the journey, and his face so disfigured by dagger thrusts that he could not be recognised.

"The commandant treated his prisoner with the most profound respect; he waited on him at meals himself, taking the dishes from the cooks at the door of the apartment, none of whom ever looked on the face of Giafer. One day it occurred to the prince to scratch, his name on the back of a plate with his knife. One of the servants into whose hands the plate fell ran with it at once to the commandant, hoping he would be pleased and reward the bearer; but the unfortunate man was greatly mistaken, for he was at once made away with, that his knowledge of such an important secret might be buried with himself.

"Giafer remained several years in the castle Ormus, and was then transported to the fortress of Ispahan; the commandant of Ormus having received the governorship of Ispahan as a reward for faithful service.

"At Ispahan, as at Ormus, whenever it was necessary on account of illness or any other cause to allow anyone to approach the prince, he was always masked; and several trustworthy persons have asserted that they had seen the masked prisoner often, and had noticed that he used the familiar 'tu' when addressing the governor, while the latter showed his charge the greatest respect. As Giafer survived Cha-Abas and Sephi-Mirza by many years, it may be asked why he was never set at liberty; but it must be remembered it would have been impossible to restore a prince to his rank and dignities whose tomb actually existed, and of whose burial there were not only living witnesses but documentary proofs, the authenticity of which it would have been useless to deny, so firm was the belief, which has lasted down to the present day, that Giafer died of the plague in camp when with the army on the frontiers of Flanders. Ali-Homajou died shortly after the visit he paid to Giafer."

This version of the story, which is the original source of all the controversy on the subject, was at first generally received as true. On a critical examination it fitted in very well with certain events which took place in the reign of Louis XIV.

The Comte de Vermandois had in fact left the court for the camp very soon after his reappearance there, for he had been banished by the king from his presence some time before for having, in company with several young nobles, indulged in the most reprehensible excesses.

“The king,” says Mademoiselle de Montpensier (‘Memoires de Mademoiselle de Montpensier’, vol. xliii. p. 474., of ‘Memoires Relatifs d’Histoire de France’, Second Series, published by Petitot), “had not been satisfied with his conduct and refused to see him. The young prince had caused his mother much sorrow, but had been so well lectured that it was believed that he had at last turned over a new leaf.” He only remained four days at court, reached the camp before Courtrai early in November 1683, was taken ill on the evening of the 12th, and died on the 19th of the same month of a malignant fever. Mademoiselle de Montpensier says that the Comte de Vermandois “fell ill from drink.”

There are, of course, objections of all kinds to this theory.

For if, during the four days the comte was at court, he had struck the dauphin, everyone would have heard of the monstrous crime, and yet it is nowhere spoken of, except in the ‘Memoires de Perse’. What renders the story of the blow still more improbable is the difference in age between the two princes. The dauphin, who already had a son, the Duc de Bourgogne, more than a year old, was born the 1st November 1661, and was therefore six years older than the Comte de Vermandois. But the most complete answer to the tale is to be found in a letter written by Barbezieux to Saint-Mars, dated the 13th August 1691: —

“When you have any information to send me relative to the prisoner who has been in your charge for twenty years, I most earnestly enjoin on you to take the same precautions as when you write to M. de Louvois.”

The Comte de Vermandois, the official registration of whose death bears the date 1685, cannot have been twenty years a prisoner in 1691.

Six years after the Man in the Mask had been thus delivered over to the curiosity of the public, the ‘Siecle de Louis XIV’ (2 vols. octavo, Berlin, 1751) was published by Voltaire under the pseudonym of M. de Francheville. Everyone turned to this work, which had been long expected, for details relating to the mysterious prisoner about whom everyone was talking.

Voltaire ventured at length to speak more openly of the prisoner than anyone had hitherto done, and to treat as a matter of history "an event long ignored by all historians." (vol. ii. p. 11, 1st edition, chap. xxv.). He assigned an approximate date to the beginning of this captivity, "some months after the death of Cardinal Mazarin" (1661); he gave a description of the prisoner, who according to him was "young and dark-complexioned; his figure was above the middle height and well proportioned; his features were exceedingly handsome, and his bearing was noble. When he spoke his voice inspired interest; he never complained of his lot, and gave no hint as to his rank." Nor was the mask forgotten: "The part which covered the chin was furnished with steel springs, which allowed the prisoner to eat without uncovering his face." And, lastly, he fixed the date of the death of the nameless captive; who "was buried," he says, "in 1704., by night, in the parish church of Saint-Paul."

Voltaire's narrative coincided with the account given in the 'Memoires de Peyse', save for the omission of the incident which, according to the 'Memoires', led in the first instance to the imprisonment of Giafer. "The prisoner," says Voltaire, "was sent to the Iles Sainte-Marguerite, and afterwards to the Bastille, in charge of a trusty official; he wore his mask on the journey, and his escort had orders to shoot him if he took it off. The Marquis de Louvois visited him while he was on the islands, and when speaking to him stood all the time in a respectful attitude. The prisoner was removed to the Bastille in 1690, where he was lodged as comfortably as could be managed in that building; he was supplied with everything he asked for, especially with the finest linen and the costliest lace, in both of which his taste was perfect; he had a guitar to play on, his table was excellent, and the governor rarely sat in his presence."

Voltaire added a few further details which had been given him by M. de Bernaville, the successor of M. de Saint-Mars, and by an old physician of the Bastille who had attended the prisoner whenever his health required a doctor, but who had never seen his face, although he had "often seen his tongue and his body." He also asserted that M. de Chamillart was the last minister who was in the secret, and that when his son-in-law, Marshal de la Feuillade, besought him on his knees, de Chamillart being on his deathbed, to tell him the name of the Man in the Iron Mask, the minister replied that he was under a solemn oath never to reveal the secret, it being an affair of state. To all these details, which the marshal acknowledges to be correct, Voltaire adds a remarkable note: “What increases our wonder is, that when the unknown captive was sent to the Iles Sainte-Marguerite no personage of note disappeared from the European stage.”

The story of the Comte de Vermandois and the blow was treated as an absurd and romantic invention, which does not even attempt to keep within the bounds of the possible, by Baron C. (according to P. Marchand, Baron Crunyngen) in a letter inserted in the ‘Bibliotheque raisonnee des Ouvrages des Savants de d’Europe’, June 1745. The discussion was revived somewhat later, however, and a few Dutch scholars were supposed to be responsible for a new theory founded on history; the foundations proving somewhat shaky, however, — a quality which it shares, we must say, with all the other theories which have ever been advanced.

According to this new theory, the masked prisoner was a young foreign nobleman, groom of the chambers to Anne of Austria, and the real father of Louis XIV. This anecdote appears first in a duodecimo volume printed by Pierre Marteau at Cologne in 1692, and which bears the title, ‘The Loves of Anne of Austria, Consort of Louis XIII, with M. le C. D. R., the Real Father of Louis XIV, King of France; being a Minute Account of the Measures taken to give an Heir to the Throne of France, the Influences at Work to bring this to pass, and the Denoument of the Comedy’.

This libel ran through five editions, bearing date successively, 1692, 1693, 1696, 1722, and 1738. In the title of the edition of 1696 the words “Cardinal de Richelieu” are inserted in place of the initials “C. D. R.,” but that this is only a printer’s error everyone who reads the work will perceive. Some have thought the three letters stood for Comte de Riviere, others for Comte de Rochefort, whose ‘Memoires’ compiled by Sandras de Courtilz supply these initials. The author of the book was an Orange writer in the pay of William III, and its object was, he says, “to unveil the great mystery of iniquity which hid the true origin of Louis XIV.” He goes on to remark that “the knowledge of this fraud, although comparatively rare outside France, was widely spread within her borders. The well-known coldness of Louis XIII; the extraordinary birth of Louis-Dieudonne, so called because he was born in the twenty-third year of a childless marriage, and several other remarkable circumstances connected with the birth, all point clearly to a father other than the prince, who with great effrontery is passed off by his adherents as such. The famous barricades of Paris, and the organised revolt led by distinguished men against Louis XIV on his accession to the throne, proclaimed aloud the king's illegitimacy, so that it rang through the country; and as the accusation had reason on its side, hardly anyone doubted its truth."

We give below a short abstract of the narrative, the plot of which is rather skilfully constructed: —

"Cardinal Richelieu, looking with satisfied pride at the love of Gaston, Duc d'Orleans, brother of the king, for his niece Parisiatis (Madame de Combalet), formed the plan of uniting the young couple in marriage. Gaston taking the suggestion as an insult, struck the cardinal. Pere Joseph then tried to gain the cardinal's consent and that of his niece to an attempt to deprive Gaston of the throne, which the childless marriage of Louis XIII seemed to assure him. A young man, the C. D. R. of the book, was introduced into Anne of Austria's room, who though a wife in name had long been a widow in reality. She defended herself but feebly, and on seeing the cardinal next day said to him, 'Well, you have had your wicked will; but take good care, sir cardinal, that I may find above the mercy and goodness which you have tried by many pious sophistries to convince me is awaiting me. Watch over my soul, I charge you, for I have yielded!' The queen having given herself up to love for some time, the joyful news that she would soon become a mother began to spread over the kingdom. In this manner was born Louis XIV, the putative son of Louis XIII. If this instalment of the tale be favourably received, says the pamphleteer, the sequel will soon follow, in which the sad fate of C. D. R. will be related, who was made to pay dearly for his short-lived pleasure."

Although the first part was a great success, the promised sequel never appeared. It must be admitted that such a story, though it never convinced a single person of the illegitimacy of Louis XIV, was an excellent prologue to the tale of the unfortunate lot of the Man in the Iron Mask, and increased the interest and curiosity with which that singular historical mystery was regarded. But the views of the Dutch scholars thus set forth met with little credence, and were soon forgotten in a new solution.

The third historian to write about the prisoner of the Iles Sainte-Marguerite was Lagrange-Chancel. He was just twenty-nine years of age when, excited by Freron's hatred of Voltaire, he addressed a letter from his country place, Antoniat, in Perigord, to the 'Annee Litteraire' (vol. iii. p.

188), demolishing the theory advanced in the ‘Siecle de Louis XIV’, and giving facts which he had collected whilst himself imprisoned in the same place as the unknown prisoner twenty years later.

“My detention in the Iles-Saint-Marguerite,” says Lagrange-Chancel,” brought many things to my knowledge which a more painstaking historian than M. de Voltaire would have taken the trouble to find out; for at the time when I was taken to the islands the imprisonment of the Man in the Iron Mask was no longer regarded as a state secret. This extraordinary event, which M. de Voltaire places in 1662, a few months after the death of Cardinal Mazarin, did not take place till 1669, eight years after the death of His Eminence. M. de La Motte-Guerin, commandant of the islands in my time, assured me that the prisoner was the Duc de Beaufort, who was reported killed at the siege of Candia, but whose body had never been recovered, as all the narratives of that event agree in stating. He also told me that M. de Saint-Mars, who succeeded Pignerol as governor of the islands, showed great consideration for the prisoner, that he waited on him at table, that the service was of silver, and that the clothes supplied to the prisoner were as costly as he desired; that when he was ill and in need of a physician or surgeon, he was obliged under pain of death to wear his mask in their presence, but that when he was alone he was permitted to pull out the hairs of his beard with steel tweezers, which were kept bright and polished. I saw a pair of these which had been actually used for this purpose in the possession of M. de Formanoir, nephew of Saint-Mars, and lieutenant of a Free Company raised for the purpose of guarding the prisoners. Several persons told me that when Saint-Mars, who had been placed over the Bastille, conducted his charge thither, the latter was heard to say behind his iron mask, ‘Has the king designs on my life?’ To which Saint-Mars replied, ‘No, my prince; your life is safe: you must only let yourself be guided.’

“I also learned from a man called Dubuisson, cashier to the well-known Samuel Bernard, who, having been imprisoned for some years in the Bastile, was removed to the Iles Sainte-Marguerite, where he was confined along with some others in a room exactly over the one occupied by the unknown prisoner. He told me that they were able to communicate with him by means of the flue of the chimney, but on asking him why he persisted in not revealing his name and the cause of his imprisonment, he replied that such an avowal would be fatal not only to him but to those to whom he made it.

“Whether it were so or not, to-day the name and rank of this political victim are secrets the preservation of which is no longer necessary to the State; and I have thought that to tell the public what I know would cut short the long chain of circumstances which everyone was forging according to his fancy, instigated thereto by an author whose gift of relating the most impossible events in such a manner as to make them seem true has won for all his writings such success — even for his Vie de Charles XII”

This theory, according to Jacob, is more probable than any of the others.

“Beginning with the year 1664.,” he says, “the Duc de Beaufort had by his insubordination and levity endangered the success of several maritime expeditions. In October 1666 Louis XIV remonstrated with him with much tact, begging him to try to make himself more and more capable in the service of his king by cultivating the talents with which he was endowed, and ridding himself of the faults which spoilt his conduct. ‘I do not doubt,’ he concludes, ‘that you will be all the more grateful to me for this mark of my benevolence towards you, when you reflect how few kings have ever shown their goodwill in a similar manner.’“ (‘Oeuvres de Louis XIV’, vol. v. p. 388). Several calamities in the royal navy are known to have been brought about by the Duc de Beaufort. M. Eugene Sue, in his ‘Histoire de la Marine’, which is full of new and curious information, has drawn a very good picture of the position of the “roi des halles,” the “king of the markets,” in regard to Colbert and Louis XIV. Colbert wished to direct all the manoeuvres of the fleet from his study, while it was commanded by the naval grandmaster in the capricious manner which might be expected from his factious character and love of bluster (Eugene Sue, vol. i., ‘Pieces Justificatives’). In 1699 Louis XIV sent the Duc de Beaufort to the relief of Candia, which the Turks were besieging. Seven hours after his arrival Beaufort was killed in a sortie. The Duc de Navailles, who shared with him the command of the French squadron, simply reported his death as follows: “He met a body of Turks who were pressing our troops hard: placing himself at the head of the latter, he fought valiantly, but at length his soldiers abandoned him, and we have not been able to learn his fate” (‘Memoires du Duc de Navailles’, book iv. P. 243)

The report of his death spread rapidly through France and Italy; magnificent funeral services were held in Paris, Rome, and Venice, and funeral orations delivered. Nevertheless, many believed that he would one day reappear, as his body had never been recovered.

Guy Patin mentions this belief, which he did not share, in two of his letters: —

“Several wagers have been laid that M. de Beaufort is not dead! ‘O utinam’!” (Guy Patin, September 26, 1669).

“It is said that M. de Vivonne has been granted by commission the post of vice-admiral of France for twenty years; but there are many who believe that the Duc de Beaufort is not dead, but imprisoned in some Turkish island. Believe this who may, I don’t; he is really dead, and the last thing I should desire would be to be as dead as he”,(Ibid., January 14, 1670).

The following are the objections to this theory:

“In several narratives written by eye-witnesses of the siege of Candia,” says Jacob, “it is related that the Turks, according to their custom, despoiled the body and cut off the head of the Duc de Beaufort on the field of battle, and that the latter was afterwards exhibited at Constantinople; and this may account for some of the details given by Sandras de Courtilz in his ‘Memoires du Marquis de Montbrun’ and his ‘Memoires d’Artagnan’, for one can easily imagine that the naked, headless body might escape recognition. M. Eugene Sue, in his ‘Histoire de la Marine’ (vol. ii, chap. 6), had adopted this view, which coincides with the accounts left by Philibert de Jarry and the Marquis de Ville, the MSS. of whose letters and ‘Memoires’ are to be found in the Bibliotheque du Roi.

“In the first volume of the ‘Histoire de la Detention des Philosophes et des Gens de Lettres a la Bastille, etc.’, we find the following passage: —

“Without dwelling on the difficulty and danger of an abduction, which an Ottoman scimitar might any day during this memorable siege render unnecessary, we shall restrict ourselves to declaring positively that the correspondence of Saint-Mars from 1669 to 1680 gives us no ground for supposing that the governor of Pignerol had any great prisoner of state in his charge during that period of time, except Fouquet and Lauzun.’“

While we profess no blind faith in the conclusions arrived at by the learned critic, we would yet add to the considerations on which he relies another, viz. that it is most improbable that Louis XIV should ever have considered it necessary to take such rigorous measures against the Duc de Beaufort. Truculent and self-confident as he was, he never acted against the royal authority in such a manner as to oblige the king to strike him down in secret; and it is difficult to believe that Louis XIV, peaceably seated on his throne, with all the enemies of his minority under his feet, should have revenged himself on the duke as an old Frondeur.

The critic calls our attention to another fact also adverse to the theory under consideration. The Man in the Iron Mask loved fine linen and rich lace, he was reserved in character and possessed of extreme refinement, and none of this suits the portraits of the ‘roi des halles’ which contemporary historians have drawn.

Regarding the anagram of the name Marchiali (the name under which the death of the prisoner was registered), ‘hic amiral’, as a proof, we cannot think that the gaolers of Pignerol amused themselves in propounding conundrums to exercise the keen intellect of their contemporaries; and moreover the same anagram would apply equally well to the Count of Vermandois, who was made admiral when only twenty-two months old. Abbe Papon, in his roamings through Provence, paid a visit to the prison in which the Iron Mask was confined, and thus speaks: —

“It was to the Iles Sainte-Marguerite that the famous prisoner with the iron mask whose name has never been discovered, was transported at the end of the last century; very few of those attached to his service were allowed to speak to him. One day, as M. de Saint-Mars was conversing with him, standing outside his door, in a kind of corridor, so as to be able to see from a distance everyone who approached, the son of one of the governor’s friends, hearing the voices, came up; Saint-Mars quickly closed the door of the room, and, rushing to meet the young man, asked him with an air of great anxiety if he had overheard anything that was said. Having convinced himself that he had heard nothing, the governor sent the young man away the same day, and wrote to the father that the adventure was like to have cost the son dear, and that he had sent him back to his home to prevent any further imprudence.

“I was curious enough to visit the room in which the unfortunate man was imprisoned, on the 2nd of February 1778. It is lighted by one window to the north, overlooking the sea, about fifteen feet above the terrace where the sentries paced to and fro. This window was pierced through a very thick wall and the embrasure barricaded by three iron bars, thus separating the prisoner from the sentries by a distance of over two fathoms. I found an officer of the Free Company in the fortress who was nigh on fourscore years old; he told me that his father, who had belonged to the same Company, had often related to him how a friar had seen something white floating on the water under the prisoner’s window. On being fished out and carried to M. de Saint-Mars, it proved to be a shirt of very fine material, loosely folded together, and covered with writing from end to end. M. de Saint-Mars spread it out and read a few words, then turning to the friar who had brought it he asked him in an embarrassed manner if he had been led by curiosity to read any of the, writing. The friar protested repeatedly that he had not read a line, but nevertheless he was found dead in bed two days later. This incident was told so often to my informant by his father and by the chaplain of the fort of that time that he regarded it as incontestably true. The following fact also appears to me to be equally well established by the testimony of many witnesses. I collected all the evidence I could on the spot, and also in the Lerins monastery, where the tradition is preserved.

“A female attendant being wanted for the prisoner, a woman of the village of Mongin offered herself for the place, being under the impression that she would thus be able to make her children’s fortune; but on being told that she would not only never be allowed to see her children again, but would be cut off from the rest of the world as well, she refused to be shut up with a prisoner whom it cost so much to serve. I may mention here that at the two outer angles of the wall of the fort which faced the sea two sentries were placed, with orders to fire on any boat which approached within a certain distance.

“The prisoner’s personal attendant died in the Iles Sainte-Marguerite. The brother of the officer whom I mentioned above was partly in the confidence of M. de Saint-Mars, and he often told how he was summoned to the prison once at midnight and ordered to remove a corpse, and that he carried it on his shoulders to the burial-place, feeling certain it was the prisoner who was dead; but it was only his servant, and it was then that an effort was made to supply his place by a female attendant.”

Abbe Papon gives some curious details, hitherto unknown to the public, but as he mentions no names his narrative cannot be considered as evidence. Voltaire never replied to Lagrange-Chancel, who died the same year in which his letter was published. Freron desiring to revenge himself for the scathing portrait which Voltaire had drawn of him in the ‘Ecossaise’, called to his assistance a more redoubtable adversary than Lagrange-Chancel. Sainte-Foix had brought to the front a brand new theory, founded on a passage by Hume in an article in the ‘Annee Litteraire (1768, vol. iv.), in which he maintained that the Man in the Iron Mask was the Duke of

Monmouth, a natural son of Charles II, who was found guilty of high treason and beheaded in London on the 15th July 1685.

This is what the English historian says:

“It was commonly reported in London that the Duke of Monmouth’s life had been saved, one of his adherents who bore a striking resemblance to the duke having consented to die in his stead, while the real culprit was secretly carried off to France, there to undergo a lifelong imprisonment.”

The great affection which the English felt for the Duke of Monmouth, and his own conviction that the people only needed a leader to induce them to shake off the yoke of James II, led him to undertake an enterprise which might possibly have succeeded had it been carried out with prudence. He landed at Lyme, in Dorset, with only one hundred and twenty men; six thousand soon gathered round his standard; a few towns declared in his favour; he caused himself to be proclaimed king, affirming that he was born in wedlock, and that he possessed the proofs of the secret marriage of Charles II and Lucy Waiters, his mother. He met the Royalists on the battlefield, and victory seemed to be on his side, when just at the decisive moment his ammunition ran short. Lord Gray, who commanded the cavalry, beat a cowardly retreat, the unfortunate Monmouth was taken prisoner, brought to London, and beheaded.

The details published in the ‘Siecle de Louis XIV’ as to the personal appearance of the masked prisoner might have been taken as a description of Monmouth, who possessed great physical beauty. Sainte-Foix had collected every scrap of evidence in favour of his solution of the mystery, making use even of the following passage from an anonymous romance called ‘The Loves of Charles II and James II, Kings of England’: —

“The night of the pretended execution of the Duke of Monmouth, the king, attended by three men, came to the Tower and summoned the duke to his presence. A kind of loose cowl was thrown over his head, and he was put into a carriage, into which the king and his attendants also got, and was driven away.”

Sainte-Foix also referred to the alleged visit of Saunders, confessor to James II, paid to the Duchess of Portsmouth after the death of that monarch, when the duchess took occasion to say that she could never forgive King James for consenting to Monmouth’s execution, in spite of the oath he had taken on the sacred elements at the deathbed of Charles II that he would never take his natural brother’s life, even in case of rebellion. To this the priest replied quickly, “The king kept his oath.”

Hume also records this solemn oath, but we cannot say that all the historians agree on this point. ‘The Universal History’ by Guthrie and Gray, and the ‘Histoire d’Angleterre’ by Rapin, Thoyras and de Barrow, do not mention it.

“Further,” wrote Sainte-Foix, “an English surgeon called Nelaton, who frequented the Cafe Procope, much affected by men of letters, often related that during the time he was senior apprentice to a surgeon who lived near the Porte Saint-Antoine, he was once taken to the Bastille to bleed a prisoner. He was conducted to this prisoner’s room by the governor himself, and found the patient suffering from violent headache. He spoke with an English accent, wore a gold-flowered dressing-gown of black and orange, and had his face covered by a napkin knotted behind his head.”

This story does not hold water: it would be difficult to form a mask out of a napkin; the Bastille had a resident surgeon of its own as well as a physician and apothecary; no one could gain access to a prisoner without a written order from a minister, even the Viaticum could only be introduced by the express permission of the lieutenant of police.

This theory met at first with no objections, and seemed to be going to oust all the others, thanks, perhaps, to the combative and restive character of its promulgator, who bore criticism badly, and whom no one cared to incense, his sword being even more redoubtable than his pen.

It was known that when Saint-Mars journeyed with his prisoner to the Bastille, they had put up on the way at Palteau, in Champagne, a property belonging to the governor. Freron therefore addressed himself to a grand-nephew of Saint-Mars, who had inherited this estate, asking if he could give him any information about this visit. The following reply appeared in the ‘Annee Litteraire (June 1768): —

“As it appears from the letter of M. de Sainte-Foix from which you quote that the Man in the Iron Mask still exercises the fancy of your journalists, I am willing to tell you all I know about the prisoner. He was known in the islands of Sainte-Marguerite and at the Bastille as ‘La Tour.’ The governor and all the other officials showed him great respect, and supplied him with everything he asked for that could be granted to a prisoner. He often took exercise in the yard of the prison, but never without his mask on. It was not till the ‘Siecle’ of M. de Voltaire appeared that I learned that the mask was of iron and furnished with springs; it may be that the circumstance was overlooked, but he never wore it except when taking the air, or when he had to appear before a stranger.

“M. de Blainvilliers, an infantry officer who was acquainted with M. de Saint-Mars both at Pignerol and Sainte-Marguerite, has often told me that the lot of ‘La Tour’ greatly excited his curiosity, and that he had once borrowed the clothes and arms of a soldier whose turn it was to be sentry on the terrace under the prisoner’s window at Sainte-Marguerite, and undertaken the duty himself; that he had seen the prisoner distinctly, without his mask; that his face was white, that he was tall and well proportioned, except that his ankles were too thick, and that his hair was white, although he appeared to be still in the prime of life. He passed the whole of the night in question pacing to and fro in his room. Blainvilliers added that he was always dressed in brown, that he had plenty of fine linen and books, that the governor and the other officers always stood uncovered in his presence till he gave them leave to cover and sit down, and that they often bore him company at table.

“In 1698 M. de Saint-Mars was promoted from the governorship of the Iles Sainte-Marguerite to that of the Bastille. In moving thither, accompanied by his prisoner, he made his estate of Palteau a halting-place. The masked man arrived in a litter which preceded that of M. de Saint-Mars, and several mounted men rode beside it. The peasants were assembled to greet their liege lord. M. de Saint-Mars dined with his prisoner, who sat with his back to the dining-room windows, which looked out on the court. None of the peasants whom I have questioned were able to see whether the man kept his mask on while eating, but they all noticed that M. de Saint-Mars, who sat opposite to his charge, laid two pistols beside his plate; that only one footman waited at table, who went into the antechamber to change the plates and dishes, always carefully closing the dining-room door behind him. When the prisoner crossed the courtyard his face was covered with a black mask, but the peasants could see his lips and teeth, and remarked that he was tall, and had white hair. M. de Saint-Mars slept in a bed placed beside the prisoner’s. M. de Blainvilliers told me also that ‘as soon as he was dead, which happened in 1704, he was buried at Saint-Paul’s,’ and that ‘the coffin was filled with substances which would rapidly consume the body.’ He added, ‘I never heard that the masked man spoke with an English accent.’“

Sainte-Foix proved the story related by M. de Blainvilliers to be little worthy of belief, showing by a circumstance mentioned in the letter that the imprisoned man could not be the Duc de Beaufort; witness the epigram of Madame de Choisy, “M. de Beaufort longs to bite and can’t,” whereas the peasants had seen the prisoner’s teeth through his mask. It appeared as if the theory of Sainte-Foix were going to stand, when a Jesuit father, named Griffet, who was confessor at the Bastille, devoted chapter xiii, of his ‘Traite des differentes Sortes de Preuves qui servent a etablir la Verite dans l’Histoire’ (12mo, Liege, 1769) to the consideration of the Iron Mask. He was the first to quote an authentic document which certifies that the Man in the Iron Mask about whom there was so much disputing really existed. This was the written journal of M. du Jonca, King’s Lieutenant in the Bastille in 1698, from which Pere Griffet took the following passage: —

“On Thursday, September the 8th, 1698, at three o’clock in the afternoon, M. de Saint-Mars, the new governor of the Bastille, entered upon his duties. He arrived from the islands of Sainte-Marguerite, bringing with him in a litter a prisoner whose name is a secret, and whom he had had under his charge there, and at Pignerol. This prisoner, who was always masked, was at first placed in the Bassiniere tower, where he remained until the evening. At nine o’clock p.m. I took him to the third room of the Bertaudiere tower, which I had had already furnished before his arrival with all needful articles, having received orders to do so from M. de Saint-Mars. While I was showing him the way to his room, I was accompanied by M. Rosarges, who had also arrived along with M. de Saint-Mars, and whose office it was to wait on the said prisoner, whose table is to be supplied by the governor.”

Du Jonca’s diary records the death of the prisoner in the following terms: —

“Monday, 19th November 1703. The unknown prisoner, who always wore a black velvet mask, and whom M. de Saint-Mars brought with him from the Iles Sainte-Marguerite, and whom he had so long in charge, felt slightly unwell yesterday on coming back from mass. He died to-day at 10 p.m. without having a serious illness, indeed it could not have been slighter. M. Guiraut, our chaplain, confessed him yesterday, but as his death was quite unexpected he did not receive the last sacraments, although the chaplain was able to exhort him up to the moment of his death. He was buried on Tuesday the 20th November at 4 P.M. in the burial-ground of St. Paul’s, our parish church. The funeral expenses amounted to 40 livres.”

His name and age were withheld from the priests of the parish. The entry made in the parish register, which Pere Griffet also gives, is in the following words: —

"On the 19th November 1703, Marchiali, aged about forty-five, died in the Bastille, whose body was buried in the graveyard of Saint-Paul's, his parish, on the 20th instant, in the presence of M. Rosarges and of M. Reilh, Surgeon-Major of the Bastille.

"(Signed) ROSARGES.

"REILH."

As soon as he was dead everything belonging to him, without exception, was burned; such as his linen, clothes, bed and bedding, rugs, chairs, and even the doors of the room he occupied. His service of plate was melted down, the walls of his room were scoured and whitewashed, the very floor was renewed, from fear of his having hidden a note under it, or left some mark by which he could be recognised.

Pere Griffet did not agree with the opinions of either Lagrange-Chancel or Sainte-Foix, but seemed to incline towards the theory set forth in the 'Memoires de Perse', against which no irrefutable objections had been advanced. He concluded by saying that before arriving at any decision as to who the prisoner really was, it would be necessary to ascertain the exact date of his arrival at Pignerol.

Sainte-Foix hastened to reply, upholding the soundness of the views he had advanced. He procured from Arras a copy of an entry in the registers of the Cathedral Chapter, stating that Louis XIV had written with his own hand to the said Chapter that they were to admit to burial the body of the Comte de Vermandois, who had died in the city of Courtrai; that he desired that the deceased should be interred in the centre of the choir, in the vault in which lay the remains of Elisabeth, Comtesse de Vermandois, wife of Philip of Alsace, Comte de Flanders, who had died in 1182. It is not to be supposed that Louis XIV would have chosen a family vault in which to bury a log of wood.

Sainte-Foix was, however, not acquainted with the letter of Barbezieux, dated the 13th August 1691, to which we have already referred, as a proof that the prisoner was not the Comte de Vermandois; it is equally a proof that he was not the Duke of Monmouth, as Sainte-Foix maintained; for sentence was passed on the Duke of Monmouth in 1685, so that it could not be of him either that Barbezieux wrote in 1691, “The prisoner whom you have had in charge for twenty years.”

In the very year in which Sainte-Foix began to flatter himself that his theory was successfully established, Baron Heiss brought a new one forward, in a letter dated “Phalsburg, 28th June 1770,” and addressed to the ‘Journal Enclycopedique’. It was accompanied by a letter translated from the Italian which appeared in the ‘Histoire Abregee de l’Europe’ by Jacques Bernard, published by Claude Jordan, Leyden, 1685-87, in detached sheets. This letter stated (August 1687, article ‘Mantoue’) that the Duke of Mantua being desirous to sell his capital, Casale, to the King of France, had been dissuaded therefrom by his secretary, and induced to join the other princes of Italy in their endeavours to thwart the ambitious schemes of Louis XVI. The Marquis d’Arcy, French ambassador to the court of Savoy, having been informed of the secretary’s influence, distinguished him by all kinds of civilities, asked him frequently to table, and at last invited him to join a large hunting party two or three leagues outside Turin. They set out together, but at a short distance from the city were surrounded by a dozen horsemen, who carried off the secretary, ‘disguised him, put a mask on him, and took him to Pignerol.’ He was not kept long in this fortress, as it was ‘too near the Italian frontier, and although he was carefully guarded it was feared that the walls would speak’; so he was transferred to the Iles Sainte-Marguerite, where he is at present in the custody of M. de Saint-Mars.

This theory, of which much was heard later, did not at first excite much attention. What is certain is that the Duke of Mantua’s secretary, by name Matthioli, was arrested in 1679 through the agency of Abbe d’Estrade and M. de Catinat, and taken with the utmost secrecy to Pignerol, where he was imprisoned and placed in charge of M. de Saint-Mars. He must not, however, be confounded with the Man in the Iron Mask.

Catinat says of Matthioli in a letter to Louvois “No one knows the name of this knave.”

Louvois writes to Saint-Mars: “I admire your patience in waiting for an order to treat such a rogue as he deserves, when he treats you with disrespect.”

Saint-Mars replies to the minister: “I have charged Blainvilliers to show him a cudgel and tell him that with its aid we can make the froward meek.”

Again Louvois writes: “The clothes of such people must be made to last three or four years.”

This cannot have been the nameless prisoner who was treated with such consideration, before whom Louvois stood bare-headed, who was supplied with fine linen and lace, and so on.

Altogether, we gather from the correspondence of Saint-Mars that the unhappy man alluded to above was confined along with a mad Jacobin, and at last became mad himself, and succumbed to his misery in 1686.

Voltaire, who was probably the first to supply such inexhaustible food for controversy, kept silence and took no part in the discussions. But when all the theories had been presented to the public, he set about refuting them. He made himself very merry, in the seventh edition of ‘Questions sur l’Encyclopedie distibuees en forme de Dictionnaire (Geneva, 1791), over the complaisance attributed to Louis XIV in acting as police-sergeant and gaoler for James II, William III, and Anne, with all of whom he was at war. Persisting still in taking 1661 or 1662 as the date when the incarceration of the masked prisoner began, he attacks the opinions advanced by Lagrange-Chancel and Pere Griffet, which they had drawn from the anonymous ‘Memoires secrets pour servir a l’Histoire de Perse’. “Having thus dissipated all these illusions,” he says, “let us now consider who the masked prisoner was, and how old he was when he died. It is evident that if he was never allowed to walk in the courtyard of the Bastille or to see a physician without his mask, it must have been lest his too striking resemblance to someone should be remarked; he could show his tongue but not his face. As regards his age, he himself told the apothecary at the Bastille, a few days before his death, that he thought he was about sixty; this I have often heard from a son-in-law to this apothecary, M. Marsoban, surgeon to Marshal Richelieu, and afterwards to the regent, the Duc d’Orleans. The writer of this article knows perhaps more on this subject than Pere Griffet. But he has said his say.”

This article in the ‘Questions on the Encyclopaedia’ was followed by some remarks from the pen of the publisher, which are also, however, attributed by the publishers of Kelh to Voltaire himself. The publisher, who sometimes calls himself the author, puts aside without refutation all the theories advanced, including that of Baron Heiss, and says he has come to the conclusion that the Iron Mask was, without doubt, a brother and an elder brother of Louis XIV, by a lover of the queen. Anne of Austria had come to persuade herself that hers alone was the fault which had deprived Louis XIII [the publisher of this edition overlooked the obvious typographical error of “XIV” here when he meant, and it only makes sense, that it was XIII. D.W.] of an heir, but the birth of the Iron Mask undeceived her. The cardinal, to whom she confided her secret, cleverly arranged to bring the king and queen, who had long lived apart, together again. A second son was the result of this reconciliation; and the first child being removed in secret, Louis XIV remained in ignorance of the existence of his half-brother till after his majority. It was the policy of Louis XIV to affect a great respect for the royal house, so he avoided much embarrassment to himself and a scandal affecting the memory of Anne of Austria by adopting the wise and just measure of burying alive the pledge of an adulterous love. He was thus enabled to avoid committing an act of cruelty, which a sovereign less conscientious and less magnanimous would have considered a necessity.

After this declaration Voltaire made no further reference to the Iron Mask. This last version of the story upset that of Sainte-Foix. Voltaire having been initiated into the state secret by the Marquis de Richelieu, we may be permitted to suspect that being naturally indiscreet he published the truth from behind the shelter of a pseudonym, or at least gave a version which approached the truth, but later on realising the dangerous significance of his words, he preserved for the future complete silence.

We now approach the question whether the prince who thus became the Iron Mask was an illegitimate brother or a twin-brother of Louis XIV. The first was maintained by M. Quentin-Crawfurd; the second by Abbe Soulavie in his ‘Memoires du Marechal Duc de Richelieu’ (London, 1790). In 1783 the Marquis de Luchet, in the ‘Journal des Gens du Monde’ (vol. iv. No. 23, p. 282, et seq.), awarded to Buckingham the honour of the paternity in dispute. In support of this, he quoted the testimony of a lady of the house of Saint-Quentin who had been a mistress of the minister Barbezieux, and who died at Chartres about the middle of the eighteenth century. She had declared publicly that Louis XIV had consigned his elder brother to perpetual imprisonment, and that the mask was necessitated by the close resemblance of the two brothers to each other.

The Duke of Buckingham, who came to France in 1625, in order to escort Henrietta Maria, sister of Louis XIII, to England, where she was to marry the Prince of Wales, made no secret of his ardent love for the queen, and it is almost certain that she was not insensible to his passion. An anonymous pamphlet, ‘La Conference du Cardinal Mazarin avec le Gazetier’ (Brussels, 1649), says that she was infatuated about him, and allowed him to visit her in her room. She even permitted him to take off and keep one of her gloves, and his vanity leading him to show his spoil, the king heard of it, and was vastly offended. An anecdote, the truth of which no one has ever denied, relates that one day Buckingham spoke to the queen with such passion in the presence of her lady-in-waiting, the Marquise de Senecey, that the latter exclaimed, “Be silent, sir, you cannot speak thus to the Queen of France!” According to this version, the Man in the Iron Mask must have been born at latest in 1637, but the mention of any such date would destroy the possibility of Buckingham’s paternity; for he was assassinated at Portsmouth on September 2nd, 1628.

After the taking of the Bastille the masked prisoner became the fashionable topic of discussion, and one heard of nothing else. On the 13th of August 1789 it was announced in an article in a journal called ‘Loisirs d’un Patriote francais’, which was afterwards published anonymously as a pamphlet, that the publisher had seen, among other documents found in the Bastille, a card bearing the unintelligible number “64389000,” and the following note: “Fouquet, arriving from Les Iles Sainte-Marguerite in an iron mask.” To this there was, it was said, a double signature, viz. “XXX,” superimposed on the name “Kersadion.” The journalist was of opinion that Fouquet had succeeded in making his escape, but had been retaken and condemned to pass for dead, and to wear a mask henceforward, as a punishment for his attempted evasion. This tale made some impression, for it was remembered that in the Supplement to the ‘Siecle de Louis XIV’ it was stated that Chamillart had said that “the Iron Mask was a man who knew all the secrets of M. Fouquet.” But the existence of this card was never proved, and we cannot accept the story on the unsupported word of an anonymous writer.

From the time that restrictions on the press were removed, hardly a day passed without the appearance of some new pamphlet on the Iron Mask. Louis Dutens, in ‘Correspondence interceptee’ (12mo, 1789), revived the theory of Baron Heiss, supporting it by new and curious facts. He proved that Louis XIV had really ordered one of the Duke of Mantua’s ministers to be carried off and imprisoned in Pignerol. Dutens gave the name of the victim as Girolamo Magni. He also quoted from a memorandum which by the wish of the Marquis de Castellane was drawn up by a certain Souchon, probably the man whom Papon questioned in 1778. This Souchon was the son of a man who had belonged to the Free Company maintained in the islands in the time of Saint-Mars, and was seventy-nine years old. This memorandum gives a detailed account of the abduction of a minister in 1679, who is styled a “minister of the Empire,” and his arrival as a masked prisoner at the islands, and states that he died there in captivity nine years after he was carried off.

Dutens thus divests the episode of the element of the marvellous with which Voltaire had surrounded it. He called to his aid the testimony of the Duc de Choiseul, who, having in vain attempted to worm the secret of the Iron Mask out of Louis XV, begged Madame de Pompadour to try her hand, and was told by her that the prisoner was the minister of an Italian prince. At the same time that Dutens wrote, “There is no fact in history better established than the fact that the Man in the Iron Mask was a minister of the Duke of Mantua who was carried off from Turin,” M. Quentin-Crawfurd was maintaining that the prisoner was a son of Anne of Austria; while a few years earlier Bouche, a lawyer, in his ‘Essai sur l’Histoire de Provence’ (2 vols. 4to, 1785), had regarded this story as a fable invented by Voltaire, and had convinced himself that the prisoner was a woman. As we see, discussion threw no light on the subject, and instead of being dissipated, the confusion became ever “worse confounded.”

In 1790 the ‘Memoires du Marechal de Richelieu’ appeared. He had left his note-books, his library, and his correspondence to Soulavie. The ‘Memoires’ are undoubtedly authentic, and have, if not certainty, at least a strong moral presumption in their favour, and gained the belief of men holding diverse opinions. But before placing under the eyes of our readers extracts from them relating to the Iron Mask, let us refresh our memory by recalling two theories which had not stood the test of thorough investigation.

According to some MS. notes left by M. de Bonac, French ambassador at Constantinople in 1724, the Armenian Patriarch Arwedicks, a mortal enemy of our Church and the instigator of the terrible persecutions to which the Roman Catholics were subjected, was carried off into exile at the request of the Jesuits by a French vessel, and confined in a prison whence there was no escape. This prison was the fortress of Sainte-Marguerite, and from there he was taken to the Bastille, where he died. The Turkish Government continually clamoured for his release till 1723, but the French Government persistently denied having taken any part in the abduction.

Even if it were not a matter of history that Arwedicks went over to the Roman Catholic Church and died a free man in Paris, as may be seen by an inspection of the certificate of his death preserved among the archives in the Foreign Office, one sentence from the note-book of M. de Bonac would be sufficient to annihilate this theory. M. de Bonac says that the Patriarch was carried off, while M. de Feriol, who succeeded M. de Chateauneuf in 1699, was ambassador at Constantinople. Now it was in 1698 that Saint-Mars arrived at the Bastille with his masked prisoner.

Several English scholars have sided with Gibbon in thinking that the Man in the Iron Mask might possibly have been Henry, the second son of Oliver Cromwell, who was held as a hostage by Louis XIV.

By an odd coincidence the second son of the Lord Protector does entirely disappear from the page of history in 1659; we know nothing of where he afterwards lived nor when he died. But why should he be a prisoner of state in France, while his elder brother Richard was permitted to live there quite openly? In the absence of all proof, we cannot attach the least importance to this explanation of the mystery.

We now come to the promised extracts from the ‘Memoires du Marechal de Richelieu’:

“Under the late king there was a time when every class of society was asking who the famous personage really was who went by the name of the Iron Mask, but I noticed that this curiosity abated somewhat after his arrival at the Bastille with Saint-Mars, when it began to be reported that orders had been given to kill him should he let his name be known. Saint-Mars also let it be understood that whoever found out the secret would share the same fate. This threat to murder both the prisoner and those who showed too much curiosity about him made such an impression, that during the lifetime of the late king people only spoke of the mystery below their breath. The anonymous author of ‘Les Memoires de Perse’, which were published in Holland fifteen years after the death of Louis XIV, was the first who dared to speak publicly of the prisoner and relate some anecdotes about him.

“Since the publication of that work, liberty of speech and the freedom of the press have made great strides, and the shade of Louis XIV having lost its terrors, the case of the Iron Mask is freely discussed, and yet even now, at the end of my life and seventy years after the death of the king, people are still asking who the Man in the Iron Mask really was.

“This question was one I put to the adorable princess, beloved of the regent, who inspired in return only aversion and respect, all her love being given to me. As everyone was persuaded that the regent knew the name, the course of life, and the cause of the imprisonment of the masked prisoner, I, being more venturesome in my curiosity than others, tried through my princess to fathom the secret. She had hitherto constantly repulsed the advances of the Duc d’ Orleans, but as the ardour of his passion was thereby in no wise abated, the least glimpse of hope would be sufficient to induce him to grant her everything she asked; I persuaded her, therefore, to let him understand that if he would allow her to read the ‘Memoires du Masque’ which were in his possession his dearest desires would be fulfilled.

“The Duc d’Orleans had never been known to reveal any secret of state, being unspeakably circumspect, and having been trained to keep every confidence inviolable by his preceptor Dubois, so I felt quite certain that even the princess would fail in her efforts to get a sight of the memoranda in his possession relative to the birth and rank of the masked prisoner; but what cannot love, and such an ardent love, induce a man to do?

“To reward her goodness the regent gave the documents into her hands, and she forwarded them to me next day, enclosed in a note written in cipher, which, according to the laws of historical writing, I reproduce in its entirety, vouching for its authenticity; for the princess always employed a cipher when she used the language of gallantry, and this note told me what treaty she had had to sign in order that she might obtain the documents, and the duke the desire of his heart. The details are not admissible in serious history, but, borrowing the modest language of the patriarchal time, I may say that if Jacob, before he obtained possession of the best beloved of Laban’s daughters, was obliged to pay the price twice over, the regent drove a better bargain than the patriarch. The note and the memorandum were as follows: “‘2. 1. 17. 12. 9. 2. 20. 2. 1. 7. 14 20. 10. 3. 21. 1. 11. 14. 1. 15. 16. 12. 17. 14. 2. 1. 21. 11. 20. 17. 12. 9. 14. 9. 2. 8. 20. 5. 20. 2. 2. 17. 8. 1. 2. 20. 9. 21. 21. 1. 5. 12. 17. 15. 00. 14. 1. 15. 14. 12. 9. 21. 5. 12. 9. 21. 16. 20. 14. 8. 3.

“‘NARRATIVE OF THE BIRTH AND EDUCATION OF THE UNFORTUNATE PRINCE WHO WAS SEPARATED FROM THE WORLD BY CARDINALS RICHELIEU AND MAZARIN AND IMPRISONED BY ORDER OF LOUIS XIV.

"'Drawn up by the Governor of this Prince on his deathbed.

"'The unfortunate prince whom I brought up and had in charge till almost the end of my life was born on the 5th September 1638 at 8.30 o'clock in the evening, while the king was at supper. His brother, who is now on the throne, was born at noon while the king was at dinner, but whereas his birth was splendid and public, that of his brother was sad and secret; for the king being informed by the midwife that the queen was about to give birth to a second child, ordered the chancellor, the midwife, the chief almoner, the queen's confessor, and myself to stay in her room to be witnesses of whatever happened, and of his course of action should a second child be born.

"'For a long time already it had been foretold to the king that his wife would give birth to two sons, and some days before, certain shepherds had arrived in Paris, saying they were divinely inspired, so that it was said in Paris that if two dauphins were born it would be the greatest misfortune which could happen to the State. The Archbishop of Paris summoned these soothsayers before him, and ordered them to be imprisoned in Saint-Lazare, because the populace was becoming excited about them — a circumstance which filled the king with care, as he foresaw much trouble to his kingdom. What had been predicted by the soothsayers happened, whether they had really been warned by the constellations, or whether Providence by whom His Majesty had been warned of the calamities which might happen to France interposed. The king had sent a messenger to the cardinal to tell him of this prophecy, and the cardinal had replied that the matter, must be considered, that the birth of two dauphins was not impossible, and should such a case arrive, the second must be carefully hidden away, lest in the future desiring to be king he should fight against his brother in support of a new branch of the royal house, and come at last to reign.

"'The king in his suspense felt very uncomfortable, and as the queen began to utter cries we feared a second confinement. We sent to inform the king, who was almost overcome by the thought that he was about to become the father of two dauphins. He said to the Bishop of Meaux, whom he had sent for to minister to the queen, "Do not quit my wife till she is safe; I am in mortal terror." Immediately after he summoned us all, the Bishop of Meaux, the chancellor M. Honorat, Dame Peronete the midwife, and myself, and said to us in presence of the queen, so that she could hear, that we would answer to him with our heads if we made known the birth of a second dauphin; that it was his will that the fact should remain a state secret, to prevent the misfortunes which would else happen, the Salic Law not having declared to whom the inheritance of the kingdom should come in case two eldest sons were born to any of the kings.

"'What had been foretold happened: the queen, while the king was at supper, gave birth to a second dauphin, more dainty and more beautiful than the first, but who wept and wailed unceasingly, as if he regretted to take up that life in which he was afterwards to endure such suffering. The chancellor drew up the report of this wonderful birth, without parallel in our history; but His Majesty not being pleased with its form, burned it in our presence, and the chancellor had to write and rewrite till His Majesty was satisfied. The almoner remonstrated, saying it would be impossible to hide the birth of a prince, but the king returned that he had reasons of state for all he did.

"'Afterwards the king made us register our oath, the chancellor signing it first, then the queen's confessor, and I last. The oath was also signed by the surgeon and midwife who attended on the queen, and the king attached this document to the report, taking both away with him, and I never heard any more of either. I remember that His Majesty consulted with the chancellor as to the form of the oath, and that he spoke for a long time in an undertone to the cardinal: after which the last-born child was given into the charge of the midwife, and as they were always afraid she would babble about his birth, she has told me that they often threatened her with death should she ever mention it: we were also forbidden to speak, even to each other, of the child whose birth we had witnessed.

"'Not one of us has as yet violated his oath; for His Majesty dreaded nothing so much as a civil war brought about by the two children born together, and the cardinal, who afterwards got the care of the second child into his hands, kept that fear alive. The king also commanded us to examine the unfortunate prince minutely; he had a wart above the left elbow, a mole on the right side of his neck, and a tiny wart on his right thigh; for His Majesty was determined, and rightly so, that in case of the decease of the first-born, the royal infant whom he was entrusting to our care should take his place; wherefore he required our signmanual to the report of the birth, to which a small royal seal was attached in our presence, and we all signed it after His Majesty, according as he commanded. As to the shepherds who had foretold the double birth, never did I hear another word of them, but neither did I inquire. The cardinal who took the mysterious infant in charge probably got them out of the country.

"'All through the infancy of the second prince Dame Peronete treated him as if he were her own child, giving out that his father was a great nobleman; for everyone saw by the care she lavished on him and the expense she went to, that although unacknowledged he was the cherished son of rich parents, and well cared for.

"'When the prince began to grow up, Cardinal Mazarin, who succeeded Cardinal Richelieu in the charge of the prince's education, gave him into my hands to bring up in a manner worthy of a king's son, but in secret. Dame Peronete continued in his service till her death, and was very much attached to him, and he still more to her. The prince was instructed in my house in Burgundy, with all the care due to the son and brother of a king.

"'I had several conversations with the queen mother during the troubles in France, and Her Majesty always seemed to fear that if the existence of the prince should be discovered during the lifetime of his brother, the young king, malcontents would make it a pretext for rebellion, because many medical men hold that the last-born of twins is in reality the elder, and if so, he was king by right, while many others have a different opinion.

"'In spite of this dread, the queen could never bring herself to destroy the written evidence of his birth, because in case of the death of the young king she intended to have his twin-brother proclaimed. She told me often that the written proofs were in her strong box.

"'I gave the ill-starred prince such an education as I should have liked to receive myself, and no acknowledged son of a king ever had a better. The only thing for which I have to reproach myself is that, without intending it, I caused him great unhappiness; for when he was nineteen years old he had a burning desire to know who he was, and as he saw that I was determined to be silent, growing more firm the more he tormented me with questions, he made up his mind henceforward to disguise his curiosity and to make me think that he believed himself a love-child of my own. He began to call me 'father,' although when we were alone I often assured him that he was mistaken; but at length I gave up combating this belief, which he perhaps only feigned to make me speak, and allowed him to think he was my son, contradicting him no more; but while he continued to dwell on this subject he was meantime making every effort to find out who he really was. Two years passed thus, when, through an unfortunate piece of forgetfulness on my part, for which I greatly blame myself, he became acquainted with the truth. He knew that the king had lately sent me several messengers, and once having carelessly forgotten to lock up a casket containing letters from the queen and the cardinals, he read part and divined the rest through his natural intelligence; and later confessed to me that he had carried off the letter which told most explicitly of his birth.

"'I can recall that from this time on, his manner to me showed no longer that respect for me in which I had brought him up, but became hectoring and rude, and that I could not imagine the reason of the change, for I never found out that he had searched my papers, and he never revealed to me how he got at the casket, whether he was aided by some workmen whom he did not wish to betray, or had employed other means.

"'One day, however, he unguardedly asked me to show him the portraits of the late and the present king. I answered that those that existed were so poor that I was waiting till better ones were taken before having them in my house.

"'This answer, which did not satisfy him, called forth the request to be allowed to go to Dijon. I found out afterwards that he wanted to see a portrait of the king which was there, and to get to the court, which was just then at Saint-Jean-de-Luz, because of the approaching marriage with the infanta; so that he might compare himself with his brother and see if there were any resemblance between them. Having knowledge of his plan, I never let him out of my sight.

"'The young prince was at this time as beautiful as Cupid, and through the intervention of Cupid himself he succeeded in getting hold of a portrait of his brother. One of the upper servants of the house, a young girl, had taken his fancy, and he lavished such caresses on her and inspired her with so much love, that although the whole household was strictly forbidden to give him anything without my permission, she procured him a portrait of the king. The unhappy prince saw the likeness at once, indeed no one could help seeing it, for the one portrait would serve equally well for either brother, and the sight produced such a fit of fury that he came to me crying out, "There is my brother, and this tells me who I am!" holding out a letter from Cardinal Mazarin which he had stolen from me, and making a great commotion in my house.

"'The dread lest the prince should escape and succeed in appearing at the marriage of his brother made me so uneasy, that I sent off a messenger to the king to tell him that my casket had been opened, and asking for instructions. The king sent back word through the cardinal that we were both to be shut up till further orders, and that the prince was to be made to understand that the cause of our common misfortune was his absurd claim. I have since shared his prison, but I believe that a decree of release has arrived from my heavenly judge, and for my soul's health and for my ward's sake I make this declaration, that he may know what measures to take in order to put an end to his ignominious estate should the king die without children. Can any oath imposed under threats oblige one to be silent about such incredible events, which it is nevertheless necessary that posterity should know?'"

Such were the contents of the historical document given by the regent to the princess, and it suggests a crowd of questions. Who was the prince's governor? Was he a Burgundian? Was he simply a landed proprietor, with some property and a country house in Burgundy? How far was his estate from Dijon? He must have been a man of note, for he enjoyed the most intimate confidence at the court of Louis XIII, either by virtue of his office or because he was a favourite of the king, the queen, and Cardinal Richelieu. Can we learn from the list of the nobles of Burgundy what member of their body disappeared from public life along with a young ward whom he had brought up in his own house just after the marriage of Louis XIV? Why did he not attach his signature to the declaration, which appears to be a hundred years old? Did he dictate it when so near death that he had not strength to sign it? How did it find its way out of prison? And so forth.

There is no answer to all these questions, and I, for my part, cannot undertake to affirm that the document is genuine. Abbe Soulavie relates that he one day "pressed the marshal for an answer to some questions on the matter, asking, amongst other things, if it were not true that the prisoner was an elder brother of Louis XIV born without the knowledge of Louis XIII. The marshal appeared very much embarrassed, and although he did not entirely refuse to answer, what he said was not very explanatory. He averred that this important personage was neither the illegitimate brother of Louis XIV, nor the Duke of Monmouth, nor the Comte de Vermandois, nor the Duc de Beaufort, and so on, as so many writers had asserted." He called all their writings mere inventions, but added that almost every one of them had got hold of some true incidents, as for instance the order to kill the prisoner should he make himself known. Finally he acknowledged that he knew the state secret, and used the following words: “All that I can tell you, abbe, is, that when the prisoner died at the beginning of the century, at a very advanced age, he had ceased to be of such importance as when, at the beginning of his reign, Louis XIV shut him up for weighty reasons of state.”

The above was written down under the eyes of the marshal, and when Abbe Soulavie entreated him to say something further which, while not actually revealing the secret, would yet satisfy his questioner’s curiosity, the marshal answered, “Read M. de Voltaire’s latest writings on the subject, especially his concluding words, and reflect on them.”

With the exception of Dulaure, all the critics have treated Soulavie’s narrative with the most profound contempt, and we must confess that if it was an invention it was a monstrous one, and that the concoction of the famous note in cipher was abominable. “Such was the great secret; in order to find it out, I had to allow myself 5, 12, 17, 15, 14, 1, three times by 8, 3.” But unfortunately for those who would defend the morals of Mademoiselle de Valois, it would be difficult to traduce the character of herself, her lover, and her father, for what one knows of the trio justifies one in believing that the more infamous the conduct imputed to them, the more likely it is to be true. We cannot see the force of the objection that Louvois would not have written in the following terms to Saint-Mars in 1687 about a bastard son of Anne of Austria: “I see no objection to your removing Chevalier de Thezut from the prison in which he is confined, and putting your prisoner there till the one you are preparing for him is ready to receive him.” And we cannot understand those who ask if Saint-Mars, following the example of the minister, would have said of a prince “Until he is installed in the prison which is being prepared for him here, which has a chapel adjoining”? Why should he have expressed himself otherwise? Does it evidence an abatement of consideration to call a prisoner a prisoner, and his prison a prison?

A certain M. de Saint-Mihiel published an 8vo volume in 1791, at Strasbourg and Paris, entitled ‘Le veritable homme, dit au MASQUE DE FER, ouvrage dans lequel on fait connaitre, sur preuves incontestables, a qui le celebre infortune dut le jour, quand et ou il naquit’. The wording of the title will give an idea of the bizarre and barbarous jargon in which the whole book is written. It would be difficult to imagine the vanity and self-satisfaction which inspire this new reader of riddles. If he had found the philosopher’s stone, or made a discovery which would transform the world, he could not exhibit more pride and pleasure. All things considered, the “incontestable proofs” of his theory do not decide the question definitely, or place it above all attempts at refutation, any more than does the evidence on which the other theories which preceded and followed his rest. But what he lacks before all other things is the talent for arranging and using his materials. With the most ordinary skill he might have evolved a theory which would have defied criticism at least as successfully, as the others, and he might have supported it by proofs, which if not incontestable (for no one has produced such), had at least moral presumption in their favour, which has great weight in such a mysterious and obscure affair, in trying to explain, which one can never leave on one side, the respect shown by Louvois to the prisoner, to whom he always spoke standing and with uncovered head.

According to M. de Saint-Mihiel, the ‘Man in the Iron Mask was a legitimate son of Anne of Austria and Mazarin’.

He avers that Mazarin was only a deacon, and not a priest, when he became cardinal, having never taken priest’s orders, according to the testimony of the Princess Palatine, consort of Philip I, Duc d’Orleans, and that it was therefore possible for him to marry, and that he did marry, Anne of Austria in secret.

“Old Madame Beauvais, principal woman of the bed-chamber to the queen mother, knew of this ridiculous marriage, and as the price of her secrecy obliged the queen to comply with all her whims. To this circumstance the principal bed-chamber women owe the extensive privileges accorded them ever since in this country” (Letter of the Duchesse d’Orleans, 13th September 1713).

“The queen mother, consort of Louis XIII, had done worse than simply to fall in love with Mazarin, she had married him, for he had never been an ordained priest, he had only taken deacon’s orders. If he had been a priest his marriage would have been impossible. He grew terribly tired of the good queen mother, and did not live happily with her, which was only what he deserved for making such a marriage” (Letter of the Duchesse d’Orleans, 2nd November 1717).

“She (the queen mother) was quite easy in her conscience about Cardinal Mazarin; he was not in priest’s orders, and so could marry. The secret passage by which he reached the queen’s rooms every evening still exists in the Palais Royal” (Letter of the Duchesse d’Orleans, 2nd July 1719)

“The queen’s, manner of conducting affairs is influenced by the passion which dominates her. When she and the cardinal converse together, their ardent love for each other is betrayed by their looks and gestures; it is plain to see that when obliged to part for a time they do it with great reluctance. If what people say is true, that they are properly married, and that their union has been blessed by Pere Vincent the missioner, there is no harm in all that goes on between them, either in public or in private” (‘Requete civile contre la Conclusion de la Paix, 1649).

The Man in the Iron Mask told the apothecary in the Bastille that he thought he was about sixty years of age (‘Questions sur d’Encyclopedie’). Thus he must have been born in 1644, just at the time when Anne of Austria was invested with the royal power, though it was really exercised by Mazarin.

Can we find any incident recorded in history which lends support to the supposition that Anne of Austria had a son whose birth was kept as secret as her marriage to Mazarin?

“In 1644, Anne of Austria being dissatisfied with her apartments in the Louvre, moved to the Palais Royal, which had been left to the king by Richelieu. Shortly after taking up residence there she was very ill with a severe attack of jaundice, which was caused, in the opinion of the doctors, by worry, anxiety, and overwork, and which pulled her down greatly” (‘Memoire de Madame de Motteville, 4 vols. 12mo, Vol i. p. 194).

“This anxiety, caused by the pressure of public business, was most probably only dwelt on as a pretext for a pretended attack of illness. Anne of Austria had no cause for worry and anxiety till 1649. She did not begin to complain of the despotism of Mazarin till towards the end of 1645” (Ibid., viol. i. pp. 272, 273).

“She went frequently to the theatre during her first year of widowhood, but took care to hide herself from view in her box.” (Ibid., vol. i. p. 342).

Abbe Soulavie, in vol. vi. of the ‘Memoires de Richelieu’, published in 1793, controverted the opinions of M. de Saint-Mihiel, and again advanced those which he had published some time before, supporting them by a new array of reasons.

The fruitlessness of research in the archives of the Bastille, and the importance of the political events which were happening, diverted the attention of the public for some years from this subject. In the year 1800, however, the ‘Magazin encyclopedique’ published (vol. vi. p. 472) an article entitled ‘Memoires sur les Problemes historiques, et la methode de les resoudre appliquee a celui qui concerne l’Homme au Masque de Fer’, signed C. D. O., in which the author maintained that the prisoner was the first minister of the Duke of Mantua, and says his name was Girolamo Magni.

In the same year an octavo volume of 142 pages was produced by M. Roux-Fazillac. It bore the title ‘Recherches historiques et critiques sur l’Homme au Masque de Fer, d’ou resultent des Notions certaines sur ce prisonnier’. These researches brought to light a secret correspondence relative to certain negotiations and intrigues, and to the abduction of a secretary of the Duke of Mantua whose name was Matthioli, and not Girolamo Magni.

In 1802 an octavo pamphlet containing 11 pages, of which the author was perhaps Baron Lerviere, but which was signed Reth, was published. It took the form of a letter to General Jourdan, and was dated from Turin, and gave many details about Matthioli and his family. It was entitled ‘Veritable Clef de l’Histoire de l’Homme au Masque de Fer’. It proved that the secretary of the Duke of Mantua was carried off, masked, and imprisoned, by order of Louis XIV in 1679, but it did not succeed in establishing as an undoubted fact that the secretary and the Man in the Iron Mask were one and the same person.

It may be remembered that M. Crawfurd writing in 1798 had said in his ‘Histoire de la Bastille’ (8vo, 474 pages), “I cannot doubt that the Man in the Iron Mask was the son of Anne of Austria, but am unable to decide whether he was a twin-brother of Louis XIV or was born while the king and queen lived apart, or during her widowhood.” M. Crawfurd, in his ‘Melanges d’Histoire et de Litterature tires dun Portefeuille’ (quarto 1809, octavo 1817), demolished the theory advanced by Roux-Fazillac.

In 1825, M. Delort discovered in the archives several letters relating to Matthioli, and published his Histoire de l’Homme au Masque de Fer (8vo). This work was translated into English by George Agar-Ellis, and retranslated into French in 1830, under the title ‘Histoire authentique du Prisonnier d’Etat, connu sons le Nom de Masque de Fer’. It is in this work that the suggestion is made that the captive was the second son of Oliver Cromwell.

In 1826, M. de Taules wrote that, in his opinion, the masked prisoner was none other than the Armenian Patriarch. But six years later the great success of my drama at the Odeon converted nearly everyone to the version of which Soulavie was the chief exponent. The bibliophile Jacob is mistaken in asserting that I followed a tradition preserved in the family of the Duc de Choiseul; M. le Duc de Bassano sent me a copy made under his personal supervision of a document drawn up for Napoleon, containing the results of some researches made by his orders on the subject of the Man in the Iron Mask. The original MS., as well as that of the Memoires du Duc de Richelieu, were, the duke told me, kept at the Foreign Office. In 1834 the journal of the Institut historique published a letter from M. Auguste Billiard, who stated that he had also made a copy of this document for the late Comte de Montalivet, Home Secretary under the Empire.

M Dufey (de l'Yonne) gave his 'Histoire de la Bastille' to the world in the same year, and was inclined to believe that the prisoner was a son of Buckingham.

Besides the many important personages on whom the famous mask had been placed, there was one whom everyone had forgotten, although his name had been put forward by the minister Chamillart: this was the celebrated Superintendent of Finance, Nicolas Fouquet. In 1837, Jacob, armed with documents and extracts, once more occupied himself with this Chinese puzzle on which so much ingenuity had been lavished, but of which no one had as yet got all the pieces into their places. Let us see if he succeeded better than his forerunners.

The first feeling he awakes is one of surprise. It seems odd that he should again bring up the case of Fouquet, who was condemned to imprisonment for life in 1664, confined in Pignerol under the care of Saint-Mars, and whose death was announced (falsely according to Jacob) on March 23rd, 1680. The first thing to look for in trying to get at the true history of the Mask is a sufficient reason of state to account for the persistent concealment of the prisoner's features till his death; and next, an explanation of the respect shown him by Louvois, whose attitude towards him would have been extraordinary in any age, but was doubly so during the reign of Louis XIV, whose courtiers would have been the last persons in the world to render homage to the misfortunes of a man in disgrace with their master. Whatever the real motive of the king's anger against Fouquet may have been, whether Louis thought he arrogated to himself too much power, or aspired to rival his master in the hearts of some of the king's mistresses, or even presumed to raise his eyes higher still, was not the utter ruin, the lifelong captivity, of his enemy enough to satiate the vengeance of the king? What could he desire more? Why should his anger, which seemed slaked in 1664, burst forth into hotter flames seventeen years later, and lead him to inflict a new punishment? According to the bibliophile, the king being wearied by the continual petitions for pardon addressed to him by the superintendent's family, ordered them to be told that he was dead, to rid himself of their supplications. Colbert's hatred, says he, was the immediate cause of Fouquet's fall; but even if this hatred hastened the catastrophe, are we to suppose that it pursued the delinquent beyond the sentence, through the long years of captivity, and, renewing its energy, infected the minds of the king and his councillors? If that were so, how shall we explain the respect shown by Louvois? Colbert would not have stood uncovered before Fouquet in prison. Why should Colbert's colleague have done so?

It must, however, be confessed that of all existing theories, this one, thanks to the unlimited learning and research of the bibliophile, has the greatest number of documents with the various interpretations thereof, the greatest profusion of dates, on its side.

For it is certain —

1st, that the precautions taken when Fouquet was sent to Pignerol resembled in every respect those employed later by the custodians of the Iron Mask, both at the Iles Sainte-Marguerite and at the Bastille;

2nd, that the majority of the traditions relative to the masked prisoner might apply to Fouquet;

3rd, that the Iron Mask was first heard of immediately after the announcement of the death of Fouquet in 1680;

4th, that there exists no irrefragable proof that Fouquet's death really occurred in the above year.

The decree of the Court of justice, dated 20th December 1664, banished Fouquet from the kingdom for life. "But the king was of the opinion that it would be dangerous to let the said Fouquet leave the country, in consideration of his intimate knowledge of the most important matters of state. Consequently the sentence of perpetual banishment was commuted into that of perpetual imprisonment." ('Receuil des defenses de M. Fouquet'). The instructions signed by the king and remitted to Saint-Mars forbid him to permit Fouquet to hold any spoken or written communication with anyone whatsoever, or to leave his apartments for any cause, not even for exercise. The great mistrust felt by Louvois pervades all his letters to

Saint-Mars. The precautions which he ordered to be kept up were quite as stringent as in the case of the Iron Mask.

The report of the discovery of a shirt covered with writing, by a friar, which Abbe Papon mentions, may perhaps be traced to the following extracts from two letters written by Louvois to Saint-Mars: “Your letter has come to hand with the new handkerchief on which M. Fouquet has written” (18th Dec. 1665); “You can tell him that if he continues too employ his table-linen as note-paper he must not be surprised if you refuse to supply him with any more” (21st Nov. 1667).

Pere Papon asserts that a valet who served the masked prisoner died in his master’s room. Now the man who waited on Fouquet, and who like him was sentenced to lifelong imprisonment, died in February 1680 (see letter of Louvois to Saint-Mars, 12th March 1680). Echoes of incidents which took place at Pignerol might have reached the Iles Sainte-Marguerite when Saint-Mars transferred his “former prisoner” from one fortress to the other. The fine clothes and linen, the books, all those luxuries in fact that were lavished on the masked prisoner, were not withheld from Fouquet. The furniture of a second room at Pignerol cost over 1200 livres (see letters of Louvois, 12th Dec. 1665, and 22nd Feb, 1666).

It is also known that until the year 1680 Saint-Mars had only two important prisoners at Pignerol, Fouquet and Lauzun. However, his “former prisoner of Pignerol,” according to Du Junca’s diary, must have reached the latter fortress before the end of August 1681, when Saint-Mars went to Exilles as governor. So that it was in the interval between the 23rd March 1680, the alleged date of Fouquet’s death, and the 1st September 1681, that the Iron Mask appeared at Pignerol, and yet Saint-Mars took only two prisoners to Exilles. One of these was probably the Man in the Iron Mask; the other, who must have been Matthioli, died before the year 1687, for when Saint-Mars took over the governorship in the month of January of that year of the Iles Sainte-Marguerite he brought only ONE prisoner thither with him. “I have taken such good measures to guard my prisoner that I can answer to you for his safety” (‘Lettres de Saint-Mars a Louvois’, 20th January 1687).

In the correspondence of Louvois with Saint-Mars we find, it is true, mention of the death of Fouquet on March 23rd, 1680, but in his later correspondence Louvois never says “the late M. Fouquet,” but speaks of him, as usual, as “M. Fouquet” simply. Most historians have given as a fact that Fouquet was interred in the same vault as his father in the chapel of Saint-Francois de Sales in the convent church belonging to the Sisters of the Order of the Visitation-Sainte-Marie, founded in the beginning of the seventeenth century by Madame de Chantal. But proof to the contrary exists; for the subterranean portion of St. Francis's chapel was closed in 1786, the last person interred there being Adelaide Felicite Brulard, with whom ended the house of Sillery. The convent was shut up in 1790, and the church given over to the Protestants in 1802; who continued to respect the tombs. In 1836 the Cathedral chapter of Bourges claimed the remains of one of their archbishops buried there in the time of the Sisters of Sainte-Marie. On this occasion all the coffins were examined and all the inscriptions carefully copied, but the name of Nicolas Fouquet is absent.

Voltaire says in his 'Dictionnaire philosophique', article "Ana," "It is most remarkable that no one knows where the celebrated Fouquet was buried."

But in spite of all these coincidences, this carefully constructed theory was wrecked on the same point on which the theory that the prisoner was either the Duke of Monmouth or the Comte de Vermandois came to grief, viz. a letter from Barbezieux, dated 13th August 1691, in which occur the words, "THE PRISONER WHOM YOU HAVE HAD IN CHARGE FOR TWENTY YEARS." According to this testimony, which Jacob had successfully used against his predecessors, the prisoner referred to could not have been Fouquet, who completed his twenty-seventh year of captivity in 1691, if still alive.

We have now impartially set before our readers all the opinions which have been held in regard to the solution of this formidable enigma. For ourselves, we hold the belief that the Man in the Iron Mask stood on the steps of the throne. Although the mystery cannot be said to be definitely cleared up, one thing stands out firmly established among the mass of conjecture we have collected together, and that is, that wherever the prisoner appeared he was ordered to wear a mask on pain of death. His features, therefore, might during half a century have brought about his recognition from one end of France to the other; consequently, during the same space of time there existed in France a face resembling the prisoner's known through all her provinces, even to her most secluded isle.

Whose face could this be, if not that of Louis XVI, twin-brother of the Man in the Iron Mask?

To nullify this simple and natural conclusion strong evidence will be required.

Our task has been limited to that of an examining judge at a trial, and we feel sure that our readers will not be sorry that we have left them to choose amid all the conflicting explanations of the puzzle. No consistent narrative that we might have concocted would, it seems to us, have been half as interesting to them as to allow them to follow the devious paths opened up by those who entered on the search for the heart of the mystery. Everything connected with the masked prisoner arouses the most vivid curiosity. And what end had we in view? Was it not to denounce a crime and to brand the perpetrator thereof? The facts as they stand are sufficient for our object, and speak more eloquently than if used to adorn a tale or to prove an ingenious theory.

MARTIN GUERRE

We are sometimes astonished at the striking resemblance existing between two persons who are absolute strangers to each other, but in fact it is the opposite which ought to surprise us. Indeed, why should we not rather admire a Creative Power so infinite in its variety that it never ceases to produce entirely different combinations with precisely the same elements? The more one considers this prodigious versatility of form, the more overwhelming it appears.

To begin with, each nation has its own distinct and characteristic type, separating it from other races of men. Thus there are the English, Spanish, German, or Slavonic types; again, in each nation we find families distinguished from each other by less general but still well-pronounced features; and lastly, the individuals of each family, differing again in more or less marked gradations. What a multitude of physiognomies! What variety of impression from the innumerable stamps of the human countenance! What millions of models and no copies! Considering this ever changing spectacle, which ought to inspire us with most astonishment — the perpetual difference of faces or the accidental resemblance of a few individuals? Is it impossible that in the whole wide world there should be found by chance two people whose features are cast in one and the same mould? Certainly not; therefore that which ought to surprise us is not that these duplicates exist here and there upon the earth, but that they are to be met with in the same place, and appear together before our eyes, little accustomed to see such resemblances. From Amphitryon down to our own days, many fables have owed their origin to this fact, and history also has provided a few examples, such as the false Demetrius in Russia, the English Perkin Warbeck, and several other celebrated impostors, whilst the story we now present to our readers is no less curious and strange.

On the 10th of, August 1557, an inauspicious day in the history of France, the roar of cannon was still heard at six in the evening in the plains of St. Quentin; where the French army had just been destroyed by the united troops of England and Spain, commanded by the famous Captain Emanuel Philibert, Duke of Savoy. An utterly beaten infantry, the Constable Montmorency and several generals taken prisoner, the Duke d’Enghien mortally wounded, the flower of the nobility cut down like grass, — such were the terrible results of a battle which plunged France into mourning, and which would have been a blot on the reign of Henry II, had not the Duke of Guise obtained a brilliant revenge the following year.

In a little village less than a mile from the field of battle were to be heard the groans of the wounded and dying, who had been carried thither from the field of battle. The inhabitants had given up their houses to be used as hospitals, and two or three barber surgeons went hither and thither, hastily ordering operations which they left to their assistants, and driving out fugitives who had contrived to accompany the wounded under pretence of assisting friends or near relations. They had already expelled a good number of these poor fellows, when, opening the door of a small room, they found a soldier soaked in blood lying on a rough mat, and another soldier apparently attending on him with the utmost care.

“Who are you?” said one of the surgeons to the sufferer. “I don’t think you belong to our French troops.”

“Help!” cried the soldier, “only help me! and may God bless you for it!”

“From the colour of that tunic,” remarked the other surgeon, “I should wager the rascal belongs to some Spanish gentleman. By what blunder was he brought here?”

“For pity’s sake!” murmured the poor fellow, “I am in such pain.”

“Die, wretch!” responded the last speaker, pushing him with his foot. “Die, like the dog you are!”

But this brutality, answered as it was by an agonised groan, disgusted the other surgeon.

“After all, he is a man, and a wounded man who implores help. Leave him to me, Rene.”

Rene went out grumbling, and the one who remained proceeded to examine the wound. A terrible arquebus-shot had passed through the leg, shattering the bone: amputation was absolutely necessary.

Before proceeding to the operation, the surgeon turned to the other soldier, who had retired into the darkest corner of the room.

“And you, who may you be?” he asked.

The man replied by coming forward into the light: no other answer was needed. He resembled his companion so closely that no one could doubt they were brothers-twin brothers, probably. Both were above middle height; both had olive-brown complexions, black eyes, hooked noses, pointed chins, a slightly projecting lower lip; both were round-shouldered, though this defect did not amount to disfigurement: the whole personality suggested strength, and was not destitute of masculine beauty. So strong a likeness is hardly ever seen; even their ages appeared to agree, for one would not have supposed either to be more than thirty-two; and the only difference noticeable, besides the pale countenance of the wounded man, was that he was thin as compared with the moderate fleshiness of the other, also that he had a large scar over the right eyebrow.

"Look well after your brother's soul," said the surgeon to the soldier, who remained standing; "if it is in no better case than his body, it is much to be pitied."

"Is there no hope?" inquired the Sosia of the wounded man.

"The wound is too large and too deep," replied the man of science, "to be cauterised with boiling oil, according to the ancient method. 'Delenda est causa mali,' the source of evil must be destroyed, as says the learned Ambrose Pare; I ought therefore 'secareferro,' — that is to say, take off the leg. May God grant that he survive the operation!"

While seeking his instruments, he looked the supposed brother full in the face, and added —

"But how is it that you are carrying muskets in opposing armies, for I see that you belong to us, while this poor fellow wears Spanish uniform?"

"Oh, that would be a long story to tell," replied the soldier, shaking his head. "As for me, I followed the career which was open to me, and took service of my own free will under the banner of our lord king, Henry II. This man, whom you rightly suppose to be my brother, was born in Biscay, and became attached to the household of the Cardinal of Burgos, and afterwards to the cardinal's brother, whom he was obliged to follow to the war. I recognised him on the battle-field just as he fell; I dragged him out of a heap of dead, and brought him here."

During his recital this individual's features betrayed considerable agitation, but the surgeon did not heed it. Not finding some necessary instruments, "My colleague," he exclaimed, "must have carried them off. He constantly does this, out of jealousy of my reputation; but I will be even with him yet! Such splendid instruments! They will almost work of themselves, and are capable of imparting some skill even to him, dunce as he is!... I shall be back in an hour or two; he must rest, sleep, have nothing to excite him, nothing to inflame the wound; and when the operation is well over, we shall see! May the Lord be gracious to him!"

Then he went to the door, leaving the poor wretch to the care of his supposed brother.

"My God!" he added, shaking his head, "if he survive, it will be by the help of a miracle."

Scarcely had he left the room, when the unwounded soldier carefully examined the features of the wounded one.

"Yes," he murmured between his teeth, "they were right in saying that my exact double was to be found in the hostile army . . . . Truly one would not know us apart! . . . I might be surveying myself in a mirror. I did well to look for him in the rear of the Spanish army, and, thanks to the fellow who rolled him over so conveniently with that arquebus-shot; I was able to escape the dangers of the melee by carrying him out of it."

"But that's not all," he thought, still carefully studying the tortured face of the unhappy sufferer; "it is not enough to have got out of that. I have absolutely nothing in the world, no home, no resources. Beggar by birth, adventurer by fortune, I have enlisted, and have consumed my pay; I hoped for plunder, and here we are in full flight! What am I to do? Go and drown myself? No, certainly a cannon-ball would be as good as that. But can't I profit by this chance, and obtain a decent position by turning to my own advantage this curious resemblance, and making some use of this man whom Fate has thrown in my way, and who has but a short time to live?"

Arguing thus, he bent over the prostrate man with a cynical laugh: one might have thought he was Satan watching the departure of a soul too utterly lost to escape him.

"Alas! alas!" cried the sufferer; "may God have mercy on me! I feel my end is near."

"Bah! comrade, drive away these dismal thoughts. Your leg pains you — well they will cut it off! Think only of the other one, and trust in Providence!"

"Water, a drop of water, for Heaven's sake!" The sufferer was in a high fever. The would-be nurse looked round and saw a jug of water, towards which the dying man extended a trembling hand. A truly infernal idea entered his mind. He poured some water into a gourd which hung from his belt, held it to the lips of the wounded man, and then withdrew it.

"Oh! I thirst-that water! . . . For pity's sake, give me some!"

“Yes, but on one condition you must tell me your whole history.”

“Yes . . . but give me water!”

His tormentor allowed him to swallow a mouthful, then overwhelmed him with questions as to his family, his friends and fortune, and compelled him to answer by keeping before his eyes the water which alone could relieve the fever which devoured him. After this often interrupted interrogation, the sufferer sank back exhausted, and almost insensible. But, not yet satisfied, his companion conceived the idea of reviving him with a few drops of brandy, which quickly brought back the fever, and excited his brain sufficiently to enable him to answer fresh questions. The doses of spirit were doubled several times, at the risk of ending the unhappy man’s days then and there: Almost delirious, his head feeling as if on fire, his sufferings gave way to a feverish excitement, which took him back to other places and other times: he began to recall the days of his youth and the country where he lived. But his tongue was still fettered by a kind of reserve: his secret thoughts, the private details of his past life were not yet told, and it seemed as though he might die at any moment. Time was passing, night already coming on, and it occurred to the merciless questioner to profit by the gathering darkness. By a few solemn words he aroused the religious feelings of the sufferer, terrified him by speaking of the punishments of another life and the flames of hell, until to the delirious fancy of the sick man he took the form of a judge who could either deliver him to eternal damnation or open the gates of heaven to him. At length, overwhelmed by a voice which resounded in his ear like that of a minister of God, the dying man laid bare his inmost soul before his tormentor, and made his last confession to him.

Yet a few moments, and the executioner — he deserves no other name — hangs over his victim, opens his tunic, seizes some papers and a few coins, half draws his dagger, but thinks better of it; then, contemptuously spurning the victim, as the other surgeon had done —

“I might kill you,” he says, “but it would be a useless murder; it would only be hastening your last Sigh by an hour or two, and advancing my claims to your inheritance by the same space of time.”

And he adds mockingly: —

“Farewell, my brother!”

The wounded soldier utters a feeble groan; the adventurer leaves the room.

Four months later, a woman sat at the door of a house at one end of the village of Artigues, near Rieux, and played with a child about nine or ten years of age. Still young, she had the brown complexion of Southern women, and her beautiful black hair fell in curls about her face. Her flashing eyes occasionally betrayed hidden passions, concealed, however, beneath an apparent indifference and lassitude, and her wasted form seemed to acknowledge the existence of some secret grief. An observer would have divined a shattered life, a withered happiness, a soul grievously wounded.

Her dress was that of a wealthy peasant; and she wore one of the long gowns with hanging sleeves which were in fashion in the sixteenth century. The house in front of which she sat belonged to her, so also the immense field which adjoined the garden. Her attention was divided between the play of her son and the orders she was giving to an old servant, when an exclamation from the child startled her.

“Mother!” he cried, “mother, there he is!”

She looked where the child pointed, and saw a young boy turning the corner of the street.

“Yes,” continued the child, “that is the lad who, when I was playing with the other boys yesterday, called me all sorts of bad names.”

“What sort of names, my child?”

“There was one I did not understand, but it must have been a very bad one, for the other boys all pointed at me, and left me alone. He called me — and he said it was only what his mother had told him — he called me a wicked bastard!”

His mother’s face became purple with indignation. “What!” she cried, “they dared! . . . What an insult!”

“What does this bad word mean, mother?” asked the child, half frightened by her anger. “Is that what they call poor children who have no father?”

His mother folded him in her arms. “Oh!” she continued, “it is an infamous slander! These people never saw your father, they have only been here six years, and this is the eighth since he went away, but this is abominable! We were married in that church, we came at once to live in this house, which was my marriage portion, and my poor Martin has relations and friends here who will not allow his wife to be insulted — ”

“Say rather, his widow,” interrupted a solemn voice.

“Ah! uncle!” exclaimed the woman, turning towards an old man who had just emerged from the house.

“Yes, Bertrande,” continued the new-comer, “you must get reconciled to the idea that my nephew has ceased to exist. I am sure he was not such a fool as to have remained all this time without letting us hear from him. He was not the fellow to go off at a tangent, on account of a domestic quarrel which you have never vouchsafed to explain to me, and to retain his anger during all these eight years! Where did he go? What did he do? We none of us know, neither you nor I, nor anybody else. He is assuredly dead, and lies in some graveyard far enough from here. May God have mercy on his soul!”

Bertrande, weeping, made the sign of the cross, and bowed her head upon her hands.

“Good-bye, Sanxi,” said the uncle, tapping the child’s,’ cheek. Sanxi turned sulkily away.

There was certainly nothing specially attractive about the uncle: he belonged to a type which children instinctively dislike, false, crafty, with squinting eyes which continually appeared to contradict his honeyed tongue.

“Bertrande,” he said, “your boy is like his father before him, and only answers my kindness with rudeness.”

“Forgive him,” answered the mother; “he is very young, and does not understand the respect due to his father’s uncle. I will teach him better things; he will soon learn that he ought to be grateful for the care you have taken of his little property.”

“No doubt, no doubt,” said the uncle, trying hard to smile. “I will give you a good account of it, for I shall only have to reckon with you two in future. Come, my dear, believe me, your husband is really dead, and you have sorrowed quite enough for a good-for-nothing fellow. Think no more of him.”

So saying, he departed, leaving the poor young woman a prey to the saddest thoughts.

Bertrande de Rolls, naturally gifted with extreme sensibility, on which a careful education had imposed due restraint, had barely completed her twelfth year when she was married to Martin Guerre, a boy of about the same age, such precocious unions being then not uncommon, especially in the Southern provinces. They were generally settled by considerations of family interest, assisted by the extremely early development habitual to the climate. The young couple lived for a long time as brother and sister, and Bertrande, thus early familiar with the idea of domestic happiness, bestowed her whole affection on the youth whom she had been taught to regard as her life's companion. He was the Alpha and Omega of her existence; all her love, all her thoughts, were given to him, and when their marriage was at length completed, the birth of a son seemed only another link in the already long existing bond of union. But, as many wise men have remarked, a uniform happiness, which only attaches women more and more, has often upon men a precisely contrary effect, and so it was with Martin Guerre. Of a lively and excitable temperament, he wearied of a yoke which had been imposed so early, and, anxious to see the world and enjoy some freedom, he one day took advantage of a domestic difference, in which Bertrande owned herself to have been wrong, and left his house and family. He was sought and awaited in vain. Bertrande spent the first month in vainly expecting his return, then she betook herself to prayer; but Heaven appeared deaf to her supplications, the truant returned not. She wished to go in search of him, but the world is wide, and no single trace remained to guide her. What torture for a tender heart! What suffering for a soul thirsting for love! What sleepless nights! What restless vigils! Years passed thus; her son was growing up, yet not a word reached her from the man she loved so much. She spoke often of him to the uncomprehending child, she sought to discover his features in those of her boy, but though she endeavoured to concentrate her whole affection on her son, she realised that there is suffering which maternal love cannot console, and tears which it cannot dry. Consumed by the strength of the sorrow which ever dwelt in her heart, the poor woman was slowly wasting, worn out by the regrets of the past, the vain desires of the present, and the dreary prospect of the future. And now she had been openly insulted, her feelings as a mother wounded to the quirk; and her husband's uncle, instead of defending and consoling her, could give only cold counsel and unsympathetic words!

Pierre Guerre, indeed, was simply a thorough egotist. In his youth he had been charged with usury; no one knew by what means he had become rich, for the little drapery trade which he called his profession did not appear to be very profitable.

After his nephew's departure it seemed only natural that he should pose as the family guardian, and he applied himself to the task of increasing the little income, but without considering himself bound to give any account to Bertrande. So, once persuaded that Martin was no more, he was apparently not unwilling to prolong a situation so much to his own advantage.

Night was fast coming on; in the dim twilight distant objects became confused and indistinct. It was the end of autumn, that melancholy season which suggests so many gloomy thoughts and recalls so many blighted hopes. The child had gone into the house. Bertrande, still sitting at the door, resting her forehead on her hand, thought sadly of her uncle's words; recalling in imagination the past scenes which they suggested, the time of their childhood, when, married so young, they were as yet only playmates, prefacing the graver duties of life by innocent pleasures; then of the love which grew with their increasing age; then of how this love became altered, changing on her side into passion, on his into indifference. She tried to recollect him as he had been on the eve of his departure, young and handsome, carrying his head high, coming home from a fatiguing hunt and sitting by his son's cradle; and then also she remembered bitterly the jealous suspicions she had conceived, the anger with which she had allowed them to escape her, the consequent quarrel, followed by the disappearance of her offended husband, and the eight succeeding years of solitude and mourning. She wept over his desertion; over the desolation of her life, seeing around her only indifferent or selfish people, and caring only to live for her child's sake, who gave her at least a shadowy reflection of the husband she had lost. "Lost — yes, lost for ever!" she said to herself, sighing, and looking again at the fields whence she had so often seen him coming at this same twilight hour, returning to his home for the evening meal. She cast a wandering eye on the distant hills, which showed a black outline against a yet fiery western sky, then let it fall on a little grove of olive trees planted on the farther side of the brook which skirted her dwelling. Everything was calm; approaching night brought silence along with darkness: it was exactly what she saw every evening, but to leave which required always an effort.

She rose to re-enter the house, when her attention was caught by a movement amongst the trees. For a moment she thought she was mistaken, but the branches again rustled, then parted asunder, and the form of a man appeared on the other side of the brook. Terrified, Bertrande tried to scream, but not a sound escaped her lips; her voice seemed paralyzed by terror, as in an evil dream. And she almost thought it was a dream, for notwithstanding the dark shadows cast around this indistinct semblance, she seemed to recognise features once dear to her. Had her bitter reveries ended by making her the victim of a hallucination? She thought her brain was giving way, and sank on her knees to pray for help. But the figure remained; it stood motionless, with folded arms, silently gazing at her! Then she thought of witchcraft, of evil demons, and superstitious as every one was in those days, she kissed a crucifix which hung from her neck, and fell fainting on the ground. With one spring the phantom crossed the brook and stood beside her.

“Bertrande!” it said in a voice of emotion. She raised her head, uttered a piercing cry, and was clasped in her husband’s arms.

The whole village became aware of this event that same evening. The neighbours crowded round Bertrande’s door, Martin’s friends and relations naturally wishing to see him after this miraculous reappearance, while those who had never known him desired no less to gratify their curiosity; so that the hero of the little drama, instead of remaining quietly at home with his wife, was obliged to exhibit himself publicly in a neighbouring barn. His four sisters burst through the crowd and fell on his neck weeping; his uncle examined him doubtfully at first, then extended his arms. Everybody recognised him, beginning with the old servant Margherite, who had been with the young couple ever since their wedding-day. People observed only that a riper age had strengthened his features, and given more character to his countenance and more development to his powerful figure; also that he had a scar over the right eyebrow, and that he limped slightly. These were the marks of wounds he had received, he said; which now no longer troubled him. He appeared anxious to return to his wife and child, but the crowd insisted on hearing the story of his adventures during his voluntary absence, and he was obliged to satisfy them. Eight years ago, he said, the desire to see more of the world had gained an irresistible mastery over him; he yielded to it, and departed secretly. A natural longing took him to his birthplace in Biscay, where he had seen his surviving relatives. There he met the Cardinal of Burgos, who took him into his service, promising him profit, hard knocks to give and take, and plenty of adventure. Some time after, he left the cardinal’s household for that of his brother, who, much against his will, compelled him to follow him to the war and bear arms against the French. Thus he found himself on the Spanish side on the day of St. Quentin, and received a terrible gun-shot wound in the leg. Being carried into a house a an adjoining village, he fell into the hands of a surgeon, who insisted that the leg must be amputated immediately, but who left him for a moment, and never returned. Then he encountered a good old woman, who dressed his wound and nursed him night and day. So that in a few weeks he recovered, and was able to set out for Artigues, too thankful to return to his house and land, still more to his wife and child, and fully resolved never to leave them again.

Having ended his story, he shook hands with his still wondering neighbours, addressing by name some who had been very young when he left, and who, hearing their names, came forward now as grown men, hardly recognisable, but much pleased at being remembered. He returned his sisters' carresses, begged his uncle's forgiveness for the trouble he had given in his boyhood, recalling with mirth the various corrections received. He mentioned also an Augustinian monk who had taught him to read, and another reverend father, a Capuchin, whose irregular conduct had caused much scandal in the neighbourhood. In short, notwithstanding his prolonged absence, he seemed to have a perfect recollection of places, persons, and things. The good people overwhelmed him with congratulations, vying with one another in praising him for having the good sense to come home, and in describing the grief and the perfect virtue of his Bertrande. Emotion was excited, many wept, and several bottles from Martin Guerre's cellar were emptied. At length the assembly dispersed, uttering many exclamations about the extraordinary chances of Fate, and retired to their own homes, excited, astonished, and gratified, with the one exception of old Pierre Guerre, who had been struck by an unsatisfactory remark made by his nephew, and who dreamed all night about the chances of pecuniary loss augured by the latter's return.

It was midnight before the husband and wife were alone and able to give vent to their feelings. Bertrande still felt half stupefied; she could not believe her own eyes and ears, nor realise that she saw again in her marriage chamber her husband of eight years ago, him for whom she had wept; whose death she had deplored only a few hours previously. In the sudden shock caused by so much joy succeeding so much grief, she had not been able to express what she felt; her confused ideas were difficult to explain, and she seemed deprived of the powers of speech and reflection. When she became calmer and more capable of analysing her feelings, she was astonished not to feel towards her husband the same affection which had moved her so strongly a few hours before. It was certainly himself, those were the same features, that was the man to whom she had willingly given her hand, her heart, herself, and yet now that she saw him again a cold barrier of shyness, of modesty, seemed to have risen between them. His first kiss, even, had not made her happy: she blushed and felt saddened — a curious result of the long absence! She could not define the changes wrought by years in his appearance: his countenance seemed harsher, yet the lines of his face, his outer man, his whole personality, did not seem altered, but his soul had changed its nature, a different mind looked forth from those eyes. Bertrande knew him for her husband, and yet she hesitated. Even so Penelope, on the, return of Ulysses, required a certain proof to confirm the evidence of her eyes, and her long absent husband had to remind her of secrets known only to herself.

Martin, however, as if he understood Bertrande’s feeling and divined some secret mistrust, used the most tender and affectionate phrases, and even the very pet names which close intimacy had formerly endeared to them.

“My queen,” he said, “my beautiful dove, can you not lay aside your resentment? Is it still so strong that no submission can soften it? Cannot my repentance find grace in your eyes? My Bertrande, my Bertha, my Bertranilla, as I used to call you.”

She tried to smile, but stopped short, puzzled; the names were the very same, but the inflexion of voice quite different.

Martin took her hands in his. “What pretty hands! Do you still wear my ring? Yes, here it is, and with it the sapphire ring I gave you the day Sanxi was born.”

Bertrande did not answer, but she took the child and placed him in his father’s arms.

Martin showered caresses on his son, and spoke of the time when he carried him as a baby in the garden, lifting him up to the fruit trees, so that he could reach and try to bite the fruit. He recollected one day when the poor child got his leg terribly torn by thorns, and convinced himself, not without emotion, that the scar could still be seen.

Bertrande was touched by this display of affectionate recollections, and felt vexed at her own coldness. She came up to Martin and laid her hand in his. He said gently —

“My departure caused you great grief: I now repent what I did. But I was young, I was proud, and your reproaches were unjust.”

"Ah," said she, "you have not forgotten the cause of our quarrel?"

"It was little Rose, our neighbour, whom you said I was making love to, because you found us together at the spring in the little wood. I explained that we met only by chance, — besides, she was only a child, — but you would not listen, and in your anger — "

"Ah! forgive me, Martin, forgive me!" she interrupted, in confusion.

"In your blind anger you took up, I know not what, something which lay handy, and flung it at me. And here is the mark," he continued, smiling, "this scar, which is still to be seen."

"Oh, Martin!" Bertrande exclaimed, "can you ever forgive me?"

"As you see," Martin replied, kissing her tenderly.

Much moved, Bertrande swept aside his hair, and looked at the scar visible on his forehead.

"But," she said, with surprise not free from alarm, "this scar seems to me like a fresh one."

"Ah!" Martin explained, with a, little embarrassment; "it reopened lately. But I had thought no more about it. Let us forget it, Bertrande; I should not like a recollection which might make you think yourself less dear to me than you once were."

And he drew her upon his knee. She repelled him gently.

"Send the child to bed," said Martin. "Tomorrow shall be for him; to-night you have the first place, Bertrande, you only."

The boy kissed his father and went.

Bertrande came and knelt beside her husband, regarding him attentively with an uneasy smile, which did not appear to please him by any means.

"What is the matter?" said he. "Why do you examine me thus?"

"I do not know — forgive me, oh! forgive me! . . . But the happiness of seeing you was so great and unexpected, it is all like a dream. I must try to become accustomed to it; give me some time to collect myself; let me spend this night in prayer. I ought to offer my joy and my thanksgiving to Almighty God — "

"Not so," interrupted her husband, passing his arms round her neck and stroking her beautiful hair. "No; 'tis to me that your first thoughts are due. After so much weariness, my rest is in again beholding you, and my happiness after so many trials will be found in your love. That hope has supported me throughout, and I long to be assured that it is no illusion." So saying, he endeavoured to raise her.

"Oh," she murmured, "I pray you leave me."

"What!" he exclaimed angrily. "Bertrande, is this your love? Is it thus you keep faith with me? You will make me doubt the evidence of your friends; you will make me think that indifference, or even another love —— "

"You insult me," said Bertrande, rising to her feet.

He caught her in his arms. "No, no; I think nothing which could wound you, my queen, and I believe your fidelity, even as before, you know, on that first journey, when you wrote me these loving letters which I have treasured ever since. Here they are." And he drew forth some papers, on which Bertrande recognised her own handwriting. "Yes," he continued, "I have read and — re-read them.... See, you spoke then of your love and the sorrows of absence. But why all this trouble and terror? You tremble, just as you did when I first received you from your father's hands.... It was here, in this very room.... You begged me then to leave you, to let you spend the night in prayer; but I insisted, do you remember? and pressed you to my heart, as I do now."

"Oh," she murmured weakly, "have pity!"

But the words were intercepted by a kiss, and the remembrance of the past, the happiness of the present, resumed their sway; the imaginary terrors were forgotten, and the curtains closed around the marriage-bed.

The next day was a festival in the village of Artigues. Martin returned the visits of all who had come to welcome him the previous night, and there were endless recognitions and embracings. The young men remembered that he had played with them when they were little; the old men, that they had been at his wedding when he was only twelve.

The women remembered having envied Bertrande, especially the pretty Rose, daughter of Marcel, the apothecary, she who had roused the demon of jealousy in, the poor wife's heart. And Rose knew quite well that the jealousy was not without some cause; for Martin had indeed shown her attention, and she was unable to see him again without emotion. She was now the wife of a rich peasant, ugly, old, and jealous, and she compared, sighing, her unhappy lot with that of her more fortunate neighbour. Martin's sisters detained him amongst them, and spoke of their childish games and of their parents, both dead in Biscay. Martin dried the tears which flowed at these recollections of the past, and turned their thoughts to rejoicing. Banquets were given and received. Martin invited all his relations and former friends; an easy gaiety prevailed. It was remarked that the hero of the feast refrained from wine; he was thereupon reproached, but answered that on account of the wounds he had received he was obliged to avoid excess. The excuse was admitted, the result of Martin's precautions being that he kept a clear head on his shoulders, while all the rest had their tongues loosed by drunkenness.

"Ah!" exclaimed one of the guests, who had studied a little medicine, "Martin is quite right to be afraid of drink. Wounds which have thoroughly healed may be reopened and inflamed by intemperance, and wine in the case of recent wounds is deadly poison. Men have died on the field of battle in an hour or two merely because they had swallowed a little brandy."

Martin Guerre grew pale, and began a conversation with the pretty Rose, his neighbour. Bertrande observed this, but without uneasiness; she had suffered too much from her former suspicions, besides her husband showed her so much affection that she was now quite happy.

When the first few days were over, Martin began to look into his affairs. His property had suffered by his long absence, and he was obliged to go to Biscay to claim his little estate there, the law having already laid hands upon it. It was several months before, by dint of making judicious sacrifices, he could regain possession of the house and fields which had belonged to his father. This at last accomplished, he returned to Artigues, in order to resume the management of his wife's property, and with this end in view, about eleven months after his return, he paid a visit to his uncle Pierre.

Pierre was expecting him; he was extremely polite, desired Martin, to sit down, overwhelmed him with compliments, knitting his brows as he discovered that his nephew decidedly meant business. Martin broke silence.

"Uncle," he said, "I come to thank you for the care you have taken of my wife's property; she could never have managed it alone. You have received the income in the family interest: as a good guardian, I expected no less from your affection. But now that I have returned, and am free from other cares, we will go over the accounts, if you please."

His uncle coughed and cleared his voice before replying, then said slowly, as if counting his words —

"It is all accounted for, my dear nephew; Heaven be praised! I don't owe you anything."

"What!" exclaimed the astonished Martin, "but the whole income?"

“Was well and properly employed in the maintenance of your wife and child.”

“What! a thousand livres for that? And Bertrande lived alone, so quietly and simply! Nonsense! it is impossible.”

“Any surplus,” resumed the old man, quite unmoved, — ”any surplus went to pay the expenses of seed-time and harvest.”

“What! at a time when labour costs next to nothing?”

“Here is the account,” said Pierre.

“Then the account is a false one,” returned his nephew.

Pierre thought it advisable to appear extremely offended and angry, and Martin, exasperated at his evident dishonesty, took still higher ground, and threatened to bring an action against him. Pierre ordered him to leave the house, and suiting actions to words, took hold of his arm to enforce his departure. Martin, furious, turned and raised his fist to strike.

“What! strike your uncle, wretched boy!” exclaimed the old man.

Martin’s hand dropped, but he left the house uttering reproaches and insults, among which Pierre distinguished —

“Cheat that you are!”

“That is a word I shall remember,” cried the angry old man, slamming his door violently.

Martin brought an action before the judge at Rieux, and in course of time obtained a decree, which, reviewing the accounts presented by Pierre, disallowed them, and condemned the dishonest guardian to pay his nephew four hundred livres for each year of his administration. The day on which this sum had to be disbursed from his strong box the old usurer vowed vengeance, but until he could gratify his hatred he was forced to conceal it, and to receive attempts at reconciliation with a friendly smile. It was not until six months later, on the occasion of a joyous festivity, that Martin again set foot in his uncle’s house. The bells were ringing for the birth of a child, there was great gaiety at Bertrande’s house, where all the guests were waiting on the threshold for the godfather in order to take the infant to church, and when Martin appeared, escorting his uncle, who was adorned with a huge bouquet for the occasion, and who now came forward and took the hand of Rose, the pretty godmother, there were cries of joy on all sides. Bertrande was delighted at this reconciliation, and dreamed only of happiness. She was so happy now, her long sorrow was atoned for, her regret was at an end, her prayers seemed to have been heard, the long interval between the former delights and the present seemed wiped out as if the bond of union had never been broken, and if she remembered her grief at all, it was only to intensify the new joys by comparison. She loved her husband more than ever; he was full of affection for her, and she was grateful for his love. The past had now no shadow, the future no cloud, and the birth of a daughter, drawing still closer the links which united them, seemed a new pledge of felicity. Alas! the horizon which appeared so bright and clear to the poor woman was doomed soon again to be overcast.

The very evening of the christening party, a band of musicians and jugglers happened to pass through the village, and the inhabitants showed themselves liberal. Pierre asked questions, and found that the leader of the band was a Spaniard. He invited the man to his own house, and remained closeted with him for nearly an hour, dismissing him at length with a refilled purse. Two days later the old man announced to the family that he was going to Picardy to see a former partner on a matter of business, and he departed accordingly, saying he should return before long.

The day on which Bertrande again saw her uncle was, indeed, a terrible one. She was sitting by the cradle of the lately-born infant, watching for its awakening, when the door opened, and Pierre Guerre strode in. Bertrande drew back with an instinct of terror as soon as she saw him, for his expression was at once wicked and joyful — an expression of gratified hate, of mingled rage and triumph, and his smile was terrible to behold. She did not venture to speak, but motioned him to a seat. He came straight up to her, and raising his head, said loudly —

“Kneel down at once, madame — kneel down, and ask pardon from Almighty God!”

“Are you mad, Pierre?” she replied, gazing at him in astonishment.

“You, at least, ought to know that I am not.”

“Pray for forgiveness — I — ! and what for, in Heaven’s name?”

“For the crime in which you are an accomplice.”

“Please explain yourself.”

“Oh!” said Pierre, with bitter irony, “a woman always thinks herself innocent as long as her sin is hidden; she thinks the truth will never be known, and her conscience goes quietly to sleep, forgetting her faults. Here is a woman who thought her sins nicely concealed; chance favoured her: an absent husband, probably no more; another man so exactly like him in height, face, and manner that everyone else is deceived! Is it strange that a weak, sensitive woman, wearied of widowhood, should willingly allow herself to be imposed on?"

Bertrande listened without understanding; she tried to interrupt, but Pierre went on —

"It was easy to accept this stranger without having to blush for it, easy to give him the name and the rights of a husband! She could even appear faithful while really guilty; she could seem constant, though really fickle; and she could, under a veil of mystery, at once reconcile her honour, her duty — perhaps even her love."

"What on earth do you mean?" cried Bertrande, wringing her hands in terror.

"That you are countenancing an impostor who is not your husband."

Feeling as if the ground were passing from beneath her, Bertrande staggered, and caught at the nearest piece of furniture to save herself from falling; then, collecting all her strength to meet this extraordinary attack, she faced the old man.

"What! my husband, your nephew, an impostor!"

"Don't you know it?" "I!!"

This cry, which came from her heart, convinced Pierre that she did not know, and that she had sustained a terrible shock. He continued more quietly —

"What, Bertrande, is it possible you were really deceived?"

"Pierre, you are killing me; your words are torture. No more mystery, I entreat. What do you know? What do you suspect? Tell me plainly at once."

"Have you courage to hear it?"

"I must," said the trembling woman.

"God is my witness that I would willingly have kept it from you, but you must know; if only for the safety of your soul entangled in so deadly a snare,... there is yet time, if you follow my advice. Listen: the man with whom you are living, who dares to call himself Martin Guerre, is a cheat, an impostor — — "

"How dare you say so?"

"Because I have discovered it. Yes, I had always a vague suspicion, an uneasy feeling, and in spite of the marvellous resemblance I could never feel as if he were really my sister's child. The day he raised his hand to strike me — yes, that day I condemned him utterly.... Chance has justified me! A wandering Spaniard, an old soldier, who spent a night in the village here, was also present at the battle of St. Quentin, and saw Martin Guerre receive a terrible gunshot wound in the leg. After the battle, being wounded, he betook himself to the neighbouring village, and distinctly heard a surgeon in the next room say that a wounded man must have his leg amputated, and would very likely not survive the operation. The door opened, he saw the sufferer, and knew him for Martin Guerre. So much the Spaniard told me. Acting on this information, I went on pretence of business to the village he named, I questioned the inhabitants, and this is what I learned."

"Well?" said Bertrande, pale, and gasping with emotion.

"I learned that the wounded man had his leg taken off, and, as the surgeon predicted, he must have died in a few hours, for he was never seen again."

Bertrande remained a few moments as if annihilated by this appalling revelation; then, endeavoring to repel the horrible thought —

"No," she cried, "no, it is impossible! It is a lie intended to ruin him-to ruin us all."

"What! you do not believe me?"

"No, never, never!"

"Say rather you pretend to disbelieve me: the truth has pierced your heart, but you wish to deny it. Think, however, of the danger to your immortal soul."

"Silence, wretched man!... No, God would not send me so terrible a trial. What proof can you show of the truth of your words?"

"The witnesses I have mentioned."

"Nothing more?"

"No, not as yet."

"Fine proofs indeed! The story of a vagabond who flattered your hatred in hope of a reward, the gossip of a distant village, the recollections of ten years back, and finally, your own word, the word of a man who seeks only revenge, the word of a man who swore to make Martin pay dearly for the results of his own avarice, a man of furious passions such as yours! No, Pierre, no, I do not believe you, and I never will!"

"Other people may perhaps be less incredulous, and if I accuse him publicly — — "

"Then I shall contradict you publicly!" And coming quickly forward, her eyes shining with virtuous anger —

"Leave this house, go," she said; "it is you yourself who are the impostor — go!"

"I shall yet know how to convince everyone, and will make you acknowledge it," cried the furious old man.

He went out, and Bertrande sank exhausted into a chair. All the strength which had supported her against Pierre vanished as soon as she was alone, and in spite of her resistance to suspicion, the terrible light of doubt penetrated her heart, and extinguished the pure torch of trustfulness which had guided her hitherto — a doubt, alas! which attacked at once her honour and her love, for she loved with all a woman's tender affection. Just as actual poison gradually penetrates and circulates through the whole system, corrupting the blood and affecting the very sources of life until it causes the destruction of the whole body, so does that mental poison, suspicion, extend its ravages in the soul which has received it. Bertrande remembered with terror her first feelings at the sight of the returned Martin Guerre, her involuntary repugnance, her astonishment at not feeling more in touch with the husband whom she had so sincerely regretted. She remembered also, as if she saw it for the first time, that Martin, formerly quick, lively, and hasty tempered, now seemed thoughtful, and fully master of himself.

This change of character she had supposed due to the natural development of age, she now trembled at the idea of another possible cause. Some other little details began to occur to her mind — the forgetfulness or abstraction of her husband as to a few insignificant things; thus it sometimes happened that he did not answer to his name of Martin, also that he mistook the road to a hermitage, formerly well known to them both, and again that he could not answer when addressed in Basque, although he himself had taught her the little she knew of this language. Besides, since his return, he would never write in her presence, did he fear that she would notice some difference? She had paid little or no attention to these trifles; now, pieced together, they assumed an alarming importance. An appalling terror seized Bertrande: was she to remain in this uncertainty, or should she seek an explanation which might prove her destruction? And how discover the truth — by questioning the guilty man, by noting his confusion, his change of colour, by forcing a confession from him? But she had lived with him for two years, he was the father of her child, she could not ruin him without ruining herself, and, an explanation once sought, she could neither punish him and escape disgrace, nor pardon him without sharing his guilt.

To reproach him with his conduct and then keep silence would destroy her peace for ever; to cause a scandal by denouncing him would bring dishonour upon herself and her child. Night found her involved in these hideous perplexities, too weak to surmount them; an icy chill came over her, she went to bed, and awoke in a high fever. For several days she hovered between life and death, and Martin Guerre bestowed the most tender care upon her. She was greatly moved thereby, having one of those impressionable minds which recognise kindness fully as much as injury. When she was a little recovered and her mental power began to return, she had only a vague recollection of what had occurred, and thought she had had a frightful dream. She asked if Pierre Guerre had been to see her, and found he had not been near the house. This could only be explained by the scene which had taken place, and she then recollected all the accusation Pierre had made, her own observations which had confirmed it, all her grief and trouble. She inquired about the village news. Pierre, evidently, had kept silence why? Had he seen that his suspicions were unjust, or was he only seeking further evidence? She sank back into her cruel uncertainty, and resolved to watch Martin closely, before deciding as to his guilt or innocence.

How was she to suppose that God had created two faces so exactly alike, two beings precisely similar, and then sent them together into the world, and on the same track, merely to compass the ruin of an unhappy woman! A terrible idea took possession of her mind, an idea not uncommon in an age of superstition, namely, that the Enemy himself could assume human form, and could borrow the semblance of a dead man in order to capture another soul for his infernal kingdom. Acting on this idea, she hastened to the church, paid for masses to be said, and prayed fervently. She expected every day to see the demon forsake the body he had animated, but her vows, offerings, and prayers had no result. But Heaven sent her an idea which she wondered had not occurred to her sooner. “If the Tempter,” she said to herself, “has taken the form of my beloved husband, his power being supreme for evil, the resemblance would be exact, and no difference, however slight, would exist. If, however, it is only another man who resembles him, God must have made them with some slight distinguishing marks.”

She then remembered, what she had not thought of before, having been quite unsuspicious before her uncle’s accusation, and nearly out of her mind between mental and bodily suffering since. She remembered that on her husband’s left shoulder, almost on the neck, there used to be one of those small, almost imperceptible, but ineffaceable birthmarks. Martin wore his hair very long, it was difficult to see if the mark were there or not. One night, while he slept, Bertrande cut away a lock of hair from the place where this sign ought to be — it was not there!

Convinced at length of the deception, Bertrande suffered inexpressible anguish. This man whom she had loved and respected for two whole years, whom she had taken to her heart as a husband bitterly mourned for — this man was a cheat, an infamous impostor, and she, all unknowing, was yet a guilty woman! Her child was illegitimate, and the curse of Heaven was due to this sacrilegious union. To complete the misfortune, she was already expecting another infant. She would have killed herself, but her religion and the love of her children forbade it. Kneeling before her child’s cradle, she entreated pardon from the father of the one for the father of the other. She would not bring herself to proclaim aloud their infamy.

“Oh!” she said, “thou whom I loved, thou who art no more, thou knowest no guilty thought ever entered my mind! When I saw this man, I thought I beheld thee; when I was happy, I thought I owed it to thee; it was thee whom I loved in him. Surely thou dost not desire that by a public avowal I should bring shame and disgrace on these children and on myself.”

She rose calm and strengthened: it seemed as if a heavenly inspiration had marked out her duty. To suffer in silence, such was the course she adopted, — a life of sacrifice and self-denial which she offered to God as an expiation for her involuntary sin. But who can understand the workings of the human heart? This man whom she ought to have loathed, this man who had made her an innocent partner in his crime, this unmasked impostor whom she should have beheld only with disgust, she-loved him! The force of habit, the ascendancy he had obtained over her, the love he had shown her, a thousand sympathies felt in her inmost heart, all these had so much influence, that, instead of accusing and cursing him, she sought to excuse him on the plea of a passion to which, doubtless, he had yielded when usurping the name and place of another. She feared punishment for him yet more than disgrace for herself, and though resolved to no longer allow him the rights purchased by crime, she yet trembled at the idea of losing his love. It was this above all which decided her to keep eternal silence about her discovery; one single word which proved that his imposture was known would raise an insurmountable barrier between them.

To conceal her trouble entirely was, however, beyond her power; her eyes frequently showed traces of her secret tears. Martin several times asked the cause of her sorrow; she tried to smile and excuse herself, only immediately sinking back into her gloomy thoughts. Martin thought it mere caprice; he observed her loss of colour, her hollow cheeks, and concluded that age was impairing her beauty, and became less attentive to her. His absences became longer and more frequent, and he did not conceal his impatience and annoyance at being watched; for her looks hung upon his, and she observed his coldness and change with much grief. Having sacrificed all in order to retain his love, she now saw it slowly slipping away from her.

Another person also observed attentively. Pierre Guerre since his explanation with Bertrande had apparently discovered no more evidence, and did not dare to bring an accusation without some positive proofs. Consequently he lost no chance of watching the proceedings of his supposed nephew, silently hoping that chance might put him on the track of a discovery. He also concluded from Bertrande’s state of melancholy that she had convinced herself of the fraud, but had resolved to conceal it.

Martin was then endeavoring to sell a part of his property, and this necessitated frequent interviews with the lawyers of the neighbouring town. Twice in the week he went to Rieux, and to make the journey easier, used to start horseback about seven in the evening, sleep at Rieux, and return the following afternoon. This arrangement did not escape his enemy’s notice, who was not long in convincing himself that part of the time ostensibly spent on this journey was otherwise employed.

Towards ten o’clock on the evening of a dark night, the door of a small house lying about half a gunshot from the village opened gently for the exit of a man wrapped in a large cloak, followed by a young woman, who accompanied him some distance. Arrived at the parting point, they separated with a tender kiss and a few murmured words of adieu; the lover took his horse, which was fastened to a tree, mounted, and rode off towards Rieux. When the sounds died away, the woman turned slowly and sadly towards her home, but as she approached the door a man suddenly turned the corner of the house and barred her away. Terrified, she was on the point of crying for help, when he seized her arm and ordered her to be silent.

“Rose,” he whispered, “I know everything: that man is your lover. In order to receive him safely, you send your old husband to sleep by means of a drug stolen from your father’s shop. This intrigue has been going on for a month; twice a week, at seven o’clock, your door is opened to this man, who does not proceed on his way to the town until ten. I know your lover: he is my nephew.”

Petrified with terror, Rose fell on her knees and implored mercy.

“Yes,” replied Pierre, “you may well be frightened: I have your secret. I have only to publish it and you are ruined for ever:”

You will not do it! “entreated the guilty woman, clasping her hands.

“I have only to tell your husband,” continued Pierre, “that his wife has dishonoured him, and to explain the reason of his unnaturally heavy sleep.”

“He will kill me!”

“No doubt: he is jealous, he is an Italian, he will know how to avenge himself — even as I do.”

“But I never did you any harm,” Rose cried in despair. “Oh! have pity, have mercy, and spare me!”

“On one condition.”

“What is it?”

“Come with me.”

Terrified almost out of her mind, Rose allowed him to lead her away.

Bertrande had just finished her evening prayer, and was preparing for bed, when she was startled by several knocks at her door. Thinking that perhaps some neighbour was in need of help, she opened it immediately, and to her astonishment beheld a dishevelled woman whom Pierre grasped by the arm. He exclaimed vehemently —

“Here is thy judge! Now, confess all to Bertrande!”

Bertrande did not at once recognise the woman, who fell at her feet, overcome by Pierre’s threats.

“Tell the truth here,” he continued, “or I go and tell it to your husband, at your own home!” — ”Ah! madame, kill me,” said the unhappy creature, hiding her face; “let me rather die by your hand than his!”

Bertrande, bewildered, did not understand the position in the least, but she recognised Rose —

“But what is the matter, madame? Why are you here at this hour, pale and weeping? Why has my uncle dragged you hither? I am to judge you, does he say? Of what crime are you guilty?”

“Martin might answer that, if he were here,” remarked Pierre.

A lightning flash of jealousy shot through Bertrande’s soul at these words, all her former suspicions revived.

“What!” she said, “my husband! What do you mean?”

“That he left this woman’s house only a little while ago, that for a month they have been meeting secretly. You are betrayed: I have seen them and she does not dare to deny it.”

“Have mercy!” cried Rose, still kneeling.

The cry was a confession. Bertrande became pate as death. “O God!” she murmured, “deceived, betrayed — and by him!”

“For a month past,” repeated the old man.

“Oh! the wretch,” she continued, with increasing passion; “then his whole life is a lie! He has abused my credulity, he now abuses my love! He does not know me! He thinks he can trample on me — me, in whose power are his fortune, his honour, his very life itself!”

Then, turning to Rose —

“And you, miserable woman! by what unworthy artifice did you gain his love? Was it by witchcraft? or some poisonous philtre learned from your worthy father?”

“Alas! no, madame; my weakness is my only crime, and also my only excuse. I loved him, long ago, when I was only a young girl, and these memories have been my ruin.”

“Memories? What! did you also think you were loving the same man? Are you also his dupe? Or are you only pretending, in order to find a rag of excuse to cover your wickedness?”

It was now Rose who failed to understand; Bertrande continued, with growing excitement —

“Yes, it was not enough to usurp the rights of a husband and father, he thought to play his part still better by deceiving the mistress also . . . . Ah! it is amusing, is it not? You also, Rose, you thought he was your old lover! Well, I at least am excusable, I the wife, who only thought she was faithful to her husband!”

“What does it all mean?” asked the terrified Rose.

“It means that this man is an impostor and that I will unmask him. Revenge! revenge!”

Pierre came forward. “Bertrande,” he said, “so long as I thought you were happy, when I feared to disturb your peace, I was silent, I repressed my just indignation, and I spared the usurper of the name and rights of my nephew. Do you now give me leave to speak?”

“Yes,” she replied in a hollow voice.

“You will not contradict me?”

By way of answer she sat down by the table and wrote a few hasty lines with a trembling hand, then gave them to Pierre, whose eyes sparkled with joy.

“Yes,” he said, “vengeance for him, but for her pity. Let this humiliation be her only punishment. I promised silence in return for confession, will you grant it?”

Bertrande assented with a contemptuous gesture.

“Go, fear not,” said the old man, and Rose went out. Pierre also left the house.

Left to herself, Bertrande felt utterly worn out by so much emotion; indignation gave way to depression. She began to realise what she had done, and the scandal which would fall on her own head. Just then her baby awoke, and held out its arms, smiling, and calling for its father. Its father, was he not a criminal? Yes! but was it for her to ruin him, to invoke the law, to send him to death, after having taken him to her heart, to deliver him to infamy which would recoil on her own head and her child’s and on the infant which was yet unborn? If he had sinned before God, was it not for God to punish him? If against herself, ought she not rather to overwhelm him with contempt? But to invoke the help, of strangers to expiate this offence; to lay bare the troubles of her life, to unveil the sanctuary of the nuptial couch — in short, to summon the whole world to behold this fatal scandal, was not that what in her imprudent anger she had really done? She repented bitterly of her haste, she sought to avert the consequences, and notwithstanding the night and the bad weather, she hurried at once to Pierre’s dwelling, hoping at all costs to withdraw her denunciation. He was not there: he had at once taken a horse and started for Rieux. Her accusation was already on its way to the magistrates!

At break of day the house where Martin Guerre lodged when at Rieux was surrounded by soldiers. He came forward with confidence and inquired what was wanted. On hearing the accusation, he changed colour slightly, then collected himself, and made no resistance. When he came before the judge, Bertrande’s petition was read to him, declaring him to be “an impostor, who falsely, audaciously, and treacherously had deceived her by taking the name and assuming the person of Martin Guerre," and demanding that he should be required to entreat pardon from God, the king, and herself.

The prisoner listened calmly to the charge, and met it courageously, only evincing profound surprise at such a step being taken by a wife who had lived with him for two years since his return, and who only now thought of disputing the rights he had so long enjoyed. As he was ignorant both of Bertrande's suspicions and their confirmation, and also of the jealousy which had inspired her accusation, his astonishment was perfectly natural, and did not at all appear to be assumed. He attributed the whole charge to the machinations of his uncle, Pierre Guerre; an old man, he said, who, being governed entirely by avarice and the desire of revenge, now disputed his name and rights, in order the better to deprive him of his property, which might be worth from sixteen to eighteen hundred livres. In order to attain his end, this wicked man had not hesitated to pervert his wife's mind, and at the risk of her own dishonour had instigated this calumnious charge — a horrible and unheard-of thing in the mouth of a lawful wife. "Ah! I do not blame her," he cried; "she must suffer more than I do, if she really entertains doubts such as these; but I deplore her readiness to listen to these extraordinary calumnies originated by my enemy."

The judge was a good deal impressed by so much assurance. The accused was relegated to prison, whence he was brought two days later to encounter a formal examination.

He began by explaining the cause of his long absence, originating, he said, in a domestic quarrel, as his wife well remembered. He there related his life during these eight years. At first he wandered over the country, wherever his curiosity and the love of travel led him. He then had crossed the frontier, revisited Biscay, where he was born, and having entered the service of the Cardinal of Burgos, he passed thence into the army of the King of Spain. He was wounded at the battle of St. Quentin, conveyed to a neighbouring village, where he recovered, although threatened with amputation. Anxious to again behold his wife and child, his other relations and the land of his adoption, he returned to Artigues, where he was immediately recognised by everyone, including the identical Pierre Guerre, his uncle, who now had the cruelty to disavow him. In fact, the latter had shown him special affection up to the day when Martin required an account of his stewardship. Had he only had the cowardice to sacrifice his money and thereby defraud his children, he would not to-day be charged as an impostor. “But,” continued Martin, “I resisted, and a violent quarrel ensued, in which anger perhaps carried me too far; Pierre Guerre, cunning and revengeful, has waited in silence. He has taken his time and his measures to organise this plot, hoping thereby to obtain his ends, to bring justice to the help of his avarice, and to acquire the spoils he coveted, and revenge for his defeat, by means of a sentence obtained from the scruples of the judges.” Besides these explanations, which did not appear wanting in probability, Martin vehemently protested his innocence, demanding that his wife should be confronted with him, and declaring that in his presence she would not sustain the charge of personation brought against him, and that her mind not being animated by the blind hatred which dominated his persecutor, the truth would undoubtedly prevail.

He now, in his turn, demanded that the judge should acknowledge his innocence, and prove it by condemning his calumniators to the punishment invoked against himself; that his wife, Bertrande de Rolls, should be secluded in some house where her mind could no longer be perverted, and, finally, that his innocence should be declared, and expenses and compensations awarded him.

After this speech, delivered with warmth, and with every token of sincerity, he answered without difficulty all the interrogations of the judge. The following are some of the questions and answers, just as they have come down to us: —

“In what part of Biscay were you born?”

“In the village of Aymes, province of Guipuscoa.”

“What were the names of your parents?”

“Antonio Guerre and Marie Toreada.”

“Are they still living?”

“My father died June 15th, 1530; my mother survived him three years and twelve days.”

“Have you any brothers and sisters?”

“I had one brother, who only lived three months. My four sisters, Inez, Dorothea, Marietta, and Pedrina, all came to live at Artigues when I did; they are there still, and they all recognised me.”

“What is the date of your marriage?”

“January 10, 1539.”

“Who were present at the ceremony?”

"My father-in-law, my mother-in-law, my uncle, my two sisters, Maitre Marcel and his daughter Rose; a neighbour called Claude Perrin, who got drunk at the wedding feast; also Giraud, the poet, who composed verses in our honour."

"Who was the priest who married you?"

"The old cure, Pascal Guerin, whom I did not find alive when I returned."

"What special circumstances occurred on the wedding-day?"

"At midnight exactly, our neighbour, Catherine Boere, brought us the repast which is known as 'medianoche.' This woman has recognised me, as also our old Marguerite, who has remained with us ever since the wedding."

"What is the date of your son's birth?"

"February 10, 1548, nine years after our marriage. I was only twelve when the ceremony took place, and did not arrive at manhood till several years later."

"Give the date of your leaving Artigues."

"It was in August 1549. As I left the village, I met Claude Perrin and the cure Pascal, and took leave of them. I went towards Beauvais, end I passed through Orleans, Bourges, Limoges, Bordeaux, and Toulouse. If you want the names of people whom I saw and to whom I spoke, you can have them. What more can I say?"

Never, indeed, was there a more apparently veracious statement! All the doings of Martin Guerre seemed to be most faithfully described, and surely only himself could thus narrate his own actions. As the historian remarks, alluding to the story of Amphitryon, Mercury himself could not better reproduce all Sosia's actions, gestures, and words, than did the false Martin Guerre those of the real one.

In accordance with the demand of the accused, Bertrande de Rolls was detained in seclusion, in order to remove her from the influence of Pierre Guerre. The latter, however, did not waste time, and during the month spent in examining the witnesses cited by Martin, his diligent enemy, guided by some vague traces, departed on a journey, from which he did not return alone.

All the witnesses bore out the statement of the accused; the latter heard this in prison, and rejoiced, hoping for a speedy release. Before long he was again brought before the judge, who told him that his deposition had been confirmed by all the witnesses examined.

“Do you know of no others?” continued the magistrate. “Have you no relatives except those you have mentioned?”

“I have no others,” answered the prisoner.

“Then what do you say to this man?” said the judge, opening a door.

An old man issued forth, who fell on the prisoner’s neck, exclaiming, “My nephew!”

Martin trembled in every limb, but only for a moment. Promptly recovering himself, and gazing calmly at the newcomer, he asked coolly —

“And who may you be?”

“What!” said the old man, “do you not know me? Dare you deny me? — me, your mother’s brother, Carbon Barreau, the old soldier! Me, who dandled you on my knee in your infancy; me, who taught you later to carry a musket; me, who met you during the war at an inn in Picardy, when you fled secretly. Since then I have sought you everywhere; I have spoken of you, and described your face and person, until a worthy inhabitant of this country offered to bring me hither, where indeed I did not expect to find my sister’s son imprisoned and fettered as a malefactor. What is his crime, may it please your honour?”

“You shall hear,” replied the magistrate. “Then you identify the prisoner as your nephew? You affirm his name to be — -?”

“Arnauld du Thill, also called ‘Pansette,’ after his father, Jacques Pansa. His mother was Therese Barreau, my sister, and he was born in the village of Sagias.”

“What have you to say?” demanded the judge, turning to the accused.

“Three things,” replied the latter, unabashed, “this man is either mad, or he has been suborned to tell lies, or he is simply mistaken.”

The old man was struck dumb with astonishment. But his supposed nephew’s start of terror had not been lost upon the judge, also much impressed by the straightforward frankness of Carbon Barreau. He caused fresh investigations to be made, and other inhabitants of Sagias were summoned to Rieux, who one and all agreed in identifying the accused as the same Arnauld du Thill who had been born and had grown up under their very eyes. Several deposed that as he grew up he had taken to evil courses, and become an adept in theft and lying, not fearing even to take the sacred name of God in vain, in order to cover the untruth of his daring assertions. From such testimony the judge naturally concluded that Arnauld du Thill was quite capable of carrying on, an imposture, and that the impudence which he displayed was natural to his character. Moreover, he noted that the prisoner, who averred that he was born in Biscay, knew only a few words of the Basque language, and used these quite wrongly. He heard later another witness who deposed that the original Martin Guerre was a good wrestler and skilled in the art of fence, whereas the prisoner, having wished to try what he could do, showed no skill whatever. Finally, a shoemaker was interrogated, and his evidence was not the least damning. Martin Guerre, he declared, required twelve holes to lace his boots, and his surprise had been great when he found those of the prisoner had only nine. Considering all these points, and the cumulative evidence, the judge of Rieux set aside the favourable testimony, which he concluded had been the outcome of general credulity, imposed on by an extraordinary resemblance. He gave due weight also to Bertrande's accusation, although she had never confirmed it, and now maintained an obstinate silence; and he pronounced a judgment by which Arnauld du Thill was declared "attainted and convicted of imposture, and was therefore condemned to be beheaded; after which his body should be divided into four quarters, and exposed at the four corners of the town."

This sentence, as soon as it was known, caused much diversity of opinion in the town. The prisoner's enemies praised the wisdom of the judge, and those less prejudiced condemned his decision; as such conflicting testimony left room for doubt. Besides, it was thought that the possession of property and the future of the children required much consideration, also that the most absolute certainty was demanded before annulling a past of two whole years, untroubled by any counter claim whatever.

The condemned man appealed from this sentence to the Parliament of Toulouse. This court decided that the case required more careful consideration than had yet been given to it, and began by ordering Arnauld du Thill to be confronted with Pierre Guerre and Bertrande de Rolls.

Who can say what feelings animate a man who, already once condemned, finds himself subjected to a second trial? The torture scarcely ended begins again, and Hope, though reduced to a shadow, regains her sway over his imagination, which clings to her skirts, as it were, with desperation. The exhausting efforts must be recommenced; it is the last struggle — a struggle which is more desperate in proportion as there is less strength to maintain it. In this case the defendant was not one of those who are easily cast down; he collected all his energy, all his courage, hoping to come victoriously out of the new combat which lay before him.

The magistrates assembled in the great hall of the Parliament, and the prisoner appeared before them. He had first to deal with Pierre, and confronted him calmly, letting him speak, without showing any emotion. He then replied with indignant reproaches, dwelling on Pierre's greed and avarice, his vows of vengeance, the means employed to work upon Bertrande, his secret manoeuvres in order to gain his ends, and the unheard-of animosity displayed in hunting up accusers, witnesses, and calumniators. He defied Pierre to prove that he was not Martin Guerre, his nephew, inasmuch as Pierre had publicly acknowledged and embraced him, and his tardy suspicions only dated from the time of their violent quarrel. His language was so strong and vehement, that Pierre became confused and was unable to answer, and the encounter turned entirely in Arnauld's favour, who seemed to overawe his adversary from a height of injured innocence, while the latter appeared as a disconcerted slanderer.

The scene of his confrontation with Bertrande took a wholly different character. The poor woman, pale, cast down, worn by sorrow, came staggering before the tribunal, in an almost fainting condition. She endeavoured to collect herself, but as soon as she saw the prisoner she hung her head and covered her face with her hands. He approached her and besought her in the gentlest accents not to persist in an accusation which might send him to the scaffold, not thus to avenge any sins he might have committed against her, although he could not reproach himself with any really serious fault.

Bertrande started, and murmured in a whisper, “And Rose?”

“Ah!” Arnauld exclaimed, astonished at this revelation.

His part was instantly taken. Turning to the judges —

“Gentlemen,” he said, “my wife is a jealous woman! Ten years ago, when I left her, she had formed these suspicions; they were the cause of my voluntary exile. To-day she again accuses me of, guilty relations with the same person; I neither deny nor acknowledge them, but I affirm that it is the blind passion of jealousy which, aided by my uncle's suggestions, guided my wife's hand when she signed this denunciation.”

Bertrande remained silent.

“Do you dare,” he continued, turning towards her, — ”do you dare to swear before God that jealousy did not inspire you with the wish to ruin me?”

"And you," she replied, "dare you swear that I was deceived in my suspicions?"

"You see, gentlemen," exclaimed the prisoner triumphantly, "her jealousy breaks forth before your eyes. Whether I am, or am not, guilty of the sin she attributes to me, is not the question for you to decide. Can you conscientiously admit the testimony of a woman who, after publicly acknowledging me, after receiving me in her house, after living two years in perfect amity with me, has, in a fit of angry vengeance, thought she could give the lie to all her wards and actions? Ah! Bertrande," he continued, "if it only concerned my life I think I could forgive a madness of which your love is both the cause and the excuse, but you are a mother, think of that! My punishment will recoil on the head of my daughter, who is unhappy enough to have been born since our reunion, and also on our unborn child, which you condemn beforehand to curse the union which gave it being. Think of this, Bertrande, you will have to answer before God for what you are now doing!"

The unhappy woman fell on her knees, weeping.

"I adjure you," he continued solemnly, "you, my wife, Bertrande de Rolls, to swear now, here, on the crucifix, that I am an impostor and a cheat."

A crucifix was placed before Bertrande; she made a sign as if to push it away, endeavoured to speak, and feebly exclaimed, "No," then fell to the ground, and was carried out insensible.

This scene considerably shook the opinion of the magistrates. They could not believe that an impostor, whatever he might be, would have sufficient daring and presence of mind thus to turn into mockery all that was most sacred. They set a new inquiry on foot, which, instead of producing enlightenment, only plunged them into still greater obscurity. Out of thirty witnesses heard, more than three-quarters agreed in identifying as Martin Guerre the man who claimed his name. Never was greater perplexity caused by more extraordinary appearances. The remarkable resemblance upset all reasoning: some recognised him as Arnauld du Thill, and others asserted the exact contrary. He could hardly understand Basque, some said, though born in Biscay, was that astonishing, seeing he was only three when he left the country? He could neither wrestle nor fence well, but having no occasion to practise these exercises he might well have forgotten them. The shoemaker — who made his shoes afore-time, thought he took another measure, but he might have made a mistake before or be mistaken now. The prisoner further defended himself by recapitulating the circumstances of his first meeting with Bertrande, on his return, the thousand and one little details he had mentioned which he only could have known, also the letters in his possession, all of which could only be explained by the assumption that he was the veritable Martin Guerre. Was it likely that he would be wounded over the left eye and leg as the missing man was supposed to be? Was it likely that the old servant, that the four sisters, his uncle Pierre, many persons to whom he had related facts known only to himself, that all the community in short, would have recognised him? And even the very intrigue suspected by Bertrande, which had aroused her jealous anger, this very intrigue, if it really existed, was it not another proof of the verity of his claim, since the person concerned, as interested and as penetrating as the legitimate wife; had also accepted him as her former lover? Surely here was a mass of evidence sufficient to cast light on the case. Imagine an impostor arriving for the first time in a place where all the inhabitants are unknown to him, and attempting to personate a man who had dwelt there, who would have connections of all kinds, who would have played his part in a thousand different scenes, who would have confided his secrets, his opinions, to relations, friends, acquaintances, to all sorts of people; who had also a wife — that is to say, a person under whose eyes nearly his whole life would be passed, a person would study him perpetually, with whom he would be continually conversing on every sort of subject. Could such an impostor sustain his impersonation for a single day, without his memory playing him false? From the physical and moral impossibility of playing such a part, was it not reasonable to conclude that the accused, who had maintained it for more than two years, was the true Martin Guerre?

There seemed, in fact, to be nothing which could account for such an attempt being successfully made unless recourse was had to an accusation of sorcery. The idea of handing him over to the ecclesiastical authorities was briefly discussed, but proofs were necessary, and the judges hesitated. It is a principle of justice, which has become a precept in law, that in cases of uncertainty the accused has the benefit of the doubt; but at the period of which we are writing, these truths were far from being acknowledged; guilt was presumed rather than innocence; and torture, instituted to force confession from those who could not otherwise be convicted, is only explicable by supposing the judges convinced of the actual guilt of the accused; for no one would have thought of subjecting a possibly innocent person to this suffering. However, notwithstanding this prejudice, which has been handed down to us by some organs of the public ministry always disposed to assume the guilt of a suspected person, — notwithstanding this prejudice, the judges in this case neither ventured to condemn Martin Guerre themselves as an impostor, nor to demand the intervention of the Church. In this conflict of contrary testimony, which seemed to reveal the truth only to immediately obscure it again, in this chaos of arguments and conjectures which showed flashes of light only to extinguish them in greater darkness, consideration for the family prevailed. The sincerity of Bertrande, the future of the children, seemed reasons for proceeding with extreme caution, and this once admitted, could only yield to conclusive evidence. Consequently the Parliament adjourned the case, matters remaining in 'statu quo', pending a more exhaustive inquiry. Meanwhile, the accused, for whom several relations and friends gave surety, was allowed to be at liberty at Artigues, though remaining under careful surveillance.

Bertrande therefore again saw him an inmate of the house, as if no doubts had ever been cast on the legitimacy of their union. What thoughts passed through her mind during the long 'tete-a-tete'? She had accused this man of imposture, and now, notwithstanding her secret conviction, she was obliged to appear as if she had no suspicion, as if she had been mistaken, to humiliate herself before the impostor, and ask forgiveness for the insanity of her conduct; for, having publicly renounced her accusation by refusing to swear to it, she had no alternative left. In order to sustain her part and to save the honour of her children, she must treat this man as her husband and appear submissive and repentant; she must show him entire confidence, as the only means of rehabilitating him and lulling the vigilance of justice. What the widow of Martin Guerre must have suffered in this life of effort was a secret between God and herself, but she looked at her little daughter, she thought of her fast approaching confinement, and took courage.

One evening, towards nightfall, she was sitting near him in the most private corner of the garden, with her little child on her knee, whilst the adventurer, sunk in gloomy thoughts, absently stroked Sanxi's fair head. Both were silent, for at the bottom of their hearts each knew the other's thoughts, and, no longer able to talk familiarly, nor daring to appear estranged, they spent, when alone together, long hours of silent dreariness.

All at once a loud uproar broke the silence of their retreat; they heard the exclamations of many persons, cries of surprise mixed with angry tones, hasty footsteps, then the garden gate was flung violently open, and old Marguerite appeared, pale, gasping, almost breathless. Bertrande hastened towards her in astonishment, followed by her husband, but when near enough to speak she could only answer with inarticulate sounds, pointing with terror to the courtyard of the house. They looked in this direction, and saw a man standing at the threshold; they approached him. He stepped forward, as if to place himself between them. He was tall, dark; his clothes were torn; he had a wooden leg; his countenance was stern. He surveyed Bertrande with a gloomy look: she cried aloud, and fell back insensible; . . . she recognised her real husband!

Arnauld du Thill stood petrified. While Marguerite, distracted herself, endeavoured to revive her mistress, the neighbours, attracted by the noise, invaded the house, and stopped, gazing with stupefaction at this astonishing resemblance. The two men had the same features, the same height, the same bearing, and suggested one being in two persons. They gazed at each other in terror, and in that superstitious age the idea of sorcery and of infernal intervention naturally occurred to those present. All crossed themselves, expecting every moment to see fire from heaven strike one or other of the two men, or that the earth would engulf one of them. Nothing happened, however, except that both were promptly arrested, in order that the strange mystery might be cleared up.

The wearer of the wooden leg, interrogated by the judges, related that he came from Spain, where first the healing of his wound, and then the want of money, had detained him hitherto. He had travelled on foot, almost a beggar. He gave exactly the same reasons for leaving Artigues as had been given by the other Martin Guerre, namely, a domestic quarrel caused by jealous suspicion, the desire of seeing other countries, and an adventurous disposition. He had gone back to his birthplace, in Biscay; thence he entered the service of the Cardinal of Burgos; then the cardinal’s brother had taken him to the war, and he had served with the Spanish troops; at the battle of St. Quentiny — his leg had been shattered by an arquebus ball. So far his recital was the counterpart of the one already heard by the judges from the other man. Now, they began to differ. Martin Guerre stated that he had been conveyed to a house by a man whose features he did not distinguish, that he thought he was dying, and that several hours elapsed of which he could give no account, being probably delirious; that he suffered later intolerable pain, and on coming to himself, found that his leg had been amputated. He remained long between life and death, but he was cared for by peasants who probably saved his life; his recovery was very slow. He discovered that in the interval between being struck down in the battle and recovering his senses, his papers had disappeared, but it was impossible to suspect the people who had nursed him with such generous kindness of theft. After his recovery, being absolutely destitute, he sought to return to France and again see his wife and child: he had endured all sorts of privations and fatigues, and at length, exhausted, but rejoicing at being near the end of his troubles, he arrived, suspecting nothing, at his own door. Then the terror of the old servant, a few broken words, made him guess at some misfortune, and the appearance of his wife and of a man so exactly like himself stupefied him. Matters had now been explained, and he only regretted that his wound had not at once ended his existence.

The whole story bore the impress of truth, but when the other prisoner was asked what he had to say he adhered to his first answers, maintaining their correctness, and again asserted that he was the real Martin Guerre, and that the new claimant could only be Arnauld du Thill, the clever impostor, who was said to resemble himself so much that the inhabitants of Sagias had agreed in mistaking him for the said Arnauld.

The two Martin Guerres were then confronted without changing the situation in the least; the first showing the same assurance, the same bold and confident bearing; while the second, calling on God and men to bear witness to his sincerity, deplored his misfortune in the most pathetic terms.

The judge’s perplexity was great: the affair became more and more complicated, the question remained as difficult, as uncertain as ever. All the appearances and evidences were at variance; probability seemed to incline towards one, sympathy was more in favour of the other, but actual proof was still wanting.

At length a member of the Parliament, M. de Coras, proposed as a last chance before resorting to torture, that final means of examination in a barbarous age, that Bertrande should be placed between the two rivals, trusting, he said, that in such a case a woman’s instinct would divine the truth. Consequently the two Martin Guerres were brought before the Parliament, and a few moments after Bertrande was led in, weak, pale, hardly able to stand, being worn out by suffering and advanced pregnancy.

Her appearance excited compassion, and all watched anxiously to see what she would do. She looked at the two men, who had been placed at different ends of the hall, and turning from him who was nearest to her, went and knelt silently before the man with the wooden leg; then, joining her hands as if praying for mercy, she wept bitterly. So simple and touching an action roused the sympathy of all present; Arnauld du Thill grew pale, and everyone expected that Martin Guerre, rejoiced at being vindicated by this public acknowledgment, would raise his wife and embrace her. But he remained cold and stern, and in a contemptuous tone —

“Your tears, madame,” he said; “they do not move me in the least, neither can you seek to excuse your credulity by the examples of my sisters and my uncle. A wife knows her husband more intimately than his other relations, as you prove by your present action, and if she is deceived it is because she consents to the deception. You are the sole cause of the misfortunes of my house, and to you only shall I ever impute them.”

Thunderstruck by this reproach, the poor woman had no strength to reply, and was taken home more dead than alive.

The dignified language of this injured husband made another point in his favour. Much pity was felt for Bertrande, as being the victim of an audacious deception; but everybody agreed that thus it beseemed the real Martin Guerre to have spoken. After the ordeal gone through by the wife had been also essayed by the sisters and other relatives, who one and all followed Bertrande’s example and accepted the new-comer, the court, having fully deliberated, passed the following sentence, which we transcribe literally:

“Having reviewed the trial of Arnauld du Thill or Pansette, calling himself Martin Guerre, a prisoner in the Conciergerie, who appeals from the decision of the judge of Rieux, etc.

“We declare that this court negatives the appeal and defence of the said Arnauld du Thill; and as punishment and amends for the imposture, deception, assumption of name and of person, adultery, rape, sacrilege, theft, larceny, and other deeds committed by the aforesaid du Thill, and causing the above-mentioned trial; this court has condemned and condemns him to do penance before the church of Artigue, kneeling, clad in his shirt only, bareheaded and barefoot, a halter on his neck, and a burning torch in his hand, and there he shall ask pardon from God, from the King, and from justice, from the said Martin Guerre and Bertrande de Rolls, husband and wife: and this done, the aforesaid du Thill shall be delivered into the hands of the executioners of the King’s justice, who shall lead him through the customary streets and crossroads of the aforesaid place of Artigues, and, the halter on his neck, shall bring him before the house of the aforesaid Martin Guerre, where he shall be hung and strangled upon a gibbet erected for this purpose, after which his body shall be burnt: and for various reasons and considerations thereunto moving the court, it has awarded and awards the goods of the aforesaid Arnauld du Thill, apart from the expenses of justice, to the daughter born unto him by the aforesaid Bertrande de Rolls, under pretence of marriage falsely asserted by him, having thereto assumed the name and person of the aforesaid Martin Guerre, by this mans deceiving the aforesaid de Rolls; and moreover the court has exempted and exempts from this trial the aforesaid Martin Guerre and Bertrande de Rolls, also the said Pierre Guerre, uncle of the aforesaid Martin, and has remitted and remits the aforesaid Arnauld du Thill to the aforesaid judge of Rieux, in order that the present sentence may be executed according to its form and tenor. Pronounced judicially this 12th day of September 1560.”

This sentence substituted the gallows for the decapitation decreed by the first judge, inasmuch as the latter punishment was reserved for criminals of noble birth, while hanging was inflicted on meaner persons.

When once his fate was decided, Arnauld du Thill lost all his audacity. Sent back to Artigues, he was interrogated in prison by the judge of Rieux, and confessed his imposture at great length. He said the idea first occurred to him when, having returned from the camp in Picardy, he was addressed as Martin Guerre by several intimate friends of the latter. He then inquired as to the sort of life, the habits and relations of, this man, and having contrived to be near him, had watched him closely during the battle. He saw him fall, carried him away, and then, as the reader has already seen, excited his delirium to the utmost in order to obtain possession of his secrets. Having thus explained his successful imposture by natural causes, which excluded any idea of magic or sorcery, he protested his penitence, implored the mercy of God, and prepared himself for execution as became a Christian.

The next day, while the populace, collecting from the whole neighbourhood, had assembled before the parish church of Artigues in order to behold the penance of the criminal, who, barefoot, attired in a shirt, and holding a lighted torch in his hand, knelt at the entrance of the church, another scene, no less painful, took place in the house of Martin Guerre. Exhausted by her suffering, which had caused a premature confinement, Bertrande lay on her couch of pain, and besought pardon from him whom she had innocently wronged, entreating him also to pray for her soul. Martin Guerre, sitting at her bedside, extended his hand and blessed her. She took his hand and held it to her lips; she could no longer speak. All at once a loud noise was heard outside: the guilty man had just been executed in front of the house. When finally attached to the gallows, he uttered a terrible cry, which was answered by another from inside the house. The same evening, while the body of the malefactor was being consumed by fire, the remains of a mother and child were laid to rest in consecrated ground.

ALI PACHA

CHAPTER I

The beginning of the nineteenth century was a time of audacious enterprises and strange vicissitudes of fortune. Whilst Western Europe in turn submitted and struggled against a sub-lieutenant who made himself an emperor, who at his pleasure made kings and destroyed kingdoms, the ancient eastern part of the Continent; like mummies which preserve but the semblance of life, was gradually tumbling to pieces, and getting parcelled out amongst bold adventurers who skirmished over its ruins. Without mentioning local revolts which produced only short-lived struggles and trifling changes, of administration, such as that of Djezzar Pacha, who refused to pay tribute because he thought himself impregnable in his citadel of Saint-Jean-d’Acre, or that of Passevend-Oglou Pacha, who planted himself on the walls of Widdin as defender of the Janissaries against the institution of the regular militia decreed by Sultan Selim at Stamboul, there were wider spread rebellions which attacked the constitution of the Turkish Empire and diminished its extent; amongst them that of Czerni-Georges, which raised Servia to the position of a free state; of Mahomet Ali, who made his pachalik of Egypt into a kingdom; and finally that of the man whose, history we are about to narrate, Ali Tepeleni, Pacha of Janina, whose long resistance to the suzerain power preceded and brought about the regeneration of Greece.

Ali’s own will counted for nothing in this important movement. He foresaw it, but without ever seeking to aid it, and was powerless to arrest it. He was not one of those men who place their lives and services at the disposal of any cause indiscriminately; and his sole aim was to acquire and increase a power of which he was both the guiding influence, and the end and object. His nature contained the seeds of every human passion, and he devoted all his long life to their development and gratification. This explains his whole temperament; his actions were merely the natural outcome of his character confronted with circumstances. Few men have understood themselves better or been on better terms with the orbit of their existence, and as the personality of an individual is all the more striking, in proportion as it reflects the manners and ideas of the time and country in which he has lived, so the figure of Ali Pacha stands out, if not one of the most brilliant, at least one of the most singular in contemporary history.

From the middle of the eighteenth century Turkey had been a prey to the political gangrene of which she is vainly trying to cure herself to-day, and which, before long, will dismember her in the sight of all Europe. Anarchy and disorder reigned from one end of the empire to the other. The Osmanli race, bred on conquest alone, proved good for nothing when conquest failed. It naturally therefore came to pass when Sobieski, who saved Christianity under the walls of Vienna, as before his time Charles Martel had saved it on the plains of Poitiers, had set bounds to the wave of Mussulman westward invasion, and definitely fixed a limit which it should not pass, that the Osmanli warlike instincts recoiled upon themselves. The haughty descendants of Ortogrul, who considered themselves born to command, seeing victory forsake them, fell back upon tyranny. Vainly did reason expostulate that oppression could not long be exercised by hands which had lost their strength, and that peace imposed new and different labours on those who no longer triumphed in war; they would listen to nothing; and, as fatalistic when condemned to a state of peace as when they marched forth conquering and to conquer, they cowered down in magnificent listlessness, leaving the whole burden of their support on conquered peoples. Like ignorant farmers, who exhaust fertile fields by forcing crops; they rapidly ruined their vast and rich empire by exorbitant exactions. Inexorable conquerors and insatiable masters, with one hand they flogged their slaves and with the other plundered them. Nothing was superior to their insolence, nothing on a level with their greed. They were never glutted, and never relaxed their extortions. But in proportion as their needs increased on the one hand, so did their resources diminish on the other. Their oppressed subjects soon found that they must escape at any cost from oppressors whom they could neither appease nor satisfy. Each population took the steps best suited to its position and character; some chose inertia, others violence. The inhabitants of the plains, powerless and shelterless, bent like reeds before the storm and evaded the shock against which they were unable to stand. The mountaineers planted themselves like rocks in a torrent, and dammed its course with all their might. On both sides arose a determined resistance, different in method, similar in result. In the case of the peasants labour came to a stand-still; in that of the hill folk open war broke out. The grasping exactions of the tyrant dominant body produced nothing from waste lands and armed mountaineers; destitution and revolt were equally beyond their power to cope with; and all that was left for tyranny to govern was a desert enclosed by a wall.

But, all the same, the wants of a magnificent sultan, descendant of the Prophet and distributor of crowns, must be supplied; and to do this, the Sublime Porte needed money. Unconsciously imitating the Roman Senate, the Turkish Divan put up the empire for sale by public auction. All employments were sold to the highest bidder; pachas, beys, cadis, ministers of every rank, and clerks of every class had to buy their posts from their sovereign and get the money back out of his subjects. They spent their money in the capital, and recuperated themselves in the provinces. And as there was no other law than their master’s pleasure, so there, was no other guarantee than his caprice. They had therefore to set quickly to work; the post might be lost before its cost had been recovered. Thus all the science of administration resolved itself into plundering as much and as quickly as possible. To this end, the delegate of imperial power delegated in his turn, on similar conditions, other agents to seize for him and for themselves all they could lay their hands on; so that the inhabitants of the empire might be divided into three classes — those who were striving to seize everything; those who were trying to save a little; and those who, having nothing and hoping for nothing, took no interest in affairs at all.

Albania was one of the most difficult provinces to manage. Its inhabitants were poor, brave, and, the nature of the country was mountainous and inaccessible. The pashas had great difficulty in collecting tribute, because the people were given to fighting for their bread. Whether Mahomedans or Christians, the Albanians were above all soldiers. Descended on the one side from the unconquerable Scythians, on the other from the ancient Macedonians, not long since masters of the world; crossed with Norman adventurers brought eastwards by the great movement of the Crusades; they felt the blood of warriors flow in their veins, and that war was their element. Sometimes at feud with one another, canton against canton, village against village, often even house against house; sometimes rebelling against the government their sanjaks; sometimes in league with these against the sultan; they never rested from combat except in an armed peace. Each tribe had its military organisation, each family its fortified stronghold, each man his gun on his shoulder. When they had nothing better to do, they tilled their fields, or mowed their neighbours’, carrying off, it should be noted, the crop; or pastured their, flocks, watching the opportunity to trespass over pasture limits. This was the normal and regular life of the population of Epirus, Thesprotia, Thessaly, and Upper Albania. Lower Albania, less strong, was also less active and bold; and there, as in many other parts of Turkey, the dalesman was often the prey of the mountaineer. It was in the mountain districts where were preserved the recollections of Scander Beg, and where the manners of ancient Laconia prevailed; the deeds of the brave soldier were sung on the lyre, and the skilful robber quoted as an example to the children by the father of the family. Village feasts were held on the booty taken from strangers; and the favourite dish was always a stolen sheep. Every man was esteemed in proportion to his skill and courage, and a man's chances of making a good match were greatly enhanced when he acquired the reputation of being an agile mountaineer and a good bandit.

The Albanians proudly called this anarchy liberty, and religiously guarded a state of disorder bequeathed by their ancestors, which always assured the first place to the most valiant.

It was amidst men and manners such as these that Ali Tepeleni was born. He boasted that he belonged to the conquering race, and that he descended from an ancient Anatolian family which had crossed into Albania with the troops of Bajazet Ilderim. But it is made certain by the learned researches of M. de Pouqueville that he sprang from a native stock, and not an Asiatic one, as he pretended. His ancestors were Christian Skipetars, who became Mussulmans after the Turkish invasion, and his ancestry certainly cannot be traced farther back than the end of the sixteenth century.

Mouktar Tepeleni, his grandfather, perished in the Turkish expedition against Corfu, in 1716. Marshal Schullemburg, who defended the island, having repulsed the enemy with loss, took Mouktar prisoner on Mount San Salvador, where he was in charge of a signalling party, and with a barbarity worthy of his adversaries, hung him without trial. It must be admitted that the memory of this murder must have had the effect of rendering Ali badly disposed towards Christians.

Mouktar left three sons, two of whom, Salik and Mahomet, were born of the same mother, a lawful wife, but the mother of the youngest, Veli, was a slave. His origin was no legal bar to his succeeding like his brothers. The family was one of the richest in the town of Tepelen, whose name it bore, it enjoyed an income of six thousand piastres, equal to twenty thousand francs. This was a large fortune in a poor country, where, all commodities were cheap. But the Tepeleni family, holding the rank of beys, had to maintain a state like that of the great financiers of feudal Europe. They had to keep a large stud of horses, with a great retinue of servants and men-at-arms, and consequently to incur heavy expenses; thus they constantly found their revenue inadequate. The most natural means of raising it which occurred to them was to diminish the number of those who shared it; therefore the two elder brothers, sons of the wife, combined against Veli, the son of the slave, and drove him out of the house. The latter, forced to leave home, bore his fate like a brave man, and determined to levy exactions on others to compensate him for the losses incurred through his brothers. He became a freebooter, patrolling highroads and lanes, with his gun on his shoulder and his yataghan in his belt, attacking, holding for ransom, or plundering all whom he encountered.

After some years of this profitable business, he found himself a wealthy man and chief of a warlike band. Judging that the moment for vengeance had arrived, he marched for Tepelen, which he reached unsuspected, crossed the river Vojutza, the ancient Aous, penetrated the streets unresisted, and presented himself before the paternal house, in which his brothers, forewarned, had barricaded themselves. He at once besieged them, soon forced the gates, and pursued them to a tent, in which they took a final refuge. He surrounded this tent, waited till they were inside it, and then set fire to the four corners. “See,” said he to those around him, “they cannot accuse me of vindictive reprisals; my brothers drove me out of doors, and I retaliate by keeping them at home for ever.”

In a few moments he was his father’s sole heir and master of Tepelen. Arrived at the summit of his ambition, he gave up free-booting, and established himself in the town, of which he became chief ago. He had already a son by a slave, who soon presented him with another son, and afterwards with a daughter, so that he had no reason to fear dying without an heir. But finding himself rich enough to maintain more wives and bring up many children, he desired to increase his credit by allying himself to some great family of the country. He therefore solicited and obtained the hand of Kamco, daughter of a bey of Conitza. This marriage attached him by the ties of relationship to the principal families of the province, among others to Kourd Pacha, Vizier of Serat, who was descended from the illustrious race of Scander Beg. After a few years, Veli had by his new wife a son named Ali, the subject of this history, and a daughter named Chainitza.

Ire spite of his intentions to reform, Veli could not entirely give up his old habits. Although his fortune placed him altogether above small gains and losses, he continued to amuse himself by raiding from time to time sheep, goats, and other perquisites, probably to keep his hand in. This innocent exercise of his taste was not to the fancy of his neighbours, and brawls and fights recommenced in fine style. Fortune did not always favour him, and the old mountaineer lost in the town part of what he had made on the hills. Vexations soured his temper and injured his health. Notwithstanding the injunctions of Mahomet, he sought consolation in wine, which soon closed his career. He died in 1754.

CHAPTER II

Ali thus at thirteen years of age was free to indulge in the impetuosity of his character. From his early youth he had manifested a mettle and activity rare in young Turks, haughty by nature and self-restrained by education. Scarcely out of the nursery, he spent his time in climbing mountains, wandering through forests, scaling precipices, rolling in snow, inhaling the wind, defying the tempests, breathing out his nervous energy through every pore. Possibly he learnt in the midst of every kind of danger to brave everything and subdue everything; possibly in sympathy with the majesty of nature, he felt aroused in him a need of personal grandeur which nothing could satiate. In vain his father sought to calm his savage temper; and restrain his vagabond spirit; nothing was of, any use. As obstinate as intractable, he set at defiance all efforts and all precautions. If they shut him up, he broke the door or jumped out of the window; if they threatened him, he pretended to comply, conquered by fear, and promised everything that was required, but only to break his word the first opportunity. He had a tutor specially attached to his person and charged to supervise all his actions. He constantly deluded him by fresh tricks, and when he thought himself free from the consequences, he maltreated him with gross violence. It was only in his youth, after his father's death, that he became more manageable; he even consented to learn to read, to please his mother, whose idol he was, and to whom in return he gave all his affection.

If Kamco had so strong a liking for Ali, it was because she found in him, not only her blood, but also her character. During the lifetime of her husband, whom she feared, she seemed only an ordinary woman; but as soon as his eyes were closed, she gave free scope to the violent passions which agitated her bosom. Ambitious, bold, vindictive; she assiduously cultivated the germs of ambition, hardihood, and vengeance which already strongly showed themselves in the young Ali. "My son," she was never tired of telling him, "he who cannot defend his patrimony richly deserves to lose it. Remember that the property of others is only theirs so long as they are strong enough to keep it, and that when you find yourself strong enough to take it from them, it is yours. Success justifies everything, and everything is permissible to him who has the power to do it."

Ali, when he reached the zenith of his greatness, used to declare that his success was entirely his mother's work. "I owe everything to my mother," he said one day to the French Consul; "for my father, when he died, left me nothing but a den of wild beasts and a few fields. My imagination, inflamed by the counsels of her who has given me life twice over, since she has made me both a man and a vizier, revealed to me the secret of my destiny. Thenceforward I saw nothing in Tepelen but the natal air from which I was to spring on the prey which I devoured mentally. I dreamt of nothing else but power, treasures, palaces, in short what time has realised and still promises; for the point I have now reached is not the limit of my hopes."

Kamco did not confine herself to words; she employed every means to increase the fortune of her beloved son and to make him a power. Her first care was to poison the children of Veli's favourite slave, who had died before him. Then, at ease about the interior of her family, she directed her attention to the exterior. Renouncing all the habit of her sex, she abandoned the veil and the distaff, and took up arms, under pretext of maintaining the rights of her children. She collected round her her husband's old partisans, whom she attached to her, service, some by presents, others by various favours, and she gradually enlisted all the lawless and adventurous men in Toscaria. With their aid, she made herself all powerful in Tepelen, and inflicted the most rigorous persecutions on such as remained hostile to her.

But the inhabitants of the two adjacent villages of Kormovo and Kardiki, fearing lest this terrible woman, aided by her son, now grown into a man, should strike a blow against their independence; made a secret alliance against her, with the object of putting her out of the way the first convenient opportunity. Learning one day that Ali had started on a distant expedition with his best soldiers; they surprised Tepelen under cover of night, and carried off Kamco and her daughter Chainitza captives to Kardiki. It was proposed to put them to death; and sufficient evidence to justify their execution was not wanting; but their beauty saved their lives; their captors preferred to revenge themselves by licentiousness rather than by murder. Shut up all day in prison, they only emerged at night to pass into the arms of the men who had won them by lot the previous morning. This state of things lasted for a month, at the end of which a Greek of Argyro-Castron, named G. Malicovo, moved by compassion for their horrible fate, ransomed them for twenty thousand piastres, and took them back to Tepelen.

Ali had just returned. He was accosted by his mother and sister, pale with fatigue, shame, and rage. They told him what had taken place, with cries and tears, and Kamco added, fixing her distracted eyes upon him, “My son! my son! my soul will enjoy no peace till Kormovo and Kardikil destroyed by thy scimitar, will no longer exist to bear witness to my dishonour.”

Ali, in whom this sight and this story had aroused, sanguinary passions, promised a vengeance proportioned to the outrage, and worked with all his might to place himself in a position to keep his word. A worthy son of his father, he had commenced life in the fashion of the heroes of ancient Greece, stealing sheep and goats, and from the age of fourteen years he had acquired an equal reputation to that earned by the son of Jupiter and Maia. When he grew to manhood, he extended his operations. At the time of which we are speaking, he had long practised open pillage. His plundering expeditions added to his mother’s savings, who since her return from Kardiki had altogether withdrawn from public life, and devoted herself to household duties, enabled him to collect a considerable force for am expedition against Kormovo, one of the two towns he had sworn to destroy. He marched against it at the head of his banditti, but found himself vigorously opposed, lost part of his force, and was obliged to save himself and the rest by flight. He did not stop till he reached Tepelen, where he had a warm reception from Kamco, whose thirst for vengeance had been disappointed by his defeat. “Go!” said she, “go, coward! go spin with the women in the harem! The distaff is a better weapon for you than the scimitar!” The young man answered not a word, but, deeply wounded by these reproaches, retired to hide his humiliation in the bosom of his old friend the mountain. The popular legend, always thirsting for the marvellous in the adventures of heroes, has it that he found in the ruins of a church a treasure which enabled him to reconstitute his party. But he himself has contradicted this story, stating that it was by the ordinary methods of rapine and plunder that he replenished his finances. He selected from his old band of brigands thirty palikars, and entered, as their bouloubachi, or leader of the group, into the service of the Pacha of Negropont. But he soon tired of the methodical life he was obliged to lead, and passed into Thessaly, where, following the example of his father Veli, he employed his time in brigandage on the highways. Thence he raided the Pindus chain of mountains, plundered a great number of villages, and returned to Tepelen, richer and consequently more esteemed than ever.

He employed his fortune and influence in collecting a formidable guerilla force, and resumed his plundering operations. Kurd Pacha soon found himself compelled, by the universal outcry of the province, to take active measures against this young brigand. He sent against him a division of troops, which defeated him and brought him prisoner with his men to Berat, the capital of Central Albania and residence of the governor. The country flattered itself that at length it was freed from its scourge. The whole body of bandits was condemned to death; but Ali was not the man to surrender his life so easily. Whilst they were hanging his comrades, he threw himself at the feet of the pacha and begged for mercy in the name of his parents, excusing himself on account of his youth, and promising a lasting reform. The pacha, seeing at his feet a comely youth, with fair hair and blue eyes, a persuasive voice, and eloquent tongue, and in whose veins flowed the same blood as his own, was moved with pity and pardoned him. Ali got off with a mild captivity in the palace of his powerful relative, who heaped benefits upon him, and did all he could to lead him into the paths of probity. He appeared amenable to these good influences, and bitterly to repent his past errors. After some years, believing in his reformation, and moved by the prayers of Kamco, who incessantly implored the restitution of her dear son, the generous pacha restored him his liberty, only giving him to under stand that he had no more mercy to expect if he again disturbed the public peace. Ali taking the threat seriously; did not run the risk of braving it, and, on the contrary, did all he could to conciliate the man whose anger he dared not kindle. Not only did he keep the promise he had made to live quietly, but by his good conduct he caused his, former escapades to be forgotten, putting under obligation all his neighbours, and attaching to himself, through the services he rendered them, a great number of friendly disposed persons. In this manner he soon assumed a distinguished and honourable rank among the beys of the country, and being of marriageable age, he sought and formed an alliance with the daughter of Capelan Tigre, Pacha of Delvino, who resided at Argyro-Castron. This union, happy on both sides, gave him, with one of the most accomplished women in Epirus, a high position and great influence.

It seemed as if this marriage were destined to wean Ali forever from his former turbulent habits and wild adventures. But the family into which he had married afforded violent contrasts and equal elements of good and mischief. If Emineh, his wife, was a model of virtue, his father-in-law, Capelan, was a composition of every vice — selfish, ambitious, turbulent, fierce. Confident in his courage, and further emboldened by his remoteness from the capital, the Pacha of Delvino gloried in setting law and authority at defiance.

Ali's disposition was too much like that of his father-in-law to prevent him from taking his measure very quickly. He soon got on good terms with him, and entered into his schemes, waiting for an opportunity to denounce him and become his successor. For this opportunity he had not long to wait.

Capelan's object in giving his daughter to Tepeleni was to enlist him among the beys of the province to gain independence, the ruling passion of viziers. The cunning young man pretended to enter into the views of his father-in-law, and did all he could to urge him into the path of rebellion.

An adventurer named Stephano Piccolo, an emissary of Russia, had just raised in Albania the standard of the Cross and called to arms all the Christians of the Acroceraunian Mountains. The Divan sent orders to all the pachas of Northern Turkey in Europe to instantly march against the insurgents and quell the rising in blood.

Instead of obeying the orders of the Divan and joining Kurd Pacha, who had summoned him, Capelan, at the instigation of his son-in-law, did all he could to embarrass the movement of the imperial troops, and without openly making common cause with the insurgents, he rendered them substantial aid in their resistance. They were, notwithstanding, conquered and dispersed; and their chief, Stephano Piccolo, had to take refuge in the unexplored caves of Montenegro.

When the struggle was over, Capelan, as Ali had foreseen, was summoned to give an account of his conduct before the roumeli-valicy, supreme judge over Turkey in Europe. He was not only accused of the gravest offences, but proofs of them were forwarded to the Divan by the very man who had instigated them. There could be no doubt as to the result of the inquiry; therefore, the pacha, who had no suspicions of his son-in-law's duplicity, determined not to leave his pachalik. That was not in accordance with the plans of Ali, who wished to succeed to both the government and the wealth of his father-in-law. He accordingly made the most plausible remonstrances against the inefficacy and danger of such a resistance. To refuse to plead was tantamount to a confession of guilt, and was certain to bring on his head a storm against which he was powerless to cope, whilst if he obeyed the orders of the roumeli-valicy he would find it easy to excuse himself. To give more effect to his perfidious advice, Ali further employed the innocent Emineh, who was easily alarmed on her father's account. Overcome by the reasoning of his son-in-law and the tears of his daughter, the unfortunate pacha consented to go to Monastir, where he had been summoned to appear, and where he was immediately arrested and beheaded.

Ali's schemes had succeeded, but both his ambition and his cupidity were frustrated. Ali, Bey of Argyro-Castron, who had throughout shown himself devoted to the sultan, was nominated Pacha of Delvino in place of Capelan. He sequestered all the property of his predecessor, as confiscated to the sultan, and thus deprived Ali Tepeleni of all the fruits of his crime.

This disappointment kindled the wrath of the ambitious Ali. He swore vengeance for the spoliation of which he considered himself the victim. But the moment was not favourable for putting his projects in train. The murder of Capelan, which its perpetrator intended for a mere crime, proved a huge blunder. The numerous enemies of Tepeleni, silent under the administration of the late pacha, whose resentment they had cause to fear, soon made common cause under the new one, for whose support they had hopes. Ali saw the danger, sought and found the means to obviate it. He succeeded in making a match between Ali of Argyro-Castron, who was unmarried, and Chainitza, his own sister. This alliance secured to him the government of Tigre, which he held under Capelan. But that was not sufficient. He must put himself in a state of security against the dangers he had lately, experienced, and establish himself on a firm footing' against possible accidents. He soon formed a plan, which he himself described to the French Consul in the following words: —

"Years were elapsing," said he, "and brought no important change in my position. I was an important partisan, it is true, and strongly supported, but I held no title or Government employment of my own. I recognised the necessity of establishing myself firmly in my birthplace. I had devoted friends, and formidable foes, bent on my destruction, whom I must put out of the way, for my own safety. I set about a plan for destroying them at one blow, and ended by devising one with which I ought to have commenced my career. Had I done so, I should have saved much time and pains.

"I was in the habit of going every day, after hunting, for a siesta in a neighbouring wood. A confidential servant of mine suggested to my enemies the idea of surprising me and assassinating one there. I myself supplied the plan of the conspiracy, which was adopted. On the day agreed upon, I preceded my adversaries to the place where I was accustomed to repose, and caused a goat to be pinioned and muzzled, and fastened under the tree, covered with my cape; I then returned home by a roundabout path. Soon after I had left, the conspirators arrived, and fired a volley at the goat.

"They ran up to make certain of my death, but were interrupted by a piquet of my men, who unexpectedly emerged from a copse where I had posted them, and they were obliged to return to Tepelen, which they entered, riotous with joy, crying 'Ali Bey is dead, now we are free!' This news reached my harem, and I heard the cries of my mother and my wife mingled with the shouts of my enemies. I allowed the commotion to run its course and reach its height, so as to indicate which were my friends and which my foes. But when the former were at the depth of their distress and the latter at the height of their joy, and, exulting in their supposed victory, had drowned their prudence and their courage in floods of wine, then, strong in the justice of my cause, I appeared upon the scene. Now was the time for my friends to triumph and for my foes to tremble. I set to work at the head of my partisans, and before sunrise had exterminated the last of my enemies. I distributed their lands, their houses, and their goods amongst my followers, and from that moment I could call the town of Tepelen my own."

A less ambitious man might perhaps have remained satisfied with such a result. But Ali did not look upon the suzerainty of a canton as a final object, but only as a means to an end; and he had not made himself master of Tepelen to limit himself to a petty state, but to employ it as a base of operations.

He had allied himself to Ali of Argyro-Castron to get rid of his enemies; once free from them, he began to plot against his supplanter. He forgot neither his vindictive projects nor his ambitious schemes. As prudent in execution as bold in design, he took good care not to openly attack a man stronger than himself, and gained by stratagem what he could not obtain by violence. The honest and straightforward character of his brother-in-law afforded an easy success to his perfidy. He began by endeavouring to suborn his sister Chainitza, and several times proposed to her to poison her husband; but she, who dearly loved the pacha, who was a kind husband and to whom she had borne two children, repulsed his suggestions with horror, and threatened, if he persisted, to denounce him. Ali, fearing the consequences if she carried out her threat, begged forgiveness for his wicked plans, pretended deep repentance, and spoke of his brother-in-law in terms of the warmest affection. His acting was so consummate that even Chainitza, who well knew her brother's subtle character, was deceived by it. When he saw that she was his dupe, knowing that he had nothing more either to fear or to hope for from that side, he directed his attention to another.

The pacha had a brother named Soliman, whose character nearly resembled that of Tepeleni. The latter, after having for some time quietly studied him, thought he discerned in him the man he wanted; he tempted him to kill the pacha, offering him, as the price of this crime, his whole inheritance and the hand of Chainitza, only reserving for himself the long coveted sanjak. Soliman accepted the proposals, and the fratricidal bargain was concluded. The two conspirators, sole masters of the secret, the horrible nature of which guaranteed their mutual fidelity, and having free access to the person of their victim; could not fail in their object.

One day, when they were both received by the pacha in private audience, Soliman, taking advantage of a moment when he was unobserved, drew a pistol from his belt and blew out his brother's brains. Chainitza ran at the sound, and saw her husband lying dead between her brother and her brother-in-law. Her cries for help were stopped by threats of death if she moved or uttered a sound. As she lay, fainting with grief and terror, Ali made, a sign to Soliman, who covered her with his cloak, and declared her his wife. Ali pronounced the marriage concluded, and retired for it to be consummated. Thus was celebrated this frightful wedding, in the scene of an awful crime; beside the corpse of a man who a moment before had been the husband of the bride and the brother of the bridegroom.

The assassins published the death of the pacha, attributing it, as is usual in Turkey, to a fit of cerebral apoplexy. But the truth soon leaked out from the lying shrouds in which it had been wrapped. Reports even exceeded the truth, and public opinion implicated Chainitza in a crime of which she had been but the witness. Appearances certainly justified these suspicions. The young wife had soon consoled herself in the arms of her second husband for the loss of the first, and her son by him presently died suddenly, thus leaving Soliman in lawful and peaceful possession of all his brother's wealth. As for the little girl, as she had no rights and could hurt no one, her life was spared; and she was eventually married to a bey of Cleisoura, destined in the sequel to cut a tragic figure in the history of the Tepeleni family.

But Ali was once more deprived of the fruit of his bloody schemes. Notwithstanding all his intrigues, the sanjak of Delvino was conferred, not upon him, but upon a bey of one of the first families of Zapouria. But, far from being discouraged, he recommenced with new boldness and still greater confidence the work of his elevation, so often begun and so often interrupted. He took advantage of his increasing influence to ingratiate himself with the new pasha, and was so successful in insinuating himself into his confidence, that he was received into the palace and treated like the pacha's son. There he acquired complete knowledge of the details of the pachalik and the affairs of the pacha, preparing himself to govern the one when he had got rid of the other.

The sanjak of Delvino was bounded from Venetian territory by the district of Buthrotum. Selim, a better neighbour and an abler politician than his predecessors, sought to renew and preserve friendly commercial relations with the purveyors of the Magnificent Republic. This wise conduct, equally advantageous for both the bordering provinces, instead of gaining for the pacha the praise and favours which he deserved, rendered him suspected at a court whose sole political idea was hatred of the name of Christian, and whose sole means of government was terror. Ali immediately perceived the pacha's error, and the advantage which he himself could derive from it. Selim, as one of his commercial transactions with the Venetians, had sold them, for a number of years, the right of felling timber in a forest near Lake Reloda. Ali immediately took advantage of this to denounce the pasha as guilty of having alienated the territory of the Sublime Porte, and of a desire to deliver to the infidels all the province of Delvino. Masking his ambitious designs under the veil of religion and patriotism, he lamented, in his denunciatory report, the necessity under which he found himself, as a loyal subject and faithful Mussulman, of accusing a man who had been his benefactor, and thus at the same time gained the benefit of crime and the credit of virtue.

Under the gloomy despotism of the Turks, a man in any position of responsibility is condemned almost as soon as accused; and if he is not strong enough to inspire terror, his ruin is certain. Ali received at Tepelen, where he had retired to more conveniently weave his perfidious plots, an order to get rid of the pacha. At the receipt of the firman of execution he leaped with joy, and flew to Delvino to seize the prey which was abandoned to him.

The noble Selim, little suspecting that his protege had become his accuser and was preparing to become his executioner, received him with more tenderness than ever, and lodged him, as heretofore, in his palace. Under the shadow of this hospitable roof, Ali skilfully prepared the consummation of the crime which was for ever to draw him out of obscurity. He went every morning to pay his court to the pacha, whose confidence he doubted; then, one day, feigning illness, he sent excuses for inability to pay his respects to a man whom he was accustomed to regard as his father, and begged him to come for a moment into his apartment. The invitation being accepted, he concealed assassins in one of the cupboards without shelves, so common in the East, which contain by day the mattresses spread by night on the floor for the slaves to sleep upon. At the hour fixed, the old man arrived. Ali rose from his sofa with a depressed air, met him, kissed the hem of his robe, and, after seating him in his place, himself offered him a pipe-and coffee, which were accepted. But instead of putting the cup in the hand stretched to receive it, he let it fall on the floor, where it broke into a thousand pieces. This was the signal. The assassins sprang from their retreat and darted upon Selim, who fell, exclaiming, like Caesar, “And it is thou, my son, who takest my life!”

At the sound of the tumult which followed the assassination, Selim’s bodyguard, running up, found Ali erect, covered with blood, surrounded by assassins, holding in his hand the firman displayed, and crying with a menacing voice, “I have killed the traitor Selim by the order of our glorious sultan; here is his imperial command.” At these words, and the sight of the fatal diploma, all prostrated themselves terror-stricken. Ali, after ordering the decapitation of Selim, whose head he seized as a trophy, ordered the cadi, the beys, and the Greek archons to meet at the palace, to prepare the official account of the execution of the sentence. They assembled, trembling; the sacred hymn of the Fatahat was sung, and the murder declared legal, in the name of the merciful and compassionate God, Lord of the world.

When they had sealed up the effects of the victim, the murderer left the palace, taking with him, as a hostage, Mustapha, son of Selim, destined to be even more unfortunate than his father.

A few days afterwards, the Divan awarded to Ali Tepeleni, as a reward for his zeal for the State and religion, the sanjak of Thessaly, with the title of Dervendgi-pacha, or Provost Marshal of the roads. This latter dignity was conferred on the condition of his levying a body of four thousand men to clear the valley of the Peneus of a multitude of Christian chiefs who exercised more power than the officers of the Grand Seigneur. The new pacha took advantage of this to enlist a numerous body of Albanians ready for any enterprise, and completely devoted to him. With two important commands, and with this strong force at his back, he repaired to Trikala, the seat of his government, where he speedily acquired great influence.

His first act of authority was to exterminate the bands of Armatolis, or Christian militia, which infested the plain. He laid violent hands on all whom he caught, and drove the rest back into their mountains, splitting them up into small bands whom he could deal with at his pleasure. At the same time he sent a few heads to Constantinople, to amuse the sultan and the mob, and some money to the ministers to gain their support. “For,” said he, “water sleeps, but envy never does.” These steps were prudent, and whilst his credit increased at court, order was reestablished from the defiles of the Perrebia of Pindus to the vale of Tempe and to the pass of Thermopylae.

These exploits of the provost-marshal, amplified by Oriental exaggeration, justified the ideas which were entertained of the capacity of Ali Pacha. Impatient of celebrity, he took good care himself to spread his fame, relating his prowess to all comers, making presents to the sultan’s officers who came into his government, and showing travellers his palace courtyard festooned with decapitated heads. But what chiefly tended to consolidate his power was the treasure which he ceaselessly amassed by every means. He never struck for the mere pleasure of striking, and the numerous victims of his proscriptions only perished to enrich him. His death sentences always fell on beys and wealthy persons whom he wished to plunder. In his eyes the axe was but an instrument of fortune, and the executioner a tax-gatherer.

CHAPTER III

Having governed Thessaly in this manner during several years, Ali found himself in a position to acquire the province of Janina, the possession of which, by making him master of Epirus, would enable him to crush all his enemies and to reign supreme over the three divisions of Albania.

But before he could succeed in this, it was necessary to dispose of the pacha already in possession. Fortunately for Ali, the latter was a weak and indolent man, quite incapable of struggling against so formidable a rival; and his enemy speedily conceived and put into execution a plan intended to bring about the fulfilment of his desires. He came to terms with the same Armatolians whom he had formerly treated so harshly, and let them loose, provided with arms and ammunition, on the country which he wished to obtain. Soon the whole region echoed with stories of devastation and pillage. The pacha, unable to repel the incursions of these mountaineers, employed the few troops he had in oppressing the inhabitants of the plains, who, groaning under both extortion and rapine, vainly filled the air with their despairing cries. Ali hoped that the Divan, which usually judged only after the event, seeing that Epirus lay desolate, while Thessaly flourished under his own administration, would, before long, entrust himself with the government of both provinces, when a family incident occurred, which for a time diverted the course of his political manoeuvres.

For a long time his mother Kamco had suffered from an internal cancer, the result of a life of depravity. Feeling that her end drew near, she despatched messenger after messenger, summoning her son to her bedside. He started, but arrived too late, and found only his sister Chainitza mourning over the body of their mother, who had expired in her arms an hour previously. Breathing unutterable rage and pronouncing horrible imprecations against Heaven, Kamco had commanded her children, under pain of her dying curse, to carry out her last wishes faithfully. After having long given way to their grief, Ali and Chainitza read together the document which contained these commands. It ordained some special assassinations, mentioned sundry villages which, some day; were to be given to the flames, but ordered them most especially, as soon as possible, to exterminate the inhabitants of Kormovo and Kardiki, from whom she had endured the last horrors of slavery.

Then, after advising her children to remain united, to enrich their soldiers, and to count as nothing people who were useless to them, Kamco ended by commanding them to send in her name a pilgrim to Mecca, who should deposit an offering on the tomb of the Prophet for the repose of her soul. Having perused these last injunctions, Ali and Chainitza joined hands, and over the inanimate remains of their departed mother swore to accomplish her dying behests.

The pilgrimage came first under consideration. Now a pilgrim can only be sent as proxy to Mecca, or offerings be made at the tomb of Medina, at the expense of legitimately acquired property duly sold for the purpose. The brother and sister made a careful examination of the family estates, and after long hunting, thought they had found the correct thing in a small property of about fifteen hundred francs income, inherited from their great-grandfather, founder of the Tepel-Enian dynasty. But further investigations disclosed that even this last resource had been forcibly taken from a Christian, and the idea of a pious pilgrimage and a sacred offering had to be given up. They then agreed to atone for the impossibility of expiation by the grandeur of their vengeance, and swore to pursue without ceasing and to destroy without mercy all enemies of their family.

The best mode of carrying out this terrible and self-given pledge was that Ali should resume his plans of aggrandizement exactly where he had left them. He succeeded in acquiring the pachalik of Janina, which was granted him by the Porte under the title of “arpalik,” or conquest. It was an old custom, natural to the warlike habits of the Turks, to bestow the Government provinces or towns affecting to despise the authority of the Grand Seigneur on whomsoever succeeded in controlling them, and Janina occupied this position. It was principally inhabited by Albanians, who had an enthusiastic admiration for anarchy, dignified by them with the name of “Liberty,” and who thought themselves independent in proportion to the disturbance they succeeded in making. Each lived retired as if in a mountain castle, and only went out in order to participate in the quarrels of his faction in the forum. As for the pachas, they were relegated to the old castle on the lake, and there was no difficulty in obtaining their recall.

Consequently there was a general outcry at the news of Ali Pacha’s nomination, and it was unanimously agreed that a man whose character and power were alike dreaded must not be admitted within the walls of Janina. Ali, not choosing to risk his forces in an open battle with a warlike population, and preferring a slower and safer way to a short and dangerous one, began by pillaging the villages and farms belonging to his most powerful opponents. His tactics succeeded, and the very persons who had been foremost in vowing hatred to the son of Kamco and who had sworn most loudly that they would die rather than submit to the tyrant, seeing their property daily ravaged, and impending ruin if hostilities continued, applied themselves to procure peace. Messengers were sent secretly to Ali, offering to admit him into Janina if he would undertake to respect the lives and property of his new allies. Ali promised whatever they asked, and entered the town by night. His first proceeding was to appear before the cadi, whom he compelled to register and proclaim his firmans of investiture.

In the same year in which he arrived at this dignity, really the desire and object of Ali's whole life, occurred also the death of the Sultan Abdul Hamid, whose two sons, Mustapha and Mahmoud, were confined in the Old Seraglio. This change of rulers, however, made no difference to Ali; the peaceful Selim, exchanging the prison to which his nephews were now relegated, for the throne of their father, confirmed the Pacha of Janina in the titles, offices, and privileges which had been conferred on him.

Established in his position by this double investiture, Ali applied himself to the definite settlement of his claims. He was now fifty years of age, and was at the height of his intellectual development: experience had been his teacher, and the lesson of no single event had been lost upon him. An uncultivated but just and penetrating mind enabled him to comprehend facts, analyse causes, and anticipate results; and as his heart never interfered with the deductions of his rough intelligence, he had by a sort of logical sequence formulated an inflexible plan of action. This man, wholly ignorant, not only of the ideas of history but also of the great names of Europe, had succeeded in divining, and as a natural consequence of his active and practical character, in also realising Macchiavelli, as is amply shown in the expansion of his greatness and the exercise of his power. Without faith in God, despising men, loving and thinking only of himself, distrusting all around him, audacious in design, immovable in resolution, inexorable in execution, merciless in vengeance, by turns insolent, humble, violent, or supple according to circumstances, always and entirely logical in his egotism, he is Cesar Borgia reborn as a Mussulman; he is the incarnate ideal of Florentine policy, the Italian prince converted into a satrap.

Age had as yet in no way impaired Ali’s strength and activity, and nothing prevented his profiting by the advantages of his position. Already possessing great riches, which every day saw increasing under his management, he maintained a large body of warlike and devoted troops, he united the offices of Pacha of two tails of Janina, of Toparch of Thessaly, and of Provost Marshal of the Highway. As influential aids both to his reputation for general ability and the terror of his’ arms, and his authority as ruler, there stood by his side two sons, Mouktar and Veli, offspring of his wife Emineh, both fully grown and carefully educated in the principles of their father.

Ali’s first care, once master of Janina, was to annihilate the beys forming the aristocracy of the place, whose hatred he was well aware of, and whose plots he dreaded. He ruined them all, banishing many and putting others to death. Knowing that he must make friends to supply the vacancy caused by the destruction of his foes, he enriched with the spoil the Albanian mountaineers in his pay, known by the name of Skipetars, on whom he conferred most of the vacant employments. But much too prudent to allow all the power to fall into the hands of a single caste, although a foreign one to the capital, he, by a singular innovation, added to and mixed with them an infusion of Orthodox Greeks, a skilful but despised race, whose talents he could use without having to dread their influence. While thus endeavouring on one side to destroy the power of his enemies by depriving them of both authority and wealth, and on the other to consolidate his own by establishing a firm administration, he neglected no means of acquiring popularity. A fervent disciple of Mahomet when among fanatic Mussulmans, a materialist with the Bektagis who professed a rude pantheism, a Christian among the Greeks, with whom he drank to the health of the Holy Virgin, he made everywhere partisans by flattering the idea most in vogue. But if he constantly changed both opinions and language when dealing with subordinates whom it was desirable to win over, Ali towards his superiors had one only line of conduct which he never transgressed. Obsequious towards the Sublime Porte, so long as it did not interfere with his private authority, he not only paid with exactitude all dues to the sultan, to whom he even often advanced money, but he also pensioned the most influential ministers. He was bent on having no enemies who could really injure his power, and he knew that in an absolute government no conviction can hold its own against the power of gold.

Having thus annihilated the nobles, deceived the multitude with plausible words and lulled to sleep the watchfulness of the Divan, Ali resolved to turn his arms against Kormovo. At the foot of its rocks he had, in youth, experienced the disgrace of defeat, and during thirty nights Kamco and Chainitza had endured all horrors of outrage at the hands of its warriors. Thus the implacable pacha had a twofold wrong to punish, a double vengeance to exact.

This time, profiting by experience, he called in the aid of treachery. Arrived at the citadel, he negotiated, promised an amnesty, forgiveness for all, actual rewards for some. The inhabitants, only too happy to make peace with so formidable an adversary, demanded and obtained a truce to settle the conditions. This was exactly what Ali expected, and Kormovo, sleeping on the faith of the treaty, was suddenly attacked and taken. All who did not escape by flight perished by the sword in the darkness, or by the hand of the executioner the next morning. Those who had offered violence aforetime to Ali’s mother and sister were carefully sought for, and whether convicted or merely accused, were impaled on spits, torn with redhot pincers, and slowly roasted between two fires; the women were shaved and publicly scourged, and then sold as slaves.

This vengeance, in which all the nobles of the province not yet entirely ruined were compelled to assist, was worth a decisive victory to Ali. Towns, cantons, whole districts, overwhelmed with terror, submitted without striking a blow, and his name, joined to the recital of a massacre which ranked as a glorious exploit in the eyes of this savage people, echoed like thunder from valley to valley and mountain to mountain. In order that all surrounding him might participate in the joy of his success Ali gave his army a splendid festival. Of unrivalled activity, and, Mohammedan only in name, he himself led the chorus in the Pyrrhic and Klephtic dances, the ceremonials of warriors and of robbers. There was no lack of wine, of sheep, goats, and lambs roasted before enormous fires; made of the debris of the ruined city; antique games of archery and wrestling were celebrated, and the victors received their prizes from the hand of their chief. The plunder, slaves, and cattle were then shared, and the Tapygae, considered as the lowest of the four tribes composing the race of Skipetars, and ranking as the refuse of the army, carried off into the mountains of Acroceraunia, doors, windows, nails, and even the tiles of the houses, which were then all surrendered to the flames.

However, Ibrahim, the successor and son-in-law of Kurd Pacha, could not see with indifference part of his province invaded by his ambitious neighbour. He complained and negotiated, but obtaining no satisfaction, called out an army composed of Skipetars of Toxid, all Islamites, and gave the command to his brother Sepher, Bey of Avlone. Ali, who had adopted the policy of opposing alternately the Cross to the Crescent and the Crescent to the Cross, summoned to his aid the Christian chiefs of the mountains, who descended into the plains at the head of their unconquered troops. As is generally the case in Albania, where war is merely an excuse for brigandage, instead of deciding matters by a pitched battle, both sides contented themselves with burning villages, hanging peasants, and carrying off cattle.

Also, in accordance with the custom of the country, the women interposed between the combatants, and the good and gentle Emineh laid proposals of peace before Ibrahim Pacha, to whose apathetic disposition a state of war was disagreeable, and who was only too happy to conclude a fairly satisfactory negotiation. A family alliance was arranged, in virtue of which Ali retained his conquests, which were considered as the marriage portion of Ibrahim’s eldest daughter, who became the wife of Ali’s eldest son, Mouktar.

It was hoped that this peace might prove permanent, but the marriage which sealed the treaty was barely concluded before a fresh quarrel broke out between the pachas. Ali, having wrung such important concessions from the weakness of his neighbour, desired to obtain yet more. But closely allied to Ibrahim were two persons gifted with great firmness of character and unusual ability, whose position gave them great influence. They were his wife Zaidee, and his brother Sepher, who had been in command during the war just terminated. As both were inimical to Ali, who could not hope to corrupt them, the latter resolved to get rid of them.

Having in the days of his youth been intimate with Kurd Pacha, Ali had endeavoured to seduce his daughter, already the wife of Ibrahim. Being discovered by the latter in the act of scaling the wall of his harem, he had been obliged to fly the country. Wishing now to ruin the woman whom he had formerly tried to corrupt, Ali sought to turn his former crime to the success of a new one. Anonymous letters, secretly sent to Ibrahim, warned him that his wife intended to poison him, in order to be able later to marry Ali Pacha, whom she had always loved. In a country like Turkey, where to suspect a woman is to accuse her, and accusation is synonymous with condemnation, such a calumny might easily cause the death of the innocent Zaidee. But if Ibrahim was weak and indolent, he was also confiding and generous. He took the letters; to his wife, who had no difficulty in clearing herself, and who warned him against the writer, whose object and plots she easily divined, so that this odious conspiracy turned only to Ali's discredit. But the latter was not likely either to concern himself as to what others said or thought about him or to be disconcerted by a failure. He simply turned his machinations against his other enemy, and arranged matters this time so as to avoid a failure.

He sent to Zagori, a district noted for its doctors, for a quack who undertook to poison Sepher Bey on condition of receiving forty purses. When all was settled, the miscreant set out for Berat, and was immediately accused by Ali of evasion, and his wife and children were arrested as accomplices and detained, apparently as hostages for the good behaviour of their husband and father, but really as pledges for his silence when the crime should have been accomplished. Sepher Bey, informed of this by letters which Ali wrote to the Pacha of Berat demanding the fugitive, thought that a man persecuted by his enemy would be faithful to himself, and took the supposed runaway into his service. The traitor made skilful use of the kindness of his too credulous protector, insinuated himself into his confidence, became his trusted physician and apothecary, and gave him poison instead of medicine on the very first appearance of indisposition. As soon as symptoms of death appeared, the poisoner fled, aided by the emissaries of All, with whom the court of Berat was packed, and presented himself at Janina to receive the reward of his crime. Ali thanked him for his zeal, commended his skill, and referred him to the treasurer. But the instant the wretch left the seraglio in order to receive his recompense, he was seized by the executioners and hurried to the gallows. In thus punishing the assassin, Ali at one blow discharged the debt he owed him, disposed of the single witness to be dreaded, and displayed his own friendship for the victim! Not content with this, he endeavoured to again throw suspicion on the wife of Ibrahim Pacha, whom he accused of being jealous of the influence which Sepher Pacha had exercised in the family. This he mentioned regularly in conversation, writing in the same style to his agents at Constantinople, and everywhere where there was any profit in slandering a family whose ruin he desired for the sake of their possessions. Before long he made a pretext out of the scandal started by himself, and prepared to take up arms in order, he said, to avenge his friend Sepher Bey, when he was anticipated by Ibrahim Pacha, who roused against him the allied Christians of Thesprotia, foremost among whom ranked the Suliots famed through Albania for their courage and their love of independence.

After several battles, in which his enemies had the a vantage, Ali began negotiations with Ibrahim, and finally concluded a treaty offensive and defensive. This fresh alliance was, like the first, to be cemented by a marriage. The virtuous Emineh, seeing her son Veli united to the second daughter of Ibrahim, trusted that the feud between the two families was now quenched, and thought herself at the summit of happiness. But her joy was not of long duration; the death-groan was again to be heard amidst the songs of the marriage-feast.

The daughter of Chainitza, by her first husband, Ali, had married a certain Murad, the Bey of Clerisoura. This nobleman, attached to Ibrahim Pacha by both blood and affection, since the death of Sepher Bey, had, become the special object of Ali's hatred, caused by the devotion of Murad to his patron, over whom he had great influence, and from whom nothing could detach him. Skilful in concealing truth under special pretexts, Ali gave out that the cause of his known dislike to this young man was that the latter, although his nephew by marriage, had several times fought in hostile ranks against him. Therefore the amiable Ibrahim made use of the marriage treaty to arrange an honourable reconciliation between Murad Bey and his uncle, and appointed the former "Ruler a the Marriage Feast," in which capacity he was charged to conduct the bride to Janina and deliver her to her husband, the young Veli Bey. He had accomplished his mission satisfactorily, and was received by Ali with all apparent hospitality. The festival began on his arrival towards the end of November 1791, and had already continued several days, when suddenly it was announced that a shot had been fired upon Ali, who had only escaped by a miracle, and that the assassin was still at large. This news spread terror through the city and the palace, and everyone dreaded being seized as the guilty person. Spies were everywhere employed, but they declared search was useless, and that there must bean extensive conspiracy against Ali's life. The latter complained of being surrounded by enemies, and announced that henceforth he would receive only one person at a time, who should lay down his arms before entering the hall now set apart for public audience. It was a chamber built over a vault, and entered by a sort of trap-door, only reached by a ladder.

After having for several days received his couriers in this sort of dovecot, Ali summoned his nephew in order to entrust with him the wedding gifts. Murad took this as a sign of favour, and joyfully acknowledged the congratulations of his friends. He presented himself at the time arranged, the guards at the foot of the ladder demanded his arms, which he gave up readily, and ascended the ladder full of hope. Scarcely had the trap-door closed behind him when a pistol ball, fired from a dark corner, broke his shoulder blade, and he fell, but sprang up and attempted to fly. Ali issued from his hiding place and sprang upon him, but notwithstanding his wound the young bey defended himself vigorously, uttering terrible cries. The pacha, eager to finish, and finding his hands insufficient, caught a burning log from the hearth, struck his nephew in the face with it, felled him to the ground, and completed his bloody task. This accomplished, Ali called for help with loud cries, and when his guards entered he showed the bruises he had received and the blood with which he was covered, declaring that he had killed in self-defence a villain who endeavoured to assassinate him. He ordered the body to be searched, and a letter was found in a pocket which Ali had himself just placed there, which purported to give the details of the pretended conspiracy.

As Murad’s brother was seriously compromised by this letter, he also was immediately seized, and strangled without any pretence of trial. The whole palace rejoiced, thanks were rendered to Heaven by one of those sacrifices of animals still occasionally made in the East to celebrate an escape from great danger, and Ali released some prisoners in order to show his gratitude to Providence for having protected him from so horrible a crime. He received congratulatory visits, and composed an apology attested by a judicial declaration by the cadi, in which the memory of Murad and his brother was declared accursed. Finally, commissioners, escorted by a strong body of soldiers, were sent to seize the property of the two brothers, because, said the decree, it was just that the injured should inherit the possessions of his would-be assassins.

Thus was exterminated the only family capable of opposing the Pacha of Janina, or which could counterbalance his influence over the weak Ibrahim of Berat. The latter, abandoned by his brave defenders, and finding himself at the mercy of his enemy, was compelled to submit to what he could not prevent, and protested only by tears against these crimes, which seemed to herald a terrible future for himself.

As for Emineh, it is said that from the date of this catastrophe she separated herself almost entirely from her blood-stained husband, and spent her life in the recesses of the harem, praying as a Christian both for the murderer and his victims. It is a relief, in the midst of this atrocious saturnalia to encounter this noble and gentle character, which like a desert oasis, affords a rest to eyes wearied with the contemplation of so much wickedness and treachery.

Ali lost in her the guardian angel who alone could in any way restrain his violent passions. Grieved at first by the withdrawal of the wife whom hitherto he had loved exclusively, he endeavoured in vain to regain her affection; and then sought in new vices compensation for the happiness he had lost, and gave himself up to sensuality. Ardent in everything, he carried debauchery to a monstrous extent, and as if his palaces were not large enough for his desires, he assumed various disguises; sometimes in order to traverse the streets by night in search of the lowest pleasures; sometimes penetrating by day into churches and private houses seeking for young men and maidens remarkable for their beauty, who were then carried off to his harem.

His sons, following in his footsteps, kept also scandalous households, and seemed to dispute preeminence in evil with their father, each in his own manner. Drunkenness was the speciality of the eldest, Mouktar, who was without rival among the hard drinkers of Albania, and who was reputed to have emptied a whole wine-skin in one evening after a plentiful meal. Gifted with the hereditary violence of his family, he had, in his drunken fury, slain several persons, among others his sword-bearer, the companion of his childhood and confidential friend of his whole life. Veli chose a different course. Realising the Marquis de Sade as his father had realised Macchiavelli, he delighted in mingling together debauchery and cruelty, and his amusement consisted in biting the lips he had kissed, and tearing with his nails the forms he had caressed. The people of Janina saw with horror more than one woman in their midst whose nose and ears he had caused to be cut off, and had then turned into the streets.

It was indeed a reign of terror; neither fortune, life, honour, nor family were safe. Mothers cursed their fruitfulness, and women their beauty. Fear soon engenders corruption, and subjects are speedily tainted by the depravity of their masters. Ali, considering a demoralised race as easier to govern, looked on with satisfaction.

While he strengthened by every means his authority from within, he missed no opportunity of extending his rule without. In 1803 he declared war against the Suliots, whose independence he had frequently endeavoured either to purchase or to overthrow. The army sent against them, although ten thousand strong, was at first beaten everywhere. Ali then, as usual, brought treason to his aid, and regained the advantage. It became evident that, sooner or later, the unhappy Suliots must succumb.

Foreseeing the horrors which their defeat would entail, Emineh, touched with compassion, issued from her seclusion and cast herself at Ali's feet. He raised her, seated her beside him, and inquired as to her wishes. She spoke of, generosity, of mercy; he listened as if touched and wavering, until she named the Suliots. Then, filled with fury, he seized a pistol and fired at her. She was not hurt, but fell to the ground overcome with terror, and her women hastily intervened and carried her away. For the first time in his life, perhaps, Ali shuddered before the dread of a murder.

It was his wife, the mother of his children, whom he saw lying at his feet, and the recollection afflicted and tormented him. He rose in the night and went to Emineh's apartment; he knocked and called, but being refused admittance, in his anger he broke open the door. Terrified by the noise; and at the sight of her infuriated husband, Emineh fell into violent convulsions, and shortly expired. Thus perished the daughter of Capelan Pacha, wife of Ali Tepeleni, and mother of Mouktar and Veli, who, doomed to live surrounded by evil, yet remained virtuous and good.

Her death caused universal mourning throughout Albania, and produced a not less deep impression on the mind of her murderer. Emineh's spectre pursued him in his pleasures, in the council chamber, in the hours of night. He saw her, he heard her, and would awake, exclaiming, "my wife! my wife! — It is my wife! — Her eyes are angry; she threatens me! — Save me! Mercy!" For more than ten years Ali never dared to sleep alone.

CHAPTER IV

In December, the Suliots, decimated by battle, worn by famine, discouraged by treachery, were obliged to capitulate. The treaty gave them leave to go where they would, their own mountains excepted. The unfortunate tribe divided into two parts, the one going towards Parga, the other towards Prevesa. Ali gave orders for the destruction of both, notwithstanding the treaty.

The Parga division was attacked in its march, and charged by a numerous body of Skipetars. Its destruction seemed imminent, but instinct suddenly revealed to the ignorant mountaineers the one manoeuvre which might save them. They formed a square, placing old men, women, children, and cattle in the midst, and, protected by this military formation, entered Parga in full view of the cut-throats sent to pursue them.

Less fortunate was the Prevesa division, which, terrified by a sudden and unexpected attack, fled in disorder to a Greek convent called Zalongos. But the gate was soon broken down, and the unhappy Suliots massacred to the last man.

The women, whose tents had been pitched on the summit of a lofty rock, beheld the terrible carnage which destroyed their defenders. Henceforth their only prospect was that of becoming the slaves of those who had just slaughtered their husbands and brothers. An heroic resolution spared them this infamy; they joined hands, and chanting their national songs, moved in a solemn dance round the rocky platform. As the song ended, they uttered a prolonged and piercing cry, and cast themselves and their children down into the profound abyss beneath.

There were still some Suliots left in their country when Ali Pacha took possession of it. These were all taken and brought to Janina, and their sufferings were the first adornments of the festival made for the army. Every soldier’s imagination was racked for the discovery of new tortures, and the most original among them had the privilege of themselves carrying out their inventions.

There were some who, having had their noses and ears cut off, were compelled to eat them raw, dressed as a salad. One young man was scalped until the skin fell back upon his shoulders, then beaten round the court of the seraglio for the pacha’s entertainment, until at length a lance was run through his body and he was cast on the funeral pile. Many were boiled alive and their flesh then thrown to the dogs.

From this time the Cross has disappeared from the Selleid mountains, and the gentle prayer of Christ no longer wakes the echoes of Suli.

During the course of this war, and shortly after the death of Emineh, another dismal drama was enacted in the pacha’s family, whose active wickedness nothing seemed to weary. The scandalous libertinism of both father and sons had corrupted all around as well as themselves. This demoralisation brought bitter fruits for all alike: the subjects endured a terrible tyranny; the masters sowed among themselves distrust, discord, and hatred. The father wounded his two sons by turns in their tenderest affections, and the sons avenged themselves by abandoning their father in the hour of danger.

There was in Janina a woman named Euphrosyne, a niece of the archbishop, married to one of the richest Greek merchants, and noted for wit and beauty. She was already the mother of two children, when Mouktar became enamoured of her, and ordered her to come to his palace. The unhappy Euphrosyne, at once guessing his object, summoned a family council to decide what should be done. All agreed that there was no escape, and that her husband’s life was in danger, on account of the jealousy of his terrible rival. He fled the city that same night, and his wife surrendered herself to Mouktar, who, softened by her charms, soon sincerely loved her, and overwhelmed her with presents and favours. Things were in this position when Mouktar was obliged to depart on an important expedition.

Scarcely had he started before his wives complained to Ali that Euphrosyne usurped their rights and caused their husband to neglect them. Ali, who complained greatly of his sons’ extravagance, and regretted the money they squandered, at once struck a blow which was both to enrich himself and increase the terror of his name.

One night he appeared by torchlight, accompanied by his guards, at Euphrosyne’s house. Knowing his cruelty and avarice, she sought to disarm one by gratifying the other: she collected her money and jewels and laid them at Ali’s feet with a look of supplication.

“These things are only my own property, which you restore,” said he, taking possession of the rich offering. “Can you give back the heart of Mouktar, which you have stolen?”

Euphrosyne besought him by his paternal feelings, for the sake of his son whose love had been her misfortune and was now her only crime, to spare a mother whose conduct had been otherwise irreproachable. But her tears and pleadings produced no effect on Ali, who ordered her to be taken, loaded with fetters and covered with a piece of sackcloth, to the prison of the seraglio.

If it were certain that there was no hope for the unhappy Euphrosyne, one trusted that she might at least be the only victim. But Ali, professing to follow the advice of some severe reformers who wished to restore decent morality, arrested at the same time fifteen ladies belonging to the best Christian families in Janina. A Wallachian, named Nicholas Janco, took the opportunity to denounce his own wife, who was on the point of becoming a mother, as guilty of adultery, and handed her also over to the pacha. These unfortunate women were brought before Ali to undergo a trial of which a sentence of death was the foregone conclusion. They were then confined in a dungeon, where they spent two days of misery. The third night, the executioners appeared to conduct them to the lake where they were to perish. Euphrosyne, too exhausted to endure to the end, expired by the way, and when she was flung with the rest into the dark waters, her soul had already escaped from its earthly tenement. Her body was found the next day, and was buried in the cemetery of the monastery of Saints-Anargyres, where her tomb, covered with white iris and sheltered by a wild olive tree, is yet shown.

Mouktar was returning from his expedition when a courier from his brother Veli brought him a letter informing him of these events. He opened it. “Euphrosyne!” he cried, and, seizing one of his pistols, fired it at the messenger, who fell dead at his feet, — ”Euphrosyne, behold thy first victim!” Springing on his horse, he galloped towards Janina. His guards followed at a distance, and the inhabitants of all the villages he passed fled at his approach. He paid no attention to them, but rode till his horse fell dead by the lake which had engulfed Euphrosyne, and then, taking a boat, he went to hide his grief and rage in his own palace.

Ali, caring little for passion which evaporated in tears and cries, sent an order to Mouktar to appear before him at once. “He will not kill you,” he remarked to his messenger, with a bitter smile. And, in fact, the man who a moment before was furiously raging and storming against his father, as if overwhelmed by this imperious message, calmed down, and obeyed.

“Come hither, Mouktar,” said the pacha, extending his murderous hand to be kissed as soon as his son appeared. “I shall take no notice of your anger, but in future never forget that a man who braves public opinion as I do fears nothing in the world. You can go now; when your troops have rested from their march, you can come and ask for orders. Go, remember what I have said.”

Mouktar retired as submissively as if he had just received pardon for some serious crime, and found no better consolation than to spend the night with Veli in drinking and debauchery. But a day was to come when the brothers, alike outraged by their father, would plot and carry out a terrible vengeance.

However, the Porte began to take umbrage at the continual aggrandisement of the Pacha of Janina. Not daring openly to attack so formidable a vassal, the sultan sought by underhand means to diminish his power, and under the pretext that Ali was becoming too old for the labour of so many offices, the government of Thessaly was withdrawn from him, but, to show that this was not done in enmity, the province was entrusted to his nephew, Elmas Bey, son of Suleiman and Chainitza.

Chainitza, fully as ambitious as her brother, could not contain her delight at the idea of governing in the name of her son, who was weak and gentle in character and accustomed to obey her implicitly. She asked her brother’s permission to go to Trikala to be present at the installation, and obtained it, to everybody’s astonishment; for no one could imagine that Ali would peacefully renounce so important a government as that of Thessaly. However, he dissembled so skilfully that everyone was deceived by his apparent resignation, and applauded his magnanimity, when he provided his sister with a brilliant escort to conduct her to the capital of the province of which he had just been deprived in favour of his nephew. He sent letters of congratulation to the latter as well as magnificent presents, among them a splendid pelisse of black fox, which had cost more than a hundred thousand francs of Western money. He requested Elmas Bey to honour him by wearing this robe on the day when the sultan’s envoy should present him with the firman of investiture, and Chainitza herself was charged to deliver both gifts and messages.

Chainitza arrived safely at Trikala, and faithfully delivered the messages with which she had been entrusted. When the ceremony she so ardently desired took place, she herself took charge of all the arrangements. Elmas, wearing the black fox pelisse, was proclaimed, and acknowledged as Governor of Thessaly in her presence. “My son is pacha!” she cried in the delirium of joy. “My son is pacha! and my nephews will die of envy!” But her triumph was not to be of long duration. A few days after his installation, Elmas began to feel strangely languid. Continual lethargy, convulsive sneezing, feverish eyes, soon betokened a serious illness. Ali’s gift had accomplished its purpose. The pelisse, carefully impregnated with smallpox germs taken from a young girl suffering from this malady, had conveyed the dreaded disease to the new pacha, who, not having been inoculated, died in a few days.

The grief of Chainitza at her son’s death displayed itself in sobs, threats, and curses, but, not knowing whom to blame for her misfortune, she hastened to leave the scene of it, and returned to Janina, to mingle her tears with those of her brother. She found Ali apparently in such depths of grief, that instead of suspecting, she was actually tempted to pity him, and this seeming sympathy soothed her distress, aided by the caresses of her second son, Aden Bey. Ali, thoughtful of his own interests, took care to send one of his own officers to Trikala, to administer justice in the place of his deceased nephew, and the Porte, seeing that all attempts against him only caused misfortune, consented to his resuming the government of Thessaly.

This climax roused the suspicions of many persons. But the public voice, already discussing the causes of the death of Elinas, was stifled by the thunder of the cannon, which, from the ramparts of Janina, announced to Epirus the birth of another son to Ali, Salik Bey, whose mother was a Georgian slave.

Fortune, seemingly always ready both to crown Ali’s crimes with success and to fulfil his wishes, had yet in reserve a more precious gift than any of the others, that of a good and beautiful wife; who should replace, and even efface the memory of the beloved Emineh.

The Porte, while sending to Ali the firman which restored to him the government of Thessaly, ordered him to seek out and destroy a society of coiners who dwelt within his jurisdiction. Ali, delighted to, prove his zeal by a service which cost nothing but bloodshed; at once set his spies to work, and having discovered the abode of the gang, set out for the place attended by a strong escort. It was a village called Plikivitza.

Having arrived in the evening, he spent the night in taking measures to prevent escape, and at break of day attacked the village suddenly with his whole force. The coiners were seized in the act. Ali immediately ordered the chief to be hung at his own door and the whole population to be massacred. Suddenly a young girl of great beauty made her way through the tumult and sought refuge at his feet. Ali, astonished, asked who she was. She answered with a look of mingled innocence and terror, kissing his hands, which she bathed with tears, and said:

"O my lord! I implore thee to intercede with the terrible vizier Ali for my mother and brothers. My father is dead, behold where he hangs at the door of our cottage! But we have done nothing to rouse the anger of our dreadful master. My mother is a poor woman who never offended anyone, and we are only weak children. Save us from him!"

Touched in spite of himself, the pacha took the girl in his arms, and answered her with a gentle smile.

"Thou hast come to the wrong man, child: I am this terrible vizier."

"Oh no, no! you are good, you will be our good lord."

"Well, be comforted, my child, and show me thy mother and thy brothers; they shall be spared. Thou hast saved their lives."

And as she knelt at his feet, overcome with joy, he raised her and asked her name.

"Basilessa," she replied.

"Basilessa, Queen! it is a name of good augury. Basilessa, thou shalt dwell with me henceforth."

And he collected the members of her family, and gave orders for them to be sent to Janina in company with the maiden, who repaid his mercy with boundless love and devotion.

Let us mention one trait of gratitude shown by Ali at the end of this expedition, and his record of good deeds is then closed. Compelled by a storm to take refuge in a miserable hamlet, he inquired its name, and on hearing it appeared surprised and thoughtful, as if trying to recall lost memories. Suddenly he asked if a woman named Nouza dwelt in the village, and was told there was an old infirm woman of that name in great poverty. He ordered her to be brought before him. She came and prostrated herself in terror. Ali raised her kindly.

"Dost thou not know me?" he asked.

"Have mercy, great Vizier," answered the poor woman, who, having nothing to lose but her life, imagined that even that would be taken from her.

“I see,” said the pacha, “that if thou knowest me, thou dost not really recognise me.”

The woman looked at him wonderingly, not understanding his words in the least.

“Dost thou remember,” continued Ali, “that forty years ago a young man asked for shelter from the foes who pursued him? Without inquiring his name or standing, thou didst hide him in thy humble house, and dressed his wounds, and shared thy scanty food with him, and when he was able to go forward thou didst stand on thy threshold to wish him good luck and success. Thy wishes were heard, for the young man was Ali Tepeleni, and I who speak am he!”

The old woman stood overwhelmed with astonishment. She departed calling down blessings on the pasha, who assured her a pension of fifteen hundred francs for the rest of her days.

But these two good actions are only flashes of light illuminating the dark horizon of Ali’s life for a brief moment. Returned to Janina, he resumed his tyranny, his intrigues, and cruelty. Not content with the vast territory which owned his sway, he again invaded that of his neighbours on every pretext. Phocis, Mtolia, Acarnania, were by turns occupied by his troops, the country ravaged, and the inhabitants decimated. At the same time he compelled Ibrahim Pacha to surrender his last remaining daughter, and give her in marriage to his nephew, Aden Bey, the son of Chainitza. This new alliance with a family he had so often attacked and despoiled gave him fresh arms against it, whether by being enabled better to watch the pasha’s sons, or to entice them into some snare with greater ease.

Whilst he thus married his nephew, he did not neglect the advancement of his sons. By the aid of the French Ambassador, whom he had convinced of his devotion to the Emperor Napoleon, he succeeded in getting the pachalik of Morea bestowed on Veli, and that of Lepanto on Mouktar. But as in placing his sons in these exalted positions his only aim was to aggrandise and consolidate his own power, he himself ordered their retinues, giving them officers of his own choosing. When they departed to their governments, he kept their wives, their children, and even their furniture as pledges, saying that they ought not to be encumbered with domestic establishments in time of war, Turkey just then being at open war with England. He also made use of this opportunity to get rid of people who displeased him, among others, of a certain Ismail Pacho Bey, who had been alternately both tool and enemy, whom he made secretary to his son Veli, professedly as a pledge of reconciliation and favour, but really in order to despoil him more easily of the considerable property which he possessed at Janina. Pacho was not deceived, and showed his resentment openly. “The wretch banishes me,” he cried, pointing out Ali, who was sitting at a window in the palace, “he sends me away in order to rob me; but I will avenge myself whatever happens, and I shall die content if I can procure his destruction at the price of my own.”

Continually increasing his power, Ali endeavoured to consolidate it permanently. He had entered by degrees into secret negotiations with all the great powers of Europe, hoping in the end to make himself independent, and to obtain recognition as Prince of Greece. A mysterious and unforeseen incident betrayed this to the Porte, and furnished actual proofs of his treason in letters confirmed by Ali’s own seal. The Sultan Selim immediately, sent to Janina a “kapidgi-bachi,” or plenipotentiary, to examine into the case and try the delinquent.

Arrived at Janina, this officer placed before Ali the proofs of his understanding with the enemies of the State. Ali was not strong enough to throw off the mask, and yet could not deny such overwhelming evidence. He determined to obtain time.

“No wonder,” said he, “that I appear guilty in the eyes of His Highness. This seal is, certainly mine, I cannot deny it; but the writing is not that of my secretaries, and the seal must have been obtained and used to sign these guilty letters in order to ruin me. I pray you to grant me a few days in order to clear up this iniquitous mystery, which compromises me in the eyes of my master the sultan and of all good Mahommedans. May Allah grant me the means of proving my innocence, which is as pure as the rays of the sun, although everything seems against me!”

After this conference, Ali, pretending to be engaged in a secret inquiry, considered how he could legally escape from this predicament. He spent some days in making plans which were given up as soon as formed, until his fertile genius at length suggested a means of getting clear of one of the greatest difficulties in which he had ever found himself. Sending for a Greek whom he had often employed, he addressed him thus:

“Thou knowest I have always shown thee favour, and the day is arrived when thy fortune shall be made. Henceforth thou shalt be as my son, thy children shall be as mine, my house shall be thy home, and in return for my benefits I require one small service. This accursed kapidgi-bachi has come hither bringing certain papers signed with my seal, intending to use them to my discredit, and thus to extort money from me. Of money I have already given too much, and I intend this time to escape without being plundered except for the sake of a good servant like thee. Therefore, my son, thou shalt go before the tribunal when I tell thee, and declare before this kapidgi-bachi and the cadi that thou hast written these letters attributed to me, and that thou didst seal them with my seal, in order to give them due weight and importance.”

The unhappy Greek grew pale and strove to answer.

“What fearest thou, my son?” resumed Ali. “Speak, am I not thy good master? Thou wilt be sure of my lasting favour, and who is there to dread when I protect thee? Is it the kapidgi-bachi? he has no authority here. I have thrown twenty as good as he into the lake! If more is required to reassure thee, I swear by the Prophet, by my own and my sons’ heads, that no harm shall come to thee from him. Be ready, then, to do as I tell thee, and beware of mentioning this matter to anyone, in order that all may be accomplished according to our mutual wishes.”

More terrified by dread of the pacha, from whose wrath in case of refusal there was no chance of escape, than tempted by his promises, the Greek undertook the false swearing required. Ali, delighted, dismissed him with a thousand assurances of protection, and then requested the presence of the sultan’s envoy, to whom he said, with much emotion:

“I have at length unravelled the infernal plot laid against me; it is the work of a man in the pay of the implacable enemies of the Sublime Porte, and who is a Russian agent. He is in my power, and I have given him hopes of pardon on condition of full confession. Will you then summon the cadi, the judges and ecclesiastics of the town, in order that they may hear the guilty man’s deposition, and that the light of truth may purify their minds?”

The tribunal was soon assembled, and the trembling Greek appeared in the midst of a solemn silence. “Knowest thou this writing?” demanded the cadi. — ”It is mine.” — ”And this seal?” — ”It is that of my master, Ali Pacha.” — ”How does it come to be placed at the foot of these letters?” — ”I did this by order of my chief, abusing the confidence of my master, who occasionally allowed me to use it to sign his orders.” — ”It is enough: thou canst withdraw.”

Uneasy as to the success of his intrigue, Ali was approaching the Hall of Justice. As he entered the court, the Greek, who had just finished his examination, threw himself at his feet, assuring him that all had gone well. “It is good,” said Ali; “thou shalt have thy reward.” Turning round, he made a sign to his guards, who had their orders, and who instantly seized the unhappy Greek, and, drowning his voice with their shouts, hung him in the courtyard. This execution finished, the pacha presented himself before the judges and inquired the result of their investigation. He was answered by a burst of congratulation. “Well,” said he, “the guilty author of this plot aimed at me is no more; I ordered him to be hung without waiting to hear your decision. May all enemies of our glorious sultan perish even as he!”

A report of what had occurred was immediately drawn up, and, to assist matters still further, Ali sent the kapidgi-bachi a gift of fifty purses, which he accepted without difficulty, and also secured the favour of the Divan by considerable presents. The sultan, yielding to the advice of his councillors, appeared to have again received him into favour.

But Ali knew well that this appearance of sunshine was entirely deceptive, and that Selim only professed to believe in his innocence until the day should arrive when the sultan could safely punish his treason. He sought therefore to compass the latter’s downfall, and made common cause with his enemies, both internal and external. A conspiracy, hatched between the discontented pachas and the English agents, shortly broke out, and one day, when Ali was presiding at the artillery practice of some French gunners sent to Albania by the Governor of Illyria, a Tartar brought him news of the deposition of Selim, who was succeeded by his nephew Mustapha. Ali sprang up in delight, and publicly thanked Allah for this great good fortune. He really did profit by this change of rulers, but he profited yet more by a second revolution which caused the deaths both of Selim, whom the promoters wished to reestablish on the throne, and of Mustapha whose downfall they intended. Mahmoud II, who was next invested with the scimitar of Othman, came to the throne in troublous times, after much bloodshed, in the midst of great political upheavals, and had neither the will nor the power to attack one of his most powerful vassals. He received with evident satisfaction the million piastres which, at, his installation, Ali hastened to send as a proof of his devotion, assured the pacha of his favour, and confirmed both him and his sons in their offices and dignities. This fortunate change in his position brought Ali’s pride and audacity to a climax. Free from pressing anxiety, he determined to carry out a project which had been the dream of his life.

CHAPTER V

After taking possession of Argyro-Castron, which he had long coveted, Ali led his victorious army against the town of Kardiki, whose inhabitants had formerly joined with those of Kormovo in the outrage inflicted on his mother and sister. The besieged, knowing they had no mercy to hope for, defended themselves bravely, but were obliged to yield to famine. After a month’s blockade, the common people, having no food for themselves or their cattle, began to cry for mercy in the open streets, and their chiefs, intimidated by the general misery and unable to stand alone, consented to capitulate. Ali, whose intentions as to the fate of this unhappy town were irrevocably decided, agreed to all that they asked. A treaty was signed by both parties, and solemnly sworn to on the Koran, in virtue of which seventy-two beys, heads of the principal Albanian families, were to go to Janina as free men, and fully armed. They were to be received with the honours due to their rank as free tenants of the sultan, their lives and their families were to be spared, and also their possessions. The other inhabitants of Kardiki, being Mohammedans, and therefore brothers of Ali, were to be treated as friends and retain their lives and property. On these conditions a quarter of the town; was to be occupied by the victorious troops.

One of the principal chiefs, Saleh Bey, and his wife, foreseeing the fate which awaited their friends, committed suicide at the moment when, in pursuance of the treaty, Ali’s soldiers took possession of the quarter assigned to them.

Ali received the seventy-two beys with all marks of friendship when they arrived at Janina. He lodged them in a palace on the lake, and treated them magnificently for some days. But soon, having contrived on some pretext to disarm them, he had them conveyed, loaded with chains, to a Greek convent on an island in the lake, which was converted into a prison. The day of vengeance not having fully arrived, he explained this breach of faith by declaring that the hostages had attempted to escape.

The popular credulity was satisfied by this explanation, and no one doubted the good faith of the pacha when he announced that he was going to Kardiki to establish a police and fulfil the promises he had made to the inhabitants. Even the number of soldiers he took excited no surprise, as Ali was accustomed to travel with a very numerous suite.

After three days' journey, he stopped at Libokhovo, where his sister had resided since the death of Aden Bey, her second son, cut off recently by wickness. What passed in the long interview they had no one knew, but it was observed that Chainitza's tears, which till then had flowed incessantly, stopped as if by magic, and her women, who were wearing mourning, received an order to attire themselves as for a festival. Feasting and dancing, begun in Ali's honour, did not cease after his departure.

He spent the night at Chenderia, a castle built on a rock, whence the town of Kardiki was plainly visible. Next day at daybreak Ali despatched an usher to summon all the male inhabitants of Kardiki to appear before Chenderia, in order to receive assurances of the pacha's pardon and friendship.

The Kardikiotes at once divined that this injunction was the precursor of a terrible vengeance: the whole town echoed with cries and groans, the mosques were filled with people praying for deliverance. The appointed time arrived, they embraced each other as if parting for ever, and then the men, unarmed, in number six hundred and seventy, started for Chenderia. At the gate of the town they encountered a troop of Albanians, who followed as if to escort them, and which increased in number as they proceeded. Soon they arrived in the dread presence of Ali Pacha. Grouped in formidable masses around him stood several thousand of his fierce soldiery.

The unhappy Kardikiotes realised their utter helplessness, and saw that they, their wives an children, were completely at the mercy of their implacable enemy. They fell prostrate before the pacha, and with all the fervour which the utmost terror could inspire, implored him to grant them a generous pardon.

Ali for some time silently enjoyed the pleasure of seeing his ancient enemies lying before him prostrate in the dust. He then desired them to rise, reassured them, called them brothers, sons, friends of his heart. Distinguishing some of his old acquaintances, he called them to him, spoke familiarly of the days of their youth, of their games, their early friendships, and pointing to the young men, said, with tears in his eyes.

"The discord which has divided us for so many years has allowed children not born at the time of our dissension to grow into men. I have lost the pleasure of watching the development of the off-spring of my neighbours and the early friends of my youth, and of bestowing benefits on them, but I hope shortly to repair the natural results of our melancholy divisions.”

He then made them splendid promises, and ordered them to assemble in a neighbouring caravanserai, where he wished to give them a banquet in proof of reconciliation. Passing from the depths of despair to transports of joy, the Kardikiotes repaired gaily to the caravanserai, heaping blessings on the pacha, and blaming each other for having ever doubted his good faith.

Ali was carried down from Chenderia in a litter, attended by his courtiers, who celebrated his clemency in pompous speeches, to which he replied with gracious smiles. At the foot of the steep descent he mounted his horse, and, followed by his troops, rode towards the caravanserai. Alone, and in silence, he rode twice round it, then, returning to the gate, which had just been closed by his order, he pulled up his horse, and, signing to his own bodyguard to attack the building, “Slay them!” he cried in a voice of thunder.

The guards remained motionless in surprise and horror, then as the pacha, with a roar, repeated his order, they indignantly flung down their arms. In vain he harangued, flattered, or threatened them; some preserved a sullen silence, others ventured to demand mercy. Then he ordered them away, and, calling on the Christian Mirdites who served under his banner.

“To you, brave Latins,” he cried, “I will now entrust the duty of exterminating the foes of my race. Avenge me, and I will reward you magnificently.”

A confused murmur rose from the ranks. Ali imagined they were consulting as to what recompense should be required as the price of such deed.

“Speak,” said he; “I am ready to listen to your demands and to satisfy them.”

Then the Mirdite leader came forward and threw back the hood of his black cloak.

“O Pacha!” said he, looking Ali boldly in the face, “thy words are an insult; the Mirdites do not slaughter unarmed prisoners in cold blood. Release the Kardikiotes, give them arms, and we will fight them to the death; but we serve thee as soldiers and not as executioners.”

At these words; which the black-cloaked battalion received with applause, Ali thought himself betrayed, and looked around with doubt and mistrust. Fear was nearly taking the place of mercy, words of pardon were on his lips, when a certain Athanasius Vaya, a Greek schismatic, and a favourite of the pacha's, whose illegitimate son he was supposed to be, advanced at the head of the scum of the army, and offered to carry out the death sentence. Ali applauded his zeal, gave him full authority to act, and spurred his horse to the top of a neighbouring hill, the better to enjoy the spectacle. The Christian Mirdites and the Mohammedan guards knelt together to pray for the miserable Kardikiotes, whose last hour had come.

The caravanserai where they were shut in was square enclosure, open to the sky, and intended to shelter herds of buffaloes. The prisoners having heard nothing of what passed outside, were astonished to behold Athanasius Vaya and his troop appearing on the top of the wall. They did not long remain in doubt. Ali gave the signal by a pistol-shot, and a general fusillade followed. Terrible cries echoed from the court; the prisoners, terrified, wounded, crowded one upon another for shelter. Some ran frantically hither and thither in this enclosure with no shelter and no exit, until they fell, struck down by bullets. Some tried to climb the walls, in hope of either escape or vengeance, only to be flung back by either scimitars or muskets. It was a terrible scene of despair and death.

After an hour of firing, a gloomy silence descended on the place, now occupied solely by a heap of corpses. Ali forbade any burial rites on pain of death, and placed over the gate an inscription in letters of gold, informing posterity that six hundred Kardikiotes had there been sacrificed to the memory of his mother Kamco.

When the shrieks of death ceased in the enclosure, they began to be heard in the town. The assassins spread themselves through it, and having violated the women and children, gathered them into a crowd to be driven to Libokovo. At every halt in this frightful journey fresh marauders fell on the wretched victims, claiming their share in cruelty and debauchery. At length they arrived at their destination, where the triumphant and implacable Chainitza awaited them. As after the taking of Kormovo, she compelled the women to cut off their hair and to stuff with it a mattress on which she lay. She then stripped them, and joyfully narrated to them the massacre of their husbands, fathers, brothers and sons, and when she had sufficiently enjoyed their misery they were again handed over to the insults of the soldiery.

Chainitza finally published an edict forbidding either clothes, shelter, or food to be given to the women and children of Kardiki, who were then driven forth into the woods either to die of hunger or to be devoured by wild beasts. As to the seventy-two hostages, Ali put them all to death when he returned to Janina. His vengeance was indeed complete.

But as, filled with a horrible satisfaction, the pacha was enjoying the repose of a satiated tiger, an indignant and threatening voice reached him even in the recesses of his palace. The Sheik Yussuf, governor of the castle of Janina, venerated as a saint by the Mohammedans on account of his piety, and universally beloved and respected for his many virtues, entered Ali's sumptuous dwelling for the first time. The guards on beholding him remained stupefied and motionless, then the most devout prostrated themselves, while others went to inform the pacha; but no one dared hinder the venerable man, who walked calmly and solemnly through the astonished attendants. For him there existed no antechamber, no delay; disdaining the ordinary forms of etiquette, he paced slowly through the various apartments, until, with no usher to announce him, he reached that of Ali. The latter, whose impiety by no means saved him from superstitious terrors, rose hastily from the divan and advanced to meet the holy sheik, who was followed by a crowd of silent courtiers. Ali addressed him with the utmost respect, and endeavoured even to kiss his right hand. Yussuf hastily withdrew it, covered it with his mantle, and signed to the pacha to seat himself. Ali mechanically obeyed, and waited in solemn silence to hear the reason of this unexpected visit.

Yussuf desired him to listen with all attention, and then reproached him for his injustice and rapine, his treachery and cruelty, with such vivid eloquence that his hearers dissolved in tears. Ali, though much dejected, alone preserved his equanimity, until at length the sheik accused him of having caused the death of Emineh. He then grew pale, and rising, cried with terror:

"Alas! my father, whose name do you now pronounce? Pray for me, or at least do not sink me to Gehenna with your curses!"

"There is no need to curse thee," answered Yussuf. "Thine own crimes bear witness against thee. Allah has heard their cry. He will summon thee, judge thee, and punish thee eternally. Tremble, for the time is at hand! Thine hour is coming — is coming — is coming!"

Casting a terrible glance at the pacha, the holy man turned his back on him, and stalked out of the apartment without another word.

Ali, in terror, demanded a thousand pieces of gold, put them in a white satin purse, and himself hastened with them to overtake the sheik, imploring him to recall his threats. But Yussuf deigned no answer, and arrived at the threshold of the palace, shook off the dust of his feet against it.

Ali returned to his apartment sad and downcast, and many days elapsed before he could shake off the depression caused by this scene. But soon he felt more ashamed of his inaction than of the reproaches which had caused it, and on the first opportunity resumed his usual mode of life.

The occasion was the marriage of Moustai, Pacha of Scodra, with the eldest daughter of Veli Pacha, called the Princess of Aulis, because she had for dowry whole villages in that district. Immediately after the announcement of this marriage Ali set on foot a sort of saturnalia, about the details of which there seemed to be as much mystery as if he had been preparing an assassination.

All at once, as if by a sudden inundation, the very scum of the earth appeared to spread over Janina. The populace, as if trying to drown their misery, plunged into a drunkenness which simulated pleasure. Disorderly bands of mountebanks from the depths of Roumelia traversed the streets, the bazaars and public places; flocks and herds, with fleeces dyed scarlet, and gilded horns, were seen on all the roads driven to the court by peasants under the guidance of their priests. Bishops, abbots, ecclesiastics generally, were compelled to drink, and to take part in ridiculous and indecent dances, Ali apparently thinking to raise himself by degrading his more respectable subjects. Day and night these spectacles succeeded each other with increasing rapidity, the air resounded with firing, songs, cries, music, and the roaring of wild beasts in shows. Enormous spits, loaded with meat, smoked before huge braziers, and wine ran in floods at tables prepared in the palace courts. Troops of brutal soldiers drove workmen from their labour with whips, and compelled them to join in the entertainments; dirty and impudent jugglers invaded private houses, and pretending that they had orders from the pacha to display their skill, carried boldly off whatever they could lay their hands upon. Ali saw the general demoralization with pleasure, especially as it tended to the gratification of his avarice, Every guest was expected to bring to the palace gate a gift in proportion to his means, and foot officers watched to see that no one forgot this obligation.

At length, on the nineteenth day, Ali resolved to crown the feast by an orgy worthy of himself. He caused the galleries and halls of his castle by the lake to be decorated with unheard-of splendour, and fifteen hundred guests assembled for a solemn banquet. The pacha appeared in all his glory, surrounded by his noble attendants and courtiers, and seating himself on a dais raised above this base crowd which trembled at his glance, gave the signal to begin. At his voice, vice plunged into its most shameless diversions, and the wine-steeped wings of debauchery outspread themselves over the feast. All tongues were at their freest, all imaginations ran wild, all evil passions were at their height, when suddenly the noise ceased, and the guests clung together in terror. A man stood at the entrance of the hall, pale, disordered, and wild-eyed, clothed in torn and blood-stained garments. As everyone made way at his approach, he easily reached the pacha, and prostrating himself at his feet, presented a letter. Ali opened and rapidly perused it; his lips trembled, his eyebrows met in a terrible frown, the muscles of his forehead contracted alarmingly. He vainly endeavoured to smile and to look as if nothing had happened, his agitation betrayed him, and he was obliged to retire, after desiring a herald to announce that he wished the banquet to continue.

Now for the subject of the message, and the cause of the dismay it produced.

CHAPTER VI

Ali had long cherished a violent passion for Zobeide, the wife of his son Veli Pacha: Having vainly attempted to gratify it after his son's departure, and being indignantly repulsed, he had recourse to drugs, and the unhappy Zobeide remained in ignorance of her misfortune until she found she was pregnant. Then, half-avowals from her women, compelled to obey the pacha from fear of death, mixed with confused memories of her own, revealed the whole terrible truth. Not knowing in her despair which way to turn, she wrote to Ali, entreating him to visit the harem. As head of the family, he had a right to enter, being supposed responsible for the conduct of his sons' families, no-law-giver having hitherto contemplated the possibility of so disgraceful a crime. When he appeared, Zobeide flung herself at his feet, speechless with grief. Ali acknowledged his guilt, pleaded the violence of his passion, wept with his victim, and entreating her to control herself and keep silence, promised that all should be made right. Neither the prayers nor tears of Zobeide could induce him to give up the intention of effacing the traces of his first crime by a second even more horrible.

But the story was already whispered abroad, and Pacho Bey learnt all its details from the spies he kept in Janina. Delighted at the prospect of avenging himself on the father, he hastened with his news to the son. Veli Pacha, furious, vowed vengeance, and demanded Pacho Bey's help, which was readily promised. But Ali had been warned, and was not a man to be taken unawares. Pacho Bey, whom Veli had just promoted to the office of sword-bearer, was attacked in broad daylight by six emissaries sent from Janina. He obtained timely help, however, and five of the assassins, taken red-handed, were at once hung without ceremony in the market-place. The sixth was the messenger whose arrival with the news had caused such dismay at Ali's banquet.

As Ali reflected how the storm he had raised could best be laid, he was informed that the ruler of the marriage feast sent by Moustai, Pacha of Scodra, to receive the young bride who should reign in his harem, had just arrived in the plain of Janina. He was Yussuf Bey of the Delres, an old enemy of Ali's, and had encamped with his escort of eight hundred warriors at the foot of Tomoros of Dodona. Dreading some treachery, he absolutely refused all entreaties to enter the town, and Ali seeing that it was useless to insist, and that his adversary for the present was safe, at once sent his grand-daughter, the Princess of Aulis, out to him.

This matter disposed of, Ali was able to attend to his hideous family tragedy. He began by effecting the disappearance of the women whom he had been compelled to make his accomplices; they were simply sewn up in sacks by gipsies and thrown into the lake. This done, he himself led the executioners into a subterranean part of the castle, where they were beheaded by black mutes as a reward for their obedience. He then sent a doctor to Zobeide; who succeeded in causing a miscarriage, and who, his work done, was seized and strangled by the black mutes who had just beheaded the gipsies. Having thus got rid of all who could bear witness to his crime, he wrote to Veli that he might now send for his wife and two of his children, hitherto detained as hostages, and that the innocence of Zobeide would confound a calumniator who had dared to assail him with such injurious suspicions.

When this letter arrived, Pacho Bey, distrusting equally the treachery of the father and the weakness of the son, and content with having sown the seeds of dissension in his enemy’s family, had sufficient wisdom to seek safety in flight. Ali, furious, vowed, on hearing this, that his vengeance should overtake him even at the ends of the earth. Meanwhile he fell back on Yussuf Bey of the Debres, whose escape when lately at Janina still rankled in his mind. As Yussuf was dangerous both from character and influence, Ali feared to attack him openly, and sought to assassinate him. This was not precisely easy; for, exposed to a thousand dangers of this kind, the nobles of that day were on their guard. Steel and poison were used up, and another way had to be sought. Ali found it.

One of the many adventurers with whom Janina was filled penetrated to the pacha’s presence, and offered to sell the secret of a powder whereof three grains would suffice to kill a man with a terrible explosion — explosive powder, in short. Ali heard with delight, but replied that he must see it in action before purchasing.

In the dungeons of the castle by the lake, a poor monk of the order of St. Basil was slowly dying, for having boldly refused a sacrilegious simony proposed to him by Ali. He was a fit subject for the experiment, and was successfully blown to pieces, to the great satisfaction of Ali, who concluded his bargain, and hastened to make use of it. He prepared a false firman, which, according to custom, was enclosed and sealed in a cylindrical case, and sent to Yussuf Bey by a Greek, wholly ignorant of the real object of his mission. Opening it without suspicion, Yussuf had his arm blown off, and died in consequence, but found time to despatch a message to Moustai Pacha of Scodra, informing him of the catastrophe, and warning him to keep good guard.

Yussuf's letter was received by Moustai just as a similar infernal machine was placed in his hands under cover to his young wife. The packet was seized, and a careful examination disclosed its nature. The mother of Moustai, a jealous and cruel woman, accused her daughter-in-law of complicity, and the unfortunate Ayesha, though shortly to become a mother, expired in agony from the effects of poison, only guilty of being the innocent instrument of her grandfather's treachery.

Fortune having frustrated Ali's schemes concerning Moustai Pacha, offered him as consolation a chance of invading the territory of Parga, the only place in Epirus which had hitherto escaped his rule, and which he greedily coveted. Agia, a small Christian town on the coast, had rebelled against him and allied itself to Parga. It provided an excuse for hostilities, and Ali's troops, under his son Mouktar, first seized Agia, where they only found a few old men to massacre, and then marched on Parga, where the rebels had taken refuge. After a few skirmishes, Mouktar entered the town, and though the Parganiotes fought bravely, they must inevitably have surrendered had they been left to themselves. But they had sought protection from the French, who had garrisoned the citadel, and the French grenadiers descending rapidly from the height, charged the Turks with so much fury that they fled in all directions, leaving on the field four "bimbashis," or captains of a thousand, and a considerable number of killed and wounded.

The pacha's fleet succeeded no better than his army. Issuing from the Gulf of Ambracia, it was intended to attack Parga from the sea, joining in the massacre, and cutting off all hope of escape from that side, Ali meaning to spare neither the garrison nor any male inhabitants over twelve years of age. But a few shots fired from a small fort dispersed the ships, and a barque manned by sailors from Paxos pursued them, a shot from which killed Ali's admiral on his quarter-deck. He was a Greek of Galaxidi, Athanasius Macrys by name.

Filled with anxiety, Ali awaited news at Prevesa, where a courier, sent off at the beginning of the action, had brought him oranges gathered in the orchards of Parga. Ali gave him a purse of gold, and publicly proclaimed his success. His joy was redoubled when a second messenger presented two heads of French soldiers, and announced that his troops were in possession of the lower part of Parga. Without further delay he ordered his attendants to mount, entered his carriage, and started triumphantly on the Roman road to Nicopolis. He sent messengers to his generals, ordering them to spare the women and children of Parga, intended for his harem, and above all to take strict charge of the plunder. He was approaching the arena of Nicopolis when a third Tartar messenger informed him of the defeat of his army. Ali changed countenance, and could scarcely articulate the order to return to Prevesa. Once in his palace, he gave way to such fury that all around him trembled, demanding frequently if it could be true that his troops were beaten. “May your misfortune be upon us!” his attendants answered, prostrating themselves. All at once, looking out on the calm blue sea which lay before his windows, he perceived his fleet doubling Cape Pancrator and re-entering the Ambracian Gulf under full sail; it anchored close by the palace, and on hailing the leading ship a speaking trumpet announced to Ali the death of his admiral, Athanasius Macrys.

“But Parga, Parga!” cried Ali.

“May Allah grant the pacha long life! The Parganiotes have escaped the sword of His Highness.”

“It is the will of Allah!” murmured the pacha; whose head sank upon his breast in dejection.

Arms having failed, Ali, as usual, took refuge in plots and treachery, but this time, instead of corrupting his enemies with gold, he sought to weaken them by division.

CHAPTER VII

The French commander Nicole, surnamed the “Pilgrim,” on account of a journey he had once made to Mecca, had spent six months at Janina with a brigade of artillery which General Marmont, then commanding in the Illyrian provinces, had for a time placed at Ali’s disposal. The old officer had acquired the esteem and friendship of the pacha, whose leisure he had often amused by stories of his campaigns and various adventures, and although it was now long since they had met, he still had the reputation of being Ali’s friend. Ali prepared his plans accordingly. He wrote a letter to Colonel Nicole, apparently in continuation of a regular correspondence between them, in which he thanked the colonel for his continued affection, and besought him by various powerful motives to surrender Parga, of which he promised him the governorship during the rest of his life. He took good care to complete his treason by allowing the letter to fall into the hands of the chief ecclesiastics of Parga, who fell head-foremost into the trap. Seeing that the tone of the letter was in perfect accordance with the former friendly relations between their French governor and the pacha, they were convinced of the former’s treachery. But the result was not as Ali had hoped: the Parganiotes resumed their former negotiations with the English, preferring to place their freedom in the hands of a Christian nation rather than to fall under the rule of a Mohammedan satrap.... The English immediately sent a messenger to Colonel Nicole, offering honourable conditions of capitulation. The colonel returned a decided refusal, and threatened to blow up the place if the inhabitants, whose intentions he guessed, made the slightest hostile movement. However, a few days later, the citadel was taken at night, owing to the treachery of a woman who admitted an English detachment; and the next day, to the general astonishment, the British standard floated over the Acropolis of Parga.

All Greece was then profoundly stirred by a faint gleam of the dawn of liberty, and shaken by a suppressed agitation. The Bourbons again reigned in France, and the Greeks built a thousand hopes on an event which changed the basis of the whole European policy. Above all, they reckoned on powerful assistance from Russia. But England had already begun to dread anything which could increase either the possessions or the influence of this formidable power. Above all, she was determined that the Ottoman Empire should remain intact, and that the Greek navy, beginning to be formidable, must be destroyed. With these objects in view, negotiations with Ali Pacha were resumed. The latter was still smarting under his recent disappointment, and to all overtures answered only, “Parga! I must have Parga.” — And the English were compelled to yield it!

Trusting to the word of General Campbell, who had formally promised, on its surrender, that Parga should be classed along with the seven Ionian Isles; its grateful inhabitants were enjoying a delicious rest after the storm, when a letter from the Lord High Commissioner, addressed to Lieutenant-Colonel de Bosset, undeceived them, and gave warning of the evils which were to burst on the unhappy town.

On the 25th of March, 1817, notwithstanding the solemn promise made to the Parganiotes, when they admitted the British troops, that they should always be on the same footing as the Ionian Isles, a treaty was signed at Constantinople by the British Plenipotentiary, which stipulated the complete and stipulated cession of Parga and all its territory to, the Ottoman Empire. Soon there arrived at Janine Sir John Cartwright, the English Consul at Patras, to arrange for the sale of the lands of the Parganiotes and discuss the conditions of their emigration. Never before had any such compact disgraced European diplomacy, accustomed hitherto to regard Turkish encroachments as simple sacrilege. But Ali Pacha fascinated the English agents, overwhelming them with favours, honours, and feasts, carefully watching them all the while. Their correspondence was intercepted, and he endeavoured by means of his agents to rouse the Parganiotes against them. The latter lamented bitterly, and appealed to Christian Europe, which remained deaf to their cries. In the name of their ancestors, they demanded the rights which had been guaranteed them. “They will buy our lands,” they said; “have we asked to sell them? And even if we received their value, can gold give us a country and the tombs of our ancestors?”

Ali Pacha invited the Lord High Commissioner of Great Britain, Sir Thomas Maitland, to a conference at Prevesa, and complained of the exorbitant price of 1,500,000, at which the commissioners had estimated Parga and its territory, including private property and church furniture. It had been hoped that Ali’s avarice would hesitate at this high price, but he was not so easily discouraged. He give a banquet for the Lord High Commissioner, which degenerated into a shameless orgy. In the midst of this drunken hilarity the Turk and the Englishman disposed of the territory of Parga; agreeing that a fresh estimate should be made on the spot by experts chosen by both English and Turks. The result of this valuation was that the indemnity granted to the Christians was reduced by the English to the sum of 276,075 sterling, instead of the original 500,000. And as Ali's agents only arrived at the sum of 56,750, a final conference was held at Buthrotum between Ali and the Lord High Commissioner. The latter then informed the Parganiotes that the indemnity allowed them was irrevocably fixed at 150,000! The transaction is a disgrace to the egotistical and venal nation which thus allowed the life and liberty of a people to be trifled with, a lasting blot on the honour of England!

The Parganiotes at first could believe neither in the infamy of their protectors nor in their own misfortune; but both were soon confirmed by a proclamation of the Lord High Commissioner, informing them that the pacha's army was marching to take possession of the territory which, by May 10th, must be abandoned for ever.

The fields were then in full bearing. In the midst of plains ripening for a rich harvest were 80,000 square feet of olive trees, alone estimated at two hundred thousand guineas. The sun shone in cloudless azure, the air was balmy with the scent of orange trees, of pomegranates and citrons. But the lovely country might have been inhabited by phantoms; only hands raised to heaven and brows bent to the dust met one's eye. Even the very dust belonged no more to the wretched inhabitants; they were forbidden to take a fruit or a flower, the priests might not remove either relics or sacred images. Church, ornaments, torches, tapers, pyxes, had by this treaty all become Mahommedan property. The English had sold everything, even to the Host! Two days more, and all must be left. Each was silently marking the door of the dwelling destined so soon to shelter an enemy, with a red cross, when suddenly a terrible cry echoed from street to street, for the Turks had been perceived on the heights overlooking the town. Terrified and despairing, the whole population hastened to fall prostrate before the Virgin of Parga, the ancient guardian of their citadel. A mysterious voice, proceeding from the sanctuary, reminded them that the English had, in their iniquitous treaty, forgotten to include the ashes of those whom a happier fate had spared the sight of the ruin of Parga. Instantly they rushed to the graveyards, tore open the tombs, and collected the bones and putrefying corpses. The beautiful olive trees were felled, an enormous funeral pyre arose, and in the general excitement the orders of the English chief were defied. With naked daggers in their hands, standing in the crimson light of the flames which were consuming the bones of their ancestors, the people of Parga vowed to slay their wives and children, and to kill themselves to the last man, if the infidels dared to set foot in the town before the appointed hour. Xenocles, the last of the Greek poets, inspired by this sublime manifestation of despair, even as Jeremiah by the fall of Jerusalem, improvised a hymn which expresses all the grief of the exiles, and which the exiles interrupted by their tears and sobs.

A messenger, crossing the sea in all haste, informed the Lord High Commissioner of the terrible threat of the Parganiotes. He started at once, accompanied by General Sir Frederic Adams, and landed at Parga by the light of the funeral pyre. He was received with ill-concealed indignation, and with assurances that the sacrifice would be at once consummated unless Ali’s troops were held back. The general endeavoured to console and to reassure the unhappy people, and then proceeded to the outposts, traversing silent streets in which armed men stood at each door only waiting a signal before slaying their families, and then turning their weapons against the English and themselves. He implored them to have patience, and they answered by pointing to the approaching Turkish army and bidding him hasten. He arrived at last and commenced negotiations, and the Turkish officers, no less uneasy than the English garrison, promised to wait till the appointed hour. The next day passed in mournful silence, quiet as death, At sunset on the following day, May 9, 1819, the English standard on the castle of Parga was hauled down, and after a night spent in prayer and weeping, the Christians demanded the signal of departure.

They had left their dwellings at break of day, and scattering on the shore, endeavoured to collect some relics of their country. Some filled little bags with ashes withdrawn from the funeral pile; others took handfuls of earth, while the women and children picked up pebbles which they hid in their clothing and pressed to their bosoms, as if fearing to be deprived of them. Meanwhile, the ships intended to transport them arrived, and armed English soldiers superintended the embarkation, which the Turks hailed from afar with, ferocious cries. The Parganiotes were landed in Corfu, where they suffered yet more injustice. Under various pretexts the money promised them was reduced and withheld, until destitution compelled them to accept the little that was offered. Thus closed one of the most odious transactions which modern history has been compelled to record.

The satrap of Janina had arrived at the fulfilment of his wishes. In the retirement of his fairy-like palace by the lake he could enjoy voluptuous pleasures to the full. But already seventy-eight years had passed over his head, and old age had laid the burden of infirmity upon him. His dreams were dreams of blood, and vainly he sought refuge in chambers glittering with gold, adorned with arabesques, decorated with costly armour and covered with the richest of Oriental carpets, remorse stood ever beside him. Through the magnificence which surrounded him there constantly passed the gale spectre of Emineh, leading onwards a vast procession of mournful phantoms, and the guilty pasha buried his face in his hands and shrieked aloud for help. Sometimes, ashamed of his weakness, he endeavoured to defy both the reproaches of his conscience and the opinion of the multitude, and sought to encounter criticism with bravado. If, by chance, he overheard some blind singer chanting in the streets the satirical verses which, faithful to the poetical and mocking genius of them ancestors, the Greeks frequently composed about him, he would order the singer to be brought, would bid him repeat his verses, and, applauding him, would relate some fresh anecdote of cruelty, saying, “Go, add that to thy tale; let thy hearers know what I can do; let them understand that I stop at nothing in order to overcome my foes! If I reproach myself with anything, it is only with the deeds I have sometimes failed to carry out.”

Sometimes it was the terrors of the life after death which assailed him. The thought of eternity brought terrible visions in its train, and Ali shuddered at the prospect of Al-Sirat, that awful bridge, narrow as a spider’s thread and hanging over the furnaces of Hell; which a Mussulman must cross in order to arrive at the gate of Paradise. He ceased to joke about Eblis, the Prince of Evil, and sank by degrees into profound superstition. He was surrounded by magicians and soothsayers; he consulted omens, and demanded talismans and charms from the dervishes, which he had either sewn into his garments, or suspended in the most secret parts of his palace, in order to avert evil influences. A Koran was hung about his neck as a defence against the evil eye, and frequently he removed it and knelt before it, as did Louis XI before the leaden figures of saints which adorned his hat. He ordered a complete chemical laboratory from Venice, and engaged alchemists to distill the water of immortality, by the help of which he hoped to ascend to the planets and discover the Philosopher's Stone. Not perceiving any practical result of their labours, he ordered, the laboratory to be burnt and the alchemists to be hung.

Ali hated his fellow-men. He would have liked to leave no survivors, and often regretted his inability to destroy all those who would have cause to rejoice at his death, Consequently he sought to accomplish as much harm as he could during the time which remained to him, and for no possible reason but that of hatred, he caused the arrest of both Ibrahim Pasha, who had already suffered so much at his hands, and his son, and confined them both in a dungeon purposely constructed under the grand staircase of the castle by the lake, in order that he might have the pleasure of passing over their heads each time he left his apartments or returned to them.

It was not enough for Ali merely to put to death those who displeased him, the form of punishment must be constantly varied in order to produce a fresh mode of suffering, therefore new tortures had to be constantly invented. Now it was a servant, guilty of absence without leave, who was bound to a stake in the presence of his sister, and destroyed by a cannon placed six paces off, but only loaded with powder, in order to prolong the agony; now, a Christian accused of having tried to blow up Janina by introducing mice with tinder fastened to their tails into the powder magazine, who was shut up in the cage of Ali's favourite tiger and devoured by it.

The pasha despised the human race as much as he hated it. A European having reproached him with the cruelty shown to his subjects, Ali replied:—

"You do not understand the race with which I have to deal. Were I to hang a criminal on yonder tree, the sight would not deter even his own brother from stealing in the crowd at its foot. If I had an old man burnt alive, his son would steal the ashes and sell them. The rabble can be governed by fear only, and I am the one man who does it successfully."

His conduct perfectly corresponded to his ideas. One great feast-day, two gipsies devoted their lives in order to avert the evil destiny of the pasha; and, solemnly convoking on their own heads all misfortunes which might possibly befall him, cast themselves down from the palace roof. One arose with difficulty, stunned and suffering, the other remained on the ground with a broken leg. Ali gave them each forty francs and an annuity of two pounds of maize daily, and considering this sufficient, took no further trouble about them.

Every year, at Ramadan, a large sum was distributed in alms among poor women without distinction of sect. But Ali contrived to change this act of benevolence into a barbarous form of amusement.

As he possessed several palaces in Janina at a considerable distance from each other, the one at which a distribution was to take place was each day publicly announced, and when the women had waited there for an hour or two, exposed to sun, rain or cold, as the case might be, they were suddenly informed that they must go to some other palace, at the opposite end of the town. When they got there, they usually had to wait for another hour, fortunate if they were not sent off to a third place of meeting. When the time at length arrived, an eunuch appeared, followed by Albanian soldiers armed with staves, carrying a bag of money, which he threw by handfuls right into the midst of the assembly. Then began a terrible uproar. The women rushed to catch it, upsetting each other, quarreling, fighting, and uttering cries of terror and pain, while the Albanians, pretending to enforce order, pushed into the crowd, striking right and left with their batons. The pacha meanwhile sat at a window enjoying the spectacle, and impartially applauding all well delivered blows, no matter whence they came. During these distributions, which really benefitted no one, many women were always severely hurt, and some died from the blows they had received.

Ali maintained several carriages for himself and his family, but allowed no one else to share in this prerogative. To avoid being jolted, he simply took up the pavement in Janina and the neighbouring towns, with the result that in summer one was choked by dust, and in winter could hardly get through the mud. He rejoiced in the public inconvenience, and one day having to go out in heavy rain, he remarked to one of the officers of his escort, “How delightful to be driven through this in a carriage, while you will have the pleasure of following on horseback! You will be wet and dirty, whilst I smoke my pipe and laugh at your condition.”

He could not understand why Western sovereigns should permit their subjects to enjoy the same conveniences and amusements as themselves. “If I had a theatre,” he said, “I would allow no one to be present at performances except my own children; but these idiotic Christians do not know how to uphold their own dignity.”

There was no end to the mystifications which it amused the pacha to carry out with those who approached him.

One day he chose to speak Turkish to a Maltese merchant who came to display some jewels. He was informed that the merchant understood only Greek and Italian. He none the less continued his discourse without allowing anyone to translate what he said into Greek. The Maltese at length lost patience, shut up his cases, and departed. Ali watched him with the utmost calm, and as he went out told him, still in Turkish, to come again the next day.

An unexpected occurrence seemed, like the warning finger of Destiny, to indicate an evil omen for the pacha's future. "Misfortunes arrive in troops," says the forcible Turkish proverb, and a forerunner of disasters came to Ali Dacha.

One morning he was suddenly roused by the Sheik Yussuf, who had forced his way in, in spite of the guards. "Behold!" said he, handing Ali a letter, "Allah, who punishes the guilty, has permitted thy seraglio of Tepelen to be burnt. Thy splendid palace, thy beautiful furniture, costly stuffs, cashmeers, furs, arms, all are destroyed! And it is thy youngest and best beloved son, Salik Bey himself, whose hand kindled the flames!" So saying; Yussuf turned and departed, crying with a triumphant voice, "Fire! fire! fire!"

Ali instantly ordered his horse, and, followed by his guards, rode without drawing rein to Tepelen. As soon as he arrived at the place where his palace had formerly insulted the public misery, he hastened to examine the cellars where his treasures were deposited. All was intact, silver plate, jewels, and fifty millions of francs in gold, enclosed in a well over which he had caused a tower to be built. After this examination he ordered all the ashes to be carefully sifted in hopes of recovering the gold in the tassels and fringes of the sofas, and the silver from the plate and the armour. He next proclaimed through the length and breadth of the land, that, being by the hand of Allah deprived of his house, and no longer possessing anything in his native town, he requested all who loved him to prove their affection by bringing help in proportion. He fixed the day of reception for each commune, and for almost each individual of any rank, however small, according to their distance from Tepelen, whither these evidences of loyalty were to be brought.

During five days Ali received these forced benevolences from all parts. He sat, covered with rags, on a shabby palm-leaf mat placed at the outer gate of his ruined palace, holding in his left hand a villainous pipe of the kind used by the lowest people, and in his right an old red cap, which he extended for the donations of the passers-by. Behind stood a Jew from Janina, charged with the office of testing each piece of gold and valuing jewels which were offered instead of money; for, in terror, each endeavoured to appear generous. No means of obtaining a rich harvest were neglected; for instance, Ali distributed secretly large sums among poor and obscure people, such as servants, mechanics, and soldiers, in order that by returning them in public they might appear to be making great sacrifices, so that richer and more distinguished persons could not, without appearing ill-disposed towards the pacha, offer only the same amount as did the poor, but were obliged to present gifts of enormous value.

After this charity extorted from their fears, the pacha's subjects hoped to be at peace. But a new decree proclaimed throughout Albania required them to rebuild and refurnish the formidable palace of Tepelen entirely at the public expense. Ali then returned to Janina, followed by his treasure and a few women who had escaped from the flames, and whom he disposed of amongst his friends, saying that he was no longer sufficiently wealthy to maintain so many slaves.

Fate soon provided him with a second opportunity for amassing wealth. Arta, a wealthy town with a Christian population, was ravaged by the plague, and out of eight thousand inhabitants, seven thousand were swept away. Hearing this, Ali hastened to send commissioners to prepare an account of furniture and lands which the pacha claimed as being heir to his subjects. A few livid and emaciated spectres were yet to be found in the streets of Arta. In order that the inventory might be more complete, these unhappy beings were compelled to wash in the Inachus blankets, sheets, and clothes steeped in bubonic infection, while the collectors were hunting everywhere for imaginary hidden treasure. Hollow trees were sounded, walls pulled down, the most unlikely corners examined, and a skeleton which was discovered still girt with a belt containing Venetian sequins was gathered up with the utmost care. The archons of the town were arrested and tortured in the hope of discovering buried treasure, the clue to which had disappeared along with the owners. One of these magistrates, accused of having hidden some valuable objects, was plunged up to his shoulders in a boiler full of melted lead and boiling oil. Old men, women, children, rich and poor alike, were interrogated, beaten, and compelled to abandon the last remains of their property in order to save their lives.

Having thus decimated the few inhabitants remaining to the town, it became necessary to repeople it. With this object in view, Ali's emissaries overran the villages of Thessaly, driving before them all the people they met in flocks, and compelling them to settle in Arta. These unfortunate colonists were also obliged to find money to pay the pacha for the houses they were forced to occupy.

This business being settled, Ali turned to another which had long been on his mind. We have seen how Ismail Pacho Bey escaped the assassins sent to murder him. A ship, despatched secretly from Prevesa, arrived at the place of his retreat. The captain, posing as a merchant, invited Ismail to come on board and inspect his goods. But the latter, guessing a trap, fled promptly, and for some time all trace of him was lost. Ali, in revenge, turned his wife out of the palace at Janina which she still occupied, and placed her in a cottage, where she was obliged to earn a living by spinning. But he did not stop there, and learning after some time that Pacho Bey had sought refuge with the Nazir of Drama, who had taken him into favour, he resolved to strike a last blow, more sure and more terrible than the others. Again Ismail's lucky star saved him from the plots of his enemy. During a hunting party he encountered a kapidgi-bachi, or messenger from the sultan, who asked him where he could find the Nazir, to whom he was charged with an important communication. As kapidgi-bachis are frequently bearers of evil tidings, which it is well to ascertain at once, and as the Nazir was at some distance, Pacho Bey assumed the latter's part, and the sultan's confidential messenger informed him that he was the bearer of a firman granted at the request of Ali Pacha of Janina.

"Ali of Tepelenir. He is my friend. How can I serve him?"

"By executing the present order, sent you by the Divan, desiring you to behead a traitor, named Pacho Bey, who crept into your service a short time ago.

"Willingly I but he is not an easy man to seize being brave, vigorous, clever, and cunning. Craft will be necessary in this case. He may appear at any moment, and it is advisable that he should not see you. Let no one suspect who you are, but go to Drama, which is only two hours distant, and await me there. I shall return this evening, and you can consider your errand as accomplished."

The kapidgi-bachi made a sign of comprehension, and directed his course towards Drama; while Ismail, fearing that the Nazir, who had only known him a short time, would sacrifice him with the usual Turkish indifference, fled in the opposite direction. At the end of an hour he encountered a Bulgarian monk, with whom he exchanged clothes — a disguise which enabled him to traverse Upper Macedonia in safety. Arriving at the great Servian convent in the mountains whence the Axius takes its rise, he obtained admission under an assumed name. But feeling sure of the discretion of the monks, after a few days he explained his situation to them.

Ali, learning the ill-success of his latest stratagem, accused the Nazir of conniving at Paeho Bey's escape. But the latter easily justified himself with the Divan by giving precise information of what had really occurred. This was what Ali wanted, who profited thereby in having the fugitive's track followed up, and soon got wind of his retreat. As Pacho Bey's innocence had been proved in the explanations given to the Porte, the death firman obtained against him became useless, and Ali affected to abandon him to his fate, in order the better to conceal the new plot he was conceiving against him.

Athanasius Vaya, chief assassin of the Kardikiotes, to whom Ali imparted his present plan for the destruction of Ismail, begged for the honour of putting it into execution, swearing that this time Ismail should not escape. The master and the instrument disguised their scheme under the appearance of a quarrel, which astonished the whole town. At the end of a terrible scene which took place in public, Ali drove the confidant of his crimes from the palace, overwhelming him with insults, and declaring that were Athanasius not the son of his children's foster-mother, he would have sent him to the gibbet. He enforced his words by the application of a stick, and Vaya, apparently overwhelmed by terror and affliction, went round to all the nobles of the town, vainly entreating them to intercede for him. The only favour which Mouktar Pacha could obtain for him was a sentence of exile allowing him to retreat to Macedonia.

Athanasius departed from Janina with all the demonstrations of utter despair, and continued his route with the haste of one who fears pursuit. Arrived in Macedonia, he assumed the habit of a monk, and undertook a pilgrimage to Mount Athos, saying that both the disguise and the journey were necessary to his safety. On the way he encountered one of the itinerant friars of the great Servian convent, to whom he described his disgrace in energetic terms, begging him to obtain his admission among the lay brethren of his monastery.

Delighted at the prospect of bringing back to the fold of the Church a man so notorious for his crimes, the friar hastened to inform his superior, who in his turn lost no time in announcing to Pacho Bey that his compatriot and companion in misfortune was to be received among the lay brethren, and in relating the history of Athanasius as he himself had heard it. Pacho Bey, however, was not easily deceived, and at once guessing that Vaya's real object was his own assassination, told his doubts to the superior, who had already received him as a friend. The latter retarded the reception of Vaya so as to give Pacho time to escape and take the road to Constantinople. Once arrived there, he determined to brave the storm and encounter Ali openly.

Endowed by nature with a noble presence and with masculine firmness, Pacho Bey possessed also the valuable gift of speaking all the various tongues of the Ottoman Empire. He could not fail to distinguish himself in the capital and to find an opening for his great talents. But his inclination drove him at first to seek his fellow-exiles from Epirus, who were either his old companions in arms, friends, of relations, for he was allied to all the principal families, and was even, through his wife, nearly connected with his enemy, Ali Pacha himself.

He had learnt what this unfortunate lady had already endured on his account, and feared that she would suffer yet more if he took active measures against the pacha. While he yet hesitated between affection and revenge, he heard that she had died of grief and misery. Now that despair had put an end to uncertainty, he set his hand to the work.

At this precise moment Heaven sent him a friend to console and aid him in his vengeance, a Christian from OEtolia, Paleopoulo by name. This man was on the point of establishing himself in Russian Bessarabia, when he met Pacho Bey and joined with him in the singular coalition which was to change the fate of the Tepelenian dynasty.

Paleopoulo reminded his companion in misfortune of a memorial presented to the Divan in 1812, which had brought upon Ali a disgrace from which he only escaped in consequence of the overwhelming political events which just then absorbed the attention of the Ottoman Government. The Grand Seigneur had sworn by the tombs of his ancestors to attend to the matter as soon as he was able, and it was only requisite to remind him of his vow. Pacho Hey and his friend drew up a new memorial, and knowing the sultan’s avarice, took care to dwell on the immense wealth possessed by Ali, on his scandalous exactions, and on the enormous sums diverted from the Imperial Treasury. By overhauling the accounts of his administration, millions might be recovered. To these financial considerations Pacho Bey added some practical ones. Speaking as a man sure of his facts and well acquainted with the ground, he pledged his head that with twenty thousand men he would, in spite of Ali’s troops and strongholds, arrive before Janina without firing a musket.

However good these plans appeared, they were by no means to the taste of the sultan’s ministers, who were each and all in receipt of large pensions from the man at whom they struck. Besides, as in Turkey it is customary for the great fortunes of Government officials to be absorbed on their death by the Imperial Treasury, it of course appeared easier to await the natural inheritance of Ali’s treasures than to attempt to seize them by a war which would certainly absorb part of them. Therefore, while Pacho Bey’s zeal was commended, he obtained only dilatory answers, followed at length by a formal refusal.

Meanwhile, the old OEtolian, Paleopoulo, died, having prophesied the approaching Greek insurrection among his friends, and pledged Pacho Bey to persevere in his plans of vengeance, assuring him that before long Ali would certainly fall a victim to them. Thus left alone, Pacho, before taking any active steps in his work of vengeance, affected to give himself up to the strictest observances of the Mohammedan religion. Ali, who had established a most minute surveillance over his actions, finding that his time was spent with ulemas and dervishes, imagined that he had ceased to be dangerous, and took no further trouble about him.

CHAPTER VIII

A career of successful crime had established Ali's rule over a population equal to that of the two kingdoms of Sweden and Norway. But his ambition was not yet satisfied. The occupation of Parga did not crown his desires, and the delight which it caused him was much tempered by the escape of the Parganiotes, who found in exile a safe refuge from his persecution. Scarcely had he finished the conquest of Middle Albania before he was exciting a faction against the young Moustai Pacha in Scodra, a new object of greed. He also kept an army of spies in Wallachia, Moldavia, Thrace, and Macedonia, and, thanks to them, he appeared to be everywhere present, and was mixed up in every intrigue, private or political, throughout the empire. He had paid the English agents the price agreed on for Parga, but he repaid himself five times over, by gifts extorted from his vassals, and by the value of the Parga lands, now become his property. His palace of Tepelen had been rebuilt at the public expense, and was larger and more magnificent than before; Janina was embellished with new buildings; elegant pavilions rose on the shores of the lake; in short, Ali's luxury was on a level with his vast riches. His sons and grandsons were provided for by important positions, and Ali himself was sovereign prince in everything but the name.

There was no lack of flattery, even from literary persons. At Vienna a poem was pointed in his honour, and a French-Greek Grammar was dedicated to him, and such titles as “Most Illustrious,” “Most Powerful,” and “Most Clement,” were showered upon him, as upon a man whose lofty virtues and great exploits echoed through the world. A native of Bergamo, learned in heraldry, provided him with a coat of arms, representing, on a field gules, a lion, embracing three cubs, emblematic of the Tepelenian dynasty. Already he had a consul at Leucadia accepted by the English, who, it is said, encouraged him to declare himself hereditary Prince of Greece, under the nominal suzerainty of the sultan; their real intention being to use him as a tool in return for their protection, and to employ him as a political counter-balance to the hospodars of Moldavia and Wallachia, who for the last twenty years had been simply Russian agents in disguise, This was not all; many of the adventurers with whom the Levant swarms, outlaws from every country, had found a refuge in Albania, and helped not a little to excite Ali’s ambition by their suggestions. Some of these men frequently saluted him as King, a title which he affected to reject with indignation; and he disdained to imitate other states by raising a private standard of his own, preferring not to compromise his real power by puerile displays of dignity; and he lamented the foolish ambition of his children, who would ruin him, he said, by aiming, each, at becoming a vizier. Therefore he did not place his hope or confidence in them, but in the adventurers of every sort and kind, pirates, coiners, renegades, assassins, whom he kept in his pay and regarded as his best support. These he sought to attach to his person as men who might some day be found useful, for he did not allow the many favours of fortune to blind him to the real danger of his position. A vizier,” he was answered, “resembles a man wrapped in costly furs, but he sits on a barrel of powder, which only requires a spark to explode it.” The Divan granted all the concessions which Ali demanded, affecting ignorance of his projects of revolt and his intelligence with the enemies of the State; but then apparent weakness was merely prudent temporising. It was considered that Ali, already advanced in years, could not live much longer, and it was hoped that, at his death, Continental Greece, now in some measure detached from the Ottoman rule, would again fall under the sultan’s sway.

Meanwhile, Pacho Bey, bent on silently undermining Ali’s influence; had established himself as an intermediary for all those who came to demand justice on account of the pacha’s exactions, and he contrived that both his own complaints and those of his clients, should penetrate to the ears of the sultan; who, pitying his misfortunes, made him a kapidgi-bachi, as a commencement of better things. About this time the sultan also admitted to the Council a certain Abdi Effendi of Larissa, one of the richest nobles of Thessaly, who had been compelled by the tyranny of Veli Pacha to fly from his country. The two new dignitaries, having secured Khalid Effendi as a partisan, resolved to profit by his influence to carry out their plans of vengeance on the Tepelenian family. The news of Pacho Bey’s promotion roused Ali from the security in which he was plunged, and he fell a prey to the most lively anxiety. Comprehending at once the evil which this man, —trained in his own school, might cause him, he exclaimed, “Ah! if Heaven would only restore me the strength of my youth, I would plunge my sword into his heart even in the midst of the Divan.”

It was not long before Ali’s enemies found an extremely suitable opportunity for opening their attack. Veli Pacha, who had for his own profit increased the Thessalian taxation fivefold, had in doing so caused so much oppression that many of the inhabitants preferred the griefs and dangers of emigration rather than remain under so tyrannical a rule. A great number of Greeks sought refuge at Odessa, and the great Turkish families assembled round Pacho Bey and Abdi Effendi at Constantinople, who lost no opportunity of interceding in their favour. The sultan, who as yet did not dare to act openly against the Tepelenian family, was at least able to relegate Veli to the obscure post of Lepanto, and Veli, much disgusted, was obliged to obey. He quitted the new palace he had just built at Rapehani, and betook himself to the place of exile, accompanied by actors, Bohemian dancers, bear leaders, and a crowd of prostitutes.

Thus attacked in the person of his most powerful son, Ali thought to terrify his enemies by a daring blow. He sent three Albanians to Constantinople to assassinate Pacho Bey. They fell upon him as he was proceeding to the Mosque of Saint-Sophia, on the day on which the sultan also went in order to be present at the Friday ceremonial prayer, and fired several shots at him. He was wounded, but not mortally.

The assassins, caught red-handed, were hung at the gate of the Imperial Seraglio, but not before confessing that they were sent by the Pacha of Janina. The Divan, comprehending at last that so dangerous a man must be dealt with at any cost, recapitulated all Ali’s crimes, and pronounced a sentence against him which was confirmed by a decree of the Grand Mufti. It set forth that Ali Tepelen, having many times obtained pardon for his crimes, was now guilty of high treason in the first degree, and that he would, as recalcitrant, be placed under the ban of the Empire if he did not within forty days appear at the Gilded Threshold of the Felicitous Gate of the Monarch who dispenses crowns to the princes who reign in this world, in order to justify himself. As may be supposed, submission to such an order was about the last thing Ali contemplated. As he failed to appear, the Divan caused the Grand Mufti to launch the thunder of excommunication against him.

Ali had just arrived at Parga, which he now saw for the third time since he had obtained it, when his secretaries informed him that only the rod of Moses could save him from the anger of Pharaoh — a figurative mode of warning him that he had nothing to hope for. But Ali, counting on his usual luck, persisted in imagining that he could, once again, escape from his difficulty by the help of gold and intrigue. Without discontinuing the pleasures in which he was immersed, he contented himself with sending presents and humble petitions to Constantinople. But both were alike useless, for no one even ventured to transmit them to the sultan, who had sworn to cut off the head of anyone who dared mention the name of Ali Tepelen in his presence.

Receiving no answer to his overtures, Ali became a prey to terrible anxiety. As he one day opened the Koran to consult it as to his future, his divining rod stopped at verse 82, chap. xix., which says, “He doth flatter himself in vain. He shall appear before our tribunal naked and bare.” Ali closed the book and spat three times into his bosom. He was yielding to the most dire presentiments, when a courier, arriving from the capital, informed him that all hope of pardon was lost.

He ordered his galley to be immediately prepared, and left his seraglio, casting a look of sadness on the beautiful gardens where only yesterday he had received the homage of his prostrate slaves. He bade farewell to his wives, saying that he hoped soon to return, and descended to the shore, where the rowers received him with acclamations. The sail was set to a favourable breeze, and Ali, leaving the shore he was never to see again, sailed towards Erevesa, where he hoped to meet the Lord High Commissioner Maitland. But the time of prosperity had gone by, and the regard which had once been shown him changed with his fortunes. The interview he sought was not granted.

The sultan now ordered a fleet to be equipped, which, after Ramadan, was to disembark troops on the coast of Epirus, while all the neighbouring pashas received orders to hold themselves in readiness to march with all the troops of their respective Governments against Ali, whose name was struck out of the list of viziers. Pacho Bey was named Pasha of Janina and Delvino on condition of subduing them, and was placed in command of the whole expedition.

However, notwithstanding these orders, there was not at the beginning of April, two months after the attempted assassination of Pacho Bey, a single soldier ready to march on Albania. Ramadan, that year, did not close until the new moon of July. Had Ali put himself boldly at the head of the movement which was beginning to stir throughout Greece, he might have baffled these vacillating projects, and possibly dealt a fatal blow to the Ottoman Empire. As far back as 1808, the Hydriotes had offered to recognise his son Veli, then Vizier of the Morea, as their Prince, and to support him in every way, if he would proclaim the independence of the Archipelago. The Moreans bore him no enmity until he refused to help them to freedom, and would have returned to him had he consented.

On the other side, the sultan, though anxious for war, would not spend a penny in order to wage it; and it was not easy to corrupt some of the great vassals ordered to march at their own expense against a man in whose downfall they had no special interest. Nor were the means of seduction wanting to Ali, whose wealth was enormous; but he preferred to keep it in order to carry on the war which he thought he could no longer escape. He made, therefore, a general appeal to all Albanian warriors, whatever their religion. Mussulmans and Christians, alike attracted by the prospect of booty and good pay, flocked to his standard in crowds.

He organised all these adventurers on the plan of the Armatous, by companies, placing a captain of his own choice at the head of each, and giving each company a special post to defend. Of all possible plans this was the best adapted to his country, where only a guerilla warfare can be carried on, and where a large army could not subsist.

In repairing to the posts assigned to them, these troops committed such terrible depredations that the provinces sent to Constantinople demanding their suppression. The Divan answered the petitioners that it was their own business to suppress these disorders, and to induce the Klephotes to turn their arms against Ali, who had nothing to hope from the clemency of the Grand Seigneur. At the same time circular letters were addressed to the Epirotes, warning them to abandon the cause of a rebel, and to consider the best means of freeing themselves from a traitor, who, having long oppressed them, now sought to draw down on their country all the terrors of war. Ali, who every where maintained numerous and active spies, now redoubled his watchfulness, and not a single letter entered Epirus without being opened and read by his agents. As an extra precaution, the guardians of the passes were enjoined to slay without mercy any despatch-bearer not provided with an order signed by Ali himself; and to send to Janina under escort any travellers wishing to enter Epirus. These measures were specially aimed against Suleyman Pacha, who had succeeded Veli in the government of Thessaly, and replaced Ali himself in the office of Grand Provost of the Highways. Suleyman's secretary was a Greek called Anagnorto, a native of Macedonia, whose estates Ali had seized, and who had fled with his family to escape further persecution. He had become attached to the court party, less for the sake of vengeance on Ali than to aid the cause of the Greeks, for whose freedom he worked by underhand methods. He persuaded Suleyman Pacha that the Greeks would help him to dethrone Ali, for whom they cherished the deepest hatred, and he was determined that they should learn the sentence of deprivation and excommunication fulminated against the rebel pacha. He introduced into the Greek translation which he was commissioned to make, ambiguous phrases which were read by the Christians as a call to take up arms in the cause of liberty. In an instant, all Hellas was up in arms. The Mohammedans were alarmed, but the Greeks gave out that it was in order to protect themselves and their property against the bands of brigands which had appeared on all sides. This was the beginning of the Greek insurrection, and occurred in May 1820, extending from Mount Pindus to Thermopylae. However, the Greeks, satisfied with having vindicated their right to bear arms in their own defence, continued to pay their taxes, and abstained from all hostility.

At the news of this great movement, Ali's friends advised him to turn it to his own advantage. "The Greeks in arms," said they, "want a chief: offer yourself as their leader. They hate you, it is true, but this feeling may change. It is only necessary to make them believe, which is easily done, that if they will support your cause you will embrace Christianity and give them freedom."

There was no time to lose, for matters became daily more serious. Ali hastened to summon what he called a Grand Divan, composed of the chiefs of both sects, Mussulmans and Christians. There were assembled men of widely different types, much astonished at finding themselves in company: the venerable Gabriel, Archbishop of Janina, and uncle of the unfortunate Euphrosyne, who had been dragged thither by force; Abbas, the old head of the police, who had presided at the execution of the Christian martyr; the holy bishop of Velas, still bearing the marks of the chains with which Ali had loaded him; and Porphyro, Archbishop of Arta, to whom the turban would have been more becoming than the mitre.

Ashamed of the part he was obliged to play, Ali, after long hesitation, decided on speaking, and, addressing the Christians, "O Greeks!" he said, "examine my conduct with unprejudiced minds, and you will see manifest proofs of the confidence and consideration which I have ever shown you. What pacha has ever treated you as I have done? Who would have treated your priests and the objects of your worship with as much respect? Who else would have conceded the privileges which you enjoy? for you hold rank in my councils, and both the police and the administration of my States are in your hands. I do not, however, seek to deny the evils with which I have afflicted you; but, alas! these evils have been the result of my enforced obedience to the cruel and perfidious orders of the Sublime Porte. It is to the Porte that these wrongs must be attributed, for if my actions be attentively regarded it will be seen that I only did harm when compelled thereto by the course of events. Interrogate my actions, they will speak more fully than a detailed apology.

"My position with regard to the Suliotes allowed no half-and-half measures. Having once broken with them, I was obliged either to drive them from my country or to exterminate them. I understood the political hatred of the Ottoman Cabinet too well not to know that it would declare war against me sooner or later, and I knew that resistance would be impossible, if on one side I had to repel the Ottoman aggression, and on the other to fight against the formidable Suliotes.

"I might say the same of the Parganiotes. You know that their town was the haunt of my enemies, and each time that I appealed to them to change their ways they answered only with insults and threats. They constantly aided the Suliotes with whom I was at war; and if at this moment they still were occupying Parga, you would see them throw open the gates of Epirus to the forces of the sultan. But all this does not prevent my being aware that my enemies blame me severely, and indeed I also blame myself, and deplore the faults which the difficulty of my position has entailed upon me. Strong in my repentance, I do not hesitate to address myself to those whom I have most grievously wounded. Thus I have long since recalled to my service a great number of Suliotes, and those who have responded to my invitation are occupying important posts near my person. To complete the reconciliation, I have written to those who are still in exile, desiring them to return fearlessly to their country, and I have certain information that this proposal has been everywhere accepted with enthusiasm. The Suliotes will soon return to their ancestral houses, and, reunited under my standard, will join me in combating the Osmanlis, our common enemies.

"As to the avarice of which I am accused, it seems easily justified by the constant necessity I was under of satisfying the inordinate cupidity of the Ottoman ministry, which incessantly made me pay dearly for tranquillity. This was a personal affair, I acknowledge, and so also is the accumulation of treasure made in order to support the war, which the Divan has at length declared.”

Here Ali ceased, then having caused a barrel full of gold pieces to be emptied on the floor, he continued:

“Behold a part of the treasure I have preserved with so much care, and which has been specially obtained from the Turks, our common enemies: it is yours. I am now more than ever delighted at being the friend of the Greeks. Their bravery is a sure earnest of victory, and we will shortly re-establish the Greek Empire, and drive the Osmanlis across the Bosphorus. O bishops and priests of Issa the prophet! bless the arms of the Christians, your children. O primates! I call upon you to defend your rights, and to rule justly the brave nation associated with my interests.”

This discourse produced very different impressions on the Christian priests and archons. Some replied only by raising looks of despair to Heaven, others murmured their adhesion. A great number remained uncertain, not knowing what to decide. The Mirdite chief, he who had refused to slaughter the Kardikiotes, declared that neither he nor any Skipetar of the Latin communion would bear arms against their legitimate sovereign the sultan. But his words were drowned by cries of “Long live Ali Pasha! Long live the restorer of liberty!” uttered by some chiefs of adventurers and brigands.

CHAPTER IX

Yet next day, May 24th, 1820, Ali addressed a circular letter to his brothers the Christians, announcing that in future he would consider them as his most faithful subjects, and that henceforth he remitted the taxes paid to his own family. He wound up by asking for soldiers, but the Greeks having learnt the instability of his promises, remained deaf to his invitations. At the same time he sent messengers to the Montenegrins and the Servians, inciting them to revolt, and organised insurrections in Wallachia and Moldavia to the very environs of Constantinople.

Whilst the Ottoman vassals assembled only in small numbers and very slowly under their respective standards, every day there collected round the castle of Janina whole companies of Toxidae, of Tapazetae, and of Chamidae; so that Ali, knowing that Ismail Pacho Bey had boasted that he could arrive in sight of Janina without firing a gun, said in his turn that he would not treat with the Porte until he and his troops should be within eight leagues of Constantinople.

He had fortified and supplied with munitions of war Ochrida, Avlone, Cannia, Berat, Cleisoura, Premiti, the port of Panormus, Santi-Quaranta, Buthrotum, Delvino, Argyro-Castron, Tepelen, Parga, Prevesa, Sderli, Paramythia, Arta, the post of the Five Wells, Janina and its castles. These places contained four hundred and twenty cannons of all sizes, for the most part in bronze, mounted on siege-carriages, and seventy mortars. Besides these, there were in the castle by the lake, independently of the guns in position, forty field-pieces, sixty mountain guns, a number of Congreve rockets, formerly given him by the English, and an enormous quantity of munitions of war. Finally, he endeavoured to establish a line of semaphores between Janina and Prevesa, in order to have prompt news of the Turkish fleet, which was expected to appear on this coast.

Ali, whose strength seemed to increase with age, saw to everything and appeared everywhere; sometimes in a litter borne by his Albanians, sometimes in a carriage raised into a kind of platform, but it was more frequently on horseback that he appeared among his labourers. Often he sat on the bastions in the midst of the batteries, and conversed familiarly with those who surrounded him. He narrated the successes formerly obtained against the sultan by Kara Bazaklia, Vizier of Scodra, who, like himself, had been attained with the sentence of deprivation and excommunication; recounting how the rebel pacha, shut up in his citadel with seventy-two warriors, had seen collapse at his feet the united forces of four great provinces of the Ottoman Empire, commanded by twenty-two pachas, who were almost entirely annihilated in one day by the Guegues. He reminded them also, of the brilliant victory gained by Passevend Oglon, Pacha of Widdin, of quite recent memory, which is celebrated in the warlike songs of the Klephts of Roumelia.

Almost simultaneously, Ali's sons, Mouktar and Veli, arrived at Janina. Veli had been obliged, or thought himself obliged, to evacuate Lepanto by superior forces, and brought only discouraging news, especially as to the wavering fidelity of the Turks. Mouktar, on the contrary, who had just made a tour of inspection in the Musache, had only noticed favourable dispositions, and deluded himself with the idea that the Chaonians, who had taken up arms, had done so in order to aid his father. He was curiously mistaken, for these tribes hated Ali with a hatred all the deeper for being compelled to conceal it, and were only in arms in order to repel aggression.

The advice given by the sons to their father as to the manner of treating the Mohammedans differed widely in accordance with their respective opinions. Consequently a violent quarrel arose between them, ostensibly on account of this dispute, but in reality on the subject of their father's inheritance, which both equally coveted. Ali had brought all his treasure to Janina, and thenceforth neither son would leave the neighbourhood of so excellent a father. They overwhelmed him with marks of affection, and vowed that the one had left Lepanto, and the other Berat, only in order to share his danger. Ali was by no means duped by these protestations, of which he divined the motive only too well, and though he had never loved his sons, he suffered cruelly in discovering that he was not beloved by them.

Soon he had other troubles to endure. One of his gunners assassinated a servant of Vela's, and Ali ordered the murderer to be punished, but when the sentence was to be carried out the whole corps of artillery mutinied. In order to save appearances, the pacha was compelled to allow them to ask for the pardon of the criminal whom he dared not punish. This incident showed him that his authority was no longer paramount, and he began to doubt the fidelity of his soldiers. The arrival of the Ottoman fleet further enlightened him to his true position. Mussulman and Christian alike, all the inhabitants of Northern Albania, who had hitherto concealed their disaffection under an exaggerated semblance of devotion, now hastened to make their submission to the sultan. The Turks, continuing their success, laid siege to Parga, which was held by Mehemet, Veli's eldest son. He was prepared to make a good defence, but was betrayed by his troops, who opened the gates of the town, and he was compelled to surrender at discretion. He was handed over to the commander of the naval forces, by whom he was well treated, being assigned the best cabin in the admiral's ship and given a brilliant suite. He was assured that the sultan, whose only quarrel was with his grandfather, would show him favour, and would even deal mercifully with Ali, who, with his treasures, would merely be sent to an important province in Asia Minor. He was induced to write in this strain to his family and friends in order to induce them to lay down their arms.

The fall of Parga made a great impression on the Epirotes, who valued its possession far above its real importance. Ali rent his garments and cursed the days of his former good fortune, during which he had neither known how to moderate his resentment nor to foresee the possibility of any change of fortune.

The fall of Parga was succeeded by that of Arta of Mongliana, where was situated Ali's country house, and of the post of the Five Wells. Then came a yet more overwhelming piece of news Omar Brionis, whom Ali, having formerly despoiled of its wealth, had none the less, recently appointed general-in-chief, had gone over to the enemy with all his troops!

Ali then decided on carrying out a project he had formed in case of necessity, namely, on destroying the town of Janina, which would afford shelter to the enemy and a point of attack against the fortresses in which he was entrenched. When this resolution was known, the inhabitants thought only of saving themselves and their property from the ruin from which nothing could save their country. But most of them were only preparing to depart, when Ali gave leave to the Albanian soldiers yet faithful to him to sack the town.

The place was immediately invaded by an unbridled soldiery. The Metropolitan church, where Greeks and Turks alike deposited their gold, jewels, and merchandise, even as did the Greeks of old in the temples of the gods, became the first object of pillage. Nothing was respected. The cupboards containing sacred vestments were broken open, so were the tombs of the archbishops, in which were interred reliquaries adorned with precious stones; and the altar itself was defiled with the blood of ruffians who fought for chalices and silver crosses.

The town presented an equally terrible spectacle; neither Christians nor Mussulmans were spared, and the women’s apartments, forcibly entered, were given up to violence. Some of the more courageous citizens endeavoured to defend their houses and families against these bandits, and the clash of arms mingled with cries and groans. All at once the roar of a terrible explosion rose above the other sounds, and a hail of bombs, shells, grenade’s, and rockets carried devastation and fire into the different quarters of the town, which soon presented the spectacle of an immense conflagration. Ali, seated on the great platform of the castle by the lake, which seemed to vomit fire like a volcano, directed the bombardment, pointing out the places which must be burnt. Churches, mosques, libraries, bazaars, houses, all were destroyed, and the only thing spared by the flames was the gallows, which remained standing in the midst of the ruins.

Of the thirty thousand persons who inhabited Janina a few hours previously, perhaps one half had escaped. But these had not fled many leagues before they encountered the outposts of the Otto man army, which, instead of helping or protecting them, fell upon them, plundered them, and drove them towards the camp, where slavery awaited them. The unhappy fugitives, taken thus between fire and sword, death behind and slavery before, uttered a terrible cry, and fled in all directions. Those who escaped the Turks were stopped in the hill passes by the mountaineers rushing down to the rey; only large numbers who held together could force a passage.

In some cases terror bestows extraordinary strength, there were mothers who, with infants at the breast, covered on foot in one day the fourteen leagues which separate Janina from Arta. But others, seized with the pangs of travail in the midst of their flight, expired in the woods, after giving birth to babes, who, destitute of succour, did not survive their mothers. And young girls, having disfigured themselves by gashes, hid themselves in caves, where they died of terror and hunger.

The Albanians, intoxicated with plunder and debauchery, refused to return to the castle, and only thought of regaining their country and enjoying the fruit of their rapine. But they were assailed on the way by peasants covetous of their booty, and by those of Janina who had sought refuge with them. The roads and passes were strewn with corpses, and the trees by the roadside converted into gibbets. The murderers did not long survive their victims.

The ruins of Janina were still smoking when, on the 19th August, Pacho Bey made his entry. Having pitched his tent out of range of Ali’s cannon, he proclaimed aloud the firman which inaugurated him as Pacha of Janina and Delvino, and then raised the tails, emblem of his dignity. Ali heard on the summit of his keep the acclamations of the Turks who saluted Pacho Bey, his former servant with the titles of Vali of Epirus, and Ghazi, of Victorius. After this ceremony, the cadi read the sentence, confirmed by the Mufti, which declared Tepelen Veli-Zade to have forfeited his dignities and to be excommunicated, adding an injunction to all the faithful that henceforth his name was not to be pronounced except with the addition of “Kara,” or “black,” which is bestowed on those cut off from the congregation of Sunnites, or Orthodox Mohammedans. A Marabout then cast a stone towards the castle, and the anathema upon “Kara Ali” was repeated by the whole Turkish army, ending with the cry of “Long live the sultan! So be it!”

But it was not by ecclesiastical thunders that three fortresses could be reduced, which were defended by artillerymen drawn from different European armies, who had established an excellent school for gunners and bombardiers. The besieged, having replied with hootings of contempt to the acclamations of the besiegers, proceeded to enforce their scorn with well-aimed cannon shots, while the rebel flotilla, dressed as if for a fete-day, passed slowly before the Turks, saluting them with cannon-shot if they ventured near the edge of the lake.

This noisy rhodomontade did not prevent Ali from being consumed with grief and anxiety. The sight of his own troops, now in the camp of Pacho Bey, the fear of being for ever separated from his sons, the thought of his grandson in the enemy’s hands, all threw him into the deepest melancholy, and his sleepless eyes were constantly drowned in tears. He refused his food, and sat for seven days with untrimmed beard, clad in mourning, on a mat at the door of his antechamber, extending his hands to his soldiers, and imploring them to slay him rather than abandon him. His wives, seeing him in this state, and concluding all was lost, filled the air with their lamentations. All began to think that grief would bring Ali to the grave; but his soldiers, to whose protestations he at first refused any credit, represented to him that their fate was indissolubly linked with his. Pacho Bey having proclaimed that all taken in arms for Ali would be shot as sharers in rebellion, it was therefore their interest to support his resistance with all their power. They also pointed out that the campaign was already advanced, and that the Turkish army, which had forgotten its siege artillery at Constantinople, could not possibly procure any before the end of October, by which time the rains would begin, and the enemy would probably be short of food. Moreover, in any case, it being impossible to winter in a ruined town, the foe would be driven to seek shelter at a distance.

These representations, made with warmth conviction, and supported by evidence, began to soothe the restless fever which was wasting Ali, and the gentle caresses and persuasions of Basillisa, the beautiful Christian captive, who had now been his wife for some time, completed the cure.

At the same time his sister Chainitza gave him an astonishing example of courage. She had persisted, in spite of all that could be said, in residing in her castle of Libokovo. The population, whom she had cruelly oppressed, demanded her death, but no one dared attack her. Superstition declared that the spirit of her mother, with whom she kept up a mysterious communication even beyond the portals of the grave, watched over her safety. The menacing form of Kamco had, it was said, appeared to several inhabitants of Tepelen, brandishing bones of the wretched Kardikiotes, and demanding fresh victims with loud cries. The desire of vengeance had urged some to brave these unknown dangers, and twice, a warrior, clothed in black, had warned them back, forbidding them to lay hands on a sacrilegious woman; whose punishment Heaven reserved to itself, and twice they had returned upon their footsteps.

But soon, ashamed of their terror, they attempted another attack, and came attired in the colour of the Prophet. This time no mysterious stranger speared to forbid their passage and with a cry they climbed the mountain, listening for any supernatural warning. Nothing disturbed the silence and solitude save the bleating of flocks and the cries of birds of prey. Arrived on the platform of Libokovo, they prepared in silence to surprise the guards, believing the castle full of them. They approached crawling, like hunters who stalk a deer, already they had reached the gate of the enclosure, and prepared to burst it open, when lo! it opened of itself, and they beheld Chainitza standing before them, a carabine in her hand, pistols in her belt, and, for all guard, two large dogs.

“Halt! ye daring ones,” she cried; “neither my life nor my treasure will ever be at your mercy. Let one of you move a step without my permission, and this place and the ground beneath your feet' will engulf you. Ten thousand pounds of powder are in these cellars. I will, however, grant your pardon, unworthy though you are. I will even allow you to take these sacks filled with gold; they may recompense you for the losses which my brother's enemies have recently inflicted on you. But depart this instant without a word, and dare not to trouble me again; I have other means of destruction at command besides gunpowder. Life is nothing to me, remember that; but your mountains may yet at my command become the tomb of your wives and children. Go!"

She ceased, and her would-be murderers fled terror.

Shortly after the plague broke out in these mountains, Chainitza had distributed infected garments among gipsies, who scattered contagion wherever they went.

"We are indeed of the same blood!" cried Ali with pride, when he heard of his sister's conduct; and from that hour he appeared to regain all the fire and audacity of his youth. When, a few days later, he was informed that Mouktar and Veli, seduced by the brilliant promises of Dacha Bey, had surrendered Prevesa and Argyro-Castron, "It does not surprise me," he observed coldly. "I have long known them to be unworthy of being my sons, and henceforth my only children and heirs are those who defend my cause." And on hearing a report that both had been beheaded by Dacha Bey's order, he contented himself with saying, "They betrayed their father, and have only received their deserts; speak no more of them." And to show how little it discouraged him, he redoubled his fire upon the Turks.

But the latter, who had at length obtained some artillery, answered his fire with vigour, and began to rally to discrown the old pacha's fortress. Feeling that the danger was pressing, Ali redoubled both his prudence and activity. His immense treasures were the real reason of the war waged against him, and these might induce his own soldiers to rebel, in order to become masters of them. He resolved to protect them from either surprise or conquest. The sum necessary for present use was deposited in the powder magazine, so that, if driven to extremity, it might be destroyed in a moment; the remainder was enclosed in strong-boxes, and sunk in different parts of the lake. This labour lasted a fortnight, when, finally, Ali put to death the gipsies who had been employed about it, in order that the secret might remain with himself.

While he thus set his own affairs in order, he applied himself to the troubling those of his adversary. A great number of Suliots had joined the Ottoman army in order to assist in the destruction of him who formerly had ruined their country. Their camp, which for a long time had enjoyed immunity from the guns of Janina, was one day overwhelmed with bombs. The Suliots were terrified, until they remarked that the bombs did not burst. They then, much astonished, proceeded to pick up and examine these projectiles. Instead of a match, they found rolls of paper enclosed in a wooden cylinder, on which was engraved these words, “Open carefully.” The paper contained a truly Macchiavellian letter from Ali, which began by saying that they were quite justified in having taken up arms against him, and added that he now sent them a part of the pay of which the traitorous Ismail was defrauding them, and that the bombs thrown into their cantonment contained six thousand sequins in gold. He begged them to amuse Ismail by complaints and recriminations, while his gondola should by night fetch one of them, to whom he would communicate what more he had to say. If they accepted his proposition, they were to light three fires as a signal.

The signal was not long in appearing. Ali despatched his barge, which took on board a monk, the spiritual chief of the Suliots. He was clothed in sackcloth, and repeated the prayers for the dying, as one going to execution. Ali, however, received him with the utmost cordiality: He assured the priest of his repentance, his good intentions, his esteem for the Greek captains, and then gave him a paper which startled him considerably. It was a despatch, intercepted by Ali, from Khalid Effendi to the Seraskier Ismail, ordering the latter to exterminate all Christians capable of bearing arms. All male children were to be circumcised, and brought up to form a legion drilled in European fashion; and the letter went on to explain how the Suliots, the Armatolis, the Greek races of the mainland and those of the Archipelago should be disposed of. Seeing the effect produced on the monk by the perusal of this paper, Ali hastened to make him the most advantageous offers, declaring that his own wish was to give Greece a political existence, and only requiring that the Suliot captains should send him a certain number of their children as hostages. He then had cloaks and arms brought which he presented to the monk, dismissing him in haste, in order that darkness might favour his return.

The next day Ali was resting, with his head on Basilissa’s lap, when he was informed that the enemy was advancing upon the intrenchments which had been raised in the midst of the ruins of Janina. Already the outposts had been forced, and the fury of the assailants threatened to triumph over all obstacles. Ali immediately ordered a sortie of all his troops, announcing that he himself would conduct it. His master of the horse brought him the famous Arab charger called the Dervish, his chief huntsman presented him with his guns, weapons still famous in Epirus, where they figure in the ballads of the Skipetars. The first was an enormous gun, of Versailles manufacture, formerly presented by the conqueror of the Pyramids to Djezzar, the Pacha of St. Jean-d’Arc, who amused himself by enclosing living victims in the walls of his palace, in order that he might hear their groans in the midst of his festivities. Next came a carabine given to the Pacha of Janina in the name of Napoleon in 1806; then the battle musket of Charles XII of Sweden, and finally — the much revered sabre of Krim-Guerai. The signal was given; the draw bridge crossed; the Guegues and other adventurers uttered a terrific shout; to which the cries of the assailants replied. Ali placed himself on a height, whence his eagle eye sought to discern the hostile chiefs; but he called and defied Pacho Bey in vain. Perceiving Hassan-Stamboul, colonel of the Imperial bombardiers outside his battery, Ali demanded the gun of Djezzar, and laid him dead on the spot. He then took the carabine of Napoleon, and shot with it Kekriman, Bey of Sponga, whom he had formerly appointed Pacha of Lepanto. The enemy now became aware of his presence, and sent a lively fusillade in his direction; but the balls seemed to diverge from his person. As soon as the smoke cleared, he perceived Capelan, Pacha of Croie, who had been his guest, and wounded him mortally in the chest. Capelan uttered a sharp cry, and his terrified horse caused disorder in the ranks. Ali picked off a large number of officers, one after another; every shot was mortal, and his enemies began to regard him in, the light of a destroying angel. Disorder spread through the forces of the Seraskier, who retreated hastily to his intrenchments.

The Suliots meanwhile sent a deputation to Ismail offering their submission, and seeking to regain their country in a peaceful manner; but, being received by him with the most humiliating contempt, they resolved to make common cause with Ali. They hesitated over the demand for hostages, and at length required Ali’s grandson, Hussien Pacha, in exchange. After many difficulties, Ali at length consented, and the agreement was concluded. The Suliots received five hundred thousand piastres and a hundred and fifty charges of ammunition, Hussien Pacha was given up to them, and they left the Ottoman camp at dead of night. Morco Botzaris remained with three hundred and twenty men, threw down the palisades, and then ascending Mount Paktoras with his troops, waited for dawn in order to announce his defection to the Turkish army. As soon as the sun appeared he ordered a general salvo of artillery and shouted his war-cry. A few Turks in charge of an outpost were slain, the rest fled. A cry of "To arms" was raised, and the standard of the Cross floated before the camp of the infidels.

Signs and omens of a coming general insurrection appeared on all sides; there was no lack of prodigies, visions, or popular rumours, and the Mohammedans became possessed with the idea that the last hour of their rule in Greece had struck. Ali Pacha favoured the general demoralisation; and his agents, scattered throughout the land, fanned the flame of revolt. Ismail Pacha was deprived of his title of Seraskier, and superseded by Kursheed Pacha. As soon as Ali heard this, he sent a messenger to Kursheed, hoping to influence him in his favour. Ismail, distrusting the Skipetars, who formed part of his troops, demanded hostages from them. The Skipetars were indignant, and Ali hearing of their discontent, wrote inviting them to return to him, and endeavouring to dazzle them by the most brilliant promises. These overtures were received by the offended troops with enthusiasm, and Alexis Noutza, Ali's former general, who had forsaken him for Ismail, but who had secretly returned to his allegiance and acted as a spy on the Imperial army, was deputed to treat with him. As soon as he arrived, Ali began to enact a comedy in the intention of rebutting the accusation of incest with his daughter-in-law Zobeide; for this charge, which, since Veli himself had revealed the secret of their common shame, could only be met by vague denials, had never ceased to produce a mast unfavourable impression on Noutza's mind. Scarcely had he entered the castle by the lake, when Ali rushed to meet him, and flung himself into his arms. In presence of his officers and the garrison, he loaded him with the most tender names, calling him his son, his beloved Alexis, his own legitimate child, even as Salik Pacha. He burst into tears, and, with terrible oaths, called Heaven to witness that Mouktar and Veli, whom he disavowed on account of their cowardice, were the adulterous offspring of Emineh's amours. Then, raising his hand against the tomb of her whom he had loved so much, he drew the stupefied Noutza into the recess of a casemate, and sending for Basilissa, presented him to her as a beloved son, whom only political considerations had compelled him to keep at a distance, because, being born of a Christian mother, he had been brought up in the faith of Jesus.

Having thus softened the suspicions of his soldiers, Ali resumed his underground intrigues. The Suliots had informed him that the sultan had made them extremely advantageous offers if they would return to his service, and they demanded pressingly that Ali should give up to them the citadel of Kiapha, which was still in his possession, and which commanded Suli. He replied with the information that he intended, January 26, to attack the camp of Pacho Bey early in the morning, and requested their assistance. In order to cause a diversion, they were to descend into the valley of Janina at night, and occupy a position which he pointed out to them, and he gave their the word “flouri” as password for the night. If successful, he undertook to grant their request.

Ali’s letter was intercepted, and fell into Ismail’s hands, who immediately conceived a plan for snaring his enemy in his own toils. When the night fixed by Ali arrived, the Seraskier marched out a strong division under the command of Omar Brionis, who had been recently appointed Pacha, and who was instructed to proceed along the western slope of Mount Paktoras as far as the village of Besdoune, where he was to place an outpost, and then to retire along the other side of the mountain, so that, being visible in the starlight, the sentinels placed to watch on the hostile towers might take his men for the Suliots and report to Ali that the position of Saint-Nicolas, assigned to them, had been occupied as arranged. All preparations for battle were made, and the two mortal enemies, Ismail and Ali, retired to rest, each cherishing the darling hope of shortly annihilating his rival.

At break of day a lively cannonade, proceeding from the castle of the lake and from Lithoritza, announced that the besieged intended a sortie. Soon Ali’s Skipetars, preceded by a detachment of French, Italians, and Swiss, rushed through the Ottoman fire and carried the first redoubt, held by Ibrahim-Aga-Stamboul. They found six pieces of cannon, which the Turks, notwithstanding their terror, had had time to spike. This misadventure, for they had hoped to turn the artillery against the intrenched camp, decided Ali’s men on attacking the second redoubt, commanded by the chief bombardier. The Asiatic troops of Baltadgi Pacha rushed to its defence. At their head appeared the chief Imaun of the army, mounted on a richly caparisoned mule and repeating the curse fulminated by the mufti against Ali, his adherents, his castles, and even his cannons, which it was supposed might be rendered harmless by these adjurations. Ali's Mohammedan Skipetars averted their eyes, and spat into their bosoms, hoping thus to escape the evil influence. A superstitious terror was beginning to spread among them, when a French adventurer took aim at the Imaun and brought him down, amid the acclamations of the soldiers; whereupon the Asiatics, imagining that Eblis himself fought against them, retired within the intrenchments, whither the Skipetars, no longer fearing the curse, pursued them vigorously.

At the same time, however, a very different action was proceeding at the northern end of the besiegers' intrenchments. Ali left his castle of the lake, preceded by twelve torch-bearers carrying braziers filled with lighted pitch-wood, and advanced towards the shore of Saint-Nicolas, expecting to unite with the Suliots. He stopped in the middle of the ruins to wait for sunrise, and while there heard that his troops had carried the battery of Ibrahim-Aga-Stamboul. Overjoyed, he ordered them to press on to the second intrenchment, promising that in an hour, when he should have been joined by the Suliots, he would support them, and he then pushed forward, preceded by two field-pieces with their waggons, and followed by fifteen hundred men, as far as a large plateau on which he perceived at a little distance an encampment which he supposed to be that of the Suliots. He then ordered the Mirdite prince, Kyr Lekos, to advance with an escort of twenty-five men, and when within hearing distance to wave a blue flag and call out the password. An Imperial officer replied with the countersign "flouri," and Lekos immediately sent back word to Ali to advance. His orderly hastened back, and the prince entered the camp, where he and his escort were immediately surrounded and slain.

On receiving the message, Ali began to advance, but cautiously, being uneasy at seeing no signs of the Mirdite troop. Suddenly, furious cries, and a lively fusillade, proceeding from the vineyards and thickets, announced that he had fallen into a trap, and at the same moment Omar Pacha fell upon his advance guard, which broke, crying "Treason!".

Ali sabred the fugitives mercilessly, but fear carried them away, and, forced to follow the crowd, he perceived the Kersales and Baltadgi Pacha descending the side of Mount Paktoras, intending to cut off his retreat. He attempted another route, hastening towards the road to Dgeleva, but found it held by the Tapagetae under the Bimbashi Aslon of Argyro-Castron. He was surrounded, all seemed lost, and feeling that his last hour had come, he thought only of selling his life as dearly as possible. Collecting his bravest soldiers round him, he prepared for a last rush on Omar Pacha; when, suddenly, with an inspiration born of despair, he ordered his ammunition waggons to be blown up. The Kersales, who were about to seize them, vanished in the explosion, which scattered a hail of stones and debris far and wide. Under cover of the smoke and general confusion, Ali succeeded in withdrawing his men to the shelter of the guns of his castle of Litharitza, where he continued the fight in order to give time to the fugitives to rally, and to give the support he had promised to those fighting on the other slope; who, in the meantime, had carried the second battery and were attacking the fortified camp. Here the Seraskier Ismail met them with a resistance so well managed, that he was able to conceal the attack he was preparing to make on their rear. Ali, guessing that the object of Ismail’s manoeuvres was to crush those whom he had promised to help, and unable, on account of the distance, either to support or to warn them, endeavoured to impede Omar Pasha, hoping still that his Skipetars might either see or hear him. He encouraged the fugitives, who recognised him from afar by his scarlet dolman, by the dazzling whiteness of his horse, and by the terrible cries which he uttered; for, in the heat of battle, this extraordinary man appeared to have regained the vigour and audacity, of his youth. Twenty times he led his soldiers to the charge, and as often was forced to recoil towards his castles. He brought up his reserves, but in vain. Fate had declared against him. His troops which were attacking the intrenched camp found themselves taken between two fires, and he could not help them. Foaming with passion, he threatened to rush singly into the midst of his enemies. His officers besought him to calm himself, and, receiving only refusals, at last threatened to lay hands upon him if he persisted in exposing himself like a private soldier. Subdued by this unaccustomed opposition, Ali allowed himself to be forced back into the castle by the lake, while his soldiers dispersed in various directions.

But even this defeat did not discourage the fierce pasha. Reduced to extremity, he yet entertained the hope of shaking the Ottoman Empire, and from the recesses of his fortress he agitated the whole of Greece. The insurrection which he had stirred up, without foreseeing what the results might be, was spreading with the rapidity of a lighted train of powder, and the Mohammedans were beginning to tremble, when at length Kursheed Pasha, having crossed the Pindus at the head of an army of eighty thousand men, arrived before Janina.

His tent had hardly been pitched, when Ali caused a salute of twenty-one guns to be fired in his honour, and sent a messenger, bearing a letter of congratulation on his safe arrival. This letter, artful and insinuating, was calculated to make a deep impression on Kursheed. Ali wrote that, being driven by the infamous lies of a former servant, called Pacho Bey, into resisting, not indeed the authority of the sultan, before whom he humbly bent his head weighed down with years and grief, but the perfidious plots of His Highness's advisers, he considered himself happy in his misfortunes to have dealings with a vizier noted for his lofty qualities. He then added that these rare merits had doubtless been very far from being estimated at their proper value by a Divan in which men were only classed in accordance with the sums they laid out in gratifying the rapacity of the ministers. Otherwise, how came it about that Kursheed Pasha, Viceroy of Egypt — after the departure of the French, the conqueror of the Mamelukes, was only rewarded for these services by being recalled without a reason? Having been twice Romili-Valicy, why, when he should have enjoyed the reward of his labours, was he relegated to the obscure post of Salonica? And, when appointed Grand Vizier and sent to pacify Servia, instead of being entrusted with the government of this kingdom which he had reconquered for the sultan, why was he hastily despatched to Aleppo to repress a trifling sedition of emirs and janissaries? Now, scarcely arrived in the Morea, his powerful arm was to be employed against an aged man.

Ali then plunged into details, related the pillaging, avarice, and imperious dealing of Pacho Bey, as well as of the pachas subordinate to him; how they had alienated the public mind, how they had succeeded in offending the Armatolis, and especially the Suliots, who might be brought back to their duty with less trouble than these imprudent chiefs had taken to estrange them. He gave a mass of special information on this subject, and explained that in advising the Suliots to retire to their mountains he had really only put them in a false position as long as he retained possession of the fort of Kiapha, which is the key of the Selleide.

The Seraskier replied in a friendly manner, ordered the military salute to be returned in Ali's honour, shot for shot, and forbade that henceforth a person of the valour and intrepidity of the Lion of Tepelen should be described by the epithet of “excommunicated.” He also spoke of him by his title of “vizier,” which he declared he had never forfeited the right to use; and he also stated that he had only entered Epirus as a peace-maker. Kursheed's emissaries had just seized some letters sent by Prince Alexander Ypsilanti to the Greek captains at Epirus. Without going into details of the events which led to the Greek insurrection, the prince advised the Polemarchs, chiefs of the Selleid, to aid Ali Pacha in his revolt against the Porte, but to so arrange matters that they could easily detach themselves again, their only aim being to seize his treasures, which might be used to procure the freedom of Greece.

These letters a messenger from Kursheed delivered to Ali. They produced such an impression upon his mind that he secretly resolved only to make use of the Greeks, and to sacrifice them to his own designs, if he could not inflict a terrible vengeance on their perfidy. He heard from the messenger at the same time of the agitation in European Turkey, the hopes of the Christians, and the apprehension of a rupture between the Porte and Russia. It was necessary to lay aside vain resentment and to unite against these threatening dangers. Kursheed Pacha was, said his messenger, ready to consider favourably any propositions likely to lead to a prompt pacification, and would value such a result far more highly than the glory of subduing by means of the imposing force at his command, a valiant prince whom he had always regarded as one of the strongest bulwarks of the Ottoman Empire. This information produced a different effect upon Ali to that intended by the Seraskier. Passing suddenly from the depth of despondency to the height of pride, he imagined that these overtures of reconciliation were only a proof of the inability of his foes to subdue him, and he sent the following propositions to Kursheed Pacha:

“If the first duty of a prince is to do justice, that of his subjects is to remain faithful, and obey him in all things. From this principle we derive that of rewards and punishments, and although my services might sufficiently justify my conduct to all time, I nevertheless acknowledge that I have deserved the wrath of the sultan, since he has raised the arm of his anger against the head of his slave. Having humbly implored his pardon, I fear not to invoke his severity towards those who have abused his confidence. With this object I offer — First, to pay the expenses of the war and the tribute in arrears due from my Government without delay. Secondly, as it is important for the sake of example that the treason of an inferior towards his superior should receive fitting chastisement, I demand that Pacho Bey, formerly in my service, should be beheaded, he being the real rebel, and the cause of the public calamities which are afflicting the faithful of Islam. Thirdly, I require that for the rest of my life I shall retain, without annual re-investiture, my pachalik of Janina, the coast of Epirus, Acarnania and its dependencies, subject to the rights, charges and tribute due now and hereafter to the sultan. Fourthly, I demand amnesty and oblivion of the past for all those who have served me until now. And if these conditions are not accepted without modifications, I am prepared to defend myself to the last.

“Given at the castle of Janina, March 7, 1821.”

CHAPTER X

This mixture of arrogance and submission only merited indignation, but it suited Kursheed to dissemble. He replied that, assenting to such propositions being beyond his powers, he would transmit them to Constantinople, and that hostilities might be suspended, if Ali wished, until the courier, could return.

Being quite as cunning as Ali himself, Kursheed profited by the truce to carry on intrigues against him. He corrupted one of the chiefs of the garrison, Metzo-Abbas by name, who obtained pardon for himself and fifty followers, with permission to return to their homes. But this clemency appeared to have seduced also four hundred Skipetars who made use of the amnesty and the money with which Ali provided them, to raise Toxis and the Tapygetae in the latter's favour. Thus the Seraskier's scheme turned against himself, and he perceived he had been deceived by Ali's seeming apathy, which certainly did not mean dread of defection. In fact, no man worth anything could have abandoned him, supported as he seemed to be by almost supernatural courage. Suffering from a violent attack of gout, a malady he had never before experienced, the pacha, at the age of eighty-one, was daily carried to the most exposed place on the ramparts of his castle. There, facing the hostile batteries, he gave audience to whoever wished to see him. On this exposed platform he held his councils, despatched orders, and indicated to what points his guns should be directed. Illumined by the flashes of fire, his figure assumed fantastic and weird shapes. The balls sung in the air, the bullets hailed around him, the noise drew blood from the ears of those with him. Calm and immovable, he gave signals to the soldiers who were still occupying part of the ruins of Janina, and encouraged them by voice and gesture. Observing the enemy's movements by the help of a telescope, he improvised means of counteracting them. Sometimes he amused himself by, greeting curious persons and new-comers after a fashion of his own. Thus the chancellor of the French Consul at Prevesa, sent as an envoy to Kursheed Pacha, had scarcely entered the lodging assigned to him, when he was visited by a bomb which caused him to leave it again with all haste. This greeting was due to Ali's chief engineer, Caretto, who next day sent a whole shower of balls and shells into the midst of a group of Frenchmen, whose curiosity had brought them to Tika, where Kursheed was forming a battery. “It is time,” said Ali, “that these contemptible gossip-mongers should find listening at doors may become uncomfortable. I have furnished matter enough for them to talk about. Frangistan (Christendom) shall henceforth hear only of my triumph or my fall, which will leave it considerable trouble to pacify.” Then, after a moment’s silence, he ordered the public criers to inform his soldiers of the insurrections in Wallachia and the Morea, which news, proclaimed from the ramparts, and spreading immediately in the Imperial camp, caused there much dejection.

The Greeks were now everywhere proclaiming their independence, and Kursheed found himself unexpectedly surrounded by enemies. His position threatened to become worse if the siege of Janina dragged on much longer. He seized the island in the middle of the lake, and threw up redoubts upon it, whence he kept up an incessant fire on the southern front of the castle of Litharitza, and a practicable trench of nearly forty feet having been made, an assault was decided on. The troops marched out boldly, and performed prodigies of valour; but at the end of an hour, Ali, carried on a litter because of his gout, having led a sortie, the besiegers were compelled to give way and retire to their intrenchments, leaving three hundred dead at the foot of the rampart. “The Pindian bear is yet alive,” said Ali in a message to Kursheed; “thou mayest take thy dead and bury them; I give them up without ransom, and as I shall always do when thou attackest me as a brave man ought.” Then, having entered his fortress amid the acclamations of his soldiers, he remarked on hearing of the general rising of Greece and the Archipelago, “It is enough! two men have ruined Turkey!” He then remained silent, and vouchsafed no explanation of this prophetic sentence.

Ali did not on this occasion manifest his usual delight on having gained a success. As soon as he was alone with Basilissa, he informed her with tears of the death of Chainitza. A sudden apoplexy had stricken this beloved sister, the life of his councils, in her palace of Libokovo, where she remained undisturbed until her death. She owed this special favour to her riches and to the intercession of her nephew, Djiladin Pacha of Ochcrida, who was reserved by fate to perform the funeral obsequies of the guilty race of Tepelen.

A few months afterwards, Ibrahim Pacha of Berat died of poison, being the last victim whom Chainitza had demanded from her brother.

Ali’s position was becoming daily more difficult, when the time of Ramadan arrived, during which the Turks relax hostilities, and a species of truce ensued. Ali himself appeared to respect the old popular customs, and allowed his Mohammedan soldiers to visit the enemy’s outposts and confer on the subject of various religious ceremonies. Discipline was relaxed in Kursheed’s camp, and Ali profited thereby to ascertain the smallest details of all that passed.

He learned from his spies that the general’s staff, counting on the “Truce of God,” a tacit suspension of all hostilities during the feast of Bairam, the Mohammedan Easter, intended to repair to the chief mosque, in the quarter of Loutcha. This building, spared by the bombs, had until now been respected by both sides. Ali, according to reports spread by himself, was supposed to be ill, weakened by fasting, and terrified into a renewal of devotion, and not likely to give trouble on so sacred a day. Nevertheless he ordered Caretto to turn thirty guns against the mosque, cannon, mortars and howitzers, intending, he said, to solemnise Bairam by discharges of artillery. As soon as he was sure that the whole of the staff had entered the mosque, he gave the signal.

Instantly, from the assembled thirty pieces, there issued a storm of shells, grenades and cannon-balls. With a terrific noise, the mosque crumbled together, amid the cries of pain and rage of the crowd inside crushed in the ruins. At the end of a quarter of an hour the wind dispersed the smoke, and disclosed a burning crater, with the large cypresses which surrounded the building blazing as if they had been torches lighted for the funeral ceremonies of sixty captains and two hundred soldiers.

“Ali Pacha is yet alive!” cried the old Homeric hero of Janina, leaping with joy; and his words, passing from mouth to mouth, spread yet more terror amid Kursheed’s soldiers, already overwhelmed by the horrible spectacle passing before their eyes.

Almost on the same day, Ali from the height of his keep beheld the standard of the Cross waving in the distance. The rebellious Greeks were bent on attacking Kursheed. The insurrection promoted by the Vizier of Janina had passed far beyond the point he intended, and the rising had become a revolution. The delight which Ali first evinced cooled rapidly before this consideration, and was extinguished in grief when he found that a conflagration, caused by the besiegers’ fire, had consumed part of his store in the castle by the lake. Kursheed, thinking that this event must have shaken the old lion’s resolution, recommenced negotiations, choosing the Kiaia of Moustai Pacha: as an envoy, who gave Ali a remarkable warning. “Reflect,” said he, “that these rebels bear the sign of the Cross on their standards. You are now only an instrument in their hands. Beware lest you become the victim of their policy.” Ali understood the danger, and had the sultan been better advised, he would have pardoned Ali on condition of again bringing Hellos under his iron yoke. It is possible that the Greeks might not have prevailed against an enemy so formidable and a brain so fertile in intrigue. But so simple an idea was far beyond the united intellect of the Divan, which never rose above idle display. As soon as these negotiations, had commenced, Kursheed filled the roads with his couriers, sending often two in a day to Constantinople, from whence as many were sent to him. This state of things lasted mare than three weeks, when it became known that Ali, who had made good use of his time in replacing the stores lost in the conflagration, buying actually from the Kiaia himself a part of the provisions brought by him for the Imperial camp, refused to accept the Ottoman ultimatum. Troubles which broke, out at the moment of the rupture of the negotiations proved that he foresaw the probable result.

Kursheed was recompensed for the deception by which he had been duped by the reduction of the fortress of Litharitza. The Guegue Skipetars, who composed the garrison, badly paid, wearied out by the long siege, and won by the Seraskier’s bribes, took advantage of the fact that the time of their engagement with Ali had elapsed same months previously, and delivering up the fortress they defended, passed over to the enemy. Henceforth Ali’s force consisted of only six hundred men.

It was to be feared that this handful of men might also become a prey to discouragement, and might surrender their chief to an enemy who had received all fugitives with kindness. The Greek insurgents dreaded such an event, which would have turned all Kursheed’s army, hitherto detained before the castle, of Janina, loose upon themselves. Therefore they hastened to send to their former enemy, now their ally, assistance which he declined to accept. Ali saw himself surrounded by enemies thirsting for his wealth, and his avarice increasing with the danger, he had for some months past refused to pay his defenders. He contented himself with informing his captains of the insurgents’ offer, and telling them that he was confident that bravery such as theirs required no reinforcement. And when some of them besought him to at least receive two or three hundred Palikars into the castle, “No,” said he; “old serpents always remain old serpents: I distrust the Suliots and their friendship.”

Ignorant of Ali’s decision, the Greeks of the Selleid were advancing, as well as the Toxidae, towards Janina, when they received the following letter from Ali Pacha:

“My well-beloved children, I have just learned that you are preparing to despatch a party of your Palikars against our common enemy, Kursheed. I desire to inform you that this my fortress is impregnable, and that I can hold out against him for several years. The only, service I require of your courage is, that you should reduce Arta, and take alive Ismail Pacho Bey, my former servant, the mortal enemy of my family, and the author of the evils and frightful calamities which have so long oppressed our unhappy country, which he has laid waste before our eyes. Use your best efforts to accomplish this, it will strike at the root of the evil, and my treasures shall reward your Palikars, whose courage every day gains a higher value in my eyes.”

Furious at this mystification, the Suliots retired to their mountains, and Kursheed profited by the discontent Ali’s conduct had caused, to win over the Toxide Skipetars, with their commanders Tahir Abbas and Hagi Bessiaris, who only made two conditions: one, that Ismail Pacho Bey, their personal enemy, should be deposed; the other, that the life of their old vizier should be respected.

The first condition was faithfully adhered to by Kursheed, actuated by private motives different from those which he gave publicly, and Ismail Pacho Bey was solemnly deposed. The tails, emblems of his authority, were removed; he resigned the plumes of office; his soldiers forsook him, his servants followed suit. Fallen to the lowest rank, he was soon thrown into prison, where he only blamed Fate for his misfortunes. All the Skipetar Agas hastened to place themselves under Kursheeds’ standard, and enormous forces now threatened Janina. All Epirus awaited the denoument with anxiety.

Had he been less avaricious, Ali might have enlisted all the adventurers with whom the East was swarming, and made the sultan tremble in his capital. But the aged pacha clung passionately to his treasures. He feared also, perhaps not unreasonably, that those by whose aid he might triumph would some day become his master. He long deceived himself with the idea that the English, who had sold Parga to him, would never allow a Turkish fleet to enter the Ionian Sea. Mistaken on this point, his foresight was equally at fault with regard to the cowardice of his sons. The defection of his troops was not less fatal, and he only understood the bearing of the Greek insurrection which he himself had provoked, so far as to see that in this struggle he was merely an instrument in procuring the freedom of a country which he had too cruelly oppressed to be able to hold even an inferior rank in it. His last letter to the Suliots opened the eyes of his followers, but under the influence of a sort of polite modesty these were at least anxious to stipulate for the life of their vizier. Kursheed was obliged to produce firmans from the Porte, declaring that if Ali Tepelen submitted, the royal promise given to his sons should be kept, and that he should, with them, be transferred to Asia Minor, as also his harem, his servants; and his treasures, and allowed to finish his days in peace. Letters from Ali’s sons were shown to the Agas, testifying to the good treatment they had experienced in their exile; and whether the latter believed all this, or whether they merely sought to satisfy their own consciences, they henceforth thought only of inducing their rebellious chief to submit. Finally, eight months’ pay, given them in advance, proved decisive, and they frankly embraced the cause of the sultan.

The garrison of the castle on the lake, whom Ali seemed anxious to offend as much as possible, by refusing their pay, he thinking them so compromised that they would not venture even to accept an amnesty guaranteed by the mufti, began to desert as soon as they knew the Toxidae had arrived at the Imperial camp. Every night these Skipetars who could cross the moat betook themselves to Kursheed’s quarters. One single man yet baffled all the efforts of the besiegers. The chief engineer, Caretto, like another Archimedes, still carried terror into the midst of their camp.

Although reduced to the direst misery, Caretto could not forget that he owed his life to the master who now only repaid his services with the most sordid ingratitude. When he had first come to Epirus, Ali, recognising his ability, became anxious to retain him, but without incurring any expense. He ascertained that the Neapolitan was passionately in love with a Mohammedan girl named Nekibi, who returned his affection. Acting under Ali’s orders, Tahir Abbas accused the woman before the cadi of sacrilegious intercourse with an infidel. She could only escape death by the apostasy of her lover; if he refused to deny his God, he shared her fate, and both would perish at the stake. Caretto refused to renounce his religion, but only Nekibi suffered death. Caretto was withdrawn from execution, and Ali kept him concealed in a place of safety, whence he produced him in the time of need. No one had served him with greater zeal; it is even possible that a man of this type would have died at his post, had his cup not been filled with mortification and insult.

Eluding the vigilance of Athanasius Vaya, whose charge it was to keep guard over him, Caretto let himself down by a cord fastened to the end of a cannon: He fell at the foot of the rampart, and thence dragged himself, with a broken arm, to the opposite camp. He had become nearly blind through the explosion of a cartridge which had burnt his face. He was received as well as a Christian from whom there was now nothing to fear, could expect. He received the bread of charity, and as a refugee is only valued in proportion to the use which can be made of him, he was despised and forgotten.

The desertion of Caretto was soon followed by a defection which annihilated Ali’s last hopes. The garrison which had given him so many proofs of devotion, discouraged by his avarice, suffering from a disastrous epidemic, and no longer equal to the necessary labour in defence of the place, opened all, the gates simultaneously to the enemy. But the besiegers, fearing a trap, advanced very slowly; so that Ali, who had long prepared against very sort of surprise, had time to gain a place which he called his “refuge.”

It was a sort of fortified enclosure, of solid masonry, bristling with cannon, which surrounded the private apartments of his seraglio, called the “Women’s Tower.” He had taken care to demolish everything which could be set on fire, reserving only a mosque and the tomb of his wife Emineh, whose phantom, after announcing an eternal repose, had ceased to haunt him. Beneath was an immense natural cave, in which he had stored ammunition, precious articles, provisions, and the treasures which had not been sunk in the lake. In this cave an apartment had been made for Basilissa and his harem, also a shelter in which he retired to sleep when exhausted with fatigue. This place was his last resort, a kind of mausoleum; and he did not seem distressed at beholding the castle in the hands of his enemies. He calmly allowed them to occupy the entrance, deliver their hostages, overrun the ramparts, count the cannon which were on the platforms, crumbling from the hostile shells; but when they came within hearing, he demanded by one of his servants that Kursheed should send him an envoy of distinction;

meanwhile he forbade anyone to pass beyond a certain place which he pointed out.

Kursheed, imagining that, being in the last extremity, he would capitulate, sent out Tahir Abbas and Hagi Bessiaris. Ali listened without reproaching them for their treachery, but simply observed that he wished to meet some of the chief officers.

The Seraskier then deputed his keeper of the wardrobe, accompanied by his keeper of the seals and other persons of quality. Ali received them with all ceremony, and, after the usual compliments had been exchanged, invited them to descend with him into the cavern. There he showed them more than two thousand barrels of powder carefully arranged beneath his treasures, his remaining provisions, and a number of valuable objects which adorned this slumbering volcano. He showed them also his bedroom, a sort of cell richly furnished, and close to the powder. It could be reached only by means of three doors, the secret of which was known to no one but himself. Alongside of this was the harem, and in the neighbouring mosque was quartered his garrison, consisting of fifty men, all ready to bury themselves under the ruins of this fortification, the only spot remaining to him of all Greece, which had formerly bent beneath his authority.

After this exhibition, Ali presented one of his most devoted followers to the envoys. Selim, who watched over the fire, was a youth in appearance as gentle as his heart was intrepid, and his special duty was to be in readiness to blow up the whole place at any moment. The pacha gave him his hand to kiss, inquiring if he were ready to die, to which he only responded by pressing his master’s hand fervently to his lips. He never took his eyes off Ali, and the lantern, near which a match was constantly smoking, was entrusted only to him and to Ali, who took turns with him in watching it. Ali drew a pistol from his belt, making as if to turn it towards the powder magazine, and the envoys fell at his feet, uttering involuntary cries of terror. He smiled at their fears, and assured them that, being wearied of the weight of his weapons, he had only intended to relieve himself of some of them. He then begged them to seat themselves, and added that he should like even a more terrible funeral than that which they had just ascribed to him. “I do not wish to drag down with me,” he exclaimed, “those who have come to visit me as friends; it is Kursheed, whom I have long regarded as my brother, his chiefs, those who have betrayed me, his whole army in short, whom I desire to follow me to the tomb — a sacrifice which will be worthy of my renown, and of the brilliant end to which I aspire."

The envoys gazed at him with stupefaction, which did not diminish when Ali further informed them that they were not only sitting over the arch of a casemate filled with two hundred thousand pounds of powder, but that the whole castle, which they had so rashly occupied, was undermined. "The rest you have seen," he said, "but of this you could not be aware. My riches are the sole cause of the war which has been made against me, and in one moment I can destroy them. Life is nothing to me, I might have ended it among the Greeks, but could I, a powerless old man, resolve to live on terms of equality among those whose absolute master I have been? Thus, whichever way I look, my career is ended. However, I am attached to those who still surround me, so hear my last resolve. Let a pardon, sealed by the sultan's hands, be given me, and I will submit. I will go to Constantinople, to Asia Minor, or wherever I am sent. The things I should see here would no longer be fitting for me to behold."

To this Kursheed's envoys made answer that without doubt these terms would be conceded. Ali then touched his breast and forehead, and, drawing forth his watch, presented it to the keeper of the wardrobe. "I mean what I say, my friend," he observed; "my word will be kept. If within an hour thy soldiers are not withdrawn from this castle which has been treacherously yielded to them, I will blow it up. Return to the Seraskier, warn him that if he allows one minute more to elapse than the time specified, his army, his garrison, I myself and my family, will all perish together: two hundred thousand pounds of powder can destroy all that surrounds us. Take this watch, I give it thee, and forget not that I am a man of my word." Then, dismissing the messengers, he saluted them graciously, observing that he did not expect an answer until the soldiers should have evacuated the castle.

The envoys had barely returned to the camp when Kursheed sent orders to abandon the fortress. As the reason far this step could not be concealed, everyone, exaggerating the danger, imagined deadly mines ready to be fired everywhere, and the whole army clamoured to break up the camp. Thus Ali and his fifty followers cast terror into the hearts of nearly thirty thousand men, crowded together on the slopes of Janina. Every sound, every whiff of smoke, ascending from near the castle, became a subject of alarm for the besiegers. And as the besieged had provisions for a long time, Kursheed saw little chance of successfully ending his enterprise; when Ali's demand for pardon occurred to him. Without stating his real plans, he proposed to his Council to unite in signing a petition to the Divan for Ali’s pardon.

This deed, formally executed, and bearing more than sixty signatures, was then shown to Ali, who was greatly delighted. He was described in it as Vizier, as Aulic Councillor, and also as the most distinguished veteran among His Highness the Sultan’s slaves. He sent rich presents to Kursheed and the principal officers, whom he hoped to corrupt, and breathed as though the storm had passed away. The following night, however, he heard the voice of Emineh, calling him several times, and concluded that his end drew nigh.

During the two next nights he again thought he heard Emineh’s voice, and sleep forsook his pillow, his countenance altered, and his endurance appeared to be giving way. Leaning on a long Malacca cane, he repaired at early dawn to Emineh’s tomb, on which he offered a sacrifice of two spotted lambs, sent him by Tahir Abbas, whom in return he consented to pardon, and the letters he received appeared to mitigate his trouble. Some days later, he saw the keeper of the wardrobe, who encouraged him, saying that before long there would be good news from Constantinople. Ali learned from him the disgrace of Pacho Bey, and of Ismail Pliaga, whom he detested equally, and this exercise of authority, which was made to appear as a beginning of satisfaction offered him, completely reassured him, and he made fresh presents to this officer, who had succeeded in inspiring him with confidence.

Whilst awaiting the arrival of the firman of pardon which Ali was reassured must arrive from Constantinople without fail, the keeper of the wardrobe advised him to seek an interview with Kursheed. It was clear that such a meeting could not take place in the undermined castle, and Ali was therefore invited to repair to the island in the lake. The magnificent pavilion, which he had constructed there in happier days, had been entirely refurnished, and it was proposed that the conference should take place in this kiosk.

Ali appeared to hesitate at this proposal, and the keeper of the wardrobe, wishing to anticipate his objections, added that the object of this arrangement was, to prove to the army, already aware of it, that there was no longer any quarrel between himself and the commander-in-chief. He added that Kursheed would go to the conference attended only by members of his Divan, but that as it was natural an outlawed man should be on his guard, Ali might, if he liked, send to examine the place, might take with him such guards as he thought necessary, and might even arrange things on the same footing as in his citadel, even to his guardian with the lighted match, as the surest guarantee which could be given him.

The proposition was accepted, and when Ali, having crossed over with a score of soldiers, found himself more at large than he did in his casemate, he congratulated himself on having come. He had Basilissa brought over, also his diamonds; and several chests of money. Two days passed without his thinking of anything but procuring various necessaries, and he then began to inquire what caused the Seraskier to delay his visit. The latter excused himself on the plea of illness, and offered meanwhile to send anyone Ali might wish to see, to visit him: The pacha immediately mentioned several of his former followers, now employed in the Imperial army, and as no difficulty was made in allowing them to go, he profited by the permission to interview a large number of his old acquaintances, who united in reassuring him and in giving him great hopes of success.

Nevertheless, time passed on, and neither the Seraskier nor the firman appeared. Ali, at first uneasy, ended by rarely mentioning either the one or the other, and never was deceiver more completely deceived. His security was so great that he loudly congratulated himself on having come to the island. He had begun to form a net of intrigue to cause himself to be intercepted on the road when he should be sent to Constantinople, and he did not despair of soon finding numerous partisans in the Imperial army.

CHAPTER XI

For a whole week all seemed going well, when, on the morning of February 5th, Kursheed sent Hassan Pacha to convey his compliments to Ali, and announce that the sultan’s firman, so long desired, had at length arrived. Their mutual wishes had been heard, but it was desirable, for the dignity of their sovereign, that Ali, in order to show his gratitude and submission, should order Selim to extinguish the fatal match and to leave the cave, and that the rest of the garrison should first display the Imperial standard and then evacuate the enclosure. Only on this condition could Kursheed deliver into Ali’s hands the sultan’s decree of clemency.

Ali was alarmed, and his eyes were at length opened. He replied hesitatingly, that on leaving the citadel he had charged Selim to obey only his own verbal order, that no written command, even though signed and sealed by himself, would produce any effect, and therefore he desired to repair himself to the castle, in order to fulfil what was required.

Thereupon a long argument ensued, in which Ali’s sagacity, skill, and artifice struggled vainly against a decided line of action. New protestations were made to deceive him, oaths were even taken on the Koran that no evil designs, no mental reservations, were entertained. At length, yielding to the prayers of those who surrounded him, perhaps concluding that all his skill could no longer fight against Destiny, he finally gave way.

Drawing a secret token from his bosom, he handed it to Kursheed’s envoy, saying, “Go, show this to Selim, and you will convert a dragon into a lamb.” And in fact, at sight of the talisman, Selim prostrated himself, extinguished the match, and fell, stabbed to the heart. At the same time the garrison withdrew, the Imperial standard displayed its blazonry, and the lake castle was occupied by the troops of the Seraskier, who rent the air with their acclamations.

It was then noon. Ali, in the island, had lost all illusions. His pulse beat violently, but his countenance did not betray his mental trouble. It was noticed that he appeared at intervals to be lost in profound thought, that he yawned frequently, and continually drew his fingers through his beard. He drank coffee and iced water several times, incessantly looked at his watch, and taking his field-glass, surveyed by turns the camp, the castles of Janina, the Pindus range, and the peaceful waters of the lake. Occasionally he glanced at his weapons, and then his eyes sparkled with the fire of youth and of courage. Stationed beside him, his guards prepared their cartridges, their eyes fixed on the landing-place.

The kiosk which he occupied was connected with a wooden structure raised upon pillars, like the open-air theatres constructed for a public festival, and the women occupied the most remote apartments. Everything seemed sad and silent. The vizier, according to custom, sat facing the doorway, so as to be the first to perceive any who might wish to enter. At five o'clock boats were seen approaching the island, and soon Hassan Pacha, Omar Brionis, Kursheed's sword-bearer, Mehemet, the keeper of the wardrobe, and several officers of the army, attended by a numerous suite, drew near with gloomy countenances.

Seeing them approach, Ali sprang up impetuously, his hand upon the pistols in his belt. "Stand! . . . what is it you bring me?" he cried to Hassan in a voice of thunder. "I bring the commands of His Highness the Sultan, — knowest thou not these august characters?" And Hassan exhibited the brilliantly gilded frontispiece which decorated the firman. "I know them and revere them." "Then bow before thy destiny; make thy ablutions; address thy prayer to Allah and to His Prophet; for thy, head is demanded. . . ." Ali did not allow him to finish. "My head," he cried with fury, "will not be surrendered like the head of a slave."

These rapidly pronounced words were instantly followed by a pistol-shot which wounded Hassan in the thigh. Swift as lightning, a second killed the keeper of the wardrobe, and the guards, firing at the same time, brought down several officers. Terrified, the Osmanlis forsook the pavilion. Ali, perceiving blood flowing from a wound in his chest, roared like a bull with rage. No one dared to face his wrath, but shots were fired at the kiosk from all sides, and four of his guards fell dead beside him. He no longer knew which way to turn, hearing the noise made by the assailants under the platform, who were firing through the boards on which he stood. A ball wounded him in the side, another from below lodged in his spine; he staggered, clung to a window, then fell on the sofa. "Hasten," he cried to one of his officers, "run, my friend, and strangle my poor Basilissa; let her not fall a prey to these infamous wretches."

The door opened, all resistance ceased, the guards hastened to escape by the windows. Kursheed's sword-bearer entered, followed by the executioners. “Let the justice of Allah be accomplished!” said a cadi. At these words the executioners seized Ali, who was still alive, by the beard, and dragged him out into the porch, where, placing his head on one of the steps, they separated it from the body with many blows of a jagged cutlass. Thus ended the career of the dreaded Ali Pacha.

His head still preserved so terrible and imposing an aspect that those present beheld it with a sort of stupor. Kursheed, to whom it was presented on a large dish of silver plate, rose to receive it, bowed three times before it, and respectfully kissed the beard, expressing aloud his wish that he himself might deserve a similar end. To such an extent did the admiration with which Ali’s bravery inspired these barbarians efface the memory of his crimes. Kursheed ordered the head to be perfumed with the most costly essences, and despatched to Constantinople, and he allowed the Skipetars to render the last honours to their former master.

Never was seen greater mourning than that of the warlike Epirotes. During the whole night, the various Albanian tribes watched by turns around the corpse, improvising the most eloquent funeral songs in its honour. At daybreak, the body, washed and prepared according to the Mohammedan ritual, was deposited in a coffin draped with a splendid Indian Cashmere shawl, on which was placed a magnificent turban, adorned with the plumes Ali had worn in battle. The mane of his charger was cut off, and the animal covered with purple housings, while Ali’s shield, his sword, his numerous weapons, and various insignia, were borne on the saddles of several led horses. The cortege proceeded towards the castle, accompanied by hearty imprecations uttered by the soldiers against the “Son of a Slave,” the epithet bestowed on their sultan by the Turks in seasons of popular excitement.

The Selaon-Aga, an officer appointed to render the proper salutes, acted as chief mourner, surrounded by weeping mourners, who made the ruins of Janina echo with their lamentations. The guns were fired at long intervals. The portcullis was raised to admit the procession, and the whole garrison, drawn up to receive it, rendered a military salute. The body, covered with matting, was laid in a grave beside that of Amina. When the grave had been filled in, a priest approached to listen to the supposed conflict between the good and bad angels, who dispute the possession of the soul of the deceased. When he at length announced that Ali Tepelen Zadi would repose in peace amid celestial houris, the Skipetars, murmuring like the waves of the sea after a tempest, dispersed to their quarters:

Kursheed, profiting by the night spent by the Epirotes in mourning, caused Ali's head to be en closed in a silver casket, and despatched it secretly to Constantinople. His sword-bearer Mehemet, who, having presided at the execution, was entrusted with the further duty of presenting it to the sultan, was escorted by three hundred Turkish soldiers. He was warned to be expeditious, and before dawn was well out of reach of the Arnaouts, from whom a surprise might have been feared.

The Seraskier then ordered the unfortunate Basilissa, whose life had been spared, to be brought before him. She threw herself at his feet, imploring him to spare, not her life, but her honour; and he consoled her, and assured her of the sultan's protection. She burst into tears when she beheld Ali's secretaries, treasurers, and steward loaded with irons. Only sixty thousand purses (about twenty-five million piastres) of Ali's treasure could be found, and already his officers had been tortured, in order to compel them to disclose where the rest might be concealed. Fearing a similar fate, Basilissa fell insensible into the arms of her attendants, and she was removed to the farm of Bouila, until the Supreme Porte should decide on her fate.

The couriers sent in all directions to announce the death of Ali, having preceded the sword-bearer Mehemet's triumphal procession, the latter, on arriving at Greveno, found the whole population of that town and the neighbouring hamlets assembled to meet him, eager to behold the head of the terrible Ali Pacha. Unable to comprehend how he could possibly have succumbed, they could hardly believe their eyes when the head was withdrawn from its casket and displayed before them. It remained exposed to view in the house of the Mussulman Veli Aga whilst the escort partook of refreshment and changed horses, and as the public curiosity continued to increase throughout the journey, a fixed charge was at length made for its gratification, and the head of the renowned vizier was degraded into becoming an article of traffic exhibited at every post-house, until it arrived at Constantinople.

The sight of this dreaded relic, exposed on the 23rd of February at the gate of the seraglio, and the birth of an heir-presumptive to the sword of Othman — which news was announced simultaneously with that of the death of Ali, by the firing of the guns of the seraglio — roused the enthusiasm of the military inhabitants of Constantinople to a state of frenzy, and triumphant shouts greeted the appearance of a document affixed to the head which narrated Ali’s crimes and the circumstances of his death, ending with these words: “This is the Head of the above-named Ali Pacha, a Traitor to the Faith of Islam.”

Having sent magnificent presents to Kursheed, and a hyperbolical despatch to his army, Mahmoud II turned his attention to Asia Minor; where Ali’s sons would probably have been forgotten in their banishment, had it not been supposed that their riches were great. A sultan does not condescend to mince matters with his slaves, when he can despoil them with impunity; His Supreme Highness simply sent them his commands to die. Veli Pacha, a greater coward than a woman-slave born in the harem, heard his sentence kneeling. The wretch who had, in his palace at Arta, danced to the strains of a lively orchestra, while innocent victims were being tortured around him, received the due reward of his crimes. He vainly embraced the knees of his executioners, imploring at least the favour of dying in privacy; and he must have endured the full bitterness of death in seeing his sons strangled before his eyes, Mehemet the elder, remarkable, for his beauty, and the gentle Selim, whose merits might have procured the pardon of his family had not Fate ordained otherwise. After next beholding the execution of his brother, Salik Pacha, Ali’s best loved son, whom a Georgian slave had borne to him in his old age, Veli, weeping, yielded his guilty head to the executioners.

His women were then seized, and the unhappy Zobeide, whose scandalous story had even reached Constantinople, sewn up in a leather sack, was flung into the Pursak — a river whose waters mingle with those of the Sagaris. Katherin, Veli’s other wife, and his daughters by various mothers, were dragged to the bazaar and sold ignominiously to Turcoman shepherds, after which the executioners at once proceeded to make an inventory of the spoils of their victims.

But the inheritance of Mouktar Pacha was not quite such an easy prey. The kapidgi-bachi who dared to present him with the bowstring was instantly laid dead at his feet by a pistol-shot. “Wretch!” cried Mouktar, roaring like a bull escaped from the butcher, “dost thou think an Arnaout dies like an eunuch? I also am a Tepelenian! To arms, comrades! they would slay us!” As he spoke, he rushed, sword in hand, upon the Turks, and driving them back, succeeded in barricading himself in his apartments.

Presently a troop of janissaries from Koutaieh, ordered to be in readiness, advanced, hauling up cannon, and a stubborn combat began. Mouktar's frail defences were soon in splinters. The venerable Metche-Bono, father of Elmas Bey, faithful to the end, was killed by a bullet; and Mouktar, having slain a host of enemies with his own hand and seen all his friends perish, himself riddled with wounds, set fire to the powder magazine, and died, leaving as inheritance for the sultan only a heap of smoking ruins. An enviable fate, if compared with that of his father and brothers, who died by the hand of the executioner.

The heads of Ali's children, sent to Constantinople and exposed at the gate of the seraglio, astonished the gaping multitude. The sultan himself, struck with the beauty of Mehemet and Selim, whose long eyelashes and closed eyelids gave them the appearance of beautiful youths sunk in peaceful slumber, experienced a feeling of emotion. “I had imagined them,” he said stupidly, “to be quite as old as their father;” and he expressed sorrow for the fate to which he had condemned them.

THE COUNTESS DE SAINT-GERAN — 1639

About the end of the year 1639, a troop of horsemen arrived, towards midday, in a little village at the northern extremity of the province of Auvergne, from the direction of Paris. The country folk assembled at the noise, and found it to proceed from the provost of the mounted police and his men. The heat was excessive, the horses were bathed in sweat, the horsemen covered with dust, and the party seemed on its return from an important expedition. A man left the escort, and asked an old woman who was spinning at her door if there was not an inn in the place. The woman and her children showed him a bush hanging over a door at the end of the only street in the village, and the escort recommenced its march at a walk. There was noticed, among the mounted men, a young man of distinguished appearance and richly dressed, who appeared to be a prisoner. This discovery redoubled the curiosity of the villagers, who followed the cavalcade as far as the door of the wine-shop. The host came out, cap in hand, and the provost enquired of him with a swaggering air if his pothouse was large enough to accommodate his troop, men and horses. The host replied that he had the best wine in the country to give to the king’s servants, and that it would be easy to collect in the neighbourhood litter and forage enough for their horses. The provost listened contemptuously to these fine promises, gave the necessary orders as to what was to be done, and slid off his horse, uttering an oath proceeding from heat and fatigue. The horsemen clustered round the young man: one held his stirrup, and the provost deferentially gave way to him to enter the inn first. No, more doubt could be entertained that he was a prisoner of importance, and all kinds of conjectures were made. The men maintained that he must be charged with a great crime, otherwise a young nobleman of his rank would never have been arrested; the women argued, on the contrary, that it was impossible for such a pretty youth not to be innocent.

Inside the inn all was bustle: the serving-lads ran from cellar to garret; the host swore and despatched his servant-girls to the neighbours, and the hostess scolded her daughter, flattening her nose against the panes of a downstairs window to admire the handsome youth.

There were two tables in the principal eating-room. The provost took possession of one, leaving the other to the soldiers, who went in turn to tether their horses under a shed in the back yard; then he pointed to a stool for the prisoner, and seated himself opposite to him, rapping the table with his thick cane.

"Ouf!" he cried, with a fresh groan of weariness, "I heartily beg your pardon, marquis, for the bad wine I am giving you!"

The young man smiled gaily.

"The wine is all very well, monsieur provost," said he, "but I cannot conceal from you that however agreeable your company is to me, this halt is very inconvenient; I am in a hurry to get through my ridiculous situation, and I should have liked to arrive in time to stop this affair at once."

The girl of the house was standing before the table with a pewter pot which she had just brought, and at these words she raised her eyes on the prisoner, with a reassured look which seemed to say, "I was sure that he was innocent."

"But," continued the marquis, carrying the glass to his lips, "this wine is not so bad as you say, monsieur provost."

Then turning to the girl, who was eyeing his gloves and his ruff —

"To your health, pretty child."

"Then," said the provost, amazed at this free and easy air, "perhaps I shall have to beg you to excuse your sleeping quarters."

"What!" exclaimed the marquis, "do we sleep here?"

"My lord;" said the provost, "we have sixteen long leagues to make, our horses are done up, and so far as I am concerned I declare that I am no better than my horse."

The marquis knocked on the table, and gave every indication of being greatly annoyed. The provost meanwhile puffed and blowed, stretched out his big boots, and mopped his forehead with his handkerchief. He was a portly man, with a puffy face, whom fatigue rendered singularly uncomfortable.

"Marquis," said he, "although your company, which affords me the opportunity of showing you some attention, is very precious to me, you cannot doubt that I had much rather enjoy it on another footing. If it be within your power, as you say, to release yourself from the hands of justice, the sooner you do so the better I shall be pleased. But I beg you to consider the state we are in. For my part, I am unfit to keep the saddle another hour, and are you not yourself knocked up by this forced march in the great heat?”

“True, so I am,” said the marquis, letting his arms fall by his side.

“Well, then, let us rest here, sup here, if we can, and we will start quite fit in the cool of the morning.”

“Agreed,” replied the marquis; “but then let us pass the time in a becoming manner. I have two pistoles left, let them be given to these good fellows to drink. It is only fair that I should treat them, seeing that I am the cause of giving them so much trouble.”

He threw two pieces of money on the table of the soldiers, who cried in chorus, “Long live M. the marquis!” The provost rose, went to post sentinels, and then repaired to the kitchen, where he ordered the best supper that could be got. The men pulled out dice and began to drink and play. The marquis hummed an air in the middle of the room, twirled his moustache, turning on his heel and looking cautiously around; then he gently drew a purse from his trousers pocket, and as the daughter of the house was coming and going, he threw his arms round her neck as if to kiss her, and whispered, slipping ten Louis into her hand —

“The key of the front door in my room, and a quart of liquor to the sentinels, and you save my life.”

The girl went backwards nearly to the door, and returning with an expressive look, made an affirmative sign with her hand. The provost returned, and two hours later supper was served. He ate and drank like a man more at home at table than in the saddle. The marquis plied him with bumpers, and sleepiness, added to the fumes of a very heady wine, caused him to repeat over and over again —

“Confound it all, marquis, I can’t believe you are such a blackguard as they say you are; you seem to me a jolly good sort.”

The marquis thought he was ready to fall under the table, and was beginning to open negotiations with the daughter of the house, when, to his great disappointment, bedtime having come, the provoking provost called his sergeant, gave him instructions in an undertone, and announced that he should have the honour of conducting M. the marquis to bed, and that he should not go to bed himself before performing this duty. In fact, he posted three of his men, with torches, escorted the prisoner to his room, and left him with many profound bows.

The marquis threw himself on his bed without pulling off his boots, listening to a clock which struck nine. He heard the men come and go in the stables and in the yard.

An hour later, everybody being tired, all was perfectly still. The prisoner then rose softly, and felt about on tiptoe on the chimneypiece, on the furniture, and even in his clothes, for the key which he hoped to find. He could not find it. He could not be mistaken, nevertheless, in the tender interest of the young girl, and he could not believe that she was deceiving him. The marquis's room had a window which opened upon the street, and a door which gave access to a shabby gallery which did duty for a balcony, whence a staircase ascended to the principal rooms of the house. This gallery hung over the courtyard, being as high above it as the window was from the street. The marquis had only to jump over one side or the other: he hesitated for some time, and just as he was deciding to leap into the street, at the risk of breaking his neck, two taps were struck on the door. He jumped for joy, saying to himself as he opened, "I am saved!" A kind of shadow glided into the room; the young girl trembled from head to foot, and could not say a word. The marquis reassured her with all sorts of caresses.

"Ah, sir," said she, "I am dead if we are surprised."

"Yes," said the marquis, "but your fortune is made if you get me out of here."

"God is my witness that I would with all my soul, but I have such a bad piece of news — — "

She stopped, suffocated with varying emotions. The poor girl had come barefooted, for fear of making a noise, and appeared to be shivering.

"What is the matter?" impatiently asked the marquis.

"Before going to bed," she continued, "M. the provost has required from my father all the keys of the house, and has made him take a great oath that there are no more. My father has given him all: besides, there is a sentinel at every door; but they are very tired; I have heard them muttering and grumbling, and I have given them more wine than you told me."

"They will sleep," said the marquis, nowise discouraged, "and they have already shown great respect to my rank in not nailing me up in this room."

"There is a small kitchen garden," continued the girl, "on the side of the fields, fenced in only by a loose hurdle, but — — "

"Where is my horse?"

“No doubt in the shed with the rest.”

“I will jump into the yard.”

“You will be killed.”

“So much the better!”

“Ah monsieur marquis, what have, you done?” said the young girl with grief.

“Some foolish things! nothing worth mentioning; but my head and my honour are at stake. Let us lose no time; I have made up my mind.”

“Stay,” replied the girl, grasping his arm; “at the left-hand corner of the yard there is a large heap of straw, the gallery hangs just over it — ”

“Bravo! I shall make less noise, and do myself less mischief.” He made a step towards the door; the girl, hardly knowing what she was doing, tried to detain him; but he got loose from her and opened it. The moon was shining brightly into the yard; he heard no sound. He proceeded to the end of the wooden rail, and perceived the dungheap, which rose to a good height: the girl made the sign of the cross. The marquis listened once again, heard nothing, and mounted the rail. He was about to jump down, when by wonderful luck he heard murmurings from a deep voice. This proceeded from one of two horsemen, who were recommencing their conversation and passing between them a pint of wine. The marquis crept back to his door, holding his breath: the girl was awaiting him on the threshold.

“I told you it was not yet time,” said she.

“Have you never a knife,” said the marquis, “to cut those rascals’ throats with?”

“Wait, I entreat you, one hour, one hour only,” murmured the young girl; “in an hour they will all be asleep.”

The girl’s voice was so sweet, the arms which she stretched towards him were full of such gentle entreaty, that the marquis waited, and at the end of an hour it was the young girl’s turn to tell him to start.

The marquis for the last time pressed with his mouth those lips but lately so innocent, then he half opened the door, and heard nothing this time but dogs barking far away in an otherwise silent country. He leaned over the balustrade, and saw: very plainly a soldier lying prone on the straw.

“If they were to awake?” murmured the young girl in accents of anguish.

“They will not take me alive, be assured,” said the marquis.

“Adieu, then,” replied she, sobbing; “may Heaven preserve you!”

He bestrode the balustrade, spread himself out upon it, and fell heavily on the dungheap. The young girl saw him run to the shed, hastily detach a horse, pass behind the stable wall, spur his horse in both flanks, tear across the kitchen garden, drive his horse against the hurdle, knock it down, clear it, and reach the highroad across the fields.

The poor girl remained at the end of the gallery, fixing her eyes on the sleeping sentry, and ready to disappear at the slightest movement. The noise made by spurs on the pavement and by the horse at the end of the courtyard had half awakened him. He rose, and suspecting some surprise, ran to the shed. His horse was no longer there; the marquis, in his haste to escape, had taken the first which came to hand, and this was the soldier’s. Then the soldier gave the alarm; his comrades woke up. They ran to the prisoner’s room, and found it empty. The provost came from his bed in a dazed condition. The prisoner had escaped.

Then the young girl, pretending to have been roused by the noise, hindered the preparations by mislaying the saddlery, impeding the horsemen instead of helping them; nevertheless, after a quarter of an hour, all the party were galloping along the road. The provost swore like a pagan. The best horses led the way, and the sentinel, who rode the marquis’s, and who had a greater interest in catching the prisoner, far outstripped his companions; he was followed by the sergeant, equally well mounted, and as the broken fence showed the line he had taken, after some minutes they were in view of him, but at a great distance. However, the marquis was losing ground; the horse he had taken was the worst in the troop, and he had pressed it as hard as it could go. Turning in the saddle, he saw the soldiers half a musket-shot off; he urged his horse more and more, tearing his sides with his spurs; but shortly the beast, completely winded, foundered; the marquis rolled with it in the dust, but when rolling over he caught hold of the holsters, which he found to contain pistols; he lay flat by the side of the horse, as if he had fainted, with a pistol at full cock in his hand. The sentinel, mounted on a valuable horse, and more than two hundred yards ahead of his serafile, came up to him. In a moment the marquis, jumping up before he had tune to resist him, shot him through the head; the horseman fell, the marquis jumped up in his place without even setting foot in the stirrup, started off at a gallop, and went away like the wind, leaving fifty yards behind him the non-commissioned officer, dumbfounded with what had just passed before his eyes.

The main body of the escort galloped up, thinking that he was taken; and the provost shouted till he was hoarse, “Do not kill him!” But they found only the sergeant, trying to restore life to his man, whose skull was shattered, and who lay dead on the spot.

As for the marquis, he was out of sight; for, fearing a fresh pursuit, he had plunged into the cross roads, along which he rode a good hour longer at full gallop. When he felt pretty sure of having shaken the police off his track, and that their bad horses could not overtake him, he determined to slacken to recruit his horse; he was walking him along a hollow lane, when he saw a peasant approaching; he asked him the road to the Bourbonnais, and flung him a crown. The man took the crown and pointed out the road, but he seemed hardly to know what he was saying, and stared at the marquis in a strange manner. The marquis shouted to him to get out of the way; but the peasant remained planted on the roadside without stirring an inch. The marquis advanced with threatening looks, and asked how he dared to stare at him like that.

“The reason is,” said the peasant, “that you have — — ”, and he pointed to his shoulder and his ruff.

The marquis glanced at his dress, and saw that his coat was dabbled in blood, which, added to the disorder of his clothes and the dust with which he was covered, gave him a most suspicious aspect.

“I know,” said he. “I and my servant have been separated in a scuffle with some drunken Germans; it’s only a tipsy spree, and whether I have got scratched, or whether in collaring one of these fellows I have drawn some of his blood, it all arises from the row. I don’t think I am hurt a bit.” So saying, he pretended to feel all over his body.

“All the same,” he continued, “I should not be sorry to have a wash; besides, I am dying with thirst and heat, and my horse is in no better case. Do you know where I can rest and refresh myself?”

The peasant offered to guide him to his own house, only a few yards off. His wife and children, who were working, respectfully stood aside, and went to collect what was wanted — wine, water, fruit, and a large piece of black bread. The marquis sponged his coat, drank a glass of wine, and called the people of the house, whom he questioned in an indifferent manner. He once more informed himself of the different roads leading into the Bourbonnais province, where he was going to visit a relative; of the villages, cross roads, distances; and finally he spoke of the country, the harvest, and asked what news there was.

The peasant replied, with regard to this, that it was surprising to hear of disturbances on the highway at this moment, when it was patrolled by detachments of mounted police, who had just made an important capture.

“Who is that? — ” asked the marquis.

“Oh,” said the peasant, “a nobleman who has done a lot of mischief in the country.”

“What! a nobleman in the hands of justice?”

“Just so; and he stands a good chance of losing his head.”

“Do they say what he has done?”

“Shocking things; horrid things; everything he shouldn’t do. All the province is exasperated with him.”

“Do you know him?”

“No, but we all have his description.”

As this news was not encouraging, the marquis, after a few more questions, saw to his horse, patted him, threw some more money to the peasant, and disappeared in the direction pointed out.

The provost proceeded half a league farther along the road; but coming to the conclusion that pursuit was useless, he sent one of his men to headquarters, to warn all the points of exit from the province, and himself returned with his troop to the place whence he had started in the morning. The marquis had relatives in the neighbourhood, and it was quite possible that he might seek shelter with some of them. All the village ran to meet the horsemen, who were obliged to confess that they had been duped by the handsome prisoner. Different views were expressed on the event, which gave rise to much talking. The provost entered the inn, banging his fist on the furniture, and blaming everybody for the misfortune which had happened to him. The daughter of the house, at first a prey to the most grievous anxiety, had great difficulty in concealing her joy.

The provost spread his papers over the table, as if to nurse his ill-temper.

“The biggest rascal in the world!” he cried; “I ought to have suspected him.”

“What a handsome man he was!” said the hostess.

“A consummate rascal! Do you know who he is? He is the Marquis de Saint-Maixent!”

“The Marquis de Saint-Maixent!” all cried with horror.

“Yes, the very man,” replied the provost; “the Marquis de Saint-Maixent, accused, and indeed convicted, of coining and magic.”

“Ah!”

“Convicted of incest.”

“O my God!”

“Convicted of having strangled his wife to marry another, whose husband he had first stabbed.”

“Heaven help us!” All crossed themselves.

“Yes, good people,” continued the furious provost, “this is the nice boy who has just escaped the king’s justice!”

The host’s daughter left the room, for she felt she was going to faint.

“But,” said the host, “is there no hope of catching him again?”

“Not the slightest, if he has taken the road to the Bourbonnais; for I believe there are in that province noblemen belonging to his family who will not allow him to be rearrested.”

The fugitive was, indeed, no other than the Marquis de Saint-Maixent, accused of all the enormous crimes detailed by the provost, who by his audacious flight opened for himself an active part in the strange story which it remains to relate.

It came to pass, a fortnight after these events, that a mounted gentleman rang at the wicket gate of the chateau de Saint-Geran, at the gates of Moulins. It was late, and the servants were in no hurry to open. The stranger again pulled the bell in a masterful manner, and at length perceived a man running from the bottom of the avenue. The servant peered through the wicket, and making out in the twilight a very ill-appointed traveller, with a crushed hat, dusty clothes, and no sword, asked him what he wanted, receiving a blunt reply that the stranger wished to see the Count de Saint-Geran without any further loss of time. The servant replied that this was impossible; the other got into a passion.

“Who are you?” asked the man in livery.

“You are a very ceremonious fellow!” cried the horseman. “Go and tell M. de Saint-Geran that his relative, the Marquis de Saint-Maixent, wishes to see him at once.”

The servant made humble apologies, and opened the wicket gate. He then walked before the marquis, called other servants, who came to help him to dismount, and ran to give his name in the count’s apartments. The latter was about to sit down to supper when his relative was announced; he immediately went to receive the marquis, embraced him again and again, and gave him the most friendly and gracious reception possible. He wished then to take him into the dining-room to present him to all the family; but the marquis called his attention to the disorder of his dress, and begged for a few minutes’ conversation. The count took him into his dressing-room, and had him dressed from head to foot in his own clothes, whilst they talked. The marquis then narrated a made-up story to M. de Saint-Geran relative to the accusation brought against him. This greatly impressed his relative, and gave him a secure footing in the chateau. When he had finished dressing, he followed the count, who presented him to the countess and the rest of the family.

It will now be in place to state who the inmates of the chateau were, and to relate some previous occurrences to explain subsequent ones.

The Marshal de Saint-Geran, of the illustrious house of Guiche, and governor of the Bourbonnais, had married, for his first wife, Anne de Tournon, by whom he had one son, Claude de la Guiche, and one daughter, who married the Marquis de Bouille. His wife dying, he married again with Suzanne des Epaules, who had also been previously married, being the widow of the Count de Longaunay, by whom she had Suzanne de Longaunay.

The marshal and his wife, Suzanne des Epauies, for the mutual benefit of their children by first nuptials, determined to marry them, thus sealing their own union with a double tie. Claude de Guiche, the marshal’s son, married Suzanne de Longaunay.

This alliance was much to the distaste of the Marchioness de Bouille, the marshal’s daughter, who found herself separated from her stepmother, and married to a man who, it was said, gave her great cause for complaint, the greatest being his threescore years and ten.

The contract of marriage between Claude de la Guiche and Suzanne de Longaunay was executed at Rouen on the 17th of February 1619; but the tender age of the bridegroom, who was then but eighteen, was the cause of his taking a tour in Italy, whence he returned after two years. The marriage was a very happy one but for one circumstance — it produced no issue. The countess could not endure a barrenness which threatened the end of a great name, the extinction of a noble race. She made vows, pilgrimages; she consulted doctors and quacks; but to no purpose.

The Marshal de Saint-Geran died on the Loth of December 1632, having the mortification of having seen no descending issue from the marriage of his son. The latter, now Count de Saint-Geran, succeeded his father in the government of the Bourbonnais, and was named Chevalier of the King’s Orders.

Meanwhile the Marchioness de Bouille quarrelled with her old husband the marquis, separated from him after a scandalous divorce, and came to live at the chateau of Saint-Geran, quite at ease as to her brother’s marriage, seeing that in default of heirs all his property would revert to her.

Such was the state of affairs when the Marquis de Saint-Maixent arrived at the chateau. He was young, handsome, very cunning, and very successful with women; he even made a conquest of the dowager Countess de Saint-Geran, who lived there with her children. He soon plainly saw that he might easily enter into the most intimate relations with the Marchioness de Bouille.

The Marquis de Saint-Maixent’s own fortune was much impaired by his extravagance and by the exactions of the law, or rather, in plain words, he had lost it all. The marchioness was heiress presumptive to the count: he calculated that she would soon lose her own husband; in any case, the life of a septuagenarian did not much trouble a man like the marquis; he could then prevail upon the marchioness to marry him, thus giving him the command of the finest fortune in the province.

He set to work to pay his court to her, especially avoiding anything that could excite the slightest suspicion. It was, however, difficult to get on good terms with the marchioness without showing outsiders what was going on. But the marchioness, already prepossessed by the agreeable exterior of M. de Saint-Maixent, soon fell into his toils, and the unhappiness of her marriage, with the annoyances incidental to a scandalous case in the courts, left her powerless to resist his schemes. Nevertheless, they had but few opportunities of seeing one’ another alone: the countess innocently took a part in all their conversations; the count often came to take the marquis out hunting; the days passed in family pursuits. M. de Saint-Maixent had not so far had an opportunity of saying what a discreet woman ought to pretend not to hear; this intrigue, notwithstanding the marquis’s impatience, dragged terribly.

The countess, as has been stated, had for twenty years never ceased to hope that her prayers would procure for her the grace of bearing a son to her husband. Out of sheer weariness she had given herself up to all kinds of charlatans, who at that period were well received by people of rank. On one occasion she brought from Italy a sort of astrologer, who as nearly as possible poisoned her with a horrible nostrum, and was sent back to his own country in a hurry, thanking his stars for having escaped so cheaply. This procured Madame de Saint-Geran a severe reprimand from her confessor; and, as time went on, she gradually accustomed herself to the painful conclusion that she would die childless, and cast herself into the arms of religion. The count, whose tenderness for her never failed, yet clung to the hope of an heir, and made his Will with this in view. The marchioness's hopes had become certainties, and M. de Saint-Maixent, perfectly tranquil on this head, thought only of forwarding his suit with Madame-de Bouille, when, at the end of the month of November 1640, the Count de Saint-Geran was obliged to repair to Paris in great haste on pressing duty.

The countess, who could not bear to be separated from her husband, took the family advice as to accompanying him. The marquis, delighted at an opportunity which left him almost alone in the chateau with Madame de Bouille, painted the journey to Paris in the most attractive colours, and said all he could to decide her to go. The marchioness, for her part, worked very quietly to the same end; it was more than was needed. It was settled that the countess should go with M. de Saint-Geran. She soon made her preparations, and a few days later they set off on the journey together.

The marquis had no fears about declaring his passion; the conquest of Madame de Bouille gave him no trouble; he affected the most violent love, and she responded in the same terms. All their time was spent in excursions and walks from, which the servants were excluded; the lovers, always together, passed whole days in some retired part of the park, or shut up in their apartments. It was impossible for these circumstances not to cause gossip among an army of servants, against whom they had to keep incessantly on their guard; and this naturally happened.

The marchioness soon found herself obliged to make confidantes of the sisters Quinet, her maids; she had no difficulty in gaining their support, for the girls were greatly attached to her. This was the first step of shame for Madame de Bouille, and the first step of corruption for herself and her paramour, who soon found themselves entangled in the blackest of plots. Moreover, there was at the chateau de Saint-Geran a tall, spare, yellow, stupid man, just intelligent enough to perform, if not to conceive, a bad action, who was placed in authority over the domestics; he was a common peasant whom the old marshal had deigned to notice, and whom the count had by degrees promoted to the service of major-domo on account of his long service in the house, and because he had seen him there since he himself was a child; he would not take him away as body servant, fearing that his notions of service would not do for Paris, and left him to the superintendence of the household. The marquis had a quiet talk with this man, took his measure, warped his mind as he wished, gave him some money, and acquired him body and soul. These different agents undertook to stop the chatter of the servants' hall, and thenceforward the lovers could enjoy free intercourse.

One evening, as the Marquis de Saint-Maixent was at supper in company with the marchioness, a loud knocking was heard at the gate of the chateau, to which they paid no great attention. This was followed by the appearance of a courier who had come post haste from Paris; he entered the courtyard with a letter from the Count de Saint-Geran for M. the marquis; he was announced and introduced, followed by nearly all the household. The marquis asked the meaning of all this, and dismissed all the following with a wave of the hand; but the courier explained that M. the count desired that the letter in his hands should be read before everyone. The marquis opened it without replying, glanced over it, and read it out loud without the slightest alteration: the count announced to his good relations and to all his household that the countess had indicated positive symptoms of pregnancy; that hardly had she arrived in Paris when she suffered from fainting fits, nausea, retching, that she bore with joy these premonitory indications, which were no longer a matter of doubt to the physicians, nor to anyone; that for his part he was overwhelmed with joy at this event, which was the crowning stroke to all his wishes; that he desired the chateau to share his satisfaction by indulging in all kinds of gaieties; and that so far as other matters were concerned they could remain as they were till the return of himself and the countess, which the letter would precede only a few days, as he was going to transport her in a litter for greater safety. Then followed the specification of certain sums of money to be distributed among the servants.

The servants uttered cries of joy; the marquis and marchioness exchanged a look, but a very troublous one; they, however, restrained themselves so far as to simulate a great satisfaction, and the marquis brought himself to congratulate the servants on their attachment to their master and mistress. After this they were left alone, looking very serious, while crackers exploded and violins resounded under the windows. For some time they preserved silence, the first thought which occurred to both being that the count and countess had allowed themselves to be deceived by trifling symptoms, that people had wished to flatter their hopes, that it was impossible for a constitution to change so suddenly after twenty years, and that it was a case of simulative pregnancy. This opinion gaining strength in their minds made them somewhat calmer.

The next day they took a walk side by side in a solitary path in the park and discussed the chances of their situation. M. de Saint-Maixent brought before the marchioness the enormous injury which this event would bring them. He then said that even supposing the news to be true, there were many rocks ahead to be weathered before the succession could be pronounced secure.

“The child may die,” he said at last.

And he uttered some sinister expressions on the slight damage caused by the loss of a puny creature without mind, interest, or consequence; nothing, he said, but a bit of ill-organised matter, which only came into the world to ruin so considerable a person as the marchioness.

“But what is the use of tormenting ourselves?” he went on impatiently; “the countess is not pregnant, nor can she be.”

A gardener working near them overheard this part of the conversation, but as they walked away from him he could not hear any more.

A few days later, some outriders, sent before him by the count, entered the chateau, saying that their master and mistress were close at hand. In fact, they were promptly followed by brakes and travelling-carriages, and at length the countess’s litter was descried, which M. de Saint-Geran, on horse back, had never lost sight of during the journey. It was a triumphal reception: all the peasants had left their work, and filled the air with shouts of welcome; the servants ran to meet their mistress; the ancient retainers wept for joy at seeing the count so happy and in the hope that his noble qualities might be perpetuated in his heir. The marquis and Madame de Bouille did their best to tune up to the pitch of this hilarity.

The dowager countess, who had arrived at the chateau the same day, unable to convince herself as to this news, had the pleasure of satisfying her self respecting it. The count and countess were much beloved in the

Bourbonnais province; this event caused therein a general satisfaction, particularly in the numerous houses attached to them by consanguinity. Within a few days of their return, more than twenty ladies of quality flocked to visit them in great haste, to show the great interest they took in this pregnancy. All these ladies, on one occasion or another, convinced themselves as to its genuineness, and many of them, carrying the subject still further, in a joking manner which pleased the countess, dubbed themselves prophetesses, and predicted the birth of a boy. The usual symptoms incidental to the situation left no room for doubt: the country physicians were all agreed. The count kept one of these physicians in the chateau for two months, and spoke to the Marquis of Saint-Maixent of his intention of procuring a good mid-wife, on the same terms. Finally, the dowager countess, who was to be sponsor, ordered at a great expense a magnificent store of baby linen, which she desired to present at the birth.

The marchioness devoured her rage, and among the persons who went beside themselves with joy not one remarked the disappointment which overspread her soul. Every day she saw the marquis, who did all he could to increase her regret, and incessantly stirred up her ill-humour by repeating that the count and countess were triumphing over her misfortune, and insinuating that they were importing a supposititious child to disinherit her. As usual both in private and political affairs, he began by corrupting the marchioness’s religious views, to pervert her into crime. The marquis was one of those libertines so rare at that time, a period less unhappy than is generally believed, who made science dependent upon, atheism. It is remarkable that great criminals of this epoch, Sainte-Croix for instance, and Exili, the gloomy poisoner, were the first unbelievers, and that they preceded the learned of the following age both, in philosophy and in the exclusive study of physical science, in which they included that of poisons. Passion, interest, hatred fought the marquis’s battles in the heart of Madame de Bouille; she readily lent herself to everything that M. de Saint-Maixent wished.

The Marquis de Saint-Maixent had a confidential servant, cunning, insolent, resourceful, whom he had brought from his estates, a servant well suited to such a master, whom he sent on errands frequently into the neighbourhood of Saint-Geran.

One evening, as the marquis was about to go to bed, this man, returning from one of his expeditions, entered his room, where he remained for a long time, telling him that he had at length found what he wanted, and giving him a small piece of paper which contained several names of places and persons.

Next morning, at daybreak, the marquis caused two of his horses to be saddled, pretended that he was summoned home on pressing business, foresaw that he should be absent for three or four days, made his excuses to the count, and set off at full gallop, followed by his servant.

They slept that night at an inn on the road to Auvergne, to put off the scent any persons who might recognise them; then, following cross-country roads, they arrived after two days at a large hamlet, which they had seemed to have passed far to their left.

In this hamlet was a woman who practised the avocation of midwife, and was known as such in the neighbourhood, but who had, it was said, mysterious and infamous secrets for those who paid her well. Further, she drew a good income from the influence which her art gave her over credulous people. It was all in her line to cure the king's evil, compound philtres and love potions; she was useful in a variety of ways to girls who could afford to pay her; she was a lovers' go-between, and even practised sorcery for country folk. She played her cards so well, that the only persons privy to her misdeeds were unfortunate creatures who had as strong an interest as herself in keeping them profoundly secret; and as her terms were very high, she lived comfortably enough in a house her own property, and entirely alone, for greater security. In a general way, she was considered skilful in her ostensible profession, and was held in estimation by many persons of rank. This woman's name was Louise Goillard.

Alone one evening after curfew, she heard a loud knocking at the door of her house. Accustomed to receive visits at all hours, she took her lamp without hesitation, and opened the door. An armed man, apparently much agitated, entered the room. Louise Goillard, in a great fright, fell into a chair; this man was the Marquis de Saint-Maixent.

“Calm yourself, good woman,” said the stranger, panting and stammering; “be calm, I beg; for it is I, not you, who have any cause for emotion. I am not a brigand, and far from your having anything to fear, it is I, on the contrary, who am come to beg for your assistance.”

He threw his cloak into a corner, unbuckled his waistbelt, and laid aside his sword. Then falling into a chair, he said —

“First of all, let me rest a little.”

The marquis wore a travelling-dress; but although he had not stated his name, Louise Goillard saw at a glance that he was a very different person from what she had thought, and that, on the contrary, he was some fine gentleman who had come on his love affairs.

“I beg you to excuse,” said she, “a fear which is insulting to you. You came in so hurriedly that I had not time to see whom I was talking to. My house is rather lonely; I am alone; ill-disposed people might easily take advantage of these circumstances to plunder a poor woman who has little enough to lose. The times are so bad! You seem tired. Will you inhale some essence?”

“Give me only a glass of water.”

Louise Goillard went into the adjoining room, and returned with an ewer. The marquis affected to rinse his lips, and said —

“I come from a great distance on a most important matter. Be assured that I shall be properly grateful for your services.”

He felt in his pocket, and pulled out a purse, which he rolled between his fingers.

“In the first place; you must swear to the greatest secrecy.”

“There is no need of that with us,” said Louise Goillard; “that is the first condition of our craft.”

“I must have more express guarantees, and your oath that you will reveal to no one in the world what I am going to confide to you.”

“I give you my word, then, since you demand it; but I repeat that this is superfluous; you do not know me.”

“Consider that this is a most serious matter, that I am as it were placing my head in your hands, and that I would lose my life a thousand times rather than see this mystery unravelled.”

“Consider also,” bluntly replied the midwife, “that we ourselves are primarily interested in all the secrets entrusted to us; that an indiscretion would destroy all confidence in us, and that there are even cases — — You may speak.”

When the marquis had reassured her as to himself by this preface, he continued: “I know that you are a very able woman.”

“I could indeed wish to be one, to serve you.”.

“That you have pushed the study of your art to its utmost limits.”

“I fear they have been flattering your humble servant.”

“And that your studies have enabled you to predict the future.”

"That is all nonsense."

"It is true; I have been told so."

"You have been imposed upon."

"What is the use of denying it and refusing to do me a service?"

Louise Goillard defended herself long: she could not understand a man of this quality believing in fortune-telling, which she practised only with low-class people and rich farmers; but the marquis appeared so earnest that she knew not what to think.

"Listen," said he, "it is no use dissembling with me, I know all. Be easy; we are playing a game in which you are laying one against a thousand; moreover, here is something on account to compensate you for the trouble I am giving."

He laid a pile of gold on the table. The matron weakly owned that she had sometimes attempted astrological combinations which were not always fortunate, and that she had been only induced to do so by the fascination of the phenomena of science. The secret of her guilty practices was drawn from her at the very outset of her defence.

"That being so," replied the marquis, "you must be already aware of the situation in which I find myself; you must know that, hurried away by a blind and ardent passion, I have betrayed the confidence of an old lady and violated the laws of hospitality by seducing her daughter in her own house; that matters have come to a crisis, and that this noble damsel, whom I Love to distraction, being pregnant, is on the point of losing her life and honour by the discovery of her fault, which is mine."

The matron replied that nothing could be ascertained about a person except from private questions; and to further impose upon the marquis, she fetched a kind of box marked with figures and strange emblems. Opening this, and putting together certain figures which it contained, she declared that what the marquis had told her was true, and that his situation was a most melancholy one. She added, in order to frighten him, that he was threatened by still more serious misfortunes than those which had already overtaken him, but that it was easy to anticipate and obviate these mischances by new consultations.

"Madame," replied the marquis, "I fear only one thing in the world, the dishonour of the woman I love. Is there no method of remedying the usual embarrassment of a birth?"

"I know of none," said the matron.

“The young lady has succeeded in concealing her condition; it would be easy for her confinement to take place privately.”

“She has already risked her life; and I cannot consent to be mixed up in this affair, for fear of the consequences.”

“Could not, for instance,” said the marquis, “a confinement be effected without pain?”

“I don’t know about that, but this I do” know, that I shall take very good care not to practise any method contrary to the laws of nature.”

“You are deceiving me: you are acquainted with this method, you have already practised it upon a certain person whom I could name to you.”

“Who has dared to calumniate me thus? I operate only after the decision of the Faculty. God forbid that I should be stoned by all the physicians, and perhaps expelled from France!”

“Will you then let me die of despair? If I were capable of making a bad use of your secrets, I could have done so long ago, for I know them. In Heaven’s name, do not dissimulate any longer, and tell me how it is possible to stifle the pangs of labour. Do you want more gold? Here it is.” And he threw more Louis on the table.

“Stay,” said the matron: “there is perhaps a method which I think I have discovered, and which I have never employed, but I believe it efficacious.”

“But if you have never employed it, it may be dangerous, and risk the life of the lady whom I love.”

“When I say never, I mean that I have tried it once, and most successfully. Be at your ease.”

“Ah!” cried the marquis, “you have earned my everlasting gratitude! But,” continued he, “if we could anticipate the confinement itself, and remove from henceforth the symptoms of pregnancy?”

“Oh, sir, that is a great crime you speak of!”

“Alas!” continued the marquis, as if speaking to himself in a fit of intense grief; “I had rather lose a dear child, the pledge of our love, than bring into the world an unhappy creature which might possibly cause its mother’s death.”

“I pray you, sir, let no more be said on the subject; it is a horrible crime even to think of such a thing.”

“But what is to be done? Is it better to destroy two persons and perhaps kill a whole family with despair? Oh, madame, I entreat you, extricate us from this extremity!”

The marquis buried his face in his hands, and sobbed as though he were weeping copiously.

“Your despair grievously affects me,” said the matron; “but consider that for a woman of my calling it is a capital offence.”

“What are you talking about? Do not our mystery, our safety, and our credit come in first?

“They can never get at you till after the death and dishonour of all that is dear to me in the world.”

“I might then, perhaps. But in this case you must insure me against legal complications, fines, and procure me a safe exit from the kingdom.”

“Ah! that is my affair. Take my whole fortune! Take my life!”

And he threw the whole purse on the table.

“In this case, and solely to extricate you from the extreme danger in which I see you placed, I consent to give you a decoction, and certain instructions, which will instantly relieve the lady from her burden. She must use the greatest precaution, and study to carry out exactly what I am about to tell you. My God! only such desperate occasions as this one could induce me to — — Here — — ”

She took a flask from the bottom of a cupboard, and continued —

“Here is a liquor which never fails.”

“Oh, madame, you save my honour, which is dearer to me than life! But this is not enough: tell me what use I am to make of this liquor, and in what doses I am to administer it.”

“The patient,” replied the midwife, “must take one spoonful the first day; the second day two; the third — — ”

“You will obey me to the minutest particular?”

“I swear it.”

“Let us start, then.”

She asked but for time to pack a little linen, put things in order, then fastened her doors, and left the house with the marquis. A quarter of an hour later they were galloping through the night, without her knowing where the marquis was taking her.

The marquis reappeared three days later at the chateau, finding the count’s family as he had left them — that is to say, intoxicated with hope, and counting the weeks, days, and hours before the accouchement of the countess. He excused his hurried departure on the ground of the importance of the business which had summoned him away; and speaking of his journey at table, he related a story current in the country whence he came, of a surprising event which he had all but witnessed. It was the case of a lady of quality who suddenly found herself in the most dangerous pangs of labour. All the skill of the physicians who had been summoned proved futile; the lady was at the point of death; at last, in sheer despair, they summoned a midwife of great repute among the peasantry, but whose practice did not include the gentry. From the first treatment of this woman, who appeared modest and diffident to a degree, the pains ceased as if by enchantment; the patient fell into an indefinable calm languor, and after some hours was delivered of a beautiful infant; but after this was attacked by a violent fever which brought her to death’s door. They then again had recourse to the doctors, notwithstanding the opposition of the master of the house, who had confidence in the matron. The doctors’ treatment only made matters worse. In this extremity they again called in the midwife, and at the end of three weeks the lady was miraculously restored to life, thus, added the marquis, establishing the reputation of the matron, who had sprung into such vogue in the town where she lived and the neighbouring country that nothing else was talked about.

This story made a great impression on the company, on account of the condition of the countess; the dowager added that it was very wrong to ridicule these humble country experts, who often through observation and experience discovered secrets which proud doctors were unable to unravel with all their studies. Hereupon the count cried out that this midwife must be sent for, as she was just the kind of woman they wanted. After this other matters were talked about, the marquis changing the conversation; he had gained his point in quietly introducing the thin end of the wedge of his design.

After dinner, the company walked on the terrace. The countess dowager not being able to walk much on account of her advanced age, the countess and Madame de Bouille took chairs beside her. The count walked up and down with M. de Saint-Maixent. The marquis naturally asked how things had been going on during his absence, and if Madame de Saint-Geran had suffered any inconvenience, for her pregnancy had become the most important affair in the household, and hardly anything else was talked about.

“By the way,” said the count, “you were speaking just now of a very skilful midwife; would it not be a good step to summon her?”

"I think," replied the marquis, "that it would be an excellent selection, for I do not suppose there is one in this neighbourhood to compare to her."

"I have a great mind to send for her at once, and to keep her about the countess, whose constitution she will be all the better acquainted with if she studies it beforehand. Do you know where I can send for her?"

"Faith," said the marquis, "she lives in a village, but I don't know which."

"But at least you know her name?"

"I can hardly remember it. Louise Boyard, I think, or Polliard, one or the other."

"How! have you not even retained the name?"

"I heard the story, that's all. Who the deuce can keep a name in his head which he hears in such a chance fashion?"

"But did the condition of the countess never occur to you?"

"It was so far away that I did not suppose you would send such a distance. I thought you were already provided."

"How can we set about to find her?"

"If that is all, I have a servant who knows people in that part of the country, and who knows how to go about things: if you like, he shall go in quest of her."

"If I like? This very moment."

The same evening the servant started on his errand with the count's instructions, not forgetting those of his master. He went at full speed. It may readily be supposed that he had not far to seek the woman he was to bring back with him; but he purposely kept away for three days, and at the end of this time Louise Goillard was installed in the chateau.

She was a woman of plain and severe exterior, who at once inspired confidence in everyone. The plots of the marquis and Madame de Bouille thus throve with most baneful success; but an accident happened which threatened to nullify them, and, by causing a great disaster, to prevent a crime.

The countess, passing into her apartments, caught her foot in a carpet, and fell heavily on the floor. At the cries of a footman all the household was astir. The countess was carried to bed; the most intense alarm prevailed; but no bad consequences followed this accident, which produced only a further succession of visits from the neighbouring gentry. This happened about the end of the seventh month.

At length the moment of accouchement came. Everything had long before been arranged for the delivery, and nothing remained to be done. The marquis had employed all this time in strengthening Madame de Bouille against her scruples. He often saw Louise Goillard in private, and gave her his instructions; but he perceived that the corruption of Baulieu, the house steward, was an essential factor. Baulieu was already half gained over by the interviews of the year preceding; a large sum of ready money and many promises did the rest. This wretch was not ashamed to join a plot against a master to whom he owed everything. The marchioness for her part, and always under the instigation of M. de Saint-Maixent, secured matters all round by bringing into the abominable plot the Quinet girls, her maids; so that there was nothing but treason and conspiracy against this worthy family among their upper servants, usually styled confidential. Thus, having prepared matters, the conspirators awaited the event.

On the 16th of August the Countess de Saint-Geran was overtaken by the pangs of labour in the chapel of the chateau, where she was hearing mass. They carried her to her room before mass was over, her women ran around her, and the countess dowager with her own hands arranged on her head a cap of the pattern worn by ladies about to be confined — a cap which is not usually removed till some time later.

The pains recurred with terrible intensity. The count wept at his wife’s cries. Many persons were present. The dowager’s two daughters by her second marriage, one of whom, then sixteen years of age, afterwards married the Duke de Ventadour and was a party to the lawsuit, wished to be present at this accouchement, which was to perpetuate by a new scion an illustrious race near extinction. There were also Dame Saligny, sister of the late Marshal Saint-Geran, the Marquis de Saint-Maixent, and the Marchioness de Bouille.

Everything seemed to favour the projects of these last two persons, who took an interest in the event of a very different character from that generally felt. As the pains produced no result, and the accouchement was of the most difficult nature, while the countess was near the last extremity, expresses were sent to all the neighbouring parishes to offer prayers for the mother and the child; the Holy Sacrament was elevated in the churches at Moulins.

The midwife attended to everything herself. She maintained that the countess would be more comfortable if her slightest desires were instantly complied with. The countess herself never spoke a word, only interrupting the gloomy silence by heart-rending cries. All at once, Madame de Boulle, who affected to be bustling about, pointed out that the presence of so many persons was what hindered the countess's accouchement, and, assuming an air of authority justified by fictitious tenderness, said that everyone must retire, leaving the patient in the hands of the persons who were absolutely necessary to her, and that, to remove any possible objections, the countess dowager her mother must set the example. The opportunity was made use of to remove the count from this harrowing spectacle, and everyone followed the countess dowager. Even the countess's own maids were not allowed to remain, being sent on errands which kept them out of the way. This further reason was given, that the eldest being scarcely fifteen, they were too young to be present on such an occasion. The only persons remaining by the bedside were the Marchioness de Bouille, the midwife, and the two Quinet girls; the countess was thus in the hands of her most cruel enemies.

It was seven o'clock in the evening; the labours continued; the elder Quinet girl held the patient by the hand to soothe her. The count and the dowager sent incessantly to know the news. They were told that everything was going on well, and that shortly their wishes would be accomplished; but none of the servants were allowed to enter the room.

Three hours later, the midwife declared that the countess could not hold out any longer unless she got some rest. She made her swallow a liquor which was introduced into her mouth by spoonfuls. The countess fell into so deep a sleep that she seemed to be dead. The younger Quinet girl thought for a moment that they had killed her, and wept in a corner of the room, till Madame de Bouille reassured her.

During this frightful night a shadowy figure prowled in the corridors, silently patrolled the rooms, and came now and then to the door of the bedroom, where he conferred in a low tone with the midwife and the Marchioness de Bouille. This was the Marquis de Saint-Maixent, who gave his orders, encouraged his people, watched over every point of his plot, himself a prey to the agonies of nervousness which accompany the preparations for a great crime.

The dowager countess, owing to her great age, had been compelled to take some rest. The count sat up, worn out with fatigue, in a downstairs room hard by that in which they were compassing the ruin of all most dear to him in the world.

The countess, in her profound lethargy, gave birth, without being aware of it, to a boy, who thus fell on his entry into the world into the hands of his enemies, his mother powerless to defend him by her cries and tears. The door was half opened, and a man who was waiting outside brought in; this was the major-domo Baulieu.

The midwife, pretending to afford the first necessary cares to the child, had taken it into a corner. Baulieu watched her movements, and springing upon her, pinioned her arms. The wretched woman dug her nails into the child's head. He snatched it from her, but the poor infant for long bore the marks of her claws.

Possibly the Marchioness de Bouille could not nerve herself to the commission of so great a crime; but it seems more probable that the steward prevented the destruction of the child under the orders of M. de Saint-Maixent. The theory is that the marquis, mistrustful of the promise made him by Madame de Bouille to marry him after the death of her husband, desired to keep the child to oblige her to keep her word, under threats of getting him acknowledged, if she proved faithless to him. No other adequate reason can be conjectured to determine a man of his character to take such great care of his victim.

Baulieu swaddled the child immediately, put it in a basket, hid it under his cloak, and went with his prey to find the marquis; they conferred together for some time, after which the house steward passed by a postern gate into the moat, thence to a terrace by which he reached a bridge leading into the park. This park had twelve gates, and he had the keys of all. He mounted a blood horse which he had left waiting behind a wall, and started off at full gallop. The same day he passed through the village of Escherolles, a league distant from Saint-Geran, where he stopped at the house of a nurse, wife of a glove-maker named Claude. This peasant woman gave her breast to the child; but the steward, not daring to stay in a village so near Saint-Geran, crossed the river Allier at the port de la Chaise, and calling at the house of a man named Boucaud, the good wife suckled the child for the second time; he then continued his journey in the direction of Auvergne.

The heat was excessive, his horse was done up, the child seemed uneasy. A carrier's cart passed him going to Riom; it was owned by a certain Paul Boithion of the town of Aigueperce, a common carrier on the road. Baulieu went alongside to put the child in the cart, which he entered himself, carrying the infant on his knees. The horse followed, fastened by the bridle to the back of the cart.

In the conversation which he held with this man, Baulieu said that he should not take so much care of the child did it not belong to the most noble house in the Bourbonnais. They reached the village of Che at midday. The mistress of the house where he put up, who was nursing an infant, consented to give some of her milk to the child. The poor creature was covered with blood; she warmed some water, stripped off its swaddling linen, washed it from head to foot, and swathed it up again more neatly.

The carrier then took them to Riom. When they got there, Baulieu got rid of him by giving a false meeting-place for their departure; left in the direction of the abbey of Lavoine, and reached the village of Descoutoux, in the mountains, between Lavoine and Thiers. The Marchioness de Bouille had a chateau there where she occasionally spent some time.

The child was nursed at Descoutoux by Gabrielle Moini, who was paid a month in advance; but she only kept it a week or so, because they refused to tell her the father and mother and to refer her to a place where she might send reports of her charge. This woman having made these reasons public, no nurse could be found to take charge of the child, which was removed from the village of Descoutoux. The persons who removed it took the highroad to Burgundy, crossing a densely wooded country, and here they lost their way.

The above particulars were subsequently proved by the nurses, the carrier, and others who made legal depositions. They are stated at length here, as they proved very important in the great lawsuit. The compilers of the case, into which we search for information, have however omitted to tell us how the absence of the major-domo was accounted for at the castle; probably the far-sighted marquis had got an excuse ready.

The countess's state of drowsiness continued till daybreak. She woke bathed in blood, completely exhausted, but yet with a sensation of comfort which convinced her that she had been delivered from her burden. Her first words were about her child; she wished to see it, kiss it; she asked where it was. The midwife coolly told her, whilst the girls who were by were filled with amazement at her audacity, that she had not been confined at all. The countess maintained the contrary, and as she grew very excited, the midwife strove to calm her, assuring her that in any case her delivery could not be long protracted, and that, judging from all the indications of the night, she would give birth to a boy. This promise comforted the count and the countess dowager, but failed to satisfy the countess, who insisted that a child had been born.

The same day a scullery-maid met a woman going to the water's edge in the castle moat, with a parcel in her arms. She recognised the midwife, and asked what she was carrying and where she was going so early. The latter replied that she was very inquisitive, and that it was nothing at all; but the girl, laughingly pretending to be angry at this answer, pulled open one of the ends of the parcel before the midwife had time to stop her, and exposed to view some linen soaked in blood.

"Madame has been confined, then?" she said to the matron.

"No," replied she briskly, "she has not."

The girl was unconvinced, and said, "How do you mean that she has not, when madame the marchioness, who was there, says she has?" The matron in great confusion replied, "She must have a very long tongue, if she said so."

The girl's evidence was later found most important.

The countess's uneasiness made her worse the next day. She implored with sighs and tears at least to be told what had become of her child, steadily maintaining that she was not mistaken when she assured them that she had given birth to one. The midwife with great effrontery told her that the new moon was unfavourable to childbirth, and that she must wait for the wane, when it would be easier as matters were already prepared.

Invalids' fancies do not obtain much credence; still, the persistence of the countess would have convinced everyone in the long run, had not the dowager said that she remembered at the end of the ninth month of one of her own pregnancies she had all the premonitory symptoms of lying in, but they proved false, and in fact the accouchement took place three months later.

This piece of news inspired great confidence. The marquis and Madame de Bouille did all in their power to confirm it, but the countess obstinately refused to listen to it, and her passionate transports of grief gave rise to the greatest anxiety. The midwife, who knew not how to gain time, and was losing all hope in face of the countess's persistence, was almost frightened out of her wits; she entered into medical details, and finally said that some violent exercise must be taken to induce labour. The countess, still unconvinced, refused to obey this order; but the count, the dowager, and all the family entreated her so earnestly that she gave way.

They put her in a close carriage, and drove her a whole day over ploughed fields, by the roughest and hardest roads. She was so shaken that she lost the power of breathing; it required all the strength of her constitution to support this barbarous treatment in the delicate condition of a lady so recently confined. They put her to bed again after this cruel drive, and seeing that nobody took her view, she threw herself into the arms of Providence, and consoled herself by religion; the midwife administered violent remedies to deprive her of milk; she got over all these attempts to murder her, and slowly got better.

Time, which heals the deepest affliction, gradually soothed that of the countess; her grief nevertheless burst out periodically on the slightest cause; but eventually it died out, till the following events rekindled it.

There had been in Paris a fencing-master who used to boast that he had a brother in the service of a great house. This fencing-master had married a certain Marie Pigoreau, daughter of an actor. He had recently died in poor circumstances, leaving her a widow with two children. This woman Pigoreau did not enjoy the best of characters, and no one knew how she made a living, when all at once, after some short absences from home and visit from a man who came in the evening, his face muffled in his cloak, she launched out into a more expensive style of living; the neighbours saw in her house costly clothes, fine swaddling-clothes, and at last it became known that she was nursing a strange child.

About the same time it also transpired that she had a deposit of two thousand livres in the hands of a grocer in the quarter, named Raguenet; some days later, as the child's baptism had doubtless been put off for fear of betraying his origin, Pigoreau had him christened at St. Jean en Greve. She did not invite any of the neighbours to the function, and gave parents' names of her own choosing at the church. For godfather she selected the parish sexton, named Paul Marmiou, who gave the child the name of Bernard. La Pigoreau remained in a confessional during the ceremony, and gave the man ten sou. The godmother was Jeanne Chevalier, a poor woman of the parish.

The entry in the register was as follows:

"On the seventh day of March one thousand six hundred and
forty-two was baptized Bernard, son of . . . and . . . his

> godfather being Paul Marmiou, day labourer and servant of this parish, and his godmother Jeanne Chevalier, widow of Pierre Thibou.”

A few days afterwards la Pigoreau put out the child to nurse in the village of Torcy en Brie, with a woman who had been her godmother, whose husband was called Paillard. She gave out that it was a child of quality which had been entrusted to her, and that she should not hesitate, if such a thing were necessary, to save its life by the loss of one of her own children. The nurse did not keep it long, because she fell ill; la Pigoreau went to fetch the child away, lamenting this accident, and further saying that she regretted it all the more, as the nurse would have earned enough to make her comfortable for the rest of her life. She put the infant out again in the same village, with the widow of a peasant named Marc Peguin. The monthly wage was regularly paid, and the child brought up as one of rank. La Pigoreau further told the woman that it was the son of a great nobleman, and would later make the fortunes of those who served him. An elderly man, whom the people supposed to be the child’s father, but who Pigoreau assured them was her brother-in-law, often came to see him.

When the child was eighteen months old, la Pigoreau took him away and weaned him. Of the two by her husband the elder was called Antoine, the second would have been called Henri if he had lived; but he was born on the 9th of August 1639, after the death of his father, who was killed in June of the same year, and died shortly after his birth. La Pigoreau thought fit to give the name and condition of this second son to the stranger, and thus bury for ever the secret of his birth. With this end in view, she left the quarter where she lived, and removed to conceal herself in another parish where she was not known. The child was brought up under the name and style of Henri, second son of la Pigoreau, till he was two and a half years of age; but at this time, whether she was not engaged to keep it any longer, or whether she had spent the two thousand livres deposited with the grocer Raguenet, and could get no more from the principals, she determined to get rid of it.

Her gossips used to tell this woman that she cared but little for her eldest son, because she was very confident of the second one making his fortune, and that if she were obliged to give up one of them, she had better keep the younger, who was a beautiful boy. To this she would reply that the matter did not depend upon her; that the boy’s godfather was an uncle in good circumstances, who would not charge himself with any other child. She often mentioned this uncle, her brother-in-law, she said, who was major-domo in a great house.

One morning, the hall porter at the hotel de Saint-Geran came to Baulieu and told him that a woman carrying a child was asking for him at the wicket gate; this Baulieu was, in fact, the brother of the fencing master, and godfather to Pigoreau’s second son. It is now supposed that he was the unknown person who had placed the child of quality with her, and who used to go and see him at his nurse’s. La Pigoreau gave him a long account of her situation. The major-domo took the child with some emotion, and told la Pigoreau to wait his answer a short distance off, in a place which he pointed out.

Baulieu’s wife made a great outcry at the first proposal of an increase of family; but he succeeded in pacifying her by pointing out the necessities of his sister-in-law, and how easy and inexpensive it was to do this good work in such a house as the count’s. He went to his master and mistress to ask permission to bring up this child in their hotel; a kind of feeling entered into the charge he was undertaking which in some measure lessened the weight on his conscience.

The count and countess at first opposed this project; telling him that having already five children he ought not to burden himself with any more, but he petitioned so earnestly that he obtained what he wanted. The countess wished to see it, and as she was about to start for Moulins she ordered it to be put in her women’s coach; when it was shown her, she cried out, “What a lovely child!” The boy was fair, with large blue eyes and very regular features, She gave him a hundred caresses, which the child returned very prettily. She at once took a great fancy to him, and said to Baulieu, “I shall not put him in my women’s coach; I shall put him in my own.”

After they arrived at the chateau of Saint-Geran, her affection for Henri, the name retained by the child, increased day by day. She often contemplated him with sadness, then embraced him with tenderness, and kept him long on her bosom. The count shared this affection for the supposed nephew of Baulieu, who was adopted, so to speak, and brought up like a child of quality.

The Marquis de Saint-Maixent and Madame de Bouille had not married, although the old Marquis de Bouille had long been dead. It appeared that they had given up this scheme. The marchioness no doubt felt scruples about it, and the marquis was deterred from marriage by his profligate habits. It is moreover supposed that other engagements and heavy bribes compensated the loss he derived from the marchioness's breach of faith.

He was a man about town at that period, and was making love to the demoiselle Jacqueline de la Garde; he had succeeded in gaining her affections, and brought matters to such a point that she no longer refused her favours except on the grounds of her pregnancy and the danger of an indiscretion. The marquis then offered to introduce to her a matron who could deliver women without the pangs of labour, and who had a very successful practice. The same Jacqueline de la Garde further gave evidence at the trial that M. de Saint-Maixent had often boasted, as of a scientific intrigue, of having spirited away the son of a governor of a province and grandson of a marshal of France; that he spoke of the Marchioness de Bouille, said that he had made her rich, and that it was to him she owed her great wealth; and further, that one day having taken her to a pretty country seat which belonged to him, she praised its beauty, saying "c'etait un beau lieu"; he replied by a pun on a man's name, saying that he knew another Baulieu who had enabled him to make a fortune of five hundred thousand crowns. He also said to Jadelon, sieur de la Barbesange, when posting with him from Paris, that the Countess de Saint-Geran had been delivered of a son who was in his power.

The marquis had not seen Madame de Bouille for a long time; a common danger reunited them. They had both learned with terror the presence of Henri at the hotel de Saint-Geran. They consulted about this; the marquis undertook to cut the danger short. However, he dared put in practice nothing overtly against the child, a matter still more difficult just then, inasmuch as some particulars of his discreditable adventures had leaked out, and the Saint-Geran family received him more than coldly.

Baulieu, who witnessed every day the tenderness of the count and countess for the boy Henri, had been a hundred times on the point of giving himself up and confessing everything. He was torn to pieces with remorse. Remarks escaped him which he thought he might make without ulterior consequences; seeing the lapse of time, but they were noted and commented on. Sometimes he would say that he held in his hand the life and honour of Madame the Marchioness de Bouille; sometimes that the count and countess had more reasons than they knew of for loving Henri. One day he put a case of conscience to a confessor, thus: "Whether a man who had been concerned in the abduction of a child could not satisfy his conscience by restoring him to his father and mother without telling them who he was?” What answer the confessor made is not known, but apparently it was not what the major-domo wanted. He replied to a magistrate of Moulins, who congratulated him on having a nephew whom his masters overburdened with kind treatment, that they ought to love him, since he was nearly related to them.

These remarks were noticed by others than those principally concerned. One day a wine merchant came to propose to Baulieu the purchase of a pipe of Spanish wine, of which he gave him a sample bottle; in the evening he was taken violently ill. They carried him to bed, where he writhed, uttering horrible cries. One sole thought possessed him when his sufferings left him a lucid interval, and in his agony he repeated over and over again that he wished to implore pardon from the count and countess for a great injury which he had done them. The people round about him told him that was a trifle, and that he ought not to let it embitter his last moments, but he begged so piteously that he got them to promise that they should be sent for.

The count thought it was some trifling irregularity, some misappropriation in the house accounts; and fearing to hasten the death of the sufferer by the shame of the confession of a fault, he sent word that he heartily forgave him, that he might die tranquil, and refused to see him. Baulieu expired, taking his secret with him. This happened in 1648.

The child was then seven years old. His charming manners grew with his age, and the count and countess felt their love for him increase. They caused him to be taught dancing and fencing, put him into breeches and hose, and a page’s suit of their livery, in which capacity he served them. The marquis turned his attack to this quarter. He was doubtless preparing some plot as criminal as the preceding, when justice overtook him for some other great crimes of which he had been guilty. He was arrested one day in the street when conversing with one of the Saint-Geran footmen, and taken to the Conciergerie of the Palace of Justice.

Whether owing to these occurrences, or to grounds for suspicion before mentioned, certain reports spread in the Bourbonnais embodying some of the real facts; portions of them reached the ears of the count and countess, but they had only the effect of renewing their grief without furnishing a clue to the truth.

Meanwhile, the count went to take the waters at Vichy. The countess and Madame de Bouille followed him, and there they chanced to encounter Louise Goillard, the midwife. This woman renewed her acquaintance with the house, and in particular often visited the Marchioness de Bouille. One day the countess, unexpectedly entering the marchioness's room, found them both conversing in an undertone. They stopped talking immediately, and appeared disconcerted.

The countess noticed this without attaching any importance to it, and asked the subject of their conversation.

"Oh, nothing," said the marchioness.

"But what is it?" insisted the countess, seeing that she blushed.

The marchioness, no longer able to evade the question, and feeling her difficulties increase, replied —

"Dame Louise is praising my brother for bearing no ill-will to her."

"Why?" said the countess, turning to the midwife, — "why should you fear any ill-will on the part of my husband?"

"I was afraid," said Louise Goillard awkwardly, "that he might have taken a dislike to me on account of all that happened when you expected to be confined."

The obscurity of these words and embarrassment of the two women produced a lively effect upon the countess; but she controlled herself and let the subject drop. Her agitation, however, did not escape the notice of the marchioness, who the next day had horses put to her coach and retired to hey estate of Lavoine. This clumsy proceeding strengthened suspicion.

The first determination of the countess was to arrest Louise Goillard; but she saw that in so serious a matter every step must be taken with precaution. She consulted the count and the countess dowager. They quietly summoned the midwife, to question her without any preliminaries. She prevaricated and contradicted herself over and over again; moreover, her state of terror alone sufficed to convict her of a crime. They handed her over to the law, and the Count de Saint-Geran filed an information before the vice-seneschal of Moulins.

The midwife underwent a first interrogatory. She confessed the truth of the accouchement, but she added that the countess had given birth to a still-born daughter, which she had buried under a stone near the step of the barn in the back yard. The judge, accompanied by a physician and a surgeon, repaired to the place, where he found neither stone, nor foetus, nor any indications of an interment. They searched unsuccessfully in other places.

When the dowager countess heard this statement, she demanded that this horrible woman should be put on her trial. The civil lieutenant, in the absence of the criminal lieutenant, commenced the proceedings.

In a second interrogation, Louise Goillard positively declared that the countess had never been confined;

In a third, that she had been delivered of a mole;

In a fourth, that she had been confined of a male infant, which Baulieu had carried away in a basket;

And in a fifth, in which she answered from the dock, she maintained that her evidence of the countess's accouchement had been extorted from her by violence. She made no charges against either Madame de Bouille or the Marquis de Saint Maixent. On the other hand, no sooner was she under lock and key than she despatched her son Guillemin to the marchioness to inform her that she was arrested. The marchioness recognised how threatening things were, and was in a state of consternation; she immediately sent the sieur de la Foresterie, her steward, to the lieutenant-general, her counsel, a mortal enemy of the count, that he might advise her in this conjuncture, and suggest a means for helping the matron without appearing openly in the matter. The lieutenant's advice was to quash the proceedings and obtain an injunction against the continuance of the preliminaries to the action. The marchioness spent a large sum of money, and obtained this injunction; but it was immediately reversed, and the bar to the suit removed.

La Foresterie was then ordered to pass to Riom, where the sisters Quinet lived, and to bribe them heavily to secrecy. The elder one, on leaving the marchioness's service, had shaken her fist in her face, feeling secure with the secrets in her knowledge, and told her that she would repent having dismissed her and her sister, and that she would make a clean breast of the whole affair, even were she to be hung first. These girls then sent word that they wished to enter her service again; that the countess had promised them handsome terms if they would speak; and that they had even been questioned in her name by a Capuchin superior, but that they said nothing, in order to give time to prepare an answer for them. The marchioness found herself obliged to take back the girls; she kept the younger, and married the elder to Delisle, her house steward. But la Foresterie, finding himself in this network of intrigue, grew disgusted at serving such a mistress, and left her house. The marchioness told him on his departure that if he were so indiscreet as to repeat a word of what he had learned from the Quinet girls, she would punish him with a hundred poniard stabs from her major-domo Delisle. Having thus fortified her position, she thought herself secure against any hostile steps; but it happened that a certain prudent Berger, gentleman and page to the Marquis de Saint-Maixent, who enjoyed his master's confidence and went to see him in the Conciergerie, where he was imprisoned, threw some strange light on this affair. His master had narrated to him all the particulars of the accouchement of the countess and of the abduction of the child.

"I am astonished, my lord," replied the page, "that having so many dangerous affairs on hand; you did not relieve your conscience of this one."

"I intend," replied the marquis, "to restore this child to his father: I have been ordered to do so by a Capuchin to whom I confessed having carried off from the midst of the family, without their knowing it, a grandson of a marshal of France and son of a governor of a province."

The marquis had at that time permission to go out from prison occasionally on his parole. This will not surprise anyone acquainted with the ideas which prevailed at that period on the honour of a nobleman, even the greatest criminal. The marquis, profiting by this facility, took the page to see a child of about seven years of age, fair and with a beautiful countenance.

"Page," said he, "look well at this child, so that you may know him again when I shall send you to inquire about him."

He then informed him that this was the Count de Saint-Geran's son whom he had carried away.

Information of these matters coming to the ears of justice, decisive proofs were hoped for; but this happened just when other criminal informations were lodged against the marquis, which left him helpless to prevent the exposure of his crimes. Police officers were despatched in all haste to the Conciergerie; they were stopped by the gaolers, who told them that the marquis, feeling ill, was engaged with a priest who was administering the sacraments, to him. As they insisted on seeing him; the warders approached the cell: the priest came out, crying that persons must be sought to whom the sick man had a secret to reveal; that he was in a desperate state, and said he had just poisoned himself; all entered the cell.

M de Saint-Maixent was writhing on a pallet, in a pitiable condition, sometimes shrieking like a wild beast, sometimes stammering disconnected words. All that the officers could hear was —

“Monsieur le Comte . . . call . . . the Countess . . . de Saint-Geran . . . let them come. . . .” The officers earnestly begged him to try to be more explicit.

The marquis had another fit; when he opened his eyes, he said —

“Send for the countess . . . let them forgive me . . . I wish to tell them everything.” The police officers asked him to speak; one even told him that the count was there. The marquis feebly murmured —

“I am going to tell you — — ” Then he gave a loud cry and fell back dead.

It thus seemed as if fate took pains to close every mouth from which the truth might escape. Still, this avowal of a deathbed revelation to be made to the Count de Saint-Geran and the deposition of the priest who had administered the last sacraments formed a strong link in the chain of evidence.

The judge of first instruction, collecting all the information he had got, made a report the weight of which was overwhelming. The carters, the nurse, the domestic servants, all gave accounts consistent with each other; the route and the various adventures of the child were plainly detailed, from its birth till its arrival at the village of Descoutoux.

Justice, thus tracing crime to its sources, had no option but to issue a warrant for the arrest of the Marchioness de Bouilie; but it seems probable that it was not served owing to the strenuous efforts of the Count de Saint-Geran, who could not bring himself to ruin his sister, seeing that her dishonour would have been reflected on him. The marchioness hid her remorse in solitude, and appeared again no more. She died shortly after, carrying the weight of her secret till she drew her last breath.

The judge of Moulins at length pronounced sentence on the midwife, whom he declared arraigned and convicted of having suppressed the child born to the countess; for which he condemned her to be tortured and then hanged. The matron lodged an appeal against this sentence, and the case was referred to the Conciergerie.

No sooner had the count and countess seen the successive proofs of the procedure, than tenderness and natural feelings accomplished the rest. They no longer doubted that their page was their son; they stripped him at once of his livery and gave him his rank and prerogatives, under the title of the Count de la Palice.

Meanwhile, a private person named Sequeville informed the countess that he had made a very important discovery; that a child had been baptized in 1642 at St. Jean-en-Greve, and that a woman named Marie Pigoreau had taken a leading part in the affair. Thereupon inquiries were made, and it was discovered that this child had been nursed in the village of Torcy. The count obtained a warrant which enabled him to get evidence before the judge of Torcy; nothing was left undone to elicit the whole truth; he also obtained a warrant through which he obtained more information, and published a monitory. The elder of the Quinet girls on this told the Marquis de Canillac that the count was searching at a distance for things very near him. The truth shone out with great lustre through these new facts which gushed from all this fresh information. The child, exhibited in the presence of a legal commissary to the nurses and witnesses of Torcy, was identified, as much by the scars left by the midwife's nails on his head, as by his fair hair and blue eyes. This ineffaceable vestige of the woman's cruelty was the principal proof; the witnesses testified that la Pigoreau, when she visited this child with a man who appeared to be of condition, always asserted that he was the son of a great nobleman who had been entrusted to her care, and that she hoped he would make her fortune and that of those who had reared him.

The child's godfather, Paul Marmiou, a common labourer; the grocer Raguenet, who had charge of the two thousand livres; the servant of la Pigoreau, who had heard her say that the count was obliged to take this child; the witnesses who proved that la Pigoreau had told them that the child was too well born to wear a page's livery, all furnished convincing proofs; but others were forthcoming.

It was at la Pigoreau's that the Marquis de Saint-Maixent, living then at the hotel de Saint-Geran, went to see the child, kept in her house as if it were hers; Prudent Berger, the marquis's page, perfectly well remembered la Pigoreau, and also the child, whom he had seen at her house and whose history the marquis had related to him. Finally, many other witnesses heard in the course of the case, both before the three chambers of nobles, clergy, and the tiers etat, and before the judges of Torcy, Cusset, and other local magistrates, made the facts so clear and conclusive in favour of the legitimacy of the young count, that it was impossible to avoid impeaching the guilty parties. The count ordered the summons in person of la Pigoreau, who had not been compromised in the original preliminary proceedings. This drastic measure threw the intriguing woman on her beam ends, but she strove hard to right herself.

The widowed Duchess de Ventadour, daughter by her mother's second marriage of the Countess dowager of Saint-Geran, and half-sister of the count, and the Countess de Lude, daughter of the Marchioness de Bouille, from whom the young count carried away the Saint-Geran inheritance, were very warm in the matter, and spoke of disputing the judgment. La Pigoreau went to see them, and joined in concert with them.

Then commenced this famous lawsuit, which long occupied all France, and is parallel in some respects, but not in the time occupied in the hearing, to the case heard by Solomon, in which one child was claimed by two mothers.

The Marquis de Saint-Maixent and Madame de Bouille being dead, were naturally no parties to the suit, which was fought against the Saint-Geran family by la Pigoreau and Mesdames du Lude and de Ventadour. These ladies no doubt acted in good faith, at first at any rate, in refusing to believe the crime; for if they had originally known the truth it is incredible that they could have fought the case so long aid so obstinately.

They first of all went to the aid of the midwife, who had fallen sick in prison; they then consulted together, and resolved as follows:

That the accused should appeal against criminal proceedings;

That la Pigoreau should lodge a civil petition against the judgments which ordered her arrest and the confronting of witnesses;

That they should appeal against the abuse of obtaining and publishing monitories, and lodge an interpleader against the sentence of the judge of first instruction, who had condemned the matron to capital punishment;

And that finally, to carry the war into the enemy's camp, la Pigoreau should impugn the maternity of the countess, claiming the child as her own; and that the ladies should depose that the countess's accouchement was an imposture invented to cause it to be supposed that she had given birth to a child.

For more safety and apparent absence of collusion Mesdames du Lude and de Ventadour pretended to have no communication with la Pigoreau.

About this time the midwife died in prison, from an illness which vexation and remorse had aggravated. After her death, her son Guillemin confessed that she had often told him that the countess had given birth to a son whom Baulieu had carried off, and that the child entrusted to Baulieu at the chateau Saint-Geran was the same as the one recovered; the youth added that he had concealed this fact so long as it might injure his mother, and he further stated that the ladies de Ventadour and du Lude had helped her in prison with money and advice — another strong piece of presumptive evidence.

The petitions of the accused and the interpleadings of Mesdames du Lude and de Ventadour were discussed in seven hearings, before three courts convened. The suit proceeded with all the languor and chicanery of the period.

After long and specious arguments, the attorney general Bijnon gave his decision in favour of the Count and Countess of Saint-Geran, concluding thus: —

“The court rejects the civil appeal of la Pigoreau; and all the opposition and appeals of the appellants and the defendants; condemns them to fine and in costs; and seeing that the charges against la Pigoreau were of a serious nature, and that a personal summons had been decreed against her, orders her committal, recommending her to the indulgence of the court.”

By a judgment given in a sitting at the Tournelle by M. de Mesmes, on the 18th of August 1657, the appellant ladies’ and the defendants’ opposition was rejected with fine and costs. La Pigoreau was forbidden to leave the city and suburbs of Paris under penalty of summary conviction. The judgment in the case followed the rejection of the appeal.

This reverse at first extinguished the litigation of Mesdames du Lude and de Ventadour, but it soon revived more briskly than ever. These ladies, who had taken la Pigoreau in their coach to all the hearings, prompted her, in order to procrastinate, to file a fresh petition, in which she demanded the confrontment of all the witnesses to the pregnancy, and the confinement. On hearing this petition, the court gave on the 28th of August 1658 a decree ordering the confrontment, but on condition that for three days previously la Pigoreau should deliver herself a prisoner in the Conciergerie.

This judgment, the consequences of which greatly alarmed la Pigoreau, produced such an effect upon her that, after having weighed the interest she had in the suit, which she would lose by flight, against the danger to her life if she ventured her person into the hands of justice, she abandoned her false plea of maternity, and took refuge abroad. This last circumstance was a heavy blow to Mesdames du Lude and de Ventadour; but they were not at the end of their resources and their obstinacy.

Contempt of court being decreed against la Pigoreau, and the case being got up against the other defendants, the Count de Saint-Geran left for the Bourbonnais, to put in execution the order to confront the witnesses. Scarcely had he arrived in the province when he was obliged to interrupt his work to receive the king and the queen mother, who were returning from Lyons and passing through Moulins. He presented the Count de la Palice to their Majesties as his son; they received him as such. But during the visit of the king and queen the Count de Saint-Geran fell ill, over fatigued, no doubt, by the trouble he had taken to give them a suitable reception, over and above the worry of his own affairs.

During his illness, which only lasted a week, he made in his will a new acknowledgment of his son, naming his executors M. de Barriere, intendant of the province, and the sieur Vialet, treasurer of France, desiring them to bring the lawsuit to an end. His last words were for his wife and child; his only regret that he had not been able to terminate this affair. He died on the 31st of January 1659.

The maternal tenderness of the countess did not need stimulating by the injunctions of her husband, and she took up the suit with energy. The ladies de Ventadour and du Lude obtained by default letters of administration as heiresses without liability, which were granted out of the Chatelet. At the same time they appealed against the judgment of the lieutenant-general of the Bourbonnais, giving the tutelage of the young count to the countess his mother, and his guardianship to sieur de Bompre. The countess, on her side, interpleaded an appeal against the granting of letters of administration without liability, and did all in her power to bring back the case to the Tournelle. The other ladies carried their appeal to the high court, pleading that they were not parties to the lawsuit in the Tournelle.

It would serve no purpose to follow the obscure labyrinth of legal procedure of that period, and to recite all the marches and countermarches which legal subtlety suggested to the litigants. At the end of three years, on the 9th of April 1661, the countess obtained a judgment by which the king in person:

> “Assuming to his own decision the civil suit pending at the Tournelle, as well as the appeals pled by both parties, and the last petition of Mesdames du Lude and de Ventadour, sends back

> the whole case to the three assembled chambers of the States General, to be by them decided on its merits either jointly or separately, as they may deem fit."

The countess thus returned to her first battlefield. Legal science produced an immense quantity of manuscript, barristers and attorneys greatly distinguishing themselves in their calling. After an interminable hearing, and pleadings longer and more complicated than ever, which however did not bamboozle the court, judgment was pronounced in Conformity with the summing up of the attorney-general, thus —

"That passing over the petition of Mesdames Marie de la Guiche and Eleonore de Bouille, on the grounds," etc. etc.;

"Evidence taken," etc.;

"Appeals, judgments annulled," etc.;

"With regard to the petition of the late Claude de la Guiche and Suzanne de Longaunay, dated 12th August 1658,"

"Ordered,

"That the rule be made absolute;

"Which being done, Bernard de la Guiche is pronounced, maintained, and declared the lawfully born and legitimate son of Claude de la Guiche and Suzanne de Longaunay; in possession and enjoyment of the name and arms of the house of Guiche, and of all the goods left by Claude de la Guiche, his father; and Marie de la Guiche and Eleonore de Bouille are interdicted from interfering with him;

"The petitions of Eleonore de Bouille and Marie de la Guiche, dated 4th June 1664, 4th August 1665, 6th January, 10th February, 12th March, 15th April, and 2nd June, 1666, are dismissed with costs;

"Declared,

"That the defaults against la Pigoreau are confirmed; and that she, arraigned and convicted of the offences imputed to her, is condemned to be hung and strangled at a gallows erected in the Place de Greve in this city, if taken and apprehended; otherwise, in effigy at a gallows erected in the Place de Greve aforesaid; that all her property subject to confiscation is seized and confiscated from whomsoever may be in possession of it; on which property and other not subject to confiscation, is levied a fine of eight hundred Paris livres, to be paid to the King, and applied to the maintenance of prisoners in the Conciergerie of the Palace of justice, and to the costs."

Possibly a more obstinate legal contest was never waged, on both sides, but especially by those who lost it. The countess, who played the part of the true mother in the Bible, had the case so much to heart that she often told the judges, when pleading her cause, that if her son were not recognised as such, she would marry him, and convey all her property to him.

The young Count de la Palice became Count de Saint-Geran through the death of his father, married, in 1667, Claude Francoise Madeleine de Farignies, only daughter of Francois de Monfreville and of Marguerite Jourdain de Carbone de Canisi. He had only one daughter, born in 1688, who became a nun. He died at the age of fifty-five years, and thus this illustrious family became extinct.

MURAT — 1815

I — TOULON

On the 18th June, 1815, at the very moment when the destiny of Europe was being decided at Waterloo, a man dressed like a beggar was silently following the road from Toulon to Marseilles.

Arrived at the entrance of the Gorge of Ollioulles, he halted on a little eminence from which he could see all the surrounding country; then either because he had reached the end of his journey, or because, before attempting that forbidding, sombre pass which is called the Thermopylae of Provence, he wished to enjoy the magnificent view which spread to the southern horizon a little longer, he went and sat down on the edge of the ditch which bordered the road, turning his back on the mountains which rise like an amphitheatre to the north of the town, and having at his feet a rich plain covered with tropical vegetation, exotics of a conservatory, trees and flowers quite unknown in any other part of France.

Beyond this plain, glittering in the last rays of the sun, pale and motionless as a mirror lay the sea, and on the surface of the water glided one brig-of-war, which, taking advantage of a fresh land breeze, had all sails spread, and was bowling along rapidly, making for Italian seas. The beggar followed it eagerly with his eyes until it disappeared between the Cape of Gien and the first of the islands of Hyeres, then as the white apparition vanished he sighed deeply, let his head fall into his hands, and remained motionless and absorbed in his reflections until the tramplings of a cavalcade made him start; he looked up, shook back his long black hair, as if he wished to get rid of the gloomy thoughts which were overwhelming him, and, looking at the entrance to the gorge from whence the noise came, he soon saw two riders appear, who were no doubt well known to him, for, drawing himself up to his full height, he let fall the stick he was carrying, and folding his arms he turned towards them. On their side the new-comers had hardly seen him before they halted, and the foremost dismounted, threw his bridle to his companion, and uncovering, though fifty paces from the man in rags, advanced respectfully towards him. The beggar allowed him to approach with an air of sombre dignity and without a single movement; then, when he was quite near —

“Well, marshal, have, you news for me?” said the beggar.

“Yes, sire,” said the other sadly.

“And what are they?”

“Such that I could wish it were anyone but myself to announce them to your Majesty — — ”

“So the Emperor refuses my services! He forgets the victories of Aboukir, Eylau, and Moscow?”

“No, sire; but he remembers the treaty of Naples, the taking of Reggio, and the declaration of war of the viceroy of Italy.”

The beggar struck his forehead.

“Yes, yes! I daresay he thinks I deserve his reproaches, and yet it seems to me that he ought to remember that there are two men in me — the soldier whom he made his brother, and the brother whom he made a king.... Yes, as brother I have treated him ill — very ill, but as king, upon my soul, I could not have acted differently.... I had to choose between my sword and my crown, and between a regiment and a people. Listen, Brune: you do not know how it all happened. There was an English fleet, the guns of which were growling in the port, there was a Neapolitan population howling in the streets. If I had been alone, I would have passed through the fleet with one boat, through the crowd with my sword alone, but I had a wife and children. Yet I hesitated; the idea of being called traitor and deserter caused me to shed more tears than the loss of my throne, or perhaps the death of those I love best, will ever wring from me.... And so he will have nothing more to do with me? He refuses me as general, captain, private? Then what is left for me to do?”

“Sire, your Majesty must leave France immediately.”

“And if I don’t obey?”

“My orders are to arrest you and deliver you up to a court-martial!”

“Old comrade, you will not do that?”

“I shall do it, praying God to strike me dead in the moment I lay hands on you!”

“That’s you all over, Brune. You have been able to remain a good, loyal fellow. He did not give you a kingdom, he did not encircle your brow with a band of iron which men call a crown and which drives one mad; he did not place you between your conscience and your family. So I must leave France, begin my vagabond life again, and say farewell to Toulon, which recalls so many memories to me! See, Brune,” continued Murat, leaning on the arm of the marshal, “are not the pines yonder as fine as any at the Villa

Pamfili, the palms as imposing as any at Cairo, the mountains as grand as any range in the Tyrol? Look to your left, is not Cape Gien something like Castellamare and Sorrento — leaving out Vesuvius? And see, Saint-Mandrier at the farthest point of the gulf, is it not like my rock of Capri, which Lamarque juggled away so cleverly from that idiot of a Sir Hudson Lowe? My God! and I must leave all this! Is there no way of remaining on this little corner of French ground — tell me, Brune!”

“You’ll break my heart, sire!” answered the marshal.

“Well, we’ll say no more about it. What news?”

“The Emperor has left Paris to join the army. They must be fighting now.”

“Fighting now and I not there! Oh, I feel I could have been of use to him on this battlefield. How I would have gloried in charging those miserable Prussians and dastardly English! Brune, give me a passport, I’ll go at full speed, I’ll reach the army, I will make myself known to some colonel, I shall say, ‘Give me your regiment.’ I’ll charge at its head, and if the Emperor does not clasp my hand to-night, I’ll blow my brains out, I swear I will. Do what I ask, Brune, and however it may end, my eternal gratitude will be yours!”

“I cannot, sire.”

“Well, well, say no more about it.”

“And your Majesty is going to leave France?”

“I don’t know. Obey your orders, marshal, and if you come across me again, have me arrested. That’s another way of doing something for me. Life is a heavy burden nowadays. He who will relieve me of it will be welcome.... Good-bye, Brune.”

He held out his hand to the marshal, who tried to kiss it; but Murat opened his arms, the two old comrades held each other fast for a moment, with swelling hearts and eyes full of tears; then at last they parted. Brune remounted his horse, Murat picked up his stick again, and the two men went away in opposite directions, one to meet his death by assassination at Avignon, the other to be shot at Pizzo. Meanwhile, like Richard III, Napoleon was bartering his crown against a horse at Waterloo.

After the interview that has just been related, Murat took refuge with his nephew, who was called Bonafoux, and who was captain of a frigate; but this retreat could only be temporary, for the relationship would inevitably awake the suspicions of the authorities. In consequence, Bonafoux set about finding a more secret place of refuge for his uncle. He hit on one of his friends, an avocat, a man famed for his integrity, and that very evening Bonafoux went to see him.

After chatting on general subjects, he asked his friend if he had not a house at the seaside, and receiving an affirmative answer, he invited himself to breakfast there the next day; the proposal naturally enough was agreed to with pleasure. The next day at the appointed hour Bonafoux arrived at Bonette, which was the name of the country house where M. Marouin's wife and daughter were staying. M. Marouin himself was kept by his work at Toulon. After the ordinary greetings, Bonafoux stepped to the window, beckoning to Marouin to rejoin him.

"I thought," he said uneasily, "that your house was by the sea."

"We are hardly ten minutes' walk from it."

"But it is not in sight."

"That hill prevents you from seeing it."

"May we go for a stroll on the beach before breakfast is served?"

"By all means. Well, your horse is still saddled. I will order mine — I will come back for you."

Marouin went out. Bonafoux remained at the window, absorbed in his thoughts. The ladies of the house, occupied in preparations for the meal, did not observe, or did not appear to observe, his preoccupation. In five minutes Marouin came back. He was ready to start. The avocat and his friend mounted their horses and rode quickly down to the sea. On the beach the captain slackened his pace, and riding along the shore for about half an hour, he seemed to be examining the bearings of the coast with great attention. Marouin followed without inquiring into his investigations, which seemed natural enough for a naval officer.

After about an hour the two men went back to the house.

Marouin wished to have the horses unsaddled, but Bonafoux objected, saying that he must go back to Toulon immediately after lunch. Indeed, the coffee was hardly finished before he rose and took leave of his hosts. Marouin, called back to town by his work, mounted his horse too, and the two friends rode back to Toulon together. After riding along for ten minutes, Bonafoux went close to his companion and touched him on the thigh —

"Marouin," he said, "I have an important secret to confide to you."

"Speak, captain. After a father confessor, you know there is no one so discreet as a notary, and after a notary an avocat."

"You can quite understand that I did not come to your country house just for the pleasure of the ride. A more important object, a serious responsibility, preoccupied me; I have chosen you out of all my friends, believing that you were devoted enough to me to render me a great service."

"You did well, captain."

"Let us go straight to the point, as men who respect and trust each other should do. My uncle, King Joachim, is proscribed, he has taken refuge with me; but he cannot remain there, for I am the first person they will suspect. Your house is in an isolated position, and consequently we could not find a better retreat for him. You must put it at our disposal until events enable the king to come to some decision."

"It is at your service," said Marouin.

"Right. My uncle shall sleep there to-night."

"But at least give me time to make some preparations worthy of my royal guest."

"My poor Marouin, you are giving yourself unnecessary trouble, and making a vexatious delay for us: King Joachim is no longer accustomed to palaces and courtiers; he is only too happy nowadays to find a cottage with a friend in it; besides, I have let him know about it, so sure was I of your answer. He is counting on sleeping at your house to-night, and if I try to change his determination now he will see a refusal in what is only a postponement, and you will lose all the credit for your generous and noble action. There — it is agreed: to-night at ten at the Champs de Mars."

With these words the captain put his horse to a gallop and disappeared. Marouin turned his horse and went back to his country house to give the necessary orders for the reception of a stranger whose name he did not mention.

At ten o'clock at night, as had been agreed, Marouin was on the Champs de Mars, then covered with Marshal Brune's field-artillery. No one had arrived yet. He walked up and down between the gun-carriages until a functionary came to ask what he was doing. He was hard put to it to find an answer: a man is hardly likely to be wandering about in an artillery park at ten o'clock at night for the mere pleasure of the thing. He asked to see the commanding officer. The officer came up: M. Marouin informed him that he was an avocat, attached to the law courts of Toulon, and told him that he had arranged to meet someone on the Champs de Mars, not knowing that it was prohibited, and that he was still waiting for that person. After this explanation, the officer authorised him to remain, and went back to his quarters. The sentinel, a faithful adherent to discipline, continued to pace up and down with his measured step, without troubling any more about the stranger's presence.

A few moments later a group of several persons appeared from the direction of Les Lices. The night was magnificent, and the moon brilliant. Marouin recognised Bonafoux, and went up to him. The captain at once took him by the hand and led him to the king, and speaking in turn to each of them —

"Sire," he said, "here is the friend. I told you of."

Then turning to Marouin —

"Here," he said, "is the King of Naples, exile and fugitive, whom I confide to your care. I do not speak of the possibility that some day he may get back his crown, that would deprive you of the credit of your fine action.... Now, be his guide — we will follow at a distance. March!"

The king and the lawyer set out at once together. Murat was dressed in a blue coat-semi-military, semi-civil, buttoned to the throat; he wore white trousers and top boots with spurs; he had long hair, moustache, and thick whiskers, which would reach round his neck.

As they rode along he questioned his host about the situation of his country house and the facility for reaching the sea in case of a surprise. Towards midnight the king and Marouin arrived at Bonette; the royal suite came up in about ten minutes; it consisted of about thirty individuals. After partaking of some light refreshment, this little troop, the last of the court of the deposed king, retired to disperse in the town and its environs, and Murat remained alone with the women, only keeping one valet named Leblanc.

Murat stayed nearly a month in this retirement, spending all his time in answering the newspapers which accused him of treason to the Emperor. This accusation was his absorbing idea, a phantom, a spectre to him; day and night he tried to shake it off, seeking in the difficult position in which he had found himself all the reasons which it might offer him for acting as he had acted. Meanwhile the terrible news of the defeat at Waterloo had spread abroad. The Emperor who had exiled him was an exile himself, and he was waiting at Rochefort, like Murat at Toulon, to hear what his enemies would decide against him. No one knows to this day what inward prompting Napoleon obeyed when, rejecting the counsels of General

Lallemande and the devotion of Captain Bodin, he preferred England to America, and went like a modern Prometheus to be chained to the rock of St. Helena.

We are going to relate the fortuitous circumstance which led Murat to the moat of Pizzo, then we will leave it to fatalists to draw from this strange story whatever philosophical deduction may please them. We, as humble annalists, can only vouch for the truth of the facts we have already related and of those which will follow.

King Louis XVIII remounted his throne, consequently Murat lost all hope of remaining in France; he felt he was bound to go. His nephew Bonafoux fitted out a frigate for the United States under the name of Prince Rocca Romana. The whole suite went on board, and they began to carry on to the boat all the valuables which the exile had been able to save from the shipwreck of his kingdom. First a bag of gold weighing nearly a hundred pounds, a sword-sheath on which were the portraits of the king, the queen, and their children, the deed of the civil estates of his family bound in velvet and adorned with his arms. Murat carried on his person a belt where some precious papers were concealed, with about a score of unmounted diamonds, which he estimated himself to be worth four millions.

When all these preparations for departing were accomplished, it was agreed that the next day, the 1st of August, at five o’clock, a boat should fetch the king to the brig from a little bay, ten minutes’ walk from the house where he was staying. The king spent the night making out a route for M. Marouin by which he could reach the queen, who was then in Austria, I think.

It was finished just as it was time to leave, and on crossing the threshold of the hospitable house where he had found refuge he gave it to his host, slipped into a volume of a pocket edition of Voltaire. Below the story of ‘Micromegas’ the king had written: [The volume is still in the hands of M. Marouin, at Toulon.]

Reassure yourself, dear Caroline; although unhappy, I am free. I am departing, but I do not know whither I am bound. Wherever I may be my heart will be with you and my children. “J. M.”

Ten minutes later Murat and his host were waiting on the beach at Bonette for the boat which was to take them out to the ship.

They waited until midday, and nothing appeared; and yet on the horizon they could see the brig which was to be his refuge, unable to lie at anchor on account of the depth of water, sailing along the coast at the risk of giving the alarm to the sentinels.

At midday the king, worn out with fatigue and the heat of the sun, was lying on the beach, when a servant arrived, bringing various refreshments, which Madame Marouin, being very uneasy, had sent at all hazards to her husband. The king took a glass of wine and water and ate an orange, and got up for a moment to see whether the boat he was expecting was nowhere visible on the vastness of the sea. There was not a boat in sight, only the brig tossing gracefully on the horizon, impatient to be off, like a horse awaiting its master.

The king sighed and lay down again on the sand.

The servant went back to Bonette with a message summoning M. Marouin's brother to the beach. He arrived in a few minutes, and almost immediately afterwards galloped off at full speed to Toulon, in order to find out from M. Bonafoux why the boat had not been sent to the king. On reaching the captain's house, he found it occupied by an armed force. They were making a search for Murat.

The messenger at last made his way through the tumult to the person he was in search of, and he heard that the boat had started at the appointed time, and that it must have gone astray in the creeks of Saint Louis and Sainte Marguerite. This was, in fact, exactly what had happened.

By five o'clock M. Marouin had reported the news to his brother and the king. It was bad news. The king had no courage left to defend his life even by flight, he was in a state of prostration which sometimes overwhelms the strongest of men, incapable of making any plan for his own safety, and leaving M. Marouin to do the best he could. Just then a fisherman was coming into harbour singing. Marouin beckoned to him, and he came up.

Marouin began by buying all the man's fish; then, when he had paid him with a few coins, he let some gold glitter before his eyes, and offered him three louis if he would take a passenger to the brig which was lying off the Croix-des-Signaux. The fisherman agreed to do it. This chance of escape gave back Murat all his strength; he got up, embraced Marouin, and begged him to go to the queen with the volume of Voltaire. Then he sprang into the boat, which instantly left the shore.

It was already some distance from the land when the king stopped the man who was rowing and signed to Marouin that he had forgotten something. On the beach lay a bag into which Murat had put a magnificent pair of pistols mounted with silver gilt which the queen had given him, and which he set great store on. As soon as he was within hearing he shouted his reason for returning to his host. Marouin seized the valise, and without waiting for Murat to land he threw it into the boat; the bag flew open, and one of the pistols fell out. The fisherman only glanced once at the royal weapon, but it was enough to make him notice its richness and to arouse his suspicions. Nevertheless, he went on rowing towards the frigate. M. Marouin seeing him disappear in the distance, left his brother on the beach, and bowing once more to the king, returned to the house to calm his wife's anxieties and to take the repose of which he was in much need.

Two hours later he was awakened. His house was to be searched in its turn by soldiers. They searched every nook and corner without finding a trace of the king. Just as they were getting desperate, the brother came in; Maroum smiled at him; believing the king to be safe, but by the newcomer's expression he saw that some fresh misfortune was in the wind. In the first moment's respite given him by his visitors he went up to his brother.

"Well," he said, "I hope the king is on board?"

"The king is fifty yards away, hidden in the outhouse."

"Why did he come back?"

"The fisherman pretended he was afraid of a sudden squall, and refused to take him off to the brig."

"The scoundrel!"

The soldiers came in again.

They spent the night in fruitless searching about the house and buildings; several times they passed within a few steps of the king, and he could hear their threats and imprecations. At last, half an hour before dawn, they went away. Marouin watched them go, and when they were out of sight he ran to the king. He found him lying in a corner, a pistol clutched in each hand. The unhappy man had been overcome by fatigue and had fallen asleep. Marouin hesitated a moment to bring him back to his wandering, tormented life, but there was not a minute to lose. He woke him.

They went down to the beach at once. A morning mist lay over the sea. They could not see anything two hundred yards ahead. They were obliged to wait. At last the first sunbeams began to pierce this nocturnal mist. It slowly dispersed, gliding over the sea as clouds move in the sky. The king's hungry eye roved over the tossing waters before him, but he saw nothing, yet he could not banish the hope that somewhere behind that moving curtain he would find his refuge. Little by little the horizon came into view; light wreaths of mist, like smoke, still floated about the surface of the water, and in each of them the king thought he recognised the white sails of his vessel. The last gradually vanished, the sea was revealed in all its immensity, it was deserted. Not daring to delay any longer, the ship had sailed away in the night.

"So," said the king, "the die is cast. I will go to Corsica."

The same day Marshal Brune was assassinated at Avignon.

II — CORSICA

Once more on the same beach at Bonette, in the same bay where he had awaited the boat in vain, still attended by his band of faithful followers, we find Murat on the 22nd August in the same year. It was no longer by Napoleon that he was threatened, it was by Louis XVIII that he was proscribed; it was no longer the military loyalty of Marshal Brune who came with tears in his eyes to give notice of the orders he had received, but the ungrateful hatred of M. de Riviere, who had set a price [48,000 francs.] on the head of the man who had saved his own.[Conspiracy of Pichegru.] M. de Riviere had indeed written to the ex-King of Naples advising him to abandon himself to the good faith and humanity of the King of France, but his vague invitation had not seemed sufficient guarantee to the outlaw, especially on the part of one who had allowed the assassination almost before his eyes of a man who carried a safe-conduct signed by himself. Murat knew of the massacre of the Mamelukes at Marseilles, the assassination of Brune at Avignon; he had been warned the day before by the police of Toulon that a formal order for his arrest was out; thus it was impossible that he should remain any longer in France. Corsica, with its hospitable towns, its friendly mountains, its impenetrable forests, was hardly fifty leagues distant; he must reach Corsica, and wait in its towns, mountains, and forests until the crowned heads of Europe should decide the fate of the man they had called brother for seven years.

At ten o’clock at, night the king went down to the shore. The boat which was to take him across had not reached the rendezvous, but this time there was not the slightest fear that it would fail; the bay had been reconnoitred during the day by three men devoted to the fallen fortunes of the king — Messieurs Blancard, Langlade, and Donadieu, all three naval officers, men of ability and warm heart, who had sworn by their own lives to convey Murat to Corsica, and who were in fact risking their lives in order to accomplish their promise. Murat saw the deserted shore without uneasiness, indeed this delay afforded him a few more moments of patriotic satisfaction.

On this little patch of land, this strip of sand, the unhappy exile clung to his mother France, for once his foot touched the vessel which was to carry him away, his separation from France would be long, if not eternal. He started suddenly amidst these thoughts and sighed: he had just perceived a sail gliding over the waves like a phantom through the transparent darkness of the southern night. Then a sailor's song was heard; Murat recognised the appointed signal, and answered it by burning the priming of a pistol, and the boat immediately ran inshore; but as she drew three feet of water, she was obliged to stop ten or twelve feet from the beach; two men dashed into the water and reached the beach, while a third remained crouching in the stern-sheets wrapped in his boat-cloak.

"Well, my good friends," said the king, going towards Blancard and Langlade until he felt the waves wet his feet "the moment is come, is it not? The wind is favourable, the sea calm, we must get to sea."

"Yes," answered Langlade, "yes, we must start; and yet perhaps it would be wiser to wait till to-morrow."

"Why?" asked Murat.

Langlade did not answer, but turning towards the west, he raised his hand, and according to the habit of sailors, he whistled to call the wind.

"That's no good," said Donadieu, who had remained in the boat. "Here are the first gusts; you will have more than you know what to do with in a minute.... Take care, Langlade, take care! Sometimes in calling the wind you wake up a storm."

Murat started, for he thought that this warning which rose from the sea had been given him by the spirit of the waters; but the impression was a passing one, and he recovered himself in a moment.

"All the better," he said; "the more wind we have, the faster we shall go."

"Yes," answered Langlade, "but God knows where it will take us if it goes on shifting like this."

"Don't start to-night, sire," said Blancard, adding his voice to those of his two companions.

"But why not?"

"You see that bank of black cloud there, don't you? Well, at sunset it was hardly visible, now it covers a good part of the sky, in an hour there won't be a star to be seen."

"Are you afraid?" asked Murat.

"Afraid!" answered Langlade. "Of what? Of the storm? I might as well ask if your Majesty is afraid of a cannon-ball. We have demurred solely on your account, sire; do you think seadogs like ourselves would delay on account of the storm?”

“Then let us go!” cried Murat, with a sigh.

“Good-bye, Marouin.... God alone can reward you for what you have done for me. I am at your orders, gentlemen.”

At these words the two sailors seized the king end hoisted him on to their shoulders, and carried him into the sea; in another moment he was on board. Langlade and Blancard sprang in behind him. Donadieu remained at the helm, the two other officers undertook the management of the boat, and began their work by unfurling the sails. Immediately the pinnace seemed to rouse herself like a horse at touch of the spur; the sailors cast a careless glance back, and Murat feeling that they were sailing away, turned towards his host and called for a last time —

“You have your route as far as Trieste. Do not forget my wife!... Good-bye-good-bye — — !”

“God keep you, sire!” murmured Marouin.

And for some time, thanks to the white sail which gleamed through the darkness, he could follow with his eyes the boat which was rapidly disappearing; at last it vanished altogether. Marouin lingered on the shore, though he could see nothing; then he heard a cry, made faint by the distance; it was Murat’s last adieu to France.

When M. Marouin was telling me these details one evening on the very spot where it all happened, though twenty years had passed, he remembered clearly the slightest incidents of the embarkation that night. From that moment he assured me that a presentiment of misfortune seized him; he could not tear himself away from the shore, and several times he longed to call the king back, but, like a man in a dream, he opened his mouth without being able to utter a sound. He was afraid of being thought foolish, and it was not until one o’clock that is, two and a half hours after the departure of the boat-that he went home with a sad and heavy heart.

The adventurous navigators had taken the course from Toulon to Bastia, and at first it seemed to the king that the sailors’ predictions were belied; the wind, instead of getting up, fell little by little, and two hours after the departure the boat was rocking without moving forward or backward on the waves, which were sinking from moment to moment. Murat sadly watched the phosphorescent furrow trailing behind the little boat: he had nerved himself to face a storm, but not a dead calm, and without even interrogating his companions, of whose uneasiness he took no account, he lay down in the boat, wrapped in his cloak, closing his eyes as if he were asleep, and following the flow of his thoughts, which were far more tumultuous than that of the waters. Soon the two sailors, thinking him asleep, joined the pilot, and sitting down beside the helm, they began to consult together.

"You were wrong, Langlade," said Donadieu, "in choosing a craft like this, which is either too small or else too big; in an open boat we can never weather a storm, and without oars we can never make any way in a calm."

"'Fore God! I had no choice. I was obliged to take what I could get, and if it had not been the season for tunny-fishing I might not even have got this wretched pinnace, or rather I should have had to go into the harbour to find it, and they keep such a sharp lookout that I might well have gone in without coming out again."

"At least it is seaworthy," said Blancard.

"Pardieu, you know what nails and planks are when they have been soaked in sea-water for ten years. On any ordinary occasion, a man would rather not go in her from Marseilles to the Chateau d'If, but on an occasion like this one would willingly go round the world in a nutshell."

"Hush!" said Donadieu. The sailors listened; a distant growl was heard, but it was so faint that only the experienced ear of a sailor could have distinguished it.

"Yes, yes," said Langlade, "it is a warning for those who have legs or wings to regain the homes and nests that they ought never to have left."

"Are we far from the islands?" asked Donadieu quickly.

"About a mile off."

"Steer for them."

"What for?" asked Murat, looking up.

"To put in there, sire, if we can."

"No, no," cried Murat; "I will not land except in Corsica. I will not leave France again. Besides, the sea is calm and the wind is getting up again — "

"Down with the sails!" shouted Donadieu. Instantly Langlade and Blancard jumped forward to carry out the order. The sail slid down the mast and fell in a heap in the bottom of the boat.

"What are you doing?" cried Murat. "Do you forget that I am king and that I command you?"

"Sire," said Donadieu, "there is a king more powerful than you — God; there is a voice which drowns yours — the voice of the tempest: let us save your Majesty if possible, and demand nothing more of us."

Just then a flash of lightning quivered along the horizon, a clap of thunder nearer than the first one was heard, a light foam appeared on the surface of the water, and the boat trembled like a living thing. Murat began to understand that danger was approaching, then he got up smiling, threw his hat behind him, shook back his long hair, and breathed in the storm like the smell of powder — the soldier was ready for the battle.

"Sire," said Donadieu, "you have seen many a battle, but perhaps you have never watched a storm if you are curious about it, cling to the mast, for you have a fine opportunity now."

"What ought I to do?" said Murat. "Can I not help you in any way?"

"No, not just now, sire; later you will be useful at the pumps."

During this dialogue the storm had drawn near; it rushed on the travellers like a war-horse, breathing out fire and wind through its nostrils, neighing like thunder, and scattering the foam of the waves beneath its feet.

Donadieu turned the rudder, the boat yielded as if it understood the necessity for prompt obedience, and presented the poop to the shock of wind; then the squall passed, leaving the sea quivering, and everything was calm again. The storm took breath.

"Will that gust be all?" asked Murat.

"No, your Majesty, that was the advance-guard only; the body of the army will be up directly."

"And are you not going to prepare for it?" asked the king gaily.

"What could we do?" said Donadieu. "We have not an inch of canvas to catch the wind, and as long as we do not make too much water, we shall float like a cork. Look out-sire!"

Indeed, a second hurricane was on its way, bringing rain and lightning; it was swifter than the first. Donadieu endeavoured to repeat the same manoeuvre, but he could not turn before the wind struck the boat, the mast bent like a reed; the boat shipped a wave.

"To the pumps!" cried Donadieu. "Sire, now is the moment to help us —
"

Blancard, Langlade, and Murat seized their hats and began to bale out the boat. The position of the four men was terrible — it lasted three hours.

At dawn the wind fell, but the sea was still high. They began to feel the need of food: all the provisions had been spoiled by sea-water, only the wine had been preserved from its contact.

The king took a bottle and swallowed a little wine first, then he passed it to his companions, who drank in their turn: necessity had overcome etiquette. By chance Langlade had on him a few chocolates, which he offered to the king. Murat divided them into four equal parts, and forced his companions to take their shares; then, when the meal was over, they steered for Corsica, but the boat had suffered so much that it was improbable that it would reach Bastia.

The whole day passed without making ten miles; the boat was kept under the jib, as they dared not hoist the mainsail, and the wind was so variable that much time was lost in humouring its caprices.

By evening the boat had drawn a considerable amount of water, it penetrated between the boards, the handkerchiefs of the crew served to plug up the leaks, and night, which was descending in mournful gloom, wrapped them a second time in darkness. Prostrated with fatigue, Murat fell asleep, Blancard and Langlade took their places beside Donadieu, and the three men, who seemed insensible to the calls of sleep and fatigue, watched over his slumbers.

The night was calm enough apparently, but low grumblings were heard now and then.

The three sailors looked at each other strangely and then at the king, who was sleeping at the bottom of the boat, his cloak soaked with sea-water, sleeping as soundly as he had slept on the sands of Egypt or the snows of Russia.

Then one of them got up and went to the other end of the boat, whistling between his teeth a Provencal air; then, after examining the sky, the waves; and the boat, he went back to his comrades and sat down, muttering, “Impossible! Except by a miracle, we shall never make the land.”

The night passed through all its phases. At dawn there was a vessel in sight.

“A sail!” cried Donadieu, — ”a sail!”

At this cry the king — awoke; and soon a little trading brig hove in sight, going from Corsica to Toulon.

Donadieu steered for the brig, Blancard hoisted enough sail to work the boat, and Langlade ran to the prow and held up the king’s cloak on the end of a sort of harpoon. Soon the voyagers perceived that they had been sighted, the brig went about to approach them, and in ten minutes they found themselves within fifty yards of it. The captain appeared in the bows.

Then the king hailed him and offered him a substantial reward if he would receive them on board and take them to Corsica. The captain listened to the proposal; then immediately turning to the crew, he gave an order in an undertone which Donadieu could not hear, but which he understood probably by the gesture, for he instantly gave Langlade and Blancard the order to make away from the schooner. They obeyed with the unquestioning promptitude of sailors; but the king stamped his foot.

"What are you doing, Donadieu? What are you about? Don't you see that she is coming up to us?"

"Yes — upon my soul — so she is.... Do as I say, Langlade; ready, Blancard. Yes, she is coming upon us, and perhaps I was too late in seeing this. That's all right — that's all right: my part now."

Then he forced over the rudder, giving it so violent a jerk that the boat, forced to change her course suddenly, seemed to rear and plunge like a horse struggling against the curb; finally she obeyed. A huge wave, raised by the giant bearing down on the pinnace, carried it on like a leaf, and the brig passed within a few feet of the stern.

"Ah!.... traitor!" cried the king, who had only just begun to realise the intention of the captain. At the same time, he pulled a pistol from his belt, crying "Board her! board her!" and tried to fire on the brig, but the powder was wet and would not catch. The king was furious, and went on shouting "Board her! board her!"

"Yes, the wretch, or rather the imbecile," said Donadieu, "he took us for pirates, and wanted to sink us — as if we needed him to do that!"

Indeed, a single glance at the boat showed that she was beginning to make water.

The effort — to escape which Donadieu had made had strained the boat terribly, and the water was pouring in by a number of leaks between the planks; they had to begin again bailing out with their hats, and went on at it for ten hours. Then for the second time Donadieu heard the consoling cry, "A sail! a sail!" The king and his companions immediately left off bailing; they hoisted the sails again, and steered for the vessel which was coming towards them, and neglected to fight against the water, which was rising rapidly.

From that time forth it was a question of time, of minutes, of seconds; it was a question of reaching the ship before the boat foundered.

The vessel, however, seemed to understand the desperate position of the men imploring help; she was coming up at full speed. Langlade was the first to recognise her; she was a Government felucca plying between Toulon and Bastia. Langlade was a friend of the captain, and he called his name with the penetrating voice of desperation, and he was heard. It was high time: the water kept on rising, and the king and his companions were already up to their knees; the boat groaned in its death-struggle; it stood still, and began to go round and round.

Just then two or three ropes thrown from the felucca fell upon the boat; the king seized one, sprang forward, and reached the rope-ladder: he was saved.

Blancard and Langlade immediately followed. Donadieu waited until the last, as was his duty, and as he put his foot on the ladder he felt the other boat begin to go under; he turned round with all a sailor’s calm, and saw the gulf open its jaws beneath him, and then the shattered boat capsized, and immediately disappeared. Five seconds more, and the four men who were saved would have been lost beyond recall! [These details are well known to the people of Toulon, and I have heard them myself a score of times during the two stays that I made in that town during 1834 and 1835. Some of the people who related them had them first-hand from Langlade and Donadieu themselves.]

Murat had hardly gained the deck before a man came and fell at his feet: it was a Mameluke whom he had taken to Egypt in former years, and had since married at Castellamare; business affairs had taken him to Marseilles, where by a miracle he had escaped the massacre of his comrades, and in spite of his disguise and fatigue he had recognised his former master.

His exclamations of joy prevented the king from keeping up his incognito. Then Senator Casabianca, Captain Oletta, a nephew of Prince Baciocchi, a staff-paymaster called Boerco, who were themselves fleeing from the massacres of the South, were all on board the vessel, and improvising a little court, they greeted the king with the title of “your Majesty.” It had been a sudden embarkation, it brought about a swift change: he was no longer Murat the exile; he was Joachim, the King of Naples. The exile’s refuge disappeared with the foundered boat; in its place Naples and its magnificent gulf appeared on the horizon like a marvellous mirage, and no doubt the primary idea of the fatal expedition of Calabria was originated in the first days of exultation which followed those hours of anguish. The king, however, still uncertain of the welcome which awaited him in Corsica, took the name of the Count of Campo Melle, and it was under this name that he landed at Bastia on the 25th August. But this precaution was useless; three days after his arrival, not a soul but knew of his presence in the town.

Crowds gathered at once, and cries of “Long live Joachim!” were heard, and the king, fearing to disturb the public peace, left Bastia the same evening with his three companions and his Mameluke. Two hours later he arrived at Viscovato, and knocked at the door of General Franceschetti, who had been in his service during his whole reign, and who, leaving Naples at the same time as the king, had gone to Corsica with his wife, to live with his father-in-law, M. Colonna Cicaldi.

He was in the middle of supper when a servant told him that a stranger was asking to speak to him — he went out, and found Murat wrapped in a military greatcoat, a sailor’s cap drawn down on his head, his beard grown long, and wearing a soldier’s trousers, boots, and gaiters.

The general stood still in amazement; Murat fixed his great dark eyes on him, and then, folding his arms: —

“Franceschetti,” said he, “have you room at your table for your general, who is hungry? Have you a shelter under your roof for your king, who is an exile?”

Franceschetti looked astonished as he recognised Joachim, and could only answer him by falling on his knees and kissing his hand. From that moment the general’s house was at Murat’s disposal.

The news of the king’s arrival had hardly been handed about the neighbourhood before officers of all ranks hastened to Viscovato, veterans who had fought under him, Corsican hunters who were attracted by his adventurous character; in a few days the general’s house was turned into a palace, the village into a royal capital, the island into a kingdom.

Strange rumours were heard concerning Murat’s intentions. An army of nine hundred men helped to give them some amount of confirmation. It was then that Blancard, Donadieu, and Langlade took leave of him; Murat wished to keep them, but they had been vowed to the rescue of the exile, not to the fortunes of the king.

We have related how Murat had met one of his former Mamelukes, a man called Othello, on board the Bastia mailboat. Othello had followed him to Viscovato, and the ex-King of Naples considered how to make use of him.

Family relations recalled him naturally to Castellamare, and Murat ordered him to return there, entrusting to him letters for persons on whose devotion he could depend. Othello started, and reached his father-in-law's safely, and thought he could confide in him; but the latter was horror-struck, and alarmed the police, who made a descent on Othello one night, and seized the letters.

The next day each man to whom a letter was addressed was arrested and ordered to answer Murat as if all was well, and to point out Salerno as the best place for disembarking: five out of seven were dastards enough to obey; the two remaining, who were two Spanish brothers, absolutely refused; they were thrown into a dungeon.

However, on the 17th September, Murat left Viscovato; General Franceschetti and several Corsican officers served as escort; he took the road to Ajaccio by Cotone, the mountains of Serra and Bosco, Venaco and Vivaro, by the gorges of the forest of Vezzanovo and Bogognone; he was received and feted like a king everywhere, and at the gates of the towns he was met by deputations who made him speeches and saluted him with the title of "Majesty"; at last, on the 23rd September, he arrived at Ajaccio. The whole population awaited him outside the walls, and his entry into the town was a triumphal procession; he was taken to the inn which had been fixed upon beforehand by the quartermasters. It was enough to turn the head of a man less impressionable than Murat; as for him, he was intoxicated with it. As he went into the inn he held out his hand to Franceschetti.

"You see," he said, "what the Neapolitans will do for me by the way the Corsicans receive me."

It was the first mention which had escaped him of his plans for the future, and from that very day he began to give orders for his departure.

They collected ten little feluccas: a Maltese, named Barbara, former captain of a frigate of the Neapolitan navy, was appointed commander-in-chief of the expedition; two hundred and fifty men were recruited and ordered to hold themselves in readiness for the first signal.

Murat was only waiting for the answers to Othello's letters: they arrived on the afternoon of the 28th. Murat invited all his officers to a grand dinner, and ordered double pay and double rations to the men.

The king was at dessert when the arrival of M. Maceroni was announced to him: he was the envoy of the foreign powers who brought Murat the answer which he had been awaiting so long at Toulon. Murat left the table and went into another room. M. Maceroni introduced himself as charged with an official mission, and handed the king the Emperor of Austria's ultimatum. It was couched in the following terms:

> "Monsieur Maceroni is authorised by these presents to announce to King Joachim that His Majesty the Emperor of Austria will afford him shelter in his States on the following terms: —
>
> "1. The king is to take a private name. The queen having adopted that of Lipano, it is proposed that the king should do likewise.
>
> "2. It will be permitted to the king to choose a town in Bohemia, Moravia, or the Tyrol, as a place of residence. He could even inhabit a country house in one of these same provinces without inconvenience.
>
> "3. The king is to give his word of honour to His Imperial and Royal Majesty that he will never leave the States of Austria without the express-permission of the Emperor, and that he is to live like a private gentleman of distinction, but submitting to the laws in force in the States of Austria.
>
> "In attestation whereof, and to guard against abuse, the undersigned has received the order of the Emperor to sign the present declaration.
>
> "(Signed) PRINCE OF METTERNICH
>
> "PARIS, 1st Sept. 1815."

Murat smiled as he finished reading, then he signed to M. Maceroni to follow him:

He led him on to the terrace of the house, which looked over the whole town, and over which a banner floated as it might on a royal castle. From thence they could see Ajaccio all gay and illuminated, the port with its little fleet, and the streets crowded with people, as if it were a fete-day.

Hardly had the crowd set eyes on Murat before a universal cry arose, "Long live Joachim, brother of Napoleon! Long live the King of Naples!"

Murat bowed, and the shouts were redoubled, and the garrison band played the national airs.

M Maceroni did not know how to believe his own eyes and ears.

When the king had enjoyed his astonishment, he invited him to go down to the drawing-room. His staff were there, all in full uniform: one might have been at Caserte or at Capo di Monte. At last, after a moment’s hesitation, Maceroni approached Murat.

“Sir,” he said, “what is my answer to be to His Majesty the Emperor of Austria?”

“Sir,” answered Murat, with the lofty dignity which sat so well on his fine face, “tell my brother Francis what you have seen and heard, and add that I am setting out this very night to reconquer my kingdom of Naples.”

III — PIZZO

The letters which had made Murat resolve to leave Corsica had been brought to him by a Calabrian named Luidgi. He had presented himself to the king as the envoy of the Arab, Othello, who had been thrown into prison in Naples, as we have related, as well as the seven recipients of the letters.

The answers, written by the head of the Neapolitan police, indicated the port of Salerno as the best place for Joachim to land; for King Ferdinand had assembled three thousand Austrian troops at that point, not daring to trust the Neapolitan soldiers, who cherished a brilliant and enthusiastic memory of Murat.

Accordingly the flotilla was directed for the Gulf of Salerno, but within sight of the island of Capri a violent storm broke over it, and drove it as far as Paola, a little seaport situated ten miles from Cosenza. Consequently the vessels were anchored for the night of the 5th of October in a little indentation of the coast not worthy of the name of a roadstead. The king, to remove all suspicion from the coastguards and the Sicilian scorridori, [Small vessels fitted up as ships-of-war.] ordered that all lights should be extinguished and that the vessels should tack about during the night; but towards one o’clock such a violent land-wind sprang up that the expedition was driven out to sea, so that on the 6th at dawn the king’s vessel was alone.

During the morning they overhauled Captain Cicconi’s felucca, and the two ships dropped anchor at four o’clock in sight of Santo-Lucido. In the evening the king commanded Ottoviani, a staff officer, to go ashore and reconnoitre. Luidgi offered to accompany him. Murat accepted his services. So Ottoviani and his guide went ashore, whilst Cicconi and his felucca put out to sea in search of the rest of the fleet.

Towards eleven o’clock at night the lieutenant of the watch descried a man in the waves swimming to the vessel. As soon as he was within hearing the lieutenant hailed him. The swimmer immediately made himself known: it was Luidgi. They put out the boat, and he came on board. Then he told them that Ottoviani had been arrested, and he had only escaped himself by jumping into the sea. Murat’s first idea was to go to the rescue of Ottoviani; but Luidgi made the king realise the danger and uselessness of such an attempt; nevertheless, Joachim remained agitated and irresolute until two o'clock in the morning.

At last he gave the order to put to sea again. During the manoeuvre which effected this a sailor fell overboard and disappeared before they had time to help him. Decidedly these were ill omens.

On the morning of the 7th two vessels were in sight. The king gave the order to prepare for action, but Barbara recognised them as Cicconi's felucca and Courrand's lugger, which had joined each other and were keeping each other company. They hoisted the necessary signals, and the two captains brought up their vessels alongside the admiral's.

While they were deliberating as to what route to follow, a boat came up to Murat's vessel. Captain Pernice was on board with a lieutenant. They came to ask the king's permission to board his ship, not wishing to remain on Courrand's, for in their opinion he was a traitor.

Murat sent to fetch him, and in spite of his protestations he was made to descend into a boat with fifty men, and the boat was moored to the vessel. The order was carried out at once, and the little squadron advanced, coasting along the shores of Calabria without losing sight of them; but at ten o'clock in the evening, just as they came abreast of the Gulf of Santa-Eufemia, Captain Courrand cut the rope which moored his boat to the vessel, and rowed away from the fleet.

Murat had thrown himself on to his bed without undressing; they brought him the news.

He rushed up to the deck, and arrived in time to see the boat, which was fleeing in the direction of Corsica, grow small and vanish in the distance. He remained motionless, not uttering a cry, giving no signs of rage; he only sighed and let his head fall on his breast: it was one more leaf falling from the exhausted tree of his hopes.

General Franceschetti profited by this hour of discouragement to advise him not to land in Calabria, and to go direct to Trieste, in order to claim from Austria the refuge which had been offered.

The king was going through one of those periods of extreme exhaustion, of mortal depression, when courage quite gives way: he refused flatly at first, and there at last agreed to do it.

Just then the general perceived a sailor lying on some coils of ropes, within hearing of all they said; he interrupted himself, and pointed him out to Murat.

The latter got up, went to see the man, and recognised Luidgi; overcome with exhaustion, he had fallen asleep on deck. The king satisfied himself that the sleep was genuine, and besides he had full confidence in the man. The conversation, which had been interrupted for a moment, was renewed: it was agreed that without saying anything about the new plans, they would clear Cape Spartivento and enter the Adriatic; then the king and the general went below again to the lower deck.

The next day, the 8th October, they found themselves abreast of Pizzo, when Joachim, questioned by Barbara as to what he proposed to do, gave the order to steer for Messina. Barbara answered that he was ready to obey, but that they were in need of food and water; consequently he offered to go on, board Cicconi's vessel and to land with him to get stores. The king agreed; Barbara asked for the passports which he had received from the allied powers, in order, he said, not to be molested by the local authorities.

These documents were too important for Murat to consent to part with them; perhaps the king was beginning to suspect: he refused. Barbara insisted; Murat ordered him to land without the papers; Barbara flatly refused.

The king, accustomed to being obeyed, raised his riding-whip to strike the Maltese, but, changing his resolution, he ordered the soldiers to prepare their arms, the officers to put on full uniform; he himself set the example. The disembarkation was decided upon, and Pizzo was to become the Golfe Juan of the new Napoleon.

Consequently the vessels were steered for land. The king got down into a boat with twenty-eight soldiers and three servants, amongst whom was Luidgi. As they drew near the shore General Franceschetti made a movement as if to land, but Murat stopped him.

"It is for me to land first," he said, and he sprang on shore.

He was dressed in a general's coat, white breeches and riding-boots, a belt carrying two pistols, a gold-embroidered hat with a cockade fastened in with a clasp made of fourteen brilliants, and lastly he carried under his arm the banner round which he hoped to rally his partisans. The town clock of Pizzo struck ten. Murat went straight up to the town, from which he was hardly a hundred yards distant. He followed the wide stone staircase which led up to it.

It was Sunday. Mass was about to be celebrated, and the whole population had assembled in the Great Square when he arrived. No one recognised him, and everyone gazed with astonishment at the fine officer. Presently he saw amongst the peasants a former sergeant of his who had served in his guard at Naples. He walked straight up to him and put his hand on the man’s shoulder.

“Tavella,” he said, “don’t you recognise me?”

But as the man made no answer:

“I am Joachim Murat, I am your king,” he said. “Yours be the honour to shout ‘Long live Joachim!’ first.”

Murat’s suite instantly made the air ring with acclamations, but the Calabrians remained silent, and not one of his comrades took up the cry for which the king himself had given the signal; on the contrary, a low murmur ran through the crowd. Murat well understood this forerunner of the storm.

“Well,” he said to Tavella, “if you won’t cry ‘Long live Joachim!’ you can at least fetch me a horse, and from sergeant I will promote you to be captain.”

Tavella walked away without answering, but instead of carrying out the king’s behest, went into his house, and did not appear again.

In the meantime the people were massing together without evincing any of the sympathy that the king had hoped for. He felt that he was lost if he did not act instantly.

“To Monteleone!” he cried, springing forward towards the road which led to that town.

“To Monteleone!” shouted his officers and men, as they followed him.

And the crowd, persistently silent, opened to let them pass.

But they had hardly left the square before a great disturbance broke out. A man named Giorgio Pellegrino came out of his house with a gun and crossed the square, shouting, “To your arms!”

He knew that Captain Trenta Capelli commanding the Cosenza garrison was just then in Pizzo, and he was going to warn him.

The cry “To arms!” had more effect on the crowd than the cry “Long live Joachim!”

Every Calabrian possesses a gun, and each one ran to fetch his, and when Trenta Capelli and Giorgio Pellegrino came back to the square they found nearly two hundred armed men there.

They placed themselves at the head of the column, and hastened forward in pursuit of the king; they came up with him about ten minutes from the square, where the bridge is nowadays. Seeing them, Murat stopped and waited for them.

Trenta Capelli advanced, sword in hand, towards the king.

“Sir,” said the latter, “will you exchange your captain’s epaulettes for a general’s? Cry ‘Long live Joachim!’ and follow me with these brave fellows to Monteleone.”

“Sire,” said Trenta Capelli, “we are the faithful subjects of King Ferdinand, and we come to fight you, and not to bear you company. Give yourself up, if you would prevent bloodshed.”

Murat looked at the captain with an expression which it would be impossible to describe; then without deigning to answer, he signed to Cagelli to move away, while his other hand went to his pistol. Giotgio Pellegrino perceived the movement.

“Down, captain, down!” he cried. The captain obeyed. Immediately a bullet whistled over his head and brushed Murat’s head.

“Fire!” commanded Franceschetti.

“Down with your arms!” cried Murat.

Waving his handkerchief in his right hand, he made a step towards the peasants, but at the same moment a number of shots were fired, an officer and two or three men fell. In a case like this, when blood has begun to flow, there is no stopping it.

Murat knew this fatal truth, and his course of action was rapidly decided on. Before him he had five hundred armed men, and behind him a precipice thirty feet high: he sprang from the jagged rock on which he was standing, and alighting on the sand, jumped up safe and sound. General Franceschetti and his aide-de-camp Campana were able to accomplish the jump in the same way, and all three went rapidly down to the sea through the little wood which lay within a hundred yards of the shore, and which hid them for a few moments from their enemies.

As they came out of the wood a fresh discharge greeted them, bullets whistled round them, but no one was hit, and the three fugitives went on down to the beach.

It was only then that the king perceived that the boat which had brought them to land had gone off again. The three ships which composed the fleet, far from remaining to guard his landing, were sailing away at full speed into the open sea.

The Maltese, Barbara, was going off not only with Murat’s fortune, but with his hopes likewise, his salvation, his very life. They could not believe in such treachery, and the king took it for some manoeuvre of seamanship, and seeing a fishing-boat drawn up on the beach on some nets, he called to his two companions, “Launch that boat!”

They all began to push it down to the sea with the energy of despair, the strength of agony.

No one had dared to leap from the rock in pursuit of them; their enemies, forced to make a detour, left them a few moments of liberty.

But soon shouts were heard: Giorgio Pellegrino, Trenta Capelli, followed by the whole population of Pizzo, rushed out about a hundred and fifty paces from where Murat, Franceschetti, and Campana were straining themselves to make the boat glide down the sand.

These cries were immediately followed by a volley. Campana fell, with a bullet through his heart.

The boat, however, was launched. Franceschetti sprang into it, Murat was about to follow, but he had not observed that the spurs of his riding-boots had caught in the meshes of the net. The boat, yielding to the push he gave it, glided away, and the king fell head foremost, with his feet on land and his face in the water. Before he had time to pick himself up, the populace had fallen on him: in one instant they had torn away his epaulettes, his banner, and his coat, and would have torn him to bits himself, had not Giorgio Pellegrino and Trenta Capelli taken him under their protection, and giving him an arm on each side, defended him in their turn against the people. Thus he crossed the square as a prisoner where an hour before he had walked as a king.

His captors took him to the castle: he was pushed into the common prison, the door was shut upon him, and the king found himself among thieves and murderers, who, not knowing him, took him for a companion in crime, and greeted him with foul language and hoots of derision.

A quarter of an hour later the door of the gaol opened and Commander Mattei came in: he found Murat standing with head proudly erect and folded arms. There was an expression of indefinable loftiness in this half-naked man whose face was stained with blood and bespattered with mud. Mattei bowed before him.

“Commander,” said Murat, recognising his rank by his epaulettes, “look round you and tell me whether this is a prison for a king.”

Then a strange thing happened: the criminals, who, believing Murat their accomplice, had welcomed him with vociferations and laughter, now bent before his royal majesty, which had not overawed Pellegrino and Trenta Capelli, and retired silently to the depths of their dungeon.

Misfortune had invested Murat with a new power.

Commander Mattei murmured some excuse, and invited Murat to follow him to a room that he had had prepared for him; but before going out, Murat put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a handful of gold and let it fall in a shower in the midst of the gaol.

“See,” he said, turning towards the prisoners, “it shall not be said that you have received a visit from a king, prisoner and crownless as he is, without having received largesse.”

“Long live Joachim!” cried the prisoners.

Murat smiled bitterly. Those same words repeated by the same number of voices an hour before in the public square, instead of resounding in the prison, would have made him King of Naples.

The most important events proceed sometimes from such mere trifles, that it seems as if God and the devil must throw dice for the life or death of men, for the rise or fall of empires.

Murat followed Commander Mattei: he led him to a little room which the porter had put at his disposal. Mattei was going to retire when Murat called him back.

“Commander,” he said, “I want a scented bath.”

“Sire, it will be difficult to obtain.”

“Here are fifty ducats; let someone buy all the eau de Cologne that can be obtained. Ah — and let some tailors be sent to me.”

“It will be impossible to find anyone here capable of making anything but a peasant’s clothes.”

“Send someone to Monteleone to fetch them from there.”

The commander bowed and went out.

Murat was in his bath when the Lavaliere Alcala was announced, a General and Governor of the town. He had sent damask coverlets, curtains, and arm-chairs. Murat was touched by this attention, and it gave him fresh composure. At two o’clock the same day General Nunziante arrived from Santa-Tropea with three thousand men. Murat greeted his old acquaintance with pleasure; but at the first word the king perceived that he was before his judge, and that he had not come for the purpose of making a visit, but to make an official inquiry.

Murat contented himself with stating that he had been on his way from Corsica to Trieste with a passport from the Emperor of Austria when stormy weather and lack of provisions had forced him to put into Pizzo. All other questions Murat met with a stubborn silence; then at least, wearied by his importunity —

“General,” he said, “can you lend me some clothes after my bath?”

The general understood that he could expect no more information, and, bowing to the king, he went out. Ten minutes later, a complete uniform was brought to Murat; he put it on immediately, asked for a pen and ink, wrote to the commander-in-chief of the Austrian troops at Naples, to the English ambassador, and to his wife, to tell them of his detention at Pizzo. These letters written, he got up and paced his room for some time in evident agitation; at last, needing fresh air, he opened the window. There was a view of the very beach where he had been captured.

Two men were digging a hole in the sand at the foot of the little redoubt. Murat watched them mechanically. When the two men had finished, they went into a neighbouring house and soon came out, bearing a corpse in their arms.

The king searched his memory, and indeed it seemed to him that in the midst of that terrible scene he had seen someone fall, but who it was he no longer remembered. The corpse was quite without covering, but by the long black hair and youthful outlines the king recognised Campana, the aide-decamp he had always loved best.

This scene, watched from a prison window in the twilight, this solitary burial on the shore, in the sand, moved Murat more deeply than his own fate. Great tears filled his eyes and fell silently down the leonine face. At that moment General Nunziante came in and surprised him with outstretched arms and face bathed with tears. Murat heard him enter and turned round, and seeing the old soldier’s surprise.

“Yes, general,” he said, “I weep; I weep for that boy, just twenty-four, entrusted to me by his parents, whose death I have brought about. I weep for that vast, brilliant future which is buried in an unknown grave, in an enemy’s country, on a hostile shore. Oh, Campana! Campana! if ever I am king again, I will raise you a royal tomb.”

The general had had dinner served in an adjacent room. Murat followed him and sat down to table, but he could not eat. The sight which he had just witnessed had made him heartbroken, and yet without a line on his brow that man had been through the battles of Aboukir, Eylau, and Moscow! After dinner, Murat went into his room again, gave his various letters to General Nunziante, and begged to be left alone. The general went away.

Murat paced round his room several times, walking with long steps, and pausing from time to time before the window, but without opening it.

At last he overcame a deep reluctance, put his hand on the bolt and drew the lattice towards him.

It was a calm, clear night: one could see the whole shore. He looked for Campana's grave. Two dogs scratching the sand showed him the spot.

The king shut the window violently, and without undressing threw himself onto his bed. At last, fearing that his agitation would be attributed to personal alarm, he undressed and went to bed, to sleep, or seem to sleep all night.

On the morning of the 9th the tailors whom Murat had asked for arrived. He ordered a great many clothes, taking the trouble to explain all the details suggested by his fastidious taste. He was thus employed when General Nunziante came in. He listened sadly to the king's commands. He had just received telegraphic despatches ordering him to try the King of Naples by court-martial as a public enemy. But he found the king so confident, so tranquil, almost cheerful indeed, that he had not the heart to announce his trial to him, and took upon himself to delay the opening of operation until he received written instructions. These arrived on the evening of the 12th. They were couched in the following terms:

NAPLES, October 9, 1815

"Ferdinand, by the grace of God, etc . . . . wills and decrees the following:

"Art. 1. General Murat is to be tried by court-martial, the members whereof are to be nominated by our Minister of War.

"Art. 2. Only half an hour is to be accorded to the condemned for the exercises of religion.

"(Signed) FERDINAND."

Another despatch from the minister contained the names of the members of the commission. They were: —

Giuseppe Fosculo, adjutant, commander-in-chief of the staff, president.

Laffaello Scalfaro, chief of the legion of Lower Calabria.

Latereo Natali, lieutenant-colonel of the Royal Marines.

Gennaro Lanzetta, lieutenant-colonel of the Engineers.

W T. captain of Artillery.

Francois de Venge, ditto.

Francesco Martellari, lieutenant of Artillery.

Francesco Froio, lieutenant in the 3rd regiment of the line.

Giovanni delta Camera, Public Prosecutor to the Criminal Courts of Lower Calabria.

Francesco Papavassi, registrar.

The commission assembled that night.

On the 13th October, at six o'clock in the morning, Captain Stratti came into the king's prison; he was sound asleep. Stratti was going away again, when he stumbled against a chair; the noise awoke Murat.

"What do you want with me, captain?" asked the king.

Stratti tried to speak, but his voice failed him.

"Ah ha!" said Murat, "you must have had news from Naples."

"Yes, sire," muttered Stratti.

"What are they?" said Murat.

"Your trial, sire."

"And by whose order will sentence be pronounced, if you please? Where will they find peers to judge me? If they consider me as a king, I must have a tribunal of kings; if I am a marshal of France, I must have a court of marshals; if I am a general, and that is the least I can be, I must have a jury of generals."

"Sire, you are declared a public enemy, and as such you are liable to be judged by court-martial: that is the law which you instituted yourself for rebels."

"That law was made for brigands, and not for crowned heads, sir," said Murat scornfully. "I am ready; let them butcher me if they like. I did not think King Ferdinand capable of such an action."

"Sire, will you not hear the names of your judges?"

"Yes, sir, I will. It must be a curious list. Read it: I am listening."

Captain Stratti read out the names that we have enumerated. Murat listened with a disdainful smile.

"Ah," he said, as the captain finished, "it seems that every precaution has been taken."

"How, sire?"

"Yes. Don't you know that all these men, with the exception of Francesco Froio, the reporter; owe their promotion to me? They will be afraid of being accused of sparing me out of gratitude, and save one voice, perhaps, the sentence will be unanimous."

"Sire, suppose you were to appear before the court, to plead your own cause?"

"Silence, sir, silence!" said Murat. "I could, not officially recognise the judges you have named without tearing too many pages of history. Such tribunal is quite incompetent; I should be disgraced if I appeared before it. I know I could not save my life, let me at least preserve my royal dignity."

At this moment Lieutenant Francesco Froio came in to interrogate the prisoner, asking his name, his age, and his nationality. Hearing these questions, Murat rose with an expression of sublime dignity.

"I am Joachim Napoleon, King of the Two Sicilies," he answered, "and I order you to leave me."

The registrar obeyed.

Then Murat partially dressed himself, and asked Stratti if he could write a farewell to his wife and children. The Captain no longer able to speak, answered by an affirmative sign; then Joachim sat down to the table and wrote this letter:

"DEAR CAROLINE OF MY HEART, — The fatal moment has come: I am to suffer the death penalty. In an hour you will be a widow, our children will be fatherless: remember me; never forget my memory. I die innocent; my life is taken from me unjustly.

"Good-bye, Achilles good-bye, Laetitia; goodbye, Lucien; good-bye, Louise.

"Show yourselves worthy of me; I leave you in a world and in a kingdom full of my enemies. Show yourselves superior to adversity, and remember never to think yourselves better than you are, remembering what you have been.

"Farewell. I bless you all. Never curse my memory. Remember that the worst pang of my agony is in dying far from my children, far from my wife, without a friend to close my eyes. Farewell, my own Caroline. Farewell, my children. I send you my blessing, my most tender tears, my last kisses. Farewell, farewell. Never forget your unhappy father,

“Pizzo, Oct. 13, 1815”

[We can guarantee the authenticity of this letter, having copied it ourselves at Pizzo, from the Lavaliere Alcala’s copy of the original]

Then he cut off a lock of his hair and put it in his letter. Just then General Nunziante came in; Murat went to him and held out his hand.

“General,” he said, “you are a father, you are a husband, one day you will know what it is to part from your wife and sons. Swear to me that this letter shall be delivered.”

“On my epaulettes,” said the general, wiping his eyes. [Madame Murat never received this letter.]

“Come, come, courage, general,” said Murat; “we are soldiers, we know how to face death. One favour — you will let me give the order to fire, will you not?”

The general signed acquiescence: just then the registrar came in with the king’s sentence in his hand.

Murat guessed what it was.

“Read, sir,” he said coldly; “I am listening.”

The registrar obeyed. Murat was right.

The sentence of death had been carried with only one dissentient voice.

When the reading was finished, the king turned again to Nunziante.

“General,” he said, “believe that I distinguish in my mind the instrument which strikes me and the hand that wields that instrument. I should never have thought that Ferdinand would have had me shot like a dog; he does not hesitate apparently before such infamy. Very well. We will say no more about it. I have challenged my judges, but not my executioners. What time have you fixed for my execution?”

“Will you fix it yourself, sir?” said the general.

Murat pulled out a watch on which there was a portrait of his wife; by chance he turned up the portrait, and not the face of the watch; he gazed at it tenderly.

“See, general,” he said, showing it to Nunziante; “it is a portrait of the queen. You know her; is it not like her?”

The general turned away his head. Murat sighed and put away the watch.

“Well, sire,” said the registrar, “what time have you fixed?”

“Ah yes,” said Murat, smiling, “I forgot why I took out my watch when I saw Caroline’s portrait.”

Then he looked at his watch again, but this time at its face.

“Well, it shall be at four o’clock, if you like; it is past three o’clock. I ask for fifty minutes. Is that too much, sir?”

The registrar bowed and went out. The general was about to follow him.

“Shall I never see you again, Nunziante?” said Murat.

“My orders are to be present at your death, sire, but I cannot do it.”

“Very well, general. I will dispense with your presence at the last moment, but I should like to say farewell once more and to embrace you.”

“I will be near, sire.”

“Thank you. Now leave me alone.”

“Sire, there are two priests here.”

Murat made an impatient movement.

“Will you receive them?” continued the general.

“Yes; bring them in.”

The general went out. A moment later, two priests appeared in the doorway. One of them was called Francesco Pellegrino, uncle of the man who had caused the king’s death; the other was Don Antonio Masdea.

“What do you want here?” asked Murat.

“We come to ask you if you are dying a Christian?”

“I am dying as a soldier. Leave me.”

Don Francesco Pellegrino retired. No doubt he felt ill at ease before Joachim. But Antonio Masdea remained at the door.

“Did you not hear me?” asked the king.

“Yes, indeed,” answered the old man; “but permit me, sire, to hope that it was not your last word to me. It is not, the first time that I see you or beg something of you. I have already had occasion to ask a favour of you.”

“What was that?”

“When your Majesty came to Pizzo in 1810, I asked you for 25,000 francs to enable us to finish our church. Your Majesty sent me 40,000 francs.”

“I must have foreseen that I should be buried there,” said Murat, smiling.

“Ah, sire, I should like to think that you did not refuse my second boon any more than my first. Sire, I entreat you on my knees.”

The old man fell at Murat’s feet.

“Die as a Christian!”

"That would give you pleasure, then, would it?" said the king.

"Sire, I would give the few short days remaining to me if God would grant that His Holy Spirit should fall upon you in your last hour."

"Well," said Murat, "hear my confession. I accuse myself of having been disobedient to my parents as a child. Since I reached manhood I have done nothing to reproach myself with."

"Sire, will you give me an attestation that you die in the Christian faith?"

"Certainly," said Murat.

And he took a pen and wrote: "I, Joachim Murat, die a Christian, believing in the Holy Catholic Church, Apostolic and Roman."

He signed it.

"Now, father," continued the king, "if you have a third favour to ask of me, make haste, for in half an hour it will be too late."

Indeed, the castle clock was striking half-past three. The priest signed that he had finished.

"Then leave me alone," said Murat; and the old man went out.

Murat paced his room for a few moments, then he sat down on his bed and let his head fall into his hands. Doubtless, during the quarter of an hour he remained thus absorbed in his thoughts, he saw his whole life pass before him, from the inn where he had started to the palace he had reached; no doubt his adventurous career unrolled itself before him like some golden dream, some brilliant fiction, some tale from the Arabian Nights.

His life gleamed athwart the storm like a rainbow, and like a rainbow's, its two extremities were lost in clouds — the clouds of birth and death. At last he roused himself from this inward contemplation, and lifted a pale but tranquil face. Then he went to the glass and arranged his hair. His strange characteristics never left him. The affianced of Death, he was adorning himself to meet his bride.

Four o'clock struck.

Murat went to the door himself and opened it.

General Nunziante was waiting for him.

"Thank you, general," said Murat. "You have kept your word. Kiss me, and go at once, if you like."

The general threw himself into the king's arms, weeping, and utterly unable to speak.

"Courage," said Murat. "You see I am calm." It was this very calmness which broke the general's heart. He dashed out of the corridor, and left the castle, running like a madman.

Then the king walked out into the courtyard.

Everything was ready for the execution.

Nine men and a corporal were ranged before the door of the council chamber. Opposite them was a wall twelve feet high. Three feet away from the wall was a stone block: Murat mounted it, thus raising himself about a foot above the soldiers who were to execute him. Then he took out his watch,[Madame Murat recovered this watch at the price of 200 Louis] kissed his wife's portrait, and fixing his eyes on it, gave the order to fire. At the word of command five out of the nine men fired: Murat remained standing. The soldiers had been ashamed to fire on their king, and had aimed over his head. That moment perhaps displayed most gloriously the lionlike courage which was Murat's special attribute. His face never changed, he did not move a muscle; only gazing at the soldiers with an expression of mingled bitterness and gratitude, he said:

"Thank you; my friends. Since sooner or later you will be obliged to aim true, do not prolong my death-agonies. All I ask you is to aim at the heart and spare the face. Now — — "

With the same voice, the same calm, the same expression, he repeated the fatal words one after another, without lagging, without hastening, as if he were giving an accustomed command; but this time, happier than the first, at the word "Fire!" he fell pierced by eight bullets, without a sigh, without a movement, still holding the watch in his left hand.

The soldiers took up the body and laid it on the bed where ten minutes before he had been sitting, and the captain put a guard at the door.

In the evening a man presented himself, asking to go into the death-chamber: the sentinel refused to let him in, and he demanded an interview with the governor of the prison. Led before him, he produced an order. The commander read it with surprise and disgust, but after reading it he led the man to the door where he had been refused entrance.

"Pass the Signor Luidgi," he said to the sentinel.

Ten minutes had hardly elapsed before he came out again, holding a bloodstained handkerchief containing something to which the sentinel could not give a name.

An hour later, the carpenter brought the coffin which was to contain the king's remains. The workman entered the room, but instantly called the sentinel in a voice of indescribable terror.

The sentinel half opened the door to see what had caused the man’s panic.

The carpenter pointed to a headless corpse!

At the death of King Ferdinand, that, head, preserved in spirits of wine, was found in a secret cupboard in his bedroom.

A week after the execution of Pizzo everyone had received his reward: Trenta Capelli was made a colonel, General Nunziante a marquis, and Luidgi died from the effects of poison.

THE MARQUISE DE BRINVILLIERS

Towards the end of the year 1665, on a fine autumn evening, there was a considerable crowd assembled on the Pont-Neuf where it makes a turn down to the rue Dauphine. The object of this crowd and the centre of attraction was a closely shut, carriage. A police official was trying to force open the door, and two out of the four sergeants who were with him were holding the horses back and the other two stopping the driver, who paid no attention to their commands, but only endeavoured to urge his horses to a gallop. The struggle had been going on same time, when suddenly one of the doors violently pushed open, and a young officer in the uniform of a cavalry captain jumped down, shutting the door as he did so though not too quickly for the nearest spectators to perceive a woman sitting at the back of the carriage. She was wrapped in cloak and veil, and judging by the precautions she, had taken to hide her face from every eye, she must have had her reasons for avoiding recognition.

"Sir," said the young man, addressing the officer with a haughty air, "I presume, till I find myself mistaken, that your business is with me alone; so I will ask you to inform me what powers you may have for thus stopping my coach; also, since I have alighted, I desire you to give your men orders to let the vehicle go on."

"First of all," replied the man, by no means intimidated by these lordly airs, but signing to his men that they must not release the coach or the horses, "be so good as to answer my questions."

"I am attending," said the young man, controlling his agitation by a visible effort.

"Are you the Chevalier Gaudin de Sainte-Croix?"

"I am he."

"Captain of the Tracy, regiment?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I arrest you in the king's name."

"What powers have you?"

"This warrant."

Sainte-Croix cast a rapid glance at the paper, and instantly recognised the signature of the minister of police: he then apparently confined his attention to the woman who was still in the carriage; then he returned to his first question.

"This is all very well, sir," he said to the officer, "but this warrant contains no other name than mine, and so you have no right to expose thus to the public gaze the lady with whom I was travelling when you arrested me. I must beg of you to order your assistants to allow this carriage to drive on; then take me where you please, for I am ready to go with you."

To the officer this request seemed a just one: he signed to his men to let the driver and the horses go on; and, they, who had waited only for this, lost no time in breaking through the crowd, which melted away before them; thus the woman escaped for whose safety the prisoner seemed so much concerned.

Sainte-Croix kept his promise and offered no resistance; for some moments he followed the officer, surrounded by a crowd which seemed to have transferred all its curiosity to his account; then, at the corner of the Quai de d'Horloge, a man called up a carriage that had not been observed before, and Sainte-Croix took his place with the same haughty and disdainful air that he had shown throughout the scene we have just described. The officer sat beside him, two of his men got up behind, and the other two, obeying no doubt their master's orders, retired with a parting direction to the driver.

"The Bastille!"

Our readers will now permit us to make them more fully acquainted with the man who is to take the first place in the story. The origin of Gaudin de Sainte-Croix was not known: according to one tale, he was the natural son of a great lord; another account declared that he was the offspring of poor people, but that, disgusted with his obscure birth, he preferred a splendid disgrace, and therefore chose to pass for what he was not. The only certainty is that he was born at Montauban, and in actual rank and position he was captain of the Tracy regiment. At the time when this narrative opens, towards the end of 1665, Sainte-Croix was about twenty-eight or thirty, a fine young man of cheerful and lively appearance, a merry comrade at a banquet, and an excellent captain: he took his pleasure with other men, and was so impressionable a character that he enjoyed a virtuous project as well as any plan for a debauch; in love he was most susceptible, and jealous to the point of madness even about a courtesan, had she once taken his fancy; his prodigality was princely, although he had no income; further, he was most sensitive to slights, as all men are who, because they are placed in an equivocal position, fancy that everyone who makes any reference to their origin is offering an intentional insult.

We must now see by what a chain of circumstances he had arrived at his present position. About the year 1660, Sainte-Croix, while in the army, had made the acquaintance of the Marquis de Brinvilliers, maitre-de-camp of the Normandy regiment.

Their age was much the same, and so was their manner of life: their virtues and their vices were similar, and thus it happened that a mere acquaintance grew into a friendship, and on his return from the field the marquis introduced Sainte-Croix to his wife, and he became an intimate of the house. The usual results followed. Madame de Brinvilliers was then scarcely eight-and-twenty: she had married the marquis in 1651-that is, nine years before. He enjoyed an income of 30,000 livres, to which she added her dowry of 200,000 livres, exclusive of her expectations in the future. Her name was Marie-Madeleine; she had a sister and two brothers: her father, M. de Dreux d'Aubray; was civil lieutenant at the Chatelet de Paris. At the age of twenty-eight the marquise was at the height of her beauty: her figure was small but perfectly proportioned; her rounded face was charmingly pretty; her features, so regular that no emotion seemed to alter their beauty, suggested the lines of a statue miraculously endowed with life: it was easy enough to mistake for the repose of a happy conscience the cold, cruel calm which served as a mask to cover remorse.

Sainte-Croix and the marquise loved at first sight, and she was soon his mistress. The marquis, perhaps endowed with the conjugal philosophy which alone pleased the taste of the period, perhaps too much occupied with his own pleasure to see what was going on before his eyes, offered no jealous obstacle to the intimacy, and continued his foolish extravagances long after they had impaired his fortunes: his affairs became so entangled that the marquise, who cared for him no longer, and desired a fuller liberty for the indulgence of her new passion, demanded and obtained a separation. She then left her husband's house, and henceforth abandoning all discretion, appeared everywhere in public with Sainte-Croix. This behaviour, authorised as it was by the example of the highest nobility, made no impression upon the. Marquis of Brinvilliers, who merrily pursued the road to ruin, without worrying about his wife's behaviour. Not so M. de Dreux d'Aubray: he had the scrupulosity of a legal dignitary. He was scandalised at his daughter’s conduct, and feared a stain upon his own fair name: he procured a warrant for the arrest of Sainte-Croix wheresoever the bearer might chance to encounter him. We have seen how it was put in execution when Sainte-Croix was driving in the carriage of the marquise, whom our readers will doubtless have recognised as the woman who concealed herself so carefully.

From one’s knowledge of the character of Sainte-Croix, it is easy to imagine that he had to use great self-control to govern the anger he felt at being arrested in the middle of the street; thus, although during the whole drive he uttered not a single word, it was plain to see that a terrible storm was gathering, soon to break. But he preserved the same impossibility both at the opening and shutting of the fatal gates, which, like the gates of hell, had so often bidden those who entered abandon all hope on their threshold, and again when he replied to the formal questions put to him by the governor. His voice was calm, and when they gave him they prison register he signed it with a steady hand. At once a gaoler, taking his orders from the governor, bade him follow: after traversing various corridors, cold and damp, where the daylight might sometimes enter but fresh air never, he opened a door, and Sainte-Croix had no sooner entered than he heard it locked behind him.

At the grating of the lock he turned. The gaoler had left him with no light but the rays of the moon, which, shining through a barred window some eight or ten feet from the ground, shed a gleam upon a miserable truckle-bed and left the rest of the room in deep obscurity. The prisoner stood still for a moment and listened; then, when he had heard the steps die away in the distance and knew himself to be alone at last, he fell upon the bed with a cry more like the roaring of a wild beast than any human sound: he cursed his fellow-man who had snatched him from his joyous life to plunge him into a dungeon; he cursed his God who had let this happen; he cried aloud to whatever powers might be that could grant him revenge and liberty.

Just at that moment, as though summoned by these words from the bowels of the earth, a man slowly stepped into the circle of blue light that fell from the window-a man thin and pale, a man with long hair, in a black doublet, who approached the foot of the bed where Sainte-Croix lay. Brave as he was, this apparition so fully answered to his prayers (and at the period the power of incantation and magic was still believed in) that he felt no doubt that the arch-enemy of the human race, who is continually at hand, had heard him and had now come in answer to his prayers. He sat up on the bed, feeling mechanically at the place where the handle of his sword would have been but two hours since, feeling his hair stand on end, and a cold sweat began to stream down his face as the strange fantastic being step by step approached him. At length the apparition paused, the prisoner and he stood face to face for a moment, their eyes riveted; then the mysterious stranger spoke in gloomy tones.

“Young man,” said he, “you have prayed to the devil for vengeance on the men who have taken you, for help against the God who has abandoned you. I have the means, and I am here to proffer it. Have you the courage to accept?”

“First of all,” asked Sainte-Croix; “who are you?”

“Why seek you to know who I am,” replied the unknown, “at the very moment when I come at your call, and bring what you desire?”

“All the same,” said Sainte-Croix, still attributing what he heard to a supernatural being, “when one makes a compact of this kind, one prefers to know with whom one is treating.”

“Well, since you must know,” said the stranger, “I am the Italian Exili.”

Sainte-Croix shuddered anew, passing from a supernatural vision to a horrible reality. The name he had just heard had a terrible notoriety at the time, not only in France but in Italy as well. Exili had been driven out of Rome, charged with many poisonings, which, however, could not be satisfactorily brought home to him. He had gone to Paris, and there, as in his native country, he had drawn the eyes of the authorities upon himself; but neither in Paris nor in Rome was he, the pupil of Rene and of Trophana, convicted of guilt. All the same, though proof was wanting, his enormities were so well accredited that there was no scruple as to having him arrested. A warrant was out against him: Exili was taken up, and was lodged in the Bastille. He had been there about six months when Sainte-Croix was brought to the same place. The prisoners were numerous just then, so the governor had his new guest put up in the same room as the old one, mating Exili and Sainte-Croix, not knowing that they were a pair of demons. Our readers now understand the rest. Sainte-Croix was put into an unlighted room by the gaoler, and in the dark had failed to see his companion: he had abandoned himself to his rage, his imprecations had revealed his state of mind to Exili, who at once seized the occasion for gaining a devoted and powerful disciple, who once out of prison might open the doors for him, perhaps, or at least avenge his fate should he be incarcerated for life.

The repugnance felt by Sainte-Croix for his fellow-prisoner did not last long, and the clever master found his pupil apt. Sainte-Croix, a strange mixture of qualities good and evil, had reached the supreme crisis of his life, when the powers of darkness or of light were to prevail. Maybe, if he had met some angelic soul at this point, he would have been led to God; he encountered a demon, who conducted him to Satan.

Exili was no vulgar poisoner: he was a great artist in poisons, comparable with the Medici or the Borgias. For him murder was a fine art, and he had reduced it to fixed and rigid rules: he had arrived at a point when he was guided not by his personal interest but by a taste for experiment. God has reserved the act of creation for Himself, but has suffered destruction to be within the scope of man: man therefore supposes that in destroying life he is God’s equal. Such was the nature of Exili’s pride: he was the dark, pale alchemist of death: others might seek the mighty secret of life, but he had found the secret of destruction.

For a time Sainte-Croix hesitated: at last he yielded to the taunts of his companion, who accused Frenchmen of showing too much honour in their crimes, of allowing themselves to be involved in the ruin of their enemies, whereas they might easily survive them and triumph over their destruction. In opposition to this French gallantry, which often involves the murderer in a death more cruel than that he has given, he pointed to the Florentine traitor with his amiable smile and his deadly poison. He indicated certain powders and potions, some of them of dull action, wearing out the victim so slowly that he dies after long suffering; others violent and so quick, that they kill like a flash of lightning, leaving not even time for a single cry. Little by little Sainte-Croix became interested in the ghastly science that puts the lives of all men in the hand of one. He joined in Exili’s experiments; then he grew clever enough to make them for himself; and when, at the year’s end, he left the Bastille, the pupil was almost as accomplished as his master.

Sainte-Croix returned into that society which had banished him, fortified by a fatal secret by whose aid he could repay all the evil he had received. Soon afterwards Exili was set free — how it happened is not known — and sought out Sainte-Croix, who let him a room in the name of his steward, Martin de Breuille, a room situated in the blind, alley off the Place Maubert, owned by a woman called Brunet.

It is not known whether Sainte-Croix had an opportunity of seeing the Marquise de Brinvilliers during his sojourn in the Bastille, but it is certain that as soon as he was a free man the lovers were more attached than ever. They had learned by experience, however, of what they had to fear; so they resolved that they would at once make trial of Sainte-Croix's newly acquired knowledge, and M. d'Aubray was selected by his daughter for the first victim. At one blow she would free herself from the inconvenience of his rigid censorship, and by inheriting his goods would repair her own fortune, which had been almost dissipated by her husband. But in trying such a bold stroke one must be very sure of results, so the marquise decided to experiment beforehand on another person. Accordingly, when one day after luncheon her maid, Francoise Roussel, came into her room, she gave her a slice of mutton and some preserved gooseberries for her own meal. The girl unsuspiciously ate what her mistress gave her, but almost at once felt ill, saying she had severe pain in the stomach, and a sensation as though her heart were being pricked with pins. But she did not die, and the marquise perceived that the poison needed to be made stronger, and returned it to Sainte-Croix, who brought her some more in a few days' time.

The moment had come for action. M. d'Aubray, tired with business, was to spend a holiday at his castle called Offemont. The marquise offered to go with him. M. d'Aubray, who supposed her relations with Sainte-Croix to be quite broken off, joyfully accepted. Offemont was exactly the place for a crime of this nature. In the middle of the forest of Aigue, three or four miles from Compiegne, it would be impossible to get efficient help before the rapid action of the poison had made it useless.

M d'Aubray started with his daughter and one servant only. Never had the marquise been so devoted to her father, so especially attentive, as she was during this journey. And M. d'Aubray, like Christ — who though He had no children had a father's heart — loved his repentant daughter more than if she had never strayed. And then the marquise profited by the terrible calm look which we have already noticed in her face: always with her father, sleeping in a room adjoining his, eating with him, caring for his comfort in every way, thoughtful and affectionate, allowing no other person to do anything for him, she had to present a smiling face, in which the most suspicious eye could detect nothing but filial tenderness, though the vilest projects were in her heart. With this mask she one evening offered him some soup that was poisoned. He took it; with her eyes she saw him put it to his lips, watched him drink it down, and with a brazen countenance she gave no outward sign of that terrible anxiety that must have been pressing on her heart. When he had drunk it all, and she had taken with steady hands the cup and its saucer, she went back to her own room, waited and listened....

The effect was rapid. The marquise heard her father moan; then she heard groans. At last, unable to endure his sufferings, he called out to his daughter. The marquise went to him. But now her face showed signs of the liveliest anxiety, and it was for M. d’Aubray to try to reassure her about himself! He thought it was only a trifling indisposition, and was not willing that a doctor should be disturbed. But then he was seized by a frightful vomiting, followed by such unendurable pain that he yielded to his daughter’s entreaty that she should send for help. A doctor arrived at about eight o’clock in the morning, but by that time all that could have helped a scientific inquiry had been disposed of: the doctor saw nothing, in M. d’Aubray’s story but what might be accounted for by indigestion; so he dosed him, and went back to Compiegne.

All that day the marquise never left the sick man. At night she had a bed made up in his room, declaring that no one else must sit up with him; thus she, was able to watch the progress of the malady and see with her own eyes the conflict between death and life in the body of her father. The next day the doctor came again: M. d’Aubray was worse; the nausea had ceased, but the pains in the stomach were now more acute; a strange fire seemed to burn his vitals; and a treatment was ordered which necessitated his return to Paris. He was soon so weak that he thought it might be best to go only so far as Compiegne, but the marquise was so insistent as to the necessity for further and better advice than anything he could get away from home, that M. d’Aubray decided to go. He made the journey in his own carriage, leaning upon his daughter’s shoulder; the behaviour of the marquise was always the same: at last M. d’Aubray reached Paris. All had taken place as the marquise desired; for the scene was now changed: the doctor who had witnessed the symptoms would not be present at the death; no one could discover the cause by studying the progress of the disorder; the thread of investigation was snapped in two, and the two ends were now too distant to be joined again. In spite, of every possible attention, M. d’Aubray grew continually worse; the marquise was faithful to her mission, and never left him for an hour. At list, after four days of agony, he died in his daughter’s arms, blessing the woman who was his murderess. Her grief then broke forth uncontrolled. Her sobs and tears were so vehement that her brothers’ grief seemed cold beside hers. Nobody suspected a crime, so no autopsy was held; the tomb was closed, and not the slightest suspicion had approached her.

But the marquise had only gained half her purpose. She had now more freedom for her love affairs, but her father’s dispositions were not so favourable as she expected: the greater part of his property, together with his business, passed to the elder brother and to the second brother, who was Parliamentary councillor; the position of, the marquise was very little improved in point of fortune.

Sainte-Croix was leading a fine and joyous life. Although nobody supposed him to be wealthy, he had a steward called Martin, three lackeys called George, Lapierre, and Lachaussee, and besides his coach and other carriages he kept ordinary bearers for excursions at night. As he was young and good-looking, nobody troubled about where all these luxuries came from. It was quite the custom in those days that a well-set-up young gentleman should want for nothing, and Sainte-Croix was commonly said to have found the philosopher’s stone. In his life in the world he had formed friendships with various persons, some noble, some rich: among the latter was a man named Reich de Penautier, receiver-general of the clergy and treasurer of the States of Languedoc, a millionaire, and one of those men who are always successful, and who seem able by the help of their money to arrange matters that would appear to be in the province of God alone. This Penautier was connected in business with a man called d’Alibert, his first clerk, who died all of a sudden of apoplexy. The attack was known to Penautier sooner than to his own family: then the papers about the conditions of partnership disappeared, no one knew how, and d’Alibert’s wife and child were ruined. D’Alibert’s brother-in-law, who was Sieur de la Magdelaine, felt certain vague suspicions concerning this death, and wished to get to the bottom of it; he accordingly began investigations, which were suddenly brought to an end by his death.

In one way alone Fortune seemed to have abandoned her favourite: Maitre Penautier had a great desire to succeed the Sieur of Mennevillette, who was receiver of the clergy, and this office was worth nearly 60,000 livres. Penautier knew that Mennevillette was retiring in favour of his chief clerk, Messire Pierre Hannyvel, Sieur de Saint-Laurent, and he had taken all the necessary, steps for buying the place over his head: the Sieur de Saint-Laurent, with the full support of the clergy, obtained the reversion for nothing — a thing that never happened before. Penautier then offered him 40,000 crowns to go halves, but Saint-Laurent refused. Their relations, however, were not broken off, and they continued to meet. Penautier was considered such a lucky fellow that it was generally expected he would somehow or other get some day the post he coveted so highly. People who had no faith in the mysteries of alchemy declared that Sainte-Croix and Penautier did business together.

Now, when the period for mourning was over, the relations of the marquise and Sainte-Croix were as open and public as before: the two brothers d'Aubray expostulated with her by the medium of an older sister who was in a Carmelite nunnery, and the marquise perceived that her father had on his death bequeathed the care and supervision of her to her brothers. Thus her first crime had been all but in vain: she had wanted to get rid of her father's rebukes and to gain his fortune; as a fact the fortune was diminished by reason of her elder brothers, and she had scarcely enough to pay her debts; while the rebukes were renewed from the mouths of her brothers, one of whom, being civil lieutenant, had the power to separate her again from her lover. This must be prevented. Lachaussee left the service of Sainte-Croix, and by a contrivance of the marquise was installed three months later as servant of the elder brother, who lived with the civil lieutenant. The poison to be used on this occasion was not so swift as the one taken by M. d'Aubray so violent a death happening so soon in the same family might arouse suspicion. Experiments were tried once more, not on animals — for their different organisation might put the poisoner's science in the wrong — but as before upon human subjects; as before, a 'corpus vili' was taken. The marquise had the reputation of a pious and charitable lady; seldom did she fail to relieve the poor who appealed: more than this, she took part in the work of those devoted women who are pledged to the service of the sick, and she walked the hospitals and presented wine and other medicaments. No one was surprised when she appeared in her ordinary way at l'Hotel-Dieu. This time she brought biscuits and cakes for the convalescent patients, her gifts being, as usual, gratefully received. A month later she paid another visit, and inquired after certain patients in whom she was particularly interested: since the last time she came they had suffered a relapse — the malady had changed in nature, and had shown graver symptoms. It was a kind of deadly fatigue, killing them by a slows strange decay. She asked questions of the doctors but could learn nothing: this malady was unknown to them, and defied all the resources of their art. A fortnight later she returned. Some of the sick people were dead, others still alive, but desperately ill; living skeletons, all that seemed left of them was sight, speech, and breath. At the end of two months they were all dead, and the physicians had been as much at a loss over the post-mortems as over the treatment of the dying.

Experiments of this kind were reassuring; so Lachaussee had orders to carry out his instructions. One day the civil lieutenant rang his bell, and Lachaussee, who served the councillor, as we said before, came up for orders. He found the lieutenant at work with his secretary, Couste what he wanted was a glass of wine and water. In a moment Lachaussee brought it in. The lieutenant put the glass to his lips, but at the first sip pushed it away, crying, “What have you brought, you wretch? I believe you want to poison me.” Then handing the glass to his secretary, he added, “Look at it, Couste: what is this stuff?” The secretary put a few drops into a coffee-spoon, lifting it to his nose and then to his mouth: the drink had the smell and taste of vitriol. Meanwhile Lachaussee went up to the secretary and told him he knew what it must be: one of the councillor’s valets had taken a dose of medicine that morning, and without noticing he must have brought the very glass his companion had used. Saying this, he took the glass from the secretary’s hand, put it to his lips, pretending to taste it himself, and then said he had no doubt it was so, for he recognised the smell. He then threw the wine into the fireplace.

As the lieutenant had not drunk enough to be upset by it, he soon forgot this incident and the suspicions that had been aroused at the moment in his mind. Sainte-Croix and the marquise perceived that they had made a false step, and at the risk of involving several people in their plan for vengeance, they decided on the employment of other means. Three months passed without any favourable occasion presenting itself; at last, on one of the early days of April 1670, the lieutenant took his brother to his country place, Villequoy, in Beauce, to spend the Easter vacation. Lachaussee was with his master, and received his instructions at the moment of departure.

The day after they arrived in the country there was a pigeon-pie for dinner: seven persons who had eaten it felt indisposed after the meal, and the three who had not taken it were perfectly well. Those on whom the poisonous substance had chiefly acted were the lieutenant, the councillor, and the commandant of the watch. He may have eaten more, or possibly the poison he had tasted on the former occasion helped, but at any rate the lieutenant was the first to be attacked with vomiting two hours later, the councillor showed the same symptoms; the commandant and the others were a prey for several hours to frightful internal pains; but from the beginning their condition was not nearly so grave as that of the two brothers. This time again, as usual, the help of doctors was useless. On the 12th of April, five days after they had been poisoned, the lieutenant and his brother returned to Paris so changed that anyone would have thought they had both suffered a long and cruel illness. Madame de Brinvilliers was in the country at the time, and did not come back during the whole time that her brothers were ill. From the very first consultation in the lieutenant's case the doctors entertained no hope. The symptoms were the same as those to which his father had succumbed, and they supposed it was an unknown disease in the family. They gave up all hope of recovery. Indeed, his state grew worse and worse; he felt an unconquerable aversion for every kind of food, and the vomiting was incessant. The last three days of his life he complained that a fire was burning in his breast, and the flames that burned within seemed to blaze forth at his eyes, the only part of his body that appeared to live, so like a corpse was all the rest of him. On the 17th of June 1670 he died: the poison had taken seventy-two days to complete its work. Suspicion began to dawn: the lieutenant's body was opened, and a formal report was drawn up. The operation was performed in the presence of the surgeons Dupre and Durant, and Gavart, the apothecary, by M. Bachot, the brothers' private physician. They found the stomach and duodenum to be black and falling to pieces, the liver burnt and gangrened. They said that this state of things must have been produced by poison, but as the presence of certain bodily humours sometimes produces similar appearances, they durst not declare that the lieutenant's death could not have come about by natural causes, and he was buried without further inquiry.

It was as his private physician that Dr. Bachot had asked for the autopsy of his patient's brother. For the younger brother seemed to have been attacked by the same complaint, and the doctor hoped to find from the death of the one some means for preserving the life of the other. The councillor was in a violent fever, agitated unceasingly both in body and mind: he could not bear any position of any kind for more than a few minutes at a time. Bed was a place of torture; but if he got up, he cried for it again, at least for a change of suffering. At the end of three months he died. His stomach, duodenum, and liver were all in the same corrupt state as his brother's, and more than that, the surface of his body was burnt away. This, said the doctors; was no dubious sign of poisoning; although, they added, it sometimes happened that a 'cacochyme' produced the same effect. Lachaussee was so far from being suspected, that the councillor, in recognition of the care he had bestowed on him in his last illness, left him in his will a legacy of a hundred crowns; moreover, he received a thousand francs from Sainte-Croix and the marquise.

So great a disaster in one family, however, was not only sad but alarming. Death knows no hatred: death is deaf and blind, nothing more, and astonishment was felt at this ruthless destruction of all who bore one name. Still nobody suspected the true culprits, search was fruitless, inquiries led nowhere: the marquise put on mourning for her brothers, Sainte-Croix continued in his path of folly, and all things went on as before. Meanwhile Sainte-Croix had made the acquaintance of the Sieur de Saint Laurent, the same man from whom Penautier had asked for a post without success, and had made friends with him. Penautier had meanwhile become the heir of his father-in-law, the Sieur Lesecq, whose death had most unexpectedly occurred; he had thereby gained a second post in Languedoc and an immense property: still, he coveted the place of receiver of the clergy. Chance now once more helped him: a few days after taking over from Sainte-Croix a man-servant named George, M. de Saint-Laurent fell sick, and his illness showed symptoms similar to those observed in the case of the d'Aubrays, father and sons; but it was more rapid, lasting only twenty-four hours. Like them, M. de Saint-Laurent died a prey to frightful tortures. The same day an officer from the sovereign's court came to see him, heard every detail connected with his friend's death, and when told of the symptoms said before the servants to Sainfray the notary that it would be necessary to examine the body. An hour later George disappeared, saying nothing to anybody, and not even asking for his wages. Suspicions were excited; but again they remained vague. The autopsy showed a state of things not precisely to be called peculiar to poisoning cases the intestines, which the fatal poison had not had time to burn as in the case of the d’Aubrays, were marked with reddish spots like flea-bites. In June Penautier obtained the post that had been held by the Sieur de Saint-Laurent.

But the widow had certain suspicions which were changed into something like certainty by George’s flight. A particular circumstance aided and almost confirmed her doubts. An abbe who was a friend of her husband, and knew all about the disappearance of George, met him some days afterwards in the rue des Masons, near the Sorbonne. They were both on the same side, and a hay-cart coming along the street was causing a block. George raised his head and saw the abbe, knew him as a friend of his late master, stooped under the cart and crawled to the other side, thus at the risk of being crushed escaping from the eyes of a man whose appearance recalled his crime and inspired him with fear of punishment. Madame de Saint-Laurent preferred a charge against George, but though he was sought for everywhere, he could never be found. Still the report of these strange deaths, so sudden and so incomprehensible, was bruited about Paris, and people began to feel frightened. Sainte-Croix, always in the gay world, encountered the talk in drawing-rooms, and began to feel a little uneasy. True, no suspicion pointed as yet in his direction; but it was as well to take precautions, and Sainte-Croix began to consider how he could be freed from anxiety. There was a post in the king’s service soon to be vacant, which would cost 100,000 crowns; and although Sainte-Croix had no apparent means, it was rumoured that he was about to purchase it. He first addressed himself to Belleguise to treat about this affair with Penautier. There was some difficulty, however, to be encountered in this quarter. The sum was a large one, and Penautier no longer required help; he had already come into all the inheritance he looked for, and so he tried to throw cold water on the project.

Sainte-Croix thus wrote to Belleguise:

“DEAR FRIEND, — Is it possible that you need any more talking to about the matter you know of, so important as it is, and, maybe, able to give us peace and quiet for the rest of our days! I really think the devil must be in it, or else you simply will not be sensible: do show your common sense, my good man, and look at it from all points of view; take it at its very worst, and you still ought to feel bound to serve me, seeing how I have made everything all right for you: all our interests are together in this matter. Do help me, I beg of you; you may feel sure I shall be deeply grateful, and you will never before have acted so agreeably both for me and for yourself. You know quite enough about it, for I have not spoken so openly even to my own brother as I have to you. If you can come this afternoon, I shall be either at the house or quite near at hand, you know where I mean, or I will expect you tomorrow morning, or I will come and find you, according to what you reply. — Always yours with all my heart."

The house meant by Sainte-Croix was in the rue des Bernardins, and the place near at hand where he was to wait for Belleguise was the room he leased from the widow Brunet, in the blind alley out of the Place Maubert. It was in this room and at the apothecary Glazer's that Sainte-Croix made his experiments; but in accordance with poetical justice, the manipulation of the poisons proved fatal to the workers themselves. The apothecary fell ill and died; Martin was attacked by fearful sickness, which brought, him to death's door. Sainte-Croix was unwell, and could not even go out, though he did not know what was the matter. He had a furnace brought round to his house from Glazer's, and ill as he was, went on with the experiments. Sainte-Croix was then seeking to make a poison so subtle that the very effluvia might be fatal. He had heard of the poisoned napkin given to the young dauphin, elder brother of Charles VII, to wipe his hands on during a game of tennis, and knew that the contact had caused his death; and the still discussed tradition had informed him of the gloves of Jeanne d'Albret; the secret was lost, but Sainte-Croix hoped to recover it. And then there happened one of those strange accidents which seem to be not the hand of chance but a punishment from Heaven. At the very moment when Sainte-Croix was bending over his furnace, watching the fatal preparation as it became hotter and hotter, the glass mask which he wore over his face as a protection from any poisonous exhalations that might rise up from the mixture, suddenly dropped off, and Sainte-Croix dropped to the ground as though felled by a lightning stroke. At supper-time, his wife finding that he did not come out from his closet where he was shut in, knocked at the door, and received no answer; knowing that her husband was wont to busy himself with dark and mysterious matters, she feared some disaster had occurred. She called her servants, who broke in the door. Then she found Sainte-Croix stretched out beside the furnace, the broken glass lying by his side. It was impossible to deceive the public as to the circumstances of this strange and sudden death: the servants had seen the corpse, and they talked. The commissary Picard was ordered to affix the seals, and all the widow could do was to remove the furnace and the fragments of the glass mask.

The noise of the event soon spread all over Paris. Sainte-Croix was extremely well known, and the, news that he was about to purchase a post in the court had made him known even more widely. Lachaussee was one of the first to learn of his master’s death; and hearing that a seal had been set upon his room, he hastened to put in an objection in these terms:

“Objection of Lachaussee, who asserts that for seven years he was in the service of the deceased; that he had given into his charge, two years earlier, 100 pistoles and 200 white crowns, which should be found in a cloth bag under the closet window, and in the same a paper stating that the said sum belonged to him, together with the transfer of 300 livres owed to him by the late M. d’Aubray, councillor; the said transfer made by him at Laserre, together with three receipts from his master of apprenticeship, 100 livres each: these moneys and papers he claims.”

To Lachaussee the reply was given that he must wait till the day when the seals were broken, and then if all was as he said, his property would be returned.

But Lachaussee was not the only person who was agitated about the death of Sainte-Croix. The, marquise, who was familiar with all the secrets of this fatal closet, had hurried to the commissary as 2496 soon as she heard of the event, and although it was ten o’clock at night had demanded to speak with him. But he had replied by his head clerk, Pierre Frater, that he was in bed; the marquise insisted, begging them to rouse him up, for she wanted a box that she could not allow to have opened. The clerk then went up to the Sieur Picard’s bedroom, but came back saying that what the marquise demanded was for the time being an impossibility, for the commissary was asleep. She saw that it was idle to insist, and went away, saying that she should send a man the next morning to fetch the box. In the morning the man came, offering fifty Louis to the commissary on behalf of the marquise, if he would give her the box. But he replied that the box was in the sealed room, that it would have to be opened, and that if the objects claimed by the marquise were really hers, they would be safely handed over to her. This reply struck the marquise like a thunderbolt. There was no time to be lost: hastily she removed from the rue Neuve-Saint-Paul, where her town house was, to Picpus, her country place. Thence she posted the same evening to Liege, arriving the next morning, and retired to a convent.

The seals had been set on the 31st of July 1672, and they were taken off on the 8th of August following. Just as they set to work a lawyer charged with full powers of acting for the marquise, appeared and put in the following statement: “Alexandre Delamarre, lawyer acting for the Marquise de Brinvilliers, has come forward, and declares that if in the box claimed by his client there is found a promise signed by her for the sum of 30,000 livres, it is a paper taken from her by fraud, against which, in case of her signature being verified, she intends to lodge an appeal for nullification.” This formality over, they proceeded to open Sainte-Croix’s closet: the key was handed to the commissary Picard by a Carmelite called Friar Victorin. The commissary opened the door, and entered with the parties interested, the officers, and the widow, and they began by setting aside the loose papers, with a view to taking them in order, one at a time. While they were thus busy, a small roll fell down, on which these two words were written: “My Confession.” All present, having no reason to suppose Sainte-Croix a bad man, decided that this paper ought not to be read. The deputy for the attorney general on being consulted was of this opinion, and the confession of Sainte-Croix was burnt. This act of conscience performed, they proceeded to make an inventory. One of the first objects that attracted the attention of the officers was the box claimed by Madame de Brinvilliers. Her insistence had provoked curiosity, so they began with it. Everybody went near to see what was in it, and it was opened.

We shall let the report speak: in such cases nothing is so effective or so terrible as the official statement.

“In the closet of Sainte-Croix was found a small box one foot square, on the top of which lay a half-sheet of paper entitled ‘My Will,’ written on one side and containing these words: ‘I humbly entreat any into whose hands this chest may fall to do me the kindness of putting it into the hands of Madame the Marquise de Brinvilliers, resident in the rue Neuve-Saint-Paul, seeing that all the contents concern and belong to her alone, and are of no use to any person in the world apart from herself: in case of her being already dead before me, the box and all its contents should be burnt without opening or disturbing anything. And lest anyone should plead ignorance of the contents, I swear by the God I worship and by all that is most sacred that no untruth is here asserted. If anyone should contravene my wishes that are just and reasonable in this matter, I charge their conscience therewith in discharging my own in this world and the next, protesting that such is my last wish.

"'Given at Paris, the 25th of May after noon, 1672. Signed by Sainte-Croix,'

"And below were written these words: 'There is one packet only addressed to M. Penautier which should be delivered.'"

It may be easily understood that a disclosure of this kind only increased the interest of the scene; there was a murmur of curiosity, and when silence again reigned, the official continued in these words:

"A packet has been found sealed in eight different places with eight different seals. On this is written: 'Papers to be burnt in case of my death, of no consequence to anyone. I humbly beg those into whose hands they may fall to burn them. I give this as a charge upon their conscience; all without opening the packet.' In this packet we find two parcels of sublimate.

"Item, another packet sealed with six different seals, on which is a similar inscription, in which is found more sublimate, half a pound in weight.

"Item, another packet sealed with six different seals, on which is a similar inscription, in which are found three parcels, one containing half an ounce of sublimate, the second 2 1/4 ozs. of Roman vitriol, and the third some calcined prepared vitriol. In the box was found a large square phial, one pint in capacity, full of a clear liquid, which was looked at by M. Moreau, the doctor; he, however, could not tell its nature until it was tested.

"Item, another phial, with half a pint of clear liquid with a white sediment, about which Moreau said the same thing as before.

"Item, a small earthenware pot containing two or three lumps of prepared opium.

"Item, a folded paper containing two drachms of corrosive sublimate powdered.

"Next, a little box containing a sort of stone known as infernal stone.

"Next, a paper containing one ounce of opium.

"Next, a piece of pure antimony weighing three ounces.

"Next, a packet of powder on which was written: 'To check the flow of blood.' Moreau said that it was quince flower and quince buds dried.

"Item, a pack sealed with six seals, on which was written, 'Papers to be burnt in case of death.' In this twenty-four letters were found, said to have been written by the Marquise de Brinvilliers.

“Item, another packet sealed with six seals, on which a similar inscription was written. In this were twenty-seven pieces of paper on each of which was written: ‘Sundry curious secrets.’

“Item, another packet with six more seals, on which a similar inscription was written. In this were found seventy-five livres, addressed to different persons. Besides all these, in the box there were two bonds, one from the marquise for 30,000, and one from Penautier for 10,000 francs, their dates corresponding to the time of the deaths of M. d’Aubray and the Sieur de St. Laurent.”

The difference in the amount shows that Sainte-Croix had a tariff, and that parricide was more expensive than simple assassination. Thus in his death did Sainte-Croix bequeath the poisons to his mistress and his friend; not content with his own crimes in the past, he wished to be their accomplice in the future.

The first business of the officials was to submit the different substances to analysis, and to experiment with them on animals. The report follows of Guy Simon, an apothecary, who was charged to undertake the analysis and the experiments:

“This artificial poison reveals its nature on examination. It is so disguised that one fails to recognise it, so subtle that it deceives the scientific, so elusive that it escapes the doctor’s eye: experiments seem to be at fault with this poison, rules useless, aphorisms ridiculous. The surest experiments are made by the use of the elements or upon animals. In water, ordinary poison falls by its own weight. The water is superior, the poison obeys, falls downwards, and takes the lower place.

“The trial by fire is no less certain: the fire evaporates and disperses all that is innocent and pure, leaving only acrid and sour matter which resists its influence. The effect produced by poisons on animals is still more plain to see: its malignity extends to every part that it reaches, and all that it touches is vitiated; it burns and scorches all the inner parts with a strange, irresistible fire.

“The poison employed by Sainte-Croix has been tried in all the ways, and can defy every experiment. This poison floats in water, it is the superior, and the water obeys it; it escapes in the trial by fire, leaving behind only innocent deposits; in animals it is so skilfully concealed that no one could detect it; all parts of the animal remain healthy and active; even while it is spreading the cause of death, this artificial poison leaves behind the marks and appearance of life. Every sort of experiment has been tried. The first was to pour out several drops of the liquid found into oil of tartar and sea water, and nothing was precipitated into the vessels used; the second was to pour the same liquid into a sanded vessel, and at the bottom there was found nothing acrid or acid to the tongue, scarcely any stains; the third experiment was tried upon an Indian fowl, a pigeon, a dog, and some other animals, which died soon after. When they were opened, however, nothing was found but a little coagulated blood in the ventricle of the heart. Another experiment was giving a white powder to a cat, in a morsel of mutton. The cat vomited for half an hour, and was found dead the next day, but when opened no part of it was found to be affected by the poison. A second trial of the same poison was made upon a pigeon, which soon died. When opened, nothing peculiar was found except a little reddish water in the stomach."

These experiments proved that Sainte-Croix was a learned chemist, and suggested the idea that he did not employ his art for nothing; everybody recalled the sudden, unexpected deaths that had occurred, and the bonds from the marquise and from Penautier looked like blood-money. As one of these two was absent, and the other so powerful and rich that they dared not arrest him without proofs, attention was now paid to the objection put in by Lachaussee.

It was said in the objection that Lachaussee had spent seven years in the service of Sainte-Croix, so he could not have considered the time he had passed with the d'Aubrays as an interruption to this service. The bag containing the thousand pistoles and the three bonds for a hundred livres had been found in the place indicated; thus Lachaussee had a thorough knowledge of this closet: if he knew the closet, he would know about the box; if he knew about the box, he could not be an innocent man. This was enough to induce Madame Mangot de Villarceaux, the lieutenant's widow, to lodge an accusation against him, and in consequence a writ was issued against Lachaussee, and he was arrested.

When this happened, poison was found upon him. The trial came on before the Chatelet. Lachaussee denied his guilt obstinately. The judges thinking they had no sufficient proof, ordered the preparatory question to be applied. Mme. Mangot appealed from a judgment which would probably save the culprit if he had the strength to resist the torture and own to nothing;

[Note: There were two kinds of question, one before and one after the sentence was passed. In the first, an accused person would endure frightful torture in the hope of saving his life, and so would often confess nothing. In the second, there was no hope, and therefore it was not worth while to suffer additional pains.]

so, in virtue of this appeal, a judgment, on March 4th, 1673, declared that Jean Amelin Lachaussee was convicted of having poisoned the lieutenant and the councillor; for which he was to be broken alive on the wheel, having been first subjected to the question both ordinary and extraordinary, with a view to the discovery of his accomplices. At the same time Madame de Brinvilliers was condemned in default of appearance to have her head cut off.

Lachaussee suffered the torture of the boot. This was having each leg fastened between two planks and drawn together in an iron ring, after which wedges were driven in between the middle planks; the ordinary question was with four wedges, the extraordinary with eight. At the third wedge Lachaussee said he was ready to speak; so the question was stopped, and he was carried into the choir of the chapel stretched on a mattress, where, in a weak voice — for he could hardly speak — he begged for half an hour to recover himself. We give a verbatim extract from the report of the question and the execution of the death-sentence:

“Lachaussee, released from the question and laid on the mattress, the official reporter retired. Half an hour later Lachaussee begged that he might return, and said that he was guilty; that Sainte-Croix told him that Madame de Brinvilliers had given him the poison to administer to her brothers; that he had done it in water and soup, had put the reddish water in the lieutenant’s glass in Paris, and the clear water in the pie at Villequoy; that Sainte-Croix had promised to keep him always, and to make him a gift of 100 pistolets; that he gave him an account of the effect of the poisons, and that Sainte-Croix had given him some of the waters several times. Sainte-Croix told him that the marquise knew nothing of his other poisonings, but Lachaussee thought she did know, because she had often spoken to him about his poisons; that she wanted to compel him to go away, offering him money if he would go; that she had asked him for the box and its contents; that if Sainte-Croix had been able to put anyone into the service of Madame d’Aubray, the lieutenant’s widow, he would possibly have had her poisoned also; for he had a fancy for her daughter.”

This declaration, which left no room for doubt, led to the judgment that came next, thus described in the Parliamentary register: “Report of the question and execution on the 24th of March 1673, containing the declarations and confessions of Jean Amelin Lachaussee; the court has ordered that the persons mentioned, Belleguise, Martin, Poitevin, Olivier, Veron pere, the wife of Quesdon the wigmaker, be summoned to appear before the court to be interrogated and heard concerning matters arising from the present inquiry, and orders that the decree of arrest against Lapierre and summons against Penautier decreed by the criminal lieutenant shall be carried out. In Parliament, 27th March 1673.” In virtue of this judgment, Penautier, Martin, and Belleguise were interrogated on the 21st, 22nd, and 24th of April. On the 26th of July, Penautier was discharged; fuller information was desired concerning Belleguise, and the arrest of Martin was ordered. On the 24th of March, Lachaussee had been broken on the wheel. As to Exili, the beginner of it all, he had disappeared like Mephistopheles after Faust’s end, and nothing was heard of him. Towards the end of the year Martin was released for want of sufficient evidence. But the Marquise de Brinvilliers remained at Liege, and although she was shut up in a convent she had by no means abandoned one, at any rate, of the most worldly pleasures. She had soon found consolation for the death of Sainte-Croix, whom, all the same, she had loved so much as to be willing to kill herself for his sake. But she had adopted a new lover, Theria by name. About this man it has been impossible to get any information, except that his name was several times mentioned during the trial. Thus, all the accusations had, one by one, fallen upon her, and it was resolved to seek her out in the retreat where she was supposed to be safe. The mission was difficult and very delicate. Desgrais, one of the cleverest of the officials, offered to undertake it. He was a handsome man, thirty-six years old or thereabouts: nothing in his looks betrayed his connection with the police; he wore any kind of dress with equal ease and grace, and was familiar with every grade in the social scale, disguising himself as a wretched tramp or a noble lord. He was just the right man, so his offer was accepted.

He started accordingly for Liege, escorted by several archers, and, fortified by a letter from the king addressed to the Sixty of that town, wherein Louis xiv demanded the guilty woman to be given up for punishment. After examining the letter, which Desgrais had taken pains to procure, the council authorised the extradition of the marquise.

This was much, but it was not all. The marquise, as we know, had taken refuge in a convent, where Desgrais dared not arrest her by force, for two reasons: first, because she might get information beforehand, and hide herself in one of the cloister retreats whose secret is known only to the superior; secondly, because Liege was so religious a town that the event would produce a great sensation: the act might be looked upon as a sacrilege, and might bring about a popular rising, during which the marquise might possibly contrive to escape. So Desgrais paid a visit to his wardrobe, and feeling that an abbe’s dress would best free him from suspicion, he appeared at the doors of the convent in the guise of a fellow-countryman just returned from Rome, unwilling to pass through Liege without presenting his compliments to the lovely and unfortunate marquise. Desgrais had just the manner of the younger son of a great house: he was as flattering as a courtier, as enterprising as a musketeer. In this first visit he made himself attractive by his wit and his audacity, so much so that more easily than he had dared to hope, he got leave to pay a second call. The second visit was not long delayed: Desgrais presented himself the very next day. Such eagerness was flattering to the marquise, so Desgrais was received even better than the night before. She, a woman of rank and fashion, for more than a year had been robbed of all intercourse with people of a certain set, so with Desgrais the marquise resumed her Parisian manner. Unhappily the charming abbe was to leave Liege in a few days; and on that account he became all the more pressing, and a third visit, to take place next day, was formally arranged. Desgrais was punctual: the marquise was impatiently waiting him; but by a conjunction of circumstances that Desgrais had no doubt arranged beforehand, the amorous meeting was disturbed two or three times just as they were getting more intimate and least wanting to be observed. Desgrais complained of these tiresome checks; besides, the marquise and he too would be compromised: he owed concealment to his cloth: He begged her to grant him a rendezvous outside the town, in some deserted walk, where there would be no fear of their being recognised or followed: the marquise hesitated no longer than would serve to put a price on the favour she was granting, and the rendezvous was fixed for the same evening.

The evening came: both waited with the same impatience, but with very different hopes. The marquise found Desgrais at the appointed spot: he gave her his arm then holding her hand in his own, he gave a sign, the archers appeared, the lover threw off his mask, Desgrais was confessed, and the marquise was his prisoner. Desgrais left her in the hands of his men, and hastily made his way to the convent. Then, and not before, he produced his order from the Sixty, by means of which he opened the marquise's room. Under her bed he found a box, which he seized and sealed; then he went back to her, and gave the order to start.

When the marquise saw the box in the hands of Desgrais, she at first appeared stunned; quickly recovering, she claimed a paper inside it which contained her confession. Desgrais refused, and as he turned round for the carriage to come forward, she tried to choke herself by swallowing a pin. One of the archers, called Claude, Rolla, perceiving her intention, contrived to get the pin out of her mouth. After this, Desgrais commanded that she should be doubly watched.

They stopped for supper. An archer called Antoine Barbier was present at the meal, and watched so that no knife or fork should be put on the table, or any instrument with which she could wound or kill herself. The marquise, as she put her glass to her mouth as though to drink, broke a little bit off with her teeth; but the archer saw it in time, and forced her to put it out on her plate. Then she promised him, if he would save her, that she would make his fortune. He asked what he would have to do for that. She proposed that he should cut Desgrais' throat; but he refused, saying that he was at her service in any other way. So she asked him for pen and paper, and wrote this letter:

"DEAR THERIA, — I am in the hands of Desgrais, who is taking me by road from Liege to Paris. Come quickly and save me."

Antoine Barbier took the letter, promising to deliver it at the right address; but he gave it to Desgrais instead. The next day, finding that this letter had not been pressing enough, she wrote him another, saying that the escort was only eight men, who could be easily overcome by four or five determined assailants, and she counted on him to strike this bald stroke. But, uneasy when she got no answer and no result from her letters, she despatched a third missive to Theria. In this she implored him by his own salvation, if he were not strong enough to attack her escort and save her, at least to kill two of the four horses by which she was conveyed, and to profit by the moment of confusion to seize the chest and throw it into the fire; otherwise, she declared, she was lost. Though Theria received none of these letters, which were one by one handed over by Barbier to Desgrais, he all the same did go to Maestricht, where the marquise was to pass, of his own accord. There he tried to bribe the archers, offering much as 10,000 livres, but they were incorruptible. At Rocroy the cortege met M. Palluau, the councillor, whom the Parliament had sent after the prisoner, that he might put questions to her at a time when she least expected them, and so would not have prepared her answers. Desgrais told him all that had passed, and specially called his attention to the famous box, the object of so much anxiety and so many eager instructions. M. de Palluau opened it, and found among other things a paper headed "My Confession." This confession was a proof that the guilty feel great need of discovering their crimes either to mankind or to a merciful God. Sainte-Croix, we know, had made a confession that was burnt, and here was the marquise equally imprudent. The confession contained seven articles, and began thus, "I confess to God, and to you, my father," and was a complete avowal, of all the crimes she had committed.

In the first article she accused herself of incendiarism;

In the second, of having ceased to be a virgin at seven years of age;

In the third of having poisoned her father;

In the fourth, of having poisoned her two brothers;

In the fifth, that she had tried to poison her sister, a Carmelite nun.

The two other articles were concerned with the description of strange and unnatural sins. In this woman there was something of Locusta and something of Messalina as well: antiquity could go no further.

M de Palluau, fortified by his knowledge of this important document, began his examination forthwith. We give it verbatim, rejoicing that we may substitute an official report for our own narrative.

Asked why she fled to Liege, she replied that she left France on account of some business with her sister-in-law.

Asked if she had any knowledge of the papers found in the box, she replied that in the box there were several family papers, and among them a general confession which she desired to make; when she wrote it, however, her mind was disordered; she knew not what she had said or done, being distraught at the time, in a foreign country, deserted by her relatives, forced to borrow every penny.

Asked as to the first article, what house it was she had burnt, she replied that she had not burnt anything, but when she wrote that she was out of her senses.

Asked about the six other articles she replied that she had no recollection of them.

Asked if she had not poisoned her father and brothers, she replied that she knew nothing at all about it.

Asked if it were not Lachaussee who poisoned her brothers, she replied that she knew nothing about it.

Asked if she did not know that her sister could not live long, having been poisoned, she said that she expected her sister to die, because she suffered in the same way as her brothers; that she had lost all memory of the time when she wrote this confession; admitted that she left France by the advice of her relations.

Asked why her relations had advised her thus, she replied that it was in connection with her brothers' affairs; admitted seeing Sainte-Croix since his release from the Bastille.

Asked if Sainte-Croix had not persuaded her to get rid of her father, she replied that she could not remember; neither did she remember if Sainte-Croix had given her powders or other drugs, nor if Sainte-Croix had told her he knew how to make her rich.

Eight letters having been produced, asked to whom she had written them, she replied that she did not remember.

Asked why she had promised to pay 30,000 livres to Sainte-Croix, she replied that she intended to entrust this sum to his care, so that she might make use of it when she wanted it, believing him to be her friend; she had not wished this to be known, by reason of her creditors; that she had an acknowledgment from Sainte-Croix, but had lost it in her travels; that her husband knew nothing about it.

Asked if the promise was made before or after the death of her brothers, she replied that she could not remember, and it made no difference.

Asked if she knew an apothecary called Glazer, she replied that she had consulted him three times about inflammation.

Asked why she wrote to Theria to get hold of the box, she replied that she did not understand.

Asked why, in writing to Theria, she had said she was lost unless he got hold of the box, she replied that she could not remember.

Asked if she had seen during the journey with her father the first symptoms of his malady, she replied that she had not noticed that her father was ill on the journey, either going or coming back in 1666.

Asked if she had not done business with Penautier, she replied that Penautier owed her 30,000 livres.

Asked how this was, she replied that she and her husband had lent Penautier 10,000 crowns, that he had paid it back, and since then they had had no dealings with him.

The marquise took refuge, we see, in a complete system of denial: arrived in Paris, and confined in the Conciergerie, she did the same; but soon other terrible charges were added, which still further overwhelmed her.

The sergeant Cluet deposed: that, observing a lackey to M. d'Aubray, the councillor, to be the man Lachaussee, whom he had seen in the service of Sainte-Croix, he said to the marquise that if her brother knew that Lachaussee had been with Sainte-Croix he would not like it, but that Madame de Brinvilliers exclaimed, "Dear me, don't tell my brothers; they would give him a thrashing, no doubt, and he may just as well get his wages as any body else." He said nothing to the d'Aubrays, though he saw Lachaussee paying daily visits to Sainte-Croix and to the marquise, who was worrying Sainte-Croix to let her have her box, and wanted her bill for two or three thousand pistoles. Other wise she would have had him assassinated. She often said that she was very anxious that no one should see the contents of the box; that it was a very important matter, but only concerned herself. After the box was opened, the witness added, he had told the marquise, that the commissary Picard said to Lachaussee that there were strange things in it; but the lady blushed, and changed the subject. He asked her if she were not an accomplice. She said, "What! I?" but then muttered to herself: "Lachaussee ought to be sent off to Picardy." The witness repeated that she had been after Sainte-Croix along time about the box, and if she had got it she would have had his throat cut. The witness further said that when he told Briancourt that Lachaussee was taken and would doubtless confess all, Briancourt, speaking of the marquise, remarked, "She is a lost woman." That d'Aubray's daughter had called Briancourt a rogue, but Briancourt had replied that she little knew what obligations she was under to him; that they had wanted to poison both her and the lieutenant's widow, and he alone had hindered it. He had heard from Briancourt that the marquise had often said that there are means to get rid of people one dislikes, and they can easily be put an end to in a bowl of soup.

The girl Edme Huet, a woman of Brescia, deposed that Sainte-Croix went to see the marquise every day, and that in a box belonging to that lady she had seen two little packets containing sublimate in powder and in paste: she recognised these, because she was an apothecary's daughter. She added that one day Madame de Brinvilliers, after a dinner party, in a merry mood, said, showing her a little box, "Here is vengeance on one's enemies: this box is small, but holds plenty of successsions!" That she gave back the box into her hands, but soon changing from her sprightly mood, she cried, "Good heavens, what have I said? Tell nobody." That Lambert, clerk at the palace, told her he had brought the packets to Madame from Sainte-Croix; that Lachaussee often went to see her; and that she herself, not being paid ten pistoles which the marquise owed her, went to complain to Sainte-Croix, threatening to tell the lieutenant what she had seen; and accordingly the ten pistoles were paid; further, that the marquise and Sainte-Croix always kept poison about them, to make use of, in case of being arrested.

Laurent Perrette, living with Glazer, said that he had often seen a lady call on his mistress with Sainte-Croix; that the footman told him she was the Marquise de Brinvilliers; that he would wager his head on it that they came to Glazer's to make poison; that when they came they used to leave their carriage at the Foire Saint-Germain.

Marie de Villeray, maid to the marquise, deposed that after the death of M. d'Aubray the councillor, Lachaussee came to see the lady and spoke with her in private; that Briancourt said she had caused the death of a worthy men; that Briancourt every day took some electuary for fear of being poisoned, and it was no doubt due to this precaution that he was still alive; but he feared he would be stabbed, because she had told him the secret about the poisoning; that d'Aubray's daughter had to be warned; and that there was a similar design against the tutor of M. de Brinvillier's children. Marie de Villeray added that two days after the death of the councillor, when Lachaussee was in Madame's bedroom, Couste, the late lieutenant's secretary, was announced, and Lachaussee had to be hidden in the alcove by the bed. Lachaussee brought the marquise a letter from Sainte-Croix.

Francois Desgrais, officer, deposed that when he was given the king's orders he arrested the marquise at Liege; that he found under her bed a box which he sealed; that the lady had demanded a paper which was in it, containing her confession, but he refused it; that on the road to Paris the marquise had told him that she believed it was Glazer who made the poisons for Sainte-Croix; that Sainte-Croix, who had made a rendezvous with her one day at the cross Saint-Honore, there showed her four little bottles, saying, “See what Glazer has sent me.” She asked him for one, but Sainte-Croix said he would rather die than give it up. He added that the archer Antoine Barbier had given him three letters written by the marquise to Theria; that in the first she had told him to come at once and snatch her from the hands of the soldiers; that in the second she said that the escort was only composed of eight persons, who could he worsted by five men; that in the third she said that if he could not save her from the men who were taking her away, he should at least approach the commissary, and killing his valet’s horse and two other horses in his carriage, then take the box, and burn it; otherwise she was lost.

Laviolette, an archer, deposed that on the evening of the arrest, the marquise had a long pin and tried to put it in her mouth; that he stopped her, and told her that she was very wicked; that he perceived that people said the truth and that she had poisoned all her family; to which she replied, that if she had, it was only through following bad advice, and that one could not always be good.

Antoine Barbier, an archer, said that the marquise at table took up a glass as though to drink, and tried to swallow a piece of it; that he prevented this, and she promised to make his fortune if only he would save her; that she wrote several letters to Theria; that during the whole journey she tried all she could to swallow pins, bits of glass, and earth; that she had proposed that he should cut Desgrais’ throat, and kill the commissary’s valet; that she had bidden him get the box and burn it, and bring a lighted torch to burn everything; that she had written to Penautier from the Conciergerie; that she gave him, the letter, and he pretended to deliver it.

Finally, Francoise Roussel deposed that she had been in the service of the marquise, and the lady had one day given her some preserved gooseberries; that she had eaten some on the point of her knife, and at once felt ill. She also gave her a slice of mutton, rather wet, which she ate, afterwards suffering great pain in the stomach, feeling as though she had been pricked in the heart, and for three years had felt the same, believing herself poisoned.

It was difficult to continue a system of absolute denial in face of proofs like these. The marquise persisted, all the same, that she was in no way guilty; and Maitre Nivelle, one of the best lawyers of the period, consented to defend her cause.

He combated one charge after another, in a remarkably clever way, owning to the adulterous connection of the marquise with Sainte-Croix, but denying her participation in the murders of the d'Aubrays, father and sons: these he ascribed entirely to the vengeance desired by Sainte-Croix. As to the confession, the strongest and, he maintained, the only evidence against Madame de Brinvilliers, he attacked its validity by bringing forward certain similar cases, where the evidence supplied by the accused against themselves had not been admitted by reason of the legal action: 'Non auditur perire volens'. He cited three instances, and as they are themselves interesting, we copy them verbatim from his notes.

FIRST CASE

Dominicus Soto, a very famous canonist and theologian, confessor to Charles V, present at the first meetings of the Council of Trent under Paul III, propounds a question about a man who had lost a paper on which he had written down his sins. It happened that this paper fell into the hands of an ecclesiastical judge, who wished to put in information against the writer on the strength of this document. Now this judge was justly punished by his superior, because confession is so sacred that even that which is destined to constitute the confession should be wrapped in eternal silence. In accordance with this precedent, the following judgment, reported in the 'Traite des Confesseurs', was given by Roderic Acugno. A Catalonian, native of Barcelona, who was condemned to death for homicide and owned his guilt, refused to confess when the hour of punishment arrived. However strongly pressed, he resisted, and so violently, giving no reason, that all were persuaded that his mind was unhinged by the fear of death. Saint-Thomas of Villeneuve, Archbishop of Valencia, heard of his obstinacy. Valencia was the place where his sentence was given. The worthy prelate was so charitable as to try to persuade the criminal to make his confession, so as not to lose his soul as well as his body. Great was his surprise, when he asked the reason of the refusal, to hear the doomed man declare that he hated confessors, because he had been condemned through the treachery of his own priest, who was the only person who knew about the murder. In confession he had admitted his crime and said where the body was buried, and all about it; his confessor had revealed it all, and he could not deny it, and so he had been condemned. He had only just learned, what he did not know at the time he confessed, that his confessor was the brother of the man he had killed, and that the desire for vengeance had prompted the bad priest to betray his confession. Saint-Thomas, hearing this, thought that this incident was of more importance than the trial, which concerned the life of only one person, whereas the honour of religion was at stake, with consequences infinitely more important. He felt he must verify this statement, and summoned the confessor. When he had admitted the breach of faith, the judges were obliged to revoke their sentence and pardon the criminal, much to the gratification of the public mind. The confessor was adjudged a very severe penance, which Saint-Thomas modified because of his prompt avowal of his fault, and still more because he had given an opportunity for the public exhibition of that reverence which judges themselves are bound to pay to confessions.

SECOND CASE

In 1579 an innkeeper at Toulouse killed with his own hand, unknown to the inmates of his house, a stranger who had come to lodge with him, and buried him secretly in the cellar. The wretch then suffered from remorse, and confessed the crime with all its circumstances, telling his confessor where the body was buried. The relations of the dead man, after making all possible search to get news of him, at last proclaimed through the town a large reward to be given to anyone who would discover what had happened to him. The confessor, tempted by this bait, secretly gave word that they had only to search in the innkeeper's cellar and they would find the corpse. And they found it in the place indicated. The innkeeper was thrown into prison, was tortured, and confessed his crime. But afterwards he always maintained that his confessor was the only person who could have betrayed him. Then the Parliament, indignant with such means of finding out the truth, declared him innocent, failing other proof than what came through his confessor. The confessor was himself condemned to be hanged, and his body was burnt. So fully did the tribunal in its wisdom recognise the importance of securing the sanctity of a sacrament that is indispensable to salvation.

THIRD CASE

An Armenian woman had inspired a violent passion in a young Turkish gentleman, but her prudence was long an obstacle to her lover's desires. At last he went beyond all bounds, and threatened to kill both her and her husband if she refused to gratify him. Frightened by this threat, which she knew too well he would carry out, she feigned consent, and gave the Turk a rendezvous at her house at an hour when she said her husband would be absent; but by arrangement the husband arrived, and although the Turk was armed with a sabre and a pair of pistols, it so befell that they were fortunate enough to kill their enemy, whom they buried under their dwelling unknown to all the world. But some days after the event they went to confess to a priest of their nation, and revealed every detail of the tragic story. This unworthy minister of the Lord supposed that in a Mahommedan country, where the laws of the priesthood and the functions of a confessor are either unknown or disapproved, no examination would be made into the source of his information, and that his evidence would have the same weight as any other accuser's. So he resolved to make a profit and gratify his own avarice. Several times he visited the husband and wife, always borrowing considerable sums, and threatening to reveal their crime if they refused him. The first few times the poor creatures gave in to his exactions; but the moment came at last when, robbed of all their fortune, they were obliged to refuse the sum he demanded. Faithful to his threat, the priest, with a view to more reward, at once denounced them to the dead man's father. He, who had adored his son, went to the vizier, told him he had identified the murderers through their confessor, and asked for justice. But this denunciation had by no means the desired effect. The vizier, on the contrary, felt deep pity for the wretched Armenians, and indignation against the priest who had betrayed them. He put the accuser into a room which adjoined the court, and sent for the Armenian bishop to ask what confession really was, and what punishment was deserved by a priest who betrayed it, and what was the fate of those whose crimes were made known in this fashion. The bishop replied that the secrets of confession are inviolable, that Christians burn the priest who reveals them, and absolve those whom he accuses, because the avowal made by the guilty to the priest is proscribed by the Christian religion, on pain of eternal damnation. The vizier, satisfied with the answer, took the bishop into another room, and summoned the accused to declare all the circumstances: the poor wretches, half dead, fell at the vizier's feet. The woman spoke, explaining that the necessity of defending life and honour had driven them to take up arms to kill their enemy. She added that God alone had witnessed their crime, and it would still be unknown had not the law of the same God compelled them to confide it to the ear of one of His ministers for their forgiveness. Now the priest's insatiable avarice had ruined them first and then denounced them. The vizier made them go into a third room, and ordered the treacherous priest to be confronted with the bishop, making him again rehearse the penalties incurred by those who betray confessions. Then, applying this to the guilty priest, he condemned him to be burnt alive in a public place; —in anticipation, said he, of burning in hell, where he would assuredly receive the punishment of his infidelity and crimes. The sentence was executed without delay.

In spite of the effect which the advocate intended to produce by these three cases, either the judges rejected them, or perhaps they thought the other evidence without the confession was enough, and it was soon clear to everyone, by the way the trial went forward, that the marquise would be condemned. Indeed, before sentence was pronounced, on the morning of July 16th, 1676, she saw M. Pirot, doctor of the Sorbonne, come into her prison, sent by the chief president. This worthy magistrate, foreseeing the issue, and feeling that one so guilty should not be left till the last moment, had sent the good priest. The latter, although he had objected that the Conciergerie had its own two chaplains, and added that he was too feeble to undertake such a task, being unable even to see another man bled without feeling ill, accepted the painful mission, the president having so strongly urged it, on the ground that in this case he needed a man who could be entirely trusted. The president, in fact, declared that, accustomed as he was to dealing with criminals, the strength of the marquise amazed him. The day before he summoned M. Pirot, he had worked at the trial from morning to night, and for thirteen hours the accused had been confronted with Briancourt, one of the chief witnesses against her. On that very day, there had been five hours more, and she had borne it all, showing as much respect towards her judges as haughtiness towards the witness, reproaching him as a miserable valet, given to drink, and protesting that as he had been dismissed for his misdemeanours, his testimony against her ought to go for nothing. So the chief president felt no hope of breaking her inflexible spirit, except by the agency of a minister of religion; for it was not enough to put her to death, the poisons must perish with her, or else society would gain nothing. The doctor Pirot came to the marquise with a letter from her sister, who, as we know, was a nun bearing the name of Sister Marie at the convent Saint-Jacques. Her letter exhorted the marquise, in the most touching and affectionate terms, to place her confidence in the good priest, and look upon him not only as a helper but as a friend.

When M. Pirot came before the marquise, she had just left the dock, where she had been for three hours without confessing anything, or seeming in the least touched by what the president said, though he, after acting the part of judge, addressed her simply as a Christian, and showing her what her deplorable position was, appearing now for the last time before men, and destined so soon to appear before God, spoke to her such moving words that he broke down himself, and the oldest and most obdurate judges present wept when they heard him. When the marquise perceived the doctor, suspecting that her trial was leading her to death, she approached him, saying:

"You have come, sir, because — — "

But Father Chavigny, who was with M. Pirot; interrupted her, saying:

"Madame, we will begin with a prayer."

They all fell on their knees invoking the Holy Spirit; then the marquise asked them to add a prayer to the Virgin, and, this prayer finished, she went up to the doctor, and, beginning afresh, said:

"Sir, no doubt the president has sent you to give me consolation: with you I am to pass the little life I have left. I have long been eager to see you."

"Madame," the doctor replied, "I come to render you any spiritual office that I can; I only wish it were on another occasion."

"We must have resolution, sir," said she, smiling, "for all things."

Then turning to Father Chavigny, she said:

"My father, I am very grateful to you for bringing the doctor here, and for all the other visits you have been willing to pay me. Pray to God for me, I entreat you; henceforth I shall speak with no one but the doctor, for with him I must speak of things that can only be discussed tete-a-tete. Farewell, then, my father; God will reward you for the attention you have been willing to bestow upon me."

With these words the father retired, leaving the marquise alone with the doctor and the two men and one woman always in attendance on her. They were in a large room in the Montgomery tower extending, throughout its whole length. There was at the end of the room a bed with grey curtains for the lady, and a folding-bed for the custodian. It is said to have been the same room where the poet Theophile was once shut up, and near the door there were still verses in his well-known style written by his hand.

As soon as the two men and the woman saw for what the doctor had come, they retired to the end of the room, leaving the marquise free to ask for and receive the consolations brought her by the man of God. Then the two sat at a table side by side. The marquise thought she was already condemned, and began to speak on that assumption; but the doctor told her that sentence was not yet given, and he did not know precisely when it would be, still less what it would be; but at these words the marquise interrupted him.

“Sir,” she said, “I am not troubled about the future. If my sentence is not given yet, it soon will be. I expect the news this morning, and I know it will be death: the only grace I look for from the president is a delay between the sentence and its execution; for if I were executed to-day I should have very little time to prepare, and I feel I have need for more.”

The doctor did not expect such words, so he was overjoyed to learn what she felt. In addition to what the president had said, he had heard from Father Chavigny that he had told her the Sunday before that it was very unlikely she would escape death, and indeed, so far as one could judge by reports in the town, it was a foregone conclusion. When he said so, at first she had appeared stunned, and said with an air of great terror, “Father, must I die?” And when he tried to speak words of consolation, she had risen and shaken her head, proudly replying —

“No, no, father; there is no need to encourage me. I will play my part, and that at once: I shall know how to die like a woman of spirit.”

Then the father had told her that we cannot prepare for death so quickly and so easily; and that we have to be in readiness for a long time, not to be taken by surprise; and she had replied that she needed but a quarter of an hour to confess in, and one moment to die.

So the doctor was very glad to find that between Sunday and Thursday her feelings had changed so much.

“Yes,” said she, “the more I reflect the more I feel that one day would not be enough to prepare myself for God’s tribunal, to be judged by Him after men have judged me.”

“Madame,” replied the doctor, “I do not know what or when your sentence will be; but should it be death, and given to-day, I may venture to promise you that it will not be carried out before to-morrow. But although death is as yet uncertain, I think it well that you should be prepared for any event.”

“Oh, my death is quite certain,” said she, “and I must not give way to useless hopes. I must repose in you the great secrets of my whole life; but, father, before this opening of my heart, let me hear from your lips the opinion you have formed of me, and what you think in my present state I ought to do."

"You perceive my plan," said the doctor, "and you anticipate what I was about to say. Before entering into the secrets of your conscience, before opening the discussion of your affairs with God, I am ready, madame, to give you certain definite rules. I do not yet know whether you are guilty at all, and I suspend my judgment as to all the crimes you are accused of, since of them I can learn nothing except through your confession. Thus it is my duty still to doubt your guilt. But I cannot be ignorant of what you are accused of: this is a public matter, and has reached my ears; for, as you may imagine, madame, your affairs have made a great stir, and there are few people who know nothing about them."

"Yes," she said, smiling, "I know there has been a great deal of talk, and I am in every man's mouth."

"Then," replied the doctor, "the crime you are accused of is poisoning. If you are guilty, as is believed, you cannot hope that God will pardon you unless you make known to your judges what the poison is, what is its composition and what its antidote, also the names of your accomplices. Madame, we must lay hands on all these evil-doers without exception; for if you spared them, they would be able to make use of your poison, and you would then be guilty of all the murders committed by them after your death, because you did not give them over to the judges during your life; thus one might say you survive yourself, for your crime survives you. You know, madame, that a sin in the moment of death is never pardoned, and that to get remission for your crimes, if crimes you have, they must die when you die: for if you slay them not, be very sure they will slay you."

"Yes, I am sure of that," replied the marquise, after a moment of silent thought; "and though I will not admit that I am guilty, I promise, if I am guilty, to weigh your words. But one question, sir, and pray take heed that an answer is necessary. Is there not crime in this world that is beyond pardon? Are not some people guilty of sins so terrible and so numerous that the Church dares not pardon them, and if God, in His justice, takes account of them, He cannot for all His mercy pardon them? See, I begin with this question, because, if I am to have no hope, it is needless for me to confess."

"I wish to think, madame," replied the doctor, in spite of himself half frightened at the marquise, "that this your first question is only put by way of a general thesis, and has nothing to do with your own state. I shall answer the question without any personal application. No, madame, in this life there are no unpardonable sinners, terrible and numerous howsoever their sins may be. This is an article of faith, and without holding it you could not die a good Catholic. Some doctors, it is true, have before now maintained the contrary, but they have been condemned as heretics. Only despair and final impenitence are unpardonable, and they are not sins of our life but in our death."

"Sir," replied the marquise, "God has given me grace to be convinced by what you say, and I believe He will pardon all sins — that He has often exercised this power. Now all my trouble is that He may not deign to grant all His goodness to one so wretched as I am, a creature so unworthy of the favours already bestowed on her."

The doctor reassured her as best he could, and began to examine her attentively as they conversed together. "She was," he said, "a woman naturally courageous and fearless; naturally gentle and good; not easily excited; clever and penetrating, seeing things very clearly in her mind, and expressing herself well and in few but careful words; easily finding a way out of a difficulty, and choosing her line of conduct in the most embarrassing circumstances; light-minded and fickle; unstable, paying no attention if the same thing were said several times over. For this reason," continued the doctor, "I was obliged to alter what I had to say from time to time, keeping her but a short time to one subject, to which, however, I would return later, giving the matter a new appearance and disguising it a little. She spoke little and well, with no sign of learning and no affectation, always, mistress of herself, always composed and saying just what she intended to say. No one would have supposed from her face or from her conversation that she was so wicked as she must have been, judging by her public avowal of the parricide. It is surprising, therefore — and one must bow down before the judgment of God when He leaves mankind to himself — that a mind evidently of some grandeur, professing fearlessness in the most untoward and unexpected events, an immovable firmness and a resolution to await and to endure death if so it must be, should yet be so criminal as she was proved to be by the parricide to which she confessed before her judges. She had nothing in her face that would indicate such evil. She had very abundant chestnut hair, a rounded, well-shaped face, blue eyes very pretty and gentle, extraordinarily white skin, good nose, and no disagreeable feature. Still, there was nothing unusually attractive in the face: already she was a little wrinkled, and looked older than her age. Something made me ask at our first interview how old she was. ‘Monsieur,’ she said, ‘if I were to live till Sainte-Madeleine’s day I should be forty-six. On her day I came into the world, and I bear her name. I was christened Marie-Madeleine. But near to the day as we now are, I shall not live so long: I must end to-day, or at latest to-morrow, and it will be a favour to give me the one day. For this kindness I rely on your word.’ Anyone would have thought she was quite forty-eight. Though her face as a rule looked so gentle, whenever an unhappy thought crossed her mind she showed it by a contortion that frightened one at first, and from time to time I saw her face twitching with anger, scorn, or ill-will. I forgot to say that she was very little and thin. Such is, roughly given, a description of her body and mind, which I very soon came to know, taking pains from the first to observe her, so as to lose no time in acting on what I discovered.”

As she was giving a first brief sketch of her life to her confessor, the marquise remembered that he had not yet said mass, and reminded him herself that it was time to do so, pointing out to him the chapel of the Conciergerie. She begged him to say a mass for her and in honour of Our Lady, so that she might gain the intercession of the Virgin at the throne of God. The Virgin she had always taken for her patron saint, and in the midst of her crimes and disorderly life had never ceased in her peculiar devotion. As she could not go with the priest, she promised to be with him at least in the spirit. He left her at half-past ten in the morning, and after four hours spent alone together, she had been induced by his piety and gentleness to make confessions that could not be wrung from her by the threats of the judges or the fear of the question. The holy and devout priest said his mass, praying the Lord’s help for confessor and penitent alike. After mass, as he returned, he learned from a librarian called Seney, at the porter’s lodge, as he was taking a glass of wine, that judgment had been given, and that Madame de Brinvilliers was to have her hand cut off. This severity — as a fact, there was a mitigation of the sentence — made him feel yet more interest in his penitent, and he hastened back to her side.

As soon as she saw the door open, she advanced calmly towards him, and asked if he had truly prayed for her; and when he assured her of this, she said, “Father, shall I have the consolation of receiving the viaticum before I die?”

“Madame,” replied the doctor, “if you are condemned to death, you must die without that sacrament, and I should be deceiving you if I let you hope for it. We have heard of the death of the constable of Saint-Paul without his obtaining this grace, in spite of all his entreaties. He was executed in sight of the towers of Notre-Dame. He offered his own prayer, as you may offer yours, if you suffer the same fate. But that is all: God, in His goodness, allows it to suffice.”

“But,” replied the marquise, “I believe M. de Cinq-Mars and M. de Thou communicated before their death.”

“I think not, madame,” said the doctor; “for it is not so said in the pages of Montresor or any other book that describes their execution.”

“But M. de Montmorency?” said she.

“But M. de Marillac?” replied the doctor.

In truth, if the favour had been granted to the first, it had been refused to the second, and the marquise was specially struck thereby, for M. de Marillac was of her own family, and she was very proud of the connection. No doubt she was unaware that M. de Rohan had received the sacrament at the midnight mass said for the salvation of his soul by Father Bourdaloue, for she said nothing about it, and hearing the doctor’s answer, only sighed.

“Besides,” he continued, “in recalling examples of the kind, madame, you must not build upon them, please: they are extraordinary cases, not the rule. You must expect no privilege; in your case the ordinary laws will be carried out, and your fate will not differ from the fate of other condemned persons. How would it have been had you lived and died before the reign of Charles VI? Up to the reign of this prince, the guilty died without confession, and it was only by this king’s orders that there was a relaxation of this severity. Besides, communion is not absolutely necessary to salvation, and one may communicate spiritually in reading the word, which is like the body; in uniting oneself with the Church, which is the mystical substance of Christ; and in suffering for Him and with Him, this last communion of agony that is your portion, madame, and is the most perfect communion of all. If you heartily detest your crime and love God with all your soul, if you have faith and charity, your death is a martyrdom and a new baptism.”

“Alas, my God,” replied the marquise, “after what you tell me, now that I know the executioner’s hand was necessary to my salvation, what should I have become had I died at Liege? Where should I have been now? And even if I had not been taken, and had lived another twenty years away from France, what would my death have been, since it needed the scaffold for my purification? Now I see all my wrong-doings, and the worst of all is the last — I mean my effrontery before the judges. But all is not yet lost, God be thanked; and as I have one last examination to go through, I desire to make a complete confession about my whole life. You, Sir, I entreat specially to ask pardon on my behalf of the first president; yesterday, when I was in the dock, he spoke very touching words to me, and I was deeply moved; but I would not show it, thinking that if I made no avowal the evidence would not be sufficiently strong to convict me. But it has happened otherwise, and I must have scandalised my judges by such an exhibition of hardihood. Now I recognise my fault, and will repair it. Furthermore, sir, far from feeling angry with the president for the judgment he to-day passes against me, far from complaining of the prosecutor who has demanded it, I thank them both most humbly, for my salvation depends upon it."

The doctor was about to answer, encouraging her, when the door opened: it was dinner coming in, for it was now half-past one. The marquise paused and watched what was brought in, as though she were playing hostess in her own country house. She made the woman and the two men who watched her sit down to the table, and turning to the doctor, said, "Sir, you will not wish me to stand on ceremony with you; these good people always dine with me to keep me company, and if you approve, we will do the same to-day. This is the last meal," she added, addressing them, "that I shall take with you." Then turning to the woman, "Poor Madame du Rus," said she, "I have been a trouble to you for a long time; but have a little patience, and you will soon be rid of me. To-morrow you can go to Dravet; you will have time, for in seven or eight hours from now there will be nothing more to do for me, and I shall be in the gentleman's hands; you will not be allowed near me. After then, you can go away for good; for I don't suppose you will have the heart to see me executed." All this she said quite calmly, but not with pride. From time to time her people tried to hide their tears, and she made a sign of pitying them. Seeing that the dinner was on the table and nobody eating, she invited the doctor to take some soup, asking him to excuse the cabbage in it, which made it a common soup and unworthy of his acceptance. She herself took some soup and two eggs, begging her fellow-guests to excuse her for not serving them, pointing out that no knife or fork had been set in her place.

When the meal was almost half finished, she begged the doctor to let her drink his health. He replied by drinking hers, and she seemed to be quite charmed by, his condescension. “To-morrow is a fast day,” said she, setting down her glass, “and although it will be a day of great fatigue for me, as I shall have to undergo the question as well as death, I intend to obey the orders of the Church and keep my fast.”

“Madame,” replied the doctor, “if you needed soup to keep you up, you would not have to feel any scruple, for it will be no self-indulgence, but a necessity, and the Church does not exact fasting in such a case.”

“Sir,” replied the marquise, “I will make no difficulty about it, if it is necessary and if you order it; but it will not be needed, I think: if I have some soup this evening for supper, and some more made stronger than usual a little before midnight, it will be enough to last me through to-morrow, if I have two fresh eggs to take after the question.”

“In truth,” says the priest in the account we give here, “I was alarmed by this calm behaviour. I trembled when I heard her give orders to the concierge that the soup was to be made stronger than usual and that she was to have two cups before midnight. When dinner was over, she was given pen and ink, which she had already asked for, and told me that she had a letter to write before I took up my pen to put down what she wanted to dictate.” The letter, she explained, which was difficult to write, was to her husband. She would feel easier when it was written. For her husband she expressed so much affection, that the doctor, knowing what had passed, felt much surprised, and wishing to try her, said that the affection was not reciprocated, as her husband had abandoned her the whole time of the trial. The marquise interrupted him:

“My father, we must not judge things too quickly or merely by appearances. M. de Brinvilliers has always concerned himself with me, and has only failed in doing what it was impossible to do. Our interchange of letters never ceased while I was out of the kingdom; do not doubt but that he would have come to Paris as soon as he knew I was in prison, had the state of his affairs allowed him to come safely. But you must know that he is deeply in debt, and could not appear in Paris without being arrested. Do not suppose that he is without feeling for me.”

She then began to write, and when her letter was finished she handed it to the doctor, saying, “You, sir, are the lord and master of all my sentiments from now till I die; read this letter, and if you find anything that should be altered, tell me."

This was the letter —

"When I am on the point of yielding up my soul to God, I wish to assure you of my affection for you, which I shall feel until the last moment of my life. I ask your pardon for all that I have done contrary to my duty. I am dying a shameful death, the work of my enemies: I pardon them with all my heart, and I pray you to do the same. I also beg you to forgive me for any ignominy that may attach to you herefrom; but consider that we are only here for a time, and that you may soon be forced to render an account to God of all your actions, and even your idle words, just as I must do now. Be mindful of your worldly affairs, and of our children, and give them a good example; consult Madame Marillac and Madame Couste. Let as many prayers as possible be said for me, and believe that in my death I am still ever yours, D'AUBRAY."

The doctor read this letter carefully; then he told her that one of her phrases was not right — the one about her enemies. "For you have no other enemies," said he, "than your own crimes. Those whom you call your enemies are those who love the memory of your father and brothers, whom you ought to have loved more than they do."

"But those who have sought my death," she replied, "are my enemies, are they not, and is it not a Christian act to forgive them?"

"Madame," said the doctor, "they are not your enemies, but you are the enemy of the human race: nobody can think without, horror of your crimes."

"And so, my father," she replied, "I feel no resentment towards them, and I desire to meet in Paradise those who have been chiefly instrumental in taking me and bringing me here."

"Madame," said the doctor, "what mean you by this? Such words are used by some when they desire people's death. Explain, I beg, what you mean."

"Heaven forbid," cried the marquise, "that you should understand me thus! Nay, may God grant them long prosperity in this world and infinite glory in the next! Dictate a new letter, and I will write just what you please."

When a fresh letter had been written, the marquise would attend to nothing but her confession, and begged the doctor to take the pen for her. "I have done so many wrong thing's," she said, "that if I only gave you a verbal confession, I should never be sure I had given a complete account."

Then they both knelt down to implore the grace of the Holy Spirit. They said a 'Veni Creator' and a 'Salve Regina', and the doctor then rose and seated himself at a table, while the marquise, still on her knees, began a Confiteor and made her whole confession. At nine o'clock, Father Chavigny, who had brought Doctor Pirot in the morning, came in again. The marquise seemed annoyed, but still put a good face upon it. "My father," said she, "I did not expect to see you so late; pray leave me a few minutes longer with the doctor." He retired. "Why has he come?" asked the marquise.

"It is better for you not to be alone," said the doctor.

"Then do you mean to leave me?" cried the marquise, apparently terrified.

"Madame, I will do as you wish," he answered; "but you would be acting kindly if you could spare me for a few hours. I might go home, and Father Chavigny would stay with you."

"Ah!" she cried, wringing her hands, "you promised you would not leave me till I am dead, and now you go away. Remember, I never saw you before this morning, but since then you have become more to me than any of my oldest friends."

"Madame," said the good doctor, "I will do all I can to please you. If I ask for a little rest, it is in order that I may resume my place with more vigour to-morrow, and render you better service than I otherwise could. If I take no rest, all I say or do must suffer. You count on the execution for tomorrow; I do not know if you are right; but if so, to-morrow will be your great and decisive day, and we shall both need all the strength we have. We have already been working for thirteen or fourteen hours for the good of your salvation; I am not a strong man, and I think you should realise, madame, that if you do not let me rest a little, I may not be able to stay with you to the end."

"Sir," said the marquise, "you have closed my mouth. To-morrow is for me a far more important day than to-day, and I have been wrong: of course you must rest to-night. Let us just finish this one thing, and read over what we have written."

It was done, and the doctor would have retired; but the supper came in, and the marquise would not let him go without taking something. She told the concierge to get a carriage and charge it to her. She took a cup of soup and two eggs, and a minute later the concierge came back to say the carriage was at the door. Then the marquise bade the doctor good-night, making him promise to pray for her and to be at the Conciergerie by six o'clock the next morning. This he promised her.

The day following, as he went into the tower, he found Father Chavigny, who had taken his place with the marquise, kneeling and praying with her. The priest was weeping, but she was calm, and received the doctor in just the same way as she had let him go. When Father Chavigny saw him, he retired. The marquise begged Chavigny to pray for her, and wanted to make him promise to return, but that he would not do. She then turned to the doctor, saying, "Sir, you are punctual, and I cannot complain that you have broken your promise; but oh, how the time has dragged, and how long it has seemed before the clock struck six!"

"I am here, madame," said the doctor; "but first of all, how have you spent the night?"

"I have written three letters," said the marquise, "and, short as they were, they took a long time to write: one was to my sister, one to Madame de Marillac, and the third to M. Couste. I should have liked to show them to you, but Father Chavigny offered to take charge of them, and as he had approved of them, I could not venture to suggest any doubts. After the letters were written, we had some conversation and prayer; but when the father took up his breviary and I my rosary with the same intention, I felt so weary that I asked if I might lie on my bed; he said I might, and I had two good hours' sleep without dreams or any sort of uneasiness; when I woke we prayed together, and had just finished when you came back."

"Well, madame," said the doctor, "if you will, we can pray again; kneel down, and let us say the 'Veni Sancte Spiritus'."

She obeyed, and said the prayer with much unction and piety. The prayer finished, M. Pirot was about to take up the pen to go on with the confession, when she said, "Pray let me submit to you one question which is troubling me. Yesterday you gave me great hope of the mercy of God; but I cannot presume to hope I shall be saved without spending a long time in purgatory; my crime is far too atrocious to be pardoned on any other conditions; and when I have attained to a love of God far greater than I can feel here, I should not expect to be saved before my stains have been purified by fire, without suffering the penalty that my sins have deserved. But I have been told that the flames of purgatory where souls are burned for a time are just the same as the flames of hell where those who are damned burn through all eternity tell me, then, how can a soul awaking in purgatory at the moment of separation from this body be sure that she is not really in hell? how can she know that the flames that burn her and consume not will some day cease? For the torment she suffers is like that of the damned, and the flames wherewith she is burned are even as the flames of hell. This I would fain know, that at this awful moment I may feel no doubt, that I may know for certain whether I dare hope or must despair."

"Madame," replied the doctor, "you are right, and God is too just to add the horror of uncertainty to His rightful punishments. At that moment when the soul quits her earthly body the judgment of God is passed upon her: she hears the sentence of pardon or of doom; she knows whether she is in the state of grace or of mortal sin; she sees whether she is to be plunged forever into hell, or if God sends her for a time to purgatory. This sentence, madame, you will learn at the very instant when the executioner's axe strikes you; unless, indeed, the fire of charity has so purified you in this life that you may pass, without any purgatory at all, straight to the home of the blessed who surround the throne of the Lord, there to receive a recompense for earthly martyrdom."

"Sir," replied the marquise, "I have such faith in all you say that I feel I understand it all now, and I am satisfied."

The doctor and the marquise then resumed the confession that was interrupted the night before. The marquise had during the night recollected certain articles that she wanted to add. So they continued, the doctor making her pause now and then in the narration of the heavier offences to recite an act of contrition.

After an hour and a half they came to tell her to go down. The registrar was waiting to read her the sentence. She listened very calmly, kneeling, only moving her head; then, with no alteration in her voice, she said, "In a moment: we will have one word more, the doctor and I, and then I am at your disposal." She then continued to dictate the rest of her confession. When she reached the end, she begged him to offer a short prayer with her, that God might help her to appear with such becoming contrition before her judges as should atone for her scandalous effrontery. She then took up her cloak, a prayer-book which Father Chavigny had left with her, and followed the concierge, who led her to the torture chamber, where her sentence was to be read.

First, there was an examination which lasted five hours. The marquise told all she had promised to tell, denying that she had any accomplices, and affirming that she knew nothing of the composition of the poisons she had administered, and nothing of their antidotes. When this was done, and the judges saw that they could extract nothing further, they signed to the registrar to read the sentence. She stood to hear it: it was as follows:

"That by the finding of the court, d'Aubray de Brinvilliers is convicted of causing the death by poison of Maitre Dreux d'Aubray, her father, and of the two Maitres d'Aubray, her brothers, one a civil lieutenant, the other a councillor to the Parliament, also of attempting the life of Therese d'Aubray, her sister; in punishment whereof the court has condemned and does condemn the said d'Aubray de Brinvilliers to make the rightful atonement before the great gate of the church of Paris, whither she shall be conveyed in a tumbril, barefoot, a rope on her neck, holding in her hands a burning torch two pounds in weight; and there on her knees she shall say and declare that maliciously, with desire for revenge and seeking their goods, she did poison her father, cause to be poisoned her two brothers, and attempt the life of her sister, whereof she doth repent, asking pardon of God, of the king, and of the judges; and when this is done, she shall be conveyed and carried in the same tumbril to the Place de Greve of this town, there to have her head cut off on a scaffold to be set up for the purpose at that place; afterwards her body to be burnt and the ashes scattered; and first she is to be subjected to the question ordinary and extraordinary, that she may reveal the names of her accomplices. She is declared to be deprived of all successions from her said father, brothers, and sister, from the date of the several crimes; and all her goods are confiscated to the proper persons; and the sum of 4000 livres shall be paid out of her estate to the king, and 400 livres to the Church for prayers to be said on behalf of the poisoned persons; and all the costs shall be paid, including those of Amelin called Lachaussee. In Parliament, 16th July 1676."

The marquise heard her sentence without showing any sign of fear or weakness. When it was finished, she said to the registrar, "Will you, sir, be so kind as to read it again? I had not expected the tumbril, and I was so much struck by that that I lost the thread of what followed."

The registrar read the sentence again. From that moment she was the property of the executioner, who approached her. She knew him by the cord he held in his hands, and extended her own, looking him over coolly from head to foot without a word. The judges then filed out, disclosing as they did so the various apparatus of the question. The marquise firmly gazed upon the racks and ghastly rings, on which so many had been stretched crying and screaming. She noticed the three buckets of water

[Note: The torture with the water was thus administered. There were eight vessels, each containing 2 pints of water. Four of these were given for the ordinary, and eight for the extraordinary. The executioner inserted a horn into the patient’s mouth, and if he shut his teeth, forced him to open them by pinching his nose with the finger and thumb.]

prepared for her, and turned to the registrar — for she would not address the executioner — saying, with a smile, “No doubt all this water is to drown me in? I hope you don’t suppose that a person of my size could swallow it all.” The executioner said not a word, but began taking off her cloak and all her other garments, until she was completely naked. He then led her up to the wall and made her sit on the rack of the ordinary question, two feet from the ground. There she was again asked to give the names of her accomplices, the composition of the poison and its antidote; but she made the same reply as to the doctor, only adding, “If you do not believe me, you have my body in your hands, and you can torture me.”

The registrar signed to the executioner to do his duty. He first fastened the feet of the marquise to two rings close together fixed to a board; then making her lie down, he fastened her wrists to two other rings in the wall, distant about three feet from each other. The head was at the same height as the feet, and the body, held up on a trestle, described a half-curve, as though lying over a wheel. To increase the stretch of the limbs, the man gave two turns to a crank, which pushed the feet, at first about twelve inches from the rings, to a distance of six inches. And here we may leave our narrative to reproduce the official report.

“On the small trestle, while she was being stretched, she said several times, ‘My God! you are killing me! And I only spoke the truth.’

“The water was given: she turned and twisted, saying, ‘You are killing me!’

“The water was again given.

“Admonished to name her accomplices, she said there was only one man, who had asked her for poison to get rid of his wife, but he was dead.

“The water was given; she moved a little, but would not say anything.

“Admonished to say why, if she had no accomplice, she had written from the Conciergerie to Penautier, begging him to do all he could for her, and to remember that his interests in this matter were the same as her own, she said that she never knew Penautier had had any understanding with Sainte-Croix about the poisons, and it would be a lie to say otherwise; but when a paper was found in Sainte-Croix’s box that concerned Penautier, she remembered how often she had seen him at the house, and thought it possible that the friendship might have included some business about the poisons; that, being in doubt on the point, she risked writing a letter as though she were sure, for by doing so she was not prejudicing her own case; for either Penautier was an accomplice of Sainte-Croix or he was not. If he was, he would suppose the marquise knew enough to accuse him, and would accordingly do his best to save her; if he was not, the letter was a letter wasted, and that was all.

“The water was again given; she turned and twisted much, but said that on this subject she had said all she possibly could; if she said anything else, it would be untrue.”

The ordinary question was at an end. The marquise had now taken half the quantity of water she had thought enough to drown her. The executioner paused before he proceeded to the extraordinary question. Instead of the trestle two feet and a half high on which she lay, they passed under her body a trestle of three and a half feet, which gave the body a greater arch, and as this was done without lengthening the ropes, her limbs were still further stretched, and the bonds, tightly straining at wrists and ankles, penetrated the flesh and made the blood run. The question began once more, interrupted by the demands of the registrar and the answers of the sufferer. Her cries seemed not even to be heard.

“On the large trestle, during the stretching, she said several times, ‘O God, you tear me to, pieces! Lord, pardon me! Lord, have mercy upon me!’

“Asked if she had nothing more to tell regarding her accomplices, she said they might kill her, but she would not tell a lie that would destroy her soul.

“The water was given, she moved about a little, but would not speak.

“Admonished that she should tell the composition of the poisons and their antidotes, she said that she did not know what was in them; the only thing she could recall was toads; that Sainte-Croix never revealed his secret to her; that she did not believe he made them himself, but had them prepared by Glazer; she seemed to remember that some of them contained nothing but rarefied arsenic; that as to an antidote, she knew of no other than milk; and Sainte-Croix had told her that if one had taken milk in the morning, and on the first onset of the poison took another glassful, one would have nothing to fear.

“Admonished to say if she could add anything further, she said she had now told everything; and if they killed her, they could not extract anything more.

“More water was given; she writhed a little, and said she was dead, but nothing more.

“More water was given; she writhed more violently, but would say no more.

“Yet again water was given; writhing and twisting, she said, with a deep groan, ‘O my God, I am killed!’ but would speak no more.”

Then they tortured her no further: she was let down, untied, and placed before the fire in the usual manner. While there, close to the fire, lying on the mattress, she was visited by the good doctor, who, feeling he could not bear to witness the spectacle just described, had asked her leave to retire, that he might say a mass for her, that God might grant her patience and courage. It is plain that the good priest had not prayed in vain.

“Ah,” said the marquise, when she perceived him, “I have long been desiring to see you again, that you might comfort me. My torture has been very long and very painful, but this is the last time I shall have to treat with men; now all is with God for the future. See my hands, sir, and my feet, are they not torn and wounded? Have not my executioners smitten me in the same places where Christ was smitten?”

“And therefore, madame,” replied the priest, “these sufferings now are your happiness; each torture is one step nearer to heaven. As you say, you are now for God alone; all your thoughts and hopes must be fastened upon Him; we must pray to Him, like the penitent king, to give you a place among His elect; and since nought that is impure can pass thither, we must strive, madame, to purify you from all that might bar the way to heaven.”

The marquise rose with the doctor’s aid, for she could scarcely stand; tottering, she stepped forward between him and the executioner, who took charge of her immediately after the sentence was read, and was not allowed to leave her before it was completely carried out. They all three entered the chapel and went into the choir, where the doctor and the marquise knelt in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. At that moment several persons appeared in the nave, drawn by curiosity. They could not be turned out, so the executioner, to save the marquise from being annoyed, shut the gate of the choir, and let the patient pass behind the altar. There she sat down in a chair, and the doctor on a seat opposite; then he first saw, by the light of the chapel window, how greatly changed she was. Her face, generally so pale, was inflamed, her eyes glowing and feverish, all her body involuntarily trembling. The doctor would have spoken a few words of consolation, but she did not attend. “Sir,” she said, “do you know that my sentence is an ignominious one? Do you know there is fire in the sentence?”

The doctor gave no answer; but, thinking she needed something, bade the gaoler to bring her wine. A minute later he brought it in a cup, and the doctor handed it to the marquise, who moistened her lips and then gave it back. She then noticed that her neck was uncovered, and took out her handkerchief to cover it, asking the gaoler for a pin to fasten it with. When he was slow in finding a pin, looking on his person for it, she fancied that he feared she would choke herself, and shaking her head, said, with a smile, “You have nothing to fear now; and here is the doctor, who will pledge his word that I will do myself no mischief.”

“Madame,” said the gaoler, handing her the pin she wanted, “I beg your pardon for keeping you waiting. I swear I did not distrust you; if anyone distrusts you, it is not I.”

Then kneeling before her, he begged to kiss her hand. She gave it, and asked him to pray to God for her. “Ah yes,” he cried, sobbing, “with all my heart.” She then fastened her dress as best she could with her hands tied, and when the gaoler had gone and she was alone with the doctor, said: —

“Did you not hear what I said, sir? I told you there was fire in my sentence. And though it is only after death that my body is to be burnt, it will always be a terrible disgrace on my memory. I am saved the pain of being burnt alive, and thus, perhaps, saved from a death of despair, but the shamefulness is the same, and it is that I think of.”

"Madame," said the doctor, "it in no way affects your soul's salvation whether your body is cast into the fire and reduced to ashes or whether it is buried in the ground and eaten by worms, whether it is drawn on a hurdle and thrown upon a dung-heap, or embalmed with Oriental perfumes and laid in a rich man's tomb. Whatever may be your end, your body will arise on the appointed day, and if Heaven so will, it will come forth from its ashes more glorious than a royal corpse lying at this moment in a gilded casket. Obsequies, madame, are for those who survive, not for the dead."

A sound was heard at the door of the choir. The doctor went to see what it was, and found a man who insisted on entering, all but fighting with the executioner. The doctor approached and asked what was the matter. The man was a saddler, from whom the marquise had bought a carriage before she left France; this she had partly paid for, but still owed him two hundred livres. He produced the note he had had from her, on which was a faithful record of the sums she had paid on account. The marquise at this point called out, not knowing what was going on, and the doctor and executioner went to her. "Have they come to fetch me already?" said she. "I am not well prepared just at this moment; but never mind, I am ready."

The doctor reassured her, and told her what was going on. "The man is quite right," she said to the executioner; "tell him I will give orders as far as I can about the money." Then, seeing the executioner retiring, she said to the doctor, "Must I go now, sir? I wish they would give me a little more time; for though I am ready, as I told you, I am not really prepared. Forgive me, father; it is the question and the sentence that have upset me it is this fire burning in my eyes like hell-flames.

"Had they left me with you all this time, there would now be better hope of my salvation."

"Madame," said the doctor, "you will probably have all the time before nightfall to compose yourself and think what remains for you to do."

"Ah, sir," she replied, with a smile, "do not think they will show so much consideration for a poor wretch condemned to be burnt. That does not depend on ourselves; but as soon as everything is ready, they will let us know, and we must start."

"Madame," said the doctor, "I am certain that they will give you the time you need."

"No, no," she replied abruptly and feverishly, "no, I will not keep them waiting. As soon as the tumbril is at this door, they have only to tell me, and

I go down.”

“Madame,” said he, “I would not hold you back if I found you prepared to stand before the face of God, for in your situation it is right to ask for no time, and to go when the moment is come; but not everyone is so ready as Christ was, who rose from prayer and awaked His disciples that He might leave the garden and go out to meet His enemies. You at this moment are weak, and if they come for you just now I should resist your departure.”

“Be calm; the time is not yet come,” said the executioner, who had heard this talk. He knew his statement must be believed, and wished as far as possible to reassure the marquise. “There is no hurry, and we cannot start for another two of three hours.”

This assurance calmed the marquise somewhat, and she thanked the man. Then turning to the doctor, she said, “Here is a rosary that I would rather should not fall into this person’s hands. Not that he could not make good use of it; for, in spite of their trade, I fancy that these people are Christians like ourselves. But I should prefer to leave this to somebody else.”

“Madame,” said the doctor, “if you will tell me your wishes in this matter, I will see that they are carried out.”

“Alas!” she said, “there is no one but my sister; and I fear lest she, remembering my crime towards her, may be too horrified to touch anything that belonged to me. If she did not mind, it would be a great comfort to me to think she would wear it after my death, and that the sight of it would remind her to pray for me; but after what has passed, the rosary could hardly fail to revive an odious recollection. My God, my God! I am desperately wicked; can it be that you will pardon me?”

“Madame,” replied the doctor, “I think you are mistaken about Mlle, d’Aubray. You may see by her letter what are her feelings towards you, and you must pray with this rosary up to the very end. Let not your prayers be interrupted or distracted, for no guilty penitent must cease from prayer; and I, madame, will engage to deliver the rosary where it will be gladly received.”

And the marquise, who had been constantly distracted since the morning, was now, thanks to the patient goodness of the doctor, able to return with her former fervour to her prayers. She prayed till seven o’clock. As the clock struck, the executioner without a word came and stood before her; she saw that her moment had come, and said to the doctor, grasping his arm, “A little longer; just a few moments, I entreat.”

“Madame,” said the doctor, rising, “we will now adore the divine blood of the Sacrament, praying that you may be thus cleansed from all soil and sin that may be still in your heart. Thus shall you gain the respite you desire.”

The executioner then tied tight the cords round her hands that he had let loose before, and she advanced pretty firmly and knelt before the altar, between the doctor and the chaplain. The latter was in his surplice, and chanted a ‘Veni Creator, Salve Regina, and Tantum ergo’. These prayers over, he pronounced the blessing of the Holy Sacrament, while the marquise knelt with her face upon the ground. The executioner then went forward to get ready a shirt, and she made her exit from the chapel, supported on the left by the doctor’s arm, on the right by the executioner’s assistant. Thus proceeding, she first felt embarrassment and confusion. Ten or twelve people were waiting outside, and as she suddenly confronted them, she made a step backward, and with her hands, bound though they were, pulled the headdress down to cover half her face. She passed through a small door, which was closed behind her, and then found herself between the two doors alone, with the doctor and the executioner’s man. Here the rosary, in consequence of her violent movement to cover her face, came undone, and several beads fell on the floor. She went on, however, without observing this; but the doctor stopped her, and he and the man stooped down and picked up all the beads, which they put into her hand. Thanking them humbly for this attention, she said to the man, “Sir, I know I have now no worldly possessions, that all I have upon me belongs to you, and I may not give anything away without your consent; but I ask you kindly to allow me to give this chaplet to the doctor before I die: you will not be much the loser, for it is of no value, and I am giving it to him for my sister. Kindly let me do this.”

“Madame,” said the man, “it is the custom for us to get all the property of the condemned; but you are mistress of all you have, and if the thing were of the very greatest value you might dispose of it as you pleased.”

The doctor, whose arm she held, felt her shiver at this gallantry, which for her, with her natural haughty disposition, must have been the worst humiliation imaginable; but the movement was restrained, and her face gave no sign. She now came to the porch of the Conciergerie, between the court and the first door, and there she was made to sit down, so as to be put into the right condition for making the ‘amende honorable’. Each step brought her nearer to the scaffold, and so did each incident cause her more uneasiness. Now she turned round desperately, and perceived the executioner holding a shirt in his hand. The door of the vestibule opened, and about fifty people came in, among them the Countess of Soissons, Madame du Refuge, Mlle. de Scudery, M. de Roquelaure, and the Abbe de Chimay. At the sight the marquise reddened with shame, and turning to the doctor, said, “Is this man to strip me again, as he did in the question chamber? All these preparations are very cruel; and, in spite of myself, they divert my thoughts, from God.”

Low as her voice was, the executioner heard, and reassured her, saying that they would take nothing off, only putting the shirt over her other clothes.

He then approached, and the marquise, unable to speak to the doctor with a man on each side of her, showed him by her looks how deeply she felt the ignominy of her situation. Then, when the shirt had been put on, for which operation her hands had to be untied, the man raised the headdress which she had pulled down, and tied it round her neck, then fastened her hands together with one rope and put another round her waist, and yet another round her neck; then, kneeling before her, he took off her shoes and stockings. Then she stretched out her hands to the doctor.

“Oh, sir,” she cried, “in God’s name, you see what they have done to me! Come and comfort me.”

The doctor came at once, supporting her head upon his breast, trying to comfort her; but she, in a tone of bitter lamentation, gazing at the crowd, who devoured her with all their eyes, cried, “Oh, sir, is not this a strange, barbarous curiosity?”

“Madame,” said he, the tears in his eyes, “do not look at these eager people from the point of view of their curiosity and barbarity, though that is real enough, but consider it part of the humiliation sent by God for the expiation of your crimes. God, who was innocent, was subject to very different opprobrium, and yet suffered all with joy; for, as Tertullian observes, He was a victim fattened on the joys of suffering alone.”

As the doctor spoke these words, the executioner placed in the marquise’s hands the lighted torch which she was to carry to Notre-Dame, there to make the ‘amende honorable’, and as it was too heavy, weighing two pounds, the doctor supported it with his right hand, while the registrar read her sentence aloud a second time. The doctor did all in his power to prevent her from hearing this by speaking unceasingly of God. Still she grew frightfully pale at the words, “When this is done, she shall be conveyed on a tumbril, barefoot, a cord round her neck, holding in her hands a burning torch two pounds in weight,” and the doctor could feel no doubt that in spite of his efforts she had heard. It became still worse when she reached the threshold of the vestibule and saw the great crowd waiting in the court. Then her face worked convulsively, and crouching down, as though she would bury her feet in the earth, she addressed the doctor in words both plaintive and wild: “Is it possible that, after what is now happening, M. de Brinvilliers can endure to go on living?”

“Madame,” said the doctor, “when our Lord was about to leave His disciples, He did not ask God to remove them from this earth, but to preserve them from all sin. ‘My Father,’ He said, ‘I ask not that You take them from the world, but keep them safe from evil.’ If, madame, you pray for M. de Brinvilliers, let it be only that he may be kept in grace, if he has it, and may attain to it if he has it not.”

But the words were useless: at that moment the humiliation was too great and too public; her face contracted, her eyebrows knit, flames darted from her eyes, her mouth was all twisted. Her whole appearance was horrible; the devil was once more in possession. During this paroxysm, which lasted nearly a quarter of an hour, Lebrun, who stood near, got such a vivid impression of her face that the following night he could not sleep, and with the sight of it ever before his eyes made the fine drawing which — is now in the Louvre, giving to the figure the head of a tiger, in order to show that the principal features were the same, and the whole resemblance very striking.

The delay in progress was caused by the immense crowd blocking the court, only pushed aside by archers on horseback, who separated the people. The marquise now went out, and the doctor, lest the sight of the people should completely distract her, put a crucifix in her hand, bidding her fix her gaze upon it. This advice she followed till they gained the gate into the street where the tumbril was waiting; then she lifted her eyes to see the shameful object. It was one of the smallest of carts, still splashed with mud and marked by the stones it had carried, with no seat, only a little straw at the bottom. It was drawn by a wretched horse, well matching the disgraceful conveyance.

The executioner bade her get in first, which she did very rapidly, as if to escape observation. There she crouched like a wild beast, in the left corner, on the straw, riding backwards. The doctor sat beside her on the right. Then the executioner got in, shutting the door behind him, and sat opposite her, stretching his legs between the doctor's. His man, whose business it was to guide the horse, sat on the front, back to back with the doctor and the marquise, his feet stuck out on the shafts. Thus it is easy to understand how Madame de Sevigne, who was on the Pont Notre-Dame, could see nothing but the headdress of the marquise as she was driven to Notre-Dame.

The cortege had only gone a few steps, when the face of the marquise, for a time a little calmer, was again convulsed. From her eyes, fixed constantly on the crucifix, there darted a flaming glance, then came a troubled and frenzied look which terrified the doctor. He knew she must have been struck by something she saw, and, wishing to calm her, asked what it was.

"Nothing, nothing," she replied quickly, looking towards him; "it was nothing."

"But, madame," said he, "you cannot give the lie to your own eyes; and a minute ago I saw a fire very different from the fire of love, which only some displeasing sight can have provoked. What may this be? Tell me, pray; for you promised to tell me of any sort of temptation that might assail you."

"Sir," she said, "I will do so, but it is nothing." Then, looking towards the executioner, who, as we know, sat facing the doctor, she said, "Put me in front of you, please; hide that man from me." And she stretched out her hands towards a man who was following the tumbril on horseback, and so dropped the torch, which the doctor took, and the crucifix, which fell on the floor. The executioner looked back, and then turned sideways as she wished, nodding and saying, "Oh yes, I understand." The doctor pressed to know what it meant, and she said, "It is nothing worth telling you, and it is a weakness in me not to be able to bear the sight of a man who has ill-used me. The man who touched the back of the tumbril is Desgrais, who arrested me at Liege, and treated me so badly all along the road. When I saw him, I could not control myself, as you noticed."

"Madame," said the doctor, "I have heard of him, and you yourself spoke of him in confession; but the man was sent to arrest you, and was in a responsible position, so that he had to guard you closely and rigorously; even if he had been more severe, he would only have been carrying out his orders. Jesus Christ, madame, could but have regarded His executioners as ministers of iniquity, servants of injustice, who added of their own accord every indignity they could think of; yet all along the way He looked on them with patience and more than patience, and in His death He prayed for them."

In the heart of the marquise a hard struggle was passing, and this was reflected on her face; but it was only for a moment, and after a last convulsive shudder she was again calm and serene; then she said: —

"Sir, you are right, and I am very wrong to feel such a fancy as this: may God forgive me; and pray remember this fault on the scaffold, when you give me the absolution you promise, that this too may be pardoned me." Then she turned to the executioner and said, "Please sit where you were before, that I may see M. Desgrais." The man hesitated, but on a sign from the doctor obeyed. The marquise looked fully at Desgrais for some time, praying for him; then, fixing her eyes on the crucifix, began to pray for herself: this incident occurred in front of the church of Sainte-Genevieve des Ardents.

But, slowly as it moved, the tumbril steadily advanced, and at last reached the place of Notre-Dame. The archers drove back the crowding people, and the tumbril went up to the steps, and there stopped. The executioner got down, removed the board at the back, held out his arms to the marquise, and set her down on the pavement. The doctor then got down, his legs quite numb from the cramped position he had been in since they left the Conciergerie. He mounted the church steps and stood behind the marquise, who herself stood on the square, with the registrar on her right, the executioner on her left, and a great crowd of people behind her, inside the church, all the doors being thrown open. She was made to kneel, and in her hands was placed the lighted torch, which up to that time the doctor had helped to carry. Then the registrar read the 'amende honorable' from a written paper, and she began to say it after him, but in so low a voice that the executioner said loudly, "Speak out as he does; repeat every word. Louder, louder!" Then she raised her voice, and loudly and firmly recited the following apology.

"I confess that, wickedly and for revenge, I poisoned my father and my brothers, and attempted to poison my sister, to obtain possession of their goods, and I ask pardon of God, of the king, and of my country's laws."

The ‘amende honorable’ over, the executioner again carried her to the tumbril, not giving her the torch any more: the doctor sat beside her: all was just as before, and the tumbril went on towards La Greve. From that moment, until she arrived at the scaffold, she never took her eyes off the crucifix, which the doctor held before her the whole time, exhorting her with religious words, trying to divert her attention from the terrible noise which the people made around the car, a murmur mingled with curses.

When they reached the Place de Greve, the tumbril stopped at a little distance from the scaffold. Then the registrar M. Drouet, came up on horseback, and, addressing the marquise, said, “Madame, have you nothing more to say? If you wish to make any declaration, the twelve commissaries are here at hand, ready to receive it.”

“You see, madame,” said the doctor, “we are now at the end of our journey, and, thank God, you have not lost your power of endurance on the road; do not destroy the effect of all you have suffered and all you have yet to suffer by concealing what you know, if perchance you do know more than you have hitherto said.”

“I have told all I know,” said the marquise, “and there is no more I can say.”

“Repeat these words in a loud voice,” said the doctor, “so that everybody may hear.”

Then in her loudest voice the marquise repeated —

“I have told all I know, and there is no more I can say.”

After this declaration, they were going to drive the tumbril nearer to the scaffold, but the crowd was so dense that the assistant could not force a way through, though he struck out on every side with his whip. So they had to stop a few paces short. The executioner had already got down, and was adjusting the ladder. In this terrible moment of waiting, the marquise looked calmly and gratefully at the doctor, and when she felt that the tumbril had stopped, said, “Sir, it is not here we part: you promised not to leave me till my head is cut off. I trust you will keep your word.”

“To be sure I will,” the doctor replied; “we shall not be separated before the moment of your death: be not troubled about that, for I will never forsake you.”

“I looked for this kindness,” she said, “and your promise was too solemn for you to think for one moment of failing me. Please be on the scaffold and be near me. And now, sir, I would anticipate the final farewell, — for all the things I shall have to do on the scaffold may distract me, — so let me thank you here. If I am prepared to suffer the sentence of my earthly judge, and to hear that of my heavenly judge, I owe it to your care for me, and I am deeply grateful. I can only ask your forgiveness for the trouble I have given you.” Tears choked the doctor’s speech, and he could not reply. “Do you not forgive me?” she repeated. At her words, the doctor tried to reassure her; but feeling that if he opened his mouth he must needs break into sobs, he still kept silent. The marquise appealed to him a third time. “I entreat you, sir, forgive me; and do not regret the time you have passed with me. You will say a De Profundus at the moment of my death, and a mass far me to-morrow: will you not promise?”

“Yes, madame,” said the doctor in a choking voice; “yes, yes, be calm, and I will do all you bid me.”

The executioner hereupon removed the board, and helped the marquise out of the tumbril; and as they advanced the few steps towards the scaffold, and all eyes were upon them, the doctor could hide his tears for a moment without being observed. As he was drying his eyes, the assistant gave him his hand to help him down. Meanwhile the marquise was mounting the ladder with the executioner, and when they reached the platform he told her to kneel down in front of a block which lay across it. Then the doctor, who had mounted with a step less firm than hers, came and knelt beside her, but turned in the other direction, so that he might whisper in her ear — that is, the marquise faced the river, and the doctor faced the Hotel de Ville. Scarcely had they taken their place thus when the man took down her hair and began cutting it at the back and at the sides, making her turn her head this way and that, at times rather roughly; but though this ghastly toilet lasted almost half an hour, she made no complaint, nor gave any sign of pain but her silent tears. When her hair was cut, he tore open the top of the shirt, so as to uncover the shoulders, and finally bandaged her eyes, and lifting her face by the chin, ordered her to hold her head erect. She obeyed, unresisting, all the time listening to the doctor’s words and repeating them from time to time, when they seemed suitable to her own condition. Meanwhile, at the back of the scaffold, on which the stake was placed, stood the executioner, glancing now and again at the folds of his cloak, where there showed the hilt of a long, straight sabre, which he had carefully concealed for fear Madame de Brinvilliers might see it when she mounted the scaffold. When the doctor, having pronounced absolution, turned his head and saw that the man was not yet armed, he uttered these prayers, which she repeated after him: "Jesus, Son of David and Mary, have mercy upon me; Mary, daughter of David and Mother of Jesus, pray for me; my God, I abandon my body, which is but dust, that men may burn it and do with it what they please, in the firm faith that it shall one day arise and be reunited with my soul. I trouble not concerning my body; grant, O God, that I yield up to Thee my soul, that it may enter into Thy rest; receive it into Thy bosom; that it may dwell once more there, whence it first descended; from Thee it came, to Thee returns; Thou art the source and the beginning; be thou, O God, the centre and the end!"

The marquise had said these words when suddenly the doctor heard a dull stroke like the sound of a chopper chopping meat upon a block: at that moment she ceased to speak. The blade had sped so quickly that the doctor had not even seen a flash. He stopped, his hair bristling, his brow bathed in sweat; for, not seeing the head fall, he supposed that the executioner had missed the mark and must needs start afresh. But his fear was short-lived, for almost at the same moment the head inclined to the left, slid on to the shoulder, and thence backward, while the body fell forward on the crossway block, supported so that the spectators could see the neck cut open and bleeding. Immediately, in fulfilment of his promise, the doctor said a De Profundis.

When the prayer was done and the doctor raised his head, he saw before him the executioner wiping his face. "Well, sir," said he, "was not that a good stroke? I always put up a prayer on these occasions, and God has always assisted me; but I have been anxious for several days about this lady. I had six masses said, and I felt strengthened in hand and heart." He then pulled out a bottle from under his cloak, and drank a dram; and taking the body under one arm, all dressed as it was, and the head in his other hand, the eyes still bandaged, he threw both upon the faggots, which his assistant lighted.

"The next day," says Madame de Sevigne, "people were looking for the charred bones of Madame de Brinvilliers, because they said she was a saint."

In 1814, M. d'Offemont, father of the present occupier of the castle where the Marquise de Brinvilliers poisoned her father, frightened at the approach of all the allied troops, contrived in one of the towers several hiding-places, where he shut up his silver and such other valuables as were to be found in this lonely country in the midst of the forest of Laigue. The foreign troops were passing backwards and forwards at Offemont, and after a three months' occupation retired to the farther side of the frontier.

Then the owners ventured to take out the various things that had been hidden; and tapping the walls, to make sure nothing had been overlooked, they detected a hollow sound that indicated the presence of some unsuspected cavity. With picks and bars they broke the wall open, and when several stones had come out they found a large closet like a laboratory, containing furnaces, chemical instruments, phials hermetically sealed full of an unknown liquid, and four packets of powders of different colours. Unluckily, the people who made these discoveries thought them of too much or too little importance; and instead of submitting the ingredients to the tests of modern science, they made away with them all, frightened at their probably deadly nature.

Thus was lost this great opportunity — probably the last — for finding and analysing the substances which composed the poisons of Sainte-Croix and Madame de Brinvilliers.

VANINKA

About the end of the reign of the Emperor Paul I — that is to say, towards the middle of the first year of the nineteenth century — just as four o’clock in the afternoon was sounding from the church of St. Peter and St. Paul, whose gilded vane overlooks the ramparts of the fortress, a crowd, composed of all sorts and conditions of people, began to gather in front of a house which belonged to General Count Tchermayloff, formerly military governor of a fair-sized town in the government of Pultava. The first spectators had been attracted by the preparations which they saw had been made in the middle of the courtyard for administering torture with the knout. One of the general’s serfs, he who acted as barber, was to be the victim.

Although this kind of punishment was a common enough sight in St. Petersburg, it nevertheless attracted all passers-by when it was publicly administered. This was the occurrence which had caused a crowd, as just mentioned, before General Tchermayloff’s house.

The spectators, even had they been in a hurry, would have had no cause to complain of being kept waiting, for at half-past four a young man of about five-and-twenty, in the handsome uniform of an aide-de-camp, his breast covered with decorations, appeared on the steps at the farther end of the court-yard in front of the house. These steps faced the large gateway, and led to the general’s apartments.

Arrived on the steps, the young aide-de-camp stopped a moment and fixed his eyes on a window, the closely drawn curtains of which did not allow him the least chance of satisfying his curiosity, whatever may have been its cause. Seeing that it was useless and that he was only wasting time in gazing in that direction, he made a sign to a bearded man who was standing near a door which led to the servants’ quarters. The door was immediately opened, and the culprit was seen advancing in the middle of a body of serfs and followed by the executioner. The serfs were forced to attend the spectacle, that it might serve as an example to them. The culprit was the general’s barber, as we have said, and the executioner was merely the coachman, who, being used to the handling of a whip, was raised or degraded, which you will, to the office of executioner every time punishment with the knout was ordered. This duty did not deprive him of either the esteem or even the friendship of his comrades, for they well knew that it was his arm alone that punished them and that his heart was not in his work. As Ivan's arm as well as the rest of his body was the property of the general, and the latter could do as he pleased with it, no one was astonished that it should be used for this purpose. More than that, correction administered by Ivan was nearly always gentler than that meted out by another; for it often happened that Ivan, who was a good-natured fellow, juggled away one or two strokes of the knout in a dozen, or if he were forced by those assisting at the punishment to keep a strict calculation, he manoeuvred so that the tip of the lash struck the deal plank on which the culprit was lying, thus taking much of the sting out of the stroke. Accordingly, when it was Ivan's turn to be stretched upon the fatal plank and to receive the correction he was in the habit of administering, on his own account, those who momentarily played his part as executioner adopted the same expedients, remembering only the strokes spared and not the strokes received. This exchange of mutual benefits, therefore, was productive of an excellent understanding between Ivan and his comrades, which was never so firmly knit as at the moment when a fresh execution was about to take place. It is true that the first hour after the punishment was generally so full of suffering that the knouted was sometimes unjust to the knouter, but this feeling seldom out-lasted the evening, and it was rare when it held out after the first glass of spirits that the operator drank to the health of his patient.

The serf upon whom Ivan was about to exercise his dexterity was a man of five or six-and-thirty, red of hair and beard, a little above average height. His Greek origin might be traced in his countenance, which even in its expression of terror had preserved its habitual characteristics of craft and cunning.

When he arrived at the spot where the punishment was to take place, the culprit stopped and looked up at the window which had already claimed the young aide-de-camp's attention; it still remained shut. With a glance round the throng which obstructed the entrance leading to the street, he ended by gazing, with a horror-stricken shudder upon the plank on which he was to be stretched. The shudder did not escape his friend Ivan, who, approaching to remove the striped shirt that covered his shoulders, took the opportunity to whisper under his breath —

“Come, Gregory, take courage!”

“You remember your promise?” replied the culprit, with an indefinable expression of entreaty.

“Not for the first lashes, Gregory; do not count on that, for during the first strokes the aide-de-camp will be watching; but among the later ones be assured I will find means of cheating him of some of them.”

“Beyond everything you will take care of the tip of the lash?”

“I will do my best, Gregory, I will do my best. Do you not know that I will?”

“Alas! yes,” replied Gregory.

“Now, then!” said the aide-de-camp.

“We are ready, noble sir,” replied Ivan.

“Wait, wait one moment, your high origin,” cried poor Gregory, addressing the young captain as though he had been a colonel, “Vache Vousso Korodie,” in order to flatter him. “I believe that the lady Vaninka’s window is about to open!”

The young captain glanced eagerly towards the spot which had already several times claimed his attention, but not a fold of the silken curtains, which could be seen through the panes of the window, had moved.

“You are mistaken, you rascal,” said the aide-de-camp, unwillingly removing his eyes from the window, as though he also had hoped to see it open, “you are mistaken; and besides, what has your noble mistress to do with all this?”

“Pardon, your excellency,” continued Gregory, gratifying the aide-de-camp with yet higher rank, — ”pardon, but it is through her orders I am about to suffer. Perhaps she might have pity upon a wretched servant!”

“Enough, enough; let us proceed,” said the captain in an odd voice, as though he regretted as well as the culprit that Vaninka had not shown mercy.

“Immediately, immediately, noble sir,” said Ivan; then turning to Gregory, he continued, “Come, comrade; the time has come.”

Gregory sighed heavily, threw a last look up at the window, and seeing that everything remained the same there, he mustered up resolution enough to lie down on the fatal plank. At the same time two other serfs, chosen by Ivan for assistants, took him by the arms and attached his wrists to two stakes, one at either side of him, so that it appeared as though he were stretched on a cross. Then they clamped his neck into an iron collar, and seeing that all was in readiness and that no sign favourable to the culprit had been made from the still closely shut window, the young aide-de-camp beckoned with his hand, saying, “Now, then, begin!”

“Patience, my lord, patience,” said Ivan, still delaying the whipping, in the hope that some sign might yet be made from the inexorable window. “I have a knot in my knout, and if I leave it Gregory will have good right to complain.”

The instrument with which the executioner was busying himself, and which is perhaps unknown to our readers, was a species of whip, with a handle about two feet long. A plaited leather thong, about four feet long and two inches broad, was attached to this handle, this thong terminating in an iron or copper ring, and to this another band of leather was fastened, two feet long, and at the beginning about one and a half inches thick: this gradually became thinner, till it ended in a point. The thong was steeped in milk and then dried in the sun, and on account of this method of preparation its edge became as keen and cutting as a knife; further, the thong was generally changed at every sixth stroke, because contact with blood softened it.

However unwillingly and clumsily Ivan set about untying the knot, it had to come undone at last. Besides, the bystanders were beginning to grumble, and their muttering disturbed the reverie into which the young aide-de-camp had fallen. He raised his head, which had been sunk on his breast, and cast a last look towards the window; then with a peremptory sign; and in a voice which admitted of no delay, he ordered the execution to proceed.

Nothing could put it off any longer: Ivan was obliged to obey, and he did not attempt to find any new pretext for delay. He drew back two paces, and with a spring he returned to his place, and standing on tiptoe, he whirled the knout above his head, and then letting it suddenly fall, he struck Gregory with such dexterity that the lash wrapped itself thrice round his victim’s body, encircling him like a serpent, but the tip of the thong struck the plank upon which Gregory was lying. Nevertheless, in spite of this precaution, Gregory uttered a loud shriek, and Ivan counted “One.”

At the shriek, the young aide-de-camp again turned towards the window; but it was still shut, and mechanically his eyes went back to the culprit, and he repeated the word “One.”

The knout had traced three blue furrows on Gregory’s shoulders. Ivan took another spring, and with the same skill as before he again enveloped the culprit’s body with the hissing thong, ever taking care that the tip of it should not touch him. Gregory uttered another shriek, and Ivan counted “Two.” The blood now began to colour the skin.

At the third stroke several drops of blood appeared; at the fourth the blood spurted out; at the fifth some drops spattered the young officer’s face; he drew back, and wiped them away with his handkerchief. Ivan profited by his distraction, and counted seven instead of six: the captain took no notice. At the ninth stroke Ivan stopped to change the lash, and in the hope that a second fraud might pass off as luckily as the first, he counted eleven instead of ten.

At that moment a window opposite to Vaninka’s opened, and a man about forty-five or fifty in general’s uniform appeared. He called out in a careless tone, “Enough, that will do,” and closed the window again.

Immediately on this apparition the young aide-de-camp had turned towards his general, saluting, and during the few seconds that the general was present he remained motionless. When the window had been shut again, he repeated the general’s words, so that the raised whip fell without touching the culprit.

“Thank his excellency, Gregory,” said Ivan, rolling the knout’s lash round his hand, “for having spared you two strokes;” and he added, bending down to liberate Gregory’s hand, “these two with the two I was able to miss out make a total of eight strokes instead of twelve. Come, now, you others, untie his other hand.”

But poor Gregory was in no state to thank anybody; nearly swooning with pain, he could scarcely stand.

Two moujiks took him by the arms and led him towards the serfs’ quarters, followed by Ivan. Having reached the door, however, Gregory stopped, turned his head, and seeing the aide-de-camp gazing pitifully at him, “Oh sir,” he cried, “please thank his excellency the general for me. As for the lady Vaninka,” he added in a low tone, “I will certainly thank her myself.”

“What are you muttering between your teeth?” cried the young officer, with an angry movement; for he thought he had detected a threatening tone in Gregory’s voice.

“Nothing, sir, nothing,” said Ivan. “The poor fellow is merely thanking you, Mr. Foedor, for the trouble you have taken in being present at his punishment, and he says that he has been much honoured, that is all.”

“That is right,” said the young man, suspecting that Ivan had somewhat altered the original remarks, but evidently not wishing to be better informed. “If Gregory wishes to spare me this trouble another time, let him drink less vodka; or else, if he must get drunk, let him at least remember to be more respectful.”

Ivan bowed low and followed his comrades, Foedor entered the house again, and the crowd dispersed, much dissatisfied that Ivan’s trickery and the general’s generosity had deprived them of four strokes of the knout — exactly a third of the punishment.

Now that we have introduced our readers to some of the characters in this history, we must make them better acquainted with those who have made their appearance, and must introduce those who are still behind the curtain.

General Count Tchermayloff, as we have said, after having been governor of one of the most important towns in the environs of Pultava, had been recalled to St. Petersburg by the Emperor Paul, who honoured him with his particular friendship. The general was a widower, with one daughter, who had inherited her mother’s fortune, beauty, and pride. Vaninka’s mother claimed descent from one of the chieftains of the Tartar race, who had invaded Russia, under the leadership of D’Gengis, in the thirteenth century. Vaninka’s naturally haughty disposition had been fostered by the education she had received. His wife being dead, and not having time to look after his daughter’s education himself, General Tchermayloff had procured an English governess for her. This lady, instead of suppressing her pupil’s scornful propensities, had encouraged them, by filling her head with those aristocratic ideas which have made the English aristocracy the proudest in the world. Amongst the different studies to which Vaninka devoted herself, there was one in which she was specially interested, and that one was, if one may so call it, the science of her own rank. She knew exactly the relative degree of nobility and power of all the Russian noble families — those that were a grade above her own, and those of whom she took precedence. She could give each person the title which belonged to their respective rank, no easy thing to do in Russia, and she had the greatest contempt for all those who were below the rank of excellency. As for serfs and slaves, for her they did not exist: they were mere bearded animals, far below her horse or her dog in the sentiments which they inspired in her; and she would not for one instant have weighed the life of a serf against either of those interesting animals.

Like all the women of distinction in her nation, Vaninka was a good musician, and spoke French, Italian, German, and English equally well.

Her features had developed in harmony with her character. Vaninka was beautiful, but her beauty was perhaps a little too decided. Her large black eyes, straight nose, and lips curling scornfully at the corners, impressed those who saw her for the first time somewhat unpleasantly. This impression soon wore off with her superiors and equals, to whom she became merely an ordinary charming woman, whilst to subalterns and such like she remained haughty and inaccessible as a goddess. At seventeen Vaninka's education was finished, and her governess who had suffered in health through the severe climate of St. Petersburg, requested permission to leave. This desire was granted with the ostentatious recognition of which the Russian nobility are the last representatives in Europe. Thus Vaninka was left alone, with nothing but her father's blind adoration to direct her. She was his only daughter, as we have mentioned, and he thought her absolutely perfect.

Things were in this state in the-general's house when he received a letter, written on the deathbed of one of the friends of his youth. Count Romayloff had been exiled to his estates, as a result of some quarrel with Potemkin, and his career had been spoilt. Not being able to recover his forfeited position, he had settled down about four hundred leagues from St. Petersburg; broken-hearted, distressed probably less on account of his own exile and misfortune than of the prospects of his only son, Foedor. The count feeling that he was leaving this son alone and friendless in the world, commended the young man, in the name of their early friendship, to the general, hoping that, owing to his being a favourite with Paul I, he would be able to procure a lieutenancy in a regiment for him. The general immediately replied to the count that his son should find a second father in himself; but when this comforting message arrived, Romayloff was no more, and Foedor himself received the letter and carried it back with him to the general, when he went to tell him of his loss and to claim the promised protection. So great was the general's despatch, that Paul I, at his request, granted the young man a sub-lieutenancy in the Semonowskoi regiment, so that Foedor entered on his duties the very next day after his arrival in St. Petersburg.

Although the young man had only passed through the general's house on his way to the barracks, which were situated in the Litenoi quarter, he had remained there long enough for him to have seen Vaninka, and she had produced a great impression upon him. Foedor had arrived with his heart full of primitive and noble feelings; his gratitude to his protector, who had opened a career for him, was profound, and extended to all his family. These feelings caused him perhaps to have an exaggerated idea of the beauty of the young girl who was presented to him as a sister, and who, in spite of this title, received him with the frigidity and hauteur of a queen. Nevertheless, her appearance, in spite of her cool and freezing manner, had left a lasting impression upon the young man's heart, and his arrival in St. Petersburg had been marked by feelings till then never experienced before in his life.

As for Vaninka, she had hardly noticed Foedor; for what was a young sub-lieutenant, without fortune or prospects, to her? What she dreamed of was some princely alliance, that would make her one of the most powerful ladies in Russia, and unless he could realise some dream of the Arabian Nights, Foedor could not offer her such a future.

Some time after this first interview, Foedor came to take leave of the general. His regiment was to form part of a contingent that Field-Marshal Souvarow was taking to Italy, and Foedor was about to die, or show himself worthy of the noble patron who had helped him to a career.

This time, whether on account of the elegant uniform that heightened Foedor's natural good looks, or because his imminent departure, glowing with hope and enthusiasm, lent a romantic interest to the young man, Vaninka was astonished at the marvellous change in him, and deigned, at her father's request, to give him her hand when he left. This was more than Foedor had dared to hope. He dropped upon his knee, as though in the presence of a queen, and took Vaninka's between his own trembling hands, scarcely daring to touch it with his lips. Light though the kiss had been, Vaninka started as though she had been burnt; she felt a thrill run through her, and she blushed violently. She withdrew her hand so quickly, that Foedor, fearing this adieu, respectful though it was, had offended her, remained on his knees, and clasping his hands, raised his eyes with such an expression of fear in them, that Vaninka, forgetting her hauteur, reassured him with a smile. Foedor rose, his heart filled with inexplicable joy, and without being able to say what had caused this feeling, he only knew that it had made him absolutely happy, so that, although he was just about to leave Vaninka, he had never felt greater happiness in his life.

The young man left dreaming golden dreams; for his future, be it gloomy or bright, was to be envied. If it ended in a soldier's grave, he believed he had seen in Vaninka's eyes that she would mourn him; if his future was glorious, glory would bring him back to St. Petersburg in triumph, and glory is a queen, who works miracles for her favourites.

The army to which the young officer belonged crossed Germany, descended into Italy by the Tyrolese mountains, and entered Verona on the 14th of April 1799. Souvarow immediately joined forces with General Melas, and took command of the two armies. General Chasteler next day suggested that they should reconnoitre. Souvarow, gazing at him with astonishment, replied, "I know of no other way of reconnoitring the enemy than by marching upon him and giving him battle."

As a matter of fact Souvarow was accustomed to this expeditious sort of strategy: through it he had defeated the Turks at Folkschany and Ismailoff; and he had defeated the Poles, after a few days' campaign, and had taken Prague in less than four hours. Catherine, out of gratitude, had sent her victorious general a wreath of oak-leaves, intertwined with precious stones, and worth six hundred thousand roubles, a heavy gold field-marshal's baton encrusted with diamonds; and had created him a field-marshal, with the right of choosing a regiment that should bear his name from that time forward. Besides, when he returned to Russia, she gave him leave of absence, that he might take a holiday at a beautiful estate she had given him, together with the eight thousand serfs who lived upon it.

What a splendid example for Foedor! Souvarow, the son of a humble Russian officer, had been educated at the ordinary cadets' training college, and had left it as a sub-lieutenant like himself. Why should there not be two Souvarows in the same century?

Souvarow arrived in Italy preceded by an immense reputation; religious, strenuous, unwearied, impassible, loving with the simplicity of a Tartar and fighting with the fury of a Cossack, he was just the man required to continue General Melas's successes over the soldiers of the Republic, discouraged as they had been by the weak vacillations of Scherer.

The Austro-Russian army of one hundred thousand men was opposed by only twenty-nine or thirty thousand French. Souvarow began as usual with a thundering blow. On 20th April he appeared before Brescia, which made a vain attempt at resistance; after a cannonade of about half an hour's duration, the Preschiera gate was forced, and the Korsakow division, of which Foedor’s regiment formed the vanguard, charged into the town, pursuing the garrison, which only consisted of twelve hundred men, and obliged them to take refuge in the citadel. Pressed with an impetuosity the French were not accustomed to find in their enemies, and seeing that the scaling ladders were already in position against the ramparts, the captain Boucret wished to come to terms; but his position was too precarious for him to obtain any conditions from his savage conquerors, and he and his soldiers were made prisoners of war.

Souvarow was experienced enough to know how best to profit by victory; hardly master of Brescia, the rapid occupation of which had discouraged our army anew, he ordered General Kray to vigorously press on the siege of Preschiera. General Kray therefore established his headquarters at Valeggio, a place situated at an equal distance between Preschiera and Mantua, and he extended from the Po to the lake of Garda, on the banks of the Mencio, thus investing the two cities at the same time.

Meanwhile the commander-in-chief had advanced, accompanied by the larger part of his forces, and had crossed the Oglio in two columns: he launched one column, under General Rosenberg, towards Bergamo, and the other, with General Melas in charge, towards the Serio, whilst a body of seven or eight thousand men, commanded by General Kaim and General Hohenzollern, were directed towards Placentia and Cremona, thus occupying the whole of the left bank of the Po, in such a manner that the Austro-Russian army advanced deploying eighty thousand men along a front of forty-five miles.

In view of the forces which were advancing, and which were three times as large as his own, Scherer beat a retreat all along the line. He destroyed the bridges over the Adda, as he did not consider that he was strong enough to hold them, and, having removed his headquarters to Milan, he awaited there the reply to a despatch which he had sent to the Directory, in which, tacitly acknowledging his incapacity, he tendered his resignation. As the arrival of his successor was delayed, and as Souvarow continued to advance, Scherer, more and more terrified by the responsibility which rested upon him, relinquished his command into the hands of his most able lieutenant. The general chosen by him was Moreau, who was again about to fight those Russians in whose ranks he was destined to die at last.

Moreau’s unexpected nomination was proclaimed amidst the acclamation of the soldiers. He had been called the French Fabius, on account of his magnificent campaign on the Rhine. He passed his whole army in review, saluted by the successive acclamations of its different divisions, which cried, “Long live Moreau! Long live the saviour of the army of Italy!” But however great this enthusiasm, it did not blind Moreau to the terrible position in which he found himself. At the risk of being out-flanked, it was necessary for him to present a parallel line to that of the Russian army, so that, in order to face his enemy, he was obliged to extend his line from Lake Lecco to Pizzighitone — that is to say, a distance of fifty miles. It is true that he might have retired towards Piedmont and concentrated his troops at Alexandria, to await there the reinforcements the Directory had promised to send him. But if he had done this, he would have compromised the safety of the army at Naples, and have abandoned it, isolated as it was, to the mercy of the enemy. He therefore resolved to defend the passage of the Adda as long as possible, in order to give the division under Dessolles, which was to be despatched to him by Massena, time to join forces with him and to defend his left, whilst Gauthier, who had received orders to evacuate Tuscany and to hasten with forced marches to his aid, should have time to arrive and protect his right. Moreau himself took the centre, and personally defended the fortified bridge of Cassano; this bridge was protected by the Ritorto Canal, and he also defended it with a great deal of artillery and an entrenched vanguard. Besides, Moreau, always as prudent as brave, took every precaution to secure a retreat, in case of disaster, towards the Apennines and the coast of Genoa. Hardly were his dispositions completed before the indefatigable Souvarow entered Triveglio. At the same time as the Russian commander-in-chief arrived at this last town, Moreau heard of the surrender of Bergamo and its castle, and on 23rd April he saw the heads of the columns of the allied army.

The same day the Russian general divided his troops into three strong columns, corresponding to the three principal points in the French line, each column numerically more than double the strength of those to whom they were opposed. The right column, led by General Wukassowich, advanced towards Lake Lecco, where General Serrurier awaited it. The left column, under the command of Melas, took up its position in front of the Cassano entrenchments; and the Austrian division, under Generals Zopf and Ott, which formed the centre, concentrated at Canonia, ready at a given moment to seize Vaprio. The Russian and Austrian troops bivouacked within cannon-shot of the French outposts.

That evening, Foedor, who with his regiment formed part of Chasteler's division, wrote to General Tchermayloff:

"We are at last opposite the French, and a great battle must take place to-morrow morning; tomorrow evening I shall be a lieutenant or a corpse."

Next morning, 26th April, cannon resounded at break of day from the extremities of the lines; on our left Prince Bagration's grenadiers attacked us, on our right General Seckendorff, who had been detached from the camp of Triveglio, was marching on Crema.

These two attacks met with very different success. Bagration's grenadiers were repulsed with terrible loss, whilst Seckendorff, on the contrary, drove the French out of Crema, and pushed forward towards the bridge of Lodi. Foedor's predictions were falsified: his portion of the army did nothing the whole day; his regiment remained motionless, waiting for orders that did not come.

Souvarow's arrangements were not yet quite complete, the night was needed for him to finish them. During the night, Moreau, having heard of Seckendorff's success on his extreme right, sent an order to Serrurier commanding him to leave at Lecco, which was an easy post to defend, the 18th light brigade and a detachment of dragoons only, and to draw back with the rest of his troops towards the centre. Serrurier received this order about two o'clock in the morning, and executed it immediately.

On their side the Russians had lost no time, profiting by the darkness of the night. General Wukassowich had repaired the bridge at Brevio, which had been destroyed by the French, whilst General Chasteler had built another bridge two miles below the castle of Trezzo. These two bridges had been, the one repaired and the other built, without the French outposts having the slightest suspicion of what was taking place.

Surprised at two o'clock in the morning by two Austrian divisions, which, concealed by the village of San Gervasio, had reached the right bank of the Adda without their being discovered, the soldiers defending the castle of Trezzo abandoned it and beat a retreat. The Austrians pursued them as far as Pozzo, but there the French suddenly halted and faced about, for General Serrurier was at Pozzo, with the troops he had brought from Lecco. He heard the cannonade behind him, immediately halted, and, obeying the first law of warfare, he marched towards the noise and smoke. It was therefore through him that the garrison of Trezzo rallied and resumed the offensive. Serrurier sent an aide-de-Camp to Moreau to inform him of the manoeuvre he had thought proper to execute.

The battle between the French and Austrian troops raged with incredible fury. Bonaparte’s veterans, during their first Italian campaigns, had adopted a custom which they could not renounce: it was to fight His Imperial Majesty’s subjects wherever they found them. Nevertheless, so great was the numerical superiority of the allies, that our troops had begun to retreat, when loud shouts from the rearguard announced that reinforcements had arrived. It was General Grenier, sent by Moreau, who arrived with his division at the moment when his presence was most necessary.

One part of the new division reinforced the centre column, doubling its size; another part was extended upon the left to envelop the enemy. The drums beat afresh down the whole line, and our grenadiers began again to reconquer this battle field already twice lost and won. But at this moment the Austrians were reinforced by the Marquis de Chasteler and his division, so that the numerical superiority was again with the enemy. Grenier drew back his wing to strengthen the centre, and Serrurier, preparing for retreat in case of disaster, fell back on Pozzo, where he awaited the enemy. It was here that the battle raged most fiercely: thrice the village of Pozzo was taken and re-taken, until at last, attacked for the fourth time by a force double their own in numbers, the French were obliged to evacuate it. In this last attack an Austrian colonel was mortally wounded, but, on the other hand, General Beker, who commanded the French rearguard, refused to retreat with his soldiers, and maintained his ground with a few men, who were slain as they stood; he was at length obliged to give up his sword to a young Russian officer of the Semenofskoi regiment, who, handing over his prisoner to his own soldiers, returned immediately to the combat.

The two French generals had fixed on the village of Vaprio as a rallying-place, but at the moment when our troops were thrown into disorder through the evacuation of Pozzo, the Austrian cavalry charged heavily, and Serrurier, finding himself separated from his colleague, was obliged to retire with two thousand five hundred men to Verderio, whilst Grenier, having reached the appointed place, Vaprio, halted to face the enemy afresh.

During this time a terrible fight was taking place in the centre. Melas with eighteen to twenty thousand men had attacked the fortified posts at the head of the bridge of Cassano and the Ritorto Canal. About seven o’clock in the morning, when Moreau had weakened himself by despatching

Grenier and his division, Melas, leading three battalions of Austrian grenadiers, had attacked the fortifications, and for two hours there was terrible carnage; thrice repulsed, and leaving more than fifteen hundred men at the base of the fortifications, the Austrians had thrice returned to the attack, each time being reinforced by fresh troops, always led on and encouraged by Melas, who had to avenge his former defeats. At length, having been attacked for the fourth time, forced from their entrenchments, and contesting the ground inch by inch, the French took shelter behind their second fortifications, which defended the entrance to the bridge itself: here they were commanded by Moreau in person. There, for two more hours, a hand-to-hand struggle took place, whilst the terrible artillery belched forth death almost muzzle to muzzle. At last the Austrians, rallying for a last time, advanced at the point of the bayonet, and; lacking either ladders or fascines, piled the bodies of their dead comrades against the fortifications, and succeeded in scaling the breastworks. There was not a moment to be lost. Moreau ordered a retreat, and whilst the French were recrossing the Adda, he protected their passage in person with a single battalion of grenadiers, of whom at the end of half an hour not more than a hundred and twenty men remained; three of his aides-de-camp were killed at his side. This retreat was accomplished without disorder, and then Moreau himself retired, still fighting the enemy, who set foot on the bridge as soon as he reached the other bank. The Austrians immediately rushed forward to capture him, when suddenly a terrible noise was heard rising above the roar of the artillery; the second arch of the bridge was blown into the air, carrying with it all those who were standing on the fatal spot. The armies recoiled, and into the empty space between them fell like rain a debris of stones and human beings. But at this moment, when Moreau had succeeded in putting a momentary obstacle between himself and Melas, General Grenier's division arrived in disorder, after having been forced to evacuate Vaprio, pursued by the Austro-Russians under Zopf, Ott, and Chasteler. Moreau ordered a change of front, and faced this new enemy, who fell upon him when he least expected them; he succeeded in rallying Grenier's troops and in re-establishing the battle. But whilst his back was turned Melas repaired the bridge and crossed the river; thus Moreau found himself attacked frontally, in the rear, and on his two flanks, by forces three times larger than his own. It was then that all the officers who surrounded him begged him to retreat, for on the preservation of his person depended the preservation of Italy for France. Moreau refused for some time, for he knew the awful consequences of the battle he had just lost, and he did not wish to survive it, although it had been impossible for him to win it. At last a chosen band surrounded him, and, forming a square, drew back, whilst the rest of the army sacrificed themselves to cover his retreat; for Moreau's genius was looked upon as the sole hope that remained to them.

The battle lasted nearly three hours longer, during which the rearguard of the army performed prodigies of valour. At length Melas, seeing that the enemy had escaped him, and believing that his troops, tired by the stubborn fight, needed rest, gave orders that the fighting should cease. He halted on the left bank of the Adda, encamping his army in the villages of Imago, Gorgonzola, and Cassano, and remained master of the battlefield, upon which we had left two thousand five hundred dead, one hundred pieces of cannon, and twenty howitzers.

That night Souvarow invited General Becker to supper with him, and asked him by whom he had been taken prisoner. Becker replied that it was a young officer belonging to the regiment which had first entered Pozzo. Souvarow immediately inquired what regiment this was, and discovered that it was the Semenofskoi; he then ordered that inquiries should be made to ascertain the young officer's name. Shortly afterwards Sub-Lieutenant Foedor Romayloff was announced. He presented General Becker's sword to Souvarow, who invited him to remain and to have supper with his prisoner.

Next day Foedor wrote to his protector: "I have kept my word. I am a lieutenant, and Field-Marshal Souvarow has requested his Majesty Paul I to bestow upon me the order of Saint Vladimir."

On 28th of April, Souvarow entered Milan, which Moreau had just abandoned in order to retreat beyond Tesino. The following proclamation was by his order posted on all the walls of the capital; it admirably paints the spirit of the Muscovite:

"The victorious army of the Apostolical and Roman Emperor is here; it has fought solely for the restoration of the Holy Faith, — the clergy, nobility, and ancient government of Italy. People, join us for God and the Faith, for we have arrived with an army at Milan and Placentia to assist you!"

The dearly bought victories of Trebia and Novi succeeded that of Cassano, and left Souvarow so much weakened that he was unable to profit by them. Besides, just when the Russian general was about to resume his march, a new plan of campaign arrived, sent by the Aulic Council at Vienna. The Allied Powers had decided upon the invasion of France, and had fixed the route each general must follow in order to accomplish this new project. It way decided that Souvarow should invade France by Switzerland, and that the arch-duke should yield him his positions and descend on the Lower Rhine.

The troops with which Souvarow was to operate against Massena from this time were the thirty thousand Russians he had with him, thirty thousand others detached from the reserve army commanded by Count Tolstoy in Galicia, who were to be led to join him in Switzerland by General Korsakoff, about thirty thousand Austrians under General Hotze, and lastly, five or six thousand French emigrants under the Prince de Conde in all, an army of ninety or ninety-five thousand men. The Austrians were to oppose Moreau and Macdonald.

Foedor had been wounded when entering Novi, but Souvarow had rewarded him with a second cross, and the rank of captain hastened his convalescence, so that the young officer, more happy than proud of the new rank he had received, was in a condition to follow the army, when on 13th September it moved towards Salvedra and entered the valley of Tesino.

So far all had gone well, and as long as they remained in the rich and beautiful Italian plains, Suovarow had nothing but praise for the courage and devotion of his soldiers. But when to the fertile fields of Lombardy, watered by its beautiful river, succeeded the rough ways of the Levantine, and when the lofty summits of the St. Gothard, covered with the eternal snows, rose before them, their enthusiasm was quenched, their energy disappeared, and melancholy forebodings filled the hearts of these savage children of the North.

Unexpected grumblings ran through the ranks; then suddenly the vanguard stopped, and declared that it would go no farther. In vain Foedor, who commanded a company, begged and entreated his own men to set an example by continuing the march: they threw down their arms, and lay down beside them. Just as they had given this proof of insubordination, fresh murmurs, sounding like an approaching storm, rose from the rear of the army: they were caused by the sight of Souvarow, who was riding from the rear to the vanguard, and who arrived at the front accompanied by this terrible proof of mutiny and insubordination. When he reached the head of the column, the murmurings had developed into imprecations.

Then Souvarow addressed his soldiers with that savage eloquence to which he owed the miracles he had effected with them, but cries of "Retreat! Retreat!" drowned his voice. Then he chose out the most mutinous, and had them thrashed until they were overcome by this shameful punishment: But the thrashings had no more influence than the exhortation, and the shouts continued. Souvarow saw that all was lost if he did not employ some powerful and unexpected means of regaining the mutineers. He advanced towards Foedor. "Captain," said he, "leave these fools here, take eight non-commissioned officers and dig a grave." Foedor, astonished, gazed at his general as though demanding an explanation of this strange order. "Obey orders," said Souvarow.

Foedor obeyed, and the eight men set to work; and ten minutes later the grave was dug, greatly to the astonishment of the whole army, which had gathered in a semicircle on the rising slopes of the two hills which bordered the road, standing as if on the steps of a huge amphitheatre.

Souvarow dismounted from his horse, broke his sword in two and threw it into the grave, detached his epaulets one by one and threw them after his sword, dragged off the decorations which covered his breast and cast these after the sword and epaulets, and then, stripping himself naked, he lay down in the grave himself, crying in a loud voice —

"Cover me with earth! Leave your general here. You are no longer my children, and I am no longer your father; nothing remains to me but death."

At these strange words, which were uttered in so powerful a voice that they were heard by the whole army, the Russian grenadiers threw themselves weeping into the grave, and, raising their general, asked pardon of him, entreating him to lead them again against the enemy.

"At last," cried Souvarow, "I recognise my children again. To the enemy!"

Not cries but yells of joy greeted his words. Souvarav dressed himself again, and whilst he was dressing the leaders of the mutiny crept in the dust to kiss his feet. Then, when his epaulets were replaced on his shoulders, and when his decorations again shone on his breast, he remounted his horse, followed by the army, the soldiers swearing with one voice that they would all die rather than abandon their father.

The same day Souvarow attacked Aerolo; but his luck had turned: the conqueror of Cassano, Trebia, and Novi had left his good-fortune behind in the plains of Italy. For twelve hours six hundred French opposed three thousand Russian grenadiers beneath the walls of the town, and so successfully that night fell without Souvarow being able to defeat them. Next day he marched the whole of his troops against this handful of brave men, but the sky clouded over and the wind blew a bitter rain into the faces of the Russians; the French profited by this circumstance to beat a retreat, evacuating the valley of Ursern, crossing the Reuss, and taking up their position on the heights of the Furka and Grimsel. One portion of the Russian army's design had been achieved, they were masters of the St. Gothard. It is true that as soon as they marched farther on, the French would retake it and cut off their retreat; but what did this matter to Souvarow? Did he not always march forward?

He marched on, then, without worrying about that which was behind him, reached Andermatt, cleared Trou d'Ury, and found Lecourbe guarding the defile of the Devil's Bridge with fifteen hundred men. There the struggle began again; for three days fifteen hundred Frenchmen kept thirty thousand Russians at bay. Souvarow raged like a lion trapped in a snare, for he could not understand this change of fortune. At last, on the fourth day, he heard that General Korsakoff, who had preceded him and who was to rejoin him later, had been beaten by Molitor, and that Massena had recaptured Zurich and occupied the canton of Glaris. Souvarow now gave up the attempt to proceed up the valley of the Reuss, and wrote to Korsakoff and Jallachieh, "I hasten to retrieve your losses; stand firm as ramparts: you shall answer to me with your heads for every step in retreat that you take." The aide-de-camp was also charged to communicate to the Russian and Austrian generals a verbal plan of battle. Generals Linsken and Jallachieh were to attack the French troops separately and then to join the forces in the valley of Glaris, into which Souvarow himself was to descend by the Klon-Thal, thus hemming Molitor in between two walls of iron.

Souvarow was so sure that this plan would be successful, that when he arrived on the borders of the lake of Klon-Thal, he sent a bearer with a flag of truce, summoning Molitor to surrender, seeing that he was surrounded on every side.

Molitor replied, to the field-marshal that his proposed meeting with his generals had failed, as he had beaten them one after the other, and driven them back into the Grisons, and that moreover, in retaliation, as Massena was advancing by Muotta, it was he, Souvarow, who was between two fires, and therefore he called upon him to lay down his arms instead.

On hearing this strange reply, Souvarow thought that he must be dreaming, but soon recovering himself and realising the danger of his position in the defiles, he threw himself on General Molitor, who received him at the point of the bayonet, and then closing up the pass with twelve hundred men, the French succeeded in holding fifteen to eighteen thousand Russians in check for eight hours. At length night came, and Molitor evacuated the Klon Thal, and retired towards the Linth, to defend the bridges of Noefels and Mollis.

The old field-marshal rushed like a torrent over Glaris and Miltodi; there he learnt that Molitor had told him the truth, and that Jallachieh and Linsken had been beaten and dispersed, that Massena was advancing on Schwitz, and that General Rosenberg, who had been given the defence of the bridge of Muotta, had been forced to retreat, so that he found himself in the position in which he had hoped to place Molitor.

No time was to be lost in retreating. Souvarow hurried through the passes of Engi, Schwauden, and Elm. His flight was so hurried that he was obliged to abandon his wounded and part of his artillery. Immediately the French rushed in pursuit among the precipices and clouds. One saw whole armies passing over places where chamois-hunters took off their shoes and walked barefoot, holding on by their hands to prevent themselves from falling. Three nations had come from three different parts to a meeting-place in the home of the eagles, as if to allow those nearest God to judge the justice of their cause. There were times when the frozen mountains changed into volcanoes, when cascades now filled with blood fell into the valleys, and avalanches of human beings rolled down the deepest precipices. Death reaped such a harvest there where human life had never been before, that the vultures, becoming fastidious through the abundance, picked out only the eyes of the corpses to carry to their young — at least so says the tradition of the peasants of these mountains.

Souvarow was able to rally his troops at length in the neighbourhood of Lindau. He recalled Korsakoff, who still occupied Bregenz; but all his troops together did not number more than thirty thousand men-all that remained of the eighty thousand whom Paul had furnished as his contingent in the coalition. In fifteen days Massena had defeated three separate armies, each numerically stronger than his own. Souvarow, furious at having been defeated by these same Republicans whom he had sworn to exterminate, blamed the Austrians for his defeat, and declared that he awaited orders from his emperor, to whom he had made known the treachery of the allies, before attempting anything further with the coalition.

Paul’s answer was that he should immediately return to Russia with his soldiers, arriving at St. Petersburg as soon as possible, where a triumphal entry awaited them.

The same ukase declared that Souvarow should be quartered in the imperial palace for the rest of his life, and lastly that a monument should be raised to him in one of the public places of St. Petersburg.

Foedor was thus about to see Vaninka once more. Throughout the campaign, where there was a chance of danger, whether in the plains of Italy, in the defiles of Tesino, or on the glaciers of Mount Pragal, he was the first to throw himself into it, and his name had frequently been mentioned as worthy of distinction. Souvarow was too brave himself to be prodigal of honours where they were not merited. Foedor was returning, as he had promised, worthy of his noble protector’s friendship, and who knows, perhaps worthy of Vaninka’s love. Field-Marshal Souvarow had made a friend of him, and none could know to what this friendship might not lead; for Paul honoured Souvarow like one of the ancient heroes.

But no one could rely upon Paul, for his character was made up of extreme impulses. Without having done anything to offend his master, and without knowing the cause of his disgrace, Souvarow, on arriving at Riga, received a private letter which informed him, in the emperor’s name, that, having tolerated an infraction of the laws of discipline among his soldiers, the emperor deprived him of all the honours with which he had been invested, and also forbade him to appear before him.

Such tidings fell like a thunderbolt upon the old warrior, already embittered by his reverses: he was heart-broken that such storm-clouds should tarnish the end of his glorious day.

In consequence of this order, he assembled all his officers in the market-place of Riga, and took leave of them sorrowfully, like a father taking leave of his family. Having embraced the generals and colonels, and having shaken hands with the others, he said good-bye to them once more, and left them free to continue their march to their destination.

Souvarow took a sledge, and, travelling night and day, arrived incognito in the capital, which he was to have entered in triumph, and was driven to a distant suburb, to the house of one of his nieces, where he died of a broken heart fifteen days afterwards.

On his own account, Foedor travelled almost as rapidly as his general, and entered St. Petersburg without having sent any letter to announce his arrival. As he had no parent in the capital, and as his entire existence was concentrated in one person, he drove direct to the general's house, which was situated in the Prospect of Niewski, at an angle of the Catherine Canal.

Having arrived there, he sprang out of his carriage, entered the courtyard, and bounded up the steps. He opened the ante-chamber door, and precipitated himself into the midst of the servants and subordinate household officers. They cried out with surprise upon seeing him: he asked them where the general was; they replied by pointing to the door of the dining-room; he was in there, breakfasting with his daughter.

Then, through a strange reaction, Foedor felt his knees failing him, and he was obliged to lean against a wall to prevent himself from falling. At this moment, when he was about to see Vaninka again, this soul of his soul, for whom alone he had done so much, he dreaded lest he should not find her the same as when he had left her. Suddenly the dining-room door opened, and Vaninka appeared. Seeing the young man, she uttered a cry, and, turning to the general, said, "Father, it is Foedor"; and the expression of her voice left no doubt of the sentiment which inspired it.

"Foedor!" cried the general, springing forward and holding out his arms.

Foedor did not know whether to throw himself at the feet of Vaninka or into the arms of her father. He felt that his first recognition ought to be devoted to respect and gratitude, and threw himself into the general's arms. Had he acted otherwise, it would have been an avowal of his love, and he had no right to avow this love till he knew that it was reciprocated.

Foedor then turned, and as at parting, sank on his knee before Vaninka; but a moment had sufficed for the haughty girl to banish the feeling she had shown. The blush which had suffused her cheek had disappeared, and she had become again cold and haughty like an alabaster statue-a masterpiece of pride begun by nature and finished by education. Foedor kissed her hand; it was trembling but cold he felt his heart sink, and thought he was about to die.

"Why, Vaninka," said the general — "why are you so cool to a friend who has caused us so much anxiety and yet so much pleasure? Come, Fordor, kiss my daughter."

Foedor rose entreatingly, but waited motionless, that another permission might confirm that of the general.

“Did you not hear my father?” said Vaninka, smiling, but nevertheless possessing sufficient self-control to prevent the emotion she was feeling from appearing in her voice.

Foedor stooped to kiss Vaninka, and as he held her hands it seemed to him that she lightly pressed his own with a nervous, involuntary movement. A feeble cry of joy nearly escaped him, when, suddenly looking at Vaninka, he was astonished at her pallor: her lips were as white as death.

The general made Foedor sit down at the table: Vaninka took her place again, and as by chance she was seated with her back to the light, the general noticed nothing.

Breakfast passed in relating and listening to an account of this strange campaign which began under the burning sun of Italy and ended in the glaciers of Switzerland. As there are no journals in St. Petersburg which publish anything other than that which is permitted by the emperor, Souvarow’s successes were spread abroad, but his reverses were ignored. Foedor described the former with modesty and the latter with frankness.

One can imagine, the immense interest the general took in Foedor’s story. His two captain’s epaulets and the decorations on his breast proved that the young man had modestly suppressed his own part in the story he had told. But the general, too courageous to fear that he might share in Souvarow’s disgrace, had already visited the dying field-marshal, and had heard from him an account of his young protege’s bravery. Therefore, when Foedor had finished his story, it was the general’s turn to enumerate all the fine things Foedor had done in a campaign of less than a year. Having finished this enumeration, he added that he intended next day to ask the emperor’s permission to take the young captain for his aide-de-camp. Foedor hearing this wished to throw himself at the general’s feet, but he received him again in his arms, and to show Foedor how certain he was that he would be successful in his request, he fixed the rooms that the young man was to occupy in the house at once.

The next day the general returned from the palace of St. Michel with the pleasant news that his request had been granted.

Foedor was overwhelmed with joy: from this time he was to form part of the general’s family. Living under the same roof as Vaninka, seeing her constantly, meeting her frequently in the rooms, seeing her pass like an apparition at the end of a corridor, finding himself twice a day at the same table with her, all this was more than Foedor had ever dared hope, and he thought for a time that he had attained complete happiness.

For her part, Vaninka, although she was so proud, at the bottom of her heart took a keen interest in Foedor. He had left her with the certainty that he loved her, and during his absence her woman's pride had been gratified by the glory he had acquired, in the hope of bridging the distance which separated them. So that, when she saw him return with this distance between them lessened, she felt by the beating of her heart that gratified pride was changing into a more tender sentiment, and that for her part she loved Foedor as much as it was possible for her to love anyone.

She had nevertheless concealed these feelings under an appearance of haughty indifference, for Vaninka was made so: she intended to let Foedor know some day that she loved him, but until the time came when it pleased her to reveal it, she did not wish the young man to discover her love. Things went on in this way for several months, and the circumstances which had at first appeared to Foedor as the height of happiness soon became awful torture.

To love and to feel his heart ever on the point of avowing its love, to be from morning till night in the company of the beloved one, to meet her hand at the table, to touch her dress in a narrow corridor, to feel her leaning on his arm when they entered a salon or left a ballroom, always to have ceaselessly to control every word, look, or movement which might betray his feelings, no human power could endure such a struggle.

Vaninka saw that Foedor could not keep his secret much longer, and determined to anticipate the avowal which she saw every moment on the point of escaping his heart.

One day when they were alone, and she saw the hopeless efforts the young man was making to hide his feelings from her, she went straight up to him, and, looking at him fixedly, said:

"You love me!"

"Forgive me, forgive me," cried the young man, clasping his hands.

"Why should you ask me to forgive you, Foedor? Is not your love genuine?"

"Yes, yes, genuine but hopeless."

"Why hopeless? Does not my father love you as a son?" said Vaninka.

"Oh, what do you mean?" cried Foedor. "Do you mean that if your father will bestow your hand upon me, that you will then consent — ?"

“Are you not both noble in heart and by birth, Foedor? You are not wealthy, it is true, but then I am rich enough for both.”

“Then I am not indifferent to you?”

“I at least prefer you to anyone else I have met.”

“Vaninka!” The young girl drew herself away proudly.

“Forgive me!” said Foedor. “What am I doing? You have but to order: I have no wish apart from you. I dread lest I shall offend you. Tell me what to do, and I will obey.”

“The first thing you must do, Foedor, is to ask my father’s consent.”

“So you will allow me to take this step?”

“Yes, but on one condition.”

“What is it? Tell me.”

“My father, whatever his answer, must never know that I have consented to your making this application to him; no one must know that you are following my instructions; the world must remain ignorant of the confession I have just made to you; and, lastly, you must not ask me, whatever happens, to help you in any other way than with my good wishes.”

“Whatever you please. I will do everything you wish me to do. Do you not grant me a thousand times more than I dared hope, and if your father refuses me, do I not know myself that you are sharing my grief?” cried Foedor.

“Yes; but that will not happen, I hope,” said Vaninka, holding out her hand to the young officer, who kissed it passionately.

“Now be hopeful and take courage;” and Vaninka retired, leaving the young man a hundred times more agitated and moved than she was herself, woman though she was.

The same day Foedor asked for an interview with the general. The general received his aide-de-camp as usual with a genial and smiling countenance, but with the first words Foedor uttered his face darkened. However, when he heard the young man’s description of the love, so true, constant, and passionate, that he felt for Vaninka, and when he heard that this passion had been the motive power of those glorious deeds he had praised so often, he held out his hand to Foedor, almost as moved as the young soldier.

And then the general told him, that while he had been away, and ignorant of his love for Vaninka, in whom he had observed no trace of its being reciprocated, he had, at the emperor’s desire, promised her hand to the son of a privy councillor. The only stipulation that the general had made was, that he should not be separated from his daughter until she had attained the age of eighteen. Vaninka had only five months more to spend under her father’s roof. Nothing more could be said: in Russia the emperor’s wish is an order, and from the moment that it is expressed, no subject would oppose it, even in thought. However, the refusal had imprinted such despair on the young man’s face, that the general, touched by his silent and resigned sorrow, held out his arms to him. Foedor flung himself into them with loud sobs.

Then the general questioned him about his daughter, and Foedor answered, as he had promised, that Vaninka was ignorant of everything, and that the proposal came from him alone, without her knowledge. This assurance calmed the general: he had feared that he was making two people wretched.

At dinner-time Vaninka came downstairs and found her father alone. Foedor had not enough courage to be present at the meal and to meet her again, just when he had lost all hope: he had taken a sleigh, and driven out to the outskirts of the city.

During the whole time dinner lasted Vaninka and the general hardly exchanged a word, but although this silence was so expressive, Vaninka controlled her face with her usual power, and the general alone appeared sad and dejected.

That evening, just when Vaninka was going downstairs, tea was brought to her room, with the message that the general was fatigued and had retired. Vaninka asked some questions about the nature of his indisposition, and finding that it was not serious, she told the servant who had brought her the message to ask her father to send for her if he wanted anything. The general sent to say that he thanked her, but he only required quiet and rest. Vaninka announced that she would retire also, and the servant withdrew.

Hardly had he left the room when Vaninka ordered Annouschka, her foster-sister, who acted as her maid, to be on the watch for Foedor’s return, and to let her know as soon as he came in.

At eleven o’clock the gate of the mansion opened: Foedor got out of his sleigh, and immediately went up to his room. He threw himself upon a sofa, overwhelmed by his thoughts. About midnight he heard someone tapping at the door: much astonished, he got up and opened it. It was Annouschka, who came with a message from her mistress, that Vaninka wished to see him immediately. Although he was astonished at this message, which he was far from expecting, Foedor obeyed.

He found Vaninka seated, dressed in a white robe, and as she was paler than usual he stopped at the door, for it seemed to him that he was gazing at a marble statue.

“Come in,” said Vaninka calmly.

Foedor approached, drawn by her voice like steel to a magnet. Annouschka shut the door behind him.

“Well, and what did my father say?” said Vaninka.

Foedor told her all that had happened. The young girl listened to his story with an unmoved countenance, but her lips, the only part of her face which seemed to have any colour, became as white as the dressing-gown she was wearing. Foedor, on the contrary, was consumed by a fever, and appeared nearly out of his senses.

“Now, what do you intend to do?” said Vaninka in the same cold tone in which she had asked the other questions.

“You ask me what I intend to do, Vaninka? What do you wish me to do? What can I do, but flee from St. Petersburg, and seek death in the first corner of Russia where war may break out, in order not to repay my patron’s kindness by some infamous baseness?”

“You are a fool,” said Vaninka, with a mixed smile of triumph and contempt; for from that moment she felt her superiority over Foedor, and saw that she would rule him like a queen for the rest of her life.

“Then order me — am I not your slave?” cried the young soldier.

“You must stay here,” said Vaninka.

“Stay here?”

“Yes; only women and children will thus confess themselves beaten at the first blow: a man, if he be worthy of the name, fights.”

“Fight! — against whom? — against your father? Never!”

“Who suggested that you should contend against my father? It is against events that you must strive; for the generality of men do not govern events, but are carried away by them. Appear to my father as though you were fighting against your love, and he will think that you have mastered yourself. As I am supposed to be ignorant of your proposal, I shall not be suspected. I will demand two years’ more freedom, and I shall obtain them. Who knows what may happen in the course of two years? The emperor may die, my betrothed may die, my father — may God protect him! — my father himself may die — !”

“But if they force you to marry?”

“Force me!” interrupted Vaninka, and a deep flush rose to her cheek and immediately disappeared again. “And who will force me to do anything? Father? He loves me too well. The emperor? He has enough worries in his own family, without introducing them into another’s. Besides, there is always a last resource when every other expedient fails: the Neva only flows a few paces from here, and its waters are deep.”

Foedor uttered a cry, for in the young girl’s knit brows and tightly compressed lips there was so much resolution that he understood that they might break this child but that they would not bend her. But Foedor’s heart was too much in harmony with the plan Vaninka had proposed; his objections once removed, he did not seek fresh ones. Besides, had he had the courage to do so; Vaninka’s promise to make up in secret to him for the dissimulation she was obliged to practise in public would have conquered his last scruples.

Vaninka, whose determined character had been accentuated by her education, had an unbounded influence over all who came in contact with her; even the general, without knowing why, obeyed her. Foedor submitted like a child to everything she wished, and the young girl’s love was increased by the wishes she opposed and by a feeling of gratified pride.

It was some days after this nocturnal decision that the knouting had taken place at which our readers have assisted. It was for some slight fault, and Gregory had been the victim; Vaninka having complained to her father about him. Foedor, who as aide-de-camp had been obliged to preside over Gregory’s punishment, had paid no more attention to the threats the serf had uttered on retiring.

Ivan, the coachman, who after having been executioner had become surgeon, had applied compresses of salt and water to heal up the scarred shoulders of his victim. Gregory had remained three days in the infirmary, and during this time he had turned over in his mind every possible means of vengeance. Then at the end of three days, being healed, he had returned to his duty, and soon everyone except he had forgotten the punishment. If Gregory had been a real Russian, he would soon have forgotten it all; for this punishment is too familiar to the rough Muscovite for him to remember it long and with rancour. Gregory, as we have said, had Greek blood in his veins; he dissembled and remembered. Although Gregory was a serf, his duties had little by little brought him into greater familiarity with the general than any of the other servants. Besides, in every country in the world barbers have great licence with those they shave; this is perhaps due to the fact that a man is instinctively more gracious to another who for ten minutes every day holds his life in his hands. Gregory rejoiced in the immunity of his profession, and it nearly always happened that the barber's daily operation on the general's chin passed in conversation, of which he bore the chief part.

One day the general had to attend a review: he sent for Gregory before daybreak, and as the barber was passing the razor as gently as possible over his master's cheek, the conversation fell, or more likely was led, on Foedor. The barber praised him highly, and this naturally caused his master to ask him, remembering the correction the young aide-decamp had superintended, if he could not find some fault in this model of perfection that might counterbalance so many good qualities. Gregory replied that with the exception of pride he thought Foedor irreproachable.

“Pride?” asked the astonished general. “That is a failing from which I should have thought him most free.”

“Perhaps I should have said ambition,” replied Gregory.

“Ambition!” said the general. “It does not seem to me that he has given much proof of ambition in entering my service; for after his achievements in the last campaign he might easily have aspired to the honour of a place in the emperor's household.”

“Oh yes, he is ambitious,” said Gregory, smiling. “One man's ambition is for high position, another's an illustrious alliance: the former will owe everything to himself, the latter will make a stepping-stone of his wife, then they raise their eyes higher than they should.”

“What do you mean to suggest?” said the general, beginning to see what Gregory was aiming at.

“I mean, your excellency,” replied Gregory, “there are many men who, owing to the kindness shown them by others, forget their position and aspire to a more exalted one; having already been placed so high, their heads are turned.”

“Gregory,” cried the general, “believe me, you are getting into a scrape; for you are making an accusation, and if I take any notice of it, you will have to prove your words.”

"By St. Basilius, general, it is no scrape when you have truth on your side; for I have said nothing I am not ready to prove."

"Then," said the general, "you persist in declaring that Foedor loves my daughter?"

"Ah! I have not said that: it is your excellency. I have not named the lady Vaninka," said Gregory, with the duplicity of his nation.

"But you meant it, did you not? Come, contrary to your custom, reply frankly."

"It is true, your excellency; it is what I meant."

"And, according to you, my daughter reciprocates the passion, no doubt?"

"I fear so, your excellency."

"And what makes you think this, say?"

"First, Mr. Foedor never misses a chance of speaking to the lady Vaninka."

"He is in the same house with her, would you have him avoid her?"

"When the lady Vaninka returns late, and when perchance Mr. Foedor has not accompanied you, whatever the hour Mr. Foedor is there, ready, to help her out of the carriage."

"Foedor attends me, it is his duty," said the general, beginning to believe that the serf's suspicions were founded on slight grounds. "He waits for me," he, continued, "because when I return, at any hour of the day or night, I may have orders to give him."

"Not a day passes without Mr. Foedor going into my lady Vaninka's room, although such a favour is not usually granted to a young man in a house like that of your excellency."

"Usually it is I who send him to her," said the general.

"Yes, in the daytime," replied Gregory, "but at night?"

"At night!" cried the general, rising to his feet, and turning so pale that, after a moment, he was forced to lean for support on a table.

"Yes, at night, your excellency," answered Gregory quietly; "and since, as you say, I have begun to mix myself up in a bad business, I must go on with it; besides, even if there were to result from it another punishment for me, even more terrible than that I have already endured, I should not allow so good, a master to be deceived any longer."

"Be very careful about what you are going to say, slave; for I know the men of your nation. Take care, if the accusation you are making by way of revenge is not supported by visible, palpable, and positive proofs, you shall be punished as an infamous slanderer."

"To that I agree," said Gregory.

"Do you affirm that you have seen Foedor enter my daughter's chamber at night?"

"I do not say that I have seen him enter it, your excellency. I say that I have seen him come out."

"When was that?"

"A quarter of an hour ago, when I was on my way to your excellency."

"You lie!" said the general, raising his fist.

"This is not our agreement, your excellency," said the slave, drawing back. "I am only to be punished if I fail to give proofs."

"But what are your proofs?"

"I have told you."

"And do you expect me to believe your word alone?"

"No; but I expect you to believe your own eyes."

"How?"

"The first time that Mr. Foedor is in my lady Vaninka's room after midnight, I shall come to find your excellency, and then you can judge for yourself if I lie; but up to the present, your excellency, all the conditions of the service I wish to render you are to my disadvantage."

"In what way?"

"Well, if I fail to give proofs, I am to be treated as an infamous slanderer; but if I give them, what advantage shall I gain?"

"A thousand roubles and your freedom."

"That is a bargain, then, your excellency," replied Gregory quietly, replacing the razors on the general's toilet-table, "and I hope that before a week has passed you will be more just to me than you are now."

With these words the slave left the room, leaving the general convinced by his confidence that some dreadful misfortune threatened him.

From this time onward, as might be expected, the general weighed every word and noticed every gesture which passed between Vaninka and Foedor in his presence; but he saw nothing to confirm his suspicions on the part of the aide-de-camp or of his daughter; on the contrary, Vaninka seemed colder and more reserved than ever.

A week passed in this way. About two o'clock in the morning of the ninth day, someone knocked at the general's door. It was Gregory.

“If your excellency will go into your daughter’s room,” said Gregory, “you will find Mr. Foedor there.”

The general turned pale, dressed himself without uttering a word, and followed the slave to the door of Vaninka’s room. Having arrived there, with a motion of his hand he dismissed the informer, who, instead of retiring in obedience to this mute command, hid himself in the corner of the corridor.

When the general believed himself to be alone, he knocked once; but all was silent. This silence, however, proved nothing; for Vaninka might be asleep. He knocked a second time, and the young girl, in a perfectly calm voice, asked, “Who is there?”

“It is I,” said the general, in a voice trembling with emotion.

“Annouschka!” said the girl to her foster-sister, who slept in the adjoining room, “open the door to my father. Forgive me, father,” she continued; “but Annouschka is dressing, and will be with you in a moment.”

The general waited patiently, for he could discover no trace of emotion in his daughter’s voice, and he hoped that Gregory had been mistaken.

In a few moments the door opened, and the general went in, and cast a long look around him; there was no one in this first apartment.

Vaninka was in bed, paler perhaps than usual, but quite calm, with the loving smile on her lips with which she always welcomed her father.

“To what fortunate circumstance,” asked the young girl in her softest tones, “do I owe the pleasure of seeing you at so late an hour?”

“I wished to speak to you about a very important matter,” said the general, “and however late it was, I thought you would forgive me for disturbing you.”

“My father will always be welcome in his daughter’s room, at whatever hour of the day or night he presents himself there.”

The general cast another searching look round, and was convinced that it was impossible for a man to be concealed in the first room — but the second still remained.

“I am listening,” said Vaninka, after a moment of silence.

“Yes, but we are not alone,” replied the general, “and it is important that no other ears should hear what I have to say to you.”

“Annauschka, as you know, is my foster-sister,” said Vaninka.

“That makes no difference,” said the general, going candle in hand into the next room, which was somewhat smaller than his daughter’s.

“Annouschka,” said he, “watch in the corridor and see that no one overhears us.”

As he spoke these words, the general threw the same scrutinizing glance all round the room, but with the exception of the young girl there was no one there.

Annouschka obeyed, and the general followed her out, and, looking eagerly round for the last time, re-entered his daughter’s room, and seated himself on the foot of her bed. Annouschka, at a sign from her mistress, left her alone with her father. The general held out his hand to Vaninka, and she took it without hesitation.

“My child,” said the general, “I have to speak to you about a very important matter.”

“What is it, father?” said Vaninka.

“You will soon be eighteen,” continued the general, “and that is the age at which the daughters of the Russian nobility usually marry.” The general paused for a moment to watch the effect of these words upon Vaninka, but her hand rested motionless in his. “For the last year your hand has been engaged by me,” continued the general.

“May I know to whom?” asked Vaninka coldly.

“To the son of the Councillor-in-Ordinary,” replied the general. “What is your opinion of him?”

“He is a worthy and noble young man, I am told, but I can have formed no opinion except from hearsay. Has he not been in garrison at Moscow for the last three months?”

“Yes,” said the general, “but in three months’ time he should return.”

Vaninka remained silent.

“Have you nothing to say in reply?” asked the general.

“Nothing, father; but I have a favour to ask of you.”

“What is it?”

“I do not wish to marry until I am twenty years old.”

“Why not?”

“I have taken a vow to that effect.”

“But if circumstances demanded the breaking of this vow, and made the celebration of this marriage imperatively necessary?”

“What circumstances?” asked Vaninka.

“Foedor loves you,” said the general, looking steadily at Vaninka.

"I know that," said Vaninka, with as little emotion as if the question did not concern her.

"You know that!" cried the general.

"Yes; he has told me so."

"When?"

"Yesterday."

"And you replied — ?"

"That he must leave here at once."

"And he consented?"

"Yes, father."

"When does he go?"

"He has gone."

"How can that be?" said the general: "he only left me at ten o'clock."

"And he left me at midnight," said Vaninka.

"Ah!" said the general, drawing a deep breath of relief, "you are a noble girl, Vaninka, and I grant you what you ask-two years more. But remember it is the emperor who has decided upon this marriage."

"My father will do me the justice to believe that I am too submissive a daughter to be a rebellious subject."

"Excellent, Vaninka, excellent," said the general. "So, then, poor Foedor has told you all?"

"Yes," said Vaninka.

"You knew that he addressed himself to me first?"

"I knew it."

"Then it was from him that you heard that your hand was engaged?"

"It was from him."

"And he consented to leave you? He is a good and noble young man, who shall always be under my protection wherever he goes. Oh, if my word had not been given, I love him so much that, supposing you did not dislike him, I should have given him your hand."

"And you cannot recall your promise?" asked Vaninka.

"Impossible," said the general.

"Well, then, I submit to my father's will," said Vaninka.

"That is spoken like my daughter," said the general, embracing her. "Farewell, Vaninka; I do not ask if you love him. You have both done your duty, and I have nothing more to exact."

With these words, he rose and left the room. Annouschka was in the corridor; the general signed to her that she might go in again, and went on his way. At the door of his room he found Gregory waiting for him.

“Well, your excellency?” he asked.

“Well,” said the general, “you are both right and wrong. Foedor loves my daughter, but my daughter does not love him. He went into my daughter’s room at eleven o’clock, but at midnight he left her for ever. No matter, come to me tomorrow, and you shall have your thousand roubles and your liberty.”

Gregory went off, dumb with astonishment.

Meanwhile, Annouschka had re-entered her mistress’s room, as she had been ordered, and closed the door carefully behind her.

Vaninka immediately sprang out of bed and went to the door, listening to the retreating footsteps of the general. When they had ceased to be heard, she rushed into Annouschka’s room, and both began to pull aside a bundle of linen, thrown down, as if by accident, into the embrasure of a window. Under the linen was a large chest with a spring lock. Annouschka pressed a button, Vaninka raised the lid. The two women uttered a loud cry: the chest was now a coffin; the young officer, stifled for want of air, lay dead within.

For a long time the two women hoped it was only a swoon. Annouschka sprinkled his face with water; Vaninka put salts to his nose. All was in vain. During the long conversation which the general had had with his daughter, and which had lasted more than half an hour, Foedor, unable to get out of the chest, as the lid was closed by a spring, had died for want of air. The position of the two girls shut up with a corpse was frightful. Annouschka saw Siberia close at hand; Vaninka, to do her justice, thought of nothing but Foedor. Both were in despair. However, as the despair of the maid was more selfish than that of her mistress, it was Annouschka who first thought of a plan of escaping from the situation in which they were placed.

“My lady,” she cried suddenly, “we are saved.” Vaninka raised her head and looked at her attendant with her eyes bathed in tears.

“Saved?” said she, “saved? We are, perhaps, but Foedor!”

“Listen now,” said Annouschka: “your position is terrible, I grant that, and your grief is great; but your grief could be greater and your position more terrible still. If the general knew this.”

“What difference would it make to me?” said Vaninka. “I shall weep for him before the whole world.”

“Yes, but you will be dishonoured before the whole world! To-morrow your slaves, and the day after all St. Petersburg, will know that a man died of suffocation while concealed in your chamber. Reflect, my lady: your honour is the honour of your father, the honour of your family.”

“You are right,” said Vaninka, shaking her head, as if to disperse the gloomy thoughts that burdened her brain, — ”you are right, but what must we do?”

“Does my lady know my brother Ivan?”

“Yes.”

“We must tell him all.”

“Of what are you thinking?” cried Vaninka. “To confide in a man? A man, do I say? A serf! a slave!”

“The lower the position of the serf and slave, the safer will our secret be, since he will have everything to gain by keeping faith with us.”

“Your brother is a drunkard,” said Vaninka, with mingled fear and disgust.

“That is true,” said Annouschka; “but where will you find a slave who is not? My brother gets drunk less than most, and is therefore more to be trusted than the others. Besides, in the position in which we are we must risk something.”

“You are right,” said Vaninka, recovering her usual resolution, which always grew in the presence of danger. “Go and seek your brother.”

“We can do nothing this morning,” said Annouschka, drawing back the window curtains. “Look, the dawn is breaking.”

“But what can we do with the body of this unhappy man?” cried Vaninka.

“It must remain hidden where it is all day, and this evening, while you are at the Court entertainment, my brother shall remove it.”

“True,” murmured Vaninka in a strange tone, “I must go to Court this evening; to stay away would arouse suspicion. Oh, my God! my God!”

“Help me, my lady,” said Annouschka; “I am not strong enough alone.”

Vaninka turned deadly pale, but, spurred on by the danger, she went resolutely up to the body of her lover; then, lifting it by the shoulders, while her maid raised it by the legs, she laid it once more in the chest. Then Annouschka shut down the lid, locked the chest, and put the key into her breast. Then both threw back the linen which had hidden it from the eyes of the general. Day dawned, as might be expected, ere sleep visited the eyes of Vaninka.

She went down, however, at the breakfast hour; for she did not wish to arouse the slightest suspicion in her father’s mind. Only it might have been thought from her pallor that she had risen from the grave, but the general attributed this to the nocturnal disturbance of which he had been the cause.

Luck had served Vaninka wonderfully in prompting her to say that Foedor had already gone; for not only did the general feel no surprise when he did not appear, but his very absence was a proof of his daughter’s innocence. The general gave a pretext for his aide-de-camp’s absence by saying that he had sent him on a mission. As for Vaninka, she remained out of her room till it was time to dress. A week before, she had been at the Court entertainment with Foedor.

Vaninka might have excused herself from accompanying her father by feigning some slight indisposition, but two considerations made her fear to act thus: the first was the fear of making the general anxious, and perhaps of making him remain at home himself, which would make the removal of the corpse more difficult; the second was the fear of meeting Ivan and having to blush before a slave. She preferred, therefore, to make a superhuman effort to control herself; and, going up again into her room, accompanied by her faithful Annouschka, she began to dress with as much care as if her heart were full of joy. When this cruel business was finished, she ordered Annouschka to shut the door; for she wished to see Foedor once more, and to bid a last farewell to him who had been her lover. Annouschka obeyed; and Vaninka, with flowers in her hair and her breast covered with jewels, glided like a phantom into her servant’s room.

Annouschka again opened the chest, and Vaninka, without shedding a tear, without breathing a sigh, with the profound and death-like calm of despair, leant down towards Foedor and took off a plain ring which the young man had on his finger, placed it on her own, between two magnificent rings, then kissing him on the brow, she said, “Goodbye, my betrothed.”

At this moment she heard steps approaching. It was a groom of the chambers coming from the general to ask if she were ready. Annouschka let the lid of the chest fall, and Vaninka going herself to open the door, followed the messenger, who walked before her, lighting the way.

Such was her trust in her foster-sister that she left her to accomplish the dark and terrible task with which she had burdened herself.

A minute later, Annouschka saw the carriage containing the general and his daughter leave by the main gate of the hotel.

She let half an hour go by, and then went down to look for Ivan. She found him drinking with Gregory, with whom the general had kept his word, and who had received the same day one thousand roubles and his liberty. Fortunately, the revellers were only beginning their rejoicings, and Ivan in consequence was sober enough for his sister to entrust her secret to him without hesitation.

Ivan followed Annouschka into the chamber of her mistress. There she reminded him of all that Vaninka, haughty but generous, had allowed his sister to do for him. The, few glasses of brandy Ivan had already swallowed had predisposed him to gratitude (the drunkenness of the Russian is essentially tender). Ivan protested his devotion so warmly that Annouschka hesitated no longer, and, raising the lid of the chest, showed him the corpse of Foedor. At this terrible sight Ivan remained an instant motionless, but he soon began to calculate how much money and how many benefits the possession of such a secret would bring him. He swore by the most solemn oaths never to betray his mistress, and offered, as Annouschka had hoped, to dispose of the body of the unfortunate aide-decamp.

The thing was easily done. Instead of returning to drink with Gregory and his comrades, Ivan went to prepare a sledge, filled it with straw, and hid at the bottom an iron crowbar. He brought this to the outside gate, and assuring himself he was not being spied upon, he raised the body of the dead man in his arms, hid it under the straw, and sat down above it. He had the gate of the hotel opened, followed Niewski Street as far as the Zunamenie Church, passed through the shops in the Rejestwenskoi district, drove the sledge out on to the frozen Neva, and halted in the middle of the river, in front of the deserted church of Ste. Madeleine. There, protected by the solitude and darkness, hidden behind the black mass of his sledge, he began to break the ice, which was fifteen inches thick, with his pick. When he had made a large enough hole, he searched the body of Foedor, took all the money he had about him, and slipped the body head foremost through the opening he had made. He then made his way back to the hotel, while the imprisoned current of the Neva bore away the corpse towards the Gulf of Finland. An hour after, a new crust of ice had formed, and not even a trace of the opening made by Ivan remained.

At midnight Vaninka returned with her father. A hidden fever had been consuming her all the evening: never had she looked so lovely, and she had been overwhelmed by the homage of the most distinguished nobles and courtiers. When she returned, she found Annouschka in the vestibule waiting to take her cloak. As she gave it to her, Vaninka sent her one of those questioning glances that seem to express so much. “It is done,” said the girl in a low voice. Vaninka breathed a sigh of relief, as if a mountain had been removed from her breast. Great as was her self-control, she could no longer bear her father’s presence, and excused herself from remaining to supper with him, on the plea of the fatigues of the evening. Vaninka was no sooner in her room, with the door once closed, than she tore the flowers from her hair, the necklace from her throat, cut with scissors the corsets which suffocated her, and then, throwing herself on her bed, she gave way to her grief. Annouschka thanked God for this outburst; her mistress’s calmness had frightened her more than her despair. The first crisis over, Vaninka was able to pray. She spent an hour on her knees, then, yielding to the entreaties of her faithful attendant, went to bed. Annouschka sat down at the foot of the bed.

Neither slept, but when day came the tears which Vaninka had shed had calmed her.

Annouschka was instructed to reward her brother. Too large a sum given to a slave at once might have aroused suspicion, therefore Annouschka contented herself with telling Ivan that when he had need of money he had only to ask her for it.

Gregory, profiting by his liberty and wishing to make use of his thousand roubles, bought a little tavern on the outskirts of the town, where, thanks to his address and to the acquaintances he had among the servants in the great households of St. Petersburg, he began to develop an excellent business, so that in a short time the Red House (which was the name and colour of Gregory’s establishment) had a great reputation. Another man took over his duties about the person of the general, and but for Foedor’s absence everything returned to its usual routine in the house of Count Tchermayloff.

Two months went by in this way, without anybody having the least suspicion of what had happened, when one morning before the usual breakfast-hour the general begged his daughter to come down to his room. Vaninka trembled with fear, for since that fatal night everything terrified her. She obeyed her father, and collecting all her strength, made her way to his chamber, The count was alone, but at the first glance Vaninka saw she had nothing to fear from this interview: the general was waiting for her with that paternal smile which was the usual expression of his countenance when in his daughter’s presence.

She approached, therefore, with her usual calmness, and, stooping down towards the general, gave him her forehead to kiss.

He motioned to her to sit down, and gave her an open letter. Vaninka looked at him for a moment in surprise, then turned her eyes to the letter.

It contained the news of the death of the man to whom her hand had been promised: he had been killed in a duel.

The general watched the effect of the letter on his daughter’s face, and great as was Vaninka’s self-control, so many different thoughts, such bitter regret, such poignant remorse assailed her when she learnt that she was now free again, that she could not entirely conceal her emotion. The general noticed it, and attributed it to the love which he had for a long time suspected his daughter felt for the young aide-de-camp.

“Well,” he said, smiling, “I see it is all for the best.”

“How is that, father?” asked Vaninka.

“Doubtless,” said the general. “Did not Foedor leave because he loved you?”

“Yes,” murmured the young girl.

“Well, now he may return,” said the general.

Vaninka remained silent, her eyes fixed, her lips trembling.

“Return!” she said, after a moment’s silence.

“Yes, certainly return. We shall be most unfortunate,” continued the general, smiling, “if we cannot find someone in the house who knows where he is. Come, Vaninka, tell me the place of his exile, and I will undertake the rest.”

“Nobody knows where Foedor is,” murmured Vaninka in a hollow voice; “nobody but God, nobody!”

“What!” said the general, “he has sent you no news since the day he left?”

Vaninka shook her head in denial. She was so heart-broken that she could not speak.

The general in his turn became gloomy. “Do you fear some misfortune, then?” said he.

“I fear that I shall never be happy again on earth,” cried Vaninka, giving way under the pressure of her grief; then she continued at once, “Let me retire, father; I am ashamed of what I have said.”

The general, who saw nothing in this exclamation beyond regret for having allowed the confession of her love to escape her, kissed his daughter on the brow and allowed her to retire. He hoped that, in spite of the mournful way in which Vaninka had spoken of Foedor, that it would be possible to find him. The same day he went to the emperor and told him of the love of Foedor for his daughter, and requested, since death had freed her from her first engagement, that he might dispose of her hand. The emperor consented, and the general then solicited a further favour. Paul was in one of his kindly moods, and showed himself disposed to grant it. The general told him that Foedor had disappeared for two months; that everyone, even his daughter, was ignorant of his whereabouts, and begged him to have inquiries made. The emperor immediately sent for the chief of police, and gave him the necessary orders.

Six weeks went by without any result. Vaninka, since the day when the letter came, was sadder and more melancholy than ever. Vainly from time to time the general tried to make her more hopeful. Vaninka only shook her head and withdrew. The general ceased to speak, of Foedor.

But it was not the same among the household. The young aide-de-camp had been popular with the servants, and, with the exception of Gregory, there was not a soul who wished him harm, so that, when it became known that he had not been sent on a mission, but had disappeared, the matter became the constant subject of conversation in the antechamber, the kitchen, and the stables. There was another place where people busied themselves about it a great deal — this was the Red House.

From the day when he heard of Foedor’s mysterious departure Gregory had his suspicions. He was sure that he had seen Foedor enter Vaninka’s room, and unless he had gone out while he was going to seek the general, he did not understand why the latter had not found him in his daughter’s room. Another thing occupied his mind, which it seemed to him might perhaps have some connection with this event — the amount of money Ivan had been spending since that time, a very extraordinary amount for a slave. This slave, however, was the brother of Vaninka’s cherished foster-sister, so that, without being sure, Gregory already suspected the source from whence this money came. Another thing confirmed him in his suspicions, which was that Ivan, who had not only remained his most faithful friend, but had become one of his best customers, never spoke of Foedor, held his tongue if he were mentioned in his presence, and to all questions, however pressing they were, made but one answer: “Let us speak of something else.”

In the meantime the Feast of Kings arrived. This is a great day in St. Petersburg, for it is also the day for blessing the waters.

As Vaninka had been present at the ceremony, and was fatigued after standing for two hours on the Neva, the general did not go out that evening, and gave Ivan leave to do so. Ivan profited by the permission to go to the Red House.

There was a numerous company there, and Ivan was welcomed; for it was known that he generally came with full pockets. This time he did not belie his reputation, and had scarcely arrived before he made the sorok-kopecks ring, to the great envy of his companions.

At this warning sound Gregory hastened up with all possible deference, a bottle of brandy in each hand; for he knew that when Ivan summoned him he gained in two ways, as innkeeper and as boon companion. Ivan did not disappoint these hopes, and Gregory was invited to share in the entertainment. The conversation turned on slavery, and some of the unhappy men, who had only four days in the year of respite from their eternal labour, talked loudly of the happiness Gregory had enjoyed since he had obtained his freedom.

“Bah!” said Ivan, on whom the brandy had begun to take effect, “there are some slaves who are freer than their masters.”

“What do you mean?” said Gregory, pouring him out another glass of brandy.

“I meant to say happier,” said Ivan quickly.

“It is difficult to prove that,” said Gregory doubtingly.

“Why difficult? Our masters, the moment they are born, are put into the hands of two or three pedants, one French, another German, and a third English, and whether they like them or not, they must be content with their society till they are seventeen, and whether they wish to or not, must learn three barbarous languages, at the expense of our noble Russian tongue, which they have sometimes completely forgotten by the time the others are acquired. Again, if one of them wishes for some career, he must become a soldier: if he is a sublieutenant, he is the slave of the lieutenant; if he is a lieutenant, he is the slave of the captain, and the captain of the major, and so on up to the emperor, who is nobody's slave, but who one fine day is surprised at the table, while walking, or in his bed, and is poisoned, stabbed, or strangled. If he chooses a civil career, it is much the same. He marries a wife, and does not love her; children come to him he knows not how, whom he has to provide for; he must struggle incessantly to provide for his family if he is poor, and if he is rich to prevent himself being robbed by his steward and cheated by his tenants. Is this life? While we, gentlemen, we are born, and that is the only pain we cost our mothers — all the rest is the master's concern. He provides for us, he chooses our calling, always easy enough to learn if we are not quite idiots. Are we ill? His doctor attends us gratis; it is a loss to him if we die. Are we well? We have our four certain meals a day, and a good stove to sleep near at night. Do we fall in love? There is never any hindrance to our marriage, if the woman loves us; the master himself asks us to hasten our marriage, for he wishes us to have as many children as possible. And when the children are born, he does for them in their turn all he has done for us. Can you find me many great lords as happy as their slaves?"

"All this is true," said Gregory, pouring him out another glass of brandy; "but, after all, you are not free."

"Free to do what?" asked Ivan.

"Free to go where you will and when you will."

"I am as free as the air," replied Ivan.

"Nonsense!" said Gregory.

"Free as air, I tell you; for I have good masters, and above all a good mistress," continued Ivan, with a significant smile, "and I have only to ask and it is done."

"What! if after having got drunk here to-day, you asked to come back to-morrow to get drunk again?" said Gregory, who in his challenge to Ivan did not forget his own interests, — "if you asked that?"

"I should come back again," said Ivan.

"To-morrow?" said Gregory.

"To-morrow, the day after, every day if I liked...."

"The fact is, Ivan is our young lady's favourite," said another of the count's slaves who was present, profiting by his comrade Ivan's liberality.

"It is all the same," said Gregory; "for supposing such permission were given you, money would soon run short."

“Never!” said Ivan, swallowing another glass of brandy, “never will Ivan want for money as long as there is a kopeck in my lady’s purse.”

“I did not find her so liberal,” said Gregory bitterly.

“Oh, you forget, my friend; you know well she does not reckon with her friends: remember the strokes of the knout.”

“I have no wish to speak about that,” said Gregory. “I know that she is generous with blows, but her money is another thing. I have never seen the colour of that.”

“Well, would you like to see the colour of mine?” said Ivan, getting more and more drunk. “See here, here are kopecks, sorok-kopecks, blue notes worth five roubles, red notes worth twenty five roubles, and to-morrow, if you like, I will show you white notes worth fifty roubles. A health to my lady Vaninka!” And Ivan held out his glass again, and Gregory filled it to the brim.

“But does money,” said Gregory, pressing Ivan more and more, — ”does money make up for scorn?”

“Scorn!” said Ivan, — ”scorn! Who scorns me? Do you, because you are free? Fine freedom! I would rather be a well-fed slave than a free man dying of hunger.”

“I mean the scorn of our masters,” replied Gregory.

“The scorn of our masters! Ask Alexis, ask Daniel there, if my lady scorns me.”

“The fact is,” said the two slaves in reply, who both belonged to the general’s household, “Ivan must certainly have a charm; for everyone talks to him as if to a master.”

“Because he is Annouschka’s brother,” said Gregory, “and Annouschka is my lady’s foster-sister.”

“That may be so,” said the two slaves.

“For that reason or for some other,” said Ivan; “but, in short, that is the case.”

“Yes; but if your sister should die?” said Gregory. “Ah!”

“If my sister should die, that would be a pity, for she is a good girl. I drink to her health! But if she should die, that would make no difference. I am respected for myself; they respect me because they fear me.”

“Fear my lord Ivan!” said Gregory, with a loud laugh. “It follows, then, that if my lord Ivan were tired of receiving orders, and gave them in his turn, my lord Ivan would be obeyed.”

“Perhaps,” said Ivan.

“He said ‘perhaps,’ repeated Gregory,” laughing louder than ever, — ”he said ‘perhaps.’ Did you hear him?”

“Yes,” said the slaves, who had drunk so much that they could only answer in monosyllables.

“Well, I no longer say ‘perhaps,’ I now say ‘for certain.’“

“Oh, I should like to see that,” said Gregory; “I would give something to see that.”

“Well, send away these fellows, who are getting drunk like pigs, and for nothing, you will find.”

“For nothing?” said Gregory. “You are jesting. Do you think I should give them drink for nothing?”

“Well, we shall see. How much would be their score, for your atrocious brandy, if they drank from now till midnight, when you are obliged to shut up your tavern?”

“Not less than twenty roubles.”

“Here are thirty; turn there out, and let us remain by ourselves.”

“Friends,” said Gregory, taking out his watch as if to look at the time, “it is just upon midnight; you know the governor’s orders, so you must go.” The men, habituated like all Russians to passive obedience, went without a murmur, and Gregory found himself alone with Ivan and the two other slaves of the general.

“Well, here we are alone,” said Gregory. “What do you mean to do?”

“Well, what would you say,” replied Ivan, “if in spite of the late hour and the cold, and in spite of the fact that we are only slaves, my lady were to leave her father’s house and come to drink our healths?”

“I would say that you ought to take advantage of it,” said Gregory, shrugging his shoulders, “and tell her to bring at the same time a bottle of brandy. There is probably better brandy in the general’s cellar than in mine.”

“There is better,” said Ivan, as if he was perfectly sure of it, “and my lady shall bring you a bottle of it.”

“You are mad!” said Gregory.

“He is mad!” repeated the other two slaves mechanically.

“Oh, I am mad?” said Ivan. “Well, will you take a wager?”

“What will you wager?”

“Two hundred roubles against a year of free drinking in your inn.”

“Done!” said Gregory.

“Are your comrades included?” said the two moujiks.

“They are included,” said Ivan, “and in consideration of them we will reduce the time to six months. Is that agreed?”

“It is agreed,” said Gregory.

The two who were making the wager shook hands, and the agreement was perfected. Then, with an air of confidence, assumed to confound the witnesses of this strange scene, Ivan wrapped himself in the fur coat which, like a cautious man, he had spread on the stove, and went out.

At the end of half an hour he reappeared.

“Well!” cried Gregory and the two slaves together.

“She is following,” said Ivan.

The three tipplers looked at one another in amazement, but Ivan quietly returned to his place in the middle of them, poured out a new bumper, and raising his glass, cried —

“To my lady’s health! It is the least we can do when she is kind enough to come and join us on so cold a night, when the snow is falling fast.”

“Annouschka,” said a voice outside, “knock at this door and ask Gregory if he has not some of our servants with him.”

Gregory and the two other slaves looked at one another, stupefied: they had recognised Vaninka’s voice. As for Ivan, he flung himself back in his chair, balancing himself with marvellous impertinence.

Annouschka opened the door, and they could see, as Ivan had said, that the snow was falling heavily.

“Yes, madam,” said the girl; “my brother is there, with Daniel and Alexis.”

Vaninka entered.

“My friends,” said she, with a strange smile, “I am told that you were drinking my health, and I have come to bring you something to drink it again. Here is a bottle of old French brandy which I have chosen for you from my father’s cellar. Hold out your glasses.”

Gregory and the slaves obeyed with the slowness and hesitation of astonishment, while Ivan held out his glass with the utmost effrontery.

Vaninka filled them to the brim herself, and then, as they hesitated to drink, “Come, drink to my health, friends,” said she.

“Hurrah!” cried the drinkers, reassured by the kind and familiar tone of their noble visitor, as they emptied their glasses at a draught.

Vaninka at once poured them out another glass; then putting the bottle on the table, “Empty the bottle, my friends,” said she, “and do not trouble about me. Annouschka and I, with the permission 2668 of the master of the house, will sit near the stove till the storm is over.”

Gregory tried to rise and place stools near the stove, but whether he was quite drunk or whether some narcotic had been mixed with the brandy, he fell back on his seat, trying to stammer out an excuse.

“It is all right,” said Vaninka: “do not disturb yourselves; drink, my friends, drink.”

The revellers profited by this permission, and each emptied the glass before him. Scarcely had Gregory emptied his before he fell forward on the table.

“Good!” said Vaninka to her maid in a low voice: “the opium is taking effect.”

“What do you mean to do?” said Annouschka.

“You will soon see,” was the answer.

The two moujiks followed the example of the master of the house, and fell down side by side on the ground. Ivan was left struggling against sleep, and trying to sing a drinking song; but soon his tongue refused to obey him, his eyes closed in spite of him, and seeking the tune that escaped him, and muttering words he was unable to pronounce, he fell fast asleep near his companions.

Immediately Vaninka rose, fixed them with flashing eyes, and called them by name one after another. There was no response.

Then she clapped her hands and cried joyfully, “The moment has come!” Going to the back of the room, she brought thence an armful of straw, placed it in a corner of the room, and did the same in the other corners. She then took a flaming brand from the stove and set fire in succession to the four corners of the room.

“What are you doing?” said Annouschka, wild with terror, trying to stop her.

“I am going to bury our secret in the ashes of this house,” answered Vaninka.

“But my brother, my poor brother!” said the girl.

“Your brother is a wretch who has betrayed me, and we are lost if we do not destroy him.”

“Oh, my brother, my poor brother!”

“You can die with him if you like,” said Vaninka, accompanying the proposal with a smile which showed she would not have been sorry if Annouschka had carried sisterly affection to that length.

“But look at the fire, madam — the fire!”

“Let us go, then,” said Vaninka; and, dragging out the heart-broken girl, she locked the door behind her and threw the key far away into the snow.

“In the name of Heaven,” said Annouschka, “let us go home quickly: I cannot gaze upon this awful sight!”

“No, let us stay here!” said Vaninka, holding her back with a grasp of almost masculine strength. “Let us stay until the house falls in on them, so that we may be certain that not one of them escapes.”

“Oh, my God!” cried Annouschka, falling on her knees, “have mercy upon my poor brother, for death will hurry him unprepared into Thy presence.”

“Yes, yes, pray; that is right,” said Vaninka. “I wish to destroy their bodies, not their souls.”

Vaninka stood motionless, her arms crossed, brilliantly lit up by the flames, while her attendant prayed. The fire did not last long: the house was wooden, with the crevices filled with oakum, like all those of Russian peasants, so that the flames, creeping out at the four corners, soon made great headway, and, fanned by the wind, spread rapidly to all parts of the building. Vaninka followed the progress of the fire with blazing eyes, fearing to see some half-burnt spectral shape rush out of the flames. At last the roof fell in, and Vaninka, relieved of all fear, then at last made her way to the general’s house, into which the two women entered without being seen, thanks to the permission Annouschka had to go out at any hour of the day or night.

The next morning the sole topic of conversation in St. Petersburg was the fire at the Red House. Four half-consumed corpses were dug out from beneath the ruins, and as three of the general’s slaves were missing, he had no doubt that the unrecognisable bodies were those of Ivan, Daniel, and Alexis: as for the fourth, it was certainly that of Gregory.

The cause of the fire remained a secret from everyone: the house was solitary, and the snowstorm so violent that nobody had met the two women on the deserted road. Vaninka was sure of her maid. Her secret then had perished with Ivan. But now remorse took the place of fear: the young girl who was so pitiless and inflexible in the execution of the deed quailed at its remembrance. It seemed to her that by revealing the secret of her crime to a priest, she would be relieved of her terrible burden. She therefore sought a confessor renowned for his lofty charity, and, under the seal of confession, told him all. The priest was horrified by the story. Divine mercy is boundless, but human forgiveness has its limits. He refused Vaninka the absolution she asked. This refusal was terrible: it would banish Vaninka from the Holy Table; this banishment would be noticed, and could not fail to be attributed to some unheard-of and secret crime. Vaninka fell at the feet of the priest, and in the name of her father, who would be disgraced by her shame, begged him to mitigate the rigour of this sentence.

The confessor reflected deeply, then thought he had found a way to obviate such consequences. It was that Vaninka should approach the Holy Table with the other young girls; the priest would stop before her as before all the others, but only say to her, “Pray and weep”; the congregation, deceived by this, would think that she had received the Sacrament like her companions. This was all that Vaninka could obtain.

This confession took place about seven o’clock in the evening, and the solitude of the church, added to the darkness of night, had given it a still more awful character. The confessor returned home, pale and trembling. His wife Elizabeth was waiting for him alone. She had just put her little daughter Arina, who was eight years old, to bed in an adjoining room. When she saw her husband, she uttered a cry of terror, so changed and haggard was his appearance. The confessor tried to reassure her, but his trembling voice only increased her alarm. She asked the cause of his agitation; the confessor refused to tell her. Elizabeth had heard the evening before that her mother was ill; she thought that her husband had received some bad news. The day was Monday, which is considered an unlucky day among the Russians, and, going out that day, Elizabeth had met a man in mourning; these omens were too numerous and too strong not to portend misfortune.

Elizabeth burst into tears, and cried out, “My mother is dead!”

The priest in vain tried to reassure her by telling her that his agitation was not due to that. The poor woman, dominated by one idea, made no response to his protestations but this everlasting cry, “My mother is dead!”

Then, to bring her to reason, the confessor told her that his emotion was due to the avowal of a crime which he had just heard in the confessional. But Elizabeth shook her head: it was a trick, she said, to hide from her the sorrow which had fallen upon her. Her agony, instead of calming, became more violent; her tears ceased to flow, and were followed by hysterics. The priest then made her swear to keep the secret, and the sanctity of the confession was betrayed.

Little Arina had awakened at Elizabeth's cries, and being disturbed and at the same time curious as to what her parents were doing, she got up, went to listen at the door, and heard all.

The day for the Communion came; the church of St. Simeon was crowded. Vaninka came to kneel at the railing of the choir. Behind her was her father and his aides-de-camp, and behind them their servants.

Arina was also in the church with her mother. The inquisitive child wished to see Vaninka, whose name she had heard pronounced that terrible night, when her father had failed in the first and most sacred of the duties imposed on a priest. While her mother was praying, she left her chair and glided among the worshippers, nearly as far as the railing.

But when she had arrived there, she was stopped by the group of the general's servants. But Arina had not come so far to be, stopped so easily: she tried to push between them, but they opposed her; she persisted, and one of them pushed her roughly back. The child fell, struck her head against a seat, and got up bleeding and crying, "You are very proud for a slave. Is it because you belong to the great lady who burnt the Red House?"

These words, uttered in a loud voice, in the midst of the silence which preceded, the sacred ceremony, were heard by everyone. They were answered by a shriek. Vaninka had fainted. The next day the general, at the feet of Paul, recounted to him, as his sovereign and judge, the whole terrible story, which Vaninka, crushed by her long struggle, had at last revealed to him, at night, after the scene in the church.

The emperor remained for a moment in thought at the end of this strange confession; then, getting up from the chair where he had been sitting while the miserable father told his story, he went to a bureau, and wrote on a sheet of paper the following sentence:

"The priest having violated what should have been inviolable, the secrets of the confessional, is exiled to Siberia and deprived of his priestly office. His wife will follow him: she is to be blamed for not having respected his character as a minister of the altar. The little girl will not leave her parents.

"Annouschka, the attendant, will also go to Siberia for not having made known to her master his daughter's conduct.

“I preserve all my esteem for the general, and I mourn with him for the deadly blow which has struck him.

“As for Vaninka, I know of no punishment which can be inflicted upon her. I only see in her the daughter of a brave soldier, whose whole life has been devoted to the service of his country. Besides, the extraordinary way in which the crime was discovered, seems to place the culprit beyond the limits of my severity. I leave her punishment in her own hands. If I understand her character, if any feeling of dignity remains to her, her heart and her remorse will show her the path she ought to follow.”

Paul handed the paper open to the general, ordering him to take it to Count Pahlen, the governor of St. Petersburg.

On the following day the emperor’s orders were carried out.

Vaninka went into a convent, where towards the end of the same year she died of shame and grief.

The general found the death he sought on the field of Austerlitz.

THE MARQUISE DE GANGES — 1657

Toward the close of the year 1657, a very plain carriage, with no arms painted on it, stopped, about eight o'clock one evening, before the door of a house in the rue Hautefeuille, at which two other coaches were already standing. A lackey at once got down to open the carriage door; but a sweet, though rather tremulous voice stopped him, saying, "Wait, while I see whether this is the place."

Then a head, muffled so closely in a black satin mantle that no feature could be distinguished, was thrust from one of the carriage windows, and looking around, seemed to seek for some decisive sign on the house front. The unknown lady appeared to be satisfied by her inspection, for she turned back to her companion.

"It is here," said she. "There is the sign."

As a result of this certainty, the carriage door was opened, the two women alighted, and after having once more raised their eyes to a strip of wood, some six or eight feet long by two broad, which was nailed above the windows of the second storey, and bore the inscription, "Madame Voison, midwife," stole quickly into a passage, the door of which was unfastened, and in which there was just so much light as enabled persons passing in or out to find their way along the narrow winding stair that led from the ground floor to the fifth story.

The two strangers, one of whom appeared to be of far higher rank than the other, did not stop, as might have been expected, at the door corresponding with the inscription that had guided them, but, on the contrary, went on to the next floor.

Here, upon the landing, was a kind of dwarf, oddly dressed after the fashion of sixteenth-century Venetian buffoons, who, when he saw the two women coming, stretched out a wand, as though to prevent them from going farther, and asked what they wanted.

"To consult the spirit," replied the woman of the sweet and tremulous voice.

"Come in and wait," returned the dwarf, lifting a panel of tapestry and ushering the two women into a waiting-room.

The women obeyed, and remained for about half an hour, seeing and hearing nothing. At last a door, concealed by the tapestry, was suddenly opened; a voice uttered the word “Enter,” and the two women were introduced into a second room, hung with black, and lighted solely by a three-branched lamp that hung from the ceiling. The door closed behind them, and the clients found themselves face to face with the sibyl.

She was a woman of about twenty-five or twenty-six, who, unlike other women, evidently desired to appear older than she was. She was dressed in black; her hair hung in plaits; her neck, arms, and feet were bare; the belt at her waist was clasped by a large garnet which threw out sombre fires. In her hand she held a wand, and she was raised on a sort of platform which stood for the tripod of the ancients, and from which came acrid and penetrating fumes; she was, moreover, fairly handsome, although her features were common, the eyes only excepted, and these, by some trick of the toilet, no doubt, looked inordinately large, and, like the garnet in her belt, emitted strange lights.

When the two visitors came in, they found the soothsayer leaning her forehead on her hand, as though absorbed in thought. Fearing to rouse her from her ecstasy, they waited in silence until it should please her to change her position. At the end of ten minutes she raised her head, and seemed only now to become aware that two persons were standing before her.

“What is wanted of me again?” she asked, “and shall I have rest only in the grave?”

“Forgive me, madame,” said the sweet-voiced unknown, “but I am wishing to know — — ”

“Silence!” said the sibyl, in a solemn voice. “I will not know your affairs. It is to the spirit that you must address yourself; he is a jealous spirit, who forbids his secrets to be shared; I can but pray to him for you, and obey his will.”

At these words, she left her tripod, passed into an adjoining room, and soon returned, looking even paler and more anxious than before, and carrying in one hand a burning chafing dish, in the other a red paper. The three flames of the lamp grew fainter at the same moment, and the room was left lighted up only by the chafing dish; every object now assumed a fantastic air that did not fail to disquiet the two visitors, but it was too late to draw back.

The soothsayer placed the chafing dish in the middle of the room, presented the paper to the young woman who had spoken, and said to her —

"Write down what you wish to know."

The woman took the paper with a steadier hand than might have been expected, seated herself at a table, and wrote: —

"Am I young? Am I beautiful? Am I maid, wife, or widow? This is for the past.

"Shall I marry, or marry again? Shall I live long, or shall I die young? This is for the future."

Then, stretching out her hand to the soothsayer, she asked —

"What am I to do now with this?"

"Roll that letter around this ball," answered the other, handing to the unknown a little ball of virgin wax. "Both ball and letter will be consumed in the flame before your eyes; the spirit knows your secrets already. In three days you will have the answer."

The unknown did as the sibyl bade her; then the latter took from her hands the ball and the paper in which it was wrapped, and went and threw both into the chafing pan.

"And now all is done as it should be," said the soothsayer. "Comus!"

The dwarf came in.

"See the lady to her coach."

The stranger left a purse upon the table, and followed Comus. He conducted her and her companion, who was only a confidential maid, down a back staircase, used as an exit, and leading into a different street from that by which the two women had come in; but the coachman, who had been told beforehand of this circumstance, was awaiting them at the door, and they had only to step into their carriage, which bore them rapidly away in the direction of the rue Dauphine.

Three days later, according to the promise given her, the fair unknown, when she awakened, found on the table beside her a letter in an unfamiliar handwriting; it was addressed "To the beautiful Provencale," and contained these words —

"You are young; you are beautiful; you are a widow. This is for the present.

"You will marry again; you will die young, and by a violent death. This is for the future.

“THE SPIRIT.”

The answer was written upon a paper like that upon which the questions had been set down.

The marquise turned pale and uttered a faint cry of terror; the answer was so perfectly correct in regard to the past as to call up a fear that it might be equally accurate in regard to the future.

The truth is that the unknown lady wrapped in a mantle whom we have escorted into the modern sibyl’s cavern was no other than the beautiful Marie de Rossan, who before her marriage had borne the name of Mademoiselle de Chateaublanc, from that of an estate belonging to her maternal grandfather, M. Joannis de Nocheres, who owned a fortune of five to six hundred thousand livres. At the age of thirteen — that is to say, in 1649 — she had married the Marquis de Castellane, a gentleman of very high birth, who claimed to be descended from John of Castille, the son of Pedro the Cruel, and from Juana de Castro, his mistress. Proud of his young wife’s beauty, the Marquis de Castellane, who was an officer of the king’s galleys, had hastened to present her at court. Louis XIV, who at the time of her presentation was barely twenty years old, was struck by her enchanting face, and to the great despair of the famous beauties of the day danced with her three times in one evening. Finally, as a crowning touch to her reputation, the famous Christina of Sweden, who was then at the French court, said of her that she had never, in any of the kingdoms through which she had passed, seen anything equal to “the beautiful Provencale.” This praise had been so well received, that the name of “the beautiful Provencale” had clung to Madame de Castellane, and she was everywhere known by it.

This favour of Louis XIV and this summing up of Christina’s had been enough to bring the Marquise de Castellane instantly into fashion; and Mignard, who had just received a patent of nobility and been made painter to the king, put the seal to her celebrity by asking leave to paint her portrait. That portrait still exists, and gives a perfect notion of the beauty which it represents; but as the portrait is far from our readers’ eyes, we will content ourselves by repeating, in its own original words, the one given in 1667 by the author of a pamphlet published at Rouen under the following title: True and Principal Circumstances of the Deplorable Death of Madame the Marquise de Ganges:

[Note: It is from this pamphlet, and from the Account of the Death of Madame the Marquise de Ganges, formerly Marquise de Castellane, that we have borrowed the principal circumstances of this tragic story. To these documents we must add — that we may not be constantly referring our readers to original sources — the Celebrated Trials by Guyot de Pitaval, the Life of Marie de Rossan, and the Lettres galantes of Madame Desnoyers.]

"Her complexion, which was of a dazzling whiteness, was illumined by not too brilliant a red, and art itself could not have arranged more skilfully the gradations by which this red joined and merged into the whiteness of the complexion. The brilliance of her face was heightened by the decided blackness of her hair, growing, as though drawn by a painter of the finest taste, around a well proportioned brow; her large, well opened eyes were of the same hue as her hair, and shone with a soft and piercing flame that rendered it impossible to gaze upon her steadily; the smallness, the shape, the turn of her mouth, and, the beauty of her teeth were incomparable; the position and the regular proportion of her nose added to her beauty such an air of dignity, as inspired a respect for her equal to the love that might be inspired by her beauty; the rounded contour of her face, produced by a becoming plumpness, exhibited all the vigour and freshness of health; to complete her charms, her glances, the movements of her lips and of her head, appeared to be guided by the graces; her shape corresponded to the beauty of her face; lastly, her arms, her hands, her bearing, and her gait were such that nothing further could be wished to complete the agreeable presentment of a beautiful woman."

[Note: All her contemporaries, indeed, are in agreement as to her marvellous beauty; here is a second portrait of the marquise, delineated in a style and manner still more characteristic of that period: —

"You will remember that she had a complexion smoother and finer than a mirror, that her whiteness was so well commingled with the lively blood as to produce an exact admixture never beheld elsewhere, and imparting to her countenance the tenderest animation; her eyes and hair were blacker than jet; her eyes, I say, of which the gaze could scarce, from their excess of lustre, be supported, which have been celebrated as a miracle of tenderness and sprightliness, which have given rise, a thousand times, to the finest compliments of the day, and have been the torment of many a rash man, must excuse me, if I do not pause longer to praise them, in a letter; her mouth was the feature of her face which compelled the most critical to avow that they had seen none of equal perfection, and that, by its shape, its smallness, and its brilliance, it might furnish a pattern for all those others whose sweetness and charms had been so highly vaunted; her nose conformed to the fair proportion of all her features; it was, that is to say, the finest in the world; the whole shape of her face was perfectly round, and of so charming a fullness that such an assemblage of beauties was never before seen together. The expression of this head was one of unparalleled sweetness and of a majesty which she softened rather by disposition than by study; her figure was opulent, her speech agreeable, her step noble, her demeanour easy, her temper sociable, her wit devoid of malice, and founded upon great goodness of heart.”]

It is easy to understand that a woman thus endowed could not, in a court where gallantry was more pursued than in any other spot in the world, escape the calumnies of rivals; such calumnies, however, never produced any result, so correctly, even in the absence of her husband, did the marquise contrive to conduct herself; her cold and serious conversation, rather concise than lively, rather solid than brilliant, contrasted, indeed, with the light turn, the capricious and fanciful expressions employed by the wits of that time; the consequence was that those who had failed to succeed with her, tried to spread a report that the marquise was merely a beautiful idol, virtuous with the virtue of a statue. But though such things might be said and repeated in the absence of the marquise, from the moment that she appeared in a drawing-room, from the moment that her beautiful eyes and sweet smile added their indefinable expression to those brief, hurried, and sensible words that fell from her lips, the most prejudiced came back to her and were forced to own that God had never before created anything that so nearly touched perfection.

She was thus in the enjoyment of a triumph that backbiters failed to shake, and that scandal vainly sought to tarnish, when news came of the wreck of the French galleys in Sicilian waters, and of the death of the Marquis de Castellane, who was in command. The marquise on this occasion, as usual, displayed the greatest piety and propriety: although she had no very violent passion for her husband, with whom she had spent scarcely one of the seven years during which their marriage had lasted, on receipt of the news she went at once into retreat, going to live with Madame d’Ampus, her mother-in-law, and ceasing not only to receive visitors but also to go out.

Six months after the death of her husband, the marquise received letters from her grandfather, M. Joannis de Nocheres, begging her to come and finish her time of mourning at Avignon. Having been fatherless almost from childhood, Mademoiselle de Chateaublanc had been brought up by this good old man, whom she loved dearly; she hastened accordingly to accede to his invitation, and prepared everything for her departure.

This was at the moment when la Voisin, still a young woman, and far from having the reputation which she subsequently acquired, was yet beginning to be talked of. Several friends of the Marquise de Castellane had been to consult her, and had received strange predictions from her, some of which, either through the art of her who framed them, or through some odd concurrence of circumstances, had come true. The marquise could not resist the curiosity with which various tales that she had heard of this woman's powers had inspired her, and some days before setting out for Avignon she made the visit which we have narrated. What answer she received to her questions we have seen.

The marquise was not superstitious, yet this fatal prophecy impressed itself upon her mind and left behind a deep trace, which neither the pleasure of revisiting her native place, nor the affection of her grandfather, nor the fresh admiration which she did not fail to receive, could succeed in removing; indeed, this fresh admiration was a weariness to the marquise, and before long she begged leave of her grandfather to retire into a convent and to spend there the last three months of her mourning.

It was in that place, and it was with the warmth of these poor cloistered maidens, that she heard a man spoken of for the first time, whose reputation for beauty, as a man, was equal to her own, as a woman. This favourite of nature was the sieur de Lenide, Marquis de Ganges, Baron of Languedoc, and governor of Saint-Andre, in the diocese of Uzes. The marquise heard of him so often, and it was so frequently declared to her that nature seemed to have formed them for each other, that she began to allow admission to a very strong desire of seeing him. Doubtless, the sieur de Lenide, stimulated by similar suggestions, had conceived a great wish to meet the marquise; for, having got M. de Nocheres who no doubt regretted her prolonged retreat — to entrust him with a commission for his granddaughter, he came to the convent parlour and asked for the fair recluse. She, although she had never seen him, recognised him at the first glance; for having never seen so handsome a cavalier as he who now presented himself before her, she thought this could be no other than the Marquis de Ganges, of whom people had so often spoken to her.

That which was to happen, happened: the Marquise de Castellane and the Marquis de Ganges could not look upon each other without loving. Both were young, the marquis was noble and in a good position, the marquise was rich; everything in the match, therefore, seemed suitable: and indeed it was deferred only for the space of time necessary to complete the year of mourning, and the marriage was celebrated towards the beginning of the year 1558. The marquis was twenty years of age, and the marquise twenty-two.

The beginnings of this union were perfectly happy; the marquis was in love for the first time, and the marquise did not remember ever to have been in love. A son and a daughter came to complete their happiness. The marquise had entirely forgotten the fatal prediction, or, if she occasionally thought of it now, it was to wonder that she could ever have believed in it. Such happiness is not of this world, and when by chance it lingers here a while, it seems sent rather by the anger than by the goodness of God. Better, indeed, would it be for him who possesses and who loses it, never to have known it.

The Marquis de Ganges was the first to weary of this happy life. Little by little he began to miss the pleasures of a young man; he began to draw away from the marquise and to draw nearer to his former friends. On her part, the marquise, who for the sake of wedded intimacy had sacrificed her habits of social life, threw herself into society, where new triumphs awaited her. These triumphs aroused the jealousy of the marquis; but he was too much a man of his century to invite ridicule by any manifestation; he shut his jealousy into his soul, and it emerged in a different form on every different occasion. To words of love, so sweet that they seemed the speech of angels, succeeded those bitter and biting utterances that foretell approaching division. Before long, the marquis and the marquise only saw each other at hours when they could not avoid meeting; then, on the pretext of necessary journeys, and presently without any pretext at all, the marquis would go away for three-quarters of a year, and once more the marquise found herself widowed. Whatever contemporary account one may consult, one finds them all agreeing to declare that she was always the same — that is to say, full of patience, calmness, and becoming behaviour — and it is rare to find such a unanimity of opinion about a young and beautiful woman.

About this time the marquis, finding it unendurable to be alone with his wife during the short spaces of time which he spent at home, invited his two brothers, the chevalier and the abbe de Ganges, to come and live with him. He had a third brother, who, as the second son, bore the title of comte, and who was colonel of the Languedoc regiment, but as this gentleman played no part in this story we shall not concern ourselves with him.

The abbe de Ganges, who bore that title without belonging to the Church, had assumed it in order to enjoy its privileges: he was a kind of wit, writing madrigals and ‘bouts-rimes’ [Bouts-rimes are verses written to a given set of rhymes.] on occasion, a handsome man enough, though in moments of impatience his eyes would take a strangely cruel expression; as dissolute and shameless to boot, as though he had really belonged to the clergy of the period.

The chevalier de Ganges, who shared in some measure the beauty so profusely showered upon the family, was one of those feeble men who enjoy their own nullity, and grow on to old age inapt alike for good and evil, unless some nature of a stronger stamp lays hold on them and drags them like faint and pallid satellites in its wake. This was what befell the chevalier in respect of his brother: submitted to an influence of which he himself was not aware, and against which, had he but suspected it, he would have rebelled with the obstinacy of a child, he was a machine obedient to the will of another mind and to the passions of another heart, a machine which was all the more terrible in that no movement of instinct or of reason could, in his case, arrest the impulse given.

Moreover, this influence which the abbe had acquired over the chevalier extended, in some degree also, to the marquis. Having as a younger son no fortune, having no revenue, for though he wore a Churchman’s robes he did not fulfil a Churchman’s functions, he had succeeded in persuading the marquis, who was rich, not only in the enjoyment of his own fortune, but also in that of his wife, which was likely to be nearly doubled at the death of M. de Nocheres, that some zealous man was needed who would devote himself to the ordering of his house and the management of his property; and had offered himself for the post. The marquis had very gladly accepted, being, as we have said, tired by this time of his solitary home life; and the abbe had brought with him the chevalier, who followed him like his shadow, and who was no more regarded than if he had really possessed no body.

The marquise often confessed afterwards that when she first saw these two men, although their outward aspect was perfectly agreeable, she felt herself seized by a painful impression, and that the fortune-teller’s prediction of a violent death, which she had so long forgotten, gashed out like lightning before her eyes. The effect on the two brothers was not of the same kind: the beauty of the marquise struck them both, although in different ways. The chevalier was in ecstasies of admiration, as though before a beautiful statue, but the impression that she made upon him was that which would have been made by marble, and if the chevalier had been left to himself the consequences of this admiration would have been no less harmless. Moreover, the chevalier did not attempt either to exaggerate or to conceal this impression, and allowed his sister-in-law to see in what manner she struck him. The abbe, on the contrary, was seized at first sight with a deep and violent desire to possess this woman — the most beautiful whom he had ever met; but being as perfectly capable of mastering his sensations as the chevalier was incapable, he merely allowed such words of compliment to escape him as weigh neither with him who utters nor her who hears them; and yet, before the close of this first interview, the abbe had decided in his irrevocable will that this woman should be his.

As for the marquise, although the impression produced by her two brothers-in-law could never be entirely effaced, the wit of the abbe, to which he gave, with amazing facility, whatever turn he chose, and the complete nullity of the chevalier brought her to certain feelings of less repulsion towards them: for indeed the marquise had one of those souls which never suspect evil, as long as it will take the trouble to assume any veil at all of seeming, and which only recognise it with regret when it resumes its true shape.

Meanwhile the arrival of these two new inmates soon spread a little more life and gaiety through the house. Furthermore; greatly to the astonishment of the marquise, her husband, who had so long been indifferent to her beauty, seemed to remark afresh that she was too charming to be despised; his words accordingly began little by little to express an affection that had long since gradually disappeared from them. The marquise had never ceased to love him; she had suffered the loss of his love with resignation, she hailed its return with joy, and three months elapsed that resembled those which had long ceased to be more to the poor wife than a distant and half-worn-out memory.

Thus she had, with the supreme facility of youth, always ready to be happy, taken up her gladness again, without even asking what genius had brought back to her the treasure which she had thought lost, when she received an invitation from a lady of the neighbourhood to spend some days in her country house. Her husband and her two brothers-in-law, invited with her, were of the party, and accompanied her. A great hunting party had been arranged beforehand, and almost immediately upon arriving everyone began to prepare for taking part in it.

The abbe, whose talents had made him indispensable in every company, declared that for that day he was the marquise's cavalier, a title which his sister-in-law, with her usual amiability, confirmed. Each of the huntsmen, following this example, made choice of a lady to whom to dedicate his attentions throughout the day; then, this chivalrous arrangement being completed, all present directed their course towards the place of meeting.

That happened which almost always happens the dogs hunted on their own account. Two or three sportsmen only followed the dogs; the rest got lost. The abbe, in his character of esquire to the marquise, had not left her for a moment, and had managed so cleverly that he was alone with her — an opportunity which he had been seeking for a month previously with no less care — than the marquise had been using to avoid it. No sooner, therefore, did the marquise believe herself aware that the abbe had intentionally turned aside from the hunt than she attempted to gallop her horse in the opposite direction from that which she had been following; but the abbe stopped her. The marquise neither could nor would enter upon a struggle; she resigned herself, therefore, to hearing what the abbe had to say to her, and her face assumed that air of haughty disdain which women so well know how to put on when they wish a man to understand that he has nothing to hope from them. There was an instant's silence; the abbe was the first to break it.

"Madame," said he, "I ask your pardon for having used this means to speak to you alone; but since, in spite of my rank of brother-in-law, you did not seem inclined to grant me that favour if I had asked it, I thought it would be better for me, to deprive you of the power to refuse it me."

"If you have hesitated to ask me so simple a thing, monsieur," replied the marquise, "and if you have taken such precautions to compel me to listen to you, it must, no doubt, be because you knew beforehand that the words you had to say to me were such as I could not hear. Have the goodness, therefore, to reflect, before you open this conversation, that here as elsewhere I reserve the right — and I warn you of it — to interrupt what you may say at the moment when it may cease to seem to me befitting.”

“As to that, madame,” said the abbe, “I think I can answer for it that whatever it may please me to say to you, you will hear to the end; but indeed the matters are so simple that there is no need to make you uneasy beforehand: I wished to ask you, madame, whether you have perceived a change in the conduct of your husband towards you.”

“Yes, monsieur,” replied the marquise, “and no single day has passed in which I have not thanked Heaven for this happiness.”

“And you have been wrong, madame,” returned the abbe, with one of those smiles that were peculiar to himself; “Heaven has nothing to do with it. Thank Heaven for having made you the most beautiful and charming of women, and that will be enough thanksgiving without despoiling me of such as belong to my share.”

“I do not understand you, monsieur,” said the marquise in an icy tone.

“Well, I will make myself comprehensible, my dear sister-in-law. I am the worker of the miracle for which you are thanking Heaven; to me therefore belongs your gratitude. Heaven is rich enough not to rob the poor.”

“You are right, monsieur: if it is really to you that I owe this return, the cause of which I did not know, I will thank you in the first place; and then afterwards I will thank Heaven for having inspired you with this good thought.”

“Yes,” answered the abbe, “but Heaven, which has inspired me with a good thought, may equally well inspire me with a bad one, if the good thought does not bring me what I expect from it.”

“What do you mean, monsieur?”

“That there has never been more than one will in the family, and that will is mine; that the minds of my two brothers turn according to the fancy of that will like weathercocks before the wind, and that he who has blown hot can blow cold.”

“I am still waiting for you to explain yourself, monsieur.”

“Well, then, my dear sister-in-law, since you are pleased not to understand me, I will explain myself more clearly. My brother turned from you through jealousy; I wished to give you an idea of my power over him, and from extreme indifference I have brought him back, by showing him that he suspected you wrongly, to the ardours of the warmest love. Well, I need only tell him that I was mistaken, and fix his wandering suspicions upon any man whatever, and I shall take him away from you, even as I have brought him back. I need give you no proof of what I say; you know perfectly well that I am speaking the truth."

"And what object had you, in acting this part?"

"To prove to you, madame, that at my will I can cause you to be sad or joyful, cherished or neglected, adored or hated. Madame, listen to me: I love you."

"You insult me, monsieur!" cried the marquise, trying to withdraw the bridle of her horse from the abbe's hands.

"No fine words, my dear sister-in-law; for, with me, I warn you, they will be lost. To tell a woman one loves her is never an insult; only there are a thousand different ways of obliging her to respond to that love. The error is to make a mistake in the way that one employs — that is the whole of the matter."

"And may I inquire which you have chosen?" asked the marquise, with a crushing smile of contempt.

"The only one that could succeed with a calm, cold, strong woman like you, the conviction that your interest requires you to respond to my love."

"Since you profess to know me so well," answered the marquise, with another effort, as unsuccessful as the former, to free the bridle of her horse, "you should know how a woman like me would receive such an overture; say to yourself what I might say to you, and above all, what I might say to my husband."

The abbe smiled.

"Oh, as to that," he returned, "you can do as you please, madame. Tell your husband whatever you choose; repeat our conversation word for word; add whatever your memory may furnish, true or false, that may be most convincing against me; then, when you have thoroughly given him his cue, when you think yourself sure of him, I will say two words to him, and turn him inside out like this glove. That is what I had to say to you, madame I will not detain you longer. You may have in me a devoted friend or a mortal enemy. Reflect."

At these words the abbe loosed his hold upon the bridle of the marquise's horse and left her free to guide it as she would. The marquise put her beast to a trot, so as to show neither fear nor haste. The abbe followed her, and both rejoined the hunt.

The abbe had spoken truly. The marquise, notwithstanding the threat which she had made, reflected upon the influence which this man had over her husband, and of which she had often had proof she kept silence, therefore, and hoped that he had made himself seem worse than he was, to frighten her. On this point she was strangely mistaken.

The abbe, however, wished to see, in the first place, whether the marquise's refusal was due to personal antipathy or to real virtue. The chevalier, as has been said, was handsome; he had that usage of good society which does instead of mind, and he joined to it the obstinacy of a stupid man; the abbe undertook to persuade him that he was in love with the marquise. It was not a difficult matter. We have described the impression made upon the chevalier by the first sight of Madame de Ganges; but, owing beforehand the reputation of austerity that his sister-in-law had acquired, he had not the remotest idea of paying court to her. Yielding, indeed, to the influence which she exercised upon all who came in contact with her, the chevalier had remained her devoted servant; and the marquise, having no reason to mistrust civilities which she took for signs of friendliness, and considering his position as her husband's brother, treated him with less circumspection than was her custom.

The abbe sought him out, and, having made sure they were alone, said, “Chevalier, we both love the same woman, and that woman is our brother's wife; do not let us thwart each other: I am master of my passion, and can the more easily sacrifice it to you that I believe you are the man preferred; try, therefore, to obtain some assurance of the love which I suspect the marquise of having for you; and from the day when you reach that point I will withdraw, but otherwise, if you fail, give up your place civilly to me, that I may try, in my turn, whether her heart is really impregnable, as everybody says.”

The chevalier had never thought of the possibility of winning the marquise; but from the moment in which his brother, with no apparent motive of personal interest, aroused the idea that he might be beloved, every spark of passion and of vanity that still existed in this automaton took fire, and he began to be doubly assiduous and attentive to his sister-in-law. She, who had never suspected any evil in this quarter, treated the chevalier at first with a kindliness that was heightened by her scorn for the abbe. But, before long, the chevalier, misunderstanding the grounds of this kindliness, explained himself more clearly. The marquise, amazed and at first incredulous, allowed him to say enough to make his intentions perfectly clear; then she stopped him, as she had done the abbe, by some of those galling words which women derive from their indifference even more than from their virtue.

At this check, the chevalier, who was far from possessing his brother’s strength and determination, lost all hope, and came candidly to own to the latter the sad result of his attentions and his love. This was what the abbe had awaited, in the first place for the satisfaction of his own vanity, and in the second place for the means of carrying out his schemes. He worked upon the chevalier’s humiliation until he had wrought it into a solid hatred; and then, sure of having him for a supporter and even for an accomplice, he began to put into execution his plan against the marquise.

The consequence was soon shown in a renewal of alienation on the part of M. de Ganges. A young man whom the marquise sometimes met in society, and to whom, on account of his wit, she listened perhaps a little more willingly than to others, became, if not the cause, at least the excuse of a fresh burst of jealousy. This jealousy was exhibited as on previous occasions, by quarrels remote from the real grievance; but the marquise was not deceived: she recognised in this change the fatal hand of her brother-in-law. But this certainty, instead of drawing her towards him, increased her repulsion; and thenceforward she lost no opportunity of showing him not only that repulsion but also the contempt that accompanied it.

Matters remained in this state for some months. Every day the marquise perceived her husband growing colder, and although the spies were invisible she felt herself surrounded by a watchfulness that took note of the most private details of her life. As to the abbe and the chevalier, they were as usual; only the abbe had hidden his hate behind a smile that was habitual, and the chevalier his resentment behind that cold and stiff dignity in which dull minds enfold themselves when they believe themselves injured in their vanity.

In the midst of all this, M. Joannis de Nocheres died, and added to the already considerable fortune of his granddaughter another fortune of from six to seven hundred thousand livres.

This additional wealth became, on accruing to the marquise, what was then called, in countries where the Roman law prevailed, a ‘paraphernal’ estate that is to say that, falling in, after marriage? it was not included in the dowry brought by the wife, and that she could dispose freely both of the capital and the income, which might not be administered even by her husband without a power of attorney, and of which she could dispose at pleasure, by donation or by will. And in fact, a few days after the marquise had entered into possession of her grandfather's estate, her husband and his brothers learned that she had sent for a notary in order to be instructed as to her rights. This step betokened an intention of separating this inheritance from the common property of the marriage; for the behaviour of the marquis towards his wife — of which within himself he often recognised the injustice — left him little hope of any other explanation.

About this time a strange event happened. At a dinner given by the marquise, a cream was served at dessert: all those who partook of this cream were ill; the marquis and his two brothers, who had not touched it, felt no evil effects. The remainder of this cream, which was suspected of having caused illness to the guests, and particularly to the marquise, who had taken of it twice, was analysed, and the presence of arsenic in it demonstrated. Only, having been mixed with milk, which is its antidote, the poison had lost some of its power, and had produced but half the expected effect. As no serious disaster had followed this occurrence, the blame was thrown upon a servant, who was said to have mistaken arsenic for sugar, and everybody forgot it, or appeared to forget it.

The marquis, however, seemed to be gradually and naturally drawing nearer again to his wife; but this time Madame de Ganges was not deceived by his returning kindness. There, as in his alienation, she saw the selfish hand of the abbe: he had persuaded his brother that seven hundred thousand livres more in the house would make it worth while to overlook some levities of behaviour; and the marquis, obeying the impulse given, was trying, by kind dealing, to oppose his wife's still unsettled intention of making a will.

Towards the autumn there was talk of going to spend that season at Ganges, a little town situated in Lower Languedoc, in the diocese of Montpellier, seven leagues from that town, and nineteen from Avignon. Although this was natural enough, since the marquis was lord of the town and had a castle there, the marquise was seized by a strange shudder when she heard the proposal. Remembrance of the prediction made to her returned immediately to her mind. The recent and ill explained attempt to poison her, too, very naturally added to her fears.

Without directly and positively suspecting her brothers-in-law of that crime, she knew that in them she had two implacable enemies. This journey to a little town, this abode in a lonely castle, amid new, unknown neighbours, seemed to her of no good omen; but open opposition would have been ridiculous. On what grounds, indeed, could she base resistance? The marquise could only own her terrors by accusing her husband and her brothers-in-law. And of what could she accuse them? The incident of the poisoned cream was not a conclusive proof. She resolved accordingly to lock up all her fears in her heart, and to commit herself to the hands of God.

Nevertheless, she would not leave Avignon without signing the will which she had contemplated making ever since M. de Nocheres' death. A notary was called in who drew up the document. The Marquise de Ganges made her mother, Madame de Rossan, her sole inheritor, and left in her charge the duty of choosing between the testatrix's two children as to which of them should succeed to the estate. These two children were, one a boy of six years old, the other a girl of five. But this was not enough for the marquise, so deep was her impression that she would not survive this fatal journey; she gathered together, secretly and at night, the magistrates of Avignon and several persons of quality, belonging to the first families of the town, and there, before them, verbally at first, declared that, in case of her death, she begged the honourable witnesses whom she had assembled on purpose, not to recognise as valid, voluntary, or freely written anything except the will which she had signed the day before, and affirmed beforehand that any later will which might be produced would be the effect of fraud or of violence. Then, having made this verbal declaration, the marquise repeated it in writing, signed the paper containing it, and gave the paper to be preserved by the honour of those whom she constituted its guardians. Such a precaution, taken with such minute detail, aroused the lively curiosity of her hearers. Many pressing questions were put to the marquise, but nothing could be extracted from her except that she had reasons for her action which she could not declare. The cause of this assemblage remained a secret, and every person who formed part of it promised the marquise not to reveal it.

On the next day, which was that preceding her departure for Ganges, the marquise visited all the charitable institutions and religious communities in

Avignon; she left liberal alms everywhere, with the request that prayers and masses should be said for her, in order to obtain from God’s grace that she should not be suffered to die without receiving the sacraments of the Church. In the evening, she took leave of all her friends with the affection and the tears of a person convinced that she was bidding them a last farewell; and finally she spent the whole night in prayer, and the maid who came to wake her found her kneeling in the same spot where she, had left her the night before.

The family set out for Ganges; the journey was performed without accident. On reaching the castle, the marquise found her mother-in-law there; she was a woman of remarkable distinction and piety, and her presence, although it was to be but temporary, reassured the poor fearful marquise a little. Arrangements had been made beforehand at the old castle, and the most convenient and elegant of the rooms had been assigned to the marquise; it was on the first floor, and looked out upon a courtyard shut in on all sides by stables.

On the first evening that she was to sleep here, the marquise explored the room with the greatest attention. She inspected the cupboards, sounded the walls, examined the tapestry, and found nothing anywhere that could confirm her terrors, which, indeed, from that time began to decrease. At the end of a certain time; however, the marquis’s mother left Ganges to return to Montpellier. Two, days after her departure, the marquis talked of important business which required him to go back to Avignon, and he too left the castle. The marquise thus remained alone with the abbe, the chevalier, and a chaplain named Perette, who had been attached for five-and-twenty years to the family of the marquis. The rest of the household consisted of a few servants.

The marquise’s first care, on arriving at the castle, had been to collect a little society for herself in the town. This was easy: not only did her rank make it an honour to belong to her circle, her kindly graciousness also inspired at first-sight the desire of having her for a friend. The marquise thus endured less dulness than she had at first feared. This precaution was by no means uncalled for; instead of spending only the autumn at Ganges, the marquise was obliged, in consequence of letters from her husband, to spend the winter there. During the whole of this time the abbe and the chevalier seemed to have completely forgotten their original designs upon her, and had again resumed the conduct of respectful, attentive brothers. But with all this, M. de Ganges remained estranged, and the marquise, who had not ceased to love him, though she began to lose her fear, did not lose her grief.

One day the abbe entered her room suddenly enough to surprise her before she had time to dry her tears; the secret being thus half surprised, he easily obtained a knowledge of the whole. The marquise owned to him that happiness in this world was impossible for her so long as her husband led this separate and hostile life. The abbe tried to console her; but amid his consolations he told her that the grief which she was suffering had its source in herself; that her husband was naturally wounded by her distrust of him — a distrust of which the will, executed by her, was a proof, all the more humiliating because public, and that, while that will existed, she could expect no advances towards reconciliation from her husband. For that time the conversation ended there.

Some days later, the abbe came into the marquise's room with a letter which he had just received from his brother. This letter, supposed confidential, was filled with tender complaints of his wife's conduct towards him, and showed, through every sentence, a depth of affection which only wrongs as serious as those from which the marquis considered himself to be feeling could counterbalance. The marquise was, at first, very much touched by this letter; but having soon reflected that just sufficient time had elapsed since the explanation between herself and the abbe for the marquis to be informed of it, she awaited further and stronger proofs before changing her mind.

From day to day, however, the abbe, under the pretext of reconciling the husband and wife, became more pressing upon the matter of the will, and the marquise, to whom this insistence seemed rather alarming, began to experience some of her former fears. Finally, the abbe pressed her so hard as to make her reflect that since, after the precautions which she had taken at Avignon, a revocation could have no result, it would be better to seem to yield rather than irritate this man, who inspired her with so great a fear, by constant and obstinate refusals. The next time that he returned to the subject she accordingly replied that she was ready to offer her husband this new proof of her love if it would bring him back to her, and having ordered a notary to be sent for, she made a new will, in the presence of the abbe and the chevalier, and constituted the marquis her residuary legatee. This second instrument bore date the 5th of May 1667. The abbe and the chevalier expressed the greatest joy that this subject of discord was at last removed, and offered themselves as guarantees, on their brother's behalf, of a better future. Some days were passed in this hope, which a letter from the marquis came to confirm; this letter at the same time announced his speedy return to Ganges.

On the 16th of May; the marquise, who for a month or two had not been well, determined to take medicine; she therefore informed the chemist of what she wanted, and asked him to make her up something at his discretion and send it to her the next day. Accordingly, at the agreed hour in the morning, the draught was brought to the marquise; but it looked to her so black and so thick that she felt some doubt of the skill of its compounder, shut it up in a cupboard in her room without saying anything of the matter, and took from her dressing-case some pills, of a less efficacious nature indeed, but to which she was accustomed, and which were not so repugnant to her.

The hour in which the marquise was to take this medicine was hardly over when the abbe and the chevalier sent to know how she was. She replied that she was quite well, and invited them to a collation which she was giving about four o'clock to the ladies who made up her little circle. An hour afterwards the abbe and the chevalier sent a second time to inquire after her; the marquise, without paying particular attention to this excessive civility, which she remembered afterwards, sent word as before that she was perfectly well. The marquise had remained in bed to do the honours of her little feast, and never had she felt more cheerful. At the hour named all her guests arrived; the abbe and the chevalier were ushered in, and the meal was served. Neither one nor the other would share it; the abbe indeed sat down to table, but the chevalier remained leaning on the foot of the bed. The abbe appeared anxious, and only roused himself with a start from his absorption; then he seemed to drive away some dominant idea, but soon the idea, stronger than his will, plunged him again into a reverie, a state which struck everyone the more particularly because it was far from his usual temper. As to the chevalier, his eyes were fixed constantly upon his sister-in-law, but in this there was not, as in his brother's behaviour, anything surprising, since the marquise had never looked so beautiful.

The meal over, the company took leave. The abbe escorted the ladies downstairs; the chevalier remained with the marquise; but hardly had the abbe left the room when Madame de Ganges saw the chevalier turn pale and drop in a sitting position — he had been standing on the foot of the bed. The marquise, uneasy, asked what was the matter; but before he could reply, her attention was called to another quarter. The abbe, as pale and as disturbed as the chevalier, came back into the room, carrying in his hands a glass and a pistol, and double-locked the door behind him. Terrified at this spectacle, the marquise half raised herself in her bed, gazing voiceless and wordless. Then the abbe approached her, his lips trembling; his hair bristling and his eyes blazing, and, presenting to her the glass and the pistol, "Madame," said he, after a moment of terrible silence, "choose, whether poison, fire, or" — he made a sign to the chevalier, who drew his sword — "or steel."

The marquise had one moment's hope: at the motion which she saw the chevalier make she thought he was coming to her assistance; but being soon undeceived, and finding herself between two men, both threatening her, she slipped from her bed and fell on her knees.

"What have I done," she cried, "oh, my God? that you should thus decree my death, and after having made yourselves judges should make yourselves executioners? I am guilty of no fault towards you except of having been too faithful in my duty to my husband, who is your brother."

Then seeing that it was vain to continue imploring the abbe, whose looks and gestures spoke a mind made up, she turned towards the chevalier.

"And you too, brother," said she, "oh, God, God! you, too! Oh, have pity on me, in the name of Heaven!"

But he, stamping his foot and pressing the point of his sword to her bosom, answered —

"Enough, madam, enough; take your choice without delay; for if you do not take it, we will take it for you."

The marquise turned once again to the abbe, and her forehead struck the muzzle of the pistol. Then she saw that she must die indeed, and choosing of the three forms of death that which seemed to her the least terrible, "Give me the poison, then," said she, "and may God forgive you my death!"

With these words she took the glass, but the thick black liquid of which it was full aroused such repulsion that she would have attempted a last appeal; but a horrible imprecation from the abbe and a threatening movement from his brother took from her the very last gleam of hope. She put the glass to her lips, and murmuring once more, "God! Saviour! have pity on me!" she swallowed the contents.

As she did so a few drops of the liquid fell upon her breast, and instantly burned her skin like live coals; indeed, this infernal draught was composed of arsenic and sublimate infused in aqua-fortis; then, thinking that no more would be required of her, she dropped the glass.

The marquise was mistaken: the abbe picked it up, and observing that all the sediment had remained at the bottom, he gathered together on a silver bodkin all that had coagulated on the sides of the glass and all that had sunk to the bottom, and presenting this ball, which was about the size of a nut, to the marquise, on the end of the bodkin, he said, “Come, madame, you must swallow the holy-water sprinkler.”

The marquise opened her lips, with resignation; but instead of doing as the abbe commanded, she kept this remainder of the poison in her mouth, threw herself on the bed with a scream, and clasping the pillows, in her pain, she put out the poison between the sheets, unperceived by her assassins; and then turning back to them, folded her hands in entreaty and said, “In the name of God, since you have killed my body, at least do not destroy my soul, but send me a confessor.”

Cruel though the abbe and the chevalier were, they were no doubt beginning to weary of such a scene; moreover, the mortal deed was accomplished — after what she had drunk, the marquise could live but a few minutes; at her petition they went out, locking the door behind them. But no sooner did the marquise find herself alone than the possibility of flight presented itself to her. She ran to the window: this was but twenty-two feet above the ground, but the earth below was covered with stones and rubbish. The marquise, being only in her nightdress, hastened to slip on a silk petticoat; but at the moment when she finished tying it round her waist she heard a step approaching her room, and believing that her murderers were returning to make an end of her, she flew like a madwoman to the window. At the moment of her setting foot on the window ledge, the door opened: the marquise, ceasing to consider anything, flung herself down, head first.

Fortunately, the new-comer, who was the castle chaplain, had time to reach out and seize her skirt. The skirt, not strong enough to bear the weight of the marquise, tore; but its resistance, slight though it was, sufficed nevertheless to change the direction of her body: the marquise, whose head would have been shattered on the stones, fell on her feet instead, and beyond their being bruised by the stones, received no injury. Half stunned though she was by her fall, the marquise saw something coming after her, and sprang aside. It was an enormous pitcher of water, beneath which the priest, when he saw her escaping him, had tried to crush her; but either because he had ill carried out his attempt or because the marquise had really had time to move away, the vessel was shattered at her feet without touching her, and the priest, seeing that he had missed his aim, ran to warn the abbe and the chevalier that the victim was escaping.

As for the marquise, she had hardly touched the ground, when with admirable presence of mind she pushed the end of one of her long plaits so far down her throat as to provoke a fit of vomiting; this was the more easily done that she had eaten heartily of the collation, and happily the presence of the food had prevented the poison from attacking the coats of the stomach so violently as would otherwise have been the case. Scarcely had she vomited when a tame boar swallowed what she had rejected, and falling into a convulsion, died immediately.

As we have said, the room looked upon an enclosed courtyard; and the marquise at first thought that in leaping from her room into this court she had only changed her prison; but soon perceiving a light that flickered from an upper window of ore of the stables, she ran thither, and found a groom who was just going to bed.

“In the name of Heaven, my good man,” said she to him, “save me! I am poisoned! They want to kill me! Do not desert me, I entreat you! Have pity on me, open this stable for me; let me get away! Let me escape!”

The groom did not understand much of what the marquise said to him; but seeing a woman with disordered hair, half naked, asking help of him, he took her by the arm, led her through the stables, opened a door for her, and the marquise found herself in the street. Two women were passing; the groom put her into their hands, without being able to explain to them what he did not know himself. As for the marquise, she seemed able to say nothing beyond these words: “Save me! I am poisoned! In the name of Heaven, save me!”

All at once she escaped from their hands and began to run like a mad woman; she had seen, twenty steps away, on the threshold of the door by which she had come, her two murderers in pursuit of her.

Then they rushed after her; she shrieking that she was poisoned, they shrieking that she was mad; and all this happening amid a crowd which, not knowing what part to take, divided and made way for the victim and the murderers. Terror gave the marquise superhuman strength: the woman who was accustomed to walk in silken shoes upon velvet carpets, ran with bare and bleeding feet over stocks and stones, vainly asking help, which none gave her; for, indeed, seeing her thus, in mad flight, in a nightdress, with flying hair, her only garment a tattered silk petticoat, it was difficult not to — think that this woman was, as her brothers-in-law said, mad.

At last the chevalier came up with her, stopped her, dragged her, in spite of her screams, into the nearest house, and closed the door behind them, while the abbe, standing at the threshold with a pistol in his hand, threatened to blow out the brains of any person who should approach.

The house into which the chevalier and the marquise had gone belonged to one M. Desprats, who at the moment was from home, and whose wife was entertaining several of her friends. The marquise and the chevalier, still struggling together, entered the room where the company was assembled: as among the ladies present were several who also visited the marquise, they immediately arose, in the greatest amazement, to give her the assistance that she implored; but the chevalier hastily pushed them aside, repeating that the marquise was mad. To this reiterated accusation — to which, indeed, appearances lent only too great a probability — the marquise replied by showing her burnt neck and her blackened lips, and wringing her hands in pain, cried out that she was poisoned, that she was going to die, and begged urgently for milk, or at least for water. Then the wife of a Protestant minister, whose name was Madame Brunel, slipped into her hand a box of orvietan, some pieces of which she hastened to swallow, while another lady gave her a glass of water; but at the instant when she was lifting it to her mouth, the chevalier broke it between her teeth, and one of the pieces of glass cut her lips. At this, all the women would have flung themselves upon the chevalier; but the marquise, fearing that he would only become more enraged, and hoping to disarm him, asked, on the contrary, that she might be left alone with him: all the company, yielding to her desire, passed into the next room; this was what the chevalier, on his part, too, asked.

Scarcely were they alone, when the marquise, joining her hands, knelt to him and said in the gentlest and most appealing voice that it was possible to use, “Chevalier, my dear brother, will you not have pity upon me, who have always had so much affection for you, and who, even now, would give my blood for your service? You know that the things I am saying are not merely empty words; and yet how is it you are treating me, though I have not deserved it? And what will everyone say to such dealings? Ah, brother, what a great unhappiness is mine, to have been so cruelly treated by you! And yet — yes, brother — if you will deign to have pity on me and to save my life, I swear, by my hope of heaven, to keep no remembrance of what has happened; and to consider you always as my protector and my friend."

All at once the marquise rose with a great cry and clasped her hand to her right side. While she was speaking, and before she perceived what he was doing, the chevalier had drawn his sword, which was very short, and using it as a dagger, had struck her in the breast; this first blow was followed by a second, which came in contact with the shoulder blade, and so was prevented from going farther. At these two blows the marquise rushed towards the door, of the room into which the ladies had retired, crying, "Help! He is killing me!"

But during the time that she took to cross the room the chevalier stabbed her five times in the back with his sword, and would no doubt have done more, if at the last blow his sword had not broken; indeed, he had struck with such force that the fragment remained embedded in her shoulder, and the marquise fell forward on the floor, in a pool of her blood, which was flowing all round her and spreading through the room.

The chevalier thought he had killed her, and hearing the women running to her assistance, he rushed from the room. The abbe was still at the door, pistol in hand; the chevalier took him by the arm to drag him away, and as the abbe hesitated to follow, he said: —

"Let us go, abbe; the business is done."

The chevalier and the abbe had taken a few steps in the street when a window opened and the women who had found the marquise expiring called out for help: at these cries the abbe stopped short, and holding back the chevalier by the arm, demanded —

"What was it you said, chevalier? If they are calling help, is she not dead, after all?"

"'Ma foi', go and see for yourself," returned the chevalier. "I have done enough for my share; it is your turn now."

"'Pardieu', that is quite my opinion," cried the abbe; and rushing back to the house, he flung himself into the room at the moment when the women, lifting the marquise with great difficulty, for she was so weak that she could no longer help herself, were attempting to carry her to bed. The abbe pushed them away, and arriving at the marquise, put his pistol to her heart;

but Madame Brunel, the same who had previously given the marquise a box of orvietan, lifted up the barrel with her hand, so that the shot went off into the air, and the bullet instead of striking the marquise lodged in the cornice of the ceiling. The abbe then took the pistol by the barrel and gave Madame Brunet so violent a blow upon the head with the butt that she staggered and almost fell; he was about to strike her again, but all the women uniting against him, pushed him, with thousands of maledictions, out of the room, and locked the door behind him. The two assassins, taking advantage of the darkness, fled from Ganges, and reached Aubenas, which is a full league away, about ten in the evening.

Meanwhile the women were doing all they could for the marquise. Their first intention, as we have already said, was to put her to bed, but the broken sword blade made her unable to lie down, and they tried in vain to pull it out, so deeply had it entered the bone. Then the marquise herself showed Madame Brunei what method to take: the operating lady was to sit on the bed, and while the others helped to hold up the marquise, was to seize the blade with both hands, and pressing her — knees against the patient's back, to pull violently and with a great jerk. This plan at last succeeded, and the marquise was able to get to bed; it was nine in the evening, and this horrible tragedy had been going on for nearly three hours.

The magistrates of Ganges, being informed of what had happened, and beginning to believe that it was really a case of murder, came in person, with a guard, to the marquise. As soon as she saw them come in she recovered strength, and raising herself in bed, so great was her fear, clasped her hands and besought their protection; for she always expected to see one or the other of her murderers return. The magistrates told her to reassure herself, set armed men to guard all the approaches to the house, and while physicians and surgeons were, summoned in hot haste from Montpellier, they on their part sent word to the Baron de Trissan, provost of Languedoc, of the crime that had just been committed, and gave him the names and the description of the murderers. That official at once sent people after them, but it was already too late: he learned that the abbe and the chevalier had slept at Aubenas on the night of the murder, that there they had reproached each other for their unskilfulness, and had come near cutting each other's throats, that finally they had departed before daylight, and had taken a boat, near Agde, from a beach called the “Gras de Palaval.”

The Marquis de Ganges was at Avignon, where he was prosecuting a servant of his who had robbed him of two hundred crowns; when he heard news of the event. He turned horribly pale as he listened to the messenger’s story, then falling into a violent fury against his brothers, he swore that they should have no executioners other than himself. Nevertheless, though he was so uneasy about the marquise’s condition, he waited until the next day in the afternoon before setting forth, and during the interval he saw some of his friends at Avignon without saying anything to them of the matter. He did not reach Ganges until four days after the murder, then he went to the house of M. Desprats and asked to see his wife, whom some kind priests had already prepared for the meeting; and the marquise, as soon as she heard of his arrival, consented to receive him. The marquis immediately entered the room, with his eyes full of tears, tearing his hair, and giving every token of the deepest despair.

The marquise receivers her husband like a forgiving wife and a dying Christian. She scarcely even uttered some slight reproaches about the manner in which he had deserted her; moreover, the marquis having complained to a monk of these reproaches, and the monk having reported his complaints to the marquise, she called her husband to her bedside, at a moment when she was surrounded by people, and made him a public apology, begging him to attribute the words that seemed to have wounded him to the effect of her sufferings, and not to any failure in her regard for him. The marquis, left alone with his wife, tried to take advantage of this reconciliation to induce her to annul the declaration that she had made before the magistrates of Avignon; for the vice-legate and his officers, faithful to the promises made to the marquise, had refused to register the fresh donation which she had made at Ganges, according to the suggestions of the abbe, and which the latter had sent off, the very moment it was signed, to his brother. But on this point the marquise was immovably resolute, declaring that this fortune was reserved for her children and therefore sacred to her, and that she could make no alteration in what had been done at Avignon, since it represented her genuine and final wishes. Notwithstanding this declaration, the marquis did not cease to — remain beside his wife and to bestow upon her every care possible to a devoted and attentive husband.

Two days later than the Marquis de Ganges arrived Madame de Rossan great was her amazement, after all the rumours that were already in circulation about the marquis, at finding her daughter in the hands of him whom she regarded as one of her murderers. But the marquise, far from sharing that opinion, did all she could, not only to make her mother feel differently, but even to induce her to embrace the marquis as a son. This blindness on the part of the marquise caused Madame de Rossan so much grief that notwithstanding her profound affection for her daughter she would only stay two days, and in spite of the entreaties that the dying woman made to her, she returned home, not allowing anything to stop her. This departure was a great grief to the marquise, and was the reason why she begged with renewed entreaties to be taken to Montpellier. The very sight of the place where she had been so cruelly tortured continually brought before her, not only the remembrance of the murder, but the image of the murderers, who in her brief moments of sleep so haunted her that she sometimes awoke suddenly, uttering shrieks and calling for help. Unfortunately, the physician considered her too weak to bear removal, and declared that no change of place could be made without extreme danger.

Then, when she heard this verdict, which had to be repeated to her, and which her bright and lively complexion and brilliant eyes seemed to contradict, the marquise turned all her thoughts towards holy things, and thought only of dying like a saint after having already suffered like a martyr. She consequently asked to receive the last sacrament, and while it was being sent for, she repeated her apologies to her husband and her forgiveness of his brothers, and this with a gentleness that, joined to her beauty, made her whole personality appear angelic. When, however, the priest bearing the viaticum entered, this expression suddenly changed, and her face presented every token of the greatest terror. She had just recognised in the priest who was bringing her the last consolations of Heaven the infamous Perette, whom she could not but regard as an accomplice of the abbe and the chevalier, since, after having tried to hold her back, he had attempted to crush her beneath the pitcher of water which he had thrown at her from the window, and since, when he saw her escaping, he had run to warn her assassins and to set them on her track. She recovered herself quickly, however, and seeing that the priest, without any sign of remorse, was drawing near to her bedside, she would not cause so great a scandal as would have been caused by denouncing him at such a moment. Nevertheless, bending towards him, she said, “Father, I hope that, remembering what has passed, and in order to dispel fears that — I may justifiably entertain, you will make no difficulty of partaking with me of the consecrated wafer; for I have sometimes heard it said that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, while remaining a token of salvation, has been known to be made a principle of death."

The priest inclined his head as a sign of assent.

So the marquise communicated thus, taking a sacrament that she shared with one of her murderers, as an evidence that she forgave this one like the others and that she prayed God to forgive them as she herself did.

The following days passed without any apparent increase in her illness, the fever by which she was consumed rather enhancing her beauties, and imparting to her voice and gestures a vivacity which they had never had before. Thus everybody had begun to recover hope, except herself, who, feeling better than anyone else what was her true condition, never for a moment allowed herself any illusion, and keeping her son, who was seven years old, constantly beside her bed, bade him again and again look well at her, so that, young as he was, he might remember her all his life and never forget her in his prayers. The poor child would burst into tears and promise not only to remember her but also to avenge her when he was a man. At these words the marquise gently reproved him, telling him that all vengeance belonged to the king and to God, and that all cares of the kind must be left to those two great rulers of heaven and of earth.

On the 3rd of June, M. Catalan, a councillor, appointed as a commissioner by the Parliament of Toulouse, arrived at Ganges, together with all the officials required by his commission; but he could not see the marquise that night, for she had dozed for some hours, and this sleep had left a sort of torpor upon her mind, which might have impaired the lucidity of her depositions. The next morning, without asking anybody's opinion, M. Catalan repaired to the house of M. Desprats, and in spite of some slight resistance on the part of those who were in charge of her, made his way to the presence of the marquise. The dying woman received him with an admirable presence of mind, that made M. Catalan think there had been an intention the night before to prevent any meeting between him and the person whom he was sent to interrogate. At first the marquise would relate nothing that had passed, saying that she could not at the same time accuse and forgive; but M. Catalan brought her to see that justice required truth from her before all things, since, in default of exact information, the law might go astray, and strike the innocent instead of the guilty. This last argument decided the marquise, and during the hour and a half that he spent alone with her she told him all the details of this horrible occurrence. On the morrow M. Catalan was to see her again; but on the morrow the marquise was, in truth, much worse. He assured himself of this by his own eyes, and as he knew almost all that he wished to know, did not insist further, for fear of fatiguing her.

Indeed, from that day forward, such atrocious sufferings laid hold upon the marquise, that notwithstanding the firmness which she had always shown, and which she tried to maintain to the end, she could not prevent herself from uttering screams mingled with prayers. In this manner she spent the whole day of the 4th and part of the 5th. At last, on that day, which was a Sunday, towards four o'clock in the afternoon, she expired.

The body was immediately opened, and the physicians attested that the marquise had died solely from the power of the poison, none of the seven sword cuts which she had received being, mortal. They found the stomach and bowels burned and the brain blackened. However, in spite of that infernal draught, which, says the official report, "would have killed a lioness in a few hours," the marquise struggled for nineteen days, so much, adds an account from which we have borrowed some of these details, so much did nature lovingly defend the beautiful body that she had taken so much trouble to make.

M Catalan, the very moment he was informed of the marquise's death, having with him twelve guards belonging to the governor, ten archers, and a poqueton, — despatched them to the marquis's castle with orders to seize his person, that of the priest, and those of all the servants except the groom who had assisted the marquise in her flight. The officer in command of this little squad found the marquis walking up and down, melancholy and greatly disturbed, in the large hall of the castle, and when he signified to him the order of which he was the bearer, the marquis, without making any resistance, and as though prepared for what was happening to him, replied that he was ready to obey, and that moreover he had always intended to go before the Parliament to accuse the murderers of his wife. He was asked for the key of his cabinet, which he gave up, and the order was given to conduct him, with the other persons accused, to the prisons of Montpellier. As soon as the marquis came into that town, the report of his arrival spread with incredible rapidity from street to street. Then, as it was dark, lights came to all the windows, and people corning out with torches formed a torchlight procession, by means of which everybody could see him. He, like the priest, was mounted on a sorry hired horse, and entirely surrounded by archers, to whom, no doubt, he owed his life on this occasion; for the indignation against him was so great that everyone was egging on his neighbours to tear him limb from limb, which would certainly have come to pass had he not been so carefully defended and guarded.

Immediately upon receiving news of her daughter's death, Madame de Rossan took possession of all her property, and, making herself a party to the case, declared that she would never desist from her suit until her daughter's death was avenged. M. Catalan began the examination at once, and the first interrogation to which he submitted the marquis lasted eleven hours. Then soon afterwards he and the other persons accused were conveyed from the prisons of Montpellier to those of Toulouse. A crushing memorial by Madame de Rossan followed them, in which she demonstrated with absolute clearness that the marquis had participated in the crime of his two brothers, if not in act, in thought, desire, and intention.

The marquis's defence was very simple: it was his misfortune to have had two villains for brothers, who had made attempts first upon the honour and then upon the life of a wife whom he loved tenderly; they had destroyed her by a most atrocious death, and to crown his evil fortune, he, the innocent, was accused of having had a hand in that death. And, indeed, the examinations in the trial did not succeed in bringing any evidence against the marquis beyond moral presumptions, which, it appears, were insufficient to induce his judges to award a sentence of death.

A verdict was consequently given, upon the 21st of August, 1667, which sentenced the abbe and the chevalier de Ganges to be broken alive on the wheel, the Marquis de Ganges to perpetual banishment from the kingdom, his property to be confiscated to the king, and himself to lose his nobility and to become incapable of succeeding to the property of his children. As for the priest Perette, he was sentenced to the galleys for life, after having previously been degraded from his clerical orders by the ecclesiastical authorities.

This sentence made as great a stir as the murder had done, and gave rise, in that period when "extenuating circumstances" had not been invented, to long and angry discussions. Indeed, the marquis either was guilty of complicity or was not: if he was not, the punishment was too cruel; if he was, the sentence was too light. Such was the opinion of Louis XIV., who remembered the beauty of the Marquis de Ganges; for, some time afterwards, when he was believed to have forgotten this unhappy affair, and when he was asked to pardon the Marquis de la Douze, who was accused of having poisoned his wife, the king answered, “There is no need for a pardon, since he belongs to the Parliament of Toulouse, and the Marquis de Ganges did very well without one.”

It may easily be supposed that this melancholy event did not pass without inciting the wits of the day to write a vast number of verses and bouts-rimes about the catastrophe by which one of the most beautiful women of the country was carried off. Readers who have a taste for that sort of literature are referred to the journals and memoirs of the times.

Now, as our readers, if they have taken any interest at all in the terrible tale just narrated, will certainly ask what became of the murderers, we will proceed to follow their course until the moment when they disappeared, some into the night of death, some into the darkness of oblivion.

The priest Perette was the first to pay his debt to Heaven: he died at the oar on the way from Toulouse to Brest.

The chevalier withdrew to Venice, took service in the army of the Most Serene Republic, then at war with Turkey, and was sent to Candia, which the Mussulmans had been besieging for twenty years; he had scarcely arrived there when, as he was walking on the ramparts of the town with two other officers, a shell burst at their feet, and a fragment of it killed the chevalier without so much as touching his companions, so that the event was regarded as a direct act of Providence.

As for the abbe, his story is longer and stranger. He parted from the chevalier in the neighbourhood of Genoa, and crossing the whole of Piedmont, part of Switzerland, and a corner of Germany, entered Holland under the name of Lamartelliere. After many hesitations as to the place where he would settle, he finally retired to Viane, of which the Count of Lippe was at that time sovereign; there he made the acquaintance of a gentleman who presented him to the count as a French religious refugee.

The count, even in this first conversation, found that the foreigner who had come to seek safety in his dominions possessed not only great intelligence but a very solid sort of intelligence, and seeing that the Frenchman was conversant with letters and with learning, proposed that he should undertake the education of his son, who at that time was nine years old. Such a proposal was a stroke of fortune for the abbe de Ganges, and he did not dream of refusing it.

The abbe de Ganges was one of those men who have great mastery over themselves: from the moment when he saw that his interest, nay, the very safety of his life required it, he concealed with extreme care whatever bad passions existed within him, and only allowed his good qualities to appear. He was a tutor who supervised the heart as sharply as the mind, and succeeded in making of his pupil a prince so accomplished in both respects, that the Count of Lippe, making use of such wisdom and such knowledge, began to consult the tutor upon all matters of State, so that in course of time the so-called Lamartelliere, without holding any public office, had become the soul of the little principality.

The countess had a young relation living with her, who though without fortune was of a great family, and for whom the countess had a deep affection; it did not escape her notice that her son's tutor had inspired this poor young girl with warmer feelings than became her high station, and that the false Lamartelliere, emboldened by his own growing credit, had done all he could to arouse and keep up these feelings. The countess sent for her cousin, and having drawn from her a confession of her love, said that she herself had indeed a great regard for her son's governor, whom she and her husband intended to reward with pensions and with posts for the services he had rendered to their family and to the State, but that it was too lofty an ambition for a man whose name was Lamartelliere, and who had no relations nor family that could be owned, to aspire to the hand of a girl who was related to a royal house; and that though she did not require that the man who married her cousin should be a Bourbon, a Montmorency, or a Rohan, she did at least desire that he should be somebody, though it were but a gentleman of Gascony or Poitou.

The Countess of Lippe's young kinswoman went and repeated this answer, word for word, to her lover, expecting him to be overwhelmed by it; but, on the contrary, he replied that if his birth was the only obstacle that opposed their union, there might be means to remove it. In fact, the abbe, having spent eight years at the prince's court, amid the strongest testimonies of confidence and esteem, thought himself sure enough of the prince's goodwill to venture upon the avowal of his real name.

He therefore asked an audience of the countess, who immediately granted it. Bowing to her respectfully, he said, "Madame, I had flattered myself that your Highness honoured me with your esteem, and yet you now oppose my happiness: your Highness's relative is willing to accept me as a husband, and the prince your son authorises my wishes and pardons my boldness; what have I done to you, madame, that you alone should be against me? and with what can you reproach me during the eight years that I have had the honour of serving your Highness?"

"I have nothing to reproach you with, monsieur," replied the countess: "but I do not wish to incur reproach on my own part by permitting such a marriage: I thought you too sensible and reasonable a man to need reminding that, while you confined yourself to suitable requests and moderate ambitions, you had reason to be pleased with our gratitude. Do you ask that your salary shall be doubled? The thing is easy. Do you desire important posts? They shall be given you; but do not, sir, so far forget yourself as to aspire to an alliance that you cannot flatter yourself with a hope of ever attaining."

"But, madame," returned the petitioner, "who told you that my birth was so obscure as to debar me from all hope of obtaining your consent?"

"Why, you yourself, monsieur, I think," answered the countess in astonishment; "or if you did not say so, your name said so for you."

"And if that name is not mine, madame?" said the abbe, growing bolder; "if unfortunate, terrible, fatal circumstances have compelled me to take that name in order to hide another that was too unhappily famous, would your Highness then be so unjust as not to change your mind?"

"Monsieur," replied the countess, "you have said too much now not to go on to the end. Who are you? Tell me. And if, as you give me to understand, you are of good birth, I swear to you that want of fortune shall not stand in the way."

"Alas, madame," cried the abbe, throwing himself at her feet, "my name, I am sure, is but too familiar to your Highness, and I would willingly at this moment give half my blood that you had never heard it uttered; but you have said it, madame, have gone too far to recede. Well, then, I am that unhappy abbe de Ganges whose crimes are known and of whom I have more than once heard you speak."

"The abbe de Ganges!" cried the countess in horror, — "the abbe de Ganges! You are that execrable abbe de Ganges whose very name makes one shudder? And to you, to a man thus infamous, we have entrusted the education of our only son? Oh, I hope, for all our sakes, monsieur, that you are speaking falsely; for if you were speaking the truth I think I should have you arrested this very instant and taken back to France to undergo your punishment. The best thing you can do, if what you have said to me is true, is instantly to leave not only the castle, but the town and the principality; it will be torment enough for the rest of my life whenever I think that I have spent seven years under the same roof with you.”

The abbe would have replied; but the countess raised her voice so much, that the young prince, who had been won over to his tutor’s interests and who was listening at his mother’s door, judged that his protege’s business was taking an unfavourable turn; and went in to try and put things right. He found his mother so much alarmed that she drew him to her by an instinctive movement, as though to put herself under his protection, and beg and pray as he might; he could only obtain permission for his tutor to go away undisturbed to any country of the world that he might prefer, but with an express prohibition of ever again entering the presence of the Count or the Countess of Lippe.

The abbe de Ganges withdrew to Amsterdam, where he became a teacher of languages, and where his lady-love soon after came to him and married him: his pupil, whom his parents could not induce, even when they told him the real name of the false Lamartelliere, to share their horror of him, gave him assistance as long as he needed it; and this state of things continued until upon his wife attaining her majority he entered into possession of some property that belonged to her. His regular conduct and his learning, which had been rendered more solid by long and serious study, caused him to be admitted into the Protestant consistory; there, after an exemplary life, he died, and none but God ever knew whether it was one of hypocrisy or of penitence.

As for the Marquis de Ganges, who had been sentenced, as we have seen, to banishment and the confiscation of his property, he was conducted to the frontier of Savoy and there set at liberty. After having spent two or three years abroad, so that the terrible catastrophe in which he had been concerned should have time to be hushed up, he came back to France, and as nobody — Madame de Rossan being now dead — was interested in prosecuting him, he returned to his castle at Ganges, and remained there, pretty well hidden. M. de Baville, indeed, the Lieutenant of Languedoc, learned that the marquis had broken from his exile; but he was told, at the same time, that the marquis, as a zealous Catholic, was forcing his vassals to attend mass, whatever their religion might be: this was the period in which persons of the Reformed Church were being persecuted, and the zeal of the marquis appeared to M. de Baville to compensate and more than compensate for the peccadillo of which he had been accused; consequently, instead of prosecuting him, he entered into secret communication with him, reassuring him about his stay in France, and urging on his religious zeal; and in this manner twelve years passed by.

During this time the marquise's young son, whom we saw at his mother's deathbed, had reached the age of twenty, and being rich in his father's possessions — which his uncle had restored to him — and also by his mother's inheritance, which he had shared with his sister, had married a girl of good family, named Mademoiselle de Moissac, who was both rich and beautiful. Being called to serve in the royal army, the count brought his young wife to the castle of Ganges, and, having fervently commended her to his father, left her in his charge.

The Marquis de Ganges was forty-two veers old, and scarcely seemed thirty; he was one of the handsomest men living; he fell in love with his daughter-in-law and hoped to win her love, and in order to promote this design, his first care was to separate from her, under the excuse of religion, a maid who had been with her from childhood and to whom she was greatly attached.

This measure, the cause of which the young marquise did not know, distressed her extremely. It was much against her will that she had come to live at all in this old castle of Ganges, which had so recently been the scene of the terrible story that we have just told. She inhabited the suite of rooms in which the murder had been committed; her bedchamber was the same which had belonged to the late marquise; her bed was the same; the window by which she had fled was before her eyes; and everything, down to the smallest article of furniture, recalled to her the details of that savage tragedy. But even worse was her case when she found it no longer possible to doubt her father-in-law's intentions; when she saw herself beloved by one whose very name had again and again made her childhood turn pale with terror, and when she was left alone at all hours of the day in the sole company of the man whom public rumour still pursued as a murderer. Perhaps in any other place the poor lonely girl might have found some strength in trusting herself to God; but there, where God had suffered one of the fairest and purest creatures that ever existed to perish by so cruel a death, she dared not appeal to Him, for He seemed to have turned away from this family.

She waited, therefore, in growing terror; spending her days, as much as she could, with the women of rank who lived in the little town of Ganges, and some of whom, eye-witnesses of her mother-in-law's murder, increased her terrors by the accounts which they gave of it, and which she, with the despairing obstinacy of fear, asked to hear again and again. As to her nights, she spent the greater part of them on her knees, and fully dressed, trembling at the smallest sound; only breathing freely as daylight came back, and then venturing to seek her bed for a few hours' rest.

At last the marquis's attempts became so direct and so pressing, that the poor young woman resolved to escape at all costs from his hands. Her first idea was to write to her father, explain to him her position and ask help; but her father had not long been a Catholic, and had suffered much on behalf of the Reformed religion, and on these accounts it was clear that her letter would be opened by the marquis on pretext of religion, and thus that step, instead of saving, might destroy her. She had thus but one resource: her husband had always been a Catholic; her husband was a captain of dragoons, faithful in the service of the king and faithful in the service of God; there could be no excuse for opening a letter to him; she resolved to address herself to him, explained the position in which she found herself, got the address written by another hand, and sent the letter to Montpellier, where it was posted.

The young marquis was at Metz when he received his wife's missive. At that instant all his childish memories awoke; he beheld himself at his dying mother's bedside, vowing never to forget her and to pray daily for her. The image presented itself of this wife whom he adored, in the same room, exposed to the same violence, destined perhaps to the same fate; all this was enough to lead him to take positive action: he flung himself into a post-chaise, reached Versailles, begged an audience of the king, cast himself, with his wife's letter in his hand, at the feet of Louis XIV, and besought him to compel his father to return into exile, where he swore upon has honour that he would send him everything he could need in order to live properly.

The king was not aware that the Marquis do Ganges had disobeyed the sentence of banishment, and the manner in which he learned it was not such as to make him pardon the contradiction of his laws. In consequence he immediately ordered that if the Marquis de Ganges were found in France he should be proceeded against with the utmost rigour.

Happily for the marquis, the Comte de Ganges, the only one of his brothers who had remained in France, and indeed in favour, learned the king's decision in time. He took post from Versailles, and making the greatest haste, went to warn him of the danger that was threatening; both together immediately left Ganges, and withdrew to Avignon. The district of Venaissin, still belonging at that time to the pope and being governed by a vice-legate, was considered as foreign territory. There he found his daughter, Madame d'Urban, who did all she could to induce him to stay with her; but to do so would have been to flout Louis XIV's orders too publicly, and the marquis was afraid to remain so much in evidence lest evil should befall him; he accordingly retired to the little village of l'Isle, built in a charming spot near the fountain of Vaucluse; there he was lost sight of; none ever heard him spoken of again, and when I myself travelled in the south of France in 1835, I sought in vain any trace of the obscure and forgotten death which closed so turbulent and stormy an existence.

As, in speaking of the last adventures of the Marquis de Ganges, we have mentioned the name of Madame d'Urban, his daughter, we cannot exempt ourselves from following her amid the strange events of her life, scandalous though they may be; such, indeed, was the fate of this family, that it was to occupy the attention of France through well-nigh a century, either by its crimes or by its freaks.

On the death of the marquise, her daughter, who was barely six years old, had remained in the charge of the dowager Marquise de Ganges, who, when she had attained her twelfth year, presented to her as her husband the Marquis de Perrant, formerly a lover of the grandmother herself. The marquis was seventy years of age, having been born in the reign of Henry IV; he had seen the court of Louis XIII and that of Louis XIV's youth, and he had remained one of its most elegant and favoured nobles; he had the manners of those two periods, the politest that the world has known, so that the young girl, not knowing as yet the meaning of marriage and having seen no other man, yielded without repugnance, and thought herself happy in becoming the Marquise de Perrant.

The marquis, who was very rich, had quarrelled With his younger brother, and regarded him with such hatred that he was marrying only to deprive his brother of the inheritance that would rightfully accrue to him, should the elder die childless. Unfortunately, the marquis soon perceived that the step which he had taken, however efficacious in the case of another man, was likely to be fruitless in his own. He did not, however, despair, and waited two or three years, hoping every day that Heaven would work a miracle in his favour; but as every day diminished the chances of this miracle, and his hatred for his brother grew with the impossibility of taking revenge upon him, he adopted a strange and altogether antique scheme, and determined, like the ancient Spartans, to obtain by the help of another what Heaven refused to himself.

The marquis did not need to seek long for the man who should give him his revenge: he had in his house a young page, some seventeen or eighteen years old, the son of a friend of his, who, dying without fortune, had on his deathbed particularly commended the lad to the marquis. This young man, a year older than his mistress, could not be continually about her without falling passionately in love with her; and however much he might endeavour to hide his love, the poor youth was as yet too little practised in dissimulation to succeed iii concealing it from the eyes of the marquis, who, after having at first observed its growth with uneasiness, began on the contrary to rejoice in it, from the moment when he had decided upon the scheme that we have just mentioned.

The marquis was slow to decide but prompt to execute. Having taken his resolution, he summoned his page, and, after having made him promise inviolable secrecy, and having undertaken, on that condition, to prove his gratitude by buying him a regiment, explained what was expected of him. The poor youth, to whom nothing could have been more unexpected than such a communication, took it at first for a trick by which the marquis meant to make him own his love, and was ready to throw himself at his feet and declare everything; but the marquis seeing his confusion, and easily guessing its cause, reassured him completely by swearing that he authorised him to take any steps in order to attain the end that the marquis had in view. As in his inmost heart the aim of the young man was the same, the bargain was soon struck: the page bound himself by the most terrible oaths to keep the secret; and the marquis, in order to supply whatever assistance was in his power, gave him money to spend, believing that there was no woman, however virtuous, who could resist the combination of youth, beauty, and fortune: unhappily for the marquis, such a woman, whom he thought impossible, did exist, and was his wife.

The page was so anxious to obey his master, that from that very day his mistress remarked the alteration that arose from the permission given him — his prompt obedience to her orders and his speed in executing them, in order to return a few moments the sooner to her presence. She was grateful to him, and in the simplicity of her heart she thanked him. Two days later the page appeared before her splendidly dressed; she observed and remarked upon his improved appearance, and amused herself in conning over all the parts of his dress, as she might have done with a new doll. All this familiarity doubled the poor young man's passion, but he stood before his mistress, nevertheless, abashed and trembling, like Cherubino before his fair godmother. Every evening the marquis inquired into his progress, and every evening the page confessed that he was no farther advanced than the day before; then the marquis scolded, threatened to take away his fine clothes, to withdraw his own promises, and finally to address himself to some other person. At this last threat the youth would again call up his courage, and promise to be bolder to-morrow; and on the morrow would spend the day in making a thousand compliments to his mistress's eyes, which she, in her innocence, did not understand. At last, one day, Madame de Perrant asked him what made him look at her thus, and he ventured to confess his love; but then Madame de Perrant, changing her whole demeanour, assumed a face of sternness and bade him go out of her room.

The poor lover obeyed, and ran, in despair, to confide his grief to the husband, who appeared sincerely to share it, but consoled him by saying that he had no doubt chosen his moment badly; that all women, even the least severe, had inauspicious hours in which they would not yield to attack, and that he must let a few days pass, which he must employ in making his peace, and then must take advantage of a better opportunity, and not allow himself to be rebuffed by a few refusals; and to these words the marquis added a purse of gold, in order that the page might, if necessary, win over the marquise's waiting-woman.

Guided thus by the older experience of the husband, the page began to appear very much ashamed and very penitent; but for a day or two the marquise, in spite of his apparent humility, kept him at a distance: at last, reflecting no doubt, with the assistance of her mirror and of her maid, that the crime was not absolutely unpardonable, and after having reprimanded the culprit at some length, while he stood listening with eyes cast down, she gave a him her hand, forgave him, and admitted him to her companionship as before.

Things went on in this way for a week. The page no longer raised his eyes and did not venture to open his mouth, and the marquise was beginning to regret the time in which he used to look and to speak, when, one fine day while she was at her toilet, at which she had allowed him to be present, he seized a moment when the maid had left her alone, to cast himself at her feet and tell her that he had vainly tried to stifle his love, and that, even although he were to die under the weight of her anger, he must tell her that this love was immense, eternal, stronger than his life. The marquise upon this wished to send him away, as on the former occasion, but instead of obeying her, the page, better instructed, took her in his arms. The marquise called, screamed, broke her bell-rope; the waiting-maid, who had been bought over, according to the marquis's advice, had kept the other women out of the way, and was careful not to come herself. Then the marquise, resisting force by force, freed herself from the page's arms, rushed to her husband's room, and there, bare-necked, with floating hair, and looking lovelier than ever, flung herself into his arms and begged his protection against the insolent fellow who had just insulted her. But what was the amazement of the marquise, when, instead of the anger which she expected to see break forth, the marquis answered coldly that what she was saying was incredible, that he had always found the young man very well behaved, and that, no doubt, having taken up some frivolous ground of resentment against him, she was employing this means to get rid of him; but, he added, whatever might be his love for her, and his desire to do everything that was agreeable to her, he begged her not to require this of him, the young man being his friend's son, and consequently his own adopted child. It was now the marquise who, in her turn, retired abashed, not knowing what to make of such a reply, and fully resolving, since her husband's protection failed her, to keep herself well guarded by her own severity.

Indeed, from that moment the marquise behaved to the poor youth with so much prudery, that, loving her as he did, sincerely, he would have died of grief, if he had not had the marquis at hand to encourage and strengthen him. Nevertheless, the latter himself began to despair, and to be more troubled by the virtue of his wife than another man might have been by the levity of his. Finally, he resolved, seeing that matters remained at the same point and that the marquise did not relax in the smallest degree, to take extreme measures. He hid his page in a closet of his wife's bedchamber, and, rising during her first sleep, left empty his own place beside her, went out softly, double-locked the door, and listened attentively to hear what would happen.

He had not been listening thus for ten minutes when he heard a great noise in the room, and the page trying in vain to appease it. The marquis hoped that he might succeed, but the noise increasing, showed him that he was again to be disappointed; soon came cries for help, for the marquise could not ring, the bell-ropes having been lifted out of her reach, and no one answering her cries, he heard her spring from her high bed, run to the door, and finding it locked rush to the window, which she tried to open: the scene had come to its climax.

The marquis decided to go in, lest some tragedy should happen, or lest his wife's screams should reach some belated passer-by, who next day would make him the talk of the town. Scarcely did the marquise behold him when she threw herself into his arms, and pointing to the page, said: —

"Well, monsieur, will you still hesitate to free me from this insolent wretch?"

"Yes, madame," replied the marquis; "for this insolent wretch has been acting for the last three months not only with my sanction but even by my orders."

The marquise remained stupefied. Then the marquis, without sending away the page, gave his wife an explanation of all that had passed, and besought her to yield to his desire of obtaining a successor, whom he would regard as his own child, so long as it was hers; but young though she was, the marquise answered with a dignity unusual at her age, that his power over her had the limits that were set to it by law, and not those that it might please him to set in their place, and that however much she might wish to do what might be his pleasure, she would yet never obey him at the expense of her soul and her honour.

So positive an answer, while it filled her husband with despair, proved to him that he must renounce the hope of obtaining an heir; but since the page was not to blame for this, he fulfilled the promise that he had made, bought him a regiment, and resigned himself to having the most virtuous wife in France. His repentance was not, however, of long duration; he died at the end of three months, after having confided to his friend, the Marquis d’Urban, the cause of his sorrows.

The Marquis d’Urban had a son of marriageable age; he thought that he could find nothing more suitable for him than a wife whose virtue had come triumphantly through such a trial: he let her time of mourning pass, and then presented the young Marquis d’Urban, who succeeded in making his attentions acceptable to the beautiful widow, and soon became her husband. More fortunate than his predecessor, the Marquis d’Urban had three heirs to oppose to his collaterals, when, some two years and a half later, the Chevalier de Bouillon arrived at the capital of the county of Venaissin.

The Chevalier de Bouillon was a typical rake of the period, handsome, young, and well-grown; the nephew of a cardinal who was influential at Rome, and proud of belonging to a house which had privileges of suzerainty. The chevalier, in his indiscreet fatuity, spared no woman; and his conduct had given some scandal in the circle of Madame de Maintenon, who was rising into power. One of his friends, having witnessed the displeasure exhibited towards him by Louis XIV, who was beginning to become devout, thought to do him a service by warning him that the king “gardait une dent” against him. [Translator’s note. — ”Garder une dent,” that is, to keep up a grudge, means literally “to keep a tooth” against him.]

“Pardieu!” replied the chevalier, “I am indeed unlucky when the only tooth left to him remains to bite me.”

This pun had been repeated, and had reached Louis XIV, so that the chevalier presently heard, directly enough this time, that the king desired him to travel for some years. He knew the danger of neglecting — such intimations, and since he thought the country after all preferable to the Bastille, he left Paris, and arrived at Avignon, surrounded by the halo of interest that naturally attends a handsome young persecuted nobleman.

The virtue of Madame d’Urban was as much cried up at Avignon as the ill-behaviour of the chevalier had been reprobated in Paris. A reputation equal to his own, but so opposite in kind, could not fail to be very offensive to him, therefore he determined immediately upon arriving to play one against the other.

Nothing was easier than the attempt. M. d’Urban, sure of his wife’s virtue, allowed her entire liberty; the chevalier saw her wherever he chose to see her, and every time he saw her found means to express a growing passion. Whether because the hour had come for Madame d’Urban, or whether because she was dazzled by the splendour of the chevalier's belonging to a princely house, her virtue, hitherto so fierce, melted like snow in the May sunshine; and the chevalier, luckier than the poor page, took the husband's place without any attempt on Madame d'Urban's part to cry for help.

As all the chevalier desired was public triumph, he took care to make the whole town acquainted at once with his success; then, as some infidels of the neighbourhood still doubted, the chevalier ordered one of his servants to wait for him at the marquise's door with a lantern and a bell. At one in the morning, the chevalier came out, and the servant walked before him, ringing the bell. At this unaccustomed sound, a great number of townspeople, who had been quietly asleep, awoke, and, curious to see what was happening, opened their windows. They beheld the chevalier, walking gravely behind his servant, who continued to light his master's way and to ring along the course of the street that lay between Madame d'Urban's house and his own. As he had made no mystery to anyone of his love affair, nobody took the trouble even to ask him whence he came. However, as there might possibly be persons still unconvinced, he repeated this same jest, for his own satisfaction, three nights running; so that by the morning of the fourth day nobody had any doubts left.

As generally happens in such cases, M. d'Urban did not know a word of what was going on until the moment when his friends warned him that he was the talk of the town. Then he forbade his wife to see her lover again. The prohibition produced the usual results: on the morrow, as, soon as M. d'Urban had gone out, the marquise sent for the chevalier to inform him of the catastrophe in which they were both involved; but she found him far better prepared than herself for such blows, and he tried to prove to her, by reproaches for her imprudent conduct, that all this was her fault; so that at last the poor woman, convinced that it was she who had brought these woes upon them, burst into tears. Meanwhile, M. d'Urban, who, being jealous for the first time, was the more seriously so, having learned that the chevalier was with his wife, shut the doors, and posted himself in the ante-chamber with his servants, in order to seize him as he came out. But the chevalier, who had ceased to trouble himself about Madame d'Urban's tears, heard all the preparations, and, suspecting some ambush, opened the window, and, although it was one o'clock in the afternoon and the place was full of people, jumped out of the window into the street, and did not hurt himself at all, though the height was twenty feet, but walked quietly home at a moderate pace.

The same evening, the chevalier, intending to relate his new adventure in all its details, invited some of his friends to sup with him at the pastrycook Lecoq’s. This man, who was a brother of the famous Lecoq of the rue Montorgueil, was the cleverest eating-house-keeper in Avignon; his own unusual corpulence commended his cookery, and, when he stood at the door, constituted an advertisement for his restaurant. The good man, knowing with what delicate appetites he had to deal, did his very best that evening, and that nothing might be wanting, waited upon his guests himself. They spent the night drinking, and towards morning the chevalier and his companions, being then drunk, espied their host standing respectfully at the door, his face wreathed in smiles. The chevalier called him nearer, poured him out a glass of wine and made him drink with them; then, as the poor wretch, confused at such an honour, was thanking him with many bows, he said: —

“Pardieu, you are too fat for Lecoq, and I must make you a capon.”

This strange proposition was received as men would receive it who were drunk and accustomed by their position to impunity. The unfortunate pastry-cook was seized, bound down upon the table, and died under their treatment. The vice-legate being informed of the murder by one of the waiters, who had run in on hearing his master’s shrieks, and had found him, covered with blood, in the hands of his butchers, was at first inclined to arrest the chevalier and bring him conspicuously to punishment. But he was restrained by his regard for the Cardinal de Bouillon, the chevalier’s uncle, and contented himself with warning the culprit that unless he left the town instantly he would be put into the hands of the authorities. The chevalier, who was beginning to have had enough of Avignon, did not wait to be told twice, ordered the wheels of his chaise to be greased and horses to be brought. In the interval before they were ready the fancy took him to go and see Madame d’Urban again.

As the house of the marquise was the very last at which, after the manner of his leaving it the day before, the chevalier was expected at such an hour, he got in with the greatest ease, and, meeting a lady’s-maid, who was in his interests, was taken to the room where the marquise was. She, who had not reckoned upon seeing the chevalier again, received him with all the raptures of which a woman in love is capable, especially when her love is a forbidden one. But the chevalier soon put an end to them by announcing that his visit was a visit of farewell, and by telling her the reason that obliged him to leave her. The marquise was like the woman who pitied the fatigue of the poor horses that tore Damien limb from limb; all her commiseration was for the chevalier, who on account of such a trifle was being forced to leave Avignon. At last the farewell had to be uttered, and as the chevalier, not knowing what to say at the fatal moment, complained that he had no memento of her, the marquise took down the frame that contained a portrait of herself corresponding with one of her husband, and tearing out the canvas, rolled, it up and gave it to the chevalier. The latter, so far from being touched by this token of love, laid it down, as he went away, upon a piece of furniture, where the marquise found it half an hour later. She imagined that his mind being so full of the original, he had forgotten the copy, and representing to herself the sorrow which the discovery of this forgetfulness would cause him, she sent for a servant, gave him the picture, and ordered him to take horse and ride after the chevalier’s chaise. The man took a post-horse, and, making great speed, perceived the fugitive in the distance just as the latter had finished changing horses. He made violent signs and shouted loudly, in order to stop the postillion. But the postillion having told his fare that he saw a man coming on at full speed, the chevalier supposed himself to be pursued, and bade him go on as fast as possible. This order was so well obeyed that the unfortunate servant only came up with the chaise a league and a half farther on; having stopped the postillion, he got off his horse, and very respectfully presented to the chevalier the picture which he had been bidden to bring him. But the chevalier, having recovered from his first alarm, bade him go about his business, and take back the portrait — which was of no use to him — to the sender. The servant, however, like a faithful messenger, declared that his orders were positive, and that he should not dare go back to Madame d’Urban without fulfilling them. The chevalier, seeing that he could not conquer the man’s determination, sent his postillion to a farrier, whose house lay on the road, for a hammer and four nails, and with his own hands nailed the portrait to the back of his chaise; then he stepped in again, bade the postillion whip up his horses, and drove away, leaving Madame d’Urban’s messenger greatly astonished at the manner in which the chevalier had used his mistress’s portrait.

At the next stage, the postillion, who was going back, asked for his money, and the chevalier answered that he had none. The postillion persisted; then the chevalier got out of his chaise, unfastened Madame d'Urban's portrait, and told him that he need only put it up for sale in Avignon and declare how it had come into his possession, in order to receive twenty times the price of his stage; the postillion, seeing that nothing else was to be got out of the chevalier, accepted the pledge, and, following his instructions precisely, exhibited it next morning at the door of a dealer in the town, together with an exact statement of the story. The picture was bought back the same day for twenty-five Louis.

As may be supposed, the adventure was much talked of throughout the town. Next day, Madame d'Urban disappeared, no one knew whither, at the very time when the relatives of the marquis were met together and had decided to ask the king for a 'lettre-de-cachet'. One of the gentlemen present was entrusted with the duty of taking the necessary steps; but whether because he was not active enough, or whether because he was in Madame d'Urban's interests, nothing further was heard in Avignon of any consequences ensuing from such steps. In the meantime, Madame d'Urban, who had gone to the house of an aunt, opened negotiations with her husband that were entirely successful, and a month after this adventure she returned triumphantly to the conjugal roof.

Two hundred pistoles, given by the Cardinal de Bouillon, pacified the family of the unfortunate pastry-cook, who at first had given notice of the affair to the police, but who soon afterwards withdrew their complaint, and gave out that they had taken action too hastily on the strength of a story told in joke, and that further inquiries showed their relative to have died of an apoplectic stroke.

Thanks — to this declaration, which exculpated the Chevalier de Bouillon in the eyes of the king, he was allowed, after travelling for two years in Italy and in Germany, to return undisturbed to France.

Thus ends, not the family of Ganges, but the commotion which the family made in the world. From time to time, indeed, the playwright or the novelist calls up the pale and bloodstained figure of the marquise to appear either on the stage or in a book; but the evocation almost always ceases at her, and many persons who have written about the mother do not even know what became of the children. Our intention has been to fill this gap; that is why we have tried to tell what our predecessors left out, and try offer to our readers what the stage — and often the actual world — offers; comedy after melodrama.

THE JUNO

Translated by Alfred Allinson

First published in 1853, this vivid sea narrative concerns the wreck of the "Juno" in 1795, one of the most famous naval tragedies of the time.

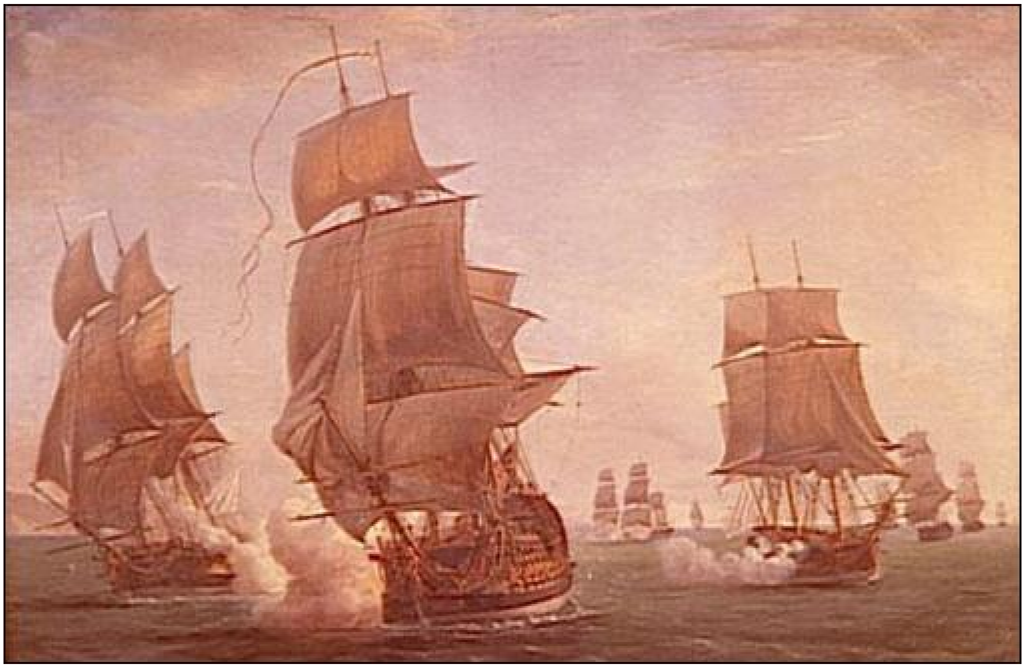

The Juno (centre) in 1779

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CHAPTER I.

1795.

WHEN Lord Byron, yet a boy, left Scotland for England, and Aberdeen for Newstead Abbey, lie was sent to a boarding-school at Nottingham, kept by a worthy man named Drury. With his tutor he became a great favourite, so much so, that while his schoolfellows were being drilled, or taking other exercise for which his lame foot incapacitated him, the boy was frequently allowed the run of his master’s library.

This library, rich in classics and suchlike literature, had a section allotted to voyages and travels, which offered the greatest attractions to the future poet.

One day his entire attention was absorbed by an account of the shipwreck of the English vessel *Juno,* and in the graphic account given by John Mackay, second mate. The passage narrating the death of a youth, one of the crew, and the grief of the lad’s father, had such an effect upon him, that, says his biographer Thomas Moore, who quotes the passage twenty years later, its substance may be found repeated in the poet’s masterpiece, *Don Juan.”*

The impression thus produced on Byron’s mind, instanced by Thomas Moore, has affected us in a similar manner, and made us frequently desire to read John Mackay’s complete account of the disaster.

Having at length succeeded in finding it, we have recast it in the following pages, wherein the passage imitated by the author of *Don Juan* will be easily recognized. The story is as follows:

At the southern extremity of the Burmese Empire, in the delta of the Irrawadi, which forms a splendid port, stands the city of Rangoon, one of the most important commercial centres of Pegu, whose exports at that time principally consisted of timber.

In this port, at the beginning of May, 1795, was lying a British vessel of four hundred and fifty tons, named the *Juno,* Captain Alexander Bremner, laden with teak for Madras.

When she was on the point of sailing, her second mate fell sick, and it speedily became evident that he could not bear the voyage, and assist in performing the sometimes arduous duty of navigating the Bay of Bengal in the height of the south-west monsoon. It was therefore most important to replace him by a capable man, whom Captain Bremner was not long in finding.

A man in the full vigour of life, between thirty-five and thirty-eight years of age, a thorough seaman, and a sailor from boyhood, presented himself with excellent discharges, certifying him to be fully acquainted with the latitudes in which the ship was voyaging. His name was John Mackay.

Captain Bremner questioned him, overhauled his papers, and clearly perceiving that he would be a profitable exchange for the sick officer, made an engagement with him for a year.

As the state of the ship on which he entrusts himself and his life is of paramount importance to the sailor, John Mackay had hardly stepped on board before he began to examine the vessel from topmast to keel, an overhaul which resulted anything but favourably for the *Juno*.

She was old, in bad order, and badly found. The crew, fifty-five all told, all Lascars, except eight or ten Europeans, did not inspire the experienced John Mackay with a confidence sufficient to counterbalance the bad impression produced by the old-fashioned build, the bad condition, and the slovenly stowing of the ship’s cargo. He therefore considered it his duty to speak frankly to the Captain, and tell him what an unfavourable opinion he had formed of the seaworthiness of the ship after his survey.

But Captain Bremner was a sailor of the happy-go-lucky- class, grey in the service, who argue that because they never have been shipwrecked they never will be.

He bluntly told his second mate that he had sailed the *Juno* for twenty years, that she had never come to grief so far, and that, seeing she had kept a level keel for twenty years, the presumption was that she would hold her own for twenty-one, or till the expiration of their agreement.

John Mackay replied that his remarks were not made from a selfish point of view, but in the interest of all; that so far as he was concerned, thank God! he was so accustomed to the sea that he was ready, if need be, to cross the Bay of Bengal in a skiff, but that, inasmuch as every officer on board a ship is more or less responsible for her safety, he thought it due to himself to make the remarks which he had made.

The Captain ironically thanked his second mate, and pointing to his wife, who was just then coming on board, and who was to sail with him, he asked him if he did not think that he had weighty reasons for desiring a prosperous voyage.

A rapid glance at Mrs. Bremner, a bride of six months, was an unanswerable argument in favour of the Captain. She was, indeed, a charming creature.

A European born in India, she possessed, in addition to her great personal beauty, all that bewitching tropical grace peculiar to Creoles, who incorporate in their style and actions a reflection of that luxuriant nature in the midst of which they have opened their eyes, in which they have been reared, and in which they will die.

A female Malay slave, dressed in the picturesque costume of the country, accompanied her, forming an accessory which completed the grouping of this picture, in which Mrs. Bremner formed the principal figure.

John Mackay saw at once that he, who risked his own safety only, had nothing to gain in argument with his Captain, who entrusted the life of his charming wife to the ship which he commanded. He therefore let the matter drop; the stowing of the timber was completed, and, on the 29th of May, 1795, the barque dropped down at flood- tide, in soundings of twenty-five to thirty feet of water over a bottom of soft mud.

From the moment of weighing, the second mate thought that the ship was being steered out of the proper channel; but Captain Bremner was too experienced a navigator in these latitudes to allow any question that he was wrong in his bearings. Mackay could not, however, help observing to Wade, the first mate, that in his opinion the course was too much to starboard. The chief mate thought so himself, and ordered the lead to be heaved, with the result that less than twenty feet were sounded.

Matters were looking serious; the Captain was at once informed, but he would not believe the state of affairs till convinced by his own eyes, when he ordered the ship to be put about. Before, however, the helmsman could luff, a violent shock showed that the vessel had grounded.

There was not a moment to lose; the Captain instantly gave the order to jibe, in order to get the ship off, but it was a useless command; nothing was to be done but try to prevent her from drifting further on the sandbank. Two, bower-anchors were immediately dropped, and, to everybody’s delight, they held, and the ship remained stationary, which gave time to decide upon what to do.

The *Juno* had grounded on a sandbank almost as hard as rock, but nevertheless she withstood the shock, and sprung no leak. No real damage had been sustained up to this point, when one of the two anchors began to drag, and made the other drag also. On this the sheet-anchor was at once dropped. The ship, already beginning to swing, drew the chain taut, tightened it like a bow-string, but this stopped her from drifting further.

Captain Bremner was beginning mentally to acknowledge the justice of his second mate’s remarks; but instead of being grateful to him for foreseeing danger, he felt vexed with him for having predicted it. Such is human nature!

But, as we have said, no actual damage had taken place, and if the ship could only be prevented from capsizing at low tide, they were pretty sure to get her off at the flood; and as no serious damage had been sustained, she might, when floated, pursue her course, taking no heed of this misadventure.

The first thing to do was to reduce the top-heaviness of the vessel; to this end the topgallant mast and yards were lowered. At low tide the ship, as had been foreseen, heeled in an alarming manner. It was a terrible moment, but it passed off without accident.

The Captain, with a swaggering air, accosted John Mackay.

“Well, mate,” said he, “for an old boat, I think the *Juno* has not done so badly.”

John Mackay shook his head. The *Juno,* no doubt, had behaved well, but all depended on the continuance of her good behaviour.

The Captain appeared to be justified by subsequent events; at flood-tide the ship floated; the moment this was perceived orders were given to weigh anchor. Every stitch of canvas was set, and she soon found herself in water deep enough to remove all fear on the score of grounding again.

On the 1st of June the wind changed and blew a gale from the south-west; a heavy sea arose, and the ship laboured a good deal. The second mate had stationed a man at the bottom of the hold; after about four hours’ duty he appeared on deck, reporting that the vessel had sprung a leak, thus confirming the apprehensions which the second mate had always entertained.

The Captain himself went down into the hold, where the water was actually beginning to rise; unfortunately they had no carpenter on board, and hardly any tools.

The ship's company set to work to pump out the ship. To do this all, without distinction, worked at the pumps; but, as if all things conspired to wreck the unfortunate *Juno*, her ballast was sand, and this sand, mixing with the water, quickly choked the pumps. After eight hours' pumping, during which the ship laboured heavily, instead of the pumps gaining on the water, the water gained on the pumps.

Then it was deliberated whether it would not be best to put about for Rangoon; but as so doing would have been an admission on the Captain's part that the second mate was right, and as a Captain cannot be wrong, Captain Bremner pointed out that the coast near Rangoon was so low that it could not be sighted further than three or four leagues off; that even if they hit off the right course, and found the ship manageable, they would have to keep in a kind of canal not thirty feet wide, fenced in on both sides by sandbanks on which they had already grounded, and that if they struck again the leak would inevitably be further widened. It was therefore, in his opinion, better policy to keep their course, risking whatever might happen; he further argued that the coarse weather had now lasted seven days, and probably would give place to smoother seas, and that under improved conditions it would be easier to master the leak.

The Captain was master. His opinion on the course to be taken was equivalent to an order; they therefore held their course for Madras, so far as the boisterous weather would let them.

At the outset things seemed to prove the Captain in the right.

On the 6th of June the wind dropped, the sea grew calm, and, as Captain Bremner had foretold, the leak diminished so much that one pump sufficed to keep it under. Search was then made, and the leak was located at the stern- post on the water-line, a spot easy to get at and repair.

As soon as ever the weather permitted they slung the cutter over the ship's side, and, as has been said, having no carpenter, and hardly any tools, they were obliged to plug up the hole with oakum, nailing a piece of tarred canvas over it, and covering the whole with sheet lead.

This simple expedient was at first quite successful, and, in fine weather, they needed only to pump once during each watch, which naturally made them suppose that the leak was got under. Mutual congratulations ensued, every one went gaily about his work, except John Mackay, who, in the midst of these rejoicings, shook his head now and then, muttering a proverb common to the English and the French languages, thus expressed in the latter — *Qui vivra verra.*

CHAPTER II.

THE MIZZEN-TOP.

ALAS! before long it was but too evident that after all the second mate was right, and that the *Juno* would have done better to return to Rangoon, whatever dangers she might have risked encountering on the coast of Pegu, rather than hold her course across the Bay of Bengal, to encounter the hurricanes coincident with the south-west monsoon.

On the 12th of June, in the midst of a gale, accompanied by the mournful groans of the timbers of the ship, which was labouring heavily, a second time resounded the cry which had before turned all faces pale: “Captain, a leak!”

An investigation between decks showed that the old fissure had opened again. The slight repairs, which held in calm weather, did not suffice against heavy seas. To add to the seriousness of the situation, the influx of water was much greater than before, bringing up more sand and speedily fouling the pumps, although these were kept working simultaneously, and a wooden bucket was also employed for baling. On the 16th the crew, who had been working without intermission for four days, were almost exhausted by fatigue and loss of rest; matters began to look very alarming indeed.

It was unfortunately now too late to put about; they were at least as far from Rangoon as from Madras, they therefore determined to risk everything, to spread all their canvas, from mainsail to studding-sail, and endeavour to make the nearest point on the coast of Coromandel.

Once off the coast, they would either proceed along it and skirt it, or beach the *Juno* and land, according as she was seaworthy enough to continue the voyage or no.

Thus, carrying all sail, the ship made even more way than they even hoped for, but the faster she sailed the more she laboured, and as every one was at the pumps, nobody had any time to devote to working her. At the end of two days the wind had blown away all her sails, except the foresail; they were obliged, therefore, to lay to from the 18th till noon on the 19th, when they took the sun’s altitude, finding themselves in 17° 10” N. lat.

Notwithstanding their almost superhuman exertions, it was obvious that the water gained upon them, and that the vessel was gradually getting deeper. At the same time, in proportion to her sinking, she became so water-logged that it seemed impossible for her ever to recover her former buoyancy.

From this moment a gloomy sadness took possession of all; they felt themselves lost men, and perceiving all their efforts vain, it became difficult to keep the crew at their posts. However, about noon, on the orders of the Captain and the entreaties of his wife, work was resumed; an order was given, and obeyed, to trim the foresail, and they scudded before a following wind under bare poles.

At the same time their efforts to pump out the *Juno* redoubled; pumps and buckets were kept going; but at the end of two hours it became evident that the ship was doomed, and that all their labour merely protracted her death agony. About seven o’clock in the evening the hands who were below came rushing up in a fright, stating that the water had reached the main deck.

Now that John Mackay’s estimate of the ship was justified by the event, so also was his opinion of the crew.

The Lascars, who comprised three-fourths of the ship’s company, were the first to refuse to work, and gave themselves up to despair, dragging down into the same despondency some Malay sailors who had shipped with them. As for the Europeans, they continued to show a bold front; but their gloomy countenances belied their brave words, and it was plain that they were merely sustained by moral courage, and were under no illusions as to the fate which awaited them.

Whether supported by ignorance of danger or real courage, Mrs. Bremner, that delicate creature, apparently no more able to withstand the force of a breath of wind than a bending reed, consoled and encouraged everybody. Amongst these despairing men she seemed an angel, invulnerable to material dangers, who had strayed out of her proper surroundings, who, when the time arrived for her to leave her present company, would expand her wings, till then invisible, and remount to heaven.

About eight in the evening the vessel shivered two or three times, and sounds were heard as of groans. This was caused by the ship sinking deeper and deeper. Ships, like men, suffer their mortal agonies; they moan, and stiffen in the throes of death.

Then the crew, apprehensive that the *Juno* was going to founder, loudly demanded that the boats should be lowered; but a mere glance at the two available craft was sufficient to satisfy any one that they were useless under the circumstances; they consisted of the ship’s cutter, so old as to be unseaworthy, and a six-oared pinnace. The crew, after inspecting them, unanimously declined to attempt to make use of them.

About nine o’clock, the Captain called the two mates into consultation, and it was decided to cut away the mainmast to ease the ship; by this means they hoped to keep her afloat about four-and-twenty hours longer.

The work was set about at once, the sailors, as usual on such occasions, falling to their task of destruction with a will. In the twinkling of an eye the mainmast, cut away at its base, snapped under the blows it received, toppled over and fell, but, unfortunately, instead of going overboard, it fell upon the deck.

The confusion which this caused may easily be imagined. The men at the rudder, unable to steer the ship, let her go broadside on to the waves; she shipped a huge sea, and was completely swamped. Instead of retarding the catastrophe, they had but hastened it.

Then the cry, “We are foundering! We are going down!” resounded on all sides.

Mrs. Bremner, who reckoned on keeping afloat for several hours yet, and whom, perhaps, her husband had kept in ignorance of the imminence of the danger, had retired to her cabin.

The Captain, feeling the ship slipping away from under his feet, gave a shout of warning, and tried to reach the cabin hatchway; but he got entangled in the loose cordage, and had only time to cry out to John Mackay, who was near him:

“John! John! My wife!”

The second mate rushed to the hatchway, where he found Wade, the first mate, stretching out his hands to reach Mrs. Bremner, who, on hearing the noise made by the falling mast, had sprung out of her berth.

Both mates helped the poor woman to escape; but, much to their surprise, amidst all this frightful confusion, she remained quite collected. Not having time to dress herself fully, she slipped a short skirt over her nightdress, and dropped into the pocket thirty rupees, about one hundred and eighty francs, which she noticed lying on the cabin table.

Trivial though this incident may appear, in the height of the terrible catastrophe which was passing, it will be seen that these thirty rupees were destined to play an important part in the sequel to this awful drama.

The moment the crew perceived that the vessel was sinking, every one instinctively clung to what he found nearest to hand, endeavouring to raise himself as high as possible and get clear of the rapidly rising water.

Wade and John Mackay, who were on the companion of the Captain's cabin, seized the poop-rails, and, with Mrs. Bremner, succeeded in catching hold of the mizzen shrouds.

At the moment of their clinging to them, a noise like a clap of thunder was heard, followed by a terrible shaking; this was caused by the air pent up in the hull of the ship, which burst open the deck. When this shock occurred every one thought all was over, and recommended his soul to God.

But scarcely was the deck submerged before the downward movement of the vessel was arrested, not ceasing altogether, for it was easy to feel that with every sea she sank a little, but so slowly that the lowest rungs of the shrouds disappeared very gradually, which enabled the poor fellows in the rigging to go aloft as fast as the vessel sank. The Captain, who had rejoined his wife, and the two mates, who were supporting her, foresaw that they could not thus remain all night clinging to the rigging, and that they must /

find a more solid footing; the mizzen-top was only about ten feet above them; they reached it the first of all, and took possession of it. This was fortunate for them, for if they had not been the first-comers, and the top had been occupied, in all probability at such a moment the respect due to their rank would not have been shown, and they might have been obliged to remain hanging to the shrouds, or to content themselves with outside places.

The example set was instantly followed, and the mizzen- top filled. The remainder of the crew hung on to the rigging of the same mast, with the exception of one sailor, who established himself on the foretop.

They then awaited with anxiety to see whether the fate of the *Juno* was to be their own.

The ship continued to sink slowly, for ten feet more or thereabouts; it then seemed to the wrecked sailors that she remained at the depth she had reached, rolling between two currents. The fore and mizzen-tops were about a dozen feet above the sea, all the crew, with the single exception mentioned, being clustered on and about the latter, which, it became evident, was inadequate to carry the great weight it bore, and threatened to break down at any moment. It was imperative to lighten it, but as this could not be done by sacrificing men, it was decided to cut away some of the rigging, and by means of sheath-knives the spanker gaff was detached and thrown into the sea.

Although the water-logged hull to some extent steadied the standing masts, yet these rolled so terribly that the unfortunate persons who were clinging to them had great difficulty in keeping their positions; notwithstanding this, so fatigued were they, that some who had tied themselves to the rigging with handkerchiefs, and some even who hooked their arms into the rungs of the shrouds, succeeded in sleeping during a portion of the night.

John Mackay, the second mate, was not among these. He had more strength, both physical and moral, than the sailors, and kept his eyes open to what was going on around him. Near him was Mrs. Bremner, in her husband's arms. The night air was bitterly cold, although it was the month of July. More warmly clad than the Captain, the good John took off his jacket and gave it to Mrs. Bremner, who thanked him, giving him a look as much as to say:

"Ah! if they had only taken your advice."

John would willingly have spoken some words of encouragement as well as given his jacket, but having lost all hope himself, he could not conscientiously inspire in the breast of another the courage which had deserted his own.

Still, when after three or four hours of suspense and anguish he found the ship still floating between the two currents and sinking no deeper, he began to hope that during the four or five days for which human life can be sustained without food, some vessel might pass and pick them up; yet, to set against this hope, the horrible alternative of slowly perishing by hunger appeared more imminent and probable.

His tensely strung nerves received a sudden shock by what sounded like the firing of a cannon; three times did this noise occur; and his own sensation was confirmed by those of such as were near him, and not sleeping, whose attention he drew to the circumstance. Yet, when day broke, they were forced to admit that it was only imagination.

Worn out with fatigue, John Mackay was about himself to close his eyes in sleep when, in the early dawn, a sailor, thinking he sighted a vessel, cried out:

“A sail! a sail!”

The effect this cry produced may be imagined. The Lascars, who are Mussulmans, called upon the Prophet, and the Christians gave thanks to God.

But, alas! the sail proved as imaginary as the cannon; and when all eyes were directed to the point indicated, this was found to be as deserted as the rest of the ocean.

CHAPTER III.

THE RAFT.

WITH the loss of this double hope the situation was terrible.

The wind continued to blow with violence, the sea ran mountains high; the upper deck and portions of the ship came away, and at length the stays supporting the mast to which seventy-two persons were clinging seemed about to give way and hurl them into the trough of the sea.

At intervals during this period of despair, some, losing all hope of rescue, and preferring an immediate death to a long agony, after having said farewell to their comrades, dropped into the sea and were seen no more; others, who desired to remain where they were, lost their hold, and, despite their frantic efforts to regain their footing, were torn away by the waves, uttering piteous and despairing cries. It then appeared that the ship, submerged though she was, was not stationary, but continued to make way, for the swimmers were unable to overtake her and one after the other were engulfed and disappeared. Sad though this sight was, it yet afforded a ray of hope to the survivors.

During the first three days, while the storm lasted, and the sea ran high, the sight of the yawning gulf, and the loss of those who from time to time were swallowed up in it, deadened the pangs of hunger; but as the wind abated, and the sea grew calm, when the apprehensions of sinking and the fear of the mast breaking were removed, then the hideous prospect of perishing by famine presented itself with all its terrors.

At this moment several men, inconveniently cramped in the mizzen-top and cramping others as well, tried to reach the foretop in response to the call of the solitary sailor there, whose sufferings were rendered more acute by his loneliness; but of the six who plunged into the sea two only accomplished the distance, short though it was; the four others were drowned.

As John Mackay was not only the one person who kept his presence of mind throughout this great disaster, but also the one to whom we are indebted for a written account of it, he is naturally the person whom we shall more particularly keep in sight during the pains and anguish, hopes and fears, which he has transmitted to us with the bluff plainness of a sailor.

To the mental agitation, due firstly to the imminence of destruction, and afterwards to the continuance of danger, there succeeded in his mind, towards the fourth day, a kind of sullen indifference, his chief desire being to sleep as long and as soundly as possible, so as to stifle the pangs of hunger. Consequently the piteous cries of the Lascars and the lamentations of the others annoyed him, because they drew him out of an apathetic frame of mind, hardly conscious, but yet painless.

For the first three days, suspended, like his companions, between life and death, he had not suffered much from hunger, but only from cold, wet through as he was with spray, and chilled by the wind; but on the fourth day, when the wind had gone down, the sky was clear, and a burning sun filled the sky and beat upon his forehead as it were equatorial torrents of lava, then he began to feel in their full force the pangs of hunger, and even more those of thirst. Still, comparing what he himself experienced with what he had read of in accounts of shipwrecks, he did not at first find these so intolerable as he had anticipated.

In one of these narratives he remembered reading a recipe by which the agonies of thirst might be much mitigated. This was given by Captain Inglefield, of the *Centaur*, and consisted in wrapping round the body a sheet soaked in sea-water; the water, freed from the salt, which is left on the skin, is absorbed by the pores, and greatly reduces the pain of the sufferer.

No sooner had this remedy occurred to him than he determined to put Captain Inglefield’s recipe in practice, both on his own person and on those of his companions; to which end he stripped off the flannel waistcoat which he was wearing, and by means of a rope-yarn dipped it in the sea and put it on again, repeating the process as often as it became dry. The others followed his example, and the action of the water on the skin, assisted, probably, by the distraction which this employment caused, afforded them considerable relief.

However, during this day, when the sun had regained its power, and the pangs of hunger and thirst became more lively, John became extremely agitated; a kind of delirium presented death before him under a frightful aspect, and the very thought of dying amidst the horrors which were staring him in the face terrified him to such a degree that he could scarcely refrain from shouting cries of despair.

Happily, during the night which intervened between the fourth and fifth days he was visited by a most soothing dream.

As almost invariably happens when the end of life is reached, and memory leaps with a single bound over all the intermediate space which separates the cradle from the grave, all his youth passed in review before him, with the procession of ancestors long since dead, neighbours forgotten and young friends lost or gone astray in this vast desert called the world, in which it so rarely happens that, once lost sight of, they are ever found again.

Then all these first visions disappeared to give place to another dearer than all.

Poor John dreamt that he was lying sick of a burning fever, during the height of which his father, bathed in tears, was praying at his bedside.

Now, as this dream, so far as John was concerned, had all the actuality of a real circumstance, he experienced great joy at the presence of his father, whom he had not seen since he last left Europe, four or five years before. As the dream progressed, it seemed to him that while the aged father prayed for his son, the fever left him, and he felt revived and sweetly refreshed; but on the contrary, if the old man ceased praying for an instant, the fever recurred more violently than ever.

In the sequel, contrary to what generally happens after agitating dreams which irritate the mind rather than soothe it, when John awoke he felt infinitely better; his agitation had given place to a deep melancholy, and involuntary tears suffused his eyes, for the inference which he drew from the dream was that his father was dead, and that, witnessing from heaven his sufferings, he had come down for a brief space to alleviate them.

On the 25th of June, the fifth day after the submersion of the vessel, death began to ravage the unhappy sufferers. Two died from hunger, one succumbing instantaneously as if from a stroke of fatal cerebral apoplexy; the other slowly and in frightful agony.

After the shipwrecked party had recovered presence of mind enough to exchange ideas, the Captain and the first mate agreed that as soon as the sea was calm enough they must endeavour to construct a raft. This afforded the only hope of rescue, and Bremner and Wade reposed great confidence in it. The weather being fine, and the sea as smooth as a looking-glass, this great project was at once set about.

For materials they had the foresail yard, the bowsprit, and a number of small spars which were entangled in the wreckage. The best swimmers set to work; neither timbers nor cordage were wanting; the day after, about noon, the raft was finished. The next question was who should embark on it.

The Captain, his wife, and Wade were the first. Although John Mackay was not so sanguine as they were about this means of salvage, their example decided him; he came down in turn and took his place beside them. But as every one else did the same, the raft was in an instant so overloaded that it threatened to founder.

Then a terrible struggle arose, such a struggle as occurs among persons dying with hunger. The stronger drove off the weaker, who were obliged to ascend the shrouds for the shelter of the top which they had just left. Some were so weak that they were drowned during this episode, which happened before the raft was cast off, and was only distant from the wreck the length of the rope by which it was attached. Before letting go the painter, John asked Captain Bremner if he had any idea where the land lay, and if he thought there was a reasonable chance of soon making it. The Captain, who was totally ignorant where he was, made no reply. Then John, stretching out his hand to the man who was waiting to cut the rope, stopped him, and, turning to the Captain, implored him, in his own name and the name of his wife, to reascend into the top, and not to risk himself on this raft, which, in his opinion, offered no chance of safety. These prayers, however, had no influence with the Captain; and as Mrs. Bremner declared that she would not leave her husband, the rope was cut and the raft drifted away. John submitted and went with them. They rowed with pieces of wood torn out of the planking, which the sailors had cut with their knives into the shape of paddles.

But, after about half an hour, Wade came to John with a sigh.

“What is the matter?” asked John. Wade shook his head.

“You were right,” said he; “right when we started; right now. We have neither compass nor chart; we are quite ignorant of the direction of the land, and are going to certain death. From the elevation of our mizzen-top we had at any rate a look-out; we could see a vessel and be sighted by her; but on this raft, lost in the waves, we have not even this chance.”

“Then,” said John, “let us return to the ship.”

Wade glanced in the direction of the two floating mastheads, peopled with clusters of wretches suspended over the deep sea, and, judging the distance —

“We shall never have strength enough to swim back,” said he.

“No; but to lighten the raft they will take us back.”

Then he told his companions that he and the chief mate wished to return to the tops, and, as they expected, every one helped them to do so. They pulled back to the wreckage, on to which they climbed; a few seconds after they got back to their former post, and the raft again left.

It might be supposed that this separation between unfortunates who have suffered together for six days, and are parting to undergo different vicissitudes, would be a cruel one. Not so; the selfishness of pain and the fear of death had displaced every other sentiment. The men on the raft saw the two mates go aloft to the mizzen-top without manifesting any emotion, and the men in the top saw the raft float away with indifference.

The only person who showed any feeling was poor Mrs. Bremner, who had undergone all her sufferings with marvellous courage, and who, instead of the lamentations and complaints which the strongest men were uttering, had up till then spoken nothing but words of consolation.

Her presence had at first seemed a burden to her husband.

No doubt this feeling proceeded from a notion on his part that his wife would hardly forgive him, especially after the warning of John Mackay, for having brought her into such danger; but the more the Captain’s strength diminished the more was he drawn to his wife, becoming as it were riveted to her, neither leaving her nor allowing her to leave him.

They kept the raft long in sight, but at length it vanished. Night found them still straining their eyes on the point where it was lost to view, and again imprisoned them in darkness. Next morning, at daybreak, they thought they saw a floating object in the wake of the *Juno.* All eyes were directed towards it, and the sailors in the tops and the rigging discovered, to their great surprise, the raft which had left them the night before; but it was returning from the opposite direction to that in which it started.

The men had rowed till they were quite exhausted; it must be borne in mind that they had eaten nothing for a week; they then fell asleep, leaning on one another, awaiting the Lord’s pleasure in the apathy of despair. It pleased God that they should rejoin their unhappy companions.

After drifting about all night at random, they again found themselves, by one of those singular chances which seem the will of Providence, within fifty yards of the waterlogged vessel.

They stretched out their arms to their shipmates, who helped them to get back, and the raft incident ceased to have any other consequence in their eyes than a futile attempt inspired by despair.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PANGS OF DEATH.

THROUGH a feeling of pity which yet smouldered at the bottom of these suffering hearts, but which, it should be stated, powerfully influenced the good John, the two places in the mizzen-top, which Mrs. Bremner and her husband had previously occupied, were restored to them. The Captain was so enfeebled that he seemed almost unconscious, yet in his ordinary condition he was a seaman inured to all the privations and hardships incidental to his profession, and appertaining to the element which he had ploughed for thirty years. His wife, on the contrary, apparently a delicate and nervous creature, had borne all these fatigues and privations with marvellous courage, and, more extraordinary still, with marvellous strength.

Scarcely had they got him into the mizzen-top when Captain Bremner became delirious, and in his delirium imagining that he saw before him a table spread with all kinds of food, he would ask, struggling in the hands of those who held him, why, when he was so hungry and thirsty and such abundance was before him, he was refused a piece of bread and a glass of water.

The sight of a death-bed is always a moving one; but, generally speaking, death-beds affect us with one kind of emotion only: the grief of separation. Those who stand round the dying person shed tears all the more copiously because they run no danger themselves.

But it is different in the case of an unfortunate wretch expiring from hunger and thirst in the midst of other wretches on the point of death from hunger and thirst like him. In this case every one sees his own fate foreshadowed in that of the dying man. The bystanders already feel, in anticipation, the pangs of death themselves. This delirium, in two hours, in the evening, or next morning, will be their delirium; this death, sooner or later, will be their death.

Here are no tears which console by their very abundance; dry eyes, a gloomy and reserved despair, teeth which gnash when the first symptoms are felt of the pains which are racking the sufferer; howls instead of lamentations; curses instead of words of consolation.

At length the Captain expired.

This was on the 1st of July, eleven days after the catastrophe.

In the convulsions of his death agony he clasped his wife so closely that they could neither unlock his arms nor unclasp his hands. She, for her part, could not believe him to be dead. Feeling herself pressed against her husband's heart, she struggled not to be deprived of this last embrace, and she was only persuaded of the fact after infinite trouble. She then sadly dropped her arms, and, strange to say, her tears ceased to flow. The men divided among them the few clothes which the Captain possessed, and cast his corpse into the sea.

When she heard the splash made by the falling body, Mrs. Bremner uttered a faint shriek, threw up her arms, and fainted. John Mackay rushed to her aid, and revived her; then she opened her eyes, and recovered the faculty of weeping, which she appeared to have lost.

During the five days which had elapsed between the return of the raft and the death of the Captain, no other accident had happened other than a succession of deaths.

One man was seized with cramps in the stomach, and died in convulsions; sometimes the dying man lost hold of the rigging to which he was clinging and fell into the sea; sometimes he expired grasping it so tightly that it required all the remaining strength of three or four men to make him let go; one died so tightly riveted to the mizzen-stays that his corpse was left hanging to them for two whole days, until, putrefaction setting in, they disarticulated his arms at the wrists, leaving the hands clutching the stay, while the body was swallowed up by the waves.

On the morning of the 28th, two days before the Captain's death, Mr. Wade, chief mate, declared that he could bear this inaction no longer.

The raft, fastened to a cable, was floating below the mizzen-top; he asked if any men would embark with him, and try a different chance from their shipmates. Two European sailors, two Malays, and four Lascars, eight men in all, volunteered, and in spite of all John Mackay's efforts to dissuade them, embarked afresh. As before, the rope was cut, and the raft drifted away. It became lost to sight as on the previous occasion, but next morning it was not visible in the wake of the vessel; a squall had arisen in the course of the night, and, in all probability, the raft and its occupants had been swallowed up by the sea.

This squall, fatal to the men who left, had a fortunate result for those who remained. Heavy rain fell; the men were able to soak their clothes with it and quench their thirst, thus alleviating their chief source of suffering.

After this, forty-eight hours seldom passed without some fresh squall bringing more rain, which, in addition to wearing a shirt which had been dipped in the sea by means of a rope-yarn, was a great relief. Indeed, whenever these poor fellows, exhausted though they were, could swallow some gulps of fresh water, for some hours the gnawing pains of hunger subsided.

On the day of Captain Bremner's death, besides him died two men in the foretop, and two in the mizzen-top. The men posted in these two places had no communication with one another; they saw what was going on, but had neither anything to say, nor strength to say it if they had.

John experienced every morning great surprise at finding himself alive, and had a firm conviction that each day would be his last, and that he should be a corpse before night. He had heard it stated that a man cannot live more than a certain number of days without food — six, eight, or ten at the most — and here on the eleventh day, that is to say, on the day of the death of Captain Bremner, he was living still.

In the evening the sea was calmer than it ever had been before. Several Lascars, who encumbered the mizzen- top, crowding their comrades, and being hustled by them, swam off to reach the foretop, which had never been full, and in which the death of two men, whom they had seen thrown into the sea, had made still more space. So weak were they that they reached it with the greatest difficulty, and, assisted by their comrades, climbed aloft.

After the 1st and 2nd of July, the survivors were so enfeebled that they became not only unconscious of what was going on around them, but even of their own sufferings. The debility into which even the strongest eventually fell had almost destroyed the sensation of hunger. When a little rain fell, these dying men seemed to awake from a lethargy; they moved about in an unusual and awkward manner in their efforts to collect all the water they could. Having swallowed this, and exchanged some words of satisfaction, slowly, sadly, and mournfully they gradually returned to their former state of silence and torpor.

The acute suffering of these emaciated and enfeebled bodies arose no longer from hunger and thirst, but from cold. Although in the latitude of the equator, the nights were intensely chilly. Then were heard complaints, groans, chattering teeth. At dawn, the rising of the sun was preceded by a rise in temperature; then the stiff limbs drawn up under the body were stretched out and recovered their suppleness.

Then came fresh torture; the sun, rising to the zenith, beat fiercely on these unprotected heads, a prey to sunstroke; then the misery of the night was forgotten for that of the day; and the absent breeze was invoked, as by night was the absent sun.

In the midst of all this tragic drama many singular isolated incidents occurred almost unnoticed even by those under whose eyes they passed, and whose death agonies rendered them indifferent to the dying struggles of others.

As we have already said, although all were dying from the same causes, all did not die in the same manner; for instance, the son of Mr. Wade, a robust and well proportioned youth, died almost suddenly, without a groan; whilst on the other hand, a youth of the same age, of feminine delicacy and physique, lasted during twelve days of hunger and thirst, and finally succumbed on the thirteenth.

This lad’s father was on board, but the great disaster had separated them, the father being the sailor who had escaped to the foretop, while the son climbed up the mizzen-shrouds.

Each remained where he was, conversing in words during the first few days; then, when their voices became too weak to carry the sound, by signs only. But when the youth’s signs informed his father that he felt death impending, the unhappy father seemed to recover all his strength.

He lost no time in descending the man-ropes, although for two or three days he had scarcely stirred. Then dragging himself on hands and knees along the weather gunwale, he rejoined his son, took him in his arms, placed him on one of the three or four forecastle planks which had floated aft, and propped him up against the taffrail, lest the waves should wash him away.

When the youth experienced one of those violent spasms in the stomach which we have already mentioned as a mortal symptom, his father again lifted him in his arms, raised him as high as his breast, and wiped the foam from his lips. When a few drops of rain fell, he carefully gathered all he could by means of his handkerchief, which he wrung over the mouth of his child; if the shower increased into a downpour, he opened the lad’s mouth, so that he might imbibe the reviving moisture in its first freshness.

Thus he remained, in the same position, for five days. At last, notwithstanding all his care, the youth expired.

Then the poor father lifted him up, grasping him tight to his breast with a power incredible in a man who had had no food for sixteen days. He stared at him with a bewildered expression, still believing that breath would again come from his lips. But the facts were too strong; it was impossible to doubt that his son was really dead.

On realizing this, nothing more seemed to affect him, and he appeared quite indifferent to his own fate. He remained near his son’s corpse, stolid and silent, till the sea, increasing under a squall, caught his son’s body and swept it overboard.

He watched the corpse float away into the transparent depths of the ocean; then, when he lost sight of it, he wrapped himself up in a piece of canvas, lay down, and never rose again. He must, however, have survived two or three days, so far as can be surmised, for the witnesses of this episode, whose interest and anxiety were aroused by its pathetic circumstances, noticed that his limbs quivered every time a wave broke over his body. The scene altogether was so heart-breaking that it deeply moved men whose own situation was so awful that it may well be supposed they had little inclination to observe that of others.

The ship drifted and rolled along at the will of the sea, but under the eye of God, and no one could say whither she was making.

At last, on the evening of the 10th of July, twenty days after the great disaster, one of the shipwrecked sailors, who had long been fixing his gaze on what seemed to him an object in the offing, struggled to an erect position for a better view, and cried out as loud as he could:

“Land! Land!”

CHAPTER V.

MRS. BREMNER’S THIRTY RUPEES.

THIS herald note of salvation, instead of being received, as might be supposed, with ecstatic joy, was heard without any emotion at all. So deadened were the faculties of the survivors, and so apathetic had they become under these moribund conditions, that God’s mercies went for nothing with them, and no one even stirred to verify or disprove the alleged fact of land being in sight.

However, after some minutes, as if a sensible period was required to convey the meaning of this news to the blunted perceptions of those to whom it was sought to be imparted, a slight stir occurred among the wretched survivors. This movement, at first hardly discernible, became contagious, and at length general attention was directed towards the point indicated. But the day was by this time too far spent to decide with certainty whether the object were really land or only one of those mirages which so often mislead shipwrecked crews tossing and drifting on the waste of ocean.

At first little notice was taken of this important intelligence; then, without discussing it, all eyes were strained in the direction shown. Next, night came on, and it was impossible to see anything; and, lastly, strange to say, every one spoke and behaved as if land were plainly in sight. Conversation, previously dead, revived; every one had something to say, and the universal opinion, with one exception, was that land was in sight.

This exception was John Mackay. He held that it could not be land; and, even supposing it were, he maintained that this by no means proved a rescue.

Poor Mrs. Bremner, shattered by the death of her husband and by her own sufferings, was about to grasp this announcement of land in sight with all the strength of the hope left in her. Her mind was clinging to this idea as her body would have clung to rigging or spars. This obstinate incredulity of John Mackay, his cold reception of the news, supposing it to be genuine, exasperated her.

“Why, tell me,” she exclaimed, “why do you dispute the existence of any coast at all, and why, again, if there be a coast, and that coast be lying before us, why are you so indifferent at seeing it?”

“Madam,” replied the second mate, “in the first place because I don’t believe in the existence of land in this latitude and longitude; and in the second, because if there be land, instead of being our refuge, it will prove our destruction.”

“Our destruction! Why?” asked the poor woman, her eyes burning with fear.

“Because,” replied John, “it being impossible to steer the ship, she cannot be brought into port, and, such being the case, she will strike on a reef far from the coast, and wherever she strikes she will infallibly go to pieces in a few minutes. If you are weary of suffering, if you feel that you have no strength to support life longer, pray for the sight of land, for land will most certainly terminate all our misfortunes.”

This prediction, coming from so experienced a man as John Mackay, caused general consternation, and conversation and hope expired simultaneously. The second mate was himself so sceptical as to the reality of the land said to be in sight, that he tells us he did not even turn his head in the indicated direction the next morning, when he awoke. Just at this moment, however, one of the men in the foretop shook his handkerchief, and endeavoured to cry “Land! “The others saw the handkerchief, and guessed what he wished to convey, but the weak tones of his voice only reached their ears as in an inarticulate mumble.

At the sight of this handkerchief, at the sound of this feeble and dying voice which nevertheless charmed his ear, the second mate himself felt a vague desire to rise and look round, yet, being in a comfortable position, his arms folded on his stomach, and facing the other direction, he felt a great indisposition to move. It required all the strength of will he possessed to enable him to sacrifice his comfort to his curiosity, and before he had decided to move, a man near had anticipated him and declared that land was actually in sight.

On hearing this a second man rose, then a third, and in five minutes the whole company, including John Mackay himself, were erect and straining their eyes towards the horizon.

He was obliged to admit that the object ahead was singularly like a coast line, but when Mrs. Bremner asked him if he judged it to be the

Coromandel coast, the question seemed so absurd to the worthy sailor that, despite the gravity of the situation, he could not help smiling; but as the day went on, the indications of land grew so evident that he became convinced that the jagged horizon could be nothing else but the outline of land.

Only, what land could it possibly be? He had not an idea.

A general feeling of restlessness and anxiety ensued; but, strange to say, amidst this general restlessness, John Mackay experienced a sensation of hope, derived from a dominant religious idea.

There are said to be men who do not believe in a God.

What else have they to believe in, and what other faith is of any avail?

Belief in God includes all other faith.

The religious idea which dominated John Mackay was this. He considered it incredible that a beneficent God would inspire hope in the breasts of a party of wretches who had suffered frightful tortures, merely as a prelude to terminating their sufferings by death.

Thus, when Mrs. Bremner turned towards him and questioned him with her eyes, as if he were the oracle upon whose reply depended the probabilities of life or death, John Mackay raised his eyes and hands to heaven, murmuring these words:

“Let us hope!”

Thenceforward, all eyes were steadily directed towards the coast.

Unhappily, the more they neared it, and the better its character could be surmised, the more appearance did it present of a sterile desert, and night fell without any more cheering symptoms being descried.

The second mate took up his usual sleeping position, firmly convinced that this night would be his last, and that before morning the ship would have struck and gone to pieces. For all that, he did not sleep less soundly, so exhausted was he.

Shortly before sunrise, the whole company, both the sleeping and the wakeful, were roused by a violent shock — the ship had struck on a rock. A faint cry, hardly louder than a sigh, escaped from all; it died away immediately, and was succeeded by an agonized silence.

The ship struck again and again; so violent were the shocks that the standing masts were shaken, and the tenants of the tops, finding it impossible to stand erect, were obliged to lie flat and grip the cross-trees. By nine or ten o’clock the sea had gone down several feet; the remnant of the deck slowly emerged and remained exposed. A general desire was felt to descend to it; but, enfeebled as they were by twenty days of famine, this was a difficult and dangerous matter. The condition of poor wretches who for three weeks had subsisted solely on a few drops of water caught in stormy weather may be imagined.

Nevertheless, an effort was made, and as man generally succeeds in attaining his ends by the combination of will and skill, so they succeeded in this instance.

The gunner and the second mate further undertook to lower poor Mrs. Bremner, and, after incredible efforts, got her down as far as the crowfoot, where their strength failed them and they were obliged to leave her. They then applied to such of the Lascars as appeared the least worn out. Two of them volunteered to bring her down on deck, but as they knew that the poor woman was possessed of thirty rupees, they demanded eight, which were promised in her name.

They then climbed aloft to her, lifted her in their arms, and got her down in safety to the deck, which no sooner had they reached than they demanded payment of the eight rupees. Mrs. Bremner was so overjoyed at her rescue from the torture she had endured in the mizzen-top, and felt so hopeful at seeing land before her, notwithstanding the sinister predictions of John Mackay, that she would gladly have given them all the thirty, but the second mate pointed out to her that the twenty-two remaining rupees were all the money they had, and that, should the necessity for spending them arise, it would be more proper to devote them to the general service than to present them to a couple of mercenary wretches who were capable of extorting money from a woman, and that woman the wife of their deceased Captain, as the price of rendering her a slight service.

With regard to the conduct of the ship’s company in general, John Mackay states with pride that this conduct of the two Lascars was the only instance of selfishness and greed which could be laid to their charge.

The fatigue of getting down from aloft had been so great that every one lay down to rest, except some Malays and Lascars, who commenced rummaging everywhere to; see if they could not find money left lying about. While ‘they were thus engaged, the second mate noticed that the rudder-head had been torn away, and that through the hole caused by this fracture it was easy to get down into the powder magazine.

As soon as the sea had completely left the spar deck, which happened about two in the afternoon, men went below to see if they could not find something useful; but the sea had been beforehand with them and carried away everything, except four cocoa-nuts, which were discovered under the cordage. This gave rise to an incident which partly consoled the more feeling for the inhumanity of the two Lascars.

The finders of the four cocoa-nuts, instead of keeping them for their own use, as they had a right to do, declared them common property to be divided alike, only reserving the milk inside as their share. They were found, however, so old that the milk had become rancid and quite unfit to quench thirst. The solid parts were so dry that they afforded hardly any nutrition, and all who ate any of them soon experienced violent attacks of colic.

Apart from their sufferings through want of water and food, to which these dying persons had become callous, the whole company were faring tolerably well, the conditions of the powder magazine being more comfortable than those of the mizzen-top. There seemed no chance of landing, and even if there had been, surely it was preferable to die peacefully in the magazine, where they were comparatively well off, than be torn to pieces by tigers. Moreover, the stranded wreck might be sighted by a passing ship, their signals be observed, and themselves be rescued. This seemed their sole remaining chance.

As if the mere sight of land had had a beneficial influence, no further deaths occurred. All eyes remained fixed on the blessed land only about three-quarters of a league distant.

About two in the afternoon they sighted what appeared to be a group of men on the shore. This news created a great sensation, and all who were able to move crawled to the taffrail and waved their clothes, making all the noise they could in the vain hope of attracting attention. The party on shore, who might naturally have been expected to observe the stranded vessel, took no notice of her whatever, and dispersed, conduct which made the castaways, foiled in all their attempts to indicate their presence, doubt whether they were really men after all. Still, the sight of this land, and the certainty that it was inhabited by creatures of some kind, inspired them with strength and courage; they spoke of endeavouring to reach it at all hazards, even were they to perish in the attempt. The more vigorous then went below into the magazine, where they had seen some spars; they took these spars, and with infinite trouble threw half a dozen into the sea. But the floating capacity of these few timbers was insufficient to sustain every one, and a good number were quite unfit to attempt the passage.

Unhappily there was no hope of recovering lost strength; every fresh effort only caused greater weakness; they lay down and waited.

In the evening, when the tide was flowing, six Lascars, the strongest of the survivors, dropped into the sea, clung to the spars, and let the flow carry them towards the beach, on which, notwithstanding a heavy surf, they succeeded in landing in sight of those remaining on the vessel. These latter, from where they were, could see their comrades gain the shore, find a stream of water, and drink of it with unmistakable signs of satisfaction; then, not venturing further inland, and not having strength enough to set about questing for food, they lay down on the beach, too tired to fear the risk of being devoured by beast of prey.

The castaways on board repaired to the taffrail the next morning before daybreak, to view the land by the first rays of sunlight, and learn what had become of the six Lascars, who, they feared, had perished during the night. Happily their apprehensions were groundless; to their great joy they descried the whole party rise from the spot which they had selected for repose the previous evening, return to the brook, and again drink from it.

This sight made the party on board anxious to imitate the example of their comrades, and, at whatever cost, gain the land as they had done. But, in their weak state, they despaired of moving the smallest spar with all their combined efforts. In fact, the only persons left besides the second mate, the boatswain’s mate, the gunner, and a young lad, were Mrs. Bremner and another woman, three old men, and a man of fifty years of age, at death’s door. Strange as it may seem, these feeble beings, to the great astonishment of the once vigorous John Mackay, himself now reduced to their condition, had survived privations and hardships which had proved fatal to the youngest and strongest.

At mid-day they sighted a large number of men, probably natives of the country, collected on the beach, and proceeding in the direction where the castaways were reposing. The latter seemed to have no other desire than to stop on the bank of their rivulet.

This sight, as may be imagined, excited the attention of the party on board to the highest pitch. Their own fate depended in great measure upon that of the party on shore, and never had a more crucial moment occurred since the commencement of the drama in which they had taken part.

The two groups halted at some little distance from each other, and appeared to parley in a friendly manner; the smaller then joined the larger, moved with it, and, whilst some were lighting a fire on the shore — doubtless to cook some rice — others began to signal the ship, waving handkerchiefs as if to invite them to land.

This created the most lively emotion among the stranded party. Instead of wild beasts, which might be expected to inhabit this desert shore, they met human beings, who appeared to have relieved those who had effected a landing, and were ready to succour those who might succeed in doing so. Life, which two days previously had appeared onerous and insupportable, now became more precious than ever. The great obstacle was that the natives had no canoes, and, even if they had, it was doubtful whether these could live in the surf; yet a fluttering hope whispered to the castaways that means would be found to put off to them and rescue them.

One consequence of this revival of hope in the breast of John Mackay was that, feeling invigorated by the scene before him, he determined, in his turn, to be one of the actors in it.

He imparted his resolution to those who remained on the vessel, and asked their help to throw some more spars into the sea. The gunner, the boatswain’s mate, and the youth before mentioned, strained every effort to do so, but very shortly the strength of the two former failed them, and sadly shaking their heads they went back to lean on the taffrail, leaving John Mackay and the youth to continue the work by themselves.

After strenuous efforts they succeeded in pitching overboard a spar, to which they had fastened a rope; then, securing a few loose floating planks, they fastened this wreckage to the other end of the rope, thus each acquiring a piece of wood to buoy him up in the attempt.

Yet, at the moment of casting off, John’s heart failed him, old sailor though he was, and he was about to remount the ship’s side and await death rather than meet it halfway. But, encouraged by his young companion, and, moreover, reflecting that the men on shore would not stay there indefinitely, and indeed might leave that very day, and, further, that next day he would be weaker than he was to-day, he resolved to take the risk and survive or perish.

He took a mournful leave of poor Mrs. Bremner, unable to walk and hardly able to speak, but promising her that, if he reached the coast, and if the coast contained any possible means of sending relief, this relief should be immediately sent. She, in return, gave him one of the remaining twenty-two rupees, which she hoarded with the greater care from a sense of the good service which this money had already rendered her.

John Mackay then descended on his spar, and, as he was occupied in praying and recommending himself to the care of Providence, the piece of wood cast loose of itself, and began to float, which appeared to him a happy omen, for it appeared like the hand of God launching him towards the shore. In fact, as if by a miracle, scarcely was he embarked, ere it seemed as if his stiff limbs, whose joints would hardly bend five minutes before, had recovered all their suppleness and some of their strength.

He soon found, however, that the spar, instead of helping and supporting him, fatigued him horribly; at every movement of the sea it turned and rolled over.

Several times immersed, and half choked, he let go of it; but, feeling it slip away from him, with a great effort he caught hold of it again and grasped it firmly under his arm as his only chance of safety. He found, however, to his great discouragement, that the current, instead of drifting him on shore, was carrying him in a direction parallel to it. Foreseeing that he could not endure this fatigue much longer, he endeavoured to prevent the spar from revolving; to accomplish this, he stretched himself along it, passing round it an arm and a leg, while with the other arm and leg he struck out in the direction of the shore.

This method for some time answered very well, and he was beginning to feel more sanguine, when suddenly a huge wave broke over him, crushing him with its weight, and leaving him alone, rolling between two seas, stunned, half killed by the shock and nearly senseless.

Once more he rose to the surface and breathed again, when another great wave passed over his head and submerged him again.

Poor John thought this time that it was all over with him; his heart and his soul united, not in a prayer, but in a supreme cry to God, when he received a violent shock. This was caused by a wave dashing him against the spar, which had been washed away from him. He seized it again, rolled over and over with it several times, and, in the act of doing so, felt his body scraped against the sand and broken shells which the surge cast up on the coast, which assured him that the coast could not be very distant, although he could not see it. At length, as the billows succeeded one another with more and more violence, one of them flung him against a rock; leaving the spar, the swimmer clung to the rock with all his strength, fearing lest the returning surge might sweep him back into the deep sea.

The wave recoiled without detaching him.

Then, to escape the heavy rollers, he crawled on hands and knees along the shingly space between high and low water mark, availing himself of every rock, and holding fast to the bottom when a roaring and furious billow broke above him.

Thus at last he landed on terra firma.

When out of immediate peril, he was so completely exhausted that, without considering whether or no he was quite out of reach of the surf, he lay down on the sand, under the shelter of a rock, and fell fast asleep, unconscious whether this was the sleep of recuperation or the sleep of death.

When John Mackay awoke, he found himself the central figure in a group of a dozen men, speaking Hindustani, which greatly reassured him, for he feared that he had been cast ashore out of the jurisdiction of the East India Company.

As he had a smattering of this language, he at once entered into conversation with them, and learnt that they were rayahs, or peasant subjects of the English Company, and the point of the coast on which he found himself was six days' journey from Chittagong, or Islamabad, capital of a district of the same name in the possession of the Company, on the frontier of the kingdom of Arakan, and ninety leagues from Calcutta.

Thus reassured with respect to the place on which he had landed, and the natives whom he found there, John asked them to give him a few grains of rice, even if they were raw. They told him to follow them, and they would do the same for him as they had done for his comrades, whom he would regain in five minutes. John attempted to rise, but found it impossible to do so. Two men then set him on his feet; but, as he was totally unable to walk, they lifted him in their arms, and transported him from the seashore to another group of men about four hundred yards away.

During the course of this transport they crossed a small stream, and John, seeing this fresh limpid water joyously prattling over the pebbles, begged them to allow him to drink. At first his guides refused; but he entreated them so persistently that at length they consented to set him down near the brook. He madly plunged his head into the water, and swallowed as much as he could, for it seemed to him that if he once took his mouth away he should never have an opportunity of drinking again. The Indians at length dragged him forcibly away, as they feared that an immoderate indulgence in this water would prove injurious to him. On the contrary, however, he found himself so much revived by this fresh and pure draught that, to his great joy, when raised on his feet again he was able to walk.

Leaning on the arms of his guides, he reached the second group of men for whom the party were making. Here he found, not only the youth who started with him, and the six Lascars who had preceded them, but also the gunner and the boatswain’s mate, who, induced by their example, had ventured into the sea after them, and had been successful in reaching the coast.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH MRS. BREMNER’S RUPEES AGAIN COME IN USEFUL.

THE happiness which the good John experienced in again meeting his comrades, the joy he felt at being saved, the satisfaction he anticipated in eating the rice which he saw cooking, for a short time drove him almost crazy. Unable to collect his ideas, too weak to give utterance to them, and having only a vague and confused notion of what had taken place, he altogether forgot Mrs. Bremner.

Meantime the rice was cooked; John put some grains in his mouth and chewed them, but was unable to swallow.

One of the rayahs, seeing his vain efforts, took some water in the palm of his hand, and, as if in joke, threw it in his face. As he happened at that moment to open his mouth, some drops, entering it, washed the rice into his throat, and nearly choked him; but the effort he made set his muscles free, and gave him the power of swallowing. He was, however, for some time obliged to take a spoonful of water with every spoonful of rice; but this contraction of the gullet was only a sample of the troubles which poor John had to endure; the heat of the sun had chapped his lips, and even the inside of his mouth. Every movement of his jaws caused these cracks to bleed, thus causing him insuperable pain. Sleep came to his relief. After he had swallowed some spoonfuls of rice, and as much as a glassful of water, he sunk into a deep slumber, and did not awake till evening.

The moment of awakening, when he felt his physical faculties reviving, and his intellectual faculties resuming their course, was to his whole being as a new birth. His memory returned, the past presented itself before his eyes, and he cried out with remorseful anguish: “Ah! poor Mrs. Bremner!”

Then, addressing the rayahs, he explained that he had left on board the Captain’s wife and two or three other persons, who were able and willing to reward them if they would attempt their rescue.

This double inducement of performing a good action, and of being well paid for it, had the effect of making the rayahs promise to keep a watch over the vessel during the night. According to them, the night tide being higher than that of the day, the vessel would probably be carried nearer the shore, and thus the salvage would be facilitated.

This was all that John heard. The profound sleep into which he had fallen in the morning overcame him a second time. He stretched himself out on the sand, and was fast asleep before the Hindoo had finished speaking. At midnight they awoke him, informing him that the lady and her slave maid had been landed in safety. John got up at once without assistance, and walked unaided to join them.

Mrs. Bremner was seated by the fire; she had just drunk a glass of water and eaten a little rice. The utmost limit of human joy was mirrored in her face.

What John had said about Mrs. Bremner's rupees had nearly caused her death, instead of her rescue.

Some of the men who were patrolling the beach had already formed a plot to get off to the ship and loot it, when the honest fellow who had already given his turban to John, and who was a Burmese, watching for a propitious moment, reached the vessel and rescued her without asking for any reward.

The same night the vessel broke in two; the hold remained fast on the rocks, the deck floated so near the beach that the last two men left on board were enabled to reach the land. The night was dirty; it rained in torrents, and the shipwrecked party, half naked, without shelter, suffered greatly from the cold. The natives next morning gave them a little more rice; but they warned them that this was the last they would give for nothing, and in future all they got must be paid for. John Mackay's imprudence in speaking of Mrs. Bremner's rupees was bearing its fruit.

The Lascars, who were both the first to land and the first to levy a contribution from the poor widow's purse, came to terms with the natives and began a meal by themselves, their religion not allowing them to eat in company with persons of another creed.

Mrs. Bremner, on her side, doubly grateful at having saved her money, and having the power by its means to benefit both herself and others, made a bargain for the food of all the others at two rupees a day for four days, at the end of which they hoped to find themselves strong enough to reach the nearest village, thirty miles away to the north.

The castaways were surprised that the natives should linger on the seaboard without any other apparent reason than that of being useful to them, but at low tide their object became apparent. They plunged into the sea, reached the ship, and overhauled it to see if in its shattered condition they could not carry off something of value. They found, however, only some broken muskets, a small quantity of iron and lead, and the copper sheathing.

Poor John, on witnessing this plundering, felt the grief which every good sailor feels on seeing the mutilation of the ship in which he has sailed. He told the natives who were engaged in it that they might suppose themselves in for a good thing at the time, but that when this wreckage came to the ears of the owners, a strict account would be required from them of all their appropriations. His remarks were very badly received, and he soon became aware that it would have been more judicious on his part not to have made them.

For the rest of the time the purveyors of rice docked his ration and served him last. They would probably even have starved him to death, had it not been for the good Burmese who had lent him his turban, and rescued Mrs. Bremner. He took John under his protection, and saved him from perishing with hunger. The stinting of food was not, however, without its good effects; for, had not the rice been parsimoniously served out, the party would have eaten more than was good for them, albeit small thanks were due to the natives for this niggardliness, seeing that their motives had no connection with the well-being of the castaways.

In order to economize their stock of rice, the natives hunted down some deer, which they skinned and roasted close by the castaways, without offering them a morsel; the latter humbly collected the bones, making with them a soup which seemed to them delicious, and which they enjoyed to the last drop.

Time passed on, but the unhappy party, fed only on water and a little rice, failed to recover strength. Mrs. Bremner, in particular, was so weak that she was unable to stand. She therefore entreated the Hindoos to carry her and her slave on a litter to the nearest village.

A long discussion ensued; the rapacity of the natives was aroused; they thought poor Mrs. Bremner’s purse inexhaustible. At length it was settled that for twelve rupees the transportation should be made. Thus two rupees remained out of the thirty.

For these two rupees, which Mrs. Bremner convinced them were the last, it was agreed that four persons should be supplied with rice till the village was reached. These four persons were Mrs. Bremner, her slave, John Mackay, and the youth who had left the ship with him.

John Mackay, after testing his strength, feared that he should be unable to follow Mrs. Bremner’s palanquin; he therefore tried to make a bargain to be likewise carried in a litter, but the Hindoos, pretending that he was twice as heavy as she was, demanded sixteen rupees, paid in advance. He had, therefore, no alternative but to drag himself along on foot after Mrs. Bremner’s palanquin, leaning on a bamboo.

The start was made on the 17th of July, the little band which accompanied the palanquin consisting of John, the gunner, the boatswain’s mate, and the boy. As for the Lascars, they made acquaintance with the natives, and, being of nearly the same race, remained with them.

The first stage was about two miles; they then halted an hour. During this halt John slept. On awaking he felt so tired that he did not think he could possibly continue the journey. He nevertheless resumed it, but was obliged to stop so frequently that he perceived his remaining with the party would render the transport impossible. He therefore stayed behind, and the boy, who was very fond of him, kept him company. There was no fear of his getting lost, for he was in mortal dread of tigers, and never strayed away twenty yards from the beaten track.

About four o’clock in the afternoon John and the boy had quite lost sight of their companions, when they perceived a party of natives of Arakan, called Maghs. These Indians were engaged in cooking rice near the seashore, and did not see the two travellers, or at any rate took no notice of them.

John, left by the palanquin bearers without any food, was very anxious to share the dinner which was cooking on the beach; but not knowing the language, and, worse still, having no money, he did not know how to set about it.

Begging seemed to him, if not the surest, the least dangerous plan; he therefore approached the Maghs, with an outstretched hand and a suppliant eye; his wretched appearance, the rags which covered him, left no doubt about his misery; at the first sight of him the chief of the party appeared moved with compassion, and addressing him in Portuguese, asked by what fatality he had been reduced to this miserable condition.

Fortunately John, who spoke imperfectly the language in which the question was conveyed, was able to converse with him. He related his shipwreck, the frightful famine which he and his companions had endured for twenty days; how by a miraculous good fortune they had at length succeeded in landing; how, when on shore, thanks to Mrs. Bremner’s rupees, they had obtained some aid; and finally how, not being able to pay the palanquin bearers, he had been abandoned by them on the road.

The chief found this story all the more probable, inasmuch as an hour before he had seen Mrs. Bremner’s palanquin go by, borne by the Hindoos, and followed by John’s two shipwrecked companions. He was a kind-hearted man; he cursed the unfeeling brutes who had left a poor wretch to die, and with the dignity of a king who offers hospitality to a neighbouring prince, he led John to his fire, and invited him and the youth who was with him to sit down beside it. He then served him with the best he had, advising him not to eat much, not out of parsimony, but for fear of overloading an enfeebled stomach, promising him sufficient supplies to suffice amply both for him and his companion, from now till they arrived at the next village.

He was as good as his word, giving them three days’ rations of rice, and assuring him that the tigers, which have a great fear of fire and smoke, would never venture to meddle with them if they took the precaution of lighting a fire before going to sleep; and as they had neither flint nor steel nor tinder, he showed them how to light a fire by the friction of two pieces of bamboo.

Moreover, as the wounds on his legs and feet were full of sand and caused him great suffering, he washed and dressed these wounds with his own hands, bathing them and rubbing them with ghee. He then swathed John’s feet in linen bandages, and, seeing him much cheered, he wished him a pleasant journey.

After his experience of the greed of the Lascars and the callousness of the Hindoos, the behaviour of the Magh chief deeply moved poor John, who could not find it in his heart to leave him. Unfortunately the chief, who was a travelling merchant, was proceeding in a direction diametrically opposite to his, being on his way from Chittagong, his ordinary place of abode, to sell goods in Arakan. They were, therefore, forced to part; John knew not how to express his gratitude to the good merchant; his tears spoke for him, and the chief could not doubt that he had done a good action to a grateful heart.

CHAPTER VII.

CONCLUSION.

AFTER marching two leagues, John and his companion overtook Mrs. Bremner and her escort, who had halted in a hut and were eating rice.

John haughtily drew from a knapsack which he carried on his shoulders his and his companion’s rations of rice, and dined apart from them. Whilst so occupied, several Hindoos and Lascars, who had remained behind to plunder the vessel, likewise rejoined them. On the road they had met the merchant, who reproached them severely for their inhumanity. This would have produced little effect upon them, but as he went on to say that John Mackay was a man of consequence, who very probably might petition the Governor of Calcutta to make a severe example of them, they took his words greatly to heart, and from that moment treated him with the greatest marks of respect. But he contemptuously repulsed their tardy politeness, contenting himself with accepting the guide’s offer to carry his bag of rice.

Next day they arrived on the banks of a river which, on sounding, they found to be so deep and rapid that its crossing at high tide would be attended with great difficulty. They therefore waited for low tide, and employed these few hours in constructing a raft of bamboos. When the water had gone down, they launched the raft on the river. Five or six Indians swam on either side to steady it and keep it from drifting, and they reached the opposite side without mishap.

John’s limbs grew so stiff that he feared it would again be necessary to leave him behind; but, eventually, his will overcoming his weakness, he arrived at the halting- place almost as soon as the rest of the caravan.

Next day they reached the village where the Hindoos lived. John was so fatigued that he entered the first hut which he found open, throwing himself, with apologies, on a mat, where he slept the same irresistible sleep which had previously overcome him. When he woke, he found himself surrounded by people who, pitying his condition, took him to the Zemindar of the village, by whom he was most cordially received, and orders were given to serve him with all kinds of refreshments.

So little was John accustomed to this compassionate treatment, that he was greatly affected by the attentions of the Zemindar; but learning that this village was only four miles distant from Ramoo, the Company’s first post, and having made the reasonable request to the Zemindar to be furnished with means of transport thither, he was greatly surprised to find that, under pretext of care for his health, the latter made a thousand excuses to detain him, offering, in a fortnight, when he would be quite recovered, to send him to Calcutta in a thirty-oared canoe.

John immediately suspected that this solicitude on the part of the Zemindar, and the great sympathy expressed with his misfortunes were all affected, and that the Zemindar was interested in his being kept away from a town where he could report the circumstances of the shipwreck. On further consideration he became more than ever convinced that, not only was the Zemindar sharing in the plunder, but that he wished to retain the monopoly of it for the future.

The fact was that the cargo, consisting, as we have said, entirely of teak, must be perfectly uninjured, and this offered to the Zemindar’s cupidity an irresistible temptation.

John therefore insisted on the Zemindar’s sending him to Ramoo; but, seeing that the latter was bent upon detaining him by every possible means, he pretended to give way, at the same time preparing to start by himself the next morning.

Just as he was about to leave, the Zemindar came into his hut.

The cunning rascal had guessed his intentions, and now came to meet the matter fairly and squarely, begging John to sign a certificate absolving him from any share in plundering the *Juno*; this certificate, he said, was necessary to prevent the magistrate for the district of Islamabad, who resided at Chittagong, from holding him responsible for what had occurred at the scene of the wreck, and might occur again. On his signing the certificate, the Zemindar would provide him with a canoe to take him to Ramoo or wherever he wished.

John, desirous above all things of getting to Ramoo, signed the certificate as requested, but took care to preface it with a full history of the wreck of the *Juno,* so that the Zemindar could not present this document to the officer in charge at Ramoo without acquainting the latter that there were survivors of the wreck who were in need of help.

The event proved John to be in the right in his mistrust, for next day, instead of being furnished with the promised facilities, it was the Zemindar who started off for Ramoo, furnished with his certificate, which he handed to the Phougedar. This official, seeing that the paper related to shipwrecked British subjects, forwarded it to Lieutenant Towers, in command of a detachment at Ramoo, who summoned the Zemindar, and having questioned him and noticed the shuffling answers he gave, immediately sent John a canoe, an escort, provisions, and money. The commander of the escort was further charged with a letter for John Mackay, who, it may be readily imagined, not having seen the Zemindar again, remained very uneasy in his village.

On the evening of the 22nd, seeing that the promised canoe did not come, and that every time he called on the Zemindar he was told that he was out, John determined at all risks to start for Ramoo the next morning. In order not to arouse suspicion by requisitioning provisions, each of his companions saved a portion of his supper and put it aside for John Mackay, who slept with this food beside him. Everything was arranged for him to get clear off before daybreak; but, just as he was going to sleep, a knock came to his door. It was the escort and the boat which had arrived.

Next morning all the party left the village on their way for Ramoo, which they reached about mid-day. Lieutenant Towers was at the landing-stage awaiting the castaways, whom he took immediately to his own house, providing Mrs. Bremner with an apartment to herself, and disposing of the others in the building. For three days he would not allow them to do anything but get up their health and strength, and during these three days, says John Mackay, he waited on us, doctored us, and even cooked for us.

On the 26th the party were embarked in two canoes, and on the 28th they arrived at Chittagong, where Lieutenant Price was in command. Here they were received and treated as at Ramoo, Lieutenant Price doing for them what Lieutenant Towers had done before. After a day’s rest, which he greatly needed, John Mackay appeared before Mr. Thomson, District Judge for Islamabad, before whom he made a declaration. The Judge immediately sent a guard to the wrecked vessel to stop further plundering.

A full account of all that had taken place was signed by Mrs. Bremner, the Captain’s widow, John Mackay, second mate, and Thomas Johnson, gunner, and sent to the ship’s owners at Madras. A week later, on the 8th of August, feeling pretty strong again, John Mackay started to return to the

Juno and save what was left. He embarked on a canoe, taking with him carpenter’s and all other necessary tools.

On the 12th he arrived at Ramoo, where he rested at Lieutenant Towers’s house; on the 14th he proceeded on his journey in a palanquin; and on the 17th he reached the bay where the ship struck, which he named Juno Bay.

Two huts were constructed, and next day they commenced stacking the timber on the shore. When this work was finished, the hull was set on fire and the iron collected, this being the only remaining object of any value.

About the beginning of November, Captain Galloway, ship *Restoration*, arrived in the bay, sent from Calcutta to load the iron and the timber. On the 25th everything was stowed, and the same day the *Restoration*, with John Mackay on board, sailed for Calcutta, where she arrived in safety on the 12th of December, 1795.

Now, if the reader wishes to know, after reading the account of this terrible disaster, what became of the principal persons who figured in it, we will tell him.

John Mackay, completely recovered from the effects of his sufferings, was, in the beginning of 1796, appointed to command one of the Company’s ships, which ship sailed for Europe and arrived in August, 1796.

Mrs. Bremner recovered her health and strength, grew more beautiful and charming than ever, and made an excellent marriage.

Lastly, the boy who had such a dread of tigers, dreading the sea equally, and with more reason, settled at Chittagong, where he lived and died in the honest avocation of a travelling merchant, — an avocation selected, no doubt, in remembrance of those Portuguese merchants who had so generously assisted him and John Mackay on the evening when they had been cruelly abandoned by the Hindoos.

THE END

THE SCOURGE OF NAPLES

Translated by Alfred Allinson

First published in 1862, this journalistic article was very likely written by Dumas during his long residence at Naples from 1860 to 1864.

THE SCOURGE OF NAPLES.

I.

NAPLES possesses a glorious sky, a pellucid air, an azure sea. Its climate is perfect, except when the wind is due north, or due south. Naples has its promontory of Posilippo, its gulf of Baja, its oysters of Lake Fusaro to the west; it has Vesuvius, Pompeii, Castellamare, Sorrento to the east. But Naples has a scourge that utterly spoils all these beauties and delights.

Is it typhus, cholera, yellow fever?

No, these are only plagues, and what I write about is a scourge, a curse. The curse of Naples is mendicancy.

Given mendicancy, such as it exists at Naples, an earthly paradise becomes a hell.

The first thing that grips the traveller by the throat as he lands at the Custom-house Quay, is mendicancy.

You do not recognize the evil thing at first sight until you are actually in the Street of Toledo or of Santa Lucia; you will find at first it wears a veil of decency. To begin with, in the Custom-house, the Customs officer, as he searches your box, shows you the palm of his hand. Then you come on a soldier; the man, if you have a bit of ribbon in your button-hole, or failing that, a good coat and well-brushed boots, will present arms to you and hint at a gratuity.

The facchino, who tears your handbags away from you by force, and carries them to your conveyance, begins the whine for charity.

The coachman again, overpaid doubly and trebly as he will be through your ignorance of the proper fare, is not satisfied with robbery, but asks for more.

At the entrance to your hotel, your torments cease; the waiters, so neatly dressed, so clean and smart, are too well drilled to beg on your arrival. They will await your departure.

There you are, smiling and happy! you have had a more or less stormy passage, and are glad to feel dry land under your feet again. The earth certainly still seems to rock a little like the boat; but your reason shows you how impossible this is, knowing, as you do, that the double motion of the earth, that through space round the sun, and that of the diurnal revolution on its axis, imparts no sense of movement to the beings which dwell upon the globe. You thus become reassured as to your equilibrium, you open your window, lean over the balcony and repeat the sacred, traditional, everlasting words, "See Naples and die."

Poor fond tourist, how I pity thee!

Pardon me, dear traveller, for saying this. I do not know you, yet I treat you as a familiar friend. You must forgive me. The love I bear my neighbour, and the sorrow I feel at the sight of injured innocence, must be my excuse. You are then in your balcony, looking at the sea, at Vesuvius, at the houses of Castellamare which adorn the seashore and at those of Sorrento which dot the orange groves with white. Capri then catches your eye for a moment, and you are thinking of Tiberius, of Sir Hudson Lowe, of General Lamarque, of the Blue Grotto, when suddenly you become conscious of a murmur rising from the street below. The sound is not that of the brook, babbling among its pebbles, nor quite that of the leaves, rustling in the wind; the tones are monotonous, nasal, plaintive, such as you have heard nowhere else. You look down and see half a score of paupers who hold up to you, one, the stump of an arm; another, half a leg; a third, the battered remnants of a hat. What you are listening to is a prayer, in which you are addressed as *Eccelenza,* and besought to give, a *grano.* It is the first time you have been called Your Excellency, and as the title tickles your vanity, you deem it worth double the price demanded.

You throw down a silver tengrano piece, and call out *"Per tutti,"* delighted to be able to show the dirty vagabonds below what you have been impressing on the Customs officer, on the hotel manager, and on his waiters, namely, that you know Italian.

Your ten poor petitioners throw themselves in a heap on the piece of money and struggle for it. Instead of sharing it between them, the strongest man keeps it all, and the murmur grows into a storm.

Then all chatter to Your Excellency at once, all clamour, all shout, all weep, all sigh, all groan; and the whole seething mass twists, writhes, gathers in a crowd, separates again, and goes through such horrible contortions, that you see before you, in anticipation, the Gehenna of Holy Writ.

You feel deep pity for all this misery. But since, while it excites pity, it also almost turns your stomach, you throw down a second coin, saying, still in the soft Italian tongue you love to pronounce, “Very well! Fight it out among yourselves!”

And you shut your window, reflecting that the distant view from Naples may be truly glorious, but the foreground is hideous.

“I will go and see the more distant landscape,” say you. You ring; a waiter answers the bell; you demand a carriage.

“In ten minutes’ time it shall be here, your Excellency,” says the attendant.

You pass the ten minutes in arranging your necktie, in brushing your hair and adjusting your eyeglasses accurately on the bridge of your nose. The carriage is announced, and you go down stairs.

At the door, you find awaiting you, not some dozen beggars, but a whole army of mendicants. The word has been passed that, at a certain hotel, a distinguished *forestiere* is staying, who gives alms. The lawful and the lawless, the cripples in tubs, the tattered on crutches, the deaf, the blind, the lepers, have gathered from far and near. You are no longer your Excellency — that is too common a title — you are now your Royal Highness the Prince.

This second patent of nobility costs you yet another piece of silver. From that time forth you are lost! You have put in practice one of the Christian virtues, you have followed the Gospel precept, and given alms of what you possess.

For you Naples has become that tenth circle of the Nether Hell, into the depths of which Dante himself dared not plunge.

II.

Let us suppose, dear reader, that you have been a week in Naples, and that, having seen all the sights of the town and its neighbourhood, you now go out only for your own amusement: to dream day dreams, to lounge in your carriage, to collect your thoughts, to commune with yourself or with God.

Probably now, when coming out of your hotel, when walking through the army of beggars, which has been growing larger day by day, and which grumbles if you do not give enough, and threatens you if you give nothing; probably, I say, at this period of your stay, you will shout to your coachman as loud as you can, “Go on! Go on!”

You have given up speaking Italian, you have proclaimed far and wide your ignorance of the language. To every word addressed to you in the beggar’s whine, you answer in forbidding accents: “*Non capisco* “(I do not understand). This is your second manner.

At Naples, the foreigner has three different styles, like Raphael. At first, he gives money to the Customs officer, to the sentries, to the porters, to the cabbies, to the beggars. First manner.

After this, he answers every voice that implores, every hand that is outstretched, every hat that pesters him, every clatter of the beggar’s box, with the one phrase, *“Non capisco.”* Second manner.

At last, however, he swears, rages, thunders, pours out every term of abuse he knows, borrows the coachman’s whip, and lays about him. This is the third manner.

You, my dear tourist! Allow me to call you *my dear* tourist, for we have been friends for ten days. At Naples, after ten days’ acquaintance, we do not ask you to dinner, for at Naples people never do ask each other to dine, but we address you by your Christian name or nickname.

Well my dear tourist, to resume, you are so far only at the second manner. So you say to your driver “Go on! Go on!” in your native tongue.

The driver starts at a gallop, but presently goes slower and slower. As he gets to the entrance to the Chiaja, under pretence of falling into single file, although there is not another vehicle in sight, he drops into a walk. Just after passing the Hotel Vittoria, when your horses have got half-way round the square, and have their heads pointing towards the Grotto of Pozzuoli, your carriage is suddenly surrounded by virtue of some inexplicable strategical manoeuvre, not as at Florence with flower girls — this would not be very disagreeable, for some of these pretty merchants are as charming and fresh as their own bouquets — but by dirty men selling flowers, who hang on to your carriage, stand on the steps, climb over the back seats, and push their bouquets into your face. You have been a purchaser of bouquets for four days. The first day you have given a piastre for each nosegay; the second day a ducat; the third, half a ducat; the fourth, ten granos.

On the fifth day you see that flowers are very cheap at Naples, while the camellias have wire stalks and the violets have no scent, and you take a dislike to all flowers; then, when you are pursued by flowers, you fly from them, and finding that they follow faster than you can flee, you take to hating flowers. You detest, you curse, you excommunicate all flowers.

And yet, you know well how sweet a thing is a flower, when, instead of being forced upon you by an ugly, dirty pedlar, it is given by a soft, white hand; when it holds, mingled with its own perfume, that of the fair lips which have touched it, and carries, hidden in its tender petals, the memory of a loving kiss.

Well, then, here is another illusion of yours vanished. You have been four days in Naples, and you hate flowers. And why? Because they are pressed on you by the hideous beggar horde. Oh, but do not despair! Let some fairy carry you to a meadow of Touraine, to the pasture lands of Normandy, or to a roadside hedge in *La Vendée*, and you would soon, with childish glee, be gathering nosegays of daisies, buttercups, and periwinkles.

You escape from the flower sellers and continue your drive. In Margellina you pass between living hedges of beggars. But you shut your eyes and avoid the sight of them, and fortunately they cannot follow you, for your carriage travels fast over the level road; moreover, it is the lame beggars’ district. But at the Villa Barbaja the road ascends, and your driver brings his horses to a walk.

Any excuse is good enough for the Neapolitan driver to make his horses walk. The road is uphill, the road is downhill, the road is paved, the road is sandy, the road is winding. It is always the fault of the road, never that of the horses.

Directly the horses come to a walk, a tribe of troglodytes appears from among the quarries in the hills. There are children of all ages from three to twelve. The youngest, from three to five years, pretend to cry. Others, from five to seven years of age, call out to you that they have had nothing to eat since last night. Others, from seven to nine years, play castanettes with their chins. Lastly, the biggest of all turn cartwheels. Of those who possess neither musical nor gymnastic talents, some cry “Viva Garibaldi “and some “Viva Cialdini,” so that all may be pleased and both sets of opinion may be fairly represented.

You are terribly tempted to get out of your carriage and smash up at least one of these young scamps. It is not philanthropy which keeps you seated on your cushions; it is nothing but the fear of consequences; you feel that if only capital punishment were abolished, you would gladly run the risk of the galleys. At last you get past them. All goes well till you get to the top of the hill. As you begin the descent, at a turn in the road, you come on a hidden house, lying as it were in ambush, with an open door. It is a fresh blockhouse of the enemy, garrisoned by little girls. These latter cannot turn cartwheels, but they address you as “Your Highness,” and the lady who accompanies you, if there is one, as “Beautiful Princess.”

You can get along faster as you are going downhill. You call out to your driver “Gallop!”

You leave behind all these ragged brats who have spoilt for you one of the most beautiful views of Naples, that of the bay of Pozzuoli from Nisida to Cape Miseno, as seen from the summit of Posilippo. Your coachman slackens speed again; look out for squalls. A quarry pit comes in sight on your left hand, a sort of hermit comes up from it. This holy man enjoys a very doubtful reputation; when night falls and the road is unfrequented, he likes, they say, to see the time by travellers’ watches and to count the money they may carry in their purses. He comes forward now and quietly plants himself in the middle of the road. The first three days you met him, you gave him something; this time, in consequence of the evil stories you have heard about him, you simply say to your driver, “Whip up the horses! “The coachman obeys your orders unwillingly. The Neapolitan coachmen have a great weakness for their begging compatriots, because it is their fares, and not they themselves, who have to pay the money. The good hermit, to avoid being run over, gets out of the way, grumbling as he goes. If you are obliged to repass his cave by night, take care to carry a good revolver.

A hundred paces further you come on a board painted white, and lettered in French as follows:

GROTTE DE SEJAN (Sejanus’ Grotto)
CONDUISANT A L’ECUEIL DE VIRGILE (leading to Virgil’s Rock)

Here is something for us to argue about with the authorities responsible for the inscription. How is it that in Naples, the town of the learned, the learned are not clever enough to know that this grotto is simply the tunnel made by Lucullus as a road from one side of the mountain to the other — that is, from his villa of Pausilippus to his Island of Nisida — and that

Sejanus, the Minister of Tiberius, and lover of his master’s daughter-in-law, never had anything to do with making it, bored, as it was, by the magnificent conqueror of Mithridates? So much for the first line, “*Grotte de Séjan.”*

As for the second line of the legend, the artist in calligraphy who adorned the board with these majestic capitals translated *scuola* (school) by *écueil* (a rock); he was quite at liberty to do so: but, again, I appeal to authority and common sense. You are promised the sight of Virgil’s Rock, and you expect to see a rock, on which the author of the “Aeneid “may have suffered shipwreck, perhaps on his return from the journey to Brindisi, or on his way home from Athens. Instead of this, you are shown one of those circular seats to which the Ancients gave the name of schools, because three or four chatterers they called philosophers, seated upon them, used to be listened to by a dozen simpletons they called disciples.

In a learned city like Naples, such gross mistakes ought not to be tolerated. All very well for France, for, as everybody knows, all Frenchmen are uneducated boors, a fact your Neapolitan especially is firmly convinced of. As for Lucullus, who had the tunnel made, or of his house, not a word is said of either.

If you were to talk of the house of Lucullus with the two cicerones who show you the Grotto of Sejanus, probably they would answer you as a native of Frankfort replied to me when I asked to be shown the house of Goethe.

“Sir, I do not know the house; it is probably one that has left off business, or that has become bankrupt.”

Here we have another kind of mendicancy; only this is more serious than the other sort, seeing that it is carried on under a Government guarantee, for the sole benefit of two ignorant, lazy rascals. We hereby request the Minister for Public Instruction to do so much for science as to change the reading of the signboard in question, and instead of the words — ” Grotto of Sejanus, leading to Virgil’s Rock,” to have the following inscribed: “The Grotto of Lucullus, leading to a circular seat, commonly called (without any historical foundation) the School of Virgil.”

III.

As you have now seen the Grotto of Lucullus under the name of the Grotto of Sejanus, and a circular seat called Virgil's Rock, which has no inscription or bas-relief to attract your attention; as, except two amphitheatres, one of which is marvellously rich and elegant, and the villa of Lucullus, which no one has said a word about, although it is not without some merit of its own; as, except the above mentioned, you have not seen any striking curiosities, you return again through the famous tunnel, in the clearing of which Ferdinand II. spent seventy-four thousand ducats (thereby proving his enlightened taste for art), and you continue your route along the road you had temporarily left, to visit the further side of Posilippo.

Here, we must give the scene the credit of being quiet and peaceful. Except for three or four fat, plump urchins who await your arrival at the foot of the hill and run alongside crying: "*Morti di fame!*" in tones of direst distress; except, also, for a refreshment vendor, who plants his table in the middle of the road and insists on your getting down to eat Fusaro oysters, you drive on for about two miles without anything to disturb you.

But about five hundred yards from Pozzuoli, three or four loafers get up from the side of the road, where they are sitting; one offers you a miniature Egyptian idol, another an old coin, and a third cries:

"The Temple of Serapis, your Excellency! "The man with the Egyptian god and the man with the antique coin give you up after a run of from a hundred to a hundred and fifty yards, according to whether your carriage goes faster or slower. But this is not at all the case with the servitor of the Temple of Serapis. As the abode of the god of health is at the further side of the town, while you have not yet passed Pozzuoli, and have not taken the road to Baja, he hopes to practise his trade on you. Nothing discourages him; he lays hold of your carriage, adapts his pace to that of the horses and, whatever you may say to drive him away, he repeats in a voice which becomes more and more breathless:

"Temple of Serapis, Excellency! Temple of Serapis! "You shout at him, in Italian this time: "I have been at your Temple of Serapis, I know it — I have seen your columns, with their lithophagons, I know them by heart — I have tasted your mineral spring — I know it, I know it all perfectly, I tell you, I tell you."

This time, it is the man’s turn not to understand Tuscan, so he repeats again in Neapolitan:

“Temple of Serapis! — Temple of Serapis!

As you draw near Pozzuoli, the first-grade beggars reappear.

We will, by your leave, proceed to classify the beggars of Naples into three degrees or grades.

First Grade — Beggars asking for alms.

Second Grade — Beggars seeking by force or strategy to show you antiquities or to sell you green idols or rusty medallions.

Third Grade — Beggars soliciting posts of emolument, decorations, or Court favours.

Perhaps you will say I ought to have numbered the grades of beggars in the inverse order.

By all that’s righteous, No! I put the beggar who insists on selling you his green idol, or his rusty coin, above the beggar who would sell his conscience or his vote; and far below the beggar who implores the passer-by, be he French or English, to throw him a *grano* I class the mendicant who begs a chamberlain’s key, a crown of honour, or the portfolio of a Minister, from Francis II. or from Victor Emmanuel. I hold, therefore, to my system of numbering. To me the professional office-seeker is the very lowest class of mendicant.

Pardon me for my digression, or rather for the recitation of my creed.

Let us return to the first-grade beggars.

Beware of a little chapel on the left of the road, containing a group in earthenware representing Christ on the Cross, blood dropping from every wound, and at His feet a gentleman dressed in a bottle-green coat and holding up his child to look at the distressing sight. It is there that you will find the first-grade beggars, awaiting you in force, provided with a money box, which they rattle as they beg.

You enter Pozzuoli with a princely escort in the middle of a symphony of laments tuned to every note in the gamut, from lower F to upper D: “Dying of hunger,”

“Pity a poor blind man,”

“Do not forget an unhappy cripple,”

“Spare a copper for a widow with eleven children,”

“Charity to an old man of seventy-four years of age whose parents are entirely dependent on his exertions! “And above all the chorus sounds the voice of your cicerone crying “Temple of Serapis! Temple of Serapis! Temple of Serapis! “But worst of all, you find the gateway blocked by empty carriages, waiting there to snap up travellers, as spiders lie in wait to pounce on flies. The police could easily force them into ranks on each side of the road, so as to leave a way in the middle; everybody would feel the benefit of the regulation, none more so than the drivers themselves. But there! there are no police in Pozzuoli, and never have been, since Sylla, to assuage the pains of death, had the Syndic strangled for refusing to pay his contribution to the State.

Having got through the gate, you think your horses will be able to trot on again. Ah well, yes! but then the road is up in the village of Pozzuoli. I cannot quite understand the phenomenon, but for some reason or other the paving stones are always in process of being taken up there and never being relaid. Then you begin to see that, whether you like it or not, you must get out of your carriage, put your hands inside your pockets and hold your handkerchief tight if you blow your nose, grasp your box firmly if you would take a pinch of snuff, and never let go of your purse if there is any money in it. A gentleman of great respectability and veracity told me that once he had his spectacles stolen off his nose. As he was extremely shortsighted, when his spectacles were gone, he could not see the thief, and this was the end of his glasses.

Thus you find yourself plunged into a jostling crowd of beggars, paviors, pickpockets, asses, mules, sellers of eggs or carrots, sham cicerones who want to take you, the one to the cathedral, the other to the amphitheatre, coachmen who vociferate “Baja, Mare Morto, Lago Fusaro!” and still you hear, above all these shouts, the voice of your original cicerone, who is yelling, “Temple of Serapis! Temple of Serapis! Temple of Serapis!”

Four men lay hold of your carriage, they steady it, push it, lift it; they are not enough; two more join them, making six in all. You lose half an hour’s time, but at last a paved street is reached. This is blocked by a barricade! Why a barricade? Surely we live in the piping times of peace. The object of it is, that five or six urchins, who have constructed the barricade to prevent you from passing, may take it down again to allow you to pass.

The men who carry, who push, who support your carriage and the boys who construct and demolish the barricade are only two varieties of the great corporation of beggars. Put your hand in your pocket; if you have given nothing to those who have done nothing for you, some remuneration is at least due to those who have worked in your service.

You again get into your carriage, the sweat of your brow running down; there are some thirty beggars surrounding you.

Your horses humanely refuse to move; they cannot take a step without treading on a man, a woman, or a child.

Then it is that, exasperated, out of your mind, panting, furious with rage, you seize the coachman’s whip and lay about you among the mob. This is the tourist’s third manner. The horses start off again at a trot; at last you think yourself free from all the vermin, you draw a long breath, you venture on a long-drawn “Ah!” of relief. All of a sudden you catch, almost in your ear, “Temple of Serapis! Temple of Serapis! Temple of Serapis! “It is your cicerone, who has entrenched himself upon the box- seat of your carriage, and who braves you with impunity from that point of vantage. You will not get rid of him before you get to the Lucrine Lake.

IV.

You have been told, have you not, that the dogs of Constantinople are divided into distinct communities; that each dog as long as he remains in his own’ district is an independent member of his republic, but that if he dares to cross the border, he is immediately torn to pieces by the dogs of the neighbouring community. It is just the same with the cicerones.

The cicerone of the Temple of Serapis leaves you at the Lucrine Lake, because he is then on the preserves of the cicerones who show Nero’s Ovens, the Wonderful Fishpond, and the ruins of Baiaa. Then you watch him returning thence on foot, and quite out of countenance, to Pozzuoli, where he will seek for another traveller more gullible than you. You have your revenge!

But in vain do you flatter yourself you have reached the end of your expedition, that is, the old castle of Baja, which guards the passage from the Gulf to the little Creek of Bauli.

The castle is there, like the City of the Iron Gates, which bars the road from Russia to Persia.

But at Naples stone walls are not difficult obstacles to surmount. “No town is impregnable, if you can get a mule with a load of gold into it,” was a maxim of King Philip, father of Alexander the Great. You will be able to force the gates of Baise at a cheaper rate than this. Take a half piastre out of your pocket, and the feat is accomplished. No, the walls which are difficult to break through at Naples are the walls of men, the living ramparts.

Arrived at the extremity of the Lucrine Lake, you will find a triple line of fortification.

The first: Cicerones showing Nero’s Ovens.

The second: Cicerones showing the Wonderful Fishpond.

The third: Cicerones showing the Temples of Venus Genetrix, of Mercury, and of Diana Lucifera, which, as a matter of fact, are not temples at all, but baths.

There, whether you will or no, even if it is your tenth visit, you are forced to get on a man’s back and ride him through the subterranean passages; you are obliged to run the risk of apoplexy in Nero’s Ovens, and while waiting for the egg, which a broken-winded guide cooks for you in the boiling water, you must listen to his absurd description of the Wonderful Fishpond, which is neither more nor less than the magnificent reservoir which used to supply fresh water to the Grotto of Misenum. After that you are dragged to the Temples of Venus Genetrix, of Mercury and of Diana Lucifera, which, as I have said, are nothing else than the ruins of those enervating baths which caused Propertius to fear for his mistress Cynthia’s sojourn at Baiee. Well then, of this again I say, the matter is one which concerns the Aedile’s Court and the Office of Public Instruction. It is a disgrace to both institutions that foreigners should come away from Baiae with erroneous legends foisted on them by cicerones licensed by the Government.

It is not the business of the authors of the *Corricolo,* as the learned M. Niccolini calls us, to set them right.

As the port of Baja is about as far as your hired horses can take you, you stop for a few minutes to admire the beautiful bay of which Horace says:

Nullus in orbe sinus Baiis prælucet amœnis.

Then getting into your carriage to return, you ask if there is no way of avoiding Pozzuoli. Pozzuoli is unavoidable. You go through Pozzuoli again; you find awaiting you, not the cicerones, for they are on the road from

Naples, but your mendicants, your barricade and your carriage porters. Only, this time, as the road beyond the town is downhill, you order the driver to go fast. He whips up his horses, sighing as he does it, and in the twinkling of an eye you reach the establishment of the oyster man.

At this point the road divides into two. Not for anything in the world would you again go through the martyrdom you suffered in coming, so you say — ” Go by the Grotto of Pozzuoli.” The driver takes the left road and you arrive at the Grotto of Pozzuoli. The Grotto of Pozzuoli resembles the turnstiles at the Louvre in this: you can only go through at a walking pace. As you come out, two beggars spring up at the horses’ heads. One rattles a money box and cries, “Give to the Madonna.” The Madonna — *honi soit qui mal y pense* — lies in the former Temple of Priapus, whence came the two harpies immortalized by Petronius.

The other is there to show you, willy-nilly, Virgil’s Tomb, which perhaps is no more the tomb of Virgil than Virgil’s rock is Virgil’s school.

You give your alms to the Madonna, you climb up, for the fourth or fifth time, to the tomb of Virgil. He must be at least a fairly great poet, considering you have to make so many different pilgrimages to his ashes. You once more pass by your flower-sellers, through your mendicants, and you reach your hotel, bruised, weary, ground to powder, paralysed, impotent, dead, assassinated!

Assassinated by whom? By the hordes of beggars.

Henceforth, there is for you no more the limpid sea, the bright clear air, the deep blue sky; no more for you is Vesuvius, or Pompeii, Castellamare, Sorrento, Capri; for you there is no Chiaja, no Posilippo, no Margellina, no Gulf of Pozzuoli, no Bay of Baja; nothing is left you but a hideous spectre, a gibbering ghost, a foul phantom, a fury, a shrew, a harpy; in one word, Mendicancy! And you say:

“Yes, I will away; I will leave the land; I will escape the fiends! For me, better are the frozen plains of Siberia, better the burning sands of the Sahara, better the mistral, the sirocco, the khamsin, better the mountain blast that drove Gastibelza mad, or the icy breeze of Madrid that will not blow out a candle yet will kill its man; better all and any of these than Naples with its Bay, its sky, its climate, its Vesuvius — and its beggars!”

PRUSSIAN TERROR

Translated by R.S. Garnett

This non-fiction work was first published in 1867. As early as 1848, Dumas warned his countrymen of the Prussian military threat; but the warnings were disregarded. In 1866, at the close of the short Seven Weeks War, Dumas went to Frankfort and visited the battlefields. Following this he wrote *La Terreur Prussienne* with the intention of awakening the French to the danger at their doors. It was no more successful than the earlier efforts, though Dumas did not live to know of the defeats of 1870-71.

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INTRODUCTION

“The enemy passed beneath our window and then out of view. A moment afterwards we heard the sound as it were of a hurricane; the house trembled to the gallop of horses. At the end of the street the enemy had been charged by our cavalry; and, not knowing our small numbers, they were returning at full speed hotly pursued by our men. Pell-mell they all passed by — a whirlwind of smoke and noise. Our soldiers fired and slashed away, the enemy on their side fired as they fled. Two or three bullets struck the house, one of them shattering a bar of the window-shutter through which I was looking on. The spectacle was at once magnificent and terrible. Pursued too closely the enemy had decided to face about, and there, twenty paces from us, was going on a combat life for life. I saw five or six of the enemy fall, and two or three of our men. Then, defeated after a ten minutes’ struggle, the enemy trusted themselves again to the swiftness of their horses, and cleared off at full gallop. The pursuit recommenced, the whirlwind resumed its course, leaving, before it disappeared, three or four men strewn on the pavement. Suddenly we heard the drum beating to the charge. It was our hundred infantry soldiers who were coming up in their turn. They marched with fixed bayonets and disappeared at the bend of the road. Five minutes later we heard a sharp platoon firing. Then we saw our hussars reappearing, driven by five or six hundred cavalry; they reappeared the pursued, as they had started the pursuers. Amid this second tempest of men it was impossible to see or distinguish anything; only, when it was past, three or four dead bodies more lay stretched on the ground.”

The boy who saw these scenes, to record them in his Memoirs many years later, was living with his mother at Villers-Cotterets, on the Soissons road in the Aisne, where fierce fighting between our little army and our allies the French on the one hand, and the Germans on the other, is taking place as these lines are being written. The time was 1814. Napoleon had retreated from Moscow and had lost the battle of Leipzig, and the Russians, Prussians, and Austrians in alliance were gradually closing in on France. All confidence in Napoleon’s star had disappeared. Every hour was bringing the roar of cannon nearer to Paris: in a few days the Allies were to enter it and Napoleon to sign the decree of abdication and leave for Elba.

The name of the boy was Alexandre Dumas. His mother had filled her cellar with furniture, bedding, and household goods, and had then had a new plank floor made for the room above, so that treasure seekers might look in vain, and had buried her little store of money in a box in the middle of the garden. She was as much in terror of Napoleon as she was of the Prussian and Russian troops. If her own countrymen, the French, were beaten, she and her son might be killed, but if Napoleon was victorious he would want her son as a soldier. Now Alexandre was twelve and conscription began at sixteen.

The boy’s father, General Alexandre Dumas, was dead, and as on account of his republican principles the First Consul had disgraced, exiled, and ruined him, so by the Emperor the widow and her son were disowned, forgotten and left to starve. In spite of this Madame Dumas’s neighbours called her a Bonapartist, her husband having fought under Bonaparte, and the term Bonapartist was one which was presently to amount to an accusation as Louis XVIII neared the throne.

The enemy seen by the boy fighting in the street were Prussians — Prussians long expected by his mother, who had made three successive enormous dishes of haricot mutton for their pacification. Although young Alexandre had partaken of the mutton and thought very little of the threatened danger before it occurred, he never forgot the sudden Prussian inroad and the dead men left outside this door. And he often said that the Valley of the Aisne might see the Prussians again.

In 1848, when a candidate for the Chamber of Deputies, Dumas lost many votes by making a speech in the course of which, when passing the state of Europe in review, he said. “Geographically, Prussia has the shape of a serpent, and like a serpent it seems always to sleep and prepare to swallow everything around it — Denmark, Holland, and Belgium; and when it has engulfed them all you will see that Austria will pass in its turn and perhaps, alas! France also.”

In June 1866 Prussia’s rapid campaign against Austria startled Europe. Every thoughtful man was calculating the consequences of the preponderance of Prussia in Germany, and Dumas was one of those Frenchmen who were seized with sad presentiments of the future for their own country. Particularly does he appear to have been struck with the barbarous conduct of the Prussians in the free city of Frankfort which the newspapers were daily reporting. Unable to remain at home while such events were occurring, he travelled to Frankfort and observed them for himself. Then he went to Gotha, Hanover, and Berlin; he visited the battlefields of Langensalza and Sadowa and returned to Paris with his notebooks crammed with precious details, his pockets bulging with unpublished documents.

Then M. Hollander, the owner of the political journal “The Situation,” came running to the author of “The Three Musketeers,” “Queen Margot,” and of so many other famous historical romances to ask for one to be called “The Prussian Terror.” Dumas, who like M. Hollander was anxious to do all he could to arouse France, fast crumbling under the Second Empire, to a sense of her danger from Prussia, gladly complied. Such is the genesis of this book in which on every page the author seems to say — ”Awake! the danger is at hand.”

To render it more easily intelligible to readers of the present day who appear to us to know very little of the Austro-Prussian War of 1866, let us glance at the important events which the newspaper proprietor and the historical romancer had in mind.

The death of the King of Denmark occurred in 1863 and North Germany buzzed like a swarm of angry bees over the Duchies of Schleswig, Holstein, and Luxemburg. By the treaty of London (1852), which fixed the succession to the Danish Crown, Austria and Prussia, although signatories to it, denied the right of the new king to those duchies and claimed them as part of Germany. In February 1864 Austrian and Prussian troops crossed the Danish border. The Danes fought well, but were forced to submit and eventually the duchies were made over to their enemies.

Then Prussia, which had long looked with jealousy on the power of Austria and considered a war with her inevitable sooner or later, opposed her desire to form the duchies into a separate state under the Duke of Augustenburg. Austria referred the matter to the Frankfort Diet, which decided in favour of the duke, but Bismarck, as Prussia’s Prime Minister, to secure the complete control of North Germany, required that, not only the duchies but the whole of Hanover, Hesse Cassel, Hesse Nassau, and the city of Frankfort should be absorbed in Prussia. Both Prussia and Austria prepared for war, Prussia entering into an alliance with Victor Emanuel. On June 7th Prussian troops entered Holstein.

On June 14th, in regard to the decisive question whether the federal army should be mobilized, Hanover voted in the Diet with Austria, and by so doing irrevocably declared on which side she would range herself in the approaching struggle. Prussia at once issued an ultimatum to Hanover, requesting her to maintain neutrality and to accept her scheme for the reformation of the Confederation. Hanover immediately rejected these demands and Prussian troops at once crossed the frontier. The resulting battles are known as those of Langensalza and Aschaffenburg. The Austrians were disastrously defeated in the terrific battle of Sadowa or Kénigsrétz, and Bismarck was thus nearer to the formation of German Unity under Prussia.

After Sadowa, the first act of the Prussians was to enter the "free" city of Frankfort, which did not attempt any defence, relying as it did on its treaties, and terrorise its inhabitants. It was these "acts of terror," then, of which M. Hollander and Dumas were particularly thinking, hoping that the recital of them in a popular romance would do something to awaken France.

It has been repeatedly stated that before the Franco-German War of 1870 the German soldiers were guiltless of acts of atrocity. This story proves the contrary, and it is not a little curious that no work in the English language, save books of reference, covering the ground traversed by "The Prussian Terror," appears to be now accessible. For this reason alone Dumas's book, which, though in story form, is an authoritative contribution to history, deserves attention at the present time. Apart from this, it is so spirited and interesting that it is quite surprising that at so late a date — forty-seven years after its original issue — I should be the first to offer a version to the British public.

Dumas was still living in Paris when, in the summer of 1869, war was declared with Germany. His health was now bad, and his son, the author of "La Dame aux Camélias," did not wish him to remain during the siege. In the autumn he took his father with him to Puys near Dieppe, where he had a villa. There Dumas died on December 5th, 1870.

He did not know it — news being kept from him — but during his last days his worst prognostications had been verified. A detachment of the Prussian army was actually taking possession of Dieppe as he breathed his last. While the soldiers marched along the streets, their bands playing German airs and the inhabitants hid in their houses behind shuttered windows, the news flew round the town that the country had lost Alexandre Dumas, the most typically French writer who has ever existed. The coffin was borne to the grave at Neuville, where the German soldiers were in occupation, before a Prussian patrol. In 1872 the body was exhumed, and buried in the family tomb at Villers-Cotterets. Hard by, where as a boy of twelve Dumas heard the Prussian cannon, three nations are now fighting.

R.S. GARNETT.

CHAPTER I

BERLIN

The architect of Berlin appears to have carefully designed his plan according to line and rule in order to produce a capital of dullness as far removed from the picturesque as his ingenuity could accomplish. Seen from the cathedral, which is the loftiest point attainable, the place suggests an enormous chess-board on which the Royal Palace, the Museum, Cathedral, and other important buildings fairly represent kings, queens, and castles. And, much as Paris is intersected by the Seine, so is Berlin divided by the Spree, except that instead of surrounding one island, as does the former river, two artificial canals branch out right and left like the handles of a vase, and form two islands of unequal size in the centre of the town. Berlin being the capital of Privilege, one of these islands is distinguished by possessing the Royal Palace, the Cathedral, the Museum, the Bourse, most other public buildings, and a score of houses which in Turin, the Berlin of Italy, would certainly be called palaces; the other contains nothing remarkable, corresponding to the Parisian Rue Saint-Jacques and the quarter Saint-André-des-Arts.

The aristocratic, the smart Berlin lies to the right and left of the Friedrich Strasse, which extends from the Place de La Belle Alliance by which one enters Berlin to that of Oranienburg by which one leaves it, and which is crossed nearly in the middle by the Unter den Linden. This famous promenade traverses the fashionable quarter and extends from the Royal Palace to the Place d’Armes. It owes its name to two rows of magnificent lime trees which form a charming promenade on each side of the broad carriage-way. Both sides abound in cafés and restaurants, whose crowds of customers, overflowing in summer on to the public road, cause a considerable amount of lively motion. This, however, never rises into noisy horse-play or clamour, for the Prussian prefers to amuse himself *sub rosa*, and keeps his gaiety within doors.

But on June 7th, 1866, as beautiful a day as Prussia can produce, Unter den Linden, at about six in the evening, presented a scene of most unusual commotion. The excitement was caused in the first place by the increasingly hostile attitude assumed by Prussia towards Austria, in refusing to allow the States of Holstein to proceed to the election of the Duke of Augustenburg, also by the general arming on all sides, by reports concerning the immediate calling up of the Landwehr and the dissolution of the Chamber, and finally by rumours of telegrams from France containing threats against Prussia, said to have been made by Louis Napoleon himself.

It is necessary to travel in Prussia before one can in the least comprehend the sort of hatred therein cherished against the French. It is a species of monomania which distorts even the very clearest vision. No minister can be popular, no orator will gain a hearing unless the one lets it be supposed his policy is for war, and the other can produce some brilliant epigram or clever *sous-entendu* levelled against France. Nor will the title of poet be allowed, unless the claimant can qualify by being the author of some popular rhyme, entitled “The Rhine,” “Leipzig,” or “Waterloo.”

Whence comes this hatred for France — a deep, inveterate, indestructible hatred which seems to pervade the very earth and air? It is impossible to say. Can it date from the time when a legion from Gaul, the advanced guard of the Roman army, first entered Germany? Abandoning this idea we come down to the battle of Rosbach as a possible cause, in which case the German national character must be an uncommonly bad one, seeing they beat us there. Still later, it might possibly be explained by the military inferiority shown by the pupils of Frederic the Great ever since the Duke of Brunswick’s famous manifesto threatening that not one stone of Paris should be left on another! One battle, that of Valmy, expelled the Prussians from France in 1792; and another, that of Jena, opened the gates of Berlin to us in 1806. Still, to these dates, our enemies — no, our rivals — can oppose the names of Leipzig and of Waterloo. Of Leipzig, however, they cannot claim more than a quarter, seeing their army was combined with those of Russia, Austria, and Sweden, to say nothing of that of Saxony, which also deserves to be remembered. Nor is more than one-half of Waterloo to their credit, for Napoleon, who till then had the advantage, was already exhausted by a six hours’ struggle with the English when they arrived.

Consequently, remembering this heritage of hate, which, indeed, they have always shown quite openly — one could not be surprised at the popular emotion caused by a rumour, non-official but widely spread, that France would throw down the gauntlet and join in the impending conflict.

Many, however, doubted the news, as not a word of it had appeared in the "Staat's Anzeiger" that morning. Berlin, like Paris, has its faithful adherents to the Government and the "Moniteur," who believe that the latter cannot lie, and that a paternal Government would never, never keep back news interesting to its affectionate subjects. These were joined by the readers of the "Tages Telegraphe" ("Daily Telegraphic News"), certain that their special organ would have known whatever was to be known, and also by those of the ministerial and aristocratic "Kreuz Zeitung," who equally declined to believe anything not contained in its usually well-informed columns. And besides these one heard the names of a dozen other daily or weekly issues bandied from side to side in the excited crowd, until suddenly a harsh cry of "French news! French news! Telegraphic News" "One kreutzer," succeeded in dominating the din.

The effect produced on the crowd may be imagined. Despite the proverbial Prussian economy, every hand sought its pocket and drawing forth a kreutzer, proceeded to exchange it for the square bit of paper containing the long-desired news. And indeed the importance of the contents made amends for the delay in obtaining it. The dispatch ran as follows:

"June 6th, 1866. His Majesty the Emperor Napoleon III, having gone to Auxerre, in order to be present at the provincial assembly, was met at the gates of the town by the mayor, who presented an address, offering the respectful homage of himself and the inhabitants. His Majesty replied in the following terms, which do not require to be explained to our countrymen. Their meaning must be sufficiently clear to all.

"I see with much pleasure that Auxerre still remembers the First Empire. Let me assure you that I, on my side, have inherited the feelings of affection entertained by the Chief of our family for the patriotic and energetic communities which supported him alike through good and evil. And I myself owe a debt of gratitude to the department of the Yonne as being one of the first to declare for me in 1848. It knew, as indeed the greater part of the nation knew, that its interests and mine were identical and that we both equally detested those treaties of 1815, which are used to-day as a means of controlling our external policy."

Here the dispatch broke off, the sender evidently not considering the remainder of the emperor's discourse worth transcribing. Certainly his meaning was sufficiently clear without it. Nevertheless some minutes elapsed before the sense of the communication was understood by the readers, and evoked the display of hatred which naturally followed.

When at last they began to comprehend and to see the hand of the nephew of Napoleon the Great overshadowing their beloved Rhine, there arose from one end of Unter den Linden to the other such a tempest of threats, howls, and hurrahs, that, to borrow Schiller’s lively expression, one would have thought the encircling hoops of the heavenly concave must all be burst asunder. Threatening toasts were called, curses shouted, and fists shaken against offending France. A Géttingen student springing on a table began to recite with due emphasis Réckert’s ferocious poem entitled “The Return,” in which a Prussian soldier, having returned home in consequence of peace being declared, bitterly regrets the various outrages he is in consequence debarred from committing. Needless to say, this recital was enthusiastically applauded. Shouts of “Bravo!” and “Hurrah!” mixed with cries of “Long live King William!” “Hurrah for Prussia!” “Down with France!” formed an accompaniment which would doubtless have been continued to the next piece, the reciter proposing to give a lyric by Theodor Kérner. The announcement was received with loud applause.

It was, however, by no means the only safety valve at which the passion of the surging crowd, now at white heat, sought and found a vent. A little lower down, at the corner of the Friedrich Strasse, a well-known singer happened to be returning from rehearsal, and as he chanced on one occasion to have made a hit by singing “The German Rhine” some one who remembered this raised a cry of “The German Rhine! the German Rhine! Heinrich! sing ‘The German Rhine!’“ The crowd instantly recognized and surrounded the artist, who, owning a fine voice, and being familiar with the piece demanded, did not wait to be asked twice, but gratified his audience by singing his very best, thereby far surpassing the Return in the tremendous reception he obtained.

But all at once a loud and furious hiss which might have issued from the throttle of a steam engine was heard above all the wild applause, and produced the effect of a blow in the face bestowed on the singer. A bomb suddenly exploding in the crowd could hardly have been more effective; the hiss was answered by a dull roar something like that which precedes a hurricane and every eye was turned towards the quarter whence it proceeded.

Standing by a solitary table was a handsome young man, apparently about five-and-twenty, fair-haired, fair-skinned, rather slightly built, and in face, moustache and costume somewhat resembling the portrait of Vandyke. He had just opened a bottle of champagne and held a foaming glass aloft. Undisturbed by angry looks and threatening gestures he drew himself up, placed one foot on his chair, and raising his glass above his head cried loudly, “Vive la France!” then swallowed the contents at one draught.

CHAPTER II

THE HOUSE OF HOHENZOLLERN

The immense crowd surrounding the young Frenchman remained for a moment dumb with stupefaction. Many, not understanding French, failed to comprehend his meaning, and others who did understand, appreciating his courage in thug braving a furious crowd, surveyed him with more astonishment than anger. Others again, who realized that a dire insult had been offered them, would nevertheless with typical German deliberation have allowed him time to escape had he wished. But the young man’s demeanour showed that, whatever the consequences of his bravado, he intended to face them. Presently a threatening murmur of “Franzose, Franzose,” arose from the crowd.

“Yes,” said he, in as good German as might be heard anywhere between Thionville and Memel. “Yes, I am French. My name is Benedict Turpin. I have studied at Heidelberg and might pass for a German since I can speak your language as well as most of those here, and better than some. Also I can use a rapier, pistol, sword, sabre, single-stick, boxing gloves, or any other weapon you like to choose. Any one wishing for satisfaction may find me at the Black Eagle.”

The young man had hardly finished his audacious defiance when four men of the lower class advanced upon him. The crowd kept silence, and the contemptuous words, “What! four to one? Leipzig again! Come on! I am ready!” were distinctly heard. Then, not waiting to be attacked, the young Frenchman sprang at the nearest and broke the bottle of champagne over his head, blinding him with foam. The second he tripped up, throwing him a good ten paces off, and disposed of the third with a vigorous blow in the ribs which hurled him against a chair. Then, seizing the fourth by the collar and grasping his waist he actually held him aloft in the air for a moment, then flinging him on the ground he placed a foot on his chest.

“Is not Leipzig avenged?” said he.

Then at last the tempest burst. A rush was made for the Frenchman, but he, still keeping a foot on his fallen enemy, seized a chair and whirled it round him so vigorously that for a moment the crowd was held at bay and only ventured on threats. But the circle drew closer, some one grasped the chair and succeeded in stopping it. A few moments more and the audacious Frenchman would probably have been torn to pieces had not two or three Prussian officers intervened. They forced their way through the crowd and formed a guard around the young man, one of them addressed the crowd thus:

"Come, come, my friends, don't murder a brave young man because he does not forget he is a Frenchman and has cried 'Vive la France!' He will now cry 'Vive Guillaume IV!' and we will let him off." Then, whispering to Benedict, "Cry 'Vive Guillaume IV!' or I can't answer for your life."

"Yes!" bawled the crowd, "let him cry 'Vive Guillaume IV! — Vive la Prusse!' and we will let him go."

"Very well," said Benedict, "but I prefer to do so freely, and without compulsion. Leave me alone and let me speak from a table."

"Stand aside and let him pass," said the officers, releasing Benedict and leaving him free. "He wishes to address you."

"Let him speak! let him speak!" cried the crowd.

"Gentlemen!" said Benedict, mounting the table nearest to the open windows of the café, "oblige me by listening. I cannot cry 'Vive la Prusse,' because at this very moment my country may be at war with yours, in which case a Frenchman would disgrace himself if he cried anything except 'Vive la France.' Nor can I very well cry 'Vive le roi Guillaume,' because, not being my king, it does not matter to me whether he lives or dies. But I will recite some charming verses in answer to your 'German Rhine!'"

The audience heard him impatiently, not knowing what he meant to recite. They had another disappointment in discovering that the lines in question were not German but French. However, they listened with all the more attention. In enumerating his accomplishments Benedict had omitted those of amateur actor and elocutionist. The lines were those written by de Musset in response to the "German Rhine," and they lost nothing in his impassioned delivery. Those among his hearers able to follow the reciter soon perceived that they had been tricked into listening to truths they had no desire to hear. Once this was understood, the storm, momentarily lulled, burst forth with redoubled violence.

Knowing that there would be no further chance of protection, Benedict was carefully considering the distance between his table and the nearest window, when suddenly the attention of the crowd was diverted by the report of several pistol-shots rapidly fired in the immediate vicinity. Turning towards the sound they perceived a well-dressed young civilian, struggling desperately with a much older man in colonel's uniform. The young man fired again, with the only result of further exasperating his adversary, who seized him with a grasp of iron, and, disdaining to call for help, shook him as a terrier shakes a rat. Then, throwing him down, he knelt upon the would-be murderer's chest, tore the now useless revolver from his hand, and placed the barrel against his forehead. "Yes, fire, fire!" gasped the young man. But the colonel, in whom the bystanders now recognized the powerful minister, Count von Bismarck, changed his mind. He pocketed the revolver, and beckoning to two officers, "Gentlemen," said he, "this young man is probably mad, or at any rate he is a clumsy fool. He attacked me without the slightest provocation and has fired five times without hitting me. You had better consign him to the nearest prison whilst I acquaint the king with what has happened. I think I need hardly mention my name — Count von Bismarck."

Then, wrapping his handkerchief round his hand which had been slightly scratched in the conflict, the count retraced his steps towards the royal palace hardly a hundred yards distant, while the two officers handed the assassin over to the police. One of them accompanied him to the prison, where he was at once incarcerated. The crowd having now time to remember Benedict Turpin found that he had vanished. However, this did not trouble them much, for the excitement of the more recent event had changed the course of their ideas. Let us profit by the interval and glance at the characters who are destined to appear in our recital. But, first let us examine the stage on which they will play their several parts.

Least German of all Germanic states, Prussia is inhabited by a mixture of races. Besides Germans proper, numbers of Slavonians are found there. There are also descendants of the Wends, Letts, Lithuanians, Poles, and other early tribes, and a mixture of Frankish refugees. The prosperity, though not perhaps the grandeur of the House of Hohenzollern, began with Duke Frederic, the greatest usurer of his day. It is as impossible to calculate the enormous sums wrung from the Jews as to narrate the means by which they were extorted. At first a vassal of the Emperor Wenceslaus, when that monarch's impending fall became evident Frederic deserted his camp for that of his rival Otho, and when Otho’s crown began to totter, he passed over to Sigismund, brother of Wenceslaus.

In 1400 A.D., the same year in which Charles VI ennobled the goldsmith Raoul, as a reward for financial help, Sigismund, equally embarrassed, borrowed 100,000 florins from Frederic, giving him the Margravate of Brandenburg as security. Fifteen years later, Sigismund having had to provide for the extravagance of the Council of Constance, found himself in debt to Frederic for 400,000 florins. Utterly unable to pay, he sold, or granted in compensation, both the Marches of Brandenburg and the dignity of Elector. In 1701 the electorate rose into a kingdom and the Duke Frederic III became the King Frederic I of Prussia.

The Hohenzollerns display the faults and the characteristics of their race. Their exchequer is admirably managed, but the moral balance-sheet of their administration can rarely be compared with the financial one. They have advanced on the lines of Duke Frederic, with more or less hypocrisy, but with ever-increasing rapacity. Thus in 1525, Albert of Hohenzollern, Grand Master of the Teutonic knights, then lords of Prussia, forsook his faith and became a Lutheran, receiving in return the rank of Hereditary Duke of Prussia, under the over-lordship of Poland. And in 1613, the Elector John Sigismund, wishing to obtain the duchy of Cleves, followed Albert’s example and became a Calvinist.

The policy of the Great Elector has been summed up by Leibnitz in a single phrase: “I side with him who pays best.” To him is due the formation of the European permanent standing army, and it was his second wife, the famous Dorothea, who started shops and taverns in Berlin for the disposal of her beer and dairy produce. The military genius of the Great Frederic is beyond dispute, but it was he who, in order to curry favour with the Russian Court, offered to “supply” the Grand Dukes with German princesses “at the lowest reasonable rate!” One lady thus “supplied” a princess of Anhalt, is known as “Catherine the Great.” We may remark incidentally that he also is chiefly responsible for the partition of Poland, a crime which has weighted the Prussian crown with the malediction of nations, and which he celebrated by this scandalously impious summons to his brother Henry, “Come, let us receive the Eucharist of the body of Poland!” To Frederic also, we owe the economical maxim, “He dines best who eats at another’s table!”

Frederic died childless, a fact for which, oddly enough, historians have seen fit to blame him. His nephew and successor, William II, invaded

France in 1792. His entry, preceded by the famous manifesto of the Duke of Brunswick, was ostentatious to a degree, but his departure, accompanied by Danton and Dumouriez, was accomplished without sound of trumpet or drum.

He was succeeded by the “Man of Jena,” Frederic William III. Among the numerous stupid, and servile letters received by the Emperor Napoleon in the days of his prosperity, must be counted those of William III.

Frederic William IV — we are rapidly approaching our own times — came to the throne in June 1840. According to the Hohenzollern custom his first ministry was a liberal one and on his accession he remarked to Alexander von Humboldt:

“As a noble I am the first gentleman in the kingdom; as a king I am only the first citizen.”

Charles X had said much the same on succeeding to the crown of France, or, rather, M. de Martignac had said it for him.

The first proof the king gave of his liberalism was an attempt to drill properly the intellectual forces of the kingdom, which duty he entrusted to the Minister Eichhorn. The name — it means “squirrel” — was quite prophetic. At the end of ten years the project had not advanced a step, although the minister himself had done wonders of perpetual revolution. On the other hand reaction had progressed. The press was persecuted, promotion and rewards were obtained only by hypocrites and informers. High office could only be acquired by becoming a servile instrument of the pietistic party, which was headed by the king.

Frederic William and King Louis of Bavaria were the two most literary of contemporary sovereigns. But Louis encouraged Art under whatever form it appeared, whereas Frederic William wished it to be drilled into a sort of auxiliary to despotism. Feeling himself constrained, like our great satirist Boileau, to give an example of good manners to both court and city, he began a correspondence with Louis, in the course of which he sent the latter a quatrain commenting on the scandal caused by his intimacy with Lola Montes. The King of Bavaria replied in another which made the round of all the courts of Europe.

“Contempteur de l’amour, dont adore l’ivresse,
Frére, tu dis que, roi sans pudeur, sans vertu,
Je garde é tort Lola, ma fille enchanteresse.
Je te l’enverrai bien. — Oui; mais qu’en ferais-tu?”

And, by general consent of the wits, the laugh remained on the side of the versatile King Louis.

After six years of domiciliary visits, suppressions, and summary expulsions of offending journalists, the Prussian Diet at length assembled at Berlin. In his opening speech the king addressed the deputies thus:

“Recollect, gentlemen, that you are here to represent the interests of the people, but *not* their *sentiments*.”

A little later in the year, Frederic William inaugurated his Divine Right by observing as he tore up the Constitution:

“I shall not allow a scrap of paper to stand between my people and their God!” meaning, though he did not dare to say it, “between my people and me.”

Then the revolution of 1848 burst forth, and did not spare Berlin, which was soon in full revolt. The king lost his head completely. In leaving the town he had to drive past the dead bodies of rioters killed in the struggle. There was a shout of “Hats off!” and the king was obliged to remain uncovered while the people sang the famous hymn composed by the Great Electress.

“Jesus, my Redeemer lives.”

Every one knows how Absolutism succeeded in dominating the National Assembly, and how presently reaction brought the following leaders into power:

Manteuffel, whose policy led to the unfortunate Austrian triumph at Olmutz.

Westphalen, who revived provincial councils, and brought the king to the famous Warsaw interview.

Statel, a converted Jew and Protestant Jesuit, a Grand Inquisitor who had missed his vocation.

And, lastly, the two Gerlachs, intriguers of the first water, whose history belongs to that of the two spies, Ladunberg and Techen.

Although the Constitution, establishing two Chambers, was sworn to by William IV, February 6th, 1850, it was not until his successor, William Louis, was on the throne that both Upper and Lower Chambers began to legislate.

A league was now formed by the bureaucracy, the orthodox clergy, the provincial squirearchy, and some of the proletariat. This was the origin of the famous association inappropriately designated the *Patriotic* Association, which had for its aim the annihilation of the Constitution.

There now appeared as First President of the Association at Kénigsberg, the Count von Bismarck, who has played so great a part in Prussian history. We cannot do less for him than we have done for the Hohenzollerns, that is to say, we must devote an entire chapter to him and to the Prussia of to-day. For is not the Count von Bismarck a much greater monarch than the King of Prussia himself?

CHAPTER III

COUNT VON BISMARCK

Many have sought, and some profess to have found, the reasons the remarkable royal favour enjoyed by Count Bismarck, but the chief, and to our thinking the only one, is the extraordinary genius which even his enemies dare not dispute, notwithstanding the fact that genius is usually anything but a passport to the favour of kings.

We will relate one or two little anecdotes concerning the Prime Minister, beginning with one which does not refer to him personally, but may serve as a sort of preface to another. Every one knows the absurd point to which military etiquette is carried in Prussia.

A Pomeranian general — Pomerania may be called the Prussian Béotia — being in garrison at Darmstadt and being bored even to the fullest possibility of Darmstadt boredom, was standing at his window, wishing for a conflagration, a revolution, an earthquake — anything — when he beheld an officer in the distance — an officer minus his sword! An awful breach of discipline! “Ah!” thought the delighted general, “here is a lieutenant to make a scapegoat of. Ten minutes’ lecture and a fortnight’s arrest! What luck!”

The unsuspecting officer drew nearer, and when within hail: “Lieutenant Rupert,” shouted the general. The officer looked up, saw the general, and immediately remembering his missing sword, understood his terrible position. The general had seen him; he could not go back, and he felt he must brave the storm. The general beamed and rubbed his hands cheerfully at the prospect of some amusement at last. The lieutenant plucked up courage, entered the house, and arriving at the ante-room, beheld a regulation sword hanging on the wall. “What a mercy!” he murmured, unhooking the sword and quickly buckling it on. Then looking as innocent as possible, he entered the room, and standing at attention by the door,

“The general did me the honour to call,” he said.

“Yes,” said the general with severity, “I have to enquire — ” he stopped suddenly, observing that the culprit’s sword was at his side. His expression changed, and he said smiling:

“Yes, I wanted to ask, I wanted to ask — What on earth was it? Ah, yes. I wanted to ask after your family, Lieutenant Rupert. I particularly wished to enquire after your father.”

“If my father could hear of your kind feeling towards him, general, he would be greatly gratified. Unhappily, he died twenty years ago.”

The general looked considerably taken aback.

The young officer continued: “Have you any further commands, sir?”

“Why, no,” said the general. “Only this. Never be seen without your sword. Had you been without it to-day, I should have given you a fortnight’s arrest.”

“I will take the greatest care, sir! You see?” answered the lieutenant, boldly indicating the sword which hung at his side.

“Yes, yes, I see. It is all right. You can go now.”

The young man lost no time in profiting by the permission; he saluted, left the room, and carefully hung up the sword as he went through the anteroom. As he left the house the general, being again at the window, again saw that he had no sword. He summoned his wife:

“Look here,” he said, “do you see that officer?”

“Certainly I do,” she replied.

“Has he a sword or not?”

“He has not.”

“Well then, you are mistaken; he looks as if he hadn’t one, but he has.”

The lady made no remark, being accustomed to accept whatever her husband said. The young officer escaped with the fright, and took good care not to forget his sword a second time.

Well, a similar misfortune — more, a real humiliation of this kind very nearly happened to the King of Prussia, when he was only the Prince Royal. Von Bismarck was then merely an attaché at the Frankfort Legation without any handle to his name. When the prince stopped at Frankfort on his way to a review at Mayence von Bismarck had the honour of being told off to accompany him.

It was a hot day in August and the railway carriages were stifling. Etiquette notwithstanding, ever; one from the prince downward, unbuttoned his coat. On arriving at Mayence, where the troops were drawn up at the station to receive him, the prince refastened his coat but left one button undone. He was just leaving the carriage, when, luckily, von Bismarck noticed the oversight.

"Good heavens, prince!" he exclaimed, "what are you about?"

And, for once forgetting etiquette, which forbids the royal person to be contaminated by profane fingers, he sprang forward and fastened the offending button. Hence, according to some, came the royal favour, for the king, greatly embarrassed by the events of '58, reflected that the man who had saved his credit at Mayence might also save his crown at Berlin.

The count now became the leader of the "Junker" faction, voiced by the "Kreuz Zeitung." He was, in fact, the fittest man for the position, possessing oratorical eloquence, great mental and physical activity, and a complete conviction that any sort of means is justified by the end. And, the end accomplished, he flung from the height of his tribune this epigram in the face of an astonished Chamber: "Might is Right!" in three words summing up both his political creed and the direct consequences which followed.

The life-giving principles of humanity should be exemplified by three nations:

Commercial activity by England.
Moral expansion by Germany.
Intellectual brilliance by France.

If we ask why Germany does not occupy the great position assigned to her we find the answer in this: France has attained freedom of thought, but Germany is allowed only the freedom of a dreamer. The sole atmosphere in which she can breathe freely is that of the fortress or the prison. And if we wonder why the rest of Germany is ruled by the rod of Prussia the explanation may be found in this: German *manners* do not exist, but there is a national *genius*; a genius which desired no revolution, but peace and liberty, and, above all — intellectual independence. This desire was Prussia's greatest difficulty; she fought it, she weakened it, and she hopes to conquer it entirely. She boasts of her compulsory education; her children are indeed taught all they can be taught, but once out of school they are never permitted to think for themselves.

The Junker faction is composed chiefly of younger sons who have to seek either an official career or a military one. Failing this, they must depend on the head of the family for a decent maintenance. With very few exceptions there is no "old nobility" in Prussia, the aristocracy is not distinguished by either wealth or intellect. A few names here and there recall ancient Germanic history; others belong to Prussian military annals. But the rest of the nobility can claim no distinction, and have only owned their estates for a century or two.

Consequently, nearly all the liberal and progressive members of the Chamber depend, either by position or office, on the Government, and not one of them was strong enough to fight against a despotism which seizes a child at the moment of his birth, guides him through adolescence, and escorts him for the rest of his life. Therefore Count von Bismarck could insult both Chamber and deputies with impunity, knowing that their complaints would rouse no answering echo in the country, while at Court they were considered as being next door to the servants. On one occasion the President Grabow, being present at a state concert, was going to occupy a chair in one of the less crowded rooms, when a footman stopped him with "These chairs are meant for Excellencies, sir."

"Indeed, my friend," answered the President, "I am evidently out of place here."

From the advent of Hohenzollern supremacy may be dated the decay of moral independence, both in Prussia and the other Germanic states. Not only have the Hohenzollerns failed to exercise any civilizing influence by encouraging literature and purifying the language, but they have changed Minerva into Pallas, and the beneficent deity of knowledge and wisdom has become the Medusa-brandishing goddess of war.

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH BISMARCK EMERGES FROM AN IMPOSSIBLE POSITION

Now for three months past Bismarck had been in an impossible position, and no one could predict how he would emerge from it. Notwithstanding the important events which were being enacted from China to Mexico, it was upon him that the eyes of Europe were fixed.

Old ministers, experienced in all the wiles of diplomacy, followed him with their eyes, spyglass in hand, never doubting that the epoch-making minister had an accomplice on the throne in a policy of which they vainly sought for precedents in the world's history. If, however, there should prove to be no accomplice, they pronounced that he must be a fool without an equal.

Young diplomats, modestly aware that they did not quite rank with the Talleyrands, the Metternichs, or Nesselrodes, studied him more seriously, believing they desired the infancy of a new policy destined to carry their epoch to its zenith, whispering the question which Germany has asked for three hundred years: "*Ist es der Mann?*" (Can it be the Man?) To make this question comprehensible we must tell our readers that Germany awaits a liberator as the Jews awaited a Messiah. Whenever her chains gall her, she exclaims: "*Wo bleibt der Mann?*" (Where, then, is the Man?)

Now, some pretend that to-day in Germany a fourth party, which up to the present has been crouching in the gloom, is preparing to emerge — a horrible figure, if the poets of Germany are to be believed. Listen to Heine on the subject:

"There is thunder truly in Germany, yea, even in Germany: it comes slowly; it rolls up gradually from afar; but I doubt not it will come.

"And when you hear a crash, such a crash as the world has not heard in all history, you will know that the German thunder has done its work. At this uproar eagles will fall dead from the upper air; and lions in the pathless deserts of Africa will crouch terrified in their lairs. In Germany will be enacted a drama compared with which the French Revolution will seem but an *innocent idyll*."

Had Heinrich Heine been the only prophet I should not repeat his auguries, for Heine was a dreamer. But here is what Ludwig B — — says:

"In truth, Germany has accomplished nothing for three centuries, and has patiently endured all the suffering inflicted upon her. But, even so, her labours, sufferings, and joys have not subdued her virgin heart, nor her chaste spirit. She contains the reserve forces of liberty and will ensure its triumph.

"Her day will come; and to bring it about but little is necessary a flash of good-humour, a smile, a summer shower, a thaw, a fool the more, or a fool the less, a nothing; the bell of a mule is enough to bring down an avalanche. Then France, which is not easily astonished, France which accomplished in three days the work of three hundred years, and has ceased to wonder at her own work, will survey the German nation with astonishment which will not be merely surprise but admiration."

But whether it was the Man or was not the Man that the gallery watched as he weighed Europe in the scales, putting everything into one, nothing into the other, whether he belonged to the old or to the new diplomacy mattered little. The only question was — will von Bismarck demand a dissolution of the Chamber, or will the Chamber impeach the count?

The conquest of Schleswig-Holstein had carried him to the height of fortune, but the new complications arising *é propos* of the election of the Duke of Augustenburg, made everything seem doubtful even to the genius of von Bismarck. During a long interview with the king which took place the very day on which this story begins, he fancied that his influence was shaken, and he attributed the king's coldness to the persistent ill will of the queen.

It is true that until now the count had worked only for his own personal advancement, and, having kept entire silence as to his projects, was reserving an explanation for a favourable moment, when by the grandeur and clearness of his views he hoped to recover the goodwill of his sovereign, by an audacious *coup d'état* to build up a more solid and unassailable position than ever.

He had, then, just left the king, intending to unmask his new plan as soon as possible, counting on the telegraphic despatches to create an effect favourable to himself, which, by making war inevitable, would ensure his own safety.

He left the palace accordingly, immersed in these thoughts, and so preoccupied that not only did he scarcely observe the excitement in the crowded streets, but he did not notice a young man leaning against one of the columns of the theatre, who left his place as he passed, and followed him like his shadow in and out of the groups blocking the street. Twice or thrice, however, as if warned of this close pursuit by some magnetic current, the count turned his head, but seeing only a well-dressed young man apparently belonging to his own class in life, he paid no attention to him.

It was not until he had passed the Friedrich Strasse and was crossing the road that he really noticed that the young man seemed determined to follow him. He then decided as soon as he had reached the other side to stop and ask what his pursuer meant by shadowing him.

But the shadower did not give him an opportunity. The count had hardly proceeded three or four steps on his way when he heard a report, and felt the wind of a ball which just missed his coat collar. He stopped and turned sharply round, seeing in a flash the eddying smoke, the aimed revolver, the assassin with his finger on the trigger preparing to fire again.

But, as we have said, the count was naturally brave: it did not occur to him either to fly or to call for help. He threw himself upon his enemy, who, without an instant’s delay, fired the second and third shots, which whistled harmlessly by. Whether the assassin’s hand trembled under stress of emotion, or whether, as some say, Providence (which nevertheless permitted the assassinations of Henri IV and Gustavus Adolphus) forbade the accomplishment of such a crime, the two balls passed right and left of von Bismarck.

Then the murderer lost courage and turned to fly. But the count seized him by the collar with one hand and with the other clutched the barrel of the revolver. Once again a shot was fired; the count was slightly wounded, but kept his hold and grasped his adversary closely, throwing him on the ground, and finally handed him over to the Prussian officers.

Seizing the favourable occasion with the promptitude of genius, he again took his way to the palace, bent on making this event the turning point of the situation.

This time he passed through a double avenue of spectators, whereas previously in the public commotion no one had noticed him. It was now otherwise — the murderer's attempt, of which he had been the object and from which he had emerged with so much courage, attracted every one's attention, if not their sympathy, and whether loved or not loved, all made room and saluted him. Sympathy might be wanting, but the count could at all events read admiration upon every face.

Von Bismarck was at this time about fifty or fifty-two; tall, with a well-proportioned figure, slightly puffy, and almost bald except at the temples, with a thick moustache. One of his cheeks was furrowed by a scar, the legacy of a duel fought at the University of Géttingen.

The palace guard had already heard the news and turned out to receive the count, who, as colonel in the Army, was entitled to this mark of respect. He graciously responded, and went up the staircase leading to the king's audience chamber.

As prime minister, the count had the right of entry at any time. He was about to turn the door handle when the usher in waiting stopped him, saying:

"His Excellency will pardon me, but the king can see no one."

"Not even me?" asked the count.

"Not even your Excellency," replied the usher with a low bow.

The count stepped backward with a movement of the lips that might have passed for a smile, but was certainly not one. Then he began to study, but without seeing it, a large naval picture which decorated the ante-room, standing out by reason of its immense gilt frame from the official green paper which adorns all the royal apartments.

At the end of a quarter of an hour, the door opened, the count hearing the *frou frou* of a satin dress, turned and bowed low before a woman of forty to forty-five years of age, who had evidently possessed great beauty and was indeed still beautiful. Perhaps, if the "Almanach de Gotha" were consulted, it would be found that the lady was rather older than this, but as the proverb says: "A woman is as old as she looks," and I see no reason why queens should be excepted.

The lady was Queen Marie Louise Augusta Catherine, daughter of Charles Frederic, Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar, and known throughout Europe as the Queen Augusta. She was of medium height — is best described by the essentially French word *attrayant*. She wore on her left arm the feminine Order of Queen Louise of Prussia. She passed the minister slowly and somewhat haughtily, saluting him indeed, but without her usual kindness. By the doors through which she passed the count understood she had been with the king, and was now returning to her own apartments.

The queen had left the door belonging to the king’s apartment open behind her, and the usher now intimated that the minister might enter. He waited, however, until the door had closed upon the queen.

“Yes,” he said, “it is true that I was not born a baron, but let us see what the future will do for me.”

And then he passed forward. The various lackeys or chamberlains whom he met hastened to open the doors leading to the audience-room. Reaching it the chamberlain announced in a loud voice: “His Excellency Count von Bismarck.”

The king started and turned round. He was standing before the chimney-piece, and heard the name of von Bismarck with some surprise, it being barely a quarter of an hour since the minister had left him. The count wondered if the king had already heard what had happened to him in the interval.

He bowed low before His Majesty.

“Sire,” he said, “an event of great importance has recalled me to Your Majesty, but I see with regret that the moment is unfavourable — ”

“Why?” enquired the king.

“Because I have just had the honour of meeting the queen in the ante-room, and not having the happiness of being in Her Majesty’s good graces — ”

“Well, count, I admit that she does not see eye to eye with you.”

“She is wrong, sire, for my devotion belongs equally to my king and to my queen, and the one cannot become Emperor of Germany without the other becoming Empress.”

“A dream, my dear count, in which Queen Augusta unfortunately believes, but which is not the dream of a reasonable being.”

“Sire, the unity of Germany is as much decreed in the design of Providence as the unity of Italy.”

“Excellent,” said the king, laughing; “can there be a united Italy while the Italians possess neither Rome nor Venice?”

“Italy is in formation, sire. She began her march in ‘59 and will not stop on the way. If she looks like stopping, she is only taking breath. Indeed, have we not promised her Venice?”

“Yes, but it is not we who will give it her.”

“Who then?”

“France? who has already given her Lombardy, and has let her take the duchies and Naples. France!” said the king. “France let her take all that with quite the best will in the world.”

“Is Your Majesty aware of the contents of the telegraphic despatches which arrived when I was here and which were delivered as I left?”

“Yes, I know. The Emperor Napoleon’s speech at Auxerre,” answered the king with some embarrassment. “You refer to that, do you not?”

“Well, sire, the emperor’s speech means war — war not only against Austria but against Germany. It means Venice for Italy and the Rhine provinces for France.”

“You really think so?”

“I mean that if we give France time to arm, the question without becoming desperate becomes grave, but that if we fall promptly and vigorously upon Austria, we shall be on the Moldau with three hundred thousand men before France can reach the Rhine with fifty thousand.”

“Count, you do not give the Austrians their proper value; the swagger of our young men has gone to your head.”

“Sire, if I appear to adopt the opinions of the heir-apparent and of Prince Frederic Charles, I can only say that the prince having been born on June 29th, 1801, is scarcely a young man; but the fact is, that in these matters I rely on my own opinion only, and I say deliberately in a war against Prussia, Austria will certainly be beaten.”

“Really?” said the king doubtfully. “Yet I have heard you speak in high terms of both their generals and their soldiers.”

“Certainly.”

“Well then, it does not seem to me so remarkably easy to conquer good soldiers commanded by good generals.”

“They have good, soldiers, sire, they have good generals, but we shall beat them because our own organization and arrangement are superior to theirs. When I persuaded Your Majesty to undertake the war on Schleswig which Your Majesty did not desire to do — ”

“If I had not desired to make war on Schleswig it would never have been made!”

“That is very true, sire, but Your Majesty hesitated; I had the courage to insist, and Your Majesty approved of my reasons.”

“Yes, and what is the result of the war on Schleswig? War throughout Germany!”

“True, sire, in the first place I like a situation that calls for resolute action; and as I consider war in Germany inevitable, I congratulate you.”

“Will you explain whence comes your confidence?”

“Your Majesty forgets that I made the campaign with the Prussian army. I did not do it for the mere pleasure of hearing cannon, of counting the dead, and of sleeping on the battlefield, where I assure you one sleeps very badly, or for the purpose of giving you what was nevertheless well worth having, two posts on the Baltic, of which Prussia stood in great need. No, I made the campaign with the object of trying the Austrians, and I repeat that they are behind us in everything — discipline, armaments, use of arms: they have bad rifles, bad artillery, and worse powder. In a war against us Austria will be beaten from the very commencement, for we have everything which she has not, and Austria once vanquished, the supremacy in Germany must inevitably fall from her hands into those of Prussia.”

“And how is Prussia with a population of eighteen millions to maintain her superiority over sixty? Only look at her pitiful appearance on the map.”

“That is exactly the point. I have looked at her for three years, and now is the time to mould her anew. Prussia is a great serpent whose head is at Thionville, while her tail is at Memel, and which has a lump in her stomach because she has swallowed half Saxony. She is a kingdom cut in two by another — Hanover — in such a fashion that you cannot get home without going abroad. You must understand, sire, Hanover is bound to become part of Prussia.”

“But what will England say to this?”

“England is no longer in the age of Pitt and Cobourg. England is the very humble servant of the Manchester School, of Gladstone, Cobden, and their scholars; England will do no more for Hanover than she did for Denmark. Must we not take Saxony also?”

“France will never allow us to meddle with Saxony, if only in memory of the king who was faithful to her in 1813.”

“Not if we took too big a mouthful; but if we only nibble she will shut both eyes, or at least one of them. And is not Hesse also very necessary?”

“The Confederation will not abandon all Hesse.”

“But if it will let us take half, that is all we want. Now let us consider Frankfort-on-the-Main.”

“Frankfort-on-the-Main! The free town! The seat of the Diet!”

“The moment Prussia can reckon thirty millions of men instead of eighteen the Diet is dead. Prussia will then be the Diet. Only, instead of crying a decree she will say ‘decree.’“

“We shall have the whole of the Confederation against us. It will side with Austria.”

“So much the better!”

“And why?”

“Austria once beaten, the Confederation is beaten along with her.”

“We shall have a million men against us.”

“Let us count them.”

“There are four hundred and fifty thousand in Austria — ”

“Agreed.”

“And four hundred and fifty thousand in Venetia.”

“The emperor is too obstinate to recall troops from Venice before two or three battles if he is successful, before ten if he is beaten.”

“Bavaria has one hundred and sixty thousand.”

“I will answer for Bavaria — her king is too fond of music to love the sound of cannon.”

“Hanover, twenty-five thousand men.”

“Only a mouthful to swallow on our first march.”

“Saxony, fifteen thousand.”

“Another mouthful.”

“And a hundred and fifty thousand belonging to the Confederation.”

“The Confederation will have no time to arm them; only we must not lose a moment, sire; therefore I now say ‘War, Victory, the supremacy of Prussia — myself — or-’“

“Or?”

“Or my resignation, which I lay very humbly at Your Majesty’s feet.”

“What is that on your hand, count?”

“Nothing, sire.”

“It looks like blood.”

“Perhaps it is.”

“Is it true, then, that some one attempted your life by firing at you with a revolver?”

“Five times, sire.”

“Five? Good gracious!”

“He thought it none too many for me.”

“And you are unwounded?”

“Only a scratch on the little finger.”

“And who was your assassin?”

“I do not know who he is.”

“Did he refuse to give his name?”

“No, I forgot to ask him; besides, that is the Attorney-General’s affair, not mine. I do not interfere with other people’s concerns. Now, my own business is my King’s business, and that is here.”

“I am listening,” said the king.

“To-morrow the chamber is dissolved; the following day we mobilize; in eight days hostilities are declared, or else — ”

“Or else what?”

“Or else, as I have the honour to repeat to Your Majesty, my resignation.”

Then, without waiting for the king’s answer the Count von Bismarck bowed low, and according to etiquette retired backwards from the king’s presence. The king said nothing to detain his minister, but before closing the door, that gentleman heard the bell rung loudly enough to rouse the whole palace.

CHAPTER V

A SPORTSMAN AND A SPANIEL

On the day following the events just narrated, a young man about twenty-five years of age arrived in Brunswick by the eleven o’clock train from Berlin. Leaving his luggage, which was labelled “Hanover,” in the station, he took a small knapsack on which were strapped a sketch-book and camp-stool, buckled on a cartridge belt, flung a baldric supporting a double-barrelled gun over his shoulder, and completed his toilet with a large grey felt hat. Altogether he appeared a sort of cross between sportsman and tourist. Accompanied by a beautiful jet-black spaniel he left the station and hailed an open carriage, whereupon the dog instantly justified his name of “Frisk” by springing joyously in, and installing himself on the front seat, while his master reclined on the back after the manner of one accustomed to do things comfortably. Courteously addressing the driver in excellent German:

“Coachman,” said he, “kindly take me to the best hotel the town affords, or at any rate, to the one which provides the best lunch!”

The coachman nodded as if to say he required no further instructions, and the carriage rattled and bumped over the cobble stones to the Hétel d’Angleterre. The dog, who had hardly been able to retain his position, instantly sprang out, and showing his relief by active gambols, besought his master to follow. The latter alighted, but left his knapsack and gun in the carriage. Turning to the driver:

“You may wait,” he said, “and keep an eye on my things.”

Hackney coachmen, all the world over, have a keen eye for good customers. This honest fellow was no exception.

“Excellency may be quite satisfied,” he answered with a wink. “I will keep careful guard over them.”

The traveller entered the inn, and passing straight through it arrived at a pleasant court shaded by lime-trees. Here he selected a small table with chairs for two, one of which was promptly occupied by Frisk; his master took possession of the other and the two proceeded to lunch. This occupied an hour, and no lady could have received more attention than the young man bestowed on Frisk. The dog ate whatever his master ate, only politely protesting when a hare, accompanied by currant jelly, appeared on the scene, that as a sporting dog he ought not to touch game, and personally had a serious objection to sweets. Meanwhile, the driver remaining on his box refreshed himself with bread, cheese, and a half bottle of wine. Consequently, when master and dog re-occupied the carriage the trio presented an appearance of general satisfaction.

“Where to, Excellency?” enquired the driver, wiping his mouth on his sleeve, with the air of a man ready to drive to the world’s end if you wished.

“I don’t quite know,” was the answer, “it depends a little on you.”

“How so?”

“Well, if I find you a good fellow, I might wish to keep you on for some time.”

“Oh, a year if you like!

“No, that is too long.”

“Well, a month then.”

“Neither a year nor a month, but a day or two.”

“Oh, that’s not enough. I really thought you meant to take me on lease.”

“To begin with, what will you charge for going to Hanover?”

“It is six leagues, you know.”

“Four and a half, you mean.”

“But it is up and down hill the whole way.”

“Nonsense! it is as flat as a billiard-table.”

“One can’t get round you,” said the grinning driver.

“In one way you can.”

“And which is that?”

“Simply by being honest.”

“Ah, indeed! That is a new idea.”

“It is one which has not before occurred to you, I think.”

“Well, name your own price, then.”

“Four florins.”

“But you are not counting the drive from the station and the time for lunch.”

“You are right, I will allow for that.”

“And the *pourboire*.”

“That is as I may choose.”

“Agreed. I don’t know why, but I trust you.”

“Only, if I keep you more than a week it will then be three and a half florins per day, and no *pourboire*.”

“I couldn’t agree to that.”

“Why not?”

“Because I see no reason for depriving you of the pleasure of doing the handsome thing when I have the misfortune of leaving you.”

“The dickens! One would take you for a wit!”

“I’ve wit enough to look like a fool when I want to.”

“Well done! Where do you come from?”

“From Sachsenhausen.”

“And where may that be?”

“It is a suburb of Frankfort.”

“Ah! yes, it is a Saxon colony from the days of Charlemagne.”

“That is so. So you know that, do you?”

“I also know that you are a fine race, something like the Auvergnats of France. We will settle up when we part.”

“That’s suits me down to the ground.”

“What’s your name?

“Lenhart.”

“Very well, Lenhart, let us get on then.”

The carriage started, scattering the usual crowd of idle spectators. A few minutes brought it to the end of the street leading to the open country. The day was magnificent. The trees had just burst into leaf, and earth had assumed a mantle of green, the soft spring breeze seemed laden with the perfume of flowers. Overhead the birds were already seeking food for their little ones, and awakening Nature appeared to listen to their songs. From time to time a lark arose from among the corn, and ascending high in the air seemed as if floating above the summit of a pyramid of song.

Beholding this magnificent country the traveller exclaimed: “But there must be splendid shooting here, is there not?”

“Yes, but it is strictly preserved,” replied the coachman.

“So much the better,” said our friend, “there will be all the more game.”

In fact, before they had gone quite a mile from the town, Frisk, who had given various signs of impatience, sprang out of the carriage, rushed into a field of clover, and pointed.

“Shall I go on or wait,” enquired the driver, seeing the young man loading his gun.

“Go on a yard, or two,” was the answer. “There, that will do; now, draw up as near to the field as you can.”

The carriage, with the sportsman standing up in it, gun in hand, halted within thirty yards of the dog. The driver looked on with all the interest of his class, an interest which is always on the side of the sportsman and hostile to the landlord and the gamekeeper. “That is a clever dog,” he remarked. “What is he pointing at?”

“It is a hare.”

“How do you know?”

“Had it been a bird he would have wagged his tail. See.”

A big leveret showed itself among the clover and fell a victim to the gun. It was promptly brought in by Frisk. Further on a covey of partridges was seen, but the dog was called off, and the young brood left in peace. They were already approaching Hanover when a startled hare was seen some sixty yards from the carriage.

“Ah!” said Lenhart, “this one wisely keeps his distance.”

“It does not follow,” replied the sportsman.

“You don’t expect to hit at that distance, do you?”

“Have you still to learn, my friend, you who profess to be able to shoot, that to a good shot and a good gun distance is of small importance? Now, watch!”

Then, having altered the charges in his gun the young man enquired:

“Do you know all about the manners and customs of hares, Lenhart?”

“Why, yes, I think I know all any one can know who can’t speak their language.”

“Well, I can tell you this. A startled hare, if not pursued, will run about fifty paces and will then sit down to have a look round and perform his toilet. Look!”

And in fact, the hare, which had run towards the carriage, instead of away from it, suddenly stopped, sat down, and began to wash its face with its forepaws. This predicted toilet cost the poor animal its life. A prompt shot and the hare bounded upwards and fell back dead.

“Beg pardon, Excellency,” said Lenhart, “but if we are going to war as it is said we are, on which side will you be?”

“As I am neither Austrian nor Prussian, but happen to be a Frenchman, you will probably find me fighting for France.”

“So long as you do not fight for these Prussian beggars I am quite satisfied. If you will fight against them, however — *donnerwetter* — but I have something to say.”

“Well? at is it?”

“I offer you the free use of my carriage to fight from.”

“Thanks! my friend, ‘tis an offer not to be despised. I always thought that if I had to fight, I should like to make the campaign in a carriage.”

“Well, then, here is the very thing you want. I can’t tell you how old my horse is, he wasn’t young when I bought him ten years ago, but I know if I took him to a Thirty Years’ War he would see me through it. As for the carriage, you can see it is as good as new. Those shafts were put on only three years ago, and last year it had new wheels and a new axle, and it is only six months since I provided it with a new body.”

“You remind me of an anecdote we have in France,” replied the other. “It is that of Simple Simon’s knife, which had first a new blade and then a new handle, but was still the same knife.”

“Ah, sir,” said Lenhart, with the air of a philosopher, “every country has its Simple Simon’s knife.”

“And also its simpletons, my good friend.”

“Well, if you put new barrels on your gun you might give me the old ones. Here comes your dog with the hare,” lifting it by the ears. “You can join the other, you fool,” he said. “See what comes of too much vanity! Ah, sir! don’t fight against the Prussians if you don’t want to, but, good heaven, don’t fight for them!”

“Oh, as to that you may be quite easy. If I do fight, it will be against them, and perhaps I shall not wait for war to be declared.”

“Bravo! Down with the Prussians!” cried Lenhart, touching up his horse with a sharp cut. The animal, as if to justify his praises, and excited by his master’s voice and cracking whip, broke into a gallop, bolted through the suburban streets and only stopped at the Hétel Royal.

CHAPTER VI

BENEDICT TURPIN

Lenhart, in his double capacity of hackney coachman and purveyor of travellers and tourists for the Hétel Royal, Hanover, was well known to Mr. Stephen, landlord thereof, who gave him a cordial reception. Anxious to magnify the importance of his present consignment, Lenhart hastened to inform him that the new arrival was a mortal enemy of the Prussians, that he never missed a shot, and that if war were declared, he would place himself and his deadly weapon at the disposal of the King of Hanover. To all of which Stephen lent an attentive ear.

“But where does your traveller come from,” he at length enquired.

“He says he’s a Frenchman, but I don’t believe it. I’ve never once heard him boast about anything, besides, his German is too good. But there, he is calling you.”

Stephen quickly answered the summons. The stranger was talking to an English officer of the Royal Household and his English appeared no less fluent than his German. Turning to Stephen he said in the latter language.

“I have asked a question of Colonel Anderson, who has kindly given me one-half of the answer, and tells me to apply to you for the rest. I asked for the title of the principal newspaper here, and the name of its editor. Colonel Anderson says the ‘Hanoverian Gazette,’ but does not know the editor’s name.”

“Wait a moment, Excellency. Yes, yes, let me see. He is Herr Bodemeyer, a tall, thin man with a beard, is he not?”

“Never mind his appearance. I want his name and address. I wish to send him my card.”

“I only know the office address, Park Strasse. Do you dine at the *table d’héte*? If so, Herr Bodemeyer is one of our regular guests. It is at five o’clock, he will be here in half-an-hour.”

“All the more reason why he should have my card first,” and producing a visiting-card bearing the legend “Benedict Turpin, Artist,” he addressed it to Herr Bodemeyer, and handed it and a florin to the hotel messenger, who undertook to deliver it within ten minutes.

Stephen then ventured to suggest that if there were private matters to discuss a private room might be desirable.

“A good idea,” said Benedict, and going to Colonel Anderson, “Sir,” said he, “although we have never been formally introduced, I nevertheless hope you will waive etiquette and do me the honour of dining with me and Herr Bodemeyer, who I think will not refuse to join us. Our host promises an excellent dinner and good wine. It is six months since I left France, consequently six months since I had a chance of conversation. In England they talk, in Germany they dream, it is in France only that they converse. Let us have a nice little dinner at which we can do all three. Here is my card, that of an insignificant artist, devoid of armorial bearings or coronets, but with the simple Cross of the Légion d’Honneur. I would add, colonel,” he continued seriously, “that in a day or two I may find myself obliged to ask a favour of you, and I should like to prove myself not unworthy of the consideration I hope you will show me.”

The colonel accepted the card and bowed politely.

“Sir,” said he with courteous English formality, “the hope you give me of being able to render you some service would certainly induce me to accept your hospitality. I have no reason whatever against dining with Herr Bodemeyer, and I have a thousand for wishing to dine with you, not the least being, if I may say so, that I find your person and manners exceedingly attractive.”

Benedict bowed in his turn.

“Since you have done me the honour to accept,” he said, “and I feel pretty sure of Herr Bodemeyer, it becomes my first duty to see that the dinner is a decent one. If you will excuse me I should like to interview the chef on the subject,” and he departed kitchenwards while the colonel sought the hotel reading-room.

Left in possession of a fair income at an age when the usual idea is only how best to squander it, Benedict Turpin had shown practical sense as well as genius. A believer in the excellent proverb which says that a man doubles his opportunities in life when he learns a new language, he had quadrupled his by spending a year in England, another in Germany, a third in Spain, and a fourth in Italy. At eighteen he was a first-rate linguist, and he spent the next two years in completing his education by classical and scientific studies, not neglecting the use of weapons and the general practice of games, calculated to further his physical development. By the time he was twenty he had attained an all-round proficiency very unusual in youths of his age and promised much in the time to come.

He took part in the Chinese expedition, and being possessed of sufficient means to indulge his taste for travelling, spent several years in world-wide wandering, hunting wild beasts, traversing deserts, picking up tapestries, jewels, curiosities, etc., wherewith on his return he furnished one of the most artistic studios in Paris. At the time our story opens he had, in the course of a round of visits to celebrated German painters, arrived in Berlin, where he upheld the honour of France, with the insolent good luck which seemed never to desert him. When the attention of the mob was momentarily diverted by the attack on the Prime Minister, Benedict succeeded in escaping unnoticed, and took refuge at the French Embassy, where he was well known. Early in the following morning he left by train and finally arrived at Hanover without let or hindrance. He had just given his last instructions to the cook when he was warned that Herr Bodemeyer was already approaching the hotel.

Benedict hurried to the entrance, where he saw close at hand a gentleman drawing near, who held a visiting card in his hand, and seemed pondering much as to what the owner could possibly want with him.

It is said that the denizens of that ancient Gaul which gave César so much trouble have so marked a personality that, wherever one is seen, the passers-by immediately remark: “Look, that’s a Frenchman!”

Herr Bodemeyer, at any rate, seemed to recognize Benedict’s nationality at once. He advanced smiling, with extended hand. Benedict promptly descended the steps to meet him and the two exchanged the customary civilities. Hearing that the artist had come from Berlin, and being professionally eager for news, the editor at once demanded an account of the uproar of the previous evening, and of the attempted assassination of Count Bismarck.

As to the latter, Benedict could give little information. He had heard the shots, seen two men struggling, and one handed over to some officers, and then had hastily sprung into the café, left it by a door in another street, and found shelter at the Embassy. There he heard further that the young man was the stepson of a proscribed refugee of the ‘48, named Blind, and that he had made terrible accusations against the count, which, coming as they did from the relative of a banished rebel, were held to count for very little.

"Well, we know a little more than that," said Herr Bodemeyer, "we hear that the young man attempted to cut his throat with a penknife, but that the wounds were only slight and the doctor says are not dangerous. But the "Kreuz Zeitung" will be here directly and we shall know a little more."

Even as he spoke newsboys hurried down the street shouting "Kreuz Zeitung — Zeitung!" There was a rush for the paper. Hanover was nearly as excited as Berlin had been the night before. Did the poor little kingdom already feel itself in the crushing embrace of the Prussian boa-constrictor?

Benedict beckoned to one of the newsboys and bought a paper. Turning to the Hanoverian editor,

"I hope you will dine with me and Colonel Anderson," he said. "We have a private room, and can talk politics as much as we like. Besides, I have something to ask of you which I could hardly ask at a public table."

Just then Colonel Anderson approached. He and Bodemeyer knew each other by sight already. Benedict now formally introduced them. The colonel had already glanced at his newspaper.

"Do you know," said he, "that although the doctor pronounced the wound of no consequence, young Blind nevertheless died early this morning? A Hanoverian officer come from Berlin says that about four o'clock a man wrapped in a large cloak and wearing a large shady hat which concealed his face, arrived at the prison provided with a permission to see the prisoner, and was taken to his cell. Blind had been put into a strait waistcoat and no one knows what passed between them, but when his cell was inspected at eight o'clock he was dead. The doctor says he must have been dead nearly four hours, so that he must have died about the time this mysterious visitor left him."

"Is this official news?" enquired Bodemeyer. "As editor of a Government paper I am bound to accept only official information. Let us see what the 'Kreuz Zeitung' has to say."

They withdrew to the room assigned to them, and the Hanoverian editor proceeded to examine the Berlin newspaper. The first paragraph of consequence stated:

"We are assured that the king's warrant decreeing the dissolution of the Lower Chamber will be officially published to-morrow."

"Come," said the colonel, "that is of some importance."

“Wait a moment; there is something more.”

“It is also announced that a decree ordering the mobilization of the Landwehr will be officially published the day after to-morrow.”

“That is enough,” observed the colonel, “we know now that the minister wins all along the line and that war will be declared in less than a fortnight. Let us have the general news. We know all we want to know of the political. Only, first, on which side will Hanover be?”

“There is no doubt about that,” replied Bodemeyer. “Hanover is bound to adhere to the Confederation.”

“And on which side is the Confederation,” asked Benedict.

“On the side of Austria,” answered the journalist promptly. “But listen, here is a fresh account of the scene in Unter den Linden.”

“Oh! let us have that by all means,” cried Benedict. “I was there, and I want to know if the account is correct.

“What! were you there?”

“Very much there,” and he added laughing, “I might even say with éneas, ‘*Et quorum pars magna fui.*’ I was in the thick of it.”

Herr Bodemeyer continued:

“We are now able to give fuller details concerning the demonstration in Unter den Linden which occurred yesterday after the report of the Emperor Louis Napoleon’s speech had been received. It appears that just as our most distinguished vocalist finished singing ‘The German Rhine,’ which was received with tremendous enthusiasm, a loud hiss was heard. It was soon seen that the author of this insult was a foreigner, a French painter, evidently intoxicated, and who would probably have atoned for his folly with his life, had not some Prussian officers generously protected him from the infuriated populace. The young fool further defied the crowd by giving his name and address, but when enquiries were made at the Black Eagle this morning he had disappeared. We commend his prudence and wish him a pleasant journey.”

“Is that paragraph signed,” asked Benedict.

“No. Is it inaccurate?” returned the reader.

“May I be permitted to remark that the one thing I have everywhere observed in my wanderings over three of the four quarters of the world — I beg your pardon, there are five, if we count Oceania — is the extremely small regard for truth shown by the purveyors of this sort of news. Whether in the north or the south, St. Petersburg or Calcutta, Paris or Constantinople, they are all alike. Each journal is bound to give so many beats of its drum every day. Good or bad, false or true, it has to give them, and those who feel injured must obtain redress — if they can.”

“Which means, I suppose,” observed Colonel Anderson, “that this account is incorrect.”

“Not only incorrect, but incomplete. The ‘young fool’ it speaks of, not only hissed, but cried, ‘Vive la France!’ Further, he drank to the health of France, and also disposed satisfactorily of the four first who attacked, him. It is true that these three Prussian officers intervened. They wished him to cry ‘Vive Guillaume I’ and ‘Vive la Prusse.’ He mounted a table, and instead, gave them a recital of Alfred de Musset’s ‘Answer to the German Rhine’ from end to end. It is also true that just then the reports of Blind’s revolver attracted general attention, and, not proposing to fight all Berlin, he profited by the incident to escape, taking refuge in the French Embassy. He had challenged one, two, or four adversaries, but not the entire populace. He also left a message at the Black Eagle to be given to any enquirers to the effect that he could not remain in Berlin, but would wait in some neighbouring country in order to oblige any one demanding satisfaction. And, leaving Berlin by an early train he arrived at Hanover an hour ago and at once sent his card to Herr Bodemeyer, hoping that that gentleman will kindly announce in his Gazette both the town and the hotel where this ‘young fool’ may be found by any one unable to find him at the Black Eagle.”

“Good heavens,” exclaimed the editor, “then it was you who caused this mighty uproar at Berlin.”

“Even I; small things make much noise, as you see.” Turning to the Englishman, Benedict continued, “And now you also see why I warned Colonel Anderson that I had a favour to ask him. I want him to be my second in case, as is quite possible, some wrathful individual should arrive demanding why, being in a foreign country, I have dared to uphold the honour of my own.”

His hearers, with one accord, immediately offered their hands. Benedict continued:

“And now, to show I am not absolutely unknown, here is a letter from the Head of our ‘Department of Fine Arts’ to Herr Kaulbach, Painter to the King of Hanover. He lives here, does he not?”

“Yes, the king had a charming house built on purpose for him.”

At this moment the door communicating with the next room was thrown open, the rotund figure of the landlord appeared in the opening and a solemn and impressive voice announced:

“Their Excellencies are served.”

Whether the chef had perceived that Benedict really understood what he was talking about, or else had had orders from his master to do what he was told, he had, at any rate, earned out his instructions to the very last letter, the result being neither French, English, nor German, but cosmopolitan, a banquet for a conference if not a congress. Nor was brilliant conversation lacking. Bodemeyer, like all German journalists, was a well-read man, but had never been outside Hanover. Anderson, on the contrary, had read little, but had travelled everywhere and seen much. He and Benedict had explored the same countries and encountered the same people. Both had been at the siege of Pekin; Anderson had followed Benedict in India, and preceded him in Russia. Both related their experiences, the one with English reserve and humour, the other with French vivacity and wit. The Englishman, a true modern Phénician, saw everything from the industrial and commercial point of view, the Frenchman from that of intellectual progress. Their different ideas, brought forward with warmth and also with the courtesy of well-bred and distinguished men, crossed each other like foils in the hands of experienced fencers, emitting sparks, brilliant if transitory. Bodemeyer, unused to this style of discussion, endeavoured to give it a philosophical turn, in which he was met by Benedict, but which Anderson found difficult to follow. The journalist seemed unintelligible, but Benedict’s theories he understood as he had never understood before.

The clock striking eight abruptly terminated the conversation. The editor sprang up.

“My paper!” he cried, “my ‘Gazette’! It is not ready by half!” Never before had he succumbed to such an intellectual temptation. “Frenchmen are the very devil,” he muttered, trying in vain to find a hat which would fit him. They *are* the champagne of the earth, they are clear, strong, and sparkling. In vain did Benedict entreat him for five minutes in which to write his announcement. “You must let me have it before eleven o’clock,” cried Bodemeyer, as, having discovered his own hat and cane he fled as if the enemy were behind him.

Next morning the following announcement might have been read in the “Hanoverian Gazette”.

“On June 7th, 1866, in Unter den Linden at Berlin I had occasion to both give and receive several blows in an encounter with various excellent citizens who wished to tear me to pieces because I had publicly emptied my glass to the glory of France. I have not the honour of knowing who gave these blows, but, wishing to be known by those who received mine, I hereby announce that during the next eight days I may be found at the Hétel Royal, Hanover, by any one wishing to criticize either my words or actions on the said occasion, and I particularly hope that the author of a certain article referring to me in yesterday’s issue of the ‘Kreuz Zeitung,’ will accept this invitation. Being ignorant of his name, I have no other means of addressing him.

“I wish to thank the three Prussian officers who interfered to protect me from the amiable people of Berlin. But, should any of them consider himself offended by me, my gratitude will not extend to refusing him satisfaction.

“I said then and I repeat now, that I am familiar with the use of all weapons.”

“BENEDICT TURPIN.

“*At the Hétel Royal, Hanover*.”

CHAPTER VII

KAULBACH’S STUDIO

Benedict lost no time in leaving his note at the “Gazette” office, and his letter of introduction at Kaulbach’s studio, where he left also his card on which was written, “I hope to have the honour of calling on you to-morrow.” He therefore ordered Lenhart to be ready a little before eleven, in order to pay his two visits, one of thanks to Herr Bodemeyer, and one to Kaulbach. As the latter lived at the extreme end of the town where the king had had a charming little house erected for him, he called at Herr Bodemeyer’s office first. The last copies of the “Gazette” were just being struck off, and Benedict was able to convince himself that his letter was actually in print. As the “Gazette” had numerous subscribers in Berlin and would be on sale there at six that evening, there was no doubt but that his communication would be widely read. The dissolution of the Chamber was confirmed and it was certain that mobilization would be announced on the morrow. Benedict continued on his way to the studio.

Seen by daylight the house appeared to be a pretty villa in Italian style, standing in a garden enclosed with iron railings. The gate stood invitingly open. Benedict entered, rang, and was answered by a servant in livery, whose manner showed that the visit was expected. He at once led the way to the studio.

“The master is just finishing dinner,” he said, “but he will be with you in a moment.”

“Tell the master,” replied Benedict, “that I am too delighted at being able to see the beautiful things here to wish to hurry him.”

And, indeed, the studio, full of original pictures, sketches, and copies of some of the works of the greatest painters known, could not fail to be intensely interesting to an artist such as Benedict, who now suddenly found himself in the sanctuary of one of the greatest of German painters. Kaulbach is an artist who has adhered to his Christian faith, and everywhere one saw proofs of this. But among highly finished sketches for some of his world-famous pictures, such as “The Dispersion of Mankind,” “The Taking of Jerusalem," etc., Benedict's attention was drawn to a modern portrait group of five persons. It represented an officer, evidently of high rank, holding a boy of about ten by the hand. His charger stood ready on the terrace below, and a lady in the prime of life sat near him with two little girls, one leaning against her knee, while the other sat at her feet and played with a small dog and some roses. The picture, apparently, was a work of love, for the artist had taken immense pains with it; too much so, in fact, for the elaborately finished details threw the faces into the background, and the general effect was too flat.

Absorbed in the study of this group, Benedict did not observe that Kaulbach had entered the room and was standing beside him, looking on with a smile. Presently he said:

"You are right, that picture is too flat, and I had it brought back, not to finish it still more, but to tone it down and soften some parts. Such as it is your public would never like it. Delacroix has spoilt you for 'clean' pictures."

Benedict laughed.

"Do you mean to imply that he painted dirty ones?" he enquired.

"Heaven forbid! His works are excellent, but your nation did not appreciate them."

"We do him justice now, however."

"Yes, now that he is dead," said Kaulbach smiling. "Is it not always so?"

"Not in your case. Admired in France, adored in Germany, happily you are yet with us."

Kaulbach at this time was about fifty-two, slightly grey, sallow in complexion, having brilliant dark eyes and a highly nervous constitution. Tall and slight, he was at the zenith of his artistic powers and hardly past that of his physical ones. The two men studied each other critically, until at last Turpin began to laugh.

"Do you know what I am thinking?" asked the German. "I am wondering how you have managed to wander from Pekin to St. Petersburg, from Astrakhan to Algiers, and yet found time to produce the remarkable pictures you have painted. I know these only by report unfortunately, but I have heard a good deal. You are a pupil of Scheffer's?"

"Yes, I have also studied under Cabat."

"Great masters, both of them. And you are the hero of that unlucky business at Berlin. I have just read your letter in the 'Gazette.'"

"But why 'unlucky'?"

"Well, you will have two or three duels on your hands."

"So much the worse for my adversaries."

"Allow me to remark that you are not lacking in self-confidence."

"No, because I have the certainty of success. Look!" and Benedict held out his hand. "Observe that the line of life is double. There is not the slightest break anywhere — nothing to indicate accident, sickness, or even the slightest scratch. I might live to a hundred — but I won't say as much of those who quarrel with me."

Aulbach smiled.

"At the end of your letter of introduction," he said, "there was a postscript, which informed me that you were more deeply interested in studying occult science than in pursuing your own art."

"I don't know that I study either very much. I am rather a slave to temperament. If a thing amuses me, well, yes, I study it. If I think I have found a truth, I try to follow it out to the very end. And I do believe that chiromancy can give us a glance into the future, and that the hand is a page on which the lines of our fate have been traced by Destiny. If for five minutes only I could study the hand of either the King of Prussia or of Count Bismarck, I could give you some idea of what will happen."

"Meanwhile," said Kaulbach, "your science says you will escape scot-free from any duels arising out of this Berlin scrimmage?"

"Certainly I shall. But we were talking about your work, which is infinitely more interesting. I believe I know all your pictures, or nearly so."

"I would wager you don't know the best of them."

"Yes, I do. You mean 'Charlemagne visited in his Tomb by the Emperor Otho'? It is the masterpiece of modern German painting."

Kaulbach was evidently delighted.

"You have seen that!" he exclaimed, and he held out his hand to Benedict. "I don't think as much of it as you seem to do, but it is the best thing I have done. Oh! pardon me, but I see two visitors who come for a sitting. But wait, they are kind friends of mine, and may not object to your presence. I will tell them who you are, and then if they do not mind your being here you can please yourself as to whether you go or stay." So saying he hastily quitted the studio.

A carriage was at the garden gate, quite plain in appearance, with no arms emblazoned on the panels, yet Benedict's practised eye saw at once that the horses had cost at least é200 each. Two gentlemen were leaving it, the elder of the two, who seemed about forty-five, wore the epaulettes of a general with an undress uniform of dark green, the collar and facings being of black velvet. Kaulbach said a few words, upon which he took off an order he was wearing and also two crosses, retaining those of the Guelphic Order and of Ernest Augustus. Then, that he might cross the little garden and ascend the steps he took the arm of the younger man, who seemed to be his son, and who, tall and very slight, appeared to be about one-and-twenty, and wore a Hussar uniform of blue and silver.

Kaulbach opened the studio door and stood respectfully aside. Benedict, as he bowed, instantly recognized the central figure of Kaulbach’s portrait group. He glanced quickly at the picture on which the missing decoration was depicted in all its glory. It was the Star of the Order of the Garter, worn by few except sovereign princes. He knew at once that the visitors must be the blind King of Hanover, one of the most cultivated and artistic sovereigns of Germany, and his son, the Crown Prince.

“Milords,” said Kaulbach, “I have the honour to present a brother artist to you. He is young, but is already famous, and he brings a special introduction from the Minister of Fine Arts at Paris. May I add that his own personality is a better recommendation even than those.”

The general bent his head graciously, the youth touched his cap. The elder man then addressed Benedict in English, regretting that his French was only indifferent. Benedict replied in the same language, saying that he was too great an admirer of Shakespeare, Scott, and Byron not to have made an effort to read these authors in their own tongue. The king, satisfied that he was unrecognized, discussed various subjects, and, knowing that Benedict had travelled much, asked many questions which were in themselves a compliment, for only men of superior intelligence could have asked and answered them. Kaulbach, meanwhile, rapidly worked at his picture softening down the too hard accessories. The young prince listened eagerly, and when Benedict offered to show him sketches made in India, he appealed anxiously to his father as to when and where he could see them.

“Better ask both these gentlemen to lunch in your own rooms,” said the King, “and if they do you the honour to accept — ”

“Oh! can you come to-morrow?” enquired the prince, delighted.

Benedict looked at Kaulbach in embarrassment.

“I fear I may have work of another kind to-morrow,” he replied.

“Yes,” said Kaulbach, “I fear my friend here is a trifle hot-headed. He only arrived yesterday and he has already written a letter for the ‘Gazette,’ which is now well on its way to Berlin.”

“What! the letter I thought so amusing that I read it aloud to my father! Is that yours, monsieur? But, indeed, you will have duels without end.”

“I count on two,” said Benedict. “It is a lucky number.”

“But suppose you are killed or wounded?”

“If I am killed, I will, with your permission, bequeath you my album. If I am badly hurt, I will ask Herr Kaulbach to show it you instead. If I am only scratched, I will bring it myself. But you need not be anxious on my account; I can assure you nothing unpleasant will happen to me.”

“But how can you know that?”

“You know my friend’s name, I think,” said Kaulbach. “He is Benedict Turpin. Well, he descends in the direct line from the famous enchanter Turpin, the uncle of Charlemagne, and he has inherited the gifts of his ancestor!”

“Good heavens,” said the prince, “are you spirit, magician, or what?”

“None of them. I simply amuse myself by reading the past, the present, and as much of the future as one’s hand can reveal.”

“Before you came,” said Kaulbach, “he was deeply regretting not being able to see the hand of the King of Prussia. He would have told us what will happen in the war. My lord,” he continued, emphasizing the title, “could we not find somewhere a royal hand for him to see?”

“Very easily,” said the king, smiling, “only it should be that of a real king or a real emperor. Such as the Emperor of China, who is obeyed by millions of subjects, or Alexander, who reigns over the ninth part of the whole world. Do you not think so, M. Turpin?”

“I think, sir,” replied Benedict, as he bent low before the king, “that it is not always great kingdoms which make great kings. Thessaly produced Achilles, and Macedonia gave birth to Alexander,” and again bowing, even more deeply, he left the studio.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHALLENGE

Benedict’s prediction was duly fulfilled. He had hardly opened his eyes the next morning when Lenhart, who had assumed the duties of valet, appeared, bearing a magnificent silver salver which he had borrowed from the landlord. On it were displayed two cards.

The cards bore the respective names of “Major Frederic von Bélow” and “Georges Kleist, Editor of the ‘Kreuz Zeitung.’“ Two different classes of Prussian society were therefore represented desiring satisfaction.

Benedict enquired where these gentlemen were to be found, and hearing that they were both at his own hotel, sent a hasty message to Colonel Anderson, begging him to come at once. When he appeared Benedict gave him the cards, requesting him to deal with the owners in due order of precedence, beginning with Major von Bélow, and to agree to whatever terms were proposed whether as to weapons, time, or place. The colonel would have protested, but Benedict declared he would have it his own way or not at all, and Anderson had no choice but to agree.

He returned at the end of half-an-hour. Von Bélow had chosen swords. But, having been sent officially to Frankfort, and having come out of his way in order to accept M. Turpin’s challenge, he would be greatly obliged if the meeting might take place as soon as possible.

“The sooner the better,” said Benedict. “It is the very least I can do to oblige a man who comes out of his way in order to oblige me.”

“All he wants, seemingly, is to be able to continue his journey this evening,” observed Anderson.

“Ah!” said Benedict. “But I cannot answer for his ability to do that, however early we meet!”

“That would be a pity,” said the colonel. “Major von Bélow is very much a gentleman. It seems that three Prussian officers interfered to protect you from the mob on condition that you cried ‘Vive King William!’ ‘Vive la Prusse!’“

“Pardon me, there were no conditions.”

“Not on your side, but they undertook it for you.”

“I did not prevent them from crying it as much as they liked.”

“Doubtless, only, instead of doing it yourself — ”

“I recited one of Alfred de Musset’s finest poems; what more could they want?”

“They consider that you treated them with disrespect.”

“Perhaps I did. Well, what next?”

“When they read your letter they decided that one of them must accept the challenge and the other two act as seconds. They drew lots, and the lot fell on von Bélow. That very moment he received orders to go on this mission to Frankfort. The others wished that one of them should take his place in the duel. But he refused, saying that if he were killed or badly wounded, one of them could take on the dispatches which would not be much delayed. So I then arranged the meeting for one o’clock.”

“Very well. What about the other man?”

“Herr Georges Kleist is not remarkable in any way: he is a typical German journalist. He chooses pistols and wants to fire at close quarters on account of his defective eyesight. I believe it is quite good enough, but, however, he does wear glasses, so you are to be at forty-five paces — ”

“Good gracious! Do you call that close quarters?”

“Have a little patience! You may each advance fifteen paces nearer, which reduces the ultimate distance to fifteen. But we had a discussion. His seconds say that he is the aggrieved party and has the right to fire first. I say, nothing of the kind; you ought to fire together, at a given signal. You must decide; it is a serious matter, and I decline the responsibility.”

“It is soon decided; he must fire first. I hope you fixed an early time for him also? We could then kill two birds with one stone.”

“That is just what I have done. At one o’clock you meet von Bélow with swords, and at a quarter-past, Herr Kleist, with pistols.”

“Well then, my dear colonel, I will go and order breakfast, and will you be so good as to tell Herr Kleist that he can have first shot? And,” he added, “let it be understood that I don’t provide any arms myself; I will use the swords and pistols they bring with them.”

It was then eleven o’clock. Benedict promptly ordered breakfast. Colonel Anderson returned in ten minutes and announced that all was settled. Whereupon they applied themselves to their repast until the clock struck twelve.

“Colonel,” said Benedict, “do not let us be late.”

“We have no great distance to go. It is a pretty place, as you will see. Are you influenced by surroundings?”

“I would rather fight on grass than on cultivated ground.”

“We are going to Eilenriede; it is a sort of Hanoverian Bois de Boulogne. In the middle of the wood there is a little open glade with a spring in it, which might have been made for this sort of encounter. I have been there once or twice on my own account and three or four times on other people’s. By the way, have you secured another second?”

“There are five on the other side, one of them will oblige me.”

“But suppose they refused?”

“Not likely! But, even if they did, you alone would be sufficient. And, as they seem anxious to finish the affair one way or another, there will be no difficulties.”

Lenhart had already announced the carriage. The colonel explained the way to him. In half-an-hour they arrived at the little glade, with ten minutes to spare.

“A lovely spot,” said Benedict. “As the others are not yet here, I will sketch it.”

And, producing a sketch-book from his pocket, he dashed off a very accurate view of the place with remarkable rapidity and skill.

Presently a carriage appeared in the distance. As they drew near Benedict rose and took off his hat. The three officers, the editor, and a surgeon they had brought, occupied it. In the officers, Benedict at once recognized his three protectors at Berlin.

His adversaries left their carriage at a little distance and courteously returned his salute. Colonel Anderson went to meet them and explained that his principal, being a stranger, had no second but himself, and asked if one of his opponents would supply the deficiency. They consulted a moment, then one of the officers crossed over and bowed to Benedict.

“I am much obliged by your courtesy, sir,” said Benedict.

“We will agree to anything, sir — rather than lose time,” replied the officer.

Benedict bit his lip.

“Will you at once select the weapons,” he said to Colonel Anderson in English, “we must not keep these gentlemen waiting.”

Von Bélow had already divested himself of helmet, coat, waistcoat, and cravat. Benedict studied him carefully as he did so. He appeared to be about thirty-three and to have lived in his uniform until he felt uncomfortable out of it. He was dark, with glossy black hair cut quite short, a straight nose, black moustache and very decided chin. Both courage and loyalty could be read in the frank and open glance of his dark eyes.

Von Bélow, having provided the swords, Benedict was offered his choice of them. He simply took the first that came, and immediately passed his left hand along the edge and felt the point. The edge was keen as a razor. The point sharp as a needle. The major’s second observed his action, and, beckoning Colonel Anderson aside.

“Will you,” he said, “kindly explain to your principal that in German duels we use only the edge of the sword? To thrust with the point is inadmissible.”

“The devil!” said Benedict when this information was repeated to him, “it is well you told me. In France, where duels, especially military ones, are usually serious, we use every stroke we can, and our sword-play is actually called ‘counterpoint.’“

“But indeed,” exclaimed von Bélow, “I beg, sir, that you will use your sword in whatever way you find best.”

Benedict bowed in acknowledgment. Having fought several duels at Heidelberg he was well acquainted with German methods of fencing and placed himself with apparent indifference. As the affronted person has the right of attack, and a challenge may be considered an affront, he waited, standing simply on guard.

CHAPTER IX

THE TWO DUELS

“Engage, gentlemen!” cried the colonel.

Von Bélow’s sword swept through the air with a flash like lightning. But, rapid though it was, it descended in empty space. Warned by the instinct of a true fencer, the blades had barely crossed when Benedict sprang swiftly aside and remained standing unguarded, his point lowered, and his mocking smile disclosing a fine set of teeth. His adversary paused, perplexed, then swung round so as to face him, but did not immediately advance. However, feeling that this duel must be no child’s play, he stepped forward and instantly the point of Benedict’s sword rose menacingly against him. Involuntarily he retreated a step. Benedict now fixed his eyes upon him, circling round him, now bending to the right, now again to the left, but always keeping his weapon low and ready to strike.

The major began to feel a kind of hypnotic influence overpowering him. Determined to fight against it, he boldly stepped forward, holding his sword aloft. Instantly he felt the touch of cold steel. Benedict thrust, his rapier pierced von Bélow’s shirt and reappeared on the other side. Had not the major remained standing motionless opposite him, an onlooker would have supposed he had been run through the body.

The seconds hastened up, but:

“It is nothing, I assure you,” said the major.

Then, perceiving that Benedict had only intended to pierce his shirt and not himself, he added:

“Come, sir, let us continue this game in earnest.”

“Ah!” said Benedict, “but you see, had I played in earnest, you would now be a dead man!”

“On guard, sir,” cried von Bélow, furious, “and remember this is a duel to the death.”

Benedict stepped back and saluting with his sword:

“Pardon me, gentlemen,” he said, “you see how unfortunate I am. Although fully intending not to use my point I have nevertheless made two holes in my opponent’s shirt. My hand might again refuse to obey my will, and, as I do not visit a country merely to rebel against its customs — particularly when they happen to be philanthropic — so — ”

He went up to a rock which rose out of the little valley and, placing the point of his rapier in a crevice, broke off a good inch of the blade.

His adversary wished to do likewise, but,

“It is quite unnecessary, sir,” said Benedict, “you are not likely to use your point.”

Being now reduced to ordinary sword-play, Benedict crossed swords with his opponent, which necessitated their keeping close together. But he continually retreated half a pace and advanced again, thanks to which incessant movement the major merely made cuts in the air. Becoming impatient, he endeavoured to reach Benedict, missed again, and involuntarily lowered his weapon. Benedict parried a back stroke and touched von Bélow’s breast with the broken point. Said he:

“You see I was right in breaking the point of my sword. Otherwise, this time something besides your shirt would have been pierced.”

The major remained silent, but quickly recovering himself again stood on guard. He now saw that his adversary was a most skilful swordsman, who united French celerity with determined coolness and who was fully conscious of his strength.

Benedict, seeing that an end must be made, now stood still, calm but menacing, with frowning brows and eyes fixed on his enemy, not attempting to strike but retaining a posture of defence. It seemed as if he awaited the attack, but suddenly with the unexpected celerity which characterized all his movements, he sprang forward with a bound like that of a jaguar, aimed a blow at his adversary’s head, and as the latter raised his arm in defence, drew a line with his blade right across his chest. Then, springing lightly back in the same instant he again lowered his sword as before.

Von Bélow’s shirt, slashed as though cut by a razor, was instantly tinged with blood. The seconds moved forward.

“Do not stir, I beg,” cried the major, “it is nothing but a scratch. I must confess the gentleman’s hand is a light one.”

And he again stood on guard.

Courageous though he was, he felt he was losing confidence, and, dumbfounded by his enemy’s agility, a sense of great danger oppressed him.

Evidently Benedict was keeping just out of reach, and was merely waiting until he should expose himself by an unwary advance. He understood that hitherto his opponent had simply played with him, but that now the duel was approaching an end and that his smallest mistake would be severely punished. His sword, never able to encounter Benedict's, seemed to become lifeless, and ceased to respond to his will.

His previous experience in fencing seemed useless here, and this flashing blade which he could never touch, but which rose constantly before him, alert, intelligent, as if endued with life, confused his senses. He dared not risk a movement before this enemy always just beyond his reach, so imperturbable and yet so alert, and who evidently intended, like the artist he was, either to finish with one brilliant stroke or else — which did not seem likely — to expire in a dignified pose like the "Dying Gladiator."

But, exasperated by his opponent's perfect bodily grace, by his elegant and masterly swordsmanship, and still more by the mocking smile which hovered on his lips, von Bélow felt the blood rise to his temples, and could not resist muttering between his teeth:

"This fellow is the very devil!"

And, springing forward, no longer fearing the broken point, he raised his sword and aimed a blow with all his might at his adversary, a blow which, had it reached its object, would have split his head as though it had been an apple. Again, the stroke only encountered empty air, for once more Benedict had effaced himself by a light, graceful spring, very familiar to Parisian fencing masters.

The major's raised sword had broken his guard. A flash, as of lightning, and his arm, streaming with blood, fell against his side. His sword dropped, but remained upright supported by the sword knot.

The seconds hurried to his side. Very pale, but with smiling lips, von Bélow bowed to Benedict and said:

"I thank you, sir. When you might have run me through the body you only wounded my shirt; when you might have cut me in two you let me off with the sort of cut one gets in shaving, and now, when you might have either cleft my head or maimed my arm, I escape with a ruined sleeve. I now ask you to extend your courtesy even further, and to complete the record like the gentleman you are by explaining why you have spared me thus?"

"Sir," said Benedict with a smile, "in the house of Herr Fellner, the Burgomaster of Frankfort, I was introduced to his god-daughter, a charming lady, who adores her husband. Her name was the Baroness von Bélow. When I saw your card it occurred to me that you might be related, and though, beautiful as she is, mourning could only add to her charm, it would grieve me to have been the cause of compelling her to wear it."

The major looked Benedict in the face and, stern soldier though he might be, there were tears in his eyes.

"Madame von Bélow is my wife," he said. "Believe me, sir, wherever she may meet you she will greet you thus: 'My husband foolishly quarrelled with you, sir; may you ever be blessed because for my sake you spared him!' and she will give you her hand with as much gratitude as I now offer you mine."

And he added smiling:

"Forgive me for only offering my left hand. It is entirely your own fault that I cannot give you the right."

And now, although the wound was not dangerous, von Bélow did not refuse to have it dressed. The surgeon promptly ripped up his sleeve, disclosing a wound, not very deep, but terrible to look at, which extended down the arm from the shoulder to the elbow. And one shuddered to think what such a wound would have been, had the swordsman struck with all his force instead of simply drawing his blade along the arm.

The surgeon dipped a cloth in the ice-cold spring which rose at the foot of the rock and wrapped it round the arm. He then drew the sides of the wound together and strapped them with plaster. He assured the major that he would be quite able to continue his journey to Frankfort in the evening.

Benedict offered his carriage to the major, who, however, declined, being curious to see what would happen to his successor. He excused himself on the score that courtesy required him to wait for Herr Georges Kleist.

Although Herr Kleist, having had time to see what sort of adversary he had to deal with, would willingly have been some leagues away, he put a brave face on the matter, and although he grew perceptibly pale during the first duel, and still paler when the wound was dressed, he was, nevertheless, the first to say.

"Excuse my interrupting you, gentlemen, but it is my turn now."

"I am quite at your service, sir," said Benedict.

"You are not properly dressed for a duel with pistols," interposed Colonel Anderson, glancing at Benedict's costume.

"Really," said Benedict, "I never thought about what clothes I was to fight in. I only wanted to do it with comfort to myself. That's all!"

"You can at least put on your tunic and button it!"

"Bah! It is much too hot."

"Perhaps we ought to have taken the pistols first. All this sword-play may have unsteadied your hand."

"My hand is my servant, dear colonel; it knows it has to obey me and you will see it does so."

"Do you wish to see the pistols you are to use?"

"You have seen them, have you not? Are they double barrelled or single?"

"Single barrelled duelling pistols. They were hired this morning from a gunsmith in the Grande Place."

"Then call my other second and see them properly loaded. Mind the shot is inside the barrels, and not dropped outside."

"I will load them myself."

"Colonel," asked the Prussian officers, "do you wish to see the pistols loaded?"

"Yes. I wish to do so. But how are we to arrange? Herr Kleist will only have one second."

"These two gentlemen may answer for Herr Kleist," said the major, "and I will go over to M. Turpin." And his wound being now bandaged, he went and sat down on the rock which gave its name to the glade.

Meanwhile the pistols were loaded, Colonel Anderson fulfilling his promise by putting in the balls himself. Benedict came up to him.

"Tell me," the Englishman asked gravely, "do you mean to kill him?"

"What do you expect? One can't exactly play with pistols as one can with swords or rapiers."

"Surely there is some way of disabling people with whom you have no serious quarrel without killing them outright?"

"I really cannot undertake to miss him just to oblige you! Think! He would naturally go and publish everywhere that I did not know how to shoot!"

"All right! I see I need not have spoken. I bet you have an idea of some sort."

"Frankly, I have. But then he must do his part."

"What must he do?"

"Just keep perfectly still, it ought not to be so very difficult. See, they are ready."

The seconds had just measured the forty-five paces. Colonel Anderson now measured off fifteen from each end, and to mark the exact limit which neither combatant was to pass, he laid two scabbards across and planted a sword upright in the ground at each end to decide the starting-point.

"To your places, gentlemen," cried the seconds.

Herr Kleist having selected his pistol, the colonel brought the other to Benedict, who was talking to the major, and who took the pistol without as much as looking at it, and still chatting with von Bélow, walked quietly to his place.

The duellists now stood at the extreme distance.

"Gentlemen!" said Colonel Anderson, "you are now forty-five paces apart. Each of you may either advance fifteen paces before firing, or may fire from where he now stands. Herr Georges Kleist has the first shot and may fire as soon as he pleases. Having fired, he may hold his pistol so as to protect any part of himself he wishes.

"Now, gentlemen!"

The two adversaries advanced towards each other. Having arrived at the mark, Benedict waited, standing, facing his opponent with folded arms. A light breeze ruffled his hair and blew his shirt open at the chest. He had walked at his ordinary pace.

Herr Kleist, dressed entirely in black, bare-headed, and with closely buttoned coat, had advanced slowly, by force of will overcoming physical disinclination. He halted at the limit.

"You are ready, sir?" he asked.

"Quite ready, sir."

"Will you not turn sideways?"

"I am not accustomed to do so."

Then, turning himself, Herr Kleist slowly raised his pistol, took aim, and fired.

Benedict heard the ball whiz close by his ear and felt the wind ruffle his hair; it had passed within an inch of his head.

His adversary instantly raised his pistol, holding it so as to protect his face, but was unable entirely to control a nervous movement of his hand.

“Sir,” said Benedict, “you courteously asked just now if I would not stand sideways, which is unusual between combatants. Permit me in my turn to offer a piece of advice, or rather, make a request.”

“What is it, sir?” asked the journalist, still protecting himself with his pistol.

“This; keep your hand steady, your pistol is moving. I wish to put my ball in the wood of your pistol, which will be very difficult unless you keep it quite still. Against my own will I might hit you, either in the cheek or the back of the head, whereas — if you keep your hand just as it is — ”

He raised his pistol and fired instantly.

“There! it is done now!”

It was done so rapidly that no one could have supposed he had taken any aim at all. But, even as the report was heard, Herr Kleist’s pistol was blown to pieces and he himself staggered and fell on one knee.

“Ah!” said Anderson, “you have killed him.”

“I think not,” replied Benedict. “I aimed between the two screws which hold the hammer. It is the shock of the concussion which has brought him down.”

The surgeon and the two seconds hastened to the wounded man, who now held only the butt end of his pistol. There was a terrible bruise on his cheek, reaching from the eye to the jaw. Otherwise he was untouched, only the shock had knocked him down.

The barrel of the pistol was picked up on one side and the lock on the other. The ball had lodged exactly between the two screws. Had it continued its course unobstructed it would have broken the upper jaw and penetrated the brain.

The dressing was simple — the bruise was a very bad one, but the skin was only broken in two places, and the surgeon considered a cold-water bandage to be all that was required.

Benedict embraced the major, bowed to the journalist, shook hands with the seconds, put on his coat, and got into the carriage, looking less dishevelled than if he had come from a picnic.

“Well, my dear sponsor,” he said to Colonel Anderson.

“Well, my dear godson,” responded the latter, “I know at least ten men besides myself who would willingly have given a thousand pounds to see what I have seen to-day.”

“Sir,” said Lenhart, “if you would promise neither to hunt nor to fight unless I am there to see, I, my horse, and my carriage should be at your service for the rest of my life.”

And indeed, Benedict returned as he had foretold, having fought his duels, vanquished his adversaries, and come off without a single scratch!

CHAPTER X

“WHAT WAS WRITTEN IN A KING’S HAND”

When Benedict returned to his hotel he was met by Kaulbach’s servant, sent by his master to learn what had happened. In the good town of Hanover it had speedily become known that in answer to Benedict’s letter in the “Gazette” two challenges had been received that very morning, and that he, his challengers, and seconds, had all gone to Eilenriede, the usual place for settling affairs of this description. Benedict desired him to assure his master that all was well, adding that he would have come in person to acknowledge his courtesy, had he not feared to rouse the curiosity of the whole town.

Colonel Anderson had made an excuse for leaving Benedict as soon as they returned. Being an officer of the Royal Ordnance he had probably some report to make to the king.

The news of the result of this double combat spread as rapidly as had that of the challenges. Such an event as two duels successfully fought without a scratch being received was quite unheard of, and was considered so extraordinary that the young men of the town, who also had no love for the Prussians, sent a deputation to congratulate Benedict on his success. He received the deputies and replied in such excellent German that they retired marvelling more than ever.

The doors had scarcely closed on them when Stephen appeared, and announced that all his guests were so interested in the events of the day that they begged Benedict would honour them by dining at the *table d’héte*, in order that they might all have the pleasure of personally congratulating him.

Benedict replied that he did not in the least understand so much admiration for his perfectly natural conduct, but that he was quite willing to do anything which might be agreeable to his fellow guests.

Stephen had time to let the news circulate in the town that the young Frenchman of whom every one was talking, would, for once only, consent to dine at the *table d’héte*. Instead of twenty-five only, he had covers laid for two hundred guests. Every place was occupied.

The police feared disorder of some kind, and came to investigate. They were assured that it was only a family affair, a demonstration such as had been made three days before under the windows of Count von Bismarck — only it was the other way about! Now the Hanoverian police was an excellent body, which highly approved of family fétes and patriotic demonstrations. Therefore, instead of objecting to this one they encouraged it with all their power, thanks to which all passed off in perfect order.

At midnight, Benedict was at length allowed to retire, but his admirers organized a serenade beneath his windows which lasted till two o’clock in the morning.

At nine Kaulbach entered his room. The Crown Prince invited Benedict to breakfast at the Palace of Herrenhausen, and requested him to bring his sketches. Kaulbach was commissioned to bring him back. The breakfast was at eleven, but the prince would be obliged if Benedict would come at ten in order to have some time for conversation both before and after.

Benedict lost no time in dressing, and although Kaulbach, intimate at the palace, assured him he could go in ordinary costume, he preferred to wear the naval uniform in which he had made the Chinese campaign. On his breast was the Cross of the Légion d’Honneur, of which the simple red ribbon means much more when worn by some than do the various grand crosses worn by others. He added a sabre, the gift of Said Pasha, took his sketches, and got into the carriage with Kaulbach.

Lenhart had a whole day’s holiday.

Twenty-five minutes brought them to Herrenhausen, which is about a league from Hanover, and, the carriage being open, Benedict could see the young prince watching for him eagerly at a window. He was accompanied only by his aide-de-camp, an officer of Engineers, and consequently well able to draw. Also, which is more unusual, he did not disdain the picturesque.

The prince enquired courteously after Benedict’s health, without making the smallest allusion to the duels of the day before. It was evident nevertheless that he knew all about them. Had there been any doubts on the subject they would have been dispelled by the appearance of Colonel Anderson as another invited guest.

But the prince’s chief interest centred in the portfolio which Benedict carried under his arm.

Anticipating his wishes, Benedict observed;

"Your Highness wished to see some of my sketches. I have brought some representing hunting incidents, thinking that they might interest you most."

"Oh! let me see, let me see!" exclaimed the prince, extending his hand, and placing the portfolio on the piano, he began eagerly to examine the contents. After having turned over several, "Ah," said he, "but they are beautiful. Will you not tell me something of the adventures which I am sure they illustrate? They must be so interesting."

Benedict endeavoured to gratify the prince, and the time both before and after the breakfast passed rapidly in listening to accounts of elephant hunting, of encounters with pirates in the Straits of Malacca, of adventures in the Caucasus, and he had just finished an especially thrilling anecdote relating to the poisonous snakes of India when the king was seen approaching from the gallery. He held the arm of his aide-de-camp with whom he was conversing and walked firmly as if able to see. He entered the dining-room without being announced. The four guests rose immediately, but:

"Do not let me disturb you, gentlemen," said the king. "I merely came to visit the prince, to ask if he has all he wants, and if not, to convey his wishes to the persons concerned."

"No! thanks to Your Majesty's kindness, nothing is wanting here except yourself. Your knowledge of men has not deceived you, and Monsieur Benedict is the most delightful companion I ever met."

"The prince is imaginative, sire," said Benedict laughing. "He attributes to some very simple anecdotes and hasty sketches an excellence which they do not possess."

But the king replied as if answering his own thought, the thought which had led him to visit the young man.

"Yesterday," he said, addressing Benedict and turning towards him, as he always did in conversation, "you said something about a science which interested me in former days, namely, chiromancy. My thoughts carry me on towards the mysterious unexplored regions of the human mind, of nature, of creation. I should like to know they are based upon logic, on physiology, for instance."

"I know, sire," replied Benedict, smiling, "that is why I ventured yesterday to mention the occult sciences to Your Majesty."

"You know. But how?" demanded the king.

"I should be a poor student, sire, if I had limited my enquiries to the hands only, and had not united the study of Lavater and Gall to that of Arpentigny. I saw at once in the form of your hands and head those precious aptitudes which are shown in phrenology by the well-developed organs of the poetic faculty and of the love of harmony, which betoken the student of natural science. The protection accorded by Your Majesty to the poor herbalist, Lampe, arose not from benevolence only, but from the conviction that certain men are empowered to receive a revelation, and that it is not always the highly placed ones of earth to whom truth is thus manifested."

"It is true," said the king. "Other men may see the stars shining in the midnight silence, but it seems to me that I actually hear that 'music of the spheres' spoken of by Pythagoras. And I am proud to think that while I stand on the summit of earthly society, there are, immediately above me, intermediate angelic influences which carry on a boundless electric chain, linking us not merely with our own little planetary system, but with others — with the whole universe."

"I do not venture," the king continued with a smile, "to discourse openly on these beliefs. I should get the reputation of 'a king of dreams,' about the worst a king can have. But to you, who are a dreamer like myself, I do say — yes, I believe in these celestial influences, and I believe that each mortal has, in that precious casket which he calls his skull, the signs of his destiny. He may strive to alter or delay its course, but it will bear him on irresistibly to fortune, success, or misery, as the case may be.

"And I speak with conviction because I have had proofs. In early youth I once met a gipsy woman in the course of a solitary walk. She examined my hand and told me certain things which came to pass. I wish to believe you, but I must have proofs. Can you read the past in my hand even as the gipsy read the future. Can you, do you, sincerely believe you have this power?"

"I do, sire. And I think actual science will tell you what has before been perhaps merely guessed at by intuition or tradition."

"Well then," said the king, extending his hand, "now tell me what you read."

"Sire," replied Benedict, "I do not know how far I dare — "

"Dare what?" enquired the king.

"What if I read only a threatening future?"

"We live in days when no predictions, however terrible, can exceed the reality of the convulsions which are taking place around us. What can you predict for me that can be so terrible? Is it the loss of my kingdom? I lost more than a kingdom when I lost the vision of sun and sky, of earth and sea. Take my hand, and tell me what is written."

"Everything?"

"Everything. As for misfortunes, is it not better to know of them than to encounter them unforeseen?"

Benedict bowed so deeply over King George's hand that he almost touched it with his lips.

"A truly royal hand," he said, after having glanced over it, "a beneficent hand; an artistic hand."

"I did not ask for compliments, sir," said the king, smiling.

"See, my dear master," said Benedict, addressing Kaulbach, "how well the Mount of Apollo, there, under the ring-finger, is developed! Apollo bestows love of the arts; he is the giver of intelligence, of all that is brilliant and creates brilliance. It is he who gives the hope of an immortal name, calm of the soul, the sympathy that creates love. Look at the Mount of Mars, represented by the part opposite the thumb. This is what gives courage, both civil and military, calm, coolness in danger, resignation, pride, devotion, resolution, and the strength of resistance. Unfortunately, Saturn is against us. Saturn threatens. You know, sire, Saturn is Fate. Now, I ought to tell you, the lines of Saturn are not only unfavourable; they are calamitous."

And here Benedict raised his head and looking at the king with the utmost respect and sympathy:

"I might continue more intimately yet, sire," he said, "and reveal your whole character in its most secret recesses. I might sketch your inclinations one by one to you to their lightest shades; but I should prefer to pass at once to graver facts. At twelve years old, Your Majesty had a serious illness."

"It is true," said the king.

"At nineteen, a line extends both towards the brain and towards the Mount of the Sun — a nervous seizure on one side; on the other, something resembling death, but which is not death — an eclipse! And worse than that, an eclipse is momentary one night!"

"The gipsy told me literally the same as you — something that resembles death, but is not death! The fact is that at the age of nineteen I passed through great trouble."

“Stay! Here, sire, on Jupiter there is a marvellous gleam; one of the highest seats of human fortune — about the age of thirty-nine.”

“Again the words of the gipsy. At thirty-nine I became king.”

“I was ignorant of the precise dates,” said Benedict, “but it might be supposed that I knew them. Let me look for a fact that I could not have known. Ah, I see it. Yes, it is certainly here. An agony of terror, an accident due to water. What is it? A boat in danger? A tempest watched from the shore? The imminent wreck of a vessel containing some one beloved? There is fearful terror, but terror only; for there is a rescue traced close to the line of fate. Your Majesty undoubtedly experienced terrible anxiety for the life of some one greatly beloved.’

“Do you hear this, Ernest?” said the king addressing his son.

“Oh, my father!” said the young prince, throwing his arms around his father’s neck. Then, to Benedict: “Yes, indeed, my poor father was in terrible fear. I was bathing in the sea at Nordeney. I can swim fairly well; but without perceiving it I let myself be carried away on a current; and, upon my word, I was on the point of sinking when I grasped the arm of an honest fisherman who had come to my assistance. One second more, and all would have been over with me.”

“And I was there,” said the king. “I could hear his cries, I stretched my arms towards him — it was all I could do. Gloucester offered his kingdom for a horse: and I would gladly have given mine for a ray of light. Do not let us think of it. All the misfortunes of the future together are not more terrible than the shadow of that misfortune which did not happen.”

“And so, sire?” said Benedict.

“And so I am convinced,” said the king. “I have no need of further proofs. Let us pass on to the future.”

Benedict looked with great attention at the king’s hand. He hesitated a moment and asked for a magnifying glass, to see more distinctly. It was brought.

“Sire,” he said, “you are about to be drawn into a great war. One of your nearest neighbours will not only betray, but will despoil you; and notwithstanding — look, monseigneur!” he said to the prince, “the line of the Sun shows victory: but an empty victory, useless, without fruit.”

“And then?” asked the king.

“Oh, sire, what do I read in this hand!”

“Good tidings, or bad?”

"You told me to keep nothing from you, sire."

"And I repeat it. Tell me then; this victory — "

"This victory, as I have told Your Majesty, leads to nothing. Here is the Line of the Sun broken off above the Line of the Head by a line starting from Mars which also cuts the Mount of Jupiter."

"And that foretells?"

"A defeat. But however — No," said Benedict, seeking to read the most mysterious secrets from the royal hand; "moreover, it is not the last word of your destiny. Here is the Line of the Sun after its breakage starting afresh, reaching the ring-finger and stopping at its base. And there see further, above this line traversing Jupiter, a straight line like a furrow crowned with a star, as a sceptre is crowned with a diamond."

"And that prophesies?"

"Restoration."

"Then according to you, I shall lose the throne and reconquer it?"

Benedict turned towards the prince.

"Your hand, if you please, monseigneur."

The prince gave him his hand.

"After the age of forty, monseigneur, the Line of Life sends a branch towards the Line of the Sun. At that period you will ascend the throne. This is all that I can tell you. Now, if you ascend the throne, prince, it can only mean that your father has either recovered or has never lost it."

The king remained silent for a moment, resting his head on his left hand. He seemed gazing fixedly before him as if absorbed in some great idea. The most profound silence reigned in the apartment.

"I cannot tell you," he said at length, "how much this unknown science interests me. Does Providence permit each of us to recognize his destiny in advance, just as the wrestler of ancient Greece might calculate the strength of his adversary in the circus, and consider how best to avoid his grip and obtain the victory?"

He remained silent for a few moments, then continued:

"After all, it would seem only just, only reasonable, that Providence which announces a storm by gathering clouds and muttering thunder, should allow to man and especially to man placed on the highest point of earthly grandeur, some indication of the approach of the storms of life. Yes, this science should be true, if only for the reason that it is necessary, and has hitherto been a missing link — unknown as it was — in the harmony of creation and in the logic of the Divine Mercy.”

At this moment an usher appeared and informed the king that the Minister of Foreign Affairs desired an audience on account of important business.

The king turned to Benedict:

“Sir,” said he, “though your predictions are gloomy, you will always be welcome in the home of him to whom you have made them. You have foretold a victory; well, I to-day commission you to depict it. And if you remain with us, it only rests with you to share it. Ernest, give your Guelphic Cross to M. Benedict Turpin. I will tell my Minister of Foreign Affairs to have the patent ready for signature to-morrow.”

The king embraced his son, gave his hand to Kaulbach, graciously saluted Anderson and Benedict, and taking the arm of his aide-de-camp left the apartment as he had entered it.

The young prince detached the cross and ribbon of the Guelphic Order which decorated his uniform, and fastened them on Benedict’s coat with signs of the most livery pleasure. The latter thanked him and expressed his gratitude with evidently heartfelt warmth. Said the prince:

“Only promise me one thing, M. Benedict. If your predictions should be verified, and you should have nothing better to do, we will go on our travels together, and you will show me how to kill lions and elephants in these wonderful forests I have heard of to-day.”

CHAPTER XI

BARON FREDERIC VON BéLOW

And now we will leave our friend Benedict Turpin in order to follow one of his adversaries who is destined to become an important character in our story. We mean Baron Frederic von Bélow, whom we left with Georges Kleist in the glade of Eilenriede.

Although his wound appeared at first sight the more serious of the two, it was not in reality so. Moreover, he was the most eager to leave the field. Entrusted as he was with a mission to Frankfort, he had turned aside from his road to call Benedict to account, and from the first moment that he was able to bear the fatigue of the journey he did not lose a moment in pursuing it.

Although untouched by the ball, the impact of the broken pistol with the right side of Kleist's face had had deplorable results. The blow was so violent that it had left a bruise of the exact shape of the muzzle of the pistol. His eyes were bloodshot and his cheek immoderately swollen. In short, Herr Kleist would be obliged for at least a fortnight to forgo the pleasures of society.

When the Baron Frederic von Bélow and Herr Kleist arrived at the Royal Hotel they found their misadventure and Benedict's triumph were already public property. The fact of their being Prussians was no recommendation, and they were received with an amount of derision which induced Herr Kleist, suffering though he was, to take the train immediately. As for the major, having already accomplished a third of his journey, he had only to continue on a branch line running direct from Hanover to Frankfort.

We have already given some account of the appearance and physique of the Baron Frederic von Bélow; we will now complete our description, first relating the romantic manner in which he entered the military career and the happy chance by which his undoubted merits found their due reward.

Frederic von Bélow came of a family belonging to Breslau. He had been a student at Jena. One fine day he resolved to make a tour which is frequently undertaken by German students along the banks of the Rhine. He set out alone; not that he was in the least misanthropical; but he was a poet. He loved to travel according to the inclination of the moment, to stop when it suited him, proceed when he pleased, and have no companion drawing him to the left when he wanted to follow a charming woman to the right.

He had reached the most picturesque part of the Rhine; the Seven Mountains. On the opposite bank, on the summit of a lofty hill there stood a fine Gothic castle, lately restored. It belonged to the brother of the King of Prussia, who was then only the Prince Royal. Not only had he rebuilt the castle on its ancient foundations, but he had furnished it throughout with appointments of the sixteenth century, collected in the neighbourhood from the peasantry and convents, and new pieces made by clever workmen from ancient models. Hangings, tapestries, mirrors, all were of the same period, and formed a charming miniature museum of arms, pictures, and valuable curiosities. When the prince was not in residence he allowed the castle to be shown to visitors of distinction.

How difficult it is to define the phrase “visitors of distinction.” Frederic, whose family was of ancient nobility, considered that he had a right, though travelling on foot, to see the castle. Knapsack on shoulder, staff in hand, he climbed the steep path and knocked at the door of the keep. The sound of a horn was heard, and the door opened. A porter appeared and an officer in the costume of the sixteenth century, who asked what could be done for him. Frederic von Bélow explained his wish as an archéologist to see the Prince Regent’s castle. The officer replied, regretting he was not able to gratify him; the prince’s intendant had arrived the evening before, preceding his master only by twenty-four hours. Visitors could no longer be admitted. But the traveller was invited according to custom to inscribe his name, titles, and qualifications in the visitors’ book. He took a pen and wrote Frederic von Bélow, student of the University of Jena. Then he took up his iron-shod stick, saluted the officer, and began to descend the path.

But he had not taken a hundred steps when he heard himself called. The officer beckoned and a page ran after him, saying the intendant begged him to return and would take upon himself to grant the desired permission to see the castle.

In the ante-room Frederic met, as if by chance, a man of about fifty-eight or sixty. It was the prince’s intendant. He entered into conversation with the young man, appeared pleased with him, and offered to be his guide throughout the castle, an offer that Frederic took good care to accept. The intendant was very well informed; Frederic was a young man of ability, and three or four hours had passed without either being aware how the time was going, when a servant announced, dinner. Frederic gracefully expressed his concern at leaving his cicerone so soon; and his regret was evidently shared by his guide.

“See here,” he said. “You are travelling as a student; I am here *en garéon*. Suppose you dine with me. You will not dine so well as you might with the king, but at any rate it will be better than hotel fare.”

Frederic protested as far as he thought good breeding demanded, but as he was really longing to accept the invitation he ended by acceding with visible pleasure, and they consequently dined together. Frederic was a delightful companion, being both poet and philosopher, qualities one finds only united in Germany. He quite made a conquest of his host, who after dinner proposed a game of chess. Midnight struck, and each thought the evening barely begun. It was not possible to return to the village at such an hour. Frederic, after some modest reluctance, remained at the castle and slept in the Landgrave Philip’s bed; and it was only the next day after lunch that he obtained his host’s permission to resume his journey.

“I am not without some slight influence at court,” said the intendant on taking leave of him, “and if I can ever be of any service to you, pray make use of me.”

Frederic promised that he would.

“And whatever may happen,” added his host, “I shall remember your name. You may forget me, but I shall not forget you.”

Frederic finished his travels on the Rhine, returned to the University of Jena, concluded his studies there, entered the diplomatic service and was greatly astonished at being one day summoned to the cabinet of the grand duke.

“Sir,” said the great man, “I have selected you to convey my congratulations to William the First, King of Prussia, on his recent accession to the throne.”

“But, Highness!” cried Frederic in astonishment, “who am I to be honoured with such a commission?”

“Really! are you not Baron Frederic von Bélow?”

“Highness! Baron? I? But since when have I become a baron?”

“Since I made you one. You will start at nine o’clock to-morrow; your letters of credit will be ready at eight.”

Frederic could only bow and utter his thanks; he bowed deeply, gratefully thanked the grand duke and left the room.

The next morning at ten o’clock he was in the train and by the evening he was in Berlin. His arrival was immediately announced to the new king. The new king replied that he would receive him the following day at the castle Of Potsdam.

On the morrow Frederic, in his court suit, started for Potsdam and arrived at the castle. But to his great astonishment he learnt that the king had just gone away and had left only his intendant to represent him.

Frederic’s first idea was to return to Berlin; but he remembered that it was this official who had entertained him so kindly and courteously two years before at the castle of Rheinstein. He did not want to appear ungrateful or offended, so had his name sent in accordingly. But while crossing the ante-room he observed a full-length portrait of the king. He stopped for an instant stupefied. His Majesty resembled his intendant as one drop of water resembles another. The truth now dawned on Frederic. It was the king’s brother himself who, to-day reigning as King William I, had received him at the castle of Rheinstein, who had acted as his guide, had kept him to dinner, who had won three games of chess out of five, and had made him sleep in the Landgrave Philip’s bed — who had offered his influence at court, and who on taking leave of him had promised not to forget him.

He understood now why he had been chosen by the Grand Duke of Weimar to carry his congratulations to the king; why the Grand Duke of Weimar had made him a baron, why the king had appointed a meeting at Potsdam, and why finally His Majesty had returned to Berlin, leaving his intendant only to represent him.

His Majesty wanted to enjoy another day like that they had passed together at Rheinstein. Frederic was a good courtier, and was ready to contribute all in his power to this caprice. He entered as if he had no suspicion, greeted his host like an old acquaintance, only showing the respect due to an older man, thus recalling the scene which had left such a pleasing influence on his mind.

The intendant made excuses for His Majesty, and invited Frederic to pass the day at the castle of Potsdam, an invitation which was accepted like the one at Rheinstein. He again offered his services as cicerone, took him into the mausoleum, and showed him the tomb and the sword of the Great Frederic.

A court carriage was ready waiting for them, and they went to see the castle of Sans-Souci, which is only two miles from Potsdam. It was here, it will be remembered, in the park of this chéteau that the famous mill was situated which its owner refused to sell to Frederic II, and which caused the king to exclaim when the miller gained his lawsuit, “So there are still judges at Berlin!” In the sequel the descendants of the stubborn miller were softened and sold their mill to William I, who, wishing to preserve it as a monument of the occurrence, refused to allow it to be demolished.

But time, which cares nothing for the commands of kings, had in store for William and his guest an example of its disregard. An hour before the arrival of Frederic and the so-called agent, the four sails of the windmill had fallen, bringing down in their fall the balustrade which surrounded it. So that to day one must conclude that there are no longer judges in Berlin, as there is no longer a mill at Sans-Souci.

On their return to Potsdam, Frederic and his companion found a table ready laid for two. They dined alone together, played five games of chess out of which the agent won three, and it was only at midnight that they separated, when on the agent wishing Frederic a good night, the latter replied with a deep bow: “Sire, may God grant Your Majesty a good night.”

The next day the fiction was abandoned. The king breakfasted with Frederic, gave him the Order of the Red Eagle, and with much pressing induced him to hand in his resignation and join the army. A week later he received his commission as lieutenant of the line, and came to pay his respects in his new character to the king, who undertook that the king would ever remember him whom the prince had promised not to forget.

Two years later, Frederic received a proof that the king indeed had not forgotten. His regiment was stationed in garrison at Frankfort, where at the house of Herr Fellner, the burgomaster, he made the acquaintance of a family of French descent exiled by the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, which had since its expatriation become Catholic. The family consisted of the mother, aged about thirty-eight, the grandmother, who was sixty-eight, and two girls of twenty and eighteen. Their family name was Chandroz.

The elder daughter, Emma, had black hair, black eyes, a pale clear skin, and well-marked eyebrows; her marvellously beautiful teeth showed like pearls against her vividly red lips. She had, in fact, that stately dark beauty which suggests the Roman matron, Lucretia and Cornelia in one.

Helen was worthy of her name. Her hair was of that exquisite blonde tint which can only be compared to the colour of ripe corn. Her complexion faintly tinted with rose had the freshness and delicacy of the camellia. And the effect was almost astonishing when under these fair locks, and upon that countenance of almost transparent pallor, she raised large dark eyes, eloquent of passion, overarched with dark eyebrows and fringed with lashes which gave to their sparkling orbs deep reflections like those of the black diamonds of Tripoli. And as one had only to look at Emma to see foreshadowed in her the calm and wisdom of those matrons among whom the Catholic religion finds its saints, so one could divine in Helen all that tempestuous future which the united passions of two races hold in store for the hybrids of their sex.

Whether it were that this strange manifestation of divine caprice dismayed him, or whether he felt himself drawn by irresistible sympathy to the elder of the two sisters — it was to her that the Baron von Bélow paid his homage. He was young, handsome, and rich. It was known that the King of Prussia held him in warm regard. He stated that if he were granted Emma’s hand, his royal protector at the same time would make him a captain. The two young people were in love, and the family had no serious opposition to raise to their union. They said: “Obtain your promotion as captain, and we will see.” He asked three days’ leave, started for Berlin, and came back on the third day with his captain’s commission.

All was arranged. But during his absence Emma’s mother was slightly indisposed. Her illness increased, developed into disease of the lungs, and at the end of six months Emma was doubly orphaned.

It was a further reason for giving the family a protector. The grandmother, sixty-nine years of age, might die at any moment. They waited till the strict season of mourning dictated both by their hearts and by custom had elapsed, and at the end of six months they were married.

Three days after the birth of his first child, a boy, the Baron Frederic von Bélow received his commission as major. On this occasion the protection of the king was so obvious and so kindly intentioned that the baron resolved to make a second journey to Berlin, not on this occasion to ask for favours, but to return thanks for them. This journey was all the more opportune because a word dropped by His Majesty’s secretary had warned him that there were great events on the horizon in which he might take part, and that he would do wisely to come to Berlin on any suitable pretext and see the king in person.

And in fact we have already said that Count von Bismarck had worked hard to bring great events to pass. The king had three times received Baron Frederic in private, and had freely discussed with him the probability of a terrible war. To crown all, he attached him to the staff, so that he might become aide-de-camp to any general whom he sent to any special place, or even at need to his son or his cousin.

This was how Baron Frederic chanced to find himself at Berlin on June 7th, that is, on the day of the attempted assassination of Bismarck. As we have seen, he, with two other officers rescued Benedict from the hands of the mob; but, having promised the crowd that the Frenchman should shout "Long live Prussia! Long live King William I!" he was confounded when, instead of adopting this prudent course, Benedict declaimed Alfred de Musset's verses on the Rhine, almost as well known in Prussia as the song to which they were an answer. He and his comrades took this affront, which the public had witnessed, as a deliberate insult. All three presented themselves at the Black Eagle, which Benedict as we know had given as his address, intending to demand immediate satisfaction.

But, as they met each other and learnt that their errands were all the same, they recognized that three men, who do not wish to gain their end by intimidation, cannot all demand satisfaction from a single opponent. For this reason they cast lots as to who should have the honour of fighting with Benedict, and the lot as we have seen fell upon Frederic.

CHAPTER XII

HELEN

There stands in Frankfort-on-Main, at the corner of the Ross-market, opposite the Protestant Church of St. Catherine, a mansion, which, by its architecture, belongs to the transition period between Louis XIV and Louis XV. It is known as Passevent House. The ground-floor was occupied by a bookseller, and all the rest by the Chandroz family, already known to the reader by name.

A sort of uneasiness, not quite amounting to actual trouble, seemed to prevail in the house. The morning before a letter had been received by Baroness von Bélow, announcing her husband's return in the evening, and close upon that came a telegram, saying that he would not arrive before the following morning, and that she must not be anxious if there were a further delay. The fact was, that two hours after writing his letter, the baron saw Benedict's announcement in the "Gazette." Fearing that he might be delayed by a wound, he wished to spare his wife any possible anxiety, her infant being only just over a week old.

Although the train was not due until four in the morning, Hans, the confidential servant of the family, had already departed at three, taking the carriage to meet his master at the station and at least ten times during the interval Emma rang up her maid, wondering why the time passed so slowly.

At length the sound of a carriage was heard, followed by the creaking of the great gate, the carriage passed under the arch, the tread of spurred boots echoed on the staircase, Emma's door opened, and Emma's arms enfolded her husband.

It did not escape her notice that Frederic winced when she threw her arms round him. She asked the cause. Frederic replied with a cock-and-bull story of a cab accident in which he had slightly sprained his arm.

The sound of the carriage and the general movement in the house informed Helen of the baron's arrival. Hastily wrapping herself in a dressing-gown with her beautiful hair falling loosely over it, she hurried to greet her brother-in-law whom she loved tenderly. In order not to disturb the Countess de Chandroz, their grandmother, orders had been given to keep her wing of the house as quiet as possible.

Madame von Bélow, with the usual penetration of wives, soon guessed that Frederic's arm was more hurt than he chose to acknowledge. She insisted that the family doctor, Herr Bodemacker, should be sent for, and Frederic, who knew by the pain he suffered, that the bandage must have been displaced during his journey, made no objection. He only begged her to keep quiet while he went to his own room for the bath he had ordered, saying that it would be much better for the doctor to follow him there and decide which of his two hundred and eighty-two bones required attention.

The question of importance was to keep the baroness in ignorance as to the serious nature of the wound. With the help of Hans and the connivance of the doctor this would be easy. The bath was a marvellous help, and Emma allowed him to go to his room without suspecting the real cause of his requiring it.

When the doctor arrived, Frederic astonished Hans by explaining that the evening before he had received a sword wound which had laid open his arm, that the bandage must have slipped in the train, and that it, his coat, and his shirt were all soaked in blood.

The doctor slit the sleeve the whole way up, and then cut it clear at the top. Frederic then was told to plunge his arm into the warm water of the bath which enabled the doctor to remove the coat sleeve. He then loosened the shirt sleeve by sponging it with the warm water, and finally, cutting it away at the shoulder, was able to expose the wound.

The arm, compressed by the sleeves, was frightfully red and swollen, the plaster had given way, the wound was gaping widely through its whole length, and in the lower part the arm appeared cut to the bone. It was fortunate that there had been plenty of warm water at hand. The doctor brought the two sides of the cut together again, fixed them carefully, bandaged the whole arm and put it in splints as if it had been broken. But it was absolutely necessary that the baron should remain quite quiet for two or three days. The doctor undertook to find the general in command and to explain privately that Baron von Bélow was charged with a mission to him but could not possibly leave the house.

Hans quickly removed the water and stained bandages. Frederic went down, kissed his wife, and satisfied her by saying the doctor had merely ordered him to rest for a few days. The word dislocation spread through the house and accounted for the baron’s indisposition. Returning to his own apartment he found the Prussian general awaiting him. He explained matters in two words; moreover, before long the story would be in all the papers. The important question was, to keep the baroness in ignorance. She would be uneasy about a dislocation, but in despair over a wound.

Frederic handed over his despatches to the general. They merely warned him to be ready for action at a moment’s notice. It was evident that Count Bismarck, from whom the order came, wished to have a garrison at hand during the Diet, to overawe the assembly, if possible. Afterwards he would withdraw it or leave it, according to circumstances. This question would be put to the Diet. “In case of war between Austria and Prussia, on which side will you be?”

Frederic was extremely anxious to see his young sister Helen, having important communications to make. After he and Benedict had vowed eternal friendship on the field of battle, and Benedict had spoken of having met the baroness at the burgomaster’s house, he had conceived an idea which he could not drive away, namely, to marry Benedict to his sister-in-law. From what he had seen and heard of the young man, he felt convinced that these two impetuous, imaginative, and artistic characters, always ready to pursue an idea suggested by a ray of sunlight or a scented breeze, were, out of the whole creation, the best suited to each other. Consequently he wished to ascertain if Helen had been attracted by his friend. Were this the case, he would find some pretext for bringing Benedict to Frankfort, and, little as Helen cared for admiration, he thought the acquaintance would soon assume the character he wished.

Moreover, he wished to warn Helen to keep newspapers away from her sister and grandmother, and on this account it was absolutely necessary to take her into his confidence. She anticipated his wishes, for scarcely had the general left him, when some one knocked softly at his door, such a knock as might have proceeded from a cat or a bird. He knew Helen’s gentle manner of announcing herself.

“Come in, little sister, come in!” he cried, and Helen entered on tip-toe.

The baron was lying on his bed in his dressing-gown, lying on his left side, his wounded arm extended along his body.

“Ah! you good-for-nothing,” said she, folding her arms and gazing at him, “so you have been and gone and done it, have you?”

“How? done what?” enquired Frederic, laughing.

"Well, now I have got you alone, we can talk."

"Exactly, dear Helen, now we are alone as you say. You are the strong-minded person of this house, although no one else knows it, not even yourself. So I want to discuss important matters with you — and they are not a few."

"So do I, and I shall begin by taking the bull by the horns. Your arm is not dislocated nor even sprained. You have fought a duel, like the hothead you are, and your arm is wounded by either a sabre or sword-cut."

"Well, my little sister, that is exactly what I wanted to tell you. I did fight a duel — for political reasons. And I did get a sabre cut in my arm, but it was a friendly sabre, very neatly and prettily applied. It is not dangerous, no artery or nerve severed. But the story will be in all the papers; it has made noise enough already. Now we must prevent both grandmamma and Emma from seeing the newspapers."

"The only paper taken here is the 'Kreuz Zeitung.'"

"Which is precisely the one that will say the most."

"What are you smiling at?"

"I can't help thinking of the face of the man who will have to supply the details!"

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing. I was only talking to myself, and when I say things to myself they are not worth repeating aloud. The question is — to keep an eye on the 'Kreuz Zeitung.'"

"Certainly I will keep an eye on it."

"Then I need not trouble any more about it?"

"When I tell you that I will see to it myself!"

"Very well! We will talk about something else."

"About anything you like."

"Do you recollect meeting a young Frenchman at Herr Fellner's, an artist, a painter?"

"Monsieur Benedict Turpin? I should think so! A charming man who makes the most rapid sketches, and though they are flattering, they are still likenesses."

"Oh! come, come! You are quite enthusiastic."

"I can show you one he did of me. He has given me a pair of wings, and I really look like an angel!"

"Then he is clever?"

"Enormously clever."

"And witty."

"He can certainly give you as good as you gave. You should have seen how he routed some of our bankers when they tried to chaff him. He spoke better German than they did."

"Is he rich as well?"

"So they say."

"It also seems as if there were remarkable affinities between his character and that of a little girl I know."

"But who? I don't understand."

"Nevertheless, it is some one you know. He appears to be capricious, imaginative, vivacious; he adores travelling, is an excellent rider, and a good sportsman, either on foot or horseback, all which coincides admirably with the tastes of a certain 'Diana Vernon.'"

"I thought that was what you always called me."

"So it is. Do you recognize my portrait?"

"Not at all, not in the least. I am gentle, calm, collected. I like travelling, yes. But where have I been? To Paris, Berlin, Vienna, London, and that is all, I love horses, but what do I ever ride except my poor little Gretchen?"

"She has nearly killed you twice over!"

"Poor thing! it was my own fault. As for shooting, I have never held a gun, and as for coursing, I have never started a hare."

"True, but why not? Only because the grandmother objected. If you could have had your own way — "

"Oh, yes! It would be glorious to rush against the wind, to feel it blowing through one's hair. There is great pleasure in rapid motion, a feeling of life which one finds in nothing else."

"So you would like to be able to do these things which you don't do."

"Yes, indeed."

"With Monsieur Benedict?"

"Why Monsieur Benedict more than any one else?"

"Because he is more charming than most."

"I do not think so."

"Really?"

"No."

"Then; supposing you were allowed to choose a husband out of all my friends, you would not choose M. Benedict?"

"I should never dream of doing so."

"Now, little sister, you know I am an obstinate man, who likes to understand, things. How is it that a man, young, handsome, rich, talented, courageous, and imaginative, fails to interest you, particularly when he has both the good qualities and the defects of your own character?"

"What am I to say? I do not know, I cannot analyse my feelings. Some people are sympathetic to me, some indifferent, some downright disagreeable!"

"Well, you don't class Monsieur Benedict among the disagreeable, I hope."

"No, but among the indifferents."

"And why among the indifferents?"

"Monsieur Benedict is of medium height, I like tall men: he is fair, I like dark men. He is volatile, I like serious people. He is bold, always rushing off to the ends of the world; he would be the husband of other men's wives, and not even the lover of his own."

"Let us resume. What sort of man, then, must he be that would please you?"

"Somebody just the opposite of M. Benedict."

"He must be tall."

"Yes."

"Dark?"

"Either dark or dark chestnut."

"Grave."

"Grave, or at least, serious. Also brave, steady, loyal, and — "

"Just so. Do you know that you have described, word for word, my friend, Karl von Freyberg?"

Helen blushed crimson, and moved quickly, as if to leave the room, but Frederic, disregarding his wound, caught her hand and made her sit down again. The light from between the curtains irradiated her face like the sunlight falling on a flower. He looked at her intently.

"Well, yes," she said, "but no one knows but you."

"Not Karl himself?"

"He may have some idea."

"Well, little sister," said Frederic, "I see no great harm in all this. Come and kiss me, and we will talk again another time."

“But how comes it,” exclaimed Helen, with vexation, “that you know all you want to know, although I have told you nothing at all?”

“Because one can see through a crystal which is pure. Dear little Helen, Karl von Freyberg is my best friend, he has all I could wish in a brother-in-law, or that you could desire in a husband. If he loves you as much as you seem to love him, there should be no great difficulty about your becoming his wife.”

“Ah! dear Frederic,” said Helen, shaking her pretty head, “but I once heard a Frenchwoman say that the marriages which present no difficulties are just those which never come off!”

And she retired to her own room, wondering no doubt as to what difficulties Destiny could interpose to the completion of her own marriage.

CHAPTER XIII

COUNT KARL VON FREYBERG

In the days of Charles V the Austrian Empire dominated for a period both Europe and America, both the East and the West Indies. From the summit of the Dalmatian mountains Austria beheld the rising of the sun, from the chain of the Andes she could watch his setting. When the last ray of sunset sank in the west, the first light of dawn was reappearing in the east. Her empire was greater than that of Alexander, of Augustus, of Charlemagne.

But this empire has been torn by the devouring hands of Time. And the champion by whom the armour of this colossus, piece by piece, has been rent away, is France.

France took — for herself — Flanders, the Duchy of Bar, Burgundy, Alsace, and Lorraine. For the grandson of Louis XIV she took Spain, the two Indies, and the islands. For the son of Philip V she took Naples and Sicily. She also took the Netherlands and made two separate kingdoms of them, Belgium and Holland, and, finally, she tore away Lombardy and Venetia, and gave them to Italy. And to-day the boundaries of this empire, upon which, three hundred years ago, the sun never set, are, in the west, Tyrol; in the east, Moldavia; to the north, Prussia; to the south, Turkey.

Every one knows that, strictly speaking, there is no Austria, properly so called, only a dukedom of Austria, with nine to ten millions of inhabitants, of which Vienna is the capital. And it was a duke of Austria who imprisoned Richard Céur-de-Lion on his return from Palestine, and only released him on payment of a ransom of two hundred and fifty thousand gold crowns.

The map-space now occupied by Austria, outside the actual dukedom, its kernel, consists of Bohemia, Hungary, Illyria, the Tyrol, Moravia, Silesia, the Sclavonian district of Croatia, the Vaivody of Servia, the Banat, Transylvania, Galicia, Dalmatia, and Styria.

We do not count four to five millions of Roumanians scattered throughout Hungary, and on the banks of the Danube. Every one of the above districts has its own character, its own customs, language, costume, frontier. Especially the dwellers in Styria, composed of Norica and the ancient Pannonia, have retained their own language, costume, and primitive customs. Before it became included in Austria, Styria had its own separate history and nobility, dating from the time when it was known as the march of Styria, about 1030. And from that epoch Karl von Freyberg dated his ancestry, remaining a great noble at a time when great nobles are becoming rare.

He was a handsome young man of about twenty-seven, tall, straight, slight, flexible as a cane, and equally tough. His fine black hair was cut close, and he had beneath black eyebrows and eyelashes, those dark grey eyes which Homer attributes to Minerva and which shine like emeralds. His complexion was sunburnt, for he had hunted since childhood. He had small hands and feet, unwearied limbs, and prodigious strength. In his own mountains he had hunted bear, wild goat, and chamois. But he had never attacked the first of these animals with any weapon except lance or dagger.

He was now a captain in the Lichtenstein Hussars, and, even in barracks, was always followed by two Tyrolean chasseurs dressed in the national costume. While the one carried out an order the other remained at hand, so that there might be always some one to whom his master might say “Go and do this.” Although they understood German he always spoke to them in their own tongue. They were serfs, understanding nothing about enfranchisement, who considered that he had absolute power of life and death over them, and although he had several times tried to explain matters, telling them they were free to go where they chose, they had simply refused either to believe or to listen.

Three years before, during a chamois hunt, one of his keepers lost his footing. He fell down a precipice, and was dashed to pieces. Karl ordered his steward to pay the widow an annuity. She thanked him, but was quite unable to understand that he owed her anything merely because her husband had been killed in his service.

When there was a hunt — and he who writes this had twice the honour to be of the party — whether in his own country or not, Karl always wore his national costume and very picturesque it was.

The count’s two attendants never left him. They were loaders. When Karl had fired, he dropped his gun on the ground and another ready loaded was instantly slipped into his hand.

Whilst waiting for the beaters to be placed, which generally took half an hour, the two chasseurs drew from their game-bags small Tyrolean flutes made of reeds, on which they played, sometimes together, sometimes alone, but always joining again after a certain number of bars, Styrian airs, melancholy, but sweet and plaintive. This lasted some minutes, then, as if drawn by the music, the count in his turn produced a similar flute and put it to his lips. He now took up the melody, the others only played accompaniments, which I think must have been improvised — so original were they. It seemed as if the accompaniments pursued the air, overtook it, and then turned around it like creepers or tendrils. Then the air reappeared, charming, but always sad, and reaching notes so high that one would have thought only silver or glass could produce them. Then a gun was heard, that of the chief beater, announcing that all was ready. The three flutes vanished inside the game-bags, the musicians took their guns and again became hunters, ear and eye strained to the utmost.

Count Karl knocked at eleven o'clock at Baron von Bélow's door, having heard both of his return and his accident. Frederic received him with an unusually smiling countenance, but only offered his left hand.

“Ah! then, it is true, is it? I have just read the ‘Kreuz Zeitung.’“

“What have you read, my dear Karl?”

“I read that you fought with a Frenchman and were wounded.”

“Hush — not so loud. I am not wounded for the family, only dislocated.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means, my dear fellow, that my wife won't think she need inspect a sprained arm, but she would positively insist on examining a wounded one. Now she would die of fright over this wound, while I believe you would rather like to have it. Have you seen many wounds a foot long? I can show you one if you like.”

“How so? A skilled fencer like you, who uses his sabre as if he had invented it!”

“None the less, I found my master.”

“A Frenchman?”

“A Frenchman.”

“Well, instead of hunting wild boar in the Taunus to-morrow, as I intended, I should like to go and hunt your Frenchman, and bring back one of his paws to replace your wounded one.”

“Don’t do anything of the kind, my dear friend, you might easily only bring back a nice little cut like this of mine. Besides, the Frenchman is now my friend, and I want him to be yours also.”

“Never! A rascal who has cut your arm open — how far? A foot, did you say?”

“He might have killed me. He did not. He might have cut me in two, and he only gave me this wound. We embraced on the battlefield. Did you see the other details?”

“What other details?”

“Those concerning his other duel, with Herr George Kleist.”

“Superficially. I don’t know him, I only cared about you. I did see that your Frenchman had damaged the jaw of some man who writes articles in the ‘Kreuz Zeitung.’ He seems to have quarrelled with two professions, since he chooses to encounter an officer and a journalist on the same day.”

“He did not choose us, we were foolish enough to choose him. We pursued him to Hanover, where he was very comfortable. Probably he was annoyed by being disturbed. So he sent me home with my arm in a sling, and dismissed Herr Kleist with a black eye.”

“Is the fellow a Hercules?”

“Not at all, it is curious. He is a head shorter than you, but formed like Alfred de Musset’s Hassan, whose mother made him small in order to turn him out perfect.”

“And so you embraced on the battlefield?”

“Better still. I have an idea.”

“What is it?”

“He is a Frenchman as you know.”

“Of good family?”

“Dear friend, they are all of good family since the Revolution. But he is clever — very.”

“As a fencing master?”

“Not at all, as an artist. Kaulbach says he is the hope of the present school. He is young.”

“Young?”

“Yes, twenty-five or six at most, and handsome.”

“Handsome as well?”

“Charming. An income of twelve thousand francs.”

“A trifle.”

“Not everybody has two hundred thousand, like you, my dear friend. Twelve thousand francs and a fine talent might mean fifty or sixty thousand.”

“But why in the world do you consider all this?”

“I should like him to marry Helen.”

The count nearly sprang out of his chair.

“What! Let him marry Helen! your sister-in-law! A Frenchman!”

“Well, is she not herself partly of French origin?”

“I am sure Mademoiselle Helen loves you too much to be willing to marry a man who has wounded you like this. I hope she refused?”

“She did.”

The count breathed again.

“But what the deuce put such an idea into your head as to marry him to your sister?”

“She is only my sister-in-law.”

“That does not matter. What an idea to think of marrying one’s sister-in-law to the first person picked up on the high road!”

“I assure you this young man is not just — ”

“Never mind! She refused, did she not? That is the chief thing.”

“I hope to make her think better of it.”

“You must be quite mad.”

“But tell me, why should she refuse? Explain if you can! Unless, indeed, she cares for some one else.”

The count blushed up to his eyes.

“Do you think that quite impossible?” he stammered.

“No, but then if she should love someone else, she must say so.”

“Listen, Frederic, I cannot positively say that she loves some one else, but I can declare that some one else loves her.”

“That is half the battle. Is it some one as good as my Frenchman?”

“Ah! Frederic, you are so prejudiced in favour of your Frenchman. I dare not say yes.”

“Then tell me at once. You see what might have happened had my Frenchman been here, and I had made any promise to him.”

“Well, at any rate, you won’t turn me out for saying it. The some one is myself.”

“Always modest, loyal, and true, dear Karl but — ”

“But? I will have no ‘buts.’“

“It is not a very terrible ‘but,’ as you will see. You are a great noble, Karl, compared to my little sister Helen.”

“I am the last of my race, there is no one to make objections.”

“And you are very rich for a dowry of two hundred thousand francs.”

“I can dispose of my own fortune as I choose.”

“These are observations I felt bound to make to you.”

“Do you consider them really serious?”

“I acknowledge objections to them would be much more so.”

“Is it of no consequence to ascertain whether Helen loves me or not?”

“That can be decided at once.”

“How?”

“I will send for her, the shortest explanations are always the best.”

The count became as pale as he had been red the moment before. In a trembling voice he exclaimed:

“Not now, for Heaven’s sake! not now!”

“But, my dear Karl!”

“Frederic!”

“Do you believe I am your friend?”

“Good heavens! yes.”

“Well, do you suppose I would subject you to an interview which could only make you unhappy?

“You mean — ”

“I mean that I believe — ”

“Believe what?”

“I believe that she loves you as much as you love her.”

“My friend, you will kill me with joy.”

“Well, since you are so afraid of an interview with Helen, go and do your hunting in the Taunus, kill your wild boar and come back again, the thing will be done.”

“Done, how?”

“I will undertake it.”

“No, Frederic, I will not go.”

“What, you will not go? Only think of your men waiting there with their flutes.”

“They may wait.”

At this moment the door opened, and Helen appeared on the threshold.

“Helen!” exclaimed Karl.

“You will be careful — you must not be too long with my brother,” she said, remaining at the door.

“He is waiting for you,” observed Frederic.

“For me?”

“Yes, come here.”

“But I don’t understand in the least.”

“Never mind! Come here.”

Karl offered his hand to Helen.

“Oh, mademoiselle,” he said, “do what your brother asks, I entreat you.”

“Well,” she said, “what shall I do?”

“You can lend your hand to Karl; he will return it.”

Karl seized her hand and pressed it to his heart. Helen uttered a cry. Timid as a child, Karl released the hand.

“You did not hurt me,” said Helen.

Karl promptly repossessed himself of the released hand.

“Brother,” said Frederic, “did you not say you had a secret you wished to confide to Helen?”

“Oh yes, yes,” cried Karl.

“All right, I am not listening.”

Karl bent towards Helen’s ear, and the sweet words “I love you” fell from his lips with a whisper as of a moth’s wings, which flitting by your ear on a spring evening breathes the eternal secret of Nature.

“Oh! Frederic, Frederic!” cried Helen, hiding her forehead on his couch, “I was not mistaken!”

Then raising her head and languidly opening her beautiful eyes.

“And I,” she said, “I love you.”

CHAPTER XIV

THE GRANDMOTHER

For a few moments Frederic left the lovers to themselves and their happiness. Then, as both raised their eyes to his, as if enquiring what next should be done:

"The little sister," said he, "must go and tell all this to her big sister, the big sister will relate it to the grandmother, and the grandmother, who believes in me, will come and talk it over and we will arrange things together."

"And when must I go and tell all this to the big sister?" enquired Helen.

"At once, if you will."

"I will go now! You will wait for me, Karl?"

Karl's smile and gesture answered her. Helen glided out of his embrace and vanished like a bird.

"Now for our own affairs!" said Frederic.

"How! what affairs?"

"I have something to tell you."

"Anything important?"

"Very serious."

"Anything about our marriage? You alarm me!"

"Suppose this morning when you doubted the possibility of Helen's love I had answered, 'Do not be afraid, Helen loves and will marry you, but there is an obstacle, and the marriage cannot possibly take place in less than a year?'"

"What would you have? I should have been in despair at the delay, but transported by the news."

"Well, my friend, I tell you now what I should have told you this morning. Helen loves you. She did not ask me to tell you this; she has told it herself, but at this moment there is an insurmountable obstacle."

"At least you will explain what the obstacle is?"

"I am going to tell you what is yet a secret, Karl. In a week, or at most, a fortnight, Prussia will declare war against Austria."

"Ah! I feared it. Bismarck is Germany's evil genius."

"Well, now you will understand. As friends we can serve on opposite sides, that happens every day. But — as brothers-in-law — we could not. You can hardly become my brother-in-law at the very moment of unsheathing your sword against me."

"You are quite sure of your information?"

"Most certainly I am. Bismarck now occupies such a position in regard to the Chambers, and has forced the king into such a position with regard to the other German princes, that, either he must embroil Germany from Berlin to Pest and even to Innspruck, or he will be tried for high treason, and end his days in a fortress! Now, Bismarck is a power — a power of darkness if you will — he will not be tried for high treason, and he will embroil Germany — for this reason: Prussia has nothing to gain by upsetting him, whereas by upsetting Germany she can annex two or three little kingdoms or duchies, which will round off her borders very comfortably."

"But the Confederation will be against him."

"Little will he care for that, so long as he himself remains indispensable. And, listen to what I tell you; the more enemies Prussia has, the more she will beat them. Our army is organized as no other European army is organized — at the present moment."

"You say our army, then you have become a *Prussian*. I thought you were a *German*."

"I am a Silesian, Prussian since the days of Frederic II. All I have I owe to King William, and I would willingly die for him, while regretting it should be in a bad cause."

"What do you advise in my case?"

"You are a Styrian, therefore an Austrian. Eight for your emperor like a lion, and if by ill luck we meet in a cavalry charge you turn your horse to the right, I also turn mine; we salute and pass on. Don't yourself get lulled, that is all, and we will sign the marriage contract the day peace is declared."

"Unhappily, I see no other way out of it, unless by good luck we could both remain at Frankfort, a free and neutral town. I have no wish to fight with Germans. It will be an iniquitous war. If it had been Turks, French, or Russians, it would be all right, but between children of the same country, speaking the same language! My patriotism ends there, I confess."

That last hope must be given up. I myself brought orders to the Prussian general here to be ready to leave, Austria will certainly withdraw her troops also. Frankfort may have a Bavarian garrison or be left with one of her own, but most certainly we, to the last man, shall have to rejoin the army."

"Poor dear Helen! What are we to say when she comes back?"

"We will say the marriage is decided on, that the betrothal will take place; but the marriage must be delayed for a year. If, in spite of my prophecy, war should not be declared, you can marry at once. If this war does take place, it is not a war which will last. It will be a tempest, a hurricane, passing over and destroying everything, then it will be peace. If I fix a date, it is because I am sure not to have to ask for further delay. Helen is eighteen, she will then be nineteen, you are now twenty-six, you will then be twenty-seven. This delay is not caused by circumstances of our making. Circumstances impose it on us. We must give way to them."

"You will promise not to let anything change your opinion of me, and that from to-day, June 12th, you count yourself my brother-in-law — on parole?"

"The honour is too dear for me ever to think of repudiating it. From to-day, June 12th, I am your brother-in-law — on parole."

"Madame von Beling!"

This exclamation was drawn from Karl by the unexpected appearance of an elderly lady dressed entirely in black. She had splendid hair, white as snow, and must in youth have been very beautiful. Her whole appearance betokened distinction and benevolence.

"How is this, my dear Frederic?" said she, entering the room. "You have been here since five o'clock this morning and I only hear of your arrival from your wife at two in the afternoon; also, that you are in pain."

"Dear grandmamma," answered Frederic, "but do I not also know that you do not awake before eleven, and only rise at noon?"

"True, but they tell me you have a sprained arm. I have three excellent remedies for sprains, one, which is perfect, came from my old friend Goethe, one from another old friend, Madame Schréder, and the third from Baron von Humboldt. You see the origin of all three is unimpeachable."

Turning to Karl, who, bowing, brought forward an armchair for her, she said:

"You, Herr von Freyberg, have evidently no sprains, for you are in hunting costume. Ah! you do not know how your Styrian dress recalls a happy memory of my youth. The first time I saw my husband, Herr von Beling it is now something like fifty-two years ago, for it was in 1814 — at a carnival masked ball, he wore a similar costume to the one you are now wearing. He was about your age. In the middle of the ball — I remember as if it were yesterday — we heard of the landing of that accursed Napoleon. The dancers vowed that if he again ascended the throne they would go to fight him. The ladies each chose a cavalier, who should be entitled to wear her colours in the coming campaign. I did like the rest, and I chose Herr von Beling, although in my heart of hearts — for I have remained French in heart — I could not be very angry with the man who had made France so great.

“This fanciful nomination of Herr von Beling as a champion wearing my colours opened my parents’ house to him. He could not, he said, be my knight without their permission. They gave their permission. Napoleon again became emperor. Herr von Beling rejoined his regiment, but he first asked my hand from my mother. My mother consulted me, I loved him. It was agreed that we should marry when the war was over. The campaign was not long, and when Herr von Beling returned we were married; I, at the bottom of my heart feeling a little vexed that he had contributed the three hundred millionth part towards the dethronement of my hero. But I never confessed this small infidelity of enthusiasm, and our life was no less happy on that account.”

“Dear grandmamma,” enquired Frederic, “did Herr von Beling — he must have been very handsome in Styrian garb, I have seen his portrait — did Herr von Beling kneel before you when he asked the favour of being your knight?”

“Certainly, and very gracefully he did it too,” returned the old lady.

“Did he do it better than my friend Karl?”

“Better than your friend Karl? But is your friend Karl likely to kneel before me by any chance?”

“Just look at him.”

Madame von Beling turned round and saw indeed Karl kneeling on the ground before her.

“Good gracious!” said she laughing, “have I suddenly grown fifty years younger?”

“My dear grandmother,” said Frederic, while Karl took possession of the old lady’s hand. “No, you have still your threescore and ten years, which become you so well that I will not let you off a single one of them; but here is Karl, who also is going to the war, and who asks to be called the knight of your granddaughter Helen."

"Really! and is my little granddaughter Helen actually old enough to have a knight of her very own?"

"She is eighteen, grandmother."

"Eighteen! My age when I married Herr von Beling! It is the age when leaves forsake the tree and are borne away by the wind. If Helen's hour has struck," she continued with a mournful smile, "she must go like the rest."

"Never, never, dear grandmother," cried the young girl who had entered unperceived, "never so far but that I can every day kiss the dear hand which gives life to all of us."

And she knelt down beside Karl and took the other hand.

"Ah!" said Madame von Beling, nodding her head, "so that is why I was invited to come upstairs. I was to be caught in a trap. Well, what am I to do now? How defend myself? To surrender at once is stupid; it is like a scene from Moliére."

"Very well, grandmamma, don't surrender, or at least not without conditions."

"And what are they to be?"

"That these young people can be betrothed as soon as they like, but that the marriage, like your own, can only be celebrated when the war is over."

"What war?" asked Helen, in anxiety.

"We will tell you about it later. Meanwhile, if Karl is your knight, he must wear your colours. What are they?"

"I have only one," replied Helen. "It is green."

"Then he is wearing them now," said Frederic indicating his friend's coat with green facings, and the hat with its wide band of green velvet.

"And in honour of my lady love," said Karl, rising, "a hundred men shall also wear them, with me, and like me."

Everything was now settled, and the whole party, Frederic leading the way, Madame von Beling on Karl's arm, went downstairs to convey the good news to the dear invalid.

That same evening it was known that the Diet was convoked at Frankfort for June 15th.

CHAPTER XV

FRANKFORT-ON-MAIN

It is time to give some information concerning the town in which the chief events of our history will take place.

Frankfort ranks as one of the most important towns in Germany, not merely on account of the number of its inhabitants, nor because of its commercial standing, but by reason of the political position which it occupies as being the seat of the Imperial Diet.

One continually hears phrases repeated until they become familiar without the person precisely understanding the exact meaning. Let us in a few words explain what the functions of the Imperial Diet really are.

It is the duty of the Diet to watch over the affairs of Germany in general and to smooth down disagreements between the confederate States. The president is always a representative of Austria. The decisions of the assembly are called *Recesses*. The Diet, which has existed since very remote ages, had at first no fixed seat, but was held sometimes at Nuremberg, sometimes at Ratisbon, or at Augsbourg. Finally, June 9th, 1815, the Congress of Vienna established Frankfort as the permanent seat of the Diet of the Germanic Confederation.

Thanks to the new constitution Frankfort has a quarter vote at the Diet, the other three-quarters belonging to the three free towns of Hamburg, Bremen, and Lubeck. In return for this honour, Frankfort was to raise seven hundred and fifty men for the Germanic Confederation and fire a salute on the anniversary of the battle of Leipzig. The execution of this latter obligation was at first a trifle difficult, for the reason that since 1803 Frankfort had ceased to possess ramparts, and since 1813 had owned no cannon. But in the first moments of enthusiasm a subscription was opened which allowed the purchase of two four-pounders, so that since 1814, on the proper day, Frankfort has duly paid the debt of fire and smoke owed to the Holy Alliance.

As to the ramparts, they exist no longer. Instead of old walls and muddy ditches, Frankfort has seen the gradual formation of a charming English garden, a gracious and perfumed enclosure, which enables one to make the circuit of the town, while walking on the smoothest of paths and under magnificent trees. So that, with its houses painted white, green, and pink, Frankfort looks like a bouquet of camellias set in a border of heather. The tomb of the mayor to whom this improvement is due stands in the midst of a delightful labyrinth of walks, much frequented by the burghers and their families about four or five o'clock in the afternoon.

The Teuton name Frankfort means a *free ford*, and the town owes its origin to an imperial castle built by Charlemagne at a point where the Namur is fordable. The first historical notice of it is the date of the Council held there in 794, in which was discussed the question of image worship. As to Charlemagne's palace, no trace of it can be found, but antiquaries say that it stood where now is the Church of St. Leonard.

It must have been about 796 that Charlemagne founded the colony of Sachsenhausen peopled by the Saxons whom he had conquered and baptized. In 822 Louis le Debonnaire built the Sala on the site of the present Saalhof, and in 838 Frankfort had already a court of justice and walls of defence.

In 853 Louis the German raised it to the rank of capital of the eastern portion of the French empire; extended its borders, and built the church of St. Saviour close to where the autumn fair was held, in accordance with the traders' custom of setting up their booths under the walls of churches and temples.

The custom of electing the emperor at Frankfort was begun by that great Swabian house whose name alone calls up a host of terrible and melancholy recollections. In 1240 Frederic II granted letters of safe conduct to all going to the market of Frankfort; and the Emperor Louis of Bavaria, wishing to show gratitude for his election, proved his attachment to the town by granting great advantages, among others the right of holding a fair for fifteen days during Lent, which was known as the Easter fair.

The Emperor Charles IV confirmed the right of the Imperial Election to Frankfort by the famous Golden Bull issued in 1356. This Bull provided the Emperor Napoleon with an opportunity for displaying his excellent memory. Dining one day with half a score of sovereign princes, at the meeting of Erfurth, the conversation chanced to turn on the Golden Bull, which, until the Confederation of the Rhine, had laid down the rules for

Imperial elections. The Prince Primate, being on his own ground, gave some details concerning the Bull, fixing the date for 1409.

“I think you are mistaken, prince,” said Napoleon. “If my memory is correct, the Bull was published in 1356 in the reign of the Emperor Charles IV.”

“Your Majesty is right,” said the primate, reconsidering, “but how is it you remember the date of a bull so exactly? Had it been a battle it would be less wonderful.”

“Shall I tell you the secret of this wonderful memory, prince?” enquired Napoleon.

“Your Majesty would give us all much pleasure.”

“Well,” continued the emperor, “you must know that when I was a sub-lieutenant in the Artillery — ”

Whereupon there was so decided a movement of surprise and curiosity among the illustrious guests that Napoleon paused an instant, but seeing that all were waiting for him to continue, he resumed with a smile:

“I was saying that when I had the honour of being a sub-lieutenant of Artillery I was in garrison at Valence for three years. I did not care for society, and lived very quietly. By a lucky chance I had rooms opposite a well-read and obliging bookseller, whose name was Marcus Aurelius, and who gave me the run of his library. I read and re-read everything in his shop two or three times during my stay in the capital of the Dréme, and I remember everything I then read — even to the date of the Golden Bull.”

Frankfort continued to govern itself as a free imperial town until, after having been bombarded by the French in the wars of the Revolution, it was one fine day handed over by Napoleon to the Prince Primate Charles of Dalberg, when it became the capital of the Grand Duchy of Frankfort.

The most interesting building in Frankfort is undoubtedly the Rémer, a huge building which contains the Hall of the Electors, now used for the sittings of the Upper Senate of Frankfort, and the Hall of the Emperors in which the latter were proclaimed. A peculiarity of this hall, which contains the portraits of all the emperors from Conrad to Leopold II, is that the architect who built it made exactly as many niches as there have been sovereigns wearing the Imperial crown. So that when Francis II was elected, all the niches were already filled, and there was no space found for the new César. There was much discussion as to where his portrait could be placed, when in 1805 the ancient German empire crumbled into dust at the noise of the cannon of Austerlitz, and the courtiers were relieved from their difficulty. The architect had exactly foreseen the number of emperors to come. Nostradamus himself could not have done better.

After the town hall the most interesting place is the street of the Jews. When the writer of these lines visited Frankfort for the first time, some thirty years ago, there were still Jews and Austrians there — real Jews, who hated Christians even as Shylock hated them, and real Christians who hated Jews as did Torquemada.

This street consisted of two long rows of tall houses, black, gloomy, sinister in aspect, closely crowded, looking as if they clung to each other in terror. It was Saturday, which no doubt added to the gloom of the street. Every door was closed, bastard little doors made to allow only one person to pass at once. All the iron shutters were also closed. No sound of voice, or step, or movement was heard; a look of anguish and terror seemed spread over all these houses. Occasionally an old woman with a hooked nose like an owl glided past and disappeared in a sort of cellar or basement in this strange street. To-day all this is more civilized and the houses have a more active and lively appearance.

The population of Frankfort consists of a historic bourgeoisie forming the aristocracy of the Imperial town, the coronation town by right of the Golden Bull. The chief families are those of the old nobility; those of French extraction expatriated by the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and who by their intelligence and industry stand in the first rank of society; thirdly, Italian families, in whom the feelings of race have been stronger than religious differences, and who, although Catholics by profession, have mingled with the French Protestants. Finally the Jewish bankers, who naturally group themselves around the house of Rothschild as being incontestably members of the same clan. All are devoted to Austria, because to Austria the town owes its peculiar position, the source of its wealth and independence, and all these classes, though divided by race, language, and religion, are united by their common affection for the House of Hapsburg — a love which perhaps hardly attains to devotion, but which, in words at least, amounts to fanaticism.

One must not omit the suburb of Sachsenhausen, situated on the other side of the Main, the colony founded by Charlemagne. Its inhabitants, living closely together and only marrying among themselves, have retained some of the roughness of the old Saxon character. This roughness, contrasted with the growing politeness among other nations, now seems to be absolute rudeness, but rudeness which is not intentional. They are said to be ready in the use of the somewhat harsh, but occasionally witty retorts, wherewith the weak sometimes retaliate upon the strong. We can give two specimens of the rough speech of the people of Sachsenhausen.

As is usual in the month of May, owing to the melting of the snow, the Main was in flood. The Great Elector himself came to judge of the rise of the water, and the damage it would probably cause. Meeting a man from Sachsenhausen:

“Well,” he asked, “is the Main still rising?”

“Well, idiot that you are!” replied the individual addressed, “can’t you see that for yourself?”

And the old Saxon went on, shrugging his shoulders. One of his comrades ran after him:

“Do you know to whom it was you spoke?” he asked.

“No, I don’t.”

“Well, it was the Elector of Hesse himself.”

“Thunder and lightning!” exclaimed the old man, “how glad I am I answered him civilly!”

At the play one of these honest people leaned against the man sitting in front of him; the latter moved away:

“Am I annoying you?” demanded the aggressor, “because if it were you who annoyed me, I should give you a punch you would remember the rest of your life!”

Since 1815 Frankfort has been garrisoned by two detachments of fifteen hundred to two thousand each, one Austrian, the other Prussian; the former were much beloved; the latter equally, or even more, hated. A Prussian officer was taking some friends to see the curiosities of Frankfort. They arrived at the Déme. There, among other votive offerings, representations of hearts, hands, or feet, the sacristan exhibited a mouse, made of silver.

“What was that for?” some one asked.

“Through the divine wrath,” answered the sacristan, “a whole quarter of Frankfort once found itself eaten up by swarms of mice. In vain they fetched all the cats of the other quarters, all the terriers, bulldogs, every sort of animal that can kill a mouse; the plague increased. At last a devout lady thought of having a silver mouse made and dedicated to the Virgin as a votive gift. At the end of a week not a mouse was to be seen!”

And as the listeners were somewhat astonished when they heard this legend:

“What fools these Frankforters are!” said the Prussian, “to tell tales of that kind and believe them!”

“We tell them,” said the sacristan, “but we do not believe them. If we did we should have made a silver Prussian and offered him to the Virgin long ago.”

It is to be remembered that our friend Lenhart, Benedict’s coachman, was a citizen of the Sachsenhausen colony.

CHAPTER XVI

THE DEPARTURE

Since the Schleswig-Holstein troubles, the Diet had always assembled at Frankfort on June 9th, this year that date was the day after the attempted assassination of Bismarck on which Benedict drank to the health of France. The Diet, knowing of the mobilization of the Landwehr and the dissolution of the Chamber, decreed that, if Frankfort were not to be compromised in its position as a free and imperial town in the various events which would necessarily follow a war between Prussia and Austria, the Prussian and Austrian garrisons must be withdrawn, and replaced by a Bavarian garrison.

It was agreed that Bavaria should appoint the commander-in-chief, and Frankfort the governor of the town. The Bavarian Colonel Lessel, who had been for many years member of the federated military commission for Bavaria, was appointed commander-in-chief, and the lieutenant-colonel of the Frankfort battalion became governor of the town.

The departure of the Prussian and Austrian troops was fixed for June 12th, and it was decided that the Prussians should leave by two special trains on the Main-Weser line, at six and eight in the morning, for Wetzlar, and the Austrians at three in the afternoon of the same day.

This arrangement was known in Frankfort on the 9th, and as may be understood, filled the Chandroz house with despair. Emma would be separated from her husband and Helen from her lover.

We have said that the Prussians were to leave first. At five in the morning Frederic said farewell to his wife, his child, his dear sister Helen, and the grandmother. It was too early for Karl von Freyberg to be in the house at that hour; but he waited for his friend on the Zeil. He and Helen had agreed the evening before that after having seen Frederic off Karl should come back and wait for her in the little Catholic church of Notre Dame de la Croix.

The harmony between the two young people was perfect. Helen and Karl, though born in two different countries hundreds of leagues apart, were both Catholics. Doubtless they had selected this early hour, because they knew the little liking the people of Frankfort had for the Prussians. No manifestation of regret was shown on the departure of the latter, perhaps they were watched through the closed shutters, but not a window or blind opened for a flower to fall which might say “Au revoir,” no waving handkerchief said “Farewell!”

One would have sworn it was a troop of the enemy leaving a town, and the town itself seemed only to wait for their departure in order to wake up and rejoice. Only the officers of the city battalion came to the station courteously to see them off, wishing nothing better than soon to fight them with deadly hate.

Frederic left by the second train at eight o’clock in the morning, consequently Karl was late and it was Helen who waited for him. She was standing by the holy water stoup leaning against a white pillar. She smiled sadly when she saw Karl, gently dipped two fingers in the holy water and held them towards him. Karl took her whole hand, and made the sign of the cross with it.

Never had the beautiful girl looked so lovely as at this moment when Karl was going to be parted from her. She had scarcely slept all night; all the rest of the time she had wept and prayed. She was dressed in white like a bride, with a wreath of little white roses on her head. They went together, Karl with Helen’s hand in his, to kneel in one of the side chapels where Helen was accustomed to pray. Almost all the ornaments in the chapel, from the altar cloth to the Virgin’s dress, were the work of her hand alone, and the Madonna’s gold and pearl crown had been her gift. They prayed together; then Karl said:

“We are going to part, Helen; what vows shall I make you? and in what words shall they be made?”

“Karl,” replied Helen, “tell me again before the beloved Madonna who has watched over me in childhood and youth, tell me again that you will love me always, and that you will have no other wife but me.”

Karl quickly extended his hand.

“Ah! yes,” he said, “and willingly! for I have always loved you. I love you now, and I shall love you always. Yes, you shall be my wife in this world and in the next, here and above!”

“Thank you,” said Helen; “I have given you my heart, and with my heart, my life. You are the tree, and I am the creeper; you are the trunk and I am the ivy which covers you with its verdure. At the moment when I first saw you, I said with Juliet: ‘I will belong to you or to the tomb.’“

“Helen,” cried the young man, “why link that dismal word with such a sweet promise?”

But she, not listening, continued her thought:

“I ask no other vow than that which you have sworn, Karl; it is the repetition of mine; keep yours as it is; but when I have said that I will love you always, that I will never love any one but you, and that I will never be another’s, let me add: and, if you die, I will die with you!”

“Helen, my love, what are you saying?” exclaimed the young man.

“I say, my Karl, that since my heart has left my bosom, to dwell in yours, you have become all that I think of, all I live for; and that if anything happened to you, I should not need to kill myself, I should only have to let myself die. I know nothing of these royal quarrels, which seem to me wicked, because they cost the blood of men and tears of women. I only know that it matters not to me whether Francis Joseph or William I is victorious. I live, if you live I die, if you die.”

“Helen, do you wish to drive me mad, that you say these terrible things?”

“No, I only wish you to know, when you are absent, what is happening to me, and if, when far from me, you are mortally wounded, instead of saying: ‘I shall never see her again!’ you must simply say: ‘I am going to meet her!’ And I say this as truly and sincerely as I lay this wreath at the feet of my beloved Virgin.”

And she took her wreath of white roses and laid it at the Virgin’s feet.

“And now,” she continued, “my vow is made, I have said what I had to say. To stay here now, to speak longer of love would be sacrilege. Come, Karl; you go this afternoon at two o’clock, but my sister, my grandmother, and Frederic will permit you to remain with me till then.”

They rose again, offered each other the holy water and left the church. The young girl took Karl’s arm for from that moment she considered herself as his wife. But with the same feeling of respect which made him take off his kolbach when he entered the church, he only allowed her hand to lie lightly on his arm all the way from Nétre Dame de la Croix until they reached the house.

The day was passed in intimate conversation. On the day when he had asked Helen which were her favourite colours and she had answered green, he had made a resolution which he now explained to her. This was what he wished to do.

He would ask his colonel for eight days’ leave; surely fighting would not begin for eight days. It would take him scarcely twenty hours to reach his mountains, where he was king. There, besides the twenty-two rangers always in his service he would select seventy-eight chosen men from the best Styrian hunters. They should wear the uniform he himself wore when hunting, he would arm them with the best rifles he could find, then he would give in his resignation as captain in the Lichtenstein Light Infantry, and ask the emperor to appoint him captain of his free company. An excellent shot himself, at the head of a hundred men renowned for their smartness, he could hope for results which, when buried in a regiment under the orders of a colonel there would be no possibility of his attaining.

There would also be another advantage in this arrangement. As the head of a free regiment, Karl would have liberty of movement. In such a case he would not be attached to any special regiment. He would be able to fight on his own account, doing all possible harm to the enemy, but only answerable to the emperor. He would thus be able to remain near Frankfort, the only town which now existed for him in the world, since in this town lived Helen. The heart exists not where it beats, but where it loves.

According to the Prussian plan of campaign which was to envelop Germany as in a half-circle, hurling king, grand-dukes, princes, and peoples one on the top of another while marching from west to east, there would certainly be fighting in Hesse, in the duchy of Baden, and in Bavaria, all near Frankfort. It was there that Karl would fight; and with good spies he could always ascertain where his brother-in-law was likely to be and so avoid the risk of meeting him.

In the midst of all these plans, for which unfortunately they could not enlist the aid of Fortune, time was flying. The clock struck two.

At two o’clock the Austrian officers and soldiers were to assemble in the courtyard of the Carmelite barracks. Karl kissed the baroness and the child lying in its cradle beside her; then he went with Helen to kneel before her grandmother and ask her blessing.

The dear old lady wept to see them so sad; she laid her hands upon their heads wishing to bless them, but her voice broke. They both rose, and stood mute before her; silent tears flowed down their cheeks. She pitied them.

“Helen,” she said, “I kissed your grandfather when I bade him farewell, and I see no reason against your granting poor Karl the same favour.”

The young people threw themselves into each other’s arms, and their grandmother, under pretext of wiping away a tear, turned away, leaving them free for their last kiss.

Helen had long sought for some means of seeing Karl again, after leaving the house where he had been permitted to take his last farewell. She had not succeeded, when suddenly she remembered that the burgomaster Fellner, her sister’s godfather, had windows overlooking the station.

She asked her good grandmother to come with her to ask her old friend for a place in his window. Women who remain beautiful when growing old generally keep a young heart: the kind grandmother consented. So it was only a goodbye of the lips which the young people had already said; there remained a last adieu of the eyes and heart.

Hans was ordered to bring round the carriage without delay; while Karl went to the Carmelite barracks. Helen would have time on her part to go to the burgomaster Fellner. Helen made a sign to Hans to hurry, but he replied with another that it was unnecessary. She then glanced again at Karl, he had never seemed so handsome as at this moment when about to leave her. She came down leaning on his arm, in order not to leave him until they reached the threshold, the last moment possible. Once there, a last kiss sealed their separation and pledged their vows.

A hussar waited for his captain at the door, holding his horse; Karl saluted Helen once again, then galloped off, sparks flying from under his horse’s hoofs: he was more than a quarter of an hour late.

The instant he had gone, Hans came with the carriage; in another moment they were at Herr Fellner’s.

Frankfort was now a very different town to what it had been in the morning. We have told of the sombre and sad departure of the Prussians, who were detested there. The citizens now wished to give a friendly farewell to the Austrians, who were adored.

Therefore, although the departure was a separation, and each separation may hide the invisible and hide also a coming grief, this departure was to be made a farewell féte. The windows were all draped with Austrian flags, and at each window where floated a flag might be seen the prettiest women of Frankfort with bouquets in their hands. The streets which led to the station were crammed with people until one asked how the regiment could pass. In the street leading to the station, the Frankfort regiment stood at attention, each soldier with the stock of his rifle between his feet, and a bouquet in the muzzle of it.

The crowd was so great that Helen was obliged to get out of the carriage. At last she reached the house of Herr Fellner, who, although not formally advised of the engagement of his young friend, had noticed that Captain Freyberg was not indifferent to her. His two daughters and his wife received Helen and her grandmother at the door of their apartments. They formed a charming family, living with Herr Fellner's sister and brother-in-law, who had no children.

In the days of peace and happiness at Frankfort, Herr Fellner and his brother-in-law received their friends twice every week. Any strangers of distinction passing through were sure to be made welcome by Herr Fellner. It was at his house that Benedict Turpin had met the Baroness Frederic von Bélow, a meeting which as we have seen he did not forget.

At three o'clock precisely, they heard in the midst of cries, hurrahs, and acclamations, the trumpets of the regiment, which was coming to the station by the Zeil and the street of All Saints, playing Radetzky's March.

It might have been said that the whole population of Frankfort was following the splendid regiment. Men waved flags from the windows above them; women threw them their bouquets, and then waved their handkerchiefs with those cries of enthusiasm which women only know how to utter on such occasions.

Helen had recognized Karl, as soon as he turned the corner, and Karl had answered her waving handkerchief by saluting with his sabre. When he passed under the window she threw him a scabious bound up with forget-me-nots. The scabious meant "sorrow and desolation," and the forget-me-not "Do not forget me."

Karl caught the flowers in his kolbach and fastened them on his breast. Still turning to look back, his eyes never left Helen until the moment when he entered the station. At length he disappeared.

Helen leaned far out of the window. Herr Fellner put his arm round her waist and drew her back within the room. Seeing the tears that flowed from her eyes and divining their cause:

"With the help of God, dear child," he said, "he will return."

Helen escaped from his arms, and threw herself on a sofa, endeavouring to hide her tears in the cushions.

CHAPTER XVII

AUSTRIANS AND PRUSSIANS

Desbarolles says in his book on Germany:

“It is impossible to talk for three minutes with an Austrian without wishing to shake hands with him. It is impossible to talk for three minutes with a Prussian without longing to quarrel with him.”

Does this difference in the two organizations spring from temperament, education, or the degree of latitude? We cannot say; but it is a fact that along the whole way from Ostrow to Oderburg, we know when we have left Austria and entered Prussia by the way in which the porters bang the carriage doors. This double impression is particularly evident at Frankfort, a town of gentle manners, cultivated habits, and amateur bankers; the country of Goethe has appreciated this difference between the extreme civilization of Vienna and the rough Protestant shell of Berlin.

We have seen the different demonstrations of feeling at the departure of the two garrisons; the people of Frankfort not having the least doubt of the result of the war, and believing, after the conclusions of the Diet, in the superiority of the Austrian arms, which would be aided by all the little States of the Confederation. They had not cared to put the least restraint on the manifestation of their feelings; they allowed the Prussians to depart like vanquished enemies whom they would never see again, and they had, on the contrary, féted the Austrians like victorious brothers, for whom if they had had the time, they would have made triumphal arches.

The good burgomaster’s drawing-room, where we have introduced our readers, was at noon on June 12th an exact and complete specimen of all the other drawing-rooms of the town, whatever the origin, country or religion of the inhabitants might chance to be.

Thus, while Helen, with whose grief all sympathized, wept, keeping her face buried in the cushions, and her good grandmother left the window to sit beside her and hide her somewhat from view, Councillor Fischer, editor of the “Post Zeitung,” was writing on a corner of the table, an article in which he compared with undisguised antipathy and sympathy, the departure of the Prussians to a nocturnal flight, and that of the Austrians to a triumphal leave-taking.

In front of the fireplace, the Senator von Bernus, one of the most distinguished men in Frankfort, by ability, education, and birth, was talking with his colleague, Doctor Speltz, Chief of Police, who, owing to the position which he held, was always well informed. A slight difference rather than a discussion had arisen between them. Herr Doctor Speltz did not completely agree with the opinion of the majority of the town's people as to the certain victory of the Austrians. His private information, as Chief of Police, was of the kind which may be relied on, and which is obtained, not to help the opinions of others, but to form one's own, and it represented the Prussian troops as full of enthusiasm, admirably armed, and burning with desire for battle. Their two generals, Frederick Charles of Prussia and the Crown Prince, were both able to command and to execute, and their rapidity and courage no one could doubt.

"But," observed Herr von Bernus, "Austria has an excellent army which is animated with an equal spirit; it was beaten at Palestro, at Magenta, and at Solferino, it is true, but by the French, who also beat the Prussians at Jena."

"My dear von Bernus," replied Speltz, "it is a far cry from the Prussians of Jena to the Prussians of to-day; the miserable state into which the Emperor Napoleon reduced them, by only allowing them to put forty thousand men under arms for six years, was the providential cause of their strength; for with this reduced army the officers and administrators could superintend the smallest details and bring them as near as possible to perfection. From this has grown the Landwehr."

"Well," said von Bernus, "if the Prussians have the Landwehr, the Austrians have the Landsturm; all the Austrian population will rise in arms."

"Yes, if the first battles are unsuccessful; yes, if there is a chance that by rising they can repel the Prussians. But three-quarters of the Prussian army are armed with needle guns which fire eight or ten shots a minute. The time is past when, as said Marshal Saxe, the rifle is only the handle of the bayonet; and of whom did he say that? Was it not the French, a fiery and warlike nation, not methodical and military like the Austrians. You know, mein Gott, victory is an entirely moral question; to inspire the enemy with an unaccountable fear is the secret. Generally, when two regiments meet, one of them runs without having ever come to grips with the enemy. If the new guns, with which the Prussians are armed, do their work, I am very much afraid that the terror in Austria will be so great that the Landsturm, from Kénigsgrétz to Trieste, from Salzburg to Pest, will not raise a man."

"Psst!... my dear friend, you have named the real stumbling block; if the Hungarians were with us, my hope would be a conviction. The Hungarians are the nerve of the Austrian army, and one can say of them what the ancient Romans said of the Marsi; 'What are we to do, either against the Marsi or without the Marsi?' But the Hungarians will not fight until they have their separate government, their constitution, and their three ministers, and they are right. For one hundred and fifty years Hungary has been promised that constitution, it has been given and withdrawn again, and now Hungary is angry; but the emperor has only one word to say, one signature to write, and the whole nation would rise for him. Then the Szozat would be heard, and in three days they would have a hundred thousand men under arms."

"What is the Szozat?" asked a big man, who kept a whole window to himself, and whose expansive face testified to great commercial prosperity. He was, indeed, the first wine merchant of Frankfort, Hermann Mumm.

"The Szozat," said Fischer, still writing his article, "is the Hungarian Marseillaise by the poet Vérésmarti. What the deuce are you doing there, Fellner?" he added, lifting his glasses to his forehead and looking at the burgomaster, who was playing with his two youngest children.

"I am doing something much more important than your article, councillor, I am making a village, of which Master Edward is to be the baron, with some houses I got in a box from Nuremburg."

"What does baron mean?" asked the child.

"That is a difficult question. To be a baron is much and it is nothing. It is much if you are called 'Montmorency.' It is nothing if you are called 'Rothschild.'" And he went back seriously to his village.

"It is said," went on von Bernus to Doctor Speltz, taking up the conversation where they had left it before Hermann Mumm's interruption, "that the Emperor of Austria has named General Benedek as General in Chief with all powers."

"The nomination was discussed in the council and signed yesterday."

"Do you know him?"

"Yes."

"It seems to me a good choice."

"May God grant it."

"Benedek is a self-made man, he has won every step sword in hand. The army will love him better than it would love an archduke made field-marshal by right of birth."

"You will laugh at me, von Bernus, and will say I am a bad republican. Very well, I would rather have an archduke than this self-made man as you call him. Yes, if all our officers were self-made men, it would be admirable, because, if none knew how to command, they would at least know how to obey: as it is, our officers are nobles, who are officers by position or by favour. They will not obey, or will only obey such a commander unwillingly. Further, you know, I have the misfortune to be a fatalist, and to believe in the influence of the stars. General Benedek is a Saturnian. May Austria escape his fatal influence! He may have patience in a first loss, resolution against a second perhaps; but in a third he will lose his head and be good for nothing.

"Also, do you not see that there cannot be two equally Great Powers in Germany. Germany, with Prussia in the north, and Austria in the south, has two heads like the Imperial Eagle. Now, he who has two heads has not even one. Last winter I was at Vienna on New Year's Day. Always, on January 1st a new standard is raised on the fortress. The Standard for 1866 was displayed at six in the morning. A moment afterwards a furious storm, such as I have seldom seen, came from the north, the Standard was torn, and the rent cut off the two heads of the Eagle. Austria will lose her supremacy both in Italy and Germany."

A profound gloom as of painful foreboding seemed to have spread over the company. The only person unaffected was "Baron" Edward, who, while anxiously considering as to in which corner of his village he should put the belfry, had fallen fast asleep.

Herr Fellner rang three times, and a beautiful peasant from Baden, answering the signal, came in and took the child. She was carrying him away asleep in her arms, when Herr Fellner, wishing to change the subject, motioned to the company.

"Listen!" he said, and putting his hand on the nurse's shoulder. "Linda," he said, "sing us that song with which the Baden mothers sing their children to sleep." Then, turning to the others he said: "Gentlemen, listen to this song, which is still sung low in the Duchy of Baden. Perhaps, in a few days, the time may have come to sing it aloud. Linda learnt it from her mother, who sang it over her brother's cradle. Their father was shot by the Prussians in 1848. Now Linda, sing as your mother sang."

Linda put her foot on a chair, holding the child in her arms as if she were pressing it to her breast and covering it with her body. Then, with anxious eyes, in a low and trembling voice, she sang:

Sleep soft, my child, without a cry,
For hark! the Prussian passeth by.
The Prussian slew thy father dear
And robbed thy mother of gold and gear
The Prussian he will close thine eye.

Sleep soft, my child, without a cry,
For hark! the Prussian passeth by.

All bloody is the Prussian's hand
It closes on our dying land.
So must we all lie still and dumb
As doth thy father in his tomb.

Sleep soft, my child, without a cry,
For hark! the Prussian passeth by.

God knows how many a weary day
We wait the dawning of that ray
Those blessed radiance shall restore
Our liberty to us once more.

Sleep soft, my child, without a cry,
For hark! the Prussian passeth by.

But when that longed for hour shall come,
However narrow be his tomb,
His foes within that grave so deep
Shall share for aye thy father's sleep.

Then shout, my child, shout loud and high,
The Prussian in his grave doth lie.

The nurse had sung this song with such expression, that a shudder passed over the hearts of those who listened, and none thought of applauding. She went out with the child in a profound silence.

Only Helen murmured in her grandmother’s ear: “Alas! alas! Prussia means Frederic, and Austria means Karl!”

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DECLARATION OF WAR

On June 15th, at eleven in the morning, Count Platen of Hallermund, presented himself to the King of Hanover. They had conversed for some minutes when the king said:

"I must tell this news to the queen. Wait for me here; I will come back in a quarter of an hour."

Within the palace King George required no guide. Queen Mary was engaged upon a piece of wool work with the young princesses. Seeing her husband she went to him and offered him her forehead to kiss. The princesses took possession of their father's hands.

"See," said the king, "this is what our cousin the King of Prussia does us the honour to communicate through his First Minister." The queen took the paper and began to read. "Stay," said the king, "I want to call Prince Ernest."

One of the princesses hurried to the door.

"Prince Ernest," she cried to the usher.

Five minutes after the prince came in, embraced his father and sisters, and kissed his mother's hand.

"Listen to what your mother is going to read," said the usher to him.

The Minister Bismarck in the name of his master offered to Hanover an offensive and defensive alliance, on the condition that Hanover should support Prussia to the utmost of its power with men and soldiers and should give the command of its army to King William. The dispatch added that if this pacific proposal were not immediately accepted the King of Prussia would consider himself as in a state of war with Hanover.

"Well?" asked the king of his wife.

"No doubt," she replied, "the king has already decided in his wisdom what is best to do; but, if he has not finally decided and such a feature as the opinion of a woman is considered to be as a weight in the balance, I would say to you, refuse, sire!"

"Oh yes, yes, sire!" cried the young prince, "refuse!"

“I thought it right to consult you both,” replied the king, “partly because of your upright and loyal natures, partly because your interests are one with mine.”

“Refuse, father: the prediction must be fulfilled to the end.”

“What prediction?” asked the king.

“You forget, sire, that the first word which Benedict said to you was this: ‘You will be betrayed by your near relation.’ You are betrayed by your German cousin; why should he be wrong about the rest since he was right at the beginning?”

“You know that he has predicted our downfall?”

“Yes, but after a great victory. We are little kings, it is true; but we are, on the English side, great princes, let us act greatly.”

“That is your opinion, Ernest?”

“That is my prayer, sire,” said the young prince, bowing.

The king turned to his wife and interrogated her by a movement of his head.

“Go, my dear,” said she, “and follow your own thought, which is ours also.”

“But,” said the king, “if we are obliged to leave Hanover, what will happen to you and the two princesses?”

“We will stay where we are, sire, in our castle of Herrenhausen. After all, the King of Prussia is my cousin, and if our crown is in danger through him, our lives are not. Summon your council, sire, and take with you the two voices which say to you: ‘Not only no treason against others, but above all no treason against our honour!’“

The king called a council of his ministers, who unanimously voted for refusal.

At midnight Count Platen replied verbally to the Prince of Issemburg, who had brought the proposal.

“His Majesty the King of Hanover declines the proposals of His Majesty the King of Prussia; as he is constrained to do by the laws of the Confederation.”

This reply was instantly telegraphed to Berlin.

Immediately upon the receipt of the reply, another telegram from Berlin ordered the troops concentrated at Minden to enter Hanover. A quarter-of-an-hour later, the Prussian troops set foot over the borders of Hanover.

A quarter-of-an-hour had sufficed for Prussia to receive the reply and to order the opening of the campaign. Already the Prussian troops from Holstein, who had obtained permission from His Majesty the King of Hanover to cross his territory in order to get to Minden, had stationed themselves at Marbourg, and were thus in occupation, within the kingdom, as enemies, even before the king's decision.

Moreover, King George had only held back his answer until the evening in order to secure time for taking measures himself. Orders had been given to the different regiments of the Hanoverian army to mobilize and assemble at Géttingen. The intention of the king was to manéuvre so as to obtain the assistance of the Bavarian army.

Towards eleven at night, Prince Ernest had asked permission of Queen Mary to take leave of her and at the same time to present to her his friend Benedict. The real object of the young prince was to get his mother to entrust her hand to the palmist, and to be reassured by him as to the dangers which might encompass the queen.

The queen received her son with a kiss, and the Frenchman with a smile. Prince Ernest explained his wish to her. She readily granted his request and held out her hand. Benedict knelt on one knee and respectfully put his lips to the tips of her fingers.

"Sir," she said, "in the circumstances in which we are placed, it is not my good- but my ill-fortune that I wish you to tell me."

"If you see misfortunes before you, madam, I may be permitted to seek in yourself the powers which Providence has given you to resist them. Let us hope that the resistance will be stronger than the strife."

"A woman's hand is feeble, sir, when it has to struggle against that of destiny.

"The hand of destiny is brute force, madam; your hand is intelligent force. Look, here is a very long first joint to the thumb."

"What does that mean?" asked, the queen.

"Will power, Majesty. Your resolution once taken, reason alone can conquer you and make you change — danger, accident, persecution, never."

The queen smiled and nodded approvingly.

"Also, you can bear to hear the truth, madam. Yes, a great misfortune menaces you."

The queen started. Benedict went on quickly.

"But, calm yourself, it is neither the death of the king, nor of the prince: the line of life is magnificently marked, on their hands. No, the danger is entirely political. Look at the line of fate: it is broken here, above the line of Mars, which shows from what direction the storm will come; then this line of fate, which might dominate again if it stopped at the circle of the middle finger, that is, at the circle of Saturn, goes on, on the contrary, to the base of the first finger, a sign of ill-fortune."

"God tries every one according to the rank he holds. We will endeavour to bear our ill-fortune like Christians if we cannot bear it like kings."

"Your hand has answered me before you, madam; the Mount of Mars is smooth and without lines, the Mount of the Moon is smooth and even; it means resignation, madam, the first of all the virtues. With this power Diogenes broke his porringer; with this, Socrates smiled at death; with this, the poor man is a king, the king is a god! With resignation and calm any strong feeling shown in the hand, worthily developed may replace the line of Saturn and create a new good fortune. But there will be a long struggle first. That struggle presents strange signs. I see in your hand, madam, auguries opposed to each other; a prisoner without a prison, wealth without riches: an unhappy queen, a happy wife, and a happy mother. The Lord will try you, madam, but as a daughter whom He loves. For the rest, you will have every kind of resource, madam; first music, next painting; the pointed and slim fingers show that; religion, poetry, invention, two princesses who love you at your side, a king and a prince who love you from a distance. God tempers the wind to the freshly shorn lamb."

"Yes, sir, shorn to the quick," murmured the queen, raising her eyes to heaven. "After all, perhaps the misfortunes of this world will secure the joys of another. In this case, I shall be not only resigned, but consoled."

Benedict bowed like a man who, having accomplished what was required of him, only awaits his dismissal.

"Have you a sister, sir?" asked the queen of Benedict, as she toyed with a string of pearls, fastened by a clasp of diamonds, which evidently belonged to one of the young princesses.

"No, madam," replied Benedict, "I am alone in the world."

"Then do me the pleasure to accept this turquoise for yourself. I am not making you a present; under that guise it would be worthless. No! it is an amulet which I offer you. You know that we people of the north have a superstition that turquoises bring good luck. Keep this as a remembrance of me."

Benedict bowed, received the turquoise ring and put it on the little finger of his left hand. While he did this the queen called Prince Ernest to her, and took up a satchel of perfumed leather.

"My son," said she, "we know the place which the exile's first step leaves, but not that at which his last will pause. This satchel contains 500,000 francs worth of pearls and diamonds. If I wished to give them to the king, he would refuse to take them."

"Oh! mother!"

"But to you, Ernest, I have the right to say *I wish it*! I wish you, dear child, to take this satchel as a last resource, to bribe a gaoler if you are made prisoner; to reward devotion — who knows — perhaps for the personal needs of the king or yourself. Hang it round your neck, put it in your belt; but in all cases, keep it always upon you. I embroidered it with my own hands; it bears your own monogram. Hush! here is your father!"

At this moment the king came in.

"There is not a minute to spare, we must be off," said, he, "Ten minutes ago the Prussians entered Hanover."

The king embraced the queen and his daughters; and Prince Ernest, his mother and sisters. Then, clinging together, king, queen, prince, princesses, went down the steps before which the horses were waiting. There took place the last adieus: there, tears flowed from the eyes of the most valiant, as well as from those of the most resigned. The king set an example by mounting his horse first.

The prince and Benedict rode two horses exactly alike, which were of the beautiful Hanoverian race, crossed with an English strain. An English carbine, which would send a pointed bullet four thousand yards, hung at the saddle-bow; and a pair of double-barrelled pistols, as true as duelling pistols, rested in the holsters.

A last farewell passed between the riders already in the saddle and the queen and princesses on the steps. Then the cavalcade, preceded by two scouts bearing torches, started at a quick trot.

A quarter-of-an-hour later they were in Hanover. Benedict proceeded to the Royal Hotel to settle his account with Mr. Stephen. Every one was up, for the news of the invasion of the Prussians and the departure of the king had already spread. As for Lenhart, he was invited to join the main body of the army with his vehicle. The rendezvous, as we know, was at Géttingen. As Lenhart was greatly attached to the dog Frisk, Benedict did not hesitate to entrust it to his care.

A deputation of the notabilities of the town, with the burgomaster at their head, waited on the king to bid him farewell. The king, his voice full of emotion, commended his wife and daughters to their care. There was but one voice in assuring him of their devotion. The whole town was abroad notwithstanding the hour of the night, and accompanied him, shouting ‘Long live the king! Long live George V! May he return victorious!’ Again the king commended the queen and the princesses, not now to the deputation, but to the whole population. The king entered the royal carriage amid a concert of tears and sobs. One would have said that every daughter had just lost a father, every mother a son, every sister a brother. Women crowded to the door of his carriage to kiss his hand. The locomotive had to whistle five or six times, and the signal had five or six times to be repeated, before the crowd could be detached from the carriage doors. At last the train had to be put into motion so as to shake off gently and almost imperceptibly the clusters of men and women who clung to it.

Two hours later Géttingen was reached.

CHAPTER XIX

THE BATTLE OF LANGENSALZA

Two days after, the army, drawn from all parts of the kingdom, was assembled round the king.

Among others the regiment of the Queen’s Hussars commanded by Colonel Hallelt, had remained thirty-six hours on horseback, and had been marching for thirty-six hours.

The king was lodged at the Crown Inn. This inn was on the line of march, and as each regiment of cavalry or infantry arrived, the king, warned by the music, went to the balcony and passed it in review. They filed one after another past the inn, flowers on their helmets, and cries of enthusiasm on their lips. Géttingen, the town of study, shuddered every instant, roused by the cheering warriors.

All the old soldiers on leave, whom there had not been time to recall, came of their own accord to rejoin their flag. All of them felt joyously, bringing with them from their villages and all along their routes a large number of recruits. Lads of fifteen gave their ages as sixteen in order to be enlisted.

On the third day they started. During this time the Prussians, on their side, had manéuvred. General Manteuffel from Hamburg, General von Rabenhorst from Minden, and General Beyer from Wetzlar were approaching Géttingen and enclosing the Hanoverian army in a triangle.

The simplest rules of strategy prescribed the union of the Hanoverian army, sixteen thousand strong, with the Bavarian, eighty thousand strong. The king, in consequence, had sent out couriers to Charles of Bavaria, brother of the old King Louis, who ought to have been in the valley of the Werra, to warn him, in entering Prussia and crossing Mulhausen, that he should proceed towards Eisenach. He added that he was followed closely by three or four Prussian regiments, who, united, would make twenty or twenty-five thousand men.

They arrived at Eisenach, by way of Verkirchen. Eisenach, defended by only two Prussian battalions, was about to be carried at the point of the bayonet, when a courier arrived from the Duke of Gotha, on whose territory they were, bringing a dispatch from the duke.

The dispatch announced that an armistice was arranged. The duke, in consequence, summoned the Hanoverians to retire. Unfortunately, as it came from a prince, the message was received without suspicion. The vanguard halted and took up its quarters where it was.

Next day, Eisenach was occupied by a regiment of the Prussian army. A great deal of time and many men had been lost in taking Eisenach, a useless manéuvre: and they resolved to leave Eisenach on the right and to proceed to Gotha. In order to put this project into execution, the army concentrated on Langensalza.

In the morning the king left, having on his left Major Schweppe, who held the sovereign's horse by invisible reins. The Prince Royal was on his right, having with him Count Platen, the first minister, and in the various uniforms of their regiments or of their calling, Count Wedel, Major von Kohlrausch, Herr von Klenck, Captain von Einem, various cuirassiers of the Guard, and Herr Meding. The cortége left Langensalza very early, and went to Thannesbruck.

Benedict rode near the prince, fulfilling the functions of a staff officer.

The army had left its cantonments in order to proceed to Gotha: but at ten in the morning, the vanguard, as it arrived on the banks of the Unstrut, was attacked by two Prussian regiments, commanded by the Generals Flies and Seckendorff. They were able to mount nearly a thousand men, both troops of the guard and *landwehr*.

Among these regiments of the guard was that of Queen Augusta, one of the élite. The rapidity of the Prussian fire showed at once that they must be armed, at least the greater part of them, with quick-firing rifles.

The king put his horse to the gallop in order to arrive as soon as possible on the spot where the battle had begun. The little village of Merscleben was on a hill to the left: behind the village, on higher ground than the Prussian artillery posts, they placed four batteries which at once opened fire.

The king desired to be informed of the disposition of the field. In front of him, running to the right and left was the Unstrut and its marshes; then a great thicket, or rather, a wood called Badenwaeldschen; and behind the Unstrut, upon the steep slope of the mountain, the Prussian masses advancing, preceded by formidable artillery which fired as it came.

"Is there a higher point whence I can direct the battle?" asked the king.

“There is a hill half a kilometre from the Unstrut, but it is under the fire of the enemy.”

“That is the place for me,” said the king. “Come, gentlemen.”

“Pardon, sire,” said the prince, “but half a gun-shot away from the hill where Your Majesty wishes to establish your camp, there is a sort of wood of alders and aspens stretching to the river. We must search that wood.”

“Order fifty skirmishers to go down to the river.”

“That will be unnecessary, sire,” said Benedict, “there is no need for more than one man for that.”

And he went off at a gallop, crossed the wood in every direction and reappeared.

“There is no one there, sire,” said he, saluting.

The king put his horse to the gallop and posted himself on the top of the little hill. His horse was the only white one, and served as a target for bullets and balls. The king wore his uniform as general of the forces, blue, turned up with red; the prince his uniform of the hussars of the guard.

Battle was joined. The Prussians had driven back the Hanoverian outposts, who had recrossed the river, and a hot cannonade was exchanged between the Hanoverian artillery before Merscleben, and Prussians on the other side of the Unstrut.

“Sire,” said Benedict, “don’t you fear that the Prussians will send men to hold the wood which I searched just now, and will fire on the king as at a target from its outskirts, only three hundred metres away?”

“What would you suggest?” asked the prince.

“I propose, monseigneur, to take fifty men and go to guard the wood. Our fire will protect you as the enemy approach.”

The prince exchanged a few words with the king, who nodded approvingly.

“Go,” said Prince Ernest; “but for heaven’s sake don’t get killed.”

Benedict showed the palm of his hand.

“Can a man be killed, who has a double line of life on his hand?”

And he galloped to the infantry of the line.

“Fifty good marksmen for me,” said he in German.

A hundred presented themselves.

“Come,” said Benedict, “we shall not be too many.”

He left his horse with a hussar of the prince’s regiment, and threw himself into the underwood at the head of his men, who scattered. They had scarcely disappeared among the trees, when a terrible fusillade burst forth. Two hundred men had just passed the Unstrut; but, as they were ignorant of the number of men following Benedict, they retreated fighting, supposing him to have superior forces, and leaving a dozen dead in the wood. Benedict guarded the bank of the Unstrut, and by a well-sustained fire, kept off all approach.

The king had been recognized, the bullets whistled around him and even between his horse’s legs.

“Sire,” said Major Schweppe, “perhaps it would be well to seek a place a little further from the field of battle.”

“Why so?” asked the king.

“The bullets may reach Your Majesty!”

“What does it matter! Am I not in the hands of the Lord?”

The prince came up to his father.

“Sire,” said he, “the Prussians are advancing by great masses towards Unstrut, despite our fire.”

“What are the infantry doing?”

“They are marching to take the offensive.”

“And — they march well?”

“As on parade, sire.”

“The Hanoverian troops were once excellent troops; in Spain they held the élite of the French troops in check. To-day, when they fight before their king they will prove worthy of themselves, I trust.”

And, in fact, all the Hanoverian infantry, formed in column, advanced with the calm of veterans under the fire of the Prussian batteries. After having been a moment astounded at the hail of bullets which the muskets rained upon them, they continued their march, crossed the marshes of Unstrut, took the thicket of Badenwaeldschen by bayonet and struggled hand to hand with the enemy.

For a moment smoke and the unevenness of the ground hid the general aspect of the battle. But at that moment a horseman was seen to emerge from the smoke and to move towards the hill where the king was stationed, riding in hot haste and mounted on the horse of a Prussian officer. It was Benedict, who had killed the rider in order to take his horse, and who was coming to say that the Prussians had commenced the attack.

“Einem! Einem!” cried the king, “haste, order the cavalry to charge.”

The captain hastened. He was a giant of over six feet, the most vigorous and handsomest man in the army. He put his horse to the gallop, crying, “Hurrah!” A minute afterwards, a sound like a hurricane was heard. It was the cuirassiers of the guard charging.

It would be impossible to describe the enthusiasm of the men as they passed the base of the hill, where stood the heroic king who wished to be at the most dangerous post. Cries of “Long live the king! long live George V! long live Hanover!” made the air tremble as in a tempest. The horses tore up the earth like an earthquake.

Benedict could not restrain himself. He put his spurs to his horse and disappeared in the ranks of the cuirassiers. Seeing the storm which was bursting upon them, the Prussians formed into squares. The first which encountered the Hanoverian cavalry disappeared under their horses’ feet; then, whilst the infantry fired in their faces, the cuirassiers took the Prussian army on the flank, which, after a desperate struggle, tried to retreat in order, but, ferociously pursued, found themselves routed.

The prince followed these movements with an excellent pair of field glasses and described everything to the king, his father. But soon his glasses followed only a group of fifty men, at the head of whom was Captain Einem, whom he recognized by his great stature, and of whom Benedict, recognizable by his blue uniform among the white cuirassiers, was one. The squadron passed on by Nagelstadt and proceeded towards the last Prussian battery which still held out. The battery fired on the squadron from a distance of thirty yards. Everything vanished in the smoke. Twelve or fifteen men alone remained; Captain Einem was lying under his horse.

“Oh! poor Einem!” cried the prince.

“What has happened to him?” asked the king.

“I think he is dead,” said the young man; “but no, he is not dead. There is Benedict helping to drag him from under his horse. He is only wounded. He is not even wounded! Oh, father, father! There are only seven left out of fifty; only one artilleryman is left; he is aiming at Einem, he is firing.... Oh, father! you are losing a brave officer, and King William a brave soldier; the artilleryman has killed Einem with a shot from his carbine, and Benedict has cut him down at his gun with his sabre.”

The Prussian army was in full flight, the victory was with the Hanoverians!...

The Prussians retired to Gotha. The rapidity of the march to the field of battle had so fatigued the Hanoverian cavalry that they could not pursue the fugitives. In this respect the advantages of the battle were lost.

The results were: eight hundred prisoners, two thousand dead or wounded, two cannon taken.

The king rode round the field of battle to complete his task by showing himself to the unhappy wounded.

Benedict had become an artist once more, and was dreaming of his picture. He was seated on the first piece of cannon which had been taken, and was sketching a general view of the battlefield. He saw that the prince was searching among the killed and wounded officers of the cuirassiers.

“Pardon, monseigneur,” said he, “you are looking for the brave Captain Einem, are you not?”

“Yes,” said the prince.

“There, monseigneur, there, on your left, in the midst of that heap of dead.”

“Oh,” said the prince, “I saw him doing miracles.”

“Can you believe that after I had drawn him from under his horse, he stabbed six with his sabre? Then he was hit for the first time and fell. They thought he was dead, and threw themselves upon him. He raised himself on one knee and killed two, who cried to him to surrender. Then he stood upright and it was at that moment that the last surviving artilleryman sent a ball into his forehead, which killed him. As I was not able to save him, being too much occupied myself, I avenged him!”

Then, presenting his sketch to the prince as calmly as if in the studio:

“Do you think that is right?” he asked.

CHAPTER XX

IN WHICH BENEDICT’S PREDICTION CONTINUES TO BE FULFILLED

The visit to the field of battle having been paid, the king followed the highway and entered the town of Langensalza. He established his headquarters in the sharpshooters’ barracks. The major-general had given orders that all should remain quiet during the night.

His Majesty’s first care was to send by three different routes despatches to the queen to tell her of the day’s victory and to ask for reinforcements, if not for the next day for the day after. And, as it turned out, he had nothing to fear from the Prussians: they were too thoroughly beaten not to wish for a day’s rest.

The night was gay; money had been given to the soldiers, and they were told to pay for everything they had. The bands played “God save the King,” and the soldiers sang in chorus, — a song by a Hanoverian volunteer, to the Polish tune:

“A thousand soldiers swear on bended knee.”

The next day was spent in waiting for news of the Bavarian army, and in sending out couriers. The first came back with promises which were never kept.

A truce until morning had been offered to the Prussians so that the dead might be buried. The Prussians refused, and the Hanoverians alone proceeded with this pious work. The soldiers dug great trenches 25 feet long and 8 feet wide. The dead were placed in these in two rows. Four thousand armed men led by the king and prince stood bare-headed while Beethoven’s funeral march was played. Over each grave a squadron passed and fired a salute by way of military mourning. The municipal officers who had come to thank the king for his orders to the soldiers, which had been strictly carried out, were present at the ceremony.

At eleven in the evening the men who were on guard towards the north announced that a large Prussian army was arriving by way of Mulhausen. It proved to be General Manteuffel’s.

The third day after the battle, the Hanoverian army had received no news of the Bavarian army, and was surrounded by 30,000 men.

Towards midday, a lieutenant-colonel came with a flag of truce, from General Manteuffel, to propose that the king should surrender.

The king replied that he knew perfectly well that he was hemmed in on all sides, but that he, his son, his major-general, his officers, and soldiers, from the highest to the lowest, preferred to die, unless an honourable capitulation were offered them.

At the same time he called a council of war which declared unanimously for a capitulation, as long as it was honourable. There was, indeed, no choice. The army had only three hundred shells left, and rations for one night and day. The whole court, the king included, had dined on a piece of boiled beef and potatoes; the soup was given to the wounded. Every man was allowed but one glass of bad beer.

Each article of the capitulation was discussed, so as to spin out the delay as long as possible. The speedy arrival of the Bavarians was still hoped for.

At length, during the night, the following conditions were drawn up, between General Manteuffel for the King of Prussia, and General von Arentschild for the King of Hanover.

The Hanoverian army was to be disbanded and the soldiers sent back to their homes. All the officers and non-commissioned officers were to go free. They were to retain their arms and equipments. The King of Prussia was to guarantee their pay. The king, the prince, and their suite were to be free to go wherever they wished. The king's private fortune was to be intact and inviolable.

The capitulation being signed, General Manteuffel went to the king's quarters. Entering his cabinet he said to him:

"I am sorry, sire, to present myself before Your Majesty in such sad circumstances. We understand all that Your Majesty suffers, we Prussians who have known Jena. I beg Your Majesty to tell me to what place you wish to retire, and to give me my orders. It shall be my duty to see that you suffer no inconvenience on your journey."

"Sir," replied the king coldly, "I do not know where I shall await the finding of the congress which has to decide whether I shall remain king, or become once more a simple English prince. Probably with my father-in-law, the Duke of Saxe-Altenburg, or with His Majesty the Emperor of Austria. In either case I have no need of your protection, for which I thank you."

The same day the king's aide-de-camp left for Vienna, to ask permission for his master to retire through the Austrian states. As soon as this request reached Vienna, one of the emperor's aides-de-camp left to serve as guide and escort to the king. This officer was the bearer of the Marie-Thérése medal for the king, and the order of knighthood for the prince.

On the same day, the king sent, as messengers to announce his arrival to His Majesty the Emperor of Austria; Herr Meding, representing the regency, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Herr von Platen, and the Minister of War, Herr von Brandis.

The prince asked Benedict to accompany him. As Benedict had never seen Vienna, he assented. But upon conditions. His life, as at Hanover, was to be entirely independent of the court. He still had to arrange Lenhart's business, which, as we know, had been left to Benedict's discretion. Benedict had kept Lenhart for seventeen days. He now gave him four hundred francs and one hundred more as a gratuity — an unexampled generosity to which Lenhart replied by declaring his attachment to the House of Hanover to be such that he would never return to Brunswick from the moment when Brunswick became Prussian. This declaration was worth two hundred francs to him from the King of Hanover, and one hundred francs from the prince.

After this Lenhart's resolution was fixed. He sold, or had sold, all the carriages and horses which he had at Brunswick and with the proceeds he meant to set up a livery stable in Frankfort, a free town, where you seldom see any Prussians. At Frankfort, his brother Hans was in service with one of the best families in the town, that of Chandroz. Madame Chandroz' daughter, the Baroness von Bélow, was the burgomaster's goddaughter. With such connections he could be sure of prospering, and Benedict promised him his custom in case he returned to Frankfort.

The adieux between Benedict and Lenhart were most affecting, and still more so between Lenhart and Frisk, but they were forced to part. Lenhart set out for Frankfort. The king, the prince, Benedict, and Frisk, on their arrival at Vienna, took up their residence in the little chéteau of Fréhliche Wiederkehr, which means Happy Return.

In this way Benedict's prediction to the king was realized — of victory, overthrow, exile.

CHAPTER XXI

WHAT PASSED AT FRANKFORT BETWEEN THE BATTLES OF LANGENSALZA AND SADOWA

Frankfort followed from afar and with anxiety the struggle which went on in the other parts of Germany. But she did not believe that that struggle could reach even her. By June 29th Prince Charles of Bavaria had been appointed general of the Federated Troops. On the same day Frankfort heard the news of the victory of Langensalza. This caused great joy throughout the town, though no one dared to show it. On June 30th Rudolfstadt and the Hanseatic towns declared that they withdrew from the Confederation. The Wértemberg and Baden regiments were in the town; the soldiers, in groups of four and five, went gaily about the streets in hackney carriages. On July 1st, news came of the capitulation of the Hanoverian Army. On July 3rd Mecklenburg, Gotha, and the younger branch of Reuss declared that they withdrew from the Confederation. On July 4th the Prussian papers accused the people of Frankfort of having turned all Prussian subjects out of the town, even those who had been established there for ten years, and of having illuminated their streets on the news of the victory of Langensalza. They had not done so; but the falser the charge, the more it frightened the people of Frankfort. Evidently the Prussians were trying to pick a quarrel with them. On July 5th the gloom increased; news came of the defeat of the Austrians between Kénigsgrétz and Josephstadt. On July 8th the first news of the battle of Sadowa arrived in Frankfort.

Everything that that fatalist, Dr. Speltz, had said with regard to Marshal Benedek came true. After two checks he lost his head; to speak in the language of Herr Speltz, Saturn ruled above Mars and Jupiter. What he had foreseen in another direction, about the superior equipment of the Prussians — in conjunction with their natural courage — also came true. In no single encounter had the Austrians the advantage. The only victory gained over the Prussians was that when the King of Hanover had been in command.

But what particularly terrified Frankfort was the order given by the commanding officers of the Allies’ Army to make entrenchments in the neighbourhood of the town. On this occasion, the Senate awoke from its inactivity, it arose and protested to the Diet that Frankfort was an unfortified town which was not able, and did not wish to be defended. But, in spite of the protestations of the Senate, the troops came to Frankfort.

On July 12th a fresh regiment was announced. It was the 8th regiment of the Federated Army, under the orders of Prince Alexander of Hesse, composed of men from Wértemberg, Baden, and Hesse, and an Austrian Brigade commanded by Count Monte Nuovo. They had scarcely entered Frankfort, when Count Monte Nuovo enquired for the house of the Chandroz family, and got himself billeted upon the widowed Madame von Beling who resided there.

Count Monte Nuovo, which title disguised the celebrated name of Neuburg, was the son of Marie Louise. He was a handsome, tall, fashionable general of forty-eight or fifty, who presented himself to Madame von Beling with all the Austrian grace and courtesy, and who, in saluting Helen, let fall from his lips the name of Karl von Freyberg.

Helen started. Emma had excused herself, as the wife of a Prussian, from doing the honours of her house to a man with whom her husband might be fighting on the morrow. This absence gave Count Monte Nuovo the opportunity of being alone with Helen. Helen, it is hardly necessary to say, awaited this moment with impatience.

“Count,” said she, as soon as they were alone, “you mentioned a certain name.”

“The name of a man who adores you, Fréulein.”

“The name of my *fiancé*,” said Helen, rising.

Count Monte Nuovo bowed and signed to her to reseat herself.

“I know it, Fréulein,” he said; “Count Karl is my friend. He has bidden me hand you this letter and to give you news of him with my own lips.”

Helen took the letter.

“Thank you, sir,” she said, and, eager to read it. “You will allow me, won’t you?”

“Certainly,” said the count bowing, and he appeared to become absorbed in a portrait of Herr von Beling in his uniform.

The letter was all vows of love and protestations of tenderness such as lovers write to each other. Old phrases always new; flowers plucked on the day of creation, and, after six thousand years, as sweet as on the first day.

Having finished the letter, as Count Monte Nuovo still looked straight at the portrait:

"Sir," said Helen, in a low voice.

"Fréulein?" answered the count, approaching her; "Karl lets me hope that you will give me some details yourself," and he adds: 'Before coming to grips with the Prussians, he will, or indeed we shall perhaps, have the pleasure of seeing you again.'"

"It is possible, Fréulein, especially if we meet the Prussians in three or four days."

"Where did you leave him?"

"At Vienna, where he was organizing his volunteer regiment. We arranged a meeting-place at Frankfort, my friend Karl von Freyberg having done me the honour of wishing to serve under my orders."

"He tells me that he has as his lieutenant a Frenchman whom I know. Do you know of whom he is speaking?"

"Yes; he met him at the King of Hanover's, where he went to pay his respects; a young Frenchman called Benedict Turpin."

"Ah! yes," said Helen smiling, "he whom my brother-in-law wished me to marry in gratitude for the sabre-cut he received from him."

"Fréulein," said Count Monte Nuovo, "these things are riddles to me."

"And a little to me also," said Helen; "I will explain to you." And she told him what she knew of Frederic's duel with Benedict. She had scarcely finished when some one simultaneously knocked and rang at the door. Hans went to open it, and a voice asking for Madame von Beling, and reaching her ears through all the closed doors between, made her start.

"What is the matter, Fréulein?" asked Count Monte Nuovo. "You are quite pale!"

"I recognize that voice!" exclaimed Helen.

At the same moment the door opened, and Hans appeared.

"Fréulein," said he, "it is Count Karl von Freyberg."

"Ah!" cried Helen, "I knew it! Where is he? What is he doing?"

"He is below in the dining-room, where he is asking Madame von Beling's permission to pay his respects, to you."

"Do you recognize the gentleman in that?" asked Count Monte Nuovo. "Another man would not even have asked for your grandmother, but have flown straight to you."

"And I could have pardoned him." Then, in a louder voice. "Karl, dear Karl!" she said. "This way!"

Karl came in and threw himself into Helen's arms, who pressed him to her breast. Then, looking round him, he saw Count Monte Nuovo, and held out his hand to him.

"Excuse me, count," said he, "for not having seen you before; but you will readily understand that I had eyes for none but her. Is not Helen as beautiful as I told you, count?"

"More beautiful," replied he.

"Oh! dear, dear Helen," cried Karl, falling on his knees and kissing her hands.

Count Monte Nuovo began to laugh.

"My dear Karl," said he, "I arrived here an hour ago; I asked to be quartered at Madame von Beling's, in order to be able to carry out my commission. It was done as you knocked. I have nothing more to do here. If I have forgotten anything, here you are, and you can supply it. Fréulein, may I have the honour of kissing your hand?"

Helen held out her hand, looking at Karl as if for his permission, which he gave with a nod. The count kissed Helen's hand, then that of his friend, and went out.

The lovers gave a sigh of relief. Fate gave them, amid all the reverses of their political fortunes, one of those rare moments which she grants to those whom she favours most.

The news from the north was only too true. But all hope was not lost in Vienna. The emperor, the Imperial Family, and the Treasury had retired to Pest, and a desperate resistance was being prepared. On the other hand, the cession of Venice to Italy gave liberty to a hundred and sixty thousand men, as a reinforcement to the army in the north. It only remained to revive the spirits of the soldiers by a victory, and it was hoped that Count Alexander of Hesse would gain that victory. The battle would take place in all probability in the outskirts of Frankfort. This is why Karl had chosen to serve in the Prince of Hesse's army, and in Count Monte Nuovo's brigade. There at least, he was sure that he should see fighting. A second cousin of the Emperor Francis Joseph, brave and courageous, he had every interest in risking his life for the House of Austria, to which he belonged.

Helen devoured Karl with her eyes. His dress was that which she had seen him wear every day when she met him going or returning from the hunt; but, without one being able to be precise about it, there was something more warlike about him; his expression was — somewhat more severe. One felt that he was conscious of danger at hand, and in meeting it like a man he met it as one who clung to life, yet who above his life put honour.

During this time, Earl's little troop, whose second in command was Benedict, bivouacked a hundred paces from the railway station, just under the Burgomaster Fellner's windows. Not that they had anything to complain of from the authorities. Karl had sold one of his estates, and each of his men received a shilling every day for food. Each man was armed with a good carbine, rifle-barrelled and able, like a quick-firing gun, to fire eight or ten shots a minute. Each man also carried a hundred cartridges, and, in consequence, the hundred men could fire ten thousand shots. The two leaders carried double-barrelled carbines.

The burgomaster returning to the Hétel de Ville, found in front of his door the little detachment dressed in an unknown uniform. He stopped with that naéve bourgeois curiosity which we call *flénerie*. After staring at the soldiers he went on to their leader before whom he stopped, not only with simple curiosity but astonishment. It seemed to him that the face of the leader was not entirely unknown to him.

And in fact, the officer, smiling, asked in excellent German:

"May I enquire after Burgomaster Fellner's health?"

"Ah! heavens and earth!" cried the burgomaster, "I was not mistaken. It is M. Benedict Turpin!"

"Bravo! I told you that your memory was unusually well developed. It must be so to recognize me in this costume."

"But you have become a soldier?"

"An officer."

"An officer! I beg your pardon."

"Yes, an amateur officer."

"Come up to my house; you must be in need of refreshment, and your men are thirsty. Aren't you, my friends?"

The men laughed.

"We are always more or less thirsty," one of them replied.

"Very well, I will send twenty-five bottles of wine and beer down to you," said the burgomaster. "Come in, M. Benedict!"

"Remember that my eye is upon you from the window," said Benedict, "and be careful."

“Be easy in your mind, captain,” replied he who had spoken before.

“Madame Fellner,” said the burgomaster on entering, “here is a captain of volunteers who is quartered on us. We must give him a worthy reception.”

Madame Fellner, who was doing worsted work, raised her head and looked at her guest. An expression resembling her husband’s passed over her face.

“Oh! it is surprising, my dear!” she cried, “how like this gentleman is to a young French painter....”

“There!” said Fellner, “there is no need to keep your incognito. Pay your respects to my wife, my dear Benedict; you are recognized.”

Benedict held out his hand to Madame Fellner. As for the burgomaster, a slave to his promise, he looked out amongst a bunch of keys that of the cellar, and went down to choose the wine in which he wished Benedict’s men to drink his health. A few minutes after, shouts of “Long live the burgomaster!” told that his wine was found to be of good quality.

CHAPTER XXII

THE FREE MEAL

The burgomaster was uneasy, and did not try to hide it. The Prussians had marched on Frankfort by way of Vogeberg: a combat was bound to take place on the frontiers of Bavaria, and, if the Allies’ army was beaten, the Prussians would occupy Frankfort on the following day. Orders had been given of which no one knew, but which could not be kept from him, as burgomaster. On July 14th, that is to say on the third day, the Federated Assembly, the Military Commission, and the Chancellor’s Office, had received orders to go to Augsburg, a proof that Frankfort was not sure of being able to preserve her neutrality. The conviction, held by every one in Frankfort, that this was the moment of supreme crisis, had raised the sympathy of the inhabitants for the defenders of the cause dear to all, that is to say the cause of Austria, to the highest pitch. So, when the dinner hour came, the great houses of Frankfort invited the officers, while the bourgeois and working people invited the privates. Some took dinner to them, others laid tables before their doors.

Hermann Mumm, the famous wine merchant, had invited a hundred privates, corporals, and sergeants, and had laid an immense table before his door, where each man had his bottle of wine.

Burgomaster Fellner, his brother-in-law, Doctor Kugler, and the other inhabitants of the road abutting on the railway station, took care of Karl’s hundred men. He himself dined with Madame von Beling and Count Monte Nuovo. Benedict, whom good Madame Fellner would not suffer to depart, could not refuse her invitation. They had invited Senators von Bernus and Speltz, but they had each their own guests, and only M. Fischer, the journalist, who lived a bachelor life, could come. Prince Alexander of Hesse dined with the Austrian consul.

The diners in the street formed strange contrasts with those inside. The soldiers, drinking together, careless of the morrow, looked for nothing but death; but death to a soldier is only a *vivandiére* in black, who pours him the last glass of brandy at the end of the last day. The soldier only fears to lose his life, because in losing his life, he loses all with it, and at one blow; while the merchant, the banker, even the bourgeois, before losing life, may lose fortune, credit, and position. He may see his coffers pillaged, his house ransacked, his wife and daughters dishonoured, his children calling him, impotent to help them. He may be tortured through his family, his money, his flesh, and his honour. It was of these things that the citizens of the free town of Frankfort thought, and these things prevented them from being as gay as they would have wished with their guests.

As for Karl and Helen, they thought of nothing but their happiness. For them, the present was everything. They wished to forget: and, by force not of wishing, but of love, they did forget.

But the saddest of these gatherings, despite Benedict's efforts, was certainly that which took place at the burgomaster's. Herr Fellner was, in his administrative capacity, one of the most intelligent burgomasters that Frankfort had ever possessed. Furthermore, he was an excellent father to his family, adoring his children, and adored by them. During fourteen years of married life not the smallest cloud had passed across his union. During the whole dinner, in spite of the weighty political preoccupation which absorbed him, he attempted, with the help of his brother-in-law the councillor, and his friend Fischer, to throw a little gaiety over the solemnity of the conversation. At dessert a servant entered and informed Benedict that his travelling companion, Lenhart, asked leave to offer him his services again. The burgomaster enquired who Lenhart was, and, at the moment when Benedict smilingly asked permission to go and shake his hand in the vestibule, the ex-livery stable keeper slapped the servant on the shoulder to make him give way, and came in saying:

"Don't give yourself the trouble, M. Benedict; I'll come right into his worship the burgomaster's dining-room. I am not proud. Good day, your worship, and ladies and gentlemen."

"Ah!" said the burgomaster, recognizing the old Saxon accent, "you are from Sachsenhausen?"

"Yes, and my name is Lenhart, at your service; I am brother to Hans, who is in service with Madame von Beling."

"Well then, my friend," said the burgomaster, "drink a glass of wine to the health of M. Benedict, whom you wish to see."

"Two, if you like; he well deserves them! Ah! there's no stand-offishness with regard to the Prussians about him. Thunder and lightning! how he went at them at the battle of Langensalza!”

“What! you were there?” asked the burgomaster of Lenhart.

“On! yes, that I was, and now mad I was at not getting a slap at those cuckoos myself!”

“Why do you call them cuckoos?” asked the journalist.

“Because they take other people’s nests to lay their eggs in.”

“But how did you know I was here?” asked Benedict, a little embarrassed by this unceremonious visit.

“Oh!” said Lenhart, “I was walking peacefully along the road, when a dog came and jumped at my neck. ‘There,’ I said, ‘it is Frisk, M. Benedict’s dog.’ Your men looked at me as if I were a curiosity, because I mentioned your name. ‘Is M. Benedict here?’ I asked them. They answered me: ‘Yes, he is there, he is dining with your burgomaster, Herr Fellner, a good man, who has good wine.’ ‘Herr Fellner’s good health,’ I said to myself: ‘Here, it’s true! he is my burgomaster, because ever since yesterday I’ve been established in Frankfort, and as he is my burgomaster, I can go in And call on him, to say good-morning to M. Benedict.’“

“Well now that you have said good-morning to me, my good Lenhart, and drunk the health of his worship the burgomaster,” said Benedict —

“Yes, but I haven’t drunk yours, my young master, my benefactor, my idol! for you are my idol, M. Benedict. When I speak of you, when I talk about your duel, where you overcame those two men, one with a sabre cut, and what a one it was! M. Frederic de — — , you know the one I mean, don’t you? Another with a pistol shot, that was a journalist, a great tall, ungainly fellow, like you, Herr Fischer.”

“Thanks, my friend.”

“I haven’t said any harm, I hope.”

“No, but leave these gentlemen in peace,” said Benedict.

“They are very peaceful, M. Benedict; look how they are listening.”

“Let him go on,” said the doctor.

“I’d go on all the same, even if you wouldn’t let me. Ah! when I’m on the subject of M. Benedict, I never run dry. Don’t shrug your shoulders, M. Benedict; if you’d wanted to kill the baron, you’d have killed him, and if you’d wanted to kill the journalist, you’d only yourself to please.”

“As a matter of fact,” said the burgomaster, “we have seen that story in the ‘Kreuz Zeitung.’ My word! I read it without ever thinking that it was to you it happened.”

"And the pretty thing is that it was he who told it you!" continued Lenhart. "He is as learned as a sorcerer! Only glanced at the poor King of Hanover's hand, and he foretold everything that's happened to him. First, the victory, then the pill."

At the moment, when they were going from the dining-room to the drawing-room, the sound of trumpets and drums was heard; the trumpet sounded "to horse," the drum beat "the alert." Madame Fellner waited impatiently; but her husband, smiling, signed to her to be patient. For the moment, a more lively and more general preoccupation was started by the sound of the alarm.

"This tells me, madam," said Benedict, pointing towards the street, "I have only time to drink your husband's health, and to the long and happy life you and your beautiful family will have with him."

The toast was repeated by all, and even by Lenhart, who thus drank twice, as he had said, to the health of the burgomaster. After which, grasping the hands of Herr Fellner, his brother-in-law, and the journalist, and kissing that of Madame Fellner, Benedict ran downstairs and out, crying: "To arms!"

The same warlike sound had surprised Karl and Helen at the end of dinner. Karl felt a terrible blow at his heart. Helen grew pale, although she did not know the meaning of the beating of the drums nor of the sounding of the trumpets; yet she felt it to be sinister. Then, at the glance exchanged between Count Monte Nuovo and Karl, she understood that the moment of separation had come. The count had pity on the two young lovers, and, to give them a minute for their last adieux, he took leave of Madame von Beling, and said to his young friend:

"Karl, you have a quarter-of-an-hour."

Karl threw a rapid glance at the clock. It was half-past four.

"Thank you, general," he answered. "I will be at my post at the time you mention."

Madame von Beling had gone to see Count Monte Nuovo off, and in order to be alone, the young people went into the garden, where a thick arbour of vines hid their adieux. One might as well try to write down the melancholy song of the nightingale, which burst forth a few paces from them, as to describe the dialogue interspersed with sighs and tears, with vows, with sobs, with promises of love, with passionate outbursts, and with tender cries. What had they said at the end of a quarter-of-an-hour? Nothing, and everything. The parting was inevitable.

As on the first occasion, Karl’s horse was waiting at the door. He dragged himself away, leading Helen with him, encircled by his arms, there he covered her face with a rain of kisses.

The door was open. The two Styrians beckoned him. A quarter to five was striking. He threw himself upon his horse, driving the spurs into him. The two Styrians ran beside him, following the galloping horse. The last words which Karl heard were these: “Thine, in this world or in the next!” and with the ardour of a lover and the faith of a Christian, he replied: “So be it.”

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BATTLE OF ASCHAFFENBURG

During his dinner, Prince Alexander of Hesse had received this dispatch: “The Prussian vanguard has appeared at the end of the Vogelsburg pass!”

This news very much astonished the commander-in-chief, who was expecting the enemy to come by the pass through the Thuringian Forest. He had, in consequence, immediately sent a telegram to Darmstadt to order a detachment of three thousand men to come by rail to Aschaffenburg and seize the bridge. Then he had immediately sounded the bugle-call and the signal to saddle.

Two steamboats were waiting at Hackenhausen. A hundred railway carriages were waiting at the station, capable of holding a hundred men each.

We have already mentioned the effect produced by the double trumpet call.

There was a moment of confusion: for a moment every one ran to and fro, uniforms were confused, cavalry and infantry were mixed, then as if a clever hand had put each man in his place, at the end of five minutes the cavalry were mounted and the infantry had their proper weapons. Everything was ready for a start.

Again, Frankfort showed its sympathy, not exactly to the Austrians, but to the defenders of Austria. Beer was handed round in half-pints and wine in jugfuls. Gentlemen of the first houses in the town shook hands with the officers. Fashionable ladies spoke cheeringly to the soldiers. A hitherto unknown brotherhood, born of the common danger, reigned over the free town.

People called from windows: “Courage! victory! long live Austria! long live the Allies! long live Prince Alexander of Hesse!”

Marie Louise’s son was greeted for his part with cries of “Long live the Count of Monte Nuovo!” But it must be said that, as they came for the most part from ladies, they were due rather to his fine figure and military bearing than to his royal birth.

Karl’s Styrian sharpshooters received orders to take their places in the first carriages. It was they who were to attack the Prussians. They went gaily into the station with no other music than the count’s two flute players. After them came Count Monte Nuovo’s Austrian brigade and lastly the Allies of Hesse and Wértemberg. The Italian brigade had left by the steamboats, protesting against what they had to do, and declaring they would never fire on their friends the Prussians for their enemies the Austrians.

The train went off, carrying men, rifles, guns, ammunition, horses, and ambulances. An hour and a half afterwards they were at Aschaffenburg. Night was beginning to fall. They had not seen the Prussians.

Prince Alexander of Hesse sent a party out to reconnoitre. The party came back towards eleven at night, after having fired a few shots at the Prussians at two hours’ journey from Aschaffenburg.

A peasant who had crossed the pass at the same time as the Prussians, said that they were nearly five or six thousand strong, and that they had stopped because they were waiting for a body of seven or eight thousand men which was late. The numbers promised to be nearly equal.

It was found necessary to defend the passage of the Main and to protect Frankfort and Darmstadt by gaining the victory. The Styrian sharpshooters were placed on the road. Their mission was to do the greatest amount of damage possible to the enemy and retire, leaving the infantry and cavalry to work in their turn, and to rally at the head of the bridge, the allies only means of retreat, and to defend that bridge to the last.

During the night each man took up his position for the next day, and supped and slept in the open. A reserve of eight hundred men had been lodged in Aschaffenburg to defend the town if it were attacked. The night passed without disturbance and came.

At ten o’clock, Karl, growing impatient, mounted his horse and leaving the command of his men to Benedict galloped off towards the Prussians who at last were beginning to march.

In the course of his gallop Karl went up to Count Monte Nuovo and brought back the guns, which were put in position across the road. Four felled trees made a sort of entrenchment for the artillery. Karl got on to this entrenchment with his two Styrians, who took their flutes from their pockets, as if on parade, and began to play their sweetest and most charming airs. Karl could resist no longer. In a minute he took his pipe from his waistcoat pocket and sent on the wind a last message to his country.

The Prussians were advancing all this time. At half-range the booming of the two Austrian guns interrupted our three musicians, who put their flutes back into their pockets, and took up their rifles. The two volleys were well aimed, they killed or wounded a score of men. Again an explosion was heard, and a second messenger of death swept through the Prussian ranks.

“They are going to try and carry the guns by assault,” said Karl to Benedict. “Take fifty men, and I’ll take fifty; we will creep through the little wood on each side of the road. We have time for two shots each. We must kill a hundred men and fifty horses. Let ten of your men fire at the horses and the rest at the men.”

Benedict took fifty men and crept along the right of the road. Karl did the same and crept along the left. The count was not mistaken; cavalry advanced from the middle on the first rank, and the gleam of the sabres was soon visible in the sunshine. Then was heard the thunder of three hundred horses, galloping forward.

Now began a fusillade, on both sides of the road, which would have seemed a game, if, at the first two shots, the colonel and the lieutenant had not been shot down from their horses, and if at each shot that followed those two a man or a horse had not fallen. Soon the road was strewn with dead men and horses. The first ranks could not advance. The charge stopped a hundred paces from the two guns, which kept up their fire and completed the confusion in the column.

Behind them the Prussians had brought forward the artillery, and had placed in position six guns to silence the two Austrian guns.

But our sharpshooters had advanced to about three hundred paces from the battery, and, when the six artillerymen had raised the match to fire with the regularity of a Prussian manéuvre, six shots were fired, three to the right and three to the left of the road, and the six artillerymen fell dead.

Six others took the burning match and fell beside their comrades. Meanwhile the two Austrian guns had fired and demolished one of the Prussian guns.

The Prussians did what they ought to have done at first; that is, they attacked the Styrian sharpshooters. They sent out five hundred Prussian sharpshooters with fixed bayonets.

Then, on both sides of the plain began a terrible fusillade, while along the road the infantry advanced in columns, firing on the battery as they came. The artillerymen harnessed horses to the guns and retreated. The two guns, by retiring, left the Neuberg brigade uncovered.

A hillock a little distance from Aschaffenburg was then crowned by a battery of six guns, the fire of which raked the Prussian masses.

The count himself seeing that in spite of the fire along the whole line, the Prussians were advancing, put himself at the head of a regiment of cuirassiers and charged. Prince Alexander ordered all the Baden army to support him. Unfortunately, he placed the Italian regiment on his left wing and for the second time the Italians told him that they would remain neutral, exposed to the shots of both sides, but would not fire themselves.

Whether by chance, or because they had been warned of this neutrality, the Prussians brought their principal effort to bear upon this left wing, which, by standing still, allowed the enemy to unhorse Count Monte Nuovo.

The Styrian sharpshooters had done marvels. They had lost thirty men, and had killed more than three hundred of the enemy. Then, according to their orders, they had rallied at the head of the Aschaffenburg bridge.

From that spot, Karl and Benedict heard a quick fusillade at the other end of the town. It was the Prussian right wing which had overthrown Prince Alexander’s left wing and was attacking the suburbs of the town.

“Listen,” said Karl to Benedict, “the day is lost! Fate has overtaken the ‘house of Austria.’ I am going to kill myself, because it is my duty; but you, who are not tied to our fortune; you, who are fighting as an amateur; you, who are French when all is said and done, it would be folly for you to kill yourself for a cause which is not your own, and not even that with which you agree. Right to the last moment; then, when you know that all resistance is useless, get back to Frankfort, go to Helen; tell her that I am dead, if you have seen me die, or that I am in retreat on Darmstadt or Wértzburg with the remains of the army. If I live, I will write to her. If I die, I die thinking of her. This is my heart’s testament, I confide it to you.”

Benedict pressed Karl’s hand.

“Now,” proceeded Karl, “it seems to me that it is a soldier’s duty to give the most service possible, to the last moment; we have a hundred and seventy men left. I am going to take some, I will take half to support the defenders of the town. You stay with the others at the bridge. Do your best here. I will do my best wherever I am. Do you hear the fusillade coming nearer? We have no time to lose. We must say farewell.”

The two young men threw themselves into each other’s arms. Then Karl hurried into the streets and disappeared in the smoke. Benedict went to a little hill covered with a thicket, where he could defend himself and protect the bridge.

He was scarcely there when he saw a cloud of dust rapidly approaching. It was the Baden cavalry, which had been driven back by the Prussian cuirassiers. The first fugitives crossed the bridge without difficulty; but soon the passage was obstructed with men and horses, and the first ranks were forced to return upon those who followed them.

At that moment, a volley from Benedict and his men felled fifty men and twenty horses. The cuirassiers stopped astonished, and courage returned to the Baden infantry. A second volley followed the first, and the click of the balls on the cuirasses could be heard like the sound of hail on a roof. Thirty men and horses fell. The cuirassiers became disordered, but in retiring they encountered a square broken by the lancers, which fled before them. The square found itself between the spears of the lancers and the sabres of the cuirassiers. Benedict saw them coming mixed pell-mell with the lancers and cuirassiers.

“Aim at the officers,” cried Benedict, and he himself picked out a captain of cuirassiers and fired. The captain fell. The others had each chosen officers, but found it more convenient to choose the officers of the lancers. Death thus offered a larger target. Almost all the officers fell, and the horses bounding riderless joined the squadron. Men were still continuing to crowd the bridge.

Suddenly the greater part of the allies’ army arrived almost upon the heels of the enemy. At the same time, in the street of the burning town, Karl was retreating with his usual calm. He killed a man at each shot. He was bare-headed. A ball had carried away his Styrian cap. A trickle of blood was running down his cheek.

The two young men greeted each other from afar. Frisk, recognizing Karl, whom he considered an admirable hunter, ran towards him, all delight at seeing him again.

At that moment, a heavy gallop made the earth shake. It was the Prussian cuirassiers returning to the charge. Through the dust of the road and the smoke of the firing could be seen the glitter of their breastplates, helmets, and sword blades. They made a hole in the centre of the Baden and Hessian fugitives, and penetrated a third of the way over the bridge.

With a last glance, Benedict saw his friend fighting against a captain, into whose throat he twice thrust his bayonet. The captain fell, but only to be succeeded by two cuirassiers who attacked Karl, sword in hand. Two shots from Benedict's rifle killed one and wounded the other.

Then he saw Karl carried away among the fugitives crossing the bridge, in spite of his efforts to rally them. Enclosed on all sides, his sole path to hope of safety was the bridge. He threw himself upon it with the sixty or sixty-five men who were left. It was a terrible struggle; the dead were trodden under foot, the cuirassiers, like giants on their great horses, stabbed the fugitives with their shortened swords.

"Fire on them!" cried Benedict.

Those of his men who had their rifles loaded fired; seven or eight cuirassiers fell; the bullets rattled on the breastplates of the rest.

A fresh charge brought the cuirassiers into the midst of the Styrian infantry. Pressed by two horsemen, Benedict killed one with his bayonet, the other tried to crush him with his horse against the parapet of the bridge. He drew his short hunting knife and thrust it up to the hilt in the horse's chest, the horse reared with a scream of dismay. Benedict left his knife with its living sheath, ran between the horse's legs, leapt over the parapet of the bridge and sprang, armed as he was, into the Main. As he fell, he cast a last look at the spot where Karl had disappeared, but his gaze sought his friend in vain.

It was about five o'clock in the evening.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE EXECUTOR

Benedict had jumped into the Main on the left side of the bridge; the current carried him towards the arches. When he came to the surface he looked round him and saw a boat moored to one of them. A man was lying in the boat. Benedict swam towards him with one hand, holding his rifle above the water with the other. The boatman seeing him coming raised his oar.

"Prussian or Austrian?" asked he.

"French," answered Benedict. The boatman held out his hand.

Benedict, dripping as he was, jumped into the boat.

"Twenty florins," he said, "if we are in Dettingen in an hour. We have the current with us and I will row with you."

"That will be easy," said the boatman, "if you are sure you will keep your word."

"Wait a minute," said Benedict; throwing down his Styrian tunic and cap, and feeling in his pocket, "here are ten."

"Then, come on," said the boatman.

He took one oar, Benedict took the other: the boat impelled by four vigorous arms went rapidly down the river.

The struggle was still continuing; men and horses fell from the bridge into the stream. Benedict would have liked to stop and watch the spectacle, but time did not allow.

No one paid any attention to the little boat flying down stream. In five minutes the oarsmen were out of range and out of danger.

While passing a little wood on the edge of the river, called Joli-Buisson, he thought he saw Karl fighting desperately in the middle of a group of Prussians. But as the uniform of all the Styrians was alike, it might have been one of the infantry. Then Benedict fancied he saw a dog like Frisk in the throng, and he remembered that Frisk had followed Karl.

At the first bend of the river, they ceased to see anything of the battle. Further on, they saw the smoke of the burning houses in Aschaffenburg. Then at the little village of Lieder, everything disappeared. The boat flew down the river and quickly they passed Menaschoft, Stockstadt, Kleim, and Ostheim. After that the banks of the Main were deserted down to Mainflig. On the other bank, almost opposite, stood Dettingen.

It was a quarter-past six, the boatman had earned his twenty florins. Benedict gave them to him; but before parting from him he considered for a moment.

“Would you like to earn twenty florins more?” he asked.

“I should just think so!” replied the boatman. Benedict looked at his watch.

“The train does not go until a quarter-past seven, we have more than an hour before us.”

“Besides which the trouble at Aschaffenburg will make the train another quarter of an hour late, if it does not stop it altogether.”

“The deuce it will!”

“Will what I tell you fly away with my twenty florins?”

“No; but go into Dettingen first of all. You are just my height, go and buy me a boatman’s dress like yours. Complete, you know. Then come back, and I will tell you what remains to be done.”

The boatman jumped out of the boat and ran down the road to Dettingen. A quarter-of-an-hour later, he came back with the complete costume, which had cost ten florins. Benedict gave him that amount.

“And now,” asked the boatman, “what is to be done?”

“Can you wait for me here three days with my uniform, my rifle, and my pistols? I will give you twenty florins.”

“Yes; but if at the end of three days you do not come back?”

“The rifle, the pistols, and the uniform will be yours.”

“I will wait here eight days. Gentlemen must have time to settle their affairs.”

“You are a good fellow. What is your name?”

“Fritz.”

“Very well, Fritz, goodbye!”

In a few moments Benedict had put on the coat and trousers and covered his head with the boatman’s cap. He walked a few steps and then stopped suddenly:

“By the way, where will you stay at Dettingen?” he asked.

“A boatman is like a snail, he carries his house on his back. You will find me in my boat.”

“Night and day?”

“Night and day.”

“All is well then.”

And in his turn Benedict went towards Dettingen.

Fritz had prophesied truly, the train was half an hour late. Indeed it was the last train which went through; hussars were sent to take up the rails; lest troops should be sent to Frankfort to help the allies.

Benedict took a third-class ticket, as befitted his humble costume. The train only stopped at Manau for a few minutes, and arrived at Frankfort at a quarter to nine, scarcely ten minutes late.

The station was full of people who had come to get news. Benedict passed through the crowd as quickly as possible, recognized M. Fellner, whispered in his ear “beaten,” and went off in the direction of the Chandroz’ house.

He knocked at the door. Hans opened it. Helen was not in the house, but he went and asked for Emma. Helen was at the Church of Notre Dame de la Croix. Benedict asked the way there, and Hans, who thought he brought news of Karl, offered to show him. In five minutes they were there: Hans wished to go back, but Benedict kept him, in case there might be some order to be given. He left him in the porch and went in. One chapel was hit by the trembling light of a lamp. A woman was kneeling before the altar, or rather, crouching on the steps. This woman was Helen.

The eleven o’clock train had brought the news that a battle would take place that day. At twelve o’clock Helen and her maid had taken a carriage, and driven by Hans had gone down the Aschaffenburg road as far as the Dornighem wood. There, in the country silence they had heard the sound of cannon. It is unnecessary to say that each shot had had an echo in her heart. Soon she could listen no longer to the sound which grew louder and louder. She went back to Frankfort, and got down at the Church of Notre Dame de la Croix, sending back Hans to ease the minds of her mother and sister. Hans had not dared to say where Helen was without the permission of the baroness.

Helen had been praying since three o’clock. At the sound of Benedict’s approach she turned. At first sight, and in his disguise, she did not recognize the young painter whom Frederic had wished her to marry, and took him for a Sachsenhausen fisherman.

“Are you looking for me, my good man?” she said.

“Yes,” answered Benedict.

“Then you are bringing me news of Karl?”

“I was his companion in the fight.”

“He is dead!” cried Helen, wringing her hands with a sob, and glancing reproachfully at the statue of the Madonna. “He is dead! he is dead!”

“I cannot tell you for certain that he is alive and not wounded. But I can tell you I do not know that he is dead.”

“You don’t know?”

“No, on my honour, I don’t know.”

“Did he give you a message for me before you left him?”

“Yes, these are his very words.”

“Oh, speak, speak!” And Helen clasped her hands and sank on a chair in front of Benedict as though before a sacred messenger. A message from those whom we love is always sacred.

“Listen; he said to me: ‘The day is lost. Fate has overtaken the house of Austria. I am going to kill myself because it is my duty.’“

Helen groaned.

“And I!” she murmured. “He did not think of me.”

“Wait.” He went on, “But you who are not tied to our fortune; you, who are fighting as an amateur; you, who are French when all is said, and done, it would be folly for you to kill yourself for a cause which is not your own. Fight to the last moment, then when you know that all resistance is vain, get back to Frankfort, go to Helen, tell her that I am dead, if you have seen me die, or that I am in retreat for Darmstadt or Wértzburg with the remains of the army. If I live, I will write to her if I die, I die thinking of her. This is my heart’s testament, I confide it to you.’“

“Dear Karl! and then...?”

“Twice we saw each other in the fray. On the bridge at Aschaffenburg, where he was slightly wounded in the forehead, then a quarter-of-an-hour later, between a little wood called Joli-Buisson and the village of Lieder.”

“And there?”

“There he was surrounded by enemies, but he was still fighting.”

“My God!”

“Then I thought of you.... The war is over. We were the last of Austria’s vital powers, her last hope. Dead or alive, Karl is yours from this hour. Shall I go back to the battlefield? I will search until I get news of him. If he is dead, I will bring him back.”

Helen let a sob escape her.

“If he is wounded, I will bring him back to you, recovered I assure you.”

Helen had seized Benedict by the arm, and looked fixedly at him.

“You will go on to the battlefield?” she said.

“Yes.”

“And you will seek for him among the dead?”

“Yes,” said he, “until I find him.”

“I will go with you,” said Helen.

“You?” cried Benedict.

“It is my duty. I recognize you now. You are Benedict Turpin, the French painter who fought with Frederic, and who spared his life.”

“Yes.”

“Then you are a friend and a man of honour. I can trust in you. Let us go.”

“Is that settled?”

“It is settled.”

“Do you seriously wish it?”

“I do wish it.”

“Very well, then, there is not an instant to lose.”

“How shall we go?”

“The railways have been destroyed.”

“Hans will take us.”

“I have a better plan than that. Carriages can be broken, drivers can be forced. I have the right man, a man who would break all his carriages and lame all his horses for me.”

Benedict called, and Hans appeared.

“Run to your brother Lenhart. Tell him to be here within ten minutes with his best carriage and horses, and wine and bread. As you pass the chemist’s tell him to get bandages, lint, and strapping.”

“Oh, sir,” said Hans, “I must write that down.”

“Very well, a carriage, two horses, bread and wine; you mustn’t forget that. I will see to the rest. Go.” Then, turning to Helen, “Will you tell your relatives?” asked Benedict.

“Oh no!” she cried. “They would wish to prevent me from going. I am under the protection of the Virgin.”

“Pray then. I will come back here for you.”

Helen threw herself on her knees. Benedict went quickly out of the church. Ten minutes later he came back with all the necessary things for the dressing of wounds, and four torches.

“Shall we take Hans?” asked Helen.

“No, it must not be known where you are. If we bring back Karl wounded, a room must be ready for him, and a surgeon ready. Also, his arrival would cause agitation to your sister, scarcely well again, or to your grandmother, whose age must be taken into consideration.”

“What time shall we get back?”

“I don’t know, but we may be expected at four in the morning. You hear, Hans? And if they fear for your young mistress — ”

“You will answer,” said Lenhart, “that they may be easy, because Benedict Turpin is with her.”

“You hear, dear Helen. I am ready when you are.”

“Let us go,” she said, “and not lose a minute. My God! when I think that he may be there, perhaps lying on the earth under some tree or bush, bleeding from two or three wounds, and calling on me with his dying voice for help!” and in high agitation she went on: “I am coming, dear Karl, I am coming!”

Lenhart whipped up his horses, and the carriage went off as quickly as the wind and as noisily as thunder.

CHAPTER XXV

FRISK

In less than an hour and a half they were in sight of Dettingen, which was the more easy to see because it appeared from afar as the centre of a vast fire. As they drew nearer, Benedict said that the light came from the camp fires. After the victory, the Prussians had pressed their outposts beyond the little town.

Helen feared that they would not be allowed to continue their journey, but Benedict reassured her. The pity shown to the wounded, and the respect for the dead in all civilized countries, when once the battle is over, left him no doubt that Helen would be allowed to seek for her *fiancé*, dead or living, and that he would be allowed to aid her.

In fact, the carriage was stopped at the outposts, and the chiefs of the watch could not take it upon themselves to let them pass, but said they must refer to General Sturm, who commanded the outposts.

General Sturm had his quarters in the little village of Horstein, rather further on than Dettingen. Benedict was told where the house was, and went off at a gallop to make up for lost time. When he reached the house indicated, he found that General Sturm was away and that he would have to speak to the major.

He went in, and an impatient voice called out, “wait a minute.”

Benedict had heard that voice before.

“Frederic!” he cried.

It was Baron Frederic von Bélow, whom the King of Prussia had made Staff-major to General Sturm. This rank was an advancement from brigade-general. Benedict explained that he was searching for Karl, who was dead or wounded on the field. Frederic would have liked to go with him, but he had work that must be done. He gave Benedict a permit to search the battlefield, and to take with him two Prussian soldiers as guards, and a surgeon.

Benedict promised to send back the surgeon with news of the expedition, and went out to the carriage where Helen was waiting impatiently.

“Well?” asked she.

“I have got what we want,” answered Benedict. Then in an undertone he said to Lenhart, “Go on twenty paces, then stop.”

He told Helen what had happened, and that if she wished to see her brother-in-law it would be easy to go back.

Helen chafed at the very idea of seeing her brother-in-law. He would be sure to keep her from going among the dead and wounded, and the thieves who were on the battlefield to rob the dead.

She thanked Benedict, and cried to Lenhart:

“Drive on, please!”

Lenhart whipped up his horses. They got back to Dettingen. Eleven o’clock struck as they entered the town. An immense fire was burning in the principal square. Benedict got down and went towards it. He went up to a captain who was walking up and down.

“Excuse me, captain,” he said, “but do you know Baron Frederic von Bélow?”

The captain looked him up and down. It must be remembered that Benedict was still in his boatman’s dress.

“Yes,” he answered, “I know him, and what then?”

“Will you do him a great service?”

“Willingly; he is my friend; but how came he to make you his messenger?”

“He is at Horstein, and obliged to stay there by order of General Sturm.”

“He is very uneasy about a friend of his, who was killed or wounded on the field. He sent me and a comrade to search for this friend, the *fiancé* of the lady whom you see in the carriage, and said: ‘Take this note to the first Prussian officer you see. Tell him to read it, and I am sure he will have the kindness to give you what you ask for.’“

The officer went to the fire, and read what follows:

“Order to the first Prussian officer whom my messenger meets, to put at the disposal of the bearer two soldiers and a surgeon. The two soldiers and the surgeon will follow the bearer wherever he leads them.

“From the quarters of General Horstein, eleven at night:

“By order, General Sturm.

“Principal staff officer,
“BARON FREDERIC VON BéLOW.”

Discipline and obedience are the two chief virtues of the Prussian army. These are what have made it the first army in Germany. The captain had hardly read his superior's order when he dropped the haughty look which he had assumed for the poor devil of a boatman.

"Hullo," he called to the soldiers round the fire. "Two volunteers to serve the principal staff officer, Frederic von Bélow."

Six men presented themselves.

"That's good, you and you," said the captain, choosing two men.

"Now who is the regiment's surgeon?"

"Herr Ludwig Wiederschall," answered a voice.

"Where is he billeted?"

"Here in the square," answered the same voice.

"Tell him he is to go on an expedition to Aschaffenburg to-night, by order of the staff officer."

A soldier got up, went across the square and knocked at the door; a moment after he came back with the surgeon-major.

Benedict thanked the captain. He answered that he was very happy to do anything for the Baron von Bélow.

The surgeon was in a bad temper, because he had been roused out of his first sleep. But when he found himself face to face with a young lady, beautiful and in tears, he made his excuses for having kept her waiting, and was the first to hasten the departure.

The carriage reached the bank of the river by a gentle slope. Several boats were anchored there. Benedict called in a loud voice:

"Fritz!"

At the second call a man stood up in a boat and said:

"Here I am!"

Benedict issued his orders.

Every one took their places in the boat; the two soldiers in the prow, Fritz and Benedict at the oars, and the surgeon and Helen in the stern. A vigorous stroke sent the boat into the middle of the stream. It was less easy travelling now, they had to go against the current; but Benedict and Fritz were good and strong rowers. The boat went slowly over the surface of the water.

They were far from Dettingen when they heard the clock strike midnight. They passed Kleim, Ostheim, Menaschoft, then Lieder, then Aschaffenburg.

Benedict stopped a little below the bridge, it was there that he wished to begin his search. The torches were lit and carried by the soldiers.

The battle had not been finished until dark; the wounded alone had been carried away, and the bridge was still strewn with dead, against whom one stumbled in the dark corners, and who could be seen by their white coats in the light ones.

Karl, with his grey tunic, would have been easily recognized, if among Prussians and Austrians; but Benedict was too sure of having seen him below the bridge to waste time in seeking for him where he was not. They went down to the fields, strewn with clumps of trees, and at the end of which was the little wood called Joli-Buisson. The night was dark, with no moon, there were no stars, one would have said that the dust and smoke of battle was hanging between the earth and the sky. From time to time silent flashes of lightning lifted the horizon like an immense eyelid: a ray of wan light leapt out and lighted up the landscape for a second with bluish light. Suddenly all became dark again. Between the flashes, the only light which appeared on the left bank of the Main was that of the two torches carried by the Prussian soldiers, which made a circle of light a dozen paces across.

Helen, white as a ghost, and gliding like a ghost over the unevennesses of the ground as if they were non-existent, walked in the middle of the circle with arms outstretched, saying. “There, there, there!” wherever she thought she saw motionless corpses lying. When they came near they found them to be corpses indeed, but recognized Prussians or Austrians by their uniforms.

From time to time also, they saw something gliding between the trees, and heard steps hastening away; these were of some of the miserable robbers of the dead who follow a modern army as wolves used to follow ancient armies, and whom they disturbed in their infamous work.

From time to time Benedict stopped the group with a gesture; a profound silence fell, and in this silence he cried: “Karl! Karl!”

Helen with staring eyes and holding her breath, seemed like a statue of suspense. Nothing replied, and the little troop moved on.

From time to time Helen also stopped, and automatically, under her breath, as if she was afraid of her own voice, called in her turn, “Karl! Karl! Karl!”

They drew near the little wood and the corpses became fewer. Benedict made one of these pauses, followed by silence, and for the fifth or sixth time cried:

“Karl!”

This time, a lugubrious and prolonged cry replied, which sent a shudder through the heart of the bravest.

“What is that cry?” asked the surgeon.

“It is a dog, howling for some one’s death,” answered Fritz.

“Can it be?” murmured Benedict. Then he went on, “Over here! over here!” directing them towards the voice of the dog.

“My God!” cried Helen, “have you any hope?”

“Perhaps, come, come!” and without waiting for the torches he ran ahead. When he came to the edge of the wood, he cried again:

“Karl!”

The same lugubrious, lamentable cry was heard, but nearer.

“Come,” said Benedict, “it is here!”

Helen leapt over the ditch, entered the wood, and without thinking of her muslin dress which was being torn to rags, she pushed on through the bushes and thorns. The torch-bearers had been thoughtful enough to follow. There in the wood they heard the sound of the robbers fleeing. Benedict signed a halt in order to give them time to escape. Then all was silent again he called a third time:

“Karl!”

This time a howl, as lamentable as the two first, answered, but so close to them that all hearts beat quickly. The men recoiled a step. The boatman pointed.

“A wolf!” said he.

“Where?” asked Benedict.

“There,” said Fritz pointing. “Don’t you see his eyes shining in the dark like two coals?”

At that moment a flash of lightning penetrated the trees, and showed distinctly a dog sitting beside a motionless body.

“Here, Frisk!” cried Benedict.

The dog made one bound to his master’s neck and licked his face; then again, taking his place beside the corpse, he howled more lamentably than ever.

“Karl is there!” said Benedict.

Helen sprang forward, for she understood it all.

“But he is dead!” continued Benedict.

Helen cried out and fell on Karl’s body.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE WOUNDED MAN

The torchbearers had come up and a group, picturesque and terrible, was formed, by the bright light of the burning resin. Karl had not been plundered like the other corpses, the dog had guarded his body and prevented this. Helen was stretched upon him, her lips to his, weeping and groaning. Benedict was on his knees beside her, with the dog's paws on his shoulders. The surgeon stood, his arms folded, like a man accustomed to death and its sadness. Fritz had thrust his head through the leaves of a thorn-tree. Every one was silent and motionless for a moment.

Suddenly Helen cried out, she sprang up, covered with Karl's blood, her face haggard and her hair wild. They all looked at her.

"Ah!" she cried. "I am going mad." Then, falling on her knees, "Karl! Karl! Karl!" she cried.

"What is it?" asked Benedict.

"Oh! have pity on me," said Helen. "But I thought I felt a breath on my face. Did he wait for me, to give his last sigh?"

"Excuse me, madam," said the surgeon, "but if he whom you call Karl is not dead, there is no time to be lost in looking to him."

"Oh! come and look, sir," said Helen, moving quickly to one side.

The surgeon knelt down, the soldiers brought the torches near, and Karl's pale, but still handsome face was seen. A wound in his head had covered his left cheek with blood, and he would have been unrecognizable if the dog had not licked the blood away from his face as it flowed.

The surgeon loosened his collar; then he raised him to undo his tunic. The wound was terrible, for the back of his tunic was red with blood. The surgeon undid his coat, and with the swiftness of habit cut his coat up the back; then he called for water.

"Water," repeated Helen in an automatic voice that sounded like an echo.

The river was only fifty paces away, Fritz ran to it and brought back the wooden shoe, with which he was accustomed to bail out the boat, full of water. Helen gave her handkerchief.

The surgeon dipped into the water and began to wash the wounded man’s chest, while Benedict supported his body across his knees. It was only then that they saw a clot of blood on his arm, this was a third wound. That on his head was insignificant. That in his chest seemed the most serious at first, but an artery had been cut in his right arm, and the great loss of blood had led to a fainting fit during which the blood had ceased to flow.

Helen, during this sad examination, had not ceased asking.

“Is he dead? is he dead?”

“We are going to see,” said the surgeon. And on examination it proved that his blood still flowed. Karl was not dead.

“He lives!” said the surgeon.

Helen cried out and fell on her knees.

“What must we do to bring him to life?” she asked.

“The artery must be tied,” said the surgeon, “will you let me take him to the ambulance?”

“Oh, no, no!” cried Helen. “I cannot be parted from him. Do you think he will bear being taken to Frankfort?”

“By water, yes. And I confess to you that considering the interest you take in this young man, I would rather some one else performed this operation. Now, if you have any way of taking him quickly by water — ”

“I have my boat,” said Fritz, “and if this gentleman” (he pointed to Benedict) “will give me a helping hand we will be in Frankfort in three hours.”

“It remains to be seen,” said the surgeon, “considering his great loss of blood, whether he will live three hours.”

“My God, my God!” cried Helen.

“I don’t dare to ask you to look, madam, but the earth is soaked with his blood!”

Helen gave a cry of dismay, and put her hand before her eyes.

While talking, while reassuring, while frightening Helen with the terrible cold-bloodedness of a man used to death, the surgeon was binding up the wound in Karl’s chest.

“You say you fear that he has lost too much blood? How much blood can one lose without dying?” asked Helen.

“It depends, madam.”

“What have I to fear or hope for?” asked Helen.

"You have to hope that he will live to reach Frankfort, that he has not lost as much blood as I fear he has, and that a clever surgeon will tie up the artery. You have to fear that he will have a second hémorrhage to-day, or in eight or ten days, when the wound is healed."

"But we can save him, can't we?"

"Nature has so many resources, that we must always hope, madam."

"Well," said Helen, "do not let us lose an instant."

Benedict and the surgeon took the torches, the two soldiers carried the wounded man to the bank. They laid him in the stern of the boat on a mattress and blanket fetched from Aschaffenburg.

"May I try to rouse him?" asked Helen, "or ought I to leave him in his present state?"

"Do not do anything to bring him back to consciousness, madam it is this which stops the hémorrhage, and if the artery is tied before he wakes, all may be well."

They all took their places in the boat, the two Prussians stood holding the torches; Helen was kneeling, the surgeon supported the wounded man; Benedict and Fritz rowed. Frisk, who did not seem to feel pride in having played such a splendid part, was sitting in the prow. This time, well ballasted, pulled by four arms, vigorous and accustomed to the exercise, the boat sped like a swallow over the surface of the water.

Karl remained unconscious. The doctor had thought that the air, cooler on the water than on the land, would rouse him, but it did not. He remained motionless, and gave no sign of life.

They arrived at Dettingen. Benedict gave a handsome reward to the two Prussian soldiers, and asked the surgeon, whom Helen could only thank by pressing his hands, to tell Frederic all the details of the expedition.

Benedict called Lenhart, who was sleeping on the box of his carriage, and told him to go to Frankfort as fast as possible, and tell some porters to wait with a litter on the banks of the Main at Frankfort. As for him, with Helen and Earl, he continued his journey by water, that being the smoothest road that one can find for a sick man.

Towards Hanau the sky began to get light; a great band of rosy silver stretched itself above the Bavarian mountains.

It seemed to Helen that the wounded man shuddered. She gave a cry that made the two rowers turn, then without another movement, Karl opened his eyes, murmured the name of Helen, and closed them again. All this was so rapid, that if Fritz and Benedict had not seen it with her, she would have doubted it. That opened eye, that gently murmured word did not seem a return to life, but the dream of a dying man.

The sun in rising sometimes has this effect on the dying, and before closing for ever their eyes look for the last time upon the sun. This idea came to Helen.

“Oh, Heaven!” she murmured, with sobs. “Is he breathing his last sigh?”

Benedict left the oar for a moment and went to Karl. He took his hand, felt his pulse; and found it imperceptible. He listened to his heart; it seemed to be still.

At each test Helen murmured: “Oh, Heaven!”

At the last test he shared her doubts. He took out a lancet, which he always carried, and pricked the shoulder of the wounded man, who did not feel or move; but a feeble drop of blood appeared.

“Be of good courage, he is still alive,” he said, and again took up his oar.

Helen began to pray.

Since the evening, no one had eaten but Fritz. Benedict broke a piece of bread and gave it to Helen. She refused it with a smile.

They reached Offenbach, and could see Frankfort in the distance silhouetted against the sky. They were due there at about eight o’clock. At eight o’clock, in fact, the boat stopped at the landing-place by the bridge. Soon they saw Lenhart and his carriage, and close to him a litter. They raised the wounded man with the same precautions as before, put him in the litter, and drew the curtains round him.

Benedict wished Helen to go in Lenhart’s carriage; the bodice of her dress was stained with blood. She wrapped herself in a large shawl and walked beside the litter. To save time she asked Benedict to go and seek for the same doctor who had attended the Baron von Bélow, Doctor Bodemacker. She herself crossed all the town from the Sachsenhausen Strasse to her mother’s house, following the litter which bore Karl. People watched her pass with astonishment, and went to question Fritz who walked behind. And when he said it was a *fiancée* who was following the body of her lover, and as every one knew that Fréulein Helen von Chandroz was engaged to Count Karl von Freyberg, they recognized the beautiful young lady, and stepped back bowing respectfully.

When they reached the house the door was already open. Her grandmother and sister were waiting on each side of the door, and as she passed Helen took a hand of each.

"To my room!" she said.

The wounded man was taken to her room and laid on her bed. At that moment Doctor Bodemacker arrived with Benedict.

The doctor examined Karl, and Benedict looked on with anxiety almost equal to Helen's.

"Who saw this man before me?" asked, the doctor. "Who bound his wounds?"

"A regimental surgeon," answered Helen.

"Why did he not tie the artery?"

"It was at night, by torchlight, in the open air; he did not dare. He told me to get a cleverer man, and I came to you."

The surgeon looked at Karl uneasily. "He has lost a quarter of his blood," he murmured.

"Well?" asked Helen.

The doctor bent his head.

"Doctor," cried Helen, "don't tell me there is no hope: it is always said that people quickly recover lost blood."

"Yes," replied the doctor, "when he can eat. But never mind, a doctor must do all he can. Can you help me?" he asked Benedict.

"Yes," he answered, "I have some idea of surgery."

"You will leave the room, won't you?" the surgeon asked Helen.

"Not for the world!" she cried, "no, no, I will stay to the end."

The operation on the arm was finished with a cleverness which astonished Benedict.

"Now," said the doctor, "ice water must be slowly dropped on that arm!"

Some ice was procured and in five minutes was upon the arm.

"Now," said the doctor, "we shall see."

"What shall we see?" asked Helen anxiously.

"We shall see the effect of the ice water."

All three were standing by the bed, and it would be difficult to say which was the most interested in its success: the doctor, from professional pride; Helen, from her great love of the wounded man; or Benedict, from his friendship with Karl and Helen.

At the first drops of ice water which fell on the arm, Karl shuddered visibly. Then his eyelids trembled, his eyes opened, and he looked round him with surprise until they became fixed on Helen. A faint smile appeared on his lips and the corners of his eyes. He tried to speak and breathed the name of Helen.

“He must not speak,” said the doctor, “until to-morrow at least.”

“Enough, my beloved,” said Helen. “To-morrow you can tell me you love me.”

CHAPTER XXVII

THE PRUSSIANS AT FRANKFORT

In Frankfort all was sorrow and dismay at the news of the defeat. The inhabitants were deeply apprehensive of their treatment by the Prussians since seeing what had occurred in Hanover. On the evening of the battle, as we have said, the news of the disaster had reached Frankfort, and from the next day, the 15th, the conviction that its occupation would be immediate had cast an aspect of mourning over the town. Not a single person was to be seen on the fashionable promenade. The Prussians, so it was said, would make their entry on the 16th after midday.

Night came, and with it a strange solitude in the streets, where, if one met a wayfarer it was evident from his hurry that he was on urgent business, carrying perhaps jewels or valuables for deposit at one of the foreign legations. At an early hour the houses had been shut up. Behind the bolted doors and windows one guessed that the inmates were silently digging holes for the concealment of their treasures.

Morning came and everywhere might be seen affixed placards of the Senate, reading as follows:

“The King of Prussia’s royal troops will make their entry into Frankfort and its suburbs; our relations with them will therefore be materially changed from what they were when they were in garrison here. The Senate deplores this change which has been brought about in the relations in question, but the national sacrifices we have already made will render our inevitable pecuniary losses easy in comparison with what we have already lost. We all know that the discipline of the King of Prussia’s troops is admirable. In circumstances of great difficulty the Senate exhorts all alike, of whatever rank or position, to give a friendly reception to the Prussian troops.”

The Frankfort battalion received orders to hold itself ready, with band in front, to march out and meet the Prussians and do them honour. From ten o’clock in the morning every advantageous spot, all the belfries and housetops from which the suburbs, and particularly the road from

Aschaffenburg could be seen, were crowded with curious spectators. Towards noon the Prussians were descried at Hanau. The railway brought them by thousands and they were seen occupying as if by magic all the strategic points along the line, not without certain precautions which indicated their uneasiness as to what might portend.

Nothing occurred, however, until four o’clock. Then successive trains left Hanau bearing the victorious army and rolled up to the town gates until seven o’clock. It was clear that General Falkenstein now waited the submission of the municipality, perhaps believing that the keys of the town would be brought him on a silver salver. He waited in vain.

All was silence. None of the inhabitants moved and the Prussian soldiers, prominent among whom were the cuirassiers who had charged so vigorously in the battle, seemed spectres in their great cloaks and steel helmets. In the evening the Zeil is ever a melancholy place. On this occasion how sad it looked, despair seemed inextricably intermingled with its brooding shadows, in which stood out like a squadron of phantoms the Prussian cuirassiers. Now and again the trumpets sounded sinister fanfares.

The fact that the Prussians were Germans was completely forgotten; their attitude clearly showed that they were enemies.

Suddenly the music of the battalion of Frankfort broke out, coming from the further side of the town. It met the Prussians at the top of the Zeil, drew up in ranks and presented arms to the beating of the drums.

The Prussians did not appear to notice these friendly advances. Two cannons arrived at a gallop. One was trained on the Zeil, the other on the Ross-market. The head of the Prussian column was formed on the Schiller Square and commanded the Zeil: for a quarter-of-an-hour the cavalry remained in line on horseback, then they dismounted and stood awaiting orders. This kind of encampment during which expectation grew tenser lasted until eleven. Then, all at once as the clocks struck, groups of ten, fifteen, or twenty men detached themselves, struck on the doors and invaded the houses.

No order had been given in the town for the provision of rations and wine. So the Prussians, treating Frankfort as a conquered world, chose the most comfortable houses in which to establish themselves.

The battalion remained a quarter-of-an-hour presenting arms; after which the commanding officer ordered muskets to be grounded. The band continued to play. It was ordered to cease.

After two hours, as no word had been exchanged between the battalion and the Prussian army, the former received the order to retire, arms lowered as for a funeral. It was the funeral of Frankfort’s liberty.

The whole night passed in the same terrors as if the town had been taken by assault. If doors opened slowly, they were broken; cries of terror were heard in the houses and no one dared to ask what caused them. As the house of Hermann Mumm appeared one of the most important, he had to lodge and board two hundred soldiers and fifteen officers this first night. Another house, that of Madame Luttereth, lodged fifty men, who amused themselves with breaking the windows and furniture, on the alleged pretext that she had given evening parties and balls without inviting the Prussian officers in garrison. Accusations of this kind, accusations which served as the pretext for unheard of violence were preferred against all classes of society. And the Prussian officers said to their men: “You have a right to get all you can from these Frankfort rascals, who have lent Austria twenty-five millions without charging interest.”

It was vain to say that the town had never had twenty-five millions in its coffers; that had it had them such a loan could not have been made without a decree of the Senate and the Legislature, and that the most skilful investigator would fail to find a trace of such a decree. The officers persisted, and, as the soldiers had no need to be encouraged in a preliminary pillage while waiting the great day of plunder which had been promised them, they gave themselves up to the most brutal disorders, believing themselves authorized by the hatred of their chiefs towards the unhappy town. From this night commenced what was rightly called *the Prussian Terror at Frankfort*.

Frederic von Bélow, who knew of the orders to treat Frankfort as a hostile city, had had a guard placed at the Chandroz’ house to secure the safety of the family, his pretext being that it had been reserved for General Sturm and his staff.

Daylight dawned and presently, few having slept, all the world was abroad, lamenting their misfortune and enquiring about those suffered by their friends. Then came the billstickers slowly and unwillingly, like men under constraint, fixing up the following notice:

“Authority having been given me over the Duchy of Nassau, the town of Frankfort and its suburbs, as also over that part of Bavaria which is occupied by the Prussian troops and over the Grand-duchy of Hesse, all workmen and functionaries will in future take orders from me. These orders will be duly and formally communicated.

“Dated at Frankfort, July 16th, 1866,

“The Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the Main,

“Falkenstein.”

Two hours later the general addressed a note to the Deputies Fellner and Méller, in which he stated that as armies at war could procure what they had need of in the enemy’s country, the town of Frankfort would furnish to the army of the Main:

“1. For each soldier a pair of boots to sample.

“2. Three hundred good horses ready saddled to replace those lost by the army.

“3. The pay of the army for a year to be sent instantly to the army treasurer.”

By way of recompense the town was to be freed from all imposts, except cigars, the general engaging furthermore to reduce the burden of the military billeting as much as possible.

The total claimed for army pay was 7,747,008 florins.

The two members hastened to General Falkenstein’s headquarters, and were admitted to him. His first words were:

“Well, sirs, have you brought my money?”

“We beg leave to submit to your Excellency,” said Fellner, “that we have no authority to decree payment of such a sum, as the government of the town having been dissolved, its consent cannot be obtained.”

“That does not concern me,” said the general, “I have conquered the country and I raise an indemnity. It is perfectly regular.”

“Will you allow me to say to your Excellency that a town which does not defend itself cannot be conquered. Frankfort, a free town, relies for its defence on its treaties, and has never thought of opposing your army.”

“Frankfort has found twenty-four millions for the Austrians,” cried the general, “and can easily find fifteen or eighteen for us. But if it refuses, I myself will find them. Four hours only of pillage and we shall see if your street of the Jews and the coffers of your bankers do not produce twice as much.”

“I doubt, general,” said Fellner coldly, “whether Germans can be got to treat Germans in such a way.”

“Who speaks of Germans? I have a Polish regiment brought expressly.”

“We have done no harm to the Poles; we have afforded them a refuge against you whenever they required it. The Poles are not our enemies; the Poles will not pillage Frankfort.”

“That is just what we are going to see,” said the general, stamping his foot with one of those oaths of which the Prussians enjoy the monopoly. “I don’t care a damn if I am called a second Duke of Alva, and I warn you that if at six o’clock to-day the money is not paid, you will be arrested to-morrow and thrown into a dungeon, which you will leave only when the last thaler of the 7,747,008 florins is paid.”

“We know your first minister’s maxim, ‘Might is right.’ Dispose of us as you wish,” answered Fellner.

“At five o’clock, the men whom I shall order to receive the seven million florins will be at the door of the bank, in readiness to transport the money to my headquarters.” Then he added so that the burgomaster could hear the orders: “Arrest and bring before me, the Journalist Fischer, editor in chief of the ‘Post Zeitung.’ I shall commence with him in dealing with the newspaper men and the newspapers.”

Two hours later Fischer was arrested in his house where, after a communication from Fellner he had remained in expectation of the event, and brought to headquarters. General Falkenstein had contrived to keep himself at boiling point, so the moment he saw Fischer:

“Let him enter,” he said, in the third person, which in Germany is the sign of the most profound contempt. And, as Fischer did not enter as quickly as the general wished, he cried: “A thousand thunders! if he hangs back, shove him in.”

“Here I am,” said Fischer; “forewarned of your intention I could have left Frankfort, but it is my custom to face danger.”

“Oh! so you knew that you would be in danger, Mr. Pocket-pen, when you reached me.”

“An unarmed man is always in danger from a powerful armed enemy.”

“You consider me your enemy, then?”

“The indemnity you have exacted from Frankfort and your threats against Herr Fellner are not those of a friend, you will allow.”

“Oh! you have no need to await my threats and orders to declare yourself my enemy. We know your paper, and it is because we know it that you are going to sign the following declaration. Sit down there, take a pen, and write.”

“I take a pen; but, before using it, what are you about to dictate?”

“You want to know? Well, here it is. I, Dr. Fischer Goullet, Councillor of State, editor in chief.... But you are not writing.”

“Finish your sentence, sir, and if I decide to write I will do so.”

“Editor-in-chief of the ‘Post Zeitung,’ acknowledge myself guilty of systematic and calumnious hostility towards the Prussian Government.”

Fischer threw down the pen.

“I will never write that, sir,” said he; “it is false.”

“Tempests and thunders!” cried the general, making a step towards him. “You give me the lie.”

Fischer took a newspaper from his pocket.

“This will inform you better than I can, sir,” he said; “it is the last issue of my paper published an hour before your entry here. This is what I wrote in it:

“‘The history of the days which are to come is written at the point of the bayonet. It is not for the citizens of Frankfort to change anything. For the population of a small and weak state there is nothing else to do but to succour the combatants, whether friends or enemies: they must dress wounds, nurse the sick, exercise charity towards all. Right behaviour is as much the duty of every one as obedience towards the responsible authority.’“

Then, seeing the general shrugging his shoulders, Fischer in his turn took a step forward and holding out his paper:

“Read yourself, if you doubt me,” said he.

The general tore it from his hands.

“You wrote that yesterday,” he said white with rage, “because yesterday you felt us coming, because, yesterday, you were afraid of us.” And tearing up the newspaper he crushed it into a ball and threw it in the Councillor’s face, shouting; “You are a coward.”

Fischer threw a wild glance around him as if for a weapon with which to avenge this insult; then with his hand to his forehead he staggered, turned round with a strangled cry and fell in a heap, killed by the bursting of a blood vessel in the brain.

The general went to him, pushed him with his foot, and seeing that he was dead:

“Throw this rascal into a corner,” said he to his soldiers, “until his family comes to fetch him.”

The soldiers dragged the corpse into a corner of the ante-room.

Meanwhile, Fellner, fearing that harm would befall his friend, had run to Hannibal Fischer, the journalist’s father, and had told him of the general’s orders. Hannibal Fischer was an old man of eighty, he went to the headquarters and asked for his son. The son had been seen going up to the first floor where General Falkenstein held his audiences, but no one had seen him leave. The old man went up and asked for the general. He had gone to lunch and his door was closed.

“Sit down there,” said some one, “he may return.”

“Cannot you tell him that it is a father who claims his son?”

“What on?” asked one of the soldiers.

“My son, Councillor Fischer, who was arrested this morning.”

“Why, it is the father,” said the soldier to his comrade.

“If he wants his son, let him take him,” said the other.

“How, take him?” said the old man, bewildered.

“Certainly,” answered the soldier. “There he is waiting for you.” And he pointed to the corpse in the corner.

The father approached the body, knelt on one knee and raised his son’s head.

“Then they have killed him?” he asked the soldiers.

“No, indeed, he died of his own accord.”

The father kissed the corpse on the forehead.

“These are unhappy days,” he said, “in which fathers bury their children.”

Then he went down, called a street porter, sent him for three of his mates, mounted again to the ante-chamber and showing them the body:

“Take my son,” he said, “and bear him to my house.” The men took the body on their shoulders and bore him to a barrow. The father walked before it bare-headed and pale, his eyes bathed in tears; and to all who questioned him about this strange procession, carrying a dead man through the town without a priest, replied: “It is my son, Councillor Fischer, whom the Prussians have killed.” And thus the news spread over Frankfort.

CHAPTER XXVIII

GENERAL MANTEUFFEL’S THREATS

At five o’clock in the afternoon of July 17th, as the general had said, he sent to the bank a squad of eight men under the command of a sergeant-major, accompanied by two men with wheel-barrows for the seven million florins. His notion of the weight of the coin, which in gold would amount to more than fifty tons, must have been a curious one. Seeing his men return without the money, General Falkenstein declared that if it were not forthcoming the next day he would permit pillage and bombardment. Meanwhile the members Bernus and Speltz were arrested and conducted to the guard-room, when, having left them in view behind the bars for two hours to convince every one of his power over the town authorities, he sent them off to Cologne with four soldiers and a letter for the governor.

This act of brutality had its effect. It alarmed a great many influential people who went to find the bank manager and urge him to advance the seven millions demanded. The directors of the bank gave way and the money was paid to the last florin on July 19th.

The same day the city battalion was disbanded in the presence of the Prussian Colonel von der Goltz. The soldiers had not expected this, and some of the oldest of them shed tears.

At the same time, the Prussians took their fill of the townspeople’s horses. They requisitioned seven hundred, including two little ponies of Madame de Rothschild. The carriages were then seized, and if a lady happened to take a cab she was obliged when she met an officer in search of one, to get out in the mud and leave him to take her place.

Two orders wore circulated. The first enjoined the presentation at the police station every morning, before eight o’clock, of a list of all travellers who had arrived in the hotels and boarding-houses.

Many societies formed for divers purposes such as gymnastics, education, and the like, were called before the commander-in-chief and dissolved. Such of them as had for object military exercises were invited to deposit their arms. Finally the general addressed to the presidents of the societies some kindly words upon the necessity of the measures taken, and upon the actual situation in general. You ask me how kindly words could be uttered by M. de Falkenstein. Reassure yourself, the illustrious general had not altered his habits. Having received his millions at two o’clock he had at once left Frankfort. General Wranzel acted as his deputy for two or three hours and showed a smiling face between two morose ones, for at five o’clock, General Manteuffel arrived. He at once issued the following order:

“To assure the subsistence of the Prussian troops a storehouse will be at once established in this town of Frankfort-on-the-Main, by order of His Excellency the Lieutenant-General Manteuffel, commander-in-chief of the army of the Main. It will be provisioned as follows:

15.000	loaves	of bread of 5 lbs. 9 ozs.
1,480	hundredweight	of sea biscuits.
600	“	of beef.
800	“	of smoked bacon.
450	“	of rice.
450	“	of coffee.
100	“	of salt.
5,000	“	of hay.

“A third part of these quantities is to be placed at our disposal in convenient places between now and the morning of the 21st. The second third on the 21st in the evening, and the last third on July 22nd at the latest.

“Frankfort, July 20th, 1866.

“The Military Superintendent of the army of the Main.

“KASUISKIL”

The unhappy townspeople had believed themselves free from these imposts according to General Falkenstein’s promise — except, indeed, as regards cigars, of which both the Prussian officers and men required nine provided each day.

The next day, while at breakfast with his family towards ten o’clock, Fellner received a letter from the new commander. It was addressed: “To the Very Illustrious Herren Fellner and Méller, proxies of the town of Frankfort.” He turned it and turned it about between his hands without unsealing it. Madame Fellner trembled, Herr Kugler, his brother-in-law, grew pale, and seeing the drops of perspiration on their father’s forehead as he sighed deeply, the children began to cry. At last he opened it, but seeing his pallor as he read, all rose to their feet awaiting his first words. But he said nothing, he let his head fall on his breast and dropped the letter on the floor. His brother-in-law picked it up and read:

“To the Very Illustrious Herren Fellner and Méller, proxies of the government in this town.

“You are invited by these presents to take the necessary measures for a war indemnity of twenty-five millions of florins to be paid within twenty-four hours to the pay office of the Army of the Main in this town.

“The Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the Main,

“MANTEUFFEL”

“Oh!” murmured Fellner, “my poor Fischer, you are fortunate.”

Within two hours bills which Messrs. Fellner and Méller had had printed were posted all over the town. They consisted of General Manteuffel’s letter to them with this addition:

“The Burgomasters Fellner and Méller declare that they will die rather than assist in the spoliation of their fellow citizens.”

The blow to the city was the more terrible because it was entirely unexpected. The city had just paid more than six millions of florins, had contributed in goods an equivalent sum, and was billeting soldiers at a crushing expense. Some had ten, others twenty, thirty, or even fifty soldiers. General Falkenstein had prescribed the soldiers’ rations as for the officers, they were entitled to anything they asked for. A soldier’s daily rations comprised, coffee and accessories in the morning; a pound of meat, vegetables, bread, and half a bottle of wine at noon; a collation with a pint of beer in the evening, in addition eight cigars. These cigars had to be specially bought from the dealers coming with the army. Usually the soldiers demanded and got an extra meal at ten in the morning of bread-and-butter and brandy, and after lunch they got coffee. The sergeant-majors had to be treated like officers, being provided with roast meat and a bottle of wine at dinner, with coffee to follow. Havana cigars, eight in number, were insisted on.

The citizens dared not complain, for the soldiers whatever they did were always found to be in the right. But when they heard of this new exaction of General Manteuffel, used as they were to theft and rapine on the part of the Prussians, the Frankfortians, mute with astonishment, looked at each other, not being able to grasp the extent of their misfortune. As soon as the news was actually billed they rushed in crowds to see it with their own eyes. Hours were spent in deploring the enemy’s greed, but nothing was done towards obeying the order. Meanwhile, some of the chief citizens, M. de Rothschild among them, had gone to seek General Manteuffel. In reply to their observations he said:

“To-morrow my cannon will be trained upon all the chief points of the town, and if in three days I have not half of the contribution, and the rest in six, I double it.”

“General,” answered M. de Rothschild, “you know the range of your cannons I do not doubt, but you do not know that of the measures you are taking — if you ruin Frankfort, you ruin the neighbouring provinces.”

“Very well, gentlemen,” answered Manteuffel, “the contribution, or pillage and bombardment.”

In spite of the intervention of the foreign legations, those of France, Russia, England, Spain, and Belgium, on July 23rd, masses of troops were put in movement with loaded cannon. These were ranged on the chief spaces in the town. At the same time batteries were established on the Muhlberger and the Roederberg, as also on the left bank of the Main.

CHAPTER XXIX

GENERAL STURM

Brigadier-General Roeder, who had replaced General Manteuffel, had brought with him General Sturm and his brigade. Baron von Bélow was the principal staff officer of this brigade, and, as we have related, on the day the Prussians entered Frankfort he had safeguarded the Chandroz family, by placing four men and a serjeant-major in their house. The serjeant-major bore a letter for Madame von Beling, informing her why she was thus garrisoned and urging her to prepare the best rooms on her first floor for General Sturm and his suite. Madame von Beling acted on these instructions, and the men had better rations and cigars supplied to them than if the municipality had catered for them.

After the surgeon’s departure Karl lay still unconscious, but his breathing gradually became more perceptible. Towards evening he uttered a sigh, opened his eyes, and by a slight movement of his left hand seemed to beckon Helen. She rushed to him, seized his hand and placed her lips upon it. Benedict wished her to retire, promising to watch over Karl, but Helen refused, saying that no one but herself should nurse him.

Benedict being desirous of ridding himself of the sailor’s clothes in which he had descended the river before General Sturm arrived, and having no other suit, left the house to get a new outfit. Lenhart was at the front door with his carriage and, driving to the port, he soon found Fritz and his boat. There was his uniform, with his pistols and carbine. He took them and put them in the carriage. Frisk, who had spent the day incessantly watching for his master, joyfully jumped in. Benedict gave Fritz twenty florins and sent him back to Aschaffenburg. Then Lenhart took him to a tailor where he had no difficulty in obtaining an outfit. Next he took a bath. He had fought during the whole of the 14th and had not closed his eyes during thirty-six hours, so he found it refreshing. Afterwards he allowed Lenhart to take him to his own house, and there he got between the sheets.

When he awoke it was ten o’clock; he had slept for six hours. He rushed to the Chandrozes. He found Helen as he had left her kneeling by Karl’s bed. She raised her head and smiled. She also had not slept for thirty hours, but the devotion of women knows no bounds. Nature has intended them for sisters of charity. Love is as strong as life itself.

Karl seemed to sleep; it was evident that, as no blood flowed to it, the brain was in a state of torpor; but every time a spoonful of syrup of digitalis was placed in his mouth he absorbed it better. Benedict’s work was to renew the ice which dripped upon the arm, washing the wound made first by the cuirassier’s sabre and then by the doctor’s lancet.

Towards eight in the morning Emma came into the room for news of the wounded man. She found Helen asking Benedict for more ice. He was an entire stranger to Emma, but by a flash of intuition she guessed him to be the man who had spared her husband’s life. She was thanking him when Hans came to announce Fellner. The worthy man was afraid that the Prussians would break into the house, and came to offer his services.

While they were talking, Frederic arrived with the news that his general was only five minutes behind him.

Nothing can describe Emma’s joy and happiness in seeing Frederic. The war was nearly over, rumours of peace became stronger, her Frederic was then out of danger. Love is egoistic, scarcely had she thought of what was happening in the city; the entry of the Prussians, their exactions, their imposts, their brutalities, the death of Herr Fischer; all these seemed vague — a letter from Frederic had been the important event. Frederic: it was he whom she embraced. He was safe and sound, unwounded, and no longer in danger. Keenly interested as she was in her sister and Karl and their mutual love, she felt how fortunate Frederic was that he was not Karl.

Frederic went up to Karl, who recognized him and smiled.

While General Sturm ate a splendid dinner, Frederic, to whom Benedict had whispered a few words about the behaviour of the Prussians at Frankfort, went out to judge for himself. He was told that the Senate was sitting and he went in. The Senate declared that the demand made upon it being impossible of fulfilment it submitted itself to the general’s clemency.

On leaving the Senate, Frederic saw the cannon trained on the town, the crowds round all the posted bills. He saw besides, entire families driven from their homes by the Prussians, bivouacking on the open spaces. The men were swearing, the women were in tears. A mother was calling for vengeance, as she tended her child of ten, through whose arm a bayonet had been thrust. Without knowing what he did the unfortunate child had followed a Prussian, singing the song that the people of Sachsenhausen had made on the Prussians:

Warte, kuckuck, warte
Bald kommt Bonaparte
Der wird alles wieder holen
Was ihr hobt bei uns gestohlen.

The Prussian had used his bayonet on the lad. But instead of consoling the mother and calling for vengeance with her, the passers-by had signed to her to be quiet, to dry her tears and wipe the blood away; so great was the general terror.

The Prussians, however, had not everywhere had a like experience. One of them lodging with a man of Sachsenhausen, to frighten him had drawn his sabre and placed it on the table. The man without offering any remark had gone out and returned within five minutes with an iron trident, which he in his turn put on the table. “What does this signify?” the Prussian had asked. “Well,” was the reply, “you wanted to show me that you had a fine knife, and I have wanted to convince you that I have a fine fork.” The Prussian had taken the joke badly, he had tried to make play with his sabre and had been transfixed to the wall with the trident.

Passing by Hermann Mumm’s house, the baron noticed him sitting at his door, his head buried in his hands. He touched him on the shoulder. Mumm looked up.

“Is that you?” he said, “and have you pillagers also?”

“Pillagers?” asked Frederic.

“Come and see! Look at my china which my family for three generations has collected — all broken. My cellar is empty, and naturally so, for I have been lodging two hundred soldiers and fifteen officers. Listen to them!” And Frederic heard shouts from within of “wine, more wine! or we blow the place to pieces with cannon balls!”

He went into the house. Poor Mumm’s fine house looked like a stable. The floors were covered with wine, straw, and filth. Not a window remained whole, not an article of furniture was unbroken.

“Look at my poor tables,” said the unhappy Mumm. “At them have sat for over a century the best people of Frankfort; yes, the king, many princes, and the members of the Diet have dined at them. Not a year ago Frau and Fréulein von Bismarck complimented me on the collation I gave them. And now, days of horror and desolation have come, and Frankfort is lost.”

Frederic was powerless and could only leave the place. He well knew that neither General Roeder nor General Sturm would stop the pillaging. Roeder was ruthless, Sturm was mad. He was an old style Prussian general, who when opposed struck down the obstacle.

Presently he met Baron von Schele, the postmaster-general. Since the entry of the Prussians he had received the order to institute a censorship, unsealing letters and drawing up reports upon those who discovered hostile feelings to the Prussian government. He had refused to obey, and, his successor having arrived from Berlin, the censorship was in operation. Von Schele, who looked on Frederic as a Frankfortian rather than a Prussian, told him all this and invited him and his friends to resist.

He reached Fellner's with a broken heart and found all the family in despair. Fellner had just received the official intimation of the refusal of the chief commercial houses to pay the millions demanded by the Prussians and the decree of the Senate in the matter. Although as a member of the Senate he knew its contents, he was re-reading it mechanically, while his wife and children sobbed around him, for all feared what excesses the Prussians might commit on receipt of the refusal. While they sat together, Fellner was informed of the decision just come to by the Legislative Assembly, that a deputation should be sent to the king to obtain the remission of the imposition of twenty-five millions of florins exacted by General Manteuffel.

“Ah,” said Frederic, “if only I could see the King of Prussia.”

“Why not?” said Fellner, catching at a straw.

“Impossible, my dear Fellner, I am only a soldier. When a general commands I must obey. But, if the millions are going to be found, my family will contribute its share.”

Being powerless to assist Fellner, he left him and had walked a few steps when a soldier saluted and asked him to proceed to General Sturm who was waiting for him.

General Sturm was a biggish, strongly made man of about two and fifty. He had a small head, with a high brow. His round face was red and when he was angry, which was often, it became crimson. His large eyes were almost always injected with blood, and he glared with fixed pupils when, as invariably was the case, he wished to be obeyed. All this, with his big mouth, thin lips, yellow teeth, menacing eyebrows, aquiline nose, and thick, short red neck, made him a formidable looking man. His voice was loud and penetrating, his gestures commanding, his movements brusque and rapid. He walked with long strides, he despised danger, but nevertheless seldom encountered any unless it was worth his while.

He had a passion for plumes, red, waving colours, the smell of powder, of gaming; he was as brusque in his words as in his movements; violent and full of pride he brooked contradictions ill and readily flew into a passion. Then his face grew a crimson-violet, his grey eyes became golden and seemed to emit sparks. At such times, he completely forgot all the decencies of life, he swore, he insulted, he struck. Nevertheless he had some common sense, for knowing that he must from time to time have duels to fight, he spent his spare time in sword exercise and pistol shooting with the *maétre-d'armes* of the regiment. And it must be allowed that he was a first-rate performer with both weapons; and, not only so, he had what was called "an unfortunate hand," and where another would have wounded slightly he wounded badly, and frequently he killed his adversary. This had happened ten or twelve times. His real name was *Ruhig*, which means peaceful, so inappropriate to its owner that he received the surname of *Sturm*, meaning storm or tempest. By this name he was always known. He had made a reputation for ferocity in the war against the Bavarians in 1848-49.

When Frederic presented himself he was relatively calm. Sitting in a great chair, and it was rare for him to be seated, he almost smiled.

"Ah, it is you," he said. "I was asking for you. General Roeder was here. Where have you been?"

"Excuse me, general," Frederic answered. "I had gone to my mother-in-law for news of one of my friends, who was seriously wounded in the battle."

"Ah! yes," said the general, "I heard about him — an Austrian. It is too good of you to enquire about such imperial vermin. I should like to see twenty-five thousand of them lying on the battlefield, where I would let them rot from the first man to the last."

"But, your Excellency, he was a friend — "

"Oh, very well — the matter is not in question. I am satisfied with you, baron," said General Sturm, in the same voice in which another man would have said "I loathe you!" "and I wish to do something for you."

Frederic bowed.

"General Roeder was asking for a man with whom I am well pleased, to carry to His Majesty King William I, whom God preserve, the two Austrian and Hessian flags taken by us in the battle of Aschaffenburg. I have thought of you, dear baron. Will you accept the mission?”

“Your Excellency,” replied Frederic, “nothing could honour or delight me more. If you recollect, it was the king who placed me near you; to bring me into contact with the king in such circumstances is to do me a favour and to do him, I dare hope, a pleasure.”

“Well, you must leave within the hour and not come to me with ‘my little wife,’ or ‘my grandmother.’ An hour suffices for embracing all the grandmothers and all the wives in the world, all sisters and children into the bargain. The flags are in the ante-room there. Within the hour jump on the train on your way to Bohemia, and to-morrow you will be with the king at Sadowa. Here is your letter of introduction to His Majesty. Take it.”

Frederic took the letter and saluted, his heart full of joy; he had not had to ask for leave; as if the general had read, had known his dearest wish, he had offered it, and with it had done him a favour of which he had not dreamt.

In two bounds he had reached Benedict.

“My dear friend,” he said, “I leave for Sadowa in an hour, but hesitate to say with what object.”

“Tell me all the same,” said Benedict.

“Well, I am taking the flags captured from the Austrians.”

“And you can take them without grieving me; for, if all Prussians were like yourself, I should have fought with them and not with the Hanoverians and Austrians,” said Benedict. “Now go and say your adieux.”

He was still embracing his wife and little child, when the same soldier who had already been sent to him, called to ask him not to take the flags without exchanging a last word with the general.

Wait, wait a bit, cuckoo,
Bonaparte is coming, who
Soon will force you to restore
All you stole from us before.

CHAPTER XXX

THE BREAKING OF THE STORM

The general received Frederic with the same calm and gracious expression as before.

“Excuse me for delaying,” he said, “after I was so anxious to speed you; but I have a little service to ask.”

Frederic bowed.

“It is about General Manteuffel’s subsidy of twenty-five millions of florins. You know about it, don’t you?”

“Yes,” said Frederic, “and it is a heavy impost for a poor city with some 40,000 inhabitants.”

“You mean 72,000,” said Sturm.

“No, there are only about 40,000 Frankfortians, the remainder of the 72,000 counted as natives are strangers.”

“What does that matter?” said Sturm, becoming impatient. “The statistics say 72,000 and General Manteuffel has made his calculation accordingly.”

“But if he has made an error, it seems to me that those who are charged with the execution of his order should point it out.”

“That is not our affair. We are told 72,000 inhabitants, and 72,000 there therefore are. We are told 25 million florins, and 25 million florins there are also. That is all! Just fancy! the senators have declared, that we can burn the town, but they will not pay the subsidy.”

“I was present,” said Frederic quietly, “and the sitting was admirably conducted, with much dignity, calm, and sorrow.”

“Ta ta ta ta,” said Sturm. “General Manteuffel before leaving gave General Roeder the order to get in these millions. Roeder has ordered the town to pay them. The Senate has chosen to deliberate; that is its own affair. Roeder came round to me about it, it is true; but I told him that it was nothing to worry about. I said. ‘The chief of my staff married in Frankfort; he knows the town like his own land, everyone’s fortune even to shillings and half-pence. He will indicate five and twenty millionaires.’ There are twenty-five of them here, are there not?”

“More than that,” answered Frederic.

“Good; we will commence with them, and if there is a balance the others shall supply it.”

“And have you reckoned on me to give you the names?”

“Certainly. All I require is twenty-five names and five and twenty addresses. Sit down there, my dear fellow, and write them out.”

Frederic sat down, took a pen and wrote;

“Honour obliging me to decline to denounce my fellow citizens, I beg the illustrious Generals von Roeder and Sturm to obtain the desired information elsewhere than from myself.

“Frankfort, July 22nd, 1866.

“FREDERIC BARON VON BéLOW.”

Then, rising and bowing low, he put the paper in the general’s hands.

“What is this?” he asked.

“Read, it, general,” said Frederic.

The general read it, and gave his chief of the staff a side glance.

“Ah! ah!” he said, “I see how I am answered when I ask a favour; let me see how I am answered when I command. Sit there and write — ”

“Order me to charge a battery, and I will do it, but do not order me to become a tax collector.”

“I have promised General Roeder to get him the names and addresses and have told him that you will supply them. He will send for the list directly. What am I to say to him?”

“You will tell him that I have refused to give it.”

Sturm crossed his arms and approached Frederic.

“And do you think that I will allow a man under my orders to refuse me anything?”

“I think you will reflect that you gave me not only an unjust but a dishonouring order and you will appreciate the reason of my refusal. Let me go, general, and call a police officer; he will not refuse you, for it will be all in his work.”

“Baron,” replied Sturm, “I considered I was sending the king a good servant for whom I asked a reward. I cannot reward a man of whom I have to complain. Give me back His Majesty’s letter.”

Frederic disdainfully tossed the letter on the table. The general’s face grew purple, livid marks appeared upon it, his eyes flamed.

“I will write to the king,” he cried furiously, “and he will learn how his officers serve him.”

“Write your account, sir, and I will write mine,” answered Frederic, “and he will see how his generals dishonour him.”

Sturm rushed and seized his horsewhip.

“You have said dishonoured, sir. You will not repeat the word, I trust?”

“Dishonoured,” said Frederic coldly.

Sturm gave a cry of rage and raised his whip to strike his young officer, but observing Frederic’s complete calm he let it fall.

“Who threatens strikes, sir,” Frederic answered, “and it is as if you had struck me.”

He turned to the table and wrote a few lines. Then he opened the door of the ante-room and calling the officers who were there:

“Gentlemen, he said, I confide this paper to your loyalty. Read what it says aloud.”

“I tender my resignation as chief of General Sturm’s staff and officer in the Prussian army.

“Dated at noon July 22nd, 1866.

“FREDERIC VON BéLOW.”

“Which means?” asked Sturm.

“Which means that I am no longer in His Majesty’s service nor in yours, and that you have insulted me. Gentlemen, this man raised his horsewhip over me. And having insulted me, you owe me reparation. Keep my resignation, gentlemen, and bear witness that I am free from all military duty at the moment I tell this man that he is no longer my chief, and consequently that I am not his inferior. Sir, you have injured me mortally, and I will kill you, or you will kill me.”

Sturm burst out laughing.

“You give your resignation,” he said, “well, I do not accept it. Place yourself in confinement. Sir,” said he, stamping his foot and walking towards Frederic, “to prison for fifteen days with you.”

“You have no longer the right to give me an order,” said Frederic, detaching his epaulettes.

Sturm, exasperated, livid, foaming at the mouth, again raised his whip upon the chief of his staff, but this time he slashed his cheek and shoulder with it. Frederic, who until now had held himself in, uttered a cry of rage, made a bound aside and drew his sword.

“Imbecile,” shouted Sturm, with a burst of laughter, “you will be shot after a court martial.”

At this Frederic lost his head completely and threw himself upon the general, but he found four officers in his path. One whispered to him: “Save yourself; we will calm him.”

“And I,” said Frederic, “I who have been struck; who will calm me?”

“We give you our word of honour that we have not seen the blow,” said the officers.

“But *I* have *felt* it. And as I have given my word of honour that one of us must die, I must act accordingly. Adieu, gentlemen.”

Two of the officers trying to follow him:

“Thunders and tempests! gentlemen,” called the general after them. “Come back; no one leaves this room except this madman who will be arrested by the provost marshal.”

The officers came back hanging their heads. Frederic burst out of the room. The first person he met on the stairs was the old Baroness von Beling.

“Gracious heavens! what are you doing with a drawn sword?” she asked.

He put the sword in its scabbard. Then he ran to his wife and embraced her and the baby.

Ten minutes later an explosion was heard in Frederic’s room. Benedict, who was with Karl, rushed to it and burst open the door.

Frederic was lying on the floor dead, his forehead shattered by a bullet. He had left this note on the table:

“Struck in the face by General Sturm, who has refused to give me satisfaction, I could not live dishonoured. My last wish is that my wife in her widow’s dress should leave this evening for Berlin, and there beg from Her Majesty the Queen the remission of the subsidy of twenty-five million florins, which the town as I testify is unable to pay.

My friend, Benedict Turpin, will, I know, avenge me.

“FREDERIC, BARON VON BéLOW.”

Benedict had just time to read this when he turned at a cry behind him. It was from the poor widow.

Benedict, leaving Emma in her mother’s care, went to his room and wrote four notes, each in these terms:

“Baron Frederic von Bélow has just shot himself in consequence of the insult offered him by General Sturm, who has refused to give him satisfaction. His body lies in the house of the Chandroz family, and his friends are invited to pay their last respects there.

“His executor,

“BENEDICT TURPIN.

“P.S. — You are asked to make the news of his death known as widely and publicly as possible.”

Having signed them he sent them by Hans to four of Frederic’s most intimate friends. Then he went down to General Sturm’s rooms and sent in his name.

The name, “Benedict Turpin,” was entirely unknown to General Sturm; he had with him the officers who had witnessed the quarrel with Frederic, and at once said: “Ask him to come in.” Although he knew nothing of what had passed the general’s face plainly showed traces of furious passion.

Benedict came in.

“Sir,” he said, “probably you are ignorant of the sequel to the occurrence between you and my friend, Frederic von Bélow — the incident which led to your insult. I have to inform you that my friend, since you refused to give him satisfaction, has blown out his brains.”

The general started in spite of himself. The officers, dismayed, looked at each other.

“My friend’s last wishes are recorded on this piece of paper. I will read them.”

The general, seized with nervous tremor, sat down.

Benedict read, speaking courteously and calmly.

“Struck in the face by General Sturm, who has refused to give me satisfaction, I could not live dishonoured.”

“You hear me, sir?” Benedict asked.

The general made a sign of assent.

“My last wish is that my wife in her widow’s dress should leave this evening for Berlin, and there beg from Her Majesty the Queen the remission of the subsidy of twenty-five million florins which the town, as I testify, is unable to pay.”

“I have the honour to inform you, sir,” added Benedict, “that I am going to conduct Madame von Bélow to Berlin.”

General Sturm got up.

“One moment,” said Benedict. “There is a final line to read, and you will see it is of some importance.”

“My friend, Benedict Turpin, will, I know, avenge me.”

“Which means, sir?” said, the general, while the officers stood breathlessly by.

“Which means, that you shall hear from me immediately respecting the time and place and weapons, for I mean to kill you and so avenge Frederic von Bélow.”

And Benedict, saluting first the general and then the young officers, left the room before they had recovered from their surprise.

When he gained the other room, Emma, who had read her husband’s last words, was already making her preparations for her journey to Berlin.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE BURGOMASTER

Two things had principally struck Sturm in Frederic’s short will. First; the legacy to Benedict of vengeance; but we must do him the justice to say that this was a minor consideration. There is an unfortunate error amongst military men that courage is only to be found under a uniform, and that one must have seen death at close quarters in order not to fear it. Now we know that Benedict in this respect was on a level with the bravest soldier. Under whatever aspect he encountered death, whether it might be at the point of the bayonet, by the talons of a tiger, the trunk of an elephant, or the poisonous fang of a serpent; still it was death — the farewell to sunshine, life, love; to all that is glorious and all that makes the breast beat high; and in its place, that dark mystery which we call the grave. But Sturm did not recognize the threat of death, for he was protected by his individual temperament and character from perceiving it. He could only recognize an actual menace accompanied by shouts, gesticulations, threats, and oaths. And Benedict’s extreme politeness gave him no idea of serious danger. He supposed, as all vulgarians do, that any one who goes duelling with the courtesy of the ordinary forms of life is arming at preserving by his politeness a means of retreat.

Therefore Frederic’s legacy to Benedict troubled him little. But it was also prescribed that Madame von Bélow should start for Berlin to beg of the queen the remission of the fine imposed upon Frankfort. He decided to see General von Roeder without a moment’s delay and tell him what had occurred.

He found Roeder furious at the Senate’s decision. After listening to Sturm he determined to have recourse again to his old tactics. He took a pen and wrote:

“To Herren Fellner and Méller, burgomasters of Frankfort and government administrators.

“I have to request you to supply me by ten o’clock to-morrow morning with a list of the names and addresses of all members of the Senate, of the permanent house of representation, and of the Legislative Assembly, house-property owners being identified as such.

“VON ROEDER.

“P.S. — Scales for weighing gold are waiting at General von Roeder’s address. An answer to this despatch is requested.”

Then he directed an orderly to deliver the document to Fellner as the senior burgomaster. Fellner was not at home. He had just received Benedict’s sad tidings; and being one of Frederic’s most intimate friends had hastened to the Chandroz’ house, telling the news to all whom he met on the way.

In less time than it takes to relate, the fact of Frederic’s death burst upon the town, and its leading citizens, scarcely able to credit it, flocked to the room where his body lay.

Fellner was astonished at not seeing Emma; heard that she had gone to Berlin, and was asking the cause of this incomprehensible step when Councillor Kugler burst in, General Roeder’s letter in his hand. Fellner opened it at once, read it, meditated; and approaching the bier gazed at his dead friend. After a few seconds of contemplation, he stooped, kissed the forehead, and murmured: “It is not only the soldier who knows how to die.”

Then he slowly left the house, crossed the town with bent head, reached the house and shut himself up in his room. Supper time came. Supper is an important meal in Germany. It is the cheerful repast, at which, in commercial towns especially, the head of the family has time to enjoy the society of his wife and children; for dinner at two o’clock is only an interval hastily snatched in business hours. But by eight, o’clock business people have thrown off their harness; the hour of domestic pleasure has come. Before refreshing sleep descends to prepare men for another day there is an interval in which to enjoy all that they hold dear within the four walls of home.

Nothing of the sort was possible on this evening of July 22nd at the Fellners’. The burgomaster showed perhaps even more than his customary fondness for his children, but it was touched with melancholy. His wife, whose gaze never left him, was unable to speak a word; tears stood in her eyes. The elder children observing their mother’s sadness sat silent; and the little ones’ voices like the chirping of birds, drew for the first time no smiling response from their parents.

Herr von Kugler was mournful. He was one of those men who act promptly and vigorously, without deviating from the straight course of honour. No doubt he had already said to himself: “Were I in his place, this is what I should do.”

Supper dragged on. All seemed reluctant to rise from the table. The children had dropped asleep, no summons having come from the nurse. At last, Mina, the eldest girl, went to the piano to close it for the night and unconsciously touched the keys.

The burgomaster shivered.

“Come Mina,” he said, “play Weber’s ‘Last Thought’; you know it’s my favourite.”

Mina began to play, and the pure melancholy notes poured forth like golden beads dropped on a salver of crystal. The burgomaster propped his bowed head in his hands as he listened to that sweet poetic melody, the final note of which expired like the last sigh of an angel exiled to earth.

Fellner rose and kissed the girl. She exclaimed in alarm:

“What is the matter with you, father? you are crying.”

“I?” said Fellner quickly. “What nonsense, my child,” and he tried to smile.

“Oh!” murmured Mina, “you can say what you like, father, but I felt a tear; and see,” she added, “my cheek is wet.”

Fellner put a hand on her mouth. Mina kissed it.

At this the father nearly gave way, but Kugler murmured in his ear:

“Be a man, Fellner!” He grasped his brother-in-law’s hand.

Eleven o’clock struck — never except for a dance or evening party had the family sat up so late. Fellner kissed his wife and the children.

“But, surely you are not going out?” said Madame Fellner.

“No, my dear.”

“Your kiss was like a goodbye.”

“Goodbye for a little while,” said the burgomaster, trying to smile. “Don’t be uneasy, I am going to work with your brother, that is all.”

Madame Fellner looked at her brother and he gave a sign of assent. Her husband took her to her bed-room door:

“Go to sleep, dear one,” he said, “we have much work before us that must be done before morning.” She stood where she was until she had seen him enter her brother’s room.

Madame Fellner spent the night in prayer. This simple woman, whose only eloquence was to say “I love you,” found words to implore God for her husband. She prayed so long and ardently, that at length sleep came to her where she knelt; for great was her need of it.

When she opened her eyes the first light of the dawn was filtering through the window blinds. Everything seems strange, fantastic, at such an hour. It is neither night nor day and nothing looks as it does at any other time. She gazed around. She felt weak and chilly and afraid. She glanced at the bed — her husband was not there. She rose, but everything danced before her eyes. “Is it possible,” she thought, “that sleep overtook him also while he worked? I must go to him.” And, groping her way through the passages, which were darker than her own room, she reached his. She knocked on the door. There was no answer. She knocked louder, but all was silent. A third time she knocked and called her husband’s name.

Then, trembling with anguish, under a premonition of the sight that awaited her, she pushed open the door. Between her and the window, black against the sun’s first rays, hung her husband’s body suspended above an overturned chair.

CHAPTER XXXII

QUEEN AUGUSTA

All through the night that was so sorrowful for the Fellner family the Baroness von Bélow was travelling rapidly to Berlin, where she arrived about eight o'clock in the morning.

In any other circumstances she would have written to the queen, asked for an audience, and fulfilled all the requirements of etiquette. But there was no time to lose; General von Roeder had allowed only four-and-twenty hours for the payment of the indemnity. It was due at ten o'clock, and in case of refusal the city was threatened with immediate pillage and bombardment. Notices at the corners of all the streets proclaimed that at ten o'clock on the morrow the general with his staff would be waiting in the old Senate Hall to receive the levy. There was, indeed, not a moment to lose.

On leaving the train, therefore, Madame von Bélow took a cab and drove straight to the Little Palace, where the queen had been living since the beginning of the war. There Madame von Bélow asked for the chamberlain, Waals, who, as has been said already, was a friend of her husband's; he came instantly, and seeing her dressed all in black, cried out:

"Good God! has Frederic been killed?"

"He has not been killed, my dear count, he has killed himself," answered the baroness, "and I want to see the queen without a moment's delay."

The chamberlain made no objections. He knew how highly the king valued Frederic; he knew, also, that the queen was acquainted with his widow. He hastened to go and beg the desired audience. Queen Augusta is known throughout Germany for her extreme kindness and her distinguished intelligence. No sooner had she heard from her chamberlain that Emma had come, dressed in mourning, probably to implore some favour, than she exclaimed:

"Bring her in! Bring her in!"

Madame von Bélow was immediately summoned and, as she left the room in which she had been waiting, she saw the door of the royal apartments open and Queen Augusta waiting for her in the doorway.

Without advancing another step the baroness bent one knee to the ground. She tried to speak, but the only words that escaped her lips were:

“Oh, Your Majesty!”

The queen came to her and raised her up.

“What do you want, my dear baroness?” she asked. “What brings you, and why are you in mourning?”

“I am in mourning, Your Majesty, for a man and for a city very dear to me, for my husband who is dead, and for my native city which is at death’s door.”

“Your husband is dead! Poor child! Waals told me so, and he added that he had killed himself. What can have driven him to such a deed? Some injustice must have been done him. Speak, and we will redress it.”

“It is not that which brings me, madam; I am not the person to whom my husband has left the duty of avenging him; in that respect I need only leave God’s will and his to take their course; what brings me, madam, is the despair of my city upon whose ruin your armies, or rather your generals, seem to be resolved.”

“Come, my child, and tell me about it,” said the queen.

She led Emma into her drawing-room and seated herself beside her; but Emma slipped from the sofa and knelt once more before the queen.

“Madam, you know the city of Frankfort.”

“I was there last year,” said the queen, “and had the kindest possible reception.”

“May the remembrance of it help my words! General Falkenstein when he came to our city began by laying upon it a tax of seven million florins; that levy was paid, together with one, about equally heavy, in kind. That made fourteen millions already, for a small town of seventy-two thousand inhabitants, half of whom were foreigners, and consequently did not contribute to the payment.”

“And did Frankfort pay it?” asked the queen.

“Frankfort paid it, madam, for that was still possible. But General Manteuffel arrived and put on a tax, in his turn, of twenty-five million florins. Such a tax, if imposed upon eighteen million subjects, madam, would yield more milliards of coin than the whole world contains. Well, and at this very hour cannon are planted in the streets and on the positions that command the town. If the sum is not paid at ten o’clock to-day — and it will not be paid, madam, it is impossible — the city will be bombarded and given over to pillage, a neutral unwalled city, which has no gates, which has not defended itself and cannot defend itself."

"And how comes it, my child," asked the queen, "that you, a woman, have taken upon yourself to ask justice for this city? It has a Council."

"It has one no longer, madam; the Council has been dissolved, and two of the councillors arrested."

"And the burgomasters?"

"They do not dare to take any step for fear of being shot. God is my witness, madam, that I did not put myself forward to come and plead for that unhappy city. It was my dying husband who said to me 'Go!' and I came."

"But what can be done?" said the queen.

"Your Majesty needs no adviser but your heart. But, I repeat, if by ten o'clock to-day, no counter-order comes from the king, Frankfort is lost."

"If only the king were here," said the queen.

"Thanks to the telegraph, Your Majesty knows that there are no distances now. A telegram from Your Majesty can receive an answer in half-an-hour, and in another half-hour that answer can be sent to Frankfort."

"You are right," said Queen Augusta as she went towards a little bureau loaded with papers.

She wrote:

"To His Majesty the King of Prussia.

"BERLIN, *July 23rd*, 1866.

"Sire, I approach you to entreat humbly and earnestly that the indemnity of twenty-five million florins arbitrarily imposed upon the city of Frankfort, which has already paid fourteen millions in money and in kind, may be withdrawn.

"Your very humble servant and affectionate wife,

"AUGUSTA.

"P.S. Please reply immediately."

She handed the paper to Emma who read and returned it. Herr von Waals was summoned and came instantly.

"Take this telegram to the telegraph office and wait for the answer. And you, my child," continued the queen, "let us think about you. You must be worn out, you must be starving."

"Oh, madam!"

A second time the queen touched her bell.

“Bring my breakfast here,” said she; “the baroness will take some with me.”

A collation was brought in, which the baroness scarcely touched. At every footstep she started, believing it to be that of Herr von Waals. At length hurried steps were heard, the door opened and Herr von Waals appeared, holding a telegram in his hand.

Emma, forgetful of the queen’s presence, rushed towards him, but paused half-way, ashamed.

“Oh, madam, forgive me,” said she.

“No, no,” replied the queen, “take it and read it.”

Emma, trembling, opened the despatch, glanced at it and uttered a cry of joy. It contained these words:

“At the request of our beloved consort, the indemnity of twenty-five million florins levied by General Manteuffel is countermanded. WILLIAM.”

“Well,” said the queen, “to whom should this despatch be sent in order that it may arrive in time? You, dear child, are the person who has obtained this favour, and the honour of it ought to rest with you. You say it is important that the king’s decision should be known in Frankfort by ten o’clock. Tell me to what person it should be addressed.”

“Indeed, madam, I do not know how to make any answer to so much kindness,” said the baroness, kneeling and kissing the queen’s hands. “I know that the proper person to whom to send it would be the burgomaster; but who can tell whether the burgomaster may not have fled or be in prison? I think the safest way — excuse my egoism, madam — but if you do me the honour of consulting me, I would beg that it may be addressed to Madame von Beling, my grandmother; she, very certainly, will not lose a moment in putting it into the proper hands.”

“What you wish shall be done, my dear child,” said the queen, and she added to the despatch:

“This favour has been granted to Queen Augusta by her gracious consort, King William; but it was asked of the queen by her faithful friend, Baroness Frederic von Bélow, her principal lady-in-waiting.”

“AUGUSTA.”

The queen raised Emma from her knees, kissed her, unfastened from her own shoulder the Order of Queen Louisa and fastened it on the baroness’s shoulder.

“As for you,” she said, “you need some hours’ rest, and you shall not go until you have taken them.”

“I beg Your Majesty’s pardon,” replied the baroness, “but two persons are waiting for me, my husband and my child.”

Nevertheless, as no train left until one in the afternoon, and as the hour could neither be hastened nor retarded, Emma resigned herself to waiting.

The queen gave orders that she should receive the same attentions as though she were already a lady-in-waiting, made her take a bath and some hours’ rest, and engaged a carriage for her in the train for Frankfort.

That city, meanwhile, was in consternation. General Roeder, with his staff, was waiting in the Council Hall for the payment required; scales were ready for the weighing. At nine o’clock the gunners, match alight and in hand, came to take their places at the batteries.

The deepest terror prevailed throughout the town. From the arrangements which they saw being made, the Frankforters judged that no mercy was to be expected from the Prussian generals. The whole population was shut up indoors waiting anxiously for the stroke of ten o’clock to announce the town’s doom.

All at once a terrible rumour began to circulate, that the burgomaster, rather than denounce his fellow-citizens, had ended his life — had hanged himself. At a few minutes before ten, a man dressed in black came out of Herr Fellner’s house; it was his brother-in-law, Herr von Kugler, and he held in his hand a rope. He walked straight on, without speaking to anybody, or stopping till he reached the Roemer, pushed aside with his arm the sentinels who attempted to prevent his passing, and, entering the hall in which General von Roeder was presiding, he advanced to the scales and threw into one of them the rope that he had been carrying.

“There,” said he, “is the ransom of the city of Frankfort.”

“What does this mean?” asked General von Roeder.

“This means that, rather than obey you, Burgomaster Fellner hanged himself with this rope. May his death fall upon the heads of those who caused it.”

“But,” returned General von Roeder brutally, while he continued to smoke his cigar, “the indemnity must be paid all the same.”

“Unless,” quietly said Benedict Turpin, who had just come in, “King William should withdraw it from the city of Frankfort.”

And, unfolding the despatch that Madame von Beling had just received, he read the whole of it in a loud voice to General von Roeder.

“Sir,” said he, “I advise you to put the twenty-five million florins into your profit and loss account. I have the honour to leave you the despatch as a voucher.”

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE TWO PROCESSIONS

Two very different pieces of news, one terrible, one joyful, ran simultaneously through Frankfort. The terrible news was that the burgomaster, who had filled two of the highest positions in the little republic now extinct, who was the father of six children and a model of the household virtues, had just hanged himself rather than yield to a greedy and brutal soldier the secrets of private wealth. The joyful news was that, thanks to Madame von Bélow's intervention and to the appeal made by the queen to her husband, the city of Frankfort had been relieved from the tax of twenty-five million florins.

It will easily be understood that nobody in the town talked of any other subject. Astonishment and curiosity were even more aroused owing to the occurrence of two mysterious deaths at the same time. People wondered how it happened that Frederic von Bélow, after having been insulted by his superior officer, should before he shot himself have charged his wife with her pious errand to Berlin, seeing that he was no citizen of Frankfort, but belonged, body and soul, to the Prussian army. Had he hoped to redeem the terrible deeds of violence committed by his countrymen? Moreover, the young officers who had been present at the quarrel between Frederic and the general had not observed entire silence about that quarrel. Many of them were hurt in their pride at being employed to execute a vengeance of which the cause lay far back amid the obscure resentments of a minister who had once been an ambassador. Those who felt this said among themselves that they were acting the part not of soldiers but of bailiffs and men-in-possession. They had repeated some words of the dispute that had taken place before them and had left the rest to be guessed.

Orders had been given prohibiting the printing of any placard without the authorization of the officer in command; but every printer in Frankfort was ready to contravene the order, and at the very moment when Councillor Kugler threw the burgomaster's rope into the scale, a thousand unseen and unknown hands were pasting upon the walls of Frankfort the following notice.

“At three o’clock our worthy burgomaster Fellner hanged himself and became the martyr of his devotion to the city of Frankfort. Citizens, pray for him.”

Benedict, on his part, had visited the printer of the “Journal des Postes” who engaged to furnish, within two hours, two hundred copies of the telegrams interchanged by the king and queen. He further undertook, on condition that the notices were not unduly large, to get them posted by his usual billstickers, who were ready to take the risk of officially announcing the good news to their neighbours. Accordingly, two hours later, two hundred bills were stuck beside the former ones. They contained the following words:

“Yesterday, at two in the afternoon, as is already known, Baron von Bélow blew out his brains, in consequence of a quarrel with General Sturm, in the course of which the general had insulted him. The causes of this quarrel will remain a secret for such people only as do not care to solve it.

“One clause of the baron’s will instructed Madame von Bélow to go to Berlin, and to beg of Her Majesty Queen Augusta that the levy of twenty-five million florins, imposed by General Manteuffel, might be withdrawn. The baroness paused only long enough to put on mourning garments before setting out.

“We are happy to be able to communicate to our fellow-citizens the two royal despatches which she sent to us.”

The crowds that collected before these notices can be imagined. For one moment the stir that passed through the whole population assumed the aspect of a riot; drums beat, patrols were organized, and the citizens received an order to stay at home.

The streets became deserted. The gunners, whose matches, as we have said already, had been lighted at ten in the morning, once more stood by their cannon with their lighted matches in hand. This sort of threat continued for thirty hours. However, as at the end of that time the crowds were no longer collecting, as no conflicts took place, and no shot was fired, all these hostile demonstrations ceased between the 25th and the 26th.

Next morning fresh placards had been stuck up. They contained the following notice:

"To-morrow, July 26th, at two in the afternoon the funerals will take place of the late burgomaster, Herr Fellner, and of the late chief staff officer, Frederic von Bélow.

"Each party will start from the house of mourning and the two will unite at the cathedral, where a service will be held for the two martyrs.

"The families believe that no invitation beyond the present notice will be necessary, and that the citizens of Frankfort will not fail in their duty.

"The funeral arrangements for the burgomaster will be in the hands of his brother-in-law, Councillor Kugler, and those of Major Frederic von Bélow in the hands of M. Benedict Turpin, his executor."

We will not endeavour to depict the homes of the two bereaved families. Madame von Bélow arrived about one o'clock on the morning of the 24th. Everybody in the house was up, and all were praying round the deathbed. Some of the principal ladies of the town had come and were awaiting her return; she was received like an angel bearing the mercies of heaven.

But after a few minutes the pious duty that had brought her so swiftly to her husband's side was remembered. Everybody withdrew, and she was left alone. Helen, in her turn, was watching by Karl. Twice in the course of the day she had gone downstairs, knelt by Frederic's bedside, uttered a prayer, kissed his forehead, and gone up again.

Karl was better; he had not yet returned to life, but he was returning. His eyes reopened and were, able to fix themselves upon Helen's; his mouth murmured words of love, and his hand responded to the hand that pressed it. The surgeon, only, still remained anxious, and, while encouraging the wounded man, would give Helen no reply; but, when he was alone with her, would only repeat in answer to all her questions:

"We must wait! I can say nothing before the eighth or ninth day."

The house of Herr Fellner was equally full of mourning. Everybody who had filled any post in the old republic, senators, members of the Legislative Assembly, etc., came to salute this dead and just man, and to lay on his bed wreaths of oak, of laurel, and *immortelles*.

From early in the morning of the 26th, as soon as the cannon were perceived to have disappeared and the town to be no longer threatened with slaughter at any unexpected moment, all the inhabitants congregated about the two doors that were hung with black. At ten o'clock all the trade guilds met together in the Zeil with their banners, as if for some popular festivity of the free town. All the dissolved societies of the city came with flags flying — although they had been forbidden to display these ensigns — determined to live again for one more day. There was the Society of Carabineers, the Gymnastic Society, the National Defence Society, the new Citizens' Society, the young Militia Society, the Sachsenhausen Citizens' Society, and the Society for the Education of the Workers. Black flags had been hung out at a great number of houses, among others at the casino in the street of Saint Gall, which belonged to the principal inhabitants of Frankfort; at the club of the new Citizens' Union, situated in the Corn Market, at that of the old Citizens' Union in Eschenheim Street, and, finally, at the Sachsenhausen Club — a club of the people, if there ever was one — belonging to the inhabitants of that often mentioned suburb.

A gathering, almost as considerable, was collecting at the corner of the Horse Market, near to the High Street. Here, it may be remembered, the house was situated which was generally known in the town as the Chandroz house, although nobody of that name now existed in it except Helen, whose maiden name had not yet been changed for that of a husband. But in the street that led to the burgomaster's house, the middle and working-classes were assembled, while opposite to the Chandroz house the crowd was made up mainly of that aristocracy of birth to which the house belonged.

The strangest feature of this second crowd was the number of Prussian officers who had assembled to render the last honour to their comrade at the risk of displeasing their superiors, Generals Roeder and Sturm. These latter had had the good sense to leave Frankfort without making any attempt whatever to suppress the display of public feeling.

When Councillor Kugler emerged from the burgomaster's house, following the coffin and holding the dead man's two sons by the hand, cries of "Hurrah for Madame Fellner! Hurrah for Madame Fellner and her children!" rang out, in expression to her of the gratitude felt to her husband. She understood this outburst rising to her from so many hearts at once, and when she appeared, dressed in black, upon the balcony with her four daughters, dressed likewise in black, sobs broke forth and tears flowed from every eye.

The same thing happened as Frederic's coffin began its journey; it was to Frederic's widow that Frankfort owed its escape from ruin. The cry of "Hurrah for Madame von Bélow!" rose from hundreds of throats, and was repeated until the fair young widow, wrapped in her draperies of black crape, came forward to accept the expression of gratitude offered her by the whole town.

Although the officers had received no order to attend Frederic’s funeral, although neither the drummers who usually precede the coffin of a superior officer, nor the soldiers who usually follow it, had been commanded to do so, yet, either from their military training or their sympathy for the dead man, the drummers were present and so was the escort of soldiers when the procession started, and it advanced towards the cathedral to the sound of muffled drums. At the agreed point the two processions united and went forward side by side, occupying the whole width of the street. Only, like two rivers which run parallel, but of which the waters do not mingle, the leaders of the two parties walked forward. Behind the burgomaster’s hearse followed the burghers and the populace; behind that of Baron von Bélow the aristocracy and the military. For the moment peace appeared to have been made between these two populations, one of which weighed so cruelly upon the other that only the death of a man universally esteemed could hold them together for a few instants, leaving them to fall asunder immediately afterwards into mutual hostility.

At the great door of the cathedral the coffins were lifted from the hearses and laid side by side. Thence they were borne into the choir, but the church had been so filled since early morning by a crowd, eager, as the dwellers in large towns always are, for a spectacle, that there was scarcely room for the two coffins to pass to the nave. The military escort, the drums, and the company of soldiers followed them, but when the crowd that accompanied the coffins tried to enter and find a place in the building, it was impossible to do so, and more than three thousand persons were left in the porch and in the street.

The ceremony began, solemn and lugubrious, accompanied by the occasional roll of drums and the sound of gun stocks touching the ground; no one could have said to which of the dead these military honours were being paid, so that the unfortunate burgomaster had his share in the funeral honours bestowed by the very body of men who had caused his death. It is true that from time to time the Choral Society sang funeral hymns and that the voices of the congregation, rising like a wave, stifled these other sounds.

The service was long, and, although it lacked the impressive Roman Catholic pomp, it did not fail to produce an immense effect upon those who were present. Then the two processions set out for the cemetery, the burgomaster attended by funeral chants, the officer by martial music.

The vault of the Chandroz family and that of the burgomaster were at a distance from each other, so that the two parties separated. At the grave of the civilian there were hymns, speeches, and wreaths of *immortelles*, at that of the officer, firing and wreaths of laurel. The double ceremonies were not entirely concluded until the evening, nor did the gloomy and silent crowd return until then into its usual channels, while the drummers, privates, and officers went to their quarters, if not like a hostile troop, at least like a body altogether apart from the inhabitants.

Benedict had had in his mind throughout the ceremony the idea of presenting himself on the morrow to General Sturm in the character of Frederic’s executor, and, as such, demanding satisfaction for the insult offered to his friend. But when he returned to the house he found Emma so overcome, Karl so weak, and the old Baroness von Beling so exhausted by age and woe together, as to make him think that the unhappy Chandroz family still needed him. Now in such a duel as that which he meant to propose to General Sturm, one of the results must inevitably ensue; either he would kill the general or the general would kill him. If he killed the general, he would clearly have to leave Frankfort that very moment, in order to escape the vengeance of the Prussians. If he were killed he would become completely useless to the family which seemed in need even more of his moral protection than of his material support. He determined, therefore, to wait for some days, but promised himself, to send his card daily to General Sturm — and he kept his word. General Sturm could thus be sure, every morning, that though he might forget Benedict, Benedict did not forget him.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE TRANSFUSION OF BLOOD.

Three days had elapsed since the events just narrated. The first bursts of grief in the two bereaved households were appeased, and though there were still tears there were no longer sobs.

Karl grew better and better; for two days past he had raised himself in his bed and had been able to give signs of consciousness, not only by broken utterances, tender exclamations, and endearing words, but by taking part in conversation. His brain, which like the rest of his body had been greatly enfeebled, was gradually recovering the supremacy which it exercises over the rest of the body in health.

Helen, who beheld this resurrection, and was at the age when youth gives one hand to love and one to hope, rejoiced in this visible recovery as though heaven itself had promised that no accident should come to disturb it. Twice a day the surgeon visited the wounded man, and without destroying Helen’s hopes he persisted in withholding any assurance of complete safety. Karl saw her hope; but he remarked, too, the reserve with which the surgeon received all her joyful schemes for the future. He, also, was making schemes, but of a sadder kind.

“Helen,” said he, “I know all you have done for me. Benedict has told me of your tears, your despair, your weariness. I love you with so selfish a love, Helen, that I wish, before I die — ”

And as Helen made a movement, he added:

“If I die, I wish first to call you my wife, so that in case there exists — as they tell us, and as our own pride leads us to believe — a world beyond this, I may find my wife there as here. Promise me, then, my sweet nurse, that if any one of those accidents that trouble the doctor’s mind should occur, promise me that you will instantly send for a priest, and with your hand in mine say: ‘Give us your blessing, father, Karl von Freyberg is my husband.’ And I swear to you, Helen, that my death will be as easy and calm then as it would be full of despair if I could not say: ‘Farewell, my beloved wife.’“

Helen listened with that smile of hope upon her lips with which she made answer to all Karl’s words, whether sad or happy. From time to time, when she saw her patient becoming excited, she would sign to him to be still, and taking down from her bookshelves Uhland, or Goethe, or Schiller, would read aloud to him, and almost always Karl would close his eyes and presently fall asleep to the sound of her melodious, liquid voice. His need of sleep, after so great a loss of blood, was enormous; and then, as though she could see the sleep-bringing shadows thickening over his brain, she would let her voice grow dim, little by little, and with her eyes half upon the sick man and half upon her page would cease to speak at the very moment when he began to sleep.

At night she allowed Benedict to take her place by Karl for two or three hours, because Karl entreated it, but she did not go out of the room. A curtain was drawn across the recess in which her bed — now brought into the middle of the room for the patient, previously stood, and behind the curtain she slept on a couch, slept so lightly that at the least movement in the room, or the first word uttered, the curtain would be lifted and her voice would ask anxiously:

“What is it?”

Helen was a sister of those delightful creations that are to be found on every page of Germany’s popular poetry. We attribute great merit to those poetic dreamers who perceive Loreleis in the mist of the Rhine and Mignons in the foliage of thickets, and do not remind ourselves that there is, after all, no such great merit in finding these charming images, because they are not the visions of genius, but actual copies, whose originals the misty nature of England and of Germany sets before them as models weeping or smiling, but always poetical. Observe, too, that on the shores of the Rhine, the Main, or the Danube, it is not necessary to seek these types — rare, if not unknown among ourselves — in the ranks of the aristocracy, but they may be seen at the citizen’s window or the peasant’s doorway, where Schéler found his Louisa, and Goethe his Margaret. Thus Helen accomplished deeds that seem to us the height of devotion with the most entire simplicity, and never knew that her loving toil deserved a glance of approval from man, or even from God.

On the nights when Helen sat up, Benedict rested in Frederic’s room, throwing himself fully dressed upon the bed, so as to be ready at the first call to run to Helen’s assistance or to go for the surgeon. We have already said that a carriage ready harnessed was always at the door, and, oddly enough, the further recovery progressed, the more the doctor insisted that this precaution should not be neglected.

July 30th had been reached, when, after having watched by Karl during a part of the night, Benedict had yielded his post to Helen, had returned to Frederic’s room and flung himself upon the bed, when, all at once he thought he heard himself loudly called. Almost at the same moment his door opened, and Helen, pale, dishevelled, and covered with blood, appeared in the doorway making inarticulate sounds that seemed to stand for “Help!”

Benedict guessed what had happened. The doctor, less reserved towards him than towards the young girl, had told him what possibilities he feared, and evidently one of these possibilities had come to pass.

He rushed to Karl’s room; the ligature of the artery had burst and blood was flowing in waves and in jets. Karl had fainted.

Benedict did not lose an instant; twisting his handkerchief into a rope he tied it round Karl’s upper arm, broke the bar of a chair with a kick, slipped the bar into the knot of the handkerchief, and turning the stick upon its axis, made what is known in medical language as a *tourniquet*. The blood stopped instantly.

Helen flung herself distractedly upon the bed, she seemed to have gone mad. She did not hear Benedict calling to her: “The doctor! the doctor!”

With his free hand — the other was pressing upon Karl’s arm — Benedict pulled the bell so violently that Hans, guessing something unusual to be the matter, arrived quite scared.

“Take the carriage and fetch the doctor,” cried Benedict. Hans understood everything, for in one glance he had seen all. He flung himself downstairs and into the carriage, calling out in his turn: “To the doctor’s!”

As it was scarcely six o’clock in the morning, the doctor was at home, and within ten minutes walked into the room.

Seeing the blood streaming over the floor, Helen, half fainting, and, above all, Benedict compressing the wounded man’s arm, he understood what had happened, the rather that he had dreaded this.

“Ah, I foresaw this!” he exclaimed, “a secondary hémorrhage, the artery has given way.”

At his voice Helen sprang up and flung her arms about him.

“He will not die! he will not die!” she cried, “you will not let him die, will you?”

The doctor disengaged himself from her grasp, and approached the bed. Karl had not lost nearly so much blood as last time, but to judge from the pool that was spreading across the room he must have lost over twenty-eight ounces, which in his present state of weakness was exorbitant.

However, the doctor did not lose courage; the arm was still bare; he made a fresh incision and sought with his forceps for the artery, which, fortunately, having been compressed by Benedict, had moved only a few centimetres. In a second the artery was tied, but the wounded man was completely unconscious. Helen, who had watched the first operation with anxiety, followed this one with terror. She had then seen Karl lying mute, motionless, and cold, with the appearance of death, but she had not seem him pass, as he had just done, from life to death. His lips were white, his eyes closed, his cheeks waxen; clearly Karl had gone nearer to the grave than even on the former occasion. Helen wrung her hands.

“Oh, his wish! his wish!” she cried, “he will not have the joy of seeing it fulfilled. Sir,” she said to the doctor, “will he not reopen his eyes? Will he not speak again before he dies? I do not ask for his life — only a miracle could grant that. But, make him open his eyes, doctor. Doctor! make him speak to me! Let a priest join our hands! Let us be united in this world, so that we may not be separated in the next.”

The doctor, despite his usual calm, could not remain cold in the presence of such sorrow; though he had done all that was in the power of his art and felt that he could do no more, he tried to reassure Helen with those commonplaces that physicians keep in reserve for the last extremities.

But Benedict, going up to him, and taking him by the hand, said:

“Doctor, you hear what she asks; she does not ask for her lover’s life, she asks for a few moments’ revival, long enough for the priest to utter a few words and place a ring upon her finger.”

“Yes, yes!” cried Helen, “only that! Senseless that I was not to have yielded when he asked and sent at once for the priest. Let him open his eyes, let him say ‘Yes,’ so that his wish may be accomplished and I may keep my promise to him.”

“Doctor,” said Benedict, pressing the hand which he had retained in his, “how, if we asked from science the miracle that Heaven seems to deny? How if we were to try transfusion of blood?”

“What is that?” asked Helen.

The doctor considered for a second and looked at the patient: then he said:

“There is no hope; we risk nothing.”

“I asked you,” said Helen, “what is transfusion of blood?”

“It consists,” replied the doctor, “in passing into the exhausted veins of a sick man enough warm, living blood to give him back, if only for a moment, life, speech, and consciousness. I have never performed the operation, but have seen it once or twice in hospitals.”

“So have I,” said Benedict, “I have always been interested in strange things, so I attended Majendie’s lectures, and I have always seen the experiment succeed when the blood infused belonged to an animal of the same species.”

“Well,” said the doctor, “I will go and try to find a man willing to sell us some twenty or thirty ounces of his blood.”

“Doctor,” said Benedict, throwing off his coat, “I do not sell my blood to my friends, but I give it. Your man is here.”

At these words Helen uttered a cry, flung herself violently between Benedict and the doctor, and proudly holding out her bare arm to the surgeon, said to Benedict:

“You have done enough for him already. If human blood is to pass from another into the veins of my beloved Karl it shall be mine; it is my right.”

Benedict fell on his knees before her and kissed the hem of her skirt. The less impressionable doctor merely said:

“Very well! We will try. Give the patient a spoonful of some cordial. I will go home and get the instruments.”

CHAPTER XXXV

THE MARRIAGE *IN EXTREMIS*

The doctor rushed from the room as rapidly as his professional dignity would allow.

During his absence Helen slipped a spoonful of a cordial between Karl's lips while Benedict rang the bell. Hans appeared.

"Go and fetch a priest," said Helen.

"Is it for extreme unction?" Hans ventured to ask.

"For a marriage," answered Helen.

Five minutes later the doctor returned with his apparatus, and asked Benedict to ring for a servant.

A maid came.

"Some warm water in a deep vessel," said the doctor, "and a thermometer if there is one in the house."

She came back with the required articles.

The doctor took a bandage from his pocket and rolled it round the wounded man's left arm, the right arm being injured. After a few moments the vein swelled, proving thereby that the blood was not all exhausted, and that circulation still continued, although feebly. The doctor then turned to Helen.

"Are you ready?" he enquired.

"Yes," said Helen, "but make haste. Oh, God, if he should die!"

The doctor compressed her arm with a bandage, placed the apparatus upon the bed so as to bring it close to the patient, and put it into water heated to 35 degrees centigrade, so that the blood should not have time to cool in passing from one arm to the other. He placed one end of the syringe against Karl's arm and almost simultaneously pricked Helen's so that her blood spurted into the vessel. When he judged that there were some 120 to 130 grammes he signed to Benedict to staunch Helen's bleeding with his thumb, and making a longitudinal cut in the vein of Karl's arm he slipped in the point of the syringe, taking great care that no air-bubble should get in with the blood. While the operation, which lasted about ten minutes, was going on, a slight sound was heard at the door. It was the priest coming in, accompanied by Emma, Madame von Beling, and all the servants. Helen turned, saw them at the door, and signed to them to come in. At the same moment Benedict pressed her arm; Karl had just quivered, a sort of shudder ran through his whole body.

"Ah!" sighed Helen, folding her hands, "thank God! It is my blood reaching his heart!"

Benedict had ready a piece of court-plaster, which he pressed upon the open vein and held it closed.

The priest approached; he was a Roman Catholic who had been Helen's director from her childhood up.

"You sent for me, my child?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Helen; "I desire, if my grandmother and elder sister will allow, to marry this gentleman, who, with God's help, will soon open his eyes and recover his senses. Only, there is no time to lose, for the swoon may return."

And, as though Karl had but awaited this moment to revive, he opened his eyes, looked tenderly at Helen and said, in a weak, but intelligible voice:

"In the depth of my swoon, I heard everything; you are an angel, Helen, and I join with you in asking permission of your mother and sister that I may leave you my name."

Benedict and the doctor looked at each other amazed at the over-excitement which for the moment restored sight to the dying man's eyes and speech to his lips. The priest drew near to him.

"Louis Karl von Freyberg, do you declare, acknowledge, and swear, before God and in the face of the holy Church, that you now take as your wife and lawful spouse, Helen de Chandroz, here present?"

"Yes."

"You promise and vow to be true to her in all things as a faithful husband should to his wife according to the commandments of God?"

Karl smiled sadly at this admonition of the Church; meant for people who expect to live long and to have time for breaking their solemn vow.

"Yes," said he, "and in witness of it, here is my mother's wedding-ring, which, sacred already, will become the more sacred by passing through your hands."

"And you, Helen de Chandroz, do you consent, acknowledge, and swear, before God and the holy Church, that you take for your husband and lawful spouse, Louis Karl von Freyberg, here present?”

“Oh, yes, yes, father,” exclaimed the girl.

In place of Karl, who was too weak to speak, the priest added:

“Take this token of the marriage vows exchanged between you.”

As he spoke he placed upon Helen’s finger the ring given him by Karl.

“I give you this ring as a sign of the marriage that you have contracted.”

The priest made the sign of the cross upon the bride’s hand, saying in a low voice:

“In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen!”

Stretching out his right hand towards the pair, he added, aloud:

“May the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob join you together and bestow His blessing upon you. I unite you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen!”

“Father,” said Karl to the priest, “if you will now add to the prayers that you have just uttered for the husband the absolution for the dying, I shall have nothing more to ask of you.”

The priest, raising his hand, pronounced the consecrated words, as if Karl’s soul had delayed until this solemn moment to depart from the body. Helen, who had raised him in her arms, felt herself drawn to him by an irresistible power. Her lips clung to those of her lover, and between them escaped the words:

“Farewell, my darling wife; your blood is my blood. Farewell.”

His body fell back upon the pillow. Karl had breathed his last breath upon Helen’s mouth. One sob only was heard from the poor girl, and the complete prostration with which she fell back upon his body showed everybody that he was dead. The spectators rose from their knees. Emma threw herself into Helen’s arms, exclaiming:

“Now we are doubly sisters, by birth and by affliction.” Then, feeling that this sorrow required solitude, one after another slipped away, slowly, gently, and on tiptoe, leaving Helen alone with her husband’s body.

At the end of a couple of hours, Benedict, growing uneasy, ventured to go to her and knocked slowly at the door, saying.

“It is I, sister.”

Helen, who had locked herself in, came to open the door. With amazement he beheld her dressed completely in bridal attire. She had put on a wreath of white roses, diamond earrings hung from her ears, and the costliest of necklaces surrounded her neck. Her fingers were loaded with valuable rings. Her arm from which the blood had been drawn to perform the miracle of resurrection was covered with bracelets. A magnificent lace shawl was thrown over her shoulders and covered a satin gown fastened with knots of pearls.

"You see, my friend," she said to Benedict, "that I have tried to fulfil his wishes completely. I am dressed not as his betrothed but as his wife."

Benedict looked at her sadly — the rather that she did not weep — on the contrary, she smiled. It seemed as though she had given all her tears to the living Karl and had none left for the dead. Benedict saw with profound surprise that she went to and fro in the room, busied with a number of little matters relating to Karl's burial and every moment showed him some fresh article.

"Look!" she would say, "he liked this; he noticed that; we will put it beside him in his coffin. By the way," she added suddenly, "I was just forgetting my hair which he liked so much."

She unfastened her wreath, took hold of her hair, which hung below her knees, cut it off, and made a plait which she knotted round Karl's bare neck.

Evening came. She talked at length with Benedict of the hour at which the funeral should take place on the morrow. As it was now but six in the evening, she begged him to see to all the details that would be so painful to the family, and indeed, almost as painful to him who had loved Frederic and Karl like two brothers. He was to order a wide oak coffin, himself:

"Why a wide one?" Benedict asked.

Helen only answered:

"Do as I ask you, dear friend, and blessings will be upon you."

She gave orders herself for the body of her husband to be placed in its shroud at six the next morning.

Benedict obeyed her in everything. He spent his whole evening over these funeral preparations and did not return to the house until eleven o'clock. He found Helen's room transformed, a double row of candles burning around the bed. Helen was sitting on the bed and looking at Karl.

Even as she no longer wept she now no longer prayed. What had she left to ask of Heaven now that Karl was dead? Towards midnight her mother and sister, who had been praying, and who understood her calmness no more than Benedict did, went to their own rooms. Helen embraced them sadly but without tears and asked that the little child might be brought, so that she might kiss him too. She held him some time in her arms and then gave him back to his mother. When she was left alone with Benedict she said to him:

“Pray take some hours’ rest, either here or at home; do not be uneasy about me. I will be down, dressed, and sleep beside him.”

“Sleep!” said Benedict, more and more amazed.

“Yes,” said Helen simply, “I feel tired. While he was alive, I could not sleep. Now — ” She did not finish the sentence.

“When shall I come back?” asked Benedict.

“When you please,” said Helen. “Let it be about eight in the morning.”

Then, looking through the open casement towards the sky, she said:

“I think there will be a storm to-night.”

Benedict pressed her hand and was going, but she called him back.

“Excuse me, dear friend,” said she, “have you been told that they are coming at six in the morning to wrap him in his shroud?”

“Yes,” said Benedict, his voice choked with tears.

Helen guessed at his feelings.

“You do not mean to kiss me then, my friend?” she observed.

Benedict pressed her to his heart and broke into sobs.

“How weak you are!” said she. “Look how calm *he* is; so calm that one would think he was happy.” And as Benedict was about to answer, she added: “Go, go; to-morrow at eight.”

As Helen had foretold, the night was stormy; with morning a terrible tempest broke out; rain fell in torrents, accompanied by such flashes of lightning as are only seen in storms that announce or cause great misfortunes.

At six o’clock the women who were to perform the last offices for Karl arrived. Helen had looked out the finest sheets she could find, and had spent a part of the night in embroidering them with Karl’s monogram and her own. Then, when her pious task was completed she did as she had said, lay down beside Karl on his bed and encircled by the double row of lighted candles, slept with as sound a sleep as though she were already in her grave. The two women, knocking at the door, awoke her. Seeing them come in, the material aspect of death was forcibly presented to her, and she could not abstain from shedding tears. Stolid as these poor creatures who live by the services that they render to the dead generally are, when they saw the young girl so beautiful, so adorned, so pale, they could not help feeling an emotion unknown to them until then. They trembled as they took the sheets from Helen’s hands and asked her to withdraw while they fulfilled their funeral office.

Helen uncovered Karl’s face, over which the two Ministers of Fate had already thrown the shroud, kissed his lips, murmured into his ear some words that the women did not hear, then, addressing one of them, said:

“I am going to pray for my husband in the Church of Notre Dame de la Croix. If between now and eight o’clock a young man named Benedict comes here, please give him this note.”

She drew from her bosom a paper already folded, sealed, and addressed to Benedict, and went away. The storm was roaring in all its violence. At the door she found Lenhart’s carriage and Lenhart himself. He was astonished to see her coming out so early, dressed in so elegant a costume; but when she had directed him to the church of Notre Dame de la Croix, to which he had driven her two or three times before, he understood that she was going to pray at her usual shrine.

Helen entered the church. The day was so dark that it would have been impossible to find one’s way if the flashes of lightning had not shot their snakes of fire through the coloured panes.

Helen went straight to her accustomed chapel. The statue of the Virgin stood in its place, silent, smiling, decked with gold lace and jewels, and crowned with diamonds. At her feet Helen recognized the wreath of white roses that she had hung there on the day when she had come with Karl and sworn to him to love him always and to die with him. The day to keep her vow had come, and she was here to tell the Virgin of her readiness to keep her promise, as though that promise were not an impiety. Then, as if that were all that she had to do, she made a short prayer, kissed the Holy Mother’s feet, and went out again to the porch of the church.

The weather had cleared a little. For the moment rain had ceased to fall, and a gleam of blue shone between two clouds. The air was full of electricity. The thunder was roaring in noisy outbursts and the flashes threw their blue light almost uninterruptedly upon the pavement and the houses. Helen left the church. Lenhart hurried forward with his carriage for her to get in.

“I feel stifled,” said she, “let me walk a little.”

“I will follow you, madam,” said Lenhart.

“As you please,” she answered.

Eight o’clock was chiming from the cathedral.

At the same hour Benedict was just entering Helen’s room where Karl lay in his shroud. The two women, who had been entrusted with that pious duty, were praying by the bed, but Helen was absent. Benedict began by looking in every direction, expecting to see her praying in some corner, but not perceiving her in any, he enquired where she could be.

One of the women replied:

“She went out an hour ago, saying that she would go to the Church of Notre Dame de la Croix.”

“How was she dressed?” asked Benedict. “And,” he added, with an uneasy presentiment, “did she not say anything or leave any message for me?”

“Are you the gentleman called M. Benedict?” returned the woman who had answered his previous questions.

“Yes,” said he.

“Then here is a letter for you.”

She handed him the note that Helen had left. He opened it hastily. It contained only these few lines:

“MY BELOVED BROTHER,

“I promised Karl, before Notre Dame de la Croix, not to outlive him; Karl is dead, and I am about to die.

“If my body is recovered, see, my dear Benedict, that it is placed in my husband’s coffin; this was the reason why I asked you to have it made wide. I hope that God will permit me to sleep in it by Karl’s side throughout eternity.

“I bequeath a thousand florins to the person who finds my body, if it should be some boatman or fisherman, or poor man with a family. If it should be some person who cannot or will not accept the money, I leave him my last blessing.

“The morrow of Karl’s death is the day of mine.

“My farewells to all who love me.”

“HELEN.”

Benedict was finishing the reading of this letter when Lenhart appeared in the doorway, pale and dripping with water, and calling out:

“Oh, how shall I tell you, M. Benedict! Madame Helen has just thrown herself into the river. Come, come at once!”

Benedict looked round, seized a handkerchief that was lying on the bier, still perfumed and damp with the poor girl's tears, and rushed from the room. The carriage was at the door; he sprang into it.

"To your house," he called sharply to Lenhart. The latter, accustomed to obey Benedict without asking why, put his horses to the gallop; moreover, his house was on the way to the river. The house being reached, he leaped from the carriage, took the staircase in three strides, and opening the door, called:

"Here! Frisk!"

The dog rushed out after his master and was in the carriage as soon as he.

"To the river!" cried Benedict.

Lenhart began to understand; he whipped up his horses and they galloped on as quickly as before. As they drove, Benedict divested himself of his coat, waistcoat, and shirt, retaining only his trousers. When they arrived at the river bank, he saw some sailors with boathooks who were raking the water for Helen's body.

"Did you see her throw herself into the water?" he enquired of Lenhart.

"Yes, your honour," he answered.

"Where was it?"

Lenhart showed him the spot.

"Twenty florins for a boat!" shouted Benedict.

A boatman brought one. Benedict, followed by Frisk, sprang into it. Then, having steered it into the line along which Helen's body had disappeared, he followed the current, holding Frisk by the collar, and making him smell the handkerchief that he had taken up from Karl's bed.

They came to a place in the river where the dog gave a melancholy howl. Benedict let him loose, he sprang out and disappeared at once. An instant later he came to the surface and swam about above the same place howling dismally.

"Yes," said Benedict, "yes, she is there."

Then he, in his turn, dived, and soon reappeared bearing Helen's body on his shoulder.

As Helen had wished, her body was, by Benedict's care, laid in the same coffin as Karl's. Her bridal garments were allowed to dry upon her and she had no other shroud.

CHAPTER XXXVI

“WAIT AND SEE”

When Karl and Helen had been laid in their place of eternal rest, Benedict considered that the time had now arrived when, having no more services to perform for the family to which he had devoted himself, he might remind Sturm that he was Frederic von Bélow’s executor.

Always obedient to convention he dressed himself with the greatest care, hung the Cross of the Legion of Honour and the Guelphic Order to his buttonhole by a line gold chain and sent in his name to General Sturm. The general was in his study. He ordered Benedict to be shown in at once, and as he entered rose from his seat, showed him a chair, and sat down again. Benedict indicated that he preferred to stand.

“Sir,” said he, “the succession of misfortunes which has befallen the Chandroz family leaves me free, earlier than I expected, to come and remind you that Frederic, when he was dying, bequeathed to me a sacred duty — that of vengeance.”

The general bowed and Benedict returned his bow.

“Nothing now keeps me in Frankfort but my wish to fulfil my friend’s last injunction. You know what that injunction was, for I have told you; from this moment I shall have the honour of holding myself at your disposal.”

“That is to say, sir,” said General Sturm, striking his fist upon the writing-table before him, “that you come here to challenge me?”

“Yes, sir,” answered Benedict. “A dying man’s wishes are sacred, and Frederic von Bélow’s wish was that one of us — either you or I — should disappear from this world. I deliver it to you the more readily because I know you, sir, to be brave, skilful in all bodily exercises, and a first-rate swordsman and shot. I am not an officer in the Prussian army; you are in no sense my chief. I am a Frenchman, you are a Prussian; we have Jena behind us and you have Leipzig; we are therefore enemies. All this makes me hope that you will place no difficulty in my way, and will consent to send me two seconds to-morrow, who will find mine at my house between seven and eight in the morning, and will do me the pleasure of announcing to them the hour, place, and weapons that you have chosen. Everything will be acceptable to me; make what conditions you like in the best way you can. I hope that you are satisfied."

General Sturm had shown frequent signs of impatience during Benedict's speech; but had controlled himself like a well-bred man.

"Sir," said he, "I promise you that you shall hear from me by the hour you name, and perhaps earlier."

This was all that Benedict wanted. He bowed and withdrew, delighted that everything had passed off so properly. He was already at the door when he remembered that he had omitted to give the general his new address, at Lenhart's. He went to a table and wrote the street and number below his name on his card.

"Excuse me," said he, "I must not fail to let your Excellency know where I am to be found."

"Are you not my neighbour?" asked the general.

"No," said Benedict. "I have left this house since the day before yesterday."

On the same evening, since he expected to leave Frankfort immediately after next day's duel — unless, indeed, some wound should detain him — Benedict left cards of farewell at all the houses where he had visited, withdrew his money from the bank, and, his banker having detained him, remained at his house until eleven o'clock, and then took leave to return to Lenhart's. But, as he was crossing the corner of the Ross Market an officer accosted him and, saying that he had a communication to make on behalf of the officer in command of the town, begged Benedict to accompany him. The latter made no difficulty about entering the market place where military were quartered, and there, at a sign from the officer, soldiers surrounded him.

"Sir," said the officer, "will you kindly read this paper, which concerns you."

Benedict took the paper and read it:

"By order of the colonel in command of the town and as a measure of public safety, M. Benedict Turpin is instructed to leave Frankfort instantly upon receipt of the present order. Should he refuse to obey willingly, force is to be employed. Six privates and an officer will accompany him to the station, enter the same carriage in the Cologne train and only leave him at the frontier of the Prussian territory.

"This order to be carried out before midnight.

"Signed ***."

Benedict looked round; he had no possible means of resistance.

"Sir," said he, "if I had any way of escaping from the order that I have just read, I declare to you that I would do anything in the world to get out of your hands. The great man who is your minister, and whom I admire although I do not like him, has said 'Might is right.' I am ready to yield to force. But I should be greatly obliged if one of you would go to 17, Beckenheim Street, to a man who lets out carriages, named Lenhart, and kindly ask him to bring me my dog, of which I am very fond. I will take occasion to give him some orders in your presence that are of no particular consequence, but rather important to a man who has been living in a town for three months and is leaving when he had no expectation of doing so."

The officer ordered a soldier to fulfil Benedict's wish.

"Sir," said he, "I know that you were intimate with a man to whom we were all attached, Herr Frederic von Bélow; although I have not the honour of your personal acquaintance, I should be sorry that you should carry away a bad impression of me. I was ordered to arrest you in the manner that I have done. I hope you will pardon an action entirely outside my own wishes, and which I have tried to perform with as much courtesy as possible."

Benedict held out his hand.

"I have been a soldier, sir; and therefore I am obliged to you for an explanation that you might easily have refrained from making."

A minute or so later Lenhart arrived with Frisk.

"My dear Lenhart," said Benedict, "I am leaving Frankfort unexpectedly; be so kind as to collect any things belonging to me that you may have and send them to me, in two or three days, unless you prefer to bring them yourself to Paris, which you do not know and where I would try to make you spend a pleasant fortnight. I do not offer any terms; you know that you may safely leave such matters in my hands."

"Oh, I will go, sir, I will go," said. Lenhart. "You may be sure of that."

"And now," said Benedict, "I think it must be time for the train; no doubt you have a carriage waiting; let us go if you have nothing more to wait for, and if you have not a travelling companion to give me."

The soldiers lined up and Benedict passed between them to the carriage that was waiting. Frisk, always delighted to go from one place to another, leapt in first, as if to invite his master to follow. Benedict stepped in, the officer followed him; four privates followed the officer, a fifth seated himself beside the driver, a sixth jumped up behind, and the conveyance set out for the station.

The engine was just ready to start as the prisoner arrived; he had not even the trouble of waiting a few minutes. At the carriage door Frisk was, as usual, the first to jump in, and although it is not customary, especially in Prussia, for dogs to travel first-class, Benedict obtained for him the favour of remaining with them. Next morning they were at Cologne.

"Sir," said Benedict to the officer, "I am accustomed, every time that I pass through this town, to provide myself with Farina's eau-de-Cologne for my dressing-table. If you are not pressed for time I would propose two things to you: in the first place my word of honour to play fair and not give you the slip before reaching the frontier; in the second place, a good breakfast for these gentlemen and you, all breakfasting together at the same table without any distinction of rank, like brothers. Then we will take the midday train, unless you prefer to trust my word that I will go straight to Paris."

The officer smiled.

"Sir," said he, "we will do what you please. I should like you to carry away the impression that we are only uncivil and tormentors when we are ordered to be. You want to stay; then let us stay! You offer me your word; I accept it. You wish to have us all breakfast with you; although it does not conform either to Prussian habits or Prussian discipline, I accept. The only precaution we will take — and that rather to do you honour than because we doubt your word — will be to see you off at the station. Where do you wish us to meet you again?"

"At the Rhine Hotel, if you please, gentlemen, in an hour's time."

"I need not say," added the officer, speaking in French that the soldiers should not understand him, "that after the way I have behaved to you I ought to be cashiered."

Benedict bowed with an air that seemed to say "You need be under no uneasiness, sir."

Benedict went away to the cathedral square, where Jean Marie Parina's shop is situated, and the officer took off his men in another direction.

Benedict supplied himself with eau-de-Cologne, which he could the more easily do because, having no other luggage, he could carry his purchase with him, and then proceeded to the Rhine Hotel, where he was accustomed to stay. He ordered the best breakfast that the proprietor could promise him, and awaited his guests, who appeared at the agreed time.

The breakfast was a thoroughly cheerful one; the prosperity of France and the prosperity of Prussia were toasted, the Prussians courteously setting the example; and after breakfast Benedict was escorted to the station, and, by military order, had a carriage to himself, instead of sharing one with six private soldiers and an officer.

At the moment of the train's starting the officer put into Benedict's hand a letter, which the traveller opened as soon as the train had passed out of the station. He gave a glance at the signature. It came, as he expected, from General Sturm and contained these words:

"MY DEAR SIR,

"You will understand that it does not become a superior officer to set a bad example by accepting a challenge of which the object is to avenge an officer who was punished for disobedience to his chief. If I were to fight you for a reason so contrary to all military discipline I should be setting a fatal example to the army. I refuse, therefore, for the present, to meet you, and in order to avoid a scandal, I employ one of the most courteous measures at my disposal. You, yourself, were so good as to acknowledge that I had a reputation for courage, and you added that you knew me to be a first-rate shot and swordsman. You cannot, therefore, attribute my refusal to any fear of facing you. A proverb, common to all countries, says: 'Mountains do not meet, but men do.' If we meet anywhere else than in Prussia, and if you are still desirous of killing me, we will see about settling this little matter; but I warn you that the result is by no means a foregone conclusion, and that you will have more trouble than you expect in keeping your promise to your friend Frederic."

Benedict refolded the letter with the utmost care, placed it in his pocket-book and slipped his pocket-book into his pocket, arranged himself as comfortably as he could in a corner, and closing his eyes for sleep, murmured: "Well, well, we will wait and see!"

CONCLUSION

The presence of the Prussians in Frankfort and the terror that they caused there did not end with the events which have just been related, and to which the present narrative ought to confine itself. A few lines only must be added that our work may close as it opened, by a page of politics.

Towards the end of September 1866 it was announced that the city of Frankfort, losing its nationality, its title of a free town, its privilege of having the Diet held there, and finally its rights as a member of the Confederation, was to be united on October 8th to the kingdom of Prussia.

The morrow was gloomy and rainy; no house had hung out the black-and-white flag; no citizen, sad or cheerful, was in the streets, every window was shuttered, every door closed. It seemed a city of the dead. The flag flew only over the barracks, the Exchange, and the post office.

But in the Roemer Square there was an assemblage of some three or four hundred men, all belonging to the suburb of Sachsenhausen. It was a curious thing that each of these men had a dog of some description with him: a bulldog, mastiff, spaniel, hound, griffon, greyhound, or poodle. Amidst these bipeds and quadrupeds, Lenhart went up and down relating what fine things he had seen in Paris, and holding everybody’s attention. He it was who had devised this meeting of his fellow inhabitants of Sachsenhausen, and who, by whispered instructions, had invited them to bring their dogs. Men and dogs alike gazed towards the window from which the proclamation was to be made. They had been waiting there since nine in the morning.

At eleven the members of the Senate, the Christian and Jewish clergy, the professors, the chief officials, and Major-General Boyer, with the officers of the garrison, were gathered together in the Hall of the Emperors in the Roemer, to witness the taking possession of the formerly free town of Frankfort by His Gracious Majesty, the King of Prussia.

The civil governor, Baron Patow, and the civil Commissioner, Herr von Madaé, came from the Senate Hall (once the hall in which the Emperors of Germany were elected) into the great hall. After some little preamble on Baron Patow’s part he read to the persons present the patent by which the former free town of Frankfort was taken into possession, and then the royal proclamation which announced that the town had been added to the Prussian dominions.

The same documents were now to be read to the people of Frankfort. The window was opened to an accompaniment of joyful murmurs and mocking acclamation from the men of Sachsenhausen and the yawns of their dogs. The square was occupied, we forgot to mention, not only by the men from Sachsenhausen but by a company of the 34th regiment of the line and its band.

Herr von Madaé read aloud the following proclamation:

“The very high and very powerful proclamation of His Majesty the King of Prussia to the inhabitants of the former free town of Frankfort.”

Either because the voice of Herr von Madaé was particularly disagreeable to his hearers or because the words “former free town of Frankfort” aroused their sensibility, several dogs howled dismally. Herr von Madaé paused until silence was restored, and continued, still in the king’s name:

“By the patent that I cause to be published to-day I unite you, inhabitants of the city of Frankfort-on-the-Main and its suburbs, to my subjects, your German neighbours and brothers.”

Five or six howls protested against this union. Herr von Madaé seemed to give no heed to them and proceeded.

“By the decision of the war and the reorganization of our common German Fatherland, you are deprived of the independence which you have hitherto enjoyed, and now enter the union of a great country, whose population is sympathetic to you by language, customs, and identity of interests.”

This news did not appear agreeable to the prejudices of some hearers; there were complaints, growls, and a certain number of lamentations. Herr von Madaé seemed to understand these sad protestations.

“If,” said he, “it is not without pain that you resign former connections that were dear to you, I respect such feelings and esteem them as a guarantee that you and your children will be faithfully attached to me and my house.”

An enormous bulldog replied by a single bark, which appeared, however, to speak the opinion of the two or three hundred companions around him. The interruption did not disturb Herr von Madaé, and he went on:

“You will recognize the force of accomplished facts; if the fruits of an obstinate war and of bloody victories are not to be lost to Germany, the duty of self-preservation and care for national interests imperatively demand that the town of Frankfort shall be joined to Prussia, solidly and for ever.”

At this moment a dog broke its chain and despite shouts of “Arrest the rebel! Arrest the rebel!” and the pursuit of some five or six Sachsenhausen urchins, disappeared into the Jewry.

"And, as my father of blessed memory declared," resumed Herr von Madaé, "it is solely for the profit of Germany that Prussia has enlarged its boundaries. I offer this for your serious reflection, and I confide in your upright German good sense to swear allegiance to me with the same sincerity as my own people. May God grant it!"

"WILLIAM"

"Given at my castle of Babelsberg, October 3rd, 1866."

And raising his voice, Herr von Madaé added, by way of peroration:

"Hurrah for King William! Hurrah for the King of Prussia!"

At the same instant the black-and-white flag was hoisted on the topmost gable of the Roemer. No shout replied to Herr von Madaé's, only the voice of Lenhart was heard like that of a drill sergeant:

"And now, my little doggies, as you have the honour to be Prussian dogs, shout 'Hurrah for the King of Prussia!'"

Then every man pressed his toe upon the tail, the ear, or the paw of his dog, and there arose such frightful uproar, including the deepest and the shrillest notes, as could only be covered by the band of the 34th Prussian Regiment playing "*Heil dir im Siegeskranze*," which means "Hail to thee in the crown of victory."

Thus was the former free town of Frankfort united to the kingdom of Prussia. But many people say that it is not stitched, but only tacked on.

EPILOGUE

On June 5th, in the year 1867, a young man of some twenty-five to twenty-seven years of age, elegantly dressed, and wearing at his buttonhole a ribbon half red and half blue-and-white, had just finished his cup of chocolate at the Café Prévét, which was at the corner of the Boulevard and the Rue Poissoniére. He asked for the "étandard" newspaper.

He had to repeat the name twice to the waiter, who, not having the paper on the premises, went out to the Boulevard for a copy and brought it to his customer. The latter cast his eyes rapidly over it, looking evidently for some article that he knew to be there. His glance settled at last upon the following lines:

"To-day, Wednesday, June 6th, the King of Prussia will enter Paris. We give a complete list of the persons who will accompany His Majesty:

"M. de Bismarck.

“General de Moltke.

“Count Puckler, Lord Marshal.

“General de Treskow.

“Count de Goltz, Brigadier-General.

“Count Lehendorff, Aide-de-Camp to the king.

“General Achilles Sturm — ”

Doubtless the young man had seen all that he wanted to see, for he carried no further his investigations into the persons accompanying His Majesty.

But he tried, to discover at what hour King William was to arrive, and found that he was expected at a quarter-past four at the Gare du Nord.

He immediately took a carriage and placed himself upon the road which the king would have to follow in going to the Tuileries.

The king and his escort were some minutes behind their time. Our young man was waiting at the corner of the Boulevard de Magenta; he placed himself at the end of the procession, and accompanied it to the Tuileries, keeping his eyes particularly, as he did so, upon the carriage which contained General von Treskow, Count von Goltz, and General Achilles Sturm. That carriage entered the courtyard of the palace with the King of Prussia’s, but came out again, almost immediately, with the three generals who occupied it, in order to go to the Hétel du Louvre.

There the three generals alighted; they were clearly intending to lodge in the neighbourhood of the Tuileries where their sovereign was staying. Our young man, who also had alighted, saw a waiter lead them to their several rooms. He waited a moment, but none of them came out again. He got into his carriage again and disappeared round the corner of the Rue des Pyramides. He knew all that he wanted to know.

Next morning, about eleven o’clock, the same young man was walking in front of the café belonging to the hotel, and smoking a cigarette. At the end of ten minutes his expectation was satisfied. General Sturm came from the Hétel du Louvre into the restaurant, sat down at one of the marble tables arranged just inside the windows and asked for a cup of coffee and a glass of brandy. This was just opposite the Zouave Barracks.

Benedict entered the barracks and came out a minute later, with two officers. He led them in front of the window and showed them General Sturm.

"Gentlemen," said he, "that is a Prussian general with whom I have so serious a quarrel that one of us must be left upon the field. I have applied to you to do me the favour of acting as my seconds, because you are officers, because you do not know me, and do not know my adversary, and consequently, will not have any of those little delicate considerations for us that fashionable people have towards those for whom they act as seconds. We will go in and sit down at the same table with him. I will reproach him with what I have to reproach him with, and you will see whether the matter is serious enough for a duel to the death. If you judge it to be so, you will do me the honour of being my seconds. I am a soldier like yourselves; I went through the Chinese war with the rank of lieutenant, I fought at the battle of Langensalza as orderly to Prince Ernest of Hanover, and, finally, I fired one of the last shots at the battle of Aschaffenburg. My name is Benedict Turpin, and I am a knight of the Legion of Honour and of the Guelphic Order."

The two officers stepped back a pace, exchanged a few words in a low voice, and returned to Benedict's side, to tell him that they were at his command.

All three then entered the café and went to seat themselves at the general's table. The latter looked up and found himself face to face with Benedict, whom he recognized at the first glance.

"Ah, it is you, sir," said he, growing rather pale.

"Yes, sir," answered Benedict. "And here are these gentlemen who are still unacquainted with the explanation that I am about to have with you and are here to hear what I say, and will be kind enough to assist me in our combat. Will you allow me to explain to these gentlemen, in your presence, the cause of our meeting, and afterwards will you give them details of our antecedents as we go together to the place decided upon? You remember, sir, that, nearly a year ago you did me the honour of writing to me that mountains did not meet, but that men did, and that whenever I had the honour of meeting you outside the kingdom of His Majesty, King William, you would put no difficulty in the way of giving me satisfaction."

The general rose.

"It is useless," said he, "to prolong an explanation in a café where everybody can hear what we say; you can give any explanations to these gentlemen of the grounds of complaint which you consider yourself to have against me, and which I am not in any degree bound to disclaim to you. I wrote to you that I was ready to give you satisfaction; I am. Give me time to go into the hotel and fetch two friends. That is all I ask of you."

"Do so, sir," said Benedict, bowing.

Sturm left the café. Benedict and the two officers followed him. He went into the Hétel du Louvre. The three gentlemen waited at the door.

In the ten minutes during which they waited Benedict told them the whole story, and was just concluding it as the general reappeared with his seconds — two officers of the king's retinue. All three came towards Benedict and bowed to him. Benedict introduced his own seconds to those of the general by a wave of the hand. All four drew apart a little. Presently Benedict's seconds came back to him.

"You have left the choice of weapons to the general?" said he.

"Yes, sir, and he has chosen the sword; we are to go to a sword cutler and choose a couple of blades that neither of you will have seen before; then we are to go to the nearest convenient spot for the meeting. We suggested the fortifications, and these gentlemen have agreed; they are to take an open carriage, we are to take another; and, as they do not know the way and we do, we shall guide them along the boulevard, and at the first sword-cutler's we will buy the swords."

Everything was arranged accordingly. Two waiters were sent for two carriages. The seconds suggested that the surgeon-major of the Zouaves should accompany the party, and the suggestion being accepted, one of the officers went to fetch him. He joined Benedict and the two Frenchmen, while General Sturm and his seconds followed at some distance.

At the sword-cutler's — which was Claudin's, Benedict said in an aside to the shopman, whom he knew:

"The swords are to be charged to me; let the gentlemen who are in the second carriage choose them."

Three different swords were shown to General Sturm, who selected the one that best suited his hand, and asked its price; he was told that they were paid for. The two carriages went as far as the étoile turnpike by way of the Maillot gate. Thence they followed the line of the fortifications for a short distance, then, when they had reached a tolerably deserted spot, the two Zouave officers alighted from their chaise, looked up and down the fosse, and finding it empty beckoned their adversaries to join them. In another minute the whole party was standing at the base of the walls. The ground was level and offered every facility for a combat of the kind that was now to take place.

The general’s seconds presented the two swords to Benedict who had not previously seen them; he cast a quick glance at them and saw that they were *montées en quarte*, a circumstance which suited his designs admirably. Apparently it suited General Sturm’s, also, since he had chosen the swords.

“When is the light to stop?” asked the seconds.

“When one of us is killed,” answered the two antagonists together.

“Coats off, gentlemen!” said the seconds.

Benedict threw aside his jacket and waistcoat, displaying his shirt.

“Are you ready, gentlemen?” asked the seconds.

“Yes,” replied both at the same time.

One of the Zouave officers took one sword and put it into Benedict’s hands; one of the Prussian officers took the other and put it into General Sturm’s hands.

The seconds crossed the two swords at a distance of three inches from the points, and, moving aside to leave the combatants face to face, said:

“Now, gentlemen!”

The words were scarcely uttered when the general swiftly made himself master of his opponent’s sword by a double engagement, making as he did so a stride forward with all the usual impetuosity of a man who knows himself an adept in fencing.

Benedict leapt back; then, looking at the general’s guard:

“Ah, ah!” he murmured, “a quick fellow on his feet. Attention!”

He exchanged a quick glance with his seconds, to tell them not to be uneasy.

But at the same moment, and without any interval, the general, while entangling the sword by a skilful pressure advanced in a crouching attitude, and lunged with so rapid a *dégagement* that it needed all Benedict’s close handling to parry by a *counter quarte*, which, quick though it was, could not save his shoulder from a graze. The shirt tore upon the sword’s point and became slightly tinged with blood.

The return thrust came so swiftly that the Prussian by luck or by instinct had not time to resort to a circular parry and mechanically employed the *parade de quarte* and was now on the defensive. The thrust was parried, but it had been given with such energy that General Sturm staggered on his legs and could not deliver his counter thrust.

“He is a pretty fencer, after all,” thought Benedict. “He gives one something to do.”

Sturm stepped back and lowered his point.

“You are wounded,” said he.

“Come, come,” returned the young man, “no nonsense! Here’s a fuss about a scratch. You know very well, general, that I have got to kill you. One must keep one’s word, even to a dead man.” He put himself in position again.

“You? Kill me! Upstart!” exclaimed the general.

“Yes, I, greenhorn as you think me,” replied Benedict. “Your blood for his, although all yours is not equal to one drop of his.”

“Cursed rascal!” swore Sturm, growing crimson. And, rushing upon Benedict, he made as he came, two successive *coups de seconde*, so hasty and so furious that Benedict had barely time to parry them, by twice retiring, and then a *parade de seconde* delivered with such precision and energy that the loose shirt was torn above the waistband, and Benedict felt the cold steel. Another stain of blood appeared.

“What! Are you trying to tear off my shirt?” said Benedict, sending his enemy a high *thrust de quarte*, which would have run him through, but that, feeling himself in danger, he flung himself forward in such a manner that the hilts touched, and the two adversaries stood with their swords up face to face.

“Here!” cried Benedict, “this will teach you to steal my thrust.”

And before the seconds could interpose their swords to separate them, Benedict, freeing his arm like a spring, drove the two hilts like the blow of a fist in his adversary’s face, who staggered back, his face lacerated and bruised by the blow.

Then followed a scene which made those who beheld it shudder.

Sturm drew back for an instant, his mouth half-open and foaming, his teeth clenched and bleeding, his lips turned back, his eyes gleaming, bloodshot and almost starting from their sockets, his whole countenance reddish purple.

“Blackguard! Dog!” he yelled, waving his stiff-held sword and crouching back for his guard like a jaguar ready to spring.

Benedict stood calm, cold, contemptuous. He extended his sword towards him.

“You belong to me, now,” he said in a solemn voice. “You are about to die.”

He fell back to his guard, exaggerating the pose as a sort of challenge. He had not to wait long.

Sturm was too good a fencer to throw himself unprotected upon his enemy. He advanced sharply one pace, making *un double engagement*, of which Benedict turned aside the second by a *dégagement fait comme on les passe au mur*.

Anger had disturbed Sturm’s guard, he was lunging with his head down — an attitude which, for this once at least, saved him. The *dégagement* merely grazed his shoulder by the neck. Blood appeared.

“A sleeve for a sleeve,” retorted Benedict, falling back quickly to his guard, and leaving a great distance between the general and himself. “Now for it!”

The general found himself too far off, took a step forward, gathered all his powers, made a frenzied beating with his sword and struck straight, lunging at the full stretch of his body. All his soul, that is to say, all his hope, was in that blow.

This time Benedict, planted firmly on his feet, did not yield an inch; he caught the sword *par un demi cercle*, executed in due form, with his nails held upwards as though he were in a fencing school, and standing over the point of his sword inclined towards his feet:

“Now then,” he said, delivering his thrust.

The sword entered the upper part of the chest and disappeared completely in the general’s body where Benedict left it, as he sprang back — as a bull fighter leaves his dagger in the breast of the bull. Then, folding his arms, he waited.

The general remained standing for a second, staggered, tried to speak; his mouth became full of blood, he made a movement with his sword and the sword fell from his hand; then he, himself, like an uprooted tree, fell full length upon the turf.

The surgeon rushed to the body of Sturm; but he was already dead.

The point of the sword had gone in below the right shoulder blade, and come out on the left hip, after passing through the heart.

“*Sapristi!*” muttered the surgeon, “that’s a man well killed.”

Such was Sturm’s funeral oration.

THE END

The Criticism

Extract from 'MEMORIES AND PORTRAITS' by Robert Louis Stevenson

XIV: A GOSSIP ON A NOVEL OF DUMAS'S

The books that we re-read the oftenest are not always those that we admire the most; we choose and we revisit them for many and various reasons, as we choose and revisit human friends. One or two of Scott's novels, Shakespeare, Molière, Montaigne, "The Egoist," and the "Vicomte de Bragelonne," form the inner circle of my intimates. Behind these comes a good troop of dear acquaintances; "The Pilgrim's Progress" in the front rank, "The Bible in Spain" not far behind. There are besides a certain number that look at me with reproach as I pass them by on my shelves: books that I once thumbed and studied: houses which were once like home to me, but where I now rarely visit. I am on these sad terms (and blush to confess it) with Wordsworth, Horace, Burns, and Hazlitt. Last of all, there is the class of book that has its hour of brilliancy — glows, sings, charms, and then fades again into insignificance until the fit return. Chief of those who thus smile and frown on me by turns, I must name Virgil and Herrick, who, were they but

"Their sometime selves the same throughout the year,"

must have stood in the first company with the six names of my continual literary intimates. To these six, incongruous as they seem, I have long been faithful, and hope to be faithful to the day of death. I have never read the whole of Montaigne, but I do not like to be long without reading some of him, and my delight in what I do read never lessens. Of Shakespeare I have read all but *Richard* 125 *III.*, *Henry VI.*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *All's Well that Ends Well*; and these, having already made all suitable endeavour, I now know that I shall never read — to make up for which unfaithfulness I could read much of the rest for ever. Of Moliére — surely the next greatest name of Christendom — I could tell a very similar story; but in a little corner of a little essay these princes are too much out of place, and I prefer to pay my fealty and pass on. How often I have read “Guy Mannering,” “Rob Roy,” or “Redgauntlet,” I have no means of guessing, having begun young. But it is either four or five times that I have read “The Egoist,” and either five or six that I have read the “Vicomte de Bragelonne.”

Some, who would accept the others, may wonder that I should have spent so much of this brief life of ours over a work so little famous as the last. And, indeed, I am surprised myself; not at my own devotion, but the coldness of the world. My acquaintance with the “Vicomte” began, somewhat indirectly, in the year of grace 1863, when I had the advantage of studying certain illustrated dessert plates in a hotel at Nice. The name of d’Artagnan in the legends I already saluted like an old friend, for I had met it the year before in a work of Miss Yonge’s. My first perusal was in one of those pirated editions that swarmed at that time out of Brussels, and ran to such a troop of neat and dwarfish volumes. I understood but little of the merits of the book; my strongest memory is of the execution of d’Eyméric and Lyodot — a strange testimony to the dulness of a boy, who could enjoy the rough-and-tumble in the Place de Grève, and forget d’Artagnan’s visits to the two financiers. My next reading was in winter-time, when I lived alone upon the Pentlands. I would return in the early night from one of my patrols with the shepherd; a friendly face would meet me in the door, a friendly retriever scurry upstairs to fetch my slippers; and I would sit down with the “Vicomte” for a long, silent, solitary lamp-lit evening by the fire. And yet I know not why I 126 call it silent, when it was enlivened with such a clatter of horse-shoes, and such a rattle of musketry, and such a stir of talk; or why I call those evenings solitary in which I gained so many friends. I would rise from my book and pull the blind aside, and see the snow and the glittering hollies chequer a Scottish garden, and the winter moonlight brighten the white hills. Thence I would turn again to that crowded and sunny field of life in which it was so easy to forget myself, my cares, and my surroundings: a place busy as a city, bright as a theatre, thronged with memorable faces, and sounding with delightful speech. I carried the thread of that epic into my slumbers, I woke with it unbroken, I rejoiced to plunge into the book again at breakfast, it was with a pang that I must lay it down and turn to my own labours; for no part of the world has ever seemed to me so charming as these pages, and not even my friends are quite so real, perhaps quite so dear, as d’Artagnan.

Since then I have been going to and fro at very brief intervals in my favourite book; and I have now just risen from my last (let me call it my fifth) perusal, having liked it better and admired it more seriously than ever. Perhaps I have a sense of ownership, being so well known in these six volumes. Perhaps I think that d’Artagnan delights to have me read of him, and Louis Quatorze is gratified, and Fouquet throws me a look, and Aramis, although he knows I do not love him, yet plays to me with his best graces, as to an old patron of the show. Perhaps, if I am not careful, something may befall me like what befell George IV. about the battle of Waterloo, and I may come to fancy the “Vicomte” one of the first, and Heaven knows the best, of my own works. At least, I avow myself a partisan; and when I compare the popularity of the “Vicomte” with that of “Monte Cristo,” or its own elder brother, the “Trois Mousquetaires,” I confess I am both pained and puzzled.

To those who have already made acquaintance with 127 the titular hero in the pages of “Vingt Ans Après,” perhaps the name may act as a deterrent. A man might well stand back if he supposed he were to follow, for six volumes, so well-conducted, so fine-spoken, and withal so dreary a cavalier as Bragelonne. But the fear is idle. I may be said to have passed the best years of my life in these six volumes, and my acquaintance with Raoul has never gone beyond a bow; and when he, who has so long pretended to be alive, is at last suffered to pretend to be dead, I am sometimes reminded of a saying in an earlier volume: “*Enfin, dit Miss Stewart*,” — and it was of Bragelonne she spoke — ”*enfin il a fait quelquechose: c’est, ma foi! bien heureux*.” I am reminded of it, as I say; and the next moment, when Athos dies of his death, and my dear d’Artagnan bursts into his storm of sobbing, I can but deplore my flippancy.

Or perhaps it is La Vallière that the reader of “Vingt Ans Après” is inclined to flee. Well, he is right there too, though not so right. Louise is no success. Her creator has spared no pains; she is well-meant, not ill-designed, sometimes has a word that rings out true; sometimes, if only for a breath, she may even engage our sympathies. But I have never envied the King his triumph. And so far from pitying Bragelonne for his defeat, I could wish him no worse (not for lack of malice, but imagination) than to be wedded to that lady. Madame enchants me; I can forgive that royal minx her most serious offences; I can thrill and soften with the King on that memorable occasion when he goes to upbraid and remains to flirt; and when it comes to the “*Allons, aimez-moi donc,*” it is my heart that melts in the bosom of de Guiche. Not so with Louise. Readers cannot fail to have remarked that what an author tells us of the beauty or the charm of his creatures goes for nought; that we know instantly better; that the heroine cannot open her mouth but what, all in a moment, the fine phrases of preparation fall from round her like the robes from Cinderella, and 128 she stands before us, self-betrayed, as a poor, ugly, sickly wench, or perhaps a strapping market-woman. Authors, at least, know it well; a heroine will too often start the trick of “getting ugly”; and no disease is more difficult to cure. I said authors; but indeed I had a side eye to one author in particular, with whose works I am very well acquainted, though I cannot read them, and who has spent many vigils in this cause, sitting beside his ailing puppets and (like a magician) wearying his art to restore them to youth and beauty. There are others who ride too high for these misfortunes. Who doubts the loveliness of Rosalind? Arden itself was not more lovely. Who ever questioned the perennial charm of Rose Jocelyn, Lucy Desborough, or Clara Middleton? fair women with fair names, the daughters of George Meredith. Elizabeth Bennet has but to speak, and I am at her knees. Ah! these are the creators of desirable women. They would never have fallen in the mud with Dumas and poor La Vallière. It is my only consolation that not one of all of them, except the first, could have plucked at the moustache of d’Artagnan.

Or perhaps, again, a portion of readers stumble at the threshold. In so vast a mansion there were sure to be back stairs and kitchen offices where no one would delight to linger; but it was at least unhappy that the vestibule should be so badly lighted; and until, in the seventeenth chapter, d’Artagnan sets off to seek his friends, I must confess, the book goes heavily enough. But, from thenceforward, what a feast is spread! Monk kidnapped; d’Artagnan enriched; Mazarin’s death; the ever delectable adventure of Belle Isle, wherein Aramis outwits d’Artagnan, with its epilogue (vol. v. chap. xxviii.), where d’Artagnan regains the moral superiority; the love adventures at Fontainebleau, with St. Aignan’s story of the dryad and the business of de Guiche, de Wardes, and Manicamp; Aramis made general of the Jesuits; Aramis at the Bastille; the night talk in the forest of Sénart; Belle Isle again, with 129 the death of Porthos; and last, but not least, the taming of d’Artagnan the untamable, under the lash of the young King. What other novel has such epic variety and nobility of incident? often, if you will, impossible; often of the order of an Arabian story; and yet all based in human nature. For if you come to that, what novel has more human nature? not studied with the microscope, but seen largely, in plain daylight, with the natural eye? What novel has more good sense, and gaiety, and wit, and unflagging, admirable literary skill? Good souls, I suppose, must sometimes read it in the blackguard travesty of a translation. But there is no style so untranslatable; light as a whipped trifle, strong as silk; wordy like a village tale; pat like a general's despatch; with every fault, yet never tedious; with no merit, yet inimitably right. And, once more, to make an end of commendations, what novel is inspired with a more unstrained or a more wholesome morality?

Yes; in spite of Miss Yonge, who introduced me to the name of d'Artagnan only to dissuade me from a nearer knowledge of the man, I have to add morality. There is no quite good book without a good morality; but the world is wide, and so are morals. Out of two people who have dipped into Sir Richard Burton's "Thousand and One Nights," one shall have been offended by the animal details; another to whom these were harmless, perhaps even pleasing, shall yet have been shocked in his turn by the rascality and cruelty of all the characters. Of two readers, again, one shall have been pained by the morality of a religious memoir, one by that of the "Vicomte de Bragelonne." And the point is that neither need be wrong. We shall always shock each other both in life and art; we cannot get the sun into our pictures, nor the abstract right (if there be such a thing) into our books; enough if, in the one, there glimmer some hint of the great light that blinds us from heaven; enough if, in the other, there shine, even upon foul details, a spirit of magnanimity. 130 I would scarce send to the "Vicomte" a reader who was in quest of what we may call puritan morality. The ventripotent mulatto, the great eater, worker, earner and waster, the man of much and witty laughter, the man of the great heart, and alas! of the doubtful honesty, is a figure not yet clearly set before the world; he still awaits a sober and yet genial portrait; but with whatever art that may be touched, and whatever indulgence, it will not be the portrait of a precisian. Dumas was certainly not thinking of himself, but of Planchet, when he put into the mouth of d'Artagnan's old servant this excellent profession: "*Monsieur, j'étais une de ces bonnes pâtes d'hommes que Dieu a faits pour s'animer pendant un certain temps et pour trouver bonnes toutes choses qui accompagnent leur séjour sur la terre.*" He was thinking, as I say, of

Planchet, to whom the words are aptly fitted; but they were fitted also to Planchet's creator; and perhaps this struck him as he wrote, for observe what follows: "*D'Artagnan s'assit alors près de la fenêtre, et, cette philosophie de Planchet lui ayant paru solide, il y rêva.*" In a man who finds all things good, you will scarce expect much zeal for negative virtues: the active alone will have a charm for him; abstinence, however wise, however kind, will always seem to such a judge entirely mean and partly impious. So with Dumas. Chastity is not near his heart; nor yet, to his own sore cost, that virtue of frugality which is the armour of the artist. Now, in the "Vicomte," he had much to do with the contest of Fouquet and Colbert. Historic justice should be all upon the side of Colbert, of official honesty, and fiscal competence. And Dumas knew it well: three times at least he shows his knowledge; once it is but flashed upon us, and received with the laughter of Fouquet himself, in the jesting controversy in the gardens of Saint Mandé; once it is touched on by Aramis in the forest of Sénart; in the end, it is set before us clearly in one dignified speech of the triumphant Colbert. But in Fouquet, the waster, the lover of good cheer and wit 131 and art, the swift transactor of much business, "*l'homme de bruit, l'homme de plaisir, l'homme qui n'est que parceque les autres sont,*" Dumas saw something of himself and drew the figure the more tenderly. It is to me even touching to see how he insists on Fouquet's honour; not seeing, you might think, that unflawed honour is impossible to spendthrifts; but rather, perhaps, in the light of his own life, seeing it too well, and clinging the more to what was left. Honour can survive a wound; it can live and thrive without a member. The man rebounds from his disgrace; he begins fresh foundations on the ruins of the old; and when his sword is broken, he will do valiantly with his dagger. So it is with Fouquet in the book; so it was with Dumas on the battlefield of life.

To cling to what is left of any damaged quality is virtue in the man; but perhaps to sing its praises is scarcely to be called morality in the writer. And it is elsewhere, it is in the character of d'Artagnan, that we must look for that spirit of morality, which is one of the chief merits of the book, makes one of the main joys of its perusal, and sets it high above more popular rivals. Athos, with the coming of years, has declined too much into the preacher, and the preacher of a sapless creed; but d'Artagnan has mellowed into a man so witty, rough, kind, and upright, that he takes the heart by storm. There is nothing of the copy-book about his virtues, nothing of the drawing-room in his fine, natural civility; he will sail near the wind; he is no district visitor — no Wesley or Robespierre; his conscience is void of all refinement whether for good or evil; but the whole man rings true like a good sovereign. Readers who have approached the "Vicomte," not across country, but by the legitimate, five-volumed avenue of the "Mousquetaires" and "Vingt Ans Après," will not have forgotten d'Artagnan's ungentlemanly and perfectly improbable trick upon Milady. What a pleasure it is, then, what a reward, and how agreeable a lesson, to see the old captain humble himself to the son of the man whom he had 132 personated! Here, and throughout, if I am to choose virtues for myself or my friends, let me choose the virtues of d'Artagnan. I do not say there is no character as well drawn in Shakespeare; I do say there is none that I love so wholly. There are many spiritual eyes that seem to spy upon our actions — eyes of the dead and the absent, whom we imagine to behold us in our most private hours, and whom we fear and scruple to offend: our witnesses and judges. And among these, even if you should think me childish, I must count my d'Artagnan — not d'Artagnan of the memoirs whom Thackeray pretended to prefer — a preference, I take the freedom of saying, in which he stands alone; not the d'Artagnan of flesh and blood, but him of the ink and paper; not Nature's, but Dumas's. And this is the particular crown and triumph of the artist — not to be true merely, but to be lovable; not simply to convince, but to enchant.

There is yet another point in the "Vicomte" which I find incomparable. I can recall no other work of the imagination in which the end of life is represented with so nice a tact. I was asked the other day if Dumas ever made me either laugh or cry. Well, in this my late fifth reading of the "Vicomte" I did laugh once at the small Coquelin de Volière business, and was perhaps a thought surprised at having done so: to make up for it, I smiled continually. But for tears, I do not know. If you put a pistol to my throat, I must own the tale trips upon a very airy foot — within a measurable distance of unreality; and for those who like the big guns to be discharged and the great passions to appear authentically, it may even seem inadequate from first to last. Not so to me; I cannot count that a poor dinner, or a poor book, where I meet with those I love; and, above all, in this last volume, I find a singular charm of spirit. It breathes a pleasant and a tonic sadness, always brave, never hysterical. Upon the crowded, noisy life of this long tale, evening gradually falls; and the lights are extinguished, and the heroes pass away one by 133 one. One by one they go, and not a regret embitters their departure; the young succeed them in their places, Louis Quatorze is swelling larger and shining broader, another generation and another France dawn on the horizon; but for us and these old men whom we have loved so long, the inevitable end draws near, and is welcome. To read this well is to anticipate experience. Ah, if only when these hours of the long shadows fall for us in reality and not in figure, we may hope to face them with a mind as quiet!

But my paper is running out; the siege-guns are firing on the Dutch frontier! and I must say adieu for the fifth time to my old comrade fallen on the field of glory. *Adieu* — rather *au revoir*! Yet a sixth time, dearest d’Artagnan, we shall kidnap Monk and take horse together for Belle Isle.

Extract from ‘LETTERS TO DEAD AUTHORS’
by Andrew Lang

XII. To Alexandre Dumas.

Sir, — There are moments when the wheels of life, even of such a life as yours, run slow, and when mistrust and doubt overshadow even the most intrepid disposition. In such a moment, towards the ending of your days, you said to your son, M. Alexandre Dumas, ‘I seem to see myself set on a pedestal which trembles as if it were founded on the sands.’ These sands, your uncounted volumes, are all of gold, and make a foundation more solid than the rock. As well might the singer of Odysseus, or the authors of the ‘Arabian Nights’, or the first inventors of the stories of Boccaccio, believe that their works were perishable (their names, indeed, have perished), as the creator of ‘Les Trois Mousquetaires’ alarm himself with the thought that the world could ever forget Alexandre Dumas.

Than yours there has been no greater nor more kindly and beneficent force in modern letters. To Scott, indeed, you owed the first impulse of your genius; but, once set in motion, what miracles could it not accomplish? Our dear Porthos was overcome, at last, by a superhuman burden; but your imaginative strength never found a task too great for it. What an extraordinary vigour, what health, what an overflow of force was yours! It is good, in a day of small and laborious ingenuities, to breathe the free air of your books, and dwell in the company of Dumas’s men — so gallant, so frank, so indomitable, such swordsmen, and such trenchermen. Like M. de Rochefort in ‘Vingt Ans Aprés,’ like that prisoner of the Bastille, your genius ‘n’est que d’un parti, c’est du parti du grand air.’

There seems to radiate from you a still persistent energy and enjoyment; in that current of strength not only your characters live, frolic, kindly, and sane, but even your very collaborators were animated by the virtue which went out of you. How else can we explain it, the dreary charge which feeble and envious tongues have brought against you, in England and at home? They say you employed in your novels and dramas that vicarious aid which, in the slang of the studio, the ‘sculptor’s ghost’ is fabled to afford.

Well, let it be so; these ghosts, when uninspired by you, were faint and impotent as ‘the strengthless tribes of the dead’ in Homer’s Hades, before Odysseus had poured forth the blood that gave them a momentary valour. It was from you and your inexhaustible vitality that these collaborating spectres drew what life they possessed; and when they parted from you they shuddered back into their nothingness. Where are the plays, where the romances which Maquet and the rest wrote in their own strength? They are forgotten with last year’s snows; they have passed into the wide waste-paper basket of the world. You say of D’Artagnan, when severed from his three friends — from Porthos, Athos, and Aramis — ’he felt that he could do nothing, save on the condition that each of these companions yielded to him, if one may so speak, a share of that electric fluid which was his gift from heaven.’

No man of letters ever had so great a measure of that gift as you; none gave of it more freely to all who came — to the chance associate of the hour, as to the characters, all so burly and full-blooded, who flocked from your brain. Thus it was that you failed when you approached the supernatural. Your ghosts had too much flesh and blood, more than the living persons of feebler fancies. A writer so fertile, so rapid, so masterly in the ease with which he worked, could not escape the reproaches of barren envy. Because you overflowed with wit, you could not be ‘serious;’ Because you created with a word, you were said to scamp your work; because you were never dull, never pedantic, incapable of greed, you were to be censured as desultory, inaccurate, and prodigal.

A generation suffering from mental and physical anaemia — a generation devoted to the ‘chiselled phrase,’ to accumulated ‘documents,’ to microscopic porings over human baseness, to minute and disgustful records of what in humanity is least human — may readily bring these unregarded and railing accusations. Like one of the great and good-humoured Giants of Rabelais, you may hear the murmurs from afar, and smile with disdain. To you, who can amuse the world — to you who offer it the fresh air of the highway, the battle-field, and the sea — the world must always return, escaping gladly from the boudoirs and the *bouges*, from the surgeries and hospitals, and dead rooms, of M. Daudet and M. Zola and of the wearisome De Goncourt.

With all your frankness, and with that queer morality of the Camp which, if it swallows a camel now and again, never strains at a gnat, how healthy and wholesome, and even pure, are your romances! You never gloat over sin, nor dabble with an ugly curiosity in the corruptions of sense. The passions in your tales are honourable and brave, the motives are clearly human. Honour, Love, Friendship make the threefold cord, the clue your knights and dames follow through how delightful a labyrinth of adventures! Your greatest books, I take the liberty to maintain, are the Cycle of the Valois (‘La Reine Margot, ‘La Dame de Montsoreau,’ ‘Les Quarante-cinq’), and the Cycle of Louis Treize and Louis Quatorze (‘Les Trois Mousquetaires,’ ‘Vingt Ans Aprés,’ ‘Le Vicomte de Bragelonné); and, beside these two trilogies — a lonely monument, like the sphinx hard by the three pyramids — ’Monte Cristo.’

In these romances how easy it would have been for you to burn incense to that great goddess, Lubricity, whom our critic says your people worship. You had Branto’me, you had Tallemant, you had Rétif, and a dozen others, to furnish materials for scenes of voluptuousness and of blood that would have outdone even the present *naturalistes*. From these alcoves of ‘Les Dames Galantes,’ and from the torture chambers (M. Zola would not have spared us one starting sinew of brave La Mole on the rack) you turned, as Scott would have turned, without a thought of their profitable literary uses. You had other metal to work on: you gave us that superstitious and tragical true love of La Molés, that devotion — how tender and how pure! — of Bussy for the Dame de Montsoreau. You gave us the valour of D’Artagnan, the strength of Porthos, the melancholy nobility of Athos: Honour, Chivalry, and Friendship. I declare your characters are real people to me and old friends. I cannot bear to read the end of ‘Bragelonne,’ and to part with them for ever. ‘Suppose Perthos, Athos, and Aramis should enter with a noiseless swagger, curling their moustaches.’ How we would welcome them, forgiving D’Artagnan even his hateful *fourberie* in the case of Milady. The brilliance of your dialogue has never been approached: there is wit everywhere; repartees glitter and ring like the flash and clink of small-swords. Then what duels are yours! and what inimitable battle-pieces! I know four good fights of one against a multitude, in literature. These are the Death of Gretir the Strong, the Death of Gunnar of Lithend, the Death of

Hereward the Wake, the Death of Bussy d’Amboise. We can compare the strokes of the heroic fighting-times with those described in later days; and, upon my word, I do not know that the short sword of Gretir, or the bill of Skarphedin, or the bow of Gunnar was better wielded than the rapier of your Bussy or the sword and shield of Kingsley’s Hereward.

They say your fencing is unhistorical; no doubt it is so, and you knew it. La Mole could not have lunged on Coconnas ‘after deceiving circle;’ for the parry was not invented except by your immortal Chicot, a genius in advance of his time. Even so Hamlet and Laertes would have fought with shields and axes, not with small swords. But what matters this pedantry? In your works we hear the Homeric Muse again, rejoicing in the clash of steel; and even, at times, your very phrases are unconsciously Homeric.

Look at these men of murder, on the Eve of St. Bartholomew, who flee in terror from the Queen’s chamber, and ‘find the door too narrow for their flight:’ the very words were anticipated in a line of the ‘Odyssey’ concerning the massacre of the Wooers. And the picture of Catherine de Medicis, prowling ‘like a wolf among the bodies and the blood,’ in a passage of the Louvre — the picture is taken unwittingly from the ‘Iliad.’ There was in you that reserve of primitive force, that epic grandeur and simplicity of diction. This is the force that animates ‘Monte Cristo,’ the earlier chapters, the prison, and the escape. In later volumes of that romance, methinks, you stoop your wing. Of your dramas I have little room, and less skill, to speak. ‘Antony,’ they tell me, was ‘the greatest literary event of its time,’ was a restoration of the stage. ‘While Victor Hugo needs the cast-off clothes of history, the wardrobe and costume, the sepulchre of Charlemagne, the ghost of Barbarossa, the coffins of Lucretia Borgia, Alexandre Dumas requires no more than a room in an inn, where people meet in riding cloaks, to move the soul with the last degree of terror and of pity.’

The reproach of being amusing has somewhat dimmed your fame — for a moment. The shadow of this tyranny will soon be overpast; and when ‘La Curée and ‘Pot-Bouillé are more forgotten than ‘Le Grand Cyrus,’ men and women — and, above all, boys — will laugh and weep over the page of Alexandre Dumas. Like Scott himself, you take us captive in our childhood. I remember a very idle little boy who was busy with the ‘Three Musketeers’ when he should have been occupied with ‘Wilkins’s Latin Prose.’ ‘Twenty years after’ (alas and more) he is still constant to that gallant company; and, at this very moment, is breathlessly wondering whether Grimand will steal M. de Beaufort out of the Cardinal’s prison.

Extract from 'ESSAYS IN LITTLE' by Andrew Lang

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

Alexandre Dumas is a writer, and his life is a topic, of which his devotees never weary. Indeed, one lifetime is not long enough wherein to tire of them. The long days and years of Hilpa and Shalum, in Addison — the antediluvian age, when a picnic lasted for half a century and a courtship for two hundred years, might have sufficed for an exhaustive study of Dumas. No such study have I to offer, in the brief seasons of our perishable days. I own that I have not read, and do not, in the circumstances, expect to read, all of Dumas, nor even the greater part of his thousand volumes. We only dip a cup in that sparkling spring, and drink, and go on, — we cannot hope to exhaust the fountain, nor to carry away with us the well itself. It is but a word of gratitude and delight that we can say to the heroic and indomitable master, only an *ave* of friendship that we can call across the bourne to the shade of the Porthos of fiction. That his works (his best works) should be even still more widely circulated than they are; that the young should read them, and learn frankness, kindness, generosity — should esteem the tender heart, and the gay, invincible wit; that the old should read them again, and find forgetfulness of trouble, and taste the anodyne of dreams, that is what we desire.

Dumas said of himself ("Mémoires," v. 13) that when he was young he tried several times to read forbidden books — books that are sold *sous le manteau*. But he never got farther than the tenth page, in the

”scrofulous French novel
On gray paper with blunt type;”

he never made his way so far as

"the woful sixteenth print."

"I had, thank God, a natural sentiment of delicacy; and thus, out of my six hundred volumes (in 1852) there are not four which the most scrupulous mother may not give to her daughter." Much later, in 1864, when the *Censure* threatened one of his plays, he wrote to the Emperor: "Of my twelve hundred volumes there is not one which a girl in our most modest quarter, the Faubourg Saint-Germain, may not be allowed to read." The mothers of the Faubourg, and mothers in general, may not take Dumas exactly at his word. There is a passage, for example, in the story of Miladi ("Les Trois Mousquetaires") which a parent or guardian may well think undesirable reading for youth. But compare it with the original passage in the "Mémoires" of D'Artagnan! It has passed through a medium, as Dumas himself declared, of natural delicacy and good taste. His enormous popularity, the widest in the world of letters, owes absolutely nothing to prurience or curiosity. The air which he breathes is a healthy air, is the open air; and that by his own choice, for he had every temptation to seek another kind of vogue, and every opportunity.

Two anecdotes are told of Dumas' books, one by M. Edmond About, the other by his own son, which show, in brief space, why this novelist is so beloved, and why he deserves our affection and esteem. M. Villaud, a railway engineer who had lived much in Italy, Russia, and Spain, was the person whose enthusiasm finally secured a statue for Dumas. He felt so much gratitude to the unknown friend of lonely nights in long exiles, that he could not be happy till his gratitude found a permanent expression. On returning to France he went to consult M. Victor Borie, who told him this tale about George Sand. M. Borie chanced to visit the famous novelist just before her death, and found Dumas' novel, "Les Quarante Cinq" (one of the cycle about the Valois kings) lying on her table. He expressed his wonder that she was reading it for the first time.

"For the first time! — why, this is the fifth or sixth time I have read 'Les Quarante Cinq,' and the others. When I am ill, anxious, melancholy, tired, discouraged, nothing helps me against moral or physical troubles like a book of Dumas." Again, M. About says that M. Sarcey was in the same class at school with a little Spanish boy. The child was homesick; he could not eat, he could not sleep; he was almost in a decline.

"You want to see your mother?" said young Sarcey.

"No: she is dead."

"Your father, then?"

“No: he used to beat me.”

“Your brothers and sisters?”

“I have none.”

“Then why are you so eager to be back in Spain?”

“To finish a book I began in the holidays.”

“And what was its name?”

“‘Los Tres Mosqueteros’!”

He was homesick for “The Three Musketeers,” and they cured him easily.

That is what Dumas does. He gives courage and life to old age, he charms away the half-conscious *nostalgie*, the *Heimweh*, of childhood. We are all homesick, in the dark days and black towns, for the land of blue skies and brave adventures in forests, and in lonely inns, on the battle-field, in the prison, on the desert isle. And then Dumas comes, and, like Argive Helen, in Homer, he casts a drug into the wine, the drug nepenthe, “that puts all evil out of mind.” Does any one suppose that when George Sand was old and tired, and near her death, she would have found this anodyne, and this stimulant, in the novels of M. Tolstoï, M. Dostoiefsky, M. Zola, or any of the “scientific” observers whom we are actually requested to hail as the masters of a new art, the art of the future? Would they make her laugh, as Chicot does? make her forget, as Porthos, Athos, and Aramis do? take her away from the heavy, familiar time, as the enchanter Dumas takes us? No; let it be enough for these new authors to be industrious, keen, accurate, *précieux*, pitiful, charitable, veracious; but give us high spirits now and then, a light heart, a sharp sword, a fair wench, a good horse, or even that old Gascon rouncy of D’Artagnan’s. Like the good Lord James Douglas, we had liefer hear the lark sing over moor and down, with Chicot, than listen to the starved-mouse squeak in the *bouge* of Thérèse Raquin, with M. Zola. Not that there is not a place and an hour for him, and others like him; but they are not, if you please, to have the whole world to themselves, and all the time, and all the praise; they are not to turn the world into a dissecting-room, time into tedium, and the laurels of Scott and Dumas into crowns of nettles.

There is no complete life of Alexandre Dumas. The age has not produced the intellectual athlete who can gird himself up for that labour. One of the worst books that ever was written, if it can be said to be written, is, I think, the English attempt at a biography of Dumas. Style, grammar, taste, feeling, are all bad. The author does not so much write a life as draw up an indictment. The spirit of his work is grudging, sneering, contemptuous, and pitifully peddling. The great charge is that Dumas was a humbug, that he was not the author of his own books, that his books were written by "collaborators" — above all, by M. Maquet. There is no doubt that Dumas had a regular system of collaboration, which he never concealed. But whereas Dumas could turn out books that *live,* whoever his assistants were, could any of his assistants write books that live, without Dumas? One might as well call any barrister in good practice a thief and an impostor because he has juniors to "devil" for him, as make charges of this kind against Dumas. He once asked his son to help him; the younger Alexandre declined. "It is worth a thousand a year, and you have only to make objections," the sire urged; but the son was not to be tempted. Some excellent novelists of to-day would be much better if they employed a friend to make objections. But, as a rule, the collaborator did much more. Dumas' method, apparently, was first to talk the subject over with his *aide-de-camp*. This is an excellent practice, as ideas are knocked out, like sparks (an elderly illustration!), by the contact of minds. Then the young man probably made researches, put a rough sketch on paper, and supplied Dumas, as it were, with his "brief." Then Dumas took the "brief" and wrote the novel. He gave it life, he gave it the spark (*l'étincelle*); and the story lived and moved.

It is true that he "took his own where he found it," like Molère and that he took a good deal. In the gallery of an old country-house, on a wet day, I came once on the "Mémoires" of D'Artagnan, where they had lain since the family bought them in Queen Anne's time. There were our old friends the Musketeers, and there were many of their adventures, told at great length and breadth. But how much more vivacious they are in Dumas! M. About repeats a story of Dumas and his ways of work. He met the great man at Marseilles, where, indeed, Alexandre chanced to be "on with the new love" before being completely "off with the old." Dumas picked up M. About, literally lifted him in his embrace, and carried him off to see a play which he had written in three days. The play was a success; the supper was prolonged till three in the morning; M. About was almost asleep as he walked home, but Dumas was as fresh as if he had just got out of bed. "Go to sleep, old man," he said: "I, who am only fifty-five, have three *feuilletons* to write, which must be posted to-morrow. If I have time I shall knock up a little piece for Montigny — the idea is running in my head." So next morning M. About saw the three *feuilletons* made up for the post, and another packet addressed to M. Montigny: it was the play *L'Invitation à la Valse*, a chef-d'oeuvre! Well, the material had been prepared for Dumas. M. About saw one of his novels at Marseilles in the chrysalis. It was a stout copy-book full of paper, composed by a practised hand, on the master's design. Dumas copied out each little leaf on a big leaf of paper, *en y semant l'esprit à pleines mains*. This was his method. As a rule, in collaboration, one man does the work while the other looks on. Is it likely that Dumas looked on? That was not the manner of Dumas. "Mirecourt and others," M. About says, "have wept crocodile tears for the collaborators, the victims of his glory and his talent. But it is difficult to lament over the survivors (1884). The master neither took their money — for they are rich, nor their fame — for they are celebrated, nor their merit — for they had and still have plenty. And they never bewailed their fate: the reverse! The proudest congratulate themselves on having been at so good a school; and M. Auguste Maquet, the chief of them, speaks with real reverence and affection of his great friend." And M. About writes "as one who had taken the master red-handed, and in the act of collaboration." Dumas has a curious note on collaboration in his "Souvenirs Dramatiques." Of the two men at work together, "one is always the dupe, and *he* is the man of talent."

There is no biography of Dumas, but the small change of a biography exists in abundance. There are the many volumes of his "Mémoires," there are all the tomes he wrote on his travels and adventures in Africa, Spain, Italy, Russia; the book he wrote on his beasts; the romance of *Ange Pitou*, partly autobiographical; and there are plenty of little studies by people who knew him. As to his "Mémoires," as to all he wrote about himself, of course his imagination entered into the narrative. Like Scott, when he had a good story he liked to dress it up with a cocked hat and a sword. Did he perform all those astonishing and innumerable feats of strength, skill, courage, address, in revolutions, in voyages, in love, in war, in cookery? The narrative need not be taken "at the foot of the letter"; great as was his force and his courage, his fancy was greater still. There is no room for a biography of him here. His descent was noble on one side, with or without the bend sinister, which he said he would never have disclaimed, had it been his, but which he did not happen to inherit. On the other side he *may* have descended from kings; but, as in the case of "The Fair Cuban," he must have added, "African, unfortunately." Did his father perform these mythical feats of strength? did he lift up a horse between his legs while clutching a rafter with his hands? did he throw his regiment before him over a wall, as Guy Heavistone threw the mare which refused the leap ("Mémoires," i. 122)? No doubt Dumas believed what he heard about this ancestor — in whom, perhaps, one may see a hint of the giant Porthos. In the Revolution and in the wars his father won the name of Monsieur de l'Humanité, because he made a bonfire of a guillotine; and of Horatius Cocles, because he held a pass as bravely as the Roman "in the brave days of old."

This was a father to be proud of; and pluck, tenderness, generosity, strength, remained the favourite virtues of Dumas. These he preached and practised. They say he was generous before he was just; it is to be feared this was true, but he gave even more freely than he received. A regiment of seedy people sponged on him always; he could not listen to a tale of misery but he gave what he had, and sometimes left himself short of a dinner. He could not even turn a dog out of doors. At his Abbotsford, "Monte Cristo," the gates were open to everybody but bailiffs. His dog asked other dogs to come and stay: twelve came, making thirteen in all. The old butler wanted to turn them adrift, and Dumas consented, and repented.

"Michel," he said, "there are some expenses which a man's social position and the character which he has had the ill-luck to receive from heaven force upon him. I don't believe these dogs ruin me. Let them bide! But, in the interests of their own good luck, see they are not thirteen, an unfortunate number!"

"Monsieur, I'll drive one of them away."

"No, no, Michel; let a fourteenth come. These dogs cost me some three pounds a month," said Dumas. "A dinner to five or six friends would cost thrice as much, and, when they went home, they would say my wine was good, but certainly that my books were bad." In this fashion Dumas fared royally "to the dogs," and his Abbotsford ruined him as certainly as that other unhappy palace ruined Sir Walter. He, too, had his miscellaneous kennel; he, too, gave while he had anything to give, and, when he had nothing else, gave the work of his pen. Dumas tells how his big dog, Mouton once flew at him and bit one of his hands, while the other held the throat of the brute. "Luckily my hand, though small, is powerful; what it once holds it holds long — money excepted." He could not "haud a guid grip o’ the gear.” Neither Scott nor Dumas could shut his ears to a prayer or his pockets to a beggar, or his doors on whoever knocked at them.

“I might at least have asked him to dinner,” Scott was heard murmuring, when some insufferable bore at last left Abbotsford, after wasting his time and nearly wearing out his patience. Neither man *preached* socialism; both practised it on the Aristotelian principle: the goods of friends are common, and men are our friends.

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The death of Dumas’ father, while the son was a child, left Madame Dumas in great poverty at Villers Cotterets. Dumas’ education was sadly to seek. Like most children destined to be bookish, he taught himself to read very young: in Buffon, the Bible, and books of mythology. He knew all about Jupiter — like David Copperfield’s Tom Jones, “a child’s Jupiter, an innocent creature” — all about every god, goddess, fawn, dryad, nymph — and he never forgot this useful information. Dear Lemprière, thou art superseded; but how much more delightful thou art than the fastidious Smith or the learned Preller! Dumas had one volume of the “Arabian Nights,” with Aladdin’s lamp therein, the sacred lamp which he was to keep burning with a flame so brilliant and so steady. It is pleasant to know that, in his boyhood, this great romancer loved Virgil. “Little as is my Latin, I have ever adored Virgil: his tenderness for exiles, his melancholy vision of death, his foreboding of an unknown God, have always moved me; the melody of his verses charmed me most, and they lull me still between asleep and awake.” School days did not last long: Madame Dumas got a little post — a licence to sell tobacco — and at fifteen Dumas entered a notary’s office, like his great Scotch forerunner. He was ignorant of his vocation for the stage — Racine and Corneille fatigued him prodigiously — till he saw *Hamlet*: *Hamlet* diluted by Ducis. He had never heard of Shakespeare, but here was something he could appreciate. Here was “a profound impression, full of inexplicable emotion, vague desires, fleeting lights, that, so far, lit up only a chaos.”

Oddly enough, his earliest literary essay was the translation of Bürger’s “Lenore.” Here, again, he encounters Scott; but Scott translated the ballad, and Dumas failed. *Les mortes vont vite*! the same refrain woke poetry in both the Frenchman and the Scotchman.

“Ha! ha! the Dead can ride with speed:
Dost fear to ride with me?”

So Dumas' literary career began with a defeat, but it was always a beginning. He had just failed with "Lenore," when Leuven asked him to collaborate in a play. He was utterly ignorant, he says; he had not succeeded in gallant efforts to read through "Gil Blas" and "Don Quixote." "To my shame," he writes, "the man has not been more fortunate with those masterpieces than the boy." He had not yet heard of Scott, Cooper, Goethe; he had heard of Shakespeare only as a barbarian. Other plays the boy wrote — failures, of course — and then Dumas poached his way to Paris, shooting partridges on the road, and paying the hotel expenses by his success in the chase. He was introduced to the great Talma: what a moment for Talma, had he known it! He saw the theatres. He went home, but returned to Paris, drew a small prize in a lottery, and sat next a gentleman at the play, a gentleman who read the rarest of Elzevirs, "Le Pastissier Français," and gave him a little lecture on Elzevirs in general. Soon this gentleman began to hiss the piece, and was turned out. He was Charles Nodier, and one of the anonymous authors of the play he was hissing! I own that this amusing chapter lacks verisimilitude. It reads as if Dumas had chanced to "get up" the subject of Elzevirs, and had fashioned his new knowledge into a little story. He could make a story out of anything — he "turned all to favour and to prettiness." Could I translate the whole passage, and print it here, it would be longer than this article; but, ah, how much more entertaining! For whatever Dumas did he did with such life, spirit, wit, he told it with such vivacity, that his whole career is one long romance of the highest quality. Lassagne told him he must read — must read Goethe, Scott, Cooper, Froissart, Joinville, Brantôme. He read them to some purpose. He entered the service of the Duc d'Orléans as a clerk, for he wrote a clear hand, and, happily, wrote at astonishing speed. He is said to have written a short play in a cottage where he went to rest for an hour or two after shooting all the morning. The practice in a notary's office stood him, as it stood Scott, in good stead. When a dog bit his hand he managed to write a volume without using his thumb. I have tried it, but forbear — in mercy to the printers. He performed wild feats of rapid caligraphy when a clerk under the Duc d'Orléans, and he wrote his plays in one "hand," his novels in another. The "hand" used in his dramas he acquired when, in days of poverty, he used to write in bed. To this habit he also attributed the *brutalité* of his earlier pieces, but there seems to be no good reason why a man should write like a brute because it is in bed that he writes.

In those days of small things he fought his first duel, and made a study of Fear and Courage. His earliest impulse was to rush at danger; if he had to wait, he felt his courage oozing out at the tips of his fingers, like Bob Acres, but in the moment of peril he was himself again. In dreams he was a coward, because, as he argues, the natural man *is* a poltroon, and conscience, honour, all the spiritual and commanding part of our nature, goes to sleep in dreams. The animal terror asserts itself unchecked. It is a theory not without exceptions. In dreams one has plenty of conscience (at least that is my experience), though it usually takes the form of remorse. And in dreams one often affronts dangers which, in waking hours, one might probably avoid if one could.

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Dumas' first play, an unimportant vaudeville, was acted in 1825. His first novels were also published then; he took part of the risk, and only four copies were sold. He afterward used the ideas in more mature works, as Mr. Sheridan Le Fanu employed three or four times (with perfect candour and fairness) the most curious incident in "Uncle Silas." Like Mr. Arthur Pendennis, Dumas at this time wrote poetry "up to" pictures and illustrations. It is easy, but seldom lucrative work. He translated a play of Schiller's into French verse, chiefly to gain command of that vehicle, for his heart was fixed on dramatic success. Then came the visit of Kean and other English actors to Paris. He saw the true *Hamlet*, and, for the first time on any stage, "the play of real passions." Emulation woke in him: a casual work of art led him to the story of Christina of Sweden, he wrote his play *Christine* (afterward reconstructed); he read it to Baron Taylor, who applauded; the Comédie Française accepted it, but a series of intrigues disappointed him, after all. His energy at this moment was extraordinary, for he was very poor, his mother had a stroke of paralysis, his bureau was always bullying and interfering with him. But nothing could snub this "force of nature," and he immediately produced his *Henri Trois*, the first romantic drama of France. This had an instant and noisy success, and the first night of the play he spent at the theatre, and at the bedside of his unconscious mother. The poor lady could not even understand whence the flowers came that he laid on her couch, the flowers thrown to the young man — yesterday unknown, and to-day the most famous of contemporary names. All this tale of triumph, checkered by enmities and diversified by duels, Dumas tells with the vigour and wit of his novels. He is his own hero, and loses nothing in the process; but the other characters — Taylor, Nodier, the Duc d'Orléans, the spiteful press-men, the crabbed old officials — all live like the best of the persons in his tales. They call Dumas vain: he had reason to be vain, and no candid or generous reader will be shocked by his pleasant, frank, and artless enjoyment of himself and of his adventures. Oddly enough, they are small-minded and small-hearted people who are most shocked by what they call "vanity" in the great. Dumas' delight in himself and his doings is only the flower of his vigorous existence, and in his "Mémoires," at least, it is as happy and encouraging as his laugh, or the laugh of Porthos; it is a kind of radiance, in which others, too, may bask and enjoy themselves. And yet it is resented by tiny scribblers, frozen in their own chill self-conceit.

There is nothing incredible (if modern researches are accurate) in the stories he tells of his own success in Hypnotism, as it is called now, Mesmerism or Magnetism as it was called then. Who was likely to possess these powers, if not this good-humoured natural force? "I believe that, by aid of magnetism, a bad man might do much mischief. I doubt whether, by help of magnetism, a good man can do the slightest good," he says, probably with perfect justice. His dramatic success fired Victor Hugo, and very pleasant it is to read Dumas' warm-hearted praise of that great poet. Dumas had no jealousy — no more than Scott. As he believed in no success without talent, so he disbelieved in genius which wins no success. "Je ne crois pas au talent ignoré, au génie inconnu, moi." Genius he saluted wherever he met it, but was incredulous about invisible and inaudible genius; and I own to sharing his scepticism. People who complain of Dumas' vanity may be requested to observe that he seems just as "vain" of Hugo's successes, or of Scribe's, as of his own, and just as much delighted by them.

He was now struck, as he walked on the boulevard one day, by the first idea of *Antony* — an idea which, to be fair, seems rather absurd than tragic, to some tastes. "A lover, caught with a married woman, kills her to save her character, and dies on the scaffold." Here is indeed a part to tear a cat in!

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The performances of M. Dumas during the Revolution of 1830, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of Alexandre the Great? But they were not literary excellences which he then displayed, and we may leave this king-maker to hover, “like an eagle, above the storms of anarchy.”

Even to sketch his later biography is beyond our province. In 1830 he had forty years to run, and he filled the cup of the Hours to the brim with activity and adventure. His career was one of unparalleled production, punctuated by revolutions, voyages, exiles, and other intervals of repose. The tales he tells of his prowess in 1830, and with Garibaldi, seem credible to me, and are borne out, so far, by the narrative of M. Maxime Ducamp, who met him at Naples, in the Garibaldian camp. Like Mr. Jingle, in “Pickwick,” he “banged the field-piece, twanged the lyre,” and was potting at the foes of the republic with a double-barrelled gun, when he was not composing plays, romances, memoirs, criticisms. He has told the tale of his adventures with the Comédie Française, where the actors laughed at his *Antony*, and where Madame Mars and he quarrelled and made it up again. His plays often won an extravagant success; his novels — his great novels, that is — made all Europe his friend. He gained large sums of money, which flowed out of his fingers, though it is said by some that his Abbotsford, Monte Cristo, was no more a palace than the villa which a retired tradesman builds to shelter his old age. But the money disappeared as fast as if Monte Cristo had really been palatial, and worthy of the fantasy of a Nero. He got into debt, fled to Belgium, returned, founded the *Mousquetaire*, a literary paper of the strangest and most shiftless kind. In “Alexandre Dumas à la Maison d’Or,” M. Philibert Audebrand tells the tale of this Micawber of newspapers. Everything went into it, good or bad, and the name of Dumas was expected to make all current coin. For Dumas, unluckily, was as prodigal of his name as of his gold, and no reputation could bear the drafts he made on his celebrity. His son says, in the preface to *Le Fils Naturel*: “Tragedy, dramas, history, romance, comedy, travel, you cast all of them in the furnace and the mould of your brain, and you peopled the world of fiction with new creations. The newspaper, the book, the theatre, burst asunder, too narrow for your puissant shoulders; you fed France, Europe, America with your works; you made the wealth of publishers, translators, plagiarists; printers and copyists toiled after you in vain. In the fever of production you did not always try and prove the metal which you employed, and sometimes you tossed into the furnace whatever came to your hand. The fire made the selection: what was your own is bronze, what was not yours vanished in smoke.”

The simile is noble and worthy of the Cyclopean craftsman, Dumas. His great works endured; the plays which renewed the youth of the French stage, the novels which Thackeray loved to praise, these remain, and we trust they may always remain, to the delight of mankind and for the sorrow of prigs.

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So much has been written of Dumas' novels that criticism can hardly hope to say more that is both new and true about them. It is acknowledged that, in such a character as Henri III., Dumas made history live, as magically as Scott revived the past in his Louis XI., or Balfour of Burley. It is admitted that Dumas' good tales are told with a vigour and life which rejoice the heart; that his narrative is never dull, never stands still, but moves with a freedom of adventure which perhaps has no parallel. He may fall short of the humour, the kindly wisdom, the genial greatness of Sir Walter at his best, and he has not that supernatural touch, that tragic grandeur, which Scott inherits from Homer and from Shakespeare. In another Homeric quality, Ç±Áy·, as Homer himself calls it, in the "delight of battle" and the spirit of the fray, Scott and Dumas are alike masters. Their fights and the fights in the Icelandic sagas are the best that have ever been drawn by mortal man. When swords are aloft, in siege or on the greensward, or in the midnight chamber where an ambush is laid, Scott and Dumas are indeed themselves. The steel rings, the bucklers clash, the parry and lunge pass and answer too swift for the sight. If Dumas has not, as he certainly has not, the noble philosophy and kindly knowledge of the heart which are Scott's, he is far more swift, more witty, more diverting. He is not prolix, his style is not involved, his dialogue is as rapid and keen as an assault at arms. His favourite virtues and graces, we repeat it, are loyalty, friendship, gaiety, generosity, courage, beauty, and strength. He is himself the friend of the big, stupid, excellent Porthos; of Athos, the noble and melancholy swordsman of sorrow; of D'Artagnan, the indomitable, the trusty, the inexhaustible in resource; but his heart is never on the side of the shifty Aramis, with all his beauty, dexterity, bravery, and brilliance. The brave Bussy, and the chivalrous, the doomed La Mole, are more dear to him; and if he embellishes their characters, giving them charms and virtues that never were theirs, history loses nothing, and romance and we are the gainers. In all he does, at his best, as in the "Chevalier d'Harmenthal," he has movement, kindness, courage, and gaiety. His philosophy of life is that old philosophy of the sagas and of Homer. Let us enjoy the movement of the fray, the faces of fair women, the taste of good wine; let us welcome life like a mistress, let us welcome death like a friend, and with a jest — if death comes with honour.

Dumas is no pessimist. “Heaven has made but one drama for man — the world,” he writes, “and during these three thousand years mankind has been hissing it.” It is certain that, if a moral censorship could have prevented it, this great drama of mortal passions would never have been licensed, at all, never performed. But Dumas, for one, will not hiss it, but applauds with all his might — a charmed spectator, a fortunate actor in the eternal piece, where all the men and women are only players. You hear his manly laughter, you hear his mighty hands approving, you see the tears he sheds when he had “slain Porthos” — great tears like those of Pantagruel.

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His may not be the best, nor the ultimate philosophy, but it *is* a philosophy, and one of which we may some day feel the want. I read the stilted criticisms, the pedantic carpings of some modern men who cannot write their own language, and I gather that Dumas is out of date. There is a new philosophy of doubts and delicacies, of dallyings and refinements, of half-hearted lookers-on, desiring and fearing some new order of the world. Dumas does not dally nor doubt: he takes his side, he rushes into the smoke, he strikes his foe; but there is never an unkind word on his lip, nor a grudging thought in his heart.

It may be said that Dumas is not a master of words and phrases, that he is not a *raffiné* of expression, nor a jeweller of style. When I read the maunderings, the stilted and staggering sentences, the hesitating phrases, the far-sought and dear-bought and worthless word-juggles; the sham scientific verbiage, the native pedantries of many modern so-called “stylists,” I rejoice that Dumas was not one of these. He told a plain tale, in the language suited to a plain tale, with abundance of wit and gaiety, as in the reflections of his Chicot, as in all his dialogues. But he did not gnaw the end of his pen in search of some word that nobody had ever used in this or that connection before. The right word came to him, the simple straightforward phrase. Epithet-hunting may be a pretty sport, and the bag of the epithet-hunter may contain some agreeable epigrams and rare specimens of style; but a plain tale of adventure, of love and war, needs none of this industry, and is even spoiled by inopportune diligence. Speed, directness, lucidity are the characteristics of Dumas' style, and they are exactly the characteristics which his novels required. Scott often failed, his most loyal admirers may admit, in these essentials; but it is rarely that Dumas fails, when he is himself and at his best.

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In spite of his heedless education, Dumas had true critical qualities, and most admired the best things. We have already seen how he writes about Shakespeare, Virgil, Goethe, Scott. But it may be less familiarly known that this burly man-of-all-work, ignorant as he was of Greek, had a true and keen appreciation of Homer. Dumas declares that he only thrice criticised his contemporaries in an unfavourable sense, and as one wishful to find fault. The victims were Casimir Delavigne, Scribe, and Ponsard. On each occasion Dumas declares that, after reflecting, he saw that he was moved by a little personal pique, not by a disinterested love of art. He makes his confession with a rare nobility of candour; and yet his review of Ponsard is worthy of him. M. Ponsard, who, like Dumas, was no scholar, wrote a play styled *Ulysse*, and borrowed from the Odyssey. Dumas follows Ponsard, Odyssey in hand, and while he proves that the dramatist failed to understand Homer, proves that he himself was, in essentials, a capable Homeric critic. Dumas understands that far-off heroic age. He lives in its life and sympathises with its temper. Homer and he are congenial; across the great gulf of time they exchange smiles and a salute.

"Oh! ancient Homer, dear and good and noble, I am minded now and again to leave all and translate thee — I, who have never a word of Greek — so empty and so dismal are the versions men make of thee, in verse or in prose."

How Dumas came to divine Homer, as it were, through a language he knew not, who shall say? He *did* divine him by a natural sympathy of excellence, and his chapters on the "Ulysse" of Ponsard are worth a wilderness of notes by learned and most un-Homeric men. For, indeed, who can be less like the heroic minstrel than the academic philologist?

This universality deserves note. The Homeric student who takes up a volume of Dumas at random finds that he is not only Homeric naturally, but that he really knows his Homer. What did he nor know? His rapidity in reading must have been as remarkable as his pace with the pen. As M. Blaze de Bury says: "Instinct, experience, memory were all his; he sees at a glance, he compares in a flash, he understands without conscious effort, he forgets nothing that he has read." The past and present are photographed imperishably on his brain, he knows the manners of all ages and all countries, the names of all the arms that men have used, all the garments they have worn, all the dishes they have tasted, all the terms of all professions, from swordsmanship to coach-building. Other authors have to wait, and hunt for facts; nothing stops Dumas: he knows and remembers everything. Hence his rapidity, his facility, his positive delight in labour: hence it came that he might be heard, like Dickens, laughing while he worked.

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This is rather a eulogy than a criticism of Dumas. His faults are on the surface, visible to all men. He was not only rapid, he was hasty, he was inconsistent; his need of money as well as his love of work made him put his hand to dozens of perishable things. A beginner, entering the forest of Dumas' books, may fail to see the trees for the wood. He may be counselled to select first the cycle of d'Artagnan — the "Musketeers," "Twenty Years After," and the "Vicomte de Bragelonne." Mr. Stevenson's delightful essay on the last may have sent many readers to it; I confess to preferring the youth of the "Musketeers" to their old age. Then there is the cycle of the Valois, whereof the "Dame de Monsereau" is the best — perhaps the best thing Dumas ever wrote. The "Tulipe Noire" is a novel girls may read, as Thackeray said, with confidence. The "Chevalier d'Harmenthal" is nearly (not quite) as good as "Quentin Durward." "Monte Cristo" has the best beginning — and loses itself in the sands. The novels on the Revolution are not among the most alluring: the famed device "L. P. D." (*lilia pedibus destrue*) has the bad luck to suggest "London Parcels Delivery." That is an accident, but the Revolution is in itself too terrible and pitiful, and too near us (on both sides!) for fiction.

On Dumas' faults it has been no pleasure to dwell. In a recent work I find the Jesuit Le Moyne quoted, saying about Charles V.: "What need that future ages should be made acquainted so religious an Emperor was not always chaste!" The same reticence allures one in regard to so delightful an author as Dumas. He who had enriched so many died poor; he who had told of conquering France, died during the Terrible Year. But he could forgive, could appreciate, the valour of an enemy. Of the Scotch at Waterloo he writes: "It was not enough to kill them: we had to push them down." Dead, they still stood "shoulder to shoulder." In the same generous temper an English cavalry officer wrote home, after Waterloo, that he would gladly have given the rest of his life to have served, on that day, in our infantry or in the French cavalry. These are the spirits that warm the heart, that make us all friends; and to the great, the brave, the generous Dumas we cry, across the years and across the tomb, our *Ave atque vale*!

Extract from ‘VIEWS AND REVIEWS’ by W. E. Henley

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

His Components.

The life of Dumas is not only a monument of endeavour and success, it is a sort of labyrinth as well. It abounds in pseudonyms and disguises, in sudden and unexpected appearances and retreats as unexpected and sudden, in scandals and in rumours, in mysteries and traps and ambuscades of every kind. It pleased the great man to consider himself of more importance than any and all of the crowd of collaborators whose ideas he developed, whose raw material he wrought up into the achievement we know; and he was given to take credit to himself not only for the success and value of a particular work but for the whole thing — the work in its quiddity, so to speak, and resolved into its original elements. On the other hand, it pleased such painful creatures as MM. Quérard and ‘Eugène de Mirecourt,’ as it has since pleased Messrs. Hitchman and Fitzgerald to consider the second- and third-rate literary persons whom Dumas assimilated in such numbers as of greater interest and higher merit than Dumas. To them the jackals were far nobler than the lion, and they worked their hardest in the interest of the pack. It was their mission to decompose and disintegrate the magnificent entity which M. Blaze de Bury very happily nicknames ‘Dumas-Légion,’ and in the process not to render his own unto Cæsar but to take from him all that was Cæsar’s, and divide it among the mannikins he had absorbed. And their work was in its way well done; for have we not seen M. Brunetière exulting in agreement and talking of Dumas as one less than Eugène Sue and not much bigger than Gaillardet? Of course the ultimate issue of the debate is not doubtful. Dumas remains to the end a prodigy of force and industry, a miracle of cleverness and accomplishment and ease, a type of generous and abundant humanity, a great artist in many varieties of form, a prince of talkers and story-tellers, one of the kings of the stage, a benefactor of his epoch and his kind; while of those who assisted him in the production of his immense achievement the most exist but as fractions of the larger sum, and the others have utterly disappeared. ‘Combien,’ says his son in that excellent page which serves to preface *le Fils Naturel* — ’combien parmi ceux qui devaient rester obscurs se sont éclairés et chauffés à ta forge, et si l’heure des restitutions sonnait, quel gain pour toi, rien qu’à reprendre ce que tu as donné et ce qu’on t’a pris!’ That is the true verdict of posterity, and he does well who abides by it.

Himself.

He is one of the heroes of modern art. Envy and scandal have done their worst now. The libeller has said his say; the detectives who make a specialty of literary forgeries have proved their cases one and all; the judges of matter have spoken, and so have the critics of style; the distinguished author of *Nana* has taken us into his confidence on the subject; we have heard from the lamented Granier and others as much as was to be heard on the question of plagiarism in general and the plagiarisms of Dumas in particular; and Mr. Percy Fitzgerald has done what he is pleased to designate the ‘nightman’s work’ of analysing *Antony* and *Kean*, and of collecting everything that spite has said about their author’s life, their author’s habits, their author’s manners and customs and character: of whose vanity, mendacity, immorality, a score of improper qualities besides, enough has been written to furnish a good-sized library. And the result of it all is that Dumas is recognised for a force in modern art and for one of the greatest inventors and amusers the century has produced. Whole crowds of men were named as the real authors of his books and plays; but they were only readable when he signed for them. His ideas were traced to a hundred originals; but they had all seemed worthless till he took them in hand and developed them according to their innate capacity. The French he wrote was popular, and the style at his command was none of the loftiest, as his critics have often been at pains to show; but he was for all that an artist at once original and exemplary, with an incomparable instinct of selection, a constructive faculty not equalled among the men of this century, an understanding of what is right and what is wrong in art and a mastery of his materials which in their way are not to be paralleled in the work of Sir Walter himself. Like Napoleon, he was 'a natural force let loose'; and if he had done no more than achieve universal renown as the prince of *raconteurs* and a commanding position as a novelist wherever novels are read he would still have done much. But he did a vast deal more. A natural force, he wrought in the right direction, as natural forces must and do. He amused the world for forty years and more; but he also contributed something to the general sum of the world's artistic experience and capacity, and his contribution is of permanent worth and charm. He has left us stories which are models of the enchanting art of narrative; and, with a definition good and comprehensive enough to include all the best work which has been produced for the theatre from Æschylus down to Augier, from the *Choephoræ* on to *le Gendre de M. Poirier*, he has given us types of the romantic and the domestic drama, which, new when he produced them, are even now not old, and which as regards essentials have yet to be improved upon. The form and aim of the modern drama, as we know it, have been often enough ascribed to the ingenious author of *une Chaîne* and the *Verre d'Eau*; but they might with much greater truth be ascribed to the author of *Antony* and *la Tour de Nesle*. Scribe invents and eludes where Dumas invents and dares. The theory of Scribe is one of mere dexterity: his drama is a perpetual *chassé-croisé* at the edge of a precipice, a dance of puppets among swords that might but will not cut and eggs that might but will not break; to him a situation is a kind of tight-rope to be crossed with ever so much agility and an endless affectation of peril by all his characters in turn: in fact, as M. Dumas *fils* has said of him, he is 'le Shakespeare des ombres chinoises.' The theory of Dumas is the very antipodes of this. 'All I want,' he said in a memorable comparison between himself and Victor Hugo, 'is four trestles, four boards, two actors, and a passion'; and his good plays are a proof that in this he spoke no more than the truth. Drama to him was so much emotion in action. If he invented a situation he accepted its issues in their entirety, and did his utmost to express from it all the passion it contained. That he fails to reach the highest peaks of emotional effect is no fault of his: to do that something more is needed than a perfect method, something other than a great ambition and an absolute certainty of touch; and Dumas was neither a Shakespeare nor an Æschylus — he was not even an Augier. All the same, he has produced in *la Tour de Nesle* a romantic play which M. Zola himself pronounces the ideal of the *genre* and in *Antony* an achievement in drawing-room tragedy which is out of all questioning the first, and in the opinion of a critic so competent and so keen as the master's son is probably the strongest, thing of its kind in modern literature. On this latter play it were difficult, I think, to bestow too much attention. It is touched, even tainted, with the manner and the affectation of its epoch. But it is admirably imagined and contrived; it is very daring, and it is very new; it deals with the men and women of 1830, and — with due allowance for differences of manners, ideal, and personal genius — it is in its essentials a play in the same sense as *Othello* and the *Trachiniæ* are plays in theirs. It is the beginning, as I believe, not only of *les Lionnes Pauvres* but of *Thérèse Raquin* and *la Glu* as well: just as *la Tour de Nesle* is the beginning of *Patrie* and *la Haine*.

At Least.

And if these greater and loftier pretensions be still contested; if the theory of the gifted creature who wrote that the works of the master wizard are 'like summer fruits brought forth abundantly in the full blaze of sunshine, which do not keep' — if this preposterous fantasy be generally accepted, there will yet be much in Dumas to venerate and love. If *Antony* were of no more account than an ephemeral burlesque; if *la Reine Margot* and the immortal trilogy of the Musketeers — that 'epic of friendship' — were dead as morality and as literature alike; if it were nothing to have re-cast the novel of adventure, formulated the modern drama, and perfected the drama of incident; if to have sent all France to the theatre to see in three dimensions those stories of Chicot, Edmond Dantès, d'Artagnan, which it knew by heart from books were an achievement within the reach of every scribbler who dabbles in letters; if all this were true, and Dumas were merely a piece of human journalism, produced to-day and gone to-morrow, there would still be enough of him to make his a memorable name. He was a prodigy — of amiability, cleverness, energy, daring, charm, industry — if he was nothing else. Gronow tells that he has sat at table with Dumas and

Brougham, and that Brougham, out-faced and out-talked, was forced to quit the field. ‘J’ai conservé,’ says M. Maxime du Camp, in his admirable *Souvenirs littéraires*, ‘d’Alexandre Dumas un souvenir ineffaçable; malgré un certain laisser-aller qui tenait à l’exubérance de sa nature, c’était un homme *dont tous les sentiments étaient élevés*. On a été injuste pour lui; comme il avait énormément d’esprit, on l’a accusé d’être léger; comme il produisait avec une facilité incroyable, on l’a accusé de gâcher la besogne, et, comme il était prodigue, on l’a accusé de manquer de tenue. Ces reproches m’ont toujours paru misérables.’ This is much; but it is not nearly all. He had, this independent witness goes on to note, ‘une générosité naturelle qui ne comptait jamais; il ressemblait à une corne d’abondance qui se vide sans cesse dans les mains tendues; *la moitié, sinon plus, de l’argent gagné par lui a été donnée*.’ That is true; and it is also true that he gave at least as largely of himself — his prodigious temperament, his generous gaiety, his big, manly heart, his turn for chivalry, his gallant and delightful genius — as of his money. He was reputed a violent and luxurious debauchee; and he mostly lived in an attic — (the worst room in the house and therefore the only one he could call his own) — with a camp-bed and the deal table at which he wrote. He passed for a loud-mouthed idler; and during many years his daily average of work was fourteen hours for months on end. ‘Ivre de puissance,’ says George Sand of him, but ‘foncièrement bon.’ They used to hear him laughing as he wrote, and when he killed Porthos he did no more that day. It would have been worth while to figure as one of the crowd of friends and parasites who lived at rack and manger in his house, for the mere pleasure of seeing him descend upon them from his toil of moving mountains and sharing in that pleasing half-hour of talk which was his common refreshment. After that he would return to the attic and the deal table, and move more mountains. With intervals of travel, sport, adventure, and what in France is called ‘l’amour’ — (it is strange, by the way, that he was never a hero of Carlyle’s) — he lived in this way more or less for forty years or so; and when he left Paris for the last time he had but two napoleons in his pocket. ‘I had only one when I came here first,’ quoth he, ‘and yet they call me a spendthrift.’ That was his way; and while the result is not for Dr. Smiles to chronicle, I for one persist in regarding the spirit in which it was accepted as not less exemplary than delightful.

His Monument.

On M. du Camp's authority there is a charming touch to add to his son's description of him. 'Il me semble,' said the royal old prodigal in his last illness, 'que je suis au sommet d'un monument qui tremble comme si les fondations étaient assises sur le sable.' 'Sois en paix,' replied the author of the *Demi-Monde*: 'le monument est bien bati, et la base est solide.' He was right, as we know. It is good and fitting that Dumas should have a monument in the Paris he amazed and delighted and amused so long. But he could have done without one. In what language is he not read? and where that he is read is he not loved? '*Exegi monumentum*,' he might have said: 'and wherever romance is a necessary of life, there shall you look for it, and not in vain.'

The Biography

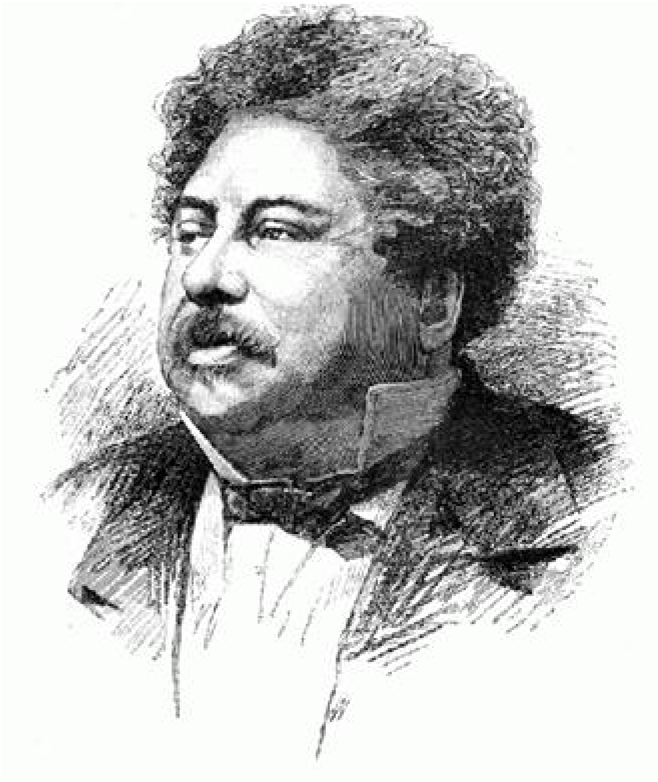

DUMAS’ PARIS by Francis Miltoun

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CHAPTER I.

A GENERAL INTRODUCTION

There have been many erudite works, in French and other languages, describing the antiquities and historical annals of Paris from the earliest times; and in English the mid-Victorian era turned out — there are no other words for it — innumerable “books of travel” which recounted alleged adventures, strewn here and there with bits of historical lore and anecdotes, none too relevant, and in most cases not of undoubted authenticity.

Of the actual life of the people in the city of light and learning, from the times of Napoleon onward, one has to go to the fountainhead of written records, the acknowledged masterworks in the language of the country itself, the reports and *annuaires* of various *sociétês*, *commissions*, and what not, and collect therefrom such information as he finds may suit his purpose.

In this manner may be built up a fabric which shall be authentic and proper, varied and, most likely, quite different in its plan, outline, and scope from other works of a similar purport, which may be recalled in connection therewith.

Paris has been rich in topographical historians, and, indeed, in her chroniclers in all departments, and there is no end of relative matter which may be evolved from an intimacy with these sources of supply. In a way, however, this information ought to be supplemented by a personal knowledge on the part of the compiler, which should make localities, distances, and environments — to say nothing of the actual facts and dates of history — appear as something more than a shrine to be worshipped from afar.

Given, then, these ingredients, with a love of the subject, — no less than of the city of its domicile, — it has formed a pleasant itinerary in the experiences of the writer of this book to have followed in the footsteps of Dumas *père*, through the streets that he knew and loved, taking note meanwhile of such contemporary shadows as were thrown across his path, and such events of importance or significance as blended in with the scheme of the literary life of the times in which he lived, none the less than of those of the characters in his books.

Nearly all the great artists have adored Paris — poets, painters, actors, and, above all, novelists.

From which it follows that Paris is the ideal city for the novelist, who, whether he finds his special subjects in her streets or not, must be inspired by this unique fulness and variety of human life. Nearly all the great French novelists have adored Paris. Dumas loved it; Victor Hugo spent years of his time in riding about her streets on omnibuses; Daudet said splendid things of it, and nearly, if not quite, all the great names of the artistic world of France are indissolubly linked with it.

Paris to-day means not “La Ville,” “La Cité,” or “L’Université,” but the whole triumvirate. Victor Hugo very happily compared the three cities to a little old woman between two handsome, strapping daughters.

It was Beranger who announced his predilection for Paris as a birthplace. Dumas must have felt something of the same emotion, for he early gravitated to the “City of Liberty and Equality,” in which — even before the great Revolution — misfortune was at all times alleviated by sympathy.

From the stones of Paris have been built up many a lordly volume — and many a slight one, for that matter — which might naturally be presumed to have recounted the last word which may justifiably have been said concerning the various aspects of the life and historic events which have encircled around the city since the beginning of the *moyen age*.

This is true or not, according as one embraces a wide or a contracted horizon in one’s view.

For most books there is, or was at the time of their writing, a reason for being, and so with familiar spots, as with well-worn roads, there is always a new panorama projecting itself before one.

The phenomenal, perennial, and still growing interest in the romances of Dumas the elder is the excuse for the present work, which it is to be hoped is admittedly a good one, however far short of exhaustiveness — a much overworked word, by the way — the volume may fall.

It were not possible to produce a complete or “exhaustive” work on any subject of a historical, topographical or æsthetic nature: so why claim it? The last word has not yet been said on Dumas himself, and surely not on

Paris — no more has it on Pompeii, where they are still finding evidences of a long lost civilization as great as any previously unearthed.

It was only yesterday, too (this is written in the month of March, 1904), that a party of frock-coated and silk-hatted benevolent-looking gentlemen were seen issuing from a manhole in the *Université quartier* of Paris. They had been inspecting a newly discovered *thermale établissement* of Roman times, which led off one of the newly opened subterranean arteries which abound beneath Paris.

It is said to be a rival of the Roman bath which is enclosed within the walls of the present Musée Cluny, and perhaps the equal in size and splendour of any similar remains extant.

This, then, suggests that in every land new ground, new view-points, and new conditions of life are making possible a record which, to have its utmost value, should be a progressively chronological one.

And after this manner the present volume has been written. There is a fund of material to draw upon, historic fact, pertinent and contemporary side-lights, and, above all, the environment which haloed itself around the personality of Dumas, which lies buried in many a *cache* which, if not actually inaccessible, is at least not to be found in the usual books of reference.

Perhaps some day even more will have been collected, and a truly satisfying biographical work compiled. If so, it will be the work of some ardent Frenchman of a generation following that in which Alexandre Dumas lived, and not by one of the contemporaries of even his later years. Albert Vandam, perhaps, might have done it as it should have been done; but he did not do so, and so an intimate personal record has been lost.

Paris has ever been written down in the book of man as the city of light, of gaiety, and of a trembling vivacity which has been in turn profligate, riotous, and finally criminal.

All this is perhaps true enough, but no more in degree than in most capitals which have endured so long, and have risen to such greatness.

With Paris it is quantity, with no sacrifice of quality, that has placed it in so preëminent a position among great cities, and the life of Paris — using the phrase in its most commonly recognized aspect — is accordingly more brilliant or the reverse, as one views it from the *boulevards* or from the *villettes*.

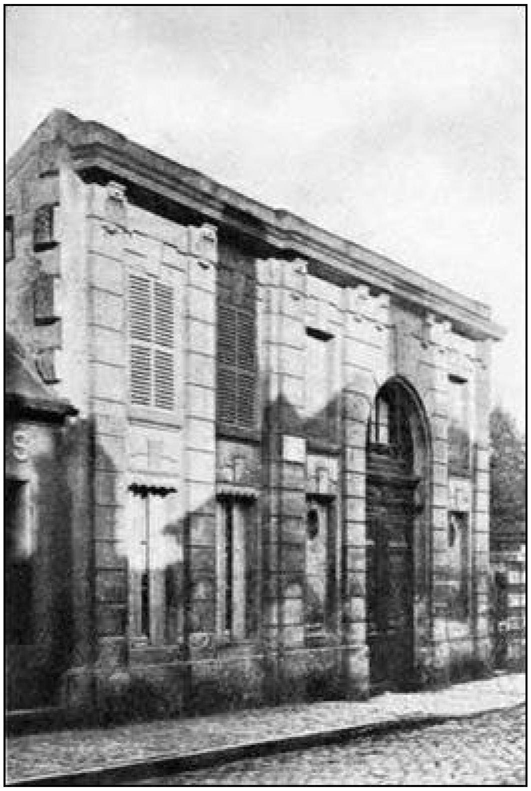

DUMAS’ HOUSE AT VILLERS-COTTERETS

French writers, the novelists in particular, have well known and made use of this; painters and poets, too, have perpetuated it in a manner which has not been applied to any other city in the world.

To realize the conditions of the life of Paris to the full one has to go back to Rousseau — perhaps even farther. His observation that “*Les maisons font la ville, mais le citoyens font la cité,*” was true when written, and it is true to-day, with this modification, that the delimitation of the confines of *la ville* should be extended so far as to include all workaday Paris — the shuffling, bustling world of energy and spirit which has ever insinuated itself into the daily life of the people.

The love and knowledge of Alexandre Dumas *père* for Paris was great, and the accessory and detail of his novels, so far as he drew upon the capital, was more correct and apropos. It was something more than a mere dash of local colour scattered upon the canvas from a haphazard palette. In *minutiæ* it was not drawn as fine as the later Zola was wont to accomplish, but it showed no less detail did one but comprehend its full meaning.

Though born in the provincial town Villers-Cotterets, — seventy-eight kilomètres from Paris on the road to Soissons, — Dumas came early in touch with the metropolis, having in a sort of runaway journey broken loose from his old associations and finally becoming settled in the capital as a clerk in the Bureau d’Orleans, at the immature age of twenty. Thus it was that his impressions and knowledge of Paris were founded upon an experience which was prolonged and intimate, extending, with brief intervals of travel, for over fifty years.

He had journeyed meantime to Switzerland, England, Corsica, Naples, the Rhine, Belgium, — with a brief residence in Italy in 1840-42, — then visiting Spain, Russia, the Caucasus, and Germany.

This covered a period from 1822, when he first came to Paris, until his death at Puys, near Dieppe, in 1870; nearly a full half-century amid activities in matters literary, artistic, and social, which were scarce equalled in brilliancy elsewhere — before or since.

In spite of his intimate association with the affairs of the capital, — he became, it is recalled, a candidate for the Chamber of Deputies at the time of the Second Republic, — Dumas himself has recorded, in a preface contributed to a “Histoire de l’Eure,” by M. Charpillon (1879), that if he were ever to compile a history of France he should first search for *les pierres angulaires* of his edifice in the provinces.

This bespeaks a catholicity which, perhaps, after all, is, or should be, the birthright of every historical novelist.

He said further, in this really valuable and interesting contribution, which seems to have been entirely overlooked by the bibliographers, that “to write the history of France would take a hundred volumes” — and no doubt he was right, though it has been attempted in less.

And again that “the aggrandizement of Paris has only been accomplished by a weakening process having been undergone by the provinces.” The egg from which Paris grew was deposited in the nest of *la cité*, the same as are the eggs laid *par un cygne*.

He says further that in writing the history of Paris he would have founded on “Lutetia (or Louchetia) the *Villa de Jules*, and would erect in the Place de Notre Dame a temple or altar to Ceres; at which epoch would have been erected another to Mercury, on the Mount of Ste. Geneviève; to Apollo in the Rue de la Barillerie, where to-day is erected that part of Tuileries built by Louis XIV., and which is called *Le Pavillon de Flore*.

“Then one would naturally follow with *Les Thermes de Julien*, which grew up from the *Villa de Jules*; the reunion under Charlemagne which accomplished the Sorbonne (*Sora bona*), which in turn became the favourite place of residence of Hugues Capet, the stronghold of Philippe-Auguste, the *bibliothèque* of Charles V., the monumental capital of Henri VI. d'Angleterre; and so on through the founding of the first printing establishment in France by Louis XI.; the new school of painting by François I.; of the Académie by Richelieu; ... to the final curtailment of monarchial power with the horrors of the Revolution and the significant events which centred around the Bastille, Versailles, and the Tuileries."

Leaving the events of the latter years of the eighteenth century, and coming to the day in which Dumas wrote (1867), Paris was truly — and in every sense —

"The capital of France, and its history became not only the history of France but the history of the world.... The city will yet become the capital of humanity, and, since Napoleon repudiated his provincial residences and made Paris *sa résidence impériale*, the man of destiny who reigns in Paris in reality reigns throughout the universe."

There may be those who will take exception to these brilliant words of Dumas. The Frenchman has always been an ardent and *soi-disant* bundle of enthusiasm, but those who love him must pardon his pride, which is harmless to himself and others alike, and is a far more admirable quality than the indifference and apathy born of other lands.

His closing words are not without a cynical truth, and withal a pride in Paris:

"It is true that if we can say with pride, we Parisians, 'It was Paris which overthrew the Bastille,' you of the provinces can say with equal pride, 'It was we who made the Revolution.'"

As if to ease the hurt, he wrote further these two lines only:

"At this epoch the sister nations should erect a gigantic statue of Peace. This statue will be Paris, and its pedestal will represent *La Province*."

His wish — it was not prophecy — did not, however, come true, as the world in general and France and poor rent Alsace et Lorraine in particular know to their sorrow; and all through a whim of a self-appointed, though weakling, monarch.

The era of the true peace of the world and the monument to its glory came when the French nation presented to the New World that grand work of Bartholdi, "Liberty Enlightening the World," which stands in New York harbour, and whose smaller replica now terminates the Allée des Cygnes.

The grasp that Dumas had of the events of romance and history served his purpose well, and in the life of the fifties in Paris his was a name and personality that was on everybody’s lips.

How he found time to live the full life that he did is a marvel; it certainly does not bear out the theory of heredity when one considers the race of his birth and the “dark-skinned” languor which was supposedly his heritage.

One edition of his work comprises two hundred and seventy-seven volumes, and within the year a London publisher has announced some sixty volumes “never before translated.” Dumas himself has said that he was the author of over seven hundred works.

In point of time his romances go back to the days of the house of Valois and the Anglo-French wars (1328), and to recount their contents is to abstract many splendid chapters from out the pages of French history.

It would seem as though nearly every personage of royalty and celebrity (if these democratic times will allow the yoking together of the two; real genuine *red* republicans would probably link royalty and notoriety) stalked majestically through his pages, and the record runs from the fourteenth nearly to the end of the nineteenth century, with the exception of the reign of Louis XI.

An ardent admirer of Sir Walter Scott has commented upon this lapse as being accounted for by the apparent futility of attempting to improve upon “Quentin Durward.” This is interesting, significant, and characteristic, but it is not charitable, generous, or broad-minded.

CHAPTER II.

DUMAS’ EARLY LIFE IN PARIS

At fifteen (1817), Dumas entered the law-office of one Mennesson at Villers-Cotterets as a *saute-ruisseau* (gutter-snipe), as he himself called it, and from this time on he was forced to forego what had been his passion heretofore: bird-catching, shooting, and all manner of woodcraft.

When still living at Villers-Cotterets Dumas had made acquaintance with the art of the dramatist, so far as it was embodied in the person of Adolphe de Leuven, with whom he collaborated in certain immature melodramas and vaudevilles, which De Leuven himself took to Paris for disposal.

“No doubt managers would welcome them with enthusiasm,” said Dumas, “and likely enough we shall divert a branch of that Pactolus River which is irrigating the domains of M. Scribe” (1822).

Later on in his “Mémoires” he says: “Complete humiliation; we were refused everywhere.”

STATUE OF DUMAS AT VILLERS-COTTERETS

From Villers-Cotterets the scene of Dumas' labours was transferred to Crépy, three and a half leagues distant, a small town to which he made his way on foot, his belongings in a little bundle "*not more bulky than that of a Savoyard when he leaves his native mountains*."

In his new duties, still as a lawyer's clerk, Dumas found life very wearisome, and, though the ancient capital of the Valois must have made an impress upon him, — as one learns from the Valois romances, — he pined for the somewhat more free life which he had previously lived; or, taking the bull by the horns, deliberated as to how he might get into the very vortex of things by pushing on to the capital.

As he tritely says, "To arrive it was necessary to make a start," and the problem was how to arrive in Paris from Crépy in the existing condition of his finances.

By dint of ingenuity and considerable activity Dumas left Crépy in company with a friend on a sort of a runaway holiday, and made his third entrance into Paris.

It would appear that Dumas' culinary and gastronomic capabilities early came into play, as we learn from the "Mémoires" that, when he was not yet out of his teens, and serving in the notary's office at Crépy, he proposed to his colleague that they take this three days' holiday in Paris.

They could muster but thirty-five francs between them, so Dumas proposed that they should shoot game *en route*. Said Dumas, "We can kill, shall I say, one hare, two partridges, and a quail.... We reach Dammartin, get the hinder part of our hare roasted and the front part jugged, then we eat and drink." "And what then?" said his friend. "What then? Bless you, why we pay for our wine, bread, and seasoning with the two partridges, and we tip the waiter with the quail."

The journey was accomplished in due order, and he and his friend put up at the Hôtel du Vieux-Augustins, reaching there at ten at night.

In the morning he set out to find his collaborateur De Leuven, but the fascination of Paris was such that it nearly made him forswear regard for the flight of time.

He says of the Palais Royale: "I found myself within its courtyard, and stopped before the Theatre Français, and on the bill I saw:

"'Demain, Lundi
Sylla
Tragédie dans cinq Actes
Par M. de Jouy'

"I solemnly swore that by some means or other ... I would see Sylla, and all the more so because, in large letters, under the above notice, were the words, 'The character of Sylla will be taken by M. Talma.'"

In his "Mémoires" Dumas states that it was at this time he had the temerity to call on the great Talma. "Talma was short-sighted," said he, "and was at his toilet; his hair was close cut, and his aspect under these conditions was remarkably un-poetic.... Talma was for me a god — a god unknown, it is true, as was Jupiter to Semele."

And here comes a most delicious bit of Dumas himself, Dumas the egotist:

"Ah, Talma! were you but twenty years younger or I twenty years older! I know the past, you cannot foretell the future.... Had you known, Talma, that the hand you had just touched would ultimately write sixty or eighty dramas ... in each of which you would have found the material for a marvellous creation...."

Dumas may be said to have at once entered the world of art and letters in this, his third visit to Paris, which took place so early in life, but in the years so ripe with ambition.

Having seen the great Talma in Sylla, in his dressing-room at the Theatre Français, he met Delavigne, who was then just completing his “Ecole des Viellards,” Lucien Arnault, who had just brought out “Regulus;” Soumet, fresh from the double triumph of “Saul” and “Clymnestre;” here, too, were Lemercier, Delrien, Viennet, and Jouy himself; and he had met at the Café du Roi, Theadlon, Francis, Rochefort, and De Merle; indeed by his friend De Leuven he was introduced to the assemblage there as a “future Corneille,” in spite of the fact that he was but a notary’s clerk.

Leaving what must have been to Dumas *the presence*, he shot a parting remark, “Ah, yes, I shall come to Paris for good, I warrant you that.”

In “The Taking of the Bastille” Dumas traces again, in the characters of Pitou and old Father Billot, much of the route which he himself took on his first visit to Paris. The journey, then, is recounted from first-hand information, and there will be no difficulty on the part of any one in tracing the similarity of the itinerary.

Chapter I., of the work in question, brings us at once on familiar ground, and gives a description of Villers-Cotterets and its inhabitants in a manner which shows Dumas’ hand so unmistakably as to remove any doubts as to the volume of assistance he may have received from others, on this particular book at least.

”On the borders of Picardy and the province of Soissons, and on that part of the national territory which, under the name of the Isle of France, formed a portion of the ancient patrimony of our kings, and in the centre of an immense crescent, formed by a forest of fifty thousand acres, which stretches its horns to the north and south, rises, almost buried amid the shades of a vast park planted by François I. and Henri II., the small city of Villers-Cotterets. This place is celebrated from having given birth to Charles Albert Demoustier, who, at the period when our present history commences, was there writing his Letters to Emilie on Mythology, to the unbounded satisfaction of the pretty women of those days, who eagerly snatched his publications from each other as soon as printed.

“Let us add, to complete the poetical reputation of this little city, whose detractors, notwithstanding its royal château and its two thousand four hundred inhabitants, obstinately persist in calling it a mere village — let us add, we say, to complete its poetical reputation, that it is situated at two leagues distance from Laferte-Milan, where Racine was born, and eight leagues from Château-Thierry, the birthplace of La Fontaine.

“Let us also state that the mother of the author of ‘Britannicus’ and ‘Athalie’ was from Villers-Cotterets.

“But now we must return to its royal château and its two thousand four hundred inhabitants.

“This royal château, begun by François I., whose salamanders still decorate it, and finished by Henri II., whose cipher it bears entwined with that of Catherine de Medici and encircled by the three crescents of Diana of Poictiers, after having sheltered the loves of the knight king with Madame d’Etampes, and those of Louis Philippe of Orleans with the beautiful Madame de Montesson, had become almost uninhabited since the death of this last prince; his son, Philippe d’Orleans, afterward called Egalité, having made it descend from the rank of a royal residence to that of a mere hunting rendezvous.

“It is well known that the château and forest of Villers-Cotterets formed part of the appanage settled by Louis XIV. on his brother Monsieur, when the second son of Anne of Austria married the sister of Charles II., the Princess Henrietta of England.

“As to the two thousand four hundred inhabitants of whom we have promised our readers to say a word, they were, as in all localities where two thousand four hundred people are united, a heterogeneous assemblage.

“Firstly: Of the few nobles, who spent their summers in the neighbouring châteaux and their winters in Paris, and who, mimicking the prince, had only a lodging-place in the city.

“Secondly: Of a goodly number of citizens, who could be seen, let the weather be what it might, leaving their houses after dinner, umbrella in hand, to take their daily walk, a walk which was regularly bounded by a deep, invisible ditch which separated the park from the forest, situated about a quarter of a league from the town, and which was called, doubtless on account of the exclamation which the sight of it drew from the asthmatic lungs of the promenaders, satisfied at finding themselves not too much out of breath, the ‘Ha, ha!’

“Thirdly: Of a considerably greater number of artisans who worked the whole of the week and only allowed themselves to take a walk on the Sunday; whereas their fellow townsmen, more favoured by fortune, could enjoy it every day.

“Fourthly and finally: Of some miserable proletarians, for whom the week had not even a Sabbath, and who, after having toiled six days in the pay of the nobles, the citizens, or even of the artisans, wandered on the seventh day through the forest to gather up dry wood or branches of the lofty trees, torn from them by the storm, that mower of the forest, to whom oak-trees are but ears of wheat, and which it scattered over the humid soil beneath the lofty trees, the magnificent appanage of a prince.

“If Villers-Cotterets (Villerii ad Cotiam Retiæ) had been, unfortunately, a town of sufficient importance in history to induce archæologists to ascertain and follow up its successive changes from a village to a town and from a town to a city — the last, as we have said, being strongly contested, they would certainly have proved this fact, that the village had begun by being a row of houses on either side of the road from Paris to Soissons; then they would have added that its situation on the borders of a beautiful forest having, though by slow degrees, brought to it a great increase of inhabitants, other streets were added to the first, diverging like the rays of a star and leading toward other small villages with which it was important to keep up communication, and converging toward a point which naturally became the centre, that is to say, what in the provinces is called *Le Carrefour*, — and sometimes even the Square, whatever might be its shape, — and around which the handsomest buildings of the village, now become a burgh, were erected, and in the middle of which rises a fountain, now decorated with a quadruple dial; in short, they would have fixed the precise date when, near the modest village church, the first want of a people, arose the first turrets of the vast château, the last caprice of a king; a château which, after having been, as we have already said, by turns a royal and a princely residence, has in our days become a melancholy and hideous receptacle for mendicants under the direction of the Prefecture of the Seine, and to whom M. Marrast issues his mandates through delegates of whom he has not, nor probably will ever have, either the time or the care to ascertain the names.”

The last sentence seems rather superfluous, — if it was justifiable, — but, after all, no harm probably was done, and Dumas as a rule was never vituperative.

Continuing, these first pages give us an account of the difficulties under which poor Louis Ange Pitou acquired his knowledge of Latin, which is remarkably like the account which Dumas gives in the “Mémoires” of his early acquaintance with the classics.

When Pitou leaves Haramont, his native village, and takes to the road, and visits Billot at “Bruyere aux Loups,” knowing well the road, as he did that to Damploux, Compiègne, and Vivières, he was but covering ground equally well known to Dumas’ own youth.

Finally, as he is joined by Billot *en route* for Paris, and takes the highroad from Villers-Cotterets, near Gondeville, passing Nanteuil, Dammartin, and Ermenonville, arriving at Paris at La Villette, he follows almost the exact itinerary taken by the venturesome Dumas on his runaway journey from the notary’s office at Crépy-en-Valois.

Crépy-en-Valois was the near neighbour of Villers-Cotterets, which jealously attempted to rival it, and does even to-day. In “The Taking of the Bastille” Dumas only mentions it in connection with Mother Sabot’s *âne*, “which was shod,” — the only ass which Pitou had ever known which wore shoes, — and performed the duty of carrying the mails between Crépy and Villers-Cotterets.

At Villers-Cotterets one may come into close contact with the château which is referred to in the later pages of the “Vicomte de Bragelonne.” “Situated in the middle of the forest, where we shall lead a most sentimental life, the very same where my grandfather,” said Monseigneur the Prince, “Henri IV. did with ‘La Belle Gabrielle.’”

So far as lion-hunting goes, Dumas himself at an early age appears to have fallen into it. He recalls in “Mes Mémoires” the incident of Napoleon I. passing through Villers-Cotterets just previous to the battle of Waterloo.

“Nearly every one made a rush for the emperor’s carriage,” said he; “naturally I was one of the first.... Napoleon’s pale, sickly face seemed a block of ivory.... He raised his head and asked, ‘Where are we?’ ‘At Villers-Cotterets, Sire,’ said a voice. ‘Go on.’” Again, a few days later, as we learn from the “Mémoires,” “a horseman coated with mud rushes into the village; orders four horses for a carriage which is to follow, and departs.... A dull rumble draws near ... a carriage stops.... ‘Is it he — the emperor?’ Yes, it was the emperor, in the same position as I had seen him before, exactly the same, pale, sickly, impassive; only the head droops rather more.... ‘Where are we?’ he asked. ‘At Villers-Cotterets, Sire.’ ‘Go on.’”

That evening Napoleon slept at the Elysée. It was but three months since he had returned from Elba, but in that time he came to an abyss which had engulfed his fortune. That abyss was Waterloo; only saved to the allies — who at four in the afternoon were practically defeated — by the coming up of the Germans at six.

Among the books of reference and contemporary works of a varying nature from which a writer in this generation must build up his facts anew, is found a wide difference in years as to the date of the birth of Dumas *père*.

As might be expected, the weight of favour lies with the French authorities, though by no means do they, even, agree among themselves.

His friends have said that no unbiassed, or even complete biography of the author exists, even in French; and possibly this is so. There is about most of them a certain indefiniteness and what Dumas himself called the "colour of sour grapes."

The exact date of his birth, however, is unquestionably 1802, if a photographic reproduction of his natal certificate, published in Charles Glinel's "Alex. Dumas et Son Œuvre," is what it seems to be.

Dumas' aristocratic parentage — for such it truly was — has been the occasion of much scoffing and hard words. He pretended not to it himself, but it was founded on family history, as the records plainly tell, and whether Alexandre, the son of the brave General Dumas, the Marquis de la Pailleterie, was prone to acknowledge it or not does not matter in the least. The "feudal particle" existed plainly in his pedigree, and with no discredit to any concerned.

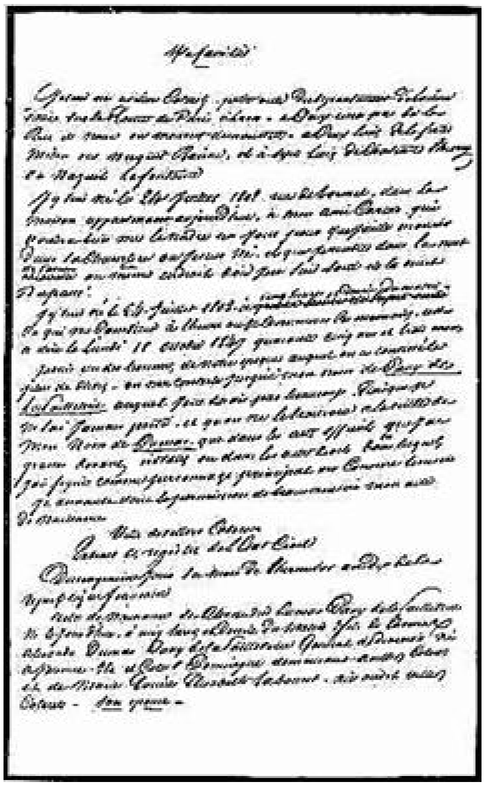

FACSIMILE OF DUMAS’ OWN STATEMENT OF HIS BIRTH

General Dumas, his wife, and his son are buried in the cemetery of Villers-Cotterets, where the exciting days of the childhood of Dumas, the romancer, were spent, in a plot of ground “conceded in perpetuity to the family.” The plot forms a rectangle six metres by five, surrounded by towering pines.

The three monuments contained therein are of the utmost simplicity, each consisting of an inclined slab of stone.

The inscriptions are as follows:

FAMILLE	ALEXANDRE	DUMAS
Thomas-Alexandre	Marie-Louise-Elizabeth	Alexandre Dumas
Dumas	Labouret	né à Villers-Cotterets
Davy de la Pailleterie	Épouse	le 24 juillet 1802
général dé division	du général de	décédé

division

né à Jeremie	Dumas Davy	le 5 décembre 1870
Ile et Côte de Saint	de la Pailleterie	à Puys
Dominique	née	transféré
le 25 mars 1762,	à Villers-Cotterets	à
décédé	le 4 juillet 1769	Villers-Cotterets
à Villers-Cotterets	décédée	le
le 27 février 1806	le 1er aout 1838	15 avril 1872

There would seem to be no good reason why a book treating of Dumas' Paris might not be composed entirely of quotations from Dumas' own works. For a fact, such a work would be no less valuable as a record than were it evolved by any other process. It would indeed be the best record that could possibly be made, for Dumas' topography was generally truthful if not always precise.

There are, however, various contemporary side-lights which are thrown upon any canvas, no matter how small its area, and in this instance they seem to engulf even the personality of Dumas himself, to say nothing of his observations.

Dumas was such a part and parcel of the literary life of the times in which he lived that mention can scarce be made of any contemporary event that has not some bearing on his life or work, or he with it, from the time when he first came to the metropolis (in 1822) at the impressionable age of twenty, until the end.

It will be difficult, even, to condense the relative incidents which entered into his life within the confines of a single volume, to say nothing of a single chapter. The most that can be done is to present an abridgment which shall follow along the lines of some preconceived chronological arrangement. This is best compiled from Dumas' own words, leaving it to the additional references of other chapters to throw a sort of reflected glory from a more distant view-point.

The reputation of Dumas with the merely casual reader rests upon his best-known romances, "Monte Cristo," 1841; "Les Trois Mousquetaires," 1844; "Vingt Ans Après," 1845; "Le Vicomte de Bragelonne," 1847; "La Dame de Monsoreau," 1847; and his dramas of "Henri III. et Sa Cour," 1829, "Antony," 1831, and "Kean," 1836.

His memoirs, “Mes Mémoires,” are practically closed books to the mass of English readers — the word books is used advisedly, for this remarkable work is composed of twenty stout volumes, and they only cover ten years of the author’s life.

Therein is a mass of fact and fancy which may well be considered as fascinating as are the “romances” themselves, and, though autobiographic, one gets a far more satisfying judgment of the man than from the various warped and distorted accounts which have since been published, either in French or English.

Beginning with “Memories of My Childhood” (1802-06), Dumas launches into a few lines anent his first visit to Paris, in company with his father, though the auspicious — perhaps significant — event took place at a very tender age. It seems remarkable that he should have recalled it at all, but he was a remarkable man, and it seems not possible to ignore his words.

“We set out for Paris, ah, that journey! I recollect it perfectly.... It was August or September, 1805. We got down in the Rue Thiroux at the house of one Dollé.... I had been embraced by one of the most noble ladies who ever lived, Madame la Marquise de Montesson, widow of Louis-Philippe d’Orleans.... The next day, putting Brune’s sword between my legs and Murat’s hat upon my head, I galloped around the table; when my father said, ‘*Never forget this, my boy*.’... My father consulted Corvisart, and attempted to see the emperor, but Napoleon, the quondam general, had now become the emperor, and he refused to see my father.... To where did we return? I believe Villers-Cotterets.”

Again on the 26th of March, 1813, Dumas entered Paris in company with his mother, now widowed. He says of this visit:

“I was delighted at the prospect of this my second visit.... I have but one recollection, full of light and poetry, when, with a flourish of trumpets, a waving of banners, and shouts of ‘Long live the King of Rome,’ was lifted up above the heads of fifty thousand of the National Guard the rosy face and the fair, curly head of a child of three years — the infant son of the great Napoleon.... Behind him was his mother, — that woman so fatal to France, as have been all the daughters of the Cæsars, Anne of Austria, Marie Antoinette, and Marie Louise, — an indistinct, insipid face.... The next day we started home again.”

Through the influence of General Foy, an old friend of his father's, Dumas succeeded in obtaining employment in the Orleans Bureau at the Palais Royal.

His occupation there appears not to have been unduly arduous. The offices were in the right-hand corner of the second courtyard of the Palais Royal. He remained here in this bureau for a matter of five years, and, as he said, "loved the hour when he came to the office," because his immediate superior, Lassagne, — a contributor to the *Drapeau Blanc*, — was the friend and intimate of Désaugiers, Théaulon, Armand Gouffé, Brozier, Rougemont, and all the vaudevillists of the time.

Dumas' meeting with the Duc d'Orleans — afterward Louis-Philippe — is described in his own words thus: "In two words I was introduced. 'My lord, this is M. Dumas, whom I mentioned to you, General Foy's protégé.' 'You are the son of a brave man,' said the duc, 'whom Bonaparte, it seems, left to die of starvation.'... The duc gave Oudard a nod, which I took to mean, 'He will do, he's by no means bad for a provincial.'" And so it was that Dumas came immediately under the eye of the duc, engaged as he was at that time on some special clerical work in connection with the duc's provincial estates.

The affability of Dumas, so far as he himself was concerned, was a foregone conclusion. In the great world in which he moved he knew all sorts and conditions of men. He had his enemies, it is true, and many of them, but he himself was the enemy of no man. To English-speaking folk he was exceedingly agreeable, because, — quoting his own words, — said he, "It was a part of the debt which I owed to Shakespeare and Scott." Something of the egoist here, no doubt, but gracefully done nevertheless.

With his temperament it was perhaps but natural that Dumas should have become a romancer. This was of itself, maybe, a foreordained sequence of events, but no man thinks to-day that, leaving contributary conditions, events, and opportunities out of the question, he shapes his own fate; there are accumulated heritages of even distant ages to contend with. In Dumas' case there was his heritage of race and colour, refined, perhaps, by a long drawn out process, but, as he himself tells in "Mes Mémoires," his mother's fear was that her child would be born black, and he *was*, or, at least, purple, as he himself afterward put it.

CHAPTER III.

DUMAS’ LITERARY CAREER

Just how far Dumas’ literary ability was an inheritance, or growth of his early environment, will ever be an open question. It is a manifest fact that he had breathed something of the spirit of romance before he came to Paris.

Although it was not acknowledged until 1856, “The Wolf-Leader” was a development of a legend told to him in his childhood. Recalling then the incident of his boyhood days, and calling into recognition his gift of improvisation, he wove a tale which reflected not a little of the open-air life of the great forest of Villers-Cotterets, near the place of his birth.

Here, then, though it was fifty years after his birth, and thirty after he had thrust himself on the great world of Paris, the scenes of his childhood were reproduced in a wonderfully romantic and weird tale — which, to the best of the writer’s belief, has not yet appeared in English.

To some extent it is possible that there is not a little of autobiography therein, not so much, perhaps, as Dickens put into “David Copperfield,” but the suggestion is thrown out for what it may be worth.

It is, furthermore, possible that the historic associations of the town of Villers-Cotterets — which was but a little village set in the midst of the surrounding forest — may have been the prime cause which influenced and inspired the mind of Dumas toward the romance of history.

In point of chronology, among the earliest of the romances were those that dealt with the fortunes of the house of Valois (fourteenth century), and here, in the little forest town of Villers-Cotterets, was the magnificent manor-house which belonged to the Ducs de Valois; so it may be presumed that the sentiment of early associations had somewhat to do with these literary efforts.

All his life Dumas devotedly admired the sentiment and fancies which foregathered in this forest, whose very trees and stones he knew so well. From his “Mémoires” we learn of his indignation at the destruction of its trees and much of its natural beauty. He says:

”This park, planted by François I., was cut down by Louis-Philippe. Trees, under whose shade once reclined François I. and Madame d’Etampes, Henri II. and Diane de Poitiers, Henri IV. and Gabrielle d’Estrées — you would have believed that a Bourbon would have respected you. But over and above your inestimable value of poetry and memories, you had, unhappily, a material value. You beautiful beeches with your polished silvery cases! you beautiful oaks with your sombre wrinkled bark! — you were worth a hundred thousand crowns. The King of France, who, with his six millions of private revenue, was too poor to keep you — the King of France sold you. For my part, had you been my sole possession, I would have preserved you; for, poet as I am, one thing that I would set before all the gold of the earth: the murmur of the wind in your leaves; the shadow that you made to flicker beneath my feet; the visions, the phantoms, which, at eventide, betwixt the day and night, in the doubtful hour of twilight, would glide between your age-long trunks as glide the shadows of the ancient Abencerrages amid the thousand columns of Cordova’s royal mosque.”

What wonder, with these lines before one, that the impressionable Dumas was so taken with the romance of life and so impracticable in other ways.

From the fact that no thorough biography of Dumas exists, it will be difficult to trace the fluctuations of his literary career with preciseness. It is not possible even with the twenty closely packed volumes of the “Mémoires” — themselves incomplete — before one. All that a biographer can get from this treasure-house are facts, — rather radiantly coloured in some respects, but facts nevertheless, — which are put together in a not very coherent or compact form.

They do, to be sure, recount many of the incidents and circumstances attendant upon the writing and publication of many of his works, and because of this they immediately become the best of all sources of supply. It is to be regretted that these “Mémoires” have not been translated, though it is doubtful if any publisher of English works could get his money back from the transaction.

Other clues as to his emotions, and with no uncertain references to incidents of Dumas’ literary career, are found in “Mes Bêtes,” “Ange Pitou,” the “Causeries,” and the “Travels.” These comprise many volumes not yet translated.

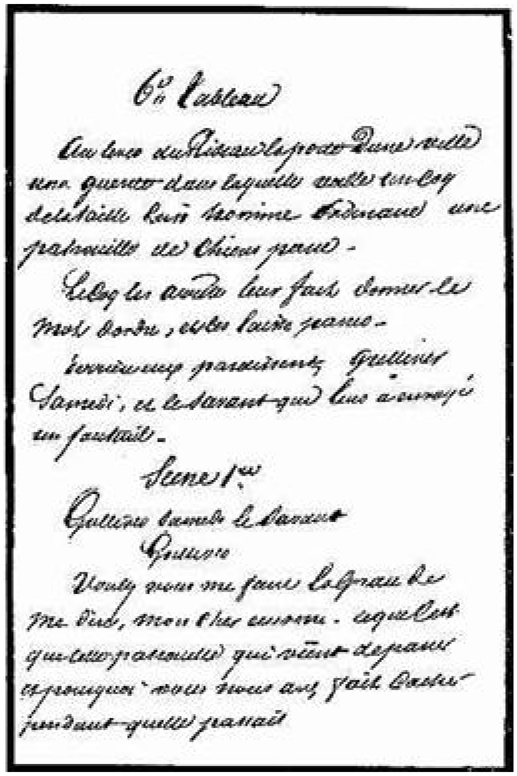

FACSIMILE OF A MANUSCRIPT PAGE FROM ONE OF DUMAS' PLAYS

Dumas was readily enough received into the folds of the great. Indeed, as we know, he made his *entrée* under more than ordinary, if not exceptional, circumstances, and his connection with the great names of literature and statecraft extended from Hugo to Garibaldi.

As for his own predilections in literature, Dumas' own voice is practically silent, though we know that he was a romanticist pure and simple, and drew no inspiration or encouragement from Voltairian sentiments. If not essentially religious, he at least believed in its principles, though, as a warm admirer has said, "He had no liking for the celibate and bookish life of the churchman."

Dumas does not enter deeply into the subject of ecclesiasticism in France. His most elaborate references are to the Abbey of Ste. Genevieve — since disappeared in favour of the hideous pagan Panthéon — and its relics and associations, in "La Dame de Monsoreau." Other of the romances from time to time deal with the subject of religion more or less, as was bound to be, considering the times of which he wrote, of Mazarin, Richelieu, De Rohan, and many other churchmen.

Throughout the thirties Dumas was mostly occupied with his plays, the predominant, if not the most sonorous note, being sounded by “Antony.”

As a novelist his star shone brightest in the decade following, commencing with “Monte Cristo,” in 1841, and continuing through “Le Vicomte de Bragelonne” and “La Dame de Monsoreau,” in 1847.

During these strenuous years Dumas produced the flower of his romantic garland — omitting, of course, certain trivial and perhaps unworthy trifles, among which are usually considered, rightly enough, “Le Capitaine Paul” (Paul Jones) and “Jeanne d’Arc.” At this period, however, he produced the charming and exotic “Black Tulip,” which has since come to be a reality. The best of all, though, are admittedly the Mousquetaire cycle, the volumes dealing with the fortunes of the Valois line, and, again, “Monte Cristo.”

By 1830, Dumas, eager, as it were, to experience something of the valiant boisterous spirit of the characters of his romances, had thrown himself heartily into an alliance with the opponents of Louis-Philippe. Orleanist successes, however, left him to fall back upon his pen.

In 1844, having finished “Monte Cristo,” he followed it by “Les Trois Mousquetaires,” and before the end of the same year had put out forty volumes, by what means, those who will read the scurrilous “Fabrique des Romans” — and properly discount it — may learn.

The publication of “Monte Cristo” and “Les Trois Mousquetaires” as newspaper *feuilletons*, in 1844-45, met with amazing success, and were, indeed, written from day to day, to keep pace with the demands of the press.

Here is, perhaps, an opportune moment to digress into the ethics of the profession of the “literary ghost,” and but for the fact that the subject has been pretty well thrashed out before, — not only with respect to Dumas, but to others as well, — it might justifiably be included here at some length, but shall not be, however.

The busy years from 1840-50 could indeed be “explained” — if one were sure of his facts; but beyond the circumstances, frequently availed of, it is admitted, of Dumas having made use of secretarial assistance in the productions which were ultimately to be fathered by himself, there is little but jealous and spiteful hearsay to lead one to suppose that he made any secret of the fact that he had some very considerable assistance in the production of the seven hundred volumes which, at a late period in his life, he claimed to have produced.

The "*Maquet affaire*," of course, proclaims the whilom Augustus Mackeat as a *collaborateur*; still the ingenuity of Dumas shines forth through the warp and woof in an unmistakable manner, and he who would know more of the pros and cons is referred to the "*Maison Dumas et Cie*."

Maquet was manifestly what we have come to know as a "hack," though the species is not so very new — nor so very rare. The great libraries are full of them the whole world over, and very useful, though irresponsible and ungrateful persons, many of them have proved to be. Maquet, at any rate, served some sort of a useful purpose, and he certainly was a confidant of the great romancer during these very years, but that his was the mind and hand that evolved or worked out the general plan and detail of the romances is well-nigh impossible to believe, when one has digested both sides of the question.

An English critic of no inconsiderable knowledge has thrown in his lot recently with the claims of Maquet, and given the sole and entire production of "Les Trois Mousquetaires," "Monte Cristo," "La Dame de Monsoreau," and many other of Dumas' works of this period, to him, placing him, indeed, with Shakespeare, whose plays certain gullible persons believe to have been written by Bacon. The flaw in the theory is apparent when one realizes that the said Maquet was no myth — he was, in fact, a very real person, and a literary personage of a certain ability. It is strange, then, that if he were the producer of, say "Les Trois Mousquetaires," which was issued ostensibly as the work of Dumas, that he wrote nothing under his own name that was at all comparable therewith; and stranger still, that he was able to repeat this alleged success with "Monte Cristo," or the rest of the Mousquetaire series, and yet not be able to do the same sort of a feat when playing the game by himself. One instance would not prove this contention, but several are likely to not only give it additional strength, but to practically demonstrate the correct conclusion.

The ethics of plagiarism are still greater and more involved than those which make justification for the employment of one who makes a profession of *library research*, but it is too involved and too vast to enter into here, with respect to accusations of its nature which were also made against Dumas.

As that new star which has so recently risen out of the East — Mr. Kipling — has said, “They took things where they found them.” This is perhaps truthful with regard to most literary folk, who are continually seeking a new line of thought. Scott did it, rather generously one might think; even Stevenson admitted that he was greatly indebted to Washington Irving and Poe for certain of the details of “Treasure Island” — though there is absolutely no question but that it was a sort of unconscious absorption, to put it rather unscientifically. The scientist himself calls it the workings of the subconscious self.

As before said, the Maquet *affaire* was a most complicated one, and it shall have no lengthy consideration here. Suffice to say that, when a case was made by Maquet in court, in 1856-58, Maquet lost. “It is not justice that has won,” said Maquet, “but Dumas.”

Edmond About has said that Maquet lived to speak kindly of Dumas, “as did his legion of other *collaborateurs*; and the proudest of them congratulate themselves on having been trained in so good a school.” This being so, it is hard to see anything very outrageous or preposterous in the procedure.

Blaze de Bury has described Dumas’ method thus:

“The plot was worked over by Dumas and his colleague, when it was finally drafted by the other and afterward *rewritten* by Dumas.”

M. About, too, corroborates Blaze de Bury’s statement, so it thus appears legitimately explained. Dumas at least supplied the ideas and the *esprit*.

In Dumas’ later years there is perhaps more justification for the thought that as his indolence increased — though he was never actually inert, at least not until sickness drew him down — the authorship of the novels became more complex. Blaze de Bury put them down to the “Dumas-Legion,” and perhaps with some truth. They certainly have not the vim and fire and temperament of individuality of those put forth from 1840 to 1850.

Dumas wrote fire and impetuosity into the veins of his heroes, perhaps some of his very own vivacious spirit. It has been said that his moral code was that of the camp or the theatre; but that is an ambiguity, and it were better not dissected.

Certainly he was no prude or Puritan, not more so, at any rate, than were Burns, Byron, or Poe, but the virtues of courage, devotion, faithfulness, loyalty, and friendship were his, to a degree hardly excelled by any of whom the written record of *cameraderie* exists.

Dumas has been jibed and jeered at by the supercilious critics ever since his first successes appeared, but it has not leavened his reputation as the first romancer of his time one single jot; and within the past few years we have had a revival of the character of true romance — perhaps the first *true* revival since Dumas' time — in M. Rostand's "Cyrano de Bergerac."

We have had, too, the works of Zola, who, indomitable, industrious, and sincere as he undoubtedly was, will have been long forgotten when the masterpieces of Dumas are being read and reread. The Mousquetaire cycle, the Valois romances, and "Monte Cristo" stand out by themselves above all others of his works, and have had the approbation of such discerning fellow craftsmen as George Sand, Thackeray, and Stevenson, all of whom may be presumed to have judged from entirely different points of view. Thackeray, indeed, plainly indicated his greatest admiration for "La Tulipe Noire," a work which in point of time came somewhat later. At this time Dumas had built his own Chalet de Monte Cristo near St. Germain, a sort of a Gallic rival to Abbotsford. It, and the "Théâtre Historique," founded by Dumas, came to their disastrous end in the years immediately following upon the Revolution of 1848, when Dumas fled to Brussels and began his "Mémoires." He also founded a newspaper called *Le Mousquetaire*, which failed, else he might have retrenched and satisfied his creditors — at least in part.

He travelled in Russia, and upon his return wrote of his journey to the Caspian. In 1860 he obtained an archæological berth in Italy, and edited a Garibaldian newspaper.

By 1864, the "Director of Excavations at Naples," which was Dumas' official title, fell out with the new government which had come in, and he left his partisan journal and the lava-beds of Pompeii for Paris and the literary arena again; but the virile power of his early years was gone, and Dumas never again wielded the same pen which had limned the features of Athos, Porthos, Aramis, and D'Artagnan.

In 1844 Dumas participated in a sort of personally-conducted Bonapartist tour to the Mediterranean, in company with the son of Jerome Napoleon. On this journey Dumas first saw the island of Monte Cristo and the Château d'If, which lived so fervently in his memory that he decided that their personality should be incorporated in the famous tale which was already formulating itself in his brain.

Again, this time in company with the Duc de Montpensier, he journeyed to the Mediterranean, “did” Spain, and crossed over to Algiers. When he returned he brought back the celebrated vulture, “Jugurtha,” whose fame was afterward perpetuated in “Mes Bêtes.”

That there was a deal of reality in the characterization and the locale of Dumas’ romances will not be denied by any who have acquaintance therewith. Dumas unquestionably took his material where he found it, and his wonderfully retentive memory, his vast capacity for work, and his wide experience and extensive acquaintance provided him material that many another would have lacked.

M. de Chaffault tells of his having accompanied Dumas by road from Sens to Joigny, Dumas being about to appeal to the republican constituency of that place for their support of him as a candidate for the parliamentary elections.

“In a short time we were on the road,” said the narrator, “and the first stage of three hours seemed to me only as many minutes. Whenever we passed a country-seat, out came a lot of anecdotes and legends connected with its owners, interlarded with quaint fancies and epigrams.”

Aside from the descriptions of the country around about Crépy, Compiègne, and Villers-Cotterets which he wove into the Valois tales, “The Taking of the Bastille,” and “The Wolf-Leader,” there is a strong note of personality in “Georges;” some have called it autobiography.

The tale opens in the far-distant Isle of France, called since the English occupation Mauritius, and in the narrative of the half-caste Georges Munier are supposed to be reflected many of the personal incidents of the life of the author.

This story may or may not be a mere repetition of certain of the incidents of the struggle of the mulatto against the barrier of the white aristocracy, and may have been an echo in Dumas’ own life. It is repeated it may have been this, or it may have been much more. Certain it is, there is an underlying motive which could only have been realized to the full extent expressed therein by one who knew and felt the pangs of the encounter with a world which only could come to one of genius who was by reason of race or creed outclassed by his contemporaries; and therein is given the most vivid expression of the rise of one who had everything against him at the start.

This was not wholly true of Dumas himself, to be sure, as he was endowed with certain influential friends. Still it was mainly through his own efforts that he was able to prevail upon the old associates and friends of the dashing General Dumas, his father, to give him his first lift along the rough and stony literary pathway.

In this book there is a curious interweaving of the life and colour which may have had not a little to do with the actual life which obtained with respect to his ancestors, and as such, and the various descriptions of negro and Creole life, the story becomes at once a document of prime interest and importance.

Since Dumas himself has explained and justified the circumstance out of which grew the conception of the D’Artagnan romances, it is perhaps advisable that some account should be given of the original D’Artagnan.

Primarily, the interest in Dumas’ romance of “Les Trois Mousquetaires” is as great, if not greater, with respect to the characters as it is with the scenes in which they lived and acted their strenuous parts. In addition, there is the profound satisfaction of knowing that the rollicking and gallant swashbuckler has come down to us from the pages of real life, as Dumas himself recounts in the preface to the Colman Lévy edition of the book. The statement of Dumas is explicit enough; there is no mistaking his words which open the preface:

“Dans laquelle
Il est établi que, malgré leurs noms en *os* et en *is*,
Les héros de l’histoire
Que nous allons avoir l’honneur de raconter à nos lecteurs
N’ont rien de mythologique.”

The contemporary facts which connect the real Comte d’Artagnan with romances are as follows:

Charles de Batz de Castlemore, Comte d’Artagnan, received his title from the little village of Artagnan, near the Gascon town of Orthez in the present department of the Hautes-Pyrénées. He was born in 1623. Dumas, with an author’s license, made his chief figure a dozen years older, for the real D’Artagnan was but five years old at the time of the siege of La Rochelle of which Dumas makes mention. On the whole, the romance is near enough to reality to form an ample endorsement of the author’s verity.

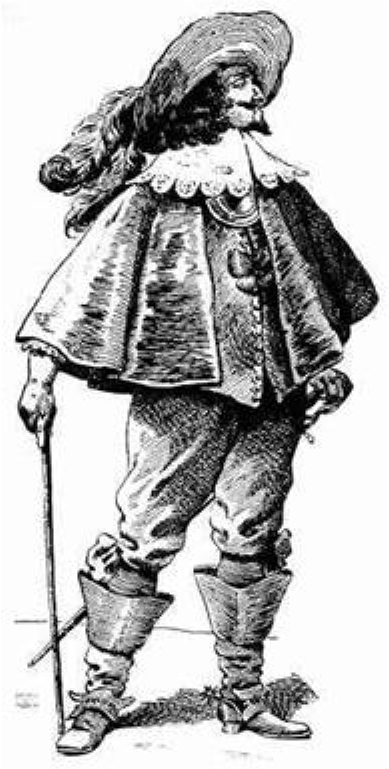

D’ARTAGNAN

The real D’Artagnan made his way to Paris, as did he of the romance. Here he met his fellow Béarnais, one M. de Treville, captain of the king’s musketeers, and the illustrious individuals, *Armand de Sillegue d’Athos*, a Béarnais nobleman who died in 1645, and whose direct descendant, Colonel de Sillegue, commanded, according to the French army lists of a recent date, a regiment of French cavalry; *Henry d’Aramitz*, lay abbé of Oloron; and *Jean de Portu*, all of them probably neighbours in D’Artagnan’s old home.

D’Artagnan could not then have been at the siege of La Rochelle, but from the “Mémoires de M. d’Artagnan,” of which Dumas writes in his preface, we learn of his feats at arms at Arras, Valenciennes, Douai, and Lille, all places where once and again Dumas placed the action of the novels.

The real D’Artagnan died, sword in hand, “in the imminent deadly breach” at Maestricht, in 1673. He served, too, under Prince Rupert in the Civil War, and frequently visited England, where he had an *affaire* with a certain Milady, which is again reminiscent of the pages of Dumas.

This D’Artagnan in the flesh married Charlotte Anne de Chanlecy, and the last of his direct descendants died in Paris in the latter years of the eighteenth century, but collateral branches of the family appear still to exist in Gascony, and there was a certain Baron de Batz, a Béarnais, who made a daring attempt to save Marie Antoinette in 1793.

The inception of the whole work in Dumas’ mind, as he says, came to him while he was making research in the “Bibliothèque Royale” for his history of Louis XIV.

Thus from these beginnings grew up that series of romances which gave undying fame to Alexandre Dumas, and to the world of readers a series of characters and scenes associated with the mediæval history of France, which, before or since, have not been equalled.

Alexandre Dumas has been described as something of the soldier, the cook, and the traveller, more of the journalist, diplomatist, and poet, and, more than all else, the dramatist, romancer, and *raconteur*. He himself has said that he was a “veritable Wandering Jew of literature.”

His versatility in no way comprised his abilities, and, while conceit and egoism played a not unimportant share in his make-up, his affability — when he so chose — caused him to be ranked highly in the estimation of his equals and contemporaries. By the cur-dogs, which always snap at the heels of a more splendid animal, he was not ranked so high.

Certain of these were for ever twitting him publicly of his creed, race, and foibles. It is recorded by Theodore de Bauville, in his “Odes,” that one Jacquot hailed Dumas in the open street with a ribald jeer, when, calmly turning to his detractor, Dumas said, simply: “Hast thou dined to-day, Jacquot?” Then it was that this said Jacquot published the slanderous brochure, “*La Maison Dumas et Cie*,” which has gone down as something considerable of a sensation in the annals of literary history; so much so, indeed, that most writers who have had occasion to refer to Dumas’ literary career have apparently half-believed its accusations, which, truth to tell, may have had some bearing on “things as they were,” had they but been put forward as a bit of temperate criticism rather than as a sweeping condemnation.

To give the reader an idea of the Dumas of 1840, one can scarcely do better than present his portrait as sketched by De Villemessant, the founder and brilliant editor of the *Figaro*, when Dumas was at the height of his glory, and a grasp of his hand was better than a touch of genius to those receiving it:

“At no time and among no people had it till then been granted to a writer to achieve fame in every direction; in serious drama and in comedy, and novels of adventure and of domestic interest, in humourous stories and in pathetic tales, Alexandre Dumas had been alike successful. The frequenters of the Théâtre Français owed him evenings of delight, but so did the general public as well. Dumas alone had had the power to touch, interest, or amuse, not only Paris or France, but the whole world. If all other novelists had been swallowed up in an earthquake, this one would have been able to supply the leading libraries of Europe. If all other dramatists had died, Alexandre Dumas could have occupied every stage; his magic name on a playbill or affixed to a newspaper *feuilleton* ensured the sale of that issue or a full house at the theatre. He was king of the stage, prince of *feuilletonists*, *the* literary man *par excellence*, in that Paris then so full of intellect. When he opened his lips the most eloquent held their breath to listen; when he entered a room the wit of man, the beauty of woman, the pride of life, grew dim in the radiance of his glory; he reigned over Paris in right of his sovereign intellect, the only monarch who for an entire century had understood how to draw to himself the adoration of all classes of society, from the Faubourg St. Germain to the Batignolles.

“Just as he united in himself capabilities of many kinds, so he displayed in his person the perfection of many races. From the negro he had derived the frizzled hair and those thick lips on which Europe had laid a delicate smile of ever-varying meaning; from the southern races he derived his vivacity of gesture and speech, from the northern his solid frame and broad shoulders and a figure which, while it showed no lack of French elegance, was powerful enough to have made green with envy the gentlemen of the Russian Life-Guards.”

Dumas’ energy and output were tremendous, as all know. It is recorded that on one occasion, — in the later years of his life, when, as was but natural, he had tired somewhat, — after a day at *la chasse*, he withdrew to a cottage near by to rest until the others should rejoin him, after having finished their sport. This they did within a reasonably short time, — whether one hour or two is not stated with definiteness, — when they found him sitting before the fire “twirling his thumbs.” On being interrogated, he replied that he had not been sitting there long; *in fact, he had just written the first act of a new play*.

The French journal, *La Revue*, tells the following incident, which sounds new. Some years before his death, Dumas had written a somewhat quaint letter to Napoleon III., apropos of a play which had been condemned by the French censor. In this epistle he commenced:

“Sire: — In 1830, and, indeed, even to-day, there are three men at the head of French literature. These three men are Victor Hugo, Lamartine, and myself. Although I am the least of the three, the five continents have made me the most popular, probably because the one was a thinker, the other a dreamer, while I am merely a writer of commonplace tales.”

This letter goes on to plead the cause of his play, and from this circumstance the censorship was afterward removed.

A story is told of an incident which occurred at a rehearsal of “Les Trois Mousquetaires” at the “Ambigu.” This story is strangely reminiscent of another incident which happened at a rehearsal of Halévy’s “Guido et Génevra,” but it is still worth recounting here, if only to emphasize the indomitable energy and perspicacity of Dumas.

It appears that a *pompier* — that gaudy, glistening fireman who is always present at functions of all sorts on the continent of Europe — who was watching the rehearsal, was observed by Dumas to suddenly leave his point of vantage and retire. Dumas followed him and inquired his reason for withdrawing. “What made you go away?” Dumas asked of him. “Because that last act did not interest me so much as the others,” was the answer. Whereupon Dumas sent for the prompt-book and threw that portion relating to that particular tableau into the fire, and forthwith set about to rewrite it on the spot. “It does not amuse the *pompier*,” said Dumas, “but I know what it wants.” An hour and a half later, at the finish of the rehearsal, the actors were given their new words for the seventh tableau.

In spite of the varied success with which his plays met, Dumas was, we may say, first of all a dramatist, if construction of plot and the moving about of dashing and splendid figures counts for anything; and it most assuredly does.

This very same qualification is what makes the romances so vivid and thrilling; and they do not falter either in accessory or fact.

The cloaks of his swashbucklering heroes are always the correct shade of scarlet; their rapiers, their swords, or their pistols are always rightly tuned, and their entrances and their exits correctly and most appropriately timed.

When his characters represent the poverty of a tatterdemalion, they do it with a sincerity that is inimitable, and the lusty throatings of a D'Artagnan are never a hollow mockery of something they are not.

Dumas drew his characters of the stage and his personages of the romances with the brilliance and assurance of a Velasquez, rather than with the finesse of a Praxiteles, and for that reason they live and introduce themselves as cosmopolitans, and are to be appreciated only as one studies or acquires something of the spirit from which they have been evolved.

Of Dumas' own uproarious good nature many have written. Albert Vandam tells of a certain occasion when he went to call upon the novelist at St. Germain, — and he reckoned Dumas the most lovable and genial among all of his host of acquaintances in the great world of Paris, — that he overheard, as he was entering the study, "a loud burst of laughter." "I had sooner wait until monsieur's visitors are gone," said he. "Monsieur has no visitors," said the servant. "Monsieur often laughs like that at his work."

Dumas as a man of affairs or as a politician was not the success that he was in the world of letters. His activities were great, and his enthusiasm for any turn of affairs with which he allied himself remarkable; but, whether he was *en voyage* on a whilom political mission, at work as "Director of Excavations" at Pompeii, or founding or conducting a new journal or a new playhouse, his talents were manifestly at a discount. In other words, he was singularly unfit for public life; he was not an organizer, nor had he executive ability, though he had not a little of the skill of prophecy and foresight as to many turns of fortune's wheel with respect to world power and the comity of nations.

Commenting upon the political state of Europe, he said: "Geographically, Prussia has the form of a serpent, and, like it, she appears to be asleep, in order to gain strength to swallow everything around her." All of his prophecy was not fulfilled, to be sure, but a huge slice was fed into her maw from out of the body of France, and, looking at things at a time fifty years ahead of that of which Dumas wrote, — that is, before the Franco-Prussian War, — it would seem as though the serpent's appetite was still unsatisfied.

In 1847, when Dumas took upon himself to wish for a seat in the government, he besought the support of the constituency of the borough in which he had lived — St. Germain. But St. Germain denied it him — "on moral grounds.” In the following year, when Louis-Philippe had abdicated, he made the attempt once again.

The republican constituency of Joigny challenged him with respect to his title of Marquis de la Pailleterie, and his having been a secretary in the Orleans Bureau. The following is his reply — verbatim — as publicly delivered at a meeting of electors, and is given here as illustrating well the earnestness and devotion to a code which many Puritan and prudish moralists have themselves often ignored:

“I was formerly called the Marquis de la Pailleterie, no doubt. It was my father’s name, and one of which I was very proud, being then unable to claim a glorious one of my own make. But at present, when I am somebody, I call myself Alexandre Dumas, and nothing more; and every one knows me, yourselves among the rest — you, you absolute nobodies, who have come here merely to boast, to-morrow, after having given me insult to-night, that you have known the great Dumas. If such were your avowed ambition, you could have satisfied it without having failed in the common courtesies of gentlemen. There is no doubt, either, about my having been a secretary to the Duc d’Orleans, and that I have received many favours from his family. If you are ignorant of the meaning of the phrase, ‘The memories of the heart,’ allow me, at least, to proclaim loudly that I am not, and that I entertain toward this family of royal blood all the devotion of an honourable man.”

That Dumas was ever accused of making use of the work of others, of borrowing ideas wherever he found them, and, indeed, of plagiarism itself, — which is the worst of all, — has been mentioned before, and the argument for or against is not intended to be continued here.

Dumas himself has said much upon the subject in defence of his position, and the contemporary scribblers of the time have likewise had their say — and it was not brief; but of all that has been written and said, the following is pertinent and deliciously naïve, and, coming from Dumas himself, has value:

“One morning I had only just opened my eyes when my servant entered my bedroom and brought me a letter upon which was written the word *urgent*. He drew back the curtains; the weather — doubtless by some mistake — was fine, and the brilliant sunshine entered the room like a conqueror. I rubbed my eyes and looked at the letter to see who had sent it, astonished at the same time that there should be only one. The handwriting was quite unknown to me. Having turned it over and over for a minute or two, trying to guess whose the writing was, I opened it and this is what I found:

"'Sir: — I have read your "Three Musketeers," being well to do, and having plenty of spare time on my hands — '

"('Lucky fellow!' said I; and I continued reading.)

"'I admit that I found it fairly amusing; but, having plenty of time before me, I was curious enough to wish to know if you really did find them in the "Memoirs of M. de La Fère." As I was living in Carcassonne, I wrote to one of my friends in Paris to go to the Bibliothèque Royale, and ask for these memoirs, and to write and let me know if you had really and truly borrowed your facts from them. My friend, whom I can trust, replied that you had copied them word for word, and that it is what you authors always do. So I give you fair notice, sir, that I have told people all about it at Carcassonne, and, if it occurs again, we shall cease subscribing to the *Siècle*.

"'Yours sincerely,

"' — — .'

"I rang the bell.

"'If any more letters come for me to-day,' said I to the servant, 'you will keep them back, and only give them to me sometime when I seem a bit too happy.'

"'Manuscripts as well, sir?'

"'Why do you ask that question?'

"'Because some one has brought one this very moment.'

"'Good! that is the last straw! Put it somewhere where it won't be lost, but don't tell me where.'

"He put it on the mantelpiece, which proved that my servant was decidedly a man of intelligence.

"It was half-past ten; I went to the window. As I have said, it was a beautiful day. It appeared as if the sun had won a permanent victory over the clouds. The passers-by all looked happy, or, at least, contented.

"Like everybody else, I experienced a desire to take the air elsewhere than at my window, so I dressed, and went out.

"As chance would have it — for when I go out for a walk I don't care whether it is in one street or another — as chance would have it, I say, I passed the Bibliothèque Royale.

"I went in, and, as usual, found Pâris, who came up to me with a charming smile.

"'Give me,' said I, 'the "Memoirs of La Fère."'

"He looked at me for a moment as if he thought I was crazy; then, with the utmost gravity, he said, 'You know very well they don't exist, because you said yourself they did!'

"His speech, though brief, was decidedly pithy.

"By way of thanks I made Pâris a gift of the autograph I had received from Carcassonne.

"When he had finished reading it, he said, 'If it is any consolation to you to know it, you are not the first who has come to ask for the "Memoirs of La Fère"; I have already seen at least thirty people who came solely for that purpose, and no doubt they hate you for sending them on a fool's errand.'

"As I was in search of material for a novel, and as there are people who declare novels are to be found ready-made, I asked for the catalogue.

"Of course, I did not discover anything."

* * *

Every one knows of Dumas' great fame as a gastronome and epicure; some recall, also, that he himself was a *cuisinier* of no mean abilities. How far his capacities went in this direction, and how wide was his knowledge of the subject, can only be gleaned by a careful reading of his great "Dictionnaire de Cuisine." Still further into the subject he may be supposed to have gone from the fact that he also published an inquiry, or an open letter, addressed to the *gourmands* of all countries, on the subject of mustard.

It is an interesting subject, to be sure, but a trifling one for one of the world's greatest writers to spend his time upon; say you, dear reader? Well! perhaps! But it is a most fascinating contribution to the literature of epicurism, and quite worth looking up and into. The history of the subtle spice is traced down through Biblical and Roman times to our own day, chronologically, etymologically, botanically, and practically. It will be, and doubtless has been, useful to other compilers of essays on good cheer.

Whatever may be the subtle abilities which make the true romancer, or rather those which make his romances things of life and blood, they were possessed by Alexandre Dumas.

Perhaps it is the more easy to construct a romantic play than it is to erect, from matter-of-fact components, a really engrossing romantic novel.

Dumas’ abilities seem to fit in with both varieties alike, and if he did build to order, the result was in most cases no less successful than if evolved laboriously.

It is a curious fact that many serial contributions — if we are to believe the literary gossip of the time — are only produced as the printer is waiting for copy. The formula is manifestly not a good one upon which to build, but it has been done, and successfully, by more writers than one, and with scarce a gap unbridged.

Dickens did it, — if it is allowable to mention him here, — and Dumas himself did it, — many times, — and with a wonderful and, one may say, inspired facility, but then his facility, none the less than his vitality, made possible much that was not granted to the laborious Zola.

Dumas was untiring to the very last. His was a case of being literally worked out — not worked to death, which is quite a different thing.

It has been said by Dumas *fils* that in the latter years of the elder’s life he would sit for length upon length of time, pen in hand, and not a word would flow therefrom, ere the ink had dried.

An interesting article on Dumas’ last days appeared in *La Revue* in 1903. It dealt with the sadness and disappointments of Dumas’ later days, in spite of which the impression conveyed of the great novelist’s personality is very vivid, and he emerges from it much as his books would lead one to expect — a hearty, vigorous creature, surcharged with vitality, with desire to live and let live, a man possessed of almost equally prominent faults and virtues, and generous to a fault.

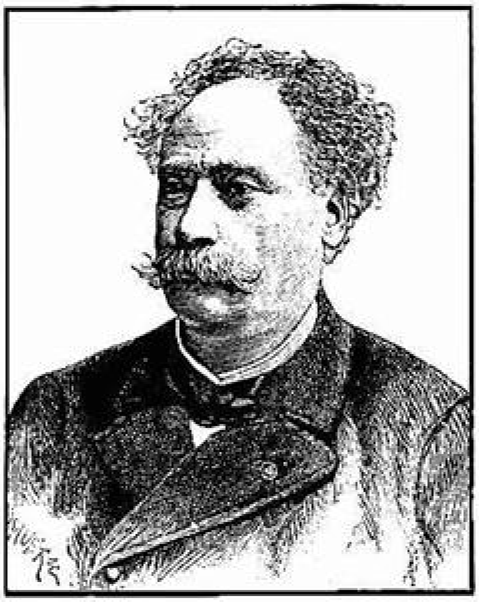

Alexandre Dumas, Fils

Money he had never been able to keep. He had said himself, at a time when he was earning a fortune, “I can keep everything but money. Money unfortunately always slips through my fingers.” The close of his life was a horrible struggle to make ends meet. When matters came to a crisis Dumas would pawn some of the valuable *objets d’art* he had collected in the opulent past, or ask his son for assistance. But, though the sum asked was always given, there were probably few things which the old man would not have preferred to this appeal to the younger author.

As he grew old, Dumas *père* became almost timid in his attitude toward the son, whose disapproval had frequently found expression in advice and warning. But Dumas could not settle down, and he could not become careful. Neither of these things was in his nature, and there was consequently always some little undercurrent of friction between them. To the end of his days his money was anybody’s who liked to come and ask for it, and nothing but the final clouding of his intellectual capacity could reduce his optimism. Then, it is true, he fell into a state of sustained depression. The idea that his reputation would not last haunted him.

In 1870, when Dumas was already very ill, his son, anxious that he should not be in Paris during its investment by the Germans, took him to a house he had at Puys, near Dieppe. Here the great man rapidly sank, and, except at meal-times, passed his time in a state of heavy sleep, until a sudden attack of apoplexy finally seized him. He never rallied after it, and died upon the day the Prussian soldiers took possession of Dieppe.

Many stories are rife of Dumas the prodigal. Some doubtless are true, many are not. Those which he fathers himself, we might well accept as being true. Surely he himself should know.

The following incident which happened in the last days of his life certainly has the ring of truth about it.

When in his last illness he left Paris for his son's country house near Dieppe, he had but twenty francs, the total fortune of the man who had earned millions.

On arriving at Puys, Dumas placed the coin on his bedroom chimneypiece, and there it remained all through his illness.

One day he was seated in his chair near the window, chatting with his son, when his eye fell on the gold piece.

A recollection of the past crossed his mind.

"Fifty years ago, when I went to Paris," he said, "I had a louis. Why have people accused me of prodigality? I have always kept that louis. See — there it is."

And he showed his son the coin, smiling feebly as he did so.

CHAPTER IV.

DUMAS' CONTEMPORARIES

Among those of the world's great names in literature contemporary with Dumas, but who knew Paris ere he first descended upon it to try his fortune in its arena of letters, were Lamartine, who already, in 1820, had charmed his public with his "Meditations;" Hugo, who could claim but twenty years himself, but who had already sung his "Odes et Ballades," and Chateaubriand.

Soulié and De Vigny won their fame with poems and plays in the early twenties, De Musset and Chénier followed before a decade had passed, and Gautier was still serving his apprenticeship.

It was the proud Goethe who said of these young men of the twenties, "They all come from Chateaubriand." Béranger, too, "the little man," even though he was drawing on toward the prime of life, was also singing melodiously: it was his *chansons*, it is said, that upset the Bourbon throne and made way for the "citizen-king." Nodier, of fanciful and fantastic rhyme, was already at work, and Mérimée had not yet taken up the administrative duties of overseeing the preserving process which at his instigation was, at the hands of a paternal government, being applied to the historical architectural monuments throughout France; a glory which it is to be feared has never been wholly granted to Mérimée, as was his due.

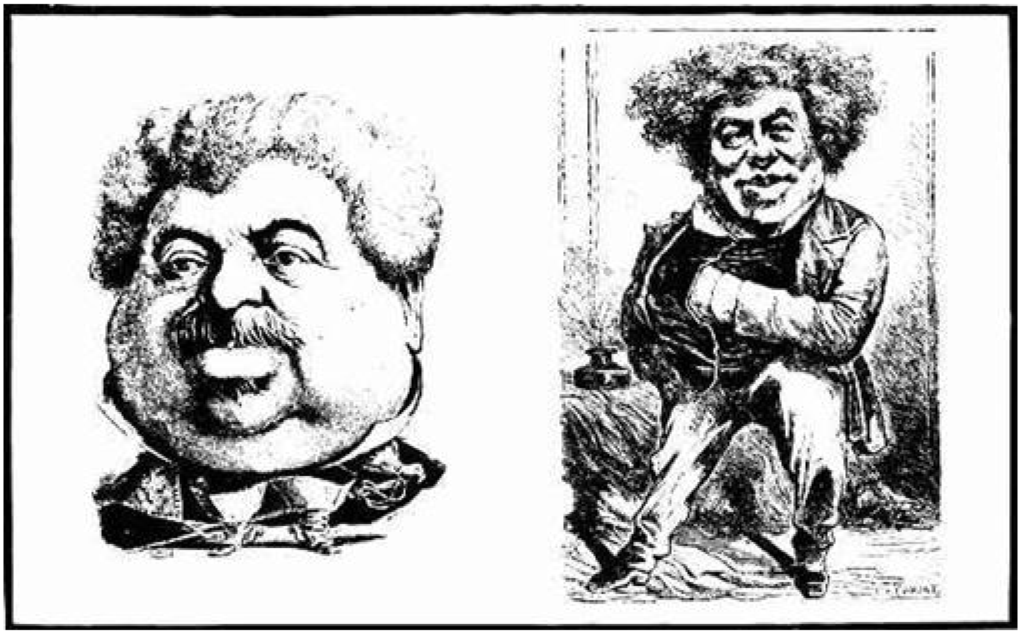

TWO FAMOUS CARICATURES OF ALEXANDRE DUMAS

Guizot, the *bête noire* of the later Louis-Philippe, was actively writing from 1825 to 1830, and his antagonist, Thiers, was at the same period producing what Carlyle called the “voluminous and untrustworthy labours of a brisk little man in his way;” which recalls to mind the fact that Carlylean rant — like most of his prose — is a well-nigh insufferable thing.

At this time Mignet, the historian, was hard at work, and St. Beauve had just deserted *materia medica* for literature. Michelet’s juvenile histories were a production of the time, while poor, unhonoured, and then unsung, Balzac was grinding out his pittance — in after years to grow into a monumental literary legacy — in a garret.

Eugène Sue had not yet taken to literary pathways, and was scouring the seas as a naval surgeon.

The drama was prolific in names which we have since known as masters, Scribe, Halévy, and others.

George Sand, too, was just beginning that grand literary life which opened with “Indiana” in 1832, and lasted until 1876. She, like so many of the great, whose name and fame, like Dumas’ own, has been perpetuated by a monument in stone, the statue which was unveiled in the little town of her birth on the Indre, La Châtre, in 1903.

Like Dumas, too, hers was a cyclopean industry, and so it followed that in the present twentieth century (in the year 1904), another and a more glorious memorial to France’s greatest woman writer was unveiled in the Garden of the Luxembourg.

Among the women famous in the *monde* of Paris at the time of Dumas’ arrival were Mesdames Desbordes-Valmore, Amable Tastu, and Delphine Gay.

“For more than half a century this brilliant group of men and women sustained the world of ideas and poetry,” said Dumas, in his “Mémoires,” “and I, too,” he continued, “have reached the same plane ... unaided by intrigue or coterie, and using none other than my own work as the stepping-stone in my pathway.”

Dumas cannot be said to have been niggardly with his praise of the work of others. He said of a sonnet of Arnault’s — ”La Feuille” — that it was a masterpiece which an André Chénier, a Lamartine, or a Hugo might have envied, and that for himself, not knowing what his “literary brothers” might have done, he would have given for it “any one of his dramas.”

It was into the office of Arnault, who was chief of a department in the Université, that Béranger took up his labours as a copying-clerk, — as did Dumas in later years, — and it was while here that Béranger produced his first ballad, the “Roi d’Yvetot.”

In 1851 Millet was at his height, if one considers what he had already achieved by his “great agrarian poems,” as they have been called. Gautier called them “Georgics in paint,” and such they undoubtedly were. Millet would hardly be called a Parisian; he was not of the life of the city, but rather of that of the countryside, by his having settled down at Barbizon in 1849, and practically never left it except to go to Paris on business.

His life has been referred to as one of “sublime monotony,” but it was hardly that. It was a life devoted to the telling of a splendid story, that of the land as contrasted with that of the paved city streets.

Corot was a real Parisian, and it was only in his early life in the provinces that he felt the bitterness of life and longed for the flagstones of the quais, for the Tuileries, the Seine, and his beloved Rue de Bac, where he was born on 10th Thermidor, Year IV. (July 28, 1796). Corot early took to painting the scenes of the metropolis, as we learn from his biography, notably at the point along the river bank where the London steamer moors to-day. But these have disappeared; few or none of his juvenile efforts have come down to us.

Corot returned to Paris, after many years spent in Rome, during the reign of Louis-Philippe, when affairs were beginning to stir themselves in literature and art. In 1839 his "Site d'Italie" and a "Soir" were shown at the annual Salon, — though, of course, he had already been an exhibitor there, — and inspired a sonnet of Théophile Gautier, which concludes:

"Corot, ton nom modest, écrit dans un coin noir."

Corot's pictures *were* unfortunately hung in the darkest corners — for fifteen years. As he himself has said, it was as if he were in the catacombs. In 1855 Corot figured as one of the thirty-four judges appointed by Napoleon III. to make the awards for paintings exhibited in the world's first Universal Exhibition. It is not remarked that Corot had any acquaintance or friendships with Dumas or with Victor Hugo, of whom he remarked, "This Victor Hugo seems to be pretty famous in literature." He knew little of his contemporaries, and the hurly-burly knew less of him. He was devoted, however, to the genius of his superiors — as he doubtless thought them. Of Delacroix he said one day, "He is an eagle, and I am only a lark singing little songs in gray clouds."

A literary event of prime importance during the latter years of Dumas' life in Paris, when his own purse was growing thin, was the publication of the "Histoire de Jules César," written by Napoleon III.

Nobody ever seems to have taken the second emperor seriously in any of his finer expressions of sentiment, and, as may be supposed, the publication of this immortal literary effort was the occasion of much sarcasm, banter, violent philippic, and sardonic criticism.

Possibly the world was not waiting for this work, but royalty, no less than other great men, have their hobbies and their fads; Nero fiddled, and the first Napoleon read novels and threw them forthwith out of the carriage window, so it was quite permissible that Napoleon III. should have perpetuated this life history of an emperor whom he may justly and truly have admired — perhaps envied, in a sort of impossible way.

Already Louis Napoleon's collection of writings was rather voluminous, so this came as no great surprise, and his literary reputation was really greater than that which had come to him since fate made him the master of one of the foremost nations of Europe.

From his critics we learn that "he lacked the grace of a popular author; that he was quite incapable of interesting the reader by a charm of manner;

and that his *style* was meagre, harsh, and grating, but epigrammatic.” No Frenchman could possibly be otherwise.

Dumas relates, again, the story of Sir Walter Scott’s visit to Paris, seeking documents which should bear upon the reign of Napoleon. Dining with friends one evening, he was invited the next day to dine with Barras. But Scott shook his head. “I cannot dine with that man,” he replied. “I shall write evil of him, and people in Scotland would say that I have flung the dishes from his own table at his head.”

It is not recorded that Dumas’ knowledge of swordsmanship was based on practical experience, but certainly no more scientific sword-play of *passe* and *touche* has been put into words than that wonderful attack and counter-attack in the opening pages of “Les Trois Mousquetaires.”

Of the *duel d’honneur* there is less to be said, though Dumas more than once sought to reconcile estranged and impetuous spirits who would have run each other through, either by leaden bullet or the sword. A notable instance of this was in the memorable *affaire* between Louis Blanc of *L’Homme-Libre* and Dujarrier-Beauvallon of *La Presse*. The latter told Dumas that he had no alternative but to fight, though he went like a lamb to the slaughter, and had no knowledge of the *code* nor any skill with weapons.

Dumas *père* was implored by the younger Dumas — both of whom took Dujarrier’s interests much to heart — to go and see Grisier and claim his intervention. “I cannot do it,” said the elder; “the first and foremost thing to do is to safeguard his reputation, which is the more precious because it is his first duel.” The Grisier referred to was the great master of fence of the time who was immortalized by Dumas in his “Maître d’Armes.”

Dumas himself is acknowledged, however, on one occasion, at least, to have acted as second — co-jointly with General Fleury — in an *affaire* which, happily, never came off.

It was this Blanc-Dujarrier duel which brought into further prominent notice that most remarkable and quasi-wonderful woman, Lola Montez; that daughter of a Spaniard and a Creole, a native of Limerick, pupil of a boarding-school at Bath, and one-time resident of Seville; to which may be added, on the account of Lord Malmesbury, “The woman who in Munich set fire to the magazine of revolution which was ready to burst forth all over Europe.”

She herself said that she had also lived in Calcutta as the wife of an officer in the employ of the East India Company; had at one time been reduced to singing in the streets at Brussels; had danced at the Italian Opera in London, — ”not much, but as well as half the ugly wooden women who were there,” — and had failed as a dancer in Warsaw.

“This illiterate schemer,” says Vandam, “who probably knew nothing of geography or history, had pretty well the Almanach de Gotha by heart.” “Why did I not come earlier to Paris?” she once said. “What was the good? There was a king there bourgeois to his finger-nails, tight-fisted besides, and notoriously the most moral and the best father in all the world.”

This woman, it seems, was a beneficiary in the testament of Dujarrier, who died as a result of his duel, to the extent of eighteen shares in the Théâtre du Palais Royal, and in the trial which followed at Rouen, at which were present all shades and degrees of literary and professional people, Dumas, Gustave Flaubert, and others, she insisted upon appearing as a witness, for no reason whatever, apparently, than that of further notoriety. “Six months from this time,” as one learns from Vandam, “her name was almost forgotten by all of us except Alexandre Dumas, who once and again alluded to her.” “Though far from superstitious, Dumas, who had been as much smitten with her as most of her admirers, avowed that he was glad that she had disappeared. ‘She has the evil eye,’ said he, ‘and is sure to bring bad luck to any one who closely links his destiny with hers.’”

There is no question but that Dumas was right, for she afterward — to mention but two instances of her remarkably active career — brought disaster “most unkind” upon Louis I. of Bavaria; committed bigamy with an English officer who was drowned at Lisbon; and, whether in the guise of lovers or husbands, all, truly, who became connected with her met with almost immediate disaster.

The mere mention of Lola Montez brings to mind another woman of the same category, though different in character, Alphonsine Plessis, more popularly known as La Dame aux Camélias. She died in 1847, and her name was not Marie or Marguérite Duplessis, but as above written.

Dumas *fils* in his play did not idealize Alphonsine Plessis’ character; indeed, Dumas *père* said that he did not even enlarge or exaggerate any incident — all of which was common property in the *demi-monde* — ”save that he ascribed her death to any cause but the right one.” “I know he made use of it," said the father, "but he showed the malady aggravated by Duval's desertion."

We learn that the elder Dumas "wept like a baby" over the reading of his son's play. But his tears did not drown his critical faculty. "At the beginning of the third act," said Dumas *père*, "I was wondering how Alexandre would get his Marguérite back to town, ... but the way Alexandre got out of the difficulty proves that he is my son, every inch of him, and at the very outset of his career he is a better dramatist than I am ever likely to be."

"Alphonsine Plessis was decidedly a real personage, but not an ordinary one in her walk of life," said Doctor Véron. "A woman of her refinement might not have been impossible in a former day, because the grisette — and subsequently the *femme entretenue* — was not then even surmised. She interests me much; she is the best dressed woman in Paris, she neither conceals nor hides her vices, and she does not continually hint about money; in short, she is wonderful."

"La Dame aux Camélias" appeared within eighteen months of the actual death of the heroine, and went into every one's hands, interest being whetted meanwhile by the recent event, and yet more by much gossip — scandal if you will — which universally appeared in the Paris press. Her pedigree was evolved and diagnosed by Count G. de Contades in a French bibliographical journal, *Le Livre*, which showed that she was descended from a "*guénuchetonne*" (slattern) of Longé, in the canton of Brionze, near Alençon; a predilection which the elder Dumas himself had previously put forth when he stated that, "I am certain that one might find taint either on the father's side, or on the mother's, probably on the former's, but more probably still on both."

The following eulogy, extracted from a letter written to Dumas *fils* by Victor Hugo upon the occasion of the inhumation of the ashes of Alexandre Dumas at Villers-Cotterets, whither they were removed from Puits, shows plainly the esteem in which his literary abilities were held by the more sober-minded of his compeers:

"Mon cher Confrère: — I learn from the papers of the funeral of Alexandre Dumas at Villers-Cotterets.... It is with regret that I am unable to attend.... But I am with you in my heart.... What I would say, let me write.... No popularity of the past century has equalled that of Alexandre Dumas. His successes were more than successes: they were triumphs.... The name of Alexandre Dumas is more than 'Français, il est Européen;' and it is more than European, it is universal. His theatre has been given publicity in all lands, and his romances have been translated into all tongues. Alexandre Dumas was one of those men we can call the sowers of civilization.... Alexandre Dumas is seducing, fascinating, interesting, amusing, and informing.... All the emotions, the most pathetic, all the irony, all the comedy, all the analysis of romance, and all the intuition of history are found in the supreme works constructed by this great and vigorous architect.

“... His spirit was capable of all the miracles he performed; this he bequeathed and this survives.... Your renown but continues his glory.

“... Your father and I were young together.... He was a grand and good friend.... I had not seen him since 1857.... As I entered Paris Alexandre Dumas was leaving. I did not have even a parting shake of the hand.

“The visit which he made me in my exile I will some day return to his tomb.

“*Cher confrère, fils de mon ami, je vous embrasse.*

“Victor Hugo.”

Of Dumas, Charles Reade said: “He has never been properly appreciated; he is the prince of dramatists, the king of romancists, and the emperor of good fellows.”

Dumas *fils* he thought a “vinegar-blooded iconoclast — shrewd, clever, audacious, introspective, and mathematically logical.”

The Cimetière du Père La Chaise has a contemporary interest with the names of many who were contemporaries of Dumas in the life and letters of his day.

Of course, sentimental interest first attaches itself to the Gothic canopy — built from the fragments of the convent of Paraclet — which enshrines the remains of Abelard and Heloïse (1142-64), and this perhaps is as it should be, but for those who are conversant with the life of Paris of Dumas’ day, this most “famous resting-place” has far more interest because of its shelter given to so many of Dumas’ contemporaries and friends.

Scribe, who was buried here 1861; Michelet, d. 1874; Delphine Cambacérès, 1867; Lachambeaudie, 1872; Soulie, 1847; Balzac, 1850; Ch. Nodier, 1844; C. Delavigne, 1843; Delacroix, the painter, 1865; Talma, the tragedian, 1826; Boieldieu, the composer, 1834; Chopin, 1849; Herold, 1833; General Foy, 1825; David d’Angers, 1856; Hugo, 1828 (the father of

Victor Hugo); David, the painter, 1825; Alfred de Musset, 1857; Rossini, 1868.

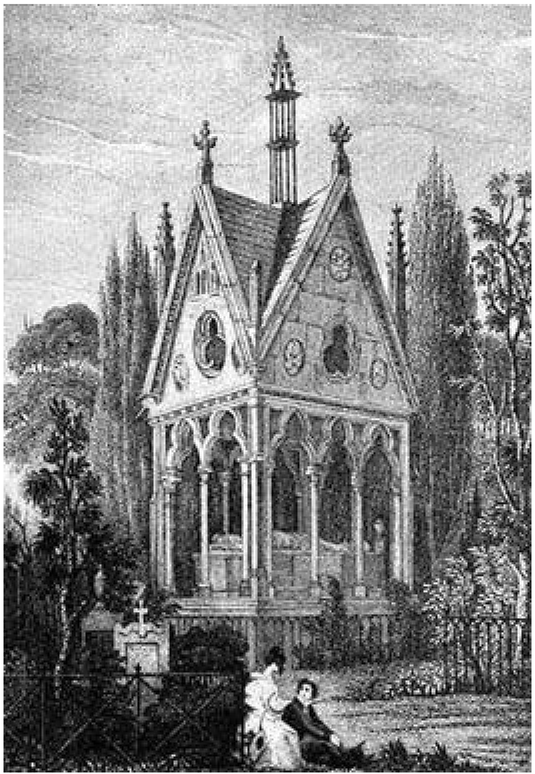

TOMB OF ABELARD AND HÉLOÏSE

CHAPTER V.

THE PARIS OF DUMAS

Dumas’ real descent upon the Paris of letters and art was in 1823, when he had given up his situation in the notary’s office at Crépy, and after the eventful holiday journey of a few weeks before. His own account of this, his fourth entrance into the city, states that he was “landed from the coach at five A. M. in the Rue Bouloi, No. 9. It was Sunday morning, and Bourbon Paris was very gloomy on a Sunday.”

Within a short time of his arrival the young romancer was making calls, of a nature which he hoped would provide him some sort of employment until he should make his way in letters, upon many bearers of famous Bourbon names who lived in the Faubourgs St. Germain and St. Honoré — all friends and compatriots of his father.

He had brought with him letters formerly written to his father, and hoped to use them as a means of introduction. He approached Marshal Jourdain, General Sebastiani, the Duc de Bellune, and others, but it was not until he presented himself to General Foy, at 64 Rue du Mont Blanc, — the deputy for his department, — that anything to his benefit resulted.

Finally, through the kindly aid of General Foy, Dumas — son of a republican general though he was — found himself seated upon a clerk’s stool, quill in hand, writing out dictation at the secretary’s bureau of the Duc d’Orleans.

“I then set about to look for lodgings,” said Dumas, “and, after going up and down many staircases, I came to a halt in a little room on a fourth story, which belonged to that immense pile known as the ‘Pâté des Italiens.’ The room looked out on the courtyard, and I was to have it for one hundred and twenty francs per annum.”

From that time on Dumas may be said to have known Paris intimately — its life, its letters, its hotels and restaurants, its theatres, its salons, and its boulevards.

So well did he know it that he became a part and parcel of it.

His literary affairs and relations are dealt with elsewhere, but the various aspects of the social and economic life of Paris at the time Dumas knew its very pulse-beats must be gleaned from various contemporary sources.

General Foy's Residence

The real Paris which Dumas knew — the Paris of the Second Empire — exists no more. The order of things changeth in all but the conduct of the stars, and Paris, more than any other centre of activity, scintillates and fluctuates like the changings of the money-markets.

The life that Dumas lived, so far as it has no bearing on his literary labours or the evolving of his characters, is quite another affair from that of his yearly round of work.

He knew intimately all the gay world of Paris, and fresh echoes of the part he played therein are being continually presented to us.

He knew, also, quite as intimately, certain political and social movements which took place around about him, in which he himself had no part.

It was in the fifties of the nineteenth century that Paris first became what one might call a coherent mass. This was before the days of the application of the adjective “Greater” to the areas of municipalities. Since then we have had, of course, a “Greater Paris” as we have a “Greater London” and a

“Greater New York,” but at the commencement of the Second Empire (1852) there sprang into being, — ”jumped at one’s eyes,” as the French say, — when viewed from the heights of the towers of Notre Dame, an immense panorama, which showed the results of a prodigious development, radiating far into the distance, from the common centre of the *Ile de la Cité* and the still more ancient *Lutèce*.

Up to the construction of the present fortifications, — under Louis-Philippe, — Paris had been surrounded, at its outer confines, by a simple *octroi* barrier of about twenty-five kilometres in circumference, and pierced by fifty-four entrances. Since 1860 this wall has been raised and the limits of what might be called Paris proper have been extended up to the fortified lines.

This fortification wall was thirty-four kilometres in length; was strengthened by ninety-four bastions, and surrounded and supported by thirteen detached forts. Sixty-five openings gave access to the inner city, by which the roadways, waterways, and railways entered. These were further distinguished by classification as follows: *portes* — of which there were fifty; *poternes* — of which there were five; and *passages* — of which there were ten. Nine railways entered the city, and the “*Ceinture*” or girdle railway, which was to bind the various *gares*, was already conceived.

At this time, too, the Quais received marked attention and development; trees were planted along the streets which bordered upon them, and a vast system of sewerage was planned which became — and endures until to-day — one of the sights of Paris, for those who take pleasure in such unsavoury amusements.

Lighting by gas was greatly improved, and street-lamps were largely multiplied, with the result that Paris became known for the first time as “*La Ville Lumière*.”

A score or more of villages, or *bourgs*, before 1860, were between the limits of these two barriers, but were at that time united by the *loi d’annexion*, and so “Greater Paris” came into being.

The principle *bourgs* which lost their identity, which, at the same time is, in a way, yet preserved, were Auteuil, Passy, les Ternes, Batignolles, Montmartre, la Chapelle, la Villette, Belleville, Ménilmontant, Charenton, and Bercy; and thus the population of Paris grew, as in the twinkling of an eye, from twelve hundred thousand to sixteen hundred thousand; and its superficial area from thirty-four hundred *hectares* to more than eight thousand — a *hectare* being about the equivalent of two and a half acres.

During the period of the "Restoration," which extended from the end of the reign of the great Napoleon to the coming of Louis-Philippe (1814-30), Paris may be said to have been in, or at least was at the beginning of, its golden age of prosperity.

In a way the era was somewhat inglorious, but in spite of liberal and commonplace opinion, there was made an earnest effort to again secure the pride of place for French letters and arts; and it was then that the romantic school, with Dumas at its very head, attained its first importance.

It was not, however, until Louis-Philippe came into power that civic improvements made any notable progress, though the Pont des Invalides had been built, and gas-lamps, omnibuses, and sidewalks, had been introduced just previously.

Under Louis-Philippe were completed the Église de la Madeleine and the Arc de Triomphe d'Etoile. The Obelisk, — a gift from Mohammed Ali, Viceroy of Egypt, to Louis-Philippe, — the Colonne de Juillet, and the Ponts Louis-Philippe and du Carrousel were built, as well as the modern fortifications of Paris, with their detached forts of Mont Valerien, Ivry, Charenton, Nogent, etc.

There existed also the encircling boulevards just within the fortifications, and yet another parallel series on the north, beginning at the Madeleine and extending to the Colonne de Juillet.

It was not, however, until the Second Republic and the Second Empire of Napoleon III. that a hitherto unparallelled transformation was undertaken, and there sprung into existence still more broad boulevards and spacious squares, and many palatial civic and private establishments, the Bourse, the New Opera, and several theatres, the Ceinture Railway, and the Bois de Boulogne and the Bois de Vincennes.

By this time Dumas' activities were so great, or at least the product thereof was so great, that even his intimate knowledge of French life of a more heroic day could not furnish him all the material which he desired.

It was then that he produced those essentially modern stories of life in Paris of that day, which, slight though they are as compared with the longer romances, are best represented by the "Corsican Brothers," "Captain Pamphile," and "Gabriel Lambert."

Among the buildings at this time pulled down, on the Place du Carrousel, preparatory to the termination of the Louvre, was the Hôtel Longueville, the residence of the beautiful duchess of that name, celebrated for her support of the Fronde and her gallantries, as much as for her beauty. Dumas would have revelled in the following incident as the basis of a tale. In the arched roof of one of the cellars of the duchess' hôtel two skeletons of a very large size and in a perfect state of preservation were discovered, which have since been the object of many discussions on the part of the antiquarians, but *adhuc sub judice lis est*. Another discovery was made close by the skeletons, which is more interesting from a literary point of view; namely, that of a box, in carved steel, embellished with gilded brass knobs, and containing several papers. Among them was an amatory epistle in verse, from the Prince de Marsillac to the fair duchess. The other papers were letters relating to the state of affairs at that time; some from the hand of the celebrated Turenne, with memorandums, and of the Prince de Conti, "of great value to autograph collectors," said the newspaper accounts of the time, but assuredly of still more value to historians, or even novelists.

At this time Paris was peopled with many hundreds — perhaps thousands — of *mauvais sujets*, and frequent robberies and nightly outrages were more numerous than ever. The government at last hit on the plan of sending to the *bagnes* of Toulon and Brest for several of the turnkeys and gaolers of those great convict *dépôts*, to whom the features of all their former prisoners were perfectly known. These functionaries, accompanied by a policeman in plain clothes, perambulated every part of Paris by day, and by night frequented all the theatres, from the Grand Opéra downward, the low *cafés* and wine-shops. It appears that more than four hundred of these desperadoes were recognized and retransferred to their old quarters at Toulon. Some of these worthies had been carrying on schemes of swindling on a colossal scale, and more than one is described as having entered into large speculations on the Bourse. Perhaps it was from some such circumstance as this that Dumas evolved that wonderful narrative of the life of a forger, "Gabriel Lambert." One of the most noted in the craft was known by the *soubriquet* of Pierre Mandrin, the name of that *célébré* being conferred on account of his superiority and skill in assuming disguises. When arrested he was figuring as a Polish count, and covered with expensive rings and jewelry. The career of this ruffian is interesting. In 1839, while undergoing an imprisonment of two years for robbery, he attempted to make his escape by murdering the gaoler, but failed, however, and was sent to the galleys at Toulon for twenty years. In 1848 he did escape from Brest, and, notwithstanding the greatest exertions on the part of the police, he succeeded in crossing the whole of France and gaining Belgium, where he remained for some time. Owing to the persecutions of the Belgian police, he subsequently returned to France. He was so unfortunate as to be captured in the very act of breaking into a house at Besançon, but his prodigious activity enabled him once again to escape while on his way to prison, and he came to Paris. Being possessed of some money, he resolved to abandon his evil courses, and set up a greengrocer's shop in the Rue Rambuteau, which went on thrivingly for some time. But such an inactive life was insupportable to him, and he soon resumed his former exciting pursuits. Several robberies committed with consummate skill soon informed the police of the presence in Paris of some great master of the art of Mercury. The most experienced officers were accordingly sent out, but they made no capture until one of the Toulon gaolers fancied he recollected the convict under the features of an elegantly attired *lion* on the Boulevard des Italiens. A few hours afterward the luckless *échappé* was safely lodged at the Conciergerie. At his lodgings, besides the usual housebreaking implements, a complete assortment of costumes of every kind was discovered — from that of the dandy of the first water to the blouse of the artisan.

There is something more than a morbid interest which attaches itself to the former homes and haunts of a great author or artist. The emotion is something akin to sentiment, to be sure, but it is pardonable; far more so than the contemplation of many more popular and notorious places.

He who would follow the footsteps of Alexandre Dumas about Paris must either be fleet of foot, or one who can sustain a long march. At any rate, the progress will take a considerable time.

It is impossible to say in how many places he lived, though one gathers from the "Mémoires," and from contemporary information, that they numbered many score, and the uncharitable have further said that he found it more economical to move than to pay his rents. Reprehensible as this practice may be, Dumas was no single exponent of it — among artists and authors; and above all in his case, as we know, it resulted from imprudence and ofttimes misplaced confidence and generosity.

One of Dumas' early homes in Paris, jocularly called by him "La Pâté d'Italie," was situated in that famous centre of unconventionality, the Boulevard des Italiens, a typical tree-shaded and café-lined boulevard.

Its name was obviously acquired from its resemblance to, or suggestion of being constructed of, that mastic which is known in Germany as noodles, in Italy as macaroni, and in English-speaking countries as dough.

To-day the structure, as it then was, exists no more, though the present edifice at the corner of the Rue Louis le Grand, opposite the vaudeville theatre, has been assuredly stated as in no wise differing in general appearance from its prototype, and, as it is after the same ginger-cake style of architecture, it will serve its purpose.

Albert Vandam, in "An Englishman in Paris," that remarkable book of reminiscence whose authorship was so much in doubt when the work was first published, devoted a whole chapter to the intimacies of Dumas *père*; indeed, nearly every feature and character of prominence in the great world of Paris — at the time of which he writes — strides through the pages of this remarkably illuminating book, in a manner which is unequalled by any conventional volume of "Reminiscence," "Observations," or "Memoirs" yet written in the English language, dealing with the life of Paris — or, for that matter, of any other capital.

His account, also, of a "literary café" of the Paris of the forties could only have been written by one who knew the life intimately, and, so far as Dumas' acquaintances and contemporaries are concerned, Vandam's book throws many additional side-lights on an aspect which of itself lies in no perceptible shadow.

Even in those days the "boulevards" — the popular resort of the men of letters, artists, and musical folk — meant, as it does to-day, a somewhat restricted area in the immediate neighbourhood of the present Opera. At the corner of the Rue Lafitte was a tobacconist's shop, whose genius was a "splendid creature," of whom Alfred de Musset became so enamoured that his friends feared for an "imprudence on his part." The various elements of society and cliques had their favourite resorts and rendezvous; the actors under the trees in the courtyard of the Palais Royal; the *ouvrier* and his family meandered in the Champs Elysées or journeyed countryward to Grenelle; while the soldiery mostly repaired to La Plaine de St. Denis.

A sister to Thiers kept a small dining establishment in the Rue Drouet, and many journalistic and political gatherings were held at her *tables* *d'hôte*. When asked whether her delicious pheasants were of her illustrious brother's shooting, she shook her head, and replied: "No, M. the President of the Council has not the honour to supply my establishment."

Bohemia, as Paris best knew it in the fifties, was not that pleasant land which lies between the Moravian and the Giant Mountains; neither were the Bohemians of Paris a Slavonic or Teutonic people of a strange, nomad race.

But the history of the Bohemia of arts and letters — which rose to its greatest and most prophetic heights in the Paris of the nineteenth century — would no doubt prove to be as extensive a work as Buckle's "History of Civilization," though the recitation of tenets and principles of one would be the inevitable reverse of the other.

The intellectual Bohemian — the artist, or the man of letters — has something in his make-up of the gipsy's love of the open road; the vagabond who instinctively rebels against the established rules of society, more because they are established than for any other reason.

Henri Mürger is commonly supposed to have popularized the "Bohemia" of arts and letters, and it is to him we owe perhaps the most graphic pictures of the life which held forth in the *Quartier Latin*, notorious for centuries for its lack of discipline and its defiance of the laws of Church, state, and society. It was the very nursery of open thought and liberty against absolutism and the conventional proprieties.

Gustave Nadaud described this "unknown land" in subtle verse, which loses not a little in attempted paraphrase:

"There stands behind Ste. Geneviève,
A city where no fancy paves
With gold the narrow streets,
But jovial youth, the landlady
On gloomy stairs, in attic high,
Gay hope, her tenant, meets.
.....
'Twas there that the Pays Latin stood,
'Twas there the world was *really* good,
'Twas there that she was gay."

Of the freedom and the unconventionally of the life of the Bohemian world of Paris, where the lives of literature and art blended in an almost imperceptible manner, and the gay indifference of its inhabitants, one has but to recall the incident where George Sand went to the studio of the painter Delacroix to tell him that she had sad news for him; that she could never love him; and more of the same sort. “Indeed,” said Delacroix, who kept on painting. — ”You are angry with me, are you not? You will never forgive me?” — ”Certainly I will,” said the painter, who was still at his work, “but I’ve got a bit of sky here that has caused me a deal of trouble and is just coming right. Go away, or sit down, and I will be through in ten minutes.” She went, and of course did not return, and so the *affaire* closed.

Dumas was hardly of the Pays Latin. He had little in common with the Bohemianism of the *poseur*, and the Bohemia of letters and art has been largely made up of that sort of thing.

More particularly Dumas’ life was that of the boulevards, of the journalist, of tremendous energy and output rather than that of the *dilettante*, and so he has but little interest in the south bank of the Seine.

* * *

Michelet, while proclaiming loudly for French literature and life in *Le Peuple*, published in 1846, desponds somewhat of his country from the fact that the overwhelming genius of the popular novelists of that day — and who shall not say since then, as well — have sought their models, too often, in dingy cabarets, vile dens of iniquity, or even in the prisons themselves.

He said: “This mania of slandering oneself, of exhibiting one’s sores, and going, as it were, to look for shame, will be mortal in the course of time.”

This may, to a great extent, have been true then — and is true to-day — manifestly, but no lover of the beautiful ought to condemn a noisome flower if but its buds were beautiful, and Paris — the Paris of the Restoration, the Empire, or the Republic — is none the worse in the eyes of the world because of the iniquities which exist in every large centre of population, where creeds and intellects of all shades and capacities are herded together.

The French novelist, it is true, can be very sordid and banal, but he can be as childlike and bland as an unsophisticated young girl — when he has a mind to.

Dumas’ novels were not lacking in vigour, valour, or action, and he wrote mostly of romantic times; so Michelet could not have referred to him. Perhaps he had the “Mysteries of Paris” or “The Wandering Jew” in mind, whose author certainly did give full measure of sordid detail; but then, Sue has been accused before now as not presenting a strictly truthful picture.

So much for the presentation of the *tableaux*. But what about the actual condition of the people at the time?

Michelet's interest in Europe was centred on France and confined to *le peuple*; a term in which he ofttimes included the *bourgeois*, as well he might, though he more often regarded those who worked with their hands. He repeatedly says: "I myself have been one of those workmen, and, although I have risen to a different class, I retain the sympathies of my early conditions."

Michelet's judgment was quite independent and original when he compared the different classes; and he had a decided preference for that section which cultivates the soil, though by no means did he neglect those engaged in trade and manufacture. The *ouvrier industriel* was as much entitled to respect as the labourer in the fields, or even the small tenant-farmer. He regretted, of course, the competition which turned *industrialisme* into a cut-throat policy. He furthermore had this to say concerning foreign trade:

"Alsace and Lyons have conquered art and science to achieve beauty for others.... The 'fairy of Paris' (the *modiste*) meets, from minute to minute, the most unexpected flights of fancy — and she *or he* does to-day, be it recalled. *Les étrangers* come in spite of themselves, and they buy of her (France); *ils achètent* — but what? — patterns, and then go basely home and copy them, to the loss, *but to the glory*, of France.

"The Englishman or the German buys a few pieces of goods at Paris or Lyons; just as in letters France writes and Belgium sells."

On the whole, Michelet thought that the population was more successful in tilling the soil than in the marts of the world; and there is this to be said, there is no question but what France is a self-contained country, though its arts have gone forth into the world and influenced all nations.

Paris is, ever has been, and proudly — perhaps rightly — thinks that it ever will be, the artistic capital of the world.

Georges Avenel has recently delivered himself of a screed on the "Mechanism of Modern Life," wherein are many pertinent, if sometimes trite, observations on the more or less automatic processes by which we are lodged, fed, and clothed to-day.

He gives rather a quaint, but unquestionably true, reason for the alleged falling-off in the cookery of French — of course he means Parisian — restaurants. It is, he says, that modern patrons will no longer pay the prices, or, rather, will not spend the money that they once did. In the first half of the last century — the time of Dumas’ activities and achievements — he tells us that many Parisian lovers of good fare were accustomed to “eat a napoleon” daily for their dinner. Nowadays, the same persons dine sufficiently at their club for eight and a half francs. Perhaps the abatement of modern appetites has something to say to this, as many folk seldom take more than thirty-five or forty minutes over their evening meal. How would this compare with the Gargantuan feasts described by Brillat-Savarin and others, or the gastronomic exploits of those who ate two turkeys at a sitting?

Clearly, for comfort, and perhaps luxury, the Parisian hotels and restaurants of a former day compare agreeably with those of our own time; not so much, perhaps, with regard to time and labour-saving machinery, which is the equipment of the modern *batterie de cuisine*, but with the results achieved by more simple, if more laborious, means, and the appointments and surroundings amid which they were put upon the board. “The proof of the pudding is in the eating” is still applicable, whether its components be beaten or kneaded by clockwork or the cook’s boy.

With the hotels himself, Avenel is less concerned, though he reminds us again that Madame de Sevigné had often to lie upon straw in the inns she met with in travelling, and looked upon a bed in a hotel, which would allow one to undress, as a luxury. We also learn that the travellers of those days had to carry their own knives, the innkeeper thinking that he did enough in providing spoons and forks. Nor were hotels particularly cheap, a small suite of rooms in a hotel of the Rue Richelieu costing 480 francs a week. It was Napoleon III. who, by his creation of the Hôtel de Louvre, — not the present establishment of the same name, but a much larger structure, — first set the fashion of monster hostelries. But what was this compared with the Elysées Palace, which M. d’Avenel chooses as his type of modern luxury, with its forty-three cooks, divided into seven brigades, each commanded by an officer drawing 3,750 francs a year, and its thirty-five hundred pairs of sheets and fifty thousand towels, valued together at little short of 250,000 francs? Yet, as we well know, even these totals pale before some of the hotels of America, in which M. d’Avenel sees the *ne plus ultra* of organization and saving of labour by the ingenious use of machinery, and incidentally a great deal of the sentiment of good cheer, which was as much an ingredient of former hospitality as was the salt and pepper of a repast.

It is pleasant to read of Alexandre Dumas' culinary skill, though the repetition of the fact has appeared in the works of well-nigh every writer who has written of the Paris of the fifties and sixties. The dinners at his apartments in the Boulevard Malesherbes were worthy of Soyer or even of Brillat-Savarin himself in his best days. In his last "Causeries Culinaires," the author of "Monte Cristo" tells us that the Bourbon kings were specially fond of soup. "The family," he writes, "from Louis XIV. to the last of their race who reigned in France, have been great eaters. The Grand Monarque commenced his dinner by two and sometimes three different kinds of soup; Louis-Philippe by four plates of various species of this comestible; in the fifth plate his Majesty usually mixed portions of the four varieties he had eaten, and appeared to enjoy this singular culinary combination."

Dumas' reputation as an epicure must have been formed early; he describes in his "Mémoires" how, on a certain occasion, when he had first become installed in Paris, he met a gentleman, Charles Nodier, in the stalls of the Porte St. Martin, who was reading a well-worn Elzevir entitled "La Pastissier Française." He says, "I address him.... 'Pardon my impertinence, but are you very fond of eggs?' 'Why so?' 'That book you are reading, does it not give recipes for cooking eggs in sixty different ways?' 'It does.' 'If I could but procure a copy.' 'But this is an Elzevir,' says my neighbour."

The Parisian is without a rival as an epicure and a *gastronome*, and he associates no stigma with the epithet. In Anglo-Saxon lands the reverse is the case, though why it is hard to see.

"Frog-legs" came to be a tidbit in the *tables d'hôte* of New York and London many years ago, but sympathy has been withheld from the luscious *escargot*. There be those fearless individuals who by reason of the *entente cordiale* have tasted of him and found him good, but learning that in the cookshops of Paris they have at last learned to fabricate them to equal the native grown article of Bourgogne, have tabooed them once for all, and threaten to withdraw their liking for that other succulent dainty, the frog.

At any rate, the schoolboy idea that the Parisian's staple fare is snails and frogs is quite exploded, and small wonder it is that Anglo-Saxon palates never became wholly inured to them. But what about England's peculiar dishes? Marrow-bones and stewed eels, for instance?

* * *

Dumas' familiarity with the good things of the table is nowhere more strongly advanced than in the opening chapter of "The Queen's Necklace," wherein the author recounts the incident of “the nobleman and his *maître d’hôtel*.”

The scene was laid in 1784, and runs as follows:

“The marshal turned toward his *maître d’hôtel*, and said, ‘Sir, I suppose you have prepared me a good dinner?’

”‘Certainly, your Grace.’

“‘You have the list of my guests?’

“‘I remember them perfectly.’

“‘There are two sorts of dinners, sir,’ said the marshal.

“‘True, your Grace, but — ’

“‘In the first place, at what time do we dine?’

“‘Your Grace, the citizens dine at two, the bar at three, the nobility at four — ’

“‘And I, sir?’

“‘Your Grace will dine to-day at five.’

“‘Oh, at five!’

“‘Yes, your Grace, like the king — ’

“‘And why like the king?’

“‘Because, on the list of your guests is the name of a king.’

“‘Not so, sir, you mistake; all my guests to-day are simple noblemen.’

“‘Your Grace is surely jesting; the Count Haga, who is among the guests — ’

“‘Well, sir!’

“‘The Count Haga is a king.’ (The Count Haga was the well-known name of the King of Sweden, assumed by him when travelling in France.)

“‘In any event, your Grace *cannot* dine before five o’clock.’

”‘In heaven’s name, do not be obstinate, but let us have dinner at four.’

“‘But at four o’clock, your Grace, what I am expecting will not have arrived. Your Grace, I wait for a bottle of wine.’

“‘A bottle of wine! Explain yourself, sir; the thing begins to interest me.’

“‘Listen, then, your Grace; his Majesty, the King of Sweden — I beg pardon, the Count Haga, I should have said — drinks nothing but Tokay.’

“‘Well, am I so poor as to have no Tokay in my cellar? If so, I must dismiss my butler.’

“‘Not so, your Grace; on the contrary, you have about sixty bottles.’

“‘Well, do you think Count Haga will drink sixty bottles with his dinner?’

"'No, your Grace; but when Count Haga first visited France when he was only prince royal, he dined with the late king, who had received twelve bottles of Tokay from the Emperor of Austria. You are aware that the Tokay of the finest vintages is reserved exclusively for the cellar of the emperor, and that kings themselves can only drink it when he pleases to send it to them.'

"'I know it.'

"'Then, your Grace, of these twelve bottles of which the prince royal drank, only two remain. One is in the cellar of his Majesty Louis XVI. — '

"'And the other?'

"'Ah, your Grace!' said the *maître d'hôtel,* with a triumphant smile, for he felt that, after the long battle he had been fighting, the moment of victory was at hand, 'the other one was stolen.'

"'By whom, then?'

"'By one of my friends, the late king's butler, who was under great obligations to me.'

"'Oh! and so he gave it to you.'

"'Certainly, your Grace,' said the *maître d'hôtel*, with pride.

"'And what did you do with it?'

"'I placed it carefully in my master's cellar.'

"'Your master? And who was your master at that time?'

"'His Eminence the Cardinal de Rohan.'

"'Ah, *mon Dieu!* at Strasbourg?'

"'At Saverne.'

"'And you have sent to seek this bottle for me!' cried the old marshal.

"'For you, your Grace,' replied the *maître d'hôtel*, in a tone which plainly said, 'ungrateful as you are.'

"The Duke de Richelieu seized the hand of the old servant, and cried, 'I beg pardon; you are the king of *maîtres d'hôtel*.'"

The French noblesse of the eighteenth century may have had retainers of the perspicacity and freedom of manners of this servant of the Maréchal de Richelieu, but it is hard to picture them in real life to-day. At any rate, it bespeaks Dumas' fondness of good eating and good drinking that he makes so frequent use of references thereto, not only in this novel of a later day, but throughout the mediæval romances as well.

Dumas' knowledge of gastronomy again finds its vent in "The Count of Monte Cristo," when the unscrupulous Danglars is held in a dungeon pending his giving up the five millions of francs which he had fraudulently obtained.

It is not a very high-class repast that is discussed, but it shows at least Dumas' familiarity with the food of man.

"At twelve the guard before Danglars' cell was replaced by another functionary, and, wishing to catch sight of his new guardian, Danglars approached the door again. He was an athletic, gigantic bandit, with large eyes, thick lips, and a flat nose; his red hair fell in dishevelled masses like snakes around his shoulders. 'Ah! ah!' cried Danglars, 'this fellow is more like an ogre than anything else; however, I am rather too old and tough to be very good eating!' We see that Danglars was quite collected enough to jest; at the same time, as though to disprove the ogreish propensities, the man took some black bread, cheese, and onions from his wallet, which he began devouring voraciously. 'May I be hanged,' said Danglars, glancing at the bandit's dinner through the crevices of the door, 'may I be hanged if I can understand how people can eat such filth!' and he withdrew to seat himself upon his goatskin, which recalled to him the smell of the brandy....

"Four hours passed by, the giant was replaced by another bandit. Danglars, who really began to experience sundry gnawings at the stomach, rose softly, again applied his eye to the crack of the door, and recognized the intelligent countenance of his guide. It was, indeed, Peppino, who was preparing to mount guard as comfortably as possible by seating himself opposite to the door, and placing between his legs an earthen pan, containing chick-pease stewed with bacon. Near the pan he also placed a pretty little basket of grapes and a bottle of Vin d'Orvieto. Peppino was decidedly an epicure. While witnessing these preparations, Danglars' mouth watered.... 'I can almost imagine,' said he, 'that I were at the Café de Paris.'"

Dumas, like every strong personality, had his friends and his enemies. It is doubtful which class was in the ascendency as to numbers. When asked, on one occasion, when he had been dining at the Café de Paris, if he were an archæologist, — he had been admiring a cameo portrait of Julius Cæsar, — he replied, "No, I am absolutely nothing." His partisans were many, and they were as devoted as his enemies were jealous and uncharitable. Continuing, he said, "I admire this portrait in the capacity of Cæsar's historian." "Indeed," said his interlocutor, "it has never been mentioned in the world of savants.” “Well,” said Dumas, “the world of savants never mentions me.”

This may be conceit or modesty, accordingly as one takes one view or another. Dumas, like most people, was not averse to admiration. Far from it. He thrived exceedingly on it. But he was, as he said, very much alone, and quite felt a nobody at times. Of his gastronomic and epicurean abilities he was vainly proud.

The story is told of the sole possession by Dumas of a certain recipe for stewed carp. Véron, the director of the opera, had instructed his own cook to serve the celebrated dish; she, unable to concoct it satisfactorily, announced her intention of going direct to the novelist to get it from his own lips. Sophie must have been a most ingenious and well-informed person, for she approached Dumas in all hostility and candour. She plunged direct into the subject, presuming that he had acquired the knowledge of this special tidbit from some outside source.

Dumas was evidently greatly flattered, and gave her every possible information, but the experiment was not a success, and the fair *cordon-bleu* began to throw out the suspicion that Dumas had acquired his culinary accomplishments from some other source than that he had generally admitted. It was at this time that Dumas was at the crux of his affairs with his collaborators.

Accordingly Sophie made her pronouncement that it was with Dumas’ cooking as it was with his romances, and that he was “*un grand diable de vaniteux*.”

At his home in the Rue Chaussée d’Antin Dumas served many an epicurean feast to his intimates; preparing, it is said, everything with his own hands, even to the stripping of the cabbage-leaves for the *soupe aux choux*, “sleeves rolled up, and a large apron around his waist.”

A favourite menu was *soupe aux choux*, the now famous carp, a *ragoût de mouton, à l’Hongroise*; *roti de faisans*, and a *salade Japonaise* — whatever that may have been; the ices and *gateaux* being sent in from a *pâtissier’s*.

The customs of the theatre in Paris are, and always have been, peculiar. Dumas himself tells how, upon one occasion, just after he had come permanently to live there, he had placed himself beside an immense *queue* of people awaiting admission to the Porte St. Martin.

He was not aware of the procedure of lining up before the entrance-doors, and when one well up in the line offered to sell him his place for *twenty sous* — held since midday — Dumas willingly paid it, and, not knowing that it did not include admission to the performance, was exceedingly distraught when the time came to actually pay for places. This may seem a simple matter in a later day, and to us who have become familiar with similar conditions in Paris and elsewhere; but it serves to show the guilelessness of Dumas, and his little regard for business procedure of any sort.

The incident is continued in his own words, to the effect that he “finally purchased a bit of pasteboard that once had been white, which I presented to the check-taker and received in return another of red.... My appearance in the amphitheatre of the house must have been astonishing. I was the very latest Villers-Cotterets fashion, but a revolution had taken place in Paris which had not yet reached my native place. My hair was long, and, being frizzled, it formed a gigantic aureole around my head. I was received with roars of laughter.... I dealt the foremost scoffer a vigorous slap in the face, and said, at the same time, ‘My name is Alexandre Dumas. For to-morrow, I am staying at the Hôtel des Vieux-Augustins, and after that at No. 1 Place des Italiens.’”

By some incomprehensible means Dumas was hustled out of the theatre and on to the sidewalk — for disturbing the performance, though the performance had not yet begun. He tried his luck again, however, and this time bought a place at two francs fifty centimes.

Every visitor to Paris has recognized the preëminence of the “Opera” as a social institution. The National Opera, or the Théâtre Impérial de l’Opéra, as it was originally known, in the Rue Lepelletier, just off the Boulevard des Italiens, was the progenitor of the splendid establishment which now terminates the westerly end of the Avenue de l’Opera. The more ancient “Grand Opera” was uncontestably the most splendid, the most pompous, and the most influential of its contemporary institutions throughout Europe.

The origin of the “Grand Opera” was as remote as the times of Anne of Austria, who, it will be recalled, had a most passionate regard for *musique* and spectacle, and Mazarin caused to be brought from Italy musicians who represented before the queen “musical pieces” which proved highly successful.

Later, in 1672, Louis XIV. accorded the privilege of the Opera to Lulli, a distinguished musician of Florence, and the theatre of the Palais Royal was ceded to the uses of Académie de Musique.

After the fire of 1763, the Opera was transferred to the Tuileries, but removed again, because of another fire, to the Porte St. Martin, where it remained until 1794, when it was transferred to a new house which had been constructed for it in the Rue Richelieu.

Again in 1820 it was removed to a new establishment, which had been erected on the site of the former Hôtel de Choiseul.

This house had accommodations for but two thousand spectators, and, in spite of its sumptuousness and rank, was distinctly inferior in point of size to many opera-houses and theatres elsewhere.

Up to this time the management had been governed after the manner of the old régime, “by three gentlemen of the king’s own establishment, in concurrence with the services of a working director,” and the royal privy purse was virtually responsible for the expenses. Louis-Philippe astutely shifted the responsibility to the public exchequer.

In 1831, Dr. Louis Véron, the founder of the *Revue de Paris*, — since supplanted by the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, — became the manager and director. Doctor Véron has been called as much the quintessence of the life of Paris of the first half of the nineteenth century as was Napoleon I. of the history of France.

Albert Vandam, the author of “An Englishman in Paris,” significantly enough links Véron’s name in his recollections with that of Dumas, except that he places Dumas first.

“Robert le Diable” and Taglioni made Véron’s success and his fortune, though he himself was a master of publicity. From 1831 onward, during Véron’s incumbency, the newspapers contained column after column of the “puff personal,” not only with respect to Véron himself, but down through the galaxy of singers and dancers to the veriest stage-carpenter, scenic artist, and call-boy.

The modern managers have advanced somewhat upon these premature efforts; but then the art was in its infancy, and, as Véron himself was a journalist and newspaper proprietor, he probably well understood the gentle art of exchanging favouring puffs of one commodity for those of another.

These were the days of the first successes of Meyerbeer, Halévy, Auber, and Duprez; of Taglioni, who danced herself into a nebula of glory, and later into a shadow which inspired the spiteful critics into condemnation of her waning power.

It has been said that Marie Taglioni was by no means a good-looking woman. Indeed, she must have been decidedly plain. Her manners, too, were apparently not affable, and “her reception of Frenchmen was freezing to a degree — when she thawed it was to Russians, Englishmen, or Viennese.” “One of her shoulders was higher than the other, she limped slightly, and, moreover, waddled like a duck.” Clearly a stage setting was necessary to show off her charms. She was what the French call “*une pimbêche*.”

The architectural effect produced by the exterior of this forerunner of the present opera was by no means one of monumental splendour. Its architect, Debret, was scathingly criticized for its anomalies. A newspaper anecdote of the time recounts the circumstance of a provincial who, upon asking his way thither, was met with the direction, “That way — the first large gateway on your right.”

Near by was the establishment of the famous Italian *restaurateur*, Paolo Broggi, the resort of many singers, and the Estaminet du Divan, a sort of humble counterpart of the Café Riche or the Café des Anglais, but which proclaimed a much more literary atmosphere than many of the bigger establishments on the boulevards. Vandam relates of this house of call that “it is a positive fact that the *garçon* would ask, ‘Does monsieur desire Sue’s or Dumas’ *feuilleton* with his *café*?’”

Of the Opera which was burned in 1781, Dumas, in “The Queen’s Necklace,” has a chapter devoted to “Some Words about the Opera.” It is an interesting, albeit a rather superfluous, interpolation in a romance of intrigue and adventure:

“The Opera, that temple of pleasure at Paris, was burned in the month of June, 1781. Twenty persons had perished in the ruins; and, as it was the second time within eighteen years that this had happened, it created a prejudice against the place where it then stood, in the Palais Royal, and the king had ordered its removal to a less central spot. The place chosen was La Porte St. Martin.

“The king, vexed to see Paris deprived for so long of its Opera, became as sorrowful as if the arrivals of grain had ceased, or bread had risen to more than seven sous the quartern loaf. It was melancholy to see the nobility, the army, and the citizens without their after-dinner amusement;

and to see the promenades thronged with the unemployed divinities, from the chorus-singers to the prima donnas.

“An architect was then introduced to the king, full of new plans, who promised so perfect a ventilation, that even in case of fire no one could be smothered. He would make eight doors for exit, besides five large windows placed so low that any one could jump out of them. In the place of the beautiful hall of Moreau he was to erect a building with ninety-six feet of frontage toward the boulevard, ornamented with eight caryatides on pillars forming three entrance-doors, a bas-relief above the capitals, and a gallery with three windows. The stage was to be thirty-six feet wide, the theatre seventy-two feet deep and eighty across, from one wall to the other. He asked only seventy-five days and nights before he opened it to the public.

“This appeared to all a mere gasconade, and was much laughed at. The king, however, concluded the agreement with him. Lenoir set to work, and kept his word. But the public feared that a building so quickly erected could not be safe, and when it opened no one would go.

“Even the few courageous ones who did go to the first representation of ‘Adele de Ponthieu’ made their wills first. The architect was in despair. He came to the king to consult him as to what was to be done.

“It was just after the birth of the dauphin; all Paris was full of joy. The king advised him to announce a gratuitous performance in honour of the event, and give a ball after. Doubtless plenty would come, and if the theatre stood, its safety was established.

“‘Thanks, Sire,’ said the architect.

“‘But reflect, first,’ said the king, ‘if there be a crowd, are you sure of your building?’

“‘Sire, I am sure, and shall go there myself.’

“‘I will go to the second representation,’ said the king.

“The architect followed this advice. They played ‘Adele de Ponthieu’ to three thousand spectators, who afterward danced. After this there could be no more fear.”

It was three years after that Madame and the cardinal went to the celebrated ball, the account of which follows in the subsequent chapter of the romance.

Dumas as a dramatist was not so very different from Dumas the novelist. When he first came to Paris the French stage was by no means at a low and stagnant ebb — at least, it was not the thin, watery concoction that many

English writers would have us believe; and, furthermore, the world's great dramatist — Shakespeare — had been and was still influencing and inspiring the French playwright and actor alike.

It was the "Hamlet" of Ducis — a very French Hamlet, but still Hamlet — and the memory of an early interview with Talma that first set fire to the fuel of the stage-fever which afterward produced Dumas the dramatist.

Dumas was not always truthful, or, at least, correct, in his facts, but he did not offend exceedingly, and he was plausible; as much so, at any rate, as Scott, who had erred to the extent of fifteen years in his account of the death of Amy Robsart.

In 1824 was born Alexandre Dumas *fils*, and at this time the parent was collaborating with Soulié in an attempted, but unfinished, dramatization of Scott's "Old Mortality."

By 1830, after he had left official work, Dumas had produced that drama of the Valois, "Henri III.," at the Théâtre Français, where more than a century before Voltaire had produced his first play, "Œdipe," and where the "Hernani" of Victor Hugo had just been produced.

It was a splendid and gorgeous event, and the adventures of the Duchesse de Guise, St. Mégrin, Henri III. and his satellites proved to the large and distinguished audience present no inconspicuous element in the success of the future king of romance. It was a veritable triumph, and for the time the author was more talked of and better known than was Hugo, who had already entered the arena, but whose assured fame scarcely dates from before "Hernani," whose first presentation — though it was afterward performed over three hundred times in the same theatre — was in February of the same year.

Voltaire had been dead scarce a half-century, but already the dust lay thick on his dramatic works, and the world of Paris was looking eagerly forward to the achievements of the new school. One cannot perhaps claim for Dumas that he was in direct lineage of Shakespeare, — as was claimed for Hugo, and with some merit, — but he was undoubtedly one of the first of the race of the popular French playwrights whose fame is perpetuated to-day by Sardou. At any rate, it was a classic struggle which was inaugurated in France — by literature and the drama — in the early half of the nineteenth century, and one which was a frank rebellion against the rigid rules by which their arts had been restrained — especially dramatic art.

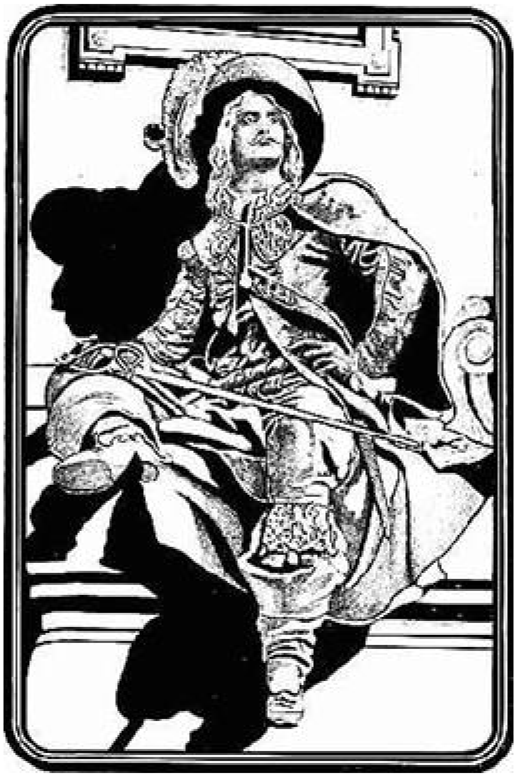

D’ARTAGNAN
From the Dumas Statue by Gustave Doré

With all due credit, then, to Hugo, it was Dumas who led the romanticists through the breach that was slowly opening; though at the same time one may properly enough recall the names of Alfred de Musset, Theophile Gautier, and Gerard de Nerval.

Dumas’ next play was in “classical form” — ”Christine.”

Mere chance brought Dumas into an acquaintance with the history of Christine of Sweden, and, though the play was written and accepted before “Henri III. et Sa Cour,” it was not until some time later that it was produced at the Odéon; the recollection of which also brings up the name of Mlle. Mars.

The statue in Paris in the Place Malesherbes, erected to the memory of Dumas, has been highly commended in conception and execution. It was the work of Gustave Doré, and, truth to tell, it has some wonderfully effective sculptures in bronze. A group of three symbolical figures *en face*, and a lifelike and life-sized representation of the courageous D’Artagnan *d’arrière*. These details are charming when reproduced on paper by process of photography or the hand of an artist. Indeed, they are of much the same quality when viewed as details, but in the ensemble, combined with a cold, inartistic base or pedestal, which is crowned by a seated effigy of Dumas — also life-size — clad in the unlovely raiment of the latter nineteenth century, there is much to be desired.

Statues, be they bronze or marble, are often artistically successful when their figures are covered with picturesque mediæval garments, but they are invariably a failure, in an artistic sense, when clothed in latter-day garb. Doublet and hose, and sword and cloak lend themselves unmistakably to artistic expression. Trousers and top-hats do not. Just back of the Place Malesherbes is the Avenue de Villiers — a street of fine houses, many of them studio apartments, of Paris’s most famous artists. Here at No. 94 lived Alexandre Dumas during the later years of his life; so it is fitting that his monument should be placed in this vicinity. The house was afterward occupied by Dumas *fils*, and more lately by his widow, but now it has passed into other hands.

Of interest to Americans is the fact which has been recorded by some one who was *au courant* with Parisian affairs of the day, “that the United States Minister to France, Mr. John Bigelow, breakfasted with Dumas at St. Gratien, near Paris,” when it came out that he (Dumas) had a notion to go out to America as a war correspondent for the French papers; the Civil War was not then over. Unhappily for all of us, he did not go, and so a truly great book was lost to the world.

In this same connection it has been said that Dumas’ “quadroon autographs” were sold in the United States, to provide additional funds for the widows and orphans of slain abolitionists. As it is apocryphally said that they sold for a matter of a hundred and twenty dollars each, the sum must have reached considerable proportions, if their number was great.

CHAPTER VI.

OLD PARIS

The Paris of Dumas was Méryon's — though it is well on toward a half-century since either of them saw it. Hence it is no longer theirs; but the master romancer and the master etcher had much in common.

They both drew with a fine, free hand, the one in words that burn themselves in the memory, and the other in lines which, once bitten on the copper plate, are come down to us in indelible fashion. The mention of Méryon and his art is no mere rambling of the pen. Like that of Dumas, his art depicted those bold, broad impressions which rebuilt "old Paris" in a manner which is only comparable to the background which Dumas gave to "Les Trois Mousquetaires."

The iconoclastic Haussman caused much to disappear, and it is hard to trace the footsteps of many a character of history and romance, whose incomings and outgoings are otherwise very familiar to us.

There are many distinct cities which go to make up Paris itself, each differing from the other, but Dumas and Méryon drew them each and all with unerring fidelity: Dumas the University Quarter and the faubourgs in "Les Trois Mousquetaires," and Méryon the Cité in "The Stryge."

The sheer beauty and charm of old-world Paris was never more strongly suggested than in the work of these two masters, who have given a permanence to the abodes of history and romance which would otherwise have been wanting. It is a pleasurable occupation to hunt up the dwellings of those personages who may, or may not, have lived in the real flesh and blood. The mere fact that they lived in the pages of a Dumas — or for that matter of a Balzac or a Hugo — is excuse enough for most of us to seek to follow in their footsteps.

In spite of the splendour of the present and the past, Paris is by no means too great to prevent one's tracing its old outlines, streets, and landmarks, even though they have disappeared to-day, and the site of the famous Hôtel Chevreuse or the Carmelite establishment in the Rue Vaugirard — against whose wall D’Artagnan and his fellows put up that gallant fight against the cardinal’s guard — are in the same geographical positions that they always were, if their immediate surroundings have changed, as they assuredly have.

Indeed, the sturdy wall which kept the Carmelite friars from contact with the outer world has become a mere hoarding for gaudily coloured posters, and the magnificent Hôtel Chevreuse on the Boulevard St. Germain has been incorporated into a modern apartment-house, and its garden cut through by the Boulevard Raspail.

The destruction of “Old Paris” — the gabled, half-timbered, mediæval city — is not only an artistic regret, but a personal one to all who know intimately the city’s history and romance. It was inevitable, of course, but it is deplorable.

Méryon, too, like Dumas, etched details with a certain regard for effect rather than a colder preciseness, which could hardly mean so much as an impression of a mood. They both sought the picturesque element, and naturally imparted to everything modern with which they came into contact the same charm of reality which characterized the tangible results of their labours.

Nothing was left to chance, though much may — we have reason to think — have been spontaneous. The witchery of a picturesque impression is ever great, but the frequency of its occurrence is growing less and less.

To-day we have few romancers, few painters or etchers of fleeting moods or impressions, and are fast becoming schooled in the tenets of Zola and Baudry, to the glorification of realism, but to the death and deep burial of the far more healthy romanticism of the masters of a few generations since.

To the Roman occupation of Paris succeeded that of the Franks, and Clovis, son of Childérie and grandson of Merovée, after his conversion to Christianity at Reims, established the seat of his empire at Paris.

Childebert, the descendant of Clovis, — who had taken unto himself the title King of Paris, — in 524 laid the foundation of the first Église de Notre Dame.

The kings of the second race lived in Paris but little, and under the feeble successors of Charlemagne the city became the particular domain of the hereditary counts. In the year 845 the Normans came up the river by boat and razed all of that part known even to-day as La Cité, hence the extreme improbability of there being existing remains of an earlier date than this, which are to-day recognizable. After successive disasters and invasions, it became necessary that new *quartiers* and new streets should be formed and populated, and under the reign of Louis VII. the walls were extended to include, on the right bank, Le Bourg l'Abbé, Le Bourg Thibourg, Le Beau-Bourg, Le Bourg St. Martin, — regions which have since been occupied by the Rues St. Martin, Beaubourg, Bourtebourg, and Bourg l'Abbé, — and, on the right bank, St. Germain des Prés, St. Victor, and St. Michel.

Since this time Paris has been divided into three distinct parts: La Ville, to the north of the Seine, La Cité, in the centre, and L'Université, in the south.

The second *enceinte* did not long suffice to enclose the habitations of the people, and in the year 1190 Philippe-Auguste constructed the third wall, which was strengthened by five hundred towers and surrounded by a deep *fosse*, perpetuated to-day as the Rempart des Fosses. At this time the first attempts were made at paving the city streets, principally at the instigation of the wealthy Gérard de Poissy, whose name has since been given to an imposing street on the south bank.

Again, in 1356, the famous Etienne Marcel commenced the work of the fourth *enceinte*. On the south, the walls were not greatly extended, but on the north they underwent a considerable aggrandizement. Fortified gateways were erected at the extremity of the Rue de St. Antoine, and others were known variously as the Porte du Temple and Porte St. Denis. Other chief features of the time — landmarks one may call them — were the Porte St. Honoré, which was connected with the river-bank by a prolonged wall, the Tour du Bois, and a new fortification — as a guardian against internal warfare, it would seem — at the upper end of the Ile de la Cité.

Toward the end of the reign of Louis XI. the city had become repeopled, after many preceding years of flood, ravage, and famine, and contained, it is said, nearly three hundred thousand souls.

From this reign, too, dates the establishment of the first printing-shop in Paris, the letter-post, and the *poste-chaise*. Charles VII., the son of Louis XI., united with the Bibliothèque Royal those of the Kings of Naples.

Louis XII., who followed, did little to beautify the city, but his parental care for the inhabitants reduced the income of the tax-gatherer and endeared his name to all as the *Père du Peuple*.

François I. — whose glorious name as the instigator of much that has since become national in French art — considerably enlarged the fortifications on the west, and executed the most momentous embellishments which had yet taken place in the city. In public edifices he employed, or caused his architects to employ, the Greek orders, and the paintings by Italian hands and the sculptures of Goujon were the highest expressions of the art of the Renaissance, which had grown so abundantly from the seed sown by Charles VIII. upon his return from his wanderings in Italy.

It may be questioned if the art of the Renaissance is really beautiful; it is, however, undeniably effective in its luxuriant, if often ill-assorted, details; so why revile it here? It was the prime cause, more than all others put together, of the real adornment of Paris; and, in truth, was far more successful in the application of its principles here than elsewhere.

During the reign of François I. were built, or rebuilt, the great Églises de St. Gervais, St. Germain l’Auxerrois, and St. Merry, as well as the Hôtel de Ville. The Louvre was reconstructed on a new plan, and the Faubourg St. Germain was laid out anew.

Under Henri II. the work on the Louvre was completed, and the Hôpital des Petites Maisons constructed. It was Henri II., too, who first ordained that the effigies of the kings should be placed upon all coins.

The principal edifices built under Charles IX. were the Palais des Tuileries, Hôtel de Soissons, the Jesuit College, and the Hôpital du St. Jacques du Haut Pas.

Henri III. erected the church of the Jesuits in the Rue St. Antoine, the Église de St. Paul et St. Louis, the Monastère des Feuillants, the Hôtel de Bourgogne, and the Théâtre Italien.

Under Henri IV. was achieved the Pont Neuf, whose centre piers just impinge upon the lower end of the Ile de la Cité; the Quais de l’Arsenal, de l’Horloge, des Orphelins, de l’Ecole, de la Mégisserie, de Conti, and des Augustins; la Place Dauphine, and the Rue Dauphine. The Place Royale came to replace — in the *Quartier du Marais* — the old Palais des Tournelles, the pleasure of so many kings, François I. in particular.

Louis XIII., the feeble king who reigned without governing, saw many improvements, which, however, grew up in spite of the monarch rather than because of him.

There was a general furbishing up of the streets and quais. Marie de Medicis built the Palais du Luxembourg and planted the Cours la Reine; many new bridges were constructed and new monuments set up, among others the Palais Royal, at this time called the Palais Cardinal; the Église St. Roch; the Oratoire; le Val-de-Grace; les Madelonnettes; la Salpêtrièré; the Sorbonne, and the Jardin des Plantes. Many public places were also decorated with statues: the effigy of Henri IV. was placed on the Pont Neuf, and of Louis XII. in the Place Royale.

By this time the population had overflowed the walls of Philippe-Auguste, already enlarged by François I., and Louis XIV. overturned their towers and ramparts, and filled their *fosses*, believing that a strong community needed no such protections.

These ancient fortifications were replaced by the boulevards which exist even unto to-day — not only in Paris, but in most French towns and cities — unequalled elsewhere in all the world.

Up to the reign of Louis XIV. the population of Paris had, for the most part, been lodged in narrow, muddy streets, which had subjected them to many indescribable discomforts. Meanwhile, during the glorious reign of Louis XIV., Paris achieved great extension of area and splendour; many new streets were opened in the different *quartiers*, others were laid out anew or abolished altogether, more than thirty churches were built, — ”all highly beautiful,” say the guide-books. But they are not: Paris churches taken together are a decidedly mixed lot, some good in parts and yet execrable in other parts, and many even do not express any intimation whatever of good architectural forms.

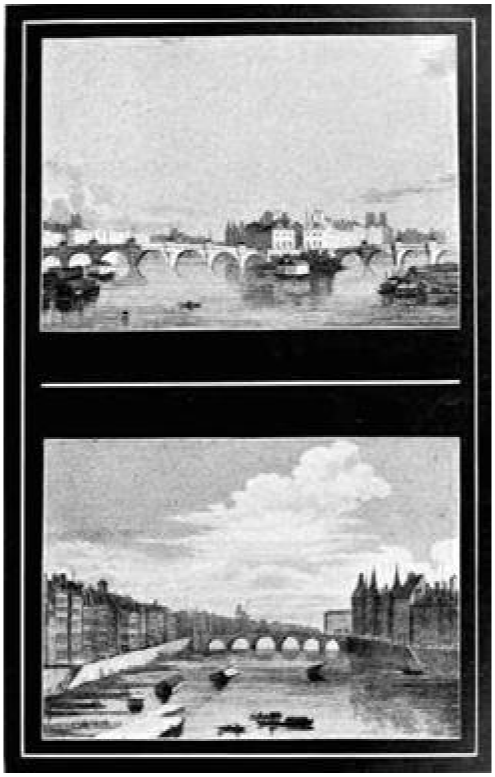

PONT NEUF. — PONT AU CHANGE

The Pont au Change was rebuilt, and yet four other bridges were made necessary to permit of better circulation between the various *faubourgs* and *quartiers*.

To the credit of Louis XIV. must also be put down the Hôtel des Invalides, the Observatoire, the magnificent colonnade of the Louvre, the Pont Royal, the Collège des Quatre Nations, the Bibliothèque Royale, numerous fountains and statues, the royal glass, porcelain, and tapestry manufactories, the Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel, and the Boulevards St. Denis and St. Martin.

Saint Foix (in his “Essais sur Paris”) has said that it was Louis XIV. who first gave to the reign of a French monarch the *éclat* of grandeur and magnificence, not only for his court, but for his capital and his people.

Under the succeeding reign of Louis XV. the beautifying of Paris took another flight. On the place which first bore the name of the monarch himself, but which is to-day known as the Place de la Concorde, were erected a pair of richly decorated monuments which quite rivalled in achievement the superb colonnaded Louvre of the previous reign, the Champs Elysées were replanted, the École Militaire, the École de Droit, and the Hôtel de la Monnaie were erected, and still other additional boulevards and magnificent streets were planned out.

A new church came into being with St. Genevieve, which afterward became the Panthéon.

The reign following saw the final achievement of all these splendid undertakings; then came the Revolution, that political terror which would have upset all established institutions; and if Paris, the city of splendid houses, did not become merely a cemetery of tombs, it was not because maniacal fanaticism and fury were lacking.

Religious, civic, and military establishments were razed, demolished, or burnt, regardless of their past associations or present artistic worth.

In a way, however, these sacrilegious demolitions gave cause to much energetic rebuilding and laying out of the old city anew, in the years immediately succeeding the period of the Revolution, which as an historical event has no place in this book other than mere mention, as it may have been referred to by Dumas.

It was Napoleon who undertook the rehabilitation of Paris, with an energy and foresight only equalled by his prowess as a master of men.

He occupied himself above all with what the French themselves would call those *monuments et decorations utiles*, as might be expected of his abilities as an organizer. The canal from the river Ourcq through La Villette to the Seine was, at the Fosses de la Bastille, cleared and emptied of its long stagnant waters; *abattoirs* were constructed in convenient places, in order to do away with the vast herds of cattle which for centuries had been paraded through the most luxurious of the city’s streets; new markets were opened, and numerous fountains and watering-troughs were erected in various parts of the city; four new and ornate bridges were thrown across the Seine, the magnificent Rues Castiglione and de la Paix, extending from the Tuileries to the interior boulevards, were opened up; the Place Vendome was then endowed with its bronze column, which stands to-day; the splendid and utile Rue de Rivoli was made beside the garden of the Tuileries (it has since been prolonged to the Hôtel de Ville).

Napoleon also founded the Palais de la Bourse (1808), and caused to be erected a superb iron *grille* which should separate the Place du Carrousel from the Tuileries.

Under the Restoration little happened with regard to the beautifying and aggrandizing of the city, though certain improvements of a purely economic and social nature made their own way.

The literature and art of Dumas and his compeers were making such sturdy progress as to give Paris that preëminence in these finer elements of life, which, before or since, has not been equalled elsewhere.

Since the Revolution of 1830 have been completed the Arc de Triomphe de l'Etoile (commenced by Napoleon I.), the Église de la Madeleine, the fine hotel of the Quai d'Orsay, the Palais des Beaux Arts, the restoration of the Chambre des Députés (the old Palais Bourbon), and the statues set up in the Place de la Concorde; though it is only since the ill-starred Franco-Prussian *affaire* of 1871 that Strasbourg's doleful figure has been buried in jet and alabaster sentiments, so dear to the Frenchman of all ranks, as an outward expression of grief.

At the commencement of the Second Empire the fortifications, as they then existed, possessed a circumference of something above thirty-three kilometres — approximately nineteen miles. The walls are astonishingly thick, and their *fossés* wide and deep. The surrounding exterior forts "*de distance en distance*" are a unique feature of the general scheme of defence, and played, as it will be recalled, no unimportant part in the investiture of the city by the Germans in the seventies.

A French writer of the early days of the last Empire says: "These new fortifications are in their ensemble a gigantic work." They are, indeed — though, in spite of their immensity, they do not impress the lay observer even as to impregnability as do the wonderful walls and ramparts of Carcassonne, or dead Aigues-Mortes in the Midi of France; those wonderful somnolent old cities of a glorious past, long since departed.

The fortifications of Paris, however, are a wonderfully utile thing, and must ever have an unfathomable interest for all who have followed their evolution from the restricted battlements of the early Roman city.

The Parisian has, perhaps, cause to regret that these turf-covered battlements somewhat restrict his "*promenades environnantes,*" but what would you? Once outside, through any of the gateways, the Avenue de la Grande Armée, — which is the most splendid, — or the Porte du Canal de l'Ourcq, — which is the least luxurious, though by no means is it unpicturesque; indeed, it has more of that variable quality, perhaps, than any other, — one comes into the charm of the French countryside; that is, if he knows in which direction to turn. At any rate, he comes immediately into contact with a life which is quite different from any phase which is to be seen within the barrier.

From the Revolution of 1848 to the first years of the Second Empire, which ought properly to be treated by itself, — and so shall be, — there came into being many and vast demolitions and improvements.

Paris was a vast atelier of construction, where agile minds conceived, and the artisan and craftsman executed, monumental glories and improvements which can only be likened to the focusing of the image upon the ground glass.

The prolongation of the Rue de Rivoli was put through; the Boulevards Sebastopol, Malesherbes, — where in the Place Malesherbes is that appealing monument to Dumas by Gustave Doré, — du Prince Eugène, St. Germain, Magenta, the Rue des Écoles, and many others. All of which tended to change the very face and features of the Paris the world had known hitherto.

The “Caserne Napoleon” had received its guests, and the Tour St. Jacques, from which point of vantage the “clerk of the weather” to-day prognosticates for Paris, had been restored. Magnificent establishments of all sorts and ranks had been built, the Palais de l’Industrie (since razed) had opened its doors to the work of all nations, in the exhibition of 1855.

Of Paris, one may well concentrate one’s estimate in five words: “Each epoch has been rich,” also prolific, in benefits, intentions, and creations of all manner of estimable and admirable achievements.

By favour of these efforts of all the reigns and governments which have gone before, the Paris of to-day in its architectural glories, its monuments in stone, and the very atmosphere of its streets, places, and boulevards, is assuredly the most marvellous of all the cities of Europe.

* * *

It may not be an exceedingly pleasant subject, but there is, and always has been, a certain fascination about a visit to a cemetery which ranks, in the minds of many well-informed and refined persons, far above even the contemplation of great churches themselves.

It may be a morbid taste, or it may not. Certainly there seems to be no reason why a considerable amount of really valuable facts might not be impressed upon the retina of a traveller who should do the round of *Campos Santos*, *Cimetières* and burial-grounds in various lands.

In this respect, as in many others, Paris leads the way for sheer interest in its tombs and sepulchres, at Montmartre and Père la Chaise.

In no other burial-ground in the world — unless it be Mount Auburn, near Boston, where, if the world-wide name and fame of those there buried are not so great as those at Paris, their names are at least as much household words to English-speaking folk, as are those of the old-world resting-place to the French themselves — are to be found so many celebrated names.

There are a quartette of these famous resting-places at Paris which, since the coming of the nineteenth century, have had an absorbing interest for the curiously inclined. Père la Chaise, Montmartre, the royal sepulchres in the old abbey church of St. Denis, and the churchyard of St. Innocents.

“Man,” said Sir Thomas Brown, “is a noble animal, splendid in ashes, and pompous in the grave.” Why this should be so, it is not the province of this book to explain, nor even to justify the gorgeous and ill-mannered monuments which are often erected over his bones.

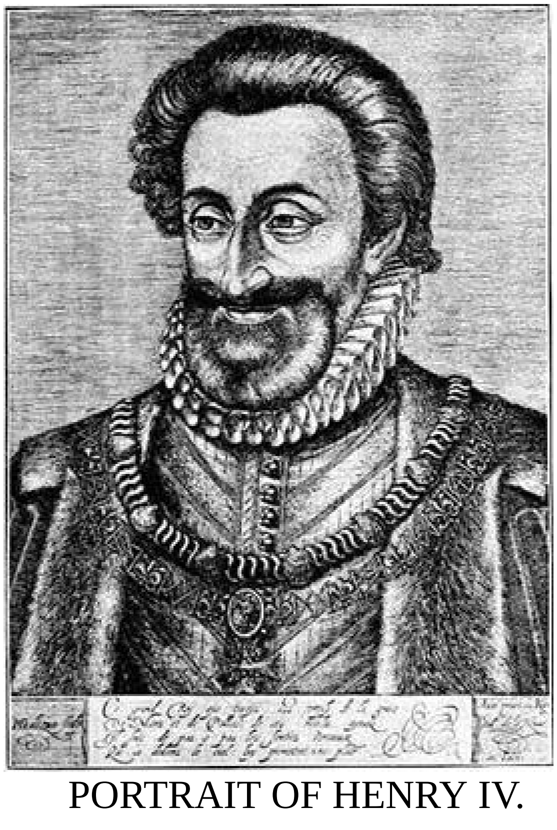

PORTRAIT OF HENRY IV.

The catacombs of Paris are purposely ignored here, as appealing to a special variety of morbidity which is as unpleasant to deal with and to contemplate as are snakes preserved in spirit, and as would be — were we allowed to see them — the sacred human *reliques* which are preserved, even to-day, at various pilgrims' shrines throughout the Christian world. That vast royal sepulchre of the abbey church of St. Denis, which had been so outrageously despoiled by the decree of the Convention in 1793, was in a measure set to rights by Louis XVIII., when he caused to be returned from the Petits Augustins, now the Palais des Beaux Arts, and elsewhere, such of the monuments as had not been actually destroyed. The actual spoliation of these shrines belongs to an earlier day than that of which this book deals.

The history of it forms as lurid a chapter as any known to the records of riot and sacrilege in France; and the more the pity that the motion of Barrere ("*La main puissante de la République doit effacer inpitoyablement ces epitaphes*") to destroy these royal tombs should have had official endorsement.

The details of these barbarous exhumations were curious, but not edifying; the corpse of Turenne was exhibited around the city; Henri IV. — "his features still being perfect" — was kicked and bunted about like a football; Louis XIV. was found in a perfect preservation, but entirely black; Louis VIII. had been sewed up in a leather sack; and François I. and his family "had become much decayed;" so, too, with many of the later Bourbons.

In general these bodies were deposited in a common pit, which had been dug near the north entrance to the abbey, and thus, for the first time in the many centuries covered by the period of their respected demises, their dust was to mingle in a common blend, and all factions were to become one.

Viollet-le-Duc, at the instruction of Napoleon III., set up again, following somewhat an approximation of the original plan, the various monuments which had been so thoroughly scattered, and which, since their return to the old abbey, had been herded together without a pretence at order in the crypt.

Paris had for centuries been wretchedly supplied with *cimetières*. For long one only had existed, that of the churchyard of St. Innocents', originally a piece of the royal domain lying without the walls, and given by one of the French kings as a burial-place for the citizens, when interments within the city were forbidden.

It has been calculated that from the time of Philippe-Auguste over a million bodies had been interred in these *fosses communes*.

In 1785 the Council of State decreed that the cemetery should be cleared of its dead and converted into a market-place. Cleared it was not, but it has since become a market-place, and the waters of the Fontaine des Innocents filter briskly through the dust of the dead of ages.

Sometime in the early part of the nineteenth century the funeral undertakings of Paris were conducted on a sliding scale of prices, ranging from four thousand francs in the first class, to as low as sixteen francs for the very poor; six classes in all.

This law-ordered *tarif* would seem to have been a good thing for posterity to have perpetuated.

The artisan or craftsman who fashions the funeral monuments of Paris has a peculiar flight of fancy all his own; though, be it said, throughout the known world, funeral urns and monuments have seldom or never been beautiful, graceful, or even austere or dignified: they have, in fact, mostly been shocking travesties of the ideals and thoughts they should have represented.

It is remarkable that the French architect and builder, who knows so well how to design and construct the habitation of living man, should express himself so badly in his bizarre funeral monuments and the tawdry tinsel wreaths and flowers of their decorations.

An English visitor to Paris in the thirties deplored the fact that her cemeteries should be made into mere show-places, and perhaps rightly enough. At that time they served as a fashionable and polite avenue for promenades, and there was (perhaps even is to-day) a guide-book published of them, and, since grief is paradoxically and proverbially dry, there was always a battery of taverns and drinking-places flanking their entrances.

It was observed by a writer in a Parisian journal of that day that “in the Cimetière du Montmartre — which was the deposit for the gay part of the city — nine tombs out of ten were to the memory of persons cut off in their youth; but that in Père la Chaise — which served principally for the sober citizens of Paris — nine out of ten recorded the ages of persons who had attained a good old age.”

CHAPTER VII.

WAYS AND MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

The means of communication in and about Paris in former days was but a travesty on the methods of the “Metropolitain,” which in our time literally whisks one like the wings of the morning, from the Arc de Triomphe to the Bois de Vincennes, and from the Place de la Nation to the Trocadero.

In 1850 there were officially enumerated over twenty-eight hundred boulevards, avenues, *rues*, and passages, the most lively being St. Honoré, Richelieu, Vivienne, Castiglione, de l’Université, — Dumas lived here at No. 25, in a house formerly occupied by Chateaubriand, now the Magazin St. Thomas, — de la Chaussée d’Antin, de la Paix, de Grenelle, de Bac, St. Denis, St. Martin, St. Antoine, and, above all, the Rue de Rivoli, — with a length of nearly three miles, distinguished at its westerly end by its great covered gallery, where the dwellings above are carried on a series of 287 arcades, flanked by *boutiques*, not very sumptuous to-day, to be sure, but even now a promenade of great popularity. At No. 22 Rue de Rivoli, near the Rue St. Roch, Dumas himself lived from 1838 to 1843.

There were in those days more than a score of passages, being for the most part a series of fine galleries, in some instances taking the form of a rotunda, glass-covered, and surrounded by shops with *appartements* above. The most notable were those known as the Panoramas Jouffroy, Vivienne, Colbert, de l’Opera, Delorme, du Saumon, etc.

There were more than a hundred squares, or *places* — most of which remain to-day. The most famous on the right bank of the Seine are de la Concorde, Vendome, du Carrousel, du Palais Royal, des Victoires, du Châtelet, de l’Hôtel de Ville, Royale, des Vosges, and de la Bastille; on the left bank, du Panthéon, de St. Sulpice, du Palais Bourbon. Most of these radiating centres of life are found in Dumas’ pages, the most frequent mention being in the D’Artagnan and Valois romances.

Among the most beautiful and the most frequented thoroughfares were — and are — the tree-bordered quais, and, of course, the boulevards.

The interior boulevards were laid out at the end of the seventeenth century on the ancient ramparts of the city, and extended from the Madeleine to La Bastille, a distance of perhaps three miles. They are mostly of a width of thirty-two metres (105 feet).

This was the boulevard of the time *par excellence*, and its tree-bordered *allées* — sidewalks and roadways — bore, throughout its comparatively short length, eleven different names, often changing meanwhile as it progressed its physiognomy as well.

On the left bank, the interior boulevard was extended from the Jardin des Plantes to the Hôtel des Invalides; while the "*boulevards extérieurs*" formed a second belt of tree-shaded thoroughfares of great extent.

Yet other boulevards of ranking greatness cut the *rues* and avenues tangently, now from one bank and then from the other; the most splendid of all being the Avenue de l'Opéra, which, however, did not come into being until well after the middle of the century. Among these are best recalled Sébastopol, St. Germain, St. Martin, Magenta, Malesherbes, and others. The Place Malesherbes, which intersects the avenue, now contains the celebrated Dumas memorial by Doré, and the neighbouring thoroughfare was the residence of Dumas from 1866 to 1870.

Yet another class of thoroughfares, while conceived previous to the chronological limits which the title puts upon this book, were the vast and splendid promenades and rendezvous, with their trees, flowers, and fountains; such as the gardens of the Tuileries and the Luxembourg, the Champs Elysées, the Esplanade des Invalides, and the Bois de Boulogne and de Vincennes.

Dibdin tells of his *entrée* into Paris in the early days of the nineteenth century, having journeyed by "*malle-poste*" from Havre, in the pages of his memorable bibliographical tour.

His observations somewhat antedate the Paris of Dumas and his fellows, but changes came but slowly, and therein may be found a wealth of archæological and topographical information concerning the French metropolis; though he does compare, detrimentally, the panorama of Paris which unrolls from the heights of Passy, to that of London from Highgate Woods.

On the contrary, his impressions change after passing the barriers. "Nothing in London," says he, "can enter into comparison with the imposing spectacle which is presented by the magnificent Champs Elysées, with the Château of the Tuileries *en face*, and to the right the superb dome of the Invalides glistening in the rays of the setting sun.”

Paris had at this time 2,948 “*voitures de louage*,” which could be hired for any journey to be made within reasonable distance; and eighty-three which were run only on predetermined routes, as were the later omnibuses and tram-cars. These 2,948 carriages were further classified as follows; 900 *fiacres*; 765 *cabriolets*, circulating in the twelve interior *arrondissements*; 406 *cabriolets* for the exterior; 489 *carrosses de remise* (livery-coaches), and 388 *cabriolets de remise*.

The *préfet de police*, Count Anglès, had received from one Godot, an *entrepreneur*, — a sort of early edition of what we know to-day as a company promoter, — a proposition to establish a line of omnibuses along the quais and boulevards. Authorization for the scheme was withheld for the somewhat doubtful reason that “the constant stoppage of the vehicles to set down and take up passengers would greatly embarrass other traffic;” and so a new idea was still-born into the world, to come to life only in 1828, when another received the much coveted authority to make the experiment.

Already such had been established in Bordeaux and Nantes, by an individual by the name of Baudry, and he it was who obtained the first concession in Paris.

The first line inaugurated was divided into two sections: Rue de Lancry — Madeleine, and Rue de Lancry — Bastille.

It is recorded that the young — but famous — Duchesse de Berry was the first to take passage in these “intramural *diligences*,” which she called “*le carrosse des malheureux*;” perhaps with some truth, if something of snobbishness.

There seems to have been a considerable difficulty in attracting a *clientèle* to this new means of communication. The public hesitated, though the prices of the places were decided in their favour, so much so that the enterprise came to an untimely end, or, at least, its founder did; for he committed suicide because of the non-instantaneous success of the scheme.

The concession thereupon passed into other hands, and there was created a new type of vehicle of sixteen places, drawn by two horses, and priced at six sous the place. The new service met with immediate, if but partial, success, and with the establishment of new routes, each served by carriages of a distinctive colour, its permanence was assured.

Then came the “*Dames Blanches,*” — the name being inspired by Boieldieu’s opera, — which made the journey between the Porte St. Martin and the Madeleine in a quarter of an hour. They were painted a cream white, and drawn by a pair of white horses, coiffed with white plumes.

After the establishment of the omnibus came other series of vehicles for public service: the “*Ecossaises,*” with their gaudily variegated colours, the “*Carolines,*” the “*Bearnaises,*” and the “*Tricycles,*” which ran on three wheels in order to escape the wheel-tax which obtained at the time.

In spite of the rapid multiplication of omnibus lines under Louis-Philippe, their veritable success came only with the ingenious system of transfers, or “*la correspondance*;” a system and a convenience whereby one can travel throughout Paris for the price of one fare. From this reason alone, perhaps, the omnibus and tram system of Paris is unexcelled in all the world. This innovation dates, moreover, from 1836, and, accordingly, is no new thing, as many may suppose.

Finally, more recently, — though it was during the Second Empire, — the different lines were fused under the title of the “Compagnie Générale des Omnibus.”

“*La malle-poste*” was an institution of the greatest importance to Paris, though of course no more identified with it than with the other cities of France between which it ran. It dated actually from the period of the Revolution, and grew, and was modified, under the Restoration. It is said that its final development came during the reign of Louis XVIII., and grew out of his admiration for the “*élégance et la rapidité des malles anglaises,*” which had been duly impressed upon him during his sojourn in England.

This may be so, and doubtless with some justification. *En passant* it is curious to know, and, one may say, incredible to realize, that from the G. P. O. in London, in this year of enlightenment, there leaves each night various mail-coaches — for Dover, for Windsor, and perhaps elsewhere. They do not carry passengers, but they do give a very bad service in the delivery of certain classes of mail matter. The marvel is that such things are acknowledged as being fitting and proper to-day.

In 1836 the “*malle-poste*” was reckoned, in Paris, as being *élégante et rapide,* having a speed of not less than sixteen kilometres an hour over give-and-take roads.

Each evening, from the courtyard of the Hôtel des Postes, the coaches left, with galloping horses and heavy loads, for the most extreme points of the frontier; eighty-six hours to Bordeaux at first, and finally only forty-four (in 1837); one hundred hours to Marseilles, later but sixty-eight.

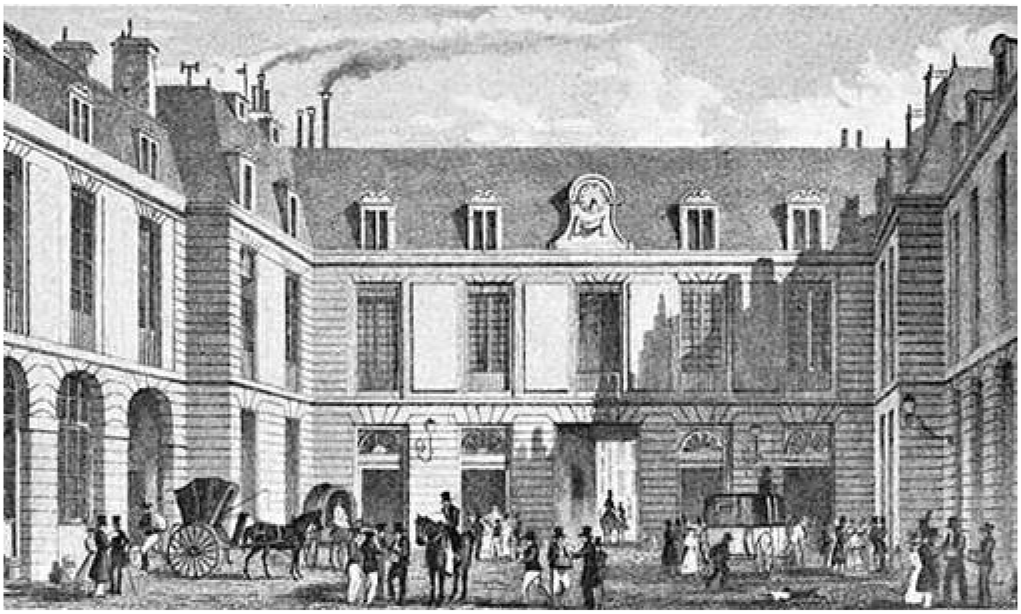

GRAND BUREAU DE LA POSTE

Stendhal tells of his journey by “*malle-poste*” from Paris to Marseilles in three days, and Victor Hugo has said that two nights on the road gave one a high idea of the *solidité* of the human machine; and further says, of a journey down the Loire, that he recalled only a great tower at Orleans, a candlelit *salle* of an *auberge en route*, and, at Blois, a bridge with a cross upon it. “In reality, during the journey, animation was suspended.”

What we knew, or our forefathers knew, as the “*poste-chaise,*” properly “*chaise de poste,*” came in under the Restoration. All the world knows, or should know, Edouard Thierry’s picturesque description of it. “*Le rêve de nos vingt ans, la voiture où l’on n’est que deux ... devant vous le chemin libre, la plaine, la pente rapide, le pont.*” “You traverse cities and hamlets without number, by the *grands rues*, the *grande place*, etc.”

In April, 1837, Stendhal quitted Paris under exactly these conditions for his tour of France. He bought “*une bonne calèche,*” and left *via* Fontainebleau, Montargis, and Cosne. Two months after, however, he returned to the metropolis *via* Bourges, having refused to continue his journey *en calèche,* preferring the “*malle-poste*” and the *diligence* of his youth.

Public *diligences*, however, had but limited accommodation on grand occasions; Victor Hugo, who had been invited to the consecration of Charles X. at Reims, and his friend, Charles Nodier, the bibliophile, — also a friend of Dumas, it is recalled, — in company with two others, made the attempt amid much discomfort in a private carriage, — of a sort, — and Nodier wittily tells of how he and Hugo walked on foot up all the hills, each carrying his gripsack as well.

More than all others the “Coches d’Eau” are especially characteristic of Paris; those fly-boats, whose successors ply up and down the Seine, to the joy of Americans, the convenience of the Parisian public, and — it is surely allowable to say it — the disgust of Londoners, now that their aged and decrepit “Thames steamboats” are no more.

These early Parisian “Coches d’Eau” carried passengers up and down river for surprisingly low fares, and left the city at seven in the morning in summer, and eight in winter.

The following is a list of the most important routes:

Paris — Nogent-sur-Seine	2 days en route
Paris — Briare	3”““
Paris — Montereau	1 day ”“
Paris — Sens	2 days ”“
Paris — Auxerre	4”““

All of these services catered for passengers and goods, and were, if not rapid, certainly a popular and comfortable means of communication.

An even more popular journey, and one which partook more particularly of a pleasure-trip, was that of the *galiote*, which left each day from below the Pont-Royal for St. Cloud, giving a day’s outing by river which to-day, even, is the most fascinating of the many *petits voyages* to be undertaken around Paris.

The other recognized public means of communication between the metropolis and the provincial towns and cities were the “Messageries Royales,” and two other similar companies, “La Compagne Lafitte et Caillard” and “Les Françaises.”

These companies put also before the Parisian public two other classes of vehicular accommodation, the “*pataches suspendues*,” small carriages with but one horse, which ran between Paris and Strasburg, Metz, Nancy, and Lyons at the price of ten sous per hour.

Again there was another means of travel which originated in Paris; it was known as the "Messageries à Cheval." Travellers rode *on* horses, which were furnished by the company, their *bagages* being transported in advance by a "*chariot*." In fine weather this must certainly have been an agreeable and romantic mode of travel in those days; what would be thought of it to-day, when one, if he does not fly over the kilometres in a Sud — or Orient — Express, is as likely as not covering the *Route Nationale* at sixty or more kilometres the hour in an automobile, it is doubtful to say.

Finally came the famous *diligence*, which to-day, outside the "Rollo" books and the reprints of old-time travel literature, is seldom met with in print.

"These immense structures," says an observant French writer, "which lost sometimes their centre of gravity, in spite of all precaution and care on the part of the driver and the guard, were, by an *Ordonnance Royale* of the 16th of July, 1828, limited as to their dimensions, weight, and design."

Each *diligence* carried as many spare parts as does a modern automobile, and workshops and supply-depots were situated at equal distances along the routes. Hugo said that the complexity of it all represented to him "the perfect image of a nation; its constitution and its government. In the *diligence* was to be found, as in the state, the aristocracy in the coupé, the *bourgeoisie* in the interior, the people in *la rotonde*, and, finally, 'the artists, the thinkers, and the unclassed' in the utmost height, the *impériale*, beside the *conducteur*, who represented the law of the state.

"This great *diligence*, with its body painted in staring yellow, and its five horses, carries one in a diminutive space through all the sleeping villages and hamlets of the countryside."

From Paris, in 1830, the journey by *diligence* to Toulouse — 182 French leagues — took eight days; to Rouen, thirteen hours; to Lyons, *par* Auxerre, four days, and to Calais, two and a half days.

The *diligence* was certainly an energetic mode of travel, but not without its discomforts, particularly in bad weather. Prosper Merimée gave up his winter journey overland to Madrid in 1859, and took ship at Bordeaux for Alicante in Spain, because, as he says, "all the inside places had been taken for a month ahead."

The coming of the *chemin de fer* can hardly be dealt with here. Its advent is comparatively modern history, and is familiar to all.

Paris, as might naturally be supposed, was the hub from which radiated the great spokes of iron which bound the uttermost frontiers intimately with the capital.

There were three short lines of rail laid down in the provinces before Paris itself took up with the innovation: at Roanne, St. Etienne-Andrézieux, Epinac, and Alais.

By *la loi du 9 Juillet*, 1835, a line was built from Paris to St. Germain, seventeen kilometres, and its official opening for traffic, which took place two years later, was celebrated by a *déjeuner de circonstance* at the Restaurant du Pavillon Henri Quatre at St. Germain.

Then came “Le Nord” to Lille, Boulogne, and Calais; “L’Ouest” to Havre, Rouen, Cherbourg, and Brest; “L’Est” to Toul and Nancy; “L’Orleans” to Orleans and the Loire Valley; and, finally, the “P. L. M.” (Paris-Lyon et Méditerranée) to the south of France. “Then it was that Paris really became the rich neighbour of all the provincial towns and cities. Before, she had been a sort of pompous and distant relative” — as a whimsical Frenchman has put it.

The mutability of time and the advent of mechanical traction is fast changing all things — in France and elsewhere. The Chevaux Blancs, Deux Pigeons, Cloches d’Or, and the Hôtels de la Poste, de la Croix, and du Grand Cerf are fast disappearing from the large towns, and the way of iron is, or will be, a source of inspiration to the poets of the future, as has the *postillon,* the *diligence,* and the *chaise de poste* in the past. Here is a quatrain written by a despairing *aubergiste* of the little town of Salons, which indicates how the innovation was received by the provincials — in spite of its undeniable serviceability:

“En l’an neuf cent, machine lourde
A tretous farfit damne et mal,
Gens moult rioient d’icelle bourde,
Au campas renovoient cheval.”

The railways which centre upon Paris are indeed the ties that bind Paris to the rest of France, and vice versa. Their termini — the great *gares* — are at all times the very concentrated epitome of the life of the day.

The new *gares* of the P. L. M. and the Orleans railways are truly splendid and palatial establishments, with — at first glance — little of the odour of the railway about them, and much of the ceremonial appointments of a great civic institution; with gorgeous *salles à manger,* waiting-rooms, and —

bearing the P. L. M. in mind in particular — not a little of the aspect of an art-gallery.

The other *embarcadères* are less up-to-date — that vague term which we twentieth-century folk are wont to make use of in describing the latest innovations. The Gare St. Lazare is an enormous establishment, with a hotel appendage, which of itself is of great size; the Gare du Nord is equally imposing, but architecturally unbeautiful; while the Gare de l'Est still holds in its tympanum the melancholy symbolical figure of the late lamented Ville de Strasbourg, the companion in tears, one may say, of that other funereally decorated statue on the Place de la Concorde.

Paris, too, is well served by her tramways propelled by horses, — which have not yet wholly disappeared, — and by steam and electricity, applied in a most ingenious manner. By this means Paris has indeed been transformed from its interior thoroughfares to its uttermost *banlieu*.

The last two words on the subject have reference to the advent and development of the bicycle and the automobile, as swift, safe, and economical means of transport.

The reign of the bicycle as a pure fad was comparatively short, whatever may have been its charm of infatuation. As a utile thing it is perhaps more worthy of consideration, for it cannot be denied that its development — and of its later gigantic offspring, the automobile — has had a great deal to do with the better construction and up-keep of modern roadways, whether urban or suburban.

"*La petite reine bicyclette*" has been fêted in light verse many times, but no one seems to have hit off its salient features as did Charles Monselet. Others have referred to riders of the "new means of locomotion" as "cads on casters," and a writer in *Le Gaulois* stigmatized them as "*imbéciles à roulettes*," which is much the same; while no less a personage than Francisque Sarcey demanded, in the journal *La France*, that the police should suppress forthwith this *eccentricité*.

Charles Monselet's eight short lines are more appreciative:

"Instrument raide
En fer battu
Qui dépossède
Le char torlu;
Vélocipède
Rail impromptu,

Fils d’Archimède,
D’où nous viens-tu?”

Though it is apart from the era of Dumas, this discursion into a phase of present-day Paris is, perhaps, allowable in drawing a comparison between the city of to-day and that even of the Second Empire, which was, at its height, contemporary with Dumas’ prime.

If Paris was blooming suddenly forth into beauty and grace in the period which extended from the Revolution to the Franco-Prussian War, she has certainly, since that time, not ceased to shed her radiance; indeed, she flowers more abundantly than ever, though, truth to tell, it is all due to the patronage which the state has ever given, in France, to the fostering of the arts as well as industries.

And so Paris has grown, — beautiful and great, — and the stranger within her gates, whether he come by road or rail, by automobile or railway-coach, is sure to be duly impressed with the fact that Paris is for one and all alike a city founded of and for the people.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BANKS OF THE SEINE

The city of the ancient Parisii is the one particular spot throughout the length of the sea-green Seine — that “winding river” whose name, says Thierry, in his “Histoire des Gaulois,” is derived from a Celtic word having this signification — where is resuscitated the historical being of the entire French nation.

Here it circles around the Ile St. Louis, cutting it apart from the Ile de la Cité, and rushing up against the northern bank, periodically throws up a mass of gravelly sand, just in the precise spot where, in mediæval times, was an open market-place.

Here the inhabitants of the city met the country dealers, who landed produce from their boats, traded, purchased, and sold, and departed whence they came, into the regions of the upper Seine or the Marne, or downward to the lower river cities of Meulan, Mantes, and Vernon.

At this time Paris began rapidly to grow on each side of the stream, and became the great market or trading-place where the swains who lived up-river mingled with the hewers of wood from the forests of La Brie and the reapers of corn from the sunny plains of La Beauce.

These country folk, it would appear, preferred the northern part of Paris to the southern — it was less ceremonious, less ecclesiastical. If they approached the city from rearward of the Université, by the Orleans highroad, they paid exorbitant toll to the Abbot of St. Germain des Prés. Here they paid considerably less to the Prévôt of Paris. And thus from very early times the distinction was made, and grew with advancing years, between the town, or La Ville, which distinguished it from the Cité and the Université.

This sandy river-bank gradually evolved itself into the Quai and Place de la Grève, — its etymology will not be difficult to trace, — and endured in the full liberty of its olden functions as late as the day of Louis XV. Here might have been seen great stacks of firewood, charcoal, corn, wine, hay, and straw.

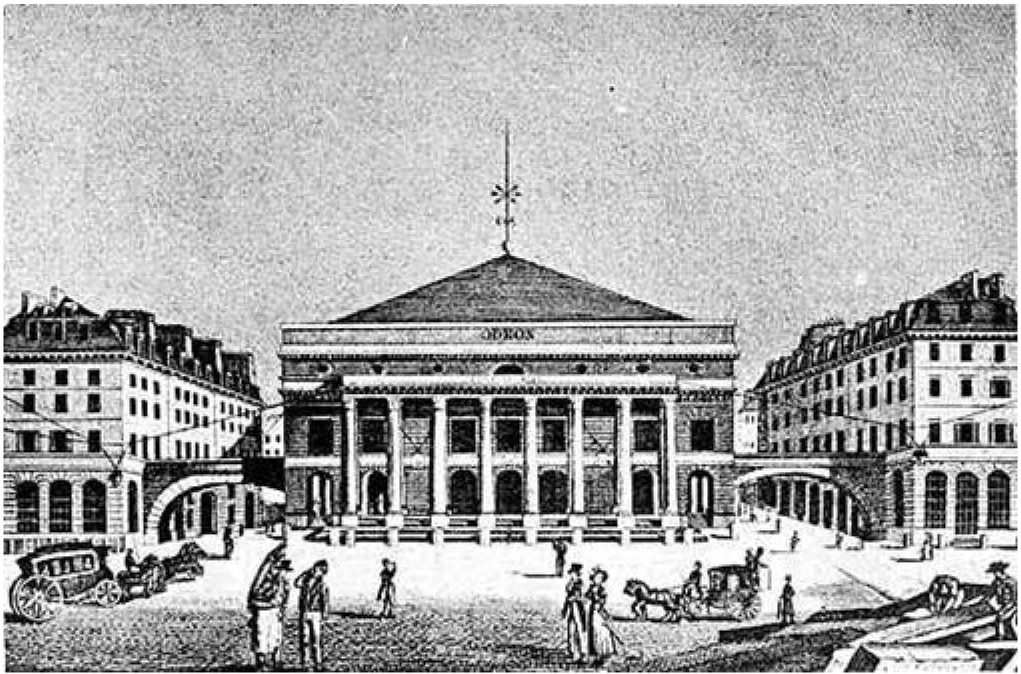

THE ODÉON IN 1818

Aside from its artistic and economic value, the Seine plays no great part in the story of Paris. It does not divide what is glorious from what is sordid, as does “London’s river.” When one crosses any one of its numerous bridges, one does not exchange thriftiness and sublimity for the commonplace. Les Invalides, L’Institut, the Luxembourg, the Panthéon, the Odéon, the Université, — whose buildings cluster around the ancient Sorbonne, — the Hôtel de Cluny, and the churches of St. Sulpice, St. Etienne du Mont, and St. Severin, and, last but not least, the Chamber of Deputies, all are on the south side of Paris, and do not shrink greatly in artistic or historical importance from Notre Dame, the Louvre, the Tour St. Jacques, the Place de la Bastille, the Palais Royal, or the Théâtre-Français.

The greatest function of the Seine, when one tries to focus the memory on its past, is to recall to us that old Paris was a trinity. Born of the river itself rose the Cité, the home of the Church and state, scarce finding room for her palaces and churches, while close to her side, on the south bank, the Université spread herself out, and on the right bank the Ville hummed with trade and became the home of the great municipal institutions.

Dumas shifts the scenes of his Parisian romances first from one side to the other, but always his mediæval Paris is the same grand, luxurious, and lively stage setting. Certainly no historian could hope to have done better.

Intrigue, riot, and bloodshed of course there were; and perhaps it may be thought in undue proportions. But did not the history of Paris itself furnish the romancer with these very essential details?

At all events, there is no great sordidness or squalor perpetuated in Dumas' pages. Perhaps it is for this reason that they prove so readable, and their wearing qualities so great.

There is in the reminiscence of history and the present aspect of the Seine, throughout its length, the material for the constructing a volume of bulk which should not lack either variety, picturesqueness, or interest. It furthermore is a subject which seems to have been shamefully neglected by writers of all ranks.

Turner, of the brilliant palette, pictured many of its scenes, and his touring-companion wrote a more or less imaginative and wofully incorrect running commentary on the itinerary of the journey, as he did also of their descent of the Loire. Philip Gilbert Hamerton, accompanied by a series of charming pictures by Joseph Pennell (the first really artistic topographical illustrations ever put into the pages of a book), did the same for the Saône; and, of course, the Thames has been "done" by many writers of all shades of ability, but manifestly the Seine, along whose banks lie the scenes of some of the most historic and momentous events of mediæval times, has been sadly neglected.

Paris is divided into practically two equal parts by the swift-flowing current of the Seine, which winds its way in sundry convolutions from its source beyond Chatillon-sur-Seine to the sea at Honfleur.

The praises of the winding river which connects Havre, Rouen, Vernon, Mantes, and Paris has often been sung, but the brief, virile description of it in the eighty-seventh chapter of Dumas' "Le Vicomte de Bragelonne" has scarcely been equalled. Apropos of the journey of Madame and Buckingham Paris-ward, after having taken leave of the English fleet at Havre, Dumas says of this greatest of French waterways:

"The weather was fine. Spring cast its flowers and its perfumed foliage upon the path. Normandy, with its vast variety of vegetation, its blue sky, and silver rivers, displayed itself in all its loveliness."

Through Paris its direction is from the southeast to the northwest, a distance, within the fortifications, of perhaps twelve kilometres.

Two islands of size cut its currents: the Ile St. Louis and the Ile de la Cité. A description of its banks, taken from a French work of the time, better defines its aspect immediately after the Revolution of 1848 than any amount of conjecture or present-day observation, so it is here given:

“In its course through the metropolis, the Seine is bordered by a series of magnificent quais, which in turn are bordered by rows of sturdy trees.

“The most attractive of these quais are those which flank the Louvre, the Tuileries, D’Orsay, Voltaire, and Conti.

“Below the quais are deposed nine ports, or *gares*, each devoted to a special class of merchandise, as coal, wine, produce, timber, etc.

“The north and south portions of the city are connected by twenty-six *ponts* (this was in 1852; others have since been erected, which are mentioned elsewhere in the book).

“Coming from the upper river, they were known as follows: the Ponts Napoléon, de Bercy, d’Austerlitz, the Passerelle de l’Estacade; then, on the right branch of the river, around the islands, the Ponts Maril, Louis-Philippe, d’Arcole, Notre Dame, and the Pont au Change; on the left branch, the Passerelle St. Louis or Constantine, the Ponts Tournelle, de la Cité, de l’Archevêche, le Pont aux Doubles, le Petit Pont, and the Pont St. Michel; here the two branches join again: le Pont Neuf, des Arts, du Carrousel, Royal, Solferino, de la Concorde, des Invalides, de l’Alma, de Jena, and Grenelle.

“Near the Pont d’Austerlitz the Seine receives the waters of the petite Rivière de Bièvre, or des Gobelins, which traverses the faubourgs.”

Of the bridges of Paris, Dumas in his romances has not a little to say. It were not possible for a romanticist — or a realist, for that matter — to write of Paris and not be continually confronting his characters with one or another of the many splendid bridges which cross the Seine between Conflans-Charenton and Asnières.

In the “Mousquetaires” series, in the Valois romances, and in his later works of lesser import, mention of these fine old bridges continually recurs; more than all others the Pont Neuf, perhaps, or the Pont au Change.

In “Pauline” there is a charming touch which we may take to smack somewhat of the author’s own predilections and experiences. He says, concerning his embarkation upon a craft which he had hired at a little

Norman fishing-village, as one jobs a carriage in Paris: "I set up to be a sailor, and served apprenticeship on a craft between the Pont des Tuileries and the Pont de la Concorde."

Of the Seine bridges none is more historic than the Pont Neuf, usually reckoned as one of the finest in Europe; which recalls the fact that the French — ecclesiastic and laymen architects alike — were master bridge-builders. For proof of this one has only to recall the wonderful bridge of St. Bénezet d'Avignon, the fortified bridges of Orthos and Cahors, the bridge at Lyons, built by the Primate of Gaul himself, and many others throughout the length and breadth of France.

The Pont Neuf was commenced in the reign of Henri III. (1578), and finished in the reign of Henri IV. (1604), and is composed of two unequal parts, which come to their juncture at the extremity of the Ile de la Cité.

In the early years a great bronze horse, known familiarly as the "Cheval de Bronze," but without a rider, was placed upon this bridge. During the Revolution, when cannon and ammunition were made out of any metal which could be obtained, this curious statue disappeared, though later its pedestal was replaced — under the Bourbons — by an equestrian statue of the Huguenot king.

The Pont des Arts, while not usually accredited as a beautiful structure, — and certainly not comparable with many other of its fellows, — is interesting by reason of the fact that its nine iron arches, which led from the Quai du Louvre to the Quai de la Monnai, formed the first example of an iron bridge ever constructed in France. Its nomenclature is derived from the Louvre, which was then called — before the title was applied to the Collège des Quatre Nations — the Palais des Arts. In Restoration times it was one of the fashionable promenades of Paris.

The Pont au Change took its name from the *changeurs*, or money-brokers, who lived upon it during the reign of Louis le Jeune in 1141. It bridged the widest part of the Seine, and, after being destroyed by flood and fire in 1408, 1616, and 1621, was rebuilt in 1647. The houses which originally covered it were removed in 1788 by the order of Louis XVI. In "The Conspirators," Dumas places the opening scene at that end of the Pont Neuf which abuts on the Quai de l'École, and is precise enough, but in "Marguerite de Valois" he evidently confounds the Pont Neuf with the Pont au Change, when he puts into the mouth of Coconnas, the Piedmontese: "They who rob on the Pont Neuf are, then, like you, in the service of the king. *Mordi!* I have been very unjust, sir; for until now I had taken them for thieves."

The Pont Louis XV. was built in 1787 out of part of the material which was taken from the ruins of the Bastille.

Latterly there has sprung up the new Pont Alexandre, commemorative of the Czar's visit to Paris, which for magnificent proportions, beauty of design and arrangement, quite overtops any other of its kind, in Paris or elsewhere.

The quais which line the Seine as it runs through Paris are like no other quais in the known world. They are the very essence and epitome of certain phases of life which find no counterpart elsewhere.

The following description of a bibliomaniac from Dumas' "Mémoires" is unique and apropos:

"Bibliomaniac, evolved from *book* and *mania,* is a variety of the species man — *species bipes et genus homo*.

"This animal has two feet and is without features, and usually wanders about the quais and boulevards, stopping in front of every stall and fingering all the books. He is generally dressed in a coat which is too long and trousers which are too short, his shoes are always down at heel, and on his head is an ill-shapen hat. One of the signs by which he may be recognized is shown by the fact that he never washes his hands."

The booksellers' stalls of the quais of Paris are famous, though it is doubtful if genuine bargains exist there in great numbers. It is significant, however, that more volumes of Dumas' romances are offered for sale — so it seems to the passer-by — than of any other author.

The Seine opposite the Louvre, and, indeed, throughout the length of its flow through Paris, enters largely into the scheme of the romances, where scenes are laid in the metropolis.

Like the throng which stormed the walls of the Louvre on the night of the 18th of August, 1527, during that splendid royal fête, the account of which opens the pages of "Marguerite de Valois," the Seine itself resembles Dumas' description of the midnight crowd, which he likens to "a dark and rolling sea, each swell of which increases to a foaming wave; this sea, extending all along the quai, spent its waves at the base of the Louvre, on the one hand, and against the Hôtel de Bourbon, which was opposite, on the other."

In the chapter entitled “What Happened on the Night of the Twelfth of July,” in “The Taking of the Bastille,” Dumas writes of the banks of the Seine in this wise:

“Once upon the quai, the two countrymen saw glittering on the bridge near the Tuileries the arms of another body of men, which, in all probability, was not a body of friends; they silently glided to the end of the quai, and descended the bank which leads along the Seine. The clock of the Tuileries was just then striking eleven.

“When they had got beneath the trees which line the banks of the river, fine aspen-trees and poplars, which bathe their feet in its current, when they were lost to the sight of their pursuers, hid by their friendly foliage, the farmers and Pitou threw themselves on the grass and opened a council of war.”

Just previously the mob had battered down the gate of the Tuileries, as a means of escape from the pen in which the dragoons had crowded the populace.

“‘Tell me now, Father Billot,’ inquired Pitou, after having carried the timber some thirty yards, ‘are we going far in this way?’

“‘We are going as far as the gate of the Tuileries.’

“‘Ho, ho!’ cried the crowd, who at once divined his intention.

“And it made way for them more eagerly even than before.

“Pitou looked about him, and saw that the gate was not more than thirty paces distant from them.

“‘I can reach it,’ said he, with the brevity of a Pythagorean.

“The labour was so much the easier to Pitou from five or six of the strongest of the crowd taking their share of the burden.

“The result of this was a very notable acceleration in their progress.

“In five minutes they had reached the iron gates.

“‘Come, now,’ cried Billot, ‘clap your shoulders to it, and all push together.’

“‘Good!’ said Pitou. ‘I understand now. We have just made a warlike engine; the Romans used to call it a ram.’

“‘Now, my boys,’ cried Billot, ‘once, twice, thrice,’ and the joist, directed with a furious impetus, struck the lock of the gate with resounding violence.

“The soldiers who were on guard in the interior of the garden hastened to resist this invasion. But at the third stroke the gate gave way, turning violently on its hinges, and through that gaping and gloomy mouth the crowd rushed impetuously.

“From the movement that was then made, the Prince de Lambesq perceived at once that an opening had been effected which allowed the escape of those whom he had considered his prisoners. He was furious with disappointment.”

CHAPTER IX.

THE SECOND EMPIRE AND AFTER

The Revolution of 1848 narrowed itself down to the issue of Bourbonism or Bonapartism. Nobody had a good word to say for the constitution, and all parties took liberties with it. It was inaugurated as the most democratic of all possible charters. It gave a vote to everybody, women and children excepted. It affirmed liberty with so wide a latitude of interpretation as to leave nothing to be desired by the reddest Republican that ever wore pistols in his belt at the heels of the redoubtable M. Marc Caussidière, or expressed faith in the social Utopia of the enthusiastic M. Proudhon. Freedom to speak, to write, to assemble, and to vote, — all were secured to all Frenchmen by this marvellous charter. When it became the law of the land, everybody began to nibble at and destroy it. The right of speaking was speedily reduced to the narrowest limits, and the liberty of the press was pared down to the merest shred. The right of meeting was placed at the tender mercies of the prefect of police, and the right of voting was attacked with even more zeal and fervour. The Revolution proved more voracious than Saturn himself, in devouring its children, and it made short work of men and reputations. It reduced MM. de Lamartine, Armand Marrast, and General Cavaignac into nothingness; sent MM. Louis Blanc, Ledru Rollin, and Caussidière into the dreary exile of London, and consigned the fiery Barbés, the vindictive Blanqui, the impatient Raspail, and a host of other regenerators of the human race, to the fastnesses of Vincennes. Having done this, the Revolution left scarcely a vestige of the constitution, — nothing but a few crumbs, and those were not crumbs of comfort, which remained merely to prove to the incredulous that such a thing as the constitution once existed.

The former king and queen took hidden refuge in a small cottage at Honfleur, whence they were to depart a few days later for England — ever a refuge for exiled monarchists. Escape became very urgent, and the king, with an English passport in the name of William Smith, and the queen as

Madame Lebrun, crossed over to Le Havre and ultimately to England. Lamartine evidently mistakes even the time and place of this incident, but newspaper accounts of the time, both French and English, are very full as to the details. On landing at the quai at Le Havre, the ex-royal party was conducted to the "Express" steam-packet, which had been placed at their disposal for the cross-channel journey. Dumas takes the very incident as a detail for his story of "Pauline," and his treatment thereof does not differ greatly from the facts as above set forth. Two years later (August 26, 1850), at Claremont, in Surrey, in the presence of the queen and several members of his family, Louis-Philippe died. He was the last of the Bourbons, with whom Dumas proudly claimed acquaintanceship, and as such, only a short time before, was one of the mightiest of the world's monarchs, standing on one of the loftiest pinnacles of an ambition which, in the mind of a stronger or more wilful personality, might have accomplished with success much that with him resulted in defeat.

After the maelstrom of discontent — the Revolution of 1848 — had settled down, there came a series of events well-nigh as disturbing. Events in Paris were rapidly ripening for a change. The known determination of Louis Napoleon to prolong his power, either as president for another term of four years, or for life, or as consul or emperor of the French, and the support which his pretensions received from large masses of the people and from the rank and file of the army, had brought him into collision with a rival — General Changarnier — almost as powerful as himself, and with an ambition quite as daring as his own.

What Louis Napoleon wanted was evident. There was no secret about his designs. The partisans of Henri V. looked to Changarnier for the restoration of peace and legitimacy, and the Orleanists considered that he was the most likely man in France to bring back the house of Orleans, and the comfortable days of bribery, corruption, and a thriving trade; while the fat *bourgeoisie* venerated him as the unflinching foe of the disturbers of order, and the great bulwark against Communism and the Red Republic.

Still, this was manifestly not to be, though no one seemed to care a straw about Louis Napoleon's republic, or whether or no he dared to declare himself king or emperor, or whether they should be ruled by Bonapartist, Bourbon, or Orleanist.

These were truly perilous times for France; and, though they did not culminate in disaster until twenty years after, Louis Napoleon availed himself of every opportunity to efface from the Second Republic, of which he was at this time the head, every vestige of the democratic features which it ought to have borne.

At the same time he surrounded himself with imposing state and pomp, so regal in character that it was evidently intended to accustom the public to see in him the object of that homage which is usually reserved for crowned heads alone, and thus gradually and imperceptibly to prepare the nation to witness, without surprise, his assuming, when the favourable occasion offered, the purple and diadem of the empire.

For instance, he took up his residence in the ancient palace of the sovereigns of France, the Tuileries, and gave banquets and balls of regal magnificence; he ordered his effigy to be struck upon the coinage of the nation, surrounded by the words “Louis Napoleon Bonaparte,” without any title, whether as president or otherwise, being affixed. He restored the imperial eagles to the standards of the army; the official organ, the *Moniteur*, recommended the restoration of the titles and orders of hereditary nobility; the trees of liberty were uprooted everywhere; the Republican motto, “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,” was erased from the public edifices; the colossal statue of Liberty, surmounted by a Phrygian cap, which stood in the centre of the Place de Bourgogne, behind the Legislative Assembly, was demolished; and the old anti-Republican names of the streets were restored, so that the Palais National again became the Palais Royal; the Théâtre de la Nation, the Théâtre Français; the Rue de la Concorde, the Rue Royal, etc.; and, in short, to all appearances, Louis Napoleon began early in his tenure of office to assiduously pave the way to the throne of the empire as Napoleon III.

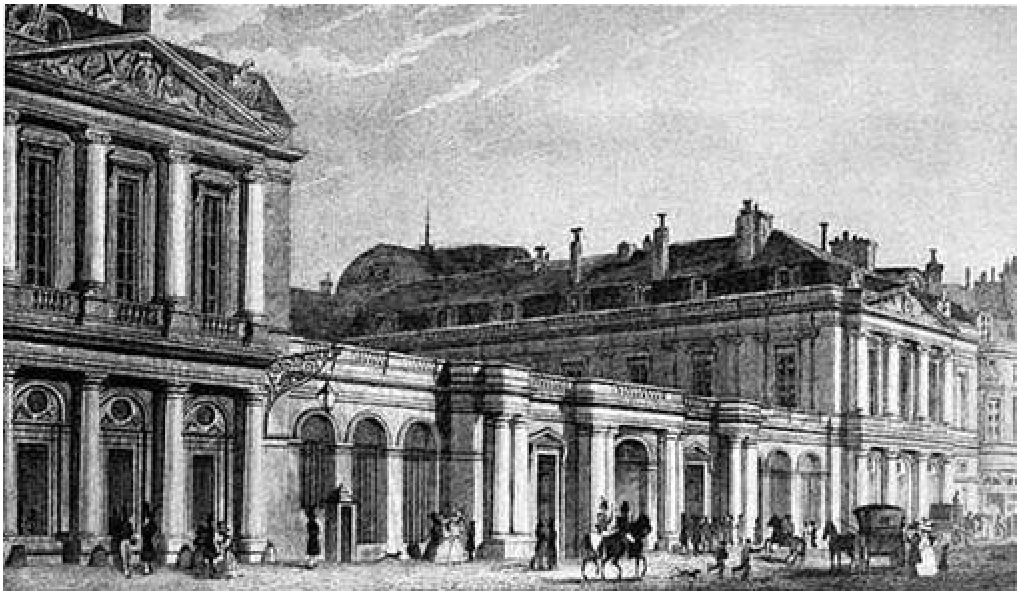
PALAIS ROYAL, STREET FRONT

The *London Times* correspondent of that day related a characteristic exercise of this sweeping instruction of the Minister of the Interior to erase the words “Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité” from all public buildings. (The three revolutionary watchwords had, in fact, been erased the previous year from the principal entrance to the Elysée, and the words “République Française,” in large letters, were substituted.)

“There is, I believe, only one public monument in Paris — the Ecole de Droit — where the workmen employed in effacing that inscription will have a double duty. They will have to interfere with the ‘Liberalism’ of two generations. Immediately under the coat of yellow paint which covered the façade of the building, and on which time and the inclemency of the seasons have done their work, may still be traced, above the modern device, the following words, inscribed by order of the Commune of Paris during the Reign of Terror: ‘Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité, Unité, Indivisibilité de la République Française!’ As the effacing of the inscription of 1848 is not now by means of whitewash or paint, but by erasure, both the inscriptions will disappear at the same moment.”

Among the most important demolitions and renovations of the sixties was the work undertaken on the Louvre at the orders of the ambitious emperor, Napoleon III. The structure was cloven to the foundations, through the slated roof, the gilded and painted ceiling, the parqueted floors; and, where one formerly enjoyed an artistic feast that had taken four centuries to provide, one gazed upon, from the pavement to the roof, a tarpaulin that closed a vista which might otherwise have been a quarter of a mile in length.

Builders toiled day and night to connect the Louvre with the main body of the Palace of the Tuileries, which itself was to disappear within so short a time. Meanwhile so great a displacement of the art treasures was undergone, that *habitués* knew not which way to turn for favourite pictures, with which the last fifty years had made them so familiar.

To those of our elders who knew the Paris of the early fifties, the present-day aspect — in spite of all its glorious wealth of boulevards and architectural splendour — will suggest the mutability of all things.

It serves our purpose, however, to realize that much of the character has gone from the Quartier Latin; that the Tuileries disappeared with the Commune, and that the old distinctions between Old Paris, the faubourgs, and the Communal Annexes, have become practically non-existent with the opening up of the Haussman boulevards, at the instigation of the wary Napoleon III. Paris is still, however, an “*ancienne ville et une ville neuve*,” and the paradox is inexplicable.

The differences between the past and the present are indeed great, but nowhere — not even in the Tower of London, which is usually given as an example of the contrast and progress of the ages — is a more tangible and specific opposition shown, than in what remains to-day of mediæval Paris, in juxtaposition with the later architectural embellishments. In many instances is seen the newest of the “*art nouveau*” — as it is popularly known — cheek by jowl with some mediæval shrine.

It is difficult at this time to say what effect these swirls and blobs, which are daily thrusting themselves into every form of architectural display throughout Continental Europe, would have had on these masters who built the Gothic splendours of France, or even the hybrid *rococo* style, which, be it not denied, is in many instances beautiful in spite of its idiosyncrasies.

To those who are familiar with the “sights” of Paris, there is nothing left but to study the aspects of the life of the streets, the boulevards, the quais, the gardens, the restaurants, and the cafés. Here at least is to be found daily, and hourly, new sensations and old ones, but at all events it is an ever-shifting scene, such as no other city in the world knows.

The life of the *faubourgs* and of the *quartiers* has ever been made the special province of artists and authors, and to wander through them, to sit beneath the trees of the squares and gardens, or even outside a café, is to contemplate, in no small degree, much of the incident and temperament of life which others have already perpetuated and made famous.

There is little new or original effort which can be made, though once and again a new performer comes upon the stage, — a poet who sings songs of vagabondage, a painter who catches a fleeting impression, which at least, if not new, seems new. But in the main one has to hark back to former generations, if one would feel the real spirit of romance and tradition. There are few who, like Monet, can stop before a shrine and see in it forty-three varying moods — or some other incredible number, as did that artist when he limned his impressions of the façade of the Cathedral of Nôtre Dame de Rouen.

Such landmarks as the Place de la Bastille, the Pantheon, — anciently the site of the Abbey de Ste. Geneviève, — the Chambre des Députés, — the former Palais Bourbon, — the Tour St. Jacques, the Fountain des Innocents, St. Germain l'Auxerrois, the Palais du Luxembourg, the Louvre, and quite all the historic and notable buildings one sees, are all pictured with fidelity, and more or less minuteness, in the pages of Dumas' romances.

Again, in such other localities as the Boulevard des Italiens, the Café de Paris, the Théâtre Français, the Odêon, the Palais Royal, — where, in the "Orleans Bureau," Dumas found his first occupation in Paris, — took place many incidents of Dumas' life, which are of personal import.

For recollections and reminders of the author's contemporaries, there are countless other localities too numerous to mention. In the Rue Pigalle, at No. 12, died Eugene Scribe; in the Rue de Douai lived Edmond About, while in the Rue d'Amsterdam, at No. 77, lived Dumas himself, and in the Rue St. Lazare, Madame George Sand. Montmartre is sacred to the name of Zola in the minds of most readers of latter-day French fiction, while many more famous names of all ranks, of litterateurs, of actors, of artists and statesmen, — all contemporaries and many of them friends of Dumas, — will be found on the tombstones of Père la Chaise.

The motive, then, to be deduced from these pages is that they are a record of many things associated with Alexandre Dumas, his life, and his work. Equally so is a fleeting itinerary of strolls around and about the Paris of Dumas' romances, with occasional journeys into the provinces.

77 Rue d’Amsterdam

Rue de St. Denis

Thus the centuries have done their work of extending and mingling, — ”*le jeu est fait*,” so to speak, — but Paris, by the necessities of her growth and by her rather general devotion to one stately, towering form of domestic architecture, has often made the separation of old from new peculiarly difficult to a casual eye. It is indeed her way to be new and splendid, to be always the bride of cities, espousing human destiny. And, truly, it is in this character that we do her homage with our visits, our money, and our admiration. Out of gray, unwieldy, distributed London one flies from a vast and romantic camp to a city exact and beautiful. So exact, so beautiful, so consistent in her vivacity, so neat in her industry, so splendid in her display, that one comes to think that the ultimate way to enjoy Paris is to pass unquestioning and unsolicitous into her life, exclaiming not “Look here,” and “Look there” in a fever of sightseeing, but rather baring one’s breast, like Daudet’s *ouvrier*, to her assaults of glistening life.

The Paris of to-day is a reconstructed Paris; its old splendours not wholly eradicated, but changed in all but their associations. The life of Paris, too, has undergone a similar evolution, from what it was even in Dumas’ time.

The celebrities of the Café de Paris have mostly, if not quite all, passed away. No more does the eccentric Prince Demidoff promulgate his eccentricities into the very faces of the onlookers; no more does the great Dumas make omelettes in golden sugar-bowls; and no more does he pass his criticisms — or was it encomiums? — on the *veau sauté*.

The student revels of the *quartier* have become more sedate, if not more fastidious, and there is no such Mardi Gras and Mi-Carême festivities as used to hold forth on the boulevards in the forties. And on the Buttes Chaumont and Montmartre are found batteries of questionable amusements, — especially got up for the delectation of *les Anglais*, provincials, and soldiers off duty, — in place of the *cabarets*, which, if of doubtful morality, were at least a certain social factor.

New bridges span the Seine, and new thoroughfares, from humble alleys to lordly and magnificent boulevards, have clarified many a slum, and brightened and sweetened the atmosphere; so there is some considerable gain there.

The Parisian cabby is, as he always was, a devil-may-care sort of a fellow, who would as soon run you down with his sorry old outfit as not;

but perhaps even his characteristics will change sooner or later, now that the automobile is upon us in all its proclaimed perfection.

The “New Opera,” that sumptuous structure which bears the inscription “Académie Nationale de Musique,” begun by Garnier in 1861, and completed a dozen years later, is, in its commanding situation and splendid appointments, the peer of any other in the world. In spite of this, its fame will hardly rival that of the Comédie Française, or even the Opéra Comique of former days, and the names of latter-day stars will have difficulty in competing with those of Rachel, Talma, and their fellow actors on the stage of other days.

Whom, if you please, have we to-day whose name and fame is as wide as those just mentioned? None, save Madame Bernhardt, who suggests to the well-informed person — who is a very considerable body — the preëminent influences which formerly emanated from Paris in the fifties. But this of itself is a subject too vast for inclusion here, and it were better passed by. So, too, with the Parisian artists who made the art of the world in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Decamps, Delacroix, Corot, and Vernet are names with which to conjure up reminiscences as great as those of Rubens, Titian, and Van Dyke. This may be disputed, but, if one were given the same familiarity therewith, it is possible that one’s contrary opinion would be greatly modified.

To-day, in addition to the glorious art collection of former times, there are the splendid, though ever shifting, collections of the Musée du Luxembourg, the mural paintings of the Hôtel de Ville, which are a gallery in themselves, and the two spring Salon exhibitions, to say nothing of the newly attempted Salon d’Automne. Curiously enough, some of us find great pleasure in the contemplation of the decorations in the interiors of the great *gares* of the Lyons or the Orleans railways. Certainly these last examples of applied art are of a lavishness — and even excellence — which a former generation would not have thought of.

The Arc de Triomphe d’Étoile, of course, remains as it always has since its erection at the instigation of Napoleon I.; while the Bois de Boulogne came into existence as a municipal pleasure-ground only in the early fifties, and has since endured as the great open-air attraction of Paris for those who did not wish to go farther afield.

The churches have not changed greatly in all this time, except that they had some narrow escapes during the Franco-Prussian War, and still narrower ones during the Commune. It may be remarked here *en passant* that, for the first time in seventy years, so say the records, there has just been taken down the scaffolding which, in one part or another, has surrounded the church of St. Eustache. Here, then, is something tangible which has not changed until recently (March, 1904), since the days when Dumas first came to Paris.

The Paris of the nineteenth century is, as might naturally be inferred, that of which the most is known; the eighteenth and seventeenth are indeed difficult to follow with accuracy as to the exact locale of their events; but the sixteenth looms up — curiously enough — more plainly than either of the two centuries which followed. The histories, and even the guide-books, will explain why this is so, so it shall have no place here.

Order, of a sort, immediately came forth from out the chaos of the Revolution. The great Napoleon began the process, and, in a way, it was continued by the plebeian Louis-Philippe, elaborated in the Second Empire, and perfected — if a great capital such as Paris ever really is perfected — under the Third Republic.

Improvement and demolition — which is not always improvement — still go on, and such of Old Paris as is not preserved by special effort is fast falling before the stride of progress.

A body was organized in 1897, under the name of the "*Commission du Vieux Paris*," which is expected to do much good work in the preservation of the chronicles in stone of days long past.

The very streets are noisy with the echo of an unpeaceful past; and their frequent and unexpected turnings, even in these modern days, are suggestive of their history in a most graphic manner.

The square in front of the Fontaine des Innocents is but an ancient burial-ground; before the Hôtel de Ville came Etienne Marcel; and Charlemagne to the cathedral; the Place de la Concorde was the death-bed of the Girondins, and the Place de la Madeleine the tomb of the Capetians; and thus it is that Paris — as does no other city — mingles its centuries of strife amid a life which is known as the most vigorous and varied of its age.

To enter here into a detailed comparison between the charm of Paris of to-day and yesterday would indeed be a work of supererogation; and only in so far as it bears directly upon the scenes and incidents amid which Dumas lived is it so made.

CHAPTER X.

LA VILLE

It would be impossible to form a precise topographical itinerary of the scenes of Dumas’ romances and the wanderings of his characters, even in Paris itself. The area is so very wide, and the number of localities, which have more than an incidental interest, so very great, that the futility of such a task will at once be apparent.

Probably the most prominent of all the romances, so far as identifying the scenes of their action goes, are the Valois series.

As we know, Dumas was very fond of the romantic house of Valois, and, whether in town or country, he seemed to take an especial pride in presenting details of portraiture and place in a surprisingly complete, though not superfluous, manner.

The Louvre has the most intimate connection with both the Valois and the D’Artagnan romances, and is treated elsewhere as a chapter by itself.

Dumas’ most marked reference to the Hôtel de Ville is found in the taking of the Bastille, and, though it is not so very great, he gives prominence to the incident of the deputation of the people who waited upon De Flesselles, the prévôt, just before the march upon the Bastille.

In history we know the same individual as “Messire Jacques de Flesselles, Chevalier, Conseiller de la Grande Chambre, Maître Honoraire des Requêtes, Conseiller d’Etat.” The anecdote is recorded in history, too, that Louis XVI., when he visited the Hôtel de Ville in 1789, was presented with a cockade of blue and red, the colours of the ville — the white was not added till some days later.

“Votre Majesté,” dit le maire, “veut-elle accepte le signe distinctif des Français?”

For reply the king took the cockade and put it on his chapeau, entered the *grande salle*, and took his place on the throne.

All the broils and turmoils which have taken place since the great Revolution, have likewise had the Hôtel de Ville for the theatre where their first scenes were represented.

It was invaded by the people during the Revolutions of 1830 and 1848, as well as in the Commune in 1871, when, in addition to the human fury, it was attacked by the flames, which finally brought about its destruction. Thus perished that noble structure, which owed its inception to that art-loving monarch, François I.

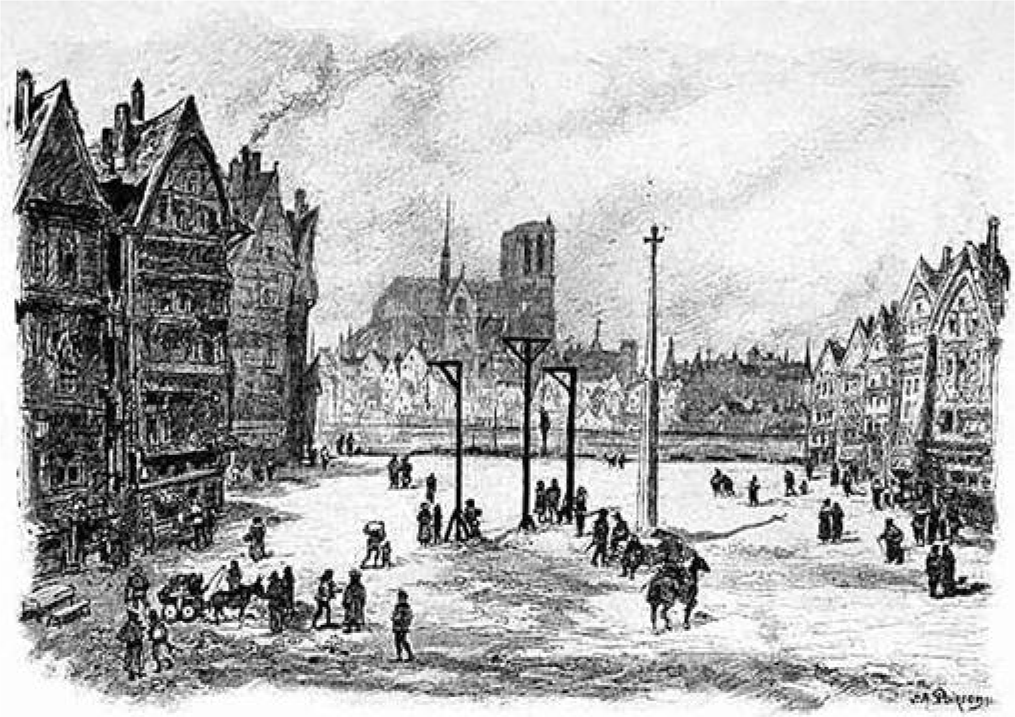

PLACE DE LA GRÈVE

The present-day Quai de l’Hôtel de Ville is the successor of the Quai des Ormes, which dates from the fourteenth century, and the Quai de la Grève, which existed as early as 1254, and which descended by an easy slope to the strand from which it took its name.

Adjoining the quai was the Place de la Grève, which approximates the present Place de l’Hôtel de Ville.

A near neighbour of the Hôtel de Ville is the Tour de St. Jacques la Boucherie, where sits to-day Paris’s clerk of the weather.

It was here that Marguerite de Valois, in company with the Duchesse de Nevers, repaired from their pilgrimage to the Cimetière des Innocents, to view the results of the Huguenot massacre of the preceding night.

"'And where are you two going?' inquired Catherine, the queen's mother. 'To see some rare and curious Greek books found at an old Protestant pastor's, and which have been taken to the Tour de St. Jacques la Boucherie,' replied the inquisitive and erudite Marguerite. For, be it recalled, her knowledge and liking of classical literature was most profound."

This fine Gothic tower, which is still a notable landmark, is the only *relique* of the Church of St. Jacques. A bull of Pope Calixtus II., dated 1119, first makes mention of it, and François I. made it a royal parish church.

The tower itself was not built until 1508, having alone cost 1,350 livres. It has often been pictured and painted, and to-day it is a willing or unwilling sitter to most snap-shot camerists who come within focus of it, but no one has perceived the spirit of its genuine old-time flavour as did Méryon, in his wonderful etching — so sought for by collectors — called "Le Stryge."

The artist's view-point, taken from the gallery of Nôtre Dame, — though in the early nineteenth century, — with the grotesque head and shoulders of one of those monstrous figures, half-man, half-beast, with which the galleries of Nôtre Dame are peopled, preserves, with its very simplicity and directness, an impression of *Vieux Paris* which is impossible to duplicate to-day.

The Place de la Grève was for a time, at least, the most famous or infamous of all the places of execution in Paris. One reads of it largely in "Marguerite de Valois" in this connection, and in "Le Vicomte de Bragelonne" it again crops up, but in a much more pleasant manner.

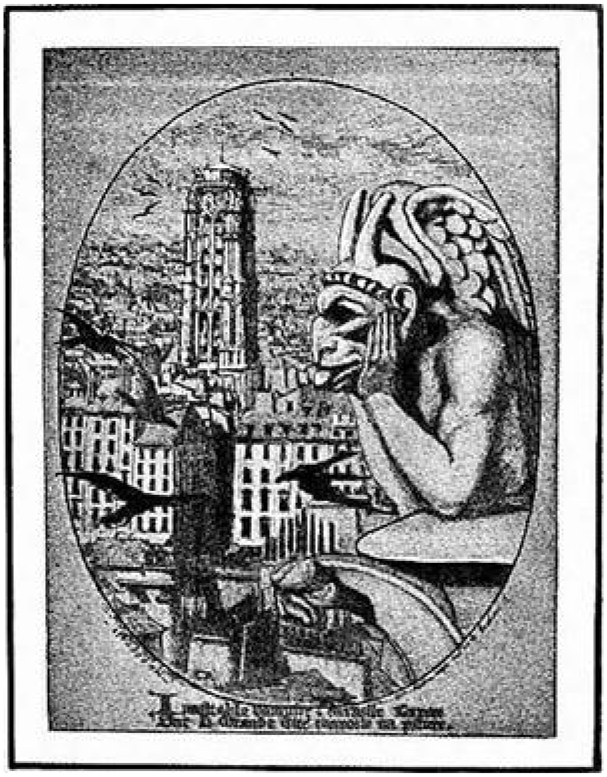

TOUR DE ST. JACQUES LA BOUCHERIE
(Méryon’s Etching, “Le Stryge”)

Dumas, ever praiseful of good wine and good food, describes Vatel, the *maître d’hôtel* of Fouquet, as crossing the square with a hamper filled with bottles, which he had just purchased at the *cabaret* of the sign of “L’Image de Nôtre Dame;” a queer name for a wine-shop, no doubt, and, though it does not exist to-day, and so cannot be authenticated, it may likely enough have had an existence outside the novelist’s page. At all events, it is placed definitely enough, as one learns from the chapter of “Le Vicomte de Bragelonne,” entitled “The Wine of M. de la Fontaine.”

“‘What the devil are you doing here, Vatel?’ said Fouquet. ‘Are you buying wine at a *cabaret* in the Place de Grève?’... ‘I have found here, monsieur, a “*vin de Joigny*” which your friends like. This I know, as they come once a week to drink it at the “Image de Nôtre Dame.”‘”

In the following chapter Dumas reverts to the inglorious aspect of the Place and the Quai de la Grève as follows:

“At two o’clock the next day, fifty thousand spectators had taken their position upon the place, around two gibbets which had been elevated between the Quai de la Grève and Quai Pelletier; one close to the other, with their backs to the parapet of the river. In the morning, also, all the sworn criers of the good city of Paris had traversed the quarters of the city, particularly the Halles and the faubourgs, announcing with their hoarse and indefatigable voices the great justice done by the king upon two peculators; two thieves, devourers of the people. And these people, whose interests were so warmly looked after, in order not to fail in respect for their king, quitted shops, stalls, and ateliers, to go and evince a little gratitude to Louis XIV., absolutely like invited guests, who feared to commit an impoliteness in not repairing to the house of him who invited them. According to the tenor of the sentence, which the criers read loudly and badly, two farmers of the revenues, monopolists of money, dilapidators of the royal provisions, extortioners and forgers, were about to undergo capital punishment on the Place de Grève, with their names affixed over their heads, according to their sentence. As to those names, the sentence made no mention of them. The curiosity of the Parisians was at its height, and, as we have said, an immense crowd waited with feverish impatience the hour fixed for the execution."

D'Artagnan, who, in the pages of "Le Vicomte de Bragelonne," was no more a young man, owned this very *cabaret*, the "Image de Nôtre Dame." "'I will go, then,' says he, 'to the "Image de Nôtre Dame," and drink a glass of Spanish wine with my tenant, which he cannot fail to offer me.'"

En route to the *cabaret*, D'Artagnan asked of his companion, "Is there a procession to-day?" "It is a hanging, monsieur." "What! a hanging on the Grève? The devil take the rogue who gets himself hung the day I go to take my rent," said D'Artagnan.

The old *mousquetaire* did not get his rent, there was riot and bloodshed galore, "L'Image de Nôtre Dame" was set on fire, and D'Artagnan had one more opportunity to cry out "*A moi, Mousquetaires*," and enter into a first-class fight; all, of course, on behalf of right and justice, for he saved two men, destined to be gibbeted, from the more frightful death of torture by fire, to which the fanatical crowd had condemned them.

The most extensive reference to the Place de la Grève is undoubtedly in the "Forty-Five Guardsmen," where is described the execution of Salcède, the coiner of false money and the co-conspirator with the Guises.

"M. Friard was right when he talked of one hundred thousand persons as the number of spectators who would meet on the Place de la Grève and its environs, to witness the execution of Salcède. All Paris appeared to have a rendezvous at the Hôtel de Ville; and Paris is very exact, and never misses a fête; and the death of a man is a fête, especially when he has raised so many passions that some curse and others bless him.

“The spectators who succeeded in reaching the place saw the archers and a large number of Swiss and light horse surrounding a little scaffold raised about four feet from the ground. It was so low as to be visible only to those immediately surrounding it, or to those who had windows overlooking the place. Four vigorous white horses beat the ground impatiently with their hoofs, to the great terror of the women, who had either chosen this place willingly, or had been forcibly pushed there.

“These horses were unused, and had never done more work than to support, by some chance, on their broad backs, the chubby children of the peasants. After the scaffold and the horses, what next attracted all looks was the principal window of the Hôtel de Ville, which was hung with red velvet and gold, and ornamented with the royal arms. This was for the king. Half-past one had just struck when this window was filled. First came Henri III., pale, almost bald, although he was at that time only thirty-five, and with a sombre expression, always a mystery to his subjects, who, when they saw him appear, never knew whether to say ‘*Vive le roi!*’ or to pray for his soul. He was dressed in black, without jewels or orders, and a single diamond shone in his cap, serving as a fastening to three short plumes. He carried in his hand a little black dog that his sister-in-law, Marie Stuart, had sent him from her prison, and on which his fingers looked as white as alabaster.

“Behind the king came Catherine de Medici, almost bowed by age, for she might be sixty-six or sixty-seven, but still carrying her head firm and erect, and darting bitter glances from under her thick eyebrows. At her side appeared the melancholy but sweet face of the queen, Louise de Touraine. Catherine came as a triumph, she as a punishment. Behind them came two handsome young men, brothers, the eldest of whom smiled with wonderful beauty, and the younger with great melancholy. The one was Anne, Duc de Joyeuse, and the other Henri de Joyeuse, Comte de Bouchage. The people had for these favourites of the king none of the hatred which they had felt toward Maugiron, Quelus, and Schomberg.

“Henri saluted the people gravely; then, turning to the young men, he said, ‘Anne, lean against the tapestry; it may last a long time.’...

”Henri, in anger, gave the sign. It was repeated, the cords were refastened, four men jumped on the horses, which, urged by violent blows, started off in opposite directions. A horrible cracking and a terrible cry was heard. The blood was seen to spout from the limbs of the unhappy man, whose face was no longer that of a man, but of a demon.

"'Ah, heaven!' he cried; 'I will speak, I will tell all. Ah! cursed duch — '

"The voice had been heard above everything, but suddenly it ceased.

"'Stop, stop,' cried Catherine, 'let him speak.'

"But it was too late; the head of Salcède fell helplessly on one side, he glanced once more to where he had seen the page, and then expired."

* * *

Near the Hôtel de Ville is "Le Châtelet," a name familiar enough to travellers about Paris. It is an omnibus centre, a station on the new "Metropolitan," and its name has been given to one of the most modern theatres of Paris.

Dumas, in "Le Collier de la Reine," makes but little use of the old Prison du Grand Châtelet, but he does not ignore it altogether, which seems to point to the fact that he has neglected very few historic buildings, or, for that matter, incidents of Paris in mediæval times, in compiling the famous D'Artagnan and Valois romances.

The Place du Châtelet is one of the most celebrated and historic open spots of Paris. The old prison was on the site of an old Cæsarian forum. The prison was destroyed in 1806, but its history for seven centuries was one of the most dramatic.

One may search for Planchet's shop, the "Pilon d'Or," of which Dumas writes in "The Vicomte de Bragelonne," in the Rue des Lombards of to-day, but he will not find it, though there are a dozen *boutiques* in the little street which joins the present Rue St. Denis with the present Boulevard Sebastopol, which to all intents and purposes might as well have been the abode of D'Artagnan's old servitor.

The Rue des Lombards, like Lombard Street in London, took its names from the original money-changers, who gathered here in great numbers in the twelfth century. Planchet's little shop was devoted to the sale of green groceries, with, presumably, a sprinkling of other attendant garnishings for the table.

To-day, the most notable of the shops here, of a similar character, is the famous *magasin de confiserie*, "Au Fidèle Berger," for which Guilbert, the author of "Jeune Malade," made the original verses for the wrappers which covered the products of the house. A contemporary of the poet has said that the “*enveloppe était moins bonne que la marchandaise*.”

The reader may judge for himself. This is one of the verses:

“Le soleil peut s’eteindre et le ciel s’obscurcir,
J’ai vu ma Marita, je n’ai plus qu’à mourir.”

Every lover of Dumas’ romances, and all who feel as though at one time or another they had been blessed with an intimate acquaintance with that “King of Cavaliers,” — D’Artagnan, — will have a fondness for the old narrow ways in the Rue d’Arbre Sec, which remains to-day much as it always was.

It runs from the Quai de l’Hôtel de Ville, — once the unsavoury Quai de la Grève, — toward Les Halles; and throughout its length, which is not very great, it has that crazy, tumble-down appearance which comes, sooner or later, to most narrow thoroughfares of mediæval times.

It is not so very picturesque nor so very tumble-down, it is simply wobbly. It is not, nor ever was, a pretentious thoroughfare, and, in short, is distinctly commonplace; but there is a little house, on the right-hand side, near the river, which will be famous as long as it stands, as the intimate scene of much of the minor action of “Marguerite de Valois,” “Chicot the Jester,” and others of the series.

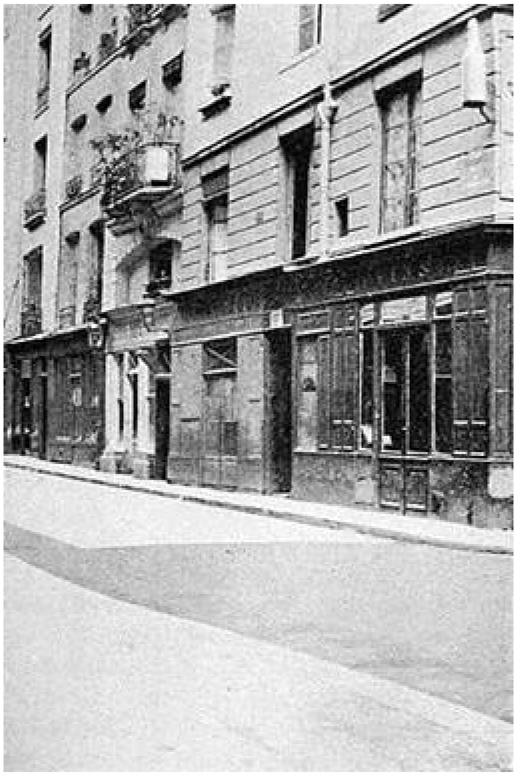

HÔTEL DES MOUSQUETAIRES, RUE D’ARBRE SEC

This *maison* is rather better off than most of its neighbours, with its white-fronted lower stories, its little balcony over the Crémerie, which now occupies the ground-floor, and its escutcheon — a blazing sun — midway in its façade.

Moreover it is still a lodging-house, — an humble hotel if you like, — at any rate something more than a mere house which offers “*logement à pied*.” Indeed its enterprising proprietor has erected a staring blue and white enamel sign which advertises his house:

HÔTEL
DES MOUSQUETAIRES

There is, perhaps, no harm in all this, as it would seem beyond all question to have some justification for its name, and it is above all something more tangible than the sites of many homes and haunts which may to-day be occupied with a modern *magasin*, *à tous génres*, or a great tourist caravanserai.

This house bears the name of “Hôtel des Mousquetaires,” as if it were really a lineal descendant of the “Hôtel de la Belle Etoile,” of which Dumas writes.

Probably it is not the same, and if it is, there is, likely enough, no significance between its present name and its former glory save that of perspicacity on the part of the present patron.

From the romance one learns how Catherine de Medici sought to obtain that compromising note which was in possession of Orthon, the page. Dumas says of this horror-chamber of the Louvre:

"Catherine now reached a second door, which, revolving on its hinges, admitted to the depths of the *oubliette*, where — crushed, bleeding, and mutilated, by a fall of more than one hundred feet — lay the still palpitating form of poor Orthon; while, on the other side of the wall forming the barrier of this dreadful spot, the waters of the Seine were heard to ripple by, brought by a species of subterraneous filtration to the foot of the staircase.

"Having reached the damp and unwholesome abyss, which, during her reign, had witnessed numerous similar scenes to that now enacted, Catherine proceeded to search the corpse, eagerly drew forth the desired billet, ascertained by the lantern that it was the one she sought, then, pushing the mangled body from her, she pressed a spring, the bottom of the *oubliette* sank down, and the corpse, borne by its own weight, disappeared toward the river.

"Closing the door after her, she reascended; and, returning to her closet, read the paper poor Orthon had so valiantly defended. It was conceived in these words:

"'This evening at ten o'clock, Rue de l'Arbre-Sec, Hôtel de la Belle Etoile. Should you come, no reply is requisite; if otherwise, send word back, *No*, by the bearer.

"'De Mouy de Saint-Phale.'

"At eight o'clock Henri of Navarre took two of his gentlemen, went out by the Porte St. Honoré, entered again by the Tour de Bois, crossed the Seine at the ferry of the Nesle, mounted the Rue St. Jacques, and there dismissed them, as if he were going to an amorous rendezvous. At the corner of the Rue des Mathurins he found a man on horseback, wrapped in a large cloak; he approached him.

"'Mantes!' said the man.

"'Pau!' replied the king.

"The horseman instantly dismounted. Henri wrapped himself in his splashed mantle, sprang on his steed, rode down the Rue de la Harpe, crossed the Pont St. Michel, passed the Rue Barthelemy, crossed the river again on the Pont au Meunier, descended the quais, reached the Rue de l’Arbre-Sec, and knocked at Maître la Hurière’s.”

The route is easily traced to-day, and at the end of it is the Hôtel des Mousquetaires, so it will not take much imagination to revivify the incident which Dumas conceived, though one may not get there that “good wine of Artois” which the innkeeper, La Hurière, served to Henri.

The circumstance is recounted in “Marguerite de Valois,” as follows:

“‘La Hurière, here is a gentleman wants you.’

“La Hurière advanced, and looked at Henri; and, as his large cloak did not inspire him with very great veneration:

“‘Who are you?’ asked he.

“‘Eh, *sang Dieu*!’ returned Henri, pointing to La Mole. ‘I am, as the gentleman told you, a Gascon gentleman come to court.’

“‘What do you want?’

“‘A room and supper.’

“‘I do not let a room to any one, unless he has a lackey.’

“‘Oh, but I will pay you a rose noble for your room and supper.’

“‘You are very generous, worthy sir,’ said La Hurière, with some distrust.

”‘No; but expecting to sup here, I invited a friend of mine to meet me. Have you any good wine of Artois?’

“‘I have as good as the King of Navarre drinks.’

“‘Ah, good!’”

The Rue de l’Arbre-Sec is of itself historic, though it was baptized as l’Arbre-Sel. Two legends of more than ordinary interest are connected with this once important though unimposing street. The first applies to its early nomenclature, and is to the effect that in the thirteenth century it contained an oak-tree, which, in the snows of winter, always remained free of the white blanket which otherwise covered everything around about. For this reason the tree was said to be so full of salt that the snow that fell upon it melted immediately, and the name was created for the thoroughfare, which then first rose to the dignity of a recognized *rue*.

The second legend in a similar way accounts for the change of name to *arbre-sec*. At a certain rainy period, when the pavements and the walls of the houses were “*ruisselants d’eau*,” the same tree remained absolutely dry. It is curious, too, to note that the Rue de l’Arbre-Sec is identified with a certain personage who lived in Mazarin’s time, by the name of Mathieu Mollé, whose fame as the first president of the *Parlement* is preserved in the neighbouring Rue Mathieu Mollé. It was in the hotel of “La Belle Etoile” that Dumas ensconced his character De la Mole — showing once again that Dumas dealt with very real characters.

Opposite the colonnade of the Louvre is the Église St. Germain l’Auxerrois. From this church — founded by Childebert in 606 — rang out the tocsin which was the signal for that infamous massacre of the Protestants in the time of Charles IX. In “Marguerite de Valois” Dumas has vividly described the event; not, perhaps, without certain embroidered embellishment, but, nevertheless, with a graphicness which the dry-as-dust historian of fact could hardly hope to equal.

This cruel inspiration of Catherine de Medici’s is recorded by Dumas thus:

“‘Hush!’ said La Hurière.

“‘What is it?’ inquired Coconnas and Maurevel together.

“They heard the first stroke of the bell of St. Germain de l’Auxerrois vibrate.

“‘The signal!’ exclaimed Maurevel. ‘The time is put ahead, for it was agreed for midnight. So much the better. When it is the interest of God and the king, it is better that the clock should be put forward than backward.’ And the sinister sound of the church-bell was distinctly heard. Then a shot was fired, and, in an instant, the light of several flambeaux blazed up like flashes of lightning in the Rue de l’Arbre-Sec.”

There is much more of moment that happened before and afterward “on this bloody ground;” all of which is fully recounted by the historians.

* * *

At No. 7 Rue du Helder, just off the Boulevard des Italiens, in a region so well known to Dumas and his associates, lived De Franchi, the hero of the “Corsican Brothers.” The *locale* and the action of that rapid review of emotions to which Dumas gave the name of the “Corsican Brothers” (“Les Frères du Corse”), was not of the mean or sordid order, but rather of the well-to-do, a sort of semi-luxuriousness of the middle-class life of the time.

The scene of the novelette bears the date of 1841, and Paris, especially in many of what are known as the newer parts, has changed but little since. A new shop-front here and there, the addition of a huge gilt sign, of which the proprietors of Parisian establishments are so fond, somewhat changes the outside aspect of things, but, on the whole, the *locale* often remains much as it was before, and, in this case, with but scarce three-quarters of a century past, the view down the Rue du Helder from its junction with Rue Taitbout differs little.

"Hôtel Picardie," in the Rue Tiquetonne, — still to be seen, — may or may not be the "La Chevrette" of "Twenty Years After," to which D'Artagnan repaired in the later years of his life. D'Artagnan's residence in the Rue Tiquetonne has, in the minds of many, made the street famous. It was famous, though, even before it was popularized by Dumas, and now that we are not able even to place the inn where D'Artagnan lived after he had retired from active service — it is still famous.

At No. 12 and 16 are two grand habitations of former times. The former served as a residence to Henri de Talleyrand, who died in 1626, and later to the Marquis de Mauge, then to Daubonne, a *tapissier*, much in the favour of Louis XIII.

The other is known as the "Hôtel d'Artagnan," but it is difficult to trace its evolution from the comfortable inn of which Dumas wrote.

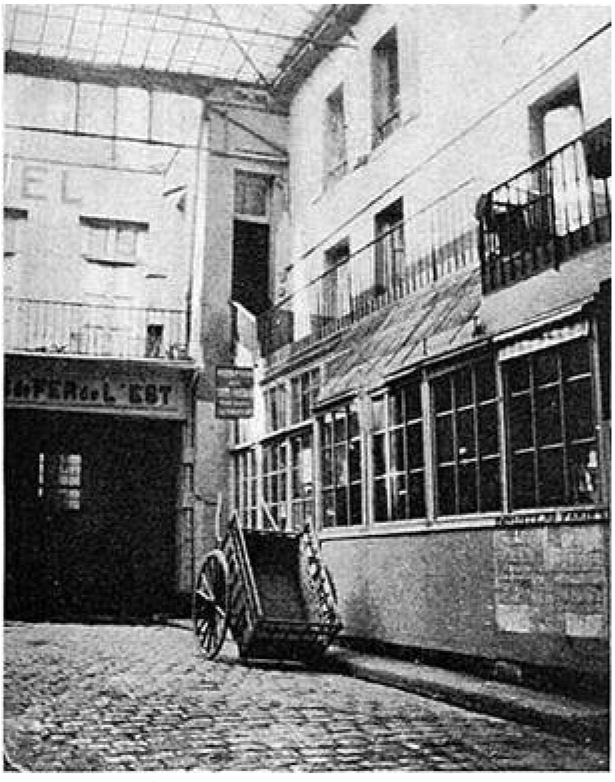

D'ARTAGNAN'S LODGINGS, RUE TIQUETONNE

At No. 23 is about the only *relique* left which bespeaks the gallant days of D'Artagnan and his fellows. It is a square tower of five *étages*, and, from the character of its architecture, we know it to be of the fourteenth or fifteenth century. It is known as the “Tour de Jean-sans-Peur.” Jean-sans-Peur was the grandfather of Charles-le-Téméraire. Monstrelet has said that it was built to contain a strong chamber, in which its owner might sleep safely at night. It formed originally a part of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, but to-day, though but partially disengaged from the neighbouring houses, it is evidently the only member of the original establishment which remains.

Not far from the precincts of the Louvre was the Rue de la Martellerie, where lived Marie Touchet.

The portraiture of Dumas forms a wonderfully complete list of the royalties and nobilities of France. Both the D’Artagnan gallery and the Valois series literally reek with the names of celebrated personages, and this, too, in the mere romances, for it must be remembered that, in spite of his reputation as a romancist, Dumas’ historical sketches and travels were both numerous and of great extent.

One significant portrait, though it is not one of noble birth, is that of Marie Touchet, extracted from “Marguerite de Valois,” and reprinted here.

“When Charles IX. and Henri of Navarre visited the Rue de la Martellerie, it was to see the celebrated Marie, who, though ‘only a poor, simple girl,’ as she referred to herself, was the Eve of Charles’ paradise. ‘Your Eden, Sire,’ said the gallant Henri.

“‘Dearest Marie,’ said Charles, ‘I have brought you another king happier than myself, for he has no crown; more unhappy than me, for he has no Marie Touchet.’

“‘Sire, it is, then, the King of Navarre?’

“‘It is, love.’

“Henri went toward her, and Charles took his right hand.

“‘Look at this hand, Marie,’ said he; ‘it is the hand of a good brother and a loyal friend; and but for this hand — ’

“‘Well, Sire!’

“‘But for this hand, this day, Marie, our boy had been fatherless.’

“Marie uttered a cry, seized Henri’s hand, and kissed it.

“The king went to the bed where the child was still asleep.

“‘Eh!’ said he, ‘if this stout boy slept in the Louvre, instead of sleeping in this small house, he would change the aspect of things at present, and perhaps for the future.’

"'Sire,' said Marie, 'without offence to your Majesty, I prefer his sleeping here; he sleeps better.'"

This illustrates only one phase of Dumas' power of portraiture, based on historical fact, of course, and casting no new light on matters which are otherwise well known, but still a very fresh and vivifying method of projecting the features of those famous in the history of France, and a method, perhaps, which will serve to impress them upon the reader in a more nearly indelible fashion than any other.

"It was this child of Marie Touchet and Charles IX. who afterward was the famous Duke d'Angoulême, who died in 1650; and, had he been legitimate, would have taken precedence of Henri III., Henri IV., Louis XIII., Louis XIV., etc., and altered the whole line of the royal succession of France."

It was a pleasurable visit for all three, that of which Dumas writes.

Charles, Henri, and Marie supped together, and the accomplished Prince of Béarn made the famous anagram from the letters of the lady's name, "*Je charme tout*," which Charles declared he would present to her worked in diamonds, and that it should be her motto.

History does not state that he did so, but no doubt that was a detail which the chroniclers have overlooked, or, of course, it may have been an interpolation of Dumas'.

Dumas' pen-pictures of the great Napoleon — whom he referred to as "The Ogre of Corsica" — will hardly please the great Corsican's admirers, though it is in no manner contemptuous. The following is from "The Count of Monte Cristo":

"'Monsieur,' said the baron to the count, 'all the servants of his Majesty must approve of the latest intelligence which we have from the island of Elba. Bonaparte — ' M. Dandré looked at Louis XVIII., who, employed in writing a note, did not even raise his head. 'Bonaparte,' continued the baron, 'is mortally wearied, and passes whole days in watching his miners at work at Porto-Longone.'

"'And scratches himself for amusement,' added the king.

"'Scratches himself?' inquired the count. 'What does your Majesty mean?'

"'Yes, indeed, my dear count. Did you forget that this great man, this hero, this demigod, is attacked with a malady of the skin which worries him to death, *prurigo*?’

“‘And, moreover, M. le Comte,’ continued the minister of police, ‘we are almost assured that, in a very short time, the usurper will be insane.’

“‘Insane?’

“‘Insane to a degree; his head becomes weaker. Sometimes he weeps bitterly, sometimes laughs boisterously; at other times he passes hours on the seashore, flinging stones in the water, and when the flint makes “ducks and drakes” five or six times, he appears as delighted as if he had gained another Marengo or Austerlitz. Now, you must agree these are indubitable symptoms of weakness?’

“‘Or of wisdom, M. le Baron — or of wisdom,’ said Louis XVIII., laughing; ‘the greatest captains of antiquity recreated themselves with casting pebbles into the ocean — see Plutarch’s life of Scipio Africanus.’”

Again, from the same work, the following estimate of Napoleon’s position at Elba was, if not original, at least opinionated:

“The emperor, now king of the petty isle of Elba, after having held sovereign sway over one-half of the world, counting us, his subjects, a small population of twenty millions, — after having been accustomed to hear the ‘*Vive Napoléons*’ of at least six times that number of human beings, uttered in nearly every language of the globe, — was looked upon among the *haute société* of Marseilles as a ruined man, separated for ever from any fresh connection with France or claim to her throne.”

Firstly the Faubourg St. Denis is associated with Dumas’ early life in Paris. He lived at No. 53 of the Rue du Faubourg St. Denis in 1824.

When one walks past the Porte St. Denis and looks up at that seventeenth-century arch of triumph, built to commemorate the German victories of Louis Quatorze, one just misses the historical significance and architectural fitness of the arch. It is not merely an incident in the boulevard. It belongs not so much to the newer boulevard, as to the ancient Rue St. Denis, and it is only by proceeding some distance up this street, the ancient route of the pilgrims to the tomb of the saint, that the meaning of the Porte St. Denis can truly be appreciated. The arch may be heavy, — it has been described as hideous, and it truly is, — but seen in the Rue St. Denis, whose roadway passes under it, it forms a typical view even to-day of Old Paris, and of the Paris which entered so largely into Dumas’ romances of the Louis.

The more ancient Porte St. Denis, the gateway which lay between the faubourg, the plain, and the ville, performed a function quite different from that of the Renaissance gateway which exists to-day; in just what manner will be readily inferred when it is recalled that, with the Porte St. Antoine, the Porte St. Denis was the scene of much riot and bloodshed in the early history of Paris.

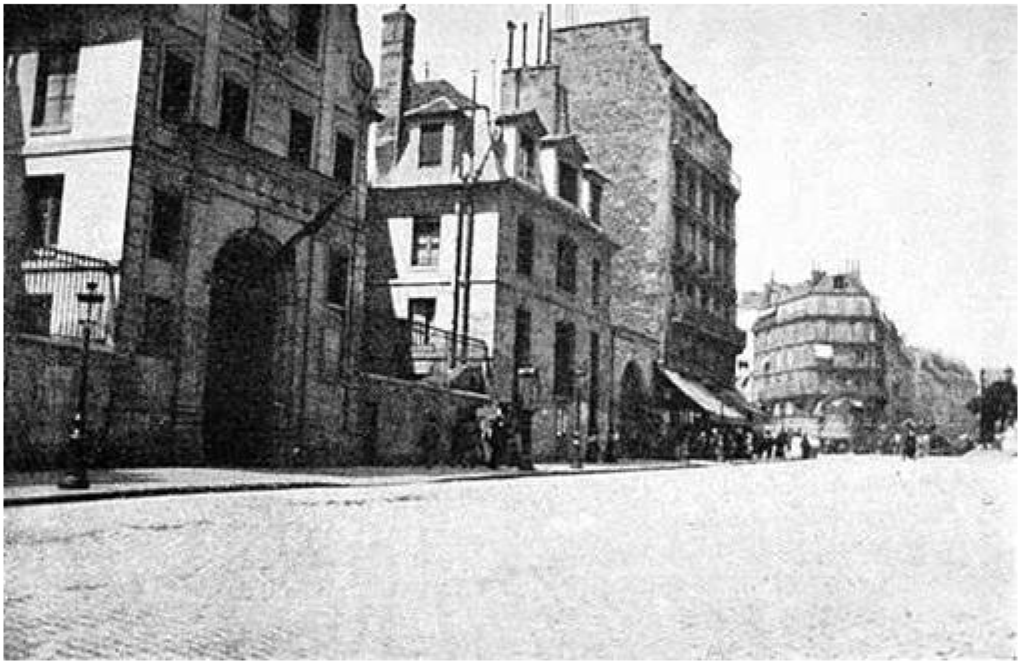

109 RUE DU FAUBOURG ST. DENIS (DÉSCAMPS' STUDIO)

There are no tram-cars or omnibuses passing through its arch, as through the Place du Carrousel, or the courtyards of the Louvre, to take away the sentiment of romance; though the traffic which swirls and eddies around its sturdy piers and walls is of a manifest up-to-date, twentieth-century variety.

Through its great arch runs the Rue du Faubourg St. Denis, where, at No. 109, was the studio of Gabriel Déscamps, celebrated in "Capitaine Pamphile."

In "Marguerite de Valois" we have a graphic reference — though rather more sentimental than was the author's wont — to the Cimetière des Innocents:

"On the day which succeeded that terrible massacre of St. Bartholomew's night, in 1572, a hawthorn-tree," said Dumas, and it is also recognized history, as well, "which had blossomed in the spring, and which, according to custom, had lost its odorous flower in the month of June, had strangely reblossomed during the night, and the Catholics, who saw in this even a miracle, and who by rendering this miracle popular made the Deity their accomplice, went in procession, cross and banner at their head, to the Cemetery of the Innocents, where this hawthorn was blooming."

Amidst the cries of "*Vive le roi!*" "*Vive la messe!*" "*Mort aux Huguenots*," the accomplished Marguerite herself went to witness the phenomenon.

"When they reached the top of the Rue des Prouvelles, they met some men who were dragging a carcass without any head. It was that of 'the admiral' (Coligny).... The men were going to hang it by the feet at Montfaucon...."

"They entered the Cemetery of St. Innocents, and the clergy, forewarned of the visit of the king and the queen mother, awaited their Majesties to harangue them."

The cemetery — or signs of it — have now disappeared, though the mortal victims of the massacre, and countless other souls besides, rest beneath the flagstones adjacent to Les Halles, the great market-house of Paris.

The Fontaine des Innocents formerly marked the site, but now it is removed to the other side of Les Halles.

This graceful Renaissance fountain was first erected in 1550, from designs of Pierre Lescot and Jean Goujon. It stood formerly before the Église des Innocents, which was demolished in 1783.

The Fontaine des Innocents, in spite of its migrations, is a charming oasis of green trees and running water, in the midst of the rather encumbered market-square of Les Halles. Not that the region around about is at all unsavoury; far from it. There is débris of green vegetables and ripe fruits everywhere about, but it has not yet reached the unsavoury stage; before it does all will be swept away, and on the morrow the clamour and traffic will start fresh anew.

The Place Royale, now called the Place des Vosges, is so largely identified with "La Comtesse de Charny" that no special mention can well be made of any action which here took place.

At No. 21, now of course long since departed, lived "a gentleman entirely devoted to your Majesty," said Dumas, and the adventuress, Lady de Winter, whom D'Artagnan was wont to visit, was given domicile by Dumas at No. 6. Likely enough it was her true residence, though there is no opportunity of tracing it to-day, and one perforce must be satisfied with locating the houses of Madame de Sévigné and Victor Hugo, each of which bear tablets to that effect.

The Place des Vosges is a charming square, reminiscent, in a way, of the courtyard of the Palais Royal, though lacking its splendour. The iron gateway to the central garden was a gift of Louis XIV., in 1685, when the square was known as the Place Royale. Richelieu caused to be set up here a magnificent equestrian statue of Louis XIII., which, however, was overturned in the Revolution, though it has since been replaced by another statue. The horse was the work of Ricciarelli de Volterre, a pupil of Michelangelo, and the figure was by Biard.

The first great historical event held here was the *carrousel* given in 1612, two years after the tragic death of Henri IV. at the hands of the assassin Ravaillac. It was a function of Marie de Medici's to celebrate the alliance of France and Spain.

Under Richelieu, the place became a celebrated duelling-ground, the most famous duel being that between the Duc de Guise and Coligny *fils*, the son of the admiral.

The Place Royale soon became the most fashionable *quartier*, the houses around about being greatly in demand of the *noblesse*.

Among its illustrious inhabitants have been the Rohans, the D'Alégres, Corneille, Condé, St. Vincent de Paul, Molière, Turenne, Madame de Longueville, Cinq-Mars, and Richelieu.

By *un arrêté* of the 17th Ventose, year VII., it was declared that the name of the department which should pay the largest part of its contributions by the 20th Germinal would be given to that of the principal place or square of Paris. The Department of the Vosges was the first to pay up, and the Place Royale became the Place des Vosges.

A great deal of the action of the D'Artagnan romances took place in the Place Royale, and in the neighbouring *quartiers* of St. Antoine and La Bastille, the place being the scene of the notable reunion of the four gallants in "Vingt Ans Après."

La Roquette, the prison, has disappeared, like the Bastille itself, but they are both perpetuated to-day, the former in the Rue Roquette, and the latter in the Place de la Bastille.

Dumas does not project their horrors unduly, though the Bastille crops up in many of the chapters of the Valois romances, and one entire volume is devoted to “The Taking of the Bastille.”

D’Artagnan himself was doomed, by an order of arrest issued by Richelieu, to be incarcerated therein; but the gallant *mousquetaire*, by a subtle scheme, got hold of the warrant and made a present of it to the intriguing cardinal himself.

The sombre and sinister guillotine, since become so famous, is made by Dumas subject of a weirdly fascinating chapter in “La Comtesse de Charny.” Dumas’ description is as follows:

“When Guilbert got out of the carriage he saw that he was in the court of a prison, and at once recognized it as the Bicêtre. A fine misty rain fell diagonally and stained the gray walls. In the middle of the court five or six carpenters, under the direction of a master workman, and a little man clad in black, who seemed to direct everybody, put a machine of a hitherto strange and unknown form. Guilbert shuddered; he recognized Doctor Guillotin, and the machine itself was the one of which he had seen a model in the cellar of the editor of ‘*l’ami du peuple*.’... The very workmen were as yet ignorant of the secret of this novel machine. ‘There,’ said Doctor Guillotin, ... ‘it is now only necessary to put the knife in the groove.’... This was the form of the machine: a platform fifteen feet square, reached by a simple staircase, on each side of this platform two grooved uprights, ten or twelve feet high. In the grooves slid a kind of crescent-shaped knife. A little opening was made between two beams, through which a man’s head could be passed.... ‘Gentlemen,’ said Guillotin, ‘all being here, we will begin.’”

Then follows the same vivid record of executing and blood-spurting that has attracted many other writers perhaps as gifted as Dumas, but none have told it more graphically, simply, or truthfully.

Every one knows the Mount of Martyrs, its history, and its modern aspect, which has sadly degenerated of late.

To-day it is simply a hilltop of cheap gaiety, whose patrons are catered for by the Moulin Rouge, the Moulin de la Galette, and a score of “eccentric cafés,” though its past is burdened with Christian tragedy. Up its slope St. Denis is fabulously supposed to have carried his head after his martyrdom, and the quiet, almost forlorn Rue St. Eleuthère still perpetuates the name of his companion in misery. Long afterward, in the chapel erected on this spot, Ignatius Loyola and his companions solemnly vowed themselves to their great work. So here on sinful Montmartre, above Paris, was born the Society of Jesus. The Revolution saw another band of martyrs, when the nuns of the Abbaye de Montmartre, old and young, chanted their progress to the guillotine, and little more than thirty years ago the Commune precipitated its terrible struggle in Montmartre. It was in the Rue des Rosiers, on the 18th of March, 1871, that the blood of Generals Lecomte and Clément-Thomas was shed.

Hard by, in the Parc Monceau, is the statue of Guy de Maupassant, and so the memory of the sinful mount is perpetuated to us.

Dumas did not make the use of this banal attribute of Paris that many other realists and romancists alike have done, but he frequently refers to it in his “Mémoires.”

Madame de la Motte, the scheming adventuress of the “Collier de la Reine,” lived at No. 57 Rue Charlot, in the Quartier des Infants-Rouges. It was here, at the Hôtel Boulainvilliers, where the Marquise de Boulainvilliers brought up the young girl of the blood royal of the Valois, who afterward became known as Madame de la Motte.

Near by, in the same street, is the superb hôtel of Gabrielle d’Estrées, who herself was not altogether unknown to the court. The Rue de Valois, leading from the Rue St. Honoré to the Rue Beaujolais, beside the Palais Royal, as might be supposed, especially appealed to Dumas, and he laid one of the most cheerful scenes of the “Chevalier d’Harmental” in the hotel, No. 10, built by Richelieu for L’Abbé Metel de Bois-Robert, the founder of the Académie Française.

Off the Rue Sourdière, was the Couloir St. Hyacinthe, where lived Jean Paul Marat — ”the friend of the people,” whose description by Dumas, in “La Comtesse de Charny,” does not differ greatly from others of this notorious person.

In the early pages of “The Count of Monte Cristo,” one’s attention is transferred from Marseilles to Paris, to No. 13 Rue Coq-Héron, where lived M. Noirtier, to whom the luckless Dantès was commissioned to deliver the fateful packet, which was left in his care by the dying Captain Leclerc.

The incident of the handing over of this letter to the député procureur du roi is recounted thus by Dumas:

“‘Stop a moment,’ said the deputy, as Dantès took his hat and gloves. ‘To whom is it addressed?’

"'To M. Noirtier, Rue Coq-Héron, Paris.' Had a thunderbolt fallen into the room, Villefort could not have been more stupefied. He sank into his seat, and, hastily turning over the packet, drew forth the fatal letter, at which he glanced with an expression of terror.

"'M. Noirtier, Rue Coq-Héron, No. 13,' murmured he, growing still paler.

"'Yes,' said Dantès; 'do you then know him?'

"'No,' replied Villefort; 'a faithful servant of the king does not know conspirators.'

"'It is a conspiracy, then?' asked Dantès, who, after believing himself free, now began to feel a tenfold alarm. 'I have already told you, however, sir, I was ignorant of the contents of the letter.'

"'Yes, but you knew the name of the person to whom it was addressed,' said Villefort.

"'I was forced to read the address to know to whom to give it.'

"'Have you shown this letter to any one?' asked Villefort, becoming still more pale.

"'To no one, on my honour.'

"'Everybody is ignorant that you are the bearer of a letter from the isle of Elba, and addressed to M. Noirtier?'

"'Everybody, except the person who gave it to me.'"

The Rue Coq-Héron is one of those whimsically named streets of Paris, which lend themselves to the art of the novelist.

The origin of the name of this tiny street, which runs tangently off from the Rue du Louvre, is curious and naïve. A shopkeeper of the street, who raised fowls, saw, one day, coming out of its shell, a *petit coq* with a neck and beak quite different, and much longer, than the others of the same brood. Everybody said it was a heron, and the neighbours crowded around to see the phenomenon; and so the street came to be baptized the Rue Coq-Héron.

In the Rue Chaussée d'Antin, at No. 7, the wily Baron Danglars had ensconced himself after his descent on Paris. It was here that Dantès caused to be left his first "*carte de visite*" upon his subsequent arrival.

Among the slighter works of Dumas, which are daily becoming more and more recognized — in English — as being masterpieces of their kind, is "Gabriel Lambert." It deals with the life of Paris of the thirties; much the same period as does “Captain Pamphile,” “The Corsican Brothers,” and “Pauline,” and that in which Dumas himself was just entering into the literary life of Paris.

Like “Pauline” and “Captain Pamphile,” too, the narrative, simple though it is, — at least it is not involved, — shifts its scenes the length and breadth of the continent of Europe, and shows a versatility in the construction of a latter-day romance which is quite the equal of that of the unapproachable mediæval romances. It further resembles “The Corsican Brothers,” in that it purveys a duel of the first quality — this time in the Allée de la Muette of the Bois de Boulogne, and that most of the Parisians in the story are domiciled in and about the Boulevard des Italiens, the Rue Taitbout, and the Rue du Helder; all of them localities very familiar to Dumas in real life. In spite of the similarity of the duel of Gabriel to that of De Franchi, there is no repetition of scene or incident detail.

The story deals frankly with the brutal and vulgar malefactor, in this case a counterfeiter of bank notes, one Gabriel, the son of a poor peasant of Normandy, who, it would appear, was fascinated by the ominous words of the inscription which French bank notes formerly bore.

LA LOI PUNIT DE MORT
LE CONTREFACTEUR

Dumas occasionally took up a theme which, unpromising in itself, was yet alluring through its very lack of sympathy. “Gabriel Lambert” is a story of vulgar rascality unredeemed by any spark of courage, wit, or humanity. There is much of truth in the characterization, and some sentiment, but little enough of romance of the gallant vagabond order.

Dumas never attempted a more difficult feat than the composition of an appealing story from this material.

Twenty years after the first appearance of “Gabriel Lambert,” in 1844, M. Amédée de Jallais brought Dumas a “scenario” taken from the romance. Unsuitable and unsympathetic though the principal character was, Dumas found the “scenario” so deftly made that he resolved to turn the book into a drama. This was quickly done, and the rehearsals promised a success. On the evening of the first performance Dumas showed himself full of confidence in the play — confidence which amounted almost to certainty; for he said to a friend with whom he promenaded the corridors of the theatre while awaiting the rise of the curtain: “I am sure of my piece; to-night, I can defy the critics.” Some of these gentlemen, unfortunately overhearing him, were provoked to hostility, and, finding unhappy phrases here and there in the piece, they laid hold of them without mercy. Only the comic part of the drama, a scene introduced by Dumas, in which a vagabond steals a clock in the presence of its owner with superb audacity, disarmed their opposition. But the verve of this comic part could not save the play, says Gabriel Ferry, in narrating this anecdote. The antipathy aroused by the principal character doomed it, and the career of the piece was short.

It remains, however, — in the book, at any rate, — a wonderful characterization, with its pictures of the blue Mediterranean at Toulon, the gay life of the Parisian boulevards, its miniature portrait of the great Vidocq, and the sinister account of the prison of Bicêtre, which, since the abandonment of the Place de la Grève, had become the last resort of those condemned to death.

The tale is a short one, but it vibrates between the *rues* and the boulevards, from the Hôtel de Venise in the Rue des Vieux-Augustins (now the Rue Herold), where Gabriel, upon coming to Paris, first had his lodgings, to the purlieus of the fashionable world, — the old Italian Opera in the Rue Pelletier, — and No. 11 Rue Taitbout, where afterward Gabriel had ensconced himself in a luxurious apartment.

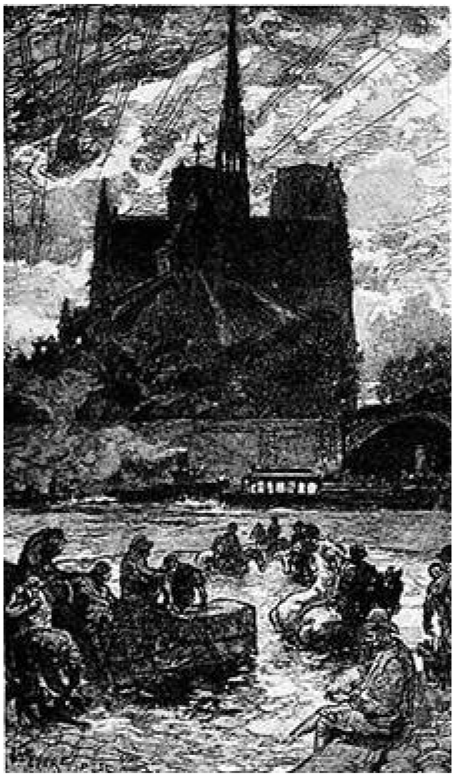

NÔTRE DAME DE PARIS

CHAPTER XI.

LA CITÉ

It is difficult to write of La Cité; it is indeed, impossible to write of it with fulness, unless one were to devote a large volume — or many large volumes — to it alone.

To the tourists it is mostly recalled as being the *berceau* of Nôtre Dame or the morgue. The latter, fortunately, is an entirely modern institution, and, though it existed in Dumas' own time, did not when the scenes of the D'Artagnan or Valois romances were laid.

Looking toward Nôtre Dame from the Pont du Carrousel, one feels a veritable thrill of emotion as one regards this city of kings and revolutions.

The very buildings on the Ile de la Cité mingle in a symphony of ashen memories. The statue of the great Henri IV., bowered in trees; the two old houses at the apex of the Place Dauphine, in one of which Madame Roland was born; the massive Palais de Justice; the soaring Sainte Chapelle, which St. Louis built for the Crown of Thorns, and "to the glory of God and France," and the towers of the Conciergerie, whose floor is for ever stained with the tears of Marie Antoinette.

Romance and history have both set their seal upon the locality, and no one better than Dumas has told its story in romance.

* * *

Henri of Navarre being Protestant, the Church would not open its doors to him, and thus his marriage to the talented but wicked Margot, sister of Charles IX., took place on a platform erected before its doors.

In the opening chapter of "Marguerite de Valois," Dumas refers to it thus:

"The court was celebrating the marriage of Madame Marguerite de Valois, daughter of Henri II. and sister of King Charles IX., with Henri de Bourbon, King of Navarre; and that same morning the Cardinal de Bourbon had united the young couple with the usual ceremonial observed at the marriages of the royal daughters of France, on a stage erected at the entrance to Nôtre Dame. This marriage had astonished everybody, and occasioned much surmise to certain persons who saw clearer than others. They could not comprehend the union of two parties who hated each other so thoroughly as did, at this moment, the Protestant party and the Catholic party; and they wondered how the young Prince de Condé could forgive the Duke d’Anjou, the king’s father, for the death of his father, assassinated by Montesquieu at Jarnac. They asked how the young Duke de Guise could pardon Admiral de Coligny for the death of his father, assassinated at Orleans by Poltrot de Mère.”

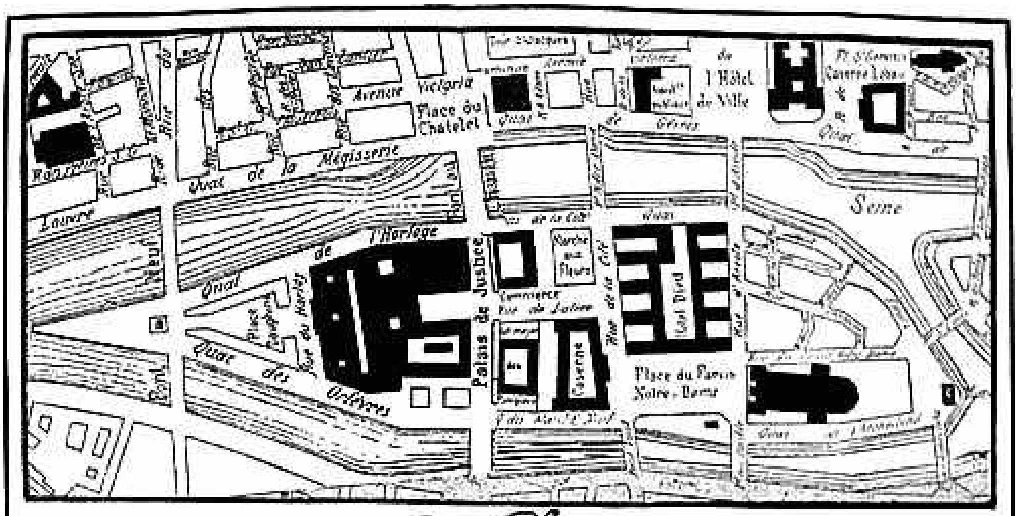
Avenue Victoria
Place du Chatelet
de l'Hôtel de Ville
Quai de la Mégisserie
Louvre
Quai de l'Horloge
Place Dauphine
Quai des Orfèvres
Palais de Justice
Marché aux Fleurs
Rue de la Cité
Hôtel Dieu
Caserne
Place du Parvis Notre-Dame
Seine

La Cité

The Tour de Nesle is one of those bygones of the history of Paris, which as a name is familiar to many, but which, after all, is a very vague memory.

It perpetuates an event of bloodshed which is familiar enough, but there are no tangible remains to mark the former site of the tower, and only the name remains — now given to a short and unimportant *rue*.

The use of the title “La Tour de Nesle,” by Dumas, for a sort of second-hand article, — as he himself has said, — added little to his reputation as an author, or, rather, as a dramatist.

In reality, he did no more than rebuild a romantic drama, such as he alone knows how to build, out of the framework which had been unsuccessfully put together by another — Gaillardet. However, it gives one other historical title to add to the already long list of his productions.

The history of the Conciergerie is most lurid, and, withal, most emphatic, with regard to the political history of France. For the most part, it is more associated with political prisoners than with mere sordid crime, as, indeed, to a great extent were many of the prisons of France.

The summer tourist connects it with Marie Antoinette; visits the “Cachot de Marie Antoinette;” the great hall where the Girondists awaited their fate; and passes on to the Palais des Beaux Arts, with never a thought as to the great political part that the old prison played in the monarchial history of France.

To know it more fully, one should read Nogaret’s “Histoire des Prisons de Paris.” There will be found anecdotes and memoirs, “*rares et precieux*” and above all truthful.

It has been eulogized, or, rather, anathematized in verse by Voltaire, —

“Exterminez, grandes Dieux, de la terre ou nous sommes
Quiconque avec plaisir repand le sang des hommes,” —

and historians and romancists have made profuse use of the recollections which hang about its grim walls.

To-day it stands for much that it formerly represented, but without the terrible inquisitorial methods. In fact, in the Palais de Justice, which now entirely surrounds all but the turreted façade of tourelles, which fronts the Quai de l’Horloge, has so tempered its mercies that within the past year it has taken down that wonderful crucifix and triptych, so that those who may finally call upon the court of last appeal may not be unduly or superstitiously affected.

The Place de la Grève opposite was famous for something more than its commercial reputation, as readers of the Valois romances of Dumas, and of Hugo’s “Dernier Jour d’un Condamné” will recall. It was a veritable Gehenna, a sort of Tower Hill, where a series of events as dark and bloody as those of any spot in Europe held forth, from 1310, when a poor unfortunate, Marguerite Porette, was burned as a heretic, until 1830, — well within the scope of this book, — when the headsmen, stakesmen, and hangmen, who had plied their trade here for five centuries, were abolished in favour of a less public *barrière* on the outskirts, or else the platform of the prison near the Cimetière du Père la Chaise.

It was in 1830 that a low thief and murderer, Lacenaire, who was brought to the scaffold for his crimes, published in one of the Parisian papers some verses which were intended to extract sympathy for him as *un homme de* *lettres*. In reality they were the work of a barrister, Lemarquier by name, and failed utterly of their purpose, though their graphic lines might well have evoked sympathy, had the hoax carried:

“Slow wanes the long night, when the criminal wakes;
And he curses the morn that his slumber breaks;
For he dream’d of other days.

“His eyes he may close, — but the cold icy touch
Of a frozen hand, and a corpse on his couch,
Still comes to wither his soul.

“And the headsman’s voice, and hammer’d blows
Of nails that the jointed gibbet close,
And the solemn chant of the dead!”

La Conciergerie was perhaps one of the greatest show-places of the city for the morbidly inclined, and permission *à visiter* was at that time granted *avec toutes facilités*, being something more than is allowed to-day.

The associations connected with this doleful building are great indeed, as all histories of France and the guide-books tell. It was in the chapel of this edifice that the victims of the Terror foregathered, to hear the names read out for execution, till all should have been made away.

Müller’s painting in the Louvre depicts, with singular graphicness, this dreadful place of detention, where princes and princesses, counts, marquises, bishops, and all ranks were herded amid an excruciating agony.

In “The Queen’s Necklace” we read of the Conciergerie — as we do of the Bastille. When that gang of conspirators, headed by Madame de la Motte, — Jeanne de St. Remy de Valois, — appeared for trial, they were brought from the Bastille to the Conciergerie.

After the trial all the prisoners were locked for the night in the Conciergerie, sentence not being pronounced till the following day.

The public whipping and branding of Madame de la Motte in the Cour du Justice, — still the *cour* where throngs pass and repass to the various court-rooms of the Palais de Justice, — as given by Dumas, is most realistically told, if briefly. It runs thus:

“‘Who is this man?’ cried Jeanne, in a fright.

“‘The executioner, M. de Paris,’ replied the registrar.

“The two men then took hold of her to lead her out. They took her thus into the court called Cour de Justice, where was a scaffold, and which was crowded with spectators. On a platform, raised about eight feet, was a post garnished with iron rings, and with a ladder to mount to it. This place was surrounded with soldiers....

“Numbers of the partisans of M. de Rohan had assembled to hoot her, and cries of ‘*A bas la Motte*, the forger!’ were heard on every side, and those who tried to express pity for her were soon silenced. Then she cried in a loud voice, ‘Do you know who I am? I am the blood of your kings. They strike in me, not a criminal, but a rival; not only a rival, but an accomplice. Yes,’ repeated she, as the people kept silence to listen, ‘an accomplice. They punish one who knows the secrets of — ’

“‘Take care,’ interrupted the executioner.

“She turned and saw the executioner with the whip in his hand. At this sight she forgot her desire to captivate the multitude, and even her hatred, and, sinking on her knees, she said, ‘Have pity!’ and seized his hand; but he raised the other, and let the whip fall lightly on her shoulders. She jumped up, and was about to try and throw herself off the scaffold, when she saw the other man, who was drawing from a fire a hot iron. At this sight she uttered a perfect howl, which was echoed by the people.

“‘Help! help!’ she cried, trying to shake off the cord with which they were tying her hands. The executioner at last forced her on her knees, and tore open her dress; but she cried, with a voice which was heard through all the tumult, ‘Cowardly Frenchmen! you do not defend me, but let me be tortured; oh! it is my own fault. If I had said all I knew of the queen I should have been — ’

“She could say no more, for she was gagged by the attendants: then two men held her, while the executioner performed his office. At the touch of the iron she fainted, and was carried back insensible to the Conciergerie.”

CHAPTER XII.

L’UNIVERSITÉ QUARTIER

L’Université is the *quartier* which foregathered its components, more or less unconsciously, around the Sorbonne.

To-day the name still means what it always did; the Ecole de Médicine, the Ecole de Droit, the Beaux Arts, the Observatoire, and the student ateliers of the Latin Quarter, all go to make it something quite foreign to any other section of Paris.

The present structure known as “The Sorbonne” was built by Richelieu in 1629, as a sort of glorified successor to the ancient foundation of Robert de Sorbonne, confessor to St. Louis in 1253. The present Université, as an institution, was founded, among many other good and valuable things, which he has not always been given credit for, by the astute Napoleon I.

With the work of the romancer, it is the unexpected that always happens. But this very unexpectedness is only another expression of naturalness; which raises the question: Is not the romancist more of a realist than is commonly supposed?

Dumas often accomplished the unconventional, and often the miraculous, but the gallant attack of D’Artagnan and his three whilom adversaries against the Cardinal’s Guard is by no means an impossible or unreasonable incident. Considering Dumas’ ingenuity and freedom, it would be unreasonable to expect that things might not take the turn that they did.

Of “Les Trois Mousquetaires” alone, the scheme of adventure and incident is as orderly and sagacious as though it had been laid down by the wily cardinal himself; and therein is Dumas’ success as the romancist *par excellence* of his time. A romancist who was at least enough of a realist to be natural, if unconventional.

Dumas is supposed to have fallen from the heights scaled by means of “Les Trois Mousquetaires,” when he wrote “Vingt Ans Après.” As a piece of literary workmanship, this perhaps is so; as a chronicle of great interest to the reader, who would trace the movement of its plot by existing stones and shrines, it is hardly the case.

One can get up a wonderful enthusiasm for the old Luxembourg quarter, which the Gascon Don Quixote entered by one of the southern gates, astride his Rosinante. The whole neighbourhood abounds with reminiscences of the characters of the tale: D'Artagnan, with the Rue des Fossoyeurs, now the Rue Servandoni; Athos with the Rue Ferou; Aramis, with the Rue de la Harpe, and so on.

There is, however, a certain tangible sentimentality connected with the adventures of Athos, Aramis, D'Artagnan, and Porthos in "Twenty Years After," that is not equalled by the earlier book, the reputed scenes of which have, to some extent, to be taken on faith.

In "Vingt Ans Après," the scene shifts rapidly and constantly: from the Rue Tiquetonne, in Paris, to the more luxurious precincts of the Palais Royal; countrywards to Compiègne, to Pierrefonds — which ultimately came into the possession of Porthos; to England, even; and southward as far as Blois in Touraine, near to which was the country estate of Athos.

At the corner of the Rue Vaugirard, which passes the front of the Luxembourg Palace, and the Rue Cassette, is the wall of the Carmelite Friary, where D'Artagnan repaired to fulfil his duelling engagements with the three musketeers of the company of De Treville, after the incidents of the shoulder of Athos, the baldric of Porthos, and the handkerchief of Aramis.

CARMELITE FRIARY, RUE VAUGIRARD

Both sides of the river, and, indeed, the Cité itself, are alive with the association of the King’s Musketeers and the Cardinal’s Guards; so much so that one, with even a most superficial knowledge of Paris and the D’Artagnan romances, cannot fail to follow the shifting of the scenes from the neighbourhood of the Palais du Luxembourg, in “Les Trois Mousquetaires,” to the neighbourhood of the Palais Royal, in “Vingt Ans Après” and the “Vicomte de Bragelonne.”

In “Le Vicomte de Bragelonne,” the fraternal *mousquetaires* take somewhat varying paths from those which they pursued in the first two volumes of the series. Porthos and Athos had arrived at distinction and wealth, and surrounded themselves accordingly; though, when they came to Paris, they were doubtless frequenters — at times — of their old haunts, but they had perforce to live up to their exalted stations.

With D’Artagnan and Aramis this was not so true. D’Artagnan, it would seem, could not leave his beloved Palais Royal quarter, though his lodgings in the hôtel in the Rue Tiquetonne could have been in no way luxurious, judging from present-day appearances.

In the Université quarter, running squarely up from the Seine is a short, unpretentious, though not unlovely, street — the Rue Guenegard.

It runs by the Hôtel de la Monnaie, and embouches on the Quai Conti, but if you ask for it from the average stroller on the quais, he will reply that he never heard of it.

It was here, however, at “Au Grand Roi Charlemagne,” “a respectable inn,” that Athos lived during his later years.

In the course of three hundred years this inn has disappeared, — if it ever existed, — though there are two hôtels, now somewhat decrepit, on the short length of the street.

Perhaps it was one of these, — the present Hôtel de France, for instance, — but there are no existing records to tell us beyond doubt that this is so.

There is another inn which Dumas mentions in “The Forty-Five Guardsmen,” not so famous, and not traceable to-day, but his description of it is highly interesting and amusing.

“Near the Porte Buci,” says Chapter VII. of the book before mentioned, “where we must now transport our readers, to follow some of their acquaintances, and to make new ones, a hum, like that in a beehive at sunset, was heard proceeding from a house tinted rose colour, and ornamented with blue and white pointings, which was known by the sign of ‘The Sword of the Brave Chevalier,’ and which was an immense inn, recently built in this new quarter. This house was decorated to suit all tastes. On the entablature was painted a representation of a combat between an archangel and a dragon breathing flame and smoke, and in which the artist, animated by sentiments at once heroic and pious, had depicted in the hands of ‘the brave chevalier,’ not a sword, but an immense cross, with which he hacked in pieces the unlucky dragon, of which the bleeding pieces were seen lying on the ground. At the bottom of the picture crowds of spectators were represented raising their arms to heaven, while from above angels were extending over the chevalier laurels and palms. Then, as if to prove that he could paint in every style, the artist had grouped around gourds, grapes, a snail on a rose, and two rabbits, one white and the other gray.

“Assuredly the proprietor must have been difficult to please, if he were not satisfied, for the artist had filled every inch of space — there was scarcely room to have added a caterpillar. In spite, however, of this attractive exterior, the hôtel did not prosper — it was never more than half full, though it was large and comfortable. Unfortunately, from its proximity to the Pré-aux-Clercs, it was frequented by so many persons either going or ready to fight, that those more peaceably disposed avoided it. Indeed, the cupids with which the interior was decorated had been ornamented with moustaches in charcoal by the *habitués*; and Dame Fournichon, the landlady, always affirmed that the sign had brought them ill-luck, and that, had her wishes been attended to, and the painting represented more pleasing things, such as the rose-tree of love surrounded by flaming hearts, all tender couples would have flocked to them.

“M. Fournichon, however, stuck to his sign, and replied that he preferred fighting men, and that one of them drank as much as six lovers.”

Dumas’ reference to this curiously disposed “happy family” calls to mind the anecdote which he recounts in “The Taking of the Bastille,” concerning salamanders:

“The famous trunk, which had now been dignified with the name of desk, had become, thanks to its vastness, and the numerous compartments with which Pitou had decorated its interior, a sort of Noah’s ark, containing a couple of every species of climbing, crawling, or flying reptiles. There were lizards, adders, ant-eaters, beetles, and frogs, which reptiles became so much dearer to Pitou from their being the cause of his being subjected to punishment more or less severe.

“It was in his walks during the week that Pitou made collections for his menagerie. He had wished for salamanders, which were very popular at Villers-Cotterêts, being the crest of François I., and who had them sculptured on every chimneypiece in the château. He had succeeded in obtaining them; only one thing had strongly preoccupied his mind, and he ended by placing this thing among the number of those which were beyond his intelligence; it was, that he had constantly found in the water these reptiles which poets have pretended exist only in fire. This circumstance had given to Pitou, who was a lad of precise mind, a profound contempt for poets.”

Here, at “The Sword of the Brave Chevalier,” first met the “Forty-Five Guardsmen.” In the same street is, or was until recently, a modernized and vulgarized inn of similar name, which was more likely to have been an adaption from the pages of Dumas than a direct descendant of the original, if it ever existed. It is the Hôtel la Trémouille, near the Luxembourg, that figures in the pages of “Les Trois Mousquetaires,” but the hôtel of the Duc de Treville, in the Rue du Vieux-Colombier, has disappeared in a rebuilding or widening of this street, which runs from the Place de St. Sulpice to the Place de la Croix-Rouge.

All these places centre around that famous *affaire* which took place before the Carmelite establishment on the Rue Vaugirard: that gallant sword-play of Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, — helped by the not unwilling D’Artagnan, — against Richelieu’s minions, headed by Jussac.

Within the immediate neighbourhood, too, is much of the *locale* of “Les Trois Mousquetaires.” Here the four friends themselves lodged, “just around the corner, within two steps of the Luxembourg,” though Porthos more specifically claimed his residence as in the Rue de Vieux-Colombier. “That is my abode,” said he, as he proudly pointed to its gorgeous doorway.

The Hôtel de Chevreuse of “*la Frondeuse duchesse*,” famed alike in history and the pages of Dumas, is yet to be seen in somewhat changed form at No. 201 Boulevard St. Germain; its garden cut away by the Boulevard Raspail.

At No. 12 or 14 Rue des Fossoyeurs, beside the Panthéon, — still much as it was of yore, — was D’Artagnan’s own “sort of a garret.” One may not be able to exactly place it, but any of the decrepitly picturesque houses will answer the description.

* * *

It is a wonderfully varied and interesting collection of buildings which is found on the height of Ste. Geneviève, overlooking the Jardin and Palais du Luxembourg: the hybrid St. Etienne du Mont, the pagan Panthéon, the tower of the ancient Abbaye de Ste. Geneviève, and the Bibliothèque, which also bears the name of Paris’s patron saint.

The old abbey must have had many and varied functions, if history and romance are to be believed, and to-day its tower and a few short lengths of wall, built into the Lycée Henri Quatre, are all that remain, unless it be that the crypt and dungeons, of which one reads in “Chicot the Jester,” are still existent. Probably they are, but, if so, they have most likely degenerated into mere lumber-rooms.

The incident as given by Dumas relates briefly to the plot of the Guises to induce Charles IX., on the plea of some religious ceremony, to enter one of the monkish *caches*, and there compel him to sign his abdication. The plot, according to the novelist, was frustrated by the ingenious Chicot.

At all events, the ensemble to-day is one most unusual, and the whole locality literally reeks with the associations of tradition.

Architecturally it is a jumble, good in parts, but again shocking in other parts.

The Église St. Etienne du Mont is a weird contrast of architectural style, but its interior is truly beautiful, and on the wall near the south transept are two tablets, on which one may read the facts concerning Ste. Geneviève, which likely enough have for the moment been forgotten by most of us.

The old abbey must have been a delightful place, in spite of the lurid picture which Dumas draws of it.

* * *

Probably in none of Dumas' romances is there more lively action than in "The Queen's Necklace." The characters are in a continual migration between one and another of the faubourgs. Here, again, Dumas does not forget or ignore the Luxembourg and its environment. He seems, indeed, to have a special fondness for its neighbourhood. It was useful to him in most of the Valois series, and doubly so in the D'Artagnan romances.

Beausire, one of the thieves who sought to steal the famous necklace, "took refuge in a small *cabaret* in the Luxembourg quarter." The particular *cabaret* is likely enough in existence to-day, as the event took place but a hundred years ago, and Dumas is known to have "drawn from life" even his pen-portraits of the *locale* of his stories. At any rate, there is many a *cabaret* near the Luxembourg which might fill the bill.

The gardens of the Luxembourg were another favourite haunt of the characters of Dumas' romances, and in "The Queen's Necklace" they are made use of again, this time, as usual, as a suitable place for a promenade or a rendezvous of the fair Oliva, who so much resembled Marie Antoinette.

* * *

Like the Rue du Helder, celebrated in "The Corsican Brothers," the Rue de Lille, where lived, at No. 29, De Franchi's friend, Adrien de Boissy, is possessed of an air of semi-luxuriousness, or, at any rate, of a certain middle-class comfort.

It lies on the opposite side of the Seine from the river side of the Louvre, and runs just back of the site formerly occupied by the Duc de Montmorenci, where was held the gorgeous ceremony of the marriage of the Marquis St. Luc, of which one reads in "Chicot the Jester."

There is not much of splendour or romance about the present-day Rue de Lille; indeed, it is rather commonplace, but as Dumas places the particular house in which De Boissy lived with definiteness, and, moreover, in that it exists to-day practically unaltered, there seems every good reason why it should be catalogued here.

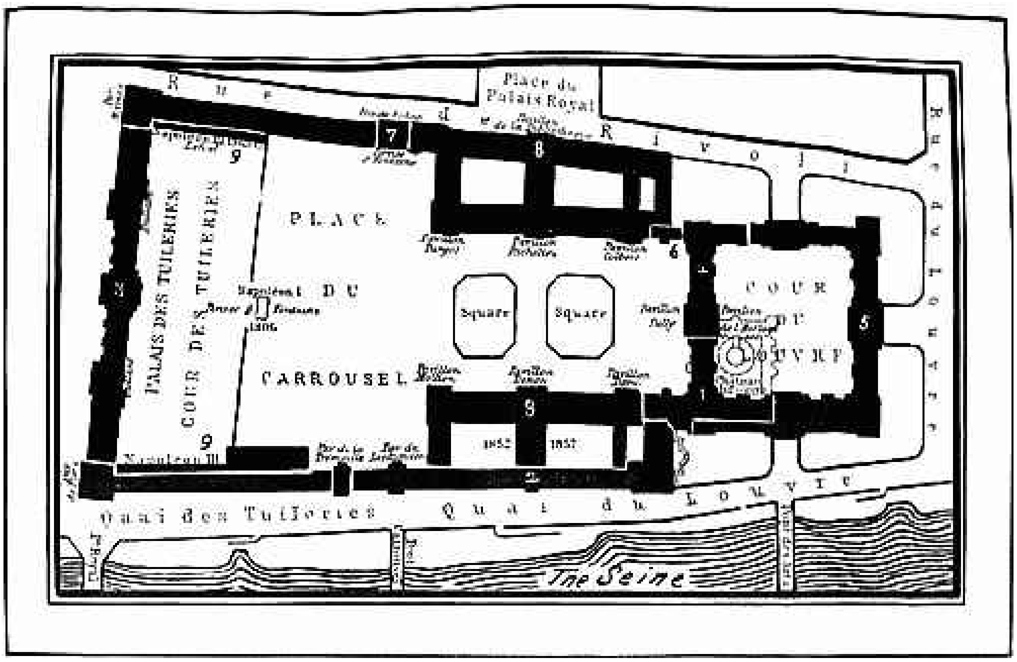
Place du Palais Royal
Rue de Rivoli
Rue du Louvre
PALAIS DES TUILERIES
COUR DES TUILERIES
PLACE DU CARROUSEL
Napoleon I
1806
Pavillon Rohan
Pavillon Richelieu
Pavillon Colbert
Pavillon Sully
Pavillon Denon
Square
Square
COUR DU LOUVRE
1852
1857
Napoleon III
Quai des Tuileries
Quai du Louvre
The Seine
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
9
9

THE BUILDERS OF THE LOUVRE

(1) François I., *1546*; (2) Catherine de Medici, *1566-1578*; (3) Catherine de Medici, *1564* (destroyed at the Commune); (4) Louis XIII., *1524*; (5) Louis XIV., *1660-1670*; (6) Napoleon I., *1806*; (7) Louis XVIII., *1816*; (8) Napoleon III., *1852-1857*; (9) Napoleon III., *1863-1868*.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LOUVRE

“*Paris renferme beaucoup de palais; mais le vrai palais de Paris, le vrai palais de la France, tout le monde l’a nommé, — c’est le Louvre.*”

Upon the first appearance of “Marguerite de Valois,” a critic writing in *Blackwood’s Magazine*, has chosen to commend Dumas’ directness of plot and purpose in a manner which every lover of Dumas and student of history will not fail to appreciate. He says: “Dumas, according to his custom, introduces a vast array of characters, for the most part historical, all spiritedly drawn and well sustained. In various respects the author may be held up as an example to our own history-spoilers, and self-styled writers of historical romance. One does not find him profaning public edifices by causing all sorts of absurdities to pass, and of twaddle to be spoken, within their precincts; neither does he make his king and beggar, high-born dame and private soldier use the very same language, all equally tame, colourless, and devoid of character. The spirited and varied dialogue, in which his romances abound, illustrates and brings out the qualities and characteristics of his actors, and is not used for the sole purpose of making a chapter out of what would be better told in a page. In many instances, indeed, it would be difficult for him to tell his story, by the barest narrative, in fewer words than he does by pithy and pointed dialogue.”

No edifice in Paris itself, nor, indeed, in all France, is more closely identified with the characters and plots of Dumas’ romances than the Louvre. In the Valois cycle alone, the personages are continually flocking and stalking thither; some mere puppets, — walking gentlemen and ladies, — but many more, even, who are personages so very real that even in the pages of Dumas one forgets that it is romance pure and simple, and is almost ready to accept his word as history. This it is not, as is well recognized, but still it is a pleasant manner of bringing before the omnivorous reader many facts which otherwise he might ignore or perhaps overlook.

It really is not possible to particularize all the action of Dumas' romances which centred around the Louvre. To do so would be to write the mediæval history of the famous building, or to produce an analytical index to the works of Dumas which would somewhat approach in bulk the celebrated Chinese encyclopædia.

We learn from "Le Vicomte de Bragelonne" of D'Artagnan's great familiarity with the life which went on in the old château of the Louvre. "I will tell you where M. d'Artagnan is," said Raoul; "he is now in Paris; when on duty, he is to be met at the Louvre; when not so, in the Rue des Lombards."

This describes the situation exactly: when the characters of the D'Artagnan and the Valois romances are not actually within the precincts of the Louvre, they have either just left it or are about to return thither, or some momentous event is being enacted there which bears upon the plot.

Perhaps the most dramatic incident in connection with the Louvre mentioned by Dumas, was that of the massacre of St. Bartholomew's night, "that bloody deed which culminated from the great struggle which devastated France in the latter part of the sixteenth century."

Dumas throws in his lot with such historians as Ranke and Soldain, who prefer to think that the massacre which took place on the fête-day of St. Bartholomew was not the result of a long premeditated plot, but was rather the fruit of a momentary fanatical terror aroused by the unsuccessful attempt on the life of Coligny.

This aspect is apart from the question. The principal fact with which the novelist and ourselves are concerned is that the event took place much as stated: that it was from the Louvre that the plot — if plot it were — emanated, and that the sounding bell of St. Germain l'Auxerrois did, on that fateful night, indicate to those present in the Louvre the fact that the bloody massacre had begun.

The fabric itself — the work of many hands, at the instigation of so many minds — is an enduring monument to the fame of those who projected it, or who were memorialized thereby: Philippe-Auguste, Marie de Medici, François I., Charles IX., Henri IV., Louis XIV., Napoleon I., — who did but little, it is true, — and Napoleon III. — who did much, and did it badly.

Besides history, bloody deeds, and intrigue, there is also much of sentiment to be gathered from an observation of its walls; as witness the sculptures and decorations of Goujon and Lescot, the interlaced monogram

G. H., of Henri and Gabrielle d'Estrées, and the superimposed crescents of the fair Diane de Poitiers. But such romances as these are best read in the pages of Dumas.

"To the French the Louvre is more than a palace; it is a sanctuary," said an enthusiastic Frenchman. As such it is a shrine to be worshipped by itself, though it is pardonable to wish to know to-day just where and when the historic events of its career took place.

One can trace the outline, in white marble, of the ancient Château du Louvre, in the easterly courtyard of the present establishment; can admire the justly celebrated eastern colonnade, though so defective was the architect in his original plans that it overlaps the side walls of the connecting buildings some dozen or more feet; can follow clearly all the various erections of monarchs and eras, and finally contemplate the tiny columns set about in the garden of the Tuileries, which mark all that is left of that ambitious edifice.

The best description of the Tuileries by Dumas comes into the scene in "The Count of Monte Cristo," when Villefort, — who shares with Danglars and Fernand the distinction of being the villain of the piece, — after travelling with all speed from Marseilles to Paris, "penetrates the two or three apartments which precede it, and enters the small cabinet of the Tuileries with the arched window, so well known as having been the favourite cabinet of Napoleon and Louis XVIII., as also that of Louis-Philippe.

"There, in this closet, seated before a walnut-tree table he had brought with him from Hartwell, and to which, from one of those fancies not uncommon to great people, he was particularly attached, the king, Louis XVIII., was carelessly listening to a man of fifty or fifty-two years of age, with gray hair, aristocratic bearing, and exceedingly gentlemanly attire, whilst he was making a note in a volume of Horace, Gryphius's edition, which was much indebted to the sagacious observations of the philosophical monarch."

Of course, an author of to-day would have expressed it somewhat differently, but at the time in which Dumas wrote, the little cabinet did exist, and up to the time of the destruction of the palace, at the Commune, was doubtless as much of a showplace in its way as is the window of the Louvre from which Charles IX. was supposed to have fired upon the fleeing Huguenots — with this difference: that the cabinet had a real identity, while the window in question has been more recently ascertained as not having been built at the time of the event.

* * *

Some one has mentioned Paris, the forgetter, as if modern Paris and its gay life — for assuredly it is gay, regardless of what the *blasé* folk may say or think — had entirely blotted out from its memory the horrors of St. Bartholomew’s night, the tragedies of La Roquette, the Conciergerie, or the Bastille.

This is so in a measure, however, though one has only to cross the square which lies before Les Halles, La Tour St. Jacques, or Notre Dame, to recall most vividly the tragedies which have before been enacted there.

The Louvre literally reeks with the intrigue and bloodshed of political and religious warfare; and Dumas’ picture of the murder of the admiral, and his version of the somewhat apocryphal incident of Charles IX. potting at the Protestant victims, with a specially made and garnished firearm, is sufficiently convincing, when once read, to suggest the recollections, at least, of the heartless act. From the Louvre it is but a step — since the Tuileries has been destroyed — to the Place de la Concorde.

When this great square, now given over to bird-fanciers, automobilists, and photograph-sellers, was first cleared, it was known as the Place de la Révolution. In the later volumes of the Valois romances one reads of a great calendar of scenes and incidents which were consummated here. It is too large a list to even catalogue, but one will recollect that here, in this statue surrounded place, with playing fountains glittering in the sunlight, is buried under a brilliance — very foreign to its former aspect — many a grim tragedy of profound political purport.

It was here that Louis XVI. said, “I die innocent; I forgive my enemies, and pray God to avert his vengeance for my blood, and to bless my people.” To-day one sees only the ornate space, the *voitures* and automobiles, the tricolour floating high on the Louvre, and this forgetful Paris, brilliant with sunlight, green with trees, beautified by good government, which offers in its *kiosks*, cafés, and theatres the fulness of the moment at every turn. Paris itself truly forgets, if one does not.

* * *

The Louvre as it is known to-day is a highly intricate composition. Its various parts have grown, not under one hand, but from a common root, until it blossomed forth in its full glory when the western front of Catherine de Medici took form. Unfortunately, with its disappearance at the Commune the completeness of this elaborate edifice went for ever.

One is apt to overlook the fact that the old Louvre, the *ancienne Palais du Louvre,* was a mediæval battlemented and turreted structure, which bore little resemblance to the Louvre of to-day, or even that of Charles, Henri, Catherine, or Marguerite, of whom Dumas wrote in the Valois romances.

THE GARDENS OF THE TUILERIES

The general ground-plan of the two distinct portions is the same, except for some minor additions of Napoleon I. and the connecting links built by Napoleon III., and many of the apartments are of course much the same, but there has been a general laying out of the courts anew, and tree-planting and grading of the streets and quais in the immediate neighbourhood; so much so that almost the entire aspect is changed. In spite of its compositeness, there is a certain aspect of uniformity of outline, though not of excellence of design.

The only relics of the Palace of the Tuileries are the colonnettes set about in the garden and surmounted by gilded balls.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PALAIS ROYAL

It seems hardly necessary to more than mention the name of the Palais Royal, in connection with either the life or the writings of Alexandre Dumas, to induce a line of thought which is practically limitless. It was identified with Dumas' first employment in the capital, and it has been the scene of much of the action of both the D'Artagnan and the Valois romances.

More than all else, however, though one is apt to overlook it somewhat, it is so closely identified with Richelieu that it is difficult to separate it from any event of French political history of the period.

It was built by Richelieu in 1629, on the site occupied by the Hôtels de Mercœur and Rambouillet, and was originally intended to have borne the name of Hôtel Richelieu. Toward 1634 it was enlarged, and was known as the Palais Cardinal. Finally it was presented, in 1642, to Louis XIII., and at his death came to Anne of Austria, when the royal family removed thither and it became known as the Palais Royal.

The incident of the flight of the royal family and Mazarin to St. Germain is one of the historic and dramatic incidents which Dumas used as one of the events in which D'Artagnan participated.

The court never returned to make use of the Palais Royal as a royal residence, and it became the refuge of Henriette de France, Queen of England and widow of Charles I. Thirty years later Louis XIV., who had fled from its walls when a child, gave it to his nephew Philippe d'Orleans, Duc de Chartres.

It was during the *Régence* that the famous *fêtes* of the Palais Royal were organized, — they even extended to what the unsympathetic have called orgies, — but it is certain that no town residences of kings were ever as celebrated for their splendid functions as was the Palais Royal in the seventeenth century.

In 1763 a fire brought about certain reconstructions at the expense of the city of Paris. In 1781, it became again the prey of fire; and Philippe-Égalité, who was then Duc de Chartres, constructed the three vast galleries which surround the Palais of to-day.

The *boutiques* of the galleries were let to merchants of all manner of foibles, and it became the most lively quarter of Paris.

The public adopted the galleries as fashionable promenades, which became, for the time, “*un bazar européen et un rendez-vous d’affaires et de galanterie*.”

It was in 1783 that the Duc d’Orleans constructed “*une salle de spectacle*,” which to-day is the Théâtre du Palais Royal, and in the middle of the garden a *cirque* which ultimately came to be transformed into a restaurant.

The purely theatrical event of the history of the Palais Royal came on the 13th of July, 1789, when at midday — as the *coup* of a *petit canon* rang out — a young unknown *avocat*, Camille Desmoulins, mounted a chair and addressed the throng of promenaders in a thrilling and vibrant voice:

“*Citoyens, j’arrive de Versailles!* — Necker is fled and the Baron Breteuil is in his place. Breteuil is one of those who have demanded the head of Mirabeau ... there remains but one resource, and that ‘to arms’ and to wear the cockade that we may be known. *Quelle couleur voulez-vous?*”

With almost a common accord the tricolour was adopted — and the next day the Bastille fell.

The Orleans Bureau, Palais Royal

Dumas’ account of the incident, taken from “The Taking of the Bastille,” is as follows:

”During this time the procession kept on advancing; it had moved obliquely to the left, and had gone down the Rue Montmartre to the Place des Victoires. When it reached the Palais Royal some great impediment prevented its passing on. A troop of men with green leaves in their hats were shouting ‘To arms!’

“It was necessary to reconnoitre. Were these men who blocked up the Rue Vivienne friends or enemies? Green was the colour of the Count d’Artois. Why then these green cockades?

“After a minute’s conference all was explained.

“On learning the dismissal of Necker, a young man had issued from the Café Foy, had jumped upon a table in the garden of the Palais Royal, and, taking a pistol from his breast, had cried ‘To arms!’

“On hearing this cry, all the persons who were walking there had assembled around him, and had shouted ‘To arms!’

“We have already said that all the foreign regiments had been collected around Paris. One might have imagined that it was an invasion by the Austrians. The names of these regiments alarmed the ears of all Frenchmen;

they were Reynac, Salis Samade, Diesbach, Esterhazy, Roemer; the very naming of them was sufficient to make the crowd understand that they were the names of enemies. The young man named them; he announced that the Swiss were encamped in the Champs Elysées, with four pieces of artillery, and that they were to enter Paris the same night, preceded by the dragoons, commanded by Prince Lambesq. He proposed a new cockade which was not theirs, snatched a leaf from a chestnut-tree and placed it in the band of his hat. Upon the instant every one present followed his example. Three thousand persons had in ten minutes unleaved the trees of the Palais Royal.

"That morning no one knew the name of that young man; in the evening it was in every mouth.

"That young man's name was Camille Desmoulins."

After 1793 the Palais Royal was converted, by decree, into the Palais et Jardin de la Révolution; and reunited to the domains of the state. Napoleon I. granted its use to the Tribunal for its seances, and Lucien Bonaparte inhabited it for the "Hundred Days." In 1830 Louis-Philippe, Duc d'Orleans, gave there a fête in honour of the King of Naples, who had come to pay his respects to the King of France. Charles X. assisted as an invited guest at the function, but one month after he had inhabited it as king.

Under Napoleon III. the Palais Royal was the residence of Prince Jerome, the uncle of the emperor, afterward that of his son the Prince Napoleon, when the *fleur-de-lis* sculptured on the façade gave way before escutcheons bearing the imperial eagles, which in turn have since given way to the Republican device of "'48" — "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité."

It is with a remarkable profusion of detail — for Dumas, at any rate — that the fourteenth chapter of "The Conspirators" opens.

It is a veritable guide-book phraseology and conciseness, which describes the streets of the Palais Royal quarter:

"The evening of the same day, which was Sunday, toward eight o'clock, at the moment when a considerable group of men and women, assembled around a street singer, who was playing at the same time the cymbals with his knees and the tambourine with his hands, obstructed the entrance to the Rue de Valois, a musketeer and two of the light horse descended a back staircase of the Palais Royal, and advanced toward the Passage du Lycée, which, as every one knows, opened on to that street; but seeing the crowd which barred the way, the three soldiers stopped and appeared to take counsel. The result of their deliberation was doubtless that they must take another route, for the musketeer, setting the example of a new manœuvre, threaded the Cour des Fontaines, turned the corner of the Rue des Bons Enfants, and, walking rapidly, — though he was extremely corpulent, — arrived at No. 22, which opened as by enchantment at his approach, and closed again on him and his two companions.

"... The crowd dispersed. A great many men left the circle, singly, or two and two, turning toward each other with an imperceptible gesture of the hand, some by the Rue de Valois, some by the Cour des Fontaines, some by the Palais Royal itself, thus surrounding the Rue des Bons Enfants, which seemed to be the centre of the rendezvous."

The locality has not changed greatly since the times of which Dumas wrote, and if one would see for himself this Rue de Bons Enfants, Numéro 22, and try to find out how the Regent of France was able to climb over the roof-tops to the Palais Royal, for a wager, he may still do so, for apparently the roof-tops have changed but little. The especial connection of the Rue des Bons Enfants with literature is perhaps Sylvestre's establishment, which will, for a price, sell you almost any French celebrity's autograph, be he king, prince, painter, or litterateur.

In the "Vicomte de Bragelonne" there is a wonderfully interesting chapter, which describes Mazarin's gaming-party at the Palais Royal.

In that it enters somewhat more into detail than is usual with Dumas, it appears worth quoting here, if only for its description of the furnishing of the *salle* in which the event took place, and its most graphic and truthful picture of the great cardinal himself:

"In a large chamber of the Palais Royal, covered with a dark-coloured velvet, which threw into strong relief the gilded frames of a great number of magnificent pictures, on the evening of the arrival of the two Frenchmen, the whole court was assembled before the alcove of M. le Cardinal de Mazarin, who gave a party, for the purposes of play, to the king and queen. A small screen separated three prepared tables. At one of these tables the king and the two queens were seated. Louis XIV., placed opposite to the young queen, his wife, smiled upon her with an expression of real happiness. Anne of Austria held the cards against the cardinal, and her daughter-in-law assisted her in her game, when she was not engaged in smiling at her husband. As for the cardinal, who was reclining on his bed, his cards were held by the Comtesse de Soissons, and he watched them with an incessant look of interest and cupidity.

"The cardinal had been painted by Bernouin; but the rouge, which glowed only on his cheeks, threw into stronger contrast the sickly pallor of the rest of his countenance and the shining yellow of his brow. His eyes alone acquired a more lively expression from this auxiliary, and upon those sick man's eyes were, from time to time, turned the uneasy looks of the king, the queen, and the courtiers. The fact is, that the two eyes of Mazarin were the stars more or less brilliant in which the France of the seventeenth century read its destiny every evening and every morning. Monseigneur neither won nor lost; he was, therefore, neither gay nor sad. It was a stagnation in which, full of pity for him, Anne of Austria would not have willingly left him; but in order to attract the attention of the sick man by some brilliant stroke, she must have either won or lost. To win would have been dangerous, because Mazarin would have changed his indifference for an ugly grimace; to lose would likewise have been dangerous, because she must have cheated, and the Infanta, who watched her game, would, doubtless, have exclaimed against her partiality for Mazarin. Profiting by this calm, the courtiers were chatting. When not in a bad humour, M. de Mazarin was a very debonnaire prince, and he, who prevented nobody from singing, provided they paid, was not tyrant enough to prevent people from talking, provided they made up their minds to lose. They were chatting, then. At the first table, the king's younger brother, Philip, Duc d'Anjou, was admiring his handsome face in the glass of a box. His favourite, the Chevalier de Lorraine, leaning over the *fauteuil* of the prince, was listening, with secret envy, to the Comte de Guiche, another of Philip's favourites, who was relating in choice terms the various vicissitudes of fortune of the royal adventurer, Charles II. He told, as so many fabulous events, all the history of his peregrinations in Scotland, and his terrors when the enemy's party was so closely on his track; of nights passed in trees, and days passed in hunger and combats. By degrees, the fate of the unfortunate king interested his auditors so greatly, that the play languished even at the royal table, and the young king, with a pensive look and downcast eye, followed, without appearing to give any attention to it, the smallest details of this Odyssey, very picturesquely related by the Comte de Guiche."

Again mention of the Palais Royal enters into the action of “The Queen’s Necklace.” When Madame de la Motte and her companion were *en route* to Versailles by cabriolet, “they met a delay at the gates of the Palais Royal, where, in a courtyard, which had been thrown open, were a host of beggars crowding around fires which had been lighted there, and receiving soup, which the servants of M. le Duc d’Orleans were distributing to them in earthen basins; and as in Paris a crowd collects to see everything, the number of the spectators of this scene far exceeded that of the actors.

“Here, then, they were again obliged to stop, and, to their dismay, began to hear distinctly from behind loud cries of ‘Down with the cabriolet! down with those that crush the poor!’

“‘Can it be that those cries are addressed to us?’ said the elder lady to her companion.

“‘Indeed, madame, I fear so,’ she replied.

“‘Have we, do you think, run over any one?’

“‘I am sure you have not.’

“‘To the magistrate! to the magistrate!’ cried several voices.

“‘What in heaven’s name does it all mean?’ said the lady.

“‘The crowd reproaches you, madame, with having braved the police order which appeared this morning, prohibiting all cabriolets from driving through the streets until the spring.’”

This must have been something considerable of an embargo on pleasure, and one which would hardly obtain to-day, though asphalted pavements covered with a film of frost must offer untold dangers, as compared with the streets of Paris as they were then — in the latter years of the eighteenth century.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BASTILLE

The worshipper at the shrines made famous by Dumas — no less than history — will look in vain for the prison of La Roquette, the Bastille, the hôtel of the Duc de Guise, at No. 12 Rue du Chaume, that of Coligny in the Rue de Bethusy, or of the Montmorencies, “near the Louvre.”

They existed, of course, in reality, as they did in the Valois romances, but to-day they have disappeared, and not even the “*Commission des Monuments Historiques*” has preserved a pictorial representation of the three latter.

One of Dumas’ most absorbing romances deals with the fateful events which culminated at the Bastille on the 14th Thermidor, 1789. “This monument, this seal of feudality, imprinted on the forehead of Paris,” said Dumas, “was the Bastille,” and those who know French history know that he wrote truly.

The action of “The Taking of the Bastille,” so far as it deals with the actual assault upon it, is brief. So was the event itself. Dumas romances but little in this instance; he went direct to fact for his details. He says:

“When once a man became acquainted with the Bastille, by order of the king, that man was forgotten, sequestrated, interred, annihilated....

“Moreover, in France there was not only one Bastille; there were twenty other Bastilles, which were called Fort l’Evêque, St. Lazare, the Châtelet, the Conciergerie, Vincennes, the Castle of La Roche, the Castle of If, the Isles of St. Marguerite, Pignerolles, etc.

“Only the fortress at the Gate St. Antoine was called *the Bastille*, as *Rome* was called *the* city....

“During nearly a whole century the governorship of the Bastille had continued in one and the same family.

“The grandfather of this elect race was M. de Chateauneuf; his son Lavrillière succeeded him, who, in turn, was succeeded by his grandson, St. Florentin. The dynasty became extinct in 1777....

“Among the prisoners, it will be recollected, the following were of the greatest note:

“The Iron Mask, Lauzun, Latude.

”The Jesuits were connoisseurs; for greater security they confessed the prisoners.

“For greater security still, the prisoners were buried under supposititious names.

“The Iron Mask, it will be remembered, was buried under the name of Marchiali. He had remained forty-five years in prison.

“Lauzun remained there fourteen years.

“Latude, thirty years....

“But, at all events, the Iron Mask and Lauzun had committed heinous crimes.

“The Iron Mask, whether brother or not of Louis XIV., it is asserted, resembled King Louis XIV. so strongly, that it was almost impossible to distinguish the one from the other.

“It is exceedingly imprudent to dare to resemble a king.

“Lauzun had been very near marrying, or did actually marry, the Grande Mademoiselle.

“It is exceedingly imprudent to dare to marry the niece of King Louis XIII., the granddaughter of Henri IV.

“But Latude, poor devil, what had he done?

“He had dared to fall in love with Mlle. Poisson, Dame de Pompadour, the king’s mistress.

“He had written a note to her.

“This note, which a respectable woman would have sent back to the man who wrote it, was handed by Madame de Pompadour to M. de Sartines, the lieutenant-general of police.”

“To the Bastille!” was the cry upon which Dumas built up his story.

“‘To the Bastille!’

“Only that it was a senseless idea, as the soldiers had remarked, that the Bastille could be taken.

“The Bastille had provisions, a garrison, artillery.

“The Bastille had walls, which were fifteen feet thick at their summit, and forty at their base.

“The Bastille had a governor, whose name was De Launay, who had stored thirty thousand pounds of gunpowder in his cellars, and who had sworn, in case of being surprised by a *coup de main*, to blow up the Bastille, and with it half the Faubourg St. Antoine.”

Dumas was never more chary of tiresome description than in the opening chapters of this book. Chapter XVI. opens as follows:

“We will not describe the Bastille — it would be useless.

“It lives as an eternal image, both in the memory of the old and in the imagination of the young.

“We shall content ourselves with merely stating, that, seen from the boulevard, it presented, in front of the square then called Place de la Bastille, two twin towers, while its two fronts ran parallel with the banks of the canal which now exists.

“The entrance to the Bastille was defended, in the first place, by a guard-house, then by two lines of sentinels, and besides these by two drawbridges.

“After having passed through these several obstacles, you came to the courtyard of the government-house — that is to say, the residence of the governor.

“From this courtyard a gallery led to the ditches of the Bastille.

“At this other entrance, which opened upon the ditches, was a drawbridge, a guard-house, and an iron gate.”

Then follow some pages of incident and action, which may be fact or may be fiction. The detail which comes after is picturesque and necessary to the plot:

“The interior court, in which the governor was waiting for Billot, was the courtyard which served as a promenade to the prisoners. It was guarded by eight towers — that is to say, by eight giants. No window opened into it. Never did the sun shine on its pavement, which was damp and almost muddy. It might have been thought the bottom of an immense well.

”In this courtyard was a clock, supported by figures representing enchained captives, which measured the hours, from which fell the regular and slow sounds of the minutes as they passed by, as in a dungeon the droppings from the ceiling eat into the pavement slabs on which they fall.

“At the bottom of this well, the prisoner, lost amid the abyss of stone, for a moment contemplated its cold nakedness, and soon asked to be allowed to return to his room....

“At the Bastille, all the places were sold to the highest bidder, from that of the governor himself, down to that of the scullion. The governor of the Bastille was a gaoler on a grand scale, an eating-house keeper wearing epaulets, who added to his salary of sixty thousand livres sixty thousand more, which he extorted and plundered....

"M. de Launay, in point of avarice, far surpassed his predecessors. This might, perhaps, have arisen from his having paid more for the place, and having foreseen that he would not remain in it so long as they did.

"He fed his whole house at the expense of his prisoners. He had reduced the quantity of firing, and doubled the hire of furniture in each room.

"He had the right of bringing yearly into Paris a hundred pipes of wine, free of duty. He sold his right to a tavern-keeper, who brought in wines of excellent quality. Then, with a tenth part of this duty, he purchased the vinegar with which he supplied his prisoners."

The rest of Dumas' treatment of the fall of the Bastille is of the historical kind. He does not blame De Launay for the fall, but by no means does he make a hero of him.

"A flash of fire, lost in a cloud of smoke, crowned the summit of a tower; a detonation resounded; cries of pain were heard issuing from the closely pressed crowd; the first cannon-shot had been fired from the Bastille; the first blood had been spilled. The battle had commenced....

"On hearing the detonation we have spoken of, the two soldiers who were still watching M. de Launay threw themselves upon him; a third snatched up the match, and then extinguished it by placing his heel upon it.

"De Launay drew the sword which was concealed in his cane, and would have turned it against his own breast, but the soldiers seized it and snapped it in two.

"He then felt that all he could do was to resign himself to the result; he therefore tranquilly awaited it.

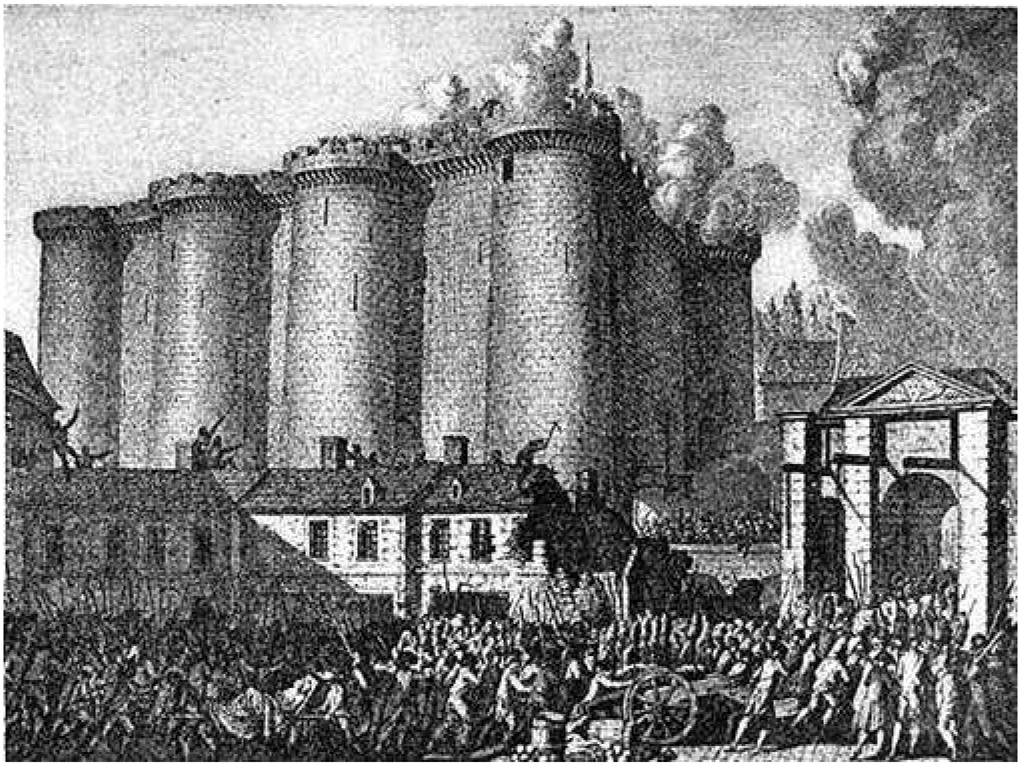

THE FALL OF THE BASTILLE

“The people rush forward; the garrison open their arms to them; and the Bastille is taken by assault — by main force, without a capitulation.

“The reason for this was that, for more than a hundred years, the royal fortress had not merely imprisoned inert matter within its walls — it had imprisoned thought also. Thought had thrown down the walls of the Bastille, and the people entered by the breach.”

The life-history of the Bastille was more extended than was commonly recalled. Still the great incident in its life covered but fifteen short days, — from the 30th June to the 14th July, 1789, — when it fell before the attack of the Revolutionists. There is rather vague markings in the pavement on the Boulevard Henri Quatre and the Rue St. Antoine, which suggest the former limits of this gruesome building.

It were not possible to catalogue all the scenes of action celebrated or perpetuated by Alexandre Dumas.

In his “Crimes Célèbres” he — with great definiteness — pictures dark scenes which are known to all readers of history; from that terrible affair of the Cenci, which took place on the terrace of the Château de Rocca Petrella, in 1598, to the assassination of Kotzebue by Karl Ludwig Sand in 1819.

Not all of these crimes deal with Paris, nor with France.

The most notable was the poisoning affair of the Marquise de Brinvilliers (1676), who was forced to make the "*amende honorable*" after the usual manner, on the Parvis du Nôtre Dame, that little tree-covered place just before the west façade of the cathedral.

The Chevalier Gaudin de Ste. Croix, captain of the Regiment de Tracy, had been arrested in the name of the king, by process of the "*lettre de cachet*" and forthwith incarcerated in the Bastille, which is once more made use of by Dumas, though in this case, as in many others, it is historic fact as well. The story, which is more or less one of conjugal and filial immorality, as well as political intrigue, shifts its scene once and again to the Cul-de-sac des Marchands des Chevaux, in the Place Maubert, to the Forêt de l'Aigue — within four leagues of Compiègne, the Place du Châtelet, the Conciergerie, and the Bastille.

Here, too, Dumas' account of the "question by water," or, rather, the notes on the subject, which accompanied the first (1839) edition of "Les Crimes Célèbres," form interesting, if rather horrible, reading.

Not alone in the Bastille was this horrible torture practised, but in most of the prisons of the time.

"*Pour la 'question ordinaire,' quatre coquemars pleins d'eau, et contenant chacun deux pintes et demi, et pour 'la question extraordinaire' huit de même grandeur.*"

This was poured into the victim through a funnel, which entered the mouth, and sooner or later drowned or stifled him or her, or induced confession.

The final act and end of the unnatural Marquise de Brinvilliers took place at the Place de la Grève, which before and since was the truly celebrated place of many noted crimes, though in this case it was justice that was meted out.

As a sort of sequel to "The Conspirators," Dumas adds "A Postscriptum," wherein is recounted the arrest of Richelieu, as foreordained by Mlle. de Valois. He was incarcerated in the Bastille; but his captivity was but a new triumph for the crafty churchman.

"It was reported that the handsome prisoner had obtained permission to walk on the terrace of the Bastille. The Rue St. Antoine was filled with most elegant carriages, and became, in twenty-four hours, the fashionable promenade. The regent — who declared that he had proofs of the treason of M. de Richelieu, sufficient to lose him four heads if he had them — would not, however, risk his popularity with the fair sex by keeping him long in prison. Richelieu, again at liberty, after a captivity of three months, was more brilliant and more sought after than ever; but the closet had been walled up, and Mlle. de Valois became Duchesse de Modena."

Not only in the "Vicomte de Bragelonne" and "The Taking of the Bastille" does Dumas make mention of "The Man in the Iron Mask," but, to still greater length, in the supplementary volume, called in the English translations "The Man in the Iron Mask," though why it is difficult to see, since it is but the second volume of "The Vicomte de Bragelonne."

This historical mystery has provided penmen of all calibres with an everlasting motive for argumentative conjecture, but Dumas without hesitancy comes out strongly for "a prince of the royal blood," probably the brother of Louis XIV.

It has been said that Voltaire invented "the Man in the Iron Mask."

There was nothing singular — for the France of that day — in the man himself, his offence, or his punishment; but the mask and the mystery — chiefly of Voltaire's creation — fascinated the public, as the veil of Mokanna fascinated his worshippers. Here are some of the Voltairean myths about this mysterious prisoner: One day he wrote something with his knife on a silver plate and threw it down to a fisherman, who took it to the governor of the prison. "Have you read it?" asked the governor, sternly. "I cannot read," replied the fisherman. "That has saved your life," rejoined the governor. Another day a young lad found beneath the prison tower a shirt written closely all over. He took it to the governor, who asked, anxiously. "Have you read it?" The boy again and again assured him that he had not. Nevertheless, two days later the boy was found dead in his bed. When the Iron Mask went to mass he was forbidden to speak or unmask himself on pain of being then and there shot down by the invalids, who stood by with loaded carbines to carry out the threat. Here are some of the personages the Iron Mask was supposed to be: An illegitimate son of Anne of Austria; a twin brother of Louis XIV., put out of the way by Cardinal Richelieu to avoid the risk of a disputed succession; the Count of Vermandois, an illegitimate son of Louis XIV.; Fouquet, Louis' minister; the Duke of Beaufort, a hero of the Fronde; the Duke of Monmouth, the English pretender; Avedick, the Armenian patriarch; and of late it has almost come to be accepted that he was Mattioli, a Piedmontese political prisoner, who died in 1703.

Dumas, at any rate, took the plausible and acceptable popular solution; and it certainly furnished him with a highly fascinating theme for a romance, which, however, never apparently achieved any great popularity.

“The clock was striking seven as Aramis passed before the Rue du Petit Muse and stopped at the Rue Tourelles, at the gateway of the Bastille....

“Of the governor of the prison Aramis — now Bishop of Vannes — asked, ‘How many prisoners have you? Sixty?’...

“‘For a prince of the blood I have fifty francs a day, ... thirty-six for a marechal de France, lieutenant-generals and brigadiers pay twenty-six francs, and councillors of parliament fifteen, but for an ordinary judge, or an ecclesiastic, I receive only ten francs.’”

Here Dumas’ knowledge and love of good eating again crops out. Continuing the dialogue between the bishop and the governor, he says:

“‘A tolerably sized fowl costs a franc and a half, and a good-sized fish four or five francs. Three meals a day are served, and, as the prisoners have nothing to do, they are always eating. A prisoner from whom I get ten francs costs me seven francs and a half.’

“‘Have you no prisoners, then, at less than ten francs?’ queried Aramis.

“‘Oh, yes,’ said the governor, ‘citizens and lawyers.’

“‘But do they not eat, too?... Do not the prisoners leave some scraps?’ continued Aramis.

“‘Yes, and I delight the heart of some poor little tradesman or clerk by sending him a wing of a red partridge, a slice of venison, or a slice of a truffled pasty, dishes which he never tasted except in his dreams (these are the leavings of the twenty-four-franc prisoners); and he eats and drinks, and at dessert cries, “Long live the king!” and blesses the Bastille. With a couple of bottles of champagne, which cost me five sous, I make him tipsy every Sunday. That class of people call down blessings upon me, and are sorry to leave the prison. Do you know that I have remarked, and it does me infinite honour, that certain prisoners, who have been set at liberty, have almost immediately afterward got imprisoned again? Why should this be the case, unless it be to enjoy the pleasures of my kitchen? It is really the fact.’ Aramis smiled with an expression of incredulity.”

A visit to the prisoners themselves follows, but the reader of these lines is referred to “Le Vicomte de Bragelonne” for further details.

The following few lines must suffice here:

“The number of bolts, gratings, and locks for the courtyard would have sufficed for the safety of an entire city. Aramis was neither an imaginative nor a sensitive man; he had been somewhat of a poet in his youth, but his heart was hard and indifferent, as the heart of every man of fifty-five years of age is, who has been frequently and passionately attached to women in his lifetime, or rather who has been passionately loved by them. But when he placed his foot upon the worn stone steps, along which so many unhappy wretches had passed, when he felt himself impregnated, as it were, with the atmosphere of those gloomy dungeons, moistened with tears, there could be but little doubt he was overcome by his feelings, for his head was bowed and his eyes became dim, as he followed Baisemeaux, the governor, without uttering a syllable.”

Dumas gives a further description, of similar import, in “The Regent’s Daughter:”

“And now, with the reader’s permission, we will enter the Bastille — that formidable building at which even the passing traveller trembled, and which, to the whole neighbourhood, was an annoyance and cause of alarm; for often at night the cries of the unfortunate prisoners who were under torture might be heard piercing the thick walls, so much so, that the Duchesse de Lesdequieres once wrote to the governor, that, if he did not prevent his patients from making such a noise, she should complain to the king.

“At this time, however, under the reign of Philippe d’Orleans, there were no cries to be heard; the society was select, and too well bred to disturb the repose of a lady.

“In a room in the Du Coin tower, on the first floor, was a prisoner alone.... He had, however, been but one day in the Bastille, and yet already he paced his vast chamber, examining the iron-barred doors, looking through the grated windows, listening, sighing, waiting....

“A noise of bolts and creaking hinges drew the prisoner from this sad occupation, and he saw the man enter before whom he had been taken the day before. This man, about thirty years of age, with an agreeable appearance and polite bearing, was the governor, M. De Launay, father of that De Launay who died at his post in ‘89....

“‘M. de Chanlay,’ said the governor, bowing, ‘I come to know if you have passed a good night, and are satisfied with the fare of the house and the conduct of the employés' — thus M. De Launay, in his politeness, called the turnkeys and jailors.

"'Yes, monsieur; and these attentions paid to a prisoner have surprised me, I own.'

"'The bed is hard and old, but yet it is one of the best; luxury being forbidden by our rules. Your room, monsieur, is the best in the Bastille; it has been occupied by the Duc d'Angoulême, by the Marquis de Bassompierre, and by the Marshals de Luxembourg and Biron; it is here that I lodge the princes when his Majesty does me the honour to send them to me.'

"'It is an excellent lodging,' said Gaston, smiling, 'though ill furnished; can I have some books, some paper, and pens?'

"'Books, monsieur, are strictly forbidden; but if you very much wish to read, as many things are allowed to a prisoner who is *ennuyé*, come and see me, then you can put in your pocket one of those volumes which my wife or I leave about; you will hide it from all eyes; on a second visit you will take the second volume, and to this abstraction we will close our eyes.'

"'And paper, pens, ink?' said Gaston. 'I wish most particularly to write.'

"'No one writes here, monsieur; or, at least, only to the king, the regent, the minister, or to me; but they draw, and I can let you have drawing-paper and pencils.'"

All of the above is the authenticated fact of history, as written records prove, but it is much better told by Dumas, the novelist, than by most historians.

Still other evidence of the good things set before the guests at the "Hôtel de la Bastille" is shown by the following. If Dumas drew the facts from historical records, all well and good; if they were menus composed by himself, — though unconventional ones, as all *bon vivants* will know, — why, still all is well.

"'A fifteen-franc boarder does not suffer, my lord,' said De Baisemeaux. — 'He suffers imprisonment, at all events.' — 'No doubt, but his suffering is sweetened for him. You must admit this young fellow was not born to eat such things as he now has before him. A pasty; crayfish from the river Marne — almost as big as lobsters; and a bottle of Volnay.'"

The potency of the Bastille as a preventative, or, rather, a fit punishment for crime, has been nowhere more effectually set forth than by the letter which Cagliostro wrote from London (in the "Queen's Necklace").

In this letter, after attacking king, queen, cardinal, and even M. de Breteuil, Cagliostro said: “Yes, I repeat, now free after my imprisonment, there is no crime that would not be expiated by six months in the Bastille. They ask me if I shall ever return to France. Yes, I reply, when the Bastille becomes a public promenade. You have all that is necessary to happiness, you Frenchmen; a fertile soil and genial climate, good hearts, gay tempers, genius, and grace. You only want, my friends, one little thing — to feel sure of sleeping quietly in your beds when you are innocent.”

To-day “The Bastille,” as it is commonly known and referred to, meaning the Place de la Bastille, has become a public promenade, and its bygone terrors are but a memory.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ROYAL PARKS AND PALACES

Since the romances of Dumas deal so largely with Paris, it is but natural that much of their action should take place at the near-by country residences of the royalty and nobility who form the casts of these great series of historical tales.

To-day Fontainebleau, St. Germain, Versailles, and even Chantilly, Compiègne, and Rambouillet are but mere attractions for the tourist of the butterfly order. The real Parisian never visits them or their precincts, save as he rushes through their tree-lined avenues in an automobile; and thus they have all come to be regarded merely as monuments of splendid scenes, which have been played, and on which the curtain has been rung down.

This is by no means the real case, and one has only to read Dumas, and do the round of the parks and châteaux which environ Paris, to revivify many of the scenes of which he writes.

Versailles is the most popular, Fontainebleau the most grand, St. Germain the most theatrical, Rambouillet the most rural-like, and Compiègne and Chantilly the most delicate and dainty.

Still nearer to Paris, and more under the influence of town life, were the châteaux of Madrid in the Bois de Boulogne, and of Vincennes, at the other extremity of the city.

All these are quite in a class by themselves; though, of course, in a way, they performed the same functions when royalty was in residence, as the urban palaces.

Dumas’ final appreciation of the charms of Fontainebleau does not come till one reaches the last pages of “Le Vicomte de Bragelonne.” True, it was not until the period of which this romance deals with Fontainebleau, its château, its *forêt,* and its fêtes, actually came to that prominence which to this day has never left them.

When the king required to give his fête at Fontainebleau, as we learn from Dumas, and history, too, he required of Fouquet four millions of francs, “in order to keep an open house for fifteen days,” said he. How he got them, and with what result, is best read in the pages of the romance.

“Life at the Palais Royal having become somewhat tame, the king had directed that Fontainebleau should be prepared for the reception of the court.” Here, then, took place the fêtes which were predicted, and Dumas, with his usual directness and brilliance, has given us a marvellous description of the gaiety of court life, surrounded by the noble forest, over which artists and sentimentalists have ever rhapsodized.

Continuing, from the pages of Dumas which immediately follow, one reads:

“For four days, every kind of enchantment brought together in the magnificent gardens of Fontainebleau, had converted this spot into a place of the most perfect enjoyment. M. Colbert seemed gifted with ubiquity. In the morning, there were the accounts of the previous night’s expenses to settle; during the day, programmes, essays, enlistments, payments. M. Colbert had amassed four millions of francs, and dispersed them with a prudent economy. He was horrified at the expenses which mythology involved; every wood-nymph, every dryad, did not cost less than a hundred francs a day. The dresses alone amounted to three hundred francs. The expense of powder and sulphur for fireworks amounted, every night, to a hundred thousand francs. In addition to these, the illuminations on the borders of the sheet of water cost thirty thousand francs every evening. The fêtes had been magnificent; and Colbert could not restrain his delight. From time to time he noticed Madame and the king setting forth on hunting expeditions, or preparing for the reception of different fantastic personages, solemn ceremonials, which had been extemporized a fortnight before, and in which Madame’s sparkling wit and the king’s magnificence were equally displayed.”

The “Inn of the Beautiful Peacock,” celebrated by Dumas in “Le Vicomte de Bragelonne,” is not directly traceable to-day in the many neighbouring hostelries of Fontainebleau. Just what Dumas had in mind is vague, though his description might apply to any house for travellers, wherever it may have been situated in this beautiful wildwood.

It was to this inn of the “Beau Paon” that Aramis repaired, after he had left Fouquet and had donned the costume of the cavalier once more. “Where,” said Dumas, “he (Aramis) had, by letters previously sent, directed an apartment or a room to be retained for him. He chose the room, which was on the first floor, whereas the apartment was on the second."

The description of the establishment given by Dumas is as follows:

"In the first place, let us supply our readers with a few details about the inn called the Beau Paon. It owed its name to its sign, which represented a peacock spreading out its tail. But, in imitation of some painters who had bestowed the face of a handsome young man upon the serpent which tempted Eve, the painter of this sign had conferred upon the peacock the features of a woman. This inn, a living epigram against that half of the human race which renders existence delightful, was situated at Fontainebleau, in the first turning on the left-hand side, which divides on the road from Paris, that large artery which constitutes in itself along the entire town of Fontainebleau. The side street in question was then known as the Rue de Lyon, doubtless because geographically it advanced in the direction of the second capital of the kingdom."

Lyons itself is treated by Dumas at some length in "Chicot the Jester," particularly with reference to Chicot's interception of the Pope's messenger, who brought the documents which were to establish the Duc de Guise's priority as to rights to the throne of France.

"The inn of the Beau Paon had its principal front toward the main street; but upon the Rue de Lyon there were two ranges of buildings, divided by courtyards, which comprised sets of apartments for the reception of all classes of travellers, whether on foot or on horseback, or even with their own carriages, and in which could be supplied, not only board and lodging, but also accommodation for exercise or opportunities of solitude for even the wealthiest courtiers, whenever, after having received some check at the court, they wished to shut themselves up with their own society, either to devour an affront or to brood over their revenge. From the windows of this part of the building the travellers could perceive, in the first place, the street with the grass growing between the stones, which were being gradually loosened by it; next, the beautiful hedges of elder and thorn, which embraced, as though within two green and flowering arms, the houses of which we have spoken; and then, in the spaces between those houses, forming the groundwork of the picture, and appearing like an almost impassable barrier, a line of thick trees, the advanced sentinels of the vast forest, which extends itself in front of Fontainebleau."

On the road to Versailles, where the Seine is crossed by the not beautiful Pont de Sèvres, is the little inn of the Bridge of Sèvres, in which the story of “La Comtesse de Charny” opens, and, indeed, in which all its early action takes place. The inn, or even its direct descendant, is not discernible to-day. The Pont de Sèvres is there, linking one of those thumblike peninsulas made by the windings of the Seine with the Bois de Meudon, and the traffic inward and outward from Paris is as great and varied as it always was, probably greater, but there is no inn to suggest that which Dumas had in mind. The rural aspect is somewhat changed, the towering stacks of the china-factory chimneys, the still more towering — though distant — Tour Eiffel, which fortunately is soon to be razed, and the iron rails of the “Ceinture” and the “Quest,” all tend to estrange one’s sentiments from true romance.

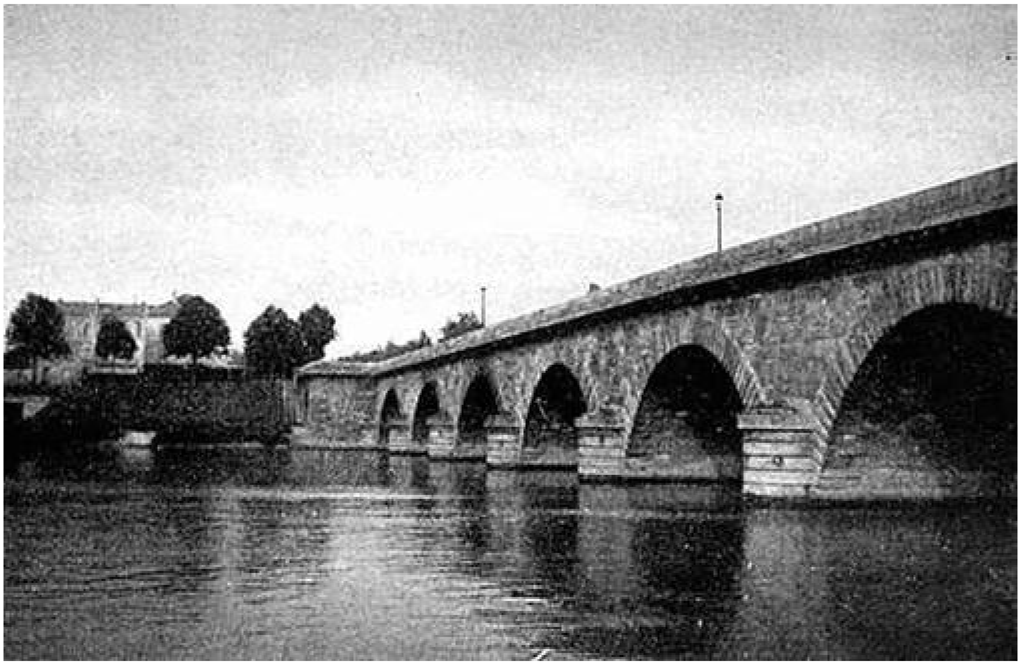

INN OF THE PONT DE SÈVRES

Farther on to the westward lies Versailles, with its theatrical, though splendid, *palais* and *parc*, the Trianons and Les Grandes Eaux, beloved by the tourist and the Parisian alike.

Still farther to the northward by the same road is the pretty town of St. Germain-en-Laye, with the remains of its Château Neuf, once the most splendid and gorgeous country residence of Henri II. and Henri IV., continuing, also, in the favour of the court until the birth here of Louis XIV. James II. of England made his residence here after his exile.

Dumas' references to St. Germain are largely found in "Vingt Ans Après."

It was near St. Germain, too, that Dumas set about erecting his famous "Châtelet du Monte Cristo." In fact, he did erect it, on his usual extravagant ideas, but his tenure there was short-lived, and, altogether, it was not a creditable undertaking, as after-events proved.

The gaiety of the life at St. Germain departed suddenly, but it is said of Dumas' life there, that he surrounded himself with a coterie which bespoke somewhat its former abandon and luxuriance. It was somewhat of a Bohemian life that he lived there, no doubt, but it was not of the sordid or humble kind; it was most gorgeous and extravagant.

Of all the royal parks and palaces in the neighbourhood of Paris, Versailles has the most popularly sentimental interest. A whim of Louis XIV., it was called by Voltaire "an abyss of expense," and so it truly was, as all familiar with its history know.

In the later volumes of Dumas' "La Comtesse de Charnay," "The Queen's Necklace," and "The Taking of the Bastille," frequent mention is made but he does not write of it with the same affection that he does of Fontainebleau or St. Germain. The details which Dumas presents in "The Taking of the Bastille" shows this full well.

"At half-past ten, in ordinary times, every one in Versailles would have been in bed and wrapped in the profoundest slumber; but that night no eye was closed at Versailles. They had felt the counter-shock of the terrible concussion with which Paris was still trembling.

"The French Guards, the body-guards, the Swiss drawn up in platoons, and grouped near the openings of all the principal streets, were conversing among themselves, or with those of the citizens whose fidelity to the monarchy inspired them with confidence.

"For Versailles has, at all times, been a royalist city. Religious respect for the monarchy, if not for the monarch, is engrafted in the hearts of its inhabitants, as if it were a quality of its soil. Having always lived near kings, and fostered by their bounty, beneath the shade of their wonders — having always inhaled the intoxicating perfume of the *fleurs-de-lis,* and seen the brilliant gold of their garments, and the smiles upon their august lips, the inhabitants of Versailles, for whom kings have built a city of marble and porphyry, feel almost kings themselves; and even at the present day, even now, when moss is growing around the marble, and grass is springing up between the slabs of the pavement, now that gold has almost disappeared from the wainscoting, and that the shady walks of the parks are more solitary than a graveyard, Versailles must either belie its origin, or must consider itself as a fragment of the fallen monarchy, and no longer feeling the pride of power and wealth, must at least retain the poetical associations of regret, and the sovereign charms of melancholy. Thus, as we have already stated, all Versailles, in the night between the 14th and 15th July, 1789, was confusedly agitated, anxious to ascertain how the King of France would reply to the insult offered to the throne, and the deadly wound inflicted on his power.”

Versailles was one of the latest of the royal palaces, and since its birth, or at least since the days of “personally” and “non-conducted” tourists, has claimed, perhaps, even more than its share of popular favour. Certainly it is a rare attraction, and its past has been in turn sad, gay, brilliant, and gloomy. Event after event, some significant, others unimportant, but none mean or sordid, have taken place within its walls or amid its environment. Dumas evidently did not rank its beauties very high, — and perhaps rightly, — for while it is a gorgeous fabric and its surroundings and appointments are likewise gorgeous, it palls unmistakably by reason of its sheer artificiality. Dumas said much the same thing when he described it as “that world of automata, of statues, and boxwood forests, called Versailles.”

Much of the action of “The Queen’s Necklace” takes place at Versailles, and every line relating thereto is redolent of a first-hand observation on the part of the author. There is no scamping detail here, nor is there any excess of it.

With the fourth chapter of the romance, when Madame de la Motte drove to Versailles in her cabriolet, “built lightly, open, and fashionable, with high wheels, and a place behind for a servant to stand,” begins the record of the various incidents of the story, which either took place at Versailles or centred around it.

“‘Where are we to go?’ said Weber, who had charge of madame’s cabriolet. — ’To Versailles.’ — ’By the boulevards?’ — ’No.’... ‘We are at Versailles,’ said the driver. ‘Where must I stop, ladies?’ — ’At the Place d’Armes.’” “At this moment,” says Dumas, in the romance, “our heroines heard the clock strike from the church of St. Louis.”

Dumas’ descriptions of Versailles are singularly complete, and without verboseness. At least, he suggests more of the splendours of that gay residence of the court than he actually defines, and puts into the mouths of his characters much that others would waste on mere descriptive matter.

In the chapter headed Vincennes, in “Marguerite de Valois,” Dumas gives a most graphic description of its one-time château-prison:

”According to the order given by Charles IX., Henri was the same evening conducted to Vincennes, that famous castle of which only a fragment now remains, but colossal enough to give an idea of its past grandeur.

“At the postern of the prison they stopped. M. de Nancey alighted from his horse, opened the gate closed with a padlock, and respectfully invited the king to follow him. Henri obeyed without a word of reply. Every abode seemed to him more safe than the Louvre, and ten doors, closing on him at the same time, were between him and Catherine de Medici.

“The royal prisoner crossed the drawbridge between two soldiers, passed the three doors on the ground floor and the three doors at the foot of the staircase, and then, still preceded by M. de Nancey, went up one flight of stairs. Arrived there, Captain de Nancey requested the king to follow him through a kind of corridor, at the extremity of which was a very large and gloomy chamber.

“Henri looked around him with considerable disquietude.

“‘Where are we?’ he inquired.

“‘In the chamber of torture, monseigneur.’

“‘Ah, ah!’ replied the king, looking at it attentively.

”There was something of everything in this apartment: pitchers and trestles for the torture by water; wedges and mallets for the question of the boot; moreover, there were stone benches for the unhappy wretches who awaited the question, nearly all around the chamber; and above these seats, and to the seats themselves, and at the foot of these seats, were iron rings, mortised into the walls with no symmetry but that of the torturing art.

“‘Ah, ah!’ said Henri, ‘is this the way to my apartment?’

“‘Yes, monseigneur, and here it is,’ said a figure in the dark, who approached and then became distinguishable.

“Henri thought he recognized the voice, and, advancing toward the individual, said, ‘Ah, is it you, Beaulieu? And what the devil do you do here?’

"'Sire, I have been nominated governor of the fortress of Vincennes.'

"'Well, my dear sir, your début does you honour; a king for a prisoner is no bad commencement.'

"'Pardon me, Sire, but before I received you I had already received two gentlemen.'

"'Who may they be? Ah! your pardon; perhaps I commit an indiscretion.'

"'Monseigneur, I have not been bound to secrecy. They are M. de la Mole and M. de Coconnas.'

"'Poor gentlemen! And where are they?'

"'High up, in the fourth floor.'

"Henri gave a sigh. It was there he wished to be.

"'Now, then, M. de Beaulieu,' said Henri, 'have the kindness to show me my chamber. I am desirous of reaching it, as I am very much fatigued with my day's toil.'

"'Here, monseigneur,' said Beaulieu, showing Henri an open door.

"'No. 2!' said Henri. 'And why not No. 1?'

"'Because it is reserved, monseigneur.'

"'Ah! that is another thing,' said Henri, and he became even more pensive.

"He wondered who was to occupy No. 1.

"The governor, with a thousand apologies, installed Henri in his apartment, made many excuses for his deficiencies, and, placing two soldiers at the door, retired.

"'Now,' said the governor, addressing the turnkey, 'let us visit the others.'"

The present aspect of St. Germain-en-Laye is hardly what it was in the days of which Dumas wrote in "Marguerite de Valois" or in "Vingt Ans Après." Le Bois or Le Forêt looks to-day in parts, at least — much as it did in the days when royalty hunted its domain, and the glorious façade château has endured well.

Beyond this, the romance and history have well-nigh evaporated into air. The whole neighbourhood is quite given over to a holiday, pleasure-making crowd, which, though it is typically French, and therefore interesting, is little in keeping with the splendid scenes of its past.

To-day peasants from Brittany, heavily booted cavalry and artillery, *ouvriers*, children and nursemaids, and *touristes* of all nationalities throng the *allées* of the forest and the corridors of the château, where once royalty and its retainers held forth.

Vesinet, on the road from Paris to St. Germain, — just before one reaches Pecq, and the twentieth-century *chemin-de-fer* begins to climb that long, inclined viaduct, which crosses the Seine and rises ultimately to the platform on which sits the Vieux Château, — was a favourite hawking-ground of Charles IX. Indeed, it was here that that monarch was warned of “a fresh calumny against his poor Harry” (Henri de Navarre), as one reads in the pages of “Marguerite de Valois.”

A further description follows of Charles’ celebrated falcon, Bec de Fer, which is assuredly one of the most extraordinary descriptions of a hunting-scene extant in the written page of romance.

Much hunting took place in all of Dumas’ romances, and the near-by forests of France, *i. e.*, near either to Paris or to the royal residences elsewhere, were the scenes of many gay meetings, where the stag, the boar, the *cerf*, and all manner of footed beasts and winged fowl were hunted in pure sport; though, after all, it is not recorded that it was as brutal a variety as the *battues* of the present day.

St. Germain, its château and its *forêt*, enters once and again, and again, into both the Valois series and the Mousquetaire romances. Of all the royal, suburban palaces, none have been more admired and loved for its splendid appointments and the splendid functions which have taken place there, than St. Germain.

It had early come into favour as the residence of the French kings, the existing chapel being the foundation of St. Louis, while the Château Neuf was built mainly by Henri II. To-day but a solitary *pavillon* — that known as Henri IV. — remains, while the Vieux Château, as it was formerly known, is to-day acknowledged as *the* Château.

The most significant incident laid here by Dumas, is that of the flight of Anne of Austria, Louis XIV., and the court, from Paris to the Château of St. Germain. This plan was amplified, according to Dumas, and furthered by D’Artagnan and Athos; and since it is an acknowledged fact of history, this points once again to the worth of the historical romance from an exceedingly edifying view-point. At the time of the flight Louis was but a mere boy, and it may be recalled here that he was born at St. Germain in 1638.

The architectural glories of St. Germain are hardly so great as to warrant comparison with Versailles, to which Louis subsequently removed his court; indeed, the Château Neuf, with the exception of the *pavillon* before mentioned, is not even a dignified ruin, being but scattered piles of débris, which, since 1776, when the structure was razed, have been left lying about in most desultory fashion.

The Vieux Château was made use of by the great Napoleon as a sort of a barracks, and again as a prison, but has since been restored according to the original plans of the architect Ducercen, who, under François I., was to have carried it to completion.

Once St. Germain was the home of royalty and all the gaiety of the court life of the Louis, and once again it was on the eve of becoming the fashionable Paris suburb, but now it is the resort of “trippers,” and its château, or what was left of it after the vandalism of the eighteenth century, is a sad ruin, though the view from its heights is as lovely as ever — that portion which remains being but an aggravation, when one recalls the glories that once were. Save the Vieux Château, all that is left is the lovely view. Paris-wards one sees a panorama — a veritable *vol-d’oiseaux* — of the slender, silvery loops of the Seine as it bends around Port Marly, Argenteuil, Courbevoie, St. Denis, and St. Cloud; while in the dimmest of the dim distance the Eiffel Tower looms all its ugliness up into the sky, and the domed heights of Montmartre and the Buttes Chaumont look really beautiful — which they do not on closer view.

The height of St. Germain itself — the *ville* and the château — is not so very great, and it certainly is not giddy, which most of its frequenters, for one reason or another, are; but its miserable *pavé* is the curse of all automobilists, and the sinuous road which ascends from the Pont du Pecq is now “rushed,” up and down, by motor-cars, to the joy of the native, when one gets stalled, as they frequently do, and to the danger to life and limb of all other road-users and passers-by.

* * *

In all of the Valois cycle, “*la chasse*” plays an important part in the pleasure of the court and the noblesse. The forests in the neighbourhood of Paris are numerous and noted.

FORÊT DE VILLERS-COTTERETS BOIS DE VINCENNES BOIS DE BOULOGNE

At Villers-Cotterets, Dumas’ birthplace, is the Forêt de Villers-Cotterets, a dependence of the Valois establishment at Crépy.

Bondy, Fontainebleau, St. Germain, Vincennes, and Rambouillet are all mentioned, and are too familiar to even casual travellers to warrant the inclusion of detailed description here.

Next to Fontainebleau, whose present-day fame rests with the artists of the Barbizon school, who have perpetuated its rocks and trees, and St. Germain, which is mostly revered for the past splendour of its château, Rambouillet most frequently comes to mind.

Even Republican France has its national hunt yearly, at Rambouillet, and visiting monarchs are invariably expected to partake in the shooting.

Rambouillet, the *hameau* and the *forêt*, was anciently under the feudal authority of the Comtes de Montford, afterward (1300) under Regnault d’Augennes, Capitaine du Louvre under Charles VI., and still later under Jacques d’Augennes, Capitaine du Château de Rambouillet in 1547. Louis XVI. purchased the château for one of his residences, and Napoleon III., as well as his more illustrious namesake, was specially fond of hunting in its forests.

Since 1870 the château and the forest have been under the domination of the state.

There is a chapter in Dumas’ “The Regent’s Daughter,” entitled “A Room in the Hotel at Rambouillet,” which gives some little detail respecting the town and the forest.

There is no hotel in Rambouillet to-day known as the “Royal Tiger,” though there is a “Golden Lion.”

“Ten minutes later the carriage stopped at the Tigre-Royal. A woman, who was waiting, came out hastily, and respectfully assisted the ladies to alight, and then guided them through the passages of the hotel, preceded by a valet carrying lights.

“A door opened, Madame Desroches drew back to allow Hélène and Sister Thêrèse to pass and they soon found themselves on a soft and easy sofa, in front of a bright fire.

“The room was large and well furnished, but the taste was severe, for the style called rococo was not yet introduced. There were four doors; the first was that by which they had entered — the second led to the dining-room, which was already lighted and warmed — the third led into a richly appointed bedroom — the fourth did not open....

“While the things which we have related were passing in the parlour of the Hôtel Tigre-Royal, in another apartment of the same hotel, seated near a large fire, was a man shaking the snow from his boots, and untying the strings of a large portfolio. This man was dressed in the hunting livery of the house of Orleans; the coat red and silver, large boots, and a three-cornered hat, trimmed with silver. He had a quick eye, a long, pointed nose, a round and open forehead, which was contradicted by thin and compressed lips.”

Compiègne, like Crépy-en-Valois, Dammartin, Villers-Cotterets, and other of the towns and villages of the district, which in the fourteenth century belonged to the younger branch of the royal house, enter largely into the romances of Dumas, as was but natural, seeing that this region was the land of his birth.

The most elaborate and purely descriptive parts are found in “The Wolf Leader,” wherein are presented so many pictures of the forest life of the region, and in “The Taking of the Bastille,” in that part which describes the journey of Ange Pitou to Paris.

Crépy, Compiègne, Senlis, Pierrefonds, are still more celebrated in Dumas’ writings for glorious and splendid achievements — as they are with respect to the actual fact of history, and the imposing architectural monuments which still remain to illustrate the conditions under which life endured in mediæval times.

At Crépy, now a sleepy old-world village, is still seen the establishment of the Valois of which Dumas wrote; and another *grande maison* of the Valois was at Villers-Cotterets — a still more somnolent reminder of the past. At Compiègne, only, with its magnificent Hôtel de Ville, does one find the activities of a modern-day life and energy.

Here in strange juxtaposition with a remarkably interesting and picturesque church, and the dainty Renaissance Hôtel de Ville, with its *jacquemart*, its belfry, its pointed gable, and its ornate façade, is found a blend of past and present, which combines to produce one of those transformations or stage-settings which throughout France are so often met with and admired.

No more charming *petite ville* exists in all France than Compiègne, one of the most favoured of all the country residences of the Kings of France.

The château seen to-day was an erection of Louis XV.

Le Forêt de Compiègne is as beautiful and unspoiled as any, and is, moreover, not overrun with tourists and trippers, as is Fontainebleau.

CHÂTEAU OF THE DUCS DE VALOIS, CRÉPY

Its area approximates 60,000 acres, and its circumference sixty miles.

In short, the whole domain forms a charming and delightful place of retreat, which must have been duly appreciated during the troublous times of Louis’ reign.

It was here, in the Forêt de Compiègne, that the great hunting was held, which is treated in “Chicot the Jester.”

The Bois de Vincennes was a famous duelling-ground — and is to-day, *sub rosa*. It was here that Louis de Franchi, in the “Corsican Brothers,” who forewarned of his fate, died in the duel with René de Chateaurien, just as he had predicted; at exactly “*neuf heures dix*.”

This park is by no means the rival of the Bois de Boulogne in the affections of the Parisian public, but it is a wide expanse of tree-covered park land, and possesses all the characteristics of the other suburban *forêts* which surround Paris on all sides.

It has, moreover, a château, a former retreat or country residence of the Kings of France, though to-day it has been made over to the ministry of war, whereas the Château de Madrid, the former possession of the Bois de Boulogne, has disappeared. The Château de Vincennes is not one of the sights of Paris. For a fact, it is quite inaccessible, being surrounded by the ramparts of the Fort de Vincennes, and therefore forbidden to the inquisitive.

It was here in the Château de Vincennes that Charles IX. died a lingering death, “by the poison prepared for another,” as Dumas has it in “Marguerite de Valois.”

Among the many illustrious prisoners of the Château de Vincennes have been the King of Navarre (1574), Condé (1650), Cardinal de Retz (1652), Fouquet (1661), Mirabeau (1777), the Duc d’Enghien (1804), and many others, most of whom have lived and breathed in Dumas’ pages, in the same parts which they played in real life.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FRENCH PROVINCES

Dumas’ acquaintance with the French provinces was very comprehensive, though it is of the region northeast of Paris that he was most fond; of the beloved forest region around Crépy and Villers-Cotterets; the road to Calais, and Picardie and Flanders. Dumas was ever fond of, and familiar with, the road from Paris to Calais. The National Route ran through Crépy, and the byroad through his native Villers-Cotterets. In the “Vicomte de Bragelonne,” he calls the region “The Land of God,” a sentiment which mostly has not been endorsed by other writers; still, it is a beautiful country, and with its thickly wooded plantations, its industrious though conglomerate population, it is to-day — save for the Cantal and the Auvergne — that part of France of which English-speaking folk know the least. And this, too, on the direct road between London and Paris!

Dumas, in the above-mentioned book, describes the journey through this region which was made by Buckingham and De Wardes.

“Arriving at Calais, at the end of the sixth day, they chartered a boat for the purpose of joining the yacht that was to convey them to England, and which was then tacking about in full view.”

The old port of Calais must have been made use of by the personages of whom Dumas wrote, who trafficked forth between England and France.

Calais has ever been the most important terminus of cross-channel traffic, and there be those who know, who say that the boat service is not improved in comfort in all these ages, and certainly Calais, which most English travellers know only by fleeting glimpses, might with profit be visited more frequently, if only to follow in the wake of Sterne’s sentimental footsteps.

The old port, of course, exists no more; new dykes, breakwaters, and the *gare maritime* have taken the place of the ancient landing-places, where royalties and others used to embark in frail sailing-vessels for the English ports across the channel.

The old belfry still exists, and forms a beacon by day, at least, much as it did of yore. By night the new electric-light flashes its beams twenty odd miles across the channel on Dover Cliff, in a way which would have astonished our forefathers in the days gone by.

It was at Calais, too, that was enacted the final scene in the life of Mary Stuart in France.

The misfortunes of Mary Stuart formed the subject of one of the series of “Les Crimes Célèbres.” In the opening words of this chapter, Dumas has said, “Of all the names predestined to misfortune in France, it is the name of Henri. Henri I. was poisoned, Henri II. was killed (maliciously, so some one has said) in a tournament, Henri III. and Henri IV. were assassinated.” In Scotland it is the name of Stuart.

The chronicle concerns France only with respect to the farewell of Mary, after having lost her mother and her spouse in the same year (1561). She journeyed to Scotland by Calais, accompanied by the Cardinals de Guise and de Lorraine, her uncles, by the Duc and Duchesse de Guise, the Duc d’Aumale, and M. de Nemours.

Here took place that heartrending farewell, which poets and painters, as well as historians and novelists, have done so much to perpetuate. “Adieu, France!” she sobbed. “Adieu, France!” And for five hours she continued to weep and sob, “Adieu, France! Adieu, France!” For the rest, the well-known historical figures are made use of by Dumas, — Darnley, Rizzio, Huntley, and Hamilton, — but the action does not, of course, return to France.

Not far south of Calais is Arras, whence came the Robespierre who was to set France aflame.

“The ancestors of the Robespierres,” says Dumas, “formed a part of those Irish colonists who came to France to inhabit our seminaries and monasteries. There they received from the Jesuits the good educations they were accustomed to give to their pupils. From father to son they were notaries; one branch of the family, that from which this great man descends, established himself at Arras, a great centre, as you know, of noblesse and the church.

“There were in this town two *seigneurs*, or, rather, two kings; one was the Abbé of St. Waast, the other was the Bishop of Arras, whose palace threw one-half the town into shade.”

The former palace of the Bishop of Arras is to-day the local *musée*. It is an extensive establishment, and it flanks an atrocious Renaissance cathedral of no appealing charm whatever, and, indeed, the one-time bishop’s palace does not look as though it was ever a very splendid establishment.

Still farther to the southward of Calais is the feudal Castle of Pierrefonds, so beloved of Porthos in “Vingt Ans Après.” It is, and has ever been since its erection in 1390 by Louis d’Orleans, the brother of Charles VI., one of the most highly impregnable and luxurious châteaux of all France.

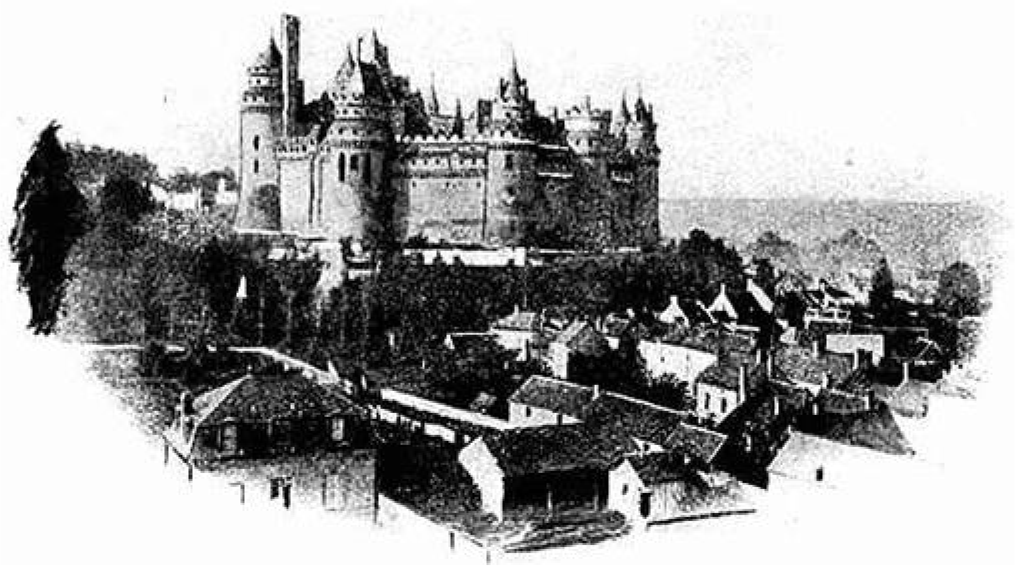

CASTLE OF PIERREFONDS

Four times it was unsuccessfully besieged, and came finally, in 1617, to be dismantled.

The great Napoleon purchased it after the Revolution, and finally, through the liberality of Napoleon III., — one of the few acts which redound to his credit, — it was restored, by Viollet-le-Duc, at a cost of over five million francs.

In “Pauline,” that fragment which Dumas extracted from one of his “Impressions du Voyage,” the author comes down to modern times, and gives us, as he does in his journals of travel, his “Mémoires,” and others of his lighter pieces of fiction, many charming pen-portraits of localities familiar not only to his pen, but to his personal experiences.

He draws in “Pauline” a delightful picture of the old fishing-village of Trouville — before it became a resort of fashion. In his own words he describes it as follows:

“I took the steamer from Havre, and two hours later was at Honfleur; the next morning I was at Trouville.”

To-day the fly-by-day tourist does the whole journey in a couple of hours — if he does not linger over the attractions of “Les Petits Chevaux” or “Trente et Quarante,” at Honfleur’s pretty Casino.

”You know the little town with its population of fisher-folk. It is one of the most picturesque in Normandy. I stayed there a few days, exploring the neighbourhood, and in the evening I used to sit in the chimney-corner with my worthy hostess, Madame Oseraie. There I heard strange tales of adventures which had been enacted in Calvados, Loiret, and La Manche.”

Continuing, the author, evidently having become imbued with the local colour of the vicinity, describes, more or less superficially, perhaps, but still with vividness, if not minuteness, those treasure-chests of history, the towns and villages of Normandy: — Caen, Lisieux, Falaise, the cradle of the Conqueror William, “the fertile plains” around Pont Audemer, Havre, and Alençon.

Normandy, too, was the *locale* of the early life of Gabriel Lambert, the unappealing leading-man of that dramatic story of a counterfeiter’s life, which bears the same title.

Dumas’ first acquaintance with the character in real life, — if he had any real personality, as one is inclined to think he had, — was at Toulon, where the unfortunate man was imprisoned and made to work in the galleys.

In the course of the narrative the scene shifts from prisons, galleys, and chain-gangs, backward and forward, until we get the whole gamut of the criminal’s life.

Gabriel, in the days of his early life at Trouville, had acquired the art of skilled penmanship, and used it wherever he could for his own advantage, by fabricating the handwriting of others — and some honest work of a similar nature.

Finally the call of Paris came strong upon him, and he set forth by Pont l’Evêque and Rouen to the metropolis, where his downfall was speedily consummated, to the sorrow and resentment of his old friends of the little Norman fishing-village, and more particularly to Marie Granger, his country sweetheart, who longed to follow him to Paris, not suspecting the actual turn affairs had taken.

In “The Count of Monte Cristo,” Dumas again evinces his fondness for, and acquaintance with, the coast of Normandy.

It is a brief reference, to be sure, but it shows that Dumas had some considerable liking for the sea, and a more or less minute knowledge of the coast of France. This is further evinced by the details into which he launches once and again, with reference to the littoral of the Mediterranean, Belle Ile, and its surroundings, and the coasts of Normandy, Brittany, and the Pas de Calais.

In “The Count of Monte Cristo,” Dantès says to his companion, Bertuccio:

“‘I am desirous of having an estate by the seaside in Normandy — for instance, between Havre and Boulogne. You see, I give you a wide range. It will be absolutely necessary that the place you may select have a small harbour, creek, or bay, into which my vessel can enter and remain at anchor. She merely draws fifteen feet water. She must be kept in constant readiness to sail immediately I think proper to give the signal. Make the requisite inquiries for a place of this description, and when you have met with an eligible spot, visit it, and if it possess the advantages desired, purchase it at once in your own name. The corvette must now, I think, be on her way to Fécamp, must she not?’”

With Brittany, Dumas is quite as familiar. In “Le Vicomte de Bragelonne,” he gives minute, though not wearisome, details of Belle Ile and the Breton coast around about. Aramis, it seems, had acquired Belle Ile, and had risen to high ecclesiastical rank, making his home thereon.

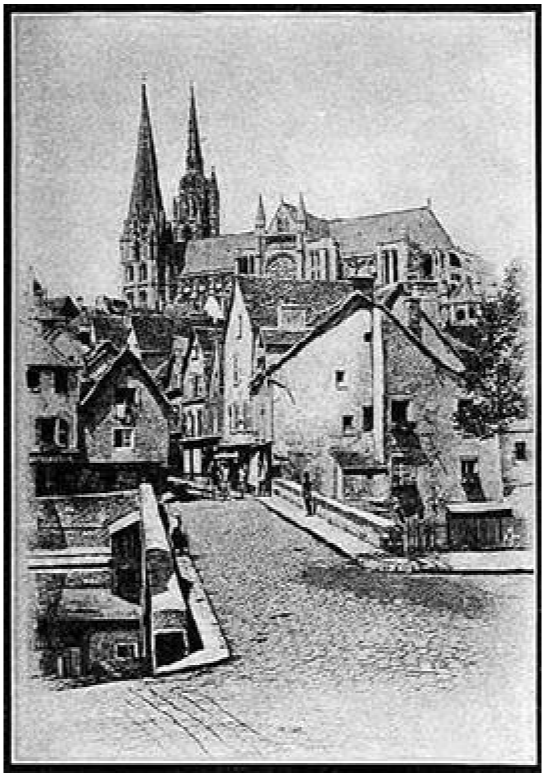

NÔTRE DAME DE CHARTRES

Dumas' love and knowledge of gastronomy comes to the fore again here. When D'Artagnan undertook his famous journey to Belle Ile, on the coast of Brittany, as messenger of Louis XIV., whom he called his sun, after he had bought that snuff-coloured *bidet* which would have disgraced a corporal, and after he had shortened his name to Agnan, — to complete his disguise, — he put in one night at La Roche-Bernard, "a tolerably important city at the mouth of the Vilaine, and prepared to sup at a hotel." And he did sup; "off a teal and a *torteau*, and in order to wash down these two distinctive Breton dishes, ordered some cider, which, the moment it touched his lips, he perceived to be more Breton still."

On the route from Paris to the mouth of the Loire, where D'Artagnan departed for Belle Ile, is Chartres. Its Cathedral de Nôtre Dame has not often appeared in fiction. In history and books of travel, and of artistic and archæological interest, its past has been vigorously played.

Dumas, in "La Dame de Monsoreau," has revived the miraculous legend which tradition has preserved.

It recounts a ceremony which many will consider ludicrous, and yet others sacrilegious. Dumas describes it thus:

“The month of April had arrived. The great cathedral of Chartres was hung with white, and the king was standing barefooted in the nave. The religious ceremonies, which were for the purpose of praying for an heir to the throne of France, were just finishing, when Henri, in the midst of the general silence, heard what seemed to him a stifled laugh. He turned around to see if Chicot were there, for he thought no one else would have dared to laugh at such a time. It was not, however, Chicot who had laughed at the sight of the two chemises of the Holy Virgin, which were said to have such a prolific power, and which were just being drawn from their golden box; but it was a cavalier who had just stopped at the door of the church, and who was making his way with his muddy boots through the crowd of courtiers in their penitents’ robes and sacks. Seeing the king turn, he stopped for a moment, and Henri, irritated at seeing him arrive thus, threw an angry glance at him. The newcomer, however, continued to advance until he reached the velvet chair of M. le Duc d’Anjou, by which he knelt down.”

But a step from Chartres, on the Loire, — though Orleans, the “City of the Maid,” comes between, — is Blois.

In “Le Vicomte de Bragelonne,” the last of the D’Artagnan series, the action comes down to later times, to that of the young king Louis XIV.

In its opening lines its scene is laid in that wonderfully ornate and impressive Château of Blois, which so many have used as a background for all manner of writing.

Dumas, with his usual directness, wasting no words on mere description, and only considering it as an accessory to his romance, refers briefly to this magnificent building — the combined product of the houses whose arms bore the hedgehog and the salamander.

“Toward the middle of the month of May, 1660, when the sun was fast absorbing the dew from the *ravenelles* of the Château of Blois, a little cavalcade entered the city by the bridge, without producing any effect upon the passengers of the quai-side, except a movement of the tongue to express, in the purest French then spoken in France (Touraine has ever spoken the purest tongue, as all know), ‘There is Monsieur returning from the hunt.’... It should have been a trifling source of pride to the city of Blois that Gaston of Orleans had chosen it as his residence, and held his court in the ancient château of its states.”

It was in the Castle of the States of Blois that Louis XIV. received that unexpected visit from “His Majesty Charles II., King of England, Scotland, and Ireland,” of which Dumas writes in the second of the D’Artagnan series.

“‘How strange it is you are here,’ said Louis. ‘I only knew of your embarkation at Brighthelmstone, and your landing in Normandy.’...

“Blois was peaceful that morning of the royal arrival, at which announcement it was suddenly filled with all the tumult and the buzzing of a swarm of bees. In the lower city, scarce a hundred paces from the castle, is a sufficiently handsome street called the Rue Vieille, and an old and venerable edifice which, tradition says, was habited by a councillor of state, to whom Queen Catherine came, some say to visit and others to strangle.”

Not alone is Blois reminiscent of “Les Mousquetaires,” but the numberless references in the series to Langeais, Chambord, — the châteaux and their domains, — bring to mind more forcibly than by innuendo merely that Dumas himself must have had some great fondness for what has come to be the touring-ground of France *par excellence*.

From “Le Vicomte de Bragelonne,” one quotes these few lines which, significantly, suggest much: “Do you not remember, Montalais, the woods of Chaverney, and of Chambord, and the numberless poplars of Blois?” This describes the country concisely, but explicitly.

Beyond Blois, beyond even Tours, which is Blois’ next neighbour, passing down the Loire, is Angers.

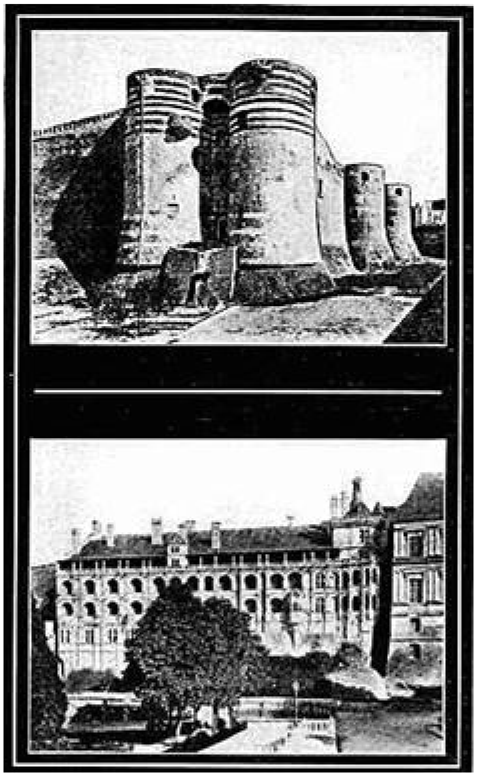

CASTLE OF ANGERS — CHÂTEAU OF BLOIS

In “La Dame de Monsoreau,” more commonly known in English translations as “Chicot the Jester,” much of the scene is laid in Anjou.

To Angers, with its wonderful fairylike castle, with its seventeen black-banded towers (recalling, also, that this is the “Black Angers” of Shakespeare’s “King John”), repaired the Duc d’Anjou, the brother of Charles IX. and Henri III., who then reigned at Paris.

To this “secret residence” the duc came. Dumas puts it thus:

“‘Gentlemen!’ cried the duke, ‘I have come to throw myself into my good city of Angers. At Paris the most terrible dangers have menaced my life.’... The people then cried out, ‘Long live our seigneur!’”

Bussy, who had made the way clear for the duc, lived, says Dumas, “in a tumble-down old house near the ramparts.” The ducal palace was actually outside the castle walls, but the frowning battlement was relied upon to shelter royalty when occasion required, the suite quartering themselves in the Gothic château, which is still to be seen in the débris-cluttered lumber-yard, to which the interior of the fortress has to-day descended.

In other respects than the shocking care, or, rather, the lack of care, which is given to its interior, the Castle of Angers, with its battalion of *tours*, now without their turrets, its deep, machicolated walls, and its now dry *fosse*, presents in every way an awe-inspiring stronghold.

Beyond Angers, toward the sea, is Nantes, famous for the Edict, and, in "The Regent's Daughter" of Dumas, the massacre of the four Breton conspirators.

Gaston, the hero of the tale, had ridden posthaste from Paris to save his fellows. He was preceded, by two hours, by the order for their execution, and the reprieve which he held would be valueless did he arrive too late.

"On reaching the gates of Nantes his horse stumbled, but Gaston did not lose his stirrups, pulled him up sharply, and, driving the spurs into his sides, he made him recover himself.

"The night was dark, no one appeared upon the ramparts, the very sentinels were hidden in the gloom; it seemed like a deserted city.

"But as he passed the gate a sentinel said something which Gaston did not even hear.

"He held on his way.

"At the Rue du Château his horse stumbled and fell, this time to rise no more.

"What mattered it to Gaston now? — he had arrived....

"He passed right through the castle, when he perceived the esplanade, a scaffold, and a crowd. He tried to cry, but no one heard him; to wave his handkerchief, but no one saw him.... Another mounts the scaffold, and, uttering a cry, Gaston threw himself down below.... Four men died who might have been saved had Gaston but arrived five minutes before, and, by a remarkable contretemps, Gaston himself shared the same fate."

In "The Regent's Daughter," Dumas describes the journey to Nantes with great preciseness, though with no excess of detail. The third chapter opens thus:

"Three nights after that on which we have seen the regent, first at Chelles, and then at Meudon, a scene passed in the environs of Nantes which cannot be omitted in this history; we will therefore exercise our privilege of transporting the reader to that place.

"On the road to Clisson, two or three miles from Nantes, — near the convent known as the residence of Abelard, — was a large dark house, surrounded by thick, stunted trees; hedges everywhere surrounded the enclosure outside the walls, hedges impervious to the sight, and only interrupted by a wicket gate.

“This gate led into a garden, at the end of which was a wall, having a small, massive, and closed door. From a distance this grave and dismal residence appeared like a prison; it was, however, a convent, full of young Augustines, subject to a rule lenient as compared with provincial customs, but rigid as compared with those of Paris.

“The house was inaccessible on three sides, but the fourth, which did not face the road, abutted on a large sheet of water; and ten feet above its surface were the windows of the refectory.

“This little lake was carefully guarded, and was surrounded by high wooden palisades. A single iron gate opened into it, and at the same time gave a passage to the waters of a small rivulet which fed the lake, and the water had egress at the opposite end.”

From this point on, the action of “The Regent’s Daughter” runs riotously rapid, until it finally culminates, so far as Nantes is concerned, in the quintuple execution before the château, brought about by the five minutes’ delay of Gaston with the reprieve.

Dumas’ knowledge of and love of the Mediterranean was great, and he knew its western shores intimately.

In 1830 he resolved to visit all the shores of the Mediterranean in a yacht, which he had had specially built for the purpose, called the *Emma*.

He arrived in Sicily, however, at the moment of the Garibaldian struggle against the King of Italy, with the result that the heroic elements of that event so appealed to him, that he forewent the other more tranquil pleasure of continuing his voyage, and went over to the mainland.

In “The Count of Monte Cristo” is given one of Dumas’ best bits of descriptive writing. At any rate, it describes one of the aspects of the brilliantly blue Mediterranean, which is only comparable to one’s personal contemplation of its charms. It is apropos of the voyage to the island of Monte Cristo — which lies between Elba and Corsica, and has become fabled in the minds of present-day readers solely by Dumas’ efforts — that he wrote the following:

“It was about six o’clock in the evening; an opal-coloured light, through which an autumnal sun shed its golden rays, descended on the blue sea. The heat of the day had gradually decreased, and a light breeze arose, seeming like the respiration of nature on awakening from the burning siesta of the south; a delicious zephyr played along the coasts of the Mediterranean, and wafted from shore to shore the sweet perfume of plants, mingled with the fresh smell of the sea.

“A light yacht, chaste and elegant in its form, was gliding amidst the first dews of night over the immense lake, extending from Gibraltar to the Dardanelles, and from Tunis to Venice. The motion resembled that of a swan with its wings opened toward the wind, gliding on the water. It advanced, at the same time, swiftly and gracefully, leaving behind it a glittering track. By degrees the sun disappeared behind the western horizon; but, as though to prove the truth of the fanciful ideas in heathen mythology, its indiscreet rays reappeared on the summit of each wave, seeming to reveal that the god of fire had just enfolded himself in the bosom of Amphitrite, who in vain endeavoured to hide her lover beneath her azure mantle.”

Of the island of Monte Cristo itself, Dumas’ description is equally gratifying. In the earlier chapters he gives it thus:

“The isle of Monte Cristo loomed large in the horizon.... They were just abreast of Mareciana, and beyond the flat but verdant isle of La Pianosa. The peak of Monte Cristo, reddened by the burning sun, was seen against the azure sky.... About five o’clock in the evening the island was quite distinct, and everything on it was plainly perceptible, owing to that clearness of the atmosphere which is peculiar to the light which the rays of the sun cast at its setting.

“Edmond gazed most earnestly at the mass of rocks which gave out all the variety of twilight colours, from the brightest pink to the deepest blue; and from time to time his cheeks flushed, his brow became purple, and a mist passed over his eyes.... In spite of his usual command over himself, Dantès could not restrain his impetuosity. He was the first who jumped on shore; and had he dared, he would, like Lucius Brutus, have ‘kissed his mother earth.’ It was dark, but at eleven o’clock the moon rose in the midst of the ocean, whose every wave she silvered, and then, ‘ascending high,’ played in floods of pale light on the rocky hills of this second Pelion.

“The island was familiar to the crew of *La Jeune Amélie* — it was one of her halting-places. As to Dantès, he had passed it on his voyages to and from the Levant, but never touched at it.”

It is unquestionable that “The Count of Monte Cristo” is the most popular and the best known of all Dumas’ works. There is a deal of action, of personality and characterization, and, above all, an ever-shifting panorama, which extends from the boulevards of Marseilles to the faubourgs of Paris, and from the island Château d’If to the equally melancholy *allées* of Père la Chaise, which M. de Villefort, a true Parisian, considered alone worthy of receiving the remains of a Parisian family, as it was there only that they would be surrounded by worthy associates.

All travellers for the East, *via* the Mediterranean, know well the ancient Phœnician port of Marseilles. One does not need even the words of Dumas to recall its picturesqueness and importance — to-day as in ages past. Still, the opening lines of “The Count of Monte Cristo” do form a word-picture which few have equalled in the pages of romance; and there is not a word too much; nothing superfluous or extraneous.

“On the 28th of February, 1815, the watchtower of Notre Dame de la Garde signalled the three-master, the *Pharaon,* from Smyrna, Trieste, and Naples.

“As usual, a pilot put off immediately, and, rounding the Château d’If, got on board the vessel between Cape Morgion and the isle of Rion.

“Immediately, and according to custom, the platform of Fort Saint-Jean was covered with lookers-on; it is always an event at Marseilles for a ship to come into port, especially when this ship, like the *Pharaon*, had been built, rigged, and laden on the stocks of the old Phocée, and belonged to an owner of the city.

“The ship drew on: it had safely passed the strait, which some volcanic shock has made between the isle of Calasareigne and the isle of Jaros; had doubled Pomègue, and approached the harbour under topsails, jib, and foresail, but so slowly and sedately that the idlers, with that instinct which misfortune sends before it, asked one another what misfortune could have happened on board. However, those experienced in navigation saw plainly that, if any accident had occurred, it was not to the vessel herself, for she bore down with all the evidence of being skilfully handled, the anchor ready to be dropped, the bowsprit-shrouds loose, and, beside the pilot, who was steering the *Pharaon* by the narrow entrance of the port Marseilles, was a young man, who, with activity and vigilant eye, watched every motion of the ship, and repeated each direction of the pilot.

“The vague disquietude which prevailed amongst the spectators had so much affected one of the crowd that he did not await the arrival of the vessel in harbour, but, jumping into a small skiff, desired to be pulled alongside the *Pharaon*, which he reached as she rounded the creek of La Réserve."

The process of coming into harbour at Marseilles does not differ greatly to-day from the description given by Dumas.

New harbour works have been constructed, and sailing-ships have mostly given way to great steamers, but the channel winds and twists as of old under the lofty brow, capped by the sailors' church of Notre Dame de la Garde, which is to-day a tawdry, bizarre shrine, as compared with the motive which inspired the devout to ascend its heights to pray for those who go down to the sea in ships.

Marseilles, of all cities of France, more even than Bordeaux or Lyons, is possessed of that individuality which stands out strong on the background of France — the land and the nation.

In the commercial world its importance gives it a high rank, and its *affaires* are regulated by no clues sent each morning by post or by telegraph from the world's other marts of trade. It has, moreover, in the Canebière, one of the truly great streets of the world. Dumas remarked it, and so, too, have many others, who know its gay cosmopolitan aspect at all the hours of day and night.

From "The Count of Monte Cristo," the following lines describe it justly and truly, and in a way that fits it admirably, in spite of the fact that Dumas wrote of it as it was a hundred years ago:

"The young sailor jumped into the skiff, and sat down in the stern, desiring to be put ashore at the Canebière. The two rowers bent to their work, and the little boat glided away as rapidly as possible in the midst of the thousand vessels which choke up the narrow way which leads between the two rows of ships from the mouth of the harbour to the Quai d'Orléans.

"The ship-owner, smiling, followed him with his eyes until he saw him spring out on the quai and disappear in the midst of the throng, which, from five o'clock in the morning until nine o'clock at night, choke up this famous street of La Canebière, of which the modern Phocéens are so proud, and say, with all the gravity in the world, and with that accent which gives so much character to what is said, 'If Paris had La Canebière, Paris would be a second Marseilles.'"

The Château d'If, far more than the island of Monte Cristo itself, is the *locale* which is mostly recalled with regard to the romance of "Monte Cristo."

Dumas has, of course, made melodramatic use of it; in fact, it seems almost as if he had built the romance around its own restricted *pied à terre*, but, nevertheless, it is the one element which we are pleased to call up as representative of the story when mention is made thereof.

Not a line, not a word, is misplaced in the chapters in which Dumas treats of Dantès' incarceration in his island prison. Description does not crowd upon action or characterization, nor the reverse.

"Through the grating of the window of the carriage, Dantès saw they were passing through the Rue Caisserie, and by the Quai St. Laurent and the Rue Taramis, to the port. They advanced toward a boat which a custom-house officer held by a chain near the quai. A shove sent the boat adrift, and the oarsman plied it rapidly toward the Pilon. At a shout the chain that closes the port was lowered, and in a second they were outside the harbour.... They had passed the Tête de More, and were now in front of the lighthouse and about to double the battery.... They had left the isle Ratonneau, where the lighthouse stood, on the right, and were now opposite the Point des Catalans.

"'Tell me where you are conducting me?' asked Dantès of his guard.

"'You are a native of Marseilles, and a sailor, and yet you do not know where you are going?'

"'On my honour, I have no idea.'

"'That is impossible.'

"'I swear to you it is true. Tell me, I entreat.'

"'But my orders.'

"'Your orders do not forbid your telling me what I must know in ten minutes, in half an hour, or an hour. You see, I cannot escape, even if I intended.'

"'Unless you are blind, or have never been outside the harbour, you must know.'

"'I do not.'

"'Look around you, then.' Dantès rose and looked forward, when he saw rise within a hundred yards of him the black and frowning rock on which stands the Château d'If. This gloomy fortress, which has for more than three hundred years furnished food for so many wild legends, seemed to Dantès like a scaffold to a malefactor.

"'The Château d'If?' cried he. 'What are we going there for?' The gendarme smiled.

"'I am not going there to be imprisoned,' said Dantès; 'it is only used for political prisoners. I have committed no crime. Are there any magistrates or judges at the Château d'If?'

"'There are only,' said the gendarme, 'a governor, a garrison, turnkeys, and good thick walls. Come, come, do not look so astonished, or you will make me think you are laughing at me in return for my good nature.' Dantès pressed the gendarme's hand as though he would crush it.

"'You think, then,' said he, 'that I am conducted to the château to be imprisoned there?'

"'It is probable.'"

The details of Dantès' horrible confinement, at first in an upper cell, and later in a lower dungeon, where, as "No. 34," he became the neighbour of the old Abbé Faria, "No. 27," are well known of all lovers of Dumas. The author does not weary one, and there are no lengthy descriptions dragged in to merely fill space. When Dantès finally escapes from the château, after he had been imprisoned for fourteen years, Dumas again launches into that concise, direct word-painting which proclaims him the master.

"It was necessary for Dantès to strike out to sea. Ratonneau and Pomègue are the nearest isles of all those that surround the Château d'If; but Ratonneau and Pomègue are inhabited, together with the islet of Daume; Tiboulen or Lemaire were the most secure. The isles of Tiboulen and Lemaire are a league from the Château d'If....

"Before him rose a mass of strangely formed rocks, that resembled nothing so much as a vast fire petrified at the moment of its most fervent combustion. It was the isle of Tiboulen....

"As he rose, a flash of lightning, that seemed as if the whole of the heavens were opened, illumined the darkness. By its light, he saw the isle of Lemaire and Cape Croiselle, a quarter of a league distant."

In "The Count of Monte Cristo," Dumas makes a little journey up the valley of the Rhône into Provence.

In the chapter entitled "The Auberge of the Pont du Gard," he writes, in manner unmistakably familiar, of this land of the troubadours, the roses, and the beautiful women; for the women of Arles — those world-famous Arlesiennes — are the peers, in looks, of all the women of France.

Dumas writes of Beaucaire, of Bellegarde, of Arles, and of Aigues-Mortes, but not very affectionately; indeed, he seems to think all Provence "an arid, sterile lake," but he comes out strong on the beauty of the women of Arles, and marvels how they can live in the vicinity of the devastating fevers of the Camargue.

The auberge of the Pont du Garde itself — the establishment kept by the old tailor, Caderousse, whom Dantès sought out after his escape from the Château d’If — the author describes thus:

“Such of my readers as have made a pedestrian excursion to the south of France may perchance have noticed, midway between the town of Beaucaire and the village of Bellegarde, a small roadside inn, from the front of which hung, creaking and flapping in the wind, a sheet of tin covered with a caricature resemblance of the Pont du Gard. This modern place of entertainment stood on the left-hand side of the grand route, turning its back upon the Rhône. It also boasted of what in Languedoc is styled a garden, consisting of a small plot of ground, a full view of which might be obtained from a door immediately opposite the grand portal by which travellers were ushered in to partake of the hospitality of mine host of the Pont du Gard. This plaisance or garden, scorched up beneath the ardent sun of a latitude of thirty degrees, permitted nothing to thrive or scarcely live in its arid soil. A few dingy olives and stunted fig-trees struggled hard for existence, but their withered, dusty foliage abundantly proved how unequal was the conflict. Between these sickly shrubs grew a scanty supply of garlic, tomatoes, and eschalots; while, lone and solitary, like a forgotten sentinel, a tall pine raised its melancholy head in one of the corners of this unattractive spot, and displayed its flexible stem and fan-shaped summit dried and cracked by the withering influence of the mistral, that scourge of Provence.”

The great fair of Beaucaire was, and is, — though Beaucaire has become a decrepit, tumble-down river town on the Rhône, with a ruined castle as its chief attraction, — renowned throughout France.

It was here that the head of the house of Morrel, fearing lest the report of his financial distress should get bruited abroad at Marseilles, came to sell his wife’s and daughter’s jewels, and a portion of his plate.

This fair of Beaucaire attracted a great number of merchants of all branches of trade, who arrived by water and by road, lining the banks of the Rhône from Arles to Beaucaire, and its transpontine neighbour, Tarascon, which Daudet has made famous.

Caderousse, the innkeeper, visited this fair, as we learn, “in company with a man who was evidently a stranger to the south of France; one of those merchants who come to sell jewelry at the fair of Beaucaire, and who, during the month the fair lasts, and during which there is so great an influx of merchants and customers from all parts of Europe, often have dealings to the amount of one hundred thousand to one hundred and fifty thousand francs (£4,000 to £6,000).”

* * *

That Dumas was a great traveller is well known and substantiated by the records he has left.

When living at Toulon in the spring of 1835, as he himself tells us, he first came into possession of the facts which led to the construction of “Gabriel Lambert.”

There was doubtless much of truth in the tale, which appears not to be generally known to English readers, and it is more than probable that much of the incident was originally related to Dumas by the “governor of the port.”

Dumas was living at the time in a “small suburban house,” within a stone’s throw of Fort Lamalge, the prison, hard at work on his play of “Captain Paul” — though, as he says, he was greatly abstracted from work by the “contemplation of the blue Mediterranean spangled with gold, the mountains that blind in their awful nakedness, and of the sky impressive in its depth and clearness.”

The result of it all was that, instead of working at “Captain Paul” (Paul Jones), he left off working at all, in the daytime, — no infrequent occurrence among authors, — and, through his acquaintance with the governor, evolved the story of the life-history of “Gabriel Lambert.”

* * *

“Murat” was the single-worded title given by Dumas to what is perhaps the most subtle of the “Crimes Célèbres.” He drew his figures, of course, from history, and from a comparatively near view-point, considering that but twenty-five years had elapsed since the death of his subject.

Marseilles, Provence, Hyères, Toulon, and others of those charming towns and cities of the Mediterranean shore, including also Corsica, form the rapid itinerary of the first pages.

For the action itself, it resembles nothing which has gone before, or which is so very horrible. It simply recounts the adventures and incidents in the life of the Marshal of France which befel his later years, and which culminated in his decapitated head being brought before the King of Naples as the only assurance which would satisfy him that Murat was not an adventurer and intriguer.

There is a pleasant little town in the Midi of France by the name of Cahors. It is a historic town as well; in fact, it was part of the dowry which Henri de Navarre was to receive when he married Marguerite.

The circumstance is recounted by Dumas in “The Forty-Five Guardsmen,” and extends to some length in the most marvellously descriptive dialogue.

“The poor Henri de Navarre,” as Dumas called him, “was to receive as his wife’s dowry three hundred thousand golden crowns and some towns, among them Cahors.

“‘A pretty town, *mordieu*!’

”‘I have claimed not the money, but Cahors.’

“‘You would much like to hold Cahors, Sire?’

“‘Doubtless; for, after all, what is my principality of Béarn? A poor little place, clipped by the avarice of my mother-in-law and brother-in-law.’

“‘While Cahors — ’

“‘Cahors would be my rampart, the safeguard of my religion.’

“‘Well, Sire, go into mourning for Cahors; for, whether you break with Madame Marguerite or not, the King of France will never give it to you, and unless you take it — ’

“‘Oh, I would soon take it, if it was not so strong, and, above all, if I did not hate war.’

“‘Cahors is impregnable, Sire.’

“‘Oh! impregnable! But if I had an army, which I have not — ’

“‘Listen, Sire. We are not here to flatter each other. To take Cahors, which is held by M. de Vezin, one must be a Hannibal or a Cæsar; and your Majesty — ’

“‘Well?’ said Henri, with a smile.

“‘Has just said you do not like war.’...

“‘Cahors is so well guarded, because it is the key of the south.’”

Chapter fifty-three of the above book recounts the siege itself, — as we know it in history, — but with all that added picturesqueness which Dumas commanded.

“‘Henri will not pay me his sister’s dowry, and Margot cries out for her dear Cahors. One must do what one’s wife wants, for peace’s sake; therefore I am going to try to take Cahors.’...

“Henri set off at full gallop, and Chicot followed him. On arriving in front of his little army, Henri raised his visor, and cried:

“‘Out with the banner! out with the new banner!’

“They drew forth the banner, which had the double scutcheon of Navarre and Bourbon; it was white, and had chains of gold on one side, and *fleurs-de-lis* on the other.

“Again the cannon from Cahors were fired, and the balls tore through a file of infantry near the king....

“‘Oh!’ cried M. de Turenne, ‘the siege of the city is over, Vezin.’ And as he spoke he fired at him and wounded him in the arm....

“‘You are wrong, Turenne,’ cried M. de Vezin; ‘there are twenty sieges in Cahors; so, if one is over, there are nineteen to come.’

“M. de Vezin defended himself during five days and nights from street to street and from house to house. Luckily for the rising fortunes of Henri of Navarre, he had counted too much on the walls and garrison of Cahors, and had neglected to send to M. de Biron....

“During these five days and nights, Henri commanded like a captain and fought like a soldier, slept with his head on a stone, and awoke sword in hand. Each day they conquered a street or a square, which each night the garrison tried to retake. On the fourth night the enemy seemed willing to give some rest to the Protestant army. Then it was Henri who attacked in his turn. He forced an intrenched position, but it cost him seven hundred men. M. de Turenne and nearly all the officers were wounded, but the king remained untouched.”

The Pyrenean city of Pau is more than once referred to by Dumas in the Valois romances, as was but natural, considering that its ancient château was the *berceau* of that Prince of Béarn who later married the intriguing Marguerite, and became ultimately Henri IV.

This fine old structure — almost the only really splendid historical monument of the city — had for long been the residence of the Kings of Navarre; was rebuilt in the fourteenth century by the brilliant Gaston Phœbus; and enlarged and luxuriously embellished by the beautiful Marguerite herself in the sixteenth century, after she had become *la femme de Henri d’Albert*, as her spouse was then known.

As might be expected, Dumas was exceedingly familiar with the suburban topography of Paris, and made frequent use of it in his novels.

It is in “The Count of Monte Cristo,” however, that this intimacy is best shown; possibly for the reason that therein he dealt with times less remote than those of the court romances of the “Valois” and the “Capets.”

When Dantès comes to Paris, — as the newly made count, — he forthwith desires to be ensconced in an establishment of his own. Dumas recounts the incident thus:

“‘And the cards I ordered to be engraved as soon as you knew the number of the house?’

“‘M. le Comte, it is done already. I have been myself to the best engraver of the Palais Royal, who did the plate in my presence. The first card struck off was taken, according to your orders, to M. le Baron Danglars, Rue de la Chaussée d’Antin, No. 7.’...

“As the steward had said, the notary awaited him in the small salon. He was a simple-looking lawyer’s clerk, elevated to the extraordinary dignity of a provincial scrivener.

“‘You are the notary empowered to sell the country-house that I wish to purchase, monsieur?’ asked Monte Cristo.

“‘Yes, M. le Comte,’ returned the notary.

“‘Is the deed of sale ready?’

“‘Yes, M. le Comte.’

“‘Have you brought it?’

“‘Here it is.’

“‘Very well; and where is this house that I purchase?’ asked the count, carelessly, addressing himself half to Bertuccio, half to the notary. The steward made a gesture that signified, ‘I do not know.’ The notary looked at the count with astonishment.

“‘What!’ said he, ‘does not M. le Comte know where the house he purchases is situated?’

“‘No,’ returned the count.

“‘M. le Comte does not know it?’

“‘How should I know it? I have arrived from Cadiz this morning. I have never before been at Paris: and it is the first time I have ever even set my foot in France!’

“‘Ah, that is different; the house you purchase is situated at Auteuil, in the Rue de la Fontaine, No. 28.’ At these words Bertuccio turned pale.

“‘And where is Auteuil?’ asked the count.

“‘Close here, monsieur,’ replied the notary; ‘a little beyond Passy; a charming situation, in the heart of the Bois de Boulogne.’

“‘So near as that?’ said the count. ‘But that is not in the country. What made you choose a house at the gates of Paris, M. Bertuccio?’

“‘I?’ cried the steward, with a strange expression. ‘M. le Comte did not charge me to purchase this house. If M. le Comte will recollect — if he will think — ’

“‘Ah, true,’ observed Monte Cristo; ‘I recollect now. I read the advertisement in one of the papers, and was tempted by the false title, “a country-house.”‘

“‘It is not yet too late,’ cried Bertuccio, eagerly; ‘and if your Excellency will entrust me with the commission, I will find you a better at Enghien, at Fontenay-aux-Roses, or at Bellevue.’

“‘Oh, no,’ returned Monte Cristo, negligently; ‘since I have this, I will keep it.’

“‘And you are quite right,’ said the notary, who feared to lose his fee. ‘It is a charming place, well supplied with spring-water and fine trees; a comfortable habitation, although abandoned for a long time; without reckoning the furniture, which, although old, is yet valuable, now that old things are so much sought after. I suppose M. le Comte has the tastes of the day?’”

Whatever may have been Dumas’ prodigality with regard to money matters in his personal affairs, he was evidently a good traveller, in the sense that he knew how to plan a journey with the greatest economy.

One sees evidences of this in the “Count of Monte Cristo,” where he describes the journey of Madame de Morcerf from Paris to Marseilles.

“‘I have made inquiries,’ said Albert, ‘respecting the diligences and steamboats, and my calculations are made. You will take your place in the coupé to Châlons. You see, mother, I treat you handsomely for thirty-five francs.’

“Albert then took a pen, and wrote:

	Frs.
Coupé to Châlons, thirty-five francs	35
From Châlons to Lyons you will go on by the steamboat — six francs	6

From Lyons to Avignon (still by steamboat), sixteen francs	16
From Avignon to Marseilles, seven francs	7
Expenses on the road, about fifty francs	50
Total	114

"'Let us put down 120,' added Albert, smiling. 'You see I am generous; am I not, mother?'

"'But you, my poor child?'

"'I! do you not see I reserve eighty francs for myself? A young man does not require luxuries; besides, I know what travelling is.'

"'With a post-chaise and *valet de chambre*?'"

The route is practicable even to-day, though probably not at the prices given, and one does not go by steamboat from Châlons to Lyons, though he may from Lyons to Avignon.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LES PAYS ÉTRANGERS

Dumas frequently wandered afield for his *mise-en-scène*, and with varying success; from the “Corsican Brothers,” which was remarkably true to its *locale*, and “La Tulipe Noire,” which was equally so, if we allow for a certain perspective of time, to “Le Capitaine Pamphile,” which in parts, at least, is gross exaggeration or burlesque.

Once only, to any great extent, did he go to Germany for his inspirations, and then only to German legend, — where so many others had been before, — and have since.

In “Otho the Archer” is found a repetition of the Knight and Swan legend so familiar to all. It has been before — and since — a prolific source of supply to authors of all ranks and nationalities: Goethe, Schiller, Hoffman, Brentano, Fouqué, Scott, and others.

The book first appeared in 1840, before even “Monte Cristo” and “Les Trois Mousquetaires” were published as *feuilletons*, and hence, whatever its merits may be, it is to be classed as one of his immature efforts, rather than as a piece of profound romancing.

The story of adventure, of battle, and of love-making is all there, but his picture of the scenery and life of the middle ages on the Rhine are, of course, as purely imaginary as is the romantic background of myth and legend.

Of all the works dealing with foreign lands, — or, at least, foreign to his pen, — Dumas’ “Black Tulip” will ever take a preëminent rank. Therein are pictures of Holland life and of the Hollandaise which, like the pen-drawings of Stevenson in “Catriona,” will live far more vividly in the minds of most readers than volumes of mere dissertation written by others.

The story opens with a recounting of the tragedy of the brothers Cornelius and Jacobus de Windt, which, though not differing greatly from historical fact, is as vivid and terrible an account of the persecutions of mortal man as any similar incident in romance itself, of whatever age and by whomever written.

Dumas was in Amsterdam, in 1849, at the coronation of William III., where it has been said — by Flotow, the composer — that the king remarked to Dumas that none of the scenes of his romances had as yet been laid in the Netherlands, and thereupon told him what was substantially the story of “La Tulipe Noire.” This first appeared as the product of Dumas’ hand and brain in 1850.

This is perhaps more or less a legendary account of its inception; like many another of the reasons for being of Dumas’ romances, but it is sufficiently plausible and well authenticated to warrant acceptance, though it has been said, too, that it was to Paul Lacroix — ”Bibliophile Jacob” — that Dumas owed the idea of the tale.

At all events, it is a charming pen-picture of Holland; shows a wonderful love and knowledge of the national flower, the tulip, and is one of the most popular of all Dumas’ tales, if we except the three cycles of romances, whose scenes and incidents are based on the history of French court life.

Not for many years did the translators leave “La Tulipe Noire” unnoticed, and for over a half-century it has enjoyed a vogue which is at least comprehensible.

Its plot and characters are most ingeniously and dextrously handled, but its greatest charm is incident to the process of evolving the famous black tulip from among the indigenous varieties which, at the time of the scene of the novel, had not got beyond the brilliantly variegated yellows and reds. From the various stages of mauve, purple, brown, and, finally, something very nearly akin to black, the flowering bulb finally took form, as first presented to a wide-spread public by Dumas.

The celebrated Alphonse Karr, a devoted lover of flowers, took the trouble to make a “romancers’ garden,” composed of trees and flowers which contemporary novelists, finding the laws of nature too narrow for them, had described in their books. This imaginary garden owed to George Sand a blue chrysanthemum, to Victor Hugo a Bengal rose without thorns, to Balzac a climbing azalea, to Jules Janin a blue pink, to Madame de Genlis a green rose, to Eugene Sue a variety of cactus growing in Paris in the open air, to Paul Féval a variety of larch which retained its leaves during winter, to Forgues a pretty little pink clematis which flourished around the windows in the Latin quarter, to Rolle a scented camellia, and to Dumas the black tulip and a white lotus. The black tulip, it may be remarked, though unknown in Dumas' day, has now become an accomplished fact.

Dumas, though not a botanist, had charming, if not very precise, notions about flowers, — as about animals, — and to him they doubtless said:

"Nous sommes les filles du feu secret,
Du feu qui circule dans les veines de la terre;
Nous sommes les filles de l'aurore et de la rosée,
Nous sommes les filles de l'air,
Nous sommes les filles de l'eau;
Mais nous sommes avant tout les filles du ciel."

Dumas wandered much farther afield than the land of his beloved Valois. To Italy, to Spain, to Algeria, to Corsica, to Germany, and even to Russia. Mostly he made use of his experiences in his books of travel, of which "Les Impressions du Voyage" is the chief.

Who would read the narrative of the transactions which took place in Russia's capital in the early nineteenth century, should turn to "Les Mémoires d'un Maître d'Armes," or "Dix-huit Mois à St. Petersburgh." It presents a picture of the Russian life of the time, in which — the critics agree — there is but slight disguise. Its story — for it is confessedly fiction — turns upon the fortunes of a young subaltern, who played a considerable part in the conspiracy of 1825, and, it has been said by a contemporary writer of the time, hardly any circumstance but the real name of the young man is disguised.

It is in the main, or, at least, it has for its principal incident, the story of a political exile, and it is handled with Dumas' vivid and consummate skill, which therein proves again that the mere romancist had a good deal of the historian about him.

Besides the *locale* of "La Tulipe Noire," Dumas takes the action of "The Forty-Five Guardsmen" into the Netherlands. François, the Duc d'Anjou, had entered Belgium and had been elected Duc de Brabant, Sovereign Prince of Flanders. At this time it was supposed that Elizabeth of England saw the opportunity of reuniting the Calvinists of Flanders and France with those of England, and so acquire a triple crown. Then follows an account of the attack on Antwerp, which resulted in final defeat of the French, and presents one of the most graphic descriptions of a battle to be found in the pages of Dumas. The historic incident of the interview in Duc François' tent, between that worthy and the French Admiral de Joyeuse, is made much of by Dumas, and presents a most picturesque account of this bloody battle. The topography of Antwerp and the country around about is as graphic as a would-be painting.

"'But,' cried the prince, 'I must settle my position in the country. I am Duke of Brabant and Count of Flanders, in name, and I must be so in reality. This William, who is gone I know not where, spoke to me of a kingdom. Where is this kingdom? — in Antwerp. Where is he? — probably in Antwerp also; therefore we must take Antwerp, and we shall know how we stand.'

"'Oh! monseigneur, you know it now, or you are, in truth, a worse politician than I thought you. Who counselled you to take Antwerp? — the Prince of Orange. Who disappeared at the moment of taking the field? — the Prince of Orange. Who, while he made your Highness Duke of Brabant, reserved for himself the lieutenant-generalship of the duchy? — the Prince of Orange. Whose interest is it to ruin the Spaniards by you, and you by the Spaniards? — the Prince of Orange. Who will replace you, who will succeed, if he does not do so already? — the Prince of Orange. Oh! monseigneur, in following his counsels you have but annoyed the Flemings. Let a reverse come, and all those who do not dare to look you now in the face, will run after you like those timid dogs who run after those who fly.'

"'What! you imagine that I can be beaten by wool-merchants and beer-drinkers?'

"'These wool-merchants and these beer-drinkers have given plenty to do to Philippe de Valois, the Emperor Charles V., and Philippe II., who were three princes placed sufficiently high, monseigneur, for the comparison not to be disagreeable to you.'"

In "Pascal Bruno," Dumas launched into a story of Sicilian brigandage, which has scarce been equalled, unless it were in his two other tales of similar purport — "Cherubino et Celestine," and "Maître Adam le Calabrais."

Originally it formed one of a series which were published in one volume — in 1838 — under the title of "La Salle d'Armes, Pauline, et Pascal Bruno."

According to the "Mémoires," a favourite rendezvous of Dumas in Paris, at this period, was Grisier's fencing-room. There it was that the *maître d'armes* handed him the manuscript entitled "Eighteen Months at St. Petersburg," — that remarkable account of a Russian exile, — and it is there that Dumas would have his readers to believe that he collected the materials for “Pauline” and “Murat.”

The great attraction of “The Corsican Brothers” lies not so much with Corsica, the home of the *vendetta*, the land of Napoleon, and latterly known politically as the 86me Departement de France, as with the events which so closely and strenuously encircled the lives of the brothers De Franchi in Paris itself.

Corsican life and topography is limned, however, with a fidelity which has too often been lacking in Dumas’ description of foreign parts. Perhaps, as has been said before, he extracted this information from others; but more likely — it seems to the writer — it came from his own intimate acquaintance with that island, as it is known that he was a visitor there in 1834.

If this surmise be correct, the tale was a long time in taking shape, — an unusually long time for Dumas, — as the book did not appear until 1845, the same year as the appearance of “Monte Cristo” in book form.

It was dedicated to Prosper Merimée, whose “Colomba” ranks as its equal as a thrilling tale of Corsican life.

It has been remarked that, curiously enough, in spite of the fact that the story has been so often dramatized and adapted for the stage, — and acted by persons of all shades and grades of ability, — Dumas never thought well enough of it to have given it that turn himself.

Dumas’ acquaintance with Naples never produced any more lucid paragraphs descriptive of character, and the local colour and scenic effect besides, than in the few short pages of “Les Pêcheurs du Filet.” It comes, of course, as a result of Dumas’ rather extended sojourn in Italy.

When Dumas actually did write scenic descriptions, they were exceedingly graphic, — though not verbose, — and exceedingly picturesque, — though not sentimental, — as witness the following lines which open the tale — though he does make use a little farther on of the now trite tag, “See Naples and die.”

“Every morning on awakening I was in the habit of resting my elbows on the window-sill and gazing far out over the limpid and sparkling mirror of the Tyrrhenian Sea.... At night the bay is so intensely blue that, under more favourable conditions, it resembles those leaden-hued lakes, such as Avernus, the Fucine Lake, or Lake Agnano, — all in the neighbourhood of Naples, which cover the craters of extinct volcanoes.”

The story gives further a wonderful pen-portrait of Ladislas I. of Hungary, of Jerusalem, and of Sicily, and of the barbaric torture of “The Question,” which was performed upon the aspiring lover of Joanna of Naples.

Rome figures chiefly in “The Count of Monte Cristo,” wherein half a dozen chapters are devoted to the “Eternal City.” Here it is that Monte Cristo first meets Albert de Morcerf, son of one of that trio of enemies on whom the count has sworn revenge. De Morcerf, enjoying the pleasures of the Roman carnival, is captured by bandits, from whom he is rescued by the count, who, in saving the son, makes the first move of vengeance against the father.

Various interesting parts of Rome are described and touched upon, — the Teatro Argentino, the Colosseum, the Plaza del Popolo — scene of the public executions of that time, — the catacombs of San Sebastian, and many others. The characteristic and picturesque manners and customs of the Romans, from *noblesse* to peasants, are set down here in vivid and graphic style; and it is clearly plain that when Dumas sojourned in Rome he “did as the Romans do.”

Dumas’ familiarity with Switzerland was no greater or no less than his knowledge of Spain, of Italy, of Russia, or of Corsica. In his volumes of travel, “Impressions du Voyage,” are many charming bits of narrative which might well be extracted and elaborated into what is otherwise known as fiction. With regard to “Pauline,” this is exactly what did happen, or, rather, the relationship between the Pauline of the novelette and the Pauline of “La Voyage en Suisse” is one based upon a common parentage.

Switzerland early attracted Dumas’ attention. He took his first tour in the cantons in 1832, partly as a means of convalescing from a severe illness, and partly because he was in danger of arrest for the too active part taken by him in the public funeral of General Lamarque and the riots that followed. No sooner was Dumas *en route* than the leaves of his note-book were torn asunder and despatched forthwith to the then newly founded *Revue des Deux Mondes*.

At Flüelen, that high Alpine pass, the mysterious veiled Pauline de Meulien and her cavalier, Alfred de N — — , make their first appearance. One feels intuitively that here are the elements of a drama, of which the author will avail himself before long. The voyages continue, however, and the veiled lady fails to reappear until the end of the journey, when another transitory glimpse of her is had at Pfeffers.

This Pauline's adventures evidently demanded more space than the travels could afford, and became ultimately a novelette.

"Pauline" is one of Dumas' early attempts at fiction, and is told with originality, and a very considerable skill. Nearly twenty years after "Pauline" was written, Dumas told us that he met the counterpart of the villain of the story, Horace de Beuzeval, who consigned the beautiful Pauline to a living burial in the old abbey vault on the coast of Normandy, near Trouville.

Dumas' pictures of Switzerland are more or less conventional; with him the story was the thing, and the minutiæ of stage setting but a side issue.

In "Les Crimes Célèbres," Dumas goes back to history, though he sticks to France, with the exception of those dealing with the Borgias and Mary Stuart.

The crimes of the Borgias — and they were many — end the series, though they cover but the period 1492-1507. The most unnatural and quite the most despicable being the throwing into the Tiber by Cæsar Borgia the cadaver of his brother. Rome, the Popes, and Italy in general form much of the venue, but the political history of France, Spain, and Austria enter largely into the movement of the chronicle, and such widely separated towns of France as Perpignan, in the Comté de Roussillon in the south, and Hesdin, Etaples, and Bethune in the north, all play their parts in the political treaties of the time.

THE END.

DUMAS
DUMAS

Dumas's grave — Villers-Cotterêts, his home town

Dumas’ final resting place — the Pantheon, Paris

ALEXANDRE DUMAS
DAVY DE LA PAILLETERIE
1802 – 1870

Dumas’ grave in the Pantheon